An Overview of the Effect of Cultism and Insecurity Challenges in Edo North

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of Cultism and insecurity on social economic development in Edo North Senatorial District, Edo State. The research explores how various forms of cultism activities and insecurity vices such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and communal clashes affect business operations, employment, investment, and socio-economic development. The paper adopted a mixed method of data gathering and social conflict theory among other theories was relied on. The findings reveal a significant relationship between the causes of insecurity and disruptions to economic activities in the region. Insecurity was found to have a notable impact on business performance, job creation, and investor confidence. Furthermore, the study shows that government and community responses to the insecurity challenges are currently effective. The research concludes that these vices significantly hamper economic growth and development in Edo North, and by extension, in Nigeria. Recommendations are made to strengthen security architecture, improve community policing, and improve economic opportunities to reduce criminal activities.

Key: Cultism, Insecurity, Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

With the inception of democratic rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, a renewed hope for national development, equity, liberty, and improved security. Nigerians believed that democracy would guarantee peace and serve as a foundation for sustainable economic growth. This hope was hinged on the fact that after years of military rule, which to a great extent impeded on fundamental human rights of the citizens to self rule democracy would usher in a setting where the will and wishes of the people will be expressed. However, nearly over decades later, this optimism has largely remained unfulfilled.

These socio-economic shortcomings have significantly contributed to the worsening security situation across the country. Since 1999, Nigeria has faced escalating security challenges, including militancy, kidnapping, armed robbery, political assassinations, arms proliferation, piracy, and ethno-religious conflicts (Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013). Despite various government strategies to address these issues, progress has been limited, as new forms of insecurity continue to emerge.

A major reason for the failure to effectively combat insecurity is the government's inability to meet the developmental needs of the people. This neglect has fueled frustration and led to the formation of ethnic, political, and religious alliances that have intensified division and violence. Onifade *et al.* (2013) describe this as a breeding ground for ethnic hatred, religious intolerance, political rivalry, and widespread discontent among citizens who feel excluded from national resources.

Security is fundamental to the existence of a State, with the governments primarily tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the safety of citizens and fostering an environment conducive to growth and development (Amoyibo & Akpomera, 2013). The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria reinforces this mandate, stating that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government." However, Nigeria's persistent security challenges have undermined this obligation, affecting both lives and economic stability across the nation. In recent years, insecurity in Nigeria has escalated to critical levels, manifesting in various forms,

including ethnic conflicts, kidnappings, terrorism, militancy, and herdsmen disturbances. These issues are particularly pronounced in the North-East, where Boko Haram, banditry, and insurgency have destabilized the region, disrupting governance and impeding economic growth (Bright, 2018). The effects of these crises are evident in daily reports of lost lives, dwindling populations, stagnating businesses, declining investments, and increasing unemployment. The widespread fear and uncertainty have caused multinational companies to close operations and deterred further investments, posing a significant threat to national development. Beland (2005) defines insecurity as the absence of protection from crime and the lack of psychological security, which leads to emotional distress and limits opportunities for individuals to achieve their potential. In the North-Eastern geopolitical zone, comprising Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe states, the impact of insecurity is profound. Economic activities, both formal and informal, have been severely disrupted. Unemployment has surged, internally displaced persons (IDP) camps have proliferated, and state revenues have plummeted. In addition, the region has seen a decline in foreign exchange earnings and an increased cost of doing business due to the high risks associated with insecurity.

Variations in the nature, scale, and intensity of cult practices exist among universities and the communities that host such institutions but wherever these practices take root, a climate of fear, insecurity, and weakened authority prevails. Several Nigerian higher institutions host communities, including Lagos, Nsukka, Ekpoma, Ibadan, Benin, Auchi, Jos, Ile-Ife, Abuja, Port-Harcourt, Makurdi, and Otukpo, have witnessed the tragic loss of lives and valuable properties worth millions of naira due to cult-related incidents. This has had direct repercussions on the academic staff and students, hindering teaching, learning, and research in these institutions. Moreover, the intricate ties between campus cult practices and the broader power structure in society have become evident in various cases, such as the University of Abuja, where numerous students arrested for cultism and violence were released under mysterious circumstances.

Against this backdrop, it is clear that cultism poses a grave challenge to the Nigerian state at large. While it was once confined to a limited group within society, cultism has now permeated various strata, regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic background, or educational level. Its spread to secondary and even primary schools has heightened concerns. The pervasive influence of cults has created palpable fear and anxiety among parents and guardians, especially in higher education institutions, due to the wanton violence and destruction unleashed by these groups.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the Nigerian government's efforts to address these challenges such as allocating substantial resources to security in annual budgets, relocating military personnel to conflict zones, and enacting anti-terrorism and anti-kidnapping laws the situation remains dire. The country's poor ranking on the Global Peace Index and the persistent economic downturn are testaments to the ongoing insecurity challenges posed on the state.

This study is therefore necessitated by the urgent need to critically assess how cultism and insecurity in Edo North has impacted on socio economic development, and to provide evidence-based recommendations that could inform policies aimed at achieving lasting peace and sustainable development in the region and the nation at large.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the effect of cultism and insecurity on socio economic development in Edo North Senatorial District of Edo State.

