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Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC): An Instrument of Selective Justice in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has been established in 2003 to combat pervasive corruption and financial crimes. The role of the EFCC in Nigeria, focusing on its perceived function as an instrument of selective justice. Moreover, it has faced significant criticism regarding its operational integrity and impartiality. The research critically examines and analyzes the concept of selective justice, highlighting how political affiliations and external influences impact the commission's effectiveness. The present study emphasizes the need for reforms to enhance the EFCC's independence, transparency, and accountability. In furtherance, through case studies of high-profile individuals, including politicians and public officials, the study illustrates instances of selective enforcement, raising concerns about the EFCC's commitment to impartiality. Furthermore, the recommendations comprise of strengthening institutional frameworks, promoting public awareness, and fostering collaboration with international bodies. Also, the findings revealed that the EFCC is often perceived as a tool for political manipulation, undermining public trust and fostering a culture of impunity among political elites. This perception not only hampers the EFCC's credibility but also deters citizen engagement in anti-corruption efforts. The study underscores the critical relationship between political influence, public perception, and the efficacy of anti-corruption strategies, offering insights into the broader implications for governance in Nigeria. Thus, by addressing these issues, the EFCC can work towards becoming a more effective agency in the fight against corruption, ultimately contributing to improved governance and national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: EFCC, Selective Justice, Political Influence, Corruption, Accountability.

Introduction

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was established in 2003 as a response to Nigeria's pervasive corruption and financial crimes. EFCC establishment has been a mandate to investigate and prosecute economic and financial offenses, including fraud, money laundering, and public sector corruption (Edeh et al., 2022). The establishment of the EFCC marked a significant step in the Nigerian government's efforts to combat corruption, which has long been recognized as a major impediment to national development and economic stability (Obuah, 2010). However, despite its noble intentions, EFCC has faced criticism regarding its operational integrity and impartiality, leading to widespread perceptions that it functions as an instrument of selective justice. Selective justice refers to the practice of applying legal standards and enforcement selectively, often influenced by political affiliations, social status, or other extraneous factors rather than objective criteria (Geng, 2023). In the context of the EFCC, this concept raises critical questions about the commission's effectiveness and credibility as it navigates a complex political landscape marked by entrenched corruption and power dynamics. This introduction aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the EFCC, its operational framework, and the allegations of selective justice that have emerged over the years.

The EFCC has been enacted under the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act of 2004, which outlines its powers and responsibilities. The commission operates under the auspices of the Nigerian government and is tasked with enforcing laws related to economic and financial crimes (Rex, 2020). Its primary objectives include the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of financial crimes, as well as the recovery of proceeds of such crimes (EFCC, 2024). The EFCC has made notable strides in its efforts to combat corruption, securing several high-profile convictions and recovering substantial sums of money believed to be proceeds of corruption. However, the EFCC's operations have frequently been clouded by allegations of bias and political manipulation. The critics have argued that the commission's actions often reflect the interests of those in power, leading to accusations of selective enforcement against political opponents while overlooking similar offenses committed by members of the ruling party (Bello & Cosmas, 2022). This perception of bias undermines the EFCC's credibility and raises concerns about the legitimacy of its prosecutions.

Numerous studies have examined the implications of selective justice in Nigeria, highlighting the detrimental effects on public trust in institutions and the rule of law. For instance, Ajagun (2010) emphasizes that selective justice fosters a culture of impunity, where individuals perceive that legal consequences are contingent upon political connections rather than adherence to the law. This perception can deter whistle-blowers and inhibit cooperation with anti-corruption efforts, ultimately undermining the fight against corruption. The political landscape in Nigeria is characterized by a history of patronage and clientelism, where political loyalty often supersedes ethical considerations. This environment creates fertile ground for selective justice, as the EFCC may be pressured to act against political adversaries while sparing allies from scrutiny. Umar et al. (2018) notes that the EFCC's effectiveness is compromised when its actions are perceived as politically motivated, leading to skepticism about the commission's commitment to impartiality.

Furthermore, the EFCC's leadership and operational independence have been subjects of scrutiny. The appointment of the EFCC chairman is often influenced by political considerations, raising concerns about the commission's autonomy in carrying out its mandate. Scholars like Ajagun (2010) argue that the lack of a robust legal framework to guarantee the EFCC's independence contributes to the perception of selective justice, as political actors may exert influence over the commission's priorities and actions. In addition to internal challenges faced by the EFCC, external factors also play a role in shaping its operations.

