



Gbagyi and Igala Relations in Karu Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria, 1991-2019

Peter Wilfred Naankiel^{1*}, Jonah Adaji², Paul Yakubu Kigbu³

¹Department of History and International Studies, Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

ORCID: 0009-0002-6700-34001

²Postgraduate Student, Department of History and International Studies, Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State.

³Department of History and International Studies, Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Article DOI: 10.55677/SSHRB/2026-3050-0811

DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.55677/SSHRB/2026-3050-0811>

KEYWORDS: Economic, Gbagyi, Igala, Intergroup Relations, Karu, Political, Social

ABSTRACT: This study interrogates Gbagyi and Igala relations in Karu Local Government Area from 1991-2019. It examines the factors responsible for the peaceful co-existence between the Igala and Gbagyi in the study area. However, the study adopts a multi-disciplinary approach of data collection as both primary and secondary sources were explored in the content analysis. The study uses the mutual theory which posits that man by nature is a social being who inevitably needs the co-operation, assistance and contributions of others for his survival and existence. In the end, the study observes that common socio-cultural practices among the Gbagyi and Igala further enhanced their peaceful co-existence. Again, contrary to the notion that the Igala are not easy to associate with and the Gbagyi are not socialised, the study identifies that the Igala are friendly and peaceful whereas the Gbagyi are highly socialised and accommodating. However, in order to promote the peaceful co-existence between them and surmount the bottlenecks in their relations, the study concludes that government at all levels should create more social, political and economic opportunities for the citizens and equal access to same in order to reduce agitations for resource control.

Corresponding Author

Paul Yakubu Kigbu

Published: August 19, 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is composed of about 250 ethno-linguistic groups with the major ones among them being the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. These multi ethno-linguistic groups also reflect the multi-cultural diversities in the country.¹ These multi-cultural diversities manifest themselves in the nature of relationships that exist among these diverse ethno-linguistic groups in the country. The diversity is still being reflected in the form and nature of their intergroup relations. Regional location and religion have served to reinforce the tripartite cleavage of the three dominant ethnic groups within the country. These disparities have been a source of intolerance, discrimination, political tension and instability ever since.² However, these have not stopped the intergroup relations that have been existing among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. For instance, the Igala and Gbagyi are among the ethnic groups in Nigeria that are considered to be minorities. Both ethnic groups differ in terms of linguistic and other cultural paraphernalia. However, there has been historical evidence of co- existence between the groups since pre-colonial epoch regardless of conflicts over resources.³ The

¹F.I. Ofili, "Intergroup Relations in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Complexities", in *International Journal of Development and Management Review* (INJODEMAR) Vol.11 June (2016)163.

²A.Y. Muhammed, S.A. Ayinla, M.N. Adeoye, "Ethnic Discrimination and Religious Intolerance: An Overview of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria." In O. Akinwunmi, O.O. Okpeh, J.D. Gwamma, eds. *Intergroup Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Makurdi, Aboki Publishers, 2006)81.

³R.T. Suberu, *Ethnic Minority Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria*. (IFRA Nigeria, Ibadan, 2006)18.

intergroup relations between the Igala and Gbagyi in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State have been characterised by cultural interactions and occasional tensions, especially in the context of political and social dynamics in the post-independence era. Both groups have distinct cultural identities that shape their interactions.

Historically, these groups have had periods of cooperation and conflict, influenced by factors such as land disputes, political representation and economic interest. Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, there have been efforts to foster unity among various ethnic groups, including the Igala and Gbagyi, through national policies and initiatives. However, challenges such as resource allocation, representations in good governance and socio-economic disparities have at times strained relations between these groups. Hence, the study interrogates how the Igala and Gbagyi have navigated a complex intergroup relationship marked by both cooperation and occasional tensions influenced by historical, political and socio-economic factors from 1991-2019 in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

The study adopts the historical methodology which is a systematic and critical framework used by historians to carry out research and interpret evidence in the reconstruction of past events. Generally, it involves the use of primary, secondary and tertiary sources of data. Primary sources of data which comprises oral interviews were used for content analysis, especially as it involved respondents who had lived and experienced Igala and Gbagyi relations in Karu area within the period covered by the study from 1991-2019.

