Detective Practices and Criminal Case Resolution in Nigeria: A Criminological Analysis of Selected High-profile Cases

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Abstract

Famous Nigerian Criminal Cases Solved by Detectives: Notable Investigations and the Detective Work Behind Kidnappings, High-Profile Murders, and Fraud Rings. This study examines landmark criminal cases in Nigeria that have been successfully resolved by detectives, focusing on high-profile kidnappings, notorious murder investigations, and organized fraud rings. It explores the specific investigative techniques, forensic methods, and inter-agency strategies employed by the Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services (DSS), and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in bringing these cases to resolution, situating each case within its broader socio-legal context. Problem of the Study: Despite Nigeria's persistent struggles with kidnapping-for-ransom, unresolved homicides, and elaborate fraud syndicates, there is limited systematic documentation of the specific detective work behind successfully solved cases, leaving a gap in institutional knowledge that could otherwise inform training, policy, and public confidence in law enforcement. The study employs a qualitative content analysis of media archives, court records, police case files, and academic sources covering notable solved cases between 2000 and 2026, identifying recurring investigative patterns and breakthroughs. Theory Adopted and Assumption: Routine Activity Theory is applied, assuming that successful case resolution reflects the strengthening of "capable guardianship" — through surveillance, forensic evidence, informant networks, and inter-agency collaboration — sufficient to disrupt and apprehend offenders after crimes occur. Findings reveal that successful investigations typically combine technological tracing (call records, financial trails), informant intelligence, and coordinated multi-agency response, though many cases remain constrained by resource and procedural limitations. The study recommends institutionalized case documentation, expanded forensic capacity, and stronger witness protection systems.

Keywords: Nigerian detectives, kidnapping investigations, murder cases, fraud rings, criminal investigation

Introduction

Nigeria's criminal justice landscape has, over the past two decades, been defined by three recurring and interlocking threats: kidnapping-for-ransom, high-profile homicide, and organised financial fraud. Each of these categories of crime has evolved from isolated incidents into structured, sometimes industrial, enterprises that test the capacity of the country's security architecture. Kidnapping, in particular, has moved from its origins as a militant pressure tactic in the oil-producing Niger Delta in the late 1990s, when expatriate oil workers were the primary targets, into a nationwide criminal economy that today touches school children, clergy, judges, and ordinary commuters alike (Inkstick Media, 2024). The scale of this transformation is captured in successive reports by SBM Intelligence, a Lagos-based risk consultancy that has tracked the trade for years: between June 2022 and June 2023, no fewer than 3,620 people were abducted in 582 recorded incidents, with kidnappers demanding roughly ₦5 billion in ransom (The ICIR, 2023). A year later, between July 2023 and June 2024, the figure rose sharply to 7,568 abductions across 1,130 incidents, with total demands of nearly ₦11 billion, of which only about 9.5 percent was actually paid (SBM Intelligence, 2024). By the most recent reporting period, July 2024 to June 2025, SBM Intelligence

documented 4,722 victims across 997 incidents, alongside 762 deaths, and ₦2.56 billion in ransom payments against demands of ₦48 billion — a single case, the abduction of Borno State High Court judge Justice Haruna Mshelia, accounting for nearly ₦766 million of that total (Guardian, 2025; BusinessDay, 2025). Ransom payments alone are reported to have risen by over 750 percent within a two-year window, a trend the same reports attribute to inflation, currency devaluation, and deepening economic desperation (The Whistler, 2026). These figures, striking as they are, describe only the crime side of the ledger; they say comparatively little about the detective work — the surveillance, forensic tracing, informant cultivation, and inter-agency coordination — that periodically interrupts this economy and brings perpetrators to justice.

Parallel to the kidnapping crisis, Nigeria has witnessed a series of murder investigations that captured national attention not merely because of the brutality involved, but because of the distinctive investigative methods used to crack them. The 2012 killing of Cynthia Osokogu, a postgraduate student and daughter of a retired army general, is frequently cited as a watershed case in this respect. Osokogu was lured from Abuja to a hotel in Lagos by two men she had befriended on Facebook, where she was drugged, robbed, and strangled (Wikipedia, 2024; TheCable, 2017). What made the case notable from an investigative standpoint was not sophisticated forensic science but the mundane persistence of digital-trail analysis: one of the suspects used the victim's stolen phone to make a call, the call was traced to the FESTAC Town area of Lagos, and this lead — cross-referenced with a missing-person report and hotel CCTV footage — allowed police to identify and eventually arrest the killers (TheBurtonWire, 2012; Channels TV, 2013). The case ended in convictions and death sentences for the two principal defendants in 2017, five years after the crime (AllAfrica, 2017). Similarly, the case of Chukwudumeme Onwuamadike, popularly known as "Evans" and dubbed "the billionaire kidnapper," illustrates how a combination of intelligence gathering, informant networks, and sustained surveillance by the Inspector-General of Police's Intelligence Response Team (IRT) eventually ended a seven-year kidnapping spree in which victims were reportedly held for ransoms exceeding one million dollars apiece (Wikipedia, 2022; BusinessDay, 2017). Evans evaded a most-wanted listing across three states before his eventual arrest at his mansion in Magodo, Lagos, in June 2017, after which he was tried, convicted, and sentenced across multiple cases (PeaceFM Online, 2017; ThisDay/PressReader, 2020). These two cases, spanning different categories of crime — murder and kidnapping — nonetheless share a common investigative signature: the conversion of ordinary traces (a phone call, a hotel receipt, a financial transaction) into actionable intelligence through patient, methodical police work rather than singular technological breakthroughs.

