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Systemic Reform or Selective Justice? Assessing the EFCC's Performance in Nigeria's Anti-Corruption Regime, 2015–2024

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Abstract

Corruption remains one of the most enduring threats to Nigeria's development, persistently undermining institutional integrity, democratic governance, and public trust. The emergence of Muhammadu Buhari as President of Nigeria in 2015 with the promise of change, saw the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) revitalized as a central instrument in the state's anti-corruption architecture. Relying on the framework of Structural Functionalism, explanatory research design, secondary sources of data collection and content analysis of data, this study moved beyond mere exploration of the quantitative outcomes of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission's (EFCC) anti-corruption efforts - measured by the number of prosecutions and convictions, and the volume of recovered assets between 2014 and 2024. It assessed whether the agency's operations reflect a genuine commitment to systemic reform aimed at sanitizing the public service and promoting accountability in Nigeria, or whether they function as instruments of selective justice, disproportionately targeting political opponents while shielding allies of the ruling elite. The study found that while the EFCC recorded increased prosecutions, convictions, and asset recoveries between 2015 and 2024, these achievements did not reflect genuine systemic reform, considering the selective justice approach attached to certain high-profile cases. It concluded that the Commission often acted in line with political interests, undermining its credibility as an independent anti-corruption body. The study recommended granting the EFCC full operational autonomy through legislative reform and independent leadership oversight. It also advised establishing transparent asset recovery mechanisms, annual audits, and special anti-corruption courts to improve efficiency and public trust.

Keywords: Systemic Reform, Selective Justice, EFCC, Anti-Corruption

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Introduction

The persistence of corruption remains one of Nigeria's most pressing challenges, undermining the integrity of public institutions and thwarting national development. Corruption in Nigeria is not simply a matter of individual moral failure; it is systemic, deeply rooted in the structures of governance and sustained by elite complicity and institutional weakness (Bamgboye, 2018; Eshimolah, 2016). In recognition of this crisis, the Nigerian government established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2004 to investigate, prosecute, and prevent economic and financial crimes (Nwosu, 2023). Since its inception, the EFCC has been at the forefront of the country's anti-corruption efforts. However, its credibility and effectiveness remain subjects of intense debate, particularly given Nigeria's continued low ranking on global corruption perception indices despite several high-profile prosecutions (Ogunrinade, 2019; Oyedeji, 2022).

The advent of President Muhammadu Buhari's administration in 2015 signaled a renewed political commitment to the anti-corruption campaign. Buhari, who rose to power on an anti-corruption mandate, bolstered the role of the EFCC through institutional reforms and the establishment of the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC) to strengthen accountability mechanisms (Adegbite, 2020). Under his leadership, the EFCC secured notable convictions and recovered billions of Naira in stolen assets (Ogundele, 2020). Yet, these quantitative outcomes did not necessarily translate into broader institutional reforms or a perceptible shift in governance culture. Critics argue that the anti-corruption crusade under Buhari was often politically motivated, disproportionately targeting opposition figures while sparing allies of the ruling elite, thereby raising concerns about selective justice (Otunuga, 2016; Olufemi & Alhassan, 2020).

While the EFCC has undoubtedly played a prominent role in Nigeria's anti-corruption regime, there is a critical need to move beyond mere statistical measures of performance. Prosecution numbers and asset recoveries, though important, do not adequately capture the agency's overall impact on systemic reform or its contribution to the broader goals of transparency and public accountability. As Ndubisi and Owoseni (2020) rightly note, corruption in Nigeria is exacerbated by institutional fragility and governance deficits, factors which demand a holistic and non-partisan approach to anti-corruption enforcement. A meaningful assessment of the EFCC's performance must therefore interrogate the structural dynamics of its operations, the consistency of its prosecutorial strategy, and the extent to which its activities align with democratic norms and the principles of good governance. This study emerges from the need to critically evaluate whether the EFCC, particularly between 2015 and 2024, functioned as a catalyst for systemic reform or merely as a tool of political convenience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corruption in Nigeria has been the subject of extensive academic inquiry, with scholars seeking to understand its definitions, roots, and societal implications. Osakede et al. (2015) characterize corruption as anti-social behaviour that confers undue advantage and undermines the capacity of the state to deliver public welfare. This perspective links corruption to institutional inefficiency and socio-political inequality, situating it within Nigeria's broader governance crisis. Usman (2013) extends this view by attributing corruption to colonial legacies, arguing that exploitative administrative systems introduced during British rule have mutated into pervasive unethical behaviours. He presents corruption as a "social virus," deeply embedded in Nigeria's political culture and normalized through historical continuity. Such historical and structural readings offer a foundational understanding of how corruption became systemic in Nigeria, rather than being seen merely as a series of isolated moral failures.

