

**GLOBAL INTEGRITY**  
Data, Learning & Action for Open Governance

## From grievance to engagement



### **How people decide to act against corruption**

Unpacking context and causal mechanisms that determine how and why people choose to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms

Implications and recommendations for how domestic and international organisations can improve citizen engagement

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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive summary</b> .....	2
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>2. Framing the study</b> .....	6
2.1 A theory-of-change approach .....	7
2.2 A multilevel approach to understanding individual behaviour .....	9
<b>3. Conceptualising how people decide to take action against corruption</b> .....	12
3.1 The micro level and individuals' engagement steps .....	14
Step 1: Pre-engagement .....	16
Step 2: First contact with a mechanism .....	19
Step 3: Sustained engagement.....	23
3.2 The macro level and the role of the public mood.....	26
3.3 The meso level and the role of social mediation .....	31
<b>4. Conclusion</b> .....	35
<b>5. Recommendations</b> .....	38
5.1 Recommendations for domestic actors .....	39
5.2 Recommendations for international actors.....	44
<b>6. References</b> .....	48
<b>7. Annex</b> .....	55
7.1 Background.....	55
7.2 Research strategy.....	56
7.2.1 Research question .....	56
7.2.2 Conceptual framework.....	57
7.2.3 Selecting fieldwork locations.....	59
7.2.4 Obtaining and analysing data from fieldwork .....	63

## Executive summary

What can anti-corruption organisations do to activate, catalyse and leverage citizens to engage in the fight against corruption? What insights about the underlying drivers and motivations that make citizens act can help organisations devise and pursue more effective strategies? Can a more nuanced way of exploring, understanding and ultimately addressing citizens' concerns help organisations become more effective in nurturing citizen engagement?

Despite a recent increase in the amount of work focused on understanding citizen engagement in the anti-corruption space, there remains a lack of clarity about how and why citizens decide to take action against corruption, and how they then choose to engage in specific anti-corruption mechanisms. In addition, there is a lack of practical guidance showing organisations how to engage citizens, which takes context into account and can be adapted if unsuccessful at first.

To address these gaps, and give organisations a practical starting point, this paper follows a theory-of-change approach to unpack and test a number of assumptions that are likely to inform how citizens choose to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms. The aim is to help organisations identify and explore the logic of citizen engagement and to support them in thinking through their own strategies, including by disaggregating and exploring different factors at the macro, micro and meso levels that influence the citizen engagement process.

The key takeaway is a three-level theory of change, which illustrates how and why people decide to engage. It centres around a highly individualistic "cost-benefit" calculation that determines what type of mechanisms people deem "viable" in a particular context, given their set of (often fuzzy) preferences. A number of factors affect the cost-benefit calculation, which a person continuously assesses and reassesses as they progress in using a particular mechanism. Factors include perceived relevance, credibility, safety, accessibility, responsiveness, trustworthiness and relatability of the mechanism. Also important is experiencing small wins throughout the engagement process. Social contacts close to the person who have already decided to engage are a key influence, including family, friends, peers and colleagues. They translate macro-contextual variables into experiences, language, facts and perceptions the individual can understand and digest when assessing the corruption grievance and mechanisms available to possibly counter or resolve the grievance.

The theory of change proposed in this paper is the result of an iterative process engaging with the literature and the conceptual and practical challenges practitioners face when trying to tease out factors that enable (or prevent) citizen engagement. It was corroborated and triangulated through empirical work conducted in (and on) Tunisia and Georgia in 2017. It proposes and then unpacks relevant concepts and their relationship with each other at the macro, meso and micro levels. As is inherent in the concept of a theory of change, it should be regarded as tentative and is meant to be refined and altered as anti-corruption organisations discover more factors and relationships that provide an even more-nuanced insight into the logic of citizen engagement and the ways in which organisations might best react to it.

The implications of the findings differ depending on whether organisations work primarily at domestic or global level. Overall, organisations at both levels would benefit from being more explicit about the assumptions that guide their programming and from combining insights from a global and comparative perspective, with knowledge from the local level. Organisations would also benefit from creating opportunities and processes to try out strategies, take stock, adapt and iterate, especially with regard to the assumptions they make.

Domestic actors would benefit from tailoring existing mechanisms to the different steps people take when deciding whether and how to engage. They should carefully consider the mechanisms they use and consider approaches that address citizens' expectations around the factors citizens deem important. Domestic actors would also benefit from using insights about the direction of the public mood at the macro level to inform programming decisions, including paying more attention to the ways citizens are influenced by their peers.

Global-level actors would benefit from creating and supporting opportunities for local actors to try different strategies and facilitate learning across boundaries. Global actors should also support cross-country research to give a better understanding of the factors that matter in the different phases of the citizen engagement process. A key ingredient to making research more useful is to create realistic expectations about when and how global programming can successfully inform thinking and practice in specific countries.

# 1. Introduction

This report is about how people<sup>1</sup> decide to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms. To support domestic and international organisations in their learning about how to best facilitate citizen engagement in anti-corruption mechanisms, we develop a theory of change (ToC) meant to help organisations better understand the causal mechanisms that determine how citizens make particular decisions, including by unpacking the role context plays and the influence of social mediation.

The belief that engaging people is a critical component to governance-related reform efforts generally, and to anti-corruption reform efforts more specifically, has emerged as a universal certainty among actors and advocates working on governance (Williams, 2000; World Bank, 2016; 2017, especially chapter 8). In response, anti-corruption organisations, including Transparency International, invest heavily in citizen-centered mechanisms, from offering people legal aid to resolve corruption grievances, to orchestrating global campaigns. However, citizen engagement, including relating to anti-corruption, has so far been poorly theorised and explained in accountability literature (Marín, 2016).

This report is the result of an initiative to test and refine assumptions about how and why citizens engage in anti-corruption mechanisms. It proposes a theory of change that can inform future work on anti-corruption mechanisms. We introduce – and tentatively confirm – a set of critical elements necessary for understanding how citizens act when they are confronted with corruption-related grievances in their everyday lives. The result is a theory of change that explains how citizen engagement happens, and which, in turn, can be used to guide organisational decision-making. It encompasses:

1. the micro level, which explains the steps people take when deciding to engage with anti-corruption mechanisms to solve their corruption-related problems
2. the macro level, which explains how context – expressed and translated as public mood – influences how people perceive their ability to do something about corruption
3. the meso level, which links the micro and macro levels by explaining how people interpret their concrete situation with the help of peers in their immediate context

What we show in this theory of change is:

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<sup>1</sup> We use the terms “citizens,” “people” and “individuals” interchangeably in this paper.

1. how a person makes the decision to engage in an anti-corruption mechanism – regardless of the type of grievance or mechanism offered
2. how context and individual action are linked and how context informs individual action
3. why and how the “viability” of a mechanism is ultimately a function of a cost-benefit assessment by a particular individual

In providing this theory of change, the report makes a distinct contribution to theorising about the logic of how citizen engagement happens, while at the same time offering concrete advice to domestic and external actors about how they can refine their strategies to improve citizen engagement.<sup>2</sup>

We hope that the different audiences reading this report — from global-level campaigners to local-level practitioners — will find value in the approach and its findings. The report aims to provoke discussion and debate to advance the field’s collective thinking, perhaps resulting in more empirical research in other contexts and on mechanisms not covered in this report.

This report is the outcome of a collaboration between Global Integrity and the Transparency International Secretariat. We are grateful for the cooperation with the Transparency International Secretariat and want to acknowledge the invaluable support provided by I-Watch in Tunisia and Transparency International in Georgia. Without the support from [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and their colleagues, we would not have been able to do this work. Their support has been particularly important in helping us navigate the anti-corruption scene in both countries. It also helped us gain the trust of people who have spoken at length about their experiences engaging in specific anti-corruption mechanisms, and the rationales and viewpoints underpinning their corruption-fighting journeys. We are also grateful to a number of other individuals and organisations in Tunisia and Georgia for openly sharing their insights with us.

This report is organised as follows:

- chapter 2 lays out the approach taken to frame the study
- chapter 3 develops the theory of change based on the conceptual and empirical work

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this initiative does not take into account the question of whether citizen engagement strategies are actually effective and whether they lead to the anticipated results in the fight against corruption. Others have focused on this question with regard to governance initiatives more broadly and have reported mixed results (see, for example, Gaventa & Barrett, 2010, and Gaventa & McGee, 2012).

- done and illustrates the insights generated during the fieldwork in Tunisia and Georgia
- chapter 4 concludes the report
  - chapter 5 gives recommendations to domestic and international actors, including a list of questions designed to support organisations in thinking through the mechanisms they offer to engage citizens.
  - the annex lays out the research strategy and methodology we used for this work

## 2. Framing the study

When do people take action against corruption, and what makes them choose to do so in the first place? A small number of recent studies using quantitative data analysis have asked just that.

Caryn Peiffer from the University of Birmingham in England and Linda Alvarez from California State University ask “What determines people’s willingness to act against corruption?” in their cross-country quantitative study from 2014, titled *Who Will Be the 'Principled Principals'?* Monika Bauhr from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden has focused on whether being directly affected by corruption affects citizen engagement in anti-corruption activities. In particular, she asks in her 2015 study what type of corruption grievances are most likely to trigger people to act against corruption. Is it “need corruption”, in which corruption is the only way to obtain a service, or is it “greed corruption”, where corruption is used to obtain a cheaper service?

In an earlier paper from 2014, Monika Bauhr and Marcia Grimes focused specifically on the effect transparency and information about corruption have on the likelihood of people engaging in anti-corruption activities – whether it leads to people mobilising against corruption or if the opposite is true, that greater knowledge about corruption is linked to demobilisation and popular resignation. Finally, a paper from 2014 by Sofia Arkhede Olsson, also from the University of Gothenburg, investigates whether there is a relationship between levels of corruption perceived by people and their political participation. More precisely, she sheds light on the proposition that corruption makes citizens feel as if they have no influence on politics, which, in turn, lowers people’s propensity to engage politically.

These papers have two things in common. First, they focus on determinants of citizen engagement in anti-corruption. Second, they use cross-country statistical analysis – based on international surveys about people-centered actions against corruption – as their methodological

approach. The aforementioned studies by Peiffer and Alvarez (2014) and Bauhr (2015) both use statistical analysis based on Global Corruption Barometer survey data, with the dependent variable being people's stated willingness to engage in various types of anti-corruption activities. The paper by Bauhr and Grimes (2014), which looks at the impact transparency has on people's engagement in anti-corruption mechanisms, uses similar data on anti-corruption-related activities taken from the World Values surveys (2005-2007). The Arkhede Olsson (2014) paper about corruption and political participation uses survey data from the International Social Survey Programme to form the three levels of citizen participation constituting the study's dependent variables. Another set of recent studies, also using survey-based quantitative analysis, looks at what (if anything) makes citizens engage in anti-corruption in the form of voting corrupt politicians out of office (Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013; Figueiredo et al, 2011; Muñoz et al, 2012; Kostadinova, 2009).

## 2.1 A theory-of-change approach

This study builds on but then departs from this literature.<sup>3</sup> Rather than following in the tracks of the survey-based, cross-country quantitative literature, we chose a qualitative, theory-building approach to inquire into the logic of citizen engagement, with the aim to generate a theory of change. We alternated between a deductive approach, using existing literature and fragments of theoretical building blocks, and an inductive approach of reflecting, concretising and refining a theory of change using data obtained during fieldwork. The output is a theoretically-led and empirically-substantiated theory of change that sheds light on when, why and how citizens with corruption grievances choose to do something about them.

Theories of change are statements of plausible, testable pathways of change for concrete actors in a wider system to help guide actions and explain impact (Avis, 2016; also see James, 2011, Valters, 2014). A theory-of-change approach can help shed light on a particular aspect of a system and the context in which it plays out, allowing us to explore, unpack and clarify the assumptions about how change happens, and helping us analyse (and hypothesise) what this means for organisations working on a specific question.

We chose this approach for two reasons. First, the aforementioned literature oversimplifies and yet under-specifies a complex, multilevel process and does not provide useful tools for

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<sup>3</sup> Additional literature is discussed in relation to the findings in chapter 3.



understanding the factors that might help catalyse and sustain citizen engagement in anti-corruption endeavours in different contexts. In essence, the questions of “when” and “why” people choose to act against corruption, and the process they go through when deciding to take action, remain largely confined to a black box (see also Marín, 2016). Whereas cross-country statistical analysis as it is used in the social sciences provides a good measure for ascertaining correlations between variables, it is inadequate as a method for teasing out causality, and even less so for shedding light on the causal mechanisms involved.<sup>4</sup>

A theory-of-change approach, in contrast, is suitable for opening that black box. It acknowledges the complexity of change and the wider system in which it takes place, and allows for unpacking the factors and actors that influence a process, including by unpacking the largely implicit assumptions about the phenomena observed and the conditions that enable or constrain them (James, 2011; Joshi, 2014). As such, the approach provides a tool for adding substance and for exploring the causal mechanisms underpinning citizen engagement, teasing out the processes people go through when they decide to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms. More precisely, we suggest a theory of change which makes a connection between having a corruption grievance and the probability of an individual acting against it. In so doing, the theory of change points to actions and strategies organisations might use to foster citizen engagement.

