

POWER DYNAMICS WITHIN THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRIMES COMMISSION (EFCC) AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the power dynamics and politics within the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) of Nigeria and its implications on national security. As a critical institution in combating corruption, the EFCC operates within a complex socio-political and economic environment. Using the Power Dynamics Theory as a bases of analysis to underscore the role of power and politics in influencing decision-making in organizational setting. This study employed a qualitative approach in, analyzing recent data from government reports, academic publications, textbooks and media sources. The findings reveal that while the EFCC has made strides in curbing financial crimes, issues such as political interference, resource constraints, and public perception undermine its efficacy. These dynamics have far-reaching consequences, including weakened economic stability, diminished public trust, and heightened security risks. The study underscores the need for enhanced institutional autonomy, improved funding, and strategic reforms to strengthen the EFCC's role in safeguarding national security.

KEYWORDS: corruption, Power dynamics, Politics, EFCC, Leadership,

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are complex social entities deliberately constructed to achieve specific objectives and goals. Power and politics are inherent elements of organizational life, shaping decision-making processes, influencing behavior, and often determining the direction and effectiveness of institutional performance. Individuals within an organization play a crucial role in carrying out its activities thus organizations do not operate in isolation (D'Oliveira & Persico, 2023; Artar & Erdil, 2024). The organizational structure and functions define the roles and responsibilities of individuals and groups, influencing their behaviour and interactions. These interactions exemplified Organizations as inherently political entities where power dynamics shape decision-making, resource allocation, and overall effectiveness.

In the context of anti-corruption agencies, such dynamics become even more pronounced, given the sensitive nature of their mandates and the powerful interests they often confront. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) of Nigeria, established in 2003 to combat economic and financial crimes, has emerged as a central actor in the nation's fight against corruption. However, beyond its publicized operations and high-profile prosecutions lies a complex web of internal and external power struggles, political

interference, and organizational maneuvering that significantly affect its effectiveness, autonomy, and legitimacy. Though a lot of studies have been done on the EFCC and anti-corruption agencies in Africa and Nigeria in particular (Thompson, Oladele, Aina and Adekola, 2024), adequate attention has not been given to the power dynamics of the body in Nigeria.

Therefore, the paper aims to address the gap in existing research by exploring the impact of power dynamics and politics within the EFCC with ITS implications for national security. Drawing on organizational theory and the concept of bureaucratic politics, the study critically interrogates the tension between institutional mandate and political expediency. It also considers how these dynamics affect perceptions of impartiality and justice, particularly in a country where anti-corruption efforts are often accused of being weaponized for political vendettas. The research questions arising from the study are: What are the power dynamics and organisational politics and its manifestations in the EFCC and How has this affected the workings of the organisation? By focusing on the EFCC as a case study, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how power and politics operate within public institutions in Nigeria. It underscores the need for organizational reform and political will to insulate such agencies from undue influence, while also highlighting the structural and human factors that perpetuate cycles of institutional vulnerability and selective

enforcement. Ultimately, the study aims to offer insights that can inform both scholarly discourse and policy interventions in the governance of anti-corruption institutions. The study adopts a qualitative method. Secondary sources of data were used to collect the data for the study. This included government reports, books, newspaper, academic publications, and media sources. The study was analysed through content analysis and interpreted thematically and through descriptive narrative.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Corruption remains one of the most pervasive challenges undermining governance, development, and institutional integrity in Nigeria. Scholars define corruption broadly as the abuse of public office for private gain (Transparency International, 2020), manifesting in forms such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and political patronage (Lawal & Tobi, 2006). The deep entrenchment of corruption in Nigeria's political and bureaucratic systems has led to the creation of specialized institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), established in 2003 to combat economic and financial crimes.

According to Can Bicer (2020) organizations, being social systems comprised of individuals with diverse interests, can readily become platforms for political maneuvering. As individuals, and groups strive to maximize their benefits within the organization, particularly in resource-scarce environments, power struggles and competing interests often emerge. He explores how individuals within organizations utilizes power dynamics and political maneuvering to achieve their goals. This is a testament to the fact that organizations be it formal, informal, governmental or nongovernmental are indeed complex political arenas where employees navigate power dynamics, make choices about how to respond to others' actions and balance their own interests and values.