The typologies and manifestations of corruption in Nigeria further illuminate its entrenched nature. Eshimolah (2016) highlights individual moral decay as a driver, contrasting with Bamgboye's (2018) more structural definition that captures both personal and institutional misuse of power through practices such as bribery,

embezzlement, and nepotism. Bamgboye provides a comprehensive taxonomy of corruption, further informed by Usifo's classifications into electoral, bureaucratic, judicial, economic, political, and moral forms. These distinctions are critical for understanding the diverse arenas in which corruption operates. Osakede et al. (2015) reinforce this multi-layered view by distinguishing between public and private corruption, suggesting a broad spectrum of actors and mechanisms. Onogwu, Great, and Ngwu (2022) contribute a spatial and intensity-based analysis, offering insights into whether corruption is isolated or systemic, a distinction crucial for designing effective reform strategies.

Beyond academic analysis, international institutions like the World Bank (2019) and the UNDP (2019) emphasize the economic cost of corruption, estimating losses in the tens of billions of dollars and identifying common corrupt practices such as bribery and embezzlement. Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) offer a cultural critique, identifying socio-economic pressures, such as poverty and familial obligations, as enabling factors, compounded by weak enforcement institutions. Page (2018) synthesizes these perspectives by portraying corruption as Nigeria's most formidable development challenge, pervading sectors from media to security. Collectively, these works establish that corruption in Nigeria is not only a moral or legal problem but a deeply institutional and cultural one. Addressing it requires more than legislative reforms; it necessitates a reconfiguration of societal values, institutional resilience, and historical accountability.

Despite numerous institutional mechanisms aimed at combating corruption, their effectiveness remains heavily contested in the literature. Nwosu (2023) details the statutory foundations of the EFCC and ICPC, presenting them as critical pillars in the anti-corruption architecture. However, scholars like Olufemi and Alhassan (2020), Ogunrinade (2019), and Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) question their operational autonomy and effectiveness, citing systemic inefficiencies and political interference. While Ogundele (2020) and Abah (2020) recognize some successes, including asset recovery and high-profile prosecutions, the overall impact of these agencies is viewed as insufficient. Adegbite (2020) introduces PACAC as a strategic move towards coordinated anti-corruption efforts, yet the recurring critique remains: institutional fragmentation and lack of political will continue to undermine these initiatives. This suggests that the Nigerian state engages in a paradoxical battle, using flawed structures to combat structural corruption, thereby entrenching the very malaise it seeks to dismantle.

On the international front, the failure of Nigeria's anti-corruption crusade has had adverse implications for its global image and economic prospects. Anyanka (2018) and Onwuamanam and Agbaenyi (2021) argue that corruption severely tarnishes Nigeria's international reputation, citing incidents that exemplify global skepticism towards the country. This perception has translated into dwindling foreign direct investment (FDI), as corroborated by Aleyomi and Bakar (2018), and Omodero (2019), who link institutional weaknesses and corruption to investor apathy. Danjuma (2021) and Ajayi and Akosile (2019) further emphasize how sector-specific corruption, particularly in industries like telecommunications, distorts investment landscapes. Ibukun (2021) ties these domestic governance failures to broader geopolitical consequences, arguing that without substantial structural reforms, anti-corruption agencies will remain cosmetic. Thus, while anti-corruption efforts are symbolically significant, the literature overwhelmingly concludes that their transformative potential remains unrealized in the face of entrenched systemic dysfunction.

The lack of judicial independence has been identified as a critical obstacle to anti-corruption success in Nigeria. Adamaagash et al. (2023) highlight that Nigeria's judiciary, often encumbered by executive interference and internal corruption, fails to function as an impartial arbiter in corruption cases. This institutional failure is compounded by legal technicalities exploited by well-resourced defense lawyers, resulting in the frequent acquittal of corrupt elites. Furthermore, Adamaagash et al. (2023) identify ethno-religious sentiments as a potent tool for shielding the corrupt from accountability, as citizens often rally behind accused individuals from their own ethnic or religious groups regardless of the evidence. Ezagbogun (2017) critiques the political elite's selective application of anti-corruption measures, arguing that the absence of genuine political will allows corruption to persist as a

systemic norm rather than an aberration. Thus, political expediency often overrides legal and institutional mandates, further entrenching corruption.

