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Crime, Causes of Crime, and Criminal Investigation in Nigeria

A Critical Narrative Review of Investigative Capacity and Institutional Coordination

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Abstract

Crime prevention and criminal investigation involve related but distinct problems: explaining offending does not establish how an allegation becomes reliable evidence. This critical narrative review examines that relationship in Nigeria through Social Disorganization Theory and Routine Activity Theory. The synthesis draws on a purposively selected corpus of 16 sources comprising two theoretical works, five contemporary empirical studies, two statutes, six official institutional documents or webpages, and one official survey summary. A targeted supplementary search undertaken on October 19, 2026, prioritised research published from 2020 to 2026 and authoritative materials relevant to institutional responsibilities. Five themes organise the analysis: structural vulnerability, changing evidence requirements, investigative capacity, forensic and digital capability, and governance and coordination. The evidence supports attention to training, information integrity, and organisational arrangements, while its geographical and methodological limitations prevent nationwide estimates of investigative performance or causal claims about reform effectiveness. The article proposes an evidence continuity framework connecting reporting, preservation, analysis, inter-agency transfer, and prosecutorial review. This is an analytical proposal requiring empirical validation. Reform should combine accountable investigation, clearly assigned responsibilities, and evaluated investment in people and infrastructure. The principal contribution is to distinguish crime-producing conditions from the institutional processes through which evidence can be developed and tested.

Keywords: Crime; Digitalization; Forensics; Investigation; Nigeria; Prevention; Security; Coordination.

Kejahatan, Penyebab Kejahatan, dan Investigasi Kriminal di Nigeria

Sebuah Tinjauan Naratif Kritis tentang Kapasitas Investigasi dan Koordinasi Kelembagaan

Abstrak

Pencegahan kejahatan dan investigasi kriminal merupakan dua persoalan yang saling berkaitan, tetapi berbeda: menjelaskan penyebab seseorang melakukan kejahatan tidak serta-merta menjelaskan bagaimana suatu dugaan tindak pidana dapat dikembangkan menjadi bukti yang dapat dipercaya. Tinjauan naratif kritis ini mengkaji hubungan tersebut dalam konteks Nigeria melalui Teori Disorganisasi Sosial dan Teori Aktivitas Rutin. Sintesis ini didasarkan pada 16 sumber yang dipilih secara purposif, yang terdiri atas dua karya teoretis, lima studi empiris kontemporer, dua peraturan perundang-undangan, enam dokumen atau laman web resmi kelembagaan, serta satu ringkasan survei resmi. Penelusuran tambahan yang terarah dilakukan pada 19 Oktober 2026 dengan memprioritaskan penelitian yang diterbitkan pada periode 2020–2026 dan sumber otoritatif yang relevan dengan tanggung jawab kelembagaan. Analisis disusun berdasarkan lima tema: kerentanan struktural, perubahan kebutuhan pembuktian, kapasitas investigasi, kemampuan forensik dan digital, serta tata kelola dan koordinasi. Bukti yang ditelaah menunjukkan pentingnya pelatihan, integritas informasi, dan pengaturan organisasi. Namun, keterbatasan geografis dan metodologis sumber yang digunakan tidak memungkinkan penyusunan estimasi kinerja investigasi secara nasional ataupun penarikan kesimpulan kausal mengenai efektivitas reformasi. Artikel ini mengusulkan kerangka kesinambungan bukti yang menghubungkan pelaporan, pengamanan bukti, analisis, pemindahan bukti antarlembaga, dan peninjauan oleh penuntut umum. Kerangka tersebut merupakan usulan analitis yang

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masih memerlukan validasi empiris. Reformasi perlu mengintegrasikan investigasi yang akuntabel, pembagian tanggung jawab yang jelas, serta investasi pada sumber daya manusia dan infrastruktur yang dievaluasi secara sistematis. Kontribusi utama artikel ini adalah membedakan kondisi yang mendorong terjadinya kejahatan dari proses kelembagaan yang memungkinkan bukti dikembangkan dan diuji.

Kata kunci: Kejahatan; Digitalisasi; Forensik; Investigasi; Nigeria; Pencegahan; Keamanan; Koordinasi.