Second, we agreed with the Transparency International Secretariat that this initiative should be as helpful as possible for practitioners and that theories of change can provide a very powerful learning lens, helping organisations ask themselves and others simple but important questions about what they are doing and why (James, 2011). Using a theory-of-change approach with a focus on understanding enabling conditions and bottlenecks to citizen engagement is also more useful to practitioners than the abovementioned quantitative research, which is too abstract to be helpful in providing practical insights for organisations doing the work on the ground. Instead, we hope that by providing a theory of change relevant to citizens, we can offer a resource that will enable Transparency International’s national chapters and other organisations to assess their own work and use the findings in their decision-making processes.

In other words, the added value of this research is in unpacking the logic of citizen engagement and providing a lens through which Transparency International chapters can experiment, learn

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<sup>4</sup> If we posit that an explanatory variable causes a dependent variable, a “causal mechanisms” approach would require us to identify a list of causal links between the two variables. In other words, causal mechanisms specify how the effects are exerted (King et al, 1994).

and possibly adapt their projects to be more effective in fostering and sustaining citizen engagement over time. Making the logic of citizen engagement explicit is also intended to help the Transparency International Secretariat and other global-level actors better understand how they can support domestic actors.

## 2.2 A multilevel approach to understanding individual behaviour

The proposed theory of change looks at when, why and how individuals with a corruption-related grievance choose to take action to solve their corruption-related problems. The theory of change incorporates three levels: a micro (individual) level, a macro (societal) level and a meso (social) level. The choice of incorporating different levels into the theory of change is based on the well-recognised proposition that “context matters”; that to understand an individual’s behaviour one needs to take into account the context in which that individual operates (Evans, 2017; O’Meally, 2013).

As a theory-based framework, the Social Ecological Model is a good starting point for incorporating the wider context in which individuals with corruption-related problems operate. The model suggests that we need to look at behaviour change not only as a question of personal choice but with a wider lens that incorporates various factors influencing individuals; factors which the individuals have little control over. These include factors at the macro level, such as societal norms, and economic and political realities. They also include factors at the meso level, such as family, friends and others in someone’s local community, as well as organisations and other structures, services and standards that regulate everyday life (Schmied, 2017).

The next section will set out the theory of change proposed as the finding/product of this initiative. The box below presents a summary of the research strategy to clarify key aspects and steps of the research strategy employed. A thorough description of the methodology can be found in the annex.

### **Box 1: Summary of our research strategy**

The theory of change presented in this paper was developed using a research approach that alternated between deductive and inductive phases. Starting with a deductive approach, we

developed a conceptual framework based on a review of the literature around the primary research question:

*For a person with a corruption grievance – experienced at the individual (highly personal) or collective (societal) level – who has access to/is offered viable mechanisms and opportunities to take action against the grievance, what affects the likelihood of him/her taking action to solve his/her particular corruption-related problem?*

The specific entry points to answering this overall research question were the following three sub-questions:

1. How do people decide to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms and how do they arrive at assessing a mechanism to be “viable”? *Question concerning the micro level.*
2. How do factors outside the direct control of an individual with a corruption-related grievance affect the likelihood of that individual choosing to act against corruption? *Question concerning the macro level.*
3. How do individuals translate contextual factors into information they use for subsequent decision-making? *Question concerning the meso level.*

This deductive approach resulted in an initial theory of change about citizen engagement. We subsequently deployed an inductive approach to reflect, concretise and refine this theory of change using data obtained during a fieldwork phase in Tunisia and Georgia.

We used a mixed-methods approach to gathering evidence. In both countries, we triangulated methods and sources of information, including by conducting focus group interviews and in-depth interviews with people acting against corruption, and through political economy system mapping based on a review of academic and gray literature.

More specifically, we conducted within-country analysis on the steps people take when they have individual grievances, investigating how people access and engage with Transparency International’s Anti-Corruption Legal Advice Centres (ALAC) in both Tunisia and Georgia. These locally adapted centers offer support to victims and witnesses of corruption and give citizens help to resolve their grievances.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> More information on the ALACs can be found in the annex.

We also looked at people's responses to collective grievances, analysing people's drivers and motivations to engage in an election-observation programme in Tunisia and a social movement called Guerrilla Gardening in Georgia. This social movement emerged through, and is run by, a group of volunteers who campaign against the abuse of public power in the management of green spaces in Tbilisi. It was set up to fight corruption (in relation to land ownership and permits) and violations of citizen rights to green spaces.

We defined individual grievances as being when a person has suffered wrongs and/or experienced grievances in a highly personal way. Collective grievances encompass situations in which citizens suffer wrongs because corruption deprives society of common goods or services.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> More information on how we arrived at these definitions can be found in the annex.

### 3. Conceptualising how people decide to take action against corruption

How do people decide to take action against corruption? Figure 1 below illustrates the three-level theory of change we propose captures the interconnected logic of citizens deciding to engage in anti-corruption based on a few critical assumptions, the role of context and the transmission mechanism of how context translates into action.

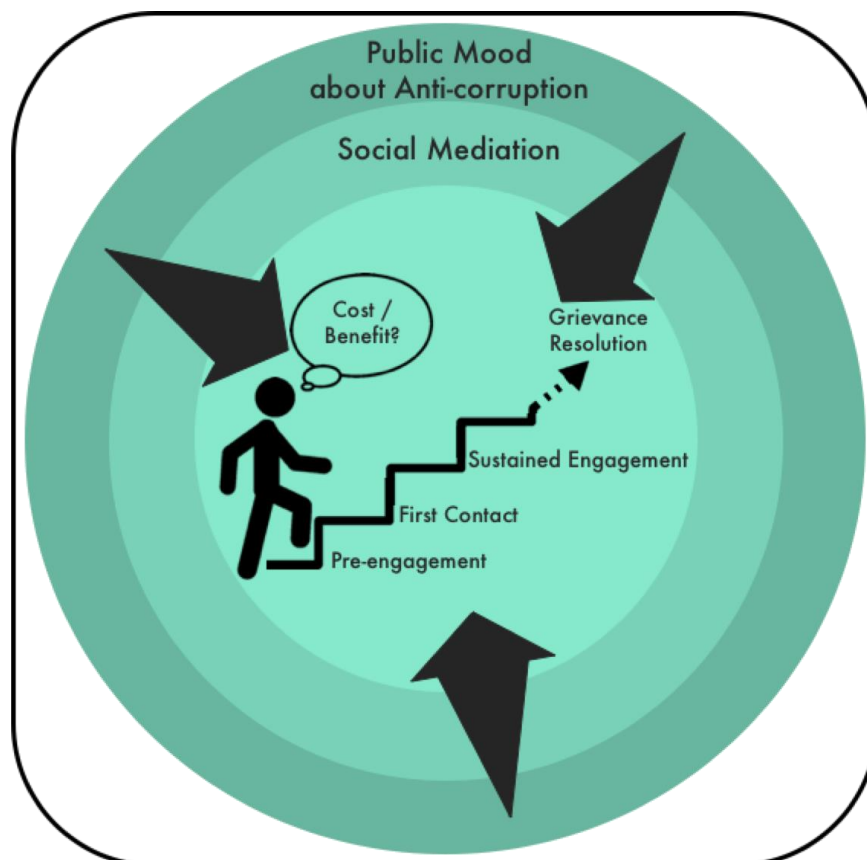


Figure 1: Illustration of the theory of change of citizen engagement against corruption

The three levels illustrate the following:

1. Starting with an individual located in the inner circle, we posit that he/she makes subjective cost-benefit calculations – or, perhaps more accurately – cost-benefit

approximations, given the many unknowns and non-monetary elements under consideration – about whether it is worthwhile and sustainable for him/her to take action against corruption through any particular mechanism available. The individual does so in three steps: i) before accessing an anti-corruption mechanism, ii) during a first contact with the mechanism, and iii) while using the mechanism. The individual assesses whether any particular mechanism is “viable” to him/her, which is key in determining whether the individual will continue the engagement toward possibly resolving the grievance he/she has set out to resolve.

2. Turning to the outer circle (the macro level), we identify the proxy of “public mood” to express how contextual factors affect the way in which citizens assess whether they have sufficient power to make a difference in the fight against corruption. We propose that the public mood significantly informs individuals’ decisions about whether to act against corruption.
3. However, macro-contextual factors by themselves – or the public mood as its proxy – do not affect actions or decisions by the individual directly. Instead, factors are translated and mediated by the individual’s interactions with others whose opinions and perceptions he/she values and trusts. We call this mechanism “social mediation” – depicted in the middle circle (meso level). Social mediation appears to be the key mechanism for how the often intangible and abstract context is translated into knowledge and perceptions that then inform an individual’s cost-benefit approximations.

These three levels seem significant in explaining the anti-corruption engagement trajectories in Tunisia and Georgia, and are reflected in people’s decisions to act in relation to both individual and collective corruption grievances. The way in which macro- and meso-level factors influence the individual reflects the complex nature of how people decide to engage in anti-corruption efforts and highlights the fact that engagement happens as part of a process over time.

This finding is consistent with existing anti-corruption research. However, it does add a new lens and a significant amount of depth to it. It also provides a constructive entry point for further reflection and subsequent action by both domestic- and global-level actors to bolster citizen engagement. The remainder of this section will lay out the findings for each of the three levels.

### 3.1 The micro level and individuals' engagement steps

How do people decide to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms, and how do they go about assessing the mechanisms available to them? This section will propose answers to these questions starting from the level of the individual (the micro level).

The theoretical starting point for looking at an individual's decision-making process to engage in anti-corruption is built on two key premises. The first is the assumption that we are dealing with a (bounded) rational, self-interested individual who will choose to engage in anti-corruption only when the perceived benefit of doing so exceeds the perceived cost. The cost to a person may be substantial. As data from the latest round of the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) shows, fear of the consequences of reporting corruption constitutes the greatest obstacle to reporting it. Almost 30 per cent of people surveyed across Europe gave fear of retaliation as the main reason people do not report cases of corruption. Even in high-income countries in Western Europe, such as France, Switzerland and the Netherlands, almost half the respondents stated that fear of retaliation was the main cause for not reporting corruption (ANTICORRP, 2016).

The cost of taking action against corruption is particularly high in contexts where corruption is the norm. In such contexts, few dare to speak out against it on their own. People are reluctant to engage, as denunciation of corruption may lead to social disapproval and perhaps even physical danger (Fisman and Golden, 2017; Marquette and Peiffer, 2015a). Seen from a cost-benefit perspective, people in high-corruption contexts are particularly unlikely to blow the whistle on corruption as this is related to extremely high risks and small returns (Persson et al, 2013). In addition, it is important to understand that in many instances, corruption may actually help solve particular problems individuals have. In these instances, it would be irrational for them to individually act against it (Marquette and Peiffer, 2015b). For the purposes of this study, however, we only look at cases where individuals have corruption-related grievances that they identify as detrimental to them.

The second premise of the proposed theory of change is taken from social accountability literature and concerns the link between information and decision-making at the individual level.<sup>7</sup> In a paper from 2014, titled *Reading the Local Context: A Causal Chain Approach to Social*

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<sup>7</sup> We look at how information provided by anti-corruption mechanism providers and others in relation to an individual's corruption-related grievance affects the decisions taken by that individual. This is a different take on

*Accountability*, Anuradha Joshi from the Institute of Development Studies lays out a decision tree linking information to impacts via citizen action (Joshi, 2014; see also Lieberman, Posner and Tsai, 2012). From this model, we borrow the idea that the form citizen action will take depends on information processed by the individual at any given point in time. The presumption is that when an individual navigates the decision tree and anticipates or receives a negative answer in any of the steps in the chain, the likelihood that he/she will act decreases; the opposite is true for positive answers.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at citizen engagement through a series of decisions taken by individuals based on the information they have at a given point in time, coupled with analysing engagement from a cost-benefit perspective, has two important implications. First, it implies that the choice to act against corruption is an internalised process, and second, it implies that the “viability” of an anti-corruption mechanism, as perceived by an individual, can change over time as new information is internalised. Applying this lens helps us understand what viability of a mechanism means and why people affected by corruption may turn down otherwise technically-sound mechanisms or disengage before the grievance has been successfully resolved.

