AN INSTITUTIONAL AND RELATIONAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY: LESSONS FROM
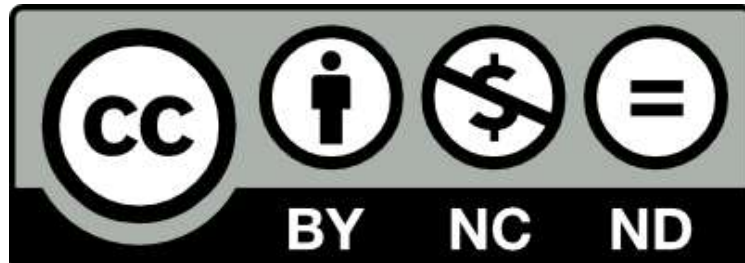
TWO COLOMBIAN CITIES

by

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ABSTRACT

Social accountability is considered a key democratic feature that can help to secure responsiveness, service delivery and control power-holders. The thesis responds to how may social accountability be secured in weak democratic contexts through three sub-questions: First, to what extent do public officials align with the role of 'account-givers' and societal actors that of 'account-holders'? Second, how may societal actors assess the performance of public officials? And third, how may societal actors impose consequences on public officials, and public officials respond? The thesis draws on recent studies analysing social accountability beyond mechanisms and is interested in how context matters for the success of such initiatives and how political history and other structures shape the interactions between state and society. This research contributes to this body of literature by employing a relational and institutional approach, analysing social accountability as an institution. The thesis explores the set of rules, practices and narratives interacting with officials and societal actors and creating regular patterns of (un)accountable behaviour such as monitoring, access to information, justifications, deliberation and possibly imposing sanctions, rewards and call or provision of redress. The research is based on a case study focusing on two Colombian cities where social accountability is expected to emerge given traditional accountability deficits, corruption, and insufficient provision of services. The findings are drawn from 40 semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and observation of public hearings. The study suggests that a dyadic relational approach may overlook civil society organisations as intermediaries between public officials and citizens and the significance of such a role in social accountability institutionalisation. The thesis also uncovers the tensions between institutional stability and weakening and argues they can be explained by the interaction with other institutions, such as exclusionary bipartisanism, clientelism and decentralisation. While exclusionary bipartisanism and clientelism create incentives for 'window dressing', decentralisation within cities can complement social accountability arrangements. These institutional dynamics underpin gaps between institutional arrangements hindering social accountability and further reinforcing power asymmetries between public officials or political elite and citizens, especially those facing critical socioeconomic challenges. While rules prescribe ongoing interactions, in practice, social accountability is reduced to specific events where local governments exercise power and control and portray narratives of compliance and responsiveness. Simultaneously, societal actors' ability to participate and impose consequences is limited but some resist and push forward changes, contributing to understanding the importance of analysing multiple actors' behaviours and how they shape institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Aim of the research

I grew up in a small town in the Caribbean region of Colombia. I remember people used to say that the national government had sent money to build a water system at least three times, yet we were still getting our water from wells or buying it from private vendors using water trucks. Why did that happen? Why did citizens not demand better services? Why was no one prosecuted for the lost money? Similar stories are common across the Caribbean and other peripheral regions in Colombia, even today. Problems associated with corruption and poverty, and their effects on the livelihoods of vulnerable populations occur worldwide (Boräng and Grimes, 2021). Social accountability has been promoted and analysed as a way to increase citizen involvement in the fight against corruption and secure access to public services (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Fox, 2015; Boräng and Grimes, 2021).

There is no unique definition for social accountability, Brummel (2021, p. 1049) refers to its use in the development and democratisation literature as an "umbrella concept" covering numerous conceptual frameworks. This thesis argues that social accountability is a subtype of public accountability through which public organisations and officials engage in ongoing, meaningful *vis-a-vis* interactions with citizens and their organised interests. In this way, social accountability constitutes a key element of democracy, especially at the local level, where citizens are expected to have a closer engagement in governance. In weak democracies, however, there has been an emphasis on social accountability as complementary to traditional or legal accountability (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012)

One of the earliest definitions of social accountability and a prominent one is the one coined by Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2002, p. 211), who defined it as

> a vertical mechanism that aims to make public authorities legally accountable by denouncing administrative corruption, wrong-doings, violations of rights or of due procedure.

The concept, as presented by the Argentinian scholars, gained prominence in Latin America and in international development since its introduction in the early 2000s. Around the same time, the World Bank also published a series of 'Social development papers' where authors such as Ackerman (2005) and Malena et al. (2004) argued that 'social accountability' is not a type of accountability but an "approach (or set of mechanisms) for exacting accountability" (Malena et al., 2004, p. 3). As Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, their analysis focused on initiatives led by civil society organisations, or government organisations with civic engagement (e.g., participatory budgeting, social audits, and citizen report cards) as tools to improve democratic governance and secure service delivery.

The approach to social accountability focusing on such initiatives or mechanisms has been criticised for its tendency to depoliticise the processes taking place when analysing accountability (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012). This means they analyse specific initiatives and their outcomes without considering the socio-political context or previous experiences and power relations. Scholars such as Joshi and Houtzager (2012, p. 146) proposed to change the focus of social accountability to the "ongoing political engagement by social actors with the state as a part of a long-term pattern of interaction shaped both by historical forces and the current context". The thesis takes a similar approach to social accountability, connecting the international development literature with political science and public administration by defining social accountability as a relationship between two sets of actors, an account-giver and an account-holder. These roles supposed other elements: answerability, which includes sharing and discussing information, deliberating to form a judgement, and consequences, the possibility for sanction, reward and providing feedback (e.g., Schedler, 1999; Bovens, 2010).

The thesis takes a relational approach to social accountability by focusing on the relationship or how actors influence each other. It aims to extend the work of scholars like Joshi and Houtzager (2012), Hickey and King (2016) and Boräng and Grimes (2021) that centres on the relationship between actors and the structures and context shaping such relationships. Although it is recognised that they matter, more work is needed to answer how. That gap is especially relevant for analysing and strengthening

social accountability in weak democratic contexts facing longstanding challenges such as corruption, clientelism and/or poverty, which hinder electoral and party systems, facilitate the abuse of power and the limitations or violation of civil and political rights (cf. Mainwaring et al., 2001; Mainwaring and Perez- Liñán, 2003). In these contexts, the emphasis so far has been on initiatives more than on the relationship between the state and citizens.

A relational approach to social accountability used in the thesis also builds on the work of Esaiasson et al. (2013) on 'communicative responsiveness' and Elstub and Escobar (2019) on 'democratic innovations' and Bartels and Turnbull's (2020) analysis of relationality in public administration. Drawing from 'communicative responsiveness', the thesis starting point sees social accountability as an ongoing and meaningful relationship between officials as account-givers and citizens and their organised interests as account-holders. Similar to the approach of scholars in the field of 'democratic innovations', the working concept of social accountability reimagines the role of citizens as highly engaged and deliberative actors who need to access and understand information and deliberate to form judgement regarding public performance.

The research focuses on the relationship between officials in local government and citizens because the local space is considered fundamental to making democracy work (Dávila, 2009; Stoker, 2011). Decentralisation policies aim to bring the state closer to citizens and increase citizen participation and engagement in the decisions made by local authorities. And despite citizen scrutiny having been recognised by the Constitution and other legal codes, its practice faces critical challenges. For instance, in 2010 a policy for social accountability was created to respond to "inadequate practices" but years later, municipalities were still criticised for not fulfilling the expectations set by the policy (e.g., Mendoza, 2015; Parada, 2017). Having stated the theoretical basis of the research, the research questions that guide the thesis are:

- How may social accountability be secured in weak democratic contexts?

- To what extent do public officials align with the role of 'account-givers' and societal actors that of 'account-holders'?

- How may societal actors assess the performance of public officials?

- How may societal actors impose consequences on public officials, and public officials respond?

New institutionalism as an analytical framework

Aiming to contribute to a relational understanding of social accountability, the research argues the need to understand social accountability as an institution shaping accountability roles and behaviours, more than analysing the mechanisms through which the relationship manifests, or the impact of social accountability mechanisms.

By institutions, the thesis refers to the set of arrangements that empower or constrain behaviour and are shaped back by human action (sp. Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). The thesis argues that 'new institutionalism' is a valuable analytical approach to contribute to the theorisation of social accountability. Understanding social accountability as interactions means actors engage in actions such as providing information, discussing it and imposing consequences; from an institutional perspective, such interactions can be better understood by focusing on the arrangements shaping them. The thesis institutional approach builds on the work of public administration scholars such as Bovens et al. (2008) or Skelcher and Torfing (2010), whose work focuses on the formal arrangements regulating public organisations' relationship with specific forums. Olsen (2013) also claimed the need for an institutional take on accountability that focuses on actors' identities and behavioural logics and considers the *politics of political order* of accountability processes (Olsen, 2013, p. 448, emphasis original). He stated:

> Accountability processes may involve political mobilisation and struggles over who deserves to be accepted as principals and trustworthy agents; over distributions of information, what is democratically desirable, power-relations, and what are legitimate

identities and roles. It is also assumed that it may be useful to attend to how institutions affect accountability through socialisation, internalisation and habitualisation, as well as through incentives (Olsen, 2013, p. 449).

Here, Olsen displays his own approach to analysing institutions as behavioural codes that affect actors through internalised habits and socialised expectations (also, March and Olsen, 1989). The thesis builds on the work of other 'new institutionalism' scholars, especially that of Lowndes and Roberts (2013), which integrates previous works on institutions to recognise that they operate through rules (formal, written), practices (informal, habits) and narratives (stories and taken for granted ideas).

Their approach also pays attention to agency, the logics informing behaviour or how actors interact with institutions (i.e., enacting them or rejecting them), and institutional dynamics of stability and change in complex institutional contexts. In this way, new institutionalism provides the analytical basis for the study of social accountability as an institution (rules, practices and narratives) that shapes officials' and citizens' behaviour and which is shaped back by actors. Moreover, the approach recognised that institutions do not stand alone, and concepts such as 'institutional matrix' helped to uncover the effect of old and neighbouring institutions such as exclusionary bipartisanism, decentralisation or clientelism. It also provides the language to explain such interactions and their effects on the institutionalisation or deinstitutionalisation of social accountability.

Methodology

The research resorts to an embedded case study to provide answers to the research questions with a new institutionalist perspective. The analysis centres on social accountability as the object of study through two subunits of analysis, the Colombian cities Barranquilla and Cartagena. These places configure a great opportunity to analyse social accountability because Colombia has had a national policy for social accountability since 2010 which facilitates an institutional analysis starting from formal rules. Both cities are located in the Caribbean region, where inhabitants face critical challenges in comparison with other parts of the country regarding poverty, education, service provision and

corruption. Decentralisation policies in Colombia also facilitate an institutional analysis that privileges context and how institutions and actors adapt in different settings; the thesis does not compare the cities but identifies the nuances that result from their differences. The analysis is based on 40 interviews, the analysis of over 30 documents, and the observation of several public hearings, which helped to identify rules, practices and narratives and to triangulate the data.

Research claims and contributions

The thesis has empirical, theoretical, analytical and practical contributions that can help to understand and strengthen social accountability. The main critical empirical contribution of the thesis is to resort to new institutionalism, as an analytical framework, arguing that it provides new and necessary insights into the *relationship* between public organisations and officials, and citizens and their organised interests in weak democratic settings. Institutionalism helps to uncover the structure shaping such behaviour by paying attention to the rules, practices and narratives that empower or constrain accountable behaviour.

The insights of an institutional and relational approach can be further summarised in four points. First, an institutional analysis of social accountability shows social accountability might involve multiple relationships at once, instead of a binary state-citizens. Civil society organisations can act as account-holders or as intermediaries between public organisations and citizens, suggesting a network or a more open relationship. Clear identification of the roles assumed by each actor helps to uncover their interaction with institutional arrangements and how they contribute to institutionalising or weakening social accountability. For example, ideas held by civil society organisations regarding citizens might encourage their engagement or perpetuate exclusionary narratives.

Second, while asymmetry between account-givers and account-holders is well documented (i.e., Bovens and Schillemans, 2014; Graves and Wells, 2019), the institutional approach helps to identify how the alignment or misalignment between institutional arrangements reinforces or diminishes asymmetries between public officials and citizens further empowering officials who might use their

power to limit citizens' capacity to hold them into account. Social accountability designs may include rules to secure citizens' access to information, spaces for discussions and even mechanisms to sanction wrongdoing or unresponsive behaviour; however, existing practices and narratives can hollow-out rules. Despite actors seeming to enact rules, their practices and narratives work against the desired effect of rules. For example, officials can promote stories of good performance while attempting to ostracise critics, disincentivising citizens from questioning public performance.

Third, the thesis proposes to see answerability and consequences as interdependent elements more than as independent of each other (Schedler, 1999) or stages of a process (Bovens, 2010). Considering independent means that analysis will find actions that focus on either answerability or consequences enough. As stages in a process, they are expected to happen in a consecutive way but still, independent from each other. The thesis argues that social accountability can be strengthened by securing that elements work almost simultaneously, this is, securing that consequences result from ongoing and meaningful interactions between citizens and officials, or that spaces for discussion and deliberation include mechanisms to redress citizens' concerns. Furthermore, deliberation can be analysed as a third constitutive element that is needed in both the interactions between officials and citizens and among citizens and their organised interests to better assess and form judgement before imposing consequences. Civil society organisations can have a critical role as facilitators of deliberation.

Fourth, institutionalism helps better to understand the interplay between social accountability and other institutions. The dynamics of social accountability in developing contexts create tension between institutionalisation and the weakening of social accountability. Actors interact with contradictory institutions such as clientelism and social accountability. While powerful groups have more incentives to hinder social accountability, disadvantaged groups face more limitations to hold them to account. All these occur simultaneously rendering social accountability an incomplete more than a weak institution. More than failing to achieve accountable behaviour, the thesis recognises that the interactions between the arrangements and actors have both secured and hindered the

enactment of social accountability. To rephrase it, an institutional approach shows that while some actors attempt to enact social accountability, others reject it and policymakers and practitioners interested in strengthening social accountability need to address both or at least be aware of the possible effects on the design and implementation of social accountability strategies.

Additionally, the thesis aims to contribute to new institutionalism as an analytical framework. It supports Olsson's (2016) argument for analysing micro-mechanisms of action to understand how actors interact and choose what institutions to follow (e.g., clientelism or social accountability) instead of enacting or rejecting (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010) a particular institution. The existence of multiple and sometimes contradictory institutions in the same context also unveils new insights into institutional dynamics suggesting that analysts need to pay attention to the ongoing tensions between institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation instead of linear paths towards institutional change.

Finally, the analytical framework developed in the thesis can contribute to strengthening social accountability in more practical ways. Policymakers and practitioners can adapt it to analyse the different degrees to which public organisations, citizens and civil society organisations interact, what strategies they use to enact or reject social accountability arrangements, and the effect of power asymmetries in citizens' capacity to hold governments and other actors such as public service providers into account.

Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 establishes the conceptual basis for the research, highlighting the current debate about analysing social accountability beyond mechanisms and presenting the research questions. The chapter argues that social accountability is a subtype of accountability that conveys the relationship between public organisations and officials and citizens and/or their organised interests. It explores how social accountability has been analysed in weak democratic settings with an emphasis on the mechanisms available to societal actors. The chapter also shows that there is a growing literature aiming to analyse social accountability by paying attention to patterns of state/citizens relations and

argues that a way to move forward is drawing from the work of public administration scholars that analyse the formal arrangements governing such relationship and paying attention to the structures shaping the interactions between actors.

Chapter 2 argues that new institutionalism is a useful analytical framework for analysing social accountability beyond mechanisms in weak democratic settings. It draws upon the work of Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 7), who asserted that "political behaviour and political outcomes are best understood by studying the rules and practices [and narratives] that characterize institutions, and the ways in which actors relate to them (whether they are politicians, public servants, citizens or social movements)". The chapter discusses key institutional concepts that guide the methodologic choices and analysis of findings.

Chapter 3 presents the research design, an embedded case study. Following Thomas (2011), the object of analysis is social accountability in weak democratic contexts which is analysed through two subunits Barranquilla and Cartagena, cities in the Caribbean region of Colombia. The chapter presents the steps to undertake fieldwork in the country, the use of documents, observation and interviews with community leaders and officials to identify the institutional arrangements and dynamics that constitute social accountability, and it reflects on the challenges and limitations of the research.

Chapter 4 establishes the context for the presentation and analysis of the research findings. It draws on the concept of an 'institutional matrix' presented in Chapter 2 to discuss three institutions impacting social accountability at the local level in Colombia: exclusionary bipartisanism, decentralisation and clientelism. The chapter describes how they work in Colombia and signals the possible effects they might have on social accountability and how actors respond to it. This chapter also introduces the Colombian policy for social accountability created in 2010, its rationale and argues that social accountability is a multilevel institution (Kiser and Ostrom, 1982; Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018) and that is not possible to understand how it is enacted or rejected at the local level without considering the constitutional and legal rules above it.

Chapters 5 to 7 present the findings of the research and connects them with the literature review and the theoretical framework. Chapter 5 focuses on how institutional arrangements shape the roles of officials as account-givers and societal actors as account-holders. The chapter shows that officials are empowered to define their role in ways that obfuscate accountability while they can also establish rules, practices and narratives that limit citizens' roles, which is reinforced by their socioeconomic characteristics. At this point, the thesis also argues that civil society organisations have undertaken a key role as supporters of citizens and community leaders instead of acting as account-holders themselves. And, that decentralisation within cities facilitates citizens to identify and interact with other actors involved in city governance or service provision.

Chapter 6 discusses answerability and finds that officials use their power to define what information to share and discuss, and the conditions to do so which might undermine social accountability. It also explores citizens' capacity to access information and engage with officials, showing that accessing information requires skills and resources not available to most citizens. The chapter expands on the role of civil society organisations and shows how some gather and publish public information or create spaces for discussing it. Finally, the chapter argues that other spaces are needed for citizen deliberation that contributes to forming a judgment about public performance.

Chapter 7 presents how institutional arrangements shape consequences, and the behaviour associated with sanctions, rewards and redress. It shows that in Colombia, at the national and local levels, actors reinterpreted consequences and refer to incentives which enable social accountability by providing community leaders with training and opportunities to know about how to engage with municipalities. However, attempts to sanction or reward officials are disconnected from formal social accountability spaces, and sanctions are discouraged by narratives used by officials and perceptions of corruption. The chapter also identifies community leaders' and civil society organisations' attempts to provide feedback but are constrained by the control exercised by officials.

The thesis concludes with Chapter 8, integrating the main findings and discussing the original contribution resulting from bringing institutionalism as analytical framework to the empirical data. It argues there is a critical misalignment between rules, practices and narratives that have facilitated a tension between the stability and weakening of social accountability. It shows tension results from the asymmetries between the actors and the interaction between social accountability and decentralisation, corruption and exclusionary bipartisanism. The chapter also presents the contributions to the theorisation of social accountability, the implications for the analysis of institutions, and for policymakers and practitioners interested in strengthening social accountability. To conclude, the chapter reflects on the limitations of the research and possible next steps to contribute to the understanding of social accountability.

1. TOWARDS A RELATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

1.1. Introduction

Liberal western democracy relies on the election of representatives to act as the voice of citizens and act in their best interest (Urbinati and Warren, 2008). In this way, citizens give a mandate to elected officials by which they can hold them accountable. Usually, literature refers to this as 'democratic accountability' and associates the concept with elections as an accountability mechanism. If citizens are happy with the performance of their representatives, they will re-elect them or their party and if not, they will vote them out of office (Przeworski et al., 1999). This classical view of accountability is also related to 'promissory representation' (Mansbridge, 2003) by which citizens assess if promises made by representatives were fulfilled. However, appointed officials and other actors (i.e., service providers) are also responsible for delivering public goods or satisfying citizens' needs (Cunill-Grau, 2006; Kosack and Fung, 2014).

This chapter, drawing from literature on political science, public administration and development, argues that the accountability relationship between public organisations and citizens can be further understood under the concept of social accountability. Scholars across different fields have shown interest in understanding how public officials (elected and appointed) are accountable to citizens or how they relate to citizens and other actors to secure the fulfilment of their role (Blair, 2000; Fung, 2001; Cornwall, 2004; Baiocchi et al., 2008; Avellaneda and Escobar-Lemmon, 2012; Richardson and Durose, 2013) but they have not always characterised this as 'social accountability'. The different approaches are also underpinned by a conceptual contestation (Mainwaring, 2003; Bovens et al., 2014; Odugbemi and Lee, 2011; Fox, 2022) and variation within disciplines that render analysis difficult across different contexts (Brummel, 2021; Fox, 2022).

The chapter suggests that a way to advance the understanding of social accountability is by paying more attention to the interactions between actors and the structures shaping them. Mainstream

empirical and theoretical approximations to social accountability have focused on citizen-led and/or state-led initiatives and actions, 'over-emphasising the tools to the detriment of analysis of context' (Gaventa and McGee, 2013, p. 6; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Hickey and King, 2016; Joshi, 2023) or at the cost of the relationship between account-givers and account-holders (Brummel, 2021). The importance of context has been recognised and analysed by others interested, for instance, the 'participatory sphere' literature has questioned "dynamics of power, voice and agency" taking place in 'new democratic spaces' (Cornwall, 2004, p. 75). As in social accountability, the 'spaces for participation' literature is concerned with increasing citizen engagement in governance and scrutiny (Cornwall, 2004, Gaventa, 2006; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007).

Cornwall and Coelho's (2007, p.22) call to examine political culture resonates with more recent approaches to social accountability that question the historical legacies and contextual factors underpinning the relationship between state-society (e.g., Joshi and Houtzager, 2012). Previous studies focusing on 'spaces for participation' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007) also highlight that actors other than the state have received more attention than state actors and show the importance of their commitment, motivation and capacity to respond to citizens' voice and engage with them (see also, Fox, 2015). In line with the need to analyse the interactions between actors, the chapter makes a case for a relational instead of a mechanistic approach to the analysis of social accountability in weak democratic contexts where the mechanistic approach prevails (e.g., Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012) and in which there has been a considerable focus from the participation literature as well (e.g., Cornwall et al., 2008; Anderson et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the chapter borrows concepts from theoretical frameworks such as democratic innovations (Smith, 2009; Elstub and Escobar, 2019) and deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2010; Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012) in an attempt to advance a relational view on social accountability

and proposes new institutionalism (sp. Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) as an appropriate analytical framework to its analysis.

The overall structure of the chapter goes from establishing a working concept for accountability to exploring the role of social accountability in local governance and identifying a gap in the analysis of social accountability from a relational standpoint. The first section critically engages with the conceptualisation of accountability, its core elements, answerability and enforcement (Schedler, 1999). And social accountability as a subtype involving public officials and societal actors and its possible characterisation as a 'participatory sphere' (Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). The following section turns to local government as a specific public organisation of interest given its role in democracy and citizens' quality of life. Once the relevance of the local level has been set out, the chapter characterises the societal actors involved in the relationship, showing that they are not monolithic categories and that despite their context having been recognised as important, there is still more to know about the structures shaping their behaviour. The last section moves from a mechanistic to a relational approach, showcasing how public administration has analysed the accountability relationship, especially in the European context. The chapter concludes that a way to analyse the importance of context and structures shaping social accountability, understood as a relationship, is by recurring to new institutionalism as an analytical framework.

1.2. Defining social accountability as a subtype of accountability

Accountability is considered a key concept in the social sciences (Mainwaring, 2003, p. 3) and a contested one (Bovens, 2010). Likewise, 'social accountability' has been conceptualised as complementary (e.g., Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006) or a subtype of accountability (Brummel, 2021) and it is also highly contested (Fox, 2022). This section discusses the importance of accountability and presents the working concepts used in the thesis. It situates social accountability as a subtype of accountability, having the same constitutive elements, answerability and consequences (Schedler,

1999; Bovens et al., 2014) and circumscribed to the interactions between public officials and citizens and their organised interests. In this thesis, social accountability is understood as a relationship between public officials and citizens or their organised interests that involves actions towards each other, enabling deliberation upon public performance and formulating consequences for public officials.

Two roles are then recognised, the account-giver who is obliged to provide information and justifications (Schedler, 1999; Bovens et al., 2014) and the account-holder who is entitled to demand information and justifications and might impose sanctions, rewards or call for redress (Schedler, 1999; Cunill-Grau, 2006; Brummel, 2021). Others have referred to the second role as 'account-seekers' (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005; McGee and Gaventa, 2011) arguing that citizens or other actors *seek* to hold power-holders to account. In this thesis, societal actors are referred to as account-holders following authors such as Bovens (2007) and more recently Brummel (2021) who recognise account-holders as those "to *whom* justification and explanation is directed" (Brummel, 2021, p. 1051, emphasis original). By doing so, the thesis aims to facilitate the connection between the literature it draws on from public administration, political science and international development.

The relational approach to social accountability highlights the interactions and relationship between officials and citizens (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Hickey and King, 2016) instead of drawing from other approaches such as citizen-led or state-led accountability. The former focus on the actions of citizens, civil society or the media to voice concerns or demand accountability and they are common in the development literature (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Anderson, et al., 2022). The latter, state-led approaches, tend to focus on the actions or regulations through which public organisations and officials make themselves accountable (Bovens, 2010; Lindberg, 2013) and are more common in the public administration literature. Next, this section expands on answerability and consequences as

accountability's constitutive elements and then, it discusses social accountability as a subtype of accountability.

1.2.1. Accountability, a contested concept

Since the early and mid-2000s, accountability has seemed to (re)emerge – catching researchers' and practitioners' interest – in different fields, including political science, public administration, and international development (Przeworski et al., 1999; Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Lindberg, 2013; Fox, 2007, 2015). In their critical assessment of 'talking about government', Pollit and Hupe (2011) regard accountability as a 'magical concept' given its prominence across fields, both in academia and practice. By magical, they refer to concepts that are "very broad, normatively charged and lay claim to universal or near universal-application" (Pollit and Hupe, 2011, p. 643). Besides buzzword and magical, accountability has been seen as a 'feel-good' concept, one that no one can be against. As Bovens et al. (2008, p. 225) note:

> Everyone intuitively agrees that public authorities should render account publicly for the way they use their mandates and spend public money. The power of government needs to be checked routinely if we don't want to wake up in an authoritarian regime one day.

Accountability has always been a key aspect of democracy because it helps to ensure responsiveness (Schmitter, 2004) or effectiveness (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006). Across practice and theory, accountability has been defined as a virtue, a mechanism or a competence (Bovens, 2010; Moreno et al., 2003). A review of the literature shows that although its definition varies across and within disciplines, a core aspect of accountability is that it supposes the exercise of control over government power (Mulgan, 2000; Cunill-Grau, 2006; Olsen, 2013) and the citizens' demand and officials' provision of justifications for their actions and decisions (Fox, 2007; Bovens, 2010).

Still, the analysis of accountability as a means to control power requires power to be approached from several perspectives. If control over government is the starting point, other forms of power also exist

or are analysed when studying accountability. For instance, Fox's 'sandwich strategy' to strengthen accountability argues that mutual empowerment between the state and society is needed to sustain pro-accountability power shift (Fox, 2015, p. 356). These two approaches to power resemble Pettit's (2013) argument of not analysing power using a single definition. He sets out different ways to make sense of power, including agency, in the sense of action and behaviour, and structure, referring to norms embedded in relationships or systems of knowledge that shape behaviour (Pettit, 2013, p. 38-9). Still, Pettit calls for an analysis of the inter-relationship between agency and structure to understand empowerment, which has been considered a required element to achieve accountability (Fox, 2015; Kosack and Fung, 2014).

As with control or power, the concept of accountability can be malleable and ambiguous (Fox, 2022). In their review of the literature, Pollit and Hupe (2011, p. 649) conclude that the concept "needs to be 'filled' with a good helping of contextual and cultural details before it can be operationalized" (see also, Cornwall et al., 2008; Fox, 2007, 2022). In a similar vein, in 2021, the Accountability Research Centre (ACR)[1] launched the 'Accountability Keywords Project' that included over 30 entries "reflecting on the meanings and usage of relevant keywords in their own contexts and languages" (Fox, 2022). Although empirical analyses of accountability depend on contextual factors, there are still essential elements to focus upon, such as who are the subjects of control, by whom and how. However, these are not fixed terms or definitions and depend on how they are interpreted by practitioners or authors.

For example, narrow definitions limit accountability to elected officials, who can only be held accountable by formalised organisations. Mainwaring (2003) defends his minimalist conceptualisation arguing that "if we include all forms of public oversight or holding actors responsible, the concept [accountability] becomes so elastic that it may not be useful" (2003, p. 7). Similarly, Mulgan (2000)

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[1] The Accountability Research Center (ARC) is an action-research centre based in the School of International Service (SIS) at American University working with civil society and academic partners in the field of participation, transparency and accountability.

defends a focus on what he terms 'core accountability', defined as "being called to account for one's actions", as discerned from wider definitions associated with responsibility, control, responsiveness, or dialogue, which he argues seem "to be more the creations of academics pursuing their own intellectual agendas rather than the results of shifts in everyday usage" (Mulgan, 2000, p. 571). Mulgan's critique calls for a theorisation of accountability that brings together common elements across fields, however, the thesis argues in the following sections, that the nuances of each field might strengthen the understanding of social accountability (Bovens et al., 2014).

1.2.2. The essential elements of accountability

Before engaging in depth with social accountability, this section presents what is considered the essential elements of accountability (Schedler, 1999; Bovens, 2010; Mulgan, 2000). Schedler (1999, p. 17) defines accountability as "A is accountable to B when A is obliged to inform B about A's (past or future) actions and decisions, to justify them, and to suffer punishment in the case of eventual misconduct". Following his definition, three elements are identified: monitoring (for which access to information is necessary), justifications and enforcement. These can be further summarised as answerability and enforcement (see Figure 1.1.) (Schedler, 1999) or answerability and consequences (Bovens et al., 2014).
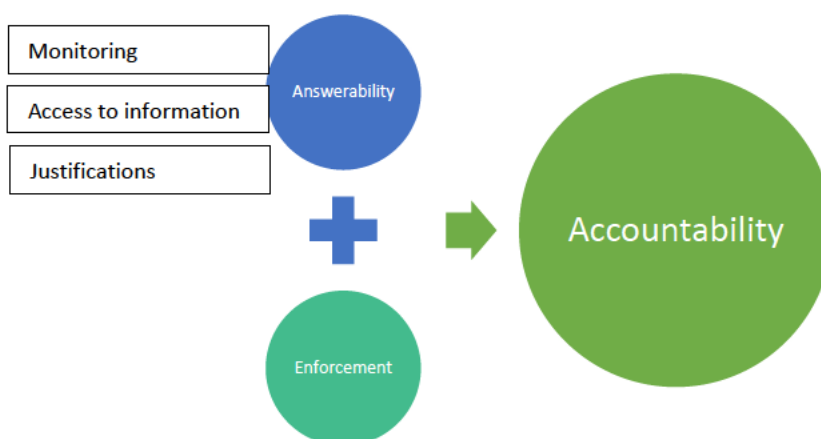
Figure 1.1. Elements of accountability
Author's own elaboration following Schedler's (1999) definition.

- *Answerability*

Answerability refers to account-givers' duty to provide information and justifications and account-holders' right to access public information and question the behaviour of public organisations and officials (Bovens, 2010; Lindberg, 2013). Schedler (1999, p. 14) notes: "The notion of answerability indicates that being accountable to somebody implies the obligation to respond to nasty questions and, vice versa, that holding somebody accountable implies the opportunity to ask uncomfortable questions". In this way, answerability challenges assumptions of discretion and opacity associated with exercising power and authority (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012). Power held by public officials can serve them to constrain citizens by restricting free speech, what Pettit refers to as 'negative power'. Answerability might help to mitigate or control such power by empowering citizens to exercise 'positive power' over those exercising public power to demand answers (Pettit, 2013).

Answerability supposes the demand for answers but also the provision of information and justifications, it "involves social interaction and exchange" (Mulgan, 2000, p. 555; Bovens et al., 2014). Complementary to such exchange is the concept of 'communicative responsiveness', a term coined by Esaiasson et al. (2013) to identify the cases in which representatives listen to citizens' views, communicate their reason for adopting them or not, and adapt according to the citizens' responses to explanations. 'Communicative responsiveness' relies on meaningful and ongoing interactions between officials and citizens, which are characteristics that can add to answerability. In this way, it can help to assess the outcomes of public administration (Przeworski et al., 1999) and if officials acted according to law or with transparency and other values (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006). Answerability can be further analysed by looking into two other concepts: access to information and justifications.

- *Access to information*

Access to public information is necessary to hold public officials accountable for the "propriety and effectiveness of the conduct of the government" (Bovens, 2010, p. 955; see also Manin et al., 1999).

Information is closely related to transparency initiatives envisioned as a way to overcome developmental failures and improve governance (Gaventa and McGee, 2013; Kosack and Fung, 2014), and as Gaventa and McGee (2013) observe, "much of what we call accountability reflects only the weaker category, answerability".

In addition, the assumption that transparency generates accountability has been questioned. Fox (2007, p. 667) refers to 'opaque transparency' as "involv[ing] the dissemination of information that does not reveal how institutions actually behave in practice, whether in terms of how they make decisions or the results of their action". Despite the challenges associated with it, information is not a weak element, it serves as a tool "for dealing with increasingly practical and specific concerns of government performance" and improving the lives of citizens (Kosack and Fung, 2014, p. 69).

Besides the interactive condition of answerability as information provision and requests, it is also important what type of information is necessary for accountability. While some argue accountability looks into past behaviour (Beetham et al., 2008; Bovens et al., 2014), others include future decisions as well (Schedler, 1999; Cunill-Grau, 2006). Schillemans et al. (2013, p. 407) argue, for example:

> The public has the right to know what government and government organizations plan to do, what they hope to achieve, and how much this will cost; and afterwards, how far goals were reached and whether this was done within budget.

Schedler (1999) maintains that answerability involves monitoring and oversight, which denotes that account-holders have the right to request information about past behaviour and have the capacity to follow the everyday of public organisations and officials. However, it is essential to consider that public organisations have considerable competence to design and implement informational systems but also to define what information is made available and how to frame it (Bovens et al., 2014; Graves and Wells, 2019). Accountability depends not solely on the existence of information but on citizens' access to it, yet its availability is highly dependent on officials' discretion (Fox, 2007).

- *Justifications and debate*

Another key element of answerability is explanations or the 'argumentative dimension' (Schedler, 1999). Bovens (2014, p. 185) refers to this as the second phase in accountability: "the information can prompt the forum to interrogate the actor and to question the adequacy of the information or the legitimacy of the conduct". For others, like Schedler, it is not sequential but an alternative to information because the account-holder could ask for either information or explanations. The latter refers to 'valid reasons' and "the corresponding duty to justify one's conduct" (Schedler, 1999, p. 15). Again, there is another way that accountability and certain notions of responsiveness overlap (Mansbridge, 2003; Esaiasson et al., 2013) because both require the provision of explanations or justifications for public officials' and organisations' actions.

The power held by account-givers might restrict access to information but it can also limit citizens' capacity to engage in debate. 'Negative power over' exercised by officials or embedded in the broader political culture can reinforce ideas that debate is not necessary or that citizens do not have the resources or knowledge to engage in public discussion (Pettit, 2013; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). Hence, it is important for accountability that citizens can build or wield 'positive power', which can manifest in three ways: the power to develop skills and capacity; the power with others to collectively engage in public debate, and the power within themselves to gain awareness of their rights (Pettit, 2013, p. 43).

This element of accountability is also close to deliberation (Mulgan, 2000; Cunill-Grau, 2006). Deliberation is important because it makes it possible to make sense of information and explanations shared. Broadly, it refers to "mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern" (Bachtiger et al., 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, Mansbridge et al. (2012, p. 5) refer to deliberative systems as a talk-based approach to political conflict and problem-solving. Not all types of communication are regarded as deliberative. For

example, Escobar (2019) distinguishes between dialogue to reach an understanding and deliberation as instances where the exchange helps reach a conclusion or decision. However, the terms are used interchangeably in accountability literature, as Mulgan (2000, p. 569) reveals in his appraisal of 'accountability and dialogue'. Still, research on the 'participatory sphere' suggests deliberation can be hindered by the effects of inequalities in power and knowledge (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007, p. 24).

Referencing March and Olsen, Mulgan (2000, p. 569) observes that "the accountability required of democratic governments produces contestable political 'accounts' within a context of shared beliefs and values". Here, accountability's 'social and exchange' character is evoked because what is highlighted is the dialectical exchange between account-givers and account-holders. As the same author (2000, p. 570) states, "the information will only make sense within an explanatory and justificatory framework assumed by the questioner and accepted, or contested, by the respondent". The framework in which explanations and responses to them occur correspond to particular institutional and contextual dynamics that require empirical investigation (Mulgan referencing Sinclair (1995) and Bovens (1998), 2000, p. 570, see also Cornwall et al., 2008; Fox, 2022).

This section has shown that for accountability to take place, account-holders need access to information, but account-givers have discretion not only over what information is shared but also over how it is framed. The importance of deliberation is that it provides opportunities to challenge information asymmetries. Ideas regarding asymmetries between actors are also prevalent in the debates regarding the second main element of accountability: enforcement. The following section will cover this issue.

- *Enforcement or consequences*

Continuing with Schedler's (1999) definition of accountability that recognises enforcement as the second core element, this section argues that 'consequences' is a term that better frames the array of actions or behaviours that can occur after citizens have deliberated and passed judgement. This term

is common in the public administration literature, for instance, Bovens (2010) conceptualises accountability as having two constitutive elements, answerability and *consequences*. Similar to Schedler, Bovens (2010, p. 951) argues that forums can either sanction (e.g., fines, disciplinary measures) or reward (public recognition) public officials. For Bovens and others (Lindberg, 2013; Brummel, 2021) 'consequences' is a third phase in accountability relationships, showing the connection between answerability and what happens as result.

The thesis argues 'consequences' rather than enforcement is a better term to refer to this aspect of accountability. Moreover, others such as Cunill-Grau (2006) include the possibility of redress as a possible response to account-givers' behaviour, similar to what Fox (2015) refers to as 'teeth', understood as the capacity to respond to citizens' voice and amend their behaviour. Hence, 'consequences' is a neutral term (Bovens, 2007) that can group three possible actions that officials may face after information has been shared and discussed: sanction, reward, or redress. Similar to McGee and Gaventa (2011) referring to enforcement, the thesis asserts that the interaction between answerability and consequences can better secure social accountability's impact.

Following the principal-agent model, some authors state enforceability or the consequential aspect means that agents (i.e., citizens) can withdraw the power delegated to principals (i.e., elected officials); others refer to 'some kind of punishment' for poor performance (Mainwaring, 2003; Moreno et al., 2003; Hickey and King, 2016). In this line are also others such as Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006), Bovens (2010) and Joshi and Houtzager (2012). They recognise sanctions as the possibility of taking away delegated power because principals are not responsive or fulfilling their mandate, for example, by not re-electing an official. More restrained views refer to enforcement not as sanctions per se but as the possibility or the "threat of sanctions" as a way of subjugating power (Schedler, 1999, p. 14).

However, since answerability helps assess public behaviour, it could also find there is no unresponsiveness or misbehaviour, which calls for the possibility of rewarding public officials by re-

electing them or publicly recognising them (Schedler, 1999; Bovens, 2010). For that reason, Bovens (2010) refers to consequences instead of sanctions and notes that consequences can be formal, such as disciplinary measures or informal, based on unwritten rules, including the act itself of publicly being called to account since it can have reputational consequences (Bovens, 2010, p. 952). The latter supposes that the aim of imposing consequences is to punish wrongdoing and redress the processes of public policies and decisions (Cunill-Grau, 2006, p. 118).

The possibility of redressing public actions or decisions or taking corrective actions (Tsai et al., 2019) recalls Fox's conceptualisation of "teeth" (Fox. 2015; Aston, 2020). Aston, discussing the analysis of sanctions across several syntheses, meta-reviews, and systematic reviews, focuses on the term 'teeth', noticing is used mostly by Fox (2015). Fox regards 'teeth' as a term that broadens the concept of sanctions to include the state's capacity to respond to voice and such capacity is stronger when besides sanctioning, it has clout which involves an array of actions to redress and prevent future wrong behaviour (Aston, 2020). The thesis argues that both the capacity to respond or to sanction is included in 'consequences' (Bovens, 2010). Still, as Cornwall and Coelho (2007) highlight, this type of interaction (citizens voicing concerns and officials in turn responding) depends on the openness and capacity of the state, however, these might be diminished by the specific context and political culture, especially in those with trajectories of corruption or authoritarianism.

Furthermore, as Mainwaring (2003) and Schedler (1999) note, having formal capacity does not always mean effective enforcement. Schedler (1999, p. 16) provides as an example the cases of Taiwan and Nigeria; in the first, the ruling party's control over the sanctioning body has hampered account-holders' capacity to hold high-ranking officials accountable. In Nigeria (1979-1983), the issue was that the account-holder lacked enough staff to investigate reports, and the sanctioning tribunal was never assembled even though it was created by law. Thus, formal and informal are categories predictable

not only of possible consequences but also of the institutional configurations that can encourage or prevent enforcement.

This section has shown several areas of disagreement regarding what constitutes the elements of accountability and how each is characterised. Following Schedler's (1999) and Bovens' concepts (2007, 2014), the thesis recognises answerability and consequences as the constitutive aspects of accountability. The first corresponds to the interactions between an account-giver and an account-holder that requires exchanging information as a basis for deliberation or dialogue, which is similar to the concept of 'communicative responsiveness' (Esaiasson et al., 2013). The latter, consequences, refers to the account-holder's capacity to impose formal or informal consequences upon the account-giver, aiming to sanction or redress wrongdoing or reward good behaviour. However, the effective enactment of accountability is dependent on the context, including the state's structure and how different actors interpret and implement the concept. This can only be assessed empirically, but that requires narrowing down what relationships to analyse.

1.2.3. Social accountability

Public accountability constitutes a broad range of relationships and topics (Schedler, 1999); Bovens et al. (2014, p. 7) summarise it as "public accountability is accountability in, and about, the public domain". In the public domain, there are different types of actors involved; a broad concept of accountability includes all public officials and even private organisations that exercise public privileges. In turn, each of them is accountable to an array of actors, peers, superiors or the public in general, including citizens, media and civil society. The latter, the relationship between public organisations and citizens or their organised interests is further examined as 'social accountability'.

