

Research Article

Political Conflicts and Ethnic Cleavages in South Sudan: The Case of Dinka and Nuer

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Abstract

This study investigates the complicated dynamics of political conflict and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan. It focuses primarily on Dinka and Nuer ethnic cleavages. South Sudan has been stalled in conflicts that are deeply rooted in its historical, socio-economic disparities and the legacy of prolonged civil wars. Dinka and Nuer have historically been differing on political ideologies and aspirations since 1991 which have exacerbated tensions between these two groups. This study employs a qualitative approach using interviews, questionnaires, archival research and existing literature to explore how ethnic identities have influenced political polarization and conflict in South Sudan. It uses 84 sample size with purposive sampling. The study highlights the historical grievances that have developed over decades, from war of the liberation where Nuer felt discriminated to access military training while favoritism was towards Dinka in post-independence power cleavages. In the same breath, the Dinka felt that Nuer were mobilized in 1991 to stab the back of the liberation movement. The study uncovers how these ethnic cleavages have been manipulated by current political leaders to mobilize support from their co-ethnic group leading to violent confrontations. A critical element of the study is the examination of the political conflicts and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan in which political factions aligned along ethnic lines resulting in large-scale atrocities, human rights violations and a humanitarian crisis. The study further explains the role of political elites in entrenching ethnic identities to foster a sense of loyalty to ethnic groups over national identity. Through the lens of ethnic conflict theory, this research suggests that the persistent conflict in South Sudan is not only a struggle for power but also appearance of deep-seated ethnic rivalries. The results of this study highlight a broader insight of how ethnic identity has shaped political landscapes in country. However, the study suggests that promoting dialogue, political inclusivity and reconciliation can help bridges the gap between Dinka and Nuer to address the historical grievances and foster mutual understanding and trust. Local leaders and youth from both communities should be engaged in these conversations to build trust and a sense of shared identity that surpasses ethnic divisions.

Keywords: Political Conflicts, Ethnicities, Cleavages, Dinka, Nuer, South Sudan.

1. Introduction

South Sudan has a long history of political conflict and ethnic cleavages that dated back to the colonial era when Sudan was under British and Egyptian rule (Johnson, 2014). The main source of conflict in South Sudan has been competition over power and resources between various ethnic groups. Ethnic diversity is one of the defining features in South Sudan, with over 64 different ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Dinka and Nuer. This diversity has led to tensions and conflicts over land, cattle and political representation. The roots of the political conflict in the region can be traced back to the struggle for independence from Sudan. The Sudanese Civil War, which lasted for several decades, resulted in a deep mistrust between different ethnic groups and contributed to a legacy of violence and instability that continues up to today. After gaining independence from Sudan in 2011, South Sudan descended into a new civil war in 2013, largely along ethnic lines between the Dinka, led by President Salva Kiir and the Nuer, led by former Vice President Riek Machar. This conflict resulted in widespread violence, displacement of civilians and a humanitarian crisis. Efforts to break peace agreements have been made, with varying degrees of success, but the underlying ethnic tensions and power struggles remain unresolved and any slight military provocations like

Nasir incident of March 2025 quickly lead to ethnic tensions. Thus, a need for inclusive governance, equitable distribution of resources, and respect for human rights are crucial for lasting peace and stability in South Sudan.

In December 2013, the political tension between South Sudanese elites erupted in violence, the dispute was not rooted on the ethnicity, but escalated to the ethnicity with the present of the political grievances igniting the armed conflict of which both ethnicity, Nuer and Dinka targeted themselves across the country. The fighting continued for more than five years, regional mediators tried to bring peace under the sponsorship of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and East Africa Community (EAC). The warring parties from time to time recommitted themselves to January 2014 cessation of hostility accord but continually violated it. In May 2014 the parties agreed to form a transitional government, but failed to reach a compromise on its composition and responsibilities. The warring parties failed many deadlines set by the regional leaders to sign the agreement, but under the threat of international sanctions that includes the proposal of arms embargo, the parties reached an agreement in August 2015, where President Salva Kiir signed the deal with reservations.

On 8th July 2016, fighting occurred between the government forces and Riek forces during the press conference by the two leaders in Presidential Palace (J1) in which the both sides sustained casualties. On July 10th 2016, fighting broke out in Juba and spread quickly across the city, violence intensively occurred in some parts of Juba and the areas around protection of civilian sites (POCs), which sheltered civilians. Many citizens were killed including two Chinese UN peacekeepers and others were wounded. After the fighting stopped, the surviving opposition troops fled the country. In September 2018, the R-ARCSS agreement was signed between the government and the oppositions SPLA/IO, South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA), former detainees (FDs) and other opposition parties (OPPs). The agreement designed outlined the power sharing in the national legislature, ministerial council, states level and counties levels. But at the state level, the political influence is loose and sometimes is regarded as against the principle of proportional representation proposed by parties (Lijphart, 1977).

The revitalized agreement also necessitated the unification, training and redeployment of the forces to be carried out within the eight months of transitional government, which has not been completed until the time of writing this article. The agreement also provided the constitutional review and elections for the next government to be conducted at least sixty days before the end of the transitional period in February 2022. In August 4th 2022, South Sudanese parties to September 2018 peace agreement signed a road-map extending the transitional period for 24 months, quoting the failure to complete some critical benchmarks on the agreed time with elections in December 2024. The road map was agreed and signed in the present of President Kiir and Riek Machar and five political parties before the audience and supporters of both parties as well as the partners in the coalition government. Riek Machar cited that the extension was necessitated by two critical issues of either crashing, run elections without critical benchmarks or extend the elections for credibility purpose. These two issues were causing concern to South Sudanese, region and the international community and the parties principals had no choice but to extend the transition period. Machar said, the extension was genuine for the Accord to be implemented (Sudan Tribune, 2022). The former detainees called for the unity of the purpose and demonstration of good will to implement the road map agreement which they signed with other groups to implement the remaining parts of the 2018 Agreement. On 13th September 2024, the parties to the agreement extends the transition for 24 months ending in February 2027 but with elections in December 2026. But all these extensions, conflicts continued to spiral with ethnic tensions everywhere but for Dinka and Nuer, this has been quite worrying. It is critical to note Dinka and Nuer share the same ancestral origin with the same social values and cultures. However, the genesis of conflicts between two sisterly ethnicities is rooted on social control and fame. Nuer believe all the cattle on earth belong to them and above all, they are "*Naath*" loosely translated as "*human beings*". On the other hand, the Dinka believe that good life and good things come from them and above all they are "*Monyjang*" loosely translated as "*men of mankind*". These social contests have made the two communities to quickly mobilise on anything that touch them. Thus, political conflicts and violence involving leaders from the two communities usually mobilize Nuer and Dinka. While the Nuer will shout their slogan "*wanathin*" loosely translated as "*let go*", the Dinka will deploy their slogan "*konkooc*" loosely translated as "*wait*". These dialectics between Nuer and Dinka have continued to keep them living alongside each other after political conflicts. However, their ethnic cleavages are sharp if not manage could return the country to war. The study is outlined as follows: section one introduces the study. Section two discusses the literature review. Section three discusses research methodology. Section four discusses the results. Sections five concludes and section six provides study recommendations.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

South Sudan had been engaged in the ethnic cleavages since 1991 when Riek Machar split from Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) forming the Nasir Faction. That split triggered an intra SPLM/A civil war and large scale of violent along the ethnic line. Riek mobilized support from Nuer co-ethnic and targeted Dinka co-ethnic of John Garang including the Bor massacre in November 1991 in which more than 2000 people were killed (Johnson, 2014). Again in 2013, the history repeated itself, the members of the same political party disagreed over the party powers and split along the ethnic line. When the two political leaders differ on political opinions, their political parties are polarized ethnically and the consequence is that, these politicians will mobilize and alliance to their ethnic groups to seek support. Kulang and Ogbonna (2021) argue that ethnicity is the fundamental cause of political conflicts in Africa and thus, the present conflict in South Sudan has rekindled ethnic identities and ideologies to recording height (Kulang and Ogbonna, 2021). The new wave of ethnic sentiment in South Sudan is a result of irrational quest for political power and control among the top echelons in the country. Although ethnicity is not considered as the only cause of the conflict in South Sudan, the two scholars, Kulang and Ogbonna have highlighted or focused on the root causes of the political conflict in South Sudan as ethnic cleavages tensions and explosions, particularly, between Dinka and Nuer and famously Jaang and Naath (Kulang and Ogbonna, 2021). Again, Christopher Pinaud, (2022) argues that Nuer recruits were allegedly the first victims of racism in the SPLA with most of these recruits being viewed with suspicion after 1991 split (Pinaud, 2022). They had also been considered with suspicion especially following the Anyanya II assassination of Akuot Atem in 1984 in Thajjak over leadership struggles and debates on whether exactly the Movement should “liberate” the south or the entire Sudan. While Akuot Atem’s split group was advocating for liberation of Southern Sudan and declare it as a state, John Garang’s group advocated for total liberation of Sudan and maintain it as one state. Although both Dinka and Nuer youth decided to abandon their villages and joined the libeartion struggle, access to training was ethnically discriminatory: Dinka recruits from Bor and Bahr El Ghazal were given privileged access to military training. One of the former SPLA soldiers, a Nuer trained in Itang, remembered, the majority of the people in senior military positions and those military officers who had been sent to military school were allegedly Dinka, most of them from Bahr El Ghazal and Bor. During training, the Nuer felt the difference between Dinka and Nuer was due to the suspicion against Nuer soldiers following the rift between Gai Tut and John Garang (Pinaud, 2022). Some accounts argues that there was tribalism in SPLA troops against Nuer recruits during training. SPLA viewed the predominantly Nuer Anyanya II as a reminder of colonial stereotypes of Nuer as “usurpers”. The 1991 split sphered by Riek Machar against John Garang and which the majority of Dinka believed as the stabbed at back of liberation increased the mistrust between Dinka and Nuer. When the 15th December 2013 political violence ensued between President Kiir and elshile Vice President Riek, the ethnic tensions between Dinka and Nuer were fanned and exploded at the local levels. The scholars, Kulang and Ogbonna and Pinaud underlined ethnicity and racism in the SPLA against Nuer during the liberation struggle and never underscored the root causes of the ethnic cleavages between Dinka and Nuer in South Sudan. Inspire by this deficit, the study will fill this gap of knowledge. Hence, the study shall assess the impact of the ethnic cleavages on national unity by investigating the causes of conflicts and their implications on South Sudanese communities, particularly, Dinka and Nuer. The study also aims to provide insights into the intersections of ethnicity, politics and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