The specific objectives are:

i. To identify the major forms and causes of cult clash and insecurity affecting socio economic activities in Edo North Senatorial District of Edo State.

ii. To assess the impact of cultism and insecurity on business operations, employment, and investment in the region.

iii.   To evaluate the effectiveness of government and community responses to cultism and insecurity in Edo North Senatorial District of Edo State.

iv.   To examine the relationship between cultism and insecurity and the decline in socio-economic development in Edo North Senatorial District of Edo State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Historical background of Edo North

Edo North is one of the three senatorial districts in Edo State, Nigeria. It is located in the northern part of the state and comprises six local government areas: Etsako East, Etsako West, Etsako Central, Owan East, Owan West, and Akoko-Edo. The district shares boundaries with Kogi State to the north and Ondo State to the west, making it a strategic gateway between the South-South and North-Central regions of Nigeria.

According to projections based on the 2006 National Population Census and subsequent estimates by the National Population Commission, the population of Edo North is estimated to be over 1.6 million people as of 2024. The region is fairly populated, with Etsako West being one of the most densely populated areas due to the presence of Auchi, a major town in the district. The people of Edo North are predominantly engaged in agriculture, with farming being the primary occupation. They cultivate crops such as yam, cassava, maize, rice, groundnut, and plantain. In addition to farming, other common occupations include trading, artisan work, civil service, and small-scale businesses.

The region also has a growing number of educated professionals in sectors like education, health, mining and public administration.

Edo North is rich in culture and tradition, with deep-rooted customs that reflect the heritage of the Afemai (or Afenmai) ethnic group, the dominant ethnic population in the region. Traditional leadership structures are still respected, with local chiefs and clan heads playing vital roles in community governance. Key cultural festivals, such as the Ukpe Festival in Uzairue, Aba Festival in Igarra, and Ososo Carnival, showcase the region's traditional music, dance, and attire. Marriage, naming ceremonies, and funerals are conducted with elaborate traditional rites, and the people hold strong beliefs in ancestral worship, even though Christianity and Islam are also widely practiced.

Brief History of Secret Cults in Nigerian.

Before the advent of secret cults in Nigerian educational institutions, they existed as organs of traditional society to maintain law and order and ensure high degree of moral rectitude. Major tribes such as the Yoruba, Efik, Delta and Edos had such cults like Ogboni, Ekpe, Ekine and Owegbe respectively. (Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi, 2010). This view was corroborated by Itedjere (2006), in whose opinion such cults were not a novel invention although their deviation from positive roles prescribed by the society was a new development, (Itedjere, 2006). In the past, secret cults in traditional societies helped in the administration of such societies and in instilling discipline in the populace so that law and order were maintained to ensure peace, harmony and progress. The Ogboni secret society among the Yoruba, the Ekpe secret society among the Efik, and the Ogo secret society among the Afikpo-Igbo were traditional cults that, at different periods in history, significantly shaped Nigeria's social structure and political economy. For example, the Ekpe society is credited with the development of Nsibidi, one of the earliest systems of writing in Nigeria, although globally, ancient Egypt is historically recognized as the first civilization to invent writing through hieroglyphics. The Ogo secret society functioned as a powerful instrument of socialization, social control, and community development. Similarly, members of the Ogboni society played a crucial role in the administration of Yoruba pre-colonial governance, and colonial administrators later engaged with them to effectively implement the policy of Indirect Rule, a practice that continued into the early years of Nigerian independence. The establishment of cults in Nigerian educational institutions could be traced to the registration of pyrates confraternity by Professor Wole Soyinka in the

University College Ibadan in the early 50s, as a harmless organisation with the sole aim of abolishing convention and combating tribalism and elitism with chivalry (Opaluwah, 2000). At the time, the intention of its founding fathers was not to inflict pain on society through wanton killing of people and destruction of property. Rather it aimed at serving as an innocuous arrowhead, to propagate nationalist interests through purposeful and coordinated activities of level headed and highly cerebral individuals who were cult members, and who jostled for positions of leadership at the time. (Udoh and Ikezu, 2015).   However, with time around early 1970s, splinter groups who were excommunicated from the pirates. Due to issues not unconnected to deviation from norms and standards, registered their new groups as the National Association of Seadogs (NAS) also known as the Buccaneers. Thereafter rapid fight for superiority and assertion of independence and freedom to associate, fueled the inordinate desire of different ambitious individuals to lead cults formed by them, with a view to wielding significant influence.

Proliferation of cults took a sickening and alarming dimension in the early 80s, when school administrations and military regimes used cults in gathering intelligence and destabilizing their institutions, to the detriment of academic staff who, at the time agitated for improved conditions of service. Poor economic situation of the country at that time paved way for easy exploitation of cult leaders as willing tools in the hands of school administrations and military regimes. Consequently, cults were armed and empowered to tackle rival cults as well as members of staff and students deemed to be recalcitrant. An easy fall out of the foregoing scenario was endless battle for supremacy by various secret cults which fought aggressively for supremacy, leaving destruction of lives and property in the wake of their nefarious activities (Nzimiro, 1999; Ugwulebo, 1999; and Akpabio, 2003). After the Buccaneers broke away from the pirates, there has been a rapid spawning of cults due to the desire to be free of controlling authority by some members.

The situation at present is such that a plethora of secret cults have invaded the Nigerian education system. Although, there is no consensus on the exact number of secret cults that now manifest in the Nigerian education system, various authors have come up with names of at least 50 existing secret cults whose nefarious activities have been recorded in Nigerian schools or the larger society.

