The Impact of Ethnic Politics on National Identity in Post-Colonial Africa: A Critical Review of South Sudan Experience

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the impact of ethnic politics on national identity in post-colonial South Sudan. Despite independence in 2011, South Sudan has continued to experience deep ethnic polarization, weak institutions, and recurrent conflict. The study was guided by three objectives: to assess how ethnic-based political mobilization affects national identity, to identify the key challenges posed by ethnic politics to national unity, and to propose frameworks for fostering an inclusive national identity in South Sudan. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 85 respondents and semi-structured interviews with key informants including government officials, political party leaders, civil society representatives, and university scholars. Secondary data from academic literature, policy documents, and government reports supplemented the field findings. Multi-stage sampling techniques were adopted to ensure diverse representation, while data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for

quantitative responses and thematic analysis for qualitative insights. The findings indicate that ethnic-based political mobilization significantly undermines citizens' sense of national belonging, as political leaders often prioritize ethnic constituencies over national interests. Over 80% of respondents confirmed that ethnic politics fuels political instability, encourages exclusion, and weakens trust in government institutions. Ethnic favoritism in appointments and resource allocation was identified as a major barrier to inclusivity, fostering resentment and marginalization. Furthermore, ethnic competition was found to fuel violent conflicts, erode social cohesion, and obstruct state-building efforts. Despite these challenges, the study revealed strong public support for inclusive frameworks that could strengthen national identity. Respondents emphasized inclusive governance, civic education, inter-ethnic dialogue, and multi-ethnic political party representation as viable strategies for fostering unity. The study concludes that addressing the negative impact of ethnic politics requires both structural reforms and cultural transformation. It recommends institutionalizing inclusivity in governance, promoting equitable distribution of resources, expanding civic education, and reinforcing national symbols and reconciliation initiatives as pathways to build a cohesive South Sudanese identity.

Keywords: *ethnic politics, national identity, post-colonial Africa, review, South Sudan, experience*

1.1. Introduction

The question of national identity has long been a central concern in post-colonial African states. In nations where ethnic affiliations often supersede national loyalty, the development of a unified national identity remains elusive. Ethnic politics defined as the use of ethnic affiliations and differences for political mobilization has emerged as a critical factor that undermines nation-building efforts (Eifert & Posner, 2010). South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, presents a compelling case of how ethnic politics have challenged the formation of a cohesive national identity after independence in 2011.

1.2 Background

The challenge of building cohesive national identities in post-colonial states is a global phenomenon, particularly in societies marked by ethnic heterogeneity. The legacy of colonialism left many nations with arbitrary borders that grouped together diverse and often antagonistic ethnic communities. In these contexts, nationalism is frequently undermined by competing ethnic loyalties, especially when post-independence leadership fails to address inclusive state-building. Ethnic groups often feel more connected to their cultural identities than to a national consciousness, resulting in fragmented states and contested citizenship (Fukuyama, 2018).

In emerging democracies across the Global South, the politicization of ethnicity has become a recurring threat to nation-building and social cohesion. Politicians frequently exploit ethnic identities to secure political support, particularly where democratic institutions are weak or captured by elites. As a result, electoral processes become ethnic contests rather than issue-based democratic engagements, deepening divisions and fostering exclusion (Cheeseman, 2018). Ethnic favoritism in the allocation of public goods and state employment further entrenches inequality and resentment, challenging the formation of a shared national identity.

In Africa, the situation is compounded by the post-colonial state's failure to construct inclusive governance frameworks. Ethnic identity continues to dominate political organization in many African states, where patron-client networks often determine access to power and public resources. Rather than being vehicles for integration, state institutions have often served as instruments of ethnic dominance, where one group's control over state apparatus leads to the marginalization of others (Posner, 2017). This phenomenon reinforces ethnic cleavages and diminishes the prospects of pan-national solidarity.

Regionally, in East Africa, ethnic-based politics have contributed to recurring political crises. In Ethiopia, the introduction of ethnic federalism aimed to empower diverse groups but has inadvertently intensified ethnic nationalism, leading to conflicts and displacements in recent years (Aalen, 2020). In Kenya, the politicization of ethnic identity has been central to post-election violence, as seen in

2007–2008 and again during the 2017 general elections. Ethnic coalitions dominate the political arena, making national unity fragile and conditional (Kanyinga & Odhiambo, 2019). These cases demonstrate how institutionalizing ethnic identity in politics can generate instability rather than cohesion.

South Sudan provides a particularly vivid case of the destructive effects of ethnic politics on national identity. Upon gaining independence in 2011, the country was hailed as Africa's newest state with promises of unity, peace, and self-determination. However, political power struggles, particularly between President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar, escalated into civil conflict along ethnic lines primarily between the Dinka and the Nuer communities (Kindersley & Rolandsen, 2019). This ethnicization of politics has severely fractured the national fabric, leading to mass displacement, widespread violence, and the collapse of social trust. At the local governance level, state institutions in South Sudan often function through ethnic patronage, where leaders allocate positions and resources based on kinship rather than national merit. The dominance of particular ethnic groups in the military, public administration, and economic structures fosters exclusion and resentment among other communities (Pendle, 2020).

The persistence of ethnic-based politics in South Sudan reflects a deeper failure to articulate a unifying national identity. The state has not effectively invested in civic education, inclusive political institutions, or equitable development that could transcend ethnic divides. Without a shared vision of nationhood, citizens retreat to ethnic affiliations for security and representation. To move forward, South Sudan must adopt nation-building strategies that prioritize inclusive governance, reconciliation, and structural reforms that weaken ethnic monopolies over state power (LeRiche, 2018).

1.3. Problem Statement

Although South Sudan attained independence in 2011 through a broadly supported liberation movement, the nation has failed to translate this unity into a cohesive national identity. Instead, ethnic politics have become the dominant feature of the country's governance and public life. The causes of this fragmentation are deeply

rooted in both historical and contemporary dynamics. Colonial and post-colonial legacies left behind weak institutions and artificial borders that grouped diverse ethnicities under one state without adequate mechanisms for inclusion. In South Sudan, the absence of inclusive political structures and the militarization of politics have enabled elites to consolidate power through ethnic patronage networks (Kindersley & Rolandsen, 2019).

The effects of ethnic politics are profound and far-reaching. Ethnic favoritism in state institutions has fueled grievances, marginalization, and violent conflict, undermining peace and state-building efforts. The civil war that erupted in 2013 and subsequent bouts of violence have been largely along ethnic lines, particularly between the Dinka and Nuer communities. These divisions have contributed to displacement, humanitarian crises, and the erosion of public trust in national governance structures (Craze, 2019).

There have been multiple attempts to foster national unity and reconciliation, including peace agreements, truth and reconciliation initiatives, and constitutional dialogues. However, many of these efforts have been either elite-centered or poorly implemented, failing to address the deeper structural causes of division. For example, the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) focused on power-sharing among elites without transforming the ethnicized foundations of the political system (Jok, 2021).

A key gap in current knowledge and practice is the lack of comprehensive analysis on how ethnic politics specifically undermines national identity formation in South Sudan. Existing literature has extensively explored the dynamics of ethnic conflict and power struggles but pays limited attention to how these processes obstruct the development of inclusive national narratives and shared citizenship (LeRiche, 2018). This study aims to fill that gap by critically examining how ethnic politics continues to disrupt the creation of a unified South Sudanese identity. It explores not only elite manipulation of ethnic sentiments but also how institutional designs, policy implementation, and public discourse sustain exclusion and division. By doing so, the study offers insights into possible pathways for reconstructing a national identity that transcends ethnic affiliations and supports long-term peace and governance.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between ethnic politics and national identity formation in post-colonial South Sudan, examining how ethnic divisions have influenced political structures, social cohesion, and governance.

1.5. Research Objectives

 i. To assess how ethnic-based political mobilization affects national identity.
 ii. To identify key challenges posed by ethnic politics to national unity.
 iii. To propose possible frameworks for fostering inclusive national identity in South Sudan.

1.6 Research Questions

 i. How has ethnic mobilization shaped the post-independence political landscape?
 ii. In what ways has ethnic politics affected the formation of a national identity in South Sudan?
 iii. What mechanisms can be employed to promote national cohesion amid ethnic diversity?

1.7. Justification of the Study

This study is both timely and necessary in the context of South Sudan's ongoing struggles with violent conflict, ethnic polarization, and fragile statehood. More than a decade after independence, the country remains plagued by intermittent civil wars and deep-rooted divisions driven by ethnic-based politics. Understanding how ethnic identity is manipulated for political gain is essential to unpacking the persistent failure of national integration. The research provides critical insight into how such practices erode social cohesion and obstruct peacebuilding, offering policymakers, civil society actors, and international stakeholders evidence-based knowledge for designing more inclusive and stable governance systems.

In a broader African context, South Sudan's experience is not unique. Many post-colonial African states face similar challenges where ethnic cleavages are politicized, undermining efforts to construct inclusive national identities. Countries such as

Nigeria, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo continue to grapple with ethnically motivated political violence and fragile nationhood. Therefore, the findings of this study have potential comparative value. They can inform regional conversations around identity politics, particularly in multi-ethnic states where the failure to build inclusive governance structures has led to recurrent instability.

Furthermore, the academic value of this research lies in its contribution to the relatively underexplored intersection between ethnic politics and national identity formation in South Sudan. While much of the literature has focused on conflict dynamics, power-sharing, or humanitarian crises, fewer studies have systematically analyzed how ethnic-based political strategies weaken efforts to build a collective sense of national belonging. This study seeks to fill that gap by linking political behavior with the long-term implications for nationhood and citizenship. In doing so, it opens new avenues for research and policy dialogue around identity, legitimacy, and governance in deeply divided societies (Pendle, 2020).

1.8. Significance of the Study

This study makes a critical contribution to the academic literature on identity politics, with a particular focus on post-conflict and fragile states. While identity politics has been widely studied in Africa, limited scholarly attention has been paid to how it specifically undermines nation-building in newly formed states such as South Sudan. By examining the interface between ethnic politics and national identity, this study adds depth to the theoretical understanding of how politicized ethnicity affects state formation, legitimacy, and democratic consolidation. It will also offer a nuanced analytical framework that future researchers can build upon when studying similar contexts.

From a policy perspective, the findings of this research will provide useful insights to national and regional policymakers working to address political instability and ethnic divisions. As South Sudan continues to navigate a fragile peace process, understanding the underlying dynamics of ethnic exclusion and identity fragmentation is essential for crafting meaningful reforms. The study can inform initiatives aimed at constitutional review, decentralization, and inclusive governance.

Moreover, it will offer evidence-based recommendations that can support South Sudanese political actors in designing strategies for civic education, inclusive representation, and reconciliation.

Practically, this study will be of interest to civil society organizations, peacebuilding practitioners, and international development partners operating in South Sudan and similar contexts. The research highlights the importance of fostering national cohesion through inclusive political processes, shared narratives, and equitable distribution of state resources. By emphasizing the long-term risks of politicized ethnicity, the study can help guide donor priorities, conflict prevention strategies, and grassroots dialogue initiatives that aim to bridge inter-ethnic divisions. Its implications are therefore not limited to South Sudan but extend to broader post-conflict peacebuilding efforts across Africa.

1.9. Conceptual Framework

Independent variables

- Ethnic politics
- Ethnic mobilization
- Ethnic-based political parties
- Ethnic favoritism in government appointments

Dependent variable

National Identity

Intervening Variables

- Elite manipulation of ethnicity
- Resource competition among ethnic groups
- Political exclusion and marginalization
- Historical grievances and civil war legacies

Source: Researcher, 2025

The independent variables such as ethnic politics, ethnic mobilization, and favoritism in political appointments are central to understanding the erosion of national identity in South Sudan. These practices fuel political alignment along ethnic lines, undermining efforts to build a shared national consciousness. Political actors, particularly elites, often exploit ethnic affiliations to gain or maintain power, making ethnicity the primary basis for political participation rather than merit or ideology. As a result, ethnic loyalty is reinforced at the expense of national unity, which is essential for a cohesive post-conflict society.

