

Niger Delta Weekly: Spotlighting the Resurgence of Cult and Gang Violence in Rivers State

February 19-25, 2023

Description

This weekly update spotlights gang violence in the Niger Delta with a focus on clashes between cult gangs in Rivers State. According to data (see map below), over 200 cult and gang related fatalities were reported in Rivers State between January 2020 and December 2022. Recent incidents indicate a resurgence of cult and gang related killings in the State, driven mainly by battle for supremacy and territorial control among rival cult gangs. Since January 2023, more than 10 persons have been killed in a series of cult clashes in the State. In January 2023, for instance, an elderly man was reportedly burned to death in a reprisal attack by members of a cult gang in Diobu community, Port Harcourt LGA. Separately, the leader of a cult gang was reportedly killed by members of a rival group in Diobu community. In February, members of a cult gang reportedly kidnapped a woman and raped her to death in Abarikpo community, Ahoada East LGA. More recently, on February 14, 2023, nine persons were reportedly shot dead during a clash over a leadership tussle between two factions of a cult gang in Ikata community, Ahoada East LGA.

Why it Matters

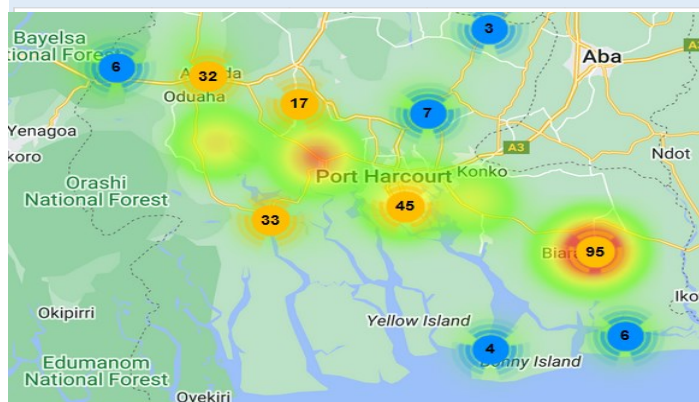
The current wave of cult and gang related violence and killings could trigger a sequence of armed clashes and reprisal attacks in the State. This could degenerate into extended battles for supremacy among the numerous cult gangs in the State. The situation could also intensify and take on various criminal, communal and political dimensions, especially against the backdrop of rising political tensions and social polarization in the lead-up to the 2023 general elections in the State.

Social: Given that cult and criminal gangs overlap, the resurgence of cult clashes could intensify criminal activities including kidnapping for ransom, robbery, arms proliferation, illicit drug trafficking and abuse, and sexual violence. Also, considering that cult gangs permeate many communities in the State, recurrent cult clashes could embolden cult gangs to enlist more youths to defend their territory. This could cause general insecurity and undermine the social wellbeing of residents

Economic: An upsurge in cult clashes and associated criminal violence could be economically devastating for the State. Properties are often destroyed, markets and shops looted, and residents robbed or killed during cult clashes. Cult clashes usually cause the closure of businesses and therefore bring about loss of revenue, economic opportunities and livelihoods. During some of the recent cult clashes, for instance, many shops and markets were reportedly closed in parts of the State.

Political: The resurgence of cult clashes could destabilize governance and politics in the State, especially given that cult clashes and political violence are mutually reinforcing - cult gangs are often funded and used by politicians to intimidate voters and influence election results.

Fatalities Heat Map of Cult and Gang Related Violence in Rivers State, Nigeria



Heat Map shows the geographical concentration of cult and gang related fatalities in Rivers State from January 2020 - December 2022. Sources: All data sources formatted on the P4P Peace Map www.p4p-nigerdelta.org

Prognosis

The current trend of cult violence and killings is mainly driven by battle for supremacy and territorial control among rival cult gangs. Stakeholders should collaborate with the State government, CSOs, relevant security agencies, and media outfits to intensify ongoing anti-cultism efforts including raising awareness of the destructive impacts of violent cult activities. Law enforcement agencies should also work with local residents for early warning signs and intelligence gathering to curtail the recruitment of youths into cult gangs.

Contact Us

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Report Incidents: IPDU Early Warning System

Please report any verified incident of conflict to the IPDU SMS early warning system: Text report to **080 9936 2222**

Incident Details: Kindly include the State, LGA, Town, Date, and brief incident description.



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