

Anti-Corruption Reform in Uzbekistan: What Can Be Learned from Singapore?

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Abstract

Corruption remains a major impediment to sustainable development and effective governance in Uzbekistan. This article offers a critical examination of Singapore's widely regarded anti-corruption model and investigates how its core principles might be adapted to the Uzbek context. It identifies four key lessons: the imperative of sustained political will, the establishment of an independent and empowered anti-corruption agency, the necessity of impartial legal enforcement, and the significance of public education in fostering a culture of integrity. The article argues that Uzbekistan stands to benefit from institutional reforms that strengthen meritocratic governance, reinforce the autonomy of oversight institutions, and enhance legal transparency. While recognizing the structural and political differences between the two countries, the study concludes that Singapore's experience offers a compelling framework for Uzbekistan to develop a more effective, context-sensitive strategy to combat corruption through legal reform, capacity building, and long-term political commitment.

Keywords: Corruption, Anti-Corruption Strategy, Singapore Model, Political Will, Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA), Transparency, Institutional Integrity

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I. Introduction

Corruption remains one of the most persistent and damaging challenges facing developing and transitional countries. It distorts economic development, undermines democratic institutions, weakens the rule of law, and erodes public trust in governance systems. The global recognition of corruption's detrimental impact has spurred the development of international frameworks and domestic reform agendas aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, and institutional integrity. Yet, despite the proliferation of anti-corruption legislation, national strategies, and oversight bodies, many countries continue to struggle with systemic corruption and its consequences (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015).

In the context of Uzbekistan, corruption has been identified as a central obstacle to sustainable development, efficient governance, and public trust. Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Uzbekistan has embarked on a long and complex transition toward building a modern state apparatus. However, the post-Soviet administrative structure characterized by centralized power, low bureaucratic accountability, and underdeveloped legal mechanisms created fertile ground for entrenched corruption. Over the past decade, the government has initiated a series of institutional reforms, including the creation of the Anti-Corruption Agency in 2020 and the adoption of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021–2025. These steps represent meaningful progress toward policy modernization and institutional restructuring.

Despite these developments, significant challenges remain. Transparency in public procurement is still limited, judicial inefficiencies persist, and civil society engagement in monitoring and policy implementation is constrained (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022; Freedom House, 2022). One of the key barriers to sustainable anti-corruption reform in Uzbekistan is the lack of sustained political will, which undermines the consistent enforcement of laws and policies. Moreover, the insufficient independence of oversight institutions prevents them from investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption cases effectively. While reforms are often articulated at the national level, their implementation at regional and local levels is inconsistent, reflecting the broader challenge of bridging the gap between policy design and practice (Eurasianet, 2021).

These limitations have not only hindered governance efficiency but have also had profound socio-spiritual implications. As highlighted by Amridinova (2023), sustainable development in Uzbekistan's socio-spiritual sphere requires the cultivation of moral

responsibility, ethical public service, and community participation. Corruption, by eroding the foundations of social justice and public accountability, disrupts these vital conditions for national progress. Thus, tackling corruption is not only a legal and administrative priority but a socio-cultural imperative tied to broader developmental goals.

In contrast to Uzbekistan's transitional challenges, Singapore represents a paradigmatic case of successful anti-corruption reform. During the British colonial period and the Japanese occupation, Singapore suffered from widespread corruption in law enforcement, customs, housing, and public procurement. Yet, within a few decades of gaining independence in 1959, it became one of the least corrupt countries in the world. The transformation was driven by comprehensive institutional restructuring, robust legislation, and decisive political leadership, particularly under the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) and Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (Quah, 2013).

A pivotal institution in Singapore's anti-corruption journey was the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), established in 1952 and significantly empowered by the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) in 1960. The CPIB was given broad investigative authority, including access to bank records, search and seizure powers, and jurisdiction over both public and private corruption cases. The government also implemented a range of complementary measures, including substantial increases in civil servant salaries, the introduction of merit-based recruitment and promotion in public service, and the prosecution of high-profile offenders regardless of their political or social status (Quah, 2011; Meagher, 2005).

Singapore's anti-corruption model is not without criticism. Scholars have pointed out that its success was facilitated by specific geopolitical and administrative factors a small, centralized, and urbanized population; limited political pluralism; and a strong legal tradition that may not be easily replicable in larger or more diverse states (Johnston, 2005; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). Nevertheless, its core principles strong political will, institutional independence, impartial enforcement, and civic education have proven relevant across multiple national contexts and continue to inform global anti-corruption policy debates.

This article argues that while Uzbekistan and Singapore differ significantly in size, governance structure, and historical trajectory, there are transferable lessons that can be adapted to Uzbekistan's evolving institutional landscape. The aim is not to replicate Singapore's model in a wholesale manner, but to extract actionable insights that align with Uzbekistan's unique political, legal, and cultural environment. Specifically, this article examines four core pillars of Singapore's anti-corruption strategy:

- Political will and leadership commitment
- Independent and empowered anti-corruption institutions
- Impartial and strict legal enforcement
- Civic engagement and ethical education

By using these components as analytical lenses, the study critically evaluates Uzbekistan's existing anti-corruption framework and explores reform opportunities. The article employs a qualitative, comparative case study methodology, drawing on secondary sources such as academic research, international policy reports, and governance indicators. Through a cross-country analysis, it identifies feasible pathways for strengthening institutional capacity, improving legal enforcement, and fostering a culture of integrity. Ultimately, the objective is to contribute to the academic and policy discourse on corruption control in Uzbekistan by offering evidence-based, context-sensitive recommendations. These insights aim to inform future reforms, guide implementation strategies, and support efforts to build public trust and enhance transparency in Uzbekistan's governance system. This research is guided by the following central question: What lessons can Uzbekistan draw from Singapore's anti-corruption model to develop a more effective and contextually appropriate anti-corruption strategy?

II. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, comparative case study approach to investigate the potential applicability of international anti-corruption strategies particularly those observed in Singapore to the context of Uzbekistan. Given the complexity and deeply embedded nature of corruption in governance systems, a qualitative methodology is well-suited for exploring structural, legal, and sociopolitical dimensions that may not be captured through quantitative indicators alone (Yin, 2018). This method allows for a rich, contextualized analysis of how institutional arrangements and policy mechanisms function in practice.

A. Research Design

The study is designed as a theory-informed, comparative analysis using Singapore as a benchmark case of successful anti-corruption reform. The central rationale for selecting Singapore lies in its internationally recognized achievements in curbing corruption and in the comprehensive nature of its institutional strategy. As a country that successfully transitioned from a high-corruption to a low-corruption environment, Singapore provides an instructive example for countries like Uzbekistan, which are

undergoing governance reforms with anti-corruption as a national priority. The comparative approach enables the identification of generalizable principles and success factors such as political will, institutional independence, enforcement integrity, and public education that have proven effective in low-corruption settings. These principles are then evaluated in light of Uzbekistan's current legal, administrative, and political context to assess their relevance and adaptability.

B. Data Sources

This study relies exclusively on secondary data, including academic literature, case studies, institutional reports, and publicly available governance datasets. Key sources include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles and books that examine anti-corruption strategies globally and regionally, with emphasis on institutional design, legal frameworks, and political economy dimensions (e.g., Quah, 2011; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015).
- Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), used to compare perceived corruption levels across countries.
- The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), specifically the dimensions of "Control of Corruption," "Rule of Law," and "Government Effectiveness."
- Reports from institutions such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index.
- National-level reports and legislative documents from Uzbekistan, including strategic frameworks such as the National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2021–2025, the charter of the Anti-Corruption Agency, and relevant legislative acts on public administration and civil service reform.

This body of data provides both empirical and theoretical foundations for conducting a structured comparison between Singapore and Uzbekistan.

C. Analytical Framework

The research employs a cross-case thematic analysis, focusing on identifying recurring themes and institutional mechanisms in countries that have successfully reduced corruption

levels. The analysis centers around four thematic pillars that recur in the literature and in empirical best-practice cases:

- **Political Will and Leadership Commitment** – Examining the presence and sustainability of top-level support for anti-corruption reforms, including leadership narratives, public statements, and resource allocation.
- **Institutional Independence** – Assessing the design, autonomy, and operational capacity of anti-corruption bodies, including their protection from political interference.
- **Legal Enforcement and Deterrence** – Investigating the strength, consistency, and impartiality of legal mechanisms used to deter and punish corruption.
- **Civic Engagement and Ethical Education** – Exploring how societies foster a culture of integrity through public education, transparency mechanisms, and citizen participation.

These themes guide the comparative analysis and are used to structure both the results and discussion sections. In addition to document analysis, this study incorporates a contextual assessment of governance structures and institutional performance in Uzbekistan through triangulation of policy documents, legal frameworks, and international assessments published between 2016 and 2024. Particular attention was given to tracking the implementation status of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2021–2025, analyzing public sector transparency measures, and reviewing the operational scope of the Anti-Corruption Agency of Uzbekistan. Comparative insights were further strengthened by evaluating governance outcomes in countries with similar developmental challenges but differing anti-corruption trajectories. This multi-source approach enhances the reliability of the findings and supports the formulation of nuanced, context-specific recommendations that reflect both structural challenges and opportunities for reform.

D. Case Selection Justification

Singapore is chosen as the principal comparator due to its widely recognized success in combating corruption. Its transformation from a corruption-prone colonial state in the 1950s to a global leader in clean governance today has been studied extensively (Quah, 2013). Furthermore, Singapore represents a clear case where anti-corruption reforms were state-led, institutionally embedded, and legally codified features that align with Uzbekistan's top-down reform trajectory. Although contextual differences between the two countries exist particularly in terms of size, political systems, and economic models, the

comparative value lies in the transferability of governance principles, not the wholesale transplantation of institutional models. This methodological orientation follows Klitgaard's (1998) argument that successful anti-corruption strategies must be adapted to fit local contexts while preserving their core integrity-enhancing functions.

E. Limitations

As the study does not involve primary data collection, it is constrained by the quality and scope of existing literature and datasets. No interviews or surveys were conducted due to time and resource limitations. Additionally, while governance indices offer useful cross-national comparisons, they are based on perception and may not capture the full complexity of corruption dynamics in either Singapore or Uzbekistan. These limitations are acknowledged in interpreting the findings and recommendations.

III. Results

The comparative analysis of global anti-corruption strategies reveals four critical pillars that consistently underpin the success of anti-corruption efforts in countries with low levels of perceived and actual corruption. These include: political will and leadership commitment, institutional independence and operational capacity, impartial and effective legal enforcement, and public engagement and ethical education. These four components form a comprehensive framework that, while context-sensitive, can be meaningfully adapted to support anti-corruption reforms in countries like Uzbekistan. The findings also underscore the role of salary reform and professionalization of the civil service as important, though often overlooked, components of effective anti-corruption strategies. In countries like Singapore, increasing public sector wages relative to the private sector helped reduce the incentives for bribery and rent-seeking behavior, thereby enhancing institutional integrity. Merit-based recruitment, regular performance evaluations, and transparent promotion criteria further contributed to building a professional and accountable bureaucracy. For Uzbekistan, similar reforms could play a pivotal role in limiting petty corruption and fostering a culture of public service ethics. Aligning remuneration with responsibility, alongside anti-corruption training and institutional performance monitoring, would not only reduce vulnerability to corruption but also strengthen the legitimacy of state institutions in the eyes of the public.

