

# Urban Pressure and Crime Involvement among Youths in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explored Urban Pressure and Crime Involvement among Youths in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The objectives were to identify the rationale for crime involvement among youths, assess the impact of youth crime involvement on communities, and propose effective measures for reducing youth crime involvement in Nasarawa State. Geographically, the study was limited to the urban centres of Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga Local Government Areas (LGAs). Grounded in Strain Theory of Robert K. Merton, data were collected across the three targeted LGAs using 600 structured questionnaires and 30 in-depth interviews with youths, community leaders, and law enforcement agents. From the distributed questionnaires, 501 valid responses were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression, alongside thematic analysis for the qualitative interviews. Findings revealed that urban pressures, led by unemployment and high cost of living, significantly drive youth crime involvement. Furthermore, youth criminality significantly impacted communities by heightening fear, suppressing business activity, and eroding trust. Provision of employment opportunities and market-aligned vocational training were proffered as key preventive measures.*

## KEYWORDS

*Youth, Crime, Investigation, Survival and Strategies*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Youth involvement in criminality has become a sophisticated global crisis, challenging the foundational stability of modern societies. In the recent decades, the youth bulge seen in many nations is increasingly viewed through a lens of risk rather than opportunity. While young people possess the cognitive agility and physical energy required for national transformation, a systemic failure to integrate this demographic into the formal socio-economic fabric has created a global vacuum. This vacuum is increasingly occupied by trans-border criminal networks, digital predation, and localised violence, making the assessment of youth criminal behaviour a matter of urgent academic and policy concern.

The landscape of crime is being radically reshaped by technology and economic volatility. We are currently witnessing a democratisation of crime, where digital tools allow youths from disparate geographical locations to engage in high-stakes financial crimes and ideological radicalisation. Global bodies now recognise that criminality is no longer a localised bad behaviour but a systemic response to a world where the cost of living is outstripping the rewards of traditional labour.

In Nigeria, the situation has reached a tipping point following the economic shocks of 2024 and 2025. The removal of fuel subsidies and the subsequent hyper-inflation have hollowed out the middle class and pushed the youth into extreme survivalism. Nigeria's youth crime is currently characterized by a transition from victimhood to predation. While the 1990s were marked by campus cultism, the 2020s are defined by kidnapping-for-ransom, ritual killings, and highly organized cyber-syndicates. The National Population Commission (2025) indicated that over 60% of the population is under 25, yet unemployment in this bracket remains staggering. This has created a culture of crime where the traditional Nigerian values of hard work are being replaced by the "Hustle" at any cost, often supported by a decayed educational system that no longer guarantees a livelihood.

Nasarawa State, the "Home of Solid Minerals," serves as a microcosm of the Nigerian crisis. Its unique proximity to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) makes it both a gateway for opportunity and a magnet for crime. In Lafia, the state capital, the influx of people has led to rapid, unplanned urbanisation, creating slums that are breeding grounds for petty theft and drug peddling. Recent data suggests that 36% of Lafia's youth are unemployed, with a significant number turning to thuggery for political patronage.

In Keffi, the presence of a major university creates a distinct dynamic where Town and Gown collide. The Student-Youth demographic often becomes entangled in cultism and online money laundering, as they try to keep up with the high cost of living in a town that serves as a dormitory for Abuja workers. Meanwhile, in Akwanga, the rural-urban transition has led to an increase in cattle rustling and highway robbery, as the agricultural sector once the main employer fails to sustain the younger generation. Across these three zones, a common thread emerges: the collapse of parental supervision and the failure of inclusive leadership. As the domestic unit breaks under economic pressure, the peer group becomes the primary authority, leading the Nasarawa State youth into a life of crime as a perceived escape from poverty. These are the issues this study intends to investigate in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

## **II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In the rapidly expanding urban landscapes of Nasarawa State, the state is no longer just a place of opportunity; for many young people, it has become a theatre of survival where the boundaries between legality and livelihood have blurred. In the major hubs of Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga LGAs, a growing number of youths find themselves trapped in what Honwana (2023) described as a state of waithood. This is a prolonged period of suspension where the absence of formal jobs and social safety nets makes the transition to traditional adulthood marked by financial independence and stable housing an impossible dream.

