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To make the dominoes fall:

*A relational-processual approach to societal
accountability in the Italian and Spanish anti-
corruption arenas*

Scientific-disciplinary sector: SPS/11

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*cantamos porque el cruel no tiene nombre
y en cambio tiene nombre su destino*

Por qué cantamos, Mario Benedetti

Abstract

How do civil society organizations (CSOs) contribute to the struggle against public corruption? How can they hold their political representatives accountable? This thesis aims to answer these wide-ranging research questions, bridging anti-corruption and social movement studies by focusing on *societal accountability*, i.e., grassroots mechanisms for controlling and sanctioning powerholders.

Over the last few years, corruption scholars have increasingly emphasized the role of civil society as an antidote against corruption, complementing state and electoral accountability mechanisms. However, empirical studies on the anti-corruption effects of civic interventions have yet to yield consistent results. This should hardly come as a surprise. If measuring corruption is a challenging task, assessing the extent to which corrupt deals are prevented due to civil society initiatives appears virtually impossible. Hence, this work takes a step back and problematizes the study of societal accountability, approaching it not as a pre-given set of mechanisms or practices deployed by anti-corruption civic actors but as the result of sustained and contentious interactions between multiple players.

To do so, the study draws on social movement theories and conceptualizes societal accountability as a set of *consequences of collective action efforts*. Therefore, this work aims to understand *how* and *under what conditions* bottom-up anti-corruption initiatives achieve accountability results such as *legal claim attainments*, *answerability*, and *sanctioning potential*.

With this goal in mind, the thesis builds upon existing evidence from corruption and accountability studies and contributes to ongoing debates on the consequences of collective action. The theoretical framework focuses on the concept of *influence*, subscribing to a *processual-relational approach*. It understands influence as a relationally emergent instance of causality, a form of positional power that enables multiple players to exert control over the consequences of collective struggles. By bridging the *strategic-interaction* approach and *mediation* models; the analysis elucidates the *strategies* followed by CSOs in seeking positions of influence, as well as the *mechanisms* through which relational patterns produce social change.

The analytical framework is applied to the anti-corruption arenas in Italy and Spain and is narrowed down by focusing on three specific campaigns in each country: introducing *transparency* laws, passing *whistleblowers'* protection acts, and developing *civic monitoring* projects. The empirical material comprises 37 semi-structured qualitative interviews, documents, and network data retrieved through Action Organization Analysis. The corpus of data is analyzed by combining thematic analysis, frame analysis, and a theory-building process tracing through a qualitative network approach.

Overall, the evidence collected contributes to the literature on anti-corruption, demonstrating that CSOs, *directly* and *indirectly*, contribute to the anti-corruption struggle by achieving policy change, increasing the system's answerability, and triggering formal and informal sanctions when necessary. However, the Italian and Spanish cases' comparative accounts highlight relevant differences. In particular, the empirical investigation contributes to current debates on the study of societal accountability, showing that integration with political elites may increase the likelihood of obtaining policy change, whereas horizontal integration among civic actors may enhance their sanctioning potential. Ultimately, this work shows how processual-relational approaches can help integrate strategic and mediation models to understand better how change-oriented collective actors influence political and social change. The concluding remarks maintain that the interactions and relations built by players over time and across different arenas serve as *mediation channels* at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Overall, this demonstrates that individual players, patterns of relations in and across arenas, and ideas about relationships mediate between players' strategies, resources, or frames and their contextual conditions, thereby increasing or constraining their influence over the anti-corruption struggle.

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List of Abbreviations

AI, Access Info

ALAC, Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres

ANAC, Autorità Nazionale Anti Corruzione

CSO, Civil Society Organization

DS, Diritto di Sapere

EU, European Union

FI, Forza Italia

FOIA, Freedom of Information Act

HC, Hermes Center for Human and Digital Rights

Libera, Libera. Associazioni, nomi e numeri contro le mafie

NGO, Non-Governmental Organization

NPRR, National Resilience and Recovery Plan

PD, Partito Democratico

POS, Political Opportunity Structure

PP, Partido Popular

PSOE, Partido Socialista Obrero Español

RIF/TGL, Riparte il Futuro/The Good Lobby

RMT, Resource Mobilization Theory

SA, Societal Accountability

SMO, Social Movement Organization

TI-It, Transparency International Italy

TI-Es, Transparency International Spain

5SM, 5 Stars Movement

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Prologue. To make the dominoes fall

"I mean, we can be the best-skilled advocates, lobbyists, and strategic litigators that we want, but you're depending on the context to make the dominoes fall, you know? For people to get it, to have the right interlocutor in government, and it could be one person, and then it changes, and it's another person you can't actually talk to because of their personality, you know, and those are things that you can't control. You really, as a civil society, you have to be super patient 'cause you can't control it, and it may not happen now, and it may happen later, hopefully, eventually."

SP-3

On a walk

In June 2019, I participated in my first international conference organized by the Interdisciplinary Corruption Research Network in Kyiv¹. Upon my arrival, I was thrilled by the idea of meeting fellow corruption scholars, scared to death about presenting my project and astonished by the beauty of Kyiv. However, the best was yet to come. The last activity of the program was an anti-corruption walk organized by the activists of the Anticorruption Research and Education Center² to unwind after three intense days of insightful presentations and stimulating discussions. The few of us still in town and with enough energy left gathered at the Arsenal'na metro station. Passing by splendid palaces, courthouses, subway stations, and amusement parks, our guide told us about major corruption scandals that had marked the country's recent history. Although I have forgotten many of the details of those stories, I vividly remember the last part of our tour. Besides accounts of seemingly unbelievable scandals, our guide told us about the risks of everyday anti-corruption activism, sharing stories of threatened activists, silenced journalists, and state violence.

The 2013-2014 cycle of anti-corruption and pro-European protests, known as the *Revolution of Dignity*, brought thousands of people to Maidan square, raising their voices against Yanukovich's government. Maidan marked a turning point in Ukraine's political history, accelerating its Europeanization and weakening Russian influence over its government. While the anti-corruption consequences of that mobilization appear far from clear-cut (Bader et al., 2019; Blatt & Schlauffer, 2021), reflecting on those events in these turbulent times raises new questions about the influence of grassroots anti-corruption efforts.

¹ [4th Interdisciplinary Corruption Research Forum - ICRnetwork](#)

² [About us – ACREC – Міждисциплінарний науково-освітній центр протидії корупції](#)

Exploring the connections between Maidan protests and the current Russian invasion of Ukraine falls well outside the scope of this work ³. However, I have often returned to that walk and the anecdotal reflections it sparked while completing this manuscript. Besides the Ukrainian case, what can we say about the power of civil society to curb corruption? Can we assess the consequences of these mobilizations solely based on their capacity to reduce the spread of corrupt deals? What exogenous and endogenous factors help explain the contingent effects of these anti-corruption efforts? In a nutshell, what is the influence of civil society on the struggle against public corruption?

Puzzle, aims, and contributions

As highlighted by the quote that opens this manuscript, civil society actors alone have limited opportunities to shape social change independently. Anti-corruption actors know that their success depends on and is influenced by contextual conditions. However, they primarily understand this context in *relational terms*. Influencing the struggle for fair government relies on personal connections, influential positions, and networks of interactions. Individuals hold significance alongside institutional constraints. Political will can be altered and modeled through direct and cooperative ties within elite circles or forced to change by united civic fronts. Ultimately, changes will occur, navigating the power dynamics of relationships with or against institutional targets.

Insights from previous research have clarified that protestors and civic groups often pile up small gains and substantial losses (Gupta, 2009; Jabola-Carolus et al., 2020; Jasper et al., 2022), that social change can occur abruptly or through long and slow processes, and that mobilizations can have interrelated effects over different realms (Bosi, 2016). More importantly, studies have clarified that movements and civic actors hardly matter independently (Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Burstein et al., 1995; Giugni & Passy, 1998). By now, we know that change-oriented collective actors contribute to shaping social change processes *in connection to many other subjects* (Crossley, 2010; Erikson & Occhiuto, 2017; Sztompka, 1994). This evidence seems to hold even in the anti-corruption context. Studies have indeed observed that curbing corruption is rarely ascribable to the action of civil society organizations or institutional actors alone. Instead, anti-corruption results depend on complex *webs of interactions* between institutional and extra-institutional actors, from the political will to enact anti-corruption efforts and from the strength of extra-institutional actors to trigger or force such will⁴ (Bader et al., 2019; Brinkerhoff, 2000; Fox, 2015, 2016; Johnston, 2013).

³ Some interesting reflections in this sense may be found here: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/70-oksana-huss-joseph-pozsgai-alvarez-on-the-war-in-ukraine/id1456617327?i=1000552516966>. The connections between the Ukrainian anti-corruption revolution and Russia's violent response were also discussed at length by several contributions in Bertelsen (2016).

⁴ The idea that civic anti-corruption could work only in synergy with political will is widespread. However, as Beyerle (2014) demonstrates, civic initiatives can change political will and trigger state action.

However, existing studies on the impact of civic anti-corruption efforts have largely built on context-centered aggregative explanations, leaving little room to investigate the agency of civic players and sub-players.

By bridging corruption and collective action studies, this study explores how social movements and civil society actors—referred to as civil society organizations (CSOs)—contribute to the normative struggle against public corruption. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing investigations into the role of CSOs in countering public corruption by examining how and under what conditions CSOs' efforts result in *societal accountability*, namely grassroots mechanisms to oversee and sanction those in power. The study refrains from seeking direct connections between collective action and reductions in the spread of corruption deals; this question remains pertinent but lies beyond the scope and possibilities of this work. Instead, the study aims to assess whether and what accountability mechanisms CSOs can generate from the ground up. Findings in this regard could reshape research on the link between civil society and corruption, providing a new foundation for qualitative and quantitative analyses and expanding the scope of studies on the impact of anti-corruption mobilizations.

Simultaneously, this work aims to contribute to current debates on the consequences of collective action. It strives to develop and apply a comprehensive relational-processual approach to deepen our understanding of how CSOs participate in social change processes. Consequently, it focuses on the concept of *influence* rather than success, outcomes, impact, or gains, emphasizing that the collective contribution of multiple players shapes the social world as we know it. Analytically, the study integrates *strategic-interaction* and *mediation* approaches to illustrate how relations mediate opportunities, resources, frames, and strategies to advance CSOs' objectives. Specifically, it argues that accountability emerges from sustained interactions among a multitude of institutional and extra-institutional individuals and entities, and the influence of civic actors depends on the relational strategies and mechanisms that characterize these unfolding interactions.

Thesis outline

The first chapter provides an overview of theories and empirical evidence in the study of corruption and anti-corruption approaches to highlight the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advocating for accountable governments. It introduces the concept of *societal accountability*, examining its characteristics, strategies, and dimensions in contrast to other forms of accountability. The second chapter reviews past and current approaches to studying the consequences of collective action, connecting the debates to the study of societal accountability and introducing the relational-processual framework. The third chapter presents the case selection, research methodologies, and

data sources employed in the study. The fourth chapter delves into the background of the Italian and Spanish case studies, discussing the features of their respective corruption systems, the primary anti-corruption approaches adopted, and the historical efforts made by civic and institutional actors to combat corruption. The fifth and sixth chapters dig into the empirical evidence, presenting insights from the Italian and Spanish cases. Finally, chapter 7 reconsiders comparatively the Italian and Spanish trajectories of influence and their societal accountability consequences, discussing the proposed relational mediation model and its broader contribution. The chapter also addresses the study's limitations and implications for future research.

PART I: Theory, Methods, and Cases

Chapter 1. (Anti)corruption and the civil society's role

“We invoke such notions today when we speak of “the rule of law” not just as a good way to do public and private business but as a matter of justice. However fundamental those ideas may seem today, they are outcomes of contention over the limits of power rather than their sources.”

Johnston, 2013:1243

1.1. Introduction

Corruption⁵ has always been a central concern for human societies, with scandals and anti-corruption efforts already animating ancient Athens' political life and philosophical debates (Kroeze et al., 2018; Vergara, 2020). However, corrupt exchanges have remained at the margins of social sciences' investigations for a long time (Pozsgai-Alvarez & Pastor Sanz, 2021). One of the reasons for this scant academic interest had been methodological difficulties in studying hidden exchanges, such as corruption, and defining their properties (della Porta & Rose-Ackerman, 2002; Heywood, 2015; Johnston, 2005).

It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that scholars introduced corruption among their objectives of analysis, sparking debates between so-called *moralists* and *revisionists* (Caiden & Caiden, 1977; Johnston, 1986). Whereas the first group preached the inevitably harmful character of corruption (Friedrich, 1966; Wraith & Simpkins, 1963), the second one sustained its potentially beneficial effects for accelerating development processes and the inclusion of marginal groups (Huntington, 1968; Leff, 1964; Lui, 1985; Nye, 1967)⁶.

Beyond moral assessments, studies on corruption grew exponentially in the 1990s, when corruption became a *global concern* (Bukovansky, 2006; Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2011; Heywood, 2015, 2017; Sampson, 2015; Warren, 2014; Wickberg, 2021). Today international organizations, policymakers, activists, and scholars largely agree on the *negative* consequences of corruption on the quality of democratic governance (Ceva & Ferretti, 2014; Johnston, 2013; Rose-Ackerman, 1978, 1999; Vergara, 21), economic growth (Choi & Woo, 2010; Drury et al., 2006; Lambsdorff, 2007; Mauro, 1995; Rose-Ackerman, 1978), service delivery and social justice (Jong-Sung & Khagram, 2005; Kayode et al., 2013; Paul & Shah, 1997), institutional and interpersonal trust (Chang & Chu, 2006; Habibov et al., 2017; Kubbe, 2014; Lavallée et al., 2008), political participation (Bauhr & Charron, 2018; Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; Fernández-Vázquez et al., 2015; Giommoni, 2017), political polarization (Curini, 2017; Hanley & Sikk, 2013), and far more.

⁵ From the Latin “*Corruptere*” to ‘[mar, bribe, destroy](#)’, from *cor-* ‘altogether’ + *rumpere* ‘to break’

⁶ This argument has generally been rejected, but recent research has started to retackle the relationship between corruption and growth. While positive interaction does not seem existent in democratic systems, authoritarian states' growth appears to benefit from public corruption (Saha & Sen, 2021).

The growing anti-corruption consensus mirrored a progressive convergence in defining corruption in behavioral rather than moral terms (Johnston, 1996) as the misuse of public power for private gains. Discourses on corruption came to be dominated by international organizations such as the IMF and legitimized by leading anticorruption NGOs such as Transparency International. As a result, a “Washington consensus on corruption” emerged, informing anti-corruption narratives and policies (Krastev, 2000; Wickberg, 2020). Over the years, this convergence started attracting several criticisms, pointing to the inaccuracy of standard corruption definitions and the inefficacy of one-size-fits-all anti-corruption strategies (Bukovansky, 2006; Ceva & Ferretti, 2021a; Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2011; P. Heywood, 1997b; Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Philp, 1997; Vannucci, 2015; Wickberg, 2021).

Studies have thus increasingly focused on evaluating anti-corruption strategies and tools (Kubbe & Engelbert, 2017). In doing so, scholars have demonstrated the limits of governmental interventions (*horizontal accountability*) and electoral controls (*vertical accountability*) in curtailing the spread of public corruption (Bauhr & Charron, 2018; de Sousa & Moriconi, 2013; Fernández-Vázquez et al., 2015; A. Persson et al., 2013; Vannucci, 2021). As a consequence, a growing body of research has started to point to the vital role of *civil society* in triggering and sustaining broad anti-corruption efforts, even though international strategies appear still well-anchored to top-down interventions (Beyerle, 2014; della Porta & Mattoni, 2021; Grimes, 2008, 2013; Koppell, 2022; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013, 2015; Mungiu-Pippidi & Johnston, 2017; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006; Torsello, 2016; Vannucci, 2017).

More recently, research on the anti-corruption role of grassroots mobilizations has crossed its path with social movement and collective action studies. Well-established theories of contentious politics have thus shed light on the political opportunities, resources, and frames that help the emergence of anti-corruption movements, shaping their characteristics and impact (Almén & Burell, 2018; Caruso, 2018; della Porta et al., 2017; della Porta & Mattoni, 2021; Mattoni, 2018; Mattoni & Odilla, 2021; C. Milan, 2018; Piazza & Sorci, 2018; Pirro, 2018; Pirro & Della Porta, 2021; Schatz, 2013). The interaction between corruption and collective action studies has hence pointed to the crucial role of *societal accountability*, namely “a non-electoral mechanism of control, resting on the activities of a wide array of actors (i.e., citizens, movements, and the media), and that are primarily responsible for denouncing misconducts and raising public awareness” (della Porta et al., 2017:241).

The concept of societal accountability⁷ (SA) constitutes the core of the present research. However, evidence on the effectiveness of SA in reducing public corruption appears still puzzling (Fox, 2015; Grimes, 2013; Johnston, 2013; Larsson & Grimes, 2022). SA's efficacy seems to vary significantly according to contextual conditions, such as the political will to enforce accountability measures. Whereas civil society efforts are often crucial to activate and sustain governments' attempts to reduce and persecute corruption, they appear hardly successful when accountability conditions are not already in place or when elites are unwilling to take action (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006). The present work takes a step back to disentangle this puzzle. Rather than assessing the impact of SA on curbing corruption, the study aims at understanding *how* and *under what conditions* CSOs produce SA, that is, bottom-up forms of control and sanctioning of powerholders that can, eventually, reduce public corruption.

The chapter builds on theories of corruption and evidence from anti-corruption research to define CSOs as primary accountability actors. First, the chapter examines the concept of public corruption and provides a systematic overview of four distinct theoretical approaches to understanding corrupt exchanges. Next, it defines SA, showing why scholars should be primarily concerned with understanding how CSOs can contribute to the anti-corruption struggle. Finally, it presents the current state-of-the-art on SA research, shedding light on its actors, strategies, and mechanisms. In doing so, it advances the possibility of taking a step back, investigating how SA is *contentiously produced by different players in interactions* rather than trying to assess its direct impact on corruption control. Finally, it focuses on three SA consequences of collective action: legal claim attainment, sanctioning, and answerability, connecting them with the three major anti-corruption areas of interventions, transparency, whistleblowing, and civic monitoring.

1.2.(Anti)corruption and liberal democracy: setting the stage for civil society's initiatives

Corruption can take different forms. Definitions of corruption generally distinguish between *grand* or *petty* based on the resources involved, *public* or *private* based on the identity of the corruptees, *political*, *bureaucratic*, *judicial*, etc., based on the membership of the public officials involved, *endemic*, *systemic*, or *structural* based on its governance mechanisms, and more. The present work focuses on *public corruption*, intended as any corrupt exchange involving at least a public official,

⁷ In line with Boräng and Grimes (2021), this work differentiates between *social* and *societal* accountability. *Social accountability* refers to state-led initiatives aimed at fostering mechanisms of citizens' control. Social accountability projects generally move from a New Management Framework, conceived as a corrective of market mechanisms in democratic systems where citizens are transformed into clients (Boräng & Grimes, 2021). Instead, *societal accountability* refers to *non-state* accountability initiatives.

such as an elected or appointed official or a civil servant (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012). Besides helping to narrow down the scope of the present investigation to an easier-to-manage object of study, this choice is rooted in the attempt to bridge corruption and collective action studies by looking at how formally disempowered groups can set limits to the constituted power, oversight of its action, and sanction it.

At a normative level, at least when focusing on the Western liberal context- democracy and public corruption appear as virtually inseparable concepts. Public corruption can be defined, identified, and empirically assessed only with regard to a particular system of good and fair governance and democratic principles of resource allocation and power delegation (Warren, 2014). For a long time, scholars have conceived democratic checks and balances as an antidote to corruption⁸ (Johnston, 2005). Decades of scandals, investigations, and judicial accounts showed these claims' flaws. Public corruption thus came to be regarded not as an alternative but as co-existent with democracy, with the former being defined as a *systemic degeneration* of democratic systems, an expression of political decay (Vergara, 2019). Whereas democracy builds on promises of inclusion and equality (Canovan, 1999; Dahl, 1998), public corruption fosters a “duplicious exclusion” perpetrated by the same authorities that should ensure inclusion and representation⁹ (Warren, 2006).

Over the years, definitions of corruption have expanded to include various legal and illegal practices, such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, lobbyism, or state capture. To avoid overstressing the term or narrowing it down excessively, this work looks at public corruption as “a form of unaccountable use of entrusted power” (Ceva & Ferretti, 2021:20), a *relational* type of wrong perpetrated by public officials who deviate from their mandate rationale (Ceva, 2018; Ceva & Ferretti, 2021).

Defining public corruption as the *unaccountable use of entrusted power* sheds light on corruption's role over the recent history of many Western and non-Western democratic systems. Evidence of widespread corruption and an increasingly promiscuous relationship between financial and political interests contributed to the progressive erosion of liberal ideals of *procedural legitimacy*, *representation*, and *electoral accountability*, feeding the long-debated crisis of liberal democratic models (Crouch, 2003; Mair, 2009; Rosanvallon, 2008; Schmitter, 2015). In such contexts, neo-liberal-inspired reform attempts often had corruption-enhancing implications (Vannucci, 2015).

⁸ Recent research has shown that corruption and democracy are linked in a U-shaped relationship, with authoritarian and high-quality democracies performing better in curbing corruption⁸ (Rothstein, 2019). Public corruption still appears to be the dark side of democracy (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006).

⁹ According to Warren, corruption in democracy is better conceptualized as a form of hypocrisy. Corrupt politicians are, in fact, those who simultaneously represent and then disregard citizens' requests and needs (Warren, 2014).

Things worsened in the 2010s. The Great Recession's financial strains further eroded citizens' trust and the legitimacy of democratic systems, and the economic crisis became political (Schmidt, 2014). The failure of many liberal democracies to deliver the democratic promises of equality and inclusiveness, in turn, fostered an interpretation of this democratic gap in corruptive terms (Milan, 2018). The duplicitous democratic exclusion provoked by widespread corruption and promiscuous relations between governments and financial elites paved the way for grassroots actors to reclaim uncorrupt and more inclusive democratic models (della Porta, 2018).

In Europe, as elsewhere, movements in various countries have successfully linked *anti-austerity* and *pro-democratic* discourses with *anti-corruption claims*. The Eurozone crisis created new spaces of contention, easing the emergence of quests for good and fair governance (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015), with citizens voicing their indignation against the predatory behavior of national and international elites and the collusive relationships between political and economic powers (della Porta, 2015). These bottom-up anti-corruption efforts advanced deep democratization goals, intended as “a continuing process of setting limits to power, building accountability, and establishing social and political foundations of support for reforms by bringing more voices and interests into the governing process” (Johnston, 2013:1238). Anti-corruption movements brought new motives, repertoires, and narratives to the anti-corruption struggle. Systemic narratives overturned personalistic and behaviorist accounts. Protestors addressed public corruption as a “long-term, slow-moving process of oligarchization of society's political structure” (Vergara, 2019:40), broadening traditional definitions focusing on the misuse of public resources for private gain. Tackling corruption came to equate challenging the systematic exclusion of citizens from the political realm (Caruso, 2018) and intersected pro-democratic goals (Flesher Fominaya & Feenstra, 2023).

The anti-corruption or corruption-inspired protest cycles of the 2010s have profoundly transformed the Western political landscape – particularly the European one- favoring the emergence of new political players and polarizing political debates (Hanley & Sikk, 2013; Polk et al., 2017). However, how and to what extent these mobilizations impact *civil society's capacity to hold accountable powerholders* is still unclear. Understanding the transformative potential of grassroots initiatives is of critical importance because, even though curbing public corruption is essentially an institutional duty that requires state mechanisms of oversight and monitoring, “getting there is a process that is fundamentally social – revolving around the interests and perceived needs of groups and individuals in society” (Johnston, 2012:58). Accordingly, corruption studies have started to look into the relationship between CSOs and anti-corruption, focusing on *societal accountability* as

complementary to state controls (*horizontal accountability*) and electoral sanctions (*vertical accountability*).

Before introducing current debates in the study of SA, the following section discusses critical theoretical approaches to corruption and anti-corruption to situate this current research within a specific theoretical perspective - new institutionalism- which will be addressed subsequently.

1.3. Corruption studies

Studies on corruption may be clustered in four research traditions: rational choice studies, collective action approaches, culturalist explanations, and institutionalist accounts (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012; Vannucci, 2015).

Theories rooted in rational choice models, derived from economics to understand people and behavior, have probably been the more successful and the first to blossom (Krastev, 2000). These approaches regarded corruption as a dyadic relationship between a *principal* and an *agent*¹⁰ with divergent interests and asymmetric information (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Philp, 1997; Rose-Ackerman, 1978). Here, corruption is explained as a function of the principal's delegation of power to agents¹¹, their information asymmetry, and the principals' difficulty in monitoring agents' behavior (Rose-Ackerman, 1975, 1978). In such a research tradition, corrupt deals have thus been treated as individual decisions to exploit entrusted power for personal advantages, resulting from rational calculations of expected gains and related risks (Vannucci, 2015).

The dominant principal-agent model has championed anti-corruption designs, seeking to increase costs and reduce incentives to engage in corrupt deals. Over the last decades, this has often meant reducing public expenditure through privatization, deregulation, and fostering market competition to supposedly reduce public incentives for corruption (Krastev, 2000; Lambsdorff, 2007; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2014; Vannucci, 2017). In reality, incentives to join corrupt networks have not been eradicated but moved from the public to the private realm, not hindering corruption but transforming its nature (Crouch, 2018). Moreover, the progressive privatization of public services has multiplied the number of opaque, blurred, and ambiguous relationships between the state and the market, sometimes increasing corruption returns and promoting a culture of private economic success over transparency and public spiritedness (Crouch, 2003, 2018; Vannucci, 2017). In a

¹⁰ Corruption is often described as a *double principal-agent problem*, alternatively identifying the principal with the state or the citizenry and the agents with the politicians or the bureaucrats (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015).

¹¹ Corruption is better understood as a *triadic* relationship, the state or the citizenry as the principal, a public agent, and a client (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012).

nutshell, principal-agent-inspired policies have had limited and questionable effects in tackling public corruption.

According to part of the scholarship, this inefficacy derives from the misconceptions inherent to principal-agent and rational approaches (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; A. Persson et al., 2019)¹². Indeed, this model comes with relevant limitations. Firstly, rational calculations are not merely economic but include the so-called *moral costs*, namely “the utility which is lost because of the illegality of an action” (della Porta & Rose-Ackerman, 2002: 12). Secondly, public corruption entails high *transaction costs* (Husted, 1994) because agents cannot freely advertise their interests, and corrupt deals are always prone to defections and cheating, with threats coming from the state repression and by partners within the agreement (Lambsdorff, 2002). Thirdly, rational choice conceives actors’ preferences as exogenously generated and fixed in time (Rose-Ackerman, 1978). What follows is that, given a similar set of incentives and constraints, individuals will behave in the same rational way. However, research has shown that this is not the case; instead, anti-corruption strategies should be designed based on the contingent model of corruption they aim to tackle (Gephart, 2009; Husted, 1999; Krastev, 2000). Several voices have thus raised against the dominant principal-agent model, questioning its on-size-fits-all approach (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; della Porta, 2018; della Porta & Vannucci, 2012; Peiffer & Alvarez, 2016; A. Persson et al., 2013; Vannucci, 2017).

Even though moving from similar premises, part of the existing scholarship has hence preferred conceptualizing corruption in collective action terms (A. Persson et al., 2013). Following the collective action theory, actors’ corrupt behavior is not merely the product of rational *individual* calculations but results from how people perceive others will behave (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015). Once accepting a bribe is perceived as the norm in people’s social environment, high levels of perceived corruption will generate resignation rather than indignation (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014) and prevent the unfolding of collective mobilization due to perceived corruption fatigue (A. Persson et al., 2013). Therefore, fighting corruption entails much more than just designing an efficient system of anti-corruption laws; it deals with people’s *perceptions* of the system of corruption. Collective action interpretations of public corruption have thus put people’s perceptions at the forefront of analyses, debating on the effects of free riding on corruption control (Rothstein, 2011)

¹² Critiques of the principal-agent model have themselves generated internal debates. Whereas part of the scholarship aims at complementing principal-agent understandings with a study of the functions that public corruption accomplishes in the “real world” (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015, 2018), others reject some interpretation in favor of collective action approaches (A. Persson et al., 2019).

In anti-corruption terms, these approaches have often called for revolutionary “big bang” approaches that aim to transform societal values and individuals’ perceptions (Persson et al., 2013). However, this approach implies a top-down reorganization of institutions and the perceived dominant structure of values (A. Persson et al., 2013). In this vein, anti-corruption approaches bid on exogenous shocks and state interventions guided by the same political elites potentially involved in corrupt exchanges. Such a position nearly disregards the role of civil society in transforming societal values and intervening in the existing structure of power relationships from below. What follows is that state actors operate to generate and enforce accountability from a top-down perspective (Lambsdorff, 2007). Recent contributions have partly addressed these issues advocating for incremental approaches (Taylor, 2018). However, even in these cases, the role of civil society is often limited to including small groups and structured organizations in oversight processes, fostering hierarchical and exclusionary dynamics and the emergence of particularized rather than generalized forms of social trust (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015).

Culturalist approaches, instead, have questioned the rationality inherent to the principal-agent model altogether, maintaining that corruption is, first and foremost, a crime of *passion* (Elster, 1989). In culturalist terms, individual preferences are not simply costs but rather the expression of values and norms internalized through socialization processes (Vannucci, 2015). Hence, developing efficient anti-corruption strategies is not just a matter of incentives and constraints but entails a profound transformation of societal values, perceptions, and collective behavior, shaping individuals’ expectations. Shifting the focus to the macro-level of analysis, concepts such as values, civic culture, and normative barriers seem to explain cross-national differences in levels of public corruption. Consequently, corrupt practices appear linked to different degrees of *public spiritedness* (Elster, 1989), mirroring the degree of ethical aversion to corruption in specific societies. Based on this model, corruption would derive from the mismatch between state preferences and norms and informal, societal, non-written ethical standards that motivate individuals to enter illegal exchanges. Where normative barriers are higher and overlap with state regulation, agents’ and state preferences will coincide, increasing the degree of public-spiritedness and decreasing the chances of misuse of delegated power (della Porta & Vannucci, 2014). Overcoming the principal-agent scheme, scholars in this tradition acknowledge that divergent ethical standards can generate different corruption *equilibria*: when ethical universalism prevails over predatory particularism, levels of public corruption would be lower (Mungiu-Pippidi et al., 2013). Recently, scholars have pointed out that the spread of the so-called *amoral neoliberalism* has weakened the moral barriers against public corruption cross-nationally, placing economic profits at all costs first and on top of public spiritedness (Vannucci, 2015).

The use of costs, material or moral, and normative barriers in rational choice, collective action, and culturalist approaches tend to oversimplify the weight of ethical preferences and furnish a static understanding of individual preferences. To solve some of these issues and in line with the renewed attention of the social sciences on the role of institutions, corruption studies have progressively moved towards a meso-level neo-institutional approach. The neo-institutional approach stresses the *relational* character of corruption, explaining mechanisms of change and stability by looking at the interactions in corruption networks and their internal regulations by referring to *first-*, *second-*, and *third-party enforcement mechanisms* (della Porta, 2018; della Porta & Vannucci, 2012, 2014; Lambsdorff, 2007). Reintroducing into the analysis corruption relational character helps understand how these networks succeed in lowering the high transaction costs characterizing illegal exchanges and explain their resilience over time (Lambsdorff, 2007).

First-party enforcement mechanisms include the moral norms and normative barriers highlighted by culturalist approaches; they summarise the structure of internalized values according to which actors can be more or less prone to enter illegal deals. Here, moral values are not regarded as exogenous and fixed; on the contrary, they are thought to arise from people's interactions, and therefore they can change and be reshaped over time. At the same time, the neo-institutional perspective reintroduces power relationships into the picture, a factor wholly overlooked by previous paradigms, by considering second-party enforcement mechanisms, namely the possibility of actors in the agreement to administer sanctions to fulfill corrupt deals (della Porta & Vannucci, 2014). Such a perspective suggests that - once settled- corruption networks can be coercively sustained, resorting to endogenous control and sanctioning mechanisms that may hinder individuals' chances of rational calculation and moral compliance. Finally, the neo-institutional approach looks at third-party enforcement mechanisms as crucial elements to lower transaction costs and force the parties to respect the informal norms governing corrupt exchanges. Here, sanctions against defections are administered by a *third actor* with specialized functions (e.g., mafia groups), ensuring the respect of illicit deals through coercion, intimidation, or violence. In sum, enforcement mechanisms create informal norms and behavioral regularities, institutionalizing trust and mutual recognition relationships, through which corrupt networks become path-dependent and self-enforcing (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012). Once institutionalized, power and trust relations are locked in and maintained over time (Lambsdorff, 2002).

The neo-institutional approach appears quite promising, even in describing the anti-corruption field. Here, second-party enforcement refers to *state accountability*¹³*mechanisms*, namely the possibility

¹³ Also known as *horizontal accountability*, power checks the power (Bauhr, 2017a).

for the state to increase the material and moral costs of being involved in corrupt exchanges through institutional monitoring and sanctions (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012). Civil society actors constitute, instead, third-party enforcement mechanisms through *societal accountability* (SA), that is, through non-legal and non-electoral oversight and sanctioning mechanisms (della Porta et al., 2017). Thus, the neo-institutional approach reintegrates vertical and top-down anti-corruption approaches with horizontal and participatory practices. What follows is that even though curtailing corruption pertains to institutional actors and depends on their political will, civil society actors can play a pivotal role in *triggering* and *meditating* institutional anti-corruption efforts and their implementation (Johnston, 2005). Such an approach connects SA to other forms of accountability and offers civil society actors a primary role in the struggle against corruption.

Before discussing SA's actors, strategies, and consequences, the chapter digs deeper into accountability research to refine the concept and elucidate its analytical dimensions.

1.4. Accountability

As with corruption studies, accountability¹⁴ research has grown significantly over the last decades (Bovens et al., 2014). Accountability has become a buzzword easily encountered in policy briefs, edited volumes, party manifestos, or media accounts to discuss institutional responsiveness (Mulgan, 2003).

Among many possible definitions, this work builds on a relational understanding of accountability as “a relationship between an actor and a forum¹⁵, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgment, and the actor may face consequences” (Bovens, 2007:450). Like many other definitions of accountability, such a relational understanding stresses the two necessary elements of accountability: *answerability* and *enforcement* (Bovens, 2007; Fox, 2007; Grimes, 2008b). *Answerability* refers to the obligation of public officials and political representatives to inform about and justify their actions and the right of the public to pose questions. *Enforcement* refers to public officials facing the consequences of their actions and rests on the capacity to administer sanctions in case of norms violation.

Traditionally, scholars have relied on a spatial metaphor to distinguish between a horizontal and a vertical form of accountability.

¹⁴ Historically, the concept has its roots in the Anglo-Norman tradition and referred to “rendering a count” of one’s possessions to the Crown (Bovens, 2005).

¹⁵ Actors and forums can be either individuals, organizations, or institutions, and the obligations and sanctions can be formal or informal (Bovens, 2007).

Horizontal accountability refers to the ensemble of “state agencies that are legally enabled and empowered, and factually willing and able, to undertake actions that span from routine oversight to criminal sanctions or impeachment, in relationship to actions or omissions, by other state agents or agencies, that may be qualified as unlawful” (O’Donnell, 1998:117). The concept relates to the liberal system of checks and balances based on powers separation, constitutionalism, and fundamental rights protection (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006b). When efficient, horizontal accountability has both preventive and sanctioning functions, relying on balancing institutional powers and overseeing public officials (O’Donnell, 2006).

In anti-corruption terms, horizontal accountability comprises second-party enforcement mechanisms (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012) aimed at strengthening state controls and sanctions to increase the costs and reduce the incentive of joining corrupt deals (Schatz, 2013). However, these mechanisms normatively assume the existence of a *principled principal* (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014) interested in pursuing anti-corruption goals¹⁶ (Brinkerhoff, 2000; Schatz, 2013). However, scholars claim that relying on the idea that power will check power appears naïve and risky, suggesting that *vertical accountability* mechanisms should complement horizontal checks, monitoring public officials’ use of delegated power and administering sanctions through electoral means (Bauhr, 2017a).

*Vertical accountability*¹⁷, i.e., citizens administering sanctions through elections, has often been evoked as a necessary complement against public corruption. Scholars have thus referred to concepts such as *electoral balance* (Rose-Ackerman, 1999) to check on political powers via continuous electoral confirmation¹⁸ (Bauhr & Charron, 2018). However, for such a model to work, politicians should not be too safe or uncertain regarding their re-election chances. Indeed, once politicians feel too confident about their mandate, they may enter illegal deals without fearing the potential legal and electoral consequences. Similarly, when elected representatives perceive the possibility of not being re-elected, they may turn to corruption to feed their electoral base and secure their position through cronyism and bribery (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Finally, the possibility of curbing corruption through electoral mechanisms appears highly dependent on the design of electoral systems and campaigns. Whereas elections are considered a powerful incentive for

¹⁶ This leads to a paradoxical situation where countries with widespread corruption will be the more in need of reforms but the least likely to obtain them due to the implications of policymakers in corrupt exchanges (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012)

¹⁷ Also known as *electoral accountability*.

¹⁸ Liberal democracies have tried to strengthen their procedural legitimacy by enhancing electoral accountability, for instance, by increasing the frequency of elections (Rosanvallon, 2008). However, political and electoral designs have sometimes created new room for corruption to spread (Johnston, 2013).

avoiding involvement in corruption networks, some systems could be more fragile than others, with the costs of electoral campaigns increasing the likelihood of accepting bribes and illegal deals.

In addition, research on the relationship between voting behavior and public corruption has questioned the significance of electoral accountability. Studies have shown that high levels of perceived corruption may feed voters' disengagement, increase abstention, or even strengthen voters' loyalty to misbehaving representatives (Bagenholm & Charron, 2014; Bauhr & Charron, 2018; de Sousa & Moriconi, 2013). Thus, electoral accountability alone seems insufficient to ensure corrupt public officials will pay for their misconduct. Conversely, the electoral competition in democratic regimes might produce specific incentives for being involved in corrupt deals, such as vote-buying, lobbying, or regulation of the public-private sector relationships (Johnston, 2013). Additionally, casting a vote requires citizens to use a unique instrument to evaluate their representatives' performance on many different grounds and to have sufficient information for administering their sanctions. Given the impossibility of voters to strategically coordinate on such a large scale, voting represents a “decentralized strategic action” and “an imperfect sanctioning system” (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006b:7). Moreover, the liberal democratic crisis has weakened electoral accountability, nurturing citizens' resignation and political inefficacy (Crouch, 2018; Rothstein, 2019).

In a nutshell, today, elections appear as an insufficient accountability mechanism. In fact, “what matters for a democracy in terms of control of corruption is not elections as one-time mechanisms for selecting between candidates, but rather the permanent capacity to ensure that whoever is elected respects individual rights, autonomy, and voice” (T. Persson & Tabellini, 2003: 173). In sum, curtailing and preventing public corruption has much to do with *deep democratization processes*, as *continuous* and *contentious* processes of democratic enhancement that constrain the power of public officials by empowering citizens and their voices (Johnston, 2013). State and electoral accountability should be complemented by *societal accountability*.

1.4.1. Societal accountability

SA is “a nonelectoral yet vertical mechanism of control of political authorities that rests on the action of an array of citizens' associations and movements and the media. The actions of these groups monitor public officials, expose governmental wrongdoing, and can activate the operation of horizontal agencies” (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006b:10). Civil society organizations represent third-party enforcement mechanisms that rely on non-institutional tools and sanctions to control powerholders (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012).

The concept is quite broad and, to date, has been applied to various contexts and democratic issues, such as monitoring of service delivery, access and diffusion of public information, or participatory budgeting (Fox, 2015; Villoria & Gómez, 2021). It includes heterogeneous actors, such as social movement organizations, civic associations, NGOs, and media (O'Donnell, 2006), each with specific goals, repertoires, and strategies. At the same time, SA *targets* can be multiple, including single politicians, political parties, governments, policies, the judiciary, or other institutional actors. The multiplicity of SA actors and targets de facto complicates the picture since some of the players involved are, at the same time, second-party mechanisms of enforcement (e.g., anti-corruption agencies), which means they are part of the same horizontal accountability bodies SA aims at activating.

SA strategies generally involve *judicialization*, *social mobilization*, and *mediatization* (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006b). The judicial strategy consists of the submission to courts and control agencies of legal claims. In some cases, presenting legal claims to agencies and institutions endowed with sanctioning power can generate tangible results beyond the symbolic dimension of SA. Moreover, legal claims may be easily satisfied when the judicial strategy couples with large mobilizations through which social actors seek to obtain voice and visibility. Mobilization from below may increase the moral and material costs for actors involved in corrupt exchanges and contribute to the activation of horizontal accountability mechanisms influencing the agenda or the functioning of the institutional system and obtaining political and institutional change. Finally, being the threatening potential of SA based on the possibility of obtaining visibility, the media play an intermediary role in obtaining accountability results.

The main *mechanisms* through which civil society may produce SA are the *direct substitution of horizontal accountability agencies* and/or the *indirect activation of horizontal accountability agencies*. CSOs can *directly* control powerholders by imposing *reputation costs* through exposure and accusation of misconduct, particularly when denunciation from social actors reaches media attention (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006b). Civil society can thus use media as an alternative tool to obtain justice and to sanction public agents. Directly, collective action against public corruption can also give rise to parallel watchdog organizations to control and evaluate the performances of public officials, thus becoming the “guardians of the guardians” (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006a:19). At the same time, CSOs may achieve SA results *indirectly*, triggering the *activation* of horizontal accountability agencies - as the judicial or legislative power -or fostering the creation of ad hoc anti-corruption legislations or state agencies and investigative commissions.

Unlike voting, SA efficacy does not rest on extension (i.e., being the majority) but on *intensity*, thus on the strength of grassroots claims and influence on public opinion (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006b). Moreover, whereas horizontal accountability mechanisms rest on liberal distrust (Rosanvallon, 2008), SA mechanisms are rooted in a *democratic form of distrust*, ensuring citizens can check and exert continuous pressure on the ruling elites. Therefore, in anti-corruption terms, SA entails a set of mechanisms that aims at curbing public corruption through the civil society's active engagement and inclusion in democratic life. However, scholars' opinions about the *consequences* of such involvement tend to diverge.

So far, studies have tried to investigate how and to what extent SA tackles corruption (Fox, 2015; Larsson & Grimes, 2022; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). Theoretically, civic controls have been regarded as a powerful antidote against public corruption (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015; Vannucci, 2015). Grassroots anti-corruption initiatives have been acknowledged the power to contest unequal systems of power distribution and resource allocation, protect general interests against particularistic ones and produce "good social capital" where corruption favors the spread of "bad social capital" (Grimes, 2008a; Putnam, 2000). However, empirical studies on the matter have often reached inconsistent results. Large-N analyses correlating civil society's strength and public corruption's spread have stressed the context-dependency of civic anti-corruption efforts (Grimes, 2008b, 2013; Larsson & Grimes, 2022). Case-study qualitative analyses have been similarly mild when evaluating the effectiveness of anti-corruption mobilizations (Fox, 2015; Huss, 2016; Sengupta, 2014).

Qualitative analyses and thick descriptions generally attribute the varying influence of anti-corruption mobilizations to a complex mix of factors: institutional systems' architecture, political will, CSOs' strategies, resources, and organizational structure, ties with international donors, and public opinion support (Bader et al., 2019; Brinkerhoff, 2000; Fox, 2015). From a theoretical point of view, the spread of malpractices, predatory behavior, and lack of accountability of political élites should trigger collective mobilization and foster civil society's empowerment. In the end, anti-corruption mobilization from below should activate processes of critical engagement of the citizenry and strengthen SA (Pirro, 2018). However, research has shown that this hypothesis holds only when considering *political will*. In fact, once the perception of general levels of public corruption couples with individuals' belief that governments are efficiently contributing to tackling corruption, civil society engagement is more likely to emerge and contribute to strengthening SA (Peiffer & Alvarez, 2016). On the contrary, when corruption is widespread and government intervention insufficient, citizens will be more likely to withdraw from the anti-corruption struggle

(Bauhr, 2017b). These puzzling results show that SA is influenced by state intervention but also that the former can, in the end, contribute to reshaping the latter (Grimes, 2008; Larsson & Grimes, 2022).

When evaluating the consequences of anti-corruption initiatives from below, the most successful examples seem to come from mobilizing different interest groups in society, which cooperate but do not necessarily develop a shared collective identity. According to Johnston (2012), “the best such examples might not involve dedicated anti-corruption groups at all, but rather the more general ways in which various interest groups in democracies pursue their interests, seek to protect themselves against official abuses, and penalize poor government performance. This connection may be due to the reality that an anti-corruption movement that is successful over time could effectively put itself out of business, handing over the task and challenges of checking official misconduct to a wide range of interests” (p.71). Hence, dedicated anti-corruption movements are relevant since they mobilize around purposive and solidarity incentives that build on a systemic understanding of corruption, yet, broader civil society coalitions, generally moved by material interests, tend to be more successful over time. However, this success is often limited in time and scope (della Porta et al., 2017) if SA becomes a mere widget enacted by external donors or NGOs “from above” (Fox, 2015; Joshi & Houtzager, 2012). Thus, to truly understand the impact and potentialities of SA, one should avoid one-size-fits-all approaches, rejecting oversimplifications of the civil society’s role as an anti-corruption, on the contrary, acknowledging the complexity and the heterogeneity of the societal actors involved in the struggle for the good and fair government (Fox, 2015).

Against this backdrop, the present work looks at SA as resulting from processes of collective mobilization. In doing so, it aims to integrate the existent body of quantitative research that demonstrates the positive effects of an active and engaged civil society in terms of corruption control (Bauhr, 2017a, 2017b; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013, 2014, 2015) with an in-depth understanding of *how* and *under what conditions* this control is achieved. Insights from the literature on collective action may help conceptualize the relationship between SA actors and the state as a contentious process that reshapes both actors and their context (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012). Being SA a relationship that connects state and non-state actors (Bovens, 2007), its emergence will depend on the different contexts in which these dynamics unfold (e.g., by the legacy of previous patterns of relations between the state and collective actors) and by the interaction between institutional and extra-institutional players (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012).

1.5. Accountability consequences of collective action: a relational approach

Decades of research on the consequences of collective action have made clear that the relationship between civil society efforts and social change is complex and multifaceted. This is probably even more true when looking at corruption, a phenomenon that is itself hidden, difficult to observe, running on covert networks, and whose contrast requires the intervention of multiple institutional and civic actors. If measuring corruption is, per se, a pernicious task, assessing the share of corrupt deals that are not happening due to civil society initiatives appears virtually impossible (Picci & Vannucci, 2018). Furthermore, research on social movement demonstrates that collective action consequences can range well-beyond original and stated goals (Deng, 1997; Suh, 2014). Hence, limiting the study of the impacts of anti-corruption mobilizations to their correlation with the spread of corrupt deals or corruption perceptions appears restrictive and, perhaps, misleading.

So far, little research has conceptualized SA as a consequence of collective action and civil society's mobilizations. Almén's and Burell's work (2018) represents a notable exception. The study builds on Gamson's work (1990 [1975]) to investigate the varying degrees to which SA has emerged in the authoritarian Chinese context and classifies SA consequences in *legal claim attainment*, *answerability*, and *enforcement*. In line with previous results, their investigation shows that anti-corruption from below brings about SA consequences when protestors are well-organized, when they can find external actors as supporters, and when their claims align with government ones. However, the conceptualization of SA consequences in terms of outcome tends to overlook both the internal distinctions between SA actors and the crucial role of institutional actors in co-shaping SA consequences.

On the contrary, this work maintains that SA consequences result from the *joint action of multiple players and their interactions* (O'Donnell, 2006; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006a). According to previous studies, SA consequences are more likely to unfold when several civil society actors mobilize around the issue of public corruption, even when they do not uniquely identify themselves as anti-corruption actors (Johnston, 2012). Besides, successful examples of anti-corruption from below tend to show a high level of *horizontal associative ties* based on mutual recognition and interlocking ties (Mazák & Diviák, 2018). Finally, SA derives from the possibility of activating horizontal accountability agencies, which requires the establishment of cooperative relationships with different institutional actors (Almén & Burell, 2018) or the substitution of horizontal mechanisms (Schatz, 2013) with the development of a threatening potential through visibility and voice in the other arenas (e.g., media, Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006b).

Hence, this work follows a *processual-relational* approach to investigate the strategies used by accountability actors and the mechanisms that lead to SA consequences. Firstly, considering SA creation through a processual lens means recognizing that there are no silver bullets when evaluating civil society's impact in deep democratization and oversight processes in democratic contexts (Fox, 2015). Secondly, a relational approach disentangles the role of different civil society and institutional actors and looks at their interactions to understand SA consequences.

The analysis revolves around three common areas of anti-corruption intervention *transparency*, *whistleblowing*, and *monitoring* (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015). Pro-transparency and pro-whistleblowing campaigns may represent crucial arenas of contention for policy change (*legal claim attainment*). Transparency obligations and monitoring practices may be exploited to force powerholders to justify their actions and decisions (*answerability*). Whistleblowers' leaks and monitoring may serve to exert formal and informal sanctions against misbehaving public officials and institutions (*enforcement*). Understanding whether and how CSOs' mobilization in these areas leads to SA consequences remains a matter of empirical investigation.

1.5.1. Transparency

Governmental transparency is often regarded as one of the more significant measures to curb public corruption, even though evidence in this regard is pretty uncertain (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014, 2014; Fox, 2007; Sampson, 2010). Besides its anti-corruption functions, transparency has been the center of intense debates and grassroots demands for decades. Scholars have thus investigated the emergence of transparency movements and postulated the beginning of a new democratic phase built on *proactive* and *reactive* information disclosure (Nolin, 2018; Schudson, 2015; Sifry, 2011). However, the blurred boundaries of the concept of transparency have generated much confusion in referring to terms such as answerability, open data, or independent press, often resulting in misleading conclusions.

Over time, the notion that “information is power” has been severely criticized. Indeed, being transparent means being visible, unveiling a black box. However, in its literal meaning, transparency does not imply that what is visible is seen. Briefly, the availability of information does not coincide with its usage; namely, transparency does not coincide with *publicity* (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). Whereas one can conceptualize transparency as a precondition of accountability, the terms do not coincide (Bovens, 2007).

The theoretical divide between these two related concepts lies in information *usability* (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). Information disclosure only brings about consequences when the audience, the

citizenry-as-principal, can assess and process it, which comes with increasing costs and efforts. CSOs, media, and institutions may significantly reduce the cost of information-gathering, but citizens' demands do not always support their efforts. More importantly, transparency does not always translate into sanctioning potential. Thus, one could distinguish between opaque and clear forms of transparency and, more importantly, between soft and hard forms of accountability (Fox, 2007). When information is used only for asking powerholders to justify their behavior (answerability, Schedler, 1999), one can only obtain soft forms of accountability, while the hard ones require the possibility for civil society actors to administer sanctions against the misbehaving officials and institutions (Fox, 2007).

Several voices in the literature have raised the point that information, per se, is hardly beneficial but, on the contrary, risks further demobilizing an already frustrated citizenry. Indeed, once quantitatively tested, the assumption underlying the straightforward relationship between transparency and accountability does not hold. Information may trigger collective action, producing and shaping SA. However, in highly corrupted countries, transparency tends to produce a vicious cycle that lowers political trust, engagement, and interests, ultimately producing resignation rather than indignation (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014). The likelihood of transparency to feed resignation rather than indignation is higher when information disclosure leads citizens to realize how widespread corruption is and to believe that most fellow citizens are engaged in illicit exchanges. When corruption represents an informal norm in people's social environment, it will likely result in adaptation (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014), preventing collective mobilization from arising due to perceived corruption fatigue (A. Persson et al., 2013).

However, CSOs working on anti-corruption and accountability can contribute to breaking this vicious cycle. In particular, they can contribute by "enabling environments for collective action that can scale up and coordinate with reforms of the state that encourage actual public sector responsiveness" (Fox, 2015:350). Such a perspective does not assign power to information per se but calls for considering the *mediating role* of CSOs. Notwithstanding the limited consequences of transparency in the anti-corruption struggle alone, obtaining higher levels of information disclosure and the right to know may be conceptualized as a form of legal claim attainment and as a starting point to mobilize citizens and groups around SA claims.

1.5.2. Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing entails "the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations

that may be able to effect action" (Near and Miceli, 1985:4). As such, blowing the whistle is generally understood as a political act of dissent threatening those in power (Farrell and Petersen, 1982; Ramirez, 2007), and a crucial accountability tool (Lewis, Brown, & Moberly, 2014). Whistleblowers play a significant role in preventing corruption at all levels, particularly in the public sector, characterized by long chains of command, highly bureaucratized and hierarchical structures, and intricate communication practices (Bernstein & Jasper, 1996).

Whistleblowers represent the quintessential form of individual protest, a prominent example of ethical resisters moved by moral principles (Jasper, 1997, 2018). Moreover, whistleblowing constitutes one of the primary measures to counter corruption, particularly in the public sector (Pérez Triviño, 2018). Besides allowing citizens to report institutional malfeasances (Bushnell, 2020; Jubb, 1999; Near & Miceli, 1985), whistleblowing has crucial preventive functions, improving transparency and accountability (Apaza & Chang, 2020; Rosen, 1998). However, whistleblowers seldom act in isolation. On the contrary, they interact with various actors, from institutional to extra-institutional (Near & Miceli, 1985; Santoro & Kumar, 2018) and often in synergy with CSOs, to obtain reciprocal benefits (Bernstein & Jasper, 1996; Bushnell, 2020; De Maria, 2008).

In accountability terms, whistleblowers' role is a crucial source of sanctioning potential. Disclosing information on potential wrongdoings and illicit behavior, individuals who speak against power break the hidden deals that sustain political corruption and reaffirm the values of social justice and political accountability (Santoro & Kumar, 2018). The sanctioning potential deriving from whistleblowing initiatives is of primary importance to move from soft to hard forms of accountability (Fox, 2007), where the answerability dimension couples with enforcement potential (Schedler, 1999). Whistleblowers do exert sanctioning by publicly exposing institutional wrongdoing. Their reporting act may have material and/or symbolic consequences, tackling corruption directly or nurturing citizens' sense of efficacy and belief in shared moral values (Rosanvallon, 2008). When channeled to regulatory agencies or police forces, their reporting may set in motion investigations and trials, indirectly generating formal sanctions (Mainwaring, 2003). When endorsed by political representatives, their disclosure may inform policy and political change. When the media reinforces their statements, they may cause symbolic sanctions (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006). When aligned to movements' claims, their denunciation may become a source of moral sanctioning and reinvigorate collective action.

Over the last few years, famous cases such as Collateral Murders or Wikileaks popularized the topic of whistleblowing, introducing new forms of data activism and digital mobilization (Di Salvo,

2020b; Mattoni; 2017, S. Milan, 2013; Sifry, 2011). The increasing international attention on the role of whistleblowers has thus coupled with an increased commitment on CSOs to protect whistleblowers, often pointing at their contribution to the anti-corruption struggle. However, it is necessary to assess the consequences of these mobilizations in terms of accountability. Hence, this work looks at whistleblowers' protection laws as cases of legal claim attainment (Almén & Burell, 2018) and at whistleblowing formal and informal sanctioning consequences mediated by CSOs.

1.5.3. *Monitoring*

Civic monitoring is a grassroots democratic practice that “focuses on the public denunciation of power abuses or citizen demands regarding the absence of transparency and potential imbalances in the democratic system” (Feenstra & Casero-Ripollés, 2014: 2453). The concept builds on Keane's theory of *monitory democracy* (Keane, 2009), which attempts to reconcile the debate about representative versus participatory democracy, pointing at a third option. According to the author, monitory democracy is not only a desideratum for the future but an already visible trend experienced by liberal democracies since the end of the Second World War. Its traces are visible in the mushrooming of citizens' assemblies and juries, as well as in think tanks or investigative media. The progressive move towards a model of monitory democracy is testified by the proliferation of multiple sites of control and oversight, which contribute to democratizing the access and exercise of power.

However, grassroots surveillance over institutional powers is much older than the concept of monitory democracy, dating back to the French Revolution (Rosanvallon, 2008). Over time, according to Rosanvallon, the power of surveillance has thus become a way to translate the distrust inherent to the liberal democratic system into a democratic virtue. Surveillance, vigilantisms, and evaluation are, therefore, critical dimensions of the civil society's counter-democratic power, first and foremost based on monitoring, regarded as a specific *mode of action*. Vigilance indeed “defines a particular form of political intervention that involves neither decision-making nor exercise of will. It rather creates possibilities and sets limits by imposing structure on a general field of action” (Rosanvallon, 2008: 34). Monitoring is not directly tied to institutional decision-making but indirectly influences the political and social debate by bridging civic and regulatory vigilance. Over time, the traditional use of mobilization, protests, and petitions from civil society has coupled with the emergence of diffuse and everyday practices of control, evaluation, and critique of the institutions' work. Such a shift has gone hand in hand with the emergence of new civil society actors, what Rosanvallon defines as *social watchdogs*. Indeed, according to Przeworski (2006), for a long time, political parties have performed the lion's share of accountability activities,

representing citizens' concerns and controls over the institutional realm. However, the crisis and decline of political parties, which gave up their representative functions in favor of their governing role (Mair, 2009), has opened up the conditions to strengthen the role of (new) social movements as the main actors monitoring, sanctioning, and evaluating institutional powers (Rosanvallon, 2008). Over time, the social watchdog field has gone through a progressive NGOization, which has partly scattered the potentialities of grassroots monitoring activities. The evaluation of international NGOs, such as Transparency International's corruption index, has reached an influence comparable to one of the international organizations' ratings for countries' economic development (Rosanvallon, 2008). However, their representativeness and work are often contested as responding to particularistic and corporatist interests (Przeworski, 2006).

The monitoring capacity of civil society and its efficacy in anti-corruption terms has been proven influential by several studies (Molina, Carella, Pacheco, Cruces, & Gasparini, 2017; Reinikka & Svensson, 2011). However, donor-sponsored initiatives tend to be hardly sustainable over time and, most notably, seem to fall short of realizing the counter-democratic functions theorized by Rosanvallon. Most of the time, monitoring activities develop along the lines of a top-down concession of the institutional elites they should oversee (Sampson, 2015). Even when carried out by CSOs, they run the risk of performing poorly in realizing downward mechanisms of accountability, therefore failing to empower the beneficiaries of the monitoring interventions while focusing on forms of upward accountability towards donors and sponsors which exercise ex-ante and ex-post control and sanctioning over the projects (Peruzzotti, 2011).

Civic monitoring initiatives are promising accountability practices, empowering the civil society's role in the anti-corruption struggle and potentially representing a powerful tool to set deep democratization processes in motion through a counter-democratic instrument¹⁹. However, the effects of such projects in terms of SA should be carefully evaluated by disentangling the relationships between institutional actors, CSOs, and the beneficiary communities they are meant to serve and how they increase answerability and sanctioning potential.

1.6. Conclusion

Many skilled researchers have recently started investigating CSOs' role in the anti-corruption struggle. Perhaps more importantly, citizens and collective actors around the globe seem to have attempted to test their influence, sparking global anti-corruption protests. Slogans against corrupt

¹⁹ Such participatory arrangements are sometimes identified also as participatory accountability, which entails a range of ex-ante controls to deter corruption, differently from the generally post-hoc interventions summarized in the SA concept (Grimes, 2008).

politicians resonated in the squares of Spain, Greece, Brazil, India, and many other countries (Loli, 2018). Activists, local communities, and NGOs worldwide have tied their narratives of change to the opposition against allegedly corrupt public officials, shady systems of party financing, or the blurred boundaries between financial and political powers. Public and political corruption nurtured calls for democratic deepening, social justice, and human rights. However, we still know little about the influence of these collective struggles.

Against this backdrop, the chapter has drawn from a neo-institutional understanding of corruption and anti-corruption, conceptualizing civil society organizations as a *third-party mechanism of enforcement* to hold power accountable. Hence, it has presented the concept of *societal accountability* (SA), i.e., grassroots mechanisms to hold accountable public officials, as a critical element for anti-corruption research and practice. It has proposed to supplement the body of quantitative research that demonstrates the positive effects of an active and engaged civil society in terms of control of corruption (Bauhr, 2017a, 2017b; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013, 2014, 2015) with an in-depth understanding of how this control is contentiously produced from below. Indeed, it has underlined the inherently political nature of SA, a relationship that connects account holders and account givers. Finally, it has built on existing studies to present SA's actors, strategies, and mechanisms. The chapter has proposed operationalizing SA consequences by looking at *legal claim attainment*, *answerability*, and *enforcement* and focusing on three crucial anti-corruption areas of intervention: transparency, whistleblowing, and monitoring. The next chapter introduces the analytical model to investigate SA as a set of consequences of anti-corruption mobilizations.

Chapter 2. The consequences of collective action: a relational mediation model for the study of CSOs' influence

“Even classic formulations in social movement theory, whether Michels’ Iron Law of Oligarchy (or Piven and Cloward’s extension of it in *Poor People’s Movements*, 1979) or McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) predictions about resource mobilization, depend on the kind of relational thinking that underlies network analysis. Each is interested in the ways in which social movement leaders forge ties not only with the members of movements but also with resource-rich potential allies and representatives of the state. This forging and severing of social ties – and its consequences – is the stuff of network thinking and amenable to network analysis. This is not, of course, to say that all relational thinking is network analysis, but rather to say that the consideration of leadership, prestige, and power in social movements tends to highlight the ways in which political actors are tied to grassroots ‘social movement communities’, to other movements, and to a variety of elite actors.”

Krinsky & Crossley, 2014:6

2.1. Introduction

The first chapter has set the stage for the present contribution, discussing the relationship between liberal democracy and public corruption and introducing the concept of *societal accountability (SA)* to look at the role of CSOs in curbing the latter and deepening the former. In particular, the chapter has advanced the possibility of investigating SA as a specific *set of collective action consequences*. Chapter 2 sketches the study’s analytical model, introducing the conceptual bases for investigating the *influence* of CSOs over change processes. At first, the chapter discusses how debates on CSOs’ capacity to achieve SA consequences resemble ongoing discussions in the study of the effects of collective action and how the dialogue between these two fields can enrich both research traditions. Next, the chapter offers a brief overview of current debates in the study of mobilizations’ effects, looking at definitions, typologies, and explanatory models to situate the *influence* perspective in context. Finally, it introduces a working definition of *influence* and presents the *relational mediation model* that guides the analysis, bridging *strategic interaction* and *mediation* approaches.

2.2. SA and the consequences of collective action

Over the last decades, the scholarship on the consequences of collective action²⁰ has gone through a blossoming of contributions aimed at describing and explaining the effects of collective action across a range of fields such as policy-making, culture, activists’ life-trajectories, market and

²⁰ As reminded in the Prologue, in this work, “consequences” and “effects” are alternatively used to refer to concepts such as success/failure, gains/losses, outcomes, impact, and influence. On the contrary, all the terms listed are intended in the definitions furnished in the literature and discussed in the chapter.

corporations, courts and beyond (Bosi et al., 2016; Bosi & Uba, 2021; Giugni, 2008). Traditional approaches in social movement studies have generally explained the consequences of collective action, referring to *organizational resources*, *political opportunities*, or *frames*. Current research on anti-corruption mobilizations relies on similar factors when studying SA consequences.

As with corruption studies, for a long time, collective action scholars have disregarded the effects of grassroots mobilizations, downplaying or neglecting the transformative impact of social movements and grassroots actors (Crossley, 2002; Diani, 2003a; Giugni, 1998; Steil & Vasi, 2014). Hence, the first generation of studies on the consequences of collective action emerged as a reaction to the collective behavior approach (Diani, 2011) and tried to tie movements' characteristics as their *repertoires* or *organizational resources* to their *success* (Gamson, 1990; Jenkins, 1983; Kitschelt, 1986; Piven & Cloward, 1979; Schumaker, 1975).

Resource-based explanations have been particularly central also in accountability studies. As remained by O'Donnell, "exercising social accountability requires (...) sufficient personal and organizational resources (some combination of time, information, media access, the capacity of public and/or interpersonal communication, and at times money). The absence of any combination of these resources condemns many questions to the silent cemetery of nonissue" (O'Donnell, 2006:341). Since producing SA means, first and foremost, strengthening CSOs' voices (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006b), organizational resources seem paramount to advancing accountability claims and influencing, *directly* and *indirectly*, state enforcement mechanisms. As social movement studies have demonstrated, ties between collective actors are pivotal for exchanging information, strengthening legitimacy, and favoring solidarity and identity-building (Tindall et al., 2012). The perspective of accessing additional resources by establishing sustained interactions appears to be an excellent incentive to forge broad alliances, and cooperation is more likely to arise in the case of abundant resources (Hathaway & Meyer, 1993; Staggenborg, 1986; Van Dyke & Amos, 2017). Along these lines, anti-corruption scholars found that resource exchanges and interlocking ties between CSOs favor SA goals (Mazák & Diviák, 2018). However, as in movement studies, resources do not explain the whole story. Research on SA, for example, has demonstrated that resource-rich donor-sponsored initiatives tend to be scarcely sustainable and impactful over time (Fox, 2015; Joshi & Houtzager, 2012).

Shifting from movement-centered to context-dependent explanations, social movement scholars have tried to make sense of the differential effects of collective mobilizations by looking at *political opportunities* (Kitschelt, 1986; McAdam et al., 1996; Schock, 1999). Such a turn came with a

definitional change, preferring more nuanced and encompassing terms such as *outcomes*²¹ to the success vs. failure dichotomy (Cable & Degutis, 1997; Giugni, 1994; Kriesi et al., 1992, 1995; Tilly, 1999). The new outcome perspective broadened the scope of analysis beyond the political to cultural, biographical, legal, and economic realms (Amenta et al., 2018; Amenta & Polletta, 2019; Giugni & Grasso, 2019; McCann, 1991; Passy & Monsch, 2018, 2018; Van Dyke & Taylor, 2018), including intra-movement effects (Diani, 1997; Earl, 2000; Hadden & Tarrow, 2007; McAdam, 2013; Meyer & Whittier, 1994; Whittier, 2004), and even unintended (Beckwith, 2016; Deng, 1997; Gupta, 2009; Suh, 2014), or interrelated consequences (Bosi, 2016).

When applied to the accountability field, the concept of POS appears particularly relevant to explain the emergence of anti-corruption mobilizations and claims-making in the first place and interpret the unfolding of SA effects. Studies have indeed demonstrated that CSOs' capacity to produce SA seems to vary greatly depending on contextual conditions, such as the system of parties competition, the levels of state transparency, the legacy of state-civil society interactions, and the actual and perceived system of public corruption showing a curvilinear relationship between accountability conditions and civil society strength (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; Boräng & Grimes, 2021; della Porta et al., 2017; Grimes, 2013; Larsson & Grimes, 2022). However, as in movement studies, it seems still unclear whether "institutions constitute the opportunity structures for direct action, or does a strong civil society in a more indirect fashion beat the drums of protest to induce officials to fulfill their formal responsibilities or both" (Larsson & Grimes, 2022:22).

Finally, social movement studies have extensively investigated how CSOs exploit discursive strategies to foster their goals, looking at frames to unpack and analyze the strategic use of ideology by social movements and political actors and their relational consequences (Mische, 2003; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1992). In particular, studies have focused on frame alignment processes and frame disputes to explain the consequentiality of civic mobilizations (Benford, 1993; Cress & Snow, 2000; Croteau & Hicks, 2003). Recently, corruption scholars have started examining how discourses shape governments' anti-corruption strategies and their efficacy (Berti, 2019; Breit, 2010; Bukovansky, 2006; della Porta & Vannucci, 2007; Zmolnig, 2018). Unfortunately, research on bottom-up anti-corruption frames is still scarce, and seldom interested in the consequences of these discursive struggles (Caruso, 2018; C. Milan, 2018; Pirro, 2018; Smilov & Dorosiev, 2012). However, recent studies have demonstrated how CSOs' frames and discourses

²¹ However, even the outcome paradigm has found few opponents advocating for alternative labels, such as *impact*, rooted in the "collective good" criterion (Amenta et al., 1999; Amenta & Young, 1999).

impact their strategies, actions, and interactions with institutional players (Di Puccio, 2014; Lang, 2021; Makarava, 2019).

Hence, none of these classical approaches sufficiently explain the SA consequences of anti-corruption mobilizations. As anticipated in Chapter 1, SA emergence rests upon the actions of a broad set of civic actors, such as social movements, media, NGOs, and civic associations (della Porta et al., 2017; Larsson & Grimes, 2022; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006). Grassroots accountability networks usually tie together organizations working in various arenas with distinct goals, resources, and repertoires and do not always entail the emergence of shared collective identities (Mazák & Diviák, 2018). Rather than problematic, studies have demonstrated that such a high heterogeneity can benefit SA goals. Transactional networks based on diverse and integrated collective actors seem more likely to succeed in mobilizing different resources and reaching their goals (Fox, 2015). Therefore, the scarcity of "pure" anti-corruption movements is generally positively evaluated, signaling the diffusion of anti-corruption practices across diverse interest groups (Johnston, 2012). Hence, the dynamics of *horizontal integration* among CSOs seem pivotal to grasping their accountability consequences (Cinalli, 2007a; Cinalli & Füglistner, 2008; Mazák & Diviák, 2018).

Beyond their compositions, studies on the consequences of anti-corruption and pro-accountability mobilizations have demonstrated that institutional actors and political will are crucial dimensions that any analysis should factor in (Brinkerhoff, 2000; Fox, 2016; Larsson & Grimes, 2022; United Nations Development Programme, 2013). In a nutshell, CSOs would need the support of committed and reform-minded institutional actors to obtain accountability results. At the same time, one should refrain from discarding CSOs' chances to produce SA consequences when lacking political allies or reform-minded elites. Existing research has demonstrated that CSOs can successfully *trigger* institutional elites to work on accountability reforms or even force accountability results using extra-institutional strategies and informal sanctions (Bader et al., 2019; Beyerle, 2014; Mattoni & Odilla, 2021). In this case, *vertical integration* dynamics with institutional elites are crucial to evaluate civic accountability consequences (Cinalli, 2007a; Cinalli & Füglistner, 2008; Fox, 2015).

The whole debate concerns the *direct* or *indirect* effects of CSOs in the anti-corruption and pro-accountability struggle (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006). Part of the scholarship considers CSOs' accountability as *horizontal*, residual, and utterly dependent on the political will (Bovens, 2007), while others label SA as a *vertical* form of accountability, resting in the hand of the people as principal (della Porta et al., 2017; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006). In between, one can find theoretical positions that regard SA as a form of *diagonal accountability* insofar as its success

depends on the activation and action of other accountability agencies (Goetz & Jenkins, 2001; Lührmann et al., 2020).

The theoretical and empirical oppositions between supporters of the *direct* or *indirect* effects of collective mobilizations are hardly new to social movement studies. Indeed, the scholarship on the effects of collective struggle has extensively explored this matter, seldom arriving at any definite conclusion. The present contribution bridges the puzzling evidence on the pro-accountability consequences of anti-corruption movements with ongoing debates in the collective action scholarship, fitting into the so-called *joint models* of collective action effects (Giugni, 1998; Giugni & Passy, 1998; Giugni & Yamasaki, 2009). Hence, it moves from the assumption that *social change is necessary and simultaneously co-shaped by the actions and interactions of multiple players*, in which one can hardly isolate the specific outcome of certain contenders. For this reason, this research moves away from discussions about success and failure (Gamson, 1990; Luders, 2006; Piven & Cloward, 1979; Useem & Goldstone, 2022), outcomes (Bosi & Uba, 2021; Giugni, 1999, 1994; Kolb, 2007; Kriesi et al., 1995), impact (Amenta et al., 1999; Amenta & Young, 1999), or gains and losses (Elliott-Negri et al., 2021a; Jabola-Carolus et al., 2020; Jasper et al., 2022), and focuses - instead - on the concept of *influence* (Diani, 1997).