Fraud, the third pillar of this study, presents its own distinct investigative challenge, being less a crime of physical confrontation than one of documentation, financial tracing, and digital forensics. Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), established in 2003, has increasingly relied on international collaboration, asset-tracing, and cyber-forensic units to unravel large-scale fraud syndicates, including advance-fee fraud ("419") networks and, more recently, cybercrime rings often referred to locally as "Yahoo Yahoo" or "Yahoo Plus" operations. These cases typically require the reconstruction of financial trails across multiple bank accounts and jurisdictions, digital forensic analysis of seized devices, and, frequently, cooperation with foreign law enforcement bodies such as the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation and INTERPOL. The Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services (DSS), and the EFCC each bring a different institutional mandate and toolkit to these overlapping crime types — the police handling conventional criminal investigation and rapid response, the DSS focusing on matters bearing on internal security and high-value targets, and the EFCC specialising in financial crime — and their capacity to collaborate, or their tendency to work in institutional silos, has repeatedly shaped whether and how quickly cases are resolved.

Despite the frequency with which these cases dominate media coverage, there remains a conspicuous gap in the systematic, comparative documentation of the actual detective methods that led to their resolution. Existing commentary tends to be episodic and journalistic, produced in the immediate aftermath of an arrest or conviction, rather than analytical or comparative across cases and time. Academic and institutional literature on Nigerian policing, by contrast, tends to focus on structural problems — under-funding, corruption, poor forensic infrastructure, and weak witness protection — without correspondingly cataloguing the specific techniques that, despite these constraints, have produced successful outcomes (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024; SBM Intelligence, 2024). This creates a paradox: Nigeria simultaneously suffers from an entrenched crime economy and produces detective work sophisticated enough to periodically dismantle major criminal networks, yet the institutional knowledge generated by these successes is rarely codified into training curricula, standard operating procedures, or public accountability frameworks. This study responds to that gap by systematically examining a purposive set of landmark cases — encompassing kidnapping, murder, and fraud — resolved between 2000 and 2026, in order to identify recurring investigative patterns, the specific evidentiary and technological tools deployed, and the conditions under which inter-agency collaboration succeeded or broke down.

Theoretically, the study is anchored in Routine Activity Theory, first articulated by Cohen and Felson (1979), which holds that a criminal event requires the convergence in time and space of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship. While the theory was originally developed to explain the occurrence of crime, this study adapts its guardianship construct to explain case resolution: successful detective work is treated as a retroactive strengthening of capable guardianship — through surveillance, forensic evidence, informant networks, and coordinated agency response — sufficient to identify, locate, and apprehend offenders after the commission of the offence (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Reynald, 2011). This framing allows the study to move beyond a purely descriptive account of "what happened" in each case toward an analytical account of which guardianship mechanisms were present, absent, or belatedly activated, and how their presence or absence shaped the speed and completeness of case resolution. By situating each case within this framework and within its broader socio-legal context, the study aims to generate findings that are useful not only for academic understanding of Nigerian criminal justice but also for practical purposes: informing detective training curricula, guiding policy on forensic capacity building, and, ultimately, strengthening public confidence in a law enforcement system whose successes are too often overshadowed, in public discourse, by its failures.

Conceptual Clarification of Detectives

Defining the Detective

At its most basic, a detective is a law enforcement investigator — typically, though not exclusively, a member of a police force — whose principal function is to establish the facts of a crime, identify the person or persons responsible, and assemble evidence sufficient to support arrest, prosecution, and conviction (EBSCO Research Starters, n.d.-a). This distinguishes the detective from the uniformed patrol officer, whose primary responsibilities centre on deterrence, order maintenance, and first response, rather than the sustained, evidence-driven reconstruction of a completed criminal event. Criminal investigation itself is conventionally classified as either reactive — commenced after a crime has already been reported, as with most kidnapping, murder, and fraud cases examined in this study — or proactive, undertaken on the basis of intelligence about an offence not yet committed (EBSCO Research Starters, n.d.-b). The detective's work is further commonly characterised in the literature as simultaneously scientific, insofar as it applies forensic and technical method, and procedural, insofar as it follows a codified, systematic process of instigation, evidence-gathering, suspect identification, and case-building toward arrest and prosecution (EBSCO Research Starters, n.d.-b). This dual characterisation — investigation as science and investigation as process — is consistent with, and complements, the "science,

craft, and art" typology discussed earlier in this study (Carson, 2011), reinforcing the view that detective work cannot be reduced to any single dimension but instead integrates technical method, systematic procedure, and individual inferential skill (Shittu, 2024).

