

THE NIGERIAN STATE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST POLITICAL CORRUPTION: A CASE OF ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRIMES COMMISSION (EFCC) 2002 -2025

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Abstract

Since 1960, when Nigeria gained independence, the Nigerian state has made several attempts to institutionalise the fight against political corruption in Nigeria. In spite of the fact that some progress has been made, it is important to note that the State institutions saddled with the responsibility of stamping out corruption in Nigeria have become a clog in the wheel of progress. Thus, institutions fighting political corruption, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Nigeria police force, the Nigeria Immigration services and the office of the Attorney General of the Federation, etc., appeared to have been heavily enmeshed in corruption. I adopt the theory of extractive corruption as our theoretical framework of analysis while relying on the documentary method of data collection. The study also used content analysis and logical deductions to arrive at the conclusion of the study. This paper, therefore, examines numerous incidences of political corruption involving top-ranking officials of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and other sister agencies in the crusade against corruption in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, concludes that the major problem of fighting political corruption in Nigeria lies squarely in the complexities and failures of institutions designated to curb political corruption. It recommends that a thorough background search or investigation was made on the prospective officials before they are appointed, and anyone found guilty of political corruption after appointment must face severe consequences as prescribed by the law.

Keywords: State, Fight, Political Corruption and Institution

Introduction

Over the years in Nigeria, one of the major setbacks to growth and national development has been the ravaging political corruption in Nigeria. A few years after independence, precisely in 1966, the military coup and subsequent recurring military coups and insurrection, as well as the Civil War of 1967-1970 were all direct and indirect consequences of political disagreement partly instigated by political corruption. Regrettably, military rhetoric on political corruption was not sufficient to addressing major causes of political corruption. Thus, political corruption became institutionalized during successive military regimes that ended in 1999. Unfortunately, years of military dictatorship has assaulted every facet of Nigerian socio-political life and deeply permeated virtually every state institution. Nigeria's economic and political landscape is presently saturated by political corruption and monumental abuse of office. With high incidences of political corruption and concomitant spread and admiration of civilian administration around the world, the Nigerian state returned to democratic rule in 1999. Thus, the return to civilian rule in 1999 was epitomized with optimism and cheerfulness that democratic institutions would play a crucial role in addressing all forms of political corruption ravaging Nigeria. But this optimism is yet to translate into visible reality. The dawn of democratic dispensation in more than two decades in Nigeria has not in any way mitigated the monstrosity of political corruption. The pathological looting of the Nigerian commonwealth by the ruling class under a pseudo-capitalist state has become both compelling and inevitable. Essentially, one major step taken by Obasanjo's government after the return to democratic rule

was the creation of a specialized agency saddled with the responsibility of tracking, investigating and prosecuting citizens who engaged in corruption and other related offences. In this regard, the former president Obasanjo's administration established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2002. The act establishing the EFCC was re-enacted in 2004 to broaden its mandate and empower the agency for effectiveness. Eme, Igwe, & Ezenwafor (2017) stated that the re-enactment of EFCC in 2004 is revolutionary as it gives the agency powers of coordination and enforcement of varied but related economic and financial crime issues.

In spite of the above, the EFCC still struggles to meticulously discharge its constitutionally assigned responsibilities. In fact, the agency has been accused of bias, selectivity, serving the interests of the Chief Executive in the fight against political corruption and regrettably also perpetuating political corruption. For instance, recently, the former Acting Chairman of EFCC, Ibrahim Magu, was removed from office after facing a presidential panel due to allegations of corruption. According to Balogun (2020) Magu was arrested due to allegations of corruption, insubordination and abuse of office levelled against him by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation.

More recently, in 2023, the former EFCC boss, Abdulrasheed Bawa was suspended by President Bola Tinubu on allegations of corrupt practices and abuse of office. Also, the Federal High Court recently ordered an interim forfeiture of fifty-seven (57) properties belonging to the former Attorney General of Federal, Abubakar Malami and his son (Odeniyi & Shaibu, 2026). It could be recalled that Malami was the Chief Law Officer of the country between 2015 and 2023 and indeed, was saddled with the responsibility of supervising all anti-corruption agencies under the late President Buhari's government. As can be seen, section 174 of the 1999 constitution empowers the Attorney General to initiate criminal proceedings or even suspend such or discontinue investigation of such, and performs a supervisory role over all anti-graft agencies in Nigeria.