Literature Review

The review of literature has been reviewed thoroughly under various captions for wider understanding.

Historical Context of EFCC

The EFCC's establishment in 2003 was a response to the rampant corruption that plagued Nigeria, particularly during the military regimes. The commission was designed to restore public confidence in governance and create a more transparent system of accountability (Edeh et al., 2022). The EFCC operates under the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act of 2004, which outlines its functions and powers, including the authority to investigate, prosecute, and recover assets linked to financial crimes (Rex, 2020).

Pre-EFCC Era: A Legacy of Corruption

Before the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003, Nigeria was marred by a pervasive culture of corruption that infiltrated virtually every aspect of governance and public life. This legacy of corruption can be traced back to the colonial era but became particularly pronounced during the military regimes that dominated Nigerian politics from the 1960s until the late 1990s (Osoba, 1996; Mikai, 2016). The military coups of 1966 and subsequent takeovers led to a series of authoritarian regimes that prioritized power retention over democratic governance. These regimes were characterized by a blatant disregard for the rule of law, leading to widespread corruption among public officials. High-ranking military officers and politicians often engaged in embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, and bribery, creating an environment where financial misconduct was not only tolerated but often rewarded (Obuah, 2010; Hope, 2023).

During this period, the lack of accountability mechanisms allowed corrupt practices to flourish. The absence of an independent judiciary and a free press meant that officials could operate with impunity, further entrenching a culture of corruption. Public funds intended for development projects were frequently siphoned off into private accounts, and the resultant neglect of infrastructure and social services contributed to widespread poverty and underdevelopment (Ajibolade & Oboh, 2017). The ramifications of this corruption extended beyond the political elite; it permeated society as a whole. The erosion of public trust in government institutions was profound, as citizens witnessed the mismanagement of resources that should have been used for national development. This disillusionment fostered a sense of hopelessness among the populace, leading to increased apathy toward political engagement and governance (Obi et al., 2023). Moreover, the pervasive nature of corruption stunted Nigeria's economic growth. Investment in critical sectors such as education, health, and

infrastructure suffered significantly due to the diversion of funds. For instance, the neglect of the healthcare system resulted in inadequate medical facilities and services, contributing to poor health outcomes for millions of Nigerians (Adeloye et al., 2017).

The educational sector also faced similar challenges, with funds meant for improving schools often misappropriated, leading to a decline in educational standards. The transition to civilian rule in 1999, following years of military dictatorship, brought renewed hope for reform and accountability. The new democratic government, led by President Olusegun Obasanjo, was met with widespread public expectations for change. Citizens demanded a break from the past and called for effective measures to combat corruption and restore integrity in governance (Edeh et al., 2022). However, the challenges faced by the new administration were daunting. The entrenched corruption that had become deeply rooted in the political system posed significant obstacles to reform. Many of the same individuals who had thrived under military rule continued to wield influence in the new democratic landscape. This continuity of leadership made it difficult to implement meaningful changes and foster a culture of accountability (Edeh et al., 2022). As the new government struggled to address corruption, public outcry grew louder. The civil society organizations, the media, and ordinary citizens began to demand accountability from their leaders. The emergence of anti-corruption advocacy groups played a crucial role in mobilizing public sentiment against corruption, highlighting cases of financial misconduct and calling for transparency in government dealings (Enweremadu, 2012).

The demand for accountability was further fuelled by high-profile corruption scandals that continued to surface, involving politicians and public officials. These scandals not only reinforced public perceptions of a corrupt political system but also galvanized support for the establishment of institutions dedicated to fighting corruption, culminating in the creation of EFCC in 2003. The pre-EFCC era in Nigeria serves as a stark reminder of the challenges posed by entrenched corruption and the culture of impunity that can develop in the absence of robust accountability mechanisms (Nabiebu et al., 2023). The military regimes' legacy of corruption left a profound impact on Nigerian society, undermining public trust in governance and stifling economic development. The transition to civilian rule brought hope for reform, but the deep-seated nature of corruption necessitated the establishment of dedicated institutions like the EFCC to combat financial crimes and restore public confidence in governance. As Nigeria continues to grapple with these issues, the lessons learned from this era remain critical in shaping the future of anti-corruption efforts in the country.

