

THE INFLUENCE OF ETHNIC DISPUTES ON REGIONAL CONFLICT: CASE OF THE EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

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M23B56/017

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

May, 2026



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DECLARATION

I Kwagala Dorcas Nakiganda, hereby declare that the content here in expressed and submitted to Uganda Christian University is entirely my own study and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree, diploma or certificate.

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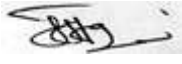
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APPROVAL

Upon the submission of this dissertation by Kwagala Dorcas Nakiganda entitled The influence of ethnic conflict in regional disputes: case study of the DRC. I hereby, approve and submit this dissertation to the academic committee of Uganda Christian University, Mukono, Uganda.

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MR. TABALANGA JONATHAN

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God for His tremendous blessings upon my life, family and friends for the generous contribution to my academic progress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First, I would like to thank the Almighty God who has been my source of strength and endless blessings. To my beloved parents, whose unconditional sacrifices and unwavering support and provision have been the exact foundation of my dreams, your love has given me the exact confidence I needed to study hard and not to care about the influences of peer pressure but just to focus on my school and be content. Lastly, to my dear father, I know you would have loved so much to be around and watch me become successful in my studies but unfortunately the Lord took you. I know you are watching over us as a family and I promise to make you proud.

ABSTRACT

Background: The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has experienced vast conflicts since 1996 with over 6 million estimated. The conflict is characterized by repetitive violence especially in the eastern regions which has attracted neighboring states and international actors. This study investigated the relationship between ethnic disputes and regional conflict in eastern DRC. Ethnic disputes such as land ownership, political representation and citizenship often serve as the immediate root causes of regional conflict. The main objective of this research was to identify the ethnic issues that fuel conflicts in the DRC. Other specific objectives included analyzing the mechanisms through which local disputes are escalated and sustained as conflicts in the DRC and understanding why peace building efforts led from above have failed and to suggest peace approaches that involve and empower local communities.

Methodology: The study utilized the 2019/2026 Armed Conflict and Location Event Dataset and Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Both of them were cross-sectional studies that used data collected which used secondary data got by other researchers. The target population was in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri province especially among the locals.

Results: Even though the DRC has experienced conflicts since the 1st and 2nd Congo wars, the 1994 Rwandan Genocide was the one that sparked off regional instability. Land disputes, ethnic tensions, resource competition and cross-border intervention. The relative weights assigned reflect the proportional emphasis across the secondary literature reviewed, including ACLED (2026) event data and Chigudu's (2025) structural analysis. Resource competition and land disputes emerge as the dominant drivers, though all the four are deeply interconnected, as the preceding sections have demonstrated. The analysis that follows examines how these drivers reinforce one another within a single self-perpetuating conflict system.

Conclusion: Ethnic disputes are exacerbated by different factors. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for lowering regional conflict but also improving the peace building mechanisms, prioritizing initiatives that bridge the gap between local and regional dimensions, and also monitoring the dynamics.

Policy recommendations: Some policy recommendations could include deepening inclusive, multi-track peace and conflict transformation, future research should longitudinally assess the influence of these locally driven interventions, addressing the resource and economic drivers of conflict, safeguarding and improving multilateral peace operations among others

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LIST OF ACRONYMNS

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
MONUSCO	The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
RSCT	Regional Security Complex Theory
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo
MCNs	Multinational Corporations
GLR	Great Lakes region
ACLED	Armed Conflict and Location Event Dataset
MCNs	Multinational Corporations
SADC	Southern African Development Community
EAC	East African Community
AU	African Union
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
GLR	Great Lakes Region
M23	March 23 Movement
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

While conflict can arise from diverse political, economic, and social factors, it often becomes prolonged when underlying grievances related to identity, power, and access to resources remain unresolved. In such contexts, local disputes may evolve beyond their original settings and interact with wider national and regional dynamics, resulting in complex and sustained patterns of violence. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) presents a striking example of this complexity. For decades, the country has experienced recurring conflict, especially in its eastern regions, despite numerous peace agreements and international interventions. What distinguishes the Congolese conflict is not only its longevity but also its capacity to draw in neighboring states, non-state armed groups, and international actors, transforming localized tensions into broader regional security challenges within the Great Lakes region.

Although much scholarly and policy attention has focused on issues such as natural resource exploitation, weak governance, and regional geopolitics, growing evidence suggests that ethnic disputes at the community level play a critical role in sustaining violence. Disputes over land ownership, political representation and citizenship usually serve as the immediate causes of conflict and when leveraged by external actors and armed groups, it leads to use arms and military intervention. If these ethnic disputes are ignored, peacebuilding mechanisms and efforts are at a risk of just addressing the symptoms and not the root causes

While introducing this study, this chapter focuses on the border of DRC (East) as the discourse for conflict and regional security. It shapes a context that ethnic disputes greatly contribute to regional conflict in eastern DRC and forms the reasoning for analyzing the link between ethnic disputes and regional insecurity. This chapter continues by giving the background of the study, problem statement, research questions among others and elaborated below

1.1 Background to the Study

Conflict is very inevitable in a community or society that usually arises when people or groups have interests that don't align. At the heart of conflict, it shows power and identity struggles and resource scarcity. Galtung (1969) stresses out that conflict goes beyond direct violence which includes cultural and structural violence such as exclusion, discrimination and poverty. Such imbalances lead to hostility that often leads to violent conflict. Hence conflict is a constant process that can take place politically socially and economically. It turns to separate parties due to different ideologies hence hardening resolution efforts

The DRC with a population beyond 100 million shows the cycles in which conflicts have persisted hence destabilizing both the nation and the neighboring countries. Since regional intervention and resource competition have taken most attention, less attention has been given to the ethnic disputes. Local tensions over citizenship, land and leadership most of the times lead to harsh conflicts. Once there is involvement of military, these conflicts attract armed groups, external actors and neighbors. This study is further elaborated by Karl Marx in the Marxist theory where he explained power struggles, social inequalities and economic disparities that contribute to conflicts in communities.

Basing on the colonial history of DRC, the roots of conflict stem from there especially during the Belgian rule under King Leopold II's rule where Congo was ruthlessly exploited which weakened the Congolese Government. The challenges still continued during Mobutu reign after Congo's independence where corruption and state collapse were marked. Researchers like Nichols have described the case of DRC as one with a resource curse despite the vast minerals, poverty and fragileness. (Nichols, 2018)

The regionalization of Congo's insecurity was the Rwandan genocide (1994) where more than 500,000 refugees of the Hutu origin with the génocidaires, crossed to Eastern Congo which was Zaire at the time. This increased on the ethnic and land disputes (Vlassenroot, et al., 2011). The neighboring countries used this as a chance to disguise military interventions on security grounds. This unfortunately increased military interventions in the ethnic disputes and also expounded on the regional power struggles (Wantchekon, 2025). The Congo wars (1st and 2nd)

showed how ethnic tensions governed regional politics leading to increase of armed groups in Congo. Gold and coltan being very essential minerals, they've provided armed groups with more reason to stay in Congo and prolong the instability. (Cannon, 2025)

Ethnic disputes still remain an underrated fuel of conflict. According to Vlassenroot, Raeymaekers and Hilgert (2011), land rights, coinciding legal frameworks and citizenship especially of the Hutu refugees at the border (DRC) raise questions leading to tensions (Vlassenroot, et al., 2011). Countries in the Greatlakes region take advantage of these disputes where they disguise their interventions as regional security concerns yet they tend to pursue their other agendas. The M23 (March 23 Movement) has proved that hence affecting peace processes (Nairobi & Luanda peace processes) (Baudon, 2024). In comparison, sidelined groups such as the Twa in South Kivu face local marginalization which leads to rejection and increased local tensions (Kizungufu, 2011)

Congo has had repeated international intervention but still peace has remained impossible. Heavy investment both military and economic have been invested by Monusco and other regional bodies though conflict has insisted. According to Autesserre (2008), peace-building usually terms ethnic conflict as unimportant however much they fuel violence hence creating a research gap. This gap needs to be urgently addressed because DRC faces one of Africa's longest humanitarian crisis that has involved the displacement of thousands of people increasing suffering (OCHA, 2024).

The micro-level and macro-level dynamics need urgent attention in order to show how ethnic disputes can spread widely leading to regional conflict. It is recommendable that policymakers come up with peacebuilding mechanisms or strategies that can merge local issues into national and regional frameworks. Not addressing disputes over land, identity and leadership, peace agreements remain fragile and prone to collapse.

Even though the ethnic disputes have existed for quite some time now, the 1994 Rwandan genocide was the one that sparked off the regional insecurity from Congo (Cannon, 2025). The heavy inflow of refugees into an environment that's was already prone to disputes worsened the tensions and gave the neighboring states validity to intervene since Congo was already divided

and hostile. Understanding how these grassroots disputes escalate into broader regional conflicts is therefore essential for breaking the cycle of violence and building durable peace in the DRC.

1.2 Problem Statement

Since the mid-1990s, the Democratic Republic of Congo has experienced ethnic disputes that have unfortunately resulted into regional conflict such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the first and second Congo war and the M23 rebellions (Vlassenroot, et al., 2011); (ACLED, 2019). These conflicts have resulted into land ownership and land use conflicts, development of weak institutions, and a resource curse. This has resulted into economic decline, failure of peace and conflict resolution efforts (Nairobi process and the UN Force Intervention Brigade), displacement of people and loss of lives, strained regional diplomacy, and refugee influxes etc. The existing research and peace building frameworks in Congo do not entirely address the ethnic disputes over land ownership, citizenship and an analytical framework that maps out the escalation and the natural resource exploitation (Cannon, 2025). By addressing how the ethnic disputes have influenced regional conflict is very significant in promoting peace and security in the DRC and the neighbouring countries. Therefore, this study will examine the influence of ethnic disputes on regional conflict in DRC so as to guide policy making, reduce the humanitarian crisis and regional and international intervention in the DRC.

1.3 Main objective

To examine how ethnic disputes in the DRC are transformed into broader regional conflicts.

1.4 Objectives of the study were to:

To identify the ethnic issues that fuel conflicts in the DRC.

To analyze the mechanisms through which local level disputes are escalated and sustained as conflicts in the DRC.

