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Judiciary and Anti- Corruption Policies in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic.

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Abstract

Nigeria's Fourth Republic has established an extensive anti-corruption framework, but the effectiveness of that framework depends not only on investigative and prosecutorial agencies but also on the judiciary's ability to process cases fairly, efficiently, and consistently. This paper examines the role of judicial procedures and accountability arrangements in anti-corruption enforcement in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It applies principal-agent theory to a purposive selection of cases involving trial continuity following judicial elevation, plea bargaining and appellate review, divergent domestic and foreign proceedings, judicial-accountability processes, and whistle-blower protection. The analysis shows that anti-corruption outcomes may be affected by procedural continuity, appellate correction, institutional safeguards governing judicial discipline, and gaps between whistle-blower incentives and protection. The selected cases are not presented as representative of all Nigerian corruption litigation; rather, they identify institutional vulnerabilities that may weaken timely and legally sustainable outcomes. The paper recommends constitutionally compliant trial-continuity arrangements, transparent judicial-accountability procedures that preserve independence and due process, and statutory whistle-blower protection with clear reward-verification and anti-retaliation mechanisms.

Keywords: judiciary, anti-corruption enforcement, Fourth Republic, Nigeria, principal-agent theory, judicial independence, plea bargaining, whistle-blower protection

Introduction

Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999 inaugurated the Fourth Republic and renewed focus on institutional reforms to combat corruption. In response, the Obasanjo administration established the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission in 2000, tasked principally with public sector corruption, followed by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in 2003, whose mandate centred on financial and economic crimes, including money laundering (Enweremadu, 2006). Both

agencies were created with prosecutorial powers intended to translate investigation into conviction through Nigeria's ordinary courts.

The judiciary's role in this arrangement was never merely mechanical. Nigeria's 1999 Constitution establishes institutional safeguards for judicial independence, including the National Judicial Council's role in judicial appointments, discipline, policy, and administration; however, debates persist over whether these arrangements sufficiently insulate judicial officers from political pressure (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, ss. 153(1), 271, 292; Third Schedule, Part I, para. 21; Oko, 2005). These institutional arrangements matter because anti-corruption agencies depend on the courts to convert investigation and prosecution into legally enforceable outcomes. Where judicial independence and disciplinary arrangements are contested, the credibility of the anti-corruption process may weaken even when prosecuting agencies are active.

This accountability problem has persisted across the Fourth Republic. High-profile corruption trials involving politically exposed persons have repeatedly stalled for years or decades, and judicial officers have themselves faced investigation and prosecution for alleged misconduct. Page (2021) identifies persistent legal, institutional, and political constraints on enforcing high-level corruption cases in Nigeria, including challenges that arise after investigations reach the courts. This raises an empirical and institutional problem: Nigeria has an extensive anti-corruption framework, but high-level cases do not always produce timely and legally sustainable outcomes.

This paper examines the relationship between the judiciary and anti-corruption enforcement in Nigeria's Fourth Republic through a review of relevant literature and selected cases. Five named cases and one policy-implementation incident, selected for their capacity to test specific claims made in the literature against documented outcomes rather than to form a representative sample, anchor the analysis. Each illustrates a distinct procedural or institutional mechanism: trial nullification following judicial elevation, appellate correction of a lenient plea-bargain outcome, divergent domestic and foreign outcomes concerning overlapping allegations, proceedings involving judicial officers, and the administration of the whistleblowing reward and protection regime. This is a purposive rather than a random or exhaustive selection, and the limitations this creates for generalisation are addressed directly in the concluding section. Existing studies have examined anti-corruption agencies, judicial independence, judicial corruption, procedural delay, plea bargaining, and whistleblower protection largely as separate concerns. This paper contributes by examining how these issues interact within the same enforcement chain: anti-corruption agencies investigate and prosecute, while judicial procedures and accountability arrangements affect whether those efforts produce legally sustainable outcomes. Against this background, the paper asks: How do judicial procedures, institutional arrangements, and accountability mechanisms affect the implementation of anti-corruption policies in Nigeria's Fourth Republic? More specifically, it examines how

