

The Convergence of Left and Right in Latin America: A Study of Operation Car Wash in Light of the Ecoplan Engineering Case

1Cristiano Trindade De Angelis
Independent researcher

Abstract: Despite limitations in the measurement of certain indicators of the Global Knowledge Index, particularly those concerning pre-university and higher education, the rankings of Peru (66th) and Brazil (75th) find some support in the academic literature and empirical evidence. This is less evident in the case of Italy (32nd) and several European countries with historical and cultural connections to Italy, including the Czech Republic (19th), Slovenia (20th), Malta (25th), Poland (26th), Spain (28th), and Latvia (30th). Brazil and Peru are particularly relevant to the analysis because they were central to Operation Car Wash (Lava Jato), one of the largest anti-corruption investigations in Latin America, which originated in Brazil and subsequently extended to Peru, a country historically associated with the Inca civilization.

The study advances the hypothesis that cultural and linguistic patterns may influence the balance between tacit and explicit knowledge, with potential implications for transparency, institutional accountability, and, consequently, levels of corruption. According to the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), Brazil recorded approximately -0.4 and Peru -0.7 for the Control of Corruption indicator, on a scale ranging approximately from -2.5 (weakest control of corruption) to +2.5 (strongest control), indicating relatively weak corruption control in both countries and a more vulnerable institutional environment in Peru.

The literature, including the work of O'Donnell, Van de Walle, Bouckaert, Van Ryzin, Vigoda-Gadot, Welch, Andía, Hamada, Casas-Zamora, and Zovatto, suggests that democratization in Latin America did not necessarily eliminate corruption. In some circumstances, intensified electoral competition and increasing campaign costs may have strengthened incentives for illicit political financing and clientelism. Other scholars have observed that informal practices may temporarily circumvent inefficient bureaucratic procedures and compensate, to some extent, for institutional weaknesses. Nevertheless, when such practices become institutionalized, corruption undermines transparency, public accountability, institutional effectiveness, and democratic quality.

Following the analytical premise that it is first necessary to identify the origins and underlying causes of a problem, then establish its manifestations and consequences before evaluating possible solutions, this study examines the relationship between education, culture, knowledge, and corruption. It treats Sergio Moro's discussion of the Italian Mani Pulite operation (Moro, 2004) as one interpretive reference within a broader literature on systemic corruption, institutional coordination, accountability, and knowledge governance, and tests those propositions against the Brazilian context, including the Ecoplan Engenharia case in Porto Alegre. Rather than attributing anti-corruption capacity to individual judges, prosecutors, or political leaders, the analysis emphasizes institutional learning, coordination among oversight bodies, public participation, and the conversion of dispersed information into usable knowledge. In this context, selected principles associated with the collaborative, collective, and accountability-oriented traditions of Inca society are used as a historical and cultural reference for reflecting on institutional reform in contemporary Latin America.

This culture could contribute to addressing the next wave of corruption in Latin America, particularly with regard to the Bioceanic Integration Corridor.

Despite the boosts to regional value chains in agribusiness (€21–22 billion annually between Brazil and Germany, with no scientific source), mining (Peru–Germany: US\$2.1–2.3 billion, OECD source), and manufacturing (€21 billion in bilateral Brazil–Germany trade, again with no scientific source), Peru, with its strong original Inca culture, is outside the program because the country was experiencing a severe political crisis after changing presidents four times following the detention of Pedro Castillo on December 7, 2022, culminating in the return of Fujimori rule to the country this year.

Keywords: Car was operation in Brazil-Peru; corruption, cultural change; Ecoplan; intelligence

I. Introduction

Relations between Italy and Poland-Latvia are not well known.

Without addressing the military issue, bilateral trade between Italy and Latvia grew by 30% between 2020 and 2023 and exceeded €1 billion in 2022, in addition to the presence of Italian companies through investment and the European Rail Baltica project.

The Polish–Italian military relationship constitutes a strategic-industrial partnership, supported by cooperation among Leonardo, PZL Świdnik, and the Polish state defense complex, with particular emphasis on the AW149, AW101, and M-346 programs. More than an arms-trade relationship, this cooperation involves local production, technology transfer, maintenance, personnel training, and integration of defense-production chains. Within the institutional framework of the EU and NATO, it demonstrates the growing interdependence of Italian and Polish industrial, technological, and strategic capabilities, which has intensified exponentially since 2017, given Donald Tusk’s position as President of the European Council from late 2014 onward.

The influence of Italy and Spain on Latin America is also highly relevant.

Italy’s and Spain’s relationship with South America is deep, but the two links have different characteristics. Spain has a more structured institutional, linguistic, and cultural connection, while Italy has a particularly strong connection through immigration, descendant communities, and economic and business relations, especially with Brazil and Italy (Bosque 2007; Toral, 2008; Farej, 2023).

Language has a strong impact on the literacy process, and the Latin language is closely related to tacit knowledge and the syllabic literacy method. This affects the transparency of the actions of individuals and organizations and therefore influences corruption indices in these countries, an issue that is already well established in the academic literature.

However, the articles examined do not show the details of corruption in Latin America, and this study seeks to fill that gap by discussing Operation Car Wash, which borrowed the idea of Italy’s Mani Pulite operation in an attempt to reduce corruption in Brazil and was terminated by then-President Jair Bolsonaro in 2022.

It had a task force in Peru because of corruption, also involving the political right, on the part of Peru’s current president, Keiko Fujimori, through the company Odebrecht, founded by Germans, which has provided substantial assistance to Peru and Brazil in agriculture.

The German foundation of Odebrecht (now called Novonor) lies in its family history: the German engineer Emil Odebrecht immigrated from Germany to Brazil in 1856 and settled in Santa Catarina. He and his descendants participated in engineering and construction activities, and his great-grandson Norberto Odebrecht founded, in 1944, the company that would later become the Odebrecht Organization.

According to United States District Court Eastern District of New York, in the legal case WMP/DK:JN/AS Fr. 2016R007090 (2016) Odebrecht, currently organized under the Novonor holding structure, admitted to paying approximately US\$788 million in bribes across twelve countries between 2001 and 2016. Of this amount, approximately US\$349 million was attributed to corrupt payments in Brazil, from which the company derived more than US\$1.9 billion in improper benefits. Considering the South American countries individually identified in the U.S. plea documents—Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela—the disclosed bribe payments total approximately US\$555.5 million. These figures should not be interpreted as the total economic loss suffered by governments, but as documented corrupt payments; the U.S. Department of Justice estimated approximately US\$3.336 billion in illicit benefits associated with the overall international scheme. The former Odebrecht group adopted the name Novonor in 2020; Novonor remains the holding company, headquartered in Salvador, Bahia, while its construction business currently operates under the Odebrecht Engenharia & Construção brand (United States District Court Eastern District of New York, 2016).

Pohlmann et al. (2019) argue that corruption in Brazil is systemic and not merely the result of individual acts, allowing corruption to become particularly entrenched in the Brazilian construction sector.

Medrano-Sanchez and Mamani-Salinas (2026), in the article “Extractive fiscal governance and subnational SDG progress: a systemic analysis of mining canon redistribution in Peru, 2012–2024,” demonstrate that dependence on mining and institutional weaknesses in the mineral-revenue distribution system produce a “resource curse,” with territorial asymmetries and governance limitations that reduce the ability of mining revenues to generate effective social development in Peru.

Given the seriousness of these facts, it is necessary to determine whether the statements of the former professor at the Federal University of Paraná, former federal judge, former Minister of Justice, and current Senator of the Republic, in his comparative study with Italy, are correct (Moro, 2004):

- The importance of coordinated action by the institutions responsible for investigating and combating corruption.
- The fight against corruption must involve changing the nation’s ethical culture.

Against this brief Europe–South America background, and taking advantage of the Mercosur–European Community agreement in the field of agriculture, the flagship sector of Latin American economies, this study reviews the literature on Education, Social Participation and Control, National Culture, and Corruption in order to propose a new Operation Condor in South America—this time not military, but educational and therefore cultural.

Accordingly, this study is divided into the following sections:

1. Tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge, and educational innovation in Latin countries.
2. The problem of education in Latin American countries
3. A reflection on corruption focusing on Latin countries and verbal communication: the need for knowledge, transparency, and social participation/control
4. A new strategy: combating corruption through knowledge
5. Corruption in Brazil: a case study of Ecoplan Engenharia, Porto Alegre, involving one of the world's largest civil engineering companies, the Dutch company Arcadis
6. An analysis of Operation Car Wash in Brazil and Peru
7. Discussion of the results
8. Conclusions and suggestions for future research

II. A brief about studies of OCDE (education & fake news) and GKI index from UNDP and PISA, the Global Knowledge Index and the Problem of Measuring Educational and Knowledge Performance

A comparison between the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Global Knowledge Index (GKI), and other international indicators reveals an important methodological tension: these instruments do not measure the same phenomenon, yet they are frequently interpreted as if they provided equivalent assessments of national educational and knowledge performance. This distinction is particularly relevant when comparing Brazil and Italy. PISA evaluates the competencies of 15-year-old students in mathematics, reading, and science, whereas the GKI adopts a multidimensional conception of knowledge encompassing pre-university education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), higher education, research and development and innovation (RDI), information and communication technologies (ICT), the economy, and the enabling environment (OECD, 2023; UNDP, 2024).

The contrast is especially evident in the PISA results. In 2022, Brazilian students obtained mean scores of 379 in mathematics, 410 in reading, and 403 in science, compared with OECD averages of 472, 476, and 485, respectively. Italy, by contrast, scored 471 in mathematics, 482 in reading, and 477 in science, placing it close to the OECD average overall (OECD, 2023). The difference is also visible at the minimum proficiency level: only 27% of Brazilian students reached Level 2 or above in mathematics, compared with 69% across OECD countries, whereas Italy reached 70%. In reading, the corresponding figures were 50% for Brazil and 79% for Italy; in science, 45% and 76%, respectively (OECD, 2023).

These results indicate a substantial weakness in Brazil's foundational competencies among 15-year-olds. However, they cannot by themselves establish that Brazil possesses a correspondingly weak national knowledge system. PISA is deliberately focused on a specific population and a restricted set of competencies. It does not directly measure the capacity of a country to generate scientific knowledge, sustain universities, produce technological innovation, develop ICT infrastructure, finance research, or create institutional conditions conducive to knowledge production. Consequently, using PISA as a proxy for the entire national knowledge system risks a category error.

The GKI was explicitly designed to address this limitation. The 2024 GKI comprises seven composite dimensions: pre-university education, TVET, higher education, RDI, ICT, economy, and enabling environment. The latter incorporates social, political, economic, health, governance, and environmental conditions that influence the functioning of knowledge systems (UNDP, 2024). The methodological distinction is fundamental: PISA primarily measures what a particular generation of students can do, while the GKI attempts to measure the institutional ecosystem through which knowledge is produced, transmitted, applied, and supported.

This distinction helps explain why rankings may appear inconsistent. A country can perform relatively poorly in PISA while possessing universities, research institutions, ICT capabilities, innovation systems, or economic structures that raise its broader knowledge performance. Conversely, a country can achieve strong student outcomes while exhibiting weaknesses in research capacity, higher education, innovation, or institutional conditions. The GKI therefore should not be expected to reproduce PISA rankings. Rather, the divergence between the indices can itself provide analytical information about the relationship—or disconnection—between foundational education and the broader knowledge ecosystem.

The 2024 GKI illustrates this point particularly clearly. Brazil ranked 72nd with a score of 67.4, while Italy ranked 31st with a score of 76.5. This ordering is broadly compatible with the large PISA gap between the two countries, but the two indicators reach their conclusions through fundamentally different routes. PISA identifies a pronounced weakness in Brazilian 15-year-olds' demonstrated competencies; the GKI evaluates a much broader structure extending from schooling to higher education, research, digital infrastructure, economic competitiveness, and institutional conditions. Thus, the fact that both indicators place Italy above Brazil does

not demonstrate that they measure the same construct. It demonstrates that different dimensions of national development may converge in their comparative assessment.