2.3. Towards a theory of influence: the state-of-the-art

Beyond debates on definitions²², the outcome perspective has eased the emergence of alternative explanatory models, reintroducing the role of contextual factors into the picture. Over time, approaches have become increasingly dynamic, focusing on the simultaneous contributions of a multiplicity of collective actors such as interest groups, parties, media, and other targets (Amenta & Shortt, 2020; Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Burstein & Linton, 2003; Cress & Snow, 2000; Giugni & Bosi, 2012; Walker et al., 2008). Since then, contributions have increasingly moved from static to dynamic explanations (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 1999), while structuralist and determinist approaches have been increasingly overcome in favor of interactionist perspectives. Nowadays, scholars concur that social change processes are co-created by many actors and jointly shaped by their interactions (Giugni, 2007; Giugni & Passy, 1998; Giugni & Yamasaki, 2009). However, many of these perspectives are seldom fully relational in their approach (Diani, 2012).

²² An attempt to synthesize these partly contradicting definitions has been made by Luders (2010). Building on Armenta's work, Luders defines *impact* as the general degree to which benefits for a specific constituency are obtained while shifting to the term *success* when those benefits coincide with the movement's stated goals. Therefore, discussing success requires stricter conditions and impact regards any observed consequence, whether or not in line with the movement's formal goals. Here, the neutral term of outcome is intended to cover all the possible scenarios that may result from the combination of impact and success.

Looking beyond social movements, scholars have started to test alternative hypotheses to determine if and how other collective actors contribute to social change. As a result, the focus has often broadened to advocacy-related organizations as "actors and organizations seeking to alter power deficits and to effect social transformations through states and governments by mobilizing regular citizens for sustained political action" (Amenta et al., 2018:450). Scholars have thus begun to acknowledge that movements are hardly the only players on the scene and that, most notably, they are hardly the more relevant ones (Skocpol, 2003). When considered alongside other advocacy organizations, social movements' effects have appeared quite downsized, particularly when considering the political realm. Whereas the agenda-setting stage is usually considered the easiest to influence (Bosi et al., 2016), studies have demonstrated that movements' choices can be severely constrained a priori by professional lobbyists (Berry, 1999). At the same time, research has shown that influencing the policy contents and passage depends on the *information* and *resources* that collective actors can furnish to political representatives endowed with decision-making power (Burstein & Linton, 2003). At the same time, chances to influence the policy passage appear significantly mediated by public opinion support (Bernardi et al., 2021; Burstein, 1999, 2003, 2019).

Hence, these approaches have tried to test and weigh the influence of collective actors against each other. However, several contributions have moved toward more *interactive* explanatory models. For example, Burstein et al. (1995) introduced a bargaining model, defining outcomes as "the result of interactions among movement organizations, the organizations whose behavior they are trying to change, and relevant actors in the broader environment, all struggling to acquire resources and use them to their best advantage vis-à-vis the other" (p.135-136). Even though the model remained strictly tied to the resource mobilization tradition (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), it saw movements' interactions with targets and third parties as transformative of the social and political reality, moving beyond movement- and context-centered explanations.

Recently, the scholarship has openly called for greater attention to targets as a powerful strategy to deepen the knowledge about movements' consequences (Bosi et al., 2016; Jasper & King, 2020). Indeed, investigating targets' responses to social movements allows resizing the role of CSOs in determining the result of specific struggles and acknowledges the multiple causalities that define processes of social change. At the same time, the study of targets further multiplies the range of possible effects movements and related political organizations may bring about (Amenta, 2014). For example, Luders (2010) bridged outcome, impact, and success approaches, analyzing the interaction between the costs imposed by movements and targets' and third parties' calculations. According to

the author, challengers' possibility of setting in motion processes of social change depends upon the *costs* they impose. This perspective calls for disaggregating and unpacking both movements' claims and targets' calculations, multiplying the actors under investigation, and acknowledging the relevance of their mechanisms of interaction²³ to explain the consequences of collective action (Kolb, 2007).

Among other approaches, *political mediation models*²⁴ seem particularly suited to move towards more interactionist and multi-actor explanations (Amenta, 2006; Amenta et al., 1992, 2005; Amenta & Elliott, 2019; King, 2008; Soule, 2009). Mediation models reconsider the role played by political opportunities, stressing that movements' consequences are highly contingent on actors' capacity to adapt their strategies to the context in which they operate (Amenta et al., 2010; Amenta et al., 1999; Amenta & Young, 1999). Here, opportunities are filters between movements' mobilization, preferred strategies, and impact. The central question guiding these approaches is, "Under what conditions do movements have an impact." Social movements do not wholly control the reality they are embedded in; they strategize, mobilize, and exploit their resources, but at the end of the day, they cannot oversee how their challengers will react. Movements' claims and actions set in motion responses from those they are contesting, but controlling the escalation of such a reaction is not entirely in their hands. The conclusion is that "to be influential, challengers need not always employ some specific strategy of action or hope for the right political conditions, but they must match mobilization and strategy to specific political context" (Amenta, 2008:14). What follows is that movements always have space of maneuver for influencing their targets, no matter how adverse the conditions may be. There are no silver bullets to be successful, none of the strategies, resources, or frames is a necessary and sufficient condition to achieve the stated goals, and no conditions are so unfavorable to hamper the possibility of obtaining social change.

Notwithstanding the merit of moving the attention away from static and structural explanations, mediation models have paid little attention to how actors select their strategies and seek to reshape contextual conditions. To fill this gap, strategic interaction approaches have advanced the possibility of evaluating the consequences of collective action by investigating the *dilemmas* actors face across different arenas and throughout their interaction histories (Elliott-Negri et al., 2021a; Jasper et al., 2022). In particular, a new wave of contributions has been advocating for introducing a

²³ The study of interactions among several players has progressively moved towards the micro determinants of social change processes, trying to reintegrate the subjectivist interpretations of actors referring to success and failure (Kolb, 2007) or gains and losses (Jasper et al., 2022).

²⁴ Or, *institutional mediation* model (Amenta et al., 2019; Amenta & Shortt, 2020).

new "gains and losses" paradigm to bring back strategic interactions in studying the consequences of collective action (Elliott-Negri et al., 2021a; Jabola-Carolus et al., 2020; Jasper et al., 2022).

However, how can one make sense of all these elements while investigating how CSOs try to reach accountability results? As contended by this chapter, mediation models and strategic approaches are better integrated when subscribing to a processual-relational approach revolving around the concept of *influence*. Hence, this work builds on Diani's suggestion of investigating the consequences of collective action in terms of *influence*, operationalized as a form of *positional power* (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000), deriving from the strategic creation of social ties. The argument builds on the idea that better-connected actors²⁵ have more chances of influencing political and cultural change processes, regarding structural positions as necessary preconditions to impact social reality. To this end, the chapter suggests introducing a *relational mediation model* combining the intuitions coming from Amenta's and colleagues' work on institutional mediation models (Amenta et al., 1992, 1999, 2005; Amenta & Elliott, 2019; King, 2008) with insights coming from strategic interaction approaches (Elliott-Negri et al., 2021a; Jabola-Carolus et al., 2020; Jasper, 2004; Jasper et al., 2022)

2.4. Influence: an introduction

Far from being a brand new concept, the term *influence* has been variously applied to studying the consequences of social movements (Amenta, 2014; Amenta et al., 2018; Amenta & Elliott, 2019; Amenta & Young, 1999). However, unlike success, outcome, or impact, the term has seldom been formally defined.

Generally speaking, the concept of influence has dramatically floated within the social sciences and across fields, defined as a *relationship* between subject A (individual or collective) and subject B (individual or collective), and operationalized as the *variation in B's behavior, attitudes, or actions due to A's intended or unintended intervention* (Gallino, 1978; Lukes, 2021; Parsons, 1963; Rashotte, 2007). Scholars have thus conceived influence as qualitatively different from conformity, power, or authority. Specifically, "Conformity occurs when an individual expresses a particular opinion or behavior in order to fit into a given situation or to meet the expectations of a given other, though he does not necessarily hold that opinion or belief that the behavior is appropriate. Power is the ability to force or coerce a particular way by controlling her outcomes. Authority is power believed to be legitimate (rather than coercive) by those subjected to it. Social influence, however,

²⁵Being "better connected" can, of course, take different forms and depends on the arena players try to influence. For example, being more integrated with elites will be more important for the sake of obtaining policy change, while integration in community networks will be more relevant for cultural changes.

is the process by which individuals make real changes to their feelings and behaviors as a result of interaction with others who are perceived to be similar, desirable, or expert.” (Rashotte, 2007:4434).

Even though the concept of influence has developed and been applied mainly within the social psychology realm, sociologists have variously exploited it. For example, social network studies have devoted a large share of their efforts to developing theories of *social influence*, considered a strategic arena of research that "links the structure of social relations to attitudes and behavior of the actors who compose a network" (Marsden & Friedkin, 1993:127). The social network literature has thus extensively used the concept to investigate network formation, transformation, and innovation processes. In its sociological declination, social influence is often defined as "a special instance of causality, namely, the modification of one person's responses by the actions of another"(Cartwright, 1965:3).

Defining influence as a specific type of *social relation* through which subject A produces, intentionally or not, a modification in B²⁶ means acknowledging that no single player determines the result of collective struggles and that social change results from the multiple influences exerted by all the actors across arenas. The concept rejects the deterministic understanding of social change as a product of any single player and goes toward joint models of social change. Influence, moreover, unfolds every time a change in B is attributable to a voluntary or involuntary behavior of A, which includes both intended and unintended consequences of A's actions. Influence can be material and cultural (Gallino, 1978), thus encompassing political, institutional, biographical, and cultural transformations. Unlike the concept of success, the influence point of view disregards the objective vs. subjective debate in interpreting consequences. However, it acknowledges the relevance of subjective motivations in the presence or absence of intentionality in subject A to provoke a change in B. Unlike impact, the concept of influence does not require a construct such as the collective good criterion to be assessed, even though it may consider that actor A may or may not act on behalf of a community of bystanders. Differently from outcomes, the concept presupposes a reciprocal directionality, where actors continuously influence each other along their interaction history.

At the end of the 1990s, Diani first proposed to move towards the influence paradigm (Diani, 1997). Considering the existing literature on the consequences of collective action as excessively concerned with research goals overly narrowed or virtually impossible to reach, Diani suggested subverting the usual logic that regards social relations as conducive to mobilizations, considering

²⁶ Being B identifiable either as an individual or a collective subject. Here, the definition of B is extended also to processes of personal, political, as well as cultural change.

the creation and transformation of social networks as the phenomenon to be explained. Indeed, every wave, cycle, or mobilization event creates new ties or transforms existing ones. However, ties are qualitatively different; while some have mere instrumental functions, others build on mutual recognition and bonds of trust²⁷. Therefore, according to Diani, the creation or transformation of trust and recognition ties²⁸ within relevant arenas and circles should be considered a precondition to exert influence over the political and cultural realms. Building on the assumption that social change is usually fueled by *influential actors* and that influence is a form of positional power held by central or better-connected actors, Diani suggested looking at movements' capacity to produce social capital as a proxy of their influence. Following an influence perspective, "the central problem is no longer whether and how mobilization campaigns and cycles of protest determine specific changes (...) instead whether they facilitate the emergence of new networks, which in turn allow advocacy groups, citizens' organizations, action committees, and alternative intellectuals and artists to be more influential in processes of political and cultural change" (Diani, 1997: 135).

An influence perspective that focuses on relation-building and transformations appears crucial when investigating anti-corruption efforts, given that SA is first and foremost a *relationship* between account holders and account givers (Bovens, 2007) and that civic players can have direct and indirect accountability consequences based on *dynamics of horizontal and vertical integration* (Cinalli, 2007a; Fox, 2015; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006).

However, this position opens a wide range of related questions. For example, how do collective actors (seek to) reach positions of influence? How do those positions change throughout collective struggles? How do they translate into instances of social change? The present work aims at answering these questions by bridging strategic interaction and mediation approaches in a relational mediation model.

2.5. Influence: towards a relational mediation model

Amenta -and his collaborators- contributed significantly to advancing our understanding of the relationship between collective action and social change (Amenta et al., 1992, 1994, 1999, 2005; Amenta & Young, 1999). Moving beyond the classical contraposition between movement- and

²⁷ In SNA there is a basic distinction between interaction and relation, while the former as a transitory and fluid nature, the latter presupposes some degree of stability and structuration (Diani & Mische, 2015).

²⁸ Social capital is conceived as "ties which, while they do not necessarily imply the presence of collective identity, are based on sentiments of mutual trust and recognition among actors involved. The broader the range of social capital ties that emerge from a period of sustained mobilization, the greater a social movement's impact will be" (Diani, 1997, p. 130)

context-centered explanations, political mediation models²⁹ succeeded in synthesizing the complexity of social change processes, maintaining that collective actors' strategies and mobilization succeed as they match institutional conditions. In a nutshell, disruption, organizational resources, frames, or strategies will be alternatively productive based on how well they adapt to long-, medium, and short-term political conditions, which mediate the connection between collective action and social change (Amenta et al., 1994, 2005, 2018; Amenta & Zylan, 1991). Elements such as the institutional design, the extension of voting rights, the electoral system, the structure of political parties, or the composition of the bureaucratic class will hence contribute to mediating social change (Amenta, 2006). However, unlike political opportunity approaches (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi et al., 1995), mediation models do not postulate a direct connection between political configurations and social change but acknowledge the transformative role of agency within existing power structures. Finally, as proposed by the contentious politics approach (McAdam et al., 2001), mediation models move beyond the study of movements in favor of a broader collective action perspective, a growing call in the field (della Porta & Diani, 2020; McAdam & Boudet, 2012).

The model's success lies in its applicability and explanatory potential. Bridging different strands of literature in studying social movements and their consequences, mediation models allow scholars to develop a fine-grained understanding of specific political and social change instances. In their basic formulation, mediation models fit *process-based inquiries* of the impact of collective action; they include context-specific factors into the picture and avoid over-structuralist explanations. The comprehensiveness of the argumentation has earned the model few criticisms. However, commenters have sometimes questioned the model's excessive focus on state targets and a generally reactionary rather than interactionist take on targets' responses (Jasper et al., 2022). Amenta's attempt at reconciling strategies and context requires focusing on a few key players, sometimes reinforcing their understanding as monolithic entities, and zooming out the dynamic unfolding of their interaction sequences. Thus, the model focuses primarily on the mediation role of formal institutions, such as political parties, the media, and other interest groups. However, studies on the consequences of collective action have underlined the crucial role of interactions with several sub-players as individuals or non-state players and the relevance of informal communication channels (Basseches, 2019; Böhm, 2015; Jasper et al., 2022; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015).

²⁹Or institutional mediation models (Amenta et al., 1992; Amenta, 2006; Amenta & Shortt, 2020; Amenta & Young, 1999).

Hence, mediation models represent a crucial starting point insofar as they reconcile critical explanations of the influence of collective action. However, they leave enough room for further specifications. For example, how do CSOs “read the room”? How does the adaptation work across different phases of the policy process? How CSOs adapt their strategies to moving targets? What about unintended consequences? What happens to mediation mechanisms when CSOs leave the legislative and administrative arenas? A more detailed focus on the mediating role of *relationships* and *social ties* could help address these and many other questions.

The political mediation model goes beyond social movement studies, integrating other strands of the literature, e.g., research on policy-making in the political mediation model (Amenta, 2014, 2016), on media in the institutional one (Amenta et al., 2019), or on corporations in its economic version (King, 2016; Soule, 2009). Accordingly, the proposed relational mediation model draws on relational theories and approaches to understand how and under what circumstances social ties mediate collective actors’ influence over social change processes, with particular attention to policy and political change. In particular, the model builds on *theories of network* and *network theories* (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Borgatti & Lopez-Kidwell, 2011; Diani & Mische, 2015).

Theories of networks deal with the theoretical and empirical investigation of the *ties creation* and *network structuration* processes and have been hardly prevalent in social movement studies (Diani, 1997). However, studies on *coalitions* (Hathaway & Meyer, 1993; Nelson & Yackee, 2012; Van Dyke & Amos, 2017; Zajak & Haunss, 2022), *spin-off* movements (McAdam, 2013; Minkoff, 1997), or *spillover* effects (Meyer & Boutcher, 2007; Meyer & Whittier, 1994; Terriquez, 2015) have improved our understanding of how collective action creates or transforms networks (Diani & Mische, 2015).

In network studies, key ideas in theories of the network are *homophily* and *proximity*, which suggest that ties are likely to be created among those who share similar characteristics and that are closer to each other (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). In the case of anti-corruption, one can hypothesize that actors that share the same frames, ideas, or goals are more likely to develop relationships of trust and cooperation while being highly dissimilar can polarise actors and hinder the possibility of entering elite circles. Other explanations are pre-existing links, shared ideology or tactics, resources, and the complementarity of functions (Diani, 2015). However, the creation of relevant connections also mirrors the actual availability of possible partners. Thus, the logic of ties formation may be reduced to the concepts of *opportunity* and *choice* (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013). The concept of opportunities recalls the well-known POS and RMT approach; thus, new links will be created when opportunities are favorable, previous connections are already present, historical repertoires of

actors' interaction are already there, or actors have the necessary resources to attract relevant partners. At the same time, the idea of choice is closer to the one of *strategy* (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011), in which actors may create connections for accessing relevant resources other nodes can guarantee or be coherent with their already existing nodes' connections (Borgatti et al., 2013). Hence, a *strategic interaction* approach seems critical to understand how actors seek to reach positions of influence.

On the contrary, *network theories* use networks as a set of explanatory variables that, through different mechanisms, lead to the specific outcome under investigation (Borgatti & Lopez-Kidwell, 2011). This approach has been the most exploited (Diani & Mische, 2015), looking at networks as resources for recruitment in social movements and their outcomes (Diani, 1997, 2011; Jenkins, 1983; Krinsky & Crossley, 2014a; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Passy & Monsch, 2014). Even if used only metaphorically, networks and social ties have often been used as explanatory variables. A whole tradition of studies has indeed looked at relational mechanisms to explain a variety of collective action consequences, ranging from processes of radicalization to policy change (Alimi et al., 2012; McAdam et al., 2001; McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). As maintained by relational sociologists, indeed, "(1)the existence of relationships has a distinct impact on many social processes of interest to social sciences, and (2) the structure of those relationships also has a distinct and unique impact on social processes of interest" (Erikson, 2018: 275). Hence, it is necessary to investigate and understand the relational mechanisms that determine the productivity of ties and social relations, understanding how they reshape the social reality, as well as the actors involved in change processes.

Theories of network and network theories inspire the relational mediation model and aim to understand i) how CSOs build up their connections to reach influence positions, ii) how these influence positions translate into tangible instances of social change, iii) whether and how relationships and social ties at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level mediate the impact of movement-controlled factors and contextual conditions.

2.5.1. Strategies and dilemmas in anti-corruption arenas

At first, the relational mediation model aims to analyze collective actors' capacity to *strategically* (seek to) reach positions of influence (Diani, 1997; Jasper, 2004; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000). Indeed, considering CSOs as purposive actors aiming to transform social reality requires investigating the *positional* and *relational strategies* used to exert influence by changing their structural positions.

Influence is intended as a relationally emergent instance of causality, a form of positional power, an attempt at controlling the consequences of collective struggles by positioning oneself vis-à-vis other players. Thus, influence entails a certain degree of strategic calculation and decision-making; it is about strategic choices (Dür, 2008b). Prominent research has contributed to refining our understanding of actors' strategic preferences, moving away from cold costs-benefit calculations in favor of more fine-grained analyses of collective action *dilemmas* (Amenta et al., 1999; Jasper, 2006; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015; King & Jasper, 2022a; Meyer & Staggenborg, 2012). However, we still know little about how actors strategize their connections to foster their goals vis-à-vis emerging collective action dilemmas and how these strategies evolve throughout actors' interaction histories (Jasper, 2004; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015).

The model distinguishes between two sets of strategies actors use to achieve their goals in interaction: *positional* and *relational*. Positional strategies refer to actors using their *network positions* to advance their goals. Social positions come with resources, power, expectations, benefits, and constraints that may help collective actors achieve their goals or hinder their potential for influence (Broadbent, 2003; Diani, 1997, 2003b; Saunders, 2007; Tindall et al., 2012). Collective actors, particularly civic ones, are typically considered structurally disadvantaged. CSOs are external to the decision-making arenas, lack recognition and legitimation by those political actors controlling institutional arenas, and have fewer resources to mobilize. However, CSOs can strategize their actions and connections to change their structural positions within and across arenas (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000). To do so, civic actors may create new arenas, enter existing ones, contend arenas ownership, etc.

Relational strategies, on the other hand, involve the concrete patterning of actors' social relationships across arenas, their evolution and dynamicity, and their coherence or contradiction. Actors' *positional strategies* across arenas or time can be conflictual, resulting in overarching *relational strategies* aimed at homogenizing and making sense of one's identity and actions vis-à-vis various actors and social situations. Relational strategies transcend single attempts at gaining positions of influence and describe broader attempts at furthering one's goals over multiple arenas, building or maintaining coherent stories, identities, and attitudes towards allies, targets, bystanders, and constituencies.

Overall, positional and relational strategies represent two approaches to achieving goals in social interactions. Individuals and groups use different positional and relational strategies depending on their interaction's specific context and objectives. However, the coherence between the two will enhance or constrain actors' influence over processes of social change.

2.5.1.1 Positional strategies

As elucidated by Stevenson & Greenberg (2000), network and organizational studies foresee three primary strategies to change one's network position: direct contact, brokerage, and coalitions – each associated with specific benefits and increasing costs. Positional strategies have much to do with arena dynamics—creation, selection, and ownership- impacting and shaping actors' preferences. Opportunities, resources, and frames certainly impact actors' course of action.

According to Stevenson & Greenberg (2000), *direct contact* emerges as a viable and promising positional strategy under favorable and unfavorable political contexts. Direct contact is considered a low-cost strategy to which CSOs can resort to make their voices heard by institutional actors, particularly when already linked through past interactions. This strategy can be particularly productive in reducing the competition of other actors, mainly when resources are scarce. In addition, private negotiation and lobbying may help CSOs convey their messages more clearly and convincingly. Collective actors can therefore prefer direct contact for various reasons, particularly when creating and maintaining large coalitions will be significantly costly and unlikely to yield significant results. Direct contact strategies include arranging public or private meetings with political elites, asking for and obtaining their official endorsement, inviting them to public events, and more.

Alternatively, CSOs may seek to change their positions by resorting to *brokerage*. Brokers are individuals or organizations that mediate exchanges and flows between actors in arenas, e.g., between CSOs and decision-makers in the policy process. They can ease communication and coordination between different subjects and across arenas. Brokerage positions are generally associated with a greater power of influence. Occupying intermediary positions, brokers can ease or hinder the exchange of resources and information within a network. However, brokerage comes with increasing costs. Whereas brokers can efficiently exploit to access new resources, it entails the risk of losing control over the goals and unfolding of collective struggles. Whereas Stevenson & Greenberg (2000) focus mainly on third-party brokers that can ease the negotiations between CSOs and institutional actors, CSOs may not only recur but also act like brokers when standing between institutional actors and the citizenry. Brokers connecting otherwise isolated network parts – also defined as structural holes (Borgatti et al., 2013)- can shut down communications and exchanges. Brokers are thus valuable in helping to build bridges between different groups and fostering collaboration and cooperation, serving as gatekeepers.

Finally, *coalitions* represent the more expensive and risky strategy CSOs can use. Coalitional efforts may help in less favorable conditions and should multiply success chances (Stevenson &

Greenberg, 2000b). As the literature on coalitions and alliances demonstrates, blocks of CSOs with different resource pools, expertise, or constituencies increase the leverage over elites (Walker et al., 2008; Walker & McCarthy, 2010; Wouters & Walgrave, 2017). By working together, coalitions can enhance their influence, pressuring decision-makers at the local, national, and international levels. Their impacts may depend on their size, resources, and ability to build support among the broader public. However, coalitions have higher costs to be initiated and maintained over time. Moreover, whereas the concentration and use of network resources can be strategically preferred to increase leverage on elites, coalitional efforts always entail the risks of partners taking over collective goals to advance their own. Hence, coalitions can have significant returns and advantages but come with high costs.

Tab 2.1. summarizes some of these potential dilemmas.

Tab.2.1. Summary of possible positional dilemmas

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|---|
| Where | Dilemmas over arenas | Engagement, Being there, extension |
| When | Dilemmas over temporalities | Plan vs. opportunity, Inevitability |
| How | Dilemmas over forms of action | Direct or Indirect Moves, Dirty hands, Basket |
| With whom | Dilemma over Alliances | Powerful allies |

The present work maintains that players select alternative positional strategies to answer emergent dilemmas. To reach positions of influence, players must solve dilemmas related to *where*, *when*, *how*, and *with whom* to act to change their structural position vis-à-vis targets and other players. Players may indeed face dilemmas related to the *where* dimension, meaning they can decide in what arena they want to be influential. Dilemmas here will regard *what* and *whether* to create or enter arenas, invest resources, take risks (engagement), stay in an arena even when facing losses or

lacking gains to maintain one's position (being there), change or leave arenas, redirect one's resources, or dragging them elsewhere, when possible, or starting from scratch (extension). Players also face dilemmas related to the *when* dimension in trying to be influential. They can enter, change, or leave arenas, craft or change alliances when they perceive change and gains are deemed to come (inevitability), or refrain from doing so over the short term to obtain higher returns in subsequent phases (plan vs. opportunity). The *how* dimension, instead, refers to tactics that players select to obtain influential positions. For example, anti-corruption players can decide to pursue accountability goals via policy change or direct social action (direct vs. indirect moves), spreading their resources over several projects (basket), or participating in hopefully productive yet unpleasant initiatives (dirty hands). Finally, they can try to change their positions by deciding *with whom* they want to interact. Dilemmas over alliances can lead players to select more or less powerful allies to maximize the return from obtaining new resources and contacts or minimizing the risks that allies will take over their goals (powerful ally) or can work with few skilled players or preferred large alliances to increase their critical mass (quality vs. quantity). The list is, of course, non-exhaustive and mainly builds on Jasper's work (2004,2006).

Overall, collective actors can strategize their actions and connections within and across arenas to reach and maintain positions of influence; and thus foster their goals. As said, CSOs may seek to get closer to MPs, force them to hear their claims, express the voices and pain of the constituencies they are mobilizing for, work with others to increase their leverage potential, or find allies or middle persons that can do so for them. However, in almost all cases, seeking and reaching supposed positions of influence opens another wide range of dilemmas.

2.5.1.2. *Relational strategies*

As affirmed by Jasper, "official positions in arenas are also useful because they bring control of resources and allow their holders to make certain moves. The distinction between a person and a position she holds generates several strategic dilemmas. The distribution of all these advantages changes, or can change, during (and as a result of) strategic engagement" (Jasper, 2004:6). As underlined by critics of the strategic interaction approach, interactions live and thrive in the here and now, the so-called toadyism or *hodiecentrism* (Duyvendak & Fillieule, 2015). However, actors' interactions are rarely determined only by the here and now. Instead, actors have long-term dispositions forged over previous interactions and in anticipation of future ones (Duyvendak & Fillieule, 2015; Jasper et al., 2022:196). Here lies the difference between *positional* and *relational* strategies, between *interactions* and *relationships*. Whereas interactions appear as points in time or

events, relationships span extended periods; they are part of a broader history of past, present, and future interactions³⁰.

Beyond positional and immediate strategies, every collective actor engages in collective struggles envisioning how to reach their desired goals. Hence, actors' positional strategies derive from broader relational preferences shaped along their interaction histories. When looking at collective struggles, we can see that; besides achieving policy or cultural change, collective actors have differing perceptions of what systemic change should entail and what role they should play in it. Relational strategies deal with this long-term, wide-ranging postures³¹ and refer to the complex web of relationships that CSOs build with targets, allies, bystanders, and various players. Overall, they resemble what Polletta defines as *relationship schemas* or *scripts*, namely “widely shared cultural recipes on how to do familiar relationships” (Polletta, 2022: 3), which help us see “people agentially reproducing institutions even as they seek to change them” (p.2).

Indeed, collective actors hold ideas, values, and beliefs on how they *should* relate to each other, their targets, or constituencies to fulfill their change-oriented goals. These relational “preferences” are long-term strategic choices through which players try to homogenize and make sense of the diverse social interactions crafted across time and arenas. Hence, occupying certain positions may increase actors' chances of influencing processes of social change. Better connected and more central actors control valuable resources and their fluxes. They can seize and create opportunities. They gain access to a vaster array of tactical choices. However, once attained, new questions surge. For example, once we are in contact with an MP, how do we further our goals and avoid cooptation? What is the right tone to file complaints against our political allies? How and when do we call our supporters to raise our voices? Collective actors must find strategies to solve these *relational dilemmas*.

Even though relational dilemmas are a constant across collective action instances, they assume a particular value when looking at accountability and anti-corruption struggles. Perhaps more than in other cases, CSOs' relational strategies have roots in complex understandings of *public corruption* and *how civil society actors should contribute to controlling their representatives*. Being societal accountability a *relationship* between an actor and a forum (Bovens, 2007); account holders (CSOs) must decide how to relate to account givers (institutions) over the long run.

³⁰ Crossley claims that relationships are “a state of play within an interaction history. To speak of a relation between two actors is to say that they interact and that how they interact is shaped both by what has passed between them in the past and by their anticipation of further interaction in the future” (Crossley, 2013: 124). Relationships are “patterns of interactions” (Jasper et al., 2022: 32), which connect players across time and arenas, or “lived trajectories of iterated interaction” (Crossley, 2010: 28).

³¹ Relational strategies somehow reflect ideas as players “taste in tactics” (Jasper, 1997).

Relationship schemas serve to understand people’s reciprocal expectations in interactions, their norms, and how they help individuals orient their choices (Polletta, 2022). In strategic terms, relational strategies may aid in understanding what collective actors expect from each other, their interactions across time and arenas, and how they orient actors’ choices across interactions. As relationship schemas, relational strategies crosscut across arenas and, often, time. They foster and constrain creativity and change. Collective actors can thus opt for less optimal positional strategies to remain coherent with their relational stances. Positional strategies can be less productive because they oppose long-lasting and deep-rooted relational strategies. In particular, the model distinguishes between co-optative, cooperative, competitive, and conflictual relational strategies. Tab. 2.2. summarizes³² four main relational strategies and their dilemmas.

Tab. 2.2. Relational dilemmas and strategies

| | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | Organizational | |
| | | <i>Shared resources</i> | <i>Non shared resources</i> |
| Naught-or-Nice | <i>Shared values</i> | Cooptation | Cooperation |
| | <i>Non shared values</i> | Competition | Conflict |

This ideal-typical typology has a descriptive function and results from the actors’ decisions on solving two fundamental dilemmas: the *naughty-or-nice* and the *organizational* one (Jasper et al., 2022). Dilemmas on the productivity of disruptive tactics and organizational structures have been at the forefront of discussion on the consequences of collective action since the first contributions in this literature strand (Cloward & Piven, 1975; Cress & Snow, 2000; Piven & Cloward, 1979). Every change-oriented grassroots actor advancing claims on behalf of their constituencies faces these dilemmas. Solving them results in long-term relational postures towards allies, targets, and

³² As in the case of positional strategies, the list of relational dilemmas and strategies is not meant to be exhaustive and has been elaborated by bridging Jasper et al.’s work (2022) with Johnson’s taxonomy on relational patterns between international bureaucrats and international CSOs.

constituencies. Relational strategies hence stem from these long-term and cross-cutting relational paths.

The first dilemma- the so-called *naughty-or-nice* (Jasper, 2006; Jasper et al., 2022)- summarizes the long debate on the productivity of disruptive action. Decisions on whether and how to exploit disruption do not derive from mere here-and-now calculations. On the contrary, they mature from broader considerations of actors' positions and attitudes toward social change. According to Piven & Cloward (1979), disruption is a necessary and rational choice for peripheral actors in society, namely for actors who hold marginal positions and whose only way to change their positioning is to strive for a radical systemic transformation. Here, disruption is not intended as a synonym for violence, even though violent tactics may be part of disruptive strategies, but as the "withdrawing [of] cooperation in social relations" (Piven, 2006: 23). Players can take this decision based on whether they share or not targets' values and imaginaries of social change (Johnson, 2016). Hence, the naughty-or-nice dilemma can be solved in various ways: deciding to fully cooperate with targets (cooptation), withdrawing entirely from cooperation (conflict), or switching from cooperation to non-cooperation based on whether they depend on incumbents' resources (competition or cooperation).

The second dilemma, the organizational one- has similarly animated theoretical discussion (Gamson, 1990; Goldstone, 1980; Jenkins, 1983). Scholars have often associated formal and bureaucratized groups with success. However, the benefits of institutionalizing and bureaucratizing collective action come with related risks (Jasper, 2006). Gamson (1990) defined success as a function of *bureaucratization* and *low factionalism*, or *combat readiness*. In Gamson's theory, what is relevant is the possibility of *reducing the asymmetry of power* between challenging groups and authorities, suggesting that success is a function of adapting to incumbents' structures and repertoires, in a way, following the rules of the game. Hence, players can solve their organizational dilemmas differently, whether they depend on or have the same resource pools of incumbents or can count on independent and alternative resource pools (Johnson, 2016). Players who depend on incumbents' resources or share the same resource pool will opt for co-optative strategies, whereas wholly independent players will more readily resort to conflict. In between, players could select cooperative or competitive strategies depending on whether they share or not incumbents' values.

The ideal-typical distinction has been elaborated, focusing on the relationships between civic account holders and institutional account givers. However, these relational strategies inform how civic players interact with allies, bystanders, and the public. Hence, one could expect players preferring a co-optative strategy to be less attentive to developing strong allies or their audience,

while the opposite will probably be true for those following a conflictual strategy. In between, players selecting competitive and cooperative strategies will shift their focus and alliances based on contingent conditions and goals.

2.5.2. Relational mechanisms

Positional and relational strategies are relevant to understand how actors (seek to) reach influence positions. However, they tell us nothing about *how* influence translates into actual instances of social change. A mechanism-based analysis can add some information on this front. First, mechanism-based accounts may reduce the risks of getting caught in the toadyism of strategic thinking and dilemmas-based depictions (Duyvendak & Fillieule, 2015). Secondly, they help to synthesize the countless interactions spanning a variety of arenas over long periods. Thirdly, they allow for the systemic reconciliation of structural explanations³³, which are only limitedly accounted for by strategic approaches (Jasper et al., 2022)³⁴.

The mechanism-process approach has been at the forefront of *outcome* explanations for a long time. Notwithstanding the numerous critiques pointing to its overly structuralist take, the mechanism paradigm has remained central for studying the consequences of collective action (Bidegain & Maillet, 2021; Halfmann, 2021; Kolb, 2007; Mattoni & Odilla, 2021). In line with the processual-relational approach followed by this work, reintroducing the mechanism logic into the picture can enhance our understanding of the influence of collective action. Processual relationalism maintains that relationships are *unfolding processes* (Dépelteau, 2018a; Selg et al., 2022). However, what remains to clarify is why some positions and relational patterns are productive or, in a nutshell, how relational mechanisms *mediate* social change. The attempt is to understand why relationships and change in them are so meaningful, that is, *how* relational patterns allow CSOs to be influential.

To unveil how social ties mediate between collective actors and social change, we must dig deeper into social ties' substantial aspects (Azarian, 2010). As previously stated, influence represents a relational instance of causality, defined by Diani (1997) as a form of positional power. The underlying hypothesis is that better-connected actors will more likely influence social change and control collective struggles' effects. However, to support such a claim, one must understand what is *productive* about relationships, going beyond strategies and relational structures.

³³ Flipping around Jasper's (Jasper, 2006) critique of structural approaches that define as agency everything that is not structure, here I refer to "structure" as the ensemble of all the elements and factors that are not directly tied to collective actors' choices, being there institutional systems or targets' counter-actions. That is, of course, a reductionist understanding of structure for clarity purposes.

³⁴ "Although a players-and-arenas framework is meant to incorporate both structure and agency, we have leaned slightly toward the latter, toward a theory of action more than a theory of structure." (Jasper et al., 2022:195).

This brings us back to *relational mechanisms*, which -according to McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, “alter connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks”(McAdam et al., 2001:26). *Dynamics of Contention* treats mechanisms (environmental, cognitive, and relational) as a “delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations.”³⁵ DOC’s prescriptions would lead us to identify a limited class of events that alter connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks in identical or *similar ways over various situations*. Therefore, relational mechanisms qualify as a limited set of interactions that alter connections among players and arenas and work similarly across various interaction histories. What is distinctive about relational mechanisms is thus the quality and contents of social ties forged in interactions (Arnold, 2011; Azarian, 2010; Burt, 2002; Diani, 1997).

Research on the policy and political consequences of collective action unanimously points to the crucial role of institutional allies in fostering social change (Böhm, 2015; Di Gregorio, 2014; Giugni, 2007; Hein & Vang, 2015; Kitschelt, 1986; Piccio, 2016; Sebastian, 2021). Previous studies have demonstrated how connections with individuals in institutional arenas count for achieving CSOs’ goals. Hence, the presence of *embedded activists* (Böhm, 2015), *internal reformers* (Kellogg, 2012), or *insider activists* (Buchter, 2021) have turned out to be essential elements in influencing policies’ passage and implementation. In a nutshell, CSOs members connected to MPs are more likely to be influential. At the meso-level, several studies and literature strands have tried to understand the connections between network structures and composition and social change. For example, collective action studies have demonstrated how *vertical* and *horizontal integration* with institutional actors and between civic players shape policy results (Cinalli, 2007b, 2007a; Cinalli & Fuglister, 2008). Similarly, the Policy Network approach has singled out the connections between networks and policy outcomes, flows of resources in networks help players advance their goals (Fawcett & Daugbjerg, 2012). At the macro level, scholars have come to realize the fundamental impact of networks and relational patterns on processes of social change (Erikson & Occhiuto, 2017), with trust networks and the integration processes between the ruled and the rulers being central to fueling social change (Tilly, 2004, 2016). Studies have claimed that systemic change requires substituting the so-called webs of interdependence that grant social systems stability and durability (Clemens, 1998), including outsider groups in the polity, as is the case with critical junctures and eventful protests (della Porta, 2020; Kitschelt, 1986). Up to now, this bulk of research answered positively to Diani’s question: (1997), “if social movements strengthen their roots among

³⁵ Such a definition has been variously criticized. Among others, Alimi et al. (2012) proposed an alternative definition of mechanisms, which focuses on “a distinct emergent effect, but not a corresponding distinct antecedent mode.” p.9

"opinion makers" in these micronetworks, does the influence of these movements increase?" (p. 139). However, why is this the case? What are the mechanisms beyond the productivity of these social ties?

To answer this question, the work builds on Burt's discussion on the productivity of social ties, referring to mechanisms of *contagion*, *prominence*, *closure*, and *brokerage of structural holes* (Burt, 2002). These mechanisms look at the role of resources - material and symbolic- and information in networks and at their flows through social ties. Burt's arguments appear crucial insofar as they reflect directly on what is productive about social relations and because they align with the idea that social influence may have different bases (material and symbolic, Gallino, 1978), for example, being alternatively based on similarity (closure), desirability (prominence), or expertise (contagion) (Rashotte, 2007).

In complex systems, actors use their social connections as a substitute for information to orient their actions and decision-making. Hence, the mechanism of *contagion* points to the focal role played by networks' connection to *fuel social change by furnishing information* to players endowed with decision-making powers. This mechanism is particularly relevant in the interaction between challengers and incumbents, as the information and knowledge controlled by CSOs are valuable currencies when interacting with institutional entrepreneurs (Orsini & Smith, 2010). In the policy-making arena, CSOs can provide helpful information to guide the decisions of politicians seeking re-election or ways to implement their programs (Burstein & Linton, 2003; Lohmann, 1993). Control over valuable information appears to be particularly relevant in the case of technical issues, where CSOs may become *essential* sources of information to guide decision-makers (Dür, 2008b). Beyond electoral purposes, CSOs may supply powerholders with crucial information to guide policy implementation. For example, specialized CSOs may support the efforts of enforcement actors to achieve their policy goals (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007), especially after introducing new laws. However, when information and knowledge are diffuse across many CSOs, institutional targets may be able to play organizations against each other, diminishing the influence of grassroots groups (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007). Hence, CSOs influence policymakers to the extent they can supply electorally relevant resources, mainly in the form of information (Burstein & Linton, 2003).

Institutional actors interacting with CSOs are motivated by the need to acquire critical information and the desire to legitimize their role in the eyes of their constituents. The second mechanism, *prominence*, maintains that social ties can indirectly serve as a source of information, deriving from their legitimacy and status. In complex systems, CSOs, as well as institutional actors, allies, and bystanders, will model their behavior based on that of *prominent* actors. Likewise, this status-

related mechanism is not new to the literature on collective action and its consequences. According to Tilly's WUNC³⁶ model (1999), the worthiness of collective actors' claims is essential for productive interactions with institutional actors (Wouters, 2018). Therefore, CSOs regarded as worthy and credible will be seen as players "that should be listened to and interacted with" (Wouters & Walgrave, 2017:5). At the same time, research on the influence of interest groups demonstrates that legitimacy is a crucial resource for influencing policymaking (Dur, 2008). CSOs can serve as a source of *legitimation* for the actions and decisions of institutional actors without necessarily resulting in cooptation (Holdo, 2019). In addition, legitimate challengers can introduce new standards on which institutional actors model their behavior, leading to processes of *imitation* and *diffusion* (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008). The expectation is that institutional actors will turn to CSOs recognized as legitimate players in relevant arenas to model their behavior, mainly when introducing new laws or services in unfavorable contexts or seeking to legitimize their actions (Galeana, 2020).

The mechanism of *closure* concerns how information flows in networks. The idea is that information flows more quickly in close or denser networks. Highly interconnected actors are more likely to receive information quickly and transmit it to others, increasing the flow of information and its chances to orient their actions. In contrast, actors with fewer connections will receive and transmit information more slowly, reducing the flow of information and the chances of action. This mechanism is relevant in policy change, as it can affect the ability of CSOs to influence policy consequences. It is closer to Diani's interpretation of the productivity of social capital ties. However, ties are qualitatively different (Borgatti et al., 2013; Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). Social capital ties based on mutual trust and recognition should be associated with more influence potential than ad-hoc and instrumental-based ones (Diani, 1997). Whereas this has been assessed particularly considering ties between elites and CSOs (Arnold, 2011), interlocking ties based on task distribution in coalitions can be equally productive even when not correlated by trust and shared identities (Mazák & Diviák, 2018).

The fourth mechanism relates to the flow of information in networks and to the *brokerage role of structural holes*. Actors connected to multiple groups or networks may serve as brokers, facilitating the flow of information between these groups and increasing the chances of social change. As the previous section shows, the brokerage can be intended as a precise positional strategy. Existing research has demonstrated the relevance of brokerage in advancing social change (Fernandez & Gould, 1994; Gould & Fernandez, 1989). Brokers can thus increase the centrality of certain CSOs

³⁶ Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, Commitment (Tilly, 1999).

within the civic sector (Diani, 2003b; Robnett, 2000) or ease the interactions with institutional actors (Galeana, 2020; Lee, 2022). By connecting unrelated actors, brokers may bring together diverse actors and facilitate communication and collaboration.

On the other hand, however, brokers may become *structural holes*, controlling flows among otherwise unconnected actors. When bridging *structural holes*, *brokers* may thus have great threatening power, shutting down the communications and exchanges between social actors. Hence, as a mechanism, the brokerage of structural holes helps the understanding of players influence social change by controlling the flows of resources and information between otherwise unconnected players or arenas.

The empirical chapters will dig into the functioning of these mechanisms, trying to assess whether and how they have mediated the influence of CSOs over the Italian and Spanish anti-corruption fields.

2.6. Conclusion

The chapter has discussed how social movement theories of social change can help explain whether and how CSOs reach their SA goals. In doing so, it has reviewed the partiality of the more traditional models in accounting for SA consequences to show how current debates on the direct and indirect effects of grassroots anti-corruption efforts resemble well-established discussions on the effects of movement activities. Hence, it has presented alternative conceptions and approaches in studying the consequences of collective action, moving towards an influence research agenda. Finally, after presenting a working definition of influence as a form of positional power, it has sketched the essential elements to investigate it empirically. It has proposed the introduction of a *relational mediation model* to investigate i) how players strategically planned their connections in order to reach positions of influence and ii) how influential positions allow players to shape change processes. Next, it has suggested investigating the first point (i) by distinguishing between positional and relational strategies, that is, by looking at how actors a) strategically try to change their positions in networks as a reaction to emerging dilemmas; and b) whether these attempts homogenize with players' broader relational schemes based on ideas of whether and how they should interact with others to shape social change. Finally, the chapter has suggested tackling the second point (ii) by looking at relational mechanisms to understand why some positional and relational strategies appear more productive than others and, even more importantly, how this is the case. For this reason, it has introduced the study of relational mechanisms. To look at the quality and contents of ties among and between accountability actors is indeed critical to understand how CSOs' (lack of) positions of influence can produce SA effects.

The following chapter will better clarify some of these analytical points presenting the relational-processual approach guiding the analysis and its methodological application.

Chapter 3. Methodological background

“The transformation of movements from something to be explained, to an explanation of political phenomena, means starting from politics and working back to movements, without losing sight of them. After all, these are not ‘movement outcomes’ as the literature often claims, but political outcomes that may sometimes be influenced by movements.”

Amenta, 2014:27

3.1. Introduction

At its very core, this work investigates how CSOs may influence the anti-corruption struggle. Ontologically, it maintains that anti-corruption advancements come in complex bundles, are influenced by a multiplicity of individual and compound players, and are shaped by sustained interactions over time. Hence, the heart of this dissertation lies in *mapping* the focal actors who co-participate in the anti-corruption struggles and *understanding* how the making, unmaking, and transformation of their interactions and relations result in SA consequences. Consequently, the epistemological foundations of this work are rooted in processual and relational perspectives, focusing on the dynamic and unfolding interactions among players to elucidate their transformative or constraining potential.

As Chapter 1 has discussed, defining and investigating public corruption is, per se, a thorny problem. Taking into account the definitions provided in the literature, this work conceives political corruption as a *relational type of wrong*, “a form of unaccountable use of entrusted power”³⁷(Ceva & Ferretti, 2021:20). However, the present research does not aim to assess collective action's impact on reducing the spread of political corruption. Instead, it focuses on how CSOs develop and strengthen bottom-up controls over public officials’ use of entrusted power, here resumed in the concept of *societal accountability*. If, as argued by anti-corruption studies, civic controls may help prevent and tackle public corruption, bottom-up accountability mechanisms become a crucial proxy to assess how civic actors contribute to the anti-corruption struggle.

As maintained in Chapter 2, this research understands societal accountability mechanisms as a set of collective action consequences, a relationship between account-holders and account-givers (Bovens, 2007, Brummel, 2021). Such a relational definition adapts to different accountabilities (e.g., horizontal, vertical, diagonal, state, social, societal, etc.) and stresses actors’ reciprocity and interdependence. Trivially, there is no accountability if no one is “asking” anything of someone or

³⁷ Such a relational definition of public corruption could be too blurred for understanding how penal systems conceptualize and persecute corrupt behaviors. However, it accommodates both personalistic and systemic accounts of public corruption, going towards a more constructivist understanding of such hidden exchanges (Wickberg, 2021).

if anyone “faces the consequences” for someone else’s sanctions. Building on the existing literature, Chapter 2 has delineated the two constitutive dimensions of societal accountability: answerability and sanctioning, and substantiated them along three main areas of anti-corruption intervention: transparency, whistleblowing, and civic monitoring.

Based on these premises, Chapter 3 presents the research strategy followed in this work. First, the chapter briefly discusses current methodological shortcomings in analyzing societal accountability and collective action’s consequences. Next, it introduces the essential elements for a relational-processual approach to studying the consequences of grassroots anti-corruption efforts. Finally, it elucidates the logic behind the case selection, presenting the data and the strategies for data gathering and analysis.

3.2. Methodological issues in the study of the consequences of grassroots anti-corruption efforts

Studies connecting CSOs and anti-corruption effects are still relatively limited in numbers. Scholars and international organizations have sometimes attempted to measure the impact of civil society actors on the anti-corruption struggle, with contrasting results (Malena et al., 2004; UNCAC Coalition, 2019; United Nations Development Programme, 2013; UNODC, 2019). Whereas part of the scholarship has started to advocate for greater involvement of civic actors in the anti-corruption struggle (Johnston, 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2014; Vannucci, 2015; Vannucci et al., 2017), others have questioned the transformative effects of existing civic initiatives (Fox, 2015; Grimes, 2008; Joshi & Houtzager, 2012). However, the lack of systematic and up-to-date meta-analyses thwarts attempts to synthesize the current state-of-the-art and to survey the most common approaches. Notwithstanding these limitations, some critical lines of investigation and methodological trends co-exist.

On a generic ground, studies focusing on the relationship between CSOs and anti-corruption tend to deploy either quantitative or qualitative methodologies. Quantitative approaches are probably the most widespread, with large-N investigations focused on understanding the correlation between CSOs’ spread and strength and corruption measures (Grimes, 2008, 2013, 2013). Another relevant strand of literature focuses on in-depth case studies, following qualitative methodologies to assess the impact of grassroots anti-corruption efforts in single countries or regions of the world (Beyerle, 2014; Fox, 2015, 2016). More recently, social movement and collective action scholars have intervened in the field, advancing comparative analyses of anti-corruption and pro-accountability mobilizations across countries, campaigns, or over time (della Porta et al., 2017; della Porta, 2018; C. Milan, 2018; Mungiu-Pippidi et al., 2013). However, in all those cases, studies have posed

relatively limited attention to the *strategic action* of CSOs in the anti-corruption field and to the complex *webs of interactions* they build with other relevant players at the institutional level and beyond.

As discussed in Chapter 2, many challenges and debates characterizing corruption and anti-corruption studies are not new to collective action research. Indeed, these fields of study have often developed along similar lines and confronted similar methodological shortcomings (della Porta, 2018). For example, part of the literature on collective action's political and policy consequences has relied on large-N statistical investigations or meta-studies attempting to connect social movements to political transformation (Giugni, 2007; Giugni & Passy, 1998; Giugni & Yamasaki, 2009; Uba, 2009). However, despite the informative potential of these investigations, variable-based analyses of policy effects have generally produced dichotomic understandings of the nexus linking collective action and political change, resulting in contradictory evidence. Indeed, methodologically speaking, variable-based analyses have hardly succeeded in isolating the influencing power of grassroots actors from co-founding effects (Earl, 2000).

Elaborating solid causal claims is undoubtedly one of the most challenging tasks for scholars investigating collective action consequences (Flesher Fominaya & Feenstra, 2023), as it is for those interested in measuring the impact of anti-corruption efforts. For their part, social movement scholars have started to obviate multi-causality issues by moving away from pure movement-centered analysis and underlying the importance of gathering data on all the actors³⁸ potentially contributing to social change processes (Amenta, 2014; Giugni, 1999; Giugni et al., 1999; McAdam & Snow, 2010). However, disentangling the net effects of multiple actors on the outcome under investigation is much easier in theory than in practice. Nevertheless, studies on the role of interest groups, political parties, NGOs, and social movements have followed this direction, trying to assess the relative weight of these actors (Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Burstein & Linton, 2003).

On the other hand, qualitative investigations have often focused on in-depth case studies, despite several voices in social movement studies have called for the implementation of comparative and processual designs to increase the explanatory potential of existing models (Bosi et al., 2016; Bosi & Uba, 2021; Giugni, 1999). The primacy of single cases over comparative designs should not surprise, given the context-dependency of social movement effects (Uba, 2009), which seems even more true in the anti-corruption case (Larsson & Grimes, 2022). A general reluctance toward between- and within-case comparisons has multiplied the amount of knowledge and evidence on the

³⁸ For example, scholars interested in policy change should collect data on the action of at least five possible co-founders: rulers, political parties, interest groups, the media, and countermovements (Giugni, 1999).

consequences of collective action but has hardly allowed the sedimentation and accumulation of generalizable results.

Furthermore, those studying the consequences of collective action have often faced significant issues in operationalizing their object of study. As partly maintained in Chapter 2, scholars have encountered significant measurement issues when operationalizing political, cultural, or biographical consequences. Scholars have alternatively relied on activists' and insiders' interpretations or pre-determined measures theoretically defined by researchers (Earl, 2000). Chapter 4 will also briefly discuss how operationalization and measurement issues have been significant challenges for corruption scholars. Moreover, measurement and operationalization issues also link to data-gathering concerns. The scant amount of data and documents available when looking for information about movements' activities and the high costs for accessing them sometimes result in ineffective collection processes (Amenta, 2014). The issue of data availability is often recalled in explaining the significant attention devoted to the policy arena. Indeed, the policy process leaves traces easier to access (Amenta et al., 2018), even though this is not equally true for all the phases of policymaking. Something similar happens when looking at the anti-corruption field, where the more tangible and easily accessible consequences of civic efforts seem to be their direct and indirect policy consequences (Mattoni & Odilla, 2021; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006). For this reason, the present contribution will mainly operationalize societal accountability as a set of political consequences of anti-corruption activism, with a specific focus on the policy process.

3.3. A relational-processual approach to the study of CSOs' influence

To partly obviate some of the methodological shortcomings just elucidated, this work draws on a most-similar research design through a processual-relational approach focusing on the influence of CSOs over the policy and political anti-corruption arenas in Italy and Spain. The project builds on a case-oriented approach (della Porta, 2008), interested in assessing the consequences of collective mobilization against corruption and explaining their eventual variation across different contexts. In particular, this work builds on a most-similar case selection (Anckar, 2008; Levy, 2008). The selection procedure will be discussed further in the following sections.

The project aims to put forward a processual-relational approach to studying societal accountability. Relational thinking is hardly new to theories on public corruption and anti-corruption research. Recently, philosophical approaches have provided a new understanding of public corruption as a

relational injustice³⁹ (Ceva, 2018; Ceva & Ferretti, 2021b), and relational approaches have been used to explain the emergence of anti-corruption mobilizations (Auyero, 2003; Auyero et al., 2017). However, less has been said about the interaction between relationalism and accountability. If, as already stressed, accountability is, first and foremost, a relationship between actors and forums (Bovens, 2007; Brummel, 2021), relational approaches should be the analytical core of this line of research.

The once-new “relational turn” in the social sciences has started to sediment, sparking intense debates. A growing body of contributions in sociology is indeed working to apply relational thinking and methodologies in research (Dépelteau & Powell, 2013; Selg & Ventsel, 2020) and re-read the discipline's classics through relational lenses, showing how -overtly or not, and with different nuances- relational thinking has been a constant in the sociological production (for a detailed overview see Dépelteau, 2018). However, since the publication of Emirbayer's *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology* (1997), rationalists have been divided along ontological and epistemological lines. Even if entering this debate goes beyond the scope of this work, it is still necessary to embark on the effort of delineating the essential elements on which the research builds.

The present work understands relationalism as an ontology founded on the belief that “transactions, interactions, social ties, and conversations constitute the central stuff of social life”(Tilly, 2002:41). As postulated in Chapter 2, this work maintains that relationalism is a crucial approach to understand social change, which results from “multiple causal chains [that] lead to a plethora of possible effects in a situation where influences other than social movement activity necessarily contribute to the effect” (Tilly, 1999: 268). Indeed, relational approaches acknowledge the impossibility of isolating the effect of single players in producing processes of social change, assuming that the social reality and its evolution over time are better understood as an ongoing process of decisions and actions in relations (Kasper, 2013). In its basic definition, this relational approach will probably appear less radical and more interactionist than sometimes postulated (Dépelteau, 2018a; Powell, 2013; Selg, 2016a, 2016b, 2020; Selg et al., 2022). However, in such a succinct formulation, the relational premises of this work allow following the strategic interactions among anti-corruption actors to shed light on how these influence accountability consequences.

The processual element is the second epistemological pillar sustaining this work. A relational approach is always processual, sometimes also defined as processual relationalism (Dépelteau,

³⁹ “Public corruption, whether individual or institutional, can be more fundamentally understood as a form of political injustice in which someone has violated the normative logic that undergirds all relations of justice in rights-based systems.” (Ceva, 2018: 119)

2018a; Selg et al., 2022), where relations are conceived as a constantly ongoing process, as “a state of play within an interaction history” (Crossley, 2013:124). Within the sociological inquiry, the progressive turn towards processual approaches has sometimes coupled with a critique of the outcome paradigm, which partly overlaps with the critique of the consequences of collective action presented in the previous chapter.

Among others, Abbott (2016) has called for a paradigmatic shift toward what he defines as *processual sociology*. Although this work does not intend to summarise the philosophical discussion about the nature and the meaning of time and temporalities endorsed by the author, it must be nevertheless stressed that his conclusions are of great importance to the rest of this work. Abbott is concerned with the sociological use of the outcome concept and its consequences on the possibility of understanding the social world, which goes beyond a mere methodological debate. He argues that the dominant outcome paradigm is still much more interested in the final goal, the endpoint, than the whole process through which the social reality is produced. Indeed, he maintains that the sociological use of outcomes leads to “a conception that enforces future calculation and disregards memory. It favours lives with nothing to regret and, perhaps, nothing to remember” (p.196-197). The suggestion to move away from analyses of the *big* outcome in favor of point outcomes in processes resonate with recent calls for analyzing collective actors’ gains and losses as they unfold over time (Jasper et al., 2022).

To partly address this criticism, the present investigation tries to develop along processual lines, focusing mainly on the *policy process*. Social movements and collective action scholars are increasingly trying to dialogue with policy scholars, mainly by breaking down the policy process into its constitutive dimensions (Amenta, 2014; Amenta et al., 2018). Thus, studies have increasingly turned to a distinction of the policy process in a series of intertwined phases, elaborating phase-specific expectations and models of social change. As a result, social movement scholars have started to elaborate models explaining the influence of collective actors over the agenda-setting stage or looking at the influence of collective actors on the definition of the policy contents or the policy implementation stage. Focusing on each phase distinctively helps shed light on the interactions and relations that link collective actors across arenas and notice their changes.

However, decades of political science and public policy studies have underlined how evolutionistic and linear models of policymaking come with several limitations. Policymaking, instead, would be better understood as a cycle, an ongoing process of recursive relationships over not-so-clear-cut stages. Over time, the literature has produced a growing body of typologies and classifications of policy stages and policy cycles (M. Hill, 2014; Howlett et al., 1995; Jann & Wegrich, 2007). Yet,

beyond conceptual and terminological differences, all these models share a cyclical understanding of the policy process, where a new agenda-setting stage always follows the policy adoption and evaluation. For this reason, beyond the policy phases of the transparency and whistleblowing campaigns in Italy and Spain, this work looks at civic monitoring projects as part of the policy cycle and terrain for broader political consequences.

3.4. Selection procedures: cases, campaigns, and interviewees

3.4.1. Case selection: Italy and Spain

Even though some research on the accountability consequences of anti-corruption mobilizations in authoritarian contexts has been carried out (Almén & Burell, 2018), scholars tend to agree that these civic efforts require minimal accountability conditions to emerge and thrive. State transparency, tolerance towards citizens' mobilization and press freedom, fair and competitive elections, and a functioning legal system are critical to mobilizing accountability concerns (Grimes, 2013; Newell, 2006; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006b). At the same time, such contextual conditions have often been used to explain the differential effects of grassroots accountability initiatives across cases. Whereas past studies have depicted quite pessimistic pictures, showing how CSOs' efforts tend to be more successful in already highly accountable contexts (Grimes, 2008, 2013), new research has instead demonstrated that SA can be more consequential where accountability conditions are moderate and less productive in highly unaccountable or accountable contexts (Larsson & Grimes, 2022). Even though such a general trend should integrate the counterintuitive evidence of anti-corruption mobilizations and consequentiality in non-accountable contexts (Almén & Burell, 2018; Beyerle, 2014), this work will focus on how SA emerges in so-defined sub-optimal cases.

Case selection has proceeded as follows. The initial list of possible national cases included only countries recognized as liberal or representative-electoral democracies, thus characterized by a somewhat developed system of liberal checks and balances (*horizontal accountability*) and free and competitive elections (*electoral accountability*). Moreover, as SA consequences appear highly context-dependent (Grimes, 2013), the selection procedure has tried to minimize the weight of contextual variations as much as possible. Based on existing literature and research traditions, relevant contextual differences, in this case, relate to levels of (perceived) public corruption, different levels of economic development (political economy explanations of public corruption), and differences in the civic culture (culturalist explanations of public corruption).

Hence, as a second step, the selection has been additionally limited to European countries. Thirdly, the sample of possible cases has been further restricted by looking at levels of (perceived)

corruption. When too widespread, perceptions of corruption may hinder the emergence of mobilization from below and feed resignation (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; della Porta et al., 2017; della Porta, 2018). Therefore, using Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2018⁴⁰ and 2019⁴¹), the case selection focused on countries with moderately high (score of 50-59) to moderate (score of 60-69) levels of perceived corruption. In this range, one can find several Southern and Eastern European countries. The selection has thus mainly focused on Southern European countries: Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece, to reduce cultural and institutional variations. The Greek case was excluded because of its lower perception index (45 in 2018 and 48 in 2019). Lastly, due to time and language constraints, the comparison was limited to Italy and Spain, excluding Portugal.

Italy and Spain represent an excellent pair for most-similar research designs that attempt to reduce the impact of external controls (della Porta, 2008). The two Southern European countries are often compared and grouped according to different indicators (e.g., Welfare state regimes, unemployment levels, anti-austerity policies, and high regional differentiation). Similarities between Italy and Spain include, among the rest, the severe impact of the financial crisis started in 2008 and the neoliberal recipes that have been proposed in its aftermath, which impacted the “modality, timing, and reach of (anti)corruption” (della Porta et al., 2017: 245).

However, the Spanish and Italian cases seem to be characterized by significant differences, even concerning the *relational patterns* among accountability actors. A systemic centrifugal corruption landscape characterizes both countries; thus, high resources are at stake in frequent corrupt exchanges with multiple centers of control (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012). However, the Italian case is additionally complicated by the presence of organized crime groups in corrupt transactions and by a well-established anti-mafia movement that mobilizes around public corruption (della Porta & Vannucci, 2014; Piazza & Sorci, 2018; Sberna & Vannucci, 2019). Over recent years, the overlapping between corruption and the mafia has increased, with growing attention devoted to the so-called *organized corruption* in which the mafia uses corruption to enter previously inaccessible territories and sectors (Picci & Vannucci, 2018). Given the peculiarity of the Italian case, in terms of the pervasiveness of organized crime and the historical heritage of the anti-mafia mobilizations, one may expect broader coalitions to emerge that jointly target mafia and corruption, with a higher degree of institutionalization.

Moreover, while the Spanish anti-corruption demonstrations have mainly developed within anti-austerity movements, the Italian case has been characterized by a more fragmented anti-corruption

⁴⁰ More at [2018 Corruption Perceptions Index - Explore the... - Transparency.org](#).

⁴¹ More at [2019 Corruption Perceptions Index - Explore the... - Transparency.org](#).

and anti-austerity landscape (Mattoni, 2018; Zamponi, 2012). Anti-corruption mobilizations have thus mainly emerged through the commitment of some pre-existing movements (e.g., No Muos, Piazza & Sorci, 2018) or by newly-formed ad hoc organizations (e.g., Riparte il future). Therefore, in the Italian case, one could expect a higher vertical integration within elites' circles and mainstream media and subsequent processes of activating horizontal accountability mechanisms, producing legal claim attainment and answerability.

In Spain, the grassroots contestation of the *15-M/Indignados* movement reframed corruption as a democratic issue or, better, a lack of real democracy. Corruption came to equate the unchecked connections between politics and the economy with the political power being regarded as entirely subjugated by private interests (Caruso, 2018). The movement linked the question of social justice with claims for the new foundations of democratic legitimacy through the issue of good governance (della Porta, 2018). Organizations such as X-Net, born out of the movement, contributed to mobilizing civil society, trying to build consensus horizontally and using discourses and frames focused on the inclusivity of citizens within the anti-corruption struggle (della Porta et al., 2017). The movement has contributed to increasing citizens' awareness of the consequences of corruption and bringing the issue to the core of the political debate, expressing a representation that challenged the old political system by linking the theme of transparency, participation, and social justice (Caruso, 2018) and refusing a vertical integration through traditional political representation (della Porta, 2017). Consequently, one may expect the Spanish case to be more concerned with creating horizontal ties to build societal coalitions rather than mechanisms of vertical integration, thus substituting rather than activating horizontal accountability producing direct sanctions. Similarities and differences between the two cases will be tackled further in Chapter 4.

3.4.2. Campaign selection

After completing the case selection, the first year of research has been wholly devoted to intense desk research to narrow the scope of the present investigation to a smaller number of campaigns. Indeed, the research focuses mainly on anti-corruption and pro-accountability *campaigns* (Ackerman & Kruegler, 1994), defined as “temporally bounded and strategically linked series of events and interactions directed at common goals” (Staggenborg & Lecomte, 2009:164). Campaigns tend to have clear objectives (e.g., policy change) and mobilize many actors without necessarily building on shared collective identities (Staggenborg & Lecomte, 2009; Villoria & Gómez, 2021). As such, using campaigns as the primary unit of analysis serves to i) acknowledge the *transactional* nature of the anti-corruption and pro-accountability mobilizations (Mazák & Diviák, 2018; Petrova & Tarrow, 2007a), ii) focus on *interactions* between individual and

compound players, as constitutive of collective action and accountability relationships (Bovens, 2007; Diani, 2012), iii) let emerge the *strategic work* of accountability actors and the dynamic unfolding of their interactions across time and arenas, going beyond structural accounts (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015).

As Amenta's opening quote (2014) recommends, the present research starts from concrete *anti-corruption instances* rather than from movements or CSOs. Hence, the selection process first focused on *what* to observe: the transparency and whistleblowing policy processes and the blossoming of civic monitoring initiatives. From there, the methodological design tries -piece by piece- to work backward to single out CSOs' influence. The campaign selection has combined theories of accountability with evidence of accountability consequences, distinguishing between *legal claim attainment*, *answerability*, and *enforcement* (Almén & Burell, 2018; Bovens et al., 2014; Fox, 2007; Schedler, 1999). In addition, it has focused on the three areas of anti-corruption interventions elucidated in Chapter 1, *transparency*, *whistleblowing*, and *civic monitoring*, currently considered among the more promising and widespread anti-corruption strategies (Brown et al., 2014; Fox, 2016; Marquette & Peiffer, 2015; Molina et al., 2017).

As elucidated by Almén and Burell (2018), *legal claim attainment* coincides with those usually known as policy outcomes (Bosi et al., 2016). In particular, legal claim attainment revolves around the first stages of the policy process, from agenda-setting to policy passage (Amenta et al., 2018); that is, it coincides with obtaining the passage of a law. Hence, the investigation revolves around two policy campaigns on *transparency and access to public information* and *whistleblowers' protection* in Italy and Spain. The campaigns are:

1. FOIA4Italy in Italy and the Pro-Acceso campaign in Spain. Both intervened and influenced the passage of a law regulating transparency, access to public information, and citizens' right to know. Spanish law (Ley 19/2013) was passed in 2013, and Italian law (Legislative Decree 97/16) in 2016.
2. #VoicesofJustice in Italy and the Spanish campaign to pass a bill on whistleblowers' protection. The Italian law was approved in 2017 (L. 179/2017), while Spain transposed the European Directive on whistleblowing only in February 2023 (Ley 2/2023).

However, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, policy results alone are hardly enough to evaluate the accountability consequences of CSOs. CSOs may reach accountability results indirectly by strengthening the legal apparatus and increasing preventive mechanisms (Larsson & Grimes, 2022; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2003, 2006). However, accountability relations require increased

answerability and sanctioning potential (Bovens, 2007; Fox, 2015). Hence, it is necessary to look beyond the phase of policy passage to understand and evaluate the accountability consequences of grassroots anti-corruption efforts. The need to keep an eye on subsequent phases of the policy process is well-known by social movements and civil society scholars interested in policy change (Andrews, 2001; Harrison, 2016; Pülzl & Treib, 2017; Revillard, 2017; Sabatier, 2005). Implementation, enforcement, and evaluation are crucial phases in the policy cycle theory, which can significantly reduce or magnify civic influence over political change (Ceron & Negri, 2016; Jann & Wegrich, 2007). For the sake of the present work, it was thus essential to go beyond legal claim attainment to try and evaluate if and to what extent CSOs campaigns increased the levels of answerability (i.e., elites being forced to answer to public concerns, justify their actions, decisions, and procedures) and enforcement (i.e., both formal and informal sanctions). Answerability and enforcement consequences are thus a way to assess the direct and indirect influence of CSOs on accountability, looking at if and how CSOs were able to obtain information and sanction directly and if and how they triggered institutional demands and sanctioning capacity (Bovens, 2007; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006).

The analysis looks at different phases of the policy process -from agenda-setting to policy evaluation- to grasp SA consequences regarding legal claim attainment, answerability, and sanctioning. Beyond the four campaigns listed above, the analysis is enriched in each country by presenting and investigating a set of different civic monitoring projects. Focusing on civic monitoring initiatives beyond policy consequences has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, as shown in Chapter 1 and briefly discussed here, accountability relations are far more than mere policy change processes. On the other hand, to appreciate the accountability consequences of civic actors, one must at least broaden the scope of analysis from the policy to the political consequences of activism and grassroots mobilizations (Bosi et al., 2016). Civic monitoring initiatives have great potential in this sense. Monitoring initiatives are increasingly widespread across various contexts and actors, and they heavily rely on the interactions between monitoring and monitored subjects, often exploiting transparency and whistleblowing tools (Feenstra & Casero-Ripollés, 2014; Keane, 2009).

3.4.3. *Units of analysis*

So far, campaigns have emerged as the central unit of analysis. However, each campaign unfolds within *collective action fields*, defined as “localized relational arenas characterized by mutual orientation, positioning, and (at times) joint action among multiple kinds of actors engaged in

diverse forms of collective intervention and challenge” (Diani & Mische, 2015:307). Collective action fields well-summarize the high heterogeneity of accountability actors, going beyond social movements and favoring a broader civil society perspective. However, even though the analysis will primarily deal with CSOs’ strategies, meanings, and positions, it is necessary to remember that SA only exists vis-à-vis other forms of accountability, mainly horizontal (i.e., institutional controls), contributing to shaping SA results. Thus, collective action fields help to analytically envision interactions between multiple institutional and non-institutional actors across relational arenas. From here, the study tries to avoid aggregative and monolithic definitions of accountability actors, thus breaking down each field into *arenas* and *players* (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015).

Arenas are “an open-ended bundle of rules and resources that allows certain kinds of interactions to proceed, leading to outcomes that may be formal or quite casual” (Jasper, 2006: 141). Arenas may differ in size and scope; they can emerge, be reshaped, and vanish. Each arena has more or less defined rules, more or less clearcut boundaries, a certain degree of formalization, and a specific history (Jasper, 2004, 2006; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015; King & Jasper, 2022b). As such, arenas help define the boundaries of the defined spaces of interactions within broader collective action fields. Arenas connect to each other and the broader collective action field via individual and compound players (and sub-players), who co-habit in arenas, migrate from one arena to another, emerge from an arena, or create arenas in the first place. Players, arenas, and fields exist beyond campaigns as temporally bounded sequences of events and can evolve throughout each campaign or its stages.

Players are intended as “those who engage in strategic action with some goal in mind” (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015:10). Whereas the organizational and meso-level remain central to data gathering, individual and compound players emerge as central both at the theoretical and analytical level. As the empirical Chapters will show, spokespersons of CSOs have usually been interviewed on behalf of their organizations. Notwithstanding, they have often expressed their worldview and opinions, as is always the case, but more importantly, they have elucidated personal connections with other institutional or civic players. Thus, a composite picture emerged where compound players are connected – cooperatively or not- via personal ties of friendship, past participation in joint events, etc. Even though potentially confusing, the entangled nature of different levels of analysis is of primary importance for the research, not only because it mirrors the experience lived by people and organizations but also because it integrates with the assumptions on which the relational mediation model presented in Chapter 2 builds.

