



## COI QUERY

<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>NIGERIA</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Black Axe cult in Edo State, including structure and activities (2005-2010); situation and treatment of former members of Black Axe cult by state and non-state actors (January 2021-2023); availability of state protection (January 2021-2023)</b>
<b>Reference period</b>	January 2005 - December 2010; January 2021 – September 2023
<b>Topics</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <a href="#">Black Axe cult in Edo State, including structure and activities (2005-2010)</a></li><li>2. <a href="#">Situation and treatment of former members of Black Axe cult by state and non-state actors (January 2021-2023)</a></li><li>3. <a href="#">Availability of state protection (January 2021-2023)</a></li></ol>
<b>Date of completion</b>	28 September 2023
<b>Query Code</b>	Q41-2023
<b>Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)</b>	N/A



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## Disclaimer

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This response to a COI query has been elaborated according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology](#) and [EUAA Writing and Referencing Guide](#).

Query responses are produced in response to COI information requests received from asylum authorities within EU+ countries or initiated by EUAA based on COI information needs. Query responses are produced within a limited time period, typically within 5 to 10 days. Within these time constraints, the information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care.

All sources used are referenced and cited in the bibliography section. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned COI methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive or conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The information in the response does not necessarily reflect the opinion of EUAA and makes no political statement whatsoever. The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision-making authorities. Any event taking place after the reference period is not included in this query response.



## COI QUERY RESPONSE – Nigeria

### **Black Axe cult in Edo State, including structure and activities (2005-2010); situation and treatment of former members of Black Axe cult by state and non-state actors (January 2021-2023); availability of state protection (January 2021-2023)**

#### **1. Black Axe cult in Edo State, including structure and activities (2005-2010)**

The Jamestown Foundation reported that the Black Axe originated at the University of Benin in Edo State in the 1970s<sup>1</sup> as a student gang.<sup>2</sup> The same source noted that '[a]fter its creation, another confraternity, called the Supreme Eiyé Confraternity, also known as the National Association of Air Lords, broke away from Black Axe. During this time, the splintered cult groups introduced a new dimension into confraternity tradition: before carrying out any activities, they would practice voodoo rituals.'<sup>3</sup> Cultism in Nigeria is considered as one of the major security issues.<sup>4</sup>

The following are some of the instances involving the Black Axe in Edo State as reported by sources for events taking place between 2005 and 2010:

- On 19 August 2005, Online Nigeria reported that three students from Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, Edo state, were killed during a clash between members of the Black Axe and Eiyé confraternities, and that five other students were placed on a 'danger list.'<sup>5</sup>
- On 19 May 2010, PM News reported the killing of 11 people in Benin City, including students from the College of Education, in a clash between Black Axe and Eiyé confraternities.<sup>6</sup> The same source also indicated that 15 people were killed during clashes in Benin City between Black Axe and Maphite confraternities.<sup>7</sup>
- On 24 October 2013, THEWILL reported that an 'influential' member of the Black Axe was sentenced to life imprisonment for the kidnapping, gang raping, and sexually assaulting a 19 year-old woman in October 2009 in Benin City. The victim was held for 50 days until she managed to escape.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jamestown Foundation (The), Nigeria's Cults and their Role in the Niger Delta Insurgency, 6 July 2007, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> Jamestown Foundation (The), Nigeria's Cults and their Role in the Niger Delta Insurgency, 6 July 2007, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), Gangs sowing terror on campus, 22 February 2007, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> Jamestown Foundation (The), Nigeria's Cults and their Role in the Niger Delta Insurgency, 6 July 2007, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Nextier, Nigeria Security Situation Analysis Report, 2022, [url](#), p. 43; Nwaogu N.R. et al., Evaluation of Youth Vulnerability to Community Cultism in Selected States in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, 2019, [url](#), pp. 1-3

<sup>5</sup> Online Nigeria, Cultists kill AAU students in Ekpoma, 19 August 2005, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> PM News, 11 Killed As Cult Groups Clash, 19 May 2010, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> PM News, 11 Killed As Cult Groups Clash, 19 May 2010, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> THEWILL, Benin 'Big Boy' Kidnapper, Mistress, Other Get Life Jail Terms, 24 October 2013, [url](#)



Additionally, the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada reported the following incidents in a 3 December 2012 query, based on a variety of sources:

- 'In February 2009, seven suspected cultists were killed according to Vanguard (23 Feb. 2009);
- Plus News Pakistan indicated that in February 2009, more than 16 people were reportedly killed, including two university students and a prominent businessman (11 Mar. 2010).

[...]

