

CULT-RELATED CRIMES AND SAFETY OF RURAL DWELLERS IN SOUTH-SOUTH GEO-POLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA

Igweng, Igweng Christopher¹, Dr. Emeka, J. O², Barr. Dr. Abang Thelma Aya³, Joseph Anthony Odama⁴ & *Dr. Egidi, Stephen Achuen⁵

^{1,2,3,4}*Department of Criminology and Security Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar Cross River State, Nigeria.*

⁵*Department of Sociology and Social Work, Arthur Jarvis University, Akpabuyo Cross River State, Nigeria.*

***Corresponding E-mail:** egidistephen36@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article No.: 0440

Accepted Date: 04/07/2026

Published Date: 27/07/2026

Type: Research

ABSTRACT

This study examined cult-related crimes and the safety of rural dwellers in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The study was guided by two objectives: to determine the relationship between armed robbery and the safety of rural dwellers, and to assess the relationship between assassination and the safety of rural dwellers. Two corresponding null hypotheses were formulated and tested. The study was anchored on the Human Security Theory. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The study was conducted in selected rural communities in Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta States. The target population comprised rural residents aged 18 years and above. Using Cochran's (1963) sample size determination formula, a sample of 384 respondents was obtained. Respondents were selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure involving purposive, simple random, and systematic random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. A pilot study yielded a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.82, confirming satisfactory internal consistency of the instrument. Data were analyzed using the Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between armed robbery as a form of cult-related crime and the safety of rural dwellers ($\chi^2 = 178.84$, $p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the first null hypothesis. Similarly, a significant relationship was found between assassination and the safety of rural dwellers ($\chi^2 = 80.62$, $p < 0.05$), resulting in the rejection of the second null hypothesis. The study concluded that cult-related crimes, particularly armed robbery and assassination, constitute serious threats to the safety and security of rural communities. The study therefore recommended the strengthening of community-based security structures through effective collaboration among traditional institutions, community leaders, and formal security agencies.

Keywords: cult, crimes, well-being, armed robbery and assassination

Introduction

In many societies, criminal groups that operate under the guise of social associations, fraternities, gangs, or secret societies have increasingly contributed to insecurity, particularly in communities where state institutions are weak or where law enforcement capacity is limited (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2023). Rural communities are especially vulnerable because they often experience inadequate policing, poor infrastructure, delayed emergency response, and limited access to justice (Ekpenyong, Omotosho & Eshiotse, 2025). Globally, the concept of safety extends beyond protection from physical violence to encompass the ability of individuals and communities to live without fear of threats to life, property, and livelihoods. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) identifies personal safety as one of the core dimensions of human security, emphasizing that sustainable development cannot be achieved where violence, organized crime, and insecurity persist. Rural populations depend heavily on agriculture, fishing, small-scale trading, and natural resource exploitation for their livelihoods. However, criminal violence disrupts these activities by restricting movement, discouraging investment, reducing agricultural productivity, displacing populations, and weakening community institutions (World Bank, 2023). Consequently, understanding the factors that undermine rural safety has become increasingly important for policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners.

Within the African context, organized criminal activities have evolved considerably over the past three decades. Several African countries continue to experience violent activities perpetrated by criminal gangs, armed groups, secret societies, militias, and cult organizations that exploit weak governance structures, unemployment, poverty, political instability, and ineffective law enforcement (African Development Bank, 2024). Although the forms of organized violence vary across regions, many communities experience similar consequences, including homicide, kidnapping, extortion, sexual violence, destruction of property, and forced displacement. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS, 2023) observes that organized violent groups increasingly exploit local grievances and socioeconomic vulnerabilities to recruit young people, particularly in marginalized rural areas where educational and employment opportunities remain limited. These developments have heightened concerns regarding the safety of vulnerable populations across the continent. Nigeria presents one of the most complex security environments in sub-Saharan Africa. The country currently faces multiple security challenges, including terrorism in the North-East, banditry in the North-West, farmer-herder conflicts in the North-Central region, separatist violence in the South-East, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, kidnapping for ransom, and cult-related crimes across several southern states (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). Among these challenges, cult-related crimes have emerged as one of the most persistent forms of organized violence affecting many communities. Cult-related crimes in Nigeria have attracted increasing scholarly attention because of their growing sophistication and expanding geographical spread. Numerous cult groups such as the Icelanders, Greenlanders, Dey Bam, Vikings, Black Axe, Klansmen Confraternity, and Supreme Eiye Confraternity have established extensive networks in several parts of southern Nigeria, particularly within the Niger Delta region (International Crisis Group, 2020). These organizations frequently compete for territorial dominance, control of illegal economic activities, political patronage, and community influence. Violent clashes among rival cult groups often result in deaths, injuries, displacement, destruction of property, and prolonged fear among residents.