Conceptual Clarification

Many scholars have conceptualised intergroup relations from various perspectives. Efforts are made here to consider some of them.

INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Intergroup relations have been conceptualised by Sherif and Sherif as the state(s) of friendship or hospitality, cooperation or competition, dominance or subordination, alliance or enmity, peace or war between two or more groups and their respective members.⁴ They view groups as a social unit different from others in the relationship and each group has distinct norms that guide their behaviours towards other groups. Nwabueze views intergroup relations as the simple or complex, conflicting or accommodating, cooperating, consensual, peaceful or acrimonious, intense, dense or indifferent way that one group is connected or associated with another in the course of their interactions with each other.⁵ In addition, Nwabueze further sees intergroup relations as that which focuses essentially on the series of methods, strategies or approaches to the understanding of separate dynamics. And secondly, of diffusing tension between different groups and creating of or building bridge across political or actual conflict relationships, or directly promoting harmony.⁶

Nwabueze's analysis of the scope of intergroup relation study is imperative here. He asserts that "a comparative approach to intergroup relation study should embrace seven areas of interest."⁷ One of these is inter-ethnic relations as intergroup relation. A good example of this is the study of Igala and Gbagyi relations. Here it is meant that interactions of one ethnic group and another which cooperates and competes with one another is economic, political and social in nature. These interactions are sometimes carried out under well organised group contexts with leaders playing prominent roles. And at other times such interactions take place under less defined organisation in which the sense of group is sustained by common interest and territoriality.

According to Akpen Philip, inter-group relations refer to the point at which differences of the mingling have by and large disappeared or submerged into a more or less a single identity.⁸ On his part, Okpeh O. Okpeh opines that intergroup relations presupposes contacts and interaction between groups each of which has an identity to make some inputs into the relationship.⁹ Therefore, the benefits of the study of intergroup relations cannot be over stressed. F.O. Edimeh captures the benefit of such relations as follows: For the purpose of national unity and its concomitant value of national development, proper emphasis on certain aspect of national (group) history and invaluable assets, such an exercise would review virile web of historical, political, economic, diplomatic, religious and cultural interactions which existed among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria in the past. Knowledge of such relationships can promote inter-ethnic unity.¹⁰

⁴M. Sherif and C.W. Sherif, *Social Psychology* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma U.S.A.1969)88.

⁵N. Nwabueze, 'Towards a Wider Understanding of Intergroup Relations', in R.T. Akinyele, ed. *Race, Ethnicity and Nation Building in Africa Studies in Intergroup Relations* (Ibadan. Rex Charles Publication, 2003)4.

⁶ N. Nwabueze, *Towards a Wider...*

⁷ N. Nwabueze, *Towards a Wider...*

⁸A. Philip, 'Intergroup Relations in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Complexities.' In O. Akinwumi, O.O. Okpeh, J.D. Gwamma, eds. *Intergroup Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers Makurdi, 2006)404.

⁹O. Akinwunmi, O.O. Okpeh, J.D. Gwamma, eds. *Intergroup Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers ,2006)5.

¹⁰F.O. Edimeh, 'The Igala and their Neighbours: A Case of the Historical Basis of National Integration' A Paper Presented at the Ist National Conference on Intergroup Relations in Nigeria, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, (2005)7.

According to Otite Okibe, inter-group relations simply mean cooperation between different groups which takes the form of trade, diplomatic ties, wars, mutual borrowing of techniques, management of trade and boundaries.¹¹ On the whole, this study sees inter-group relations as a term used to refer to social, political, cultural and economic interactions between groups or among groups of people in the society with the aim of socio-cultural, political and economic benefits or gains regardless of areas of differences.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In terms of theoretical framework, this study adopts the mutual aid theory. The mutual aid theory was propounded by Peter Alekseyevich Kropotkin as a collection of articles published in 1902 titled "Mutual Aid: A factor in Evolution."¹² Other proponents of the mutual aid theory include: Moya K. Mason, Okpeh O. Okpeh, Yakubu A. Ochefu, to mention just a few. The mutual aid theory was borne out of a careful study of Darwin's work titled *The Origin of Species*. Kropotkin argued that mutual aid has pragmatic advantages for the survival of humans and animals and has been promoted through natural selection and that mutual aid is arguably as ancient as human culture. Kropotkin did not wholly dispute Darwin's thesis, rather he concluded that the struggle for survival has two opposing sides. He did observe that individuals of the same species struggled and competed where limited resources existed, but on the other hand, the struggle between individuals and their environment led to cooperation within the species. Despite the war and extermination existing in nature, he claimed that mutual aid was prevalent and moreover that this results in creativity and development. We see that in the animal world, progressive development and mutual aid go hand in hand, while the inner struggle within the species is concomitant with retrogressive development.¹³

