



## Effectiveness of Community-Based Initiatives for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Mangu LGA, Plateau State – Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper examines the effectiveness of community-based initiatives for preventing and countering violent extremism in Mangu LGA, Plateau state – Nigeria. The paper noted that Mangu Local Government Area (LGA) has been relatively peaceful over the last two decades compared to other LGAs in Plateau State. However, Mangu LGA recently experienced serious violent conflicts following the 2023 elections. Data for this paper were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire were designed in both closed and open-ended questions which utilized a 5-point Likert scale to capture responses. Simple descriptive statistics presented in figures and percentages were used to analyse the quantitative data collected in the study. The findings shows that a significant majority of respondents were aware of the National Policy Framework and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE). This high level of awareness was attributed to various channels of information dissemination, including social media platforms, radio and television programs, as well as community meeting. The community-based initiatives encompass a wide range of groups and activities, such as the Hunters Association, Vigilante groups (locally known as Yan Banga in Hausa), traditional institutions, Operation Rainbow, religious leaders, the Red Cross Society, Neighborhood Watch, Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF), and these initiatives were very effective. The paper recommended that there is need to encourage coalitions among local leaders, traditional institutions, and community organizations to foster collaboration and effective decision-making. Also, leadership training programs to equip community leaders with the skills needed to manage conflicts and promote peace-building efforts is necessary.

**Keywords:** Violent Extremism, Community-Based Initiatives, Mangu LGA, Effectiveness, Prevention

## Introduction

Mangu Local Government Area (LGA) has been relatively peaceful over the last two decades compared to other LGAs in Plateau State. This is corroborated by the research of Hiemstra (2018), Cinjel and Kefas (2024). Mangu LGA served as a safe haven during the Plateau crises, providing refuge for many affected by recurrent conflicts in neighboring LGAs such as Barkin Ladi, Jos South, and Riyom. These LGAs frequently experience clashes between the Berom and the Fulani communities.

According to the USAID, OTI NERI, and PPBA (2021) Conflict Rapid Assessment Report, the conflict between the Berom of Barkin Ladi LGA and the Fulani has extended into

Pyem and Kadunung communities along Mangu LGA's eastern borders. Additionally, disputes over herders' cattle encroaching into farmlands have led to minor, yet potentially escalating, skirmishes between the Fulani and Mwaghavul in other parts of Mangu LGA. However, Mangu LGA has recently experienced serious violent conflicts following the 2023 elections.

Rural areas have increasingly become hotspots for militancy and violent extremism, driven by significant disruptions in the rural socio-economic structure. Nomadic pastoralists and farmers are among the most affected, as they have seen their traditional ways of life deteriorate due to the poor governance of rural spaces. In contexts marked by fragile state authority and the rise of violent extremist movements, the failure or reluctance of governments to address these challenges has eroded trust in leadership, strained relationships between nomadic herders and farming communities, and escalated the risks of violence (Anouar & Carl, 2023).

Yvon et al. (2022) highlight growing recognition that state-centric approaches to building resilience against organized crime must be supplemented by community-based, context-specific responses aimed at combating organized crime and violence at the local level. Local communities are crucial actors in addressing the destabilizing impacts of organized crime, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Hiemstra (2018) stated that Mangu LGA is situated in a volatile environment due to widespread distrust. However, much of this distrust is not immediately apparent but is deeply rooted as latent distrust, which does not automatically lead to action. Hiemstra further differentiates between an active and a latent security dilemma. The active security dilemma arises when people perceive a situation as requiring immediate action, while the latent security dilemma reflects future concerns that are not translated into immediate action.

The two major cleavages being discussed in Mangu LGA are religion and ethnicity. This is exemplified by the history of relations between the Fulani herders and the Mwaghavul ethnic group. According to Cinjel and Kefas (2024), the conflict between the Fulani herders and the Mwaghavul lacks a precise origin; it stems from multiple factors at different times. In the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, minor disputes between the two groups primarily arose when the herders' animals damaged the crops of Mwaghavul arable farmers, often due to negligence or carelessness. At the time, these disputes were infrequent and effectively resolved by traditional institutions and the police force. They were not regarded as issues that could escalate into major conflicts.

