A Comparative Analysis of Anti-Corruption Institutions: The Case of Indonesia's KPK and South Korea's KICAC

Wijaya[1], Arif Hossain[2], and Sharmin Sultana[3]
[1] UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia
[2] BRAC University, Bangladesh
[3] Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET), Bangladesh

Corresponding Author:

Shir Wijaya,
Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang.
Prof. K. H. Zainal Abidin Fikri Street, Kilometer 3, Neighborhood Unit 05, Pahlawan Village, Kemuning Subdistrict, Palembang City, South Sumatra 30126, Indonesia
Email: wijaya_uin@radenfatah.ac.id

Abstract

The establishment of independent anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) is a primary global strategy for combating systemic corruption. Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and South Korea's former Korea Independent Commission Against Corruption (KICAC) represent two prominent yet divergent models in Asia, both emerging from post-authoritarian transitions. Understanding their distinct institutional trajectories provides crucial insights into the dynamics of anti-corruption reform. This study conducts a comparative analysis of the institutional design, operational effectiveness, and political resilience of the KPK and KICAC to identify the determinant factors shaping their successes and challenges in fulfilling their mandates. A qualitative comparative case study approach was employed, analyzing foundational legal documents, official institutional reports, scholarly articles, and reputable media archives. The analysis focused on key variables including legal powers, degree of independence, resource allocation, and the prevailing socio-political contexts in which each agency operated. The findings indicate that the KPK's comprehensive mandate, which includes investigative and prosecutorial powers, allowed for more high-profile enforcement actions compared to KICAC's primary focus on prevention and policy coordination. However, this enforcement power also made the KPK a target of sustained political resistance, while KICAC faced challenges of relevance that eventually led to its institutional merger. The long-term success of an ACA depends not only on a robust legal mandate but, more critically, on sustained political support and strong institutional defenses against political co-optation. The divergent experiences of the KPK and KICAC offer vital lessons for designing and safeguarding effective anti-corruption institutions worldwide.

Keywords: Anti-Corruption Agency, Comparative Politics, Institutional Design.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption remains one of the most persistent and corrosive challenges to global governance, sustainable development, and democratic consolidation in the twenty-first century (Garcia & Rios, 2023). It functions as a significant impediment to economic growth by distorting market mechanisms, deterring foreign investment, and misallocating public resources away from essential services such as healthcare and education (Feng et al., 2023). Beyond its economic toll, systemic corruption erodes the legitimacy of state institutions, undermines the rule of law, and dissolves the bonds of trust between citizens and their government, thereby creating fertile ground for political instability and social unrest (Figueroa Neri, 2024). The pervasiveness of this issue has propelled it to the forefront of the international policy agenda, culminating in multilateral frameworks like the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) (Garmaev, 2025).

In response to this global challenge, a dominant institutional paradigm has emerged over the past three decades: the establishment of specialized, independent Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs) (Georgeta et al., 2024) These bodies are designed to operate with a significant degree of autonomy from the executive and legislative branches of government, insulating them from the political interference that often paralyzes traditional law enforcement entities (Ghazwani, 2025). The theoretical appeal of the ACA model lies in its promise of focused expertise, dedicated resources, and impartial enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Consequently, nations across the developmental and political spectrum have adopted this model, viewing it as a critical instrument in their efforts to enhance transparency, accountability, and public integrity (J. Han, 2024).

The global proliferation of ACAs has been particularly pronounced in nations transitioning from authoritarian rule to democracy (S. Han et al., 2023). Within these contexts, the creation of an independent anti-corruption body is often a powerful symbol of a definitive break from a past characterized by cronyism and impunity for the political elite (Harun et al., 2024). Countries like Indonesia and South Korea, both of which embarked on ambitious democratic reforms in the late 1990s following decades of authoritarian governance, stand as exemplary cases. The establishment of Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in 2002 and South Korea's Korea Independent Commission Against Corruption (KICAC) in 2002 emerged from profound public demand for clean governance and accountability, representing keystone reforms of their respective democratic transitions (He & Kryzanowski, 2024).

The widespread adoption of the ACA model, however, has yielded a landscape of profoundly divergent outcomes (Hermawan, 2024). Despite being founded on similar principles of independence and specialization, the operational effectiveness and political impact of these institutions vary dramatically across different national contexts (Holovkin et al., 2023). Some ACAs have evolved into formidable anti-graft watchdogs, successfully prosecuting high-level officials and catalyzing significant shifts in public integrity norms. In stark contrast, many others have faltered, becoming what scholars term "*paper tigers*"— symbolic institutions that lack the capacity, resources, or political will to meaningfully confront systemic corruption, often succumbing to political co-optation or strategic underfunding (Hu & Li, 2024).