The Contemporary Organizational Position of Detectives

In most contemporary police organizations, detective work is treated as a distinct specialism rather than a universal function of all officers, although investigation in a general sense is understood as an activity performed by all police personnel to varying degrees (EKU Online, n.d.). Detectives are typically supported by a wider ecosystem of specialist personnel — records clerks, dispatchers, crime analysts — who assist by sorting and providing information rather than conducting frontline investigation themselves (EKU Online, n.d.). In most national policing systems, detectives are drawn from one of two pathways: promotion from within uniformed patrol ranks after passing a specialized examination, or direct recruitment of college graduates into investigative roles without prior patrol service (EBSCO Research Starters, n.d.-a). Nationally representative data from the United States indicate that only 10 to 15 percent of a typical police department's sworn personnel are assigned to detective units, reflecting the specialized and comparatively resource-intensive nature of the role relative to routine patrol staffing (EKU Online, n.d.). This organizational scarcity is instructive for the Nigerian context: given the country's already well-documented forensic and resource constraints (Nte, 2012; Shittu, 2024), it is reasonable to infer that the proportion of Nigerian security personnel with dedicated, specialized investigative training is smaller still, compounding the capacity limitations identified elsewhere in this study.

The Relevance of Detectives to Criminal Justice and Public Confidence

Beyond their procedural function, detectives occupy a position of particular symbolic and institutional importance within the criminal justice system, precisely because their work sits at the intersection of state capacity and public trust. The SAGE Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment (n.d.) notes that the American detective role has historically been simultaneously criticised — for abuse of power, corruption, and resistance to reform — and celebrated, being popularly portrayed as heroic, artistic, and professional in equal measure, a duality that reflects genuine ambivalence in how the public and scholars alike assess investigative policing. This duality is directly mirrored in the Nigerian literature reviewed in this study: while cases such as the Cynthia Osokogu murder investigation and the pursuit of Chukwudumeme Onwuamadike ("Evans") generated genuine public confidence in detective capability, the broader Nigerian public-perception literature — including the 2018 Benin Metropolis study of policing attitudes toward kidnapping — documents persistently poor public confidence in investigative effectiveness overall. The relevance of the detective function to this study, therefore, is not confined to its technical or evidentiary role. Detectives function as the primary institutional mechanism through which the state demonstrates that crime does not go unanswered — those offenders, even when they evade apprehension in the immediate aftermath of an offence, remain within reach of eventual accountability. This positions detective work as directly relevant to the Routine Activity Theory framework adopted by this study: the detective is, in institutional terms, the human embodiment of reconstructed "capable guardianship," and the public's assessment of the criminal justice system's legitimacy is shaped disproportionately by the visibility, and documentation, of that guardianship in action — reinforcing, once again, this study's central argument for systematic documentation of Nigeria's successfully resolved cases.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's crime landscape presents a troubling paradox: violent and financial crime are escalating by nearly every available metric, while the country's mechanisms for documenting, studying, and institutionalising the detective work that occasionally interrupts this trend remain underdeveloped. This gap is most visible across the three crime categories at the centre of this study — kidnapping, homicide, and

organised fraud — each of which has generated its own body of current statistics that, taken together, expose the scale of the problem and the urgency of understanding what successful investigation actually looks like.

Kidnapping-for-ransom has moved from a militant tactic confined to the Niger Delta into a nationwide criminal enterprise operating with near-industrial efficiency. According to SBM Intelligence's most recent tracking, 4,722 people were abducted in 997 incidents between July 2024 and June 2025 alone, resulting in 762 deaths, with ransom demands totalling ₦48 billion against ₦2.56 billion actually paid (Guardian, 2025; BusinessDay, 2025). This represents a continuation of a multi-year surge: abductions rose from roughly 3,620 in 2022–2023 to 7,568 in 2023–2024, while ransom payments climbed by more than 750 percent within a two-year window, a trend researchers attribute to currency devaluation and deepening economic desperation rather than any single security failure (The ICIR, 2023; SBM Intelligence, 2024; The Whistler, 2026). Separately, a 2024 National Bureau of Statistics survey — the country's first systematic crime victimisation survey of its kind — estimated that over 2.2 million Nigerians were abducted and more than 614,000 killed between May 2023 and April 2024, with an estimated ₦2.23 trillion paid in ransom nationally, figures an order of magnitude larger than security-consultancy tracking and widely described as symptomatic of how poorly the true scale of victimisation is captured by official policing statistics (AllAfrica/Daily Trust, 2024). Whichever dataset is used, the pattern is the same: a criminal economy expanding faster than the public record of how, or whether, it is being countered.

Homicide investigation presents a parallel and arguably more troubling gap. Nigeria's intentional homicide rate stood at 15.75 per 100,000 population in 2023, itself a significant burden by international standards (ProfitBridge, 2023), yet what is far less documented is how many of these cases are actually resolved. Nte (2012), in one of the few systematic academic treatments of the subject, found that the near-total absence of forensic skills and equipment among Nigerian police and internal security agencies routinely stalls murder investigations, to the point that even the assassinations of high-profile public figures have gone without a single forensic lead. Aborisade (2018), writing in African Security Review, similarly documented systemic investigative failures behind Nigeria's backlog of unresolved murders, linking the trend to the use of inappropriate investigative approaches, poor information management, resource constraints, corrupt practices, and institutional pressure to close cases quickly rather than correctly — all of which, the study argues, carry direct security and sociopolitical consequences for public trust in the state. Unlike jurisdictions such as the United States, where annual homicide clearance rates are tracked and published by the FBI and independent bodies such as the Murder Accountability Project (finding, for instance, that roughly half of U.S. homicides are now cleared annually, down from 71 percent in 1980), Nigeria has no comparable, regularly published clearance-rate metric — meaning that both scholars and the public are left to infer investigative performance from a handful of high-profile cases that happened to attract media attention, such as the 2012 Cynthia Osokogu murder, rather than from any systematic institutional record (Aborisade, 2018; ABC6/Marshall Project analysis, cited 2024).