However, the impact of these independent variables on national identity is not direct but mediated through several intervening variables. Elite manipulation of ethnicity, resource competition, political exclusion, and weak institutions serve as channels through which ethnic politics destabilizes the idea of nationhood. These intervening factors intensify mistrust among communities, hinder inclusive governance, and promote fragmentation. Consequently, the dependent variable national identity becomes weakened, as citizens begin to identify more with their ethnic group than with the state. Addressing these intervening dynamics is therefore critical to reversing the negative effects of ethnic politics and fostering a unified national identity in South Sudan.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Ethnic Politics and National Identity

2.1.1. Ethnic Politics

Ethnic politics refers to the organization and mobilization of political actions based primarily on ethnic affiliations. In ethnically diverse societies, political actors often use ethnic identity as a strategic tool to galvanize support, win elections, and secure access to state resources. In post-colonial African states such as South Sudan, where colonial borders grouped diverse ethnic communities within a single state, ethnic politics has become a dominant feature of political life. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in fragile states where political competition is zero-sum, and ethnic identity becomes the most accessible and reliable means of political organization (Chol, 2014). Nevertheless, it is quite perturbing getting to review scholarly

definitions of ethnic politics as it has been highly contested by political scientists and political practitioners. However, career politicians seemed to have preferred definitions. Thus, ethnic politics is defined as 'politics that's based solely on a tribe and ethnicity and that's doomed to tear a country apart, it's a failure of imagination (Smith, 2009). Institutionalist theory as a pillar of ethnic politics showed how established structures of political legitimacy provide incentives for actors to pursue certain types of political strategies. Another pillar follows a configurationally logic which depends on political power and hence similar political institutions can produce different consequences, while similar consequences can result from different constellations of power. The institutionalist part of the argument specifies the conditions under which political loyalties will align along ethnic cleavages; the configurationally part explains when such ethnic politics lead to armed conflict and how it should return to genuine peace (Wimmer, 2013).

2.1.2. National identity

National identity, conversely, is the collective sense of belonging to a nation-state, built upon shared symbols, values, history, and citizenship. It acts as a unifying force that fosters solidarity among diverse groups within a country. In South Sudan, efforts to cultivate a common national identity have been challenged by the legacy of prolonged conflict, ethnic favoritism, and underdeveloped state institutions. The post-independence period, while symbolic of unity, has been marred by internal divisions and civil conflict, largely driven by ethnic-based political competition. The ambiguity and controversy surrounding the discourse of the concepts of identity in social sciences is indeed baffling. The scholarship on identity is therefore highly divided. Broadly, three schools of thought or models are discerned. These are primordialism, constructivism and Ethno-symbolism (Smith, 2009).

Further as derivatives, two main conceptual and theoretical models dealing with national identity are also duly identified. These are the civic and ethnic. The schools are further identified as modernist/constructivist/instrumentalist, on the on hand and primodialist/ essentialist/intrinsic, on the other. The modernist cluster has for several decades now, particularly in sociology, political science and political anthropology, assumed the dominant model of identity analysis ad theorizing (Voros, 2006).

According to the ethnicist or primodialist model, the set of the dichotomy, identify is perceived as a repository of collective memory, a manifestation memory, in turn, is presumably spawned by constitute variables such as descent, blood ties, linguistic affiliation, homestead, kinship, etc. The primodialist model distinguishes itself through reposting identity at the ethnic social store whose contours invariably may be real or imaginary common descent, shared speech, common cultural traits, defining specific or unique commonality (Connor, 1994).

The civil or modernist model, on the other hand, locates identity at the civil repository premises whose contours are invariably identified as territoriality, residence under common secular law, loyalty to and with identifying with common national symbols such as flags, national holidays etc, national institutions such as parliament and judiciary as well as loyalty to overarching state. The modernist model, broadly understood as characterizing modern identity, is therefore related to the modern state, that is, allegiance to the state (Anderson, 1991). Meanwhile ethno-symbolism as third school of thought or model, rejects the premises of both primordialism and constructivism and concludes that there is continuation between primodialist and modernist models. It argues that primordial identity is transformed into the modern one. Unlike the primordialist that claims that identity is perennial, or the modernist who claims it is a modern construction, the ethno-symbolist traces continuity and change (Armstrong, 2017; Hutchinson, 2000).

The tension between ethnic identity and national identity becomes apparent when political loyalty is driven more by ethnic considerations than national commitment. This often leads to exclusionary governance, marginalization of minority groups, and the erosion of trust in national institutions. In South Sudan, ethnic allegiances tend to override national affiliation, especially during periods of political instability. This has weakened state legitimacy and hindered efforts to promote inclusiveness and reconciliation. Scholars argue that the dominance of ethnic politics in post-colonial Africa is partly a legacy of colonial administrative strategies that categorized and governed people along tribal lines. These colonial frameworks have continued to shape post-independence political structures and identities. In the case of South Sudan, the continuation of these patterns is evident in the ethnically structured

political and military elites, who often prioritize ethnic loyalty over state-building efforts. As a result, national identity remains fragmented and fragile (Gai, 2025) Recent literature emphasizes that overcoming ethnic politics and fostering a cohesive national identity requires deliberate policies aimed at inclusion, civic education, equitable distribution of resources, and the development of national narratives that celebrate diversity. In South Sudan, such measures remain limited or inconsistently applied, further complicating the nation-building project. Without a shift from ethnic to civic political identity, national unity and long-term peace will remain elusive (Ibid).

2.2. How ethnic-based political mobilization affects national identity

2.2.1. The Intersection of Ethnicity, Class, and Political Struggles

Social class can be understood through two key lenses: the structural and the processual. The structural view treats class as a stratified system defined by measurable factors such as income, occupation, and education, placing individuals at different levels of social mobility (Wright & Shin, 1988). Max Weber (1947) outlined classes such as the working class, intelligentsia, and upper class, while Warner's model (1949) expanded this into a six-tiered hierarchy later adapted by Gilbert (2002) and Thompson and Hickey (2005). In contrast, the processual approach emphasizes how individuals construct and display class identities through lived experiences and social interactions (Riak, 2025).While the processual perspective highlights subjective aspects of class identity, the structural approach better explains mobility, particularly intergenerational mobility the ability to surpass the economic position of one's parents (Thompson & Hickey, 2005). Nathan Bok (1996) distinguishes between structural mobility, resulting from broad economic growth, and circulation mobility, which concerns the fair distribution of opportunities. In practice, mobility is often shaped by ethnic favoritism, which privileges certain groups while disadvantaging others (Riak, 2025).

Ethnicity is a crucial factor in shaping class and mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa. Political elites frequently distribute resources and opportunities along ethnic lines to consolidate power, undermining merit-based advancement. While this has entrenched

inequalities in many states, Rwanda offers a notable exception: its constitution prohibits ethnic favoritism and emphasizes fairness and meritocracy in governance, resource allocation, and social advancement (Riak, 2025). Such policies illustrate the potential of institutional reforms in addressing ethnic bias, though progress across the region remains uneven. Contentious politics emerges when marginalized groups employ disruptive actions such as strikes, protests, or riots to press demands for political or social change. Charles Tilly (2008) defines it as collective interactions involving claims that affect others' interests, with governments often acting as targets, initiators, or third parties. Ethnic dynamics heavily influence these mobilizations, shaping both participation and intensity. For example, members of the ruling leader's ethnic group may be reluctant to protest out of loyalty or cultural norms, while marginalized groups are more likely to engage in contention (McAdam et al., 2007; Tilly, 2008).

2.2.2. Ethnic Identity and the Dynamics of Political Mobilization

Ethno-nationalist mobilization is often explained through three main theoretical approaches primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. These frameworks are especially useful in analyzing how religion and ethnicity intersect in shaping group identity and political activism. In many Muslim societies, politicized Islam functions as a form of religious nationalism, where sectarian divides such as the Sunni-Shi'a split mirror ethnic politics, reinforcing identity-based mobilization (Little, 2017). These dynamics are not confined to the Middle East but are also visible elsewhere, such as in South Sudan, where disputes within the church, like the leadership conflict in Jonglei State, reveal how ethnic and religious identities can become deeply intertwined (Riak, 2025). Primordialism views ethnicity as an innate and enduring element of identity, rooted in ancestry, history, and cultural traditions. This perspective emphasizes emotional and instinctive bonds that create strong attachments to one's group, making ethnic solidarity resistant to change. While this approach explains the depth of ethnic belonging, it has been criticized for failing to clarify how identity translates into active political mobilization or conflict. The existence of multiple, overlapping identities suggests that ethnic attachments are not

always fixed, but may be selectively activated in specific contexts (Tiemessen, 2005).

Instrumentalism, by contrast, treats ethnicity as fluid and subject to political manipulation. Leaders and elites strategically highlight shared traits and emphasize differences with outsiders to mobilize support. By framing group survival in terms of threats of domination or assimilation, they can rally communities around ethnoreligious identities to advance political or economic agendas. This perspective underscores the agency of political actors in shaping conflicts, making it especially useful for comparing how elites mobilize identity across different societies (Fearon & Laitin, 1996; Riak, 2025).Constructivism offers a middle ground, seeing ethnicity as neither innate nor entirely manipulable, but rather as socially and politically constructed through interactions over time. While it acknowledges the durability of some aspects of identity, constructivism argues that conflict is not inevitable. Instead, it arises from broader systemic factors such as weak institutions, exclusionary politics, or structural inequalities. Elites still play a central role in mobilization, but identities are shaped within wider "political opportunity structures" and social systems that either exacerbate or mitigate tensions (Anderson, 1993; Rothschild, 1981).

2.2.3. The Cooperative Dimensions of Ethnicity

Although ethnicity is often perceived as divisive in multi-ethnic societies, it can also serve as a foundation for cooperation. Shared cultural norms, language, religion, and historical ties strengthen in-group trust and enable collective organization. In contexts where state institutions are weak or unresponsive, ethnic groups frequently provide social support and mutual assistance, which in turn facilitates collective political action such as voting, protest, or civic engagement (Fearon & Laitin, 1996).Cooperation within ethnic groups is reinforced by informal enforcement mechanisms and reputational pressures. Ethnic networks disseminate information, monitor behavior, and impose sanctions on non-compliant members, thereby reducing the risks of free-riding. Habyarimana et al. (2009) describe this as the "technology of ethnic cooperation," highlighting how ethnic ties can resolve collective action problems more effectively than heterogeneous groups. In such

settings, sanctions—ranging from social exclusion to economic penalties—ensure adherence to group norms even in the absence of strong state authority.

Beyond enforcing cooperation, ethnic trust extends into political and economic spheres. Ethnic-based organizations, religious groups, and community councils often serve as platforms for collective mobilization, lobbying, and service provision. These informal institutions can supplement or even rival state structures by coordinating voter blocs and advancing group interests (Chandra, 2004). However, while such institutions strengthen intra-group solidarity, they rarely foster cooperation across ethnic boundaries. This duality makes ethnicity both a unifying and divisive force. It generates bonding social capital within groups but limits bridging social capital across communities, reinforcing ethnic boundaries and hindering national integration (Posner, 2005). Thus, ethnicity operates as a double-edged sword: it can enable cooperation and governance within groups, but also risks deepening exclusion and parochialism. Acknowledging these trade-offs is vital for understanding the role of ethnicity in sustaining or undermining political stability in diverse societies (Ruiz, 2015).

