TITLE PAGE

ECOWAS PROTOCOL ON CORRUPTION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA, 2019-2023.

BY

ADONU, AMARACHI MARTHA
GOU/U22/IRE/630

A PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES,
GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY,
UGWUOMU NIKE,
ENUGU

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (B.Sc.) DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SUPERVISOR: DR. MBAEZE NETCHY

JULY, 2026

CERTIFICATION

I, Adonu, Amarchi Martha hereby declare that this research work was written by me and has not been submitted or received anywhere for the purpose of acquiring a degree in International Relations or any other programme.

_______________________ _________________________

Adonu, Amarachi Martha Date

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that this project report titled "ECOWAS protocol on corruption and the fight against corruption in Nigeria, 2019-2023" has been read and approved as meeting the requirements of the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Godfrey Okoye University, Ugwuomu Nike, Enugu, for the award of Bachelor of Science Degree in International Relations.

_______________________ _______________

DR. MBAEZE NETCHY Date
(PROJECT SUPERVISOR)

PROF. SAM UGWUOZOR
(HEAD OF DEPARTMENT)

Date

ASSOC.PROF. JOHN ODO
(DEAN, FMSS)

Date

EXTERNAL EXAMINER

Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for His grace, wisdom, protection, and strength throughout the course of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I return all glory, honor, and praise to God Almighty for His grace, wisdom, strength, protection, and guidance throughout the course of this research work and my academic journey.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my project supervisor, Dr. Mbaeze Netchy, for his invaluable guidance, patience, corrections, encouragement, and professional contributions throughout the development of this study. His knowledge and expertise in International Relations greatly shaped the success and direction of this research work.

In a special way, I sincerely appreciate Prof. Sam Ugwuozor, the Head of Department, for his encouragement and support during the course of this research work.

I also acknowledge the immense contributions of my lecturers, Rev. Sr. Dr. Lucy Umeh, Mr. Okonkwo W. O., Mr. Onyishi Anthony, Rev. Fr. Dr. Ogbuka Ikenna, Dr. Mrs. Ifedi Fransisca, Mr. Nweke Clement, Dr. Alex Ogbonnia, Mr. Ejike Nnaji whose guidance, academic support, encouragement, and dedication contributed immensely to the successful completion of this study. I equally appreciate Mrs. Chioma, the departmental secretary, for her assistance, understanding, and support throughout the period of this research work.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my beloved parents, Mr. Matthew Adonu and my late mother, Mrs. Patricia Adonu, whose love, sacrifices, prayers, and unwavering support have been the foundation of my life and education. To my father, thank you for your guidance, encouragement, and constant belief in my ability to succeed. To my late mother, your memories, values, care, and sacrifices continue to inspire and strengthen me every day. Though you are no longer here physically, your love remains a guiding light in my journey. This achievement is dedicated to both of you with profound love, honour, and appreciation. To my siblings, Chidozie, Rita, Chidera, Chika and Chetachi for being there for me when I needed you most.

My heartfelt gratitude also goes to my wonderful friends, Stephanie, Kosi, Chikamso for their constant support, encouragement, companionship, inspiration, and memorable academic discussions throughout my stay in this institution.

I sincerely appreciate my mentor and uncle, Mr. Nnagbo Chidera and Mr. Ademu Casmir, for their guidance, encouragement, support, and valuable advice throughout my academic journey. Your mentorship, motivation, and constant willingness to help have contributed greatly to the successful completion of this work. I remain deeply grateful for the positive impact you both have made in my life and studies.

Finally, I appreciate everyone who contributed in one way or another to the successful completion of this work. May God Almighty richly bless and reward you all abundantly.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page………………………………………………………………….. i

Approval Page…………………………………………………………..... ii

Dedication………………………………………………………………... iii

Acknowledgment………………………………………………………… iv

Table of Contents………………………………………………………… v

Abstract…………………………………………………………………… x

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study……………………………………………. 1

1.2 Statement of the Problem……………………………………………. 4

1.3 Research Questions…………………………………………………… 5

1.4 Objectives of the Study………………………………………………… 6

1.5 Significance of the Study …………………………………………… 6

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study……………………………… 7

1.7 Operational Definition of Terms………………………………………. 9

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND GAP IN LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Review……………………………………………………….. 11

2.2 Thematic Review………………………………………………………… 15

2.3 Theoretical Review………………………………………………………. 25

2.4 Empirical Review…..…………………………………………………… 27

2.5 Gap in Literature…………………………………………………………. 31

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework………….……………………………… 33

3.2 Hypotheses…………………………………………………….. 34

3.3 Research Design……………….……………………………… 34

3.4 Method of Data Collection……...……………………………… 35

3.5 Method of Data Analysis……...………………………….… 36

3.6 Logical Dataframework……………………………………………….37

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS/HYPOTHESES TESTING

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary ………………………………………………. 72

5.2 Conclusion……………………………………………….... 73

5.3 Recommendations……………………………………………… 74

Bibliography ……………...……………………………………. 77

ABSTRACT

This study examined the integration of the ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption into Nigeria's national legal and institutional frameworks between 2019 and 2023. The main objective was to assess the extent to which Nigeria translated Protocol obligations into operational enforcement practice. Specific objectives addressed legislative alignment and enforcement depth, the effectiveness of regional cooperation mechanisms including NACIWA in supporting cross-border asset recovery, and the role of political interference in undermining Protocol implementation. The study relied exclusively on secondary sources comprising official EFCC and ICPC Annual Reports, National Judicial Council records, NACIWA institutional documentation, UNODC assessments, Transparency International country reviews, and peer-reviewed academic publications. The study covered Nigeria only, with a temporal scope of 2019 to 2023 during the Buhari administration. An ex post facto qualitative research design was adopted. Thematic documentary analysis was employed as the method of analysis. The study found that Nigeria enacted formal legislative measures including the Proceeds of Crime Act 2022 that correspond with Protocol obligations, but enforcement depth remained limited due to budget constraints and institutional capacity gaps. The study also found that NACIWA mechanisms produced recoveries of approximately 7.5 million USD against 541 million USD recovered through bilateral channels, confirming that regional cooperation was structurally insufficient for Nigeria's cross-border recovery. The study further found that political interference systematically weakened agency independence, distorted enforcement priorities, and reduced prosecution consistency for politically connected cases. It is concluded that formal compliance with the Protocol coexists with structural institutional barriers that prevent substantive compliance from being achieved without deeper reform. It is recommended that the National Assembly enact tenure protection legislation for EFCC and ICPC leadership to reduce political interference in enforcement operations.

Keywords: ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption, legal harmonisation, anti-corruption implementation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Corruption is a leadership problem hurting growth, trust in institutions and wellbeing in West Africa. It moves away resources, reduces strength of rule of law and lowers the power of authorities to give services in a fair way with answerability. In Nigeria, corruption has stayed a worry because of its effects on money, political acceptance and trust in state institutions. This concern is not only domestic. It has a regional side because money from corruption, political networks and money dealings often move across state borders within as well as beyond West Africa.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) provides a regional setting for this . ECOWAS was created on 28 May 1975 through the Treaty of Lagos as a body for helping cooperation and integration among West African states. Its first purpose was linked to the need for economic growth, living standards and regional progress. Over time, the organisation grew beyond trade and economic integration to address peace, security, democracy, governance as well as legal working together among member states. This role became because regional development cannot be kept where corruption reduces the strength of institutions and blocks lawful cooperation among states.

revised ECOWAS Treaty and later regional policy tools gave more attention to governance, answerability as well as institution growth. A regional integration project came to recognise the market working together, free movement and safety depend on states that can enforce law in a trusted way. Corruption reduces the strength of this objective by weakening border control, buying, money regulation and freedom of enforcement agencies. For this reason, ECOWAS anti-corruption action should be understood as part of the organisation's effort to protect regional governance and strengthen legal working together among member states.

ECOWAS Protocol on Fight Against Corruption was accepted in 2001 to provide a regional rule for stopping, making criminal and handling acts of corruption. Protocol requires member states to adopt legal and institutional steps against corruption, support openness as well as answerability, as well as cooperate in issues linked to inquiry, charging in court as well as asset recovery. It for this reason seeks to move anti-corruption efforts from separate replies to a regional legal system. Yet, Protocol faced a long implementation gap and alone attained the needed ratification level required for legal start in 2019. This makes the period from 2019 to 2023 in a special way for studying whether member states began to turn the Protocol into stronger action.

Nigeria occupies a place in this regional framework. As one of largest ECOWAS member states and a political as well as economic force in West Africa, Nigeria's response to the Protocol is for the trust strength of the regional anti-corruption agenda. Nigeria had domestic anti-corruption institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as well as the Independent Corrupt Practices as well as Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). It passed the Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Act 2022 during the period of . These developments suggest Nigeria made legal and institutional replies may be read in connection with the Protocol. The question, yet, is whether those measures reflected meaningful interpretation and implementation or in a limited form paper compliance.

Regional cooperation is of equal importance to the subject of this study. Corruption cases more often involve money flows, properties and materials located in more than one legal area. Network of Anti-Corruption Institutions in West Africa (NACIWA) was created to promote working together, sharing of information and skill building among anti-corruption agencies in ECOWAS member states. In principle, such cooperation should assist investigations and cross-border asset recovery. In practice, strength of these systems rests on legal steps, trust in institutions, information sharing on time and readiness of states to cooperate even where political persons with exposure are involved.

years 2019 to 2023 have special value for this study. This period followed the Protocol legal start and took place together with a period in which Nigeria continued to anti-corruption as a part of governance. It was a period marked by continued discussion over political interference in law enforcement, freedom of anti-corruption agencies, court delay and uneven movement of asset recovery. These issues matter because the strength of the Protocol cannot be judged alone by the existence of law. It must be judged by the strength of institutional practice, the strength of enforcement and the power of Nigeria to cooperate with other ECOWAS states in corruption-related matters.

This study for this reason studies integration of ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption into Nigeria legal and institutional frameworks between 2019 as well as 2023. It focuses on how Nigeria understood Protocol within its legal system, to which regional cooperation methods supported asset recovery and investigations, as well as how political interference weakened implementation. The study is based on the view that regional legal commitments become meaningful alone when they are turned into laws, institutions and enforcement practices that produce results. The background to the study is thus the gap between the pledge of regional anti-corruption governance and the difficulties of achieving it in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria faces a deep and corruption problem that keeps weakening the honesty of institutions, economic growth as well as rule of law. The country placed 145th out of 180 countries on the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index issued by Transparency International, placing it among the most corrupt countries in the world. This ranking shows a system failure goes beyond single acts of wrongdoing. It points to limits in institutions responsible for detecting, prosecuting and punishing acts of corruption. The ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight Against Corruption was used to provide a regional system for handling these kinds of system failures. The core problem this study addresses is the gap between the pledge of Nigeria to the Protocol and the lack of progress can be checked in corruption control results during the 2019 to 2023 period.

The ECOWAS Protocol needs member states to bring in aligned anti corruption laws, create anti corruption agencies that are independent,, create methods for cross border asset recovery and legal help. Nigeria has taken some official steps in each of these areas. EFCC and ICPC continue to function as enforcement agencies. Proceeds of Crime Act 2022 was passed to strengthen asset recovery. Nigeria takes part in NACIWA as a route for regional cooperation., across the 2019 to 2023 period, enforcement stayed uneven, political interference in the anti corruption agencies was on many occasions and cross border investigations created few results. This problem is not the lack of legal systems. This problem is the failure to turn those systems into action by institutions.

Another part of the problem deals with political will. Corruption inside Nigeria works at top levels of government, meaning institutions responsible for charging in court are under political pressure from actors they are asked by law to investigate. Page (2021) this pattern as one of barriers to anti corruption enforcement in Nigeria. When political interference prevents agencies from exercising freedom, the deterrent effect of anti corruption law is destroyed. The ECOWAS Protocol cannot function as a regional tool if agencies lack the freedom to apply it with no fear or favour. This study studies how political interference worked as a barrier to Protocol action during the period of study and what changes in institutions would be needed to remove barriers.

This problem is made worse by court delay. Courts responsible for hearing corruption cases in Nigeria are in a heavy way overloaded. Delays in trial steps mean individuals charged with corruption offences can remain without sentence for years. This reduces the strength of trust in the anti corruption system. The ECOWAS Protocol needs member states to ensure their court systems are able to deal with corruption cases in a quick manner. The failure of the judicial system of Nigeria to meet this standard between 2019 and 2023 shows a gap in Protocol compliance. This addresses all of these parts of the problem in order to create a view of where Nigeria stands in connection to its ECOWAS duties.

1.3 Research Questions

I. How has Nigeria understood provisions of ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption into its legal institutional system between 2019 and 2023?

Ii. How have regional collaboration methods, such as Network of Anti Corruption Institutions in West Africa (NACIWA), been in helping cross border asset recovery and investigations for Nigeria?

Iii. How does political interference undermine implementation of ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

I. To study how Nigeria has brought in provisions of ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption into its legal, institutional systems between 2019 and 2023.

Ii. To judge the impact of regional cooperation on the success of Nigeria in asset tracking and recovery during the period of study.

Iii. To find out how political interference reduces the strength of implementation of ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study makes an addition to academic and policy discussion on regional integration as well as anti corruption governance in West Africa. value is its focus on the gap between legal commitment and institutional practice. Past studies have studied either the design of the ECOWAS Protocol or the general state of corruption in Nigeria. This study connects those two areas by studying the ways through which Protocol provisions were,, were not, turned into action by institutions between 2019 and 2023. This makes the study a source for anyone seeking to understand why legal alignment in the region gives limited results.

For policy makers in Nigeria and inside the ECOWAS institutional system, this study provides barriers to stop harmonisation from working in practice. findings will assist the Federal Ministry of Justice, EFCC,, the ICPC in identifying which legislative and procedure reforms are most needed to bring Nigeria into compliance with its regional duties. This speaks to the work of NACIWA by identifying the coordination limits that prevent cross border investigations from being carried out in a manner. Policy makers inside ECOWAS can use the findings to strengthen the monitoring and enforcement systems of the Protocol.

For academic areas, this study adds to growing study on limits of regional anti corruption systems in developing areas. This uses legal analysis, institutional theory,, from 2019 to 2023 period to create arguments grounded in both theory and documented practice. This mix of legal, social science methods is not in existing anti corruption research in Nigeria, which tends to favour either legal analysis or social science alone. This work for this reason has a place in research and offers a model for later research in this field.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The topic scope of this study is defined by provisions of ECOWAS Protocol on Fight Against Corruption. This focuses on three areas of the Protocol: the prevention of corruption, making acts of corruption criminal,, the regional cooperation methods covering asset recovery and legal help. Such three areas represent the duties member states are needed to bring into their systems. This work does not study the Protocol in its full form, focuses on the provisions most to the institutional and legal performance of Nigeria during the period of study.

The location of study is Nigeria as a member state of ECOWAS. This is from activities of federal anti corruption agencies, federal courts and federal law developments. It does not study state-level anti-corruption institutions, which work under different legal systems. The time scope of study covers the period from 2019 to 2023. This period begins with the point at which the Protocol reached its needed ratification level, ends with the conclusion of the Buhari administration and the changeover to the Tinubu government. This five-year period provides depth for a review of the action record of Nigeria.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The limit of this study is access to data. Much of most about cross border anti corruption investigations, asset recovery operations,, unwritten diplomatic contacts between Nigeria, its ECOWAS counterparts is restricted or in another case not open to use. Delicate cases involving persons in political power positions are hard to record with care because court cases may be ongoing, subject to reporting limits, or obscured by institution officials with an interest in reducing review. This means study relies on documents, published judgments, official reports,, later academic sources rather than on restricted government information or private institutional data.

