



## Understanding Security Gaps in Nigeria's Cultural Artefacts Preservation Through the Lens of Routine Activity Theory

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### Abstract

This study draws on the importance of cultural artefacts in understanding historical events, driving economic growth, and preserving identity as its foundation, focusing on Nigeria's struggle against the theft of cultural property. Simultaneously, it examines the risks and difficulties involved in protecting these cultural artefacts through the lens of Routine Activity Theory (RAT). In conjunction with archival studies, observational techniques were employed to identify institutional security vulnerabilities and socioeconomic factors that enable artefact theft. This study's key outcomes are a lack of effective digital monitoring systems, insufficient museum security protocols, poorly-trained personnel, and extremely weak rules enforcement. The research outcomes indicate that Nigeria needs to establish a thorough preservation plan and incorporate area-specific cultural asset conservation initiatives alongside museum security layouts to decrease the number of risks. Nigeria can prevent the illicit trafficking of its cultural artefacts by enforcing more effective legislation, promoting public awareness, and fostering greater global collaboration. This research is significant because it contributes to a more comprehensive discussion of policy-driven conservation methods.

**Keywords:** Artefacts, Ungoverned landscape, Security, Routine Activity Theory, Cultural Preservation

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### Introduction

Nigeria's artistic heritage spans over 2,900 years and encompasses a diverse array of traditional artistic forms like bronze sculptures, terracotta, and ivory carvings (Fakhro & Mohamad, 2020, Njoku & Okafor, 2019). Historically significant or not, Nigerian art has struggled with numerous issues, particularly following colonial invasions, illicit trading, and global plundering. The illicit removal of priceless cultural artefacts, frequently via theft or coerced acquisition, has significantly impacted the country's ability to conserve and exhibit its cultural heritage globally. Nigerian arts, along with those of other African cultures, have earned their rightful place among humanity's greatest creative accomplishments, a recognition long overdue (Akinyoade, 2013; Chidozie & Obubo, 2014), considering that Nigeria boasts one of the richest artistic legacies within the global Black community. Despite this, many priceless and irreplaceable natural heritage resources remain scattered all over the country.

These resources are being consolidated and preserved in designated institutions known as museums, which are dispersed throughout the country.

The museums have played a pivotal role in safeguarding the country's cultural relics, serving as custodians for threatened heritage items and ensuring their availability for future generations to access (Mahagwa, 2023). However, a lack of robust security protocols in museums, coupled with the ongoing illicit trade of cultural artefacts, poses a substantial threat to Nigeria's cultural heritage. Moreover, the fact that many valuable items are situated in ungoverned areas under weak government jurisdiction, such as town halls, community monuments, and heritage sites, makes them more vulnerable to theft and deterioration (Conway, 2018). For instance, in 1897, the British military, as part of the Benin Punitive Expedition, forcibly removed thousands of highly valuable artefacts from the Benin Kingdom, including



items such as terracotta, ivory carvings, and intricately crafted bronze sculptures created by skilled court artists. This case is a significant example of cultural heritage being exploited. The Benin court's creative legacy was erased when African artefacts were systematically moved from public collections to private museums and collections in North America and Europe. Conversely, the loss of these cultural treasures caused widespread devastation among the Nigerian people, and the aftermath of colonial plunder was strikingly evident in 1977 when the country was unable to reclaim the famous 16th-century ivory mask that had been selected as the emblem for the FESTAC '77 celebration, a significant event honouring African arts and culture (Kingi, 1996).

The country's cultural heritage has been compromised by its historical interactions with colonizers dating back to the 15th century, rendering it vulnerable to illicit trade and unauthorized removal. The Jos Museum, the Esie Museum, and the Owo Museum in Ile-Ife have also been victims of substantial thefts, largely as a consequence of the ongoing illicit excavation and the global art trafficking driven by the international interest in Nigerian antiquities. The precarious state of cultural property preservation in the country has been brought to greater attention by accounts of break-ins and exhibits that have been missing at other national museums, including those located in Owo, Abeokuta, Oro, and Ile-Ife (Oluwole, 2021).

