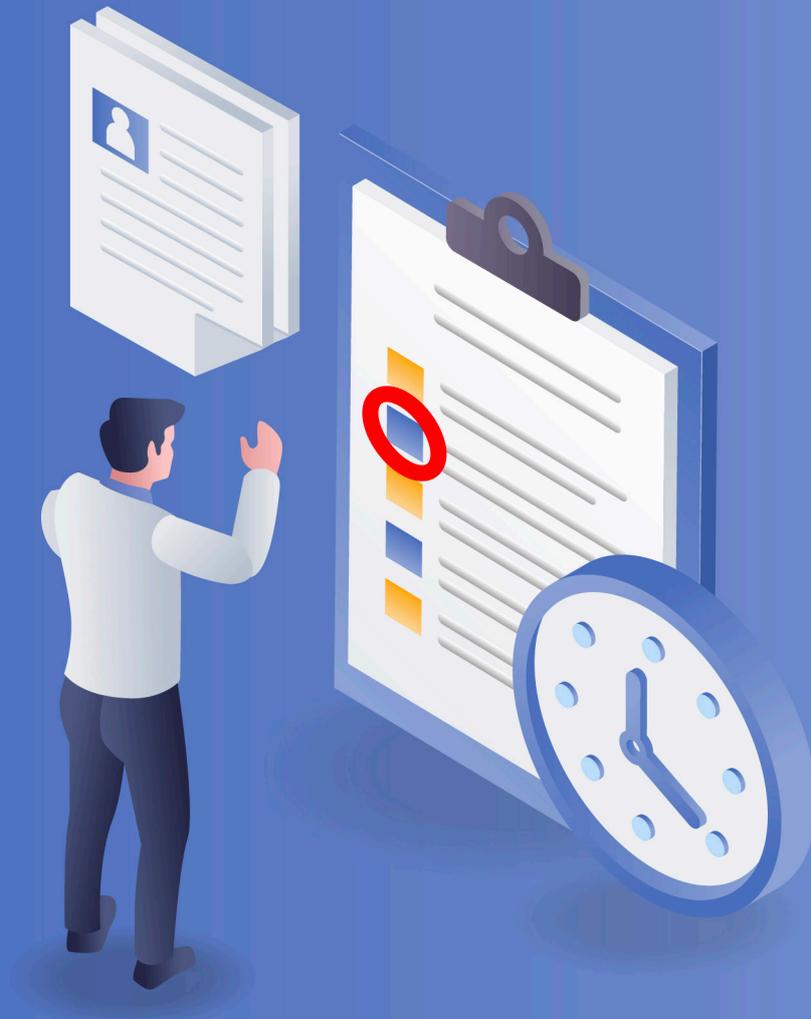




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## Anti-Corruption Institutions without an Anti-Corruption Curve: Assessing Ghana's Governance Architecture, 2019–2025

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### ABSTRACT

Ghana has expanded its anti-corruption efforts from 2019 to 2025 in ways that, in theory, should lead to an apparent decrease in corruption levels and an increase in global governance scores. The establishment and operation of the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP), the activation of the Right to Information (RTI) Commission, and repeated audits of payroll and public financial management (PFM). The ongoing presence of the Auditor-General, EOCO, CHRAJ, and Parliament's Public Committee all suggest a growing network of accountability. However, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) shows Ghana remaining between 42 and 43 points out of 100 for most of this period, dropping to 42 in 2024. Citizen data from Afrobarometer also indicates declining trust in key public institutions. This paper explores this paradox. Through qualitative analysis of official reports, survey data, and secondary literature on African anti-corruption agencies, it argues that Ghana's issue is not a lack of institutions but a weak capacity to turn investigations, audits, and administrative findings into visible, enforceable outcomes. The paper recommends shifting from creating many institutions to strengthening and consolidating existing ones. It suggests that performance-based funding, RTI-budget integration, and judicial expedited processing of OSP cases are the next steps for Ghana's governance reform.