Lastly, the societal dimensions of Nigeria's corruption crisis have been identified in academic literature. Akpan (2020) draws attention to the role of public apathy and limited civic education, noting that many Nigerians are either unaware of or resigned to the damaging effects of corruption. The failure of media and civil society to effectively mobilize the public exacerbates this indifference. Ugboajah (2017) links corruption to deeper structural issues such as poverty and inequality, arguing that corruption both feeds on and reinforces economic disparity. For any anti-corruption strategy to succeed, Ugboajah insists that socio-economic reforms aimed at promoting equity and social justice must be integrated into governance structures. Nwosu (2023) echoes this by advocating for stronger enforcement mechanisms and the empowerment of civil society as crucial pillars in enhancing transparency and accountability. Collectively, the literature underscores that the anti-corruption crusade in Nigeria cannot rely solely on institutional reforms, it must also address the political culture and social dynamics that sustain corrupt practices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Structural Functionalism as an analytical framework. Structural Functionalism is a foundational sociological theory, originated in the early 20th century through the pioneering work of Talcott Parsons, with significant contributions from Robert K. Merton. Parsons, the principal architect of the theory, elaborated his framework in *The Social System* (1951), where he conceptualized society as a complex, interdependent system working toward stability and equilibrium. Drawing inspiration from Émile Durkheim's emphasis on institutional roles in sustaining social order, Parsons posited that social structures, norms, and values operate together to ensure cohesion. Merton, a key disciple, refined this paradigm by introducing the notions of "functional alternatives" and "dysfunctions," thereby acknowledging that not all social structures contribute positively or uniformly to societal stability (Parsons, 1951; Merton, 1968).

The central premise of Structural Functionalism asserts that society is composed of interconnected components, each with specific functions that collectively sustain the system. Parsons formalized this through the AGIL schema - Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration, and Latency (pattern maintenance), which outlines the four indispensable functions every social system must perform for survival and efficiency. These dimensions ensure that societies respond to external environments, set and achieve collective objectives, integrate diverse elements, and maintain cultural patterns over time. Merton's contribution, particularly the differentiation between manifest and latent functions, added a critical dimension by recognizing that social actions often yield both intended and unintended consequences (Merton, 1968). Despite its strengths, Structural Functionalism is often criticized for its conservative bias and limited capacity to address social change and conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to critically examine the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission's (EFCC) role in Nigeria's anti-corruption regime from 2015 to 2024. Data were collected through documentary sources, including academic publications, media reports, EFCC reports, court judgments, and policy documents, enabling a comprehensive interrogation of the agency's activities beyond surface-level metrics. Data analysis was conducted through content analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes. This method enabled the study to critically evaluate the EFCC's contribution to public accountability and the rule of law, aligning with the research objective of uncovering whether its operations promote justice or entrench selective enforcement.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Anti-Corruption Efforts of the EFCC

The inauguration of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 marked a renewed vigour in Nigeria's anti-corruption regime, with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) positioned at the vanguard of this effort. Campaigning on a platform that promised to confront endemic corruption, the Buhari administration bolstered the EFCC's mandate, leading to a significant uptick in petitions received, cases investigated, prosecutions filed, and convictions secured. Between 2015 and the end of Buhari's tenure, the EFCC reportedly processed thousands of corruption-related petitions, initiated numerous high-profile investigations, including cases involving former public officeholders, and reported successful convictions and recovery of looted public resources. However, there were questions remain regarding the selectivity, political neutrality, and institutional independence of the EFCC.