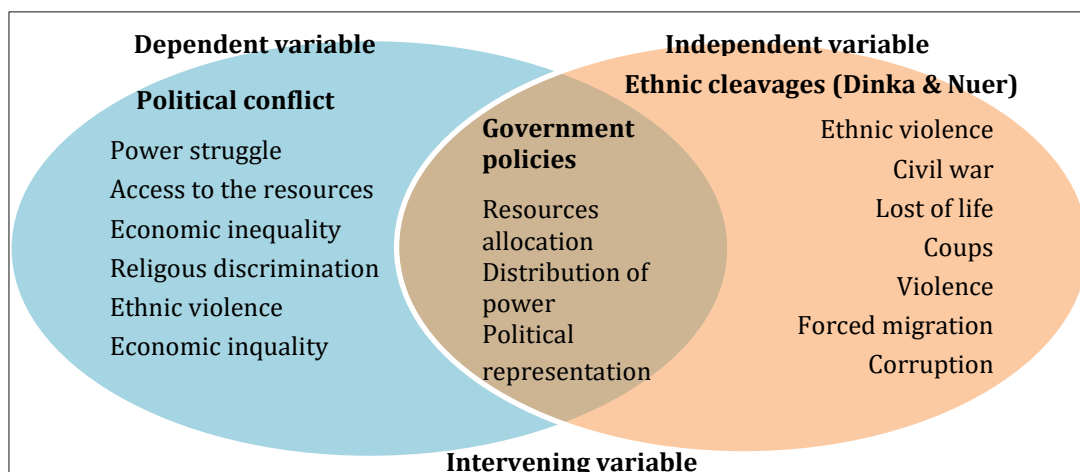


Figure 1. Conceptual framework (Source: Authors).

Figure 1 above offers a logical structure that connected concept and provides visual display of how the ideas in the study are related to one another (Grant and Osanloo, 2014). The relationships between the variables in the research is illustrated in the above Venn diagram.

1.2.1. Political Conflict and Ethnic Cleavages: Explanation of Variables

According to a study by Fjelde and Østby (2019), political conflict has been a defining characteristic of African societies following their independence in 1960s and 1970s (Fjelde and Østby, 2019). These conflicts often have ethnic, religious, civil, or political roots and are frequently influenced by power struggles, resource distribution and limited access to basic services leading to economic inequality. The consequences of these conflicts include violence, displacement of populations, loss of life and hindered economic growth. As indicated in the conceptual frame above, political conflict is the dependent variable. In South Sudan political conflict revolves around power struggles, resources distribution and governance issues between two leaders Salva Kiir and Riek Machar. The competition for the power and resources has always led to the violent conflict and fragmentation of the two ethnic groups Dinka and Nuer. Ethnic cleavages according to Cordell and Wolff (2010), is defined as the conflict where groups define their goals exclusively in ethnic terms and in which the fault time of confrontation is one of the ethnic variations (Cordell and Wolff, 2010). Ethnic cleavages are the result of historical grievance and configurations which lead to the sentiment of us against them as such elites politicize ethnicity to gain power.

Ethnic cleavages is the independent variable as illustrated in the above conceptual framework. In South Sudan, ethnic cleavages refer to the deep-rooted ethnic divisions and tensions that have a historical existence in South Sudan between the two major ethnic groups Nuer and Dinka. The struggle for power between these ethnic groups has resulted into ethnic polarization and violent conflict. Government policies is the link or bridge between the independent and dependent variable, political conflict and ethnic cleavages and is the intervening variable. Government policies such as resources allocation, distribution of powers and political representation often lead to political conflict and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan. In South Sudan, the historical grievances between the two competing ethnic groups Dinka and Nuer combine with discriminatory government policies have ignited the conflict in the country. The failure of the government to address the diversity of ethnic composition in South Sudan has exacerbated ethnic tension, in addition to the policies that favour one ethnicity over the others had created resentment and deep division along the ethnic lines.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Causes of Political Conflicts between Dinka and Nuer

Many factors often lead to the political conflicts within the state (Rotfeld, 1999). These factors increase the possibility of war because of the inability of the government to provide governance and protection of the citizens. Weak government judicial institutions have limited ability to prevent the escalation of the ethnic conflict than the organized government can contain. Political institutions play a vital role in the ethnic cleavages, because political conflict is the product of the power struggle between the elite politicians who have been excluded from the power sharing in the authoritarian system of one-party rule. War torn countries usually suffered inequality among social sections, this could be one of the factors that lead to the conflict in South Sudan. Whether on the ethnic basis or national identity or economic class, inequality is reflected in unequal access to political power, which impeded peaceful transform of power. The root cause of the political conflict in South Sudan according to (Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005) connected to availability of natural resources such as oil which has been fueling the civil war in South Sudan because the warring parties have continued to control oil and other natural resources. There is a relationship between the oil resources exploitation and civil war in South Sudan (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Political conflicts are inevitable phenomenon of the social life in the world and have been subjected to the study within various fields including international relations (Henderson, 1998), and in the field of research (Gultung, 1969). Defining the conflict is hard because it is a complex social habit that refer to different aspects. Scholars use the term conflict when referring to the situations where there are difficulties in reconciling different interests or differences in opinions or disagreements over objectives (Bush and Folger, 1994). Researchers refer to the political conflict as the differences in ideology or disagreements on policies between the political parties or actors (Oscarsson, 1998). Others have used the term political conflict to refer to the behavior where actors behave in confrontational way to promote their interest and attempt to block other actors from achieving their objectives (Deutsch, 1973). Over several decades, political conflict has remained a persistent issue in Africa, manifesting in various forms such as civil wars, ethnic tensions, coup, violence, corruption and economic mismanagement. This instability has had profound effects, resulting in significant loss of life, forced migration and extensive infrastructural damage (Fjelde and Østby, 2019).

Political conflict in South Sudan revolves around power struggles, resources distribution and governance issues between two leaders Salva Kiir and Riek Machar. The competition for the power and resources has always led to the violent conflict and fragmentation of the two ethnic groups, Dinka and Nuer. According to (Coser, 1956) conflict is a struggle between opponents over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources (Coser, 1956). The conflict in South Sudan manifested when the three prominent members of SPLM, Vice President Riek Machar, former SPLM Secretary General (SG) Pagan Amum and Rebecca Nyandeng declared their intentions to contest for the chair of party which angered President Kiir to purge the party from political opponents this is because elites see any alternative voice to their rule as a threat to their sources of wealth (De Waal, 2014). As a result, in July 2013, President Kiir dismissed Vice President Riek and suspended Pagan Amum the Secretary General of the SPLM party. This led to tensions that led to military mutiny and consequently political ignominy. This is because the behavior and attitudes of individual actors in response to differences in political institutions are shaped by the complex mixture of political risks and individual reactions (Huddy *et al.*, 2013).

While the political conflicts between Dinka and Nuer are historical, they are not fundamentally absolute in each ethnicity. This is because there are many Nuer who had supported late John Garang and at the time of writing this article, there are Nuer who are supporting Salva Kiir Mayardit and SPLM in Government (IG). This is also reaffirm with Riek Machar who has Dinka who are supporting his SPLM/A in Opposition (IO) faction. Although this is the case, the paradox of ethnic explosion between two ethnic groups occur when a government takes any political and security action which the Nuer will view as Jaang (Dinka) intention to eliminate them. Thus, the Nuer will react with its villages militia outfit known as Jiech Mabor or White Army which is always guided by spiritual leaders (the prophets) (Riak, 2021). This is what was witnessed in Nasir with White Army dislodging South Sudan People Defence Forces (SSPDF), captured garrison in Nasir town and killed the Commander, Major General, David Majur Dak Thel on 7th March 2025. While the death of general and SSPDF officers, of which majority are Dinka almost led to ethnic cleansing between Dinka and Nuer, President Salva Kiir immediately addressed the press conference and asked all the South Sudanese not to take law into their hands by killing themselves. He noted that this was a matter the SPLM-IG and SPLM/IO will resolve. While senior IO leaders including Minister of Petroleum Puot Kang and Lt. Gen. Duop Lam have been arrested and accused of orchestrating the Nasir White Army attack, South Sudanese have asked the government to arrange those arrested to court so that they answer the charges against them.

2.2. Roles of Judicial Institutions in Providing Justice on Ethnic Cleavages Related Political Conflicts

Judicial institutions arbitrate and adjudicate disputes of various sorts within a political community. The basic social logic of courts and judges is rooted in the trial for conflict resolution. Whenever two actors come into a conflict that they cannot themselves solve it. They call upon a third party for assistance (Shapiro, 1981). According to this simple but universal view of judicial institutions, the effectiveness and efficiency of the third-party is related to the extent that he or she is neutral to the issue in dispute and independent from the parties in conflict, as well as to the extent to which it applies pre-exist legal norms after adversary proceedings (Shapiro, 1981). The immediate role of judicial institutions would then be to resolve specific disputes. But judicial institutions are also means to achieve other, more general or proximate, normative appealing goals through the resolution of those specific disputes. According to modern political thinkers, along with the other branches of government, judicial institutions partake in creating a moderate or balanced system of rule. This is what Montesquieu famously called “the liberty of the constitution” in *The Spirit of the Laws*.