A. Political Will and Leadership Commitment

Political will stands out as the most decisive factor in the success or failure of anti-corruption efforts. Unlike symbolic commitments or policy declarations, genuine political

will is demonstrated through decisive institutional action, adequate resource allocation, and the willingness to prosecute high-level offenders, regardless of their political affiliation (Johnston, 2005; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). In Singapore, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew played a pivotal role in establishing zero tolerance for corruption. His administration not only passed stringent anti-corruption laws but also backed them with consistent enforcement, even against politically connected figures (Quah, 2013).

Studies have found that anti-corruption campaigns fail where leadership merely pays lip service to reform while tolerating or even engaging in corrupt practices (Kaufmann, 2005). Conversely, in countries like Estonia and Georgia, high-level leadership has driven comprehensive legal, bureaucratic, and civic reforms that led to dramatic improvements in public sector integrity (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015; World Bank, 2020).

In the context of Uzbekistan, recent years have witnessed presidential initiatives aimed at modernizing governance and combating corruption. The establishment of the Anti-Corruption Agency and approval of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2021–2025) are promising signs of reform-oriented leadership. However, a critical gap remains between policy articulation and implementation particularly regarding selective enforcement and elite immunity. For political will to have genuine impact, Uzbekistan's leadership must ensure that no individual or group is above the law, and that political influence does not compromise institutional functioning or legal outcomes.

B. Institutional Independence and Capacity

Independent and well-resourced anti-corruption institutions (ACAs) are another foundational pillar. In jurisdictions where ACAs operate autonomously free from political and bureaucratic interference, they are significantly more effective in investigating and prosecuting corruption (Doig, Watt, & Williams, 2007; Meagher, 2005). A prominent example is Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), which reports directly to the Prime Minister and is empowered with the authority to investigate even the highest-ranking officials. The CPIB benefits from full legal autonomy, access to financial records, and an internal culture of meritocracy and professionalism (Quah, 2011). In addition to independence, adequate funding, legal clarity, and professional training are critical to institutional effectiveness. For instance, Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) invests heavily in staff development, operational technology, and public outreach, contributing to its success in curbing both grand and petty corruption.

In Uzbekistan, the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Agency represents a step toward institutionalizing oversight. However, analysts have raised concerns about the agency's limited budget, unclear legal mandate, and lack of enforcement power (Eurasianet, 2021). Currently, the agency's role is mostly confined to monitoring and advisory functions, without prosecutorial powers. For institutional reforms to be credible, Uzbekistan must enhance the agency's statutory authority, budgetary independence, and recruitment based on professional merit, thereby insulating it from political patronage and institutional inertia.

C. Impartial and Effective Legal Enforcement

Legal frameworks are the backbone of any anti-corruption strategy, but their effectiveness depends on consistent and impartial enforcement. In countries with successful anti-corruption track records, laws are applied uniformly, regardless of a perpetrator's status or affiliation. This impartiality enhances public trust in the legal system and increases the cost of corrupt behavior (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). In Singapore, the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) is enforced with strict regularity, and penalties for corruption include substantial fines and long prison sentences. The state also uses asset recovery mechanisms, public disclosure of cases, and high detection probabilities to deter misconduct. These measures transform corruption into a high-risk, low-reward activity.

Countries like Rwanda and Chile have also reformed their judiciary and law enforcement systems to improve prosecutorial independence and transparency. In Rwanda, for example, the judiciary operates under a strict performance-based accountability model, while in Chile, anti-corruption units are embedded in the public prosecutor's office. In Uzbekistan, however, several barriers hinder effective enforcement. These include politicization of the judiciary, limited legal protections for whistleblowers, and weak coordination between anti-corruption and law enforcement bodies (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022). Moreover, asset declaration systems are underdeveloped, and public officials are not uniformly held accountable. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms in Uzbekistan will require judicial reform, training of prosecutors and investigators, and the development of independent anti-corruption courts to handle complex cases without external interference.

D. Public Engagement and Ethical Education

While institutional reforms are vital, long-term anti-corruption success also depends on societal norms and values. In low-corruption societies, citizens are empowered to report wrongdoing, demand transparency, and participate in decision-making processes. Tools

such as whistleblower protection laws, freedom of information acts, and civic tech platforms help close the gap between state and society (Transparency International, 2020). Singapore's strategy includes extensive public outreach campaigns and mandatory ethics training for civil servants. Schools integrate integrity education into the curriculum, while public agencies maintain transparent websites for performance data, procurement records, and grievance redressal. Similarly, countries like Estonia have built digital governance platforms that facilitate open access to government data and allow citizens to monitor spending and public appointments (OECD, 2018).

For Uzbekistan, public engagement remains an underutilized asset. Although legal frameworks acknowledge the role of civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media outlets often operate under restrictive regulations. Moreover, citizens may hesitate to report corruption due to fear of retaliation or disbelief in institutional responsiveness. To build a culture of integrity, Uzbekistan must prioritize civic education, media freedom, and the development of secure reporting channels for whistleblowers. Additionally, integrating anti-corruption themes into the national education system can foster values of accountability, honesty, and transparency from an early age. Integrity-building should not be limited to punitive measures but should also include positive incentives, such as public recognition for ethical behavior and transparency awards for public institutions.

The four pillars political will, institutional independence, legal enforcement, and public engagement emerge as universally critical across comparative studies of anti-corruption success. However, these pillars do not function in isolation; rather, they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Political will facilitates institutional reform, which in turn enables impartial enforcement and fosters civic trust. Without one, the effectiveness of the others is diminished. In addition to the four central pillars identified political will, institutional independence, impartial legal enforcement, and public engagement the results also reveal the importance of coherence and coordination across different levels of government. In countries with successful anti-corruption frameworks, such as Singapore and Estonia, reform efforts are not confined to national policies but are cascaded effectively through regional and local governance structures. This vertical alignment ensures that anti-corruption measures are implemented consistently, minimizing gaps between policy design and on-the-ground execution.