The most pressing of the problem lies in a significant governance gap that treats youth crime as a moral failure rather than a structural consequence. According to Case, Johnson, Manlow, Smith, and Williams (2021) when society sets high goals for success but blocks the legitimate paths to reach them, individuals are forced to innovate. In the student-heavy corridors of Keffi LGA or the administrative centre of Lafia LGA, this innovation often manifests as illicit survival strategies, ranging from cybercrime to informal street gangs.

Despite the persistence of these issues, there seems a severe lack of empirical data on the specific survival logic that drives youths into crime in these three LGAs. Without this data, the government of Nasarawa State remains locked in a cycle of reactive and punitive policing that treats the symptoms of crime while ignoring the root causes of urban marginalisation. This study will address this critical knowledge gap by providing an evidence-based analysis of how urban pressures in Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga LGAs fuel criminality, offering a framework to move from a system of punishment to a model of genuine youth inclusion.

#### A. *Research Objective*

The primary aim of this study is to provide a diagnostic assessment of Urban Pressure and Crime Involvement among Youths in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Identify the rationale for crime involvement among youths in Nasarawa State.
- Assess the impact of youth crime involvement on communities in Nasarawa State.
- Propose effective measures for reducing youth crime involvement in Nasarawa State.

#### B. *Research Hypotheses*

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between urban pressure and youth involvement in crime in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.
- H<sub>02</sub>: Youth involvement in crime has no significant effect on communities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

### **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### A. *Rationale for Crime Involvement among Youths*

When survival becomes a matter of tactical ingenuity rather than moral choice, the line between entrepreneurship and criminality inevitably blurs for the urban youth. At the heart of this crisis lies the phenomenon of waithood, a state of prolonged socioeconomic suspension where young people remain trapped between childhood and the financial independence required for adulthood. Abashi and Umar, (2024) explained that when legitimate pathways to upward mobility are obstructed, individuals experience a profound sense of relative deprivation. Data from the study revealed that a significant majority of young offenders view property crimes and informal street enforcement not as a rejection of societal values, but as a practical response to the soaring cost of living and the absence of formal labour markets.

Furthermore, the innovation aspect of youth criminality remains a central theme in modern sociological discourse. In high-density environments where visible wealth exists alongside systemic poverty, youth often adopt illicit livelihood models, such as digital fraud and burglary, as primary survival logic. This behaviour reflects an attempt to achieve socially approved goals such as financial success and status through alternative, illegal channels. Audu (2025) suggested that this trend is exacerbated by a lack of state-sponsored social safety nets, leaving marginalized demographics with almost no viable alternatives for economic mobility.

The persistence of these criminal patterns is also linked to a persistent “governance gap” in urban policy. Bello and Okoro (2024) consistently demonstrated that these initiatives fail to reach the most vulnerable populations due to bureaucratic hurdles and political exclusion. This disconnect creates a vacuum in marginalised urban wards, where criminal networks often provide the sense of belonging and immediate financial reward that formal institutions lack.

#### *B. Impact of Youth Crime Involvement on Communities*

When the vibrancy of youth is eclipsed by the shadow of criminality, the community ceases to be a sanctuary and becomes a landscape of fear and economic stagnation. The most immediate consequence of youth criminality is the erosion of social capital, the invisible fabric of trust that holds a community together. Sani and Peters (2025) indicated that high rates of youth crimes lead to a climate of fear, which restricts social interaction and community participation. As public spaces become contested territories, the collective efficacy of the neighbourhood ability to self-regulate and maintain order diminishes significantly. In areas where youth crime is prevalent, residents are less likely to invest in communal projects or support local security initiatives, creating a feedback loop of vulnerability and institutional decay.

Economically, the impact is equally devastating. Persistent youth crime acts as a deterrent to both small-scale entrepreneurship and external investment. Studies on urban marketplaces revealed that frequent incidents of theft and extortion by youth gangs force businesses to incur high security costs or relocate entirely. This flight of capital further exacerbates the unemployment crisis, stripping the community of the very opportunities needed to redirect youth toward legitimate labour. Furthermore, the loss of human capital as young people are either incarcerated or killed in criminal encounters deprives the community of its most productive demographic, stunting long-term growth and perpetuating a cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Beyond the economic and social spheres, youth crime imposes a heavy burden on public health and state resources. The normalisation of violence and substance abuse among young offenders leads to increased pressure on local healthcare facilities, which must manage trauma cases and addiction-related illnesses (Audu, 2025). Also, state funds that could be channelled into infrastructure and education are often diverted to reactive policing and the maintenance of correctional facilities. Usman, (2024) consistently explained that the cost of managing the fallout of youth crime far outweighs the investment required for proactive youth development programs.