The problem becomes more complex when other international rankings are introduced. University rankings such as QS, for example, emphasize institutional and research-related dimensions rather than the competencies of the general school-age population. Similarly, the Human Development Index (HDI) captures a broader conception of human development, including education, health, and income, while innovation indices emphasize research, technological outputs, business sophistication, and knowledge creation. These measures can therefore produce apparently contradictory results without necessarily being statistically or conceptually erroneous. They answer different questions.

The GKI itself recognizes this multidimensionality. Its methodology incorporates variables from numerous international sources, including UNESCO, the World Bank, ITU, WEF, IMF, OECD, and ILO, and combines hard data, composite indicators, and survey-based measures (UNDP, 2022). The index was constructed precisely because knowledge cannot be reduced to education or technology alone. The European Commission's Competence Centre on Composite Indicators and Scoreboards similarly characterizes the GKI as a multidimensional framework designed to capture the interaction among education, TVET, higher education, RDI, ICT, economy, and the enabling environment (European Commission, 2022).

The critical implication is that PISA should be interpreted as an outcome measure of foundational competencies, whereas the GKI should be interpreted as a systemic measure of knowledge capacity. The former is closer to the question, "What do students know and what can they do?"; the latter is closer to, "What institutional, educational, technological, economic, and governance capacities enable a country to create and use knowledge?" Confusing these questions can generate misleading conclusions about national educational performance.

The Brazil–Italy comparison is therefore analytically valuable. Brazil's PISA results reveal a serious problem in foundational learning, particularly mathematics, reading, and science. The OECD reports that Brazilian PISA performance has remained remarkably stable since 2009 and that only 20% of 15-year-olds reached at least Level 2 in mathematics in 2022, although this represents an increase from 14% in 2003 and occurred alongside substantial expansion in the population represented by the assessment (OECD, 2023). Italy, meanwhile, performs substantially better at the foundational level but is not uniformly superior: its mathematics performance declined in 2022, reading remained broadly flat over the longer term, and science, although improved relative to 2018, remained below earlier levels (OECD, 2023).

Consequently, neither PISA nor the GKI should be treated as a definitive measure of "knowledge" in isolation. Their greatest analytical value lies in their complementarity. PISA can identify failures in the acquisition of foundational competencies; the GKI can investigate whether national systems possess the institutional capacity to transform education into higher education, research, innovation, digital capability, and economic development. The discrepancy between indicators is therefore not necessarily an inconsistency to be eliminated. It can instead reveal where the transformation from information → knowledge → intelligence → innovation is succeeding or failing.

For Latin American countries in particular, this distinction is crucial. A national education system may expand access to schooling without generating corresponding improvements in learning outcomes. Conversely, universities, research institutions, technological sectors, and economic structures may develop capacities that are not immediately reflected in the performance of 15-year-olds. The central policy question is consequently not which index is "correct," but whether the different indicators collectively explain the mechanisms through which knowledge is acquired, codified, transmitted, institutionalized, and transformed into social and economic capacity.

The strongest interpretation, therefore, is that the apparent incompatibility between PISA, GKI, and other international indices is primarily epistemological and methodological rather than empirical. PISA provides a relatively focused measure of student competencies; GKI provides a systemic measure of knowledge ecosystems; university and innovation rankings capture still other dimensions. Their results should be triangulated rather than hierarchically ordered. Such an approach avoids both the reduction of national knowledge to school-test scores and the opposite error of interpreting a favorable composite knowledge ranking as evidence that foundational educational deficiencies are insignificant.

III. The Problem of Education among Latinos: Cultural Knowledge and the Transformation of Tacit into Explicit Knowledge

Choo (2003) distinguishes three forms of knowledge: tacit knowledge, associated with Polanyi (1983); explicit knowledge, expressed through rules and formal systems; and knowledge grounded in cultural experience. Tacit knowledge encompasses competencies, know-how, intuition, and experience acquired through formal and informal learning. Because it is experiential and subjective, it is expressed through perceptions,

narratives, metaphors, analogies, and other elements of organizational culture (Choo, 2003). Its transmission consequently depends on tradition, shared experience, examples, and training. Explicit knowledge, by contrast, can be formalized in systematic language and converted into data, scientific models, specifications, and manuals, facilitating its processing, transmission, and reuse (Nonaka et al., 2000). The transformation of tacit into explicit knowledge therefore depends substantially on cultural knowledge, socialization, and knowledge-management processes (Schatzi et al., 2001).

2. Although tacit knowledge is difficult to articulate, imitate, or substitute (Barney and Clark, 1991), it remains fundamental to innovation and to addressing complex educational problems. Gubbins and Dooley (2021) emphasize that social capital, particularly its relational dimension, facilitates the acquisition and sharing of tacit knowledge and thereby strengthens organizational innovation. Trust is similarly important, although its precise relationship with knowledge acquisition remains insufficiently established empirically (Palacios, 2022). While trust is widely recognized as relevant to knowledge transfer (Wijk, Jansen and Lyles, 2008), there is no consensus regarding which forms of trust are most effective (Alexopoulos and Buckley, 2013). Social relationships shape information flows and learning within networks (Borgatti and Cross, 2003), while knowledge seeking and the initiation of sharing processes constitute important stages of knowledge exchange (Hansen, 2005). Social identity may also strengthen psychological safety, encouraging individuals to seek and share tacit knowledge (Gubbins and Dooley, 2021). Consequently, Singh (2019) and Shrivastava et al. (2021) call for greater attention to the retention and concealment of both explicit and tacit knowledge and their implications for organizational performance.

The relationship between knowledge codification and innovation is particularly relevant to education. Park et al. (2022) found that explicit-knowledge transfer through manuals, guides, and structured procedures has a significant effect, whereas tacit knowledge alone does not necessarily produce a direct effect. This suggests that educational systems should develop mechanisms for converting teachers' experiential knowledge into explicit and reusable forms. Collaborative networks and digital platforms can support this process by facilitating knowledge dissemination and collective learning. Chesbrough and Teece (1996) emphasize the difficulty of generating innovation directly from tacit knowledge because of its inaccessible and uncoded character, reinforcing the strategic importance of organizational culture. A learning culture can strengthen social capital by promoting trust, collaboration, and continuous development (Lee and Han, 2024; Coleman, 1994; Pasupuleti and Bommali, 2023). Collaborative platforms likewise facilitate the dissemination of specialized knowledge, while narratives, metaphors, and examples remain effective mechanisms for transmitting experiential knowledge (Neethu Mohammed and Kamalanabhan, 2022; Van Houten, 2022).

In this sense, knowledge management should not be understood merely as an administrative mechanism for storing information. Its broader function is to transform individual, oral, experiential, and cultural knowledge into systematized knowledge that can be recorded, transmitted, evaluated, and reused. For education, this transformation is particularly significant because it connects organizational intelligence with the capacity of individuals and communities to preserve and expand what they already know.

De Angelis (2025) examines literacy in Brazil and Bolivia precisely from this perspective, interpreting literacy as a process through which tacit knowledge acquired through experience, orality, local culture, and community practices can become explicit, codified, and transmissible through reading and writing. Based on comparisons among Brazilian communities, including the semi-arid region of Bahia and the Rio Negro region of the Amazon, the study proposes Communities of Practice and Knowledge Management mechanisms to preserve and disseminate such knowledge. Although the study emphasizes the phonemic/phonetic method, a complementary interpretation suggests that syllabic approaches may facilitate the transition from orality to written representation by working with linguistic units that are more immediately perceptible in speech and writing (De Angelis, 2016).

The phonetic method systematically associates speech sounds with their graphic representations, developing listening, phoneme identification, and orthographic correspondence. Mortatti (2004) emphasizes the relevance of the phonemic method in the Brazilian context. Yet the broader significance of literacy extends beyond the choice of pedagogical technique. Literacy can be understood as a mechanism for transforming forms of knowledge: through mastery of the relationship between sound and writing, individuals acquire the capacity to encode experiences and knowledge that were initially oral and tacit, making them explicit, recordable, transmissible, and reusable. This is particularly relevant in Latin America, where community and cultural knowledge has frequently been transmitted orally. Collaborative networks, trust, social interaction, and Communities of Practice can facilitate this conversion by allowing the experiences of teachers, students, and communities to become systematized and shared.

The relationship between literacy and knowledge transformation is also supported by research on phonological development. Rathcke et al. (2024), studying Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong, examined whether familiarity

with writing systems based on phonemic segmentation influences phonological awareness. Storkel (2002) proposes that literacy begins with the organization of phonologically similar words, creating networks that progressively expand across the lexicon. In languages with complex syllabic structures, reorganization may also occur at the onset–rime level (De Cara & Goswami, 2002; Storkel, 2002). Nevertheless, the relationship between subsyllabic phonological awareness and alphabetic literacy acquisition remains complex (Anthony & Francis, 2005; Carroll et al., 2003; Ziegler & Goswami, 2005). Comparative research across languages is therefore essential for understanding how different literacy systems and pedagogical methods support reading and writing.

This educational problem must also be considered within the institutional and socioeconomic context of Latin America. Vázquez (2024) characterizes Latin America as comprising 33 countries extending from Mexico to Tierra del Fuego and including the Caribbean. Gómez-Mejía and colleagues employ the VUCA framework—volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—to describe the region. In developing economies, information institutions can reduce uncertainty in economic transactions (Verbeke and Kano, 2013), whereas weak institutional structures may undermine monitoring and control mechanisms (Dau et al., 2020). Regulatory deficiencies also affect the implementation of public policies and the protection of social actors (Hoskisson et al., 2000; Khama and Palepu, 2010). Education should therefore be understood not simply as the transmission of curricular content, but as institutional infrastructure for producing, organizing, and democratizing knowledge.

This perspective necessarily introduces the relationship between knowledge and power. For Foucault, knowledge is produced and organized in relation to a “will to power” (Moreira, 2014), making power and knowledge inseparable dimensions of social organization. Veiga-Neto further conceptualizes power as a network containing multiple and shifting points of resistance. Drawing on Quijano, Ballestrin (2013) demonstrates that coloniality did not disappear with the formal end of colonialism; rather, structures of domination continue to be reproduced through modern/colonial capitalist cultures and institutions (Grosfoguel, 2008). Unequal access to education and knowledge production can therefore be interpreted as a question of power: those who control knowledge possess greater capacity to interpret reality, formulate alternatives, influence institutions, and participate in social decisions.

This connection between education, knowledge, and power is also relevant to Reich’s analysis of authoritarian political behavior. Oliveira and Cruz (2009) explain that, in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1932), Reich sought to understand why socially oppressed populations might become receptive to authoritarian movements. His analysis does not treat fascism as an exclusive characteristic of particular peoples, but as an emotional and irrational disposition that can emerge under different social conditions. Education consequently becomes politically significant because limited access to knowledge, reading, and critical capacities can restrict individuals’ ability to evaluate political discourse, compare information, and resist manipulation.

Paulo Freire provides a particularly important Latin American perspective by connecting literacy with critical consciousness. Literacy should not be restricted to decoding written language; it should enable individuals to “read the world,” interpret their social reality, and participate consciously in its transformation. From this perspective, limited access to books and reading practices is not merely an educational deficiency but a constraint on a society’s ability to produce knowledge, critically evaluate information, and exercise social control over power. Education therefore becomes a means through which individuals move from being passive recipients of information to active producers and evaluators of knowledge.

International experience further demonstrates the importance of openness to external knowledge. Germany’s post–World War II development can be interpreted as an example of intercultural learning and institutional openness. Cultural intelligence involves comparing values, beliefs, assumptions, and traditions across societies, thereby expanding the capacity to understand alternative perspectives and innovate. Similar processes of international learning subsequently contributed to the economic transformation of countries such as India and China. Language proficiency, international mobility, and the capacity to compare cultural systems therefore constitute important forms of knowledge acquisition.

In the Brazilian and broader Latin American context, the educational challenge should consequently not be reduced to a choice between isolated pedagogical methods. The fundamental issue is the capacity of educational institutions to transform information into knowledge and knowledge into critical capacity. Reductions in educational investment, limited access to books, and insufficient emphasis on scientific and linguistic education may increase dependence on information produced by others. In societies characterized by unequal access to knowledge, this dependence can weaken citizens’ capacity to interpret information, evaluate public policies, and identify mechanisms of manipulation.

