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Anti-Corruption Law in Vietnam : Limitations in Design and Implementation, Orientations for Improving the Legal System

BaoKhanh Nguyen Huynh

PhD. Ho Chi Minh City University of Law, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract: Corruption continues to be a significant obstacle to national development and undermines the integrity of the public apparatus. Although Vietnam has built a relatively comprehensive anti-corruption legal framework, especially since the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law came into effect, the effectiveness of enforcement remains far from social expectations. The article analyzes the main limitations in legal design and implementation mechanisms, focusing on the following issues: transparency of income and assets is still formalistic, the mechanism for controlling conflicts of interest lacks operational criteria, the protection of whistleblowers is inadequate, the recovery of corrupt assets is limited, and the absence of an independent monitoring institution. Through qualitative analysis and normative approaches, the study shows that current obstacles stem from the gap between regulations and practice, as well as the dependence of enforcement agencies on the current power structure. On that basis, the article proposes a set of solutions to strengthen independent supervision, digitize and connect public databases, standardize the process of handling violations, and improve the accountability mechanism. The research results contribute to supplementing scientific arguments for building a more effective anti-corruption legal system in the context of a socialist-oriented market economy in Vietnam.

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INTRODUCTION

Corruption is one of the most damaging problems to national development and the integrity of public administration. In the process of innovation and international integration, Vietnam has identified anti-corruption as a key and long-term task to strengthen the legal foundation for national governance and improve the effectiveness of State operations. The development of the legal system in anti-corruption reflects the State's efforts to control power, ensure transparency, and enhance accountability in public service activities (Anh et al., 2016; Forde, 2022).

✉ Corresponding author E-mail: vuhongvan051978@gmail.com

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Since 2005, Vietnam has issued its first law on anti-corruption to establish a unified legal framework for preventing and handling corruption in the public sector. The 2005 Law on Anti-Corruption lays the foundation for the public disclosure of state agencies' activities, the declaration of assets and income, regulations on the responsibilities of heads, and the strict handling of acts of abusing their positions and powers (National Assembly, 2005). Although this law marks an important development in power control, practice shows that many mechanisms remain largely procedural and have not created great changes in implementation.

The context of economic development and the need to modernize governance require continued improvement of anti-corruption laws. Therefore, in 2018, the National Assembly passed a new Anti-Corruption Law with a broader scope of regulation, extending to the non-state sector, while strengthening the mechanism for declaring and publicizing assets and income, adding regulations on controlling conflicts of interest and enhancing the responsibility of leaders when corruption occurs in agencies, organizations and units (National Assembly, 2018; CPV, 2021). This is an important step forward in approaching international standards of transparent governance.

However, recent studies indicate that corruption in Vietnam does not only stem from individual behavior but is also associated with power structures and benefit accumulation mechanisms in the public apparatus (Bui, 2019; Forde, 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). According to Forde (2022), corruption in Vietnam can be seen as a power accumulation structure, in which group interests and networks of friendly relationships create an environment where violations are likely to arise. This shows that improving anti-corruption laws is not only about issuing new norms but also requires comprehensive reforms in institutions, enforcement mechanisms, and power-monitoring structures.

In addition, the gap between legal regulations and actual effectiveness is still very large. Limitations in enforcement are reflected in the level of formal asset declaration, difficulties in verification, inadequacies in coordination between inspection, audit, investigation and prosecution agencies, as well as the low rate of recovery of corrupt assets. These issues require in-depth analysis of the causes of inefficiencies in both legal design and enforcement mechanisms (Politburo, 2022; Maslen, 2025).

On that basis, this article focuses on comprehensively assessing the limitations of anti-corruption laws in Vietnam today in both aspects of normative design and practical implementation. The objective of the article is to clarify the shortcomings in the current legal system, point out the factors leading to low enforcement effectiveness, and thereby propose directions for improvement in accordance with the requirements of building a rule-of-law state and consolidating the foundation of public service integrity (Bui, 2019; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025).

The research is significant in both theory and practice by supplementing scientific arguments for perfecting anti-corruption laws, while providing a reference basis for policy-making and institutional reform activities to enhance the effectiveness of state power control in the current period.