Academic assessments of the EFCC's effectiveness have been mixed. Some scholars acknowledge its successes in securing high-profile convictions and raising public awareness on corruption (Ibrahim et al, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2011). However, critics argue that the Commission is often compromised by political interference, selective prosecutions, and weak judicial support (Okon, 2005; Ayoade, 2013; Bello & Cosmas, 2022). Obuiah (2010) notes that government interference and policy discontinuities further weaken the agency's operations. Thompson et al (2024) describe the activities of the agency as becoming embarrassing with its night raids in spite ceasing such. These challenges highlight the relevance of power dynamics theory in understanding the EFCC's role.

This study employs the Power Dynamics Theory, which explores how power is distributed, exercised, and sustained within organizations (Pfeffer, 1992; Weber, 1947). The theory offers insights into the intricate relationships of power and their influence on organizational behavior. It serves as a useful lens for analyzing how individuals and groups acquire power, leverage it to shape decisions and actions, and perpetuate their influence over time. According to Emerson (1962), power is not an inherent attribute of individuals but is embedded in relationships among people and groups. This relational view challenges traditional conceptions of authority as a static possession, instead portraying power as fluid formed and redefined through interaction, interdependence, and social dynamics. This aligns with broader sociological and political science perspectives that treat power as negotiable and contextual.

One of the foundational theorists in this area, Max Weber (1947), made significant contributions to understanding power and authority within organizations. He differentiated between 'power' which is the capacity to enforce one's will despite opposition and 'authority' power that is perceived as legitimate by those subject to it. Weber identified three distinct types of authority: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational. His analysis of bureaucratic structures emphasized efficiency, order, and rule-based governance, arguing that bureaucracies are the most effective administrative systems. His framework continues to inform contemporary debates on governance, institutional control, and organizational management."

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND POWER DYNAMICS

The EFCC's organizational structure reflects a hierarchical model typical of law enforcement agencies, with a chairman appointed by the President of Nigeria, subject to Senate confirmation, leading a workforce of investigators, prosecutors, and administrative staff across 15 zonal commands. Power within the EFCC is centralized at the top, with the chairman wielding significant authority over strategy, operations, and public-facing activities. However, this structure also creates internal and external power dynamics that shape the agency's effectiveness. This can be divided into internal and external power dynamics.

INTERNAL POWER DYNAMICS

Leadership Transitions and Patronage

Leadership Transitions and Institutional Autonomy: The study found that leadership changes within the EFCC significantly impact its performance. Different chairpersons have adopted varying approaches to enforcement, often

reflecting the political climate at the time. For instance, under Nuhu Ribadu's tenure, the EFCC was perceived as highly proactive, securing high-profile convictions. However, later leadership transitions saw a decline in aggressive anti-corruption efforts, with reports of political interference affecting case selection. The frequent changes in EFCC leadership, often driven by political decisions, create internal power struggles. Since its inception, the EFCC has seen multiple chairmen (e.g., Nuhu Ribadu, Farida Waziri, Ibrahim Lamorde, Ibrahim Magu, Abdulrasheed Bawa, and Ola Olukoyede as of 2023), with several dismissals or suspensions tied to political interference or allegations of misconduct. For instance, Ibrahim Magu's suspension in 2020 amid corruption allegations highlighted how internal power dynamics can be destabilized by external political pressures. These transitions often lead to redeployments of key personnel, disrupting investigations and creating factions loyal to different leaders.