Literacy—including the debate between syllabic and phonetic/phonemic approaches—should therefore be embedded within a broader strategy of cognitive and social development. Mastery of the relationship among sounds, syllables, letters, words, and texts provides the basis for moving from orality to writing and,

subsequently, from information to systematized knowledge. This transition enables tacit, cultural, and experiential knowledge to become explicit, recorded, and shareable knowledge, strengthening intellectual autonomy. Thus, in Latin America, improving education means more than increasing literacy rates. It requires expanding the capacity of individuals and communities to preserve cultural knowledge, transform experience into explicit knowledge, participate in collaborative networks, and critically evaluate the information that shapes social and political life. The ultimate objective is not simply to teach people to read and write, but to reduce the social monopoly of knowledge and create conditions in which citizens become producers, evaluators, and active participants in the construction of knowledge.

IV. A reflection on corruption focusing on Latin countries and verbal communication: the need for knowledge, transparency, and social participation/control

Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell (2013) define corruption as the abuse of public office for private benefit, a concept already present in Nye (1967). In contexts of weak institutions, inefficient bureaucracy, and ineffective legal systems, corruption can function as an informal mechanism for circumventing deficient controls (Leff, 1964; Huntington, 1968; Acemoglu and Verdier, 1998; Hung Mo, 2001). In Latin America, its persistence can also be related to power structures, personalism, and institutional control deficits, even during democratization processes (Weyland, 1998; Geddes and Ribeiro, 1992). Expanding political competition may also increase electoral costs and stimulate the search for legal or illegal resources (Davis et al., 2016), while the combination of monopoly, discretion, and lack of transparency creates conditions particularly favorable to corruption (Klitgaard, 1988).

This problem becomes more serious when the state simultaneously concentrates power and knowledge, making it difficult for citizens to understand, monitor, and challenge public decisions. Protests may lose effectiveness when government shifts them into institutional channels under its greater control (Hevia, 2015), while the state's ability to create rules, exceptions, and discretionary interpretations favors the centralization of power (Crozier, 1969). Bauman (1999) relates this process to the reproduction of corporatist, authoritarian, and paternalistic forms of political subordination, capable of producing governments unable to resolve political, social, economic, and cultural deficits. Hevia (2015) adds that the cultural reproduction of corporatism—marked by discretion and limited pluralism—may cause these practices to be perceived as normal and transmitted across generations.

When corruption becomes widespread, it tends to be normalized and institutionalized, becoming a systemic phenomenon whose logic cannot be explained solely by the actions of corrupt individuals (Gault, Galicia, and Lepore, 2015). Collier (2000), Mungiu-Pippidi (2006), and Karklins (2005) show that repeated failure of anti-corruption policies can produce cynicism and the perception that society is trapped in a corrupt system. Rothstein and Uslaner (2005) argue that when corruption is expected as normal behavior, control and punishment mechanisms become ineffective because citizens have few incentives to report it. Bardhan (2005) reinforces this logic: the more frequent corruption becomes, the lower the individual incentive to act honestly. For this reason, Gault, Galicia, and Lepore (2015) advocate a shift from an exclusively legal-policing perspective toward a long-term strategy of institutional and cultural transformation. The Argentine case demonstrates the limitations of anti-corruption bodies dependent on the Executive, while O'Donnell (2002) associates new Latin American democracies with forms of delegative democracy and deficits in horizontal accountability. By contrast, the experiences of Singapore, Hong Kong, and Indonesia demonstrate the importance of placing the public interest at the center of government action while simultaneously strengthening vertical accountability—the control exercised by society over government—and horizontal accountability—the mechanisms of control among state institutions (Gault, Galicia, and Lepore, 2015). The Italian case also demonstrates the risks of placing excessive confidence in individuals or magistrates as a solution to a structural problem: Villoria, Van Ryzin, and Lavena (2013) use the murder of Judge Giovanni Falcone as an example of the dangers of this strategy, while Vanucci (2009) highlights social pessimism regarding the integrity of political and economic elites. Corruption produces effects that extend beyond the financial sphere. It reduces the efficiency of public services (Rose-Ackerman, 1999), increases transaction costs (Lambsdorff, 2002; Wei, 1997), distorts economic incentives (Ades and Di Tella, 1997), weakens the rule of law (Tanzi, 1998), and may reduce citizens' trust in institutions and their willingness to comply with rules (Villoria, Van Ryzin, and Lavena, 2012). Trust in government, in turn, is associated with citizens' satisfaction with public services (Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003; Van Ryzin et al., 2004; Vigoda-Gadot and Yuval, 2003; Welch, 2005). Education also has strategic importance: Honlonkou (2003) found an association between lower levels of corruption, lower inflation, and greater human development, suggesting that societies with higher educational attainment reduce opportunities to exploit citizens' lack of knowledge.

V. A new strategy: combating corruption through intelligence, knowledge applied.

The literature reviewed in these studies supports a transition from a predominantly reactive approach to corruption toward a broader strategy based on knowledge, intelligence, prevention, institutional capacity, and accountability. Punishment remains essential, but it should operate within a system capable of identifying risks, integrating information, learning from previous cases, and enabling citizens and institutions to act before corruption becomes systemic.

Agerberg (2018; published 2019) provides an important starting point by challenging the assumption that education automatically produces stronger democratic participation and institutional trust. Using individual- and country-level data from 31 democracies, Agerberg finds that corruption substantially weakens many of the positive political effects normally associated with education. Under conditions of high corruption, educated and politically sophisticated citizens may become as resigned toward formal political institutions as less-educated citizens.

This finding is particularly important for the concept of applied knowledge. Education and information do not automatically become institutional capacity. Citizens may possess considerable knowledge about government, public policy, budgets, political processes, and institutional failures, but this knowledge can produce resignation rather than participation when institutions are perceived as corrupt or ineffective. Agerberg (2018/2019) therefore suggests that the relationship between knowledge and democratic action depends fundamentally on institutional quality.

The implication for anti-corruption policy is that simply increasing education or making information publicly available is insufficient. Knowledge must be connected to mechanisms that allow citizens, researchers, journalists, civil-society organizations, auditors, and public officials to transform information into effective oversight. The relevant objective is consequently not only more knowledge, but knowledge that can be applied.

Ferraz, Finan, and Moreira (2012) provide direct evidence of why this transformation matters in Brazil. Using information from federal audits of Brazilian municipalities, they examine the consequences of missing educational resources caused by corruption. Their results show that corruption in education is associated with substantially worse student outcomes and with reductions in important educational inputs. The study demonstrates that corruption is not simply a financial or legal problem: it directly affects the capacity of public institutions to produce social outcomes.

The importance of this evidence extends beyond education. When resources intended for schools, hospitals, infrastructure, procurement, or other public services are diverted, the resulting damage includes not only the immediate financial loss but also the loss of organizational capacity, professional development, infrastructure, service quality, and public trust. Corruption therefore interrupts the chain linking public resources → institutional decisions → public services → social outcomes.

Ferraz, Finan, and Moreira (2012) also demonstrate the value of converting administrative information into applied knowledge. Their research connects audit information concerning missing resources with measurable educational outcomes. This is qualitatively different from merely identifying irregularities. It enables researchers and policymakers to understand the consequences of corruption and therefore to design interventions based on evidence.

The contribution of Sargiacomo, Ianni, D'Andreamatteo, and Servalli (2015) adds another important dimension. Their longitudinal critical analysis of Italian government procurement between 1992 and 2014 examines the development of accounting-based anti-corruption mechanisms following the Mani Pulite scandal. They show that the Italian experience revealed a government procurement environment shaped by an organizational culture of corruption and subsequently subjected to new accounting and anti-corruption arrangements.

The significance of Sargiacomo et al. (2015) is that formal control mechanisms cannot be assumed to eliminate corruption simply because they exist. Accounting, auditing, reporting, and procurement procedures may increase visibility and discipline, but corruption can also adapt to institutional controls. Consequently, anti-corruption systems must be capable of learning and adapting themselves. This is central to the concept of institutional intelligence. A control system that merely generates more forms, reports, and procedures may increase bureaucracy without necessarily increasing the ability to detect corruption. An intelligent control system must connect information from different transactions, organizations, suppliers, contracts, and periods of time. It must be capable of recognizing patterns that would remain invisible when each transaction is considered independently.

The Italian procurement experience therefore reinforces an important distinction between transparency and intelligence. Transparency makes information available; intelligence makes information useful. A government may publish thousands of contracts and financial records while citizens and oversight institutions remain unable to identify relationships among suppliers, officials, payments, and administrative decisions.

Applied knowledge begins when information is organized, compared, interpreted, and connected to institutional action.

The study by Manzi (2024) provides an additional perspective through the Italian Mani Pulite operation. Manzi analyzes the effectiveness of corruption prosecutions through the concept of judicial populism and argues that the Clean Hands operation represented a major breakthrough against a vast and complex corruption system that had sustained Italian politics for decades. The prosecutors developed interpretations of criminal rules and procedures that contributed to the effectiveness of the investigation and framed the conflict through an opposition between corrupt elites and virtuous citizens.

Manzi (2024) is especially relevant because Mani Pulite demonstrates how professional knowledge can become operational intelligence. Prosecutorial expertise, knowledge of institutional practices, investigative experience, legal interpretation, and strategic communication were combined to expose a complex corruption system. The operation therefore illustrates that successful anti-corruption action requires more than formal legal rules: it requires institutions capable of understanding how corruption actually operates.

At the same time, Manzi (2024) identifies an important danger. The use of judicial populism helped generate public support for the investigation, but it also constructed a strong moral and political opposition between corrupt elites and virtuous citizens. This demonstrates that public communication can strengthen anti-corruption efforts but can also create institutional risks when the fight against corruption becomes excessively personalized or polarized.

The lesson of Mani Pulite should therefore not be interpreted as a simple argument for more aggressive prosecution. Its broader significance is that anti-corruption institutions require legal expertise, investigative intelligence, institutional knowledge, public communication, and social support, while remaining subject to institutional safeguards and accountability.

Taken together, Agerberg (2018/2019), Ferraz, Finan, and Moreira (2012), Sargiacomo et al. (2015), and Manzi (2024) reveal different dimensions of the same problem. Agerberg demonstrates that corruption can neutralize the positive political effects of education; Ferraz et al. demonstrate that corruption can directly reduce the effectiveness of public services; Sargiacomo et al. demonstrate that formal accounting and procurement controls must adapt to organizational behavior; and Manzi demonstrates how professional and judicial knowledge can become powerful investigative intelligence while also creating risks when anti-corruption action becomes populist.

Knowledge refers to information distributed among public institutions and society. Intelligence emerges when this information is integrated, analyzed, interpreted, and connected to institutional objectives. Prevention occurs when intelligence is used to identify vulnerabilities before corruption becomes systemic. Accountability provides the administrative, political, social, and judicial mechanisms necessary to correct institutional failures and sanction violations.

This sequence also changes the meaning of social participation. Participation should not be reduced to citizens receiving information or formally submitting complaints. Citizens can contribute to the production of institutional intelligence by identifying irregularities, monitoring public services, comparing government promises with actual performance, and communicating local knowledge to oversight institutions. However, participation becomes effective only when institutions possess the capacity to receive, analyze, and respond to this knowledge.

Agerberg (2018/2019) is particularly important here because his findings indicate that corruption can generate resignation even among educated citizens. If citizens conclude that formal institutions are incapable of responding to information about corruption, knowledge can become a source of frustration rather than democratic capacity. Consequently, anti-corruption policy must create credible channels through which information can produce institutional consequences.

The Brazilian evidence reinforces this point. If corruption in education can reduce student achievement and weaken essential educational resources, then anti-corruption policy should be evaluated not only through the number of investigations, prosecutions, or recovered funds but also through the capacity of institutions to improve public outcomes. Ferraz, Finan, and Moreira (2012) therefore support a broader performance-based understanding of accountability.

