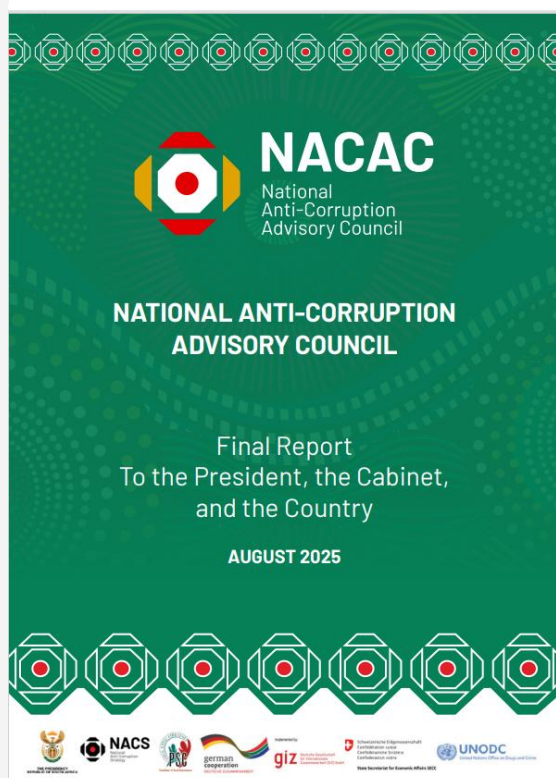


Thought Leadership

THE ARCHITECTURE OF INTEGRITY: NACAC'S BLUEPRINT FOR A CORRUPTION-RESISTANT SOUTH AFRICA



The publication of the [National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council's \(NACAC\) final report](#) in August 2025 is a watershed moment for South Africa. It exceeds the typical government white paper and is a profound work of democracy.

Following the autopsy of state capture performed by the Zondo Commission, which laid bare the mechanisms of looting and institutional sabotage, the NACAC has delivered the comprehensive design specifications for rebuilding a state that is not merely capable of prosecuting corruption after the fact but is structurally and culturally resistant to it.

The full report is now available for public access on The Presidency website and is a crucial step for transparency and national engagement: [National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council Final Report 2025](#).

The report recognises corruption as a complex social phenomenon, a "collective norm", sustained by weak institutions and eroded public trust. Its recommendations form an interconnected framework targeting the foundations of state capability and social contract, offering sophisticated solutions rather than simple punitive measures. This systemic understanding is what sets the NACAC report apart. It correctly identifies that you cannot out-prosecute a problem that is woven into the fabric of governance and society. The proposed solutions, therefore, must be equally systemic.

The Cornerstone: The Office of Public Integrity (OPI) – A Chapter 9 Institution

The proposed [Office of Public Integrity and Anti-Corruption \(OPI\)](#) as a permanent Chapter 9 institution forms the centerpiece of this new architecture. Its constitutional entrenchment alongside institutions like the Public Protector, signals that integrity preservation is as crucial as free elections.

This is arguably the NACAC's most strategic intervention.

This placement provides structural insulation from political interference, with disbanding requiring a two-thirds parliamentary majority, a crucial protection against the fate suffered by the Scorpions. The recommendation to absorb the [Special Investigating Unit \(SIU\)](#)'s mission, resources and capabilities represents pragmatic operational planning.

By elevating the OPI to a Chapter 9 body, it is intentionally moving the anti-corruption fight out of the sphere of day-to-day politics and placing it at the heart of our constitutional democracy.

This balances visionary institution-building with hard-nosed practicality. It neutralises potential opposition from a successful entity while ensuring the OPI has immediate operational teeth, avoiding the fate of becoming a mere “paper tiger” during a lengthy setup phase.

