

# AN ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE IN UDU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA) OF DELTA STATE 2006-2023

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# ACRONYMS

APC	All Progressives Congress
CAC	Christ Apostolic Church
DSC	Delta Steel Company
LGA	Local Government Area
NBTC	Niger Benue Transport Company
NWD	Nigeria Watch Database
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PG	President General

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This working paper aims to detect and record instances of fatalities caused by violent incidents in Delta State's Udu Local Government Area (LGA) between November 2006 and June 2023. The study uses quantitative data from the Nigeria Watch Database (NWD). To complement the analysis, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted in various locations within Udu LGA in May and June 2023. The majority of respondents stated that their area could be considered violent, and several of them went on to name lethal incidents they had personally witnessed.

Ovwian, Owhase, and Orhuwhorun were reported to have the highest rates of fatalities in Udu LGA, with gangsterism and cultism being the primary driver of violence in the region. The field research's findings are in line with those from the Nigeria Watch Database, which indicates that cult-related crimes accounted for the majority of fatalities reported in Udu LGA. Some respondents also mentioned the importance of land conflicts involving community borders disputes.

# INTRODUCTION

According to the Nigeria Watch Database, 190,682 people died as a result of violence in Nigeria between June 2006 and June 2023, including 6,947 in Delta State and 267 in Udu LGA. Yet many fatal incidents go unreported, unrecorded, or unaccounted for. Therefore, the aim of this study is to refine the grain. Its specific objectives are to: provide an analysis of the socioeconomic and political context of Udu; determine the patterns and the main causes of violence in the region; validate the incidents listed in the Nigeria Watch Database; pinpoint instances of fatalities that are not reported by the media and identify the reasons why they go unreported.

# METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Data from both quantitative and qualitative sources were used in the study. In order to identify instances of violent deaths in Udu LGA, quantitative data was generated from the Nigeria Watch Data Base and analyzed. Additionally, 25 respondents (19 men and 6 women) who resided in various areas of the LGA provided qualitative information through in-depth interviews conducted in May and June 2023. Men who ranged in age from 30 to 65 made up the majority of the respondents. They worked in a variety of skilled jobs, with the majority of them being self-employed or civil servants.

The study's respondents had all resided in the area for at least ten years and had thorough knowledge of the LGA. A snowballing strategy was used to choose them as community members were originally hesitant to share private information with a stranger. The in-depth interviews also assisted the researcher in validating some of the occurrences listed in the NWD. They provided details on cases that went unreported and hypothesis on some of the factors that contributed to violence in the LGA.

# LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

One of the study's limitations is that the majority of respondents were unable to identify the precise month and day when specific incidents took place in their areas. The year and, sometimes, the month were the most they could remember. In other instances, some respondents were able to link these incidents to important local events that occurred during the same time. Furthermore, the researcher could not access official documents pertaining to fatalities in the LGA because the local law enforcement agencies and hospitals refused to provide such information. Some security officers responded on an individual basis rather than in accordance with their official status.



## Udu Local Government Area: A Contextual Analysis

Figure 1: Map showing Delta State and its LGAs, including Udu



Located in the southern part of Nigeria, Delta State is one of the nine states covered by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Named after the Niger Delta, it was formed from the former Bendel State on 27 August 1991. It is bordered on the East by Rivers and Anambra States; on the North by Edo State; on the West by the Bight of Benin; on the South by Bayelsa State. Delta State is made up of 25 LGA. Its capital city, Asaba, is situated on the Western Bank of the Niger River in Oshimili South Local Government Area.

Udu is the name of a kingdom, a local government, and a town in Delta State. It is part of the Delta Central Senatorial District and has its administrative centre in Otor-Udu. It is a suburb of Warri Metropolis and it is connected to Enerhen by the Udu bridge over the Warri River. Udu is the ancestral home of the Udu people, who speak the Urhobo language. It is surrounded by the cities of Warri to the north, Effurun to the northeast, Otu-Jeremi to the southeast, Ohwawha and Asaba to the south, and Ogbe-Ijaw to the southwest.