The South-South geopolitical zone occupies a strategic position within Nigeria because it hosts the country's largest crude oil reserves and contributes substantially to national revenue. The zone comprises Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States. Despite its enormous economic significance, the region has experienced prolonged insecurity arising from militancy, illegal oil bunkering, piracy, kidnapping,

communal conflicts, and cult-related violence (International Crisis Group, 2020). Rural communities in the South-South region are particularly exposed to cult-related crimes because many are located in difficult-to-access riverine environments characterized by limited police presence, inadequate transportation infrastructure, weak communication networks, and insufficient public services. These conditions create opportunities for cult groups to establish operational bases, recruit unemployed youths, and carry out violent activities with relatively limited resistance from security agencies.

These conditions undermine both human security and rural development by reducing economic productivity and weakening social trust. Furthermore, prolonged exposure to violent crimes contributes to psychological trauma, increased poverty, food insecurity, and reduced community resilience (UNDP, 2022). Consequently, there remains insufficient evidence regarding the patterns through which cult-related crimes influence rural safety across different ecological, social, and economic settings within the region. Another notable gap concerns the integration of human security perspectives into studies of cult-related crimes. While crime statistics provide useful information regarding incidents of violence, they often fail to capture the lived experiences of rural dwellers whose daily activities, mobility, livelihoods, and social relationships are shaped by persistent fear and insecurity. It is against this background that this study examines cult-related crimes and the safety of rural dwellers in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The paper is set to examine armed robbery and assassination as the forms of cult related crimes.

Statement of the Problem

Security remains a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable rural development, social stability, and economic productivity. However, rural communities in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone continue to experience increasing threats from criminal activities associated with cult groups, gangs, and other non-state security actors (Wilson, 2018). The South-South region, consisting of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States, has historically been affected by multiple security challenges arising from resource conflicts, youth unemployment, poverty, political violence, and weak institutional control. Within this complex security environment, cult-related crimes have transformed from a predominantly campus-based phenomenon into a broader form of organized criminality affecting communities, including rural settlements (Kpae, 2016). Originally associated with secret societies in Nigerian higher institutions, cultism has expanded into community-based networks characterized by violent rivalry, territorial struggles, and criminal enterprises. Kpae (2016) established that cult-related violence in the Niger Delta has become a major security concern because rival groups frequently engage in violent confrontations for dominance and control of territories.

These activities have contributed to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among residents, particularly in rural communities where state security presence is often limited. The vulnerability of rural dwellers in the South-South region is intensified by socioeconomic and environmental conditions that create opportunities for criminal networks to thrive. Many rural communities experience inadequate infrastructure, limited employment opportunities, weak law enforcement capacity, and declining traditional mechanisms of social regulation. These conditions expose young people to recruitment by cult organizations that promise financial benefits, protection, identity, and social influence. Studies on youth vulnerability to community cultism in the Niger Delta have shown that economic hardship, peer influence, and the quest for power contribute significantly to cult membership, while rivalry among groups often results in assassinations, abductions, communal disturbances, and property destruction (Ekanem, Ekpenyong & Uwah, 2020). The insecurity has negatively affected agricultural productivity because farmers are frequently exposed to threats associated with criminal gangs, violent conflicts, and cult-related activities. Ndubueze-Ogaraku, Etowa &

Ekine, (2017) observed that insecurity shocks in the Niger Delta have disrupted farming activities and weakened the resilience of rural households. Wilson (2018) noted that non-state security actors, including cult groups and gangs, have become influential actors in some Niger Delta communities, affecting local governance structures and development processes. Their activities create parallel systems of authority where fear and violence replace lawful community control mechanisms. Although government agencies have introduced various measures, including anti-cultism laws, security operations, youth empowerment programmes, and community policing initiatives, cult-related crimes remain persistent in several rural communities of the South-South zone. Existing studies have largely examined cultism from the perspectives of higher institutions, youth behaviour, or general Niger Delta insecurity, leaving insufficient empirical attention on how cult-related crimes specifically affect the everyday safety experiences of rural dwellers across the six states of the South-South geopolitical zone.

