



## Correlates of Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism in Plateau State

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**Abstract.** The study examined the correlates of youth resilience to violent extremism in Plateau State. Participants were 386 youths with a mean age of 27 years ( $SD = 6$  years) in Bokokos and Barkin-Ladi LGAs, comprising 228 males and 158 females. The study employed the convergent parallel mix method. Three hundred eighty-six (386) questionnaires were analysed, and sixteen (16) KII were conducted. Content analysis showed that youths were aware of violent extremism, displayed a negative perception of violent extremism, and pointed to poverty, social exclusion/racial discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, discrimination based on religion, and drug and alcohol as drivers of violent extremism. The result of multiple linear regression revealed that parents' socioeconomic status significantly predicted resilience to violent extremism ( $\beta = 1.470, p = 0.031$ ) and accounted for an 11.8% variation in resilience to violent extremism. However, age ( $\beta = -.103, p > .05$ ), gender ( $\beta = -.830, p > .05$ ), religious affiliation ( $\beta = 1.263, > .05$ ), and level of education ( $\beta = -.301, p > .05$ ) were not significant predictors of resilience to violent extremism. The study concluded that the level of socioeconomic status of parents is pertinent to youth attitude towards engaging in violent extremism. The study recommended, from a policy perspective, the primary focus by the government on income or economic growth as one of the strategies to counter violent youth extremism.

### 1. Introduction

Government or any particular group of people is not solely responsible for maintaining peace and security in any society or country; rather, all citizens share this responsibility. The effort is, however, spearheaded by the government. Other stakeholders besides the government include the organized private sector, interest groups, and civil society

organizations. In each of these, the young people who make up the majority in the majority of communities are the leaders of peace and security. Youths have contributed significantly to Nigeria's development in various ways, including politics, democracy, governance, economy, security, and community development. Youth's efforts to incite violence and lessen it cannot be disregarded in terms of security. Youths continue to predominate in promoting various forms of violent acts or extremism, including farmer-herder disputes, militant vandalism, and other types of insurgencies, despite being the backbone of most community developments (Yusuf, 2019).

In Nigeria, youths have been blamed for all violence, and there is never a social issue that does not involve youth. When a society uses youth as a tool to further marginalize them and fails to protect their interests, leaving them further vulnerable to injustice, poverty, a lack of access to quality education, unemployment, isolation, radicalization, violent behaviour, and extremism is inevitably to follow (Adebayo, 2017; Kadiwa, 2016). This is demonstrated by the fact that young people who participate in insurgency and violent extremism are typically dropouts from school, uneducated, unemployed, have grievances against the government, excluded, marginalized, and come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Yusuf, 2019; UNDP, 2017; Umar, 2016).

Studies (Dan-Azumi & Azeez, 2018; Umar, 2016) have demonstrated that the environment in communities has contributed to youth disillusionment and, as a result, predisposed them to be ready tools for violence, and they are frequently used as such for ethnoreligious, political, and thuggish violence. Despite this, young people in every society have the potential to be resilient to violent extremism and act as a driving force for development because they

make up the labour force that propels the economy through the creation of goods and services.

Building resilience to violent extremism at the community and individual levels has been a component of efforts to prevent violent extremism for more than ten years (Grossman, Hadfield, Jefferies, Gerrand, & Ungar, 2020). Cross-cultural standardized assessments can help pinpoint young people's strengths and weaknesses against violent extremism. A measure of resilience cannot be used to determine who will or will not carry out terrorist acts because the causes of violent extremism are multifaceted. Instead, it aims to track the various capital sources available to youth at risk of turning to violence to redress ideological, religious, and political grievances and to use this information to inform interventions that strengthen youths' resistance to the push and pull factors of violent extremism (Grossman et al., 2020).

Resilience development can be used to combat youth violent extremism. The ability to withstand or recover from hardship is typically referred to as resilience. A resilient approach does not have a quick fix. It depends on having a thorough understanding of what resilience means for a specific group of people and how history, politics, society, and culture have influenced it. Additionally, it depends on the government forging and maintaining alliances with the affected families, communities, networks, and organizations. Furthermore, it depends on the government collaborating to design, implement, and assess the interventions that can truly impact resilience-building, a process that is certain to involve trial and error (Weine, 2013).