trial delay and judicial elevation affect the outcome of corruption prosecutions, how plea bargaining and appellate review shape accountability, and how the treatment of accused judicial officers reflects the tension between judicial independence and judicial accountability. To answer this question, the paper has three objectives: first, to map the key themes in the literature, including the relationship between anti-corruption agencies and the courts, judicial corruption, procedural delay, plea bargaining, and whistleblower protection; second, to examine these themes through selected cases and policy incidents; and third, to assess the usefulness of principal-agent theory for explaining the institutional challenges identified.

This paper adopts a structured narrative review supported by qualitative thematic analysis and purposive case selection. It does not claim to be a formal systematic review. This approach is appropriate because the material considered includes doctrinal legal analysis, academic studies, institutional reports, judicial decisions, and case-based reporting that cannot be combined through quantitative pooling.

Literature Review

Institutional Fragility (Agency-Judiciary Interface)

Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies depend on the courts to determine criminal liability, impose sanctions, and order forfeiture or restitution. Their effectiveness must therefore be assessed not only by investigations, arrests, or charges filed, but also by how cases proceed through the justice system. Akogwu et al. (2023) identify institutional and operational constraints affecting the EFCC's anti-corruption efforts between 2015 and 2020. This suggests that the performance of anti-corruption agencies is shaped, in part, by the wider legal and institutional environment in which they operate.

The relationship between anti-corruption agencies and the judiciary is therefore important to this study because judicial procedure, case management, and appellate review can affect whether investigations result in timely and legally sustainable outcomes. The selected cases considered later illustrate this relationship without assuming that every delay, acquittal, or reversal results from judicial bias or corruption.

Judicial Corruption and Bench Integrity

A second body of literature examines judicial integrity and accountability, including allegations of misconduct involving judicial officers and the institutional procedures for investigating or disciplining them. The clearest legal-institutional account of this problem concerns the Code of Conduct Tribunal's disciplinary authority and its uncertain relationship with the National Judicial Council, which exercises constitutionally assigned functions relating to judicial appointments, discipline, policy, and administration (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, s. 153(1); Third Schedule, Part I,

para. 21). Bobai and Dalmat (2021) examine whether the chairman and members of the Code of Conduct Tribunal fall within the National Judicial Council's disciplinary authority. Their analysis identifies unresolved questions about the Tribunal's relationship with the Council in matters of judicial discipline. This ambiguity was tested in practice in the proceedings against Chief Justice Walter Onnoghen, who was charged before the Code of Conduct Tribunal in 2019 over alleged false asset declarations. The case raised a central institutional question: whether the Tribunal could prosecute a serving judicial officer without first referring the matter to the National Judicial Council. In November 2024, the Court of Appeal set aside Onnoghen's conviction and held that the Tribunal lacked jurisdiction to try and convict him without first resorting to the National Judicial Council. The case therefore illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing legitimate judicial accountability from processes that may undermine constitutionally protected judicial independence. The October 2016 searches of several serving judges' residences became a major test of the relationship between anti-corruption enforcement and judicial independence (National Judicial Council, 2016). The operation generated disagreement over whether the searches represented lawful investigation of alleged judicial corruption or an infringement of the institutional safeguards surrounding judicial officers. The subsequent proceedings involving Justice Adeniyi Ademola, Justice Sylvester Ngwuta, and Justice John Inyang Okoro produced different outcomes and must be assessed separately. Read together with the Onnoghen proceedings, this literature highlights the continuing tension between ensuring accountability for judicial officers and preserving the constitutional safeguards intended to protect judicial independence.

Procedural Bottlenecks and Trial Delay

The most empirically documented theme in this literature concerns the chronic duration of corruption trials involving politically exposed persons. A Dataphyte review of 393 corruption cases involving Nigerian public officials between 2013 and 2026 found that only 144 had reached final judgment, leaving more than 60 per cent pending at different stages of litigation (Dataphyte, 2026). The Kalu proceedings illustrate how procedural continuity can affect the duration and finality of complex corruption trials. In Ude Jones Udeogu v. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2020), the Supreme Court held that section 396(7) of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 was unconstitutional, meaning proceedings concluded by a judge after elevation to the Court of Appeal could not stand.