Aside from incidents of armed robbery, kidnapping became more prevalent between 2019 and 2023. It frequently occurred in places such as Kantoma, Mangul, Mairana, Bungha-Dawo, Daika, Sabon Gari, Gindiri, and other areas. On Tuesday, 23rd January 2024, approximately 30 people were killed in Kwahaslalek over a span of two days during clashes between farmers and herders. Around 1,500 people sought refuge in an established camp (Aktas, 2024). In Satguru and Tyop villages in Mangu LGA, along Gindiri Road, gunmen launched an attack on the communities between 7:00 and 7:30 am, leaving 30 people dead. During an attempt to dislodge the assailants, four soldiers sustained injuries (IPCR, 2024).

From the foregoing, this study was conducted to assess citizens' awareness of the National Policy Framework and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria, as well as the effectiveness of community-based initiatives in addressing violent extremism. This is particularly relevant as some communities are grappling with farmer-herder conflicts, others with criminality, and yet others facing lower but notable security threats. It is understood, however, that community-based approaches vary from one community to another. Nevertheless, when properly implemented, they can play a crucial and impactful role in preventing and countering violent extremism especially in Mangu LGA.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Violent Extremism**

The UN Secretary-General describes violent extremism as a diverse phenomenon without a clear definition, which is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality, or belief system (Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/674). Therefore, the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism recognizes the concept as encompassing a broader range of manifestations. However, there is also a risk that conflating the terms "violent extremism" and "terrorism" may justify an overly broad application of counter-terrorism measures.

According to UNDP (2021), while its definition is context-specific and remains the prerogative of UN Member States, violent extremism is commonly understood to refer to individuals and groups advocating for, engaging in, preparing for, or otherwise supporting violence motivated or justified by ideology to further social, economic, and political objectives. Similarly, the Federal Republic of Nigeria Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (2017) defines violent extremism as the beliefs and actions of individuals or groups who support, promote, or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve socioeconomic, political, ethnic, and religious objectives.

The Institute for Autonomy and Governance (2023) views violent extremism as a belief system that drives individuals or groups to commit violent acts. This belief system develops in the context of repression, poverty, and other push or pull factors, such as money, power sought by recruits, and charismatic violent extremist leaders. Furthermore, the Institute defines violent extremism as the willingness to use or support violence to advance a particular political, ideological, or social agenda.

Ruggero and Giorgio (2025) sees violent extremism as individuals, associations or religious movements that use, incite, threaten with, legitimize or support violence and hatred to further their religious, social or political goals, motivated by exclusionary religious beliefs, and based on the rejection of out-group faiths and freedom of worship principles, and centred on intolerance towards all views other than the in-group.

Beji and John (2023) provides four (4) different manifestations of violent extremism: (1) violent extremism is marked by a considerable departure from the usual or traditional; (2) it involves tending or disposed to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions; (3) of, relating to, or constituting a political group associated with views, practices, and policies of extreme change; and (4) advocating extreme measures to retain or restore an apolitical state of affairs (the radical right).

Countries severely affected by armed conflicts often experience fragile security situations, poor governance, organized crime, social and economic inequalities, and political instability—conditions that enable violent extremist groups to mobilize. When extremism results from intractable conflicts within communities, violent and dispersed non-state armed groups proliferate, frequently relying on weapons and armed fighters. Additionally, these violent extremist groups infiltrate political parties and establish more terrorist organizations (Institute for Autonomy and Governance, 2023).