Many studies have a glaring gap in their coverage of and thorough documentation of young people's positive contributions to society regarding their resilience to violent extremism. This results in a growing securitization of the youth issue. In most communities in Nigeria, it now seems to be an add-on or a sort of a priori disclaimer not to view the youth as a negative force (Yusuf, 2019). Governmental and non-governmental organizations fighting violent extremism are increasingly adopting a prevention rather than a counterterrorism strategy (Obonyo, 2019). This ranges from generating employment and providing essential services to more soft power initiatives that ease community tensions and foster trust, like identifying resilience factors and developing interventions that further support such resilience to violent extremism (Obonyo, 2019).

### 1.1 Statement of Problem

Despite the efforts made by both government and non-government organizations to reduce violent youth extremism, experts and researchers on the Plateau have looked for explanations for the reasons why violent extremism has spread and reached such high levels in some areas of the State (Krause 2017; Bunte & Vinson 2016). The larger literature emphasizes ethnic segregation as a crucial demographic factor in young people's susceptibility to violent extremism and population density and poverty (Madueke 2018). However, there are divergent viewpoints on how this relationship functions (Bhavnani & Choi 2012). According to one theory, violent incidents occur more frequently in racially segregated settings. This viewpoint claims segregation causes violence by encouraging in-group loyalty and out-group animosity (Boal 1972).

Another argument contends that ethnically diverse neighbourhoods are more likely to experience violence and that to prevent these clashes, the various groups should be kept apart in separate housing (Kaufmann 1996). There is broad agreement among experts on ethnic riots that mixed-ethnicity areas are more likely to experience mass violence than segregated ones. Studies comparing the levels of violence in segregated and mixed localities served as the foundation for the conclusion. While this addresses differences between settlements with different ethnic compositions, it is still unclear how violence differs across areas with different ethnic compositions.

Investigation into prevention strategies that specifically address youth resilience to violent extremism with cultural identity and connectedness, the presence of both bridging and linking capital, violence-related behaviours, and violence-related beliefs as indicators of stronger or weaker resilience to violent extremism is necessary given the cycle of violent youth extremism in some parts of Plateau State. Regarding youth resilience against violent extremism, there is a gap in research studies that examine these domains in Nigeria, particularly in Plateau State.

More specifically, a persistent knowledge gap in the field of understanding resilience to violent extremism has been the collection and analysis of statistically valid data to provide scientific evidence for how young people from diverse cultural backgrounds in multicultural settings operationalize resilience to violent extremism through their regular, multilevel social and institutional interactions. The urban and rural populations of Plateau State are both dense and extremely culturally diverse, making them perfect

comparative settings for further research on these issues.

As a result, the study's findings will dispel the constraints that communities and agencies currently face in their efforts to develop meaningful youth-focused policies and programs that can both identify the resilience-building assets that young people in communities already have and the vulnerabilities or gaps that may need to be filled as well as how to close gaps in the development of indicators or measures of community resilience relating to violent extremism, especially in developing countries.

### 1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study investigated the socio-demographic correlates of youth resilience to violent extremism. The focus was on the following specific objectives:

- Determine the predictive role of age on youth resilience to violent extremism in Plateau state
- Investigate the role of gender in resilience to violent extremism in Plateau state
- Examine the role of the level of education on youth resilience to violent extremism in Plateau state
- Find out the role of religious affiliation on youth resilience to violent extremism in Plateau state
- Assess the role of socioeconomic status on youth resilience to violent extremism in Plateau state

### 1.3 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

- Age will significantly predict resilience to violent extremism among youths
- Gender will significantly predict resilience to violent extremism among youths.
- Religious affiliation will be a significant predictor of youth resilience to violent extremism.
- Level of education will significantly predict resilience to violent extremism among youths.
- Socioeconomic status of parents of youths living in the communities will significantly predict resilience to violent extremism among youths.

## 3. Results

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1 Design

Mixed-methods research was used in the study. Specifically, the convergent parallel mix method approach. Instead of using isolated approaches to solve the research problem, this mixed-method approach allowed for triangulation, resulting in greater depth, breadth, and knowledge of the problem (Almalki, 2016). This research approach offers the chance to have a thorough understanding of the research issues, including the ability to: Differentiate between the various perceptions obtained from quantitative and qualitative data and discuss quantitative results with a qualitative data collection and analysis follow-up (Creswell, 2014). The correlational design was chosen for this study's quantitative component. At the same time, the study's qualitative component used a phenomenological approach (Patton & Cochran, 2002).

### 2.2 Participants

The participants in the study were 386 youths with a mean age of 27 years (SD = 6 years) who are residents in the two Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the study (Bokkos and Barkin-Ladi,) consisting of 228 males and 158 females.