Scholars have made efforts to theorize the role that courts play in bringing about outcomes such as regime stability, human rights protection, corruption control, or investment and economic growth either by enhancing the credibility of government commitments, by providing focal points that help solve coordination problems, or by providing information that reduces the uncertainty that partly causes cooperation dilemmas (Barro, 1997). Institutions such as transitional justice can play a pivotal role and strategic policy tool to build just and inclusive future in polarized societies that are grappling with legacies of conflict and large-scale human rights abuses by the states and other stakeholders. Transitional justice can be a catalyst for changes in the societies and a model to redress for victims. It prevents the conflict and serious violation for sustaining peace, accountability and rule of law for social cohesion, societal healing and reconciliation and for sustainable development (De Greiff, 2015).

United Nation on its principle 9 calls on the UN to strive to ensure transitional justice processes and mechanism take account of the root causes of the conflict and repressive rule, and address violation of all rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. Failure to realize economic, social and cultural rights as

well as violation of these rights can be part of the root causes of conflict. Federal institutions can also play an important role on ethnic cleavages, the literature on ethnic conflict regard federalism as both cure and curse for the state disintegration (Bakke and Wibbels, 2006). Evidence based on case studies suggests that the ability of federalism to contain conflict and prevent disintegration is highly contingent upon the specific design of federal institutions (Filippov *et al.*, 2004).

However, other works point to the importance of non-institutional factors such as income disparities to account for federal stability. Bakke and Wibbels (2006) find that in contexts with high levels of interregional inequalities fiscal decentralization increases the likelihood of conflict through its tendency to amplify cross-regional income inequalities (Bakke and Wibbels, 2006). When wealthy regions find that the costs of financing redistribution to poorer regions offset the benefits provided by the undivided state (military security, economies of scale), pressures towards secession increase (Alesina and Spolaore, 2003). Political institutions such as political parties mobilize passive individual to actively participate in social life by pursuing popular collective action toward a defined set of claims, interests, or goals (Tilly, 1978).

Mobilization can take various forms ranging from protests to civil resistance, to revolution and to armed rebellion. It can also occur in various degrees of organization, from more spontaneous contentious episodes such as riots to direct actions coordinated by social movement organizations. Mobilization is a process that people undertake when other alternatives (e.g. political parties, legislative representation and legal representation) are either blocked, compromised, usurped by other interests, or otherwise unavailable. Also, literature on civil war has taken institutions very seriously. Scholars like Donald Horowitz empathize the role of institutions in preventing the violence. In his seminal work Horowitz explains that the distribution of economic and political power between ethnic group is crucial to understand ethnic conflict (Horowitz, 1985).

It is important to note that judicial institutions in South Sudan have a role to play in providing justice on ethnic cleavages political conflicts. Unfortunately, they have not played any role. The courts in South Sudan were envisage to help provide justice on the historical political conflicts between Dinka and Nuer. Victims of 1984, 1991, 2013, 2016 and 2025 are supposed to be provided with special tribunals to receive justice on their loved ones they have lost in those senseless conflicts. However, the leaders have not proactively allowed this to happen due to the fear of being pulled to courts. While the African Union (AU), designated Hybrid Court of South Sudan (HCSS) to trial perpetrators of 2013 political conflicts, the principals to the R-ARCSS have not agreed in entirety for this justice path (Biswaro, 2025). Hence, the judicial institutions of South Sudan have failed to help thaw the political conflicts turned into ethnic overtones between Dinka and Nuer.

2.3. Military Involvement in the Political Conflicts and Influence on Ethnic Cleavages in South Sudan

The weakness of South Sudan military institutions will be the continuing factor in addressing political conflicts in South Sudan. Military institutions have played a negative role on the ethnic cleavages in South Sudan. This is because the army was not a professionalized, institutionalized army (De Waal, 2016). But rather a collection of militias each of which was organized on the basis of personal loyalty and ethnically based armed unit. The ethnic group that had been organized around President Salva Kiir was known as Mathiang Anyoor and because Riek Machar was not having resources to buy loyalty from multi-ethnic group militias, he resorted to ethnic mobilization which was so quick and very cheap. He called upon ethnic wartime Nuer militias, the so-called traditional White Army and mobilized them overnight. The military involvement into the conflict came in when the war broke out within the South Sudan armed forces, the SPLA. SPLA split into two-armed faction, those loyal to President Kiir and those loyal to Vice President Riek Machar. President Kiir accused Riek Machar of attempted coup d'état launched by his supporters. During the night of Dec 16th, 2013, President Kiir dressed in military uniform marking the military intervention in the political conflicts. He gave the official statement in the state-owned television, stating that the soldiers loyal to Riek Machar had launched an attack on the headquarters of the SPLA that was repulsed after several hours (Downie, 2013).

The political conflicts that involved the military intervention was the disagreement between president and his deputy, Riek Machar when he declared his intention to challenge the President in South Sudan's next elections scheduled in 2015. In Dec 6th 2013, Riek Machar criticized President Kiir when he held a press conference to air his grievances. Machar complained about Kiir conducts as an echo of his critique of John Garang leadership (Downie, 2013). He also went so far to accused Kiir of trying to turn the Presidential Guard into his own private army. Machar who was still the deputy chairman of the SPLM accused the

president of ignoring the views of the party and allowed his decisions to be dictated by the regional and ethnic lobbies by close business associates. He urged the president to convene a meeting of the SPLM National Liberation Council and Political Bureau so that an agenda could be set in advance for party conference in mid-December 2013. That request was ignored and it was while the conference was wrapped up in Nyakuoren in Juba that gunfire broke out (Downie, 2013). The December 15th 2013 wars led to Nuer massacre in Juba as well as Dinka massacre in Bor, Ayod, Bentiu and Malakal. Ethnic memories were awoken with traditional Nuer white army quickly mobilised against grassroots Dinka as well as mobilization of Gelweng, the Dinka cattle protectors that graduated to Dot-ku-Beny outfit in Juba. Thus, the professionalism of South Sudan military was watered down on 15th December 2013 during political madness with majority of Nuer military officers joined their tribesmen and declared a resistance against the Government of South Sudan.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Research design is an overall formulation of a research process (Kabir, 2016). Research design refers to the strategies that are chosen to incorporate different components of the study into a logic and reasoning way. It is the essential statement of objectives of inquiry and the strategy for collecting the facts and analyzing them and report the final findings. The study was a cross-sectional survey involving both men and women, the young and old people, educated and non-educated to give a detailed account of their views, feeling and attitudes of the people in Juba towards the effect of conflict and ethnicity on the citizens. The design assisted the researchers to find solutions to the pressing problems. Mixed design that includes qualitative and quantitative tools was used in order to understand the dynamic of political conflict and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan. Descriptive quantitative method explained the field information and finally led to conclusive decision. This research design shows how all major parts of the research projects works to address the central research questions (Kabir, 2016).

3.2. Area of Study

The study focused on Juba County which is one of the six counties of Central Equatoria State. It is indeed located in Central Equatoria state and it hosts the capital City of South Sudan which is Juba itself. Juba borders Terekeka County to the north and Kajo Keji and Lainya counties to the South. The counties of Lafon/ Lopa, Torit and Magwi in Eastern Equatoria state are to the east, while Mundri East and Mundri West counties in Western Equatoria state are to the west. The River Nile flows northwards through the county and capital city. The county covers an approximate area of 18,362 km². According to South Sudan census 2008, the population of the Juba County was estimated to be 368,436 where 203,493 (55.2%) are male and 164,943 (44.8%) are female. However, according to 2017 projection by the National Bureau of Statistics, the population was estimated to be 525,953 (Brinkhoff, 2024). Juba County was affected by the political conflicts and ethnic cleavages in 2013 when fighting erupted within the presidential guards between forces loyal to President Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar. It was reported that the government had targeted the members of Nuer ethnic group in which 200–300 Nuer men were killed in the neighborhood Gudele, Mangatain and New Site in Dec 16th 2013 (Bekele, 2014). The targeted killing had included members of Dinka by the opposition force in the other parts of the country. Both parties to the conflict had killed and destroyed the civilian properties in different location across the country which had contributed to the displacement of more than 400,000 people according to the estimates of the United Nations. Given that Juba is the seat of the Government of South Sudan, it is imperative that Juba County is chosen site for this timely and robust study.

3.3. Source of Information

Data is important factor in research. It is needed by researcher to solve problem in investigation. Data is an information about the research object that is gotten in research field (Bungin, 2008). It means that data is all information needed by researcher to find the answers to the research problems. The data is a fact used in discussing or deciding the answer to research question. The source of data in the study is the subjects from which the data can be collected for the purpose of research (Arikunto, 2010). The researchers used both primary and secondary sources of data.

3.3.1. Primary Source

This included the data collected through interviewing the respondents and submission of the questionnaires to be filled by the educated respondents. These are data that have been collected from the first-hand experience. This data has not been published yet and are more reliable, authentic and objective. Primary data are the data that have not be changed or altered by human beings and therefore, the validity of this data is greater than the secondary data (Kabir, 2016). Researchers face challenges in obtaining the primary data.

This could be due to the scarcity of population or lack of cooperation. Primary sources are the most importance sources of data because they are not manipulated by human beings.

3.3.2. Secondary Source

Secondary data according to Kabir (2016), is a data collected from a source that has already been published in any form (Kabir, 2016). The sources of the secondary data are books, internet, reports and journal articles. These data are collected from the previous publications with analysis of constraints.

3.4. Population and Sample Techniques

Population means all individuals or units of interest, typically there are no available data for most of all individuals in a population (Hanlon and Larget, 2011). Since the topic is political conflict and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan amongst Dinka and Nuer, the individuals of interest are the largest population of South Sudan. And since there was no data available for all individuals in the population, the research design adopted a single out of particular group known as target population. Target population is the group of individuals or participants with specific attributes of interest and relevance (Asiamah, 2017). The target population is more precise compared to the general population on the basis of containing no attributes that controverts a research assumption. Qualitative research can draw their samples from the target population using general qualitative sampling methods depending on the size and complexity and whether or not every member will be willing to participate in the study. The target population in this study was the local people or population found in Juba County. The sample included intellectuals, local community leaders, men and women, young and old as well as government officials.

