

Implementation Effectiveness of EU Anti-Corruption Directives: A Comparative Case Study of Germany, France and Italy

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Abstract: This paper uses institutional adaptation theory to assess the implementation of EU law in member states. It focuses on Germany, France and Italy, examining their adherence to the EU Anti-Corruption Directive. The analysis uses three approaches. Germany combines a strong legal culture with robust administrative practices, resulting in a robust but unwieldy approach. France, a centralised state, follows an efficient but hard-to-monitor approach. Italy, however, has devised a different approach, using digital technology to overcome its own problems. The study's findings reveal that policy success hinges on striking a balance between policy goals and governance structures, rather than simply adhering to similar rules. The most important concept is policy transfer by ongoing talks between different institutions where external policies interact with domestic ideas and rules. This is to say that the EU's governance will continue to evolve. For the future, the EU policy should be aimed at adaptability in the light of general principles and cognisance of the varying nature of governance by its member states. The paper also concludes that further research should be done to examine how institutions and people interact in this digital age, and ways must be found to ensure the adherence to rules is achieved without hindering various types of individuals that these meetings may prove to be very vital in solving the increasingly complex problems of modern times.

Keywords: EU Anti-Corruption Directives; Comparative Case Study; Institutional Adaptation; Institutional Fit; Legal Integration; Digital Governance

1 Introduction

According to Transparency International, corruption significantly adversely impacts good governance, equity, justice, the EU economy, the rule of law, and democratic processes. The EU addresses the problem of corruption both in its own member states and those with which it cooperates. It considers this an essential component in the diffusion of good management worldwide (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2020). In addressing this challenge, the EU will be proposing new legislation. These include the PIF Directive which is going to protect EU funds and the Anti-Corruption Directive that will make member state criminal laws uniform. These steps show, nevertheless, how the EU institutions are active in attempting to prevent and contain cross-border corruption (Commission, 2023). Nevertheless, significant variance exists between the legislation that the EU has established and the ability of member states to actually implement it. This is an important part of the politics of legislation within the EU (Börzel, 2022), and reflects the complex role of the implementers or agents (Abbott et al., 2017) This paper explores the divergence between rule-making and rule compliance in diverse jurisdictions when new legislation is enacted by the EU.

The key question we will examine is: what explains the different impacts of the EU Directive against corruption? What are the decisive conditions in the establishment and management of a project? If the investigation of this problem is pursued further, new understanding and behavior could emerge. A review of what has already been written shows critical lacunae. Research often adopts the close-up perspective on a country, such as GRECO, or the statistical perspective on many countries, such as (Börzel, 2022; Zhelyazkova, 2024). However, such studies lack a theoretical framework for comparative research on Western European countries or for an analysis of how "implementation logic" works under variable conditions. This predicament becomes even more difficult because corruption itself is very difficult to measure (Heywood & Rose, 2014).

The institutional adaptation theory provides a lens through which the effectiveness of a country's policies can be assessed in light of its interaction with pre-existing institutions rather than mere rule compliance. This multilevel analytical framework incorporates legal transposition, judicial safeguards, administrative execution and technological application. The website can be used to compare the ways in which countries such as Germany, France and Italy adapt, and how these methods are influenced by their institutions. These results will be important for the drafting of future European Union legislation, and demonstrate how organisations can address issues and contribute to the development of principle-based legislation. The analysis also enables the three case countries to learn from one another, and has important implications for countries such as China that wish to control corruption more effectively.

First of all, it was revealed that there exist three methods in which people adapt: Germany is divided into

the Länder; this implies that changes can be made piecemeal. France's highly centralized system enables them to make rapid moves using resources efficiently. Italy is applying technology to solve local problems. Such differences highlight a range of country commitments to combat corruption, how countries design their strategies to suit diverse institutional environments.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Core Theory

Theory of institutional fit explains why the same EU directives are implemented differently across member states. This perspective is rooted in broader understandings of institutional diversity (Ostrom, 2009) and the strategic interactions of real actors within these institutional settings (Scharpf, 2018). Two related yet distinct ideas are 'institutional adaptation' (changing internal institutional arrangements to meet policy demands) and 'institutional fit' (the coordination resultant of this process). Policy-organisation fit makes it easier to implement, while a poor fit makes it harder, a dynamic often observed as national administrative responses to Community policy (Héritier, 2001) A study of how people adapt in Germany, France and Italy shows that the way institutions work in each country affects the results.

The basic idea of this theory is that how well a policy works, or doesn't work, has more to do with how well it fits with the specific situation it's being put into, including its institutional fit (Uda et al., 2020), rather than whether the design of the policy itself is better or worse. Other studies have shown that this is true.(Ostrom, 2009; Scharpf, 2018) By 'institutions', we mean a combination of formal rules, such as constitutional structures, legal frameworks and bureaucratic systems, that grant varying degrees of autonomy to state actors(Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014), as well as informal norms deeply entrenched in civil society. These include political culture, typical behaviour, and trust mechanisms(Héritier, 2001).