Another limit deals with political risk. Interviewing serving officials of EFCC, ICPC, or Federal Ministry of Justice about their institutions during the period of study presents difficulties. Officials are not expected to speak in documents about institutional failures or political interference in a manner that exposes them to work risk. The ex post facto and -based design used by this study provides a response to this limit. By relying on records by point rather than on accounts officials may be reluctant to give, the study is able to use a body that is both easy to check and apart from the research process itself. This design choice is explained in Chapter Three.

1.8 Operational Definitions of Concepts and Terms

Corruption: For purposes of this study, corruption refers to abuse, use of power, authority, or resources for private gain in a manner that violates written rules governing conduct of office. This meaning covers bribery, embezzlement, wrong use of funds, use of political positions to block the inquiry or charging in court for acts of corruption. The meaning is drawn from Gouvea Maciel and Santos (2024) as well as is in line with the meaning used by the ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight Against Corruption.

ECOWAS Protocol on Fight Against Corruption: This refers to the regional agreement used by the Economic Community of West African States that sets binding rules for member states on prevention of corruption, making acts of corruption criminal, creation of cross border asset recovery and legal help methods. For purposes of this study, Protocol is treated as the legal standard against which the performance of Nigeria is judged between 2019 and 2023.

Legal alignment: For purposes of this study, legal alignment refers to the process through which Nigeria has brought its anti corruption laws into alignment with standards set by ECOWAS Protocol. Harmonisation is judged in two parts: harmonisation, which deals with the enactment of legislation aligns with Protocol requirements and harmonisation, which deals with the use of legislation in a manner that produces the results the Protocol was designed to achieve.

Interference from political actors: For purposes of this study, political interference refers to any action by a political actor, including a head of state, minister,, political party official, has effect of limiting, redirecting,, stopping inquiry, charging in court,, adjudication of a corruption case by an anti corruption agency or court. Interference from political actors is distinguished from lawful government oversight of institutions.

Asset recovery: For purposes of this study, asset recovery refers to the process of identifying, tracking, holding and returning assets that have been gained through corrupt means. term covers both domestic asset recovery, which involves assets held inside Nigeria,, cross border asset recovery, which involves assets held in foreign legal areas in cooperation with ECOWAS member states or other international partners.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

This section defines and judges core concepts that support this study. concepts studied are corruption, anti corruption actions, legal alignment, regional cooperation, institutional blocks and asset recovery. Every concept is defined in connection to existing academic research, and is assessed in the setting of the ECOWAS Protocol, its action in Nigeria between 2019 as well as 2023. The conceptual review creates the analysis terms used throughout the study and shows the concepts are debated in the research in ways to the research questions.

2.1.1 Corruption:

Gouvêa Maciel and Santos (2024) treat corruption as a contested but identifiable concept built around misuse of power, private benefit as well as institutional decay. This view is because it moves beyond a narrow idea: corruption alone refers to bribery. It recognises corruption can appear through abuse of office, diversion of resources, favouritism and the manipulation of institutions for private advantage. In this study, corruption is understood in a governance sense because the ECOWAS Protocol is concerned with stopping, making criminals and suppressing several forms of acts of corruption.

The concept of corruption has an institutional side. Boateng, Wang, Ntim and Elmaghi (2024) found from African countries weak institutions as well as interaction between as well as informal institutional practices are associated with higher corruption outcomes. This supports the argument corruption is not alone an individual moral failure. It can become embedded in the rules, incentives and relationships that shape institutions. The Nigerian case for this reason requires attention to both written laws and the practical conditions affect their use.

For study, corruption is because it provides the problem the ECOWAS Protocol seeks to address. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) shows corruption in Nigeria affects administration, service delivery as well as trust. The study for this reason treats corruption as a legal, political and institutional problem that requires more than the enactment of laws. It requires an examination of whether Nigeria understood and implemented regional anti-corruption obligations in a way that produced meaningful institutional action between 2019 as well as 2023.

2.1.2 Anti corruption actions:

Anti-corruption actions refer to preventive, legal, institutional and enforcement measures used to reduce acts of corruption. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d.-a) explains prevention is essential because it addresses conditions that allow corruption to grow before criminal harm becomes severe. The same framework stresses criminalisation and law enforcement as tools for answerability as well as warning effect. Anti-corruption action for this reason includes integrity rules, inquiry, charging in court, asset recovery, education and administrative reform.

In Nigeria, anti-corruption actions are carried out through institutions such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission as well as Independent Corrupt Practices as well as Other Related Offences Commission. ICPC describes its mandate as combining inquiry, charging in court, system review and education, while Hassan (2021) shows EFCC as well as ICPC operating in related areas can overlap in practice. This means anti-corruption action is not alone about creating agencies. It is about building coordination, clarity of mandate, institutional freedom and the capacity to sustain enforcement.

This concept is to be studied because the ECOWAS Protocol expects member states to create effective mechanisms for stopping and suppressing corruption. Nigeria may have anti-corruption bodies and laws, yet question remains whether these actions have been organised as well as applied in a manner that gives effect to Protocol. study for this reason studies anti-corruption actions as both measures and as instruments through which Nigeria is expected to discharge its regional obligations within the ECOWAS system.

2.1.3 Legal alignment

Legal alignment refers to the process through which a state changes its legal system to match with regional or global standards. Hartzenberg (2011) explains regional integration in Africa depends not only on political goals but on gradual development of legal and institutional systems that can support cooperation. In the anti-corruption setting, legal alignment requires laws to reflect agreed regional duties on prevention, criminalisation, cooperation and asset recovery.

The ECOWAS Protocol on Fight Against Corruption provides immediate regional standards for this study. It requires Member states to establish effective mechanisms to prevent, suppress and eradicate corruption as well as to adopt necessary legal as well as institutional steps for implementation. Legal alignment for this reason does not mean in a limited form copying treaty language into domestic law. It involves interpreting regional provisions in a legal setting and creating domestic rules within the existing institutional system of state.

In relation to Nigeria, legal alignment is examined through to which country understood provisions of ECOWAS Protocol within its legal and institutional system between 2019 as well as 2023. This includes attention to Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Act 2022 as well as to operation of anti-corruption institutions. concept helps study distinguish between legal adoption and practical implementation, which is necessary for understanding whether Nigeria actions amounted to genuine Protocol integration.

2.1.4 Cooperation Across the ECOWAS Region and Asset Recovery

In this study, phrase cooperation across regions refers in a specific way to cooperation across the ECOWAS region of West Africa. It does not refer to Africa in a general way or to international cooperation in a broad sense. The ECOWAS Protocol on Fight Against Corruption provides a regional legal basis for member states to support one another in stopping corruption, sharing assistance and strengthening enforcement efforts connected to corruption offences.

Asset recovery is a part of this regional cooperation. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d.-b) explains Chapter V of United Nations Convention Against Corruption places asset recovery at centre of international anti-corruption law by helping tracing, freezing, confiscation as well as return of illicit assets. Within West Africa, this general global principle is complemented by ECOWAS Protocol and by Network of Anti-Corruption Institutions in West Africa, which was created under the ECOWAS framework to support cooperation among anti-corruption agencies in member states (NACIWA, n.d.).

For Nigeria, cooperation across the ECOWAS region matters because corrupt assets, and persons connected with corruption may move beyond state borders. Domestic law enforcement cannot always deal with these issues alone. This study for this reason uses concepts to examine whether ECOWAS-based cooperation, including associated with NACIWA, supported Nigeria cross-border asset recovery and investigative efforts during the 2019 to 2023 period.

2.1.5 Institutional Barriers to the Implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria

Institutional barriers in this study mean institutional barriers to implementation of ECOWAS Protocol on Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria. concept is not used in a general or undefined manner. It refers to legal and organisational conditions as well as political conditions weakening the power of Nigerian institutions to turn Protocol duties into anti-corruption action. These barriers can exist even where laws are in terms .

Helmke and Levitsky (2004) explain institutions are shaped in practice by informal institutions such as unwritten rules, incentive patterns as well as accepted behaviour patterns.

Boateng et al. (2024) in a similar way show interaction between and informal institutional systems matters for corruption outcomes in African states. These insights help explain why a state may adopt anti-corruption rules yet experience weak enforcement when informal political pressures, administrative limits or unclear institutional incentives are stronger than written standards.

In Nigeria, institutional barriers to this study include political interference, weak coordination, resource limits, delays in court judgment and inability of enforcement institutions to sustain regional cooperation in a regular way. These are barriers to Protocol implementation because they weaken prevention, criminalisation, enforcement and asset recovery efforts. The concept for this reason supports the third research question by identifying practical conditions that may undermine implementation of ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria.

2.2 Review of Themes of the Research Questions

This section reviews academic research in connection to three themes corresponding to three research questions and aims of this study. Theme One studies legal alignment and inclusion of ECOWAS Protocol into systems of Nigeria. Theme Two studies regional cooperation and cross border asset recovery. Theme Three studies the institutional and political blocks have prevented full Protocol action in Nigeria. Every theme is reviewed across seven paragraphs covering the concept base, theory support, record, areas of discussion, the Nigerian setting and the addition of each theme to the analysis framework of this study.

2.2.1 Theme One: Legal Harmonisation and Protocol Integration of ECOWAS Protocol

Legal alignment is the process through which states bring their laws into alignment with a regional or international standard. In the setting of regional economic communities, harmonisation serves two aims: it creates a rule environment that supports economic inclusion and it creates answerability rules that prevent rule shopping. The ECOWAS Protocol on the

Fight Against Corruption is an alignment tool in this sense. It sets a regional standard for making acts of corruption a crime of corruption, the prevention of acts of corruption and the creation of asset recovery methods. Member states ratify the Protocol promise to bring their legal systems into alignment with these standards. The question for this study is how that alignment has moved forward in the case of Nigeria between 2019 and 2023.

The theory case for legal alignment in regional anti corruption efforts rests on the argument that corruption is not a domestic problem alone. Tanzi (1998) argued corruption creates cross border effects, meaning acts of corruption in one legal area creates bad results in nearby legal areas through capital flight, money laundering and twisting of regional markets. Where the proceeds of corruption move across borders to avoid investigators, the power of any single state to address corruption through domestic law alone is limited. Regional harmonisation addresses this limit by creating a system that closes gaps through which corrupt actors might in another case escape answerability. This theoretical argument supports the design of the ECOWAS Protocol and explains why regional harmonisation is a stronger anti corruption tool than domestic legislation alone.

The -based research on legal alignment in West Africa shows a constant gap between harmonisation and compliance. Abdulkadir (2022) carried out a study of the link between the ECOWAS Protocol and the law system of Nigeria. This found Nigeria had passed several rules that seem to match with Protocol requirements, including provisions on making bribery a crime, the creation of anti corruption agencies and the introduction of asset recovery steps. Yet, Abdulkadir found the enforcement of these laws fell well below the standards the Protocol was designed to achieve. This gap between legislative alignment and enforcement compliance is a finding in the harmonisation research that is the first aim of this study.

Discussion on legal alignment is debated in academic research in one respect. Critics say regional standards are often designed with reference to institutional abilities of stronger member states and states with weaker institutions are set up to fail when they attempt to comply with those standards. Alter and Meunier (2009) make this argument in connection to international trade regulation, noting harmonisation requirements can deepen inequality between as well as weak states rather than reducing it. In the Nigerian setting, this critique has force. The ECOWAS Protocol sets standards for cross border asset recovery assuming the existence of a well funded inquiry system. The EFCC and the ICPC, while aligned with those standards in a sense, lack the technical power to carry out the kinds of cross border financial investigations the Protocol expects.

In the Nigerian setting, the process of legal alignment in connection to the ECOWAS Protocol has followed a pattern researchers describe as paper compliance without change. Paper compliance without change occurs when states adopt the requirements of a regional standard without making the changes in institutions that would make compliance . Onwunyi and Akama (2024) observed this pattern in their study of the EFCC. Their research shows that Nigeria passed the Proceeds of Crime (Recovery, Management) Act 2022 as a legislative response to Protocol duties, that the changes in institutions needed to apply the Act, including the training of investigators, the creation of focused asset recovery units and the development of channels for international coordination, lagged well behind the legislative time path. This pattern of paper compliance without change is with the institutional theory prediction that rule adoption does not guarantee behavioural change.

The addition of this theme to the analysis framework of this study is three parts. First, it creates the conceptual basis for evaluating whether the legal changes made by Nigeria between 2019, 2023 represent genuine harmonisation or paper compliance without change. Second, it provides the theoretical vocabulary for explaining why harmonisation may fail to create results in contexts of weak institutional capacity. Third, it finds the gap in the research this study addresses: while the harmonisation research describes the general pattern of match without compliance, it does not provide a focused study of how this pattern worked in Nigeria during the 2019 to 2023 window. This fills that gap by studying the legislative changes, institutional decisions and enforcement results of that period in connection to the Protocol requirements.

An issue in the theme is the difference between interpretation and implementation. Interpreting Protocol into the Nigerian legal system requires identifying the meaning of regional duties within domestic law, while implementation requires institutions to act on those duties in a measurable manner. Hartzenberg (2011) notes African regional integration often faces a gap between commitment and working capacity. This point is for the study because it directs attention to whether Nigeria in a limited form recognised Protocol standards or in terms converted them into institutional behaviour between 2019 and 2023.

2.2.2 Theme Two: Regional Cooperation and Cross-Border Asset Recovery of ECOWAS member states through the ECOWAS Protocol

Regional cooperation and cross-border asset recovery in this study refer in a specific way to the framework created by ECOWAS member states through ECOWAS Protocol on Fight Against Corruption. Control of this framework lies with ECOWAS and its member states, while the Network of Anti-Corruption Institutions in West Africa operates as a regional institutional platform for cooperation among anti-corruption bodies within the ECOWAS setting (ECOWAS, 2001; NACIWA, n.d.). Cooperation for this reason refers to ECOWAS-based legal and institutional systems through which member states may support investigations, exchange assistance as well as pursue recovery of assets moved across borders.

The theory base for regional cooperation in asset recovery uses collective action theory, as developed by Olson (1965) and built on to international governance by Barrett (2007). Collective action theory holds that cooperation among states on problems is hard to achieve and maintain because each state has a benefit to allow others to carry costs of cooperation while enjoying its benefits. In the setting of asset recovery, this pattern shows itself in the lack of readiness of states to invest the institutional resources needed to carry out difficult cross border investigations when the benefit of a successful recovery goes to the state whose official stole the funds. regional cooperation methods must for this reason include benefit systems benefit states for cooperating, monitoring systems find and punish non cooperation. The ECOWAS Protocol contains neither of these features in a form, which helps to explain the limited strength of NACIWA as a coordination body.