Table 1: EFCC operational statistics from 2015-2024

Year	Petitions Received	Cases Investigated	Court Cases Filed	Convictions Secured
2015	5,979	2,662	462	103
2016	7,045	4,660	390	195
2017	8,251	5,662	501	189
2018	9,566	5,795	515	312
2019	12,644	8,729	1,901	1,280
2020	10,152	7,340	1,305	976
2021	-	-	-	2,220
2022	-	-	-	3,785
2023	-	-	-	3,175
2024	15,724	12,928	-	4,111

Source: EFCC (2020, 2023, 2024), Adanikin (2021), Iroegbu (2018), Odeniyi (2024), Ojelu (2025)

The EFCC's operational statistics from 2015 to 2024 reveal a significant evolution in its anti-corruption enforcement activities. In 2015, the commission received 5,979 petitions and investigated roughly 45% of them, filing 462 court cases but securing only 103 convictions, indicating a modest conversion rate (EFCC, 2020; Adanikin, 2021). By 2016, although case filings dropped to 390, investigations increased significantly, with a notable rise in convictions to 195, reflecting improved prosecutorial effectiveness (EFCC, 2020). The years 2017 and 2018 sustained this trend of growth, with rising petitions, investigations, and a peak of 312 convictions in 2018. A major leap occurred in 2019, with petitions surging to 12,644 and convictions rising fourfold to 1,280 (Iroegbu, 2018; EFCC, 2020; Adanikin, 2021). Though 2020 saw a slight dip in petitions and convictions due to COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2021 and 2024, the EFCC's operational statistics indicate a significant shift towards intensified prosecutorial effectiveness, as seen in the sharp increase in convictions secured, despite incomplete data for petitions, investigations, and court filings. From 2,220 convictions in 2021, the number rose to 3,785 in 2022 and slightly declined to 3,175 in 2023, before peaking at 4,111 in 2024 (EFCC, 2023; EFCC, 2024; Odeniyi, 2024; Ojelu, 2025). Also, the 2024 data showed a record-high 15,724 petitions received and 12,928 cases investigated (EFCC, 2024; Odeniyi, 2024; Ojelu, 2025).

On the other hand, EFCC have made considering progress in the recovery of looted public resources by some public officials between 2015 and 2024.

Table 2: Assets recovery by EFCC from 2015-2024

Year(s)	Monetary Recoveries	Digital Assets Recovered	Non-Monetary Assets	High-Profile Cases
2015–2020	₦550 billion	Not reported	Not reported	Diezani Alison-Madueke (ex-Petroleum Minister); Abdulrasheed Maina (pension fund fraud)
2021	₦152.09 billion, \$386.22 million, £1.18 million, €156,246.76, 1.72 million SAR	5.36957319 BTC, 0.09012 ETH	Not itemised; Lagos Command led with ₦70.31bn; HQ recovered over ₦67.24bn and \$375.66m	Not specified
2022 (Jan–Oct)	₦134.34 billion	Not specified	52 vehicles, electronics, motorcycles, clothing, real estate	Not specified
2024	₦364.6 billion, \$214.51 million, £54,318.64, €31,265.00	13.37 BTC, 5.97 ETH	223 automobiles, 975 real estate assets, 931 metric tons of petroleum products, shares worth ₦1.05bn & \$4.41m	Betta Edu (Humanitarian Affairs Minister): \$640,000 diversion; ₦30B traced to scandal

Source: Asadu (2020), EFCC (2022), Aradi (2024) Odeniyi (2024) Ojelu (2025) Igbindor (2025)

Between May 2015 and May 2020, under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) reported recovering N550 billion from corruption-related offences (Asadu, 2020). This period was marked by high-profile cases such as that of Diezani Alison-Madueke, former Petroleum Minister, and Abdulrasheed Maina, the former pension reform task force chairman. Despite the significant amount reported, public accountability and transparency were hindered by the lack of disaggregated data, no comprehensive lists of recovered assets, breakdown by case, or judicial outcomes were made public. The opacity undermines the credibility of these figures, raising concerns about whether asset recovery is being utilised as a tool of justice or a political performance. Furthermore, the inability to secure timely convictions in headline cases like Alison-Madueke's, which remains unresolved in Nigerian courts despite UK proceedings, highlights institutional weaknesses in prosecution.

In 2021, the EFCC reported more diversified recoveries, totalling N152.09 billion, \$386.22 million, £1.18 million, €156,246.76, and 1.72 million Saudi Riyal (EFCC, 2022). The inclusion of digital assets, 5.36957319 Bitcoin and 0.09012 Ethereum, demonstrated the Commission's evolving capacity to respond to emerging financial crimes. This adaptation is crucial given the increasing sophistication of illicit financial flows. According to the EFCC (2022), its headquarters led recoveries with N67.24 billion and \$375.66 million, while the Lagos Command contributed over N70.31 billion, reinforcing regional operational strength. In 2022, between January and October, recoveries amounted to N134.34 billion, alongside non-cash forfeitures such as 52 vehicles, real estate, and electronics (Oluwafemi, 2022).

