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"It all comes back to self-control?": Unpacking the Discourse of Anti-corruption Education in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary educational studies on anti-corruption have largely been underpinned by the conception of corruption as a moral problem. Consequently, anti-corruption curricula were mainly developed around instilling the correct moral orientations, characters, or decisions in individuals. The current study departs from such theoretical approaches by critically deconstructing dominant discourses constituting anti-corruption education in an underrepresented yet highly relevant setting: Indonesia, a country deemed one of the most corrupt globally. Analyzing Indonesian anti-corruption educational policies, learning modules, textbooks, and other relevant anti-corruption campaign materials, the current study unearthed two dominant discourses in Indonesian anti-corruption education materials. The first is a discourse of neoliberalism, and the second is a discourse of individual morality and heroism. We discuss these findings in relation to the ways Western-originated agendas of rationalism, neoliberal capitalism, and individualism have become the central organizing principles through which anti-corruption educational praxis is imagined and enacted in the Global South. We propose that Indonesian anti-corruption education might find benefits in adopting critical and decolonial approaches to corruption and education more broadly.

KEYWORDS

Anti-corruption education; Indonesia; morality; neoliberalism; discourse analysis

The problem of corruption has been of interest to many societies globally in the last 2 decades. Both state governments as well as international organizations have pushed various campaigns, funding, and resources towards curbing it. Corruption is claimed to harm developmental goals (Aidt, 2009; Bardhan, 1997), innovation (Ellis et al., 2020), and democracy (Warren, 2004) in different parts of the world; educating all citizens to stand against it is considered of paramount importance. Moreover, some scholars argue that corruption very much affects education institutions (Reyes, 2009), which is why the quest to study the educational landscape and instruments to approach the problem of corruption is warranted. The current study engages with anti-corruption endeavors in a Global South context, namely, Indonesia. Specifically, we analyze anti-corruption educational materials with the objective of unpacking dominant discourses underlying the ways (anti-)corruption is conceptualized and discussing their ramifications.

Indonesia is the most populous country in Southeast Asia that has undergone democratization since the downfall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, and anti-corruption has been one of the key agenda items in this context. Anti-corruption campaigns in Indonesia have included a significant educational effort to prevent corruption and build awareness among the general public, particularly the youth. In this article, we argue that the educational approach and materials in

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these campaigns have constructed (anti-)corruption in certain ways, which might not always be supportive of education that is critical, democratic, and humane.

Theoretically, our study is informed by a poststructuralist approach to discourse, power, and subject positions (Foucault, 1972, 1982; Davies, 2006; Weedon, 1987), where social realities are not understood as objective, neutral, and operating in a mechanistic and universal way. Instead, realities are socially, historically, and contextually constructed through language and discourse, which are imbued with power relations. We refer to the term discourse here as a set of interrelated ideas that constitute the ways in which a notion, such as corruption, is understood. Discursive formations about a notion, such as corruption, in a given context are never singular nor static, but multiple and ever-shifting. The term discourse here also implies that the interconnection between power and knowledge is always at play.

Taking up this framework allows us to critically interrogate anti-corruption education as a phenomenon situated in a particular time and place, inseparable from the operation of power and politics. In contrast with existing anti-corruption educational studies that have generally sought pedagogically effective ways to change corrupt behaviors, we seek to unearth dominant discourses underpinning anti-corruption educational materials. Therefore, we offer an alternative way to think about and investigate anti-corruption education. More specific discussions on how the current study may contribute new insights to existing academic knowledge will be discussed in the next section. Subsequently, contemporary Indonesian contexts vis-à-vis anti-corruption education are briefly introduced to situate the study. After some notes on the methodology, we discuss our findings in relation to dominant discourses within Indonesian anti-corruption educational campaigns, namely, a discourse of neoliberalism and a discourse of individual morality and heroism.

The politics of anti-corruption education

Anti-corruption education can be considered a relatively nascent field of scholarship that only started to flourish in the early 2000s. This is unsurprising given that the anti-corruption movement itself only began to dominate policy discourse in the late 1990s, following the lead of the World Bank and other transnational actors in their global anti-corruption crusade. Various development actors, including the Berlin-based Transparency International, took part in producing anti-corruption-related materials, which were then disseminated globally following the trajectory of the development agenda in the Global South (Brown & Cloke, 2004; Walton, 2013). Given that corruption is an interdisciplinary phenomenon, discussions around anti-corruption education can be found in different bodies of literature, such as in higher education, business ethics, legal studies, Asian and African studies, development, and international relations. In addition to scholarly works, there is a plethora of resources available in the form of consultant reports, evidencing the burgeoning anti-corruption industry in the past 2 decades (Sampson, 2010; Pertiwi & Ainsworth, 2020).

The current study seeks to contribute to the existing literature in at least three ways. The first is to challenge the dominant views within the intersecting fields of education and anti-corruption, which have hitherto approached corruption mainly through an objectivist lens, thus ignoring the political and discursive dimensions of anti-corruption. These dominant views subscribe to the dominant definitions as well as the causes and consequences of corruption presented in the mainstream corruption literature (see Pertiwi, 2018). Corruption is often portrayed as an acute problem in the developing world, affecting mainly government institutions, including the education sector (Arellano-Gault et al., 2022; Heyneman et al., 2008), with some arguing that corruption disrupts the benefit of education (Duerrenberger & Warning, 2018).

Presenting corruption as a moral problem, anti-corruption curricula have been designed around instilling the correct moral orientations, characters, or decisions, using both more generic

terms such as integrity and accountability (USAID, 2006). Some localized terms were also used, such as *ubupfura,* or nobility, in Rwanda (de Dieu Basabose, 2019), *akrasia,* or lack of self-command, in Kenya (Amukowa & Gunga, 2013), and *tadarus,* or religious learning, in Indonesia (Al-Fatih, 2018). These seemingly locally derived solutions, however, still treat individual incapacity to exercise the "correct" moral judgment and act in the "correct" manner as a central explanation as to why corruption persists. Consequently, it downplays the socio-economic, historical, and political contexts within which it occurs.

Consistent with this, anti-corruption trainings are believed to be the 'savior' which will transform attitudes or intentions to commit corrupt acts (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Hauser, 2020). This, however, does not necessarily mean that such training guarantees a change in behavior, especially when cultural factors come into play (Hauser, 2020). For example, in the context of underpaid civil servants, especially in regional areas, it is common for public service users to give "thank you money" or "cigarette money," partly to compensate for the low wage (Znoj, 2017). Still, others attempted to push public participation towards anti-corruption through the notion of public integrity and citizen activism, suggesting that increased scrutiny of public officials can help address corruption (World Bank, 2003).