2.2.4. Managing Ethnic Diversity through Political Accommodation

Political accommodation refers to institutional mechanisms designed to integrate diverse ethnic groups into governance and prevent exclusion or conflict. In divided societies, models such as consociational democracy, federalism, and proportional representation are used to provide groups with access to decision-making and state resources. These inclusive arrangements aim to reduce marginalization by guaranteeing participation and protecting minority rights (Lijphart, 1977; Horowitz, 1985).The logic behind accommodation is that exclusion fosters grievances, which may lead to ethnic mobilization, separatism, or violence. By contrast, when minority groups are assured meaningful political representation, they are more likely to pursue their interests peacefully. Consociationalism, one widely discussed approach, emphasizes grand coalitions, proportionality, mutual veto powers, and group autonomy. Advocates argue that power-sharing among elites fosters stability by managing group differences within structured institutions (Lijphart, 1977). Despite its strengths, consociationalism has been criticized for entrenching ethnic divisions.

Critics argue that by institutionalizing ethnicity, such systems can reinforce boundaries rather than encourage integration. This may encourage ethnic outbidding, where leaders appeal narrowly to their own communities at the expense of national unity (Horowitz, 1991; Chandra, 2004). Federalism offers an alternative, allowing geographically concentrated groups autonomy over local affairs such as education and language. However, poorly designed federal systems may deepen separatist aspirations or exacerbate inequalities if resources are unevenly distributed (Posner, 2005). Ultimately, the success of political accommodation depends on institutional credibility and elite commitment to inclusive governance. When arrangements are perceived as fair and consistently applied, they can build trust and stability. However, if they are manipulated through practices such as electoral fraud or exclusionary politics, they risk worsening tensions instead of reducing them. Thus, accommodation is a double-edged tool that can either mitigate or inflame ethnic divisions depending on its design and implementation (Ruiz, 2015).

2.2.5. Ethnicity as a Determinant of Voting Patterns

In ethnically diverse societies, electoral behavior is often shaped by identity politics. Voters frequently prefer co-ethnic candidates, expecting them to deliver group benefits and protect community interests. This practice, known as "ethnic voting," is especially pronounced in young democracies where parties are weakly institutionalized and politics is closely tied to patronage. Politicians reinforce this trend by forming parties that appeal directly to ethnic constituencies and promising targeted benefits (Horowitz, 1985; Chandra, 2004). The design of electoral systems strongly influences how ethnicity affects voting patterns. Majoritarian systems, which rely on single-member districts, tend to reinforce bloc voting as candidates seek majority support. In contrast, proportional representation systems create opportunities for multi-ethnic coalitions and offer smaller groups fairer representation, reducing the likelihood of exclusion (Reynolds, 2005). However, even proportional systems are not immune to ethnic dominance when group identities remain politically salient. Ethnicized elections can have damaging consequences for democratic development. Politicians may exploit ethnic grievances or fears to mobilize support, leading to polarization and reducing the role of policy

debates. Electoral competition becomes about identity rather than ideas, which undermines accountability and innovation in governance. This dynamic often entrenches patronage systems and hinders broader national integration (Posner, 2005). To mitigate these risks, scholars recommend electoral reforms that encourage cross-ethnic collaboration, such as vote-pooling or alternative voting systems. These approaches incentivize candidates to seek support beyond their ethnic base, promoting moderation and coalition-building. Still, the effectiveness of such reforms depends on political culture and the credibility of electoral institutions. Ultimately, while ethnicity provides marginalized groups with political voice, it also risks entrenching fragmentation unless institutions strike a balance between representation and inclusivity (Bogaards, 2007).

2.3. Challenges posed by ethnic politics to national unity

2.3.1 Patronage, Kinship, and Ethnic Corruption

Corruption is generally defined as unethical or dishonest behavior by individuals in positions of authority, often for personal gain (Mitchel, 2018). It can take many forms, including bribery, embezzlement, and other practices that may even be legal in some contexts. Vito Tanzi (1998) offers a particularly precise definition, describing corruption as the deliberate violation of the arm's-length principle to secure advantages for oneself or associated individuals (Riak, 2025). Economically, corruption is analyzed as either exogenous or endogenous to the political process, with three main forms: process-accelerating corruption, administrative corruption, and state capture, all often tied to rent-seeking behavior and weak or ambiguous legal frameworks.Ethnic corruption occurs when political power is perceived as belonging to specific ethnic groups, leading leaders to favor their own communities. Michela Wrong's *It is Our Turn to Eat* (2009) and Jean-Francois Bayart's *The State of Africa* (2009) highlight how this dynamic is widespread in African politics, creating systemic patterns where community loyalty intersects with personal gain. In South Sudan, Clemence Pinaud documents similar practices within the SPLM/SPLA, ranging from misappropriation of refugee aid to allocating resources and privileges to allies and kin, illustrating how corruption intertwines with ethnic favoritism (Riak, 2025).

The concept of "gifts" from Marcel Mauss provides a lens to understand these dynamics, where offerings such as bride wealth or distribution of resources serve to consolidate authority and maintain hierarchical power. In South Sudan, commanders' gifts to their soldiers exemplify this logic, reinforcing loyalty and perpetuating systems of political and class domination (Mauss, 2011). Ethnic favoritism in corruption has been particularly pronounced among the Dinka, as shown by the disproportionate number of accused or acquitted individuals from this ethnic group in high-level cases. Scholars such as Sarah Chayes emphasize that corruption poses serious threats beyond immediate financial losses, undermining ethnic cohesion, national stability, and even global security (Chayes, 2016). Ethnic corruption, therefore, not only perpetuates inequality and weak governance within states like South Sudan but also risks escalating tensions between groups, demonstrating how patronage and favoritism compromise both political legitimacy and broader national unity.

2.3.2. The Politics of Rent-Seeking and Resource Competition

Corruption in South Sudan has been closely tied to a struggle for wealth and power within the political marketplace. As described by Chol (2021), political elites have historically sought to accumulate resources rapidly, often prioritizing personal gain over institutional regulation. Alex de Waal (2014) argues that during the SPLM's secessionist struggle, leaders created a governance system that was highly unregulated and brutal, aiming both to consolidate southern control and prevent the northern government from co-opting southern militias. This environment fostered a culture of extreme rent-seeking and competition for political spoils. The collapse of national oil production in 2012 intensified these dynamics. By 2013, the government could no longer afford loyalty payments, prompting cycles of rebellion and negotiation over state resources. Commanders or provincial leaders could claim a share of rents through mutinies, often resulting in widespread violence, displacement, and looting. These "rent-seeking rebellions" combine material objectives with ethnic overtones, illustrating how corruption and conflict became deeply intertwined (Riak, 2025). From its early days, the SPLM/SPLA became a hub for rent-seekers, with corruption permeating both military and political operations. Peter Adwok Nyaba

(1997) highlights the diversion of food rations intended for conscripts, which contributed to starvation and disease among recruits. Over time, the systematic looting of humanitarian aid and natural resources such as gold and timber became normalized, reflecting both greed and military strategy (Riak, 2025).This pattern produced a "military aristocracy," where commanders leveraged coercion, patrimonial networks, and corruption to maintain power. Pinaud (2014) emphasizes that South Sudan's political and military marketplace transformed corruption into an institutionalized system, shaping governance, warfare, and the distribution of resources. The interplay between greed, ethnic identity, and institutional weakness made corruption a central feature of the state's political economy.

2.3.3. Disparities in Regional Resource Distribution

Unequal resource distribution has been a major driver of ethnic tensions and demands for control over resources in multi-ethnic countries like Nigeria. Elites and ruling classes often monopolize and politicize resources, fueling sectionalism and undermining national integration. Attempts to establish fair revenue allocation mechanisms through formal institutions have frequently been ineffective, leaving grievances unresolved and exacerbating competition among regions and ethnic groups (Osaghae, 2017). Over the years, multiple commissions and ad-hoc committees have been established to address disparities in resource allocation. Despite these efforts, implementation has often been weak or inconsistent, allowing inequality to persist and contributing to the politicization of ethnic identity in resource debates. The lack of effective enforcement mechanisms has created a sense of marginalization in some regions, reinforcing ethnic-based grievances and political mobilization (Riak, 2025). The revenue allocation system in Nigeria traces back to 1946 under the Richard's Constitution, which introduced regional autonomy and aimed to balance federal-regional relations. Allocation principles were based on population, even development, and derivation, designed to ensure a fair distribution of resources among regions. For example, the Phillipson Commission (1946) allocated 46% of revenue to the Northern Region, 30% to the Western Region, and 24% to the Eastern Region, reflecting both regional disparities and the complexities of equitable distribution (Osaghae, 2017). Despite these frameworks, disputes over

resource control remain unresolved. The persistent asymmetry in allocation has entrenched sectional politics, reinforced ethnic competition, and impeded national cohesion. Ethnic politics around resources continue to challenge the development of inclusive governance structures, highlighting the critical link between resource management, equity, and political stability (Riak, 2025).

2.3.4. The Politics of Ethnic Aggression

Large-scale inter-ethnic violence in Kenya is a relatively recent phenomenon, closely linked to democratization and electoral cycles rather than deep-rooted, primordial causes. As multi-party politics gained momentum, senior politicians often made inflammatory statements during rallies, urging individuals to return to their ancestral lands or face expulsion. These provocative declarations frequently preceded outbreaks of violent clashes, illustrating the political instigation of ethnic conflict (Nyukuri, 1997). The emergence of new political parties highlighted enduring ethno-regional interests, with violence often serving as an instrument for advancing these agendas. In this context, ethnicity functioned primarily as a vehicle for political expression rather than as an inherent source of conflict. Political competition effectively ethnicized violence, turning identity into a tool for mobilization while aligning local loyalties with broader party objectives (Riak, 2025). Once established, these patterns became self-reinforcing, increasing the likelihood of future conflict. Ethnicized violence sharpened group identities, fostered chauvinism, and propagated the notion that specific regions "belonged" to the groups considered original inhabitants. Such dynamics intensified social divisions, promoting suspicion and rivalry among communities even in areas where legal land ownership and constitutional rights permitted free residence (Ndegwa, 1997). Consequently, ethnic violence in Kenya illustrates how political processes can manipulate identity to produce destructive outcomes. While ethnicity is often perceived as the root of such conflicts, in reality, it is the politicization of identity within competitive and weakly regulated political systems that drives large-scale violence. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing policies that mitigate electoral and ethnic tensions in multi-ethnic societies (Riak, 2025).

2.4. Possible frameworks for fostering inclusive national identity in South Sudan

2.4.1. Policy Reforms for Managing Ethnicity

To effectively manage the complexities of ethnicity within South Sudan, it is imperative to establish robust institutional frameworks that promote ethnic inclusivity and mitigate biases entrenched in existing governance structures. One of the primary steps involves creating mechanisms for equitable representation across all ethnic groups within political institutions. Implementing proportional representation systems that accurately reflect the demographic makeup can serve to diminish the politicization of ethnic identity, making governance more inclusive and collaborative. Such reforms can help prevent dominant groups from monopolizing power and marginalizing minorities, thereby reducing ethnic tensions that threaten national stability (Gai, 2025) However, potential barriers such as entrenched patronage networks, resistance from elites benefiting from the status quo, and logistical challenges in implementing new electoral systems must be carefully addressed. Ensuring transparency and fairness in the reform process will be crucial to garnering broad support and legitimacy. Additionally, reviewing and reforming policies that currently perpetuate ethnic favouritism or exclusion is essential. This includes establishing transparent, merit-based processes for appointments to public service positions, resource distribution, and project implementation. Incorporating cultural competence training for government officials can further enhance their understanding of ethnic dynamics, fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity within the public sector (Ibid). Drawing on successful conflict resolution practices in South Sudan, such as the peace processes facilitated by the Juba Peace Agreement (2018), which incorporated inclusive dialogue among diverse groups, can provide valuable lessons.These initiatives demonstrated that structured, participatory approaches involving multiple stakeholders can foster trust and pave the way for reconciliation. Institutionalizing such inclusive processes within governance reforms can help address potential barriers and build a more cohesive political landscape (Ibid).