Despite being the first nation in Africa to enact legislation banning the illicit trade of artworks, Nigeria continues to experience significant levels of cultural property theft (Nomishan et al., 2023). The persistent nature of these crimes underscores a range of enforcement problems, including public underreporting, ineffective investigative methodologies, and a dearth of qualified law enforcement personnel. Most often, public opinion considerably slows the implementation of enforcement. In Nigeria, cultural property theft is often seen as a relatively minor offense, with looted artefacts frequently linked to affluent individuals or communities (Bos, 2024). Only a

small percentage of stolen artefacts are recovered, with just 10% being returned to their rightful owners, and the rates of reporting these thefts and securing convictions continue to be disappointingly low (Brodie, 2022). By implication, this means that numerous artefacts are often overlooked even though they hold equal significance in defining the country's cultural heritage. Additionally, researchers have largely overlooked the thousands of artefacts still in the country's possession scattered all over the country in ungoverned spaces, whereas both national and international activism has primarily focused on repatriation efforts aimed at retrieving looted antiquities (Dippon & Moskaliuk, 2020, Stuhlhofer, 2020).

A significant gap in heritage preservation underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach that integrates community-led conservation initiatives and agencies with strengthened museum security protocols. This study uses Routine Activity Theory (RAT) as a framework and conducts an archival analysis to examine the vulnerability of cultural factors in regions with inadequate governance structures. Routine Activity Theory was selected for its capacity to elucidate how the availability of suitable targets influences cultural property crimes, the motivation of offenders and the lack of skilled protectors. This study offers a systematic method for understanding the factors that increase the susceptibility of cultural artefacts to theft and illicit trading by applying this framework. The study group comprised influential community leaders from areas notorious for artefact theft, as well as museum personnel with firsthand experience in heritage conservation and artefact security, encompassing both historical and contemporary contexts. The findings of this study provide valuable information that could inform more comprehensive heritage preservation policies and draw attention to the risks associated with artefacts in uncontrolled areas. For the long-term preservation of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage to be secured, it is crucial to enhance local conservation efforts and increase community participation.



## **Literature review**

### **Conservation of Cultural Assets; Principles, and Practices**

A society's cultural heritage serves as a vital representation of its historical background, core values, and traditional customs (Theodora, 2020). Effective intergenerational knowledge transfer, economic development, and social unity are all reliant on each other. Sculptures, texts, buildings, and sacred objects serve as examples of cultural relics that showcase the complexity and ingenuity of societies (Oyinloye et al., 2020). Preserving Nigeria's cultural heritage is crucial for a country with immense cultural diversity, enabling it to safeguard its extensive artistic legacy, national identity, and historical continuity. As one of the world's most culturally varied countries, preserving its rich artistic past, sense of national pride, and historical continuity is paramount.

Heritage preservation also has a substantial impact on cultural tourism, thereby contributing to both economic sustainability and the global recognition of indigenous innovations (Hassan, 2020). Cultural events at heritage sites foster community engagement, attract tourists, and contribute to local economic growth. These cultural sites are threatened by significant risks to their longevity stemming from both environmental and human-induced factors. Moisture, sunlight, wind, and biological decomposition can all lead to structural deterioration, manifesting as discolouration, abrasion, and fungal growth. Cultural and historical sites have suffered damage due to illicit trade, unlawful excavation, and rapid urbanization. Currently, travellers are seeking out destinations that offer engaging, creative, and historical experiences, and there has been an increase in recent years in the demand for authentic cultural interactions. Despite being officially designated as cultural heritage archives, numerous Nigerian artefacts remain stored in ungoverned sites, including local historical sites, palaces, and community shrines, making them susceptible to environmental damage, theft, and deterioration (Uzuegbu et al., 2024; Nomishan et al., 2023).

Therefore, maintaining historical knowledge, bolstering cultural identity, and promoting economic resilience heavily depend on protecting cultural artefacts, a task that extends beyond simply preserving national pride. When cultural objects are lost or destroyed, the flow of cultural narratives is disrupted, the educational opportunities available to future generations are compromised, and the collective memory of a nation is undermined (Ahmad & Hertzog, 2020). Additionally, heritage sites and artefacts generate a significant amount of revenue for local economies through the tourism, research, and cultural sectors. This shows how significant cultural and historical artefacts are. However, despite their immense value, Nigeria's cultural heritage is facing increasing threats. The risks encompass environmental degradation, governmental apathy, clandestine archaeological digs, and the persistent issue of international art smuggling. Without prompt and sustained conservation efforts, these priceless historical resources are tantamount to facing the very real possibility of being irretrievably lost, thereby significantly widening the already existing cultural and financial disparities resulting from their absence (Oyinloye et al., 2020).