Establishment of EFCC

In response to the growing demand for anti-corruption measures, the Nigerian government, under President Olusegun Obasanjo, established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003 (Duke & Agbaji, 2017). This initiative was part of a broader strategy aimed at tackling the rampant corruption and financial crimes that had plagued the nation for decades, significantly hindering its development. The establishment of the EFCC was a critical step toward restoring public trust in governance and demonstrating the government's commitment to addressing the pervasive issue of corruption. The EFCC was formally established under the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act of 2004, which provided a legal framework outlining its powers, functions, and responsibilities (Onyema et al., 2018). This legislative backing was essential for the

commission to operate effectively and assert its authority in combating financial crimes. The EFCC was designed to function independently, with the mandate to investigate and prosecute economic and financial crimes, thereby ensuring that those who engaged in corrupt practices would face legal consequences (Rex, 2020).

One of the primary objectives of EFCC is the prevention of economic and financial crimes, which include a wide range of illicit activities such as money laundering, fraud, and embezzlement (Agu, 2023). The commission was empowered to enforce various laws related to financial misconduct, including the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act and Advance Fee Fraud and Other Related Offences Act. These legal instruments provided the EFCC with the necessary tools to investigate financial crimes thoroughly and prosecute offenders effectively. The EFCC's establishment marked a significant commitment by the Nigerian government to combat corruption and restore public trust in governance. Moreover, by creating a specialized agency focusing on economic and financial crimes, the government signalled its recognition of the detrimental effects of corruption on national development. The EFCC's formation was also a response to international pressure and the need for Nigeria to improve its global image, particularly in light of its history of corruption and financial mismanagement. Since its establishment, the EFCC has undertaken numerous high-profile investigations and prosecutions, targeting both public officials and private individuals involved in corrupt practices. The commission has also engaged in public awareness campaigns aimed at educating citizens about the dangers of corruption and the importance of transparency and accountability in governance. These efforts have contributed to a gradual shift in public perception regarding corruption and the role of government institutions in addressing this issue (Edeh et al., 2022). Despite its achievements, the EFCC has faced significant challenges, including political interference, inadequate funding, and a lack of public trust in the justice system. Furthermore, the critics have often accused the commission of selective enforcement, suggesting that it sometimes targets political opponents rather than pursuing a comprehensive anti-corruption agenda. Such challenges highlight the complexities of fighting corruption in a political landscape where vested interests often resist accountability.

Concept of Selective Justice

Selective justice refers to the unequal or biased application of legal and judicial processes, typically influenced by political, economic, racial, or social factors (Geng, 2023). This concept contradicts the principle of equal treatment under the law, fostering perceptions of injustice and undermining the legitimacy of legal institutions. In international law, selective justice often surfaces in the uneven prosecution of crimes, where individuals or groups in power are shielded while opponents or marginalized communities face disproportionate scrutiny. For instance, Latifah (20203) highlights the criticism of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for focusing primarily on cases from Africa, raising concerns about biased prosecutorial selectivity. Such tendencies risk reinforcing geopolitical inequalities, as decisions on case selection often mirror global power dynamics. Domestically, selective justice manifests in prosecutorial discretion, racial disparities, and the use of legal frameworks to shield powerful actors (Lynch, 2018). In the UK, the Overseas Operations Bill exemplifies selective justice by creating significant barriers to prosecuting war crimes by military personnel while holding foreign perpetrators to stricter standards. This demonstrates how selective application of legal mechanisms can preserve systemic inequalities.

Selective justice raises critical ethical and institutional questions, as it not only contradicts the principles of fairness but also erodes public confidence in the justice system. Reform efforts often call for enhanced transparency, standardized procedures, and mechanisms to hold institutions accountable for bias or undue influence in judicial decision-making. Also, selective justice is particularly relevant in discussions about corruption and governance, especially in countries like Nigeria, where political dynamics heavily influence legal proceedings. In the Nigerian context, the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was intended to address corruption comprehensively; however, the commission has faced criticism for its selective enforcement practices. In furtherance, critics argued that the EFCC often targets political opponents of the ruling party while ignoring corrupt practices among its allies, thereby undermining its credibility and effectiveness (Edeh et al., 2022). Moreover, selective justice can exacerbate social inequalities. Those with connections to powerful political figures or significant financial resources may evade accountability, while marginalized groups often face harsher scrutiny and punishment. This disparity contributes to a sense of injustice among the populace and can fuel social unrest and conflict (Obuah, 2010). In addition to its social implications, selective justice poses significant challenges for economic development. When corruption is not addressed uniformly, it can deter foreign investment and hinder economic growth. Investors are often wary of engaging in environments where the rule of law is inconsistent, fearing that their interests may not be protected (Adebayo et al., 2019). Consequently, the perception of selective justice can have far-reaching consequences for a nation's economic stability and growth prospects.