According to Nnam (2014), Omebe & Omebe (2015), Mediayanose (2016), Ekeayanwu & Igbinoba (2007), Umeh, 2001 and Onodarho (1999), some examples of such cults include: Black Beret; Black Ofals; Black Brothers; Black Axe; Black Scorpion; Black Sword; Blanchers; the Termites; Egbe Dudu; Fangs; Angels; Big 20; Buccaneers; Eiye; Dreaded Friends of Friends, Green Berets; Gentleman's club; Eagle club; Mgbamgba Brothers; Nite Hawk, Red Fishes; Scavengers; Nite Rovers; Airswords; Magic Lords; Marphites; Mafiaso; Thomas Sankara Boys; Temple of Eden; Sons of the Night, Scorpions; the Fame; Trojan Horse; Black Cobra; Black Cat; Blood Suckers; Vikings; Osiri; Ogboni; Fliers; Bloodline; Maplates; mafia; musketeers; Black Ladies Club; Ninjas; Amazons; Black Nationalists, White Angels, Daughters of Jezebel, BraBra; Charlie's Angles; Bulky Sisters; the Amazons; Cappa Vendetto; Baby one Breast Confraternity, Black Bra; Bulky sisters; Royal Queen; Burking Faso; Queen of the Coast; Ku Wux Plan and so on.

Cultism

A cult is defined as a group that demonstrates a high level of passion or devotion to a certain cause or ideal while concealing its activities and participation from the uninitiated. Cult membership and activities are often veiled in secrecy, according to Ajitoni and Olaniyan (2018), and as such, they are sometimes referred to as secret cults.

Arele (2006) defines a cult as a group of individuals who share and disseminate strange ideas among their members alone. Cultism, on the other hand, is strongly associated with cult activities. It is a set of religious ideas and practices, or ideology, that often involves rituals. In accordance with this viewpoint, Ajayi, Ekundayo, and Osalusi (2010) define cultism as a ritual practice by a group whose membership, admission policy, and initiation formalities, as well as their mode of operations, are done in secret and kept in secret, with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members. Some academics describe cults from a religious standpoint, for example, as a distinctive, briefly trendy system of worship or belief. This explains why various cults have distinct rules, conventions, emblems, and other characteristics that are concealed from uninitiated members of society.

Secret cults, according to Ogunbameru (2004), are groups whose methods of operation are hidden, although such activities take place at odd hours of the day, conflicting with convention or publicly accepted ways of life. Ogunbameru goes on to say that these acts are kept hidden from the public eye, that they are camouflaged, and that they are normally carried out behind closed doors.   According to Adewale (2005), a cult is a group of individuals who share unusual views and beliefs and participate in hidden conduct. According to the foregoing, it is safe to define a secret cult as a group of people whose activities are carried out in exclusive locations and unusual times without being exposed to the uninitiated, as it has been observed that almost every passing day, new stories of devilish acts perpetrated by secret cults on tertiary institutions in Nigeria are published. Unfortunately, despite all attempts to address the issue, covert cult activities in higher institutions of learning have resisted all answers, and those remedies proposed so far are akin to chopping down a tree while leaving the root firm to the ground or soil.

Possible Causes of Cultism

Peer Group: Peer pressure is a major incentive for young pupils to join secret cults. According to Ibeh (2005), adolescence is defined by extensive social connections in each environment in which he or she finds oneself. The focus on social interactions moves from the parents to the peer group throughout adolescence. As a teenager loses all dependency and contact with his or her parents, he or she shifts to a newly acquired group, which in most instances is any organization on campus that he or she accepts. Akinfolarin (2003) and Omoegun and Akanle (2007) discovered that peer group influence is one of the reasons students join cults in their studies.

Parental Background: Students from homes where outstanding conduct and discipline are strictly enforced are less likely to join a cult or be cultists, even though a tiny number of them may join in certain situations. According to Olajuigbe (2001), cult participation may be influenced by family history, a lack of moral direction at home, and the manner in which a child is nurtured. The author underlined that too much parental control, too many limits, might make a person tense and uncomfortable, while a child with boundless freedom may be a great candidate for cult membership in specific conditions. According to Mgbekem (2004), some parents cherish their children to the point of pampering them. When they make a mistake, rather than chastising them, they let the children off the hook. They grow up with such bad habits and, as a consequence, imbibe criminal conduct, which drives them to join cults. Owoeye (1997) discovered a significant link between a poor and dysfunctional family environment and the impact and tendency of pupils to join secret cults.

Societal Decadence: According to Ogunbameru (1997), Nigerian culture has created an enabling environment for all forms of crimes, including the issue of campus hidden cults. According to the author, the normal Nigerian mindset has substituted respect with dishonour.

Mgbekem (2004) also highlighted that the present generation has immoral ideas implanted in them rather than moral and respectable standards. This, according to the author, explains why young people have no qualms about joining a hidden group. Okeowo (1994) also linked the inclination of young people to join cults to Nigeria's general lack of rules.

Erosion of Education Standards: The country's economic difficulties in the 1980s and early 1990s encouraged corruption and lowered educational standards. Despite possessing doubtful credentials, the majority of students were admitted to universities (Akinfolarin 2003). Because of low self-esteem, some students seek solace in cultism in order to survive scholastic rigors at any costs. Survival in the academic system becomes a game of survival at any cost for such students, and as a consequence, they join cult groups in order to intimidate teachers and school administrators.

Need for protection: Some children join cults due to the fact that members get excessive protection. Cultists work relentlessly to protect their adherents' interests, regardless of what it takes. They are continuously seeking special treatment for their members and may be violent in order to protect the interests of their members. Some vulnerable students get convinced or coerced into joining cults out of fear of being abused or harassed by members of covert cults or other unfriendly individuals.

Creation of fears: Some children join cults in order to scare their peers. This permits them to commit whatever evil they choose on campus. Students and university management are both at their mercy since they may wreak havoc at any time of day or night, killing or frightening their classmates or lecturers. Any effort to control their activities may result in violence, disturbing the session's academic schedule (Udoh, 2011).