The impact of youth crime on a community is not merely a collection of isolated incidents but a systemic degradation of the quality of life. The empirical consensus suggests that without a strategic shift toward economic inclusion and social reintegration, communities risk becoming permanent hubs of instability. Addressing the rationale for youth crime is therefore not just a matter of justice, but a prerequisite for restoring the social and economic health of the urban environment.

#### *C. Effective Measures for Mitigating Youth Crime*

When the focus of intervention shifts from punitive suppression to the strategic reclamation of human potential, the cycle of urban criminality begins to dismantle. A primary defence against youth crime is the provision of sustainable economic alternatives that transcend

temporary stipends. Research by Olowo and Chukwuma (2024) suggested that vocational training is most impactful when it is directly synchronized with local market demands and supported by accessible micro-credit facilities. The study further indicated that when young people are integrated into the formal economy, the perceived utility of illicit livelihood models diminishes significantly. This transition addresses the crisis of prolonged dependency by providing a legitimate pathway to social adulthood.

The implementation of community-led restorative justice frameworks has proven more effective than traditional incarceration in reducing recidivism. Gadzama (2025) noted that while reactive policing often alienates the youth, community-oriented models-where local leaders and reformed peers mediate disputes-strengthen the collective efficacy of the neighbourhood. This suggests that restorative programs, which emphasize accountability and community service over retribution, help re-establish the trust lost during periods of active criminality. This approach fosters a sense of belonging and mitigates the social exclusion that frequently drives vulnerable individuals back into the arms of criminal networks.

An evaluation of modern social investment strategies by Musa and Adebayo (2024) revealed that digitalizing the selection process for empowerment schemes reduces bureaucratic bias and ensures that marginalized residents are reached. Furthermore, the integration of specialized public health interventions-specifically drug rehabilitation and mental health support-addresses the underlying vulnerabilities that often lead to crime.

#### **IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

##### **A. *Strain Theory***

The theory underpinning youth involvements in crime are best understood through the lens of Strain Theory by Robert K. Merton in 1938. The theory operates on the fundamental assumption that while society dictates universal aspirations-chiefly financial prosperity and social standing-it does not distribute the legitimate tools for achieving them, such as quality schooling or stable jobs, with any degree of equity.

The theory explains the drift into criminality as a process of Innovation, that is, when young people are socialized to desire success but find their path obstructed by economic barriers, they experience a psychological and social tension known as strain. To alleviate this pressure, many innovate by keeping the goal of financial independence while discarding the legal methods of attaining it. In this light, illicit activities like digital fraud or theft are not viewed by the actor as a rebellion against social values, but as a pragmatic, albeit illegal, shortcut to the very success that society demands.

Applying this to the urban landscapes of Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga LGAs, the theory takes on a localized character. In Lafia, the state's political nerve centre, the proximity of the struggling youth to the affluent political class creates an environment of relative deprivation. This visual disparity fuels the strain, making property crimes an attractive innovation to close the wealth gap. In Keffi, the presence of a massive student and graduate population creates a different kind of pressure. Here, the frustration stems from a broken promise: after years of investing in education (the means), the absence of a labour market to absorb

those leads to a sense of betrayal. This specific strain often pushes educated youths toward sophisticated white-collar deviance or cyber-innovation. In Akwanga, a town defined by its role as a transit hub, the constant movement of wealth through the community heightens material expectations. When the local economy fails to provide legitimate roles for its youth, they often resort to transit-related offenses or drug peddling to maintain their social relevance.

The theory fails to account for the millions of impoverished youths who endure severe strain without ever resorting to crime and it entirely focus on the social structure. Despite these gaps, the theory remains a powerful tool for understanding how the collision between high aspirations and low opportunity forces young people in Nasarawa State to seek survival in the shadows of the law.

### *B. Justification for the Study*

The necessity of this study stems from the widening disconnect between traditional law enforcement strategies and the shifting survival realities of the urban youth. In Nasarawa State, particularly within the high-pressure hubs of Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga LGAs, the state's reliance on reactive policing has failed to curb the rise of illicit economies. This failure signals that youth criminality is not merely a breakdown of law and order, but a strategic response to structural exclusion. Without a deep dive into the survival logic of these individuals, the government continues to treat the symptoms of unrest while leaving the root causes of poverty and urban marginalisation untouched.