Fig. 3.1. Graphical representation of the interaction between campaigns, fields, arenas, and players

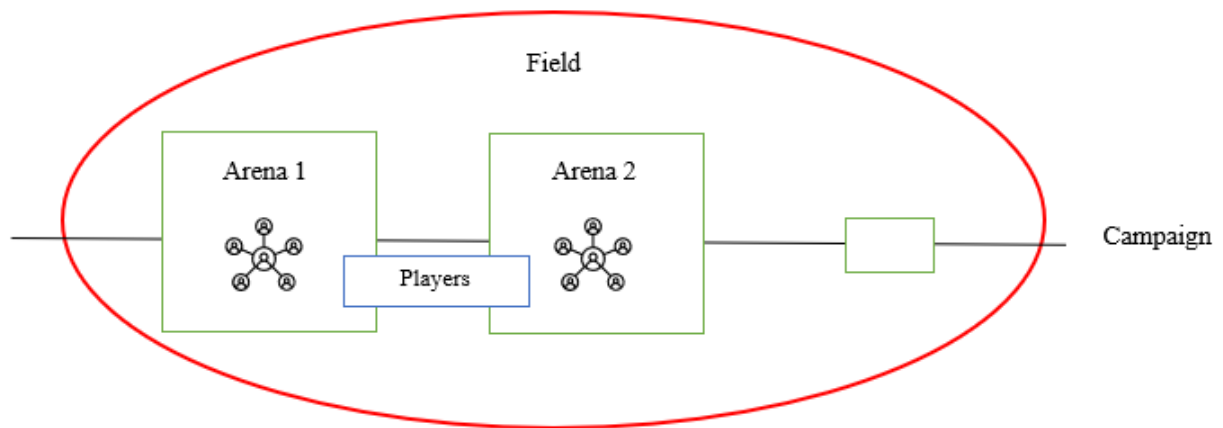


Fig. 3.1. visually represents the dynamic relation between campaigns, fields, arenas, and players. Taking transparency as an example, the campaign to pass a bill regulating access to public information represented a sequence of temporally located and strategic interactions between multiple actors, populating a broader collective action field. Concrete interactions among actors advocating or resisting transparency goals happened synchronically and diachronically in several different arenas (e.g., the *policy arena* – including the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, and Commissions; the *administrative arena*- including local governments, the transparency office of each local government, the National Anticorruption Authority; the *media arena*, etc.), each regulated by its rules, with specific resources, and dynamics.

3.4.4. Sample selection: mapping the field and selecting interviewees

The sampling strategy for identifying potential interviewees combined *realist* and *nominalist* criteria and served first to map anti-corruption and pro-accountability CSOs in Italy and Spain (Heath et al., 2009; Knoke & Yang, 2019; Laumann et al., 1989). In particular, the first exploratory sample followed a *nominalist* strategy, including 6 CSOs who openly self-identified as anti-corruption and pro-accountability actors and were involved in the four campaigns under investigation: *Transparency International* in Italy and Spain, *Libera* and *Riparte il Futuro* in Italy, *X-Net* and *Access Info* in Spain. Secondly, a second broader sample was drawn, following a *realist* criterion, based on the boundaries CSOs were establishing (i.g., being or not being part of the anti-corruption and pro-accountability field). Hence, the selection procedure identified the more relevant coalitional efforts involving the first sample's CSOs: FOIA4Italy (32) and VoicesofJustice (3) in Italy and the Coalition Pro Acceso (73) and ABRE (12) in Spain. As a result, the final Italian

sample counted 32 CSOs, whereas the Spanish one included 81 groups when removing redundant CSOs.

Finally, the last step of the selection procedure looked for additional nodes and their alters, relying on the Action Organization Analysis approach (Kousis, Giugni, & Lahusen, 2018), a strategy that builds on the well-known Protest Event Analysis applied to online interactions. Following such an approach, the abovementioned coalition's websites have been used as initial hubs for the investigation. However, the Italian sample included two coalitions that had already accomplished their functions and disappeared, representing a significant issue for mapping and investigating up-to-date civic monitoring projects. Hence, the sample included an additional hub, selecting an active CSO working in the monitoring field: *A Scuola di OpenCoesione*⁴². In this case, the selection followed a brief period of participant observation at the annual monitoring school organized by Libera, Scuola Common. The final Italian matrix included 39 CSOs.

Then, each hub has been scrutinized to detect relevant connections, usually in the section "partners" or deductively retrieved by searching for information about past and ongoing projects and partnerships. This first mapping has led to identifying approximately 300 organizations related to relevant anti-corruption actors in Italy and Spain. Secondly, each site has been analyzed to make sense of the relationships between these different organizations and exclude those unrelated to the anti-corruption landscape. This analysis of online contents has focused on: I) some "*socio-demographic*" information such as the year of foundation, the scope of the organization (international, national, regional, local), the type of organization (NGO, cultural association, project, political collectives, networks of organizations, trade unions, banks, nonprofit organizations, startups, institutional organizations, the state of activity (still active or not); II) *relational data* such as a list of partners, a list of donors when present; III) the *organizational structure*. Finally, besides these descriptive and "demographic" variables, a more qualitative analysis of the contents of each website has been carried out, looking for information about their *goals*, areas of intervention, and *relationships with institutional actors*. A detailed codebook is available in Appendix 1.

The selection of interviewees has then followed a realist criterion. At first, CSOs' goals and activities were scrutinized by analyzing the sections "who are we," "projects/areas of intervention," manifestos, and action plans. Next, each organization has been classified as working on active

⁴² A Scuola di OpenCoesione is an institutional monitoring initiative dedicated to develop monitoring projects in schools. It has been selected because the initiative has involved a wide range of CSOs all over the country over the years, thus broadening the mapping to areas beyond the central poles of Milan and Rome where the majority of CSOs initially are based.

citizenship/activism, legality, transparency, civic monitoring, open data, mafia, whistleblowing, corruption, or none. The first round of selection has thus excluded from the sample those organizations which were not working on any of the selected themes, or working exclusively on active citizenship/activism, on legality in a loose sense, or exclusively on open data and digital innovation.

As a second step, all the regional or local branches of national organizations (e.g., Action Aid Abruzzo, Libera Palermo) and those inactive have been excluded. The final fixed list served to map the pro-accountability and anti-corruption field and resulted in a fixed list of possible interviewees. The final interviewees' sample included 34 CSOs in Italy and 24 in Spain. However, some groups had vanished, some did not answer when contacted, and others declined to be interviewed, instead relying on their online materials. The first round of interviews started from this fixed list and served to refine the sample additionally. Once the interviewing process started, additional actors were contacted through a snowball strategy.

3.5. Methodology: data gathering and data analysis

3.5.1. Data gathering

The study builds on *data triangulation* to increase information variety and validity (Ayoub et al., 2014). It puts forward an in-depth investigation of the relational dynamics between and within CSOs and institutional actors in the anti-corruption and pro-accountability field, combining network information from Action Organization Analysis (Kousis et al., 2018) with evidence from qualitative interviews (della Porta, 2014), and Document Analysis (Altheide et al., 2008; Bowen, 2009).

Network data have been collected following an *unobtrusive* approach to gathering information on *directly reported* inter-organizational ties (Webb et al., 1966; Webb & Weick, 1979). The direct-unobtrusive strategy collects information on direct collaboration and communication among collective actors (Ciordia & Perego, 2023). Here, relationships are not inferred indirectly by looking at co-participation in events as in most social movement studies. Instead, ties are registered as directly reported by collective actors, in this case, by advertising cooperative ties on their websites. Observing ties reported directly through unobtrusive strategies such as analyzing organizations' websites allows researchers to access otherwise hardly available data and significantly cut data collection costs. Indeed, unlike surveys and standardized questionnaires, this strategy appears relatively cost-effective and mitigates pressing reliability issues, such as the low response rate of obtrusive data collection strategies. At the same time, web-based unobtrusive strategies may help obtain a complete picture of collective action fields that could sometimes escape

the more obtrusive strategies relying on fixed lists of network nodes or even open-ended qualitative interviews, where participants may fall to recall all the alters to whom they are connected. Such shortcomings are particularly pressing when reconstructing diachronic relational dynamics since actors may find it difficult to recall their past connections accurately. On the contrary, web-based strategies to directly observe connections among collective actors allow for elaborating longitudinal studies, reducing gathering costs, and simplifying data analysis (Caiani, 2014; Caiani & Wagemann, 2009).

At the same time, web- or document-based unobtrusive strategies for data gathering come with a specific set of limitations (Ciordia & Perego, 2023). Ties mapped observing online interactions, as in the case of the present research, may indeed be less meaningful than what can be assumed a priori from social researchers. For example, listing some organization as a partner on a website is a relatively costless form of cooperation that tells us nothing about such ties' strength, contents, and endurance. On the other hand, the absence of direct reference to some other organizations from one's website could be misinterpreted as a sign of non-cooperation. This reliability issue has been partly mitigated in the present case with integration from qualitative interviews. However, it was not rare to encounter a situation where CSOs often cooperating in coalitions or joint events did not reference each other on their website. The reasons behind this lack of cross-references may be multiple, ranging from un-updated websites, lack of formal cooperation protocols, or the need to hide some cooperative ties. At the same time, the opposite was also often true. The qualitative interviews have revealed a few cases where organizations listed as partners on CSOs' websites were instead perceived as rivals or outsiders or that those connections had faded away. Unfortunately, investigating the reasons for these mismatches is beyond this project's scope.

Still, this strategy appeared more suited for the sake of the present research and its theme- and country-specificities. As Chapter 4 will discuss at greater length, Italy and Spain have seldom experienced large and full-fledged anti-corruption mobilizations, with few notable exceptions. For this reason, using traditional indirect unobtrusive strategies to infer inter-organizational connections via participation in shared events or demonstrations was hardly viable (Ciordia & Perego, 2023). For the same reason, online interactions have appeared as a more suitable data repository than traditional reliance on newspaper articles, such as in the classical formulation of the Protest Event Analysis (Ciordia & Perego, 2023; Hutter, 2014, 2019). Indeed, the Italian and Spanish anti-corruption and pro-accountability instances of collective action have generally relied on open consultations, general assemblies, or parliamentary auditions, which do not usually make the news.

For this reason, the data collection has relied on online hubs and sub-hubs, building on the Action Organization Analysis (Kousis et al., 2018).

Network data mainly served to map the anti-corruption and accountability field in Italy and Spain and draw the initial sample. However, the research questions at the basis of the present work could not have been answered by employing a standard Social Network Analysis (Borgatti et al., 2013) mainly because of the impossibility of reconstructing the whole network of civil society and institutional actors' relations over two extensive national cases as Italy and Spain. Therefore, chapter 4 will present the exploratory visualization and some essential characteristics of the Italian and Spanish anti-corruption and pro-accountability networks for descriptive purposes, only to introduce the cases.

On the contrary, the main arguments of the present work will be extrapolated from the 37 semi-structured interviews collected between December 2019 and October 2022. Qualitative interviews represent a preferred data-gathering technique in the social sciences (della Porta, 2014). When it comes to social movements and civil society studies, qualitative interviews are crucial to let the agency of collective actors emerge and to understand the motives, rationale, emotions, ideology, perceptions, or values guiding their actions (Blee & McDowell, 2013). Moreover, qualitative interviews help researchers open the black box of collective action, moving from participants' lived experiences to reconstructing the meso-level dynamics of mobilization processes (Blee & Taylor, 2002). Hence, qualitative interviews appear as a pivotal technique to gather data on strategies, positions, and perceptions, which are at the forefront of the present investigation.

After having drawn the initial sample, as specified in the previous section, each CSOs has been contacted via email. Whereas most organizations responded positively, some never replied or asked to refer exclusively to their online materials. Furthermore, the research tried to include the perspective of institutional actors symmetrically. For this reason, the sample includes representatives of political parties and public officials. Specifically, interviews were conducted with a member of the Five Stars Movement in Italy, a member of Barcelona's city council, a former member of the Italian Anticorruption Authority, and three public officials in Barcelona's Transparency and Good Government office, and the Antifraud authority of Valencia.

The semi-structured interviews aimed at letting the interviewees elicit and elaborate on their relationships with other organizations in the accountability field and relevant institutional actors over different phases of the campaigns under investigation. For example, each interviewee had to list its more relevant partners in the civic field or with which institutional actors they cooperated to

pass a specific bill. In each case, the interviewer has tried to grasp the nature of these relationships, asking respondents how these interactions emerged and unfolded.

In addition, the qualitative and open-ended nature of the questions has served to nurture the quality of data, going beyond the mere recalling of partners and connections in order to grasp the meanings attached to them and to contextualize them into their social context in a processual way (della Porta, 2014). The open-ended questions have touched upon pre-determined themes to explore network-building strategies, their meanings, and evaluations. The creation of the interview guide has followed a theory-driven approach revolving around five main themes: 1) Ideas and perceptions of corruption and anti-corruption, 2) Ideas about the role of civil society and civil society organizations as anti-corruption actors, 3) Relationships among civil society actors within the SA landscape and related strategies, 4) Relationships with state actors and related strategies, 5) Evaluation of results obtained so far in terms of political, cultural, legal consequences. In addition, the interviews have collected information on each organization's structure, resources, and primary repertoires. At the same time, the semi-structured interview guide has left much room for emergent themes. Interviewees have been invited to further elaborate on previous questions and add additional untouched topics at the end of each interview. New themes and questions have emerged in this way and have been later integrated into the interview guide.

The interviews were generally conducted with the spokesperson of each organization (e.g., president, executive director), given the relevance of one's position to furnish detailed information about the organization's connections (Hollstein, 2011), and lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. However, in many cases, CSOs sent more than one member to sit in the interviews; this explains the mismatch between the number of interviewees (53) and interviews (37). Interviews have been alternatively conducted in Italian, Spanish, and English and transcribed *verbatim* in the original language. Table 3.1. presents all the interviewees and their reference organizations. Appendix 1 includes a table with some basic information on each CSOs included. The acronyms IT and SP are used to differentiate between Italian and Spanish organizations. The progressive number follows the temporal order in which participants have been interviewed. Letters such as -a, -b, -c distinguish between different members within the same CSO.

Given the limited number of institutional actors included in the sample and the need to reconstruct the positions and strategies of institutional actors throughout the policy campaigns, this work has relied heavily on document analysis. Document analysis has long become a central research strategy in the social sciences, allowing researchers to assess a great variety of information hardly obtainable otherwise (Bowen, 2009). In particular, organizational and institutional documents greatly help

reconstruct processes and constitute a primary information source for process-tracing methodologies (Vennesson, 2008). In addition, qualitative document analysis often complements interviews and observation in case study research and can help retrieve critical information and access actors' perspectives and processes of meaning-making (Altheide et al., 2008; Wood et al., 2020).

Table 3.1. List of interviewees

| Country | ID | Position/Title | Organization |
|---------|---------|---------------------------|--|
| Italy | IT 1 | Spokesperson | Common, Libera & Gruppo Abele |
| Italy | IT 2 | President | Data Ninja |
| Italy | IT 3 | Former Executive Director | Transparency International Italy |
| Italy | IT 4 | President | Hermes Center for Transparency and Digital Human Rights |
| Italy | IT 5 | Spokesperson | IRPI - Investigative Reporting Project Italy |
| Italy | IT 6 | Spokesperson | Illuminiamo la Salute |
| Italy | IT 7 | President | OnData |
| Italy | IT 8 | Spokesperson | The Good Lobby Italia (former Riparte il Futuro) |
| Italy | IT 9 | Spokesperson | Integrity Pact Project, Action Aid |
| Italy | IT 10 | President | Diritto di Sapere |
| Italy | IT 11-a | President | Idee in Comune, Siena |
| Italy | IT 11-b | Activists | Idee in Comune, Siena |
| Italy | IT 11-c | Activists | Idee in Comune, Siena |
| Italy | IT 11-d | Activists | Idee in Comune, Siena |
| Italy | IT 12 | Director | ALAC, Transparency International Italy |
| Italy | IT 13 | Spokespersons | Integrity Pact Project, Amapola |
| Italy | IT 14 | Former board member | ANAC's council |
| Italy | IT 15-a | Community Manager | A Scuola di OpenCoesione |
| Italy | IT 15-b | Team member | A Scuola di OpenCoesione |
| Italy | IT 15-c | Team member | A Scuola di OpenCoesione |
| Italy | IT 15-d | Team member | A Scuola di OpenCoesione |
| Italy | IT 16 | Spokesperson | Integrity Pact Project, Transparency International Italy |
| Italy | IT 17 | Former MP | SSM |
| Italy | IT 18 | Spokesperson | Metis |
| Italy | IT 19-a | Co-founder | Parliament Watch |

| Country | ID | Position/Title | Organization |
|---------|---------|---|--|
| Italy | IT 19-b | Co-founder | Parliament Watch |
| Italy | IT 20-a | President | Monithon |
| Italy | IT 20-b | Vice-President | Monithon |
| Italy | IT 21 | Spokesperson | OpenPolis |
| Italy | IT 22 | Executive Director | Linea Libera |
| Italy | IT 23-a | Staff member | Linea Libera |
| Italy | IT 23-b | Staff member | Linea Libera |
| Spain | SP 1 | President | X-Net |
| Spain | SP 2-a | President | Hay Derecho |
| Spain | SP 2-b | Staff member | Hay Derecho |
| Spain | SP 2-c | Staff member | Hay Derecho |
| Spain | SP 3-a | President | Access Info |
| Spain | SP 3-b | Staff member | Access Info |
| Spain | SP 3-c | Staff member | Access Info |
| Spain | SP 4-a | Executive Director | Transparencia Internacional España |
| Spain | SP 4-b | Staff member | Transparencia Internacional España |
| Spain | SP 5-a | Spokesperson | FIBGAR |
| Spain | SP 5-b | Staff member | FIBGAR |
| Spain | SP 6 | Spokesperson | CIVIO |
| Spain | SP 7 | Spokesperson | Maldita |
| Spain | SP 8-a | Spokesperson | Political Watch |
| Spain | SP 8-b | Staff member | Political Watch |
| Spain | SP 9 | Spokesperson | Corruptil |
| Spain | SP 10 | Spokesperson | Por Causa |
| Spain | SP 11 | Head of the Transparency and Good Governance Office | Transparency and Good Governance Office, Barcelona |
| Spain | SP 12 | Member of Barcelona's city council | Barcelona's city council |
| Spain | SP 13 | Executive Director | Antifraud Authority of Valencia |
| Spain | SP 14 | President | Antifraud Authority of Valencia |

The analysis has focused on institutional documents retrieved from the Italian and Spanish parliament's websites to follow the interactions between CSOs and institutional actors throughout the campaigns under investigation (e.g., parliamentary transcripts). Appendix 2 offers a complete list of the institutional documents employed in the analysis. In addition, it has employed a sample of

organizational documents (blog posts, press releases, reports, etc.) to investigate CSOs' positions and strategies. Finally, it has included newspaper articles to access the media's representations of the campaigns and the interactions between CSOs and institutional actors through the media and their depiction. Articles were retrieved via Factiva, searching for keywords associated with transparency (2012-2016 in Italy, 2009-2013 in Spain) and whistleblowing campaigns (2009-2017 in Italy, 2012-2020 in Spain). The search was limited to national newspapers written in Italian and Spanish. All the articles were downloaded, exported in MaxQDA, and manually scrutinized. More detailed information is available in Appendix 2.

3.5.2. A few notes from the field

The fieldwork began back in December 2019. The data collection officially started from one of the more central actors in the Italian scenario, Libera, whose spokesperson I had previously gotten to know during a short period of participant observation in October 2019. From there onwards, the first phase of data collection was pretty intense. Thanks to a snowball strategy, I obtained direct contact with several interviewees. Being the first round of interviews, however, my interview guide was far from perfect, and the data I obtained were general and preliminary. With time, my interview guide has been revised and shortened, and the interviews have become less structured. Contrary to my expectations, this has helped me obtain more specific and circumscribed information.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy (February 2020) disrupted the fieldwork experience. For months, I have just avoided doing interviews and contacting potential respondents. Amidst what appeared to be a dramatic and unexpected situation, I stopped the data-gathering process. At the same time, this external shock forced me to sit down and start thinking about my data. During the lockdown, I thus had the chance to conduct an exploratory analysis of my interview materials and the various documents accumulated. This moment served me to draft an exploratory empirical account of one of my cases and gave me the time and chance to rethink some aspects of the overall research and empirical strategy. I then resumed the fieldwork in September 2020, with a moment of participant observation. From October 2020 onwards, the data collection moved online with online interviews. Given my field's specificities and my interviewees' characteristics, the shift to online means did not represent a significant challenge. Most organizations I worked with were already used to meeting and working online.

On the contrary, sometimes, moving online helped multiply the voices I could hear. Indeed, online interviews have represented a chance to gather several representatives and experts of the same organization, offering a vaster representation of different organizational points of view, eventual

disagreements, and a more informed overview of their internal processes. Thus, I have collected several interviews with multiple interviewers, richer in content but often more challenging to manage. Conducting interviews with several interviewees at the same time has indeed profoundly transformed the interviews' communicative dynamics.

The shift from offline to online interactions has represented more of an opportunity than a challenge. However, online interaction has hampered the possibility of developing more personal and informal relationships with the interviewees, which in the case of in-person meetings, has often given me the opportunity of accessing detailed information on more controversial issues. In addition, moving the fieldwork online has significantly affected the quantity, quality, and depth of information collected for the two case studies. Even though the Spanish accountability field is slightly larger, more interviews have been collected in Italy. The reasons for this limitation are multiple.

The Italian fieldwork started offline, meaning I already had the chance to build an informal network of possible interviewees and meet them before starting the interview process. Once moved online, those first contacts were central gatekeepers that helped me proceed with my snowball sampling. Moreover, being born and raised in Italy, my knowledge of the context, actors, institutions, and historical background was reasonably accurate and helped me enter the field.

Neither of these conditions occurred in the Spanish case. The lack of in-person interaction has represented a major issue that concerns fieldwork in Spain. Whereas I have spent three months in Barcelona (March - July 2021), one in Madrid (October 2022), and one in Valencia (Castellon de la Plana, October 2023), most of the interviews have been collected online. The combination of covid restrictions, personal preferences, institutional rules, and unpredictable events (e.g., the outbreak of covid cases in the municipality of Barcelona right before a scheduled interview) have forced me to resort to online outlets in most cases. Being less familiar with the Spanish case and lacking any previous connection with the organizations in my sample has partly reduced the quality and depth of the data collected. At the same time, the Spanish case has been harder to access, with several organizations ignoring the emails and reminders I have sent over time. Interestingly, Italian interviewees have often served as gatekeepers for entering the Spanish field. As Chapters 5 and 6 will discuss, the interactions between CSOs in the two countries are pretty solid, and this immensely helped me, particularly in identifying contact persons within CSOs.

Another problem relates to the issue of saturation. The Italian interviews have been “multiplied” by interviewing different members of the same organizations several times in case of the co-existence

of different projects (e.g., three interviews have been conducted with Transparency Italy, with the executive director, and with the spokespersons of different sectors as whistleblowers' protection and civic monitoring). Whereas the data collection in Italy has been more extensive, various projects of civic monitoring worthy of deeper investigation are just emerging or are in a very embryonic phase. On the one hand, this is an exciting moment to collect information on the generative dynamics based on monitoring processes from below. This is also true for the Spanish case. On the other hand, the risk of remaining stuck in a never-ending data collection process forced me to exit the field and leave these interesting developments to future research.

3.5.3. Data analysis

The present work investigates societal accountability as a set of consequences of anti-corruption collective action. It focuses on CSOs' influence, combining a qualitative network approach, process tracing, and frame analysis. Beyond what has been already discussed, the concept of influence helps researchers to focus on the agency and strategic action of collective actors, representing "to the study of decision-making what force is to the study of motion—a generic explanation for the basic observable phenomena" (March, 1955:432). At the same time, influence allows an understanding of how actors transform their contextual conditions (i.e., ecological influence, Cartwright, 1965). However, how to define and measure influence has sparked lively and intense debates (Amenta, 2014; Dür, 2008a; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007). Following Dür's suggestion, this work combines *self-assessments*, *preference attainment*, and *process tracing* to evaluate collective actors' influence over change processes (Dür, 2008b).

Chapter 2 has defined influence as a form of *positional power* (Cartwright, 1965; Diani, 1997), which in social network analysis derives from occupying certain structural positions. Although the present study does not rely on Social Network Analysis, it should be understood as a network-inspired investigation (Borgatti et al., 2013; Hollstein, 2011). Indeed, whereas it has applied qualitative strategies to retrieve network information, networks have been mainly used for mapping and exploratory purposes⁴³. However, network concepts and metaphors have been crucial in guiding the qualitative analysis of interviews and documents.

The empirical materials have been analyzed through a theory-driven thematic analysis approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a "method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2012:57). In its theory-driven version, different from other approaches such as

⁴³ Chapter 4 visually represents the Italian and Spanish pro-accountability networks based on information from Action Organization Analysis.

reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2021), thematic analysis is a well-suited and flexible analytical strategy to code materials according to the researchers' theoretical concerns. Given the impossibility of conducting a full-fledged qualitative network study, mainly because of issues in defining the boundaries for a whole-network study, thematic analysis has served to look at qualitative materials guided by relational lenses. In particular, the coding procedure has focused on *horizontal* and *vertical* integration processes, reconstructing the interactions within and between civic and institutional actors along the campaigns under investigation (Cinalli, 2007a; Cinalli & Füglistner, 2008). Processes of *horizontal* and *vertical integration* have been investigated by looking at subthemes such as the nature of such relations (cooperation, coordination, co-participation in events, co-participation in projects, hostility), their evaluation (rationale of relation, positive or negative evaluation, elicitation of problems in the relation, reasons for lack of integration), and on the role of civil society and civil society organizations in the anti-corruption context. For example, the theme "horizontal integration," i.e., references to interactions within CSOs, has been broken down into sub-themes such as interpersonal relations, exchange of resources, internal disagreements, competition, joint participation in events, overlapping memberships, etc. Other themes have instead emerged "bottom-up" throughout the analysis. Some examples include relational structures (internal specialization, node availability, micro-level influencer). Other themes have instead been enriched by sub-themes that emerged through the analysis, e.g., relational strategies (direct contact, coalition, brokerage *but also* mediatization, web extension, etc.).

Moreover, qualitative interviews have been scrutinized to reconstruct actors' *dilemmas* and *self-assessments of influence* (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007). Notwithstanding the biases and difficulties related to concepts such as *success* and *failure* (Bosi et al., 2016; Earl, 2000; Staggenborg, 1995), actors hold beliefs and ideas about the effectiveness of their actions (Jasper et al., 2022). While failing or succeeding can mean very different things for social actors, analyzing success and failure perceptions as subjective beliefs can be highly informative about the chain of events tying collective action to social change. Personal accounts of influence can represent consequences of collective action in their own right (Meyer, 2006), shaping actors' repertoires and relational strategies over the long run (Makarova, 2019). Well aware of the relevance of such self-perceptions, social movement scholars have recently called for reintroducing the investigation of subjective concepts such as success and failure (Useem & Goldstone, 2022) or the more actor-centered concepts of gains and losses (Jabola-Carolus et al., 2020; Jasper et al., 2022). To mitigate CSOs' eventual tendency to over- or under-estimate their influence, the analysis has included in the sample key institutional actors that co-participated in policy processes at different stages (e.g., agenda-setting, passage, or

implementation). In addition, the study has integrated actors' interpretative accounts with analyzing organizations' documents, newspaper articles, press conferences, and parliamentary debates. Following thematic analysis, theory driven themes have focused on consequences (some subthemes: policy, procedural, cultural, legal, etc), evaluation of consequences (some subthemes: perceptions of success, perceptions of failure, perceptions of target's responsiveness, etc). Finally, some themes have been added to include standar social movement explanations, e.g. resources (some subthemes: skills, legitimacy, external funding, etc.), repertoires of action (some subthemes: advocacy, activism, direct social action, etc), frames (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational), and to keep track of essential organizational information, e.g., years of foundation, anagraphics of the interviewee, etc, and of the time dimension (e.g., policy process, subthemes agenda-setting, contents' definition, passage, etc.).

Interviews and documents also constituted the primary materials for this work's *theory-building process tracing* approach (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Vennesson, 2008). Here, the process-tracing approach reconstructs the paths that brought about different SA consequences and evaluates the consequences of actors' positional and relational strategies, trying to reconstruct their mechanisms of influence. Studies on the influence of interest and advocacy groups have often relied on process tracing to shed light on the causal mechanisms underlying observed changes. As in investigative strategies, this method leads researchers to start from a specific result and work back to identify the chain of multiple steps and interactions that explain change processes. As recalled by Dür (2008b), when using process tracing, "scholars scrutinize groups' preferences, their influence attempts, their access to decision-makers, decision-makers responses to the influence attempts, the degree to which groups' preferences are reflected in outcomes and groups' statements of (di-) satisfaction with the outcome" (p.562). Even if very promising and widely used in collective action studies, process tracing still faces relevant limitations. Among the more important issues, a relevant one concerns the availability of complete information on all the phases throughout the process analyzed. The lack of or incomplete information can be problematic and lead to partial reconstructions. Problems of incomplete data are particularly pressing when analyzing the policy process. Indeed, while formal passages and official decisions are normally easy to access and reconstruct via relatively costless data-gathering procedures (e.g., accessing governmental documents through transparency portals), the whole set of informal, unofficial, and often covert interactions and decisions within parties, organizations remain unaccessible to scholars via desk research. The present study has integrated qualitative interviews to partly obviate this issue, even though interviews are similarly subject to another set of reliability and validity issues, such as problems in recalling past events, the effect of social desirability mechanisms, the need for secrecy, etc.

Frame analysis has been additionally used to look at the *discursive* “construction of social relations, which are themselves shifting and multilayered” (Mische, 2003: 264). Indeed, frames analysis represents a relevant strategy to unpack and analyze ideology and actors’ discursive strategies (Benford & Snow, 2000a; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Snow et al., 2018; Snow & Benford, 1992). Mechanisms of frame alignment or frame disputes may inform on the (lack of) emergence of sustained interaction among players (Carroll & Ratner, 1996; Mayer, Brown, & Morello-Frosch, 2010; Parks, 2015). In particular, frames have obviated problems associated with retrospectively asking about actors’ goals, proposed solutions, and effective gains, evaluating actors discursive positioning and decision-making *while* defining the policy contents. Distinguishing between actors diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames the analysis has tried to evaluate players *preferences* during campaigns and their *goals attainment* (Dür, 2008c).

The sample of data has been analyzed using MaxQDA. All the empirical material has been coded and scrutinized multiple times in an iterative process between theories and empirics.

3.6. Conclusion

The chapter has discussed the ontological and epistemological roots of the analysis, presenting current shortcomings in studying the accountability consequences of anti-corruption mobilizations. Building on a case-oriented design, this work puts forward a processual-relational approach that aims to partly tackle some of these issues, focusing on the influence of anti-corruption CSOs over policy and political change processes. The study looks comparatively at the cases of Italy and Spain, with specific attention to four campaigns and civic monitoring initiatives.

Triangulating data from the Action Organization Analysis, qualitative interviews, and document analysis of organizations and parliamentary materials, the thesis combines a qualitative network approach, process tracing, and frame and thematic analysis to analyze the data.

The previous sections have already shed light on the main methodological limitations of this work. Certainly, the data-gathering phase has been the more challenging moment of the research. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the quantity and quality of empirical materials. At the same time, the forced hybrid fieldwork has increased the range of voices and perspectives to be heard within each organization, which was unexpected and unplanned but tremendously helpful. Whereas each of the methodologies presented has shortcomings, the study has tried to overcome them and increase the reliability of its results by triangulating different data gathering and data analysis approaches. The concluding remarks will return to the research design's limitations in greater detail.

Chapter 4. Background Context: Corruption and Anti-corruption in Italy and Spain

“There once was a country that ran on illegality. There were laws, of course, and the political system was based on principles that everyone more or less claimed to share. But as it branched through many power centers, the system demanded unlimited financial resources (once accustomed to having lots of money at hand, one loses the capacity to imagine life any other way) and these could be obtained only illegally, that is, by performing illegal favors for those holding the resources. Those with money to trade for favors usually gained it from favors they had performed in turn; the resulting economic system tended to be circular and enjoyed its own unique harmony.”

Italo Calvino, A Defense of Honesty in the Land of Corruption, La Repubblica, March 15, 1980

4.1. Introduction

Italy and Spain share similar secular trends that eventually eased the sedimentation of particular economic, familiar, and welfare structures. Among many similarities, the two Mediterranean countries have often been compared when discussing corruption.

The similarities between Italy and Spain have generated several attempts at elaborating encompassing definitions, speaking of a “*Southern syndrome*” (Pujas & Rhodes, 1999), a “*Mediterranean culture of corruption*” (Saccoccia & Olivieri, 2019), or a “*difference of Southern Europe*” (Melián, 2015). Even though such essentialistic definitions come with evident problems, it is true that Italy and Spain share relevant similarities regarding public corruption's origins, models, and spread. First, both countries experienced parallel but different experiences of dictatorship. In both cases, the authoritarian regimes profited from networks of illicit exchanges and clientelism, reinforcing their political control and influence over the countries (Giovannini & Palla, 2019; Pujas & Rhodes, 1999). Whereas Italy and Spain significantly differ in the timing, modalities, and results of their democratization processes, in both cases, the legacy of decades of dictatorship and the democratic transition have multiplied elites' chances for profiting from corrupt exchanges. In both countries, unregulated economic growth - from the 1970s in Italy to the 1980s in Spain- has left room for bribery and corruption to proliferate in a context of general tolerance under favorable economic conditions. In both cases, the 1990s represented a turning point in the history of corruption. The global crisis of the by-then sedimented neo-liberal model and the sudden deceleration in economic growth rates sparked a first wave of diffuse moral indignation against a similar system of clientelism, patronage, and illicit revenues that for a long time had de-facto privatized the management of the public good.

As will be argued later on, despite relative differences in size and structure of their system of public corruption, the 1990s represented the first opening of the corruption Pandora's box for both Italians and Spaniards. Discourses and accusations of public corruption- increasingly present in the media-catalyzed public attention and increased political polarization but hardly originated full-fledged anti-corruption mobilizations. On the contrary, public corruption became a matter of electoral competition and political litigation, discursively exploited by predatory elites. However, the recent revival of widespread economic hardships, starting with the global recession in 2008, partly re-activated the corruption and anti-corruption debate. In the following years, Italy and Spain went through similar economic and social unrest patterns, which took different forms and sparked uneven reactions in the two countries (Romanos, 2017; Zamponi, 2012).

Public corruption has undergone a new wave of intense politicization at the institutional level, functioning like a Trojan horse for the emergence and electoral breakthrough of new populist parties. Indeed, the Great recession represented a critical juncture in the international political scenario, opening new spaces for the rise of emergent electoral competitors. In Southern European countries like Greece, Spain, and Italy, the economic crisis of the neo-liberal market and the European austerity measures furnished a perfect terrain for the rise of insurgent parties on both sides of the political spectrum. In Italy and Spain, even though not exclusively, the political discourse of these parties coalesced around the traditional us vs. them populist cleavage, opposing the corrupt elites to the defrauded people. Although very different, parties such as Podemos in Spain or the 5 Star Movement in Italy prioritized public corruption in their discourse and political performances. However, the meaning of public corruption declined differently in the two contexts. In Spain, the wave of popular contention initiated with the 15-M/Indignados equated the spread of public corruption to a lack of real democracy. The lack of such a widespread and sustained moment of mass mobilization in Italy narrowed the scope of the anti-corruption struggle. Whereas in Spain, the fight against corruption partly overlapped with the net rejection of the neo-liberal democratic model altogether, the Italian less clear-cut declination resembled more an accusation of the old political class and its power distribution system.

The chapter describes the Italian and Spanish corruption scenario, discussing its models and causes. Next, it traces the volatile attention that the topic has received in the public discourse, trying to describe the characteristics of the anti-corruption institutional scenario in the two countries. Finally, it introduces the Italian and Spanish anti-corruption collective action fields, presenting and discussing the characteristics of their civil society networks.

4.2. Causes and models of public corruption

Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece are often jointly investigated when it comes to models of corruption. Over the past decades, comparisons have mainly been built on culturalist and value-based explanations, relying on *national characters*. Studies in this area have often come up with essentialized descriptions of national tendencies toward corruption, postulating the existence of a *Southern corruption syndrome* (Pujas & Rhodes, 1999) and producing homogenous narratives of Italians and Spaniards as corrupt and lazy peoples (della Porta & Vannucci, 2005; Heywood, 1997a). Besides their questionable assumptions, those essentialistic explanations have hardly explained between and within case variations in the Italian and Spanish corruption and anti-corruption scenarios, being progressively abandoned.

Whereas Italy and Spain generally score high in international surveys on perceived corruption, the variations within each country put culturalist explanations into question. Italy and Spain are characterized by a high degree of regional differentiation when evaluating the share of experienced or perceived corruption. Moreover, the variation is even higher within regions, with well-performing cities located in highly corrupt regions and vice versa (Dràpalovà, 2016). Instead, episodes of corruption seem to be evenly distributed on the whole national territory. In Italy, for example, the spread of public corruption nationwide contradicts the famous distinction introduced by Putnam and Fukuyama between regions characterized by a high level of *civicness* and amoral regions (Pujas & Rhodes, 1999). All in all, the distribution of public corruption within the Italian and Spanish contexts and the internal differentiation at the regional and local levels do not allow the identification of clear-cut national or subnational “cultures” of public corruption.

Italy and Spain share some common traits regarding the origins and characteristics of public corruption. However, rather than intrinsic to national communities’ public-spiritedness, these similarities are better explained by a similar structure of political opportunities, which lies at the bases of public corruption in Southern Europe. This structure is defined by the interaction between the state and political parties, the levels and mechanisms of accountability, the regulation of the economic and financial market, and the system of party financing (Pujas & Rhodes, 1999).

4.2.1. Insights from the Italian case

As masterfully shown by Sales and Melorio (2020), Italian political history has been strictly entangled with corruption scandals since the country’s unification in the 1860s⁴⁴. Indeed, corrupt

⁴⁴ The railway and tobacco scandals emerged in 1862 and 1865, involving ministries of the Crown and the Royal family, represent prominent examples of corruption scandals in the newborn Italian reign (Sales & Melorio, 2020).

exchanges represented a *file rouge* in the country's political and economic transformations, a constant in its transition from monarchy to dictatorship and – finally - democracy. After the Second World War, this illicit exchange and political patronage system led to a progressive crystallization of political power and favored pursuing the “generalized interest of particularistic groups” (Sales & Melorio, 2020:26). The solid presence of the Christian Democrats (DC) and centrist parties in governments through a *convention ad excludendum* favored the systematization of public corruption (Colarizi, 2007). The high stability of the Italian political scene, the lack of political alternation in power, and the high costs of institutional politics favored the emergence of a system of endemic corruption (Vannucci, 2010). The long history of corruption in Italy underwent an acceleration in the 1970s. The spoil system at the central level (*lotizzazione*) and the perverse consociativism between political parties (Pujas & Rhodes, 1999) coupled with the progressive decentralization of the state in favor of the regional and local levels of government (Saccoccia & Olivieri, 2019). Over time, the proliferation of internal factions within governing parties originated a well-governed system of influences, with the leaders of each faction controlling the market of influences and parties becoming schools of public corruption (della Porta & Vannucci, 2014).

The outbreak of the *Clean Hands* scandal in 1992 started with the investigation of the socialist administrator Mario Chiesa and marked the passage from the so-called first to the second Republic (della Porta & Vannucci, 1997). The scandal resulted in a profound reorganization of the political and institutional arena. The disintegration of the Christian Democrats, who had ruled uninterruptedly for 45 years, the crisis of the Socialists, and the reorganization of the Italian Communist party after the fall of the Berlin Wall, completely transformed the face of the Italian party system. With the advent of Forza Italia (FI), led by the media tycoon Berlusconi, the 1994 general elections represented a turning point in Italian political history. It began a new era of alternation in government and increased political competition. However, this political turmoil produced only limited and contrasting effects on the anti-corruption institutional design. The mild consequences of the Clean Hands case testified to the questionable effectiveness of remedies based on a rational-choice approach to public corruption and anti-corruption. In the aftermath of the greatest scandal in Italian Republican history, the lack of significant anti-corruption reforms and the increased opaque interaction between public and private interests unveiled the limited efficacy of liberal-democratic mechanisms to curb public corruption (Vannucci, 2009).

However, the judicial investigations of the 1990s sparked relevant changes in the system of corrupt exchanges (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012). The occasional and short-lived rise in public awareness following Clean Hands and the subsequent first wave of convictions increased the costs of being

involved in corrupt exchanges. However, rather than working as an effective deterrent, the increasing costs were rapidly compensated by changes in the structure of hidden corruption networks (della Porta & Vannucci, 2007). The highly centralized and hierarchical spoil system that had governed the market of influence throughout the history of the First Republic was thus substituted by decentralized, polymorphic network-like structures, which multiplied the centers of power (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012; Vannucci, 2020). Corrupt actors have thus adapted to the new scenario, developing alternative skills and norms of internal regulation. The role of intermediaries and mediators has become more salient, with third parties often playing the role of regulatory actors in otherwise risky exchanges (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012). Actors from organized criminal organizations have become crucial third-party enforcers. Links between the Mafia and public corruption have been a constant throughout the history of the Republic. However, these ties changed with the post-Clean Hands reorganizations of political parties and the new strategy of *invisibility* followed by mafia organizations after the season of terrorist attacks. Whereas public corruption networks have started to deploy mafia-like strategies, mafia actors have increasingly moved their interests from illicit to legal fields of action (Sberna & Vannucci, 2019). Despite these changes, some elements of continuity persist. Convictions for public corruption over the years have not dented the resilience of corruption networks and, most importantly, the ubiquitous presence of some of their central players (della Porta & Vannucci, 2007). The traditional patron-client form of clientelism, usually locally based, has coupled with institutional clientelist networks, where political connivance has often prevailed over a political competition of facade (della Porta & Vannucci, 1997).

Vannucci (2020) recently offered a detailed reconstruction of the Italian anti-corruption history, distinguishing between 4 phases. The interaction between corruption *politicization* and *saliency* in public debates results in a typology of 4 anti-corruption modes, alternating over the years. Crossing these two dimensions, Vannucci's typology differentiates between 1. *missing anti-corruption* (1948-1972; 1975-1979; 1984-1991), 2. *consensual anti-corruption* (1973-1974; 1992-1994; 2011-12), 3. *submerged anti-corruption* (1980-1983; 2018-2019), 4. *polarized anti-corruption* (1995-2010; 2013-2018). Periods of missing anti-corruption are characterized by the sporadic emergence of corruption cases (low saliency) and a substantial lack of institutional debate over corruption and anti-corruption measures (low politicization). With some notable interruptions (e.g., the emergence of the Lockheed scandal in 1973-1974), this model well synthesizes the Italian anti-corruption scenario before the outbreak of the Clean Hands scandal.

The situation changed with the beginning of the Clean Hands investigations in 1992. Here, the high saliency of the topic coupled with low levels of politicization of the issue. Notwithstanding the presence of credible competitors such as the Northern League (Diani, 1996), the system of corruption was so extended that no political force could develop partisan narrations. In these moments, major anti-corruption reforms were thus passed consensually. In the aftermath of Clean Hands, the parliament approved a change in the mechanism to put MPs on trial.

Similarly, the politicization of grand corruption over the years of the Great Recession has further reshaped the political scenario. The new wave of corruption scandals of the 2010s favored the re-politicization of the issue (Vannucci, 2020), leading to the emergence of new party competitors, such as the populist 5 Stars Movement (5SM, Sales & Melorio, 2020). Starting from 2012, therefore, the legal anti-corruption framework has become more solid, implementing some efficient reforms both in sanctioning and preventive terms (Vannucci, 2020). On the contrary, periods of low saliency of public corruption and intense politicization lead to what Vannucci (2020) defines as submerged anti-corruption. As in the case of the moral issue pushed by the Communist leader Enrico Berlinguer in the 1980s, a partisan understanding of public corruption tends to bear little or no result when lacking the necessary public attention to force reforms upon governing actors. At the same time, low saliency levels can still produce significant policy reforms when actors advocating for the introduction of anti-corruption reforms reach government positions. This was the case with the 5 Stars Movement in 2018-2019, which succeeded in passing the *Spazzacorrotti*⁴⁵ law in a context of general indifference from public opinion.

Lastly, there have been moments where the emergence of large scandals and the subsequent increase in the salience of public corruption brought highly unsatisfactory anti-corruption measures due to the high politicization of the topic. These are moments of polarized anti-corruption. This model synthesizes the characteristics of the Italian scenario over the first years of the so-called Second Republic. In those years, attempts at introducing effective institutional reforms starting from the first Prodi's government in 1996, faced political vetoes and failed to reach any significant result (della Porta & Vannucci, 2007). At the same time, the increased electoral competition that followed the end of the First Republic created new opportunities for corrupt exchanges (Vannucci, 2009). With the inauguration of the second Berlusconi executive in May 2001⁴⁶, the topic of corruption was progressively marginalized. The debate diverted attention to the judiciary's role, with the

⁴⁵ [L. 3/2019, n.3.](#)

⁴⁶ 2001 represented a turning point in the Italian fight against corruption. Such change of pace is also testified by the number of convictions for corruption, passed from 1700 in 1996 to 239 in 2006, a descending curve started in 2001 (Vannucci, 2010).

center-right coalition denouncing what was framed as a worrying intrusion of the judicial apparatus over the political realm (della Porta & Vannucci, 2007). Clearly, this period was alternated by moments of submersion, matched, and reinforced by the media. After the peak reached in the years of Clean Hands, with newspapers covering almost obsessively the developments of the scandal and contributing to praise the “movement of the judges,” the coverage of corruption news dramatically dropped. The increased instrumentalization of public corruption and a growing tolerance from public opinion helped the partial disappearance of corruption scandals from the news (Vannucci, 2010). Similarly, between 2013 and 2018, the presence in opposition of the 5 Stars Movement revitalized the politicization of the anti-corruption debates. However, contrary to what was affirmed by Vannucci (2020), in this case, the policy changes were far from being only symbolic. On the contrary, the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act in 2016 and the approval of the Whistleblowers’ protection act in 2017 indeed represented important policy results for the Italian anti-corruption scenario.

4.2.2. The Spanish trajectory

As in Italy's case, the Spanish public corruption model is better described as grand or public corruption (Heywood, 2007). Indeed, Spain is hardly characterized by petty corruption, meaning that corruption is not part of the everyday life of most citizens. The prevalent model is thus one of structural corruption, with many resources at stake and high centralization of the exchanges. Administrative corruption is also virtually non-existent or, at least, limitedly widespread nationwide. The bureaucratic organization and the prevalence of selection criteria based on the Weberian concept of meritocracy seem to reduce the spread of administrative corruption (Villoria, 2015). On the contrary, as demonstrated by the numerous scandals that have emerged over the last few decades, corruption in Spain is mainly a matter of political power.

As in the case of Italy, the academic debate around public corruption in Spain is relatively recent, with several authors pointing to the novelty of the theme for Spanish literature. Starting with the 2008 economic crisis, public corruption has instead bounced back to the forefront of scholars’ analyses. This renewed academic attention has undoubtedly been influenced by the increased saliency of the corruption theme in Spaniards’ concerns. Over the last few decades, perceived corruption levels have skyrocketed, with corruption being indicated among the more worrying problems the country faces. However, the recent increase in attention over public corruption is merely the result of a longer and sedimented system of political exploitation. The outbreak of several corruption scandals has unveiled the pervasiveness and depth of what was an overlooked issue until a few decades ago. However, rather than demonstrating the newness of the phenomenon,

the Spanish case well-exemplifies the importance of the so-called time lag in the study of public corruption. Most of the scandals result from a long tail of economic exploitation and unchecked economic growth, which animated the country after the democratic transition (Villoria & Jiménez, 2012). According to Heywood (2007), the Spanish process of transformation from a fully-fledged authoritarian regime to a “democracy in the making” represented the perfect terrain for the emergence of what Johnston (2005) defines as “influence markets” and “elite cartels.” In both cases, “syndromes” of corruption are associated with collusion between economic and political powers, eroding the quality of democracy and the vitality and fairness of the market. In particular, public corruption in Spain has often been associated with the rapid and unchecked expansion of the construction sector (Jiménez, 2009), which decades later represented one of the major causes of the housing bubble faced by the country.

Whereas public corruption started to attract the center of Spaniards’ concerns only at the beginning of the 1990s, several cases of misuse of public power emerged long before, mostly passing unnoticed. The simultaneous presence of solid electoral support for the Socialist party (PSOE), the weakness and internal fragmentation of the Partido Popular (PP), and the unwillingness of the media to publicize potentially destabilizing news contributed to the limited impact of the corruption scandals (the so-called *transition syndrome*, Jiménez, 2004). Corruption became a new catalyst in public discourse with the progressive vanishing of some of these elements and the party system polarization. The first wave of scandals involving members of the PSOE produced a direct juxtaposition between public corruption and the Socialists (Heywood, 2007). As in the Italian case, a first period of missing anti-corruption (low saliency and low politicization) was thus followed by a submerged model of anti-corruption (low saliency and high politicization). The unveiling of several scandals regarding members of Gonzales’ government (PSOE) in the early 1990s contributed to associating the “sleaze culture” with the socialist party to the extent that the subsequent electoral victory of the conservative PP resulted in lower levels of perceived corruption (Heywood, 2007). However, as in the Italian case, the situation changed dramatically in the late 1990s. The new PP government led by President Aznar (1996-2004) did not result in any significant change of pace. The high costs of political competition fed the proliferation of corrupt exchanges at both extremes of the political spectrum. In addition, the Spanish public corruption scenario was worsened by the contraposition between the national and the local level of government, with national regulations often remaining unattended due to the lack of local “principled principals” (Jiménez et al., 2012). Public corruption in Spain thus appeared to be widespread along the whole political continuum, generating a context of anti-corruption consensus, revitalizing in the 2010s with the emergence of scandals related to Rajoy’s governments (2011-2018).

Even in Spain, the outburst of distrust in institutional actors that followed the economic crisis changed the picture. The economic hardship and increased corruption scandals represented a proper critical juncture or turning point in the Spanish anti-corruption history (Jiménez & Villoria, 2018). At the same time, the opening of new opportunities for anti-corruption mobilization was further sustained and reinforced by the beginning of a period of institutional reforms that targeted public corruption directly. In 2013, the government led by Mariano Rajoy, leader of the PP, proposed and passed a reform of administrative transparency⁴⁷. However, unveiling major scandals such as the Gürtel and Bãrcenas cases involving PP members and the same PM, Rajoy, exacerbated the ongoing political crisis.

The consequences of the economic crisis and the rampant distrust in traditional political parties contributed to the profound restructuring of the party system after 2015. The autonomous elections held in 17 local communities in 2015 marked the end of the bipartisan government that had ruled over the country since the beginning of the democratic transition (Gomez Fortes & Urquizu, 2015). The Socialist PSOE and the conservative PP lost many of their sustainers in favor of emergent parties like Podemos and Ciudadanos, two political competitors that extensively campaigned around the issue of public corruption. As in the case of the Italian Northern League or 5 Stars Movement, these competitors were credible as they were new and, therefore, outsiders to the traditional and consolidated system of public corruption. The social and political turmoil generated by the Great recession has thus created opportunities to implement new anti-corruption reforms. The deep transformations of the institutional scenario prompted the debate and approval of crucial reforms at the national and local levels (Jiménez & Villoria, 2018).

4.3. Different institutional settings

As recalled at the beginning of the chapter, culturalist explanations fall short of explaining the variations between and within the Italian and Spanish corruption systems. Indeed, the brief historical account of the causes, characteristics, and reactions to public corruption in the two countries has revealed several similarities.

On the contrary, neo-institutional approaches seem more promising for reading and understanding the different corruption and anti-corruption scenarios in Italy and Spain. Notwithstanding their similarities, Italy and Spain display different institutional anti-corruption architectures and civic anti-corruption networks. Hence, the interaction between *formal norms* dictated by institutional systems and *informal norms* - emerging out of sustained interactions between actors and people's

⁴⁷ Ley 19/2013, de 9 de diciembre, de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno.

expectations about corruption - qualifies as an essential explanatory factor when analyzing the causes, characteristics, and consequences of public corruption in the two countries (Dràpalovà, 2016).

At the institutional level, one of the main differences lies in the level of centralization or decentralization of the anti-corruption apparatus. In the Italian case, the high inter- and intra-regional differentiation couples with a highly centralized anti-corruption structure. The National Anti-corruption Authority (ANAC) creation in 2012 marked a net separation between preventive and sanctioning anti-corruption powers. Whereas ANAC obtained preventive functions, the sanctioning functions have remained in the hands of the judiciary and the Court of Audit. At the same time, the task of evaluating and rating the performance of the public administration has been delegated to the Ministry of the Interior, specifically at the Dipartimento della Funzione Pubblica.

On the contrary, the Spanish anti-corruption landscape appears much more scattered. Unlike Italy, Spain suffers from the lack of a central authority with national competencies over corruption. In this case, the preventive and sanctioning powers are equally distributed across local and regional authorities. Every *autonomia* (regional government) is endowed with the power of founding its authorities, creating significant issues regarding interregional disparities regarding anti-corruption standards or the resources available for anti-corruption activities. The main actors in the anti-corruption field are the Fiscalias, with regional competencies, and the local municipal anti-fraud authorities, when present. The level of national coordination is low. For example, transparency and access to information are regulated by a National Council –Consejo Transparencia y Buen Gobierno – with limited powers.

For the sake of the present study, some relevant differences specifically relate to the anti-corruption legislation implemented in the two countries. For example, Spain and Italy recently passed a law on transparency and access to public information. In the Spanish case, the Ley de Transparencia y de Buen Gobierno (Ley 19/2013) was proposed and passed by Mr. Rajoy's center-right government. In Italy, Legislative Decree 97/2016 was sponsored and approved three years later by the center-left coalition guided by Mr. Renzi. In both cases, a large coalition of civil society actors organized and mobilized around the issue, pressing the national government and trying to influence the bill's contents. However, some internal differentiations are detectable. Indeed, the Italian legislation has a national character and assigns the power of control, oversights, and sanctioning over transparency issues to the National Anti-corruption Authority. On the contrary, in the Spanish case, the national legislation is often integrated and ameliorated by the proliferation of regional laws on transparency,

which multiplies the number of regulatory agencies in charge of checking the correct implementation of the norm and the related sanctions.

The state-of-the-art of whistleblowers' protection instead represents a significant difference between the two countries. Italy passed its legislation on whistleblowing in 2017. This time, the bill was sponsored by the 5 Stars Movement, sitting in the opposition ranks of the center-left coalition led by Mr. Letta. The legislative process was, however, initiated and influenced by a coalition of civil society actors. On the contrary, in Spain, the civic attempts to introduce national legislation to protect whistleblowers have failed. For years, Spain has lacked coherent national legislation, even though some municipalities have developed internal regulations to protect informants. In some cases, e.g., in the municipality of Barcelona, these regulations resulted from movements' mobilization and have been incorporated into institutional practices. However, the approval of the European directive on whistleblowers' protection (EU 2019/1937) has recently forced the Spanish government to act on the topic, transposing the EU directive into its national legislation.

Other differences can be found in the civic monitoring scenario of the two countries. Whereas the Italian field is now populated by several well-structured or emerging monitoring projects and actors, the Spanish landscape here appears more scattered.

4.4. Mobilizing against corruption in Italy and Spain

Principal-agent explanations of corruption have played the lion's share in Western anti-corruption strategies for a long time. Besides the problem of definitions, the prevalence of rational choice approaches has had relevant repercussions on the effectiveness of the anti-corruption recipes adopted by these countries⁴⁸. Indeed, the lack of attention to national characteristics and local peculiarities have been indicated as the significant causes accounting for the poor results of curbing public corruption through cost-incentive solutions (Jiménez et al., 2012).

Partly as a reaction, scholars working on the Italian and Spanish cases have stressed the importance of relying on an active and engaged civil society to implement efficient and long-lasting anti-corruption measures in Italy successfully (Vannucci, 2015) and Spain (Caballería, 2016). The lack of this sustained anti-corruption engagement from below, on the contrary, is often regarded as the missing block to otherwise promising anti-corruption landscapes. The absence of civil and political coalitions willing to push for the inclusion and implementation of anti-corruption policies explains

⁴⁸ For example, Italy has generally preferred strengthening sanctioning mechanisms over implementing efficient preventive measures (La Spina, 2019).

the poor result of many legislative attempts. When not supported by a committed social block, the critical junctures offered by the emergence of corruption scandals and the institutional attempts at reforming the legal framework will likely bear only limited consequences in curbing corruption. Jiménez and Villoria (2018) claim that such an absence risks leaving Spain in a similar situation to what Italy experienced in the aftermath of the Clean Hands scandal. Similarly, Ferrante and Vannucci (2017) stress the necessity of activating civic and communitarian control mechanisms to enhance the Italian anti-corruption system.

Somehow counterintuitively, at least for part of the existing literature (Bazurli & Portos, 2021; Bonifácio & Fuks, 2017), the spread and depth of public corruption in Italy and Spain seldom resulted in the emergence of mass anti-corruption movements. Besides explanations based on the demobilizing effects that corruption may have (Bauhr & Charron, 2018; Choi & Woo, 2010; Giommoni, 2017), this absence can be partly explained by the specificities of the civil society engagement in the two countries. Italy and Spain are characterized by fragmented civil societies, where the high levels of mobilization of different social strata are rarely translated into coherent and unified popular uprisings (Romanos et al., 2021).

At the informal level, Italy and Spain have experienced significant turmoils following the emersion of major corruption scandals. The great scandals of the early 1990s did not represent a unicum in these countries' national history but emerged when social and political conditions allowed public indignation to be mobilized. The interaction between the growing distrust in political institutions increased tensions in political competition, and the progressive erosion of traditional bargaining mechanisms between the media and the institutional sector created the perfect conditions for scandals to unfold (Pujas, 2003). In both countries, however, the cyclical nature of scandals and their instrumentalization by political competitors have progressively eroded the mobilizing potential of corruption evidence (Heywood, 2007). Nevertheless, from the 1990s onwards, corruption has never totally abandoned the forefront of Italians' and Spaniards' concerns, as demonstrated by decades of opinion surveys. Therefore, notwithstanding all the problems associated with the various attempts at measuring corruption, mentioning, and contrasting some of the more frequently used indicators can furnish a first image of the anti-corruption landscape in Italy and Spain.

Regarding the Spanish case, comparing the peaks and fluctuations in perception and victimization indexes helps shed light on the Spaniards' attitudes toward public corruption. Quite straightforwardly, perception measures⁴⁹ reflect citizens' beliefs about the spread of public

⁴⁹ Transparency International Perception Index is probably the more famous and used measures among the ones focusing on perceptions.

corruption in a country, often differentiating between institutions (Parliament, political parties, politicians, police, judiciary) and levels of government (local, regional, national). Victimization measures are built by asking how frequently the respondent has experienced a corruption episode, often differentiating per sector (e.g., constructions, health). Besides these two measures, there are “objective” indexes based on the number of corruption reporting and/or judicial proceedings. Like many other countries, Spain shows a mismatch between these measurements. Starting with the 2007-2008 construction bubble and the subsequent financial crisis, Spain experienced steady growth in perceived corruption. However, such sustained growth was not directly mirrored in objective scores and victimization measurements. As reported by Villoria (2015), in 2009, the Spanish Fiscalía (anti-corruption authority) reported 730 open investigations; in 2012, more than 1000 Spanish politicians were investigated for corruption, whereas in 2013, there were approximately 1613 opened investigations on cases of corruption or economic malfeasances. In light of these numbers, not insignificant but modest compared with other countries, 84% of Spaniards interrogated in the 2013 Eurobarometer reported believing there was widespread corruption in political parties and 72% among politicians, against 68% and 63% of the Italians (Villoria, 2015). Besides the national government, which is generally perceived as the most corrupt, Italian and Spaniards also share high levels of distrust in the local and regional branches of government.

Although similar, the Italian situation appears more aligned when considering different indicators. As in Spain, one can appreciate a progressive deterioration of Italians’ trust in their political elites. However, the rampant distrust in the institutional sector has coupled with objective measures indicating an erosion in the mechanisms to curb public corruption. According to the World Bank index, Italy passed from a score of 71 in 2009 to 57 in 2013 (Saccoccia & Abela, 2017). The data collected by the Eurobarometer between 2006 and 2014 shows consistency in the perception of public corruption, with the political sectors being ranked as the more corrupt both in terms of perceptions and direct experiences of extortion over justice, health/education, police, public administration, and finance (Saccoccia & Abela, 2017). Similar trends are observable in Spain, with a general worsening in the perceptions of corruption in the political sphere and a general disbelief in the state's capacity and willingness to curb corruption.

Despite not being as extended as in Spain, the Italian case also presents a gap between objective measures and indexes based on perceptions. Indeed, whereas citizens’ and experts’ perceptions of corruption worsened over the years, convictions sometimes remained stable or decreased. The National Anti-corruption Authority analyses have shown a contraction in the number of convictions

for corruption-related crimes, which passed from more than 500 in the early 2000s to nearly 250 in 2011, vis-à-vis the substantially unvaried number of denunciations (Vannucci et al., 2017). Rather than in optimistic terms, this decrease is generally interpreted as an indicator of the poor functioning of the Italian anti-corruption apparatus. The gap between subjective and objective measures can represent a red flag of the anti-corruption state of the art. Low denunciations and condemnations indicate a specific resistance to disclosing news on corrupt exchanges. As far as the Italian case is concerned, this is well-demonstrated by the data coming from the Eurobarometer. If in 2014, almost 9% of the Italian respondents declared to know someone who was asked for a bribe, and the 3% had a direct experience of bribery, 74% of them did not denounce the episode (Vannucci et al., 2017).

In both cases, several reasons can account for increasing levels of perceived corruption. The spike in perceptions of corruption compared to other measurements is explained by the changing economic conditions and the role of media. Negative economic conjunctures, such as those experienced by Spain and Italy in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, are a good predictor of worsening perceptions of corruption. In economic growth and wealth accumulation, episodes of corruption usually can be more easily tolerated or ignored, whereas the opposite occurs during economic adversities. The percentage of Spaniards who believed there was a reduction in corruption was the highest between 2001 and 2006, during the peak of Spanish urban speculation (Villoria, 2015). In addition, the media seem to have played a relevant role in shaping corruption perceptions (Palau & Davesa, 2013). Between September 2008 and July 2010, 50% of the major Spanish newspapers' media coverage was dedicated to public corruption news (Villoria, 2015). The renewed media attention fostered political distrust, worsening citizens' perceptions of corruption (Villoria & Jiménez, 2012).

However, the attempts at measuring or evaluating the existence of an engaged civil society often offer puzzling and misleading pictures. The reliance on quantitative measures is crucial to first describe the civil society anti-corruption landscape in the two countries. However, these measures must be integrated by qualitative accounts of the characteristics and evolution of anti-corruption mobilization to understand their changes and potential effects. If, on the one hand, the emergence of corruption scandals has remained stable over the last few decades, significant and enduring anti-corruption mobilizations in Spain and Italy have been relatively scarce.

In Italy, anti-corruption movements have tended to be short-lived and poorly organized, resembling spontaneous outbreaks of rage and indignation. The outbreak of the Clean Hands investigation sparked the first moment of civil society demonstrations. These public displays of popular indignation quickly took a sanctioning and confrontational turn, as in the famous cases of the

masses throwing coins at the ex-PM and socialist leader Bettino Craxi, who became one of the symbolic figures of the corrupt political system. The civic resentment was, however, rapidly channeled within the institutional arena. A lot of energy and effort was thus dedicated to sustaining the judges involved in the investigations, with the media creating a hero-like narrative rather than sparking fully-fledged citizens' mobilizations. However, the "revolution of the judges" had limited consequences on the Italian corruption scene (della Porta & Vannucci, 2007). The availability of credible and alternative political parties, as in the case of the Northern League (Diani, 1996), and the emergence of new political subjects as Berlusconi's Forza Italia, quickly turned the attention from anti-corruption legislative efforts to the politicization of the legal discourse. Over the next few years, a bi-partisan agreement between the center-right and center-left coalitions removed the topic of public corruption from the public debate and, more importantly, from the policy agenda⁵⁰.

The lack of a sustained and organized anti-corruption movement, the electoral success of Forza Italia, the twenty years of *berlusconismo*, and the moralization around public corruption have severely constrained the elaboration of efficient anti-corruption policies. For a long time, Italy has thus been an example of the inefficacy of institutional mechanisms to curb and contrast public corruption (Vannucci, 2009), where judicial activism prevailed over large anti-corruption mobilizations and often backfired on the fight against public corruption. In Italy's context of a fully-fledged liberal-democratic state built around the separation of powers and an independent judiciary, the politicization of corruption has opened a new terrain of political conflict (Sberna & Vannucci, 2013). Moreover, the polarization of opinions generated by political entrepreneurs' strategic use of corruption scandals has weakened electoral accountability mechanisms (Sberna & Vannucci, 2013).

Similarly, Spain has seldom witnessed the emergence of large and organized anti-corruption movements. From time to time, the emergence of high-profile scandals in the ranks of the Socialist PSOE or the Conservative PP has sparked popular mobilizations, which, however, had little systemic consequences. The situation changed after the Great Recession when the anti-austerity mobilizations transformed this long tendency. The mobilization of the 15M, started on the 15th of May 2011 in Puerta del Sol, Madrid, represented a crucial moment of discontinuity. The movement, born as a reaction to the severe austerity measures implemented at the European level to offset the effects of the Spanish economic crisis, quickly developed a shared frame targeting the blurred interactions between politics and economic power. Public corruption was thus framed as a democratic problem, denouncing the extreme financialization of the Spanish economy and blaming the political and economic elites for the harsh economic situation experienced by the country. While

⁵⁰ For a detailed historical account see della Porta and Vannucci (2007).

asking for a “real democracy,” the 15M developed a potent anti-corruption discourse, partly juxtaposing the distortions of the neo-liberal economic model with corruption. However, in this case, the widespread unrest against corruption was rapidly channeled by the emergence of new political competitors. The foundation of Podemos on the left, which allegedly represented part of the initial requests on the 15M, and Ciudadanos on the center-right, ended this season of popular mobilization against public corruption.

The following section offers a more detailed overview of the current scenario of anti-corruption from below in Italy and Spain.

4.5. Anti-corruption networks

This study builds on a qualitative network understanding to integrate quantitative measures of the anti-corruption engagement of civil society in Italy and Spain. Civil society is thus conceptualized as a third-party mechanism of anti-corruption enforcement, summarized in the concept of Societal Accountability (SA). Therefore, rather than focusing on the number of civic organizations or surveys indicating the citizens' willingness to act against public corruption, this work tries to map the whole network of Italian and Spanish SA actors, namely organizations dealing with anti-corruption tasks.

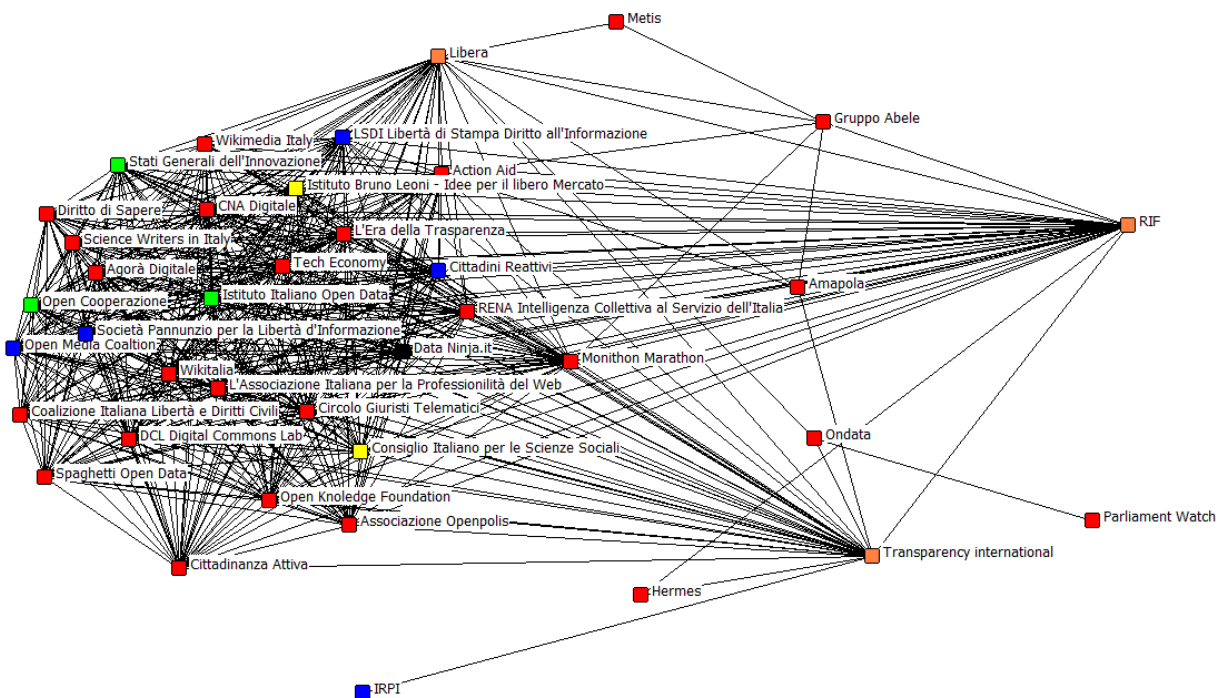
Every network is, at least, bidimensional (Krinsky & Crossley, 2014b). It comprises i) a set of nodes, individual actors, collective actors, or non-human entities, and ii) a set of ties, namely the interactions or relations that bind the nodes in a network. The presence/absence of a tie depends on the type of interaction or relation investigated. For example, in a policy network, opposition parties might be related by links of “who is talking to whom” for the sake of writing and passing a bill. On the other hand, the same parties may appear as isolates (i.e., lacking any tie) when considering an interaction based on the “who is participating in an event with whom” criterion.

In this case, the network helps to visualize the relationship between societal accountability actors in Italy and Spain. As explained in chapter 3, actors have been included in the networks combining two selection criteria: 1. the definition of SA (distinguishing between social movement actors, civic organizations, NGOs, and investigative journalism), 2. the array of SA consequences (distinguishing between answerability, legal claim attainment, and sanctioning). Therefore, the nodes represent all those collective actors involved in advocating for i) public transparency and information disclosure, ii) the protection of whistleblowers, and iii) projects of civic monitoring. Most organizations in both countries have been selected from those participating in pro-transparency initiatives: FOIA4Italy in Italy and Coalición Pro Acceso in Spain. Actors working in

whistleblowing and monitoring have thus been added to this initial list. Each network has been additionally refined through a snowball strategy.

The networks in Fig 4.1. and 4.2. represent relationships of cooperation within the SA field. Here, ties express links between CSOs recognized as partners on each node's website. Ties have been weighted to distinguish cooperation based on trust and recognition from instrumental alliances (Cinalli & Füglistler, 2008). Therefore, each cell in the matrix can assume three values: 0=lack of a tie, 1=presence of at least one tie, and 2=presence of more than one tie. The value of 1 has been assigned by organizations only linked by instrumental ties (just listed as partners). A value of 2 has been assigned to organizations sharing members and co-founders, developing shared projects, or repeatedly co-participating in joint events, besides being recognized as partners.

Fig.4.1. The Italian network of societal accountability actors



0 indicates the lack of any interaction between the organizations. The networks are undirected, meaning each tie represents only an interaction between two nodes without distinguishing between incoming and outgoing ties. Ties colored in black represent a single type of relation, being listed as a partner. Ties colored in red represent multiplex relationships, where being part partners goes together with working on shared projects. Nodes' colors are used to indicate different attributes of the actors. In this case, the selected attribute refers to the identity or identification of the group. Nodes colored in red represent data organizations working on the theme of transparency, open data, human rights, and active citizenship. Blue nodes indicate actors in the media realm. Nodes in

orange represent actors who directly identify as anti-corruption subjects. Nodes colored in yellow represent institutional initiatives, and green nodes represent actors in the academic/research field.