3.4.1. Sampling Techniques

Sample technique or design is defined as a plan determined before any data are actually collected for obtaining a sample from a given population (Kothari, 2004). Therefore, sample technique is the procedure a researcher employed for selecting items for the sample. In this study, three (3) sampling techniques were adopted. These included purposive, quota and multistage cluster sampling and random sampling.

3.4.2. Determination of Study Sample

According to Hanlon and Larget, sample is a subset of the individuals in population (Hanlon and Larget, 2011). There is typically data available for individuals in samples. Hence, sample size refers to the numbers of items to be selected from the universe to constitute a sample. The size of the sample should be neither excessively large nor too small. It should be optimum because an optimum sample is the one which fulfills the requirements of efficiency, representatives, reliability and flexibility (Kothari, 2004). The target population of this study comprised of 107. When determining the size of sample, the researcher must determine the desire precision and acceptable level for the estimate. The population size variance is considered in case of larger variance a bigger sample is considered. The parameters of interest in the study must be kept in view, whereas deciding the size of the sample. Costs that dictate the size of sample can be drawn, budgetary constraint must be invariably be taken into consideration when determining the sample size. To choose the sample size, the study use sample determination formula known as Slovin's Formula provided by (Yamane, 1967).

The formula: $n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$

Where; n = minimum returned sample size; N= the population size; e = the level of marginal error

Hence, n = ?

N = 107

e = 0.05 calculated from 95 % level of confident. Which indicates that 5% is surrendered to error because no selection of the sample size can be 100%.

$n = 107 / 1 + 107 (0.05)^2$, $n = 107 / 1.2675$, $n = 84$

Therefore, $n = 107 / 1 + 107 (0.05)^2$, $n = 107 / 1.2675$, $n = 84$

Therefore, the study determined 107 into 84 respondents as the sample size.

3.4.3. Sample Procedures

Purposive sampling of the population was on the basis of researcher's understanding and knowledge of the population being studied, its elements and the nature of research designed especially in the initial design of the questionnaires where the researcher wished to select the large different respondents to test the relevance of the designed research questions. Simple random sampling was used in rotary uniformity without replacement of the right numbers of the needed respondents for example under multistage. In

multistage cluster sampling, two basic steps were involved namely sampling and listing of the population in the study. The list of the primary sampling unit was comprised of intellectuals, men, women, local leaders, elders and government officials.

3.5. Variables Definitions and Measurement

A variable is a concept, a noun that stands for variation within a class of objects. Variables can be classified into two classifications. The most important classification is on the basis of their use within the research under consideration, when they are classified as independent variables or dependent variables (Ary, 1985).

3.5.1. The Dependent Variable

Dependent variable is observed to determine the effect, if any, the types of variables may have on it. In other words, dependent variable will act if there is any relationship. In this research, the dependent variable political conflict in South Sudan.

3.5.2. The Independent Variable

Independent variable is an antecedent of the depend variable (Ary, 1979). Independent variable is variable selected by the research to the effect on or relationship with dependent variable. In this research the independent variable is ethnic cleavages in South Sudan.

3.5.3. Intervening Variable

Intervening variable is the link between the dependable variable and independent variable. Government policies is the bridge between the dependent variable, political conflict and independent variable ethnic cleavages. Government policies such as unequal allocation of resources, distribution of powers and political representations often lead to political conflict and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan.

3.5.4. Measurement

Measurement is defined as assigning numbers to things according to explicit rules. It refers to the process of giving identification tags to elements of our research data in order to arrange them for study (Miller, 1962). It is the process of systematically assigning values to represent attributes of organisms, objects, or events. Variables are measured using an instrument. The scale of the variable measured drastically affects the type of analytical techniques that can be used on the data, and what conclusions can be drawn from the data. There are four scales of measurement, nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio. Nominal scales of measurement represent only qualitative differences of the attribute of interest. While ordinal scales represent relative differences in the amount of some attribute such that the value assigned to someone or something reflects its rank among the rest of the data. Interval scales also reflect quantitative differences among data, but unlike ordinal scales they assume equal differences in the amount of the attribute being measured.

3.6. Procedure of Data Collection

The researchers obtained permission from Ministry of Higher Education of South Sudan to carry out the study. The purpose of data collection is to seek the quality evidence that can be translated and provide reliable data analysis that provide credible answer to the questions that have been asked. Data collection method is a way how the needed data are collected. Data collecting is a systematic and standardized procedure to obtain the necessary data (Tanzeh, 2011). Before considering the procedures of data collection, the study must consider two types of data, the primary and the secondary data. The primary data are the fresh and collected for the first time and are original in nature. The secondary data are the data that had been collected by someone else and have already been passed through the statistical process (Kothari, 2004). The researchers met the potential participants which include intellectuals, government officials and community leaders from Dinka and Nuer in Juba. The researchers used anonymity to protect the respondent's identity and later on during the data analysis the numbers were assigned to each of the respondents. The researchers distributed the questionnaires to extract the information needed from the potential participants.

3.7. Data Collection Instruments

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes (Kabir, 2016). In any study, an investigator may have a choice of collecting the relevant data himself or of relying entirely on existing data already collected by somebody else. The objective for all data collection is to capture quality evidence that is translated to rich data analysis and allows the building of a convincing and credible answer to questions that have been posed. While deciding about the method of

data collection to be used for the study, the research considered two types of data such as: primary and secondary data as argued earlier.

3.7.1. Questionnaires

The questionnaires consist of both open-ended and close-ended questions, these were distributed to the government officials and as well as university students comprising of male and female and community leaders in Juba.

3.7.2. Interviews

Interviews allow the researcher to understand what people say and what they experienced, think, feel and understand. Interviews are widely used as a data collection tool in qualitative research. They are typically used as a research strategy to gather information about the participant's experiences, views and beliefs concerning a specific research question or phenomenon of interest (Lambert and Loiselle, 2007). One-to-one interviews are the most commonly used data collection tools in qualitative research (Sandelowski, 2002). The study included oral interviews to collect information about the phenomena. The interviews conducted include community leaders, elders and intellectuals as well as government officials in form of questions and interview guides that give relevant information to the best of their knowledge hence yielding to qualitative data resulting from free expression. This method encouraged all respondents to participate in the interview to answer the research questions on what they think are the causes of political conflict and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan amongst the Dinka and Nuer.

3.7.3. Observation

Observation is a data collection method which may be used in either qualitative or quantitative research. In qualitative research, observation is used to collect data about what people do, the things which are important to them and applying subjective interpretation (Pope and Mays, 2020). In quantitative research, observation is used to collect and quantify things using set parameters and criteria (Ellis, 2022). In order to make critical judgment and come up with detailed information on the impact of political conflict and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan, the study used this technique because it gave an opportunity to physically observe the behaviour of members of Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups and record how citizens were affected by the attitudes of Dinka and Nuer political conflict and ethnic cleavages tensions in South Sudan.

3.8. Piloting the Study

Hertzog cautions that this is not a simple or straight forward issue to resolve because these types of studies are influenced by many factors (Hertzog, 2008). However, a pilot study is sometimes known as pretesting or fore-testing. According to Lynne Connelly, piloting study is a "mini-survey where the researcher sends out a questionnaire to a smaller sample size compared to the actual target participants" (Connelly, 2008). By collecting information from a convenience sample, you can predict the response patterns of participants and make any required change to your research. The purpose of piloting is to determine whether:

- a) The questions are properly framed.
- b) The questions have been placed in the best order.
- c) The questions are understood by all participants/respondents.
- d) Wording of the questions will achieve the desired results.
- e) Additional or specifying questions are needed or some need to be eliminated.

Generally, piloting aims to test the reliability and validity of questionnaire. In the size of piloting sample, some scholars such as Verra et al. recommended that the sample be small enough (Verra *et al.*, 2012). However, this piloted 10% of its determined sample size which turned out to be 8 respondents. Hence, government officials and community leaders in Juba were given 8 questionnaires for trials. The result was that 5 questions were corrected before actual research.

3.9. Quality/Error Control

The researchers controlled the dependent variable which is political conflict to see whether it could have been caused by ethnic cleavages. This is to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the result in data analysis. The research focused on the underlying causes of the political conflict and hence control factors facilitated it. Government policies, regime type and group population are the facilitating conditions (Harff and Gurr, 2004) of political conflict and are controlled in the analysis. It is seen that large groups are better able to mobilize, protest and fight due to their numerical strength. Therefore, the population ratio of various groups is an important factor of reference in ethnic division.

3.10. Reliability

Research reliability refers to whether research methods can reproduce the same results multiple times. If the research methods can produce consistent results, then the methods are likely reliable and not influenced by external factors. Reliability show how consistent is the instrument related to measuring the study variables (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). Several methods exist to measure reliability such as the test and retest method, split half method, parallel form and internal consistency method (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). However, internal consistency is the most commonly used psychometric measure of assessing questionnaire using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). The researchers employed Cronbach's alpha coefficient test for internal consistency to reveal whether the content of the questionnaire is reliable. Furthermore, a pilot study using 10% of the sample size was conducted to determine the time it takes to complete the questionnaire, check the instruments' clarity, consistency, adequacy, efficiency and dependability (Guetterman *et al.*, 2020). The pilot tests provide feedback to the researcher to detect any ambiguity and refine the questionnaire (Guetterman *et al.*, 2020). Due to the multidimensionality of the independent variables' constructs, Cronbach alpha was computed separately for each variable to ascertain the extent to which the items making up each variable shared a common core (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient test value of 0.7 or above is considered reliable (Leung, 2015). Similarly, (McCombes, 2019) corroborates that the value of alpha (α) greater than .80 is considered good, between 0.7 and 0.8 is acceptable and below 0.7 is poor. Thus, the reliability of this study instruments was 0.75 which is considered acceptable.

