

# The Causes Of Corruption In African States And Anti-Corruption Strategies: A Study Of Economic And Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) In Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Corruption remains one of the most persistent challenges confronting governance, democratic consolidation and sustainable development in African states. Despite the proliferation of anti-corruption laws, specialised agencies, financial reforms and international conventions, corruption continues to affect public administration, political accountability, resource allocation and citizens' confidence in government institutions. This paper critically examines the causes of corruption in African states anti-corruption strategies, with particular emphasis on Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) between 2020 and 2025. The paper adopts a qualitative documentary research design and relies on scholarly literature, official reports, legislation and institutional data from the EFCC, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Transparency International. Institutional Theory constitutes the principal analytical framework. The paper argues that corruption in African states should not be reduced to individual greed or moral deficiency because it is reproduced through weak institutions, political patronage, excessive discretion, opaque procurement, weak judicial accountability, electoral financing and socio-economic inequalities. Evidence from Nigeria indicates that the EFCC recorded significant achievements in investigation, prosecution, convictions, asset recovery and preventive initiatives during 2020–2025. Nevertheless, Nigeria's Corruption Perceptions Index score improved only marginally from 25/100 in 2020 to 26/100 in 2025. The paper therefore argues that the EFCC has demonstrated considerable operational effectiveness but remains structurally constrained by the broader political and institutional environment. Sustainable corruption control consequently requires moving beyond an enforcement-centred strategy towards institutional reforms that strengthen accountability, transparency, prevention, judicial effectiveness and the independence of anti-corruption institutions.

Keyword: Causes, corruption, African State, strategies, economic financial crime commission

## Introduction

Corruption constitutes a major obstacle to democratic governance, socio-economic development and institutional effectiveness across many African states. Although corruption is a global phenomenon and its prevalence differs substantially across African countries, its effects are particularly damaging in societies where state institutions are weak, public resources are limited and large sections of the population depend heavily on government-provided services. Corruption diverts resources from development programmes, distorts public expenditure, weakens administrative efficiency and reduces citizens' confidence in state institutions (Boateng et al., 2024).

Recent empirical evidence suggests that the persistence of corruption in Africa is closely connected to the quality of political and administrative institutions. In a study covering 52 African countries between 2007 and 2022, Boateng et al. (2024) found that weak formal governance institutions are significantly associated with higher levels of corruption. Their findings are particularly important because they challenge explanations that portray corruption primarily as an expression of African culture. Instead, corruption should be understood within the interaction between formal institutions, informal networks, political incentives and structures of accountability.

Corruption also undermines development by affecting the operation of financial and economic institutions. Recent African evidence indicates that the economic consequences of corruption are strongly conditioned by institutional quality; where institutions are weak, corruption has more damaging consequences for financial development and economic performance (Kouadio et al., 2025). Consequently, strengthening institutions is not simply an ethical requirement but an important component of economic development.

Nigeria represents an important case for examining the effectiveness of institutional responses to corruption. The country has developed an extensive anti-corruption architecture consisting of institutions such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU), Bureau of

Public Procurement (BPP) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Among these institutions, the EFCC has become particularly prominent because of its responsibility for investigating and prosecuting economic and financial crimes and recovering proceeds of crime (EFCC, 2021).

The period between 2020 and 2025 is particularly important because it witnessed significant changes in the Commission's leadership, legislation, enforcement activities and strategic orientation. The EFCC Strategic Plan 2021–2025 identified public engagement, prevention, intelligence-driven investigation and prosecution, asset recovery, inter-agency collaboration and institutional capacity as central priorities (EFCC, 2021). The plan therefore represented an attempt to move beyond a narrow prosecution-based approach towards a more comprehensive strategy.

Despite these efforts, corruption remained a significant challenge. Transparency International reported that Nigeria scored 25 out of 100 and ranked 149th out of 180 countries in the 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index. By 2025, the country scored 26 out of 100 and ranked 142nd out of 182 countries (Transparency International, 2021, 2026). Although rankings should be interpreted cautiously because the number of countries assessed changes, the movement from 25 to 26 points demonstrates only marginal improvement in perceived public-sector integrity. This creates an important analytical paradox: how can an anti-corruption agency record thousands of convictions and substantial asset recoveries while the wider corruption environment demonstrates only limited improvement?