To understand why peace building efforts led from above have failed and to suggest peace approaches that involve and empower local communities.

1.5 Research Questions

Identify the ethnic grievances that most directly fuel conflict in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri?

How do local-level disputes in DRC escalate and persist as regional conflicts?

Why have centralized peace building frameworks failed to resolve the conflicts, and what alternative ethnically driven approaches could offer more sustainable solutions?

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.6.1 Geographical Scope

Geographically, the research will be on the provinces of the DRC, that is, North Kivu and South Kivu, and some arguments will be on Ituri Province. This area is the center of the dispute, where there is a number of armed forces, weak boundaries, as well as great rivalry over the mineral resources and land. These provinces are chosen based on their key role in the complex of the conflict of the region since the regions are the location of the local militias and rebel groups supported by foreign forces. The study will be based on the case studies and empirical data, represented in these particular regions to make sure the analysis is detailed, and not based on the generalization of the whole country.

1.6.2 Content Scope

The study will focus on specific main factors that influence the ethnic disputes to lead to regional conflict. These include the contested land rights, identity and ethnic based issues and the political economy of the natural resource exploitation. However much these factors are deeply intertwined with the broader humanitarian crisis, including displacement, poverty, and state weakness, this study will analyze these issues only as they directly relate to the mechanisms of conflict escalation and perpetuation. This study will examine the already existing peace-building mechanisms and frameworks and suggest others that are community led.

1.6.3 Time Scope

This study is going to generate data from 1996 to the present day. This timeframe is very significant in this study because it is where external intervention stemmed from beginning with Rwanda because they wanted to get back the Hutu refugees. This external intervention has till to date expanded to the current occurrence of the conflict especially with the M23 movement in 2025. This longitudinal approach will allow for a comprehensive examination of the cyclical nature of the conflict and the evolution of the ethnic-to-regional nexus over three decades.

1.7 Justification of the Study

The persistence of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The conflict in the DRC has been continuous since the first Congo war and this has posed challenges to the peace and security. This results in widespread insecurity, humanitarian crises, mass displacement, and economic disruption within the Great Lakes region. Understanding the influence of ethnic disputes on regional conflict is crucial for developing effective intervention mechanisms in order to control or stop the conflict since the existing interventions have struggled to achieve lasting stability.

Current peace and security responses in the DRC have largely relied on military operations, elite-level negotiations, and regional diplomatic initiatives. While these approaches have at times reduced violence temporarily, they have not sufficiently addressed the processes through which local conflicts are escalated and sustained at the regional level. By examining these processes, this study provides practical knowledge that can help policymakers and peace practitioners better understand conflict dynamics and design interventions that respond to escalation patterns rather than reacting to crises after they occur.

The findings of this study are expected to be particularly useful to policy makers. This can attract international attention and funding despite the fact that there are other greater conflicts that are taking the limelight currently by stressing the link between ethnic disputes and regional conflict hence ensuring conflict resolution and long lasting peace in DRC and its neighbors.

1.8 Significance of the Research

This research study on the influence of ethnic disputes on regional conflict in the DRC has the potential to address ethnic disputes such as land ownership and citizenship disputes, resource competition and also weak governance which result from external intervention, lack of peace-building mechanisms, existence of natural resources among others leading to regional conflict.

This study also sought to inform policy and intervention of peace-building strategies by understanding the relationship between the ethnic disputes and regional conflict. It informs the development of targeted interventions to promote stability in national and regional stability both in DRC and the Great Lakes Region. This could involve deepening multi-track peace and conflict transformation, embedding traditional conflict resolution practices with MONUSCO mandates and national peace-building strategies, making regional interventions more coherent and accountable and also reforming the natural resource governance.

This study also contributed to the deeper understanding of the factors influencing ethnic disputes in the DRC and how they speculate into regional conflict. This can be valuable peace-building to better tailor solutions to lasting mechanisms with the involvement of the local community to ensure success.

This research sought to highlight the disparities and identify the provinces that are disproportionately affected such as North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. This information can be used to address these disparities and ensure equitable solutions to regional and national stability.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review focuses on the available literature about the role of ethnic conflicts in regional conflicts with a specific reference to DRC. It seeks to put the study into perspective in a greater discourse of ethnic conflicts, critical findings, gaps and suggestions to policy and peace building policies.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Theories that construct the research are explained in this chapter. This research has employed a number of studies that aim at expounding more on the conflict in DRC. The theories will give a ground and be a foundation of how ethnic conflicts and interventions by outsiders grow and increase conflict.

2.1.2 The Resource Curse and its Micro-Level Manifestations.

The Theory of the Resource Curse, it is a type of political economy theory that presupposes a paradox (irony) natural resources are more likely to lead to lower economic growth and rise in conflict in countries of the former than in the ones of the latter (Jackson. R, et al., 2013). The usual case of this phenomenon is the DRC. The nation is endowed with huge deposits of minerals that go unexploited to a value of more than 24 trillion dollars rendering it rich with a lot of wealth, yet the individuals are the poorest in the world. This contrast is vocal, and is related directly to the struggle inflicted.

The theory provides a theoretical viewpoint of the politics of the conflict on the ground. It explains the violence and poverty that occur due to the quest of profit by means of resources like coltan, cobalt and gold. Most of the armed groups such as the M23 seize the mines in an effort to finance their operations, and such operations constitute an industry worth billions of dollars in war (IPI, 2008). This is a lucrative business that renders peace bad business in this business of

influential players who prefer the instability in the country. The resource curse then provides a good example of how a macro level economic theory is identified to be reduced to ethnic level conflict and struggle over land and mineral high-value locations.

Although the debate on conflict minerals is inclined to replicate the scenario that they are the sole cause of violence, there is need to have a closer look at the situation. The literature has suggested it as the conflicts were not necessarily the outcome of the mineral ones suggesting that the reasons were not similar (Kopp, 2025). Instead, one of the key contributing factors is the over exploitation of the resources, which provides a new dimension on top of the historical and institutional inefficiency, and transforms the localized conflict into a long-term stakes conflict. Using the example, a history of a lengthy history of colonialism, ethnic enmity, and lax leadership became a free arena to struggle (Amnesty International, 2024). The precious minerals of that time were considered as a source of effective fuel, which generated a monetary stimulus of violence by military and exogenous powers, as a security. This would reduce the research approach that would focus on conflict mineral only to be biased as they would tend to overlook the magnitude of the causes of the conflict and its perpetuation.

This literature review examines the existing body of research on the influence of ethnic disputes on regional conflict exactly focusing on DRC. It aims to contextualize the study within a broader discourse on ethnic disputes, identifying key findings, gaps and implications for policy and peace building strategies.

2.1.3 Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

The theory of Regional Security Complex (RSCT) provides a mechanism through which the security of a certain state could never be separated out of the state that are adjacent to it (Buzan, et al., 2003). This theory is based on the idea that the proliferation of conflicts and insecurity can be caused by geographic proximity along with the structural circumstances, such as the colonial legacies and weak states (Adebajo, 2011). The example of African Great Lakes Region (GLR) is one of the brightest examples of a typical example of a regional insecurity complex where conflicts are not based on the borders of countries.

The conflicts in DRC have not ended since 1990s, but were regionalized. The incident led to the First and Second Congo wars when the wartime world came to know that the enormous wave of two million Rwandan refugees and Hutu militias that perpetrated the genocide were flowing into DRC because the world saw that it is a weak territory (Panzi Foundation, 2024). This violence got involved in a war in which six countries were involved as the ensuing violence lured different neighbor states, including Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Rwanda and Uganda and the war was fought within the Congolese territory (Geneva Academy, 2011).

The biggest component of this dynamic can be considered a complex and a cyclic feedback factor of ethnic disputes and the intervention of the region. The ethnic conflicts in terms of land and ethnic tensions between Hutu and Tutsi are the pretexts of intervention by other neighboring states. As an illustration, Rwanda finds it reasonable to back factions such as the M23 on the pretext of defending the communities of the Tutsi people and the elimination on nationals of the Hutus (FDLR), which it claims is a national security threat on the other side of the border. It is this ethnic resentment that is then instrumentalised by a power in the region to cause their own geopolitical and economic interests like the control of mineral-rich land. This foreign aid makes the ethnic conflict more intractable in its turn, increasing it more as well, and returning to the game of regional security. This symbiotic causal relationship which is that, the ethnic issues are worsened by the external factor, and this alienates the local environment further, is what should be analyzed in the conflict.

2.1.4 The Marxist Conflict Theory

The paper will apply the Conflict theory developed by Karl Marx in discussing the issue of power struggles, monetary imbalances and social differences as reasons why conflicts occurred. The Conflict theory is the way the historical resentment, ethnic hatred and rivalry over resources such as land, minerals and the battle over power have led to the instability in the setting of M23 rebellion in the DR. The history of the marginalization of certain ethnic groups in particular Banyamulenge (Tutsi community) argues that this war is being discriminated against by the Congolese Government (Kerstan, 2024). In addition, the control of precious resources like gold,

coltan and diamond has intensified the struggle over the resource by groups, regional authorities and other multinational corporations which have led to the pre-existing unrest.

As stated by Machibya (2025), the Realist International Relations theory can be applied in this situation in the role that the regional and international actors played in the DRC conflict. According to this theory, states will put national interests, and in most cases, intervene in foreign conflicts to safeguard the economic interests of the countries, maintain stability in the region, or dominate politically (Magabo, et al., 2024). The countries like the Rwanda and Uganda are also accused of supporting M23 as a ploy tactic as the world powers like the United States, China and the European nations have been playing the chess through diplomacies to protect their economic and security interests (Nantulya, 2025). To illustrate, it has been documented that M23 rebels have taken control of the strategic mineral enriched towns such as Ituri, North and South Kivu in DRC which describe the intersection of local wars and the wider geopolitical interests.

2.1.5 Political Economy and Multi-Actor Perspectives

Leaving the state-based theories, a political economy perspective reveals the fact that the non-state actors played a key role in conflict in the DRC. A diversity of actors that involves rebel movements, private military contractors, multinational corporations (MNCs) as well as local militia characterizes the conflict (IPI, 2008). The MNE technology companies are also involved in the continuation of the war by the demand of minerals they require to fulfill their global industries such as smartphones and electric vehicles. The absence of any traceability or accountability in the supply chain coupled with widespread corruption allows the minerals to cross the borders and re-brand and pack in the smuggled exports one more time into a legitimate export, and companies are allowed to use plausible deniability but gain off the instability.