More specifically, the research problem addressed in this article is the persistence of a gap between Vietnam's relatively complete anti-corruption framework and the limited practical capacity of that framework to prevent, detect and remedy corruption. Existing literature has examined corruption as an economic constraint, a political-administrative phenomenon and an institutional challenge; however, fewer studies connect legal design, enforcement coordination, asset transparency, whistleblower protection and asset recovery within one integrated legal analysis. This article therefore contributes by clarifying how shortcomings in normative design interact with implementation barriers and by proposing legally feasible reforms for Vietnam in light of regional and international anti-corruption standards.

Accordingly, the article pursues the following objectives and research questions:

- To identify the principal limitations in the design of Vietnam's anti-corruption legal framework, especially in relation to transparency, conflict-of-interest control, whistleblower protection and asset recovery.
- To explain why enforcement remains uneven despite the existence of formal legal rules and specialized anti-corruption institutions.
- To examine how international experience and comparative legal standards can inform feasible reforms for Vietnam.

1. Which legal-design weaknesses most directly reduce the effectiveness of Vietnam's anti-corruption framework?
2. Which implementation barriers prevent anti-corruption rules from operating as effective mechanisms of power control?
3. Research question 3: What reform orientations can strengthen accountability, independent supervision and recovery of corrupt assets in Vietnam?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative legal research design. It combines doctrinal legal analysis, policy analysis and limited comparative analysis to examine whether the existing anti-corruption rules are sufficiently clear, enforceable and consistent with the requirements of public accountability and integrity governance.

Sampling Method

Because the article is not based on a survey or experiment, it does not use probabilistic sampling of human participants. Instead, purposive document sampling is applied. The selected materials include primary legal documents, official policy reports, published judgments and inspection conclusions, and peer-reviewed studies directly related to anti-corruption law, public integrity, asset declaration, whistleblower protection and asset recovery in Vietnam.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected through systematic documentary review. Legal texts were gathered from official legislative sources, while policy reports, Party documents and institutional summaries were used to identify implementation problems. Academic publications and comparative materials were selected to support interpretation, triangulation and international contextualization.

Data Collection Tools

The main data collection tools were a document review matrix and a legal-issue coding sheet. These tools were used to classify materials by source type, legal issue, institutional actor, enforcement barrier and reform implication. This procedure helped maintain consistency in extracting information from legal, policy and academic sources.

Data Analysis

The collected materials were analyzed through normative interpretation, thematic coding and comparative reasoning. Normative interpretation was used to clarify the meaning and scope of legal rules; thematic coding identified recurring implementation barriers; and comparative reasoning assessed whether selected international practices could be adapted to Vietnam's institutional context.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

To enhance validity and reliability, the study triangulates legal provisions, official reports, case-based evidence and peer-reviewed literature. Identifiable sources support claims, and reform proposals are derived from the convergence of domestic legal analysis and comparative experience rather than from isolated examples.

The research method for this topic is designed to ensure the scientific nature, systematicity, and verifiability of the analysis process. Because the topic belongs to the field of law and public policy, the study uses a qualitative approach combining normative analysis, policy analysis and legal comparison. The methods are selected to clarify the legal structure of the anti-corruption system, identify limitations in practical implementation, and determine the requirements for perfecting the law in the direction of meeting modern governance standards. Specifically, as follows:

Document analysis and normative synthesis method: First, the study uses document analysis to systematize current legal documents on anti-corruption. The sources of documents include the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law, decrees and circulars guiding its implementation, summary reports of the Government Inspectorate, the State Audit, the Central Steering Committee on Anti-Corruption, as well as resolutions and conclusions of the Party related to the construction of a rule-of-law state and public service integrity. This method allows to clear identification of the scope of regulation, the structural pillars of the legal system and the level of formal completion. From there, the missing, contradictory or inapplicable contents are objectively identified.

Method of practical analysis and case study: To reflect the gap between regulations and implementation, the study analyzes typical corruption cases that have been tried or disciplined in recent years. Data sources include judgments, inspection conclusions, audit reports, and information from mainstream media agencies. This analysis helps to clearly identify common forms of corruption and the level of complexity in areas such as land, bidding, public finance and state-owned enterprise management. At the same time, the study clarifies barriers in law enforcement, including overlapping jurisdictions, lack of data transparency, limitations in whistleblower protection mechanisms, and limited investigative capacity.