Theoretical Perspectives on Selective Justice

Legal Positivism vs. Natural Law

Legal positivists argued that laws must be applied as written, regardless of morality (Marmor, 2006; Campbell, 2016). However, selective justice challenges this principle by subverting legal neutrality through biased enforcement. From a natural law perspective, selective justice represents a failure of the moral foundation of justice, which prioritizes fairness and equality (Killen, 2018).

Power & Justice Theories

Theories of power, such as Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, suggest that justice systems are not neutral but reflect the interests of those in power (Driver, 1985). In selective justice, power relations dictate who benefits or suffers from the application of laws, often creating systemic inequities.

Institutional Corruption

Klitgaard (1988) views selective justice as a symptom of institutional corruption. When political or economic elites can influence judicial outcomes, justice systems become tools for reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than promoting accountability.

Manifestations of Selective Justice

Selective justice manifests in various forms, often reflecting the socio-political context in which it occurs. Common examples include politically motivated prosecutions, biased law enforcement, and judicial favouritism.

1. Politically Motivated Prosecutions

Selective justice is frequently associated with the prosecution of political opponents. For instance, in authoritarian regimes, judicial systems are often co-opted to suppress dissent. Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has been accused of targeting opposition figures while sparing allies of the ruling party, reflecting a pattern of selective enforcement (Edeh et al., 2022). Similarly, in Russia, high-profile cases against political adversaries, such as the prosecution of Alexei Navalny, highlight the intersection of politics and justice (Etkind, 2023).

2. Biased Law Enforcement

Law enforcement agencies may exhibit selective justice by disproportionately targeting marginalized communities. In the United States, racial bias in policing is a widely documented example. Studies reveal that Black and Hispanic individuals are more likely to be stopped, searched, and arrested compared to their White counterparts, even when controlling for similar behavior (Milner et al., 2016). This racialized form of selective justice perpetuates systemic inequalities.

3. Judicial Favouritism

Selective justice can also occur within the judiciary when judges exhibit bias in their rulings. This may involve granting lenient sentences to influential individuals or convicting defendants based on extrajudicial pressures. For example, South Africa's judicial system has faced criticism for inconsistent rulings in corruption cases, reflecting broader concerns about political interference (Mchunu, 2023).

Need & Relevance

The perception of selective justice within the EFCC raises critical concerns about the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies in Nigeria. When an anti-corruption agency is perceived as biased, it risks becoming a tool for political manipulation rather than a mechanism for promoting accountability. In light of the allegations of selective justice, it is essential to critically assess the EFCC's operational framework and the factors that contribute to perceptions of bias. The Nigerian media, civil society organizations, and international stakeholders have increasingly scrutinized the EFCC's actions, calling for greater transparency and accountability.

The role of the media in exposing corruption and holding public officials accountable cannot be overstated. However, the media landscape in Nigeria is fraught with challenges, including censorship, harassment, and intimidation, which can hinder investigative journalism and limit the public's access to information about the EFCC's activities (Ekwo, 2011). Despite these

challenges, the EFCC has made significant strides in raising awareness about the consequences of corruption and promoting a culture of accountability. The public campaigns aimed at educating citizens about their rights and the importance of reporting corruption have gained traction, fostering a sense of civic responsibility among Nigerians (Amin et al., 2024). However, for these efforts to be effective, the EFCC must demonstrate a commitment to impartiality and transparency in its operations. Hence, there is a need to understand the historical context of the EFCC and examine few case studies that illustrates selective enforcement. Also, to analyse the impact of political influence on the commission's operations. In furtherance, the present study seeks to provide insights into the EFCC's role in Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts and propose recommendations for enhancing its effectiveness and credibility.