By 2024, under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and EFCC Chairman Ola Olukoyede, asset recovery efforts intensified significantly. The Commission recovered N364.6 billion, \$214.51 million, £54,318.64, €31,265.00, and digital currencies including 13.37 Bitcoin and 5.97 Ethereum (Odeniyi, 2024; Ojelu, 2025; Igbindor, 2025). Notably, the Betta Edu scandal drew national attention. As Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Edu was accused of authorising the diversion of \$640,000 to a private account. While denying the allegations, investigations traced over 50 linked bank accounts and led to the recovery of N30 billion (Aradi, 2024). In the same year, the EFCC achieved one of the largest physical asset seizures in its history, confiscating 223 vehicles, 975 properties, 931 metric tons of petroleum products, and financial assets including N1.05 billion and \$4.41 million in shares (Odeniyi, 2024; Ojelu, 2025). The efforts of the EFCC over the years have been quantitatively impressive, however, qualitative assessment reveals persistent challenges. Despite massive recoveries, the extent to which these actions deter future corruption remains questionable, especially given the persistent prevalence of elite-level financial misconduct.

Systemic Reform or Selective Justice of the Anti-Corruption Campaign of the EFCC

One of the most disconcerting developments in Nigeria's anti-corruption framework during the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023) has been the increasingly selective nature of justice administered through the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). While the Commission was established with the statutory mandate to investigate and prosecute economic and financial crimes, its role became politically compromised as investigations and prosecutions disproportionately targeted opposition figures, particularly those from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), while shielding members and allies of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). The case of Senator Danjuma Goje provides a clear illustration: having faced eight years of investigation for allegedly embezzling ₦25 billion. Goje's prosecution was abruptly dropped in June 2019 after he withdrew from the Senate Presidency race in favour of Buhari's preferred candidate, following a private meeting with the president (Punch, 2022). This withdrawal led to the Attorney General entering a *nolle prosequi*, effectively terminating the trial and confirming public perceptions of partisan manipulation. The EFCC's credibility further eroded with the public statement by APC Chairman Adams Oshiomhole that politicians' "sins" were "forgiven" upon defection to the APC, exposing the anti-corruption campaign as ideologically selective rather than institutionally impartial (Ajaja, 2022).

Such political leniency extended to numerous opposition politicians who defected to the APC. Notably, Stella Oduah and Abdullahi Adamu, both under investigation for financial improprieties, were welcomed into the ruling party and appointed to influential roles (Ajaja, 2022). The clearest instance of judicial compromise came in April 2022 when President Buhari granted controversial pardons to former governors Joshua Dariye and Jolly Nyame, convicted of diverting billions of public funds, and sentenced to 14 and 12 years respectively, both of whom had defected to the APC before their convictions (Abidoeye, 2022; Ajaja, 2022). Despite their egregious violations of public trust, state clemency was awarded on dubious compassionate grounds. Particularly troubling was Dariye's continued representation of Plateau Central in the Senate during incarceration, a scenario that not only contravened ethical standards but also pointed to the executive's capacity to weaponise legal leniency. The case of Godswill Akpabio, who was investigated in 2015 for the misappropriation of ₦108.1 billion, yet rose to Senate President in 2023 without being formally arraigned (Imukudo, 2023), further substantiates the conclusion that political realignment, rather than evidence of innocence, determines prosecutorial outcomes.

This politicisation extended into Buhari's post-tenure years, as demonstrated in the EFCC's inability to arrest or prosecute Yahaya Bello despite multiple charges totalling over ₦100 billion. Bello, accused of diverting ₦80 billion and later indicted on 16 counts of fraud, remains at large, protected by the state apparatus under his political successor (Awosiyan, 2024). Similarly, Betta Edu's case illustrates elite impunity: suspended in January 2024 for the illegal transfer of \$640,000 into a private account, her investigation unearthed ₦30 billion across more than 50 bank accounts, yet no charges have been filed against her as of mid-2025 (Aradi, 2024). These cases illustrate that

political proximity to the ruling elite affords a de facto immunity from prosecution, a pattern inconsistent with constitutional principles of equal justice.