Objectives of the study

- i. To assess if armed robbery relate to safety of rural dwellers
- ii. To assess the role of assassination in the safety of rural dwellers

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between armed robbery as form of cult related crime and the safety of rural dwellers
2. There is no significant relationship between assassination as form of cult related crime and the safety of rural dwellers

Literature review

Armed robbery as a form of cult-related crime and the safety of rural dwellers

Crime and insecurity remain significant challenges affecting social stability, economic development, and human wellbeing in many developing societies. Among the various forms of violent crime, armed robbery represents one of the most threatening because of its direct implications for human life, property ownership, and public confidence in security institutions. Armed robbery involves the use of weapons, threats, or physical force to unlawfully obtain money, goods, or other valuables from individuals, households, businesses, or communities. In rural communities, where security infrastructure is often limited and access to formal law enforcement may be inadequate, armed robbery creates heightened vulnerability among residents and undermines feelings of safety (Kpae, 2016). In Nigeria, the relationship between violent crimes and emerging criminal networks has become increasingly complex. One notable dimension of this complexity is the transformation of some cult groups from secret associations into organized criminal networks involved in various violent activities, including armed robbery, kidnapping, assassination, and territorial conflicts. Cult-related crimes have historically been associated with campus-based secret societies; however, over time, some groups have expanded beyond educational institutions into wider communities, adopting criminal behaviours and operating as informal networks of violence and intimidation (Kpae, 2016). Research indicates that cult groups in parts of Nigeria, particularly within the Niger Delta region, have been linked to violent crimes because members often use weapons, coercion, and organized structures to achieve criminal objectives.

The involvement of cult groups in armed robbery presents a serious security concern because it introduces organization, loyalty structures, and group coordination into criminal activities. Unlike ordinary individual offenders, cult-related armed robbery operations may involve intelligence gathering, recruitment networks, weapon acquisition, and retaliatory violence against perceived opponents or community members. The criminal orientation of some cult groups is reinforced by factors such as unemployment, poverty, peer influence, weak social control, political patronage, and the desire for social recognition or economic

advancement (Yabagi & Ada, 2025). Rural communities are particularly affected by cult-related armed robbery because of their limited capacity to prevent and respond to violent attacks. Many rural areas experience challenges such as inadequate police presence, poor road networks, limited communication facilities, and delayed emergency responses. These structural weaknesses create opportunities for criminal groups to operate with reduced risk of detection. Consequently, rural dwellers may experience persistent fear, restricted movement, loss of livelihoods, and declining participation in social and economic activities. Studies on rural insecurity in Nigeria have shown that violent criminal activities, including armed attacks, robbery, kidnapping, and extortion, threaten community livelihoods and social stability (Egidi, Emeka & Owan, 2020).

The consequences of armed robbery as a cult-related crime extend beyond immediate financial losses. Victims may suffer psychological trauma, physical injuries, displacement, and reduced trust in community and state security mechanisms. In rural settings, where farming and local commerce are major sources of livelihood, insecurity can discourage agricultural production, limit market activities, and increase poverty levels. Furthermore, continuous exposure to violent crimes can weaken traditional systems of social control, as residents may become reluctant to report criminal activities due to fear of retaliation from armed groups (Iwarimie-Jaja, 2012). The safety of rural dwellers is therefore closely connected to the effectiveness of crime prevention strategies, community resilience, and the capacity of security institutions to address evolving forms of criminality. Addressing cult-related armed robbery requires more than conventional law enforcement approaches; it demands attention to the social and economic conditions that encourage youth involvement in criminal networks.