Based on this analytical starting point, and substantiated by findings from the fieldwork, we propose a three-step model to help us understand the process individuals go through when deciding whether to attempt to solve their corruption-related grievances through a particular mechanism. In each step people need to have and use a certain type of information to assess whether the mechanism is viable for them. This three-step process, which is illustrated in Figure 2 below, encompasses:

1. pre-engagement
2. first contact
3. sustained engagement

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information than has been looked at in previous anti-corruption literature. The paper by Bauhr and Grimes (2014), for example, looks at the impact transparency has on citizen engagement in anti-corruption activities. Rather than focusing on the kind of information about corruption that is digested at the individual level, these authors look more broadly at country-wide institutional transparency.

<sup>8</sup> Finding empirical support for this assumption means that we were able to rule out, using data from fieldwork, any alternative explanations, including 1) alternative decision-making processes of citizen engagement in anti-corruption mechanisms; 2) that viability of a mechanism can be objectively assessed; 3) that the information individuals need and use as they move along the decision-making process is the same in every step; and 4) that other factors in the assumption, for example, the type of corruption grievance, are more important than the type of mechanism.



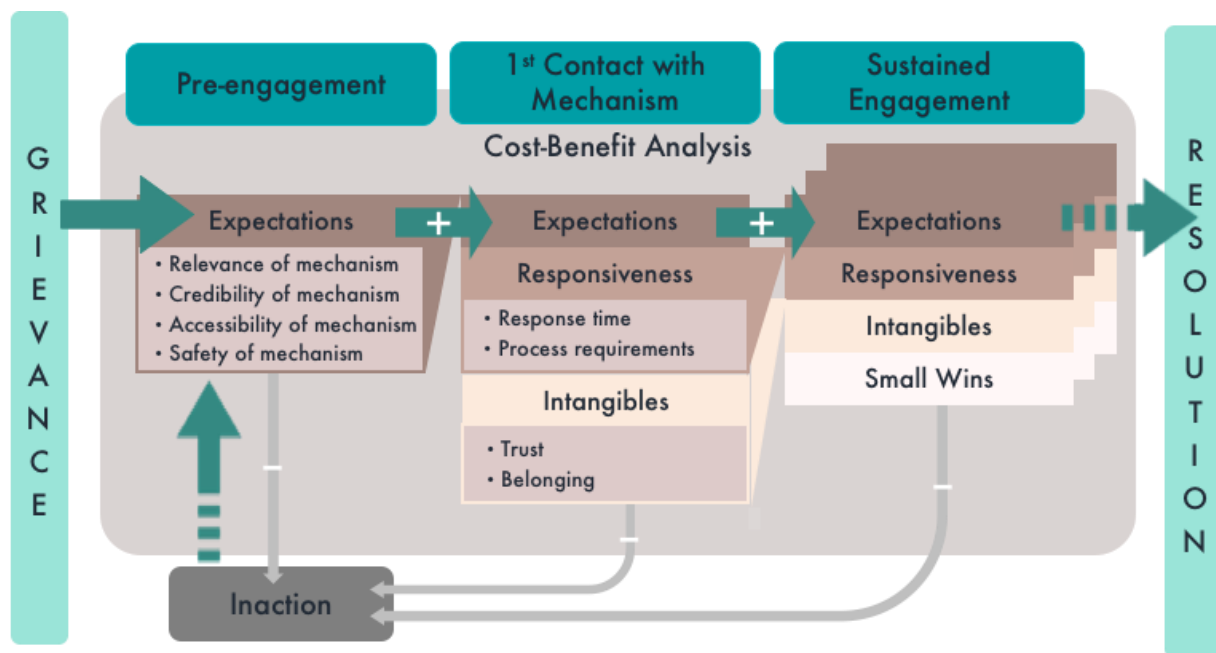


Figure 2: A three-step process to understanding individual decision-making

## Step 1: Pre-engagement

Our starting point is an individual experiencing a corruption-related grievance. The instant this person becomes aware of their grievance, they start assessing the costs the grievance will entail, willingly or not. Doing so, and thinking about possibilities to counter the grievance, puts the person in the pre-engagement step.

During this step, people think about solutions but don't yet engage in a particular mechanism. This step is thus a subjective discovery process through which the individual updates their perceptions and expectations, and processes random bits of information about one or more anti-corruption mechanisms they're aware of. On paper, individuals might have a menu of options available to them for solving their corruption-related problem. They could approach the police, state accountability bodies, the press or civil society programmes, among many others. Technically, from an anti-corruption expert's view, one solution may appear more "obvious" and sound than another option. In practice, however, the process is less straightforward. For the affected individual, what option may be best depends on what mechanism, if any, they assess to be "viable".

In turn, viability is highly subjective and people can (and frequently do) wrongly assess whether a mechanism is viable to them.

During fieldwork, we found that people mentally map the mechanisms they are aware of and decide which are viable based on perceived **accessibility, safety, relevance** and **credibility**.

### **Accessibility**

For a mechanism to be viable it must be accessible. People looking for a solution to their corruption-related problem ask themselves, “Can I use the mechanism? Can I reach the mechanism? Is it easy to speak to, deal with, and understand the mechanism? Do I think I have the ability to put to work or influence the mechanism?” Accessibility also includes knowing about what mechanisms are available in a given location.

In Tunisia, we found people who overcame multiple physical and other barriers to learn about mechanisms not immediately accessible, including people who travelled long distances, had to find time during work hours to learn about mechanisms or recruited friends to overcome challenges associated with their disabilities. We also heard about how people’s literacy levels and level of comfort with different types of media influenced whether and how they assessed a mechanism as being accessible.

It is not impossible to overcome accessibility barriers, but accessibility does affect which mechanisms have a better chance of being considered by people. Some mechanism providers take active measures to address accessibility barriers. The ALAC in the Georgian city of Batumi, for example, runs mobile clinics, which improves accessibility to people outside the city.

### **Safety**

Safety, and the perceived risk of a mechanism, is another factor affecting people’s perception of mechanism viability. People ask themselves, “Is it safe to engage in the mechanism?”

In Tunisia, fear about engaging in anti-corruption is a significant issue. As one I-Watch volunteer explained, “My mother warned me to be careful, even though she supported it. My father was scared of potential threats; ‘you are going to get killed, he said, the threat is real.’ I did it anyway, even going to strongholds of Ben Ali, dangerous places.” In Georgia, fear about incurring harm as a result of approaching a mechanism was less salient in citizens’ assessments. However, people nonetheless voiced concern that others in their village might find out about them accessing a

mechanism (which they would often equate with “snitching”) and feared that this would result in social retaliation and diminished career opportunities.

### **Relevance**

Someone may assess a mechanism as accessible and safe during this pre-engagement step. But people need to also believe that it has significant bearing on their problem. It is important to note, however, that the stumbling block is *perceived* relevance rather than factual or objective relevance of a mechanism.

In Georgia, we learned that people were often reluctant to believe that the ALAC mechanism might be suitable to support them in cases of alleged nepotism and land-rights grievances. We learned of people trying various alternative avenues before turning to the ALAC.

Favourable press coverage, as we found in both Tunisia and Georgia, can help change people’s perception about the relevance of a mechanism.

### **Credibility**

Finally, people must perceive a mechanism to be credible to reach out to it and to share sensitive personal experiences. Many factors could enhance a mechanism’s credibility.

Some people perceive mechanisms that appear technical to be more trustworthy in handling their grievance. Others have higher expectations about mechanisms they feel are relatable. Other aspects related to credibility, relevant in both Tunisia and Georgia, are whether the mechanism is housed at a state or non-state body, and whether it is funded locally or supported by a foreign entity.

Interestingly, some people concluded in Tunisia that foreign funding is preferable because it circumvents the “corrupt” bodies that might be sponsored by domestic actors. Yet, the argument could go the other way in Georgia, where many citizens believe that non-governmental organisations are generally less trustworthy than state institutions.

During the pre-engagement step, and in an effort to form their opinion about accessibility, safety, relevance and credibility, people start to think about what it would take to actively pursue a resolution to their grievance. They think about their problem and talk about it (sometimes purposefully looking for a solution, and sometimes less so by simply sharing their dissatisfaction)

with family and friends. They draw on information they happen to come across, including advertisements about grievance-redress mechanisms on the radio, on TV or on bus stops; interviews with mechanism providers on news shows; public information displays at festivals; or through social media.

In the majority of cases where citizens have not interacted with a mechanism before, they might consume, categorise, analyse and digest information for some time before taking the conscious step to contact the mechanism. They often need this time as they are unsure about the range of possibilities, do not do a targeted search or simply endure a grievance without attempting to act on it, all the while being aware that there is a cost to the grievance. In Tunisia and Georgia, we learned that some ALAC clients “investigated” the mechanism before engaging.

The type and nature of the grievance and the economic effect it has are obviously important factors determining how quickly and urgently people seek help. For example, if the cost of a demotion or firing, or the loss of land rights weighs heavily, people will be more desperate to engage.

By interviewing people who had preliminarily assessed a mechanism to be viable for them during the pre-engagement stage, and who then went on to contact the mechanism provider, we inferred that they had reached a trigger point during the information-gathering phase where they perceived the benefits of engagement to be greater than the costs.

What, when and how a particular trigger point is reached varies from person to person. That said, a common observation was that the trigger often had to do with how others, often trusted individuals, cross-pollinated and further validated a person’s preliminary assessment, and, in so doing, provided the tipping point for the individual to engage in a next step. This viability trigger played a role across all cases analysed – across contexts, mechanisms and types of grievances.

## **Step 2: First contact with a mechanism**

Moving on to the second step, people must have enough curiosity and reason to believe that finding out about a mechanism from its providers is worth their time and energy, and the perceived risks involved. In some cases, this first-contact phase can last a month, and in others, it may be as short as one meeting or a phone call.

During the first-contact phase the individual updates his/her expectations using new sources of information. In getting to know each other, the mechanism provider and individual synchronise their expectations on all the factors mentioned during the initial step (accessibility, safety, relevance and credibility). In some cases, mechanism providers and individuals struggle or fail to synchronise their expectations, most importantly on relevance or safety.

This can leave citizens frustrated and might make them decide not engage further. Many decide at this point that engagement is not viable for them and walk away. For example, in Tunisia two people approached I-Watch twice, trying to blow the whistle on misconduct they had witnessed in their workplace. Each time, however, I-Watch insisted that they needed copies of documentation to pursue their case. Despite their decision to come to the I-Watch offices, the perceived cost of risking identification by submitting written documentation to I-Watch meant the people withdrew from attempt to blow the whistle. For others, however, the requirement to turn over information, or to formally commit to making truthful statements, convinced people the mechanism was credible and “for real.” From a mechanism-provider viewpoint, it is important to synchronise expectations, not least because potential users will often have grievances entirely unrelated to what the mechanism is set up to achieve.

In Georgia, people who sympathise with the Guerilla Gardening group and follow it on Facebook do often call the suggested phone number – for the first time – when they notice the city taking actions that appear to reduce green spaces, such as cutting down trees close to their homes. When calling, they often ask whether someone from the group will be able to come and protest. Learning from the activist on the hotline that this will not be possible at short notice and that the caller should do something to protest, many callers end the conversation unwilling to make the risky investment to protest themselves.

In some instances, people thus learn that the mechanism they have reached out to does not meet their expectations – the viability assessment does not match. Sometimes they also acquire new information during this step that points them to a mechanism that might be a better fit. For example, in Tunisia we heard of whistleblowers who had reached out to journalists or the official state body against corruption, INLUCC, only to learn that another mechanism (such as the ALAC) was better-suited to addressing their problem. In other cases, ALAC mechanism providers pointed people to INLUCC. The same is true for the multiple legal clinic approaches in Georgia, where there are active referrals among organisations specialising in particular cases. If and when a referral happens, people do not automatically contact the new mechanism, however. Instead,

they go back to the pre-engagement step and consider all information available, even if this is just a brief update of expectations.

Other signals of credibility are also explored during the first-contact phase. Many interviewees reported that, at first, they were unsure whether mechanism providers were credible. People feared that mechanism providers would be a “bunch of kids” or that they might be unrelatable bureaucrats and lawyers who did not care about resolving their grievance. Staff at the ALAC in Tunisia explained how they looked out for signs potential clients were mistaking their youthfulness for lack of expertise and immediately responded by adapting their tone and style of communication to be more “lawyer-like”. All stakeholders interviewed associated this kind of customisation with an increased likelihood that people would choose to use a mechanism.