### **Cases of Cultural Property Trafficking: Patterns and Occurrences**

As a result of the escalating global demand for rare and historical artefacts, cultural property trafficking has become a highly prevalent and financially rewarding form of transnational crime. Organized crime networks connected to the illicit industry also employ smuggling routes used for weapons, counterfeit items, and narcotics (Bruwer, 2020). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has determined that the trafficking of cultural property is a significant factor in transnational crime, and it also contributes to corruption, money laundering, and the intentional damage of historical and archaeological sites. Illicit activities drain communities of cultural and financial assets, undermine the rule of law and skew the art market while also depriving countries of their heritage artefacts (Campana, 2020).



The trade-in of stolen antiquities is one of the most lucrative activities, ranking alongside the smuggling of narcotics and arms, with estimated annual sales of over \$6 billion on the global black market (Levi & Soudijn, 2020). Evidence suggests that cultural items originating from Africa, Asia and the Middle East are frequently smuggled into European and North American markets, a finding corroborated by the UK House of Commons in 2001, which confirmed the illicit trade in cultural property as a substantial concern. The majority of illicitly traded artefacts' final sales revenue, amounting to 98%) is directed towards intermediaries, whereas none of the funds are allocated to the local communities or the artefacts' rightful owners (Ward, 2020). The large economic differences linked to the trade of cultural heritage goods highlight the exploitative aspects of this illicit activity, which involves the removal of ancestral objects for the benefit of foreign business operations, thus undermining the economic and cultural well-being of their countries of origin.

The situation has had a particularly detrimental effect on Nigeria, where numerous antiquities have been stolen and smuggled to institutions and collectors overseas. Yoruba spiritual and religious artefacts, including Ifa divination equipment, have been stolen and are illegally traded on the international art market (Odokuma & Aganbi, 2017). The effectiveness of current international agreements in preventing the circulation of looted artefacts has been questioned, as stolen Yoruba wooden sculptures and masks regularly appear in high-end auction houses across North America and Europe. In 2018, authorities thwarted an attempt to smuggle ancient Igbo Ukwu bronze artefacts to an underground auction in the United States, seizing them at a border station in Lagos. These instances clearly illustrate how complex smuggling networks persist in exploiting Nigeria's rich cultural legacy, highlighting the pressing requirement for enhanced heritage preservation laws, more comprehensive legal structures, and increased global cooperation to tackle this rapidly deteriorating crisis (Sanda and Oladokun, 2017).

### **Recovery and Monitoring of Illicitly Obtained Cultural Assets**

Civilizations are threatened by the worldwide problem of artefact theft (Campana, 2020). Efforts to prevent the trafficking of stolen artefacts and ensure their repatriation have largely been unsuccessful, despite the implementation of international accords and initiatives led by UNESCO. Complex international ownership regulations and a lack of uniformity are significant obstacles to successfully recovering cultural property. The lack of a uniform legal framework across different regions has led to significant loopholes, enabling stolen artefacts to remain in both institutional and private collections, often under the guise of legitimate purchase (Bruwer, 2020). In many European countries with civil law systems, buyers can claim ownership of stolen antiques as long as they acquired them in "good faith," even if the goods were obtained illegally. The recovery of looted cultural treasures for countries such as Nigeria, Mali, and Egypt have become impracticable due to this clause, which has effectively legitimized the possession of plundered artefacts. This cycle of cultural loss has been perpetuated by the ongoing presence of these legal disparities, allowing Western collectors and museums to buy items from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia freely (Theodora, 2020).

Domestic laws aimed at preventing cultural heritage theft have been put in place, although difficulties with enforcement persist. In 1972, the nation agreed to oversee the import, export, and trade of cultural property by adopting the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Legislation, including Decree No. 77 in 1979 and Law 9 from 1974, aimed to prohibit the unlawful possession and trade of antiquities. Illicit trade in Nigerian antiques remains largely unchecked, primarily due to insufficient resources, corruption, and inadequate border controls, with enforcement measures still falling short despite these legal initiatives (Oyinloye et al., 2020). National treasures stored in museums are intended to be safeguarded but often fall short of adequate security measures, making them vulnerable to



domestic theft and international trafficking. Although museum collections are supposed to be protected stores of national treasure, they frequently lack proper security, leaving them open to both domestic theft and international trafficking (Bruwer, 2020).