Indicatively, as Schouten, Matthysen and Spittaels, 1904 IOM report (mapping Eastern DRC) quotes, this argument has its practical spatial foundation. It has an estimated 2,700 artisanal mines, about 945 check points on the road and even about 71 trade hubs and has mapped the main supply channel routes that connect these locations to cross border markets. When these hotspots are superimposed over the results of the land grab politics, the taxation of armed groups and foreign backed security escort, the mapping data transforms the abstract theory into visual

representation of where mineral riches, good government failures and foreign interventions intersect. (Schouten, et al., 2019)

Integrating the IOM evidence of the site, RSCT and multi actor frameworks thus shifts the part of the political economy of the section of the resource curse into a rather data based analysis of how ethnic conflicts, resource extraction and geopolitics of the region collide into each other into a permanent conflict.

It is not only weak state that makes the conflict persist but a system in which both state and non-state actors are busy making fortunes out of the instability. This has enabled armed groups to flourish due to the inability of the state to offer key services and security. Minerals and arms have been found being trafficked by elements of the Congolese national army (FARDC) or arms sold to rebel factions in a system that is so corrupt. This indicates that there is a complicated nexus of corruption and complicity between the formal and informal economy of war. The current conflict is lucrative to the people who are involved in making money on the sidelines. It is a detailed examination that should thus look beyond the direct opposition of armed gangs and examine how the violence is sustained in institutional corruption and transnational corporate practices.

Finally, the theorists above present valid points regarding ethnic conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as they define the conflict drivers in the country. Resource curse theory brings to the fore the reality that the DRC is very blessed with minerals particularly in the Eastern region and still that does not contribute to development of the region but instead to war in the region. In contrast, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) demonstrates that neighbors determine the security of a particular nation. This also implies that the ethnic conflicts in a country can be transmitted to other countries. The Marxist Conflict Theory is centered on the imbalance of resource allocation and power struggles between the lower classes and the bourgeois hence the tendency to stick to the ethnic conflicts typically occurring when certain groups are likely to feel excluded by those with the power and money. Then the realist theory comes and opposes and argues that nations are concerned with their national interests as they get engaged in war and this has been justified by the Rwanda and the various peace-keeping

missions in-order to acquire more power to themselves. Multi-Actor Perspective brings it all together integrating all the theories that all actors, because of their greediness they make profit out of the chaos that makes the war to be a long process as all actors are benefactors.

2.2 Empirical Studies

A wide scope of empirical literature has been applied in discussing interrelation between ethnic conflict and regional conflict in the DRC. The literature already has qualitative studies of on-the-ground processes and quantitative studies of the effects of the conflict. The gaps identified in the research are important despite the multiple studies created; they remain especially in the domains of micro-level analysis and the effectiveness of localized and non-traditional interventions.

2.2.1 Study One: The Limits to Community-Based Conflict Resolution in North-East Congo

Author(s): (Gaynor, 2015)

Objective: To highlight the failure of international and national peace-building initiatives to address the underlying causes of the Ituri conflict and to argue for the limits of what local communities can achieve on their own.

Methodology: The study utilized a qualitative approach, drawing on fieldwork conducted with community groups in the Ituri District of northeastern DRC.

Key Findings: The research found that while community-based activities had a significant influence at the individual level, such as in resolving inter-personal disputes over plot boundaries or contracts, they had a limited effect on the structural causes of violence. The study identified three interrelated reasons for this limitation: the collaborative, rather than confrontational, relationship with local political authorities who are often embedded in the exploitative networks; the limited way in which local groups frame issues and difficulties; and the challenging relationships with their broader communities.

Relevance to Current Study: This study is crucial for understanding the local turn in peace-building literature and its limitations. It provides a strong qualitative foundation for examining local agency and structural constraints. It also highlights the importance of analyzing the relationship between local authorities and community efforts, showing how a lack of political will at the local level can undermine grassroots initiatives.

2.2.2 Study Two: The Influence of Conflict Events on Household-Level Economic Conditions

This will serve a purpose of filling a gap in the literature review that lacked an in-depth study.

2.4 Literature Research Gaps and Limitations.

Objective: This will serve a purpose of filling a gap in the literature review that lacked an in-depth study.

Methodology: This research study applied a quantitative method of research that involved a synthesis of conflict event data of Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). Armed Conflict and Location Event Dataset (ACLED) and (Croicu, et al., 2013). The researchers have used instrumental variable approach and the distance of the city of Goma, which is a major flash point to a large extent as an important tool, in their attempt to address the non-random distribution of conflict.

Key Findings: The research study provided valuable data that conflict impedes the economic performance of households in that political violence was associated with less land ownership and inadequate living conditions of an average citizen.

Relevance to Current Study: This study demonstrates that conflict is detrimental to households therefore qualifying the qualitative studies. The qualitative researches demonstrate the importance of applying empirical methods to balance the consequences of conflict that is paramount in enabling policy makers to make evidence-based decisions and policies.

2.3 Methodological Approaches in the Literature

The previous studies employed both the quantitative research methods. Case studies have been employed in qualitative research to study the ancient sources and the ethnic cycles and dynamics of conflict. such practice will assist one in empathizing with the drawbacks of the externally imposed peace systems and in the need to capture the complexity of the conflict-impacted communities (Fletcher Forum, 2025).

Quantitative research involves gathering and utilizing numerical data and testing hypothesis like surveys and observing in order to determine the gauge and impact of conflict on household as in the case of the research studies that have been used in understanding the events of conflicts and their effects on household. (CERGE-EI, 2012)

The latest literature has employed various approaches like the transformation of the community peace-building literature that facilitates inclusivity and the involvement of the locals to make sure that the community-based mechanisms are in place thus a success in national and regional stability. This demonstrates that although the external interventions are ingenious and possess the know-how in conflict, they will not tend to comprehend the applicability of the local government and the cultural forces that are required to instigate sustainable peace.

2.4 Research Gaps and Limitations in the Literature

Overusing Macro-Level Narratives: The Macro-level discourse is one-sided on the problem of unlawful exploitation of natural resources as the source of the conflict. Other equally important root causes like systemic corruption, deep-rooted local political and social animosity, land feuds and poverty endemics are not counted in this simplification. This has been restricted academic knowledge not only but also transferred into ineffective poor, centralized peace-building efforts. The thing is that a foreign account, which is usually led by the international institutions, is a prism through which the crisis is seen in a single, easily comprehensible, dimension mineral wealth. It is a narrative, but in part a verity, that blurs other reasons that are more significant, like land claims and ethnic conflicts, and makes individuals focus on institutionalized land policies, like mineral regulation, instead of other more valuable activities, like inter-community reconciliation and judicial land re-liking. The implication is that peace settlements are never

permanent and violence breaks out once more and once more because of the ethnic issues that are not being addressed.

Lack of Recent and Granular Data: Despite the value of the quantitative research, the absence of the current, systematic, and granular information on the specific causes of conflict in particular geographical places is still present (CERGE-EI, 2012). The inherent dangers and logistical difficulties of conducting fieldwork in conflict regions may create the situation where secondary data has to be used, which may not capture the nuances and the reality of what is going on at the ground or new developments in the dynamics of conflict.

Underrepresentation of Key Actors and Contexts: The research has been skewed towards representing underrepresented actors and contexts of the process of peace-building by non-traditional actors and situations. This includes a monitoring of the enormous potential of religious organizations and practices that can peace-build greatly and this has been ignored by the secular and governmental actors. In addition, the marginalized such as females and the youth are not included in the centralized peace processes despite bearing a disproportionate burden of the conflict.

Methodological Constraints: The methodological approaches are also limited to a limitation. The interventions that are centralized are externally imposed and thus, fail to work, they are not grounded on the realities and aspirations of the people in a locality (Fletcher Forum, 2025). Even though community-based projects are valuable, research has discovered that they may contribute to the causes of structural conflicts in a minor way (Gaynor, 2015). This demonstrates that it is high time to bridge the gap between the micro-level analysis and macro-level policy.

2.5 Conceptual framework

This conceptual framework will outline the key variables and their hypothesized relationships in examining the influence of ethnic disputes on regional conflict in the DRC. This framework will guide the research by identifying the factors influencing the ethnic disputes to lead to regional conflicts and illustrating the pathways through which these factors interact with each other.

2.5.1 Key Concepts

Ethnic Disputes. These refer to wars between two or more groups of differing ethnicities. It can be influenced by factors such as land disputes, citizenship and identity issues, resource competition, colonial legacy, and political instrumentalization.

Regional Conflicts. These are wars, disagreements or tensions that take place inside a certain geographical area and frequently involve nearby nations or Governments. It can be influenced by factors such as external intervention, armed group proliferation, RSCT spillover, and failed peace mechanisms.

2.5.2 Contextual Factors

Geographical Context. These will include; Eastern DRC as the epicenter, mineral rich territories, and the Great Lakes Region.

Historical Context. This will include the colonial legacy, 1994 Rwandan Genocide, and the Mobutu era.

Political Institutional Context. This will include weak governance, centralized peace-building, and failed regional frameworks.