For example, in education, procurement and expenditure information could be analyzed together with school infrastructure, teacher training, dropout rates, student performance, and access to learning materials. In healthcare, procurement and financial information could be connected with waiting times, availability of medicines, staffing, equipment, and service outcomes. Such integration would allow institutions to identify not only whether money has been improperly used but also whether patterns of corruption are undermining the intended results of public policy.

This represents a fundamental change from a purely procedural model of oversight. Traditional control mechanisms frequently ask whether rules were followed. An intelligence-based model additionally asks whether

the relationship among resources, decisions, organizations, actors, and outcomes indicates a pattern of institutional risk.

Digital technologies can strengthen this approach. Data integration, statistical analysis, network analysis, anomaly detection, and artificial intelligence can help identify unusual relationships among suppliers, contracts, payments, officials, and procurement processes. However, technology alone does not create intelligence. Algorithms can identify patterns, but qualified professionals must interpret those patterns, distinguish legitimate administrative behavior from corruption risks, and determine appropriate institutional responses.

The same principle applies to institutional specialization. Auditors possess financial knowledge; prosecutors possess legal knowledge; public managers possess administrative knowledge; data specialists possess analytical knowledge; journalists possess investigative knowledge; and citizens possess contextual and experiential knowledge. Corruption can remain invisible when each group sees only one part of the system. Integrating these different forms of knowledge can produce a more complete understanding of institutional vulnerabilities.

This is particularly relevant in decentralized governmental systems such as Brazil, where federal, state, and municipal institutions frequently participate in the financing and implementation of public policies. Anti-corruption intelligence should therefore be capable of connecting information across governmental levels while preserving the appropriate legal and institutional responsibilities of each entity.

The literature also indicates that punishment should remain part of the model. The objective is not to replace enforcement with education, transparency, or technology. Rather, the objective is to make enforcement more intelligent. Audits, investigations, prosecutions, and sanctions should generate institutional learning. Each detected case should provide information about the mechanisms, organizational weaknesses, and relationships that permitted the corruption to occur.

The resulting model can therefore be described as intelligence-based anti-corruption rather than simply reactive anti-corruption. A reactive system asks:

Who committed the violation, and how should the offender be punished?

An intelligence-based system asks additional questions:

What institutional conditions permitted the violation? What patterns preceded it? Which institutions possessed relevant information? Why was that information not connected? What organizational weaknesses made the corruption possible? How can similar risks be detected earlier? What knowledge must be shared among institutions and society to prevent recurrence?

The distinction is fundamental. Punishment addresses the consequences of corruption; intelligence addresses the conditions that allow corruption to emerge and reproduce itself.

The proposed strategy is therefore not a rejection of courts, prosecutors, auditors, or control institutions. On the contrary, it seeks to strengthen them through better information, interdisciplinary expertise, institutional coordination, and continuous learning. Nor does it assume that education, transparency, or technology alone can solve corruption. The literature demonstrates that education without institutional quality may generate resignation, accounting controls may be circumvented, information without institutional responsiveness may weaken trust, and judicial action without adequate safeguards may generate risks of populism.

The innovation lies in integration. Effective anti-corruption policy requires the integration of education, institutional knowledge, auditing, accounting, data intelligence, legal expertise, public communication, social participation, and accountability.

The central proposition is therefore that corruption should be treated not only as a problem of law enforcement but also as a problem of knowledge governance. Institutions must learn to identify patterns, integrate information, share expertise, evaluate consequences, and transform evidence into preventive action.

The ultimate objective is to break the monopoly of knowledge that can emerge when technical information remains concentrated within political, administrative, or professional institutions. Public information should not merely be available; it should be understandable, connected, comparable, and usable. Citizens, journalists, researchers, civil-society organizations, and professional associations should be able to interpret relevant information, while public institutions should possess the interdisciplinary capacity to respond to the knowledge generated by society.

The literature reviewed here therefore supports a shift from “more punishment” to “more intelligent prevention.” Punishment remains necessary, but it should become one component of a larger institutional learning system. The objective is to create a continuous cycle in which every audit, investigation, procurement process, citizen complaint, and judicial case contributes to the accumulation of institutional knowledge.

Thus, the proposed strategy can be summarized as:

Culture → Knowledge → Intelligence → Prevention → Accountability → Institutional Learning

This model recognizes that corruption is sustained not only by individual misconduct but also by organizational cultures, information asymmetries, weak institutional coordination, insufficient social participation, and failures to transform knowledge into action. Combating corruption effectively therefore requires institutions capable of learning faster than corrupt practices can adapt.

VI. Corruption in Brazil: the Ecoplan Engenharia case, its relationship with Arcadis, and the institutional dispute over Lot 12

This section follows a simple chain: institutional weakness can concentrate information and discretion, reduce transparency and social control, and increase corruption risk. The Ecoplan case is then used to test how that risk was investigated—and why different Brazilian institutions reached different conclusions.

Reader's guide — the institutional sequence is: (1) PISF contracts and technical responsibilities; (2) TCU audit findings; (3) Federal Police / Operation Vidas Secas; (4) CPAR's initial attribution of responsibility; and (5) CGU/AGU review concluding that the evidence was insufficient for a penalty. The key distinction throughout is between irregularity indicators, investigative allegations, and a final finding of legal responsibility.

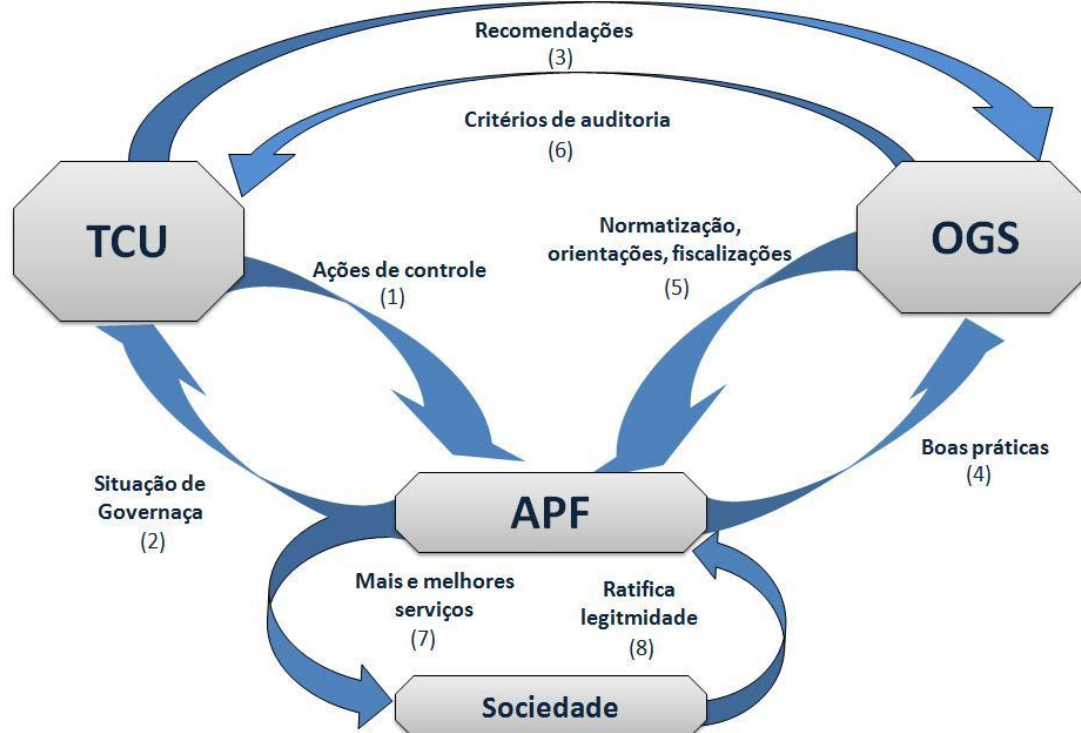


Figure 1. Institutional governance and control relationships used as a conceptual reference for the analysis.

5.1 Arcadis and the PISF management structure

The PISF case illustrates how political responsibility, corporate networks and forensic effectiveness intersect. During Ciro Gomes's tenure as Minister of National Integration, he formally approved stages of the 2004 procurement process in which Logos/Concremat ranked first, ultimately leading to Contract No. 9/2005-MI for management of the São Francisco Integration Project. Logos was already linked to the Dutch Arcadis group. This documented Ciro–Ministry–Logos/Arcadis–PISF institutional chain warrants particular scrutiny because companies occupying management and supervisory positions in the project subsequently became objects of investigations into serious irregularities. Nevertheless, the evidence examined here establishes institutional and administrative responsibility for decisions made during Ciro's tenure, rather than proof that he personally received illicit payments.

At the micro level, the Ecoplan case reveals an important failure in converting suspicion into sufficiently robust forensic evidence. Federal Police experts identified strong indications of quantity-based overpricing in Lot 12, including discrepancies between natural-ground elevations contained in the executive design and those reported in measurements (CGU, 2022). Yet Lot 12 was not the principal object of Forensic Report No. 607/2014: only a sample of its documentation was examined. This methodological limitation subsequently allowed the AGU/CGU legal analysis to characterize the examination as insufficient to establish materiality (AGU, 2023). Thus, rather than conclusively reinforcing the TCU's external-control function, Federal Police criminal forensics left an evidentiary gap between indications of engineering irregularities and

their comprehensive scientific demonstration. This gap is particularly significant when contrasted with the model of technically autonomous, scientifically rigorous criminal forensics advocated within the Federal Police itself.

5.2 Ecoplan, Lot 12, and the evidentiary dispute

The Ecoplan/Lot 12 case provides a particularly useful empirical test of the strongly affirmative claims already embedded in the title of Analysis of Forensic Activity in the Brazilian Federal Police: Consolidation of an Effective and Efficient Model Based on Technical, Scientific and Functional Autonomy (Lopes et al., 2022). The article evaluates Federal Police forensic activity largely from within the same institutional environment and was published in the *Revista do Sistema Único de Segurança Pública*, linked to Brazil's Ministry of Justice and Public Security. This does not invalidate the study, but its unusually positive assessment requires independent empirical validation. Lot 12 provides precisely such a test: Federal Police Forensic Report No. 607/2014 was primarily an examination of Lot 11, while Lot 12 was addressed only through a sample from which a "trend" of overbilling was inferred. The subsequent CGU and AGU reviews concluded that this did not establish the materiality of wrongdoing in Lot 12 and that treating the forensic report as conclusive evidence would be "reckless," ultimately recommending dismissal for insufficient evidence (CGU, 2023; AGU/CGU, 2023).

This evidentiary weakness contrasts sharply with the initial force of Operation Vidas Secas. In December 2015, the Federal Court in Pernambuco authorized five-day temporary detention of four executives, together with coercive questioning and searches, on the basis of an investigation drawing upon Federal Police, MPF and TCU material. The court itself emphasized that the investigation still needed to be deepened, including to identify possible administrative and political participants (JFPE, 2015). The later inability to establish the alleged Lot 12 misconduct against Ecoplan therefore matters when assessing the broad "effective and efficient" characterization advanced by Lopes et al. (2022). It does not establish that Federal Police forensic work was generally ineffective; rather, it demonstrates why institutional self-assessment cannot substitute for independent evaluation of whether forensic conclusions actually survive adversarial, administrative and judicial scrutiny. Ecoplan's own institutional record makes this discrepancy even more significant. The company expressly identifies the Ministry of National Integration as its client and describes its Lot 12 responsibilities as "supervision, technical monitoring and technological control" of the civil works, executive design and mechanical and electrical equipment; the same record also identifies its work on the executive design of the São Francisco Integration Project's Lot D (Ecoplan Engenharia, n.d.). Thus, Ecoplan does not merely acknowledge peripheral involvement: its own description establishes substantial technical responsibility for Lot 12. Precisely because those responsibilities were extensive, a robust forensic investigation should have clearly distinguished documented supervisory failures from contractual performance and established a specific evidentiary chain for Lot 12 rather than extrapolating from Lot 11. That gap — subsequently recognized by CGU and AGU — is a more compelling empirical criticism of the Federal Police article's generalized claims of effectiveness than a purely theoretical challenge.

