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Navigating the Complexities of Nigeria's Fourth Republic: An Exploration of Political Conflicts and Youth Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

Youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts remains a concern in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, particularly regarding the use of young people by political elites to advance ethnic and political interests. This study examined youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, focusing on the forms of involvement, causes of ethnic conflicts, factors influencing youth participation and possible measures for addressing the problem. The study adopted a historical approach and a descriptive survey research design. It focused on Irewole Local Government Area of Osun State, with participants drawn from five of the eleven wards. The study population comprised youths between 18-45 years, while 50 participants were propulsively selected. Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews and analysed thematically. Findings revealed that youths were actively involved in electoral malpractices, including voter intimidation, ballot box stuffing, vandalism of electoral materials and falsification of election results. Unequal distribution of government resources and benefits emerged as major causes of ethnic conflicts, while unemployment and poverty contributed to youth involvement in ethnic politics and political violence. The study further indicated that political enlightenment alone may be insufficient to discourage such involvement. It recommends improved political leadership, equitable resource distribution and increased economic opportunities for young people to reduce their vulnerability to political manipulation and ethnic conflicts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Political conflict and its implications for peace, security and development remain significant concerns in many African countries. The International Day of Peace, established by a United Nations resolution in 1982 and observed annually on September 21, highlights global efforts towards conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Its relevance is particularly evident in Africa, where prolonged political, ethnic and communal conflicts have continued to undermine social stability and development. These challenges have been associated with socio-political and economic instability across the continent (Ishola et al., 2024; Ong'ayo, 2008).

Nigeria provides an important context for examining the relationship between ethnicity, political conflict and youth involvement. The country's ethnic diversity has frequently generated competition over political power, resource allocation, group recognition and representation. Perceptions of ethnic domination and marginalisation have contributed to agitation and conflict, thereby threatening peaceful coexistence, national unity and integration. Federalism was adopted partly as a mechanism for managing these

competing interests through accommodation, autonomy and unity in diversity (Ishola et al., 2024; Aiyede, 2009). However, the persistence of ethnic tensions and political conflicts raises questions about the effectiveness of existing institutional arrangements in addressing grievances and promoting inclusive political participation.

Ethnicity is an important dimension of political relations in Nigeria because ethnic identities can influence political preferences, alliances, representation and policy-making (Ekanem & Simon, 2012). It generally refers to a sense of collective identity associated with shared ancestry, language, culture and historical experiences (Hoffman & Graham, 2009). In Nigeria, ethnic consciousness has become an important feature of political competition, particularly in relation to the country's major ethnic groups, including the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo (Azeez, 2009). Although ethnic diversity does not necessarily produce conflict, competition among groups over political influence, recognition and resources can intensify ethnic tensions, particularly when political interests are mobilised along ethnic lines.

Political conflict is a recurring feature of Nigeria's political system and manifests in elite competition, ethnic and communal disputes, electoral violence and protests (Babatunde, 2017). Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the country has experienced various forms of religious, identity-based, communal and electoral conflicts. Elaigwu (2005) identified 131 conflicts between 1999 and 2015, attributing their occurrence to issues such as excessive centralisation of political power, demands for decentralisation, dissatisfaction with resource distribution and communal disagreements. Although democratic governance provides opportunities for citizens and groups to express grievances and pursue competing interests (Adebanwi, 2004; Afegbua, 2010), these opportunities have not eliminated the use of violence and other destructive means of political engagement.