Numerous studies such as (Okwor, 2019; Ojo, 2020; Idris, 2021; Nyewusira & Isreal, 2023; Ibuomo, 2024; Itse, 2025; Mohammed & Muslim, 2025) have separately interrogated the role of the EFCC in addressing corruption in Nigeria, the implications of the EFCC's fight against corruption on growth and national development. Earlier studies focus on the efforts of the EFCC towards recovery of looted funds, its fight against corruption and the implications on democratic consolidation in Nigeria (Ogundiya, 2009; Yagboyaju, 2010; Obuah, 2010; Inokoba & Ibegu 2011; Enweremadu, 2010; Enweremadu, 2013). These studies separately argued that there is a greater connection and linkage between the effectiveness of anti-corruption agency especially the EFCC, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. While these studies provide valuable insights on the menace of corruption, efforts of the EFCC and the challenges confronting the agency, little or no attention has been dedicated to interrogating the actions and inactions of those piloting the affairs of the agency. Evidently, incidences of political corruption have continued to manifest unabatedly in spite of the existence and efforts of the EFCC. Incidentally, the people, state institutions and the EFCC seem suspiciously trapped in corrupt

practices. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the Nigerian State and political corruption with a specific focus on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission.

Conceptualizing State and Political Corruption

The centrality of the modern state in the affairs of society has also amplified perceptions and divergent views of the state, especially in the last few decades. Thus, studies such as (Farooq, 2012; Kukathas, 2014; Nnorom, Odigbo & Nebeife 2018; Kundi & Bano, 2020) have separately x-rayed the concept of state within the context of generally known characteristics of the state and as an entity embodied with a high sense of cohesion. They separately noted that a state embodies some characteristics such as; organized body of people, a definite territory, sovereignty, government and sometimes recognition. Some other studies argued that the role of the state in a particular environment is critical to what the state is or represents.

A state can be seen as a form of political association or polity that is distinguished by the fact that it is not itself incorporated into any other political associations, though it may incorporate other such associations (Kukathas, 2014). In his view, a state is thus a supreme corporate entity because it is not incorporated into any other entity, even though it might be subordinate to other powers (such as another state or an empire). One state is distinguished from another by its having its own independent structure of political authority, and an attachment to separate physical territories (Kukathas, 2014). On the other hand, Kundi & Bano, (2020) emphasized cohesiveness as a major quality of a state. According to them, the modern state is a “rational ethical community by being the highest form of association in coherence and cohesiveness.

However, we present the State in this study as the machinery or fundamental bureau saddled with the onerous duty of managing the affairs of the people. In conceptualizing the state within this context, it is necessary and indeed apt to state that the character of the state as manifested via its membership and composition constitute problem to the fight against political corruption, hence the maintenance, production and reproduction of corruption is actualized through the instrumentalities of the established state institutions. This, therefore, remains a fundamental constraint in the fight against political corruption in Nigeria. In spite of the above, this study views the state simply as an institution or machinery established to deal with the problem of political corruption regardless of its nature, character and the prevailing tendencies.

Essentially, the state in this sense oversees and superintends the affairs of the society. According to Nnorom, Odigbo & Nebeife (2018) it means the agency that superintends the law-making process, the enforcement and implementation of the law to ensure peace, stability, growth and prosperity, and indeed provides the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. Therefore, state institutions as established by law, perform vital responsibilities on behalf of the state, and these responsibilities include the fight against corruption.

On the other hand, corruption over time has been identified as one of the hindrances to the growth and economic development of democracy in Nigeria. It is most often seen as the perversion of public good or will for personal growth and advancement by public officers. In his view, Duru (2012) stated that corruption has a long history and it is an endemic which is

well known in every society, both in the developed and developing economies of the world. Scott-Joynt (2010) reported the alarming rate at which corruption takes place amongst government officials in France, where many of them had corruption allegations hanging over them and in Mexico, where the people battled a long-time corruption regime.