### **Community-Based Approaches in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism**

The community serves as the central stage for the manifestation of security or insecurity. As such, the community—where people live and organize every aspect of their existence—should be integral to any processes aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (Ajayeoba, n.d.). This study categorized community-based approaches into three major components: local governance and leadership, local security governance, and communication. These components shape the level of collective efficacy and the capacity and willingness of a community to proactively respond to violent extremism, as opposed to relying solely on state-centric response frameworks. Community capacity is crucial for building resilience against

violent extremism (Yvon et al., 2022). These components encapsulate and explain community-based approaches, focusing on collective efficacy and the ability to address violent extremism effectively.

Firstly, local governance and leadership encompass community leadership and individual agency, which serve as crucial factors and pathways out of fragility. Coalitions formed among local leaders, through local governance structures, reduce the vulnerability of individuals in contexts characterized by high-crime governance, thereby strengthening local governance over time. Supporting local governance through incremental interventions that foster relationships and coalitions among local leaders is essential (Yvon et al., 2022). Additionally, ACCORD (2023) emphasized that community leadership and empowerment are critical components of successful community mobilization efforts. Community-led initiatives are often more sustainable and effective in addressing local challenges because they leverage the unique strengths, resources, and experiences of the community.

Secondly, is the security governance which play constructive roles in local communities that are weak and fragile through civilian self-defense groups. These groups are vigilante groups that include ordinary citizens, hunter's association, and state formed security outfits like the Operation Rainbow in Plateau state that plays important roles in areas where violence has escalated and state is unable to provide protection. These are the common manifestations of perceived community resilience. According to ACCORD (2023) vigilante groups consist of individuals protecting their community, often outside the formal justice and policing system. Vigilante groups may be formed in response to a perceived lack of action or effectiveness by the police or other authorities in addressing a particular problem, such as crime or disorder.

Thirdly, is communication, information and the media identified as community resilience models as a key element of community capacity. Here, they include the traditional town criers, community radio that broadcast vital information, news, and alerts to rural communities, promoting awareness and collective action against violent extremists. Others are social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, X, Instagram, and so on can be used to facilitate peaceful social dialogue and build trust and resilience between and among communities as well as to share intelligence, coordinate efforts, and receive updates on extremists' activities, therefore, fostering a sense of community and collective responsibility (Yvon, et al, 2022).

These categorization of the community-based approaches as stated above, and for it to be able to function effectively as unit of organizing human society and civilization, every community must have the requisite agency and appropriate autonomy to organize its own self administration, and local governance for the purpose of meeting the needs and aspirations of its

own residents, and provisioning their basic needs through the delivery of accessible and affordable basic social services. That is, services that are required for individuals to function effectively within a collective responsibility. For communities to be able to play a decisive role in preventing and countering violent extremism, community institutions must be such that they are geared towards identifying and responding to grievances, rumor management, building tolerance, capacity building, referral mechanism, promoting peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts, and engendering peaceful coexistence among residents of the community (Ajayeoba, nd).