- On 22 October 2010, Vanguard stated that during a clash with Maphite confraternity in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, seven people were killed, while police confirmed three deaths;
- In March 2010, according to Plus News Pakistan, there was a "renewed bloody clash" with Manfile confraternity (11 Mar. 2010);
- In March 2010, This Day reported that, in a war with the Markvites, nine cult members were killed (15 Mar. 2010).
- In March 2009, the son of the Chairman of Ovia South West local government council was abducted by people suspected of being cult members (The Nation 16 Mar. 2009; Vanguard 12 Mar. 2009), including members of Black Axe (ibid.). The child was released in exchange for ransom (The Nation 16 Mar. 2009).<sup>9</sup>

In 2000, Edo state issued the Secret Cult (Prohibition) Law punishing members of 'cultist groups' up to 21 years imprisonment.<sup>10</sup> According to sources, the Law faces problems in implementation due to problems in enforcing the law<sup>11</sup> and identifying and prosecuting cultists.<sup>12</sup> In June 2004, the Secret Cult and Similar Activities Prohibition Law entered into force, banning about 100 cult groups, including Black Axe.<sup>13</sup> Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

Information on the structure of the Black Axe cult could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

## **2. Situation and treatment of former members of Black Axe cult by state and non-state actors (January 2021-2023)**

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<sup>9</sup> Canada, IRB, Nigeria: The Black Axe confraternity, also known as the Neo-Black Movement of Africa, including their rituals, oaths of secrecy, and use of symbols or particular signs; whether they use force to recruit individuals (2009-November 2012) [NGA104208.E], 3 December 2012, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> Vanguard, Why it's difficult to prosecute suspected cultists in Edo, by A-General, 13 May 2015, [url](#); ECPAT France et al., Religious, social and criminal groups in trafficking of Nigerian girls and women, March 2019, [url](#), pp, 160-161

<sup>11</sup> Vanguard, Why it's difficult to prosecute suspected cultists in Edo, by A-General, 13 May 2015, [url](#); ECPAT France et al., Religious, social and criminal groups in trafficking of Nigerian girls and women, March 2019, [url](#), pp, 160-161

<sup>12</sup> Vanguard, Why it's difficult to prosecute suspected cultists in Edo, by A-General, 13 May 2015, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> Small Arms Survey, Armed and aimless: Armed Groups, guns, and human security in the ECOWAS region, 2005, [url](#), pp. 21-22



According to a BBC documentary on the Black Axe, the Black Axe ‘have a vast network and infiltrated all levels of Nigerian society.’ The BBC documentary cites John Stone, a professor of political science at the University of Benin and a former member of the cult, as indicating that the Black Axe have members in the Nigerian army, the navy, the air force, and the judiciary.<sup>14</sup> Without providing details, sources also indicate that many politicians have linkages with the Black Axe.<sup>15</sup> The BBC documentary indicates that a vigilante group, the Onyabo, is dedicated to targeting members of the Black Axe and reportedly handing them over to the police.<sup>16</sup> Additional and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

Information on situation and treatment of former members of Black Axe cult by state and non-state actors was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information on the situation and treatment of former cult members in Nigeria, including in Edo State, may be relevant.

A report by Nextier, a Nigerian think tank, indicated that ‘In recent years, many cult members have denounced their membership in cult groups in Nigeria. For instance, in 2016, at least 222 cultists resigned their membership in Edo and Delta states, [...] [...] [but] the body language of the political class does not encourage these denouncements’ because they are ‘readily available armed groups to be hired by people seeking to unleash terror in society.’<sup>17</sup> The same source indicated that ‘[s]ome state governments have initiated a search for cultist to rid their states of cult activities’ including in Edo state.<sup>18</sup> Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

### **3. Availability of state protection (January 2021-2023)**

Information on state protection available for former members of Black Axe cult could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

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<sup>14</sup> BBC News, Black Axe: Nigeria’s Mafia Cult - BBC Africa Eye documentary [Online video], 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> BBC News, Black Axe: Nigeria’s Mafia Cult - BBC Africa Eye documentary [Online video], 13 December 2021, [url](#); Le Journal de l’Afrique, [Gangs of Africa] "Black Axe", the mysterious Nigerian mafia, 2 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> BBC News, Black Axe: Nigeria’s Mafia Cult - BBC Africa Eye documentary, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> Nextier, Nigeria’s Security Situation Analysis Report, 2022, [url](#), p. 73

<sup>18</sup> Nextier, Nigeria’s Security Situation Analysis Report, 2022, [url](#), p. 76



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## **ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED**

African Examiner; Aljazeera Nigeria; Al Jazeera; AllAfrica.com; Amnesty International; Belgium – Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons; Bertelsmann Stiftung; Brookings Institution; Buzz Nigeria; The Cable; Council on Foreign Relations; The Daily Champion; Daily Nigerian; Deutsche Welle; eoi.net; EuroNews; European Union – EUAA COI Portal; Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; Freedom House; The Fund for Peace; The Guardian; The Herald; Human Rights Watch; InfoGuide Nigeria; InfoStride News; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Crisis Group; INTERPOL; Metro Daily Nigeria; The Nation; Nigeria – National Human Rights Commission; Nigeria Watch; Norway – Landinfo; Norwegian Refugee Council; People’s Daily; The Punch; The Sun; This Day; United Kingdom – Home Office; United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Refworld; United States – Central Intelligence Agency, Department of State