The theory of institutional adaptation helps us to understand how the European Union is governed. The EU establishes common objectives for its member states and enables them to adapt EU regulations to their own requirements, a procedure akin to designing robust policies(Capano & Woo, 2018). Such translations always reveal the distinctive ways in which organisations operate in different countries, often involving a strategic process of policy transfer where agents ensure that lessons learned abroad are applied at home (Dussauge-Laguna, 2019). One example of this is transparency in public procurement. It is a common goal, but it is put into practice in different ways depending on the country. This is

because of France's centralising administrative tradition, Germany's cooperative federalism, and Italy's fragmented -yet-innovative administrative landscape (Thomann & Lieberherr, 2023). This means that by looking at how national governments, power and society interact with the EU's rules, we can understand why the EU's policies are sometimes different in different countries.

2.2 Multi-dimensional Evaluation Framework

To turn ideas about how institutions change into real research, we need to create a step-by-step plan for analysing the complexity of how things are put into practice. This study proposes a four-dimensional approach to implementing a plan. This approach considers the various interconnected parts of the process. It looks at how various institutions adapt in the three countries under study.

The 'Effectiveness of Legal Implementation' dimension examines legal adaptation. It addresses the degree to which EU directives are adapted and their novelty, or newness (Töller, 2010). Examples include 'gold-plating' of EU directives, meaning that they are more stringent than the minimum requirement, and how EU standards change when combined with local legal traditions. This dimension shows how well the legal system can use and follow outside rules. This depends on how EU environmental policies are made and the results of these policies for EU countries. It is also affected by the politics of law in the EU.

It is essential for the implementation of the law to make it work. This aspect evaluates the role of the judicial system as the main tool for unlocking the prevention of bad things from happening. It thereby evaluates the degree of independence, quality of government lawyers, and level of personnel and budget to conduct investigations into corruption, the latter concerning the broader challenge for autonomy within bureaucracies as a whole, as well as disciplinary liability for judges and prosecutors (Bošković & Kostić, 2025). It further considers the level of cooperation within the organization, for example, EPPO, concerning the handling of corruption within member countries (Öberg, 2021). All in all, it enables the assessment of the law's strength within the fight against corruption, a procedure which takes into consideration the main approach of the actual bureaucrats concerning the handling of policy implementation at the grassroots level of administration (Thomann & Lieberherr, 2023).

Transparency by governments is key, as corruption breeds where processes are not transparent (Bocquet et al., 2025; Rasmussen et al., 2021) Freedom of information requests could be a method of data collection to explore government information access by the public. These mechanisms together act to protect against corruption.

The digital dimension of enablement focuses on the positive as well as negative effects of digital technology on the anti-corruption process, marking the commencement of Digital Era Governance. It involves analyzing the use of new technology for the prevention, detection, as well as investigation of fraud (Dunleavy, 2006). The key dimensions of attention would be the assurance that reporting wrongdoing digitally is safe and easy (Di Salvo, 2024), checking vital records like contracts and approvals using blockchain technology,

using big data analytics for early risk detection of corruption, and enabling investigative journalism using graph-based heterogeneous data management (Anadiotis et al., 2021). Digital enablement is a way in which new technology can improve traditional ways of doing things.

Figure 1 shows how these four parts work together to form a complete analytical framework. The way the law is put into practice is the most important part of how the system responds. The two main ways that governments deal with this are through judicial enforcement and transparency. Digital enablement is a driving force that affects how well the other three dimensions work. The main idea of the framework is that the successful implementation of any directive ultimately comes from the way these dimensions and the different institutional environments of different Member States interact.

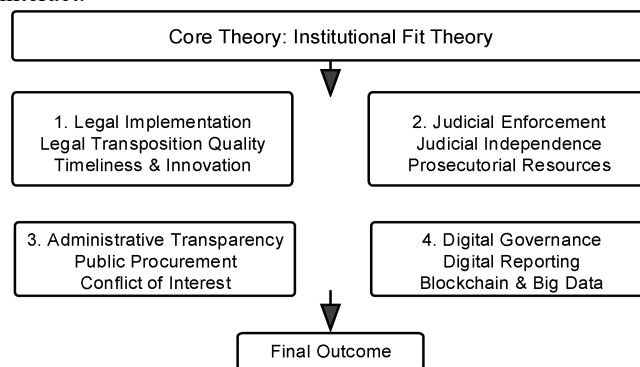


Figure 1. Multi-dimensional analysis framework for the effectiveness of EU anti-corruption directives

3 Research Design and Methods

3.1 Case Selection and Research Design

This study uses a 'most-different-systems' research design, comparing Germany, France and Italy, a comparative approach aligned with established principles of case study research (Gerring, 2006) While these countries share similar EU institutional contexts, including obligations to follow EU rules and comparable levels of economic development, they differ in their institutional structures. The way they are governed follows federal, centralised and fragmented models, while their legal systems have distinct features, such as decentralisation, high specialisation and too much work. What's more, their administrative capacities show clear differences between mature and developing stages. By looking at how the same EU directive is put into practice in these very different institutional environments, the study can show that differences in how effective policies are are due to differences in national institutional contexts rather than the content of the directive. This provides a practical test of the theory of how institutions adapt.