In recent years, Nigeria has increased its diplomatic efforts to recover cultural items that have been taken, with significant successes having been obtained. A significant milestone in restitution efforts was achieved in 2021 when the Nigerian government relaxed regulations, allowing for the return of two Benin Bronzes from Germany. Several Nigerian antiquities are stored in major Western museums, such as the British Museum, the Louvre, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) has played a vital role in facilitating further repatriation discussions, thereby underscoring that these artefacts embody not only Nigeria's historical significance but also its cultural heritage and ancestral ties. For Nigeria's stolen cultural heritage to be successfully repatriated, stronger international laws must be put in place, along with sustained diplomatic efforts and continued advocacy, as some museums and governments are beginning to acknowledge the moral obligation to return plundered artefacts (Njoku & Okafor, 2019).

### **Cultural Heritage Crisis and Genocide in Nigeria's Cultural Scene**

Cultural looting has significant consequences for historical understanding, national heritage, and environmentally responsible growth, and it is now one of the most destructive yet least recognized forms of organized crime. The systematic looting of artefacts remains a pervasive problem worldwide, with many cases going unreported, particularly in Nigeria, where traffickers have frequently targeted invaluable historical relics. Items removed from shrines, royal residences, and university museums have ended up in private collections and overseas auction houses, illustrating the high demand in illicit markets for Nigeria's substantial cultural heritage, which comprises valuable bronze statues, intricately

carved ivory, and ancestral remains (Oluwole, 2021).

The prevalence of cultural theft is a significant issue in Nigeria. Between 1986 and 1996, at least 24 museums and cultural institutions suffered from looting, resulting in the disappearance of over 382 priceless artworks (Eluyemi, 2002). These losses are indicative of a broader pattern of systemic cultural exploitation rather than standalone incidents. Serious security vulnerabilities in Nigerian museums were exposed by the theft of artefacts from the Owo Museum in Ondo State, prompting concerns about the country's ability to safeguard its cultural heritage. In 2013, the appearance of stolen Ife bronze heads in a Belgian private collection highlighted the complex worldwide networks engaged in the illicit trade of historical artefacts, including those of significant importance to Yoruba heritage.

In addition to museum theft, archaeological sites and cultural landscapes have faced serious threats. Fighting, illicit excavations, and unchecked land seizures have heightened the vulnerability of Adamawa State's Sukur Cultural Landscape, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. African sculptures, such as the oldest known Nok terracotta figurines, have been extensively stolen and smuggled into European and North American markets, often using fake documents to hide their origins. Cultural theft in Nigeria is an ongoing issue rather than a historical phenomenon driven by high global demand, lenient regulations, and inadequate conservation laws. Despite widespread recognition of cultural heritage as a crucial driver of sustainable tourism and economic development, the long-term socioeconomic repercussions of Nigeria's cultural artefact loss are largely overlooked. The local economy suffers as a result of the exploitation of cultural resources, particularly in tourism, education, and the conservation of local heritage sites. If the ongoing destruction and illicit trading of cultural objects is not halted, Nigeria risks losing both its cultural heritage and opportunities for economic growth and international cultural recognition.



This study aims to bridge the existing research gap by providing new viewpoints on the vulnerability of Nigerian cultural heritage and proposing practical methods for its preservation. This research aims to identify the underlying reasons for cultural theft, assess the effectiveness of existing laws for protecting heritage, and examine collaborative strategies, including technological innovations and community-driven conservation projects, to prevent further losses. This research contributes to the broader discussion on heritage preservation, reparations, and sustainable cultural development in Nigeria by highlighting previously underreported concerns.

### **Theoretical Underpinning: Routine Activity Theory**

Crime opportunity theory has a sub-field known as routine activity theory, which focuses on circumstances in which crimes take place. Marcus Felson and Lawrence E. Cohen developed the theory. Routine activity theory (RAT) is based on the idea that crime is largely independent of social factors such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Following World War II, Western countries experienced a thriving economy and significant expansion of their welfare systems. Crime increased sharply during this period. The increase in crime, as noted by Felson and Cohen (1979), can be attributed to the prosperity of contemporary society, which provides more opportunities for crime to take place and offers more valuable items to steal. This theory is a subject of debate among sociologists who attribute crime to social factors. The theory, therefore, posits that any individual can commit a crime if given the right opportunity. The theory also maintains that victims are provided with choices regarding whether to be targeted, primarily by avoiding situations where a crime can be perpetrated against them.