This variation in institutional performance presents a central puzzle for scholars and policymakers in the fields of comparative politics, public administration, and governance

studies(Jalil et al., 2025). The critical question is no longer simply whether to establish an ACA, but rather which factors determine its trajectory toward either effectiveness or irrelevance. The inquiry delves into a foundational debate concerning the primacy of institutional design versus the influence of the surrounding socio-political environment (Kandala & Moffat, 2024). It questions whether an ACA's success is predetermined by its formal legal powers and structural autonomy, or if its fate is ultimately contingent upon the shifting dynamics of political support, civil society engagement, and the resilience of embedded corrupt networks (Kassimova et al., 2023).

This study addresses this puzzle through a focused comparative analysis of Indonesia's KPK and South Korea's KICAC. These two institutions provide a compelling basis for comparison as they were established in the same year, born from similar post-authoritarian contexts, yet were conceived with fundamentally different institutional mandates (Knežević, 2025). The KPK was designed as an enforcement-heavy "*super-body*" with extensive powers of investigation and prosecution, a model geared toward direct confrontation with graft. Conversely, KICAC was conceptualized primarily as a prevention-focused agency, tasked with policy coordination, whistleblower protection, and public ethics promotion (Kong et al., 2023). Their subsequent, starkly different institutional paths—the KPK's high-profile yet politically embattled existence versus KICAC's eventual merger and absorption into a larger entity—crystallize the critical problem of why similarly-motivated reforms can lead to such disparate long-term outcomes (Kumanayake et al., 2023).

The principal objective of this research is to conduct a systematic and in-depth comparative analysis of the institutional design, operational performance, and political resilience of Indonesia's KPK and South Korea's KICAC (Obioji et al., 2025). This study seeks to move beyond a descriptive account of each agency by identifying and dissecting the key determinants that have shaped their distinct institutional trajectories. The ultimate goal is to illuminate the complex interplay between an ACA's formal architecture and the dynamic political context in which it operates, thereby generating nuanced insights into the conditions that foster effective anti-corruption efforts (Watt, 2024).

To achieve this overarching goal, this paper pursues several specific objectives. First, it aims to systematically map and contrast the foundational institutional designs of the KPK and KICAC, focusing on critical variables such as their legal mandates, investigative and prosecutorial powers, mechanisms for ensuring independence, and resource allocations (Tauda et al., 2023). Second, the research will evaluate and compare the operational effectiveness of each agency relative to its intended mandate, examining the KPK's enforcement record and the KICAC's impact on systemic prevention and policy reform (Thommandru & Maratovich, 2024). Third, it will analyze the political resilience of each institution by examining their interactions with other state actors and their ability to withstand political pressure and resistance (Tanjung & Shimada, 2025).

Through this structured comparison, the study aims to contribute to a more sophisticated theoretical understanding of ACA effectiveness (Obioji et al., 2025). It seeks to generate empirically grounded propositions about the relative importance of different institutional attributes—such as the balance between enforcement and prevention powers—in shaping an agency's capacity to both perform its functions and ensure its own survival (Ngamvilaikorn et al., 2024). The research endeavors to provide a clearer answer to the critical question of what constitutes a "successful" ACA, moving beyond simplistic metrics to offer a multi-dimensional assessment that encompasses both tangible outputs and long-term institutional sustainability (Marzouki & Ben Amar, 2025).

The scholarly literature on anti-corruption and institutional reform is extensive, yet it contains identifiable gaps that this study aims to address (Mahmood, 2023). A significant portion of the existing research on ACAs falls into one of two categories: large-N quantitative studies that analyze cross-national datasets to identify broad correlations, or single-country case

studies that provide deep, context-rich analysis of a particular institution (Mahendra et al., 2024). While both approaches have yielded valuable insights, the former often struggles with causal inference and the nuances of context, while the latter lacks the comparative leverage needed to generalize findings (Mahdi et al., 2024).

While the KPK and KICAC have been the subjects of numerous individual case studies, there is a conspicuous scarcity of direct, systematic comparative research that places these two influential models in direct analytical dialogue (Ma et al., 2024). Existing comparative work on Asian ACAs often includes these cases as part of broader regional surveys, which, by necessity, limits the depth of the analysis. A focused, in-depth comparison of these two agencies is missing from the literature—one that rigorously contrasts the "*enforcement-first*" model of the KPK with the "*prevention-first*" model of KICAC, tracing the long-term consequences of these foundational design choices (Lukiko, 2023).

