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From Rhetoric to Action?: A Comparative History of Indonesian Anti-Corruption (1945-Reformasi)

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ABTRACT
This study aims to critically evaluate the disparity between political rhetoric and the implementation of formal anti-corruption policies across three regime periods in Indonesia: the Old Order, the New Order, and the early Reformation era. This research employs a qualitative historical-comparative design using Thematic Analysis Braun & Clarke, 2006. Data sources include presidential speeches, legal statutes, and institutional records, which were coded to identify patterns of political will versus enforcement reality. The analysis reveals distinct patterns: (1) The Old Order established the initial legal terminology for corruption but lacked enforcement data and institutional capacity due to political instability; (2) The New Order (32 years) produced strong anti-corruption rhetoric and laws (Law No. 3/1971), yet corruption became systemic and structured, indistinguishable from state operation; (3) The early Reformation era marked a shift towards institutional independence (establishment of KPK), attempting to dismantle the decades-long structure of the previous regime. Unlike the previous eras, the Reform era focused on creating "superbodies," though early enforcement outcomes struggled to match the scale of entrenched corruption inherited from the New Order regime. The study concludes that legal evolution alone is insufficient without political consistency. The transition shows that while institutional authority has strengthened, the "culture of impunity" remains a persistent legacy that new regulations struggle to overcome.

Keywords: Anti-Corruption, Indonesia, Political Regimes, Governance, Political Rhetoric.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption has been a chronic impediment to Indonesia's developmental progress, casting a long shadow over the nation's trajectory since independence (Henderson & Kuncoro, 2011; Sulista & Rosyid, 2022). The increasingly widespread problem of corruption weakens the effectiveness of governance structures, erodes public trust, and distorts resource allocation, thereby hampering economic growth and the quality of public infrastructure (Alfada, 2019; Gertler et al., 2024; Vial & Hanoteau, 2010). It also contributes to the growth of a "shadow economy," where illicit transactions thrive outside of formal state control (Bahoo et al., 2020). Detecting corruption requires continuous, careful examination due to its diverse impacts, especially across Indonesia's various political regimes. According to previous studies, analysing political rhetoric and policy frameworks can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of corruption and anti-corruption efforts (Baloi & Price, 2003). A study by Batory (2012) highlights the importance of understanding the role of political rhetoric in shaping anti-corruption policies, while Pomeroy et al. (2001) emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing corruption.

The Indonesian government has been in power since the early post-independence period until now, and has repeatedly declared "war" on corruption, recognising its negative impact on the nation's progress (Henderson & Kuncoro, 2011). Although institutional structures and legal steps have been established to address corruption, the concrete results of these anti-corruption efforts are often the subject of debate (Berenschot et al., 2022; Gunarto et al., 2022). Efforts to prevent ingrained corruption in Indonesian society and its institutions remain controversial, with varying assessments of their impact (Muslihuddin & Bahtiar, 2020; Painuly, 2001). This pattern of policy failure is not unique to anti-corruption, but is also evident in other sectors such as energy and environmental management, where weak enforcement enables problems like illegal logging and wildlife crime (Johansson et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2022; Nijman et al., 2025; Sumarno et al., 2022). Evidently, the government has recently struggled with various mega-corruption cases, while at times, law enforcement's efforts to eradicate corruption were not particularly evident to the public. However, to determine how much the state loses due to corruption, it requires further, more in-depth, and more complex studies (Mahsun et al., 2021).

The historical roots of corruption in Indonesia are very deep, extending from the feudal era to the modern era, indicating that corrupt practices have been ingrained in the culture of government (Mukartono et al., 2019; Vial & Hanoteau, 2010). The persistence of these practices across different political eras can be understood through the concept of "path dependency", where historical governance structures and the vested interests they create continue to influence present-day outcomes, making systemic change difficult (Talib et al., 2022).

This culture of corruption is not born in a vacuum but is shaped by a long historical trail. Studies show that practices resembling corruption, such as tributes and patronage, have existed since the kingdom era and continued during the Dutch colonial period (Mukartono et al., 2019). Moreover, the moral atmosphere in Indonesia's development is often coloured by informal practices and patronage that run parallel to, or even contradict, formal rules (Jakimow, 2018). This is further complicated by the ideological context of each regime, which has shaped public trust and the relationship between the state and its citizens (Suntana et al., 2023). Consequently, an environment arises in which the gap between formal rules and informal practices becomes commonplace, creating fertile ground for the continuation of corruption across generations and regimes.

