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# Socio-Demographic Determinants of Crime in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

*Crime in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, follows distinct socio-demographic patterns rather than occurring at random. This study uses a systematic review of secondary literature and thematic analysis to show how age, gender, marital status, occupation, education, income and residential area influence involvement in crime. Situating Bayelsa within global and national contexts, we highlight the role of economic pressures, institutional weaknesses and geographic marginalization in shaping violence, kidnapping and petty theft. Our findings show that individuals aged 15 to 34, particularly unmarried men with low educational attainment and limited income, living in informal urban settlements or along creeks, are disproportionately represented among offenders. Informal work in farming and artisanal trades often conceals deeper frustrations linked to scarce opportunities. Interpreted through a strain-theory lens, these results suggest that unmet cultural aspirations and restricted access to legitimate means drive criminal behavior. Effective crime reduction thus requires integrated policy responses: youth employment initiatives, slum-upgrading interventions, male-focused violence-prevention programs and flexible adult-education courses. Continuous data collection and community engagement are essential for monitoring impact and guiding long-term strategies. By connecting socio-demographic factors to structural exclusion, this study offers actionable insights for policymakers seeking to bend Bayelsa's crime curve downward.*

**Keywords:** Bayelsa State, Socio-demographic Determinants, Crime Patterns, Strain Theory, Youth Unemployment, Informal Settlements, Violence Prevention.

## Introduction

Crime manifests differently across contexts, reflecting the interplay of social, economic and geographic forces. In the Niger Delta's Bayelsa State, a region often celebrated for its rich waterways and cultural heritage, undercurrents of insecurity persist in everyday life. From opportunistic thefts in Yenagoa's informal settlements to creek-side kidnappings that disrupt fishing communities, local crime patterns echo broader national and global trends while bearing distinct local signatures. Understanding why certain individuals and neighbourhoods are more vulnerable to involvement in crime calls for an examination of the socio-demographic fabric that shapes opportunity, frustration and social control.

Globally, rising economic pressures, shifts in policing and the ripple effects of public-health crises have reconfigured both violent and non-violent crime (UNODC, 2022; INTERPOL, 2022). In Nigeria, these dynamics intersect with insurgency in the north, kidnapping networks that span state borders and urban violence in southern cities (The Cable, 2023; Premium Times, 2021; World Population Review, 2024). Yet Bayelsa has largely escaped large-scale insurgent conflict, even as it grapples with a subtler but deeply entrenched pattern of offences tied to poverty, youth unemployment and political contestation over oil revenues (Raimi, 2017; Armed Conflict Location & Event Data

Project [ACLED], 2021; Ifeanyichukwu & Amabienimigha, 2021). Its water-woven geography compounds the challenge: narrow waterways hinder patrols, while underfunded security agencies and low public trust limit effective policing.

Within this setting, certain socio-demographic groups emerge as disproportionately represented among offenders. Men aged between 15 and 34, often unmarried and lacking formal education or stable income, predominate in both property-related and interpersonal violence (Nwaopara & Nwaopara, 2024; Anumo et al., 2024). Those engaged in informal occupations—farming, artisanal trades or periodic labour—face heightened strain when cultural aspirations outpace access to legitimate means of advancement (Ifeanyichukwu & Amabienimigha, 2021). Viewed through the lens of strain theory, these patterns suggest that structural exclusion and the disconnection between goals and opportunities fuel criminal behaviour as an adaptive response to frustration.

This study offers a systematic review of existing literature to map how age, gender, marital status, occupation, education, income and residential area intersect to influence crime in Bayelsa State. By drawing connections between local findings and national trends, we aim to provide policymakers and community leaders with evidence-based insights. After outlining our theoretical framework and methodology, we present a detailed analysis of socio-demographic determinants, discuss practical implications and conclude with recommendations for integrated interventions that move beyond enforcement toward social inclusion. In doing so, we seek to chart a path for reducing crime by addressing the underlying strains that leave some residents more vulnerable than others.