In taking a moral and objectivist view on corruption (Pertiwi, 2018; Torsello & Venard, 2016), scholars and practitioners in this field rarely questioned popular definitions of corruption, despite asserting that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be effective in its eradication. The diverse and fluid nature of "corruption" across time and place is often ignored despite its serious implications when one begins thinking about what anti-corruption interventions should look like. Katzarova (2019), for example, documented that before the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1980s, corruption was once conceived as the abuse of corporate power instead of government power.

To the best of our knowledge, there is only a limited amount of research attempting to unpack the multiplicity and contextuality of corruption or unethical behavior more generally. Some of them can be found in the areas of public administration, business ethics, cross-cultural communications, and education. Adelstein and Clegg (2016), for example, argue that the code of ethics, as a mechanism of enforcing ethical behavior, needs to be democratized, whereby "employees' own ethical views are acknowledged" instead of dismissed and considered a deviation. Looking at the work of bureaucrats, Lopdrup-Hjorth and Obling (2018) contend that structural factors matter in understanding corruption and that the rigid and rational-legal nature of bureaucracy rarely allows officials to "engage in ultimate moral discussions" (p. 279).

These works, however, do not specifically focus on *anti-corruption education* as a form of global campaign traveling across borders and the kind of dynamics and consequences it has on members of the local society it seeks to educate. In challenging the dominant view, our study seeks to offer a more reflective and contextualized view of anti-corruption education, which is currently lacking in critical voice. We build on the growing literature of critical anti-corruption studies, which have pointed out the floating and unstable meanings of corruption (Koechlin, 2013; Pertiwi & Ainsworth, 2020) and necessitated a more nuanced and historical take on educating about (anti-)corruption.

Secondly, we seek to extend existing research on the impact of neoliberal political projects on anti-corruption education around the globe. The neoliberal logic heavily infused into the global anti-corruption agenda resulted in a biased campaign against public servants (Katzarova, 2019) by defining corruption as rent-seeking (Bedirhanoğlu, 2007). Simultaneously, those campaigns treated the private sector as anti-corruption champions able to self-regulate against any questionable conduct (Walton, 2013). We undertook a critical analysis of anti-corruption promoters' claim that fighting corruption is a way to achieve social justice. Our research shows that such an ideal has been hijacked through a narrow and simplified neoliberal conception of justice in a society marked by extreme inequality and the pervasive adoption of market logics.

Last but not least, our study contributes to the limited number of anti-corruption educational studies voicing postcolonial critiques by presenting the tensions found in anti-corruption projects in an underrepresented yet highly relevant setting, that is, Indonesia. Almost all previous studies on anti-corruption education in the Global South confirmed the "hegemonic position of theories developed in the global center and tested in the 'periphery'" (Derich, 2017, pp. 17–18). Western conceptions and cures of corruption were treated as given and undisputable, despite ostensible attempts to deploy local terms (e.g., Al-Fatih, 2018; Amukowa & Gunga, 2013; de Dieu Basabose, 2019).

In contrast, our study departs from such an analytical posture by critically deconstructing the dominant discourses and practices of anti-corruption education. We offer a plethora of examples where Western-oriented agendas of rationalism, neoliberal capitalism, and individualism have become the central organizing principles through which anti-corruption praxis is imagined and enacted. In so doing, we begin to introduce postcolonial nuances into anti-corruption education literature by showing that global inequalities are inseparable from the processes of anti-corruption knowledge production (Polzer, 2001; Pertiwi & Ainsworth, 2021). The local contextuality of (anti-)corruption might not always be sufficiently explained using ostensibly universal Western theorizations. To better situate the current study both contextually and historically, the next section will briefly discuss Indonesia's legacy of authoritarianism, contemporary democratization, and neoliberal turn vis-à-vis anti-corruption endeavors.

A brief introduction to corruption and anti-corruption education in Indonesia

Corruption has long been considered a problem in Indonesia, an archipelagic Southeast Asian country located north of Australia that gained its independence from the Dutch in 1945. Corruption entered policy debates and public discourse in Indonesia in the 1990s and became a significant socio-political movement in 1997–1998 when the Asian financial crisis hit and Suharto's 32-year authoritarian regime collapsed (Marquette, 1999). Corruption was associated with Suharto's regime and his cronies and often blamed for Indonesia's political turmoil and economic collapse during the monetary crisis in 1997–1998 (Lee, 2003). The fight against corruption has since become one of the key agendas in Indonesia's post-authoritarian era. This agenda can be seen in various reforms as a response to the demands of international donors such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank following their rescue packages (e.g., World Bank, 2003). It was also evident in the establishment of various anti-corruption NGOs, most prominently Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) in 1998.

The subsequent establishment of KPK (Corruption Eradication Commission) in 2002 has often been considered a landmark in Indonesia's anti-corruption endeavors. Aside from investigating corruption cases, KPK's main responsibility is to prevent corruption, including through anti-corruption education and campaigns. Its two main educational platforms are the Anti-Corruption Learning Center (ACLC) and the Anti-Corruption Clearing House (ACCH). ACLC is the educational body of KPK; its mission is to be the center for experts, knowledge, and experience in the field of anti-corruption; a center for learning and outreach; and an anti-corruption learning coordinator. ACLC is funded by the Indonesian government and, in its earlier days, by donors such as the German Corporation for International Cooperation, or GIZ ("KPK Luncurkan," 2014). The ACLC website boasts 18 actively running, online-based courses on anti-corruption and displays testimonies from former participants. Meanwhile, ACCH is KPK's online portal for the public to access information, data, and educational materials about anti-corruption in Indonesia. It includes KPK's own academic journal, *Integritas*, and magazine, *Integrito*; attractively designed infographics and videographics; and 53 downloadable anti-corruption e-books, from a guidebook for political parties to storybooks and comics for children and teenagers.