Fig.4.1. offers a visual representation of the Italian network of SA. To date, the Italian anti-corruption scenario appears various and scattered. Whereas several movements, particularly environmentalist ones, bring forward anti-corruption claims in their broader fight (Piazza & Sorci, 2018; Torsello, 2016), dedicated anti-corruption organizations are scarcer. Only 3 out of the 39 organizations populating the SA would identify primarily as anti-corruption actors.

On the other hand, the informal network of organizations dealing with SA, such as transparency, whistleblowing, and civic monitoring, is vastly populated (Fig.1). The Italian network appears indeed as a multiform universe in which at least three main clusters could be identified: open-data and pro-transparency organizations, anti-corruption organizations, and media organizations. The first cluster comprises organizations seeking to pressure public institutions to reactively disclose public information or proactively publish information in an open-data format. The goal of the majority of these actors is to increase the levels of transparency and publicity, ensuring, at the same time, the reusability of public information. One can find organizations such as OnData, DataNinja, and Spaghetti OpenData. However, this first cluster also includes other organizations which do not identify as pro-transparency actors but that benefit from the disclosure of public information for their work, e.g., actors involved in the process of civic monitoring such as Amapola or Action Aid. The second cluster is instead represented by organizations that target, or used to target, public corruption specifically. Here one can find highly structured and centralized organizations such as the Italian chapter of Transparency International and more grassroots-based organizations such as the anti-mafia movement Libera or the campaign-based organization Riparte il Futuro. Finally, the third cluster reunites actors that range from investigative journalism groups such as IRPI or citizens-based media outlets such as Cittadini Reattivi. This multifaceted network denotes the transactional character of Italy's anti-corruption collective action field. Many organizations involved do not necessarily, or primarily, understand themselves as committed to the anti-corruption cause. Of the organizations in the network, only some directly reference “corruption” on their website. At the same time, others refer more broadly to “legality,” “open data,” “transparency,” or “mafia/organized crime.”

At the same time, the Italian network of SA appears highly centralized around anti-corruption figures. Indeed, TI-It scores the highest in degree centrality (37.00, average 0.487) and betweenness centrality (95.533, average 13.632). In a nutshell, the Italian chapter of Transparency International is the node counting more links within the network and lying between several paths connecting

otherwise disconnected nodes. These two measures represent the power of an actor in the network. Being better connected, central actors will have greater chances to mobilize necessary resources, find valuable allies, and select alternative action strategies. At the same time, controlling the flux of interactions between different parts of the network will likely increase their bargaining power and, thus, their power of influence. Of course, centrality measures do not always go hand in hand. In the Italian case, for example, Libera (36.00, average 0.474) and RIF/TGL (35.00, average 0.461) are the second and third more central actors in-degree centrality. However, in terms of betweenness RIF/TGL (23.817, average 3.388) loses its position in favor of Ondata (37.00, average 5.263), an actor with a degree centrality of 3.000, average 0.039. Net of the number of their direct connections, Ondata will probably be endowed with more significant influence potential by being able to connect nodes that will be unconnected otherwise. The Italian network seems relatively cohesive, with an average density of 0.698 and an average geodesic distance of 1.4, meaning that each actor can connect with any other node through 1.4 nodes.

Fig.4.2. The Spanish network of societal accountability actors

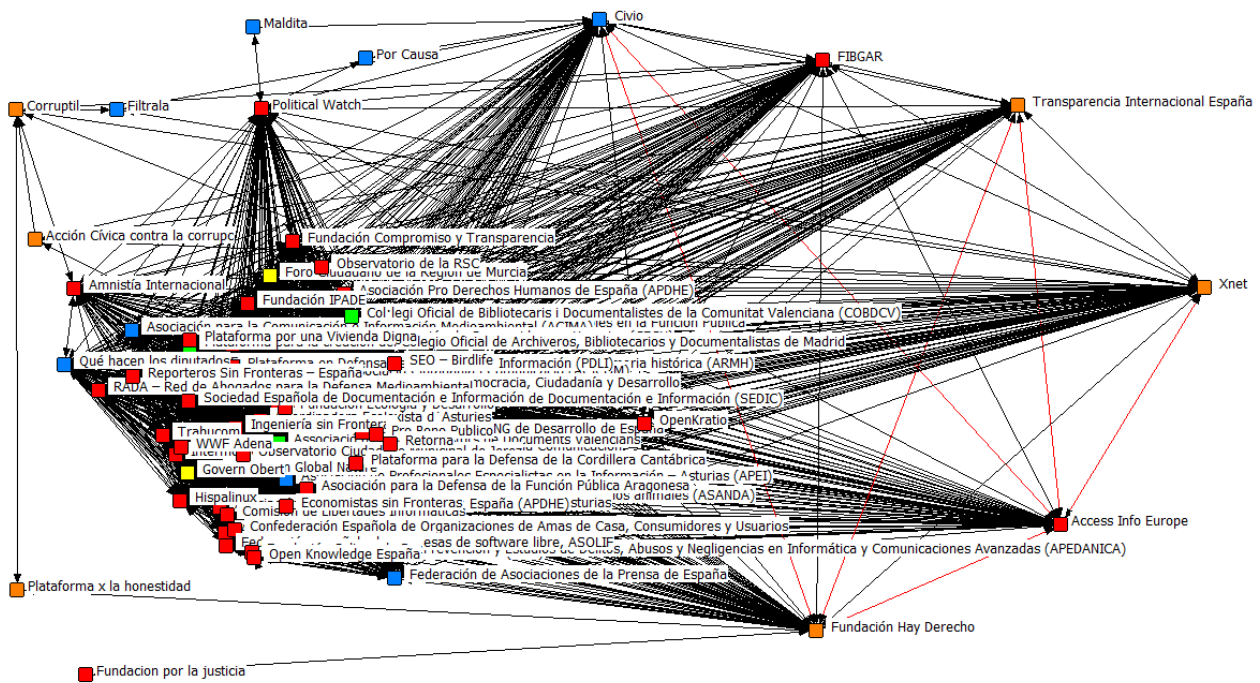


Fig.4.2 offers a similar picture for the Spanish case, with some meaningful differences. First of all, it is necessary to acknowledge the different compositions of the network, which is about twice in size compared to the Italian one. For this reason, in Spain, one can find more organizations that directly identify as anti-corruption actors but maintain a similar ratio, 6 out of 81. In this case, at least three clusters can be identified: actors working in transparency and access to information, anti-corruption organizations, and media outlets. However, the Spanish case is characterized by greater

participation of institutional actors, at least for what concerns the activities related to the right to know.

A relevant difference comes instead from a first descriptive analysis of the centrality measures. Indeed, unlike the Italian case, the Spanish network of SA appears more polycentric and less centralized. Here, several organizations score high on degree centrality measures, thus based on the number of ties sent and received. In addition, the more central actors are all coming from different clusters: Hay Derecho (79.00, average 0.494), X-Net (77.00, average 0.481), and Transparency Spain (76.00, average 0.475) can be identified as proper anti-corruption organizations, whereas Civio (75.00, average 0.488) is a media outlet, and Access Info (77.00, average 0.488), Political Watch (75.00, average 0.488), and FIBGAR (75.00, average 0.488) work in the field of transparency and monitoring. Despite the size difference, this network also appears relatively cohesive, with an average geodesic distance of 1.2.

4.6. Conclusion

As maintained in the previous sections, Italy and Spain share several similarities regarding public corruption. The historical development, characteristics, depth, and rootedness of public corruption systems are similar. Trends in different corruption measures have indicated a general worsening in the perceptions of corruption in the two countries, in both cases accompanied by a deterioration of state mechanisms to curb public corruption. High levels of political polarization and the fluctuating salience of corruption mirror the mutable media attention to corruption scandals, and have delineated a similar context when evaluating the political opportunities for anti-corruption mobilizations. Although corruption has generally retained a relevant position in the Italians' and Spaniards' concerns, sustained forms of grassroots engagement against public corruption have known moments of acceleration and setback. Significant scandals have been followed by intense indignation and civic unrest, generally resulting in a progressive marginalization of corruption in the public discourse. The structure and competition of the party system, the media coverage, and the economic conditions have played a significant role in the fluctuating relationship between collective action and anti-corruption efforts.

Some notable differences, however, appear when considering the mechanisms of enforcement of the anti-corruption apparatus in the two countries. State accountability mechanisms appear more centralized in Italy than in Spain, with a prevalence of centralized national structure in the former case in contrast to the prominence of regional and scattered structure in the latter. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, mechanisms of electoral accountability left room for new political competitors to emerge. However, the characteristics and political positioning of anti-corruption

political actors differ in the two countries. Whereas in Spain, parties directly targeting public corruption have emerged at both extremes of the political spectrum (Podemos and Ciudadanos), Italy has witnessed the rise of a less ideologically characterized player (the 5 Star Movement).

Even in the case of mechanisms of societal accountability, Italy and Spain share some significant similarities and differences. Looking at the SA networks, both countries seem to be characterized by various and scattered networks. In both cases, proper anti-corruption actors do not represent most organizations populating the SA field, despite occupying central positions in the network. Whereas in the Italian case, proper anti-corruption organizations play the lion's share in SA initiatives, the Spanish network appears more diverse, with anti-corruption, transparency, and media actors occupying similar central positions. The following empirical chapters will further explore these networks' composition, dynamics, and consequences.

PART II: Empirics

Interlude. The partiality of alternative explanations

Existing explanations of the consequences of collective action fall short of understanding how CSOs in Italy and Spain have set limits to power, producing societal accountability. Better, each of them sheds light on alternative pieces of a more composite puzzle.

In its basic version, resource mobilization theory (Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Zald & McCarthy, 1979) maintains that resources such as financial and human capital explain why some collective actors succeed where others fail. Resourceful organizations would significantly impact political and social change processes, channeling resources toward their desired outcome. However, in the cases at hand, resources are often an obstacle rather than an asset. As reported by all the CSOs interviewed, the scarcity of financial resources represents one of the most pressing issues for successful anti-corruption efforts. Most of all, financial resources are hard to secure. Italy and Spain lack a philanthropic culture of civic engagement; citizens' donations are scarce, governmental funding is generally absent, and foundations are few. Problems associated with the scarcity of resources go beyond the Italian and Spanish cases and usually pertain to the civic anti-corruption field in the Western World. The legacy of economic explanations of public corruption and the dominance of rational choice approaches have nurtured the spread of neo-liberal anti-corruption policies (della Porta, 2018; Sampson, 2015; Vannucci, 2015), which left little space and resources for grassroots anti-corruption actors.

Similarly, there is a general shortage of resources in the form of human capital. According to interviews in both countries, levels of associationism are generally low, and CSOs rely more on one-time donors than long-term committed activists. Usually, the two shortages go hand in hand: few financial resources and low membership rates. Some CSOs may be better off on one of the two dimensions. For example, Libera can count on many supporters but still collects limited financial resources. Others, like Access Info, may rely on more funding -mostly from European projects- but lack associates. Finally, the organizational resources of these CSOs tend to be quite limited as well. Even the more structured organizations rely on just a handful of paid staff members. Sometimes, the work is carried out voluntarily in one's free time.

Overall, resource explanations are unlikely enough to understand the influence of these groups in the anti-corruption collective action field. The lack of resources tends to jeopardize collective efforts toward accountability, promoting competition rather than cooperation among civic subjects and favoring ad-hoc short-term projects over wide-ranging long-term commitments (Fox, 2015, 2016). For instance, European funds benefit international partnerships over national coalitions and

few-year-long projects over systemic interventions. However, anti-corruption CSOs often successfully rely on digital media and technologies, which can become relevant resources to foster their goals (Mattoni, 2018, 2021; Mattoni & Odilla, 2021).

Explanations focusing on disruption and repertoires of action have similar problems in grasping the roots of the influence of anti-corruption CSOs. As shown in chapters 5 and 6, the anti-corruption and pro-accountability networks in the two countries were mainly composed of quite institutionalized collective actors. The reliance on nonconventional repertoires of action was minimal, particularly in the Italian case. In Spain, the 15M/*Indignados* movement was pivotal in bringing public corruption to the forefront of public debates (Fominaya, 2020; Gerbaudo, 2017; Hughes, 2011). The mass mobilizations that animated the Spanish squares starting from May 15th 2011, transformed the discourses around democracy and public corruption, created new political players, and increased the salience of transparency and whistleblowing for years to come (Faber & Seguín, 2019; Feenstra et al., 2017; Jiménez-Sánchez & García-Espín, 2022; Orriols & Cordero, 2016). However, it is hard to draw a direct arrow connecting the *acampadas* to the transparency law's passage and even more problematic when it comes to whistleblowing. If the transparency law mirrors the influence of multiple players and their different logic, X-Net's and 15MpaRato's innovative practices in the whistleblowing field significantly impacted public corruption besides the (lack of) policy gains. In Italy, on the contrary, the lack of mass mobilizations centered on public corruption curtailed the possibility of envisioning new and alternative solutions in the field of public corruption (della Porta & Andretta, 2013; Zamponi, 2012). CSOs generally refrained from disruptive tactics, mostly resorting to public performances and online mobilizations (e.g., tweet bombings) to accelerate the unfolding of events, that is, when policies were already legitimate in the institutional arena.

Frame theory certainly adds a piece to the puzzle, even though it does not complete the whole picture. As emerged from analyzing frames elaborated before and during the definition of the policy contents (Chapters 5 and 6), CSOs' frames tended to resonate more with the elites' positioning rather than with the general audience. In most cases, Italian and Spanish CSOs have preferred to reproduce and adapt international frames on public corruption, transparency, and whistleblowing with minor context-specific adjustments (Bukovansky, 2006; Gephart, 2016, 2009). Context-specific frames emerged mainly at the *diagnostic* level, where collective actors have bridged international discourses to the specific distortions characterizing Italy (e.g., the mafia) and Spain (e.g., the democratic transition). However, *prognostically*, these actors have generally stuck to well-known mainstream solutions, supporting the introduction of non-context-specific tools and policies

and backing up their arguments referring to the opinion of international organizations such as the IMF, the WB, the GRECO, and others.

With the notable exception of X-Net's and 15MpaRato's frames, which reproduced and reinvigorated the 15 M's discourses, the *motivational* discourses developed by anti-corruption CSOs were hardly salient for the general audience. Instead, the technicality and inward-looking character of their arguments targeting potential political allies favored frame integration processes (Croteau & Hicks, 2003; Snow & Benford, 1988). Political parties were the main target of CSOs' frames and sometimes served as echo chambers to magnify the salience of civic discourses. For example, in Italy, the debate on whistleblowing gained salience thanks to the 5SM's addition of populist elements to the policy proposal. Hence, in the Italian case, the mediation of political entrepreneurs, as in the innovation frame elaborated by Renzi's government, enhanced CSOs' frame resonance. Equally, in Spain, anti-corruption frames derived from the vastly successful Indignados ones were appropriated by political parties such as Podemos and Ciudadanos but with opposite effects. Rather than magnify their impact, this appropriation faded the transformative potential of these discourses and domesticated them for institutional actors' use.

Even contextual approaches seem insufficient to explain the influence of anti-corruption CSOs in Italy and Spain. Context-specific explanations connect the openness of the political opportunities structure, generally regarding friendly political allies, to the likelihood of shaping social change (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi et al., 1995; Schock, 1999). Whereas both countries have experienced an opening of political opportunities over the last decades, these have hardly translated directly into accountability gains. The connection here seems much less clear. In the Spanish case, transparency and whistleblowing made their way into the political debates thanks to the 15 M's mobilization and its offspring's campaigns. However, the move along the various phases of the policy process coincided with a progressive shrinking of these opportunities. Once entering the institutional arenas, political parties recovered their role and shaped policy gains according to their needs and logic. The PP exploited the transparency law to re-legitimize its position. The internal competition among political elites and civic actors nullified the attempts to pass a bill protecting whistleblowing, even when progressive parties took up the government. Short-term circumscribed cooperation emerged instead at the local level, often helped by civic coalitions in governments. In the Italian case, progressive parties in governments helped bring into the parliamentary arena scarcely salient topics such as the transparency law. Still, these allies were hardly helpful in the implementation and enforcement stages. Support from regulatory agencies such as ANAC was an additional pressure source on governments. Yet, this alliance faded once the contention moved from the legislative to

the administrative arena. Contextual conditions helped seize opportunities at the legal level - e.g., with the *acusacion popular* in Spain- and in the media. However, the high volatility of governments in both countries and the presence of institutional moving targets along the various phases of the policy process severely resized the role of the POS, which falls short in grasping the dynamicity of influence dynamics.

Standard approaches to the study of the consequences of collective action appear highly informative but insufficient to understand the influence of CSOs over the Italian and Spanish anti-corruption struggle. Each conveys crucial information to disentangle the complex web of interactions that led to the approval of essential laws in the transparency and whistleblowing fields or the effects of monitoring initiatives. However, none is sufficient to understand how these pieces of legislation were drafted, voted on, implemented, and enforced or to grasp the impact of civic monitoring. All these explanatory factors add a chapter to a longer story, but they can be put together into a coherent tale only using relational lenses. Chapters 5 and 6 reconstruct the Italian and Spanish stories piece by piece, discussing the *strategies* and *mechanisms* that connect the work of anti-corruption CSOs to societal accountability consequences.

Chapter 5. Policy Change and Procedural Gains in the Italian Case

5.1. Introduction

“It's all about asking yourself what kind of impact you want and can achieve (...) Then, having to choose, one chooses, and then one can devote oneself to changing the laws, changing the culture, or standing beside individuals in need, like whistleblowers. So, there are different ways to achieve impact, and every few years, you question them and change them maybe.”

IT-8

Exploring recent trends in the Italian anti-corruption field helps to elucidate the complex mix of steps forward and setbacks that characterize deep democratization processes and accountability relations. Recent developments in the Italian anti-corruption institutional systems have been triggered and sustained by national CSOs. However, the accountability consequences of these institutional changes are challenging to evaluate. The deep restructuring of the Italian political system over the last few years has indeed been primarily shaped by challenging parties, which channeled grassroots anti-corruption and pro-accountability demands. In such a context, civic anti-corruption efforts have often preferred creating and maintaining cooperative relations with institutional actors to achieve change over the long run. As elucidated by the opening quote, Italian anti-corruption players have tended to work in multiple arenas, sometimes holding different ideas about what kind of changes or interventions was necessary to increase the system's accountability. On the one hand, CSOs' high heterogeneity of goals and means helped secure relevant pieces of legislation, such as transparency and whistleblowing laws, or develop complementary monitoring initiatives. On the other hand, the primacy of vertical integration processes with political and bureaucratic elites has sometimes resulted in low accountability traps (Fox, 2007), increasing the system's answerability but failing to enhance citizens' sanctioning potential.

The chapter offers a reconstruction of CSOs' patterns of influence over the *policy consequences* of the campaigns for a) introducing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA, 2016) and b) regulating whistleblowers' protection (2016), and the *political effects* of their c) monitoring initiatives.

The transparency campaign started in 2012, led by a small coalition of journalists and media outlets, FOIA.it. The campaign aimed to reform the Italian law to access public information, introducing the so-called *generalized civic access*, which grants every citizen the right to ask and obtain administrative information besides what is already proactively disclosed by public authorities. The norm sought to increase state transparency and prevent the occurrence of corrupt deals easing the monitoring of decision-making processes. However, the policy process began only in 2014, when a

renewed coalition of civic actors – FOIA4Italy, entered the parliamentary arena. The new coalition included diverse CSOs and exploited its heterogeneity to attract public opinion support and forge cooperation ties with institutional elites. The coalition crumbled once the law passed, but direct ties with administrative actors helped refine its contents and influence its implementation.

One year later, a smaller group of CSOs started to mobilize to introduce a bill on whistleblowers' protection. The campaign #VoicesofJustice that eventually led to law 179/2017⁵¹ asked for new whistleblowing regulation, moving from the insufficient protections granted by the so-called Severino's law in 2012⁵². In particular, CSOs aimed to increase informants' rights and safety and extend those protections to the private sector. Here, direct contact with reform-minded elites proved far more essential to politicize the theme and exploit political opportunities. However, the law represented a compromise that left many CSOs' requests unattended. Beyond the policy approval, these actors obtain significant refinements at the implementation and enforcement stage, acting as brokers between whistleblowers and institutions.

Finally, the chapter goes beyond policy consequences and tries to understand the political effects of civic monitoring initiatives. It presents four models of civic monitoring, elucidating the relational strategies followed by monitoring actors and the accountability consequences of these initiatives.

Overall, the chapter shows that coalitional and direct contact strategies have been particularly crucial over the first stage of the policy process to obtain the introduction of new pieces of legislation. However, alliances have often changed later in the policy process, reshuffling the relational patterns within and between civic and collective actors. Moreover, it shows that CSOs who have remained influential over the implementation and enforcement stage have followed more flexible relational strategies, juggling cooperative and conflictual strategies when needed. Finally, the chapter presents a preliminary discussion on the consequences of monitoring initiatives, arguing that in the Italian case, they usually result in soft forms of accountability (answerability) while often lacking the power to administer formal and informal sanctions from below (enforcement).

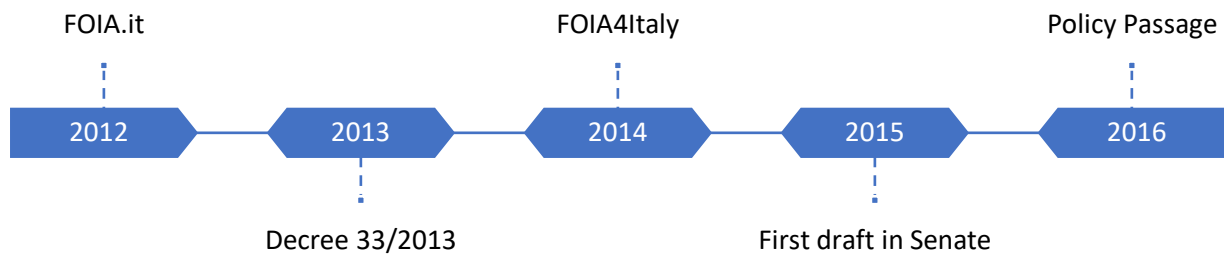
5.2. Transparency in Italy

The Italian law on transparency and the right to access public information (*generalized civic access*) was passed in 2016 by the center-left coalition government led by Mr. Matteo Renzi. The law was sponsored by the Democratic Party (PD) and built on the policy draft produced by the civic coalition FOIA4Italy, which had animated the Italian transparency debate since 2014.

⁵¹ The L.179/2017 was meant to modify the limited protection granted by the 54-bis D.Lgs. n. 165/2001.

⁵² Art. 51bis, L.190/2012

Fig. 5.1. Timeline of the Italian transparency campaign



The final text mediated the interests of many civic and institutional players, resulting in a suboptimal bill. However, this policy attainment represented a crucial innovation in the Italian anticorruption landscape and a starting point for many CSOs to keep pursuing their accountability goals by opening and using public information in their monitoring activities. Fig.5.1. summarizes the main steps of the pro-transparency campaign.

5.2.1. Agenda-setting

The mobilization that since 2012 grouped numerous CSOs in favor of the formulation and approval of a *Freedom of Information Act* (FOIA) demonstrates how much the Italian anticorruption landscape developed around the mantra that “information is key.”⁵³

The first organized attempts at regulating transparency and citizens’ access to public information dates to the foundation of the *FOIA.it* civic coalition in 2012. The coalition, powered by 29 CSOs, primarily from the media arena, was first presented during a press conference at the Chamber of Deputies. The *arena selection*, intended as the physical space where the press conference occurred, already elucidates some of the campaign’s essential elements. First, *FOIA.it* emerged as a policy campaign to reform the right to know. Second, being sponsored by press associations and prominent journalists, its promoters already had relevant political connections to present their proposal to government officials, asking the centrist government of Mr. Monti to intervene by reforming the right to access information. Third, in its proposal, *FOIA.it* targeted MPs and focused on legislative technicalities and administrative details rather than trying to raise awareness in public opinion.

⁵³At the time of the campaign major newspapers were titling: La Stampa, 28th January 2016, [“We need more transparency on the transparency law”](#); L’Espresso, 12th April 2016, [“Transparency is not a game”](#); AGI, 29th December 2016. [“Cantone: FOIA is an embankment against corruption”](#).

Because of its nature, FOIA.it found little support, both inside and outside the Parliament, failing to address broader constituencies beyond the journalistic and academic one. After launching a petition, the platform focused on publishing blog posts and opinion articles, decoupling political lobbying from forms of extra-institutional mobilization. Parliamentary documents reveal the limited coalition's impact⁵⁴⁵⁵⁵⁶.

Hence, among the coalition's members, some CSOs started to imagine new ways to influence the transparency regulation. Over this phase, Diritto di Sapere (DS) became a particularly central player. DS, founded in 2012, resulted from a casual meeting between a journalist, a lawyer, and the President of the Spanish pro-transparency NGO Access Info. According to Transparency Italy (TI-It), which later became one of its main allies, DS' founders initiated the campaign because:

“(They) were selfishly interested in having a Freedom of Information Act in Italy (...) (One of the initiators) always says, "I've started this campaign because, as a journalist, to make inquiries, I needed information that I could not get, so I thought “let's get together and make sure that, like many other countries in the world, we get this law.” IT-3

Considering the right to know as an essential tool for their work, DS's founders had to find new spaces for maneuvering in what was perceived as a highly favorable political context, characterized by abundant resources for those working on transparency and information disclosure.

“Since 2012, there has been a strong interest in access to information, open government, and open data (...) 2012 was a particular year because there was a boom of all these participatory platforms, this buzzword of civic technology, all over the world (...), so there was a great deal of interest, both by civil society and by donors " IT-10

With FOIA.it's failure, DS had to find new ways to influence the policy process. Faced with the *engagement dilemma*, DS' founders decided to leave the ranks files of FOIA.it to shape a new civic initiative. As recalled by a member of OnData, who joined the campaign at a later stage:

"The first campaign was FOIA.it (...) I never understood why, but there was some division among the organizers, and therefore FOIA4Italy was created, which then brought to passing the law. " IT-2

Whereas this came with costs and risks, the Spanish organization Access Info⁵⁷ helped DS to model the new coalition on the successful case of the *Coalición Pro Acceso*, which had obtained a Spanish FOI law a few years earlier. It was the founding moment of the FOIA4Italy campaign. Having to enter the parliamentary arena and exploit a moment of growing opportunities, DS decided to stick to a *coalitional strategy* to change its structural position:

⁵⁴ Defined during parliamentary debates as “a group of individual citizens, of civil society organizations working online and, in the press, journalists, professors, and public administration experts”. Senato della Repubblica, Legislatura 16 Atto di Sindacato Ispettivo n° 1-00644, Atto n. 1-00644, Pubblicato il 30 maggio 2012, nella seduta n. 733

⁵⁵ Legislative Decree no. 33/13.

⁵⁶ Report *Open Data in Parliament*, 2015, Italian Parliament and the Politecnico of Turin.

⁵⁷ As reported by Access Info's president: “In the same year, I actually set up Diritto di Sapere in Italy”.

“FOIA4Italy was born precisely with the idea of creating a cartel of organizations, elaborating the ten essential points, working on a petition, and building a bit of a campaign. Within the 30 organizations, not all of them have had a “leading role,” but all have served to create a critical mass.” IT-10

Hence, working in a coalition was crucial to obtain visibility in the public and political debate. However, at this point, DS had to decide *with whom* to work in pursuing its policy goals, a version of the *extension* dilemma. Cooperating with others was insufficient; DS had to select valuable allies to create critical mass and attract new audiences. Building on FOIA.it’s experiences, DS decided to change its pool of allies, crafting a large coalition led by a small core of highly specialized CSOs.

The new campaign, FOIA4Italy, was launched in 2014 by an utterly different coalition of CSOs; out of the 29 civic groups of FOIA.it, just 7 of them figured among the 32 CSOs that composed FOIA4Italy. The changed geometry of the coalition is striking, particularly concerning the presence of “pure” anticorruption actors such as Transparency International Italy (TI-It) and Riparte il Futuro (today, The Good Lobby Italia, RIF/TGL), and the anti-mafia movement Libera⁵⁸. Far from being casual, the partners' selection followed a logic of *complementarity* and *task distribution*. As recalled by the spokesperson of RIF/TGL:

“We have been invited to join the coalition (...) it was a very successful coalition case because the people who animated it were very determined to bring home (...) It always happens in coalitions; some do more, and some do less because coalitions are useful, but they are useful for those who organized them because they want to carry the thing forward” IT-8

At this point, the new coalition had to decide *how to intervene* in the policy arena. Given the favorable POS and the renewed profile of the coalition, the promoters opted for direct involvement in the policy process through a *policy input strategy* (Mattoni & Odilla, 2021). Hence, DS decided to actively stimulate the political process, a version of the engagement dilemma, drafting a bill from below. Even in this case, DS decided to do it through a coalitional strategy, gaining legitimacy vis-à-vis institutional players. The collective writing process was vastly advertised on the channels of the various CSOs composing FOIA4Italy and stressed in the communications with the legislator during public meetings.

However, to enter the parliamentary arena, FOIA4Italy needed also to find some *institutional sponsors*. Some of the campaign’s leading members started contacting MPs until they found one available to sponsor the bill. Over this phase, selecting an institutional interlocutor did not represent a significant challenge but rather answered an easy-to-solve *availability dilemma*. Indeed, the new coalition government guided by Mr. Renzi appeared strongly reform-minded and sympathetic to the

⁵⁸ Whereas RIF/TGL was not yet an independent reality in 2012, TI-It and Libera already represented prominent players in the anti-corruption and anti-mafia fields.

coalition's aims. In what was back then perceived as a favorable opportunity structure, FOIA4Italy thus opted for a strategy of *direct contact* with the political elites, contacting several MPs until:

"One of the MPs took charge of the FOIA, X, and we worked a lot with her and the PD to ensure it was included in the public administration reform. " IT-10

FOIA4Italy found an institutional ally in an MP from the governing party, the Democratic Party (PD). The proposal entered the Chamber of Deputies in 2015. The bill⁵⁹, sponsored by the PD, was essentially a transposition of the 10 points drafted in the coalition's manifesto. It was the beginning of the parliamentary discussion that eventually brought to the definition of the bill's contents.

5.2.2. *Definition of the Policy Contents*

As documented by RIF/TGL, once the new center-left government of Mr. Renzi addressed the parliament with a speech promising a revolution in the relationship between public administration and civil society, CSOs understood it was the time to advocate for introducing a new transparency law. As elicited by the President of DS:

" Prime Minister Renzi mentions FOIA among the innovations in Italy that were needed ... as happens very often, in a short time, this buzzword emerged. Everyone seemed to know the FOIA; everyone wanted the FOIA "IT- 10

. Whereas the endorsement of a member from the majority party (PD) sufficed to let the proposal enter political debates, convincing a single MP was not enough to influence the passage of a new law. Hence, facing a *dilemma of policy innovation*⁶⁰, the coalition changed its plan, discarding the possibility of approving an ad hoc law, and sought to introduce the FOIA within the broader public administration reform the PD's government promoted. However, much work was necessary to shape the bill's contents.

Unlike FOIA.it, FOIA4Italy worked hard to obtain public opinion support, presenting itself as an initiative "*For a government of public power in public.*" The new coalition FOIA4Italy transformed the frames on transparency and the right to know. It denounced the systemic violation of the citizens' right to know perpetrated by an administrative culture based on secrecy and opaqueness. The lack of a FOIA was considered detrimental to the international image of the country, one of the few Western democracies lacking coherent legislation on the right to know. FOIA4Italy thus framed the bill's introduction as a way of reclaiming a long-neglected human right⁶¹.

⁵⁹ Proposta di legge n.3042 presentata il 15 aprile 2015, Camera dei Deputati.

⁶⁰ Jasper (2004) presented the dilemma of cultural innovation, stating that "To appeal to your various audiences, you must use the meanings they already hold, and pushing too far may cause you to lose them." (p. 13).

⁶¹ The l. 241/90 granted access to information only to individuals with a "direct, concrete, and relevant" interest.

Diagnostically, the coalition blamed political elites for passing a law (33/13) in which “*the line between citizenship and subjection is still very subtle*”⁶². In its manifesto, the coalition bridged the obtainment of greater levels of transparency to the resolution of concrete problems experienced by citizens, such as the high costs of public corruption. The introduction of FOIA was thus presented not as a goal per se but as a fundamental tool to “*become agents of transparency*,”⁶³ with the ultimate purpose of “*taking care of one’s communities*.”⁶⁴ Throughout the policy process, the coalition strengthened the *denied right* frame, shedding light on the structural asymmetry of power between citizens and the public powers. The main critique revolved around the high *discretionary* power granted to the state, de facto able to deny access to information.

A good share of the coalition’s prognostic work focused on the significance of the right to know to foster civic participation. FOIA4Italy’s CSOs developed a frame of *civism*, where information was vital to citizens’ involvement and democratic enhancement. The coalition stressed the preventive function of the right to know, *bridging* their proposals with the *prevention* rhetoric of international organizations such as the IMF and the WB (Bukovansky, 2006; Sampson, 2010, 2015). Hence, the Italian civil society sector remained anchored to rationalist and mainstream interpretations of the issue to exploit favorable conditions and build synergies with governmental actors.

Finally, the coalition motivated its supporters, presenting the right to know as a *universal right*, a Copernican Revolution in the balance of power between the ruled and the rulers. Among their principles, FOIA4Italy asked to remove the need to justify information requests, forcing the PA to motivate information denials and including sanctions in case of non-response. The law was advertised as the first step of a much-needed process of democratic enhancement to align the country with more modern and transparent democracies.

Institutional actors easily appropriated part of these frames. The PD, for example, built on the universal right frame, stressing the need to rebalance the power between the public administrations (PAs) and the citizenry. Bridging the introduction of a transparency law with an overarching *innovation* frame developed by the government and its PM Renzi, the party presented the bill as an instrument for reducing the bureaucratic burdens over the economic and political system and eradicating the PAs’ discretionary power. The PD thus combined the backwardness and power unbalance elements in a narrative of *systemic inefficiency* of the public administrative machine.

⁶² FOIA4Italy, [For a government of public power, in public](#)

⁶³ FOIA4Italy, [For an Italian FOIA](#)

⁶⁴ FOIA4Italy, [For a government of public power, in public](#)

In prognostic terms, the PD's narrative was well-aligned with the frames elaborated by CSOs. The bill was indeed included in the broader reform of the PA sponsored by Minister Madia, becoming part of a legislative framework aimed at simplifying the functioning of the Italian administrative machine. The reform represented a wide-ranging project of institutional transformation based on the rhetoric of digital innovation and open government that had been at the core of the government's narratives. In addition, the innovation frame leveraged the cooperation with civic actors, advertised as an alleged profound reorganization of the institutional system against the "politics as usual." The law should have been a first attempt to set in motion a progressive opening of the political system to citizens' interests and participation. The motivational frame thus *extended* beyond its original anticorruption scope (Benford & Snow, 2000a), being depicted as the first piece of the broader innovation project.

Overall, the bill encountered mild opposition. The 5 Stars Movement (5SM) partly endorsed FOIA4Italy's critique of the first governmental draft and presented some of its amendments (e.g., asking for access to information free of charge for citizens, introducing a duty for the PAs to motivate denied access). The center-right coalition expressed similar mild opposition to the law. Forza Italia (FI) stressed that granting every citizen the right to ask public administrations for any information would have generated a sort of institutional stalking, with individuals submerging the administrations of useless requests. Nevertheless, opposition parties tended to sustain the relevance of transparency and disclosure, even if stressing the negative burden this would have represented for the smallest administrations and the bureaucratic machine.

Given the relatively low level of politicization that characterized the proposal, integrating the CSOs' and party's frames did not represent a significant issue. Most parties endorsed the bill proposed by FOIA4Italy and aligned with the coalition's discourses. Civic and party players diagnostically converged on a narrative of systemic power imbalances in the relationship between the citizenry and the state. In prognostic terms, the frames of horizontal integration within the civil society sector and civism elaborated by CSOs and the PD were well-integrated into a consonant innovation frame (Croteau & Hicks, 2003). However, the first draft of the reform left some of the civil society's requests unanswered. CSOs' pressure on the government through mobilizing strategies such as tweet bombings and ANAC's endorsement forced the Parliament to accept some of the amendments requested by FOIA4Italy.

5.2.3. Policy Passage

The new geometry of FOIA4Italy spurred profound modifications even in the coalition's repertoires of action, mirroring its scattered composition. FOIA4Italy was indeed characterized by low levels of *homophily*, meaning that the actors differ according to several attributes (goals, audiences, repertoires) and *ideological proximity* since its members alternatively identified themselves as transparency, anticorruption, or development actors.

However, the coalition successfully exploited its heterogeneity (Walker & Stepick, 2014). The *complementary* of FOIA4Italy's members was, in fact, fundamental to crafting *interlocking transactional ties* (Mazák & Diviák, 2018), distributing tasks based on actors' resources and expertise. Moreover, accessing new resources and repertoires via coalition partners compensated for the risks and costs associated with the coalitional strategy (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000) and eased interactions with institutional representatives and the general audience:

"There was the association for the Open Government of the lawyer X, Riparte il Futuro, who put much know-how from the point of view of digital communication and of campaigning, then Guido Y who worked hard to bring around Italy the idea and met with MPs to understand who the spokesperson for this law could then be." IT- 10

"... we had to do work a lot on supervising contents because the legislator himself was new to the topic (...) we did a lot of simplification (...) that is precisely also our strongest skill, so we did a lot of simplification work for people. Some were involved in institutional lobbying within the coalition, and others were responsible for explaining this to people: we did this latter part." IT- 8

In particular, a few campaigners and experts emerged as central figures within each organization. As recalled by DS's spokesperson:

"Let's say that, if we have a FOIA today in Italy, it is due to the work of these people that I have mentioned to you, Ernesto X, Guido X, Federico X, back then in Riparte Il Futuro, for the whole communication work, then the contribution of Rosy X, the contribution of Beatrice X from Action Aid. These 5-6 people are the ones who pushed the hardest at that stage", IT-10

To avoid the risks of dissipating those resources and energies among various members, FOIA4Italy opted for a centralized structure. During the interviews, actors such as DS, RIF/TGL, and TI-It stood out for their central role, mentioned by all the interviewees as crucial players.

RIF/TGL was one of the more central players in the campaign. Founded in 2014 as a campaign sponsored by Libera and Gruppo Abele⁶⁵, RIF/TGL met widespread public support thanks to the strength of the territorial constituencies on which these two organizations, which it retained even when leaving Libera to become an independent anticorruption NGO. The professionalization and

⁶⁵ The original name of the campaign was *Senza la Corruzione Riparte il Futuro*. The specificity of Riparte il Futuro and its strategies of data production, usage and transformation⁶⁵ have been brilliantly investigated by Mattoni (2018).

digital repertoires represented the second strength RIF/TGL provided to the coalition (Mattoni, 2018), producing simplified contents for the general public and launching a petition that reached around 80.000 signatures. This strategy was undoubtedly a distinctive trait of RIF/TGL, as reported by several interviewees, and strengthened the advocacy work vis-à-vis the political elites. The combination of mobilization repertoires used by RIF/TGL, and the institutional lobbying carried out by other organizations, such as DS, was crucial for the result of the campaign.

However, the coalition's members faced new dilemmas in their attempts to interact with political parties and the government. As reconstructed by RIF/TGL, MPs from the *Intergruppo Parlamentare Innovazione* embraced the proposals, serving as an internal source of pressure on the government. FOIA4Italy thus started to work with the major party (PD) within the coalition government. A first draft of the bill⁶⁶ was presented to the Senate in March 2015, capitalizing on FOIA4Italy's 10 points. Hence, ties of vertical integration with political elites emerged quite easily. At this stage, CSOs' influence over decision-makers was channeled by a *contagion mechanism*. Having crafted direct ties with CSOs, the governing party and the MP sponsoring the bill used information furnished by FOIA4Italy and their text to shape the Italian law on the right to access public information.

Direct ties with governing elites were easily created thanks to the openness of the POS and the salience of the anticorruption discourse for political representatives. At the same time, over the years, a new generation of younger political leaders with a reform-minded attitude emerged, particularly concerned with the involvement of CSOs in democratic processes. For instance, the spokesperson of Monithon, an independent monitoring project building on data of the European Cohesion funds, remembers that:

“There were two schools of thought, one that fundamentally forced the mechanism of engagement and participation, that it became part of a strategy. You say, "Then I'll make this data available." After 2010, almost all the institutions that released data had this problem. So yes, ok, free the data, but who reuses them? (and another) saying, ‘We have to make participation strategies. We have to engage; we have to involve the citizens’. IT-2’

In both cases and regardless of the motivations moving political representatives, the cooperation with institutional elites over transparency was relatively smooth. However, notwithstanding the high degree of vertical integration established with MPs within the majority party, the legislative process suffered several setbacks. A first amendment to the public administration reform introduced the principle of access to information. However, the bill appeared unsatisfactory to the coalition. FOIA4Italy thus continued to pressure the government, offering the Chamber of Deputies pieces of

⁶⁶ Proposta di legge n. 1814, presentata il 12 marzo 2015, Senato della Repubblica

advice from several international experts on the topic of transparency, meeting members of the government and the majority party, and receiving Minister Madia's public endorsement. Despite all the efforts, the first text approved in January 2016 was still considered insufficient.

Given the risk of losing control over the bill's content and passage, the coalition faced the *direct vs. indirect dilemma* and sought new ways to push for the bill's approval through confrontation. On the one hand, the coalition put additional pressure on the government by obtaining the support of institutional brokers. As a result, relevant institutional actors such as the National Anticorruption Authority (ANAC) and the State Council endorsed the coalition's criticisms, offering additional legitimation to the platform's demands. On the other hand, some of the more central CSOs in the campaign did not refrain from deploying more disruptive tactics when needed. For example, RIF/TGL called its supporters for a tweet bombing during a live Q&A with PM Matteo Renzi, obtaining the promise of revising the bill to improve its most critical contents. As a result, the *Commissione Affari Costituzionali* summoned the coalition to discuss possible amendments to the bill, and Minister Madia invited the FOIA4Italy to present the 80.000 signatures collected through the online petition. Shortly after, the law was finally approved, embracing some of the coalition's amendments.

The sustained interaction with MPs and the intersection of different repertoires, such as institutional lobbying, the use of petitions, the production of media content, and mobilization strategies, such as tweet bombing initiatives, were thus fundamental to the approval of an Italian FOIA in May 2016. Differently from the FOIA.it initiative, FOIA4Italy presented a bill drafted from below, finding institutional allies that contributed to bringing that piece of legislation into parliamentary debates and that served as an additional source of internal lobbying. The endorsement of members of the majority party and relevant figures in the government further attracted the media attention to the debate on access to information, in turn contributing to increasing the salience of the issue in the eyes of public opinion (Burstein, 1999). During moments of tension and setback, the interaction with institutional actors and brokers proved essential. The mobilization of public opinion support was crucial to exert a simultaneous influence from *within* and *outside* the political realm, adapting repertoires to the particular political context (Amenta et al., 1999). However, all these efforts led to a suboptimal law.

As affirmed by TI-It's former executive director:

"If we want to be intellectually honest, this has not led to the FOIA in Italy, according to international standards, but these things never happen in an ideal world. It led to an improvement of the legal framework for accessing information (...) only part of the ten requests were accepted, and then obviously we found ourselves, with what we found ourselves with ...", IT- 3

5.2.4. Policy Implementation

Despite its relevance in passing the law, the high heterogeneity of FOIA4Italy's members proved to be a double-edged sword over subsequent stages of the policy process. Once the law passed, CSOs who animated the campaign made different decisions on whether to stay or disengage from the policy arena. Specifically, central coalition members from the media arena, who saw the right to know as a valuable tool to enhance their investigative work, decided to demobilize once the law came into force. On the contrary, pro-accountability and anti-corruption groups considered the law's obtainment as a point outcome from which to keep influencing the transparency field.

Hence, FOIA4Italy crumbled right after the law's passage. Only a tiny group of CSOs kept cooperating to put together a second report on state-of-the-art of transparency one year after the law's introduction. DS, the initiator of FOIA4Italy, became progressively less relevant. As recalled by its spokesperson, some of DS' founders believed the organization had accomplished its mission with its legal claim attainment (Almén & Burell, 2018).

However, obtaining policy change is seldom enough to secure social change, particularly when laws represent a compromise among diverse players. Aware of the necessity to ameliorate the law and increase public information visibility and usability (C. Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010), those who kept mobilizing on transparency saw their resources shrinking due to a decreasing international interest in the right to know.

“(The former president) leaves; he never intended to launch an NGO dealing with the right of access in Italy. The remaining board believes in the continuity of FOIA4Italy and the right to know despite a total lack of funding. Funding from international foundations on these issues goes a bit in waves and fads; it ends, normally within 3-4 years of the fad, and there is no more talk about the right to access, to the point that incumbent donors begin to rethink their investment choices.” IT-10

The partial dissatisfaction with the law and the profound reorganization of the civic block forced CSOs interested in influencing the subsequent phases of the policy process to rethink their strategies. Indeed, the law's shortcomings opened new opportunities for obtaining progressive and cumulative refinements at the implementation stage.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, moving from policymaking to the policy-implementation arena brings significant change and relational reshuffles, with CSOs generally becoming less influential (Amenta et al., 2018; Andrews, 2001). The shrinking of the opportunities for influence is usually explained by referring to the weakening of some of the factors traditionally associated with successful mobilizations, such as the use of violent repertoires (Piven & Cloward, 1979), the openness of the POS (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi et al., 1995), or the use of particular framing strategies (Benford &

Snow, 2000a). Moving from elected representatives to bureaucratic and administrative targets changes capitulation costs (Luders, 2010) and the dilemmas CSOs face (Jasper et al., 2022).

However, the implementation stage is critical to translate formal gains into substantial social and political change, even more in the transparency case. Transparency, per se, is not consequential for social change. As broadly discussed, to be transparent does not mean to be seen (C. Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). Quite the contrary, transparency risks feeding resignation rather than furthering accountability (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014). To avoid low accountability traps and to transform information disclosure into accountability (Fox, 2007), transparency must ensure publicity and usability (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). In the Italian case, CSOs that kept mobilizing on transparency thus strived to obtain procedural refinements to ensure the usability of public information. While some of these actors have directly continued with marginal, sometimes local, and often sectorial types of advocacies, indirectly, they have also worked to partly substitute, or at least sustain, institutional initiatives in the field of transparency.

Hence once the law passed, CSOs tried their best to exploit the new opportunities offered by the FOIA. In particular, CSOs started to develop technological instruments apt to anticorruption tasks, easing access to information. Although these initiatives were mainly intended as forms of *direct social action* to compensate for the lack of institutional tools (Bosi & Zamponi, 2020), their (partly) unintended consequences were to set in motion processes of institutional imitation (Hilson, 2002; McCammon & McGrath, 2015). Public authorities recreated civic technologies to supply citizens with public information, cooperating with CSOs. For example, this happened with *Confiscati Bene*, a project led by the anti-mafia movement Libera, with the technical support of OnData. Gathering, organizing, and publicizing data on the mafia's confiscated assets, these actors created a unique repository that served a three-fold purpose: increasing the accessibility of data, unveiling the poor state of governmental transparency on confiscated assets, and serving as a model for reform-minded PAs. According to OnData:

"Among the goals we managed to reach, there is one that- in quotation marks- cannot be found anywhere. The national agency of confiscated assets, thanks to Confiscati Bene, has transformed its website after several years and has made the information more, let's say, available in a slightly more modern way (...) This thing was also a direct effect, as I can tell you ... not from a pressure campaign, but they said, "we must take this step as well." I tell you; you can't find it written anywhere, but we talked to the national agency, and one of the representatives told us, "We did this after seeing how your project was going and how it was working." IT- 7

Small *procedural gains* at the administrative level have thus come from building direct ties of cooperation with civil servants. In some cases, these ties have served to ease the spread of these bottom-up technologies over the country. As maintained by OnData's spokesperson, their platform

for FOIA requests has been vastly reproduced and officially adopted by PAs nationwide. These results represent “unintended” consequences of the activism on transparency and open data:

“They are municipalities that have adopted our methodology with a resolution, with an official measure. Among other things, I challenge to see how many others have achieved such a result that quickly. We don't look for them, eh? We don't advertise it; they (i.e., the PAs) are coming for us.” IT-7

At the implementation stage, information and resources thus played a focal role, with CSOs serving as *models* and *sources of information* for institutional actors. In this way, technological and procedural standards produced by civic actors have spread through direct contacts thanks to a *prominence* mechanism: institutional actors have reached out to reproduce these tools when civic initiatives have become visible and legitimate in the transparency field.

However, these processes have rarely been reproduced nationally, sometimes generating new fragmentations in the civic block. Tensions have emerged between tech and non-tech actors. Their different approaches and organizational structures have indeed hampered the development of alternative platforms and projects to facilitate access to information. According to the President of Hermes Center for Digital and Human Rights (HC):

“I do realize that the anticorruption activist, the anticorruption NGO, often does not understand it. They consider it (i.e., technology) more a nice to have, a desired technological component. I think I'm pretty pragmatic, and there must not be "technology"; it must be useful (...). They do not perceive how strongly enabling it is. And then, when we are told in articles, in conferences, "The FOIA in Italy does not work." Well, of course, because the average citizen makes a request, must fill in a form, put name and surname, digitize a document, put a signature on the pdf, send a pec...what is less enabling than that?” IT-4

Civic actors' different degrees of technical sophistication have often produced internal tensions. As OnData's co-founders recalled, non-tech actors tend to underestimate issues related to the sustainability of technological projects, which may constrain the impact and replicability of successful models:

“We have effectively donated our platform to Libera, even if we still own it, but we have made it available to the project; we have asked for funding from the Tim Foundation, which has given us about 100 thousand euros, with biblical times but oh well. The project ended last year, and the funding has been since last year, 2018; we have been donating our time for free to Libera for a year, which wants to make changes to the project. They have not sought new funds (...) But how is this project supported?” IT-2

Despite various attempts to strengthen the process's digitalization, the results remain partly unsatisfactory. More precisely, the integration of tech actors and the creation of digital platforms and procedures to access public information served to create ties of cooperation with the PAs, indirectly obtaining refinements of the procedural aspects of the legislation. However, this was less successful on the citizenry's side. The FOIA is still little known and exploited by the citizenry. According to various reports, citizens file few FOIA requests. As recalled by the president of DS:

“The FOIA is a muscle for democracy, and like all muscles, it is healthy and works if you keep it trained; if it's not used, it doesn't work; it's not a useful tool. So, from this point of view, it's not a matter of making tons of requests, but it's a matter of making it a normal and not an extraordinary tool.” IT-10

In some cases, the FOIA has also helped forge new ties between CSOs or strengthen existing ones. For example, anticorruption actors such as TI-It have created a service called FOIA4Journalists, dedicated to assisting journalists in asking for information or doing it on their behalf. The service is particularly relevant because it helps protect the identity of journalists working on sensitive themes, preventing them from running into personal risks or blowing up their investigative work. In this way, CSOs as TI-It have become *brokers* in the transparency field, serving as gatekeepers between public information and other civic subjects. As explained by one of the members of the investigative media IRPI:

“It is important because they guide you in drafting the FOIA and make you understand whom to address it to, therefore to one or another administration, to this or that other office, also in writing it (...) For me, on the other hand, it was important because in this way I had a gatekeeper in front of me. Therefore, a person who could act as front of the request, and this is a fundamental thing, the privacy of the journalist.”, It, IRPI

Overall, over the implementation process, the tech component and the work of CSOs have also indirectly influenced the meaning of FOIA for other civic subjects. CSOs have thus served as *mediators* of transparency, connecting the PAs and other civic groups and obtaining indirect refinements for implementing the FOIA in Italy.

5.2.5. Policy Enforcement and Evaluation

As far as policy enforcement is concerned, the civil society sector has exerted minimal influence. Whereas, according to the law, formal sanctioning powers rest in the hands of the National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC), the authority has scarcely used them. The PAs rarely furnish motivations for information denials or blame it on other actors such as the Privacy Authority. In such a context, CSOs have tried intervening at the enforcement stage, deploying indirect and direct tactics, triggering formal sanctions, and administering informal ones.

Indirectly, pro-transparency CSOs have sometimes opted for *legal strategies* to try and influence law enforcement (Hilson, 2002; McCammon & McGrath, 2015). The idea here is to give legal support to those citizens and organizations to which the PAs have denied access, to socialize the judicial and administrative systems to the tool and its related sanctions. According to DS' president, this is of great strategic relevance because institutional actors tend to reject requests believing that CSOs will unlikely have the resources to resort to courts to have their rights recognized:

“You make the request, they deny it, but if you don't have a lawyer who takes the request to the TAR and possibly to the Council of State, you don't produce any decision. So, you don't produce jurisprudence,

and the counterparty says, "Oh well, I'll deny you access; any way you will never, never appeal to the TAR, you will never appeal to the Council of State because you don't have the tools, or you don't have the resources." Therefore, even an element of strategic litigation works to the extent the law." IT-10

Hence, CSOs that follow *cooperative* and *conflictual* relational strategies, meaning that they do not depend on public authorities' resources, have sometimes tried to exploit legal strategies to reaffirm citizens' right to know.

Even actors following a *competitive* relational strategy, thus competing with elites over the opening and use of public information, such as investigative journalists and media, have often opted for legal means. Besides their investigative work, media players have often used their voices to denounce the silences and non-cooperation of institutional actors, contributing informally to law enforcement. As affirmed by a journalist from the independent media outlet IRPI:

"The moment you (i.e., the PA) give me a negative answer, for me, a journalist, that is already the news. Because, in any case, it means you are not giving me a piece of data. Therefore, I am free to write that I made the request, and you are not leaving me that give a piece of data; therefore, a little more openness would be needed but precisely for them, for their reputation, right?" IT-5

However, in both cases, most CSOs tend to be quite pessimistic when evaluating the law's impact after all these years. Most criticisms relate to the usability of the right-to-know. For example, the institutions' lack of publicization of the FOIA and difficulty retrieving and using public information significantly constrained the law's transformative potential. Yet, at the same time, CSOs agree on the beneficial impact of the reform on their work and struggles. For example, the law's introduction has significantly improved the civic sector's monitoring potential, strengthening the answerability of public powers (Fox, 2007; Schedler, 1999). Instead, their sanctioning potential remained quite limited.

However, as stated by DS' president, procedural gains at the administrative level risk having a limited impact when citizens do not exploit these tools. To win is thus a matter of winning in public opinion's eyes.

"Yes, we win in courts, but if you don't win, let's say, in the public opinion's court and, even earlier, in making corruption inadmissible or unacceptable, these tools will have important but limited consequences." IT-10

Whereas the law has undoubtedly enhanced the answerability of the Italian political system on paper (Fox, 2007), actual improvements in the sanctioning capacities of civic actors are still limited (Bovens, 2007; Schedler, 1999). As stated by the spokesperson of RIF/TGL, the FOIA legislation represented a relevant obtainment at the policy level; it was of great strategic importance to fuel public opinion support but has probably had marginal accountability consequences:

“FOIA has brought Italy from 90th to 40th in a ranking made by people caught in packets of chips. That is, we must also understand who does what. You know that there are statistics of any kind; we must also evaluate the seriousness of those who do things; however, obviously, everything is useful, so we, as activists, tell you, "Ah, Italy is now in the 40th position." IT- 8

At the same time, the FOIA introduction brought other essential gains, particularly at a relational level, favoring the emergence of ecosystems of transparency. Indeed, the possibility of asking for and obtaining public information has significantly enlarged the boundaries of the civic actors performing anticorruption functions. Whereas most CSOs involved in the FOIA4Italy coalition and now using the FOIA do not necessarily identify as anticorruption actors, their work raises red flags and awareness around corrupt deals. From investigative journalists to civic groups, the use of transparency tools is widening the boundaries of the anticorruption and pro-accountability anticorruption network, letting emerge its transactional nature (Mazák & Diviák, 2018; Petrova & Tarrow, 2007b). As recalled by RIF/TGL’s spokesperson:

"Like CittadinanzAttiva, Cittadini Reattivi, they do not make anticorruption in the strict sense, but by using the means that are available to citizens, the tools that the administrative transparency made available to citizens, they exercise their democratic rights and, indeed, intercept an unhealthy use of public funds, " IT- 8

At this very moment, the central actors that have animated the FOIA4Italy campaign are also reconnecting to envisage new forms of mobilization that could lead to additional legislative improvements amidst a new window of political opportunities. Ta.5.1. summarizes the main dilemmas and positional strategies that emerged throughout the pro-transparency mobilization.

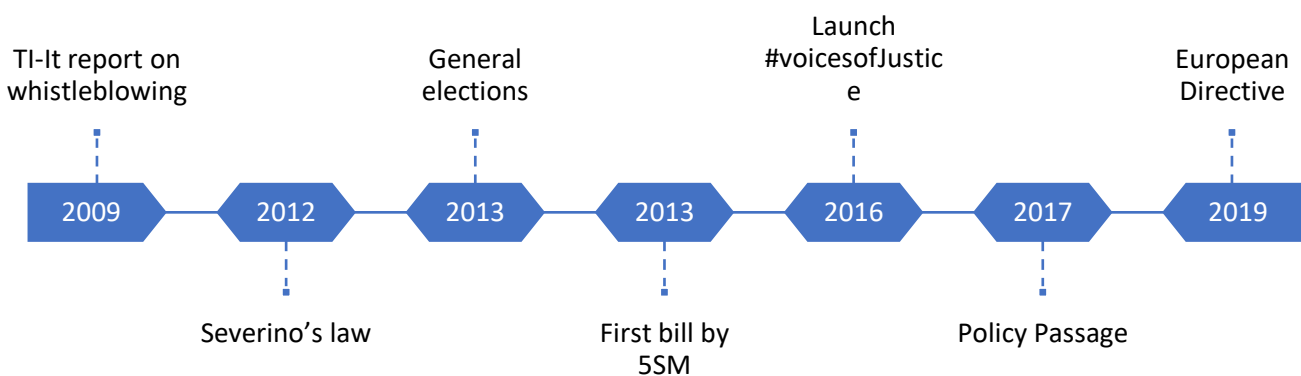
Tab.5.1. Actors, dilemmas, strategies, and mechanisms in the Italian transparency campaign

| Phase | Actor | Dilemma | Positional Strategy | Relational Strategy | Relational Mechanism |
|--|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Agenda-setting</i> | DS FOIA4Italy | Engagement Extension Availability | Coalition Direct Contact | Cooperative | Contagion |
| <i>Policy Contents</i> | FOIA4Italy | Policy innovation | Direct Contact | Cooperative | Contagion |
| <i>Policy Passage</i> | FOIA4Italy | Direct vs. Indirect | Direct Contact Brokerage | Cooperative | Contagion |
| <i>Policy Implementation</i> | Pro-transparency CSOs | Engagement vs Disengagement | Direct Contact Brokerage | Cooperative & Conflictual | Prominence Closure |
| <i>Policy Enforcement & Evaluation</i> | Pro-transparency CSOs | Direct vs. Indirect Engagement | Brokers Coalition | Cooperative & Conflictual | Brokerage |

5.3. Whistleblowing in Italy

In 2017, the Italian Parliament passed the Whistleblowers' protection act (l. 179/2017). Once again, the law's passage was welcomed enthusiastically by CSOs and presented as a success of grassroots anticorruption actors, particularly by TI-It, RIF/TGL, and Libera. However, this policy result pertained to a multiplicity of players beyond CSOs, such as governing forces (PD), opposing parties (5SM), and other institutional and regulatory agencies (ANAC). Fig.5.2. lists the main steps of the whistleblowing campaign.

Fig. 5.2. Timeline of the Italian whistleblowing campaign



5.3.1. Agenda-setting

Unlike in other countries⁶⁷, the Italian debate around whistleblowing entangles with the anticorruption one. The juxtaposition between whistleblowing and anticorruption is a relevant hint of CSOs' influence over the whistleblowing field. The link between whistleblowing and anticorruption dates to 2009, when TI-It started mobilizing on the issue in a context of general indifference:

"In Italy, we pushed a lot on anticorruption because it is not that we were the first subject of civil society that dealt with it in 2009. We were the very first subject ever. That is, even at the institutional level, nobody knew anything about it!" IT-12

TI-It initiated working specifically on whistleblowing after hiring a young Italian expert with previous experience abroad:

"I did my thesis on it, and then I went to work in the UK in this charity, which is responsible for adopting the whistleblowing law in the UK (...) I did a year there, and when I came back, I said, 'I would like to do the same thing in Italy.' The fact is that the same year Transparency had a project on whistleblowing,

⁶⁷ In other contexts, such as the US, whistleblowers play and have played a major role in a variety of contexts and themes such as anti-nuclear mobilizations (Bernstein & Jasper, 1996; De Maria, 2008; Jasper, 1997).

and they contacted me (...) Initially, I was doing a little bit of regulatory research in general; however, the activities increased, and we got to push for legislation” IT-12

The lack of alternative institutional and extra-institutional competitors granted TI-It a central position in the whistleblowing field but represented a severe limitation in popularizing the issue. Moreover, back then, TI-It lacked the necessary organizational resources to launch a full-fledged campaign on whistleblowers’ rights, relegating whistleblowing to academic discussions among experts. The goal was to create an arena for whistleblowing, but the lack of available partners prevented selecting a coalitional strategy or directly contacting institutional representatives.

Things started to change slowly in just a few years, with the end of the fourth Berlusconi government in 2011 and the birth of a new technocratic government led by Mr. Monti (2011-2013). While Italy was on the brink of a financial and political crisis, the new cabinet committed to a wide range of structural reforms, making essential steps in the anticorruption sector to restore markers’ trust and to counter populist actors (Di Mascio et al., 2020).

At this point, TI-It had to decide *how to engage* in the policy arena. However, its limited resources and lack of alternative allies forced the organization to try to enter the policy arena through the less costly positional strategy, directly contacting institutional actors (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000). Thus, trying to make the best out of the existing opportunities, TI-It exploited the limited opening of Monti’s cabinet to introduce the topic of whistleblowing in the political debate. Monti’s government supported TI-It very mildly, introducing an embryonal form of protection for whistleblowers in the broader anticorruption reform known as Severino’s law. Whereas these protections were far from sufficient, at this stage, TI-It succeeded in tying the whistleblowing debate with its anticorruption struggle:

“We knew them; we met Severino, we managed to bring her there, (...) in short ... that's why whistleblowing in Italy is a matter of anticorruption " IT-12

After that, the advocacy work resumed in 2013, when the Five Stars Movement’s (5SM) electoral success at the general elections transformed the political landscape and opened new opportunities for positional changes. With the PD in government and the 5SM in opposition, TI-It saw broadening its strategic options.

At this point, direct contact with this MP was crucial to include whistleblowing in the policy arena, thanks to a mechanism of *prominence*. Recognized as a legitimate player, TI-It was contacted by a newly elected deputy from the 5SM to translate the party anticorruption program into actual policy change.

“The 5 Stars arrived! And they, being a non-traditional party, but more than a non-traditional party, were made of people trained differently or not trained at all. They had done a particular thing when they were elected; they were common people, many were common people, and they said, 'You know what? I come from the world of associations; I'll start talking to some associations and ask them what they do' IT-12

TI-It's proposal on whistleblowers' protection fitted the 5SM's anticorruption rhetoric perfectly, and the inexperience and the relatively marginal position occupied by its MPs made the party a perfect ally for influencing the bills' contents. As recalled by the deputy, who later became the first signatory of the whistleblowing bill:

“The most important meeting of all, which certainly led me to sponsor the bill, was with Transparency in Milan (...) I became the rapporteur of the measure, and whistleblowing looked like a tax code, no, it wasn't a topic. (...) I remember that both my colleagues in the group made fun of me, but above all, those other political forces who did not understand (...) I said, "guys, I want to try; now I'm available; I'm here; let's try it.” But no, I did not know what whistleblowing was before I met Transparency.” IT-17

TI-It was aware of the strategic importance of such a relationship and its risks. Cooperating with the 5SM meant partly losing control over the bill's frame, which had to fit the party's populist tone. Hence, in a version of the *powerful ally* dilemma, TI-It agreed to write the bill for the 5SM, putting its technical expertise into the proposal. However, the increased issue's visibility came at the cost of partly losing control of the bill's frame and tone:

"She (i.e., MP) asks us to write it, then oh well, they rehash it a bit, they add things a bit more thrust to us as it represents a bit of the movement ... but the starting point, the structure is ours" IT-12

5SM's position as a minority party reduced the possibility of passing the bill. However, according to Italian laws, the parliament must consider and discuss a minimum number of law proposals from opposition parties. Because of the theme's strategic importance and thanks to the presence of an MP who acted as an embedded activist (Böhm, 2015), the 5SM bet on the whistleblowing proposal, which finally entered parliamentary debates.

5.3.2. Definition of the Policy Contents

Once a bill enters the parliamentary arena, its contents attract the interest of a vaster array of players. In the whistleblowing case, the governing party (PD), the opposition block (center-right coalition), and a series of regulatory agencies, such as the National Anticorruption Authority (ANAC), joined its discussion.

At this point, TI-It faced an *extension dilemma* and opted for a coalitional strategy to win the support of a broader set of institutional actors, joining its forces with Riparte il Futuro (now The Good Lobby, RIF/TGL), and with the support of Libera. Each of these actors brought its interests and goals in defining the policy contents, sometimes bridging or mediating between different frames to push forward their demands or developing counter-frames to oppose the bill.

Diagnostically, the civic block developed a narrative centered around the hostility of the Italian system framing the lack of whistleblowers' protection as a symptom of the *omerta* characterizing Italian culture and institutions in a context of endemic corruption. Such a systemic frame denounced the backwardness of the existing legal framework and the dramatic situation experienced by Italian whistleblowers. Hence, CSOs' diagnostic frame developed on three strictly intertwined levels: cultural, legislative, and individual.

The 5SM quickly seized the cultural frame through *frame amplification* (Benford & Snow, 2000a; McCammon et al., 2004). First, the bill resonated with M5S's broader populist rhetoric, particularly its *systemic understanding* of public corruption. As reported by TI-It's spokesperson, the 5SM operated a discursive juxtaposition between the proposal and the party's identity. Second, the civil society diagnostic frame widened to include populist elements. In motivational terms, the inadequacy of the existing legal framework and the other political forces' inattentiveness represented perfect examples of the very *raison d'être* of the 5SM existence. The whistleblowers' protection law was framed as an anticorruption tool and a way of democratizing the anticorruption struggle by empowering the civil society's role. This narrative aligned with CSOs' motivational frame, which stressed the pro-democratic role played by informants. Through *frame bridging* (Benford & Snow, 2000a), both the 5SM and the civil society sector came to link the practice of whistleblowing with processes of democratic enhancement. These actors shared a narrative of co-responsibility in line with the interpretation of public corruption as, firstly and foremost, a cultural phenomenon. Third, the inclusion frame was broadened by the 5SM, acquiring the characteristics of a horizontal struggle opposing the elites to the good people. The 5SM denounced the hostility of part of the political as an "anthropological impossibility" of accepting that workers, employers, and, more generally, the "good people" might have a chance of questioning and opposing powerholders.

However, at a prognostic level, the party operated an ideological compromise to pass the bill. Derogating to its Euroscepticism and anti-elitist discourses, 5SM's MPs often referred to the opinion of the European level or Confindustria, the largest private employers' confederation, to back up the bill. Finally, these elements blended with a neoliberal discourse that highlighted the positive role the bill might have had in attracting foreign investments and recovering public resources. These elements furnished a terrain of convergence with the PD's neoliberal argument.

The PD developed the most controversial narrative around the whistleblowing act. Differently from the FOIA campaign, where the framing proposed by the civil society sector was easily appropriated and bridged under the umbrella of the party's *innovation* narrative, the Whistleblowers' protection act was initially proposed and sponsored by the 5SM as part of a broader set of anticorruption

measures⁶⁸. Throughout the policy process, the PD had to balance its political culture based on protecting constitutional and civil liberties (so-called *garantismo*) with a bill associated with the sanctioning culture of the 5SM (*giustizialismo*). Diagnostically, both the PD and the 5SM stressed the dramatic situations suffered by whistleblowers at a personal level and the existence of an endemic culture of omerta. Still, the PD was less prone to blame the political system and reject the existing legislation⁶⁹. The center-right parties thus easily aligned with the PD frame, coupling it with three well-established pillars of their political area: support of free market and economic competition, defense of civil liberties, and a suspicious attitude towards the public administration and state-owned activities. The PD partly supported the argument of other liberal parties in the majority and underlined the economic and bureaucratic burden the whistleblowers' protection would have imposed on the Italian economy. The civic proposal to extend the protection to the whole private sector was thus strongly downsized. The PD worked to soften some of the law's aspects, to obtain its coalition partners' support.

Consequently, the party proposed an alternative draft (ddl. *Ferranti*), eliminating some elements of Businarolo's proposal. All in all, the amendments to the original Businarolo's proposal were justified using a *liberal-democratic* frame, referring to the necessity of combining the safety of workers and employers vis-à-vis the constitutional order and the existent legislative context. To gain the support of more centrist parties such as the PD, TI-It, and RIF/TGL, operated a process of *frame extension*, stressing the *utilitarian* dimension of whistleblowing to save public resources and attract foreign investments. Similarly, to oppose the center-right anti-democratic counter-frame, the PD intertwined its argument into a broader *prevention* frame, which had characterized debates around public corruption in Italy and behind for decades. The PD thus operated a *frame transformation* starting from the 5SM proposal (Benford & Snow, 2000a). In addition, it underlined the bill's cultural value, focusing on reporting rather than denouncing and *preventing* rather than sanctioning, a frame that resonated with ANAC's positions.

ANAC represented a crucial ally for CSOs, sharing their cultural frame at a diagnostic level and denouncing an administrative subculture prone to turn a blind eye to illicit behavior and protect the internal status quo. The cultural frame hence emerged as crosscutting the civil society and political realm. Motivationally, ANAC's frame built revolved around the preventive potential of

⁶⁸ The proposal was indeed considered as part of a broader set of anti-corruption measures including the introduction of a ban from public offices and the prohibition of negotiating with the public administration for corrupt officials, and of the so-called *agente provocatore*, measures that have been later introduced in the *Spazzacorrotti* reform.

⁶⁹ PD was actually supporting the government which passed Severino's law.

whistleblowing. The authority pushed for enhancing the anonymity guarantees for informants, stressing the need to derogate from the constitutional rights for uncovering corrupt deals. In prognostic terms, ANAC thus endorsed the quest of CSOs for safe reporting channels, a proposal meant to offer the authority a central role in the process.

All in all, the whistleblowing protection act was characterized by an intense political debate. The 5SM and the PD eventually supported the bill after a long confrontation between political identities and anticorruption conceptions. Frame disputes originated mainly at the diagnostic and prognostic levels. While the civil society sector and the 5SM blamed the existing legal framework for the insufficient protection granted to informants, the PD was more cautious in condemning a law it had contributed to passing. Hence, the final bill ruled out the creation of a solidarity fund for informants, reduced the anonymity guarantees, and introduced sanctions in case of false allegations.

Despite downsizing CSOs' requests, the phase of policy contents' definition strengthened the cooperative ties between CSOs and the 5SM and with ANAC. Both worked as important institutional allies sponsoring part of the civic demands. Finally, the parliamentary debate reactivated the cooperation with the PD, which had proven essential for approving the FOIA in 2016. The bill's final draft thus mirrored the joint influence exerted by these actors and the internal process of alignment and mediation between and within the civil society and institutional actors.

5.3.3. Policy Passage

Once the bill entered the parliamentary arena, TI-It understood it was time to change its strategy to pressure MPs and force them to discuss and approve the bill. Hence, the organization decided to broaden the arena of contention by looking for civic allies. As recalled by the spokesperson for the whistleblowing sector of TI-It:

“We were close to the end of the mandate, so since things are very long in Parliament since it was a minority proposal since a certain part of the majority said "Ah, nice, nice idea, let's see," and in reality, then he hadn't done anything to try to carry it forward, so it was complicated! That's where the idea was born; we already knew this association, Riparte il Futuro, which has now merged into The Good Lobby. They are really campaigners! It is their job! They do that! They sell things, lobby a lot, and know many politicians, especially from the PD! So, they helped us with this thing, and we decided to do this project together to make a bit of a megaphone, put a little more pressure.”, IT-12

Hence, at this point, TI-It opted for a coalitional strategy mainly based on exchanging valuable resources. Here, the *extension dilemma*, i.e., whether to extend the arena by letting in new civic players at the risk of losing primacy over the topic, was solved quite easily. Knowing already RIF/TGL, TI-It was not concerned about the possibility of losing control over the campaign but rather valued the essential advocacy expertise that this civic player could have brought to the policy

struggle. Indeed, RIF/TGL introduced new repertoires in the campaign, combining mobilizing strategies and institutional lobbying, capitalizing on the TI-It's legislative work, and endorsing the 5SM's text.