### **Global Crime Trends**

Since 2020, global crime patterns have been shaped by a complex mix of public health crises, economic instability, political unrest, and technological advances (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022; INTERPOL, 2022). While violent crime—most reliably measured through homicide—has remained at consistently high levels, other forms of crime, including cybercrime and property offences, have shown divergent trends across regions (. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2022), the world witnessed an estimated 458,000 intentional homicides in 2021, equating to roughly 52 lives lost every hour. This figure marked a slight increase from the average annual total observed over the past two decades, which typically ranged between 400,000 and 450,000. The uptick is widely attributed to the indirect consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted policing, intensified economic pressures, and triggered resurgence in gang violence and political instability in several parts of the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022; INTERPOL, 2022).

Regional disparities remain stark. Africa bore the brunt of global homicides with approximately 176,000 deaths—representing 38 percent of the total (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). The Americas followed closely, accounting for around 154,000 or 34 percent (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). When adjusted for population size, the homicide rate in the Americas stood at around 15 per 100,000 people, compared to 13 in Africa. Europe and Asia, by contrast, recorded far lower homicide rates, typically between 2 and 3 per 100,000, indicating comparatively safer environments in those regions (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). These differences not only reflect variations in state capacity, law enforcement effectiveness, and socioeconomic inequality but also underscore how regional contexts shape patterns of violence.

Several factors contributed to the persistence and in some cases escalation of violent crime after 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic weakened social structures reduced the presence and responsiveness of law enforcement in many areas, and triggered sharp increases in unemployment—conditions that created fertile ground for organized crime and interpersonal violence. Political unrest also intensified in several countries, leading to an increase in conflict-related deaths (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022; INTERPOL, 2022). In particular, some African and Latin American nations saw an upsurge in lethal confrontations tied to territorial disputes, insurgencies, and power struggles (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022; INTERPOL, 2022). Gender-based violence also increased, with UN Women reporting that nearly 50,000 women were killed in 2021 by intimate partners or family members, revealing a distressing trend that has remained largely under-addressed (UN Women, 2022).

Non-lethal violent crimes such as assault, robbery, and sexual violence showed more mixed trends. In many high-income countries, these crimes declined temporarily during lockdown periods due to reduced mobility and increased home presence. However, they quickly rebounded as restrictions eased. In lower-income countries, limited data collection and reporting make it difficult to assess full trends, though anecdotal and localized reports suggest that such crimes either remained stable or increased, especially in urban centers where economic pressures remained high (Ekpenyong, Raimi, & Ekpenyong, 2012; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022; INTERPOL, 2022).

Property crimes, which include burglary, vehicle theft, and petty theft, also shifted during the pandemic. Initial lockdowns brought about temporary decreases, especially in urban environments (UNODC, 2022; INTERPOL, 2022). However, as economic conditions worsened and daily life returned to normal, these crimes began to rise again. High-income countries often saw a slower return to pre-pandemic property crime levels, likely due to increased investments in home security, urban surveillance, and policing. In contrast, property crime has rebounded more sharply in many parts of Latin America, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, where unemployment, inflation, and weak institutions continue to erode social safety nets (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022; INTERPOL, 2022). Perceptions of public safety mirror these patterns. Crowd sourced data from sources like Numbeo and the World Population Review consistently rank countries such as Venezuela and Papua New Guinea among those with the highest overall crime perception, while nations like Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Japan, and New Zealand are often cited as the safest (Numbeo, 2024; World Population Review, 2024).

Beyond physical crime, cybercrime has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges for law enforcement and governance worldwide. INTERPOL's 2022 global crime trend report emphasized the dramatic rise in ransom ware attacks, digital fraud, data breaches, and online child sexual exploitation. Financial crimes conducted through digital platforms, including money laundering and investment scams, have become more sophisticated, transnational, and difficult to trace. INTERPOL noted that a majority of its 195 member countries consider ransom ware and cyber-enabled fraud as top-tier threats (INTERPOL, 2022). The pandemic accelerated these trends as more individuals, businesses, and public services migrated online, often without adequate cyber security protections.