The concept “corruption” like many other concepts in social sciences, has no one generally acceptable definition. What this means is that many scholars have given their different views and postulations about the concept. Brownsberger (1983) sees corruption as the misapplication of public resources to private ends. When public holders divert public goods or resources to benefit their private lives, and family corruption takes place. Thus, when public officers take bribes and add illegal taxes to the services they render, corruption is evident. To Olusoga (1981) corruption is any transaction that contravenes the responsibility of a public officer with the aim of acquiring state resources illegally for personal enrichment and gratification. The above definition sees corruption as an act exhibited by only public office holders who are seen in the public realms forgetting that private individuals also engage in corrupt activities. Lipset (1995) posits that corruption is the deviation from public laws and regulations with the intention to take advantage of one’s public position to advance one's private gains. The public officer is therefore seen as negating every law guiding and regulating the financial process just to achieve his or her personal targets.

In line with the above, Defiem (1995) defines corruption as the sidestepping of the laid-down procedures or rules, which determine social activities. When public officers overlook the laid-down rules and regulations guiding their affairs in order to advance their personal objectives, corruption is said to take place. Mauro (1995) sees corruption as a framework used by individuals or groups to gain influence and determine the activities of the bureaucracy. Corruption in this sense is mostly seen to take place in the official public sector, where a group of individuals who participate in the decision-making process to a greater extent use their institutions to advance corruption. Salawu (2007) assert that corruption represents a shift from the ideal and correct procedure of carrying out activities such as the exchange of goods and services on the part of everybody that resides within the society.

As can be seen, political corruption has become a household name as a result of the fact that its manifestations know no bounds. Globally, political corruption seems ubiquitous and has continued to impact negatively on the socio-economic and political leadership of many nations. In fact, its magnitude and prevalence have continued to pose a serious threat to governance. It could be noted that political corruption exists in every clam but its manifestations differ substantially, especially based on the level of institutionalisation and development in each society. Essentially, political corruption occurs when political decision-makers manipulate policies and procedures to maintain their power and wealth, often at the expense of fair resource allocation (Mohammed & Muslim, 2025). In this view, this form of corruption can distort democratic processes and hinder effective governance, as decisions may favor a select few rather than the larger population. Political corruption can lead to a misallocation of resources that stifles economic growth, exacerbates social inequalities, and fosters an environment where the rule of law is weakened (Mohammed & Muslim, 2025). Earlier, Oghuvbu (2021) opines

that “political corruption occurs when decision makers, policymakers, and those who implement the laws participate in the types of unethical activities mentioned within the domain of leadership and the exercise of government power”. In other words, Oghuvbu (2021) further noted that “when laws and regulations are made for the benefit of politicians and their self-interests, political corruption exists”.

It is important to note that political corruption is one of the maladies that destroy a society. Its consequences are monumental. It retards economic growth and endangers justice system. This is because it affects every facet of society. Political corruption deteriorates state institutions, undermines policy-making and implementation and promotes self-centered agenda above collectivity and general good. According to Oghuvbu (2021) the propelling force of political corruption is egocentricity. Its antithesis is selflessness. So altruism in political leadership is the albatross of political corruption. Consequently, confronting political corruption successfully becomes feasible only when the crime fighters are not *prima facie* criminals.

Indeed, political corruption involves the manoeuvring of the state institutions and rules for the benefit of an individual or a group of people. Political corruption is a deviation from the rational-legal values and principles of the modern state and leads to institutional decay. Corruption promotes economic decay and social and political instability, perverts the ability of the state to foster rule of law, and eventually corrodes trust and undermines legitimacy (Ghana Center for Democratic Development 2001). No doubt that Nigeria is one of the developing nations struggling with growing incidences of political corruption.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the theory of extractive corruption. Thus, Amundsen (1999) discussed the interplay between the elites’ establishment of an authoritarian regime and their use of such regimes to appropriate public funds for personal benefits. The theory of extractive corruption unveiled the state-society relationship. It explains that the dominant force in every society is the elites who use state apparatuses to perpetuate their stay and hold on to state power. It therefore emphasizes the authoritarian character and neo-patrimonial tendencies of the state. The extractive theory of corruption explains that the over-concentration of powers of government in the hands of a few elites empowers the elite to abuse such powers, operate a transactional government where political corruption remains the order of the day and availing them the opportunity to rely on it to divert commonwealth for personal use. That is, the more political power is concentrated exclusively in the hands of a few individuals, the greater the temptation for political corruption, selfish wealth-seeking and primitive extraction (Amundsen 1999).