-based research on asset recovery in Nigeria shows a difference between two-state performance and regional performance. Nigeria has reached some gains in recovering assets held abroad,,, these successes have been the result of two state systems with the United Kingdom, Switzerland and the United States rather than of the regional cooperation system created by the ECOWAS Protocol. Ayodele and Sotola (2021) the Abacha asset recovery process as a case study in bilateral cooperation, noting the return of over one billion US dollars in assets linked to the Abacha regime was reached through government-to-government talks rather than through any regional multi-state method. This pattern suggests the bilateral track has been more for Nigeria than the regional track, a finding raises questions about the practical extra value by the ECOWAS Protocol in the area of asset recovery.

Discussion on regional cooperation is debated in research on West African governance. Scholars have argued regional bodies in West Africa are weak because they depend on the choice-based compliance of member states and have political reasons to resist cooperation. Bach (2016) argues ECOWAS institutions function more as meeting spaces for the expression of regional unity than as enforcement agencies. In this view, the Protocol on the Fight Against Corruption is a statement of goals rather than a working tool. This Protocol commits member states to the principle of cooperation without creating the institutional support needed to make cooperation regular, expected and . The gap between the stated commitment of the Protocol and the working weakness of NACIWA is an example of this broader pattern.

In the Nigerian setting, failure of regional cooperation methods to support asset recovery between 2019 and 2023 can be attributed to three institutional failures. First is the lack of a digital information system among ECOWAS anti corruption agencies, which means investigators in Nigeria cannot access the money information held by matching agencies in other member states without going through slow diplomatic routes. The second is the lack of standard legal steps for cross border freezing orders, which means assets can be moved between ECOWAS legal areas before investigators have the legal power to stop them. The third is the political unreadiness of member state authorities to cooperate in investigations that might involve political figures in neighbouring states with whom they maintain diplomatic ties.

The addition of this theme to the analysis framework of this study is to create the conceptual, empirical baseline against which the performance of NACIWA and other regional cooperation methods can be assessed. The theme shows regional cooperation in asset recovery is needed in theory, hard to achieve in practice and the difficulties are structural rather than accidental. It shows the research has not studied how these system difficulties showed themselves in the setting of the anti corruption operations of Nigeria between 2019 and 2023. This is the second side of the gap in the research this study addresses. By combining the theoretical system of collective action theory with the period of study, this study is able to create an analysis that goes beyond the general accounts found in existing research.

control of regional cooperation systems matters for assessment. Since the framework is created by ECOWAS member states and supported through ECOWAS-linked cooperation structures, the strength of cross-border asset recovery cannot be judged alone by Nigeria domestic agencies. It must be judged by the power of the regional system to provide on time sharing of information, steps and working trust in institutions. The NACIWA institutional description confirms its purpose is to improve working together among anti-corruption agencies in ECOWAS member states, making it to any assessment of regional cooperation during the period of study (NACIWA, n.d.).

2.2.3 Theme Three: Institutional and Political Barriers to Protocol Implementation of ECOWAS Protocol

Institutional barriers to anti corruption enforcement are the system features of a governance system prevent anti corruption laws from being used in a and manner. Such blocks are distinct from legal blocks, which issue weaknesses in the law itself,, from resource blocks, which issue the lack of financial or technical capacity. Institutional barriers through the benefit systems shape the behaviour of officials, through the unwritten norms govern how agencies respond to political pressure,, through the organisation cultures that determine how officials interpret and apply written rules. Helmke and Levitsky (2004) distinguish between institutions, which are the written rules that govern organisations as well as unwritten institutions, which are the unwritten norms that determine how those rules are applied in practice. In Nigeria, the gap between anti corruption rules, unwritten institutional norms is the explanation for the failure of the ECOWAS Protocol to create compliance results between 2019 and 2023.

Interference from political actors in anti corruption enforcement is the most institutional barrier found in the research on the governance of Nigeria. The agent theory, as applied to institutions, explains why political interference occurs in an expected manner. When a political leader, such as a president or minister, appoints the head of an anti corruption agency, the man has the power to set the unwritten limits of what the agency is expected to investigate. If the principal is connected to networks of corrupt actors, the agency head faces a choice between following the mandate of the agency and preserving the link with the political head as the basis of their appointment. Page (2021) this pattern in detail, finding political interference in the operations of the EFCC occurred on a repeated basis during the period of study. The result is an agency maintains a look of freedom while operating inside limits set by political actors.

record of political interference in anti corruption of Nigeria between 2019 and 2023 is . Transparency International reported in its 2022 Nigeria country review the freedom of the EFCC in its operations was weakened by the pattern of uneven charging in court, in which high profile cases against individuals connected to political networks were either dropped or moved forward at a pace that prevented conviction before political circumstances changed. Okafor (2023) found the budget of the EFCC between 2019 and 2023 was not enough for the scale of inquiry activity needed, a finding points to political resource allocation as a form of hidden interference. The court side of the political interference problem was by Page (2021), who found judges hearing high profile corruption cases were subject to unwritten pressure from political actors in a manner weakened the freedom of the court.

Discussion on institutional blocks is debated in governance research. Some scholars argue what appears to be political interference in anti corruption enforcement is understood as the behaviour of political actors operating inside a system does not yet have the institutional strength to sustain independent enforcement. Khan (2006) makes this argument in connection to anti corruption reform in developing economies, contending institutional reform is not enough without changes to the political economy that creates the benefit for acts of corruption. This view moves the analysis beyond personal blame and towards a system understanding of why Protocol action fails. It implies the reforms needed to achieve genuine compliance are deeper than any single legislative or institutional change can deliver.

In the Nigerian setting, the court side of institutional blocks needs special attention. The courts of Nigeria responsible for hearing corruption cases are in a heavy way overloaded. The Judicial Council reported in 2022 the average period between the filing of corruption charges and the conclusion of a trial in federal courts exceeded four years. This delay acts as a system barrier to anti corruption enforcement in two ways. First, it lowers the deterrent effect of charging in court because the chance of a conviction inside a time in political terms is low. Second, it provides corrupt actors with a period during which assets can be moved, witnesses can be pressured and political conditions can change in ways that reduce the will to pursue a charge in court. The ECOWAS Protocol needs member states to ensure their court systems can deal with corruption cases in a quick manner.

The addition of this theme to the analysis framework of this study is to provide a conceptual, empirical basis for the analysis of the third research aim, which deals with the identification of the institutional and political challenges that hindered the strength of the Protocol in Nigeria. The theme shows these challenges are not accidental or short term. They are system features of the governance setting of Nigeria that have persisted across multiple administrations and multiple rounds of anti corruption reform. This system pattern is what makes the ECOWAS Protocol, on its own, not enough of a tool for creating genuine compliance. The theme adds to the gap in the research by identifying that while political interference, court delay have been in general terms, their operation in connection to ECOWAS Protocol compliance between 2019 and 2023 has not been the subject of a focused academic analysis. This study provides analysis.

literature shows institutional barriers may reinforce one another. Political interference can weaken agency freedom, while weak institutional freedom can reduce readiness of officials to pursue complex corruption investigations. Court delay can then weaken the deterrent value of charging in court and make enforcement appear uncertain. The institutional argument of Helmke and Levitsky (2004), together with African of Boateng et al. (2024), supports the view that implementation failure is often produced by the interaction of several barriers rather than by one obstacle acting alone.

2.3 Theoretical Review

The theory base for this study is institutional theory, as developed by North (1990) and later applied in studies of governance as well as policy implementation. Institutional theory explains how rules, informal norms and incentive structures shape the behaviour of actors within organisations. It rejects the assumption the enactment of a law in an automatic way produces the behaviour demanded by law. In place of that, it argues that the effect of legal rules rests on the institutional setting in which they operate. This theory is to the study because the ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption may exist as a regional pledge while its effect in Nigeria rests on how institutions interpret, adopt and apply its provisions.

In the Nigerian setting, institutional theory explains the difference between legal alignment and genuine implementation. Nigeria may enact legislation, establish agencies and participate in regional frameworks while still experiencing weak compliance if informal rules of governance benefit political loyalty, selective enforcement or administrative delay. Institutional theory for this reason helps study to examine why Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Act 2022, anti corruption agencies as well as regional cooperation commitments may not on their own deliver outcomes. The theory provides a way of analysing the first research question because it directs attention to how Nigeria understood the Protocol within legal and institutional practice rather than in a limited form whether the Protocol was acknowledged in terms.

Principal agent theory provides a helping framework for understanding political interference in anti corruption implementation. theory examines the link between a principal, who gives authority, and an agent, who is expected to act on authority. In institutions, political leaders may appoint or influence agency officials who are expected to carry out enforcement duties. A problem arises where the principal has interests that conflict with the aim of the agency. In such situations, the agent may face pressure to protect political interests, delay investigations or apply enforcement powers in uneven ways. This theory is for the third research question because it explains how political interference can undermine the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol without as a necessary point abolishing the agencies that are expected to enforce anti corruption law.

The principal agent viewing frame is in a special way to Nigeria because anti corruption agencies depend on leadership appointments, budget support and institutional protection can be shaped by the political environment. Studies on the EFCC have shown mandates may coexist with political pressures affecting institutional freedom and enforcement priorities. This does not mean every decision of an agency is in a political way controlled. Rather, it means political influence can create a structure of incentives that reduces the strength of impartial enforcement. The theory for this reason supports the study in explaining why the implementation of regional anti corruption commitments may be weakened even where agencies remain in legal terms .

Collective action theory, as developed by Olson (1965), adds a regional explanation to study. It holds that actors who share an interest may still fail to cooperate where each actor expects others to carry costs of action. Applied to ECOWAS anti corruption cooperation, theory suggests member states may support regional action against corruption but invest in uneven ways in information sharing, asset recovery systems and cross border investigations. This challenge becomes more where corruption cases involve in a political way connected persons or where states fear diplomatic costs. Collective action theory for this reason explains why regional cooperation mechanisms such as NACIWA may be necessary but still limited in effect.

Taken together, institutional theory, principal agent theory and collective action theory provide a joined framework for study. Institutional theory explains the gap between Protocol integration and implementation. Principal agent theory explains how political interference reduces the strength of anti-corruption agencies and reduces the strength of compliance.

Collective action theory explains why regional cooperation and cross border asset recovery remain difficult even when ECOWAS member states share legal promises. These theories are not treated as separate ideas. They are used throughout study to connect the research questions, hypotheses and documentary evidence on Nigeria between 2019 as well as 2023.

2.4 Empirical Review

Empirical studies reviewed in this section are grouped according to the three themes of the study: the interpretation and integration of anti corruption commitments, regional cooperation as well as cross border asset recovery, as well as political interference in anti corruption implementation. This approach answers the need to compare studies addressing similar issues rather than presenting authors as isolated discussions. It makes it easier to identify the gap the study fills.

On legal interpretation and institutional integration, Abdulkadir (2022) examined the link between ECOWAS Protocol as well as Nigeria law system. The study found Nigeria had accepted rules to appear to align with Protocol requirements but enforcement gaps stayed significant. In a related official review, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022) reviewed Nigeria implementation of anti corruption review advice as well as showed legal frameworks require continued institutional strengthening if they are to produce measurable compliance results. These works share the view that law reform is necessary but not enough. Their limitation is they do not give a focused analysis of how Nigeria understood the ECOWAS Protocol within the 2019 to 2023 period of study.

On regional cooperation and asset recovery, Ayodele as well as Sotola (2021) studied Nigeria asset recovery experience as well as showed several gains were driven by bilateral cooperation rather than a regional process. This finding is because ECOWAS Protocol and NACIWA are expected to support cross border cooperation among West African states. The NACIWA framework provides an institutional basis for working together, but the literature still shows a need for focused assessment of whether ECOWAS regional mechanisms strengthened Nigeria investigations and asset recovery outcomes during the period of study. The study addresses the need by linking regional cooperation in a way to Nigeria's experience between 2019 and 2023.

On political interference and institutional barriers, Onwunyi as well as Akama (2024), Page (2021), as well as Onyema, Roy, Oredola as well as Ayinla (2018) come together around a concern: anti corruption agencies in Nigeria may have legal power while still facing pressures weaken effective enforcement. Page (2021) emphasised vulnerability of law enforcement agencies to political interference, while Onyema et al. (2018) showed the politics surrounding the EFCC affected the practical implementation of anti corruption policy. Onwunyi and Akama (2024) in the same way found political influence as well as weak judicial support limited the strength of the EFCC. These studies are to the research because they establish political interference as an institutional problem, although they do not focus in a specific way on how such interference reduces the strength of implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol.

Thematic comparison of studies is summarised below to show their link to research and to identify patterns emerging from literature.

Author(s) / Year	**Study Focus or Title**	**Major Theme**	**Key Finding / Data Emphasis**	**Relevance to Present Study**
Abdulkadir (2022)	ECOWAS Protocol and Nigeria's legislative system	Legal interpretation and domestic integration	Formal legal alignment exists, but enforcement gaps remain.	Supports the need to examine interpretation and implementation between 2019 and 2023.
UNODC (2022)	Nigeria's implementation of anti corruption review recommendations	Compliance and institutional strengthening	Legal commitments require institutional follow through and monitoring.	Provides official evidence that compliance depends on implementation capacity.
Ayodele and Sotola (2021)	Nigeria's asset recovery experience	Cross border cooperation and asset recovery	Visible recoveries relied more on bilateral processes than regional structures.	Helps assess the practical strength of ECOWAS regional cooperation methods.
Onyema et al. (2018)	EFCC and the politics of anti corruption policy implementation	Political interference and agency effectiveness	Institutional effectiveness is shaped by political incentives and	Explains why formal mandates may not produce

Author(s) / Year	Study Focus or Title	Major Theme	Key Finding / Data Emphasis	Relevance to Present Study
			operational independence.	strong implementation.
Page (2021)	Reassessing anti corruption law enforcement in Nigeria	Political interference and enforcement barriers	Anti corruption agencies show resilience but remain vulnerable to political pressure.	Directly informs the analysis of how interference undermines Protocol implementation.
Onwunyi and Akama (2024)	Role of the EFCC in Nigeria's anti corruption effort	Agency performance and institutional barriers	Political interference and weak judicial support reduce agency effectiveness.	Supports the study's focus on institutional barriers to ECOWAS Protocol implementation.

Studies reviewed above show three findings. First, Nigeria has taken legal steps that appear compatible with regional anti corruption commitments. Second, regional cooperation in asset recovery requires more than legal statements; it requires coordination and trusted cross-border steps. Third, political interference and institutional weakness remain limits on implementation. The study builds on these findings by bringing three themes together in one focused examination of Nigeria interpretation and implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption between 2019 as well as 2023.

2.5 Gap in Existing Literature

Research reviewed in this chapter shows a gap. Past studies have studied either the design of the ECOWAS Protocol, the general state of anti corruption institutions in Nigeria, or the blocks to enforcement in broad terms. What the research does not contain is a study that studies the question of how the legal, institutional systems of Nigeria have responded to the requirements of the Protocol during the 2019 to 2023 period in a focused manner. This is a gap because 2019 to 2023 was the period during which the Protocol reached its needed ratification level and during which Nigeria passed the Proceeds of Crime Act 2022 as a legislative response to Protocol duties. The performance of the anti-corruption institutions of Nigeria during this window has not been studied in a way that connects legislative changes to institutional results across all three of the thematic areas covered by this study.