KPK has also collaborated with other government institutions in its educational efforts, particularly the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). Muhammad Nuh, the Minister of Education from 2009–2014, stated in 2010 that his institution would seek to incorporate anti-corruption materials in the national curriculum ("Kurikulum Antikorupsi," 2010), a plan that has not fully manifested until today. Some schools or educational institutions did adopt some form of anti-corruption education (e.g., Paramadina University, 2016), along with local governments and politicians (Rosadi, 2015; Sidik, 2020), which arguably had some effect on enhancing their public image. Other smaller efforts include the establishment of an "honest canteen," or *kantin kejujuran*, which encourages self-service and self-checkout in school canteens in different parts of Indonesia but was apparently deemed a failure after a 3-year rollout (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2010). At the tertiary education level, MoEC has attempted to incorporate anti-corruption materials into higher education teaching and learning through some short- and medium-term projects. MoEC claimed that "in 2020, anti-corruption education will have been delivered to more than 4500 lecturers in more than 2000 universities all over Indonesia in collaboration with KPK and anti-corruption NGOs" (Handini, 2021, para. 21).

Since 2012, KPK has begun to combine more traditional forms of education (e.g., courses, seminars, textbooks, formal education settings) with creative campaigns involving the media, social media, and creative events ("Kreatif Cegah Korupsi," 2016). Between 2012 and 2017, KPK launched its own radio channel, television channel, YouTube channel, Instagram account, smartphone educational app, annual anti-corruption film festival (ACFFEst), and socio-drama events for children (*Festival Anak Jujur*/Honest Children Festival). In these creative campaigns, KPK also partnered with celebrities or influencers to popularize messages about anti-corruption.

The ICW, the leading anti-corruption NGO in the country, also has educational projects. They include *Sekolah Anti-korupsi/SAKTI* (Anti-corruption School), that is, a short course-based educational program for youth, and its online version, *Akademi Anti-Korupsi* (Anti-corruption Academy), which, at the time of writing, offers 20 attractively designed learning modules. ICW mobilizes the alumni of these programs into a community called *Sahabat ICW* (ICW Friends) and involves them in its various anti-corruption endeavors. ICW also regularly holds anti-corruption competitions for youth, including poster, infographic, and video competitions. It is against these socio-political and educational backdrops that the current study took place.

Notes on methodology

In alignment with our poststructuralist theoretical approach, this research adopts critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a methodological framework in which we consider corruption mainly as a discursive regulatory device as opposed to an objective feature of reality. Following Phillips and Hardy (2002), CDA is specifically interested in unpacking the meanings of texts in particular contexts and how the reproduction of meanings is shaped by the intricate relationship between power and knowledge. Furthermore, social actors are further structured in specific discursive spaces via the constitution of concepts, objects, and subject positions. In conducting CDA, we take a critical stance in reading the texts to identify the dominant discourses (Arellano-Gault et al., 2022) underpinning anti-corruption education in Indonesia that are often taken for granted. Educational materials were not approached as neutral texts but were understood as texts that were shaped by certain socio-political and cultural discourses. Identifying and unpacking these discourses was what we pursued in the current analysis.

We collected texts, images, and audiovisual materials as artifacts to explore the discourses underpinning anti-corruption education in Indonesia from selected relevant sources. These sources include the contents of prominent anti-corruption websites, anti-corruption learning modules, anti-corruption textbooks, educational audiovisual materials, and some additional newspaper articles on relevant anti-corruption educational campaigns. We included only educational

Table 1. Types of data analyzed.

Types of Data Sources	Amount	Notes
Main Sources		
Textbooks/learning modules	46	Textbooks, educational storybooks, and teacher's guidebooks for students at the primary and secondary level published by KPK, and at the tertiary level by MoEC
Websites	3	KPK's ACLC website: https://elearning.kpk.go.id KPK's ACCH website: https://acch.kpk.go.id/ ICW's website: https://antikorupsi.org/
Audiovisual materials	35	Educational video modules by ICW: 33 videos Award-winning popular movies about corruption: 2 movies, namely, *Kita vs. Korupsi* (Us versus Corruption) and *Sekolah Kami Hidup Kami* (Our School, Our Lives)
Additional Sources		
Newspaper articles	8	Online news reports on Indonesian anti-corruption educational campaigns from reputable news websites (selected by the authors based on relevance)

materials published and/or endorsed by official government bodies, such as the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), or prominent institutions in this field, such as KPK and ICW, the leading anti-corruption bodies in Indonesia. Following the aim of the study, we paid specific attention to educational materials from two KPK platforms, namely, ACLC and ACCH, and two ICW platforms, namely, *Sekolah Anti-korupsi* and *Akademi Anti-korupsi*. Most of these sources were in Indonesian; the excerpts presented in this article were translated to English by the authors, who are native Indonesian speakers. Table 1 summarizes the types of artifacts analyzed.

We conducted data analysis simultaneously by first doing a close reading of the texts collected and making notes of the patterns in the texts. In reading the texts, we used guiding questions stemming from the aforementioned understandings of discourse and CDA, such as: How is corruption discursively constituted in the educational materials? What are the key assumptions underlying such constitutions? Who are represented as key actors in anti-corruption efforts? Who is positioned as responsible for corruption? What are the solutions offered for corruption? We also attended to details beyond the contents, such as visual presentations, and those who contributed to the materials, including marketing professionals and consultants, to generate initial themes. Finally, we identified, reviewed, specified, and articulated the final key themes that best represent the data analyzed, to which we will now turn.

Findings

Before we elaborate on our findings, we are cognizant that our analyses could be misread as opposing anti-corruption education altogether; this is not our intention. In critically examining anti-corruption education materials, we draw attention to certain ways of thinking and doing anti-corruption education—as we argue below—that might have been uncritical, undemocratic, or potentially inhumane. We do not suggest throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Anti-corruption education through market logic: A discourse of neoliberalism

The first key theme identified in the data is the notion that the widespread adoption of anti-corruption values is to be achieved using a whole range of marketing devices that will promote these values in fun and enjoyable ways. Through a buying-and-selling logic, ideas about anti-corruption are framed as something that everyone can adopt and will enjoy being a part of. Here, individuals were positioned as potential consumers who are waiting to buy into anti-corruption values as a popular movement. The ubiquity of such themes in anti-corruption materials and campaign

strategies indicated the dominant role of the discourse of neoliberalism in constituting anti-corruption education in Indonesia. Neoliberalism itself is a political-economic project built around the use of free market logic to transform various dimensions of social reality (Connell, 2013); its typical strategies are deregulation, privatization, tax reduction, and entrepreneurialism. In education, neoliberalism emphasizes market-oriented learning, audit culture, individualism, and the application of market technologies, including marketing tactics and popular cultural icons, to educate or change one's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Carpenter et al., 2022; Wijaya Mulya, 2016).