Objectives

- To critically analyse the role of the EFCC in enforcing anti-corruption laws in Nigeria and assess whether it functions as an instrument of selective justice
- To examine case studies illustrating the selective application of justice by the EFCC
- To analyse the impact of political influence on the operations of the EFCC
- To propose recommendations for enhancing the EFCC's impartiality and effectiveness

Methodology

The present study adopted a systematic review to investigate the allegations of selective justice by the EFCC. The data were gathered from various secondary sources, including scholarly articles, reports, and official government publications. Keeping the nature of the research, descriptive research design has been administered and content analysis was used to understand the observations and discussed accordingly under different themes.

Observations

Case Studies Illustrating Selective Justice by the EFCC

James Ibori Case

Background: James Ibori served as the Governor of Delta State from 1999 to 2007. He was accused of embezzling over $250 million during his tenure, using various fraudulent schemes to divert state funds into personal accounts (Prelec & de Oliveira, 2023). Following his tenure, Ibori fled Nigeria and was eventually convicted in the UK for money laundering. His case highlighted the challenges the EFCC faced in prosecuting high-profile corruption cases domestically.

Outcome: Although Ibori was convicted abroad, the EFCC's failure to secure similar convictions in Nigeria has led to criticism regarding its commitment to tackling corruption among influential political figures (Worika & Ozuru, 2019).

Evidence of Selective Justice: The EFCC's inability to prosecute Ibori domestically, despite overwhelming evidence of his corruption, suggested a selective enforcement approach that favours political elites, highlighting systemic issues within the Commission (Edeh et al., 2022).

Sambo Dasuki Case

Background: Colonel Sambo Dasuki (Rtd.) served as the National Security Adviser to former President Goodluck Jonathan. He was at the center of a significant scandal involving the misappropriation of $2.1 billion earmarked for arms procurement to combat Boko Haram insurgents (Njoku, 2020). Allegations emerged that the funds were diverted to finance the 2015 presidential campaign of Jonathan and other political elites. Dasuki was arrested in December 2015, shortly after the Buhari administration took office, and faced multiple charges of corruption and money laundering.

Outcome: While the EFCC pursued charges against Dasuki, critics argue that the investigation was politically motivated, targeting him due to his association with the opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Evidence of Selective Justice: The EFCC's failure to investigate similar allegations against members of the ruling party who were also implicated in the arms scandal raises concerns about bias.

Diezani Alison-Madueke Case

Background: Diezani Alison-Madueke was Nigeria's Minister of Petroleum Resources from 2010 to 2015 and the first female president of OPEC. During her tenure, she was accused of extensive corruption, including money laundering and the misappropriation of public funds (Komolafe et al., 2019). Investigations revealed that she allegedly diverted billions of dollars into personal accounts and used public funds to acquire luxury properties and assets both in Nigeria and abroad. The EFCC initiated investigations into her affairs following her departure from office.

Outcome: Although the EFCC successfully secured forfeiture of her assets, critics argued that its focus on Alison-Madueke was selective, as many individuals within the ruling party involved in similar allegations were not prosecuted.

Evidence of Selective Justice: Numerous reports indicate that while Alison-Madueke faced intense scrutiny, other officials from the ruling party implicated in similar financial misconduct were not pursued with the same vigour, suggesting a politically motivated focus (Edeh et al., 2022).

Ayodele Fayose Case

Background: Ayodele Fayose, the former Governor of Ekiti State, was known for his vocal criticism of the Buhari administration. He served as governor from 2014 to 2018 and was accused of receiving illicit funds during his election campaign. The EFCC alleged that Fayose received money from the $6.9 billion arms deal scandal (Udumaga et al., 2024). His outspoken nature and opposition to the ruling party made him a target for the EFCC, which arrested him in 2016.

Outcome: His prosecution illustrates the EFCC's tendency to pursue high-profile opposition figures while neglecting similar cases involving ruling party members.

Evidence of Selective Justice: Fayose's claims of political motivation were supported by the lack of similar investigations into ruling party governors who had also been accused of financial impropriety.

Ibrahim Shema Case

Background: Ibrahim Shema served as the Governor of Katsina State from 2007 to 2015. After leaving office, he faced allegations of financial mismanagement and corruption, particularly concerning the misappropriation of state funds (Okechukwu et al., 2024). The EFCC initiated investigations into his administration's financial dealings, focusing on contracts awarded and expenditures made during his tenure.