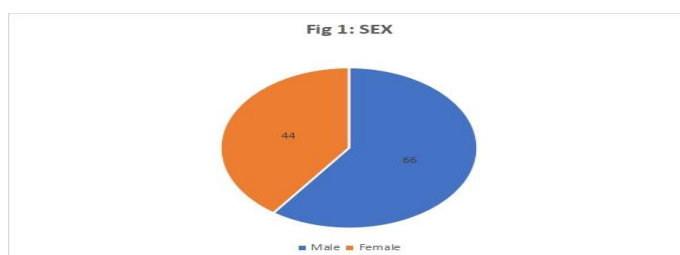
## Methodology

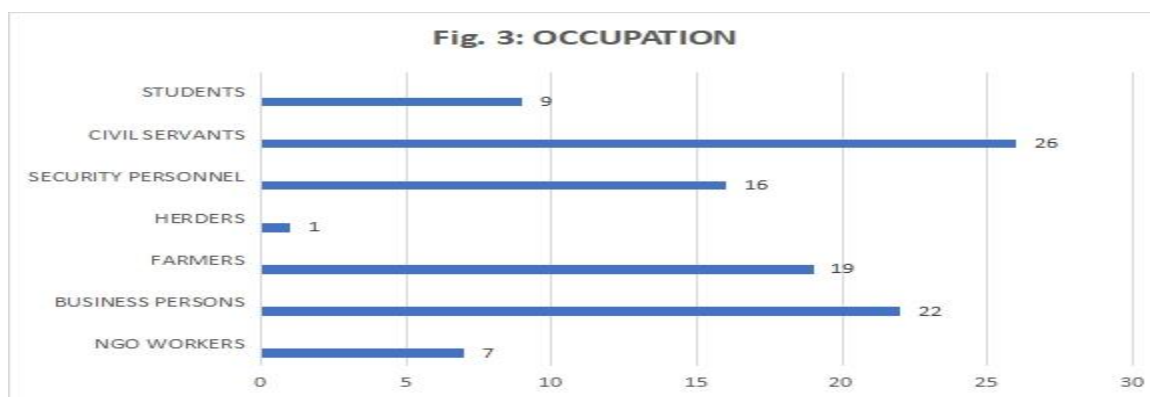
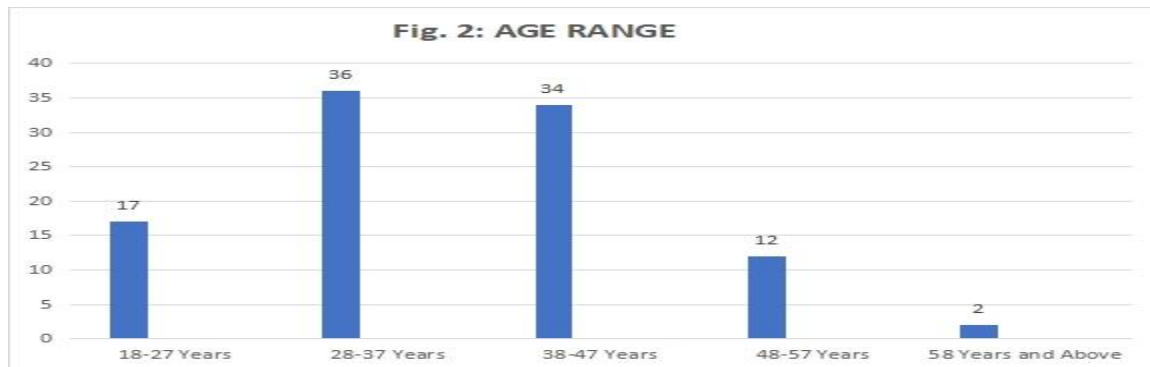
This study employed a survey research design, which facilitated the collection of data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire, designed to include both closed and open-ended questions, utilized a 5-point Likert scale to capture responses systematically while minimizing interference in the data collection process. Secondary data were gathered from a variety of sources, including journals, books, articles, newspapers, and official reports. By incorporating diverse perspectives and multiple sources, the study ensured a rich and comprehensive dataset. To validate the reliability and cohesion of the data collected, triangulation was applied. This process enabled the alignment of varied perspectives, contributing to a more holistic understanding of community capacity to prevent and counter violent extremism in Mangu LGA.

The population size of the study area was estimated to be 442,100 individuals. Using the Krejcie and Morgan table as a reference, the study determined a sample size of 205 respondents. To effectively reach this sample, purposive sampling was employed, allowing the researcher to focus on specific individuals who could provide relevant and insightful information for the study.