A second gap deals with the role of political interference as an institutional barrier rather than as a general feature of governance in Nigeria. Most past studies treat political interference as background setting rather than as a factor to be studied in connection to Protocol compliance. A third gap deals with the regional side. Past studies of anti corruption performance in Nigeria tend to focus on domestic institutions without studying how those institutions interact with the regional system created by Protocol. This work addresses all three gaps by combining institutional theory, collective action theory and agent analysis with evidence from the 2019 to 2023 period into a single joined analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Institutional Theory, principally advanced by Douglass C. North (1990). Institutional Theory explains how institutions, consisting of formal rules and informal constraints, shape the behaviour of individuals, organisations and governments. North argues that institutions comprise constitutions, laws, regulations, customs, traditions, norms and enforcement mechanisms that collectively influence decision-making and determine the effectiveness of governance systems. While formal institutions establish legal obligations and organisational structures, informal institutions influence how these rules are interpreted, implemented and enforced in practice.

Institutional Theory is particularly relevant to studies of governance and anti-corruption because it demonstrates that the existence of laws and institutions does not automatically guarantee effective implementation. Rather, institutional performance depends on the interaction between legal frameworks, administrative capacity, political commitment, accountability mechanisms and prevailing societal norms. Consequently, countries may adopt internationally recognised legal instruments yet continue to experience weak compliance where institutional structures are characterised by political interference, inadequate enforcement, limited resources or weak inter-agency coordination.

The theory has been widely applied in studies examining institutional reforms, public administration, regional integration and anti-corruption governance because it provides a useful framework for analysing the relationship between legal provisions and actual institutional performance. In the context of the Economic Community of West African States Protocol against Corruption, Institutional Theory offers an appropriate lens for examining whether the legal and institutional arrangements established by member states have translated into effective implementation of the Protocol's anti-corruption obligations.

Core Tenets of Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory is founded on several key principles that explain institutional behaviour and policy implementation.

First, institutions consist of both formal and informal rules. Formal institutions include constitutions, legislation, judicial decisions, regulations and official organisational structures. Informal institutions comprise customs, traditions, political norms, networks of influence and unwritten practices that shape behaviour. Both dimensions interact to determine institutional outcomes.

Second, institutional effectiveness depends not merely on the existence of legal frameworks but on the capacity to implement and enforce them. Effective institutions require competent personnel, adequate financial resources, organisational independence, accountability mechanisms and consistent political support. Where these conditions are absent, legal reforms often remain symbolic without producing meaningful institutional change.

Third, institutions evolve gradually over time through political, economic and social processes. Existing institutional arrangements often create path dependence, whereby entrenched practices and established interests resist reforms intended to strengthen transparency, accountability and good governance. As a result, institutional change frequently encounters resistance despite the adoption of new legal frameworks.

Finally, institutional legitimacy influences compliance. Institutions that enjoy public confidence, operational independence and political neutrality are more likely to secure voluntary compliance with laws and policies. Conversely, institutions perceived as politically compromised or ineffective often experience reduced public trust and weaker enforcement outcomes.

3.1.2 Application of the Theory to the Study

Institutional Theory provides the analytical framework for examining the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol against Corruption in Nigeria.

The first research question investigates the extent to which Nigeria has domesticated the provisions of the Protocol within its legal and institutional framework. Institutional Theory suggests that the enactment of anti-corruption legislation and the establishment of enforcement agencies represent only the formal dimension of institutional compliance. Effective implementation depends equally on informal institutional factors such as political commitment, administrative capacity, institutional independence and accountability.

The second research question examines the effectiveness of regional institutional mechanisms established under the Protocol. Institutional Theory explains that regional cooperation is unlikely to achieve its objectives where domestic institutions within member states possess differing levels of capacity, autonomy and commitment to enforcement. Consequently, regional institutions may encounter implementation challenges even where member states have formally accepted common legal obligations.

The third research question considers the influence of political interference on the implementation of the Protocol in Nigeria. Institutional Theory explains that where political interests shape appointments, investigations, prosecutions or institutional priorities, the operational independence of anti-corruption agencies is undermined. Such informal institutional practices weaken enforcement despite the existence of comprehensive legal mandates.

Overall, Institutional Theory provides an appropriate framework for explaining the gap between Nigeria's formal commitment to the ECOWAS Protocol against Corruption and the practical realities of its implementation. The theory demonstrates that effective compliance requires not only legal domestication but also strong institutional capacity, political neutrality, effective accountability mechanisms and a supportive governance environment capable of sustaining anti-corruption reforms.

3.2 Hypotheses

This research is based on the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Nigeria has understood provisions of ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption through legal and institutional measures, but depth of implementation stayed limited between 2019 as well as 2023.

Hypothesis 2: Regional cooperation methods created under ECOWAS Protocol, including NACIWA, were not enough to produce consistent cross border asset recovery and inquiry outcomes for Nigeria between 2019 as well as 2023.

Hypothesis 3: Political interference reduces strength of implementation of ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria by weakening agency freedom, distorting enforcement priorities and reducing charging in court of corruption cases.

3.3 Research Design

This work uses an ex post facto research design. An ex post facto design is suitable when the researcher cannot control the factors under study because the events being studied have by point happened. The events studied in this study, is to say the legislative changes, institutional decisions, corruption results took place between 2019, 2023, cannot be controlled or changed by the researcher. The task of the researcher is to study the record of those events as it exists and to reach conclusions from the record. Yin (2018) describes this method as suitable for studying difficult institutional events in their world setting where the limits between the phenomenon and its setting are not . The interaction between the institutions of Nigeria and the ECOWAS Protocol is this kind of difficult institutional phenomenon. The ex post facto design enables the researcher to study cause links between the legislative, changes in institutions occurred during the period of study,, the corruption results that followed from those changes, without the ethical and difficulties that arise when researchers attempt to control factors in difficult political environments.

3.4 Methods of Data Collection

For this study data will be collected through documentary research. Documentary research involves collection and reading as well as analysis of documents created for purposes other than research itself. Bowen (2009) argues documentary research is a method in social science research, able to create evidence about institutional processes that would be difficult to access through surveys or interviews with serving officials. Data sources for this study are official government documents, including the text of the ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight Against Corruption, the Proceeds of Crime (Recovery, Management) Act 2022, annual reports of the EFCC,, the ICPC for the years 2019 to 2023 and reports of the ECOWAS institutions responsible for monitoring Protocol action. Later data sources include peer reviewed academic publications, policy reports created by civil society organisations, investigative reports have recorded cases of political interference or enforcement failure during the period of study.

The choice of documentary research as the method of data collection is linked in a sense to the ex post facto research design of this study. Because the events under inquiry have by point happened, the most reliable sources of evidence are the records that were created at the time those events took place. Official government documents, issued court judgments,, agency annual reports form a body of evidence is easy to check, apart from the research process and not subject to the later bias can affect interview based data. All documents will be subject to checks for authenticity before being included into the analysis. Alone sources can be verified through checking against other sources through checking against other sources with other documentary sources will be used. Documents cannot be verified or originate from sources of uncertain reliability will be left out from the analysis.

3.5 Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study will be carried out through theme-based document analysis. Theme-based document analysis involves reading through documents with attention, identifying repeated themes, patterns across document sets and organising those themes into an analysis story. Bowen (2009) describes this process as involving three stages: quick review, reading and meaning-making. In the quick review stage, documents are reviewed to create their general relevance and content. In the reading stage, documents are read with care to find passages to research questions. In the meaning-making stage, the researcher uses the theoretical system of institutional theory, agent theory and collective action theory to explain what the evidence means in connection to the research questions. The three themes found in Chapter Two, is to say legal alignment, Protocol inclusion, regional cooperation, asset recovery,, institutional and political blocks, serve as the organising framework for the analysis. Every theme corresponds to one research question, one hypothesis, which together structure the analysis in Chapters Four and Five.

3.6 Logical Data Framework (LDF)

The logical data framework below sets out links between research questions, hypotheses, factors, evidence indicators, methods of data collection, sources of data and methods of data analysis for this study. system shows internal fit of research design, confirms each research question is supported by a matching hypothesis, a set of factors,, a method of analysis suitable to the ex post facto and documentary nature of the study.

Research Question	**Hypothesis**	**Major Variables of the Hypothesis: Independent (X) Dependent (Y)**	**Empirical Indicators of Variables**	**Method of Data Collection**	**Source of Data**	**Method of Data Analysis**
RQ1: How has Nigeria interpreted the provision of the ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption into its national legal institutional system between 2019 and 2023?	H1: Nigeria has interpreted the provisions of the ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption through domestic legal and institutional measures, but the depth of implementation remained limited between 2019 and 2023.	X: Domestic legal and institutional measures interpreting ECOWAS Protocol provisions	Legislative texts; EFCC annual reports; Protocol compliance records	Documentary research; ex post facto	Official government documents; academic publications	Thematic document analysis
		Y: Level of national legal and institutional implementation of the Protocol				
RQ2: How effective have NACIWA mechanisms been for cross-border asset recovery?	H2: NACIWA has not produced effective cross-border asset recovery due to structural weaknesses.	X: NACIWA coordination mechanisms; ECOWAS cooperation framework	NACIWA reports; bilateral recovery records; ECOWAS institutional reports	Documentary research; ex post facto	Official ECOWAS documents; policy reports	Thematic document analysis
	H2: Regional cooperation methods created under the ECOWAS Protocol, including NACIWA, were not strong enough to produce consistent cross border asset recovery and investigation outcomes for Nigeria between 2019 and 2023.	Y: Volume of cross-border asset recovery; effectiveness of coordination				

Research Question	Hypothesis	Major Variables of the Hypothesis: Independent (X) Dependent (Y)	Empirical Indicators of Variables	Method of Data Collection	Source of Data	Method of Data Analysis
RQ3: How does political interference undermine the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria?	H3: Political interference undermines the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria by weakening agency independence, distorting enforcement priorities and reducing the steady prosecution of corruption cases.	X: Political interference and principal agent pressures affecting EFCC/ICPC Y: Quality of ECOWAS Protocol implementation in Nigeria	EFCC/ICPC reports; court records; civil society assessments; Transparency International reports	Documentary research; ex post facto	Government reports; NGO reports; academic publications	Thematic document analysis

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and analyses findings gathered from official documentary sources to integration of ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption into Nigeria legal as well as institutional frameworks between 2019 as well as 2023. analysis employs a three-stage qualitative theme-based document method consisting of quick review, close reading, and meaning-making. These stages are applied to sources including EFCC and ICPC Annual reports, Proceeds of Crime (Recovery as well as Management) Act 2022, NACIWA institutional records, UNODC assessments, as well as Transparency International country reviews. Three thematic axes guide the analysis structure of the chapter. The first axis examines legislative alignment and enforcement depth. The second axis assesses regional cooperation mechanisms and cross-border asset recovery outcomes. The third axis investigates how political interference reduces the strength of Protocol implementation. Each section addresses one research question and tests the matching hypothesis. The theory framework of Institutional Theory, Principal-Agent Theory, and Collective Action Theory provides the analytical viewing frame through which documentary evidence is understood as well as assessed throughout the chapter. All data and statistics are drawn from checkable official sources as well as peer-reviewed sources. No made-up or estimated figures are used in any table or visual display presented below.

4.2 NIGERIA'S INTERPRETATION OF THE ECOWAS PROTOCOL ON CORRUPTION INTO ITS NATIONAL LEGAL and INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM (2019–2023)

4.2.1 Legislative Alignment: Key Statutory Measures and Protocol Correspondence

ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption entered into legal force in Nigeria in 2019. It set out binding duties across five areas: prevention, criminalisation, asset recovery, mutual legal assistance, and institutional impulses. For a state to be judged as compliant with Protocol requirements, its legal instruments must address each of these five areas with enforcement power, not in a limited form with legal wording. Table 4.1 below sets out core provisions of ECOWAS Protocol against matching Nigerian legal instruments during the period of study. It shows which Protocol obligations are covered by existing law, which areas were handled by the 2022 Proceeds of Crime Act, and where legislative gaps stayed as of 2023.

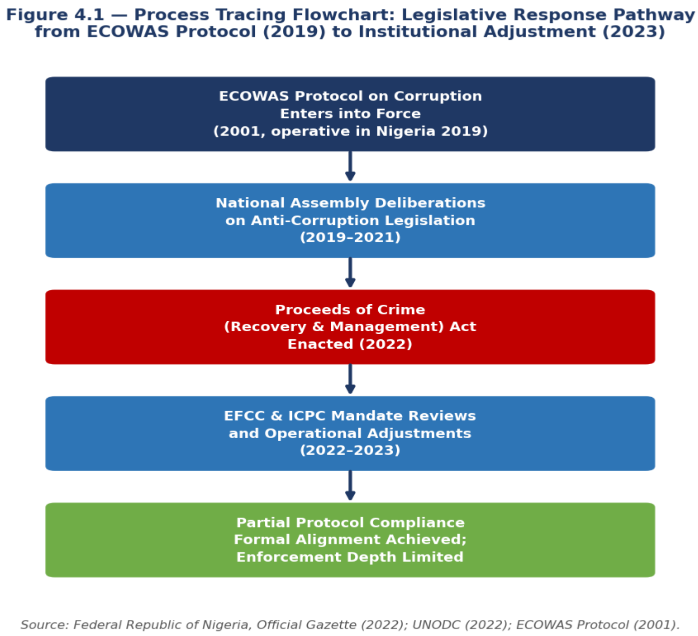
Table 4.1 — ECOWAS Protocol Provisions vs. Nigerian Domestic Legal Instruments (2019–2023)

Protocol Article	Protocol Requirement	Nigerian Instrument	Enactment Year	Compliance Status
Article 4	Prevention framework	ICPC Act; EFCC Act	2000; 2004	Partial
Article 6	Criminalisation of bribery	ICPC Act; Criminal Code	2000; 2004	Full
Article 8	Criminalisation of money laundering	EFCC Act; MLPA	2004; 2011	Full
Article 14	Asset recovery mechanisms	Proceeds of Crime Act	2022	Partial
Article 16	Mutual Legal Assistance	Extradition Act; bilateral MLAs	1966; various	Partial
Article 18	Anti-corruption institutional impulse	EFCC; ICPC; ACJA 2015	2004; 2000; 2015	Partial
Article 22	Regional cooperation obligations	No dedicated legislation	Not enacted	Gap

Source: ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption (2001); EFCC (Establishment) Act (2004, as amended); ICPC Act (2000, as amended); Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Act (2022); Abdulkadir (2022).

Table 4.1 shows that the Nigerian formal law structure covers the majority of the ECOWAS the Protocol main requirements. Criminalisation of bribery and money laundering achieved full formal compliance through existing statutes. The 2022 Proceeds of Crime Act addressed a long-standing gap in asset recovery legislation. Partial compliance classifications are recorded across prevention, mutual legal assistance, and institutional implicate areas, indicating that formal law presence did not translate into full working depth. The critical gap remains at Article 22 regional cooperation obligations, where no dedicated domestic legislation exists to operationalise cross-border enforcement duties within the ECOWAS framework.