Social accountability involves actions from both actors toward each other that enable societal actors (especially citizens) to deliberate to evaluate and impose consequences on officials. To an extent, social accountability can be understood as part of the 'participatory sphere' (Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall and

Coelho, 2007) since it aims to provide opportunities for contestation and meaningful interactions between the state and citizens. The literature on 'spaces for participation' (Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2006; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007) defines spaces as "decision making arenas and forums for deliberation and action" (Pettit, 2013, p. 47), and while social accountability is analysed here as a relationship that assesses past behaviour instead of decision-making, it does involve deliberation and action. This literature has considered the importance of understanding the effects of the combination of elements such as context, actors' capacity, and rules and practices (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Anderson et al., 2022) on citizen engagement for development and democratisation which echoes social accountability scholars' call for analysing how context matters (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Boräng and Grimes, 2022).

Social accountability is also prominent in development and democratisation literature (Malena et al., 2004; Kosack and Fung, 2014; Brummel, 2021; Boräng and Grimes, 2021; Fox, 2022), especially in countries facing challenges for deepening democracy (Diamond et al., 1999; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Anderson et al., 2022; Joshi, 2023). Fox (2022) summarises the expansion of the term in Latin America, the World Bank and international development and discusses some of the difficulties of translating 'social accountability' into Spanish, French or Portuguese due to the difference in what the term translates to in each language. For example, in French, there is an emphasis on 'holding responsible', while what is been analysed here as 'social accountability' in Colombia is referred to as 'rendición de cuentas'[2] and it is usually associated with one side of the relationship, officials' duty to inform and be responsive to citizens' concerns, while the citizen-side is analysed under the term 'control social' which

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[2] The term 'rendición de cuentas' could be translated as 'giving account' which emphasises only one side of the relationship. However, Isunza-Vera (2021) argues that the term does refer to collective assessments. in Colombia, legislation regulating 'rendición de cuentas' refers to the concept or idea of accountability. This discussion is further developed in Chapter 4 which presents the institutional context and the background of the social accountability policy in Colombia.

can be translated as citizen or participatory oversight (Fox, 2022, p. 55; Escandón and Velasquez, 2015; Cepeda, 2022).

Another challenge in analysing social accountability is related to the different uses of the concept. In Latin America, for example, democratisation came along with the idea of citizen oversight or social accountability in response to challenges of intra-state accountability, which refers to public organisations or specialised accountability bodies holding other public organisations to account (O'Donnell, 1999; Smulovitz and Peruzzotti, 2000; Mainwaring, 2003). Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006, p. 10) coined 'social accountability' to refer to actions taken or led by civil society to "monitor public officials, expose governmental wrongdoing, and […] activate the operation of horizontal agencies". However, they argue social accountability is not a subtype but an alternative to the traditional approach to public accountability that emerged as a way to overcome deficits in traditional accountability (intra-state) (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; see also, Malena et al., 2004).

Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006, p. 10) propose a definition that separates from the direct *relationship* between actors. They define it as "a non-electoral yet vertical mechanism of control of political authorities that *rests on the actions* of an array of citizens' associations and movements and the media" (emphasis mine, this is further discussed in section 1.5.). In the fields of international development and democratisation, social accountability analysis seems to derive from the premise that this type of initiative can help to fight issues that undermine public services or states' attention to vulnerable or marginalised communities (e.g., Blair, 2000; Rodan and Hugues, 2012; Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg, 2016; Fox, 2015; Anderson et al., 2022). This bottom-up approach focuses on citizen-led initiatives and might oversight how the interactions between citizens and officials or the structures shaping such interactions affect social accountability.

Although social accountability has been prominent in development literature, the relationship between elected or non-elected officials and citizens has also been analysed by scholars in public

administration and political science (Cunill-Grau, 1997, 2006; Isunza-Vera and Gurza, 2014; Fox, 2022).

In their analysis of 'non-electoral democratic controls' (Controles Democráticos No Electorales – CDNE),

Isunza-Vera and Gurza (2014) argue that control mechanisms are the result of historical processes

connected to transitions from authoritative regimes, traditional accountability deficits, and a

commitment to expand citizen participation and the protection of fundamental rights. The authors

distinguished between CDNE and 'rendición de cuentas' or social accountability considering that the

latter is more restrictive to democratic and representative models and the actions of citizens (Isunza-

Vera and Gurza, 2014, p. 23).

Nevertheless, democratic challenges are not unique to developing countries (e.g., Fung and Wright,

2001; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Brummel, 2021). In the European context, for example, the

relationship between public organisations and citizens has been analysed in relation to broader

changes in representative and participatory governance models (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). For

instance, the delegation of the provision of public services to private actors or '(quasi) autonomous

public organisations' (Skelcher et al., 2005), international bodies such as the European Union (Bovens

et al., 2008) or non-hierarchical systems, like networks or community governance (Richardson and

Durose, 2013; Brummel, 2021). Moreover, 'settle polities' (Olsen, 2013) or 'strong states' (Cornwall

and Coelho, 2007) also face challenges to enhancing citizen engagement and securing authentic

participation. The thesis argues that analysing social accountability as a relationship between citizens

and those with authority or power to influence their livelihoods, that allows citizens to hold those with

power accountable might enhance democracy and secure the provision of services not only in weak

contexts but other contexts in which there are marginalised groups excluded from governance.

Certain initiatives or mechanisms labelled as social accountability, such as participatory budgeting, or

citizen oversight boards and councils (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Boräng and Grimes, 2022) have also

been analysed as institutions of the 'participatory sphere' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). The

participatory sphere refers to hybrid spaces involving the state and civil society (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; see also Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2006) and scholars in this field share similar concerns with those analysing social accountability regarding "*who* enter them, on *whose* terms and with *what* 'epistemic authority'" (Chandoke, 2003 referenced by Cornwall and Coelho, 2007, p. 5, original emphasis). For example, Hickey and King (2016, p. 1231) suggest situating social accountability in context, "with a particular focus on capacities, commitment and the interrelationships between key actors and spheres" while Boräng and Grimes (2021) recap the literature and emphasise inequalities, elite capture or corruptions as major obstacles for social accountability.

The thesis recognises there are significant differences between the development and the public administration approaches, and between their analysis in weak democratic settings and others seen as "settled polities" (Olsen, 2013, p. 451; Brummel, 2021; Joshi, 2023). However, this research argues that it is possible to draw lessons from contexts such as Colombia for a better understanding of social accountability more broadly. To do so, it focuses on the relationship between citizens and local governments, a key public organisation with a close connection to citizens and the structures shaping their behaviour. The thesis argues that instead of looking at mechanisms or spaces (e.g., Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Blair, 2000), new lessons can be learned by taking an approach informed by public administration scholarship focusing on arrangements shaping accountability (Bovens, 2007; Brummel, 2021). Before delving deeper into a such discussion, first, it is necessary to distinguish which relationship is the focus of the thesis, local governments and societal actors.

1.3. The importance of social accountability at the local government level

This research focuses on local governments as account-givers and their relationship with societal actors. This section discusses the importance of the local arena to explore social accountability and presents relevant research exploring accountability at the local level to identify how the thesis can contribute to the understanding of the relationship between public organisations and citizens. Earlier,

it was shown that accountability is considered a critical element in democratic systems and "democracy is first and foremost a local affair" (Baiocchi et al., 2011). The local arena is a complex one; multiple actors engage in different roles to provide well-being to communities and respond to their needs (González, 2013). In Latin America, elected mayors are the leading local authority, responsible for localities' public administration and in Colombia, they are the head of municipalities (Avellaneda and Escobar-Lemmon, 2012). This section focuses on local governments as the account-giver by first exploring the importance of the organisation, and then it moves into the broader relationship between them and citizens, to finally examine literature to show social accountability literature has focused on localities but not on the relationship between local governments and societal actors.

Local government plays a fundamental role in the livelihood of communities, for example, as providers or guarantors of public services. Stoker (2011) identifies four societal functions to be fulfilled by local government: identity, economic development, welfare and lifestyle coordination. Latin American countries are characterised as systems where the welfare function predominates; local authorities are responsible for providing for basic needs, from security and education to "shaping the fortunes" of citizens and cities (Dávila, 2009). In Colombia, local authority or municipal leadership relies on the figure of the mayor (Davila, 2009; Gonzalez, 2013), regarded as the head of municipal public administration or municipalities, as referred to in the thesis.

Local governments have an essential role not only in public administration but also in democracy. As Baiocchi et al. (2011, p. 39) state: "It is not only in local arenas that citizens are most likely to encounter the state, but it is in local arenas that citizens are most likely to exercise their democratic rights". The local government is not only the provider of services but also configures a space for citizen participation, deliberation and decision (Falleti, 2010; Stoker, 2006). Lister (2017, p. 40, referencing Pateman, 1984) argues that small-scale politics offers a space to build political competence, a necessary condition for active citizenship. Decentralisation, a strong feature of local politics in Latin

America, has been implemented to improve the provision of services and improve citizen voice and local accountability (Falleti, 2010; Nickson, 2011).

The way accountability is practised varies within a country, and it depends on political and administrative configurations (Blair, 2000; Escobar-Lemmon and Ross, 2014) but also on how actors (officials and citizens) envision their role and the democratic system (Richardson and Durose, 2013). Aiming to test the claim that decentralisation creates incentives for accountability, Escobar-Lemmon and Ross (2014) used secondary data to analyse citizen perception of 'accountability as answerability' regarding different types and levels of decentralisation in Colombia. However, their study analyses perceptions of accountability using a narrow operationalisation of accountability that includes views on public information availability without questioning opportunities for citizens to deliberate and pass judgement regarding local government decisions.

Other attempts to capture accountability at the local level pay more attention to mechanisms available to promote it. Blair (2000) draws from a study conducted on behalf of USAID across six countries in the Global South regarding democratic local governance to identify mechanisms through which elected officials are (potentially) held to account. Although Blair does not address 'social accountability' per se, he identifies civil society, media, public meetings, formal grievance procedures and opinion surveys as ways to promote accountability. Again, local context is highlighted, although not explicitly, as significant for mechanisms to be considered "from reasonably effective to virtually useless". For example, Blair (2000, p. 30) refers to how public meetings were implemented differently by mayors across Ukraine and the Philippines; while some embrace the space to know citizen views, others ignore them. The main presence of a mechanism does not guarantee accountability; actors within specific localities or contexts play a major role in their implementation. However, there does not seem to be much information about the incentives or restrictions actors face to make accountability possible.

Differences across localities within the same country derive from formal and informal approaches to accountability and governance (Skelcher et al., 2005; Richardson and Durose, 2013). In England, Richardson and Durose (2013) identify five different governance models across localities/communities with varying implications for accountability. In model 1, for example, local government is seen as solely responsible for delivering programmes and services and accountable only through elections. Subsequent models envision officials and citizens interacting in spaces beyond elections, which implies that officials are answerable (providing information and explanations) more often and citizens are more engaged in dialogue and deliberation. A salient conclusion of their study is observing that "there are conflicting models being used in the same organisation, authority or area" (Richardson and Durose, 2013, p. 48). Although examples offered are more related to who is responsible for what, such inconsistencies can affect how accountability is practised, especially in contexts where there is clientelism and patronage (Blair, 2000; Cornwall et al., 2008; Lakha et al., 2015, Stremlau et al., 2015).

Here, this chapter has shown the relevance of analysing social accountability at the local level and introduced some of the relevant studies analysing accountability at this level of governance. It has highlighted that more research is needed to analyse the interaction between actors, the importance of context and models of governance. The next section looks at a diversity of actors that might constitute the social. For instance, Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2002, 2006) coined the term 'societal accountability' to analyse and theorise the role of civil society, arguing such a role was neglected. The next section includes citizens, civil society and media as possible account-holders to show that although 'social accountability' is a subtype of accountability, it is not monolithic, and researchers have focused on different actors to understand it.

1.4. Who constitutes the social

As seen above, definitions of social accountability suppose a dichotomy of actors. From the standpoint of public officials and organisations, it refers to their relation to the public (Bovens and Schillemans,

2014) and from the other side, multiple actors are recognised as the societal ones to hold state actors to account (Brummel, 2021). Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000), for example, focus on organised civil society and the media, while others use the language of 'clients' (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012), 'users' (Kosack and Fung, 2014) or 'citizens' (Brummel, 2021). Although they could be grouped under the broader label of 'societal actors', there are differences among them that are important to consider. Also, even within each category, there might be significant differences; as Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg (2016, p. 275) state, "groups with privileged access to state resources are unlikely to share the concerns of deprived groups for service delivery accountability and may oppose their demand making". Three sets of actors are explored here, citizens, civil society organisations and the media.

1.4.1. *Citizens*

Social accountability literature usually refers to the citizen-state relationship without defining with precision who constitutes the citizenry or considering that it is not homogenous, or the possible biases associated with different forms of understanding citizenship, from old debates between status or practice to new ones regarding cultural, sexual or ecological (Lister, 2017). From a normative standpoint, public organisations would be accountable to all citizens, and in exchange, all citizens have the right to hold state actors accountable. However, not all groups or people have the same capacity or power to realise their full or active citizenship[3], such as poor or marginalised groups (women, indigenous) (Cornwall et al., 2008; Pettit, 2016; Lister, 2017). Cunill-Grau, referring to accountability as a form of citizen participation, writes about the relationship between officials and citizens:

> [Accountability] is conditioned on drawing a line between political authority incumbent on the
>
> state and social spheres demanding reciprocal recognition of political autonomy. If not a given,

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[3] For a further discussion on 'active citizenship', please refer to Lister (2017) and her commentary on citizenship as a general obligation, and the tension between rights and duties, where the author places 'active citizenship'.

from at least a formal standpoint, it is impossible to evoke citizen intervention in controlling the government apparatus (Cunill-Grau, 2006, p. 117).

As seen across the chapter, control over public organisations and officials is the key element of (social) accountability. However, as reminded by Lister (2017), the universality of the concept of citizenship might obscure women or marginalised groups' full recognition or capacity to access rights associated with citizenship. This challenge has also been recognised by social accountability practitioners and scholars who have maintained that citizens can be characterised as voiceless or powerless and in need of using social accountability to secure or improve access to goods and services (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Kosack and Fung, 2014; Fox, 2015).

In his analysis of social accountability, Brummel (2021) recognises two roles that citizens can play as account-holders. One, in which the interest in monitoring public organisations is the result of a more extensive interest in participating in politics. And another, informed by new public management, in which accountability operates through options of 'exit' and 'voice'. Approaches to social accountability focusing on the second role look into arrangements allowing users to decide to change service providers or voice complaints. This characterisation of citizens as 'users' corresponds to specific modes of governance where there are multiple providers for the same service. This is not the case for contexts such as the Colombian one where there is no competition but only one service provider or when the account-giver is distinct, such as government authorities.

Additionally, Boräng and Grimes (2021, p. 273) argue that social accountability analysis assumes citizens as active and deliberative individuals, capable and willing to get involved in politics. Such an assumption is similar to the "reimagined role" for citizens in the literature on democratic innovations. The field imagines citizens as 'co-producers' or 'problem-solvers' (Elstub and Escobar, 2019, p. 15). However, such a level of participation and engagement implies incurring time and effort costs that need to be empirically assessed and that have not been usually considered by previous research on

social accountability (Boräng and Grimes, 2021). Pettit (2016, p. 98), analysing citizen engagement, also invites us to analyse other types of constraints to engagement and asses, 'rational passivity' we identified in the Swedish study showed that poor and marginalised people often choose to comply with power where the risks of challenging power are perceived to be high".

Moreover, resorting to democratic innovations (Fung, 2006, p. 67) can help to interrogate citizens' roles by questioning "who is eligible to participate, and how do individuals become participants?". In a similar vein, Lister, referring to care as a political ideal, argues policy needs to "create the conditions for a '*gender inclusive*' citizenship (Lister, 2017, p. 200, emphasis original), highlighting the importance of policy frameworks supporting marginalised citizens. As Cunill-Grau (2006) argues, "citizens require resources with legal consequences, and require that conditions be made available for public deliberation and examination". In the past decade, there has been recognition of context and analyses regarding the possible characteristics that determine if social accountability initiatives will work.

Despite the contributions of feminism's or 'spaces for participation's literature to understand the divisions and exclusions that can arise from the concept of citizenship, the structures such as political culture, policy frameworks or socioeconomic conditions, shape how citizens (and all actors) engage in social accountability, as understood here, are still underexplored (Boräng and Grimes, 2021). Besides citizens, civil society organisations and the media have also been identified as key actors in social accountability, the next sections discuss the literature exploring their role in social accountability and broader participatory spaces.

1.4.2. *Civil society*

Civil society, as citizenship, is not a monolithic concept either (Cornwall et al., 2008; Grimes, 2013). Broadly, it refers to citizens grouped under an organised interest (Peruzzotti, 2012). More specifically, Arato (2006, p. 210) defines it as "the organizational substratum of groups, associations, and movements required of the generalization of the experience of communication, as well as for its

political influence". From Tocqueville onwards (Foley and Edwards, 1998) to Putnam (1993, 2000), research has found the prominent role organised and connected citizens can play in democratic settings, such as building citizenship, providing services along with or independently from the state, and giving identity and voice to certain interest to influence government action (Foley and Edwards, 1998, p. 12). However, researchers have also drawn attention to *how* civil society engages with the state while attempting to mediate or represent poor or marginalised groups (Piper and von Lieres, 2015; Grimes, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2002, 2006) refer to 'societal accountability' to analyse and theorise the role civil society has in holding the government accountable. Similar to what Foley and Edwards called the 'representative function' or in addition to it, Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006, p. 10) recognise an accountability function that works to "monitor public officials, expose governmental wrongdoing, and can activate the operation of horizontal agencies". Their focus has been on identifying what mechanisms or actions were employed by societal actors to exercise control, specifically in Latin America.

However, not all civil society organisations and movements pursue the same interests, and some of them could even undermine political accountability (Przeworski, 2006; Grimes, 2013). In their analysis of how civil society can mediate, as in representing or speaking for citizens, Piper and von Lieres, 2015) conclude that civil society interventions can vary from democratic to clientelistic or coercive. The presence alone of civil society organisations does not secure better democracy. Hence, the analysis of social accountability needs to consider that civil society organisations can voice the interests of unrepresented groups, but according to their characteristics and motivations, they can also over-represent some minorities or self-interested groups such as lobbyists (Przeworski, 2006).

More recent research has emphasised that the role taken by civil society varies according to the type of organisation but also on other contextual factors, which can lead to civil society organisations' work

having negative impacts. For instance, Gaventa and Barret (2012) highlight the role such organisations can have as "schools of democracy", providing opportunities to gain knowledge and awareness but the authors also warn about possible negative effects such as citizens being disempowered and relying upon knowledge in performative ways "allowing participants to speak the language that funders and intermediary donors might expect, but in fact reflecting a position of powerlessness, rather than a sense of emerging empowerment" (Gaventa and Barret, 2012, p. 2403 referencing Cassidy and Leach, 2010).

Another manifestation of diversity relies on civil society organisations' capacity to hold state actors accountable. Such capacity has been related to the internal characteristics of the associations as the context in which they operate. More than the strategies used by CSOs, researchers have shown an interest in their capacity to self-organise (Baiocchi et al., 2006; García, 2008) and not to be captured by the state (Baiocchi et al., 2006) or elite actors (Lakha et al. 2015). More recently, research has focused on understanding contextual factors affecting civil society's role in accountability (Fox, 2015; Grandvoinnet et al., 2015), from the effects of the previous trajectory of the organisations in specific places (Houtzager et al., 2021) to the existence of formal mechanisms or spaces designed by the state (Escandón and Velásquez, 2015).

1.4.3. The role of media

The media has been recognised as both an accountability actor and a strategy (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006). In Latin America, there has been a rising in independent and watchdog journalism, which has been related to three phenomena: first, the fourth wave of democratisation by which several countries in the region passed from dictatorships and authoritarian regimes to more democratic ones; second, with the marketisation of media, states and family-controlled organisations lost monopoly, giving space to new and independent media organisations able to monitor and scrutinise public actors; and finally, the increased interest of citizens and civil society organisations in a "more demanding model of representation" (Peruzzotti, 2006, p. 254). However, this depiction of

the region needs to be better analysed by country and within cities and even localities. Research conducted in Bogota, the capital of Colombia, found that issues related to social accountability are prominent when they involve the whole city, while localities do not get the same attention (Marin and Jimenez, 2013).

Citing Entman (2005, p. 48), Jacobs and Schillemans (2016, p. 26) state, "The ideal goal of traditional journalism has been to make power accountable: to keep ordinary citizens apprised of what government is doing, and how it affects them both individually and with respect to the groups and values that they care about." However, they criticised this position, arguing that the media's main interest does not rely on the public but is motivated by a 'media logic' that searches for news that journalists think will appeal to their audiences. Although this might not be the case for all media outlets and journalists, it does provide nuance to the idea that all media can or have an interest in holding public actors accountable.

Another important point raised by Jacobs and Schillemans (2016) is the media's capacity to access public information. As they state, "the information phase thus largely depends on organisations that *feel* bound to render an account but are often not formally obliged to do so" (original emphasis). This is predictable to any actor's capacity to access public information. However, it is important to consider that there have been considerable advances in securing access to public information through Freedom of Information and open government initiatives and trends (Gaventa and McGee, 2013). Moreover, such capacity goes beyond the formal arrangements. For example, in his analysis of media scandals, Peruzzotti (2006) illustrates that access to information about wrongdoing might depend on the action of whistle-blowers and face challenges imposed by political elites involved in the transgressions.

Nevertheless, the media can also be necessary as a resource for citizens, civil society and even public organisations (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Jacobs and Schillemans, 2016). The media can configure a space for citizens to pose questions to public actors (Stremlau et al.,

2015) or engage their attention to pass judgment and impose symbolic (reputational) sanctions (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012). In their analysis of over 23 initiatives across eight Latin-American countries, Hernandez et al. (2021, p. 660) found dissemination through mass media was a strategy employed by all participants to pursue their objectives, including "monitor the public administration and to promote accountability of the local governments". The research also found that civil society organisations' efforts, such as access to public information, are challenged by contextual factors such as "characteristics of mass media, local civil society, and local business organizations".

A closer look at how these elements can configure a challenge for social accountability can be found in Stremlau et al. (2015). In highly clientelistic territories, other actors use or attempt to use media spaces to promote their own agenda; as Stremlau et al. (2015, p. 1516) write: "the stories paid for by a businessman or politician shape the theme and topics covered, with bias towards the agenda that will be paid for". Hence, it is necessary to consider that media spaces can be a tool for societal actors to expose wrongdoing or gain attention over specific issues and for other powerful actors to disseminate different or opposite narratives. Again, as the same author points out:

> While these spaces have been hailed by academics, NGOs and donors as tools to promote institutional accountability and democratic participation, our analysis shows that they do not simply offer a new platform for citizens to speak up; they also offer a way for existing power structures to reproduce themselves in new forms (Stremlau et al., 2015, p. 1522).

In sum, this section has pointed out the importance of recognising the diversity of actors that constitute the social. Previous studies on social accountability have mentioned the array of actors that engage in holding state actors accountable without considering the distinctions between them (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2002, 2006). Others have focused on the strategies employed by them (Hernandez et al., 2021), and more recently, they have begun to examine the role of context in shaping societal actors' ability and capacity to exercise control (Cornwall et al., 2008; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012;

Rodan and Hughes, 2012; Lakha et al., 2015; Houtzager et al. 2021). The contextual factors might be associated with historical trajectories of civil society but also the political landscape, such as the presence of clientelism and the overall socioeconomic characteristics of societal actors.

Still, one of the limitations regarding the analysis of social accountability in weak democratic contexts such as the Latin American one is the operationalisation of the concept. Brummel's (2021) literature review asserts there are multiple frameworks, including a variety of initiatives and practices, that hinder the understanding of social accountability as a relationship, a limitation pointed out by others such as Joshi and Houtzager (2012) or Hickey and King (2016) in the development literature, or by Cornwall et al. (2004) regarding participatory spaces in Brazil and beyond (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). The following subsection differentiates between mechanistic and relational approaches to social accountability; while the first is prominent in weak democratic contexts and focuses on actions taken or mechanisms available to citizens to hold officials or service providers accountable, the second is more common in the European context and focuses on the formal arrangements or rules followed by officials and organisations to give account to citizens.

1.5. The mechanistic approach to social accountability in weak democratic contexts

The previous section showed that social accountability has been mostly defined and analysed by looking into initiatives aiming to "increase citizen involvement to reduce corruption and improve the quality of public goods and services" (Boräng and Grimes, 2021, p. 270; Anderson et al., 2022) and that are usually carried by societal actors (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006). The focus on societal-led actions and initiatives can be named 'mechanistic' because it pays attention to mechanisms available for citizens to hold officials to account, or for officials or other organisations to give account to societal actors.

Initially, the analysis of social accountability in Latin America and other weakly democratic contexts focused on three mechanisms: judicial strategy, social mobilisation and the use of media (Smulovitz

and Peruzzotti, 2000; Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2002; Herrera and Mayka, 2020). This repertoire has expanded to include actions used by CSOs to engage directly with public organisations and co-produce accountability (Cornwall et al., 2008; Fox, 2015; Houtzager et al., 2021; Hernandez et al., 2021). For instance, Hernandez et al. (2021) analyse social accountability by looking into the actions launched by the 'Network for Fair, Democratic and Sustainable Cities and Territories in Latin America' which include elaborating policy indicators or disseminating public information directed at other organisations or citizens. Based on their findings, the authors argue such actions evidenced a more direct relationship between societal actors and the state (see also, Richardson and Durose, 2013). Although more recent works show that social accountability can engage in multiple ways with the state or citizens, social accountability is still defined as a relation between two actors, interacting in either 'invited spaces' designed and controlled by the state or 'claimed/created spaces' which are claimed by less powerful actors or designed by them (Gaventa, 2006; Pettit, 2013).

Other researchers within the mechanistic approach analyse social accountability by interrogating the effectiveness of mechanisms implemented 'bottom-up' to hold public organisations and service providers accountable or aiming to 'boost accountability' (Herrera and Mayka, 2020). Among these mechanisms are included legal strategies such as accessing information via judges (Herrera and Mayka, 2020), media studies analysing how newspapers cover citizens' reports or possible wrongdoings (Marin and Jimenez, 2013), protests (Grimes, 2013), public hearings (Hernandez, 2017) or other ways in which citizens dissent and critique the status quo, such as cultural expressions like hip-hop music (Anderson et al., 2022, p. 25). Although the emphasis is on societal-led actions, some state-led initiatives, such as hearings or participatory budgeting, are included because for some researchers like Fox (2015, p. 346), "social accountability strategies try to improve institutional performance by bolstering both citizen engagement and the public responsiveness of states and corporations".

Besides studies focusing on specific mechanisms, there are also considerable meta-studies aiming to compare and draw lessons about what works (Gaventa and McGee, 2013; Fox, 2015; Grandvoinnet et al., 2015; Hickey and King, 2016). Despite the recognition that context matters, terms such as 'demand side' of accountability or 'voice and teeth' (e.g., Fox, 2015) informed the object of analysis of the first cumulative studies. However, social accountability involves actions from both societal and state actors, which has led to critics highlighting the importance of the 'supply side' and the context where strategies take place (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg, 2016).

Joshi and Houtzager (2012) listed three limitations to the mechanistic approach, including the emphasis on particular initiatives, sometimes associated with specific projects and ignoring the historical trajectories of the relationships between citizens and the state and the possible effect of other actions influencing outcomes. They argued that:

> taking this narrow focus hides a more substantial gap – we do not really have an understanding of why social accountability demands emerge in some settings and not in others, why some collective actors engage in social accountability activities at specific points of time. In other words, we do not have a theory that explains the origins of social accountability in practice (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012, p. 154).

Similar concerns have been addressed by those studying the 'participatory sphere' or 'new democratic spaces'. Even though social accountability could be analysed as a 'democratic innovation', the literature on the participatory sphere has paid more attention to participation and decision making. Moreover, such literature sees accountability as a value that can be secured through enhancing participation, while in this thesis the analysis of social accountability is focused on assessing past performance through meaningful and ongoing exchanges. The thesis argues that social accountability is a relational behaviour that deserves to be analysed on its own.

Still, it is important to consider to what extent the lessons learned in one field can support the other. For example, Coelho (2007) analysed health councils in Brazil and concluded that such 'participatory space' is restricted by the legacy of the political culture, bureaucrats' resistance to power-sharing, or the institutional design of such spaces. More broadly, Cornwall and Coelho (2007) argue that these spaces depend not only on those factors but also on how new spaces interact with other institutions, an increasing concern in the social accountability literature (sp. Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Boräng and Grimes, 2022).

Questions regarding under what settings different manifestations of social accountability emerge have started to be addressed (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015; Hickey and King, 2016; Odugbemi and Lee, 2011; Boräng and Grimes, 2021; Sarker et al., 2022). However, scholars have paid more attention to national issues than local ones, even if they are looking at localised examples of social accountability. For instance, Grandvoinnet et al. (2015) aimed to open up social accountability's black box by providing an analytical framework to assess contextual factors for effective social accountability, which they cluster into five 'drivers': state action, information, citizen action, civic mobilisation and citizen-state interface. The study underlined three findings regarding context, including the importance of political and power relations, the structure of state and civil society relations, and the dynamics of inequality and exclusion.

The framework developed by Grandvoinnet et al. configures a review of the literature stating context matters and provides a toolkit to evaluate how, with an emphasis on what can make certain initiatives successful or effective and ultimately guarantee a better service (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015; Boräng and Grimes, 2021). This and similar studies emphasise the importance of patterns of state-society relationships and actors' capacities, repertoires and commitment (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Hickey and King, 2016; Joshi, 2023). Moreover, Hickey and King (2016, p. 1237) argue there is a need to change how social accountability strategies are designed, monitored and evaluated based "on the political and contextual factors that enable and constrain such interventions in particular places". Similarly,

Cornwall et al. (2008) have pointed out the impossibility of exporting 'participatory institutions' without considering the political culture and history of each country and how it affects the state-citizen interactions at national, regional and local levels (Joshi, 2023).

In line with the recent approach to analyse social accountability, Houtzager et al. (2021) analyse 'accountability activism' in Sao Paulo and Delhi. Although they differentiate between 'social accountability' and 'accountability activism', the research responds to the limitations of "tool-led approaches" by taking a civil society-led approach that "looks at how civil society actors make strategic choices in the context of a web of relations to providers and the state, and to an array of possible strategies" (Houtzager et al., 2021, p. 60). Their work moves forward Joshi and Houtzager's (2012) proposal to pay attention to broader dynamics in which social accountability initiatives manifest and question the incentives for organisations to engage in accountability and patterns in state-society relations, including social norms (Joshi, 2023). The thesis argues that further insights might be gained by looking into the structures shaping such patterns and looks into how public or social accountability has been analysed in other contexts or in fields other than international development.

1.6. Public administration's relational approach to social accountability

Literature that focuses on mechanisms or initiatives has looked into the repertoire of actions available to citizens and state actors, including protesting, citizen scorecards or public hearings (e.g., Fox, 2015), with special emphasis on civil society (e.g., Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Houtzager et al., 2021). The mechanistic approach is prominent in the development and democratisation literature and to some extent in public administration (Brummel, 2021). Another leading approach to social accountability in public administration is connected to definitions of accountability as a relationship (Mulgan, 2000; Bovens, 2007).

According to Bovens et al. (2014, p. 19),

Accountability is then a relational concept, linking those who owe an account and those to whom it is owed. Accountability is a relational concept in another sense as well, linking agents and others for whom they perform tasks or who are affected by the tasks they perform.

The analysis of (social) accountability in this context shows two notable differences from the mechanistic one. First, it usually focuses on the account-giver, their internal organisation structure, and how they relate to societal actors (e.g., Bovens, 2010; Chan and Rosenbloom, 2010) and second, it focuses on the formal arrangements "govern the behavio[u]r of public agents" (Bovens et al., 2014, p. 22). Under this type of relational approach, social accountability refers to the relation between a public organisation and citizens or civil society organisations as a forum. For instance, Brummel (2021, p. 1055) differentiates between four types of societal forums that can act as account-holders: individual forums (e.g., individual citizens, clients); external and loosely organised forums (e.g., social media, mobilised groups); external and organised forums (e.g., civil society, news media), and internally institutionalised forums (e.g., stakeholder boards).

In terms of arrangements, public administration scholars have examined (social) accountability by identifying statutory documents and reforms (Curtin, 2007; Mathur and Skelcher, 2007; Bovens et al., 2008). Bovens et al.'s (2008) criteria for evaluating 'accountability arrangements' provide analytical leverage to apply empirically to cases. Despite the authors' interest in specific arrangements, which could be seen as mechanisms, their focus is not on specific initiatives (e.g., scorecards and audits) but on how the accountability elements are designed and enacted (Bovens et al., 2008). Similarly, Brandsma and Schillemans (2013) developed an 'accountability cube' as a tool to empirically analyse such relationships through a 'three steps approach' including information, discussions and consequences. The cube neglects to consider actors' attributes (Ostrom, 2005) influencing their actions within the three dimensions, a research item that the development literature in the mechanistic approach has addressed in some cases (Blair, 2000; Fox, 2015; Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg, 2016).

This thesis suggests this relational approach focusing on the arrangements governing behaviour can be applied in weak democratic contexts such as Latin America to enrich the understanding of social accountability, in a similar way power analysis has been used in development studies (Gaventa, 2006; Pettit, 2013). However, as mentioned above, despite referring to a relationship, public administration literature has focused on public organisations over interactions. In this sense, and in line with the need to theorise social accountability beyond mechanisms available to civil society, more research is needed to understand the structures shaping the interactions between both actors. A more critical approach to relationality in public administration that can be useful to social accountability theorisation is the one mobilised by Bartels and Turnbull (2020). They maintained that relationality in public administration is a diffuse concept, but it can be summarised under the premise that "individuals exist only *in relation* to others" (Bartels and Turnbull, 2020, 1330, original emphasis).

The focus on the particularities of either societal or state actors disengaged from the context in which they are situated can be categorised as an individualist depiction of social accountability. Furthermore, literature on social accountability that refers to relations, explicitly or not, seems closer to what Bartels and Turnbull (2020, p. 1338) identify as 'relationistic' approaches "which study transactional exchanges between static actors and systems with fixed properties". Despite the absence of a unique understanding of relationality in public administration (Bartels and Turnbull, 2020), a relational approach to social accountability requires more attention to be paid to interactions between state and societal actors and the structures that shape them.

Another useful concept to advance a relational approach to social accountability is power (Pettit, 2013). Although Pettit (2013) argues that is necessary to analyse power from different perspectives, one in particular is highlighted here, power in the form of agency which he explains as the actions and behaviour of people, or what here it is referred to as accountable behaviour, providing or demanding information, discussing information, forming judgment, and imposing or modifying actions. Still,

another way to understand power is by the existing constraints in specific contexts that shape ideas and behaviours (Pettit, 2013; Gaventa, 2006). Analysis of power, both as agency and structure, can help to understand social accountability and contribute to the literature interested in the behaviour and structures shaping accountable behaviour. To an extent, it helps to bring closer the mechanistic and relational approaches by showing the necessity of looking into contextual and institutional factors explaining social accountability (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015; Boräng and Grimes, 2021; Gaventa, 2006; Pettit, 2013).

1.7. Conclusion

The literature discussed above constitutes a theoretical framework for the analysis of social accountability as a key aspect of democratic governance, especially at the local level and in weak democratic settings such as Colombia or others where new democratic practices have emerged aiming to strengthen citizen engagement in governance. Despite the raise in popularity of accountability and social accountability, both concepts remain contested. Across and within academic fields, and practice scholars and practitioners tend to have their own working definitions of social accountability. Still, there is agreement about their significance for democracy to prevent or sanction the abuse of power, secure responsiveness and the engagement of citizens and their organised interests in governance.

This chapter argued that the conception of social accountability as public officials providing information and explanations to citizens (and other societal actors) who in turn can pose questions, pass judgment and impose sanctions (Schedler, 1999; Cunill-Grau, 2006; Bovens et al., 2008) is inherently relational, denoting ongoing interactions between the actors. However, there has been a preponderant emphasis, especially in weak democratic contexts like Latin America, on the different initiatives or mechanisms (e.g., hearings, protests, scoreboards) available to citizens to hold officials to account. More recently, researchers have highlighted the need to analyse social accountability beyond

the mechanistic approach. Most studies signalled the importance of context and history in the success or failure of initiatives but the analysis of *how* they matter is still emerging.

The thesis aims to contribute to the body of knowledge theorising about social accountability looking into the patterns of state-citizen interactions (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Cornwall et al., 2008). There is also a gap in identifying the role of power and politics (Hickey and King, 2016, p. 1236, Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Pettit, 2013) as key contextual elements shaping social accountability. This thesis argues that the analysis of what structures shape actors' behaviour (Boräng and Grimes, 2021) for securing social accountability might be moved forward by drawing from the analysis of public accountability in more settled democratic contexts (e.g., Bovens et al., 2008; Richardson and Durose, 2013; Olsen, 2013; Bovens et al., 2014) and 'new democratic spaces' (Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007).

However, the public administration approach, common in Europe, has limitations that the thesis aims to address as well. First, there is a significant focus on formal arrangements and research on social accountability in weak democratic contexts has shown the importance of considering informal arrangements. Second, contrary to what is found in the development literature that emphasises the societal actors, the institutional approach's emphasis is on public organisations as account-givers. Taking relationality seriously implies paying more attention to interactions between them and the structures shaping such interactions.

Although similar approaches exist in development literature, paying attention to power dynamics, political culture and actors' capacity and will to open or claims spaces for citizen engagement (Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2006; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007) they cover a broader subject, 'the participatory sphere'. Moreover, the spatial approach to participation conceived by Cornwall (2004) highlights the need of analysing both 'invited' (run by the state) and 'claimed' spaces (run by citizens), however, the spatial metaphor sees 'spaces' as "opportunities, moments and channels" (Gaventa, 2006". Conversely,

the thesis argues that is possible to expand the understanding of social accountability not by analysing the 'spaces' where it might occur but by paying attention to the structures shaping accountable behaviour.

Chapter 2 argues that it is possible to advance the understanding of social accountability by analysing it as an institution, a set of structures empowering or constraining actors' behaviour. New institutionalism (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) provides an analytical framework to interrogate who takes part in social accountability, what roles they enact and what actions they can or cannot perform (i.e., inform, deliberate, sanction). An institutional and relational account of social accountability can help to answer the following research questions:

- How may social accountability be secured in weak democratic contexts?

- To what extent do public officials align with the role of 'account-givers' and societal actors that of 'account-holders'?

- How may societal actors assess the performance of public officials?

- How may societal actors impose consequences over public officials, and public officials respond?

2. NEW INSTITUTIONALISM AS AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

2.1. Introduction

Chapter 1 argued that more attention needs to be given to the structures shaping actors' behaviour to advance the understanding of social accountability. Providing information and explanations, debating, forming judgement and imposing consequences (answerability and consequences) are bounded behaviours that are immersed in political struggles and contested views of what accountability entails. Although an institutional approach to (social) accountability is not new, there are three reasons to pursue a 'new institutional' take on the subject. First, previous analyses tend to focus on formal rules that provide an incomplete picture of structure shaping behaviour. Second, institutional analyses are less prominent in the literature and research centred on 'developing' democracies but have been useful in analysing more developed democracies (for a different perspective, see Cornwall et al., 2008). Third, the existing ones look at initiatives promoting social accountability instead of interactions between the account-giver and the account-holder. This chapter introduces new institutionalism (sp. Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) as a theoretical-analytical framework for researching social accountability.

Institutional analysts argue that "political behaviour and political outcomes are best understood by studying the rules and practices that characterize institutions, and the ways in which actors relate to them" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 7). The thesis aims to analyse social accountability as a set of arrangements (formally codified, informal conventions and symbolic) that can empower or constrain actors to act as account-givers or account-holders, facilitating or not access to information, its discussion and the imposition of consequences. The converged theory of institutions also recognises that arrangements cannot achieve change – or in this case, accountable behaviour – on their own but that they are dependent on the way actors interact with them (Streeck and Thelen, 2005; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; Cornwall et al., 2008). Additionally, specific institutions, such as social accountability, are part of broader institutional environments that expand across time and space.

This chapter explores core concepts associated with new institutionalism, which will be used to analyse fieldwork data. First, the chapter addresses what institutions are and how they operate and the need to go beyond 'institutionalisation' as the creation or adoption of formal rules created by government organisations; it then argues institutions are dynamic while exploring the tensions between institutional design or deliberative attempts to design and incompleteness as an inevitable institutional feature (Durose and Lowndes, 2021). The following section presents 'logics of action' as a concept that helps to explain another significant aspect of institutional dynamism, that institutions are shaped by how actors interact with them, allowing institutions to effectively (or not) shape behaviour. Then, it moves to the need to recognise institutions as embedded in broader contextual and historical processes or fellow institutions, which might result in competing structures. The final section reminds the research questions guiding the thesis and remarks on the relevance of new institutionalism by summarising key terms.

2.2. Institutions, what they are and how they work

This research argues that an institutional approach to social accountability can help to understand and improve the relationship between officials and citizens by identifying the structures shaping such a relationship. However, institutionalism is a fragmented theory (Olsson, 2016) and it is important to clarify what the thesis refers to as institutions and institutionalism. This section first gives a brief overview of a converging standpoint on new institutionalism, it then presents a working concept of institutions and centres on the three modes of *constraint* proposed by Lowndes and Roberts (2013) to identify how institutions work.

2.2.1.   *A converging theory of institutionalism*

Institutionalism aims to explain political behaviour by analysing institutions, understood as the regular patterns that constrain our actions in the political arena and can be enforced by 'third parties' (Crawford and Ostrom, 1995; Lowndes, 2010; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), and that are embedded in

governance structures in ways that make them resilient to attempts of dismantle them (Cornwall et al., 2008, p. 51), for instance: markets, bureaucracies or electoral systems. The concept of institutions and the theories and methods employed to analyse them have varied across time and disciplines. Scott (2001) states that the earliest institutional arguments arose – simultaneously but disconnected – in the fields of economics, political science and sociology between the end of the nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries. Although debates and differences remain between different strands of institutionalism (Olsson, 2016), this thesis draws on the work of Lowndes and Roberts (2013), which identified a converging theory for institutionalism.

While earlier political scientists were interested in formal political institutions (e.g., constitutions, legal codes), economists and sociologists theorised about institutions from diverse and contrasting viewpoints. Earlier institutional economists defined institutions as "settled habits of thought common to the generality of man" (Veblen, 1919, referenced by Scott, 2001, p. 3) and showed interest in how social structures affected economic processes. In addition, Scott depicted sociologists as having a broader view of social life that included politics, economics and religion, with a different understanding of what institutions are, conceptualising them as functions and later, as a 'symbolic systems' product of human interaction. In his account of early institutionalism, Scott (2001, p. 17) highlighted that "these theorists in numerous ways anticipated distinctions and insights rediscovered by later analysts", or what is known now as new institutionalism.