Broken homes: Broken homes, as well as the fact that sadistic kids are mostly cultists in schools. As a consequence, the family serves as the primary socialization agent, imparting social views and behavioral expectations in the child. It is an agent that imparts social culture to the kid. What occurs in the family throughout the socialization process will surely have an influence on the child's personality and interactions with other members of society. As a consequence, some children turn to cultism as an escape from difficult home conditions, especially when there is discord. Cultism at postsecondary campuses was sometimes encouraged by poor economic conditions and the fact that cultists were not adequately persecuted among others

Effects of Cultism

Oju (1991) opines that the greatest crisis besetting the Nigerian education system, especially the University system, is that of cult violence. The brutish attacks unleashed by cults indiscriminately, at the slightest provocation in universities across the nation leaves much to be desired. As a result of attacks and counter attacks that are motivated by cults, the educational system has gradually become a theatre of war, rather than a serene atmosphere that is otherwise required for effective and pleasant transmission and reception of learning experiences, respectively. It is therefore pertinent to outline some ills associated with cultism as they manifest in the education system. Researchers have been explicit in cataloguing woes of the educational system as a result of cultism. For instance, Ossai (2001) asserts that secondary school education in Nigeria has been besieged and destroyed by secret cults which openly cheat at examinations while brazenly threatening teachers and students alike with their dangerous arsenal of weapons like daggers, axes and knives.

Ivagher, Onyeanisi & Agugu (2016), Nnam (2014), Mediayanose (2016), Omebe & Omebe (2015), Birabil & Okanezi (2017), Udoh & Ikezu (2015), Ajayi, Ekundayo & Osalusi (2010), Onyemwinmina & Aibieyi (2015) explicitly stated some of the adverse effects of cultism to the education system which includes but are not limited to:

Wanton Destruction of Lives of Stakeholders in the Education Sector: Cultists unleash mayhem on teachers, students and members of school managements, to the extent that some have been killed or permanently maimed through violent acts such as shooting, stabbing, acid baths and other dangerous attacks. Such attacks destabilize the educational system by creating palpable fear in the hearts of its stakeholders.

Heinous crimes like armed robbery, rape, kidnapping black mailing Prostitution: Cult members engage in robbery and other dangerous crime to terrorize their victims and usually to make money needed to sustain their expensive lifestyles, procure arms, buy protection from corrupt law enforcement agents, pay hospital bills when attacked and pay for legal fees when their members are arrested for crimes.

Poor Academic Performance: The reign of terror unleashed by cults in educational institutions inhibits learning by creating fear and tension in the school environment. Learning is known to thrive best in an atmosphere devoid of elements of threat, therefore, it takes its toll on academic performance of students. Cultists also fail to study hard while attacking rivals or their victims or worse still while attempting to evade attack.

Destruction of Property: Cults are known to destroy the property of their victims or school, to draw attention o their grievances. Houses, vehicles, stationery, and other facilities belonging to educational institutions have been razed or utterly damaged by cults. The economic implications recession, is best imaged.

Insecurity

The concept of insecurity is not alien to societies, as it has existed even in the primitive societies of the world. To be able to give an all-encompassing definition of insecurity, it is important we have a brief look at what security is. The social contract in which the people willingly surrender their right to the government who oversees the survival of all is necessitated by the need for security. According to Nwanegbo & Odigbo, (2013), with the

end of the cold war, there have being attempt to shift conceptualization of security from a static centric perspective to a broader view that places premium on individuals, in which human security that embodies elements of national security, human rights and national development remain major barometer for explaining the concept. At the heart of this debate is an attempt to deepen and widen the concept of security from the level of the states to societies to individuals, and from military to non-military issues (Krahmann, 2003). In the opinion of McGrew, (1988), the security of a nation hangs on two important pillars which are (1) the maintenance and protection of the socioeconomic order in the case of internal and external threat and (2) the promotion of a preferred international order, which minimizes the threat to core values and interests, as well as domestic order. Security is an allencompassing condition which suggests that a territory must be secured by a network of armed forces; that the sovereignty of the state must be guaranteed by a democratic and patriotic government, which in turn must be protected by the military-police and the people themselves; that the people must not only be secured from external attacks but also from devastating consequences of internal upheavals such as unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution cum socioeconomic injustices. Dike (2010) & Omede (2011) extended the view expressed above by saying that, Nigeria's security should be based on a holistic view which sees the citizens as the primary beneficiaries of every security and developmental deliverable that the state can offer. In the view of Nwanegbo & Odigbo, (2013), Nigeria's security will involve efforts to strengthen the capacity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria so it can advance its interests and objectives to contain internal and external aggression, control crime, eliminate corruption, enhance genuine development, progress and growth and improve the welfare and quality of life of every citizen. The antithesis of security is insecurity, which can be seen as the absence of security as discussed above. The common description of insecurity is uncertainty, hazard, danger, want of safety, want of confidence, state of doubt, inadequately guarded and protected, lack of protection and being unsafe, instability and others.

Effects of Insecurity in Edo North

Effect on Agriculture: The agricultural sector was never spared during uprising but particularly badly hit, especially as people were forced to move in the course of the conflicts. For instance, due to herdsmen's clashes in part of Edo North in Edo State that resulted in destruction of farmlands, farm produce in those areas were low causing an increase in the prices of food items during the period. Insecurity including kidnappings and banditry caused many farmers to abandon their farms, disrupting agricultural activities and reducing food production in local communities. This situation undermines both household livelihoods and regional food security.

Fear, Trauma, and Psychological Impact: Residents live in fear due to persistent violence, killings, and kidnappings. This pervasive insecurity contributes to psychological trauma among families and communities who worry about their safety and that of loved ones.

