

# CRIME AND PUNISHMENT: ASSESSING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE EFCC TO NIGERIA'S SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

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**Abstract:** This study critically assesses the role of the Economic and Financial EFCC, crime Crimes Commission (EFCC) in crime prevention in Nigeria, focusing on its prevention, effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Using a qualitative corruption, research design, the study analyzes empirical data from existing literature, official financial reports, and interviews with key stakeholders, including EFCC staff, legal experts, crimes, anti- and civil society members. Findings reveal that while the EFCC has made significant corruption strides in prosecuting high-profile cases, recovering looted funds, and implementing strategies. innovative strategies like the whistleblower policy, it continues to face challenges such as political interference, judicial inefficiencies, and inadequate funding. These issues have limited its operational capacity and eroded public trust in its activities. Additionally, the study highlights regional variations, the impact of the EFCC's work on Nigeria's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), and the role of political will in shaping its effectiveness. The research underscores the need for reforms to enhance the EFCC's autonomy, financial capacity, and transparency. Recommendations include judicial reforms to expedite cases, increased public engagement, and leveraging technology to combat financial crimes. This study contributes to the broader discourse on anti-corruption strategies in Nigeria and provides actionable insights for strengthening institutional frameworks to promote accountability and good governance. Further research is encouraged to explore the socioeconomic impact of EFCC activities and comparative analyses with other anti-corruption agencies globally.

**Keywords:** EFCC, Crime Prevention, Corruption, Financial Crimes, Anti-Corruption Strategies

## Introduction

damage to socioeconomic progress and public Crime and corruption remain major challenge confidence due to massive fraud, economic bedeviling Nigeria which has potential of causing crimes, and enduring corruption despite its sufficient natural and human resources which have worsen poverty, affected economic development, diminish public trust in governmental institutions. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was created in 2003 during President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, to strengthen anticorruption crusade and prevent crimes like fraud, bribery, embezzlement, and money laundering. Money laundering is a pervasive crime that poses significant challenges to the Nigerian economy and society. The intricacies of these crimes and their impact on the country, the regulatory framework in place to combat it, and the initiatives and efforts taken to prevent and prosecute money laundering offences are very key to this study. Orokpo (2017) is of the opinion that the EFCC's efficiency is still hotly debated, despite the fact that it has prosecuted numerous high

profile corruption cases over the years and recovered substantial sums of looted monies. This shows that the country is in urgent need to address systemic corruption and financial crimes, which escalated to epidemic proportions with over \$440 billion in public funds allegedly stolen between 1960 and 1999, prompted the creation of the EFCC and similar organizations like the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) (Ribadu, 2009).

The Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) and the adoption of creative tactics like the whistleblower policy are only two examples of the EFCC's noteworthy accomplishments in its fight against corruption. It also faces key challenges like court system flaws in Nigeria, inadequate financial and human resources, and political meddling. Jamo (2021) argues that the EFCC's function in crime prevention has been made more difficult by its perceived usage as a political witch hunt and its inability to obtain convictions in numerous high-profile cases. This study contributes to the literature on promoting institutional frameworks for crime prevention and accountability in governance and the role of the EFCC and its effectiveness.

Nigeria's economy, governance, and social advancement have all been hampered by economic and financial crimes, especially corruption. The nation has battled systemic corruption that affects both the public and private sectors, despite having a plenty of natural and human resources. Nigeria's low rankings in Transparency International's Corruption

Perceptions Index and the startling quantities of public cash lost to corruption which amount to more than \$440 billion supposedly stolen between 1960 and 1999, show how widespread these crimes are (Ribadu, 2009). Claims of selective prosecution and its use as a political witch-hunting tool have damaged the EFCC's reputation. These challenges suggest that despite the commission's efforts, Nigeria's anticorruption framework is ineffectual, allowing economic crimes to thrive. Thus, this study's goal is to assess the EFCC's contribution to crime prevention in Nigeria critically, concentrating on the elements that reduce its efficacy and investigating strategies to boost it.

### **Research Questions**

1. what are the major factors contributing to the prevalence of economic crimes in Nigeria?
2. how effective has the EFCC been in preventing and prosecuting economic and financial crimes in Nigeria?
3. what challenges hinder the EFCC's ability to fulfill its mandate of crime prevention?
4. what strategies can be adopted to enhance the EFCC's performance in combating economic and financial crimes in Nigeria?