As Indonesia approaches its centenary of independence in 2045, this moment is an important opportunity to critically evaluate

the country's progress in combating corruption. Although the government has consistently articulated a strong anti-corruption stance, the extent to which these anti-corruption statements have been translated into concrete, sustainable actions remains a major question (Berenschot et al., 2022; Henderson & Kuncoro, 2011).

Based on the identified gap, this study addresses two primary research questions. First, to what extent did the disparity between political rhetoric and actual policy enforcement manifest across the Old Order, New Order, and early Reformation eras?. Second, what are the critical historical lessons from this comparative analysis relevant to formulating effective anti-corruption strategies as Indonesia approaches its centenary in 2045?.

A core concern motivating this research is the apparent gap between the anti-corruption pronouncements made by successive Indonesian regimes and the practical realities of implementation and legal enforcement (Baloi & Price, 2003; Berenschot et al., 2022; Gunarto et al., 2022; O'Callaghan, 2010). The study seeks to critically evaluate the extent to which the government/regime's anti-corruption commitments move beyond mere rhetoric, examining whether tangible actions and effective enforcement mechanisms are in place to address this persistent problem. This gap is often exacerbated by systemic issues within the legal system itself, such as obstruction of justice, which actively undermines anti-corruption efforts (Isra et al., 2017; Rohmy et al., 2024).

Differences in political, legal, and economic conditions across eras also shape the level and form of corruption (Jakimow, 2018). For example, the Old Order faced corruption problems because its government was centralised and its economy was tightly regulated (Jakimow, 2018; Triatmanto et al., 2023). Meanwhile, in the New Order, corruption felt more structured because economic development went hand in hand with strong political control (Vial & Hanoteau, 2010). When the Reformation began, decentralisation and democracy brought new hope to fight corruption (Clifton, 2003; Henderson & Kuncoro, 2011). However, new challenges also emerged, such as the decentralisation of corruption to the regional level, in building trusted and responsible institutions to address the ongoing problem of corruption, which also has significant impacts on social inequality (Muslihuddin & Bahtiar, 2020; Sulista & Rosyid, 2022; Szczepaniak et al., 2022).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

Corruption in this study is understood as the abuse of public authority for private gain, a phenomenon involving state actors and targeted by eradication efforts across regimes (Joseph et al., 2016; Muslihuddin & Bahtiar, 2020; Triatmanto et al., 2023). Political Rhetoric refers to the use of language by political and state actors to frame corruption, persuade the public, and communicate anti-corruption commitments, often found in speeches or official documents (Ridge, 2006). Third, Public Policy (as a formal framework) is defined as the instruments or programs of action formally chosen and documented by the government to address corruption, including legislation (laws) and formal institutional structures established.

Focusing on this operational definition allows a comparative analysis of the regime's formal commitments without entering into deep theoretical debates. Existing scholarship on the Old Order period in Indonesia indicates that President Soekarno frequently employed forceful rhetoric to address corruption. He often framed corruption as an act that undermined the progress of the Indonesian revolution, or characterised it as a detrimental "disease" that required eradication to safeguard the country's security (Hadiz, 2017). This rhetorical stance was reflected in the formal policy measures undertaken by the regime, primarily through the establishment of the Panitia Retooling Aparatur Negara, as mandated by Presidential Regulation Number 1 of

1959, which explicitly aimed to purge the state apparatus of "elements" deemed to hinder the revolutionary process (Murphy, 2009). Furthermore, official documents from this era, such as regulations issued by the Penguasa Perang Tertinggi to combat corruption, utilised firm language, describing corruption as a dangerous threat that could "disrupt and undermine the authority of the Government as well as the Safety of the State and the Revolution", thus necessitating strong eradication measures for the sake of national interests (Triatmanto et al., 2023).

The existing literature indicates that the New Order regime incorporated anti-corruption rhetoric into its official discourse, frequently framing it within a narrative emphasising national development and political stability, and incorporating it into state planning documents such as the Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara (Butt, 2011; Joseph et al., 2016). As a formal policy measure, the government enacted Law No. 3 of 1971 on the Eradication of Criminal Acts of Corruption, which became the primary legal framework for defining and addressing corruption during this era (Gunarto et al., 2022; Isra et al., 2017). Additionally, the regime officially launched institutional initiatives, such as the Tim Pemberantasan Korupsi, and implemented ad hoc operations, such as "Operasi Tertib," as part of its formal efforts to demonstrate a commitment to eradicating corruption (Joseph et al., 2016; Syuraida, 2015).