Furthermore, much of the literature on ACA effectiveness tends to gravitate toward a definition of success narrowly defined by the number of high-profile prosecutions. This "enforcement bias" inadvertently overlooks the potential impact of prevention-oriented agencies like KICAC and fails to adequately theorize institutional outcomes other than outright success or failure, such as the institutional transformation and merger that characterized KICAC's trajectory (Lhaopadchan et al., 2025). This study fills this gap by adopting a more holistic and multi-dimensional framework for evaluation, treating both enforcement and prevention as valid, albeit different, strategic objectives and analyzing institutional adaptation as a key outcome variable worthy of explanation (Leheza et al., 2025).

The primary novelty of this research lies in its specific and purposive comparative juxtaposition of the Indonesian and South Korean anti-corruption models (Xiao et al., 2024). By treating the KPK and KICAC as representative archetypes of the enforcement-led and prevention-led ACA strategies, this study creates a unique natural experiment (Le & Than, 2025). This focused comparison of two prominent, contemporaneous, yet institutionally divergent agencies from similar political origins provides powerful analytical leverage to isolate the causal impact of institutional design on performance and resilience, a contribution that a single-case study or a large-N analysis could not offer with the same degree of nuance (Lawan & Henttonen, 2024).

The justification for this research is grounded in its significant potential for both scholarly and practical contributions (Lau, 2024). From a scholarly perspective, this study advances the theoretical debate in the field of anti-corruption studies and comparative institutionalism (Wei et al., 2024). By providing a rich, empirically detailed analysis of the interplay between agency design and political context, it helps to refine middle-range theories of institutional effectiveness. The findings challenge simplistic, one-size-fits-all prescriptions for institutional reform and contribute to a more contingent and context-sensitive understanding of what makes anti-corruption efforts succeed or fail (Lasmadi & Sukma, 2025).

From a policy perspective, the justification is even more compelling. The divergent experiences of the KPK and KICAC offer invaluable lessons for international development partners, policymakers, and civil society actors in countries currently designing or reforming their own anti-corruption institutions. This research provides an evidence-based analysis of the potential strengths and inherent vulnerabilities associated with different ACA models. By illuminating the trade-offs between a politically potent but perilous enforcement strategy and a less confrontational but potentially less impactful prevention strategy, this study equips reformers with the critical insights needed to make more informed and contextually appropriate institutional design choices, ultimately enhancing the prospects for successful anti-corruption reform globally.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative, comparative case study design to analyze the institutional trajectories of Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and South Korea's former Korea Independent Commission Against Corruption (KICAC). The research framework is grounded in a "*most similar systems design*" (MSSD), a comparative logic that seeks to explain divergent outcomes by isolating key distinguishing variables between cases that share numerous contextual similarities. This approach was chosen for its strength in generating in-depth, context-rich causal explanations. The design is explanatory in nature, aiming not only to describe the development of each institution but also to understand the critical factors that contributed to their distinct levels of effectiveness and political resilience over time (Chaisse, 2023).

Population and Samples

The study's cases were purposively selected: the KPK of Indonesia and the KICAC of South Korea. This selection is justified by their shared origins in post-authoritarian democratic transitions in the early 2000s, yet their fundamentally different institutional mandates—the KPK's enforcement-led model versus KICAC's prevention-focused approach. The "sample" for this research does not consist of human subjects but rather an extensive collection of primary and secondary textual data. Primary sources include the foundational laws establishing each agency, official annual reports, strategic plans, performance audits, and relevant court documents. Secondary sources comprise a wide range of peer-reviewed academic literature on governance and corruption in both countries, in-depth reports from international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and credible investigative reports from reputable national and international media outlets (Dhlamini & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2025).

Research Procedure

The research was conducted in three distinct phases. The first phase involved a comprehensive data collection process, where relevant legal, institutional, and academic documents pertaining to both the KPK and KICAC were gathered for the period covering their inception to the present day. The second phase consisted of a detailed within-case analysis. All collected documents for each case were systematically coded according to the pre-defined thematic framework (Fagbemi et al., 2023). This process produced two rich, structured narratives detailing the institutional evolution, major achievements, and significant challenges faced by the KPK and KICAC independently. The final phase involved a structured cross-case comparison. The coded data and narrative findings from both cases were systematically juxtaposed to identify key points of divergence and convergence, which were then analyzed to build and substantiate the study's central arguments regarding the factors that shaped their different outcomes (Doğan & Altun, 2024).

