



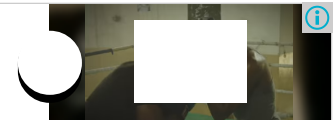
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Cult killings: States in grip of deadly rise

By Anthony Maliki, Haruna Ibrahim, Hope Abah, (Makurdi), Victor Edozie, (Port Harcourt), Itodo Danie | Publish Date: Jun 18 2016 5:00AM

149 killed in past 6 months

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Once skirmishes for supremacy on campuses, cult-related violence has now eaten deep into the larger society, leading to rivalries that spawn brutal killings. Just how bad is the worrisome trend across the country? Daily Trust reports.

Cult-related violence in Nigeria has been spiking in the last few months, reaching unprecedented heights recently. Law-enforcement agencies are finding it difficult to contain, as they struggle to stop it in one place, with another surfacing almost immediately. Cases of rival cults' deadly clashes are fast-spreading nationwide.

Experts say within the sociological realm of religious movements, a cult is a religious or social group with socially deviant or novel beliefs and practices. In Nigeria, as it is in many other places, this definition is problematic, leaving unanswered questions as to the cults' real motives, as their motivations and beliefs remain shrouded in mystery, resulting in them regularly called 'secret cults'.

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Also, the word 'cult' has always been controversial, as some consider it subjective and used as an attack against groups with differing doctrines or practices. Many are unaware of the various cults in the country.

In Nigeria, cults were birthed at the universities and extended to the larger society. New groups keep emerging, with varying modus operandi. Among the earliest cult groups in the country, is the Black Axe, as well as the National Association of Seadogs, popularly known as the Pirate Confraternity. It was founded in 1952 by persons who called themselves the 'Magnificent Seven'.

Other cults are The Buccaneers Confraternity known as the National Associations of Sea Lords, which broke out from the Pirates, and became an arch-rival. There is also the Aro-Mates which was founded by 3 students, the Supreme Eiyé Confraternity, known as the National Association of Air Lords, formed in the University of Ibadan in 1965, the Klan Konfraternity, Supreme Vikings Confraternity, Family Confraternity founded in Abia State University, the Brotherhood of the Blood at the Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), the Victor Charlie Boys (allegedly established by a former Vice-Chancellor), and much more.

According to a source, memberships of these groups include highly-placed Nigerians, civil servants, entrepreneurs, politicians and even security operatives. "They cut across all demographics," he said. "Power is attractive to everyone, and cults provide an illusion of it." The source added that sometimes when mutilated bodies are found and chalked up to ritual killings, the truth is that one cult is probably sending a message to another, by killing a member, a friend or even a loved one.



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Interestingly, women are not left out, as they also have clubs exclusively for females. Among them are the Black Bra, Viqueens, Daughters of Jezebel and the Damsels. But basically, their ideologies are drawn from the men's groups'.

In Nigeria, many join cults for power, wealth and prestigious status in society. But in many instances, the rivalries are bloody. In Benue State, for instance, residents currently live in fear following deadly activities of some cults, which has left many dead.

A police source revealed that nationwide, there is growing concern at the rate which cult killings are rising. According to him, several high-powered meetings have been held in a bid to come up with a lasting solution, but so far it has been naught.

Daily Trust discovered that at least 15 people have been killed within the past three months in various locations in the state, with some higher institutions of learning topping the list. Rival cult clashes claimed several lives and injured many in Otukpo town, Benue State Polytechnic, Ugbokolo, North-Bank area of Makurdi and recently the University of Agriculture, (UAM), Makurdi.

The latest clash, which resulted in the death of seven people at UAM last week, led to the closure of the university. It was gathered that those killed include six students of the institution living in Shammah Hostel, a private lodge near the university, and a private guard of same lodge. Five out of the seven corpses were discovered in one of the rooms, while one was found along a footpath to the hostel, alongside that of the security man. The police command in the state had identified the late security guard as Igyegye Terungwa, 30, and one of the dead students as Shite Fanen while the other corpses are yet to be identified. The Head of Information and Public Relations Unit of the university, Mrs. Rosemary Waku expressed shock at the incident noting that it was connected with the cultists' attack which had earlier claimed the life of a student two days earlier.

Waku said it was believed that the student who was earlier killed may have belonged to a cult group that later launched a reprisal. She disclosed that the school authority while going around after the police evacuated the dead bodies to ascertain whether there were other casualties, broke into a room and found one more corpse, and many others wounded, locked up by their attackers.