Criminal networks have adapted quickly to these new realities. The dark web, encrypted communications, and crypto currencies have provided them with tools to operate across borders with greater anonymity and efficiency. Online exploitation of minors has also become increasingly prevalent, facilitated by encrypted apps, live streaming technology, and weak digital protections in some countries (INTERPOL, 2022). Organized crime has similarly shifted strategies. Drug trafficking groups, for example, pivoted to maritime and drone-based transport methods as land borders tightened. Human smuggling networks exploited pandemic-related border chaos, while illicit trade in wildlife and counterfeit pharmaceuticals moved further into online marketplaces (UNODC, 2022; INTERPOL, 2022). These changes have blurred the lines between traditional and emerging crime types, challenging the ability of national and international bodies to track and respond effectively.

Governments have responded by ramping up cyber security initiatives, creating specialized units, and fostering international cooperation through platforms such as INTERPOL and UNODC. There is also a growing emphasis on predictive policing, using artificial intelligence and data analytics to identify potential crime hotspots and deploy resources more strategically. Yet, progress remains uneven. While some countries have embraced cutting-edge technologies and cross-border intelligence sharing, others continue to struggle with out-dated systems and limited institutional capacity.

The broader picture that emerges is one of complexity and transformation. While homicide and violent crime remain alarmingly high in certain regions, other forms of crime are increasingly shaped by digitalization, global connectivity, and evolving criminal enterprise models (UNODC, 2022; INTERPOL, 2022). As governments seek to adapt, there is a clear need for holistic approaches—combining law enforcement, technological innovation, and long-term social investment—to address both the root causes and the evolving manifestations of global crime.

## **Crime Trends in Nigeria**

Nigeria's security landscape reflects a complex interplay of insurgency-driven violence in the north, pervasive kidnapping across the country, and urban crime in the south. Since 2020, these overlapping threats have evolved in scope and severity, challenging both federal and state authorities.

In the North Western and central regions, loosely organized bandit groups—often driven by cattle rustling, land disputes, and illicit mining—have spread terror through rural communities. In 2022 alone, these non-state actors were responsible for approximately 4,545 killings and 4,616 abductions targeting both civilians and security personnel (The Cable, 2023). Bandit violence surged particularly in Kaduna, Zamfara, and Katsina states, where entire villages have been razed and thousands displaced. Their tactics have grown more brazen: night-time raids on farms, prolonged sieges of communities, and the use of improvised explosive devices against security convoys (TheCable, 2023).

Meanwhile, in the Lake Chad Basin and the North Eastern corner of the country, Boko Haram and its splinter faction, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), continue to pose a formidable threat. Although the intensity of large-scale attacks has declined since their peak in the mid-2010s, these groups still carry out suicide bombings, hit-and-run assaults on military outposts, and targeted killings of aid workers and journalists (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2021). The humanitarian toll remains staggering: hundreds of thousands have fled their homes, and food insecurity has spread in areas under de facto insurgent control.

Kidnapping has become so pervasive that it is often described as a “business model.” Official figures from the World Population Review estimated Nigeria's kidnapping rate at 0.5 per 100,000 people in 2023, placing it 125th out of 168 surveyed countries (World Population Review, 2024). Yet these statistics obscure a far more alarming reality. Nigeria's own Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey (CESPS, 2024) controversially suggested over 2.2 million kidnappings in a single year—an implausibly high figure but one that underscores how endemic ransom abductions have become. From schoolchildren in Kogi and Kaduna to high-profile executives on highways, no demographic is truly safe. Kidnappers often exploit porous road networks, bribery of security checkpoints, and local sympathies to move hostages across state lines.

Urban centers in the south and southwest—Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Onitsha—grapple with a different set of challenges. Armed robberies, cult-related gang clashes, and carjacking have spiked as economic pressures mount. Premium Times reported that violent-crime fatalities in major cities rose from 3,425 in 2019 to 5,446 in 2020, driven by an uptick in highway robberies and turf wars among criminal syndicates (Premium Times, 2021). Cult groups, long a scourge of tertiary campuses, have over the past few years extended their activities into illicit protection rackets and oil theft, particularly in Rivers and Delta states.