The case becomes easier to understand when the evidence is separated by institution and by legal effect. The TCU identified control weaknesses; the Federal Police investigated possible criminal conduct; the CPAR initially saw sufficient grounds for administrative responsibility; and the later CGU/AGU review found the proof insufficient for sanction.

According to Cedraz (2023), the TCU identified significant problems concerning the supervision and execution of Lots 11 and 12 of the Eastern Axis of the PISF. In Lot 12, whose works were carried out by the OAS/Galvão/Barbosa Mello/Coesa Consortium and whose supervision was assigned to Ecoplan Engenharia Ltda. (CNPJ 92.930.643/0001-52), the TCU required Ecoplan and the consortium to provide explanations because monthly service measurements were prepared by the contractor itself rather than by the supervising company, contrary to the contractual requirement and the principle of segregation of duties. The Court also identified unjustified delays in the execution of Lot 12.⁹

Another important point, according to Cedraz (2023), concerns a potentially sensitive aspect of Ecoplan's contracting history. Through the Ecoplan-Skill Consortium (Contract No. 38/2007-MI), the company participated in preparing the executive design for Lots 11 and 12 and was subsequently hired to supervise Lot 12 (Contract No. 16/2008-MI). The TCU examined this circumstance and recorded that the legislation then in force did not automatically prohibit a company that had prepared an executive design from subsequently performing inspection or supervision functions. This was therefore a contractual circumstance requiring attention, but it did not, by itself, establish fraud or collusion.¹⁰

However, Cedraz (2023) emphasizes that it is equally important not to turn indications and allegations into a definitive conviction. In Decision 745/2023-TCU-Plenary, the TCU recorded that hearings had been conducted and subsequently recognized the limitation period for punitive and compensatory claims, ordering the case archived; furthermore, the technical analysis expressly stated that the contractor's preparation of measurements,

by itself, did not constitute overbilling or automatically generate a debt. Thus, the TCU did investigate failures in segregation of duties and delays, but these findings do not amount to a conviction of Ecoplan for overbilling (Cedraz, 2023).

A subsequent investigation by the Office of the Comptroller-General (CGU) raised more serious allegations. In its capacity as supervisor, Ecoplan was accused of concealing or failing to respond to alleged irregular practices, allegedly in concert with other companies, including alleged quantity-based overbilling. It is essential, however, to distinguish these investigative allegations from a definitive finding of liability. The CGU legal opinion, prepared with the Legal Consultancy attached to the Comptroller-General (CONJUR) and the Attorney General's Office (AGU), concluded that the evidentiary record was insufficient to substantiate the allegations and recommended dismissal of the Administrative Accountability Proceeding (PAR) (00318/2023/CONJUR-CGU/CGU/AGU; NUP: 00190.101883/2021-17), conducted under Law No. 12,846/2013 (Brazilian Anti-Corruption Law).¹¹

In parallel, the Federal Police, through Operation Vidas Secas, led in the Ecoplan investigation by Federal Police Commissioner Felipe Leal, sought to give the matter a criminal-law dimension. Initiated on December 11, 2015, the operation investigated, among other companies, Ecoplan's role in supervising and providing technical oversight for Lots 11 and 12 of the São Francisco River Integration Project (PISF). The investigation examined suspected overbilling and diversion of resources, initially estimated at approximately R\$200 million, allegedly through the use of shell companies. The Federal Police also indicated that it intended to examine possible omissions by Ecoplan, Concremat, and Arcadis in the performance of their respective technical and management functions.¹²

However, there was a change in the sphere of investigation—from police to administrative—which cannot be characterized as a formal transfer of responsibility from the Federal Police to Ecoplan.

Following Operation Vidas Secas, the Federal Police initially concentrated on the economic and operational nuclei, particularly the contractors and shell companies involved in Lots 11 and 12. The Federal Police stated that, at a later stage, it would examine the possible omission of companies responsible for technical assistance and management, including Ecoplan, Concremat, and Arcadis, to determine whether they had failed to perform their respective functions. Ecoplan's possible responsibility was also examined administratively by the CGU because confidential Police Inquiry No. 093/2014 (case No. 0000472-54.2014.4.05.8303 before the Federal Regional Court of the 5th Region of Brazil) had not yet been concluded. The CGU therefore initiated a new Administrative Accountability Proceeding (PAR No. 00190.101883/2021-17), focusing on Lot 12.¹³

It is important to note that the subject actually examined in this PAR was Ecoplan's role as supervisor of Lot 12 of the PISF. The Federal Police allegations were not accepted as sufficient to establish liability, and the PAR was ultimately recommended for closure. However, the Administrative Accountability Proceeding Commission (CPAR), which issues its assessment after investigations by several bodies, did not initially absolve Ecoplan.^{14,15}

Initially, the Commission considered that there was sufficient evidence to hold Ecoplan responsible for irregularities in the supervision of Lot 12, including the certification of measurements considered fraudulent and omissions allegedly contributing to overbilling. It therefore proposed declaring the company ineligible. Subsequently, however, CGU Technical Note No. 2008/2023 disagreed with the CPAR's assessment, concluding that the evidence was insufficient to establish Ecoplan's responsibility and recommending that the PAR be closed without penalty.

The overlap of responsibilities after the Federal Police complaint was referred to the TRF5, while the matter was also examined administratively by the CGU, may have complicated the assessment of the alleged overbilling. The CGU therefore decided not to impose penalties on Ecoplan for less serious matters identified in other opinions,

Analytical sequence: THEORY → EMPIRICAL CASE → INSTITUTIONAL EVIDENCE → EVIDENTIARY TEST → CONCLUSION. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the logic so that the reader can follow the institutional "tangle" without losing the legal distinction between suspicion and established responsibility.

KNOWLEDGE	INFORMATION	SOCIAL CONTROL	DISCRETION	ACCOUNTABILITY	CORRUPTION RISK
Limited access to relevant knowledge	Information asymmetry between institutions, firms and citizens	Reduced capacity to monitor and contest decisions	Greater space for discretionary interpretation and action	Weaker capacity to detect, challenge and sanction misconduct	Higher systemic corruption risk

Table 1: Analytical Framework I - FROM INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS TO CORRUPTION RISK (elaborated by the authors based on the Brazilian organizations and literature review, 2026)

Institutional environment	Control vulnerabilities	Investigative process	Institutional interpretation	ECOPLAN case
PISF and its complex contractual structure	Supervision, measurements, segregation of duties and delays	PF: criminal investigation	TCU: audit and accountability findings	ECOPLAN's supervisory role in Lot 12
Multiple public and private actors	Distribution of technical knowledge and responsibility	CGU: administrative accountability	CPAR: initially considered evidence sufficient	Initial attribution of responsibility
Fragmented information and responsibilities	Potential spaces for discretion and weak monitoring	AGU: legal-technical assessment	CGU Technical Note 2008/2023: evidence insufficient for responsibility	Final administrative recommendation: closure without penalty
Institutional overlap	Difficulty establishing who knew what, when and with what responsibility	JF: judicial function	Different institutions may reach different conclusions because they answer different legal/institutional questions	

Table 2: Analytical Framework II — ECOPLAN: Institutional Fragmentation and the Production of Corruption Risk (elaborated by the authors based on the Brazilian organizations and literature review, 2026)

In the Sao Francisco river's project, as discussed above, the TCU investigated the involvement of companies associated with Car Wash in the execution of the works (OAS/Galvão/Barbosa Mello/Coesa Consortium), whose supervision was assigned to Ecoplan Engenharia Ltda. Cedraz (2023) found that the principal allegations concerning Ecoplan related to its supervision of Lot 12 of the São Francisco River Integration Project. The CGU commission identified the certification of allegedly fraudulent measurements, inspection failures allegedly contributing to overbilling, the hiring or use of personnel without the required technical qualifications, and delays in delivering contractually specified outputs.^{17,18,19} It is important, however, to distinguish administrative allegations and investigative findings from a definitive finding of responsibility. Although these irregularities were identified during the investigations, the CGU subsequently concluded, on legal grounds, that the evidence was insufficient to support a declaration of ineligibility, as discussed above.

Apart from the documentation produced by the AGU-CGU and the TCU decision, the documented measures included a search and seizure at Ecoplan's headquarters and at the home of its owner, Mr. Percival Ignácio de Souza. Unlike several companies investigated in Brazil's major anti-corruption operation, Lava Jato (Car Wash), Ecoplan was treated by the Brazilian government and its control bodies as a supervisory company subject to a separate investigative process.²⁰

The relationship between the Brazilian company Ecoplan, based in Porto Alegre, and the Dutch group Arcadis followed the contractual and functional arrangement described below.²¹

The Arcadis–Ecoplan relationship can be read more clearly through two documentary anchors:

3. Contract No. 38/2007—Ministry of National Integration

4. Technical Note No. 1120/2020/COREP contains the following relevant passage: “(...) Given that several companies engaged in the construction of the São Francisco Integration Project had also been cited in the context of Operation Car Wash, and that, within that operation, a *modus operandi* possibly similar to that of Operation Vidas Secas was identified (...)”

These documents can be synthesized in the following institutional chain:

Ministry of National Integration → Concremat/Arcadis Logos (project management and technical coordination) → specialized engineering/supervision consortia → Ecoplan/Skill and Ecoplan/Techne/Skill (design and supervision).

Analytical Framework III — relationship between the Ministry of National Integration with the network between the Brazilian and Dutch companies.

This framework provides the theoretical basis for understanding the conditions under which corruption risk may emerge, while the Ecoplan evidence is used to examine whether those conditions translated into an established finding of responsibility.

The relationship between Arcadis and Ecoplan within the São Francisco River Integration Project (PISF) was essentially contractual and functional. The two companies operated within the same project-

management structure, but this did not constitute a corporate or ownership relationship. Arcadis/Concremat occupied the project-management and verification level, while Ecoplan/Skill operated at the engineering-design and supervision level. This distinction is important when assessing institutional responsibility because participation in the same project does not, by itself, establish shared legal responsibility.

In short, Ecoplan's participation and supervisory responsibilities in Lot 12 are documented, as are audit findings and serious investigative allegations. What was not ultimately established, on the administrative record reviewed here, was sufficient proof to sustain the proposed penalty. That distinction is the core of the case.

The central criticism is therefore not simply that the criminal investigation failed to produce a final sanction. The deeper problem is institutional fragmentation: the Federal Police, Federal Justice, TCU, CPAR, CGU and AGU examined overlapping facts under different mandates and evidentiary standards. This made it difficult to distinguish technical irregularities, criminal suspicion, administrative responsibility and final legal liability. The absence of a coordinated international dimension, unlike the broader Lava Jato investigations, also limited scrutiny of multinational actors within the PISF structure.

VII. A brief synthesis of Operation Car Wash and its extension to Peru: a comparison with Inca culture.

Operation Car Wash, initiated in 2014, became the most prominent anti-corruption investigation in Brazil's recent history, centered on a broad scheme of cartelization, corruption, money laundering, and bribery involving Petrobras, major construction companies, and political actors. The Curitiba Federal Public Prosecutor's Office task force ceased to exist as a distinct unit on February 1, 2021, when its work was incorporated into the Special Task Force to Combat Organized Crime (GAECO) (Reuters, 2021). One of its principal protagonists was prosecutor Deltan Dallagnol, coordinator of the task force from 2014 to 2020. His role was particularly important in coordinating indictments, negotiating plea-bargaining agreements, and publicly presenting the operation's anti-corruption strategy. Academic studies, however, also questioned judicial activism and the politicization of Car Wash, particularly after messages involving Dallagnol and then-judge Sérgio Moro became public (Grangeia & Alberdingk Thijm, 2025; Sá e Silva, 2020).

Lula remained imprisoned for 580 days, from April 2018 to November 2019. In 2021, the Federal Supreme Court annulled the Car Wash convictions against Lula after recognizing the lack of jurisdiction of the 13th Federal Court of Curitiba to hear the cases, thereby restoring his political rights; subsequent Supreme Court decisions also emphasized problems concerning impartiality and due process (de Sa e Silva, 2022), as illustrated by the Opportunity Bank case and the Satiagraha operation, which was annulled by the Federal Supreme Court in 2022 (Da Ros & Taylor, 2022).