An important dimension of these conflicts is the involvement of young people. Youths may become participants in ethnic and political mobilisation through political campaigns, group rivalries, protests and electoral activities. In some circumstances, political actors exploit youth unemployment, poverty and social vulnerability to recruit young people for intimidation, violence and other electoral malpractices. Such involvement has implications beyond immediate political competition, as it can undermine social cohesion, democratic institutions and peaceful coexistence. Understanding the conditions that encourage youth involvement is therefore essential to addressing the broader consequences of ethnic politics and political conflict in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Previous studies have examined ethnicity, federalism, political instability and the causes of political conflict in Nigeria. However, there remains a need for more focused empirical investigation into the forms of youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts, the underlying causes of such conflicts, and the socio-economic conditions influencing young people's participation. In particular, the experiences of youths in Irewole Local Government Area of Osun State have not been sufficiently addressed in the literature considered for this study. This geographical and empirical gap provides the basis for examining youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts within the local context. The study therefore focuses on Irewole Local Government Area, covering five of its eleven wards, while situating the investigation within the broader political experience of Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The relationship between democracy and peace remains a subject of debate among peace and conflict scholars. While some scholars argue that democratic governance promotes peaceful coexistence by providing opportunities for political participation and the expression of grievances, others contend that democratic competition can intensify existing social and political divisions (Joshua, 2013). In Nigeria, the Fourth Republic has witnessed recurring political conflicts despite the restoration of democratic governance in 1999 (Annan, 2019; Osaghae, 2019). This situation raises concerns about the ability of democratic institutions to manage competing interests and prevent political disagreements from escalating into violence.

One major concern is the persistence of ethnic mobilisation and competition over political power and public resources. Although federalism is intended to promote accommodation, autonomy and unity in diversity, institutional challenges, corruption and dissatisfaction with resource distribution have continued to generate tensions (Aiyede, 2009). These conditions create opportunities for political elites and interest groups to mobilise ethnic identities in pursuit of political objectives. Consequently, ethnic affiliations may become instruments of political competition, with young people sometimes drawn into activities that threaten electoral integrity and community security.

Youth involvement in these conflicts presents a particular empirical problem. Young people may be mobilised to participate in electoral intimidation, political violence, the destruction of electoral materials and confrontations between opposing political groups. Such activities can expose them to physical danger, criminal involvement and long-term social consequences. Poverty, unemployment, perceived

marginalisation and unequal access to government resources may further increase their vulnerability to political manipulation. However, the specific ways these conditions influence youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts require closer empirical examination, particularly at the local level.

The persistence of these problems can be further understood through Mayer's (2000) three-dimensional explanation of conflict: conflict as perception, conflict as feeling and conflict as action. Conflict begins with the perception that interests, needs or values are incompatible; develops through emotions such as fear, anger and bitterness; and may eventually manifest in actions, including confrontation and violence. This perspective is relevant to the present study because ethnic competition and perceived marginalisation can shape how young people interpret political relationships, develop emotional responses towards opposing groups and participate in political activities. It therefore provides a basis for examining the relationship between perceived grievances, emotional responses and the actions through which youths become involved in ethnic and political conflicts. These dynamics also have implications for social cohesion and the achievement of sustainable development goals (Aransi, 2020; Akinyooye & Aransi, 2020).

The experiences of the Niger Delta further demonstrate the consequences of unresolved political and resource-related grievances. The activities of militants in the region disrupted oil production and exposed the economic and security implications of prolonged conflict (Omotola, 2007). The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), for instance, became associated with violent resistance and instability in the region. These experiences illustrate how unresolved grievances and political mobilisation can develop into destructive forms of conflict.

Despite existing studies on ethnic relations, political instability and democratic governance in Nigeria, there remains a need for context-specific evidence on how youths become involved in ethnic politics and political conflicts, the conditions responsible for such involvement and the implications for peaceful coexistence. In particular, the circumstances of Irewole Local Government Area of Osun State require empirical attention. Without a clearer understanding of these issues, interventions may fail to address the socio-economic and political conditions that make young people vulnerable to mobilisation for conflict. It is against this background that the study examines youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with particular reference to Irewole Local Government Area of Osun State.