Outcome: Although Shema faced charges, the EFCC's actions were criticized for being less vigorous compared to investigations of opposition figures.

Evidence of Selective Justice: The EFCC's relatively lenient approach towards Shema, in contrast to the aggressive pursuit of opposition leaders, suggests a pattern of selective enforcement based on political affiliation.

Patience Jonathan Case

Background: Patience Jonathan, the wife of former President Goodluck Jonathan, was implicated in several corruption scandals involving significant sums of money. Allegations included the misuse of public funds and money laundering, with the EFCC investigating the source of her wealth, including the acquisition of properties and luxury items (Onyiliogwu, 2018). Her involvement in various financial transactions raised eyebrows, especially during her husband's presidency.

Outcome: While the EFCC successfully secured the forfeiture of assets linked to her, there were criticisms regarding the perceived leniency towards her compared to other politically exposed persons.

Evidence of Selective Justice: Critics noted that despite serious allegations against her, the EFCC's actions were not as aggressive as those taken against opposition figures, indicating a selective approach to enforcement (Edeh et al., 2022).

Abba Kyari Case

Background: Abba Kyari, a former Deputy Commissioner of Police, was a prominent figure in Nigeria's police force, known for his role in combating crime and leading high-profile investigations. In 2021, he was implicated in a $1.1 million fraud scheme involving Ramon Abbas, also known as Hushpuppi, a notorious internet fraudster (Umar et al., 2022). Kyari was accused of facilitating the fraudulent activities by allegedly working with Hushpuppi to carry out the scam, which targeted a victim in the United States. The EFCC arrested him following these allegations, leading to widespread media coverage and public scrutiny.

Outcome: While Kyari faced serious charges, the perception was that his connections within the police and political circles might shield him from severe repercussions. The EFCC's

handling of the case was scrutinized, especially regarding the speed of the investigation and the subsequent arrest.

Evidence of Selective Justice: Critics raised concerns about the potential for selective justice, given Kyari's high-profile status and previous accolades (Odorige, 2024).

Godswill Akpabio Case

Background: Godswill Akpabio served as the Governor of AkwaIbom State from 2007 to 2015 and later became the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs. During his tenure as governor, he faced multiple allegations of corruption, including misappropriation of state funds and fraudulent contracts. Investigations into his administration revealed a pattern of financial irregularities, leading to calls for accountability. Despite these allegations, Akpabio has maintained a prominent position in Nigerian politics (Odorige, 2024).

Outcome: Although the EFCC has investigated Akpabio, he has not faced significant legal consequences. His political connections and status as a member of the ruling party have led to perceptions that he is being shielded from prosecution.

Evidence of Selective Justice: Critics argue that Akpabio's political influence has protected him from facing the same level of scrutiny and legal action as other politicians with similar allegations.

Ifeanyi Ubah Case

Background: Ifeanyi Ubah, a senator and businessman, was implicated in a scandal involving the alleged diversion of funds meant for oil subsidies. His political career has been marked by controversy, and he has been an outspoken critic of the ruling party. The EFCC arrested Ubah, alleging that he was involved in financial misconduct related to government contracts and subsidies (The Nation, 2013).

Outcome: Ubah's arrest and subsequent trial drew significant media attention and public scrutiny, with many viewing the charges as politically motivated.

Evidence of Selective Justice: The timing of Ubah's arrest, along with the nature of the charges, led to accusations that the EFCC was using legal mechanisms to undermine his political influence.

Impact of Political Influence on the Operations of EFCC

Erosion of Public Trust

The politicization of the EFCC has significantly compromised public trust, a critical component for its effectiveness. Public perception often views the EFCC as an appendage of the ruling government, primarily serving political objectives rather than acting as an impartial anti-corruption institution. Onyema et al., (2018) observed that political interference in the EFCC's operations often takes the form of selective prosecutions, where political opponents are targeted disproportionately while allies are overlooked, exacerbating the distrust of the

populace. In the same vein, scholars such as Obuah (2010) argued that the EFCC has often been manipulated by successive administrations to target political opponents, resulting in selective prosecution.