### **Intangibles**

Going beyond the first-contact step and toward sustained engagement to eventually resolve a grievance takes more than synchronising information and updating expectations. Our findings suggest that any citizens deciding to engage in anti-corruption efforts are certainly conscious of the monetary aspects they might incur (loss or gain) – either by engaging and/or by enduring the grievance they have. However, there are also a number of other, often intangible, factors that start weighing equally heavy as citizens think through whether to engage. These factors include acknowledgement and recognition, vindication and validation, often led by the promise that they would be able to contribute to the common good by engaging in a mechanism. During the first-contact step, intangible factors become important, and citizens increasingly start weighing and reflecting on them as part of their cost-benefit analysis.

Numerous people interviewed in Tunisia and Georgia revealed that after initial contact with a mechanism they felt unsure about whether the people running it would be trustworthy, and whether they would feel comfortable sharing their grievances. Mechanism providers have a large role to play in putting these individuals at ease. Mechanism providers can mitigate questions and doubts about safety, for example, by being very personable and building strong relationships. This may not affect the objective assessment of safety, but it could satisfy an individual’s need to feel safe. The ALAC lawyers in Batumi, Georgia, for example, stressed the importance of actively listening to people’s stories, even to the parts that are not relevant to the case, as it makes the clients feel more comfortable and enables them to move to the next step. They also stressed the importance of being available to their clients for any follow-up or clarification they might need while deciding whether to take their case forward.

Another intangible citizens identified as important when pursuing either individual or collective grievance resolutions in the two countries is believing that they were among people who care and who share their conviction to find a solution. An ALAC client in Tunisia said in relation to taking his workplace corruption case to the ALAC that before coming to I-Watch he felt afraid and depressed about receiving negative reactions from his colleagues, and he felt stressed and pressured by his family not to blow the whistle. As soon as he contacted the ALAC, however, he felt secure and as though he had a friend. Also, in Tunisia, several ALAC clients referred to the staff as “family.”

Group identity and shared purpose also made a significant difference in the accounts we heard from people engaging in collective grievances. People acknowledged (without being prompted) that they felt a sense of belonging and trust as soon as they made personal contact with the people running the mechanism. In both countries, volunteers were willing to give up time and money to contribute to making the collective-action activities work, not just because of their hopes of finding a resolution to the corruption grievance, but explicitly with the aim of supporting the group.

These cases illustrate that mechanism providers and new peers engaged in anti-corruption activities can start to replace other trusted social intermediaries, such as family and peers. During the fieldwork, we learned that experienced mechanism providers can help provide and catalyse these intangibles, including by organising joint activities among citizens and by fostering a sense of joint identity through individual and empathetic communication alongside the engagement process.

In Georgia, for example, after taking on a property rights case, the Batumi regional ALAC staff visited the affected community to talk to all the aggrieved people, a gesture the community greatly appreciated.

### **Responsiveness**

Besides the mechanism provider responding with sympathy/empathy to a person’s needs, timely communication and adequate procedures are also important. It is in the eyes of the beholder what “timely” and “adequate” mean. For example, we heard of multiple instances where people in Tunisia perceived that being given formal and procedurally correct notices, as opposed to direct updates received by calling a person in the office, discouraged them from acting through

INLUCC. This was despite attempts by INLUCC officials to streamline and manage formal notices with little delay and according to a well-working process to meet citizens' expectations about responsiveness.

During the first-contact step, the discussion between citizens and mechanism providers often revolves around results. That said, people who engage with a mechanism do not generally abandon further engagement because they fear the mechanism might not be effective. Expectation management by mechanism providers – providing truthful information about the ins and outs of pursuing a particular resolution strategy – is a crucial step. In almost all cases looked at, individuals assessed the timeliness of expected results to be rather disappointing. However, the way in which mechanism providers communicated this information and the quality of their relationship made up for the “bad” news.

In sum, the set of information collected during the first-contact step – updated and revised expectations, the individual's experience of the intangibles encountered and their evaluation about the responsiveness of the mechanism – help the individual refine their subjective assessment of the perceived costs and benefits of engaging in a mechanism. People walk away without engaging in a mechanism if they assess the cost to be too high. Analysing the interviews conducted, we found this to be true in both countries and across all types of grievances.

### **Step 3: Sustained engagement**

The third and final step of the decision-making process is what most readers will intuitively associate with the phrase “acting against corruption” or “doing something about corruption”. It describes the continuing process by which citizens and mechanism providers decide to work together toward resolving a grievance. Examples range from joining an anti-corruption monitoring programme, to taking concrete steps to launch an investigation, to regularly meeting with fellow campaigners to organise, among many other possible actions. During this step, citizens engage repeatedly with the mechanism over time and continuously assess all of the above categories of information to decide whether to keep going or walk away.

As “getting to know each other” turns into “working together toward a solution”, people expect to see things moving in the right direction — whatever that might mean for them. Small wins seem to contribute toward sustaining engagement. In Tunisia, the ALAC's staff and clients



explained that procedural wins can help extend people's patience to obtain substantive results in what they anticipate can be a long process.

A common practice to move individual grievances forward, while nurturing patient engagement, is to file access to information (ATI) requests. Filing ATI requests and receiving information or, alternatively, taking ATI requests not answered by the authorities through the court system, appears to signal enough progress for citizens to continue engaging, even if it is a step people would not take on their own.

In Georgia, at the Batumi regional ALAC, interviewees reported that small wins inside and outside of the courts were sufficient to keep them engaged and hopeful about finding a resolution to their grievance. Wins inside the court system contributed to people believing in the capability of ALAC lawyers and the justice systems to make progress on their case. Being invited to speak on TV (or hearing allies speak on TV) contributed to them feeling better about their safety. Also, publicly communicating about the injustices they had suffered gave them a sense of relief.

One of the cases observed in Georgia concerned a man who, after being fired from his public-sector job for being a member of a political opposition party, had contacted the ALAC. He was, however, worried that his wife, who still worked with the government, would get fired in retaliation. The ALAC showcased the man's case in the media as a strategy to stop his wife being fired. Appearing in the media was seen as a small win for this client. It should be noted that this assessment will, of course, depend on the gravity of the grievance and on other individual circumstances and contextual factors. Not all whistleblowers want to go on national TV. It was telling, however, that in both countries there was a subset of individuals who perceived being given "a big microphone" as an important step in their fight for a resolution.

In summary, in this third step of the engagement model, citizens continue to assess the cost-benefit of their engagement through a continuous process of updating their expectations, updating the value of intangibles and by assessing responsiveness while also factoring in small wins. In other words, they continue to subjectively evaluate the benefits of staying engaged and taking action.

During steps 2 and 3, the people who matter in terms of influencing the likelihood of people engaging are different from the trusted sources consulted during step 1. All people engaging in grievance-redress mechanisms experienced and referenced an emerging feeling of shared

identity, trust and of belonging to a particular group of vested individuals during these stages. Staff across contexts and mechanisms confirm that this dynamic is key to keeping people involved. It appears that this shift in the relative importance of factors influencing an individual's propensity to engage largely offsets the lack of speed or progress people initially hope for. Beyond that, it also starts to affect how people assess the payoffs they expect by pursuing a particular anti-corruption engagement path.

To sum up, whereas the literature on citizen engagement in anti-corruption largely treats this decision-making process as a black box, we propose a three-step model to understanding how affected citizens decide to engage, making explicit the various factors that influence their decision-making. The key takeaway is that the notion of "viability" of a given mechanism is a subjective and dynamic concept, assessed by citizens on an individual basis.

Though there are distinct and identifiable steps in an individual's decision-making sequence, ultimately it is people who decide to either move ahead or walk away, based on their own cost-benefit approximation updated throughout the process. Individuals made these subjective calculations in both countries and in relation to different types of grievances.

The theory of change posits that there are two influences – one being the broader public mood and the other being the narrower social sphere surrounding the individual – that are beyond the direct control of the individual. Nonetheless, they impact significantly on how and why citizens engage.

## 3.2 The macro level and the role of the public mood

What aspects of the macro-level context affect how individuals assess opportunities to act against corruption? In other words, how do factors outside the direct control of an individual with a corruption-related grievance affect the likelihood of that individual choosing to act against corruption?

In this study – to address the question of how macro-contextual factors might be understood in terms of their effect on how individuals change their cost-benefit calculations over time – we build on the premise that anti-corruption is a contingent behaviour and that behaviour is influenced by perceived outcomes from one's efforts. In doing so, we try to strike a balance between conceiving of context as a structural condition that can limit activists, while also allowing room to account for agency. The assessment of whether or not context is benign (enough) to allow individuals to act against corruption lies in the eyes of the beholder of a grievance at any given point in time.

Previous contributions have argued that engagement in anti-corruption activities should be seen as a contingent behaviour influenced by – and depending on – what other people do (Fisman and Golden, 2017). In fact, an individual's expectations about what others will do in the same context has been singled out as one of the most important predictors of whether people will choose to act against corruption, by research using experimental data (Yap, 2013; 2016) as well as research on corruption and collective action (Persson et al, 2013; Bauhr and Grimes, 2014; Marquette and Peiffer, 2015a).

Another prominent finding in the anti-corruption literature is that people are unlikely to take action against corruption where corruption is entrenched (Peiffer and Alvarez, 2014; Bauhr, 2015; Bauhr and Grimes, 2014; Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013; Marquette, 2012; Gatti et al, 2003; Marquette and Peiffer, 2015a; Persson et al, 2013; Johnston and Kpundeh, 2002; Hough and Verdenicci, 2015). This touches on the importance of people perceiving that it is possible to make a difference in the fight against corruption. Mungiu-Pippidi (2013), for example, argues that people's behaviour, including with a view to their anti-corruption engagement, is shaped by their expectations about the future consequences of their actions. Promoting a sense of efficacy around anti-corruption mechanisms can therefore mobilise individuals and help build a critical mass of engaged individuals. This line of reasoning sits neatly alongside the aforementioned premise that engagement in anti-corruption depends on

perceived benefits exceeding perceived costs.

Finally, previous research looking at the determinants of citizen action against corruption has treated context mostly as a series of structural variables in a country, from levels of perceived corruption to various socioeconomic variables, including the presence of democratic institutions, an impartial and efficient judiciary, adherence to the rule of law, and a free and competitive media (Alam, 1995). Arkhede Olsson's 2014 study of the determinants of anti-corruption activism looked at a number of institutional and political variables, including economic growth, compulsory voting, presidentialism, proportional systems, multipartyism and majority status but found none of these variables to be statistically significant in predicting political participation.

Our approach takes a dynamic view of the macro context, expressed as "public mood." By looking at countries' anti-corruption histories, we propose that citizen engagement can change over time as people gradually absorb and align their behaviour in accordance with the public mood. In short: if the average person in country X believes that they (or someone like them) can make a difference in the fight against corruption today, then people in country X are more likely to engage in the fight today.

Support for this proposition can be found in some countries' experiences of anti-corruption engagements. In the case of Brazil, for example, more than 2 million citizens recently acted against perceived high levels of corruption by signing a proposal to pass new anti-corruption legislation. Many of them also used social media and took to the streets to counteract an attempt by legislators to hijack the project and distort its purpose. A change in the public mood must have affected these individuals to suddenly choose to engage. One plausible explanation for this spur in activity is that the people involved chose to mobilise because they perceived a level of optimism and a sense that it was worth engaging. A change in the public mood from a formerly more cautious position might have contributed to changing their internal cost-benefit assessment in favour of engaging.

Transparency International is a leader in capturing and disseminating data about macro-level perceptions around citizen action against corruption. We have used the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB), and in particular people's answers to the survey question "Can ordinary people make a difference in the fight against corruption?" to understand whether the general trajectory of a country might be in favour, or not, of increased citizen engagement. The data provides a good proxy of the prevailing public mood as it synthesises voices on the ground, and aggregates

them for each country. Using the past two rounds of GCB data (2013 and 2015/2016) we can follow the change in a country's public mood over time. Based on this variable we then group countries into three categories: "hopeful", "disillusioned" and "apathetic". Tunisia falls into the hopeful group and Georgia falls into the disillusioned category (see the annex for a more detailed explanation of these categories).

A country is hopeful if people perceive a recent positive change in ordinary people's ability to make a difference in the fight against corruption. Anti-corruption advocates have wind in their sails and anti-corruption efforts can move forward swiftly.

A country is disillusioned if people perceive a recent lessening of ordinary people's ability to effectively combat corruption. In this context, people, on average, have lost hope. Because individual citizens expect others to not act against corruption, they too refrain from doing so. In this situation, anti-corruption engagement by citizens may dry up as people give up.