Table 1 provides a structured comparison of the selected cases across nine important areas: state structure; rule of law indicators; judicial organisation; e-procurement coverage; system interoperability; enforcement efficacy; administrative capacity; type of

core mechanisms; and anticipated implementation patterns. This analytical framework provides a step-by-step way of understanding how different institutional environments influence the varied outcomes of the EU Anti-Corruption Directive being implemented. The next case studies use this comparison to show what happened.

Table 1. Core Institutional Features:

Comparative Baseline			
Dimension	Germany	France	Italy
State Structure	Federal System (16 Länder)	Centralized State (Jacobin tradition)	Fragmented Pluralism (Regional divisions)
Rule of Law Index	0.87/1.0 (Strong)	0.71/1.0 (Moderate-Strong)	0.48/1.0 (Moderate)
Judicial Organization	Decentralized (16 state prosecutors + BKA)	Specialized & Centralized (PNF, AFA, HATVP) ²	Overburdened but Independent (+23% case backlog 2023)
E-Procurement Coverage System Interoperability	89%	Comprehensive digitalization	Emerging systems
Law Enforcement Efficiency	Moderate (28-month processing cycle)	High (78% case closure rate)	Developing (digital compensation)
Administrative Capacity	Mature (institutionalized)	Strong (state-driven)	Developing (digital compensation)
Core Mechanism	Legal precision + Federal coordination	State authority + Institutional innovation	Digital innovation + Institutional compensation
Expected Implementation Pattern	Institutionalized Robustness	Efficacy-Oriented State-Led	Digitally-Driven Compensatory

Note: Data sources include Transparency International (2023), national judicial statistics (2023-2024), and anti-corruption agency reports.

Germany's cooperative federalism and its strong tradition of the rule of law have shaped a way of implementing the law that emphasises legal precision, procedural legitimacy, and coordination between states. The country's strong legal independence and its system for prosecuting crimes, which is spread across the country, show that the law is formalised but may not always be applied in the same way (Wolf, 2021).

In France, the state-driven implementation model has been supported by the interventionist administrative style and centralist tradition of governance. One distinctive French approach to accomplishing policy objectives through new institutions and centralized action is the establishment of more specialized organizations, such as the Office of the Prosecutor for Financial Crimes, with public trust in such agencies being a key factor (Monnery & Chirat, 2024).

Italy's laws and regulations are complicated and many are corrupt. The government is often changing the rules, the administration is disorganised and the court system is overworked and cannot make its own rules. In response, Italy has developed a 'technological empowerment' strategy to combat corruption. The National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC) is developing new initiatives, such as secure online platforms for reporting corruption and straightforward systems for online purchases. These are innovative solutions for the problems caused by fraud in the system (Feldman, 2020).

The research considers different cases and employs a variety of research techniques in order to gather information. The research incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to make findings reliable while maintaining a strong qualitative background. For example, the research incorporates both qualitative techniques, such as personal conversations, as well as quantitative elements, like numerical data (Flick, 2022). Rather than relying only on quantitative data in regression models, we use it to corroborate patterns identified through qualitative analysis, thus enhancing our ability to discern causal relationships.

This paper examines the adoption and implementation of the EU Anti-Corruption Directive in Germany, France, and Italy. We provide evidence based on a comparison and discussion of how the institutional framework of each country shapes the effectiveness of the Directive.

3.2 Research Strategy

The research has tried to find out why, under varying circumstances, individuals interpret and implement unified directives differently. This therefore, means you will have to understand the workings of such processes (Gerring, 2006). Following Chapter 2, this study employs the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). By locating Germany, France, and Italy within the same EU legal and socio-economic environment, we systematically attribute the observed differences in their implementation outcomes to differences in domestic institutional environments—a logic underpinning comparative measurement of Europeanization (Töller, 2010). The three cases, institutionally contrasting, will test the replicability logic, i.e., whether the same

"causes" (EU directives) produce systematically differentiated "outcomes" (implementation pathways and effectiveness) under different institutional conditions, according to the "institutional fit theory."

This study applies the "process tracing method" to analyze how institutions influence implementation. This method establishes logical links between causes and effects by analyzing the sequence of decisions and activities, along with supporting evidence. (Checkel, 2008). To do this, the process will be rebuilt in each country starting from EU directives. This will look at the change in laws, institutions, and the legal system to the expected policy results. The main elements that will be highlighted consist of the Federal Senate, the National Financial Prosecutor's Office, and ANAC online platforms and the Ministry of Justice, along with certain prosecutors. Then it looks at the way they behave and how well their systems work (Scharpf, 2018). Comparing these factors between cases makes it easier to understand how the concept 'institutional adaptation.'