According to the 2006 national population census, Udu LGA has a total of 142,480 out of the 4,112,445 inhabitants living in Delta State (Federal Government Gazette, 2009). Udu villages and communities include Ovwian, Okpaka, Epame, Opete, Orhuwhorun, Igbogidi, Oleri, Uwherun Settlement, Eket Oburhie, Oghio, Eket Oboto, Aladja, Emadadja, Ubogo, Egini, Ukperheren, Owbrode, Okolo Oboto, Ujevwu, Owbase, Ayama, Ukpiovwin, Okolo Oburhie, Otor Udu, Obubu, Ogbe Udu, Ovworokpokpo, and Delta State Company (DSC) Township.

## Political Context:

The Udu people have a diverse political life. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) dominates while the All Progressives Congress (APC) is the second biggest parties in the LGA. The *kpako-re-orere* (village leaders), the *Oghuvwie* council, and elders also work together with the monarch, the *Ovie* of Udu, to govern the kingdom's sociopolitical issues and organizational structure. With the backing of the local government chairman, the president general (PG) and his excos—the vice president, secretary general, treasurer, etc. manage each of the various towns or villages. In other words, politics in Udu start at the level of the elect-President-General (PG). The first PG was Late T.J. Sokoh, followed by W.T. Odibo and David Otirikpen, aka “Pogee” or “Pogay”.

After Udu LGA was established, the late Chief Hon. Austin Ogbaburhon served as its first chairman. He was then succeeded by Barr. Andrew Origbo, Hon. Patrick Ariole, Chief Solomon Kpoma, Mr. Edidjala Raymond, Hon. Chief Sakpra, and finally, the current chairman, Honorable Jite Brown. The chairmanship post in Udu LGA is decided by election. Primaries are held within the various political parties to choose their delegate for the election of the local government chairman. Chosen candidates from each political party then compete against one another on a set date, with the victor becoming the chairman of the local government. Politically, the Udu Local Government Area is organized into ten (10) wards, each of which elects a councilor to represent it in the council's legislative arm. The LGA's towns and villages are divided into wards according to the following distribution: Udu I; Udu II; Udu III; Udu IV; Opete/Assagba/Edjophe: Eket; Ovwian I; Ovwian II; Orhuwhorun; and Aladja.