Political Influence and Centralized Control

One of the key findings is that the EFCC's effectiveness is often shaped by political influence. While the agency is mandated to operate independently, political affiliations frequently dictate its priorities. For example, between 2003 and 2007, the EFCC secured **270 convictions**, including the prosecution of a former governor. However, subsequent administrations have been accused of using the EFCC selectively to target political opponents while shielding allies from scrutiny. Investigators and field operatives possess significant operational power due to their role in gathering evidence and building cases. However, their autonomy is constrained by the chairman's strategic priorities and external pressures from politically exposed persons (PEP). This tension can lead to selective enforcement, where certain cases are prioritized or sidelined based on political considerations rather than merit.

Inadequate Resource Allocation

Resource Constraints: Inadequate budgetary allocations limit the EFCC's capacity to recruit qualified personnel, invest in forensic tools, or expand its operations. An average annual budget of \$67 million has been deemed insufficient for tackling systemic corruption. The EFCC's reliance on federal government funding creates internal competition for resources, as different units (e.g., Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt commands) vie for budgetary support. The Lagos command, for example, secured 765 convictions in 2022, reflecting its resource prioritization, while other commands lagged. This uneven distribution can foster internal rivalries and affect morale. Financial allocations within the

EFCC may be influenced by political maneuvering, affecting resource distribution and operational effectiveness.

Selective Enforcement and Political Vendettas

The EFCC has been accused of selective enforcement, where investigations and prosecutions appear to target political opponents of the incumbent government. Under Nuhu Ribadu (2003–2007), the EFCC was praised for its aggressive pursuit of high-profile figures but criticized for aligning with President Olusegun Obasanjo's political agenda. For instance, Ribadu's attempt to prosecute James Ibori, a close ally of Obasanjo's successor, led to his ousting. Recent cases, such as the prosecution of former Kogi State governor Yahaya Bello for alleged N80.2 billion fraud, have been framed by critics as politically motivated, with coalitions urging the EFCC to avoid defamation. This perception of the EFCC as a tool for political vendettas undermines its credibility. The Punch publication of 18th September, 2018 highlighted concerns about the EFCC impartiality, with allegations of being used as a tool for Political witch-hunting. The freezing of accounts of Benue and Akwa Ibom States governments in 2018, both governed by opposition parties, sparked widespread criticism. Stakeholders questioned the EFCC's motives, suggesting a bias towards the ruling party and the EFCC's decision to freeze accounts was potentially influenced by political consideration. However, their decision to subsequently unfreeze the accounts of Benue and Akwa Ibom State governments after 72 hours highlights the potential impact of political games on the commission's decision-making process and underscore how external forces influence conduct of investigations and which cases are prioritized.

EXTERNAL POWER DYNAMICS

Political Influence and Interference

The EFCC operates in a context where political elites hold significant power. The agency's mandate to investigate PEPs, including governors and ministers, often pits it against powerful figures who can influence its operations through lobbying, legal challenges, or direct interference. For example, the failure to prosecute former Rivers State governor Peter Odili, despite substantial evidence, was attributed to his political connections and a favorable court ruling. Such as government officials or influential stakeholders, may support certain individuals within the EFCC to advance their own interests. This can lead to favoritism in appointments and decision-making. The appointment of chief Executive officers of EFCC over the years remain subject of controversy with accusations of successive administrations appointing CEO's Based on political considerations undermining the agency's independence and effectiveness. The appointment of Magu as the Acting Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes

commission during President Buhari's administration was indeed controversial where allegations of bias and family ties were raised, sparking debates about conflicts of interest. In a similar vein the appointment of Olukayode as the Chairman of EFCC by the present administration of President Bola Tinubu has been subjected to controversy, with accusations of lopsided appointment for political reasons defying federal character (Omolaoye, 2024). However, the presidency defended his appointment citing his experience as chief of staff of the EFCC chairman from 2018-2020 as a qualification for the role.

Judicial System Constraints

The EFCC's dependence on Nigeria's judiciary for prosecutions introduces another layer of external power dynamics. The courts, often criticized for inefficiency and susceptibility to corruption, can delay or derail cases. The EFCC has faced frustration from senior legal counsels and judges colluding to subvert justice, undermining its authority.