Entering the early post-Soeharto Reformasi era, the literature highlights a significant shift in both the rhetoric and the formal anti-corruption policy framework, driven by strong public demands to eradicate Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism (KKN) (Bahoo et al., 2020; Butt, 2011; Sabani et al., 2019). The early post-Soeharto Reformasi era saw a significant shift driven by public demands, which led to the use of new approaches such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to promote transparency (Sabani et al., 2019) and the formation of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) with a strong mandate (Butt, 2011; Joseph et al., 2016). The rhetoric of leaders during this era explicitly adopted narratives of 'reformasi' (reform) and 'good governance', marking a difference from the New Order's focus on development/ stability or the Old Order's revolutionary jargon (Diprose et al., 2019; Muslihuddin & Bahtiar, 2020; Syuraida, 2015).

This change in rhetoric was followed by a series of stronger formal legal and institutional products, such as the enactment of Law No. 28 of 1999 concerning Clean and KKN-Free State Organizers (which established the State Officials' Wealth Audit Commission/ KPKPN), the significant revision of the Anti-Corruption Law through Law No. 31 of 1999 as amended by Law No. 20 of 2001, and the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) through Law No. 30 of 2002, after ad hoc bodies like the Joint Team for the Eradication of Criminal Acts of Corruption (TGPTPK) were deemed inadequate (Butt, 2011).

The formal establishment of the KPK as an independent institution with broad powers (including investigation and prosecution) represents a key point of differentiation compared to previous anti-corruption bodies like PARAN in the Old Order or TPK/Opstib in the New Order, which tended to be under executive control and had limited authority; this indicates a fundamental change in the state's formal approach to corruption in the early era of Indonesian democracy (Isra et al., 2017; Joseph et al., 2016; Muslihuddin & Bahtiar, 2020; Sabani et al., 2019; Syuraida, 2015).

Several studies have examined corruption and efforts to eradicate it in Indonesia across certain historical periods (Mukartono et al., 2019; Saragih, 2023). These studies often focus on a specific era, for example analyzing corrupt practices related to political and economic structures during the Old Order (Henderson & Kuncoro, 2011; Triatmanto et al., 2023), examining systemic Collusion, Corruption, and Nepotism (KKN) and the

failure of anti-corruption policy during the New Order (Brata, 2009; Vial & Hanoteau, 2010), or examining the formation of anti-corruption institutions such as the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and the challenges of law enforcement in the early Reformation era (Muslihuddin & Bahtiar, 2020). Several studies also explore specific aspects such as the impact of fiscal decentralisation on regional development (Paranata, 2022), problems in regulatory governance (O'Callaghan, 2010), or the role of political coalitions. For example, works such as those by Hadiz (2017) often link corruption to power structures and political economy and discuss decentralisation (Vial & Hanoteau, 2010), while other studies, such as those by Simon Butt, analyse the development of anti-corruption law and reform in the post-Soeharto era. Works analysing the legal aspects also highlight persistent weaknesses, such as the challenges in prosecuting corporate crime (Sasmita et al., 2023), the illicit financing of political activities (Vial & Hanoteau, 2010), and the prevalence of obstruction of justice in corruption cases (Isra et al., 2017).

The existing scholarly literature has chronicled the diverse forms of political rhetoric and formal policy frameworks adopted by each regime in Indonesia's efforts to combat corruption. The Old Order government framed corruption within a revolutionary narrative and established institutions like PARAN, while the New Order employed a developmental discourse and enacted the 1971 Anti-Corruption Law, forming bodies such as TPK/Opstib. In contrast, the early Reformasi era was characterised by strong anti-KKN rhetoric, strengthened legislation, and the establishment of institutions such as KPKPN, TGPTPK, and, eventually, KPK. Despite these detailed descriptions for each period, a notable gap remains in the scholarly literature - the lack of a direct and systematic comparative analysis of how the rhetorical and formal policy approaches to anti-corruption differed or shared similarities across these three distinct regimes. Addressing this analytical gap constitutes a central focus of the current research, aiming to enhance our understanding of anti-corruption efforts in Indonesia.