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

Documentary analysis served as the primary instrument for data collection. A structured analytical framework was developed to guide the systematic extraction of relevant information from the collected documents. This framework was organized around the study's core theoretical variables: institutional design (legal mandate, formal powers, structural independence), operational effectiveness (enforcement statistics, policy impact assessments, public engagement levels), and political resilience (documented instances of political interference, budgetary politics, legislative amendments affecting the agency). For data analysis, a thematic coding scheme was developed and managed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. This instrument allowed for the systematic categorization of textual

data, ensuring a rigorous and consistent approach to identifying patterns, themes, and causal relationships both within and across the two cases (Duisenbayeva et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the foundational legal and institutional documents reveals a fundamental divergence in the core design of Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and South Korea's Korea Independent Commission Against Corruption (KICAC). This initial descriptive finding, derived from a systematic review of their enabling legislation and official mandates, is summarized in the comparative table below. The data highlights significant differences in their primary functions, legal powers, and the structural mechanisms intended to safeguard their operational autonomy at the time of their inception.

The institutional architecture of each agency was purposefully distinct, reflecting different underlying theories of anti-corruption reform. These foundational differences, established in their respective enabling laws, set the two agencies on divergent operational and political paths from the outset. The table below presents a direct comparison of their key institutional attributes at inception (Anyadike et al., 2025).

Table 1. Comparative Institutional Design of KPK and KICAC at Inception

Institutional Attribute	Indonesia's KPK (Law No. 30/2002)	South Korea's KICAC (Act on Anti-Corruption, 2001)
Primary Mandate	Enforcement-led: Investigation, prosecution, and prevention of corruption.	Prevention-led: Policy coordination, institutional improvement, whistleblower protection.
Key Powers	Full investigative powers (interrogation, wiretapping, asset seizure), independent prosecution.	Power to conduct surveys, make policy recommendations, receive corruption reports, refer cases to prosecutors.
Structural Autonomy	Independent "super-body" status, separate from police and attorney general's office.	Independent presidential commission, focused on administrative and policy domains.
Operational Focus	High-profile, grand corruption cases involving state officials and law enforcers.	Systemic corruption risk assessment, public ethics codes, anti-corruption education.

The data presented in the table demonstrates a clear strategic bifurcation. The KPK was conceived as an enforcement-heavy institution, a "*super-body*" endowed with an integrated suite of powers—from intelligence and investigation to prosecution—placing it in direct, confrontational engagement with corrupt actors. Its design prioritized punitive action and the deterrent effect of high-profile enforcement, positioning it as a frontline law enforcement agency specifically targeting grand corruption. This integrated model was a deliberate response to the perceived weakness and co-optation of existing law enforcement institutions in Indonesia.

In stark contrast, KICAC's institutional DNA was rooted in a prevention-first philosophy. Its mandate was oriented toward systemic reform rather than individual

punishment. The agency was designed to function as a central coordinating hub for the government's anti-corruption policies, focusing on proactive measures such as corruption risk assessments, policy recommendations, and the protection of whistleblowers. Lacking independent prosecutorial powers, its primary mode of operation was persuasive and administrative, aiming to strengthen the overall integrity of the public sector from within, rather than confronting it from the outside as an enforcement entity (Aspan & Rosli, 2024).

The operational outputs of each agency, as documented in their respective annual reports and secondary analyses, reflect these foundational design differences. Over its first decade, the KPK established a formidable enforcement record, initiating investigations against hundreds of high-level officials, including cabinet ministers, governors, members of parliament, and senior judges (Astramowicz-Leyk et al., 2023). The agency maintained a near-perfect conviction rate in the specialized anti-corruption court, recovering significant state assets and establishing a public reputation for being one of the country's most trusted institutions.

KICAC's performance metrics, conversely, centered on its prevention and policy activities. During its tenure from 2002 to 2008, the commission received and processed tens of thousands of corruption reports, developed and implemented the national whistleblower protection system, and introduced the Corruption Impact Assessment (CIA) program, which reviewed new legislation for potential corruption risks. Its achievements were systemic and procedural, focused on building an institutional infrastructure for integrity rather than accumulating conviction statistics. This culminated in its eventual merger into the larger Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC) in 2008.
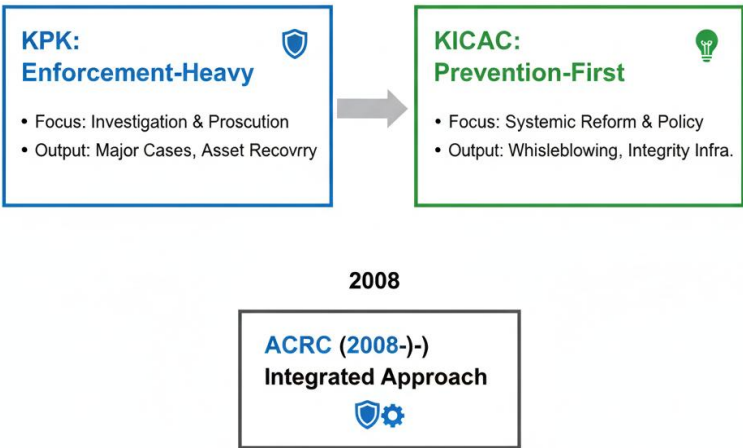