3.11. Validity

Validity in qualitative research means appropriateness of the tools, processes and data. Whether the research question is valid for the desired outcome, the choice of methodology is appropriate for answering the research question, the design is valid for the methodology, the sampling and data analysis is appropriate and finally the results and conclusions are valid for the sample and context. Scholars asserted that validity is the appropriateness of an instrument in measuring whatever it is intended to measure (Šerbetar and Sedlar, 2022). Quantitative validity is achieved if the researcher can draw useful and meaningful inferences from scores produced by a given instrument (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). The questionnaire itself was designed to assist in checking content validity. In addition to this, experts will be used to judge the nature of the questions used in the instrument to justify that the responses would appropriately indicate the measure even when asked in a number of ways. The validity of the instrument will be established using the Content Validity Index (CVI) where the relevance of the statements in the close ended questionnaire is scored by the experts (Šerbetar and Sedlar, 2022). A CVI above 0.7 indicates that the instrument is valid. The content validity ratio is calculated using the formula:

$$\text{CVI} = \frac{\text{total number of items rated}}{\text{total number of items}}$$

According to (Street and Ward, 2021), a content validity index of 0.7 and above is good enough for the study. Meanwhile construct validity concerns the extent to which the tool tests or measures accurately what it is supposed to. The researchers operationalized the constructs into concrete and measurable characteristics based on the idea of the construct and its dimensions (Šerbetar and Sedlar, 2022). The CVI of this study was 0.77 which is considered valid.

3.12. Data Processing and Analysis

Data was collected from subjects using two methods namely, qualitative and quantitative from questionnaires that was arranged according to the subjects that was to be filled. The qualitative data was then coded and laid in questions according to what they were to address. Qualitative data was arranged and organized according to the variables of the study that were identified. Where necessary, the researcher presented the data through tabulating so as to ease better analysis of the issues at the stake.

Data analysis is the computation of certain measures along with searching for patterns of relationships that exist among data group (Kothari, 2004). Therefore, in the process of analysis, relations or difference supporting or conflicting with original hypothesis should be subjected to statistical test of significance to determine with what validity data can be said to indicate any conclusions. Data analysis in general involves a number of closely related operations which are performed with an aim of summarizing the collected data and organizing them in a way that answer the research questions. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative measures could address the research questions through their inquiry and respective strength. Qualitative research is the development of concepts which support us to understand social phenomena in natural setting, giving the emphasis to the meanings, experiences and views of the participants (Bryman,

2008). The study organized and extended meaning from the data collected during interview session, questionnaires and information on the themes which were collected to ease the process of analyzing data. Data was done through observation, interviews and questionnaires analyzed qualitatively. The qualitative analysis was meant to explore challenges posed during and after the political conflict and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan and solutions to curb its consequences and implications.

3.13. Ethical Consideration

There are several reasons why it is important to stick to ethical norms in research (Kabir, 2016). This is because norms promote the aims of research in finding knowledge, truth and avoid errors. Since research involves cooperation and coordination between different people in various disciplines and institutions, ethical contemplation promotes the values that are necessary for collaboration such as trust, accountability and mutual respect. The acceptable professional norms and procedures will be used in this study. The researchers made program with various government officials as well as community leaders on the day of conducting the study. The study also applied anonymity when conducting the interviews so that respondents would not be exposed to security measures and the information given by the respondents would be kept secret and not exposed to the community and outside world rather than it would be used for academic purposes.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Causes of the Political Conflict between Dinka and Nuer in South Sudan

This section explained respondents` views and understanding of political conflict and ethnic cleavages in South Sudan. Variables in this section are represented in tables below to provide clear image of the responses from the respondents about the research topic.

Table 1. Causes of political conflict between Dinka and Nuer.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Power struggle	34	41%
	Control over the resources	5	6%
	All above	45	53%
	Total	84	100%
Source: Field data (2024)			

According to Table 1, the respondents` views indicate that 41% of the respondents believed that the causes of the political conflict between Dinka and Nuer is the power struggle which has fueled the tension. This power struggle transformed ethnic identities into political instruments which has led into violence and displacement. While 6% of the respondent`s views indicates that causes of the political conflict between the two ethnic groups is driven by the competition over the control of resources in which the politicization of ethnic identities is manipulated creating the cycle of violence. 53% of the respondents` views stated that the causes of the political conflict between Dinka and Nuer stem from competition over power struggle and control over the resources as evident in 2013 civil war driven by the power struggle and control over the resources.

Table 2. The root cause of ethnic cleavages between Dinka and Nuer.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Political elites	16	20%
	Power struggle	16	20%
	Control over the resources	5	5%
	All above	47	55%
	Total	84	100%
Source: Field data (2024)			

Based on the Table 2 above, 20% of the respondents agreed that political elites are the root cause of ethnic cleavages between two major ethnic groups Dinka and Nuer. Ethnic cleavages are the attribute of the power struggle driven by political elites. The elites from Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups fueled ethnic cleavages by fostering narratives that pit one ethnicity against the other. On the other hands, 20% of the respondent`s views indicated ethnic cleavages between the two ethnic groups is linked with ambitions of political elites who are after the control of power. The table also indicates that 5% of the respondents agree that control over the resources is the root cause of ethnic cleavages between Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups. This is due to

the lack of effective governance and equitable resources distribution which has left many in both ethnic's communities to feel marginalized, therefore reinforcing the cleavages. The table also revealed that, 55% of the respondent's views elucidate that political elites, power struggle and control over the resources are the root cause of the ethnic cleavages between Dinka ethnic group and Nuer ethnic group. The cleavages between these two groups are largely attributed to the power struggle and control over the resources driven by the political elites manipulating ethnic identity for personal gain.

Table 3. The political conflict has disintegrated social fabric along the ethnic line.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	23	27%
	Strongly agree	49	58%
	Disagree	4	5%
	Strongly disagree	8	10%
	Total	84	100.00%
Source: Field data (2024)			

In Table 3, the respondents' views indicated that 58% of the respondents strongly agree that the political conflict has disintegrated the social fabric along the ethnic line. The ongoing conflict has intensified ethnic divisions with political leaders exploiting the identities for their gain. This has led to increased mistrust and hostilities among different ethnic groups, fragmenting the societies along the ethnic line. Longstanding social ties and networks have been weakened as communities become divided by the conflict. The breakdown of inter-communal relations and support system has destroyed the trust that is necessary for social cohesion leading to increased isolation and vulnerability for individuals. The conflict has exacerbated the prolonged exposure to violence and displacement which resulted in psychological trauma for many individuals and communities. This trauma has hindered social interactions and impeded community rebuilding effort, perpetuating cycles of mistrust and fear.

The Table 3 also indicated that 27% of the respondents agreed that indeed the political conflict has disintegrated the social fabric along the ethnic line. The social fabric of the nation is deeply disintegrated along the ethnic divisions displacing communities and erode trust, traditional structures and fostering the environments of violence and trauma. While 10% of the respondent's views strongly disagreed that the political conflict has not disintegrated the social fabric along the ethnic line. On the other hands, 5% of the respondents disagreed that the social cohesion are not affected by the political conflict.

Table 4. How does the political conflict polarize the South Sudanese?

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Along the ethnic line	14	16%
	Tribal affiliation	18	21%
	Ethnic party	4	6%
	All above	48	57%
	Total	84	100.00%
Source: Field data (2024)			

As shown in the Table 4 above, the respondents' views showed that 57% of the respondents think that the political conflict in South Sudan has polarized South Sudanese along the ethnic line, tribal affiliation and ethnic party. Political leaders often align to their specific ethnic group leading to strong ethnic loyalties. This created an environment where national identity is overshadowed by the ethnic identity resulting in high tension and division between different groups. The conflict has created partisan politics and party where rivalry between ruling party and oppositions has polarized not only political factions but also public opinion. People always align themselves with these factions based on ethnic lines or personal loyalty to their leaders, this has reinforced the divisions within the society. The conflict has also exacerbated social stratification where communities are pitted against each other based on tribal and political affiliation. This has led to the social fragmentation and individual become wary of those from opposing factions, affecting community relations, marriages and social interactions. Many youths in South Sudan find themselves dragged into armed groups due to political polarization as a result, ethnic youth militias are mobilized around their political leaders when political issues arise creating a generation which is divided along political and ethnic line. The table also revealed that 21% of respondents agree that the political conflict has polarized the nation into tribal affiliation while 16% viewed that the conflict has polarized the society along the ethnic line. Only

6% viewed that conflict has polarized the society into ethnic party creating ethnic alliances that fostered partisan politics and exacerbated social divisions.

Table 5. The impact of political conflict on human security.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Internal displacement of the people	8	9.6%
	Refuge to the neighboring countries	3	3.5%
	Ethnic killing	6	7.2%
	All above	67	79.7%
	Total	84	100.00%
Source: Field data (2024)			

From the Table 5 above, the respondents' views indicated that 79.7% of the respondents think that the impacts of the political conflict on the human security are the internal displacement of the people, refuge to the neighboring countries and ethnic killing. The conflict that erupted in 2013, 2016 and Nasir-2025 has resulted in widespread violence including massacres, sexual violence and targeted killings of different ethnic groups. The conflict has also displaced millions of South Sudanese leading to a large population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to the neighboring countries. This displacement has disrupted livelihoods and exposes vulnerable populations to further risk including violence, exploitation and lack of basic services such as healthcare. Also, the conflict has destroyed agricultural production and disrupted supply chains leading to severe food insecurity. Many people were unable to access sufficient food resulting in malnutrition among the children and women. The impacts of the political conflict on human security are also be summarized on widespread destruction of schools and educational infrastructure leading to many children dropping out of the schools which affect their futures prospects and additionally armed group resorted to sometimes recruiting the children which compromise their safety and security.