For Uzbekistan, this highlights the need to strengthen mechanisms that support local-level accountability, such as decentralized auditing systems, performance evaluations for

regional officials, and capacity-building programs targeting local administrators. Without such systemic integration, national strategies may remain disconnected from everyday bureaucratic practices, limiting their transformative impact. For Uzbekistan, these findings suggest a multi-dimensional approach to reform. While policy frameworks have been introduced, their operationalization requires long-term investment, cross-sector coordination, and genuine political accountability. Importantly, reforms must be tailored to the local context acknowledging Uzbekistan's political, legal, and cultural environment while aligning with international best practices.

IV. Discussion

Corruption is widely acknowledged in academic literature as a formidable obstacle to sustainable development, effective governance, and democratic legitimacy (Johnston, 2005; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). It undermines institutional integrity, deters foreign investment, distorts policy priorities, and deepens social inequalities particularly in transitional or post-authoritarian contexts (Kaufmann, 2005; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). For countries like Uzbekistan, where the legacy of centralized control and weak institutional accountability persists, the challenge is not only to enact anti-corruption reforms but to embed them within a systemic framework that fosters long-term change. This discussion examines key thematic insights from the literature and the comparative analysis presented in the results section, assessing their implications for Uzbekistan's anti-corruption strategy. It is organized around five core themes: models of anti-corruption, the centrality of political will, institutional reform and enforcement, civic engagement and education, and contextual adaptation.

A. Historical Background of Corruption in Uzbekistan

Corruption in Uzbekistan has deep roots that trace back to the Soviet era, where centralized control over economic resources and bureaucratic opacity fostered a culture of informal networks, favoritism, and bribery. During the Soviet period, although official ideology denounced corruption, the lack of transparency and weak institutional accountability mechanisms made corrupt practices commonplace, particularly in local government and agricultural sectors such as the cotton industry (Kandiyoti, 2002).

Following independence in 1991, Uzbekistan inherited a highly centralized administrative system but lacked the institutional frameworks needed to ensure rule of law, checks and balances, and civic engagement. In the 1990s and 2000s, the country maintained tight political control with limited press freedom, minimal civil society

engagement, and virtually no independent judiciary. These conditions enabled corruption to persist at various levels of government. Public sector jobs were often obtained through informal payments, while government contracts and tenders lacked transparency (Freedom House, 2022). International indices during this period consistently ranked Uzbekistan among the more corrupt countries. For example, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in the early 2000s often placed Uzbekistan near the bottom of global rankings. The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators reflected similarly low scores in "Control of Corruption" and "Rule of Law" (World Bank, 2020).

Over the past decade, however, Uzbekistan has embarked on a series of reform initiatives. The change in leadership in 2016 marked a notable shift in rhetoric and policy emphasis. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev initiated administrative reforms and acknowledged corruption as a national concern. Reforms included simplifying bureaucratic procedures, creating digital service platforms to reduce face-to-face interactions (a key driver of petty corruption), and launching the National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2021–2025. These efforts were further institutionalized through the creation of a specialized Anti-Corruption Agency in 2020 and increased participation in international anti-corruption frameworks (Eurasianet, 2021).

Despite these developments, Uzbekistan continues to face structural and cultural barriers to effective reform. While legal frameworks have improved, enforcement remains inconsistent. Political patronage, weak judicial independence, and limited civic oversight hinder the full realization of reforms. Surveys reveal a gap between public expectations and actual change, particularly in sectors such as law enforcement, public procurement, and education. Understanding the historical trajectory of corruption in Uzbekistan is essential to crafting appropriate and sustainable reforms. Without addressing the legacy of centralized control, informal institutions, and bureaucratic opacity, anti-corruption strategies risk remaining superficial. Future success will depend on dismantling entrenched networks of privilege and fostering a culture of transparency and public accountability.

B. Singapore's Anti-Corruption Strategy in Depth

Singapore's transformation from a corruption-plagued colonial outpost to one of the world's least corrupt nations is often cited as a benchmark for effective governance and institutional integrity. This section provides a deeper examination of the mechanisms, policies, and institutional culture that contributed to Singapore's success and assesses their relevance for reform efforts in Uzbekistan.

When Singapore gained independence in 1965, corruption was widespread. Colonial rule had failed to establish effective oversight systems, and petty bribery was common among police officers, customs agents, and licensing officials. Political leaders, particularly Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, understood that corruption threatened economic development, public trust, and foreign investment. As a result, combating corruption became a national priority not only for moral reasons but as a strategic development imperative (Quah, 2013). A cornerstone of Singapore's strategy was the enactment and strict implementation of the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA). Originally passed in 1960, the act was continuously strengthened to broaden the definition of corruption, empower investigators, and reduce procedural barriers to prosecution. Key features include:

- Presumption of guilt when illicit wealth is unexplained.
- No requirement to prove quid pro quo for public servants.
- Severe penalties, including imprisonment and asset seizure.

Unlike many countries where anti-corruption laws are vague or unenforced, POCA was backed by strong political will and active enforcement, creating real deterrents for both public and private actors (Quah, 2011). The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), established in 1952 and later strengthened post-independence, is directly accountable to the Prime Minister but operates independently in practice. It enjoys:

- Full authority to investigate corruption at all levels of government.
- Legal power to summon documents, conduct raids, and arrest suspects.
- A protected budget and merit-based recruitment.