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INTRODUCTION

Crime causation and criminal investigation represent two closely related but analytically distinct dimensions of criminal justice. Understanding the social conditions associated with offending does not necessarily explain how criminal allegations are investigated, how evidence is established, or how investigative findings are translated into legally defensible decisions. In Nigeria, these questions arise within a criminal justice system shaped by historical institutional arrangements, changing patterns of offending, and continuing demands for effective policing and procedural accountability. Fourchard (2006, 2010) demonstrates how colonial administrative practices shaped the categorization and institutional treatment of juvenile delinquency, while Igbinovia (2000) provides an earlier assessment of the development and institutional challenges of Nigerian policing. These perspectives suggest that contemporary criminal investigation should be examined not only as a technical law-enforcement activity but also as an institutional process influenced by historical practices, organizational arrangements, and the protection of individual rights.

Theoretical explanations of crime provide a foundation for identifying the conditions under which criminal behavior may emerge. Social Disorganization Theory emphasizes the relationship between community characteristics, informal social control, and variations in crime, while Routine Activity Theory explains criminal opportunities through the convergence of potential offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Cohen & Felson, 1979). These perspectives are particularly relevant to Nigerian studies examining socioeconomic exclusion, urban insecurity, and opportunities for criminal participation. Salaam (2011) investigates motivations for gang membership among unemployed youths in Lagos, while Adeyinka et al. (2023) examine socioeconomic factors associated with youth involvement in cybercrime. Although these studies illuminate different dimensions of criminal behavior, their findings do not establish that economic disadvantage inevitably produces offending. More importantly, theories explaining criminal opportunities cannot independently determine whether investigating institutions possess the capacity to identify suspects, preserve evidence, or establish responsibility through lawful procedures.

Research on crime in Nigeria identifies several interacting socioeconomic, familial, and developmental conditions associated with delinquency. Chukwuemeka et al. (2012) discuss challenges affecting youth development and employment opportunities, providing a broader perspective on the social environment in which young people make educational and occupational decisions. Animasahun et al. (2023) examine associations between family structure, childhood deprivation, parenting practices, peer influence, and criminal behavior among inmates in Agodi, Nigeria. Similarly, Atilola (2012) investigates psychosocial difficulties among adolescents in institutional care, while Olashore et al. (2017) examine factors associated with delinquency among incarcerated male juveniles. Together, these studies demonstrate the value of examining family relationships, social disadvantage, and peer environments rather than attributing criminal behavior to a single cause. Nevertheless, their institutional and geographically concentrated samples limit the extent to which their findings can be generalized to the wider Nigerian population or used to establish causal relationships.

The relationship between psychosocial vulnerability and criminal justice involvement also deserves attention. Research involving young offenders has documented substance use, mental health concerns, and developmental difficulties that may affect their experiences within correctional institutions. Ogunwale et al. (2012) investigate psychoactive substance use among young offenders, while Atilola et al. (2016) examine substance-use disorders among adolescents in juvenile correctional facilities in Lagos. Lasisi et al. (2024) address intellectual disability and its correlates among incarcerated adolescents in Kaduna. These findings raise questions about the suitability of investigative interviewing, access to appropriate support, and safeguards for vulnerable suspects, although the studies do not directly evaluate the reliability of investigative evidence. Gender also requires consideration because patterns of criminal justice involvement and institutional experiences may differ between men and women. Okoh (2024) provides a feminist conceptual perspective on female criminality in Nigeria, challenging approaches that treat predominantly male offender samples as representative of all offending populations. Accordingly, developmental, psychological, and gender-related characteristics should inform procedural safeguards without being treated as presumptive indicators of criminal responsibility.

Studies of juvenile justice further illustrate the relationship between institutional design, procedural protection, and responses to offending. Atilola (2013) argues for diversion programs as an alternative to excessive reliance on custodial responses, while Diriwari (2023) examines the resocialization of young offenders within Nigeria's juvenile justice system. Idowu and Muhammed (2019) identify challenges affecting delinquency control and juvenile recidivism in correctional institutions, and Oluwatoyin (2022) investigates educational programs and rehabilitation in Lagos State juvenile homes. Adekeye and Emmanuel (2018) examine the relationship between early release and juvenile recidivism, indicating that post-custodial outcomes require attention to more than detention arrangements alone. Importantly, Atilola et al. (2020) compare victimization experiences among adolescent boys processed through juvenile and adult criminal justice systems in Lagos, raising concerns about procedural safeguards and treatment within justice institutions. These studies support a distinction between determining criminal responsibility, protecting individuals during investigation, and designing appropriate rehabilitative responses. Although prevention, investigation, adjudication, and rehabilitation are connected, they involve different legal responsibilities and should not be treated as interchangeable measures of criminal justice effectiveness.