A state of apathy means there is no wind in the sails for any meaningful anti-corruption engagement. If there is no change in the average perception of what the collective can do, people become apathetic and are unlikely to take action. An apathetic context can also stem from the perception that others – particularly the government – are effective in fighting corruption. In this case, however, apathy is not so much a sense of action against corruption being pointless rather than it being needless (Karklins, 2005).

During the fieldwork stage, we set out to discover whether the public mood indeed influences people's choice about whether to engage against corruption and, if it does, whether it does so as proposed by the deductively developed theory of change. Before and during fieldwork, we spoke with anti-corruption experts in each country to verify that the country categories (hopeful, apathetic, disillusioned) made sense, and that the two countries were correctly grouped. Insights obtained in both Tunisia and Georgia support the suggestion that the public mood influences people's choices about whether it is worthwhile to act against corruption. It also has a bearing on the mechanisms deemed viable.

All personal accounts from the Tunisians interviewed touched upon how their calculations about whether and how to act against corruption changed after the 2011 revolution. The level of optimism felt played a big role. As argued by an I-Watch team member, the revolution added a boost, which has since started to fade. However, there is still some leftover hope. The "hopeful"

trajectory implied by the GCB data analysis for Tunisia is mirrored in the behaviour and beliefs of citizens and the growing availability of mechanisms. For example, the latest GCB data shows that “reporting corruption” is perceived to be the single most effective action that people can take to fight corruption. That said, there appears to be variation within Tunisia with regard to the public mood and the resulting level of engagement in relation to fighting corruption. For example, as an I-Watch volunteer explained, she perceived people in her hometown to be apathetic and not caring about trying to induce change, unlike in Tunis. As she explained, when she started engaging with I-Watch, she first needed to “fake” an attitude of hope and reprogramme herself to seeing things in a better light.

In Georgia, citizen engagement in anti-corruption also needs to be understood in terms of the opportunities and barriers created by the public mood. The case of Georgia highlights that the public mood is based on people’s perception, which is not necessarily aligned with expert opinions. On the one hand, the country has been labelled as a “world’s top reformer” by the World Bank and has had its successful anti-corruption reforms chronicled by the same organisation (World Bank, 2012) and scholars alike (Kupatadze, 2017). On the other hand, people in general do not feel as if they can make a dent in corruption. Findings from the latest round of the GCB, for example, show that “doing nothing” followed by “refusing to pay a bribe” are perceived to be the most effective actions people can take to fight corruption. It also showed that engaging against corruption, including joining or supporting an organisation, signing a petition or joining a protest march, is perceived to be largely ineffective.

As suspected, we found that the “disillusioned” trajectory implied by the data analysis for Georgia is indeed mirrored by a sense of pessimism, the absence of a multitude of mechanisms and a general belief among people that they are unable to effectively fight corruption. However, there are nuances to these factors. On the one hand, there is general agreement that petty corruption is not much of an issue (anymore) and that the executive and the judicial branches are credible players that are able to effectively deal with corruption cases related to service delivery.

However, this reality is now accepted and therefore constitutes the new base line on which expectations are set. As a Transparency International member of staff remarked, while early post-revolution anti-corruption efforts were successful, Georgia has struggled to move to the next level and to effectively fight grand corruption. Although there is no deterioration in terms of corruption, people do not have a sense of positive change any more. As such, some big wins in terms of tackling grand corruption are needed to bring more hopefulness and enthusiasm back

into anti-corruption. The prevailing sense of pessimism then concerns grand corruption and abuses of power at the highest level. Various organisations and journalists interviewed, as well as the individuals engaged in anti-corruption mechanisms, uniformly displayed disbelief that any mechanism or dynamic would be able to counter the entrenched interests of and behaviour by the elites and parties that are perceived to be the vehicles for personal interest.

Looking at context through the lens of public mood opens up interesting avenues: grouping countries according to their trajectory of where the public mood is moving can give external actors an entry point to better understand the trajectory of a country over time and help them assess whether and to what degree citizen action might be harnessed. Using the GCB data in this dynamic form provides a valuable indication about whether organisations can expect to find a multitude of citizen engagement-focused anti-corruption mechanisms in a country, or a lack of them. It can also help to provide insights into whether citizens are easily hooked onto a mechanism.

The analysis may thus help to define realistic expectations about what types of actions and results may be possible in a particular setting at a specific point in time. Organisations could opt, for example, to design strategies and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems that pay attention to cross-national context variations. This kind of information would help to customise lessons from other contexts by improving cross-context learning (Guerzovich and Poli, 2017; Guerzovich et al, 2017).

### 3.3 The meso level and the role of social mediation

To recap the discussion so far: People's decision to act against corruption depends on their assessment as to what constitutes a viable mechanism for them. They refine this assessment gradually and over time by moving through different analytically discernible steps during which they amass and evaluate various types of information and compare that information against their expectations. This gradual journey is influenced by a variety of contextual factors. Instead of attempting to isolate particular factors (that might not be comparable), a good proxy to capture the influence of these factors is the prevailing public mood.

Linking these two levels provides an opportunity to connect findings from two strands of the literature that inform anti-corruption work more broadly — one focused on macro-contextual factors and one looking at micro-level dynamics. However, making this case in the abstract may not be sufficient to move the conversation to a space helpful to practitioners, their decision-making needs and to make the insights actionable. What then is the mechanism by which individuals translate contextual factors into information they use for subsequent decision-making?

We propose this link to be “social mediation”: the way in which bits of information a person collects during the different steps of the engagement process are put into context through the direct or indirect influence of friends, family, peers, trusted institutions and organisations, or other institutions. Social mediation became a salient factor during the fieldwork stage of this project. The accounts we heard in Tunisia and Georgia cannot be understood without paying attention to this factor.

We found that a small group of people and organisations around the person with a grievance play an outsized role in the process where the individual fits together bits of information to assess the cost and benefits of pursuing a mechanism. In other words, the assessment of costs and benefits is influenced heavily by the opinion of others. As such, social mediation is the connecting tissue between individual decision-making and the contextual factors that influence the cost-benefit calculations by any individual. Notably, social mediation occurs during all three steps of individual decision-making and changes while progressing along the decision-making chain.

The social mediation factor ties in well with the aforementioned literature that pointed out that



taking action against corruption is a contingent behaviour that depends on what other people do or believe to be right (Persson et al, 2013; Bauhr and Grimes, 2014; Marquette and Peiffer, 2015a; Yap, 2013; 2016). Social mediation also ties in with findings from research on social movements about the importance of shared identities. Marco Giugni (2004), for example, found that most people join collective action through interpersonal ties, while Shaazka Beyerle's 2014 case studies of citizen action against corruption highlight the importance of connectedness to grassroots action – that in most cases, the catalyst for civic action was already connected, or cultivated deliberately, through relationships with regular people and through one-to-one interactions or social networking. Social mediation also links to the wider study of behaviour and behaviour change and the role of norms. Alice Evans, for example, stresses the role of norms and how norm perceptions play a role in people taking action (Evans, 2017). And Todd Rogers, Noah Goldstein and Craig Fox conclude in their review of evidence about strategies that benefit collective action, “The motivational force of social mobilisation [...] and its overall impact is enhanced by the fact that people are embedded within social networks.”

During the fieldwork stage, when asking people how they collected information about different mechanisms, they consistently pointed out that they assessed information and its implications by assigning weight to the opinions and knowledge of others around them. Interview partners said they triangulated information with the stories, beliefs and assessments of family, colleagues and friends, or – at the very least – anticipated how these people would react. In fact, in some instances people gave up on the engagement path they were on because of people in their social circle's opinions. In Tunisia, for example, an individual who approached the ALAC with a construction-related corruption grievance got cold feet and decided not to pursue due to fear about how neighbours would react. Interviews with mechanism providers backed this up.

Trusted organisations can also play the role of social mediator. For example, an interview with a media personality can make a mechanism more viable for those who trust that person. A referral to a different, more suitable mechanism, made by a trusted organisation, can break down barriers. In Tunisia, the ALAC and the state-led counterpart, INLUCC, often make referrals to one another, lending legitimacy to the other mechanism.

In Tunisia, this practice is widespread and is known by the Arabic saying “someone who knows someone who referred”. What the configuration of social mediators/influencers looks like varies on a case-by-case basis. The point is that the people who play this function matter, even if they are not always accounted for in assumptions.

One key insight generated during the fieldwork was that as individuals move step by step through the engagement process, people whose opinions they value and trust may gradually change. Family, peers and other trusted networks do stop mattering, but mechanism providers and new groups of reference points gradually gain in importance and take on a more significant role. Sometimes new groups that build on a shared identity have a stronger pull than old (trusted) sources, especially for people engaging to solve collective grievances. In other instances, new (trusted) sources build informal coalitions with the existing network of reference points, with transactional relationships being more prevalent in the case of individual grievances.

The configuration of social mediators can change over time for various reasons. In some instances, the old social influencers remain the most trusted source but “compete with” or reinforce the opinions of people who are part of the journey. Savvy mechanism providers realise the social nature of decision-making and make sure to inform and sometimes make allies of influencers who may get in the way.

In Tunisia, ALAC staff asked family members and friends to join in information-sharing sessions as a way to get decision-makers and their key people in the room at the same time together. The goal seems to be to get buy-in from these potential supporters (or avoid information getting lost in translation when communicated with others).

Sometimes, the new social relationships people acquire as they consider doing something about corruption gain salience over old ones. New shared identities develop, which might provide a stronger pull than old relationships. As mentioned earlier, there was a common viewpoint among election-monitoring volunteers in Tunisia that the friends they made as volunteers became an important group of trustworthy sources for validating action. As one volunteer said, “I have made 10 or more friends through volunteering; we have become a friends group. We protect each other and we grow together.” This finding is strongly mirrored in the case of Georgia and the community of volunteers pursuing Guerilla Gardening.

While the type of corruption-related grievance does not seem to play an important role in determining the general steps citizens take against corruption, social mediation does seem to have varying effects based on whether the grievance is individual or collective. Interviews suggest that the relevance of social mediation via new shared identities is greater when individuals seek to do something about collective grievances rather than individual grievances. Examples of

election monitors in Tunisia and Guerilla Gardeners in Georgia put value on being within a group of friends in addition to making headway in resolving their grievances.

In fact, some individuals doubted the efficacy of the mechanism they were engaged in but still said they would continue working for the cause based on there being trust among the members and a shared sense of identity. However, there were also a few cases where people's self-ascribed identity did not match that of the group, which influenced their decision to walk away.

Taking the role of social mediation seriously opens up new ways of thinking through and evaluating anti-corruption strategies and programming for citizen engagement. There is much room for manoeuvre and creativity on the part of anti-corruption practitioners when they open up to the idea of being social mediators and seeing their clients and followers as social entities. Anti-corruption practitioners in both Georgia and Tunisia who commented on the findings pointed out that conceptualising something they were intuitively following was helpful. As one Transparency International country-office staff member said, "Learning about the role of social mediation in informing people's decision to contact an anti-corruption mechanism to denounce an individual grievance can have implications for the communication strategy through which the organisation disseminates that mechanism."

## 4. Conclusion

This report was commissioned to better understand how and why citizens choose to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms and to propose – based on conceptual and empirical insights – a theory of change that can guide future work. To unpack and test relevant assumptions, we collected data from diverse groups of citizens in Tunisia and Georgia who have experienced corruption-related grievances and decided to take action. We questioned and analysed their experiences through a theoretical lens drawing on previous research from within and beyond the two countries. Iterating between theory and practice to better investigate, frame and understand how citizens engage allowed us to come up with a theory of change that has explanatory value beyond the specific instances of action observed in the two countries.

The findings add to the existing literature on citizen engagement in four ways:

- First, the process through which people decide whether to act against corruption has been largely confined to the analytical black box until now. We show that process matters and that it is worthwhile and possible to investigate causal mechanisms to better understand how citizen engagement works. The theory of change presented is a promising start for improving our collective understanding and can provide a starting point to build on for researchers and practitioners alike.
- Second, we find support for the proposition that context matters and explain how and why researchers and practitioners should not ignore macro factors. Understanding the role and effects of context on individual decision-making requires operationalising these factors, and we propose categorising the trajectory of where the public mood is moving to be a useful proxy. However, more attention needs to be paid to intra-country variations, including to geography and other structural variables, such as differences across socioeconomic groups – a task we were unable to systematically research in this initiative.
- Third, while the type of grievance people experience (individual vs. collective) matters to a limited degree, it is not as important a determinant as we had originally expected. The logic of how and why citizens engage and how they move from grievance to action is fundamentally the same, regardless of the grievance they experience.
- Lastly, social mediation is a critical feature in determining whether and how citizens engage in anti-corruption mechanisms. Trusted individuals communicate and translate

contextual knowledge and assessments about the benefits and detriments of context in ways that allow individuals to reach decisions and arrive at important tipping points.