RIF/TGL, which started as the first anticorruption campaign launched by Libera, had become an independent organization with a strong focus on political advocacy and a specific interest in whistleblowing. It joined the mobilization at a later stage, exploiting the increased national attention on whistleblowing to seize an international momentum:

"Whistleblowing increased in importance and visibility in the public discourse also thanks to some people, whistleblowers who had become world-famous, Manning, Snowden, Deltour, more recently Wiley, etc ... and so, let's say, at an international level there was a momentum, when there is a media momentum there is also at an institutional level, therefore: opinions of the Council of Europe, opinions of the UN, a series of things and we were like 'ok, let's take all this material together, let's go to Italy and see what there is.'" IT-8

In this case, some of the organization's members had previous international experience working on whistleblowing and felt ideologically close to the struggle of projects such as Wikileaks. Hence, wanting to enter the whistleblowing collective action field, RIF/TGL decided to join TI-It's ongoing efforts to mitigate the costs of the *engagement dilemma*, counting on the organization's expertise and legitimacy on the topic:

"So, we got this proposal and got together with Transparency International because coalition always pays off, especially in this thing where Transparency is an excellent interlocutor, both Italian and international, on the issue of whistleblowing that it has been covering for a long time." IT-8

At first, RIF/TGL focused on lobbying MPs within the majority, particularly those from the PD, with whom they had already cooperated on the FOIA campaign. More importantly, RIF/TGL significantly supplemented TI-It's work by exploiting its major strength: its advocacy-oriented repertoires, mainly through digital mobilizations (Mattoni, 2018). Furthermore, RIF/TGL sought to increase the salience of whistleblowing by launching a petition and using the media to popularize the proposal in public opinion eyes. However, months went by without arriving at the final approval. Since the end of the mandate was getting closer, CSOs did not want to lose the opportunity of approving the bill in such a promising context and looked for new ways to accelerate the process. On the one hand, the campaign tried to create new spaces of influence working on the media front, knowing that:

"When there is a media momentum, there is also at an institutional level." IT-8

This grassroots-oriented approach sometimes opposed TI-It's institutional logic but was crucial for the campaign's success. As recalled by other supporters of the campaign, the advocacy-oriented

nature of RIF/TGL granted a central role to the organization. #Voicesofjustice thus relied on traditional mobilizing and lobbying repertoires, supplementing the work already done by TI-It:

"We have started with the collection of signatures, which is something that Transparency does not do but that we believe important, even if for, I tell you in a very trivial way, to end up in the newspaper. If I go to a journalist and tell him, "Oh, there are 10 thousand people who signed this thing in 24 hours", this is news! (...) In the meantime, we have done our job. So, you try to have stories of whistleblowers; you try to end up in the newspapers, write blog posts, hear stakeholders of any kind, ANAC, involve ANAC, and ask for an endorsement...that is, do your job of campaigning and advocacy, always in a coalition." IT-8

According to TI-It's former executive director, this combination was pretty new for the Italian collective action field:

"It started as an individual action of Transparency, but it was very important to see the aggregation of different subjects, of which, perhaps, the most famous one is RIF/TGL. It was a very innovative campaign for our country because we focused on institutional advocacy. So, we met parliamentarians and ministers ... we ensured that the law's approval continued in the so-called palaces; on the other hand, we also coordinated an innovative public communication activity using particular languages." IT-3

Even though TI-It and RIF/TGL were the campaign's initiators and central players, many Italian and international CSOs informally joined their coalitional efforts. Among others, Libera entered the debate. Libera was not officially part of the campaign but advocated for the bill's introduction and publicized it among its supporters and local strongholds. Compared to the FOIA4Italy coalition, the #VoicesofJustice campaign was thus composed of more homogenous actors. Despite the high homophily among its animators and their common anticorruption identity, these subjects were highly complementary in their preferred repertoires of action, political allies, and audiences. Altogether, these elements were vital to increase the impact of the horizontal integration of the civic sector. As in the FOIA case, the coalition was highly centralized, revolving around TI-It's and RIF/TGL's work. However, as recalled by the MP who sponsored the bill, the aggregation of several CSOs around the campaign was crucial to get the proposal further in the parliamentary discussions:

"Then other associations joined because Riparte il Futuro joined in the running. It was also with interest from this international association (i.e., *Blueprint for Free Speech*), and we managed to raise awareness of other politicians because it wasn't enough having me from the 5 Stars Movement." IT-17

At first, the interactions between TI-It and the MP sponsoring the bill were mainly motivated by exchanging resources and information. However, these ties grow deeper over time, becoming ties of trust and mutual recognition (Diani, 1997). Hence the *closure* mechanism helped the bill advance through the policy process (Burt, 2002). According to the MP sponsoring the bill, TI-It's support kept her going despite many institutional obstacles. For example, when recalling the PD's attempt at completely revising her proposal during the parliamentary debate, she affirms that:

“He (i.e., *the former executive director of TI-It*) was very far-sighted and told me: “Go anyway.” That is, I was just ready to leave everything. Instead, he was very, very important in this, their support, and he said “at least we can take something home” because really, there wasn’t anything, it didn't exist before. We have imposed a theme.” IT-17

However, TI-It and RIF/TGL understood that it was necessary to put additional pressure to ease the bill’s approval and started looking for institutional brokers. In particular, they sought the support of the National Anticorruption Authority, back then guided by Mr. Cantone, a very influential figure in the Italian political scene. The coincidence of a promising opportunity structure, the presence of institutional allies both in legislative and regulatory agencies and the integration of legislative and mobilizing strategies at the civil society level granted the Whistleblowers' protection act the chance of being calendarized and discussed. The 5SM’s MP openly acknowledges the relevance of all these factors:

“It was truly a miracle for me, so I say, “damn, you were lucky to find the right people and the right moment, with Cantone and ANAC, to catch the right times, to meet the right sensitivity,” that is (...) it was a difficult, demanding experience.” IT-17

At this point, the acceleration of the policy process had a pseudo-eventful character. The policy passage was probably the moment in which RIF/TGL and TI-It exerted the greatest influence over the process, intensifying their direct connections with the political representatives and guiding the revision process:

“All the political forces came up with their amendments, which must be studied and understood immediately, commented on, and activated immediately. That is the most exciting time because you have little time, then they discuss them, (..) Among other things, we have proposed amendments that PD and 5SM have endorsed.” IT-8

Thus, the CSOs included amendments to the law, working with MPs to write their interventions in parliamentary debates. This part of the work preceded the phase of policy passage, where the organizations were in charge of securing the support of a majority of MPs to pass the bill.

“You have to write even commas to politicians because, in law, you know that if you put a comma at the beginning of the end of a phrase, that is, it changes the whole meaning. So, let's write the laws, write the amendments, count them, convince them, do all the institutional lobbying work, which is what I'm in charge of, and then if there is ... if things don't move, I call the communications department which raises its voice.” IT-8

Finally, RIF/TGL and TI-It organized a public performance to speed up the policy passage, installing a glass cage containing an actor playing the part of a whistleblower in one of Rome’s more central squares. To attract even more public attention and show the initiative’s legitimacy, ANAC’s President joined the performance with various MPs. At the same time, CSOs were aware of the necessity of balancing cooperation and confrontation with political elites. According to RIF/TGL’s spokesperson, to strike a balance between the two was necessary to be influential:

“The collection of signatures is always there; you have to show that there is support, that it is not Priscilla whom he asks for this law, but it is Priscilla with 60,000 other people behind her. However, nothing moved. Sixteen months have passed in which this bill was not spun crazily by anyone, and we carried out a fairly large action at the Pantheon, which was covered in various ways by the media because we had thought it through well, and within eight weeks, we had a law!” IT-8

The campaign’s organizers recognize the strategic importance of combining institutional and extra-institutional means. In particular, RIF/TGL reported how this *cooperative* relational strategy, which builds on coordination and conflict with political elites when needed, represents a specificity of their way of relating to institutional actors to obtain relevant changes:

“So, let’s say, in that case, that is... our model is always the same; sometimes it is more implicit, others it is more explicit, depending on how much you need to raise your voice. Why? Because we have to guarantee the trust of the people, but also of the politicians, so it is not that we can invite people to do a mail bombing every week” IT- 8

The positive result of the campaign, in the organizations’ account, almost resembled a strategy of prefigurative politics, a desirable model for future interactions with state actors. Whereas cooperation and exchanges with the institutions were crucial, CSOs’ narrative stressed the pivotal role in securing the legislation (Di Puppo, 2014; Meyer, 2006). RIF/TGL was particularly influential over the second and third stages of the policy process. As TI-It, RIF/TGL was highly central, directly connecting with most actors that populated the policy process. Differently from TI-It, RIF/TGL seemed to enjoy also a higher betweenness centrality, a necessary node connecting the institutional world and public opinion. However, over the subsequent phases, its relevance seems to diminish in favor of other civil society actors. Indeed, moving into the implementation arena changed the structure and dynamics of the whole whistleblowing network.

5.3.4. Policy Implementation

The policy implementation phase is arguably one of the least studied when evaluating the influence of collective actors (Amenta et al., 2010). However, collective actors’ engagement and mobilization rarely cease with the policy adoption. Conversely, analyzing the implementation stage is critical to appreciate CSOs’ influence on social change processes (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). For example, in the whistleblowing case, CSOs sought to influence the implementation stage by i) shaping the law’s regulation and ii) intervening directly in the whistleblowing process by interacting with informants and public administrations (PAs).

At the regulatory level, TI-It and Libera tried to participate in ANAC’s effort to draft the whistleblowing applicative guidelines. At first, ANAC invited TI-It to participate in the process because, as stated by a former member of ANAC’s board:

“(The Authority) has taken the convention's provision very seriously and involved the civil society, particularly concerning whistleblowing instruments.” IT-14

The proactive attitude towards civil society's involvement was thus motivated as a necessary choice, bound to international regulations and a specific vision of the state-society relationships:

“Article 13 of the UN Convention discusses civil society participation in prevention work. And it says, "Each state party shall take appropriate measures to promote the active participation of individuals and groups, and civil society entities," so you see, it's not the civil society that has to go knocking on the door of the Republic, it's the public entity that has to promote involvement.” IT-14

However, at this point, ANAC had to select which civic player to cooperate with. The selection of TI-It over other civic players followed the *prominence* and *closure* mechanisms. On the one hand, TI-It was invited to participate due to its expertise and legitimacy in the whistleblowing field, built over years of intense work and campaigning. In addition, TI-It already had a long experience supporting whistleblowers through a dedicated service, *ALAC*. On the other hand, TI-It benefited from the presence of a critical institutional insider (Buchter, 2021). ANAC's deputy for the whistleblowing areas was a former member of TI-It's board and had worked with TI-It's whistleblowing team. Therefore, TI-It got invited to sit at the decision-making table. Building on *existing ties of mutual trust and recognition* (Diani, 1997), ANAC solved its *extension* dilemma and asked TI-It to define the regulatory guidelines for implementing the Whistleblowers' protection act. For its part, TI-It participated in the process but rapidly realized that it was part of a *false arena* devoid of decision-making powers.

Hence, the relationships between ANAC and TI-It took a tenser turn over drafting the whistleblowing guidelines. Whereas TI-It and ANAC shared the goal of whistleblowers' protection, they disagreed on practical aspects of its regulation. At this point, TI-It moved towards more critical positions without slipping into an open confrontation. Both ANAC and TI-It were indeed interested in maintaining their relationship of mutual recognition for the benefits it granted. Whereas TI-It's participation in drafting the guidelines was essential to extending its influence over the implementation phase, ANAC benefited from TI-It's opposition to collecting information to plan its future steps in the broader institutional context. As remembered by the former member of ANAC:

“Transparency has continually questioned us. This has forced us to question ourselves on issues that we may not have been able to accept and which, however, entered the cultural baggage of ANAC to work on future ministerial tables to fulfill the directive of the European Union.” IT-14

Unlike TI-It, Libera was not immediately invited to participate and needed to strategize its connections with a powerful ally such as ANAC to enter the regulatory arena. Being born out of the anti-mafia movement and historically associated with the fight against organized crime, Libera needed to impose itself as a relevant and credible anti-corruption actor exploiting its reputational

capital. Hence, Libera faced *internal competition*, typical in coalitional efforts, and tried to build direct connections with ANAC while differentiating itself from TI-It. For this reason, Libera *proactively* invited ANAC's members for consultations and managed to build a fruitful relationship of collaboration and mutual exchange of information. Libera supplied ANAC with relevant information and an alternative methodology based on the creation of monitoring communities. Libera's initiative served to craft a relationship that, according to a former member of ANAC's board, was:

“Very enriching for ANAC; I went to the audition with my assistant, we learned a lot about Libera's working method, and so much so that now I work with Libera. Therefore, it has been, I hope, of mutual support” IT-14

Hence, Libera made its way into the whistleblowing implementation arena by building *direct personal connections* with ANAC's members (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000), aiming to be recognized as:

“The civic counterpart of ANAC. We are the civil society equivalent of ANAC.” IT-1

Both TI-It and Libera maintained or created strong interlocking ties with ANAC based on the exchange of information between civil society and institutional actors. However, TI-It and Libera did not manage to influence the draft of whistleblowing guidelines, given that the political output structure was relatively closed (Kitschelt, 1986). ANAC's commitment to involving CSOs in drafting the whistleblowing guidelines was mainly informal and constrained by the consultation of other institutional actors⁷⁰. As a result, the influence of CSOs on the implementation was quite limited when considering the regulatory arena. However, the creation of direct ties between Libera and ANAC was beneficial over other arenas, as we will see when discussing civic monitoring initiatives. Conversely, the interactions between TI-It and ANAC over the implementation stage partly deteriorated what used to be a relationship of trust and cooperation.

The different logics of ties formation shed some light on the alternative relational strategies followed by TI-It and Libera. Libera followed a *cooperative* relational strategy (Johnson, 2016), sharing common values but different resource pools. Intending to become its “civic counterpart,” Libera sought to supplement ANAC's work while both players exchanged valuable resources in the form of information and legitimation.

On the contrary, TI-It opted for a *competitive* relational strategy (Johnson, 2016). Indeed, whereas ANAC represented a powerful ally while passing the whistleblowing bill, over the implementation

⁷⁰ The process of drafting and approving the guidelines was delayed and eventually hampered by internal disagreement occurring between ANAC and the State Council.

stage, these players disagreed on how the law had to be administratively regulated and showed different values and concerns related to informants' safety and reporting channels. At the same time, these actors compete over shared resources, mainly in the form of *legitimation* and *control over whistleblowing platforms*.

Indeed, besides the normative level, TI-It decided to *extend* its efforts to intervene directly in the whistleblowing process by broadening the scope of its ALAC initiative service for supporting whistleblowers. The extension dilemma led TI-It to change its connections, forging a new alliance with the tech actor Hermes Center for Digital and Human Rights (HC) (Di Salvo, 2020a). Together, TI-It and HC supplied ALAC with a dedicated encrypted digital platform for whistleblowing. Taking advantage of their know-how acquired over years of work on whistleblowing platforms, TI-It and HC used their digital resources to obtain procedural refinements of the law. Rather than a residual effort, the mobilization over the implementation phase was perceived as crucial to get an actual impact on the whistleblowing issue. As maintained by HC's president:

"A procedural aspect can make the regulatory implementation work or completely sabotage the law." IT-4

HC is the creator of *Globaleaks*, the first whistleblowing platform based on open-source encrypted software. Over the years, *Globaleaks* has become the official software adopted by several chapters of Transparency International, and HC has cooperated with several institutional actors worldwide, including ANAC. As a result, HC's software has become a necessary *broker*, allowing NGOs, private companies, and institutional actors to interact with whistleblowers. The CSOs working in the field of whistleblowers' protection thus became *de facto* necessary *mediators* in the whistleblowing process (Fubini & Lo Piccolo, 2021). According to its creators, this technological infrastructure played a crucial role, setting in motion processes of *diffusion* and *imitation* that improved the conditions for whistleblowers in Italy and elsewhere:

"ALAC by Transparency is something that, when it starts in a country because we did it in Chile, the Czech Republic, Portugal, France and so on ... within 6-12 months at the most, becomes the only anti-corruption whistleblowing system, it's like a listening center, it's a bit like saying the blue telephone for abused children." IT-4

The control of these technological resources has changed HC's structural positions and partly rebalanced the power asymmetry between institutions and CSOs. The quasi-monopoly over the technical component of whistleblowing digital platforms has allowed TI-It and HC to use a *brokerage* mechanism, filling a *structural hole* between informants and institutional and non-institutional actors. Connecting whistleblowers to the PAs, the media, and public opinion, TI-It, and

HC have improved the law's implementation at a procedural and obtained relevant extra-institutional results.

At a procedural level, for example, law 179/2017 allows for the use of whistleblowing platforms without providing guidelines for their architecture. With their platform, TI-It and HC have contributed to refining what the law had left unregulated. As affirmed by HC's president, starting from a concrete example:

"If I only put it on the intranet (*i.e.*, the whistleblowing platform) and the public contract has expired, how does the indirect employee of a company that has won a tender 600km away make a report? He cannot do it. I have no legal effect if I have not exposed it on the internet without any form of authentication."
" IT-4

To intervene in those aspects TI-It and HC exploited their control over digital infrastructures, threatening the PAs that used their services to interrupt their furniture. Indeed, due to internal disagreements with ANAC, HC, and TI-It have moved a step forward by elaborating a digital whistleblowing platform for the PAs. In 2015, ANAC asked HC to design a whistleblowing platform for all the Italian PAs. According to the Italian public procurement law, HC was hindered from the tendering procedure, being the platform designer. For this reason, it created a parallel joint-stock company, *Whistleblowing Solution*, later excluded from the tendering. This event originated a harsh contraposition that resulted in HC suing ANAC for violating intellectual and property rights; a querelle closed in 2020 with a financial transaction from ANAC to HC. This conflict led to a new strategy to influence the implementation process. TI-It and HC released *WhistleblowingPA*, a platform dedicated to the PAs in direct competition with the one officially released by ANAC. When PAs started using *WhistleblowingPA*, TI-It, and HC gained direct control over the law's technical implementation. As affirmed by TI-It's' spokesperson:

"Having this service, what do institutions do? They take it and maybe put it on the intranet. We do not see it published, and we say: "but listen, you know that you cannot keep it on the intranet because the law says that employees and collaborators of supplier companies must also be able to report." And they say: "no but I want to keep it on the intranet." "Okay, then I'll turn it off, and you buy it from a commercial supplier," and then they put it on the internet because they don't want to pay. " IT-12

Hence, through their platform and services, TI-It and HC started to build direct connections with PAs nationwide. Beyond the sheer power of digital platforms, the direct connections with civil servants using *WhistleblowingPA* enhanced the law implementation through a *contagion* mechanism. Through their platforms and their direct connections, TI-It and HC have indeed become a reference point in the law implementation, furnishing information and guidance to civil servants:

"We decided to do this project, and it worked because many institutions have it, they continue to use it (*i.e.*, the platform), and I'll tell you more, from a certain point of view, it worked almost too well. In the sense that we have become the reference for the PA also on the interpretation of the law, on a tide of things!

(...) So we are also going to work on education, instructing them on the use and legislation, in quotation marks, because no one else does it, and therefore this has become extra work, which, however, must be done because there is no alternative " IT-12

Something similar has happened outside the administrative arena through *ALAC*, the digital platform dedicated to potential whistleblowers. *ALAC* provides informants with a safe and encrypted platform through the technological infrastructure developed by HC. It also furnishes support to whistleblowers through a dedicated team of TI-It experts. Most of the time, this support also has a psychological dimension. Still, the organization aims to help whistleblowers understand their situation and present their information efficiently to the more suited target. In doing so, CSOs actors fill an existing gap; they occupy an *intermediary* position between the whistleblower and the institutional world (Fubini & Lo Piccolo, 2021).

"We explain to them all the options they have, the risks involved, all the possibilities they have; we help them understand their position a little because people often don't know. This is a bit of a limit that they have, but because no one has ever told them, they don't understand what it means to expose oneself" IT-12

Thus, supporting a single whistleblower becomes a way to improve the general system *mediating* between the informants and the sanctioning institutions, being them a regulatory agency, such as ANAC or the investigative media. The strategic importance of this intermediation process appears vital to regulatory agencies such as ANAC. Interestingly, TI's president and ANAC's former members use similar words to describe the procedural importance that this work might have. TI-It's president affirms that a significant part of their service means working with:

"People with 1000thousand attachments, 15thousand a4 sheets of stories...so we help to systematize, give a chronological order, select the most important attachments, that is, it is better to send three pages that are important to understand the case rather than 100 where even those three things get lost" IT-12

Similarly, when asked about the importance of the service offered by the civil society sector, the former member of ANAC affirmed:

"It is sufficient to say that if someone is well oriented by Libera or Transparency and sends 30 instead of 3000 pages, the office that carries out the investigation works on 30 pages, not 3000, so the state saves resources. An investigation of 3000 pages takes weeks, and the investigation of 30 pages takes a few days" IT-14

At the level of practices, CSOs thus seem to be included in the broader whistleblowing networks thanks to the services and resources they provide to the institutional actors. However, their roles remain clearly distinguished in the eyes of TI-It's spokespersons:

"Because, as I said, we assist whistleblowers. ANAC is an institution with hyper-bureaucratic and regulated procedures, and once it receives a report, it has a whole series of protocols of actions that it must do; it has less sensitivity towards the whistleblower, to be flexible based on what arrives ... and they do not perform a consultancy function. " IT-12

Similarly, Libera set up *Linea Libera*, a service dedicated to whistleblowers and victims of retaliation and racket, with a dedicated email inbox and helpline. However, the technological component of the service, less developed than ALAC or WhistleblowingPA, has limited Libera's chance to influence the implementation phase. Moreover, the high degree of vertical integration reached with ANAC and its cooperative strategy constrain Libera's options. Perceiving itself as the civic counterpart of ANAC, Libera hardly imagines different reporting channels or strategies besides cooperating with the authority. As specified by Linea Libera's manager:

"The activity of Libera is to collect reports; these are reports of subjects which have seen opaque or corrupt practices in their public workplace that do not concern them directly, but who want to report, because they are aware of it, to the anti-corruption authority which is ANAC" IT-22

Lacking control over the technical digital component of the whistleblowing process, Linea Libera strongly relies on *soft* competencies. As a result, Libera is not a structural mediator in the process but an *intermediary* that filters the interactions between whistleblowers and institutions. This function of intermediation is well-recognized by Libera's spokesperson:

"I always say to ANAC that their website on whistleblowing is so fallacious, and I say that our is between the button that says, "whistleblowing reports" and the button "report." In the middle, although on ANAC's website, there are two centimeters, in the middle, there is endless work that is just not looking at the institution, the whistleblowing, but looking at the person, the whistleblower" IT-1

As reported above, this service is highly valued by ANAC since it eases the authority's work. However, being mainly recognized as an anti-mafia actor by the public, the volume of whistleblowers supported by Libera is significantly lower than that of TI-It. As a result, Libera's influence over the implementation stage has been lower, lacking instruments to redress the power differentials with the institutional actors. The personal and informal connections with ANAC still furnish chances to voice disagreement, which, however, generate frustration when remaining unheard:

"I tell them that they can do a lot more. Sometimes I feel almost...oh well, forget it. But they are trying to improve, huh?" IT-1

On the contrary, TI-It and HC directly influenced the whistleblowing process, creating direct ties with the PAs and supplying them with their reporting platform. Indirectly, these organizations have become an essential reference for using their platforms and interpreting the legislation and have reached a position of intermediation, working as *brokers* that connect informants with institutional and extra-institutional actors (Burt, 2002; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000). According to TI-It and HC, their platforms are having a crucial impact on the whistleblowing regulation, forcing institutional actors to comply with civic standards and going beyond what the law initially foresaw:

"It enables (i.e., the *platform*) the interlocutor who uses the tool of whistleblowing as an activist activity; it leads indirectly, but certainly, because it is happening in all countries, in all the individual countries in which a national initiative starts, certainly leads to the adoption of efficient anti-corruption measures also by public administrations and this, in my opinion, is one of the coolest results." IT-4

"What pleases me, something of what I am very proud of is that we started it (i.e., the *platform*), and now it is mandatory for all institutions, it is mandatory; that is, ANAC has done it, and they practically do not consider it anymore the reports receive in other ways " IT-12

5.3.5. Policy Enforcement and Evaluation

Beyond the implementation stage, a law's effectiveness depends on its enforcement, which CSOs can significantly contribute to influence (McCammon & McGrath, 2015; McCann, 1991; Revillard, 2017). For example, in the whistleblowing case, the law approved in 2017 assigned ANAC sanctioning powers against non-compliant administrations (e.g., violations of informants' safety or lack of safe disclosure channels). However, the Authority has seldom deployed its sanctioning faculties, partly disagreeing with the sanctioning criteria⁷¹ the law foresaw. Specifically, ANAC has generally refrained from administering financial sanctions, partly subsidizing its sanctioning duties to civic actors. Indeed, at the enforcement stage, CSOs can represent strategic allies to complement the institutions' work, having access to a broader range of *informal sanctions*, for example, restoring to naming-and-shaming, but also through positive enforcement mechanisms:

"They can do something different and alternative that is to do positive actions starting from a case of whistleblowing and thus indirectly arrive at supporting the reputation of the discriminated person and not protecting the reputation of those who have discriminated in that institution. "IT-14

Hence, ANAC has sometimes strategically sought direct contact and cooperation with CSOs to complement its work. However, players such as TI-It have tried to escape this cooperative logic, considering ANAC's inactivity as one of the main causes of the limited impact of the law:

"If ANAC started giving sanctions, the fund could create them. I've told them 100 times, but... it isn't easy. ANAC is a giant, administrative, a sideshow, as they say; it is not so easy to go and modify all of it ... it is the subject that knows the most about whistleblowing in Italy, with mediocre results, so imagine what it means." IT-12

TI-It has thus resorted to *direct and indirect* strategies to intervene on the enforcement stage. Directly, CSOs such as TI-It have sometimes found external support in direct contact with other institutional bodies, such as the Italian data protection authority, with jurisdiction over the privacy policies of administrative whistleblowing platforms. The data protection authority has significantly improved the law's enforcement, becoming an internal competitor for ANAC and an indirect ally for CSOs working in the whistleblowing protection arena. As a result, ANAC's authority has been partly overshadowed at the level of law enforcement, losing centrality. Instances of internal

⁷¹ ANAC can only administer financial sanctions in case of wrongdoing or non-compliance..

competition among institutional actors have thus sometimes played in favor of civic actors, advancing CSOs' claims and procedural innovations. As recalled by TI-It's spokesperson:

"But it doesn't work if you don't check who doesn't make a legal instrument available. There are fines of up to €50,000; if you don't give them, how can you hope they will comply with the law? Now the institutions are starting to be more concerned about privacy authority. As I told you earlier, they want to ensure the platform is well done because the privacy authority fines them. But the privacy authority is not the body of reference for whistleblowing, so they (i.e., PAs) should be careful and fear well the intervention of ANAC, but this is not the case." IT-12

Indirectly, TI-It's competitive strategy has allowed the organization to resort to more confrontational actions when needed. For example, through the ALAC service, TI-It sometimes advises whistleblowers to contact the media and go public with their stories when public authorities seem uninterested in following their case or when it is too late to obtain gains in courts:

"It also happens that we take these stories to the media; why? Maybe they're very advanced, so they've already gone through a trial, and they're so advanced that there's no longer a report to bring forward, but maybe there's an interest to expose what happened, or maybe when it's hard to find suitable institutional channels. So it may be interesting to take it to the media, maybe just the person wants to expose it to the media (...) (in one case) someone wanted to make a report, but there were so many elements that would definitely lead back to him. He was afraid. His institutional channels didn't work because (...) the person goes, "Let's try to take it to the media." (...) We decided to involve the media with the informant because it seemed like the right way to take it forward."

Beyond structural limitations and the partial lack of political will at the enforcement level, CSOs acknowledge some crucial steps at the procedural level and in allocating protection rights (Revillard, 2017). While commenting on the changes that occurred since the law's approval, TI-It's spokesperson affirms that:

"The thing that has changed, quite significantly, is the PA side. Because so many PAs are beginning to understand (...), the law has significantly changed their obligations. Now, have a dialogue with the RPCT (i.e., the head of the anti-corruption and transparency office, present in every PA) that I have never had before. It is sensational how many have just understood; now they understand it and say they really need whistleblowing and want to do it well. This, in my opinion, is the most critical change the law has generated. But it has done more for whistleblowing than for whistleblowers so far, so we have to go and fill this gap." IT-12

Four years have passed since the approval of the 1.179/2017. Notwithstanding the critical improvements introduced by the law, the Italian cultural context has remained quite hostile towards informants. The cultural hostility against whistleblowers is reflected in law enforcement, having critical consequences for the instrument and the efficacy of the policy process. As recalled by ANAC's former board member:

"And you see, this depends on another fact, always cultural, on how public institutions treat the tool. If a Senator of the Republic refers to a whistleblower as a scoundrel, if the judges do not know the instrument and therefore do not know how to value it, a public official thinks, "But why should I do it? Why should I be a model employee? Why don't I continue to do like the three monkeys I don't see, hear, or speak?" IT-14

At the implementation stage, thus, the interactions between central CSOs and institutional actors such as TI-It and ANAC got tenser at the enforcement stage. Once the cooperation had to go beyond public endorsement, cooperating towards common goals and moving from diverse logic of action became more complicated.

Hence, whereas the introduction of a law to protect whistleblowers represented a significant step forward in the Italian fight against corruption and in the country's overall democratic architecture, to what extent has this law efficiently improved the informants' experience and the whistleblowing process more accessible is hard to tell. Even more importantly, whether and how the new law had societal accountability consequences, strengthening citizens' mechanisms to sanction misbehaving powerholders is still unclear.

Tab.5.2. summarizes the main dilemmas and positional strategies in the whistleblowing campaign.

Tab. 5.2. Actors, dilemmas, strategies, and mechanisms in the Italian whistleblowing campaign

| Phase | Actor | Dilemma | Positional Strategy | Relational Strategy | Relational Mechanism |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| <i>Agenda-setting</i> | TI-It 5SM TI-It | Engagement Powerful Ally | Direct Contact | Cooperative | Prominence |
| <i>Policy Contents</i> | TI-It | Extension | Coalition | Cooperative | Contagion |
| <i>Policy Passage</i> | TI-It RIF/TGL TI-It/RIF/TGL | Extension Engagement Powerful ally | Coalition Coalition Brokerage | Cooperative | Closure |
| <i>Policy Implementation</i> | ANAC Libera TI-It-HC | Extension Powerful Ally False Arenas, Extension | Direct Contact Direct Contact Brokerage | Cooperative Competitive Conflictual | Closure Contagion Prominence Brokerage |
| <i>Policy Enforcement & Evaluation</i> | Libera TI-It | Powerful Ally Direct vs. Indirect | Direct Contact Brokerage | Cooperative Competitive | Brokerage |

5.4. Civic Monitoring in Italy

Policy change represents an *indirect* instance of societal accountability. However, once a law is in place, CSOs may exploit it to obtain direct accountability gains. For example, information disclosure and whistleblowers protection must be exploited to prevent corruption and unveil illicit deals. To do so, CSOs often resort to monitoring practices.

The concept of civic monitoring has its roots in Keane's work on monitory democracy (2009) and has proliferated throughout the years, with monitoring initiatives spreading across several countries and arenas (Ciociola & Reggi, 2015; Hatakka, 2020; Molina et al., 2017; Morita et al., 2013; Suman et al., 2022; Sun & Yan, 2020). Being differently declined as a top-down form of citizens' engagement or as a bottom-up form of control of the institutional work, and monitoring initiatives represent an excellent terrain to investigate the interactions between institutional and extra-institutional actors and their accountability implications.

Italy counts at least five models of civic monitoring. The first is a model of shared monitoring (Feenstra & Casero-Ripollés, 2014), stemming from institutional attempts at involving the citizenry in anti-corruption activities⁷². Here one can find initiatives such as A Scuola di Open Coesione (ASOC), an educational program born in 2013 from the initiative of the Department for the Cohesion Funds of the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Education and the Italian representation of the European Commission. Over the years, the project has involved more than 300.000 students and has recently crossed the Italian borders, arriving in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Spain, and Portugal.

The second group comprises *negotiated monitoring projects*, where institutional and extra-institutional actors jointly coordinate monitoring initiatives. This second category groups projects based on agreements between monitored institutions and monitoring CSOs. The project Integrity Pacts represent a prominent example in this sense⁷³. The Integrity Pact is a quintessentially anti-corruption tool. Initially developed by the general secretariat of Transparency International, the Integrity Pacts are a declaration of intent signed by the two main actors in public tendering: the contracting authority and the economic operator, to enhance transparency and accountability in tendering procedures. Under the guidance of Transparency International, the European Union has enlarged the Integrity Pacts scope to monitor its Cohesion Fund's use⁷⁴ by introducing civic groups as monitoring authorities.

The European Integrity Pacts project involved eleven countries in eighteen monitoring initiatives. In Italy, three NGOs monitored four projects: one in Milan and one in Cagliari (TI-It), one in Sicily (Amapola), and one in Calabria (Action Aid). Whereas all the projects involved EU Cohesion Funds, the tendering's value, contractors' type, and the goods and services financed differed. Over

⁷² Shared monitoring represents a form of *social accountability* (Boräng & Grimes, 2021), a top-down effort to foster civic engagement in anti-corruption activities.

⁷³ "Integrity Pacts – Civil Control Mechanism for Safeguarding EU Funds"

⁷⁴ Cohesion Fund: "provides support to Member States with a gross national income (GNI) per capita below 90% EU-27 average to strengthen the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU", Cohesion Fund - Regional Policy - European Commission (europa.eu)

time, similar initiatives have been autonomously reproduced by other CSOs, signing monitoring contracts with various PAs. For example, the CSOs Parliament Watch has autonomously started to monitor the use of public funds in Sicily under a regional agreement.

Thirdly, there are *monitoring campaigns* forged by heterogeneous coalitions of civic subjects. In Italy, several monitoring campaigns emerged in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic to scrutinize the use of the *National Recovery and Resilience Plan* (NPRR), financed in the framework of the Next Generation EU program, as in the case of Libernet or the Osservatorio Nazionale NPRR and other local initiatives (e.g., Osservatorio Civico NPRR Bologna).

Fourthly, one can find bottom-up initiatives without an a priori agreement with monitored actors. For example, Libera and Gruppo Abele launched the project *ComMon*, Comunità Monitoranti, in 2015. The project aims at activating *monitoring communities* working with Libera's local garrisons scattered around the Italian peninsula. The national headquarter supports local initiatives by supplying technical and human resources and helping create new communities by organizing annual monitoring schools. Similar bottom-up projects have spread nationwide, targeting diverse areas, as in the case of Metis, a CSO which – along with its activities on participatory governance- used monitoring practices to oversee the reconstruction works in the aftermath of the earthquake of L'Aquila.

Finally, one can find forms of *disclosure monitoring* led by alternative media, such as the civic platform Cittadini Reattivi, the investigative media outlet IRPI, or data-driven journalistic projects such as OpenPolis or open data initiatives such as OnData.

The Italian civic monitoring arena epitomizes the transactional nature of monitoring practices, which rely on creating more or less stable ties between CSOs and institutional actors rather than on mass participation (Mazák & Diviák, 2018; Petrova & Tarrow, 2007). Hence, the civic monitoring field allows a closer look at players' relational strategies: intended as wide-ranging relationship patterns connecting CSOs with targets, allies, and bystanders, simplified along a continuum from co-optation to conflict (Johnson, 2016).

CSOs who populate the Italian monitoring arenas are rarely new to the anti-corruption and pro-transparency struggle. On the contrary, most have been central players in the transparency and whistleblowing campaigns. Moving from policy to monitoring arenas, some of these civic players have thus capitalized on a vast array of previous interactions and interpersonal relationships with political and bureaucratic elites and well-entrenched *relational strategies*. As elucidated in Chapter 2, relational strategies are simplified along a continuum from co-optation to conflict (Johnson,

2016). At one extreme, co-optation refers to interactions between actors that build on the same resource pools and share values. Conversely, conflict refers to situations in which actors' resources are independent and there is a lack of shared values. Finally, one can talk about cooperation when players that share values do not depend on the same resource pool or where resource interdependence is not matched by shared values, as in the case of competition (Johnson, 2016).

5.4.1. *Negotiated Monitoring*

Forms of *negotiated monitoring*, such as the Integrity Pacts, stem from agreements between monitoring CSOs and institutional actors, often based on co-optative relational strategies. In this case, all the actors depend on the *same pool of resources*, i.e., the European Cohesion Funds, and share transparency and accountability values specified in their official agreements. By default, forms of negotiated monitoring, such as the Integrity Pacts, require CSOs to opt for “nice” tactics and formalized organizational structures.

Pacts are indeed signed by already committed institutions, which reduces or excludes the necessity and opportunities of deploying “naughty” repertoires in monitoring practices altogether. Quite the contrary, collaborative interactions with institutional actors appear quintessential for CSOs to access data, documents, and information otherwise unavailable to the general public and carry out their monitoring work. As affirmed by Amapola's spokesperson:

“We could not monitor contracts using generalized civic access because we need to talk to the contracting authority, whereas other forms of civic engagement could also work without this contact.” IT-13

Much of the necessary information thus passes through *direct connections* between monitoring and monitored actors. In addition, the Integrity Pacts program – like other projects sponsored by international donors- requires CSOs to participate in calls, fill application forms, formalize projects, formulate action plans, et., de facto preventing informal, less structured, and unprofessional groups from participating in these monitoring activities. CSOs who participate in these projects have thus generally already solved their organizational dilemma by opting for formal bureaucratic structures.

Within such formalized relational contexts, CSOs still have room to strategize their actions to increase their influence. Forms of negotiated monitoring are indeed understood as a perfect entry point to craft new alliances with politicians and practitioners, obtain formal recognition, and trigger procedural changes. Admittedly, the President of Parliament Watch maintains that these relationships are not always productive. However, over time, sustained interactions with institutional elites help CSOs understand *what* and *who* is the right channel to get what they want, reorienting their tactics over the long run:

“As you go forward, you see what keys you can use, you find doors that open to you, and in those, we continue to move forward in the corridor. You find doors in the next corridor and doors closed to you, and then you look for a plan B. This is the situation” IT-19

While CSOs can obtain information and access through interpersonal contacts, institutional actors may benefit from these interactions by outsourcing their monitoring duties to civic actors, obtaining significant returns such as increased trustworthiness and expertise (Lohmann, 1993; Orsini & Smith, 2010).

However, in these co-optation cases, civic monitoring players depend strongly on institutional resources and calculations (Holdo, 2019; Luders, 2010). Whereas their privileged position allows CSOs to access crucial information and build direct connections with civil servants, the co-optative strategy reduces CSOs’ sanctioning chances, hampering the emergence of full-fledged accountability relationships. The role of monitoring actors is thus mainly *preventive*, as acknowledged by Amapola’s president:

“We monitor, but we have no authority to be cops (...) let us say that we support them (i.e., institutions) in the process, helping them to take into account all those elements of transparency, integrity, and so on (...) We help them understand the importance of publishing some things, of being regular in the publication, etc.” IT- 13

CSOs’ functions are thus the objects of internal debates and questioning. On the one hand, CSOs understand their positions as input to trigger institutional transparency and ameliorate accountability conditions. On the other, the existence of committed NGOs and civic organizations risks becomes a shortcut allowing institutional actors to outsource part of their accountability duties. As reminded by Metis’ spokesperson, negotiated monitoring projects often aim at furnishing governments and administrations with tools to strengthen mechanisms of institutional checks and balances (i.e., horizontal accountability (della Porta & Vannucci, 2012, p. 20)). However, most of the time, these actors end up substituting the state action, which can be problematic:

“The ambition is that the public administrations can use these tools independently, without our presence. I tell you from my experience that this is not the case yet. We are still a lot in the service logic, so I, as a public administration, have the feeling that I am missing something; I do not know how to do it, so I turn to external, to you (civil society organization) who have always done it.” IT-18

Overall, negotiated monitoring seems to serve more institutional actors than the general public, to the point that some interviewees perceive a clear-cut divide between NGOs’ professional monitoring and “pure” civic monitoring initiatives. The watchdog activities by specialized NGOs seem alternative and hardly integrative to bottom-up practices. As maintained by Amapola’s president:

“We have to distinguish civic monitoring and Integrity Pacts. Because we don't do that civic monitoring, because we work with the contracting authority, we have an agreement with the contracting

authority; civic monitoring from below is very different. Let's say that the purpose is the same, and yet the methods and tools are very different, and therefore, in my opinion, keeping them close but distinct is important." IT-13

Hence, NGO-led projects tend to reproduce top-down forms of SA; here, the idea of community is almost absent, and constituencies are approached in individualistic terms. CSOs communicate with public authorities, analyze content, and educate interested and atomized individuals on how to read public information. As maintained by TI-It's project manager:

"We provide the tools. That is, trivially, we explain to citizens how to access information, how to use open data on the Region website, and how to safely report if it is found out that something is not working ... and then citizens do their monitoring. We have a group of experts who clearly ... a citizen does not ... in a sense, the tenders are very complex, so you cannot expect that a citizen can take the documentation, read it and understand it; therefore, thanks to the resources that are made available to the European community, we have created a group of experts ... the accounting engineer, the mechanical engineer, who read the documents, understand them, and ... they explain if they are ok, and when they are not ok, they collaborate with the citizenship "IT-16

Of course, this teaching-based approach seems necessary to simplify complex themes such as public contracting, which require skills and resources, both in terms of time and money, to be accessed and processed. Negotiated monitoring thus emphasizes fighting corruption through the mediation of structured CSOs entitled to negotiate and cooperate with authorities, while the public is atomized and relegated to the position of "moral judge":

"The individual is fundamental because corruption, especially in countries like Italy, such as in the South, is a cultural phenomenon more than due to legislation or corporate practice. The individual is, therefore, fundamental because he is the leading actor who must make a decision, that is, that of not being corrupt or corrupting." IT-3

Such a perspective partly downsizes the systemic feature of public corruption and hampers the chances for collective action to develop actual mechanisms of public sanctioning when needed (Fox, 2007, 2015).

However, direct attempts at involving the citizenry in negotiated monitoring projects seem hardly productive even when willingly pursued. CSOs indeed lament the lack of channels and resources to include citizens in governing processes, which inevitably hampers the possibility of monitoring from below. As affirmed by the spokesperson of TI-It:

"We have a structural problem! I always give this example when I organize a monitoring school with people; I tell them, "We try to teach you what the tools are, what is there now in Italy that you can use." But the problem is that when I go to ARST, which would be the contracting authority, I have to fill a sheet with carbon paper even to enter. Well, this is the level of institutions in Italy here. You understand that as long as I have to fill out a sheet on carbon paper, I cannot think of having a website with open data that citizens can read and understand." IT-16

In the case of negotiated monitoring, the juxtaposition between CSOs' top-down attitudes and the constraining of spaces for civic engagement at the institutional level restricts the possibilities of

public sanctioning. This model resembles what Fox (2015) defines as a *low accountability trap*, where local interventions, mostly information-led, tend to have limited SA consequences, increasing the system's answerability but depriving these initiatives of sanctioning powers.

Not surprisingly, CSOs such as TI-It, Amapola, and Action Aid themselves questioned the effectiveness of these monitoring practices. In this case, players expressed a pragmatic skepticism toward the model's sustainability and replicability on a larger scale. As affirmed by the spokesperson of TI-It and Amapola, the cost-benefit evaluation of monitoring public tenders represents a significant question mark in imagining future developments of this practice:

“Something that must be considered in the analysis is how much it costs. Because for which one of the lessons learned certainly is that an element that cannot be left aside, which is quality monitoring, which therefore is real, in-depth supervision and that is a true accompaniment of the contracting authority, requires extremely varied skills... in the monitoring stage, I have to redo, retrace the process of technical evaluation of all the phases of the procedure, but it means duplicating the procedure, and it has not... It is not, well, not cheap, that is, it is not, it is not efficient from this point of view.” IT-13

In most cases, there is a diffuse perception of the impossibility or difficulty of creating a vast and self-sustaining monitoring environment from which additional projects could autonomously arise.

5.4.2. *Monitoring Campaigns*

Rather than work separately on monitoring initiatives, CSOs may sometimes join broader monitoring coalitions, gluing together players with different goals and relational strategies. Forms of coalitional monitoring have multiplied as a response to the common threats faced by transparency and accountability amidst the Covid 19 pandemic. As in the Spanish case discussed in the next chapter, the Italian government suspended the right to access information during the first wave of the pandemic. In a nutshell, the Italian government lifted the PAs from their duty to answer requests to access public information right when data on the state of the pandemic were needed the most. The suspension of the right-to-know provoked a quick mobilization of the Italian civic sector, which launched a call to action, urging the government to restore the citizens' right to access public information. In November 2020, a network of CSOs launched the campaign *Dati Bene Comune* (Data Common Goods), supported by 293 organizations. The coalition thus exploited a phase of great uncertainty to bring the issue of transparency to the forefront of the public discourse. Over the two years of crisis management, *Dati Bene Comune* asked the government to open and distribute the data used by expert committees to decide on the measures to contrast the pandemic (e.g., lockdowns, curfews, rules on social gatherings).

The coalition obtained small gains, such as data publication in reusable formats, but remained largely uninfluential in decision-making processes. However, according to one of OpenPolis'

spokespersons, the convergence of several CSOs around the issue represents per se a crucial relational result:

“Dati Bene Comune could be a sign, even though there have not been concrete results there, but the fact that more subjects and more people get together and put together a request is, in any case, an element if you want positive. It is an index of the maturation of a question that perhaps was not there before. I would say that there are still few results to be seen (...) there is a long way to go, but I think there is a greater sensitivity.” IT-21

In particular, the government’s resistance to including CSOs in decision-making processes concerning the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NPRR) was perceived as a significant loss. However, the lack of recognition and access to decision-making multiplied the coalitional efforts around the Recovery Plan, which became a new critical monitoring arena. Dati Bene Comune has thus partly redirected its activities in this sense, cooperating with the recently created *Osservatorio Civico NPRR*. Alongside these initiatives, the anti-mafia SMO Libera launched its monitoring coalition, *Libenter*, together with 20 CSOs. The progressive spread of these initiatives hints at the saliency that transparency and monitoring have in the civic sector.

Coalitional monitoring is thus spreading, often reinforcing ties among pro-accountability CSOs. According to the spokesperson of OpenPolis, for example, the cooperation with Libera on a local monitoring initiative has proved to be particularly beneficial for the intense resource exchanges between the two, characterized by the complementarity of functions, repertoires, and targets:

“We do the piece of work, which is to collect the data, make the data available. Other subjects make up the missing piece: they use the data (...); this then adds another fundamental piece of work: requesting further data. Because what we manage to collect centrally from national databases, the local ones manage to cover a piece of information with the work of Libera in the local context, it has been activated push to ask the institutions, in that case, to the regional ones and the local ones (...) this is a typical example of collaboration, of the synergies between subjects of civil society, of political activism that by coming together manage to achieve results and this gives an idea of the potential for data collection”, IT-21

Coalitional monitoring thus groups CSOs with different relational strategies, which may sometimes take a tenuous turn and escalate in competition or become the basis for creating cooperative ties with public administrations. Whereas these horizontal cooperative efforts can set the stage the basis for full-fledged accountability relations, so far, they have reached mainly answerability goals.

5.4.3. *Community Monitoring*

The constant oscillation between naughty or nice tactics also depends on the arena in which interactions between civic and institutional actors unfold. This is evident when looking at the case of *community monitoring*, where the same players, Libera, and its local strongholds, seem to follow a cooperative strategy at the national level and a more confrontational one locally. *Cooperative strategies* emerge when players share values but rely on different resource pools (Johnson, 2016).

Organizationally, CSOs following cooperative strategies perceive themselves as alternative and complementary to institutional actors. In the *monitoring communities*' case, led by Libera and Gruppo Abele, civic and institutional monitors have different structures and repertoires but complement each other:

"We are like the civic side of ANAC. That is, ANAC does institutional monitoring on certain things. Obviously, we do civic monitoring but more or less with different objectives because one thing is to do institutional monitoring, and another is to do civic monitoring. However, we must also find the best ways to discuss the kind of prevention we want, right? " IT-1

Cooperative interactions with PAs and institutional bodies may have relevant preventive consequences, fostering answerability. However, they often lack the "teeth to bite" (Fox, 2016). The willingness to work toward shared values leads these groups to prefer "nice" strategies when interacting with institutional allies, even if avoiding forms of cooptation. As recalled by the spokesperson of Libera's anti-corruption sector:

"Monitoring brings you a little out of the logic of collaboration. We often say we "relate to institutions"... that is, institutions must always be your privileged speakers (...). When an administration proves sensitive, as a monitoring community, one can think of doing more." IT 1

Nevertheless, cooperative relational patterns depend highly on the predisposition of PAs and civil servants. Hence, the gains deriving from these cooperative ties hardly crystallize in systemic change. According to Metis' spokesperson, the high volatility of these gains is due to the lack of institutional arenas where to systematize these informal gains into substantial change:

"We realized the difficulties of involving citizens and that this is not the key alone. It is necessary to understand how to do it because, in any case, it also takes the involvement of the institutions. As I have said before, civil society organizations are now fundamental for intermediation with institutions and citizens. This is because institutions, within themselves, do not have bodies of this type, and therefore (...) you have to change the system of institutions a bit and foresee someone within them who deals with the participation of citizenship if you want to bring this thing into the system, because otherwise, in my opinion, that always remains (the civic monitoring) ... just a project". IT-18

CSOs hence work as necessary *mediators* in the relationship between citizens and institutions. Their intermediary position allows them to opt for more conflictual strategies when the lack of shared resources couples the lack of shared goals. For example, monitoring communities born within Libera's project - generally opting for non-confrontational strategies- can sometimes resort to open forms of contention to further their goals. As maintained by Libera's spokesperson, this generally happens at the local level:

"Monitoring takes place precisely where the administrations are more complicated. We are asked to accompany where there is already a problem. So, we monitor where things may go well and where we can obtain more. However, we often monitor where we perceive that there may be a problem, and we try to minimize it by clarifying that there is civic attention (...); this can also place us in dislike with a public administration or, better, with whoever represents it." IT-1

In the monitoring community born in Siena, *Idee in Comune*, for example, once the public administration tried to close participatory spaces (i.e., open consultation for the anti-corruption plan), ties with the civic group rapidly deteriorated:

"We wanted to participate in drafting the anti-corruption plan, and we got it. (...) (the administration) made it almost impossible for us to participate. We read the plan, sifted through it, and even in that short time, we worked hard to contribute. Naturally, it was a consultative contribution. You can't imagine what happened! That is, the anti-corruption office of the hospital did everything to prevent us from participating." IT-11

Hence, whereas the relationships at the national level tend to be quite positive and continuously reproduced through participation in shared projects, attendance at joint events, reciprocal consultation, and mutual appreciation, the local situation tends to be more conflictual. Indeed, grassroots initiatives of community monitoring which are essentially demand-driven, tend to emerge in already conflictual contexts where at least some evidence of opacity or possible malfeasance does exist. Cooperation with the public authorities is not a viable solution in these cases. Instead, it is necessary to raise the bar of contention, calling for local mobilization and using public exposure through tailored campaigns.

Local communities' needs are at the very core of forms of community monitoring. As recalled by the project's spokesperson:

"The idea is to work with territories precisely on the things on which they want to work. Unlike others, we don't say, "You have to do this," but much more often happens that we receive calls like "We have this problem, this thing is happening, what can we do with the legislation on transparency?" or "there are elections, what questions can we ask the mayor, which we can then monitor?" and from there we start work on the contents but as a community. (...) This is our style in civic monitoring. We believe that if I do, from my office in Turin, 10 thousand civic access requests, yes, I can make a theme of common interest more transparent. But it has another impact if those requests for civic access are made by those who live in it or are closer to it territorially. " IT-1

Here, the stress is not on the role of single agentic individuals but instead on the role played by the whole community to monitor its environment and prevent the risks of corruption from concretizing. This method builds on a systemic understanding of public corruption, where risks always exist and must be acknowledged. The work with communities thus always stems from a self-reflection of the dangers that the communities themselves may experience to shed light on opaque political processes:

"Because then the model that we always propose is acted as a collectivity, or as a community, already in monitoring yourself, that is, do not supervise yourself on your own, we are...this is an anthropological prerequisite that we use that is to abandon of the idea of the hero" IT-1

So far, the monitoring communities' model has been strictly intertwined with the local strongholds of Libera, even though the aim is precisely one of building communities outside the traditional

affiliation to the anti-mafia movement. If public corruption rests on webs of illicit exchanges, building alternative associative ties and coalitions appears to be the only viable solution:

"The nets are fought with the nets! This a little bit, doing anti-corruption as a network... anti-corruption as a network, and from here, you can have the networks for integrity and monitoring communities, right? (...) to give a foundation to an anti-corruption movement that is such ... giving up being satisfied with self-referential circuits ". IT- 1

5.4.4. *Disclosure Monitoring*

Finally, one can find more competitive relational strategies, particularly in disclosure monitoring practices by data-driven or journalism-oriented CSOs. Here, civic and institutional actors usually share the same resource pools (i.e., public information) but have different goals and guiding values. Whereas the institutional logic seems to push institutional actors to preserve and keep their data secret, CSOs want to circulate them as much as possible as public and shared goods. As maintained by one of IRPI's journalists:

"I always have a bit of that impression that the administrations try to keep to themselves even things that, that then when they arrive (i.e., they give you the information) and you say, "that's all?" IT-5

Forms of disclosure monitoring thus tend to combine high levels of integration within the civil society sector with a net demarcation of boundaries with institutional actors. Well aware of their role as civic watchdogs, these alternative media stress their position as independent actors and underline the political significance of their actions. This differentiation emerged strongly from the words of the spokesperson of OpenPolis, who claims that their relationship with institutions:

"It is characterized by otherness and distance. By respect, which we hope is reciprocal, but it is of a necessary and prudent distance. For those who want to observe and critically analyze the phenomena of power, this requires a necessary distinction and differentiation." IT-21

The net demarcation of roles appears crucial to ensure the impartiality and watchdog functions of CSOs and lead these groups to rely on naughty repertoires when necessary. These CSOs work to open, gather, organize, and reuse public information to hold political representatives accountable and promote government transparency. In the Italian case, several CSOs in this category started building civic platforms and apps to publish and give visibility to already available administrative data, opening new information using transparency laws, or compiling new data sources through investigative methods. Aiming at the opening and making information accessible, these actors seek to create *monitoring ecosystems*, enabling other civic subjects to re-use their data. Organizationally, they tend to be characterized by loose cooperative connections with other CSOs, inclusive boundaries, and broad collective identities. As mentioned by the spokesperson of Openpolis, his organization:

“Stands in a relationship of collaboration and synergy with the wide world of civic, political, and social activism, the world of information. The goal, I told you, is precisely that of socializing and enhancing this wealth of data and tools, so they can be used in different ways and forms. At the moment, we have been able to make it available to other civic subjects.” IT-21

Those working on data-driven monitoring projects thus acknowledged their role as *gatekeepers* into the broader pro-accountability field, which can carry out relevant anti-corruption functions. Interactions between CSOs generally entail creating and circulating information to ease the mobilization of other civic actors, among which anti-corruption CSOs. However, collective identities tend to emerge around accountability claims rather than anti-corruption ones, which risk being less inclusive. In the case of OpenPolis, for example:

“I would not say that we deal directly with anti-corruption. It concerns our field in a mediated way because we deal with producing and circulating as much information as possible, and therefore we raise awareness on what public resources are, how they are used, what are the public responsibilities in the use of resources, and decisions that concern our communities: national, regional, local, and therefore, if you want we deal, in a broad sense, with production, circulation, of knowledge on issues of public importance and therefore one could say of transparency and therefore in this sense, indirectly, of anti-corruption”, IT-21

Transparency and access to information thus represent shared values for the more diverse CSOs, which can create short-term and goal-specific cooperation through sustained resource exchanges. The combination of the work of very different CSOs, generally operating independently, with specific repertoires, goals, and resources, can thus integrate their logic in light of shared collective identities, as in the anti-corruption struggle. As affirmed by one of IRPI’s journalists:

“There are many pieces that civil society has the task of fitting together. I see anti-corruption a lot in this sense, and therefore... I believe in basic teamwork, and when faced with an issue like corruption, I believe in it even more! (...) the anti-corruption chain could be the whistleblower who reports to our whistleblowing platform; I who take his report to develop, which can lead me to say that "ok, this is a case of corruption" I end up writing that this is actually a case of corruption and then as I told you, the work of others begins, of pressure groups, of politics and then - in the case - of the legislator, at last.”, IT-5

However, the scarcity of public resources in the Italian civil society sector hampers the possibility of formalizing these networks, sometimes fostering internal competition. Moreover, the reliance on European funds and projects tends to benefit the creation of international coalitions at the expense of national networks. As affirmed by one of the spokespersons of OnData:

“There is this underground of small organizations, which has a tough time finding funds to promote their actions and does so in competition because if I win the tender, you lose it. And why? Also, what do the mechanisms of the European community foresee? That there are partnerships, but they are international partnerships. So, let's go for OnData, Transparency, Libera, and OpenPolis on a project. The European Community tells us, “No, you must be,” like the joke, “a Frenchman, a German, and a Spaniard.” And so, what happens in Italy? In all this, why should the Italian political ecosystem promote a system of this type?” IT-2

In such a scenario, local cooperation is often easier to organize and more productive. The President of OnData recalls that:

“In terms of campaigning, if you are running a national campaign, you have a brilliant idea of communication, or it is a severe issue, or you must be Libera, Action Aid, a group with a huge network. The small, I call them the small blocks that connect works well in the local case.” IT-7

Disclosure monitoring practices can balance competition and conflict to increase answerability and sanctioning potential, becoming the basis for full-fledged accountability relations. Whereas horizontal integration among civic subjects generally is one of the main strengths of these initiatives, the scarcity of resources prevents the formalization of stable monitoring networks at the national level.

Tab. 5.3. Monitoring initiatives, actors, dilemmas, strategies, and mechanisms in the Italian case

| Monitoring Type | Actor | Dilemma | Positional Strategy | Relational Strategy | Relational Mechanism |
|--------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Negotiated</i> | Amapola, Parliamentary Watch TI-It, Action Aid | Naughty or Nice Organizational | Direct Contact | Co-optation Cooperation | Contagion |
| <i>Coalitional</i> | Libenter Dati Bene Comune | Organizational | Coalition | Cooperation Competition | Closure |
| <i>Community</i> | Common (national) Common (local) | Naughty or Nice | Direct Contact Coalition | Cooperation Conflict | Closure Contagion |
| <i>Disclosure</i> | Openpolis | Naughty or Nice Organizational | Direct Contact Brokerage | Competition | Prominence |

5.5. Conclusion

The FOIA and the Whistleblowers’ protection act have significantly improved the Italian anti-corruption legal framework. The grassroots campaigns that eventually led to the laws’ passage benefited from a complex mix of factors at each stage. During the agenda-setting phase, contextual factors, such as the increased international attention over transparency and whistleblowing, were undoubtedly helpful in bringing these issues into the policy arena. However, the strategic choice to engage in the policy process had different roots. In the transparency case, FOIA4Italy learned from

previous losses and restructured the geometry of its coalition before trying to pass a bill. In the whistleblowing case, entering the policy arena followed political entrepreneurs' availability, such as the 5SM, to work for a new law. In both cases, alliances and oppositions have been discursively crafted and transformed during parliamentary discussions (Böhm, 2015; Di Puccio, 2014), with CSOs obtaining the support of majority parties but partly losing control of the laws' contents. Both campaigns drew on strong interlocking transactional ties and a net task division (Mazák & Diviák, 2018), whereas their heterogeneity helped combine different repertoires of action to alternatively obtain the support of political elites, media, and public opinion. Using *coalitions*, *direct contacts*, and *brokerage* was fundamental to entering the policy arena and obtaining influence positions from where to compromise with decision-makers (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000). Hence, these campaigns *indirectly* enhanced societal accountability, increasing institutional answerability (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2003, 2006).

However, in both cases, the legislation resulting from compromises between institutions and CSOs was far from perfect. Procedural and applicative issues have reshuffled the relationships between CSOs and state institutions, moving contention from the national to the local arenas, from the policy to the administrative one, and changing targets' cost calculations (Luders, 2010). At the implementation stage, the role of resources, particularly digital tools, has emerged as crucial to increase players' influence over the anti-corruption struggle (Mattoni, 2021). Technological resources and platforms have served as direct social action (Bosi & Zamponi, 2020) to supply citizens with clear, accessible, and understandable information or safe reporting channels. CSOs have thus become crucial brokers in the transparency and whistleblowing processes building vertical linkages between the PAs and the citizenry (Lee, 2022). Their work has *indirectly* influenced the law implementation, setting new standards to which administrative players had to homogenize. At the same time, by building direct ties with civil servants within administrative and regulatory arenas, these organizations have rebalanced the asymmetry of power with institutional actors, *directly* influencing the law's implementation. In both cases, the more influential CSOs have been those able to balance cooperation and conflict in pursuing their goals. *Cooperative* and *competitive* relational strategies have allowed civic players to deploy different positional strategies and advance their accountability goals. Even if quite rarely, these CSOs have opted for more conflictual strategies at the implementation and enforcement stage, using litigation and recurring to courts or the media when necessary. Disagreements and inefficiencies in the laws' implementation and enforcement have often become the terrain to elaborate new policy claims and re-enter the policy arena.

Nevertheless, policy and procedural gains at the legislative and administrative level risk having a limited accountability impact if citizens do not exploit these tools. Indeed, influential anti-corruption mobilizations do not always reach societal accountability results (Pirro, 2018). Whereas policy change can indirectly enhance grassroots accountability (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006), *direct* answerability and enforcement gains are not always straightforward (Bovens, 2007; Fox, 2007; Schedler, 1999). Analyzing civic monitoring initiatives has partly elucidated this issue. Forms of negotiated monitoring seem to rest on a top-down understanding of SA and an atomized view of citizens as anti-corruption actors, mainly resulting in *answerability* gains. These initiatives seem to fall short of increasing citizens' sanctioning potential, producing mild forms of SA (Fox, 2007, 2015). Instead, grassroots demand-driven initiatives of monitoring communities seem better equipped to develop accountability relations, moving from constituencies' needs at the local level. At the national level, the model postulates the creation of stable and cooperative relations with the elites but escapes cooptation, serving as grassroots preventive watchdogs. In between, we find monitoring coalitions and disclosure monitoring, which capacities of balancing cooperation and conflict. Their alternative focus on vertical or horizontal integration increased the pressure on powerholders and improved the system's answerability, facilitating citizens' access to information while resorting to sanctions when necessary.

However, a certain degree of disillusion on the possibility of achieving systemic change seems to be cross-cutting to different monitoring practices. Even though powers of oversight and control from below appear more accessible, fully-fledged forms of diffuse civic monitoring seem far to come. According to these civic actors, the limited engagement of the citizenry in monitoring practices is hardly a consequence of diffuse political apathy but rather the result of a systemic exclusion perpetrated by institutional logic and sometimes opposed by reform-minded politicians and civil servants.

Chapter 6. Policy Gains and Systemic Change in the Spanish Case

6.1. Introduction

“You need to be patient. Even, possibly, perseverant. Really, because change does not happen fast, you know? And that is, I think, it is not easy in the political world where the thinking is very short-term. Because politicians do not think long-term, which conditions the whole policy debate, I think, as civil society, part of our role can be to sort of think a bit longer than that. I mean, it's frustrating if you don't get what you want at first. But if you can see beyond the sort of short term, I mean...gain what you can and then keep pushing for the other things.”

SP-3

As elucidated by the opening quote, gains rarely come as a total success. Instead, collective action often results in chains of gains and losses while influencing change processes (Jasper et al., 2022). The analysis of the pro-accountability consequences of the Spanish anti-corruption mobilization over the last years is a great example in this sense. Unlike Italy, Spain experienced a profound reshuffling of the political system triggered from below. The 15M/Indignados mobilization helped popularize themes such as transparency, whistleblowing, and political monitoring, on which domestic and international CSOs had worked for years. The radical requests that emerged out of the *acampadas* gave visibility and resonance to anti-corruption and accountability claims, favoring the emergence of grassroots sanctioning mechanisms but sometimes hampering the possibility of achieving policy goals. Hence, the Spanish mobilizations around transparency, whistleblowers' rights, and monitoring initiatives allows to grasp the transformative power of relational dynamics, illuminating how positions and relations can result in complex mixes of gains and losses.

The chapter presents a reconstruction of the events that allowed a) Spanish CSOs to influence the *policy process* preceding the introduction of the 2013 transparency law, b) the many attempts at passing a whistleblowers' protection act between 2012-2022, and c) discusses the *political consequences* of civic monitoring initiatives.

The Spanish transparency law- Ley 19/2013⁷⁵- approved in 2013, was a long time coming, with the process starting in 2009 and gaining momentum after the 15M/Indignados mobilization. Here, the Pro Acceso coalition, consisting of Access Info and other civic players, bridged its requests with growing popular demands for transparency and won the governing party's support, threatened by mounting corruption scandals. CSOs collaborated directly with MPs and exerted additional pressure on decision-makers through online mobilization and international brokers. However, despite its

⁷⁵ Ley 19/2013, de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno.

approval, the Pro Acceso coalition had limited influence on the policy contents, primarily shaped by political parties, sometimes twisting and exploiting their relationships with some players within the coalition. After its passage, CSOs continued to work outside official government channels to expand the law's scope. At the implementation stage, players such as Access Info and Civio acted as brokers, helping other CSOs access and use public information to hold powerholders accountable for their actions. However, the law's implementation faced obstacles due to poor design and resistance from some PAs to disclose public information, leading CSOs to opt for confrontational legal strategies at the enforcement stage.

On the contrary, whistleblowing emerged as a salient topic thanks to the action of social movement organizations. Groups emerging from the 15M/Indignados mobilization exploited leaks to politicize the struggle against public corruption. Grassroots legal actions (15MpaRato) condemned Spanish political and financial elite members blamed for the country's economic and democratic crisis. Over this stage, a unitary coalition among movement players was essential in bringing the topic of whistleblowing into the public debate and making it a prominent issue in courts and media. The relevant gains of these actors and the international attention on the topic led other CSOs to start mobilizing on whistleblowing. While becoming central in the political debate, the fragility of the civic sphere and the high levels of political polarization hampered the possibility of crafting direct ties with elite members to policy change. However, acting as brokers, groups such as X-Net obtained critical political gains at the local level.

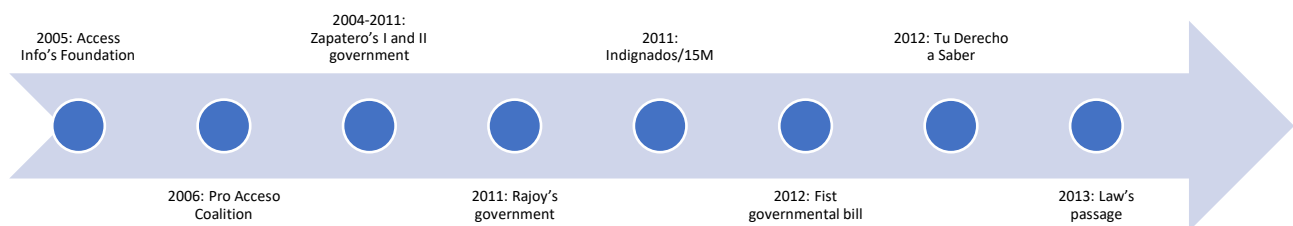
Going beyond the policy consequences of CSOs, the last section of the chapter focuses on civic monitoring initiatives in the Spanish case. As done for the Italian case, the analysis describes the leading monitoring practices developed in Spain by examining the relationships between monitoring actors, monitored institutions, and their constituencies.

Overall, the chapter shows the relevance of players' positional and relational strategies to secure policy goals and how the mismatch between these positional and relational stances may reduce players' influence potential. It discusses various mechanisms of influence, maintaining that brokerage over structural holes may help CSOs further their goals despite policy losses. Finally, it elaborates on the accountability consequences of monitoring initiatives, finding that competitive and conflictual strategies in this field seem the more productive to establish accountability relations based on answerability *and* sanctioning potential.

6.2. Transparency in Spain

In line with international trends (Nolin, 2018; Sampson, 2015; Schudson, 2015), transparency and the right to know emerged as central themes in the Spanish public debate. Whereas the quest for a more transparent government emerged as a grassroots demand (Magallón Rosa et al., 2017; Perramon, 2013), the law that regulates access to public information originated from a government initiative. The mounting number of scandals involving the back-then governing Partido Popular (PP) led the parliamentary majority to intervene on transparency to re-legitimize its position vis-à-vis the citizenry, markets, and EU (Magone, 2016). By the end of September 2012, Mariano Rajoy's government released the first draft of a bill on transparency, the right to access information, and good government. The first version of the document had a limited scope. Nevertheless, the draft set new standards of active publication for administrative entities, widening citizens' rights to ask for public information not already available and defining new criteria of good government for political representatives, civil servants, and public administrations. Fig.6.2. highlights the main stage of the process that led to the passage of Ley 19/2013, *de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno*.

Fig.6.2. Timeline of the Spanish transparency campaign



6.2.1. Agenda-setting

As in the Italian case, the chain of events that eventually took to the approval of the Spanish Transparency law originated from grassroots demands (Magallón Rosa et al., 2017; Perramon, 2013). The first instances of pro-transparency claims trace back to 2006 when Access Info (AI) – a newborn NGO dedicated to advancing the right to know and enhancing public transparency in

Europe- founded the *Coalición Pro Acceso*⁷⁶. As expressed by its founder, working in a *coalition* represented the only viable strategy from day one, despite the high costs associated with it (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000):

“In 2006, we set up Access Info, and we had the first meeting of the coalition Pro Acceso because my strategy was to have this coalition, this network, based on what had worked well in other countries (...) The coalition Pro Acceso came first, but I had been using the Access Info logo in September 2005. Because, you know, you create the fiction, and then you create the legal reality. I’ve been putting out press releases with the logo since September 2005, sitting on a bed in my mom’s house, literally, with my ex-boyfriend who made the logo, you know? Like that’s how you get anything started.” SP-3

Its creator's background and experience served Access Info to kick off its action in Spain. However, at that time, transparency was not a significant issue in the public debate, and policy solutions such as the American or British Freedom of Information Acts (FOIA) were largely unknown to civic and institutional Spanish players. The Spanish unfamiliarity with the theme of transparency and international regulatory standards forced AI to solve the *engagement dilemma* of arena creation (Elliott-Negri et al., 2021b). AI had to create a “demand side” before entering the policy arena, turning transparency into a policy matter and putting it on the political agenda. However, opting for a coalitional strategy came with high costs (Stevenson and Greenberg, 2000), mainly because Spanish CSOs were new to working on domestic democratic issues:

“I arrived in Spain 15 years ago and started talking to civil society organizations about access to information and transparency laws, and civil society had no idea what it was (...) Some people knew about some things that were happening in Latin America, but you know, in Latin America, they need those kinds of things “cause they're they're more corrupt, right?”. Yeah, so the fact that Mexico and Peru in 2002 had access to information laws was like, “Yeah, we can have heard about it, but we don't need that in Western Europe, do we?” So, we started with civil society and journalists, educating them even before educating other people.” SP-3

Contrary to the expectations (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000), AI opted for a coalition positional strategy, despite counting on very few financial and human resources, having no pre-existing ties, and working in a largely unfavorable political context. At this stage, much of AI’s efforts focused on popularizing the issues of transparency and the right to know among civic actors. Furnishing as a source of information, AI socialized other CSOs to transparency tools through a *contagion* mechanism.