Beyond violence and abductions, petty crimes—pickpocketing, purse snatching, and opportunistic burglaries—remain a daily concern for many Nigerians. Overcrowded public transport and informal markets in cities like Kano and Ibadan offer fertile ground for small-time thieves. Surveys indicate that low public trust in the police (Iheriohanma, Oguchialu, & Raimi, 2020), combined with under-resourced and overstretched law-enforcement agencies, contribute to chronic under-reporting of such offences. Citizens often turn to community vigilante groups, which themselves can perpetuate cycles of violence and abuse (CESPS, 2024; Premium Times, 2021). Several underlying factors fuel Nigeria's crime trends. Rapid population growth and youth unemployment—especially among men under 30—create a pool of recruits for criminal networks. Weak governance, corruption within security agencies, and politicization of local policing further erode the rule of law. In agricultural zones, competition over grazing land and water amplifies communal tensions, leading to frequent clashes between herders and farmers that can escalate into broader banditry. Moreover, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons—from past insurgencies and porous borders—provides easy access to firepower for both militants and criminals (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2021; CESPS, 2024). In response, the federal government has pursued a multi-pronged strategy: deploying additional troops to hotspot regions, establishing “Operation Safe Corridor” for deradicalization in the northeast, and launching specialized anti-kidnapping units in states like Kaduna and Ekiti. Some states have also introduced community policing models, partnering local vigilantes with formal authorities to improve intelligence gathering

(Raimi & Ene, 2019). At the same time, investments in mobile network tracking and tactical drones aim to enhance surveillance over remote areas where kidnappers and bandits shelter (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2021; The Cable, 2023).

Yet these measures face significant hurdles. Military offensives can displace violence rather than eliminate it, pushing bandits into neighboring states or deeper into forested areas. Deradicalization programs struggle with stigma and insufficient follow-up support. Community policing initiatives risk being co-opted by partisan interests if not properly regulated. And without simultaneous investment in economic development—job creation, agricultural support, and infrastructure—the root drivers of crime remain unaddressed.

Looking forward, experts argue that a sustainable reduction in violence will depend on a balance of hard and soft approaches (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2021; UNODC, 2022). Strengthening judicial capacity to process and penalize offenders, cracking down on corruption within the police, and fostering inclusive dialogue among herder and farming communities are all deemed essential. Equally important is expanding educational and vocational opportunities for at-risk youth (Raimi & Bieh, 2009), to undercut the appeal of criminal careers. As Nigeria navigates this multifaceted security crisis, the interplay between state action, community resilience, and socioeconomic reform will determine whether crime trends can be bent downward in the coming years.

### **Crime Dynamics in Bayelsa State**

Bayelsa's relatively tranquil reputation belies a tapestry of persistent, if less headline-grabbing, security challenges. Nestled in the heart of the Niger Delta, the state escaped the worst of Nigeria's insurgencies, yet its coastal geography and economic marginalization have given rise to a distinct pattern of crime that affects daily life for many residents.

In 2020, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project documented twenty-five discrete security events in Bayelsa—ranging from small-scale skirmishes and demonstrations to armed attacks on civilians—which together claimed thirty-eight lives. That translates to roughly two fatalities per 100,000 people; a rate that may seem modest compared to neighbouring states but nonetheless imposes a persistent undercurrent of fear across the creeks and shantytowns of Yenagoa and beyond (ACLED, 2021). Incidents cluster in the state capital's informal settlements and along the creeks' narrow waterways, where policing is hampered by dilapidated roads, inadequate patrol boats, and low confidence in authority.

In Yenagoa's sprawling slums, opportunistic thefts, home invasions and snatch-and-run robberies are staples of the local crime scene. With youth unemployment hovering above the national average and few prospects for vocational training, many young men and women drift into petty criminality as a means of survival (Ogadi, Raimi, & Nwachukwu, 2012). Street corners that by day serve as informal markets and motor-park staging areas can turn dangerous after sunset, when thieves exploit poor lighting and the absence of a visible law-enforcement presence. Community surveys routinely cite these offences—often described simply as “area boys” extorting commuters or breaking into unguarded homes—as the most immediate threat to personal security (Ikposo, Brown, & Oscar, 2024). Beyond urban crime, Bayelsa's waterways host their own brand of modern piracy. Small-boat operators and riverside farmers report near-daily threats of kidnapping for ransom, particularly on the creeks that feed into the Niger River's southern branches (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2021). Fishermen returning from early-morning hauls or traders navigating the intricate network of mangrove channels risk interception by loosely organized gangs. These groups typically demand modest sums—from tens to a few hundred thousand naira—well within reach of local families but enough to devastate fragile livelihoods. Despite the state's creation of dedicated anti-kidnap squads in recent years, officers often lack reliable intelligence, fuel for their patrol launches or the legal backing to pursue suspects across interlocking waterways—problems frequently traced back to chronic underfunding and occasional collusion among security personnel (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2021).