The diversity of criminal activities in Nigeria also complicates the relationship between crime causation and investigative practice. Research on cybercrime demonstrates how digital environments and socioeconomic circumstances may shape particular forms of offending (Adeyinka et al., 2023). Fiennes (2020) examines oil bunkering in the Niger Delta, bringing attention to economic crime within the broader political and resource-governance environment. Utoo et al. (2018) investigate sexual assault cases reported at a law-enforcement health facility, illustrating the relevance of victim reporting and clinical information to criminal justice processes. More recently, Enemuwe et al. (2026) analyze public perceptions of kidnapping in Nigeria and identify associations involving economic conditions, community insecurity, institutional performance, and perceived severity. These studies concern substantially different offences and employ different research designs. Their combined relevance lies in demonstrating why investigative requirements cannot be reduced to a single standardized technical response. Different allegations may require physical exhibits, witness testimony, medical documentation, financial records, communications data, or combinations of these materials. Determining how such information becomes admissible and reliable evidence remains a separate institutional question.

Research focusing directly on Nigerian policing reveals a more specific set of investigative challenges. Ojedokun and Oshilaja (2022), in their study of cybercrime policing within the Lagos State

Command of the Nigeria Police Force, identify operational difficulties and unequal access to specialized professional training. Ismail and Abdullahi (2024) examine digital policing within the Jigawa State Police Command, reporting limitations in technological resources and information and communication technology skills. These findings extend earlier discussions of policing development and organizational constraints in Nigeria (Igbinovia, 2000). However, the two contemporary studies investigate particular police commands rather than the entire national police system. Their findings therefore support concerns about training, technological adoption, and institutional readiness in the locations studied, but they cannot establish nationwide levels of investigative performance. They also raise a question that requires further analytical attention: whether additional technology can improve investigations without corresponding improvements in evidence management, organizational procedures, and professional accountability.

Forensic capability introduces another dimension of this problem. Sibe and Muller (2022) examine digital forensic readiness within the Nigeria Police Force and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, identifying resource, technical, and personnel-related constraints within the institutions studied. Sarki (2023) investigates forensic intelligence and database reliability in the Nigeria Police Force, reporting associations between unreliable databases and institutional problems involving corruption, limited interagency cooperation, and interference in investigations. These findings suggest that investigative effectiveness depends on more than the availability of forensic equipment or digital information systems. The practical value of forensic information also depends on how evidence is collected, documented, preserved, analyzed, and communicated to relevant decision-makers. A digital record may provide an investigative lead without independently establishing its evidentiary reliability, just as forensic analysis may be weakened by inadequate documentation or uncertainty about the origin and handling of an exhibit. These connections provide a rationale for examining evidence management as a continuous institutional process rather than as a series of isolated technical activities.

Institutional coordination is particularly relevant when investigations involve multiple forms of evidence or require cooperation between agencies with different statutory responsibilities. Studies of cybercrime policing, digital forensic readiness, and forensic databases indicate that technological resources, specialist skills, and organizational cooperation are closely related concerns (Ojedokun & Oshilaja, 2022; Sibe & Muller, 2022; Sarki, 2023; Ismail & Abdullahi, 2024). Nevertheless, evidence of organizational difficulties does not demonstrate that every Nigerian investigating institution experiences identical problems or that particular reforms will necessarily improve outcomes. The relevant analytical issue is how investigative responsibilities are allocated and how information is transferred between reporting officers, investigators, forensic specialists, collaborating institutions, and prosecutors. A criminal complaint may fail to generate a sufficiently documented investigative lead; collected material may remain unanalyzed; completed analysis may be difficult to interpret without a reliable record of provenance; and evidence that reaches prosecution may still require clarification or further examination. These are potential points of evidentiary discontinuity rather than empirically established failures across all Nigerian criminal investigations.