This distrust is further entrenched by high-profile corruption cases that fail to result in substantive convictions. For instance, despite over 400 convictions within its first decade, only a handful of these involved politically exposed persons (PEPs), leading to a perception that the EFCC lacks the independence or capacity to prosecute influential figures effectively (Falana, 2013). The inability to consistently hold political elites' accountable fosters scepticism about the EFCC's ability to address systemic corruption effectively. Furthermore, as Raimi et al. (2013) highlight, the public often perceives that the EFCC prioritizes minor economic crimes over substantial political corruption. Such prioritization contributes to the belief that the EFCC's activities are less about eradicating corruption and more about managing public perception while maintaining the political status quo. Research by Ijewereme (2015) emphasized on the critical role of public trust in sustaining the legitimacy and efficacy of anti-corruption agencies. When citizens perceive the EFCC as a politically biased institution, they are less likely to report corrupt activities, believing their efforts will yield little or no results. Furthermore, this erosion of trust contributes to societal apathy, wherein the populace becomes resigned to corruption as an unavoidable norm.

Undermining of Governance

Political interference in the EFCC's operations significantly undermines governance by fostering a culture of impunity and weakening institutional integrity. Political leaders frequently use the EFCC as a tool to reinforce patronage systems, protecting loyalists while prosecuting dissenters. For instance, Onyema et al. (2018) identify cases where high-ranking politicians defected to the ruling party to evade prosecution, such as Joshua Dariye and Jolly Nyame, both of whom joined the ruling APC during advanced stages of their trials. These actions illustrate how political allegiance can influence the trajectory of anti-corruption efforts, thereby eroding the rule of law. Additionally, systemic corruption perpetuated by political interference reduces the state's capacity to deliver essential services, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities. The diversion of public funds for personal enrichment or political patronage deprives citizens of critical resources for infrastructure, education, and healthcare. As noted by Hope (2017), corruption undermines Nigeria's developmental prospects, costing the country an estimated 37% of its GDP by 2030, according to projections by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC).

The political manipulation of EFCC extends beyond the agency itself, exacerbating governance failures across the broader political system. According to Dike (2005), the use of anti-corruption institutions as tools of political vendetta entrenches a culture of impunity, where individuals aligned with the ruling government are shielded from prosecution while opponents are targeted. This practice not only distorts the principles of justice but also weakens democratic accountability. Adebayo et al., (2019) highlighted on how this selective application of justice reinforces institutional weaknesses, enabling corrupt practices to proliferate at all levels of government. For instance, public funds earmarked for critical infrastructure and social services are often embezzled, depriving citizens of essential amenities and widening socio-economic inequalities. Dike (2005) further observed that political interference in anti-corruption efforts discourages public sector reforms, as officials are incentivized to align with

political patrons rather than adhere to ethical standards. Moreover, political interference undermines the judiciary's role as an impartial arbiter of justice. Adebakin and Raimi (2012) documented cases where judicial decisions have been influenced by political interests, resulting in the dismissal of high-profile corruption cases. This erosion of judicial integrity compromises the rule of law and fosters disillusionment with democratic institutions.

Global Perception

The EFCC's politicization has adverse implications for Nigeria's global standing. Despite being at the forefront of anti-corruption efforts, the EFCC's association with selective justice diminishes its credibility internationally. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index consistently ranks Nigeria among the most corrupt countries, highlighting the limited success of anti-corruption efforts amidst persistent political influence (Transparency International, 2012). The international community often views Nigeria's anti-corruption campaigns as superficial, undermined by political manipulation (Justine & Okoye, 2014). Salau (2024) highlighted the fact that high-profile corruption scandals, such as the Halliburton and Siemens bribery cases, underscored the challenges of prosecuting politically connected individuals. While foreign entities involved faced prosecution, Nigerian officials implicated in these scandals largely evaded accountability. This disparity further tarnishes Nigeria's reputation, affecting its diplomatic relations, foreign investment inflows, and access to international financial support. Moreover, Raimi et al., (2013) argued that the politicization of anti-corruption agencies like the EFCC reduces their capacity to engage in meaningful partnerships with international bodies. This lack of credibility undermines the potential for global collaboration, which is critical for tackling transnational crimes such as money laundering and terrorism financing.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed a complex interplay between the EFCC's operations, political influence, and public perception in Nigeria. The allegations of selective justice presented significant challenges not only for the EFCC but also for the broader governance landscape in the country. The examined case studies have illustrated a troubling pattern of selective enforcement by the EFCC. High-profile cases involving political elites often raise questions about the commission's impartiality. For instance, the contrasting treatment of figures like James Ibori and Diezani Alison-Madueke compared to opposition leaders like Ayodele Fayose highlights a systemic bias. Such disparities in prosecution suggest that the EFCC may prioritize political expediency over genuine anti-corruption efforts. This selective approach undermines the commission's credibility and reinforces the perception that it serves as a political tool rather than an independent agency dedicated to justice. The observations indicated that political interference significantly hampers the EFCC's effectiveness. The commission's leadership appointments and operational priorities are often influenced by current political dynamics, which can skew its focus towards targeting opposition figures while neglecting similar offenses by allies. This politicization not only erodes public trust but also fosters a culture of impunity among political elites. As highlighted by scholars like Obuah (2010) and Umar et al. (2018), the resulting skepticism regarding the EFCC's commitment to impartiality can deter citizens from reporting corrupt activities, further complicating the fight against corruption.