Public Perception and Pressure

The EFCC's public image as a corruption fighter creates a dynamic where societal expectations exert pressure on its operations. Public criticism, as seen in posts on the social questioning the agency's impartiality or demographic composition, can influence its strategic decisions, pushing it to pursue high-profile cases to maintain legitimacy. Any wonder Thompson et al (2024) describes it as more of a thief at night because of its illegal operations which has made it lose public trust.

Difficulty of Prosecuting High-Profile cases

Another critical finding is the difficulty in prosecuting high-profile cases due to political and institutional constraints. The EFCC has faced challenges in securing convictions against influential figures, as legal and bureaucratic hurdles often delay proceedings. The claim by Onyeme et al. (2018), as cited in Lawal A. Bakare (2023), highlights a significant concern regarding the selective prosecution of political figures by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The assertion that only four members of the political class were prosecuted through dubious plea bargain deals out of over 400 convictions between 1999 and 2007 suggests a pattern of political shielding and negotiated settlements rather than full judicial accountability.

Internal Politicking and Careerism

Internal politics within the EFCC is evident in the redeployment of officers following leadership changes. New chairmen often transfer investigators loyal to predecessors, disrupting case continuity and fostering a culture of allegiance

over merit. This practice, noted in research, hampers the agency's efficiency and creates a politicized work environment. The dismissal of 27 officers in 2024 for fraudulent activities and misconduct suggests efforts to curb internal corruption but also highlights how personal agendas can infiltrate the agency. It is also subject to frequent political interference, which reduces its effectiveness and means that it is often seen as an extension or an arm of the incumbent government, without an independent mandate. (Babatunde and Filani 2016) cited in Ace Anti-corruption Evidence 2019. Nuhu Ribadu the pioneer chairman of EFCC whose tenure spanned from 2003-2007 was marked by significant achievements and gaining international recognition as prominent anti-corruption agency yet his tenure was faced with criticism for allegedly targeting political opponents of president Olusegun Obasanjo. And his subsequent removal in 2007 highlighted the EFCC's vulnerability to political influence and control by the government in Power.

Lack of Synergy with other Enforcement agencies

The EFCC's interactions with bodies like the ICPC and CCB often involve jurisdictional and resource-based tensions, despite its broader mandate. Overlapping cases require collaboration, but inter-agency rivalry can hinder effectiveness. Additionally, global actors like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) influence the EFCC's operations by setting anti-money laundering benchmarks, sometimes shifting focus away from local priorities. Political interference further complicates matters—when influential figures within or around these agencies are politically compromised, professional independence may be undermined. This can lead to selective enforcement and public skepticism, weakening trust in the EFCC and its ability to combat corruption effectively.

These findings suggest that while the EFCC plays a crucial role in Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts, its effectiveness is heavily influenced by political dynamics, leadership transitions, and institutional constraints. Strengthening its autonomy and reducing political interference are essential for enhancing its ability to combat corruption effectively.

IMPLICATION OF THE EFCC POWER DYNAMICS ON NATIONAL SECURITY

The interplay of power dynamics and politics within and around the EFCC creates several challenges and negative impacts for the agency. These are erosion of independence, inefficient judicial process, public trust deficit among others. However, the most debilitating of them is the implication on national security. One of the most pressing but often overlooked consequences of institutional power dynamics within the EFCC is the erosion of trust and coordination across Nigeria's broader security and law enforcement architecture. This phenomenon,

often termed "**security sector distrust**," manifests in several critical ways:

1. Infighting Among Agencies

The EFCC operates alongside other key security and intelligence agencies, such as the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Department of State Services (DSS), the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), and the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU). However, rather than collaborating toward shared national objectives, these institutions often find themselves in conflict—competing for jurisdiction, resources, media attention, and influence. A prime example is the turf war between the EFCC and DSS, which has led to embarrassing public confrontations. In some instances, DSS operatives have blocked EFCC agents from executing court orders, while the EFCC has accused other agencies of shielding corrupt individuals. This rivalry undermines the credibility of all involved and signals institutional disunity to the public.