According to Okpeh O. Okpeh, man by nature is a dependent creature, he depends on his environment and others for food, shelter and clothing, all which give him a sense of purpose here on earth. He further argues that indeed, it needs no mentioning that the dialectics of existence ordinarily dictates that each human group must consciously and/or unconsciously relate with other groups to be able to survive.¹⁴

It becomes clear from the above assertion, therefore that intergroup relations are an important social phenomenon which cannot be ignored if the present society must be better off. It is in view of this that Kropotkin maintains that cooperation within species has been an historical factor in the development of social institution, and in fact, that the avoidance of competition greatly increases the chances of survival and raises the quality of life. On the whole, the innate nature of man as a social being who needs fellow man to survive makes the mutual theory relevant to the study on Gbagyi and Igala relations in Karu area within the period under study.

Igala And Gbagyi Relations in Karu Local Government Area, 1991-2019

For the purpose of this study, the relations between the Igala and Gbagyi in Karu Local Government Area is examined within the contexts of socio-cultural relations, economic relations and political relations respectively.

SOCIO-CULTURAL RELATIONS

Igala-Gbagyi relations have been very cordial. The relations between them became more cordial since 1991 as a result of the relocation of the Federal Capital Territory to Abuja. Hence, the Igala and Gbagyi like other ethnic groups began to migrate to the area in search of a better life. Some of the members of these ethnic groups settled in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State given its proximity to the Federal Capital Territory.

An informant noted that the influx of people including the Igala is responsible for the urbanisation of Karu since 1991. He emphasised that prior to the relocation of the 'seat of government' from Lagos to Abuja in 1991, the Igala living in Karu Local Government Area were few.¹⁵ However, it was reiterated that the influx of different people into Karu has made the Gbagyi people come to terms with the diverse nature of the study area and has made them to accommodate other people.¹⁶ In fact, due to this, the Gbagyi have sold their lands to visitors as some of them have left the town to settle in the forest.¹⁷ This response to the cosmopolitan nature of the Karu area from 1991 onwards speaks well of the peaceful and accommodating nature of the Gbagyi especially towards their Igala neighbours who have bought land and settled there.

In terms of religion, the Igala and the Gbagyi have common practices. They both believe in the existence of the Supreme being called 'God'. While the Igala call God 'Ojo', the Gbagyi call him 'Shekwoyi' (one who was there before their ancestors).¹⁸ Like the Igala who believe in deities such as 'Ichekepa' (god of stars), 'Akpabana' (god of thunder), the Gbagyi also devote themselves to

¹¹O. Otite, *Problems and Prospects of Mobilisation for National Integration in Nigeria*. Mimeo. (1990)6.

¹²Moya K. Mason, 'Kropotkin and His Theory of Mutual Aid' www.moyak.com. Retrieved, 19/9/2024.

¹³P. Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (London, Frankcass, 1910)16.

¹⁴Okpeh O. Okpeh, 'Conceptual and Theoretical Issues Arising from Studies in Intergroup Relations in Nigeria in the 20th Century,' in O. Akinwumi, J.D. Gwamma, O.O. Okpeh, eds. *Intergroup Relations in the 19th and 20th centuries*...6-7.

¹⁵Interview with Ahmed Bala, 65 years, Aso, 26/6/2025.

¹⁶T. T. Chigundu, *A Brief History of the Gbagyi Speaking People*...5.