This paper argues that the paradox can be explained by distinguishing between operational effectiveness and systemic effectiveness. Operational effectiveness concerns an institution's ability to investigate cases, prosecute offenders, secure convictions and recover assets. Systemic effectiveness concerns whether these activities significantly reduce the opportunities, incentives and political structures through which corruption is continuously reproduced. The central argument advanced here is that the EFCC demonstrated considerable operational effectiveness during 2020–2025 but remained structurally constrained in transforming Nigeria's wider corruption environment.

## **Conceptual Clarification of Terms;**

### **The Concept of Corruption**

Osoba (1996) defined Corruption as an antisocial behaviour that accords inappropriate benefits as against the law and morality and it also affects the ability of authorities to alleviate the living standards of the people. Wilkins (1970) views corruption as contrasting or incompatible with the norms that are espoused as normal in a group or social system. The World Bank defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gains. Public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts, solicits or extorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. Public office can also be abused for personal benefit even if no bribery occurs, through patronage and nepotism, the theft of state assets or the diversion of state revenue (World Bank, 1997).

### **The Concept of anti-Corruption Strategies**

Anti-corruption strategies refer to institutional, legislative, political, administrative and societal measures designed to prevent, detect, investigate and punish corruption. They include prosecution, asset recovery, financial intelligence, auditing, public procurement reforms, asset declaration, whistle-blower mechanisms, digitalisation, public education and civic monitoring (Adenigbagbe *et al*, 2024).

### **The Evolution of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria**

The EFCC was established in the year December 12, and its operational activities officially commenced on April 13, 2003, under Nigerian law as a specialised institution for combating economic and financial crimes. Its responsibilities include investigation and prosecution of financial crimes, tracing and recovery of criminal proceeds, enforcement of relevant financial legislation and collaboration with domestic and international agencies (EFCC, 2021).

The Commission occupies a particularly important position because contemporary corruption increasingly involves sophisticated financial transactions, corporate entities, property acquisition and transnational movement of illicit proceeds. Consequently, effective anti-corruption enforcement requires financial intelligence and asset tracing in addition to conventional criminal investigation. Between 2020 and 2025, the Commission attempted to combine investigation, prosecution and recovery with greater preventive activities. The EFCC Strategic Plan specifically recognised prevention as potentially less costly and more efficient than relying entirely on enforcement after crimes have occurred (EFCC, 2021).

### **The Structure and Membership of EFCC**

According to (Nyewusira *et al*, 2023) The strategic plan for the year 2021-2025 outlines the leadership structure of the commission, to include an Executive Chairman who serves as the Chief Accounting Officer and has responsibility for the executive operations of

the commission. The individual serving as the Secretary to the Commission assumes the role of the administrative leader and bears the responsibility of maintaining the panel's financial records. The commission comprises a total of 14 departments, namely: Administration and Human Resources, Operations, Legal and Prosecution, Planning, Research and Statistics, Forensics and Crime Laboratory Services, Asset Forfeiture, Internal Affairs, Intelligence, Internal Audit, Information and Communication Technology, Procurement, and Staff Welfare Services. In addition, the Commission possesses strategic units, including External Cooperation, Freedom of Information (FOI), and SERVICOM. Additionally, it possesses a Training Academy, known as The EFCC Academy, which is tasked with providing training to its workers and other relevant parties. Rufai (2020) averred that the commission is composed of the following members:

- The Chairman, who is the Executive and the Accounting Officer of the commission and also the chairman of the board. The Governor of the Central Bank or his representative.
- A representative each of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Justice.
- The Chairman, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency or his representative.
- The Director General of the National Intelligence Agency or his representative.
- The Director General of the State Security Service or his representative.
- The Registrar General of the Corporate Affairs Commission or his representative
- The Director General, Department of State Security Service or his Representative
- The Director-General, Securities and Exchange Commission or his Representative
- The Managing-Director, Nigeria Deposit Insurance Cooperation or his Representative
- The Commissioner for Insurance or his Representative
- The Postmaster-General of the Nigerian Postal Services or his Representative
- The Chairman, Nigeria Communication Commission or his Representative
- The Controller-General of the Nigeria Custom Service or his representative
- The Controller-General, Nigeria Immigration Service or his Representative
- The Inspector-General of Police or his Representative
- Four Eminent Nigerians with cognate experience in any of the following; finance, banking or accounting