### **Research Objectives**

The aim of the study is to assess the role of the EFCC in crime prevention in Nigeria. Other objectives include to:

1. ascertain the major factors contributing to the prevalence of economic crimes in Nigeria
2. analyse how effective has the EFCC been in preventing and prosecuting economic and financial crimes in Nigeria
3. assess the extend at which challenges hinder the EFCC's ability to fulfill its mandate of crime prevention

4. identify the strategies adopted to enhance the EFCC's performance in combating economic and financial crimes in Nigeria.

### **Scope of the Study**

The study's geographic focus is Nigeria, with special attention paid to well-known incidents and their effects on social development and government. While the primary focus is on EFCC, the study also references the broader anticorruption framework in Nigeria, including its interaction with other regulatory bodies such as Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). This scope provides a comprehensive understanding of the EFCC's role in addressing economic and financial crime and its contribution to national development.

### **Empirical Studies**

Nkemdilim & Iyoha (2024) conducted similar study, they argued that corruption has been blamed for the continued underdevelopment of Nigeria. The study relied on secondary source of data collection. The study pinpoints how corruption by the political class hinders development in Nigeria. There is no doubt that crime of corruption in government threatens the moral integrity of a nation and hampered development, this thus make the topic of discourse very interesting especially looking at the global effect of corruption on democracy and development generally.

Odeke's (2024) research focused on the effects of the EFCC on financial accountability and transparency in Nigeria between 2010 and 2023. The study employed an ex post facto research design and secondary data from the

International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) and EFCC Conviction reports. The results revealed distinct effects of EFCC activities on corruption perception: the number of petitions received has a negative significant effect on the corruption perception index, whereas the number of investigated cases positively influences perceptions of corruption.

Bello et al (2022) evaluated the EFCC's contribution to the fight against corruption. For this investigation, data was gathered from secondary sources. According to the study, political meddling makes it more difficult for the EFCC to carry out its anti-corruption mission. Additionally, the survey discovered that the EFCC has contributed to a decrease in the degree of corruption in the public sector. It was recommended that the federal government should be committed to the sincere translation of the expressed political will of fighting corruption into reality by allowing the anti-corruption institutions to operate without political intervention in order not to compromise with their statutorily assigned responsibilities.

Umar et al. (2018) evaluated the EFCC's involvement in combating systemic corruption. Documentary analysis, non-participatory observations, and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. The results of the integrative analysis show that the EFCC has apparently been ineffective, and further improvization of the organization is needed. Poor performance of the EFCC was associated with factors such as lack of commitment, inefficient judiciary, insufficient budgets and incompetent personnel. This study recommends further improvements in the form of a greater political will, improved legal process and also elevated budgetary funds and recruitment of personnel to the EFCC. Similar to the current study, the study adopted a descriptive, qualitative case study approach to describe the current state of

the EFCC in Nigeria. Adebayo et al. (2019) considered corruption in the public sphere to be one of the major challenges facing Nigerian governance. Given the increased prevalence of corruption, as shown by Transparency International's negative Corruption Perception Index for Nigeria, the campaign against corruption appears to have failed to provide the expected outcome despite the creation of the EFCC. The study's primary goal was to evaluate the efficacy of the EFCC in Nigeria from 2015 to the present under the Muhammadu Buhari Administration. The study's conclusions, which drew from primary and secondary sources, showed that excessive political meddling significantly limited the EFCC's operations. The institution was not adequately funded with feeble financial autonomy. The corruption reporting system in the federal public service was found to be more effective under Buhari Administration. The study concluded that the degree of autonomy of the EFCC under the administration is weak while its level of activities is more noticeable in the public glare in the Buhari regime than other regimes because the regime identified the fight against corruption as a key governance agenda. From the discussion, Nkemdilim & Iyoha (2024), opine that corruption still exists in Nigeria in spite of anti-corruption organizations, especially in the legislative and executive branches. They