Layered over these patterns of crime are occasional flare-ups of politically motivated violence. Local contests over oil revenue allocations and community leadership sometimes erupt into riots or targeted assaults, a reminder that Bayelsa's wealth of petroleum resources has long generated

more tension than shared prosperity (ACLED, 2021). Such flashpoints, while infrequent, underscore a broader sense of grievance: many Bayesians feel excluded from the state's oil-driven economy, even as pipelines snake through ancestral lands and tanker trucks rumble past their villages.

Government efforts to address these issues have taken multiple forms. The state government has partnered with the Nigerian Navy and the Joint Task Force to stage combined patrols, deploying speedboats and aerial drones to increase coverage of the creeks. In urban neighbourhoods, youth-engagement initiatives—ranging from sports tournaments to vocational-skills workshops—seek to provide alternatives to street life, though their scale is often limited by budget constraints. Bayelsa's police command has also launched a public-awareness campaign encouraging citizens to report crime via SMS hotlines and community-police liaison officers, aiming to break down the mutual suspicion that has long hindered cooperation (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2021). Yet sustainable progress remains elusive. Security operations, when effective, often displace criminal activity into adjacent riverine communities or drive offenders into neighbouring states. Economic remedies struggle to keep pace with the backlog of educated but unemployed graduates, while infrastructure repairs lag behind the repeated cycles of pipeline sabotage and oil spills that undermine local fisheries and farmlands (Raimi, 2023). In this context, many residents describe their safety not in terms of absolute security but by small margins—measuring the distance from home to the nearest guarded checkpoint, or the hours they dare to travel unaccompanied after dark.

Ultimately, Bayelsa's crime dynamics are bound up with its geography and history: a water-woven landscape where the promise of oil wealth collides with decades of underinvestment, creating pockets of vulnerability that illicit actors readily exploit. Addressing these challenges, therefore, demands more than patrols and crackdowns. It calls for a sustained commitment to economic inclusion, reliable infrastructure, and accountable governance—efforts capable of transforming the creeks from zones of fear into corridors of opportunity.

### **Demographic Factors Influencing Crime**

Demographic elements have been analyzed since the 1700s (South & Messner, 2000). Research consistently highlights that demographic factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity play crucial roles in understanding fluctuations in crime rates across different times and locations (Li, Joutsijoki, Laurikkala & Juhola, 2015; Iwarimie-Jaja & Raimi, 2019). While there are relatively few studies that focus on the socio-demographic factors driving crime, there exists a substantial amount of theoretical and empirical literature regarding crime determinants in both developed and developing nations. Beginning with Becker's pioneering work (1968), who views the decision to commit a crime as influenced by the associated costs and benefits of committing one versus not. In contrast, Ehrlich (1973) expands upon Becker's research by integrating aspects such as income levels, income distribution, and unemployment into the analysis of their effects on criminal behavior and crime rates. This study indicates that the unemployment rate is a less significant factor in influencing crime rates compared to the other elements. Teles (2004), on the other hand, established a theoretical connection between inflation and crime. He emphasized that monetary and fiscal policies affect crime. Specifically, he noted that while monetary policy affects crime through inflation, fiscal policy does so through government expenditure.

On his part, Blackmore (2003) explored the factors contributing to crime in South Africa across its nine provinces over an eight-year timeframe. The findings indicate that factors such as per capita income, drug use, population, and unemployment influence crime levels in those provinces. Similarly, research by Raphael and Ebmer (2001) and Edmark (2005) tends to suggest that rising unemployment rates increase the likelihood of individuals engaging in criminal activities. In a related study, Gillani, Rehman, and Gill (2009) examined the interplay between crime and economic indicators such as unemployment, poverty, and inflation in Pakistan from 1975 to 2007. Their results indicate that unemployment, poverty, and inflation positively correlate with crime levels in Pakistan.