## Socio-Cultural Context:

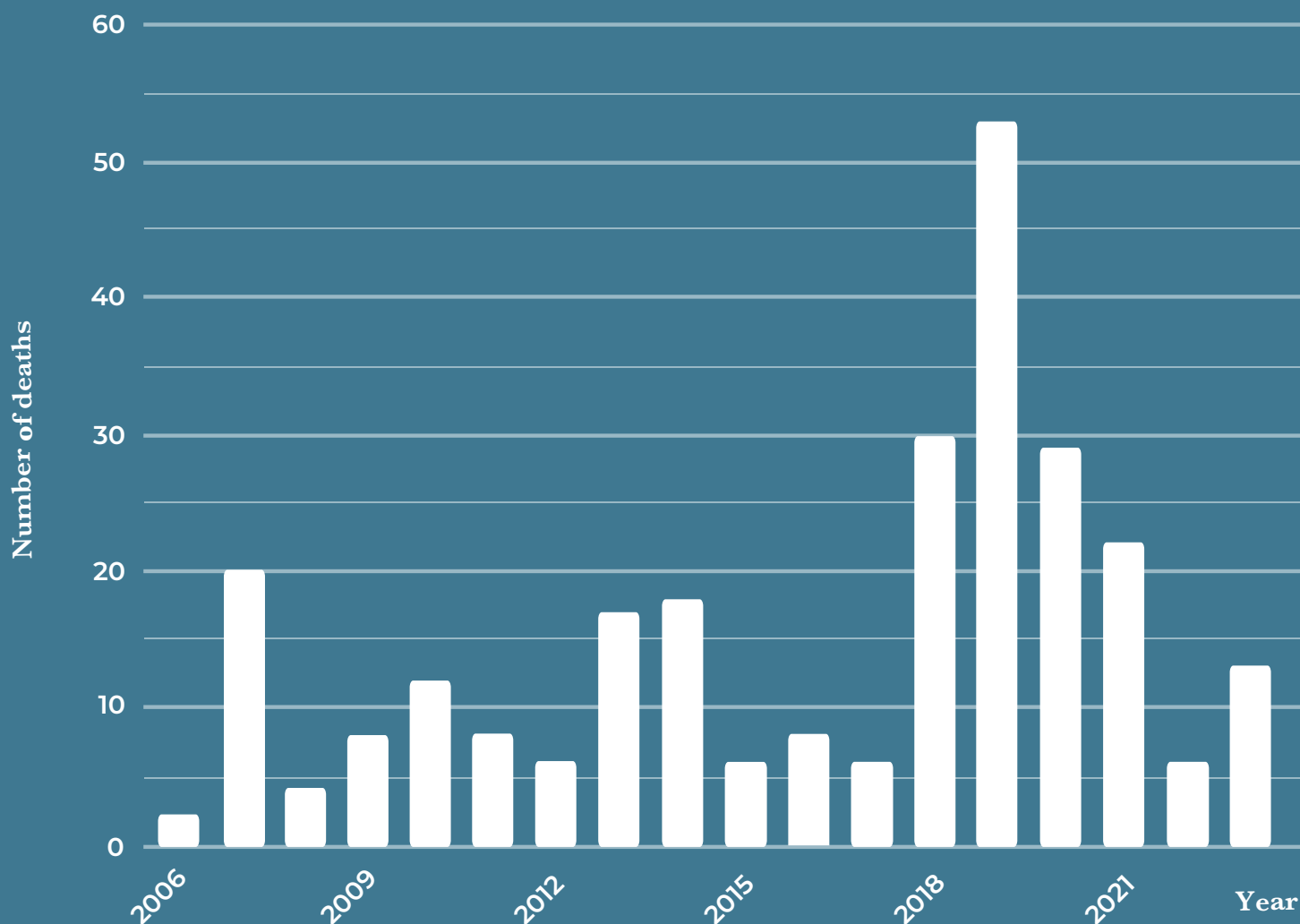
Although Urhobo is the dominant ethnic group in the LGA, the Isoko, Ijaw, and Itsekiri are also present. The majority of people in Udu are Christians, but there are also some followers of traditional African religions, the most well-known of which is the Igbe religion, which started in Kokori in the Ethiope East LGA of Delta State. The Udu people revere their gods, shrines, and ancestors. They construct altars to venerate their deceased ancestors, who they view as living individuals. The Udu people have a variety of cultural traditions and beliefs that are important to them. For instance, they annually observe the circumcision festival, which commences from Oleri village. During the celebration, the Chief Priest and his followers travel from Oleri to Otor-Udu and stay there for seven days while wearing a special hat. Upon his return, he will formally declare the festival/ceremony open to the entire Udu community. Besides this celebration, each of these subclans has its own festivals that are observed independently. The president-generals and executives of each community in Udu also hold an annual general day of prayer on a Sunday at Otor-Udu for the expansion and improvement of the LGA on behalf of the Udu people.

## Economic Context:

Udu is a rural community where the majority of the people engage in agricultural activities, including farming, fishing, and hunting, as well as some small-scale trading. They prepare and process garri, weave mats and local baskets as well as ropes for fishing and climbing. They are also businesspeople who sell agricultural products and other goods at public marketplaces as well as in private markets and stores both in short and long distance. Udu Market, Jigbale Market, Ovwian Market, Ubogo Market, Harbour Market, etc. are notable marketplaces in the LGA. Some of them also have private enterprises, schools, hospitals, and other establishments that aid in generating employment for locals. There are various government parastatals in the LGA where other residents of the LGA hold civil service jobs. It is however uncommon to find people in Udu LGA with post-graduate degrees because many of them stop their study after completing secondary school and, at most, a first degree from a university, polytechnic, or college of education. The Urhobo people frequently practice polygamy, hence it is usual to observe numerous houses headed by women as a result of the absence of their husbands. As a result, many Urhobo and Udu women have been forced to assume the roles of breadwinners and can be categorized as low income families.