### **Institutional Theory**

Institutional Theory provides the principal theoretical framework for this paper. The theory is associated prominently with Meyer and Rowan (1977) and further developed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), who conceptualises institutions as formal and informal rules that structure human interactions. Institutions influence behaviour by establishing incentives, constraints and expectations. Applied to corruption, Institutional Theory suggests that corrupt conduct cannot adequately be explained solely through the moral character of individuals. The institutional environment determines the opportunities available for corruption and the probability that corrupt actors will be detected and sanctioned.

This argument receives strong contemporary empirical support in Africa. Boateng et al. (2024), using data from 52 African countries, found that weak formal governance institutions are associated with higher corruption. They further demonstrate that formal and informal institutions interact in influencing corruption outcomes.

Institutional Theory therefore provides an important corrective to culturally deterministic explanations of African corruption. The existence of considerable differences in corruption outcomes across African countries demonstrates that corruption cannot simply be attributed to an undifferentiated “African culture.” Rather, variations in governance, accountability, political competition and enforcement capacity are critical explanatory factors (Boateng et al., 2024).

Applied specifically to Nigeria, the theory suggests that strengthening the EFCC without simultaneously improving procurement systems, judicial accountability, electoral financing, legislative oversight and administrative transparency may generate only limited systemic change. Anti-corruption agencies operate within institutions; they cannot remain completely insulated from weaknesses in those institutions.

### **Methodology**

The paper adopts a qualitative documentary research design. Documentary research is appropriate because the study seeks to critically examine patterns, institutional processes and anti-corruption performance rather than generate primary survey data. Data were derived from peer-reviewed academic literature, EFCC reports and strategic documents, Transparency International publications, National Bureau of Statistics reports, UNODC publications and relevant Nigerian legislation. Particular attention was paid to evidence covering 2020–2025, although foundational theoretical literature was retained where necessary.

The study employs thematic content analysis. Evidence was organised around two principal analytical themes: the structural causes of corruption in African states and the of Nigeria's anti-corruption strategies, particularly those implemented through the EFCC. Effectiveness is evaluated through multiple indicators, including enforcement, convictions, asset recovery, preventive capacity, institutional independence and changes in the broader corruption environment.

#### Major Causes of Corruption in African States are:

- **Weak Political and Administrative Institutions:** Weak institutions constitute one of the strongest explanations for persistent corruption in African states. Where legislative oversight, auditing, procurement regulation, judicial review and administrative accountability are ineffective, political and bureaucratic actors may exercise substantial discretion without corresponding accountability. Boateng et al. (2024) provide strong empirical support for this proposition, demonstrating that weaker formal governance institutions are associated with higher corruption across African countries. Similarly, recent evidence concerning the relationship between corruption and financial development demonstrates that institutional quality fundamentally influences the economic consequences of corruption (Kouadio et al., 2025). Consequently, creating additional anti-corruption legislation without strengthening enforcement institutions may produce what can be termed an implementation deficit: extensive formal regulation accompanied by weak practical accountability.
- **Weak Judicial and Enforcement Systems:** Effective anti-corruption policy requires credible judicial enforcement. Investigating and charging an individual does not establish guilt; successful enforcement requires competent prosecution, independent adjudication and timely judicial decisions. Weaknesses in judicial institutions can reduce deterrence where cases remain unresolved for prolonged periods. Transparency International (2024) has emphasised that limited access to justice and impunity for corrupt actors remain significant obstacles to corruption control in Sub-Saharan Africa. The implication is that EFCC effectiveness cannot be separated entirely from judicial effectiveness. An anti-corruption commission may investigate cases efficiently while systemic delays elsewhere in the criminal justice system undermine final outcomes.
- **Corruption in Public Procurement:** Public procurement constitutes a major area of corruption vulnerability because governments purchase enormous quantities of goods, infrastructure and services. Manipulation can occur through contract inflation, predetermined bidding, payment for incomplete projects, conflict of interest and politically connected contractors. Gray (2021), examining South Africa, identifies procurement as a major mechanism through which rent-seeking and state capture can operate and argues that additional formal anti-corruption policies alone may not resolve the underlying political dynamics. The broader lesson for African states is that procurement corruption cannot be addressed solely through prosecution after funds disappear. Open contracting, transparent bidding, beneficial ownership disclosure, digital procurement and effective auditing are necessary preventive mechanisms.
- **Electoral Financing and Political Corruption:** The high financial cost of political competition can contribute to corruption. Political candidates frequently require substantial financial resources to obtain party nominations, conduct campaigns and mobilise supporters. Where campaign financing is opaque, business interests and political financiers may expect access to contracts, appointments or policy influence after elections. Albert et al. (2021). Illustrate the relationship between political patronage financing and economic decision-making in Nigeria. Such relationships blur the distinction between political finance and public corruption. This produces a cycle in which corrupt resources finance political competition and political victory subsequently creates opportunities for further accumulation. Anti-corruption policy that ignores political financing therefore addresses only part of the corruption system Albert et al. (2021).