International assessment situates this pattern within a broader capacity and rule of law problem, rather than attributing it to any single case or actor. Aderoju's review of corruption's impact on the effective administration of justice in Nigeria identifies inadequate case management infrastructure, insufficient specialised judicial training in complex financial crime and resource constraints on both the bench and prosecuting agencies as compounding, rather than isolated, causes of delay (Aderoju, 2023). A separate civil society monitoring initiative, examined by the World Justice Project,

reports measurable improvement in specific trial-monitored cases following sustained public observation, suggesting that procedural delay, while structurally entrenched, is not wholly resistant to intervention that increases the reputational cost of adjournment (World Justice Project, 2023). This is an important qualification against a purely fatalistic reading of the delay literature, since it indicates that observed delay reflects institutional incentives as much as fixed capacity constraints.

Plea Bargaining

Plea bargaining occupies a genuinely contested position in this literature, unlike the largely convergent findings in sections 2.2 and 2.3. Omojola and Omodanisi (2024) present the efficiency case for plea bargaining, arguing that the mechanism may enable the EFCC to secure convictions and recover assets in cases that could otherwise face prolonged trials. Under section 270 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015, a prosecutor may receive, consider, or offer a plea bargain, subject to the conditions prescribed by the Act (Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015, s. 270).

Azubuike (2020) offers a more critical doctrinal assessment, arguing that the ACJA's plea-bargaining provisions are unduly broad and overlapping and should be amended to reduce uncertainty and potential abuse. Omojola and Omodanisi's efficiency framing produces an unresolved tension in the literature rather than a settled consensus, namely whether plea bargaining's demonstrated capacity to secure convictions justifies sentencing outcomes that critics argue fall well short of proportionate punishment for the scale of financial harm involved, particularly where politically exposed defendants are disproportionately the ones offered and accepting such arrangements.

Whistleblower Protection

Nigeria's whistleblowing policy, approved in December 2016, offers informants a reward of between 2.5 and 5 per cent of recovered funds but operates as a policy-based arrangement rather than a comprehensive statutory protection framework (Ojobo, 2023). Salihu (2019) argues that the policy's effectiveness is limited by the absence of legislation providing structured protection for whistleblowers and recommends enacting a whistleblower-protection law.

Ezeoha et al. (2026) provide the most recent empirical test of this prediction, finding that the policy's mobilisation of citizen participation has been considerably weaker and more uneven than its early framing suggested and arguing that the policy's implementation has not consistently operated as a neutral accountability instrument. Ephraim (2025) reports accounts of retaliation risks faced by whistleblowers and continuing calls for a dedicated whistleblower-protection law. Together, the literature indicates that the policy's financial incentives are more developed than its legal protection mechanisms, creating a continuing

gap between encouraging disclosures and safeguarding those who make them (Ezeoha et al., 2026; Ojobo, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on principal-agent theory. The theory originates with Ross (1973), who identified the core problem of delegation: a principal cannot costlessly observe or control an agent's conduct once authority has been transferred, creating scope for the agent to pursue interests that diverge from the principal's. Groenendijk (1997) extends this framework to the study of corruption, arguing that corrupt transactions exploit exactly this informational advantage and that agency slack is greatest where monitoring is costly. Outcomes are only loosely traceable to specific agent decisions, conditions that describe complex financial crime prosecution reasonably well.

This theory has direct institutional application to anti-corruption architecture. De Jaegere (2012) identifies operational independence as a central condition for the effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies and proposes institutional safeguards intended to reduce political interference. This study further asks whether agency independence alone can secure effective accountability when prosecution ultimately depends on judicial processes.