Focusing on these three specific Local Government Areas was critical because they represent the intersection of rapid urbanisation and a stagnant labour market. The study provided an essential empirical roadmap to understand waithood the state of being stuck between childhood and productive adulthood. The study was a strategic investment in the state's stability, providing the evidence required to transform a marginalised demographic into a cornerstone of regional security and growth.

### *C. Research Methodology*

The study adopted a survey research design to capture both statistical trends and the personal lived experiences of youth in the selected regions. The study made use of quantitative and qualitative methods of research. The investigation was strictly limited to Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga LGAs, chosen for their roles as the states administrative, educational, and commercial nerve centres. The sample size of 600 was derived using the Cochran (1977) formula with a confidence level of 95% and margin of Error of 4%.

A total of 600 structured surveys was distributed (200 per LGA) to quantify the correlation between unemployment levels and types of criminal involvement. 30 in-depth interviews was conducted with youths, community leaders, and law enforcement to understand the survival motivations behind illegal acts. Quantitative data was processed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative narratives underwent thematic analysis to map the governance gap in each urban centres.

## V. RESULTS/FINDINGS

A total of Six hundred structured questionnaires were distributed across the three urban centres. Of these, 548 were retrieved from the field. Forty-seven instruments were set aside because they contained incomplete sections, multiple ticks on single items or blank responses on core questions relating to the study objectives. The remaining 501 fully completed and consistent questionnaires therefore constitute the valid sample used for analysis.

Table1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

| Variable                          | Category            | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Sex                               | Male                | 297       | 59.3           |
|                                   | Female              | 193       | 38.5           |
|                                   | Prefer not to say   | 11        | 2.2            |
| Age Group                         | 18–20 years         | 89        | 17.8           |
|                                   | 21–25 years         | 176       | 35.1           |
|                                   | 26–30 years         | 147       | 29.3           |
|                                   | 31–35 years         | 89        | 17.8           |
| Highest Educational Qualification | No formal education | 37        | 7.4            |
|                                   | Primary             | 83        | 16.6           |
|                                   | Secondary           | 209       | 41.7           |
|                                   | Tertiary            | 172       | 34.3           |
| Current Employment Status         | Employed            | 79        | 15.8           |
|                                   | Unemployed          | 223       | 44.5           |
|                                   | Self-employed       | 131       | 26.1           |
|                                   | Student             | 68        | 13.6           |
| Urban Centre                      | Lafia               | 181       | 36.1           |
|                                   | Keffi               | 167       | 33.3           |
|                                   | Akwanga             | 153       | 30.5           |

Source: Field Survey, 2026

As shown in Table 1, the valid sample (N=501) comprised predominantly male respondents (59.3%) with a primary concentration in the 21-25 age bracket (35.1%). A substantial proportion of respondents held secondary (41.7%) or tertiary (34.3%) educational qualifications. Notably, 44.5% of respondents were unemployed, reflecting severe economic vulnerability across the sampled urban hubs of Lafia (36.1%), Keffi (33.3%), and Akwanga (30.5%). The implication of the findings is that youth criminality in Nasarawa State is fundamentally driven by structural economic exclusion rather than a lack of basic literacy. With 44.5% of respondents unemployed despite 76% holding secondary or tertiary qualifications, the data presented a labour market failure that leaves educated youths trapped in prolonged “waithood”. Because this vulnerability is heavily concentrated among young males (59.3%) across Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga LGAs, policy interventions must move beyond basic literacy or localized policing to deliver state-wide, market-aligned economic opportunities.

Table 2: Distributions of respondents' views on rationale for crime involvement among youths

| S/N | Question                                                                                      | Yes            | No             | Not Sure      | Mean | Std  |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|------|------|
| 1   | Does lack of employment encourage some youths to engage in crime?                             | 409<br>(81.6%) | 43<br>(8.6%)   | 49<br>(9.8%)  | 2.73 | 0.60 |
| 2   | Does high cost of living encourage some youths to engage in crime?                            | 381<br>(76%)   | 67<br>(13.4%)  | 53<br>(10.6%) | 2.63 | 0.69 |
| 3   | Does lack of parental supervision encourage some youths to engage in crime?                   | 293<br>(58.5%) | 121<br>(24.2%) | 87<br>(17.4%) | 2.34 | 0.80 |
| 4   | Does limited access to education or skills training encourage some youths to engage in crime? | 347<br>(69.3%) | 91<br>(18.2%)  | 63<br>(12.6%) | 2.51 | 0.75 |
| 5   | Do urban pressures contribute to youth crime involvement in Nasarawa State?                   | 369<br>(73.7%) | 73<br>(14.6%)  | 59<br>(11.8%) | 2.59 | 0.72 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026