### 2.3 Instrument for Data Collection

Two instruments were used for data collection in the study. These include; the Key Informant Interview (KII) schedule and the Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism Scale (BRAVA-14), a measure that assesses youth resilience to violent extremism.

### 2.4 Procedure

An in-depth interview utilizing semi-structured open-ended questions was conducted for 16 participants that met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate in the study from the two study locations (Bokkos and Barkin-Ladi). For the quantitative data collection, in each of the two (2) LGAs, a maximum of thirty clusters (communities) were randomly selected from the list of communities in the study.

### 2.5 Method of Data Analysis

The multiple linear regression statistical tool was used to test the hypotheses, while the content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected.

The results of the descriptive statistics of the regression model summary are presented below.

**Table 1: Model Summary of Regression Model**

R <sup>2</sup>	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
.029	2.278	5	378	0.046	1.596

The results of the multiple linear regression model summary revealed that the coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 0.029$ ,  $F_{(5, 378)} = 2.040$  (5% significance level). This showed that the model could be held for a 2.9% change in youth resilience to violent extremism. The F-statistic (ANOVA) of the model has a closeness of fit at a 5% ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) level of significance. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.596 indicated that the autocorrelation is significant without multicollinearity.

**Inferential Result**

**Table 2: Coefficients of Regression Model 1**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	$\beta$	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	44.617	2.626		16.994	.000
Age	-.103	.059	-.092	-1.752	.081
Gender	-.830	.735	-.058	-1.129	.260
Religious affiliation	1.263	.970	.067	1.302	.194
Level of educational	-.301	.343	-.050	-.876	.382
Socioeconomic status of parents	1.470	.677	.118	2.170	.031

Dependent Variable – Resilience to violent extremism

The multiple linear regression was used to analyse whether socio-demographic variables were significant predictors of resilience to violent extremism among the youth. The result of the regression coefficients reveals that age was not a significant predictor of resilience to violent extremism ( $\beta = -.103$ ,  $p = 0.081$ ), accounting for a 9.2% variation in youth resilience to violent extremism. Gender did not significantly predict resilience to violent extremism ( $\beta = -.830$ ,  $p = 0.260$ ) and accounting for 5.8% variation in youth resilience to violent extremism. Also, religious affiliation was not a significant predictor of resilience to violent extremism ( $\beta = 1.263$ ,  $p = 0.194$ ), and accounted for 6.7% variation in resilience to violent extremism; and level of education did not significantly predict resilience to violent extremism ( $\beta = -.301$ ,  $p = 0.382$ ), accounting for 5% variation in resilience to violent extremism. However, parents' socioeconomic status significantly predicted resilience to violent extremism ( $\beta = 1.470$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ) and accounted for an 11.8% variation in resilience to violent extremism.

**Content Analysis**

Findings of the content analysis revealed that the youths were aware of violent extremism in their environments, displayed a negative perception of violent extremism, and indicated poverty, social exclusion/racial discrimination, lack of economic

opportunities, discrimination based on religion, and drug and alcohol as major drivers of violent extremism.

**Awareness of Violent extremism**

Regarding awareness and perception of violent extremism, the common statements indicated that the KII participants were aware of violent extremism and disagreed with the violent extremism ideology held by some youths. The following statements point to this:

*"Yes, I am aware that youths engage in violent extremism. Especially where they usually go to drink and those involved in politics".* Male Participant

And,  
*"I don't agree that to settle grievances, one has to resort to violence. Whatever peace cannot give anybody, violence cannot give that thing. So, violence further causes destruction. Violence comes in where there is that misunderstanding of purpose, and the youths that have resort to violence as a means of settling issues, I think is a mistake."* Female Participant

**Perception of Violent Extremism**

Responses from qualitative data show that violent extremism in terms of ethnic or religious nature was

negatively perceived. Participants, however, see a rise of violent extremism in some communities, while others have a very low incidence of violent extremism. The following statements attest to this:

*People in the community see violent extremism as very bad behaviour. When it happened some time ago, the Fulani Ardo and the elders met and resolved the issue.* Male participant

And,

*The perception of violent extremism in the community is not good, though it is not frequent.* Female participant

#### **Drivers of Violent Extremism**

Findings revealed that poverty, social exclusion/racial discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, discrimination based on religion, and drug and alcohol abuse were the most frequently cited major causes of violent extremism.