In this study, Nigerian citizens may be regarded as the ultimate principals, while public institutions exercise delegated authority on their behalf. The EFCC and ICPC are agents responsible for investigating and prosecuting corruption. Still, they depend on the judiciary as a second institutional agent to determine guilt, impose sanctions, and uphold due process. The effectiveness of anti-corruption policy therefore depends not only on agency performance but also on judicial case management, procedural interpretation, appellate review, and disciplinary accountability.

The judiciary also occupies a dual position: it is expected to hold public officials accountable, yet judicial officers may themselves face allegations of corruption or political pressure. This paper uses principal-agent theory to examine how delegation, information asymmetry, weak monitoring, incentives, and sanctions affect this enforcement chain. It guides the analysis of trial delay, procedural nullification, plea bargaining, judicial discipline, and whistleblower protection in the selected cases.

Information asymmetry occurs in this enforcement chain because the EFCC/ICPC and citizens cannot directly observe the judges' internal deliberations, including case assignments, adjournment decisions, bail and sentencing decisions. Judges have significant discretion over case and evidence management, and they may also rely on extralegal considerations in making their decisions. As a result, the EFCC/ICPC has little to no control over judges' decisions and little ability to question them. In contrast, judicial officers (e.g., judges) face relatively weak formal incentives to control case backlogs and overtime, compared with weak but stalling reputation and career incentives. In addition,

whistleblowers are entitled to a bounty of 2.5 to 5 percent of the value of the proceeds of a recovery, but no legal protections. Consequently, the bounty does not sufficiently incentivise whistleblowing. The theory has a limitation that should not be assumed away. Stephenson (2015) argues that corruption may involve both principal-agent and collective-action problems. This qualification is important where those expected to monitor or sanction misconduct may themselves have incentives to tolerate it. This qualification matters wherever the executive branch has an interest in the outcome of specific cases, since the state cannot then be modelled as a unified, disinterested principal acting only to constrain agency failure. With this limitation in view, principal-agent theory provides the analytical frame for examining the selected cases without assuming that every judicial outcome results from corruption or bias.

Discussion of findings

The Judiciary as Anti-Corruption Enforcer

The selected cases are examined through the principal-agent concepts of delegation, monitoring, incentives, sanctions, and information asymmetry. The framework does not assume that every delay, acquittal, or reversal reflects corruption. Instead, it identifies institutional points where delegated anti-corruption functions may be weakened, corrected, or constrained by procedural and accountability arrangements. Table 1 summarises the framework's application to the selected cases and incidents.

Table 1: Principal-Agent Analysis of Selected Cases and Incident

Case or incident	Principal-agent issue	Main monitoring or accountability mechanism	Institutional lesson
Kalu	Trial continuity after judicial elevation	Supreme Court review	Constitutional limits on trial continuity can undo a completed process
Yusuf	Sentencing discretion in plea bargaining	Appeal and NJC discipline	Appellate and disciplinary review can correct contested first-instance outcomes
Ibori	Conversion of prosecution into adjudication	Appeal and cross-border proceedings	Outcomes may differ across legal and institutional settings
Judicial-raids cases	Judicial officers as accountability subjects	Courts, NJC, and security investigation	Accountability procedures must be reconciled with judicial-independence safeguards

Case or incident	Principal-agent issue	Main monitoring or accountability mechanism	Institutional lesson
Ikoyi whistleblower	Citizen reporting as an accountability input	Reward administration and protection arrangements	Incentives are limited where protection arrangements are unclear

Note. NJC = National Judicial Council. The table summarises the principal-agent analysis applied to the selected cases and incident.

A prominent test of the Nigerian judiciary's effectiveness as an anti-corruption enforcer is the case of Orji Uzor Kalu, former governor of Abia State. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arraigned Kalu in 2007 on charges of diverting more than seven billion naira through his company, Slok Nigeria Limited, during his eight-year tenure as governor. The trial spanned twelve years. On 5 December 2019, Justice Mohammed Idris of the Federal High Court in Lagos convicted Kalu, sentenced him to twelve years in prison, and ordered the forfeiture of Slok's assets (Channels Television, 2019).