The term 'new' derives from a 'rediscovery of institutions' (March and Olsen, 1989; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) after other theoretical approaches became dominant, especially in economics and political science. Scott (2001) argues that scholars across various fields privileged certain elements or 'pillars' over others and sustains that such an approach is useful. He notes:

> Although it is possible to combine the insights of economic, political, and sociological analysts
> into a single, complex, integrated model of an institution, I believe it is more useful at this point

to recognize the differing assumptions and emphases that accompany the models currently guiding inquiry into this phenomena (Scott, 2001, p. 69).

Unlike Scott, Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 40) argue that different strands not only co-exist but that they overlap and have gained a momentum of convergence and consolidation regarding core concepts and key dilemmas. Core concepts across the converged theory of institutionalism include an expansion and refinement of the concept of institutions to include formal rules and informal conventions; interest in the values and power relationships embodied in institutions; and the institutional change as a product of human action that shapes institutions as much as the latter constrains behaviour (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 28-9). Their approach to institutions constitutes a sound analytical framework to analyse social accountability since it provides clear heuristics and concepts to analyse political realities which are explored later in the chapter.

2.2.2. Institutions and institutional modes of constraint

The central concept in institutionalism to explain human behaviour is 'institution'. Institutions are social structures, sets of prescriptions that shape behaviour and usually manifest through a combination of rules, practices and narratives (Scott, 2001; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Scott (2001), drawing from the work of Anthony Giddens (1984), refers to structures as "patterned social activities, incorporating rules and resources, that are reproduced over time" (Scott, 2001, p. 75). Institutions do not only limit human behaviour, but they can also empower actors by specifying what roles and actions they can assume or undertake (March and Olsen, 1989; Scott, 2001). Chapter 1 showed social accountability involves specific roles such as 'account-giver' and 'account-holder', and actions such as accessing information, discussing it and imposing consequences. An institutional approach argues that who gets to act as what and what they can or cannot do is influenced by different sets of arrangements and how actors interact with them.

Similar to Olsen's (2013) argument about accountability or Cornwall et al. (2008) about participatory governance in Brazil, the research analyses the institutional arrangements shaping social accountability in a specific context and period. Olsen argues that "Accountability processes may involve political mobilisation and struggles over who deserves to be accepted as principals and trustworthy agents; over distributions of information, what is democratically desirable, power-relations, and what are legitimate identities and roles" (Olsen, 2013, p. 449). Institutionalism helps to identify the answer to questions of roles, power and agency to exercise accountable behaviour. A critical element to understanding the structures shaping social accountability is institutional arrangements.

When referring to the 'central ingredients' of institutions, Scott (2001, p. 49) sustains that institutions' building blocks are regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements which he refers to as 'pillars'. Scott provides a complex view of institutions that takes into account the pillars but also the activities and resources available to actors, and to the 'carriers', the repositories in which pillars are embedded. Lowndes and Roberts (2013), drawing on the advances of several new institutionalists, present a similar set of heuristics to analyse how institutions operate: rules, practices and narratives.

In the initial years of institutionalism, rules were almost a synonym for institutions. Since institutions were recognised as regular patterns that constrain our actions, most institutionalists used to look into formal rules (e.g., laws, constitutions) to explain how they influence behaviour (Scott, 2001; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Although some analysts use the term 'rules' indistinctly to refer to all "routines, procedures, conventions, roles, strategies, organizational forms, and technologies around which political activity is constructed" (March and Olsen, 1989, p. 22), this thesis refers to rules as formal prescriptions, written and usually conceived by an authoritative actor who also has the capacity to monitor and enforce the rules via sanctions or incentives (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Scott, 2001). Rules, provide a framework and configure 'binding obligations' that are still dependent on the will to

enact them or awareness to make them efficient (Cornwall et al., 2008). Rules have been important for the understanding of social accountability, for example, Isaza's (2015) analysis of social accountability in Colombia starts by looking at the mechanisms devised by the constitution and the law. However, it is important to acknowledge that given the association of institutionalism to formal rules, some analysts refer to 'institutionalisation' as the process by which certain patterns of behaviour are legitimised or adopted by authorities. This distinction is used by Hernandez et al. (2021) to differentiate between institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of citizen participation as objectives of civil society organisations in Latin America.

The second mode of constraint identified by Lowndes and Roberts is practices. Once institutionalists realised that formal and codified rules are not the only ones influencing or constraining behaviour, they started to analyse what has been called 'informal rules of the game'. Norms of behaviour that are the product of social convention inform, constrain or enable actions taken by certain actors at certain times. The main difference with rules is that practices are not formally codified. Although Lowndes and Roberts connect practices to Scott's 'normative pillar', the latter has stated: "While I … agree that more attention needs to be given to activities and practices, habits and routines, I am not persuaded of the need to add a fourth pillar to the conceptual framework" (Scott, 2014, p. 70). Scott argues practices are a mode of transmitting institutions, a 'carrier'. Practices are more related to norms, understood as 'cultural prescriptions' associated with what might be considered moral behaviour (Scott, 2001; Ostrom, 2005). For example, "practices may support 'positive' patterns of behaviour, like accountability or probity or a 'public service ethos'; equally they may underpin 'negative' frameworks like patronage, paternalism or sexism", which vary across different settings (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 58).

The final element that constitutes institutional constraints or enables behaviour is narratives. Despite narrative and the associated discourse analysis having been highly studied in social sciences,

institutional approaches using them are more recent (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). The inclusion of narratives as prescriptions influencing behaviour derives from acknowledging that stories convey values, ideas, and power shaping actors' behaviour. Lowndes and Roberts differentiate narratives from other modes of constraint by noticing,

> While rules rely on experience as the basis of compliance, practices rest upon binding expectations and a sense of social obligation, and narratives, on the other hand, secure compliance by establishing as 'taken-for-granted' certain framing devices, explanatory categories and normative understandings (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 64).

In politics, narratives constitute what is taken for granted by a set of actors in a specific context and a mechanism through which an actor persuades another to follow particular actions (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Schmidt, 2008, 2010). Lowndes and Roberts connect narratives with the cognitive-culture pillar conceptualised by Scott (2001), which emphasises the system of beliefs shared by actors immersed in a specific context and that helps them make sense of the world and select how to respond to particular situations. Narratives convey "underlying, taken-for-granted assumptions that people hold about themselves and their situations" (Ospina and Dodge, 2005, p. 145). Recurring to Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003), the works of Ospina and Dodge (2005) and Olsson (2016) show how stories help reveal street-level actors' judgements about clients before deciding how to deliver services to them. Stories also serve to exchange lessons about how to handle complex situations and are sometimes discouraged because "those stories can undermine the official discourse of public agencies and their tools of supervision" (Olsson, 2016, p. 71). Shared beliefs can also constrain certain actors to focus on certain actions over others. For example, Rodan and Hugues argue that in the Philippines, the Church has played a significant role in the use of social accountability mechanisms to fight corruption, and their involvement is explained by members of a religious community's belief that it was a moral

and cultural problem and what was needed was to change the mindsets of ordinary people who have become tolerant of corruption (Rodan and Hugues, 2012, p. 372-3).

To summarise, rules refer to formal and written prescriptions that indicate what actors – in specific situations – must or must not do. However, a deep understanding of political phenomena is not possible by looking only at rules. Also known as informal rules, practices correspond to how things are done in a particular setting and have a normative character. Finally, narratives refer to the actors' ideas and stories that indicate what actors take for granted. Following Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 55), this thesis rests on the argument that "the proper subject matter of third phase institutionalism is the specific combination of formal and informal mechanisms that constrain political behaviour in different settings". Table 2.1. provides abstract examples of what the three different institutional arrangements can look like in social accountability.

Table 2.1. Abstract examples of institutional arrangements

	Definition	Example
Rules	Written, formal and indicate what actors must do	A law requiring local authorities to publish quarterly reports of budget expenses
Practices	Informal, how things are done	Each department at the local authority is responsible for publishing their own report
Narratives	Stories, what is taken for granted	Officials assuming there is no public interest in budget reports

Author's own elaboration

Institutions constrain some actors while empowering others by defining their roles and what they must or can do or not, which develop into tensions that provoke endogenous institutional change (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Institutions' enactment, stability or change are processes that depend on the different strategies actors use to interact with institutions. Actors' strategies are a manifestation of their agency and the dual character of institutions, the fact they are shaped back by human actions.

2.3. A closer look at agency

According to Scott (2001, p. 49), institutions are better understood as processes entailing institutional arrangements and their associated behaviour. 'Animating' institutions entails asking about actors' capacity to interpret and enact *rules* and the logic of action informing them (Ostrom, 2005; Cornwall et al., 2008; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Olsson, 2016). Scholars interested in social accountability have highlighted the importance of actors' will and resources to secure the success of initiatives (e.g., Hickey and King, 2016) or the role of power hierarchies (e.g., Rodan and Hugues, 2012). Institutionalism provides analytical elements to better understand how actors make use of their resources to enact or reject social accountability arrangements.

New institutionalism analysts use the concept of agency to explore the interaction between institutional arrangements and actors' behaviour (Olsson, 2016, p. 11) or the processes by which actors connect existing rules to the situations they are experiencing (March and Olsen, 1989). The logics of action correspond to patterns regarding how actors interpret institutions, adapt them or resist them (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Olsson, 2016). Social accountability can be considered a highly normative institution, it carries democratic values that "call[s] attention to processes of socialisation, internalisation, identification and habituation that make actors accept as legitimate codes of conduct specifying appropriate behaviour of different roles in different situations" (Olsen, 2013, p. 468). A normative perspective such as the one taken by Olsen prioritises a 'logic of appropriateness' by which actors internalised accountability as the appropriate behaviour.

Other institutionalists prioritise interest-based logics of calculation, a history-based logic of path dependence (Schmidt, 2008, p. 312). More recently, Schmidt (2010) proposed the concepts of ideational and discursive abilities to analyse how 'sentient' actors make sense of their context and persuade others to maintain or change institutions. Similarly, Lowndes and Roberts describe actors "with real human heads and hearts, who engage critically and strategically with institutions rather than

simply playing pre-assigned roles" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 145) or just acting on 'rule-following logic' (Schmidt, 2008). A converging institutional approach considers the complexity of institutions and human behaviour in specific contexts that also define the resources available to actors.

Lowndes and Roberts argue the consolidation of new institutionalism and conceptualise agency under a 'logic of combat' (Olsson, 2016, p. 25-6). According to Olsson (2016), their approach is an ambition to 'upgrade political agency' by including elements of power and conflict. As Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 109) note, "not only do political actors seek to empower themselves and their allies; they also seek to constrain their opponents in a direct and combative manner". Besides following a 'logic of combat', their conceptualisation of agency brings together what they see as a 'third phase institutionalism' approach to agency, which Olsson summarises,

> Their so-called 5C model of institutional agency has the following characteristics: *collective* because actors need to mobilize other actors to work together; *combative* in the sense of direct action by a group of actors with the intent of opposing and undermining other groups; *cumulative* through the impact of agency on institutions over time; *combinative* in the sense of actors using the 'institutional materials' at hand; and *constrained* through dependency on their institutional context (Olsson, 2016, p. 24).

Although Olsson (2016) categorises Lowndes and Roberts' approach as a 'logic of combat', they do not use the term 'combative' to refer to logics of action. What is more, Lowndes (2014) connects different modes of constraint with a particular logic. In her analysis of how institutions produce gendered effects, Lowndes proposes a research agenda that asks:

> First, how do institutions *regulate* actors' behavio[u]r to produce gendered effects? We need to consider how laws, standards, and protocols produce such effects and identify the rewards and punishments associated with compliance or noncompliance. Second, how do institutions *obligate* actors to behave in gendered ways? Here we need to uncover "gendered logics of

appropriateness" (Chappell 2006), looking at how they operate through routines and practices and may be enforced through informal means (for instance, displays of disapproval, social isolation, threats, or even acts of violence). Third, how do institutions *narrate* forms of gendered behavio[u]r or legitimize gendered political outcomes? A research agenda opens up regarding forms of cognitive framing within political life, which "organize in" or "organize out" certain arguments on a gendered basis (Lowndes, 2014, p. 689).

Her questions seem to imply that rules operate under a logic of consequentiality, practices under a logic of appropriateness and narratives, under a logic of communication, and that this happens all at the same time. Similarly, but from a distinctive viewpoint, Olsen (2013) concludes that in 'complex and dynamic settings', actors are driven by both a logic of consequentiality and a logic of appropriateness. Despite recognising two logics, Olsen (2013) still gives prominence to the logic of appropriateness as part of a broader shift in how accountability has been analysed and the assumptions underlying those analyses. His approach is evident when he states, "At issue is whether effective accountability requires democrats, citizens and office-holders that have internalised and habitualised a democratic-civic ethos" (Olsen, 2013, p. 468).

Olsen's interest is in the *role* of 'guardians' and citizens and the normative criteria (ethos) to assess if an actor's behaviour has been appropriate or not. However, such a task is more difficult when there are competing values regarding what is appropriate or desirable (Olsen, 2013). Another, and maybe more significant, difference between Olsen (2013) and Lowndes (2014) is that the former sees the logic of appropriateness as the way in which institutions shape behaviour by defining "appropriate actions in terms of relations between roles and situations" (March and Olsen, 1989, p. 173).

Following Olsson, this thesis takes 'political agency seriously' and agrees that, "we need to avoid repeating the problem of theorizing on single action logics and, in contrast, to acknowledge a micro-level perspective on the complexity and dynamics of political agency within institutional contexts"

(Olsson, 2016, p. 31). He proposes focusing on 'micro-mechanisms of action' through which different logics manifest and "are assumed to work in combination and in sequences in interaction with institutional rules, norms, and practices in different contexts and situations" (Olsson, 2016, p. 31). This approach to agency embraces complexity and uncertainty, arguing that to analyse "how and to what extent formal organizational structures and positions matter" is an empirical endeavour (Olsson, 2016, p. 29).

Analysing social accountability in Latin America can benefit from Olsson's approach. Latin American cities are usually associated with issues of corruption and inequality which can have a critical impact on how actors interact with institutions, the resources available to them and how they exercise power. In such contexts, Olsson's (2016) attention to subversion as a micro-mechanism for stability or change can help to understand the dynamics of social accountability. He defines subversion as "secret political actions against institutional rules, norms, and practices by ignoring, violating, or seeking to change them, or trying to preserve stability by secretly resisting or undermining activities or initiatives, which are perceived as threats to existing institutions" (Olsson, 2016, p. 105). Olsson's approach to institutional subversion (see also Mahoney and Thelen, 2010) follows his argument of taking *political* agency seriously and the need to empirically study the different manifestations and combinations of logics of action, especially the logic of combat (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). The following section pays special attention to strategies or micro-mechanisms that account for processes of institutional design and formation (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018), deinstitutionalisation (Scott, 2001) or institutional weakness (Brinks et al., 2020).

2.4. Institutional dynamics: design and change

Rules, practices, and narratives do not only shape behaviour or do it straightforwardly. Institutions are also 'distributional instruments' (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), distributing power and other resources. This section turns to how institutions emerge and change. By looking into

institutional design and change, it is possible to see human action continuously 'creating and recreating' institutions, so they can be characterised as incomplete and dynamic. Institutions always depend on actors and as Streeck and Thelen (2005, p. 14) highlight when referring to sources of change, the fact is that "*the enactment of a social rule* is never perfect and that there always is a gap between the *ideal pattern* of a rule and the *real pattern* of life under it" (emphasis original).

2.4.1. *Institutional design and formation*

How do institutions originate? With what purpose? Drawing from Suchman (1995), Scott (2001) states that institutions are created to respond to problems for which existing institutional arrangements are unsatisfactory. Similarly, Ostrom (2005, p. 255), drawing from her analysis of common-pool resources' governance, argues that 'rules' are created "in efforts to improve outcomes in this policy domain". Similarly, recent fields such as 'democratic innovations' refer to institutions to discuss new practices "developed to reimagine and deepen the role of citizens in governance processes by increasing opportunities for participation, deliberation and influence" (Elstub and Escobar, 2019, p. 14) or to create spaces to increase and improve citizen engagement, development and democratisation (Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). Generally, institutions are designed with a purpose, and in the political realm, for certain actors to try making 'their values stick' (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 171, also March and Olsen, 1989). Social accountability is also identified with different purposes, for instance, to secure responsiveness or prevent and punish abuses of power; it has also been linked to democratic values such as transparency and responsibility.

Considering institutions are created with a purpose, Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 172) assert that design "refers to the construction of institutional configurations" intended to achieve such purpose. Institutional design is usually associated with the creation of rules, for example, analysts have shown interest in understanding the design of specific mechanisms to hold actors accountable by looking into the formal creation and rules setting spaces and processes like boards, neighbourhood councils, participatory budgeting (Fung and Wright, 2001; Cunill-Grau, 2006) or the development of specific

policies for social accountability (Isaza, 2017). However, as institutions themselves, the process of design is not static and while design can be seen as a deliberative and intentional effort (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), this is not possible because "even when institutions are formally codified, their guiding expectations often remain ambiguous and always are subject to interpretation, debate, and contestation" (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010, p. 11).

Although institutional design might sound like a straightforward process, institutions are not simply enacted (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Streeck and Thelen, 2005). Actors need to engage with others to persuade them to create, maintain or change institutions (sp. Schmidt, 2008; see also, Streeck and Thelen, 2005; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). However, those actions do not have immediate effects either, and, as the previous section shows, effective institutions achieve their goal when the three modes of constraint work together, closing the gap between design and everyday practices (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Mayka, 20). With that in mind, the purpose of the research presented in this thesis is to analyse not the design itself, but the dynamics that result after a policy for social accountability was introduced in 2010 as a response to 'inadequate practices' (Conpes 3654).

Furthermore, new rules-in-use and supporting narratives are established through a process of 'institutional formation' (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018, p. 228). The concept sits between two opposite theoretical approaches regarding institutions' emergence and change that see "institutional design as a time-limited event and from institutional change as an open-ended historical trajectory" (2018, p. 229). Institutional formation helps to understand processes of institutionalisation as growth over time and institutions' capacity to shape behaviour (Scott, 2001), others have referred to the importance of the conjunction ¬of context, design and capacity for 'new democratic spaces' to be effective (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007, p. 22, emphasis original). The model conceived by Lowndes and Lemprière takes into consideration that besides the intention of rule makers or designers to establish

or reform institutions, the process is embedded in historical and geographical contexts, and even more, institutional development depends on actors' interpretation of them. As Streeck and Thelen note:

> What all this amounts to is that those who control social institutions, whoever they may be in a concrete case, are likely to have less than perfect control over the way in which their creations work in reality. What an institution *is* is defined by continuous interaction between rule makers and rule takers during which ever new interpretations of the rule will be discovered, invented, suggested, rejected, or for the time being, adopted (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 16).

As an example, in their analysis of the impact of institutional reforms on local-state and civil society relationships, Baiocchi et al. (2006, p. 915) found that "reform efforts can be compromised by general problems of compliance (the existence of extra-institutional norms and rules), the resistance of elites (a recurrent theme in the decentralization literature) or the absence or disorganization of civil society partners". Institutions then are never complete; they need to be animated by actors. Although incompleteness is regarded as inherent to institutions, Durose and Lowndes (2021) propose a different criterion to approach the concept, which might be helpful for the analysis of emerging institutions, such as social accountability.

2.4.2. *Institutional incompleteness*

Attempts for institutional design are inevitable; however, "the form that institutions take depends critically upon the creative work of reflexive actors" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 155). With interest in the processes of 'design itself', Durose and Lowndes (2021, p. 4) identify three distinctive 'design logics' underpinning design strategies and goals: pragmatic, instrumental and emergent. The first one is closer to the conceptualisation of institutions as 'works in progress' (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) and advocates for 'good-enough' design. A pragmatic logic design acknowledges the ambiguities that result from actors' interpretation and contestation over institutional arrangements and the effect of

changing environments. Similarly, Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 191) argue revisability, understood as flexibility and tolerance to design variants, can serve as a guiding principle to maximise chances of institutional success.

From a different standpoint, incompleteness is seen as an element to be 'designed out', which Durose and Lowndes categorise as an 'instrumental design logic'. Unlike the pragmatic design logic that is close to a consolidated view of new institutionalism, the instrumental is closer to the rational choice approach. Under this logic, design has a goal-oriented perspective; once achieved, the design is complete (Durose and Lowndes, 2021). Social accountability designs centred on formal rules could be seen as an example of this type of logic. For instance, Escandón and Velasquez (2015) critique the Colombian 'institutional offer' because mechanisms created by the state are highly restricted, and there are not enough incentives for citizens to participate. An analysis under the instrumental logic could argue that designs are incomplete because rules are not followed. Durose and Lowndes (2021, p. 7) note, "Incompleteness may reflect a situation in which institutional design has stalled, failed or been abandoned, or there has been a lack of attention to the enforcement of institutional rules".

The last type, the emergent design logic, is conceptualised as institutional designs that include incompleteness as a 'normative design value' (Durose and Lowndes, 2021, p. 9). The emergent logic privileges incompleteness as a mechanism to allow rule-takers to shape institutions in ways that respond to their interests and identities, enhancing democracy. In this way, it takes a step further than the 'pragmatic logic' because incompleteness is not seen as unavoidable but intentionally designed-in. Durose and Lowndes (2021) conceptualise the pragmatic logic as a critique of rational choice analysts' approach to institutions as rigid, restricting or ignoring actors' interactions with institutional arrangements; and technocratic, envisioning an 'optimal solution' devised by technocratic experts and underestimating other forms of expertise.

Durose and Lowndes' conceptual framework does not privilege one logic over another; instead, they are proposed as heuristics to understand political dynamics. Furthermore, they show that the same actor can resort to different logics at different times and with different purposes (2021, p. 13). The plurality and hybridity of incompleteness also serve as a reminder that new institutionalism, especially Lowndes and Roberts (2013), understand institutions as 'messy', dependent on human action and context. An institutional analysis of social accountability might benefit from the nuance proposed by Durose and Lowndes, considering the plurality of actors (officials, citizens, civil society) and their particular contexts and characteristics. Actors' iteration with rules, practices and narratives has also been extensively explored by those interested in institutional change and, more broadly, how they shape behaviour. This section now turns to change to explore actors' strategies to enact, shape and change institutions.

2.4.3.   *Institutional change*

Behind the concept of institutional design resides the 'myth of the intentional designer' (Lowndes and Roberts referencing Goodin, 2013, p. 186) or the idea that it is possible to design and create a set of rules to achieve a specific result. However, the differentiation between processes of institutional formation and change is arbitrary, it depends on the analysts' focus. Scott (2001, p. 95) states: "Institutions do not emerge in a vacuum; they always challenge, borrow from, and, to varying degrees, displace prior institutions". While the origin of the first institutions, such as language, might be unknown, it is now recognised that the formation of new institutions is a process that cannot be disengaged from prior institutions; thus, when deciding what point of the process to focus on, analysts might be looking at design or change. The debate has moved on to understand that design is not static, it does not finish when a new policy is created, for example, the design of a social accountability policy in Colombia does not secure its design is complete. Foundational moments for formal regulations need to be addressed along with "many disparate small acts of adjustment undertaken by strategic actors on the ground" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 171).

In addition, the distributional character of institutions also explains their dynamism (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010); after all, they are contested arenas in which political actors struggle to make their values stick (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), and account-givers and account-holders might have contrasting values such as opacity and transparency. Rules, practices and narratives "might combine to produce institutional stability over time, but it is also possible for gaps and contradictions to open up, creating instability – and possibilities for change" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 134). For example, in their analysis of participatory governance in Barcelona, Blanco et al. (2022) found that possibilities for change resulted from the dynamism of practices that embodied different values and power relations across time. While rules remain more or less static, practices and narratives employed by politicians and civil society actors revealed political struggles and contradictions that permanently opened spaces for change.

Understanding change as endogenous processes inherent to institutions has led to changing the focus from external factors such as an economic crisis to the effects of the combination of the modes of constraint (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), paying attention to actors' behaviour, strategies, conflict and manoeuvring (Thelen, 2009), and to the overlap between institutions (Scott, 2001). The previous section covered rules, practices and narratives, and the overlap will be addressed later along with institutional context, drawing attention now to the strategies for change identified by Mahoney and Thelen (2010) (following Streeck and Thelen, 2005) and Lowndes and Roberts (2013).

In their analysis of endogenous change, both works theorise change by considering human action, institutions' connection to other institutions, and their context. Actors employ different strategies trying to 'provoke shifts' in institutional arrangements (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 181), and by enacting, rejecting or ignoring certain arrangements, they can produce institutional change (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). In some cases, actors might introduce new arrangements to *displace* old ones, *remember* old ones to apply them to new situations, or *layer* further adjustments on existing

institutional sets, sometimes *borrowing* from others available to other actors. Table 2.2. shows a brief comparative summary of types of change.

	Displacement	Layering	Drift	Conversion
Removal of old rules	Yes	No	No	No
Neglect of old rules	-	No	Yes	No
Changed impact/enactment of old rules	-	No	Yes	Yes
Introduction of new rules	Yes	Yes	No	No

Table 2.2.Types of gradual change

Source: Mahoney and Thelen, 2010, p. 16.

Furthermore, Lowndes (2005, p. 294) argues institutional change is "never a purely technical matter because any challenge to existing institutional settlements is likely to be met by resistance". Institutional arrangements are not only the result of political struggle, but they also aim to shape the behaviour of multiple actors who have 'divergent and conflicting interests' (Thelen, 2009, p. 490; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Institutional stability or change depends on actors' enactment or resistance to rules. Emphasis on agency over structure supposes less powerful actors have the opportunity to realise their intents and shape institutions in ways that are favourable to them, still, the analysis of both as a manifestation of power is necessary (Pettit, 2013). From an institutional viewpoint, emphasis is on structure since "if this tendency [to focus on agency] is taken too far, then we fall into over-optimistic pluralist assumptions of a level playing field in which the victims of structured inequalities are to blame for their failure to impose themselves upon their environment" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 137-8).

This section has argued that despite the intentions behind an institutional configuration, institutions' capacity to shape behaviour depends on their enactment and maintenance by actors, not only those who 'design' it (e.g., national authorities) but also 'rule-takers' (e.g., municipalities or citizens). The interactions between institutional arrangements and actors denote that institutions are dynamic and

in permanent processes of change. Another critical insight of new institutionalism is the examination of different motivations informing actors' actions, or 'logics of action' underpinning how they engage with institutions. The following section follows Olsson's (2016) analysis of agency and covers Lowndes and Roberts' '5 C' conceptualisation of agency as actors' capacity, "in the sense of seeking to realize intentions" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 105).

2.5. Explaining institutional 'failure': Institutional weakness

Previous sections have shown that institutions do not shape behaviour immediately because they depend on human action to be enacted, resisted, rejected and eventually changed (Scott, 2001; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). A closer look at political agency also reveals the interest in processes of stability and change (Olsson, 2016); however, another analytical concept – besides change – can help understand why some institutions do not stick or disappear: weakness (sp. Brinks et al., 2019, 2020).

Institutional weakness is a prevalent analytical concept regarding institutions in Latin America. Levitsky and Murillo (2014, p. 189) argue "many studies of democratic institutions are based on an assumption of institutional strength: that is, they assume that the rules that are written into parchment are minimally stable and regularly enforced". Such an assumption is especially predictable in established democracies such as the United Kingdom or the United States, while on the contrary, weakness is supposed to be common in Latin America and other postcolonial regions (Brinks et al., 2020). Despite the attempts to build democratic and participatory institutions, Latin America remains a region with "vast inequalities and state deficiencies", and institutional weakness has helped to explain the gap between what institutions set out to accomplish and what they actually do (Brinks et al., 2020; Mayka, 2019).

Similarly, social accountability literature has also paid attention to 'effectiveness', and 'failure' to analyse why some initiatives work and others do not (e.g., Lakha et al., 2015; Boräng and Grimes,

2021). For example, in their analysis of social audits for assessing an employment programme, Lakha et al. (2015) argue that among the reasons for 'ineffective' audits is that local elites have subverted the scheme's objectives and captured or co-opted the vigilance committees. Their analysis is also comparable to others, such as Boräng and Grimes (2021), who highlight the need to analyse 'behavioural logics' for the success or failure of social accountability initiatives. However, their work identifies institutions as external to social accountability, while this thesis is interested in social accountability as a set of institutional arrangements itself. An institutional approach to social accountability asks about the logics of action and micro-mechanisms through which actors contribute to the strength and weakness of those arrangements in effectively shaping accountable behaviour (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013).

Brinks et al. (2020, p. 7) argue that, "a strong institution is one that sets a nontrivial goal and achieves it, whereas a weak institution achieves little or nothing, either because it fails to achieve an ambitious goal or because it never set out to accomplish anything". From their viewpoint, institutional strength is related to compliance, stability, and 'ambition' as in pursuing a significant goal to preserve or change the status quo. Another approximation to institutional strength (and weakness) is provided by Lowndes and Roberts (2013), who refer to it as those instances where rules, practices, and narratives combine or align. Moreover, they argue, "Rule-breaking is poorly understood within the literature, and our framework of distinct but interrelated modes of institutional constraint can help" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 74). While their approach can help to identify if the different modes of constraint combine or not, Brinks et al. (2020) offer conceptual tools to understand weakness.

Three types of institutional weakness are recognised by Brinks et al. (2020): insignificance, instability and noncompliance. The first one refers to institutions with no ambition; their goal, even if accomplished, does not constitute a change and the situation remains the same as if the institution did not exist. The second, instability, is the result of a high rate of change in contradictory directions.

It should not be confused with some institutions' capacity to adapt to changes in the context they are immersed in order to achieve their ultimate goals (see also Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Finally, noncompliance indicates institutions where rules are not followed for three possible reasons: officials decide not to enforce them (e.g., window dressing institutions); sanctions are too weak to incentivise following the rules, and officials might want to enforce them but lack the capacity to do it (e.g., aspirational laws); or despite their efforts, they find societal resistance.

Whilst the first two types emphasise institutions themselves, noncompliance focuses on behaviour. Again, some similarities can be drawn between their approach and Lowndes and Roberts' framework. The latter recognises that sometimes in some places, "rules are broken, dominant practices resisted and authoritative narratives disrupted" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 76), emphasising human action to explain institutional weakness. Besides disobedience, they also pay attention to the gaps that might emerge between the enactment of rules, practices and narratives. Such actions, seen as everyday behaviour (Olsson, 2016), could serve to understand change not as in the replacement of old institutions by new ones but in a more nuanced way, as a dynamic process inherent to institutions and how they shape behaviour and are shaped by behaviour as well, sometimes resulting in institutional weakness, even as "a conscious political strategy" (Brinks et al., 2020, p. 6). As with the heuristics developed by Mahoney and Thelen (2010) and Lowndes and Roberts (2013) to understand change, explanations for weakness also consider context. For example, Brinks et al. (2020) note how economic and political volatility foster weakness or that changes in the environment can cause adaptation. The following section follows Lowndes and Roberts (2013) to explore the importance of context in institutionalism and institutional approaches to political phenomena.

2.6. An institutional take on context

Across this chapter and the previous one, context has been recognised as a critical element in institutional dynamics and the success or failure of social accountability. Recognising the importance

of context results in 'institutional matrix' as a final analytical concept. Since the emergence of new institutionalism, context or the environment has been regarded as essential. March and Olsen (1989, p. 79) argue regarding institutional reform that "the content, organization, and implementation of deliberate attempts to routinize comprehensive administrative reform are influenced by the institutional and historical context within which they take place". Later, Scott (2001, p. 126) argues that 'organizational systems' are not only shaped by their environments, but institutions shape their environments back, and, although institutional analysts might focus on specific levels of analysis, it is necessary to recognise that "social phenomena operate as nested, interdependent systems, one level affecting the others".

Furthermore, Kiser and Ostrom's (1982) conceptualisation of institutional hierarchies denotes how a particular institution is dependent on higher sets of rules. Distinguishing between operational, collective and constitutional levels of rules can help to understand where specific arrangements come from and how they are bounded or shaped. Lowndes and Lemprière (2018, p. 229), drawing from Kiser and Ostrom, refer to the institutional formation process as 'vertically nested'. Although they reference Kiser and Ostrom's three levels, and their main argument is that the phenomenon is "influenced by higher-level institutional rules", there is a slight divergence between them which rests on what is analysed at the operational level. While Lowndes and Lemprière are interested in how new institutional arrangements are established, Ostrom (2005) discerns that "all action situations where individuals engage in the provision, production, distribution, appropriation, assignment, or consumption of goods and services are classified as operational situations". Since the object of analysis differs, the specific iteration of how a particular institution is shaped by the decisions made at a higher level relies on the researcher's interest.

More recently, Lowndes and Roberts (2013) advance the need to recognise the environment not as independent from institutions but intertwined with them. They exemplify their argument by drawing

on the aphorism "You aren't stuck in the traffic – You *are* the traffic!" (2013, p. 170, emphasis original). Consistent with their 'consolidation' approach to new institutionalism, Lowndes and Roberts distinguish between the effects of 'old' and 'neighbouring' institutions. Temporal effects refer to the idea that past institutional arrangements might persist even if they have been scratched out on paper (Lowndes, 2005). The transmission of effects also occurs across space: institutions are interconnected with contemporary sets of arrangements (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018).

The previous chapter shows context matters. For over a decade, analysts have highlighted the effect of contextual factors on the effectiveness of social accountability. Early works by Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2002, p. 218) noted: "the scope and effectiveness of the social mobilization strategy also has an uneven development in the region due to contextual and historical reasons". They refer to Latin America and argue that mobilisation for the defence of human rights in Argentina could be traced to organisations that appeared during the transition years after the dictatorship. More recently, works by Grandvoinnet et al. (2015) or Boräng and Grimes (2021) have moved the argument forward by identifying that social accountability initiatives tend to have better outcomes where there is less corruption or more robust bureaucracies. Moreover, they are now questioning how different government institutions affect the outcomes and the actors themselves (Boräng and Grimes, 2021).

Furthermore, political institutions are influenced by non-political elements and other institutions that are not easy to discern. Helmke and Levitsky (2004) define 'informal institutions' as those "created, communicated, and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels". They assert that analysts must pay attention to both formal and informal institutions to understand political behaviour, especially since scholars not paying attention to the latter "risk missing many of the most important incentives and constraints". The interaction between 'formal' and 'informal' institutions that co-exist can have positive or negative effects depending on how they interact. Helmke and Levitsky (2004) devise at least four types of interaction: complementary, accommodating, competing or substitutive. Reflecting on

the complexity and multiplicity of institutions, Scott argues, "the presence of multiple competing and overlapping institutional frameworks undermines the stability of each" (Scott, 2001, p. 183). As with the hierarchical and temporal effects, spatial ones from other formal or informal institutions can only be assessed empirically.

2.7. Conclusion: An institutional approach to social accountability

This chapter has introduced various analytical concepts (summarized in Table 2.2) derived from a consolidated approach to new institutionalism (sp. Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). It argues that institutionalism is an appropriate theoretical framework for analysing political phenomena and presents critical concepts that derive from the theory to explain how institutions shape, constrain or empower human behaviour. To do so, the chapter identifies institutions as prescriptions that manifest through rules, practices and narratives (Scott, 2001; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). These institutional arrangements do not emerge in a vacuum, neither they are fixed; they depend on human action to be enacted. Thus, institutions have a dual character: they shape behaviour and are also shaped by behaviour, and it is the interactions between institutional arrangements and actors that makes possible their stability or change.

Table 2.3. Key concepts used in the thesis.

Concept	Definition	Example
Institution	set of prescriptions that constrain or empower behaviour	language, money, marriage, accountability
Rules	formal prescriptions, usually written and created by authoritative actors like the state	constitutions, laws, official guidance
Practices	patterns in behaviour associated with normative regulations	handshakes, bowing, meeting at certain times
Narratives	stories, ideas, and beliefs regarding what is taken for granted	positive or negative accounts of actors or organisations' performance
Agency	actors' response to institutions, enacting, rejecting, and shaping them back	officials complying with transparency regulations

Institutional design	deliberative efforts to create institutions with specific goals in mind	congress trying to pass a new law to fight corruption
Institutional formation	the dynamics occurring between design and institutionalisation as effective shaping behaviour	devolution
Institutional change	new set of prescriptions that replace or overlap with old and current institutions	
Institutional weakness	institutions that fail to constrain or empower behaviour	citizen participation in certain contexts
Institutional incompleteness	feature to be design in or design out, also refers to the 'nature' of institutions, never complete	Design out: institution achieves its goal, recipe to follow Design in: flexible designs to be completed on implementation
Institutional matrix	serves to recognise institutions operating along with other institutions, might be older, informal	decentralisation, electoral system

Author's own elaboration.

Additionally, the chapter brings attention to institutional weakness, a concept prominent in the analysis of institutions in Latin America, a region of particular interest for this thesis, in which analysts have been concerned with democratic institutions' ineffectiveness. Lastly, the chapter discusses the importance of context for institutional analysis, recognising that institutions are part of a broader matrix in which different sets of rules interact and overlap.

Although these core concepts have been presented in sequence, institutions are 'messy' as in so far as:

- there are multiple ones at work at the same time,

- shaping behaviour through at least three different ways, which are not always aligned,

- with disparate power distribution, and

- dependant on human action, leaving gaps between institutional arrangements and real behaviour.

Figure 2.1. is presented as an attempt to simplify institutional 'messiness' by presenting the 'life of institutions'. Since the chapter has argued institutions are dynamic, that is, change is always present

in the several processes by which institutions emerge, operate, remain or 'disappear', the dynamic character is represented in the arrows instead of including change as a fixed stage and agency is included in each stage showing that institutions are always incomplete because they depend on human action. The figure shows different institutional dynamics, from the relation of institutions to the broader context, their design and possible deinstitutionalisation. On the left side of the figure, the 'institutional matrix' box includes different shapes representing old and neighbouring institutions which affect the specific dynamics of a particular institution. The institution portrayed in the right box starts with design, in which rules are the dominant arrangement, moving clockwise, the figure shows formation, a period in which rules start to interplay with narratives and practices. Such interplay can evolve in two ways. First, stability in which rules, practices and narratives align and achieve to shape the intended behaviour; or is weakness, in which the institutional arrangements misalign. The figure finally shows that further weakening of institutions can lead to deinstitutionalisation. Since even 'new' institutions are not designed in a vacuum there is an arrow signalling that an old institution can still affect the institutional matrix and the design of new institutions.

Figure 2.1. Institutional conceptual connections
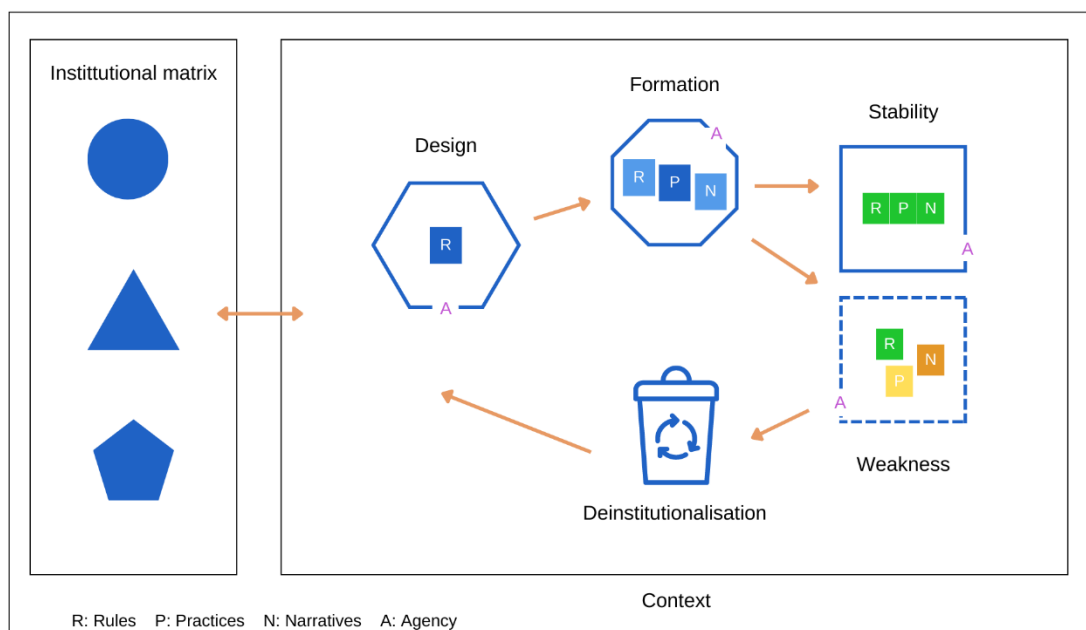
Author's own elaboration

Chapter 1 presented an analytical turn to institutional approaches to explain how different manifestations of social accountability emerge and remarked there is still a gap in the recognition and understanding of the structures shaping accountable behaviour. This thesis aims to advance social accountability by drawing on the analytical concepts shown in this chapter. This approach differs from current propositions to analyse social accountability as singular initiatives and uncover how 'higher government institutions' affect the initiatives and actors' behaviour. Instead, the thesis considers social accountability itself as a dynamic institution and asks what and how rules, practices and narratives shape accountable behaviour (answerability and consequences), how actors interact with the institutional arrangements and overall, what we can learn about social accountability effectiveness in shaping behaviour without disregarding the contingent effects of the institutional matrix in which social accountability is nested and embedded. The next chapter, the methodological one, shows how the theoretical concepts are operationalised for the analysis of social accountability in weak democratic contexts such as Colombia.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter argued new institutionalism can help to understand social accountability by identifying not only the formal rules that constrain and enable actors, but also the practices and narratives enabling or constraining their accountable behaviour: answerability and consequences. A new institutional lens also helps to interrogate power dynamics and actors' capacity to enact or reject institutional arrangements, which, in turn, shapes social accountability itself as an institution, and its capacity to actually shape behaviour. While new institutionalism provides an analytical framework, the thesis relies on an embedded single case study as a research design to explore the topic empirically.

Following Yin (2017), a case study is an appropriate mode of inquiry to address 'how' questions, such as those focused upon here. The interest in social accountability as the object of analysis, and local government in Colombia configures the subject, which illuminates and contributes to the theorisation of social accountability. The design follows an embedded single case study logic; the case itself is social accountability within local government context and two units of analysis were sampled to gather and analyse data: Barranquilla and Cartagena. The two cities help to illuminate the topic and are not being compared. However, insights can be drawn from their differences, especially considering that institutional dynamics are deeply connected to their context and institutions are expected to be flexible and adapt to different settings (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013).