### INTRODUCTION

Ghana is often seen as one of Africa's democratic success stories. Since 1992, the country has held regular and competitive elections, experienced peaceful transitions of power between the two main parties and maintains an active media environment. However, governance is now judged not only by procedural democratic standards but also by how well public institutions prevent, detect, and punish corruption. Under this higher standard, Ghana's performance has been disappointing. The country's CPI score dropped from the mid-to-high 40s in the early 2010s to the low 40s and has stayed there. This is striking. During the same period, Ghana witnessed the initiation of several of the nation's most ambitious accountability initiatives, notably the establishment of the Office of the Special Prosecutor (created under Act 959) to facilitate independent investigation and prosecution of corruption and related offenses, as well as the enactment of the Right to Information Act, 2019 (Act 989), which institutionalized a formal right of access to public information complemented by an enforcement commission. What accounts for the lack of response of outcome indicators to these inputs?

This paper takes that question seriously. It considers Ghana as an instructive example of what happens when a state establishes institutions more rapidly than it strengthens enforcement powers. Instead of assuming that any new anti-corruption agency will automatically

reduce corruption, the paper examines what these institutions have actually achieved, such as the number of cases resolved, sanctions imposed, and citizen reactions. It argues that Ghana faces what can be called an 'anti-corruption curve problem': institutional activity has increased, but the actual levels of corruption, as measured by the CPI and citizen trust, have not declined.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The global anti-corruption literature has, for at least twenty years, cautioned that the establishment of specialized agencies is necessary, yet often insufficient, for the reduction of corruption. Johnston (2005) differentiates among various types of corruption and demonstrates that in systems characterized by competitive politics but weak enforcement, elites tend to adapt more swiftly to new regulations than institutions can implement them. Similarly, Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) highlight that without credible sanctions and an independent judiciary shielded from political influence, anti-corruption initiatives risk becoming merely symbolic gestures. In Africa, Doig *et al.* (2006), followed by Fjeldstad (2019), indicate that anti-corruption agencies in Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Nigeria frequently encounter three overlapping challenges: limited resources, political interference, and conflicting mandates. Ghana exemplifies this pattern, with institutions such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the

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Economic and Organized Crime Office (EOCO), the Auditor-General, an active Public Accounts Committee, and, more recently, the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) and the Right to Information (RTI) Commission. The primary concern is institutional overload of agencies with minimal substantive impact.

In West Africa, Ghana is frequently compared to Nigeria and Sierra Leone, both of which possess prominent anti-corruption agencies (EFCC and ACC). Nigeria’s experience demonstrates that mere visibility, absent successful prosecutions, has a limited impact on perception scores. Notably, Sierra Leone saw modest improvements in its CPI when the ACC secured high-profile convictions and fostered narratives of recovery. The lesson for Ghana is unequivocal: international rankings tend to favor cases that are fully concluded and sanctions enforced over those that establish legal frameworks.

An alternative perspective that sheds light on Ghana is the institutionalist approach spearheaded by North (1990) and further expanded by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012). This perspective emphasizes that institutions are significant because they shape incentives for both government officials and private stakeholders. In Ghana, these incentives remain misaligned. Public officials continue to perceive a low likelihood of punishment for procurement irregularities, payroll padding, or failure to respond to RTI requests. This suggests that the policies implemented between 2019 and 2025 have yet to establish credible deterrents. The concept of ‘conversion capacity,’ the system’s ability to transform allegations and investigations into sanctions and restitution, serves as a valuable framework for analysis. Effective anti-corruption initiatives, such as Botswana’s DCEC in collaboration with a competent Directorate of Public Prosecutions, demonstrate high conversion rates. Conversely, Ghana’s system appears to exhibit strong ‘activation capacity’ capable of initiating cases, demanding information, and publishing reports, yet it demonstrates weak conversion. The research adopts a qualitative documentary approach supported by descriptive statistics. Primary data sources include: the 2025 Mid-Year Fiscal Policy Review of the Ministry of Finance; half-yearly and annual reports of

the Office of the Special Prosecutor from 2020 through 2025; monitoring and compliance reports of the Right to Information Commission for 2023, 2024, and 2025; annual reports of the Auditor-General; and relevant parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC) proceedings where available. These are triangulated with secondary data from Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2015–2024 and Afrobarometer Round 9 and Round 10 Ghana country reports.