Objectives of the Study

The study's overarching goal is to evaluate the impact of ethnic politics and political conflicts in Nigeria's fourth republic on youths. The specific objectives are to;

i. determine the extent to which Nigeria's pluralistic state formation has exacerbated violent tendencies among youths involved in political conflicts;
ii. examine the impact of authoritative value allocation among Nigeria's federal components on political conflicts in the fourth republic;
iii. investigate the implications of youth involvement in political conflicts on Nigeria's fourth republic political arrangement; and
iv. propose strategies to address youth involvement in ethnic components of political violence in Nigeria's fourth republic democratic experiment.

2. METHOD, DATA, ANALYSIS

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, using a historical-descriptive research design to examine youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with particular reference to Irewole Local Government Area of Osun State. The historical component provided a basis for examining the political and socio-ethnic developments that have shaped political conflicts in Nigeria since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999, while the descriptive component facilitated the collection and interpretation of information on the experiences, perceptions and involvement of youths in ethnic politics and political conflicts. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the study to investigate the phenomenon within its social and political context without manipulating the conditions under investigation. It also allowed the researcher to draw on primary and secondary sources to develop a contextual understanding of the research problem (Cohen et al., 1989).

Specifically, the study examined the influence of Nigeria's pluralistic state formation on youth involvement in political conflicts, the implications of resource allocation and competition among the federating units for political conflict, the consequences of youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts for Nigeria's Fourth Republic, and possible strategies for addressing youth involvement in political

violence. These areas of investigation guided the selection of informants, data collection instruments and analytical procedures.

Population, Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The study population comprised youths aged 18–45 years in Irewole Local Government Area of Osun State. A total of 50 participants were purposively selected from five of the eleven wards in the local government area. The selection was based on participants' age eligibility, knowledge of and involvement in grassroots political activities, and experience or understanding of ethnic politics and political conflicts. Purposive sampling was used to identify eligible participants, while snowball sampling facilitated the identification and recruitment of additional informants with relevant experiences and knowledge of the subject. This approach ensured that the study obtained information from individuals capable of providing relevant insights into youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts.

Sources of Data

The study utilised both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained directly from informants through interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and participant observation. These sources provided first-hand information on the forms of youth involvement in ethnic politics, the causes of political conflicts, the socio-economic and political factors influencing youth participation, and possible approaches to reducing such involvement.

Secondary data were obtained from relevant books, peer-reviewed journal articles, official publications, policy documents, newspapers and other published and unpublished materials relating to ethnicity, political conflicts, youth participation and democratic governance in Nigeria. These materials provided historical and contextual information and helped to situate the primary findings within existing scholarly discussions. The combination of primary and secondary sources enabled the study to examine the research problem from both the perspectives of the informants and the broader political and historical context.

Instruments of Data Collection

The primary data collection instruments consisted of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected political party leaders, grassroots political functionaries and youths with relevant experiences of ethnic politics and political conflicts. The interviews explored their understanding of the causes of ethnic conflicts, the forms of youth involvement, the influence of political and socio-economic conditions, and possible measures for addressing youth participation in political violence.

Focus group discussions were conducted with selected youths to obtain diverse perspectives on ethnic identity, political mobilisation, resource distribution, unemployment, poverty and youth participation in political conflicts. The discussions also provided opportunities for participants to compare experiences and express their views on strategies for promoting peaceful political participation. Participant observation complemented the interviews and FGDs by enabling the researcher to document relevant observations concerning grassroots political activities and the socio-political context of the study.

Research assistants familiar with the study area were engaged and briefed on the research objectives, ethical considerations and procedures for conducting the interviews and discussions. Participants were encouraged to express their views freely, while confidentiality and voluntary participation were maintained throughout the data collection process.