As presented in Table 2, structural economic hardships represent the primary drivers of youth criminality across Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga LGAs. Unaffordable living costs (76%) and Mean score of (2.63) and general urban pressures (73.7%), and Mean score of (2.59) closely follow lack of employment (81.6%), and Mean score of (2.73), which registered the highest level of respondent consensus. All mean scores exceeded the decision benchmark, indicating that respondents recognised these factors as contributors to youth crime involvement.

The qualitative accounts strongly reinforced these quantitative findings, with participants observing that prolonged joblessness and severe material precarity frequently leave young people with few viable alternatives to property crimes, drug distribution, and informal street enforcement as immediate survival strategies.

Key informants emphasized that immediate economic survival frequently overrides fear of legal penalties, with one youth leader noting that:

1. (IDI 1, Male, Youth Leader, 29 years, 2026).

"When daily needs become difficult to meet, some youths begin to accept offers from people who use them for theft, drug distribution or political violence"

Beyond economic survival, community leaders highlighted the role of domestic precarity, noting that:

2. *(IDI 2, Male, Traditional Leader, 61 years, 2026).*

"Inadequate parental monitoring can create space for peer groups to influence the behaviour of young people,"

With intervention often arriving only after legal arrest occurs Law enforcement perspectives further linked substance abuse with criminal recruitment, observing that:

3. *(IDI 3, Female, Police Inspector, 42 years, 2026).*

"Unemployed youths are recruited by drug dealers because they are available,"

Creating a compounding cycle of drug dependence and offense involvement. Peer pressure was described as a gradual, coercive process rather than an isolated event, as one youth noted that:

4. *(IDI 4, Male, Motorcycle Operator, 24 years, 2026).*

"Crime involvement develops through friendship, financial inducement, fear and group pressure,"

Making voluntary withdrawal difficult once initiated. Political manipulation was identified as a major structural entry point, with participants noting that:

5. *(IDI 5, Male, Community Development Officer, 38 years, 2026).*

"Political actors exploit unemployed youths for intimidation with unfulfilled promises of jobs, leaving them with ongoing criminal connections post-election"

Institutional frustration further accelerates youth criminality, with officers noting that:

6. *(IDI 6, Male, Police Sergeant, Akwanga Division, 39 years, 2026).*

"Repeated job rejection and lack of practical employable skills create anger toward society, making illicit opportunities appear more profitable than lawful work"

The qualitative accounts presented above strongly supported the quantitative findings, revealing that severe material precarity and structural joblessness leave young people highly vulnerable to criminal recruitment. Key informants emphasized that immediate economic survival frequently overrides the fear of legal sanctions, with one youth leader noting that "when daily needs become difficult to meet, some youths begin to accept offers from people who use them for theft, drug distribution or political violence" (IDI 1, Male, 29 years). Community leaders highlighted domestic precarity, observing that "inadequate parental monitoring creates space for peer groups to influence the behaviour of young people," with intervention often arriving only after an arrest occurs (IDI 2, Male, 61 years).

Law enforcement perspectives linked substance abuse directly with criminal networks, noting that "unemployed youths are recruited by drug dealers because they are available" (IDI 3, Female, 42 years). Peer pressure was characterized as a gradual, coercive process making voluntary withdrawal difficult once initiated (IDI 4, Male, and 24 years).

Furthermore, participants identified political manipulation during elections (IDI 5, Male, and 38 years) and institutional frustration stemming from employable skill mismatches (IDI 6, Male, and 39 years) as critical drivers pushing educated yet unemployed youths toward illicit survival strategies.