RAT offers a straightforward and effective understanding of the underlying causes of crime-related issues. At the core of this concept is the notion that without sufficient controls, perpetrators will target vulnerable individuals. For a crime to occur, a motivated offender must

converge with an attractive target at the same location. The primary focus of property crimes is on an object or a tangible item. The target of personal crimes is an individual. If a desirable target is consistently at a different place than a motivated offender, the target will remain unharmed and unattacked. There are certain authorities whose existence deters criminal activity. Typically, in this case, formal and informal security apparatuses are used. Crime can occur if the controllers are either absent or present but ineffective. In the context of routine activity theory, these individuals are referred to as 'handlers'. Crime is likely to occur in environments where those in charge are either absent, lacking authority, or compromised by corruption. Next, we consider those who are targeted or become victims. Guardians strive to safeguard targets by preventing theft and damage and also shield potential victims from potential attacks and assaults. Formal protectors encompass law enforcement officers, security personnel, and other professionals whose primary responsibility is safeguarding individuals and assets from illicit activities. Nearby people, such as neighbours and friends, as well as others in the same location, may serve as informal guardians. The close relatives of potential victims, including parents, teachers, and peers, can also serve as potential guardians. A target with a reliable protector is less susceptible to assault by a potential aggressor than a target without any protection. In the absence of a strong and trustworthy guardian, minimal safeguarding is afforded to the target.

Finally, consider geographical locations. Ownership of every location gives the owner the authority to control access to the site and dictate the behaviour of individuals on the premises. The owner and their representatives, who may include staff members, are responsible for maintaining the premises and for those who visit or utilize them. Property owners and their representatives are referred to as place managers. Place managers oversee the conduct of perpetrators and individuals who may be targeted. Representatives at various locations, such as shops, beaches, parking areas, recreation centres,



facilities and hotel receptions, are examples of place managers. The presence of a capable and honest place manager significantly reduces the likelihood of crime, as opposed to situations in which the manager is ineffective, absent, or corrupt.

Moreover, following this theory, individuals utilize tools to facilitate the achievement of their criminal or crime control goals. Items commonly used by gang members include spray paint cans, firearms, and vehicles. Individuals without access to tools are less likely to evade detection, gain unauthorized entry, and overpower victims, guardians, and administrators. Guardians may employ light to enhance surveillance utilize engraving tools to label property, and use other equipment to minimize the likelihood of victimization. Place managers can utilize gates, fences, signs, and other equipment to govern behaviour. Using effective tools, individuals in handling positions affected by crimes, their protectors, and administrators will have a higher likelihood of preventing crimes from happening. The instruments employed are frequently very tailored to the offence being investigated. The instruments a perpetrator requires for a burglary (such as a screwdriver) are likely to be distinct from those needed for a robbery (such as a gun), for instance.

The combination of appealing targets, inexperienced supervisors, inadequate protection, and unresponsive leadership is not randomly dispersed across different locations. Criminals do not wander the terrain at random. Offenders, like others, often engage in routine activities that take them away from supervision and lead them to encounter environments with desirable targets. Vulnerable individuals often establish daily habits that isolate them from potential protectors in areas with inadequate supervision. The spatial arrangement of crime opportunities, in conjunction with the daily routines of both offenders and victims, contributes significantly to the crime issues we encounter. Generally, crime rates are often in line with the number of motivated offenders, like teenagers and unemployed individuals, within a

population. Clearly, having accessible, legitimate avenues for offenders to achieve their objectives can undermine motivation. Offenders may become more motivated when they perceive that committing a crime is their only viable means of achieving their objectives. The moral beliefs and socialization of an offender also serve as a deterrent to routine activities that lead to crime. Individuals who have been socialized to adhere to conventional values are likely to avoid engaging in criminal behaviour, even when opportunities arise. The power of social connections is strong enough to act as a barrier to prevent people from being drawn into criminal behaviour.

