



## IMPACT OF MODERN CULTISM AND GOVERNANCE IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

Esara Umoh Victor<sup>1</sup>, Mfon Effiong Asuquo<sup>2</sup>, and Walter Omang Ogar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Uyo, Uyo.

Email: [Umohesara1@gmail.com](mailto:Umohesara1@gmail.com); Tel.: +234806011189

<sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus.

Email: [mfonasuquo@aksu.edu.ng](mailto:mfonasuquo@aksu.edu.ng); Tel.: 07035490011

<sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology, Federal University Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State.

Email: [ogarwalter@gmail.com](mailto:ogarwalter@gmail.com); Tel.: 08134716334

### Cite this article:

Esara U. V., Mfon E. A., Walter O. O. (2024), Impact of Modern Cultism and Governance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. African Journal of Law, Political Research and Administration 7(1), 135-147. DOI: 10.52589/AJLPRA-4NDQROTH

### Manuscript History

Received: 13 Apr 2024

Accepted: 1 Jun 2024

Published: 2 Jul 2024

### Copyright © 2024 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits anyone to share, use, reproduce and redistribute in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

**ABSTRACT:** *This study was conducted to investigate the factors responsible for cultism in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This was necessitated by the prevalent cult attacks that threaten lives and property in the state, and to examine the measures taken to fight against this menace. This study adopted two theories to guide the research, namely, symbolic interactionism and brotherhoodism in efforts to explain cultism. The data for the study were obtained through personal interviews with traditional rulers, police and the clergy, while secondary data were obtained from textbooks, journals, newspapers, and magazines. A total of 100 respondents were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were analyzed qualitatively as well as theoretically and empirical studies were reviewed from the basis for conclusion and recommendations. The paper recommends that the Nigeria police force should establish a police community trust relationship in their various stations for effective crime prevention and control. Also, distress call lines should be made available to the public to send information to the police.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cultism, Governance, Politics, Insecurity, State Machinery.



## INTRODUCTION

Cultism is a social problem in our society because of its devastating threats which have affected a significant number of people in the urban and rural communities. Cultists willingly perpetrate all forms of atrocities on campuses, political campaigns, burials, and most unfortunately have succeeded in planting cults in primary and secondary educational institutions. The children from privileged families find school cultism as an easy way to escape from their academic responsibilities without explanations to their sponsors. In fact, there are many cases where parents are cowered down by threats from their wards' cult groups. They engage in moral ruin, murder, terrorism, kidnapping, sexual harassment, rape, armed robbery, and generally debased practices across Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general.

This situation is used by politicians during elections; many aspirants hire various cult groups and use them as security and political thugs. Aspirants are linked to killings during and after political campaigns. Ballot boxes are snatched, with camera evidence, electoral officers and some law enforcement agents get maimed, killed, assaulted and manhandled in some areas, and nothing is known to be done against such aspirants/candidates and their supporters so far (Esara, 2021).

This was the situation that was exploited by politicians in Akwa Ibom State and other states in Nigeria, for their unbridled pursuit of political power and electoral successes. They recruit cultists as security and political thugs to harass and suppress their opponents both during and after campaigns; immediately after they succeed, some of the culprits are given opportunities to serve as governors, while others are in the Senate, House of Representative, House of Assemblies, some Council Chairmen and some Commissioners throwing their weights around, while the families of their victims languish in pain and loss from the activities of the cult groups. The problems of cultism in our political system and governance have persisted unabated because our political leaders have vested interests. Politicians empower, arm, keep, protect and maintain cultists at all levels of the social strata, for their purposes, hence the lip service to plans and actions that will curtail the spread of cultism in our society (Esara, 2021).

Esara, Asuquo and Udoh (2024) observed that cultism has become a social problem because it has affected a significant number of children and youths in society; both the rich and the poor are affected, most especially the vulnerable ones.

According to Asuquo and Ekanem (2023), in Nigeria, politics has remained the central factor in conflict and violence. Esara, Asuquo, Ekanem and Samuel (2023) averred that every existing state in the world today has an established government vested with the rights and responsibility to protect lives and property of her citizens. But cultism has really hampered this development in Akwa Ibom State. To Udonwa, Effiong, Asuquo and Samuel (2022), besides social amenities is the heavy presence of state apparatuses in governance to ensure safety and security of the people.