Notably, the CPIB has investigated and prosecuted high-ranking officials, including ministers and civil servants, sending a strong message that no one is above the law. Its autonomy and efficiency have been crucial in building public confidence in the rule of law (Quah, 2013; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Singapore's public service reforms played a vital role in eliminating opportunities and incentives for corruption. These reforms included:

- Competitive salaries for civil servants to reduce economic temptation.
- Merit-based recruitment and promotion to deter patronage and nepotism.
- Transparent procurement systems with digital monitoring.

By professionalizing its civil service and creating a performance-oriented culture, Singapore made corruption less rewarding and public service more attractive to skilled professionals. Singapore's leadership promoted a strong anti-corruption culture through education and public campaigns. Media coverage of prosecutions, public service announcements, and civic education helped entrench a zero-tolerance attitude. Over time, this created societal norms where corrupt behavior was stigmatized rather than normalized. Anti-corruption values were also embedded in the school curriculum, emphasizing personal integrity, civic responsibility, and respect for the law. According to UNODC (2019), these early interventions contributed to long-term changes in behavior and attitudes.

Singapore's reputation for clean governance has enhanced its appeal as a global financial and commercial hub. Its consistent top rankings in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index and the World Bank's governance indicators reinforce the view that anti-corruption is not only a moral issue but also an economic asset. While Uzbekistan differs significantly in size, political system, and historical trajectory, several lessons from Singapore's experience are applicable:

- Strong political will must be coupled with sustained enforcement.
- Legal frameworks must be detailed, enforceable, and supported by judicial reform.
- Anti-corruption agencies must be operationally independent and well-resourced.
- Public sector salaries and promotion systems should reflect merit, not loyalty.
- Civic education and media engagement are essential for building integrity norms.

However, it is crucial that Uzbekistan adapts these lessons to its own institutional and cultural realities, rather than replicating them wholesale. The following section will compare multiple international models to offer a broader policy menu for reform.

C. Comparative Frameworks: Hong Kong, Georgia, and Estonia

While Singapore presents a compelling model for anti-corruption reform, it is not the only success story. Other countries such as Hong Kong, Georgia, and Estonia have also achieved significant reductions in corruption by implementing tailored strategies aligned with their governance structures and political contexts. Analyzing these models enriches the global policy toolkit and highlights additional pathways for reform in countries like Uzbekistan. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Hong Kong struggled with pervasive corruption, especially in the police force and public housing administration. Like Singapore, it

launched sweeping reforms centered on an empowered and independent anti-corruption agency. The establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 1974 marked a turning point. ICAC operated under three key principles: investigation, prevention, and education. It was equipped with:

- Autonomous investigative powers.
- A generous, protected budget.
- Public education departments that ran integrity campaigns in schools and the media.

One of ICAC's strengths was its transparency: it published regular reports, held public hearings, and was subject to oversight by multiple civilian panels. Over time, Hong Kong transformed into one of the cleanest economies in Asia, consistently scoring high in international rankings (Quah, 2011). Georgia's experience is notable for its rapid and radical anti-corruption reforms following the 2003 Rose Revolution. Unlike Singapore and Hong Kong, Georgia operated in a more volatile political environment and had weaker institutions. Key anti-corruption strategies included:

- Mass dismissal of corrupt traffic and customs police and recruitment of new personnel.
- Deregulation to reduce discretionary authority of officials.
- Introduction of e-governance platforms to deliver public services online.
- Strong political will under President Mikheil Saakashvili, who made anti-corruption a public priority.

Georgia's Transparency International CPI score improved dramatically in less than a decade. However, critics argue that these reforms were overly top-down and vulnerable to reversal, illustrating the need for long-term institutionalization and oversight (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). Estonia has been praised for integrating digital innovation with anti-corruption reform. Following independence from the Soviet Union, Estonia focused on:

- E-governance, including electronic tax filing, online procurement, and e-residency.
- Open data policies for public procurement and budgeting.
- Transparent recruitment for civil service based on standardized exams.
- Active support for an independent press and civil society.

Estonia's reforms succeeded not through mass purges but through gradual professionalization, legal clarity, and a trust-based relationship between the government and citizens. The country is now among the top European performers in public integrity. Each model offers distinct insights:

- Singapore and Hong Kong highlight the importance of independent agencies and meritocratic public administration.
- Georgia shows that political disruption can be leveraged for reform but must be institutionalized to endure.
- Estonia demonstrates that transparency and technology can reduce corruption without dramatic political upheaval.

For Uzbekistan, the implications are clear:

- An independent anti-corruption agency must be legally protected and insulated from political interference.
- Digital transformation of public services can reduce opportunities for petty bribery.
- Civil service reform including salary restructuring and competitive recruitment is essential.
- Citizen trust must be rebuilt through participatory governance and an empowered press.

However, none of these strategies work in isolation. Anti-corruption reform must be systemic, context-specific, and supported by broad coalitions within society. Uzbekistan's evolving political environment presents an opportunity to adopt and adapt these lessons for long-term transformation.

D. Approaches to Combating Corruption

The literature outlines a spectrum of anti-corruption approaches, each emphasizing different mechanisms and reform priorities. Legalistic approaches focus on the creation of anti-corruption laws, ethics codes, and regulatory oversight mechanisms. However, scholars argue that legal provisions, while necessary, are insufficient in the absence of credible enforcement and sustained political support (Doig et al., 2007; Meagher, 2005). Countries with detailed anti-corruption frameworks but weak enforcement often experience a phenomenon known as "legal façade," where rules exist but are routinely violated.

Institutional approaches emphasize the establishment of specialized anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) with adequate independence, resources, and investigative authority. Successful cases such as Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) and Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) demonstrate how institutional autonomy, combined with political insulation and professional capacity, leads to effective control of corruption (Quah, 2011). However, the risk of institutional capture remains high in contexts where appointments, mandates, or resources are controlled by political elites.