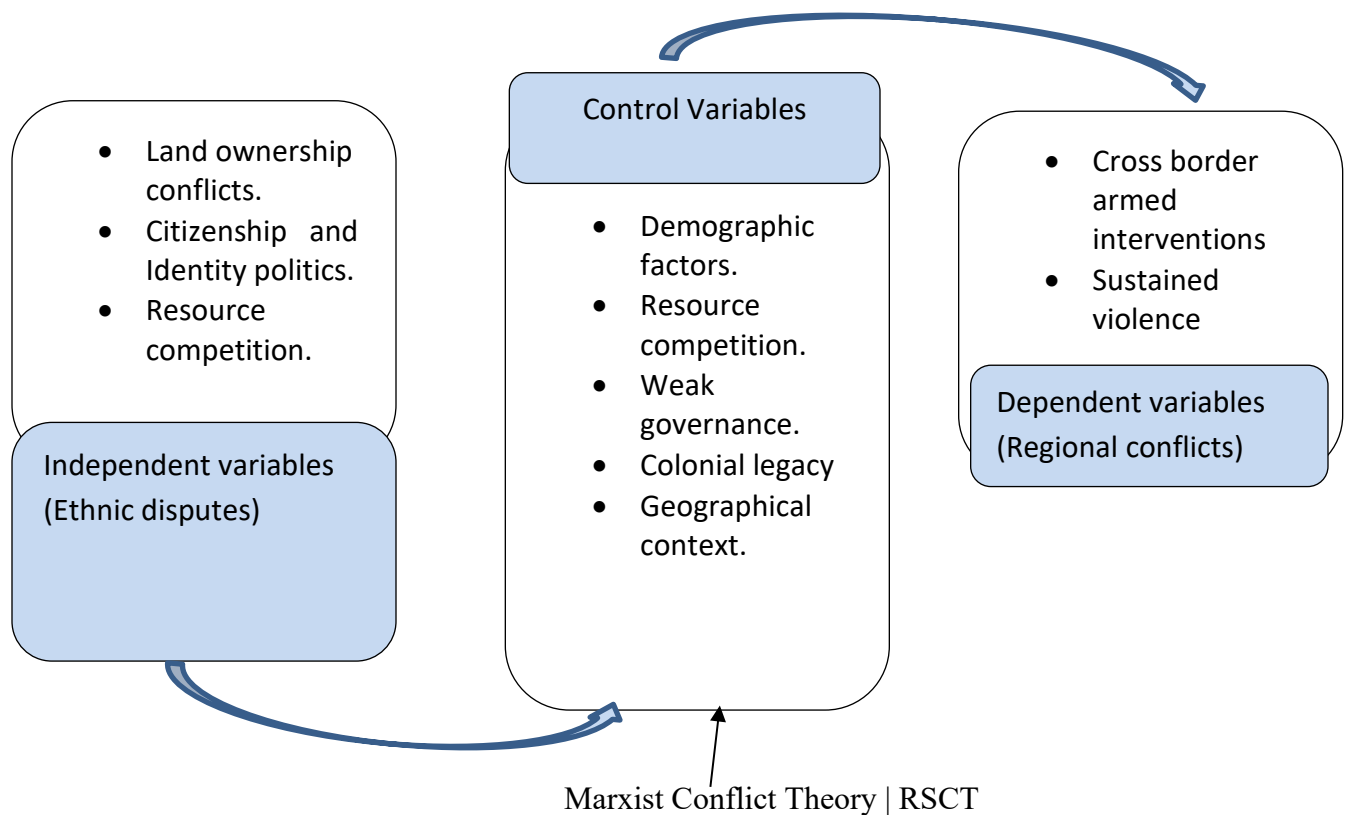
Resource Competition. This will include the M23, the global demand, and the land grabs.

Demographic Factors. These will include the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), ethnic intermingling, and refugee spillover.

2.5.3 Hypothesized Relationships

Ethnic disputes in DRC have a positive and significant direct relationship with regional conflict in the Great Lakes Region. This study assumes that an increase in ethnic disputes leads to greater regional instability through armed group formation and cross border escalation.

2.5.4 Diagrammatic Representation



2.6 Summary of the literature

Despite the significant research on the influence of ethnic disputes on regional conflicts, gaps remain, particularly regarding the contextual factors. There's need for more localized studies that consider the resource curse and its implications, the RSCT, the Marxist Conflict theory and the political economy influencing regional conflicts. The literature underscores the complex interplay of factors contributing to the influence of ethnic disputes on regional conflict in the DRC. This study aims to contribute to this body of knowledge by providing insights into the specific factors influencing ethnic disputes in the neighboring countries of the DRC and their impact on regional conflicts. Finding stable peacebuilding mechanisms through targeted interventions can significantly lower the regional conflicts hence promoting peace and security in

the region. Continued efforts are necessary to address the international intervention from peacekeeping bodies, weak governance structures etc. to achieve stability in the region.

CHAPTER THREE; METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design, methods, and procedures used to address the research questions or hypotheses presented in Chapter One. It explains how data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted, ensuring transparency and reproducibility. This research was conducted using secondary data and data sets from ACLED and other scholars

3.1 Research Design

This study was carried out using a case study approach that was filled with both qualitative and quantitative secondary data. This study allows a deep conceptual understanding of the conflict's root causes and the lived experiences of those affected. This study allowed me assess the influence of ethnic disputes on regional conflict.

3.2 Area of study

The study covered the part of the Democratic Republic of Congo that is North and South Kivu, and Ituri.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 Document Analysis

This method will provide crucial secondary data to corroborate and. Sources will include UN reports, NGO documents, and post-conflict administrative records (Balcells, 2018). This allows for a wider historical and contextual understanding than can be obtained through field research alone and can reveal information on clandestine mobilization and bureaucratic accountability that is not observable using conventional sources. Sources such as the UN and OCHA reports from 2015-2026. (Balcells, et al., 2018).

3.3.2 Qualitative content analysis

This method will involve studying qualitative data such as texts, images, videos, news articles and policy briefs to extract meaningful patterns and themes.

3.3.3 Secondary qualitative data analysis

This method involves the re-use of existing interviews, focus group transcripts, publications and presentations from archives or repositories and analyze them for my own research. This will enable access to hard to reach participants. (Recommendations for Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data, 2020)

3.3.4 Database mining of open repositories

This study will involve the use of pre-existing large scale surveys, census data or conflict event databases from Governmental portals, international organizations or specialized data archives. (Fitchett, et al., 2017)

3.3.5 Systematic literature review

This method will involve the use of academic databases, books and reviewed journals to compile published findings on ethnic disputes, land conflicts and resource competition. Quantitative results or qualitative themes will be extracted. (<https://csr.education/csr-projects-programmes/secondary-data-collection-sources-precautions/>, 2024)

3.3.6 Meta-analysis / Secondary quantitative data

This method will involve combining numerical data from multiple existing datasets for example ACLED etc. Using statistical techniques to test new hypotheses. (Bryman, 2016)

3.4 Tools

Data will be captured using digital voice recorders for interviews and Focused Group Discussions, and a secure, encrypted digital device will be used for field notes and data storage. A robust digital security protocol is non-negotiable, requiring the use of encrypted files and

devices, especially in a volatile context where the researcher's devices could attract unwanted attention.

3.4.1 Books

These being purchased works on a particular topic by an author after carrying out intensive research. Books are considered as the most authentic sources of data under secondary data. I intend on using these by focusing on books that were written with a focus on ethnic disputes and regional conflict so as to attain a clear understanding of what ethnic disputes are as well as regional conflicts.

3.4.2 Journals

These are publications that focus on specialized subjects. They provide up to date information on a given topic. I intend on using these so as to be able to acquire current trends and statistics in regards to influence of ethnic disputes on regional conflict in DRC.

3.5 Population and Sampling

3.5.1 Study population

The study considered all individuals situated in the provinces of North and South Kivu, Uvira, and Ituri.

3.5.2 Target population

This study targeted Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees, affected communities, peace keeping bodies and neighboring countries.

3.5.3 Sampling procedure

The research was conducted using secondary qualitative purposive sampling and snowball sampling, secondary stratified random sampling with major ethnic groups, age and gender

3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

All interview and focus group transcripts will be analyzed using a multi-level thematic analysis (Braun, et al., 2021). This is an iterative, recursive process that allows for the identification of patterns, shared meanings, and deeper insights into the data (Braun, et al., 2021). The analysis will follow the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke:

Familiarization with the data: This involves immersing oneself in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts (Braun,et al., 2021).

Generating initial codes: The researcher will systematically identify and label segments of data that are relevant to the research questions (Braun, et al., 2021).

Generating initial themes: Codes will be grouped into broader patterns of shared meaning (Braun, et al., 2021).

Reviewing themes: The provisional themes will be critically evaluated against the entire data set to ensure that they accurately and comprehensively reflect the data (Braun, et al., 2021).

Refining, defining, and naming themes: The essence of each theme will be clarified and given a clear, concise name that tells a story relevant to the research questions (Braun, et al., 2021).

Writing up: The final report will present a compelling narrative, supported by data extracts, that interprets the significance of the findings in relation to the research questions and existing literature (Braun, et al., 2021).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The ACLED 2019 and 2026 research was already subject to some ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and data security. However, during my research study I will also have some ethical considerations that will include responsible use of data,

ethical review and approval from university, transparency and honesty and responsibility to participants.

3.8 Limitations

The limitations of the study will include; the ACLED 2019 & 2026 and UCDP data is cross-sectional, meaning it captures information at a single point in time which makes it difficult to determine ethnic disputes lead to increased regional conflict. Data on customary land disputes, resource competition and citizenship issues is self-reported by the locals which might be subject to recall bias, social desirability or misreporting, which can affect the accuracy of the data. There might also be misclassification or errors in measuring key variables such as ethnic disputes, regional conflict, number of tribes and regions affected which will lead to inaccurate measurement and biased estimates affecting the validity of the study findings. The study may not also account for all potential control variables such as demographic factors, resource competition, and colonial legacy. Besides, the data is from 2019 and some little from 2026 in January which is still not enough, and there have been significant changes in the political and economic conditions and regionally and so the findings may not fully reflect the current situation or trends. While the ACLED and UCDP also aim to be nationally representative, the findings may not be generalizable to specific sub-populations or regions within the DRC.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR;

4.1 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings from the study on the relationship between ethnic disputes and regional conflict with a case study of DRC. The analysis is based on data collected from secondary literature of ethnic disputes experienced in the eastern part of DRC and aims to provide insights into the factors influencing ethnic disputes in DRC. The findings are organized according to the research objectives: (1) To identify the ethnic issues that fuel conflict in the DRC (2) To analyze the mechanisms through which local level disputes are escalated and sustained as conflicts in the DRC (3) To understand why peace building efforts led from above have failed and to suggest peace approaches that involve and empower local communities.