Table 3: Distributions of respondents' responses on impact of youth crime involvement on communities

| S/N | Question                                                                             | Yes            | No            | Not Sure      | Mean | Std  |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|------|------|
| 1   | Does youth crime involvement increase fear among community residents?                | 423<br>(84.4%) | 37<br>(7.4%)  | 41<br>(8.2%)  | 2.77 | 0.55 |
| 2   | Does youth crime involvement reduce business activities in communities?              | 387<br>(77.2%) | 61<br>(12.2%) | 53<br>(10.6%) | 2.65 | 0.67 |
| 3   | Does youth crime involvement reduce trust among community residents?                 | 353<br>(70.5%) | 89<br>(17.8%) | 59<br>(11.8%) | 2.53 | 0.74 |
| 4   | Does youth crime involvement increase pressure on community security?                | 401<br>(80%)   | 47<br>(9.4%)  | 53<br>(10.6%) | 2.70 | 0.62 |
| 5   | Does youth crime involvement negatively affect the wellbeing of community residents? | 375<br>(74.9%) | 71<br>(14.2%) | 55<br>(11.0%) | 2.61 | 0.70 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026

As shown in Table 3, youth criminality imposes severe socio-economic costs on host communities across Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga LGAs. Widespread fear and insecurity registered the highest agreement (84.4%), and Mean score of (2.77), followed by depressed local business activity (77.2%), and Mean score of (2.65) and overstretched community security resources (80%), and Mean score of (2.70). All mean scores exceeded the decision benchmark, showing that respondents recognised significant negative effects of youth crime involvement on communities.

Table 4: Distributions of respondents' responses on measures for reducing youth crime involvement

| S/N | Question                                                     | Yes            | No            | Not Sure      | Mean | Std  |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|------|------|
| 1   | Can employment opportunities reduce youth crime involvement? | 431<br>(86%)   | 31<br>(6.2%)  | 39<br>(7.8%)  | 2.79 | 0.53 |
| 2   | Can vocational training reduce youth crime involvement?      | 397<br>(79.2%) | 53<br>(10.6%) | 51<br>(10.2%) | 2.69 | 0.64 |

|   |                                                                      |                |                |               |      |      |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|------|------|
| 3 | Can improved parental supervision reduce youth crime involvement?    | 303<br>(60.5%) | 119<br>(23.8%) | 79<br>(15.8%) | 2.37 | 0.79 |
| 4 | Can community-based rehabilitation reduce youth crime involvement?   | 349<br>(69.7%) | 87<br>(17.4%)  | 65<br>(13.0%) | 2.53 | 0.74 |
| 5 | Can these measures reduce youth crime involvement in Nasarawa State? | 413<br>(82.4%) | 43<br>(8.6%)   | 45<br>(9.0%)  | 2.74 | 0.59 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026

As detailed in Table 4, structural economic interventions were identified as the most effective measures for mitigating youth criminality across Lafia, Keffi, and Akwanga. Direct job creation strategies recorded the highest consensus (86%), and Mean score of (2.76), followed closely by market-aligned vocational training (79.2%), and Mean score of (2.69) and family/community support systems (60.5%), and Mean score of (2.58). All mean scores exceeded the decision benchmark, indicating that respondents considered the proposed measures capable of reducing youth crime involvement in Nasarawa State.

The qualitative responses mirrored these trends, with community leaders and divisional police officer emphasizing that practical skill acquisition, enterprise grants, and multi-agency cooperation offer far more sustainable security outcomes than purely punitive enforcement.

Respondents emphasized that mitigation strategies must prioritize long-term economic autonomy over short-term relief, noting that:

7. (IDI 7, Male, Youth Chairman, 31 years, 2026).

"Youths need practical skills, access to tools, and enterprise mentorship so that survival no longer depends on criminal networks"

Technical education interventions require direct integration with market demand, as one trainer stressed that:

8. (IDI 8, Female, Skills Trainer, 40 years, 2026).

"Vocational schemes must connect trainees directly with equipment, local market demand, and post-training placement to prevent certificates from becoming redundant"

Community leaders advocated for dialogue-driven mentorship models, arguing that:

9. " (IDI 9, Male, Traditional Council Member, 58 years, 2026).

"Preventive guidance must replace purely punitive measures through open communication channels between elders, parents, and struggling youths"

Law enforcement officers indicated that effective policing relies on institutional trust, stating that:

10. (IDI 10, Male, Divisional Police Officer, 50 years, 2026).

"Arbitrary arrests based on poverty or neighbourhood profiling erode public cooperation, whereas fair, professional community policing enhances intelligence gathering"

Stakeholders called for a multi-sectoral security network, asserting that:

11. (IDI 11, Male, Community Officer, 48 years, 2026).