This crime is linked to the trafficking of cultural items, suggesting that the activity is typically carried out in line with the regular habits of a community and is more likely to happen when three key factors come together: an offender with a motive (traffickers and those assisting them locally), a vulnerable target (archaeological sites, museums, or galleries that are not adequately protected), and a lack of effective protection (weak security systems and a limited legal framework to prevent such crimes). When a determined perpetrator and a vulnerable target converge in the absence of an effective protector, a criminal opportunity arises. Factors that determine the suitability of the target include its worth or value, accessibility, and the ability to withstand resistance. The motivation of an offender encompasses both a predisposition to commit crimes and the means to act on those tendencies, with capable guardians being either formal or informal entities that possess the ability to intervene (Cohen and Felson, 1979; Felson, 1994). The distinct characteristics of Nigerian cultural antiquities, particularly their exceptional quality and the cleverness of their creators, make them desirable targets for criminals who are driven by the significant financial gain they could achieve by selling them on the international black market for stolen artefacts. Items of great cultural and historical importance frequently remain in the care of inadequate and non-existent protectors. As a result, they become vulnerable targets for motivated offenders who are willing to take risks to plunder, smuggle, and then sell them



to corrupt international dealers of art and antiques at excessively high prices.

### **Research Outcomes and Theoretical Analysis**

The discovery supports this study's theoretical foundation. The study findings indicate that crime can be committed because there are opportunities to take action. The findings from this study, among other issues, highlighted poor political will to enforce existing laws on the prevention of trafficking of cultural objects, religious zealotry that made people neglect cultural objects and/or monuments within their communities, as well as the absence of motivation for the security arm of museums to live up to their capabilities. Thus, the above amounted to “opportunity,” which motivated individuals to commit crimes. These findings demonstrate that victims have presented the avenues to be victims by placing themselves in situations where crime can be committed against them. In this situation, the victims are museums and educational institutions that have been looted in the past and communities whose cultural artefacts remain vulnerable to looting.

The clear indication is that there was a lack of effective control over the looting of cultural artefacts, thereby allowing the perpetrators of these crimes to act with impunity and exploit vulnerable targets such as the cultural objects in question. Due to this, the offenders have been driven to revisit the same location, which has become a more appealing and targeted destination. The instances of looting in certain locations that the presence of security personnel should have been sufficient to prevent the crimes, yet their ineffectiveness due to the lack of adequate equipment allowed the crimes to occur. Without confirmation of potential arrests, the social and demographic profiles of the looters remain unclear. According to the existing literature and a sociological understanding of such issues, individuals who engage in looting are often shaped by influential people in their lives. These influences can be easily linked back to the socialization processes individuals obtain from their parents, relatives, siblings, friends, teachers, coaches, and other related figures in their lives. In

such a situation, the impacts of intimate partners, close friends, relatives, and even their children should not be overlooked. According to routine activity theory, individuals of this type are referred to as 'handlers'. The crimes occurred because the supervisors of the perpetrators were either absent or ineffective due to weakness, corruption, or both.

The next point of focus is the intended targets or affected targets. Guardians aim to protect targets from theft and harm and shield potential victims from attack and assault. In this instance, the Guardians comprise the administration of museums. The individuals who act as formal guardians include law enforcement officials, security personnel, and others whose primary responsibility is to safeguard both people and assets from illicit activities. Informal guardians of cultural objects often include individuals such as neighbours residing near the monuments, acquaintances, and others coincidentally present in the same location. The museum staff who housed the cultural objects assumed a custodial role. A target that an effective guardian protects is at a lower risk of being assaulted by a potential aggressor than a target without protection. Where the guardian (effective policing) is absent, weak, or corrupt, little or no protection is provided for the target. Other perspectives that need consideration include the places or locations where cultural objects are kept. Someone owns every location, and ownership confers certain rights to regulate access to the site and the behaviours of people using the site. The owner and its agents (e.g., employees) look after the place and the people using the place. Owners and their agents are called place managers.

Place managers oversee the behaviour of individuals who have committed offences and those who may become victims. Examples of place managers in this scenario include curators, heritage managers, tour guides, and every staff member who works closely with artefacts and those in the administrative units of institutions where these cultural objects are stored. The presence of a capable place manager leads to lower crime rates, in contrast to when the



manager is absent, lacks effectiveness, or compromised. The individuals involved in this analysis utilize tools or implement them to achieve their objectives related to crime or crime prevention. Gang members may employ a variety of tools, including chemical substances, to neutralize obstacles, firearms, and vehicles. Individuals without access to tools face reduced chances of evading law enforcement, entering restricted areas, and overpowering victims (those with cultural influence), guardians (police and security personnel), and managers (curators and other authorized staff). Guardians can use light to enhance surveillance capabilities, employ engraving devices to label property, and other equipment to minimize the risk of victimization. Place managers can utilize gates, fences, signs, and other implements to control and manage behaviour. Using the right tools, individuals such as victims, guardians, and managers, along with those who handle crimes, will have a heightened opportunity to prevent crimes from occurring. The instruments employed are frequently tailored to the particular crime under investigation. The types of tools required for a burglary, such as a screwdriver, generally differ from those necessary for a robbery, like a gun.