The main output of this project is a three-level theory of change that illustrates why and how people with corruption-related grievances decide to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms, the process they go through, and the ways the wider and more immediate contexts people find themselves in have a bearing on their decisions.

The theory of change proposes that, at the micro level, any person's decision to act depends on their gradual and highly subjective decision-making journeys, during which they assess what a viable mechanism is to them. This process has three steps: pre-engagement, first contact, and sustained engagement. People need and use different types of information during each step to decide whether to move to the next step or walk away.

Considering the macro level, individuals take cues from the public mood about whether people in general think they have the power to make a difference in the fight against corruption. This influences their decision to act or not. An optimistic environment lowers subjective barriers to engagement, while in pessimistic and apathetic environments, the range of perceived obstacles for action grows. Interestingly, what matters is not so much whether the public mood is objectively good or bad at a given point in time (or compared to other countries), but how the mood is evolving dynamically over time.

Lastly, considering the meso level, people fit together new and old sources of information and make sense of both anti-corruption mechanisms and the public mood, relying on the opinions, beliefs and experiences of others they know and trust. "Social mediation" helps us understand how people translate, prioritise and focus information toward what appears to be most important for them in a given situation.

One important insight is that as individuals move from one step to another in their journey toward taking action, the people whose opinions they value and trust may change. This dynamic opens up opportunities for mechanism providers to more effectively influence decision-making by understanding and fostering both transactional and identity-based relationships with potential clients and their influencers. Mechanisms that strengthen collective identity-building seem to have a stronger pull, as observed in the case of collective grievances.

Macro- and meso-level factors reinforce and interact with the micro level to influence behaviour. It is through looking at a combination of these processes and levels of action that we can unpack and understand the diversity of anti-corruption experiences and people's propensity to take action.

Having focused this project on reaching conceptual and definitional clarity about how citizens decide to engage, and teasing out the causal mechanism that describes how people move from a grievance to action, we now encourage others to build on this theory of change in future projects. Equally – and as this was not the focus of this initiative – we encourage others to inquire into the link between citizen engagement and anti-corruption results.

Finally, the focus on opening up the black box around processes has charted a way for practitioners to understand how citizens engage in anti-corruption mechanisms in more detail, giving them a tool to reflect and possibly rethink their strategies and tools for citizen engagement.

## 5. Recommendations

Assumptions that underpin anti-corruption strategies and resultant programming have implications for how we research, design, implement, monitor, course correct and evaluate work in the field. They also have important implications for how we choose to invest the limited financial and nonfinancial resources at our disposal. In the case of citizen engagement strategies, this includes the social and political capital organisations have at their disposal.

Assumptions built into our theories of change reflect bets about the future rather than certainties about how change happens (Valters, 2014). Whether in global or local work, or at their intersection, we need to create opportunities and processes to try, adapt, reflect and iterate on our assumptions as new information emerges and contexts change. For this reason, among others, we are comfortable presenting our findings as statements of plausibility that should be further analysed and iterated upon through both research and practice, linking monitoring, evaluation, research and learning to action.

Based on the findings of this report, there are two general recommendations presented here, and sets of specific recommendations for anti-corruption organisations operating primarily at domestic and global levels.

**Recommendation #1** (overarching)

**Assumptions that guide citizen engagement programming need to better account for, and ultimately integrate, insights from a global and comparative perspective alongside insights and tacit knowledge from the local level.**

Because anti-corruption work is inherently political and complex, local experiences add a lot to the field's collective understanding of how particular reform processes play out in specific contexts. Local knowledge offers the best chance to explore how anti-corruption efforts can be implemented most effectively. Yet, and as laid out in this study, the use of country groupings (hopeful, disillusioned and apathetic) seems to offer a productive approach to help the field eschew the implication that every country is unique (Levy, 2011; Guerzovich and Rosenzweig,

2013). Making a conscious effort to link insights generated across levels is an important move to ensure that anti-corruption organisations consider all knowledge available, which will help to improve cross-country learning and bolster analytical leverage, including by making future research and resultant programming more fruitful and effective.

**Recommendation #2** (overarching)

**Attention must be paid to how context influences and interacts with processes, rather than looking at context or anti-corruption mechanisms in isolation.**

Processes are the bread and butter of practitioners' daily work, as they catalyse and nurture citizen engagement. Yet, anti-corruption mechanisms do not exist in isolation. Credible causal explanations of how political phenomena unfold can only occur if and when researchers are attentive to the interaction between causal mechanisms and context (Falleti and Lynch, 2009). This means there is value in mapping holistically and in great detail how different mechanisms work, how they evolve and how different contextual factors shape the to better understand how strategies can be most effective in stimulating and harnessing citizen engagement.

Below is a list of additional recommendations for domestic actors interested in harnessing citizen engagement at the country level as well as international actors whose role may be to support domestic actors and/or to advocate and foster citizen engagement strategies at global levels.

## 5.1 Recommendations for domestic actors

Domestic actors are most often at the frontline grappling with concrete questions around how to fine-tune specific mechanisms to foster citizen engagement in a specific context and in response to a particular set of corruption-related grievances. Here are key recommendations and a list of questions that can support domestic organisations to reflect on their efforts to promote citizen engagement:

**Recommendation #3** (micro level)

**Domestic organisations should engage with the logic that underpins citizen engagement on specific questions, in a particular context. The aim must be to identify what "viability" means**



**for an individual throughout the different steps of the citizen engagement process, to tailor and adapt their strategies to address citizens' needs.**

Citizens discover iteratively whether and how a particular mechanism is viable to them. For domestic organisations, this means exploring, testing and reflecting on what approaches might work best to address citizens' expectations about accessibility, safety, relevance and credibility, and – later on – questions about responsiveness, trust, shared identity and small wins.

To support domestic actors in making the above findings actionable, here is a list of questions they might find valuable to answer to clarify whether further experimentation, tactical tweaks or alternative strategies might help bolster their efforts to activate citizens and to help them fine-tune existing strategies. The list is not exhaustive and is meant to kick-start continued exploration. It does invite reflection without requiring a time-consuming or formalistic approach.

Relevance	Reflection questions
<p><b>Pre-engagement step</b></p>	<p>What is a/the corruption problem citizens want to solve? Why?</p> <p>How does the mechanism we employ address the problem citizens have?</p> <p>How might citizens access/seek grievance resolution outside our organisation? Why?</p> <p>Is our effort in addressing a particular grievance feasible and credible? Why?</p> <p>How can we bolster and communicate our credibility?</p> <p>How can we communicate the relevance of our mechanism?</p> <p>What are direct or indirect safety concerns citizens have when accessing our mechanism? Why?</p> <p>How can we enhance measures to ensure safety or mitigate concerns?</p>

	<p>How can we make accessing our mechanism as easy as possible?</p> <p>How can we track citizens' evolving needs and expectations over time?</p> <p>Do we track/measure whether our approach addresses these expectations?</p> <p>Do we deliberately pause every [x] months and reflect on our efforts?</p> <p>Do we consciously adapt our approach when necessary?</p> <p>Do we systematically track, measure, reflect and adapt periodically?</p>
<p><b>First-contact step</b></p>	<p>What expectations do citizens have when they communicate with us for the first time? Why?</p> <p>How do we communicate the relevance, credibility, accessibility and safety of our mechanism during a first contact?</p> <p>What are the expectations citizens have with regard to follow-up? Why?</p> <p>How do we make sure we are responsive while remaining credible and reliable?</p> <p>How do we ensure trust is built between citizens and staff?</p> <p>How do we ensure trust is built between citizens and other mechanism users?</p> <p>What are alternative strategies to increase the level of trust?</p> <p>Do other programmes, initiatives or organisations in our ecosystem contribute to building trust?</p> <p>Do we track and test whether our approach addresses citizens' expectations during the first-contact step phase?</p>

	<p>Do we deliberately pause every [x] months and reflect on our efforts?</p> <p>Do we consciously adapt our approach when necessary?</p> <p>Do we systematically track, measure, reflect and adapt periodically?</p>
<p><b>Sustained engagement</b></p>	<p>What expectations do citizens have when they decide to engage in a mechanism offered?</p> <p>How do we continue to listen to citizens' needs and expectations?</p> <p>How do we respond to their needs and expectations?</p> <p>How do we continue to build trust between citizens, staff and other users?</p> <p>How do we inquire about, and possibly leverage, the role of friends, family and peers to strengthen ongoing engagement?</p> <p>How do we communicate about the small (or big) wins achieved?</p> <p>How do we communicate with other mechanism providers in the field and seek to strengthen our relationship?</p> <p>Do we make the most of linkages between existing programmes and coalitions of anti-corruption actors to build trust? Do we foster a sense of shared identity?</p> <p>How do we follow up with past mechanism users to strengthen our network?</p> <p>Do we pause and reflect on our efforts?</p> <p>Do we consciously adapt our approach when necessary?</p> <p>Do we continue to systematically track, reflect and adapt periodically?</p>

**Recommendation #4** (macro level)

**Domestic actors should use contextual insights about the trajectory of the public mood to inform how they influence strategy-making and programming developed by external actors, and/or programming developed internally (but involving external support).**

A key challenge involving domestic actors and global-level organisations remains the tension between what local organisations know is useful at a particular point in time (contextual and local insights) vis-a-vis the needs global organisations have in justifying funding and programming decisions through narratives based on cross-country comparative data. Domestic organisations can help steer and enhance these processes by offering ways to enrich cross-country data with insights from their particular context.

**Recommendation #5** (macro level)

**Domestic actors should use data and insights about the direction of the public mood to inform strategies and programming beyond concrete mechanisms.**

Most organisations working on anti-corruption undertake multiple tasks beyond providing a particular grievance-resolution mechanism. These include, for example, advocacy and awareness-raising activities and providing other services. Incorporating insights about the trajectory of the public mood can help organisations tailor other programmes and activities to enhance citizens' sense of political efficacy. It can also support norm-building and norm-reinforcement that can contribute to enhanced uptake of grievance mechanisms in the long run.

**Recommendation #6** (meso level)

**Domestic actors should tap into and leverage social mediation mechanisms as they try to foster citizen engagement through their communication strategies.**

This means understanding and further exploring the role that friends, family and peers have in influencing awareness and the perceptions of individuals toward using available mechanisms. It also means thinking about targeting communications and outreach mechanisms not just toward potential clients or users but toward the entire ecosystem they inhabit. Two specific entry points

stand out:

**Recommendation #6a** (meso level)

**Domestic actors should consider engaging with specific individuals who might be able to influence a person's decision to take action, determining whether and how it might be possible – and ethical – to do so.**

In the case of mobilising people around a collective grievance, domestic organisations should consider whether and how they can strengthen the relationships between different users and how they might best foster a sense of shared identity.

**Recommendation #6b** (meso level)

**Domestic actors should prioritise keeping abreast of developments in the ecosystem of related grievance-redress mechanisms, and lend legitimacy to other mechanisms that might prove helpful in addressing users' grievances.**

Systematically scouting the landscape and understanding the ecosystem in which other organisations are operating will help strengthen and maintain links to these organisations. There is value in referring individuals to other mechanisms when they are more suitable. It contributes to coalition-building across actors and strengthens the field's overall chances to engage people in anti-corruption mechanisms. Tapping into an existing referral system and/or using other organisations' credibility and reach to widen the sphere of influence appears to be an effective and low-cost way of using the power of social mediation.

## 5.2 Recommendations for international actors

International actors often play a different role from those involved at the domestic level. Rather than staffing and maintaining grievance-resolution mechanisms themselves, they support actors at the country level through funding, advocacy at the global level and by nudging along the research agenda.

A number of recommendations targeted to global-level actors can be made from the findings of

this initiative:

**Recommendation #7** (micro level)

**International actors should seek to create opportunities for domestic actors to iteratively test assumptions about citizen engagement and encourage them to adapt strategies and mechanisms through processes of (data-driven) reflection and learning.**

One way of doing this is to prioritise the learning element of Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) strategies geared toward enhancing the decision-making ability of domestic actors, rather than focusing on monitoring and evaluation for accountability purposes.

**Recommendation #8** (micro level)

**International actors should fund additional, comparative, cross-country research into the factors that catalyse citizens to take action throughout the different phases of their decision-making process, especially with regard to the functions mechanism providers can perform to support citizens to take action.**

Research should look beyond the body of anti-corruption literature, build on insights from the ground and theories and methodologies employed in the broader field of social sciences to push the frontier of our knowledge and challenge our assumptions.