Along with the more traditional educational methods and materials such as classroom teaching and textbooks (e.g., MoEC, 2011), Indonesian anti-corruption educational efforts have adopted social marketing strategies in order to reach a wider, younger audience. These strategies include fun educational board games, movies featuring popular celebrities, youth competitions (i.e., fiction, movie, and video game making) offering large prizes, and anti-corruption social media contents in collaboration with influencers. The underpinning marketing logic is derived from the popular culture industry; that is, when youth "customers" are happy, entertained, and engaged, they are more likely to voluntarily accept anti-corruption values being taught. An example is a campaign kit created by KPK for schoolchildren similar to the Monopoly board game called SEMAI (which stands for *sembilan nilai moral dan antikorupsi,* or nine moral and anti-corruption values). It has gained media attention for its fun and innovative approach to instilling anti-corruption values (Winanto, 2015). SEMAI exemplifies the recent global trend of the gamification of learning as part of the neoliberalization of education (Tulloch & Randell-Moon, 2018).

Social marketing elements of anti-corruption educational campaigns are also found in the production of the movie titled "Us versus Corruption" (Aziz, 2012). The movie represented popular imaginations about what corruption is, who the "corrupt" actors are, and what must be done. To allure Indonesian youth into the anti-corruption movement, "Us versus Corruption" featured A-list celebrities (e.g., Tora Sudiro, Nicholas Saputra, and Revalina Temat), catchy original soundtracks, interesting storylines, and excellent cinematography. This award-winning movie received significant media attention during its roadshow.

The roadshow was a part of the broader Anti-Corruption Film Festival (ACFFest), a collaboration between KPK and a Washington-based management consultant named Management System International (Linggasari & Afrisia, 2014). To further tap into popular culture, ACFFest invited submissions from artists from all over Indonesia for different categories such as fiction, documentary, animation, and a special category for citizen journalism and animation games for younger groups. These campaigns primarily targeted middle-class audiences, especially the youth, and bore a striking resemblance to popular culture events and the entertainment industry. This campaign strategy exemplifies the influence of neoliberal logic and mechanisms in the attempt to educate, or more accurately, *sell*, anti-corruption ideas to the broader public.

Another example of the neoliberal, pop-culture-imbued features of Indonesian anti-corruption efforts can be seen in the designs of KPK's educational bodies, such as ACLC and ACCH. Both have attractive elements of web design, combining the use of bright colors, cartoons, and a modern feel akin to websites aimed at younger demographics. Here, the adoption of pop-culture designs for anti-corruption educational material increases its visual appeal to the Indonesian youth market, who have widely consumed and are familiar with Japanese-originated comic styles. While pop culture contents elsewhere can indeed be used to critique neoliberalism (e.g., D'hondht, 2020), such critical nuances are not featured on these websites.

In addition to visually attractive materials packaged in a popular culture vibe, learning modules on ACCH websites were titled using enticing marketing-oriented slogans. For instance, "*Panduan Memberantas Korupsi dengan Mudah dan Menyenangkan*" (Fun and Easy Guidelines to Eradicating Corruption), which is also coupled with catchy phrases such as "*Semua BISA berAKSI*" (All Can Take Action). The content of these guidelines was authored by communication professionals and

digital marketing consultants at SPORA Communication (ACLC, 2014). This signifies the entanglement between international aid that funded ACCH, neoliberal practices, and the mediatization of contemporary life in the context of Indonesian anti-corruption education.

Our analysis of anti-corruption education infrastructure in Indonesia also unearthed another neoliberal mechanism, namely, standardized certification of anti-corruption educators (or *penyuluh*). Imported from business and industrial practice, certification has been a major trend in the Indonesian education system more generally, where skills in various professions were standardized in order to be measured, trained, evaluated, and streamlined to meet labor market demands. Similarly, a certification program for anti-corruption educators was introduced by KPK in 2016 through its professional certification body. To claim authority when speaking about *a particular version* of anti-corruption knowledge, one needs to be certified as a *penyuluh* by enrolling in KPK's affiliated programs, which are free of charge, or in other programs offered by certifying institutions at a cost. When invited to a campaign event, a certified *penyuluh* is eligible for a modest honorarium (albeit non-mandatory), and this can be quite a motivation for people with meager salaries to generate additional income.

This practice of certification in anti-corruption education is constituted through a neoliberal, industry-originated practice of standardizing one's knowledge and skills in order to perform educational work and get paid. The certification might be attractive for the poor majority who have an entrepreneurial attitude. Here, more critical and complex understandings of anti-corruption education gave way to standardized, mechanistic, and entrepreneurial forms of knowledge and education.

While we acknowledge that market mechanisms might have made anti-corruption messages more accessible, widespread, and accepted in Indonesia, we identified at least two problems with such neoliberally constituted anti-corruption educational endeavors. Firstly, one of the dominant messages permeating the aforementioned anti-corruption campaigns is that everyone can and should be a part of the anti-corruption movement because it is "fun" and "for everyone." This does not only demonstrate oversimplification and naivety in educating the public about corruption; it also distracts the public from the importance of sufficiently addressing underlying structural issues in corruption. As pointed out by previous researchers, socio-economic inequalities, cultural norms (Pertiwi, 2022), and problematic election financing (Mietzner, 2015) might have underpinned many of the practices commonly referred to as corruption in Indonesia.

Secondly, neoliberalism has made anti-corruption education, and education in Indonesia more generally, less about critical awareness, enlightenment, self-cultivation, or political resistance. Instead, it is more about the production and consumption of ideas, entertaining the learners, and the financial utility of knowledge, resulting in superficial understanding, pragmatism, and a lack of emancipatory attitudes. This is a condition that might not be very helpful for the strengthening of civil societies, which is crucial for battling structural corruption in the long run, in Indonesia's current post-authoritarian democratization era.