Against this background, the present article critically synthesizes scholarship on the causes of crime and the institutional requirements of criminal investigation in Nigeria. It addresses three interconnected questions: how structural and situational explanations of offending relate to investigative requirements; what the selected studies establish about policing, forensic capability, and institutional constraints; and how responsibilities across successive stages of evidence handling may be coordinated while maintaining legal accountability. Drawing on Social Disorganization Theory and Routine Activity Theory, the review distinguishes explanations of criminal behavior from the institutional processes

through which criminal allegations become testable evidence. Its principal contribution is a proposed *evidence continuity framework* encompassing reporting, evidence preservation, forensic and digital analysis, interagency transfer, and prosecutorial review. The framework is presented as an analytical interpretation of the reviewed literature rather than a validated model of investigative effectiveness. Because the underlying studies differ in location, population, methodology, and institutional focus, the review does not attempt nationwide estimates or causal claims about the effects of specific reforms. Instead, it identifies priorities for further empirical research and for the evaluation of training, information integrity, institutional coordination, and accountable investigative practice.

CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Crime and investigative requirements

For this review, crime refers to conduct prohibited by the applicable criminal law. Social disapproval alone is insufficient to establish criminal liability. Investigation is treated as an inquiry capable of supporting or excluding competing explanations, rather than a process whose success is measured only by securing a conviction. A suspect's guilt remains a question for lawful adjudication.

Offence categories are useful here because they indicate evidence requirements. Violence against persons may require scene records, medical findings and witness accounts; financial wrongdoing may require transaction histories and ownership information; and cyber-enabled offending may require authenticated device, account and service-provider records. The categories overlap. A kidnapping can involve bodily harm, payment movements and digital communications, while a fraud can combine online contact with physical documentation. This classification is an organising device for the review, not a replacement for statutory offence definitions.

The relevant historical and institutional distinction is between the availability of a technique and the institutional ability to use it competently. The existence of DNA analysis, surveillance or a digital database elsewhere cannot establish its availability, reliability or lawful use in a particular Nigerian investigation.

Social Disorganization Theory

Shaw and McKay (1942) provide the foundational neighbourhood perspective used in this article. Social Disorganization Theory directs attention to the relationship between community conditions and the capacity to sustain informal social control. It is used as a sensitising framework for examining social vulnerability and access to institutions. It does not justify identifying a person as an offender because of poverty, residence or family background.

An investigative implication proposed here is that community conditions may affect access to witnesses, willingness to report and the durability of local cooperation. These are research propositions rather than causal results established by this review. Applying a theory developed in American urban settings to Nigeria requires attention to regional differences, displacement, rural insecurity and the varied legitimacy of formal and informal authorities. Community membership must not become a proxy for criminal suspicion.

Routine Activity Theory

Cohen and Felson (1979) explain opportunities for predatory crime through the convergence of likely offenders, suitable targets and insufficient capable guardianship. Their approach supplies the situational component of the framework. Guardianship should not be reduced to the police: household routines, organisations, service providers and ordinary users can also shape opportunities.

Investigation typically follows an alleged offence, whereas guardianship concerns opportunities surrounding its occurrence. The connection is therefore indirect. Investigative learning may inform future prevention, but collecting evidence after an event is not automatically a demonstration of effective guardianship. Whether a specific investigative reform changes offending requires separate evaluation.

Integrating the frameworks

The two theories operate at different levels. Social disorganisation directs attention to community conditions; routine activities directs attention to opportunities and guardianship. Neither supplies a complete theory of laboratory management, evidence admissibility or inter-agency governance. The evidence continuity framework adds an institutional question to these perspectives: which actor maintains the reliability of information at each transition? Strain Theory, biological determinism and an unspecified Multiple Factor Theory are not used as additional explanatory frameworks in this analysis.

REVIEW METHOD

Design and scope

This article is a critical narrative review with documentary legal and institutional clarification. It is not a systematic review, meta-analysis, primary interview study or statistical analysis of Nigerian crime rates. A complete historical search and screening record is unavailable. The review therefore uses an explicitly bounded supplementary search and a source register prepared on 19 October 2026.

The contemporary research window was 2020 to the search date in 2026. Earlier theoretical works and legislation were retained where needed to explain the framework and institutional setting. English-language sources were considered. The scope prioritised Nigerian investigations and used one international empirical study as a comparison for organisational capability, without assuming direct transferability.