3.3 Data Composition and Triangular

Verification

The study will use data source triangulation to develop an elaborate and trustworthy chain of evidence that cross-verifies findings (Flick, 2022). This covers the whole chain: policy implementation down to how society sees it.

The legal and policy process data is central to tracking the 'legal enforcement intensity' dimension. It primarily comprises EU directives and key domestic legislation. For example, Germany has updated its Criminal Code, France has introduced the "Sapan II Act" and related regulations, and Italy has issued decrees through the National Anti-Corruption Authority (Zimmermann, 2024). The government's proposed new laws, what they were trying to do with them, and the discussions in Parliament about them are all included in the analysis to show what the new laws are supposed to do and what the main arguments about them are.

Information relating to the enforcement and compliance assessment. This dataset appraises the operational effectiveness of the "Judicial Enforcement Efficiency" and "Administrative Transparency Mechanism" dimensions. The system incorporates chapters on judicial and anti-corruption systems from the European Commission's annual Rule of Law Reports, the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption's (GRECO) fifth and sixth compliance assessment reports for the three countries, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Monitoring and Compliance Mechanisms country assessments (2024). Additionally, annual judicial statistics from prosecutorial authorities (e.g. the National Police Force in France) and the Supreme Court provide critical quantitative evidence of law enforcement activities.

Data on governance, innovation and social perception. The data underpinning this finding of social impact from digital governance come from the annual reports published by the national anti-corruption agencies, such as France's AFA, Italy's ANAC, and Germany's federal and state authorities; these report on the usage of digital platforms, the results of risk assessments, and the nature of implementation outcomes. Moreover, the

Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, 2023, and the Global Corruption Barometer provide further insight into perceptions of corruption and changes in these. Data composition, therefore, will be systematically supported by sources such as freedom of information requests (Bocquet et al., 2025) and graph-based data management techniques for investigative purposes (Anadiotis et al., 2021).

3.4 Data Analysis Process

Figure 2 shows that the analysis started with a deep dive into each case and worked its way up to understanding how they all fit together. This enabled a well-planned, in-depth study that allowed new patterns to emerge from the data.

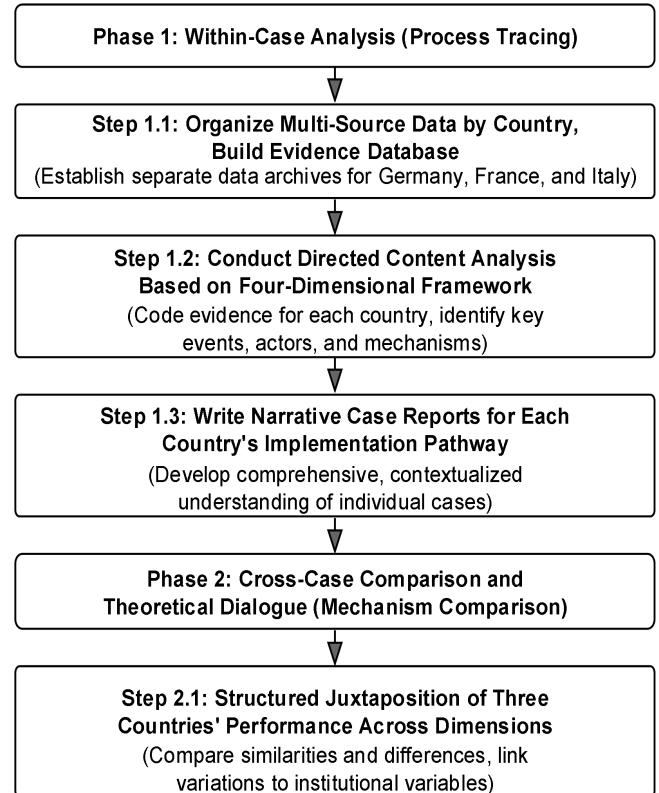


Figure 2. Data Analysis Process: A Two-Phase Comparative Research Design

Process tracing, as a tool of causal inference, needs the elucidation of the causes of a problem at hand in various countries. In this regard, time series evidence databases were established for Germany, France, and Italy, thus forming a basis for causal analysis through process tracing in the subsequent chapters. Qualitative data from all these countries were coded into a four-dimensional evaluation framework as developed in Chapter 2. This is a content analysis method that precisely identifies, filters out representative events, decisions, and interactions while compiling detailed thematic reports for each country.

After understanding these in detail, the second phase involved comparing them step by step and improving the theories. We observed clear patterns in how the three countries performed in each area.

The next section develops a fine-grained comparative framework of mechanism analysis by mapping identified mechanisms onto their

institutional origins so that we may distill core institutional variables of state structure and judicial organization to account systematically for differential implementation outcomes across our cases, thereby refining institutional adaptation theory through empirical engagement.