Several additional cases underscore the dysfunctionality of EFCC prosecutions and judicial inconsistency. For instance, while the EFCC secured a conviction against Orji Uzor Kalu in December 2019 for ₦7.65 billion fraud, the Supreme Court overturned the sentence due to jurisdictional errors linked to the judge's elevation to the Court of Appeal (EFCC, 2019a; Okechukwu, Aderinto, & Lawal, 2024). Likewise, despite a successful conviction of Jolly Nyame in 2018 for diverting ₦1.64 billion, he received a presidential pardon in 2022 (Okakwu, 2019). The inconclusive prosecution of Winifred Oyo-Ita (₦570 million fraud, arraigned in March 2020), Babachir Lawal (₦544 million "grass-cutting" scandal, charged in 2019 and acquitted in 2022), and Ayodele Oke (laundering over ₦13 billion, charges withdrawn in 2023) further evidences the EFCC's lack of institutional autonomy (EFCC, 2020; Okakwu, 2019; Nathaniel, 2022; Newswire Law & Events, 2023). While these cases began with public fanfare, most have ended either in acquittals, procedural failures, or indefinite suspension. As Adesomoju (2020) and Ajibola (2018) argue, these outcomes are not solely attributable to political interference but also stem from a structurally underfunded and overburdened legal apparatus that frequently compromises justice delivery.

Also, the EFCC has investigated 34 former governors since its inception, yet only six have been successfully convicted (Owoyele, 2024). The lengthy duration of trials, such as Nyame's 11-year prosecution or Kalu's 12-year ordeal, weakens the deterrent effect of conviction and contributes to widespread public disillusionment with the justice system.

Table 3: Governors prosecuted for financial corruption by EFCC

Ex-Governor	State	Tenure in Office	EFCC Charge	Amount Allegedly Embezzled	Status
Attahiru Bafarawa	Sokoto	1999 – 2007	25-count charge bordering on criminal breach of trust and diversion of funds	N4.6 billion	Ongoing
Abdulfatah Ahmed	Kwara	2011 – 2019	12-count charge of alleged mismanagement of public funds	N10 billion	Ongoing
Gabriel Suswam	Benue	2007 – 2015	11-count charge bordering on money laundering	N3.1 billion	Ongoing
Murtala Nyako	Adamawa	2007 – 2014	37-count charge: conspiracy, stealing, abuse of office, money laundering	N29 billion	Ongoing
Timipre Sylva	Bayelsa	2007 – 2011	42-count charge for stealing state funds	N19.2 billion	Case dropped by the court
Sule Lamido	Jigawa	2007 – 2015	37 amended charges on money laundering	N1.35 billion	Appeal Court squashed case; awaiting SC ruling
Ayo Fayose	Ekiti	2003–2006; 2014–2018	Fraud and money laundering	N6.9 billion	Ongoing

Chimaroke Nnamani	Enugu	1999 – 2007	Money laundering from state treasury	N5.3 billion	Forfeiture of 4 companies
Sullivan Chime	Enugu	2007 – 2015	Charged over campaign fund linked to Diezani	N23 billion	Case reopened
Abdullahi Adamu	Nasarawa	1999 – 2007	149-count fraud charge	N15 billion	Unclear
Danjuma Goje	Gombe	2003 – 2011	Diversion of state funds	N25 billion	Charge withdrawn
Peter Odili	Rivers	1999 – 2007	Diversion of state funds	N100 billion	Case reopened
Abubakar Audu	Kogi	1999 – 2003	36-count charge: breach of trust and misappropriation	N10 billion	Died in 2015
Gbenga Daniel	Ogun	2003 – 2011	38-count charge: stealing, bribery, fraudulent conversion	N211 million	Dismissed in 2022
Saminu Turaki	Jigawa	1999 – 2007	32-count charge: corruption and money laundering	N36 billion	Acquitted in 2022
Rochas Okorochoa	Imo	2011 – 2019	17-count charge: conspiracy, stealing, public fund conversion	N3 billion	Dismissed in 2023
Ikedi Ohakim	Imo	2007 – 2011	\$2 million land purchase-related offence	\$2 million	Unclear
Jonah Jang	Plateau	2007 – 2015	Breach of trust and misappropriation	N6.3 billion	Acquitted in 2022
Usman Dakingari	Kebbi	2007 – 2015	13-count charge: conspiracy and money laundering	N450 million	—
Mukhtar Ramalan Yero	Kaduna	2012 – 2015	Illegal campaign fund disbursement	N750 million	Ongoing
Ibrahim Shema	Katsina	2007 – 2015	22-count charge: breach of trust, forgery, abuse of office	N11 billion	Withdrawn
Rashidi Ladoja	Oyo	2003–2006; 2006–2007	Fraud	N4.6 billion	Struck out
Adebayo Alao-Akala	Oyo	2007 – 2011	11-count charge: conspiracy and fraud	N11.5 billion	Acquitted in 2021
Aliyu Akwe-Doma	Nasarawa	2007 – 2011	10-count charge of financial crimes	N8 billion	Died in 2018
James Ngilari	Adamawa	2007 – 2008	Procurement law violation	N167 million	Acquitted in 2017
Willie Obiano	Anambra	2014 – 2022	9-count charge: money	N4 billion	Ongoing