3. METHODS

This qualitative investigation employs a historical-comparative research design to examine the meanings and interpretations embedded in rhetorical texts and policy documents related to corruption in Indonesia across the Old Order, New Order, and Early Reform periods. The qualitative approach enables researchers to unpack the thematic elements, conceptual frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and narrative structures present in the anti-corruption rhetoric and policy frameworks of each regime. Simultaneously, the historical-comparative methodology facilitates the tracking and systematic comparison of formal institutional elements across these distinct political eras, allowing for the identification of patterns, similarities, and divergences in the conceptualisation and management of corruption (Skocpol & Somers, 1980). This multifaceted analytical approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving notions and practices of corruption across Indonesia's diverse historical and political contexts.

The primary data sources for this study comprise original documents from relevant historical periods that directly reflect the political rhetoric or formal policy frameworks related to anti-corruption efforts. These primary sources include transcripts or authentic quotations from key speeches by the President or high-ranking government officials addressing the issue of corruption; the full text of Corruption Crime Laws in effect across different eras; the text of Presidential Decrees, Instructions, or Government Regulations pertaining to the establishment or mandate of formal anti-corruption institutions and agencies; and manuscripts of the General Guidelines of State Policy, Decrees of the People's Consultative Assembly, or other official state documents containing

policy statements or rhetoric related to the eradication of corruption. To provide context, interpretative analysis, and complement the understanding of these primary sources, the study also utilises secondary data sources, such as credible Indonesian political and legal history books, articles in national and international scientific journals, research reports from research institutions, and news archives from leading mass media that describe or analyse the formal anti-corruption rhetoric and policies in the eras under investigation.

Data Analysis Procedure

To process the qualitative data, this study employed a Thematic Analysis approach as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis proceeded in three stages: (1) Data Reduction, where raw documents (speeches and laws) were collected and filtered for relevance; (2) Coding and Categorization, where texts were coded based on keywords such as "order," "development," "reform," and "eradication," then grouped into two core themes: 'Rhetorical Promises' and 'Policy Instruments'; and (3) Synthesis, where we compared the alignment between these themes across the three historical periods to draw conclusions about regime consistency.

While the historical-comparative qualitative approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of rhetoric and formal policies across regimes, this method inherently has certain limitations. Analysing three extended historical periods naturally restricts the depth of investigation for specific contexts or events within each era, in contrast to studies focused on a single period.

Furthermore, the primary reliance on documentary data sources means the research findings are heavily dependent on the availability, completeness, and potential biases present in these documents. The absence of primary data, such as interviews with historical actors, may constrain the understanding of nuances in implementation and informal motivations behind formal policies. Additionally, as in other qualitative research, an element of researcher interpretation is present in the data analysis process, though systematic efforts through content and comparative analysis have been made to maintain objectivity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of Data Sources

To support the historical-comparative analysis, this study examined a dataset comprising primary legal documents and official state records spanning from 1958 to 2002. The data corpus consists of three categories of documents that represent the formal stance of each regime:

a. Legislative Instruments: We analysed 8 key laws (Undang-Undang) and emergency regulations that served as the primary legal basis for corruption eradication, ranging from the Military Authority Regulation of 1958 (Old Order) to the KPK Law of 2002 (Reform Era).
b. Institutional Decrees: The study examined 7 Presidential Decrees and Instructions (Keppres/Inpres) specifically related to the establishment of ad-hoc anti-corruption bodies.
c. Rhetorical Texts: Data on political will were derived from key state speeches, specifically focusing on transition periods when anti-corruption narratives were most prominent.

Anti-Corruption Legal Frameworks Across Eras: A Comparative Review

The formal policy framework for combating corruption in Indonesia is reflected in various laws and regulations issued since the Old Order era through the early Reformation period. Below is a table 1 summarising the key laws related to corruption crimes under each regime.

The Old Order (1945-1966): Rhetoric and Policy

During the Old Order era, political rhetoric on corruption began to emerge alongside efforts to build the nation after independence. Although it was not yet

widely documented in the form of specific state speeches on corruption, awareness of this issue had existed since the early days of independence. The government, during this period, issued several regulations as an initial response to the problem of corruption. Peraturan Penguasa Perang Nomor Prt/Perpu/013/1958 and Undang-Undang Nomor 24/Prp/1960 became the first legal basis for efforts to eradicate corruption. Law No. 24 PRP of 1960 specifically regulated the investigation, prosecution, and examination of corruption crimes, and for the first time used the term "corruption crime" in Indonesian legislation. This regulation defined corruption as an act of enriching oneself or others that harmed the state finances, or abuse of office.