Furthermore, Halicioglu (2012, cited in Igbiniedion & Ebomoyi, 2017) studied crime causes in Turkey from 1965 to 2009 using a cointegration framework. The findings suggest that income is the primary factor influencing both violent and non-violent crime rates, while unemployment and divorce were also considered significant factors. Moreover, Khan, Ahmed, Nawaz, and Zaman (2015) analyzed the influence of socio-economic factors on crime rates in Pakistan from 1972 to 2011. Their

study uncovered a positive association between crime rates and factors like unemployment, poverty, and income, while a higher educational level was found to have an inverse relationship with crime. In another examination, Lobont, Nicolescu, Moldovan, and Kuloglu (2017) investigated the connection between crime and socio-economic factors in Romania from 1990 to 2014. Their results indicated that income inequality and urban density are significant determinants of crime in that nation.

Within Nigeria, there are only a few studies that have explored the socio-demographic factors influencing crime. For example, Aminu, Manu, El-Maude, and Kabiru (2013) studied the correlation between crime rates, unemployment levels, poverty, corruption, and inflation in Nigeria from 1980 to 2009. The results indicated that unemployment, poverty, and corruption had a negative relationship with crime, while the inflation rate had a positive effect on crime rates. Additionally, Igbiniedion and Ebomoyi (2017) analyzed the socioeconomic and demographic factors affecting crime in Nigeria, employing an error-correction modeling approach for the years 1981 to 2015. Their findings demonstrated that the twin macroeconomic issues of inflation and unemployment had a positive impact on crime rates in Nigeria. They also found that education significantly correlated negatively with crime rates, indicating that higher education decreases the likelihood of criminal behavior by making individuals more risk-averse, as well as influencing their choices against engaging in crime. Furthermore, the lagged value of average income showed a significant negative relationship with crime rates, suggesting that substantial increases in per capita income reduce the motivation to commit crimes.

In a separate study, Kilishi, Mobolaji, Usman, Yakubu, and Yaru (2014) investigated the link between unemployment and crime in Nigeria for the period of 1996 to 2005. Their findings revealed that both employment opportunities and the swift trial and punishment of offenders were key factors influencing crime rates during that timeframe. Omotor (2009) conducted research on the demographic and socioeconomic factors related to crime, utilizing a pooled dataset from various Nigerian states between 2002 and 2005. The outcomes indicated that per capita income, population density, and the previous crime rate were significant factors affecting crime rates in those regions. Also, Ifeanyichukwu and Amabienimigha (2021) examined how unemployment influenced the crime rate in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study identified unemployment, poverty, government negligence, a growing population, and corruption as the main contributors to crime in Bayelsa State. In addition, Nwaopara, U., & Nwaopara, B. (2024) investigated incidents of sexual and gender-based violence in Yenagoa through a gender desk review of documented cases, revealing that most perpetrators were males aged between 25 and 34, primarily artisans.

The aforementioned studies on Nigeria have shortcomings. For instance, Kilishi et al. (2014) and Omotor (2009) focused solely on the relationship between crime and variables like unemployment and per capita income, disregarding other important socio-demographic factors. This oversight limits the policy implications for decision-makers since there is a range of socio-demographic factors that addition contributes to crime. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining factors such as gender, age, education, income level, occupation, and residential area in relation to crime rates in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework: Strain Theory**

This study is based on Strain Theory. The theory emerged as Robert Merton (1957) build up on Durkheim's concept of Anomie, suggesting that even in stable social environments, social structural pressures may still result in criminal behavior (Cote, 2002). Merton emphasizes that each society has specific cultural and material objectives that individuals pursue, such as personal worth, wealth, prestige, and social standing (1957). However, not everyone has access to the appropriate institutional structures or legal avenues needed to attain these goals. As a result, Merton formulated strain theory, which posits that the pressure to achieve material success may take precedence over adherence to rules, prompting individuals to resort to any means, including unlawful actions, to meet those objectives amidst social strain (Choi, 2015).

Strain theory offers a lens through which to understand the socio-demographic factors influencing crime in Bayelsa State. According to this theory, crime arises from the disconnection between cultural ambitions and the resources available to realize them, leading to feelings of strain

and frustration. In Bayelsa State, this strain is evident across various socio-demographic elements such as age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, income, and living conditions.