“Coordinated action between schools, health workers, religious institutions, and police ensures early identification of vulnerabilities without exposing youth to destructive public stigma”

The qualitative responses mirrored the survey trends by stressing that sustainable economic empowerment and institutional fairness yield far better security outcomes than purely punitive enforcement. Respondents emphasized that intervention schemes must prioritize long-term economic autonomy over temporary stipends, noting that “youths need practical skills, access to tools, and enterprise mentorship so that survival no longer depends on criminal networks” (IDI 7, Male, 31 years). Vocational educators stressed that technical training must connect directly with equipment, market demand, and post-training job placement to avoid redundant certifications (IDI 8, Female, 40 years). Traditional leaders advocated for dialogue-driven mentorship models, arguing that open communication between elders, parents, and struggling youths should replace harsh punitive approaches (IDI 9, Male, and 58 years). Law enforcement officers indicated that effective crime prevention relies on public trust, stating that “arbitrary arrests based on poverty or neighbourhood profiling erode public cooperation, whereas fair, professional community policing enhances intelligence gathering” (IDI 10, Male, and 50 years). Lastly, stakeholders called for a multi-sectoral security network combining schools, health workers, social workers, and police to ensure early identification of youth vulnerabilities without exposing individuals to public stigma (IDI 11, Male, and 48 years).

## VI. DATA ANALYSIS

### A. Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between urban pressure and youth involvement in crime in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Table: 5 Model Summary

| Model | R     | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | 0.487 | 0.237    | 0.228             | 0.641                      |

Table: 6 ANOVA

| Model      | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F     | Sig. |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|------|
| Regression | 62.84          | 6   | 10.47       | 25.51 | .000 |
| Residual   | 202.73         | 494 | 0.41        |       |      |
| Total      | 265.57         | 500 |             |       |      |

Table: 7 Coefficients

|            | B    | Std. Error | Beta | t    | Sig. |
|------------|------|------------|------|------|------|
| (Constant) | 1.12 | 0.18       | -    | 6.22 | .000 |

|                                                |      |      |      |      |      |
|------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Lack of employment encourage                   | 0.31 | 0.06 | 0.24 | 5.17 | .000 |
| High cost of living                            | 0.27 | 0.05 | 0.21 | 5.40 | .000 |
| peer pressure encourages                       | 0.09 | 0.04 | 0.08 | 2.25 | .025 |
| lack of parental supervision                   | 0.14 | 0.05 | 0.12 | 2.80 | .005 |
| limited access to education or skills training | 0.19 | 0.05 | 0.16 | 3.80 | .000 |
| General urban pressures                        | 0.22 | 0.05 | 0.18 | 4.40 | .000 |

Source: Researcher's computation, 2026

The regression model was statistically significant,  $F(6, 494) = 25.51$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that the predictors jointly explain variation in youth crime involvement. The R value of 0.487 shows a moderate relationship between the predictors and youth crime involvement, while the R Square value of 0.237 indicates that 23.7% of the variation was explained by lack of employment, high cost of living, peer pressure, parental supervision, limited education or skills training and urban pressures. All predictors were statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that urban pressures significantly influence crime involvement among youths in Nasarawa State.

#### B. Hypothesis Testing:

Youth involvement in crime has no significant effect on communities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Table: 8 Model Summary

| Model | R     | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | 0.521 | 0.271    | 0.263             | 0.598                      |

Table: 9 ANOVA

| Model      | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F     | Sig. |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|------|
| Regression | 66.19          | 6   | 11.03       | 30.81 | .000 |
| Residual   | 176.82         | 494 | 0.36        |       |      |
| Total      | 243.01         | 500 |             |       |      |

Table: 10 Coefficients

|                                                                      | B    | Std. Error | Beta | t    | Sig. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------------|------|------|------|
| (Constant)                                                           | 0.98 | 0.16       | -    | 6.13 | .000 |
| Crime involvement increase fear among community residents            | 0.29 | 0.05       | 0.23 | 5.80 | .000 |
| Crime involvement reduce business activities in communities          | 0.24 | 0.05       | 0.19 | 4.80 | .000 |
| Youth crime involvement reduce trust among community residents       | 0.17 | 0.04       | 0.14 | 4.25 | .000 |
| Youth crime involvement increase pressure on community security      | 0.26 | 0.05       | 0.21 | 5.20 | .000 |
| Youth crime involvement reduce participation in community activities | 0.11 | 0.04       | 0.09 | 2.75 | .006 |

|                                                                          |      |      |      |      |      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Crime involvement negatively affect the wellbeing of community residents | 0.21 | 0.05 | 0.17 | 4.20 | .000 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|