2.4.2. National Reconciliation Initiatives

Promoting genuine dialogue among ethnic groups remains vital for fostering understanding, trust, and a shared sense of identity across South Sudan. Establishing structured national reconciliation initiatives that encourage inter-ethnic dialogue can bridge divides and foster a collective sense of community. These initiatives may include community forums, workshops, and facilitated dialogues led by neutral third-party organizations, designed to provide safe spaces for open discussions about historical grievances, shared experiences, and future aspirations (Zartman, 2023). Integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and cultural practices into these initiatives can significantly enhance their effectiveness. Many communities possess indigenous methods of conflict management that emphasize reconciliation, harmony, and communal consensus. By bridging formal dialogue processes with these traditional approaches, South Sudan can create a holistic framework that respects and leverages its cultural heritage. Such an approach not only promotes reconciliation but also nurtures a shared national identity rooted in mutual respect and understanding.Nonetheless, potential barriers such as mistrust, political manipulation, and deeply ingrained stereotypes must be acknowledged and addressed. Ensuring the neutrality of facilitators, safeguarding participants' safety, and maintaining sustained engagement are critical to overcoming these challenges. Drawing from successful conflict resolution efforts in South Sudan, such as the community peace dialogues conducted in various states, which have helped reduce local tensions and foster cooperation, demonstrates that culturally sensitive and inclusive dialogue processes can lay the foundation for long-term peace (Pachai,, 2023).

2.4.3. Future Research Directions

Advancing strategies that foster a cohesive national identity also requires a concerted effort to deepen understanding of the intersection of ethnicity and governance. Encouraging further research on how ethnic identities influence political behaviour, policymaking, and social cohesion can generate valuable insights into the factors that either facilitate or hinder nation-building. Cross-disciplinary studies integrating political science, sociology, and anthropology can shed light on the nuanced ways

ethnic dynamics operate within South Sudan's unique context (Gai, 2025). Longitudinal research tracking changes in ethnic relations over time particularly in response to policy interventions and reconciliation initiatives can help identify best practices and inform adaptive strategies. For example, evaluating the long-term impact of past peace processes and inclusive reforms can provide critical lessons for future efforts. Engaging local scholars, community leaders, and practitioners in this research ensures that findings are grounded in the realities on the ground, fostering a participatory and context-sensitive approach (Ibid). Addressing potential barriers such as limited research capacity, political sensitivities, and resource constraints is essential to sustaining meaningful inquiry. By prioritizing research that is inclusive and community-driven, South Sudan can develop evidence-based policies that promote resilience, social harmony, and shared prosperity.

2.5. Literature gap

Despite extensive scholarship on ethnic politics and national identity, current literature reveals several conceptual and contextual gaps in understanding these dynamics within the post-independence South Sudanese context. Much of the foundational work whether from primordialism (Connor, 1994), instrumentalism (Horowitz, 1985), or constructivism (Cerulo, 1997) has focused on broader theories with limited empirical grounding in South Sudan's unique political and historical setting. Existing analyses do not fully account for how ethnically driven political mobilization actively undermines efforts at nation-building in fragile post-conflict states like South Sudan (Gai, 2025). Furthermore, the literature heavily leans on generalized theoretical frameworks without integrating lived experiences from within South Sudanese communities or drawing on indigenous governance structures. While theorists such as Armstrong (2017) and Kymlicka (1995) contribute valuable insights into national identity formation, there is minimal engagement with the complex interplay of ethnic favoritism, corruption, and resource allocation in shaping political behavior and national cohesion in South Sudan (Pinaud, 2014; Wrong, 2009). This limits the practical applicability of existing models to policy and governance contexts. The literature also understates the role of religious institutions and ethnoreligious intersections as drivers of conflict and political allegiance. For

instance, the nuanced dynamics of disputes such as those in Jonglei State between Bishop Moses Anur Ayom and Ruben Akurdit Ngong (Riak, 2025) demonstrate that religious identity serves not just as a cultural marker but also a potent political mobilization tool an area rarely explored in depth in ethnic identity discourses. Lastly, although several scholars emphasize political accommodation as a solution (Lijphart, 1977; Horowitz, 1991), there is limited exploration of how inclusive governance strategies can be adapted to South Sudan's fragmented socio-political landscape. The theoretical propositions on consociationalism and federalism lack contextual tailoring, failing to account for the entrenchment of ethnic patronage networks and militarized elite behavior that define South Sudanese politics (De Waal, 2014; Chol, 2021).

2.6. How to fill the gap

This study aims to contextualize dominant theories of ethnicity and national identity within the lived realities of South Sudan by anchoring its analysis in locally rooted experiences and empirical patterns of political behavior. By examining ethnic-based mobilization and national fragmentation through the lens of political marketplace dynamics (De Waal, 2014), this study will apply existing theories to a unique post-conflict context, thereby enriching both global theory and local policy relevance. Second, it will synthesize insights from constructivism, instrumentalism, and primordialism into a multidimensional framework capable of tracing how ethnic elites selectively amplify cultural symbols and historical grievances to manipulate group identities (Conversi, 1995; Dawisha, 2002). This hybrid approach will offer a more holistic understanding of how political entrepreneurs in South Sudan strategically manufacture ethnic loyalty to advance factional interests, thereby deepening national fragmentation.Third, the study will foreground the ethno-religious linkages that complicate ethnic mobilization, drawing on regional examples such as Jonglei State's church disputes to illustrate how religious frameworks both reinforce and complicate ethnic cleavages (Little, 2017; Riak, 2025). This component will expand the existing discourse by unpacking how identity politics rooted in religion interact with ethnic allegiances, thus shaping political competition and civic engagement. Finally, the research will propose context-sensitive models for political

accommodation based on lessons from indigenous reconciliation mechanisms, participatory dialogues, and inclusive governance reforms (Zartman, 2023; Pachai, 2023). By integrating frameworks of proportional representation and merit-based public appointments (Gai, 2025), the study seeks to offer actionable policy recommendations for fostering inclusive national identity and minimizing ethnic antagonism in South Sudan's evolving democratic space.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design, which was appropriate for exploring the relationship between ethnic politics and national identity. Descriptive design allowed the researcher to collect accurate data without manipulating any variables, enabling an in-depth understanding of how ethnic-based political practices influence national unity in South Sudan. The study took place in Juba, the capital city of South Sudan. Juba was selected because it hosts a diverse population representing various ethnic groups and serves as the administrative and political center of the country. It also provided access to government institutions, civil society organizations, and informed respondents.

3.2. Source of Information

This section typically identified where the researcher planned to obtain data or supporting information.The study derive its information from both primary and secondary sources to ensure triangulation and depth in understanding the relationship between ethnic-based political mobilization and national identity in South Sudan.

Primary Sources

These included structured questionnaires administered to citizens, and semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants such as government officials, leaders of ethnic-based political parties, civil society representatives, and university scholars. The direct perspectives from diverse stakeholders offered firsthand insight into political affiliations, ethnic identification, and perceptions of national unity.

Secondary Sources

Relevant literature, policy documents, academic journals, government reports, and historical records were reviewed to contextualize the findings and enrich the theoretical framework. These sources provided background on ethnic dynamics, governance structures, and national identity discourse in South Sudan. This dual-source approach strengthened both the empirical and analytical dimensions of the study, allowing for comprehensive exploration of ethnic politics within post-conflict nation-building efforts.

3.3. Population and Sampling Techniques

3.3.1. Population

The target population refers to the complete set of individuals, groups, or institutions relevant to the research problem, from which a representative sample is drawn (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the target population consists of individuals residing in Juba, South Sudan, who were either directly involved in or significantly affected by political processes and national identity discourse. The total target population is estimated at 108 respondents, carefully selected to reflect diversity in political affiliation, ethnic identity, and socio-institutional roles. The study's target population in Juba, South Sudan, was composed of diverse groups who were directly or indirectly engaged in political processes and national identity issues. This included government officials and policy-makers working in institutions responsible for governance and reconciliation, and members of political parties, especially those shaped by ethnic affiliations. These groups were instrumental in shaping political agendas, implementing national policies, and influencing public narratives around unity and identity.

The second category included civil society actors and university scholars, who played essential roles in peacebuilding, public discourse, civic education, and academic research. Civil society organizations promotd inclusiveness and accountability, while scholars offer theoretical and historical insights into ethnicity and nation-building. Their involvement provided both empirical and intellectual depth to the study. Lastly, the study included citizens from various ethnic

backgrounds, who represent the broader population's lived experiences and perceptions of national identity. Their inclusion captured grassroots realities of ethnic attachment, political behavior, and intergroup relations, especially in the post-conflict context of South Sudan (Horowitz, 1985). This stratified approach ensured comprehensive and balanced representation, enhancing the relevance and generalizability of the research findings. Therefore, the target population was 108 individuals

3.3.2. Sampling Techniques

This study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure a comprehensive, representative, and reliable selection of participants. This technique combined different sampling methods at various stages to cater to the diverse characteristics of the target population and to minimize selection bias.

Stage One: Purposive Sampling

At the first stage, purposive (or judgmental) sampling was used to select key informants who possess specialized knowledge or hold influential positions related to the study topic. These included senior government officials and leaders of ethnic-based political parties. These participants were selected intentionally because they provided expert opinions, policy perspectives, and contextual understanding of the interplay between ethnic politics and national identity in South Sudan. Their insights were essential in explaining complex political behaviors and historical trajectories.

Stage Two: Stratified Sampling

In the second stage, the study applied stratified sampling to divide the population into different strata based on ethnic affiliation. This ensured that all major ethnic groups in Juba are represented proportionately in the study. The rationale behind using stratified sampling is to prevent over-representation or under-representation of any ethnic community, which could skew the results or reduce generalizability. Within each stratum, the number of participants to be selected was proportional to the size of the ethnic group in the population.

Stage Three: Simple Random Sampling

After stratification, simple random sampling was employed to select respondents within each ethnic group. This method ensured that every member of each stratum has an equal and independent chance of being selected. A list of eligible individuals in each group was compiled, and respondents were chosen randomly using lottery or computer-generated numbers. This process reduced the risk of researcher bias and enhanced the credibility of the data collected from the general population.

Justification for Multi-Stage Sampling

The combination of these techniques allows the study to:

- Capture both elite and grassroots perspectives.
- Include ethnic diversity without bias.
- Ensure scientific rigor and broad applicability of findings.

Overall, this structured and layered approach to sampling guarantees that the study reflects the pluralistic nature of South Sudan's society, which is critical in understanding how ethnic politics impacts national identity formation.

3.4. Determination of Study Sample

3.4.1 Sample Size

The sample size is determined using Yamane's (1967) formula:

The formula

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = target population (what we are solving for)

e = margin of error (commonly 0.05 for 95% confidence level)

n ?