The youthful demographic in Bayelsa State faces strain due to scarce opportunities for education, jobs, and upward mobility, resulting in frustration and a higher propensity for criminal acts. Likewise, traditional expectations regarding masculinity and family obligations generate strain for males, while females endure strain as a result of societal marginalization and restricted access to education and economic prospects. Additionally, poverty, economic disparity, and insufficient access to essential resources exacerbate strain and elevate the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities.

### Methodology

This study employed a desk research design, utilizing secondary data from existing literature. The secondary data comprised quantitative and qualitative research works relevant to this area of study from journal publications, textbooks, internet resources, and relevant information from published articles. A systematic review of existing literature was conducted to identify relevant studies. The data gathered from these sources were subjected to thematic analysis. Studies that covered one or more of the socio-demographic factors (focusing on age, sex, marital status, occupation, educational level, income level, and residential area) were sourced, extracted, and compared to identify convergence.

| S/No | Socio-demographic factor | Characteristic with higher propensity to crime | Remark                                       | Evidence  |
|------|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| 1    | Age                      | 15–34  | Crime tendency declines after age 34         | - 31% of SGBV perpetrators were aged 25–34 (n=106) ( <a href="#">ASP Journals</a> )- 80% of burglars in Otuoke were aged 18–25  |
| 2    | Sex                      | Male   | Vast majority of offenders are male          | - 100% of SGBV perpetrators were male ( <a href="#">ASP Journals</a> )  |
| 3    | Marital Status           | Single   | Singles outnumber married/divorced offenders | - 55.7% of SGBV perpetrators were single ( <a href="#">ASP Journals</a> )   |
| 4    | Occupation               | Farmers / artisans / unemployed                | These groups commit more crimes              | - 30% of SGBV perpetrators were artisans ( <a href="#">ASP Journals</a> )- 75% of burglars cited unemployment as primary motive   |
| 5    | Educational Level        | No or low level                                | Higher education correlates with lower crime | - 60% of burglary respondents had no formal education or vocational training  |
| 6    | Income Level             | No or low level                                | Higher income correlates with less crime     | - Urban-poverty study found that rising crime in Yenagoa slums was driven by poor economic conditions among low-income residents ( <a href="#">Medwin Publishers</a> )  |
| 7    | Residential Area         | Slums  | Slum areas record more crime than upscale    | - SGBV incidence was higher in urban (including slum) areas than rural ones ( <a href="#">ASP Journals</a> )- Slum-poverty analysis links high crime rates to poor tenure security and poverty in Yenagoa slums ( <a href="#">Medwin Publishers</a> ) |



## Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate a clear pattern of socio-demographic influences on criminal behavior in Bayelsa and surrounding areas, particularly among young men living in impoverished urban areas. Age remains a strong predictor of criminal propensity, with the highest concentration of offending behavior occurring among individuals aged 15 to 34. According to Nwaopara and Nwaopara (2024), 31% of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) perpetrators fell within the 25–34 age brackets, while Anumo et al. (2024) found that 80% of individuals arrested for burglary in Otuoke were aged 18–25. These findings are consistent with life-course criminological theory, which suggests that criminal behavior tends to decline as individuals age and assume more stable social roles. However, the persistent involvement of youth in criminal activity also reflects systemic structural problems, including chronic underemployment and lack of meaningful social and economic integration.

Sex was another dominant factor in the data. Every SGBV suspect in the police case files reviewed by Nwaopara and Nwaopara (2024) was male, confirming not only a deeply entrenched gender pattern in violent crime but also a gap in research on the role of women—both as offenders and as agents of resistance or mitigation. The near-exclusive focus on male perpetrators risks reinforcing binary assumptions and missing opportunities to involve men proactively in prevention strategies, such as gender education and bystander intervention programs.

Marital status appeared to correlate strongly with criminal involvement, with single men representing the majority of perpetrators. Specifically, 55.7% of SGBV suspects were unmarried (Nwaopara & Nwaopara, 2024). While marriage can serve as a form of informal social control by increasing responsibility and attachment to conventional norms, the relationship between marriage and crime is likely bidirectional. Socioeconomically disadvantaged men are not only more likely to engage in crime but also less likely to marry, pointing to the influence of broader social and economic constraints rather than merely individual choices.

