feature

Reign, fall of dreaded Anambra criminals: Cautionary tales for youths eyeing crime

The rise and fall of some dreaded criminals in Anambra State offers a cautionary tale for youths tempted to lead a life of crime. CHIJIOKE IREMEKA explores how the fall of deadly criminals, such as Oliver Nweze, - Okwadili Ndiwe (Derico Nwamama), and Chiefina, can serve as a deterrent to youths toeing the path of infamu

A 36-year-old notorious kidnap kingpin, Oliver Nweze, who had been terrorising Anambra State, never imagined that his reign and fear, like many other criminal elements in the region, would come to such an abrupt end.
With 16 loyal thugs working under him, Nweze had built a criminal empire in the forests of Anambra, making life unbearable for communities such as Abba and Ukwulu.

The Ebonyi State-born kidnapper rose from humble begins a block moulder and later became a criminal mastermind of as abook mouler and later became a criminal materning as a block moulder and later became a criminal maternind until he was captured by security operatives last mouth.

According to those familiar with his reign of terror, Nweze's overholded conflictence led to his downfall.

Speaking after his arrest, he stated that he moved to Ukwdu in numbra in 2012 in search of greener neatures.

Speaking after his arrest, he stated that he moved to Ukwulu in Anambe in rots in search of groene pastures.

"I am a skilled block moulder and was working at construction sites until I was paid to join the Ukwulu community to help chase herdseme out of their forest.

"I brought in others to assist, but when the community stopped paying us for the work, we had to find another way to survive. That was when we reserted to kidnapping for ransom, he said.

He dated that the attraction of kidnapping, which held the allure of overnight riches, was too strong for him to resist.

He added that his Turning joint' came when he acquired some charms from Okle naive doctors, which he believed would save him from the long arm of the law.

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His belief in those powers fuelled his confidence, making him feel inwholble. Like he hoped, his gang of hidnappers flourished, carrying out several high-profile abductions.

However, the riches he accumulated through hidnapping were fleeting; a quick rise that was followed by an inevitable fall.

Newez's riegin finally came to an end in Pehruary 2005, when he was apprehended by the Anambra State security outif, Agunechembo.

The rathless criminals noticity view when he masterminded

The rubbless criminal's notoriety grew when he masterminded the kidnapping of Rev Fr Nonso, a clergyman associated with the Spiritual Director of the Holy Ghost Adoration Ministry in Uke, Anambra, Fr Emmanuel Obimma, popularly known as Fr Ebube

Muonso.
His gang held Nonso captive for days and demanded a befly ranson. This led to Ohimma's public condemnation of insecurity in the state, criticising Governor Chulewuma Soludo's administration for failing to address the risting

crime rate.

Speaking on the incident, Nweze said, "We kidnapped Nonso. Though I didn't go with them, I knew they came back with him, My boys said they ran into him on the road and kidnapped him.

"When I went to the camp at Univuln forest, where we used to call our office, I saw him. After

a ransom of N8m was paid, my boys dropped him

"I can't say how many days he stayed in the bush because I live within the community while they stayed in the fogust. I provided them with useful information, as whenever there was a threat, we moved immediately."

other notorious criminal, Peter Sunday, rose quickly in the

underworld but fell just as fast.

At the age of no, he had become a key member of a nine-person lodoscoping goog that abdustral and killed a member of the Anambra State House of Assembly, Institut Anala.

The reign of this fearness criminal, who had a large tattoo on his chest bearing the inscription, No peace 4 of Government, was one that many would not forget in a lurny.

Sunday, who hadled from the Yalla area of Cross River State, said the

Sunday, who hasted from the I make and Cross Rever State, said the attroo was done after some soldlers allegedly invaded his community on a revenge mission and killed his mother in the process.

He claimed that he then moved to Anambra where he joined the

ichang ang in pursuit of illich wealth.

With such inscription, he was on a revenge mission to unleash terror on the government and the masses, but his mission was cut short, 'the police said shortly after his arrest.



suspects actively involved in this unfortunate incident and

guns.
"One of the suspects sustained a gunshot injury on his leg during a gun duel with the police operatives."

the police operatives."

According to Itam, the other arrested suspects were Ugochulovu Omuorah (30), Ikemefuna Ossai (20), Ikema Orugu (27), Chibuike Obiefuna (19), Chinonso Olisa (19), Chinedu Okoli (21), and David

We also neutralised 100 notorious criminal comminals and successfully destroyed many criminal camps in Ufuma, Eziowelle, Achalla, Ogharu, and many other places in the state.