Figure 1. Evolution of Anti-Corruption Agencies: KPK & KICAC to ACRC

An inferential analysis of these divergent operational histories suggests a strong correlation between an ACA's institutional design and the nature of the political resistance it encounters. The KPK's aggressive, enforcement-led approach, while yielding high-profile successes, consistently generated intense and sustained political backlash from the country's political elite. This resistance manifested in repeated legislative attempts to weaken its legal powers, criminal investigations targeting its commissioners, and significant reductions in its operational budget, creating a state of perpetual political conflict (Awopeju, 2023).

The trajectory of KICAC allows for a different inference. Its less confrontational, prevention-oriented mandate did not provoke the same level of direct political hostility. However, its focus on systemic, often intangible, improvements made it difficult to demonstrate its value to the public and political stakeholders in a clear and compelling manner. This perceived lack of immediate, high-impact results may have contributed to its political vulnerability, making it susceptible to bureaucratic restructuring and merger when the political

administration changed, suggesting that a lack of visible enforcement can lead to challenges of institutional relevance and survival (Bae et al., 2024).

A clear relationship can be established between the agencies' formal powers and their long-term institutional stability. The KPK's potent combination of investigative and prosecutorial authority was the very source of both its celebrated effectiveness and its profound political precarity. Each successful prosecution of a powerful political figure simultaneously bolstered its public legitimacy and intensified the political elite's motivation to dismantle or neutralize the institution. Its institutional life has thus been characterized by a cyclical pattern of enforcement success followed by political counter-attack.

For KICAC, the relationship between its mandate and its institutional fate is equally direct but different in nature. Its lack of headline-grabbing enforcement powers, while insulating it from direct political warfare, also deprived it of a powerful tool for building a public constituency and demonstrating its indispensability. Its value proposition was more abstract and long-term, making it harder to defend during periods of government-wide administrative reform. Its eventual absorption into the ACRC can be seen as a direct consequence of an institutional design that prioritized quiet, systemic work over politically salient enforcement actions (Bozhyk et al., 2023).

A key case study illustrating the KPK's operational reality is its investigation into the "Century Bank bailout scandal." This complex case involved allegations of massive corruption reaching the highest levels of government and finance. The KPK's persistent and independent investigation, which utilized its full array of powers including wiretapping and asset tracing, placed it in direct opposition to powerful political parties and senior officials. The resulting political firestorm included a parliamentary inquiry aimed at discrediting the commission and attempts to remove its commissioners, perfectly encapsulating the high-stakes political battles inherent in its enforcement-led model.

An illustrative case for KICAC's approach is its development and implementation of the aforementioned Corruption Impact Assessment (CIA) system. This initiative required all government ministries to submit proposed new laws and regulations to KICAC for a review of potential corruption loopholes before they could be enacted. This proactive mechanism institutionalized a form of anti-corruption "proofing" directly within the legislative process. The successful implementation of the CIA represents a quiet, systemic victory for prevention, embedding anti-graft considerations into the very fabric of governance, an impact that is significant but far less visible than a high-profile prosecution.

The Century Bank case explains the paradox at the heart of the KPK's existence. The investigation demonstrated the agency's unique capacity to hold the powerful to account in a system where other institutions had failed. Yet, this very capacity is what triggers existential threats to the organization. It confirms that for an enforcement-led ACA in a context of systemic corruption, its core function is inherently a political act, and its survival depends on its ability to navigate the ensuing political backlash, primarily through the cultivation of strong public support.

The Corruption Impact Assessment case explains the different set of challenges faced by a prevention-focused agency. The initiative's success is measured by the absence of future corruption, an outcome that is inherently difficult to quantify and attribute directly to the agency's efforts. While a fundamentally important reform, its impact is diffuse and long-term, lacking the immediate, tangible quality of an arrest or conviction. This explains how a successful prevention agency can still struggle for political recognition and institutional permanence, as its greatest successes are often invisible (c & Nguyễn Anh, 2025).