## Findings

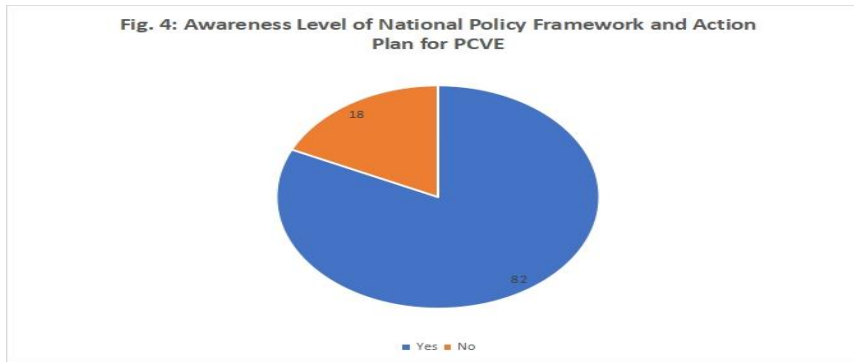
### Demographics of Survey Participants





Figures 1, 2, and 3 above illustrate the distribution of the participants by sex, age range, and occupation. Male respondents make up the majority, accounting for 56% of the total, while female respondents constitute 44%. The age range distribution highlights a diverse group, with 17% of participants aged 18–27 years, 36% aged 28–37 years, 34% aged 38–47 years, 12% aged 48–57 years, and only 2% aged 58 years and above. These figures reveal that the majority of respondents fall within the active and youthful age group of 28–47 years.

In terms of occupation, the participants represent various professional and economic backgrounds. Students account for 9% of respondents, while civil servants represent the largest occupational group at 26%. Security personnel make up 16%, herders constitute just 1%, farmers account for 19%, business persons form 22%, and NGO workers contribute 7% to the total representation. This occupational breakdown provides insights into the diversity of participants and their roles within the community.



As observed in Figure 4, a significant majority of respondents, accounting for 82%, reported being aware of the National Policy Framework and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE). This high level of awareness can be attributed to various channels of information dissemination, including social media platforms, radio and television programs, as well as community meetings (see Figure 5 for further details). Respondents emphasized that government agencies such as the Plateau State Peace Building Agency, along with the programs and engagements of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) within their communities, played a crucial role in raising their awareness of the PCVE. This was particularly necessitated by the violent conflicts that had occurred in Mangu LGA, which underscored the importance of such awareness initiatives.

The widespread awareness among respondents aligns with the third objective of the Policy Framework and National Action Plan for PCVE, which seeks to enhance the capacity of communities and individuals to prevent and counter violent extremism while facilitating recovery from violent incidents. By empowering communities through awareness campaigns and capacity-building efforts, the framework aims to foster resilience and proactive responses to the challenges posed by violent extremism (PFNAP, 2017).



