

# Prevention of Violence among Youth: An Analysis of Conflict Dynamics in Plateau State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The persistent violence in Plateau State, Nigeria, has attracted national and international attention. Much of this violence has involved youth, making them both perpetrators and victims of the conflict. This paper explores the dynamics of youth violence in Plateau State, analyzing the root causes, contributing factors and possible interventions. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study combines quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions. The study requires the socio-economic, political and ethnic drivers of violence, focusing on the roles of unemployment, political manipulation and identity-based conflicts. The findings reveal that youth violence in Plateau State is primarily driven by economic hardship, political exploitation and deep-rooted ethnic tensions. Additionally, lack of effective governance and limited access to educational and economic opportunities further exacerbate the issue. The dynamics of youth violence in Plateau State has been investigated in this study. The results emphasize how important it is for political manipulation, identity-based conflicts, and economic hardship to feed violence. The study recommends a multi-faceted approach to preventing youth violence, which includes economic empowerment and job creation, political reforms, community-driven peace-building initiatives, educational programs as well as drug rehabilitation programme aimed at fostering tolerance and understanding.

**Keywords:** Youth Violence, Plateau State, Conflict Dynamics, Unemployment, Nigeria

## Introduction

The prevalence and complexity of youth violence make it a critical global issue. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) reports that it is one of the main causes of injury and death among youth globally, with hundreds of thousands of deaths reported each year, mostly in low- and middle-income nations. There are many different types of youth violence, such as physical assault, bullying, involvement in gangs, and psychological abuse. These behaviors all have serious repercussions for the victims, their families, and society as a whole. Youth violence is caused by a variety of factors, including exposure to violent environments or media, family dynamics, education, peer pressure, and socioeconomic status (WHO, 2020). Youth violence is a global concern because of its long-term effects on societal stability, development, and peace in addition to its immediate effects on individuals. Youth violence in high-income nations is closely associated with problems like social inequality, gun access, and gang membership. For instance, gun culture and socioeconomic inequality have been strongly linked to youth violence in the United States, which has increased crime rates in urban areas. Additionally, O'Donnell (2021) notes that systemic inequalities and cultural influences reinforce cycles of poverty and violence by encouraging violent behaviours in young people. In these situations, community interventions, policy changes, and social cohesion promotion are frequently the main goals of preventive strategies. Initiatives that prioritize education, skill-building, and mentoring are also essential in lowering youth violence. As part of global efforts to prevent violence, the UN has emphasized the significance of youth empowerment and education in addressing violence, acknowledging young people as both victims and potential change agents (UNODC, 2021).

With rising rates of unemployment, poverty, and political unrest, youth violence in Nigeria has become a major concern. Many socioeconomic and political factors, such as political thuggery, poverty, and tensions based on ethnicity or religion, are major causes of violence among young people in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), youth unemployment in Nigeria exceeded 42% in 2022. This, in turn, led to a sense

of frustration and disillusionment among the youth, who may resort to violence as a way of resolving their differences or advancing their political or economic agendas (NBS, 2022). There is still a problem with political violence, which is usually committed by young people who are enlisted as "political thugs" before elections. Politicians take advantage of the vulnerabilities of young people without jobs and those on the margins by offering money or assurances of safety in return for violent crimes like stealing ballots, intimidating rivals, or attacking opposition organizations (Aghedo, 2015). These actions have long-term effects on social cohesion and national security because they not only threaten Nigeria's democratic processes but also encourage a violent culture among young people. Furthermore, youth violence has been made worse by ethno-religious conflicts, especially in areas like the Northeast and Middle Belt. Extremist organizations such as Boko Haram, which enlist young people in violent. The goal of the paper is to examine the dynamics of conflict, pinpoint its underlying causes, and suggest ways to stop youth violence while emphasizing peace-building initiatives.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

#### **The Concept of Youth**

Youth is a stage that falls between childhood and adulthood; its definition varies depending on the organization and the context. The Commonwealth extends the youth age range to 15–29 years, while the United Nations sets it between 15 and 24 years. The World Health Organization classifies people between the ages of 10 and 29 as youth, and Nigeria's National Youth Policy defines youth as those between the ages of 15 and 35. Two phases of youth can be distinguished: early youth (15–24 years old), who are still reliant on their parents, and later youth (25–30 years old), who are becoming more self-sufficient. During this time, young people experiment with their identities and roles as they become more integrated into society. Adolescence is perceived as a phase of growth and as a component of social integration, guided by diverse cultural standards. Since its inception during the industrial revolution, the idea of youth has been influenced by social and psychological viewpoints.