Transparency was not making the news; government and opposition members were generally uninterested. Nonetheless, the peculiarities of the Spanish laboratory furnished relevant spaces of influence for civic actors (Feenstra et al., 2017). According to AI’s founder:

⁷⁶ The first meeting of the coalition counted about 10 organizations. At the beginning of September 2007, the coalition’s website listed 27 subscribing organizations. Sixteen years after its foundation, the coalition has grown significantly nowadays counting 49 organizations and several individual supporters.

“We could have been based in Spain, Italy, or France. It happened to be in Spain, but if it happened to be in Italy, we’d have been working a lot more in Italy, or if we happen to be in France, more in France, you know? Spain was an interesting case because it needed work, clearly needed work. But Access Info was only able to do it by being a more international organization that works internationally.” SP-3

For years, AI and the coalition tried to push the issue of transparency into the policy arena, but every attempt was inconsequential, and various changes in government worsened the situation. Finally, between 2004 and 2011, Zapatero’s socialist government first attempted to pass a bill introducing the right to know. However, the low salience of the transparency issue left little room for creating direct connections within elite circles or winning public opinion support (Burstein, 2003, 2020). Nevertheless, AI and its coalition members started to make their way into the policy arena:

“They (i.e., the socialist government) actually had it in the 2000s. One brilliant guy put it in the 2004 manifesto that they would have so, so someone had read about these laws happening elsewhere. But most people in the government didn’t know about it, didn’t know what was in those manifestos. But we pushed them; they started working on it. And then that government ended, and a PP government came in.” SP-3

During Zapatero’s government, the coalition tried to pressure the government to comply with its electoral promise and elaborate a transparency law. Between 2010 and 2011, the Pro Acceso coalition used open letters to the PM and obtained official meetings with its office using mobilization repertoires such as tweet bombing. However, these lobbying activities fell short in triggering the policy process due to the low salience of the theme and the lack of favorable contextual conditions. As a result, the bill never made it to the parliamentary discussion. Hence, over the first years, the coalitional strategy proved hardly productive.

Nevertheless, AI decided to keep fueling resources and efforts in the project, gaining and maintaining a central position in the transparency network. Faced with the dilemma of *being there* or abandoning the work in the Spanish context to channel its resources elsewhere (i.e., AI works at the European level), AI decided to maintain its position and continue with the coalition’s advocacy activities. Meanwhile, with its work at the European level and after years of advocacy in the Spanish context, AI started to build a broad network of direct contacts with institutions, understanding it was the right time to enter the policy arena. Indeed, at this point, the exogenous pressure of international organizations made clear that new spaces for policy intervention were *inevitably* about to be opened:

“The changes that have taken place in Spain in that period are also influenced by what was happening in the outside world where you had in 2006, the InterAmerican Court of Human Rights, recognizing a right to information, 2009, the European Court of Human Rights, 2011, the UN Human Rights Committee, you have the Open Government Partnership. Spain joins everything. It doesn’t know what it’s doing; it’s just like, “There are these countries that just join, yeah, I’ll sign up, it’s a democracy thing, I’ll do it. You know we’re a democracy, right?”. And then they realize that they had to participate in it.” SP-3

Endogenously, things changed dramatically in 2011. The outbreak of the global financial crisis, the austerity measures imposed on Spain, and the eruption of numerous corruption scandals involving government officials and prominent figures close to the majority party created the conditions for mass mobilizations to emerge (Hughes, 2011; Romanos et al., 2022). Five years after the foundation of AI and the Pro Acceso coalition, with the outbreak of the *Indignados*/15M protests in May 2011, transparency became central in the public and political debate. According to all the coalition members interviewed, that represented a crucial turning point:

“Social protests had developed, the 15M movement, which indicated that many people were re-politicizing themselves (...) the concept of transparency reached the social debate, that is, people on the street begun to talk about the need for transparency.” SP-6

These eventful protests reshuffled patterns of interactions among collective actors (della Porta, 2014, 2020) and created new civic platforms, which represented significant gains per se (Portos & Carvalho, 2022). The 15M eased the emergence of new anti-corruption and accountability players and furnished new opportunities for already existing CSOs to come together in a more structured fashion. As recalled by AI’s founder, the 15M strengthened the coalition:

“It was 2011 that I think was a tipping point for some of these new civil society organizations.... So yeah, it was funny how these things sort of started happening really after that moment of shock. But we were already there. We were already there, Access Info, from 2006, with the coalition, with the principles.” SP-3

The salience of pro-transparency demands thus grew significantly in the aftermath of the 15M mobilizations, and the theme entered political debates (Fominaya, 2020; Magallón Rosa et al., 2017). The call for “*Democracia Real Ya!*” was strongly intertwined with requests for a more open and transparent government. Admits the severity of the financial crisis, Spaniards regarded the opacity of the relationships between political and economic powers as one of the primary sources of their economic strains. The promiscuous relationship between the political and financial elites, confirmed by the eruption of several high-profile corruption scandals, became one of the recurring themes discussed in the *acampadas* (Caruso, 2018; Romanos, 2017; Romanos et al., 2021), together with mounting quests for more open, accessible, and transparent practices of democratic participation (Butler, 2019). Beyond its symbolic relevance, the search for a more transparent government rapidly became a pragmatic necessity for activists. The right to know became a necessary tool to enhance the quality of civic participation, to allow citizens to participate and make informed decisions about public goods, and to become full-fledged political subjects within the public sphere. Rather than mere premises of the 15M movement, transparency and access to information became emerging demands stemming from the prefigurative exercise of a different democratic model (Magallón Rosa et al., 2017).

Hence, existing CSOs and movements – such as pro-transparency NGOs or open-data groups- experienced significant growth and increased visibility. The once largely unheard voices calling for opening public information gained new leverage in public opinion (Sampedro & Lobera, 2014). Rather than passively take advantage of this wave of grassroots contestation, organizations such as AI participated directly in the popular uprisings, building on the discourses produced in the squares. As remembered by AI's director:

“My colleagues were working with the people who were occupying Sol to say “Transparencia Ya!”, “We want more transparency now.” So, the government had to say, “Oh yeah, we've got this transparency law, which was drafted by the Socialists originally, we got this transparency law, and we'll adopt it,” and then we pushed very hard to get it a little bit better.” SP-3

The socialists' defeat in the ballot box and various corruption scandals hitting prominent figures close to the newly formed center-right government guided by the PP forced the Parliament to intervene. By the end of September 2012, Rajoy's government released the transparency bill's first draft. The first version of the document had a pretty limited scope. The draft pursued the systematization of the complex system of norms regulating the active publication of information by the public administration⁷⁷. Simultaneously, it aimed at introducing an embryonal “right to know,” granting citizens access to public information.

The Council of Ministers approved the bill's first draft on the 26th of March, 2012. The government immediately opened a public consultation to collect suggestions on the text. AI and the coalition harshly criticized the bill's draft and launched a petition asking the government to rewrite it, reaching around 82.000 signatures. However, the government minimally modified the text before submitting it to Congress in August 2012⁷⁸.

6.2.2. *Definition of the Policy Contents*

The bill's discussion officially started in 2012- Rajoy's government opened a round of public consultations on its draft, with more than 80.000 people participating and 3700 observations expressed⁷⁹. Hence, the bill was forwarded to Congress and discussed by a dedicated committee. Over this first stage, parties in parliament presented amendments to the whole law (*emniendas de totalidad*) or specific parts (*emniendas al articulado*). In May 2013, during the committee's work, parliamentary groups presented eight integral amendments to the law, 7 asking the government to withdraw the bill altogether, and 1 to produce a new text. All of them were rejected. Other

⁷⁷ Modifying article 136, law 47/2003, 26 November, General Presupuestaria.

⁷⁸ The bill was officially approved by the Council of Ministers on the 27th of July 2012, and then submitted to Congress.

⁷⁹ The government summarized the 3700 opinions in an internal working document, which was later published by Civio and El Diario.

opposition parties presented partial amendments, discussed, and partly incorporated at later stages of the policy debate. The text introduced changes from various political forces and constitutional experts, as well as by CSOs – as the Coalition Pro Acceso- invited to express their opinions in front of the Constitutional Committee. Congress finally approved a first working draft on the 12th of September 2013. The text thus passed to the *Senado*, the high chamber, and was finally approved in December 2013⁸⁰.

All political parties diagnostically framed the transparency law as an urgent matter. The initiative matured in a critical economic and social conjuncture, skyrocketing unemployment rates and mounting social unrest (Cameron, 2014; Romanos, 2017; Zamponi & Bosi, 2016). Starting to see hints of the massive political restructuring that would have happened in just a few years (Fominaya, 2020; Orriols & Cordero, 2016; Rodríguez Teruel & Barrio, 2016), government and opposition parties used the transparency bill to re-legitimize the political system. In particular, the PP tried to divert attention from the outbreak of several corruption scandals involving the party's high ranks.

At the time of its proposal, Spain was the only European country with more than one million inhabitants without any regulation to access public information⁸¹. This element was unitarily framed as a sign of backwardness, a symbol of continuity with the country's authoritarian past, and a partial failure of the transition process. A *regeneration* frame thus crosscut the whole political spectrum. The government, opposition parties, and CSOs aligned, sustaining that the lack of a transparency law represented an unbearable shame for the country, significantly affecting its international credibility.

However, frame disputes emerged regarding *blame attribution* (Benford, 1993). As emerged from parliamentary debates, vote declarations, and amendments, opposition forces pointed at the inherently corrupt nature of the Spanish party system, reinforcing a *culturalist* interpretation of public corruption and *extending* the prevailing frames in the civic sphere (Benford & Snow, 2000b). Opposition parties thus used the eruption of several corruption scandals involving the PP and its leaders at the national and local levels to question the reform's adequacy.

At the same time, opposition parties such as Izquierda Unida worked to bridge the debate on the transparency law to the political and economic crisis experienced by the country, acknowledging the influence of the Indignados/15M protests in politicizing the issue. Opposition forces thus backed up criticisms coming from CSOs, increasing the pressure to amend the bill. CSOs and

⁸⁰ Differently from the Italian system of perfect bicameralism, Spain has a model of differentiated bicameralism.

⁸¹ The closest form of regulation of access to public information was included in article 105 b of the constitutional law and in law 30/1992, Régimen Jurídico de las Administraciones Públicas y del Procedimiento Administrativo Común, article 37, including the right to access specific documents in administrative archives.

opposition forces contrasted the government's proposal to exempt critical political institutions such as the Crown or political parties from transparency obligations, obtaining a relevant gain on this point, as acknowledged by various institutional forces. The bill thus significantly ameliorated during parliamentary debates.

However, the Coalition's attempt at creating direct ties with MPs came with costs associated with the *powerful ally* dilemma. Overall, from the PP to independentist parliamentary groups, all the institutional forces used CSOs' endorsement and opinions to defend their positions vis-à-vis political contenders (Di Puccio, 2014), producing a *legitimation frame*. All political actors thus exploited the coalition because of its legitimacy. Many opposition parties modeled their positions on the coalition's requests through the *prominence* mechanism. In the PP's case, such bottom-up legitimation openly referred to CSOs' endorsement to support a suboptimal law. In particular, the PP exploited Transparency International Spain's endorsement to pass its bill, while opposition parties exploited the Coalición Pro Acceso's principles to oppose it.

Finally, the debate focused on the strategies to ensure the correct implementation and enforcement of the law. The government's draft foresaw the creation of a special Council in charge of controlling and regulating the application of the law. Minority parties vehemently opposed the composition of such a regulatory body directly appointed by the government. Similarly, the sanctioning powers of the Council were considered highly insufficient to incentivize the PAs' compliance with the law. To some opposition parties sitting in Parliament, the Coalition's principles represented an ideal model to elaborate amendments and revise these harmful gaps.

These partly contradictory positions hold constant when looking at the motivational frames used by different civic and institutional actors. In line with its diagnostic arguments, the PP stuck to a *regeneration* frame, presenting the transparency law as necessary to rebuild the trust relationship between citizens and the government. Such a frame was in line with the aims and requests of several CSOs, with organizations such as *Hay Derecho* listing the regeneration of the Spanish political system as the primary goal of their action. Over the last phases of the policy approval, the party also elaborated a *convergence* frame, according to which the transparency law should have passed with a large parliamentary consensus, symbolizing the unity of the political system in rebuilding a direct connection with the citizenry. Those opposing the law were thus depicted as enemies of transparency and the country's progress.

The integration between CSOs and part of opposition parties served to obtain partial refinements of the law. However, the PP passed the bill, leaving many civic requests unheard. As recalled by TI-ES' spokesperson when reflecting on their influence over the definition of the policy contents:

“Our former president appeared in Congress several times, and I know that some recommendations were sent from our organization that was almost ignored, as you can see in the final result of the law, right? They do not have a sanctioning regime; it has certain shortcomings.” SP-4

6.2.3. Policy Passage

When the mobilization around the transparency law started, between the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, the Coalition Pro Acceso counted around 57 member organizations and several individual subscribers, against the 15 founding members and the 26 members listed in 2007⁸². The coalition's composition was quite heterogenous, including actors from disparate fields, such as local organizations protecting animal rights⁸³ working alongside CSOs involved in the anti-corruption⁸⁴ struggle or the human rights⁸⁵ field. Such high heterogeneity allowed the emergence of cooperative ties, even if lacking a shared collective identity (Diani, 2015b; Diani & Bison, 2004). As for the Italian case, the coalition's *heterogeneity* signals the transactional nature of the pro-accountability struggle (Mazák & Diviák, 2018; Petrova & Tarrow, 2007a).

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, the Spanish coalition seemed less flattened on the action of “pure” anti-corruption actors compared to the Italian case. Besides Access Info, which was, and still is, occupying a central position in the coalition as founder and leader, Civio, a hybrid organization at the intersection of activism and journalism, emerged as a central player (Faber & Seguín, 2019). Civio was set up with AI's support and became a crucial ally in the pro-transparency campaign, complementing AI's approach to policymaking and advocacy with technical expertise in open data and journalism. As recalled by Civio's spokesperson when referring to AI:

“They have more of a lawyer profile, more legal, and had more experience than us to try to exert common pressure to improve the transparency law being drafted here in Spain.” SP-6

The *complementarity* – in the form of accessing new resources and skills- between AI and Civio was crucial for the campaign's result. In 2012, AI and Civio decided to pressure the institutional arena by selecting a *direct* form of action (Bosi & Zamponi, 2020), building the civic platform “*Tu derecho a saber*” to provide citizens with information to foster political change. In addition, the platform served to relaunch bottom-up campaigns created by AI and Civio, calling followers to

⁸² The complete list of members in 2007, 2012, and 2022 can be found in Appendix 1.

⁸³ Asociación Andaluza para la Defensa de los animales (ASANDA).

⁸⁴ Transparencia Internacional España.

⁸⁵ Amnistía Internacional España.

contact MPs in Congress via Twitter to accelerate the passage of the transparency bill⁸⁶. Overall, the *horizontal integration* between CSOs was pivotal to increasing the leverage over the government and MPs (Cinalli, 2007a; Cinalli & Fuglister, 2008).

In particular, the coalition exploited e-petitions at various policy process stages – from the first governmental draft to the discussion in Congress of the bill- to win public opinion support. As remembered by the spokesperson of Civio:

“One of the pressure measures we did was to collect signatures, start an online signature collection (...) We collected about 54,000 signatures, more or less, in a period of, I think, approximately 6 or 7 months.” SP-6

The complementarity of the CSOs involved in the coalition, the unity of its core members, and the use of mobilization strategies to increase the public opinion pressure were thus fundamental tools to show the WUNCness of the transparency campaign, easing the interactions with institutional representatives along the policy process (Wouters & Walgrave, 2017).

Despite some friction with government officials and political representatives, the relationships between the coalition and institutional players seldom became openly conflictual. The general tendency towards *cooperative* or *competitive* relational strategies, building on the 15M mobilizations, which, as Political Watch’s spokesperson maintained, had drastically changed citizens’ expectations towards the political class:

“There was an obvious empowerment of citizens, a bit of a recognition of rights that were the same before, they were like petitions, and little was known, right? The right to participation, the right of access to information...and that generated a very clear change of attitude in the political class and the public administration (...) the attitude of accessibility, the attitude of acknowledging that there was no going back in opening information, in participation, in transparency. That was a change; there is a direct causality between the 15M and these changes.” SP-8

Despite the positive opportunities for the civic sector (Cameron, 2014; Fominaya, 2020) and the coalition’s efforts to secure support via lobbying and advocacy, influencing the law's passage was far from easy. According to one of the members of Civio, CSOs had access to the first drafts of the text thanks to Access Info’s long-standing political connections:

“It was not easy to access the first drafts of the legislative project that the political groups were going to handle, that above all thanks also to Access INFO, which as it had been before, had more contact with representatives, with deputies and people of the political world. We accessed the drafts and saw they were not up to the task.” SP-6

⁸⁶ After 228 days sitting in Parliament, the government draft was still waiting to be discussed. Access Info and Civio called for a tweet bombing on the Congress twitter account and on congresspeople to ask about the law.

The coalition intensified its lobbying activities to amend the law, lamenting its limitation. Given its centrality, AI managed to obtain a meeting with the PM's office, presenting its critiques of the bill and advancing its proposals to improve the text. AI aimed at granting the right to inform the status of a human right, a theme that opposition parties later appropriated. When recalling the most salient moment of the campaign, one of Civio's members affirmed that their main activities were:

“Meeting with the political groups and presenting them with the law's limitations, explaining that it was not like that in other countries. Not only because those entities were left out, but, for example, in some countries, the right of access to information is considered a right based on the Constitution. So, we pressed with those 4-5 points to tell them that we need a better law.” SP-6

The coalition was also directly invited by some opposition parties, such as Izquierda Plural, to participate in a committee working on amending the bill. Taking advantage of these connections, CSOs worked in synergy with some of these parties, obtaining the endorsement of most of their proposals by opposition forces. However, when passing the law, most of their requests remained unheard. Among many losses, CSOs obtained the extension of transparency requirements to the Crown and political parties. As maintained by one of the spokespersons of Hay Derecho:

“The transparency law was much more meager, short, when it came to the Congress of Deputies. It was the social movements, the ones that managed to get article number 3 of the 2013 transparency law, where it says about parties and unions as well; in other words, it was broadened a lot.” SP-2

Hence, during the most hectic phases of the policy process and concerning the most controversial contents of the law, CSOs opted for more confrontational repertoires when needed. For example, the coalition looked for other institutional brokers to multiply pressure on the government. While trying to forge direct relationships with members of the majority (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000), e.g., being invited by Ministries to official meetings, AI exploited its international connections to push for broader reform. In addition, the civil society sector increased its leverage over the government, pairing critical opinions from international organizations with a strategy of *naming* and *shaming* on the organizations' communication channels and mainstream media (della Porta, 2018; Jiménez, 2004; Peruzzotti, 2019). As recalled by AI's president, sometimes, these initiatives resulted in increasing tensions with the government:

“We got the OSCE to invite, to get an expert, they chose the former special rapporteur for the Americas, to write an analysis of the draft Spanish access to info nation law. And he wrote a very critical analysis. And the government, the particular minister, hated it. Hated it. And we know he hated it because we were told by a journalist that he picked up the phone, almost swearing down the phone and the journalist. I mean, he was talking to the journalist trying to get the journalists from a right-center newspaper to write something against it.” SP-3

Confrontational actions to influence political elites included forms of online mobilization. In March 2013, to accelerate the discussion and approval of the law, AI, Civio, and other groups organized a

tweet bombing targeting MPs in Congress. A few months later, a small coalition constituted by Access Info, Civio, Qué hacen los diputados, Open Knowledge Spain, OpenKratio, and Proyecto Avizor called their followers to initiate an email bombing action. By asking people to select and contact one senator, the organizations were trying to let circulate their proposals, asking MPs to take a clear stance on the law. Contextually, CSOs sent letters to various embassies in Madrid and launched a Change.org petition, which collected 37.415 signatures in just a few weeks. Building on this mobilization strategy, the organizations launched a new campaign, #SenadoTrasparente, which made it to relevant media channels such as La Sexta.

Despite the combination of coalitional efforts, direct contact, and brokerage, the Senate approved the law failing to include many of the coalition's requests. The law was officially adopted by Congress on the 28th of November, 2013, coming into force one year later. Many groups, such as Civio and AI, strongly criticized the law's final version for its many gaps. However, after a few years, all the interviewees acknowledged that their role was fundamental to get the approval of a law which, far from being completely satisfactory, still represented a crucial turning point in the struggle towards a more transparent state.

6.2.4. Policy Implementation

Once new legislation comes into force, the media and public opinion attention tend to decline, the urgent threats and needs that motivated the mobilization seem to disappear, fewer economic resources accrue, coalitions can crumble, and organizational structures can undergo significant changes. CSOs know that the policy process hardly stops when a new law is approved and comes into force. On the contrary, implementing any law can significantly shape and constrain the actual impact of new rules, hindering or downsizing processes of political change (Amenta et al., 2018; Andrews, 2001; Buchter, 2021). However, influencing the implementation phase is hard, even for the more successful social movements and CSOs. Nonetheless, CSOs may play a role in the law's implementation and orient institutional behavior with their information and example, especially when legislation is vague, subject to interpretation, or recently introduced (Burstein, 1999).

Unlike the Italian case, where the CSOs that contributed to the passage of the Freedom of Information Act quickly demobilized, the Spanish CSOs started to work on implementing the law right after its passage. As affirmed by Civio's spokesperson:

“The law was approved far below what we wanted; what we have done since then is meet both with the Government, the successive governments, as well as with the opposition and other parties since then, trying to raise awareness.” SP-6

Hence, the coalition maintained its direct contact strategy in the Parliamentary arena. However, faced with the *extension dilemma*, some of its core members decided to invest time and resources to enter national, regional, and local administrative arenas.

Nationally, the coalition tried to influence the law's regulatory decree with questionable results. The *Consejo de Transparencia y Buen Gobierno*, the regulatory agency monitoring the law's implementation, obtained few substantial powers, with a virtually non-existent system of formal sanctions. At this stage, CSOs obtained very few formal gains; however, their influence increased via *direct connections with reform-minded decision-makers*. For instance, while the design and structure of the *Consejo de Transparencia y Buen Gobierno* raised many doubts and critiques from the CSOs, the first president of the Council proved particularly keen to cooperate with the civic sector, to the point of being acknowledged as a crucial ally by many CSOs. As maintained by Civio's spokesperson:

“The first president of the Transparency Council was very motivated, very committed to transparency. In other words, she was someone that no one expected, not even the Government, which had appointed her. No one expected her to be such a promoter of transparency. She was so often on the side of the citizen instead of on the side of the administration. So, seeing her work day-by-day encouraged us to see ways of collaborating with her.” SP-6

A reform-minded president who understood the movement's requests and worked to implement them represented a crucial influence channel (Harrison, 2016). More importantly, the *bonds of trust* developed with the President helped CSOs keep on with their mobilization vis-à-vis eventual frustrations. More than influencing the implementation stage, the *closure mechanisms* – based on ties of trust and mutual recognition- gave continuity to the mobilization process. Indeed, these “informal” gains hardly piled up in systemic changes and faded after the council's restructuring since the new board proved less open to input from CSOs. At best, the influence over the implementation phase has passed through direct connections (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000), which appear fragile and insufficient to set the stage for broader and durable systemic change processes.

Yet, the contrasting results obtained at the national level opened new spaces for influence at the local level. In many cases, CSOs entered administrative arenas opting for direct rather than indirect strategies. As allowed by the Spanish institutional design, local governments and regional autonomies started work on their transparency laws, creating relevant disparities in the quality and quantity of information that citizens can access based on where they live (Jiménez et al., 2012; Villoria et al., 2013). The co-existence of several national, regional, and local legislative obligations multiplied the doubts and uncertainties for public institutions that had to comply with multiple

transparency obligations. According to TI-Es' spokesperson, this complexity helped CSOs to craft direct contacts with several authorities and local governments throughout the country, becoming de-facto *mediators* in the law's interpretation and implementation. Amid a system of complex information, CSOs crafted and exploited direct contacts with PAs and civil servants and, through a *contagion* mechanism, supplied them with information to guide administrative action:

“As the regulation never arrived, autonomous communities created their laws (...). In that sense, there has been interaction with us to see how city councils can get over it. The communities are concerned, “I have to comply with the local, the local has to comply with the autonomous community and the national,” so they have like that triple or double, depending on where you are, obligation and often disparate. So, in that sense, we have had more or less active participation through these indices, where we have helped guide them.” SP-4

Simultaneously, much of the work to influence the law's implementation happened outside institutional arenas. At the meso-level, for example, the interaction *between* CSOs with different backgrounds and expertise broadened the scope of the transparency law, furnishing relevant information to carry out civic initiatives in various fields. Moreover, given the lack of clear institutional guidelines, skilled and specialized CSOs such as AI or Civio have often served as *brokers* (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000), supporting other CSOs in their attempt to collect and reutilize public information. Under the guidance of these transparency actors, other civic groups have thus had the opportunity to take advantage of the new legislation, going beyond the technical difficulties in the law implementation.

“We have helped, for example, Greenpeace to request information, to use the transparency law from organizations that are not specialized in it, Green Peace, and many others. We have investigated public contracts, for example, on health issues for other social organizations that investigated these issues, so we have collaborated a lot helping other organizations that work in particular areas use the transparency law.” SP-6

In addition, to partially solve the bill's shortcomings and secure citizens' identity in exerting their right to information, many CSOs have created intermediation services where citizens can ask to access information via civic groups. CSOs thus become *mediators* in the transparency system through forms of direct social action, easing the process of accessing information and working as a filter between the citizenry and the institutions (Magallón Rosa et al., 2017). As maintained by one interviewee from Hay Derecho:

“Especially when there are questions about sensitive issues, for example, an official who is working in the administration and wants to know something but maybe he prefers not to disclose who he is (...) "Don't worry, the Foundation asks it for you." So, the name does not appear, nor does the person appear, "and then we will give you the information," it is sometimes used when there are topics that people prefer not to ask directly.” SP-2

Hence, not only have CSOs sometimes managed to orient the PAs' behavior over the implementation stage but have worked as gatekeepers to connect a multicity of players – other CSOs, private citizens, and civil servants- to administrations and information repositories, easing access to public information and hence finding alternative channels to intervene in the law's implementation.

6.2.5. Policy Enforcement and Evaluation

Spanish CSOs reached relevant results even at the enforcement stage, intervening in different arenas. To secure some gains at this stage CSOs such as Civio and AI solved the *basket* dilemma, intervening in several arenas, such as courts, PAs, media, etc. Those groups able to balance collaboration and conflict through *cooperative* and *competitive* relational strategies managed to take the most from this stage.

On a more cooperative side, the integration between well-established and legitimized actors such as AI and political elites was particularly relevant to advance the state of transparency and push forward the policy process at its initial stages. For example, before the transparency law passed, AI happened to recur to MPs to get access to public information and internal documents otherwise inaccessible to the public. Once the law came into force, the cooperative relationships between the Transparency Council and CSOs such as Civio legitimized civic actors' requests vis-à-vis the resistance of the PAs. Indeed, the number of exceptions in the law and the so-called *negative silence* allowed the PAs to dismiss part of citizens' requests to access public information. Hence, CSOs often turned to the Transparency Council to see their right to know legitimized. However, being the Council devoid of sanctioning powers, its official pronouncement favoring CSOs seldom yielded tangible results.

On a more conflictual note, CSOs have often resorted to the *litigation* instrument to advance their goals and contribute to law enforcement (Hilson, 2002; McCammon & McGrath, 2015; McCann, 1991). For example, when PAs neglected the right to access public information, CSOs turned to courts to reaffirm their right. However, these actions have often yielded symbolic rather than substantial results. Besides, the shift from primarily cooperative to more confrontational repertoires of action weakened the civil society front, increasing tensions between CSOs holding different relational strategies. For example, AI's President reported that when they decided to resort to the litigation instrument:

“Members of the Access Info team had requested information they were not given; we went to court. Oh! The reaction against that from other coalition members Pro Acceso (...) was like, “We don't litigate.” It

was seen as super confrontational and super inappropriate. It was fascinating to see how a mixture of kind of fear and just feeling that it wasn't appropriate somehow in other members of the coalition Pro Acceso. So, Access Info, we did it on our own.” SP-3

AI understood civil society’s role as an alternative to institutional actors. In contrast, CSOs following co-optative strategies were unwilling to deploy confrontational tactics because of their dependence on institutional resources and adherence to institutional values and forms of action:

“In a more kind of mature civil society context, you would have civil society organizations who are critical, who will challenge, who will litigate, but who understand as well, and you are ready to kind of brainstorm solutions with the people in the public administration who are trying to do the right thing.” SP-3

However, once the law came into force, confrontational strategies became more appealing to a broader set of CSOs, particularly those involved in journalistic and monitoring projects. Groups following a *competitive strategy* entered the legal arena to secure the necessary public information for their work. According to Hay Derecho’s former head of communication, choosing to move the confrontation was somewhat forced by institutional actors trying to curtail the law's transformative effects:

“They force you to go to court (...) This is important because in Spain, the courts take a long time, and that means that you get the information because normally, if you are right, and Court will assess it, but maybe a year has passed, two years have passed, and they no longer have the same importance, because the information is important if it is immediate, right? (...) So they play a little with this, with time.” SP-2

The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures paved the way for new conflicts to emerge. As in the Italian case, the Spanish government blocked access to public information during the first months of confinement. However, Spanish CSOs, like the Italian ones, organized and reclaimed their right to obtain information on the pandemic and the measures implemented to tackle it (Cifuentes-Faura, 2021). According to Civio, indeed, the decision to block the right to information was not a necessity but rather the expression of a precise political will:

“We demand the Government, together with other organizations, within the Pro-Access coalition, for example, not to paralyze the administrative procedures associated with the right to access information, which didn't happen. We saw that many autonomous communities, and many regional governments, instead of not responding, responded even earlier. In other words, it was possible, despite the government's difficulties, it was possible to respond to people and solve their doubts in moments of great social anxiety.” SP-6

The pandemic has thus shed additional light on the law’s shortcomings. In particular, it has clarified how gains and steps forward promoted by civil society actors are still far from crystallizing into systemic changes. The disparities between regional autonomies, the great discretionary power of the PAs, and the dependence on the “goodwill” of committed civil servants draw a pretty negative image of the state-of-the-art transparency in the country. However, the eventful character of the pandemic has unveiled the relevance of data and information in everyone’s everyday life. New calls

for transparency have thus echoed the work of committed CSOs, triggering further accountability gains. In particular, the convergence between legal and mobilization strategies has proven particularly fruitful. An excellent example in this sense is offered by one of Maldita's editors when recalling the process through which the organization succeeded in opening information about the expert committee deciding upon mobility and lockdown measures in Spain:

"They (i.e., the government) said that they were not going to make it public because they were going to receive pressure, that they were civil servants, that they were qualified. We believe this is not the case and that citizens have the right to know who is making decisions and evaluating something so important and relevant (...) We did request it, but they did not give it to us; we complained to the Council and requested it many times in a thousand ways. Obviously, we were not the only ones; many media did it. I think that this is an ant-like type of work (...) and the end, we got the names and published them, we published them." SP-7

Whereas small procedural and substantial gains have accumulated throughout the years, systemic or *hard* accountability results appear yet to come (Fox, 2007). For this reason, pro-transparency CSOs have shifted back to the policy arena, launching a new campaign asking to reform the law. This new policy proposal builds on the results of years of mobilization. Indeed, as mentioned by the spokesperson of Civio, over the years, members of the coalition have kept on:

"Meeting with the Government, the opposition, and other parties to raise awareness. On the one hand, to persuade them, to influence them to reform and improve the law, and on the other hand, to persuade people to create the opinion that it is necessary and needs to be improved. There is a commitment, now, that the law will be reviewed." SP-6

The theme of transparency and access to information have become central to any aspect of public life and have come to the forefront of democratic debates (Feenstra et al., 2017; Fominaya, 2020; Magallón Rosa et al., 2017). Almost ten years after the transparency law has come into force, both CSOs and institutional actors have learned a lot about the pitfalls, potentialities, and strategies to push forward or resist the social and political change that more open and accessible information engenders. Among the various factors accounting for the influence of CSOs across the policy process narrated above, the main merits of these civic groups have been to hold their position even when in abeyance, to have kept on working, becoming trustable yet fearsome transparency actors for the institutional world. The power of influence and the legitimation coming from these *positional efforts* are well-expressed in this back-and-forth dialogue between two members of Access Info:

"I believe that our constant participation as transparency actors in the creation of a culture of transparency has created a bond of comradeship, to say it here, but it is a bond of trust between those who make these decisions, between the government and the civil society, because when we have had to insist we insist, but this has also given them the confidence that they too, "well, if they are demanding this so much we are going to include it". In the case of the action plan, when they gave us the draft, to all the civil society, to

all the open government forum, there were things that had been left out and we wrote "what happened with this recommendation" and they included it.

H: Was satisfying, eh?

P: Yeah, for us it was like "Oh, they included it" SP-3

Tab. 6.1. Actors, dilemmas, strategies, and mechanisms in the Spanish transparency campaign

| Phase | Actor | Dilemma | Positional Strategy | Relational Strategy | Relational Mechanism |
|--|-------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|----------------------|
| <i>Agenda-setting</i> | Access Info | Engagement Being there Inevitability | Coalition Direct Contact | Cooperative | Contagion |
| <i>Policy Contents</i> | Pro Acceso | Powerful Ally | Direct Contact | Cooperative & Co-optative | Prominence |
| <i>Policy Passage</i> | Pro Acceso | Engagement Dirty Hands | Direct Contact Brokerage | Cooperative & Competitive | Prominence |
| <i>Policy Implementation</i> | AI/Civio TI-Es | Extension | Direct Contact Brokerage | Cooperative/Competitive Co-optative | Closure Contagion |
| <i>Policy Enforcement & Evaluation</i> | AI/Civio TI-Es | Basket | Direct Contact Coalition | Cooperative/Competitive Co-optative | Contagion |

6. 3. Whistleblowing in Spain

Whistleblowing represents the quintessential form of individual protest, and whistleblowers are a prominent example of ethical resisters moved by moral principles (Jasper, 1997, 2018). However, whistleblowers seldom act in isolation. On the contrary, they interact with various actors, from institutional to extra-institutional (Near & Miceli, 1985; Santoro & Kumar, 2018). In particular, they often synergize with CSOs and SMOs, obtaining reciprocal benefits (Bernstein & Jasper, 1996; Bushnell, 2020; De Maria, 2008). The increasing international attention on the role of whistleblowers has thus coupled with an increased commitment on CSOs to protect whistleblowers, often pointing at their contribution to the anti-corruption struggle.

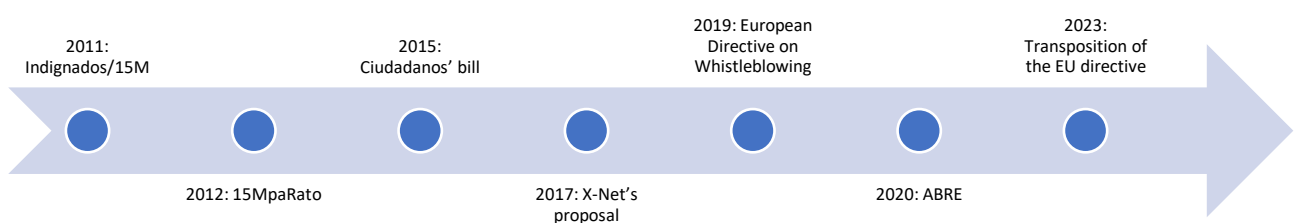
Whereas the Italian civil society sector experienced some setbacks during its journey to obtain a whistleblowers' protection law, its trajectory was more or less linear. After years of silent and almost unnoticed mobilization, the conjuncture of the favorable political opportunity structure and

the strategic integration between civic and institutional allies secured the bill's passage. On the contrary, the Spanish route whistleblowers' protection faced many obstacles. However, labeling the Spanish case as an instance of failure would be partial and misleading. As in the Italian case, the (lack of) regulation of whistleblowing in Spain helps shed light on the multiple influences CSOs can play when producing SA.

X-Net, a spinoff SMO of the 15M/*Indignados*, started to receive and exploit leakers' information to mount lawsuits against Spanish political and financial elites. The attention received by the campaign in the media and its success in courts helped popularize whistleblowing, which became a legitimate democratic practice. Moreover, the creation of safe platforms for information disclosure has qualified these actors as technology- and product-oriented SMOs (Hess, 2005), able to trigger social change through the creation and use of digital tools, here intended as a form of direct social action (Bosi & Zamponi, 2020).

However, the evolution of political circumstances led these actors to change their strategies over time. When the political system started to reorganize after the 15M critical juncture (della Porta, 2020; Portos & Carvalho, 2022), CSOs mobilizing on whistleblowing shifted from a strategy of direct social action to more direct involvement in the policy arena through a legal input strategy (Mattoni & Odilla, 2021). Changing the arena modified the relational dynamics in the field and created new ties with those CSOs that started turning to the whistleblowing theme. However, the lack of vertical integration with political parties and the fragmentation of the civic sector hampered the influence over the national policy process. At the same time, relevant gains accrued locally and at the international level. Fig.6.2. presents the main steps of the whistleblowing campaign.

Fig. 6.2. Timeline of the Spanish whistleblowing campaign



6.3.1. Agenda-setting

The first instances of mobilization around whistleblowing date back to 2012, when leaks from whistleblowers animated the outbreak of spiff-off campaigns orbiting around the Indignados/15M mobilization. Among various initiatives, the campaign *15MpaRato* represents one of the more critical and instructive examples (Fominaya, 2020).

In May 2012, during the first anniversary of the *Indignados* mobilization in Barcelona, an activist asked, “Why don’t we have Rato sent to prison in five years?”⁸⁷. Rodrigo Rato, former director of the IMF, Minister of the Economy, vice president of the Spanish government, and president of Caja Madrid - then Bankia⁸⁸ - rapidly became the symbol of the corruption of the Spanish political system (Blakeley, 2019). The connection with the Indignados/15M appeared already in the campaign’s name, even though *15MpaRato* maintained a certain autonomy from the movement and its constitutive groups. As affirmed by one of the campaign’s leaders:

“It is a very transversal movement (...) the organizations and groups are not involved as such, but there are people who participate in one of those groups and also lend a hand in this initiative”. *SEl Mundo*, 22/05/2012

The campaign was led by a small core of activists and supported by a sizeable civic network (Fominaya, 2020). *15MpaRato* quickly gained the support of many pivotal groups, which animated the 15M: *Democracia Real Ya*, the *Plataforma Auditoría Ciudadana de la Deuda*, the *Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH)*, *X.net*, *#CierraBankia*, *Toma Tu Banco*, *Democracia 4.0*, *#opEuribor*, *Iaioflautas*, *Toma Parte*, with the support of academics, journalists, lawyers, and individual citizens. The initiative thus showed a high level of heterogeneity, reflecting the networked and diverse composition of the 15M (Monterde et al., 2015).

Among these groups, X-Net emerged clearly as the more central organization in the platform coordinating the campaign. X-Net is a grassroots group founded in 2008 in Barcelona, working on technopolitics, digital rights, and corruption, among the initiators of the 15M. With around 94 grassroots organizations, X-Net launched the *15MpaRato* campaign intending to land Rato in prison and make the corrupt elites pay for the costs of the economic crisis. As maintained by one of its spokespersons, the campaign represented:

“A way to restore dignity to Spanish laws so that if the powers are incapable of applying them, it will be the citizens who do it.” *El Mundo*, 22/05/2012

⁸⁷ [How Spanish activists landed ex-IMF head Rodrigo Rato in court - BBC News](#)

⁸⁸ The bailout of Bankia contributed to set in motion the crisis of the Spanish economy.

Since the very beginning of their mobilization, these groups launched a twofold call. On the one hand, they asked citizens to leak all the potentially relevant information to build the case against Rato. On the other hand, they organized a political crowdfund to collect the necessary resources to bring the case to court. The results were astonishing. The initiative collected more than 15000 euros in about 24 hours, and the essential evidence arrived in a matter of weeks.

At this stage, whistleblowing was not intended as a policy issue but as a tool to obtain *formal* and *informal* sanctions against misbehaving elites. Representing 44 small savers who lost their money, 15MpaRato framed the case of Bankia as a fraud, accusing Rato of falsifying and manipulating documents. According to the X-Net's spokesperson, the group became a reference point for the citizenry, considered more trustable than public institutions. A few months later, the members of the anti-corruption commission of the newly created Partido X – born out of X-Net, received an anonymous email saying:

“I have very important information (...) that draws a clear picture of institutional corruption in Spain.” Sp-X-Net

The evidence leaked by the anonymous informant opened a new line of investigation, the so-called *Tarjetas Negras* case. This second flow of information focused again on Rato and his involvement in an embezzlement case for the misuse of Bankia's funds. The significant volume of information received forced X-Net to open its first reporting platform– *X-Net Leaks*- to keep track of all the evidence related to Rato's case and to give voice to many other instances of public corruption. Later, the group started cooperating with the Italian *Hermes Center*, using its open-source software for its platform.

X-Net then used the leaks to build a citizen lawsuit against Rato and other prominent figures in Bankia. The legal opportunity structure eased the strategic choice of entering the legal arena (De Fazio, 2012; Hilson, 2002; Vanhala, 2012). The Spanish system of the *accusation* or *acción popular*, which entitles every Spanish citizen to file a lawsuit to denounce crimes related to the public sphere in general interests⁸⁹, offered legal opportunities for the *15MPaRato* initiative, which successfully opened an investigation against Rodrigo Rato and other top figures of Bankia.

At the same time, X-Net used the information accruing from its platform to exert non-institutional sanctions against corrupt elites (Mattoni, 2018; Segura, 2019). By supplying the media with

⁸⁹ Art. 101, Ley de Enjuiciamiento Criminal, “The criminal action is public. All Spanish citizens may exercise it in accordance with the provisions of the Law”.

information on relevant corruption cases, X-Net attracted public opinion support, increasing its *threatening potential* vis-à-vis the political elites. Presenting its leaking platform, the group affirmed that:

“All the elements we need to build a citizen surveillance and control network against corruption are there; all that is needed is the correct channel to reach the specialists who know how to use it to act, both in the media and legally. This channel is the X-Net platform.” Sp-X-Net

The amount of evidence collected through grassroots leaks and the magnitude of the political scandal attracted the attention of mainstream media. However, when journalists pressured the organization to disclose their informants' names, X-Net granted its sources absolute anonymity. At the same time, the amount and relevance of the information were so impressive that it served as a bargaining tool. Traditional media had to accept the conditions posed by 15MpaRato to cover the news and access the leaks. In the words of the leader of X-Net, this was the only possible option since the group was ready to self-publicize the same information through a communication guerrilla strategy. As a result, 15MpaRato ended up collaborating with the more influential media outlets of the country, such as El Mundo, El Diario, InfoLibre, El Pais, and 20 minutos.

Faced with the *engagement dilemma*, X-Net preferred to avoid the policy arena for several reasons. First, X-Net and other groups working on the 15MpaRato campaign opposed the neo-liberal model of representative democracy (Caruso, 2018; della Porta, 2018). Second, rejecting the legitimacy of the representative model, these actors called for a move towards participatory forms of democracy, as they prefiguratively enacted in the *acampadas* all over the country. Third, incumbent parties were blamed for the economic crisis, accused of corruptness, and refused as legitimate interlocutors. Hence, whistleblowing was intended as a monitoring practice to tear down the existing corrupt system, not a policy matter to be regulated by the same political elites it served to sanction. In its manual on how to curb corruption from the grassroots, X-Net clearly states that:

“Corruption will not end with the corrupt; only organized citizens can do it, and we are doing it.” Sp-X-Net

In its publications⁹⁰, X-Net invited whistleblowers and citizens to be suspicious of political parties, institutions, and the media and asked informants to well-document their leaks, protect their identity and organize from below to unveil institutional wrongdoing. On its website, X-Net maintains that:

“As citizens, we do not perceive political parties and the judicial system as allies against corruption and abuse, but rather as part of the problem (...) At Xnet, we firmly believe that freedom of expression is not

⁹⁰ [Cómo luchamos contra la corrupción: manual de uso para la ciudadanía](#)

a right of the big media but a right of citizenship. For this reason, we work so citizens can provide information to detect corruption cases.” Sp-X-Net

Hence, whistleblowing was, and still is, regarded as a specific *practice* of grassroots political participation, a counter-democratic tool to curb public corruption and hold power accountable.

However, the situation changed significantly in just a few years. Around 2016-2017, whistleblowing became an international policy issue and started attracting the attention of other CSOs. As remembered by Hay Derecho’s spokesperson, an NGO that started working on the topic in those years, whistleblowing was new to the Spanish field, and the idea of regulating it by law was utterly alien to most Spanish CSOs and political parties:

“In Spain, there wasn’t, let’s say, a lot of know-how, and they (i.e., *some American CSOs*) told us a little about how they worked. In other words, it hasn’t been that long since people started talking about it in Spain (...) Many people are already working on this, but it was quite new 5 or 6 years ago. Not much was known. Of course, there were whistleblowers, right? It was unknown whether there could be some regulatory framework or protection, or how that worked (...) There was nothing, and nothing was known.” SP-2

As in the case of the right to know, whistleblowing and its possible legal regulations came to Spain through international *diffusion*. X-Net developed its conflictual strategy thanks to its connections with the American whistleblowing movement and, according to its leader, its direct relationships with WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. As a policy issue, instead, the topic entered the Spanish debate as a tool coming from the private sector, then transposed to the public one. As maintained by Transparency Spain (TI-Es):

“In 2010, it introduced the reform of the Penal Code, for criminal liability of legal persons (...) so the companies needed to exempt or mitigate their responsibility, were some compliance systems or models, among which the most important element is the whistleblowing channel (...) it came later to the public sector.” SP-4

The eruption of multiple corruption scandals increased whistleblowing visibility and salience for political parties. At the same time, more and more CSOs started to focus on the theme, modeling their positions on international CSOs dealing with whistleblowers’ protection. Confronted with all these changes, X-Net had to reconsider its decisions. The attention of many players dragged whistleblowers’ protection into the policy arena.

6.3.2. *Definition of the Policy Contents*

Throughout the years, Spain has witnessed different attempts at passing a law to protect whistleblowers. However, hints about the scarce possibilities of those bills becoming laws were already visible when analyzing the discursive positioning of CSOs and institutional actors on the

theme. Frame integration or alignment processes did not materialize, whereas several frame disputes emerged (Benford, 1993; Croteau & Hicks, 2003). On the contrary, the institutional and civic positions integrated more efficiently at the international, regional, and local levels, generating productive dialogues.

The center-right populist party Ciudadanos was the first political actor to push for introducing a bill to protect whistleblowers in Spain. The law, presented to Congress in 2015, was harshly opposed by X-Net and other civic subjects and never made it to the parliamentary debate. As a reaction, X-Net decided to engage in the parliamentary arena and elaborated an alternative text. In 2020, the extreme-right party Vox elaborated its bill, while Ciudadanos and X-Net kept pushing their proposals. To date, none of these initiatives has led to any policy outcomes.

Meanwhile, X-Net participated in designing the European Directive on whistleblowing and Catalan legislation to protect whistleblowers. Simultaneously, it opened the first institutional whistleblowing platform with the municipality of Barcelona, now replicated by several institutional actors. In March 2023, the coalitional government led by Mr. Sanchez finally transposed the European Directive into the Spanish legal framework, disregarding all the existing proposals.

As in the Italian case, much of the Spanish debate focused on defining whistleblowing and finding a suitable translation for the term. The lack of a straightforward linguistic adaptation was, and partly still is, perceived as a sign of the cultural hostility towards people ready to “speak the truth to power.”

The first draft, presented by Ciudadanos, identified whistleblowers using the term *denunciantes*. As maintained by the Italian CSOs, however, the Spanish civic sector strongly opposed the term for its limiting scope. To denounce implies filing an official report to enforcement authorities instead of whistleblowing's preventive role. If informants report possible misbehaviors and inconsistencies that might raise a red flag and prevent a crime from happening, a *denunciante* speaks to the public authority only when a crime has already occurred.

Since the beginning of their mobilization, X-Net and civic groups participating in the 15mPaRato campaign opted for the more nuanced term of *alertadores*, intending to extend the protection to all those subjects detaining relevant information on eventual institutional wrongdoings. Such a linguistic difference was deemed essential by the Spanish CSOs, as it meant extending protections to a broader plethora of citizens. Whereas Ciudadanos ignored the proposal, other political forces

seemed more receptive to this policy idea, preferring the term *alertadores*⁹¹ in their motions. Later Ciudadanos reviewed its text after the European Directive passed in 2019, switching to the term *alertadores*, while Vox's proposal stuck to *denunciates*. At the local level, the municipality of Barcelona, which has begun to work with X-Net, preferred the term *alertador* rather than *denunciante*. As often happens, the problem of definitions represented more than a simple linguistic issue and shows whether and to what extent CSOs introduced new policy ideas into political debates (Amenta & Chen, 2023).

Frame disputes also emerged at the *prognostic* level (Benford, 1993; Snow & Benford, 1992). X-Net decided to engage in the policy arena to contrast Ciudadanos' proposal and enhance the policy discussion. As in the Italian case, much of the players' prognostic debates opposed confidentiality and anonymity. X-Net proposed the introduction of encrypted whistleblowing platforms to safeguard informants' anonymity and foresaw an official role for CSOs committed to whistleblowers' protection. In particular, building on the results already achieved at the European level, X-Net and other civic groups asked to introduce NGOs and CSOs as alternative leaking channels alongside institutional ones.

Motivationally, much debate and discursive positioning about whistleblowing focused on its anti-corruption value. From Ciudadanos' proposals and Vox's draft to the bill presented by Sanchez's government, all the policy initiatives coupled the protection of whistleblowers to the anticorruption fight in their title. On the contrary, X-Net's text, presented in 2019 and sponsored by 15 MPs, was the only one leaving the anticorruption struggle outside the law title.

Again, these definitional choices carry different, sometimes irreconcilable, understandings of whistleblowing and its potentialities. For example, X-Net regarded whistleblowing as a democratic practice to speak the truth vis-à-vis constituted powers and hence tried to widen its frames beyond discourses on corruption. Conversely, political parties such as Ciudadanos and Vox did their best to bridge informants' protection to their anti-corruption and anti-establishment rhetoric.

The existence of sharp ideological, methodological, and motivational differences between CSOs and parliamentary forces sponsoring whistleblowers' protection hampered frame integration

⁹¹ Moreover, the term *alertador* was more in line with the European Directive (2019/1937), which affirms that: "By reporting breaches of Union law that are harmful to the public interest, such persons act as 'whistleblowers' and thereby play a key role in exposing and preventing such breaches and in safeguarding the welfare of society." European Directive, 2019/1937

processes. On the contrary, frame disputes at the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational levels weakened the possibilities of different proposals to move along subsequent phases of the policy process.

6.3.3. Policy Passage

Attempts to pass a law protecting whistleblowers trace back to 2015-2016, when the protection of informants had transformed into a salient policy issue at the international and national levels. At first, the unity and strength of the civic sector were pivotal to introducing the topic of whistleblowing into the public debate and transforming it into a prominent policy issue. When 15MpaRato emerged, whistleblowers' leaks were catalyzers for broad mobilizations stemming from the 15M and bringing forward the movement's claims and goals (Fominaya, 2020; Mattoni, 2018; Segura, 2019). The campaign's success in the legal arena and its salience in the media legitimized whistleblowers' voices and troubles in public debates. The mobilizations around and on whistleblowing and whistleblowers' rights thus displayed worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, namely high levels of WUNCness (Tilly, 1999; Wouters, 2018; Wouters & Walgrave, 2017).

At this point, more and more CSOs had started to mobilize and work on whistleblowers' rights, exploiting the mounting international attention over the theme. However, there was very little knowledge about how to intervene and regulate the whistleblowing process. Spanish CSOs modeled their proposals on international examples to fill this gap, which differed significantly from what movement actors such as X-Net were doing. Hence, international models conflicted with local interventions in the whistleblowing arena, as is often the case with anti-corruption practices and discourses (Bukovansky, 2006; Gephart, 2016; Sampson, 2015). The confluence of more moderate CSOs in the whistleblowing arena also changed the prevailing forms of action. More institutional actors like TI-Es rebuffed 15MpaRato's confrontational repertoires in the legal and media arena in favor of advocacy and lobbying activities. In such a context, coalitional efforts were difficult to initiate and proved scarcely influential when materialized. X-Net started to understand that it was time to enter the policy arena. However, it eventually did it only once Ciudadanos' presented the first draft to regulate whistleblowers' protection to Parliament.

Ciudadanos, founded in Catalunya in 2005, peaked in the 2015 local and regional elections. Starting its trajectory at the regional level, the party slowly transformed into a national political force, heavily campaigning on transparency and anti-corruption (Orriols & Cordero, 2016; Revilla-Blanco & Molina-Sánchez, 2021; Rodríguez Teruel & Barrio, 2016). Once in Parliament, Ciudadanos rapidly presented a draft introducing whistleblowers' protection in the Spanish legislation.

X-Net harshly contested the bill, considering it potentially harmful to whistleblowers. In particular, X-Net contested Ciudadanos' attempt at instituting a national authority with regulatory powers on whistleblowers' leaks and independent sanctioning powers, likely to reproduce existing power inequalities. Launching the campaign #VuelvelaSTASI⁹² X-Net affirmed that the draft represented:

“a profoundly erroneous and dangerous postulate against which we have been fighting for a long time: that institutions can control themselves, that they are better than citizens doing it. It has been amply demonstrated that only citizen vigilance can end corruption.” Sp-X-Net

X-Net condensed the meaning of its *conflictual* relational strategy in the slogan *La Ciudadania Lo Hizo; The Citizens Did It* to reclaim the efficacy of 15mPaRato in protecting whistleblowers and using their leaks to sanction powerholders. The motto restated the power of citizens' voice and initiative vis-à-vis the political and media establishment. As mentioned in several working documents, the alignment between Spanish political and cultural elites contributed to the ongoing exploitation of people's power, reproducing a model of subjugation and silencing of civil society. In the eyes of X-Net, this modus operandi mirrored a precise democratic idea: a net distribution of tasks in the policy process. As maintained in the group's statements at the Catalan Parliament:

“That's what it's about. Civil society creates the law from where we need it – At Xnet, we are whistleblowers and facilitators of whistleblowers against corruption – and the deputies are in charge of its approval; together, we will be in charge of monitoring its implementation.” Sp-XNet

This political posture stemmed from the idea that the political will should rest firmly in the hands of the people, while political representatives are only interpreters of that will. X-Net explicitly rejected the idea of a *principled principal* (Peiffer & Alvarez, 2016) regarding external and civic controls as the only means to unveil the corrupt nature of power:

“70% of corruption cases were not uncovered by the institutions in charge, but by people. It is evident: corruption does not uncover itself in cathartic events of repentance.” Sp-X-Net, Press Conference

These premises made cooperation and direct contact with political forces such as Ciudadanos practically impossible.

X-Net tried to block the passage of Ciudadanos' bill by presenting several amendments to the attention of Congress and European MPs. In March 2017, X-Net called several parties to find MPs willing to resist the bill. As reported in the memories of X-Net, political representatives from various forces responded to that call, trying to find viable ways to modify the bill. In particular, X-Net started an interaction with Sònia Farré y Joan Mena (ECP), Xavier Eritja (ERC), Juan Pedro Yllanes (Unidos Podemos), Enric Bataller (Compromís), Oskar Matute (EHBildu) y con Artemi

⁹² Roughly translated into “The STATI is coming back”, referring to the authoritarian nature of the bill.

Rallo (PSOE). However, a few months later, the fall of the second Rajoy government in 2018 marked the end of this first attempt at regulating whistleblowers' protection. The bill never advanced in the policy process.

When the new socialist government led by Mr. Sanchez took office, Ciudadanos presented a new proposal, forcing X-Net to change its strategy and engage more directly in the policy process. Adopting what its leader defined as a “*hacking methodology*” to the policy process, X-Net discovered the possibility of elaborating grassroots bills by obtaining the signature of 15 MPs⁹³. Needing an entry point to the policy arena, X-Net remained coherent with its conflictual strategy while solving the powerful allies' dilemma. Hence, it looked for the support of single independent MPs rather than for resourceful allies as populist political parties. The group thus formalized its policy proposal, aiming to use the bill as a benchmark to enhance the standards of the policy discussion. The text, presented in 2019, stated that:

“This Law Proposal has been drafted by Xnet, a citizen group that works for democratic renewal in the digital age, with the review of «Whistleblowing International Network (WIN) and comments from «Blueprint for Free Speech» based on the Decalogue for the Protection of Whistleblowers and Whistleblowers of the Citizen Working Group Against Corruption of which Xnet is a founding member.” SP-X-Net

The initiative was highly inconsequential, given the marginal role played by these MPs over the policy process and the instrumental ties linking them to X-Net and its proposal. However, X-Net's policy initiative provoked new ruptures on the civil society side.

Some CSOs appreciated the initiative and started to work on alternative proposals. For example, the anti-corruption group *Corruptil* began to craft an integral law against corruption, including whistleblowers' protection. Direct involvement in the process of writing laws was considered more effective than more traditional mobilizing strategies:

“Since many of us are lawyers, we can draft laws in a way that almost no one can do (...) So, we have much more impact working with 17 people than with 17,000. In the end, we ended up in this little group, okay? Of course, in the end, politicians and the media already know we are here”. SP-9

However, other groups refused to endorse the legal input strategy, considering it too partisan and divisive. In particular, those groups following a co-optative relational strategy preferred to avoid direct intervention in the policy process and not to be associated with specific parties. As reported

⁹³ 15 MPs presented a bill for the whistleblowers' protection in 2019. The bill was signed by independent MPs as Joan Baldoví Roda, Néstor Rego Candamil, Gabriel Rufián Romero, Íñigo Errejón Galván, María Carvalho Dantas, Pilar Vallugera Balaña, Francesc Xavier Eritja Ciuró, Norma Pujol i Farré, Joan Capdevilla i Esteve, Joan Josep Nuet Pujals, Inés Granollers Cunillera, Montserrat Bassa Coll, Marta Rosique i Saltor, Jordi Salvador i Duch, Joan Margall Sastre y Carolina Telechea i Lozano.

by TI-Es's spokesperson, the decision to whether or not to engage in drafting bills worked as a mechanism of boundary definition within the civic block (Diani, 2015b), hampering the emergence of ties of trust and recognition between CSOs (Diani, 1997):

“We, as Transparency, are nonpartisan; we do not position ourselves with one political party or another. Others, for example, X-Net, I know they made a draft, a group of deputies put together a proposal, and X-Net put together a bill for them. But we have that apolitical character (...) So, we are going to push the draft that the government makes of the law; that is where we can influence, where to put all the improvements that can be made, because all the others, well and... the other political groups give their proposals for laws because we can issue recommendations for each one, not just for some of them... No, we are not like X-Net, which is clearly positioned and made an ad-hoc law. We don't work like that.” SP-4

Conversely, the more structured and institutionalized CSOs, such as TI-Es, opted for supposedly *indirect* strategies for engaging in the policy process. The need to guarantee a certain detachment from political parties confined the lobbying activities of these groups within institutionally designed arenas, like government consultations.

Given the lack of reliable civic allies and the limited consequentiality of its policy proposal, X-Net tried to influence the national policy process shifting contention into the European arena. Exploiting its international connections, as the participation in the *Whistleblowing International Network*, X-Net hence contributed to designing the European Directive⁹⁴ on whistleblowing. Entering the European arena represented a strategic attempt at countering Ciudadanos' proposal to regulate whistleblowing at the national level:

“As you know, this Directive is very important to deactivate and invalidate the disastrous proposal being processed in Spain in the Congress.” Sp-X-Net

Simultaneously, X-Net started to work locally, presenting a bill to the Catalan Parliament. Through this proposal, the group wanted to:

“Oppose the proposal of Ciudadanos in process and the imminent amendment phase in the Congress of Deputies. Several times we have denounced the dangers of this law in the #VuelveLaStasi campaign; It is a freedom-killing proposition that, far from protecting those of us who denounce abuses, undermines the fundamental rights of the entire population.” Sp-X-Net

The intersection between the transnational and the local context represented one of the primary strategies of the group. The local law was supposed to benefit from the international attention on the theme and to oppose Ciudadanos' proposal, contemporary sitting in the national Parliament. At the same time, the intervention at the local level was meant as an empirical example to force the desired amendments into the EU bill. In front of the Catalan MPs, X-Net affirmed that:

⁹⁴ Directive EU 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law, 23 October 2019.

“We have managed to get the European Parliament to approve a Resolution on October 24, 2017, for the European Commission to produce a Directive in defense of Whistleblowers, and the draft of the Directive arrived on April 22, 2018. Our Proposal contains all the elements of the directive and goes even further. We want it to be the concrete example towards which to aspire in the ongoing discussion on the Directive.”, Sp-X-Net, Press conference at the Catalan Parliament, 25 June 2018

Once the European Directive passed in 2019, X-Net was the first European CSO to elaborate a bill for its transposition⁹⁵. Again, the legal input strategy posed significant dilemmas to the civic field. As reported by the spokesperson of FIBGAR, CSOs confronted the necessity of diverting their scant resources in the most productive arena. Perceiving the transposition process as *inevitable* - and hence easier to be influenced - some CSOs opted to work on the Directive rather than promoting a new law:

“Since the Directive exists among the different organizations that work against corruption in Spain, there has been a debate. What do we do? Do we support a Comprehensive Law against corruption, or do we focus on the transposition of the Directive on the protection of whistleblowers? So, let's say it's a dilemma between what one would like and what is possible. Because apparently, it is easier for us to influence the transposition because it is mandatory; Spain has to transpose it at some point, even if it takes time, even if it does not meet the deadline. At some point, it will have to transpose it, and maybe we can have an impact there.” SP-5

In such a renewed scenario, X-Net and others selected a coalitional strategy to intervene in the transposition process. Around 16 CSOs coalesced in the ABRE⁹⁶ coalition to ensure the transposition process was as open and participatory as possible, presenting MPs with legislative advice and monitoring their work. However, the coalition's high heterogeneity significantly reduced its influence potential. The coalition rapidly crumbled under the pressure of internal divisions. According to the spokesperson of *Corruptil*, major disagreements came precisely from the impossibility of coordinating and homogenizing different policy proposals and texts, underlying a deep opposition in goals. *Corruptil*, for example, decided to leave the coalition because:

“We are not aligned. (i.e., the coalition) is coordinated by one of Blueprint for Speech, and no, we do not pursue the same objectives. They wanted to reduce the text, for example, that we had written...This one from Blueprint said that the whole part on courts had to be removed, etc. So, we decided that we would go on our own, with our text” SP-9

All in all, the attempts at coordinating from below to influence the policy transposition have been mostly in vain. As reported by the spokesperson of FIBGAR, there is a general agreement on the fact that the coalition had little to no impact on the transposition process:

⁹⁵ As maintained later in the text, X-Net significantly influenced the contents of the European directive as well.

⁹⁶ Blueprint for Free Speech, Fundación Internacional Baltasar Garzón – FIBGAR, Access Info, AWP/Filtrala, X-Net Transparencia Internacional – España, ASEBLAC - Asociación Española de los Sujetos Obligados en Prevención del Blanqueo de Capitales, ANADEI - Asociación Española de Afectados por Delitos Económicos e Impagos, *Corruptil*, Plataforma por la Honestidad*, Alertadores contra la Corrupción (Valencia)*, Fundación por la Justicia, Más Democracia, Acción Cívica, ADUCCO - Alertadores y denunciantes unidos contra la Corrupción, Asociación Alianza contra la Corrupción (Andalucía).

“We are part of the ABRE coalition, but it's not like the coalition worked too well, right? Like it has already fulfilled its role and is waiting to see what happens. Not much has happened” Sp-5

In the Spanish case, the high levels of polarization and politicization of the political scene have significantly reduced civil society's chances to exert political influence. As a result, relationships of trust and recognition with elite circles did not emerge (Diani, 1997), but goal-based and strategic coalition-building options proved equally unsuccessful.

6.3.4. Policy Implementation

To date, grassroots attempts at influencing the policy process on whistleblowing in Spain have been inconsequential. Nonetheless, CSOs have paradoxically succeeded in influencing the implementation of forms of whistleblowers protection. Looking at the intersection of the international, national, and local levels helps shed light on this counterintuitive process. For example, Spanish CSOs such as X-Net contributed to drafting and influencing the passage of the European Directive on the protection of whistleblowers. However, the Directive's approval in 2019 moved the terrain of contention back to the national stage. Given the failed attempt to pass a bill at the national level, the Spanish CSOs tried to intervene in whistleblowing by influencing the Directive's implementation.

The transposition process constituted a perfect terrain to magnify the power of influence of grassroots groups, given the government's obligations to ratify the Directive. However, this process proved to be far more challenging than expected. Whereas contacts between CSOs and Spanish political representatives started in 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic and the state of emergency delayed the process. The parliamentary transposition thus started only in 2021, a few months ahead of the European deadline. The process eventually accelerated in 2022 and was completed only in March 2023. X-Net and members of the ABRE coalition have blamed the government for not considering their opinion while transposing the directive. Nevertheless, relevant gains emerged at the regional and local levels.

Barcelona and Catalonia represent telling examples. Here, a less polarizing political scenario eased cooperation with the institutional elites. However, interactions between X-Net and local actors were not always smooth. In Barcelona, X-Net's experience and commitment to collecting leaks from whistleblowers were crucial to forging a collaboration with the city government led by a civic coalition. X-Net was indeed controlling valuable technologies to put in place secure disclosure channels. Its *Buzon*, i.e., a safe and encrypted platform to collect informants' leaks, received many reports throughout the years. As a result, X-Net's *centrality* in the whistleblowing arena grew significantly over time, together with its bargaining potential. Its gains over the years accumulated

incrementally, with a positive return on its resources and legitimacy (Gupta, 2009). On the one hand, its commitment to giving voice to informants' leaks, its visibility in the media, and the legal consequences of its actions started to worry institutional actors (Segura Alfonso, 2019).

On the other hand, the group controlled valuable technological resources to enable the whistleblowing process, building on a grassroots encrypted platform created by the Italian *Hermes Center* (Di Salvo, 2020a). The combination of *legitimacy*, *threatening potential*, and *control over valuable resources* helped X-Net to force procedural ameliorations at the administrative level. After years of mobilization across several arenas, X-Net became a crucial broker in whistleblowing. Its platform connected informants to the legal system, the media, and institutions, de facto filling a structural hole. X-Net's position served to gain leverage vis-à-vis institutional actors.

The conflictual-yet-fruitful with the municipality of Barcelona started through *direct contact* with civil servants, who reached out to X-Net in search of help to set up their platform thanks to the *prominence* mechanism. Asked to recall the beginning of their work with X-Net, the head of Barcelona's Transparency and Good Government office affirmed that the group's work had had a crucial role in unveiling corruption and that their know-how was needed to set up an institutional platform. However, she affirmed, X-Net's work had more of a journalistic and sanctioning nature, which needed to be complemented by the rigorousness of institutional processes to protect informants.

At first, the administration resisted X-Net's request to build the platform using HC's software, *Globaleaks*. X-Net's leaders explain this resistance as a lack of trust in HC. To overcome institutional resistance, and in line with its conflictual relational strategy, X-Net threatened to disclose internal working documents to the media to expose the resistance of the local PA to the project. Ultimately, the municipality agreed to HC's technology, asking for minor adjustments and obtaining the group's support in setting up the first institutional whistleblowing channel.

From there onwards, the municipality of Barcelona proved to be very open to X-Net's suggestions. The city of Barcelona was the first institutional actor to open an encrypted reporting platform, building on X-Net's channel. In doing so, the municipality committed to extending the protection of informants beyond the legal definition of whistleblowers, thus welcoming one of X-Net's central claims. Today, Barcelona offers the same guarantees of safety and anonymity to every citizen filing a report, regardless of their employment status⁹⁷. Through a process of diffusion from the civil society to the institutional world, and then within institutions, X-Net has managed to introduce the

⁹⁷ The whistleblower status can be granted only to those individuals directly or indirectly employed by the organization they are reporting about.

protection of whistleblowers also in the absence of a national legal framework, with protection standards that in some cases are higher than the ones granted by the EU directive.

Moreover, implementing safe and anonymous reporting channels had relevant consequences for the number and quality of whistleblowers' reports. As maintained by the head of Barcelona's Transparency and Good Government office, the number of reports has dramatically increased since the platform's setup, rising from 63 in 2016 to 499 in 2017. X-Net has thus shut down its leaking platform as a result. However, such a decision well-represents the contradictory results CSOs and movement actors often achieve (Gupta, 2009; Jasper et al., 2022; Krastev, 2000). The conformity of institutional actors to the safety and anonymity standards introduced by X-Net offers a proxy of its power of influence. However, according to X-Net's spokesperson, this has not always translated into a real institutional commitment to hear whistleblowers' voices and pursue their leaks. Judging the results achieved so far as cosmetic, from time to time, X-Net's leader underlines how citizens and informants still try to rely on the organization when they feel ignored or unheard by the institutional channels.

Notwithstanding such limitation, X-Net feels to have primarily accomplished its role by triggering the creation of secure institutional channels of disclosure. For this reason, the group decided to close its reporting platform. At the same time, having been granted a role as a monitoring agent by the municipality, X-Net keeps surveilling the correct implementation of the law and calling out the municipality wherever necessary. As maintained on the group's website after the setup of the channel:

“We conclude our collaboration as advisers to the Office for Transparencia I Bones Pràctiques. For us, this type of consulting must be related to specific projects. Therefore, we end our collaboration related to implementing an anonymous channel for citizen complaints. However, we will continue to collaborate from outside, sending recommendations and observations and exchanging knowledge and information, as we do with many other institutions.” Sp-X-Net

The relationship between X-Net and the municipality of Barcelona has proved successful in other arenas. On a political level, the local administration became an important ally, endorsing X-Net's bill in the Catalan Parliament and granting the group a permanent role of vigilance and supervision on whistleblowing. On a more procedural level, the municipality and X-Net registered their platform as a shared domain. To date, as reported in the municipality's official documents, every public institution interested in reusing the platform must acknowledge the technology's co-ownership, subscribing to the requirements jointly approved by the two actors. So far, different local governments and public institutions have adopted the platform. More importantly, public officials working with X-Net to set up Barcelona's platform carried this innovation to other

institutions when obtaining a new position. For example, for the Anti-fraud Authority of Valencia, the choice to implement X-Net's platform came once the former director of the Transparency and Good Practices office of Barcelona was elected President of the Valencian Authority:

“The director of the anti-fraud agency was the manager of the Barcelona City Council (...) when the Barcelona City Council's anti-fraud office was created and put into operation. He was there.” SP-13

At the same time, as postulated by the current Head of Valencia Transparency Office, the cooperation with institutional actors has helped CSOs to improve their software and increase its efficacy, e.g., implementing a bidirectional communication channel to interact directly with informants. The complementarity between the CSOs and institutional logic thus has enhanced the platform. As reported by its President:

“The truth is that it has been an organization, an NGO, a citizen organization, the one that has created this communication system, easy to install and with all the guarantees (...) the truth is that from us there is total gratitude because it wasn't an administration that did this. The maximum that the Barcelona City Council has reached was to improve the software, but there wasn't an administration initiative to install, create, and install in its place. But not only here, in Italy, Europe, or anywhere, it has been an NGO made up of citizens that carried out this research and this very good product. Well, you Italians can be proud of that.” SP-14

Overall, the Spanish case reinforces what has already emerged in the Italian case, demonstrating how control over valuable technological resources can serve to forge ties of vertical integration with the institutional elites to influence the implementation phase. When facing moving targets (Soule, 2009), where several institutional actors have the jurisdiction to make and implement laws at different and nested levels, the logic motivating civic-institutional interactions goes beyond the electoral threat. Pairing the control over valuable resources with mobilizing strategies allowed X-Net to obtain procedural refinements for whistleblowers' protection at the local level, even in the absence of national legislation. Its influence in Barcelona then eased mechanisms of institutional imitation, with many PAs all over the country looking up to the municipality to model their laws and platforms. As maintained in the group's documents:

“This two-year collaboration – purely activist and unpaid– has made it possible to create the technical tool and the internal action protocols with the users. For the first time in Spain and Europe, an institution allows citizens, civil servants, and employees to report acts of corruption or other practices harmful to good governance anonymously, safely, and with the possibility of dialogue with the institution. This Ethics Mailbox has already been replicated by the Anti-Fraud Office of Catalonia and the Anti-Fraud Office of Valencia and has been taken as a model for the CNMC mailbox.” Sp-X-Net

6.3.5. Enforcement and Evaluation

The Spanish case offers a good overview of the many ways in which CSOs' can intervene in the anti-corruption struggle. When looking at the whistleblowing process, one can appreciate the

consequences that CSOs such as X-Net and campaigns such as 15MpaRato had at a cultural, political, and administrative level, despite the lack of national legislation protecting whistleblowers. For example, X-Net proudly reclaimed the critical role of citizens and organized groups in unveiling corrupt deals, using whistleblowers' leaks, and protecting their identities. As reported by the group in 2017:

“In Spain, the majority of cases uncovered by whistleblowers are cases of corruption, and most cases of corruption are revealed by civil society and not by institutions. The impact has been so great, especially after its acceleration thanks to the 15M-Indignados, which is now at the center of the political debate and the populisms of the left and right co-opt this anti-corruption discourse for their political and marketing campaign but emptying it of effectiveness.” Sp-X-Net

X-Net's control and use of encrypted platforms for whistleblowers' disclosure allowed the group to collect vital information on the state of corruption in the country. The group's centralization and tactical choices increased the impact of these leaks, using them as the basis for lawsuits and media campaigns. Through its platform and repertoires, X-Net instituted *de facto* an embryonal system of whistleblowers' protection despite lacking *de iure* protections. Indeed, these technologies have granted basic protections to potential informants that otherwise would have risked significantly more for their leaking activities. As in the Italian case, whistleblowing platforms' development constituted a case of direct social action (Bosi & Zamponi, 2015, 2020). As discussed in the previous sections, X-Net and 15MpaRato have indeed protected informants in the media and courts without asking for protection from the state and political elites. On the contrary, they have decided to engage directly in the whistleblowing process as brokers, connecting informants with the institutional, legal, and media arenas.