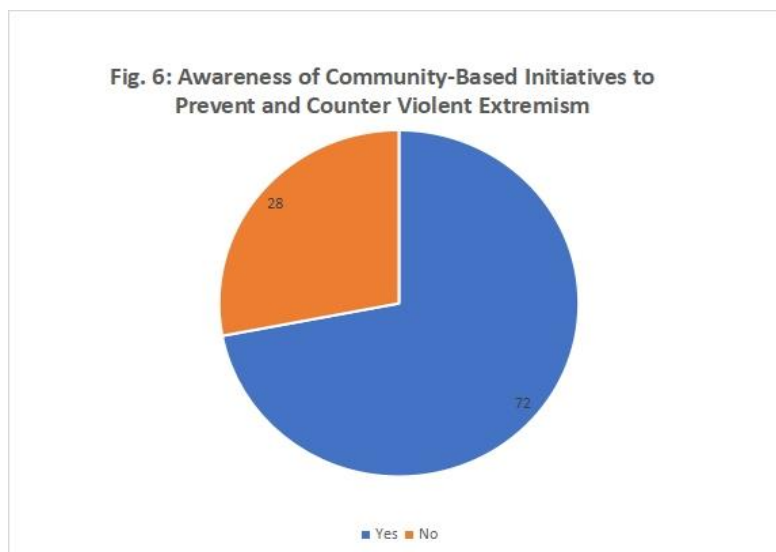
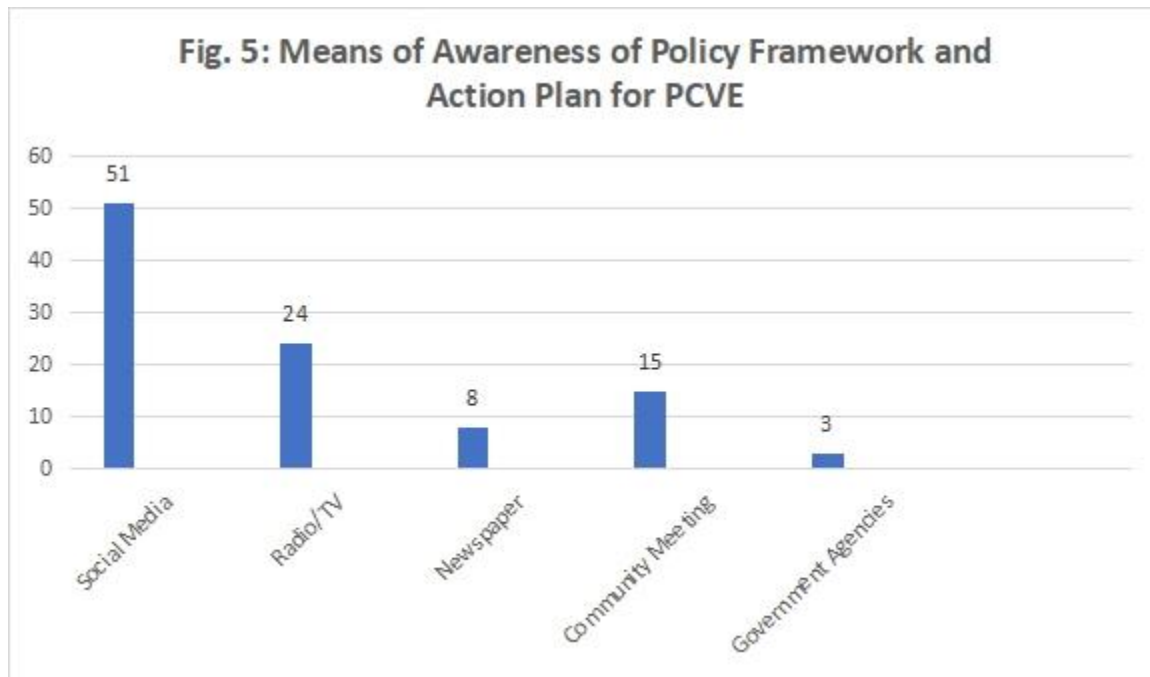


Figure 6 above indicates that 72% of respondents reported being aware of various community-based initiatives aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism within their communities. These initiatives encompass a wide range of groups and activities, such as the Hunters Association, Vigilante groups (locally known as Yan Banga in Hausa), Traditional Institutions, Operation Rainbow, Religious Leaders, the Red Cross Society, Neighborhood Watch, Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF), community engagement initiatives, Peace Corps efforts,

and activities organized by individuals, including football competitions, inter-school competitions, and cultural displays. Additionally, community-based organizations, including the Mwaghavul Development Association, Mangun Community Development Association, Kerang Community Development Association, and women's groups, play significant roles in these initiatives.

The vigilante groups, in particular, are highly regarded in Mangu LGA, as noted by Hiemstra (2018). Their reputation stems from the clear leadership provided by district heads, which ensures their effectiveness and reliability. In urbanized areas like Mangu town and Gindiri, vigilante groups are actively engaged, while in rural areas, their establishment is often overseen and supported by local chiefs. This structured leadership has contributed to their positive perception and operational success in fostering security within their communities.