#### **Conceptualization of Violence**

In his book, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*, Hent de Vries (2002: 1) offers a basic and inclusive definition of violence as entailing 'any cause, any justified or illegitimate force, that is exerted – physically or otherwise – by one thing (event or instance, group or person, and, perhaps, word and object) on another'. As inclusive as it is, the definition harbors a serious problem, which becomes one of the main strands of the work. The definition of violence as 'force', or at least the concept of force as violence, presupposes a relation between more than one, and thus a potential *play*, or worse, *opposition*, of forces. Violence as a condition of possibility is thus presupposed by any act of force. Any *real* violence (physical, psychological, social, etc.) might seem to presuppose an ideal (a priori or transcendental) violence – or even a radical non-violence. Violence is a 'slippery concept' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004), difficult to define, and a stress on physicality ignores its social context. The World Health Organization definition emphasizes both physical and psychological dimensions that the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in, injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation (WHO, 2002).

#### **Youth Violence in Perspective**

Youth violence occurs in both structured (like schools) and unstructured (like streets, gangs) contexts, and it can take many different forms, such as physical, verbal, and psychological harm. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, unemployment, peer pressure, and exposure to violence in families or communities are known to be causes of youth violence. Adversity as it is portrayed in the media contributes to the normalization of violent behavior in young people. The problem of youth violence is worldwide and context-specific. It is frequently associated with drug-related crime, gun access, and gang activity in developed countries; in low- and middle-income nations, it is associated with social disintegration and political instability. In order to reduce youth violence, major issues like poverty, inequality, and a lack of educational opportunities must be addressed. Through its Sustainable Development Goals, the UN promotes inclusive societies, enhanced social support networks, and

a decrease in youth violence. Youth violence in Nigeria's Plateau State is closely linked to political unrest, socioeconomic hardships, and past ethno-religious disputes. Youth have been central players in violent conflicts, frequently enlisted by local and political leaders who take advantage of tensions arising from racial and religious differences.

### **Perspective on Conflict Dynamics**

The idea of conflict dynamics centers on how conflicts evolve over time, highlighting their emergence, escalation, persistence, and de-escalation. In order to better understand the intricate interactions between the many elements that either exacerbate or lessen conflict, scholars have created a number of frameworks to examine these processes. The study of conflict dynamics identifies important factors that influence the emergence and resolution of conflicts, including social identity, financial incentives, environmental stress, and systemic interactions. Conflicts progress through phases of emergence, escalation, stalemate, de-escalation, and resolution, as explained by Morton Deutsch (1973). Social Identity Theory developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), this theory suggests that conflicts often arise from in-group vs. out-group dynamics, with leaders manipulating group identities to fuel animosity and rivalry, particularly in ethnic and religious conflicts. Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler (2004) argue that conflicts are driven by both social grievances (e.g., marginalization) and economic motivations (e.g., greed for resources). Frances Stewart (2008) adds that horizontal inequalities, or group disparities, also play a significant role in driving conflicts. William Zartman (2001) describes a "mutually hurting stalemate," where conflicting parties shift to negotiation after realizing violence is unproductive.