On June 17, 2009, in the judgment of RE 511.961, the Federal Supreme Court, by a vote of 8 to 1, rejected the requirement of a university degree in Journalism to practice the profession. The central reasoning was that Article 4(V) of Decree-Law No. 972/1969, enacted during the military regime, was not compatible with the 1988 Federal Constitution because it disproportionately restricted the freedoms of expression, information, and communication provided for in Articles 5(IX) and (XIII) and 220 of the Constitution, and also conflicted with Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights (Pact of San José, Costa Rica). The Court therefore held that a state requirement of prior qualification constituted a form of prior control incompatible with freedom of the press, and that the creation of a professional order or council for journalism was unnecessary.

Regarding the companies involved in Car Wash, the figures need to be contextualized: official documents from the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office recorded, up to August 2017, 16 companies and one political party among the targets of first-instance improbity proceedings, in addition to 10 leniency agreements concluded with companies. The so-called main Petrobras cartel, in turn, involved 16 major construction companies, including Odebrecht, OAS, UTC, Camargo Corrêa, Andrade Gutierrez, and Queiroz Galvão, as well as other companies identified subsequently. It is therefore methodologically incorrect simply to say that "16 companies were punished," because the figures refer to different legal categories—companies investigated, accused, convicted, and signatories to leniency agreements.

However, because of the strong cultural similarity between Brazil and Italy and the large number of people of Italian descent in Brazil, the principal bibliographic reference on Operation Car Wash is a comparison with Italy, where its name originated. The article is entitled "Considerations on the Mani Pulite Operation" (Moro, 2004).

Moro (2004) used the Italian experience of Mani Pulite to emphasize the importance of coordinated action among institutions responsible for investigating and combating corruption. The Ecoplan case allows that proposition to be examined empirically: different institutions possessed different mandates, evidence, and standards of proof, and their conclusions did not always converge. The analytical value of Moro's argument therefore lies less in the authority of an individual magistrate than in the institutional question it raises—whether

oversight bodies can share knowledge, coordinate responsibilities, and remain accountable while preserving due process.

A second proposition discussed by Moro (2004) is that systemic corruption cannot be reduced exclusively through punishment and requires changes in ethical and organizational culture. This proposition is consistent with the broader literature reviewed in this study, but it is treated here as an institutional hypothesis rather than as a personal prescription.

6.1 From Judicial Protagonism to Coalition Realignment: Lava Jato and the Reconfiguration of Left and Right in Brazil and Peru

Analytical sequence: Lava Jato → judicial protagonism → Moro–Doria/PSDB public proximity → Bolsonaro government → rupture over Federal Police autonomy → fragmentation of the traditional center-right → Lula–Alckmin convergence → Moro’s later partisan repositioning → weakening of the old PT–PSDB bipolarity → cross-ideological coalition realignment → Peruvian comparison

The sequence above is not intended to suggest that judicial action mechanically produced a predetermined political outcome. Rather, it identifies a set of institutional and partisan transformations whose interaction altered the structure of political competition. This distinction is essential because the strongest comparative scholarship on Operation Car Wash rejects monocausal explanations. Prado and Machado (2021), writing in *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, show that Lava Jato produced important innovations in criminal enforcement while also generating serious risks for due process, legal predictability, and institutional legitimacy. De Sá e Silva (2020) analyzes how legal actors and anti-corruption discourse became connected to broader political transformations that culminated in Brazil’s illiberal turn. Grangeia and Alberdingk Thijm (2025), in *Latin American Research Review*, likewise identify activist and moralizing elements in the integrity discourse of Lava Jato’s principal actors. More recently, Peres da Silva (2026) demonstrates that the old presidential competition structured around PT and PSDB was decisively broken in 2018, with the decline of PSDB’s electoral centrality and the rise of a new right. The analytical object is therefore not a single judge or party, but a reorganization of the party system under conditions of institutional crisis.

Within this broader process, Sergio Moro’s documented public and political proximity to João Doria and sectors of the PSDB is relevant because it predates Moro’s formal entry into electoral politics. On 15 May 2018, Moro and Doria appeared at the Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce’s Person of the Year event in New York, where Doria publicly described Moro as a “national hero”; on the following day, Moro participated in the LIDE Brazilian Investment Forum in Manhattan, linked to the business organization founded by Doria. Moro subsequently denied having a personal relationship with Doria. For that reason, the evidence supports the more precise expression “documented public and political proximity,” rather than a claim of private friendship. What matters analytically is that the judge who had become the most visible symbol of Lava Jato was already circulating in public spaces occupied by leading actors of the Brazilian center-right before he entered government.

That proximity acquired a clearer political dimension in 2021. Reporting documented a dinner involving Moro, Doria, and former Health Minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta, at which the 2022 election and the possibility of a common political project were discussed. Later that year, Doria publicly stated that he maintained good relations with Moro and confirmed a meeting with Moro and Podemos president Renata Abreu, framing the political moment in terms of dialogue and “unity.” These episodes do not establish a stable alliance, but they demonstrate repeated interaction between Moro and actors associated with the PSDB and the wider center-right. They also reinforce the argument that Moro’s trajectory is better understood as part of a changing political field than as the isolated evolution of a judicial personality.

The transition from judicial protagonism to executive power became explicit after the 2018 election, when Moro accepted Jair Bolsonaro’s invitation to become Minister of Justice and Public Security. Prado and Machado (2021) emphasize that the appointment, occurring after Lula’s imprisonment and exclusion from the 2018 presidential race, intensified controversy over Moro’s impartiality, while correctly warning that the appointment alone cannot prove a pre-existing political plan. The point is institutional rather than conspiratorial: an actor who had acquired exceptional legitimacy through criminal adjudication moved directly into the Executive elected in the political environment transformed by the anti-corruption operation. This movement illustrates the danger, identified in the literature on judicial populism and anti-corruption, of personalizing institutional legitimacy around judges or prosecutors.

The alliance later collapsed. In April 2020, Moro resigned from the Bolsonaro government and accused the president of seeking improper political influence over the Federal Police, including through changes in its leadership and access to information concerning investigations; Bolsonaro rejected Moro’s account. The episode is particularly important for the present article because Moro explicitly presented Federal Police autonomy as an institutional safeguard. That claim provides a benchmark for evaluating the Ecoplan case: the relevant question

is not whether one political actor was consistently correct, but whether police, prosecutorial, auditing, administrative, and legal-review institutions can preserve autonomy while coordinating information and remaining mutually accountable.

The Ecoplan case supplies a concrete institutional counterpoint. As shown in the previous section, Federal Police investigations, TCU findings, the administrative accountability commission, and the later CGU/AGU legal review did not reach identical conclusions regarding the same broader factual environment. The final administrative legal analysis concluded that the evidentiary record was insufficient to sustain the proposed corporate sanction. This divergence cannot, on the evidence presently available, be treated as proof that the Presidency directly interfered in the Federal Police investigation. A more rigorous interpretation is institutional fragmentation: different bodies operated with different mandates, evidentiary thresholds, time horizons, and positions within the state structure. The Ecoplan case therefore transforms the controversy over “police autonomy” from a dispute surrounding Moro and Bolsonaro into a broader problem of knowledge governance, horizontal accountability, and institutional coordination.

This interpretation is consistent with the literature on Brazilian political restructuring. Bello, Capela, and Keller (2021) argue that Lava Jato helped destabilize and reorganize the hegemonic bloc in Brazil and contributed to the political environment in which Bolsonaro rose to power. Research published in *Social Forces* similarly shows that the protests beginning in 2013, the economic crisis, anti-partisan mobilization, and Lava Jato jointly intensified anti-PT sentiment and opened space for a new right-wing coalition. Importantly, this literature also notes that center-right actors such as PSDB and PMDB/MDB were themselves affected by investigations and anti-establishment sentiment. Peres da Silva (2026) goes further by identifying the loss of PSDB’s centrality as one of the defining changes in the post-2018 party system, ending the PT–PSDB presidential duopoly that had structured national competition from 1994 to 2014.

The subsequent Lula–Alckmin alliance therefore has analytical significance beyond the biographies of two politicians. Geraldo Alckmin had been one of the most important national leaders of the PSDB and Lula’s presidential opponent in 2006. In 2022, after leaving the PSDB and joining the PSB, Alckmin became Lula’s vice-presidential candidate. The Superior Electoral Court formally proclaimed the Lula–Alckmin ticket elected in December 2022. This did not mean that PT and PSDB had become the same party. It demonstrated instead that the old PT–PSDB cleavage no longer exhausted the structure of political competition. The former bipolar configuration had given way to a more fluid pattern in which actors from historically opposed camps could cooperate against a newly reorganized right

Moro’s later trajectory further illustrates this fluidity. After leaving the Bolsonaro government, seeking an electoral “third way,” passing through Podemos and União Brasil, he formally joined the Liberal Party (PL) in March 2026. The relevance of this move lies less in assigning a moral label to Moro than in showing how quickly the boundaries of political camps can change. A figure who had publicly broken with Bolsonaro over Federal Police autonomy later entered the principal party identified with the Bolsonaro political field. This is precisely why the article should avoid transforming Moro into either a hero or a villain: his changing alignments are empirical evidence of a wider realignment in the Brazilian right.

Lula’s imprisonment in Curitiba during the 2018 campaign provides another illustration of the interaction between judicial processes and political reorganization. Lula remained politically influential while imprisoned and maintained contact with party leaders and Fernando Haddad. Yet the institutional sequence must be described accurately: the Federal Police did not decide the substitution of Lula by Haddad. The Superior Electoral Court rejected Lula’s candidacy and the coalition subsequently formalized Haddad as its presidential candidate; the TSE later approved Haddad’s registration. The prison in Curitiba nonetheless became a politically significant site of communication, showing how a space symbolically associated with Lava Jato simultaneously became part of the political organization of the PT campaign. This paradox is analytically stronger than the inaccurate claim that the Federal Police itself chose the substitute candidate.

The Peruvian comparison strengthens the argument because Peru represents an even more weakly institutionalized party environment. Levitsky and Cameron (2003) describe post-Fujimori Peru as highly atomized and candidate-centered, while Crabtree (2010) emphasizes the weakness of durable linkages between state and society. Sanchez (2009) proposes the concept of “party non-systems” precisely to capture cases in which competition is highly volatile and weakly institutionalized. Alemán, Ponce, and Sagarzazu (2011) add an important legislative dimension: in weakly institutionalized and nonprogrammatic systems, party unity tends to be lower and bargaining more contingent. The Peruvian case therefore suggests that the opposition between left and right may remain real at the electoral level while becoming substantially less rigid at the institutional level.

This institutional weakness coexists with profound socioeconomic, territorial, and educational inequalities. León and Valdivia (2015) show that inequalities in school resources contribute significantly to learning gaps in Peru, while Serrano Rodríguez et al. (2023) find that quality and equity do not progress uniformly across the education system. These inequalities matter politically because the 2022–2023 uprising was strongly structured

by class, regional, and ethnic cleavages and by a long-standing crisis of representation (Somma, Disi, & Medel, 2024). In such a setting, presidential candidates may mobilize sharply different social constituencies while entering institutions that reward tactical adaptation, coalition-building, and political survival.

Pedro Castillo and Roberto Sánchez illustrate this difference. Castillo entered national politics as an outsider strongly associated with rural, Andean, and lower-income constituencies. Flores Quispe, Rojas Antonio, and Torres Quispe (2026) characterize his 2021 victory as the product of an outsider leadership that assembled a heterogeneous and weakly institutionalized coalition around anti-establishment sentiment and popular representation; the same study argues that the fragility of this coalition contributed to the rapid disintegration of his governing base. Castillo was removed from office and arrested after his attempted dissolution of Congress in December 2022. In 2025, Peru's Supreme Court convicted him of conspiracy to commit rebellion and imposed a sentence of eleven years, five months, and fifteen days (Poder Judicial del Perú, 2025). The purpose of this comparison is not to endorse or reject that judicial outcome, but to observe that Castillo lacked a durable party and congressional structure capable of protecting his government from institutional collapse.