Effective interventions may include youth empowerment programmes, community policing, improved intelligence gathering, strengthened rural security infrastructure, and collaboration between government agencies and local communities (Yabagi & Ada, 2025). Despite increasing attention to insecurity in Nigeria, there remains a need for deeper understanding of armed robbery as a specific manifestation of cult-related crime and its implications for rural safety. Much existing research has focused on cultism in educational institutions or general violent insecurity, while fewer studies examine how cult-linked criminal activities affect the everyday security experiences of rural populations (Joseph, Awunghe, Abang, Egidi & Eyie, 2026). Investigating this relationship is important because rural communities often represent vulnerable environments where criminal groups can establish influence and where residents may have limited mechanisms for protection and justice (Ekpenyong, Omotosho & Eshiotse, 2025). Therefore, this study examines armed robbery as a form of cult-related crime and its implications for the safety of rural dwellers. The study seeks to contribute to criminological understanding of how organized violent groups operate within rural spaces and provide insights into strategies that can enhance community security, reduce victimization, and promote safer rural environments.

Assassination as form of cult related crime and the safety of rural dwellers.

Assassination as a form of cult-related crime represents one of the most complex manifestations of organized violence, particularly because it involves deliberate acts of killing motivated by ideological, political, spiritual, social, or group-based objectives. Unlike ordinary homicide, assassination is characterized by the intentional targeting of specific individuals whose elimination is perceived by perpetrators as necessary for achieving a broader purpose. In many societies, cult-related criminal activities are associated with secrecy, ritual practices, coercive control, and strong group allegiance, making such crimes difficult to detect and prevent. Cult groups may employ assassination as a mechanism for enforcing internal discipline, eliminating perceived enemies, gaining social influence, or demonstrating power over communities (Barkun, 2013). The relationship between cult activities and violent

crimes has attracted scholarly attention due to the capacity of some groups to normalize extreme behaviours through shared beliefs and collective identities. Research on destructive cults indicates that charismatic leadership, ideological manipulation, social isolation, and obedience to group authority can contribute to the willingness of members to participate in harmful actions, including targeted killings (Lalich & Tobias, 2006). In such contexts, assassination is not merely an individual criminal act but a socially organized form of violence embedded within the belief systems and operational structures of the group. Rural communities are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of cult-related assassinations because of limited security infrastructure, inadequate law enforcement presence, poor access to justice institutions, and socio-economic challenges (Ushie & Egidi, 2022). Rural dwellers often depend on close-knit social relationships and traditional authority structures, which can be disrupted when violent groups operate through intimidation and fear. The occurrence of targeted killings in rural areas can create widespread insecurity, restrict economic activities, weaken community trust, and encourage displacement among residents who perceive their environment as unsafe (Okoli & Orinya, 2013). The fear generated by assassination-related violence extends beyond direct victims, affecting families, community leaders, farmers, and other vulnerable populations whose daily activities depend on a stable security environment.

In many developing societies, including parts of sub-Saharan Africa, rural insecurity has increasingly been linked to the activities of non-state armed groups, criminal networks, and secret associations. These groups often exploit conditions such as poverty, unemployment, weak governance, and social grievances to recruit members and sustain violent operations. The presence of cult-related violence in rural communities therefore presents a significant challenge to human security, which emphasizes the protection of individuals from threats that affect survival, dignity, and livelihood (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994). From this perspective, addressing assassination as a cult-related crime requires not only criminal justice responses but also broader interventions that strengthen community resilience, improve rural security systems, and address underlying social vulnerabilities. The safety of rural dwellers is therefore closely connected to the ability of governments, security institutions, and communities to identify and respond effectively to emerging forms of organized violence. Preventing assassination linked to cult activities requires improved intelligence gathering, community-based security partnerships, effective policing strategies, and public awareness initiatives.