N = 108

e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2} \qquad\qquad n = \frac{108}{1+108\,(0.05)2}$$

$$\frac{108}{1+108(0.0025)} = \frac{108}{1+0.27} = \frac{108}{1.27} = 85.039 = \textbf{85 respondents}$$

Hence, the sample size is **85 respondents.**

Reasons for choosing Yamane's formula

The Yamane (1967) formula was chosen for determining the sample size because it offers a simple, practical, and efficient method suitable for studies with a known and limited population. It requires minimal data inputs just the total population and desired margin of error making it easy to apply, especially in field-based research. Its ability to produce a statistically representative sample within a 95% confidence level ensures the accuracy and reliability of research findings without the need to survey the entire population. Additionally, Yamane's formula is widely accepted in social science research, which strengthens the methodological credibility of the study. It is particularly beneficial in settings with limited resources, as it helps save time and effort while maintaining scientific rigor. Its adaptability to real-world constraints, especially in developing countries like South Sudan, makes it an ideal tool for ensuring both efficiency and validity in sample size determination.

3.5. Variables Definitions and Measurements

In this study, variables were defined and measured to empirically assess the relationship between ethnic-based political mobilization (independent variable) and national identity formation (dependent variable) in South Sudan. The operationalization of these variables is grounded in theoretical constructs from the literature and tailored to the socio-political context of the country.

3.5.1 Independent Variable: Ethnic-Based Political Mobilization

Ethnic-based political mobilization refers to the use of ethnic identity as a primary tool for political organization, campaigning, and participation. It encompasses

practices where ethnic affiliation shapes voting behavior, party membership, and leadership appointments.

Measurement Tool

Likert-scale statements (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) used in the questionnaire.

Example item: *"I trust leaders from my ethnic group more than those from other ethnic groups."*

3.5.2 Dependent Variable: National Identity Formation

National identity formation refers to the development of a sense of belonging and loyalty to the nation-state over ethnic or sub-national affiliations. It involved embracing national symbols, institutions, and shared values that transcend ethnic lines.

Measurement Tool

Likert-scale questionnaire and open-ended items in key informant interviews. Example item: *"I identify more as a South Sudanese than as a member of my ethnic group."*

This structured approach to variable definition and measurement provides a robust foundation for analyzing the interplay between ethnic politics and national unity in South Sudan.

3.6. Procedure for Data Collection

The data collection procedure outlined the systematic steps that the study follows to obtain reliable and valid data for analyzing the relationship between ethnic-based political mobilization and national identity in South Sudan. The procedure integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure comprehensive and credible findings.

3.6.1 Preparation Phase

Instrument Development and Review

The research instruments structured questionnaires and interview guides were developed based on the study objectives and conceptual framework. These tools

included both closed-ended (Likert-scale) and open-ended questions designed to assess key variables such as political affiliation, ethnic identification, and perceptions of national identity.

Pilot Testing

Piloting of the study involved 9 participants drawn from a sample size which was 10% of the 85 respondents. The purpose was to refine the instruments by identifying ambiguous questions, improving clarity, and ensuring cultural and contextual relevance. Revisions were made based on feedback from the piloting of the study.

Ethical Clearance and Consent

Ethical approval was obtained from University of Juba. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, data confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Informed consent either written or verbal was secured before any data collection begins.

3.7. Data Collection Instruments

The study utilizes the following instruments for data collection:

Questionnaire Tool

This was designed to capture demographic data, ethnic affiliations, political attitudes, and perceptions of national identity. The questionnaire includes both multiple-choice items and Likert-scale statements (e.g., 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Interview Guide for KIIs

This semi-structured guide included open-ended questions tailored to each informant's role and expertise. It explored the root causes of ethnic mobilization, the functioning of institutions, and views on reconciliation and inclusiveness. Each instrument was pre-tested through a pilot study to ensure clarity, cultural relevance, and appropriateness for the target audience.

3.8. Piloting the Study

The piloting phase of the study played a vital role in testing the effectiveness and clarity of the research instruments before full data collection begins. A sample of 9

individuals, drawn from a 10% of the sample size, was selected to participate in this piloting of the study. These participants helped evaluate whether the questionnaire and interview guide were clear, relevant, culturally appropriate, and aligned with the study's objectives. The piloting of the study also allowed the researcher to assess the time needed to complete the tools and provided an opportunity to train research assistants.

During the piloting of the study, participants were asked to provide feedback on the structure, wording, and flow of questions. Their responses were used to identify and correct ambiguous, redundant, or sensitive items. This process ensured that the tools were refined for better face and content validity. Additionally, the piloting of the study helped determine the internal consistency of Likert-scale items by calculating Cronbach's Alpha; instruments scoring above the 0.70 threshold were considered reliable for use. Overall, the piloting of the study enhanced the accuracy and credibility of the research by ensuring that all instruments function properly under real-world conditions. It helped the researcher detect issues early, improve the quality of data collection, and build confidence in the tools' ability to measure key variables related to ethnic-based political mobilization and national identity formation in South Sudan.

The main objectives of piloting of the study were to:

- Evaluate the clarity and relevance of questionnaire items and interview questions

- Test the internal consistency of multi-item scales

- Identify and correct ambiguous, leading, or redundant questions

- Estimate the time required to complete the instruments

- Familiarize research assistants with the tools and procedures

The outcome and result of piloting of the study

The piloting of the study, conducted with 9 participants (10% of the sample size), revealed that some questionnaire items were ambiguous or culturally insensitive, leading to rewording for clarity, appropriateness, and relevance to the local context. Abstract terms and assumptions about political literacy were simplified to improve

understanding. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha produced a coefficient above 0.70, confirming acceptable internal consistency. The piloting of the study also helped determine the average completion time, enabling logistical adjustments, and overall confirmed that the instruments were clear, culturally suitable, and reliable for full-scale data collection.

3.9. Quality/Error Control

To ensure the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of the data, the study incorporated several quality and error control measures throughout the research process. These measures aimed to minimize bias, prevent errors, and enhanced the credibility of the research findings. Before the data collection phase begins, all research assistants went under comprehensive training on ethical standards, proper data collection procedures, and the use of research instruments. This training included role-playing sessions and mock interviews to prepare the team for real field conditions. The instruments were also pre-tested during the pilot study to identify any ambiguous or inconsistent items, which were revised to improve clarity and relevance.

During data collection, the principal investigator supervised the process through regular check-ins and random spot checks. Completed questionnaires and interview responses were reviewed daily to identify and address issues such as incomplete answers or inconsistencies. Where necessary, follow-up clarification were sought from respondents. After collection, all data were double-checked during entry into SPSS to eliminate coding or transcription errors. Digital data were backed up regularly, and all materials were securely stored to ensure confidentiality and protect against data loss. These steps collectively maintained high data quality and reduce the likelihood of systematic or random errors.

3.8. Reliability

The study ensured reliability by adopting standardized procedures and testing methods that measure the consistency and stability of the research instruments. Reliability will refer to the degree to which the tools yield consistent results across different conditions and time periods. Two main forms of reliability were applied: internal consistency and test-retest reliability. To test internal consistency, the study used Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, calculated using SPSS. A coefficient of 0.70 or

higher was considered acceptable, indicating that the items within a scale measure the same construct. This was particularly applied to Likert-scale items that assess constructs such as ethnic identity and national affiliation. For test-retest reliability, a subset of respondents completed the same questionnaire twice within a two-week interval. The responses were correlated using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r). A correlation of $r \geq 0.70$ demonstrated good stability over time. These approaches ensured that the research instruments were dependable, producing consistent and replicable results.

Formula:

The formula for Cronbach's Alpha is:

$$\alpha = (N \times \bar{C}) / [\bar{V} + (N - 1) \times \bar{C}]$$

Where:

N = Number of items (questions) in the test.

$\bar{C}$ = Average covariance between item pairs.

$\bar{V}$ = Average variance of the items.

The below Steps are used to Calculate Cronbach's Alpha:

Calculate the variance for each item in the questionnaire.

Compute the covariance between all pairs of items.

Plug these values into the formula to compute α.

Therefore, the interpretation will be as;

$\alpha \geq 0.9$: Excellent reliability.

$0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$: Good reliability.

$0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$: Acceptable reliability.

$\alpha < 0.7$: Indicated the instrument may need refinement.

Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, which tests internal consistency among Likert-scale items. The results showed a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient above 0.70, indicating that the items consistently measured constructs such as ethnic-based

political mobilization and national identity. This range was considered acceptable to good, suggesting strong internal reliability.

3.9. Validity

To ensure that the research instruments accurately measure the intended constructs, the study applied multiple forms of validity, including content validity, face validity, and construct validity. These validation procedures helped guarantee that the instruments were both conceptually sound and practically relevant. Content validity was established by subjecting the questionnaire and interview guide to expert review. Specialists in political science, sociology, and research methodology evaluated each item to ensure that it aligned with the study objectives and adequately captured the dimensions of ethnic mobilization and national identity. Their feedback guided revisions to eliminate irrelevant or misleading items. Face validity was assessed through pilot testing with a small group of participants who provided feedback on the clarity, cultural appropriateness, and interpretability of the items. Construct validity was evaluated by aligning each survey item with theoretical concepts from the literature and, where applicable, applying factor analysis to confirm the clustering of related items. These combined strategies enhanced both the internal and external validity of the study, ensuring accurate and meaningful measurement of key variables.

Formula for Validity

While there is no single universal formula for measuring validity as there is for reliability, construct validity and criterion-related validity could often be quantified using correlation techniques.

For criterion-related validity, one common method is to calculate the correlation coefficient between the research instrument's results and an external criterion (a validated measure of the same construct). This is typically represented as:

$$r = (\Sigma(xy) - \Sigma x \Sigma y / N) / \sqrt{[(\Sigma x^2 - (\Sigma x)^2 / N) \times (\Sigma y^2 - (\Sigma y)^2 / N)]}$$

Where:

r = Correlation coefficient.

x = Scores on the new instrument.

y = Scores on the validated criterion.

N = Number of observations.

The point at which the study becomes valid depends on the threshold chosen for r. For example:

If $r \geq 0.7$, the instrument is measured valid.

If $r < 0.7$, the instrument may need additional refinement.

For validity, the instruments were subjected to content and face validity assessments. Content validity was ensured through expert reviews by scholars in political science and research methodology, who confirmed that the questions aligned well with the study objectives. Face validity was supported by pilot participants, who found the questions clear, culturally appropriate, and relevant. Although validity does not have a universal numerical threshold, the positive expert feedback and logical alignment with theoretical constructs confirmed that the tools were valid in content and structure. Therefore, the instruments fell within acceptable reliability and validity ranges, making them suitable for full data collection.The outcome of the validity and reliability assessments confirmed that the research instruments were both accurate and dependable for measuring the intended variables.

3.10. Data Processing and Analysis

The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between ethnic-based political mobilization and national identity in South Sudan. This mixed-methods approach allowed for triangulation, enhances validity, and provided both statistical trends and contextual insights.For quantitative data, responses from structured questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The data underwent cleaning to address errors, inconsistencies, and missing values. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, valid percentages and cumulative percentages were used to summarize demographic characteristics and responses related to ethnic affiliation, political attitudes, and perceptions of national identity.

For qualitative data, transcripts from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher transcribed and organized the data, then identified emerging themes and patterns from participants' responses. Coding was done manually or with qualitative analysis software, and recurring ideas were grouped under thematic areas such as ethnic identity, political participation, institutional trust, and national unity. The qualitative findings were compared and integrated with quantitative results to provide a more in-depth and holistic interpretation of the data. This integrated approach ensured a robust and balanced analysis, allowing the study to capture both measurable trends and meaningful insights into the dynamics between ethnic politics and national identity in South Sudan.

3.11. Ethical Considerations

This study was guided by established ethical principles to ensure that the rights, dignity, and welfare of all research participants were respected throughout the research process. Ethical compliance was fundamental to producing trustworthy and socially responsible research outcomes. The following ethical standards are rigorously observed:

All participants are fully informed about the nature, objectives, and potential implications of the research prior to their participation. They are provided with a consent form that outlines the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Only individuals who explicitly provide their informed consent are included in the study. This process ensured that participation was based on a clear understanding and free will, in line with ethical standards outlined in the Belmont Report (1979).