In April, rival cults clashed claimed the lives of three people in Otukpo town. Police spokesman in the state, ASP Moses Yamu confirmed the death of three persons, three injured and the arrest of 15 others on suspicion of participating in the unrest. Witnesses however told Daily Trust that the incident involved many cult groups, in a battle for supremacy. They include: Vikings, Black Axe, Baggas, Judges, Black Gorillas and the Furies.

Meanwhile, 20-year-old Friday Okoh was killed by suspected cultists at North-Bank penultimate weekend. Yamu said that the deceased had been on the wanted list of the police on suspicion of cultism. He explained that it was the father of the late young man who reported to the police that some

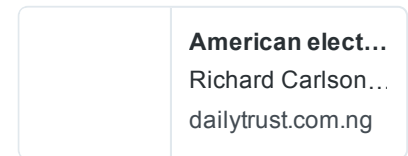
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young men armed with dangerous weapons stormed his residence at 2pm on a Saturday and killed his son.

Also, the body of a yet-to-be identified person but believed to have been killed by cultists was found by the roadside at North-Bank. The body had deep cuts on the head, suggesting that he may have been axed to death. Residents said the incident was the second in one week as one other mutilated corpse was removed earlier from the spot.

Cult activities are also prevalent among school pupils and students of junior secondary schools in Makurdi. Known as 'Koboko', they mostly carry out their operations in slums after consuming alcohol and other intoxicants. The police appear helpless, after a series of enlightenment campaigns were carried out across primary and secondary schools in the state have proven futile, even if ASP Yamu expressed optimism.

In Rivers State, cases of cult-related killings have assumed alarming dimensions, becoming a major source of security concern. In the past few weeks, cult clashes have broken out in Ahoada, Ikwerre, Etche and Emuoha Local Government Areas of the state with several deaths recorded. Among the dead were some military personnel who were part of the response team in Emuoha.

Furthermore, in Oduoha, Ahoada-West Local Government Area residents woke up to a gory sight of the bodies of three beheaded youths, alleged to be victims of a supremacy battle between two rival cult groups. Before the incident, many persons lost their lives in Ula-Ukpata part of Ahoada. This was followed with another incident in the area where 8 persons including the eldest man in the community were killed.

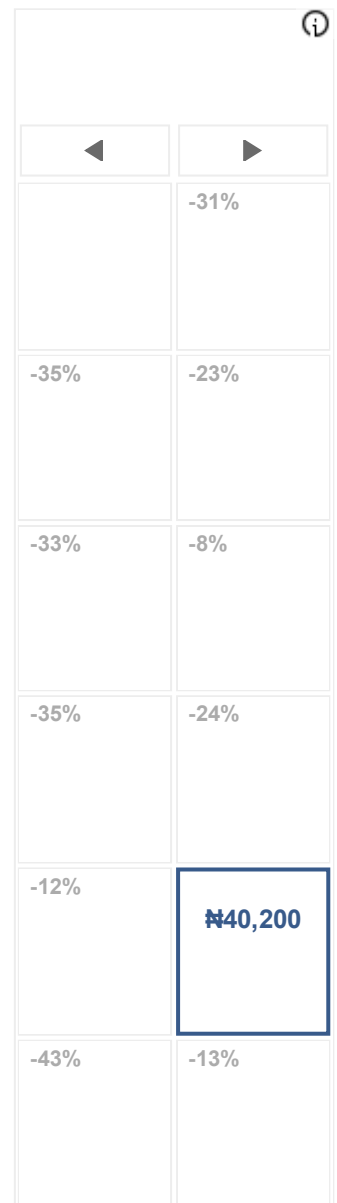
Also, four Mobile Police officers were also killed along Okogbe in Ahoada-West Local Government Area. They are believed to have been ambushed by cultists as they were returning to Yenagoa.

Two weeks ago, residents of Aluu in Ikwerre Local Government Area experienced a cult battle where 17 persons were killed. The attackers later moved to Obite in Etche where two persons were also killed. In Emuoha, suspected cultists invaded three communities where more than ten persons were reportedly killed. A Police post in the area was also attacked by cultists.

The Governor of Rivers State, Nyesom Wike, however blamed the recent cult-related killings in the state on multi-national oil companies who he accused of engaging said groups to protect their installations. He said the aggrieved rival cults that fail to benefit from the contracts usually launch attacks on beneficiary groups.