At the same time, these civic reporting channels and the legal initiatives followed by some Spanish CSOs have secured crucial gains in the legal arena. By protecting whistleblowers, collecting their information, and exposing it, the group aimed at making visible the *trama* that governs the relationship between economic and political powers in the country.

“For years, we have operated our anonymized leak box, which has allowed us to continue uncovering corruption cases and protect whistleblowers.” Sp-X-Net

Exploiting the legal opportunities granted by the *acusacion popular* instrument, 15MPaRato has thus triggered the action of state accountability mechanisms, obtaining gains in courts. After 15MPaRato, new cases were opened thanks to the X-Net leaking platform, e.g., the Black Cards and Castor cases. Hence, the group introduced a new *modus operandi* in the whistleblowing processes, with new cases opening every time significant leaks arrived.

The success of X-Net's pioneer initiative and increased international interest in whistleblowers' protection eased the opening of new leaking platforms by other CSOs. Given the absence of national legislation on the theme, these civic platforms have long constituted the sole protection for whistleblowers in most of the country. As reported by one of the interviewees from FIBGAR:

"In Spain, we only managed to get a platform, after conversations and conversations with companies and public institutions, but only one, which is that of the journalists' unions, and then we do have a platform ourselves, which is a mailbox through which you can alert about specific issues related to the pandemic (...) Yes, alerts have arrived. I am the person who directly manages the mailbox; I can tell you that they have arrived (...) The tool is there, but people are not using it as it should be used" SP-5

Civic groups deem these initiatives essential but have had questionable results. As elucidated by the excerpt above, many platforms receive unrelated or unusable information.

At the same time, current national and institutional developments seem to have diminished CSOs' influence at the enforcement stage. In particular, the political opportunities and context have significantly mutated since the outbreak of the 15M movement. As reported by a member of the municipal government of Barcelona, the use of the *acusacion popular* has been progressively reduced, forcing grassroots actors to prefer other strategies:

"The popular accusation is a tool that is also limited lately. It has also been politicized, especially at least to the political parties, the power to present themselves as a popular accusation has been quite limited, and the truth is that I am not a specialist in criminal procedural law, and I would have to look at it, but also in general, a direct interest in the case is increasingly required to be able to exercise popular accusation." SP-12

According to X-Net, Rato's absolution in one of the proceedings marked the end of an era of mounting popular power. According to the leader of X-Net, the progressive weakening of civil society's influence had much to do with the role of political parties. Whereas the Indignados represented a mass movement that succeeded in bringing new issues and solutions to the fore, nowadays, insurgent parties have reassumed their leading positions, weakening the civic sector. In 2020, the group thus announced the decision to abandon the legal strategy to focus its efforts on the policy arena:

"After eight years leading the prosecution of the Bankia case -after achieving the recovery of 1,500 million in Bankia shares, providing the key evidence for the return of 3,000 million to preferred investors and provoking the conviction of 64 politicians and bankers and the entry into the imprisonment of 15 of them by uncovering the Black Cards case- we have decided not to appeal the recent acquittal sentence. The objectives we set for ourselves have been more than achieved, and continuing now with an expensive and risky process would be useless and exhausting. (...) The situation has changed (...). We must be aware of the situation and continue looking for concrete achievements instead of martyrdom. The criminal procedure is closed. We have to focus on legislative achievements." Sp-X-Net

X-Net thus strategically decided to channel its resources into the policy arena. As already mentioned, the groups joined other CSOs in the ABRE campaign. Whereas these coalitional efforts

have hardly paid off over the last two years, things have recently accelerated. In 2022, Sanchez’s government released a first draft of the bill to transpose the European Directive. The government has thus invited the citizenry and CSOs to contribute to the policy process, opening a process of public consultations. Numerous groups have intervened, presenting their opinions to the government. The CSOs engaged in the transposition process have thus voiced their concerns through a public call and asked Congress to amend the bill⁹⁸. However, the fragmentation of the civil field limited CSOs’ influence over the transposition of the European Directive.

Tab.6.2. Actors, dilemmas, strategies, and mechanisms in the Spanish whistleblowing campaign

| Phase | Actor | Dilemma | Positional Strategy | Relational Strategy | Relational Mechanism |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| <i>Agenda-setting</i> | 15MpaRato/X-Net | Engagement | Direct Contact | Conflictual | Contagion |
| <i>Policy Contents</i> | X-Net | Engagement | Direct Contact | Conflictual | Contagion |
| <i>Policy Passage</i> | X-Net ABRE TI-Es/ Corruptil | Extension Powerful Ally Direct vs. Indirect | Coalition Direct Contact | Conflictual Cooperative Co-optative | Contagion |
| <i>Policy Implementation</i> | X-Net ABRE | Powerful Ally | Direct Contact Coalition | Conflictual Cooperative | Prominence Brokerage |
| <i>Policy Enforcement & Evaluation</i> | X-Net | Direct vs. Indirect Inevitability | Brokerage Coalition | Conflictual | Brokerage |

6.4. Civic Monitoring in Spain

Transparency and whistleblowing are necessary building blocks to enhance societal accountability. However, information and disclosure alone are insufficient to hold those in power accountable. SA entails forcing powerholders to motivate their actions⁹⁹ and sanctioning¹⁰⁰ them when necessary (Bovens, 2007; Fox, 2007; Schedler, 1999). As shown, campaigning on transparency and whistleblowing, CSOs have secured procedural and substantial gains, triggering formal and

⁹⁸ Criticisms have been endorsed by X-Net, Access Info, Hay Derecho, Blueprint for Free Speech, Asociacion ASANDA, Asociacion de Archiveros Espanoles en la Funcion Publica, AMP, AUC, Asociacion para la Comunicacion e Informacion Medioambiental, ACICOM, CECU, FeSP, Fundacion Global Nature, GobiernoTransparente.com, that.world, Mas Democracia, RADA, SEO, SEDIC, Transparency International Espana. These organizations do not match members of the ABRE Coalition.

⁹⁹ *Answerability* (Schedler, 1999).

¹⁰⁰ *Enforcement* (Schedler, 1999).

informal sanctions (Bovens, 2007; Fox, 2016; Peruzzotti, 2011; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2003; Schedler, 1999). However, to understand the accountability consequences of CSOs, it is necessary to analyze whether and how transparency and whistleblowing result in accountability relations between account givers and account holders. For this reason, the last section of the chapter focuses on civic monitoring practices, a privileged terrain to observe the interactions between grassroots and institutional accountability actors.

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 5, the study of political monitoring represents a flourishing field in the literature on civil society, democracy, and corruption. To date, analytical efforts have advanced our knowledge about the characteristics of this democratic practice, with typologies differentiating between governmental, shared, and civic monitoring (Feenstra & Casero-Ripollés, 2014). However, as elucidated by the Italian case, civic monitoring hardly represents a monolithic reality. Quite the contrary, civic monitoring practices seem to be characterized by relevant internal differences in their goals, strategies, repertoires, and *consequences*.

As in the Italian case, one can distinguish four models of civic monitoring in the Spanish collective action field.

The first group includes monitoring practices carried out individually by NGOs such as Transparency International Spain, Access Info Europe, or FIBGAR. These projects may vary significantly in their focus, preferred forms of action, and consequences. This category includes projects of *negotiated* top-down and bottom-up monitoring, as in the case of the Integrity Pacts subscribed by TI-ES, but also the creation of monitoring tools for institutions in the cases of NGOs such as Access Info and FIBGAR.

The second category refers to monitoring initiatives launched by CSOs in coalition (NGOs, movement actors, civic groups, and alternative media) to open public information, ask for policy change, or enhance the responsiveness of political representatives. Lobbying and advocacy are the primary repertoires of action of these *monitoring campaigns*. Here we can find stable alliances such as the coalition Pro Acceso and ABRE and ad-hoc coalitional campaigns such as the one aimed at monitoring the Next Generation EU funds (Open Generation EU¹⁰¹).

¹⁰¹ Members: Estudiantes del Posgrado en Tecnopolítica y Derechos en la era Digital, Observatorio de la Deuda en la Globalización (ODG), Instituto de Derechos Humanos de Catalunya (IDHC), Xnet, Access Info Europe, Ecologistas en Acción, Observatorio de Multinacionales en América Latina (OMAL), Ingeniería Sin Fronteras Catalunya, Plataforma Auditoría Ciudadana de la Deuda (PACD), Oxfam Intermón, Asociación de Ingenieros de la Energía, Asociación Andaluza para la Defensa de los Animales (ASANDA), Asociación de Archiveros Españoles en la Función Pública (AEFP), Asociación Española de Acreditación de la Transparencia (ACREDITRA), Asociación para la Comunicación e Información Medioambiental (ACIMA), Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España (APDHE), Associació Ciutadania i Comunicació (ACICOM), Associació d'Arxivers i Gestors de Documents Valencians (AVV), Col·legi

The third group consists of social movement campaigns built around monitoring practices such as *15MpaRato*, and monitoring initiatives carried out by movement actors such as X-Net or the X-Party. These monitoring actors work to collect otherwise inaccessible information via whistleblowers and publicize them through mainstream and alternative media channels. Initiatives in this group resemble the Italian model of *community monitoring*.

The last group encompasses alternative media, which exercise a watchdog function through *disclosure monitoring*. They include data-driven and investigative journalism and civic groups committed to developing civic technologies for data gathering, reuse, and publicity. These monitoring actors can and often do participate in coalitional monitoring campaigns while carrying out their watchdog practices. Here we can find actors such as Civio, Maldita, Por Causa, and Political Watch.

6.4.1. Negotiated Monitoring

Quite often, national NGOs participate in international monitoring projects. Rather than a free strategic preference, this should be understood as a necessary choice, strictly dictated by the sustainability of monitoring practices. As in the Italian case, many Spanish monitoring initiatives and CSOs depend on funds from the European Union, which tends to reward projects involving different member states and international coalitions. Given the sponsoring role of the EU and the voluntary participation of national institutions such as municipalities and public administrations, the relationships between CSOs and institutional actors in these monitoring projects tend to be generally collaborative. The Integrity Watch project, carried out by TI-ES as the Spanish partner, constitutes a telling example:

“It is a European project; more than 8 European countries participated. It has two objectives, one is a platform that each country generates, which is what helps access information. You can add citizen participation to follow up and monitor public officials. In Spain, the focus was on the deputies and senators, on the declarations of assets and income, and then on analyzing the data from the declaration form. And we prepared a report and the platform and managed to put together a final event where the President of the Congress of Deputies and seven deputies from different parliamentary groups participated.” SP-4

These monitoring practices seem to be more compliance-oriented rather than representing full-fledged instances of grassroots scrutiny. The involvement of the citizenry is generally minimal, with CSOs negotiating the goals and means of monitoring practices with public authorities rather than with their constituencies. Often, the aim of engaging the citizenry is reduced to mere training

oficial de Bibliotecaris i Documentalistes de la Comunitat Valenciana (COBDCV), Confederación de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU), Federación de Periodistas de España (FAPE), Federación de Sindicatos de Periodistas (FeSP), Fundación Global Nature, Fundación Hay Derecho, Gobierno Transparente, Iniciativa Barcelona Open Data, Innovación Y Derechos Humanos, Observatorio de RSC, Political Watch (previously, CIECODE), RADA – Red de Abogados para la Defensa Ambiental, Sociedad Española de Documentación e Información (SEDIC).

moments to inform citizens about the existence and functioning of transparency tools, such as access to public information. However, due to their project-specific logic (i.e., funds limited in time and bounded by project goals), these initiatives risk having little to no impact on the general audience. As maintained by the spokesperson of TI-ES:

“So, we started with these pacts; we signed those pacts, some workshops were held for all citizens, and for monitors, etc. (...) What happens is that when that project ended, that financing ended. Then we could only give it a minimal follow-up, but without resources and people, to continue doing, signing more pacts, or doing events or raising awareness.” SP-4

The short-term approach of these initiatives severely constrains the possibility of popularizing practices of civic monitoring. In addition, the specialized contents of these formative occasions are often quite hard to grasp for the citizenry and challenging to exploit in one’s everyday life. Whereas, as in the Italian case, this approach seems to point at creating or reinforcing a society of *monitoring citizens* (or *monitorial*, Schudson, 1998); this goal appears hardly achievable in a project-based context.

More importantly, these negotiated monitoring initiatives do not emerge from communities’ needs but try to adapt and accommodate institutional goals and working methods. In this case, the underlying logic of social change follows a quantitative approach that aims to multiply the presence of CSOs in administrative processes, like tendering procedures. Civic monitoring actors aim at “being there” and participate in the guise of overseeing agents. In the case of TI-ES, for example:

“We had to sign at least four integrity pacts, which were signed; we achieved that. The objective was achieved. (*Integrity Pacts*) fully depended on political will (...) It is like saying to the State, “Hey, I know you already have controls; you have all the inspectors, so we are going to introduce this tool for you from the third sector, from the civil society, blablabla, then there will be a third eye”, so; obviously, it’s outside in some way, it’s extra-legal because it is not in the law, it is a political will, a good practice.” SP-4

Monitoring here assumes the character of a *preventive* measure. It is supposed to disincentivize public corruption by the simple fact of having CSOs scrutinize the process. However, being dependent on the free will of institutional subjects, this form of monitoring focuses its resources on already committed and supposedly transparent administrations. In this case, monitoring practices will hardly unveil opaque deals or illegal practices, while they will be more likely to increase the *efficacy* and *efficiency* of administrative processes. As recalled by TI-ES’s spokesperson concerning the consequentiality of the Integrity Pacts:

“So, we help to ensure that this contract is clear, and that the best is chosen, that everything goes according to the law.” SP-4

These monitoring practices are thus based on shared resources and values between CSOs and institutional actors, taking the form of *cooptation*, namely the incorporation of previously excluded monitoring actors in decision-making arenas. Here, every scrutinizing activity is oriented toward

creating ties of recognition and cooperation with political and bureaucratic elites, while confrontation and conflict are not viable interaction strategies. Even potentially contentious tools - such as Transparency International's corruption perception indexes - are strategically exploited to get closer to institutional actors, building ties of mutual recognition rather than scrutiny relations. In the case of TI-ES, for example:

"You go to the portal of Soria, or the portal of Salamanca, of Granada, you will see that they quote us and for "we follow the indicators of Transparency International for the index of municipalities or Autonomous Communities." So, you see that this is how we are there, how we are a benchmark for its transparency. The indices also helped us not to make enemies with them but rather to get them to say, "How can I improve?" SP-4

All in all, co-optative forms of civic monitoring will mainly result in procedural rather than substantial consequences, increasing the legitimacy and participation of CSOs in institutional processes while reducing their oversight power. In this case, these monitoring practices seem to have mainly horizontal accountability consequences (Bovens, 2007), meaning that they depend entirely on the political will to be scrutinized.

However, the interactions between single monitoring CSOs and monitored institutional actors can sometimes take a tenuous turn. Advocacy-oriented players may be more prone to deploy conflictual tactics to foster their monitoring goals. The idea here is that conflictual tools such as recurring to courts or exploiting offline and online forms of mobilization are sometimes required to advance CSOs' goals and force institutional actors to hear their voices. Besides the potential gains at the legal and public opinion level, these strategies also serve as a *signaling* mechanism for institutional actors. As maintained by Access Info's (AI) President when reasoning on her organization's strategic choices:

"You use litigation not only as a sort of legal tool but also as a political tool. But you need to understand that you're doing that and do it in a way that your messaging is carefully focused while simultaneously trying to keep the door open with the government. And I think that all that is easier to do if you maintain a political balance." SP-3

Finding a balance between extreme relational strategies is thus essential for advancing civic goals. In this way, CSOs following *cooperative strategies* can serve to reach *interrelated* gains (Bosi, 2016). Monitoring practices based on confrontational repertoires can thus become the baseline to trigger policy change and reclaim a more direct involvement in decision-making and public consultations. Moreover, this model corresponds to a specific understanding of the role of the organized civic sector when it comes to democratic functioning and well-being:

"I think that, in a more mature civil society environment, civil society organizations would understand well that your role is again a mixture of the two and that you can manage that if you manage it well. But it's something that requires a certain clarity of what your view of your role is as a civil society, and not everyone necessarily has that clarity. I got a lot of experience with this because I've worked with civil

society groups all around the world, and I've been in countries where people say, "No, we're not going to the meeting with the government. We don't like the government, they're wrong, no!". And it's like, "Come on, we have to go talk to them," and the government's like, "We're not talking to the civil society people!". So, building a culture in which it's understood that there's a role for civil society, that is legitimate." SP-3

This second set of monitoring initiatives tends to take the form of *cooperation*, where CSOs and institutional actors base their work on separate resource pools but – generally- share common goals. Here, differently from the cooptation case, a certain ambiguity is present. Direct and positive interactions with civil servants, perceived as active agents of change, balance the persistence of a systemic critique against an often-reluctant institutional structure. Cooperative stances generate ties of trust and recognition with institutional elites, multiplying the sources of influence of civic actors. In AI's case, the strategic value of this ambivalent approach is evident:

"If we, the civil society, are sort of outsiders to the administration, if we're not sympathetic to how they work, if we don't try to understand the challenges they have, we can't have the same impact, because that becomes confrontational, you know, and I think that again, in a more kind of mature civil society context, you would have civil society organizations who are critical who will challenge, who will litigate, but who understand as well and you are ready to kind of brainstorm solutions with the people in the public administration who are trying to do the right thing.", SP-3

These practices of civic monitoring can thus have very different impacts, thanks to the balancing and the multiple ties created outside and within the institutional arenas. All in all, practices of cooperative civic monitoring tend to have procedural as well as substantial consequences increasing the answerability of institutional actors, thus, the likelihood that they will explain their decisions and actions.

6.4.2. *Monitoring Campaigns*

The proliferation of technologies for civic monitoring and initiatives that oversee powerholders' work and decisions using transparency and open data have become central forms of action for the Spanish CSOs. While welcomed as a crucial step towards more accountable forms of government and greater civic participation, many of these groups acknowledge that a minority of civic groups and citizens recur to monitoring practices. Indeed, monitoring has hardly become a widespread form of political participation but has become a central practice for many CSOs. As maintained by the spokesperson of Civio:

"You always have to assume that it is going to be a minority, an active minority, a minority that is sometimes capable of changing things, a minority that can generate changes, that can write to a political official, who can pressure, who can demand, who can write a column in a newspaper, can send a letter to the editor and they are people who can make changes." SP-6

Such awareness has thus increased the relevance of *coalitional* forms of coordination to bring about processes of political and cultural change moving from practices of civic monitoring. Whereas some

of these efforts have produced relatively stable alliances, such as the Pro Acceso coalition, others have emerged as ad hoc campaigns, as in the case of Open Generation Eu, where loyalties and identities remain firmly circumscribed within each organization's boundaries (Diani, 2015b, 2015a).

In the Spanish case, alternative media such as Maldita or Por Causa have intensified their collaboration with CSOs committed to open data and disclosing public information through civic monitoring technologies. Based on intense resource exchanges, these interactions have helped popularize civic monitoring, with transparency actors opening data for other CSOs working in various fields.

At the same time, the majority of CSOs participate in advocacy and lobbying coalitions to scrutinize the power and trigger political change. Quite intuitively, coalitions are meant to increase the leverage of CSOs vis-à-vis institutional actors and the media:

“The main strategy to amplify our impact has been to build coalitions with other organizations. There is a platform called Poletika, which is like politics and ethics, Poletika (...) 500 political watchdog organizations, imagining the capacity for media impact, political impact, pressure, communication, and social base when 500 civil society organizations are active at the same time and coordinated under the same name. And this was great because our added value was to provide information thanks to our tools. Then the rest of the organizations put their own added value, political contacts, etc...Greenpeace, its 200,000 followers on Twitter, Por Causa, its technical knowledge of each subject (...) In fact, we were like one of the references, political parties called us when they wanted us to recognize some of the improvements they were making; that is, we were in the main media on television and the radio. In other words, building coalitions is a way that we, as a small organization with a short trajectory, to achieve relevance, a media, social and political impact that we would not have on our own.” SP-8

Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic paved the way for new monitoring campaigns to emerge. For instance, CSOs have mobilized against the block to the right of information during the first lockdown (Cifuentes-Faura, 2021). Amidst the pandemic, their work obtained relevant answerability gains, forcing the government to report on the composition of special committees or to open data on infection trends. Recently, new synergies have emerged to monitor the allocation and use of the Next Generation EU funds.

“Now we are also working with another platform, the next generation EU platform, which is the platform for monitoring or transparency in using Next Generation EU funds. Thus, we make some recommendations on what transparency organizations there should be or what mechanisms there should be to effectively guarantee that all citizens know where the money is being used, if it is being used for what is appropriate, and to whom the funds are arriving.” SP-3

The multiplication of monitoring coalitions on different matters (e.g., the transposition of the whistleblowing directive, the reform of the transparency law, the Next Generation Eu funds, etc.) is an interesting phenomenon to observe the co-participation of a core of CSOs such as Access Info, Civio, TI-ES, and other actors in many monitoring projects.

However, these shared monitoring projects have often failed or been under-productive for various reasons. One of them is undoubtedly the lack of resources, which sometimes has impacted the sustainability of these initiatives. Besides the resource issue, internal tensions associated with disagreements on the preferred forms of action, structure, and even political positioning have often harmed the maintenance of such coalitions. For example, some CSOs have sometimes rejected the use of disruptive repertoires in practices of civic monitoring, hampering the possibility of horizontal integration:

“The first time I proposed to the coalition Pro Acceso to jointly analyze the political party programs and manifestos to see what they were saying about transparency, everyone said there was “Absolutely not”, because they never followed those programs anyway. And so at Access Info, we did it on our own (...) Even not a sort of a large number of people doing an action, but just an organization taking a case because you know, you are trying to defend a right.” SP-3

6.4.3. Community Monitoring

The first full-fledged instances of monitoring practices in Spain emerged in horizontal campaigns such as 15MpaRato. As discussed, such bottom-up initiatives originated and developed as synergic interactions between informants, platforms, and media outlets. Cases such as Los Correo de Blesa or the Tarjetas Negras were initiated by whistleblowers deciding to disclose information about organizational wrongdoings to civic actors such as X-Net or the X-party. The horizontal integration among central actors in the 15M and their control over technological and communicative channels helped publicize this information filtering the leaks to mainstream media.

More generally, the critical juncture of the Indignados mobilizations represented a turning point for spreading monitoring practices in Spain. The vibrant political and cultural context that characterized the mobilizations of 2011 created the necessary conditions for civic monitoring practices to spread. The high interconnectedness among civic groups was thus sustained by a shared collective identity, with different subjects working towards common goals and shared values. Here, X-Net and its collaborators de facto introduced full-fledged practices of civic monitoring in the Spanish political system.

The 15M has thus paved the way for many independent civic subjects specializing in transparency and political monitoring. However, over the long term, the end of the Indignados wave of mobilization coincided with a reorganization of the party system that increased the political value of monitoring practices. Civic monitoring practices have thus experienced a progressive decrease in horizontal integration, losing their movement-like characteristics in favor of community monitoring forms. While the participation of informal groups became more sporadic, collective identities based

on the goal of transparency, civic participation, and public scrutiny retained a central role in the work of many CSOs.

Forms of community monitoring have often built on *conflictual* relational strategies. Groups such as X-Net, for example, framed their conflictual stance as a systemic critique, even when focusing their action against individual targets. When reconstruing the process of the Correos de Blesa case, the group thus affirms that their actions were not a “personal political lynching” but instead a reaction to:

“The abandonment and subsequent lynching of Rato by his people, in an attempt to support the theory of the rotten apple, when we know that what was rotten was the basket, that the collective tragedy that has been the "crisis" is not the responsibility of one but of all those who have allowed it.” SP-X-Net

Here, scrutiny and sanctioning powers are perceived to rest exclusively in the hands of the citizenry. Rather than trying to trigger change processes from the inside, activating institutional bodies, or progressively reforming the system, these monitoring practices aimed to restructure the democratic model profoundly. In this case, there was little space for cooperation with institutional actors and a profound distrust in the actions and will of the liberal democratic institutions. Whereas, from time to time, these forms of monitoring relied upon accountability bodies such as courts, their monitoring practices were rooted in the idea that only grassroots players would succeed in dismantling the corrupt system:

“And that's how it has to be since corruption will only end the proactive, continuous, and definitive control of citizens over institutions and parties. It will never be done by spontaneous generation from within.” SP-X-Net

What followed was a net preference for repertoires of monitoring that did not depend on the action of official bodies, such as the reliance on whistleblowers’ leaks, the use of the legal tool of the *acusación popular*, or the citizenry legislative initiative discussed above. The aim of building alternative monitoring practices eased the emergence of secure disclosure channels that directly connected informants with civic groups, as in the case of the Buzon de X-Net. As clarified during a European roundtable discussing the protection of whistleblowers:

“For years, we have operated the anonymous leak mailbox that has allowed us to continue uncovering corruption cases and protect whistleblowers. To strengthen the helpless people who sent us information, we have created the Citizen Group against Corruption in Catalonia and Spain to exchange experiences and create support networks between whistleblowers and against corruption.” SP-X-Net

X-Net became an infrastructural mediator in whistleblowing by controlling critical technological resources (Fubini & Lo Piccolo, 2021). In 2012, without a legal framework regulating access to

public information and whistleblowers' protection, these public scrutiny initiatives had substantial political, legal, and cultural repercussions.

However, these conflictual monitoring practices had to be partly mitigated over time to reach substantial gains and the policy and administrative levels. As discussed in section 6.1., once the mobilization on whistleblowing started to attract the attention of political parties and moderate CSOs, actors such as X-Net decided to move into the policy arena. Yet, the contradiction between the X-Net's positional and relational strategies reduced the group's influence at the national level. Instead, new synergies were created at the local level, particularly in those municipalities led by civic parties and coalitions, as in the case of Barcelona.

As already discussed, the long commitment of X-Net and its work with informants have triggered the municipality of Barcelona to create the first institutional reporting channel in the country. However, the collaboration between the municipality and X-Net was hardly smooth and free from contention. After the platform's set up, the group stopped working with whistleblowers and remained in the municipal committee as a watchdog. Sticking to its firm belief in a net separation between the civil and the institutional sphere and in the power of the citizenry as an alternative force to institutionalized powers, X-Net abandoned its involvement in the whistleblowing process through direct social action and moved the conflict to other arenas:

“We withdrew from the Consell Ciutadà Assessor de l'Oficina per la Transparència I les Bones Pràctiques del Ajuntament de Barcelona (...) now, we must once again be external elements to fulfill the role of watchdogs. The institutions must do most of the work because that is where the resources are. The citizen devices must replace the institutions only when they neglect their functions. The recommended methodology advises the leaker to send the information only to the administration's mailbox with the resources to act. But, after the time indicated by the administration, the citizen who considers the action ineffective can denounce this oversight through citizen self-organization, such as the Xnet Mailbox.” SP-X-Net

All in all, this type of monitoring practice has had relevant consequences at the legal, procedural, and cultural levels. Unlike other relational patterns, monitoring practices following conflictual strategies are more likely to exert informal sanctions and, from time to time, trigger processes of formal sanctioning by institutional bodies. In this case, significant results can be reached at the systemic level, changing the balance of power between monitoring, and monitored actors. In the case of X-Net, for example, the group managed to secure the first institutional channel to protect whistleblowers and was granted a monitoring role over the state-of-the-art of whistleblowers' protection in the municipality. However, as in their initiators' intentions, these monitoring practices hardly result in processes of inclusion of outsider groups in decision-making arenas. Accountability relations remain mainly *vertical* (Bovens, 2007), with answerability and sanctioning exerted by grassroots groups mainly through non-cooperative strategies.

6.4.4. Disclosure Monitoring

Political monitoring requires specialized skills and typically entails a demanding workload, and it is hard to imagine that such a practice will become a generalized form of political participation. To partly obviate such an issue, CSOs started to develop civic technologies to favor diffuse practices of civic monitoring (Magallón Rosa et al., 2017). CSOs, such as Political Watch, have thus sought to create *ecosystems of transparency*, opening information to ease civic monitoring for other actors:

“Normally, our tools are more oriented to people who carry out political surveillance for their work, for example, the advocacy department of a civic organization, which need to know what happens in the details of politics, for example (...).” SP-8

On the other hand, data-driven CSOs, and alternative media have upsurged as *intermediary* bodies in monitoring initiatives, connecting institutions and the citizenry through the use and re-use of public information. Civic monitoring technologies and data journalism projects aim to reduce the complexity of finding, collecting, systematizing, and understanding public information. Civio, for example, dedicates its efforts to:

“(collects) all the measures that officially came into force, and we try to explain them to citizens in a familiar language because usually, the Official State Gazette is a very long document, it has a bureaucratic language that makes it very difficult to understand (...) So, one of the activities is to provide citizens with simple and clear information about public services, on the new policies that affect them.” SP-6

Opening, collecting, and sharing information with these actors create the necessary conditions for other initiatives of civic monitoring to emerge, building *monitoring ecosystems*. As emerged from the worlds of one of Maldita’s editors, monitoring practices that disclose public information aim at educating as well as activating the citizenry and other civic groups:

“Many times, what we do is ask for databases, we ask the Government, the administration, or whatever, the Spanish Government, but we also go to the Autonomous Communities, to the Town Halls, or whoever. And from there, tell the story that is in that data, and what we also always try to do is open those databases, no, which is like "we have achieved this, yes we have requested it, because we believe that it is data that has to be public. They must be public; they are government data, therefore they are public data, and they belong to all of us and beyond our use and telling what is interesting, here is the database and whoever wants to use it, redistribute it or whatever, Well, here it is”.” SP-7

However, the consequences of these enabling actions are hard to determine. Whereas monitoring appears to be a salient issue in public opinion, the citizenry at large seems to delegate this practice to specialized actors:

“People want to monitor institutions. In other words, people still trust social organizations that do this work more than doing it themselves.” SP-6

CSOs carrying out forms of *disclosure monitoring* have often opted for competitive relational strategies. Competitive relational patterns refer to the absence of shared values and competition

over the same resource pools in a zero-sum game where others lose resources gained by one of the actors at play. Competitive relations in monitoring practices develop from a generally confrontational stance towards institutional actors, aiming at unveiling institutional wrongdoings, lack of transparency, and eventually illicit or corrupt institutional behavior.

In the case of alternative media, for example, unveiling the lack of transparency of public institutions can significantly impact governmental interests in favor of the public good. However, as expressed by the spokesperson of Civio, this often requires deploying conflictual strategies such as restoring to courts to open administrative information.

“We often go to court, sometimes with the administration, when they deny us information. That is, we participated, I think, maybe in 8-9 legal proceedings against ministries, a lot against the Court of Accounts, and against many different institutions when they deny us information that we believe citizens should have a right to. In the end, what we do is investigate and press to generate the necessary jurisprudence so that if we win a particular trial, information that is not available right now, we can make it possible for any citizen to request it from now on and that they have to give it if we have won, or we have a payment order. We try to raise the bar by researching and supporting this information.” SP-6

Forms of competitive monitoring that combine investigative and data-driven journalism can substitute state forms of accountability, exerting informal sanctions through naming and shaming. Alternative media, for instance, can contribute to disclosing systemic illicit behavior and wielding informal sanctions to influence public opinion. In some cases, as narrated by one of Por Causa’s journalists, these monitoring investigations can have relevant polity consequences, translating informal sanctions into tangible political change. For example, in Melilla, Por Causa unveiled the corrupt system regulating the control of migration in the city:

“We did an investigation that reveals that, like immigration control, it generates impunity in the city, and at the same time, it generates a lot of money without control; the result is enormous corruption for a long time, people who have a very bad time, both migrants and people who live in Melilla. (...) That investigation went very well because the presentation was beautiful, the information was complete, and it was read. Many videos later came out on television everywhere. And a month after this investigation, there were elections, and the Government of Melilla changed for the first time in 20 years. The new President of Melilla said that the investigation was crucial for that change. In short, corruption and migration control go hand in hand. And Melilla is a very clear example, but it is not the only one.” SP-10

Competitive monitoring practices can thus activate other forms of accountability, such as vertical accountability mechanisms that sanction powerholders through formal political participation, such as voting. At the same time, these models of civic monitoring can trigger the activation of horizontal accountability agents, e.g., democratic mechanisms of check and balance. One example in this sense comes from the pressure exerted by Maldita on the government amidst the pandemic to increase its answerability:

“So they were like no, that they are going to receive pressure, now, of course, if precisely what you have to do is that all these committees, all these types of organizations, have to be public, who forms them and who takes the decisions, so that they can be accountable and so that they really know what they are making, how they are making the decisions, (...) And the work of damn was important because we filed a complaint with the Transparency Council for lack of active publicity. Because we understood that the Ministry should have said who it was directly, it's not that we asked for it; it's that they should have already said it (...) And finally, after a lot of requests and complaints, we got the list of members of that Escalation committee, which was the most controversial and which was the one that was the one that was asked the most; press conference after press conference, all the journalists, the citizens, every day in computing. I mean. It was a very, very discussed, very controversial topic in the pandemic in Spain, and in the end, we got the names and published them, we published them.” SP-7

However, the competitive interactions between CSOs and institutional actors often acquire a positive connotation for various reasons. First, competitive interactions between civic and institutional actors in monitoring often lead to reciprocal benefits in discovering and making the information public. One of Por Causa's journalists offers a reconstruction of the interrelated effects of interactions between societal and institutional accountability actors:

“We are not an anti-corruption organization, but we are an organization that reports on corruption, and the direct effect of that information is to improve the fight against corruption. We maintain a very good relationship with... Note that we have a difficult relationship with the police, the Civil Guard, with the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office. Still, it is a friendly relationship at the same time because our work allows them to continue working. Following the police and corruption also allows us to work better. We have a love-hate relationship. But deep down, it is a symbiotic relationship. Their work is good for us; our work helps theirs. Although we often have problems, because we are independent and a good part of the information, we work with negatively affects the police or the Civil Guard, who sometimes, not always, form part of the corruption scheme.” SP-10

The tension between cooperation and conflict in competitive forms of civic monitoring is not necessarily motivated by shared values but rather by the reciprocal profit that CSOs and institutional actors can derive from uncovering and denouncing malpractices and illicit behavior. These competitive-yet collaborative interactions can often be the basis for proposing new and alternative courses of action to increase administrative processes' efficacy and transparency. As explained by one of Civio's spokespersons:

“In other words, we investigate areas in which we believe there is insufficient information on transparency. And what we do afterward is, with what we have learned, what we bring to light, especially if they are bad practices, abuses or errors, or bad faith on the part of the administrations, we try to provide solutions (...) by bringing your problem to light, we are trying to get you to correct that, let's say, that bad practice.” SP-6

Monitoring practices in this category can also deploy more conciliatory strategies, such as joint agreements with institutional actors to form civil servants or to sponsor monitoring courses to increase the political system's transparency and accountability and the citizenry's involvement. For example, in the case of Maldita:

“We gave some presentations mainly focused on transparency and journalism, but on the part of open data, not so much right of access, the main topic was open data. This, for example, was organized by the chair of the Polytechnic University of Valencia, which, well, is a public university; it is still administration, but well, it is the university environment, but the Department of Transparency of the Generalitat Valenciana collaborated with them (. ..) 400 people had signed up, and that the majority were public officials or administration workers, that there were many anti-fraud people, they were interested in that part of transparency, open data and also disinformation, to combat all this not to stop for also as the part of red flags against the contras, corruption, right?” SP-7

Indeed, the balance between collaboration and conflict is hard to maintain, particularly for those CSOs that aim to serve as watchdogs over powerholders. But on the other hand, this balancing work grants CSOs *legitimacy* and *recognition*, increasing their influence potential. In the case of Political Watch, this appears clearly:

“The WebMaster of the Congress is a person who, I think, if you ask "Who are the people dedicate their lives to parliamentary surveillance?", he will say "Political Watch." That is, they are people who know us (...), In fact, a year ago, they renewed the Congress’s website after 20 years, and they informed us of the progress so that we could also prepare or adapt our technology (...) indirectly, collaborations or alliances with the public administration itself is a way of inoculating the virus of political innovation from within.” SP-8

Overall, practices of disclosure monitoring seem to be better equipped to bring about *diagonal forms of societal accountability* (Bovens, 2007), meaning that they can simultaneously obtain relevant answerability and sanctioning gains directly - opening information, mobilizing the public, and exerting sanctions- as well as indirectly by activating state accountability mechanisms and improving institutional work.

Tab. 6.3. Monitoring initiatives, actors, dilemmas, strategies, and mechanisms in the Spanish case

| Monitoring Type | Actor | Positional Strategy | Relational Strategy | Relational Mechanism |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Negotiated</i> | TI-Es | Direct Contact | Co-optation | Contagion |
| <i>Coalitional</i> | ProAceso | Coalition | Cooperation | Prominence |
| <i>Community</i> | 15MpaRato, X-Net | Brokerage | Conflict | Brokerage |
| <i>Disclosure</i> | Civio, Maldita, Political Watch, porCausa | Direct Contact Brokerage | Competition | Brokerage, Contagion |

6.5. Conclusion

The 15M/*Indignados* mobilizations started in 2011 and deeply reshuffled the Spanish anti-corruption collective action field. The pro-transparency requests that emerged from the movement, several corruption scandals, and the mounting economic crisis helped CSOs enter the policy arena. The same elements brought whistleblowing to the forefront of public concerns, with informants' leaks being exploited by movement actors to sanction financial and political elites. However, whereas the pro-transparency campaign was able to simultaneously deploy direct contact, brokerage, and coalitional strategies to influence the law's passage, the conflictual relational strategy of central whistleblowing players hampered the possibility of passing a bill to protect informants. The high political polarization within parliament and between CSOs and institutional actors nullified every policy attempt. Tensions between movement actors and more moderate CSOs also arose, with the former advocating for a more confrontational approach and the latter preferring advocacy and lobbying activities.

However, both campaigns obtained relevant gains at the implementation and enforcement levels, achieving *direct* and *indirect* accountability results (Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006). In the pro-transparency case, these gains accrued due to shifting competitive and cooperative relations, even though they partly weakened the civic block. Specialized CSOs such as Access Info and Civio acted as brokers, helping other CSOs access and use public information. Opening and circulating public information they created *ecosystems of transparency*, giving many civic groups a chance to exploit transparency tools to hold powerholders accountable for their actions. In addition, these actors filtered public information to the citizenry, coupling transparency with publicity and usability (C. Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). The struggle over transparency increased the system's answerability (Fox, 2007).

In the whistleblowing case, the control over essential pieces of technology granted actors such as X-Net an invaluable brokerage position. Bridging structural holes between informants, institutions, and the media, X-Net attracted the attention of local governments and administrative actors, supplying them with its technology and setting in motion processes of institutional imitation. Finally, at the enforcement level, 15MpaRato reached relevant gains in the legal arena and exerted informal sanctions through the media.

The 15M/*Indignados* movement represented a turning point also for the spread of monitoring practices, characterized by high levels of interconnectedness and shared collective identity among participating groups. In the Spanish case, civic monitoring practices connect the elites and their constituencies, trying to set up forms of bottom-up controls and sanctioning. The type of mediation

these actors provide can vary widely and impact these practices' effectiveness and consequences. For example, some forms of monitoring may prioritize educating citizens about transparency tools, while others may focus on representing citizens' interests to institutions. In some cases, delegating monitoring powers to dedicated organizations can help to amplify the impact of these efforts. Cooperative and cooptation forms of civic monitoring carried out by CSOs tend to have legalistic forms of intermediation and may not be designed to meet the needs of citizens. In contrast, community and disclosure monitoring practices by CSOs higher levels of horizontal integration within the civic sector and with the public. These practices are successful when they build and expand the boundaries of communities and force power holders to disclose information about their actions and processes. Overall, in Spain, monitoring practices seem associated with a complex mix of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal societal accountability consequences.

Chapter 7. Italy and Spain: Trajectories of Influence through a Relational Mediation Model

7.1. Introduction

"Democracy is based on rules, but also on relationships."

Polletta, 2021:112

CSOs in Italy and Spain claim to have achieved crucial victories in the long struggle against corruption. In Italy, a composite network of dedicated anti-corruption organizations, anti-mafia actors, open data, and pro-transparency players reclaim their role in improving the system's answerability, whistleblowers' safety, and surveillance over institutional actors. In Spain, movement actors revindicate the 15M/*Indignados*' role in politicizing the theme of transparency, whistleblowing, and corruption. CSOs declare to have sanctioned misbehaving elites, obtaining relevant political gains on transparency and informants' protection. In both countries, civic monitoring projects have multiplied over the years, with CSOs appraising the preventive functions of their scrutiny activities. However, whether these initiatives have enhanced the accountability of the Italian and Spanish systems remains unclear.

Societal accountability, namely grassroots mechanisms of oversight and sanctioning, entails scrutinizing powerholders, forcing them to explain their decisions and face the consequences of their actions (Bovens, 2007). Assessing to what extent anti-corruption and pro-accountability grassroots mobilization result in societal accountability relationships is challenging. Societal accountability is not a point outcome (Abbott, 2016) but rather an instance of *deep democratization*, a "continuing process of setting limits to power" (Johnston, 2013:1238). As with any democratization instances (Tilly, 2000), deep democratization processes have no single path nor necessary and sufficient conditions.

Societal accountability *relations* emerge from interactions among diverse players holding different intentions, ideas, and values and unfold throughout long chains of gains and losses, step forwards and step backs, formal success and substantial failure. To understand societal accountability relationships as consequences of collective action is thus to try and reconstruct the *patterns of influence* that CSOs have in these dynamic and interactive processes.

The chapter discusses the Italian and Spanish influence patterns over accountability relationships. Firstly, it reviews comparatively the strategies and mechanisms that characterized the two countries' campaigns on transparency, whistleblowing, and civic monitoring. Secondly, it presents the trajectories of the two cases through a relational mediation model. In doing so, it points at the

micro-, meso-, and macro-level relational dynamics that have mediated between contextual conditions, CSOs strategies, and their accountability consequences. The concluding section discusses the model's contributions and limitations and its potentialities for future research on the consequences of anti-corruption and, more generally, collective action processes.

7.2. Transparency

The Italian and Spanish pro-transparency mobilizations qualify as two cases of policy gains or legal claim attainment (Almén & Burell, 2018). In both countries, coalitions emerged under favorable and unfavorable political circumstances (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000) and thrived on a broad *transactional* civic partnership, tied by *interlocking ties* (Mazák & Diviák, 2018; Petrova & Tarrow, 2007).

At first, contextual opportunities were crucial to let transparency enter the policy arena. Around the 2010s, transparency had become a buzzword, with international organizations, mass movements, and the media calling for open and less opaque governments (Bukovansky, 2006; C. Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). Politicians were thus keen to work on transparency laws for their potential returns in image and legitimacy. However, the timing and mechanisms through which civic actors have exploited these opportunities appear diverse.

Differences in the agenda-setting stage demonstrate not only that choosing one arena rather than another can significantly impact the course of collective struggles (Jasper, 2006) but also that who starts a campaign can significantly shape its course.

The case of Access Info in Spain is particularly telling about a single player's relevance *in making and breaking relational dynamics* and *strategizing one's social connections* to gain influence on institutional players. As emerged in Chapter 6, coalition-making was AI's preferred positional strategy since the beginning. However, much effort went into creating a pro-transparency civic arena to magnify AI's influence over the long run. The fruits of these coalitional efforts were harvested only a few years later; the outbreak of the 15M/*Indignados* mobilization put transparency at the top of public concerns. AI increased its legitimacy on the civic front by bridging the coalition's proposals with calls from the movement. Once mounting corruption scandals overwhelmed the PP, the government had to embrace the coalition's requests to intervene in citizens' right to know. Influence at the agenda-setting stage was thus exerted through a prominence mechanism (Burt, 2002).

However, in the Spanish case, the prominence mechanism also worked the other way around, with institutional actors furnishing legitimacy and leverage to CSOs' demands, as happened when the

OSCE served as a broker to force governments to consider amendments from the Pro Acceso coalition. More importantly, the prominence mechanism also had perverse effects, with the governing party exploiting TI-Es' endorsement to legitimize its bill, creating friction within the civic front.

On the contrary, the Italian case demonstrates that those who join a mobilization can change its trajectory. In this case, coalitional efforts were hardly productive at first. The lack of an Italian "Indignados" movement left transparency at the margins of political debates. Despite the availability of some political leaders, the first civic initiative to regulate the right to know - FOIA.it - proved unsuccessful. The strong journalistic and homogenous nature of FOIA.it hampered the possibility of securing new resources and diluted its significance in the political elites' eyes. However, things changed when Access Info contacted Diritto di Sapere, a rank-file member of FOIA.it. AI and DS orchestrated and crafted a new pro-transparency coalition, FOIA4Italy. The contagion mechanism was central to launching the Italian mobilization of transparency. At the agenda-setting stage, international links between Spain and Italy represented a fundamental diffusion channel through *change agents* (Strang & Soule, 1998), who introduced practices and relational strategies into the Italian civil society sector.

Hence, getting on board pivotal anti-corruption actors such as TI-It, RIF, and Libera, with resources, legitimacy, and diverse audiences, increased the coalition's leverage and transformed the campaign's course. FOIA4Italy grouped CSOs with different relational strategies, some better integrated with political elites (e.g., TI-It) and others central in public opinion (e.g., RIF/TGL). The integration of repertoires moved the policy process and accelerated the law's approval. However, the goal-based nature of such an exogenously crafted coalition weakened its maintenance over time. As a result, FOIA4Italy reached a significant victory in obtaining the law but dissolved after the policy passage.

In both cases, influencing subsequent phases was far more complex. However, CSOs able to balance *cooperation* and *conflict* managed to be influential even over the most challenging stages, demonstrating that how players relate to each other along their interaction stories can shape the consequences of collective struggles.

Once the Italian transparency law passed, some CSOs demobilized (e.g., those from the media sphere), while others tried to have a say in its implementation to improve the bill further. At this point, the few organizations left opted for a brokerage strategy, whose influence was enhanced by the *closure* mechanism. Easing the circulation of public information among CSOs and sometimes

asking for information on behalf of other watchdog groups (e.g., investigative journalists), these groups have increased the publicity and usability of the right to know. Moreover, by creating *ecosystems of transparency*, they have increased CSOs' possibility of asking for and obtaining public information (*answerability*).

CSOs' intermediary position has improved the right to know on a *procedural level*. A perfect example in this sense comes from *direct interactions* between CSOs and civil servants and relates to translating policy gains into political change. As remarked by all interviewees, triggering social change and creating accountability relationships is not just a matter of having a right recognized or laws in place. Rights and laws must be implemented and enforced to be effective. Moving from the policy to administrative arenas, bureaucratic orientations, ideals, or values can magnify or hinder the large or small gains in the policy process. For example, in Italy and Spain, passing the transparency law was welcomed as a great success. However, have these laws improved the state of transparency in the country? It depends. Often, such contingency boils down to *people in administrations* and their willingness to open and share administrative data¹⁰². Sustained interactions throughout time can help deepen such relationships and *turn targets into allies*. As recalled in Chapters 5 and 6, interactions with civil servants or Heads of administrative and regulatory agencies have not had a great start. However, they have often turned into fruitful and productive relationships.

In Italy, CSOs following cooperative strategies towards the institutions have generally used their integration within elites' circles to set in motion processes of *institutional imitation*. Hence, combining the brokerage and prominence mechanism helped move to central positions, building direct contacts with PAs. In particular, CSOs characterized by more *cooperative* stances toward bureaucratic actors, such TI-It and Libera in Italy, have done much work in this sense. Interacting with politicians in local governments or public officials in administrative bodies, they have built substantial collaborations, in a few cases obtaining achievements beyond what the law foresaw. On the contrary, resorting to more confrontational repertoires such as litigations, some groups have tried to exert formal and informal sanctions against non-compliant institutional bodies (enforcement). However, their sanctioning potential has been severely constrained by the unwillingness of institutional actors to administer sanctions and by the general rejection of using disruptive repertoires by CSOs following co-optative relational strategies.

¹⁰² The reasons beyond positive or negative predispositions can be rooted in multiple reasons, from administrative culture to personal backgrounds. Future research interested in these interactions will undoubtedly do a better job in understanding them more closely.

Even in the Spanish case, the mobilization around transparency continued beyond the policy's passage. Here, gains hardly come from institutional mechanisms or channels of communication but rather from *informal ones*. The few steps made to improve the bill at a procedural level were obtained thanks to direct ties of communication and support with reform-minded bureaucrats. As reported by the interviewees, in a legislative context that still leaves high discretionary power to civil servants, the presence of committed individuals in leading positions (e.g., the Spanish Transparency Council) was crucial to secure gains otherwise unattainable. For their part, CSOs tried to make the most of their work, cultivating cooperative ties with responsive institutions but also deploying more disruptive repertoires when needed. While balancing cooperation and conflict was relatively easy and efficient for CSOs subscribing to a cooperative or competitive relational strategy, this weakened ties with actors less inclined to conflict, such as TI-Es.

Overall, Italian and Spanish CSOs have obtained crucial advancements in the transparency field, significantly increasing their system's answerability (Bovens, 2007). However, in most cases, procedural ameliorations at the implementation stage have accrued through informal channels and have hardly crystallized into durable structural change. At the same time, they have sometimes managed to overcome accountability traps (Fox, 2007), transforming public information into visible and usable information (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). As a result, they have become *mediators* in the field of transparency and have increased the integration within the civic field, trying to lay the foundations for the emergence of transparency ecosystems.

7.3. Whistleblowing

The mobilizations around whistleblowers' protection add another piece to the puzzle. In this case, differences between the Italian and Spanish cases span well beyond their varying influence over the policy process. Here, Italy represents a case of legal claim attainment, whereas Spanish CSOs mainly reached sanctioning goals (Almén & Burell, 2018).

The mobilization around whistleblowing had a very different start and course in the two countries, demonstrating that the arenas where interaction among players starts may matter significantly. Indeed, whereas in Italy, whistleblowers' protection emerged as a policy issue and translated into a crucial policy gain, in Spain, whistleblowing emerged as a peculiar form of contentious political participation, increasing grassroots sanctioning potential.

In Spain, whistleblowing represented a specific strategy to act against the country's corrupt elites. Moving from the outbreak of 15M/*Indignados* and building on protesters' goals, the 15MpaRato campaign and its leading player X-Net de facto opened a new arena of political contestation, using

informants' leaks to sanction powerholders *directly* and *indirectly*. Through their whistleblowing platform, X-Net and 15MpaRato reached a brokerage position, connecting informants to courts, media, and public opinion. From there, CSOs initiated and won lawsuits, obtained economic reparations and exerted extra-institutional sanctions gaining the media's attention.

However, as an offspring of the 15M/*Indignados* that saw participatory and radical democracy as the only way to reach a "real democracy," X-Net remained vehemently opposed to traditional methods of influencing policymaking within the liberal representative model. Its decision not to engage in the policy process left room for challengers like Ciudadanos to conquer the policy arena. Coherently, when X-Net decided to leave the legal arena and enter policy one, its firm rejection of any cooperation with challenger and incumbent parties informed its positional strategies. Contacts with political parties were de facto impossible due to sharp ideological oppositions and competition. Rather than asking for the endorsement of possibly supportive political parties, X-Net selected a less productive positional strategy, contacting independent MPs. The direct contact strategy proved mostly unproductive, having little to no effect on the policy level. However, it still allowed X-Net to enter the policy arena as a legitimate political subject, maintaining a coherent position concerning its anti-establishment stance.

For the same reason, X-Net refrained from crafting or joining civic coalitions. Sharp differences in CSOs' relational strategies – rooted in different ideological stances- hampered the chance of joining forces to obtain leverage over political representatives. On a more practical side, Spanish CSOs clashed over direct vs. indirect involvement in the policy process. If X-Net forged direct ties with MPs through a contagion mechanism, hence furnishing information on whistleblowing regulations to decision-makers, other groups opposed being associated with specific parties to maintain supposed neutrality.

Similarly, the Italian case demonstrates that with whom players interact matters massively. Indeed, whereas TI-It kicked off the first whistleblowing campaign, the Italian policy results highly depended on its direct contact with a central political player, the 5SM. The *prominence* mechanism was crucial at the agenda-setting stage. As reported by the same MP sponsoring the bill, the whistleblowers' protection was alien to the institutional debates and the Italian party system. The conditions of informants and the existence of legislative models to protect them were utterly unknown to the political class and part of the civic field. Contacting TI-It for information to translate her party's anti-corruption program into policy proposals, the MP learned about whistleblowing and brought the theme into the policy arena.

Over time, the closure mechanism became relevant to push the bill further. When the policy process started, MPs from the 5MS had just entered Parliament and were not seeking re-election. Instead, they were new to policymaking and seeking information to orient their political work. At this point, the *quality* of the relationship between the 5SM and TI-It mediated the whistleblowing policy gain. In fact, throughout time, the relationship between the MP who sponsored the bill and TI-It's deepened in nature. The organization was not only a source of information but a crucial support that helped the MP push through with her proposal, even against members of her party. As a result, the cooperation with the 5SM was even more productive than expected; not only did whistleblowing enter parliamentary debates, but it made its way over the whole policy process, becoming law in 2017.

At the same time, the 5SM's endorsement alienated the support of other political parties. To move forward in the policy process and obtain the law, TI-It turned to other CSOs, through a coalitional strategy. The horizontal integration with RIF/TGL and their heterogeneity of repertoires and audiences was fundamental to advancing the bill. Well aware of the necessity of working in strict collaboration with MPs to advance policy goals, RIF/TGL managed to build ties of information sharing with elites and directly influence their work by supporting them in writing amendments. At the same time, the organization managed to exploit its popular support to increase the level of contention when necessary. Overall, the coherence between positional and relational strategies of central CSOs increased their influence over the policy's passage.

However, the change of arenas over the implementation stage significantly reshuffled the interactions among players and their balance of power. Here, the Italian and the Spanish cases help understand how the medium through which players interact can shape their influence potential.

In the Italian case, Hermes Center, which elaborated whistleblowing platforms and services alternative to the institutional ones, gained the forefront of the mobilization. Unsatisfied with the law's final contents, which resulted from the work and influence of multiple players, HC joined TI-It in creating whistleblowing platforms to connect informants and public administrations. In this way, TI-It and HC became brokers in the whistleblowing process connecting informants with various disclosure channels, both institutional and extra-institutional. Their technological resources give them the power to force procedural refinements of the legislation over the PAs under the threat of turning off their services altogether. HC used litigations to introduce technical ameliorations in the whistleblowers' protection when necessary. Still, HC's conflictual stance towards institutional actors was partly mitigated by its long-standing alliance with TI-It, a more cooperative player. However, this sanctioning potential faded at the enforcement stage. CSOs' control of civic

technologies increased their procedural influence but hardly increased grassroots sanctioning potential.

Similarly, X-Net's use of digital whistleblowing platforms increased its local influence through a prominence mechanism. The high legitimacy won in the general public's eyes enhanced X-Net's leverage on sympathetic institutional actors. Notwithstanding X-Net's conflictual stances towards institutional politics, once the municipality of Barcelona set up its reporting channel, it turned to the group as a source of information. X-Net's long commitment to the issue and its use of encrypted whistleblowing platforms in the 15MpaRato campaign and similar cases made it a crucial source of information for the local government. As reported in Chapter 6, the group and the municipality interactions had a rough start; nevertheless, things changed along the way. The platform was changed and adapted to the municipality's needs, and the direct contacts via civil servants favored its reproduction by other PAs across the country. At this point, X-Net renounced its role as a broker in whistleblowing, channeling its resources into the policy arena.

In summary, the Italian case exerted significant influence over the policy process but with low potential for sanction. On the contrary, while Spanish CSOs bear little influence on the national policy process, they were highly influential in legitimizing whistleblowing as a form of political participation and obtaining relevant legal gains. In both cases, the brokerage mechanism through the control of pieces of technologies favored crucial procedural gains, ameliorating whistleblowers' protection at a procedural and administrative level, regardless of the legislative framework of reference. Moreover, controlling valuable information and technologies served to forge direct ties with civil servants and informants, regardless of CSOs' relational stances and ideological positioning.

7.4. Civic Monitoring

The monitoring field comprises many players, each using different strategies to oversee and control institutional powers (Feenstra & Casero-Ripollés, 2014). With slight variations, the Italian and Spanish monitoring fields seem to be characterized by four main types of civic monitoring practices based on different relational patterns between monitoring actors, institutional elites, and the general public. Overall, the analysis of civic monitoring shows how CSOs' ideas about what their relations should look like and why they should interact with other players shape their influence potential.

Negotiated monitoring, typically carried out singularly by structured groups made of professionals, focuses on ensuring transparency in public procedures and increasing citizen awareness. The main consequences of these practices relate to law enforcement and administrative change. These

monitoring practices are typically set up by and with already committed public institutions. The dependence on institutional resources and the shared goals of monitoring bodies and monitored actors often results in co-optative relational schemas, with limited chances to increase the system's answerability.

Here, the *contagion* mechanism appears particularly relevant. In the Italian case, civic monitors have often become reference points for the PAs working with them. In projects such as the Integrity Pacts, carried out by NGOs, these groups have increased the efficacy and efficiency of administrative procedures, oversaw resource allocation processes, and helped out civil servants. In turn, these organizations gained *access* to institutional bodies and decision-making processes.

Something similar happens in the Spanish monitoring field. Indeed, NGOs' monitoring in Spain has often been coopted by institutional actors for the legitimacy they can furnish. CSOs such as TI-Es are aware of these institutional interests and use their legitimacy as a currency to obtain formal gains by being included in the institutional arena. The aim is to change institutions from within without relying on disruptive tactics. However, the risk is that formal gains will hardly couple with substantial ones. In fact, in these cases, citizens' involvement appears minimal and complex to extend even by the more motivated CSOs.

Monitoring campaigns tend to prefer coalitional strategies led by a strong core of specialized organizations and a broader set of satellite groups. A loose collective identity and an intense exchange of resources generally characterize these initiatives. In both cases, monitoring campaigns rest on a collaborative stance towards institutional actors and the PAs. Civil society coalitions acknowledged the need to build cooperation ties with institutional and administrative actors to accelerate political and social change. These attempts seem particularly productive when *contagion* and *prominence* mechanisms are at play, hence when institutional and civic actors build on each other's expertise and legitimacy. In Spain, the pandemic gave a new impulse to push for reforming the existing transparency law. In Italy, it helped forge new coalitions for monitoring the use of the Recovery Funds granted by the European Union.

Disclosure monitoring is performed by alternative media and civic platforms, using data collection and information disclosure to hold political representatives accountable and promote government transparency. These groups often build civic platforms and apps to publish and give visibility to already available administrative data, using transparency laws or compiling new data sources through investigative methods. They tend to be horizontally integrated, building solid exchanges with other civil actors, and aim to create monitoring environments where other civic subjects can

reuse public information to increase the system's answerability. Moreover, these actors believe in the political nature of their knowledge-based monitoring practices and supply other civic actors with the necessary knowledge to carry out their monitoring activities, triggering broader mobilization processes.

In Italy and Spain, mechanisms of *prominence* and *closure* have thus favored the opening and circulation of public information, which have become an essential resource for new initiatives to foster accountability. Additionally, in both countries, data production, recollection, and dissemination combine with forms of data journalism. Alternative media make direct use of their bulk of data, often using strategies of naming and shaming to exert pressure on the institutional realm. The *brokerage* mechanism has thus furnished those actors a position of intermediation, extracting and re-elaborating information from public authorities for citizens' needs. As a result, their sanctioning potential increased while trying to favor citizens' participation and public awareness.

Community monitoring, or monitoring communities, on the other hand, tend to be less involved with institutional actors and more focused on community building, using public meetings and protest strategies when necessary. The goal is cultural change rather than solely shedding light on illicit behavior. These practices demonstrate that real change can be achieved through coordination and community building. These monitoring practices have shown the most remarkable variation between the Italian and the Spanish case. Whereas in both cases, the *closure* mechanism was crucial to enhance their influence, variations in their stances towards institutional actors have led to different consequences.

In the Italian case, monitoring communities have been mainly concerned with complementing the work of public authorities through direct contact with local and administrative elites. From time to time, they have been heard for the contextual and local knowledge they could offer powerholders and their legitimacy in public opinion. However, their results have been chiefly articulated on a formal level, claiming the inclusion of civic groups in decision-making arenas and underlying the crucial preventing role of their actions.

On the contrary, community monitoring has often coupled with conflictual stances towards public powers in Spain. Thus, monitoring coincided with developing counter-democratic powers and grassroots surveillance tools, resulting in formal and informal sanctioning through brokerage and coalitional strategies.

Competitive relational strategies emerge prevalently when looking at the civic monitoring arenas, both in Italy and Spain. Here, alternative media and data-driven initiatives such as Openpolis and Civio were founded to surveil the use of public resources and decision-making processes and have greatly benefited from swinging between cooperation and conflict with authorities. By opening and publicizing information, these projects have increased the system's answerability by administering informal sanctions, triggering formal sanctions, and creating cooperation ties with civil servants and PAs. While traditional media repertoires of action served to monitor actors to fulfill their watchdog function (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012), direct contact strategies helped create new synergies with reform-minded politicians and civil servants, obtaining significant preventive gains.

Co-optative strategies appear clearly in the civic monitoring arena in Italy and Spain. Co-optative ties here emerge mainly with political elites, with which, in *negotiated monitoring* CSOs tend to share values and resources. NGOs carrying out monitoring projects following a co-optative relational strategy tend to perceive their role as supportive of institutional mechanisms. NGOs such as TI-Es in Spain or Parliament Watch in Italy represent good examples. Here, civic monitoring practices seldom or never resort to violent and disruptive tactics because they depend on the willingness of institutional elites to bring forward monitoring activities. The aim is not to question the current state of affairs or to contest the power distribution system but rather to improve the efficacy and efficiency of institutional mechanisms through the intervention of civic groups and controls. As one of the spokespersons of RIF/TGL reported, the logic of change underlying these projects is quantitative. The more civic groups check administrative and political procedures, the less public corruption and maladministration will occur. However, as discussed in chapters 5 and 6, this strategy is generally associated with formalistic and processual results rather than substantial changes. Regarding the anti-corruption struggle, this commonly boils down to reproducing neo-liberal anti-corruption policies and tools, likely resulting in *low accountability traps* (Fox, 2007).

The Spanish case, instead, appears much more composite, with central anti-corruption central actors resorting alternatively to conflict (X-Net), competition (Civio), or cooperation (AccessInfo). In Spain, transparency, whistleblowers' protection, and practices of civic monitoring entered the public debate through *diffusion from below*. Notwithstanding the pre-existence of CSOs working on the issue of transparency and anti-corruption, these themes gained salience in the political and public discussion only in the aftermath of the 2011 mass mobilizations. The 15/*Indignados* mobilized around public corruption and democratic deepening, bridging the two struggles. Transparency, whistleblowing, and civic monitoring have thus emerged as bottom-up forms of democratic participation, incidentally fruitful in combating one of the most significant distortions of

democratic systems, namely public corruption. Transparency and access to public information emerged as critical tools to question the elites' reconstruction of the Spanish crisis to attribute faults and imagine alternative courses of action (Magallón Rosa et al., 2017). The whistleblowers' protection was not merely a moral desideratum but rather a technical necessity to protect those informants already contributing to exposing the corruption in the Spanish apparatus.

In short, both countries have experienced an increase in the *answerability* of their systems thanks to civic monitoring practices (Almén & Burell, 2018). However, in Italy, this often came with an increased integration within elite circles, whereas Spanish initiatives had significant sanctioning consequences.

7.5. The Relational Mediation Model: Influence and Accountability

The present work has advanced the idea of looking at interactions and relations as mediational conduits between players' strategies – which come with and are sometimes bounded by resources, organizational characteristics, values, and identities - and contextual factors in the form of opportunities and threats. Moving from this intuition, the research has subscribed to an *influence* perspective, maintaining that multiple players jointly shape social change. To investigate how each player contribute to change processes, the thesis has built on Diani's proposal (1997) – grounded in network studies – to assume that being central in relational structures or better connected with actors endowed with decision-making power increases players' influence potential.

As discussed in Chapter 2, such a perspective has paved the way for a blossoming of contributions interested in understanding the relational consequences of collective action. However, this work has tried to do something else: crafting *a relational approach to investigate the accountability consequences of collective action* in the anti-corruption field. In doing so, it has maintained that researchers interested in understanding the influence of grassroots players should investigate i) how actors strategize social connections to change their structural positions vis-à-vis powerful players (*positional strategies*; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000); ii) players' relational dispositions or relational schemas (Jasper et al., 2022; Polletta, 2022), that is their long-term models about how to relate with other players – targets, allies, constituencies, bystanders, etc.- in one's pursuit of social change (*relational strategies*); and iii) and what is specific about the transformative power of relations (Burt, 2002; Cinalli, 2007b; Tilly, 2002), that is to understand how making, breaking, and transforming positions and relations fuel social change (*relational mechanisms*). Moving from such a theoretical framework, the thesis has discussed several positional (direct contact, brokerage, and coalition; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000) and relational (cooptation, cooperation, competition, and

conflict; Johnson, 2016) strategies, as well as some relational mechanisms (contagion, prominence, closure, and brokerage of structural holes; Burt, 2002).

Chapters 5 and 6 have thus put this bundle of concepts in action to recount the story of some of the most recent changes in the Italian and Spanish anti-corruption history through processual and relational lenses. The diachronic analysis of transparency and whistleblowing campaigns and the synchronic description of civic monitoring initiatives has elucidated CSOs' attempts at reaching influence positions and has assessed whether and how these attempts have translated into influence over societal accountability consequences.

Sections 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4 have sought to compare the Italian and Spanish experiences. In this case, comparing has not served to find sufficient and necessary conditions of influence but rather to shed light on some *possible trajectories* -or patterns (Amenta, 2006)- *of influence*. As amply discussed throughout the text, societal accountability consequences are here intended as instances of *deep democratization* processes for which no silver bullets exist (Johnston, 2013, 2014).

Institutional and political mediation models have contributed to our understanding of the complex relationship between collective action and social change (Amenta et al., 1992, 2005; Amenta & Elliott, 2019; King, 2008), demonstrating how the more influential players are those who manage to adapt their strategies to changing environmental conditions. Zooming in, the strategic interaction perspective has closely investigated how players strategically take action in interactions to pursue their goals, often coming up with packages of gains and losses (Elliott-Negri et al., 2021b; Jabola-Carolus et al., 2020; Jasper et al., 2022). The relational mediation model considers interactions and relations as mediation channels in conversation with these two approaches. However, till now, the mediational element has remained mostly unspoken and under-theorized. The following sections try to shed light on this matter, focusing on the micro-, meso-, and macro-level analysis.

7.5.1. Micro-level relational mediation

Studies on the consequences of collective action and anti-corruption research have seldom theorized about the role of individuals in triggering or shaping change processes. Whereas several contributions have targeted the biographical outcomes of social movements and activism (Giugni, 2004; Giugni & Grasso, 2016; Passy & Monsch, 2018), the transformative role of single players or influential actors within compound players has rarely been addressed, with few notable exceptions (Böhm, 2015; Buchter, 2021; Kellogg, 2012; Robnett, 2000). The same goes for anti-corruption and accountability studies, where – if present- micro-level and agentic perspectives have customarily dealt with the role of a single corrupt official or misbehaving apical figures. Instead, collective

action and corruption studies have generally focused on aggregative views (Diani, 2012; Krinsky & Crossley, 2014). Similarly, both strands of the literature have generally preferred to focus on broader “movements” or “civil society,” seldom shedding light on the role of specific players and groups within the broader collective action field. However, single players’ or change agents’ contributions may be paramount to drawing a clear picture of the black box connecting anti-corruption mobilizations and accountability results.

Relevant theoretical insights in this sense come from the application of network studies to social movement mobilizations. For example, scholars have sometimes highlighted how waves of contention can radically transform relational structures *and* people’s networks (Diani, 1997; Tindall et al., 2012). If reaching influential positions means being more integrated within decision-making or opinion-making circles, the role of individuals and individual players becomes crucial. The Italian and Spanish anti-corruption fields and the unfolding of their accountability struggles have elucidated the relevance of single players and individual agents in favoring or hampering political or social change processes.

In the Spanish case, single activists have been crucial for kicking off the mobilizations around transparency and whistleblowing. Both campaigns have been mainly crafted by the spokespersons of organizations such as AI and X-Net, which have guided the pro-accountability struggle across various arenas. More generally, single organizations within broader anti-corruption networks have been crucial in Spain and Italy to start and sustain collective action processes. Without AI and X-Net in Spain, TI-It, RIF/TGL, and Libera in Italy, relevant accountability claims would have remained at the margins of the political and public debate. At the same time, the analysis has revealed that who joins a particular mobilization can significantly shape its course. For example, changing members from FOIA.it to FOIA4Italy transformed the destiny of the Italian campaign on the right to know, while incompatible strategies within the Spanish ABRE’s members weakened the coalition’s influence over the transposition of the European Directive.

At the same time, the Italian mobilization around whistleblowing has let emerge the role of individual decision-makers in bringing forward collective action claims. Without a committed MP willing to learn from and cooperate with legitimate civic actors, the whistleblowers’ protection would have hardly entered the Parliamentary arena. On the other hand, the same campaign has let emerge how one-to-one personal relations can matter to push forward grassroots’ goals even in an adverse scenario. Without the social capital ties based on trust and recognition built between the MP and TI-IT's team members, the whistleblower act would have hardly become a top priority for the 5SM, and its institutional sponsor would have probably moved to a more rewarding policy issue.

Interpersonal and direct connections between CSOs members and institutional actors were probably even more critical at the administrative level. Considering the different logic of the public administrations, which does not work through consensus or majoritarian rules as legislative processes, securing cooperative relations with civil servants was often a way to introduce relevant procedural ameliorations, both in the Italian and Spanish fields.