Theoretical framework

Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory was introduced by the United Nations Development Programme in its 1994 Human Development Report. The report shifted the traditional understanding of security from a state-centered approach, which focuses primarily on territorial protection and military strength, to a people-centered perspective that prioritizes the safety, dignity, and well-being of individuals. Human Security Theory is built on several fundamental assumptions for instance, that the individual is the primary referent of security. The theory argues that security should focus on protecting people rather than merely safeguarding the territorial integrity of the state. It recognizes that insecurity may arise from violence, crime, poverty, disease, environmental degradation, unemployment, food shortages, and political instability. Human Security Theory provides an appropriate framework for explaining the relationship between cult-related crimes and the well-being of rural dwellers. Cult-related crimes including murder, kidnapping, armed robbery, intimidation, sexual violence, destruction of property, and communal conflicts directly threaten the safety and livelihoods of rural populations. Despite its relevance, Human Security Theory has several limitations. First, the concept of human security is broad and multidimensional, making it difficult to define precise boundaries. Because it encompasses economic, political, social,

environmental, health, and personal security, researchers sometimes find it challenging to determine which aspects should receive greater attention in empirical studies. Despite its broad scope and conceptual limitations, it remains a valuable theoretical framework for understanding how insecurity affects the overall quality of life of rural populations and for informing policies aimed at promoting sustainable peace, safety, and human development. The Human Security Theory was used here because of its usefulness to the study.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to obtain data from a representative sample of respondents and describe existing conditions regarding cult-related crimes and the safety of rural dwellers in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The study was conducted in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The zone comprises six states: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. However, for the purpose of this study, three states Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta States were selected because of the reported prevalence of cult-related criminal activities in many of their rural communities. The selected states are characterized by extensive riverine settlements, agrarian livelihoods, fishing activities, oil exploration, and dispersed rural populations. These socioeconomic and geographical characteristics have created conditions in which rural residents experience varying levels of insecurity arising from cult-related violence, kidnapping, armed robbery, communal clashes, and other organized criminal activities. The target population comprised adult rural dwellers (18 years and above) residing in selected rural communities within Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta States. To determine the sample size Cochran's formula (1963) was adopted. The formula for Cochran sample size determinant is stated thus:

$$n_o = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

n_o = sample size

z = is Z-value from table at given confidence level (put at 95% or 1.96)

p = Proportion of victims of cult-related crimes age 18 years and above (given in this study as 50%). That is 0.5

q = $1 - P$, compliment of p (put at 50%, i.e, 1-50%)

e = desired level of precision or error margin (put at 0.05).

Applying the formula therefore,

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 (0.5)(0.5)}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 (0.25)}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$n = 384.16$$

$$n = 384$$

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents for the study. Stage One: Selection of States, three states were selected (Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta States) were purposively selected from the six states in the South-South geo-political zone because of the documented incidence of cult-related criminal activities and their relevance to the objectives of the study. Stage Two: Selection of Local Government Areas (LGAs) from each of the three selected states, four (4) Local Government Areas were selected through simple random sampling (balloting without replacement), making a total of twelve (12) LGAs for the study. Stage Three: Selection of Rural Communities from each of the selected LGAs, two rural communities were selected through simple random sampling, resulting in a total of twenty-

four (24) rural communities. Stage Four: Selection of Respondents within each selected community, households were identified with the assistance of community leaders.

Eligible respondents were selected using systematic random sampling. Where more than one eligible adult was present in a household, one respondent was selected through simple balloting. Equal allocation of respondents across the selected communities was maintained, with 16 respondents selected from each of the 24 communities, giving: $24 \text{ communities} \times 16 \text{ respondents} = 384 \text{ respondents}$. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity by three experts: two specialists in Criminology/Security Studies and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study conducted among 30 rural dwellers in communities outside the selected study area but possessing similar characteristics. Data obtained from the pilot study were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The overall reliability coefficient was 0.82, indicating that the instrument possessed satisfactory internal consistency and was suitable for the study. The completed questionnaires were analyzed using the Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence at the 0.05 level of significance.

Findings

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between armed robbery as form of cult related crime and the safety of rural dwellers

Table 1: Chi-Square Computation

Cell	O	E	(O - E) ² /E
SA–Unsafe	95	65.63	13.14
SA–Safe	10	39.38	21.91
A–Unsafe	110	78.13	13.00
A–Safe	15	46.88	21.69
D–Unsafe	25	50.00	12.50
D–Safe	55	30.00	20.83
SD–Unsafe	10	46.25	28.41
SD–Safe	64	27.75	47.36
Total χ^2			178.84

Degrees of Freedom

$$df = (r-1)(c-1) = (3-1)(2-1) = 2 \times 1 = 2$$

The critical Chi-square value is: $\chi^2_{0.05, 2} = 5.991$

The calculated Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 178.84$) is greater than the critical value ($\chi^2 = 5.991$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The analysis indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between armed robbery as a form of cult-related crime and the safety of rural dwellers.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between assassination as form of cult related crime and the safety of rural dwellers