Also 9.6% of the respondents agreed that the impacts of the political conflict on human security are the internal displacement of the people. The political conflict has posed severe threats on human security by generating violence which caused the displacement. While 7.2% of the respondents views the impacts on human security in form of targeted ethnic killing of specific ethnic groups, and these ethnic targeted killings were reported in Juba, Bor, Bentiu and Upper Nile state. The conflict has been marked by enormous human rights abuses including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence and torturing. On the other hands, 3.5% of the respondents view that, the conflict has forced millions of citizens to flee to the neighboring countries seeking for the safety and security of their lives.

Table 6. The economics implications of political conflict on South Sudanese.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Poverty	3	3.5%
	Destruction of economic infrastructure	1	1.2%
	Economic crisis and inflation	20	23.9%
	All the above	60	71.4%
	Total	84	100.00%
Source: Field data (2024)			

Table 6, show that 71.4% of the respondents revealed that the direct impact of political conflict is the exposure of the citizens to the poverty. This is because the conflict has impacted the agriculture which is crucial for sustaining the population. The conflict leads to the displacement of farmers, destruction of crops and limited access to markets. This exacerbates food insecurity and affects the livelihood of large population making them dependent on humanitarian foreign aid. The table revealed that the economic impacts of political conflict is the destruction of economic infrastructure such as the looting of banks in both Upper Nile and Jonglei states. The destruction of crucial infrastructure as such roads, schools and health facilities has hampered economic activities and increase government expenditure on reconstruction rather than development. The conflict also has disrupted the oil production on which the economy is heavily dependent for government revenue and budget leading to decreased revenue, budget deficit and economic instability. This instability has led to inflation and devaluation of South Sudanese pounds which resulted in reduction in the purchasing power, aggravates poverty levels and complicates trade by increasing the cost of imports. The table also proposed that 23.9% understand that the economic implication on South Sudanese are the economic crisis and inflation and due to the conflict, the political situation creates an unstable investment

climate which discourage both domestic and foreign investor. This lacks of investor stunts economic growth and development leading to increased unemployment. Also, the table shows that 3.5% of the respondents said that the economic implication of the political conflict to citizens is the exposure to the poverty. As the conflict destroyed the crops and displaced the farmers, the civil population become vulnerable to the starvation and poverty. Only 1.2% of the survey shows that economic implication of the conflict on the South Sudanese is the destruction of the economic infrastructure such as banks, school, healthcare and roads that can deliver the services to the population.

4.2. The Roles of Institutions on Ethnic Cleavages

In this section, the findings were processed in a way that the highest score for each statement was considered to be the prevailing opinion of the respondents and it constituted to the outcome of the findings for that particular statement. A close scrutiny of the scores of each statement on the table depicted that majority of the respondents had a view of all the statements.

Table 7. Institutions such as justice system and public sector recruitment process influence ethnic cleavages through the following.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Negative peace	4	4.7%
	Structural justice	11	13.1%
	Nepotism	15	17.9%
	All above	54	64.3%
	Total	84	100.00%
Source: Field data (2024)			

As shown in Table 7 above, the respondents’ views indicated that 64.3% of the respondents think that institutions such as justice and public sector recruitment can influence ethnic cleavages. When the justice is not accessible to the specific ethnic groups due to the weakness and corruption in the justice system this indicates that there is a negative peace. This means that a weak and corrupt justice system undermines the rule of law that leads to the lack of accountability for unethical behaviors. Also, the justice system in South Sudan is perceived to be biased and is influenced by the political interest especially when referring to the case of James Gatdet Dak who was sentenced to death without embracing the entire justice from 1984, 1991, 2013, 2016 and recent violence in Nasir for 2025. Therefore, ethnic favoritism within the judicial process can result in grievances and thereafter deepen the divisions and ethnic breaches among communities. Recruitment process also influences the cleavages, in the public sectors, people are appointed based on the nepotism and not on the meritocracy. When the specific ethnic leader came to the government office, that particular institution will be filled with ethnic group of the leader in power. The exclusionary practice of appointment can therefore exacerbate ethnic tensions and inequality that can leads the resentment and conflict. Transparent recruitment process that is perceived as fair can enhance public trust in the government institutions while perception of corruption and unfairness can foster discouragement and conflict when the citizens feel marginalized. The table also indicates that 17.9% view that leaders in the government institution often favor their family and ethnic kin and undermine meritocracy, this intensifies grievance among other groups. When certain group feel marginalized that leads to tensions and divisions. While 13.1% think that there is no structural justice in both justice system and public sector recruitment. Certain ethnic groups are denied access to the justice and rule of law as well as specific ethnic group dominate government institutions with exclusive appointment based on the nepotism. Only 4.7% express that although there is no war, they feel that the peace they are in is a negative peace because they cannot be treated equally whether in justice system or in government institutions.

Table 8. Institutions and regime type can play an important role in ethnic divisions.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Yes	60	71.4%
	No	5	6%
	Don’t know	19	22.6%
	Total	84	100.00%
Source: Field data (2024)			

According to Table 8 above, it demonstrates that, 71% of the respondent’s views indicated that the regime type in South Sudan significantly influences ethnic divisions within the country. Institution and regime type

play an important role when the powers are concentrated on the hands of few ethnic groups. This made the regime to be authoritarian, authoritarian regimes often centralized power in the hands of few individuals or groups. In South Sudan, political powers have been largely concentrated in the hands of the specific ethnic elites, this has led to resentment among other ethnic groups fueling the ethnic rivalry. The few ethnic groups appointed into the government institutions tend to employ base on ethnic loyalty where other ethnic groups feel excluded hence pave the way for the ethnic divisions. This means that the institutions in South Sudan are structured in a way that exacerbates ethnic tensions and ethnic factor become significant in political interactions and access to resources. In South Sudan appointment to public institutions are made according to the community and geographical representations and always celebrated by the community whose sons are appointed into these institutions; this made the regime to be authoritarian therefore promoting ethnic divisions. In some cases, constitutional appointments are made on ethnic loyalty and not on the meritocracy. Institutions such as justice system has played essential role in dividing the society, some ethnic group feel denied access to the justice and rule of law and therefore exacerbate the ethnic divisions. Some of the respondents expressed that, when the institutions such legal system and security sectors become weak and characterized by nepotism, corruptions and extrajudicial killings and unequal distribution of the resources, the regime become a catalyst for ethnic cleavages. Some respondent's emphasis that, authoritarian regime such the ruling system in South Sudan has exploited ethnic identity to mobilize support and justify their actions against Nuer during 2013 and 2016 crisis, ethnic divisions have been manipulated by the leaders to consolidate power. In 2013 and 2016, it was not Dinka as community who fought the war, it was the regime that mobilized Dinka to fight white army that was mobilized by Riek Machar based on tribalism, stoking tensions between these two rivalry groups and leading to violent confrontations. They went so far to asserted that the involvement of institution such as military in the conflict has contributed a lot on ethnic cleavages. Additionally, the respondents stressed that the regime in South Sudan seem to be corrupt where institutions are run without transparency and accountability, this has contributed to ethnic divisions and rampant corruption.

On the other hands, 6% of the respondents disagree that, institutions and regime type cannot exacerbate ethnic divisions, implying that the regime in South Sudan is semi democratic setting with political competition that can mitigate ethnic divisions. Positive competitions can lead to more inclusive politics. But if political parties align along ethnic lines, this can reinforce divisions. The government of South Sudan is transitional government that have many opportunities for dialogue and negotiation among ethnic groups and then regime have encouraged inclusive practice which can facilitate reconciliation and have reduced ethnic divisions through power sharing agreements hence promoting the presentation of some ethnic groups. Also, some respondents expressed that the regime is semi democratic regime which is not grounded on rule of law and provide access to justice regardless to the race, religion or color of the skin. 23% of the respondents don't know how the institution and regime type can influence or play an important role on ethnic divisions.

4.3. Military Involvement in Ethnic Cleavages

This section explains respondents' views and understanding of the military involvement in the ethnic cleavages in South Sudan. Variables in this section are represented in tables below to provide clear illustration of the responses from the respondents about the research topic.

Table 9. Military involvement in the political conflict shapes the ethnic cleavages in South Sudan.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	26	30.9%
	Strongly agree	46	54.7%
	Disagree	3	3.6%
	Strongly disagree	9	10.8%
	Total	84	100.00%
Source: Field data (2024)			

According to Table 9, the views indicate that 54.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that military involvement in the conflict has a great impact on ethnic cleavages in South Sudan. The military involvement in the conflict affects not only the level of violence and insecurity but the way ethnic identities are reinforced. The conflict has led to the formation and widespread of ethnic militias and armed youth organized along the ethnic lines. These groups can reinforce ethnic identities and create severe divisions as they represent specific ethnic interest. The involvement of the military in the conflict has created the symbol of ethnic loyalty where military service and allegiance to armed factions has been marked with ethnic loyalty,

therefore, creating a sense of us against them, deepening divisions between ethnic groups and each group began to see the military involvement as an extension of ethnic struggle. During 2013 crisis, the military involvement in the conflict has led the rivalry ethnic group to target each ethnic community as the means of the warfare resulting the displacement, atrocities and killings of children, women and elderly people. These actions have contributed to a long-term enmity that divided the community apart. Some of the respondents stressed that, the leaders in South Sudan have politicized the military forces and use them as a tool for political gain; this has led to favoritism of the specific ethnic group in the military ranks which exacerbate the assumption of unequal treatment that has divided the military into ethnic allies. Some said that, before the conflict, the military was dominated by Dinka ethnic group and control the military resources which allow them to dictate power dynamic in the country and marginalized other, resulting into ethnic cleavages within the military institution. Some respondents underscored that due to the military involvement in the conflict, ethnic cleansing occurred in the areas of Maiwut where Padang women, children and elderly people were murdered in a cold blood. Pregnant women were reported killed and children removed from the womb. Such an action perpetuated ethnic identities and tensions. 30.9% of the respondents agree that the involvement of the military in the conflict has reinforced and shape ethnic cleavages in South Sudan forcing many for the displacement and eventually leads to creation of refugee’s population that settle in the neighboring countries in ethnic fragmentation. Only 10.8% strongly disagree that the military involvement in the conflict has no impact on ethnic cleavages while 3.6% disagree that military involvement has no impact.