Identification and selection

Targeted web searches combined Nigeria or Nigerian police with criminal investigation, forensic investigation, digital evidence, cybercrime policing, kidnapping, corruption and inter-agency coordination. Examples included “Nigeria criminal investigation forensic police empirical study 2021 2024 digital evidence”, “Nigeria cybercrime police investigation qualitative study 2023 2024”, and “Nigeria kidnapping empirical study 2024 2025 interviews journal”. Follow-up title searches checked publisher records, and domain-specific searches located official institutional information.

Discovery used general web-search indexes; source checking used journal and publisher pages including SAGE, Salus Journal, Southern Journal of Social Sciences and Nature, the Deakin institutional repository, and Nigerian agency and UNODC websites. DOAJ assisted discovery of the Lagos study. Subscription databases such as Scopus and Web of Science were not searched directly. Materials were retained for a direct contribution to one of the review questions, identifiable provenance and sufficient accessible information to support the particular claim made. Duplicated records, news commentary, unverifiable citations and sources available only as an unsupported title were excluded from the analytical corpus.

The final corpus contains 16 distinct sources, all listed in the references. It comprises two theoretical works, five empirical journal studies, two statutes, six official institutional sources and one official survey summary. These are selected sources, not the output of exhaustive screening. A total search-hit count, exclusion-flow diagram and claim of saturation are intentionally not supplied. The source

register distinguishes full-text inspection from abstract-level or webpage-level inspection, so an accessible abstract is not represented as a full methodological appraisal.

Synthesis and credibility

For each source, the source register records its type, geographical scope, accessible evidence, relevant finding or mandate, and main inferential limit. Five organising themes were specified from the review questions: structural vulnerability; changing evidence requirements; institutional capacity; forensic and digital capability; and governance and coordination. Relevant material was allocated to these categories and compared across sources. This is a structured narrative synthesis, not a claim of independently replicated qualitative coding.

Statutes and institutional webpages clarify responsibilities; they do not demonstrate operational effectiveness. Empirical studies inform claims within their own locations, samples and designs. Survey perceptions are distinguished from incident counts and case outcomes. Where only abstracts were accessible, the synthesis uses only the information reported there. No pooled estimate, formal risk-of-bias score, intercoder agreement or new primary dataset is claimed. The evidence matrix and source register make the basis and limits of the synthesis inspectable.

EVIDENCE AND THEMATIC SYNTHESIS

Empirical evidence base

The five studies below address distinct questions. Their differences are analytically useful but prevent direct comparison of performance measures.

Table 1. Selected empirical studies and limits of interpretation

Study	Design and setting	Contribution	Limit
Ojedokun and Oshilaja 2022	Lagos qualitative interviews	Training access and operational constraints	Local police perspectives; no national estimate
Ismail and Abdullahi 2024	Jigawa questionnaires and interviews	Technology and skills constraints	Abstract inspected; state-command scope
Sarki 2023	Survey of investigators	Database reliability and organisational challenges	Abstract inspected; methods not fully appraised
Enemuwe et al. 2026	Afrobarometer secondary analysis	Perceived kidnapping severity and governance	Perception associations, not incident trends
Whelan et al. 2025	Two federal organisations outside Nigeria	Integration and retention of civilian expertise	Comparison; transferability untested

Structural vulnerability and the limits of causal claims

Enemuwe et al. (2026) analyse Afrobarometer Round 9 data on perceived kidnapping severity and associated social and governance conditions. Their study illustrates the value of incorporating citizens' assessments alongside institutional accounts. Its outcome concerns perceptions; it must not be reported as a count of kidnappings or an estimate of investigative clearance. Cross-sectional associations also cannot establish that deprivation causes an individual to offend.

The implication for this review is methodological as well as substantive. Structural explanations should specify whether they concern exposure, fear, recruitment opportunities or recorded offending. These outcomes are different. Social Disorganization Theory helps formulate questions about collective capacity and institutional access, while causal claims about individual offending require evidence beyond the selected studies.

For policy, social prevention and investigation should have connected but distinct objectives. Improving access to education or support may address vulnerability; preserving a victim's account and testing a suspect's involvement serve evidential purposes. Neither objective can stand in for the other. A prevention programme should be evaluated against appropriate social outcomes, while investigative improvements require measures of evidence quality, timeliness, fairness and case progression.