To protect the privacy and identity of participants, all personal identifiers were removed or coded. Data were stored securely and only accessible to the research team. Any quotations or information used in reporting were anonymized to ensure that participants could not be identified either directly or indirectly. Confidentiality was maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed that they had the right to decline to answer specific questions or withdraw from the study

at any stage without penalty or consequence. This ensured that respondents were not subjected to coercion, pressure, or obligation, thereby upholding their autonomy and freedom of choice. The study recognized the cultural and social dynamics of South Sudan, especially in relation to ethnicity and identity. The researcher conducted all interactions with sensitivity, avoiding language or approaches that could cause distress, offense, or misunderstanding among respondents. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study upholds the integrity of the research process and safeguards the rights and welfare of all participants involved.
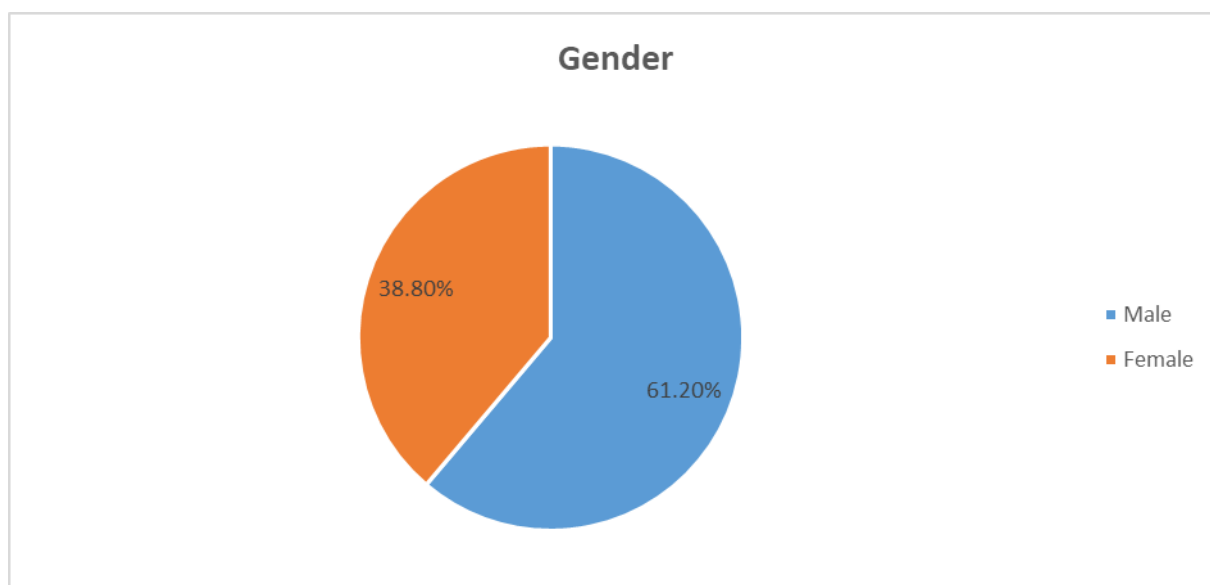
4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Rate of Return

A total of 85 questionnaires were distributed, of which 85 were returned, representing a response rate of 100%. This high response rate demonstrates strong engagement from respondents, ensuring the data's reliability and representatives for the study.

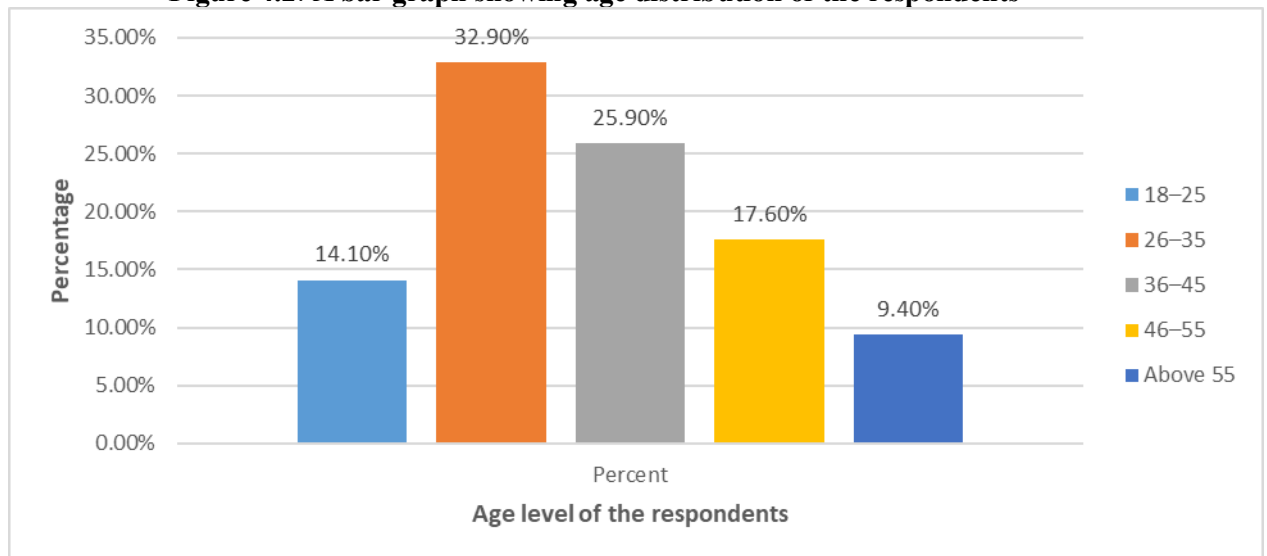### 4.2. Demographic Characteristics

Figure 4.1: **A Pie-chart showing Gender of Respondents**

Source: Field data (2025)

The majority of respondents were male 61.2%, while females accounted for 38.8%. This slight imbalance may reflect higher male participation in political discussions or public affairs in South Sudan.

Figure 4.2: A bar graph showing age distribution of the respondents

The largest group was 26–35 years (32.9%), followed by 36–45 years (25.9%), representing a working-age population likely active in political and civic affairs.

Table 4.1: **Marital Status of the respondents**

Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	30	35.3%	35.3%	35.3%
Married	45	52.9%	52.9%	88.2%
Widow	5	5.9%	5.9%	94.1%
Widower	5	5.9%	5.9%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

The majority of respondents were married 52.9%, indicating that family perspectives may influence perceptions of ethnic politics and national unity.
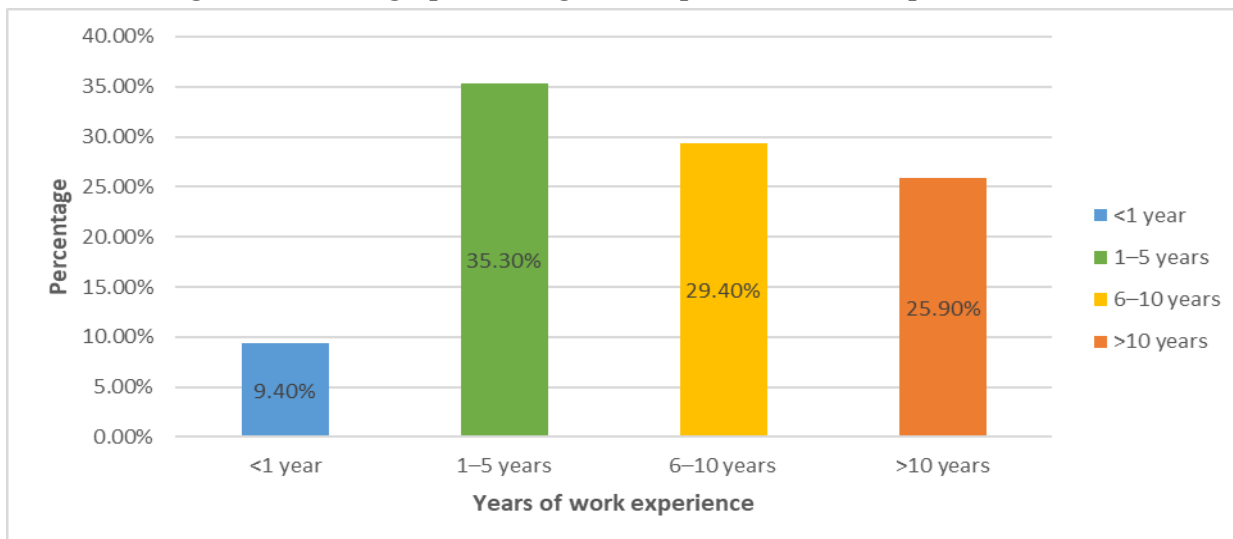
Table 4.2: Educational Level of the respondents

Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Certificate	7	8.2%	8.2%	8.2%
Diploma	10	11.8%	11.8%	20.0%
Bachelor's Degree	45	52.9%	52.9%	72.9%
Master's Degree	23	27.1%	27.1%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Most respondents held a Bachelor's degree (52.9%) or Master's degree (27.1%), indicating a well-educated population capable of critical evaluation of ethnic politics and national identity issues.

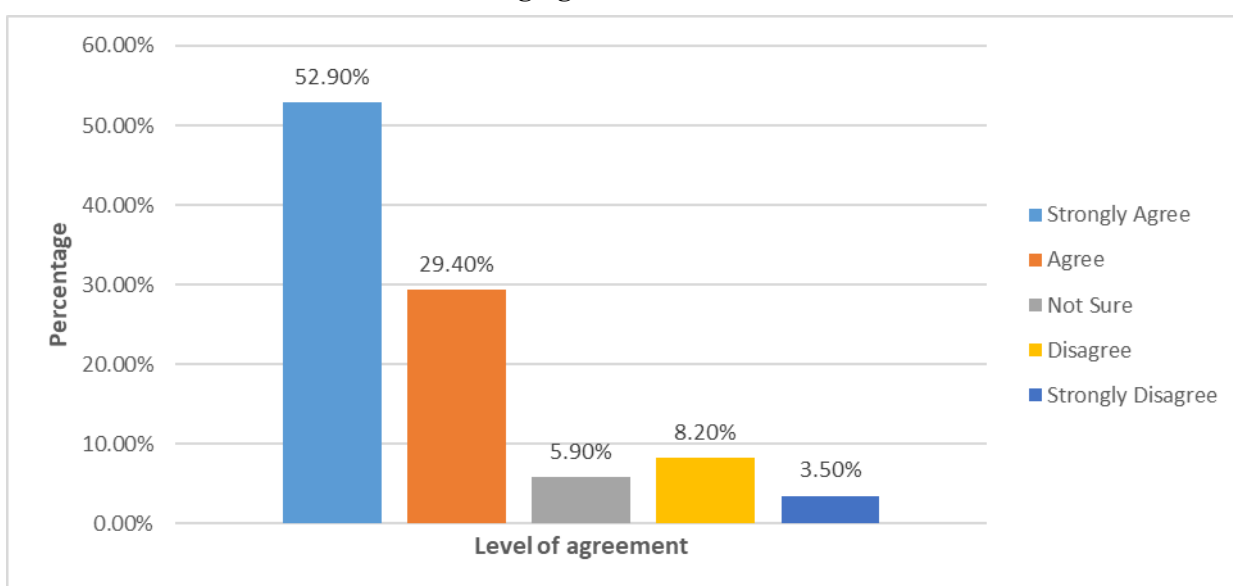**Figure 4.3: A bar graph showing work experience of the respondents**

Respondents had varied work experience, with the majority (35.30%) having 1–10 years, reflecting exposure to social, political, and institutional processes relevant to ethnic politics and national identity.