Legal comparison method: The study also uses the comparative method to compare Vietnamese law with the models of some countries with effective anti-corruption systems such as Singapore, South Korea, and OECD countries. The comparison focuses on the following factors: the level of independence of corruption investigation agencies, asset verification mechanisms based on interconnected data, accountability standards of heads and mechanisms for recovering illicit assets. The comparison results provide a scientific basis to assess the compatibility of Vietnamese law with international practices and suggest feasible reform directions.

Policy analysis and interdisciplinary approach: In addition to analyzing legal norms, the study applies a policy analysis approach to explain the reasons why many legal regulations are not effective in practice. This method places the law in relation to economics, public administration, and data science, thereby showing that the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures depends not only on the content of the norms but also on institutional capacity, the behavioral motivation of civil servants, the technical conditions of the information system, and the level of social supervision. The interdisciplinary approach helps the study achieve comprehensiveness and overcome the limitations of purely normative analysis.

Synthesis and logical reasoning method: The study uses synthesis and logical reasoning methods to connect the analysis results, thereby forming arguments in the discussion section and proposing solutions. The synthesis is based on a reasonable connection between legal structure, application practice, and international experience, ensuring that the recommendations are both scientifically grounded and suitable to Vietnam's conditions.

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the analysis of the current state of design and implementation of anti-corruption laws in Vietnam based on normative approaches and practical application. The main findings are organized into core groups of issues reflecting the adequacy of the legal framework, its effectiveness, and its ability to meet the requirements of power control in the context of modern governance.

The Anti-Corruption Legal Framework Has Been Formed But Lacks Synchronous Operation.

The analysis results show that Vietnam has built a relatively comprehensive legal foundation to prevent corruption. However, this system still lacks synchronous and consistent operation between institutions and groups of regulations. The 2005 Anti-Corruption Law is the first law to create a unified legal basis for anti-corruption activities in the public sector, laying the foundation for mechanisms of publicity, transparency, asset declaration, and responsibility of the head (National Assembly 2005). However, many regulations in this period are still heavy on principles and not deep enough to be transformed into mandatory management processes.

The promulgation of the 2018 Law on Anti-Corruption marked an important development by expanding the scope of regulation to the private sector, while adding many provisions related to controlling conflicts of interest, accountability, asset transparency, and handling corruption in both the public and private sectors (National Assembly 2018). However, when considering the operational capacity of this legal system, it is possible to see a gap between the provisions on paper and the ability to enforce in practice.

First, the regulations on prevention mainly stop at the framework level, lacking specific instructions for implementation in each high-risk area, such as land, bidding, and public finance. Competent authorities are often confused in handling situations due to the lack of criteria for assessing behavior or standard procedures for inspection and supervision. This situation creates a gap in the ability to apply the law consistently across parts of the state apparatus.

Second, the regulations on transparency and declaration of assets and income are broad in scope but lack a mechanism to ensure enforcement. Declarations mainly rely on the self-awareness of declarants, while verification agencies lack tools to compare data between tax, banking, and property registration systems. This lack of synchronization makes the detection of unusual assets depend more on individual denunciations than on the state's proactive control ability.

Third, the fragmentation of the law enforcement system is clearly shown through the overlapping of powers between inspection, audit, investigation, and prosecution. Ineffective coordination between agencies leads to prolonged processing time, even losing opportunities to detect and recover corrupt assets. According to Forde (2022), corruption in Vietnam is characterized by a complex network of interests, so the lack of uniformity in legal design easily creates space for interest groups to take advantage. At the same time, according to Anh et al. (2016), corruption has a clear negative impact on economic growth, and the effectiveness of the legal system is one of the factors that determine the ability to control corruption.

In general, although the legal framework is relatively complete, the lack of harmony between groups of regulations, the lack of specific operational criteria, and the lack of effective coordination mechanisms between enforcement agencies have made the system unable to achieve the necessary synchronization. This is a major barrier to the effectiveness of anti-corruption in the current context.