On 8 May 2020, the Supreme Court upheld the appeal brought by Kalu's co-defendant, Ude Jones Udeogu, ruling that section 396(7) of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 was unconstitutional. This provision had sought to permit a High Court judge, upon elevation to the Court of Appeal, to conclude a part-heard criminal case. The Supreme Court determined that an elevated judge could not continue to serve as a High Court judge, as this conflicted with constitutional requirements for the composition of the Federal High Court (Ude Jones Udeogu v. Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020). This case demonstrates how a constitutional defect in trial-continuity arrangements can nullify the outcome of a protracted corruption trial, regardless of the evidence presented at first instance.

The EFCC's attempt to retry Kalu was blocked by a Federal High Court ruling in September 2021, which held that the Supreme Court had ordered a retrial only for Kalu's co-defendant, not for Kalu himself. In March 2025, the Court of Appeal granted the Federal Government an extension of time to challenge the September 2021 judgment that had barred Kalu's retrial (Premium Times, 2025). Eighteen years after arraignment, the matter remains unresolved. The Kalu proceedings illustrate how judicial elevation and constitutional limits on trial continuity can contribute to significant delays and uncertainty in complex corruption cases.

A second case provides a contrasting perspective. In January 2013, John Yakubu Yusuf, a former assistant director in the Police Pension Office, pleaded guilty to charges arising from the diversion of funds from the Police Pension Fund. Justice Abubakar Talba of the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory accepted a plea-bargain arrangement and

imposed two years' imprisonment on each of three counts, with an option of a N250,000 fine per count; Yusuf paid the cumulative N750,000 fine (Nicholas, 2018). Public outrage ensued, and the National Judicial Council suspended Justice Talba for 12 months without pay, finding that he had not exercised his discretion judicially and judiciously in sentencing Yusuf (Channels Television, 2013). The EFCC appealed, and in 2018 the Court of Appeal imposed a six-year term of imprisonment and ordered Yusuf to refund N22.9 billion; the Supreme Court affirmed that decision on 13 April 2022 (Azu, 2022). Compared to Kalu, the Yusuf case demonstrates the corrective function of appellate review. Kalu's trial outcome was set aside due to a constitutional jurisdictional defect, whereas Yusuf's initial sentence was revised on appeal after extended proceedings.

A third case evaluates the enforcer role against an external benchmark. James Ibori, a two-term governor of Delta State, was charged by the EFCC in December 2007 on 170 counts of theft, abuse of office, and money laundering. In December 2009, a Federal High Court in Asaba discharged and acquitted him on all counts, a ruling the EFCC publicly described as a hazy judgment (The ICIR, 2020). Ibori fled to Dubai in 2010 after resisting arrest and was extradited to the United Kingdom. He pleaded guilty in the United Kingdom on 27 February 2012 to offences including money laundering and conspiracy to defraud, and was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment in April 2012 (Crown Prosecution Service, 2023). The Nigerian and United Kingdom proceedings addressed overlapping allegations of corruption and money laundering, but proceeded under different charges, evidence, and procedural frameworks. On 15 May 2014, the Court of Appeal allowed the EFCC's appeal against the 2009 decision, held that Ibori had a case to answer, and directed that the matter be reassigned for trial continuation (Channels Television, 2014). The divergent outcomes in Nigeria and the United Kingdom underscore the importance of examining how variations in evidence, procedure, prosecutorial strategy, and institutional capacity influence the resolution of high-profile corruption cases across jurisdictions.

The Judiciary as Anti-Corruption Target

On October 7 and 8, 2016, the Department of State Services conducted raids on the residences of at least seven sitting judges. The individuals targeted included Supreme Court justices John Inyang Okoro and Sylvester Ngwuta, as well as Federal High Court judge Adeniyi Ademola. During these operations, Ademola was arrested. Authorities reported the discovery of cash in naira and several foreign currencies at his residence (Adesomoju, 2017). A Department of State Services witness stated that a total of fifty-four million naira, $121,179, 4,400 euros, and 80 pounds sterling were recovered (Punch Newspapers, 2017). Subsequently, Ademola faced eighteen charges, including money laundering and unlawful possession of firearms.