In the whistleblowing case, relationships based on the exchange of information and through services delivered by civic actors to administrations have often served to build trust relationships. In this way, CSOs have become reference points for single civil servants, favoring administrative changes and diffusion processes. As elucidated by many interviewees and in the quote opening this work, with whom CSOs interact is crucial to determine their potential influence. Beyond strategies and mechanisms, the single decision-makers in legislative, administrative, or enforcement bodies can magnify or hinder grassroots attempts at triggering social change. As stressed by research focusing on the political will for anti-corruption research (Brinkerhoff, 2000), reform-minded politicians and civil servants are crucial allies in pursuing accountability goals and can sometimes grant civic groups more benefits than requested. On the other hand, in contexts of great discretionary power and informality, single targets can resist change processes and reduce relevant achievements to mere cosmetic transformations.

Overall, the research shows that single players and specific individuals may work as *influential change actors* and increase the influence of compound groups. At the same time, it shows how much personal connections and direct interactions between individuals and single players in civic and institutional arenas can serve to secure gains vis-à-vis institutional constraints. Hence, single players and personal connections may serve as mediation channels, increasing the influence of civic actors even under unfavorable conditions, regardless of their groups' resources, frames, or organizational characteristics.

7.5.2. *Meso-level relational mediation*

From a different starting point, relationalists have often moved similar critics to aggregative approaches in studying collective action phenomena (Crossley, 2010). Here, attention is posed on the patterns of relations among individuals and groups, maintaining that “actors are just a temporary lens for perceiving, but also frequently obscuring, what is the real causal nexus: the intersecting pattern of relations” (Erikson, 2018:273). Whereas this work has shown how much single players – and sometimes individuals- matter for social change, it is true that what *happens between actors* and

their *interactions' structure* plays an equally relevant role in building or tearing down relations at the meso-level (Coley et al., 2020).

In particular, the analysis has shed light on the fact that *where players interact*, namely different arenas, can increase or hinder their influence. As discussed in Chapter 3, this work has focused on the anti-corruption collective action field as a space of contention made of several arenas, intended as “an open-ended bundle of rules and resources that allows certain kinds of interactions to proceed, leading to outcomes that may be formal or quite casual” (Jasper, 2006: 141). Chapters 5 and 6 have let emerged that the arena where interactions start and the kind of interactions that develop in each shape players' influence.

The different trajectories of the Italian and Spanish mobilization around whistleblowing, for example, have revealed how interactions that start in contentious arenas- as in the case of the 15M/Indignados and 15MpaRato - will likely follow a different pattern from those initiating closer to political arenas, as in the Italian case. Whereas whistleblowing emerged as a contentious practice of political participation in Spain, in Italy, the protection of whistleblowers immediately took the form of a policy issue. The conflictual interactions that characterized the Spanish mobilization helped secure sanctioning consequences but hampered the achievement of policy results; the dialogic relationships in the Italian case secured policy change but decreased players' sanctioning potential.

At the same time, the analysis has focused on the interdependence and shifts among contiguous arenas. Chapters 5 and 6 have elucidated that there is no such thing as an anti-corruption arena, but rather that the contentious against public corruption spreads diachronically and synchronically across several different arenas, each characterized by precise rules, resources, and opportunities. On the one hand, the analysis has stressed how much arena opportunities and constraints can sustain or constrain CSOs' influence. For example, the Italian parliamentary arena obliged MPs to put on the agenda a certain number of proposals coming from minority parties, which helped to bring forward the whistleblowing issue, and the Spanish legal system foresees the possibility of popular lawsuits, which helped 15MpaRato to trigger formal sanction against corrupt elites. At the same time, interactions *between players across arenas* can foster civic goals. For example, competitive interactions between the Italian anti-corruption authority and the privacy authority helped refine and enforce the whistleblowers' protection, and frictions between the national and local governments in Spain allowed X-Net to secure relevant gains on whistleblowing at the regional and local level, despite its limited influence on the national policy process.

Similarly, the processual approach adopted to investigate players' influence over policymaking has shed light on the relevance of changes in arenas. In particular, both in the Italian and Spanish cases, it appears clearly how relational patterns change across the policy-making process. The shift of alliances and the selection of new targets throughout the policy process is particularly telling. For example, the transparency and whistleblowing campaigns show how much targets, allies, and the overall logic of interaction among players changed from the policy approval to the policy implementation stage. Over the policy adoption phase, the main targets of civil society organizations are indeed policymakers, influenced through institutional lobbying and mobilization strategies. The implementation phase is, however, governed by different actors and logic. The targets thus shift from political-institutional actors to institutional regulatory agencies and law enforcement bodies. Again, lobbying and mobilization can help, but different institutional logic may call for different strategies. For example, in the Italian case, ANAC was an essential institutional ally during the adoption phase but became the target of new mobilizations when moving into the implementation stage. Similarly, in the Spanish case, the influence of civic players grew significantly when the transparency law was passed. Once the mobilization moved to the administrative sphere and at local levels, AI increased its influence by crafting cooperative interactions with civil servants and through participatory forums.

At the same time, in both cases, the processual study of the policy process has demonstrated how moving from one stage to another reshuffle the relational dynamics and the centrality of certain players, even within the civic front. Whereas TI-It and RIF significantly influenced the policy adoption phase, combining lobbying and mobilization, influence on the implementation stage depended mainly on including a new tech player, HC, and its pseudo-monopolist control over whistleblowing technologies. RIF's contribution during this second period was relatively modest, continuing an advocacy campaign at the European level and participating in public events and auditions with other civil society organizations. This last point helps stress another crucial meso-level element: *the channels through which players interact* can change their influence.

The Italian and Spanish mobilizations around whistleblowing have shown how much the control over technological platforms has changed the balance of power between civic and institutional actors, forcing procedural refinements over the public administrations. Through their digital disclosure channels CSOs have secured brokerage positions and, in the more successful cases as ALAC, WhistleblowingPA, and X-Net's Buzon, have served as *brokers of structural holes*, connecting informants with public opinion, the media, and institutional actors. Similarly, the mobilization around transparency and the mushrooming of several monitoring initiatives have

underlined how much CSOs' *intermediary* role matters in transforming public information into actual resources to increase the system's answerability. As clearly stated in the literature, information is not power per se but can become a crucial instrument to dismantle or prevent the emergence of shady deals when its visibility, usability, and salience increase thanks to the work of CSOs. In both countries, CSOs have thus contributed to exploiting the right to know to open, connect, refine, and circulate, creating ecosystems of transparency.

The analysis shows that strategies, resources, and opportunities engrained in the multiple arenas composing the anti-corruption collective action field can significantly impact players' influence potential. At the same time, it demonstrates how much the changing relational patterns that characterize the interactions between CSOs, allies, targets, and bystanders within and across arenas can change across phases, how arenas can be instrumentally used one against the other, and how much CSOs mediating role *across arenas* and *between players* can increase their influence potential, securing gains even in the least likely scenarios. In a nutshell, interactions between and across arenas may serve as conduits of influence to overcome the constraints of contextual conditions, while players can mediate across arenas, changing their structural positions by connecting other actors through the resources they control.

7.5.3. Macro-level relational mediation

Relations and relational structures can significantly shape macro-level transformations (Clemens, 1998; Erikson & Occhiuto, 2017). The analysis has built on Polletta's (2022) concept of relational schemas or scripts to investigate players' relational dispositions in interactions (Jasper et al., 2022). As elucidated in Chapters 5 and 6, these "familiar ways of doing relations," that is, to interact with other players using relational models, shape players' influence, for example, leading CSOs to build direct contact with marginal parties to stay coherent with their conflictual relational stances, as in X-Net's case.

However, relational schemas, scripts, or models impact the here-and-now of interactions but can also significantly mediate the consequences of grassroots mobilization efforts at a macro-level analysis. More specifically, the ideas that players hold on *real* and *imagined relationships* can mediate between bottom-up claims and instances of social change. That is, beyond strategies, contextual opportunities, resources, and frames, individual and collective ideas about real or imagined solidarities, boundaries, and structural positions will hinder or increase the influence of grassroots players (Polletta, 2020).

Building on calls for new forms of civic relationships, Polletta reminds us that people have always “acted cooperatively and politically by imagining themselves as religious fellows, as a team, and as nodes in a computer network. They have put their lives on the line by imagining themselves as the “first-class citizens” they were not (...) The relationships they drew on were metaphorical, but those metaphors helped them to work through their differences, arrive at practical compromises, and envision routes to genuine political impact” (Polletta, 2020:4-5). When extended to the present work, Polletta’s argument represents a powerful lens through which understanding the role of ideas and relationships in mediating macro-level changes.

The analysis of the Italian and Spanish anti-corruption fields has stressed how much formal gains, as losses, have tended to stick at a formalist level without producing long-term systemic change. For example, obtaining a law on the right to know and opening public information has not directly enhanced the system’s answerability. Likewise, passing a law regulating whistleblowing has not necessarily eased whistleblowers’ experience or favored their reports. Similarly, multiplying civic monitoring initiatives has not consistently increased citizens’ surveillance powers. Real and imagined relationships mediate between complex gains and losses chains and players’ influence on broader political change processes.

In this sense, attention should be paid to the ideas that every relevant player in arenas holds about their relationships. For example, the Italian case on whistleblowing is pretty telling. CSOs introduced the topic in public debate, wrote the bill, helped secure the political support to pass it, participated in writing down its regulatory laws, implemented safe civic reporting channels, supplied them to the public administrations, and helped civil servants to deal with reports and interpret the law. Still, institutional actors, such as the former ANAC board member, do not recognize them as legitimate actors in whistleblowing since the law does not allow civic groups to act as reporting channels.

Similarly, in Spain, institutional actors in Barcelona and Catalunya decided to open institutional leaking platforms to collect reports from citizens on institutional wrongdoings. To do so, they built on the expertise accumulated by civic actors over years of work with whistleblowers. However, when interrogated, civil servants in these institutional bodies affirmed that their decision was motivated by the need to elevate whistleblowing and whistleblowers’ protection to an institutional matter as if the protections and goals of civic initiatives were not legitimate enough.

The same is valid for monitoring projects, which in both countries, are often exploited by institutional actors as an instrument to share the burden to keep an eye on their procedures and to

extract knowledge from civic actors rather than as moments of co-creation or as an opening of collective and participative decision-making. For example, Italian groups in the field of community monitoring have often reported high frustration because civic inputs to prevent the spread of corruption episodes or to increase the efficacy of administrative procedures against the perils of maladministration often lack an arena to be presented, discussed, and acted upon.

Similar elements recur in the pro-transparency field. For example, AI has extensively commented on the difficulty of working on pro-democratic issues in supposedly democratic countries like Spain. To trigger and generate *systemic changes* in liberal democratic contexts appears to be much more complex, even when policy goals can be easily met from below, precisely because radical ideas about restructuring the power relations between civic and institutional players are hard to pass. Moreover, the legitimacy of CSOs and their role in deep democratization processes are contested because incumbent actors may be uninterested in rediscussing democratic models now taken for granted.

Hence, formal gains such as obtaining policy change, transforming administrative procedures, or setting up monitoring projects may be weakened by the non-availability of institutional arenas to acknowledge civic groups as legitimate players in anti-corruption and pro-accountability struggles.

Conversely, civic actors and grassroots mobilization can sometimes succeed in radically transforming ideas about real and imagined relationships. For example, this was the case with the 15M/*Indignados* movement, which worked as a critical juncture, precisely reshuffling the relational patterns characterizing the Spanish political system. As reported by many interviewees, the movement represented a critical turning point, changing elites' attitudes toward citizens' requests and bringing the issues of transparency, anti-corruption, and real democracy to the forefront of public concerns. However, as with any other change in longer processes, that profound restructuring of ideas on democratic relationships has progressively crystallized into new power imbalances.

Such restructuring has, however, left room to imagine new ways to relate to institutional actors. Aware of the relevance of *working with* and not against institutional targets to gain influence, many CSOs have learned to balance contestation and collaboration, to build trust relationships with public officials, and to raise their voices through mobilization when necessary to gain a legitimate position as accountability actors, standing in-between powerholders and the citizenry.

7.6. Conclusion

7.6.1. CSOs' influence

Interactions between CSOs, targets, bystanders, and constituents mediate the influence of collective actors across arenas and time. Indeed, how actors exploit resources, select strategies, elaborate discourses, and seize opportunities will vary depending on the multiple connections between all the players populating different arenas.

The lack of resources will not always be a significant impediment to pursuing one's goals. CSOs counting on scarce financial and human resources might still be highly influential if they change their structural position vis-à-vis the elites (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000). As happened to X-Net, controlling the technological infrastructure of information disclosure helped the organization gain centrality in the general audience and leverage on institutions. Something similar happened in Italy for TI-It. On the contrary, counting on large and highly structured organizations will not necessarily increase actors' influence (Goldstone, 1980). For example, Libera's large membership numbers did not translate into influence over regulatory agencies such as ANAC.

At the same time, decisions on tactics and repertoires of action are hardly independent of evaluations on the presence of other players, counter-movements, or targets. Strategic decisions on tactics and repertoires emerge from actors' evaluations and feelings toward other players (Jasper, 2004; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015) and change according to dynamic interactions with friends and foes (Fillieule & Broqua, 2018; King & Jasper, 2022b; Zald & Bert, 2017). So, movement actors such as X-Net can strategically decide to intervene in the corruption battle through civic lawsuits and decide to move from the legal to the legislative arena when incumbent parties start to reorganize. At the same time, arenas' selection can change the interactions between challengers and incumbents, as between TI-It and ANAC, forcing players to readapt their action repertoires. Finally, actors can decide whether to work in a coalition or isolated, to be associated with certain players or to avoid potentially harmful interactions, as happened with FOIA4Italy and Corruptil. Often, strategic dilemmas are solved by resorting to relational criteria.

Moreover, relationships can be discursively crafted or destroyed. Resonant frames can be created by bridging civic tropes with political slogans, as in the Italian struggle against whistleblowing. As with the Spanish mobilization around transparency, grassroots requests can be nuanced and diluted to sound more reasonable for political parties and their constituencies. Frames are hardly built in isolation but are instead dialogically created (N. Lindstedt, 2018). In interaction, bridging, extending, transforming, and amplifying frames happen (Mische, 2003). Frame consonance and

disputes are thus good discursive proxies to understand how players adjust to each other to gain mutual support and take the most out of the policy process (Croteau & Hicks, 2003).

Political conditions become favorable opportunities only when perceived as such (della Porta & Diani, 2020) and- most importantly- when relationships give actors a chance to chase them (Cinalli, 2007b; Diani, 1997; Einwohner, 1999). Progressive political parties in government are not always good allies in processes of social change. When CSOs and parties compete over the same social basis, the interactions between the two will likely result in opposition rather than easing social change. The necessity of appropriating and re-claiming one's role in the battle over valence issues, as with corruption, will likely feed competition between similar political entrepreneurs, blocking or slowing down processes of change, as happened in the Spanish case. Moreover, actors' chances to seize opportunities depend significantly on their relational resources. CSOs will be differently able to influence policy processes in favorable conditions when lacking direct connections with high ranks officials or the general public (Arnold, 2011), as was the case for the first FOIA.It initiative.

Beyond opportunities, resources, frames, or tactics, understanding how collective actors strategize their *social connections* sheds new light on their ability to influence social change (Jasper, 2006). The chapter has discussed how collective actors seek to reach positions of influence and how these positional efforts integrate with broader relational strategies. It has elucidated how change-oriented extra-institutional actors, generally excluded from decision-making arenas, can influence powerholders and make their way into institutional settings. CSOs can combine positional strategies to change their structural location by reaching out to MPs and institutional players, creating large coalitions to pressure decision-makers, or becoming central brokers connecting institutional and extra-institutional arenas.

However, it has underlined how positions and positional wars are rooted in longer, more complex relational stances. CSOs hold different ideas of what social change is desirable, the best and proper tools to reach it, and their role in these change processes. These ideas relate to the relationships between CSOs, targets, bystanders, and constituencies. To move from one position to another, CSOs must choose among various possible postures vis-à-vis multiple players. For example, solving the naughty-or-nice dilemma or the organizational one results in different and constantly evolving relational strategies. To be influential, however, collective actors must select coherent positional strategies and adapt them to continuous changes in arenas, targets, and allies. Here, supportive, adversarial, or mediational strategies can be productive as they remain coherent throughout time and with the positional strategies followed by CSOs. Supportive strategies may be less impactful in achieving substantial change but can effectively deliver incremental policy

reforms. Adversarial strategies, on the other hand, may result in formal and informal sanctions and can bring new issues onto the policy agenda and shape public discourse. However, they will hardly influence policy change given the difficulty of coherently integrating strategies as direct contact with their adversarial understanding of the relationship between institutional actors and civic subjects.

Finally, CSOs following mediational strategies, which involve a combination of confrontation and dialogue, may be more successful in securing policy change while allowing for gains outside the policy arena. The Italian and Spanish CSOs sometimes obtain divergent results even when selecting similar strategies. To explain this, the chapter has restored the investigation of relational mechanisms of influence behind the productivity of social ties. It has discussed contagion, prominence, closure, and brokerage mechanisms, looking at the role of resources (practical and symbolic) and information in networks and how they flow through social ties. Finally, as postulated by the relational mediation model, it has shown that changes did not occur evenly.

Contagion and prominence seem particularly relevant over the agenda-setting and implementation stage, mainly if supported by cooperative stances towards institutional actors and integration with the broader civic field. On the contrary, the brokerage mechanism appears highly productive at the implementation stage, having different results if integrated with mediational or adversarial relational strategies. Finally, the closure mechanism has appeared particularly relevant in the monitoring field in Italy and Spain, but with varying results according to monitoring actors' horizontal and vertical integration levels.

7.6.2. Contributions, limitations, and ways forward

Most existing studies have tended to approach the anti-corruption work of civil society through aggregative lenses. For example, large-N investigations have searched for correlations between the size and characteristics of civil society across countries and the spread or perceptions of public corruption (Boräng & Grimes, 2021; Grimes, 2008, 2013). Whereas this research remains highly valuable in understanding cross-country variations, regional differences, and – quite rarely- in-time modifications, it risks oversimplifying the complex web of interactions that characterize accountability relationships in liberal-democratic contexts.

The recent interest from social movement studies in anti-corruption mobilizations and, more generally, qualitative and interpretative investigations of civil society organizations' anti-corruption role has undoubtedly shed additional light on the topic. In particular, these studies have gone beyond principal-agent or culturalist and essentialist understanding of public corruption and anti-

corruption in favor of more agentic descriptions and explanations (Almén & Burell, 2018; Bader et al., 2019; Beyerle, 2014; Caruso, 2018; della Porta, 2018; della Porta & Mattoni, 2021; Khambekova et al., 2021; Mattoni & Odilla, 2021; C. Milan, 2018; Pirro, 2018; Pirro & Della Porta, 2021). Hence, scholars have come to investigate when, how, and why social movements, NGOs, civic groups, and interest groups mobilize around anti-corruption claims, what repertoires they deploy, how they fuel public support, craft alliances, or endure over time, and with what consequences (Johnston, 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015; Mungiu-Pippidi & Johnston, 2017). However, even this strand of literature has remained trapped in quite aggregative perspectives. The reliance on explanations based on contextual conditions, opportunities, and resources has illuminated only part of the broader picture, whereas the focus on frames and repertoires has only partially engaged with actors' strategic work.

Against this backdrop, the present work has sought to accomplish two primary goals. First, it has tried to go beyond interpretations of societal accountability as an *attribute* of civil society. In doing so, it has investigated how bottom-up forms of accountability emerge from contentious collective action processes. In a nutshell, it has problematized the concept of societal accountability, approaching it not as a pre-given set of mechanisms or practices deployed by anti-corruption civic actors but as the *result of sustained and contentious processes of interactions between a multiplicity of players*. If, as remained by Johnston (2012, 2013), curtailing public corruption is essentially an institutional duty and necessitates institutional means; to trigger, sustain, and monitor this institutional work is a social and contentious process. In line with previous studies (Peruzzotti, 2011; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006), the present work has shown how pro-accountability organizations, of which pure anti-corruption actors are only a smaller portion (Johnston, 2012; Mazák & Diviák, 2018), can, *directly* and *indirectly*, impact institutional accountability mechanisms.

Social movements and civil society studies elucidated that grassroots groups may intervene in social change at multiple levels. CSOs may trigger and influence policy change, supervises policy implementation and enforcement, monitor institutional actors' work, exploit institutional arenas to activate formal sanctioning mechanisms, or use alternative means and arenas to administer informal sanctions. Hence, based on the evidence from the Italian and Spanish cases, CSOs qualify as pivotal *accountability actors*. Civic accountability networks in Italy and Spain have proven to be characterized by high transactionality (Petrova & Tarrow, 2007b), mobilizing heterogeneous groups and often succeeding in combining different resource pools, audiences, and forms of action to pursue their accountability goals. The scattered composition of these groups has been strategically

mastered and exploited in Italy and Spain, leading to relevant gains even in the absence of broadly shared identities. However, it has also favored the emergence of internal competition and friction, which leads us to this work's second contribution.

The second aim of this work was to move toward a *relational* understanding of societal accountability, bridging anti-corruption studies with works on the consequences of collective action. Borrowing concepts and theories from the social movement and collective action literature has broadened the scope of analysis toward a more complex understanding of anti-corruption mobilizations, including actor- and context-centered explanations. In particular, the present work has introduced the analysis of the *strategic work* of anti-corruption and pro-accountability CSOs, a factor often removed or undervalued in studies of civil society and societal accountability. Indeed, beyond a few notable exceptions (Fox, 2015, 2016), corruption – and sometimes civil society scholars- have vastly understated the strategic work of anti-corruption CSOs. Moreover, although the relevance of acknowledging the high contingency of anti-corruption attempts to avoid one-size-fits-all approaches and solutions (Gephart, 2016, 2009; Grimes, 2013; Larsson & Grimes, 2022), studies have often removed the agency of anti-corruption and accountability actors from the picture.

Social movement theories come at hand in this, underlying how resources, organizational features, and political opportunities, such as the presence of potential institutional allies, grant CSOs room to influence the political realm. However, current debates in the movement scholarship call for widening the scope of analysis, putting multiple players and their interactions at the forefront of analysis (Amenta, 2006; Amenta & Shortt, 2020; Giugni, 2007; Giugni & Passy, 1998; Holdo, 2019; King & Jasper, 2022b; Soule, 2009). As a result, this study has built on evidence suggesting that societal accountability consequences depend significantly on the interactions between various CSOs (movements, NGOs, investigative media, etc.) and institutional actors (Fox, 2015; Marquette & Peiffer, 2015). At the same time, it has tried to avoid an aggregative perspective by breaking down the civic and institutional blocks into their constitutive players (Duyvendak & Jasper, 2015; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015; McAdam & Boudet, 2012), intended as goal-oriented collective actors. In line with well-accepted results in collective action and anti-corruption studies, the analysis has shown that societal accountability results can hardly be understood considering CSOs in isolation. In fact, reaching accountability results – both in the form of answerability and enforcement- highly depends on the political will of institutional actors when it comes to policy and political change. At the same time, empirical evidence has demonstrated that CSOs can sometimes force change processes, relying on third non-state and non-civic actors to pursue their goals.

In addition, the study of positional and relational strategies and the related relational mechanisms has shed light on an almost neglected topic in the study of collective action consequences and anti-corruption, namely the intersection between different levels of analysis, between individuals, organizations, and institutions, when it comes to change processes. A majoritarian strand in social movement studies has customarily focused on the meso-level of analysis, trying to understand how movements as a whole or some movement organizations within them have (not) been able to reach their goals and transform their social, cultural, and political reality. On the other hand, interactionist perspectives have delved into micro-sociological approaches to understand how single and compound players intervene in their contexts, strategically chasing some desired changes (Jasper, 2004; King & Jasper, 2022). Theorizing the complementarity of these perspectives goes beyond the scope of the present work; however, it is worth restating how much accountability consequences in the Italian and Spanish cases are simultaneously modeled by CSOs and single activists within them, political parties and their MPs, administrative bodies and regulatory agencies and their civil servants. Beyond academic discussions, putting at the forefront the complex interactions between the micro- and meso-level is paramount to understanding the (eventual) macro-level consequences of pro-accountability and anti-corruption efforts.

Throughout the analysis, the present work has elucidated how CSOs try to change their structural positions vis-à-vis allies and institutional targets to reach positions of influence (Diani, 1996). Civic groups can use direct contacts, brokers, or coalitions to reach influence positions (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000), getting closer to decision-makers or increasing their pressure to obtain favorable policies, as in the transparency and whistleblowing case. However, influence is not just a matter of structural positions (Saunders, 2007). As maintained throughout the analysis, long-term relational dispositions, or schema (Jasper et al., 2022; Polletta, 2022), matter for CSOs' influence potential. Hence, CSOs more used to juggling confrontational and collaborative strategies will have fewer issues negotiating policy elements with decision-makers while obtaining relevant gains in courts or public opinion through civic coalitions or brokerage. On the contrary, CSOs building on more conflictual strategies will hardly obtain policy gains even when directly interacting with MPs, as those following a co-optative strategy will refrain from resorting to coalitions or brokers to administer informal sanctions and openly confront their targets.

Finally, the study has elucidated the contents of influence processes, looking at relational mechanisms. In particular, it has discussed how influence through social interactions can have different bases (Burt, 2002). Players in interactions can influence each other through multiple channels. For example, when CSOs are connected directly to institutional actors, they can serve as a

source of valuable information, orienting the action of decision-makers. Alternatively, legitimate CSOs who occupy brokerage positions can become models on which other players shape their behavior through imitation and diffusion. At the same time, influence can derive from bonds of trust and mutual recognition, going beyond the instrumentality of interactions in coalitions or direct contacts.

Of course, this work is not free from criticism. First, as with many other pieces of research, the present work should be intended as an informed exercise to simplify and break down an extremely complex reality to get closer to its partial understanding. For parsimony and (attempted) explanatory reasons, the theoretical and analytical chapters have built on several categories and taxonomies. The list of dilemmas, strategies, or mechanisms discussed here is not meant to be exhaustive. Similarly, the net categorical distinction between positional and relational strategies, or mechanisms, is meant to simplify the analysis and the exposition. In the “world out there,” positions are less clear-cut, relations are immensely more complicated, and mechanisms are almost undetectable. Aware of these limitations, the present work invites scholars to challenge these results and move forward, criticizing, revising, and broadening the current catalogs to shedding new light on how relational dynamics and interactions inform the connection between collective action and change processes.

Analytically, the empirical investigation has been limited to three focal campaigns in the struggle against public corruption. Without any doubt, transparency, whistleblowing, and civic monitoring are critical for anyone interested in curtailing the spread of corrupt deals. However, many other relevant struggles have been excluded from the present discussion for evident reasons. Among many, it is worth remembering that both Italy and Spain – along with several other countries - have experienced the blossoming of various (till now) unsuccessful mobilization efforts, such as the regulation of political lobbying, just to cite one example. At the same time, the constructionist and relational nature of a complex phenomenon such as public corruption could be extended to look at the mobilizations that target the so-called legalized corruption. Future studies on different campaigns or forms of corruption could help corroborate or contradict the results of the present investigation.

For similar reasons, this work has limited itself to investigating anti-corruption collective action's policy and political consequences. Of course, pro-accountability struggles can lead to a plethora of different effects. Let's think, for example, about the biographical effects that whistleblowing can have on informants and how much these can be mediated by the supporting role of CSOs, as cases such as Linea Libera and ALAC have demonstrated. More importantly, the cultural consequences

of the initiatives presented here can be more relevant and transformative than the policy gains discussed. Obtaining cumulative and progressive cultural change through awareness-raising activities represents one of the main goals of many organizations met throughout this study. Whereas some hints about the cultural effects of Italian and Spanish pro-accountability CSOs have been sometimes discussed throughout the analysis (e.g., changes in administrative culture on transparency and whistleblowing or the difficulty of socializing citizens to transparency instruments in monitoring initiatives), dedicated studies in this sense would greatly enrich the understanding of the bottom-up mobilizations over democratic accountability.

Methodologically, this qualitative work has tried to combine the in-depth analysis of two cases with processual and relational approaches. The triangulation of sources of information and data-gathering techniques has sought to multiply the evidence for a relational and processual understanding of the accountability consequences of collective action. Certainly, the arguments expressed in this thesis would gain clarity and replicability when based on a more structural network approach. However, despite this methodological shortcoming, the analytical strategy followed in this work has tried to find a way out of the lack of formal network analysis by using network and relational metaphors to guide the qualitative analysis of data. Subscribing to an influence understanding of social change requires scholars to confront the task of revealing the relational strategies and relevant mechanisms at play in each interaction history. However, as recalled by relational sociologists (Dépelteau, 2018a), a true challenge would be to imagine new methods or adapt existing methodologies to understand the relational basis of the social world and its changes. On this, processual approaches could greatly help disentangle the multiple influences at play in processes of social change, and comparative research designs could increase the analytical leverage of relational explanations across different contexts, arenas of interaction, and types of relationships.

However, this leads to the fundamental limitation of this study. What is the relational mediation model adding to our understanding of collective action? In particular, to what extent and how such a model could apply beyond the empirical cases presented here? The whole manuscript has tried to state and demonstrate that thinking *explicitly* about the relational dynamics underpinning collective action efforts and investigating the nature, intensity, characteristics, and structural patterns of these interactions can shed new light on well-developed understandings of social change, connecting various strands of studies in political sociology. The present work represents only a starting point and invites scholars to keep reasoning in these directions to see whether and how interactions,

relations, and relational dynamics can help disentangle the complex bundle connecting grassroots demands and instances of social change.

Epilogue. CSOs' accountability consequences

“These things require an approach that is not one of “results” but one of the fruits. I mean, you don't know, you see the fruits there, and you say, "Boh, this will ripen, it won't ripen, it will suck, it won't suck," you don't know, and from there, you take care of it, you try to make it grow however then maybe that fruit falls, and it produces trees that you maybe hadn't even imagined.”

IT-1

The present work has integrated corruption and collective action studies focusing on societal accountability. In doing so, it has tried to demonstrate not how much CSOs contribute to curbing public corruption but how their work, dedication, and efforts may create and nurture the necessary accountability conditions for every democratic system to thrive.

Subscribing to a relational understanding of public corruption and accountability, the research has sought to empirically investigate how single players, organized groups, and institutions interact and craft those webs of relations and interdependence which represent the quintessential element to set in motion deep democratization processes that create systems to go beyond elections as a one-time mechanism of political participation and involve a multiplicity of players to participate in the constant and ongoing work of checking powerholders in the use of their delegated power.

The present analysis has tried to answer a central question, how and to what extent can civil society actors produce societal accountability from below? The theoretical scaffolding of this research question thus lies in an understanding of accountability as "a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgment, and the actor may face consequences" (Bovens, 2007).

With this general goal in mind, the thesis has attempted to shed light on the role of CSOs in influencing social change processes. Building on the idea that "the ability of a challenger to win collective benefits depends partly on conditions it can control." (Amenta et al., 2005:519), this investigation has put at the forefront CSOs' strategic *relational* work going beyond correlations between civic efforts and corruption levels and highlighting the intermediary role that grassroots efforts may have in the struggle against public corruption and for accountable power.

The national focuses on Italy and Spain have reconstructed the unfolding of anti-corruption and pro-accountability campaigns, elucidating the political consequences of grassroots efforts to promote transparency, whistleblowing, and political monitoring. In particular, it has reconstructed the

processes and relational dynamics through which CSOs have attempted to reach policy results (legal claim attainment), sometimes failing and sometimes increasing their chances to force powerholders to justify their actions (answerability) and sanction them when necessary (enforcement).

As recalled in Chapter 2, societal accountability is alternatively presented as a vertical (della Porta et al., 2017; della Porta, 2018; Pirro & Della Porta, 2021), horizontal (Bovens, 2007), or diagonal form of accountability (Goetz & Jenkins, 2001; Lührmann et al., 2020). The present work has not contested the theoretical and empirical evidence that supports each of these interpretations; somewhat, it has elucidated how all these spatial metaphors co-exist and represent different consequences of grassroots anti-corruption efforts. CSOs can indirectly obtain accountability reform by winning the support of reform-minded elites (horizontal), directly influence accountability consequences by forcing sanctions over powerholders (vertical), and indirectly increase the system's answerability and sanctioning by activating state enforcement mechanisms (diagonal). Hence, the empirical work has helped delineate the blurring boundaries between institutional and civic accountability players. The Italian and Spanish cases have revealed the existence of internal inconsistencies, fragmentations, and tensions, but also of sometimes unexpected synergies between supposedly distant or opposing actors within and outside the institutions.

However, as recalled by the quotation opening this epilogue and the one at the beginning of this work, many are the elements that CSOs *cannot* control. If it is true that social change passes through personal connections, group interactions, and relations within and across arenas, one has to acknowledge that no silver bullet exists in the struggle for fair, just, and accountable democratic systems. In the walk towards that goal, we may plant new seeds, nurture the plants we encounter, and care for the blossoming flowers. Fruits will ripen, hopefully, eventually.

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Appendix 1. Interviews

List of interviewees

Italy

1. IT 1 – Spokesperson Common, Libera & Gruppo Abele
2. IT 2- President of Data Ninja
3. IT 3 - Former Executive Director of Transparency International Italy
4. IT 4 - President of Hermes Center for Transparency and Digital Human Rights
5. IT 5 – Spokesperson of IRPI- Investigative Reporting Project Italy
6. IT 6- Spokesperon Illuminiamo la Salute
7. IT 7- President of OnData
8. IT 8- Spokesperson the Good Lobby Italia (former Riparte il Futuro)
9. IT 9 - Spokesperson Integrity Pact Project, Action Aid
10. IT 10 – President of Diritto di Sapere
11. IT 11- Activists Idee in Comune, Siena
12. IT 12 - Director of ALAC, Transparency International Italy
13. IT 13 – Spokespersons Integrity Pact Project, Amapola
14. IT 14 – Former member of the ANAC’s council
15. IT 15 – Spokespersons, A Scuola di OpenCoesione
16. IT 16 – Spokesperson Integrity Pact Project, Transparency International Italy
17. IT 17 – Former MP, 5SM
18. IT 18 – Spokesperson Metis
19. IT 19 –Spokespersons, Parliament Watch
20. IT 20 – Spokespersons, Monithon
21. IT 21- Spokesperson OpenPolis
22. IT 22 – Executive Director of Linea Libera
23. IT 23 – Staff members, Linea Libera

Spain

24. SP 1 – President of X-Net
25. SP 2- President and staff members Hay Derecho
26. SP 3- President and staff members Access Info
27. SP 4- President and staff members Transparencia Internacional Espana
28. SP 5- Spokespersons FIBGAR
29. SP 6- Spokesperson CIVIO
30. SP 7- Spokesperson Maldita
31. SP 8- Spokespersons Political Watch
32. SP 9 – Spokesperson Corruptil
33. SP 10 – Spokesperson Por Causa
34. SP 11 – Head of the Transparency and Good Governance Office, Barcelona
35. SP 12- Member of Barcelona’s city council
36. SP 13- Executive Director of the Prevention Office, Antifraud Authority of Valencia
37. SP 14 – President of the Antifraud Authority of Valencia

Tab.3.1 Interviewees per country and organization

| Country | ID | Organization | Scope |
|---------|-------|--|-----------------------|
| Italy | IT 1 | Common, Libera & Gruppo Abele | CSO |
| Italy | IT 2 | Data Ninja | CSO |
| Italy | IT 3 | Transparency International Italy | CSO |
| Italy | IT 4 | Hermes Center for Transparency and Digital Human Rights | CSO |
| Italy | IT 5 | IRPI - Investigative Reporting Project Italy | CSO |
| Italy | IT 6 | Illuminiamo la Salute | CSO |
| Italy | IT 7 | OnData | CSO |
| Italy | IT 8 | The Good Lobby Italia (former Riparte il Futuro) | CSO |
| Italy | IT 9 | Integrity Pact Project, Action Aid | CSO |
| Italy | IT 10 | Diritto di Sapere | CSO |
| Italy | IT 11 | Idee in Comune, Siena | CSO |
| Italy | IT 12 | ALAC, Transparency International Italy | CSO |
| Italy | IT 13 | Integrity Pact Project, Amapola | CSO |
| Italy | IT 14 | ANAC's council | Regulatory Agency |
| Italy | IT 15 | A Scuola di OpenCoesione | Institutional Project |
| Italy | IT 16 | Integrity Pact Project, Transparency International Italy | CSO |
| Italy | IT 17 | 5SM | Political Party |
| Italy | IT 18 | Metis | CSO |
| Italy | IT 19 | Parliament Watch | CSO |
| Italy | IT 20 | Monithon | CSO |
| Italy | IT 21 | OpenPolis | CSO |
| Italy | IT 22 | Linea Libera | CSO |
| Italy | IT 23 | Linea Libera | CSO |
| Spain | SP 1 | X-Net | CSO |
| Spain | SP 2 | Hay Derecho | CSO |
| Spain | SP 3 | Access Info | CSO |
| Spain | SP 4 | Transparencia Internacional España | CSO |
| Spain | SP 5 | FIBGAR | CSO |
| Spain | SP 6 | CIVIO | CSO |
| Spain | SP 7 | Maldita | CSO |
| Spain | SP 8 | Political Watch | CSO |
| Spain | SP 9 | Corruptil | CSO |
| Spain | SP 10 | Por Causa | CSO |

| Country | ID | Organization | Scope |
|---------|-------|--|-------------------|
| Spain | SP 11 | Transparency and Good Governance Office, Barcelona | Regulatory Agency |
| Spain | SP 12 | Barcelona's city council | Political Party |
| Spain | SP 13 | Antifraud Authority of Valencia | Regulatory Agency |
| Spain | SP 14 | Antifraud Authority of Valencia | Regulatory Agency |

Appendix 2. Documents

List of parliamentary documents

Italy

Dlgs 25 maggio 2016, n. 97 - FOIA e Trasparenza

1. Legislatura 16 Atto di Sindacato Ispettivo n° 1-00644, Atto n. 1-00644, 30 maggio 2012, nella seduta n. 733
2. Senato della Repubblica, Resoconto stenografico, 387^a seduta pubblica, martedì 10 febbraio 2015
3. Proposta di Legge FOIA4Italy, 18/02/2015
4. Legislatura 17^a - 1^a Commissione permanente - Resoconto sommario n. 245 del 24/02/2015
5. Senato della Repubblica XVII Legislatura, N. 1814, Disegno di Legge d'iniziativa dei senatori DE PIETRO, ORELLANA, SIMEONI, GAMBARO e MASTRANGELI, 12 marzo 2015
6. Camera dei Deputati, N. 3042, Proposta di Legge, d'iniziativa della deputata ASCANI, Disposizioni in materia di libertà di informazione, diritto di accesso e trasparenza delle informazioni in possesso
7. delle pubbliche amministrazioni, 15 aprile 2015
8. Decreto Legislativo, 25 maggio 2016, n. 97, Revisione e semplificazione delle disposizioni in materia di prevenzione della corruzione, Commissione Parlamentare per la semplificazione
9. Schema di decreto legislativo recante revisione e semplificazione delle disposizioni in materia di prevenzione della corruzione, pubblicità e trasparenza, Giovedì 31 marzo
10. Commissione Parlamentare per la semplificazione Schema di decreto legislativo recante revisione e semplificazione delle disposizioni in materia di prevenzione della corruzione, pubblicità e trasparenza, Martedì 5 aprile 2016

Legge 179/2017 sul Whistleblowing

1. XVII Legislatura, Commissioni Riunite (II e XI), Seduta antimeridiana n.1 di Mercoledì 23 settembre 2015
2. XVII Legislatura, Commissioni Riunite (II e XI), Resoconto stenografico, Seduta pomeridiana n. 2 di Mercoledì 23 settembre 2015
3. XVII Legislatura, Commissioni Riunite (II e XI), Resoconto stenografico, Seduta n. 3 di Giovedì 22 ottobre 2015
4. XVII Legislatura, Resoconto stenografico dell'Assemblea, Seduta n. 527 di lunedì 23 novembre 2015
5. XVII Legislatura, Whistleblowing, Nota sull'A.S. n. 2208, approvato in prima lettura dalla Camera dei deputati, settembre 2016, n. 38
6. XVII Legislatura, Resoconto stenografico dell'Assemblea, Seduta n. 551 di mercoledì 20 gennaio 2016
7. XVII Legislatura, Resoconto stenografico dell'Assemblea, Seduta n. 552 di giovedì 21 gennaio 2016
8. egislatura 17^a - 11^a Commissione permanente - Resoconto sommario n. 272 del 26/10/2016
9. Legislatura 17^a - 11^a Commissione permanente - Resoconto sommario n. 273 del 02/11/2016

10. Legislatura 17ª - 11ª Commissione permanente - Resoconto sommario n. 302 del 15/03/2016
11. Legislatura 17ª - 14ª Commissione permanente - Resoconto sommario n. 192 del 18/05/2016
12. Legislatura 17ª - 11ª Commissione permanente - Resoconto sommario n. 271 del 18/10/2016
13. Legislatura 17ª - 5ª Commissione permanente - Resoconto sommario n. 807 del 04/10/2017
14. Legislatura 17ª - 5ª Commissione permanente - Resoconto sommario n. 808 del 05/10/2017
15. Senato della Repubblica, Bozze di stampa, 11 ottobre 2017, XVII LEGISLATURA, Disposizioni per la tutela degli autori di segnalazioni di reati o irregolarità di cui siano venuti a conoscenza nell'ambito di un rapporto di lavoro pubblico o privato, Emendamenti
16. Senato della Repubblica, Resoconto stenografico, 896ª seduta pubblica (pomeridiana), mercoledì 11 ottobre 2017
17. Legislatura 17ª - 5ª Commissione permanente - Resoconto sommario n. 812 del 12/10/2017
18. Senato della Repubblica, Resoconto stenografico, 897ª seduta pubblica (antimeridiana), giovedì 12 ottobre 2017
19. Disegni di legge, Atto Senato n. 2208, XVII Legislatura, Disposizioni per la tutela degli autori di segnalazioni di reati o irregolarità di cui siano venuti a conoscenza nell'ambito di un rapporto di lavoro pubblico o privato
20. Senato della Repubblica, 18 ottobre 2017, Disposizioni per la tutela degli autori di segnalazioni di reati o irregolarità di cui siano venuti a conoscenza nell'ambito di un rapporto di lavoro pubblico o privato

Spain

Ley de Transparency y Acceso, l. 19/2013

1. Boletín oficial de las cortes generales. Congreso de los diputados. X Legislatura. Serie A: Proyectos de ley. 7 de septiembre de 2012. Num-19-1 Proyecto de Ley. 121/000019 Proyecto de Ley de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno.
2. Cortes Generales. Diario de sesiones del congreso de los diputados. Pleno y diputación permanente. Año 2013. X Legislatura. Num 117. Presidencia del excmo.pr.d. Jesús Posada Moreno. Sesión plenaria num 111. Celebrada el jueves 30 de mayo de 2013. Debates de totalidad de iniciativas legislativas: Proyecto de ley de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno. «BOCG. Congreso de los Diputados», serie A, número 19-1, de 7 de septiembre de 2012. (Número de expediente 121/000019).
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4. Cortes Generales. Diario de sesiones del congreso de los diputados. Comisiones. Año 2013. Presidencia del excmo.pr.d. Arturo García-Tizon López. Celebrada el miércoles 31 de julio de 2013. Ratificación de la ponencia designada para informar sobre: Proyecto de ley de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno. (Número de expediente 121/000019). Emitir dictamen a la vista del informe elaborado por la ponencia sobre: Proyecto de ley de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno. (Número de expediente 121/000019).
5. Boletín oficial de las cortes generales. Congreso de los diputados. X Legislatura. Serie A: Proyectos de ley. 31 de julio de 2013. Num-19-4. Informe de la ponencia. 121/000019 Proyecto de Ley de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno.
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8. Boletín oficial de las cortes generales. Congreso de los diputados. X legislatura. Serie A: Proyectos de ley. 10 de septiembre de 2013. Num 19-7. Aprobación por el pleno. 121/000019. . Proyecto de ley de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno.
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13. Cortes Generales. Diario de sesiones. Senado. Num 235. 13 de noviembre 2013. Comisión constitucional. Presidencia del excmo. sr. d. Gonzalo Pineiro García-Lago. Dictaminar
14. Boletín oficial de las cortes generales. Senado. X Legislatura. Num 269. 20 de noviembre de 2013. Iniciativas legislativas. Proyectos y proposiciones de ley. Proyecto de Ley de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno. Núm. exp. 121/000019. Cong. Diputados, Serie A, núm. 19 Núm. exp. 121/000019. Dictamen de la comisión.
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18. Boletín oficial de las cortes generales. Senado. X Legislatura. Num 274. 26 de noviembre de 2013. Proyectos de ley de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno. (621/000046). Enmiendas del senado mediante mensaje motivado.
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Proposición de Ley de Protección de alertadores

1. Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales. Congreso de los Diputados. XII legislatura. Serie B: Proposiciones de ley. 23 de septiembre de 2016. Num 33-1. 122/000022 Proposición de Ley Integral de Lucha contra la Corrupción y Protección de los Denunciantes. Presentada por el Grupo Parlamentario Ciudadanos
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5. Boletín oficial de las cortes generales. Congreso de los diputados. XII legislatura. Serie B: Proposiciones de ley. 19 de diciembre de 2017. Num. 33-4. Enmiendas e índice de enmiendas al articulado. 122/000022 Proposición de Ley Integral de Lucha contra la Corrupción y Protección de los Denunciantes.
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8. Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales. Congreso de los Diputados. XIV legislatura. Serie B: Proposiciones de ley. 25 de junio de 2019. Num. 35-1. Proposición de ley 122/000006 Proposición de Ley de protección integral de los denunciantes de corrupción. Presentada por el Grupo Parlamentario VOX.
9. Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales. Congreso de los Diputados. XIV legislatura. Serie B: Proposiciones de ley. 20 de diciembre de 2019. Num. 27-1. 123/000003 Proposición de Ley de protección integral de los alertadores. Presentada por Joan Baldoví Roda y 15 Diputados.
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11. Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales. Congreso de los diputados. XIV legislatura. Serie B: Proposiciones de ley. 21 de febrero de 2020. Num 56-1. 122/000031 Proposición de Ley de protección integral de los denunciantes de corrupción. Presentada por el Grupo Parlamentario VOX
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16. Ministerio de Justicia. Anteproyecto de Ley reguladora de la protección de las personas que informen sobre infracciones normativas y de lucha contra la corrupción por la que se transpone la Directiva (UE) 2019/1937 del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo, de 23 de octubre de 2019, relativa a la protección de las personas que informen sobre infracciones del Derecho de la Unión. LA MINISTRA DE JUSTICIA. María Pilar Llop Cuenca.
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Appendix 3. Action Organization Analysis

List of organizations

Italy

CITTADINANZATTIVA ONLUS

ACTION AID

AMICI DI LANCIANOVECCHIA

ANCI GIOVANI ABRUZZO

ASSOCIAZIONE DAVIDE ORECCHIONI ONLUS

ITALIA NOSTRA ONLUS (per la tutela patrimonio artistico, culturale e naturale della nazione)

POLICENTRICA ONLUS

ADM - AMICI DI MONTEREALE ONLUS (laboratorio partecipato dei cittadini e delle associazioni)

LEGAMBIENTE

CASANETURALAPS

RETE INTEGRITY PACTS monitora appalti

A.N.P.A.N.A. - O.E.P.A. (Associazione Nazionale Protezione Ambiente Natura Animali)

ASSOCIAZIONE CULTURALE GIANFRANCESCO SERIO

La Terra

CENTRO STUDI ALETHEIA
CENTRO STUDI DIFESA CIVICA- CESDIC
CENTRO STUDI NORMANNO-SVEVI
CIVITAS SOLIS
DOMUS ONLUS
EUROFORM RFS
FA.D.I.A. (FAMIGLIE DISABILI ASSOCIATE)
FNSIM - FEDERAZIONE NAZIONALE DEGLI INSEGNANTI
FUTURO DIGITALE
GAL KROTON
INNOVAMENTIS
IPF IONADI
JUMP – GIOVENTÙ IN RISALTO
LEGA NAVALE ITALIANA - CROTONE
LETTERA AL FUTURO
LION CLUB GUARDIA PIEMONTESE - CITTA' DEI VALDESI
PRO LOCO SAN MARCO ARGENTANO
PRONEXUS
VOLONTÀ SOLIDALE - CSV COSENZA
AGRORINASCE
ANTA - ASSOCIAZIONE NAZIONALE PER LA TUTELA DELL'AMBIENTE
ASS. CULTURALE VISIONAIR
ASSOCIAZIONE ENJOY
A.V.F. - ASSOCIAZIONE VOLONTARI DEL FAITO
BIMED - BIENNALE DELLE ARTI E DELLE SCIENZE DEL MEDITERRANEO
CARMINEONLUS-ACO
CASA MIA ONLUS "DOPO DI NOI"
COM&TE
ENNEA - CULTURA TERRITORIO SOCIETÀ
ESSENIA UETP - UNIVERSITY AND ENTERPRISE TRAINING PARTNERSHIP
FONDAZIONE GIUSEPPE FERRARO ONLUS
MAPPINA
NATA LIBERA

NAPOLI OPEN INNOVATION
NOI @ EUROPE
NWM NETWORK
PATATRAC
POMPEI 2033
PRO LOCO MARCIANISE
PRO LOCO POGGIOMARINO
RIZE UP
SLOW FOOT CILENTO
STATUS - Sele Tanagro Associazione Territoriale d'Utilità Sociale
WWF SANNIO
ADA - ASSOCIAZIONE DONNE AMBIENTALISTE
ASS. CULTURALE CAPUT GAURI
ASP LANGHIRANO
BOLOGNA CHANNEL
OFFICINE ON/OFF
ANAB - ASSOCIAZIONE NAZIONALE ARCHITETTURA BIOECOLOGICA
CONOSCENZA E PROTEZIONE AMBIENTE NATURALE DEL FRIULI
AICCRE
LACUS TIMAVI
AIM AGENZIA INTERCULTURA E MOBILITÀ
APS RISING - PARI IN GENERE
ASS. ASTROFILI SABINA
ASS. CULTURALE SIRIO
EARTH DAY ITALIA ONLUS
MILLEPIANI
PRO.M.ET.EU.S.
URBAN EXPERIENCE
STATI GENERALI DELL'INNOVAZIONE
OPENGENOVA
AISU - ASSOCIAZIONE INTERCULTURALE PER LO SVILUPPO UMANO
CENTRO SERVIZI PER IL VOLONTARIATO DELL'INSUBRIA
CONFEDERAZIONE CITTADINANZA CONSAPEVOLE

CSV M&B - Centro servizio per il volontariato di Monza e Brianza

LA FRECCIA

MARSE

CENTRO STUDI STORICI "MONS. VITTORIO FUSCO"

CREATTIVAAPS

EQUAMENTE - ASSOCIAZIONE CULTURALE E DI SOLIDARIETÀ

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ASS. CULTURALE ONDOCKS

BARLETTA SI FA IN QUATTRO

CASA DELLE AGRICOLTURE "TULLIA E GINO"

CENTRO DI CULTURA GIUSEPPE LAZZATI

COLLETTIVO ZEBU'

DEJÀ-VU

GRUPPO SPELEO STATTE

ITACA

KREATTIVA

LIBER-Azione

MURGIA ENJOY

NASCIRA

OBIETTIVO GARGANO

PRO LOCO GROTTAGLIE

TRANI NOSTRA

VULCANICAMENTE

WORK IN PROGRESS 4EU

AILUN

CICLOFUCINA

PROPOSITIVO

SARDEGNA 2050 (Cagliari)

SARDINIA OPEN DATA

ANTEPRIMA
APP A.S.D. CANNISTRA'
BEPPE MONTANA LIBERA TERRA
BRANCACCIO E MUSICA
CARA BELTA'
CENTROSTUDIAURORAONLUS
CLAC
COLLEGIO DEI ROSSI
CULTURALMENTE
FONDAZIONE CITTA' DEL FANCIULLO
ARCI COMITATO TERRITORIALE CATANIA
MDT - MOVIMENTO PER LA DIFESA DEI TERRITORI
OFFICINE CULTURALI
PALESTRA PER LA MENTE
PARLIAMENT WATCH ITALIA
PRESIDIO PARTECIPATIVO DEL PATTO DI FIUME SIMETO
PUSH
MOBILITA PALERMO
SUPERABILI ONLUS
STUDIARE DIGITALE
DONNE INSIEME VAL D'ELSA
PIEDI IN CAMMINO
PROGETTO ACCOGLIENZA
ARCI - COMITATO PROVINCIALE DI TERNI
PANTA REI - CENTRO DI EDUCAZIONE AMBIENTALE
ANPI - ASSOCIAZIONE NAZIONALE PARTIGIANI D'ITALIA (SEZ. FELTRE)
CSV VERONA
INTERZONA
Agorà Digitale
CILD Coalizione Italiana Libertà e Diritti Civili
Circolo Giuristi Telematici
Cittadini Reattivi
Consiglio Italiano per le Scienze Sociali

CNA Digitale
Data Ninja.it
DCL Digital Commons Lab
Diritto di Sapere
L'Era della Trasparenza
Istituto Bruno Leoni - Idee per il libero Mercato
Istituto Italiano Open Data
L'Associazione Italiana per la Professionilità del Web
Libera
LSDI Libertà di Stampa Diritto all'Informazione
Monithon Marathon
Open Cooperazione
Open Knowledge Foundation
Open Media Coalition
Associazione Openpolis
RENA Intelligenza Collettiva al Servizio dell'Italia
Science Writers in Italy
Società Pannunzio per la Libertà d'Informazione
Tech Economy
Transparency international Italia
Wikitalia
Wikimedia Italy
Movimento Consumatori
Associazione Pubblici Cittadini
ADGI
Carte in Regola
Master Anticorruzione Università Roma Tre
Civico97
Civicum
Blueprint for Free Speech
Government Accountability Project
Fundaciòn Internacional Baltasar Garzòn
Collegium Civitas

The Good Lobby
Vouliwatch
ECAS
VoteWatch
IRPI - Investigative Reporting Project Italy
Civic Forum for Asset Recovery CiFAR
International Institute for Nonviolent Action
Stefan Batory Foundation
AC Azione Cattolica Italiana
ACLI Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani
AGESCI
AIFO
ANPAS
ARCI
CNCA Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità d'AccoglienzaC
CSI Centro Sportivo Italiano
EMMAUS ITALIA
FAI Federazione delle associazioni Anti-racket Italiane
FONDAZIONE MARAZZO, GIOVANI DELLE ACLI
FUCI Fondazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana
Gruppo Abele
MAGISTRATURA DEMOCRATICA
PAX CHRISTI
SIAP Sindacato Italiano Appartenenti Polizia
SILP Sindacato Italiano Lavoratori di Polizia
SIULP Sindacato Italiano Unitario Lavoratori Polizia
SOS IMPRESA
SPI-CGIL
UISP
UNIONE DEGLI STUDENTI
OPEN DATA SICILIA
ACSI Associazione di Cultura Sport e Tempo Libero
Rete della Conoscenza

Avviso Pubblico
LAV Lega Antivivisezione
CGIL
CISL
UIL
SNADIR Sindacato Nazionale Autonomo Insegnanti di Religione
Illuminiamo la Salute
ALISEO Associazione Contro l'Alcolismo
Narcomafie
Numeri Pari
Il Filo d'Erba
Abele Lavoro
EDRi European Digital Rights
WIN Whistleblowign International Network
AWP Associated Whistleblowign Press
X-Net
Localization Lab
Internet Freedom Festival
A Buon Diritto
ANSI
Antigone
ARCIGAY
ASGI
DIVERSITY
Fondazione Leone Moressa
Forum Droghe
Gruppo Umana Solidarietà
Hermes Center
Lunaria
Associazione 21 luglio
MDKI Magaden David Keshet Italia
Associazione Luca Coscioni
Movimento Difesa del Cittadino

Avvocati per Niente
NAGA
Certi Diritti
PARSEC
CIE PIEMONTE
Progetto Diritti
CIPSI
Rete Lenford
Società della Ragione
Società Informazione
CIR
Cittadini del Mondo
TEFA COLOMBIA
COPSE
Volontari in Carcere
Zabbara
On the Road
Bambini Senza Sbarre
K_ALMA
BIN
CoopUp
Sociolab
Creativi 108
Vivaio per l'intraprendenza
HUB Spa
Mani Tese
Bicipace
Scuola Antonino Caponnetto
Rete Rifiuti Zero
ComMon Comunità Monitoranti
Casa Memoria Peppino e Felicia Impastato
Banca Etica
European Global Data Journalism Network

Global Investigative Journalism Network
Popolo Project
RiSSC
NeXT Nuova Economia per Tutti
RIF
Spaghetti Open Data
Engagment Journalism Accelerator
A Scuola di OpenCoesione
Confiscati Bene
Open GOV Italia
OnData
On Our Watch project
19-lug-92
Forum Italiano Sicurezza Urbana
Lait
Progetto Mondo Mlal
Associazione Italiana Trasparenza ed Anticorruzione “AITRA
Fondazione Ugo Bordoni
Labsus – Laboratorio per la Sussidiarietà
OpenRicostruzione
OpenPompei
APOF-IL
Spain
Acción Cívica contra la corrupción
Fundaciòn Internacional Baltasar Garzòn
Guerrilla foundation
International Institute for Nonviolent Action
Nodo50.org
Fundacion Ciudadana Civio datos que cuentan contra la opacidad
el confidencial
maldita
Corruptil

Museo Iber
SEEC Sociedad española de estudios clásicos
Fundación César Manrique
Transparency International España
Fundación Hay Derecho
Pandora Box
Fundación por la Justicia
COSITAL
Familias por la Infancia
Clínica jurídica por la justicia social
ASOCIACIÓN CIUDADANÍA Y COMUNICACIÓN
TRANSPARENCIA URBANÍSTICA
Proyecto metamorfosis
Fundación Enrique Montoliu
ASOCIACIÓN VALENCIANA DEL PROFESORADO DE GEOGRAFÍA, HISTORIA Y ARTE
Blautic
Telegestión
La Rambleta
ASOCIACIÓN PARA LA DEFENSA DE LA FUNCIÓN PÚBLICA ARAGONESA
X-Net
Función Acción Pro Derechos Humanos
ADADE
VENDIDOS
Plataforma x la honestidad
15MpaRato
ala
Acción Cívica contra la corrupción
Transparency
ecologías en acción
Observatorio DESC
Universidad de Salamanca
CIC
CIVIO

Filtra.la
B, la película
los genoveses
La brigada tuitera
Quien manda
Access Info
Chage.org
Amnistia Internacional
AVAAZ
el indultometro
Hay derecho
FIBGAR
Unicef
Oxfam Intermon
rendicionedecuentas.es
federacion espanola de bancos de alimentos
Themis
Facua
% attac espana
escuela publica de todos para todos
fundacion internacional de derechos humanos
15Mpedia
el huffington post
eldiario.es
Infolibre
publico es
el confidencia
el plural.com
Fundación La Caixa
Repsol
Fundación Telefónica
Ahora
Civio

Access Info!

fundacion Rafaele del Pino

Transparency ES

Accors

Fundacion Ortega-Maron

Aproed

Funcdacion Transforma Espana

Fundacion Transicion Espanola

Circulo Civico de opinion

Fundacion por la Justicia

Foro de foros Foro de encuentros

Siec obywatelska

watchdog.

Africa freedom of information Centre

Alianza regional por la libre expression e informacion

Info House Institute for Privacy and Access to Public Information

X-Net

Partido X

Confidencial

Infolibre

Publico

Vilaweb

Antean3

Cadena Ser

Caffè amb Llet

Cinco Dias

Cuatropder

Cuatropder

Diario Critico

EFE

El confidencial

El mundo

el pais

El proceso
El triangle
Europa Press
Gara
Huffington Post
Infolibre
La directa
La sexta
La Vanguardia
Mongolia
Nacio Digital
Opengov.cat
Periodico de Catalunya
Playground
Publico
Sentic Critic
Tercera Informacion
The guardian
The wall street journal
Tiempo
TV3
Vox Populi
WDR
20 minutos
European Data Journalism Network
Consortio RECORD
Healt Investigative Team
SceMaps
Global Investigative Journalism Network
Consortio Fandango
Consortio Openbudgets.eu
Consortio CHEST
Lobbying Transparency

Coalicion Pro Acceso
Subnational Government Pilot Program de la OGP
Filtrala
Consejo de Transparencia y Buen Gobierno
Federacion Espanola de Municipios y Provincias
Jurismatica
Fundacion Astic
Acreditra
ALBOAN
Amigos de la Tierra
Amnistía Internacional
Anabad Murcia
Asociación Andaluza para la Defensa de los animales (ASANDA)
Asociación de Archiveros de Asturias
Asociación de Archiveros de Castilla y León
Asociación de Archiveros Españoles en la Función Pública
Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid (APM)
Asociación de Profesionales Especialistas en la Información – Asturias (APEI)
Asociación de Usuarios de la Comunicación
Asociación Española de Documentación e Información (SEDIC)
Asociación para la Comunicación e Información Medioambiental (ACIMA)
Asociación para la Defensa de la Función Pública Aragonesa
Asociación para la Prevención y Estudios de Delitos, Abusos y Negligencias en Informática y Comunicaciones Avanzadas (APEDANICA)
Asociación para la recuperación de la memoria histórica (ARMH)
Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España (APDHE)
Associació Ciutadania i Comunicació (ACICOM)
Associació d'Arxivers i Gestors de Documents Valencians
Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España (APDHE)
Associació Ciutadania i Comunicació (ACICOM)
Associació d'Arxivers i Gestors de Documents Valencians
Ayuda en Acción
CIECODE

Civio

Col·legi Oficial de Bibliotecaris i Documentalistes de la Comunitat Valenciana (COBDCV)

Comisión de Libertades Informàtiques

Confederación de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU)

Confederación Española de Organizaciones de Amas de Casa, Consumidores y Usuarios

Coordinadora de ONG de Desarrollo de España

Coordinadora Ecoloxista d'Asturies

DECIDE – Democracia, Ciudadanía y Desarrollo

Ecologistas en Acción

Economistas sin Fronteras

Federación de Asociaciones de la Prensa de España

Federación española de empresas de software libre, ASOLIF

FFII España

Foro Ciudadano de la Región de Murcia

Fundación Ciencias de la Documentación

Fundación Cultura de Paz

Fundación Compromiso y Transparencia

Fundación Ecología y Desarrollo

Fundación Global Nature

Fundación Hay Derecho

FIBGAR

Fundación IPADE

Greenpeace España

Govern Obert

Hispalinux

Ingeniería sin Fronteras

Intermón Oxfam

Kuorum

Observatorio Ciudadano Municipal de Jerez

Observatorio de la RSC

Open Data España

Open Knowledge España

OpenKratio

Plataforma en Defensa de la Libertad de Información (PDLI)

Plataforma para la creación del Colegio Oficial de Archiveros, Bibliotecarios y Documentalistas de Madrid

Plataforma para la Defensa de la Cordillera Cantábrica

Plataforma por una Vivienda Digna

Pro Bono Publico

Qué hacen los diputados

RADA – Red de Abogados para la Defensa Medioambiental

Reporteros Sin Fronteras – España

Retorna

SEO – Birdlife

Sociedad Española de Documentación e Información

Trabucom

Transparencia Internacional España

WWF Adena

List of variables included in the analysis of websites

ID

Organization's name

Website type (e.g., webpage, Facebook page, Instagram page)

Type of organization (e.g., NGO, civic group, SMO, Srl, SpA)

Organization's scope (e.g., local, regional, national, international, local branch of a national organization, the national branch of an international organization)

Year of foundation

Presentation (i.e., organization's motto or short description on the homepage)

Description (i.e., a short description of the main activities)

Relationship with institutions (i.e., no reference, reference to direct institutional funding and collaboration, mentions of sporadic collaboration, mention of open confrontation)

Goals (i.e., description of the main organization's goals)

Themes (i.e., list of the main areas of intervention)

Partners (i.e., collaborators in the "partners" section, when not available, indirectly retrieved by sampling documents on collaboration, and joint events...)

Fundings (i.e., list of funders when available)

Corruption (i.e., mention of one or more of these themes: corruption, transparency, whistleblowing, civic participation, legality)

Structure (i.e., organizational structure: president, board, council, honorary members...)

Codebook

NF= Not Found

Webpage

S1=Website

S2=Facebook

S3=Twitter

S4=Wordpress/blog

S5=Other

Scope

SC0=national

SC1=local

SC2= local branch of a national organization

SC3= national branch of an international organization

SC4= international organization

SC5= local branch of an international organization

Corruption

0= No mention

1= Legality

2= Transparency

3=Monitoring

4= Mafia

5=Corruption

6=Civic Participation

7=Open data

8= Whistleblowing

Relationship with institutions

R0=No mention

R1= cooperation, promotion of legislative process, co-creation with institutions

R2= not stated as a goal, but present in practice through cooperation in projects, shared participation in events

R3= open conflict, mention of control and opposition to institutional activities

Structure

1=President

- 2=Executive board
- 3=Assembly of the members
- 4=Treasurer
- 5=Secretary
- 6= ethical committee, vigilance body
- 7= executive director/project manager/managing director
- 8=board of auditors
- 9=scientific committee
- 10=press office
- 12=local spokesperson, adjunct committees
- 13=local branch council
- 14=Other

Appendix 4

Members of the Coalición Pro Acceso in 2007:

1. Transparencia Internacional (España)
2. Amnistía Internacional
3. Intermón Oxfam
4. Access Info Europe
5. Greenpeace España
6. Observatorio de la RSC
7. Ecologistas en Acción
8. SEO – Birdlife
9. Economistas sin Fronteras
10. Fundación IPADE
11. Confederación de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU)
12. Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España (APDHE)
13. Fundación Ciencias de la Documentación
14. Asociación de Archiveros Españoles en la Función Pública
15. Asociación de Archiveros de Castilla y León
16. Comisión de Libertades Informáticas
17. Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid
18. Asociación Española de Documentación e Información (SEDIC)
19. Plataforma para la Defensa de la Cordillera Cantábrica
20. Grupo de Investigación “Transparencia, buena gobernanza y comunicación” de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid
21. Coordinadora Ecoloxista d’Asturies
22. Asociación de Usuarios de la Comunicación
23. Reporteros Sin Fronteras
24. Asociación de Profesionales Especialistas en la Información – Asturias (APEI)
25. Sunaptein Asociación para la Promoción de la Salud Mental
26. Plataforma para la creación del Colegio Oficial de Archiveros, Bibliotecarios y Documentalistas de Madrid

Members of the Coalicion Pro Acceso in 2012:

1. Access Info Europe
2. ACIMA
3. ALBOAN
4. Amnistía Internacional
5. Anabad Murcia
6. Asociación Andaluza para la Defensa de los animales (ASANDA)
7. Asociación de Archiveros de Castilla y León
8. Asociación de Archiveros Españoles en la Función Pública
9. Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid (APM)
10. Asociación de Profesionales Especialistas en la Información – Asturias (APEI)
11. Asociación de Usuarios de la Comunicación
12. Asociación Española de Documentación e Información (SEDIC)
13. Asociación para la Comunicación e Información Medioambiental (ACIMA)
14. Asociación para la Defensa de la Función Pública Aragonesa
15. Asociación para la Prevención y Estudios de Delitos, Abusos y Negligencias en Informática y Comunicaciones Avanzadas (APEDANICA)
16. Asociación para la recuperación de la memoria histórica (ARMH)
17. Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España (APDHE)
18. Asociación Transparencia y Libertad
19. Associació Ciutadania i Comunicació (ACICOM)
20. Associació d'Arxivers i Gestors de Documents Valencians
21. Col·legi Oficial de Bibliotecaris i Documentalistes de la Comunitat Valenciana (COBDCV)
22. Comisión de Libertades Informàtiques
23. Confederación de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU)
24. Confederación Española de Organizaciones de Amas de Casa, Consumidores y Usuarios
25. Coordinadora de ONG de Desarrollo de España
26. Coordinadora Ecoloxista d'Asturies
27. DECIDE – Democracia, Ciudadanía y Desarrollo
28. Ecologistas en Acción
29. Economistas sin Fronteras
30. Federación de Asociaciones de la Prensa de España
31. Federación española de empresas de software libre, ASOLIF
32. FFII España
33. Foro Ciudadano de la Región de Murcia
34. Fundación Ciencias de la Documentación
35. Fundación Cultura de Paz
36. Fundación Ecología y Desarrollo
37. Fundación IPADE
38. Greenpeace España
39. Govern Obert
40. Hispalinux
41. Ingeniería sin Fronteras
42. Intermón Oxfam
43. Observatorio de la RSC
44. Open Data España
45. Plataforma para la creación del Colegio Oficial de Archiveros, Bibliotecarios y Documentalistas de Madrid
46. Plataforma para la Defensa de la Cordillera Cantábrica
47. Plataforma por una Vivienda Digna
48. Pro Bono Publico

49. Proyecto EQUO
50. RADA – Red de Abogados para la Defensa Ambiental
51. Reporteros Sin Fronteras
52. SEO – Birdlife
53. Sunaptein – Asociación para la Promoción de la Salud Mental
54. Trabucom
55. Transparencia Internacional (España)
56. Voota
57. WWF-Adena

Members of the Coalicion Pro Acceso in 2022:

1. Access Info Europe
2. Acreditra
3. ALBOAN
4. Amigos de la Tierra
5. Amnistía Internacional
6. Anabad Murcia
7. Asociación Andaluza para la Defensa de los animales (ASANDA)
8. Asociación de Archiveros de Asturias
9. Asociación de Archiveros de Castilla y León
10. Asociación de Archiveros Españoles en la Función Pública
11. Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid (APM)
12. Asociación de Profesionales Especialistas en la Información – Asturias (APEI)
13. Asociación de Usuarios de la Comunicación
14. Asociación Española de Documentación e Información (SEDIC)
15. Asociación para la Comunicación e Información Medioambiental (ACIMA)
16. Asociación para la Defensa de la Función Pública Aragonesa
17. Asociación para la Prevención y Estudios de Delitos, Abusos y Negligencias en Informática y Comunicaciones Avanzadas (APEDANICA)
18. Asociación para la recuperación de la memoria histórica (ARMH)
19. Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España (APDHE)
20. Associació Ciutadania i Comunicació (ACICOM)
21. Associació d'Arxivers i Gestors de Documents Valencians
22. Ayuda en Acción
23. CIECODE
24. Civio
25. Col·legi Oficial de Bibliotecaris i Documentalistes de la Comunitat Valenciana (COBDCV)
26. Comisión de Libertades Informàtiques
27. Confederación de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU)
28. Confederación Española de Organizaciones de Amas de Casa, Consumidores y Usuarios
29. Coordinadora de ONG de Desarrollo de España
30. Coordinadora Ecoloxista d'Asturies
31. DECIDE – Democracia, Ciudadanía y Desarrollo
32. Ecologistas en Acción
33. Economistas sin Fronteras
34. Federación de Asociaciones de la Prensa de España
35. Inicio - FeSP - Federación de Sindicatos de Periodistas (fesperiodistas.org)
36. Federación española de empresas de software libre, ASOLIF
37. FFII España
38. Foro Ciudadano de la Región de Murcia
39. Fundación Ciencias de la Documentación
40. Fundación Cultura de Paz

41. Fundación Compromiso y Transparencia
42. Fundación Ecología y Desarrollo
43. Fundación Global Nature
44. Fundación Hay Derecho
45. FIBGAR
46. ihr.world
47. Fundación IPADE
48. Greenpeace España
49. Govern Obert
50. Hispalinux
51. Ingeniería sin Fronteras
52. Intermón Oxfam
53. Kuorum
54. Observatorio Ciudadano Municipal de Jerez
55. Observatorio de la RSC
56. Open Data España
57. Open Knowledge España
58. OpenKratio
59. Plataforma en Defensa de la Libertad de Información (PDLI)
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61. Plataforma para la Defensa de la Cordillera Cantábrica
62. Plataforma por una Vivienda Digna
63. Pro Bono Publico
64. Qué hacen los diputados
65. RADA – Red de Abogados para la Defensa Medioambiental
66. Reporteros Sin Fronteras – España
67. Retorna
68. SEO – Birdlife
69. Observatorio - Observatorio cannabis
70. Trabucom
71. Transparencia Internacional España
72. WWF Adena
73. Xnet