"It all comes back to self-control": A discourse of individual morality and heroism

"It is up to us how to conduct ourselves amidst the temptations,
It comes back to ourselves."
~ Former Vice President Boediono (2009–2014),
Speaking about anti-corruption (Rahadi, 2012)

The second discourse that permeates educational materials and campaigns we analyzed is a discourse of individual morality and heroism. Through this discourse, individuals' moral decisions, particularly money-related honesty, and their willingness to patriotically sacrifice themselves in the fight against corruption were rendered as the main solutions to corruption eradication. We surmise that such a focus on individual decisions and behaviors might have been the result of the

larger epistemological project of Western rationalism, in which personhood is constituted through the notion of atomized, autonomous, and rational individualism. This is different from Indonesia's traditionally collective sensibilities. In this section, we argue that such a discourse of individual morality and heroism is evident and widespread in Indonesian anti-corruption educational campaign materials. We also demonstrate how such a dominant discourse might be problematic for anti-corruption education in Indonesia.

Examples of the emphasis on morality as a form of personal responsibility in Indonesian anti-corruption educational materials abound. KPK, for instance, first introduced the slogan "Berani Jujur, Hebat" (To Be Honest is Great) in 2011 as a theme for that year's annual anti-corruption day. This slogan, which KPK leaders often draw on, suggested that corruption can be cured by demonstrating absolute honesty, where people use their "*hati nurani*" (conscience) and "*akal budi*" (rationality) whenever they are confronted with questionable practices (Surya, 2011). According to this logic, honesty will protect someone from slipping into the abyss of corruption. By practicing honesty, individuals are expected to detach themselves from any prevailing social norms or collective consciousness, which are crucial in understanding personhood in Indonesia, while throwing all the consequences for such decisions back to the individuals. This discourse of personal honesty also permeates the contents of the anti-corruption textbook for higher education published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2011. Chapter 2 (p. 39), for example, reads:

> The causes of corruption can be simplified into two factors, namely, internal and external factors. Internal factors came from the individual, while external ones came from outside the individual. Internal factors include moral dimensions, such as lack of faith, honesty, and shame; attitudinal or behavioral dimensions, such as consumptive behaviors; and social dimensions, such as family upbringing.
>
> External factors are economic dimensions, such as low wages; political dimensions, such as political interests, instability, and establishing or maintaining power; managerial and organizational dimensions, such as a lack of accountability and transparency; legal dimensions, such as a lack of law enforcement; and social dimensions, such as a lack of support for anti-corruption in society.

The first paragraph in the excerpts above refers to individual-centric explanations for corruption such as dishonesty, consumerist behaviors, family upbringing, and most importantly, a lack of faith. The framing of corruption through the lens of personal morality and linking it with religiosity as such can be highly effective in the context of a religiously-oriented society such as Indonesia (Pertiwi & Wijaya Mulya, 2022). The second paragraph is noteworthy because the authors also mentioned more structural explanations, which include factors such as politics, the law, and public sector welfare. Despite this, the individual explanations remain central and dominate the overall textbook. In Chapter 4, for instance, the authors returned to this idea of corruption as an individual problem by outlining nine anti-corruption values as follows: honesty, caring, independence, discipline, responsibility, hard work, simplicity, courage, and justice. The discussions in the texts reduced almost all of these values to individual-level actions while being largely silent on collective efforts and responsibilities to push for structural change. When discussing the value of "responsibility," for example, the text reads (MoEC, 2011, p. 81):

> The value of responsibility can be implemented by students by studying hard, graduating on time with good grades, working responsibly on assignments, maintaining amanah (God-given responsibility), and maintaining the trust that has been given to them.

Similarly, the value of "justice" was explained away by reducing it down to the individual ability to appreciate others merit fairly and to make friends with everyone:

> The value of justice can be developed by students in everyday life, both inside and outside of campus, such as by giving genuine praise to a friend's achievements, giving suggestions and encouragement to friends lacking in achievements, making friends without considering their social backgrounds, and so on.

In both examples, virtually no discussion was provided on solving the external, underlying factors of economic and power inequality in society. Even in ICW's educational module on *critical*

pedagogy and anti-corruption (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2022), the forms of change encouraged for learners were *personal* "critical" awareness to refuse and fight corruption. Some examples mentioned were involvement in reporting corruption cases and monitoring the government's accountability, while more structural changes and discursive contestations were left untouched. In such a module, the "critical" approach to morality relies on Lawrence Kohlberg's outdated psychological theory of moral reasoning. It had been criticized by feminist psychologists such as Carol Gilligan (1993) for its focus on the reasoning ability of individuals through hypothetical moral dilemmas (i.e., rationalism) without considering the complexities of power relations in real social situations.

By drawing attention to individual-centric examples, these texts have largely ignored the broader literature on structural and cultural factors that contribute to practices commonly referred to as corruption and reduced the problem of corruption to individual moral responsibility. Simultaneously, the texts conformed to the now-classic emphasis of Western rationalism and individualism, that is, the positioning of educational subjects as autonomous individuals who actively make decisions based on rational considerations (Hargreaves, 1980; Peters & Marshall, 1996).

Such a dominant discourse of individual morality was then imbued with a sense of heroism when one was involved in an anti-corruption movement or was completely honest despite being in difficult conditions. Epitomizing such heroic positioning, the educational movie "Our School, Our Lives" (Setiabudi, 2009) created by ICW portrays a group of high school students bravely investigating corruption scandals in their school and mobilizing an anti-corruption movement called "Save Our School." In a similar vein, KPK has also discursively constructed itself as the hero of its time, a beacon of hope that must be defended by society in order to eradicate corruption entirely. In the learning modules for Primary schoolchildren, for example, KPK referred to itself as "young" yet "extraordinary," "a breakthrough," and on "the front line" of Indonesia's corruption eradication efforts:

> In its journey, KPK has been extraordinary. Amidst various obstacles, KPK keeps demonstrating its best performance. Through its breakthroughs, the public's trust keeps increasing. As a result, support for KPK is getting stronger. The public believes all these are part of the process that is supposed to be done by the still-young KPK.

Module 3 for Primary School Grades 1, 2, and 3 (KPK, 2019a, p. 7).

> Oftentimes, anti-corruption bodies in Indonesia were established and then failed. All have fallen. But the desire to eradicate corruption has never ceased. KPK was formed because other government bodies tackling corruption have not worked effectively and efficiently. KPK is the front line of anti-corruption, which is professional, intensive, and sustainable.

Module 3 for Primary School Grades 4, 5, and 6 (KPK, 2019b, p. 7).