Nigeria is bedevilled with a seemingly intractable challenge of insecurity; the menace of cultism, cult-related killings and kidnapping has been posing a strong security threat in Akwa Ibom State and the South-South region of the country (Nnodim & Ochogba, 2018). Cultism, cult-related killing, robbery and kidnapping have been widely experienced in some parts of Akwa Ibom State, such as Ika, Etim Ekpo, Ukanafun, Uyo, Itu, Abak, Essien Udim and Ikot Ekpene, amongst others, local government areas in the state (Esara, 2021). It is on record that



in 2018, cult groups took over Etim Ekpo, Ukanafun and Ika Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Cultists are the ones collecting revenue across various revenue points; they also assume the position of headship of communities and determine who gets a job, the people to stay in the community and whose business operates in the area. Cultists do play an active role in every social vice that occurs; they are also recruited and used as mercenaries in various communal conflicts in the country (Esara, 2023).

Communities in these local government areas now contribute money on a monthly basis for cult gangs in the area to allow them to live in peace. Before a resident of the area would be allowed to hold any event, such as burial, birthday or wedding ceremonies, the organizers would first of all meet with the leaders of various cult groups controlling the area and pay a certain amount of money before such events would be allowed to hold. According to one of the informants, he reported how the boys call prominent indigenes from the local government areas and threaten them to pay 'ransom' or they would be kidnapped. Economic activities in the affected local government areas completely collapsed because people were no longer going to the markets. People were unable to go to farm anymore because farmlands had become no-go areas as different cult groups used to hide kidnapped victims (Adeniyi *et al.*, 2017).

These situations and more have put Akwa Ibom State in a situation of anarchy, a situation which has forced the Governor to redeploy the Nigeria police and military personnel to restore order in the affected areas. The negative impacts of these menaces have indeed been enormous; these range from poor human and infrastructural development in the state to the loss of millions of naira in many committees occasioned by forced migration. This highlights the imperatives of a long-lasting solution to the scourge of cultism in the state. The Akwa Ibom State government in 2019 granted amnesty to cultists in the affected local government areas. The efforts of security operatives to address the menace of cultism in the state are worth attention. However, this current study mainly examined the causes or factors responsible for cultism and the efforts taken by the government in combating the menace in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Cultism is a social problem disturbing the society; cultism can be reckoned as one of the highest forms of murder and unlawful activities that have taken over streets, communities, LGAs and the state as a whole. It has brought about all manners of criminality, lawlessness and chaos in Akwa Ibom State and other states in Nigeria. Over the years, Nigeria has experienced a high rate of insecurity in our tertiary institutions, communities, political campaigns and elections. Due to the overwhelming nature of insecurity in the state, which is best captured in this work, 'Nigerians are sleeping with one eye close and one eye open' the paper examined the causes of cultism and what has been done to address the problem of cultism in the state. According to Akpan, Ekoriko, Ekanem and Ottong (2024), the act of cultism has seriously eroded academic excellence in Nigeria's institutions of learning—primary, secondary and tertiary.

Cultism has brought about underdevelopment in the state. This is because investors are afraid of establishing their businesses in a place that is characterized by insecurity; others that were operating their businesses are moving their properties out of the area. The participants also noted some setbacks that arise from the complicity of some politicians or government officials; it was reported that most of these boys who perpetrate the terror in the state have connections with politicians who provide them with the sophisticated weapons with which they operate. A



good number of cultists are used as political thugs by politicians. In most cases, their godfathers usually bail or rescue them from the police net when arrested in the state.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to examine the factors or causes of cultism. The specific objectives are:

- i. To examine the factors or causes responsible for cultism in Akwa Ibom State
- ii. To investigate the history of cultism and their modus operandi
- iii. To investigate the measures taken by the people and the government to fight against this menace
- iv. To suggest some policy measures that would help to reduce cultism in our society.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Participants in the study attributed the spate of cultism in Akwa Ibom State to the political and economic situation in the state. It has been observed that during electoral campaigns, politicians do recruit cultists across the state and use them as private securities and political thugs who kill, maim, kidnap and hijack ballot boxes to ensure the success of their paymaster and, after the exercise, they are compensated with millions of naira in cash, contracts worth millions of naira and political appointments in the state (Esara, 2021). In the course of doing these dirty jobs, politicians supply them with weapons such as Ak47 rifles which they use to ruin terror in the state. Politics was found to be one of the factors responsible for the spate of cultism in Akwa Ibom State; cultists also serve politicians as thugs. These explain the lack of political will to combat the menace of cultism in the state. The association of cultism with politics and governance was also confirmed by Ijuye Dagogo (2018).