¹⁷Interview with Lazarus Dazha, 68 years. Ado, 19/6/2025

¹⁸Interview with Samuel Danjuma, 70 years, Mararaba, 19/6/2025.

appeasing deities such as ‘Maigiro’ (god of thunder).¹⁹ Religion is one of the potent factors that promotes cordial relations among the Igala, the Gbagyi and other ethnic groups in Karu Local Government Area. The practice of Christianity among the Igala and Gbagyi in Karu has played a significant role in uniting and promoting the cordial relations among them. In churches in the study area, the various ethnic groups also worship together with the Gbagyi and the Igala. Besides, majority of the Igala unlike other ethnic groups live in houses owned by the Gbagyi. They also serve as pastors, priests, or leaders in various departments of these churches. Hence, the Igala enjoy cordial relations with the Gbagyi like other ethnic groups in the area.²⁰ The people are united more by their coming together in places of worship where they learn morals which enable them to love one another, live peacefully and be law abiding. In fact, members who are not seen for a long period are usually visited while those in need are assisted.²¹ This goes a long way to promote cordial relations among the people.

The church has also played a critical role in promoting inter-marriage among the Igala and the Gbagyi in Karu area. By worshipping together, some members of these ethnic groups meet their life partners and get married. During the traditional marriages, there are cultural displays in the form of music, dance, marriage rites, traditional attires and presentation of kolanut among others.²² Hence, intermarriage among the people has increased significantly within the period under study.

Other functions performed by the church such as naming ceremony, child and property dedication and burial are equally important factors that promote relations among the Igala and the Gbagyi in Karu Local Government Area. For instance, during naming ceremony and dedication of any kind, church members join the family in the celebration. The celebration continues at home with loved ones and same goes for burial.²³ This way, the people begin to see each other as one thereby strengthening their unity and relations. The Muslims among them also demonstrate same love through the teaching received in the mosque where they worship together. Hence, like their Christian counterparts, during Sallah festivals, food, drinks and meat are shared. Generally, both groups visit one another and exchange gifts during festive celebrations.²⁴ These practices enhance the relations between the Igala and the Gbagyi in Karu.

The socio-cultural relations among the Igala and the Gbagyi are also seen in the commemoration of festivals. The Igala and Gbagyi in Karu Local Government Area have festivals which they celebrate annually like their neighbours the Igbo, Hausa and others. The Igala commemorate ‘Oteibekwu’ festival while the Gbagyi commemorate Agbamaya’ festival. ‘Oteibekwu’ festival is a celebration commemorating the ancestors who are believed to still have influence in the affairs of the living. During the festival, Igala sons and daughters gather before ‘Onu’ Igala, Karu in a designated venue usually in a school premises. The Gbagyi and other ethnic groups are present on invitation to grace the occasion. The festival begins with the firing of a gunshot and dance, then libation is performed in order to appease the ancestors for more blessings upon the land.²⁵ The Igala ‘Egwuafia’ competes with the Gbagyi ‘kaka’ as masquerades of other ethnic groups do, in a dance competition on invitation. At the end of the festival, food and drinks are served. Then the masquerades go on procession from one street to another which marks the end of the festival. The festival usually takes place in October each year.²⁶

In the same vein, during the ‘Agbamaya’ festival among the Gbagyi which is a celebration performed to welcome the rainy season usually in April, the Igala and their other neighbours are also invited to grace the occasion.²⁷ According to an informant, during the festival, Gbagyi sons and daughters travel from far and near to grace the occasion. There is also a dance competition between ‘Kaka’ and ‘Egwuafia’ on the one hand and ‘Kaka’ and other masquerades on the other hand, and the winner goes home with a prize.²⁸ The commemoration of these festivals has served as a unifying factor which also promotes peaceful co-existence among the people in Karu Local Government Area. For instance, by living together and interacting over time, there is exchange of socio-cultural ideas such as language. They understand each other’s language to some extent with words such as ‘Ayife’ and ‘Olaodudu’ which means ‘good morning’ are commonly used by the people.²⁹ This promotes their interactions and relations.