Fraud and cybercrime, meanwhile, illustrate a different dimension of the same problem: even where an agency publishes strong headline results, the specific investigative methodology behind those results is rarely disclosed or analysed. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission reported a record 4,111 convictions in 2024 — its best year since its 2003 establishment — alongside the recovery of over ₦364.6 billion, $214.5 million, and more than 750 duplexes and apartments forfeited to the Federal Government, out of 15,724 petitions received and 12,928 cases investigated (NAN, 2025; Arise News, 2025). The Commission's chairman separately disclosed that Nigeria lost over $500 million to cybercrime in 2022 alone, with cybercrime accounting for a significant share of the agency's convictions (AllAfrica/EFCC, 2024). Yet public reporting on these outcomes is

almost uniformly aggregate and statistical — conviction counts, recovery sums, and petition volumes by zonal office — rather than case-level or methodological, leaving virtually undocumented the specific combination of financial-trail analysis, digital forensics, informant intelligence, and international cooperation that produces a given conviction. The result is that both the volume of Nigeria's fraud problem and the scale of EFCC's enforcement response are well publicised, while the actual investigative playbook — the techniques that translate a petition into a conviction — remains institutional knowledge that is neither codified for training purposes nor made available for independent academic scrutiny.

Taken together, these patterns expose the precise gap this study addresses. Nigeria simultaneously suffers from an accelerating, well-quantified crime problem across kidnapping, homicide, and fraud, and from a strikingly under-documented account of the investigative successes that do occur within that same environment. Existing literature tends toward one of two poles: aggregate crime statistics that quantify the scale of the problem (SBM Intelligence, National Bureau of Statistics, EFCC annual reports), or structural critiques of policing capacity that explain why investigations fail (Nte, 2012; Aborisade, 2018). Comparatively little work sits between these poles to systematically document, compare, and theorise the specific detective work — the surveillance operations, forensic techniques, informant networks, and inter-agency collaborations — behind the cases that were successfully solved, despite the same resource and procedural constraints that cause so many others to stall. Without this documentation, lessons from successful investigations are not being captured into training curricula, standard operating procedures, or public accountability frameworks; policy responses to kidnapping, homicide, and fraud risk being designed reactively around aggregate statistics rather than around demonstrated investigative practice; and public confidence in the Nigeria Police Force, the DSS, and the EFCC continues to be shaped disproportionately by the volume of unresolved cases rather than by an accurate account of what these agencies do well when a case is, in fact, resolved. It is this institutional knowledge gap — the absence of systematic, comparative documentation of successful Nigerian detective work between 2000 and 2026 — that the present study sets out to address.

Literature Review

Existing scholarship relevant to this study clusters around five thematic strands: forensic-investigative capacity in Nigerian homicide cases; the effectiveness and operational challenges of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in fraud and corruption cases; kidnapping-for-ransom as a criminological phenomenon; inter-agency and cross-border collaboration in combating financial crime; and the theoretical application of Routine Activity Theory (RAT) to Nigerian security contexts. This review synthesises current findings across these strands to situate the present study's focus on the specific detective work behind *successfully solved* cases, a dimension the literature has, until now, addressed only incidentally.

Forensic Investigation and Homicide Cases

The most consistent finding across the Nigerian forensic-investigation literature is that under-capacity, rather than case complexity, is the principal driver of unresolved murders. Nte's (2012) foundational study, published in the *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, evaluated the challenges facing forensic investigation capacity among the police and other internal security agencies and found that a persistent lack of forensic skills and equipment directly undermines the ability to resolve homicide cases, a deficit so severe that even the assassinations of prominent public figures have gone without a single forensic lead. This finding has been substantially reaffirmed by more recent work. Shittu's (2024) systematic review, published in the *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, synthesised sixteen studies on murder investigation and forensic science application in Nigeria published between 2012 and 2022, concluding that forensic science application in Nigerian murder investigations remains "suboptimal," a shortfall the review directly links to the country's accumulation of

cold and unresolved cases, alongside inadequate forensic legislation and poor adherence to validated investigative procedures. Sarki's (2020) mixed-methods study of Investigating Police Officers in Zone 1 of the Nigeria Police similarly found that perceptual, motivational, and organisational factors compound the material shortage of forensic facilities, meaning the problem is not purely one of equipment but also of institutional culture and officer training. Olaniyi's (2022) study of forensic science–enabled crime-fighting mechanisms in Oyo State, published in the *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, reached a parallel conclusion using key-informant interviews and focus group discussions, finding facilities "grossly inadequate" and recommending synergy between government, private organisations, and researchers to strengthen forensic capacity. Aborisade's (2018) analysis in *African Security Review* extends this diagnosis beyond resourcing to procedure, identifying inappropriate investigative approaches, poor information management, and institutional pressure to close cases quickly — rather than correctly — as systemic drivers of Nigeria's unresolved-murder backlog, with direct implications for public trust in the security sector. Taken together, this cluster of literature establishes a well-documented *problem* — chronic under-resourcing and procedural weakness — but stops short of systematically documenting the specific techniques used in the subset of cases where these constraints were nonetheless overcome, which is precisely the gap this study addresses.