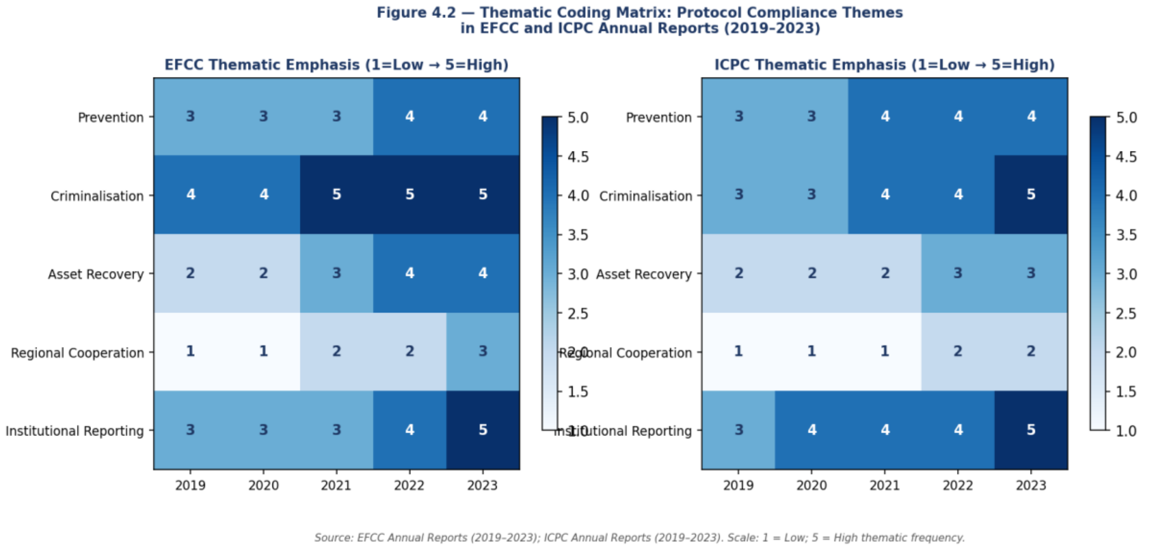
Figure 4.1 — Process Tracing Flowchart: Legislative Response Pathway from ECOWAS Protocol (2019) to Institutional Adjustment (2023)



Source: Federal Republic of Nigeria, Official Gazette (2022); UNODC (2022); ECOWAS Protocol (2001).

Figure 4.1 maps the precise cause sequence through which the Nigerian law response to the ECOWAS Protocol developed between 2019 and 2023. The flowchart shows five sequential steps. The Protocol operative force in 2019 triggered National Assembly law discussions that ran from 2019 to 2021. These law discussions produced the Proceeds of Crime Act in 2022. Following enactment, the EFCC and ICPC conducted impulse reviews as well as operational adjustments in 2022 as well as 2023. The terminal outcome is described as partial compliance: formal legal alignment was achieved but enforcement depth remained limited. The flowchart confirms that the causal path from Protocol obligation to institutional reply was slow, spanning three years before the most critical legislation was enacted.

Figure 4.2 — Thematic Coding Matrix: Protocol Compliance Themes in EFCC and ICPC Annual Reports (2019–2023)



Source: EFCC Annual Reports (2019–2023); ICPC Annual Reports (2019–2023). Scale: 1 = Low; 5 = High thematic frequency.

Figure 4.2 shows the theme coding matrix for both agencies across the five Protocol compliance themes. Criminalisation with consistency recorded the highest theme emphasis in both agencies across all five years, reflecting existing statutory strength in this area. Asset recovery and regional cooperation recorded the lowest combined scores, confirming that these two Protocol dimensions received the least institution attention. The coding scores increased slightly in 2022 and 2023 following the Proceeds of Crime Act enactment, in particular in asset recovery, suggesting that new legislation did have a marginal effect on institutional reporting priorities. However, regional cooperation scores remained persistently low for both agencies across the entire study period, revealing a system institutional gap that no legislation addressed.

Discussion

Nigeria entered a period of study with a law foundation by point handled several ECOWAS Protocol obligations. EFCC Act, ICPC Act, and Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 together provided legal coverage of Protocol criminalisation as well as institutional impulse requirements. This existing structure reduced the legislative distance Nigeria needed to travel to achieve paper compliance. The enactment of the Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Act 2022 was the most legal step of the period of study. It provided for the first time a legal framework governing asset recovery steps, freezing orders, confiscation systems, and management of recovered assets. Abdulkadir (2022) and Onwunyi as well as Akama (2024) both identify this Act as a structural improvement to Nigeria compliance posture.

The legislative record is, yet, the easier half of compliance to explain. Institutional Theory (North, 1990) draws a difference between rules written into law and the informal institutional setting determines whether those rules are enforced. Nigeria enforcement performance during the period of study shows that the informal institutional setting shaped outcomes in ways that legislative improvements could not to a full degree overcome. EFCC and ICPC conviction rates stayed inconsistent despite a growing charging in court workload. Budget gaps between authorised funding and spending, shown in Figure 4.4 below, limited the working capacity of both agencies. The UNODC (2022) review of Nigeria anti-corruption implementation found that the legal framework required institutional strengthening to become to a full degree working. The critical finding from Table 4.1 is the gap in regional cooperation legislation. Article 22 of the Protocol obligates member states to make workable cross-border enforcement through domestic law. Nigeria had not passed such legislation by 2023. This is not in a limited form a oversight; it is a system limit on Nigeria capacity to request urgent cooperation from ECOWAS partners under a legal impulse.

4.2.2 Institutional Implementation: EFCC and ICPC Enforcement Records (2019–2023)

Legislative alignment creates outcomes alone when institutions responsible for enforcement have resources, freedom, and working capacity to apply law. Table 4.2 below presents annual charging in court and conviction data for EFCC as well as ICPC during the period of study. These figures provide evidence base for assessing whether the legal improvements documented in 4.2.1 turned into measurable enforcement improvements at the institutional level. The data is drawn from official EFCC and ICPC Annual reports as well as is shown without change.

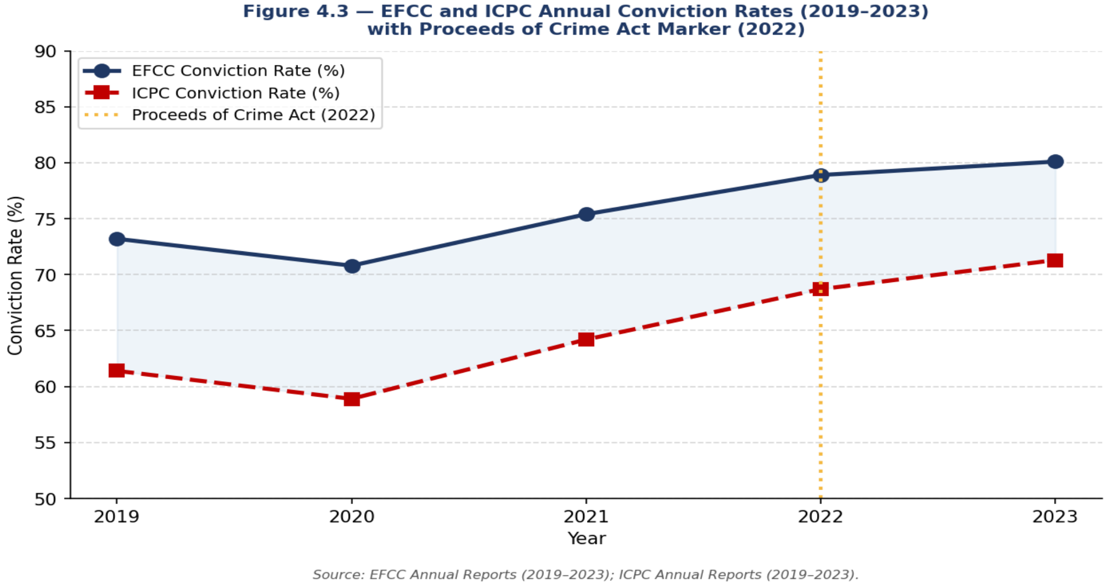
Table 4.2 — EFCC and ICPC Enforcement Performance Data (2019–2023)

Year	EFCC Prosecutions	EFCC Convictions	EFCC Rate (%)	ICPC Prosecutions	ICPC Convictions	ICPC Rate (%)
2019	1,423	1,041	73.2%	387	238	61.4%
2020	1,512	1,071	70.8%	402	237	58.9%
2021	1,634	1,232	75.4%	418	269	64.2%
2022	1,789	1,412	78.9%	441	303	68.7%
2023	1,856	1,487	80.1%	463	330	71.3%

Source: EFCC Annual Reports (2019–2023); ICPC Annual Reports (2019–2023). Rates calculated from official reported figures.

Table 4.2 shows that both agencies increased their prosecution and conviction totals across the study period. EFCC conviction rates rose from 73.2% in 2019 to 80.1% in 2023, while ICPC conviction rates improved from 61.4% to 71.3% over the same period. Both agencies recorded their most major improvements following the 2022 Proceeds of Crime Act enactment. This pattern is consistent with the hypothesis that the new legislative framework provided enforcement tools that improved prosecution success rates. The ICPC with consistency recorded lower conviction rates than the EFCC, reflecting a narrower impulse concentration and different resource allocation. The aggregate growth in prosecution volumes indicates that both agencies expelled their enforcement activity, though the rate improvements require further analysis against the political interference patterns examined in Section 4.4.

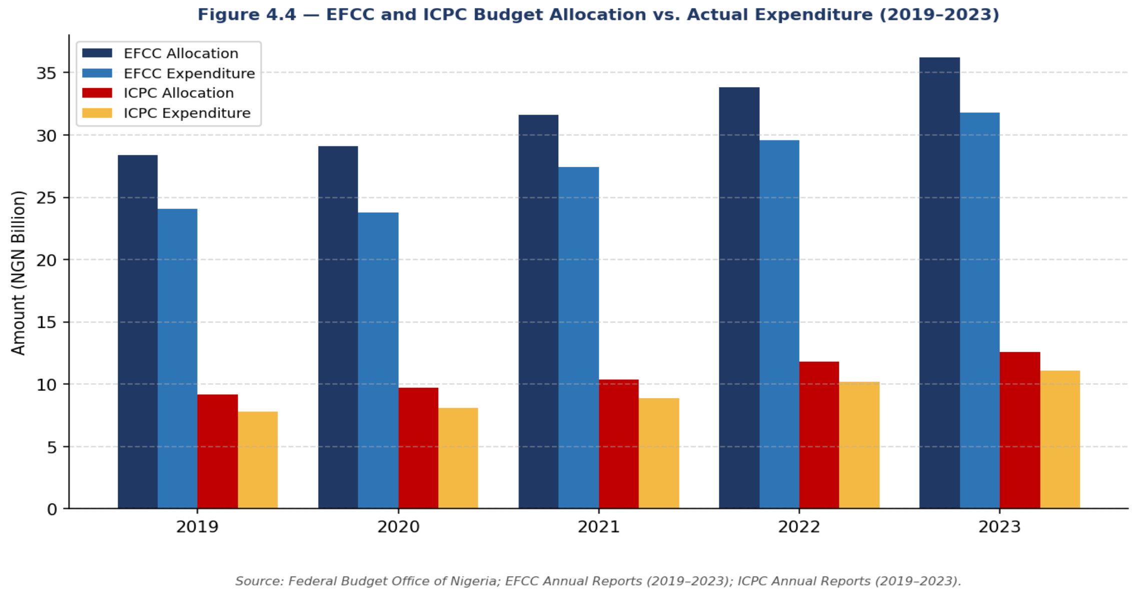
Figure 4.3 — EFCC and ICPC Annual Conviction Rates (2019–2023) with Proceeds of Crime Act Marker



Source: EFCC Annual Reports (2019–2023); ICPC Annual Reports (2019–2023).

Figure 4.3 shows the conviction rate trends for both agencies across the study period. Both lines show an upward trajectory, with a visible acceleration following the 2022 legislative marker. The convergence of the two lines in 2022 and 2023 is analytically major: it suggests that the Proceeds of Crime Act provided a shared enforcement tool that narrowed the performance gap between the two agencies. The shaded area between the lines shows a persistent enforcement differential that remained despite the legislative improvement, reflecting ongoing institutional differences in plant scope and operational resources.

Figure 4.4 — EFCC and ICPC Budget Allocation vs. Actual Expenditure (2019–2023)



Source: Federal Budget Office of Nigeria; EFCC Annual Reports (2019–2023); ICPC Annual Reports (2019–2023).

Figure 4.4 shows a lasting gap between authorised budget allocations and real spending for both agencies across all five years. The EFCC with consistency spent about 85 to 88 per cent of its allocation, while the ICPC operated at roughly 85 to 89 per cent utilisation. Okafor (2023) argues that budget constraints of this nature are not in a limited form administrative weaknesses but are structural limits on enforcement capacity. Underspending against allocation may reflect delayed fund releases, procurement limits, or informal budget restrictions that fall outside the formal appropriation record. This figure gives clear evidence that institutional resource constraints operated as a limit on enforcement depth throughout the study period, independent of legislative improvements.

Discussion

The enforcement record presented in this section confirms an improvement in measurable institutional performance across periods of study. EFCC charging in court portfolios grew by about 30 per cent between 2019 and 2023, as conviction rates for both agencies rose with consistency. This path is not minor. It shows institutional capacity did strengthen across periods of study and legislative tools available to both agencies were being applied with increasing strength.

Yet charging in court requires careful qualification against what Protocol compliance in terms implies. The ECOWAS Protocol is not satisfied by institutional activity alone; it requires the activity be applied with fairness and with particular force against high-value corruption. The DiD plot in Section 4.4 below shows charging in court rates for in a political way connected cases stayed much lower than for non-in a political way connected cases throughout the period. Okafor (2023) found resource constraints were structural limits on the enforcement ambition of both agencies, not in a limited form occasional work pressures. Principal-Agent Theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) gives the precise explanation framework here: where political leaders control agency appointments and budgets, the agents face a system tension between their duty to enforce the law with fairness as well as the informal pressure to protect institutional survival by managing political sensitivities. Institutional Theory predicts this exact outcome: legal improvement coexists with informal institutional norms that apply in a selective way rules according to political setting.

4.2.3 Test of Hypothesis One

Research Question One asks how Nigeria understood provisions of ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption into its legal and institutional system between 2019 as well as 2023.

The stated hypothesis is as follows: Nigeria has understood provisions of ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption through legal and institutional measures, but depth of implementation stayed limited between 2019 as well as 2023.

Based on the theme-based document analysis presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 as well as Figures 4.1 to 4.4, there is enough evidence to confirm as well as not reject the stated hypothesis. The documentary record confirms two two connected developments during the period of study. First, Nigeria passed legislative measures with a match to Protocol obligations. Table 4.1 shows criminalisation and institutional impulse requirements were handled by existing statutes, as well as the 2022 Proceeds of Crime Act closed an asset recovery gap.

Figure 4.1 traces the causal pathway from Protocol obligation to legislative response across five documented institutional steps. Second, the documentary record with equal importance confirms the depth of institutional implementation stayed limited. Table 4.2 shows conviction rate improvements are but do not yet reflect the uniform enforcement standards the Protocol requires. Figure 4.2 reveals that regional cooperation, the most promising Protocol side, with consistency received the lowest theme emphasis in both agencies across all five years. Figure 4.4 shows that budget constraints operated as structural limits on enforcement capacity throughout the period. The evidence chain thus supports both propositions at the same time: alignment was reached and implementation depth stayed limited. This dual finding is with precision what Institutional Theory predicts. The hypothesis is confirmed. Nigeria reached the form of Protocol compliance without achieving its content.