The chapter argues that since Colombia introduced a specific policy (formal rules) to foster a social accountability culture (institutional change), it presents a significant opportunity for an institutional analysis of the topic. Considering that the policy establishes clear rules for public organisations and officials, there is a focus on 'invited spaces' which are designed and controlled by local governments. Underpinning the thesis' approach to institutions as constitutive of political behaviour and shaped by it, there is an ontological position recognised as critical realism. Under critical realism, what is real is

not always observable, what is observable is behaviour. Structures configure what is real and condition action. In line with this ontological position, the case allows the identification of institutional arrangements, the behaviour they shape, and connects them with the broader socio-economic context.

Delbridge and Edwards (2013, 935) state, "moving from ontological to epistemological considerations, our knowledge of social phenomena is to be found in the relational connection between the observable features of social action and those unobservable structures that shape events". Institutionalism provides a way to see those structures, rules, practices and narratives. The research aims to identify social accountability as a structure or institution and to explain how it shapes (or not) accountable behaviour. It also aims to understand how actors shape it by interpreting and enacting the institutional arrangements that configure social accountability.

The chapter has been organised in the following way. It begins by presenting the research design addressing its philosophical underpinnings. Then, it presents the rationality for choosing an embedded case study as research design, and the steps taken to sample the sub-units of analysis, two cities in the Caribbean region of Colombia. The following section presents the research methods used to constitute the case: documentation, observation and semi-structured interviews, and explains how they fit the research design and the analytical framework. A description of how the analysis was conducted is provided in the next section, including the abductive and retroductive modes of inference that guided the analysis, and the iterative character of the process. Finally, the chapter reflects upon the ethical considerations involved in conducting the research, including steps to secure an ethical relationship with participants. This section also explores challenges regarding the treatment of information obtained in informal conversations, issues associated with positionality, and the potential implications that derive from being from the place where the research was conducted and what could mean for the interpretations made during the analysis. The chapter concludes by briefly summarising the thesis' methodology and signals the transition to the following chapters.

3.2. Research design

This research examines and explains how social accountability has been enacted in two Colombian cities. Specifically, it raises questions about the 'rules' (formal and informal) that shape the relationship between representatives and citizens. Through a case study research design, the research aims to understand how rules, practices and narratives empower or constrain officials' and citizens' accountable behaviour at the local level. This chapter presents why this methodological approach was chosen, outlines the proposed embedded case study and rationale for sampling, data collection and analysis. It also explores the advantages and limitations that they present.

The first section of the chapter presents the philosophical underpinnings of the research in terms of ontology and epistemology. Then, it explains why a case study was chosen as the research design, exploring its limitations and challenges encountered while implementing it. Fundamental parts of the design are the research methods employed for data collection. This section presents the process of gathering data through interviews, documents and observation. Later on, the chapter reflects on the ethical implications of the research, issues related to working on a 'local knowledge' case, and data management, both during fieldwork and then in the analysis stage. Finally, the section outlines stages for data analysis, and the operationalisation of analytical concepts chosen (i.e., rules, practices and narratives).

3.2.1. Research philosophy

This section reflects on the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the research project. Doing so aims to bridge the institutional framework with the methods employed to understand social accountability in fragile democracies. Institutions understood as 'rules of the game' are – at the same time – independent of the actors bounded by them and a product of those same actors (John, 2003; Ostrom and Basurto, 2011; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). From a philosophical perspective and for the purpose of this project, institutions are the reality to study or analyse.

The thesis' understanding of institutions reflects a clear ontological and epistemological positionality. An anti-foundationalist approach guides the research as the ontological starting point to refer to the nature of reality. This approach considers that we all participate in the construction of reality and researchers cannot disengage from their research object so as scientists they can understand and find out its meaning (Marsh and Furlong, 2002, p. 18). Similarly, the institutional stance of the thesis is that institutions are both a creation of human action but at the same time independent of it and capable of shaping behaviour. However, there are other ontological approaches to institutions. New institutionalists such as Scott (2001) and Lowndes and Roberts (2013) who recognise institutions as complex structures, do so from different ontological and epistemological standpoints. The former recognised himself as a 'postpositivist', "viewing science as operating along a continuum stretching from the empirical environment, on the one hand, to the metaphysical environment on the other (Scott, 2001, 62).

For their part, Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 12-3) identified their ontological position as 'constructivist', emphasising individuals' capacity to construct their identities and their realities. Although the understanding of institutions is highly informed by their work, this research stands on a different ontological place, critical realism, because it understands institutions as the product of social and historical interaction but also as independent of those they affect. Institutions' duality reflects reality as constitutive of both observable events and the not always observable structures that shape them (Delbridge and Edwards, 2013; Edwards, 2015).

The next question is what methods work best to undertake research using an institutional analytical framework. For a long time in social sciences, qualitative and quantitative methods were seen as conflicting and intrinsically related to a specific epistemological position. Nowadays, it is accepted that methods do not belong to any stance in particular (Bryman and Becker, 2012). However, since this research aims to understand the institutional dynamics of social accountability, paying special

attention to the interplay of rules, practices and narratives (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) and the context in which they operate, qualitative methods were chosen to address the research questions. In order to do that, it draws on three methods to gather and analyse data. It employs semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and observation to identify and analyse the interplay of institutions within social accountability relationships. These methods also help uncover the relationship between social accountability and other informal institutions such as clientelism and corruption. They do so through a case study research design. The next section explains why this design was selected and what it consists of.

3.2.2. Design: Embedded single case study

Although there is not a single conceptualisation for what a case study is across social sciences, it has been highly recognised as a key design for political science inquiries (Yanow et al., 2010). As a research design, the case study is identified as an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a "real life" context (Simons, 2009, p. 20-1). Thus, a case study aims to get the whole picture of a social phenomenon through all the participants involved (Hakim, 2000; Thomas, 2011).

This research aims to understand the modes of constraint shaping social accountability relationships, hence social accountability is the case to explore in depth. Following Thomas (2011), the case has two components, a subject and an object, the latter being the analytical frame to be explained by the research (here, social accountability) whereas the subject is a particular setting where the analytical frame will be applied or studied in, a practical or historical unit (2011, p. 513). The subjects of this research are two cities in Colombia where the relationship between local government and citizens is explored. In this way, the design is single because the case is one, social accountability; it is embedded because it is explored through two different subunits, two cities (Yin, 2018).

The Colombian cities, Barranquilla and Cartagena, as units of analysis configure an embedded single case (Yin, 2018). The rationality behind such design is two-fold: first, the design corresponds to a revelatory case (Yin, 2018) given the use of new institutionalism as an analytical framework to analyse social accountability to gain new insights about the relationship between public organisations and societal actors. Second, it is also a key case (Thomas, 2011) as far as in Colombia there has been a deliberate attempt to design a formal framework for social accountability. This provides an opportunity to analyse the interplay between rules, practices and narratives. The analysis of social accountability as an institution starts by looking into the rules designed at the national and local levels which leads to a focus on spaces designed by public officials or 'invited spaces' (Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Pettit, 2013). Additionally, the researcher's familiarity with the cities' political dynamics facilitated access to gatekeepers and participants. It also helped to access essential information, which could be challenging to find if there were no awareness of the political and organisational context, adding value to the case study approach.

An embedded single case study as characterised above fits well with new institutionalism as an analytical framework (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Lowndes and Polat, 2020). While the focus is social accountability as an institution, that is, a set of modes of constraint shaping behaviour, its analysis is the result of gathering data from two similar places. Having two subunits of analysis allows flexibility, and a better understanding of how institutions take different forms in different contexts, not only because of the characteristics of such contexts but also of the actors enacting and shaping institutions. The next section explains the rationality behind the selection of the two cities.

3.2.3. Sampling the subunits of analysis

As mentioned above, this case study design follows Thomas' (2011) identification of two elements in every case study, subject and object. The object is the analytical framework that the case aims to understand; here it is social accountability, defined as the relationship between governments and citizens by which the latter can exercise control over their representatives. For its part, the subject

refers to the case itself, a place, institution or person who exemplifies or can help to contribute to the literature about social accountability (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009). There are several reasons why social accountability in Colombia is relevant to analyse social accountability in depth. First, Colombia offers a distinctive setting to analyse social accountability because as the literature review showed, a relational and institutional approach to its analysis is not common in Latin America. Second, from a more pragmatic standpoint, the researcher is Colombian and knows and understands the political context where social accountability relationships are embedded (a theme explored at length in Chapter 4); as well, language and networks in the country facilitated her access to relevant data necessary to undertake the case study.

However, the research is interested not in what happens at the national but local level. Consequently, a strategy for selecting municipalities to collect and analyse data was required. Two units of observation were defined, Barranquilla and Cartagena, both department capitals in the Caribbean region[4]. The cities are in the north of Colombia by the Caribbean Sea and are peripheral cities in a highly centralist country. The Caribbean region is considered one that straggles behind others in Colombia: its population is among the poorest and most unequal in the country, and it has inadequate public services provision, including education (Bonet and Pérez, 2020). Being major cities with a significant semi-industrial history, Barranquilla and Cartagena show better results than others in the region or compared to other municipalities within their departments (Restrepo, 2004). However, they still present critical challenges regarding poverty and public services provision.

Before fieldwork in Colombia, a revision of the data produced by the National Planning Department (DNP in Spanish), the Civil Services Department (CSD) measuring local government performance enabled to identify the cities to focus on. CSD reports on social accountability were compared against

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[4] Colombia is a unitary country. The regional division serves to identify five different geographical zones but does not exist as a political-administrative unit. The second level after the national state is departments. Barranquilla is the capital of Atlántico and Cartagena, of Bolivar.

the municipal performance scores produced by DNP. Within the Caribbean region, Barranquilla has the highest score in both accounts while Cartagena has a good score but is lower than the former. Then, it was interesting to see how this looked in real life and how close the scores were to reality or participants' perceptions of it.

There were several challenges associated with conducting fieldwork in Colombia. Barranquilla and Cartagena have had different paths regarding their local governments in the past years. Chapter 4 explores some of the differences in more depth, here is worth mentioning that Cartagena municipality has had a significant turn over which has impacted its archives. While in Barranquilla documents were available online and public officials were willing to participate in the project, in Cartagena the same type and amount of information was not available and none of the officials responsible for implementing social accountability strategies agreed to be interviewed. The data imbalance was mitigated by requesting more information via freedom of information requests and accessing a different set of documents (i.e., anti-corruptions plans instead of decrees), and by analysing such imbalance considering the particularities of each city.

Furthermore, familiarity with the cities was both an advantage and a risk for conducting the research. On one hand, the researcher knew the political dynamics of both cities and the awareness of the context facilitated the search for information. The researcher also had easy access to some of the participants to be interviewed or to gatekeepers who helped her to contact relevant people. On the other, familiarity with the sites implied strong assumptions about both places. To mitigate possible biases, it was necessary to reflect continually upon that and confront the normative assumptions regarding social accountability resulting from the theoretical framework and the researcher's political views regarding the role of the state (e.g., to secure citizen participation at all stages of public policy or to secure the provision of public services) against the data being gathered.

3.3. Methods of data collection

To be able to understand the institutional dynamics of social accountability, the case study relies on multiple qualitative methods techniques (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p. 150). Evidence from documents, interviews and observations are the types of data collected for that purpose. The combination of this type of evidence helps to interrogate the three sets of institutional arrangements and institutional dynamics and strengthen the case study by triangulating the methods for data collection. This is important to achieve a complete picture but also to avoid misunderstandings or erroneous conclusions. Moreover, in terms of methodological implications of a case study design, it is relevant to discuss research reliability and validity. Stoker and Marsh (2002, p. 9) mention that when referring to the scientific approach through political science, "it is about the production of systematic knowledge about the political". The research provides a systematic path to gather answers to the proposed research question.

In the case study design, reliability does not rely on expecting to get the same results over time because the particularities of a case depend on the unique context in which the case study is set. Usually, reliability is associated with fixed designs that rely on quantitative methods to collect data and where measure and scales are expected. However, the case study design is flexible, and reliability is a contested concept (Robson and McCartan, 2016). However, following Thomas (2017) there is the need to be sure that the methods we use to collect the data provide the information necessary to answer the research question. Thus, this section explicitly covers the methods used in the project, so other researchers can replicate the design in other contexts using the same theoretical framework and the same operationalisation for social accountability, and institutional concepts, such as rules, practices and narrative or agency and institutional change.

For Robson and McCartan (2016, p. 169), validity is concerned with accuracy, if the research results effectively show the topic's real state. In this case, resorting to semi-structured interviews, observation

and media reports offer some sense of security. These methods make it possible to get a broader picture of reality than documentary analysis would do by itself. By making use of different methods, the research reassures the validity of the analyses and results. Alternatively, Thomas (2017) refers to two types of validity. The first one, experimental validity, is related to experiments as its name indicates, so they are not addressed here. The second, instrument-validity, is similar to reliability in the sense that it is about making sure that instruments used to gather data are appropriate for the information that is needed. The mixed method approach of the research adds validity and rigour to the results, since each method allowed the identification of the three sets of prescriptions and the triangulation of different sources.

3.3.1. *Documentary evidence*

In a broad sense, documents refer to written text (Scott, 1990 in May, 2011) and can be found in different sources (May, 2011, p. 194). How they are used in a research project, depends on the researcher's perspective on documents. May presents several standpoints, from positivist to more critical ones such as realism, feminism, critical theory, postmodernism and post-structuralism (2011, p. 201). Like May, the research sees documents "as representatives of the practical requirements for which they were constructed" (May, 2011, p. 198); therefore, they underlie specific social patterns.

Alongside interviews, one main data source is public documents produced by national and local authorities. Among these are national documents containing public policy for social accountability implementation (Conpes 3654/2010, Manual Único de Rendición de Cuentas, Ley 1757/2015). At the local level, documents containing strategies, procedures and records or reports of social accountability were gathered through official websites. The process was straightforward in Barranquilla, where it was possible to recover over 30 documents from their site. Cartagena's municipality does not have the information online, but it was possible to obtain ten documents after requesting them directly by letter. The difference between the documents available for analysis could potentially have been problematic because it might have hindered the identification and analysis of rules as a mode of constraint. This

risk has been minimised by selecting other official documents that, although they are not exactly the same, also contain critical information regarding social accountability.

Documentary analysis as a method regards not the use of documents but how they are used. The research gathered different types of documents: laws, decrees, public reports, media reports and opinion columns (the final selection of documents analysed in the thesis is in Appendix 4). Each category helps to identify the analytical concepts of the research, rules, practices and narratives. In some cases, a document such as a public report can serve as a recording of a practice or a rule. Given the research's stance on what documents are, it is believed all of them encompass a narrative, since "they do not simply reflect, but also construct social reality and versions of events" (May, 2011, p. 199).

The documents were selected taking into account Scott's criteria (cited in Vromen, 2010; May, 2011): authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. All public documents are authentic; they were obtained from official websites or directly from the municipality after being requested by letter or email. Other documents, despite not being provided by a government authority, were collected from open sources such as recognised and credible media outlets; thus, their authenticity is not contested.

Foster proposes several questions to interrogate documents. One of them is "are they accurate records of the events or processes described?" (Cited by May, 2011, p. 207). This question relates to authenticity and credibility. The second element probes if documents are reliable, "free from error and evasion" (Scott in May, 2011, p. 207). It was not possible to answer this question prior to the analysis. One of the purposes of the research is to uncover rules, practices and narratives. Documents containing rules might be reliable but not enacted in real life. Meanwhile, records and reports might be affected by the authors' biases. For these reasons, it is important to contrast documents with each other but also to triangulate their data with that gathered through other research methods.

In third place, there is representativeness, which helps to identify documents that are typical. The first stage of gathering documents resulted in over 30 documents, most of which were public ones created by local governments. This brought up the question if from the pool of decrees and reports only a couple could be taken as representative. Alternatively, if it would be more beneficial for the research to track changes over time since even small changes could have great impact or significance.

The final criteria to verify the quality of the documents is meaning. This refers to how clear and comprehensible documents are to the researcher. In this case, it applies more to open documents such as opinion columns or CSOs reports, which sometimes are too vague and do not give a clear idea of what they are trying to portray or convey. In the case of public documents, they cannot be excluded from the research in case they are imprecise.

3.3.2. Semi-structured interviews

Interviews refer to the instrument by which researchers ask questions directly to the research subjects, usually face-to-face (Robson and McCartan, 2016). The advantage of this technique is the opportunity to go deeper into what might be found in the documentary analysis. As with documents, interviews are expected to gather different sources to compare and strengthen the analysis. Local governments or municipalities are complex organisations but since the interest of the project is on representatives' and citizens' relationship, the aim was to interview public officials who are responsible for the design and implementation of social accountability. The research also identified and contacted community leaders and members of civil society organisations to gain more data about the citizen side in the relationship as well as experts' perceptions of the topic.

A different questionnaire was designed for each group, officials and community leaders or CSOs, which can be read in Appendix 1. The interview guides were informed by the literature review and focused on the specific expectations, practices and ideas related to social accountability held or used by the local administration and citizens or their organised interests. Nonetheless, the questions were open

enough to allow participants to answer what they think social accountability is and how they enacted (or rejected) it without creating a bias with the questions. Moreover, the semi-structured design allowed to obtain insights into processes more than the outcome of interactions and exchanges between the municipality and citizens, and how their relationship is perceived by each group and the constraints they identify, including a specific question regarding clientelism as the result of informal conversations with local experts before conducting the interviews.

In total, 40 interviews were conducted in Barranquilla and Cartagena (20 each). Since the project uses a relational concept of social accountability, people working in local government, community leaders and representatives of civil society organisations were invited to participate. Thus, a purposive sample strategy was used to select and invite participants to be interviewed (Robinson, 2014). It was only possible to interview public officials in Barranquilla; five public officials accepted to be interviewed. The 15 remaining interviewees in Barranquilla and all 20 in Cartagena were participants who are either members of civil society organisations (CSOs) or have a prominent or leading profile in their communities or networks, such as members of Neighbourhood boards, Advisory planning boards and local journalists.

Potential participants from the municipality were identified after reviewing official reports and documents to find who the officeholders responsible for social accountability were. The initial interviews help to identify other individuals with important roles in this topic. On the other hand, CSOs were selected taking into account their reputation in each city. The organisations have over 10 years of experience or have gained recognition from the public sector and community leaders. Finally, community leaders and remaining participants were approached through a 'snowballing' process (Burnham et al., 2008, p. 108). Early informal conversations with CSOs helped to identify some of them, and during interviews, participants were asked about who else they recommended talking to. In

Barranquilla it was also pivotal to approach some leaders during a public event, tell them briefly about the project and ask them if they would be willing to take part.

It was not possible to have the same balance in Cartagena. Several public officials were contacted by email, phone or through intermediaries but none of them agreed to take part in the project. As in Barranquilla, interviewees included CSO members and others who were recognised as community leaders or had a role in associations or networks working for women and Afro-Colombian communities. An important difference with leaders interviewed in Barranquilla is that two participants were members of Local Planning Boards, which is an active body in Cartagena but not Barranquilla. Despite the imbalance between cities, the research benefitted from the diversity of societal actors interviewed who had different trajectories and relationships with the local government.

Table 3.1. Interviewees summary

		Role	Description
Barranquilla, Atlántico	1	Baq_Public Official1	Reviews reports and makes sure they comply with law requirements
	2	Baq_Public Official2	Mediates between the Municipality and community leaders
	3	Baq_Public Official3	Compiles reports from all dependencies and follows action plan fulfilment
	4	Baq_Public Official4	Controls internal and external communications: social media, press statements, communication pieces
	5	Baq_Public Official5	Manages cultural programmes and projects: dance, music, theatre
	6	B_CSO1 Director	Analyses and promotes local democracy through workshops, training
	7	B_CSO1 member	Analyses and promotes local democracy through workshops, training
	8	B_CSO2	Accountability programme. Uses municipality's data to analyse living standards and compiles citizens' perception of local governance
	9	B_CSO3	Promotes and analyses local democracy
	10	B_Think Tank	Emerging think tank aiming to strengthen local governance. Provides training to community and young leaders
	11	B_JAC authority	Undeco is the small traders' association and has a permanent relationship with the municipality/ JAC federation groups all JACs in the city, community boards by neighbourhood

	12	B_Watchdog	Engineers' association is a consulting group which also monitors infrastructure projects and related public procurements
	13	B_Local political journalist1	Followed local political news in two different outlets
	14	B_Local political journalist2	Through community radio station, makes visible local leaders and community issues
	15	B_Community Leader1	Created community centre and highly recognised as community leader
	16	B_JAC Zone1	Member of La Playa community board
	17	B_JAC Zone2	Member of different community boards across the city, Women's Network
	18	B_Academic	Economist, expert in local economics and with weekly column in most-read newspaper
	19	B_JAC Zone3	Member of Barrio Abajo community board
	20	B_Cultural promotor	Highly recognised cultural promotor, involved in several projects in the city
Cartagena, Bolívar	21	C_CSO1	Focuses on highlighting Afro-Colombian history to empower communities, also works with other groups to improve civic culture
	22	C_CSO2	Regular panels to discuss Cartagena's planning, environment, etc
	23	C_CSO3	Analyses and promotes local democracy through workshops, training and monitors public procurements
	24	C_Academic1	Political Scientist. Member of the Elections Observatory Mission (MOE)
	25	C_Activist1	Experience in several projects promoting political rights. Currently focuses on Afro-Colombian women's rights
	26	C_Activist2	University teacher. His activism focuses on demanding accountability and better performance
	27	C_JAC authority	JAC federation groups all JACs in the city, community boards by neighbourhood
	28	C_ Business Association	Association business and residents within historical centre
	29	C_Watchdog	Aims to strengthen democracy by mobilising citizens to claim their rights and demand better policies
	30	C_Think tank	Generates reports about different aspects of the city to promote its development. Works closer to power than citizens
	31	C_Consejo Territorial de Planeación	Monitors fulfilment of planning act, holds government accountable
	32	C_Consejo Local de Planeación	Monitors fulfilment of planning act, holds neighbourhood authorities accountable
	33	C_Activist3	Gained recognition as peace activist. Delivers workshops about democracy and human rights at community centres
	34	C_Community Leader1	Member of Women's Network, responsible for public policy for women's rights
	35	C_Afro leader1	Member of Afro Network, coordinated young chapter

36	C_Afro leader2	Member of Afro Network. Currently, member of Interinstitutional Committee monitoring Afro public policy
37	C_Activist4	Environmental activist working close to communities
38	C_Aspiring politician	'Ediles' are elected to represent neighbourhood clusters
39	C_Community Leader2	Intermediates between municipality and people in his community to defend their rights and demand services and programmes
40	C_Academic2	PhD researcher analysing clientelism. Expert in political communication, worked as communications officer for municipality in 2008

Author's own elaboration.

All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and lasted around 40 minutes on average. Shorter interviews lasted half an hour approximately and the longest over an hour. During the conversations, contemporary notes were taken and later analysed along with transcripts. A similar source of data are notes taken during informal conversations (6) with CSOs and academic experts at the beginning of fieldwork in Colombia and a few public officials accessed through the researcher's personal connections. For this last type of notes and conversations, there was no expressed consent given the nature of the talks but they helped to inform the analysis by providing nuance and a source of triangulation.

Table 3.2. Informal conversations summary

	City	Role	Description
1	Barranquilla	Academic	Political Science associate professor – Universidad del Norte
2	Barranquilla	CSO Baq1	Programme coordinator- CSO in Barranquilla
3	Barranquilla	Public official	Public official posted at Culture department
4	Barranquilla and Cartagena	Former public official	Former contractor of Barranquilla and Cartagena municipalities.
5	Cartagena	CSO Cg1	Coordinator CSO in Cartagena
6	Cartagena	CSO Cg2	Director CSO in Cartagena

Author's own elaboration

3.3.3. Observation

Observation is a research method usually related to ethnographic studies. Ethnography is the study of both explicit and tacit cultural knowledge (Spradley, 1980, p. 8). Spradley refers to three elements to take into account when conducting participant observation within ethnography research and which were useful to conduct observation in this study. First, there is place, the space where elements to observe develop. For instance, public hearings for social accountability and other public meetings attended in person or observed through live streaming and video recordings. Here it is important to mention only one site hosted these events or kept a record of them, Barranquilla. Those public hearings for social accountability can be small when they are hosted by one of the offices of the municipality where they only engage with topics relevant to their role. The other is held by the mayor himself and relates to all the activities, programmes or works conducted by all local government dependencies. Several locations served as physical space for the observed events, from classrooms to public and open spaces like a city road.

A second element is who takes part in the events, the actors. There were two categories of people attending and participating: public officials who hosted the event and the ones invited to participate. Among the latter were those closely related to the local authority because they are its employees, contractors or beneficiaries of public programmes. But also, another subgroup was composed of members of organised associations like CSOs or citizens interested in taking part in the activities.

The final element is activities. Spradley suggests doing observation when activities are recurrent. Activities that took place during hearings were considered; however, it was not possible to observe them recurrently because the year in which fieldwork was undertaken, the municipality implemented a new schedule and only one sectorial hearing was attended. However, bigger or broader public hearings were observed via streaming or internet, but they differ from the smaller ones given they cover more topics.

A more limited source of data is the observation of other practices that can be labelled as social accountability actions. Given the constraints imposed by conducting fieldwork in a country different from where the PhD is and for a limited amount of time it was not possible to observe many of them. While in Colombia, there was the opportunity to observe two events in Barranquilla. The first one was a public meeting held on March 8th, 2019. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the municipality's methodology for the upcoming social accountability hearings in 2019.

The second event was one sectorial hearing hosted by the Government department on March 15th, 2019. In this space, he and others involved in the department's programmes presented achievements accomplished in the previous year. In both meetings, contemporary notes were taken about who participated in the events, speakers, depth of presentations as well as interaction dynamics between local government and citizens. Being able to observe these exercises allowed the triangulation of the data gathered via interviews and documentation, verifying if people behaved as the interviewees said and documents stipulated.

3.4. Analysis strategy

Data analysis in qualitative research is usually a nonlinear process. Informal analysis can take place during the collection of data and continue as an iterative process until reaching a conclusion that answers the research question (Yin, 2016). As Yin notes, although analysis "does not follow any cookbook, neither is it totally undisciplined" (2016, p. 185). This section presents the steps taken to organise, code and interpret the collected data. It also reflects on the iterative nature of analysis and how processes of abductive and retroductive inference (Danemark et al., 2002) served to connect the data with both social accountability and institutionalism theories.

As mentioned above, data analysis is a nonlinear process. As an attempt to capture the processes used in this thesis, three iterative stages are identified. First, a preliminary one that occurred in preparation for fieldwork and during the data collection; second, the compiling and disassembling of the data which

includes the transcription of interviews, along with organising the documents and field notes, and their coding or schematic diagramming (Yin, 2016). The third and final stage involved writing up the findings and refinement of analysis, which also benefitted from developing new diagrams. All stages of the analysis are derived from the analytical concepts identified in the literature review and the analytical framework.

While abduction helped to interrogate, interpret and analysed the gathered data to the light of institutionalism, and reframed it as rules, practices or narratives, retroduction complemented that process and "[tried] to arrive at what is basically characteristic and constitutive of these structures" (Danemark et al, 2002, p. 96), connecting the identified institutional arrangements to broader analytical concepts such as institutional matrix, institutional weakness and logics of action.

> The question of how a certain action is possible can be answered by referring to (philosophical) theories of intentionality as a universal condition for all human activity. But the question can also be answered by attempting to reconstruct the system of social positions, the norms and rules, or the social and culturally acquired dispositions (habitus) structuring a particular action (Danemark et al., 2002, p. 97).

3.4.1. *Preliminary analysis and data disassembling*

Analysis is usually connected to data collection; what to ask during an interview, for example, is an analytic choice (Yin, 2016, p. 147). It could be suggested that deciding what to ask and what data to collect is also an analytic choice. The previous section presented the arguments underpinning data collection; the aim here is to connect such decisions with the analysis. During fieldwork, notes were taken after each interview or at the end of the day, and during the observation of public hearings, either in person or recorded. While some notes were more spontaneous, to keep a record of the setting or mood, there was also an attempt to identify key themes and highlight information in

connection to social accountability elements: answerability and consequences, and to the institutions'

modes of constraint: rules, practices and narratives.

Once the data collection process ended, documents and interviews were organised by city and year as

a way to refine initial notes and produced a 'first thoughts' analysis. Such exercise helped identify

emergent themes and corroborate the usefulness of the categories employed to collect the data. The

process was then refined by transcribing the interviews which is not possible without making decisions

that could affect the analysis. For example, how to transcribe silences, conversation tokens (hum,

mmm, ehh) or laughs and sounds. Reflecting on this, Oliver et al. (2005) signalled the main

transcription styles, "naturalism, in which every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible,

and denaturalism, in which idiosyncratic elements of speech are removed" (p. 1274). The interviews

were transcribed with a denaturalised approach since there is more interest in the participants' ideas

or responses about the relationship between citizens and municipalities than in the mechanistic of

their speech. The transcription process gave space for new notes or interview memos regarding overall

reflections and connections between participants' responses.

After the data was all compiled, two coding strategies served to interrogate it: documentary analysis

for written documents collected and created (observation notes), and interview analysis for the

transcripts. The creation of codes and categories is characterised as one of the most difficult tasks in

qualitative research and as an intuitive and permanently evolving process that helps to organise and

make sense of the data (Basit, 2003). For the analysis of documents, especially the ones produced by

local governments, the coding focused on identifying rules and narratives referring to account-givers

and account-holders, signs of institutional change and weakness, and to social accountability elements,

information, debate and consequences. The observation notes were not codified in the same way, but

they served to identify prevalent stories or narratives.

For the analysis of the interviews, a more systematic codebook was developed including the social accountability elements and also other institutional concepts. The codebook was then transferred to NVivo, a specialised software developed to aid the analysis of qualitative data. This coding aimed to identify and collect comments on what rules were recognised by the participants, their practices and the stories they shared regarding social accountability and citizen participation. A second iteration in the creation of codes included more complex themes, such as instances of the interplay between modes of constraint, actors' capacity and power, and the connection to other political phenomena such as clientelism and corruption. At this stage, sketches of schematic diagrams were produced trying to make sense of the data; for example, Figure 3.1., depicts an early version of the ways different societal actors relate to the local authority.
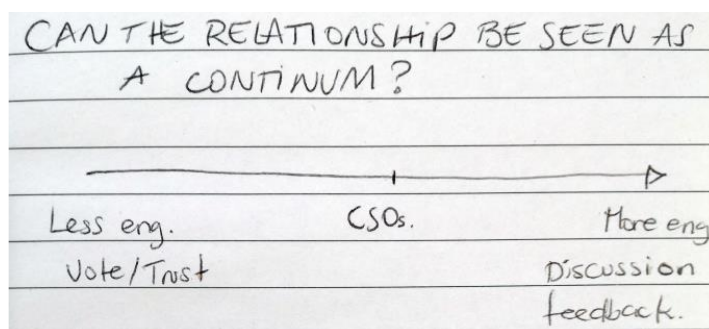
Figure 3.1. Early analytical diagram
Author's own elaboration.

3.4.2. Analysis refinement

A further refinement of the analysis brought coded data, notes and diagrams to a 'higher conceptual plane' (Yin, 2016). For this stage, writing the research findings served to connect the data to the theoretical concepts. This reflected the abductive and retroductive strategies followed by the thesis, since writing helped to reflect deeper into new institutionalism, supported by new iterations with the data in order to identify more complex themes. In this stage, new schematic diagrams were designed to question the data and the analysis itself. Table 3.3, for example, shows how the data was interpreted to identify the rules, practices and narratives in a particular city.

Table 3.3. Example of the analysis of institutional prescriptions and social accountability

	Rules	**Practices**	**Narratives**
Actors	Decrees identify citizens as the main actor to give account to. Not clear if they could differ between different sectors, need to look into strategy mentioned in last decree. It does not include specific strategy to involve minorities.	In the hearings, attendees are people connected to gov. because they work there or are taken by community leaders in a clientelistic network.	How officials refer to other actors. Critics are referred to as detractors. Participants themselves feel ignored, treated as enemies of the gov. In hearings, the phrase "thanks to mayor", which add up to the idea of the transformation of the city in the last decade.
	There is a specific department in charge of the documents, but practice is another, internal auditor who is supposed to be independent.	In other spaces, actors are mixed, not all have the same knowledge, skills or resources. Their voices can be ignored.	
	It is not clear in the decrees if there is a SA strategy to promote it among all officials.	Hearings are designed by officials concerned with showing only the good while the planning department takes a less relevant role.	

Author's own elaboration.

After analysing the interplay between rules, practices and narratives, the NVivo software also helped to interrogate the data and query the connection between the modes of constraint and the emerging themes, especially corruption/clientelism. Coding refinement involved querying the data using specific terms such as 'clientelism' and reading the transcriptions several times to codify emergent themes. The iterative process of writing and analysis made it possible to make the most of the data and provided insights not only to identify the structure shaping social accountability but also to analyse the institutional dynamics taking place in the particular context of the two field cities. At this stage it was possible to develop a comprehensive interpretation of the data that describes social accountability as an institution but also that allows to make sense of the possible institutional changes and dynamics of social accountability.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Ethics concerns the procedures used to gather data and the possible effects of the research findings. Thus it was necessary to think about how this research might have affected the participants and to

secure the respect and safety of all people involved. The use of qualitative methods such as interviews required asking for the consent of the research participants and informing them about the research aims as clearly as possible to avoid deception. Interviews were conducted in Colombia which meant an ethical review had to be secured before travelling from the UK. The University of Birmingham Ethical Review Committee revised and approved the ethical form presented containing a summary of the aims of the research, the methods and instruments.

Once in Colombia, participants were contacted by email with a letter informing them of some details of the research. Among these, that it was funded by Colciencias, the Colombian administrative department for science and innovation, the purpose of the research, why their participation was important and how long the interview might take. In some cases, participants were approached at events or on a phone call to explain to them briefly about the research. Those who showed interest in taking part were contacted by email to provide the details mentioned above. All interviewees received an information sheet as approved by the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee, signed the consent forms, and agreed for the interview to be recorded which they all did.

Besides interviews, informal conversations were held with some of the participants prior to their interviews or with other actors. This raised a concern on how to treat the information obtained from them, information that has helped to interrogate interviews and documents. It was decided to use that data because it proved to be significant and pivotal but more in a contextual sense than being presented as part of the results of the research.

Another ethical issue considered was the consequences of participating in the project and their results. Clientelism and other informal political practices are a sensitive subject and can bring a variety of troubles to research participants if they share responsibility in the practice of this kind of damaging behaviour. Some interviewees showed concern about this; in response, they were reassured that the data would be anonymised and everything they said would be confidential. To secure confidentiality

and anonymity participants' data has been kept confidential and their names and other identifying information erased from the transcripts. They are identified with numbers or pseudonyms in the analysis. The recordings where participants may be identified by name, voice or other personal information have not been accessed by anyone but the researcher.

Two other pivotal issues to reflect on are positionality and bias. The researcher's values and perceptions affect the selection of cases and the interpretation of data, and it is necessary to recognise how the position of the researcher may affect the interview itself by becoming one of the clusters or too critical of interviewees (Robson and McCartan, 2016; Mathur and Skelcher, 2007; Pierce, 2008). Moreover, the choice of new institutionalism as analytical framework and a realist ontological position suppose certain assumptions regarding reality and knowledge. Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 11), for example, refer to their positionality as 'engaged' and explain that "institutionalism allows us not just to understand better how political institutions work, but also to generate strategies for resistance and reform, designed to prioritize new interests and values". Such strategies are informed by one's own position, regarding the role of the researcher but also the individual, female, middle class and 'mestiza' (mixed-race). Besides identity, one's values and what is understood as a democracy and power can also affect not only the research interest and questions but also how data is collected, and analysis is conducted.

Given the political context and the researcher's own political affiliations, it was important to keep an open mind to what participants shared and include questions that able them to speak openly about what they do, why they do it and how. The strategy proved to be successful because it made it possible to gather unexpected data and recognise even before data analysis new or rather different ways that citizens engage with local government. However, reflexivity was also important in the analysis of such information. Another issue related to positionality is the effect of conducting research in two languages. While the primary and secondary data were collected in Spanish, the analysis corresponds to

categories developed in English. Here, there is an awareness of not only one's positionality but also of interpreting a case situated in a formerly colonised, developing country within Western/European understandings of government and citizen participation. Understanding the political history and context provides an insight that also adds to the analysis of social accountability, including what lessons can be learned from how social accountability is enacted in countries such as Colombia.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research strategy to identify the institutional arrangements and dynamics empowering or constraining accountable behaviour of officials and societal actors in two Colombian cities. Critical realism, along with new institutionalism, provides a rigorous analytical background to analyse the structure-agency duality. The proposed understanding of social accountability as an institution, that is, a set of rules, practices and narratives shaping accountable behaviour and at the same time being shaped by actors, is done by resorting to an embedded case study design (Yin, 2018). Following Thomas (2017), two elements of the case are recognised, the subject, social accountability, and the object or subunits of analysis (Yin, 2018) to explore it, two Colombian cities or local governments.

Furthermore, the case was explored drawing on three distinctive and reliable methods: documentation, semi-structured interviews, and observation. During a visit to the country, and online exploration, it was possible to conduct 40 semi-structured interviews, observe public meetings and gather documents (the last two were also possible via video recordings and internet searches). Such methods align with the case study design and with the analytical framework, making it possible to identify the different modes of constraint, and to query the data to uncover institutional dynamics of enactment or rejection of social accountability.

The data was analysed iteratively, connecting empirical data to social accountability and institutional theory which corresponds to abductive and retroductive modes of inferences. The analysis was

supported using the NVivo software and other manual strategies such as the sketch of schematic diagrams. The chapter also includes a reflection on the researcher's positionality and how it informs the research analysis. Drawing on empirical fieldwork, which included engaging with official documents such as local government decrees (rules), observing how policy actors enact or implement social accountability (practices) and what perspective they have regarding it (narratives), the thesis will present and analyse how social accountability arrangements empower and constrain actors (Chapters 5 to 7). However, as Chapters 1 and 2 show, context is critical to understanding institutional dynamics since institutions and actors' roles also depend on the characteristics of the setting where they interact.

Chapter 4 helps to situate the findings in the broader institutional context, including the possible effects of old and neighbouring institutions, and introduces the national policy for social accountability.

4. A CONTEXT FOR SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN COLOMBIA

4.1. Introduction

This chapter argues that it is possible to better understand social accountability dynamics when considering it as immersed in a multi-level framework (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018; Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall et al., 2008; Gaventa and Barret, 2012). It draws from specialised literature and national policies (e.g., the national handbook for social accountability) to present the context informing the empirical chapters. First, the chapter shows three institutions identified as having a critical effect on the enactment of social accountability; secondly, the main characteristics of the national policy for social accountability, and third, it presents the socioeconomic context of actors interacting with social accountability arrangements.

By presenting the institutional matrix, the chapter recognises that social accountability is interconnected with other institutions, which also serves to characterise the country and city context where the research is situated. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first briefly describes part of the context in which social accountability is embedded by presenting three institutions considered to have a key interconnection. Given the abductive and retroductive character of the analysis, two institutions presented here (exclusionary bipartisanism and decentralisation) became apparent during the coding, while clientelism was explicitly interrogated during data collection. The thesis argues that the lasting temporal effects of exclusionary bipartisanism and the spatial effects of clientelism explain why social accountability has not gained much traction in the analysed cases. In contrast, there are also indications that there are more opportunities for SA institutionalisation when combined with decentralisation, as a stable set of arrangements effectively shaping accountable behaviour.

The second main section of the chapter focuses on the national social accountability policy. Identifying SA as a multi-level institution will help understand local actors' expectations and behaviour. Moreover,

the chapter argues that national policy and related formal prescriptions are highly aspirational. They establish an ideal way of how things should be instead of regulating what is possible in real life. This part of the chapter also introduces the rationale behind the social accountability policy and what national rule-makers considered inadequate social accountability practices. This will help to analyse if the way the institution has been enacted at the local level shows an institutional change in how social accountability works, such as if local practices align with the values and aspirations established at higher institutional levels.

The third section expands on the socioeconomic context in which social accountability has been introduced in Barranquilla and Cartagena. Looking into the characteristics of citizens and civil society organisations helps illuminate the data explored in the following chapters, especially how this set of actors interpret, enact and shape social accountability rules, practices and narratives. Finally, the conclusion summarises key takeaways, acknowledges affairs left out, and highlights how the context helps navigate the following chapters.

4.2. Social accountability as an embedded institution

While the research focuses on institutional arrangements (rules, practices and narratives) shaping social accountability behaviour at the city level, it cannot ignore that no institution stands alone. This section looks into the effects of institutional legacies and localities (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018) on social accountability. The chapter offers a broad exploration of each institution that helps to situate the findings presented in Chapters 5 to 7, still, each institution could be further analysed by identifying the rules, practices and narratives that configure them and detailing how they influence human action in Barranquilla and Cartagena and beyond.

Figure 4.1. Social accountability institutional matrix
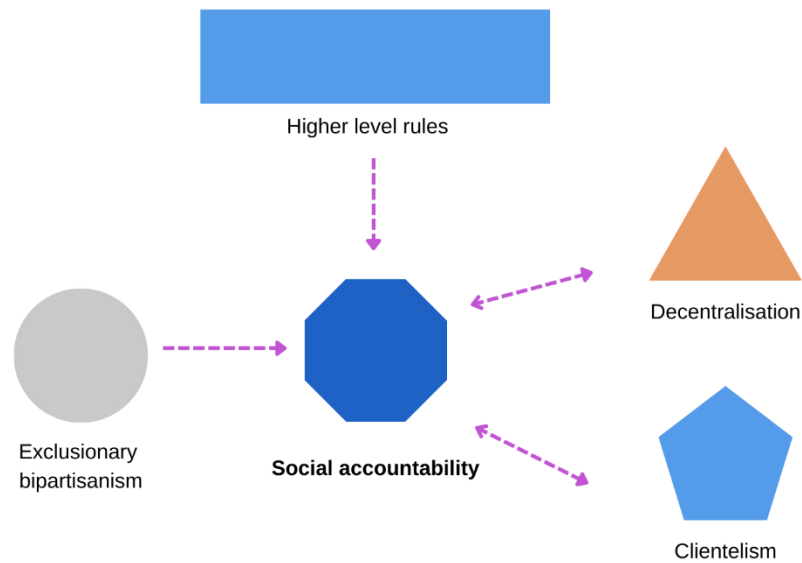
Author's own elaboration

Figure 4.1. shows social accountability at the centre and the institutional matrix surrounding and interacting with it. In this way, the figure further develops the left bloc in Figure 2.1. (page 76) that showed the 'life of institutions'. At the top of the figure are 'higher level rules' such as the political constitution which create expectations and shape rules at the local level. To the left is exclusionary bipartisanism, a set of rules, practices and narratives that formally ended in 1974 but whose coalitional, legalistic and bureaucratic features significantly influence social accountability. To the right, there are two current neighbouring institutions, decentralisation and clientelism which have a more dynamic interplay with social accountability, shown in the figure as double-pointed arrows. While decentralisation seems to offer more opportunities to oversee public administration when present within the city level, clientelism may contribute to misalignment between rules, practices and narratives since it affects who can access general information, for example. This section focuses on old and neighbouring institutions and the relationship between social accountability and higher-level rules is explored in section 4.3.