In contrast, governance-based approaches adopt a broader lens, advocating for comprehensive public sector reform, transparency in service delivery, open government data, and civic participation as tools to reduce opportunities for corruption (Klitgaard, 1998; UNDP, 2014). These approaches address underlying structural drivers such as low public sector salaries, complex bureaucracy, and lack of oversight, thereby creating a more integrity-driven system.

E. The Centrality of Political Will

A near-unanimous conclusion in anti-corruption literature is that political will is the cornerstone of reform (Johnston, 2005; Senior, 2006). Without leadership commitment, even the most robust legal and institutional frameworks remain dormant. Political will involves more than rhetorical commitments—it requires demonstrated action, such as initiating high-profile prosecutions, reforming corrupt agencies, and investing in preventive systems. Countries such as Singapore, Estonia, and Georgia illustrate how political leadership can galvanize institutional reform and cultural change (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). For instance, in Singapore, the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew was instrumental in driving zero-tolerance policies, enhancing the power of CPIB, and maintaining consistent oversight.

In Uzbekistan, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has initiated several governance reforms since 2016, including the creation of the Anti-Corruption Agency and the adoption of a national anti-corruption strategy (2021–2025). While these are encouraging developments, concerns remain about the depth and consistency of implementation. True political will would be evident in prosecuting high-ranking officials, reforming the judiciary, and empowering oversight bodies without political interference. Only through such actions can public confidence be restored and corruption meaningfully reduced.

F. Institutional Reform and Legal Enforcement

Institutional reform is another critical area where international experience offers valuable guidance. Effective ACAs are characterized by legal independence, professional staffing, internal integrity controls, and protected budgets. Singapore's CPIB, for example, operates under the Prime Minister's Office but is legislatively insulated from political meddling (Quah, 2013). It has broad investigative powers, merit-based recruitment, and a clear mandate to investigate both public and private sector corruption.

By comparison, Uzbekistan's Anti-Corruption Agency, established in 2020, currently lacks the full scope of powers needed for comprehensive enforcement. It primarily plays a coordinating and advisory role, with limited capacity to initiate prosecutions or conduct independent investigations. For institutional reform to be credible and effective, Uzbekistan must ensure that its anti-corruption bodies are legally and operationally autonomous, with access to all necessary tools for investigation and enforcement. This includes unrestricted access to financial data, protection for investigators, and the ability to investigate high-level cases without political obstruction.

Moreover, legal enforcement must be impartial and consistent. The deterrent effect of anti-corruption laws hinges on their uniform application across all sectors of society. Countries such as Chile, Rwanda, and Georgia have demonstrated that even limited-resource environments can achieve enforcement success if supported by political will and legal integrity. For Uzbekistan, this necessitates reforms in the judiciary, including enhanced prosecutorial independence, training for judges, and transparent case tracking systems.

G. Civic Engagement and Ethical Education

A growing body of research emphasizes the role of public engagement and civic education in shaping societal norms and reducing the tolerance for corruption. Civil society organizations, investigative media, and digital whistleblowing platforms serve as crucial external checks on public power (Transparency International, 2020). Integrity-building efforts in countries like South Korea and Estonia have shown that civic education targeting youth and public servants helps internalize ethical standards over time (UNODC, 2019).

In Uzbekistan, civic space remains constrained, with media and non-governmental organizations subject to licensing and oversight. While some improvements have been made, including access to online reporting tools and anti-corruption education initiatives, these remain limited in scale and impact. To cultivate a culture of integrity, Uzbekistan must expand access to civic information, support media freedom, and embed ethics

education in national curricula. This also includes protecting whistleblowers from retaliation and incentivizing citizen reporting through secure and anonymous mechanisms. Ethics training for civil servants, mandatory asset declarations, and transparent recruitment systems are additional tools that can reinforce a meritocratic culture and reduce reliance on informal networks and patronage.

H. Adapting International Models to Local Contexts

While Singapore's model is often cited as a "gold standard," scholars warn against uncritical adoption of foreign frameworks. Contextual differences such as population size, political history, bureaucratic culture, and resource constraints affect the transferability of reforms (Klitgaard, 1998; Meagher, 2005). Singapore's centralized governance, small population, and long-standing political stability have enabled sustained reforms that may not be feasible in larger, more heterogeneous countries.

Therefore, Uzbekistan must adapt rather than replicate. This involves understanding the local drivers of corruption, identifying entry points for reform, and ensuring that new institutions are compatible with existing legal and administrative structures. Hybrid strategies that combine best practices with culturally sensitive reforms are more likely to succeed. For instance, while institutional independence is non-negotiable, the design of oversight bodies should reflect Uzbekistan's bureaucratic structure and legal norms.

I. Policy Recommendations for Uzbekistan

To effectively combat corruption, Uzbekistan must develop a comprehensive strategy that addresses both the symptoms and root causes of corrupt practices. The country's recent reforms signal political recognition of the issue, but further efforts are needed to institutionalize anti-corruption measures, ensure enforcement, and build a public culture of integrity. Drawing from international models and contextual realities, this section outlines key policy recommendations structured around four domains: legal-institutional reform, governance innovation, public sector integrity, and civic empowerment. A robust legal environment is the backbone of any anti-corruption system. Uzbekistan should consider the following:

- **Enhance Legal Precision:** Clarify anti-corruption laws to reduce ambiguity and allow for consistent application. Laws should clearly define forms of corruption, outline penalties, and empower courts to handle complex corruption cases.