### **Conflict Prevention**

Throughout the 1990s, there was an increase in interest in conflict prevention, which led to it becoming a major topic on agendas for global security and governance. The body of research on the topic grew, emphasizing the value of preventive measures taken by regional and global organizations. Transitioning from the rhetoric of conflict prevention to institutionalized practice is still difficult, though. The question of whether conflict prevention should span the escalation and post-conflict phases or be restricted to the early, non-escalatory stages remains conceptually unclear. Ackermann (2000) and Leatherman et al. (1999) are two academics who have proposed that conflict prevention should take place at every stage of the conflict lifecycle. Michael Lund (2002a), on the other hand, argues against a broader definition, emphasizing prevention of violent outbursts as opposed to dealing with disputes at any level after they have escalated. The question of whether conflict prevention should focus on its underlying causes as well as its immediate causes is also up for debate. This dichotomy is reflected in terms such as "light versus deep prevention" or "operational and structural prevention," with deep prevention being associated with resolving the underlying causes of conflict. A key component of the UN Charter is conflict prevention, which gives the Security Council, the Secretary-General, and the General Assembly the authority to resolve conflicts amicably and to stop wars and other armed conflicts from breaking out in Chapters VI and VII. A number of preventive strategies, including fact-finding, negotiation, mediation, conciliation, court settlement, and arbitration, are covered in Chapter VI. Preventing violent conflict was one of the main goals of the United Nations during the Cold War, even though the term "preventive diplomacy" was not coined until almost fifteen years later. In an effort to avert a nuclear exchange, conflict and crisis management also dominated the national security agendas of the two rival superpowers (Lund, 1996a). In addition to serving as a bulwark against the Soviet threat, structural and procedural arrangements like the Marshall Plan, NATO, and the establishment of common European institutions were meant to prevent future wars among the Western European states by uniting erstwhile adversaries in bodies that make collective decisions and establishing a liberal security community (Ackermann, 1994: 229–250).

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Dynamics of Conflict in the Plateau State**

The state of conflict dynamics in the Plateau state has been widely discussed in literature, with varying perspectives depending on the context. Plateau State has long served as a melting pot for the various ethnic and

religious groups that make up Nigeria. But tensions have arisen because of this diversity, particularly between the Hausa-Fulani, a predominantly Muslim settler population, and the indigenous, largely Christian groups. Contestations over identity, political representation, and territory are common causes of conflict in Plateau State, and these disputes have gotten more intense recently. Governance structures that were both colonial and post-colonial divided people along racial and religious lines, which made tensions worse. The introduction of identity politics, which gave some groups preference over others while colonial rule was in effect, planted the seeds of resentment that still sprout into violent conflicts today. The conflict has become even more complex due to the spread of small arms and the involvement of criminal networks in Plateau State. Often composed of young individuals who have been deprived their rights, while armed groups exploit the chaos for their own gain. These groups may commit organized crime, such as cattle rustling and banditry, further destabilizing the area and making it challenging to distinguish between criminal activity and acts of political or ethno-religious violence.

### **Drivers of Youth Violence in Plateau State**

#### **Economic Deprivation and Unemployment**

According to researchers such as Urdal (2020), areas with a high proportion of young people and inadequate governance are more vulnerable to violent conflict. In Nigeria, unemployment, poverty, and limited educational opportunities are frequently mentioned as the main causes of youth violence. According to a National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report from 2022, Nigeria's youth unemployment rate was 42.5%, underscoring the financial vulnerability that the country's youth face (NBS, 2022). At more than 35 percent, Plateau State has one of Nigeria's highest rates of youth unemployment, according to another report by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) based on data from 2023. This number is consistent with the high frequency of violent confrontations between youth groups in the state, especially around election seasons (Shehu, 2021). The correlation between the incidence of conflicts and financial difficulties highlights the critical role that economic policies play in reducing violence. According to recent research by Isichei, (2020); Okoli, (2022); Usman, (2022) claimed that, unemployment and poverty are the main causes of youth violence in Nigeria. Nigeria's youth unemployment rates are still extremely high, especially in states like Plateau that are prone to conflict. Consequently, Youth are more susceptible to being recruited into violence by political elites who use violence to further their own agendas when economic opportunities are limited. Krause (2021) conducted empirical research to assess peace-building efforts in Plateau State, with a particular emphasis on programs that promote economic empowerment and community-based dialogue. The study discovered that while community mediation initiatives headed by religious and ethnic leaders were successful in lowering violence, there was insufficient backing from the government to establish long-lasting peace.