Loss of Lives and Violence: Kidnapping, ambushes, and violent attacks have resulted in numerous deaths and serious injuries across Edo State, affecting citizens in Edo North as part of this broader insecurity trend. Incidents of mob violence such as the lynching of suspected kidnappers further exacerbate loss of life and community tensions.

Economic Hardship: Insecurity deters economic activities. Traders may close businesses early or leave the area, creating reduced economic productivity and lower revenue collection. Small-scale enterprises operate under constraint due to fear of attack or extortion. Disrupted farming and commerce also contribute to increased poverty and hardship in affected communities.

Community Displacement and Social Disintegration: Persistent threats have caused some residents to relocate temporarily from high-risk areas, leading to displacement and weakening of traditional social structures and support systems in villages and towns. (This effect is a general pattern seen in regions facing comparable insecurity issues; local sources highlight abandoned farms and disrupted daily life.)

Effective government and community responses to insecurity in Edo North

Community Policing

Community-oriented policing is a theory that encourages organizational solutions, with the use of cooperation and challenge methods, which proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues

including crime, social dysfunction, and fear of violence (Alemika, 2012). This attitude and strategy are built on working together with the community and the police to discover innovative answers to current issues with crime, the community, and other connected issues. According to Okonkwo (1996), Police community partnerships are steered by the policy of "community policing," which also calls for a problem-solving methodology sensitive to local requirements.

Community policing existed in the traditional Nigerian context before the colonial era. Therefore, Nigerians are not unfamiliar with this form of policing system; for instance, community policing was common there before colonial power and persisted in being so, even after Nigeria's independence in 1960 (Inyang & Abraham, 2013). In order to elevate the calibre of police services and, as a result, reduce crime rates, community policing enhances problem-solving methods, collaboration between formal and informal law enforcement, and partnerships between security agencies and the public. The people did not trust the Nigeria Police Force because they believed it to be cruel, dishonest, and ineffective, according to numerous studies on police-public relations in Nigeria (Zumve, 2013). The community policing programme has also been backed by significant training programmes created to acquire new skills and change attitudes and behaviours, in addition to major awareness-raising and sensitisation campaigns targeted at both the general public and the police force. The objectives of policing programmes including citizen advisory boards, landlord security administration, community forums, foot patrols, neighbourhood watches, and door-to-door visits are to raise public satisfaction with police and to improve public confidence in law enforcement. Additionally, people are more inclined to contact the police to report problems and share details about crimes and offenders if they engage in these activities (Maguire, 2000).

Community Policing in Edo North

The communities established a community policing organisation known as vigilante to protect them from criminals in their neighbourhood. To do this, the communities organised more than 1,000 young people under the name "vigilante" in collaboration with the Nigerian Police, vigilante offers the police vital information, and occasionally the two organisations work together to battle criminals. Most of the operations occur in the night under the direction of Edo State Security Network With the support of the state governor, the police trained members of the vigilante group (Kingsley, 2021).

The Edo Security Network (ESN), headquartered in Auchi, the administrative headquarters of Etsako Local Government Area, serves as a central coordinating body for community-based security efforts across Edo North Senatorial District. The ESN accommodates and oversees several local vigilante groups, including the Uzairue Vigilante Group, Ibienafe, Iyakpi, Aviele, Agede, among others operating within Edo North. These vigilante groups are drawn from their respective communities, making them familiar with the local terrain, population, and security challenges, which enhances their effectiveness in intelligence gathering and rapid response to security threats.

The core responsibility of these vigilante groups is to collaborate closely with the Nigeria Police Force and other statutory security agencies to ensure effective and watertight security across the state. This collaboration involves information sharing, joint patrols, surveillance of crime-prone areas, and timely reporting of suspicious activities. By complementing formal security agencies, the Edo Security Network helps to bridge manpower gaps, improve community trust in security operations, and strengthen grassroots security architecture. Overall, the ESN and its affiliated vigilante groups play a critical role in maintaining peace, curbing crime, and promoting safety and stability in Edo North and Edo State at large.

Edo State Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law, 2025 and the Kidnapping Prohibition (Amendment) Law, 2025

Governor Okpebholo signed into law two critical legislations: These laws provide severe consequences for offenders 21 years imprisonment for sponsors of cultism, 10 years for individuals harboring cultists, and the death penalty for cult-related killings. Similarly, convicted kidnappers face the death penalty, while any property used to facilitate the crime is to be confiscated and demolished.

Since the enactment of these laws, Edo State has seen the demolition of several buildings used as hideouts by kidnappers or as rendezvous points for cult groups. In March 2025, the government began pulling down structures in Illeh and Uromi used in high-profile kidnapping cases, including those where victims were kept until ransoms were paid. In one instance, a property in Esioriri-Erah in Owan East Local Government Area, reportedly belonging to a kidnap informant, was flattened after investigations confirmed its use in coordinating abductions.(The Nigerian Observer, May 1, 2025).

On September 19, 2025, the Edo State Government launched a major security operation across Etsako West Local Government Area, demolishing four houses linked to suspected cultists and arresting over twenty individuals. The operation was carried out by the state's Special Security Squad, known as Operation Flush Out Cultists and Kidnappers, under the supervision of senior security officials attached to the Government House.

Among the demolished properties was a building in Auchi belonging to a wanted cult figure known as Too-Believe, identified as a regular meeting point for a confraternity. Security operatives recovered weapons and other incriminating items from the premises, though the suspect escaped. Other properties demolished were linked to known cult leaders in Iyakpi (South-Ibie) and Ibie-Nafe, including one accused of masterminding a recent killing. Two youths were also arrested for alleged cybercrime, while additional suspects were apprehended during raids on a hotel in Uzairue.