The perception of selective justice has profound implications for public trust in governance. When citizens believe that the EFCC operates with bias, it diminishes their faith in the rule of law and the effectiveness of governmental institutions. This erosion of trust can lead to apathy and disengagement from civic responsibilities, as individuals may feel that their efforts to combat corruption are futile. The implications extend beyond EFCC, affecting the overall governance framework in Nigeria. As public confidence wanes, the legitimacy of democratic institutions is undermined, making it increasingly difficult for the government to implement effective reforms. The socio-economic implications of selective justice are quite significant. The perception that corruption is tolerated among political elites who can deter foreign investment, as potential investors may view Nigeria as an unstable environment where the rule of law is inconsistently applied. This perception can stifle economic growth and exacerbate the existing inequalities, as resources meant for public welfare are diverted to private interests. Also, the observations align with Ramos Maqueda and Chen (2016), who have noted in their research study that selective justice can hinder economic development by creating an unpredictable business climate.

The EFCC's perceived partiality raises critical concerns about its effectiveness in combating corruption in Nigeria. The interplay of political influence, selective enforcement, and public trust creates a challenging environment for the commission's operations. Hence, to fulfill its mandate and restore public confidence, the EFCC must adopt measures that promote transparency, accountability, and impartiality. Furthermore, addressing these issues is essential for enhancing the EFCC's credibility and ensuring its role as a genuine instrument in the fight against corruption. Thus, by implementing the suggestions, the EFCC can work towards becoming a more effective and independent agency, ultimately contributing to better governance and national development in Nigeria.

Suggestions

The following are suggested based on the observations and discussion of this research study:

Strengthening Institutional Independence: Implementing reforms to ensure the EFCC operates independently of political influence. This could involve establishing a more transparent and merit-based process for appointing leadership positions within the commission.

Enhancing Transparency & Accountability: Increasing transparency in the EFCC's operations by regularly publishing reports on investigations and prosecutions. Establishing an independent oversight body to review the commission's activities will further promote accountability.

Promoting Public Engagement & Education: Launching public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the importance of reporting corruption and mechanisms available for doing so. Engaging civil society organizations will help to foster a culture of accountability and encourage citizen participation in anti-corruption efforts.

Encouraging Whistleblower Protections: Developing and enforcing robust legal protections for whistleblowers to ensure that individuals who report about corruption can do so without

fear of retaliation. This will enhance the flow of information to the EFCC and facilitate more effective investigations.

Fostering Collaboration with International Bodies: Strengthening partnerships with international anti-corruption organizations to benefit from best practices and technical assistance. This collaboration will enhance the EFCC's capacity to combat financial crimes effectively.

Implementing Comprehensive Training Programs: Providing on-going training for EFCC personnel on best practices in investigation and prosecution, as well as ethical standards. This will help ensure that the commission operates with integrity and professionalism.

Conclusion

The EFCC's role in combating corruption in Nigeria is critical, yet its perceived partiality and allegations of selective justice pose significant challenges to its effectiveness and credibility. This study highlighted the complex relationship between the EFCC, political influence, and public perception, and also illustrated on how these dynamics undermine the commission's ability to fulfill its mandate through specific case studies. The evidence suggested that EFCC's actions are often influenced by political considerations, leading to disparities in enforcement that erode public trust and diminish the rule of law. Therefore, EFCC need to function effectively without any bias and maintain its sanctity to gain the people's will to alleviate corruption in Nigeria.

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