#### **Politics of Identity and Conflict**

It has been observed that identity politics, which preys on racial and religious differences, is a major contributing factor to violence in Plateau State (Krause, 2021). Leaders from different ethnic groups use youth as weapons of violence while manipulating these identities to further their political agendas. According to research by Kwaja (2020), identity politics exacerbates already-existing conflicts and obstructs inclusive development and efficient governance. Political players in Nigeria have a history of taking advantage of the weaknesses of young people without jobs and no education, frequently enlisting them as political goons to commit violent crimes during elections (Olarinmoye, 2016). This phenomenon is especially noticeable in Plateau State, where political elites take advantage of differences in race and religion to further their own agendas. In the process of manipulating youths to become weapons of violence, racial and religious divisions are widened (Higazi, 2011). Other factors that have been linked to youth violence include cultural practices and the politicization of identity. According to Kwaja (2011), there are certain communities where using violence to assert control or power is considered appropriate, and young people are frequently brought up with these norms. In states like the Plateau where identity-based conflicts are common, identity politics—the mobilization of ethnic and religious identities for political ends—exacerbate youth violence (Ostien, 2009).

### **The Role of Religion in Fueling Conflicts among Youth**

Scholars who have studied the role of religion as a conflict driver among young people in Plateau State have emphasized how religious identity can be mobilized to incite violence, especially among younger populations. This mobilization is frequently linked to larger sociopolitical and economic environments that increase young people's susceptibility to radicalization and conflict engagement (Shehu, 2024). Researchers like Best (2007) contend that among young people in Plateau State, religious identity serves as a potent indicator of group cohesion. When disputes emerge, young people frequently quickly side with their religious communities, fostering a sense of group action against imagined outside threats. Leaders who cast disputes in religious terms have easy access to this feeling of unity. Higazi (2011) addresses the impact of extremist religious discourse on young people, particularly in situations where they have little access to economic and educational opportunities. Religious leaders who spread divisive doctrine can readily draw in young people who experience marginalization or disenfranchisement. Then, these young people might take these messages to heart, which would fuel the violence. While religious institutions frequently aid in promoting peace, Danjibo (2010) opined that when they become politicized, they can also exacerbate conflict. Religiously affiliated youth groups have been known to attack people or defend their beliefs, particularly in times of high tension. According to researchers such as Egwu (2015), young people's susceptibility to religious manipulation is strongly associated with their sense of self. In Plateau State, where there are significant socioeconomic difficulties, young people frequently look to religion for a sense of identity and community.

### **Implications of Youth Violence in Plateau State**

Various studies have critically examined the effects of youth violence in Plateau State, Nigeria, elucidating its profound implications on the region's development and economy. There have been thousands of fatalities, ruined communities, and uprooted families—the human cost is enormous. Due to business closures and infrastructure damage, there is also a significant economic impact. Furthermore, the frequent violent outbursts interfere with education, further marginalizing youth and reducing their prospects for the future. The continuation of violence also erodes attempts to foster mutual trust among communities. Long-term peace-building efforts are made more difficult by the vicious cycle of mistrust and animosity that deepens divisions with increasing violence (Shehu, 2024; Nwogwugwu, 2019).

### **Preventing Youth Violence in Plateau State and Nigeria**

**Employment and Educational Opportunities:** Expanding employment and educational options is a crucial tactic in the fight against youth violence. Urdal (2006) found a strong correlation between increased rates of violence and youth unemployment and under education. According to volumes of literatures indicates that in Nigeria, youth violence can be considerably reduced by providing them with economic opportunities through entrepreneurship and vocational training (Akinwale, 2010). Initiatives aimed at reducing youth violence in the Plateau State have included job creation programs that are intended to engage youth in productive activities and reduce their vulnerability to recruitment by violent groups (Higazi, 2011).