In April 2017, the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory acquitted Ademola, his wife, and a co-defendant of all eighteen charges, citing the prosecution's failure to establish its case (Channels Television, 2017). In June 2017, the National Judicial Council reinstated Ademola and five other judicial officers (Nnochiri, 2017). In March 2018, the Federal High Court dismissed thirteen charges of money laundering and passport fraud against Ngwuta, citing the absence of the required prior referral to the National Judicial Council (Punch Newspapers, 2018). In December 2019, Yusuf (2019) reported that the Department of State Services had concluded its investigation into Justice Okoro, found no basis for the allegations of misconduct, and returned the cash and other items seized during the 2016 operation.

The proceedings following the 2016 operation produced varied outcomes: Ademola was discharged and acquitted because the prosecution failed to establish a prima facie case; Ngwuta's charges were dismissed on procedural grounds related to the National Judicial Council; and Okoro was cleared by the Department of State Services without prosecution. These outcomes should not be interpreted as direct evidence of judicial self-protection, as the allegations, evidence, charges, and procedural histories differed in each case. However, they illustrate the challenges of ensuring judicial accountability while maintaining the institutional safeguards associated with judicial independence.

The Fourth Republic as a Temporal Unit

The Kalu case demonstrates that treating the Fourth Republic as a homogeneous period is inaccurate. The initial charges against Kalu were filed in 2007 under one administration, while a subsequent administration secured a conviction in 2019. This conviction was overturned by a court in 2020. By 2025, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) continued to debate the conditions for a potential retrial, now under a fourth administration since the original charges. The persistence of the case across multiple governments without resolution indicates that no single administration can be solely held responsible. Furthermore, changes in political leadership do not ensure a smooth transfer of accountability for procedural delays. The prosecution's duration, spanning several administrations, illustrates how a trial can become detached from the political cycle in which it originated.

Whistleblower Protection in Practice

In April 2017, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), acting on information provided by a whistleblower, recovered approximately 43.4 million dollars, 23 million naira, and 27,800 pounds sterling in cash from an apartment in Osborne Towers, Ikoyi, Lagos. The apartment was subsequently linked to the wife of the then Director-General of the National Intelligence Agency (Daniel, 2017). The EFCC

confirmed that the whistleblower received a policy-mandated percentage of the recovered funds and became a millionaire as a result (Oluwagbemi, 2017).

This episode also highlights the limitations of the whistleblower policy. After the whistleblower's identity became known, he went into hiding, and within months, multiple individuals claimed to be the true informant, disputing entitlement to a reward of approximately 850 million naira (Aziken, Abdulah, & Kumolu, 2017). These competing claims exposed the lack of transparent procedures for independently resolving disputes over reward entitlement. The case further demonstrates the shortcomings of a policy framework that provides financial incentives without a comprehensive statutory system for confidentiality and protection against retaliation (Ojobo, 2023; Ephraim, 2025). In this instance, the financial reward mechanism functioned as intended, yet the individual responsible for the recovery was left to ensure his own safety.

Cross-Border Cases and the Limitations of the Record

The case of Diezani Alison-Madueke demonstrates the limitations of equating the length of a high-profile investigation with judicial delay. A London jury acquitted Alison-Madueke of bribery charges at Southwark Crown Court on 17 June 2026, following a trial that began in January 2026. The broader investigation had begun several months before the trial began (Olumhense, 2026). During the proceedings, her defence counsel argued that the prosecution's case relied on evidence provided by the EFCC, a claim that attracted significant attention in Nigeria.

