



# **CULTS IN NIGERIA: UNRAVELLING THE DISTINCT SECURITY CHALLENGES AND CONTRASTS WITH THE WEST**

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## **Abstract**

The macabre discovery of the Shakahola Forest massacre brought back the issue of religious extremism, sectarian drift and the complexity of regulating such groups. Cults still pertain to a grey zone in both the academic and legal realms; they are at the crossroads of freedoms and restrictions, exist in various structures and ideologies, and have diverse implications for stability and security. Cultism touches all levels of society and there is not one typical profile of a recruit. However, sectarian groups have the common characteristic of deeply affecting individuals.

To this end, the analysis focuses on Nigeria where cults have been active within society for decades, and continue to grow their influence. Cultism in Nigeria reaches most spheres of the country, from politics to the economy including education. The implications for development and security in each of these aspects are multiple and interlinked, even mutually reinforcing in some respects.

Using network analysis, this paper answers the questions *How do cults challenge security in Nigeria?* and *How do these challenges differ from those depicted by the scholarship?* The overall research project aims to gain more clarity on the importance of alternative analytical frameworks as well as to understand to what extent context matters when it comes to analysing the cult-security nexus. Through an assessment of how much Nigeria's history and culture influences the general perception of and engagement with cult groups, the research highlights that conclusions drawn from analysing Western cases cannot necessarily be generalised.