The period 2019–2025 is chosen because it captures the post-establishment phase of the OSP and the operational phase of the RTI regime. It also captures a fiscal consolidation era, during which Ghana, under an IMF-supported program, tightened public financial management controls. This coincidence of anti-corruption institution building and fiscal austerity offers a natural setting to observe whether governance improvements followed. The study, however, recognizes limitations: official reports may under-report politically sensitive investigations; perception indices may lag actual reforms; and some 2025 data is provisional.

#### Ghana’s Anti-Corruption Architecture, 2019–2025

By 2025, Ghana’s anti-corruption system could be seen as ‘crowded but porous’. At the top is the Office of the Special Prosecutor, responsible for investigating and prosecuting corruption and related offenses. Adjacent and below it are long-standing watchdogs: the Auditor-General, whose reports annually reveal financial violations totaling hundreds of millions of Ghana cedis; the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), which handles cases involving administrative justice and conflicts of interest; the Economic and Organized Crime Office (EOCO), which prosecutes serious financial crimes; and Parliament’s Public Accounts Committee, which conducts public hearings on audit violations. Additionally, the RTI Commission has established a body authorized to penalize public institutions that fail to submit annual reports or unlawfully deny information requests. The OSP’s reports indicate increasing activity. In its 2025 half-year report, the Office stated that it opened 132 new investigations, referred 28 for prosecutorial

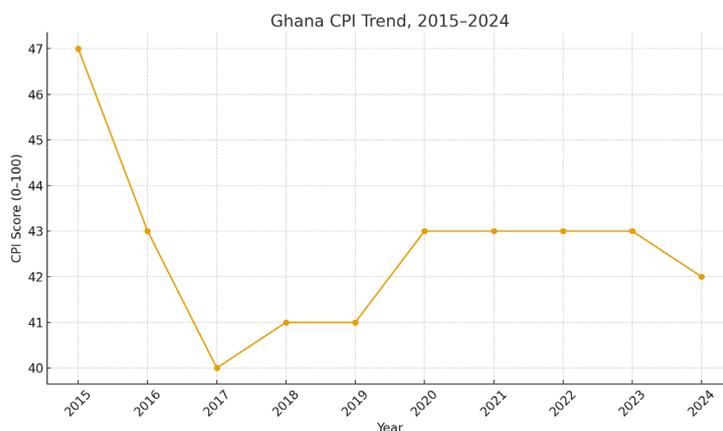


Figure 1: Ghana’s CPI Trend, 2015–2024

review, and recovered approximately GH¢128 million in assets, taxes, and funds. The report also highlighted high-profile investigations into politically connected individuals and agencies. However, it acknowledged that only a few cases had reached trial and conviction, mainly due to court delays and interlocutory challenges. This signals the first indication of limited conversion capacity. The RTI Commission reported a steady increase in the number of institutions submitting annual reports: 241 in 2023, 296 in 2024, and 345 by the end of March 2025 following an extension of the statutory deadline. Concurrently, the Commission observed a decline in the approval rate of RTI requests, decreasing from 85.4% in 2022 to approximately 70% in 2024, along with a rise in outright refusals. This trend indicates that public institutions are becoming more defensive while citizens are asserting their rights more vigorously. The Commission imposed administrative penalties on certain non-compliant entities; however, these sanctions were modest and, crucially, were not always supported by financial or Budgetary consequences notwithstanding, in the absence of a connection to the Ministry of Finance’s approval process, non-compliance with RTI regulations remains a low-cost violation.

**Table 1:** CPI Scores for Ghana, 2015–2024

Year	CPI Score
2015	47
2016	43
2017	40
2018	41
2019	41
2020	43
2021	43
2022	43
2023	43
2024	42

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data presented above confirm that Ghana’s CPI trajectory over the last decade has been essentially flat, with a mild deterioration in 2024. This is despite, not because of, the establishment of new institutions. To understand this, we must disaggregate institutional performance into four sequential steps: (1) allegation or detection; (2) investigation and case building; (3) prosecution or administrative sanction; and (4) restitution and public communication. Ghana scores relatively well on steps 1 and 2 — there is no shortage of audit findings, RTI-triggered exposures, or OSP investigation announcements. It is steps 3 and 4 that are weak. Court processes are slow; plea bargaining is still emergent; and even when sums are recovered, the public is often not told how the money was used. From a governance perspective, this means the signaling effect of anti-corruption work is muted. Perception indices, which are sensitive to visible,

high-level sanctions, therefore do not move.