4 Results and Analysis

4.1 Comparative Institutional Pathways: An Overview

Therefore, this section provides a comprehensive comparative analytical framework to systematically synthesize the findings from all three countries on how institutional contexts shape differential implementation outcomes. The mechanisms identified are mapped to their institutional origins across the four dimensions of evaluation in Table 2. This study identifies three institutional variables as central in determining the effectiveness of differentiated implementation of the EU anti-corruption directive.

To systematically synthesise the analytical findings from the three countries, Table 2 provides a structured comparison of the implementation mechanisms and institutional roots. The federal coordination of Germany ensures clarity of the law, but at great financial cost. The average case processing takes 28 months, with an average success rate of 42% across all states. On the contrary, in France, with the centralized system, they managed to deal with 78% of the cases and recovered €1.2 billion in assets in 2023 alone. However, in such highly centralized systems, critical control issues arise (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1996). Italy did well in the 'digital empowerment compensation' program, where usage of the whistleblowing platform jumped 215% in 2023 alone. Similarly, electronic purchasing helped save €935 million. This means that technology can help countries to catch up, even without strong institutions. So, there is no single "good" or "bad" path; they represent different ways for institutions to adapt to specific national contexts and their inherent dynamics of change (Olsen, 2009). Later country studies look in more detail at the reasons for these mechanisms.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Implementation Pathways and Core Mechanisms in Germany, France, and Italy

	Germany:	France:	Italy:
Assessment Dimension	Institutionalized Robustness	State-Led Efficacy	Digital-Driven Compensation
Legal Implementation Strength	Federal-State Coordination; 2021 Corporate	Legislation-First Approach; 2016 Sapin II Act	Reactive Legislation; 2023 new anti-corruption

	Germany:	France:	Italy:
Assessment Dimension	Institutionalized Robustness	State-Led Efficacy	Digital-Driven Compensation
Judicial Enforcement Efficiency	Sanctions Act; 18-month variance across 16 states; systematical ly precise State-Level Autonomy; average processing cycle 28 months; cross-state coordination success rate 42%	exceeds EU law; 69% of minimum standards; proactive foresight	69% of provisions lack implementation regulations
Administrative Transparency Mechanisms	E-procurement coverage 89%; inter-state interoperability 67%; risk-averse approach	2023 reviewed 8,417 asset declarations ; AFA covers 83% of central government ; prediction accuracy 71%	Traditional procurement mechanisms weak; procurement blacklist implementation 58%; limited capacity
Digital Governance	Blockchain pilots 37%	HATVP Model; 2023 AFA algorithmic	Core Breakthrough

Assessment Dimension	Germany: Institutionalized Robustness	France: State-Led Efficacy	Italy: Digital-Driven Compensation
	Empowerment of major projects; supporting existing processes	risk monitoring; covers 83% of departments; accuracy rate 71%	gh: Digital reporting platform reports increased 215% (2023); e-procurement saves €935M annually
Core Institutional Foundations	Cooperative Federalism + Rule of Law tradition; multi-layered coordination; constitution al judicial independence	Centralized State + Interventionist Administration; hierarchical bureaucratic control; specialized anti-corruption agencies	Administrative Fragmentation + Political Volatility + Technological Agility; weak horizontal coordination but high adaptive capacity

Note: Data sourced from national judicial statistics, anti-corruption agency reports (2023-2024), and validated through European Commission Rule of Law Reports, GRECO Fifth & Sixth Round Evaluations, and OECD Country Governance Assessments.

Germany's federal system has fostered multi-layered mechanisms that prioritise quality over efficiency. France's centralised system has led to an efficient, state-led legislative and enforcement model. In Italy, there are

many different legal systems and this often means that there is a difference between the laws that are created and the laws that are enforced.

The way the law is set up and the way the police are organised has a direct effect on how well the police do their job. Decentralisation (Germany) ensures independence and routine operations; centralisation (France) achieves professionalism and high deterrence; personalisation/fluctuation (Italy) leads to highly uncertain effectiveness.

The different parts of the model show how countries can improve how well they govern. One way to do this is to gradually integrate, like they do in Germany, or to have national rules about what is right and wrong, like in France. Solutions like these work because the systems are robust. Another way of overcoming weak institutions, as can be seen in Italy, is through digital technologies.

The EU Anti-Corruption Directive is not just a matter of enforcement in Germany, Italy, and France. A process of adaptation between EU policies and the systems of member states is at play in the respective German institutional structure, the French state-led model, and digital-driven measures of Italy. Taken together, these cases represent how EU legal integration combines formal uniformity with substantive diversity and support the theory of institutional adaptability.

4.2 Germany's Institutional Robustness: Federal Model

Table 2 shows that the roots of the "federal-state coordination" model in the German legal system lie in the "cooperative federalism" and "rule of law". Although Germany passed the Corporate Sanctions Act 2021 for the transposition of EU directives, all 16 federal states needed 16 to 18 months to finish localized legislation. This illustrates the specificity of the legislative framework of Germany, in which states observe federal guidelines while making localized adjustments—a signature of its regulatory behavior. To Bryer, this is a case of "suboptimal coordination." Still, such thorough governance at the cost of effectiveness means that the average duration for resolving corruption cases takes two and a half years, with only 42% of the coordinated cases between states resolved, which indicates systemic issues in dealing with complex corruption cases.