Roberto Sánchez followed a different trajectory. He had already accumulated legislative and governmental experience, served in Castillo's cabinet, remained active in Congress after the fall of the Castillo government, and continued within Juntos por el Perú. His survival through investigations, congressional fragmentation, the collapse of Castillo's presidency, and the subsequent reconfiguration of the Peruvian left indicates greater institutional adaptability than Castillo possessed. This does not demonstrate that Sánchez was "bought," "invented," or controlled by the right; no reliable evidence establishes such a claim. It does, however, show how different political actors can experience very different outcomes within the same weakly institutionalized system depending on their capacity to remain embedded in parliamentary, partisan, and coalition networks.

Juntos por el Perú likewise did not arise in a political vacuum. It belongs to a longer history of coalition-building, fragmentation, and recomposition on the Peruvian left. Van Dyck (2018), examining the earlier schism of Izquierda Unida, shows that organizational tensions between leadership, coalition maintenance, and party survival have long shaped the Peruvian left. This history helps explain why Juntos por el Perú could function as a coalition vehicle rather than as a strongly institutionalized mass party and why Sánchez could inherit an existing political network rather than constructing an electoral identity entirely from scratch. The 2026 presidential election illustrates this volatility. Roberto Sánchez, candidate of Juntos por el Perú, reached the second round against Keiko Fujimori. The final official proclamation by the Jurado Nacional de Elecciones recorded 9,223,396 votes for Fuerza Popular and 9,173,755 for Juntos por el Perú, a remarkably narrow result (JNE, 2026). The closeness of the contest is analytically important because it demonstrates that a weakly institutionalized party system can nevertheless generate intense ideological polarization at the electoral level.

Keiko Fujimori's victory also illustrates coalition convergence on the right. Support from actors and organizations outside Fuerza Popular during the second-round environment, together with subsequent attempts at legislative coordination, does not erase the differences among Fujimorismo, Renovación Popular, the PPC, and other conservative actors. It does, however, demonstrate that fragmented political forces can temporarily converge when electoral competition produces a common strategic objective. Vergara and Augusto (2021) characterize Fujimorismo itself as a relatively loose electoral coalition with limited vertical and horizontal organizational cohesion, reinforcing the argument that ideological labels in Peru coexist with pragmatic coalition behavior.

The two countries therefore display different versions of the same broader phenomenon. Brazil moved from a comparatively recognizable presidential competition structured around PT and PSDB toward a system reorganized by Bolsonarism, the decline of PSDB, the persistence of PT, and alliances across former ideological boundaries. Peru entered the period with a much weaker party system in which personalistic candidacies and temporary coalitions were already common. The 2026 contest between Keiko Fujimori and Roberto Sánchez is therefore better interpreted through the literature on party-system weakness, personalization, and volatile representation than through an unverified hypothesis of hidden coordination.

A brief European comparison further clarifies the distinction between formal ideological identity and political practice. Pedro Sánchez and the PSOE should not be described academically as "left only in the party statute" unless that proposition is operationalized and empirically demonstrated. The PSOE formally identifies with the socialist and social-democratic tradition, while scholarly research documents successive phases of ideological and programmatic moderation. Delgado-Fernández and Cazorla-Martín (2017), for example, identify a gradual movement toward more centrist positions in parts of the party's recent trajectory. Spain is therefore useful as a comparative warning: formal ideology, electoral positioning, coalition strategy, and government policy are related but analytically distinct variables.

The comparative evidence therefore supports a more precise formulation than “union of left and right.” What is observable is political convergence and coalition realignment under conditions of institutional crisis, electoral fragmentation, and weakened party boundaries. In Brazil, Lava Jato, the decline of PSDB, the rise of Bolsonaro, Lula’s return, the Lula–Alckmin coalition, and Moro’s changing partisan affiliations restructured a previously more predictable pattern of competition. In Peru, weak institutionalization allows coalitions and candidacies to reorganize even more rapidly. In both cases, corruption investigations and anti-corruption discourse interact with party competition but do not operate independently of it.

This conclusion returns directly to the central argument of the present study. Anti-corruption capacity cannot depend on a judge, prosecutor, president, party, or temporary electoral coalition. Institutions must be capable of preserving autonomy, due process, accountability, transparency, knowledge sharing, and organizational learning despite changes in government and political alliances. The Ecoplan case is especially valuable because it demonstrates the distance that can exist between suspicion, forensic investigation, audit findings, administrative attribution of responsibility, legal review, and final sanction. The political trajectory surrounding Lava Jato demonstrates the corresponding political lesson: when institutional credibility becomes excessively associated with particular personalities, changes in those personalities’ political alignments can also alter public interpretations of the institutions themselves.

The analytical chain proposed in this article can therefore be extended as follows:

Culture → Knowledge → Information → Institutional Intelligence → Prevention → Accountability → Institutional Learning → Democratic Resilience.

The central question is not whether Sergio Moro, João Doria, Jair Bolsonaro, Lula, Geraldo Alckmin, Keiko Fujimori, Roberto Sánchez, Pedro Sánchez, or any particular party should embody the fight against corruption or democratic legitimacy. The relevant question is whether democratic institutions can continue to investigate wrongdoing, protect due process, coordinate knowledge, and remain sufficiently autonomous from changing political coalitions to preserve legitimacy and public trust.

VIII. Discussion of the results

The literature reviewed in this study—including Moro (2004, 2018), Pohlmann et al. (2019), and the institutional-accountability literature—supports the conclusion that responsibility for reducing corruption should not be transferred to the judiciary or personalized around magistrates. Brazil and Peru’s governance challenges instead point toward a combination of social participation, stronger educational and knowledge capacities, institutional coordination, and mechanisms capable of converting dispersed information into accountable action. From this perspective, the debate over literacy and the transformation of tacit into explicit knowledge is relevant insofar as it strengthens citizens’ capacity to understand, compare, and challenge institutional decisions. The Inca experience is used here not as an idealized model to be reproduced, but as a historical reference for reciprocity, collective responsibility, cooperation, and the organization of shared knowledge. Its analytical value lies in showing that institutional capacity depends on social practices and reciprocal obligations as well as formal rules. The comparison therefore returns the argument to culture and institutions, rather than to political or judicial personalities.

IX. Conclusions

This study reassessed the relationship among education, culture, knowledge, corruption, and institutional accountability by using Mani Pulite, Operation Car Wash, and the Ecoplan Engineering case as interconnected analytical references. Moro (2004) remains relevant as one contribution to the debate, particularly regarding institutional coordination and ethical culture, but the evidence examined here does not support a personalized interpretation of anti-corruption capacity. The Italian and Brazilian experiences instead show the risks of concentrating expectations in individual judges or prosecutors and the importance of durable institutional safeguards.

The Brazilian political realignment that followed Lava Jato further illustrates this point. The rise of Bolsonaro, Moro’s movement from the judiciary into government and electoral politics, and the later cooperation between political actors historically located in opposing camps show that personal and party alignments can change rapidly. Institutions therefore need to remain effective independently of the political trajectories of their most visible actors. The central policy implication is a shift from personality-centered anti-corruption toward knowledge governance: Culture → Knowledge → Intelligence → Prevention → Accountability → Institutional Learning.

Future research should test this institutional-learning model comparatively across Brazil, Peru, Italy, and other Latin American and European cases, examining whether stronger education, social participation, inter-

institutional information sharing, and independent accountability mechanisms reduce corruption risks without weakening due process. The practical objective is not to identify a new anti-corruption hero, but to develop institutions capable of learning, coordinating, and correcting themselves.

REFERENCES

- [1] Acemoglu, D., & Verdier, T. (1998). Property rights, corruption and the allocation of talent: A general equilibrium approach. *The Economic Journal*, 108(450), 1381–1403.
- [2] ADVOCACIA-GERAL DA UNIÃO; CONTROLADORIA-GERAL DA UNIÃO — AGU/CGU. (2023). Parecer nº 00318/2023/CONJUR-CGU/CGU/AGU. NUP 00190.101883/2021-17. Brasília: AGU/CGU.
- [3] Alemán, E., Ponce, A. F., & Sagarzazu, I. (2011). Legislative parties in volatile, nonprogrammatic party systems: The Peruvian case in comparative perspective. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 53(3), 57–81. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2011.00125.x>.
- [4] Andia, Rossana; Hamada, Yukihiro. The Integrity of Political Finance Systems in Latin America: Tackling Political Corruption. International IDEA Policy Paper No. 21. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), 2019. 37 p. ISBN 978-91-7671-283-2. DOI: 10.31752/idea.2019.38.
- [5] Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social. (2007). Projeto de Integração do Rio São Francisco: Documentação técnica do PISF.
- [6] Bardhan, P. (2005). Scarcity, conflicts, and cooperation: Essays in the political and institutional economics of development. MIT Press.
- [7] Bauman, Z. (1999). In search of politics. Stanford University Press.
- [8] Bello, E., Capela, G., & Keller, R. J. (2021). Operação Lava Jato: ideologia, narrativa e (re)articulação da hegemonia. *Revista Direito e Práxis*, 12(3). <https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2020/53884>.
- [9] Bosque Maurel, Joaquín (2007). Spain and Latin America. Structural changes and new relations after the emancipation of the Spanish speaking America (1824–2005). *Anales de Geografía de la Universidad Complutense*, 26, 67–94.
- [10] Bouckaert, G., & Van de Walle, S. (2003). Public service performance and trust in government: The problem of causality. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 26(8–9), 891–913. <https://doi.org/10.1081/PAD-120019352>
- [11] Carey, J. M. (2003). Presidentialism and representative institutions. In J. I. Domínguez & M. Shifter (Eds.), *Constructing democratic governance in Latin America* (2nd ed., pp. 11–42). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [12] Cedraz, Aroldo (2023). Acórdão 2.628/2011-TCU-Plenário. Relatório de auditoria, referente ao Fiscobras 2011 e as obras do Eixo Leste do Projeto de Integração do Rio São Francisco com as Bacias Hidrográficas do Nordeste Setentrional (PISF), abrangendo contratos de execução e supervisão. Tribunal de Contas da União. Disponível em <https://pesquisa.apps.tcu.gov.br/documento/ata-sessao/NUMEROATA:15%20ANOATA:2023%20COLEGIADO:%22%28Plen%C3%A1rio%29%22/DTRELEVANCIA%20desc/0>
- [13] Collier, P. (2000). How to reduce corruption. *African Development Review*, 12(2), 191–205.
- [14] CONTROLADORIA-GERAL DA UNIÃO (CGU). Relatório Final — Processo Administrativo de Responsabilização: Ecoplan Engenharia Ltda. Brasília, 2022.
- [15] CONTROLADORIA-GERAL DA UNIÃO — CGU. (2023). Relatório Final e Nota Técnica nº 2008/2023/CGIPAV-ACESSO RESTRITO/DIREP/SIPRI. Processo Administrativo de Responsabilização nº 00190.101883/2021-17 — Ecoplan Engenharia Ltda. Brasília: CGU.
- [16] Controladoria-Geral da União. (2020). Nota Técnica n.º 1120/2020/COREP.
- [17] Controladoria-Geral da União. (2023a). Nota Técnica n.º 2008/2023.
- [18] Controladoria-Geral da União. (2023b). Processo Administrativo de Responsabilização n.º 00190.101883/2021-17.
- [19] Crabtree, J. (2010). Democracy without parties? Some lessons from Peru. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 42(2), 357–382.
- [20] Crozier, M. (1964). The bureaucratic phenomenon. University of Chicago Press.
- [21] Da Ros, L., & Taylor, M. M. (2022). Brazilian politics on trial: Corruption and reform under democracy. Lynne Rienner Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781955055192>
- [22] De Angelis, C. T. (2013). A knowledge management and organizational intelligence model for public administration. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 36(11), 807–819. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2013.791315>