Changing evidence requirements

Ojedokun and Oshilaja (2022) draw on 25 in-depth interviews and two key-informant interviews with police officials in Lagos. They report differentiated access to cybercrime training and operational obstacles. Their qualitative design provides situated explanations, not a national rate of competence. For this synthesis, the central lesson is that identifying cybercrime as a priority does not ensure that officers receiving complaints have the support needed to preserve useful information.

Different offence categories can converge on the same evidential problem. A payment record may be relevant to both fraud and kidnapping, but its investigative value depends on how it is connected to a person, account, time and event. This is the review's analytical inference, not a new empirical result. An allegation, an intelligence lead and an authenticated evidential item should remain distinguishable throughout the file.

The selected material supports the importance of digital evidence and specialist capability in particular contexts. It does not establish a comparable national time series across all forms of crime.

Institutional capacity and specialist expertise

Ismail and Abdullahi (2024) report a Jigawa study involving 215 police questionnaires and 15 interviews with police personnel, information-technology professionals and policing scholars. The accessible abstract identifies limited technology availability and skills in the setting studied. The finding warrants attention to local readiness, while its state-command scope prevents an inference that every Nigerian command has the same resources or deficiencies.

An international comparison broadens the institutional question. Whelan et al. (2025) examine 56 interviews across two federal law-enforcement organisations in different Five Eyes countries. Their analysis addresses civilian expertise, recruitment, training and retention. It suggests that organisational arrangements matter alongside technical equipment, but provides no direct estimate of what civilian recruitment would achieve in Nigeria.

Taken together, these studies motivate a capability assessment that asks who receives a report, who handles the exhibit, who performs specialist analysis and who can explain the result. This proposed division of tasks should be tested against actual workflows. Purchasing a tool, completing a course and demonstrating competence in a case are separate indicators. Reform proposals should specify which indicator they intend to change.

Forensic capability and information integrity

Sarki (2023), in an investigator survey described in the accessible abstract, reports associations between unreliable forensic databases and corruption, limited inter-agency cooperation and interference. The source supports an organisational perspective on database reliability. As only the abstract was available for this synthesis, sampling quality, instrument validity and model specification could not be fully assessed; the finding is treated as provisional supporting evidence.

The practical inference is that a database is more than a collection of records. Its usefulness depends on accurate entry, controlled correction, documented provenance and accountable access. These are proposed criteria for evaluating evidence continuity, rather than measured conditions across Nigerian

databases. An integrated system could amplify errors if information quality and responsibility are unclear. Information sharing should therefore be designed around lawful purpose and traceability, rather than unrestricted access.

Laboratory or digital capacity requires competent use and verifiable handling. The reviewed sources do not establish national laboratory coverage, DNA turnaround times or the comparative accuracy of investigative methods, so those quantities are not asserted.

Governance and institutional boundaries

The UNODC and National Bureau of Statistics (2024) corruption survey summary documents reported experiences and attitudes toward bribery. It provides relevant governance context, including resistance to bribery demands. It does not justify assuming misconduct by every investigator or calculating a national rate of evidence tampering. The interpretation advanced here is that public confidence and institutional accountability should be included in investigative reform, alongside equipment and staffing.

Institutional precision also matters. The Nigeria Police Act 2020 supplies the general policing foundation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020). The Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 is relevant to criminal procedure, with its application requiring attention to federal jurisdiction, the Federal Capital Territory and the relevant state legislation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015). Neither enactment proves that reforms are consistently implemented. The Police Act is cited by its enactment year, 2020.

The EFCC's official Establishment Act identifies economic and financial-crime responsibilities, while the ICPC's official account explains its corruption investigation, prosecution and prevention functions (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, 2004; Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission, n.d.). These responsibilities overlap in subject matter but should not be described as identical or unlimited. Case allocation requires attention to the alleged offence and applicable law.

The DSS describes its functions in relation to internal security, and the NDLEA's official annual report identifies its drug-control mandate (Department of State Services, n.d.; National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2022). The NSCDC identifies protection of critical infrastructure and emergency-response responsibilities in its official account (Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, n.d.). These descriptions support a differentiated institutional map; they are not evidence that each body has general jurisdiction over every form of offending.