The EFCC and the Investigation of Financial Crime

A substantial and long-running body of literature evaluates the EFCC's institutional effectiveness, though much of it is framed around anti-corruption policy outcomes rather than case-level investigative methodology. Early appraisals were largely critical: Albert and Okoli's (2016) documentary analysis in the *Journal of Financial Crime* concluded that the EFCC had not been effective in combating corruption between 2003 and 2012, attributing this to intrusive government interference, lack of institutional autonomy, poor funding, and weak enabling laws. Umar, Samsudin, and Mohamed's (2017) appraisal, published in the *Journal of Advanced Research in Business and Management Studies*, similarly linked EFCC effectiveness to institutional and organisational factors, while Ahmed Jamo's (2021) review found that the Commission has struggled to win the majority of the cases it prosecutes, attributing this to weaknesses in investigation and case presentation rather than to a shortage of petitions or leads. More recent scholarship, however, suggests a shifting picture. A 2026 empirical appraisal of the EFCC's operational strategies under the Buhari administration (2015–2023), published in the *Benue Journal of Sociology*, surveyed 376 Commission staff and found measurable institutional strengthening in operational strategy over that period, even as it acknowledged continuing resource and legal constraints. This shift aligns with the EFCC's own reported 2024 performance data — a record 4,111 convictions and over ₦364.6 billion in recovered assets — suggesting that, whatever the historical institutional weaknesses documented in the literature, investigative and prosecutorial capacity has measurably improved in the years immediately preceding this study's 2000–2026 scope. What remains absent from this literature, however, is case-level analysis of *how* specific convictions were secured — the financial-trail and digital-forensic methodology behind them — as opposed to aggregate performance appraisal, again underscoring the documentation gap this study is designed to fill.

Inter-Agency and Cross-Border Collaboration

A smaller but directly relevant strand of literature examines collaboration among Nigeria's anti-graft and security institutions. Ebire and Daniels (2023), writing in the *Journal of Money Laundering Control*, assessed the roles of the EFCC and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) in combating illicit financial flows, concluding that despite documented institutional effort, Nigeria continues to rank among the African countries most affected by such flows, and recommending more coordinated, collective strategy among domestic

and international authorities. Complementary institutional reporting confirms that inter-agency coordination is an explicit, ongoing policy priority: EFCC leadership has publicly called for deepened cooperation among the country's anti-corruption agencies, and the Commission has separately moved to strengthen operational ties with bodies such as the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC) to safeguard the financial system and support the apprehension of financial-crime perpetrators. This literature substantiates the study's underlying premise — that inter-agency collaboration functions as a distinct, identifiable investigative resource — while again leaving the specific, case-level mechanics of how such collaboration contributed to particular successful investigations comparatively under-explored.

Kidnapping-for-Ransom as a Criminological Phenomenon

The kidnapping literature has grown considerably in the past five years, tracking the crime's transformation from a Niger Delta militancy tactic into a nationwide criminal economy. Regional case studies — on the Abuja–Kaduna Expressway corridor, Edo North Senatorial District, Katsina State, and Southern Taraba State — consistently identify vast, poorly guarded terrain, economically motivated offender networks, and constrained state security capacity as the conditions sustaining the trade, with several of these studies explicitly adopting Routine Activity Theory, alone or in combination with Social Disorganisation Theory, as their analytical frame. A related strand examines public perception of police effectiveness: a 2018 study published in the *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* surveyed 960 respondents in Benin Metropolis and found a very poor public perception of the Nigeria Police Force's capacity to curb kidnapping, attributing this to a multiplicity of operational obstacles. This body of work is valuable for establishing the socio-legal and criminological context of kidnapping in Nigeria, but, consistent with the pattern observed in the homicide and fraud literatures, it is overwhelmingly oriented toward explaining the *prevalence* of kidnapping rather than documenting the investigative processes behind cases that were ultimately resolved.

Theoretical Framework

Finally, the theoretical literature confirms both the relevance and the adaptability of Routine Activity Theory to the Nigerian context. Akinyetun and Bakare (2022), in *Facta Universitatis: Law and Politics*, applied RAT to explain the escalation of armed banditry, framing the phenomenon as the product of numerous motivated offenders, abundant unprotected targets, and an overstretched, undermanned security apparatus — that is, largely absent capable guardianship. Bello and Griffiths (2020) extended RAT specifically to cybercrime investigation in Nigeria, examining law enforcement's capability to respond to advance-fee fraud through the theory's three-part framework, and providing direct precedent for this study's application of RAT to investigative capacity rather than solely to criminal opportunity. Across this literature, RAT has been used almost exclusively as an explanatory tool for crime prevalence and prevention failure. This study's contribution lies in redirecting the same theoretical apparatus toward the reactive, post-offence phase — treating successful detective work itself as the reconstruction of capable guardianship — a theoretical move that, while consistent with more recent, variable-based conceptions of guardianship (Reynald, 2011), has not yet been systematically applied to Nigerian case-resolution outcomes across kidnapping, murder, and fraud simultaneously.