Esara, Asuquo and Samuel (2024) argued that arms and ammunition acquired to fight communal wars are being used for armed robbery, cultism, thuggery, kidnapping and bunkering. As observed by Asuquo and Ekanem (2023), corruption is a serious crime in Nigeria and it is punishable by law; yet corrupt politicians always use these corrupt means to fight against their political opponents (Ekanem, Asuquo, Ogar & Ofuka, 2023) posited that violence during elections and violence against women is a barrier that cannot be overemphasized. Many of these acts of violence are carried out by cults.

As observed by Esara, Asuquo and Udoh (2024), for years, crime control has always been advocated by different governments and their agencies, even when Nigeria as a nation was still under British Colonial control with its indirect rule system of administration. And cultism has brought a lot of crimes into Nigeria's system.

On the economic aspect, it was revealed that poverty and unemployment are factors responsible for cultism, when there are little or no job opportunities for the youths and many youths are overwhelmed by the get-rich-quick syndrome in the state. Nevertheless, the need for enlightenment is usually based on the general belief that the involvement of many youths in the crime of cultism is as a result of ignorance (Nnodim & Ochogba, 2018).



Regarding the emergence of secret cults in Nigeria, the first university campus cult was the National Association of Sea Dogs, Pyrate confraternity founded in the University of Ibadan in 1956, aimed then at addressing the injustice and oppression in the campus, but they became corrupt as they spread into other university campuses in Nigeria in those days. Initially, they commanded power and influence on the campuses and were generally gentle, good men and women. The desire by many to have more power, influence and control led to the rise of different cult groups in the campuses. The Mafia confraternity followed in the University of Ife in 1972, as a breakout from Pyrates Confraternity. The National Association of Adventures, called the Vikings Fraternity, was founded in the University of Port Harcourt in 1982, with black and red as their colours, and this marked the real beginning of violence (Offiong, 2003).

Other fraternities subsequently emerged as either offshoots in opposition to the parent body or in direct response to the stimulus provided by it and its successive splinter groups. They include:

- i. The Pyrates Confraternity/National Association of Seadogs (NAS)
- ii. The Vikings
- iii. The Buccaneer Confraternity
- iv. The Black Axe
- v. The Klansmen Konfraternity
- vi. K. K. K.
- vii. The Mafia
- viii. The Amazon (female cult)
- ix. The Black Braziers
- x. The Daughters of Jezebel
- xi. The Black Berets
- xii. The Black Serpent
- xiii. The Scorpion Fraternity
- xiv. The Secret sons of satan

Thus, it is correct to say that the PC is the progenitor of what came to be known as secret cults in Nigeria, and it is important to state that in 1980, the Pyrates Confraternity (PC) became a registered association under the new name, National Association of Seadogs. The spiritual leader, Wole Soyinka, took on the name of Cap'n Blood of Tortuga. Fashioned after the Scandinavian cult of the Vikings, they used battle axes, swords and knives freely to torment their victims. Black Axe Confraternity followed in the University of Benin in 1984, and introduced fetish practices into campus cultism. They wanted to be wholly African but they did



very un-African things, engaging mostly in blood covenants, ritual worship and rigorous machete drill during initiation (Esara, 2021).

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Cultism:** The term cultism involves a group of people indulging in worship activities although not part of any established religion (Offiong, 2003).

**Cult:** The term ‘cult’ conjures the image of a religious group advocating a new and unconventional belief in society. A cult is a cohesive group of people, often a relatively small and new religious movement, devoted to beliefs or practices that the surrounding culture or society considers to be for outside mainstream culture.

**Cultists:** A cultist therefore is one who is involved in cult activities. Their activities include occult practices such as initiation, blood covenant, oath taking and other demonic activities (Offiong, 2003).

**Insecurity:** Insecurity is seen as a form of danger that threatens a state and the reason why states, in order to defend and protect themselves, compete for the acquisition of arms and weapons of mass destruction (Ajayi, 2017).

**Politics:** Politics refers to the struggle for governance through political power (Esara, 2023).

**State Machinery:** State machinery are legitimate security personnel used by the government for the maintenance of law and order.

**Governance:** Governance is an act of exercising political and legislative authority within the state (Esara, 2023).

**Violent Crime:** Violent crime, otherwise known as crime against persons, is a type of crime carried out through the use of force and it usually attracts public attention.