Other social ties among the Igala and the Gbagyi are seen in their day-to-day interactions and relations in the office as colleagues, on the field as players, in the stadium as spectators or audience and in the classroom as learners. Both the Igala and Gbagyi in Karu have schools where students are admitted for learning. This goes a long way to bring the people close and promote their relations. According to an informant, the role of social activities in the promotion of peaceful co-existence among the Gbagyi and their

¹⁹ Interview with Ahmed Bala, 65 years, Aso, 25/6/2025.

²⁰ Interview with Paul Shekwoyada, 75 years, New Nyanya, 20/6/2025.

²¹ Interview with Andrew Patrick, 70 years, Kabayi, 20/6/2025.

²² Interview with Danladi Abiche, 60 years, Kabayi, 20/6/2025.

²³ Interview with Wunyika Wushekwo, 55 years, Aso, 2/7/2025.

²⁴ Interview with Abah. Adejoh, 50 years, Masaka, 7/7/2025.

²⁵ Interview with Maji Barnabas, 70 years, Aso, 7/7/2025.

²⁶ Interview with Samuel Danjuma, 70 Years, Mararaba, 23/6/2025.

²⁷ Interview with Lazarus Dazha, 68 years. Ado, 28/6/2025.

²⁸ Interview with Lazarus Dazha...

²⁹ Interview with Abigail Musa, 72 years, Kabayi, 10/7/2025.

neighbours is great. The Gbagyi mingle with their neighbours on the field, worship together in church and mosque and learn together as students in schools. They see one another as brothers and sisters,³⁰ and through these means, socio-cultural ideas are exchanged and promoted among the peoples which in turn contributes to the peaceful coexistence that exists between the Igala and Gbagyi.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

In economic and trade relations, the Igala and the Gbagyi have never ceased to relate. Before we consider the nexus in trade, it is critical that we know the economic crops of each of the groups. The Igala practice agriculture and manufacturing. Hence, cassava, yam, cotton, palm oil and kernel production is prevalent among the Igala in Karu Local Government Area.³¹ On the other hand, the Gbagyi economy is centered on agriculture and hunting with farming being the primary occupation. They also engage in activities like pottery, wood-fetching and black-smithing. The Gbagyi in the Karu area cultivates crops like yam, maize, groundnuts, beans, salad greens and tomatoes.³² The production, distribution and consumption of these crops among the Igala and the Gbagyi in Karu Local Government Area have enhanced interdependence, interactions and relations among them. The importance of crops in promoting economic relations among the Igala and Gbagyi cannot be over-emphasised. They do not only produce crops for consumption but also for trade. They progressed from trade by barter to embrace capitalist market. This way, they have not only satisfied their personal needs but they have also succeeded in providing food for others who might lack the crops they produce.³³ As noted earlier, Ochefu described intergroup relations as being factored on the ubiquity of man's social relations that he must interact with his fellow men in order to produce his material livelihood.³⁴ Hence, crop production, distribution and consumption of certain common crops among the Igala and the Gbagyi have played a great role in peaceful co-existence among them.

The role of markets and the availability of accessible roads for trade among the Igala and the Gbagyi in Karu Local Government Area is worthy of note. Since the creation of Karu Local Government, successive Governors and Chairmen have made concerted efforts towards building markets and constructing roads with a view to facilitating economic activities in the Local Government Area. It is this collective effort that eventually gave rise to urban towns and commercial centres in Karu Local Government Area. According to an informant, the interconnectivity of roads constructed does not only ease transportation, but it also boosts commercial activities in the area. For example, Igala, Gbagyi and other traders attend Orange market, Masaka market, Mararaba market, Aso Tacha market and Kugbaru market respectively where they exchange various items such as yam, cassava flour, corn, garri, maize, beans, nuts, grains, palm oil, soaps and clothes among others.³⁵

It has been noted that the importance of certain food items of trade such as garri and cassava flour which are usually in short supply within Karu Local Government Area has led many Igala traders to bring them from Kogi and Benue States in order to meet the demand.³⁶ This way, the Igala and Gbagyi complement each other in the provision of food items for survival.