The cumulative results of this comparative analysis indicate that the foundational design of an anti-corruption agency is a critical determinant of its operational focus, its relationship with the political environment, and its ultimate institutional fate. The choice between an enforcement-led model and a prevention-led model is not merely a technical decision but a

strategic one with profound and lasting consequences. The data shows that neither model is inherently superior, but each generates a predictable set of distinct opportunities and vulnerabilities.

In short, the findings reveal a fundamental trade-off at the heart of anti-corruption institutional design. The KPK's enforcement-centric model produced tangible, high-impact results and built significant public trust but at the cost of continuous political hostility that threatens its long-term survival. KICAC's prevention-centric model fostered important systemic reforms and avoided direct political conflict but struggled to demonstrate its relevance, ultimately leading to a loss of institutional independence. This core tension between confrontational impact and collaborative sustainability is the central finding of this comparative analysis.

This study's central finding is the identification of a fundamental trade-off inherent in the institutional design of Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs), as vividly illustrated by the divergent trajectories of Indonesia's KPK and South Korea's KICAC. The results demonstrate that the KPK's enforcement-led model, armed with formidable investigative and prosecutorial powers, was highly effective at achieving high-impact enforcement actions and building substantial public legitimacy. However, this very effectiveness engendered continuous, existential political hostility from the elite, locking the institution in a perpetual struggle for survival. Its institutional life has been a paradox of celebrated success and profound precarity (Cai, 2024).

Figure 2. Balancing Enforcement and Vulnerability in ACAs

Conversely, KICAC's prevention-focused mandate produced significant, albeit less visible, systemic reforms by embedding anti-corruption safeguards within the state bureaucracy. This less confrontational approach insulated the agency from the direct political warfare that besieged the KPK. The absence of headline-grabbing enforcement actions made it difficult for KICAC to demonstrate its immediate value and build a strong public constituency, which ultimately rendered it vulnerable to political restructuring and the loss of its institutional independence through a merger.

The findings reveal that the foundational choice between an enforcement-first and a prevention-first strategy is not a mere technical decision but a critical strategic one that predetermines an ACA's operational reality, its relationship with the political establishment, and its pathway to institutional sustainability. Neither model proved to be inherently superior; instead, each design choice created a distinct and predictable set of opportunities and vulnerabilities. The core conclusion is that the architecture of an ACA directly shapes the nature of the political challenges it will inevitably face.

The comparative analysis underscores that an ACA's long-term viability is contingent on its ability to manage the specific political dynamics generated by its institutional design. The KPK survived numerous attacks not just because of its legal powers, but because its high-profile enforcement actions cultivated a powerful reservoir of public support that could be mobilized for its defense. KICAC's quiet, systemic work, while valuable, did not create a similar public shield, leaving it exposed when political winds shifted. Thus, institutional survival is as much a function of political strategy and public engagement as it is of formal legal design.

These results contribute to a significant ongoing debate within the anti-corruption literature regarding the optimal design of ACAs. Much of the early scholarship, often implicitly or explicitly, championed the "Hong Kong model"—an enforcement-heavy institution akin to the KPK—as the gold standard for success. Our findings challenge this enforcement-centric view by demonstrating its inherent political risks. The KPK's experience shows that while a strong enforcement mandate can yield spectacular results, it can also provoke a political immune response that threatens to neutralize the agency, a crucial caveat often downplayed in prescriptive policy literature.

Our analysis aligns more closely with a growing body of scholarship that emphasizes the critical importance of political context and contingent institutional design. Researchers like Alina Mungiu-Pippidi have argued that anti-corruption strategies must be tailored to the specific nature of a country's governance equilibrium. The divergent fates of the KPK and KICAC provide strong empirical support for this contingent approach. They show that there is no universal "best practice" for ACA design; rather, the "best fit" depends on the prevailing political realities and the strategic goals of the reform effort.

Furthermore, this study speaks to the literature on institutional survival and resilience. While many studies focus on measuring an ACA's effectiveness in reducing corruption, fewer have systematically analyzed the factors that enable an ACA to simply endure as a functional entity. The case of KICAC's merger illustrates a form of institutional outcome—transformation and loss of independence—that is often overlooked in dichotomous success/failure analyses. Our findings suggest that institutional resilience requires a strategy for demonstrating value and building a protective coalition, a task that proved more challenging for the prevention-focused KICAC (Trudy et al., 2024).