4.1.1 Land and agricultural disputes

Land conflicts are usually the main root cause of community insecurity. According to Mathys and Vlassenroot (2011), land ownership is usually heavily influenced politically by the government and this has been evident since Mobutu's reign where it was only the politicians and the most highly ranked military that owned land. With this, the local farmers lost their land and a new class of large scale owners was formed and this meant that the underprivileged losing their land. This led to forceful eviction of the plantation workers by the new elite owners hence leaving the underprivileged landless. This alone led to conflict and rebellion from the peasants. In summary, this means that stolen land is a chronic source of tension: even if most disputes do not immediately produce large-scale violence, they create a pool of aggrieved people that armed groups can recruit.

Locally, weak governance often leads to increased customary land disputes for instance, according to the Human Rights Watch, the Hema landholder (elites) allegedly forged land titles and captured land from the Lendu people (villagers/poor). This led to the formation of armed groups and later they attacked each other. The local authorities weren't capable of handling and mitigating the conflict and even when Uganda intervened, it was reported to support the Hema landlords which made the conflict worse than it already was. This case illustrates how localized land claims can ignite ethnic militancy when there is no credible civil administration to mediate.

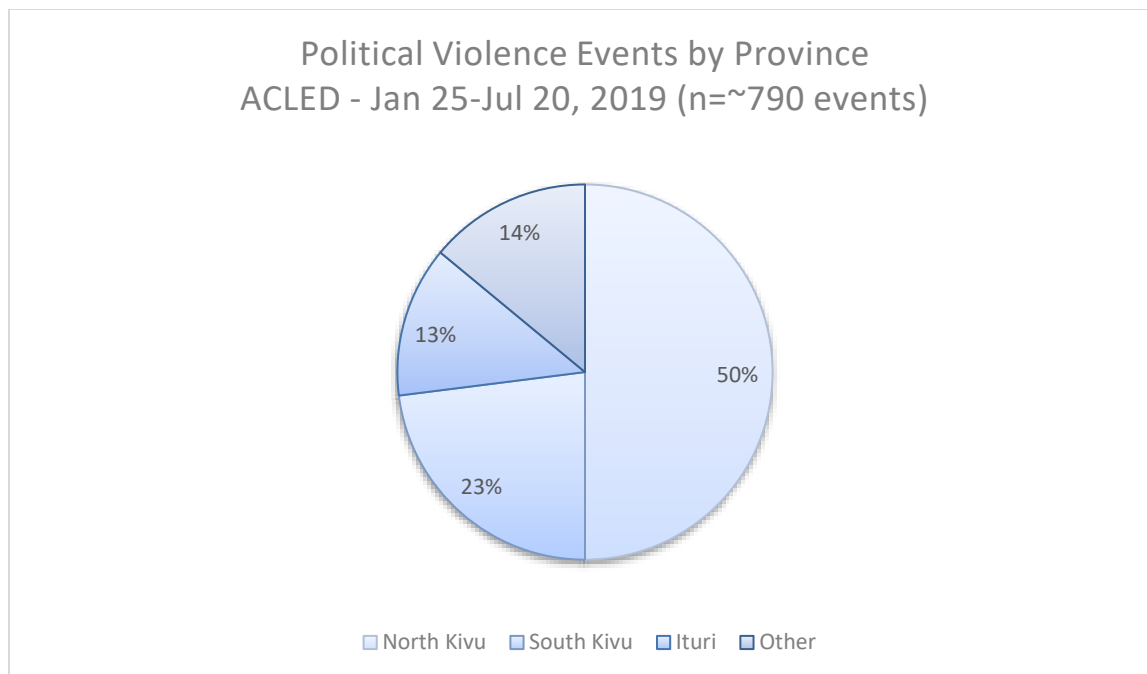
It also demonstrates that local land disputes provide an opening for external forces to step in (discussed further below).

According to (Shamamba, et al., 2021), many phenomena occurred over the last two decades in the East of DRC following the resurgence of conflicts that characterized this region: especially massive acquisition of land and innumerable land conflicts sometimes which resulted to violence. Many authors even considered that ambitions for land resources control and protection as well as related conflicts have considerably contributed to experienced socio-political instability in this part of the DRC, most of the time resulting to violent disputes either between individuals or communities. Some land massive acquisitions are also justified by the lack of arrangement between land centered resources management tools, notably agriculture, mining and forests in DR Congo. (Shamamba, et al., 2021)

It has also been realized that land disputes are as a result of identity politics particularly regarding who is native (autochthonous) and non-native. According to Mkhize, he found out that there was a crisis of belonging among the ethnic Rwandans has made their access to land a fierce point of contestation and this has led to the escalation of the conflict. The successive migrations and discriminatory nationality laws have fostered an environment where citizenship is used as a tool to exclude groups from land rights. (Mkhize, et al., 2025).

Qualitative studies reinforce these insights. Autesserre's field work shows that many low-level conflicts in eastern Congo start as land or power disputes at the village level. She finds that international interventions have often failed because they neglected such local roots: the main reason that the peace-building strategy in Congo has failed is that the international community has paid too little attention to the root causes of the violence: local disputes over land and power.

In order to put land related violence into a geographic context, ACLED (2019) data on the 6 months of Tshisekedi presidency (January-July, 2019) indicates a remarkable concentration of conflict in eastern provinces. North Kivu (see Figure 4.1) registered half of all reported instances of political violence, South Kivu reported 23 per cent and Ituri 13 per cent. This geographic trend supports the point by Autesserre (2008) that the local land grievances are most pronounced in the east where the state control is least strong and land contention is most established.



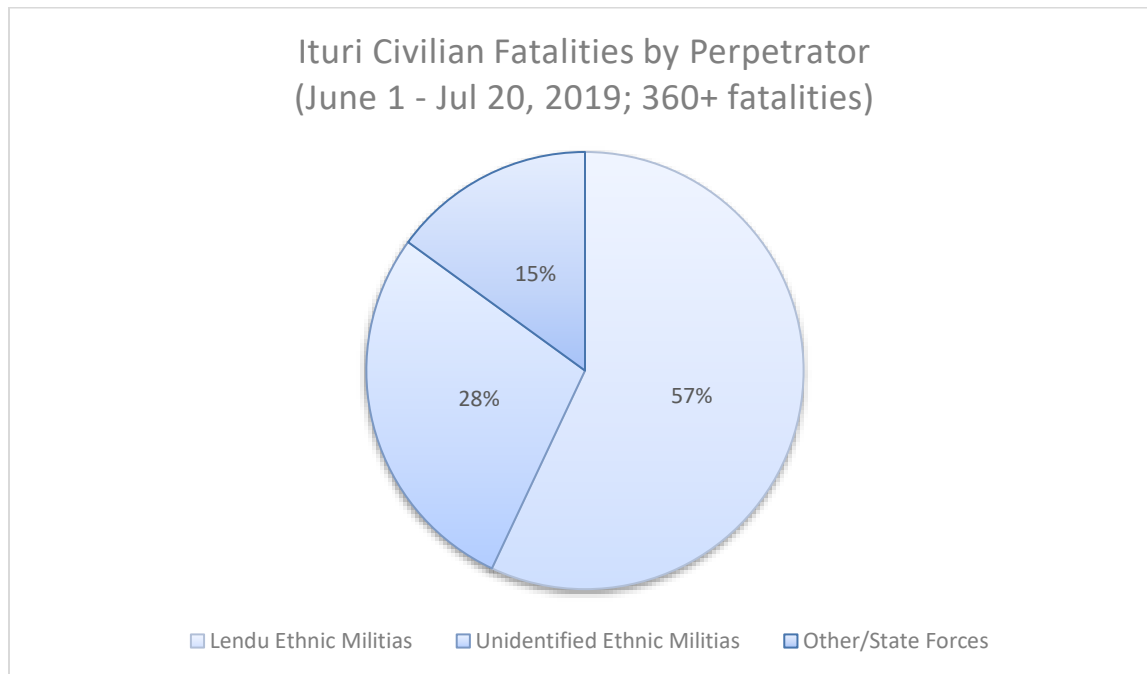
Source: ACLED (2019). Fact Sheet: Conflict in DRC

Figure 4.1 shows the province violence pie chart

4.1.2 Ethnic and Communal Tensions

Disputes are likely to be even stronger given that ethnic identity usually cuts across land battles. Competition over territory has increased historical grievances between ethnic groups. The archetype is the Ituri conflict (1999-2003): long-standing conflicts between the Hema cattle herders and the Lendu farmers about land distribution and grazing rights had been transformed into an outright ethnic warfare due to the power vacuum in the late 1990s. According to HRW (2001), the violence that ensued in this time was soon ethnicized and communities started to perceive one another as existential enemies and reinforcements on ethnic lines escalated the killing. The result was a massacre: thousands of people were killed and each one of them charged the other with ethnical cleansing. Importantly, the war was still around the concept of an ethnic struggle to control the land.

The Ituri case is a good illustration of the human cost of ethnic mobilizations around land. In the Hema-Lendu clashes in June and July 2019, more than 360 civilians had been killed according to the ACLED data. Figure 4.2 breaks down these deaths by perpetrator, with 57% of the civilian deaths being attributed to Lendu ethnic militias, and 28% to unidentified ethnic militias. These statistics show that the violence is then ethnically engineered increasingly in one direction where land disputes are concerned.



Source: ACLED (2019). Fact Sheet: Conflict in the DRC – Communal Violence in Ituri

Figure 4.2 shows the Ituri civilian fatalities pie chart.

The same is the case in other areas of DRC. The Banyamulenge (Congolese Tutsi) has in South Kivu been in most cases involved in bloody conflicts with other communities. According to some scholars, the Banyamulenge issues in terms of land ownership and discrimination have been used to legitimize the March 23 Movement (M23) a recent uprising by the Tutsi. The leaders of M23 place themselves as protectors of Banyamulenge rights, as such as to have historic land claims recognized in their name. Many analysts however believe that this ethnic discourse is mostly a simple cloak to Rwandan ambitions in DRC. Stated another way, the

mobilizing of local fighters and legitimizing the intervention by Rwandese-backed forces is being done by ethnic identity.

Ethnic tensions are also based on colonial legacies. Amnesty International (2024) mentions that the colonial borders and the divide-and-rule policies of Congo united various peoples and solidified ethnic enmity in the country. Such inherited divisions imply that even such minor competitions related to resources obtain an ethnic turn rather rapidly. An example is that competition between farmers and pastoralists is usually associated with ethnic identities (e.g., with Hema and Lendu).