Routine Activity Theory

This study is anchored in Routine Activity Theory (RAT), a criminological framework developed by American sociologists Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson and first articulated in their seminal 1979 paper, "Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach," published in the American Sociological Review. Departing from dispositional theories that locate the causes of crime primarily in the psychological or social background of the offender, Cohen and Felson (1979) proposed a situational, opportunity-based explanation: rather than asking why an individual becomes criminally motivated, the theory asks under what circumstances that motivation is converted into an actual criminal event. Their central claim is

that most direct-contact predatory crime — theft, robbery, assault, and, by extension, kidnapping, homicide, and fraud — requires the convergence, in the same place and at the same time, of three minimal elements: a likely or motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian against crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Routine Activity Theory was originally formulated as a preventive framework — explaining the conditions under which crime is more or less likely to occur, and by extension, how situational crime prevention (target hardening, improved surveillance, environmental design) might reduce opportunities for offending before the fact. This study adopts a deliberate theoretical adaptation, applying the theory's guardianship construct retrospectively, to the post-offence investigative phase, rather than solely to the pre-offence preventive phase. The underlying assumption guiding this adaptation is that when initial, real-time guardianship fails to prevent a kidnapping, murder, or fraud from occurring, a second, reactive phase of guardianship becomes operative: the deployment of detective work, forensic analysis, informant networks, and inter-agency coordination aimed at re-establishing "capable guardianship" after the fact, in order to identify, locate, and apprehend the offender before further harm occurs and before the offender can be considered to have escaped accountability.

Routine Activity Theory has been applied with growing frequency to Nigerian security scholarship in recent years, lending further theoretical warrant to its use here. Akinyetun and Bakare (2022), writing in *Facta Universitatis: Law and Politics*, apply RAT to explain the deepening scourge of armed banditry in Nigeria, arguing that the convergence of numerous motivated offenders, an abundance of suitable targets (unprotected rural communities, farmer-herder resource conflicts, ungoverned forest terrain), and a weak, overstretched, and undermanned security apparatus — that is, largely absent capable guardianship — accounts for the persistence and escalation of the phenomenon. Comparable applications have been made specifically to kidnapping for ransom: RAT has been used as the anchoring theory in county- and district-level Nigerian studies of the crime, including analyses of the Abuja–Kaduna Expressway kidnapping corridor, Edo North Senatorial District, Katsina State, and Southern Taraba State, each identifying the combination of vast, poorly guarded terrain, economically motivated offenders, and constrained state security capacity as the conditions that sustain the kidnapping economy (studies reviewed include those situated in Katsina, Edo, and Taraba states, and along the Abuja–Kaduna corridor). What distinguishes the present study from this existing body of RAT-informed Nigerian scholarship is that virtually all of it applies the theory to explain the *persistence and prevalence* of crime — why kidnapping, banditry, or fraud continue to occur despite state efforts at prevention.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the study proceeds from the central assumption that case resolution is not primarily attributable to isolated forensic breakthroughs or singular strokes of luck, but reflects a systematic, if uneven, strengthening of capable guardianship after the commission of an offence. It further assumes that the degree of this guardianship strengthening can be observed and compared across cases through four principal indicators derived directly from the theory's guardianship construct: the extent and sophistication of technological surveillance and tracing (call records, financial and digital trails); the quality and reliability of forensic evidence gathered and processed; the depth and reach of informant and intelligence networks; and the degree of effective coordination achieved among the Nigeria Police Force, the DSS, and the EFCC. Where these four indicators are jointly and effectively present, the theory predicts, and this study assumes, that case resolution is more likely and more timely; where one or more indicators are weak, absent, or undermined by resource and procedural constraints — as documented extensively in the Nigerian forensic-capacity literature (Nte, 2012) and in critiques of investigative failure (Aborisade, 2018) — the theory predicts, and prior Nigerian scholarship confirms, that cases are more likely to stall, go cold, or remain permanently unresolved. It is against this theoretically derived expectation that

the study's qualitative content analysis of Nigeria's landmark solved cases, spanning kidnapping, murder, and fraud between 2000 and 2026, is conducted.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis design, appropriate for systematically interpreting textual and documentary material to identify recurring patterns, categories, and themes without the constraints of a predetermined statistical model (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2018). This design suits the study's aim of extracting recurring investigative patterns — rather than measuring their statistical frequency — across a purposively selected set of landmark Nigerian criminal cases.

Sources of Data

The study relies entirely on secondary data, drawn from four categories of documentary sources:

Media archives — newspaper and broadcast coverage of case investigations, arrests, and trials (e.g., *Punch*, *ThisDay*, *Premium Times*, *Channels TV*, *BusinessDay*).

Court records and judgments — publicly available rulings and case proceedings documenting how evidence was presented and evaluated at trial.

Police and agency case files/press briefings — official statements and case summaries released by the Nigeria Police Force, the DSS, and the EFCC.

Academic and institutional sources — peer-reviewed journal articles, security-sector reports (e.g., SBM Intelligence), and NBS crime statistics, used to situate individual cases within broader socio-legal and criminological context.

Sample size

A **purposive sampling** technique is used to select landmark cases resolved between 2000 and 2026, spanning three crime categories: high-profile kidnappings, notorious murder investigations, and organised fraud rings. Cases are selected on the basis of (a) public documentation sufficient for analysis, (b) confirmed resolution (arrest, prosecution, and/or conviction), and (c) relevance to at least one of the three focal crime types.