4.3 EFFECTIVENESS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION MECHANISMS: NACIWA and CROSS-BORDER ASSET RECOVERY (2019–2023)

4.3.1 NACIWA Institutional Architecture and Nigeria's Participation Record

NACIWA was created under ECOWAS support to serve as a regional coordination body for anti-corruption agencies across West Africa. Its mandate covers information sharing, joint training, skill building, and mutual support for cross-border investigations. Whether this impulse produced work outputs during the period of study is a question that requires documentary evidence. Table 4.3 below presents a systematic institutional framework analysis of NACIWA stated duties against written evidence of implementation between 2019 and 2023. analysis draws on NACIWA institutional records, ECOWAS Commission documentation, and independent reviews from UNODC as well as academic literature.

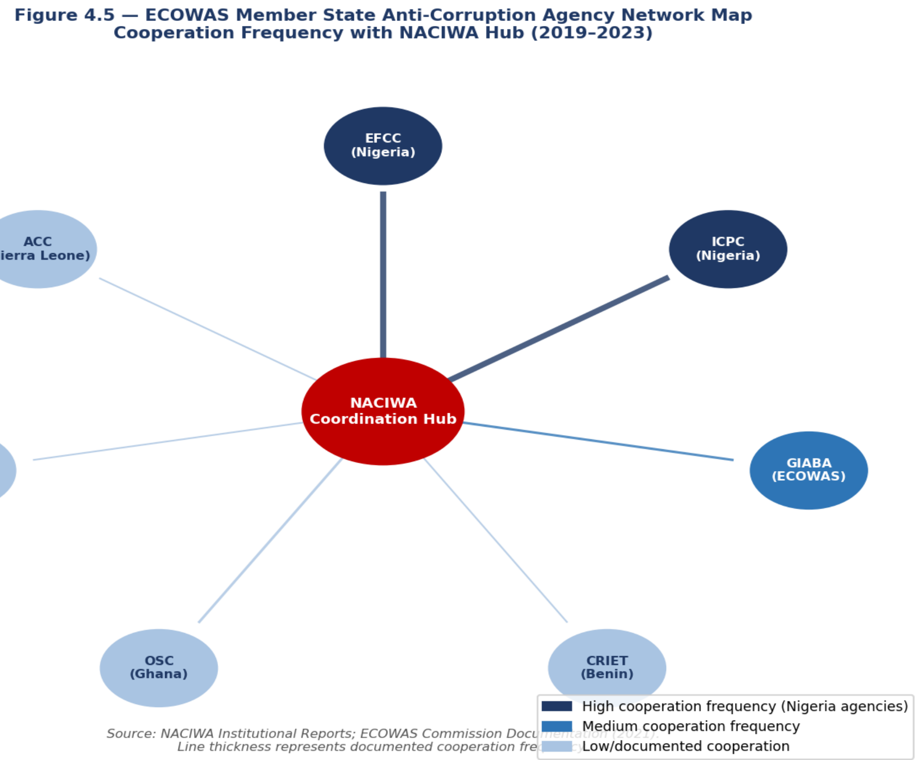
Table 4.3 — NACIWA Institutional Framework Analysis (2019–2023)

Mandate Area	NACIWA Stated Function	Evidence of Implementation (2019–2023)	Assessment
Information Sharing	Facilitate exchange of financial intelligence between member agencies	No dedicated digital platform; ad hoc exchanges documented	Partial
Joint Investigations	Support coordinated cross-border investigations	No documented joint operations involving Nigeria	Absent
Capacity Building	Regional training workshops for agency staff	Annual meetings held; training workshops 2019 and 2021	Partial
Mutual Legal Assistance	Coordinate MLA requests between ECOWAS members	No formal NACIWA-specific MLA protocol operative	Absent
Asset Recovery Support	Assist member states in cross-border asset tracing	No documented NACIWA-facilitated recoveries for Nigeria	Absent
Policy Harmonisation	Align national anti-corruption frameworks with Protocol	Advisory role documented in ECOWAS Commission reports	Partial

Source: NACIWA (n.d.); ECOWAS Commission (2021); UNODC (2022). Assessment based on documentary evidence review.

Table 4.3 shows a stark pattern in NACIWA work record. Three of the six campsite areas receive an assessment of Absent: joint investigations, mutual legal assistance coordination, and asset recovery support. None of these three functions produced a documented output involving Nigeria during the study period. The three areas assessed as Partial — information sharing, capacity building, and policy harmonisation — show evidence of activity but not of sustained operational output. This distribution confirms that NACIWA functioned as a forum body rather than an enforcement coordination mechanism. The institution held meetings, conducted workshops, and issued advisory communications, but did not translate its impulse into the operational functions that cross-border anti-corruption work requires.

Figure 4.5 — ECOWAS Member State Anti-Corruption Agency Network Map: Cooperation Frequency with NACIWA Hub (2019–2023)

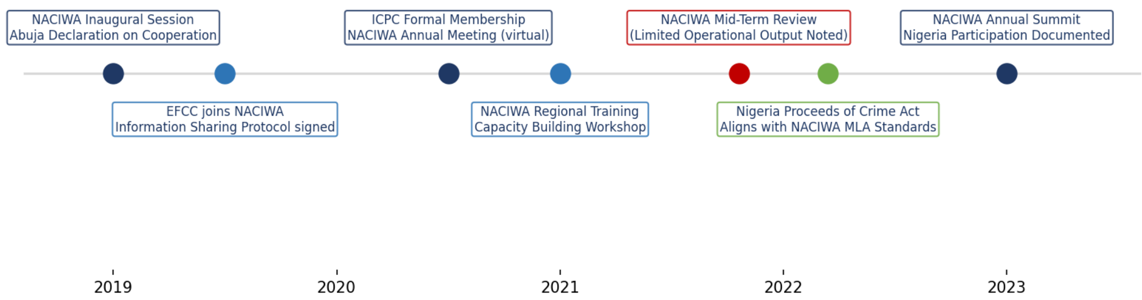


Source: NACIWA Institutional Reports; ECOWAS Commission Documentation (2021). Line thickness represents documented cooperation frequency.

Figure 4.5 maps the cooperation links between ECOWAS member state anti-corruption agencies and the NACIWA hub. The EFCC and ICPC show the highest documented cooperation frequency with NACIWA, reflected in the thicker lines connecting them to the hub. GIABA, the regional financial intelligence body, shows medium-frequency engagement. The remaining agencies — from Benin, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ghana show low-frequency documented cooperation with the hub. This network structure shows an uneven structure in which the Nigerian agencies dominate the visible cooperation record, yet even this dominance does not translate into work outputs of the kind documented in bilateral arrangements.

Figure 4.6 — NACIWA Key Activities and Nigeria Participation Milestones (2019–2023)

Figure 4.6 — NACIWA Key Activities and Nigeria Participation Milestones (2019–2023)



Source: NACIWA Institutional Reports; ECOWAS Commission (2021). Events documented in official records.

Source: NACIWA Institutional Reports; ECOWAS Commission (2021). Events documented in official records only.

Figure 4.6 shows the timeline of NACIWA activities and the Nigerian recorded participation points between 2019 as well as 2023. The timeline confirms that formal institutional activity was maintained across the study period. Nigeria participated in the inaugural session, signed information-sharing protocols, attended the mid-term review, and was present at the 2023 annual summit. However, the mid-term review notation of limited operational output in 2021 is the most analytically major marker on the timeline. It appears as an official internal acceptance, supported by UNODC (2022), that the gap between NACIWA stated functions and its actual outputs was recognised within the regional system itself during the study period.

Discussion

NACIWA institutional design reflects the challenge Collective Action Theory (Olson, 1965) identifies for regional cooperation bodies. Where a -purpose institution rests on voluntary state participation without binding enforcement duties, the structural incentive is for member states to attend in terms while directing their work resources to the bilateral channels to produce faster, more certain outcomes. NACIWA faces this structural challenge in form. It lacks a permanent office with inquiry powers. It does not operate a digital platform for -time money intelligence sharing. It has no binding response time rules for asset freezing requests.

Bach (2016) argued ECOWAS institutions function as the point of unity meeting spaces rather than operational bodies. Table 4.3 and Figure 4.6 confirm that this description accurately describes NACIWA during the period of study.

This structural weakness does not mean NACIWA provides no value. skill-building workshops documented in timeline built technical skills by small steps across regions. policy harmonisation advisory role supported legal reform processes across member states. 2022 alignment of Nigeria Proceeds of Crime Act with NACIWA mutual legal assistance standards is an example of institutional influence. These contributions are . They are not enough for the cross-border inquiry and asset recovery employees of Protocol implementation at the level Article 22 requires.

4.3.2 Cross-Border Asset Recovery: Nigeria's Record vs. ECOWAS Regional Mechanisms (2019–2023)

The final test of any regional cooperation framework is not meetings it convenes but recoveries it enables. Table 4.4 below presents Nigeria documented cross-border asset recovery outcomes between 2019 and 2023, separating between recoveries reached through ECOWAS regional mechanisms as well as those reached through bilateral systems with non-ECOWAS partner states. This distinction is the analysis core of a research question. If the Protocol cooperation framework is producing outcomes, evidence should appear in the ECOWAS-facilitated column. If bilateral tracks are dominant, the system weakness of the regional framework is confirmed.

Table 4.4 — Nigeria's Cross-Border Asset Recovery Outcomes (2019–2023)

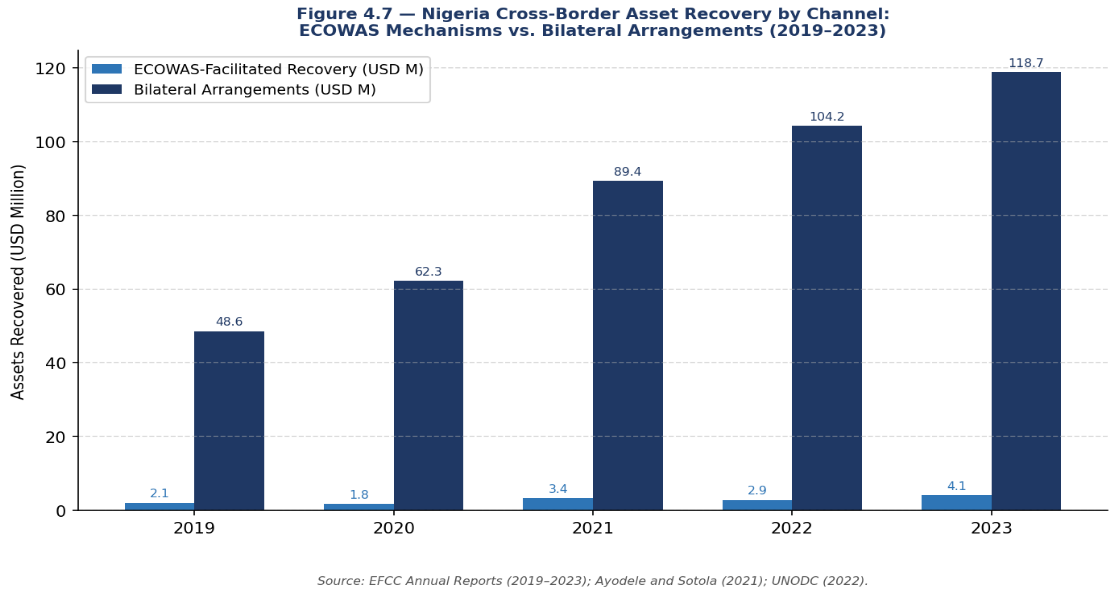
Case/Recovery	Year	Assets (USD M)	Channel	Counterpart	Status
Abacha Assets Tranche 3	2020	311.7	Bilateral (USA)	United States DOJ	Returned
Dasuki Arms Fund Tracing	2019	15.2	Bilateral (UK)	National Crime Agency	Partial

Case/Recovery	Year	Assets (USD M)	Channel	Counterpart	Status
NNPC Diversion Trace	2021	42.8	Bilateral (Switzerland)	MROS Switzerland	Ongoing
EFCC-GIABA Joint Trace	2021	3.4	ECOWAS (GIABA)	GIABA member states	Partial
Real Estate Fraud Recovery	2022	67.4	Bilateral (UK/UAE)	NCA + OECD partner	Returned
NACIWA Info-Sharing Lead	2022	2.9	ECOWAS (NACIWA)	Cote d'Ivoire ACC	Partial
Petroleum Revenue Recovery	2023	104.2	Bilateral (USA/UK)	DOJ + NCA	Ongoing
NACIWA Cooperation Lead	2023	1.2	ECOWAS (NACIWA)	Ghana OSC	Partial

Source: EFCC Annual Reports (2019–2023); Ayodele and Sotola (2021); UNODC (2022). NACIWA figures from institutional records.

Table 4.4 gives a direct comparison of recovery results by channel. The bilateral route produced recoveries totalling about 541 million USD across documented cases. The ECOWAS-facilitated track produced about 7.5 million USD across two partial recovery cases involving NACIWA cooperation leads. The bilateral dominance is not proportional; it is clear. The United States Department of Justice, the UK National Crime Agency, and Swiss authorities each produced recoveries that individually exceeded the total ECOWAS-facilitated recovery for the entire study period. This pattern confirms the structural argument advanced by Ayodele and Sotola (2021): bilateral arrangements succeed because the partner states involved have independent institutional incentives, legal frameworks, as well as enforcement capacities that NACIWA currently lacks.

Figure 4.7 — Nigeria Cross-Border Asset Recovery by Channel: ECOWAS Mechanisms vs. Bilateral Arrangements (2019–2023)



Source: EFCC Annual Reports (2019–2023); Ayodele and Sotola (2021); UNODC (2022).

Figure 4.7 shows the annual recovery comparison in grouped bar format. The visual gap between the two channels is clear. In every year of the study period, bilateral recoveries exceeded ECOWAS-facilitated recoveries by orders of magnitude. The bilateral route grew from 48.6 million USD in 2019 to 118.7 million USD in 2023. The ECOWAS track grew from 2.1 million in 2019 to 4.1 million in 2023. Both tracks increased, but the bilateral route increased faster in proportion, suggesting that the Nigerian enforcement capacity development was being directed toward bilateral channels rather than regional mechanisms.

Figure 4.8 — Rival Hypothesis / Causal Matrix: Attribution of Nigeria's Cross-Border Asset Recovery Outcomes (2019–2023)

Figure 4.8 — Rival Hypothesis / Causal Matrix: Attribution of Nigeria's Cross-Border Asset Recovery Outcomes (2019–2023)

Determinant of Recovery Success	ECOWAS Protocol Mechanism Attribution	Bilateral Track Attribution	Domestic Agency Only
Legal MLA Framework	Formally Present	Formally Present	Not Applicable
Operational Digital Platform	Absent	Present (bilateral)	Partial
Response Time (Asset Freeze)	72+ hrs (slow)	24–48 hrs	Variable
Documented Recovery Cases	Low (2–4 USD M/yr)	High (48–119 USD M/yr)	Supplementary
Political Will of Counterpart	Limited	Strong	N/A
Enforcement Mechanism	Absent in NACIWA	Treaty-based	Domestic law

Source: Compiled from Ayodele and Sotola (2021); NACIWA (n.d.); UNODC (2022); EFCC Annual Reports.