4.4 Impact of Ethnic-Based Political Mobilization

Figure 4.4: A bar graph showing Ethnic-based political mobilization weakens the sense of belonging to the nation

Over 52% strongly agree and 29% agree, indicating that ethnic mobilization significantly reduces national belonging. 5.9% are not sure, while 11.7% disagree or strongly disagree, reflecting a small minority who see limited impact. The implication is that ethnic mobilization undermines cohesion, highlighting the need for inclusive policies and leadership.

Table 4.3: Political leaders prioritize ethnic interests over national unity

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	50	58.8%	58.8%	58.8%
Agree	20	23.5%	23.5%	82.3%
Not Sure	6	7.1%	7.1%	89.4%
Disagree	5	5.9%	5.9%	95.3%
Strongly Disagree	4	4.7%	4.7%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Source: Field data (2025)

A majority perceive leaders as prioritizing ethnic interests (58.8% strongly agree, 23.5% agree). This highlights that leadership practices reinforce ethnic loyalties, undermining national identity.
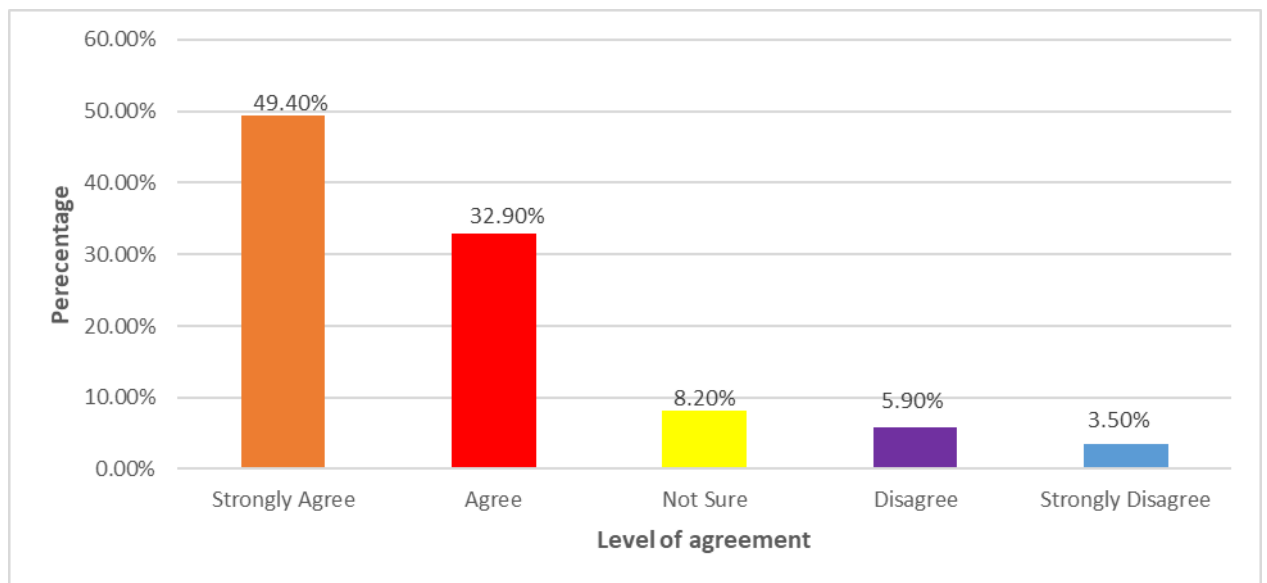
Table 4.4: Ethnic mobilization contributes to political instability

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	48	56.5%	56.5%	56.5%
Agree	22	25.9%	25.9%	82.4%
Not Sure	5	5.9%	5.9%	88.3%
Disagree	6	7.1%	7.1%	95.4%
Strongly Disagree	4	4.7%	4.7%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Source: Field data (2025)

Ethnic mobilization is widely seen as a driver of instability. This emphasizes the need for policies that manage ethnic diversity to reduce conflict and enhance governance stability.

Figure 4.5: A bar graph showing Political parties are largely organized along ethnic lines

Source: Field data (2025)

Nearly half (49.40%) of the respondent strongly agree that political parties are ethnically aligned, with most others agreeing. This structure reinforces ethnic divisions, making it harder to develop shared national identity.

Table 4.5: Ethnic-based politics discourages the development of a shared national identity
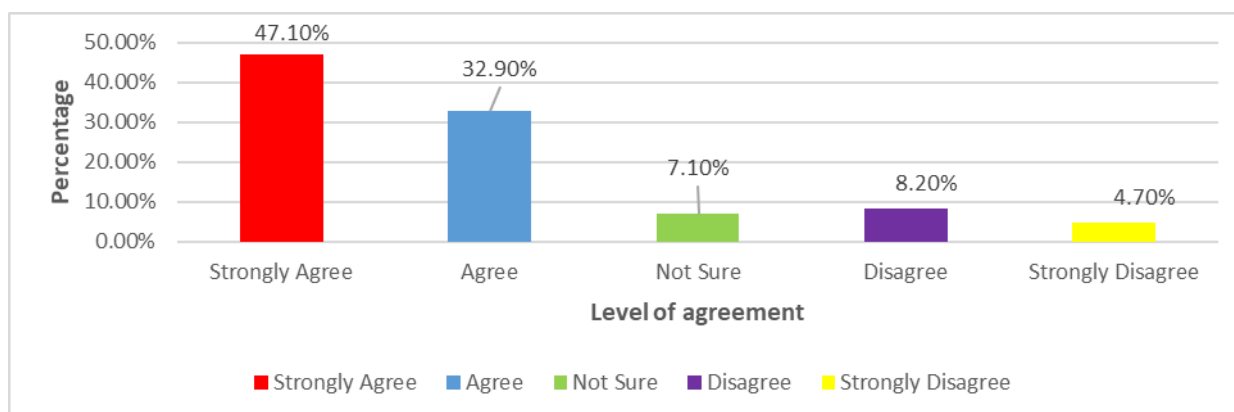
Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	46	54.1%	54.1%	54.1%
Agree	23	27.1%	27.1%	81.2%
Not Sure	6	7.1%	7.1%	88.3%
Disagree	7	8.2%	8.2%	96.5%
Strongly Disagree	3	3.5%	3.5%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Source: Field data (2025)

The majority strongly agree that ethnic politics hinders a shared national identity. The implication is that inclusive policies, civic education, and inter-ethnic dialogue are crucial to promote unity.

4.5 Challenges Posed by Ethnic Politics to National Unity

Figure 4.6: **A bar graph showing Ethnic-based politics leads to unequal access to political opportunities**

Source: Field data (2025)

The data shows that 47.1% strongly agree and 32.9% agree, meaning nearly 80% of respondents perceive unequal access as a serious issue. 7.1% are not sure, possibly reflecting limited exposure to political processes, while 8.2% disagree and 4.7% strongly disagree represent a minority who believe opportunities are fairly distributed. These findings suggest that ethnic favoritism in political representation is widespread. The implication is that policies promoting equal access to political offices for all groups are essential for national cohesion.

Table 4.6: **Conflicts among ethnic groups are fueled by political competition**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	42	49.4%	49.4%	49.4%
Agree	25	29.4%	29.4%	78.8%
Not Sure	7	8.2%	8.2%	87.0%
Disagree	6	7.1%	7.1%	94.1%
Strongly Disagree	5	5.9%	5.9%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Source: Field data (2025)

Nearly 79% of respondents agree that ethnic political competition fuels inter-group conflicts. 8.2% are not sure, reflecting limited direct experience, while 13% disagree or strongly disagree, representing a minority who may see other causes of conflict. Ethnic-based political competition is a key driver of instability. Policies encouraging

inclusive participation and conflict-resolution mechanisms are necessary to reduce ethnic tensions.
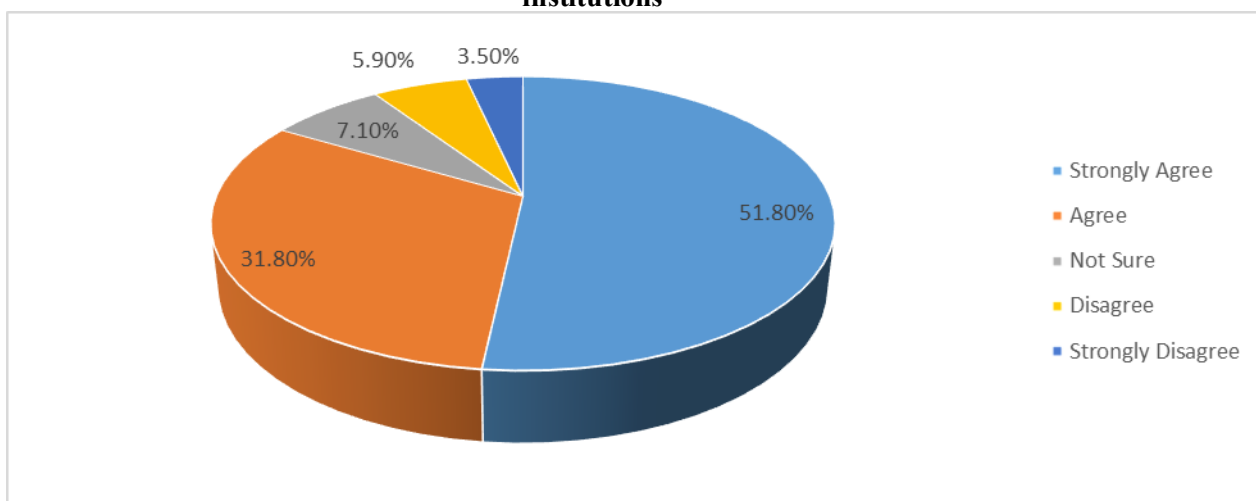
Table 4.7: Ethnic favoritism affects fair distribution of national resources

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	48	56.5%	56.5%	56.5%
Agree	22	25.9%	25.9%	82.4%
Not Sure	4	4.7%	4.7%	87.1%
Disagree	6	7.1%	7.1%	94.2%
Strongly Disagree	5	5.9%	5.9%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Source: Field data (2025)

Over 82% of respondents perceive that ethnic favoritism skews resource allocation. 4.7% are uncertain, while 13% disagree or strongly disagree. Implication: Unequal resource distribution fosters resentment and undermines trust in government, emphasizing the need for transparent, equitable policies.

Figure 4.7: A Pie-Chart showing Ethnic politics reduces public trust in government institutions

Source: Field data (2025)

A combined 83.6% strongly agree or agree that ethnic politics reduces trust in institutions. 7.1% are not sure, while 9.4% disagree, showing limited confidence in institutional impartiality. Strengthening impartial governance, merit-based appointments, and inclusive practices is essential to rebuild trust.