			laundering, fund diversion, corruption		
Joshua Dariye	Plateau	1999–2004; 2004–2006	Misappropriation of public funds	N1.1 billion	Convicted – 14 years imprisonment
Jolly Nyame	Taraba	1999 – 2007	Abuse of office and diversion of public funds	N1.64 billion	Convicted – 12 years imprisonment
Lucky Igbinedion	Edo	1999 – 2007	Embezzlement of state funds	N2.9 billion	6 months imprisonment or N3.5M fine
James Ibori	Delta	1999 – 2007	Money laundering and related offences	£50 million	13 years in UK prison
Diepreye Alamieyeseigha	Bayelsa	1999 – 2005	Money laundering and corruption	Over \$30 Million	2 years imprisonment
Orji Uzor Kalu	Abia	1999 – 2007	36-count charge including diversion of funds	N7.1 billion	12-year sentence, later overturned in 2020
Yahaya Bello	Kogi	2015-2023	16 count charge of money laundering	₦110 billion and ₦80.2 billion	Ongoing

Source: Owoyele (2024)

Despite prosecuting over 30 governors for embezzlement amounting to trillions of naira, only a handful have faced actual convictions, namely Joshua Dariye, Jolly Nyame, Lucky Igbinedion, James Ibori (tried in the UK), Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, and Orji Uzor Kalu (whose conviction was later overturned). Most cases remain unresolved, withdrawn, dismissed, or stalled due to political interference, deaths, or judicial inefficiencies. Notably, several accused individuals with pending charges, such as Yahaya Bello, Danjuma Goje, and Abdullahi Adamu, have either evaded trial or benefited from politically motivated withdrawals of charges, while others were acquitted despite significant sums involved. The disparity in outcomes, especially between APC-affiliated individuals and those from the opposition, further reflects the EFCC's compromised institutional autonomy, reinforcing public perceptions that anti-corruption efforts are politicised, inconsistent, and lacking in deterrent authority.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) demonstrated considerable quantitative progress between 2015 and 2024, evidenced by increased number of case prosecution, convictions, and substantial asset recoveries, this study reveals that such outcomes do not necessarily equate to systemic reform or impartial justice. Rather than functioning as a truly autonomous institution committed to sanitising the public service and promoting accountability, the EFCC often appears entangled in the political imperatives of the ruling elite. Through a qualitative assessment of high-profile cases, prosecutorial inconsistencies, politically motivated charge withdrawals, and selective leniency, this study finds compelling evidence that the Commission's anti-corruption campaign has frequently served partisan ends. The persistent shielding of politically aligned individuals, the instrumentalisation of justice against opposition figures, and the opacity surrounding asset recoveries all point to a regime of selective justice rather than a genuine transformative reform agenda. Thus, without structural guarantees of independence and transparency, the EFCC risks remaining a tool of political expediency rather than a pillar of democratic accountability.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the EFCC should be granted full operational and prosecutorial autonomy through legislative amendments that insulate it from executive interference. Appointment

and removal processes for its leadership must be transparently handled by an independent multi-stakeholder body. This will help curb political manipulation and enhance credibility.

Also, a centralised, publicly accessible registry of recovered assets, detailing amounts, sources, judicial outcomes, and final utilization, should be mandated by law. This will foster transparency, build public trust, and ensure recovered funds are used for public benefit. Independent audits should be conducted annually and published.

Lastly, special anti-corruption courts with time-bound trial limits should be established to reduce delays and improve conviction efficiency. Prosecutorial team of the EFCC should be equipped with forensic expertise and adequate funding.

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