The Mechanism of Transparency and Declaration of Assets and Income is Formal and Does Not Create Deterrence

The analysis results show that the mechanism of transparency and declaration of assets and income in Vietnam, although designed to become an important tool to control power and prevent corruption, in reality, does not create the necessary deterrence. This stems from both limitations in the legal framework and factors related to the organization of enforcement.

The 2005 Anti-Corruption Law for the first time stipulated the obligation to declare assets for several groups of subjects holding positions and powers in the public sector, considering this an important preventive measure to detect irregular assets and enhance the accountability of civil servants (National Assembly 2005). However, this mechanism was designed around self-declaration and was not linked to independent verification or comparison of data with information systems of tax authorities, banks, or property registration. This led to a situation where many declarations were procedural, lacked accuracy, and did not show a full picture of the declarant's actual assets.

The 2018 Anti-Corruption Law has expanded the scope of asset declarations, added provisions on public disclosure of declarations in some cases, and increased verification requirements when there are signs of irregularities (National Assembly 2018). However, the effectiveness of the new regulations has not met expectations due to the lack of enforcement mechanisms. Currently, most asset verifications are only conducted upon denunciation or request from competent authorities, while periodic or random verification mechanisms have not been widely applied. This creates an important gap in the State's proactive control capacity.

According to Hoang and Dinh (2022), corruption in Vietnam also stems from objective causes related to the public asset management mechanism and economic interests, in which the lack of transparency and the lack of an independent inspection system for the assets of people in positions of authority are factors that increase risks. When the asset and income declaration mechanism is not effectively monitored, the risk of concealing income, taking advantage of work positions to create illegal assets, or transferring assets through intermediaries is very likely to occur.

In addition, research results on the impact of local corruption on business investment activities show that the lack of transparency in asset management by officials at the local level reduces business confidence and hinders capital flows into investment projects (Nguyen et al. 2024). This proves that the asset transparency mechanism not only affects the quality of public administration but also has a direct impact on the business environment and economic development.

Another important factor is the low level of handling violations in asset declaration. Cases of dishonest declarations are mainly handled with reprimands or warnings; very few cases are criminally prosecuted or result in resignation. The lack of strict sanctions makes the declaration mechanism a formal activity, not strong enough to prevent the act of concealing assets.

In general, although the transparency and declaration mechanism of assets and income has been formed and has been improved through many stages of legislation, the lack of synchronization between regulations and enforcement, along with the lack of an independent verification system, has made this mechanism unable to create deterrence. This requires continued reform toward digitizing asset information, strengthening independent verification, and improving the accountability of people in positions of authority, to turn asset declaration into a real tool for preventing corruption.

Ineffective Protection of Whistleblowers, Creating Barriers in Detecting Violations

The analysis results show that the mechanism for protecting whistleblowers in Vietnam, although stipulated in many legal documents and emphasized in many stages of institutional reform, is still very limited in its effectiveness. This is one of the biggest barriers to early detection of violations and prevention of corrupt behavior in both the public and private sectors.

First, corruption in Vietnam is characterized by complex interest relationships and structural power networks, which often put whistleblowers at risk of retaliation or isolation in the working environment. Forde (2022) points out that crony relationships and power accumulation structures in the administrative apparatus create invisible pressure on those who provide information about wrongdoing. When the environment does not ensure legal security, whistleblowers are unlikely to come forward to report the incident.

Second, although the anti-corruption law has provisions on whistleblower protection, the enforcement mechanism is unclear. In many cases, the identity of the whistleblower is still revealed during the verification process, putting them in a high-risk situation. According to Hoang and Dinh (2022), psychological factors of fear and lack of confidence in the effectiveness of state agencies' protection are among the objective reasons why corruption reporting is not encouraged. This means that the number of corruption cases discovered through internal reporting is still low compared to the actual level of violations.

Third, retaliation and repression against whistleblowers still occur in many different forms, from income deductions and negative evaluations to transfers to positions with unfavorable working conditions. Doan (2025) stated that corruption in the non-state sector is increasingly complex, and whistleblowers in this sector are subject to fewer protection mechanisms than in the public sector. This creates a large gap in the ability to prevent and detect misconduct in private enterprises.