To conclude, the results show that the ethnic identity conflict is highly interwoven with the land conflict. The ethnic interpretation of the land competition by local communities usually complicates the conflicts and makes them harder to resolve. Political actors and armed groups take advantage of this by positioning struggles as ethnic defense. Such local animosities can, and frequently do, bring about or serve as sources of wider tensions in the event that larger forces are at work when Autesserre (2008) cautions, larger forces intervene.

4.1.3 Competition for Resources and Armed Actors.

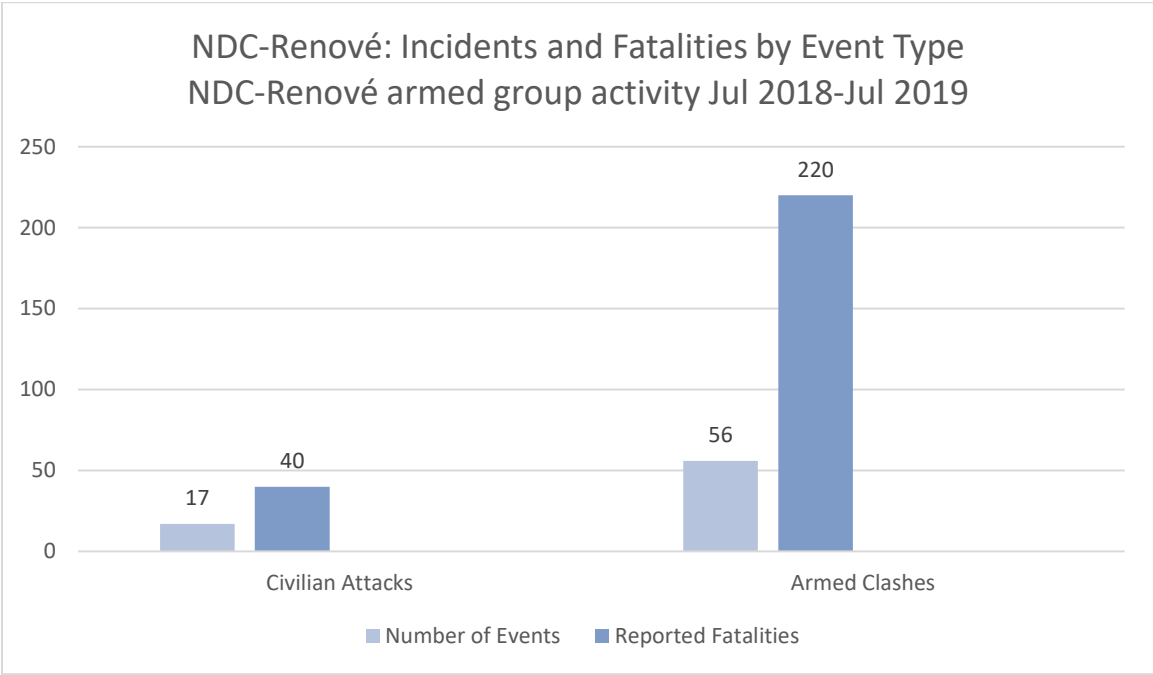
Local conflicts are also escalated by the competition for natural resources (minerals, forests, etc.). DRC is also endowed with precious minerals such as gold, tin, coltan, and tungsten and possession of these minerals is a prized commodity. Researchers and non-governmental organizations have constantly emphasize that military organizations even invest in mining activities, which are illegal. Indicatively, according to the Panzi Foundation (2024), since 1998 the struggle over mineral-rich land has served as the source of conflict between armed groups and militia groups, and the income gained through the illegal mining is used to fund their activities. According to the foundation, this mineral war has resulted in long-term bloodshed, which has resulted in the killing of millions of people and the destabilization of whole regions. On the same note, Amnesty International (2024) also stresses that mineral wealth in Congo is one of the primary sources of the conflict; certain armed formations are funded directly by the control over the mining fields.

At the ground level, the point where resources are being pulled and local conflicts take place form dynamic flashpoints. The field research conducted by Verweijen (2017) in South Kivu talks about violent confrontations in the area of a gold mining concession: the local militia fighters attacked a foreign mining company, arguing that it was their land and that the attack was carried out as a defense of their ancestral hill. This is an example of a trend that can be followed, namely, industrial or semi-industrial resource projects (usually supported by influential outsiders) create a community backlash that can rapidly go militarized. Verweijen demonstrates that mining firms may contribute to the empowerment of local warlords unintentionally since such enterprises usually negotiate or bribe armed gangs as protection. In the meantime, other men of the community and farmers, artisanal miners in particular who were dependent on such land are sidelined and their anger is yet another weapon used by warlords to find followers.

Such processes are manifested in the conflict mapping: Schouten, Matthysen and Spittaels (2019) mention that illegal mining activities are usually not addressed within the weakened state, therefore, people resort to armed actions or militias to be protected or resolve the conflict. Companies are viewed as a part of the problem by local miners and communities sometimes. Arguing against the attacks on mining, be it artisanal or corporate, are not spontaneous acts of banditry but usually perpetrated by such grievances. Resource competition in this manner is directly related to local causes of conflict. (Schouten, P., et al., 2019)

The association between armed group operation and resource contention is also demonstrated by looking at the nature of operation that a particular militia has. Figure 4.3 demonstrates the data about NDC- Renové, one of the most active armed groups in the mineral-rich North Kivu provided by ACLED (2019). In July 2018-July 2019, the group conducted 17 attacks on civilians that led to the death of over 40 people, as well as 56 armed confrontations with a result of more than 220 people being killed according to the group. These statistics demonstrate the persistence of the campaigns of violence by resource mobilized armed groups as Verweijen (2017) shows that the mining concessions are entrenched by the militia. The authors state that the ongoing conflict in DRC was actually a misguided fight that led to the deaths of numerous people, considerable damage, and many displaced individuals. The authors explain that the current

conflict in DRC was a wrong struggle that caused the death of many people, substantial destruction and displacement of a large number of people. (ACLED, 2019)



Source: ACLED (2019). Fact Sheet: Conflict in the DRC

Figure 4.3 shows the NDC- Renové Bar Graph.

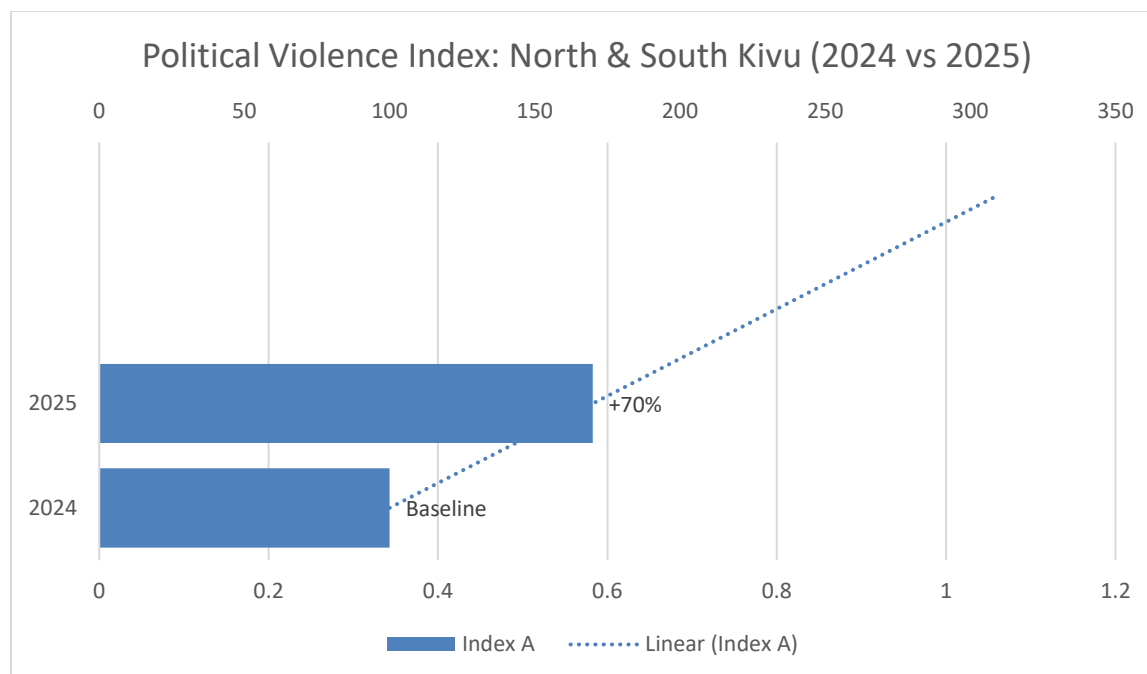
Conclusively, the results indicate that resource endowed regions turn into hotbeds of struggle whereby localized grievances and armed interests intersect. The armed groups can emerge to mobilize armed forces around communal anger against mining (they say that our land is being stolen). Simultaneously, resource sites are the form of rich prize to both local strongmen, as well as regional interests. In this way, the conflict of the resources is not only the manifestation of the existing local tensions but also the aggravation of them. According to the literature, mining will still contribute to violence, unless the issues of land accessibility and fair distribution of resources are addressed at the community level (Panzi Foundation, 2024); (Verweijen, 2017).

4.1.4 Regional Dynamics and Cross-Border Intervention

An important observation here is that, local conflicts in the DRC are hardly limited to village level, they are often used by the regional actors. In the history of DRC, the intervention by neighboring states and non-Congolese armed groups in the name of local concern has taken place. The same tendency is emphasized by Amnesty international (2024) where it says Rwanda and Uganda have been instrumental in the conflicts in the DRC, where they tend to support militia groups due to political, economic, or security objectives.

Concrete examples abound. As mentioned above, in Ituri, Ugandan military units openly sided with one ethnic group in a land conflict between two communities. In North Kivu, current affairs reflect the same trend with the analysts claiming that M23 rebellion was successful in early 2025 due to the strong military support by Rwanda. According to Nantulya, evidence exists that about 4,000 Rwandan soldiers also joined hands with the M23 rebels when they managed to capture Goma (Nantulya, 2025). Even indications of Uganda having other support to M23 are observed. The public justified these interventions by arguing that they were in the interests of safeguarding local ethnic relatives (the Banyamulenge Tutsis), but the tactical reasons seem to be more extensive. Researchers claim that the mission of M23 to promote the right of Banyamulenge to the land is just a mere face to cover the regional interests of the Rwanda. Practically, M23 has proceeded to set up a parallel civil government and increased mining in areas that it has taken over implying, a scheme of establishing its patron-state.