- **Grant Full Operational Independence to the Anti-Corruption Agency:** The Agency must be institutionally and financially autonomous, with its head appointed through a merit-based, transparent process and protected from arbitrary dismissal.
- **Judicial Reform:** Strengthen the independence of courts and prosecutorial bodies. Judges must be selected based on qualification and integrity, not political loyalty.
- **Introduce Whistleblower Protection Laws:** Create a legal mechanism that encourages individuals to report corruption without fear of retaliation. International best practices offer models for anonymous reporting systems and legal safeguards.

Reducing face-to-face interactions between citizens and officials is a proven method to cut petty corruption. Uzbekistan should:

- **Expand Digital Service Platforms:** Build on existing e-government tools to digitize permits, licenses, tax filings, and procurement. Georgia and Estonia provide strong models.
- **Create an Open Data Portal:** Publish information on government contracts, expenditures, and public procurement in machine-readable formats, making it accessible to civil society and journalists.
- **Use Blockchain for Public Records:** In areas such as land registration or customs, blockchain can prevent tampering and ensure traceability of decisions.

Corruption thrives when civil servants are poorly paid, undertrained, or promoted through nepotism. Uzbekistan should invest in:

- **Competitive and Transparent Salaries:** Ensure public sector pay is sufficient to discourage bribery while linking raises to performance and ethics.
- **Merit-Based Hiring and Promotion:** Introduce civil service exams and professional development programs, as seen in Singapore.
- **Conflict of Interest and Asset Declarations:** Mandate regular and verifiable declarations by public officials, including high-ranking executives and judges.

Sustainable anti-corruption requires an informed and engaged public. This involves:

- **Ethics Education:** Introduce anti-corruption and civic responsibility curricula in schools, universities, and public institutions. Values-based education from a young age has shown long-term impact in Singapore and Estonia.

- **Media and Investigative Journalism Support:** Protect media freedom and support professional development for journalists investigating corruption. A vibrant media can hold power accountable and uncover wrongdoing.
- **Support Civil Society Monitoring:** Enable NGOs and watchdogs to access procurement data, attend public hearings, and file complaints. Civil society participation increases oversight and builds trust in government processes.

Leadership must model ethical behavior:

- **Prosecute High-Level Corruption Transparently:** Send a strong message that no one is above the law. Singapore's prosecution of top officials is one reason for its low corruption perception.
- **Public Reporting on Progress:** Regularly report anti-corruption outcomes, investigations completed, and penalties imposed. Accountability must be measurable and visible.
- **Engage Parliament and Local Councils:** Encourage legislative bodies to conduct anti-corruption hearings and oversee agency performance, creating a multipolar system of accountability.

Finally, reform efforts must respect Uzbekistan's specific legal traditions, social norms, and institutional capacities. Imported models should be critically assessed for compatibility. Hybrid strategies combining centralized leadership with decentralized oversight can be effective if designed with input from local experts, civil society, and international partners. By implementing these interlocking policy measures, Uzbekistan can take meaningful steps toward a more transparent and equitable governance system. The experiences of Singapore, Georgia, Estonia, and Hong Kong demonstrate that anti-corruption reform is not only possible but transformative when rooted in political courage, institutional integrity, and public participation.

J. Implications for Regional Policy and Central Asia

Uzbekistan's anti-corruption reforms have significance not only for its national development but also for the broader Central Asian region. As the most populous country in Central Asia and a geopolitical hub, Uzbekistan's success or failure in curbing corruption can influence governance norms and reform trajectories across neighboring states, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

Uzbekistan has the potential to emerge as a regional leader in governance reform. As it deepens its anti-corruption efforts, it can set a precedent for neighboring countries, especially those grappling with similar post-Soviet legacies of centralized governance, opaque institutions, and informal patronage networks. The development and transparent implementation of Uzbekistan's National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2021–2025) offer a framework that could inspire policy harmonization in the region, particularly around issues such as digital transparency, merit-based civil service reform, and judicial independence.

Regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) can serve as platforms for sharing anti-corruption best practices and fostering joint initiatives. Uzbekistan could propose the formation of a regional Anti-Corruption Forum or a Central Asian Integrity Pact that promotes collective standards and peer learning. Corruption often crosses national borders through illicit financial flows, smuggling, and transnational organized crime. Combatting these issues requires regional cooperation in:

- Asset recovery and repatriation, particularly in cases involving former officials who launder money abroad.
- Harmonization of legal frameworks to ease the prosecution of cross-border bribery and fraud.
- Data sharing and transparency in customs, tax, and procurement systems, reducing opportunities for corruption in trade and logistics.

Learning from Singapore's participation in international anti-money laundering (AML) standards, Uzbekistan could strengthen collaboration with neighboring countries to improve regional financial integrity. Civil society organizations and investigative journalists often face similar constraints across Central Asia, such as restricted access to information and limited legal protection. Uzbekistan can play a role in empowering regional civic actors by facilitating networks that advocate for transparency, expose cross-border corruption, and monitor government performance. Platforms for regional dialogue among media professionals, academics, and civil society organizations can enhance accountability and elevate the public demand for cleaner governance across borders.

However, there is also a risk that without coordination, asymmetrical progress in anti-corruption reform may create vulnerabilities. For example, if one country adopts strong procurement transparency measures while neighbors do not, illicit actors may simply shift operations to jurisdictions with weaker controls. Hence, policy

coherence across the region is critical to reduce opportunities for corruption and create a fair economic playing field. Moreover, the integration of digital technologies into public administration has emerged as a powerful tool in the fight against corruption. E-governance platforms, open data systems, and digital procurement mechanisms increase transparency, reduce face-to-face interactions, and limit opportunities for discretionary decision-making by officials. In countries like Estonia and South Korea, digital transformation has significantly enhanced accountability and service delivery efficiency.