**Terrorism:** Schmallegger (1999) defined terrorism as a violent act or an act dangerous to human life in violation of the criminal laws of a state to intimidate or coerce government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by the assumption of two theories; these include symbolic interactionism and brotherhoodism. George Herbert Mead’s theory is often referred to as symbolic interactionism or social behaviourism. He was basically interested in symbols, interaction and behaviour in a social setting. George Herbert Mead explored the relationship between self and society and the socio-psychological nature of the mind, and insisted that self is a product of association and communication (Esara, 2021). Secret cults use secret signs and symbols in communication among members. These signs and symbols are mainly known to members and only a few are known by non-members. Secrecy is a characteristic feature of man and any association involving man. No association discusses its important policy matters in public. If secret cults expose their signs and symbols to non-initiates, women and children, the mystery and curiosity about them during their initiation would be gone (Esara, 2021).



Symbolic interactionism is interested in the ways people interpret the social world and the meaning they attach to it. Some people get involved in cultism so that they can have access to highly influential cult members in government, where they can get favours in cash and political appointments.

The Brotherhoodism Theory was coined by Esara Umoh in the year 2021, in an attempt to explain cultism. The word Brotherhoodism was coined from the word brotherhood, meaning oneness. This is why cultists from the same fraternity see themselves as one, in which if anything happens to one, it affects the entire group. Brotherhoodism refers to any association that has sworn to an oath during initiation to protect one another at all costs. Before anybody is initiated into any secret cult, such a person must be made subject to oath taking to ensure that such a fellow keeps “secret”. Lack of secrecy would destroy the very essence of the group and the ability to perform most of their activities, such as violence.

Brotherhoodism makes old members in good positions in government to help their fellow brothers who are in need to strengthen their bond. This is why contracts are awarded at the state and local government level at fictitious amounts to compensate the cultists they used as political thugs. Fictitious contracts are awarded and the money is shared among brothers and their godfathers. They end up launching fatal attacks on perceived enemies (anybody that opposes them or tries to ban the group) using very sophisticated and lethal weapons with much confidence knowing that they are covered (Esara, 2021).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The total of 100 respondents were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Respondents were selected from 9 local government areas of Akwa Ibom State. Primary data were obtained from interviews and participant observation. Secondary data were obtained from textbooks, journals, newspapers, and magazines.

## **RESULT**

The respondents in their responses said that modern secret cults are sponsored and used by the political class to protect them as security and they also work for them as political thugs. Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents said that modern cults were doing dirty work for politicians, such as hijacking ballot boxes; they also attack and maim political opponents in order for their bosses to succeed and remain permanently in political offices.

In an interview with Mr. Inyang Bassey, one of the respondents said that these cultists were usually compensated by their bosses by being given political appointments. He said that some weapons that were given to them during the election, such as AK47 and pump action rifles, were later used for kidnapping and armed robbery, making our state unsafe for businesses to thrive (Interviewed on 21-07-2023).

In an interview with a police officer, Supol Akpan Okon, one of the study participants said that most of these cultists in government were using that influence to engage in drug business, by



supplying drugs to their customers using government number plates, knowing that security operatives will not disturb them.

In an interview with the Police Public Relation Officer, Odiko Macdon, he said that cultism is a crime and that the police are combat ready to eradicate cultism in the state. The police boss said that the anti-cultism unit of the force is ready to arrest and prosecute anybody connected to cultism (Interviewed 20-01-2024).

The respondents narrated how their fellow students were going for armed robbery and murder in order to have money to pay for dues to avoid punishment from their superiors. The respondents accepted that most of these robbery cases were carried by students.

In an interview with the students of the University of Uyo, who were the study participants, 60% of the respondents caution their students to say no to cultism because it would not do them any good rather than sending them to the early grave and also forcing them to drop out from school.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings from this study showed that factors like poverty, unemployment, ignorance/enticement and get-rich-quick syndrome are the major factors responsible for cultism in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general. The study also showed that in every electioneering/election, politicians usually use cultists as their private security details and political thugs who kill and maim to ensure their political success. The study also showed that sophisticated weapons used by cultists were provided by some desperate politicians. The study also showed that political oppression and power deprivation is also a factor responsible for cultism. The study showed that the amnesty programme is one of the measures used by the government to reduce cultism in the state—opportunities are given to cultists to surrender their weapons to the government. Cash and entrepreneurial empowerment across different job careers are given to them. The study also showed that some rural communities have introduced vigilante groups to fight against the menace of cultism in the state.