The lawmaker was abducted late last year. Following his kidnap, a joint team of security operatives intensified efforts for his rescue.

linfortunately, his decomposing body was found on the second Niger Bridge in the state, the commissioner added. He noted that a nurse based in Asaba (Delta State) assisted the criminal gang in withdrawing N100m, while a native doctor, also residing in Asaba, prepared charms for them.

On October 8, 2024, the police killed three members of a five-man robbery gang terrorising the Onitsha metropolis and its

According to a resident, Chinedu Adimora, the gang was infamous for vehicle snatching at gunpoint until men of the Anambra State Command smashed them.

He said the criminals met their Waterlo when they tried to ambush a vehicle at the Ibekwe junction by Ugwunakpamkpa, Inland Town, Onitsha, without realising that the Ibekwe junction by Ugwunakpamkpa, Inland Town, Onitsha, without realising that the occupants of the vehicle were police officers on

Adimora said, "The security operatives, who were patrolling the area, opened fire on them, killing three at the spot and capturing one alive, while one escaped with bullet wounds."

During interrogation, the surviving gaug member, who is a resident of Kaduna Street, Fegge, Onitsha, said, We had intended to snatch the vehicle, believing it belonged to a civilian.

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"However, as soon as we moved to attack, the police officers responded with immediate force, taking out three of our gang members on the spot and collecting their gans."

The suspect, who is currently in police custody, confused that the gans were supplied by a notorious cultist, who also received their

In recent times, Anambra State has become a theatre of criminal

state, like many other parts of southeastern Nigeria, faced serious

state, are many other parts of southerstern rugera, actor servois-security challenges before the introduction of a new security law in response to rising insecurity and violence in the region. For this 42-year-old father of five, those challenges included kidnappings, armed robberies, and other attacks by criminal groups. He said, There were also clashes between security forces and

He said, There were also classes between security rotres and local groups, specially during the & EndSARS protest, which led to a breakdown of law and order in several parts of the state. The situation worsened in the years leading up the introduction of the law, with violent activities affecting businesses, education, and daily life, as well as undermining the confidence of the people in the A trader at Onitsha Main Market, John Obi, said the governor

wasted too much time before taking decisive action, leading to the

wasses uso muce use cetter taxing occave action, actually to the loss of innocent three, properly, and peace in the state. He said, "The high rise in crime rates in the state is the fallout of the Oktie rithus, which gave the crimminals a false sense of protection. "There are many criminal elements in the state kidnapping, maining and bling innocent people. Anambra had got to the point where people saw kidnapping as the legal means of livelihood before the state's internation.

"People are being kidnapped for ransoms of N200, 000, N300, 000 and even less. That is the situation in our community today. It shows the level of moral degradation and security breakdown in the

Many young people who acquired skills abandoned them for

to thrive.

According to him, the situation got so bad that a former governor of the state, the late Chimwoke Mbadinuju, invited the vigilante group—Bakasis Boys—to sanitise the state.

He added, "The Soludo government has taken a similar path with the launch of the Agunenhemba security outfit. We hope this saves the situation because there are still pociets of kidatapping here and

"One cannot stay out at night. Once it is 7pm, the roads and streets are descrited. People are even scared of burying their loved ones because these criminal gangs would come and kill people, demanding settlement.

We now avoid ceremonies in the state because people are killed,

feature

maimed or abducted during such events. I know several rich men who conducted their children's traditional weddings in Lagos due insecurity in Anambra State. People die nome to match them force for force as we are

Ruthless reign of Derico, Chiejina Okwudili Ndiwe, aka Derico, was only 22 years old when he became the most feared man in the state.

According to Goddy Akubueze, a trader of Ochanja Market in Onitsha, Derico did not start as a cold-blooded killer. Like many street boys in Onitsha, he was a small-time hustler, picking pockets, running errands, and surviving on the fringes of society.

bueze said Derico committed too many atrocities against humanity. "In one fell swoop, Derico and his gang robbed a Lagos-bond hunry bus at Upper Iweka, Onitsha, in 2000 and ordered the execution of 59 passengers onboard. Only

"During his reign, traders could not display their wares without fear, Families dared not sleep with their two eyes closed. Passengers travelling through Anambra State were traumatised.

"While Derico held sway, there was yet another ruthless crimin

Chiejina, terrorising Onitsha at the time. These criminals operated with cruelty and brutality," he said

Stories of Chiejina's cruelty abound in the areas where he carried out his ruthless

said to often force family members to

Akabueze said, "On one occasion, Chiejina threw a four-month-old baby down a threemoney out of its poor

the two forged

alliances between men of violence, their friendship did not last. He noted that in 1999, the Obi of Onitsha, Ofala Okagbue, called on the local vigilantes in Onitsha to help restore order in the community and this necessitated the meeting of some of the notorious criminals in the city, arranged by the youth leaders hoping to negotiate peace. Both Chiejina and Derico attended.