## Udu Local Government Area: The Findings

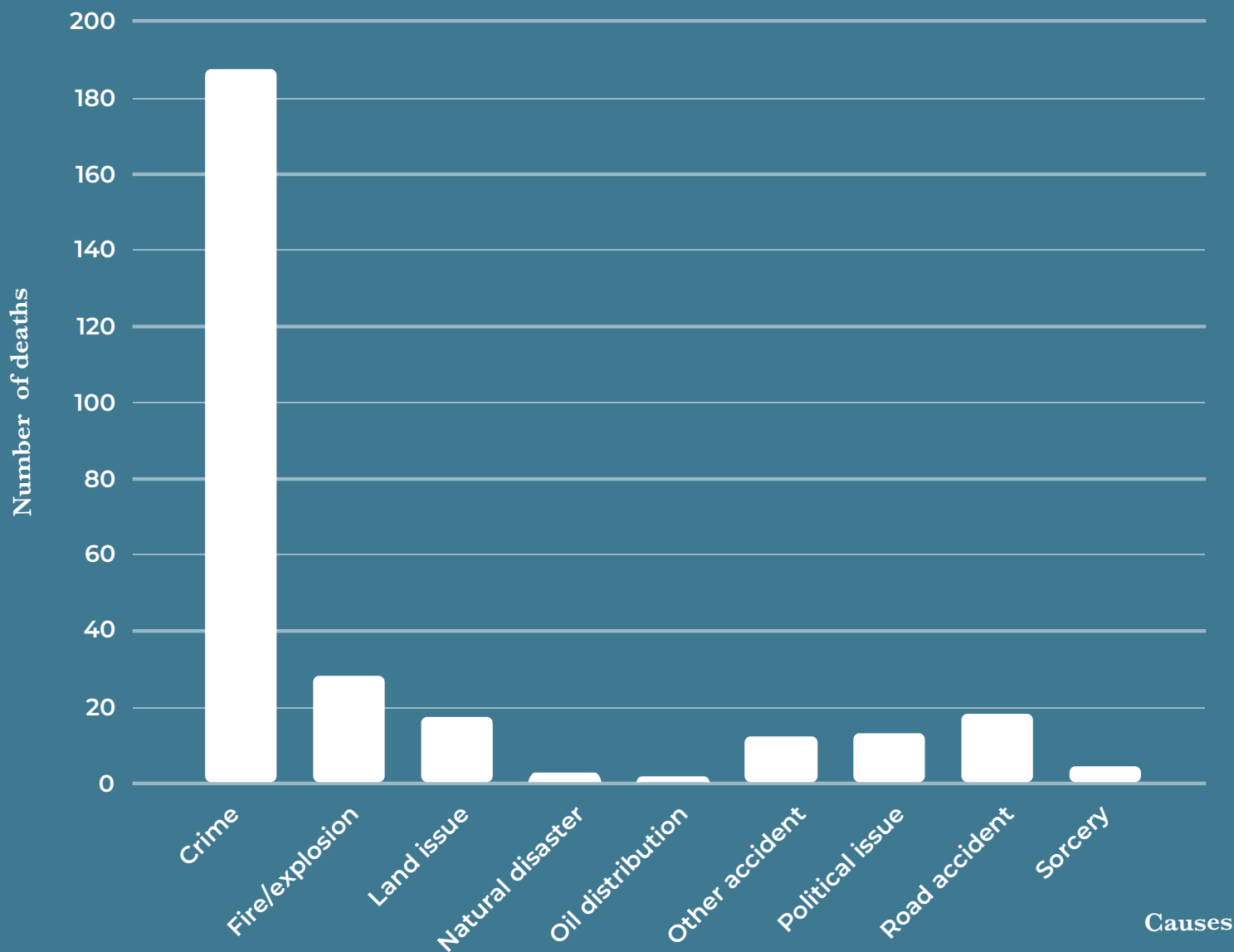
Figure 2: Number of violent deaths in Udu LGA between November 2006 and June 2023 (NWD, 2023)



### I. Incidences of Violent Deaths in Udu LGA

According to the Nigeria Watch Database, a total of 267 deaths were reported in Udu LGA between 10 November 2006 and 30 June 2023, with the years between 2018 and 2021 recording the highest number of reported occurrences (see fig 2).