contend that political corruption impedes progress and provide ways to stop corruption in government. Odeke (2024) examines the EFCC's impact on financial accountability and transparency from 2010 to 2023. The study finds that while the number of petitions negatively affects corruption perception, investigated cases positively influence it. However, court filings and convictions have insignificant effects. Recommendations include enhancing EFCC's transparency and efficiency in handling cases. Bello et al. (2022) describe corruption as a "monster" that undermines public institutions. They find that political interference hampers the EFCC's effectiveness, though it has reduced public sector corruption. They advise the government to let anti-corruption organizations function independently of politics. The EFCC's involvement in regulating financial crimes is the main topic of Njabulo et al. (2022). They conclude that financial crimes have a negative impact on Nigeria's development and that, despite the EFCC's advancements, there are still issues. To increase the EFCC's efficacy, they advise fortifying its functions and tackling its issues. The EFCC's effectiveness is evaluated by Umar et al. (2018), who conclude that it is ineffectual because of things like a lack of dedication, an incompetent judiciary, and inadequate funding. They suggest strengthening legal procedures, political will, and the EFCC's financial and hiring capabilities and Adebayo et al. (2019) assess the EFCC's effectiveness under the Buhari administration, noting that while the EFCC's activities are more visible, they are constrained by political interference and inadequate funding. They recommend greater political will and financial autonomy for the EFCC.

Nwosu (2023) explores the effectiveness of Nigeria's anti-corruption laws, highlighting a gap between legal frameworks and practical outcomes. The study identifies weak enforcement, lack of political will, and inadequate resources as significant impediments to effective anti-corruption efforts. This gap underscores the need for not only robust laws but also effective implementation strategies. Empirical evidence suggests that Nigeria's anticorruption agencies are not adequately funded, which hampers their effectiveness. Awopeju et al. (2018) recommend that a significant percentage of the national

budget be allocated to ACAs to enhance their operational capabilities. Furthermore, Nwosu (2023) emphasizes the importance of bridging the gap between legal provisions and their execution to achieve tangible anti-corruption outcomes.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design based on empirical research. A thorough examination of empirical research on the EFCC and anti-corruption initiatives in Nigeria were considered. Using both original qualitative data and current empirical facts, the qualitative approach involves examination of the EFCC's

efficacy, difficulties, and reform options. There are two primary components to data collection. This includes a thorough analysis of empirical research with an emphasis on studies related to the EFCC's operations, successes, and difficulties that were published between 2018 and 2024. To find recurrent themes, trends, and gaps in the literature, studies from scholarly journals, official government reports, and international organizations like Transparency International and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are examined. Also, firsthand opinions on the EFCC's performance and the elements affecting its efficacy, in-depth interviews are carried out with EFCC staff, attorneys, civil society members, and anticorruption specialists. Participants were chosen using a purposive sample technique to capture those with pertinent training and experience are represented.

Key themes and patterns from the empirical research and interviews are found and coded through the use of thematic analysis in order to comprehend the EFCC's role in fighting financial crimes and corruption. Throughout the whole research process, ethical principles including informed consent and confidentiality are rigorously upheld. The study offers a solid and fact-based evaluation of the EFCC's efficacy by fusing a review of empirical research with qualitative interviews, adding to the larger conversation on anti-corruption initiatives in Nigeria.

The assessment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in crime prevention requires a comprehensive analytical process that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection should include primary sources such as interviews with EFCC officials, legal experts, and law enforcement officers, as well as secondary sources like EFCC reports, judicial records, and academic studies on anticorruption measures. Descriptive statistical analysis will help measure conviction rates, asset recovery, and public trust, while comparative analysis will benchmark the EFCC's effectiveness against international agencies like Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) and the UK's Serious Fraud Office (SFO). Furthermore, thematic content analysis of policy documents, media reports, and legislative acts will provide insights into the structural challenges faced by the EFCC, such as political interference and funding constraints. To ensure objectivity, performance indicators (KPIs) such as case completion time, institutional independence, and financial recoveries must be examined critically. However, challenges in this analytical process may arise due to inconsistent data availability, political bias in official reports, and public perception distortions. These can be mitigated through triangulation, where multiple data sources and methodologies are cross-referenced to validate findings. The study should also employ risk assessments to identify gaps in EFCC operations and propose data-driven reforms to strengthen its mandate.



Ultimately, by applying rigorous analytical techniques, this research will provide a clearer understanding of whether the EFCC is effectively preventing financial crimes or if structural and policy changes are necessary.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

The research employed a qualitative empirical research design and in-depth interviews to discuss the EFCC's contribution to crime prevention in Nigeria. The research questions serve as the framework for the analysis, which focuses on the causes of economic crimes, the efficacy of the EFCC, its difficulties, and methods for improving its operations. The discussion is developed in the light of previous empirical research as well as the qualitative information obtained from interviews.