Fourth, reporting corruption is directly related to the investment environment and the stability of business operations. Research by Dung and Thanh (2023) shows that businesses often avoid reporting corrupt behavior because they fear being made difficult in the licensing process or retaliation by local interest groups. This shows that the lack of whistleblower protection mechanisms not only reduces the effectiveness of detecting corruption but also negatively impacts the investment environment.

In addition, Giang’s (2024) study shows that although recent anti-corruption campaigns have had a strong effect, they have not yet created a structural change in the protection mechanism for whistleblowers. Many cases of denunciation are only resolved when there is clear evidence, but accompanying support measures such as legal advice, temporary support, or job relocation are not properly implemented. In addition, Huy et al.’s (2025) study shows that the economic environment tends to respond positively when anti-corruption activities are implemented transparently and fairly. However, to achieve this, whistleblowers must be guaranteed safety and not be exposed to legal or professional risks.

The above findings confirm that the protection of whistleblowers against corruption has not been implemented fully and effectively. The lack of a robust protection mechanism not only reduces the ability to detect violations but also weakens the anti-corruption system in both the public and private sectors. This requires restoring confidence in the protection mechanism by improving legal regulations, developing independent support institutions and strengthening the responsibility of the agencies receiving denunciations.

Overlapping Powers Among Inspection, Audit, Investigation and Prosecution Agencies Reduce The Effectiveness of Handling

One of the important findings of the study is that the overlapping functions among inspection, audit, investigation and prosecution agencies have reduced the effectiveness of handling corruption cases in practice. The system of these agencies is organized in a decentralized structure, in which many entities have the right to detect and recommend handling violations. However, there is no mandatory and unified coordination mechanism. The lack of connectivity and a common coordination mechanism has created gaps in determining responsibilities and led to prolonged processing. Specifically:

First, inspection and audit have the same function of detecting violations but lack a unified process in handling initial conclusions. Many cases only stop at administrative recommendations, although there are signs of a crime, and the files are not transferred to the investigation agency according to a clear process. This reality reflects the opinion of Bui Hai Thiem (2019) that the effectiveness of the integrity system is limited by inadequate coordination between agencies, causing many cases to be delayed for a long time and increasing the risk of violations being missed.

Second, when the investigation agency receives a case, information sharing between inspection, audit, and investigation is not smooth. In cases with collusion or the participation of interest groups, information is more fragmented and difficult to verify. Forde (2022) argues that interest networks within the state apparatus create invisible barriers to the flow of information, making it difficult for investigative agencies to access the evidence needed to handle corruption.

Third, the role of the Procuracy in supervising investigative activities has not been fully implemented, leading to a lack of uniformity between localities. Although the Procuracy has the duty to supervise the legality of investigative activities, in many cases it has not thoroughly implemented the request for additional investigation or inspection of violations during the handling process. Giang (2024) comments that although the anti-corruption campaign has created great changes, the mechanism for coordinating prosecution has not yet reached a level of effectiveness commensurate with practical requirements.

Fourth, the situation of overlapping jurisdiction also has a negative impact on the economic environment and business operations. Bai et al. (2017) point out that businesses often face multiple inspection and audit teams, which increases compliance costs and facilitates corrupt practices. Dung and Thanh (2023) argue that the lack of coordination among enforcement agencies makes businesses more vulnerable to policy access and reduces incentives to invest in the domestic market.

Fifth, the fragmentation of functions also reduces the ability to detect and handle corruption in the non-state sector. Doan (2025) emphasizes that many violations in the private sector are slow to be detected because it is unclear which agency is responsible for handling them, while the inter-sectoral coordination mechanism has not been fully established. This increases the risk of forming less controlled spaces where violations take place secretly and are difficult to trace.