The comparison also enriches the understanding of different anti-corruption strategies. It reframes the debate from "enforcement versus prevention" to an analysis of the distinct political economies of each approach. Enforcement is politically costly but generates high public visibility and support. Prevention is less politically explosive but its successes are often diffuse, long-term, and difficult to attribute, complicating the task of building and maintaining political and public backing. This research provides a clear framework for understanding this fundamental strategic trade-off.

The findings of this study are a clear signal that the institutional design of an ACA is, in essence, a political statement that predetermines its mode of engagement with the state. An enforcement-led body like the KPK is designed for confrontation; its existence is predicated on a conflictual relationship with the political establishment it is meant to police. A prevention-led body like KICAC, by contrast, is designed for collaboration and incremental reform, operating within and alongside the state apparatus it seeks to improve. These are not merely different tools for the same job; they represent fundamentally different theories of change (Soegiarto, 2025).

The results serve as a powerful reflection on the nature of political will. The establishment of an ACA is often cited as evidence of political will to combat corruption. However, our analysis suggests a more nuanced interpretation. The creation of a powerful enforcement body may signal an initial, perhaps fleeting, moment of reformist zeal, but the subsequent political attacks against it reveal the true, fractured, and contested nature of that

will. The sustained assault on the KPK indicates that the political elite's commitment to anti-corruption is often shallow and quickly retracts when its own interests are threatened. [Gambar spanduk unjuk rasa mendukung KPK]

This research is also a marker of the inherent fragility of specialized integrity institutions within transitional democracies. The experiences of both the KPK and KICAC demonstrate that these agencies are not unassailable pillars of the state but are, in fact, highly contested political arenas (Sianipar et al., 2025). Their autonomy is not a permanent feature guaranteed by law but a dynamic condition that must be constantly defended against encroachment from powerful political and economic interests who stand to lose from effective anti-graft measures.

Ultimately, these findings signify that the long-term success of an anti-corruption agency cannot be measured by a single metric. A focus solely on conviction rates, as is common, would laud the KPK while overlooking its constant state of crisis. A focus on policy adoption would credit KICAC while ignoring its eventual loss of independence. A more sophisticated assessment, as this research indicates, requires a multi-dimensional view that considers impact, resilience, and the capacity to adapt to a hostile political environment.

The most critical implication of this research is for policymakers and reformers engaged in the design of new anti-corruption institutions. The findings serve as a stark warning against the simple replication of perceived "best practice" models without a deep and realistic assessment of the local political context. Adopting an enforcement-heavy model like the KPK requires a clear-eyed understanding of the political battles that will ensue and a pre-emptive strategy for cultivating the broad-based public and civil society support necessary to defend the institution (Nugroho, 2025).

For international donors and development partners, the implication is the need to shift from promoting a single institutional template to supporting a more politically informed and context-sensitive approach to governance reform (Haryono et al., 2025). Support should extend beyond technical capacity-building to include strategies for political risk management, coalition-building, and public communication. Furthermore, donors must be prepared to use their diplomatic leverage to help shield nascent ACAs from political attacks, recognizing that their survival is a political, not just a technical, challenge.

There are also significant implications for civil society organizations. In contexts where a confrontational ACA like the KPK exists, civil society's role as a vigilant watchdog and a mobilizer of public support is absolutely critical to the agency's survival. For countries with prevention-focused agencies, the task for civil society is different but no less important: to help document, publicize, and attribute the often-invisible successes of systemic reform, thereby building the public recognition needed to protect the agency from being marginalized or dismantled.

Finally, the implications for scholarship are clear. The study calls for a move away from simplistic measures of ACA performance and toward more nuanced, multi-dimensional frameworks of evaluation that capture the trade-offs between different strategies. It highlights the need for more comparative research that can help build middle-range theories about which institutional designs are most likely to be effective and resilient under specific political conditions, advancing a more sophisticated and evidence-based science of institutional reform (Anku-Tsede et al., 2023).

The divergent outcomes of the KPK and KICAC are a direct result of the different political calculations and historical contexts from which they emerged. Indonesia's post-Suharto Reformasi movement was characterized by a deep and widespread public distrust of existing state institutions, particularly the police and judiciary (Ambituuni, 2025). This created a powerful public mandate for a truly independent "*super-body*" that could operate outside of, and in opposition to, the compromised state apparatus. The KPK's confrontational design was thus a product of a political settlement that demanded a radical break from the past.