### **Conceptualizing Economic and Financial Crimes**

The term "economic and financial crimes" describes illegal actions with the intention of making money; these crimes frequently involve complex techniques and impact both public and private organizations. These crimes are classified as non-violent offenses done with the intention of obtaining riches illegally in Nigeria under the Economic Crimes Commission (EFCC) act of 2004. Money laundering, embezzlement, bribery, fraud, smuggling, and other corrupt practices are included in the (EFCC Act, 2004; Abdulrauf, 2012). Financial crimes are defined specifically in the EFCC Act as actions that violate financial rules and regulations, consequently jeopardizing governance and economic stability.

Economic and financial crimes cover illegal oil bunkering, cybercrimes, human trafficking, and business fraud and tax avoidance. These crimes are frequently connected, involving complex network and international aspects, as Obiwuru (2020) notes. Because of their substantial influence on the global financial system, financial crimes in Nigeria are not only a domestic problem but also a global one. These crimes damage societal values, destroy public trust, and impede national progress, claims Ayoade (2022). The goal of economic and financial crimes is frequently to take advantage of regulatory gaps or institutional deficiencies.

For example, these crimes thrive in circumstances that are made possible by systemic corruption, bad governance, and insufficient legal enforcement. Orokpó (2017), opined that around \$440 billion in public funds was stolen between 1960 and 1999. Also, according to Mung-Ling, Sze-Ling, and Chin-Hong (2008), the demise of companies such as Cadbury Nigeria Plc and other Nigerian banks as a result of fraudulent operations highlights the urgent need for strict measures to combat these crimes. Essentially, Nigerian economic and financial crimes are complex with diverse individuals and techniques that take advantage of structural weaknesses.

### **Factors Contributing to the Prevalence of Economic Crimes in Nigeria**

According to empirical research, systemic corruption, lax regulatory frameworks, and bad governance foster an atmosphere that encourages crimes including fraud, embezzlement, and money laundering (Nkemdilim & Iyoha, 2024; Orokpó, 2017). Stakeholder interviews provide additional support for these conclusions, with participants highlighting the significance that institutional flaws and political meddling play in sustaining corruption. For example, one of the participants opined that "corruption is deeply embedded in Nigeria's political and bureaucratic systems, making it difficult for anti-corruption agencies like the EFCC to operate effectively."

This corroborates Bello et al's (2022) argument that political meddling compromises the EFCC's capacity to bring high-profile cases to justice. And Salawu (2020), who opined that the issue is made worse by the societal acceptance of corruption, since many Nigerians believe that bribery and other corrupt activities are required in order to obtain governmental services.

**Effectiveness of the EFCC in Preventing and Prosecuting Economic Crimes** Studies have shown that the EFCC has made great progress in the fight against financial and economic crimes, especially in reclaiming stolen property and bringing high-profile cases to justice. For instance, according to Odeke (2024), the EFCC's work has improved public perceptions of corruption, especially case investigations.

According to interviews with EFCC officials and legal professionals, they are of the opinion that the EFCC has pursued certain cases effectively, judicial delays, a lack of funds, and political meddling frequently diminish the agency's effectiveness. A participant said, "The EFCC is often constrained by a lack of resources and political will, which limits its ability to prosecute cases effectively." This result is in line with Umar et al. (2018), who contend that issues including a weak judiciary and inadequate funding hinder the EFCC's effectiveness. Furthermore, as Odeke (2024) points out, the study emphasizes the negligible influence of court files and convictions on the perception of corruption. The implication is that although the EFCC always investigates and prosecutes cases, the legal system's delays and low conviction rates diminishes the agency's overall efficacy.

### **Challenges Hindering the EFCC's Ability to Fulfill Its Mandate**

Several challenges have been identified that hinder the EFCC's ability to fulfill its mandate.

These include:

#### **Political Interference**

Adebayo et al. (2019) point out that political meddling is a significant barrier to the efficacy of the EFCC. Interviewees pointed to examples where political elite pressure resulted in highprofile cases being dismissed or postponed. This reduces the EFCC's operational authority and erodes public confidence in the agency.

#### **Inadequate Resources**

Significant resource limitations affect the EFCC, such as a lack of skilled staff and inadequate money. This restricts its ability to carry out exhaustive investigations and bring complicated financial crime cases to justice. Ibrahim (2019) and Adeyemi (2018) both stress how the EFCC's performance is affected by resource limitations. Awopeju, Olowu, and Jegede (2018) argue that comparing Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts with those of Singapore and Hong Kong reveals significant insights. Both Singapore and Hong Kong have well-funded and effective ACAs, which have contributed to their low corruption levels. In contrast, Nigeria's ACAs, including the EFCC, face challenges related to inadequate funding and political interference, hindering their effectiveness.