- [23] De Angelis, C. T. (2024a). Um plano de inteligência cultural para reduzir o déficit de talentos: Um estudo comparativo entre a Alemanha e o Brasil. *Revista Conhecimento em Ação*, 8(2), 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.47681/rca.v8i2.59185>
- [24] De Angelis, C. T. (2024b). Um modelo de gestão do conhecimento e inteligência cultural para reduzir o déficit de talentos no Perú: Um estudo comparativo com a Alemanha. *Gestão e Desenvolvimento*, (32), 133–161. <https://doi.org/10.34632/gestaoedesenvolvimento.2024.16021>
- [25] De Angelis, C. T. (2025). Comunidades de práticas para transformação do conhecimento tácito em explícito no âmbito do analfabetismo: Um estudo comparativo entre Brasil e Bolívia. *Revista Cognosis*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.33936/cognosis.v10i2.7420>
- [26] De Sa e Silva, F. 2022. “Relational Legal Consciousness and Anticorruption: Lava Jato, Social Media Interactions, and the co-Production of Law's Detraction in Brazil (2017–2019).” *Law & Society Review* 56(3): 344–368. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12620>
- [27] De Sá e Silva, F. (2020). From Car Wash to Bolsonaro: Law and lawyers in Brazil's illiberal turn (2014–2018). *Journal of Law and Society*, 47(S1), S90–S110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jols.12250>
- [28] De Sá e Silva, F. (2020). From Car Wash to Bolsonaro: Law and lawyers in Brazil's illiberal turn. *Journal of Law and Society*, 47(S1), S90–S110.
- [29] Delgado-Fernández, S., & Cazorla-Martín, Á. (2017). El Partido Socialista Obrero Español: de la hegemonía a la decadencia. *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*, 44, 247–273. <https://doi.org/10.21308/recp.44.10>.
- [30] ECOPLAN ENGENHARIA. (n.d.). Irrigação e Drenagem — Projeto Executivo de Integração do Rio São Francisco – Lote D; Supervisão das Obras de Integração do Rio São Francisco – Lote 12. Ecoplan Engenharia. https://www.ecoplan.com.br/aa_irrigacao-e-drenagem.html
- [31] European Commission. (2022). The Global Knowledge Index: Competence Centre on Composite Indicators and Scoreboards. European Commission.
- [32] Farej, Moufdi M. (2023). “La cultura en las relaciones internacionales contemporáneas. La diplomacia cultural, el modelo español y el espacio iberoamericano.” *Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana*, 17(2), 175–204. DOI: 10.20318/reib.2023.8299.
- [33] Flores Quispe, F., Rojas Antonio, L. S., & Torres Quispe, S. G. (2026). Del éxito electoral al desgobierno: estrategias electorales y desintegración de la base política de Pedro Castillo (2021–2022). *Politai*, 17(28), 132–159. <https://doi.org/10.18800/politai.202601.007>.
- [34] Freedom House. (2023). Freedom in the World 2023: Brazil. Freedom House – Brazil, 2023
- [35] Freedom House. (2024). Freedom in the World 2024: Brazil. Freedom House – Brazil, 2024
- [36] Freedom House. (2025). Freedom in the World 2025: Brazil. Freedom House – Brazil, 2025
- [37] Gault, A. D., Hernández Galicia, J. F., & Lepore, W. (2015). Corrupción sistémica: límites y desafíos de las agencias anticorrupción. El caso de la Oficina Anticorrupción de Argentina. *Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia*, 61, 75–106. <https://doi.org/10.69733/clad.ryd.n61.a887>.
- [38] Geddes, B., & Ribeiro Neto, A. (1992). Institutional sources of corruption in Brazil. *Third World Quarterly*, 13(4), 641–661. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599208420302>.
- [39] Grangeia, M. L., & Alberdingk Thijm, J. (2025). In the name of integrity? Anticorruption discourse of Brazilian Operation Lava Jato. *Latin American Research Review*, 60(2), 235–255. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.61>.
- [40] Honlonkou, A. N. (2003). Corruption, inflation, croissance et développement humain durable. Y a-t-il un lien? *Mondes en développement*, 123(3), 89–106.
- [41] Huntington, S. P. (1968). Political order in changing societies. Yale University Press.
- [42] Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE). (2026). Proclamación de resultados de la Segunda Elección Presidencial 2026, Resolución N.º 1625-2026-JNE.
- [43] JUSTIÇA FEDERAL EM PERNAMBUCO — JFPE. (2015). Operação Vidas Secas — decisões relativas às prisões temporárias e posterior revogação. Recife: Justiça Federal em Pernambuco.
- [44] Karklins, R. (2005). The system made me do it: Corruption in post-communist societies. M. E. Sharpe.
- [45] Klitgaard, R. (1988). Controlling corruption. University of California Press.
- [46] Leff, N. H. (1964). Economic development through bureaucratic corruption. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 8(3), 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276426400800303>
- [47] Levitsky, S., & Cameron, M. A. (2003). Democracy without parties? Political parties and regime change in Fujimori's Peru. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 45(3), 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2003.tb00248.x>.
- [48] León, G., & Valdivia, M. (2015). Inequality in school resources and academic achievement: Evidence from Peru. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.015>.

- [49] LOPES, A. O.; RAUPP, A. B.; BAÚ, N.; SANTOS, R. S.; SIGNOR, R. (2022). Uma análise da criminalística exercida pela Polícia Federal: integração de um modelo eficaz e eficiente pautado na autonomia técnica, científica e funcional. *Revista do Sistema Único de Segurança Pública*, v. 1, n. 2, p. 16–41. DOI: 10.5
- [50] Medrano-Sanchez, E. J., & Mamani-Salinas, A. (2026), “Extractive fiscal governance and subnational SDG progress: a systemic analysis of mining canon redistribution in Peru, 2012–2024,” *Frontiers in Political Science*, 8, DOI 10.3389/fpos.2026.1863029
- [51] Moro, Sergio Fernando. Considerações sobre a operação Mani Pulite. *Revista CEJ*, Brasília, v. 8, n. 26, p. 56–62, jul./set. 2004. Disponível em <https://www.migalhas.com.br/arquivos/2015/1/art20150102-03.pdf>
- [52] Moro, Sérgio Fernando. Preventing Systemic Corruption in Brazil. *Daedalus*, v. 147, n. 3, p. 157–168, 2018. DOI: 10.1162/DAED_a_00508
- [53] Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2006). Corruption: Diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Democracy*, 17(3), 86–99. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2006.0050>
- [54] OECD. (2023). PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education. OECD Publishing.
- [55] OECD. (2023). PISA 2022 Results: Country Note – Brazil. OECD Publishing.
- [56] OECD. (2023). PISA 2022 Results: Country Note – Italy. OECD Publishing.
- [57] O'Donnell, G. (2002). In partial defense of an evanescent “paradigm.” *Journal of Democracy*, 13(3), 6–12.
- [58] Peres da Silva, G. (2026). Eleições em tempos de incerteza: a reconfiguração do sistema partidário brasileiro e o papel da disputa de 2026. *Estudos Avançados*, 40(117). <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0103-4014.2026.40117.001>.
- [59] Persson, A., Rothstein, B., & Teorell, J. (2013). Why anticorruption reforms fail—Systemic corruption as a collective action problem. *Governance*, 26(3), 449–471. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2012.01604.x>
- [60] Poder Judicial del Perú. (2025). Sentencia contra José Pedro Castillo Terrones por conspiración para una rebelión. Sala Penal Especial, Corte Suprema de Justicia de la República.
- [61] Pohlmann, M., Valarini, E., Trombini, M., & Jorge, M. (2019). Systemic corruption in Brazil: An autopsy of the Odebrecht case. *Journal of Self-Regulation and Regulation*, 5, 55–78. <https://doi.org/10.11588/josar.2019.0.69286>
- [62] Prado, M. M., & Machado, M. R. (2021). Using criminal law to fight corruption: The potential, risks, and limitations of Operation Car Wash (Lava Jato). *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 69(4), 834–879. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcl/avac008>.
- [63] Prado, M.M. Machado, M. A. Using Criminal Law to Fight Corruption: The Potential, Risks, and Limitations of Operation Car Wash (Lava Jato), *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, Volume 69, Issue 4, December 2021, Pages 834–879, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcl/avac008>
- [64] Reuters. (2020, April 24). Brazil justice minister Sergio Moro resigns and accuses President Jair Bolsonaro of political interference in the Federal Police. Reuters.
- [65] Reuters. (2021, February 3). After seven years, Brazil shuts down Car Wash anti-corruption task force. Reuters.
- [66] Rose-Ackerman, S. (1999). Corruption and government: Causes, consequences, and reform. Cambridge University Press.
- [67] Rothstein, B., & Uslaner, E. M. (2005). All for all: Equality, corruption, and social trust. *World Politics*, 58(1), 41–72.
- [68] Sanchez, O. (2009). Party non-systems: A conceptual innovation. *Party Politics*, 15(4), 487–520. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809334566>.
- [69] Serrano Rodríguez, R., Pérez Gracia, E., Puño-Quispe, L., & Hurtado-Mazeyra, A. (2023). Quality and equity in the Peruvian education system: Do they progress similarly? *International Journal of Educational Research*, 119, 102183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102183>.
- [70] SIEMENS. 100% Transparency Movement: Brazil. Siemens AG, 2026.
- [71] SILVA et al. (2025). Public-Private Partnerships in Urban Regeneration Projects: The Brazilian Context and the Case of “Porto Maravilha” in Rio de Janeiro. *Land*, v. 14, n. 5, art. 1055.
- [72] Somma, N. M., Disi, R., & Medel, R. M. (2024). PROFILE: Understanding the 2022–23 Peruvian uprising. *Social Movement Studies*, 24(4), 525–533. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2024.2330582>.
- [73] Tanzi, V. (1998). Corruption around the world: Causes, consequences, scope, and cures. *IMF Staff Papers*, 45(4), 559–594.

- [74] Toral, Pablo (2008). "The Foreign Direct Investments of Spanish Multinational Enterprises in Latin America, 1989–2005." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 40(3).
- [75] TRIBUNAL DE CONTAS DA UNIÃO — TCU. (2012). Acórdãos e documentação de fiscalização relativos ao Projeto de Integração do Rio São Francisco, incluindo os Lotes 11 e 12. Brasília: TCU.
- [76] Tribunal de Contas da União. (2012). Documentação relativa ao Projeto de Integração do Rio São Francisco.
- [77] Tribunal de Contas da União. (2023). Acórdão 745/2023-TCU-Plenário.
- [78] Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (TSE). (2022, September 8). TSE defere registro da candidatura de Lula a presidente da República e aprova Geraldo Alckmin como vice na chapa. Tribunal Superior Eleitoral.
- [79] UNDP. (2022). Global Knowledge Index 2022: Methodology. United Nations Development Programme and Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation.
- [80] UNDP. (2024). Global Knowledge Index 2024. United Nations Development Programme and Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation
- [81] United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York. (2016). *United States of America v. Odebrecht S.A.* Information, Cr. No. 16-643 (RJD), F. #2016R00709, 21 December 2016.
- [82] Van Dyck, B. (2018). Why new parties split: The schism of Peru's United Left in comparative perspective. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 50(3), 627–655.
- [83] Van Ryzin, G. G. (2004). Expectations, performance, and citizen satisfaction with urban services. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 23(3), 433–448. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20020>
- [84] Vergara, A., & Augusto, M. C. (2021). Fujimorismo and the limits of democratic representation in Peru, 2006–2020. In J. P. Luna, R. Piñeiro Rodríguez, F. Rosenblatt, & G. Vommaro (Eds.), *Diminished Parties: Democratic Representation in Contemporary Latin America* (pp. 236–263). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072045.012>.
- [85] Vigoda-Gadot, E., & Yuval, F. (2003). Managerial quality, administrative performance and trust in governance revisited: A follow-up study of causality. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 16(7), 502–522. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513550310500382>
- [86] Villoria, M., Van Ryzin, G. G., & Lavena, C. F. (2013). Social and political consequences of administrative corruption: A study of public perceptions in Spain. *Public Administration Review*, 73(1), 85–94. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02613.x>
- [87] Welch, E. W., Hinnant, C. C., & Moon, M. J. (2005). Linking citizen satisfaction with e-government and trust in government. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 15(3), 371–391. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui021>