Another area of economic relation among the Igala and the Gbagyi within the study area is in terms of oil and gas business. It has been revealed that a good number of the fuel stations in Karu Local Government Area are owned and managed by the Igala, and it has gone a long way in enhancing relations between the Igala and Gbagyi because of daily interaction.³⁷ Through oil and gas business, the Igala in Karu Local Government Area have not only enriched themselves but they have also met the needs of their Gbagyi neighbours and other resident groups in the provision of petroleum, gas and kerosene for their daily needs. The business has also served as a means of providing job opportunities for their neighbours, including the Gbagyi. Some of the popular fuel stations owned and managed by the Igala who deal in oil and gas in Karu include: Kaura Oil and Gas located in Autabalefi, Enyo-Ojo Fuel Station located along Abacha Road. Others are Total Filling Station located in Mararaba and NNPC Filling Station situated along Aso Road.³⁸

The role of hotel and restaurant businesses in unifying and promoting peaceful co-existence among the Igala and the Gbagyi is worthy of note. Both the Igala and the Gbagyi are into hotel and restaurant businesses just like their other neighbours. The hotels and restaurants owned and managed by the Igala and the Gbagyi do not only serve as a source of income and providing comfort but they also serve as a meeting point for the people and members of other ethnic groups. Here, occasions and conferences are held and ideas are exchanged for the promotion of peace, unity and development among the peoples. According to an informant, hotels do not only provide relaxation or comfort for the people but they also serve as a platforms for holding ceremonies in times of peace and for resolving conflict in times of misunderstandings. This usually involves representatives of the Gbagyi and the Igala

³⁰ Interview with Abigail Musa...

³¹ Interview with John Agene, 67 years, Aku Village, 15/7/2025.

³² F. Bawa, 'Gbagyi: The Land of Peace, in Aso Youth Development Association.' *An Annual Editorial*, 2011.

³³ Interview with Abigail Musa...

³⁴ A. Y. Ochefu, *The Idoma and their Neighbours*...9.

³⁵ Interview with Sarah Musa, 75 years, Orange Market, 19/7/2025.

³⁶ Interview with Peter Ibrahim, 60 years, New Nyanya, 8/7/2025.

³⁷ Interview with Jacob Ali, 65 years, Mararaba, 8/7/2025.

³⁸ Interview with Jacob Ali...

accordingly.³⁹ The foregoing commercial practices of the Igala and the Gbagyi have helped to cement ties of good neighbourliness. So, apart from the socio-cultural interaction among the people, interaction at the commercial level is another great dimension to their relations.

POLITICAL RELATIONS

The Igala and the Gbagyi in Karu Local Government Area have had a good political relation during the period the study covers. Like their Igala neighbours, the Gbagyi practice a centralised political administrative system with the Esu Karu as the overall ruler. The Esu has other cabinet members who serve as king makers and they include the Madaki, Sa, Magaji, Dakechi and Hakimi among others. They assist the Esu in administration of the people. While the Esu is the first-class chief, the Sa and the Dakechi are the second class and third-class chiefs respectively. Thus, every town in Karu has its Sa and its kingmakers. Hence, we have the Esu of Karu, Sa of Mararaba, Sa of Aso, Sa of Ado, and so on.⁴⁰ The Igala in Karu Local Government Area also have their appointed representative by the Attah called Onu Igala in Nasarawa who represent the interests of the Igala. He is, however, under the influence of the Esu Karu. It is to be noted that the primary function of the Onu Igala is to serve as the representative of the Attah of Igala. He represents the interests of the people and discusses with the Esu and the Sa whenever there are issues that concern both parties.⁴¹ The Onu Igala in Karu Local Government Area has accepted the political authority of the Esu and the Sa over him and Igala sons and daughters living in the area.⁴² This quality has distinguished him from many other leaders in the area and made the Esu to relate well with him. Furthermore, the Onu Igala in Karu is regarded as a leader who has a cordial relation with the Esu and the Gbagyi of Karu, especially since he has never been found wanting in acts of disloyalty against the Esu and the Local Government Chairman.⁴³ He admonishes his people to respect constituted authorities and to be law abiding. Hence, these exceptional qualities of Onu Igala in Karu have drawn him closer to the Esu Karu.⁴⁴