In addition, during this period, several institutions were formed with anti-corruption mandates, although their effectiveness was limited. The Panitia Retooling Aparatur Negara (PARAN) was formed in the late 1950s with the aim of cleaning up the state apparatus from corrupt practices. However, PARAN's efforts encountered resistance from officials who were reluctant to report their wealth, thus limiting its effectiveness. Later, in 1963, Operasi Budhi was formed through Presidential Decree No. 275 of 1963 as part of the PARAN program, focusing on state institutions and state-owned enterprises deemed vulnerable to corruption. Although it managed to recover some state funds, Operasi Budhi also faced bureaucratic obstacles and the close relationship between officials and the president, which ultimately limited its impact.

The examination of anti-corruption measures undertaken during the Old Order period suggests that while there

Table 1. **The Formal Policy Framework for Combating Corruption in Indonesia**

Law Name/Number	Year Issued	Regime	Brief Description (if available)
Martial Law Authority Regulation Number Prt/ Perpu/013/1958	1958	Old Order	Regulates the investigation, prosecution, and examination of corruption crimes as well as asset scrutiny.
Law Number 24/ Prp/1960	1960	Old Order	Regulates the investigation, prosecution, and examination of corruption crimes, first used the term "corruption crime".
Law Number 3 of 1971	1971	New Order	Regulates the eradication of corruption crimes, revokes Law No. 24 Prp of 1960, contains definitions and penalties for corruption crimes.
Law Number 11 of 1980	1980	New Order	Regulates bribery crimes beyond existing provisions.
Law Number 28 of 1999	1999	Early Reformation	Concerning State Administration that is Clean and Free from corruption, collusion, and nepotism.
Law Number 31 of 1999	1999	Early Reformation	Concerning the Eradication of corruption crimes, replacing law No. 3 of 1971.
Law Number 20 of 2001	2001	Early Reformation	Concerning amendments to law number 31 of 1999 concerning the eradication of corruption crimes.
Law Number 30 of 2002	2002	Early Reformation	Concerning the corruption eradication commission.

Source: Processed Data

was formal acknowledgement of the corruption issue and legislative initiatives, as well as the establishment of relevant institutions, the implementation of these efforts was not yet fully effective. The political instability and the prioritisation of national development in the early years of independence may have been significant impediments to the consistent enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Additionally, the strong influence wielded by the military in the business sector was also suspected to have exacerbated the corruption problem during this era.

New Order (1966-1998): Rhetoric and Policy

The anti-corruption political rhetoric during the New Order era was marked by President Soeharto's firm statement promising to eradicate corruption to its roots in his state speech on August 16, 1967 (Jakimow, 2018; Mukartono et al., 2019; Talib et al., 2022). This promise was followed up with the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Team (TPK) through Presidential Decree No. 228 of 1967. However, the TPK was deemed ineffective and was even considered to lack the courage to reveal major corruption cases.

The formal anti-corruption policy framework during the New Order era was strengthened with the issuance of Law No. 3 of 1971 on the Eradication of Corruption Crimes. This law repealed Law No. 24 Prp of 1960 and contained definitions and punishments for perpetrators of corruption crimes. In addition, the government also formed the Komisi Empat (Four Commission) through Presidential Decree No. 12 of 1970 in response to student protests regarding the ineffectiveness of the TPK. This commission was tasked with assisting the president in handling

Table 2. **Timeline of Early Anti-Corruption Measures During the Old Order Era**

Date	Type of Policy	Policy Name	Main Provisions/Objectives (Brief Description)
1946	Speech	Proclamation Anniversary Mandate	Commitment to eradicate profiteers and corruption
April 16, 1958	Regulation of the War Authority	Regulation of the War Authority No. Prt/Perpu/013/1958	First legal step specifically using the term "corruption" and granting authority to the War Authority to handle it.
Late 1950s	Institution	State Apparatus Retooling Committee (PARAN)	Formed to cleanse the state apparatus of corrupt practices.
June 9, 1960	Law	Law No. 24/ Prp/1960	Regulated the investigation, prosecution, and examination of corruption crimes; first Indonesian legislation to use the term "corruption crime". Repealed Perpu 013/1958.
1963	Institution	Operation Budhi	Formed as part of the PARAN program, focusing on state institutions and state-owned enterprises (BUMN) prone to corruption.
1963	Appointment/ Reappointment	Nasution as head of PARAN and Operation Budhi	Tasking Nasution to continue handling corruption cases for court proceedings.