Sixth, from a political perspective, important Party documents emphasize the need to strengthen coordination between anti-corruption agencies. The 12th and 13th Congresses affirmed that it is necessary to strengthen the unity and synchronization in inspecting and monitoring violations to improve the effectiveness of anti-corruption (CPV 2016 & 2021). However, implementation practices show that there is still a significant gap between policy direction and implementation at all levels, causing the effectiveness of corruption control to fall short of expectations.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that the overlapping of authority between inspection, audit, investigation, and prosecution agencies has created a major barrier to timely and effective handling of corruption. This is an issue that needs to be addressed through legal reform and restructuring of coordination mechanisms to ensure consistency and transparency in the entire anti-corruption system.

Low Results in Recovering Corrupt Assets, Lack Of Mechanisms For Handling Unexplained Assets

One of the notable findings of the study is that the effectiveness of recovering corrupt assets in Vietnam is still low, despite many important amendments to the legal system. The 2018 Anti-Corruption Law has added many mechanisms related to asset transparency, asset verification, and public declaration. However, the recovery of misappropriated assets still faces many limitations due to the lack of strong enough enforcement tools (National Assembly 2018). The gap between legal regulations and their practical application shows that this is an area that needs extensive reform to minimize the loss of State assets.

First, the low results of asset recovery are partly due to the lack of full legal recognition of the mechanism for handling unexplained assets and the lack of application of the asset origin explanation model according to the approach of many countries. Nguyen and Nguyen (2025) stated that the biggest limitation of the anti-corruption system in Vietnam lies in the lack of a strong enough accountability mechanism for abnormally increased assets, leading to a situation where enforcement agencies find it difficult to prove the elements of a crime. In the context of a lack of independent civil measures to recover unexplained assets, the handling still depends mainly on criminal judgments, causing many cases to escape prosecution.

Second, the ability to detect and trace corrupt assets is limited due to the lack of interconnected data between management agencies such as tax, banking, and land registration. This reduces the effectiveness of asset monitoring, especially in cases involving collusion between officials and businesses. Nguyen et al. (2024) point out that local corruption can negatively affect the investment environment because businesses are concerned about assets and investment capital being affected by illegal acts. When information systems are not connected, and asset control mechanisms are fragmented, the ability to detect corrupt assets being dispersed abroad or transferred through relatives becomes more difficult.

Third, investigative media and specialized press have not yet fully played their role in detecting illicit assets. Nguyen and Nhan (2024) argue that the press can become an important tool in detecting suspicious assets. However, the current legal framework does not create favorable conditions for the press to access information fully. When social monitoring channels are not effectively supported, the ability to detect illicit assets is further limited, especially in cases involving interest groups or complex power structures. Fourth, the international context shows that many countries have included anti-corruption provisions in investment treaties to protect investors and ensure transparency in the business environment. Teramura and Nottage (2025) argue that investment treaties in East Asia and South Asia are increasingly incorporating anti-corruption elements, considering this a criterion for ensuring policy stability. Vietnam’s failure to fully apply international cooperation mechanisms in tracing corrupt assets has resulted in many assets being dispersed abroad and not being recovered promptly.

Fifth, the Party’s reports on anti-corruption over the past ten years show that the rate of asset recovery has not yet met the set targets. Politburo (2022) acknowledges that the verification of asset origins still faces many limitations, especially in cases involving high-ranking officials. This is consistent with the assessment of Vu (2025), who argues that asset losses and negative behaviors can be prolonged in the absence of effective monitoring mechanisms. Finally, recovering corrupt assets is also difficult because the current criminal law system lacks a mechanism to separate criminal assets from legitimate assets in many complex cases. Van et al. (2024) argue that the Vietnamese legal tradition has always placed great importance on proving criminal elements. However, in the context of sophisticated corruption, it is necessary to update asset handling models in a more proactive direction. These analyses confirm that the effectiveness of asset recovery is still low due to the lack of modern legal tools and inter-sectoral coordination, requiring strong reforms in the coming time.

DISCUSSION

One of the central issues of this study is the lack of uniformity in the anti-corruption legal system, reflected in the dispersion of authority among inspection, audit, investigation and prosecution agencies. The findings in the previous section show that overlapping functions create control gaps, prolonging the process of detecting and handling corruption and increasing the risk of missing violations. This observation is consistent with the view of Bui (2019) that the reform of the integrity system in Vietnam still lacks in-depth coordination between enforcement agencies, leading to low overall effectiveness. Thus, one important theoretical issue is to perfect the mechanism of assigning responsibilities so that the anti-corruption system operates in a unified and effective logic.