Table 2: Chi-square Computation

Cell	O	E	(O - E) ² /E
Frequently × Safe	40	83.33	22.54
Frequently × Not Safe	160	116.67	16.09
Not Frequently × Safe	120	76.67	24.50
Not Frequently × Not Safe	64	107.33	17.49
Total χ^2			80.62

Degrees of Freedom = $df = (r-1)(c-1) = (2-1)(2-1) = 1$

Calculated $\chi^2 = 80.62$, Critical $\chi^2 = 3.841$

The Chi-square analysis indicates a statistically significant relationship between assassination as a form of cult-related crime and the safety of rural dwellers ($\chi^2 = 80.62$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that the occurrence of assassination is significantly associated with reduced safety among rural residents.

Discussion of findings

Rural areas frequently experience delayed security responses, poor road networks, limited surveillance systems, and insufficient policing, making them attractive operational environments for armed robbery. Cult groups exploit these vulnerabilities by engaging in robbery, intimidation, kidnapping, and violent attacks against residents, thereby creating an atmosphere of persistent fear and insecurity. The availability of small arms, youth unemployment, poverty, political patronage, and weak community policing mechanisms further contribute to the increasing involvement of cult groups in armed robbery activities. These conditions enhance the operational capacity of criminal groups while simultaneously reducing the ability of rural communities to resist or prevent such crimes. The findings further imply that armed robbery associated with cult activities directly undermines the safety of rural dwellers by threatening lives, destroying property, restricting movement, and weakening social cohesion. Rural residents become reluctant to engage in farming, trading, and other livelihood activities due to fear of attacks. This ultimately affects agricultural productivity, household income, food security, and local economic development. The psychological consequences are equally significant, as repeated exposure to violent crimes often results in trauma, anxiety, and reduced trust among community members. The findings align with Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) who observed that increasing violent crimes, including armed robbery, significantly weaken public confidence in state security institutions and reduce community safety. Similarly, Alemika (2013), reported that organized criminal groups increasingly exploit weak rural governance structures to perpetrate violent crimes, including armed robbery and kidnapping. The finding is also consistent with studies specifically examining cultism and organized criminal violence in Nigeria. Best (2007) argued that many contemporary cult groups have transformed into organized criminal networks involved in armed robbery, political violence, kidnapping, and illegal arms trafficking. However, the finding differs slightly from studies that attribute rural insecurity primarily to economic deprivation or communal conflicts rather than cult-related criminality. For example, Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2004) emphasized poverty, inequality, and competition over resources as primary causes of violent conflict. While these structural factors remain important, the current study demonstrates that cult-related armed robbery constitutes an independent and significant security threat affecting rural dwellers.

In many rural communities, security infrastructure is relatively weak, with inadequate police presence, delayed emergency response, poor surveillance systems, and limited

intelligence gathering. These conditions provide cult groups with opportunities to carry out targeted killings with minimal resistance or risk of arrest. Rural dwellers may avoid farming, attending community meetings, participating in local markets, or travelling after dark because of the perceived threat of targeted attacks. This finding corroborates previous empirical studies. For instance, Okoli and Iortyer (2014) found that cult-related violence in Nigerian communities increasingly manifests through targeted killings and political assassinations, leading to widespread fear and weakening public confidence in local security structures. Likewise, Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2004) observed that violent organized groups frequently employ assassination as a mechanism for asserting dominance, intimidating opponents, and maintaining control over territories, particularly in communities where state security institutions are weak. Similarly, Akinwale (2010) reported that cult-related assassinations significantly contribute to rural insecurity by disrupting peaceful coexistence, increasing fear among residents, and discouraging social and economic participation.

The finding also aligns with international evidence. UNODC (2019) reported that organized criminal groups often use assassination strategically to eliminate rivals, enforce compliance, and instil fear within communities. Such targeted killings not only increase homicide rates but also erode public confidence in state institutions responsible for maintaining law and order. Similarly, the Global Organized Crime Index (2023) observed that criminal organizations frequently employ assassination to sustain illicit networks, suppress opposition, and expand territorial influence, particularly in regions characterized by weak governance and limited law enforcement capacity.