Method of Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained through interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, organised and analysed thematically. The analysis followed a systematic procedure. First, the interview and focus group transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to develop familiarity with the data. Second, relevant statements and expressions relating to the research objectives were identified and assigned preliminary codes. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories reflecting the major issues emerging from the data. These categories were subsequently developed into themes corresponding to the study's specific objectives. The analysis focused on identifying patterns relating to the forms of youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts, the causes of such conflicts, the political and socio-economic factors influencing youth participation, the implications of youth involvement, and possible strategies for addressing the problem. Evidence from interviews, FGDs and participant observation was compared to identify areas of convergence and divergence. Relevant extracts from participants' accounts were used to support the interpretation of the findings. Secondary data were analysed through documentary review to establish the historical and political context of the conflicts and to compare the primary findings with existing literature. The integration of these sources provided a basis for interpreting the findings in relation to the study's objectives and research questions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Findings

The analysis of the focus group discussion data generated four broad themes corresponding to the objectives of the study: the relationship between Nigeria's pluralistic state formation and youth involvement in political violence; ethnic considerations in the allocation of political authority and resources; the implications of youth involvement in political conflicts for the political arrangement and youth development; and strategies for addressing youth involvement in ethnic political violence. Within these themes, participants discussed electoral malpractice, ethnic and religious mobilisation, unemployment, political patronage, perceived exclusion, electoral administration and the consequences of political violence.

The findings are presented thematically rather than as a sequence of isolated participant statements. Related accounts were grouped according to their common meanings, interpreted in relation to the research objectives and compared where participants expressed different perspectives. The findings therefore reflect participants' experiences and perceptions of ethnic politics and political conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, particularly within the study context of Irewole Local Government Area, Osun State.

Objective One: Nigeria's Pluralistic State Formation and Violent Tendencies among Youths Involved in Political Conflicts

The first objective examined the extent to which Nigeria's pluralistic state formation has exacerbated violent tendencies among youths involved in political conflicts. The FGD findings suggest that ethnic and religious identities influence political competition, particularly where political power and access to national resources are perceived as matters of competition among different groups.

Participants described Nigerian politics as a struggle among ethnic groups for political representation, positions of authority and access to national resources. They explained that ethnic groups are connected not only through kinship but also through shared principles and collective interests. According to the participants, these connections can influence political preferences and mobilisation, especially when political actors appeal to ethnic identity to secure support (Extract from FGD, 2025).

The participants also linked the historical development of ethnic rivalry to colonial divide-and-rule policies. Their accounts indicated that ethnic identity has remained an important feature of political competition since independence. They further associated the mobilisation of ethnic identities with the emergence of ethnic militia movements and militant forms of agitation for self-determination. These accounts suggest that ethnic identity may become a source of political tension when it is used to mobilise groups against perceived political opponents or to advance competing claims over political authority and resources (Extract from FGD, 2025).

The findings, however, do not suggest that Nigeria's pluralistic composition automatically produces political violence. Rather, participants' accounts indicate that violence may emerge when ethnic identity is politicised and combined with competition for resources, political exclusion and the mobilisation of young people by political actors. In this context, youths may become involved in political conflicts as members or supporters of ethnic and political groups.

A related theme was the role of unemployment and limited economic opportunities in youth involvement in political conflict. Participants argued that political enlightenment alone might not be sufficient to prevent young people from participating in political violence. They identified unemployment and economic idleness as conditions that may make youths more vulnerable to recruitment by political actors. One participant referred to the expression "an idle hand is a devil's workshop" to emphasise the perceived relationship between idleness and involvement in conflict (Extract from FGD, 2025). Participants further suggested that addressing youth unemployment could reduce the likelihood of young people being recruited as political thugs. They believed that youths with access to meaningful employment and economic opportunities would be more likely to participate in electioneering through orderly and lawful activities rather than violent confrontation (Extract from FGD, 2025).

The FGD findings also indicated that confrontational behaviour among some youths was not limited to electoral politics but could extend to sporting and other social activities. Participants associated such behaviour with the desire for quick wealth, unemployment, moral concerns and unwillingness among some young people to accept guidance from older members of society (Extract from FGD, 2025). Taken together, the findings suggest that the relationship between Nigeria's pluralistic state formation and youth involvement in political violence is shaped by the politicisation of ethnic identity and the wider social and economic conditions affecting young people. Ethnic diversity provides the context for group identities, but political

mobilisation, competition for resources and youth vulnerability appear to influence whether those identities become associated with conflict.