The practice of overlapping jurisdictions also reflects the absence of conflict-resolution regulations and a clear hierarchy between the agencies with control functions. When multiple agencies have the same inspection and examination powers, enterprises and officials face pressure from different inspection teams, increasing the risk of harassment, as pointed out by Bai et al. From this perspective, improving the law is not only to fight corruption but also to reduce compliance costs and create a healthy investment environment. This is consistent with the observation of Dung and Thanh (2023) that enterprises are directly affected by inconsistencies in the enforcement system. This clearly demonstrates the need for legal reform to reduce the dispersion of authority and strengthen the coordination mechanism.

Another prominent issue in the discussion related to the formality in the asset and income transparency mechanism. The findings indicate that the current asset declaration system has not become an effective tool in controlling corruption due to the lack of independent verification mechanisms and measures to deal with assets of unexplained origin. Nguyen and Nguyen (2025) argue that Vietnam does not have a strong enough accountability mechanism for abnormally increased assets, leading to low deterrence. Politburo (2022) assesses that it is necessary to strengthen the asset verification mechanism based on the separation between the declaration rights of officials and the inspection rights of independent agencies. Thus, legal reform in this area should move towards a public and data-based asset management model.

Another challenge discovered is the low efficiency of recovering corrupt assets. This issue stems not only from domestic laws but also from the international context and the ability to cooperate across borders. Nobumichi Teramura & Luke Nottage (2025) show that many countries have included anti-corruption provisions in investment treaties to create mechanisms to protect investors and at the same time, enhance cooperation in asset tracing. Meanwhile, Nguyen et al. (2024) emphasize the difficulty in tracing assets at the local level due to the lack of cross-sectoral data. The combination of the two factors of lack of domestic connectivity and lack of international cooperation makes Vietnam face a dual challenge in recovering corrupt assets. To solve this problem, it is necessary to adjust both national and international laws simultaneously.

Another important factor discussed is the role of investigative journalism and the media in anti-corruption. Nguyen and Nhan (2024) emphasize that the press can act as a powerful channel of social monitoring. However, the current legal framework does not facilitate the press's access to data on assets and investigation results. This leads to limitations in detecting illicit assets, especially in cases involving interest groups. From the perspective of social monitoring, it can be seen that the law needs to empower non-state actors more strongly to form a multi-dimensional control mechanism. This is also one of the important recommendations from the theory of power control that many countries have successfully applied.

Another discussion topic is related to the relationship between legal design and enforcement capacity. Forde (2022) points out that the presence of interest accumulation networks in the public apparatus makes many legal provisions ineffective. Giang (2014) also states that the anti-corruption campaign has achieved remarkable results but has not yet completely overcome the shortcomings in litigation coordination. This shows that the law can only be effective when placed in a political and administrative environment that is transparent enough, capable of self-regulation, and able to handle interest groups. Thus, legal reform must go hand in hand with apparatus reform to create a solid foundation for enforcement.

The improvement of anti-corruption laws needs to be based on a comprehensive approach that combines criminal law, administrative law, financial law and public administration. Van et al. (2024) show that the Vietnamese legal tradition emphasizes proving crimes, while the international trend is expanding the mechanism for recovering assets independent of criminal judgments. Vu (2025) asserts that legal reform must aim to enhance asset monitoring and limit the ability to dissipate assets before they are detected. Taken together, these arguments suggest that anti-corruption legal reform must be grounded in both legal theory and governance practices, aiming to create a unified, effective, and workable legal environment.

International Implications and Contribution of The Discussion

The following discussion is retained as a contribution-oriented subsection rather than a separate section, so that the manuscript's international significance is directly connected to the analytical findings and reform arguments developed above.