Figure 3: Number of fatalities by causes of violence in Udu LGA between November 2006 and June 2023 (NWD, 2023)

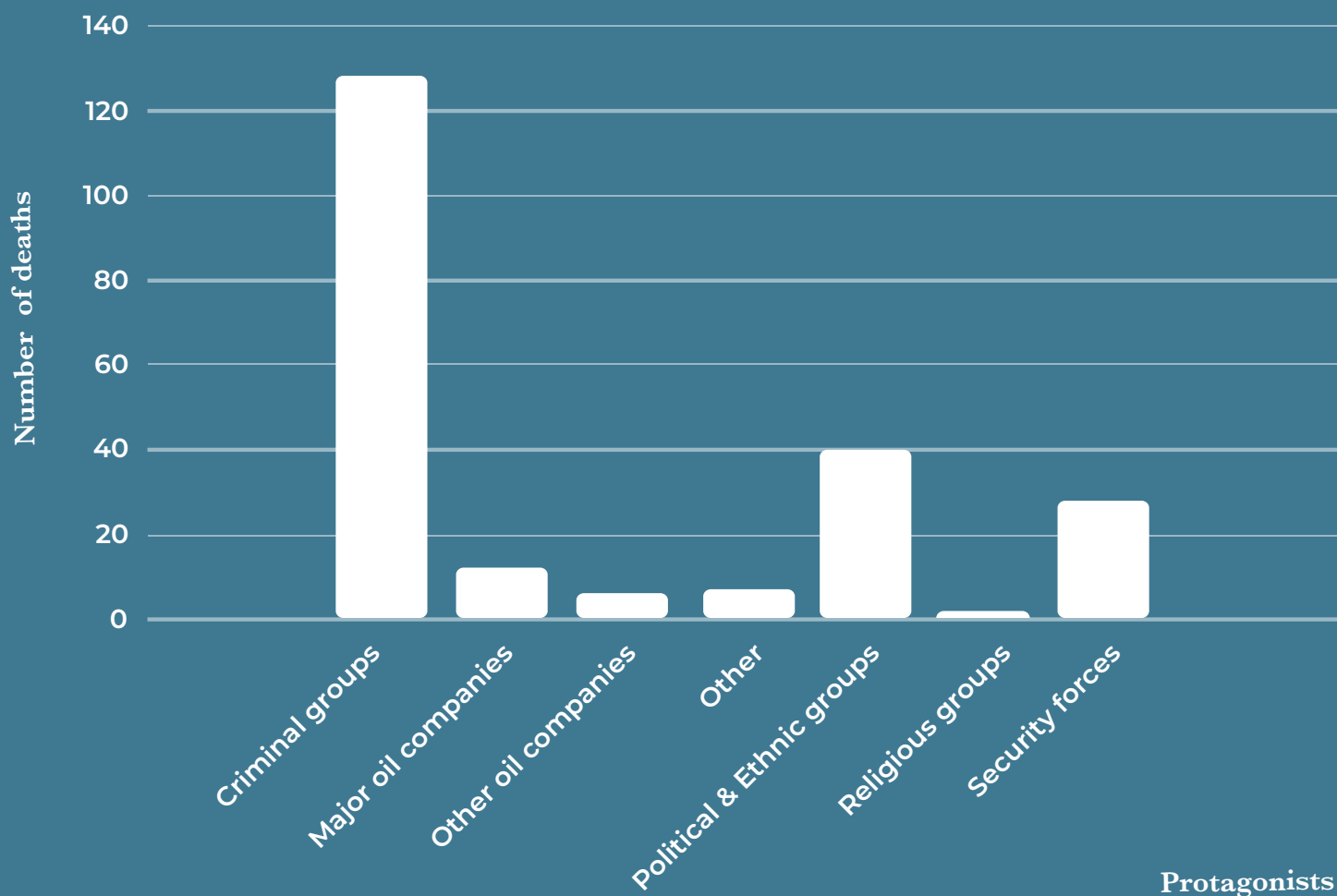


## II. Causes of Violent-Related Deaths in Udu LGA

Violence in Nigeria manifests itself in various ways, and it has a variety of socioeconomic, political, and cultural root causes. In Udu, a large number of fatal incidents since 2006 are connected to criminal activities, disagreements over land and other natural resources, political issues, family crises, and disputes over motor parks and other local government revenue collection, among other things.

Based on the NW database, crime committed by armed gangs and cult groups appears to be the most prevalent risk and is responsible for 187 of the total number of violent deaths reported in Udu LGA during the research period. (see fig 3). Accidents involving fire, explosion and oil distribution come next. Some fatalities are also attributable to communal conflicts sparked by property disputes.