The 2 Brigade Command of the Nigerian Army last week warned youths involved in cultism to have a change of heart or be ready to face the wrath of the law. The command, in a press statement in Port Harcourt and signed by its Public Relations Officer, Captain Lazarus Eli, said preliminary investigation revealed that the barbaric acts are connected to oil theft and illegal bunkering.

The state Police Command Public Relations Officer, Ahmad Muhammad



said the command has deployed patrol teams to different parts of the state stressing that it is geared towards securing lives and properties of residents.

Also, some parts of Kogi State recently recorded deadly cult clashes which have left a number of people dead and many injured. There are also concerns at the rate in which cult activities are said to be spreading among young boys and girls especially in primary and secondary schools in the state. However, most of the cult cases are recorded in areas where there are tertiary institutions, such as Idah, Anyigba, Ankpa, Lokoja and Okene. While most cult groups operate clandestinely, some turn violent wreaking havoc sometimes on innocent people. One of the deadliest cult clashes in the state occurred on Friday April 22 in Idah, when rival groups went berserk, killing each other. About 15 persons were reportedly killed with many injured.

Daily Trust learnt trouble started when a cult member, one Danjuma Ignatius Amodu popularly known as Murphy, was killed at his family house at GRA Idah, by suspected members of a rival group. The gruesome murder was said to have sparked heavy reprisal attacks across the town the following day.

It was gathered that members of the Black Axe cult group after the burial of its slain member, reportedly invited their counterparts from Edo State to Idah, on a revenge mission. As a result, about eight persons were reportedly killed, with an innocent woman killed by a stray bullet.

Daily Trust further gathered that the rampaging cult members drove towards a police station in the area and reportedly shot two policemen. The Kogi State Police Commissioner, Mr Yakubu Usman, who confirmed the cult clashes, said 12 persons have been arrested in connection with the incident.

On March 13, two suspected cult members were reported to have lost their lives during a clash with a rival group at Ganaja village, an outskirt of Lokoja.

Speaking on the cult clashes, Chairman of Idah Local Government Area, Dr. Major Musa, said it was unfortunate that the youth have chosen to engage in social vices instead of concentrating on their studies and other productive ventures.

Then in the once-peaceful ancient city of Calabar, cult violence persists. Residents of the Cross River State capital now live in fear, after 15 persons were reported killed within two weeks by suspected cult members. However, the new Commissioner of Police in the state, Jimoh Ozi-Obeh, confirmed the arrest of 46 suspects.

Ozi-Obeh disclosed that the cult groups were fighting for supremacy and possessed assorted deadly weapons, and had attacked policemen as well as unwary members of the public. Ozi-Obeh said the main cult groups operating in the state are the Vikings and Mafia confraternities. Because of the fear of cults, many organisations close early so workers get home before dark while most residents are indoors as early as 7pm. Last



week, banks were reported to have closed before the official time to enable their staff return home early. Also, market women and shop owners for many days last week close their shops before dark at the famous Watt Market and other densely populated commercial hubs in the town, out of fear.

A community leader, Chief Effiong Samuel, expressed concern over the rising cases of cultism in the state noting that another secret cult, Vikings, clashed with Bayside Boys in the Old Calabar.

However, some of the cult victims might be cases of mistaken identity. One of such was Bishop Otong E. Otong, a member of Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. He alongside his wife and three other members were accosted at Edgerly Street, Calabar but none were harmed.

But Orji Obi and Obinna Chukwu were not lucky as they were killed in their shops at 8 Miles in the outskirts of Calabar. In Anantigha, Calabar-South Local Government Area, a seamstress was also reportedly stabbed by a suspected cultist because she dared to argue with him. On Thursday June 9, cultists with red head bands and machetes, killed two men believed to be rivals at the Watt Market roundabout.

In Edo State, cult-related violence is presently on the decline in the last three months, compared to years past. Daily Trust gathered that the war between rival cults has claimed many lives in the past, while there are over 50 persons charged to court on the matter. It was gathered that the skirmishes were at their peak between 2012 and 2015, almost a daily occurrence. In 2012 for instance, 30 persons including two mothers were reportedly killed at different locations in the state due to rival cult clashes. "Our youths have gone haywire," said a female resident. "I don't understand why anyone in their right senses would join any group which encourages violence, or even murder," she said.

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