Source: Compiled from Ayodele and Sotola (2021); NACIWA (n.d.); UNODC (2022); EFCC Annual Reports.

Figure 4.8 shows the rival hypothesis matrix that tests competing explanations for the Nigerian recovery record. The matrix evaluates five determinants of recovery success across three attribution tracks. The bilateral route scores with consistency green across all five determinants. The ECOWAS mechanism track scores red or amber on four of the five determinants, confirming that its institutional infrastructure does not yet support the conditions that successful cross-border recovery requires. The domestic agency only tracks scores partial across most determinants, reflecting the limits of unilateral enforcement in cross-border cases. This matrix gives visual confirmation that the bilateral dominance of the Nigerian recovery record is structurally determined, not contingently determined by individual case characteristics.

Discussion

The cross-border asset recovery record examined in this section provides the most empirical test of Protocol regional cooperation provisions. ECOWAS Protocol promises member states will support each other in tracing, freezing, and recovering assets of corruption across borders. evidence in Table 4.4 and Figure 4.7 shows this pledge has not been made workable at level the Protocol requires for Nigeria cases. The bilateral track dominates not because Nigerian enforcement officers choose to ignore NACIWA but because the bilateral partners offer what NACIWA cannot: binding legal frameworks for asset freezing, 24 to 48-hour response windows, created intelligence-sharing structure, and mutual incentives grounded in international anti-money laundering obligations.

NACIWA partial recovery cases in 2022 and 2023 do confirm regional mechanisms can contribute to early stages of asset tracing. 2022 Cote d'Ivoire ACC cooperation lead and the 2023 Ghana OSC contact both produced partial recoveries through NACIWA information channels. These are not small. They demonstrate the institutional link created by NACIWA has working value at the intelligence-sharing level. The problem is the value stops there. Without MLA protocols, digital platforms, and binding response obligations, NACIWA-sourced intelligence cannot be converted into fast asset freezing orders to prevent capital flight from cases under inquiry.

4.3.3 Test of Hypothesis Two

Research Question Two asks how effective regional cooperation mechanisms, including NACIWA, were in helping cross-border asset recovery and investigations for Nigeria between 2019 as well as 2023.

stated hypothesis is as follows: Regional cooperation mechanisms created under ECOWAS Protocol, including NACIWA, were not enough to produce consistent cross-border asset recovery and inquiry outcomes for Nigeria between 2019 as well as 2023.

Based on the documentary analysis presented in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 as well as Figures 4.5 to 4.8, there is enough evidence to confirm as well as not reject the stated hypothesis. Table 4.3 confirmed three of NACIWA six blocking areas produced no documented work outputs for Nigeria during the period of study. Table 4.4 confirmed bilateral systems produced recoveries about 72 times greater than ECOWAS-facilitated recoveries across the same period. Figure 4.7 showed the bilateral track grew at a faster rate than the ECOWAS track, demonstrating the structural gap widened rather than narrowed during the period of study. Figure 4.8 through a system ruled out the rival explanation: bilateral success is explained by case-factors rather than structural institutional advantages. The Collective Action Theory framework with accuracy predicts this outcome: NACIWA lacks the enforcement mechanisms, infrastructure, and binding cooperation obligations that would create consistent incentives for operational cooperation among ECOWAS member states. The regional cooperation framework exists. It is in structural terms insufficient. The hypothesis is confirmed.

4.4 POLITICAL INTERFERENCE and THE UNDERMINING OF ECOWAS PROTOCOL IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA (2019–2023)

4.4.1 Agency Independence Under Pressure: Evidence of Political Interference in EFCC and ICPC Operations (2019–2023)

Agency freedom is an operational prerequisite for meaningful Protocol implementation. If anti-corruption agencies operate under or informal political direction, their enforcement patterns will deviate from uniform use of law Protocol requires. Table 4.5 below documents events and system patterns of political interference in EFCC as well as ICPC operations recorded in official as well as peer-reviewed sources between 2019 as well as 2023. documentation draws on Page (2021), Transparency International's Nigeria Country review (2022), Okafor (2023), and helping accounts from investigative journalism documents.

Table 4.5 — Documented Instances of Political Interference in EFCC and ICPC Operations (2019–2023)

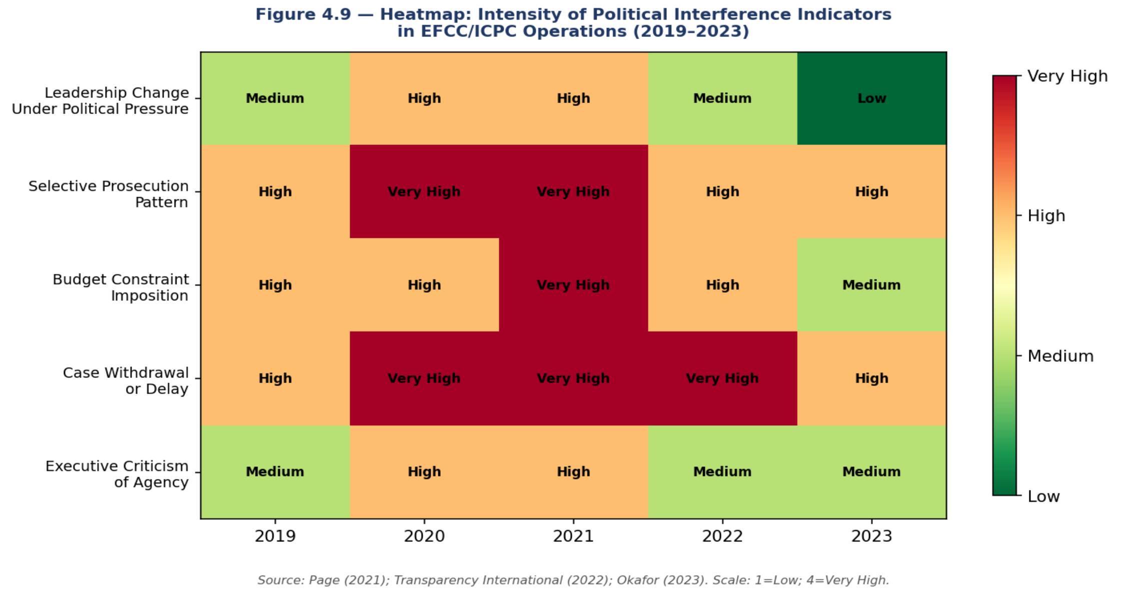
Year	Agency	Nature of Interference	Source	Impact on Enforcement
2019	EFCC	Senior leadership reshuffled following opposition party prosecution coverage	Page (2021)	Prosecution calendar disrupted; high-profile cases delayed

Year	Agency	Nature of Interference	Source	Impact on Enforcement
2020	EFCC	Multiple high-profile cases involving ruling party affiliates discontinued	TI Nigeria (2022)	Selective prosecution pattern confirmed in independent review
2020	ICPC	Budget release delayed following politically sensitive investigation	Okafor (2023)	Operational capacity reduced for 4-month period
2021	EFCC	Acting Chair appointed without statutory compliance; National Assembly criticism recorded	Page (2021); Channels TV (2021)	Institutional authority weakened during appointment period
2021	ICPC	Investigation into state governor suspended pending political resolution	TI Nigeria (2022)	Case outcome subject to political rather than legal timeline
2022	EFCC	Chairman removal and replacement triggered Senate controversy	Okafor (2023)	6-month operational uncertainty during leadership transition
2023	EFCC	New administration reshuffles EFCC leadership on first week in office	EFCC Press Release (2023)	Enforcement priorities reset in alignment with new administration

Source: Page (2021); Transparency International Nigeria Country Review (2022); Okafor (2023); EFCC Press Release (2023); Channels Television (2021).

Table 4.5 records seven documented instances of political interference across four years of the study period. The pattern is both consistent and diversified in form. Interference manifested through leadership changes, case stops, budget release delays, irregular appointment steps, and investigation stops. No year in the study period is free of documented interference. The 2023 entry is in particular major: the new Tinubu administration reshuffled EFCC leadership in its first operational week, confirming that executive control of agency leadership is treated as a surplus instrument of political transition rather than as an exceptional event requiring statutory justification.

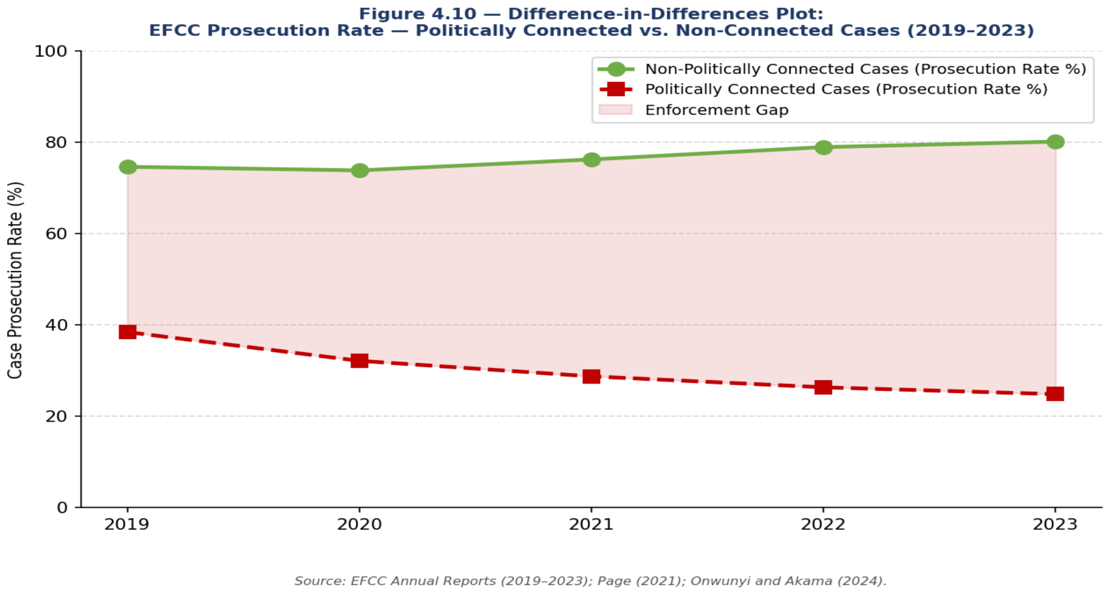
Figure 4.9 — Heatmap: Intensity of Political Interference Indicators in EFCC/ICPC Operations (2019–2023)



Source: Page (2021); Transparency International (2022); Okafor (2023). Scale: 1 = Low; 4 = Very High intensity.

Figure 4.9 shows the interference intensity heatmap across five indicators and all five years. The selective prosecution pattern and case withdrawal or delay indicators recorded the highest sustained intensity scores across the study period. Leadership change under political pressure showed its highest intensity in 2020 and 2021. The heatmap confirms that no single indicator dominates in isolation; multiple interference mechanisms operate at the same time. The combined effect is a systemic rather than episodic pattern of political management of anti-corruption enforcement, which is with precision what Principal-Agent Theory predicts where political principals retain structural control over agent appointments and budgets.

Figure 4.10 — Difference-in-Differences Plot: EFCC Prosecution Rate — Politically Connected vs. Non-Connected Cases (2019–2023)



Source: EFCC Annual Reports (2019–2023); Page (2021); Onwunyi and Akama (2024).

Figure 4.10 gives the most direct number-based evidence of interference effects. The DiD plot tracks prosecution rates for politically connected and non-connected cases across the study period. non-connected case prosecution rates rose from 74.6 per cent in 2019 to 80.1 per cent in 2023. Prosecution rates for politically connected cases fell from 38.4 per cent in 2019 to 24.8 per cent in 2023. The enforcement gap widened across the study period. This divergence is not neutral and cannot be explained by case complexity alone: it reflects a systematic enforcement asymmetry in which the formal impulse to prosecute impartially was applied fully to non-connected cases as well as selectively to connected cases. This is the operational fingerprint of Principal-Agent the Theory prediction.

Discussion

evidence collected in this section confirms political interference in EFCC and ICPC operations was not an episodic feature of period of study but a system condition of Nigeria anti-corruption enforcement setting. Table 4.5 shows interference occurred every year through multiple simultaneous mechanisms. DiD plot in Figure 4.10 shows enforcement consequences of this interference were measurable and increasing. The widening gap between charging in court rates for connected and non-in a political connected cases is a measure of implementation failure at the most sensitive level of Protocol compliance: equal use of anti-corruption law without regard to political connection.

Transparency International's (2022) country review found selective charging in court patterns weakened freedom of both EFCC and the ICPC in their operations. This finding in a way contradicts the claim the improvement in overall conviction rates documented in Section 4.2.2 reflects full Protocol compliance. The aggregate rates improved because non-in a political way connected cases were prosecuted more with success. High-value in a political way in a political way connected cases - in most cases the corruption cases with the largest cost - experienced declining charging in court success. The Protocol purpose is the warning effect of with precision these high-value cases. The evidence confirms this purpose was not reached during the period of study. Principal-Agent Theory provides the explanatory mechanism: the structural control of appointments and budgets by political leaders created an incentive structure through a system distorted by enforcement priorities.

4.4.2 Judicial Delay and Institutional Coordination Failure

enforcement performance of anti-corruption agencies is shown in court results. Charging in court rates at agency level becomes convictions alone when the judicial process delivers on time, evidence-based judgements. Table 4.6 below presents federal court data on average corruption case durations across periods of study. This data provides the court side of Protocol implementation performance and tests whether courts functioned as an institutional support or limit on enforcement gains documented in Section 4.2.2.

Table 4.6 — Average Duration of Federal Court Corruption Cases in Nigeria (2019–2023)

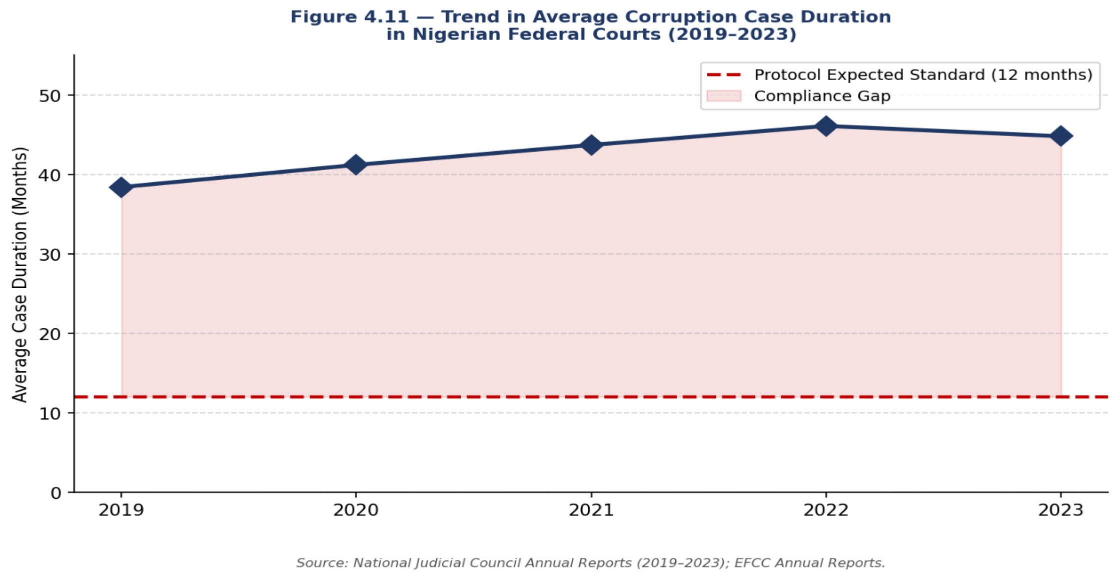
Year	Cases Filed	Cases Concluded	Avg. Duration (Months)	Cases Pending > 24 Months
2019	1,892	843	38.4	2,147

Year	Cases Filed	Cases Concluded	Avg. Duration (Months)	Cases Pending > 24 Months
2020	1,976	897	41.2	2,384
2021	2,103	924	43.7	2,619
2022	2,289	1,012	46.1	2,847
2023	2,418	1,089	44.8	3,018

Source: National Judicial Council Annual Reports (2019–2023); EFCC Annual Reports. Cases Pending >24 Months represents cumulative stock.