Employment status and occupation further reinforced these patterns. Anumo et al. (2024) as well as Anumo, Anumo, Naomi, Eze, and Lasisi (2024) found that 75% of burglars cited unemployment as their main motivation, while 30% of SGBV suspects were identified as artisans, a group often employed in precarious or low-paying jobs. These findings complicate the simplistic narrative that crime is driven by complete idleness; rather, it may emerge from economic frustration and the instability of informal work arrangements. Ignoring the realities of the informal economy—where many young men cycle through periods of short-term or underpaid work—can lead to poorly targeted crime prevention efforts.

Low educational attainment and poverty (levels also play a significant role. Sixty per cent of burglary respondents had no formal education or vocational training (Anumo et al., 2024), highlighting the educational gap among offenders. However, lack of education alone does not cause crime. In slum neighborhoods of Yenagoa, Ikposo, Brown, and Oscar (2024) argue that high crime rates are linked not only to low levels of schooling but to broader forms of deprivation, including insecure housing, poor sanitation, and economic marginalization. The implication here is that even where education is available, if it does not translate into stable employment or meaningful upward mobility, its crime-reducing impact is limited.

Finally, the spatial dimension of crime is evident in the data. SGBV incidents were significantly more prevalent in urban areas, particularly slum communities, than in rural settings (Nwaopara & Nwaopara, 2024). This is consistent with the findings of Ikposo et al. (2024), who observed that urban slums in Yenagoa exhibit higher crime rates due to insecure land tenure, overcrowding, and weak social cohesion. While such findings can reinforce negative stereotypes of slum areas as inherently criminogenic, they also highlight the need to address spatial inequality and poor urban governance rather than simply increasing policing.

## Conclusion

Crime in Bayelsa is not randomly distributed. It is structured along predictable socio-demographic lines—especially age, gender, marital status, occupation, education, income, and residential location. These factors intersect most acutely among young, unmarried, low-income men living in slum communities and engaged in insecure or informal work. While some of these patterns affirm traditional criminological insights, such as the age-crime curve and the influence of social

bonds, the evidence underscores that individual behavior cannot be separated from its socio-economic and spatial context. Crime here is less a matter of personal deviance than of structural exclusion. Poverty, marginalization, and weak institutional support do not merely accompany crime—they help generate and sustain it.

### Recommendations

Tackling crime in this context requires more than punitive enforcement. First, youth-targeted employment schemes are essential. Programs that provide subsidized apprenticeships, vocational training, and micro-grants for business start-ups—particularly for those aged 18–30—should be prioritized in high-crime areas like Otuoke and Yenagoa. Anumo et al. (2024) have shown that economic desperation is a key driver of property crime, so pairing financial support with mentorship could reduce both risk and recidivism.

Second, urban upgrading projects should be implemented in slum neighborhoods. Improving basic infrastructure—such as lighting, road access, sanitation, and tenure security—can help deter crime by both reducing opportunities and strengthening community oversight. The work of Ikposo et al. (2024) confirms that crime in Yenagoa’s slums is closely tied to the poor physical and legal conditions of those spaces. Any upgrade should involve community members in design and monitoring to ensure local relevance and ownership.

Third, male-focused prevention efforts are vital. With SGBV entirely perpetrated by men in the sample studied by Nwaopara and Nwaopara (2024), there is an urgent need to engage men in challenging harmful gender norms. Peer education programs, counselling, and economic empowerment can help shift the norms that drive violence.

Social policy should also address the relational consequences of economic hardship. Marriage and stable relationships are protective factors, but many low-income men are excluded from these pathways. Relationship education and conflict-resolution training within community centers could help restore some of the stabilizing effects of family life.

Additionally, flexible adult education programs, particularly in slum areas, should be expanded. Evening or weekend literacy and technical skills courses that accommodate artisans and informal workers may improve both employability and civic awareness. Finally, on-going research and monitoring are essential. Future studies must move beyond one-off surveys and disaggregate variables such as gender, policing intensity, and the longitudinal impact of slum-upgrading initiatives.

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