Germany's implementation system is based on principles like the rule of law and cooperative federalism, driving the development of its policing methods. This continuous adaptation of enforcement practices is driven by systematic reforms in legislation and coordination between the federal and state governments.

When the EU's Corporate Sanctions Act was implemented, the federal government passed it, but its enforcement varied significantly in the sixteen states. The European Commission Rule of Law Report, 2023, highlights the challenges of the federal system and the reality of federal-state legislative coordination. While this sub-federal organisation ensures the law is properly enforced and systematically enforced, these complex processes result in slower implementation compared to those in unitarian states.

Germany has a very independent, yet very spread out court system. But this "state-level prosecutorial autonomy mechanism" has shown weaknesses in "high coordination costs" when dealing with complex corruption cases that need cross-state collaboration. Recent data shows that, in 2022, it took German state prosecutors an average of 28 months to deal with corruption cases. At the same time, the German Federal Ministry of Justice said that the number of cross-border cases that were successfully coordinated was only 42% (2023). This suggests that Germany's legal system works in a "routine way," but it doesn't seem to be quick enough to deal with new corruption problems that cross regional borders.

When it comes to making government processes clear and digital management, Germany has chosen to 'gradually introduce technology'. The federal e-procurement platform of the United States federal government has been found to have an 89% coverage rate, which shows that the administrative system in place is very good. However, the interoperability score between state systems is only 67%. This shows that the federal structure puts limits on digital governance that are used across the country (Transparency International Germany, 2024).

4.3 France: Centralized Authority and Institutional Innovation

France's approach contrasts Germany's. Table 2 illustrates that effectiveness of enforcement depends on a strong central government. It uses two mechanisms.

France's anti-corruption strategy includes "legislative prioritisation and exceeding standards". The 2016 Sapin II Act was both compliant with the latest EU directive requirements and exceeded EU minimum standards, creating so-called "gold-plating legislation". This indicates an ambition to establish anti-corruption standards that exceed EU ones, positioning France as an "exemplary nation".

France has a centralised organisational structure. It has used this to set up a specialised "elite institution centralised case-handling mechanism" to enforce its laws. France has been able to successfully prosecute major corruption cases, thanks to the creation of the National Financial Prosecutor's Office (National Financial Prosecutor's Office, 2024). This office is a highly specialised and centralised institution, and its effectiveness is linked to the high levels of trust placed in such national agencies by both experts and citizens.

The success of these mechanisms is clear from France's 2023 enforcement data, which shows that 78% of cases were resolved and €1.2 billion was recovered. This means that France is doing better than the other two countries, and is much better at making sure the rules are followed.

France's centralised state system works really well (100% high interoperability and a relatively high rule of law index (0.71/1.0), as shown in Table 1. It relies on professional legal talent coordinated at the center, namely on three key institutions: the National Financial Prosecutors' Office, the French Anti-Corruption Agency, and the High Council for Transparency in Public Life. Each has vital contributions to make. Their specialized division of labor and collaboration form one pillar on

which the effective application of law and regulation depends.

France has implemented a strict, state-driven regime of regulation pertaining to business ethics. The High Court of Transparency in Public Life imposes strict asset disclosure and conflict-of-interest checks on public officials. In 2023, it reviewed 8,417 asset declarations and sanctioned 12 senior-level officials for wrongdoing (High Court of Transparency in Public Life, 2024). These figures are indicative of the fact that this regime functions quite effectively in the prevention and detection of corruption.

4.4 Italy: Digital Empowerment and Institutional Compensation

Italy has a distinctive digital approach to fighting corruption. Its institutional framework is less mature than that of the EU's core members, but the digital anti-corruption initiatives have a variety of synergistic effects (Table 2). For instance, the National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC) reported a 215% year-on-year increase in 2023. This supports Feldman's 2020 theory of 'low-threshold reporting mechanisms', which states that ease of access leads to civic engagement in oversight. The platform vividly illustrates how prevention via digital means can be ensured and is an important design feature for transparency within anti-corruption systems. Italy's e-procurement system has achieved considerable success in public procurement. According to the 2023 Open Contracting Partnership report, the system saved €935 million on average over eight years. Automation provides transparency reducing corruption. According to Datta, Walker & Amarilli, 2020, this is a crucial digital transformation for Italy's public administration.

The agency's success is due to its strategic vision. Faced with a 23% increase in unresolved court cases and the limitations of traditional systems, ANAC chose an unconventional approach: using digital technology to empower civil society. This "institutional bypass" bypassed the system, setting a new model for learning. Italy's experience shows that tech-empowered civic participation is a key pathway for change when traditional systems fail.

It also strengthens the powers of ANAC. In 2023, the agency issued 107 disciplinary sanctions, which is a 27% increase on 2022, and conducted around 400 investigations. According to ANAC and Statista, the increase in legal cases indicates that the police are becoming more effective at detecting and investigating crimes, resulting in more cases being identified and entered into the legal system.