The chapter draws from specialised literature that focuses on Colombia to provide richness and clarity to the upcoming findings chapters. Still, it is important to acknowledge that the role of other institutions, including clientelism or decentralisation, has also been central in the analysis of 'new democratic spaces' and other analyses of accountability (Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall et al., 2008; Gaventa, 2006; Joshi, 2023). For instance, in their analysis of participation and citizenship in Brazil, Cornwall et al. (2008) find that the development of health councils as participatory spaces depends on the municipal administration's own decentralised arrangements more than the legal framework that created them. Moreover, the literate on 'spaces for participation' has recognised the importance of the interplay of institutions, agency and political legacies in the development and institutionalisation of new spaces (Coelho, 2007).

4.2.1. *The legacy of exclusionary bipartisanism*

Unlike other Latin American countries, Colombia has not suffered dictatorships, and democratic elections have been held regularly. However, the country has a record of significant armed conflicts within its territory, and in 1953 these provoked the Presidency's military take-over by General Rojas Pinilla. He acted as president until 1957 when the two main political parties signed an agreement to regain "democratic" control for the next sixteen years, a period known as 'Frente Nacional' (García, 2008). The bipartisan agreement configures an institutional legacy, and its effects have moulded the political system and the state's administrative structure at national and local levels, similar to the effects of dictatorship and authoritarianism in other countries (Cornwall et al., 2008; Lakha et al., 2015; Joshi, 2023). The formal and informal prescriptions that derived from it reconfigured the executive branch and excluded certain actors from politics and public administration while privileging elites. The 'Frente' also ostracised critics of the system and reinforced political perceptions of opposition as illegal or illegitimate actors by associating them with guerrilla groups or forcing them to join the accepted groups in power.

As a result of the agreement, the two parties agreed to take turns at the Presidency, from 1958 to 1974, and share seats and posts in other state organisations (Congress, judiciary courts and bureaucracy across the country). The alternation and other agreed practices aimed to restore democracy after General Rojas' authoritarian government and help the country 'catch up' with modern/industrialised countries (Gutierrez-Sanin et al., 2007, p. 16). During this period, the political system opted to strengthen the executive branch as a mechanism to secure social change (Lopez, 2007, p. 26), creating several national administrative departments regarded as critical actors in shaping public administration (Roth, 2018). Despite the advances towards consolidating a bureaucratic structure, these were undermined by the rules of the same agreement, mainly the limitation to political competition in favour of consociationalism (García, 2008; Gutierrez-Sanin et al., 2007), a "deliberate joint effort by the elites to stabilize the system" avoiding political competition by agreeing to benefit each other while excluding other political parties (Lijphart, 2008 (1969), p. 29).

The 'Frente Nacional' limited not only the participation of other groups or their access to power and public administration, but it also exemplifies the political system's elitist, coalitionist and clientelistic character (Martz, 2017; García, 2008). Referring to another Latin American state, Bolivia, Zegada (2007, p. 283) states that these characteristics have had significant consequences in the public administration since the state is used to benefit those who take power, neglecting the states' mission to address public needs or successfully secure citizen engagement (Gaventa and Barret, 2012). García (2008) explains the coalitional feature as the elite's capacity to make agreements to maintain control over the state and prevent or stop violent ruptures. The elite's coalition also created a party system "ideologically and politically centred" (Peeler cited by García, 2008, p. 51) because, without competition, there were no incentives for having clear and distinctive programmes from which citizens could choose (Pizarro cited by Giraldo, 2007, p. 169).

The forced alternation between elite parties resulted in widespread depoliticisation and weakened opposition (Giraldo, 2007). The "exclusionary nature" of the 'Frente' caused even those opposing the coalition to join one of the traditional parties in order to gain a seat in Congress (Gutierrez-Sanin et al., 2007, p. 17). In the following decades, this was aggravated because it was a belief that opposition was linked to subversion and terrorism (UNPD, 2011, p. 20). As sustained by García (2010), political violence against militants of traditional parties is not as common as violence against other groups, especially those recognised as leftists. Between the mid-1980s and mid-2000s, more than 6,000 members of the leftist Unión Patriótica (UP) were either murdered, disappeared or sexually assaulted by state agents and paramilitaries (El Espectador, 2023). More recently, since the peace accord signed in 2016 between the state and the former guerrilla group FARC, 355 ex-guerrilla members have been killed (Palomino, 2023). Thus, objecting to government and traditional parties was seen as extreme, and nowadays is still considered a risk given the ongoing violence that persists. Despite advances in legislation and practices (peace agreement, 'new' actors with distinctive political ideologies winning elections at the local level), there remains a belief that criticism and objection to governments are associated with opposition as a negative attitude.

Another effect of the coalition is evidenced in the party system. During the 'Frente', party leaders retained control at the national level while parties atomised due to local power disputes at the regional level. By 1991, the system opened to new political forces that were excluded from the bipartisan agreement and new parties that resulted from the bipartisan fragmentation. Pizarro (2002) refers to the latter as electoral machines that could be seen as factions of the same party but function around different leaders, a form of "personalistic fragmentation". This fragmentation has led to new coalitions since politicians need support from several parties or political groups to secure an election. As the following sections show, like in other 'challenging contexts' (Anderson et al., 2022), clientelism, fragmentation and negative associations towards opposition created a hostile environment for social

accountability. Some parties aligned around certain politicians from elite families motivated by possible gains and excluding others who objected to them (Pizarro, 2002).

While some institutions, like exclusionary bipartisanism ('Frente Nacional'), have longstanding effects in time, others can be considered neighbours and have *spatial* effects. The following sections present decentralisation and clientelism as neighbour institutions to social accountability. Decentralisation and clientelism's associated rules, practices and narratives are not independent of the configuration of social accountability. However, their effect can be complementary, accommodating, competing or substitutive (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004).

4.2.2. *Decentralisation's effects on the configuration of local politics*

Following Falleti (2005, p. 328), decentralisation is understood as "a process of state reform composed by a set of public policies that transfer responsibilities, resources, or authority from higher to lower levels of government in the context of a specific type of state". The author's novel approach to decentralisation recognises fiscal, administrative and political as types that depend on what kind of authority is devolved, to increase revenues, transfer management of public services or dynamize spaces for representation at subnational levels (Falleti, 2005, p. 329).

In Colombia, the three types co-exist but here the emphasis is on political decentralisation arrangements, especially rules (constitution, laws), creating expectations regarding participative and deliberative democracy. Decentralisation creates expectations of local autonomy in relation to national governments and citizen participation (Gaventa, 2006; Cornwall et al., 2008; Malena and McNeil, 2010). Citizens can approach the local administration and obtain a solution to their most present needs (Transparencia por Colombia, 2019, p. 5). Such autonomy also allows officials at the local level to interpret and create new rules for the enactment of SA, such as local authorities' (governors and mayors) strategies for social accountability, which are updated annually. In the case of Barranquilla, officials at the municipality created their own social accountability guidelines and annual

decrees regarding certain social accountability events. This section summarises how decentralisation has shaped the Colombian state's structure and discusses its potential effects on social accountability, especially at the local level.

Since Colombia gained its independence from the Spanish Crown during the XIX century, it has undergone several significant changes, from its territory and borders (e.g., from 1819 to 1830 it was known as 'Gran Colombia' with Venezuela, Ecuador and Panamá, which later separated) to its administrative and political structure (from federal to unitary state). The 1991 Constitution is the most recent political and administrative structure reform. The first article of the document states:

> Colombia is a social state under the rule of law, organised in the form of a unitary republic, decentralised, with autonomy of its territorial units, democratic, participatory, and pluralistic, based on the respect of human dignity, the work and solidarity of the individuals who belong to it, and the prevalence of the general interest.

Given the Constitution's importance in the legal and political system, it is noteworthy that unitary state and decentralisation are mentioned in article one. While the state's territory is divided into 32 departments and 1102 municipalities,[5] they correspond to an executive-hierarchical model. The Constitution refers to municipalities as the fundamental political-administrative unit, and departments

Figure 4.2. Colombian government tiers

Author's own elaboration

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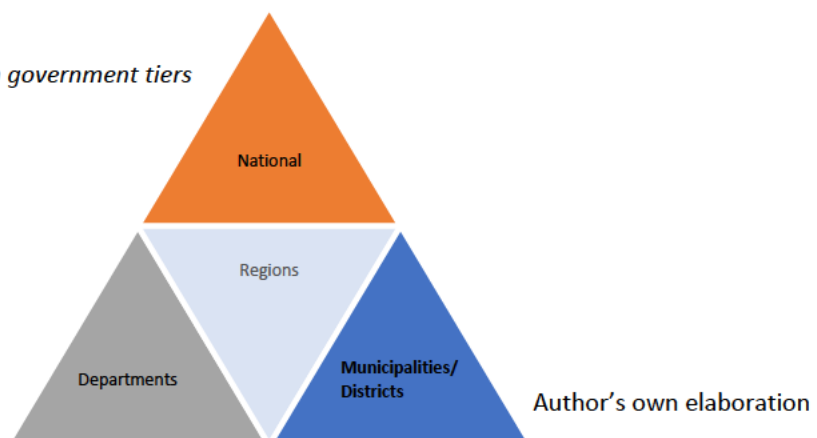
[5] Among them there are seven districts, a category to nominate municipalities with certain characteristics, for example Bogotá which is the capital district. Barranquilla and Cartagena are also categorised as districts.

as complementary to them, an intermediary between municipalities and the national government, configuring a four-tier level system (see Figure 4.2.). Despite the Constitution and other laws' recognition of territorial units' autonomy, they are highly dependent on the national government. Yet, local authorities have significant discretion in certain areas, such as implementing policies designed at the national level, like social accountability (Conpes 3654 and related regulations).

Legal reforms regarding decentralisation can be traced to international organisations' influence and internal demands for improving public services, political representation and autonomy from the central government (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; González, 2013). Additionally, decentralisation started to be implemented along with other reforms aiming to modernise the state, including delegating functions and subcontracting with the private sector to provide public goods and services (Ocampo, 2020). Decentralisation reforms assigned more resources to municipalities and allowed them to implement their own revenue sources. As the fundamental manifestation of the state at the local level, municipalities have the responsibility

> … to lend those public services determined by the law, to build the projects required for local progress, to arrange for the development of its territory, to promote community participation, the social and cultural betterment of its inhabitants, and to execute the other functions assigned to it by the Constitution and the laws (Constitution, article 311).

The transfer of responsibilities and resources and the possibility of direct elections for local government are not sufficient to provide well-being (Cornwall, 2004) as in the case of Colombia's peripheral regions, such as the Caribbean region where Barranquilla and Cartagena are located. The region is still characterised as "poor, backward and unequal" (Espinosa, 2020, p. 145). Decentralisation reforms have helped improve local governments' finances and provided them with more autonomy via resource transfer from the higher tiers to local ones. However, such improvement is limited in municipalities and departments in peripheral regions. While some argue that more autonomy and

resources are needed to improve living conditions (Bonet et al., 2020, p. 227), others refer to politicians' lack of political will (Velasquez, 1995).

Decentralisation's rules empower local governments via finances and create opportunities to democratise local spaces, cities, and municipalities. The Constitution concedes sub-national tiers with autonomy over their territories; at the same time, it constrains them to act within limits imposed by the law (Gaventa, 2006). Expressions of such autonomy are elections held every four years to elect local authorities: mayors, municipal councillors and locality councillors ('ediles')[6]. While the figures of mayors and councils might be easily recognised, it is important to say a bit more about 'ediles'. They form locality boards (Juntas Administradoras Locales - JAL) which are only present in cities categorised as districts and divided into sub-municipal units known as localities. There are significant differences across districts, including how many localities exist and the mechanisms to transfer resources from the municipality to the locality level.

Locality boards or JALs were created in the 1980s to help to implement the law and follow the executive authority's instructions in their corresponding neighbourhoods or localities. The reforms that came after the '91 Constitution assigned them more duties, including taking part in planning the territory and exercising control over public service provision (Herrera, 2002). Despite being elected bodies, JALs were not considered a key player in Barranquilla until 2013, when a new reform changed the dynamic between their members and the municipality (García, 2008; Tuiran and Villalba, 2018). The new law instructed municipalities to assign at least 10% of their budgets to be administrated by the JALs, which would work alongside locality mayors (designated by the city mayor) to plan and implement actions that benefit their localities.

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[6] Appendix 5 includes a glossary of the administrative and governance bodies referenced in the chapter. The appendix also includes tables and figures that further characterised each city and how the different bodies relate to one another.

Academics and civil society organisations have contrasted the practices surrounding JALs in Barranquilla and Cartagena. In the latter, the municipality assigns localities with a budget to invest in public works in their areas. JALs in Cartagena create locality development plans and have held social accountability exercises (e.g., Locality 2 created a Documentation and Transparency Centre) (De la Hoz, 2019). 'Ediles' in Barranquilla have pleaded for more autonomy and a budget without success (according to the municipality's office, they invest the money directly according to the requirements established in the law) (Tuirán and Villalba, 2018; El Heraldo, November 2015). In both cities, JALs and locality mayors have been criticised because their actions are more aligned with the council or municipality than seeking to respond to citizens' needs and demands (e.g., improving parks or security). Even though they are not part of the municipality's structure, they are closely linked to them, and the actual transfer of responsibilities and resources in Cartagena (decentralisation) creates opportunities to hold local authorities accountable.

Another prominent organisation resulting from decentralisation policies is the Planning Advisory Boards at the district (municipal) and locality levels. These boards were introduced in 1991 as citizen participation spaces to discuss development plans before their approval and following their fulfilment (DNP, 2011). In 2012 a local media article published 'Desempolvan Consejo Territorial de Planeación' (Dusting off the Planning Advisory Board) where some of its members (representatives of civil society organisations, guilds and other organisations) complained they were only called at the last minute to revise and comment on the draft of the city's development plan for the 2012-2015 period. They have also pointed out the board does not meet with the periodicity suggested by law or has any support from the municipality to follow up on the implementation of plans (Solís, 2012; El Heraldo, 2016).

As with JALs, Cartagena sets itself apart from Barranquilla due to having an operational city planning board; there is also one in each locality. These boards have substantial challenges to overcome to fulfil their role as participation and accountability mechanisms. Infante (2018) asserts that local planning

boards do not have enough support from the citizenry or the municipality. From municipalities, boards need the provision of trustworthy information that allows them to follow up on the implementation of plans. And from citizens, feedback about their needs. Infante also lists other limitations such as lack of knowledge or unfamiliarity with the resources available to them, citizens' unawareness of their existence or role, and locality mayors and JALs disregarding their duties concerning the boards. These two organisations are highlighted because they were the most mentioned by participants, but they co-exist along with others, such as specialised boards such as the ones aiming to take part in women or youth programmes and policies, or others operating at the neighbourhood level (Juntas de Acción Comunal, JAC).

To summarise, decentralisation is supposed to strengthen democracy by allowing local governments to make their own decisions and promote citizen engagement by bringing politics closer. Two types of decentralisation arrangements might help understand how social accountability works at the local level in Barranquilla and Cartagena. First, from national to local decentralisation of powers and tasks which enables local authorities to administrate public resources and create their own *rules of the game* for certain issues, including adapting social accountability national policy. On the other hand, intra-local arrangements in cities like the ones analysed here include the transference of certain powers to other local authorities and create intra-local identities and ways to relate to municipalities. While the first gives significant power to municipalities to shape social accountability, the second, when it exists, creates more spaces for citizen engagement and, possibly, oversight.

4.2.3. *Clientelism creates incentives for opacity and co-option*

Helmke and Levitsky (2004, p. 725) assert that analysts must pay attention to both formal and informal institutions[7] to understand political behaviour, especially since not paying attention to the latter "risks

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[7] It is necessary to remember here that the thesis addresses two levels of informality: practices, understood as informal institutional arrangements, and informal institutions as defined by Helmke and Levitsky (e.g., clientelism).

missing many of the most important incentives and constraints". González (2019, p. 2) asserts that clientelism and corruption "are a recurring practice as measures to securing votes and distributing public resources". He also explains that despite undergoing modernisation, Latin American countries have not overcome poverty or reduced inequalities, which creates favourable conditions for candidates to offer resources to communities where the state has not reached nor has a strong presence in exchange for their support. Instead of providing services as part of their role if elected, candidates might offer money, school or building supplies or promise to distribute public jobs and programmes, bidding, and completing public works in exchange for peoples' votes (Martz, 2017; García, 2008; Abitbol, 2015; González et al., 2019).

Regarding Colombia, Martz (2017, p. 38)) concludes that clientelism "had operated historically as a tool of elite domination, its interactions laced with policy-making pragmatism, programmatic flexibility, and a personal, sometimes charismatic form of leadership". These practices can be found across the country, affecting politics at the national and local levels. As Martz suggests, there is more evidence of the patron-clientelism relationships at a local level given the country's colonial past when the exchange was between a patron with status and authority who would favour clients as a reward for their loyalty (2017, p. 22). Since then, the country has experienced the adaptation of clientelism to new dynamics. For example, Barranquilla configures a context of two types of clientelism, 'mediation clientelism' and 'armed clientelism'. It is mediated because unlike traditional clientelism (Martz, 2017; Ocampo, 2020) there is no direct exchange between a candidate and citizens (González et al. 2019). However, there is a network or structure in which others play different roles and serve as intermediaries (brokers) in the clientelistic transaction. In some cases, the mediator is an illegal armed group that instead of offering material benefits, mobilised votes through armed violence (Trejos et al., 2021, p. 40).

Dávila-Ladrón de Guevara (cited by Ocampo 2020, p. 312) distinguishes between traditional, modern and market clientelism. By traditional, Dávila-Ladrón de Guevara refers to the direct exchange

between clients and patrons without the state's involvement. Then, with changes in the economic and political regional context, such as the rise of the livestock industry over the agricultural one and the development of decentralisation policies, political elites and clans captured the state and used the bureaucracy and public budgets to grant favours to clients (Bonilla and Higuera, 2018), similar to what Lyrintzis coined as 'bureaucratic clientelism'[8] (Hopkin, 2001, p. 116-7). Market clientelism appears after 1991 when the modernisation of the state provides new opportunities for clientelistic exchanges. Ocampo refers to this period as the institutionalisation of clientelism because it was seen as natural or "how politics works" (2020, p. 318), an idea firmly embedded in Barranquilla and Cartagena at the time of enquiry.

Ocampo (2020, p. 324) sustains that clientelism has become predatory over recent decades. To the "personalised distribution of bureaucracy posts and public resources in exchange for political support" is now added a "predatory appropriation of such resources". This type of clientelism manifests, among others, in signed contracts by the government and the private sector. Similarly, Giraldo labels 'electoral corruption' as the private interests (contractors) financing campaigns to capture local democracy (2019, p. 175). A 2018 report by the Electoral Observation Mission (Misión de Observación Electoral – MOE) spoke of 'pawned democracy', referring to the cases in which campaign financiers are selected as contractors, earning as much as 400 times the money they invested. Since elections are tainted by vote-buying and predatory funding, it is possible that public officials are more accountable to those funding their campaigns or securing their election than to societal actors.

An example of the state's capture at the national level is the Odebrecht (Brazilian multinational) case. An article from the BBC explains it as "illegal payments [which] have sloshed through presidential campaigns, boosted the careers of political top brass in country after country, and oiled the wheels of

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[8] The concept of 'bureaucratic clientelism' refers to "an organised expansion of existing posts and departments in the public sector and the addition of new ones in an attempt to secure power and maintain a party's electoral base" (Lyrintzis, 1984, p. 103). Hopkin (2001) appeals to this concept to differentiate between bureaucratic and electoral clientelism, this is, the exchange of votes or electoral support while analysing clientelism in Spain.

worldwide construction projects including motorways, gas pipelines and hydroelectric dams" (BBC, 2019). At the local level, for the elections held in 2015 for local authorities (governors, mayors, councillors), the clientelistic market in Barranquilla was estimated at approximately £5 million (COP20 billion) (El Heraldo, 2015), exceeding legal caps for campaign funding. The expenses indicate that clientelism is a manifestation of corruption and provides opportunities for more. In Cartagena, for example, the programme to provide meals at local schools was questioned, and a legal case was raised because public officials, including the mayor, apparently agreed to accept an overpriced budget in order for the contractor to keep a percentage of the money to the detriment of students' access to meals (Cárdenas, 2018). Opacity around information about financiers and public procurement helps to maintain ideas regarding local governments being accountable to private interests instead of the public good or citizens' needs, such as access to education or improved living conditions.

Clientelism has also shaped the relationship between different local elites and authorities within the cities, especially the municipality and the city councils. In both cities, there is recognition of elite families that have been able to obtain and maintain political power. Valencia (2020, p.6) refers to them as clans: "powerful regional groups with family connections or political, economic and social ties" that strengthened during the 'Frente Nacional' in response to the bipartisan agreements that took place at the national level. Valencia (2020) also sustains that due to clientelistic practices and, in some cases, partnerships with drug lords and paramilitary, the clans gained more importance in the local political system than political parties.

In the case of Cartagena, Caicedo (n.d.) explains that certain families monopolised political power in the city and the department of Bolívar[9] from the mid-'50s until the '90s when new actors emerged. Caicedo identifies three new roles in local politics: New political *barons* who also belong to the local elite, businesspeople who did not run for office but financed political campaigns to benefit from

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[9] Cartagena is the capital of Bolivar. Departments are the second tier between nation and cities or municipalities.

political decisions, and the paramilitary (p. 84). A break from this type of political control was the election of an independent candidate as the mayor in 2007. After her time in office (2008-2011), Cartagena has undergone what the press has called 'La mala hora' (Bad time for Cartagena), referring to the fact it had eleven mayors in six years, of which five served during the period 2016-2019, despite being elected to serve for four years. In contrast, the same political group had maintained power in Barranquilla in the same period.

Candidates for and those elected to city council positions are also seen as part of the clientelistic system described earlier. In both cities, elected councillors have been scrutinised for corruption allegations. For example, in 2012, the Supreme Court initiated a judiciary process against a councilman and a former councilman in Barranquilla for their relationships with paramilitary organisations (Verdad Abierta, 2012). Political ties with paramilitary groups have been closely related to drug trafficking, an illegal activity present in Barranquilla since the 1970s. At the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, the relationship between drug trafficking and paramilitarism was recognised as one of the causes behind the increase in violence against trade unionists, teachers and students. Trejos et al. (2021, p. 47) explain that paramilitary leaders gained access to local politics in Barranquilla financing political campaigns in exchange for controlling 40% of the local administration. Following Garay et al (2008), the authors sustain that the connection between drug trafficking and politics produced the 'co-opted reconfiguration of the state' since illegal groups obtained economic benefits and were also able to influence different branches of government (Trejos et al., 2021, p. 62).

The relationship between city councils and municipalities has changed over time. In the case of Barranquilla, the dynamic used to be tense; between 1998 and 2002, the council rejected about 65% to 75% of the projects presented by the municipality, but still was considered permissive of the municipality's questionable actions (García, 2008). Recently, the council has been seen as subordinate to the municipality. A media report referencing a source stated, "[family in power] have understood

that for not wearing down, they needed a council that serve them as a subordinate entity, with whom they will not lose time settling quotas or favours". They have accomplished that by supporting candidates from their political group or clan (Ardila, 2020). Other councillors have been accused of being part of current clientelistic networks by which they received payments in exchange for approving the budgets presented by the municipality (Ardila, 2020). Similarly, several of Cartagena's councillors were accused in 2017 of receiving money in exchange for selecting a person to be the district's comptroller (El Universal, 2017).

Despite the municipality's instability, the relationship also seems mediated by influence-peddling in Cartagena. In the local paper, El Universal, several opinion columnists at various times have condemned councillors' behaviour, accusing them of pressuring municipality officials or officials offering jobs and contracts to approve the projects presented to the council. For example, Villalba (2012), in the column 'Por falta de aceite' (Not greasing enough palms), held that the council's partial approval to the city's development plan because the mayor had announced he would cut jobs that were usually distributed as part of clientelistic arrangements. Another example was the approval of new faculties for a mayor to regulate public areas disregarding what was permitted by law (Carrascal, 2014). The examples presented here illustrate the importance of other political actors, such as civil society or citizens, aiming to hold governments accountable since councils, who are supposed to represent citizens and exercise control over municipalities, fail to do so because of their clientelistic connections.

This section has helped to understand the effect of context on how actors and institutional arrangements interact by identifying part of the 'institutional matrix' (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) in which social accountability is embedded (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018). Three institutions with a critical impact on the relationship between public officials and societal actors in Barranquilla and Cartagena were introduced. First, an 'old' institution, exclusionary bipartisanism that refers to the

'Frente Nacional', a bipartisan accord at the national level that reconfigured politics at a local level and the temporal effects of which include depoliticisation and low tolerance to criticism. Other two 'neighbouring' institutions, decentralisation and clientelism, also provide "resources for actors engaged in processes of institutional change" (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018, p. 229). Decentralisation empowers local governments by allowing officials to develop their own frameworks for social accountability; it also shapes the relationships between public officials at municipalities and other organisations or groups within cities. Decentralisation also creates expectations and ideas regarding the role of citizen participation which are a counterpart to ideas and practices associated with clientelism. The latter shapes multiple relationships involving municipality officials (elected or not), city councillors, political campaign sponsors and public contractors. The following section focuses on social accountability as a nested institution (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018), that is, as part of a hierarchical structure where higher arrangements influence its shape at the local level.

4.3. Social accountability as a normative multi-level institution

This research identifies how social accountability works locally by examining the rules, practices and narratives present in two Colombian cities. However, such institutional arrangements do not exist in a vacuum or are particular to the city level. This section engages with the constitutional and collective-choice rules informing local actors' choices, especially public officials for whom the rules are designed. It shows higher rules created idealistic expectations about social accountability even before the publication of a specific policy. Social accountability policy consolidates the transition from a discourse of social accountability as a value to a procedure. However, the approach has limitations that are exacerbated by the context in which the policy is implemented. The next section introduces Conpes 3654[10], a policy guideline created at the national level in 2010 and that is the leading legal outline for

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[10] The word 'CONPES' refers to both policy documents and the advisory body that produces them, Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (Advisory National Board for Economic and Social Policy – CONPES). The board is made up by the President and several ministers and other national level officials and is regarded not as a political but as technical body, and the state's primary policy planning department (Law 19/1958). Its function

social accountability. Its importance is illustrated by situating the policy in the broader legal and political Colombian environment. Then, the section focuses on the policy itself, its definition of social accountability, and its rationale. The remaining section pays attention to the 'Handbook for social accountability' (2014, from here Handbook) created as a result of the Conpes 3654 and configures the framework for social accountability.

4.3.1. Antecedents to social accountability policy

Concepts associated with what is now social accountability in Colombia can be traced to ideas and practices introduced by the 1991 'Political Constitution' or that were strengthened by it. For example, the freedom of information request has been a citizens' right since 1984 but the Constitution strengthened it because it includes it as a fundamental right, meaning that in case of refusal to provide information, citizens can enforce it by judiciary means. The Constitution describes the country as a unitary republic with popular sovereignty and participative democracy. Uprimny and Sánchez (2013, p. 5-6) identify two main features of the Colombian Constitution related to social accountability. First, its regulatory character compels state actors to align with the principles and set of rights included in the text (enforced by the Constitutional Court). Second, it intends to strengthen democracy by restructuring the political system and establishing citizens' right to participate directly in policy planning and public administration oversight.

As García (2013, p. 82) asserts, the Constitution, more than a text, is a process, and political actors' interpretation and context mediate its implementation. In the case of Colombia (and other Latin American countries), constitutions promise a future, a time when social progress has been secured for all, overcoming "a great unconformity with the present" (e.g., highly unequal societies, authoritarian and violent past experiences). In this sense, the Colombian constitution is a highly rhetorical document

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is to act as an advisory body for the government at all levels: national, departmental and municipal by laying down policy guidelines known as Conpes.

facing several obstacles in its implementation. Nevertheless, as the basis of the legal system, the Constitution enables citizens (directly or through civil society) to advance towards securing the constitutional promises of civic and social rights.

Following Kiser and Ostrom's (1982) hierarchy of institutional arrangements, the constitution is the highest level of decision-making. Rules at the constitutional level inform those created at the collective (legal and governmental) and operational (everyday) ones (see also Lowndes and Lemprière, 2017). Social accountability is nested within the interactions that take place at these three levels. For example, Political Constitution (1991) article 270 states, "The law will organise the forms and systems of citizen participation making it possible to oversee the public management completed at the various administrative levels and their results". Several laws created by Congress regulate citizens' rights to oversight public administration indicating the procedures to make it effective [11], including Law 1757/2015, which incorporates social accountability[12] as a citizen participation mechanism (See Figure 4.3.).

[11] Law 489/1998 includes public hearings as a space to present and discuss public policies, from their conception, implementation, outcomes and evaluation. Law 850/2003 includes a similar component by conferring the right to oversight bodies to demand a space to discuss with public authorities about the specific projects they are watching over.

[12] Social accountability is understood here as the processes to be followed to hold public officials accountable or for the latter to render account to citizens.

Figure 4.3. Social accountability rules' sources
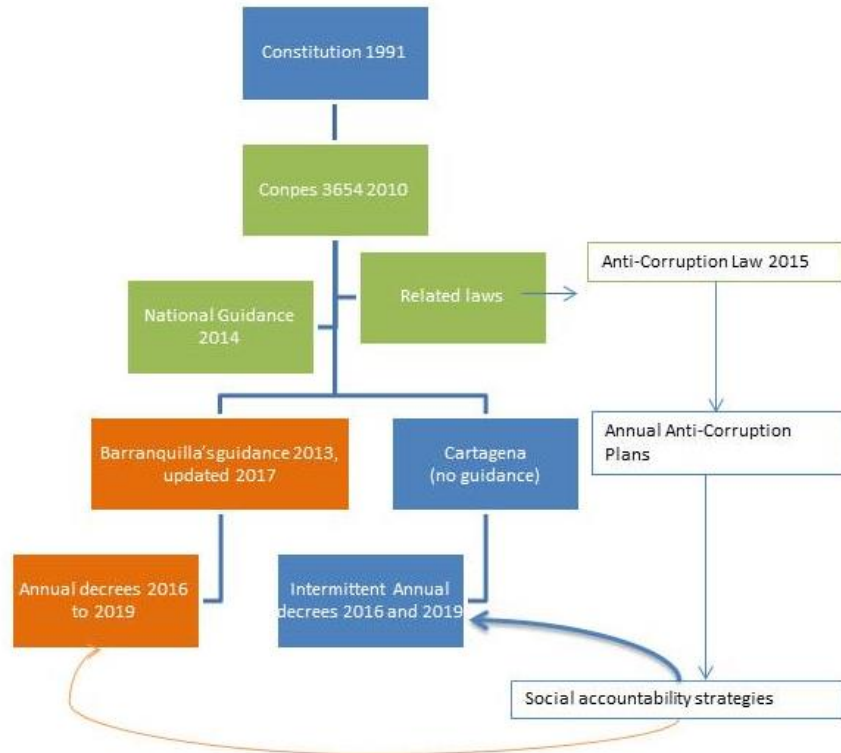
Author's own elaboration

Along with Congress's laws, other norms with an equal or similar hierarchy were developed by national authorities (the executive branch of government) before 2015[13]. The idea of strengthening citizen participation in public spaces took hold thanks to the constitutional renewal together with the commitments acquired at the international level such as the UN's convention against corruption (2003), and the influence of other organisations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), World Bank and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Such organisations supported programmes aiming to strengthen democracy or the state's capacity to fulfil its missions (e.g., USAID's Fortalecimiento de la transparencia y la rendición de cuentas – Transparency and accountability

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[13] The term 'social accountability' seems to be introduced in the Colombian legislation in 2005 by the Decree 3622. The term is brought up in an article asking for instituting a policy for the democratisation of public administration. It argues that such a policy will help advance open public institutions that allow social accountability (Decree 3622/2005, art. 7-C). However, the text does not elaborate on what it understands by social accountability.

strengthening – (El Tiempo, 2004)) which have a significant influence over what Isaza (2017) identifies as social accountability discourses.

In her analysis of social accountability in Colombia, Isaza (2017) refers to 2002–2009 as a period when two discourses defined social accountability, each relating to different aims concerning management and democracy. First, a managerial discourse that sees accountability as a means to efficiency and effectiveness (e.g., Conpes 3294/2004) meaning (i) better quality of public management, (ii) improving efficiency, (iii) guaranteeing management transparency and (iv) guaranteeing efficiency in public resources management. And second, a democratic discourse related to participation and social control (e.g., Law 850/2003) aiming to (i) improve the relationship between public administration and community, (ii) deepen democracy, (iii) improve citizens' quality of life and (v) improve governability at national and local levels. Table No. 4.1., based on guidelines for social accountability, summarises how the concept of social accountability changed from 2003 to 2010. In each iteration, more elements were included in the concept; social accountability was first seen as a principle (highly normative) and later, as a set of actions (obligation/right) involving ongoing interactions between actors.

Table 4.1. Development of the social accountability concept 2003-2010

	Social accountability's concept from 2003 to 2010			
	2003	**2005**	**2009**	**2010**
Defined as	-A component of constitutional principles -A moment	An obligation	A duty	An obligation/right Also, legal norms, practices, and outcomes
Elements	-Information -Discussion -Evaluation	-Information -Discussion -Evaluation -Consequences	-Information -Discussion -Evaluation -Consequences	-Information -Dialogue -Incentives
For	-Improving transparency -Generating trust -Facilitating social control	-Same as preceding + -Adjusting, adapting public policies -Effectiveness, efficacy, and efficacy	-Implementing participative democracy -Social control	-Strengthening transparency -Holding representatives and public officials accountable (responsibility) -Social control

How	Public Audience	Public Audience Internet Other monitoring and evaluation mechanisms	Process where public audiences are final step. Public meeting by zones, tv/radio programmes	Public Audience Town councils (public meetings) Specific means for each element

Author's own elaboration.

4.3.2. *Conpes 3654 as the consolidation of social accountability discourse*

In 2010, a policy was created at the national level in response to "inadequate practices of social accountability" and aiming to foster a SA culture in Colombia (Conpes 3654, p. 35). Isaza (2017) recognises this document as the start of the consolidation of one social accountability discourse that merged the two previously mentioned, and spread across different laws, regulations and policies. Indeed, one of the purposes of creating a national policy specifically for social accountability was to systematise and unify the plurality of social accountability or citizen oversight regulations, one of its identified implementation constraints (DNP, 2007, p. 142).

Conpes 3654/2010 on social accountability is looked upon as the basis for its implementation[14]. Prior to the creation of the policy, several legal and policy precedents mentioned social accountability without explaining what it was or how to achieve it. However, there were some exceptions, such as the guidelines published by the Departamento Administrativo de la Función Pública (Department of Public Affairs – DAFP) that offered a definition and presented methodologies for giving account to citizens, but these were limited. The Conpes 3654 was a breakthrough because it aimed to regulate some of the existing but piecemeal regulations for social accountability. Given the significance of these Conpes documents, the Conpes 3654 advanced the institutionalisation of social accountability by providing instructions to consolidate it and a framework to be followed by public entities.

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[14] As Medina explains, documents produced by the body are considered soft law devices. Despite not being mandatory by nature, they are accepted and adopted by governmental bodies, which consider them binding. Conpes documents also tend to justify the subsequent creation of mandatory norms such as laws and decrees (2016, p. 65-6).

4.3.2.1. The definition of social accountability in Conpes 3654

With important precedents, the Conpes 3654 stands out because it is a complex document presenting not only a methodology but also a diagnosis and an action plan to be followed to systematise, improve and institutionalise social accountability practices, aiming to achieve an accountability culture. In some way, the Conpes recompiles previous guidelines and moves towards a distinctive discourse on social accountability. However, the policy does not provide a unique and clear concept of social accountability. Instead, it provides two different definitions. First, Conpes 3654 relies on academic literature (e.g., Schedler 2004; Grant and Keohane 2005 cited in Conpes 3654) and refers to accountability as an actor's obligation to inform and explain his/her actions to another with the right to demand them and to social accountability as a subtype, whereby public officials are accountable to civil society actors (e.g., citizens, interest groups and media).

The second definition states that "in the political realm, it [accountability] is the compilation of structures, practices and outcomes" through which accountability is enacted (Conpes 3654, p.13). Although this alternative definition expands on the previous one, it can be problematic because it encloses all existing regulations related to public officials' and organisations' duty to provide public information, citizens' right to demand information or explanations, or to recall elections for mayors. Conpes 3654 listed at least sixteen different regulations, and more have been produced since then. The inclusion of dispersed sets of rules may make it more difficult to set a clear path to social accountability enactment.

Then again, the complexity that derives from expanding the concept could be seen as an example of the "messiness" of institutions (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Rules aiming to shape accountable behaviour are scattered through several regulating documents, which then may work along with a diverse set of practices and narratives particular to certain places. The reference to other regulations also exemplifies that 'institutional designers' use institutions at hand, remembering or sharing certain

arrangements with other institutional processes. For instance, public hearings are seen as an opportunity for social accountability, and they were first introduced into the law in 1998. Similarly, planning advisory boards are committees created to analyse governments' drafts for development plans before they are presented to city councils for approval. They are also seen as an opportunity for social accountability, as they would allow citizens and public officials to discuss the plans' implementation.

Before moving to the next section, it is important to notice the differences between this thesis's working definition of social accountability (Chapter 1) and the policy's definition. Mainly, while the thesis argues the need to analyse social accountability as a relationship (e.g., Bovens, 2010), the policy refers to it either as an obligation/right or as a compilation of rules and practices. Such difference might be traced to the differences in the language since there is no precise translation for 'accountability' in Spanish (Isaza, 2017, p. 943; Escandón and Velásquez, 2015). However, the problem remains because seeing explanations about political actions and decisions in the dichotomy of obligation/right entails missing what may be most relevant about the concept: a meaningful and ongoing relationship among the actors. As a consequence of this inarticulacy, the policy ends by adding to the existing coexistence of understandings about social accountability as a relationship, process and practices.

Finally, and following the difficulties of defining social accountability, are the characterisations of its constitutive elements: answerability and consequences. Conpes 3654 differentiates between information, dialogue, and incentives as the components for accountability. Although the policy's introductory sections define them following academic literature (sp. Schedler, and Grant and Keohane, cited in Conpes 3654), following sections draw away from that approach. To illustrate, Conpes 3654 defines the elements as follows:

> Information (Grant and Keohane 2005) refers to the availability, disclosure and dissemination of data such as statistics, documents, reports, etc., related to the duties of public officials or

organisations, from policies and programmes' formulation to their implementation and evaluation. Explanations or dialogue refers to the justification of actions, the presentation of assessments and interpretations, the presentation of the criteria used to make past decisions, and the existence of dialogue and the possibility of others to provide input for future decisions. Finally, incentives consist in the existence of corrective mechanisms, stimulation of proper performance or sanctioning poor performance (Conpes 3654, p. 14-5).

From the definition, it is noticeable that explanations or discussions, a component of answerability, are replaced by dialogue, and incentives replace consequences. While the former could be seen as a trivial change, including incentives instead of sanctions or consequences is significant. Consequences are a key element of accountability, it refers to societal actors' capacity to impose sanctions or rewards, but the policy shifts toward an understanding of consequences as incentives as actions to encourage officials to provide information and explanations, and for societal actors to request them. Furthermore, the policy presents each component as nonrelated experiences, suggesting uncoordinated actions to enact them. Separating the policy in this way increases its dispersion and hinders the enactment of social accountability.

4.3.2.2. The rationale of Conpes 3654

The previous section situated the social accountability policy within the Colombian legal framework and described its approach to defining social accountability, which then serves as the frame for local social accountability arrangements. The next section briefly presents what the policy includes as the rationale for its creation and connects it with some of the issues discussed in the section on social accountability as an embedded institution. Broadly, Conpes 3654 identifies one key problem with the enactment of social accountability, specifically, "inadequate practices". It highlights that the problem to overcome is not the absence of social accountability but that there are limitations related to its components. For example, the Conpes states there are:

Public information restrictions and few opportunities for dialogue and interaction between public entities and citizens to provide explanations about management. Also, [there are] insufficient incentives for entities to give accounts and citizens to demand accounts to engage in public administration effectively (Conpes 3654, 2010, p. 35).

The policy offers an assessment for each element, information, dialogue and incentives. The Conpes 3654 described information as not accessible in many cases, both in terms of obtaining it and it being understandable. Regarding dialogue, the document also reported that opportunities to participate were restricted or did not allow citizens to offer feedback. As for incentives, the Conpes 3654 pointed out that public officials and citizens ignored the available mechanisms to demand and render accounts or their value. The document argues that inadequate social accountability practice is associated with other democratic challenges, such as citizens' ignorance and apathy towards public issues and the way public administration works, or public organisations missing opportunities to assess and improve their performance (Conpes 3654, p. 38). Furthermore, the policy supposes that such issues can ultimately develop into limited citizen participation and more opportunities for corruption inside public organisations, which then ends in:

Eroding, in the long term, citizens' trust in democracy as a government system, since the organisations and entities at the national and local level ignore actual citizens' needs and preferences, and as a result, public policies become inefficient and insufficient (Conpes 3654, p. 39).

The rationale offered by the Conpes exemplifies that more than consolidating the managerial and democratic discourses into one, both continue to shape social accountability arrangements. While the managerial discourse reflects on Conpes 3654's aims to secure efficiency and effectiveness in public administration, the Conpes shows a concern for citizens' trust in political institutions and their participation in the policy process. It is also important to notice the connection made between social

accountability and corruption. As presented earlier in the chapter, clientelism has shaped the relationship between politicians and citizens, subverting political representation through vote-buying, the co-option of citizen leaders and other public authorities, and predatory practices affecting public budgets and the provision of public services. Social accountability policy regards the need to improve social accountability, in connection with decentralisation, as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between citizens and the state and sees clientelism as an obstacle to accomplishing that aim, and an evil to fight against with more and better accountability.

So far, this section has illustrated that social accountability is not a new concept that emerged from a policy design in 2010 but a value that can be traced to the 1991 Constitution and other laws. While the term 'social accountability' appeared in 2005, and a policy explicitly designed to foster a social accountability culture was designed in 2010, citizen oversight over public officials was already highly regarded in the country. The policy and related documents aimed to improve inadequate social accountability practices in Colombia, which were considered opportunities for clientelism and corruption.