**Recommendation #9** (micro level)

**International actors should encourage domestic actors to explore, test, describe and learn about the functions particular mechanisms fulfill in a specific context, instead of directing their attention to the form particular mechanisms (should) have.**

One important implication is to create realistic expectations about when and how global programming and lessons from one country can successfully inform thinking in practice in other countries.

**Recommendation #10** (macro level)

**International actors should prioritise experimenting with new approaches to utilise**

**comparative cross-country data by understanding it to be a proxy for dynamic processes over time. They can use the resulting insights to adjust their strategies and MEL systems to consider medium-term political histories and the implications these might have on citizen engagement strategies.**

Specific GCB data can serve as a proxy for context variables and can tell us about the public's beliefs with regard to corruption, allowing for rule-of-thumb predictions about whether a particular context might allow for certain intervention strategies. Grouping countries according to their trajectories can help to provide insights to better understand which local partners are likely to face similar obstacles and barriers when applying similar approaches to harnessing citizen action. These insights can inform what reasonable expectations of success look like to different partners in global programmes and campaigns. In addition, the information can inform external partners' efforts to tailor support and/or to identify opportunities for peer-learning strategies across contexts to strengthen domestic actors.

**Recommendation #11** (macro level)

**International actors should advocate for – and fund – research and opportunities that help domestic organisations feed information about critical contextual insights and experiences back into international efforts geared to enhance citizen-engagement strategies.**

The process of bridging and interpreting operational processes that take place simultaneously at global and local levels requires coordination and multiple feedback loops from partners at all levels, especially those who operate mechanisms on the ground.

**Recommendation #12** (meso level)

**International actors should take the role of social mediation seriously and invite new ways of thinking about, planning for, supporting and evaluating programming for citizen engagement that incorporates this insight.**

Such thinking can and should build on knowledge emerging from within and outside the anti-corruption field to better understand the role of infomediaries, the role of norms and social movement dynamics in general. In addition, the social mediation lens provides a new rationale for distinguishing between campaigns and programmes that seek to foster action with regard to

either individual or collective grievances. These distinctions should be further explored and unpacked in both research and practical assessments of work going forward.



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## 7. Annex

### 7.1 Background

Anti-corruption organisations, including Transparency International, invest heavily in citizen-centered anti-corruption mechanisms based on the assumption these are a key factor in empowering citizens to act:

*“When people are affected by corruption and have access to/are offered viable mechanisms and opportunities to act against it they are indeed more likely to get engaged and do something about it.”*

This assumption underpins many of the project-level strategies to advance the fight against corruption, not just from Transparency International. Whether and to what degree the assumption holds true, however, is largely unexplored and uncorroborated.

This report is the result of a collaboration between Global Integrity and the Transparency International Secretariat. It seeks to question and unpack the assumption to propose a theory of change for future proposals and projects. We decided early on that aiming for a simple “yes” or “no” in response to whether the assumption holds true would be overly ambitious and ultimately unhelpful to practitioners.<sup>9</sup>

Instead, we decided to focus on exploring the logic of how and why citizens engage when they do. Inquiring into this logic and teasing out what it means neither validates nor negates the assumption *per se*. Instead, it provides a necessary building block upon which we can develop an empirical strategy for testing the assumption.

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<sup>9</sup> A number of reasons stopped us from attempting a fuller assessment of the assumption, including 1) The relatively small amount of resources budgeted for this project; 2) Feasibility: Any attempt to solely focus on empirically assessing the assumption would have required a readily available and solid theoretical foundation, which does not exist; 3) In the absence of a solid theoretical framework, we could have simplified the conceptual scope of the assumption. That would have rendered any finding too specific to actually speak to the overall assumption. In turn, that would not have provided more clarity to practitioners about how these findings then apply to their situations.



## 7.2 Research strategy

### 7.2.1 Research question

Our first challenge in unpacking Transparency International's assumption was to disaggregate the assumption into a research question we could credibly tackle, given the state of previous research and the resources available. A period of deliberation with the Transparency International Secretariat followed, during which we looked for a way to identify a research focus that could help us bring conceptual clarity to the assumption, be useful for various practitioners and be doable on a limited budget. As a result, we chose to concentrate on one research scenario in which people have been affected by corruption and have decided to act against it.

Focusing on positive cases is in line with the "positive deviance" approach, in which the starting point is to look for outliers who have succeeded against the odds. In other words, we gain an understanding of how problems are solved by learning from those who have actually overcome them (Pascale et al., 2010). This choice also relates to findings from previous literature that those who have a greater stake and are more personally affected by corruption are more likely to act against it (Transparency International, 2016). As such, our research focus presupposes a concrete and identifiable corruption-related problem that an individual attempts to solve.

In turn, we chose to focus our attention on two different types of corruption problems:

- a) where an individual has experienced or witnessed corruption and suffered wrongs and/or experienced grievances in a highly personal way
- b) instances of corruption at the collective level, where citizens have not experienced a direct grievance but suffer wrongs because corruption deprives society of common goods or services<sup>10</sup>

Our primary research question, which, as described above, evolved away from Transparency International's assumption, was:

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<sup>10</sup> This distinction is in line with the research on citizen engagement in anti-corruption endeavours conducted by ANTICORRP, which distinguishes the role of the citizen as (a) a direct victim and witness of corruption, and thus a potential refuser, reporter, litigant or whistleblower on corrupt acts, and as (b) a potential volunteer in social accountability initiatives, donating his or her time, expertise and voice to help monitor budget spending, lifestyles, public works projects, etc. (Zinnbauer and Srinivasan, 2017).

*For a person with a corruption grievance – experienced at the individual (highly personal) or collective (societal) level – who has access to/is offered viable mechanisms and opportunities to take action against the grievance, what affects the likelihood of him/her taking action to solve his/her particular corruption-related problem?*

The specific entry points to answering this overall research question were the following three sub-questions:

1. How do people decide to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms, and how do they come to assess a mechanism to be “viable”? *Question concerning the micro level.*
2. How do factors outside the direct control of an individual with a corruption-related grievance affect the likelihood of that individual choosing to act against corruption? *Question concerning the macro level.*
3. How do individuals translate contextual factors into information they use for subsequent decision-making? *Question concerning the meso level.*

To be clear, our intended objective was to gain a better understanding of the processes by which a corruption-related grievance leads to the aggrieved person taking action against the corruption. Whether these actions result in solving the corruption-related problem or not, or contribute to making a positive dent in corruption, is beyond the scope of this initiative.

## 7.2.2 Conceptual framework

To gain a better understanding about when, why and how a person affected by corruption decides to do something about it, we chose to develop a conceptual framework, allowing us to hone in on, and refine, a theoretical explanation to help us gain conceptual clarity.<sup>11</sup> Choosing a qualitative research methodology, the conceptual framework helped us to approach the research question by focusing on a limited set of relevant factors as opposed to adding a large number of potentially relevant independent variables to a regression equation. This strategy seemed particularly relevant given the inability of existing research to provide insights that reformers can easily use when designing, implementing, course correcting and evaluating their citizen engagement strategies (Transparency International, 2016).

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<sup>11</sup> While the essence of the conceptual framework is ingested into this report, we will provide the original 15-page version upon request.

The conceptual framework had the purpose of:

1. transparently unpacking the original assumption, factoring in how the Transparency International Secretariat might conceive of the different elements within it, and having a first go at hypothesising the interplay between context, individual-level processes and the different variables that might have a bearing on the assumption
2. developing an initial version of a plausible theory of change, paying attention to what individuals' paths to engagement might look like (micro level), and how contextual factors influence this
3. defining and refining our research strategy to guide the empirical phase of the project

For this exercise we built on a literature review prepared by the Transparency International Secretariat (Transparency International, 2016), and a review of select evaluations of Transparency International's projects shared by the Secretariat. We complemented this with our own review of the literature on grievances in the anti-corruption field, as well as other bodies of work that could help support our thinking. We drew on our collective experience working with the broader anti-corruption and governance literature as well as reviews about approaches to behavioural change in development, social accountability, citizen engagement and participation in democratic processes, and social movements. Last but not least, we assigned focus and direction to the framework based on a series of in-depth conversations with staff at the Transparency International Secretariat and a range of conversations with Transparency International chapter representatives attending the five-day ALAC workshop in Berlin in December 2016.

The resulting conceptual framework made explicit a series of theory-informed, testable propositions. These were:

1. Engagement is a process and not a one-off decision and the existing empirical literature on citizen action against corruption oversimplifies and under-specifies a complex, multilevel process through which citizen engagement with anti-corruption mechanisms happens. In addition, keeping the process confined to an analytical black box prevents us from understanding the effect of other variables and processes on engagement.
  - Testing the assumption: What does this process look like?

2. The type of corruption grievance people experience matters (individual vs. collective) in determining how people engage.
  - Testing the assumption: Do we see a difference in behaviour across these two types of grievances?
3. Behaviour cannot be averaged out. There are structural variables, such as geography, age and gender, that make engagement systematically easier or harder for certain people.<sup>12</sup>
  - Testing the assumption: We could not test this systematically given the data and other constraints in the field, but this informed our analysis of cases.
4. Context matters, and focusing on within-country variation in context (country trajectories) can be more informative for understanding citizen engagement in anti-corruption than looking at cross-country comparisons.
  - Testing the assumption: Is it possible to classify and compare countries' trajectories in terms of citizen engagement in anti-corruption? Is there variation in behaviour corresponding to the three analytical categories of context? If so, do these variations provide insights that explain different ways of engagement?

### 7.2.3 Selecting fieldwork locations

The empirical phase of the project allowed for four weeks of fieldwork in two countries. The purpose of this research phase was to validate, refine and build upon the deductively developed conceptual framework. Our approach to selecting cases was based on the feasibility and promise of the country cases individually and in comparison.

In comparative qualitative research, cases ought to be selected according to variation in the key causal explanatory variable (King et al., 1994). In our case, from the conceptual framework we posited that a country's macro context constitutes one such key causal explanatory variable

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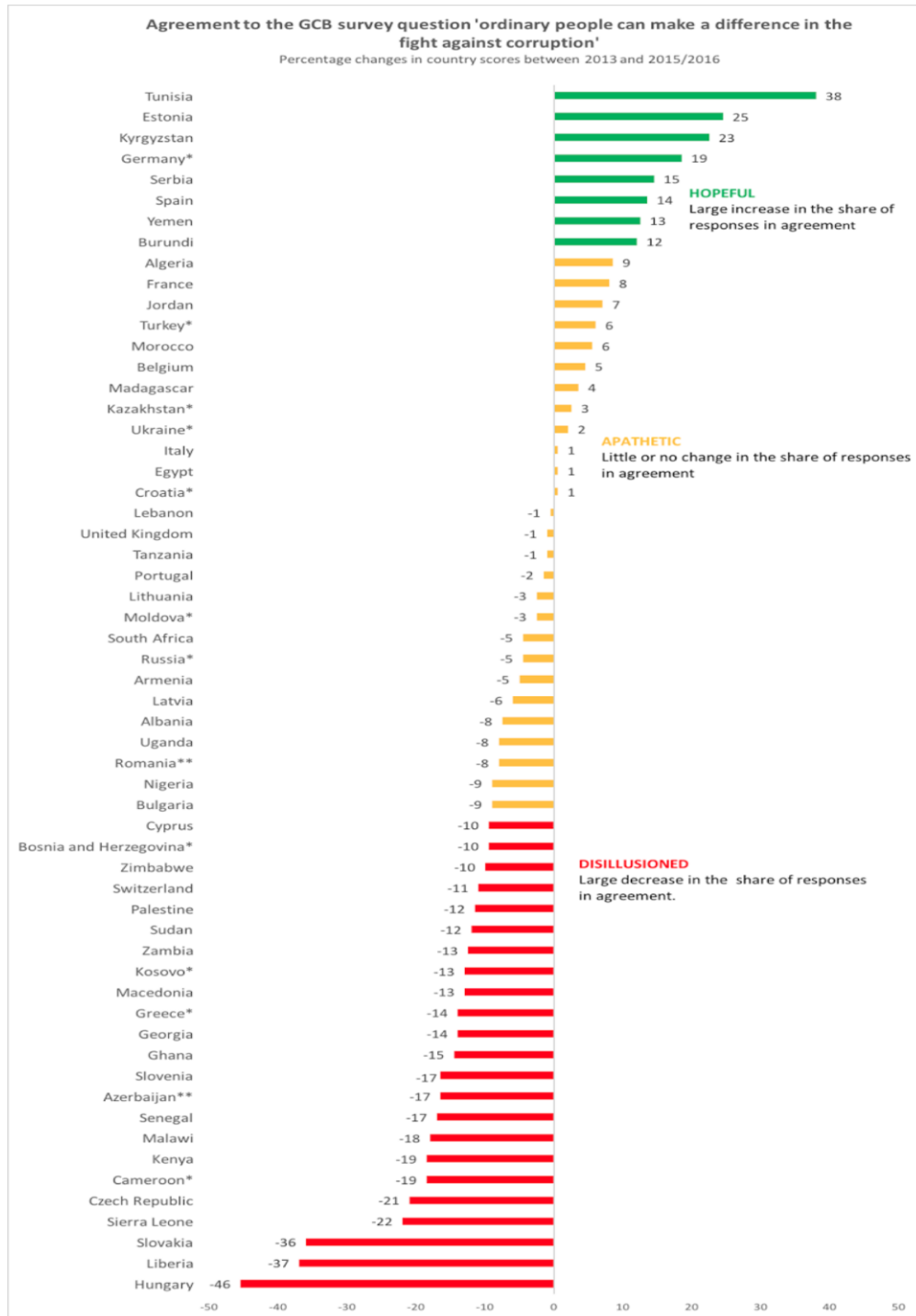
<sup>12</sup> Even if a country's overall context is favourable for citizens to engage in anti-corruption mechanisms, some groups will face higher barriers for action than the average. Several studies have, for instance, found that the poor are more likely to pay bribes because they are more dependent on government services and cannot afford to say no, let alone act against it (Pfeiffer and Rose, 2016; Justesen and Bjørnskov, 2014). Conversely, we may find groups in society that face lower (real or perceived) barriers for action and that mobilise even in countries where the average person is unlikely to act.