This change shows that the Italian model understands the issue better. Digital empowerment can stop corruption at the administrative level, but the judicial system may still limit how well anti-corruption efforts work. Italy's experience shows that digital technology can help in situations where some parts of society or government are stronger than others. But for digital technology to be useful, the whole governance system needs to be strengthened.

4.5 Cross-case Comparison and Core Mechanism Summary

Table 3 juxtaposes the performance, mechanisms and roots of the three countries in the four evaluation dimensions.

Table 3. Comparison of implementation paths and core mechanisms of Germany, France and Italy

Dimension	Germany	France	Italy
Legal Implementation	Federal-State Coordination; Systematically precise, steady	Legislation-First; Proactive, gold-plating	Reactive; Frequent, weak enforcement
	State autonomy, routinized; Independent, high coordination costs	Centralized (PNF); Efficient, resource-concentrated	Volatile activism; Unstable, person-dependent
Judicial Enforcement	Gradual tech integration; Robust, risk-averse	Strong intervention, prevention-first	Weak mechanisms; Limited capacity
	Administrative integration tool; Supporting processes	Supervisory auxiliary tool; Reinforcing oversight	Digital compensation; Empowering society (€935M savings)
Digital Empowerment	Cooperative federalism + rule of law	Centralized state + interventionist admin	Fragmentation + volatility + tech agility
Institutional Foundation			

By demonstrating the three institutional variables that underpin the effectiveness of the EU anti-corruption directive, this study shows that national structural variables form the basis of models for legal transformation. While Germany's federal system has led to multi-level coordination mechanisms, this has been at the expense of efficiency. France's centralist system has led to an effective state-led model. In Italy, fragmented pluralism has disconnected legislation from enforcement.

The organizational architecture of judicial and law enforcement systems always conditions their operational logic and eventual outputs. Viewed comparatively, Germany's decentralized model protects institutional autonomy and, day to day, operational independence while France's more centralized structure secures professional standards and enforcement deterrence better.

Still, the Italian law enforcement system, given much latitude to individual discretion, demonstrates some remarkable operational variations that have limited its governance performance to a certain extent.

In other words, from the perspective of institutional evolution, these three routes to optimization reflect the paths of gradual integration of institutions, state-led ethical oversight, and the solid foundation of state capacity. However, the Italian case reflects another pattern of innovation: when the traditional resources for governance are relatively scarce, "compensatory mechanisms" based on digital technology enable leapfrogging forms of institutional development. These three divergent developmental trajectories respectively bring insightful analytical perspectives into the dynamic relationship between state capacity and governance innovation.

EU Anti-Corruption Directive implementation, therefore, spans from surface-level member state compliance to a deeper process of institutional adaptation between unified policies and distinct national governance ecosystems. In this respect, the discussion of Germany's institutional development, France's state-led approach, and Italy's digital compensation strategy reveals EU legal integration to be fundamentally dual: while seeking formal harmonization, it also allows for substantive diversity. This interplay surely confirms the core hypothesis of the theory of institutional adaptation-the notion, in other words, that institutional evolution is a continuous process of calibration of unified frameworks and localized practices.

5 Discussion

5.1 Refining Institutional Adaptation Theory

The paper investigates how member states of the European Union, through institutional adaptation, translate directives into national practices. Uda et al. describe the process of policy implementation as a dynamic process of negotiation between external norms and domestic institutions. The three main patterns of adaptation which empirically emerge are that Germany implements an 'institutionalised adaptation' through its federal structure, while France has a 'state-led adaptation' through its centralized system, and Italy has developed a 'compensatory adaptation' driven by digital innovation. Each trajectory is underlined by the country's different institutional traditions, and the degree of coordination among elements constituting the institution in question is a key predictor for the success of the adaptation (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2022).

While engaging in this adaptation process, conflict might not be with the existing structures themselves. One such example of proactive adaptation in Italy is the National Anticorruption Authority, ANAC, that has utilized digital tools in reporting and e-procurement to overcome some of the inefficiencies of traditional governance (Di Salvo, 2024) This case study has shown that, even in contexts with weak institutional foundations, public agencies can meet policy objectives through the strategic deployment of new technologies within constraints.(Nookala, 2024).

5.2 Implications for EU governance: from "one size fits all" to adaptive management

The study has some important recommendations about how the EU should be governed. The EU's current rules and how they are put into practice mostly follow a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to standardisation. This approach assumes that the same rules will have the same effect across all member states, which are very different. But the situation is different in Germany, France and Italy, which makes us think that the EU's future anti-corruption policy design should consider a 'principle-oriented adaptive management' framework, moving beyond a one-size-fits-all model as discussed in handbooks of policy tools (Capano & Woo, 2018; Howlett & Mukherjee, 2017). Focus on the most important principles and goals, instead of spending too much time and energy on small details. Focus on anti-corruption outcomes (e.g. making public procurement transparent, making sure judges are held accountable) rather than how to implement them. Allow member states to innovate based on their institutional characteristics.