Objective Two: Authoritative Value Allocation among Nigeria's Federal Components and Political Conflicts in the Fourth Republic

The second objective examined the impact of authoritative value allocation among Nigeria's federal components on political conflicts in the Fourth Republic. The FGD findings indicate that the allocation of political positions, public resources and opportunities for representation is perceived by participants as closely connected to ethnic identity and political influence.

Participants expressed the view that ethnic considerations sometimes influence the selection of political candidates. They argued that political actors may support candidates because of their ethnic origin rather than their competence or suitability for office. Participants further suggested that this practice could contribute to the emergence of leaders who fail to meet the expectations of the groups whose support helped them gain political power. Some participants observed that politicians who emerge through ethnic support may subsequently neglect the communities that supported them (Extract from FGD, 2025).

The discussion also addressed rotational political arrangements, particularly the rotation of the presidency among Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Participants acknowledged that such arrangements are intended to reduce ethnic tension and promote inclusion. However, they expressed concern that political selection based on geographical or ethnic origin may sometimes take precedence over merit and leadership competence. This finding reflects a perceived tension between the objectives of equitable representation and merit-based political selection (Extract from FGD, 2025).

Another theme concerned political patronage and the influence of political godfathers. Participants described the disregard for formal party procedures in the selection and nomination of candidates as a source of dissatisfaction within the political process. They associated such practices with disputes among political supporters and the mobilisation of youths around political and ethnic interests (Extract from FGD, 2025).

These findings suggest that the allocation of political authority and public resources can become a source of conflict when ethnic affiliation, political loyalty and personal influence are perceived to outweigh transparent procedures and merit. Where groups believe that they are excluded from political opportunities or disadvantaged in the distribution of resources, dissatisfaction may develop into political tension. Young people may become involved in such conflicts through their association with political groups, ethnic interests or influential political actors.

The findings also reveal an important distinction between ethnic inclusion and the use of ethnicity as the principal basis for political allocation. Measures intended to promote representation among Nigeria's diverse groups may help address perceptions of exclusion. However, when ethnic identity is treated as the overriding basis for political selection and resource distribution, it may undermine merit, accountability and public confidence in political institutions.

Objective Three: Implications of Youth Involvement in Political Conflicts for Nigeria's Fourth Republic Political Arrangement

The third objective investigated the implications of youth involvement in political conflicts for Nigeria's Fourth Republic political arrangement. The FGD findings identified several interconnected consequences, including the weakening of democratic participation, political instability, economic disruption, educational interruption and adverse effects on youth development.

Participants reported that young people are sometimes mobilised by political actors to intimidate opponents, disrupt political activities and support electoral malpractice. They observed that such involvement may be particularly attractive to youths with limited educational opportunities, weak economic prospects or inadequate access to constructive political participation (Extract from FGD, 2025).

This finding suggests that youth involvement in political conflict can undermine democratic participation. Instead of engaging through peaceful campaigning, political debate and other lawful activities, some young people may be drawn into actions that threaten political opponents and weaken the credibility of electoral processes. Such mobilisation may also reinforce the influence of political elites who use young people to advance personal or group interests.

Participants identified unemployment, inadequate access to political information, limited formal education, lack of parental support, low income and the availability of weapons as conditions associated with youth involvement in political conflict. These accounts indicate that social and economic vulnerabilities may limit young people's ability to resist political manipulation and pursue constructive forms of political participation (Extract from FGD, 2025).

The participants further associated political conflicts with loss of lives and destruction of property. They also identified disruption of economic activities, interruption of educational activities and the deterioration of the teaching-learning environment as consequences of political violence (Extract from FGD, 2025).