The NCoS official mandate centres on custody, rehabilitation, reintegration and non-custodial measures (Nigerian Correctional Service, n.d.). Custodial information may assist appropriate authorities, but the Service is not presented here as an interchangeable general criminal-investigation agency. The abbreviation NCoS is used consistently. Detailed assertions concerning Customs, Immigration, NAPTIP and NFIU powers are omitted because the selected corpus does not establish the complete legal position for those bodies. This omission concerns scope and verification, not their importance.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

An evidence continuity framework

The synthesis proposes five linked stages: reporting and initial documentation; preservation and provenance; specialist analysis; transfer between responsible institutions; and prosecutorial review and feedback. These stages are analytical categories and can overlap in practice. They identify points at which responsibility needs to be clear, rather than prescribing a universal chronological sequence for every offence.

At reporting, institutions should record what is alleged and what remains uncertain. At preservation, the concern is whether later users can identify the item and reconstruct its handling. Analysis requires a qualified explanation that distinguishes observation from inference and recognises limitations. Transfer requires an identifiable recipient, purpose and record of responsibility. Prosecutorial review should identify unanswered evidential questions while leaving investigative and adjudicative roles distinct.

The framework gives practical specificity to calls for funding and collaboration. A delay at one stage may make investment elsewhere less effective. For example, additional analytical capacity cannot repair information that was never preserved. This is a logical proposition for evaluation, not a measured Nigerian effect. Its value depends on whether empirical work can identify where such dependencies arise and which interventions improve them.

Policy and institutional implications

Reform should begin with an assessment of actual workflows in selected commands and specialist bodies. A baseline can record report-to-referral time, exhibit documentation completeness, analysis turnaround, file-return reasons and complaints about investigative treatment. These are proposed indicators; the review supplies no baseline figures or predetermined improvement target. Case complexity and resources must be considered when comparing institutions.

Training should connect frontline personnel with specialist support through defined referral arrangements. Technology proposals should state the competence, maintenance, quality-control and legal requirements necessary for operation. A phased pilot with documented costs and outcomes is more assessable than a general promise that nationwide procurement will improve convictions. Conviction counts alone cannot establish investigative quality because case selection, prosecutorial decisions and court processes also affect outcomes.

Coordination should assign a responsible lead, define information requests and document transfers. Access should be restricted to authorised purposes, with a mechanism for correcting errors. Community cooperation should include accessible reporting and a response to confidentiality concerns. Witness-support proposals should be matched to applicable law and evaluated implementation; the review does not assert that Nigeria lacks every form of witness-protection provision.

Theoretical implications

The conceptual contribution is to place institutional evidence processes alongside community conditions and situational opportunities. Social Disorganization Theory helps ask how community organisation relates to reporting and cooperation. Routine Activity Theory helps ask how settings shape exposure and guardianship. Evidence continuity asks how institutions convert information into material that can be assessed. These questions complement one another without collapsing prevention into investigation.

Two propositions follow for future testing. First, any relationship between community cooperation and case progression may depend on how reports are received and followed up. Second, the contribution of specialist technology may depend on evidence handling before referral and on interpretation afterward. The review does not test either proposition, amend the original theories or demonstrate a causal interaction. It specifies where an institutional study could examine those relationships.

Future research and limitations

Comparative studies should trace a defined class of case across reporting, specialist referral and prosecutorial review in contrasting settings. Designs could combine anonymised file audits, interviews

and administrative timelines, subject to ethical and legal access requirements. Prospective evaluations could assess training or referral changes against a baseline and a credible comparison, rather than relying on participants' satisfaction alone. Database research should examine accuracy and correction practices as well as availability.

The present review is purposive and English-language, and its web-based discovery is vulnerable to ranking and availability bias. Some studies were examined only through their abstracts. No exhaustive search, formal quality appraisal or independent coding was undertaken. The selected Nigerian studies concern different settings and outcomes; the international study is contextual evidence. Statutes and agency descriptions establish stated responsibilities rather than implementation. The small corpus does not resolve national trends, comparative agency performance or reform effects, and the proposed framework remains unvalidated.

CONCLUSION

This review links the broad subject of crime and criminal investigation in Nigeria to a narrower institutional problem: maintaining reliable information across the stages of an investigation. The selected evidence gives reason to examine training, technology, database integrity and coordination together, while preserving the distinction between social explanations of crime and proof in an individual case. A differentiated institutional map and an evidence continuity framework make the resulting recommendations more specific and testable. The contribution is a bounded conceptual synthesis. Further case-based research is needed to assess the framework and determine where improvements would be most effective.

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Conflict of Interest

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