Create a system to support and evaluate the implementation. When checking how well member states are following the rules, the European Commission should not only check that they are complying with the law, but also assess whether they are successfully achieving the objectives of the law through the resources available to them. Countries like Italy, which are good at digital innovation, should be recognised for this and given the technical help they need (European Court of Auditors, 2022).

Help member states share what they know and how they do things. The EU should make it easier for countries to share knowledge by encouraging Germany to share its expertise in legal systems, France to share its experience of institutional setups, and Italy to share its expertise in digital anti-corruption technology through modular decomposition and cross-border dissemination (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2020). Such metagovernance of collaborative innovation can be key to facilitating this learning across governance networks (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017).

5.3 Implications for member States: Mutual Learning and Path Optimization

The core reference value for international practices in this study is to explore how to share cross-border experiences and optimize institutions. Taking Germany as an example, through interdepartmental coordination mechanisms, its federal system could effectively absorb some elements from France's centralized governance model to further improve efficiency in dealing with corruption cases. This will help reduce the cost of coordination between multi-level governments and increase the capacity to fight cross-border corruption. Advantages in systematic legal integration and civil society supervision may be adopted from Germany by France to consolidate the sustainability of the anti-corruption system with efficient execution.

In a context of institutional weakness, Italy's model of 'digital empowerment compensation' is clearly relevant for developing countries. The Italian model is part of a global trend of GovTech and CivicTech innovations. This highlights the importance of digital technologies in

supporting transparent governance in challenging environments (Bhanye & Shayamunda, 2025). It comes into effect by adding technology applications to the powers of the National Anti-Corruption Agency, ANAC. However, Italy needs to turn the results of digital innovation systematically into wide-ranging reforms of its judiciary and administration, going from 'compensation' to 'fundamental enhancement'.

5.4 Implications for China: Policy

Adaptation and Institutional Fit

This study, therefore, seeks to identify the important mechanisms in policy implementation for jurisdictions that need to introduce international anti-corruption frameworks. International cooperation and regional integration do demand rule coordination, but success depends upon an thorough understanding of the local institutional environment.

In implementing China's "Belt and Road" initiative, one should focus on "rule compatibility" in international legal cooperation, as opposed to the simple transplantation of foreign norms. Indeed, Mukherjee have noted that such a process requires extensive policy design. More importantly, substantive improvement in governance capacity comes to the fore. Other scholars, such as (Almquist et al., 2013) emphasize that effectiveness in the mechanisms of the governance of the public sector and accountability should be guaranteed, achievable by technical assistance, personnel training, and low-cost digital solutions, such as the digital platforms adopted in Italy. Countries should be encouraged to identify ways of implementation suitable for their institutional characteristics, as long as the core international principles are observed. As Gunningham & Sinclair (Gunningham & Sinclair, 2017) show with respect to environmental policy, good governance by strategic combinations of policy—a differentiated development approach—deserves emulation and promotion in the anti-corruption area.

5.5 Research Limitations and Future

Directions

For the current study, there are several limitations: First, the qualitative comparative approach needs to be further validated through large-scale quantitative research or multi-case in-depth analysis. Also, existing literature focuses only on institutional differences at the national level, without due attention being given to local practical factors and the dynamic processes of institutional evolution. Future research could deepen and expand existing methodological frames or even tap into cutting-edge theoretical perspectives, such as "institutional complexity," to rebuild analytical frameworks.

In particular, as the EU Anti-Corruption Directive reaches full implementation, analysis of how the member states adapt to the new rules, especially with respect to the increasingly robust EU soft-law instruments, would be a valuable strand of research coming out of the study by Ausfelder et al. (Ausfelder et al., 2024). This tracking will not only serve to validate the conclusions of the present study but also provide fresh empirical evidence for understanding transnational legal integration.

6. Conclusions

This paper applies institutional adaptation theory to the implementation of EU legislation by EU member states. A comparative study of the implementation of the EU Anti-Corruption Directive in Germany, France, and Italy shows three different models of adaptation: "systematic institutional adaptation" in Germany, with its strict frameworks; "state-led adaptation" in France; and "compensatory adaptation" by Italy, using digital technologies to make up for institutional deficiencies. What this therefore means is that the findings of the research have demonstrated how effective policies do not derive from a simple reproduction of regulatory frameworks but from a dynamic balance of policy objectives with governance traditions of the member states. For the implementation of policy to be effective, there has to be sustained "institutional dialogue," or mutual adaptation, between the external demands of policy and domestic norms and practices. This finding affects how we understand EU governance. In the future, policy design must balance flexibility and uniformity. This means upholding core principles while considering member states' different governance approaches. More research is needed into the new digital mechanisms of interaction between institutions and actors. The aim is to develop governance systems that can ensure enforcement while accommodating differences. The results will provide valuable insights into theoretical solutions to challenging policy issues.

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