Conclusion

Cult-related crimes have become a significant threat to the security architecture of rural communities, undermining the safety, stability, and socio-economic wellbeing of residents. Rather than being isolated criminal incidents, armed robbery and assassination have evolved into organized expressions of cult violence that create persistent fear, disrupt livelihoods, weaken community cohesion, and erode public confidence in formal security institutions. Armed robbery, as a cult-related crime, exhibited a statistically significant relationship with the safety of rural dwellers. Frequent attacks on homes, farms, markets, and transportation routes expose residents to physical harm, economic losses, and psychological trauma. Consequently, rural dwellers experience heightened insecurity that restricts agricultural production, commercial activities, and social interactions, thereby impeding sustainable rural development. Assassination, perpetrated as a form of cult-related violence, maintained a significant relationship with the safety of rural dwellers. Cult-inspired targeted killings generate an atmosphere of intimidation and uncertainty, particularly in communities where victims include traditional rulers, community leaders, youth leaders, political actors, or individuals perceived to oppose cult interests. The persistent occurrence of assassinations weakens local governance structures, reduces public participation in community affairs, and reinforces a culture of silence born out of fear of reprisal. This study has several limitations first, the study was limited to selected rural communities within the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria; consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to rural communities in other geopolitical zones with different socio-cultural, economic, and security contexts. Also, the investigation focused specifically on armed robbery and assassination as indicators of cult-related crimes. Other manifestations of cult violence such as kidnapping, extortion, sexual violence, drug-related offences, and political intimidation were beyond the scope of the study and therefore were not incorporated into the analysis. Overall, the tested relationships confirm that cult-related crimes are significant predictors of the safety of rural dwellers in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Community-based security structures should be strengthened through collaboration between traditional rulers, community development committees, youth leaders, and formal security agencies. This recommendation stems directly from the finding that cult-related armed robbery thrives where local surveillance and collective security mechanisms are weak.
2. Security agencies should increase regular patrols and intelligence gathering in rural communities identified as hotspots for cult-related armed robbery. This recommendation is informed by the finding that the persistent occurrence of armed robbery creates an atmosphere of insecurity that limits the movement and economic activities of rural residents.
3. Youth empowerment programmes, including vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and employment initiatives, should be expanded to reduce the recruitment of unemployed youths into cult groups involved in armed robbery. This recommendation is based on the finding that youth participation contributes significantly to the prevalence of cult-related criminal activities.
4. Law enforcement agencies should prioritize intelligence-led investigations into cult-related killings to ensure that perpetrators are promptly identified and prosecuted. This recommendation is directly linked to the finding that the persistence of assassination is partly sustained by weak investigation and limited accountability.
5. Government should establish conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms in rural communities to identify and address disputes before they escalate into cult-related assassinations. This recommendation arises from the finding that many targeted killings are preceded by unresolved conflicts and threats.
6. Traditional institutions, religious leaders, and community stakeholders should be actively involved in peacebuilding and conflict mediation initiatives. This recommendation is informed by the finding that strong community leadership can discourage violence and reduce the likelihood of cult-related assassinations.