Source: Researcher's computation, 2026

Multiple regression analysis showed that youth involvement in crime significantly affected communities in Nasarawa State,  $F(6, 494) = 30.81$ ,  $p < .001$ . The model yielded  $R = .521$ ,  $R^2 = .271$  and adjusted  $R^2 = .263$ , indicating that 27.1% of the variance in community effects was explained. Crime involvement significantly increased residents' fear, reduced business activities, weakened trust, increased pressure on community security, reduced participation in community activities and negatively affected residents' wellbeing ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Youth involvement in crime has a significant effect on communities across the studied communities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

## VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Descriptive findings for the first objective identified unemployment as the most prominent factor, followed by high living costs, urban pressures, limited education or skills training, and peer pressure. The regression findings supported these results by showing that all five factors significantly contributed to youth crime involvement. Qualitative accounts further explained how unemployment, poverty, social comparison, substance use and political manipulation create opportunities for criminal recruitment. These findings agree with Honwana (2023), who associated youth criminality with waithood, and Case et al. (2021), who argued that blocked legitimate opportunities, may encourage innovative illegal responses.

The second objective findings showed that pressure on community security, reduced business activities and declining participation in community activities was the most recognised effect. The inferential findings agreed with these responses by confirming that youth crime involvement significantly affected all five community conditions. Qualitative participants explained that criminal activities restrict movement, discourage investment and increase the burden on security institutions. These findings agree with Sani and Peters (2025), who linked youth crime with fear and reduced community participation. They also support Bello and Okoro (2024), who reported declining business activity and increased security costs in affected communities.

The third objective findings showed strongest support for employment opportunities, followed by vocational training, community-based rehabilitation, improved parental supervision and the combined effectiveness of the proposed measures. Qualitative findings supported these responses by stressing sustainable employment, practical skills, family guidance, drug rehabilitation, fair policing, political accountability, youth participation, recreation and post-release support. The findings agree with Olowo and Chukwuma (2024), who linked vocational training with reduced attraction to illicit activities. They also support Gadzama (2025), who favoured community-based restorative approaches, and Musa and Adebayo (2024), who emphasised fair access to social investment programmes and support services.

Also, the findings support the major assumptions of Strain Theory. The theory argues that society promotes goals such as financial success and social recognition while denying some

youth's legitimate means of achieving them. The present findings confirm that unemployment, high living costs, limited skills and urban pressures can encourage young people to seek illegal alternatives. Qualitative accounts further support the theory's explanation of innovation, as some youths turn to theft, drug distribution, cybercrime and political violence when lawful opportunities appear unavailable. However, the findings also extend the theory by showing that peer pressure, family supervision, substance use, social exclusion and political manipulation influence crime involvement. Therefore, Strain Theory is supported, although youth criminality also involves social relationships and institutional conditions.

### **VIII. CONCLUSION**

The findings imply that youth crime in Nasarawa State should be understood as a social protection and community development issue rather than solely a policing problem. Persistent exclusion from legitimate economic opportunities may weaken young people's confidence in lawful advancement, making criminal alternatives appear acceptable or necessary. This places responsibility on government, families, schools, community institutions and security agencies to address the conditions that make offending attractive.

The community implications also show that crime can damage social trust, economic activity, collective participation and residents' wellbeing. Responses that focus only on arrest may therefore leave the conditions of vulnerability unchanged while deepening distrust between youths and authorities. Effective prevention should connect employment, skills development, mentoring, rehabilitation, family support, fair policing and accountable governance. Such an approach treats youths as contributors to community stability whose capabilities can be developed through practical opportunities, supportive relationships and legitimate participation. It also implies that prevention must be sustained rather than activated only after serious offences occur.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The Nasarawa State Government should expand youth employment through public works, apprenticeships, enterprise grants and transparent recruitment, prioritising communities with limited lawful opportunities so that young people can secure income, develop work experience and reduce dependence on criminal livelihoods.
- Local government authorities, traditional leaders, religious organisations and social workers should establish youth mentorship and family support structures that strengthen supervision, communication, counselling and early referral for youths exposed to peer pressure, substance use or social exclusion.
- The State Government should strengthen accountability in public institutions, prevent political exploitation of youths and establish coordinated monitoring involving communities, social workers, security agencies and civil society organisations to assess prevention programmes and sustain reductions in youth crime.

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