Figure 4: Number of fatalities in Udu LGA by protagonists between November 2006 and June 2023 (NWD, 2023)



**Crime:** Cult clashes were the most reported type of crime-related violence in the area, accounting for over 80 of fatalities recorded by the Nigeria Watch Database in Udu LGA between November 2006 and June 2023. For instance, fights between various cult groups were responsible for around 13 of the fatalities reported to the local authorities in 2018. In a similar vein, conflicts between competing cults in the region claimed over 40 deaths in the Ovwian community between March and September 2019. Some alleged cultists also stabbed Chief Egor Kolo to death on September 19, 2019. Cult conflicts in Orhuwhorun then claimed the lives of four people on June 18, 2023.

Between 2006 and 2023, robberies and kidnappings perpetrated by armed gangs also constituted a prominent cause of fatal incidents in Udu LGA. For instance, unidentified gunmen killed four people while fleeing on December 30, 2021. On July 23, 2022, a well-known local businessman was then killed after being attacked. As for conflicts with security operatives, two soldiers were for instance killed on February 21, 2007, when robbers broke through a military checkpoint at the Delta Steel Company (DSC) on Orhuwhorun Road in Ovwian Aladja. Furthermore, four deaths were reported in November 2013 following a protracted gunfight between the police, three robbers and one kidnapper. More recently, in January 2023, clashes between police officers and armed thieves resulted in four deaths.

**Land Issues:** The on-going land conflict between Aladja in Udu LGA and Ogbe-Ijoh in Warri South-west LGA of Delta State has led to the death of several persons as well as the destruction of properties in October 2018. Furthermore, in March 2020, a communal strife over land issues occurred between the Oghior and Ukpiovwin communities, resulting in the death of two persons.

**Other Causes of Violence:** Apart from crime and land issues, the NW database recorded violent incidents related to political conflicts, fires, explosions, oil, sorcery, domestic issues, as well as different types of accidents. On 10 November 2006 in Ovwian-Aladja, for example, the crash of a helicopter working for an oil company killed the pilot and his passenger over an electrical line. Furthermore, on October 12, 2007, a gas pipeline explosion brought on by illegal oil mining at the Shell's Utorogu-Ughelli Pumping Station resulted in twelve fatalities.

On 14 April 2007 in Orhuwhorun Road, the gubernatorial election also led to the killing of six persons including the then PDP Chairman known popularly as "Poge". According to one of the respondents who lived close to the area where the incident occurred, people saw vehicles allegedly containing ballot boxes to rig the election in favour of PDP candidates (Respondent 12). On election day, protest broke out. Security forces then came in and there was an exchange of gunshot between civilians and members of the armed forces. An unknown number of persons lost their lives in the process, while others sustained various forms of injuries (Respondent 13).

### III. Unreported Incidences of Violent-Related Deaths in Udu LGA

Despite the fact that the Nigeria Watch Database has listed numerous violent deaths in Udu LGA, field research has shown that many more fatalities go unreported for a variety of reasons, including the media's disinterest of rural areas and the community's reluctance to share such information with the general public. One of the interviewees claimed that Udu people refrain from reporting such problems so as not to damage their reputation. Yet respondents spoke about a number of fatal incidents that weren't covered in the major newspapers. Examples are included in the following section and classified according to their causes.

**Crime caused by the activities of cult groups:** One of the most common causes of violent deaths in Udu settlements is clashes between members of various cult groups. In 2018, for instance, cultists broke into the home of the former president general of Ovwian, resulting in the killings of an unknown number of persons. In the same vein, a man suspected of belonging to a cult was killed by rivals in March 2021 after being ambushed on Ovwian Road. His body was not entirely retrieved due to the severity of the attack (Respondent 1). In January 2022, Otobo, a notorious cult member, was then murdered under the Udu Bridge. He was shot with a gun and planked with wood until he died, at which point the murderers pulled out his eyes (Respondent 25). On September 14, 2022, again, two cult factions, Aye and Baga, fought ferociously in Orhuwhorun. The heads of six Baga members were hacked off and hauled away on the evening of that same day: one at Egin Road, one at Ubughere, one in Ekreraha quarters, and one in DSC housing quarters, all in the vicinity of Orhuwhorun. A cousin of the chief of the village was also killed by gangsters trying to spot his older brother, another cultist.