In these educational modules, members of the KPK were portrayed as patriotic individuals who brought pride to Indonesian citizens. They were depicted as courageous figures who successfully prosecuted corrupt individuals, regardless of their status. In public discourse, KPK members were presented as highly proactive, breaking away from societal norms to uphold anti-corruption values and protect Indonesia from a corrupt future. It is widely known that KPK members demonstrate their integrity by refusing offers of drinking water during visits to government agencies, symbolizing their stance against "gratification," which is seen as a form of corruption (see Ihsanuddin, 2015).

The problem with the discourse of individual morality and heroism is that it not only fails to address the real-life complexities surrounding what is commonly referred to as corruption but also places unrealistic expectations on individuals to make sacrifices comparable to fallen heroes in the fight against corruption. In Indonesian, this concept is known as "memasang badan" (putting one's body as a living sacrifice). For instance, the dominant anti-corruption formula in

Indonesia often asked people to denounce practices such as accepting gifts, which in many cases is a symptom of salary inequality in the public sector (Tidey, 2016; Pertiwi & Ainsworth, 2020). Anti-corruption prescriptions dismiss the harsh reality that people face should they decide to reject "corrupt" practices, as one police officer admitted to the media upon participating in a no-gift campaign endorsed by the KPK. The officer said, "It's so tough. My salary is not enough" (Hutton, 2017).

The discourse of Western individualism appears clearly in this case, where the subject position of an agentic individual is supposed to be able to choose the "right" thing by exercising correct ethical judgment disconnected from their social contexts. Meanwhile, these supposedly "ethical" individuals are left to their own devices to find other more legitimate sources of income since the existing one is no longer acceptable according to the anti-corruption formula. The fact that members of the KPK enjoy a relatively higher level of income compared to the rest of Indonesian society was rarely discussed when explaining their capacity to break away from the socially and culturally condoned practices commonly labeled as corruption (Znoj, 2017). Coupled with simplistic expressions such as "fighting corruption is easy," discussed in the previous section, anti-corruption educational campaigns denied the existence of various contextual, discursive, and material tensions in trying to undo corruption. This situation might not necessarily be comparable with studies conducted in Western contexts. Anti-corruption education constituted through the discourse of individual morality and heroism in Indonesia might have been too unrealistic, reductionist, unfair, and unsympathetic.

Conclusion

The current research has examined the dominant discourses constituting anti-corruption educational materials and campaign strategies in a Global South context, that is, contemporary Indonesia. The analysis reveals that such educational materials and strategies were given rise by two dominant discourses. The first is a discourse of neoliberalism, in which anti-corruption education is understood through buying-selling logics and market mechanisms. The second is a discourse of individual morality and heroism that positions personal willingness to be honest and sacrificial at the heart of anti-corruption. We have demonstrated how these discourses were evident in Indonesian anti-corruption educational materials and why these discourses could be problematic for Indonesia's democratization vis-à-vis education.

There are some implications for the current study. Firstly, anti-corruption education might find benefits in accommodating more critical approaches to education and to corruption. In the Indonesian context, ICW has begun to incorporate Freire's critical pedagogy in one of its learning modules (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2022). However, its "critical" approach was still focusing on building awareness about the traditional power imbalance between the ruler and the people, to the extent that it tends to be anti-state and too market-friendly (Walton, 2013). Simultaneously, it also uncritically accepts "corruption" as given, in contrast to a social construction embedded in particular times and places (Katzarova, 2019). A more complex understanding of power relations operating in a society, such as neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and discursive dimensions of power, might enable more critical and agentic learners. In turn, they will be more likely to make informed decisions for themselves as democratic citizens rather than simply agreeing to what the educators think they should do (i.e., saying no to corruption).

Secondly, anti-corruption education should accommodate the complexity of the everyday realities of corruption by taking a more decolonial approach to knowledge. For instance, while personal moral character is often a focus in largely Western-oriented corruption literature, an equally important contextualized discussion about the structural, ideological, and cultural underpinnings of "corrupt" behavior is urgently needed. Further, the very idea of "corruption" itself should also be opened for discussion, to the extent that learners can begin to think about the

influence of global inequality and the contradictory tensions in making meaning about corruption. One key theme here is Western epistemic dominance in knowledge production about (anti)-corruption (see Pertiwi & Ainsworth, 2021). As a result, there is no "single truth" or "one right answer" to fighting corruption. By contextualizing corruption as a phenomenon inseparable from modernity or colonialism (Mignolo, 2009), we hope that anti-corruption education and education more generally in Indonesia may encourage future citizens who are democratic, critical, thoughtful, and humane.

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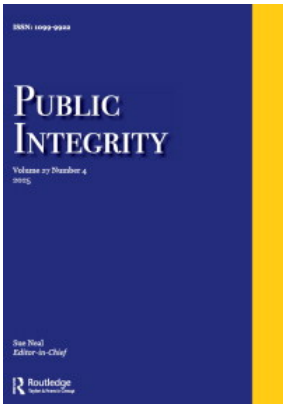

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Edited by Dominic de Cogan, Alexis Brassey, and Peter Harris, Hart Publishing, 2023, ISBN: 9781509958030, 9781509958061, 9781509958054

Karina Krisnanda, Winda Meylen Eriza & Waliyyatu Azzahra

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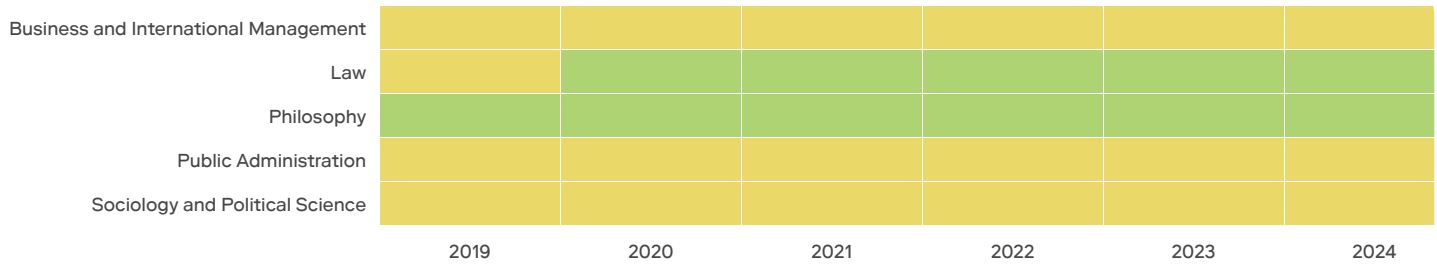