*“You see, the youths are mostly idle, and as such they easily engage in vices that are usually violent in nature. Most especially when they take drugs.”* Male participant

And,

*“Most of the violence by youths took place some time back during the ethno-religious conflict that happened some time ago.”*

#### **4. Discussion on the Findings**

Findings from the study showed that violent youth extremism was not significantly predicted by age, gender, religious affiliation, or level of education. According to studies that contradict the findings of this one, violent offenders are more likely to be older, to be from a higher social class, to have a criminal record, to commit their acts in the afternoon, and to use a knife as a weapon of violence (Rippon, 2017).

The findings showed that gender was not a significant predictor of resilience to violent extremism in contrast to Namy, Carlson, Pala, Faris, Knight, Allen, Devries, and Naker's (2017) study, which discovered a complex relationship between violence and resilience as well as evidence that the gender moderated these dynamics. The finding of Adams and Mrug (2019) that school ethnic composition, absenteeism, and size were stronger predictors of violence perpetration and poor safety after adjusting for all student- and school-level factors contrast with the result of this study, which showed that the level of education did not predict resilience to violent extremism.

Furthermore, the results contrast with earlier research that indicated that factors such as the significance of

religion in a person's life and religious affiliations might have a greater impact on violence than self-reported religiosity (Kelly, Polanin, Jang, & Johnson, 2015). Additionally, religious affiliation was found to be negatively associated with lower involvement in physical violence by Goncalves, Madruga, Lucchetti, Dias Latorre, Laranjeira, and Vallada (2020).

Findings revealed that the socioeconomic status of parents predicted youth resilience to violent extremism; This agrees with a growing body of empirical studies that have focused on various socioeconomic underpinnings of violent youth extremism and indicated the significant role of socioeconomic status on violent extremism (Vijaya, Cathcart & Fiorellini, 2018). The results of this study contrast the findings of Fair and Shepherd (2006), which indicated that socioeconomic variables are not predictors for violent extremism. Also, some studies indicate that violent extremism is rooted in political repression and frustration (Krueger & Laitin, 2008).

The study's results that looked at parental socioeconomic status as a predictor of violent extremism suggest that understanding parental socioeconomic status may be the key to understanding the economic roots of violent extremism. This discovery is not unusual. Prior studies at the macro level have demonstrated a relationship between violent extremism and inequality measures (Enders & Hoover, 2012).

The argument for the lack of significance in the predictability of age, gender, religion, and educational attainment could be supported by evidence that unemployment rates have an impact on violent extremism (Vijaya et al., 2018). This is highlighted even more by participant responses from the interviews and focus groups, which showed that the most common causes of violent extremism among young people were poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, racial discrimination, a lack of economic opportunities, discrimination based on religion, and drug and alcohol abuse. As a result, these factors impact one's resilience to violent extremism.

#### **5. Study Limitation**

The results of this study should be viewed in the context of a few limitations. First, the study cannot establish causality between parental socioeconomic status and resistance to violent extremism. To identify a cause and effect, experimental designs would be more appropriate. Verifying whether the correlations mentioned above are causal will require additional study. Secondly, the experience of

resilience to violent extremism was assessed using self-report questionnaires, which could have been skewed by respondents' social desirability responses or poor memory, leading to a response bias.

## 6. Implications

Future research may succeed by identifying the risk factors and pathways concerning this group of young people. Our results suggest a possible connection between parental socioeconomic status and resistance to violent extremism. Given the association between parental socioeconomic status and resilience to violent extremism, efforts to decrease violent extremism should also concentrate on determining parents' socioeconomic status and developing alternate strategies for enhancing the economic well-being of community members.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study identified a strong association between parents' socioeconomic status and resilience towards violent behaviour among youths. However, age, gender, religious affiliation, and level of education were not significant predictors of resilience to violent extremism among youths. Poor socioeconomic conditions like widespread poverty can reinforce antisocial values and increase religious intolerance, further encouraging social exclusion, racial discrimination, and drug and alcohol abuse which can be drivers of violent extremism among young people.

## 8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendation is made:

- From a policy viewpoint, there is the need for government at all levels to focus primarily on the economic or income growth of families as one of the strategies to counter violent extremism among youths.
- Growth in income without a corresponding reduction in inequality might be counterproductive. Moreover, relative deprivation can be more multi-dimensional, such as the lack of productive employment or educational opportunities, and not merely related to lack of income.
- The relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and resilience to violent extremism can be explored further in the future with experimental research. In this analysis, we are limited by the small number

of socioeconomic status variables available in the dataset.

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