affecting citizens' choices to act against corruption. We used internationally comparative survey data from the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) to serve as a proxy for this macro context. This data lent itself well to select fieldwork locations as we had, at the time of selecting countries, relevant data from 58 countries. Apart from ensuring variation across countries, we also wanted to maximise variation within countries. For that purpose, we constructed our macro-contextual variable using data from the past two rounds of GCB data (2013 and 2015/2016).

Based on responses to the survey question "Can ordinary people make a difference in the fight against corruption" from these two rounds of the GCB, we grouped country contexts into three categories: hopeful, disillusioned and apathetic. A country is hopeful if people perceive a recent positive change in ordinary people's ability to make a difference in the fight against corruption. On the contrary, we consider a country to be disillusioned if people perceive a recent lessening of ordinary people's ability to effectively combat corruption. A state of apathy is when there is no change in a country's average perception of what ordinary people are able to do in the fight against corruption. More concretely, we divided the 58 countries into these three categories based on the following formula:

- Hopeful countries: A significant increase (more than 10 percentage points) in the share of people in a country agreeing to the question ("ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption") between the first and second GCB survey rounds.
- Disillusioned countries: A significant decrease (more than 10 percentage points) in the share of people in a country agreeing to the same question between the first and second GCB survey rounds.
- Apathetic countries: The response to the same survey question has seen no significant change between the first and second GCB survey rounds.

Figure 3 below illustrates the country division across the three macro-contextual categories.

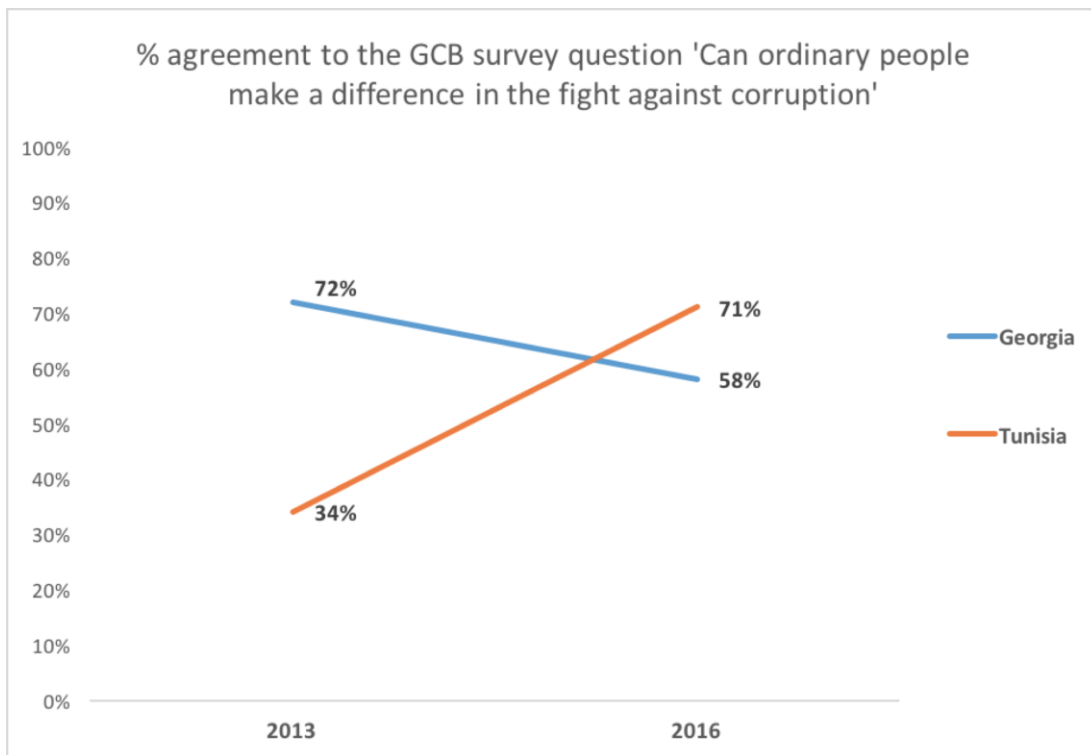


\* The country's 2015/16 data has a relatively large share (20 per cent or more) of responses in the category "neither disagree nor agree," which has been absorbed equally between the "total agree" and "total disagree" response categories. \*\* The country's 2015/16 data has a relatively large share (20 per cent or more) of responses in the category "don't know," which has been absorbed equally between the "total agree" and "total disagree" response categories.

**Figure 3: Categorization of countries across the three categories “hopeful,” “apathetic” and “disillusioned”**

We eventually selected Tunisia and Georgia as fieldwork locations. A number of reasons underpinned this decision, related to each case individually as well as to the two cases paired together.

First, as depicted in the figure above, the two countries fall into two different categories. Tunisia is depicted as a hopeful country, having seen a positive swing in citizens’ beliefs about their ability to do something about corruption. Georgia, on the other hand, falls into the disillusioned category, having experienced a negative trajectory. These country trajectories are shown in Figure 4 below. Choosing countries with such degree of within-country variation over time meant we could gain analytical leverage with fewer countries.



**Figure 4: Tunisia becoming hopeful and Georgia becoming disillusioned**

Second, as a pair, the two countries also offer an interesting basis for analysing the significance of macro context in relation to citizen anti-corruption engagement. Georgia’s wholesale and top-

down assault on corruption came right after the Rose Revolution in 2003. This brought about a sense of optimism in the population about eradicating corruption, which later ebbed out. We thought this trajectory may inform recent occurrences in Tunisia. Having experienced its own revolution in 2011 and, more recently, an upswing in optimism about the ability of ordinary people to fight corruption, Tunisia may well be on a similar trajectory to Georgia. Focusing on Tunisia, and doing it in a way that speaks to practitioners, may in this sense provide reformers with ideas on how to deal with a negative change in the level of optimism.

Third, the selected fieldwork locations also had to offer useful material for the other components of our initial, and deductively developed, theory of change. After discussions with the Transparency International Secretariat about the portfolio of mechanisms, projects and campaigns targeted at increasing citizen engagement, we settled on having a Transparency International Anti-Corruption Legal Advice Center (ALAC) as a country selection criterion.

In selecting countries, we considered other factors, too, including whether the experiences in our chosen countries would enable us to extract insights that could inform target audiences beyond these countries. We also considered the feasibility of the fieldwork, including the availability and accessibility of relevant country data, as well as prior research on key variables and background conditions. Lastly, a critical factor in selecting countries concerned the willingness and ability of the local Transparency International offices to assist us with the research.

#### 7.2.4 Obtaining and analysing data from fieldwork

Having selected countries for fieldwork, the next step was to choose specific anti-corruption mechanisms within these countries that could be compared and contrasted. At this stage, we identified and examined all potentially relevant mechanisms in the two countries. The abovementioned theory-derived and testable assumption – that the type of corruption grievance people experience matters (individual vs. collective) in determining how people engage – provided the basis for selecting the types of mechanisms. Choosing functional, equivalent mechanisms across the two countries, both in terms of individual and collective grievances, enabled us to explore the plausibility of our theoretical expectations.

We chose the local adaptations of Transparency International's ALACs in both countries to be the basis for our micro-level analysis of the steps people with individual grievances take when they



act against corruption. The ALACs in Tunisia and Georgia are Transparency International-provided mechanisms offering support to victims and witnesses of corruption. Individuals who reach out to these ALACs have a diverse set of complaints. In Tunisia, the ALAC started operations in September 2015, and grievances brought to the mechanism concern corruption in both public and private companies, including instances in which corruption may be affecting a person's livelihood, property rights or ability to participate in public life. As of April 2017, potential clients had approached the ALAC more than 400 times and the ALAC had started working with up to 150 of them. In Georgia, people reaching out to the ALAC do so with a range of complaints – from allegations of nepotism in the workplace to instances where corruption is affecting their property rights. The number of people reaching out is significant. The Georgian ALAC assisted 420 people in 2014 and helped resolve 88 court cases in 2015.

In terms of collective grievances, we focused on two programmes that offer concerned citizens entry points to hold political actors to account. In Tunisia, we chose the Election Observation Programme, which was established in 2014 and is administered by I-Watch. The field of electoral improvement is popular in Tunisia. It was a critical area of intervention after the transition in 2011, and while I-Watch was an early adopter, various organisations around the country are now working on this type of intervention.

For Georgia, we explored election monitoring too. However, in the end we focused on Guerrilla Gardening, which started in 2013 and is run by a group of citizens with no formal incorporation. It is run by a group of volunteers that campaign against the abuse of public power in the management of green spaces, triggered by the dual offences of corruption (in relation to land ownership and permits) and affronts on citizen rights to green spaces.

We used a mixed-methods approach to gathering evidence from these countries and cases, using the methodological tool of analytic narratives, which links to process tracing (Collier, 2011), and institutional histories methodologies, which help document “how” “when” and “where” specific behavioural changes come about or not.

To analyse the decision-making processes for both individual and collective grievances, we used focus group and individual interviews with a carefully selected range of key stakeholders in each country, both citizens and mechanism providers. In Georgia, we identified individuals for follow-up conversations through focus groups of citizens who were engaged in the ALAC mechanism in

the city of Batumi, through their volunteer work at Transparency International Georgia in Tbilisi and through their engagement in the Guerilla Gardening initiative, also in Tbilisi.

In Tunisia, we held focus group discussions with citizens engaged through the ALAC mechanism in Tunis, with I-Watch volunteers engaged in election campaign monitoring work and with a group of young citizens participating in an accountability programme by the Jasmine Foundation.

Based on the focus group interviews, we identified specific individuals whose experiences and rationales in accessing the anti-corruption mechanisms at hand seemed to fit an emerging average pattern without obvious extremes.<sup>13</sup> We then interviewed these individuals and triangulated their accounts through additional sources, such as family, neighbours, friends or colleagues, and through interviews and reflection sessions with the key personnel running these mechanisms.

To analyse the role of macro context, we conducted political economy system mapping for each country through desk research. This helped paint a picture of the countries' trajectories from 2010 to present in terms of state and citizen-led efforts to fight corruption. The anti-corruption digests for Georgia and Tunisia published by the Council of Europe were particularly helpful in this regard. These mappings were subsequently corroborated through interviews in both countries with a range of experts from civil society, academia, government and journalists.<sup>14</sup>

We were careful not to bias our interviews toward particular outcomes but to enable a free flow of conversation that would allow interviewees ample space to highlight what they considered to be important and to develop the logic of their engagement and the various steps taken without biasing their accounts. To confirm the validity, we asked about counterfactuals (and corroborated these elsewhere), probed interview partners in various ways and explicitly asked about alternatives that, if confirmed, would have ruled out other findings. In total, we interviewed 42 people in Georgia and 44 in Tunisia.

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<sup>13</sup> Although we had initially set out to analyse particular groups, for example, marginalised groups or other structural outliers, in practice this was not feasible.

<sup>14</sup> These interviews also helped us understand engagement with other mechanisms. As per the terms of reference, this research was not meant to be an evaluation of one intervention but to help get a picture of the logic of citizen action in relation to a range of mechanisms.