The role of the Esu and the 'Sa' in promoting peace and security of lives and property through the encouragement of vigilante groups in the local government is also a factor that promotes socio-political relations among the Igala and the Gbagyi. Hence, in various towns of the local government, Igala and Gbagyi able bodied men and women have joined hands together as members of vigilante groups to ensure the peace and security of Karu L.G.A. As the head of the local government, the successive Chairmen of Karu L.G.A have contributed immensely to political relations among the Igala and the Gbagyi. Apart from promoting peace and security in the Local Government Area, the Local Government Service has been structured in a manner that residents who are qualified can secure appointment and work as staff members. Hence, the Igala and the Gbagyi work together as colleagues in the Local Government Secretariat. During General Elections, the Local Government, the Esu, the Sa and the Onu Igala are at the fore front in educating the people on the need for free, peaceful and fair elections. They also give security personnel maximum support to ensure security of lives and property during and after elections.⁴⁵

Political parties have also played a great role in promoting political relations among the Igala and the Gbagyi in Karu area. Both members of the ethnic groups belong to same political parties. While some are members of the All Progressive Congress (APC), others belong to Labour Party (LP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) among others. Thus, they meet for party meetings, rallies and campaigns, and they also gather during General Elections to vote for candidates of their choice.⁴⁵ Through these means, political interaction is promoted among the people.

CHALLENGES CONFRONTING IGALA AND GBAGYI RELATIONS

The challenges confronting intergroup relations between the Igala and Gbagyi in Karu Local Government Area are largely driven by the broader issues prevalent in North-Central Nigeria. These includes struggles over land and resources, the contentious indigene/settler dichotomy, the manipulation of ethnic identities by political elites and stereotype against the Igala by other ethnic groups including the Gbagyi.⁴⁶

In terms of resource and land disputes, competition over scarce material resources, particularly land for farming and settlement, is a primary source of conflict. Karu Local Government Area like much of Nasarawa State is largely agricultural, making land ownership and access to water and other natural resources a highly sensitive issue that often escalates into violent confrontation

³⁹ Interview with Monday Yerima, 70 years, Aku Village, 8/7/2025.

⁴⁰ Interview with Edward Solomon, 70 years, Kugbaru, Mararaba 15/7/2025.

⁴¹ Interview with Jeremiah Silas, 55 years, One Man Village, 15/7/2025.

⁴² Interview with Edward Solomon...

⁴³ Interview with Danladi Abiche, 60 years, Kabayi, 25/7/2025.

⁴⁴ Interview with Sunday Yakubu, 45 years, Autabalefi, 25/7/2025.

⁴⁵ Interview with Garba Lawal, 67 years, Mararaba, 15/1/2026.

⁴⁶ Interview with Garba Lawal...

especially in cases where lands are sold and resold by land owners or their relations as it is a common practice in the area lately.⁴⁷ Consequently, cases of land disputes between the Igala and Gbagyi in the area are common. This negates their harmonious relations. The concept of 'indigeneity' is a significant driver of tension. Long standing Gbagyi communities view the Igala, who have also been present in the area for a long time due to historical migrations and trade as settlers or non-indigenes. This classification fuels socio-economic disparities and political marginalisation, as indigenes often claim a greater right to political right and resource allocation.⁴⁸ The political elites often exploit ethnic and regional differences for personal gain. Competition for political positions and control of local government structures lead to the manipulation of ethnic sentiments which incites conflict among the masses and undermines peaceful co-existence.⁴⁹ Besides, economic factors such as high rates of poverty and unemployment especially among the youths and general underdevelopment in the area exacerbates tensions.⁵⁰ Economic hardships can make individuals more susceptible to mobilisation for conflict by ethnic or political leaders.