**Inter-Group Dialogue, Peace Education, and Peace-building:** In conflict-prone regions like Plateau State, peace-building initiatives have focused on fostering communication between various ethnic and religious groups. Peace education is crucial for educating in young people a culture of tolerance and understanding in order to prevent youth violence (UNDP Nigeria, 2021). Through the inclusion of interfaith discourse, peace education, and peace building in school curricula, young people can be taught tolerance and conflict resolution skills. Local government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions should host forums, community-based dialogues, and workshops where young people from different backgrounds could engage in meaningful discussions about their shared struggles and experiences in order to promote understanding and reduce tensions. The Danjibo (2019) study asserts that while economic empowerment is important, the only ways to achieve long-term peace are through inclusive community engagement and education.

**Community-Based Approaches:** Community-based interventions can help to break down stereotypes and promote the growth of trust by encouraging cooperation between various ethnic and religious groups. Research

has indicated that the inclusion of community leaders in violence prevention initiatives can yield favorable results, as they possess the ability to mediate conflicts and encourage non-violent approaches to conflict resolution (Kwaja & Smith, 2020). (Higazi, 2011; Shehu, 2024; Nwagwu, 2020).

**Political Inclusion and Youth Empowerment:** Researchers such as Adesoji (2010) stress the significance of political inclusion in averting youth violence. Young people feel excluded from political decision-making processes in many parts of Nigeria, which exacerbates their resentment and occasionally sparks violence. Involving young people in local governance and decision-making processes can empower them and help lower their involvement in violent crimes. Although there are still obstacles because of deeply ingrained racial and religious differences, Plateau State has attempted to involve youth in local governance structures and peace-building projects (Best & Kemedi, 2005).

### **Methodology**

This study aims to explore the prevention of violence among youth: An Analysis of Conflict Dynamics in Plateau State, Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative design approach, emphasizing the analysis of secondary data gathered from a variety of sources, including articles, journals, newspapers, government documents, internet resources, and other relevant texts related to the topic.

### **Data Collection**

For the study on the prevention of violence among youths in Plateau State, Nigeria, the data collection will primarily rely on secondary sources. This approach will allow for a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and documented evidence related to conflict dynamics and youth violence. The following methods will be employed to gather relevant secondary data.

- a) **Academic Journals and Articles:** A thorough review of peer-reviewed journals and articles will be conducted to gather insights into the causes and consequences of youth violence. This literature will provide theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that highlight successful prevention strategies and interventions.
- b) **Government Reports and Policy Documents:** Official publications from government agencies will be analyzed to understand the policies and programs aimed at addressing youth violence in Plateau State. These documents will offer insights into the governmental response to conflict dynamics and the effectiveness of existing measures.
- c) **NGO Reports:** Reports from non-governmental organizations working in the region will be examined to identify community-based initiatives and programs focused on violence prevention among youths. These sources will provide valuable case studies and evaluations of different approaches.
- d) **Media Content Analysis:** Local newspapers, magazines, and online news platforms will be reviewed to capture public discourse surrounding youth violence and conflict. This analysis will help identify trends, community perceptions, and the impact of media representation on youth behavior.
- e) **Theses and Dissertations:** Academic theses and dissertations related to youth violence and conflict dynamics in Plateau State will be consulted. These works often contain original research and in-depth analyses that can contribute to a broader understanding of the issues.
- f) **Data from International Organizations:** Reports and publications from organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank will be included to provide a global perspective on youth violence and conflict prevention strategies, contextualizing the findings within international frameworks.

By utilizing these secondary sources, this study aims to build a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing youth violence in Plateau State and to identify effective prevention strategies based on existing research and documented evidence.

## Findings

The findings draw attention to the main causes of youth violence, the efficacy of preventative tactics, and the role played by different stakeholders in resolving disputes. These are:

- a) **Unemployment:** Unemployment rates have negative impacts in young people which leads them to engage in violent activities. As findings revealed that socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and a lack of educational opportunities were the most significant causes of youths violent. Furthermore, it was also found that unemployment leads idle youths into drug abuses.
- b) **Root Causes of Violence:** Research indicates that factors such as economic deprivation, unemployment, and lack of educational opportunities significantly contribute to youth violence in Plateau State. Addressing these root causes is essential for effective prevention.
- c) **Role of Traditional Institutions:** Traditional leaders play a crucial role in conflict resolution and mediation. Their involvement in community dialogues and peace-building initiatives can effectively reduce tensions and promote social cohesion among youths.
- d) **Youth Engagement Programs:** Successful prevention strategies often include youth engagement initiatives that provide skills training, mentorship, and recreational activities. Programs that empower youths and foster a sense of belonging have shown promise in mitigating violence.
- e) **Community Involvement:** Community-based approaches that involve local stakeholders, including parents, educators, and religious leaders, are more effective in addressing youth violence. Collaborative efforts enhance trust and accountability within the community.
- f) **Impact of Media:** Media representation of youth can influence public perception and attitudes toward violence. Positive portrayals and awareness campaigns can help shift narratives and encourage peaceful conflict resolution.
- g) **Policy Gaps:** Despite existing policies, there is often a lack of implementation and monitoring. Strengthening policy frameworks and ensuring their enforcement can enhance efforts to prevent youth violence.
- h) **Psychosocial Support:** Providing mental health resources and psychosocial support for at-risk youths can help address trauma and emotional distress, reducing the likelihood of involvement in violence.

These findings underscore the importance of a multifaceted approach that combines economic, social, and cultural strategies to effectively prevent violence among youths in Plateau State.

## Conclusion

The dynamics of youth violence in Plateau State have been investigated in this study, with an emphasis on the socioeconomic, political Identity, unemployment among other, and ethnic factors that fuel the conflict. The results emphasize how important it is for political manipulation, identity-based conflicts, and economic hardship to feed violence. The study also revealed that the significance of community-based peace-building initiatives, economic empowerment, and education as critical tactics for reducing youth violence. For Plateau State to be stable and peaceful, economic initiatives aimed at the youth must be combined with political changes, peace education, and community involvement. The ability of the state, civic society and local communities to collaborate in tackling the underlying causes of violence will be necessary for maintaining long-term peace.

## Recommendations

1. **Economic Empowerment and Job Creation:** Through entrepreneurship development and vocational training programs, the government should place a high priority on providing youth with employment opportunities. Public-private partnerships may be able to help with youth-focused business incubation centers and microfinance programs.
2. **Peace Education and Communication:** It is essential to incorporate peace education into both formal and informal educational systems in order to help young people develop nonviolent conflict resolution techniques and tolerance. Initiatives for community dialogue that unite young people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds ought to receive backing from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the government.

3. **Political Reforms and Accountability:** Stricter legal guidelines and enforcement tactics are needed to combat the political exploitation of young people for violent ends. Identity politics should be less of a factor in electoral reforms, and those politicians who encourage violence ought to answer for their actions.
4. **Strengthening Institutional Support for Peace-building:** The government and civil society in Plateau State need to provide more substantial institutional support for peace-building initiatives. This entails providing funds for programs that promote mediation, educating regional peacekeepers, and enhancing security agencies' ability to resolve disputes amicably.
5. **Enhancing Institutions and Governance:** Improving governance frameworks is a crucial suggestion for reducing youth violence in Plateau State. The conditions for violence have been made worse by weak institutions and bad governance, so it is crucial to improve public service delivery and government accountability. Reducing political manipulation, which frequently results in violence, requires transparent and inclusive governance that attends to the complaints of marginalized groups, especially young people.
6. **Involving Youth in Peace-building Processes:** Young people need to be viewed as agents of peace as well as perpetrators and victims of violence. Young people can actively participate in fostering peace in their communities with the support of programs that involve them in peace-building initiatives. These initiatives may include dialogue forums, community development projects, and leadership development. They may be more equipped as a result to refute the myths that encourage violence and conflict.
7. **Improving the Mechanisms of Justice and Security:** Long-term peace requires strengthening the legal and security apparatus's ability to respond to violence. Systems must be in place to guarantee prompt resolution of disputes and successful prosecution of violent offenders. Additionally, local communities need to be involved in security planning through programs like community policing, which can foster a sense of trust between the public and law enforcement.
8. **Drug Rehabilitation Programs:** Since drug addiction has been found to be a major contributing factor to violent behavior, more rehabilitation programs should be put in place for young people who are struggling with drug addiction.

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