These consequences have important implications for youth development. The loss of lives and destruction of property can affect young people's physical security, livelihoods and sense of belonging within their communities. Political violence may also disrupt access to education, which is important for acquiring knowledge, developing skills and improving employment prospects. When educational activities are interrupted, young people may lose opportunities for academic progress and social mobility.

The findings also suggest that political conflict can weaken the social conditions required for a successful transition into adulthood. Young people who experience insecurity, economic deprivation or social exclusion may have fewer opportunities to develop the skills and relationships needed for peaceful and constructive participation in society. Participants' accounts therefore point to a relationship between political conflict and broader vulnerabilities affecting youth development (Extract from FGD, 2025).

At the level of the political arrangement, the findings indicate that the mobilisation of youths for violence may weaken electoral credibility, reduce confidence in democratic institutions and sustain political instability. When political participation is associated with intimidation and coercion, young people may become less involved in peaceful democratic processes, while political actors may continue to rely on violent mobilisation to secure political advantage.

Overall, the findings show that youth involvement in political conflicts has consequences beyond immediate electoral violence. These include threats to democratic participation, insecurity, loss of lives and property, disruption of economic activities and reduced access to educational and developmental opportunities. The findings therefore suggest that the political consequences of youth involvement in conflict are closely connected to the social and economic conditions affecting young people.

Objective Four: Strategies for Addressing Youth Involvement in Ethnic Components of Political Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The fourth objective proposed strategies for addressing youth involvement in ethnic components of political violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

First, youth employment and economic empowerment should be prioritised. Participants repeatedly associated unemployment and economic idleness with young people's vulnerability to recruitment for political violence. Expanding access to employment, vocational training and sustainable economic opportunities may reduce the attraction of political thuggery and support more constructive forms of youth participation (Extract from FGD, 2025).

Second, civic and political education should be strengthened. Although participants suggested that political enlightenment alone may not prevent youth involvement in conflict, civic education remains relevant when combined with measures addressing economic and social vulnerabilities. Such education should promote peaceful political participation, respect for opposing views, electoral accountability and the responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society.

Third, internal party democracy and transparent candidate selection should be promoted. Participants' concerns about political godfathers and the disregard for formal party procedures suggest the need for more transparent and accountable party processes. Strengthening internal party democracy may reduce dissatisfaction and limit the opportunities for influential individuals to mobilise youths around personal or ethnic interests.

Fourth, equitable political representation and fair resource allocation should be encouraged. The findings indicate that perceived ethnic exclusion and competition for political positions may generate tension. Political arrangements should therefore promote inclusion, fairness and merit in public appointments and resource distribution. Such measures may help reduce perceptions that political opportunities and public benefits are determined primarily by ethnic affiliation.

Finally, electoral administration and accountability should be strengthened. Participants' accounts of electoral malpractice, intimidation and administrative failures indicate the importance of credible election management. Effective monitoring, enforcement of electoral laws and appropriate sanctions for electoral violence may reduce opportunities for political actors to recruit youths for activities that undermine democratic processes. These strategies indicate that addressing youth involvement in ethnic political violence requires a combination of economic empowerment, civic education, transparent political processes, equitable representation and credible electoral administration.

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is shaped by the interaction of historical, political, economic and social factors. Participants identified ethnic identity and competition for political authority and resources as important features of political mobilisation. However, the local findings from Irewole also suggest that ethnic politics may be expressed differently across political contexts. The reported inclusion of councillors from different ethnic backgrounds indicates that local political arrangements may accommodate diversity and reduce the likelihood of open conflict. This does not necessarily contradict the national findings; rather, it demonstrates that the political expression of ethnic identity may vary according to local conditions and political practices.

The findings further suggest that the allocation of political authority and public resources may generate conflict when ethnic affiliation, political loyalty and personal influence are perceived to override transparent procedures and merit. Concerns about candidate selection, rotational political arrangements and political godfatherism illustrate the tensions that may arise between the objectives of inclusion, fairness and competence. These tensions may create dissatisfaction among political supporters and provide opportunities for the mobilisation of youths.