## **CONCLUSION**

Cultism has indeed been a nightmarish phenomenon to the residents of Akwa Ibom State. This is why a long-term remedy is imperative in order to restore law and order in the state. Cultism is a serious menace that needs adequate attention because of its devastating implications on the love of the people and the development of the state. The general public is tasked with the responsibility of giving out information regarding the activities of cultism to the police for immediate arrest and prosecution accordingly.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Government should give out cash rewards to people that give out information on cultism.
- ii. Vigilante groups should be equipped with weapons and gadgets to fight against cultism.
- iii. Police and communities should form a policing group.
- vi. Traditional rulers should report activities of cultism to the police for proper action.
- v. The State Assembly should enable the law to carry out capital punishment on cultists.

## REFERENCES

- Adeniyi, T. Agbo Ad et al., (2017). *Cultism Bringing communities to their knees*. Daily trust, 23, July 2017.
- Ajajyi, I. A. Eundayo, H. Oshashi F. M. (2010). *Menace of cultism in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions: The way out Anthropology*.
- Asuquo, M. E. & Ekanem, A. E.(2023). Implications of Violence on Ini Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Culture and Society*,(1)2, 105 - 117.
- Asuquo, M. E. & Ekanem, A. E.(2023). Corruption in Education Sector and Economic Development of Akwa Ibom State. *Aksu Annals of Sustainable Development*, 1 (1), 39-49.
- Ekanem, A. E., Asuquo, M. E., Ogar, W. O. & Ofuka, V. K.(2023). Gender, Politics and their Effects on Socio-societal Development. *Social Sciences and Management International Journal*, 4(3), 57-69.
- Esara, U. V. (2021) "Cultism and Rural governance in Akwa Ibom State: Focus on the itu Government Area" Dissertation Submitted to Postgraduate school university of Uyo, Uyo Akwa Ibom State, 2021.
- Esara, U. V., Asuquo, M. E., Ekanem, A. E. & Samuel, E. E.(2023). Jungle Justice and Governance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Communication and Humanities*, 2 (3), 20 -30.
- Esara, U. V., Asuquo, M. E. & Samuel, M. E.(2024). Remapping and Communal Conflicts in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Culture and Society*, 2 (2), 60-71.
- Esara, U. V., Asuquo, M. E. & Udoh, A. J.(2024). Traditional Secret Cults and Rural Governance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Culture and Society*, 2(1), 26- 37.
- Esara, U. V., Asuquo, M. E. & Udoh, A. J.(2024). Baby Factories and Child Abuse in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Culture and Society*, 2(1), 71-79.
- Ijyuye-Dagogo, S. (2018) *Cultism as political Weapon in Rivers State*. Rivers Ijaw Voice, 13 March 2018.
- Nnodim, A. U., Ochogba C. O. (2018). Impact of culpractivities on the socio-economic wellbeing of rural dwellers in Orashi region of rivers State, *Nigeria. International Journal of Innovative social sciences & Humanities Research* 6 (1): 56-63.
- Offiong, D. A. (2003). *Secret Cults in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions*. Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers.



- 
- Schmallegger, F. (1999). *Criminology today: An Integrative Introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Udonwa, E. U., Effiong, U. E., Asuquo, M. E. & Samuel, M. E.(2022). Poverty in Nigeria: The Political Economy Perspective. *International Journal of Research ( IJR)*, 9(10), 155-176,
- Wisdom M. A., Edidiong A. E., Anne E. E., Inimfon J. O. (2024), Attitude and Perception as Associated Risk Factors of Sexual Harassment of Secondary School Girls in Abak Lga, Akwa Ibom State. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research* 7(1), 174-184

**APPENDIX I**



**VICTIMS OF MODERN SECRET CULTS IN AKWA IBOM STATE  
SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023**

**APPENDIX II**



**VICTIMS OF MODERN SECRET CULTS IN AKWA IBOM STATE ON ELECTION DAY  
SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023**

**APPENDIX III**



**VICTIMS OF MODERN SECRET CULTS CLASH IN AKWA IBOM STATE.  
SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023**



**WEAPONS RECOVERED BY CULTIST IN AKWA IBOM STATE.  
SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023**