Thus, such rules have a highly normative character and work as prescriptions for public officials' and entities' behaviour to secure citizen participation and oversight over public administration. Furthermore, rules designed at the national level were influenced by international organisations and European conceptualisations of social accountability that are not easy to implement in contexts such as Colombia. Although Conpes 3654, as a strategic policy document, can be considered a step forward for the institutionalisation of social accountability, it provided a range of potential options for implementation without situating them in context or providing any specific regulatory framework for this which may impede its implementation. The following section pays attention to one of the outcomes of the strategy, the 'Handbook for social accountability' developed in 2014, which included a more specific array of actions to improve social accountability.

4.3.3. Handbook for social accountability

By 2014, a committee formed by officials from the Presidential Transparency Office, the Department of Public Affairs and the National Planning Department published a handbook in response to Conpes 3654's action plan. This guideline informs public officials' behaviour and citizens' expectations at the operational level (implementing social accountability at local government). It includes how to run a diagnostic of current practices, identify, and characterise audiences, and develop or put into practice different accountability tools. This section aims to illustrate some of the actions included in the handbook to secure "adequate social accountability practices". Broadly, Handbook's stated purpose was to:

> Present a set of steps, instruments and tools that will allow public officials to materialise in action, each one of the accountability's constitutive concepts, namely: information, dialogue and incentives, allowing greater ownership of the public [services, resources] and in this way to achieve higher trust levels in governments.

The Handbook follows the Conpes definition of social accountability. The Handbook may be seen as a benchmark to improve the existing "inadequate practices" and to guide public organisations towards developing their own social accountability strategies. For example, the Handbook states (referencing the policy) that the aim of creating such strategies is to improve or consolidate social accountability as a permanent or ongoing process which can be met through three further objectives:

-     To improve the information given to citizens.

-     To promote dialogue and feedback

-     To create incentives to give and ask for accounts (Handbook, 2014, 38).

The Handbook suggests a set of actions for each objective, Table 4.2. provides examples of some of them. The list adds up to 28 actions from which public officials or entities could choose to design and

implement a social accountability strategy. Thus, public officials are obligated to have a social accountability strategy, but they can choose from an array of actions to give account to citizens.

Actions suggested by the Handbook of social accountability	
Information	Producing performance and budget reports
	Recurring to mass media (sees them as intermediaries)
	Implementing open data strategies
Dialogue	Public hearings to assess public performance
	Focal groups or participatory boards to discuss specific topics
	Community or regional assemblies to discuss issues within territorial boundaries
Incentives	Training courses aimed at public officials and citizens
	Contests to promote internal knowledge about the different processes happening inside a public organisation
	Open and participative collaboration inviting citizens to make suggestions on how to improve social accountability

Table 4.2. Social accountability actions suggested by the Handbook
Author's own elaboration.

Besides specific actions, the Handbook restates the definitions introduced in the Conpes for each element and configures the higher-level rules constraining the parameters of institutional formation at the local level (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018, 228). The Handbook shapes, or attempts to, answerable behaviour by qualifying the type and characteristics of the information shared by public officials, as defining certain minimum requirements for effective dialogue with societal actors. For example, regarding information, the Handbook states that it must meet requirements of quality and availability to secure citizens can access it with enough time prior to meeting with public officials, or before the shared information loses value (Handbook, p. 39-40). In respect of dialogue, the Handbook (2014, p. 45) states that it "should have following up mechanisms that allow citizens and public officials to verify the progress and fulfilment of the commitments that result from dialogue actions". In this way, the definitions can be seen as the regulative prescriptions that create expectations for accountable behaviour.

Although the Conpes and the Handbook do not include citizens' actions, or a how-to guide to hold governments accountable from the bottom-up, they configure benchmarks for all actors. Public

officials, citizens and civil society organisations can use the guidance to evaluate and compare what has been done and how close or far it is from what is stated in the policy: permanent, timely, engaging interactions. Actors' interpretation of the guidelines informs their behaviour and attitudes at the operational level, hence the importance of interrogating how social accountability is enacted at the local level, not only in regard to the implementation of rules but also in how they interact with practices and narratives. Such interpretation is further informed by the interaction of actors with other institutions such as decentralisation and clientelism as Section 4.2. suggests. The upcoming section provides a partial view of some of the socioeconomic characteristics of Barranquilla and Cartagena as a way to situate actors' backgrounds with the aim of facilitating the understanding of the findings.

4.4. Societal actors' characteristics in Barranquilla and Cartagena

Social accountability is understood by both the Colombian policy and this research as a relationship between public entities or officials and citizens. Earlier sections provide context for public organisations but not much regarding societal actors. This section focuses on specific attributes that will help understand some of the assumptions and beliefs encountered during fieldwork regarding Barranquilla and Cartagena citizens' socioeconomic characteristics, literacy and civic education, and broad characteristics of civil society organisations.

4.4.1. Citizens

To refer to socioeconomic attributes it is worth looking at both cities in context. As Chapter 3 shows, Barranquilla and Cartagena are capital cities in the Caribbean region, where the population is among the poorest in Colombia and facing critical challenges regarding public services provision (Bonet and Pérez, 2020). In 2019, the year the fieldwork was conducted, the National Statistics Department (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas – DANE) calculated that 25.6% of Barranquilla's were poor (i.e., lived under poverty line, calculated in $COP 326,674 or £66.6 per capita) and 3.6% extremely poor (i.e., income per person was under $COP 137,350 or £28). For Cartagena, the same

data was 34.3% and 3%, respectively. Both cities have an estimated population of over one million people, which means around three thousand people in each city live in poverty.

Regarding other socioeconomic dimensions, the Social Progress Index (SPI) calculated at the city level in Colombia, helps to identify challenges regarding basic human needs, wellbeing and opportunities. The scorecards for each city can be consulted in Appendix 5, here the focus will be on three aspects, basic human needs, access to basic knowledge and access to information. In 2019, for the first dimension, basic human needs (access to public services, nutrition and primary medical care, shelter and personal safety) Barranquilla scored 70.43 and Cartagena 71.22 out of 100 possible points. The global Social Progress Index for both cities (Barranquilla 64.8 and Cartagena 63.01) characterises them as middle-low compared to the other thirteen analysed cities, ranking in the 9th and 12th position respectively (Red Ciudades Como Vamos, 2020). Although they have a similar development, Cartagena is poorer than Barranquilla and has more challenges regarding public services, and in terms of extreme poverty, Barranquilla has more people in this situation.

The SPI for Colombian cities also scored access to basic knowledge and access to information. The score is mentioned separately because even if it cannot be disentangled from social progress in real life, illiteracy and civic literacy are significant constraints for social accountability. For 2019, Barranquilla scored slightly higher in access to basic knowledge with 74.7 while Cartagena scored 73.9 with the latter showing a significant increase in this indicator compared to previous years. There is a more notable difference between the cities regarding access to information, while Barranquilla scored slightly over the average with 70.2, Cartagena is among the ones with lower scores with 62.86. The research illustrates the challenges citizens and organisations face to obtain public information and why legal strategies are used to access information (Herrera and Mayka, 2020).

Finally, civil literacy or what a participant called 'lack of citizen culture' is explored using citizen engagement data. In their analysis of citizen participation in Colombia, Velásquez et al. (2018 p. 99)

distinguished between institutional and mobilisation logics of citizen participation. The first one refers to participatory experiences or activities created and regulated by formal rules (constitutional, legal or administrative). The authors identified 130 participatory spaces that exist under the institutional logic, and highlight the decrease in citizen participation at the local level between 1986 and 2018 since participatory spaces or mechanisms at the municipal level sum 43.8% (Velásquez et al., 2018, p. 230). In the case of Barranquilla, their research found 26 statutory spaces (20 created by national laws) and conclude that the local government has not shown interest in promoting or supporting them but there is no mention of citizens' attitudes.

An insight towards citizens' attitudes can be drawn from the work of the 'Red de Ciudades Cómo Vamos'. In 2018, their report 'Encuesta de Percepción Ciudadana Comparada' (Compared Citizen Perception Survey), showed that the space where citizens in Barranquilla participate the most was religious organisations with 33%, while in Cartagena 23% of respondents said, 'Juntas de Acción Comunal' (Neighbourhood boards). The same report concludes that while 49% of surveyed have a favourable image of their local council in Barranquilla, only 29% does in Cartagena, with the lower score among capital cities, while Medellin scores the highest with 70% of support towards the council. Similarly, Cartagena also reports the lowest score for support to the mayor's performance with only 7% while in this case, Barranquilla has the highest, with 87% of respondents affirming to support the mayor.

Electoral participation in Colombia is low compared to other Latin American countries. For example, the turnout percentage for presidential elections in Argentina, Brazil or Ecuador surpasses 70% while in Colombia it has not reached 50% (Pignataro, 2014). Hoskin et al., (2003) suggest several reasons for low voter turnout at national and local elections, including that the vote is not mandatory, unlike other countries in the region. Citing Gutiérrez, their working paper highlights that the mayor's first elections presented a high turnout, but this has decreased because citizens do not believe the local government

solves their problems (Hoskin et al., p. 9). For example, a 2019 'Cartagena Cómo Vamos' poll found that only 25% of participants believed the municipality was taking action to improve their lives (CCV, n.d.). At the time of writing, the most recent local elections were held in 2019, and both cities showed lower turnout than the average of the country, and excepting Barranquilla, there were more votes cast for mayors than city and locality councils (Table 4.3. shows voter turnout). Electoral abstention is not the only limitation to electoral participation. As shown later, clientelism also affects this and other participatory mechanisms, including those designed for social accountability, like public hearings.

	Barranquilla	Cartagena	Colombia
Mayor	53.20%	55.25%	60.65%
City council	53.43%	54.16%	59.23%
Locality council	54.23%	53.83%	55.19%

Table 4.3. Voter turnout local elections 2019
Author's own elaboration using data from Registraduría General de la Nación.

There is no official information regarding citizen engagement in other participatory or civic spaces; however, two polls can help to assess it. The Americas Barometer provides data about the country while the 'Cómo Vamos' initiatives glean the local level. The 2018 Barometer report shows that citizens tend to attend religious organisations more frequently than other activities, followed by parents' school meetings, neighbourhood organisations and political parties' meetings (Rivera et al., 2019, p. 128). That is the broader picture at the national level, yet in Barranquilla and Cartagena, 'Cómo Vamos' reported that 82% and 70% of respondents, respectively, mentioned not taking part in *any* organisation, space or network. From those who do, the most mentioned space was Neighbourhood Boards (BCV, 2020; CCV, n.d.). If reports are a trustworthy reflection of all citizens, it is expected that social accountability spaces such as public hearings show similar levels of participation.

4.4.2. Civil society organisations

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are understood here as "voluntary and non-profit associations that are independent of the government" (García, 2008, p. 31) and that can assume different roles or goals.

According to Marín (2006), some complement the state in different capacities; others replace it or antagonise it. García recognises three types of CSOs: grassroots organisations, popular movements and supporting institutions. In her research about the role of CSOs in Barranquilla's governance, García (2008) finds that although there is a considerable number of these organisations registered at the Chamber of Commerce, they have a weak impact on the development and implementation of public or the discussion of public issues at the district level.

Among the reasons why CSOs are considered weak, García's research found they could relate to the organisations' resources and structures or the government's lack of responsiveness to their attempts to participate in public decisions. Regarding their resources, organisations tend not to have a place to meet and work. In terms of structure, García denotes that groups with a board seem to have more chances to participate in local politics, but such participation is highly restricted or low. Furthermore, some distrust not only the government but other organisations, which obstructs them from working together. On the other hand, the local government was characterised by organisations that participated in the research as hindering their opportunities to participate or that public officials only responded to influential political and economic minorities. Despite the pessimistic perception, García (2008) highlighted groups that effectively voiced their concerns and impacted the formulation of policies and others trying to hold the government accountable.

There are no similar studies regarding civil society in Cartagena. However, analysing governance and employment in the city, Pineda stated there is a "significant elite and interest groups fragmentation", and organisations do not interact but compete with each other (2014 p. 49-50). Given the similarities between Cartagena's and Barranquilla's political systems, it is possible to infer that organisations share the same limitations with similar exceptions. For example, Planning Boards are made up of representatives from a range of CSOs, and some are part of broader networks (e.g., the Cómo Vamos Network), referred to as supporting organisations (García, 2008).

Civil society organisations are characterised by having members, individuals or other organisations, from the middle or upper classes, professionals, businesses or academia (García, 2008, p. 61). Florez and Hernandez (2013), analysing a network of organisations present at Barranquilla and Cartagena, characterise them as elite organisations. They are integrated by representatives of businesses, academia, guilds and media who shared an interest in holding governments accountable and providing information to citizens to promote their interest and participation in public issues. One of the oldest organisations in Cartagena with that profile is the 'Fundación Cívico Social Pro-Cartagena' (Civic and Social Pro-Cartagena Foundation – FUNCICAR), created in 1997 and since then has extended the range of their activities, including the scrutiny of the city council, municipality public procurement processes and the training of other organisations (FUNCICAR, n.d.).

Other organisations that could be identified as elite ones are the initiatives 'Cómo Vamos' (How are we doing). In each city, they were created by a different group of organisations, but both include academia, media and businesses. In her analysis of alliances between CSOs and the media in Latin America, Montoya identified that these initiatives aim to strengthen citizens' 'voice' and improve public administration's transparency and efficiency. As for the 'Cómo Vamos' accomplishments, she includes that their work is consulted by other actors, including the government, although this varies across cities (Montoya, 2009). In the case of Barranquilla, it is possible to find opinion columns where the director of the initiative insisted on the possibility of changing the dynamics of public hearings for social accountability by improving the quantity and quality of the information, decentralising public hearings to respond to the interests of each locality (Mendoza, 2015).

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter argues that examining the institutional context is critical to understanding social accountability. Such context is presented as working at two different levels. First, social accountability stands together with previous and neighbouring institutions also shaping actors' behaviour,

configuring an institutional matrix. Secondly, analysing social accountability at the local level by trying to uncover how different institutional arrangements configure answerability and consequences needs consideration of higher levels of analysis, especially the constitutional. At this level, 'rules of the game' informing collective-choice rules are created. In the case of Colombia, this set of rules is aspirational and normative.

Thus, the chapter has set a framework for the upcoming findings, which present how rules, practices and narratives empower or constrain the roles and behaviour of municipality officials and societal actors. Chapter 5 addresses the actors, identifying how the institutional arrangements empower or constrain them from taking part in accountability, the role or position they might take, and contextualising them in the socio-economic environment, affecting their power and capacity to act. Chapters 6 and 7 take a step further to present and analyse how the rules, practices, and narratives shape actors' actions in terms of providing or demanding information and explanations (answerability) or imposing consequences (enforcement). The findings chapters also reflect on the 'logics of action' displayed by actors when they adapt or resist institutional arrangements and how this shapes social accountability.

5. ACTORS' ENACTMENT OF THEIR ROLES AS ACCOUNT GIVERS OR ACCOUNT HOLDERS

5.1. Introduction

Chapters 5 to 7 present the findings of the research, paying attention to how rules, practices and narratives empower or constrain officials' and citizens' behaviour while considering actors' attributes and context. Across previous chapters, the thesis has referred to social accountability as the ongoing and meaningful interactions between officials and citizens or their organised interests (civil society organisations, media), described here as societal actors. The thesis has highlighted the need for public officials' willingness to give account and societal actors' capability to access information, question officials and establish consequences. This chapter focuses on how social accountability in Barranquilla and Cartagena has shaped the roles of officials as account-givers and societal actors as account-holders.

The thesis shows that institutional arrangements empowered officials to design social accountability strategies which effectively rendered them as not meaningfully answerable to societal actors. At the same time, institutional arrangements constrained citizens by limiting their opportunities to meaningfully engage in social accountability spaces. This limitation is reinforced by the exclusionary political context, and the socio-economic conditions of the average citizens or organisations, which do not have the knowledge or resources to hold public officials to account meaningfully (for a closer look at socioeconomic characteristics, see Appendix 5.4., p. 258). This research suggests, however, that civil society organisations are beginning to support citizens in holding public officials to account, for example by providing public information, civic education, or training. This indicates that a more locally-grounded form of social accountability is now emerging.

This chapter has been divided into three main sections. The first section focuses on the power held by officials allowing them to dominate social accountability spaces and limit citizens' engagement. The second explores how clientelism, poverty and lack of civic education reinforce power asymmetries between officials and citizens. The final section suggests that decentralisation within cities strengthens

social accountability by increasing citizens' opportunities to engage with other actors with prominent roles at the city level. It also suggests some civil society organisations have not adopted a role as account-holders but as intermediaries between citizens and officials.

5.2. Social accountability empowers public organisations and officials more than citizens

Social accountability assumes citizens' power and capacity to hold officials accountable (Schedler, 1999; Cunill-Grau, 2006). However, this research suggests that institutional arrangements shaping social accountability in Barranquilla and Cartagena, have distributed more power to public officials than to citizens. This distribution of power reinforces asymmetries between the actors and this section shows how officials use their power through rules, practices and narratives to shape the identities and roles associated with social accountability. First, by allowing officials to perform social accountability, sharing only 'good news', thus rendering it a hollow institution. Second, by constraining citizens' role and their organised interests, as a 'passive audience' apprehensive to question the municipality or public officials.

5.2.1. Institutional arrangements designed by officials define roles and identities

Public officials are empowered by the national and local guidance, their own way to do things and the stories they share to define the roles assumed by themselves and citizens in social accountability spaces. National rules define the role of public organisations and officials as account-givers who must engage in a continuous process to give pertinent information to citizens and incentivise dialogue and feedback. Social accountability guidance also encourages officials to incentivise account-giving and account-demand (Handbook, p. 38). Regarding the role of citizens, national guidance specified:

> The concept of social accountability refers to a bidirectional relationship by which an actor gives an account and another asks for it. However, that aspect of the relationship [asking] will not be developed in this document because it will be the subject of a policy for citizen participation that is being formulated (Conpes 3654, p. 19).

The quote illustrates how at the national and local levels, most rules are directed towards officials who are delegated with the task of following national guidelines regarding information, dialogue and incentives, the elements recognised by the policy. In this way, officials are empowered to "undertake concrete actions that become tools for citizen participation, social control[15], transparency and the fight against corruption" (Handbook, p. 7). Although social accountability has been defined as a relationship, officials are deemed responsible for it. The research shows that such empowerment is used to create strategies, issue decrees and engage in practices and narratives that constitute officials' and citizens' identities and roles.

Responsibility for the implementation of national rules of social accountability has rested with officials who have privileged 'good news' narratives over transparency and explaining any shortcomings of their performance. In Barranquilla, rather than the Planning department, which usually leads on policy strategy, social accountability is instead led by the Communications and the Internal Audit departments. The findings suggest this has helped shape social accountability in ways that hinder citizens' assessment of public performance and their engagement with officials. A public official from the Communications department in Barranquilla explained their role:

> All the design of the dissemination and promotion strategy is our job... Public information is generated by us daily; from here, we manage the municipality's communications structure and we have social communicators assigned to each secretary or dependency. They send the information to us, acting as reporters, we might say. And those facts, we contextualise them within the Development Plan (Public official 4, B).

The Communications department controls what news and stories are shared and with what context, constituting a practice constraining other officials who might want to discuss possible problems with citizens. For example, another official said, "one shows all the pretty things, all the good, your best

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[15] Social control exists in Colombian literature and legislation. It refers to citizens' right to oversee public power.

indicators. And what is not going so well, one tries dissimulating them a bit" (Public Official 3, B). By exercising such control over information, municipality officials undermine citizens' ability to know the actual performance of the municipality and provide feedback or engage in actions to overcome challenges or improve performance.

Another way in which roles have been shaped is through the personalisation of power, using the image of the mayor to compel a positive narrative. The research found a narrative focus on the mayor as a "figure" with more visibility than the municipality as a public organisation, a journalist mentioned, "When I see the municipality, I see the [mayor's name]. The municipality's Twitter account retweets whatever he says as an individual" (Local journalist 2, B). Personalisation of public power was also observed during public hearings; in these events, public officials often mentioned the mayor and thanked him repeatedly for the city's transformation. Public officials from the Communications department mentioned that the mayor is very attentive to social media and recognised that is their department that controls public discussions. An official stated: "We are the ones who set the public agenda and the news agenda, from the mayor's social media profiles. He is the one who sets the parameters" (Public official 4, B). The quote indicates how the Communications department uses the popularity of the mayor to control what is being discussed publicly and which helps to reinforce the narrative of 'good news' and limit the role of citizens in the public sphere.

The personalisation of power also affects social accountability by ignoring the role played by civil society organisations. For example, despite evidence showing civil society organisations had proposed some changes for public hearings, officials seemed to regard themselves as responsible for them. A similar example was given by other participants highlighting practices that ignore citizens' efforts to make their work visible and that copy their ideas without recognition (JAC Z2, B). In this way, officials have created a narrative that highlights the municipality and renders invisible the work of leaders or

organisations, which could be seen as a way to disempower them and limit their participation and ability to hold officials accountable since their role and contributions are disregarded.

However, research also found practices within the municipality that could support social accountability. The Internal Audit officer explained how the relationship of the department with other dependencies has changed over the years:

> For the first two years I wanted to run away from here, it was not easy. There was no [oversight] environment, and no one wanted to be audited, so it was difficult to make reports because people got upset about the observation we made, and they would complain, until they understood it was an internal process… Now people accept being audited (Public Official 1, B).

In the quote, the participant refers to the gradual change within the municipality for officials to accept being monitored by a fellow officer. Similarly, an official from Communications said about the introduction of sectoral public hearings in 2018: "Of course, in the beginning, the idea was unpopular, officials looked at it askance because at a public entity [hearings] imply much work, it is overwork, so to speak" (Public Official 4, B). The overwork reference, as doing more of what is needed, denotes that while some processes or practices are more accepted now, the narrative still denotes resistance to citizens' accountability.

So far, the chapter has focused on the role assigned by rules and enacted by officials via practices and narratives. The research indicates that institutional arrangements have empowered officials allowing them to appear accountable but without acting transparently or responsively. The following section focuses on the ways current social accountability arrangements constrain the role of citizens, civil society organisations and media.

5.2.2. *Institutional arrangements discourage citizen engagement in social accountability*

The previous section shows that through their practices, officials control social accountability spaces to minimise meaningful social accountability, whilst telling narratives that belie how rules are enacted

and instead simply relay 'good news' stories. These arrangements also condition what citizens and their organised interests can or cannot do. This section focuses on the role of societal actors, by showing how arrangements designed by officials constrain citizens, and how such arrangements are reinforced by the lasting effects of exclusionary bipartisanism that has shaped attitudes towards criticism.

The way hearings are conducted also constrains who can take part and what actions citizens can participate in social accountability spaces. Several participants mentioned that public hearings were attended mainly by people who work for the municipality or were mobilised by politicians or community leaders who are part of a clientelistic network (Academic B; CSO1M, B; Activist2, C). An academic who has criticised hearings and performance of the municipality said: "The place is filled with public officials and with people who are friends of the municipality who are brought in buses, they occupy all the chairs" (Academic, B). During a hearing, it was also possible to observe that despite rules giving citizens the right to intervene and ask questions, officials concluded the event without allowing questions. Citizens then became a 'passive audience' with few opportunities to meaningfully interact with officials to hold them accountable.

Despite an official maintaining that hearings, especially since they were held by sector, help to connect with citizens and improve social accountability, these types of events are not well regarded by citizens. In Cartagena, a participant working at a civil society organisation described the hearing as a 'show', reflecting further:

> They hold the event and the government official talks, in a one-way direction – about what were their main achievements, based on the report and what he believes were the main achievements and usually it is what people would find more eye-catching (CSO3, C).

It is noticeable how the participant refers to the practice of one-way presentations that show only the best aspects of past performance as 'normal'. This is someone working at an organisation promoting

democracy and citizen participation recognising officials' discretion and control as an expected practice. In Barranquilla, a political scientist and journalist with experience in covering local politics also saw this practice as expected and expressed: "What I really criticise is that there is no way to counteract [officials'] account, there is no right to respond" (Local journalist 1, B). He referred to those attending hearings as bystanders: they receive the information shared by the municipality but do not have the opportunity to raise any questions or offer feedback.

Moreover, officials tend to share stories about good performance that lack "self-criticism" (Academic, B), a practice and narrative reinforced by some citizens. A community leader talked about feeling frustrated when attending public meetings or hearings because:

> Those are issues [broken promises or incomplete public works] that as an observer, community leader or member of a Neighbourhood Board, or young person, you raise an observation, a comment, and when you do that, what you get is the rejection from an 'applause committee' that does not allow that you say something against the mayor or his actions (Community Leader 1, B).

The quote uses the phrase "applause committees" which was used by several participants, including public officials, to denote people who support municipalities. The support goes beyond backing up the mayor's decisions and actions but also repudiates those who have questions, observations or reservations regarding some aspects of public management. Such practice is so embedded that it affects non-partisan citizens or civil society organisations as well as those who are openly opposed to the incumbent government.

Public officials' reluctance to engage with criticism relates to broader narratives, that relate to the character of the city and Colombia. A participant, working at a community radio station and who has lived in Barranquilla for over a decade, said she perceived that in the city "it is not cool to dispute". She continued, "It is cooler to be happy because this is a festive city. It is not nice to complain about the

city. No one likes complaints about the place where they live, especially if it comes from an outsider" (Local journalist 2, B). Like her, other participants shared stories about how officials and government supporters tend to view those who criticise the municipality negatively, thus constraining social accountability because community leaders and citizens fear ostracism.

For example, a community leader who belonged to the same political party as the political group in power, and recognised herself as a critic of some of the officials' decisions and behaviour said:

> A leader thinks that if she/he says something to the mayor, he will stop talking to her/him
>
> or is not going to open his door anymore. The leader feels if that happens, she/he will not
>
> be able to keep going (JAC Z2, B).

She referred to community leaders who fear losing their connections to the municipality and then being unable to do or obtain things for themselves or their communities. However, she also stated that leaders need to be "brave" and speak their minds. Leaders' and citizens' lack of capacity to voice their concerns exemplifies how narratives of fear can hinder social accountability.

Narratives that portray criticism as negative or opposing the incumbent government could also be connected to Frente Nacional's "exclusionary nature" (Gutierrez-Sanin et al., 2007, p. 17). Members of civil society organisations mentioned that officials see them as "opposition" (CSO 1, CSO 2, B), which implies a negative attitude towards them. One of them, who directed a high-profile CSO and talked about how the relationship changed over the years, referred to public officials' cautious attitude when the organisation started to publish data regarding the municipality's performance; she said: "There is still that perception that [social accountability] initiatives incline towards opposition [to the incumbent party], when the truth is that is not about being pro or contra, it is simply [accountability]" (CSO2, B). As the quote suggests, social accountability is not about being "pro or contra" officials to hold them responsible for citizens' demands or the mandate given to public officials when elected. However,

while some CSOs might have the capacity to challenge such perceptions, other citizens and community leaders fear being excluded from public programmes.

Besides 'opposition', other participants used the language of "enemies" (JAC Z2, B) and one public official referred to "administration's detractors" (Public official 4, B). During the interview, the official said: "When an administration is going well, people start to demand more, and if you notice, here, the administration' detractors and a lot of people say, this a 'cement-mayor'" (Public official 4, B). When asked about what he meant by administration detractors, he explained:

> Colombian society, how could I say it? Is very homogenous in the sense it is easy to identify actors who, in all municipalities, some groups are against municipality officials, for example, unions and whatnot. So, when I say detractors, I mean those who have a political interest contrary to municipalities' (Public official 4, B).

It was not a straightforward explanation, he seemed worried about being caught pointing to specific groups or individuals and only mentioned unions as actors who are always challenging governments. Earlier, he mentioned detractors along with "cement-mayor", a phrase used to refer to the idea that the political group in power has invested most of the budget in public works such as new sports venues, bridges or roads but has not invested in reducing poverty or improving education, for example. Considering the context, officials' reference to critics as 'detractors' suggest they use the term to ostracise citizens who criticise the mayor and the municipality.

This section has outlined how the control exercised by officials via rules, practices and narratives empowers them and constrains citizens. Rules are designed by politicised officials who favour 'good news' narratives instead of providing sufficient information and explanations to assess public performance. Officials also engage in practices that privilege unidirectional communication or select who can take part in social accountability spaces, limiting citizens' opportunities to ask questions or provide feedback. Furthermore, criticism is not accepted, undermining social accountability because

neither officials nor citizens seem allowed to discuss possible shortcomings or question public performance or behaviour. The next section shows how these arrangements are exacerbated by other manifestations of power asymmetries between officials and citizens.

5.3. Clientelism, inequality and poverty reinforce power asymmetries and further limit social accountability

Power asymmetries between officials, citizens and civil society organisations result from and interact with their socio-economic context (see also, Appendix 5.4., p. 258). This section shows the interplay between actors' context and institutional arrangements by arguing that politicians are part of elite families with the ability to co-opt other groups, sometimes via clientelism. It also argues that societal actors are diverse and unequal and some civil society organisations and high-educated leaders know the rules better and are able to access public information. And finally, the section argues that poverty, insufficient resources and the lack of civic education prevent citizens from taking part in social accountability spaces.

5.3.1. Clientelism's effect on social accountability roles

Mayors' and municipality officials' connection to businesses and political elite families is an obstacle to holding the government accountable. In Barranquilla, a participant concludes:

> Today, we have the phenomenon that the most powerful business group in the Caribbean region controls the municipality. That means that other business groups, through their guilds, are silent or submit to the municipality's will because they do not want to contradict the most powerful business group (Academic, B).

A local journalist on community radio, also emphasises the business character of the political group: "the [incumbent group] pretty much owns the mass media in the city, they are also a huge employer through their supermarket chain, or their distribution and supplier companies, and there is the thing of football" (Local journalist 2, B). Besides designing and controlling social accountability spaces,

mayors or those seen as 'in power' have co-opted other social spheres which reinforces the narrative of 'good news' and the lack of dissent.

Referring to politicians' co-option by economic groups, a Cartagena-based academic said:

> On a bigger scale, there is the big financing boss, the one who has all the money. When someone is aspiring to power, they might tell him/her 'you seem to have skills to speak publicly and with charisma. We are going to fund you but, you know, all contracts would be for me' (Academic 2, C).

The quote highlights how clientelism interacts with social accountability by privileging private interests over public ones. An activist argued that co-opted officials are accountable to no one but those who "have put them there" (Activist 3, C), referring to elite families that finance political campaigns. Mayors and other officials are perceived as responsive to the national government or elite families that finance their campaigns instead to citizens' interests and needs.

Clientelism also influences who gets appointed or hired to work at municipalities. A member of a Neighbourhood Board who also directs a watchdog initiative reflected on this: "When the [municipality] is made up of citizens that are not doing their job as they should, the institution becomes dysfunctional and increases the gap between citizens and the institution" (Watchdog, C). This affects social accountability because it increases distrust and because if these claims are true, then officials do not have incentives to be answerable to citizens.

Besides controlling formal and procedural aspects of what is considered social accountability by laws and policy, both municipalities (and politicians identified with them in the case of Cartagena) control other aspects of public life, hindering citizens' capacity to hold them accountable or allowing them to resist and ignore their attempts. For example, when some participants have tried to denounce illegal or unethical practices or decisions, authorities who are supposed to regulate public officials do not act

on it. A member of a professional guild talked about their experience trying to report possible wrongdoings:

> We have publicly reported these issues [regarding lack of transparency]. I have even reported specific cases to the comptroller, public prosecutor, ombudsmen at a high personal cost and nothing happened. Why? Because those official control entities have been co-opted as well. Here, there is a serious problem and the guild hasn't kept quiet about it (Professional Guild, B).

The quote refers to authorities who are supposed to exercise a type of oversight, but whose appointment responds to politicians' interests. Similarly, city councillors are elected at the same time as the mayor and one of their legal duties is to scrutinise municipalities. However, participants mentioned how they seem to act as part of the mayor's group, given the clientelistic relation between them and the economic and political control maintained by the mayor. In Cartagena, most participants brought up the case of eleven of 19 councillors (Caracol, 2018), who were in jail on corruption charges. For instance, the director of a civil society organisation mentioned:

> At the city council… there are audio files where [councillors] say they are going to pick up some books, and by books, they meant the money. And they were in jail and were recently released due to the expiration of terms [the prosecutor office did not follow the procedure to keep the case open] (CSO 1, C).

The participant highlighted the lack of trust in the council to oversee the municipality when its members are corrupt politicians. What is more, they are in a political context where authorities have no interest in prosecuting them, hence despite the audio files, they were let out of jail without charge. According to participants, the consolidation of political power capable of co-opting those who are supposed to regulate political power, seems to be connected to economic status, corruption and popularity.

Another example of municipalities' excessive power and co-option is the relationship between politicians and local media. The relationship between the municipality and the media is evidenced by a report revealing that during the analysed period there was a significant public expense on media advertisements (La Silla Vacía, 2018). As several participants mentioned, the political group owns the most popular radio stations, and are shareholders of the most important newspaper. As a result, local media neglects to inform citizens about the news that could hinder the mayor's popularity. A participant gave this example,

> A local news portal, less than three months ago, published a report that wasn't even an original piece but a quote of a grievance that, at another major national outlet, was made by [a national politician]. What was the grievance? Odebrecht[16] has something related to this city because a city's contractor was mentioned in a document (local journalist 1, B).

The participant criticised the fact that the editor of the local outlet was fired because he refused to change or remove the note, and then the editor "made public audio files where the owner of the outlet told him that he received a call from the municipality asking to take down the note; that the mayor was going to be upset". Given the high media coverage of the news in other places, the journalist then questioned that no local outlet published any news about the case. The story depicts the power held by Barranquilla's mayor at the time, whose name or the idea of him being upset can hinder the press' freedom to question even municipality contractors.

This section has shown that officials and elite families have co-opted other actors (e.g., city council, civil society organisations, local media), hindering social accountability. From how mayors get elected to the appointment of officials and their relationship with other actors, research suggests clientelism produces opacity, corruption and citizens' distrust or loss of interest in holding governments

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[16] The Odebrecht case is one of the biggest corruption scandals in Latin America in recent years. The Brazilian firm has been prosecuted in several countries for paying bribes and illegal financing of political campaigns.

accountable. The following section highlights how certain inequalities between societal actors also affect their ability to demand information, question public officials or engage with municipality officials.

5.3.2. *Poverty and inequality among societal actors also informed their capacity to enact social accountability*

The socio-economic characteristics of actors also contribute to the asymmetry between official and societal actors. The latter, especially citizens, are affected by conditions such as poverty which is related to their capacity and interest to act as account-holders. Several participants reflected that the average citizens are "apathetic" (JAC Z3, B; Public official 1, B; Academic 2, C) towards local politics or have been "alienated" (Academic, B). Among the reasons for their apathy, some mentioned distrust (CSO1 M, B) and others stated that poverty plays a significant role in how citizens engage in politics, including social accountability. For instance, a participant who was recognised as an activist said:

> The main limitations in Cartagena at the moment, are poverty and lack of education. It is difficult for real democracy to exist when Cartagena's citizens or the vast majority, vote with their stomachs, that is to say, they vote feeling hungry, it is very hard (Activist 2, C).

Voting with the stomach refers to the practice of vote-selling: poor citizens sell their vote in exchange for money or material for their homes (e.g., roof tiles) or even a meal. In the quote, there is an emphasis on voting as a citizens' way to take part in local politics. His question could also apply to social accountability: what interest can citizens, who do not have access to a minimum dignified life, have in taking part in hearings or following up on government actions when they have more prominent problems to solve every day? Similarly, in Barranquilla, although it does not have the same poverty levels as Cartagena, it was perceived that citizens in disadvantaged areas do not have as much interest in holding the government accountable as in accessing services they have lacked for years, such as paved roads or parks (Community leader 1, B).

Lack of resources also affects certain organised interests' ability to engage in social accountability. A CSO member in Barranquilla who follows and has participated in several citizen participation spaces said: "You can be a community leader, you want to participate, even a non-governmental organisation like us, you need to have staff that takes the time to do it, but we cannot afford that, there is no money" (CSO1, D, B). His quote touches upon resources such as time, workers and money as necessary to take part in participation and accountability spaces. However, when municipalities themselves support CSOs with resources, it raises concerns if they are potentially being co-opted as well.

In Cartagena, the Territorial Planning Advisory Board and the Neighbourhood Boards Association shared an office provided by the municipality in 2018 (see how these bodies fit in local governance settings in Appendix 5., p. 255-6). Participants from both groups seemed grateful for such space since they also mentioned scarce resources as a limitation to fulfilling their mission. The head of the advisory board stated: "We lasted twelve years without an office to meet at. This you see here, the computers, the equipment was given by the current administration" (CTP, C). By contrast, in Barranquilla, such support is not evident despite rules including supporting citizens and civil society organisations as one of the municipality's responsibilities. However, a question remains over the possible effects of the support given by officials. For instance, providing an equipped place to work can be beneficial for boards to meet their objectives or an opportunity to co-opt them.

Inequality can also be analysed as a prominent narrative. Often in Cartagena, participants referred to the co-existence of two cities, the prosperous and the poor. The prosperous, grouped in the city centre and nearby neighbourhoods, are highly touristic, where municipality departments and high-income inhabitants live. As for the poor one, extended across the territory, an activist – later elected a city councillor – revealed: "90% of the city are people living in the lower economic stratum[17] (1, 2 and 3),

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[17] The National Statistics Department (DANE) defines socio-economic strata as a classification of the buildings that have access to public services that serve to differentiate between those who need to be subsidised and those who can contribute to cover the costs of the lower stratums.

while strata 4 and 5 only represent a 9%" (Activist 2, C). The differences go beyond income, resulting in stories of exclusion from public life since public meetings and access to officials occur in the city centre and most citizens live in other areas. Another activist who has lived both in the city centre and one of the peripheral neighbourhoods concluded:

> That disparity that exists with the political and administrative centre also relates to how you perceive your administration, how do you see yourself in the city? You put yourself on the outside, in the periphery, not only because you live there but also you have been treated that way (Activist 1, C).

According to her, more than living far from the centre, citizens in those neighbourhoods feel actively excluded. Her quote shows how narratives can constrain participants by seeding the idea that those in the periphery do not belong in the city or have a say in the decisions made at the city centre. The exclusion is also considered a result of discrimination; an Afro-Colombian leader said, "[it] is not a money issue, [it] is how they imagine the city" (Afro leader 2, C). He shared a story about when surveying a low-income area, he found that "if you walk from there to the city centre, without hurry, it takes 20, 25 minutes. While conducting a survey I realised people there, 64% of them do not know the city centre".

Conversely, elite civil society organisations seem to have better access to information and opportunities to engage with municipality officials. Three initiatives (the Cómo Vamos initiatives in Barranquilla and Cartagena, and Funcicar) constantly mentioned are funded by a mix of businesses, universities and major local newspapers. A member of one of them said, regarding their role as supporters of leaders,

> The municipality, by their own initiative, they do not provide information to localities' authorities, information that the law says they have to send semi-annual reports to planning boards. But, when [CSO] presents them with an FOI request and establishes a dialogue with

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the municipality, then they pay attention to [CSO] and provide the information and everything

flows (CSO 3, C).

Despite the participant having described their relationship with the municipality as tense, the organisation is still more recognised than others whose members are ordinary citizens. Similarly, a former CSO director listed having well-regarded partners as one of the reasons for gaining access to municipality information and the improvement of their relationship over time. She continued, "the programme was never going to be politically contaminated, and it gained the recognition of the media". The above quotes suggest that socio-economic inequalities play a significant role in social accountability because initiatives or CSOs that are supported by the elite have better access to public information or are able to interact with officials in ways average citizens and their organised interests cannot.

This section illustrates how institutional arrangements constraining citizens are reinforced by their socio-economic context. Poor and under-resourced leaders lack the resources to attend social accountability spaces or engage in activities conducive to holding officials accountable such as visiting public departments to obtain public information. The need for support and resources is sometimes covered by civil society organisations but it can also make citizens and organisations vulnerable to co-option by municipality officials. Unlike under-resourced actors, other organisations funded by elite actors seem to have more access to officials or public information suggesting inequality also affects the role of citizens and organisations, or that officials treat them differently given their status.

The following section builds on this one and focuses on how under-resourced communities lack access to education, including civic education, which might contribute to their limitations in holding officials accountable.

5.3.3. *Under-resourced communities and lack of [civic] education*

Lack of access to education and training to understand the outcomes of public programmes limits citizens' role as account-holders and is usually related to poverty. Among civil society members, there is a perception that one of the challenges for citizens to engage in social accountability is "the lack of a political culture" (CSO 1, 2 and 3, B). They refer to the idea that citizens understand democracy only as the act of voting or lack the basis to know how to access public information or understand it. One of them expressed:

> If citizens could understand that democracy is more than casting a vote every [four] years, that is about constantly intervening in all the issues that are of public interest, I think [the city] would have the chance to have a more demanding citizenry (CSO3, B).

The quote refers to a lack of civic education and lack of access to public information that is a different issue but that is connected since it would be difficult to access information. Similarly, another CSO member questioned that "There are not many initiatives in the city teaching citizens. Who teaches that participation is necessary?" (CSO 2, B). Both participants mentioned that public organisations do not incentivise citizens' civic education, their appreciation seemed informed by national guidance that encourages officials to create incentives for both, officials to give account, and citizens to demand accountability.

The above quotes refer broadly to citizens, but other participants note that the lack of education is higher in under-resourced communities. The head of an advisory planning board stated:

> Do you think that the [street vendor] out there selling tangerines has any interest in what is happening here [board office]? He is concerned with selling his products until 4 pm. If you ask him the name of the mayor or how many councillors are in the city, he wouldn't know (District planning board, C).

The quote highlights both a lack of knowledge about local politics and uninterest. However, other examples suggest citizens or community leaders are interested but do not know how to act on it. A member of a Neighbourhood board, who is relatively new in the role, explained how she did not know about what she could do until the Citizen Participation Department contacted her two years after being selected to be part of the board. She questioned how leaders with more experience or presiding over the board did not inform her about their functions and resources. But it is also important to highlight that it took the municipality two years to approach them as well. It seems there is a vicious circle limiting social accountability: citizens' unawareness or disinterest that keeps them disengaged from politics, and municipalities' lack of support towards citizen participation.

Lack of civic education also relates to narratives such as 'there is no need to participate' or 'nothing can be done' limiting social accountability. In Barranquilla, multiple participants among civil society organisations, academics and some leaders shared the idea that when things are going well citizens lose interest in participating or holding the government accountable (CSO 2, Academic, B). A CSO member summarised as follows:

> Since people see or believe that the city is on track, they do not feel the need to worry about what is happening. They believe they are in good hands, this government's hands that everything is going to be okay and it is not necessary to get involved in citizen participation spaces… (CSO 2, B).