The consequences of youth involvement in political conflict extend beyond electoral activities. The findings identify loss of lives and property, economic disruption and interruption of education as important consequences. These effects may weaken the social, educational and economic conditions required for youth development. Political violence can therefore affect both the democratic process and the opportunities available to young people to participate meaningfully in society.

The findings also suggest that strategies for addressing youth involvement in political violence should not be limited to political enlightenment. Economic empowerment, transparent party procedures, equitable political representation and credible electoral administration are also important. Together, these measures may help reduce the conditions that make young people vulnerable to political manipulation and promote peaceful participation in Nigeria's democratic process.

4. CONCLUSION

The study examined the impact of ethnic politics and political conflicts on youths in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with particular reference to Irewole Local Government Area of Osun State. The findings indicate that ethnic and religious identities influence political competition, especially where access to political authority and national resources is perceived as a struggle among different groups. However, ethnic diversity does not necessarily produce political violence. Rather, the politicisation of ethnic identity, perceived exclusion, competition for resources and the mobilisation of youths by political actors appear to contribute to conflict.

The findings further reveal that ethnic considerations, political patronage and the influence of political godfathers can generate dissatisfaction when political appointments and candidate selection are perceived to disregard merit, transparency and established procedures. Although the national findings point to the prominence of ethnic politics, the local accounts from Irewole suggest that ethnic representation and inclusive political arrangements may help reduce tensions. This indicates that the expression of ethnic politics varies across political contexts.

Youth involvement in political conflicts has implications for democratic participation, political stability and youth development. The mobilisation of young people for intimidation and electoral malpractice weakens democratic processes, while political violence contributes to insecurity, loss of lives and property, economic disruption and interruptions to education. These consequences may further limit young people's opportunities for social, educational and economic advancement.

The study concludes that addressing youth involvement in ethnic political violence requires more than political enlightenment. It calls for a comprehensive approach that combines youth employment and empowerment, inclusive political arrangements, transparent party processes, equitable resource allocation and credible electoral administration. These measures are essential to promoting peaceful youth participation and strengthening democratic development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

i. Youth employment and economic empowerment: Government at all levels should expand employment opportunities, vocational training and youth enterprise support. These initiatives should address the economic vulnerabilities that may make young people susceptible to recruitment for political violence.

ii. **Civic and political education:** Relevant government agencies, educational institutions, civil society organisations and community leaders should strengthen civic education programmes that promote peaceful political participation, tolerance, respect for opposing views and democratic responsibility. Such programmes should be complemented by practical opportunities for youth engagement.
iii. **Internal party democracy:** Political parties should ensure transparent and democratic procedures for candidate selection and party administration. The influence of political godfathers should be curtailed through adherence to established party rules and accountable nomination processes.
iv. **Equitable political representation and resource allocation:** Government should promote fairness and inclusion in political appointments and the distribution of public resources. Ethnic representation should not be used to justify discrimination or the exclusion of qualified individuals from political and administrative opportunities.
v. **Credible electoral administration:** Electoral institutions should strengthen monitoring, enforce electoral laws and ensure that electoral malpractice and political intimidation are appropriately addressed. Credible election administration can reduce opportunities for political actors to mobilise youths for violence.
vi. **Peacebuilding and community engagement:** Community leaders, youth organisations, political stakeholders and civil society groups should establish initiatives that encourage dialogue across ethnic and political divisions. These initiatives should provide young people with constructive channels for expressing grievances and resolving disagreements peacefully.
vii. **Protection of educational and economic activities:** Relevant authorities should develop measures to protect schools, businesses and community facilities during periods of political tension. This would help minimise the disruption of education and economic activities and protect the developmental opportunities of young people.
viii. **Further research:** Future studies should examine youth involvement in ethnic politics and political conflicts across other local government areas and states in Nigeria. Comparative research could establish how local political arrangements, employment conditions and patterns of ethnic representation influence youth participation in political conflict.

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