Table 4.8 Political polarization in South Sudan is driven mainly by ethnic divisions
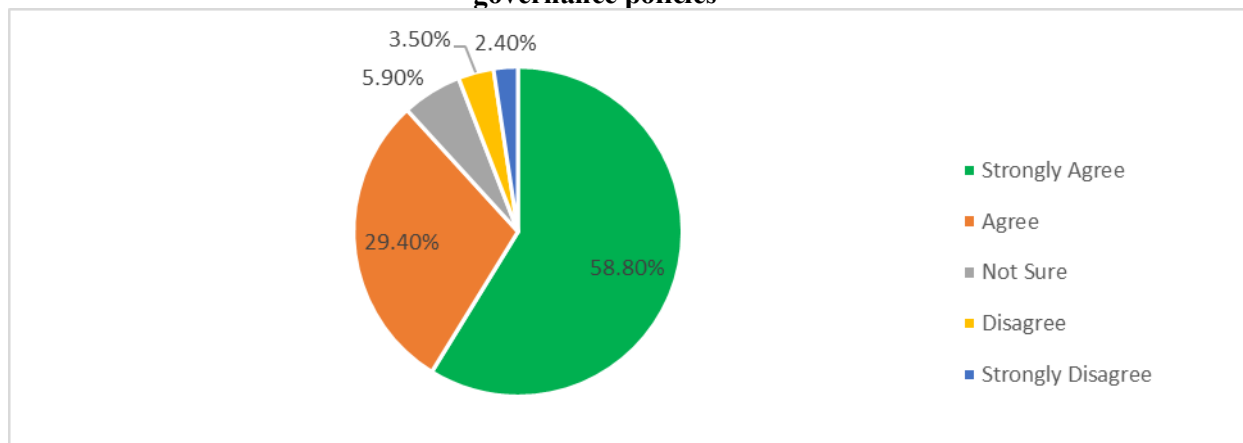
Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	45	52.9%	52.9%	52.9%
Agree	23	27.1%	27.1%	80.0%
Not Sure	6	7.1%	7.1%	87.1%
Disagree	7	8.2%	8.2%	95.3%
Strongly Disagree	4	4.7%	4.7%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Source: Field data (2025)

Nearly 80% agree that ethnic divisions are the main driver of political polarization. 7.1% are not sure, and 12.9% disagree or strongly disagree, reflecting minor alternative perspectives. Fostering cross-ethnic cooperation and inclusive political practices is vital for reducing division and promoting national cohesion.

4.6 Strategies for Fostering Inclusive National Identity

Figure 4.8: A Pie-Chart showing National identity can be strengthened through inclusive governance policies

Source: Field data (2025)

Nearly 88% of respondents see inclusive governance as key to strengthening national identity. Minor disagreement suggests broad consensus on its importance. Policies promoting equal participation and representation across ethnic groups can reinforce national cohesion.

Table 4.9: Civic education can help reduce the influence of ethnic-based politics

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	46	54.1%	54.1%	54.1%
Agree	28	32.9%	32.9%	87.0%
Not Sure	5	5.9%	5.9%	92.9%
Disagree	4	4.7%	4.7%	97.6%
Strongly Disagree	2	2.4%	2.4%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Source: Field data (2025)

Over 87% agree that civic education reduces ethnic politics' influence. Minor disagreement indicates strong support for education-based interventions. Structured civic programs can foster awareness, tolerance, and national cohesion.

Table 4.10: Inter-ethnic dialogue initiatives are important for promoting unity

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	48	56.5%	56.5%	56.5%
Agree	27	31.8%	31.8%	88.3%
Not Sure	4	4.7%	4.7%	93.0%
Disagree	4	4.7%	4.7%	97.7%
Strongly Disagree	2	2.4%	2.4%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Source: Field data (2025)

Nearly 88% see inter-ethnic dialogue as effective for promoting unity. Minor uncertainty reflects limited exposure to dialogue initiatives. Dialogue initiatives are essential to build trust, reduce stereotypes, and strengthen national identity.
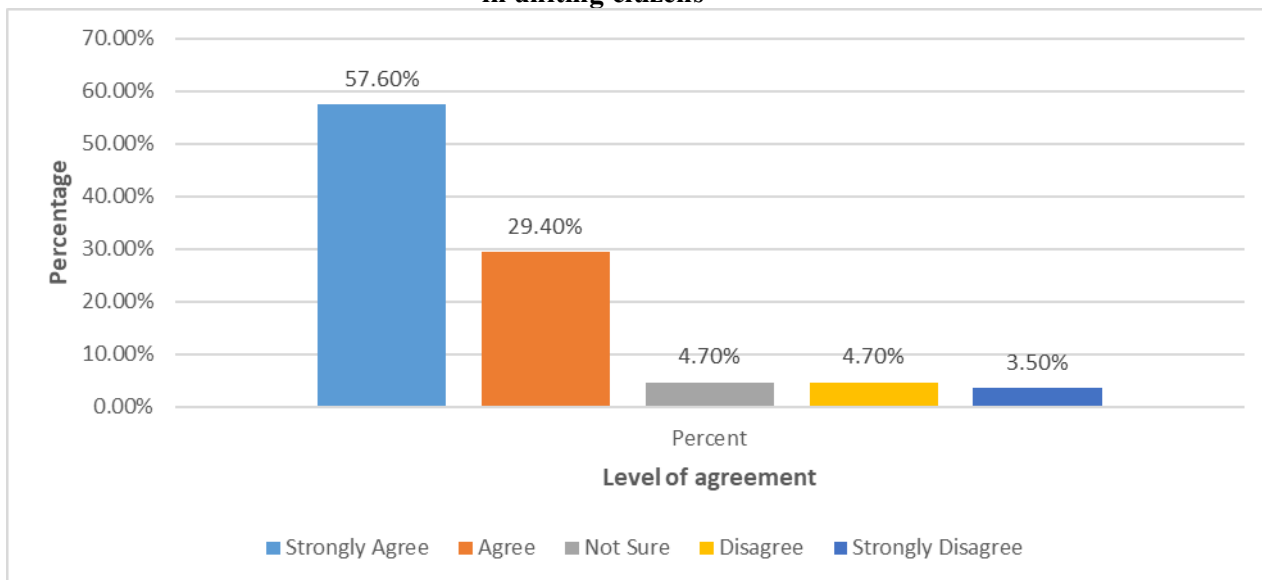
Table 4.11: Political parties should be required to have diverse ethnic representation

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	47	55.3%	55.3%	55.3%
Agree	26	30.6%	30.6%	85.9%
Not Sure	5	5.9%	5.9%	91.8%
Disagree	4	4.7%	4.7%	96.5%
Strongly Disagree	3	3.5%	3.5%	100%
Total	85	100%	100%	-

Source: Field data (2025)

85.9% support multi-ethnic representation in political parties. Minor opposition reflects limited disagreement. Enforcing multi-ethnic participation within parties can foster national cohesion.

Figure 4.9: **A bar graph showing National symbols (flag, anthem, etc.) play an important role in uniting citizens**

As showed above in the bar graph, 87% recognize the unifying role of national symbols. Minor skepticism reflects a very small minority. Promoting respect for national symbols can strengthen collective identity across ethnic lines.

5. Conclusions

The study concludes that ethnic-based political mobilization is one of the major factors undermining national identity in South Sudan. Political leaders continue to mobilize support primarily along ethnic lines, thereby eroding the sense of shared belonging among citizens. Instead of cultivating loyalty to the state as a collective entity, politics is structured around ethnic constituencies, which weakens the foundations of nation-building. This explains why many South Sudanese perceive the state not as an impartial institution serving all, but as a contested space dominated by ethnic favoritism. Secondly, the findings revealed that ethnic politics is a key driver of political instability and polarization. The prioritization of ethnic interests over national objectives perpetuates cycles of exclusion, resentment, and inter-communal conflicts. This has consistently destabilized the political environment, hindered

development, and deepened divisions among communities. The conclusion is that unless deliberate measures are taken to de-ethnicize politics, the prospects for lasting peace and stability will remain elusive.

Another important conclusion is that ethnic favoritism in governance and resource allocation continues to entrench inequality. Access to political opportunities and distribution of public resources are often determined by ethnic affiliation rather than merit or national needs. This practice has fostered perceptions of marginalization among minority groups, reinforcing grievances that further weaken trust in government institutions. For national unity to be achieved, South Sudan must move towards transparent, equitable, and merit-based systems of governance. The study also concludes that ethnic politics has eroded public trust in political institutions. Institutions such as parliament, the judiciary, and the civil service are often viewed as ethnicized bodies rather than neutral arbiters of public interest. This lack of confidence diminishes the legitimacy of the state and undermines social cohesion. Rebuilding trust will therefore require reforms that promote impartiality, accountability, and inclusivity across all government structures. On a positive note, the study found that South Sudanese citizens strongly support strategies that can foster inclusive national identity. Respondents emphasized the value of inclusive governance, civic education, inter-ethnic dialogue, and national symbols as tools for bridging divisions. This indicates that, despite deep-rooted challenges, there is widespread recognition of possible pathways to unity. Such consensus offers a foundation upon which policymakers, civil society, and community leaders can build practical reforms to strengthen national cohesion. Finally, the overarching conclusion is that addressing the negative impact of ethnic politics requires both structural reforms and cultural transformation. Structural reforms should focus on institutionalizing inclusivity, ensuring equitable access to opportunities, and promoting cross-ethnic political cooperation. At the same time, cultural transformation through civic education, dialogue, and the promotion of shared values is essential to cultivate a sense of belonging that transcends ethnic loyalties. Without this two-pronged approach, South Sudan will continue to struggle with fragile unity, persistent conflict, and a weak sense of national identity.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following practical measures are recommended to strengthen national cohesion, inclusivity, and trust in governance:

- The government should institutionalize policies that guarantee representation of all ethnic groups in decision-making structures. Inclusive governance would not only reduce perceptions of marginalization but also encourage citizens to view the state as a collective entity rather than a tool for ethnic dominance.

- There is a need to expand civic education programs that emphasize shared values, responsibilities, and the importance of national unity. Such programs should particularly target schools, universities, and local communities to instill a culture of tolerance and collective belonging.

- Platforms for dialogue between different communities should be established and supported at local and national levels. Inter-ethnic dialogue can build trust, break down stereotypes, and provide peaceful avenues for addressing grievances that might otherwise escalate into conflict.

- The legal framework governing political parties should require inclusivity in leadership and membership structures. By ensuring diverse ethnic representation, parties would move away from exclusive tribal affiliations and evolve into platforms for national rather than ethnic agendas.

- Transparent mechanisms for allocating national resources are crucial. The government must adopt fair criteria in budgeting and service delivery to reduce perceptions of favoritism, which often fuel resentment and weaken loyalty to the state.

- Strengthening the independence and impartiality of public institutions such as the judiciary, parliament, and civil service is vital. Recruitment and promotion should be merit-based, and accountability measures should be enforced to restore confidence in government structures.

- National symbols like the flag, anthem, and independence commemorations should be promoted through civic events and education. These symbols serve as powerful reminders of shared identity and should be tied to narratives that emphasize unity and collective aspirations.

- Deliberate efforts should be made to encourage cross-ethnic political coalitions and alliances. Reducing polarization requires fostering cooperation across communities and ensuring that political competition does not deepen ethnic divisions.

- Civil society organizations and media outlets should play a greater role in promoting inclusive narratives. By countering divisive rhetoric and amplifying messages of unity, they can shape public opinion in favor of national identity over ethnic loyalty.

- Political leaders must demonstrate commitment to serving the nation rather than narrow ethnic constituencies. Leadership training, codes of conduct, and accountability frameworks should be introduced to ensure leaders prioritize unity, fairness, and inclusivity in governance.

7. Areas for Further Research

While this study provides important insights into national cohesion and governance, several areas warrant further investigation to deepen understanding and guide future policy interventions

- Future studies could examine how targeted civic education programs influence perceptions of national identity and social cohesion across different ethnic groups. This research would help identify the most effective strategies for fostering tolerance, shared values, and citizen engagement in diverse societies.

- Further research could explore how structural reforms within political parties such as mandatory diversity in leadership and membership affect political polarization and inter-ethnic cooperation. Insights from such studies would guide policymakers in designing inclusive political systems that prioritize national agendas over ethnic interests.

- There is a need to investigate the long-term outcomes of inter-ethnic dialogue initiatives at local and national levels. Research could assess whether these platforms successfully mitigate conflicts, build trust, and promote collective problem-solving among communities with historical tensions.

- Future studies might analyze the impact of transparent and equitable resource allocation on public perceptions of government legitimacy. Understanding this

relationship can inform policies that reduce grievances, strengthen citizen loyalty, and reinforce the social contract between the state and its diverse populations.

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