As the quote shows, the explanation for not taking part in social accountability and other participation spaces is citizens' confidence in what the government is doing. A community leader, who has criticised municipality decisions and practices, added that such confidence is the result of narratives imposed by officials who have "inserted a [brain] microchip" that makes citizens believe that what municipality has done is enough or what they have got, such as paved roads, is the best they can get. However, he mentioned several examples of broken promises made by the municipality and that, unlike other

people, he does not simply believe what officials say and as a lawyer, he knows how to verify information shared by the municipality. The section points out that sometimes it is necessary to have a certain level of education or civic skills in order to be able to question public officials, but participants perceived most of the population lacks both, limiting social accountability. The final section shows the findings suggesting that despite the challenges presented so far, there are nascent institutional arrangements empowering citizens to hold officials accountable or improve social accountability at the city level.

5.4. Signals of institutional change: decentralisation and civil society's practices

So far, the chapter has argued that current institutional arrangements empower officials and constrain citizens and organised interests. Still, some societal actors seem willing to look for public information, question public performance, or offer feedback. There are also civic society organisations that support such actions. This section looks further into what other institutional arrangements support institutional change, going from "inadequate practices" of social accountability (Conpes 3654) to empowering citizens to embrace their roles as account-holders. First, the section focuses on how decentralisation arrangements within cities have helped participants to identify and engage with other actors besides the municipality. Secondly, it focuses on an emerging practice enacted by some civil society organisations that suggest they play a significant role as supporters of citizens or intermediaries between officials and citizens.

5.4.1. Decentralisation within cities strengthens social accountability

This section looks at how decentralisation arrangements at the city level can expand the role of account-givers to organisations other than the municipality, especially in contexts where the municipality is not renowned, such as in the case of Cartagena. The research shows that when societal actors cannot establish a relationship with the municipality, they attempt to hold accountable other

actors at the locality level or service providers. These new interactions seem easier to establish in settings with higher decentralisation within cities.

Decentralisation arrangements in Colombia affect the transference of resources and functions from municipalities to other local authorities within cities. This research suggests that citizens identify and engage with public organisations other than municipalities where decentralisation arrangements are enacted. When asked with whom they engage in solving or following up on an issue affecting their communities, a participant who is part of a Communal Council (Consejo Comunero) in Cartagena said: "We [he and other community leaders] impact our community through the communal council. Last Tuesday, for example, we invited the waste contractor [to our meeting] ". Later on, he mentioned other companies providing public services such as transport and electricity who have also attended communal council meetings to discuss new projects or problems with the council members. Although securing public services provision is one of the municipality's duties, community leaders do not seem to appeal to officials but instead go directly to the providers.

Leaders approach other organisations, partly because they perceived municipality officials as unapproachable. However, identifying other key governance actors does not secure a social accountability relationship with them. A participant who belongs to a planning advisory board mentioned the difficulties of receiving the reports that locality-mayors (appointed by the city mayor) are supposed to send to the board and how "each time they have to send it, it is a fight, literally". Still, she showed relief that nowadays they get the reports, even if late and after handing in a freedom of information request. She stated:

> It should not be like that because if there is a city council's bill stating they have to send the report within the first five days of June and October, we would not have to present any request or anything like that (LocalPlanning, C).

It could be argued that decentralisation within cities creates more opportunities for citizens and leaders to hold accountable officials and providers responsible for securing services and their wellbeing. This level of engagement might be possible because the interviewees quoted above belong to specific public bodies who believe that part of their role is to engage with different authorities to serve their communities and might not represent the majority of the population or other community leaders.

Furthermore, Cartagena is decentralised in ways that other cities are not. In Barranquilla, for example, a participant, who was part of a planning advisory board but resigned, commented,

> Localities do not have the capacity to implement the "famous" local development plans, and all that discourse about participation and the space we were invited to engage with them, it exists, and if you map other participation spaces you will find they all exist, there are five planning advisory boards, but go and see if they are really working (CSOMember, B).

The quote highlights that while rules state and narratives even express that decentralised spaces such as localities and planning boards exist, they do not function in practice. The absence of these spaces limits the opportunities for social accountability since other actors who could also be accountable to citizens regarding local governance are not even active, much less able to engage with citizens to be answerable to them, provide explanations and receive feedback, for instance. Furthermore, the quotes point out the need to expand the definition of social accountability within decentralised governance structures since municipalities are not solely responsible for citizens' wellbeing.

5.4.2. *Civil society organisations as enforcers and intermediaries for social accountability*

All CSOs interviewed show interest in adopting national policy because it would be appropriate to secure democratic goods (e.g., transparency, citizen participation, responsiveness), but they do not have the same roles. Some of them are enforcers, demanding municipalities implement formal rules fully. Others are intermediaries that provide training and support to other actors, especially under-resourced community leaders or organisations. By pressing changes from public officials and

promoting social accountability among other societal actors, CSOs have reshaped their role as account-holders; instead of acting as a forum or interlocutor to officials, they mediate social accountability interactions between officials and citizens.

First, as enforcers, some CSOs have been able to influence municipality practices. During the 2016-2019 period, Barranquilla's municipality increased public hearings from one yearly to smaller, sectoral ones. Two of the interviewees who belong to two different organisations mentioned that public hearings by sector were accomplished thanks to their insistence. One of them stated that she told the head of Internal Audit, that "there should be more spaces to summon the audience, that the spaces should be bigger and to increase convening capacity" (CSO2, B). The quote highlights that some civil society organisations' insistence, both directly to officials and through local media, influenced the municipality to adopt new practices that can strengthen social accountability.

Secondly, some civil society organisations offer training and support to grassroots and neighbourhood organisations. The scope of training varies according to the resources available to CSOs, and in some cases, they depend on municipality support to find a place or cover the price of materials or transport (JAC Authority, B). In Barranquilla, the training covers information about the history and legislation regulating neighbourhood boards. In other cases, the training goes beyond providing information and includes support to create websites, find information about public procurement, and understand it (CSO 3, C).

A participant shared the story of several community leaders who have been working together in defence of their territory as the result of the training programme. The leaders live in precarious conditions by one of the biggest lagoons in the city. Cartagena municipality approved a significant amount of money to solve some of the problems associated with the water basin without consulting the community and their needs. The participant related: "the community rallied, they carried out a demonstration in front of their locality mayor's office. They sent a letter to the Environmental

Prosecutor, and they accomplished stopping the procurement process" (CSO3, C). He explained the community was capable of stopping the contract's implementation on their own, without the help of any external group or CSO. Then, he remembered,

> Leaders from eight neighbourhoods close to that lagoon, all those leaders underwent a training process with us. And then that situation happened, and thanks to that process, they were able to analyse the procurement contract, identify how to contribute, etc. They knew how to stop the procurement contract, on their own (CSO 3, C).

The quote highlights citizens' training on how to hold government accountable, understanding public information and what actions to take when public decisions affect them or they are not consulted. It also shows it took a group of leaders who went through training together to put into practice what they learned and changed a public decision to another more responsive to their interests and needs. According to an interviewee in Barranquilla, similar training is needed there for members of advisory boards who have the responsibility to analyse policies and programmes:

> But it is a person who maybe, she is not at the same level in terms of training or academic preparation, especially technical. They can be very political, but not so technically trained. So, when they are asked to evaluate a document or follow up on the impact of public policies, they won't know how to do it. (CSO1, M, B).

She seemed worried about the differences among the members of some of the advisory boards in the city. A few are professionals with years of experience producing or analysing technical information while others might not have completed secondary school. The participant affirmed, "It is necessary to qualify the members of all [formal] participation bodies". The positive outcome of this type of training and support in Cartagena suggests civil society organisations might have a significant impact as intermediaries between citizens and officials instead of being seen solely as actors to hold municipalities accountable directly.

This section highlights research findings suggesting two aspects shaping the identities and roles of actors in ways that might strengthen social accountability. First, research suggests that citizens engage in different governance relationships in places with decentralisation arrangements and identify public organisations, other than the municipality, to hold them accountable. Secondly, the section shows that civil society organisations act as enforcers of social accountability by evaluating municipalities' strategies and calling for changes. Some of them have also acted as intermediaries between community leaders and officials, either by backing up leaders' requests or by offering training that allows citizens and grassroots organisations to hold municipalities accountable.

5.5. Conclusion

The chapter has presented how rules, practices and narratives have shaped the roles of public officials as account-givers, and societal actors as account-holders. This section discusses the main findings of this chapter and establishes their connection to the broader literature on social accountability and new institutionalism as an analytical framework. Despite a relational view on social accountability suggesting a bidirectional engagement that allows citizens to exercise control over officials (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006; Brummel, 2021), findings show that there are significant power asymmetries that hinder citizens' capacity and agency to meaningfully engage with officials. Findings also show the need for the literature on social accountability to consider that some civil society organisations' role is not to hold officials accountable but to intermediate between municipalities and citizens or community leaders.

The case of social accountability in Barranquilla and Cartagena exemplifies how the interaction between rules and human action shapes social accountability itself (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; Cornwall et al., 2008; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). For instance, it matters which officials or departments are in charge for the design of social accountability strategies because they interpret and enact the national policy according to the values and practices inherent to their function (e.g., planning

vs. communication). In addition, they are also constrained by rules to shape other officials' and citizens' behaviour which they do through practices and narratives.

Moreover, certain officials use their power over other officials and citizens to maintain the status quo that favours opacity and hinders social accountability (Gaventa, 2006; Pettit, 2013). In Barranquilla, for example, the role of officials is characterised as deliverers of 'good news' instead of informing and explaining the advances and shortcomings of public performance. Along these lines, the research confirms the distributive aspect of institutions (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) and additionally, it argues that social accountability is hindered when institutional arrangements reinforce the power of officials instead of empowering citizens or marginalised groups to hold government accountable.

Officials responsible for the every-day enactment of social accountability use their power to shape citizens' role and limited it to a 'passive audience', contributing to a misalignment between rules, practices and narratives. Spaces created by officials configure 'invited spaces' (Cornwall, 2004; Pettit, 2013) in which citizens are expected to listen and accept the information provided by officials without questioning it or providing feedback, essential aspects of social accountability (Schedler, 1999; Bovens, 2010; Cunill-Grau, 2006; Pettit, 2016). Similar to research focused on the 'participatory sphere' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Cornwall et al., 2008) and institutionalism itself (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018), the research suggests that the limitations imposed by officials over citizens' role are reinforced by the institutional matrix affecting social accountability. The effects of an old institution that discourage dissent and excludes those who are not aligned with those in power resonates with Cornwall et al. (2008) research on participation in Brazil and how certain practices are learned in other spaces or be the result of interactions shaped by other institutions (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013).

An institutional approach that considers not only old but also neighbouring institutions (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018; Cornwall et al., 2008), also helps to better understand the effects of clientelism on social accountability. Usually, social accountability literature portrays clientelism as a contextual

aspect hindering the success of initiatives or mechanisms (Boräng and Grimes, 2021; Baiocchi et al., 2008) or as a democratic challenge that can be overcome through social accountability (e.g., Fox, 2015; Isaza, 2017; Houtzager et al., 2020). Conversely, the institutional lens helps to explain the way in which clientelistic arrangements *interplay* with social accountability, similar to Cornwall et al. (2008, p. 53) work on Brazil which concluded that "clientelistic political culture continues to *pervade* political conduct" (emphasis mine). In this case, the interaction between social accountability and clientelism discourages transparency and allows officials to co-opt other actors whom citizens approach when trying to hold officials accountable, echoing the findings of other researchers interested in citizen-led initiatives (Gaventa and Barret, 2012). Such an interaction also incentivises citizens' fear to lose benefits if they voice concerns (Pettit, 2016). In this way, clientelism, as neighbouring institution displaces or competes with some social accountability arrangements.

Furthermore, existing arrangements shaping the roles associated with social accountability reinforce the asymmetries given by actors' socioeconomic contexts. For example, some narratives suggest leaders and civil society organisations perceive citizens as uninterested in holding officials accountable because they lack knowledge or resources. Previous analyses also seem to assume citizens are voiceless and powerless and in need of social accountability to raise their 'voice' (Fox, 2015; Joshi and Houtzager, 2015). Still, the institutional lens shows that such a perception ignores that portraying citizens as uninterested in local politics or unable to assess public performance because they have more prominent problems arrangements in place, is a narrative limiting citizen engagement. It can also ignore that although citizens might be aware of the importance of holding government to account, they decide not to act because their agency or capacity are conditioned by the resources available to actors (Scott, 2001; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2006, Pettit, 2016). Thus, is important to empirically verify positive assumptions of citizens' willingness or capacity to embrace the role of account-holders (Boräng and Grimes, 2021) but also negative ones.

Conversely, practices presented in this chapter show that professional guilds or elite civil society organisations display more capacity to engage in social accountability. These groups have either enough knowledge to navigate the system and obtain information, or privileged access to officials given the reputational value of their founders. Additionally, certain organisations are empowered to act as account-holders because they participate in 'invited spaces' given their reputation and connection to other elite members, such as politicians or public officials. These findings help to respond to who is eligible to participate and how (Fung, 2006; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007).

Some of these elite organisations recognised such privilege and used it to support others´ requests for information and other social accountability actions, they do not intermediate to *speak for* citizens or marginalised groups (Piper and von Lieres, 2015), but rather support their efforts to access information which can lead to institutional stability. The research suggests that instead of engaging directly with the municipality, civil society organisations can also positively impact strengthening social accountability as intermediaries between officials and citizens, a role that needs to be recognised in the conceptualisation of social accountability, usually seen as a relationship between officials and citizens.

Other significant findings presented in the chapter include the impact of decentralisation within cities, also as a neighbouring institution, on citizens' participation in local politics. Decentralisation arrangements tend to create expectations regarding citizen engagement in local governance (González, 2013). Malena and McNeil (2010, p. 12) sustain that "social accountability may be a crucial missing component of many decentralization programs" to argue the need for social accountability to improve local governance. This thesis offers a view from the other side and suggests that decentralisation within cities strengthens social accountability, recognising it is valuable in its own right. Although municipalities play a crucial part in local governance in a context such as the Colombian one, citizens have more opportunities to discuss developing plans or the outcome of public performance and

provide direct feedback to authorities when other organisations at the neighbourhood or locality level have an active role in governance and are not co-opted by the municipality.

To summarize, existing arrangements shaping the roles of account-giver and account-holders reinforce power asymmetries associated with the socioeconomic context. Formally, officials align with their role of account-givers and exercise power through rules, practices and narratives to limit the role of citizens and some CSOs as account-holders. Moreover, the thesis shows the need to recognise a third role and to open the concept of social accountability to include the role of intermediation or support embraced by some civil society organisations. In the next chapter, these findings will help understand how the institutional conditioning of actors' roles affects how they interact with arrangements shaping answerability, which refers to the provision of and access to public information and explanations regarding past behaviour and performance and the opportunities for deliberation and judgment formation. It shows how power asymmetries between officials and citizens allow officials to render public hearings (the main space for social accountability) an 'empty ritual' (Arnstein, 1969).

6. SOCIETAL ACTORS' ASSESSMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS

6.1. Introduction

The last chapter established the power asymmetries between public officials and societal actors, which are reinforced by rules, practices and narratives enacted by municipality officials, as well as the socio-economic and political context of Barranquilla and Cartagena. While social accountability arrangements empower officials, citizens are highly constrained by a lack of resources or education, undermining their capacity to hold officials accountable. Chapter 5 also noted that other two sets of actors play a significant role in enacting social accountability: one, public organisations that are part of the city governance structure and two, civil society organisations that act as intermediaries or advocates of less privileged or under-resourced citizens or community leaders. This power asymmetry and new roles inform answerability, the information and debate element of social accountability.

This chapter argues that officials control most information accessible to citizens and limit spaces for discussions, and citizens cannot easily access or understand available information without the support of civil society organisations. The structure of the chapter is divided into three parts. First, it shows that public information is controlled by officials and is perceived as scarce or highly specialised which hinders access to it. Then the chapter argues that officials limit citizens' right and effort to access information through Freedom of Information requests or that citizens resort to practices informed by clientelism to obtain information. The first section ends by showing that civil society organisations play a critical role in the monitoring of public performance, compiling and circulating information that is then made available to the citizenry.

The chapter then moves on to show officials also have significant discretion to control spaces aimed at engaging citizens in discussion. Public hearings and meetings are scenarios where officials continue to present a 'good news' narrative, privileging their presentation of information over meaningful interactions with citizens. Moreover, neither citizens nor their organised interests are allowed to ask

questions that have the potential to be critical of the municipality or discuss issues to make public management more responsive. However, decentralisation and the activation of other spaces strengthen social accountability.

The final section presents spaces led by citizens or civil society organisations that contribute to the formation of collective judgement. Forums and debates regarding different public issues are held with experts or highly educated attendees to learn about such topics and think about how to contribute to solving public problems. These spaces are not necessarily conceived as ones for social accountability, and they are not easily accessible to average or under-resourced communities. However, they show the potential to contribute to the implementation of social accountability because they might work as spaces for public deliberation, allowing citizens to form a judgment about public officials and public performance.

6.2. The existence of information does not secure accessibility

Social accountability requires public information to be relevant and accessible, but officials' control over what is shared along with citizens' limitations undermines access to information. In Barranquilla, the stability of the same incumbent party and the officials working at the municipality has helped to improve the availability of information because officials have made efforts to systematically gather and safeguard information about their performance. However, officials display significant discretion over information, limiting citizens' access to it. Some participants resort to their own professional expertise or to personal connections to access information, but most citizens lack the resources (time, skills) to do the same. The disparity between officials and citizens and among societal actors themselves hinders social accountability because it is not possible to hold officials accountable when their performance is unknown or there is not enough data to assess it.

First, the section focuses on the information made available by officials through different channels and then specifically, on reports released prior to public hearings, arguing such information is insufficient

to secure accessibility and understanding. Secondly, attention is paid to citizens' demands and expectations regarding public information, showing that Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs) are vital for accessing information, but municipalities' practices still limit the mechanism as a means of securing social accountability. Third, the section shows how civil society organisations produce information that helps citizens and officials to assess public performance.

6.2.1. *Information provided by officials*

The research shows that despite the significant amount of information available, accessing it requires specialised knowledge, skills and time. Despite some participants' concerns regarding information available through public websites, public officials maintained that some people raised doubts without looking for the information. One official said:

> People need to consult the website more often; in the hearings for social accountability, we always emphasise that because of many events we attend, committees and so on, they say 'we do not see, we do not know but it is because they do not search among what we have (Public Official 3, B).

His quote suggests that the municipality produces information constantly, but citizens do not look for it. However, as mentioned above, findings show that skills or knowledge about public administration is needed to engage with the information, to know what to look for, where and how. The research suggests that information alone is insufficient to ensure social accountability and diffusion through accessible outlets other than the website and promoting public engagement and civic education is also necessary.

Moreover, the information provided by municipalities does not necessarily fit social accountability purposes such as preventing wrongdoing or securing responsiveness. A journalist who followed local politics stated: "To obtain information from the municipality, other than the basics, like how to complete paperwork, or where the contact points are – and even that can be complex sometimes –

but, more than that is difficult" (Local journalist 1, B). The quote points out that municipalities provide information that helps citizens with specific routine procedures but it is difficult to know more about the background and details of public decisions and programmes. The same participant added: "I mean, there is nothing that facilitates obtaining information about specific indexes by strategic areas. At least, through the website, it is almost non-existent" (Local journalist 1, B). Similarly, another journalist said about the information available on the municipality's website:

> I do not know if it might exist, but there is no public space for transparency and accountability regarding [public] investments. It is not like you go to their website and quickly you can go to 'Infrastructure' and find out about roads, floodings and the state of public works related to these issues (Local journalist 2, B).

Despite journalists having a set of skills that facilitate accessing information, what is available is not always what is expected or required by citizens or civil society organisations to hold officials accountable. Moreover, the research shows that even those with particular expertise have difficulties accessing information. A university professor interested in the town's financial performance mentioned how important it was to be an "expert managing [public procurement] databases" because without such ability, "you cannot understand what is happening there" (Academic, B). He referred to skills to navigate and search in a specialised database holding information about all public procurements in the country.

Another critical source of information for social accountability is the reports shared by officials prior to public hearings, considered the main space for officials to interact with citizens and discuss past performance. The reports are created by the Planning department to give account to citizens and are usually published on the municipality's website by the end of January. Referring to these reports, an academic who has written in the local newspaper about the municipality's public performance stated, "they are very deficient because they are standardised index cards where they state a goal – a

thousand of something – and then accomplishment level, 100%" (Academic, B). Figure 1 below exemplifies what the academic was referring to, and it shows an adaptation of one of the charts included in Barranquilla's 2018 report:

Figure 6.1. A slide from Barranquilla´s report 2018

SECTOR: EDUCATION
SDG: Quality education

Dependency: Department of education
Programme: Outstanding full-day school

* To build 1600 classrooms for full-day school and increase attendance

Term	Goal	Output	Compliance annual target
Base line 2015	Unknown		
Year 2016	172	251	145.9%
Year 2017	260	262	100.7%
Year 2018	380	391	102.9%
Year 2019	709		
Four-year advancement			98.20%
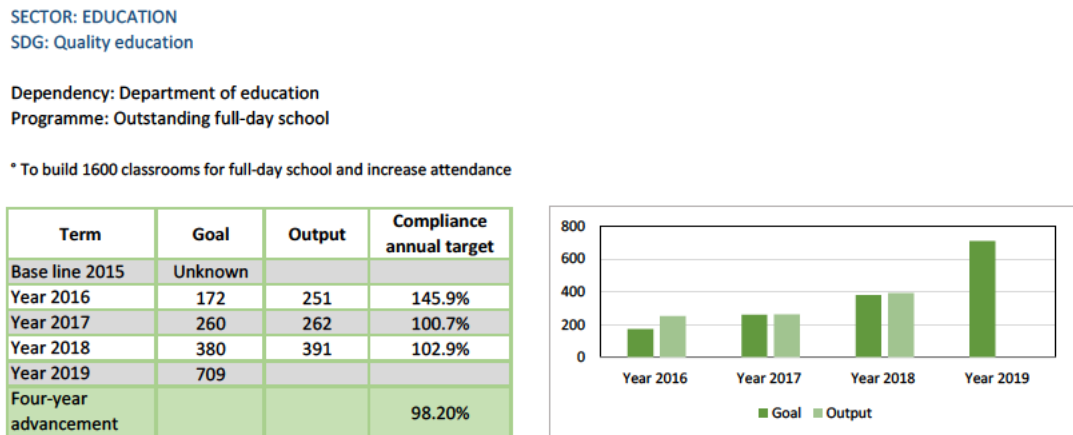
Source: Barranquilla's municipality, Accountability report 2018, published January 2019, p. 28. The slide has been replicated to show information in English since the original is in Spanish

The chart illustrates that the municipality reports do not give the reader any context by which to understand the information they present. The graph does not include texts that help the reader understand the data or if the results helped achieve the goal of increasing the number of students attending school. It is noticeable that the reports "lack a vision or an introduction at least where they outline what has been done and what problems or difficulties exist" (Academic, B). Expectations around reports seemed to be informed by the interests of citizens but also by what national guidance has established as the objective of social accountability which includes explanations and justifications supporting public decisions.

A participant who teaches a university course on citizen oversight ('control social in Spanish) [18]' developed a teaching exercise for students to compare a report against the national guidance. Reflecting on the class exercise, she said, "I teach my students how not to do it by looking at the report". She then listed what students found, "is there technical jargon? Yes, teacher; no one could understand this. Excessive use of figures? Yes, teacher, this is all charts. Is the information too broad? Yes, teacher" (CSO 2, B). This example reveals that illegible reports limit social accountability because it undermines citizens' ability to know and assess public performance.

Next, this section focuses on actions taken by citizens and their organised interests to access public information, arguing that inequalities discussed in Chapter 5 and a clientelistic context shape access to information.

6.2.2. Citizens' access to public information

When asked how they inform themselves about municipalities' management or performance, several participants mentioned freedom of information requests. Whilst Freedom of information requests (FOI) improve access to information, they are still limited when municipalities or officials provide vague or incomplete responses. In some cases, responses took longer than the limit set by law to respond (CLP, C; Community L2, C). In other cases, participants turned to the courts to demand that their requests were responded to (Activist 2, C), or to clientelistic and personal relationships. Although officials stated they kept permanent contact with citizens through the municipalities or mayor's social media (Public Official 4, B), societal actors perceived them, given their experiences, as reluctant, which suggests officials lack the willingness to be accountable.

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[18] In Spanish, 'Control Social' refers to citizens' right to oversee public performance. Occasionally, 'control social' is translated as 'social accountability', and they overlap sometimes, especially with the answerability element of accountability which involves monitoring and access to information. For a further discussion of the terms, see Fox (2022).

Even when officials respond to requests, the answers are not seen as sufficient. Several participants shared experiences of obtaining responses that were either superficial or obstructing the understanding of the information provided. Participants mentioned obtaining responses that were a "cliché, full of legal jargon" (Academic, B) or adducing "statutory reserve and other stories like that" (Professional Guild, B). In these cases, officials could 'check a box' because they provided an answer; however, citizens did not obtain a meaningful response. Without access to complete and readable information, it is difficult to assess municipalities' performance or officials' behaviour and decisions.

Similar experiences suggest that officials can obstruct access to information in other ways. A CSO member stated she "realised the municipality has no interest in making public information accessible" after providing information about safety statistics in a "juggernaut document, printed in black and white, which made it impossible to understand the [originally colour] graphics in there". The organisation had requested the data to run their analyses regarding safety and security issues in the city, but the way data was delivered did not allow them to understand the analysis made by the municipality. Such practices limit access to information needed to assess public performance and hold officials accountable. They also generate frustration: the same participant said, "it was as if they hadn't sent anything, they could just have said no to my request" denoting it was preferable, to her, that data was denied instead of intentionally responding in a way that obstructed further analysis.

Another limitation is reports of not accessing municipality information because it does not exist or is "scarce" (Professional guild, B; Academic, B). Participants in Cartagena reported that the municipality does not have the information they needed. An interviewee who has presented numerous FOIs stated that "sometimes you go to a public department requesting some information and they respond they do not have it" (Activist2, C). The research suggests that access to public information depends on how well officials collate the data they produce.

Finally, it is essential to include clientelism and personal relationships to access public information. Several participants mentioned that when it is impossible to find information quickly through municipalities' websites, they called a friend or acquaintance working at the municipality to obtain the information. A community leader in Cartagena said how difficult it was to get an appointment at the municipality unless you have a "godfather" (CommLeader2, C), referring to someone with clientelistic ties to officials. In other cases, participants approach officials themselves to obtain information; however, "it is informal information… there are no documents or just a few" (Academic, B) which hinders citizens' ability to use the information to hold officials accountable. This type of access suggests the strength of clientelism might work as an incentive for officials not to make information available and limit average citizens' access to information without clientelistic or personal connections.

6.2.3. *Citizens turn to information provided by CSOs because they distrust municipalities*

Civil society organisations strengthen social accountability by acting as sources and disseminators of public information. When asked about where they go to know more about what is happening in the city or the state of the topics of their interest, several participants mentioned CSO's websites, such as the organisations in the 'How are we doing network' (Red Ciudades Cómo Vamos) or the 'Civic and social foundation pro-Cartagena' (Funcicar). Besides CSOs' own interest in incentivising the production of public data, its evaluation and dissemination to citizens and their organised interests (Cartagena Cómo Vamos, n.d.), participants seem to resort to CSOs because they consider municipalities do not have the information they seek, or they mistrust such information.

A community leader on the advisory planning board said that in Cartagena, "there are around three organisations following and overseeing public performance: Funcicar, Cartagena Cómo Vamos and the city's think tank. They continuously monitor what the municipality is doing and show it to the citizens" (Local planning advisory board, C). Such scrutiny includes hosting information regarding the city and localities' development plans and analysing the performance reports (Funcicar, n.d.). The same participant quoted earlier regarding the lack of information in the municipality stated, "I believe more

in the civil society organisation than in the administration because its information is systematised and integrated into better ways than the municipality. (Activist2, C). The quote shows that participants choose to follow up on what other organisations produce when public information is inaccessible via the municipality to oversee the local government's performance, decisions, and actions.

Some participants also expressed distrust of the information shared by the local government, either the report shared before public hearings, the presentations made during the event or other spaces. For example, a community leader working on women's issues said that "municipality officials never provide truthful information in the hearings. Besides, sometimes one accesses information through FOIs, one knows – unfortunately – all those reports are 'cooked', they do not portray the reality" (JAC Z2, B). Her quote shows citizens' distrust in public information: she used the term 'cook', which other participants also used to refer to municipality reports. An activist in Cartagena stated:

> Whoever has the power to decide what to show and how has the power of cooking the books or to show what they want to show and not what the reality shows. The truth is that official accounts are very different from what is reported by civil society organisations (Activist 2, C).

The last quote indicates that mistrust in public information also motivates citizens to turn to civil society organisations. It is worth highlighting that in most cases, civil society organisations do not generate their own data but compile public information from public databases or obtained via FOIs. Still, some participants find this more accessible, or as offering an alternative to asking the information directly from the municipality (Activist 2, C). Citizens' trust in civil society organisations enhances the relationship between the latter and officials since popular support increases CSOs' legitimacy. The former director of a CSO in Barranquilla explained how officials' attitude toward providing information changed over the years; she attributed the change to the social recognition of the programme and that "more people attended our events every year, and everyone expected our annual report" (CSO 2, B).

This section has shown access to information, a key aspect of answerability, is limited for two reasons: First, municipalities do not have easily accessible channels, or the information they provide can be highly technical and superficial. Secondly, freedom of information requests to access public information are sometimes obstructed by officials providing incomplete and obscure answers or not replying. Due to difficulties accessing public information and distrust in municipalities, social accountability seems to be fostered by citizens drawing on information compiled by civil society organisations, creating new dynamics between citizens and CSOs and between the latter and municipality officials. The following section shows that public hearings are the main space designed for 'dialogue' and how officials' control over the spaces has limited ongoing and meaningful interactions and instead used the space for delivering information in one way.

6.3. Public hearings and other spaces for interaction

Answerability is more than securing information accessibility, it also supposes that actors (officials, citizens) engage in debates to discuss the existing information and give or demand explanations. Colombian national policy refers to this element as dialogue and defines it as:

> Practices by which organisations, after providing information, explain and justify or answer citizens' inquiries regarding their actions and decisions in spaces (they can be face-to-face, – broad, segmented or targeted –, virtual through new technologies) where they keep direct contact (Handbook, p. 19).

Similarly, Barranquilla municipality's guidelines state that in dialogue spaces, officials must lay out the criteria applied to take decisions, underpin actions taken, explain the results of their management to citizens and listen to citizens' evaluations, opinions and proposals (Barranquilla municipality, 2017, p. 8). The document then enlists several spaces where dialogue occurs: public hearings, information requests, and other spaces for citizen participation in creating public policies (e.g., planning board, neighbourhood councils) and social media. Since most participants referred only to public hearings,

this section focuses on them as a key space for citizens to question local governments' information and engage meaningfully in the discussion of it. First, it interrogates officials' control over the space and the information shared in public hearings. Secondly, it shows how the citizens' voice is controlled or ignored during hearings. Officials' discretion to design and control hearings hinders social accountability because it limits citizens' engagement and capacity to question officials.

6.3.1. Officials design and control hearings to push a narrative of success

The research shows that public hearings (for a definition, see Appendix 5.1., p. 255) are seen as the main space for social accountability and as a space controlled by officials, with limited opportunities for citizens to ask questions or demand explanations. In some places in Colombia, public hearings were and still are understood as synonyms for social accountability (Handbook, p. 20). These public meetings were regulated for the first time in 1998 through Law 489, which focused on the rules for public administration in the country. Back then, the rule established that public hearings were meetings in which elected public officials would present what they have done each year and the outputs of their administration. Item 33 of the law expresses:

> When the administration considers it convenient and timely, a public hearing could be summoned to discuss aspects related to the formulation, implementation or evaluation of public policies and programmes under public entities' control; especially when collective rights or interests could be affected by them (Law 489/1998, item 33).

Later on, as social accountability guidelines and policies were created, such hearings were referenced as a mechanism for public organisations to 'give account' to citizens (DNP, ESAP, DAFP, 2009; Conpes 3654/2010). Despite the Conpes and the 2014 Handbook listing other possible spaces for dialogue, municipalities' strategies for social accountability seemed limited to hearings. The events are convened yearly through decrees establishing the agenda and mechanics or procedures guiding the event.

Municipalities decide when, where and who attends the events and in what capacity citizens can take part in the event.

The research shows that, in practice, municipalities limit citizens' engagement which renders hearings as spaces for delivering public information but not to discuss it, nor offer justifications and explanations to citizens' questions. For instance, several participants expressed that finding information about when and where hearings will even occur is hard, or that the municipality invites them with insufficient time to prepare. A member of a CSO that follows hearings every year mentioned:

> So far, I have not seen that the schedule [for sectoral hearings] has been published in any media outlet. I attended the one for the [security and participation] sector. I checked the press on that day and two days before the event, and I did not see an announcement for the hearing anywhere" (CSO 1 member, B).

The quote shows officials convene hearings, but they are not highly publicised and promoted. It was evidenced that even when a schedule was shared in meetings held prior to hearings, it was not final, and some dates were changed without announcement, limiting citizens' participation. Also, as shown in Chapter 5, officials invite other officials and contractors to attend the spaces, securing an audience that might not be interested in asking uncomfortable questions because their job might be on the line, or they are invited to fill the space and support officials.

The research also indicates that hearings are used as spaces to deliver information emphasising what officials see as the main accomplishments. Hearings start by welcoming the audience to the 'Rendición de Cuentas'[19], an event "to tell citizens what the mayor has done with public resources given to him to manage and how he has fulfilled his government plan" (Public official 3, hearing 2019). Officials acting as hosts explain the meeting procedure and then give the floor to colleagues or the mayor to present

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[19] In cases like this 'Giving account' refers to the event, the public hearing.

the highlights of their past performance and, in some cases, announce upcoming actions or programmes.

While reports are considered too technical, participants (citizens, CSO and even public officials) referred to hearings as showy. A local journalist said about these events: "[hearings] are a show, propaganda, not social accountability, and all municipalities do it like that" (Local journalist 1, Barranquilla). A public official in the communications department expressed: "social accountability could be very restricted if it only involves the report, or the hearing with the mayor, which ends up being, in practice, nearly a media show" (Public official 4, Barranquilla). Main hearings show significant production, from the selected scenario to the display of videos, animations and live musical presentations. For instance, Image 1 is a photo taken prior to a public hearing held next to a new public walkway next to the river to which the mayor arrived in the boat pictured in the image, an uncommon and not easily accessible mode of transport.

Image 1. In 2017, Alejandro Char, mayor of Barranquilla, arrives at the public hearing on boat

The way municipalities deliver information during hearings is valued by officials but criticised by other participants. Officials stated that the different modes to present the information during hearings is the mechanism to "bring information closer to citizens" (Public Official 4, B) since before specific changes were introduced, hearings were a "brick", a word used to denote that hearings were boring and did not catch citizens' attention. However, other interviewees referred to hearings as a charade, a show,

where information about public performance is shared superficially (e.g., JAC Z2, B; Academic, B; Watchdog, C). For example, Figure 2 shows a slide forming part of the Cartagena municipality presentation during a hearing.

Figure 6.2. Cartagena's accountability presentation 2019
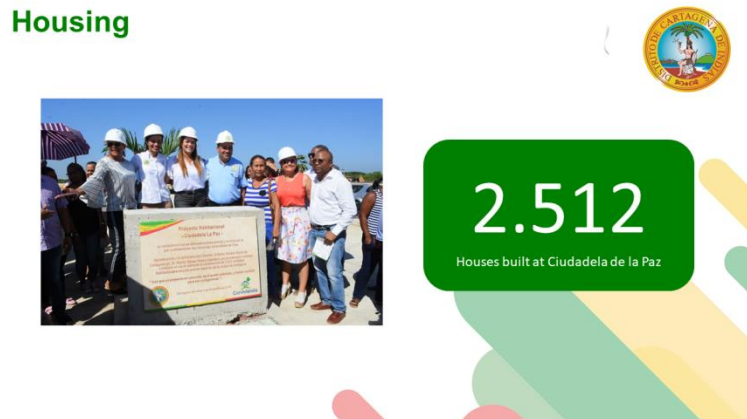
Source: Cartagena municipality via a freedom of information request presented by the researcher

The figure, showing a photo with beneficiaries from the programme, also evidences what several participants in Cartagena express concerning the language used in public hearings and what a public official in Barranquilla referred to as 'a closer' communication with citizens. One of the participants in Cartagena expressed about a public hearing held in December 2016:

> [The mayor] delivered a very heartfelt presentation, I mean, his accountability hearing was based on videos: the lady who received a house and she was crying, or kids who had the chance to travel to x country. That is how he gave account. And I do not know if I am mistaken, but I see social accountability beyond that and expect them to talk about the budget as well. I mean, here, they do not tell us how they have spent the money and how much is left in the budget. They explain as if it was a performance report, "we have negotiated this and will do this or that" (CLP, Cartagena).

Presentations made during the hearing include a significant production: videos, animations, live musical presentations and beneficiaries' testimonials. Thus, in broad hearings, the presentation given by the mayor and municipality officers could take between four and six hours. The length of broad hearings represented a challenge because people attending would start leaving before the event ended or lose focus on what was being shared. This posed the question if people who stayed for the whole hearing could critically engage with the information shared. These difficulties were picked up by CSOs, who wrote in local papers about the need of having shorter audiences for specific themes or sectors. Reflecting on the change, a public official said:

> It is a lot healthier to stimulate citizen participation in this way. Besides, the amount of information produced by the municipality is a monstrosity. Thus, accommodating all that in a single hearing is very difficult because people really do not get the message and the content they need. When you divide it into sectorial hearings, it is easier to deliver the messages (Public Official 4, B).

Despite the changes introduced and mentioned in the quote, most participants still perceived hearings, even the sectorial ones, as having the same issues as before: unidirectional, without real opportunities for discussion. The following section shows how officials' discretion in the unfolding of hearings and similar spaces limits citizens from raising questions, ostracising critics or simply not recording their input in the minutes of meetings. The impossibility of asking, demanding explanations or voicing concerns hinders social accountability.

6.3.2. *No time to question, especially uncomfortable questions*

This section shows that the procedures followed during hearings and other spaces for discussion constrain citizens from asking questions, limiting social accountability. First, the section presents how rules designed at the local level might discourage citizen engagement. Then, it shows that officials avoid difficult questions during hearings or use narratives that ostracise and undermine critics.

Despite the hearings' agenda including a time for organisations and citizens to intervene, the procedure to do so might discourage them. For example, the Cartagena hearings' agenda or order of business includes a slot for CSOs to take the floor, for which they would have to send a proposal within ten days before the event. Similarly, both municipalities have similar rules reserving a space in the hearings' agenda to answer citizens' questions but not for them to intervene directly (e.g., offering different explanations for certain results, questioning information presented by public officials). In this case, citizens would have to send their questions 15 days prior to the hearing (e.g., as stated in Decree 1129/2019, Cartagena) or follow a specific procedure to do so, including the maximum length of the request, three letter-size pages, using Times News Roman font size 12 or legible handwriting (Decree 033/2019, Barranquilla). While a straightforward procedure is needed to organise citizens' questions, the specificities might discourage participation because requests made in advance are expected to relate to performance reports that are not easily accessible, as shown in previous sections.

While observing hearings, it was noticed that no time was allocated for citizens and CSOs to speak or question officials during hearings. In one of the sectoral hearings observed, where the head of the Government department was presenting their results (15/03/2019), the chairs of the meeting concluded the event and excused the officer for not taking questions from the audience. They explained that he had limited time available, and he had to attend to questions from the press present at the event. Not allowing questions from the audience is a practice seen in other hearings as well, although not always as explicit. For example, in one hearing, the chair stated that "some questions would be answered by the mayor during his speech" (Hearing, December 5th, 2019), rather than being addressed individually, giving the mayor the opportunity to evade questions.

In some hearings, it was observable that a few leaders or citizens were invited by officials to talk about their experiences as beneficiaries of municipality programmes. Their participation might help others know about the actions taken by officials and is a way to disseminate public information without using

technical jargon. However, participants showed concern about how these dynamics entangled with clientelism and saw that type of participation as an example of co-option. One of them reflected on a young local leader who she believes has been co-opted by officials and described him as a "person completely subjected to the municipality" (CSO 1M, B) because she knew him as a very cautious and critical leader, but in the hearing, he spoke to highlight only positive aspects of public management. Similarly, another participant mentioned how certain young leaders are given jobs in the municipality to co-opt them (Community leader, B). These practices, not giving space for questions, and co-option of leaders who used to criticise the municipality undermine social accountability because they discourage participation.

Officials also use their control to select what questions to answer during hearings, avoiding those that might lead to negative perceptions. Participants in Barranquilla from different sectors, academics, CSOs and communal leaders state that the administration mainly uses hearings to present a good image of the municipality. A member of the Neighbourhood Boards Association expressed:

> That said, they do not resolve questions there (hearings) because the formality is that questions are previously submitted, through email and whatnot, and after that, they take a look and select what questions to answer during the hearing and which they will answer after the event individually. They have a way of handling it, you may send 500 questions, and they would decide what to answer, those that are convenient to them (JAC_Authority, B).

The practice of pre-selecting questions supports the narrative of local government being negative towards criticism. It was common to find participants from academics to local leaders drawing attention to Barranquilla municipality's resistance to hearing or giving space to critics, even if they were members of their political group. A member of a CSO who follows up on public performance said: "municipality tends to ignore CSOs, sees them as an obstacle to their performance" (CSO1 D, B). In one of the hearings, the mayor said things such as: "do not believe that little story that there is no money,

there is money", or "those that say I am the concrete mayor, they are right" (Public hearing, December 5th, 2019). Observing the hearings and listening to his tone, it is possible to argue that he was trying to undermine the criticism he received from civil society organisations and some leaders in local media. Instead of using the hearing to explain and justify his actions, the mayor used the space to shun critics.

As stated above, this idea is broadly shared; a member of the professional guild for which scrutiny is not their main activity said:

> The mere fact that you say anything to them [public officials] generates a rejection reaction to defend themselves. Instead of paying attention and saying, 'let's look, discuss' to see if the other person's point of view is right or listen to her arguments. It is almost a gut reaction to any criticism; we have a low level of criticism acceptance (Professional guild, B).

Hence, there is a shared idea that public officials see criticism and questioning not as a tool to evaluate their work and improve, but as inconvenient. This has immediate effects during the hearings but transcends this space, and it is also present in others where the interaction is expected as the possibility of citizens being heard.