A second explanation relates to political-economic incentives. Anti-corruption agencies in Ghana are structurally reliant on the executive for appointments, budget approvals, and, in some cases, operational directives. Although the OSP is constitutionally independent, its leadership has publicly complained multiple times about insufficient resources or interference. The RTI Commission similarly depends on the Ministry of Finance for funding. In practice, this means investigations involving politically sensitive actors can be slowed down indirectly through budget or administrative means. This situation is not unique to Ghana; it is common in hybrid regimes, but it significantly limits their effectiveness.

Third, the anti-corruption system is weakly integrated into the public financial management (PFM) cycle. The 2016 PFM Act (Act 921) and subsequent rollouts of Treasury Single Account and GIFMIS have improved expenditure control and commitment reporting. However, they have not been fully linked to RTI and OSP outputs. For example, when the RTI Commission has determined that a ministry has either failed to submit required reports or has unlawfully denied access. Such actions should activate alerts within the Public Financial Management (PFM) system and may result in the postponement of non-salary disbursements. Furthermore, when the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) recovers funds or detects procurement irregularities, these findings should be integrated into the Auditor-General’s surcharge and disallowance regime as well as the procurement authority’s blacklist. Currently, these feedback mechanisms operate in an ad hoc manner. Consequently, corrupt practices remain at a relatively low risk.

## Policy Recommendations

1. Performance-based funding for accountability institutions. The budgets of the OSP, RTI Commission, and CHRAJ should be partly tied to measurable enforcement outcomes, such as the number of cases fully resolved, sanctions enforced, recovered funds, and compliance levels. This would motivate institutions to resolve cases quickly rather than just accumulating investigations.

2. Incorporate RTI compliance into the national budget process. The Ministry of Finance could issue a circular requiring timely RTI reporting for the release of funds for goods and services to MDAs and MMDAs. This simple change would encourage compliance by increasing the cost of non-compliance.

3. Accelerate corruption cases within the judiciary. Establish specialized anti-corruption courts with stringent deadlines for pre-trial motions, interlocutor appeals, and verdicts to aid in minimizing delays during step 3 of the enforcement process. Kenya and Tanzania have successfully piloted such courts; Ghana may consider adopting their best practices.

4. Public Communication of Recovery. The government shall publish a comprehensive ‘Anti-

Corruption Scorecard' twice a year, detailing recovered funds, sanctioned officials, pending cases, and the use of recovered resources (such as supporting school feeding programs or health facilities). This initiative aims to create a strong signaling effect for both citizens and the international community.

5. rationalize mandates. An inter-agency task force should review overlapping functions among OSP, EOCO, CHRAJ, and the Auditor-General to clarify the lead agencies for different offense types. More explicit mandates improve accountability and prevent suspects from forum shopping.

## CONCLUSION

Ghana's experience from 2019 to 2025 highlights a challenging reality for reform advocates: establishing institutions is comparatively easier than ensuring their effective operation. The nation has completed the arduous legislative process enacting the RTI Act, establishing the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP), and modernizing its Public Financial Management (PFM) system. Yet, it has not fulfilled the political imperative of ensuring that investigations result in sanctions and that those sanctions are publicly announced. Until this discrepancy is addressed, Ghana will continue to exhibit mediocre CPI scores, despite the appearance of a comprehensive anti-corruption framework on paper. The optimal strategy does not involve creating additional agencies but rather enhances the efficacy, independence, and coordination of existing entities. Suppose budget allocations, human resource performance systems, and judicial processes begin to reflect the outputs of the OSP, the RTI Commission, and the Auditor-General. In that case, Ghana's anti-corruption efforts are poised to make significant progress.

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