The extractive theory explains that authoritarian rulers are using the power capabilities of the state in the struggle for power, to ensure personal enrichment, attain and increase their powers, and to accumulate resources from the nation’s commonwealth and from the ruled, for private benefit. The two broad areas that allow the establishment and continuous expansion of the

programme of extractive theory of corruption are the adoption or use of an authoritarian regime or neo-patrimonialism.

Essentially, there is a kind of surreptitious act of connivance among the elites who established a government that promotes their interests by creating a sophisticated but “weak” institutional arrangement agreeable to corrupt practices. This pattern of amenable institutional arrangement exists in virtually all forms or levels of government in Nigeria. The institutions are weak to the extent that they facilitate a patronage system and serve as a conduit pipe for political corruption.

Following from the above, understanding the unquenchable menace of political corruption in Nigeria, is understanding the patterns of institutions designated for the fight against political corruption, the character of the state and the character of the personnel saddled with the responsibility of fighting political corruption in Nigeria. Extractive theory unveils the linkages and connivance among these three elements in explaining the occurrence, sustenance and continuity of political corruption in Nigeria. Institutionally, the EFCC remains hugely ineffective, with several allegations of selectivity in its investigation and overbearing influence of the executive arm of government.

Sadly, virtually all the former EFCC chairmen have either been accused of corruption or prosecuted for corruption. For instance, former EFCC chairmen Ibrahim Magu and Abdulrasheed Bawa faced prosecution for alleged corruption practices while in office (Balugun, 2020). Presently, the former Attorney General of Federal, Abubakar Malami, is being prosecuted for alleged illegal acquisition of 57 properties while in office (Odeniyi & Shaibu, 2026). Since 1999, when Nigeria returned to democracy, to date, more 20% of former governors of various states in Nigeria have been prosecuted for political corruption, with the majority of them found guilty by the court of law.

Also, in recent years, there were very damaging allegations of bribery against the leadership of the EFCC. For instance, in 2023, the former governor of Zamfara state alleged that the former EFCC chairman, Abdulrasheed Bawa was demanding a \$2 million bribe from him. More recently, in 2024, the Nigerian Bar Association demanded an investigation into an allegation that some EFCC officers were demanding a bribe of N15 million from Bobrisky to drop the allegation of money laundering.

Following from the above, extractive theory is essential if not the foundation of this study. This is because it is able mirror and indeed unveils why weak institutions are established by authoritarian regimes and how elites who manipulate these institutions to their personal benefit perpetuate themselves in power as well as perpetuate political corruption. Thus, political elites drive political corruption and utilize the instrumentality of weak state agencies. In this sense, political corruption occurs when decision-makers and political elites manipulate public policies and procedures to maintain their wealth, perpetuate themselves in power, often at the expense of fair resource allocation.

The EFCC and the Dilemma of Political Corruption in Nigeria, 2002-2025

The Nigerian state has over the years struggle to stamp out political corruption but the more the state devised measures to battle the monster the more it (corruption) develop resistant measures. Presently, it appears as if corruption has successfully and deeply been rooted. No doubt, virtually all state institutions appear to have been overwhelmed. This state of affairs made Nigeria to earn an unenviable position as one of the 40 most corrupt nations globally. The Nigerian police are frequently at the centre of corruption cases, not really in the fight against corruption, but rather the activities of the institution and the personnel are shamelessly enmeshed in corruption. For instance, Essien (2025) recently reported the illegal sale of strategic national assets, Garki Police Barracks (Abuja), to private individuals linked to Exima Realty Ltd., without required approvals. More recently, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) agreed that it mistakenly paid a N100 million to Victor Egbetokun, the son of the immediate past Inspector General of Police Kayode Egbetokun (Adeuyi, 2026). The N100 million was a security fund for Anambra State. Strangely, the Police later reversed the transaction and argued that such transaction was made in error with no sufficient answers on why such funds would be transferred to individual. There are also several accusations of extortion, bribery and even the involvement of some fraudulent officers in criminal activities including renting their arms to criminals.

On the other hand, other anti-graft agencies such as ICPC and the Code of Conduct Bureau have, over the years, remained under the control of the executive arm of government and obviously been used to harass or intimidate political rivals in Nigeria. For instance, the Code of Conduct Bureau failed to conclusively investigate the former Senate President, Bukola Saraki, who was brought before the Commission on a 13-count charge of corruption levelled against him by the Code of Conduct Bureau. Incidentally, anti-graft agencies in Nigeria have been in the spotlight for either being manipulated by an organ of government or being used as an instrument of witch-hunt to persecute perceived political opponents of those in power.