The OPI’s proposed functions reveal a sophisticated, three-pronged strategy that addresses the lifecycle of corruption:

- Preventing through proactive systemic audits, data-driven risk mapping of government institutions, and issuing binding directives for remedial action, the OPI moves upstream to identify and plug governance vulnerabilities before massive losses occur. This shifts the financial burden from costly recovery to smarter, cheaper prevention which is a significant evolution in the state’s cost-benefit analysis of fighting graft.
- Investigation and Remedy. Building on the SIU’s successful model, the OPI will conduct civil investigations into corruption, both via presidential proclamation and, critically, on its own initiative. It will also have the power to convene public inquiries, bringing sunlight and transparency to complex corrupt schemes that thrive in secrecy. This autonomy is the bedrock of its independence; without it, the OPI would remain vulnerable to political stalling and a key lesson from the state capture era would be ignored.
- Most innovatively, the OPI is tasked with leading a sustained national communication and social behaviour change strategy. This acknowledges a fundamental truth: that laws and institutions cannot succeed in a vacuum: they require a supportive social ethos and an active citizenry that values and demands integrity.

The NACAC’s diagnosis reveals an enforcement network plagued by overlapping mandates and capacity constraints. The solution involves rationalising responsibilities: strengthening the **Investigating Directorate Against Corruption (IDAC)** to handle serious corruption and commercial crime exclusively, while refocusing the Hawks on organised crime.

This proposed mandate clarification is not just bureaucratic tidying; it is a direct response to one of state capture’s key enablers: the deliberate creation of a confused and competitive law enforcement environment where accountability could easily fall through the cracks.

Re-engineering Law Enforcement

The proposed Case Management Committee, chaired by the National Director of Public Prosecutions, would coordinate investigations across agencies.

The choice of the NDPP as chair is analytically significant as it centralises prosecutorial authority over the investigative process, aiming to build cases from the outset with court-admissible evidence in mind, thereby increasing the likelihood of successful convictions.



Human-Centred Approach

Unlike conventional anti-corruption strategies, NACAC's approach recognises that systems depend on their human components. The plan addresses whistleblower protection as a central pillar. The analysis here is stark: **South Africa's current environment effectively punishes integrity.**

The harrowing experiences of whistleblowers like Baburam Maharaj, a former Transnet official who faced death threats and professional exile after exposing corruption, underscore this reality.



Until whistleblowers are treated as democratic assets rather than disposable liabilities, the flow of information needed to break corrupt networks will remain stifled. Recommendations include interim SIU protection mechanisms, legislative reform criminalising retaliation and eventual establishment of an independent whistleblower protector. The strategy also addresses social norms through a proposed National Communications Partnership that would execute evidence-based behavior change campaigns.

This acknowledges that a significant portion of the population has become desensitised to, or even complicit in, petty corruption. This is perfectly reflected in the frustrations voiced at NACAC's Youth Anti-Corruption Dialogue, where young people consistently highlighted how the 'it's just how things are' mentality normalises graft and erodes their future prospects. Reversing this requires a professional, sustained campaign akin to those for public health, not just occasional government statements.

Groundbreakingly, the report mandates a gendered understanding of corruption, particularly sexual corruption (sextortion), ensuring protection for vulnerable groups often excluded from traditional anti-corruption frameworks. This brings forward a hidden and often pervasive form of coercion into the mainstream anti-corruption discourse, recognising that the abuse of power is not always financial and that the most vulnerable often pay the highest price.

The Implementation Imperative - A Cross-Society Mandate

The blueprint's comprehensiveness presents implementation challenges requiring cross-society commitment. The report's ultimate test will not be the quality of its ideas, but the strength of the coalition it builds to enact them. This requires:

- Political will from executive leadership to drive legislative processes and resource allocation;
- Administrative courage from officials to embed anti-corruption measures into departmental operations;
- Vigilant civil society to monitor implementation and maintain pressure; and
- Private sector accountability to address corruption's supply side through ethical practices.

A Defining Choice

The NACAC's final report is more than a recommendation. It is a mirror held up to the nation. It reflects a deep understanding of the corrosive complexity of systemic corruption and offers a detailed, credible and courageous path forward.

The report presents South Africa with a defining choice. One path leads to the continued erosion of democracy, where public resources are siphoned away from the poor, trust in institutions evaporates and corruption becomes a permanent feature of life.

The other path, plotted by NACAC, leads toward a resilient, capable state where integrity is engineered into the system, accountability is enforced and citizens are empowered active participants in their democracy.

The cost of inaction, measured in continued poverty, inequality, and injustice, is astronomically higher than the investment required to build this architecture of integrity.

The time for advice is over. The era of action must begin.