#### Effects of Corruption

According to (Inienger et al, 2018). Identified some effects of corruption are:

- **Poor Investment :** Unemployment in Nigeria would have been eradicated to some extent if only investors were attracted to it. Companies that would have invested in Nigeria are afraid because they do not know if the corrupt practice will ruin their industries in time. Because of this, they refuse to invest in Nigeria.
- **Rise in Poverty:** When the heads of public service are busy laundering the money that is supposed to be used to create employment for the masses and reduce poverty, what happens is that there will be a rise in the poverty level of the country. Just like the rise in poverty as statistically shown between 2004 and 2008. Since the government is selfish and does not want to help the poor, poverty continues to rise in Nigeria.
- **Poor National Development:** Any country with high corruption is likely to experience developmental bankruptcy. A situation where some CEOs indulge in corrupt practices to make their money means that economic development will suffer. When Nigerians keep on shifting the country's currency to foreign countries, there will be less economic development in Nigeria.

### The anti-Corruption Strategies adopted by the EFCC in Nigeria, 2020–2025 are:

- **Investigation, Prosecution and Convictions:** One of the strongest areas of EFCC performance has been investigation and prosecution. During the period under review, the Commission secured thousands of convictions involving various forms of economic and financial crime. These outcomes demonstrate substantial organisational and prosecutorial capacity. It would therefore be analytically inaccurate to conclude that the EFCC has been wholly ineffective merely because corruption continues to exist. Nevertheless, conviction figures require critical interpretation. The number of convictions tells us how many defendants were successfully prosecuted, but not necessarily whether the political and institutional structures responsible for grand corruption have been fundamentally disrupted. This distinction is especially important where significant numbers of convictions involve relatively straightforward financial or cybercrime offences. An anti-corruption agency may increase its total convictions substantially without achieving a comparable increase in successful prosecution of complex politically exposed corruption cases. Therefore: High conviction rates constitute evidence of operational effectiveness, but they are not sufficient evidence of systemic corruption control.
- **Asset Recovery:** Asset recovery represents another significant dimension of EFCC effectiveness. Recovering proceeds of crime is important because prosecution alone does not return diverted resources to society. Asset forfeiture also reduces the economic incentives associated with financial crime.  
During the period under review, the Commission recorded substantial recovery of financial and physical assets. Its asset-recovery activities were further strengthened by the Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Act 2022, which provided a more comprehensive legal framework for tracing, recovery and management of criminal proceeds.
- **Prevention and Intelligence-Led Enforcement:** A particularly important development was the increasing emphasis on prevention. The 2021–2025 Strategic Plan explicitly recognised prevention as a potentially cheaper and more effective response than waiting for economic crimes to occur before commencing investigation (EFCC, 2021). The Commission also strengthened attention to intelligence-led investigation, financial monitoring and sectors vulnerable to money laundering. This represents progress towards a more comprehensive anti-corruption model. Prevention has significant advantages. Once public money has been transferred through complex financial networks or moved outside Nigeria, recovery can become difficult and expensive. Preventing suspicious transactions or procurement irregularities before funds disappear is therefore preferable to relying entirely on subsequent recovery.
- **Public Engagement and Reporting:** The EFCC has also promoted public engagement through sensitisation campaigns, reporting channels, integrity programmes and partnerships with civil society, whistle blowers, and other institutions. This approach corresponds with the Commission's Strategic Plan, which identifies public participation as one of its major priorities (EFCC, 2021).  
There is some evidence that anti-corruption agencies have become increasingly relevant channels for citizens reporting corruption. UNODC, data show that among Nigerians who reported bribery in 2023, 28 percent reported to an anti-corruption agency, compared with lower proportions in earlier surveys (UNODC, 2024).

### Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that corruption in African states is fundamentally an institutional and political-governance problem rather than merely a consequence of individual moral failure. Weak formal institutions, political patronage, opaque political financing and poor accountability create conditions in which corruption becomes embedded in governance processes (Boateng et al., 2024; Albert et al., 2021). This suggests that anti-corruption efforts cannot succeed through prosecution alone where the wider political and administrative system continues to generate incentives and opportunities for corrupt practices.

The study further finds that the EFCC recorded notable achievements between 2020 and 2025 in investigation, prosecution, asset recovery, financial intelligence and preventive strategies. However, its effectiveness remains dependent on judicial efficiency, political support, institutional autonomy, public cooperation and inter-agency coordination (EFCC, 2021). Although these achievements demonstrate considerable operational capacity, Nigeria's movement from a CPI score of 25 in 2020 to 26 in 2025 shows that wider systemic improvement remained limited (Transparency International, 2021, 2026).

### Conclusion

This paper examined the causes of corruption in African states and evaluated the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies, with particular reference to Nigeria's EFCC between 2020 and 2025. The analysis shows that corruption is driven mainly by institutional weakness, political patronage, opaque procurement, weak accountability, electoral financing and judicial limitations rather than individual greed or culture alone. Although the EFCC recorded notable achievements in investigation, prosecution, convictions, asset recovery and preventive initiatives, Nigeria's CPI score improved only marginally from 25/100 in 2020 to 26/100 in 2025 (Transparency International, 2021, 2026), indicating that operational success has not produced equivalent systemic transformation. The paper therefore concludes that the EFCC has been effective in important respects but remains structurally constrained by the

wider governance environment. Sustainable corruption control consequently requires stronger institutions, political accountability, transparent procurement, judicial effectiveness and preventive mechanisms that reduce opportunities for corruption.

### Nigeria's Corruption Perceptions Index Performance

Perhaps the most significant evidence for evaluating systemic effectiveness is Nigeria's broader corruption environment. In 2020, Nigeria scored 25/100 and ranked 149th among 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2021). By 2025, Nigeria scored **26/100 and ranked 142nd among 182 countries** (Transparency International, 2026). The ranking improvement should be interpreted cautiously because rankings depend partly on the number and performance of countries assessed. The more meaningful comparison is the score, which increased by only one point over five years.

The explanation is not necessarily institutional failure by the EFCC. Rather, corruption is generated by a broader system involving procurement, electoral finance, political patronage, judicial processes, bureaucratic discretion and private-sector networks. The EFCC principally intervenes against manifestations of corruption and financial crime. It does not independently control all the political and institutional structures that generate them.

### Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following recommendations are advanced:

- 1. Strengthen EFCC independence:** Appointment, tenure, funding and operational arrangements should provide stronger institutional protection against actual or perceived political interference.
- 2. Prioritise prevention alongside prosecution:** Greater emphasis should be placed on corruption-risk assessment, procurement monitoring, financial intelligence, digital transparency and early detection rather than relying predominantly on prosecution after public resources have been diverted.
- 3. Strengthen judicial and inter-agency coordination:** Cooperation among the EFCC, ICPC, NFIU, CCB, BPP, Auditor-General and judiciary should be strengthened to reduce duplication and unnecessary delays in corruption cases.

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