The outcomes of Rwanda support of M23 can be estimated through the latest conflict statistics. According to Figure 4.4, political violence in North and South Kivu increased 70 percent in 2025 compared to 2024, the same year that M23 launched an increased territorial attack and both Goma and Uvira fell (ACLED, 2026). This one-year peak highlights the position of some academic that the outside patronage swiftly transforms the domestic complaints to area hell.



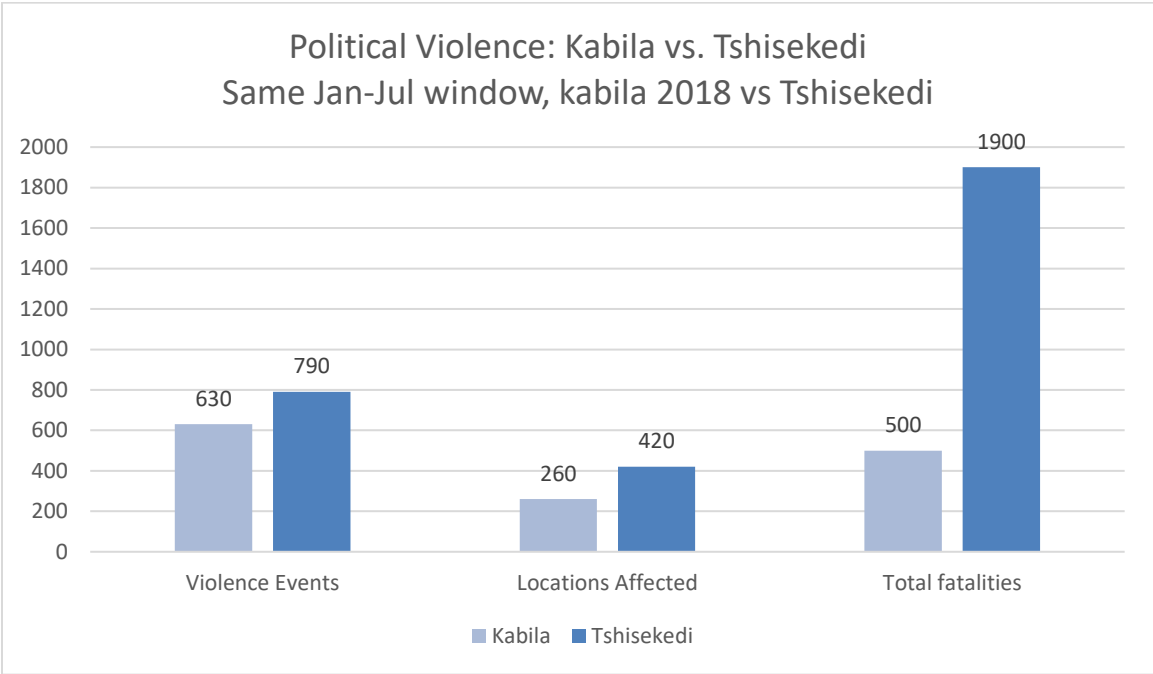
Source: ACLED (2026). Africa Overview: January 2026 – M23 takes Uvira

Figure 4.4 shows the North and South Kivu violence rise bar graph (2024 vs 2025)

When the period of two presidencies with similar periods is compared, the gradual increase in the effect of regional dynamics on domestic violence levels is very clear. According to figure 4.5, in the same January-July period of 2018, ACLED noted that under Kabila there were about 630 incidences of political violence which led to approximately 500 deaths. This increased almost to 790 events and close to 1,900 deaths under the Tshisekedi in 2019 which was a near four times rise in fatalities. Such course is not only a shift in a domestic leadership, but also a further entrenching of external intervention and the growth of militias over the same time. (ACLED, 2019)

In conclusion, the findings highlight that resource-rich areas become hotbeds of contestation where local grievances and armed interests overlap. Armed factions can fan communal resentment over mining (claiming that our land is being stolen) into armed mobilization. At the same time, both local strongmen and regional interests see resource sites as lucrative prizes. Thus

disputes over resources both reflect existing local tensions and amplify them. The literature suggests that without addressing community-level concerns about land access and equitable resource sharing, mining will continue to exacerbate violence (Panzi Foundation, 2024); (Verweijen, 2017).



Source: ACLED (2019). Fact Sheet: Conflict in the DRC

Figure 4.5 shows the political violence encountered during Kabila and Tshisekedi era

4.1.4.1 The role of African Union and the United Nations

The African Union (AU) has tried to fulfill its mandate in promoting peace and security in DRC and Africa and it has worked hand in hand with the international community especially the United Nations. The AU has consistently called for a cessation of hostilities, urging dialogue and regional cooperation to address the root causes of the conflict (African Union, 2025). Additionally, the AU has supported mediation efforts led by former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, who was appointed as the EAC’s chief facilitator in peace talks between the DRC

Government and armed groups. The United Nations, through its peace keeping mission in DRC, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), has been actively engaged in efforts to contain the M23 insurgency and protect civilians. MONUSCO, which has been operating in the DRC since 1999, has deployed peacekeeping forces in North Kivu to prevent further territorial advances by M23 and mitigate human rights violation according to a UN report. However, MONUSCO has faced widespread criticism for its perceived ineffectiveness in curbing violence from Congolese citizens demanding withdrawal.

4.1.4.2 The role of the East African Community (EAC)

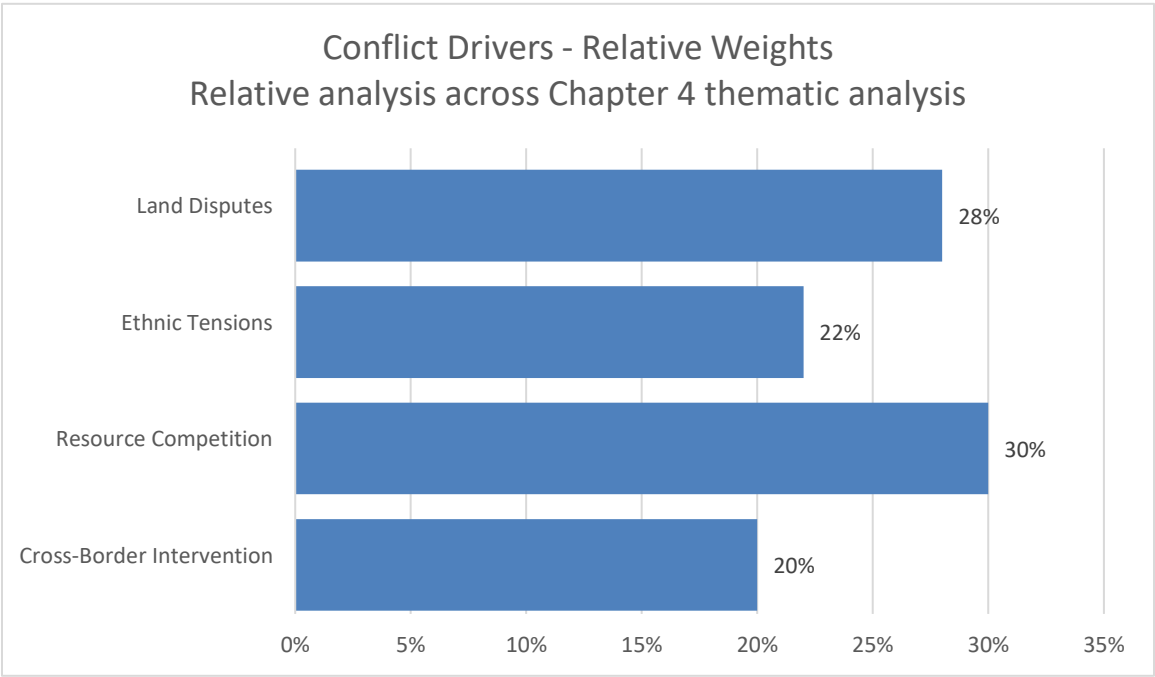
The East African Community has taken a proactive role in addressing the instability caused by the M23 rebellion. In 2022, the EAC established a regional force known as the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), to assist the Congolese Government in restoring security in DRC. The East African Community Regional Forces faced financial challenges, resistance from some key actors in the Congolese Government and they were accused to have failed to adhere to the Just war cause of neutrality. They had regional troops from Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan and Burundi. (Greco, E, et al., 2025) Aside from all the challenges the EAC faced, their participation in the conflict showed empathy and increased on regional security cooperation.

The EAC has also held diplomatic negotiations with an aim of promoting peace and security in DRC. Several high end meetings have been conducted in Uganda and Rwanda between leaders of Uganda, Rwanda, Congo and other stakeholders in order to solutions on how the conflict can be ended and discuss on the political boundaries. With that being said, all the talks have led to nothing due to the mistrust among all parties especially between Rwanda and the Congolese Government with Rwanda being accused of backing the M23 and yet President Kagame still denies (Crisis Group, 2022)

In conclusion, the findings showed that the agendas of the regional interventionists worsen the ethic disputes since most of them use the disputes as a disguise to intervene in the affairs of the DRC and exploit it.

4.2 ANALYSIS

Before proceeding to the analytics synthesis, Figure 4.6 offers a consolidated view of the four thematic conflict drivers examined in this chapter. Land disputes, ethnic tensions, resource competition and cross-border intervention. The relative weights assigned reflect the proportional emphasis across the secondary literature reviewed, including ACLED (2026) event data and Chigudu’s (2025) structural analysis. Resource competition and land disputes emerge as the dominant drivers, though all the four are deeply interconnected, as the preceding sections have demonstrated. The analysis that follows examines how these drivers reinforce one another within a single self-perpetuating conflict system.



Source: Derived from ACLED (2019); Chigudu (2015), PCD Journal; Chapter 4 thematic analysis

Figure 4.6 shows the conflict drivers summary bar chart.