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"At the meeting, Chiejina refused to back down. Rather, he attacked the vigilante group. The youths then turned to Derico for help. Derico worked with the youth and betrayed Chiefina, and his men were aritisted

"On learning what had happened, Chiejina went on a revenge mission and killed Derico's father. In retaliation, Derico murdered Chiefina in cold blood. This ended his reign of terror."

The Bakassi Boys and fall of Derico However, despite his many atrocities, all the efforts by the police to capture Derico failed.

At this point, the late Governor Mbadinuju knew something had to be done differently. The police had failed, and the people had lost hone. There was only one solution left: the Bakassi Boy

The Bakassi Boys, a vigilante group known for their brutal methods, did not believe in arrests or trials; they were only metrods, dut not believe in artest of dails, day interested in swift and bloody justice.
"On July 3, 2001, Derico's luck ran out. He was captured by the Bakassi Boys while travelling from Agbor in Delta State to Onitsha.

The bus he was in was intercepted at the Onitsha Bridge Head.
"On July 9, 2001, six days after his capture, he was paraded through Onitsha before he was taken to Ochanja Market junction, where he was killed with a cutlass.

Eddie Nawgu: The false prophet
Edward Okeke, popularly known as Eddie N' Nawgu, was an
alleged sorcerer and occultist, who was also described as a false



At the age of 29, Nawgu formed an organisation called the 'Anioma Healing Centre,' which had its headquarters in Nawgu, Anambra State. Throughout the mid-1990s, he became a notable

According to a Neuswatch report by Geoffrey Ekenna, titled, Nigeria: Death of A Miracle Man, Nawgu became a person of interest in numerous crimes committed not only in the community but across Anambra State as a whole.

DUI ACTOSS AMBRIDETS SALE BE A WINGE NAWQU WAS accused of Kichapping, aiding and abetting infamous criminale, partaking in rituals involving the use of human body parts, illegal possession of firearms, and human sacrifice. This attracted the Balassi Boys, who failed to capture him on 13

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cocasions. Many residents of the
town believed that he possessed
supernatural powers which helped
him to evade arrest.

However, he was eventually captured by the vigilante group and taken to their base of operation for questioning and interrogation before he was subsequently killed.

Lessons for the youth Security experts have warned that the same fate in the hands of Agunechemba await anyone who

The Managing Director of Zarmac Securities. Joseph Abana, urged the government and community leaders in the state to discourage the youth from committing crimes.

He stated that the stories of

notorious criminals who had eith been killed or imprisoned in the state should serve as a poignant

warning that there was no lasting gain in a life of crime.

Advising young people, he said, "These criminals, no matter how feared or powerful they once were, eventually met tragic ends, either through death or lengthy

morally wrong but also unsustainable in the long run. The seeming rewards are fleeting, while the consequences are severe and irreversible."

He urged young people to focus on positive opportunities and energies, stressing the importance of education, skill acquisition, and hard work as

By learning from the grim fates of former criminals, the expert believes that the youth

can be deterred from making the same mistakes, and can instead choose a future that leads to stability and prosperity.

He warned, "Once you choose the path of crime, you become

everybody's enemy. Security operatives will be looking for you, then you begin to live a life of fear, which takes away your freedom.

There is no charm that will protect you, whether Okite or Odeshi.

The moment anyone joins a kidnapping or robbery gang, they should begin a countdown to their deaths, as they may have less than three years to live. It is either they are killed or jailed. So, what

He recalled how criminals like Anini, Derico and Chiejina terrorised the country but still met their downfall, and warned youths tempted

by a life of crime that the same fate awaits all crimin

by a life of crime that the same fate awaits all criminals.

A Lagor-based criminal psychologist, Dr Fidel Glazye, viewed crime in acciety and the destruction of youth as a complet issue, shaped by a mix of individual, family, and societal factors.

According to him, addressing the root causes through education, support systems, community engagement, and mental health interventions, could help prevent youth from engaging in criminal servicities.