#### **Judicial Inefficiencies**

The incessant delays in the judicial system in corruption cases have become a major challenge. It is based on this that Ayode (2020) argues that judicial inefficiencies allow corrupt individuals to evade

justice, reducing the deterrent effect of the EFCC's efforts. Salawu (2020) argues that cultural acceptance of corruption makes it difficult for the EFCC to gain public support for its efforts.

Based on the findings, the study proposes several strategies to enhance the EFCC's effectiveness in combating economic and financial crimes:

This includes reduction of political interference, the EFCC should be granted greater institutional autonomy. Ojo (2020) suggests that merit-based selections and protection from political pressures could accomplish this.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The results of the study are consistent with institutional theory, which highlights how autonomy and institutional structures influence organizational success. The difficulties facing the EFCC—such as institutional weaknesses and political meddling—highlight the significance of setting up autonomous, well-funded anticorruption organizations. Furthermore, the Fraud Diamond Theory offers a helpful framework for comprehending the elements of opportunity, pressure, capability, and rationalization that propel financial crimes in Nigeria. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates institutional development, public involvement, and legal reforms is needed to address these concerns.

### **Summary of Findings**

The analysis reveals several key insights:

With nearly \$440 billion in public monies allegedly stolen between 1960 and 1999 through money laundering, bribery, fraud, and embezzlement, corruption and financial crimes are still rampant in Nigeria. This has a significant negative impact on the country's economic growth, public trust, and governance. In its fight against corruption, the EFCC has made some progress, including reclaiming large sums of money and bringing high-profile cases to justice. Initiatives like the whistleblower policy and collaboration with international bodies have enhanced its capabilities.

Factors such as political interference compromises the independence of the EFCC, as well as inadequate funding and human resources. Inefficiencies within the judiciary is also another factor that result in prolonged cases.

The EFCC's activities have had a marginal improvement in Nigeria's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) over the years.

The EFCC's visibility and activities have varied across different administrations. For example, under President Buhari, the EFCC's operations were more prominent, aligning with the administration's anti-corruption agenda.

### **Recommendations**

To learn about best practices and identify areas for improvement, future research might conducted on court inefficiencies and the possible effect of judicial changes on accelerating cases involving corruption could be undertaken. Future studies should look into what influences public trust in the EFCC and other anticorruption organizations, taking into account the ways that accountability, transparency, and community involvement impact support from society.



The influence of political will on the efficacy of the EFCC could be the subject of future research. Analyzing comparisons between administrations may help us better understand how political backing affects the agency's independence and performance.

The effectiveness of Nigeria's whistleblower laws could be evaluated in more detail, with an emphasis on how they affect the reporting of corruption and how to better protect and reward whistleblowers. The impact of the EFCC on national development, international investment, and poverty alleviation could be investigated. With an emphasis on how local government, cultural elements, and economic circumstances affect anti-corruption initiatives, research might examine regional variations in the frequency of economic crimes and the efficacy of the EFCC. Future research might examine how long-lasting the EFCC's anti-corruption tactics are, with an emphasis on long-term capacity-building projects and institutional reforms to ensure enduring success in combating financial crimes. These areas of study can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting the EFCC's performance and contribute to strengthening Nigeria's anti-corruption framework.

## **Conclusion**

The study comes to the conclusion that although the EFCC has achieved great progress against financial and economic crimes, structural issues like judicial inefficiency, political meddling, and a lack of funding limit its efficacy. The EFCC needs more budget, judicial changes, public support, and institutional autonomy in order to

work better. This is in line with Awopeju, Olowu, and Jegede (2018) who emphasize that adequate funding and strong political will are crucial for the success of ACAs. The effectiveness of anticorruption agencies (ACAs) is often linked to their funding and political support. They note that successful agencies worldwide are wellfunded and enjoy substantial governmental backing. The EFCC can prevent and prosecute economic crimes more successfully and support Nigeria's socioeconomic growth by tackling these issues and implementing the suggested tactics. The study's conclusions add to the larger conversation on Nigeria's anti-corruption initiatives and offer insightful information to stakeholders, anti-corruption organizations, and legislators looking to bolster the anti-corruption movement.

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A dedicated and accomplished legal professional with over fifteen years of experience in governance, compliance, and anti-corruption efforts within the Nigerian public sector. Proven track record in **fraud prevention**, conducting **vulnerability analysis** of databases, and developing **anti-corruption strategies**.

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