Source: Processed Data

corruption issues specifically. Operasi Tertib (OPSTIB) was also launched in 1977 through Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 1977 with the aim of eradicating corruption and extortion (Butt, 2011; Isra et al., 2017). Efforts to eradicate corruption during the New Order era were also marked by the issuance of Law No. 11 of 1980 on Bribery Crimes.

Despite the formation of various anti-corruption policies and institutions during the New Order era, corrupt practices became increasingly rampant and were even considered a deeply ingrained culture (Hadiz, 2017). The centralised and closed government system during the New Order era was suspected to be a major factor that made it difficult to monitor and take action against corrupt practices. The close relationship between the ruling elite and entrepreneurs also worsened the situation, where corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN) became characteristic of this regime (Chwastiak, 2013; Jakimow, 2018).

Early Reform Era (1998-early 2000s): Rhetoric and Policy

The early Reform Era in Indonesia was marked by a strong commitment to eradicate corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN) as one of the primary demands of the reform movement. The political rhetoric during this period emphasised the importance of a clean government free from KKN. President B.J. Habibie issued Law No. 28/1999 on Clean State Administration, which laid the groundwork for forming various anti-corruption commissions and institutions, including the State Administrator Wealth Inspection Commission (KPKPN), established through Presidential Decree No. 127/1999, the Business Competition Supervisory Commission (KPPU), and the Ombudsman.

Table 3. **Timeline of Early Anti-Corruption Measures During the New Order Era**

Date	Type of Policy	Policy Name	Main Provisions/Objectives (Brief Description)
August 16, 1967	Speech	Pidato Kenegaraan Presiden Soeharto	President Soeharto made a strong commitment to eradicate corruption to its roots.
1967	Presidential Decree	Keppres No. 228 Tahun 1967	Established the Team for Eradication of Corruption (TPK) with the Attorney General as the head.
1970	Presidential Decree	Keppres No. 12 Tahun 1970	Formed the Komisi Empat (Four Person Committee) to assist the President in handling corruption issues specifically, as a response to student protests regarding the ineffectiveness of TPK.
1971	Law	Undang-Undang Nomor 3 Tahun 1971	Enacted to eradicate corruption, replacing UU No. 24 Prp Tahun 1960. It contained definitions and penalties for acts of corruption. The consideration mentioned that corruption harms state finances and hinders national development, causing unhealthy governance and economic conditions.
1977	Presidential Instruction	Inpres No. 9 Tahun 1977	Launched Operasi Tertib (OPSTIB) with the aim of eradicating corruption and illegal levies to improve the smooth running of government and development.
1980	Law	Undang-Undang Nomor 11 Tahun 1980 tentang Suap	Specifically regulated bribery outside of existing provisions.

Source: Processed Data

During President Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur) administration, the Joint Corruption Eradication Team (TGPTPK) was formed through Government Regulation No. 19/2000, implementing Law No. 31/1999 on Corruption Eradication. This law replaced Law No. 3/1971 and provided more comprehensive provisions on corruption. Later, during President Megawati Soekarnoputri's administration, Law No. 20/2001 was issued as an amendment to Law No. 31/1999.

The culmination of anti-corruption efforts during the early Reform Era was the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) through Law No. 30/2002. KPK was formed as an independent institution with greater authority to combat corruption than previous institutions.

The early Reform Era demonstrated a significant increase in formal commitment to combating corruption, reflected in stronger laws and institutions. However, challenges persist in implementation

Table 4. **Timeline of Early Anti-Corruption Measures During the Early Reform Era**

Date	Type of Policy	Policy Name	Main Provisions/Objectives (Brief Description)
1999	Law	Undang-Undang Nomor 28 Tahun 1999 tentang Penyelenggaraan Negara yang Bersih dan Bebas dari Korupsi, Kolusi, dan Nepotisme 1	Establishes principles for clean governance and freedom from corruption, collusion, and nepotism.
1999	Presidential Decree	Keppres Nomor 127 Tahun 1999	Established the Komisi Pemeriksa Kekayaan Penyelenggara Negara (KPKPN) to audit the wealth of state officials.
1999	Institution	Komisi Pengawas Persaingan Usaha (KPPU)	Established to supervise fair business competition, indirectly preventing corruption related to monopolies and unfair practices.
1999	Institution	Ombudsman	Established to oversee public services and handle complaints of maladministration, including potential corruption.
1999	Law	Undang-Undang Nomor 31 Tahun 1999 tentang Pemberantasan Tindak Pidana Korupsi	Replaced UU No. 3 Tahun 1971 and provided more comprehensive regulations regarding corruption crimes.
2000	Government Regulation	Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 19 Tahun 2000	Formed the Tim Gabungan Pemberantasan Tindak Pidana Korupsi (TGPTPK) to combat corruption.
2001	Law	Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2001	Amended Law No. 31 Tahun 1999 concerning the eradication of corruption crimes.
2002	Law	Undang-Undang Nomor 30 Tahun 2002	Established the Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK) as an independent institution with greater authority to eradicate corruption.