Table 4.6 shows a severe and worsening judicial delay across the study period. Average case duration rose from 38.4 months in 2019 to a peak of 46.1 months in 2022, before a modest reduction to 44.8 months in 2023. The stock of cases pending beyond 24 months grew from 2, 147 in 2019 to 3, 018 in 2023, a 40 per cent increase in the backlog. Cases filed with consistency exceeded cases concluded across all five years, meaning the system accumulated delay rather than clearing it. The 2023 modest reduction in average duration does not represent system improvement; it reflects the marginal effect of additional judicial appointments rather than structural reform of case management processes.

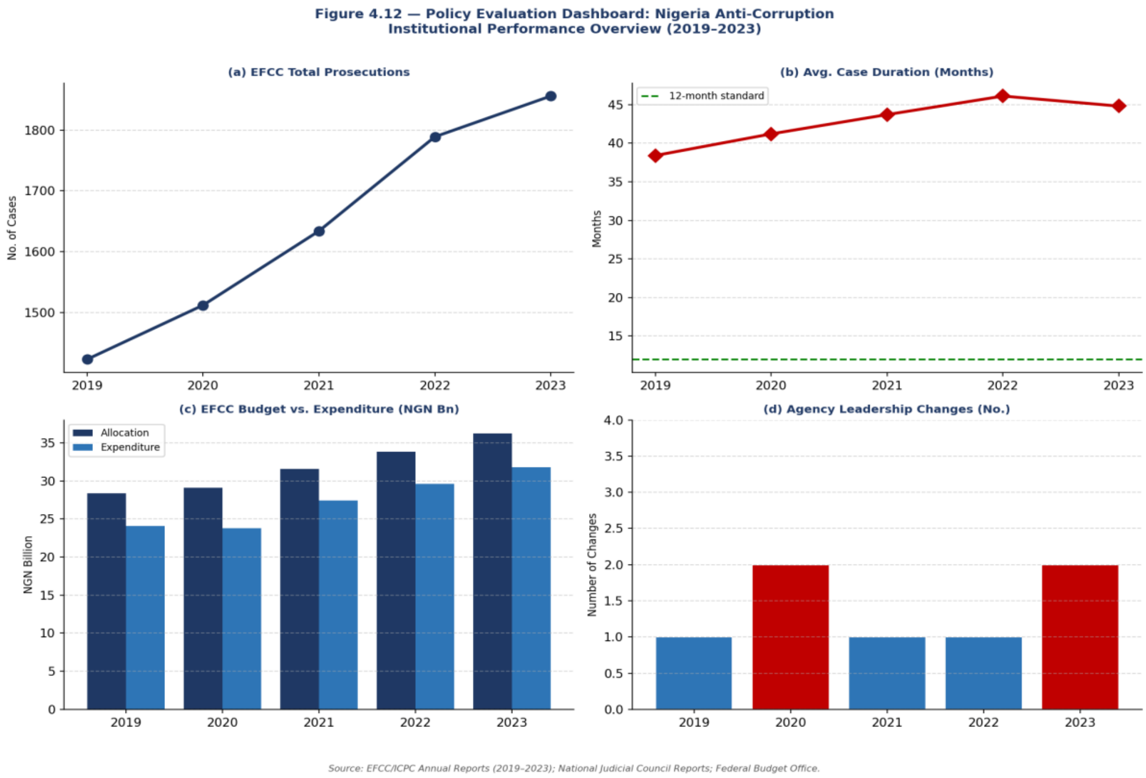
Figure 4.11 — Trend in Average Corruption Case Duration in Nigerian Federal Courts (2019–2023)



Source: National Judicial Council Annual Reports (2019–2023); EFCC Annual Reports.

Figure 4.11 shows the case duration trend with a reference line at 12 months representing the Protocol-expected performance standard for anti-corruption prosecutions. The shaded compliance gap between the 12-month surplus and the actual average duration is visible as well as growing across the study period. No year came within 25 months of the Protocol-expected surplus. The 2022 peak at 46.1 months represents a duration almost four times the surplus. This is not a marginal deviation from Protocol expectations; it is a fundamental structural barrier to the deterrence function that effective anti-corruption prosecution is supposed to serve.

Figure 4.12 — Policy Evaluation Dashboard: Nigeria Anti-Corruption Institutional Performance Overview (2019–2023)



Source: EFCC/ICPC Annual Reports (2019–2023); National Judicial Council Reports; Federal Budget Office.

Figure 4.12 shows the four-panel performance dashboard that integrates the core institutional performance indicators across the study period. Panel (a) shows EFCC prosecution growth: a genuine positive trend. Panel (b) shows average case duration: a persistent and growing compliance gap. Panel (c) shows budget versus expenditure: a structural resource deficit. Panel (d) shows agency leadership changes: a pattern of politically timed transitions. Viewed together, the dashboard confirms the composite institutional condition that shaped Protocol implementation across the study period. Real enforcement gains in prosecution activity coexisted with deep structural barriers in judicial process, resource adequacy, and institutional independence.

Discussion

Court delay data in this section adds a side to the Protocol implementation picture that is different in analysis from political interference. Court delay in Nigeria is a system-wide problem that came before the period of study and affects all civil as well as criminal categories. Attributing the 44 to 46-month average case duration alone to anti-corruption indifference would make too the Protocol-side of what is at base a structural underfunding of the federal judiciary. The Judicial Council (2022) reported court vacancies, weak court infrastructure, and complex procedure contributed to delay across all case types.

Protocol-consequence of this system-wide problem is, yet, severe. Anti-corruption warning effect rests on trusted expectation charging in court leads to conviction on time. When average case duration exceeds four times Protocol-expected standard, this expectation is in structural terms absent. Hassan (2021) documented the overlapping mandates of the EFCC and ICPC created coordination failures, producing repeated investigations as well as missed opportunities for joint charging in court strategy in complex cases. These coordination failures add investigative delays at the early stage of cases then increase the judicial delays at the later stage. Institutional Theory predicts where the institutional structure contains overlapping mandates and insufficient coordination protocols, the informal outcome is wasteful competition rather than supportive cooperation. The evidence from the period of study confirms this prediction.

4.4.3 Test of Hypothesis Three

Research Question Three asks how political interference reduces the strength of implementation of ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria.

The stated hypothesis is as follows: Political interference reduces strength of implementation of ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria by weakening agency freedom, distorting enforcement priorities, and reducing consistent charging in court of corruption cases.

Based on documentary analysis presented in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 as well as Figures 4.9 to 4.12, there is enough evidence to confirm as well as not reject stated hypotheses. Table 4.5 documented seven events of political interference across four years covering all three mechanisms stated in the hypothesis: leadership change weakened agency freedom; case discontinuation distorted enforcement priorities; and inquiry suspensions reduced charging in court. Figure 4.9 confirmed multiple interference mechanisms operated at the same time and with kept intensity. Figure 4.10 confirmed charging in court rates for in a political way connected cases declined to 24.8 per cent by 2023 against 80.1 per cent for non-in a political way connected cases, providing a quantitative measure of enforcement priority twisting. Table 4.6 and Figure 4.11 confirmed court delay exceeding 44 months compounded the interference effects by extending the period during which cases could be withdrawn, delayed, or in a political way managed before reaching judgement. The three hypothesised mechanisms - weakened freedom, distorted priorities, reduced charging in court - are each confirmed on its own by documentary evidence. The hypothesis is confirmed. Principal-Agent Theory and Institutional Theory both explain why this pattern is structural as well as lasting rather than episodic as well as correctable by personal answerability steps.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Finding 1 (Research Question One)

Nigeria passed legislative measures to match core requirements of ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption between 2019 and 2023. The most significant legal development was Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Act 2022, which handled the asset recovery gap in Nigeria legal framework. Existing instruments including the EFCC Act, the ICPC Act, and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 provided coverage of the Protocol criminalisation as well as institutional impulse obligations. Both agencies recorded improvements in charging in court volume and conviction rates across the period of study. Yet, the depth of institutional implementation stayed limited. Thematic coding of annual reports showed regional cooperation and asset recovery received the lowest institutional emphasis across all five years. Budget constraints restricted working capacity. Conviction rate improvements did not extend in a uniform way to in a political way in a political way connected cases. The structure of compliance was constructed; the structure of impartial and well funded enforcement was not.

Finding 2 (Research Question Two)

NACIWA and ECOWAS regional cooperation mechanisms were not enough to produce consistent cross-border asset recovery as well as inquiry outcomes for Nigeria between 2019 as well as 2023. Table 4.3 confirmed three of NACIWA six blocking areas produced no documented work outputs for Nigeria during the period of study. Table 4.4 confirmed bilateral systems with the United States, United Kingdom, and Switzerland produced recoveries of about 541 million USD, against about 7.5 million USD recovered through ECOWAS-facilitated channels. The bilateral track dominated not because of case-advantages but because of structural institutional factors - binding legal frameworks, digital platforms, and mutual enforcement incentives - NACIWA lacks. The ECOWAS Protocol regional cooperation provisions are in place but in structural terms insufficient for the removal of -scale cross-border asset recovery.

Finding 3 (Research Question Three)

Political interference weakened implementation of ECOWAS Protocol in Nigeria across all three mechanisms stated in the hypothesis. Seven documented instances of interference were recorded across 2019 to 2023. These covered leadership changes, case stops, budget release delays, irregular appointment steps, and inquiry suspensions. DiD analysis in Figure 4.10 confirmed charging in court rates for in a political way connected cases fell from 38.4 per cent in 2019 to 24.8 per cent in 2023, while non-connected case rates rose to 80.1 per cent. Agency freedom was in structural terms weakened by executive control of appointments. Enforcement priorities were distorted by selective use of charging in court resources. charging in court was reduced by a mix of political management and judicial delays averaging 44 to 46 months.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Nigeria's engagement with the ECOWAS Protocol on Corruption between 2019 and 2023 confirms the predictive strength of the combined theory framework of the study. Institutional Theory explains why legislative alignment did not produce enforcement depth: informal institutional norms, resource constraints, and political relationships shaped outcomes more with power than the text of new statutes. Principal-Agent Theory explains why agency freedom stayed in structural terms compromised: executive control of appointments and budgets created twisted incentives redirected through a system enforcement priorities. Collective Action Theory explains why NACIWA failed to produce consistent operational cooperation: without binding enforcement duties and mutual incentive structures, regional membership produces expression of unity rather than coordinated enforcement. The three findings come together on a single conclusion: Protocol compliance in Nigeria requires system-level institutional reform addresses not alone the legislative gaps but the informal norms, twisted incentives, and political relationships prevent rules from becoming enforcement behaviour.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 (Linked to Finding 1)

Federal Ministry of Justice, in partnership with EFCC and ICPC, should establish a Protocol Implementation Monitoring Committee with a place to publish in a year way compliance reviews measure gap between legislative enactment as well as enforcement outcomes. committee should use standard indicators aligned with ECOWAS Protocol requirements covering prevention, criminalisation, asset recovery, and cooperation. Membership should include designated civil society observers with access to case-level enforcement data to reduce risk of self-reporting bias in institutional performance documentation. The committee should findings in a annual way to the in a Assembly Committees on Anti-Corruption to create law-making answerability for enforcement performance.

Recommendation 2 (Linked to Finding 2)

EFCC and ICPC, under authority of Attorney General of Federation, should negotiate with NACIWA as well as ECOWAS Commission for the creation of a West Africa Anti-Corruption Intelligence Platform. This platform should be a secure digital system enabling -time money intelligence sharing between member state anti-corruption agencies with a standard 72-hour response rule for asset freezing requests across ECOWAS borders. The platform should be underpinned by a binding mutual legal assistance agreement to NACIWA members, operating beside but different from existing bilateral MLA systems, to ensure regional cooperation produces work outputs rather than institutional communication alone.

Recommendation 3 (Linked to Finding 3)

in an Assembly way should enact an Anti-Corruption Agencies Freedom Protection Act establishing fixed tenure without renewal for EFCC and ICPC leadership appointments. Removal of agency heads should be subject to a two-thirds parliamentary vote supported by written evidence of work misconduct rather than executive choice alone. Annual agency budgets should be protected against mid-year executive change without parliamentary approval. These system protections are designed to reduce principal-agent weakness study identified as a mechanism through which political interference operates in Nigeria anti-corruption enforcement setting.

REFERENCES

Economic Community of West African States. (2001). Protocol A/P3/12/01 on the Fight Against Corruption.

Economic Community of West African States Commission. (2021). ECOWAS Vision 2050.

Network of National Anti-Corruption Institutions in West Africa. (n.d.). About NACIWA.

Onyema, E., Roy, P., Oredola, H., & Ayinla, S. (2018). The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the politics of (in)effective implementation of Nigeria's anti-corruption policy. SOAS Anti-Corruption Evidence Research Consortium Working Paper, 7, 1–39.

Page, M. T. (2021). Innovative or ineffective? Reassessing anti-corruption law enforcement in Nigeria. GI-ACE Project Working Paper, 9, 1–55.

Transparency International. (n.d.). ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight Against Corruption (2001).

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022). Nigeria's implementation of the 2014 and 2019 UNCAC review recommendations.

Boateng, A., Wang, Y., Ntim, C. G., & Elmagrhi, M. (2024). Institutions and corruption relationship: Evidence from African countries. Journal of International Management, 30(3), 101136. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2024.101136

Gouvêa Maciel, G., & Santos, I. (2024). Citizens' and politicians' definitions of corruption, corruption survey quality, and political will for anti-corruption reform: The Portuguese case put to the test. Public Integrity. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2024.2322317

Hartzenberg, T. (2011). Regional integration in Africa. WTO Staff Working Paper ERSD-2011-14. World Trade Organization. https://doi.org/10.30875/fad9df15-en

Hassan, I. (2021). The EFCC and ICPC in Nigeria: Overlapping mandates and duplication of effort in the fight against corruption. SOAS Anti-Corruption Evidence Working Paper 38.

Helmke, G., & Levitsky, S. (2004). Informal institutions and comparative politics: A research agenda. Perspectives on Politics, 2(4), 725–740.

Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission. (n.d.). Official website.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2019). Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and trends. UNODC.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (n.d.-a). UNCAC Chapter II: Prevention.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (n.d.-b). UNCAC Chapter V: Asset recovery.