In more than two decades now, the EFCC has existed as one of Nigeria's anti-graft agencies. There is also mixed commentary on EFCC performance and trajectory. No doubt, the agency (EFCC) has focused on discharging its constitutional role of identification and prosecution of individuals and organizations whose activities are considered to be corrupt. However, there exists a mammoth of conflicting commentaries on the extent to which the EFCC has judiciously and effectively discharged its responsibilities. This is not unconnected to the fact that some personnel of the EFCC and the institution have been severally accused of corrupt practices.

Thus, most of the studies have focused on EFCC performances, measured by the number of arrests made, number of cases filed, number of convictions secured and the number high profile politicians facing trial (Okechukwu, 2021; Okafor, 2024; Ibuomo, 2024). Incidentally, little attention has been directed towards investigating the actions or activities of the personnel of the EFCC and other personnel overseeing the functioning of the EFCC. Such investigations are germane as they may also unravel reasons why many investigated cases remain inconclusive and others are pending in the courts.

As can be seen, the subordination of the commission's actions (arrest and prosecution) to the office of the Attorney-General of the Federation is arguably the most difficult in the framework of judicial procedure and legal provisions of the EFCC (Ibuomo, 2024). This has led many of the Attorney-General of the Federation to discontinue corruption cases against his political allies, party members, and indeed immunizes himself against any corruption charges. For instance, the former Attorney-General of the Federation, Micheal Aondoakaa, faced several cases of alleged corruption charges at the end of the late former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's administration. Very recently, the immediate past Attorney-General of the Federation, Abubakar Malami, was in the storm again as the Federal High Court ordered him to forfeit 57 properties valued at approximately N213.2 billion, following his arraignment by the EFCC, the same institution he superintended her affairs for eight years.

Obviously, the EFCC's ability to effectively combat corruption is threatened by the judiciary's protracted delays in resolving cases of corruption that it has placed before it and the constitutional inadequacy that subordinates its activities under the office of the Attorney-General of the Federation. These issues not only stall investigation or cause the agency to overlook obvious cases of corruption, but also tend to mock the entire process and the crusade against corruption in Nigeria. For instance, many cases have been abandoned by the EFCC for reasons not known to the public. Oluwole & Omilabu (2022) noted that the EFCC has not done anything about N84 Billion Naira that was missing at the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), and nothing has been said about the N311 Billion Naira that was missing at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

On the other hand, the officials of the EFCC in some incidents presented themselves as the same members in the "Cathedral of Corruption". Several allegations of demand for bribes and patronage against some EFCC officials are disheartening and poses severe threat to public trust. For instance, Sanusi (2023) stated that the Governor of Zamfara State, Bello Matawalle, has accused the former Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Chairman, Abdulrasheed Bawa, of demanding a two-million-dollar bribe from him. The issue here is not primarily the amount of money demanded, but the person who oversees the operations of the anti-corruption agency is involved in the unholy act. It therefore questions the integrity and transparency of the agency. In all, reducing, if not completely eliminating, corruption in Nigeria demands that the searchlight be turned to the EFCC as an institution by repealing major inadequacies in its establishment act. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, is to utilize background search or investigation on the prospective officials before they are appointed, and if found guilty of political corruption after appointment, they must face severe consequences as prescribed by the law.

Conclusion

We reiterated that this paper interrogated the Nigerian State and the fight against political corruption with a specific focus on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. The study noted, even though one may arguably state that the state has made a modicum of progress in this regard, it is not yet "uhuru". It argued that the major problem of fighting political corruption in Nigeria lies squarely in the complexities that fraught with the EFCC's enabling act and the

failures of institutions such as the EFCC, which is designated to curb political corruption. It demonstrated how numerous incidences of political corruption involving top-ranking officials of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and other sister agencies in the crusade against corruption in Nigeria threatened the entire process of the anti-corruption crusade. The paper, therefore, concluded that purging the Nigerian State of political corruption requires a critical look at the agencies entrusted with the responsibility of anti-corruption in Nigeria. It recommends the need to end the supervisory role of the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of the Federation over the EFCC, and that a thorough background search or investigation should be made on the prospective officials before appointment, and if found guilty of political corruption after appointment, they must face severe consequences as prescribed by the law.

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