IMPACTS ON COUNTER-TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME

Organized crime and terrorism financing require sophisticated, coordinated responses. Criminal networks often exploit weak institutional coordination to move funds, launder proceeds, and evade justice. When security agencies do not trust one another or are unwilling to share intelligence, it creates **loopholes** that criminal and terrorist groups can exploit. For example, Boko Haram, bandit gangs, and oil theft cartels depend heavily on financial networks to sustain their operations. Disjointed institutional efforts—where EFCC tracks suspicious financial flows while DSS focuses on field intelligence without collaboration—delay response times and reduce investigative efficacy.

WEAK INTER-AGENCY COMMUNICATION

In many cases, critical intelligence is not shared promptly because agencies operate in silos. Fear of leaks, rivalry, or political manipulation discourages transparency and communication. This delays arrests, hinders asset recovery, and reduces the state's ability to prevent financial crimes that fund insecurity. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) operates in a complex and often contentious environment where its interactions with other Nigerian security agencies, such as the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Department of State Services (DSS), and the Nigerian Army, are frequently marked by rivalry. This inter-agency tension, driven by overlapping mandates, competition for control over high-profile cases, and a lack of clear delineation of roles, significantly undermines operational efficiency and poses a threat to national security. Overlapping mandates and

jurisdictional conflicts have led to the EFCC engaging in broad day fisticuffs with sister agencies over suspects. This overlap leads to jurisdictional disputes, as agencies compete to assert authority over cases, particularly those involving high-profile individuals. For example, in 2017, the EFCC and DSS clashed over the arrest of a former DSS Director-General, with each agency claiming primacy, resulting in a public standoff that embarrassed the government and delayed justice. Similarly, cases involving former governors or top politicians have seen agencies like the NPF and EFCC tussle over custody, with each accusing the other of obstructing investigations. In 2023, the EFCC's attempt to arrest a former Central Bank governor was reportedly obstructed by operatives from another agency, leading to a public dispute that played out in the media. This incident highlighted how competition for control can escalate into open confrontations, with agencies deploying personnel to secure suspects or evidence at the expense of cooperation.

Fragmented Intelligence Sharing: Rivalries discourage agencies from sharing critical intelligence. For example, if the EFCC uncovers evidence of money laundering linked to terrorism but fails to share it with the DSS due to mistrust, the opportunity to disrupt terrorist networks is lost. This fragmentation is particularly dangerous in Nigeria, where financial crimes often intersect with security threats like insurgency and banditry. Such lacuna may lead to the movement of the cash or its use for other deadly attacks on infrastructures which are still not only dilapidated but grossly inadequate.

Vulnerability to External Threats: The lack of cohesive inter-agency action makes Nigeria more vulnerable to transnational crimes, such as cybercrime and illicit financial flows, which require coordinated responses. For instance, Nigeria's ranking on the Global Organized Crime Index reflects weaknesses in its law enforcement coordination, which rivalries exacerbate. In summary, security sector distrust undermines national security by fracturing the chain of cooperation needed to tackle complex crimes. Without institutional reforms that promote clarity, collaboration, and mutual respect among agencies like the EFCC, DSS, and NPF, Nigeria will continue to face preventable security and governance crises.

CONCLUSION

The EFCC's role as Nigeria's leading anti-corruption agency places it in a vortex of power dynamics and organizational politics, both internally and externally. The EFCC remains a critical institution in Nigeria's fight against economic and financial crimes, with significant implications for national security. However, its effectiveness is hampered by systemic challenges, including political interference and limited

resources, which erode its ability to function as a robust deterrent. Strengthening the EFCC requires comprehensive reforms, such as ensuring greater institutional independence, enhancing capacity through training and technology, and fostering public trust through transparent operations. By addressing these issues, the EFCC can better mitigate the economic and security threats posed by financial crimes, contributing to a more stable and secure Nigeria. Future research should focus on evaluating the impact of proposed reforms and exploring comparative models from other nations to further enhance the EFCC's efficacy.

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