Ultimately, the study's results demonstrated that criminal behaviour is structured around the everyday patterns of a community and that crime arises from the interaction of three key factors: a motivated perpetrator (the traffickers and their local accomplices), a vulnerable target (under-protected archaeological sites, museums, and galleries), and the lack of a capable protector (an inadequate security system; a relatively weak legal system with insufficient deterrents). When motivated offenders encounter suitable targets, often without a capable guardian present, a criminal opportunity arises. The suitability of a target relates to factors like the worth of the individual or asset, their accessibility, and resilience against attack. An offender's motivation encompasses both their inclination toward crime and their capability to act on those impulses, and capable guardians can be either formal or informal parties with the ability to intervene, which is in line with the findings of Felson (1994) and Cohen and Felson (1979).

The distinctive characteristics of Nigerian cultural artefacts, regarding their excellence and the cleverness of their makers, make them attractive targets for individuals with criminal intentions who are driven by the substantial financial gains their sale could yield in the global black market for stolen antiquities. Objects of considerable cultural and historical importance are frequently maintained under insufficient or non-existent protective oversight. As a result, these items become vulnerable to the actions of determined thieves who are willing to steal, smuggle, and then sell them to unscrupulous international art and antique dealers at significantly inflated prices. Despite several similarities between the positions of routine activities theory and the findings of this study, a significant divergence emerged regarding the role of poverty or economic inequalities as a factor combined with others to facilitate the occurrence of criminality. The respondents cited poverty and inequality as key factors contributing to the trafficking of cultural objects. However, routine activity theory contradicts this. This study aligns with routine activity theory, noting that not all community members face poverty, inequality, and unemployment. If these three factors serve as justifications, then anchoring deviance to one of them will result in widespread looting of cultural objects, rendering museums empty and cultural tourism obsolete.

### **Conclusion**

Heritage sites and institutions continue to be susceptible to threats, especially in areas with weak governance and insufficient regulatory oversight. The situation of illicit trafficking of Nigeria's cultural and historical artefacts has worsened due to artefacts being vulnerable in insecure areas, poorly protected museums, and sites susceptible to clandestine archaeological digs. However, if no immediate action is taken in Nigeria, its valuable cultural heritage could be irretrievably lost, making it increasingly difficult for future generations to establish a strong connection with their ancestral customs. This study has highlighted the urgent necessity for immediate action to be taken to safeguard Nigeria's rich cultural and historical legacy for the benefit of future generations.



In the short term, by combining technological innovations, legislation changes, and community-driven conservation efforts, Nigeria can protect its priceless cultural assets and prevent further misuse of its extensive historical legacy. In the long run, effective long-term preservation of Nigeria's cultural heritage depends on combined efforts from government agencies, local communities, and global preservation organizations. More so, the study revealed the extent to which inadequate security measures, disengaged local populations, and ineffectual law enforcement agencies enable the smuggling of cultural artefacts. The following are the recommendations generated for this study:

- (a) **Strengthening Nigeria's Heritage Protection Policies** - This includes improving the processes for prosecuting heritage crimes and updating and implementing stronger laws on cultural property.
- (b) **Enhancing Museum and Artefact Security**—Implementing technological tracking and centralized digital inventories to monitor and secure cultural assets.
- (c) **Promoting Community-Led Conservation Efforts**: Empowering local custodians, traditional leaders, and grassroots organizations to take an active role in safeguarding heritage sites.
- (d) **Increasing Public Awareness and Cultural Education**: Developing heritage-based curricula, awareness campaigns, and youth engagement programs to foster national appreciation for cultural preservation.
- (e) **Expanding International Cooperation**: Strengthening Nigeria's collaboration with global heritage organizations, INTERPOL, and UNESCO to facilitate artefact repatriation and stricter regulation of international antiquities markets.

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