More recently, on May 25, 2023, in Old Egin Road, still in Orhuwhorun, a wanted male cultist who had been missing from the community for years due to his involvement in a string of homicides in the town was shot and killed in the open. Less than an hour after his passing, masked cult members swarmed the town of Orhuwhorun, looting, killing, and attacking defenseless residents. One Mr. Efe Kanya was assaulted with a cutlass and narrowly avoided dying. On May 30 and 31, 2023, at the Ekrivie quarters in the Orhuwhorun community, the Baga cult group then carried out a retaliation attack on the capo of the Aye's cult group, killing in cold blood Jackson Apen, aka the "Yellow Man", and his brother Ghenoro Apen (Respondent 22).

**Crime caused by the activities of state security operatives:** In the course of riots and the burning of banks in Orhuwhorun Junction on February 15, 2023, when there was a shortage of Naira, two people were shot to death by security personnel. Additionally, on March 26, 2023, close to NBTC Junction, a young man was fatally shot by members of the state's anti-cult squad who believed him to be a gangster when, in fact, he was simply crossing the street to visit his older brother's house in quest of food. Because he had a young child, the family asked for compensation for his passing, and they were granted a piece of land in exchange.

**Armed Robbery:** According to Respondent 3, frequent armed robbery incidents caused many fatalities in the Ovwian community in 2017. On 29 October 2020, a man named Papa Beauty was also stabbed to death in his compound by armed robbers who came late at night to steal his phone and his money (Respondent 2).

**Communal Clashes and Land Issues:** Besides criminal activity, respondents provide numerous examples of fighting that they have seen in their neighborhood as a result of disagreements over land boundaries and ownership. Such crises can occur at any time of year. Respondent 19, for instance, claims that Oghior and Ukpiovwin communities were embroiled in a dispute that killed three young people from Oghior in March and April 2020. The conflict between the residents of the Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh settlements is one of the most severe and persistent one in the region. One of the interviewees thus brought up the instance of a husband and woman who lived in the Aladja village but were strangers. They were slain and had their bodies dumped into the river. Similarly, an altercation between members of the Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh communities resulted in the death of a man in Aladja in September 2022 (Respondent 6).

**Other incidents and accidents:** On 1 January 2022, a biker in Ujevwu was killed by an unidentified assailant after having his bike snatched. According to the respondent, bikers in the area were often the targets of attacks by unidentified persons, whom the community leaders suspected to be herders passing by (Respondent 8). Additionally, a trailer struck a bike carrying an elderly woman in March 2023 at the Eket Expressway near the Lonia Hospital. The biker survived the collision, however the woman passed away (Respondent 2).



Table 1: Unreported fatalities in Udu LGA, 2006-2023

S/No	Date of Event	Community	Cause of Incident	Description	No of Fatalities
1	December 2017	Ovwian Waterside	Crime	Cult members stormed into the house of somebody believed to also be a cultist and shot him dead on the spot	1
2	June 2018	Express Junction	Crime	Fighting between members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers at the Express motor park	3
3	January 2019	Close to Assemblies of God Church in Ovwian	Accident	A man was killed in one his land sites when the fence of the building fell on him	1
4	August 2020	Behind CAC Church, Ovwian	Accident	A young boy known as Kess was electrocuted to death when he accidentally stepped his foot on a naked wire	1
5	29 October 2020	Ovwian	Crime	A man identified as Papa Beauty was stabbed to death by armed robbers in his compound	1
6	January 2021	Eketé-Inland	Crime	A man was assassinated in his white vehicle by unknown gunmen	1
7	March 2021	Ovwian	Crime	A suspected cult member was massacred to death by a member of a rival group	1
8	March 2021	Ovwhase	Crime	A cultist identified as Ekerugbe was beaten to death with a plank of wood by members of a rival group	1
9	October 2021	Ovwian Main Road	Crime	Two brothers, known for their cult activities were killed in their house by a rival group	2
10	November 2021	Caravan One, Ovwian	Crime	A cultist named Francis was shot dead by a rival group	1