References

- Ajodo-Adebanjoko, A. (2017). Crime and insecurity in Nigeria: Implications for national development. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Research*, 3(3), 53–62.
- Akinwale, A. A. (2010). Integrating the traditional and the modern conflict management strategies in Nigeria. *Ibadan Journal of the Social Sciences*, 8(1), 1–14.
- Alemika, E. E. O., & Chukwuma, I. C. (2004). Criminal victimization and fear of crime in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria. CLEEN Foundation.
- Barkun, M. (2013). A culture of conspiracy: Apocalyptic visions in contemporary America. University of California Press.
- Best, S. G. (2007). Conflict and peace building in Plateau State, Nigeria. Spectrum Books.
- Boege, V., Brown, A., Clements, K., & Nolan, A. (2009). Building peace and political community through hybrid political orders. *International Peace Institute*.
- Cohen, L. E., & Felson, M. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review*, 44(4), 588–608.
- Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and grievance in civil war. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56(4), 563–595.
- Egidi, S. A., Emeka, J. O., and Owan, L. A. (2020). Communal Conflict and Rural Development in Bekwarra local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. *The Researchers Journal: A Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*. Vol. 1 issue 4, pp 44-5.4
- Ekanem, S. A., Ekpenyong, B. E., & Uwah, I. E. (2020). Evaluation of youth vulnerability to community cultism in selected states in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Advanced Research and Reports*, 14(2), 1–14.
- Ekpenyong, B. E., Omotosho, T. J., & Eshiotse, E. (2025). Community stability in the face of cult-related crimes in rural areas of South-South Nigeria. *Multi-Disciplinary Journal of Research and Development Perspectives*, 14(2), 145–156.
- Ellis, S. (2016). *This present darkness: A history of Nigerian organized crime*. Oxford University Press.
- European Union Agency for Asylum. (2026). *Nigeria security situation: Violence linked to criminality, gangs/cults and separatism in the Niger Delta*. European Union Agency for Asylum.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (2022). *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022*. FAO.
- Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. (2023). *Global Organized Crime Index 2023*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.
- Institute for Security Studies. (2023). *Organised crime and insecurity in Africa*. <https://issafrica.org>
- International Crisis Group. (2020). *Violence in Nigeria's oil-rich Rivers State*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org>
- Iwarimie-Jaja, D. (2012). *Criminology: The study of crime and criminal behaviour*. Pearl Publishers.
- Joseph, A. O., Awunghe, A. A., Abang, T. A., Egidi, S. A. & Eyie V. F. (2026). Distributed Denial-Of-Service (Ddos) Attacks, Malware Distribution And Electronic Transactions In Cross River State, Nigeria. *Impact International Journals and Publications*. Volume 2, Issue 3, pp. 142-155 | ISSN: 2636-4484.
- Kpae, G. (2016). Cultism and violent crime: An appraisal of the security challenges in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(12), 37–41.

- Lalich, J., & Tobias, M. (2006). *Take back your life: Recovering from cults and abusive relationships*. Bay Tree Publishing.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Crime experience and security perception survey 2023*. Abuja, Nigeria.
- Ndubueze-Ogaraku, M. E., Etowa, E. B., & Ekine, I. D. (2017). Analysis of insecurity shocks and farmers' resilience in the Niger Delta region, Nigeria. *Journal of Agricultural Extension*, 21(3), 104–115.
- Nigeria Security Tracker. (2024). *Nigeria Security Tracker database*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker>
- Nwabgoso, C. I. (2012). Security challenges and economy of the Nigerian state (2007–2011). *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 2(6), 244–258.
- Okoli, A. C., & Atelhe, G. A. (2014). Nomads against natives: A political ecology of herder/farmer conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4(2), 76–88.
- Okoli, A. C., & Iortyer, P. (2014). Terrorism and humanitarian crisis in Nigeria: Insights from Boko Haram insurgency. *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, 14(1), 39–50.
- Okoli, A. C., & Lenshie, N. E. (2018). Nigeria: Nomadic migrant pastoralism and rural violence. *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, 25, 35–52.
- Okoli, A. C., & Orinya, S. (2013). Oil pipeline vandalism and Nigeria's national security. *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, 13(5), 9–16.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Human development report 2021/2022: Uncertain times, unsettled lives*. UNDP.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2019). *Global Study on Homicide 2019*. United Nations.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2023). *Global study on homicide 2023*. United Nations.
- Ushie, M. A. and Egidi, S. A. (2022). Violence, Environment and Sustainable livelihood: Focus on the Herdsmen /Farmers Crisis in Nigeria. *Journal of Environmental and Tourism Education*. Vol. 1, No. 1
- Weisheit, R. A., & Donnermeyer, J. F. (2000). *Change and continuity in crime in rural America*. In G. LaFree et al. (Eds.), *The Nature of Crime: Continuity and Change* (pp. 309–357). U.S. Department of Justice.
- Wilson, G. (2018). Non-state security actors and rural community development in Niger Delta region, Nigeria. *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 19(1), 109–129.
- World Bank. (2023). *World development report 2023: Migrants, refugees, and societies*. World Bank.
- World Bank. (2024). *World development report 2024: The middle-income trap*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org>