This study makes an important contribution to the international discussion on anti-corruption by highlighting the structural challenges that Vietnam is facing in its legal reform process. One of the international values of the study is that it provides a typical case of a country transitioning towards strengthening integrity and preventing corruption based on the rule of law. When placing Vietnam in the general context of the Asian region, it can be seen that the shortcomings in accountability, asset transparency and asset recovery are not isolated problems. According to Forde (2022), many developing countries are hampered by networks of interests that can undermine the effectiveness of the rule of law, and the case of Vietnam is a typical example of how institutions can create barriers to legal reform. The study thus contributes to the broader understanding of the academic community on anti-corruption models in the specific political-administrative context of the region.

The second contribution of the study is reflected in the analysis of the asset recovery mechanism in comparison with international standards. Nguyen and Nguyen (2025) point out that Vietnam has not yet built an asset accountability mechanism that is compatible with the trend of increasing asset recovery that is widely applied in many countries. Compared with Nobumichi Teramura & Luke Nottage's (2025) view of the development of anti-corruption provisions in investment treaties in East Asia and South Asia, Vietnam faces the need to improve its international cooperation capacity in tracing and recovering assets outside its borders. This makes an important contribution to the global discussion on the difficulties of transitional countries in accessing new international standards. The study also suggests that Vietnam can learn from asset recovery models that do not depend on criminal convictions, a measure that many countries are applying to overcome the situation of hiding assets through relatives or intermediaries.

The third contribution lies in the way the study explains the role of investigative media in controlling power. Nguyen and Nhan (2024) argue that the press can be a key factor in promoting transparency, but the current legal framework does not provide sufficient access to information for the press. By placing this finding in an international context, the study expands the discussion on the legal safeguards for investigative journalism, which is considered an important standard in the integrity systems of many countries. This comparison helps international researchers better understand how the legal environment affects the ability to monitor power in different political regimes, especially in developing countries.

In addition, the study contributes to the international forum by analyzing the impact of corruption on the business environment in emerging economies. Bai et al. (2017) found that corruption reduces firm growth, a finding that is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2024), who found that local corruption undermines firm confidence in the legal system. Taken together, these results support the assertion that corruption is a major barrier to economic development in the context of integration. This helps to bring the case of Vietnam into the international discussion on the relationship between institutional quality and economic performance, while adding empirical evidence from a dynamic transition economy.

Finally, the study contributes to international comparisons by showing that anti-corruption is only effective when the synchronization between law and enforcement is ensured. Giang (2024) argues that the anti-corruption campaign has brought about many results but still exposed institutional weaknesses that cannot be overcome immediately. When combined with Vu's (2025) assessment of the need to strengthen asset supervision, the study contributes to strengthening the argument that legal reform must go hand in hand with apparatus reform and strengthening power control. This is an important message for the international community in the context of many countries seeking anti-corruption models that are suitable for their socio-political conditions.

CONCLUSION

The research results show that Vietnam's anti-corruption legal system has made important strides but still has many limitations in design and implementation. The findings show that the dispersion of authority between inspection, audit, investigation and prosecution reduces the effectiveness of handling, while the asset transparency mechanism remains mainly a formality. The low rate of recovery of corrupt assets, despite the need for reform, reflects the lack of modern legal tools, especially mechanisms for handling illicit assets. These conclusions show that the current anti-corruption law has not formed a sufficiently robust operating system to curb corruption in an increasingly complex context. Research has shown that the effectiveness of anti-corruption depends not only on the promulgation of regulations but also on the capacity to coordinate enforcement and transparency in public administration. The network of interest groups has weakened the effectiveness of the law, and corruption burdens businesses and affects growth. Anti-corruption standards have become a requirement of many international investment agreements, thereby emphasizing the need for legal reform to enhance Vietnam's reputation in economic integration. Thus, improving anti-corruption laws is meaningful in terms of both institutional stability and economic development. However, the study is still limited in that it has not exploited quantitative data and has not analyzed in depth the impact of recent reforms in each specific field. Therefore, the next research direction should focus on empirically assessing the level of compliance with the law, the impact of reforms on corruption behavior, and the ability to apply advanced asset recovery models mentioned in international studies. This will contribute to perfecting the scientific basis for amending the law and improving the effectiveness of anti-corruption in the coming period.

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Data Availability Statement

The study is based on publicly available legal documents, official reports, published case information, and scholarly sources cited in the manuscript. No primary datasets involving human participants were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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