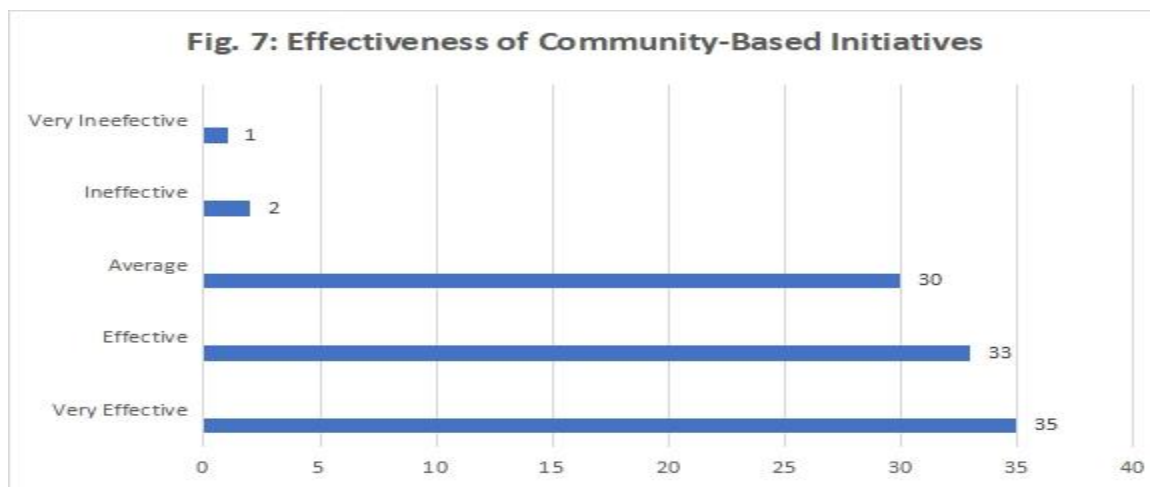


Figure 7 highlights the perceived effectiveness of community-based initiatives in Mangu LGA. Among respondents, 35% indicated that these initiatives were very effective, 33% rated them as effective, and 30% considered their effectiveness to be average. This general acknowledgment of their effectiveness demonstrates the significant impact of community-based initiatives on various aspects of life within Mangu LGA.

These initiatives have played a vital role in preventing violent extremism by fostering proactive community responses and addressing underlying social tensions. They have also contributed to strengthening social cohesion, enhancing relationships and trust among community members, and promoting unity. Furthermore, community-based initiatives have opened up economic opportunities, empowering individuals and groups to improve their livelihoods. Additionally, they have boosted community engagement, encouraging residents to take active roles in addressing local challenges and building resilience.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated that Mangu Local Government Area (LGA) has been relatively peaceful over the last two decades compared to other LGAs in Plateau State. However, Mangu LGA recently experienced serious violent conflicts following the 2023 elections. The two major cleavages in Mangu LGA are religion and ethnicity. In addition to incidents of armed robbery, kidnapping became more prevalent between 2019 and 2023. Furthermore, violent extremism in 2024 resulted in the deaths of approximately 30 people in Kwahaslalek over a span of two days during clashes between farmers and herders. Around 1,500 people sought refuge in an established camp (Aktas, 2024). To address these challenges, the community-based initiatives in Mangu LGA were effective. These initiatives have played a vital role in preventing violent extremism by fostering proactive community responses and addressing underlying social tensions. They have also contributed to strengthening social cohesion, enhancing relationships and trust among community members, and promoting unity.

## Recommendations

In order to enhance the effectiveness of community-based initiatives to prevent and counter violent extremism in Mangu LGA. The following are recommended based on the findings of the study.

1. **Review the Policy Framework and National Action Plan for PCVE in Nigeria:** While the policy requires a review at the national level, Plateau State and Mangu Local Government need to develop their own documents to address the root causes of violent extremism.
2. **Strengthen Local Governance and Leadership:** There is need to encourage coalitions among local leaders, traditional institutions, and community organizations to foster collaboration and effective decision-making. Also, leadership training programs to equip community leaders with the skills needed to manage conflicts and promote peace-building efforts is necessary.
3. **Enhance Community-Based Security Measures:** Government of Plateau state should support the establishment and reinforcement of community-based security groups such as Vigilante groups, Neighborhood Watch, and Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) to prevent and counter violent extremism in Mangu LGA.

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