Table 10. Power struggle motivate Dinka and Nuer to group along their ethnicity.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	20	23.8%
	Strongly agree	46	54.7%
	Disagree	8	9.5%
	Strongly disagree	10	12%
	Total	84	100.00%
Source: Field data (2024)			

Table 10 shows that 54.7% of the respondents revealed that power struggle between Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups have significantly motivated these communities to cleave around their ethnic identities. The factors behind this are the governance policies which have contributed to the ethnic tensions between Dinka and Nuer. The governance policies which favor certain group have deepened mistrust and therefore laying the foundation for ethnic mobilization when they struggle for power. Also, political leaders always leverage ethnic identities for political gain yielding the system that rewards loyalty along the ethnic lines. The respondents also revealed that Dinka leader in person of President Kiir and Nuer leader in person of Riek Machar has turned the struggle for power into a conflict frame by ethnicity. The power struggle between these two leaders have created a perception of threat from each other forcing the members of these group to unify along ethnic lines in order to protect their interest, resources and political power. In response to power struggle, the two ethnic groups have formed armed militias that are identified along the ethnic lines. These militias are necessary for self-defense. One of the respondents expressed that during the conflict in 2013, ethnic identity becomes the basis for political and social organization and therefore, Dinka and Nuer prioritize their ethnic identity to support themselves for the perceived threat. The table also indicates that 23.8% agreed that power struggle between Dinka and Nuer have catalyzed the consolidation of ethnic identities and motivated these ethnic groups to align along the ethnic lines. Whereas 12% of the respondents have strongly disagreed that power struggle is not the basis for ethnic alignment, 9.5% have disagreed with the idea that power struggle is what motivate these ethnic group to align along the ethnicity.

Table 11. The politicians in South Sudan have used ethnicity as a tool to achieve their objectives.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Yes	80	95.2%
	No	4	4.8%
	Total	84	100%
Source: Field data (2024)			

According to Table 11 above, it demonstrates that, 95.2% of the respondents agreed that the politicians have used ethnicity on illiterates negatively as a tool to stay in power. The politicians who are dissatisfied by the governance system and excluded from the regime tend to mobilize their ethnic group to fight the government in order to gain the positions in the ruling system and not to bring constructive changes that

will benefit the nation. Some respondents stressed that both Dinka and Nuer have used ethnicity to justify their actions against each other causing atrocities and annihilation to the citizens. The table also demonstrated that the politicians in South Sudan had appealed to their ethnic identities to mobilize support during President Kiir’s endorsement in Bahr El Ghazal in July 2024 as SPLM presidential flag bearer. During the rally the politicians promised to prioritize the interest of some ethnic groups creating an incentive for ethnic alignment. During the same rally, South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) was seen ethnically aligning to the SPLM. This was to enhance their political power coalition which can be beneficial during the elections. By aligning with certain ethnic group, politicians exclude others from the power making it politically advantageous to keep rivals marginalized. The table shows that 4.8% disagreed that politicians in South Sudan have used ethnicity as a tool to achieve their political objectives but instead, the lack of institutionalism and good governance has led to the politicians’ struggle for power.

Table 12. Irrational quest for political power is the cause of ethnic cleavages in South Sudan.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	29	34%
	Strongly agree	38	45%
	Disagree	11	14.0%
	Strongly disagree	6	7%
	Total	84	100.00%
Source: Field data (2024)			

According to Table 12 above, it demonstrates that, 45% of the respondents strongly agreed that irrational quest for political power is the significant cause of ethnic cleavages in South Sudan. This is because the political leaders often mobilize ethnic identities to consolidate power and this led to deep divisions and mistrust among communities. When ethnic leaders such as President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar contest for power, for instance, nationalities of Dinka and Nuer divide because the two leaders have created a hostile political landscape. Both leaders resorted to violence to retain power which causes a rift between the two ethnic groups. Also, 34% of the respondents agreed that irrational quest for power and control over the national resources such as oil have contributed to the ethnic cleavages. Also, they stated that the political system in South Sudan is characterized by weak institutions which advance irrational pursuit of power because some groups believed that military coercion is the only way to achieve their political objectives. Meanwhile, 14% of the respondents’ views demonstrated their disagreement with the statement that irrational quest for political power is not the cause of the ethnic cleavages in South Sudan whereas 7% strongly disagree with the statement.

Table 13. There is a link between 1991 and 2013 ethnic division between Nuer and Dinka in South Sudan.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Yes	52	62%
	No	13	15.4%
	Don’t know	19	22.6%
	Total	84	100%
Source: Field data (2024)			

According to Table 13 above, it demonstrates that, 62% of the respondents agreed that ethnic divisions between Dinka and Nuer in South Sudan have a historical background. The events of 1991 and 2013 have shaped the contemporary relations. The 1991 split within the SPLA led by the two ethnic groups under Riek Machar and John Garang resulted in ethnic divisions and confrontation. The ethnic divisions between Dinka and Nuer created a concept among both Nuer and Dinka that their leaders represented their ethnicity rather than national interest. The conflict that erupted in 2013 can be traced back to the earlier divisions of 1991. Therefore, the 1991 laid the ground work for the ethnic tensions that exploded in 2013. The 1991 division was a result of power struggle between two leaders from Dinka and Nuer, John Garang and Riek Machar. Riek wanted to overthrow Garang and seize the power. This action had contributed to ethnic tensions in 1991. Dinka and Nuer are the largest ethnic groups in South Sudan and historical memories of the 1991 massacre have laid a conducive environment for 2013 ethnic divisions and violence as a revenge of what happened in 1991. Also, some respondents expressed that there is a link between 1991 and 2013 events because the actors in both events remained the same. The 1991 event was the split in the SPLA/M leading to ethnic violence and again the history repeated itself, in 2013 SPLM party disagreement of the chairmanship of the party and the voting system which slid the country into ethnic divisions and violent conflict. Therefore,

there is a link between 1991 and 2013/2016 ethnic divisions. This means that 2013 is the continuation of 1991 ethnic divisions but this time under the leadership of President Salva Kiir. The only different is 2013 conflict escalated into the Upper Nile region and some parts of Bahr El Ghazal while 1991 event did not escalate and was quickly contained in Bor.

Also, the table indicated that 22.6% of the respondents don't even know if there is a link between 1991 and 2013 ethnic divisions between Dinka and Nuer. While 15.4% of the respondents demonstrated that there is no link between the two events stating that, what happened in 1991 was the civilian targeting their neighbor but 2013 was basically the government targeting one tribe the Nuer and therefore there is no link between the two events. Also, one of the respondents stated that "according to my knowledge, 1991 divisions was about the ideology and the objectives of the SPLM for what to be liberated, South Sudan or the whole Sudan? Whereas, 2013 was purely ethnic divisions between Dinka and Nuer" one of the respondents stated that there is no link between 1991 and 2013 because the divisions in the earlier days was the about the power struggle without resource while 2013 was the competition over the power and control of the allocation of the resources.

Table 14. Ethnic power and power politics are the root cause of ethnic division in South Sudan.

Valid	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
	Yes	68	81%
	No	5	6%
	Don't know	11	13%
	Total	84	100.0%
Source: Field data (2024)			

According to Table 14 above, it demonstrates that, 81% of the respondents agreed that ethnic divisions in South Sudan is largely attributed to ethnic power and power politics because since the independence, South Sudan faced persistent conflict always driven by the power struggle between two ethnic groups notably Dinka and Nuer. These power struggles have fostered an environment of mistrust with political leaders manipulating ethnic identities to maintain the power. The idea of the ethnic power emerged as the ethnic leader's rally for support from their ethnic communities and this has deepened the ethnic divisions. Always the struggle for the power and resources control in South Sudan between two ethnic groups have resulted in ethnic power and political power competition between Dinka leader Salva Kiir and Nuer leader Riek Machar. South Sudan is seen as dominated by one ethnic group notably Dinka, the domination of one tribe on the state affairs has led to the ethnic power and power politics in the country creating ethnic parties whereby SPLM-IG is known as Dinka party and SPLM-IO as Nuer party. The two parties' leaders brainwashed the most illiterate population to support them leading to the ethnic divisions in the country.

On the other hands, the 13% of the respondents expressed that they really don't know how ethnic power and power politics has become the root causes of ethnic divisions in South Sudan. While 6% of the respondents denied ethnic power and power politics to be the root cause of ethnic divisions in the country highlighting that the leaders have exploited ethnicity and hence confusing the public opinions.

Table 15. Can South Sudanese be divided again for the third time on ethnic lines?

Valid	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
	Yes	27	32.2%
	No	23	27.4%
	Don't know	34	40.4%
	Total	84	100%
Source: Field data (2024)			

Table 15 demonstrates that 32.2% of the respondents agreed that South Sudan is likely to prone to the ethnic divisions again, if the marginalized groups still feel excluded or oppressed. If the government does not put efforts towards inclusive governance and power sharing and address the inequalities and build trust among South Sudanese, the risk of exacerbating the ethnic tensions are very high. Also, since signing the revitalized agreement, the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed only power sharing have defused the conflict but if the seats for the defusing the conflict are not managed well, the ethnic tensions may arise once again. Some respondents expressed their worry that the country might be divided again as the revitalized agreement remains not fully implemented because the security arrangement of unifying the forces remains the challenge with no genuine reconciliation put on the ground. The table indicated that the

chances of the third ethnic divisions are high if the government push for 2027 elections with some articles of the revitalized agreement being not implemented. This will lead some political parties not to accept the elections outcome which may result in third ethnic divisions. Other respondents expressed that if the government does not follow the right democratic transition which will ensure the free and fair elections in 2027 elections, tensions are likely to be very high. While others fear that lack of true reconciliations, reparations and transitional justice are not being accomplished, the grudges in the victims' hearts may laid the groundwork for the ethnic divisions if the elections are rigged. Because the current ruling elites are expected to reconcile the citizens and hold those accountable for the atrocities and human right abuses during the conflict and if not done there is a likelihood of more ethnic divisions.