Data Analysis

Data is analysed using thematic/categorical content analysis, involving: (i) close reading and coding of case documentation; (ii) identification of recurring investigative techniques (e.g., call-record and financial-trail tracing, forensic evidence, informant intelligence, inter-agency coordination); and (iii) interpretation of these patterns through the lens of Routine Activity Theory's guardianship construct, comparing how its strength or weakness across cases relates to investigative outcomes (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Reynald, 2011).

Discussion of Findings

The content analysis undertaken in this study identifies four recurring elements across Nigeria's successfully resolved landmark cases: technological tracing (call-detail records and financial trails), informant and intelligence-network cultivation, coordinated multi-agency response, and — cutting across all three — persistent resource and procedural constraints that shaped how, and how quickly, guardianship was reconstructed. This section discusses each finding in turn, situating it against the existing literature and interpreting it through the Routine Activity Theory (RAT) framework adopted for the study, before turning to the cross-cutting limitations that qualify these successes.

Technological Tracing as Reactive Guardianship

The single most consistent finding across the cases reviewed is that technological tracing — the reconstruction of a suspect's movements, communications, or financial activity after the fact — functions as the most immediately actionable form of reactive guardianship available to Nigerian investigators. In the 2012 murder of Cynthia Osokogu, the case broke not through advanced forensic science but through the comparatively mundane act of tracing a phone call made on the victim's stolen handset to a specific location in Lagos, a lead that, once cross-referenced with a missing-person report and hotel

records, converted an anonymous crime into an identifiable suspect network (TheBurtonWire, 2012; TheCable, 2017). A structurally similar pattern recurs in fraud cases handled by the EFCC, where financial-trail analysis — tracing transactions across bank accounts, and increasingly across digital payment platforms — forms the backbone of case-building, consistent with the Commission's 2024 record of 4,111 convictions built substantially on the reconstruction of financial movements underlying petitions received (NAN, 2025; Arise News, 2025). This finding aligns closely with Bello and Griffiths' (2020) application of RAT to cybercrime investigation in Nigeria, which frames investigative capacity itself — including the technical capacity to trace digital and financial trails — as a determinant of whether guardianship can be meaningfully exercised once an offence has occurred. Read through the RAT lens, technological tracing functions precisely as the theory's guardianship construct predicts: it does not prevent the initial offence, but it re-establishes the "capable" element of guardianship after the fact, converting an absent guardian at the moment of the crime into a present and effective one during the investigation.

Informant Intelligence and Human-Network Guardianship

A second recurring pattern is the centrality of informant networks and sustained intelligence-led surveillance, particularly in kidnapping cases where technological trails are more easily disrupted by offenders operating in rural or forested terrain. The seven-year pursuit and eventual 2017 arrest of Chukwudumeme Onwuamadike ("Evans"), Nigeria's so-called "billionaire kidnapper," exemplifies this pattern: his eventual capture at his Magodo, Lagos residence followed sustained intelligence gathering by the Inspector-General of Police's Intelligence Response Team rather than a single forensic breakthrough (Wikipedia, 2022; PeaceFM Online, 2017). This finding resonates with the broader regional kidnapping literature, which consistently identifies the exploitation of vast, poorly guarded terrain as a structural advantage for kidnapping gangs — a condition documented in RAT-informed studies of the Abuja–Kaduna Expressway corridor, Edo North, Katsina, and Southern Taraba. Where offenders can rely on geography to evade real-time guardianship, human-network intelligence becomes the primary mechanism by which reactive guardianship is reconstructed, substituting a socially embedded source for the physical absence of a guardian at the crime scene. This is consistent with Reynald's (2011) reconceptualization of guardianship as a matter of capability rather than mere presence: an informant network does not need to be physically present at the moment of offending to constitute effective guardianship, provided it is subsequently capable of generating actionable intelligence.

Coordinated Multi-Agency Response

Third, the cases reviewed consistently show that no single agency's resources are sufficient in isolation, and that case resolution — particularly in fraud and organised kidnapping cases — depends on the pooling of capacity across the Nigeria Police Force, the DSS, and the EFCC. This finding is corroborated by the institutional literature on inter-agency collaboration: Ebire and Daniels (2023) found that, despite documented cooperative effort between the EFCC and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, illicit financial flows in Nigeria have continued largely unabated, underscoring both the necessity and the incompleteness of current collaborative arrangements. Public statements from EFCC leadership calling for deepened cooperation among anti-graft agencies, and the Commission's efforts to formalise ties with institutions such as the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation, further indicate that inter-agency coordination is recognised within the institutions themselves as a binding constraint on investigative effectiveness, not merely an academic observation. Interpreted through RAT, multi-agency collaboration represents an institutional pooling of guardianship capacity: where the Police Force's rapid-response and community-level reach, the DSS's internal-security intelligence apparatus, and the EFCC's financial-forensic specialisation are combined, the aggregate guardianship capacity approaches what the theory identifies as necessary to disrupt

offenders operating across jurisdictional and institutional boundaries — a threshold that, the findings suggest, is rarely reached by any single agency acting alone.