South Korea's democratic transition, while also driven by popular demand for reform, proceeded with a greater degree of elite consensus and institutional continuity. The impetus for KICAC's creation was less about dismantling a thoroughly corrupt state and more about professionalizing the civil service and aligning the country's governance standards with those of other OECD nations (Amagnya, 2024). The choice of a prevention-focused model reflected a belief that corruption could be managed through systemic administrative improvements rather than requiring the kind of surgical, high-stakes law enforcement pursued by the KPK.

The role of civil society also explains the different trajectories. In Indonesia, a vibrant and organized civil society movement, born from the anti-authoritarian struggle, consistently acted as the KPK's primary defender. During moments of political attack, these groups were able to mobilize massive public demonstrations and media campaigns that created a significant political cost for those seeking to weaken the agency. This external support has been a crucial factor in the KPK's ability to withstand repeated assaults (Alghamdi, 2025).

In South Korea, while civil society was instrumental in the democratic transition, its focus on anti-corruption was perhaps less singular and sustained. The less confrontational nature of KICAC did not generate the same sense of urgent public drama or create a clear "us versus them" narrative that is often effective for mobilization. Consequently, when the government decided to merge KICAC into a larger body, there was no significant public or civil society backlash comparable to what has been seen in Indonesia, which helps explain the relative ease with which its institutional form was altered (Al-Zaza & Al Khasawneh, 2023).

While this study provides a robust comparative analysis, its qualitative design limits the generalizability of its findings. The immediate next step is to test the propositions generated here through mixed-methods research incorporating a larger number of cases. Future studies should develop quantitative metrics to more systematically measure the trade-off between enforcement impact and political backlash across a diverse range of countries, which could help validate the core findings of this paper (Acheampong et al., 2023).

Future research must also focus on developing better methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of prevention-focused anti-corruption agencies. The impact of such bodies is notoriously difficult to measure, often leading them to be unfairly judged by enforcement-centric metrics (Abuhummour, 2023). Scholars need to develop and validate new indicators that can capture the long-term impact of systemic reforms, such as changes in public procurement integrity, reductions in legislative corruption risks, and shifts in bureaucratic norms, to allow for a fairer comparison of different ACA models.

There is a critical need for more longitudinal research on the evolution of ACAs. These institutions are not static; they adapt and change in response to their political environments. Future studies should trace the long-term co-evolution of ACAs and their political contexts, examining how agencies strategically alter their approaches over time to navigate political threats and maintain their relevance (Abou-Nouh & El Khomsi, 2024). This would move the analysis from a static comparison of initial designs to a more dynamic understanding of institutional adaptation and learning.

Finally, the agenda for future work must include a deeper investigation into the demand side of accountability. This study focused primarily on the institutional supply of anti-corruption efforts. The next generation of research should more deeply explore the conditions under which citizens and civil society groups successfully mobilize to defend their integrity institutions. Understanding the factors that sustain public engagement in the often-protracted fight against corruption is a critical piece of the puzzle that remains undertheorized and is essential for crafting reforms that are not only well-designed but also politically sustainable.

CONCLUSION

This research's most distinctive finding is the identification of a fundamental trade-off between institutional impact and political resilience inherent in the design of anti-corruption

agencies. The comparative analysis demonstrates that Indonesia's KPK, with its enforcement-led model, achieved high-profile successes and significant public trust but at the cost of provoking continuous, existential political hostility. Conversely, South Korea's KICAC, with its prevention-focused mandate, fostered important systemic reforms but struggled to demonstrate its immediate value, leaving it vulnerable to political marginalization and eventual institutional absorption. The study reveals that an agency's foundational design is a primary predictor of the specific political challenges it will face throughout its existence.

The principal contribution of this research is conceptual, enabled by its focused methodological approach. By systematically juxtaposing these two archetypal—enforcement-led versus prevention-led—agencies from similar post-authoritarian contexts, the study moves beyond a simple evaluation of which model is "better." It instead provides a new framework for understanding the predictable political consequences and strategic dilemmas that flow from initial design choices. This reframing of the debate from a search for a "best practice" model to an analysis of the "effectiveness-resilience trade-off" is the core value added to the fields of comparative politics and governance studies.

The study's focus on two cases, while enabling deep analysis, necessarily limits the generalizability of its findings. The research is also a retrospective analysis, and its qualitative nature makes the precise measurement of prevention's impact a continuing challenge. These limitations point toward a clear agenda for future research. The next steps should involve expanding this comparative framework to a larger set of cases to test the trade-off hypothesis more broadly, conducting longitudinal studies to analyze how agencies strategically adapt to political pressures over time, and developing more sophisticated quantitative metrics to better capture the long-term, often subtle, impact of prevention-focused anti-corruption work

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Look this example below:
Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.
Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.
Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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