Overall ethnicity in DRC is best understood as a powerful organizing frame layered into structural problems such as state failure, predatory resource economies, and competing regional

security agendas (Machibya, 2025); (Hoffmann, 2022). Local ethnic disputes over land, citizenship and customary authority are repeated instrumentalized by national elites and neighboring states, which transforms micro-level grievances into protracted regional wars. Durable solutions therefore require not only inter-ethnic reconciliation and land/citizenship reforms, but also regional security cooperation, governance, and regulation of cross-border resource exploitation.

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE; SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Summary of major findings;

5.1.1 With objectives

In conducting this research I've been able to realize that the ethnical factors leading to the conflict in the DRC such as land, stem from colonial legacies, land struggles due to identity politics, and migrations as shown by the ACLED data site indicating the heavy violence concentration in the DRC. The marginalization of the Twa and the Hutu-Tutsi divides have taken place because of the historical discrimination (1994 Rwandan Genocide) and the citizenship debates on whether the Banyamulenge should be granted citizenship rights. There is high intensity in the resource competition between the locals, artisanal miners, external peace-keeping bodies and this has been well reflected by NDC-Renové showing how this continued competition and fight over minerals has prolonged violence. In addition, as much as many regional neighbors have intervened, there are continued speculations that the M23 are being backed by Uganda and also external support has escalated hence increasing the humanitarian crisis in the DRC. In summation, the drivers of this conflict have a self-repeated cycle which has neglected the peace efforts. The community initiatives have shown promise but yet declined.

5.2 Summary

This research aimed to examine the relationship between ethnic disputes and regional conflict with a case study of DRC focusing on the land disputes, natural resource competition, weak governance and citizenship. Analysis used Uppsala Conflict Data Program and Armed Conflict and Location Event Dataset studies on conflict. The study explored both qualitative and quantitative factors such as land ownership conflicts, citizenship and identity politics, resource competition, cross border armed interventions and sustained violence. The main focus was on the ethnic disputes in the areas of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri province.

The Democratic Republic of Congo's conflict remains one of the largest humanitarian crises in Africa and the world mainly driven by corruption, weak governance structures, resource

competition land disputes among others hence proving what many of the scholars such as Autesserre found out about Congo's persistent conflict. A substantial amount of Congolese nationals has sought asylum in other neighboring countries and others have died because of the conflict and the Government itself can't seem to do much because it's heavily infested with corruption from the top to bottom. Research has also shown that external intervention found it had to implement peace-building strategies mainly due to resistance from the locals because external forces don't involve community engagement and also because the external interventionists came with their own agendas of resource exploitation. This has had negative impacts on the households economically hence increasing on the instability. Ethnic disputes contribute to refugee influxes in neighboring countries, regional conflict, economic and political instability, land disputes among others thereby affecting national and regional stability.

5.3 Conclusion

This research highlights a critical linkage between ethnic disputes and regional conflicts in the DRC. As one compares these findings, it is evident that there was a significant relationship between ethnic disputes and their influence on regional conflict in the DRC and its neighbors. The findings show that the drivers of ethnic disputes are related to land disputes, colonial legacies, ethnic and communal tensions, resource competition and regional dynamics and cross-border interventions. These ethnic disputes have surely prevented the prevailing of peace and reconciliation in the region and also in DRC and this has affected the economy of DRC together with that of the regions since there are other on-going conflicts in the EAC regions hence putting all members at stake. Addressing the grievances that underlie the ethnic disputes and building institutions and norms that allow those disputes to be resolved without violence will surely not come from military interventions alone. Future research should continue to monitor these dynamics, and policymakers should prioritize initiatives that bridge the gap between the local and regional dimensions of conflict in the DRC.

5.4 Policy recommendations

Deepen inclusive, multi-track peace and conflict transformation. This will build a coordinated conflict transformation architecture that links track I (state and diplomatic actors), track II

(religious, traditional, civil society leaders) and track III (communities, women, youth), hence reducing duplication and communities among peace initiatives. Peace agreements can also be designed as genuine win-win processes with credible implementation mechanisms, monitoring and enforcement to avoid repeated breakdowns like those surrounding the M23 and Nairobi process. To add, in track II, there must be prior coordinated arrangements for meetings between representatives of rival armed groups. Such efforts must be treated with extreme caution so that the proceedings do not degenerate into a verbal showdown that would lead to further complexities in resolving the conflict. Other tracks have their own responsibilities as well. (Sadiki Maeresera, et al., 2018)

Embed traditional conflict-resolution practices within MONUSCO mandates and national peace-building strategies. Academically, the research contributes a micro-macro analytical model that links grassroots grievances to Regional Security Complex Theory, filling the literature gap identified in the proposal.

Make regional interventions more coherent and accountable. This can be done by clarifying institutional roles and coordination between SADC, ICGLR, EAC, AU and MONUSCO and create standing mechanisms to align political dialogue, sanctions and military operations. Regional decision making can also be done to allow faster crisis responses and also prioritizing synchronized regional strategies over fragmented or competing initiatives driven by member-state interests. (Maeresera, 2017)

Address the resource and economic drivers of conflict by reforming natural resource governance to increase transparency, accountability and state oversight over mining and trade conflict prone provinces. This can be done by rebuilding the state, transforming non-state forces into a professional military and inducing a few innovations into the defense reform process. Such innovations can include establishing territorial armies in eastern provinces where armed groups and foreign forces take advantage of state weaknesses to exploit resources and abuse local defenseless populations. (Kibasomba Man-Byemba, R, 2023)

Safeguard and improve multilateral peace operations through maintaining and reforming, rather than abrupt withdrawal, multilateral missions like MONUSCO and Force Intervention Brigade

can improve mandates, accountability and cooperation with regional bodies instead of hollowing them out. The multilateral presence can be used to raise standards on human rights, transparency and civilian protection and to constrain the most predatory behavior by state and non-state actors.

Future research should longitudinally assess the influence of these locally-driven interventions on conflict frequency and regional stability, employing mixed-methods triangulation to validate causal pathways.

5.5 Implications for Peacebuilding Strategies

Given these findings, peacebuilding in the DRC must operate simultaneously at the local and regional levels. First, local reconciliation and dispute resolution should be prioritized. As (Autesserre, 2010) prescribes, building peace requires attention to local foundations where meaningful intercommunity dialogue and land reforms are essential to alleviate grievances. In practice, this could mean reinforcing or enhancing traditional land tribunals and blending them with formal justice systems within which farmers and herders will be able to settle land claims without the need to use militias. The granting of land rights, particularly to historically marginalized communities should be legalized so as to discourage claims to violence.

Second, there is a need to support peace efforts by communities. Ituri examples demonstrate working models. Other networks, such as Haki na Amani, educate villages on land rights, governance and the causes of conflicts by training local, so-called animators. These peace committees of the community (consisting of women peace cells) address minor conflicts before they get out of control. Peacebuilders can leverage such locally invested capacity by transforming possible points of grievances into a venue of dialogue. Notably, the interventions are not supposed to dictate new schemes, but to enhance the one that is already in place (chiefdoms, churches, civil society). On the ground tensions can be defused by training and empowering local leaders on negotiation and inclusive decision-making.

Third, there should be better governance of resources to undermine the war economy. This is not just policing: it entails open benefit sharing of mining and forestry. The literature cautions that bans that are heavy handed (such as former mining moratoria) may intensify poverty and drive

people to conflict. Rather, other measures, like clean supply chains and community participatory budgeting of mining revenue, would assist. As an example, the communities would have an interest in peace by setting aside a portion of the mine royalties to local development projects (schools, clinics, farming inputs). Meanwhile, it is crucial to disarm and demobilize militia fighters most prominently landless or unemployed ones. In the demobilization programs, land redistribution or job training should be incorporated to deal with the inherent grievances that fueled recruits into armed organizations.

Fourth, diplomacy and accountability should be used to supplement the efforts of the locals at the regional level. State norms should be reinforced by the Great Lakes states against interference in internal conflicts. The agreements which do not accept proxy wars in neighbors could be strengthened by regional bodies (ICGLR, AU). Outside meddling should be curtailed by international actors (UN, EU, multilateral forums) using selective pressure, say, by imposing arms embargoes on apparent supporters of militia. Simultaneously, the national elites should not be the only participants of peace negotiations but also the representatives of the local population. Indicatively, Banyamulenge civil society voices to any ceasefire with an outfit of the nature of M23 must include ensuring that the concerns of the people (land claims, citizenship rights) are met and not distorted by non-national interests. The connection between regional peace and local justice is mandatory: the perpetrators of local crimes (ethnic murders, land grabbing) also should be held responsible, and it would mean a signal that grievances should be resolved in courts, not by force.

Peace agenda land and citizenship reform. It is crucial to consider the issue of divided citizenship or the so-called bifurcated citizenship and the unfair access to land between the so-called native population and the so-called non-natives as a vital part of long-term peace, rather than an addition. This can prevent certain Banyarwanda from participating in armed conflict against the non-banyarwanda communities in the Kivu region and the Congolese Government. This will help to reduce on the instability in Kivu region (Stearns, 2014). This will reduce on the uncertainty over citizenship and land access hence reducing on the interethnic relations issues that undermine state legitimacy as marginalized and deprived groups often view the state as complicit in their exclusion. (Mkhize, et a., 2025)

Finally, civic education and reconciliation programs can help heal divisions. Given the salience of ethnic narratives, teaching cross-community understanding and non-violent problem solving is important (Autesserre, 2010). Schools, media, and NGOs can facilitate interethnic dialogue and communal projects to rebuild trust. Over time, such confidence-building measures can reduce the appeal of identity-based mobilizers. Psycho-social work shows in Laulaba, DRC shows that depoliticizing ethnic narratives, clarifying land administrative law and continuous dialogue can reduce intergroup tensions (Fidele, 2023)

In all these strategies, sensitivity to context is paramount. Westernization has been proven to be a wrong approach, and the risk is that the same error will be made again. One should integrate centralized and bottom-up strategies in which international mediation must be based on realities on the ground as postulated by scholars (Autesserre, 2010). As one analyst noted, until Congolese communities see tangible change in their daily lives and injustices, security in the entire country and the Great Lakes region will remain fragile.

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