S/No	Date of Event	Community	Cause of Incident	Description	No of Fatalities
11	1 January 2022	Ujevwu	Crime	A biker was killed after his bike was taken from him	1
12	March 2022	Onos Estate, by Matrix Filling Station, Ovwian	Crime	A well-known criminal, caught in the act, was burnt to death by community members and street boys	1
13	May 2022	Efaka, Ovwian	Accident	A bricklayer identified as Mr. Emakachi died when the slab of a soakaway pit fell on him	1
14	September 2022	Aladja	Land issue	A man was killed in the crossfire of a land dispute between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh communities	1
15	14 September 2022	Orhuwhorun	Crime	Battle between cult groups	7
16	23 November 2022	Ovwian	Crime	A young man was strangled to death by his elder brother due to dispute over family inheritance	1
17	December 2022	Ekrata, Ovwian	Crime	A notorious cultist known as Padi was killed by a rival group for allegedly killing their member	1
18	15 February 2023	Orhuwhorun Junction, Ovwian	Market issue Crime	Two persons were shot dead by the police during the protests and burning of banks due to cash scarcity	2
19	March 2023	Near Lonia Hospital, Eket Express Way	Road Accident	An old woman on a bike was crushed to death by a trailer trying to reverse	1
20	26 March 2023	Near NBTC Junction	Crime	Security Forces killed somebody mistaken as a cultist	1
21	24 May 2023	Orhuwhorun	Crime	Cult clashes led to the killing of one young man, called "Commissioner"	1
22	31 May 2023	Orhuwhorun	Crime	Revenge killings by cultists	2

#### **IV. Community Perception on the Causes of Violence in Udu LGA**

Violence takes many forms in Udu. For instance, social gatherings like fairs and festivals can foster an environment conducive to fatal incidents. In the past several years, Udu has seen a number of cult group fights at different motor parks. Respondents in Owghase and Ovwian also claimed that cult members often harassed locals, robbing them of their phones, cash, and other items. When locals resisted, they were stabbed or beaten, which resulted in a number of unreported deaths in the region.

Almost all the respondents stated that they consider Udu to be violent. While they were unable to recall the precise dates of the incidents, they acknowledged fatalities in their neighborhood. For them, armed robberies, cult fights, and street pickpocketing became a normal part of their daily experience and they have just learnt to adapt by avoiding some of the dens known for such notorious activities. Others reported that they avoid night movement and ensure that their houses are heavily guarded. They also confirmed the fatal incidents listed in the Nigeria Watch Database.

The respondents offered a variety of explanations for such high levels of violence. Some of them claimed that parents no longer provided children with adequate care and supervision. One of the respondents mentioned that it is now typical to see kids playing in the street after 10 o'clock at night with nobody worrying about their safety. Another interviewee stated that coercion and peer pressure at school or in the neighborhood led these kids to join gangs. The majority of them, he continued, depended on their friends for company because of the absence of their parents, which also made it simple for them to be persuaded to become cultists.

Another respondent said that the lack of community policing is also a problem. He continued by saying that while it takes a village to raise a child, parents today get angry when they are told that their kids are criminals. They will tell you to stop giving them advice and concentrate on parenting your own kids instead of passing judgment on others. This has led to many members of the community turning a blind eye when certain crimes are done in public, even when they are familiar with the offender's family.

Other factors cited by respondents are inadequate law enforcement, low educational standards, a decline in moral values, low self-esteem, drugs, dangerous environment, poverty, and unemployment. Respondent 4 said that some parents are even aware that their children are criminals but are powerless to intervene because these kids provide the majority of the family's income.

#### **V. Reasons for Unreported Cases of Violent-Related Fatalities in Udu LGA**

To explain why some violent incidents are not reported, one of the respondents claimed that there are no media outlets in the region and that journalists usually pay more attention to high-profile cases. Another respondent mentioned that residents are members of a WhatsApp group that helps keep them up to date on local incidents, adding that they choose to resolve disputes among themselves rather than contact the media and risk damaging their community's reputation.

## **Conclusion:**

The study confirmed that cultists' fights are the main patterns of violence in Udu and that many incidents are not reported by the media.

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- Interview with Respondent 5, Female, 56 years, Trader, Ovwian, 22 May 2023
- Interview with Respondent 6, Male, 40 years, Bike Rider, Aladja, 23 May 2023
- Interview with Respondent 7, Male, 37 years, Trader, Aladja, 23 May 2023
- Interview with Respondent 8, Male, 53 years, Artisan, Ujevuwu, 24 May 2023
- Interview with Respondent 9, Female, 49 years, Nurse, Ujevuwu, 24 May 2023
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