The stereotype held against the Igala by some members of the Gbagyi ethnic group and other ethnic groups constitute yet a major threat to the peaceful co-existence of the Igala and the Gbagyi in Karu Local Government Area. The prevailing and pervasive notion of tagging the whole members of an ethnic group- the Igala as being diabolical, evil, wicked and troublesome by their neighbours including the Gbagyi is also a factor militating against the cordial relations between the Igala and the Gbagyi.⁵¹ The implication of this stereotype is the deprivation of the Igala to have access to rented houses from non- Igala landlords and land ladies. Once a landlord or landlady finds out one is Igala, he begins to think otherwise. In fact, some of them outrightly deny access to their rented house once they discover the Igala identity from a prospective tenant.⁵²

CONCLUSION

This study has considered the nature of intergroup relations between the Igala and their Gbagyi neighbours in Karu Local Government Area from 1991-2019. The work has indicated that the two groups have lived in peace and tranquility, inter relating in socio-cultural, economic and political perspectives. In fact, the Igala-Gbagyi relations in the study area are an unmistakable example of human relations that cuts across Nigeria and Africa. The study observed that common socio-cultural practices among the Gbagyi and Igala further enhanced their peaceful co-existence. For instance, the Esu and successive Local Government Chairmen were ambassadors of peace. They preached peace and ensured infrastructure was made available for the inhabitants in Karu Local Government Area which paved way for peaceful resolution of conflict and easy access to the market. Again, contrary to the notion that the Igala are not easy to interact with and the Gbagyi are not socialised, the study identified that the Igala are friendly, peaceable and the Gbagyi are highly socialised and accommodating. The Igala and the Gbagyi appear to have originated from the same stock in Kwararafa, hence, they see each other as brothers. This affinity created a bond of unity among them and has strengthened cordial relationship over the years. Semblance of their cultures, political affinity and economic relations cemented their relations in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. In spite of the positive nature of their relation, they faced certain negative challenges amongst which is stereotype and minor conflicts over land ownership especially after purchase among others. But on the whole, their relationship depicted positive outcomes of symbiotic relations that transcends the socio-cultural, political and economic spheres.

In order to surmount the challenges confronting the Igala-Gbagyi relations, government at all levels should provide equal access to opportunities and material resources to reduce disputes and competition over same. So also, government, non-governmental organisations and individuals should enlighten the people on the need to desist from the concept of indigeneship, marginalisation and stereotype, especially against the Igala. Above all, social and cultural activities which brings both ethnic groups together should be encouraged by all and sundry.

⁴⁷ Interview with Abah Adejoh, 50 years, Masaka, 20/1/2026.

⁴⁸ Interview with Garba Lawal, 67 years, Mararaba, 15/1/2026.

⁴⁹ Interview with Garba Lawal...

⁵⁰ Interview with Abah Adejoh...

⁵¹ Interview with Abigail Musa, 72 Years, Kabayi, 24/1/2026.

⁵² Interview with Abigail Musa...

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S/No	Name	Gender	Age	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1	Abiche, Danladi	Male	60 years	Kabayi	20/6/2025
2	Adejoh, Abah	Female	50 years	Masaka	7/7/2025
3	Agene, John	Female	67 years	Aku Village	15/7/2025
4	Ali, Jacob	Male	65 years	Mararaba	8/7/2025
5	Bala, Ahmed	Male	65 years	Aso	25/6/2025
6	Barnabas, Maji	Male	70 years	Aso	7/7/2025
7	Danjuma, Samuel	Male	70 years	Mararaba	19/6/2025
8	Dazha, Lazarus	Male	68 years	Ado	19/6/2025
9	Dogo, Amidu	Male	50 years	Kugbaru	7/7/2025
10	Ibrahim, Peter	Male	60 years	New Nyanya	8/7/2025
11	Lawal, Garba	Male	67 years	Mararaba	15/1/2026
12	Musa, Abigail	Female	72 years	Kabayi	10/7/2025
13	Musa, Sarah	Female	75 years	Orange Market	19/7/2025
14	Patrick, Andrew	Male	70 years	Kabayi	20/6/2025
15	Shekwoyada, Paul	Male	75 years	New Nyanya	20/6/2025
16	Silas, Jeremiah	Male	55 years	One's Man Village	15/7/2025
17	Solomon, Edward	Male	70 years	Kugbaru	15/7/2025
18	Wushekwo, Wunyika	Male	55 years	Aso	2/7/2025
19	Yakubu, Sunday	Male	45 years	Autabalefi	25/7/2025
20	Yerima, Monday	Male	70 years	Aku Village	8/7/2025

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