Source: Processed Data

and political consistency, which remain key issues to address. The establishment of KPK marked a crucial milestone in Indonesia's corruption eradication history, signifying a more serious and structured effort to tackle the problem.

Discussion

Comparative Analysis of Rhetoric and Policy Approaches

A comparative analysis of political rhetoric on corruption across different regimes in Indonesia reveals a growing awareness and emphasis on this issue from the Old Order to the early Reform Era. During the Old Order, although initial acknowledgements were made, anti-corruption rhetoric was not particularly strong or structured. The New Order regime displayed more assertive rhetoric from President Soeharto, but it often did not align with real actions on the ground. The early Reform Era demonstrated very strong rhetoric, supported by public demands to eradicate Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism (KKN), which was later manifested in various policies and the formation of more independent anti-corruption institutions.

The disparity between rhetoric and action in the Reform era can be attributed to persistent structural challenges. While formal institutions like the KPK were established, the underlying political economy remained deeply entrenched in patterns of patronage and clientelism. Scholars note that the transition to democracy did not immediately dissolve the informal networks formed during the New Order; instead, these networks adapted to the new decentralised system (Hadiz, 2017; Vial & Hanoteau, 2010). Consequently, formal anti-corruption policies often face resistance during the implementation stage, where conflict of interest among political elites creates barriers to effective enforcement.

In terms of the formal policy framework, there has been significant evolution from the Old Order to the early Reform Era. The Old Order laid the first legal foundation with Law No. 24 Prp/1960, but its scope and effectiveness were limited. The New Order strengthened the legal framework with Law No. 3/1971 and Law No. 11/1980, and formed various teams and operations to eradicate corruption, although their effectiveness was also questionable. The early Reform Era showed more tangible progress with the issuance of Law No. 28/1999 and Law No. 31/1999, which were more comprehensive, and the establishment of institutions such as KPKPN and KPK, which have stronger mandates and authority.

The main difference in policy approach lies in the level of independence and authority of anti-corruption institutions. During the Old Order and New Order, anti-corruption institutions tended to be under executive control and lacked adequate independence. The early Reform Era, particularly with the establishment of KPK, demonstrated efforts to create institutions that are more independent and have greater authority to combat corruption. Additionally, the policy focus has shifted from merely enforcement during the Old Order and New Order to a more balanced approach between prevention and enforcement in the early Reform Era.

Furthermore, while the establishment of the KPK in 2002 was a formal peak in anti-corruption policy, the outcome indicators present a mixed reality. Despite the KPK's high success rate in prosecution, Indonesia's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) has shown stagnation in several periods. This reflects what critics call 'functional failure' or 'institutional layering' (Silalahi et al., 2025), where a strong agency like the KPK is systematically weakened through political mechanisms such as the revision of the KPK Law or the criminalisation of its commissioners (the 'Cicak vs Buaya' episodes). Thus, the Reformation era demonstrates that creating powerful independent bodies triggers a stronger political counter-reaction, a challenge that was less visible in the authoritarian, centralised control of the New Order.

Analysis of Key Official Documents and Presidential Speeches

Analysis of official documents, such as Presidential Decrees (Keppres) and Instructions (Inpres), reveals the establishment of various anti-corruption institutions across different eras in Indonesia. These include Operasi Budhi during the Old Order (formed through Presidential Decree No. 275/1963), followed by the New Order's creation of the Corruption Eradication Team (Presidential Decree No. 228/1967), the Komisi Empat (Presidential Decree No. 12/1970), and Operasi Tertib (OPSTIB) (Presidential Instruction No. 9/1977). Subsequently, the early Reform Era established the State Administrator Wealth Inspection Commission (KPKPN) through Presidential Decree No. 127/1999.

These documents demonstrate formal efforts to address corruption through specialised institutions with specific mandates. However, the effectiveness of these institutions varies, often influenced by political support and allocated resources.