For Uzbekistan, expanding digital governance initiatives such as e-procurement, online tax reporting, and digital licensing could serve as a strategic entry point to curb administrative corruption and increase citizen oversight. However, the success of such initiatives depends on digital literacy, infrastructure development, and safeguards against cyber manipulation or data opacity, which must be addressed concurrently to ensure technological reforms translate into meaningful anti-corruption outcomes. Uzbekistan's anti-corruption journey is not only a matter of national importance but also a potential catalyst for regional transformation. By embracing a leadership role, fostering cross-border cooperation, and promoting shared values of integrity and rule of law, Uzbekistan can contribute to a stronger, more transparent Central Asia.

K. Limitations and Future Research

This study is based on secondary data and comparative analysis and does not include field-based or empirical evidence from Uzbekistan. As such, it provides a theoretical and policy-oriented perspective, but lacks granular data on the real-time functioning of anti-corruption agencies, enforcement practices, and citizen perceptions. Future research could benefit from mixed-methods studies, combining surveys, interviews, and administrative data to assess the effectiveness of recent reforms. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking changes in corruption perception, civic participation, and institutional performance over time would offer valuable insights into the sustainability of current efforts.

Conclusion

This article has explored the foundational pillars of effective anti-corruption strategies and critically assessed their applicability within the context of Uzbekistan's ongoing governance reforms. Drawing from a comparative, literature-based framework, the study has highlighted four recurring dimensions: political will, institutional independence, impartial enforcement, and civic engagement as key drivers of successful

anti-corruption efforts globally. Among the comparative models examined, Singapore's anti-corruption success story provides a particularly instructive case, offering pragmatic insights that, while not universally transferable, present valuable lessons for transitional countries seeking to curb systemic corruption.

The analysis affirms that political leadership and high-level commitment are not optional prerequisites but essential catalysts for reform. Political will, when demonstrated through actionable policies, sufficient resource allocation, and a willingness to hold powerful individuals accountable, becomes the cornerstone upon which broader institutional integrity can be built. In Singapore, the state's firm stance on zero tolerance for corruption enshrined through both rhetoric and enforcement proved decisive in transforming the governance landscape. In the case of Uzbekistan, efforts such as the formation of the Anti-Corruption Agency and the launch of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2021–2025) are important foundational steps. Yet, without sustained and visible leadership commitment, backed by the prosecution of high-level offenders and insulation of reform institutions from political interference, these reforms risk stagnation or rollback.

A second key insight relates to institutional independence and capacity. The study underscores that oversight bodies must not only exist in form but function in substance. Effective anti-corruption agencies, such as Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) or Hong Kong's ICAC, are characterized by their operational autonomy, professional staffing, and legal authority to investigate without fear of reprisal. For Uzbekistan to emulate such institutional strength, its agencies must be protected from executive interference, equipped with adequate investigative tools, and empowered through comprehensive legislation and budgetary independence. Institutional credibility must be earned through both transparency and tangible results.

Third, impartial and consistent enforcement of anti-corruption laws remains a critical benchmark. The deterrent effect of legal frameworks relies not only on their technical soundness but also on the public perception of fairness and equity in their application. In contexts where elites are shielded from accountability, the legitimacy of anti-corruption initiatives erodes. Uzbekistan must move beyond symbolic prosecutions and establish a culture of accountability, underpinned by judicial independence, prosecutorial discretion, and mechanisms for protecting whistleblowers and investigative journalists. Legal reforms should be accompanied by judicial reforms that reduce vulnerability to political manipulation, thus reinforcing public trust in the rule of law.

The fourth dimension, civic engagement and ethical education, speaks to the long-term sustainability of anti-corruption efforts. As numerous studies confirm, institutional reform must be matched by societal change a transformation in values, expectations, and public behavior (UNODC, 2019; Transparency International, 2020). This includes embedding integrity education in school curricula, fostering public awareness campaigns, promoting civic participation through digital governance tools, and supporting an independent media landscape. In line with Amridinova (2023), who emphasizes the importance of socio-spiritual development in achieving sustainable progress, building a culture of integrity becomes a moral and civic imperative. An anti-corruption strategy that neglects societal engagement is likely to falter in the face of deep-rooted informal norms and institutional inertia.

Nonetheless, the study also cautions against the uncritical transplantation of foreign models. Singapore's small size, centralized governance, and unique political context limit its replicability in larger, more complex states such as Uzbekistan. Policy borrowing must be nuanced and contextually adapted, considering Uzbekistan's own institutional history, administrative capacity, and socio-political dynamics. Reform measures should be designed with local ownership and gradual institutionalization in mind, avoiding top-down approaches that may generate resistance or appear disconnected from the lived realities of citizens and officials.

Moreover, this study reiterates that corruption is not merely a technical issue but a governance and developmental challenge. It intersects with issues of economic inequality, weak state capacity, and socio-political exclusion. Tackling corruption requires a whole-of-society approach a coordinated effort involving government agencies, private sector actors, academic institutions, religious organizations, international partners, and most critically, the general public. Laws and institutions alone are insufficient; what is needed is a collective ethical consensus that corruption is morally unacceptable and socially unsustainable.

The political leadership has laid the groundwork for reform, articulated clear national strategies, and established dedicated institutions. The next challenge lies in implementation and consolidation translating policies into practices, empowering institutions to act independently, and fostering a culture where transparency and accountability are the norm rather than the exception. The road ahead is complex and may involve setbacks, but with a clear vision, steadfast political commitment, and an inclusive

approach that brings citizens into the fold, Uzbekistan can move toward a governance model that reflects both efficiency and integrity.

The experience of Singapore and other successful reformers demonstrates that corruption is not destiny. Through consistent, courageous, and coordinated efforts, states can dismantle the structures that enable corruption and replace them with systems that reward honesty, professionalism, and public service. For Uzbekistan, the opportunity is now and the responsibility is shared by all who envision a more just, transparent, and prosperous future.



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