The table 15 also, demonstrated that 40.4% don't really know if the country could be divided again for the third time along the ethnic lines. This is because predicting the future is always uncertain, the possibility of being divided again along the ethnic lines cannot be ruled out because several factors make such a scenario complex and challenging. But if the leaders involved in the conflict put aside their interest and put the nation-state interest on top and work for the nation building and inspire the spirit of nationalism in South Sudanese people to live together then there would be no recurrent of the ethnic divisions. While 27.4% of the respondents disagreed that there would be no recurrent of the ethnic divisions for the third time because the time will come when the current leaders who polarized the nation will go and the nation will be united again. Others expressed that South Sudanese have become aware of the impact of the ethnic divisions on their unity and some have learned that they were fighting for the seats of the elites who did not deliver any services to them. They also learned that the consequence of the war and ethnic violence is the displacement, humanitarian catastrophic and annihilation to their love ones. South Sudan would not be ethnically divided again if the ruling elites put a clear vision on how the country would be ruled.

Table 16. What should be done to avoid the recurrence of ethnic division in South Sudan?

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Reconcile	10	12%
	Reparation	4	4.8%
	Forgive	6	7.1%
	All above	64	76.1%
	Total	84	100%
Source: Field data (2024)			

According to Table 16 above, it demonstrates that, 76.1% of the respondents agreed that to avoid the recurrence of the ethnic divisions in South Sudan, the parties involved in the conflict should embark on the concept of reconciliation, reparations and forgiveness as a crucial element to heal the wounds of the past and prevent future ethnic divisions. Reconciliation is very necessary to advance the sense of community mutual understanding among South Sudanese ethnic groups. The reconciliation process should be inclusive to address the past atrocities and injustices and to allow the victims and perpetrators to be engaged in the dialogue. The respondents expressed that healing workshops and truth finding initiatives can promote empathy and acknowledgement of conflict grievances. Such peacebuilding programs can bring different ethnic groups to dismantle the stereotype. Also, reparations are essential in acknowledging the suffering of the victims during the conflict because reparations can help in rebuilding lives of those affected victims but the reparations should be transparently equitable to avoid favoritisms that would lead to other tensions. While forgiveness is the personal transformative action, it requires victims and perpetrators to confront painful memories. The table also advocates that 12% of the respondents expressed that reconciliation should not be associated with excuses of the past suffering, for the reconciliations to be successful in preventing ethnic divisions, it must be integrated into peacebuilding framework that includes political stability and social justice. 7.1% of the respondents' emphasis on the forgiveness as the crucial elements that heal the past wounds and prevent future ethnic fragmentation. 4.8% of the respondents expressed their views that reparations play an essential role in acknowledging the suffering of the victims and financial compensation can contribute in rebuilding the lives of ethnic groups affected during the conflict.

5. Conclusions

The political conflict between Dinka and Nuer is driven by competition for resources, historical grievances, and the politicization of ethnic identities creating a cycle of violence that continues to affect South Sudan's stability. Furthermore, the lack of effective governance and equitable resource distribution has left many in both communities feeling marginalized which reinforce the ethnic divisions. Overall, the root causes of ethnic cleavages between Dinka and Nuer are deeply linked with the ambitions of political elites and the

struggle for control over essential resources which reflect a broader pattern of ethnic cleavages. Also, the politicians in South Sudan leverage ethnicity as a powerful tool to achieve their objectives, from mobilizing support and forming alliances to control resources and legitimize their stay in power. This manipulation does not only serve political aims but also exacerbates ethnic divisions and conflicts, complicating efforts toward national unity and sustainable peace. Moreover, the issues of resources allocation, governance failures and historical grievances further entrench these divisions. This resulted in insecurity and fosters a sense of loyalty to ethnic groups over national identity. Thus, ethnic power and political manoeuvring serve as a critical driver of the ongoing ethnic divisions in South Sudan. On the other hands, political conflict in South Sudan has significantly disintegrated the social fabric of the nation by deepening ethnic divisions, displacement of communities, eroding trust and fostering environments of violence and trauma. The conflict has polarized the communities and creates deep ethnic alliances which foster partisan politics and exacerbating social divisions. This environment of division increases mistrust among communities and undermines efforts toward national unity. Also, the conflict had posed a severe threat to human security by generating violence, displacement and compromise access to food and health services. These challenges impacted the well-being of individuals and communities.

Economically, the political conflict creates a complicated economic challenge that hinders both immediate recovery and long-term development. Whereas, institutions governing the justice system and public sector recruitment in South Sudan have influenced ethnics conflict, strong transparent and accountable justice system with a fair recruitment process is needed to foster ethical governance and help mitigate conflicts. The type of regime in South Sudan also plays a critical role in shaping ethnic divisions. The regime type in South Sudan seems to be authoritarian where the powers are concentrated on the hands of President which allegedly exacerbate ethnic divisions. Military involvement in the conflict in South Sudan had played disastrous role in shaping and reinforcing ethnic divisions. The militarization of ethnic identities and the uses of military power to control the resources had contributed to ethnic cleavages in the country. Addressing these military dynamics is necessary to promote reconciliation and rebuild the trust among the divided communities. There is a link between 2013/2016 and 1991 ethnic divisions. The events of 1991 laid the groundwork for the ethnic dynamics that exploded in 2013, 2016 and 2025. This is because the legacy of past conflicts continues to complicate the relationships between the Dinka and Nuer. This poses a significant challenge to peace and reconciliation in South Sudan. Irrational quest for political power and manipulation of ethnicity had significantly contributed to political cleavages in South Sudan. Hence, there is a great need to cultivate social cleavages that unite Dinka and Nuer so that their youth are not mobilized by power hungry politicians for political power. While Dinka and Nuer may lynch one another on ethnic and power politics, they are cousins. A Nuer man cannot allow a Dinka man to be killed by another ethnic member without rescuing him and this applies to a Dinka man who can always rescue a Nuer when being assaulted by other groups.

6. Recommendations

To tackle the manipulation of ethnic identities for political gain in South Sudan, particularly between the Dinka and Nuer communities, several recommendations are proposed.

- a) Firstly, fostering national unity and a collective South Sudanese identity is essential. Educational initiatives that focus on the significance of diversity and encourage collaboration among various ethnic groups should be established. A curriculum that celebrates the contributions and shared histories of all ethnicities can pave the way for a more inclusive society.
- b) Secondly, the introduction of transparent governance frameworks can diminish the impact of ethnic identity in politics. This includes establishment of accountability mechanisms for politicians and enforcement of laws against hate speech that incites violence. Such measures are critical in curbing the exploitation of ethnic divisions.
- c) Thirdly, engaging civil society and the grassroots people in advocating for peace and reconciliation can empowers communities to resist divisive narratives. Facilitation of grassroot dialogues between the Dinka and Nuer can help them unite and address their common challenges, thus reducing the opportunities for political manipulation.
- d) Fourthly, the government should also consider redesigning political structures that ensure equitable representation of all ethnic groups. A viable strategy would involve implementing proportional representation systems that can facilitate a more balanced distribution of power. This reform can not only have the potential to enhance collaboration across ethnic lines but also to diminish feelings of alienation among marginalized groups. By ensuring that government positions are perceived as accessible to all, these reforms can help foster a sense of belonging within diverse communities.

- e) Fifthly, promotion of dialogue and reconciliation initiatives is important for healing the existing rifts. The government should organize community driven dialogues that would create opportunities for the Dinka and Nuer to address their grievances openly. This is possible by involving local leaders and youth from both communities in these discussions to build mutual trust and a shared identity that transcends ethnic divisions. Such initiatives can pave the way for understanding and cooperation needed for the long term peace.
- f) Sixth, to avoid military involvement in the conflict that would exacerbate ethnic cleavages, several measures are essential to be adopted such as fostering inclusive dialogue through peacebuilding initiatives is paramount. The government should engage community leaders and civil society organizations to create platforms for discussion aimed at addressing grievances and promote reconciliation between Dinka and Nuer. Such engagement can not only help to mitigate tensions but also enhances the legitimacy of peacekeeping efforts. Additionally, establishing effective governance structures that guarantee equal representation for both the Dinka and Nuer communities is necessary in reducing the feelings of marginalization. Political inclusivity always ensures that no group feels favored over the other; therefore, this can address the perceptions of biasness and contribute to a more stable political environment.
- g) Seventh, government should prioritize grassroots engagement, this can form collaborative platforms which is necessary for dialogue. The government should also work with NGOs to train local peacekeepers from both ethnic groups. This initiative would reinforce community led security measures, reducing dependence on military solutions that could escalate violence. Educational programs designed to promote mutual understanding and respect between the communities are also essential. Such programs can inculcate values of coexistence and encourage collaborative behaviors for a young people, fostering a culture of peace and harmony.
- h) Eighth, to prevent the recurrence of ethnic cleavages between the Dinka and Nuer groups in South Sudan, government should promote inclusive governance; this can be achieved by ensuring that all ethnic groups are adequately represented in political processes. Establishing a national dialogue that fosters collaboration and trust among various communities will be crucial. Such dialogue can help to address the existing grievances and cultivate a shared national identity, which exceeds ethnic boundaries.
- i) Ninth, strengthening the rule of law and the justice system is required. An independent judiciary must be established to fairly resolve ethnic conflicts; this can restore public trust in government institutions. Moreover, prioritizing accountability for past human rights abuses is necessary to provide victims with avenues for justice while deterring future acts of violence. Finally, implementing economic development programs that focus on marginalized communities will be important in reducing disparities. By addressing economic inequalities, resentment can diminish, further promoting social cohesion and peace among different ethnic groups. This can be achieved through the establishment of Commission of National Unity (CNU) to foster the unity of over 64 ethnic groups by laying out various social, economic and political programmes for empowerment. This Commission should be chaired and supervised by the President.

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