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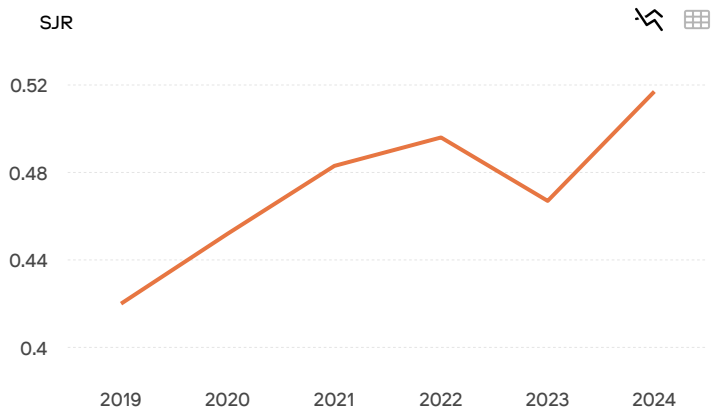

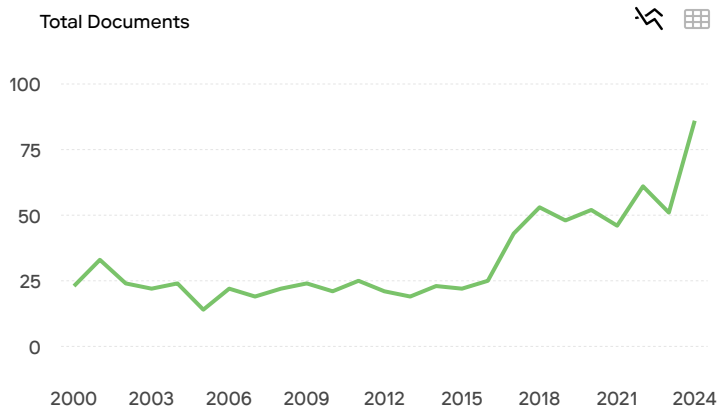

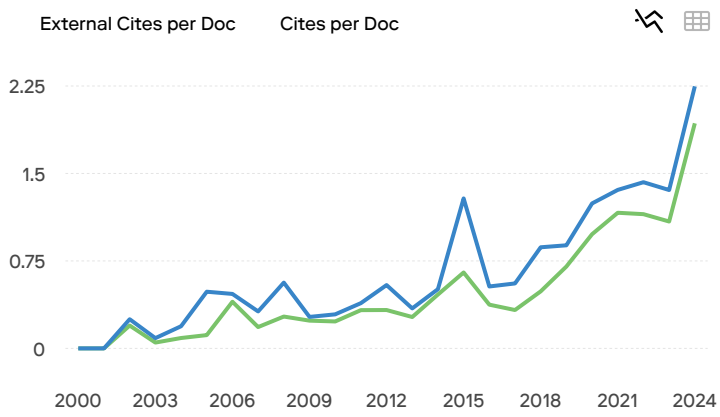

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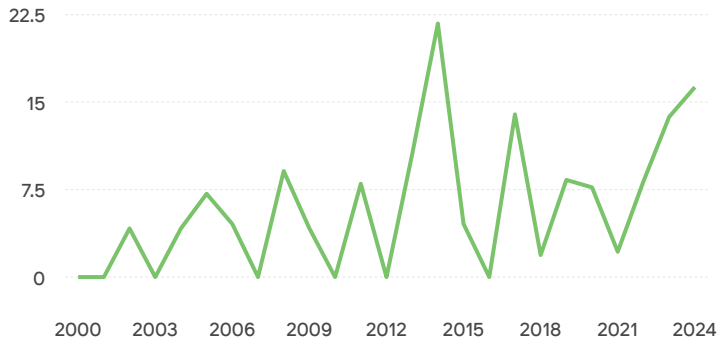

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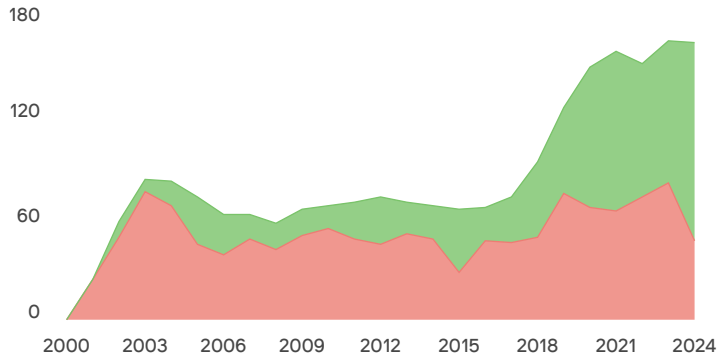

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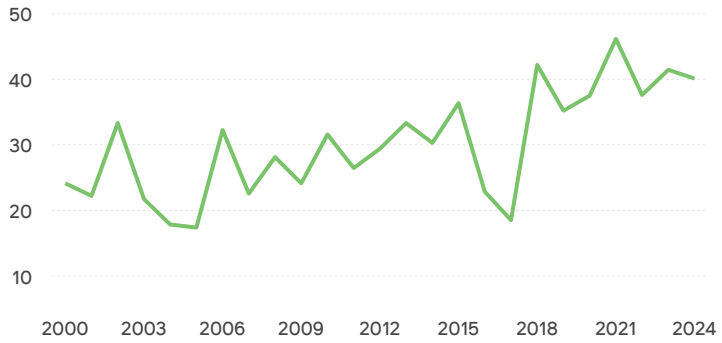

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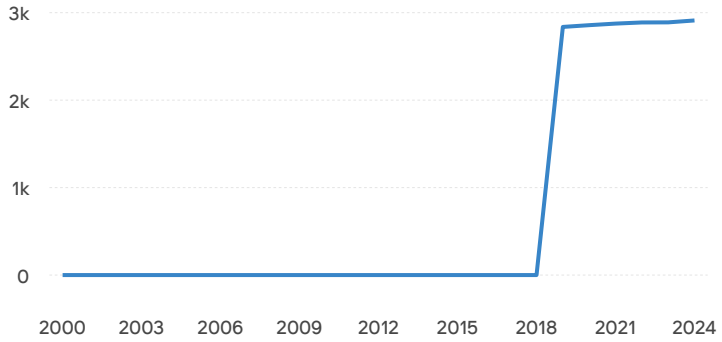