Concurrently with the criminal proceedings, United States civil forfeiture actions concluded in 2023, resulting in the recovery of approximately fifty-three million dollars in cash and a promissory note, as well as assets such as a superyacht and properties in California and New York (Eboh, 2025). In January 2025, Nigeria and the United States signed a formal repatriation agreement for these funds, designating them for rural electrification and counter-terrorism initiatives (U.S. Department of State, 2025). Eleven years passed between the initial arrest and the final criminal disposition, which ended in acquittal, while a parallel civil recovery process concluded on a shorter timeline. Transferring the case across jurisdictions did not resolve the delays in domestic proceedings; it only shifted them.

Implications of the Findings

Reforming anti-corruption agencies in isolation is unlikely to yield sustainable outcomes. The Kalu, Yusuf, judicial-raids, and Ikoyi whistleblower incidents demonstrate that the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy depends on the entire process, from investigation through to final judicial outcome, rather than on agency activity alone.

These findings shift the focus of reform from agency capacity to judicial processes. Most anti-corruption policies in Nigeria have prioritized strengthening investigative and prosecutorial agencies, including amendments to the laws establishing the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), as well as improving asset recovery mechanisms. An implicit assumption has been that, once corruption cases are investigated and prosecuted, the judicial process will function effectively. However, the cases examined in this study indicate that rules governing judicial procedures and judicial-officer discipline can facilitate the resolution of corruption cases, while deficiencies in the judicial process may hinder anti-corruption objectives. Policy attention should therefore extend beyond government agencies to include the judicial process. The recommendations in Chapter 7 propose measures to address this need.

From an academic perspective, this study extends the application of principal-agent theory by demonstrating that anti-corruption enforcement involves multiple levels of delegation. While anti-corruption agencies are responsible for investigating and prosecuting wrongdoing, the judiciary determines whether these efforts result in convictions, acquittals, or procedural reversals. The study thus highlights the judiciary as a critical institutional actor in shaping anti-corruption outcomes.

From a societal perspective, delayed trials, procedural reversals, and uncertainty regarding accountability can undermine public confidence in anti-corruption institutions and discourage citizens from reporting corruption. An independent and accountable judiciary is therefore essential not only for effective legal enforcement but also for fostering public trust, democratic governance, and citizen participation in anti-corruption efforts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper contends that Nigeria's anti-corruption performance in the Fourth Republic cannot be attributed solely to agency design. While anti-corruption agencies are responsible for investigation and prosecution, courts and related judicial institutions play a central role in determining whether cases result in convictions, acquittals, procedural reversals, or other legally sustainable outcomes. The selected cases demonstrate how trial continuity, appellate review, judicial-accountability procedures, and whistleblower protection influence the implementation of anti-corruption policy. These cases also indicate that judicial outcomes must be interpreted with caution, as evidentiary strength, charge type, procedural history, and prosecutorial preparation vary across cases. Principal-agent theory provides a useful framework for explaining these cases by highlighting the multiple stages of delegation and monitoring in anti-corruption enforcement; however, its explanatory power is limited when political actors, oversight institutions, and judicial bodies do not function as neutral or unified principals.

This study offers a case-based analysis of the judiciary's role in anti-corruption enforcement and applies principal-agent theory to the relationships among anti-corruption agencies, courts, and judicial-accountability institutions. Three recommendations are proposed. First, judicial and legislative authorities should establish constitutionally compliant trial-continuity and case-management arrangements for complex corruption cases affected by judicial elevation, transfer, or repeated adjournment, and should promote transparent judicial approval of plea agreements. Second, procedures for investigating and disciplining judicial officers should be transparent, legally clear, and consistent with both judicial independence and due process. Third, Nigeria's whistleblowing framework should be established in statute to provide clear procedures for reward verification, confidentiality, anti-retaliation protection, and institutional oversight.

These recommendations are provisional and based on the selected cases, rather than a representative sample of Nigerian corruption proceedings. The study has three limitations. First, the purposive selection of six incidents does not support general conclusions about the entire judiciary. Second, the cases vary in evidentiary strength, charge type, procedural history, and defence resources, which limits direct comparison between judicial and non-judicial defendants. Third, the literature review was selective rather than systematic. Future research could employ a broader and more transparent database-search strategy to determine whether the patterns identified here extend beyond the selected cases.

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