Analysis of presidential speeches also provides insight into anti-corruption rhetoric across eras. President Soeharto's speech on August 16, 1967, promised corruption eradication, but implementation fell short of rhetoric. In the Reform Era, presidential speeches emphasised commitment to eradicating Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism (KKN) as part of the reform agenda.

Implications Towards 100 Years of Indonesian Independence

A comparison between political promises to eradicate corruption and the official state regulations made to combat it shows the development of how Indonesia has dealt with corruption across governments. In the past, during the Old Order, corruption was acknowledged, but efforts to combat it were limited. Then, during the New Order, the government spoke more loudly about anti-corruption, but its real actions were less effective. At the beginning of the Reformation era, the commitment to eradicating corruption was stronger and more independent institutions were formed. Although regulations and seriousness in eradicating corruption have increased over time, these efforts are often hampered by problems such as unstable politics, a lack of sustainable political support, and resistance from parties involved in corruption.

This study finds that the growing institutional autonomy during the Reform Era has not necessarily translated into commensurate effectiveness. The expansion of legal and organisational infrastructure has been insufficient to dismantle the entrenched political cultures that tolerate or perpetuate corruption (Berenschot et al., 2022; Mukartono et al., 2019). This can be partly explained by the phenomenon of institutional layering, where new reform-oriented institutions are constrained by the persistence of older, unreformed structures (Silalahi et al., 2025) and the powerful influence of path dependency and vested interests (Sari et al., 2024). A discrepancy persists between anti-corruption rhetoric and sustained political commitment (Henderson & Kuncoro, 2011; Permana, 2025). The difficulty of managing socio-political risk at the subnational level (Röell et al., 2022) and reconciling the competing interests of diverse actors further complicates these efforts (Silalahi et al., 2025).

As Indonesia approaches its 100th year of independence, lessons from past anti-corruption efforts are crucial. The early Reform Era, with the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), demonstrates the potential for more effective corruption eradication through independent and authorised institutions. However, challenges such as deeply entrenched corruption, lack of support from all elements of society, and potential conflicts of interest remain obstacles to be addressed. Future success in combating corruption will depend heavily on consistency between political rhetoric and real action, as well as strengthening

anti-corruption institutions and active participation from the entire society.

As Indonesia approaches its centennial in 2045, the battle against corruption must transcend a legalistic approach (Gunarto et al., 2022). It demands not merely robust institutions but also a cultural transformation in governance, including a moral and spiritual foundation (Mukhlishin, 2020) and a commitment to integrity among the younger generation (Sihombing, 2018). Future strategies could involve leveraging technology for greater transparency and accountability through e-governance and online integrity reporting systems (Sabani et al., 2019; Sihombing, 2018), adopting international best practices and jurisdictional approaches for sustainable governance (Macdonald et al., 2024), and designing new anti-corruption supervision models (Sunaryo & Nur, 2022). Ultimately, addressing systemic issues like obstruction of justice (Isra et al., 2017), strengthening internal controls , and building public trust through transparent governance and citizen engagement (Virnandes et al., 2024).

5. CONCLUSION

A comparative analysis of anti-corruption efforts across different regimes in Indonesia (Old Order, New Order, and early Reform Era) reveals significant developments in political rhetoric and formal policy frameworks. Although each regime demonstrated awareness of corruption and made efforts to address it through laws and anti-corruption institutions, effectiveness varied. The Old Order laid the initial legal foundation, but implementation was limited. The New Order displayed stronger rhetoric but was accompanied by widespread corrupt practices. The early Reform Era was marked by a stronger commitment and the establishment of independent institutions like the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), which shows potential for greater success. This historical analysis underscores the importance of consistency between rhetoric and action, as well as the need for strong and independent anti-corruption institutions to achieve significant progress in eradicating corruption in Indonesia as it approaches its 100th year of independence.

This study finds that the growing institutional autonomy during the Reform Era has not necessarily translated into commensurate effectiveness. The expansion of legal and organisational infrastructure has been insufficient to dismantle the entrenched political cultures that tolerate or perpetuate corruption. A discrepancy persists between anti-corruption rhetoric and sustained political commitment.

As Indonesia approaches its centennial in 2045, the battle against corruption must transcend a legalistic approach. It demands not merely robust institutions but also a cultural transformation in governance: the reshaping of bureaucratic conduct, the reinforcement of public involvement in oversight, and the cultivation of political integrity at all levels. These bigger changes are crucial to ensure that anti-corruption becomes not merely a matter of formal compliance, but a foundational principle of democratic governance.

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