He said, "Certain portrayals of crime in the media, such as movies or music, can glamourise criminal behaviour, leading young people to

or music, can giamourise criminal octaves, can giamourise criminal while a lack of positive role modes, yourse may gravinate covariant individuals or groups that provide a sense of belonging, even if those groups engage in illegal activities, hence there is a need for positive modelling for our youths. Powerty, lack of eshoustion, and limited access to opportunities can

rovery, act of education, and ininted access to opportunities can push young people toward criminal behaviour as a way to cope or survive. Youth in marginalised communities may feel that crime is

survive. Tourn in marginaissed communities may been such their only path to success or recognition.

He also noted that dysfunctional family dynamics, such as neglect, abuse or a lack of parental guidance, could lead young individuals to

about or a tack of parental guidance, coast tend young nonvanish to seek acceptance and identity through criminal groups. The absence of strong family support may also increase the likelihood of involvement in criminal activities. We need to model these youth and educate them on the rewards and dangers of every

choice they make.

Adolescents and young adults are highly susceptible to peer pressure, so we need to check their association. This starts from the family, the smallest unit of society," be added.

Soludo asks parents to prioritise moral development.

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Worried by the increasing moral decadence among the youth, the wife of the Anambra State governor, Mrs. Nonys Solada, tasked mothers to prioritise the moral development of their children.

While addressing women of the All Progressives Grand Alliance at a meeting in Awst, ask lamented that some mothers did not question the source of wealth of their children these days.

To the None how a 16-year-old child should be spraying money at functions and we, mothers, don't want to question how they made the money. This is a child who is supposed to still be in achool.

"Mothers should not be seeking advice on social realistic because most of the things there are lake. So, we have a fine children, when the morals in our children. Whatever we are design in figure good morals in our children. Whatever we are design in figure to the first object of the children when the proposition of the children is when the seek of the days are the seek of the children is particularly the service of the children is particularly designed to the property of the children is particularly designed to the property of the children is particularly designed to the property of the children is particularly designed to the property of the children is particularly at it concerns the issue of children's updayinging.

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"If our families are good, our communities and our state will be
good and it will extend to Nigeria. And a good family benefits mothers
more because the children are closer to us, "she said.

The 'Operation Udo Ga-Achi' security network in Anambra State is now fully operational following Governor Soludo's signing of the Anambra Homeland Security Law 2025.

This joint security initiative, comprising a team of 2,000 crack personnel from the Army, Police, Navy, and other security agencies, along with the Agunaechemba Strike Force, will operate across the 21 local government areas of the state In an emotionally charged speech at the International Convention Centre in Awka, Soludo reaffirmed his administration's commitment to eradicating criminality in

He urged communities to take ownership of their localities by helping the government with internal security efforts, including providing valuable information that could lead to the arrest of criminal suspects.

To incentivise cooperation, the governor announced a N5m reward for anyone who provides information leading to the capture of wanted criminals.

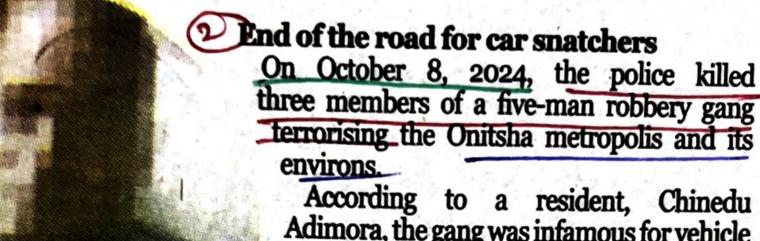
Governor Soludo singled out six communities in Ihiala Local Government Area— Mhosi, Azia, Lilu, Isseke, Orsumoghu

and Ubuluisiuzor— for being particularly notorious.

He then declared a full-scale war against the hoodlums to resto order and peace to the area, emphasising that his administration would use both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to combat criminality, offering a period of amnesty for criminals living in the forests. Those who surrender their arms before the end of February

are meant to be reintegrated into society.

Meanwhile, the new state chairman of the Anambra Stat Traditional Rulers Council, Igwe Chidubem Iweka, alongside other traditional rulers, expressed strong support for Soludo's security



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Adimora said, "The security operatives, who were patrolling the area, opened fire on them, killing three at the spot and capturing

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During interrogation, the surviving gang member, who is a resident of Kaduna Street, Fegge, Onitsha, said, "We had intended to snatch the vehicle, believing it belonged to a civilian.

"However, as soon as we moved to attack, the police officers responded with immediate force, taking out three of our gang

members on the spot and collecting their guns."

The suspect, who is currently in police custody, confessed that the guns were supplied by a notorious cultist, who also received their stolen vehicles and other loot.

The Anambra solution

kabueze

In recent times, Anambra State has become a theatre of criminal activities, including robbery and kidnapping for ransom.

According to Obed Okorie, a resident of Ihiala community, the