The crackdown followed the expiration of a 166-day grace period granted by Governor Monday Okpebholo, during which cultists were encouraged to renounce cultism in exchange for rehabilitation opportunities. With the offer ignored, the government enforced the Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law 2025, which prescribes severe penalties for cultists and landlords who aid them.

Theoretical framework

In this work, three theories have been adopted to provide explanation to the concept of cultism and security and economic development. The three theories are: social conflict, Neo-Malthusian theories, frustration-aggression theory and socialization theory

The Social Conflict Theory

The social conflict theory draws attention on the class differentiation and the misery of the working class that was attendant upon the growth of capitalism. It is a synthesis of German philosophy, English political economy and the French socialism, built on the idea of historical and dialectical materialism – class struggle and the classless proletarian society. According to the proponents of this theory, it provides theoretical explanation for competition among social classes, state actors and non-state actors in their attempt to protect their selfish interest. This class struggle leads to the acquisition of weapons and ammunitions for self-preservation thus leading to social conflicts and threats to the national security and sustainable economic development (Adebakin and Raimi, 2012). These opinions expressed above approximate Marx and Engel (1848) assertion that, the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, in a common ruin of the contenting classes.

The emergence of political institutions, economic organs, legal institutions, traditional institutions et cetera as forms of social structure are products created as a result of conflicts between groups with conflicting ideological interest with the sole aim of controlling the resources of the society. The social conflict theory sees threat to security as motivated by the struggle among rival social classes or groups in their quest for group economic interests, relevance and political dominance. In the words of Adebakin and Raimi, (2012), the import of the two strands of social conflict theory is that, in a society where exploitation of one class or group by a dominant class or group exist, if this dysfunctional relation is not addressed, it results in armed struggle and full scale warfare. This situation is capable of eroding the developmental effort of the people. That is to say, peace is a panacea for economic development in any society.

Frustration-aggression theory

This theory was developed by John Dollard Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer and Robert Sears in 1939, is based on the general premise that all humans have basic needs and goals which they seek to fulfill, when there is any obstruction to the fulfillment of their needs and goals by individuals or groups it creates frustration which eventually leads to an aggressive response. Such aggressive response could be directed to a person or object and to both as the case may be. Simply put, when frustration cannot be eased off, it turns into aggression.

This theory is relevant to the study with respect to various cases of violence in form of kidnapping, armed robbery, pipe-line vandalization by militants, farmers-herders" clashes, communal clashes, religious crisis which can be attributed to some forms of frustration.

The socialization theory

The socialization theory, using the learning by imitation model of socialization, is used as the theoretical framework for analysis. According to Eguavoen (2006), socialization is the process through which cultural values, norms; behaviors and skills characteristics of a society are transmitted to its young and potential members. This is the principal means by which any society preserves its rich cultural heritage and achieves basic social conformity which are important means for ensuring their survival. Aweriale (2005) explains that learning termed learning by imitation is also known as Bandura's theory. Learning by imitation deals with learning by observation. This is a rapid form of learning by students and most behaviourare learnt by imitation.

The school, an agent of socialization teaches the child or even young adults quite a lot of experiences through learning. Teachers, non- academic staff and other various arrangements within the school setting assist to socialize the individual. The school as an agent socialization has both formal and informal aspects. The peer group as agent socialization is very important is socializing the individual. It should be noted that it is not in all cases peer socialization is beneficial. It can be dysfunctional, especially in cases where values that contradict those previously taught are being propagated- cultism. The decisive role peer group influence plays in instilling social values seems to be in consonance with the maxim, "show me your friends and I will tell you who you are". This becomes imperative when viewed against the biblical injunction of I Corinthians 13:55(NIV) which

states that "… Bad company corrupts good character". Indeed from observations and experiences, most people (excultists) confessed that it was their peers (friends/roommates) that lured then to join secret cults (Echekwube, 1999).

Drawing on the above, learning in various educational institutions becomes important in the acquisition and utilization of knowledge for the transformation of the individual and the society. Such learning can take place through the agent of socialization- the school, whether formally or informally. Again, learning in such institutions can be impeded by cultism, which develops out of the process of socialization. Cultism does not exist in a vacuum but comes about through the process of socialization and the agents of socialization. The origin of cultism in Nigeria is traced to the educational institution (University of Ibadan), which is a social institution and an agent of socialization through the peer group which is also an agent of socialization. All these come as a result of learning by imitation.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the social institution vis- a –vis socialization plays a vital role in the society. So learning and cultism as a process of socialization to a great extent have impact on the individual, the social institution (s) and the society.

Empirical Review

Arisukwu (2017) examined the implication of insecurity on the socio-economic development in Ilorin metropolis and found out that, insecurity factored by ethno-religious crisis, terrorism, absence of viable security outfit has negative effects on the socio-economic development of Ilorin metropolis.

Onime (2018) examined the effect of insecurity on economic growth in Nigeria and observed that economic activities have been slowed down in areas were insecurity is prevalent. He observed that as a result of the Boko Haram terrorist insurgency in the North East of Nigeria and the militants attack and vandalisation of oil pipeline installations in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, many communities have been deserted, economic activities in both the formal and informal sectors have been disrupted, multinational companies have closed and relocated their offices, thus increasing the level of unemployment.