Persistent Resource and Procedural Constraints

Notwithstanding these successes, the findings also confirm that Nigeria's successfully resolved cases remain the exception against a backdrop of significant structural constraint, a pattern strongly corroborated by the wider literature. Nte's (2012) foundational assessment found that poor or absent forensic skills and equipment directly undermine investigative capacity, a finding echoed more than a decade later by Shittu's (2024) systematic review of sixteen studies published between 2012 and 2022, which concluded that forensic science application in Nigerian murder investigations remains suboptimal and is a direct contributor to the country's backlog of cold and unresolved cases. Sarki's (2020) study of Investigating Police Officers similarly found that organisational and motivational factors compound material shortages, while Aborisade (2018) identified poor information management and institutional pressure to close cases quickly — rather than accurately — as a further procedural constraint with direct implications for public trust. These constraints are not merely historical: the widening gap between kidnapping incidence and case resolution is itself illustrative, with SBM Intelligence (2024) and Guardian (2025) reporting thousands of annual abductions against a comparatively small number of documented, resolved landmark cases. Interpreted through the study's theoretical framework, these findings indicate that reactive guardianship in Nigeria remains inconsistently capable: the same four mechanisms — technological tracing, informant intelligence, forensic evidence, and inter-agency collaboration — that produce successful outcomes in the cases examined are, in the far larger population of unresolved cases, either absent, under-resourced, or undermined by procedural weakness. This asymmetry supports the study's central theoretical proposition: that the difference between a solved and an unsolved Nigerian criminal case is best explained not by the absence of investigative knowledge or technique, but by the inconsistent institutional capacity to deploy that technique with sufficient speed, coordination, and resourcing to reconstruct capable guardianship before the trail goes cold.

Taken together, these findings support a central conclusion: Nigeria's landmark solved cases are not explained by exceptional or novel investigative technology, but by the successful, if inconsistent, combination of ordinary, well-established techniques — call and financial tracing, informant cultivation, and inter-agency coordination — deployed with enough persistence and institutional backing to overcome the resource and procedural constraints that, in the majority of cases, prevent this same combination from being realised. This reframes the practical question facing Nigerian law enforcement not as one of acquiring fundamentally new investigative capability, but of institutionalising, resourcing, and replicating the guardianship-reconstruction mechanisms already demonstrated to work in the country's most notable case resolutions — a conclusion that directly informs the study's subsequent recommendations on case documentation, forensic capacity building, and witness protection.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine landmark Nigerian criminal cases — spanning high-profile kidnappings, notorious murder investigations, and organised fraud rings — that have been successfully resolved by detectives, and to systematically document the specific investigative techniques behind these outcomes, a dimension left largely unaddressed by existing literature. Guided by Routine Activity Theory and its guardianship construct, the study treated successful case resolution as evidence of a retroactive strengthening of "capable guardianship," reconstructed after an offence through technological tracing, informant intelligence, forensic evidence, and inter-agency collaboration.

The findings confirm that Nigeria's successfully solved cases are not distinguished by exceptional or novel investigative technology, but by the disciplined, sustained combination of ordinary and well-established techniques — call-detail and financial-trail tracing, as illustrated in the Cynthia

Osokogu murder case; sustained informant-led surveillance, as demonstrated in the pursuit and eventual arrest of Chukwudumeme Onwuamadike ("Evans"); and coordinated multi-agency response involving the Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services, and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, whose 2024 record of 4,111 convictions illustrates what sustained institutional capacity can achieve (NAN, 2025). At the same time, the study confirms that these successes remain the exception rather than the rule, constrained by the same forensic under-capacity, resource shortages, and procedural weaknesses documented across the wider Nigerian criminal-justice literature (Nte, 2012; Aborisade, 2018; Shittu, 2024). The gap between the scale of Nigeria's kidnapping, homicide, and fraud problem and the comparatively small number of well-documented, successfully resolved landmark cases underscores that the country does not lack investigative knowledge, but lacks the consistent institutional capacity to deploy that knowledge with sufficient speed, coordination, and resourcing across the vast majority of cases that never reach resolution.

In sum, the study concludes that case resolution in Nigeria is best understood not as a matter of isolated forensic breakthroughs, but as a function of how effectively "capable guardianship" is reconstructed after a crime has occurred — and that this reconstruction, where it succeeds, offers a replicable institutional template that has, until now, remained undocumented and therefore under-utilised.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study recommends the following:

Institutionalised case documentation. The Nigeria Police Force, DSS, and EFCC should establish a standardised, centralised system for documenting the investigative methodology behind resolved cases — not merely case outcomes — to convert individual investigative successes into replicable institutional knowledge and training material for new detectives.

Expanded forensic capacity. Government should prioritise sustained investment in forensic laboratories, digital-forensic units, and officer training, directly addressing the capacity gaps identified by Nte (2012), Sarki (2020), and Shittu (2024) as the single most consistent obstacle to case resolution, particularly in homicide investigations.

Strengthened witness and informant protection. Given the centrality of informant intelligence to cases such as the Evans arrest, a formalised, adequately funded witness and informant protection framework should be established to sustain the human-intelligence networks that reactive guardianship depends upon.

Formalised inter-agency protocols. Building on existing but informal cooperation between the Police, DSS, and EFCC, and consistent with Ebire and Daniels' (2023) findings on the limits of current inter-agency coordination, the study recommends binding operational protocols — including shared case-management systems and joint task forces — for cases spanning kidnapping, homicide, and financial crime jurisdictions.

Public reporting of case-level investigative outcomes. Agencies, particularly the EFCC, should complement existing aggregate statistical reporting (convictions, recoveries, petitions) with periodic, anonymised case-study reporting of investigative methodology, both to strengthen public confidence in law enforcement and to support ongoing academic and policy research of the kind undertaken in this study.

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