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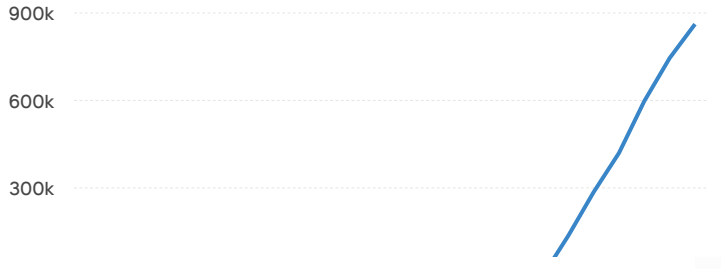
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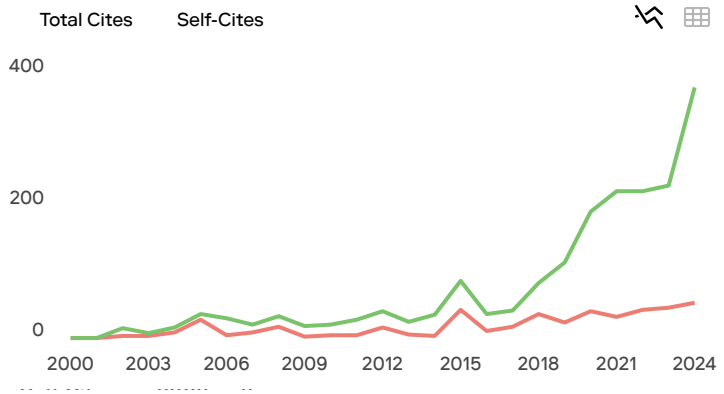
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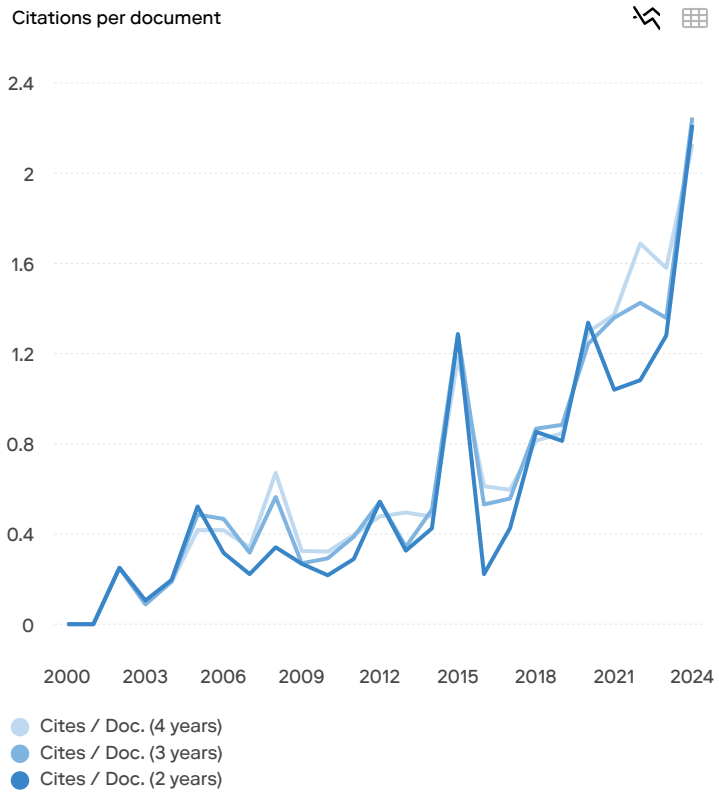
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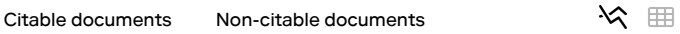
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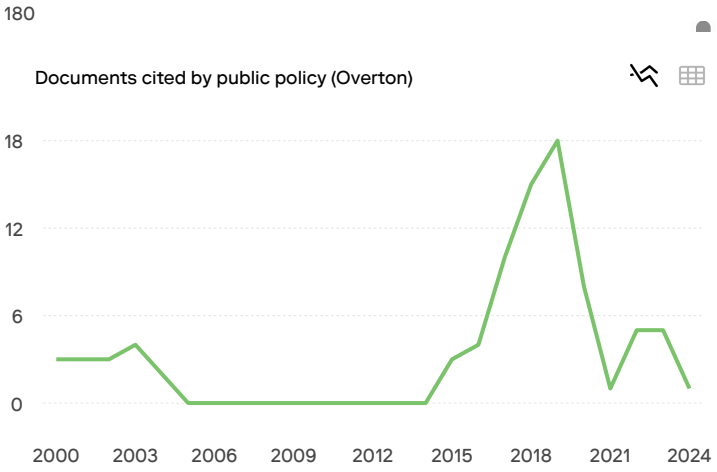

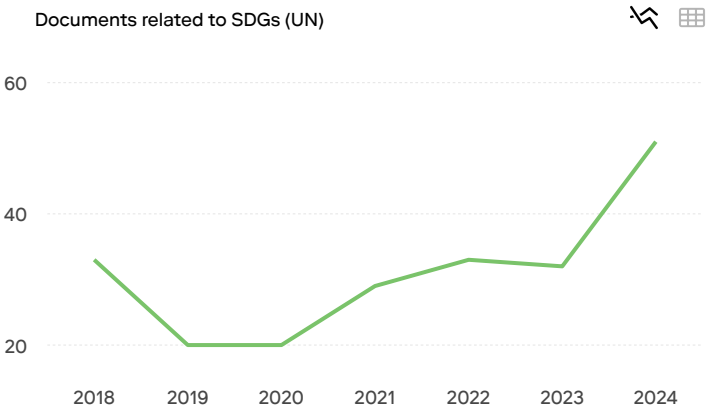

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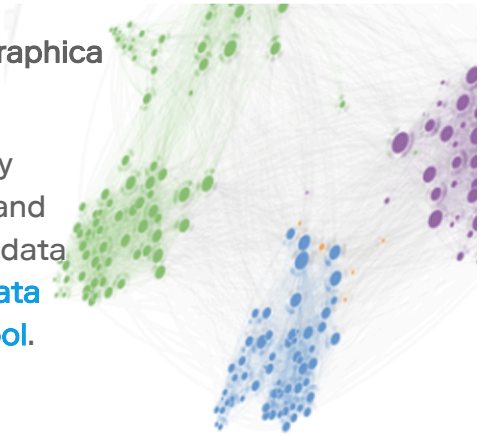

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