Oriazowanlan & Erah (2019) analysed the effect of insecurity on MSMEs development in Benin-City, Edo State. Their findings revealed that the productive hours of businesses have been reduced as a result of many business operators closing early for fear of being attack by thugs. Their findings substantiated the opinion of other researchers that the consequence of insecurity will discourage both business operators who want to expand their businesses and potential businesses and investors. Insecurity situations in Nigeria have led to the closure of many businesses especially in areas where threats of insecurity are prevalent. Many business owners and investors relocate their businesses to states and countries considered to be relatively secure for doing business (Agogbua, et al., 2022).

Yusuf & Moh'd, (2022) in their study on the growth and fiscal effects of insecurity on Nigerian economy found out that Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) are often directed to low risk countries which ultimately reduces returns on investments in countries associated with insecurity. In line with this, Brodeur (2018) stated that activities of terrorists also affect economic growth by increasing the cost of doing business through higher wages, higher insurance premiums and increased security expenditures; which consequently result in lower profits and, as a result, a lower return on investment. He further asserted that terrorist attacks can lead to the devastation of infrastructure, causing business disruptions.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objective of this study both primary and secondary data were used, and the data content-analyzed to establish a relationship between cultism and insecurity on economic development in Edo North.

The descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. Descriptive survey design is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting existing condition ongoing process and so on.

The population of this research is therefore one thousand five hundred and seventeen (1,517) residents of Edo North senatorial district, Edo state. North senatorial district in Edo State comprises six local government areas which includes; Etsako West, Etsako East, Etsako Central, Owan West, Owan East and Akoko Edo.

The questionnaire was used to gather data for the study and seek respondents opinions on the effect of cultism and insecurity on economic development in Nigeria, with the primary focus on residence of Edo North senatorial district in Edo State.

The method employed in analyzing the collected data is simple percentage method and Chi-Square (X). The simple percentage was used to answer the research questions, while the Chi-square was used to test the hypotheses of the study.

Table 1 Question 1: Are there major forms and causes of cultism and insecurity activities affecting economic activities in Edo North?

RESPONSE	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	500	70
No	217	30
Total	725	100

Source: Field Work, 2026

The above table shows that a total number of 500 respondents which represent 70% of the whole respondent administered agreed that there are major forms and causes of cultism and insecurity activities affecting economic activities in Edo North while on the other hand 217 (30%) of the respondents disagreed.

Table 2: Question 2: Does cultism clash and insecurity impact business operations, employment, and investment in Edo North?

RESPONSE	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	653	90
No	72	10
Total	725	100

Source: Field Work, 2026

The respondents in tables 2 shows that the total of 653 (90%) of the respondent admitted this fact that cultism clash insecurity impact business operations, employment, and investment in Edo North while 72 (10%) disagreed.

Table 3: Question 3: How effective are the government and community responses to cultism and insecurity in Edo North?

RESPONSE	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	653	10
No	72	90
Total	725	100

Source: Field Work, 2026

The table 3 above shows that 72 (10%) of the respondents agreed that government and community responses to cultism insecurity in Edo North are effective while 653 (90%) disagreed showing that the government and community responses to insecurity in Edo North are not effective.

Table 4: Question 4: What is the relationship between cultism and insecurity and the decline in socio-economic development in Edo North?

RESPONSE	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	689	95
No	36	5
Total	725	100

Source: Field Work, 2026

The table 4 point out that 95% of the respondents admitted that there is a relationship between cultism and insecurity and the decline in socio-economic development in Edo North. While 5% disagreed.

Hypotheses Testing

In analysis, the hypothesis formulated the chi-square was used for testing where of = observed frequency

The chi-square statistic (χ^2) is defined by the formula:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Where:

- $\chi 2$ = Chi-square value

- O_i= Observed frequency for the ith category

- E_i = Expected frequency for the ith category

- $\sum$ = Summation over all categories

X^2 will be tested at 95% confidence level.

Decision rule, the computed X^2 obtained level of significance 0.05 is testing the hypothesis the null hypothesis is rejected from the alternative which is accepted, the computed exceed the table value X and vice verse.

Hypothesis 1

H$_{01}$: There is no significant relationship between the major forms and causes of cultism and insecurity and economic activities in Edo North.

Hi: There is significant relationship between the major forms and causes of cultism and insecurity and economic activities in Edo North.

Chi-square calculation

Response	Observed Oi	Expected Ei	Oi-Ei	(Oi-Ei)2	(Oi-Ei)2 E
Yes	689	362.5	326.5	106,602.25	294.21

No	36	362.5	-326.5	106,602.25	294.21
Total	725	725			588.42

Researcher's computation 2026

Significance Level (α) = 0.05

Degrees of Freedom (df) = 1

Under 5% 0.05 chi-square table Value =3.841

Calculated value = 588.42

From the Chi-Square table, the value of Chi-Square at 5% of level of Significance at df = 1 $\approx$ 3.841, the calculated value χ^2 = 588.42 is much greater than tabulated value 3.841, where the value is greater than tabulated value, reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept alternative (H_i) the researcher accept that there is significant relationship between the major forms and causes of cultism and insecurity and economic activities in Edo North.

Hypothesis 2

H_{02}: Cultism and Insecurity has no significant impact on business operations, employment, and investment in Edo North.

Hi: Insecurity has significant impact on business operations, employment, and investment in Edo North.

Response	Observed Oi	Expected Ei	Oi-Ei	(Oi-Ei)2	(Oi-Ei)2 E
Yes	653	362.5	290.5	84,390.25	232.84
No	72	362.5	-290.5	84,390.25	232.84
Total	725	725			465.68

Researcher's computation 2026

Significance Level (α) = 0.05

Degrees of Freedom (df) = 1

Under 5% 0.05 chi-square table Value =3.841

Calculated value = 465.68

From the Chi-Square table, the value of Chi-Square at 5% of level of Significance at df = 1 $\approx$ 3.841, the calculated value χ^2 = 465.68 is much greater than tabulated value 3.841, where the value is greater than tabulated value, reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept alternative (H_i) the researcher accept cultism and insecurity has significant impact on business operations, employment, and investment in Edo North.

Hypothesis 3

H_{03}: Government and community responses to cultism and insecurity in Edo North are not significantly effective.

Hi: Government and community responses to cultism and insecurity in Edo North are significantly effective

Chi-square calculation

Response	Observed Oi	Expected Ei	Oi-Ei	(Oi-Ei)2	(Oi-Ei)2 E
Yes	72	362.5	-290.5	84,390.25	232.80
No	653	362.5	+290.5	84,390.25	232.80
Total	725	725			465.60

Researcher's computation 2026

Significance Level (α) = 0.05

Degrees of Freedom (df) = 1

Under 5% chi-square table Value =3.841

Calculated value = 465.60

From the Chi-Square table, the value of Chi-Square at 5% of level of Significance at df = 1 $\approx$ 3.841, the calculated value χ^2 = 465.60 is much greater than tabulated value 3.841, where the value is greater than tabulated value, reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept alternative (H_i) the researcher accept Government and community responses to cultism and insecurity in Edo North are significantly effective

Hypothesis 4

H_{04}: There is no significant relationship between cultism and insecurity and the decline in socio-economic development in Edo North.

H_i: There is significant relationship between cultism and insecurity and the decline in socio-economic development in Edo North.

Chi-square calculation

Response	Observed Oi	Expected Ei	Oi-Ei	(Oi-Ei)2	(Oi-Ei)2 E
Yes	653	362.5	290.5	84,390.25	232.84
No	72	362.5	-290.5	84,390.25	232.84
Total	725	725			465.68

Researcher's computation 2026

Significance Level (α) = 0.05

Degrees of Freedom (df) = 1

Under 5% chi-square table Value =3.841

Calculated value = 465.68

From the Chi-Square table, the value of Chi-Square at 5% of level of Significance at df = 1 $\approx$ 3.841, the calculated value χ^2 = 465.68 is much greater than tabulated value 3.841, where the value is greater than tabulated value, reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept alternative (H_i) the researcher accept there is significant relationship between cultism and insecurity and the decline in socio-economic development in Edo North.

Findings

This study examined the effect of cultism and insecurity on economic development in Edo North. Seven hundred and twenty five (725) respondents were used as sample size in the analysis. The study adopted Chi-square method of analysis in testing the hypotheses formulated. From the hypotheses tested, the resulted show that there is significant relationship between the major forms and causes of cultism and insecurity activities on economic activities in Edo North, cultism and insecurity activities has significant impact on business operations, employment, and investment in Edo North, Government and community responses to cultism and insecurity in Edo North are significantly effective and there is significant relationship between cultism and insecurity and the decline in socio economic development in Edo North.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, cultism and insecurity significantly contribute to the decline in socio-economic development in Edo North. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that combines effective policy implementation, community sensitization, youth empowerment, and job creation. By tackling the root causes of cultism such as unemployment, poverty, and peer influence, and by enhancing security structures, Edo North can create a safer environment for businesses, investments, and social progress to thrive. Sustainable development in the region depends greatly on the ability of stakeholders to collectively address the threats posed by cultism and insecurity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

i. Government should deploy more security personnel and intelligence units to hotspots in Edo North, while also ensuring proper training and equipping of officers. Special anti-cultism and anti-crime task forces should be established to respond swiftly to cult-related activities and insecurity challenges in the region.

ii. Adequate funding, provision of patrol bike, vehicles of Edo Security Network (ESN) specifically for rural farm patrols.

iii. Since unemployment and idleness are key drivers of cultism, government, NGOs, and private investors should create more skill acquisition centers, vocational training programs, and entrepreneurship schemes targeted at youths. Access to small business loans and start-up grants will also help reduce their vulnerability to cult recruitment in Edo North.

iv. Community leaders, religious bodies, and educational institutions should organize continuous awareness programs on the dangers of cultism and insecurity. Moral education, mentorship programs, and peer counseling in schools and communities can help change the mindset of young people and discourage involvement in cult groups in Edo North.

v. There should be stronger partnerships among government agencies, community vigilante groups, civil society organizations, and traditional institutions in Edo North. This collaboration will ensure effective intelligence sharing, grassroots monitoring, and collective action in preventing and responding to cultism and insecurity.

Gap in the Literature

Although several studies have examined the relationship between insecurity and economic development in Nigeria, much of the existing literature has focused predominantly on the North-East region, largely due to the Boko Haram insurgency and related conflicts. Consequently, there is a limited body of empirical research that specifically addresses the unique nature, causes, and economic consequences of insecurity in other regions such as Edo North. This area faces distinct security challenges, including cult-related violence, kidnapping, armed

robbery, and other criminal activities, which differ significantly from the insurgency-driven insecurity in the North-East.

Furthermore, many existing studies tend to rely on historical accounts of government interventions, with little emphasis on recent or ongoing efforts aimed at curbing insecurity and cultism in Edo North. There is also a noticeable lack of studies that capture public perception regarding the effectiveness and achievements of government security initiatives in this region.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by providing a context-specific analysis of insecurity in Edo North, incorporating public perceptions of government efforts and achievements alongside empirical data analysis. By doing so, the study aims to generate insights that can inform targeted policy formulation, security interventions, and development strategies for enhancing economic development in Edo North amidst persistent security challenges.

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