6.3.3. Boards as spaces for dialogue

Different formal mechanisms exist in Colombia for citizens to engage in local governance, which can also serve as a space for discussing public performance. National guidance for social accountability refers to "boards and other formal citizen participation spaces", defining them as formal spaces that "have open the possibility for participation and establishing open direct dialogues between public entities and citizens. Usually, they have a thematic character and are stable in time" (Handbook, 2014, p.47). During fieldwork, two types of boards were mentioned: 'Planning advisory boards' and specific 'policy boards', committees chaired by the municipality to analyse and implement policies and programmes within specific policy areas (e.g., health, women, culture, and arts) (see also glossary in Appendix 5.1., p. 255). However, this research suggests that when municipality officials control these

spaces, citizens are undermined or ignored. Conversely, when the municipality is perceived as chaotic, the spaces seem to have more engaging dynamics.

Despite spaces for dialogue are supposed to serve as a space "exchange of opinions" regarding municipalities' performance (Barranquilla handbook, 2017, ps. 7-8), they face critical challenges. The mayor designates members of the board, but one participant, part of one of the most active CSOs in Barranquilla, mentioned they do not even know whom all the members of the territorial board are (CSO 1M, B), suggesting the selection process is not clear or made public. Another interviewee said that the board "has never worked" because "it has never been possible for them to create spaces for discussion where citizens can participate" (CS03, B). Planning boards are supposed to represent particular public interests in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of municipalities' development plans and then disseminate information to groups they represent and the citizenry. The quote criticises that planning boards fail to create spaces for citizens' deliberation.

Within cities such as Barranquilla and Cartagena, there are also 'local advisory planning boards' with similar dynamics to the city level ones. Regarding their experience as members of a local board, a participant said: "We attended several meetings; we made some recommendations to the local development plan draft, and it turns out that the process stopped there. We have made formal requests, called the locality's mayor, and spoken to several local councillors". She explained that despite their efforts to continue with the process, no other board members of local authorities seemed interested in overseeing the plan's implementation. Then, she added "it is this government's participation model. How can I explain it? It is eye-catching but not real participation" (CSO 1 member, B). The second quote suggests that several participation spaces are convened to show they are working, but there are no following actions that make the spaces really functional.

In contrast, public officials regarded boards as genuine opportunities for social accountability. One of the public officials interviewed stated:

There is a very good relationship with guilds and organisations because we do not meet with them only in accountability hearings, there are many participatory spaces. The Territorial Planning Board, the consulting one, the committee for citizen participation, the Public Policy Board, we are always interacting with them. Most of our stakeholders are external, and we meet them to follow up on each topic which is also part of the Development Plan (Public Official 3, B).

Informal conversations with other officials showed a formality by which boards and councils are arranged, but as other participants said, they do not work. For example, a young official working for one of the officers interviewed stated that they formally summoned several committees, but their members did not attend the meetings. Another participant also spoke about the effectiveness of these spaces: "Well, I have been on the committee for three years, we are in the fourth one, and I have not seen results. Things get recorded on paper but go and look that what is on the paper is being fulfilled, it is difficult" (JAC, Z 2, B). Again, there is the perception that spaces for dialogue exist only on paper, but they are not conducive to meaningful interactions between officials and citizens or organised interests.

The research findings suggest that some board members mistrust the spaces because they are more of a token. Participants told stories that reflect such distrust. In Barranquilla, a leader who is a member of the Public Policy Board mentioned that meetings are held, but she noticed that the minutes did not include her participation which sometimes criticised the mayor or other officials (JAC2, B). Similarly, another interviewee, a member of the committee following Cartagena's public policy for the Afro Colombian population, mentioned how they "end up fighting most of the time" with officials because lead officers delegate their participation to other officials that "do not have the power to decide anything in that space. The mayor is there to install the meeting, and then he leaves" (Afroleader2, C). In line with other participants quoted above, the distrust relates to the idea that discussion spaces are

convened to comply with legal requirements, but citizens' voices are not heard, or their input integrated into the process of decision making.

In Barranquilla, not listening to citizens was seen as a hallmark of the current government (CSO2, B). There is a common perception that the municipality does whatever the mayor sees fit without consulting citizens or interest groups and without caring about what citizens might say about decisions made by the public officials. A CSO member referred to this style as 'managerial or business alike': "This administration's note is a managerial one, 'they approve what I am doing, I keep going because if they are endorsing me it is because I am doing things right. Citizen participation is not the hallmark of this administration" (CSO 2, B). The participant noted that officials make decisions without consulting citizens as a business manager will do but they assume citizens' support for their decisions. The government style adds to citizens' distrust, hindering social accountability because the style indicates no relationship between officials and societal actors, including providing explanations or citizens' participating in local governance, improving performance, or making it more responsive to their needs.

Conversely, in Cartagena, despite the idea of the "chaotic" character of the municipality (Activist2, C), some board members have been able to scrutinise at the locality level. The chair of one of the three Cartagena localities said about her experience:

> At the locality level, we do have an impact [in contrast to the city level], and if we evaluate everything we have accomplished on our board, the balance is positive. For example, as advisors, we are responsible for checking the locality development plan before it is endorsed, and we issue observations that are not legally binding. The locality mayor decides if he takes them on board or not. However, this time, we achieved everything that the board suggested, if not everything, some 90%, was taken up by the mayor and included in the local development plan (CLP, C).

When reading the quote above, it is also important to remember that decentralisation within Cartagena is more robust than in Barranquilla and that CSOs (sp. 'Funcicar') have offered training programmes to board members. Thus, the research suggests that decentralisation and training have a crucial role in empowering community leaders to engage in social accountability.

The findings in this section indicate that, by law, there are several spaces in which officials and citizens could discuss public information. However, in practice, such spaces are controlled by officials who use them to provide more information and put forward narratives that highlight achievements and undermine critics. The research suggests that community leaders expect to question and voice concerns to officials, but sometimes they cannot participate, or if they do, their interventions are not recorded in meetings' minutes. Finally, the section highlights that decentralisation within cities might help citizens engage with authorities at the locality level and facilitate processes by which their involvement informs public decisions. The next section moves on to show that other spaces, led by citizens or their organised interests, might be opportunities for citizens to deliberate and form a judgement regarding public information available to them or after interacting (or not) with officials.

6.4. Forming judgement is critical but more spaces are needed to secure it

Another important aspect of the research is the importance and lack of spaces where citizens can form a judgement prior to sanctioning or rewarding public officials and organisations. The previous section points out that participants perceive information as insufficient and distrust municipalities officials for presenting only 'good news'. However, findings also suggest that there are spaces where citizens have the opportunity to make sense of public information and discuss public issues. This section argues that those spaces might strengthen social accountability because they allow citizens to deliberate and form a judgement regarding public performance and behaviour.

The research identifies spaces other than hearings where attendees had the chance to ask questions to officials and discuss public issues. Several participants mentioned boards, which were addressed in

the previous section. Here, the focus is on spaces led by participants that suggest that citizens need to come together to learn about public issues, discuss them and identify actions to engage with officials. Reflecting on why she started the initiative 'Lunes de Ciudad' (City Mondays, a monthly panel), a university teacher said it gave citizens the chance to "move from a passive to an active role in [Cartagena's] transformation, participating in a collaborative work to help and improve the city" (CSO2, C). The quote alludes to the need for spaces to discuss collective issues and participate in the city's governance. Although such spaces are not labelled as social accountability, they are an opportunity to strengthen it because they help disseminate public information and incentivise citizens to give feedback to municipalities and participate in other ways.

Most spaces referenced by participants are not easily accessible to the average citizen. Despite the potential of existing dialogue spaces, they share some limitations that public hearings have, such as who takes part in the space and where it is held. Participants referred to experts and civil society organisations as either the guests, speakers or organisers of forums, panels, and similar spaces (CSO2, B; CSO3, B; CSO2, C) and recognised that existing spaces did not include average citizens. A former director of a CSO in Barranquilla highlighted forums as a missed opportunity for social accountability because officials only present the positive outcomes of the administration, and "dialogue is lacking, and that constrains the space" (CSO, 2). In other cases, such as 'Lunes de Ciudad', the venue limits citizens' participation because the event is held in the city centre and is attended only by those "who work nearby and can stop by the event after work" (CSO 2, C) but the city centre is not easily accessible to the average citizen given the high rates of poverty, informal employment and unemployment.

Finally, the expectation of counting on experts in different areas to discuss collective issues might exclude average citizens. Several participants mentioned the need to bring experts to hearings and other potential spaces for social accountability to analyse and help understand municipalities' data performance and discuss public management "to improve the quality of decision-making processes

and policies" (CSO3, B). Simultaneously, some interviewees stated that most citizens are "apathetic" (JACZ3, B) to engaging in local politics at either the neighbourhood or city levels or that some grassroots organisations are interested in taking part in public discussions. However, they feel "ignored" by the municipality (Local journalist1, B), and research suggests they are also ignored by other [more recognised] CSOs who turn to experts instead of average citizens to discuss collective issues. Findings suggest current spaces led by a CSO have a more academic than practical or everyday tone, limiting social accountability because it prevents the average and under-resourced citizens from discussing public issues, contributing and forming collective judgment regarding public performance.

This last section has shown that there are not many spaces where citizens can come together to discuss public issues. Although participants highlighted some participatory spaces that could strengthen social accountability, they seem to aim at a limited number of citizens who can engage with academic experts or have the resources to participate in such events. The research argues that forming judgement in social accountability processes is a collective endeavour and that organised interests could make more efforts to include practitioners, programmes' users or beneficiaries and average citizens in public discussions.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on how societal actors assess the performance of public officials, highlighting information and debate as key elements of social accountability. The chapter builds on the literature analysing lack of access and assessment of public information as limitations for holding officials accountable (Escobar-Lemmon and Ross, 2014; Boräng and Grimes, 2021) and argues that asymmetries between officials and citizens are reinforced by institutional arrangements. It also discusses the importance of the 'argumentative dimension' (Schedler, 1999), and how current institutional arrangements can limit opportunities for meaningful and ongoing discussions (Esaiasson

et al., 2013; Mansbridge et al., 2012) between officials and citizens, and therefore can contribute to the misalignment with rules at the national level and social accountability weakening.

The findings are consistent with previous studies claiming that officials exercise significant discretion to decide what information is made available and the conditions to discuss it (Fox, 2007; Graves and Wells, 2019). From an institutionalist perspective, the thesis shows a misalignment between rules, practices and narratives generating tension between stability and weakening. Thus, offering an alternative or complementary analysis to misalignment as a condition for change (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Blanco et al., 2022). Although municipalities enact rules by producing a substantial amount of information, officials hinder its accessibility via practices such as publishing highly technical reports echoing the concept of 'opaque transparency' (Fox, 2007) or through narratives of 'good news'.

Concurrently, the thesis suggests that societal actors distrust public information or lack the knowledge and skills to access and understand it which can have important implications for future strategies to strengthen social accountability. As Cornwall and Coelho (2007, p. 8) state, "for people to be able to exercise their political agency, they need first to recognize themselves as citizens rather than see themselves as beneficiaries or clients" (see also, Pettit, 2013, 2016 and Lister, 2017). Despite the amount of available information and civil society organisations' efforts to make it more accessible, actors' socio-economic characteristics have critical effects on their capacity to participate in spaces such as boards or hearings, and benefit from resources available to them.

The previous chapter called attention to the need to recognise the role of civil society organisations as intermediaries who can support attempts to build citizens' capacity. This chapter corroborates the intermediary role suggested by Hernández et al. (2020) showing some civil society organisations compile and disseminate public information in response to the challenges of availability or readability. In this way, the thesis suggests revisiting the conceptualisation of social accountability as a dyadic relationship between officials and societal actors (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006) or as intermediaries

as 'speaking for' vulnerable or marginalised groups (Piper and von Lieres, 2015). The findings broadly support the research led by Houtzager et al. (2021) or previous studies by Fox (2015) that analyse different strategies used by societal actors to exact social accountability. The thesis contributes to these works suggesting that different strategies are associated with a diversity of roles: account-holder, intermediary or enforcer. In turn, each role depends on the diverse interplay between institutional arrangements and contexts.

The increase of 'invited spaces' (Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007) such as public hearings indicates emergent practices that can help strengthen social accountability. Still, findings corroborate the importance of the 'design' of these spaces, who are invited or able to engage and how (Fung, 2001; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). When hearings are held in places difficult to access or their schedules change without notice, citizens do not have many opportunities to meaningfully engage and discuss public performance. Once again, the findings show a tension between institutionalisation and weakness that results from the interaction between arrangements and human action (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Cornwall et al., 2008). On one hand, officials have further enacted rules by creating more opportunities for engagement but old practices and narratives remain. The tension results from the limitations imposed by current arrangements and the expectations associated with the increase of spaces. It is therefore likely that the tension, along with the misalignment (Blanco et al., 2022), create opportunities for change or the institutionalisation of social accountability.

Finally, one of the issues emerging from the chapter is the need for more spaces for citizens and their organised interests to come together, deliberate and form a collective judgement. Since current 'invited spaces' do not provide opportunities for ongoing and meaningful engagement and deliberation (Esaiasson, 2013; Mansbridge, 2012) further research is needed to identify 'claimed spaces' (Cornwall, 2004; Pettit, 2013) and analyse the arrangements shaping interactions in such

spaces. This research shows there are already some spaces led by activists and civil society organisations that have the potential to become spaces to share information and facilitate their understanding and discussion. However, current spaces seem to exclude most citizens because they aim to bring experts to discuss public issues without necessarily involving average citizens and under-resourced communities. Furthermore, participants tend to describe the broader citizenry as apathetic and with no interest in participating in public discussions, but it is not clear that there are opportunities and resources to secure their engagement (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Blanco et al., 2022), despite having a legal framework (Cunill-Grau, 2006) that supports their role as account-holders.

The next chapter argues that the lack of access to public information, the little discussion between citizens and officials, and then among citizens themselves, along with existing rules and guidance, have also shaped the action taken or not, by societal actors to reward or sanction public officials, or call for redress. Findings regarding consequences, the last stage of social accountability processes, reflect what has been discussed in the past two chapters regarding the identities, roles and capacities of officials to control social accountability spaces and avoid meaningful information and explanations, and citizens' restrictions to hold governments accountable.

7. SOCIETAL ACTORS' IMPOSING CONSEQUENCES ON PUBLIC OFFICIALS, AND HOW PUBLIC OFFICIALS RESPOND

7.1. Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 add to the argument that prevalent power asymmetries and clientelism/corruption context play a significant role in designing and enacting social accountability. The chapters help characterised officials, citizens and civil society organisations and argue that identified rules, practices and narratives reinforce asymmetries, constraining citizens' capacity to hold public officials at municipalities accountable and empowering officials to obfuscate accountability. Both chapters have also highlighted the role of civil society organisations by showing they can help strengthen social accountability by offering support and creating spaces for others to learn, access information or discuss it.

This chapter focuses on how such power asymmetries manifest through the institutional arrangements shaping consequences, which are considered crucial in securing public entities and officials to give account to citizens. Consequences are seen as the stage where citizens can sanction, reward or call for redress, and public officials should then have the capacity to reflect and make changes. The findings from this research challenge the understanding of social accountability as stages, where enforcement or consequences follow answerability spaces. Instead, the research suggests that citizens oversee public performance and attempt to sanction or reward officials independently from what happens during hearings or board meetings, diluting the relational character of social accountability.

The chapter also shows that the 'social accountability' concept adopted at the national and local level has been borrowed from academic literature (e.g., Schedler) but readapted in a way that promotes incentives to engage in social accountability instead of sanctioning or rewarding performance. The research draws attention to the importance of tools to promote accountability through civic education and the need to increase and improve opportunities for imposing consequences.

The chapter is structured as follows. After this introductory first section, the second one analyses the rules available at the national and local levels and how officials and civil society organisations have adapted social accountability literature by reinterpreting consequences as incentives to increase citizens' participation in accountability spaces. The section pays special attention to two types of incentives, training and preparatory meetings in which both the local government and civil society organisations play a key role. Then, in the third section, the chapter shows that despite rule makers at the national level reinterpreting consequences as incentives, citizens still engage in actions such as protesting or reporting possible wrongdoing to the press or other authorities and these actions are analysed here as consequences. However, citizens' attempts to sanction are limited by corruption and the co-option of actors, allowing officials to evade accountability. The fourth section focuses on popular support and tax payment as symbolic rewards for performance, analysing how existing narratives favour a favourable and partial performance assessment. The fifth section argues that feedback provided by citizens can be analysed as a consequence since it aims to influence officials' future behaviour for an improved or more responsive performance. Feedback exemplifies how social accountability is a fluid process more than rigid stages and how citizens have similar constraints to provide feedback as to access and discuss information, and how officials use surveys more as a check box tool than as an input to obtain feedback and incorporate it into their performance.

7.2. Incentives instead of consequences

Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2., showed that the national policy for social accountability reinterpreted the element of consequences as incentives (Conpes 3654). This section examines how officials and societal actors have followed the national guidance and given prevalence to incentives over consequences which hinders social accountability, understood as the relation through which citizens can impose sanctions, rewards or call for redress. Findings show that incentives are positive but limited, and although they seem necessary, actual consequences (i.e., sanctions, rewards) are not integrated into

the interactions between officials and citizens. It first recounts how legislation and local guidelines are conflicting since they mention consequences (sanctions and rewards) as an element of the concept of social accountability but regulate incentives. Then, it focuses on two incentives found for the period of interest, training and support to community leaders and preparatory meetings prior to public hearings.

7.2.1. National guidance set up the framing of incentives

Conpes 3654 (p. 46), the key document regulating social accountability in Colombia, recognises that citizens lack channels to sanction inadequate behaviour or shortcomings of public performance. However, the document states that "for the purposes of this document, sanctions are understood as incentives, positive and negative" (p. 14) and defines incentives as "mechanisms to adjust actions, a stimulus for adequate fulfilment, or sanctions for poor performance" (p. 15). Later on, the Conpes expands on incentives, focusing on actions that officials can take to persuade other officials to give account and citizens to demand account (information and explanations).

Building on the Conpes, the 2014 Handbook (p. 19) defines incentives as actions that reinforce the accountable behaviour of officials and citizens and stimulate social accountability processes. The Handbook (p. 50) also mentions rewards and sanctions as possible incentives, which creates confusion between consequences and incentives. As with the Conpes, more attention is given to incentives which the Handbook listed as workshops, surveys, collaborative officials, "open and collaborative participation" and contests. Rules, at the national level, have focused on incentives to promote social accountability and put aside consequences (sanctions, rewards or feedback) as mechanisms that allow citizens to enforce responsive and accountable behaviour.

At the local level, actors also embraced the interpretation of consequences as incentives. In Barranquilla, the local guidance (p. 5) defines incentives as "Mechanisms for corrective actions, to incentivise adequate fulfilment or sanction for poor performance". Later on, it refers to feedback as an "expression of social [accountability] that entails actions such as scrutiny, evaluation, rewards or

sanctions" (p. 17). Besides the concept, the guide states that the municipality provides citizens with "academic and technical tools" to facilitate accountability, but it does not state what tools are available. The findings show that while guidance mentions sanctions and rewards, officials and civil society organisations pay more attention to activities to incentivise citizen engagement.

Similarly, annual decrees and other regulations at the local level do not include any possible mechanisms for citizens to reward or sanction officials. In line with the reframing of consequences as incentives, local rules include actions to promote citizens' participation in social accountability hearings, from inviting citizens, leaders, and organised interests to participate in hearings and intervene in them to publishing the responses to requests or questions made by them. These documents also include incentives for officials to promote a culture of giving account to citizens. The research argues that although this change of focus hinders citizens' capacity to enforce social accountability, it also has positive effects. The following section focuses on two mechanisms seen and discussed with participants in Barranquilla that seek to incentivise citizens' and leaders' participation in hearings.

7.2.2. *Training as an incentive to engage in social accountability*

Municipalities and other civil society organisations offer community leaders training and support to enhance citizen participation and accountability. Different workshops aim to give attendants tools to increase and improve citizen participation. Although the research found training has helped community leaders to identify how to interact and demand responsiveness it also shows limitations regarding selecting those who attend the training programmes, the suitability of those providing the training and what support citizens need in order to put into practice what they have learned. In both municipalities, there are departments assigned to improve the relationship between the organisation and the citizenry, offering support and training to grassroots organisations and neighbourhood boards and associations (Juntas de Acción Comunal) (for a definition of these bodies, see Appendix 5.1., p. 255). Besides public organisations, some civil society ones have also undertaken such tasks, signalling

that the demand for such training and support is more significant than what municipalities are able to cover.

Cartagena's local newspaper highlighted the department's role in delivering workshops to over 35,000 people in schools, universities, and neighbourhoods aiming to encourage new and better civic attitudes (Meza, 2016) or holding meetings with community leaders to include their insights in the development plan. The press also covered 'Encuentros con mi gente' (Encounters with my people), a series of meetings where public officials met around a hundred community leaders for them to express their communities' most pressing needs (*Caracol,* 25 July 2019). Similar events are held by the Department for Citizen Participation in Barranquilla, although they do not offer training directly but support the federation of Neighbourhood Boards with its training programme aimed at 'comunales' (Neighbourhood Board members).

Despite the potential role such training can have in enhancing citizens' and leaders' knowledge about public administration and democracy and improving their civic skills, participants shared some concerns. A young community leader who studies political science said the name of Cartagena's department is "ornamental" because sometimes "they have guest speakers who are not the most fitting for the topics" (Watchdog, C). He considered that those hired to deliver the training lack the qualifications to teach those participating in the workshops. Another participant questioned the selection process of those who gain access to workshops. Talking about the results shown in a hearing regarding the training of over a hundred leaders, he reflected:

> To what extent are those 120 leaders a representative sample? Was the project conceived to transcend and achieve a more active, more participative citizenry? No. It was created to be delivered to a small group so they could contract out directly and they could exploit the situation and grab money from the contract for themselves (Activist 3, C).

The quote exemplifies participants' mistrust of the information shared by officials but also of the

training itself, suggesting it is used to obtain benefits from corruption transactions. The participant suggested that since the programme only benefits a small percentage of leaders, officials could contract out through less regulated mechanisms usually associated with corruption practices. Although it was not possible to corroborate his claim, the quote shows that in contexts with perceived high levels of corruption, training programmes could be used for the personal benefit of officials hindering their capacity to promote social accountability.

As seen in previous chapters, civil society organisations also play a crucial role in training community leaders. As with other programmes, the sessions aim to teach about what the state is, what participation mechanisms exist in the country, and how to take part in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Available workshops tend to be more related to citizen participation (e.g., how to present a Freedom of Information request, the structure of the state) than specific ways to ask for accounts or hold officials accountable. One of the directors of an organisation providing training said they encourage trainees to put lessons into practice because "To learn about participation mechanisms, you need to do it" (Think Tank, B). From the interviewees, it is not clear that there are sessions aiming specifically to teach about the social accountability policy, but findings suggest that training offered by civil society organisations can empower citizens and community leaders to demand actions from municipalities.

The research found that municipalities support civil society organisations in different ways. For example, a member of the Neighbourhood Boards Federation recalled that in 2018, the head of the Citizen Participation department helped them by sponsoring the training of 70 'comunales' (board members) in topics such as the laws regulating the boards, their rights, and functions. However, municipality support is perceived as very limited, and the same participant continued: "later on, we presented a proposal to train from 50 to 100 more leaders, and it has not been possible because [Citizen participation officer] has not found another department that supports her" (JAC_Authority, B).

Findings show that the Citizen Participation department has a minimal capacity (budget, staff) to respond to leaders' requests or needs. As in Cartagena, a more significant effort could be made to train community leaders directly, or more resources could be allocated to support other organisations aiming to enhance civic knowledge and skills.

7.2.3. Preparatory meetings

Another mechanism used in Barranquilla to incentivise citizen participation in social accountability is meetings held by public officials in each locality with community leaders prior to the hearings. The head of the Citizen Participation department is responsible for organising the event and referred to them as "pedagogical workshops" where officials "motivate attendees to make the most of [accountability hearings] and so they can effectively solve their doubts" (Public Official 2, B). Observing one of the five preparatory meetings held in 2019, it was possible to see that the Citizen Participation department organises the meeting but officials from the Internal Audit or Planning departments are the ones in charge of providing information. As stated in Chapter 5, which department leads social accountability strategies seems to have a considerable effect; for instance, preparatory meetings focus more on procedural information than on establishing a more engaging relationship with attendants to motivate them to take part in upcoming hearings.

Officials from the Internal Audit Department and the Planning department explained what social accountability is based on national guidance. One of them stated that it "aims to fulfil transparent and participative public management" and that the "municipality is not after a social accountability process in which people attend a hearing and they do not participate, ask questions or make suggestions" (Preparatory meeting, March 8th, 2019). The meeting also aimed to show where citizens can access the municipality's performance report and present the methodology to be followed during the upcoming hearings.

Other officials highlighted the practice during interviews. An official from the Communications department stated they are part of a strategy to strengthen social accountability and increase citizen participation. She continued:

> [preparatory meetings] help people to know the hearings are going to happen. They receive the schedule so those who have an interest, have questions or want to interact with officials responsible for each area of the administration, have the chance to participate and get involved in those [accountability] processes (Public official 4, B).

The interviewee referred to these meetings as innovative and as part of the municipality's effort to improve social accountability. A different official from the Citizen Participation department stated that they hoped to incentivise leaders to download the performance report, discuss it with their groups and communities, and prepare to intervene and ask questions during hearings. She also maintained that the response from community leaders varied across localities; in others, more people attended the event and seemed more interested in taking part in upcoming hearings. Although the municipality summons these meetings, their success in improving social accountability also depends on leaders' and citizens' interest and capacity to attend the meetings, access reports, understand them and discuss them prior to public hearings or other spaces where they interact with officials.

Challenges remain to engage more citizens in more meaningful ways during preparatory meetings and hearings. Informal conversations before the start of the meetings and interviews with some attendees revealed that officials send invitations only a day or two before the event, which affects who can attend with such short notice (JACZ1, B). Comparing information shared during the meetings and later development of hearings, it was possible to notice that the schedule shared was later changed without informing attendees. What is more, the observed meeting was held on a Friday and the upcoming Monday, and an official had already shared a different schedule. Officials' way of convening meetings and hearings limits leaders' and citizens' participation because it is unclear when the events will occur.

In the same line, officials explain social accountability concepts referencing national guidance, which sets specific standards (i.e., information regarding all policy cycles, budgets and ongoing discussions) and creates unmet expectations during hearings. During the meeting, one of the officials stated that hearings could help to assess if the municipality has fulfilled the goals included in the development plan. However, as seen in Chapter 6, officials use hearings to share information regarding what they deem as positive but not a balanced assessment of their performance. One of the attendees mentioned she hoped that in the upcoming hearings that year, officials would report and solve questions regarding all their responsibilities and not only the ones that had positive results. The gap between theory and practice adds to feelings of frustration shared by some participants regarding hearings. Citizens are encouraged to take part to ask questions and present suggestions, but then hearings do not provide the space to take them into account.

This section has shown that national and local guidance readapting consequences as incentives has contributed to strengthening social accountability, but it also has negative consequences. Municipalities' guidance and practices focus on incentives understood as actions that encourage officials and citizens to engage in social accountability actions and spaces. Findings suggest that incentives such as training offered by municipalities and civil society organisations strengthen community leaders' engagement by providing knowledge and tools to access information and understand civic and democratic concepts and rights. As with preparatory meetings, there are still challenges that allow more citizens and leaders to take part in these spaces and close the gaps between what is said and what is done. The next section shows that although rewards and sanctions are not commonly referenced by guidance, citizens still try to hold governments accountable through sanctions, but face significant challenges in enforcing them.

7.3. Attempts to sanction and limitations to achieve it

The previous section referenced citizens' lack of channels to sanction inadequate behaviour or shortcomings of public performance (Conpes, p. 46). The Conpes (p. 56) also states that "without a powerful citizenry, it is pointless to design a policy for the state to give account". Despite such diagnosis, guidance aims "to promote [organisational] behaviour conducive to good processes of accountability and "to generate incentives for citizens to ask account" (ps. 55-56), not to impose consequences, a key element of social accountability. This section argues that even independently from the guidance, citizens still try to sanction what they perceive as wrongful behaviour or unresponsive performance. Moreover, the thesis argues that citizens' attempts to sanction officials or municipalities result from processes different to those framed as social accountability such as hearings or board meetings which suggest citizens resorted to other forms of scrutiny. However, participants reported that corruption is a critical limitation to imposing sanctions directly or through other public organisations.

7.3.1. Types of sanctions

Conpes 3654 (p. 19) listed some of the actions available to citizens to sanction the state: moral sanctions, showing disapproval through media outlets or symbolic displays; also going to the competent authorities to request they look into or sanction public officials' wrongdoings. This section focuses on demonstrations to protest wrongdoing and appeal to the press. The following section looks into reporting to other authorities to report unresponsive behaviour or wrongdoing as well. Previous chapters show that most citizens lack the resources (time, money), interest or skills to access information or discuss public reports and that officials seem unwilling to give balanced accounts, and that spaces for dialogue are used mainly by officials to share information unilaterally but not to have meaningful engagement with attendees. In that context, the research suggests attempts to sanction officials are not directly related to what has been framed as answerability but a consequence of organisations or citizens' follow-up of government actions. The disconnection between consequences

and answerability cast doubts on social accountability as a relationship that occurs in synchronised stages (information, debate, passing judgement and consequences).

Citizens use protests to complain or demand responses to their needs. For example, in Cartagena, community leaders were able to hold back a public work in their locality by holding a protest because they were not consulted on which was the best way to invest in the area (CSO 3, C). Local newspapers also cover demonstrations against municipalities and public service providers such as the electricity company or education organisations. News reports tended to be short in length, only showing some photographs of the demonstrations and informing of road disruptions. The one with the most coverage in Barranquilla during the period of the research (2016-2019)[20] was a demonstration held by over five thousand grocery shop owners who were protesting against the new rules included in the Police Code. According to the news article, shopkeepers marched toward the municipality building, but officials did not meet them to discuss their concerns and demands (Perez, October 24, 2017).

Similarly, over 40 protests were counted by a news article in Cartagena in 2019 (Goez, December 24, 2019). Among the ones directed to the municipality were demonstrations to demand the competition of construction works or because citizens of particular neighbourhoods felt some works affected them negatively. Several interviewees in Cartagena highlighted that in 2019 they observed a change in how the last mayor (appointed in 2018) engaged with protesters. A participant stated that "if there is a protest against the mayor, he comes down to pay attention, to settle with the people" (CTP, C). He continued by saying there is still more to be done to improve the relationship between the municipality and citizens, but that change was noticed. Another interviewee mentioned that demonstrations are

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[20] On November 21st mass strikes (Paro Nacional 21N) started across the country. Although the strike was initiated by unions, it soon aggregated numerous demands and a diversity of groups (women, Afro-Colombians, indigenous, students, and teachers) (Archila, et al., 2020). In December 2019, El País (a Spanish newspaper) reported the third civic strike in two weeks, showing the protest's scale (Manetto, 2019). After the lockdown was established to control Covid-19, the strikes started again in 2021 and Cuestión Pública, an online media, reported 42 victims, including 14 killed during the protests since November 2019. Strikers' demands are associated with broader socio-economic issues at the national level and were not considered for the analysis of the thesis that focuses on demands or concerns at the local level.

informal mechanisms people use to get attention and to be heard; she referred to a protest near where she lives and stated that "probably, the municipality did not inform the community about how the project was going to impact them, because they did not have any interest in providing that information". Participants' perception of town officials as uninterested in engaging with demonstrators suggests that protests help to bring attention to some issues but do not help improve the relationship between officials and citizens or correct wrongdoings or modify unresponsive behaviours.

Other participants talked about "making noise in the media" (Community Leader 1, B) as a way to pressure the town into implementing a proposal. He was referring to a project presented to the council (which the mayor also needed to approve) to allow 'Community Mothers' (women members of the publicly funded care network) to be exempted from property taxation. In this case, the media was used to gain popular support to exhort officials to take specific action in favour of an organised group. Local media picking up stories regarding citizen participation and demonstrations shows that news outlets have the potential to be tools for citizens to report wrongdoing or to demand that officials change or improve their behaviour. However, findings also suggest that engaging with an ongoing and meaningful relational approach to social accountability, calls for the articulation of citizen control and citizen participation initiatives with other processes such as access to information and deliberation. The following section looks into another challenge: the effect of corruption and co-option as constraints to citizens' capacity to impose sanctions.

7.3.2. Corruption and co-option limit citizens' capacity to sanction officials

Community leaders approach other officials in the municipality or other authorities, such as the Comptroller or the Inspector General, to report concerns or wrongdoings, but most of these attempts at ensuring accountability are unsuccessful because of corruption. For instance, a group of community leaders protested, but they also sent a letter to the environmental prosecutor to stop a project that was going to be implemented without listening to their concerns and needs (CSO 3, C). The report to

the prosecutor's office, a sanctioning agency, also resulted in the instruction for the municipality to meet with the community to establish what actions to prioritise with the available budget. Although they were not consulted from the beginning, they were able to demand responsiveness from the municipality.

A significant limitation to reporting wrongdoing is corruption or its perception, which causes distrust. For instance, in 2017, a senator condemned that the Anti-Corruption Attorney General had taken actions to delay 21 criminal prosecutions for corruption against Barranquilla's mayor (*W Radio,* October 18, 2017). Similarly, several participants perceived that the local comptroller and public prosecutor officers served the interest of municipality officials and did not follow up on the reports denouncing illegal or unethical practices or decisions. A member of an Engineers Professional Guild explained:

> We have publicly reported these issues (lack of transparency). I have even reported specific cases to the comptroller, public prosecutor, and ombudspersons at a high personal cost, and nothing happened. Why? Because those official control entities have been co-opted as well. Here, there is a serious problem, and the guild has not kept quiet about it. The truth is that since then, we are looked at it with a lot of wariness (Professional Guild, B).

His quote illustrates the distrust citizens feel towards government agencies that are supposed to hold public organisations and officials accountable. In the same line, other participants mentioned the city council as an organisation that "should be a scenario for political scrutiny" and has become an "appendix of the municipality" (CSO3, B). A local journalist remembered how in the last term served by the current mayor, the president of the city council "spoke as the spokesman for the municipality as if he was a member of the administration and not from the organisation supposed to serve as the first to scrutinise the administration" (Local journalist1, B). City councillors have the authority to summon high-ranking and appointed officials and vote on no-confidence motions to remove them

from their posts, but most participants state that councillors have been co-opted by mayors and municipality officials and support and approve municipality decisions without question.

Despite perceiving councillors as unwilling to hold officials accountable, at least one participant mentioned asking one of them to summon an officer to explain the advances in the implementation of a policy. The local newspaper also covered several council sessions in which different officials were summoned to discuss public issues such as safety (Guerrero, October 25, 2016) or city mobility (Patiño, July 10. 2018). However, as the interviewee and press state, not all officials attend the sessions, which adds to the citizens' feelings of frustration regarding citizen participation. Although corruption and clientelism are key elements in the political context of the research, there are still nascent opportunities to strengthen social accountability through other authorities.

Moreover, corruption is not only perceived as affecting the relationship between officials and other authorities but also between the latter and community leaders. An activist interviewee spoke about how some watchdogs undermine their role by monitoring public performance and looking to extort public officials:

> [community] leaders use that tool, a large majority, to pressure the government to make certain concessions that favour them. I present an information request, you do not respond, I take you to court and follow up the case, and if I know there is no budget for you to fulfil what the judge might order, I compromise [sell out] for one or two job contracts, or repairing the road where I live, and so on (Activist 3, C).

As the participant explained, not all watchdogs or interested citizens follow up on public performance, looking for mistakes and wrongdoings to blackmail officials. However, other participants shared similar stories, together with ideas of corrupt or co-opted and old leaderships (JAC Z1, B; Watchdog, C; CommL2, C). This suggests that those interested in holding the government to account distrust public officials and leaders.

Attempts to sanction officials result from the interest of particular leaders or organisations following areas of their interest or because they have been affected directly by a municipality decision. Except for the groups of leaders in Cartagena, none of the examples above was the result of citizens' engagement with officials in public hearings, boards or other spaces. The research shows sanctions are unconnected to the processes of answerability seen in Chapter 6, suggesting social accountability does not take place in stages. The following section argues that the reinterpretation of consequences also hinders identifying actions that might reward officials. Moreover, as sanctions, rewards are hard to connect to existing opportunities to access and discuss information or form a collective judgment regarding public performance.

7.4. Symbolic rewards for public officials

Section 7.1. showed that national and local guidance regulating social accountability redefined citizens' capacity to impose sanctions or rewards to officials as incentives. Guidance states that incentive actions aim to motivate officials and citizens and that such actions could be sanctions or rewards (Handbook, p. 49). However, among the actions listed in official documents, there is only one that mentions rewards. The Handbook developed in 2014 included contests which could "generate a wave of interest in what public organisations do" by creating questionnaires that incentivise citizens and officials to "navigate and examine" the organisation across different information outlets and discussion spaces (p. 50). However, in this case, the reward or prize is not seen as given to officials after assessing their performance as outstanding or responsive but to citizens to incentivise them to be informed about public organisations and their performance.

Similarly, at the local level, Barranquilla's guidance[21] did not include mechanisms for citizens to reward officials as part of the social accountability processes or stages. Observing hearings and following

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[21] It is important to remember that at the time of the research, the guidance referenced not the 2014 Handbook but previous and non-mandatory guidelines published in 2011 by the Administrative Department of Public Function.

reports regarding them, there was no evidence either of mechanisms available to citizens or their organised interests to give rewards. A former director of a CSO stated that the organisation considered arranging a contest to select the best department within the municipality or the best practices at the local level as a way for "citizens to incentivise public officials to give account" (CSO2, B). Her quote shows that the guidance's reinterpretation of consequences as incentives also shapes how civil society organisations see this element of social accountability.

As with sanctions, the research suggests that what might be seen as rewards, such as mayors' high popularity or praise, is not directly connected to social accountability processes. A participant stated that Barranquilla "has a municipality in which citizens' validation of public performance is enough for [officials] to assume they are doing their job well" (CSO 2, B). Such validation refers to the mayor's popularity and the results of surveys which listed him as the best mayor in the country (Barranquilla municipality website, 2019), which can be considered a reward for public performance. A member of a CSO said:

> At the municipality, [the mayor] thinks: 'I am doing well in surveys, and that gives me scope to govern'. That is to say, [the mayor] understands participation as [popularity on surveys]. Thus, decisions are made when he wants, as he wants, how he wants, and there is too little citizen participation (CSO1, B).

The quote reflects a shared perception that the mayor does not consider citizens' opinions when making decisions because his performance is backed up by his popularity. This chapter argues that popular support also dissuades officials from engaging with citizens in ways that might diminish their popularity. Although widespread support shown in surveys can be seen as a reward, the research shows that community leaders and civil society organisations perceived municipalities and public officials rely on popularity to dismiss or ignore critics and others interested to know more about their performance.

Moreover, the research findings question if the positive image of the mayor and other municipality officials is heavily supported by the 'good news' narrative used by them. As Chapter 6 shows, officials do not use available spaces for sharing balanced performance reports detailing shortcomings, challenges or any information that could be seen as negative. The above and the lack of access to education and civic education seem to discourage citizens from questioning officials because "they believe they are in good hands" (CSO 2, B). Some participants stated that the mayor's popularity gives him and the municipality political leverage while leaving citizens "completely alienated" (Academic, B). Findings suggest that high popularity can be seen as a reward but might discourage officials from being accountable to citizens.

However, there are other behaviours that show support towards municipalities' performance such as paying taxes[22]. For instance, a member of a CSO in Barranquilla stated that paying taxes is a way citizens endorse the municipality because it is different "to like the mayor than paying what I have to pay" (CSO2, B). Her quote suggests that beyond the mayor's charisma and popularity, taxes are a sign of support for the municipality. In Cartagena, most participants mentioned the city was under administrative chaos or crisis, and one interviewee stated that "people did not pay [taxes] because they said, 'If I pay, corrupt politicians are going to steal it'". In this case, not paying taxes is not a reward but a way of sanctioning poor performance. However, the same leader continued: "Today they are saying to the mayor, 'I have the money, and I want to pay so you can invest that money in my neighbourhood'" (CTP, C). He signalled that the incumbent mayor had gained citizens' trust, which was noticeable in the payment of taxes.

This section has argued that paying taxes and popular support are indicators of citizens' supporting the municipality and officials. Nevertheless, in contexts of power asymmetry in which officials are able to

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[22] Although Barranquilla has shown an improvement in tax collection, it seems that participants believe it is because inhabitants are paying tax debts while researchers explained the improvement based on municipalities optimising their capacity to collect taxes (e.g., Bonet and Perez, 2017).

disseminate narratives that highlight what they perceive as positive results and ignore challenges and criticism, popular support might also hinder social accountability. The next section pays attention to the interactions regarding feedback and argues that current practices show potential to enforce accountability but fear, frustration and misuse of surveys limit citizens' ability to voice their opinions and officials' response to feedback.

7.5. Feedback

Feedback is regarded by the Handbook for social accountability as part of 'dialogue' and as a tool for assessment and follow-up of social accountability spaces. Here, feedback is introduced as a possible consequence for two reasons. First, feedback aims to improve public performance (Handbook, p. 54), which would be actions taken after social accountability spaces or interactions. Secondly, officials have designed surveys to collect feedback at the end of hearings, leaving them out of the interactions in those spaces. The placement of feedback in this section is analytical since the exchange and interactions associated with feedback are possible at different points in the social accountability relationship. The first section argues that there are multiple opportunities to provide feedback (e.g., hearings and comments/complaints/compliments systems) but citizens refrain from doing so because they fear retaliations. The second section argues that officials' control over what is considered feedback and what topics they collect feedback on constrains citizens' ability to give their opinions. Moreover, the lack of follow-up mechanisms undermined feedback as a way to secure adjustments or improve public performance in response to citizens' input.

7.5.1. *Fear limits citizens' capacity to provide feedback*

As the research has shown in the past three chapters, some leaders and organisations have tried to hold governments accountable. In both cities, they have had difficulties actually doing so. In some cases, limitations are related to resources or electoral stability. For example, not having the time and money to commute or pay for copies of necessary documents, or as in Cartagena, the impossibility of

establishing a relationship with officials given the high turnover. As this section shows, another limitation is that those who comment on things they consider are not being done properly or can be improved are undermined, and others seem to believe it is not the citizens' place to question public decisions or that doing so might affect them and their communities, negatively.

Findings suggest that power dynamics in clientelistic and unequal contexts, citizens are the ones fearing sanctions imposed by officials. According to an interviewee, Neighbourhood Board members are afraid of raising their concerns because then their relationship with the mayor will be lost, and they will lose benefits for their communities. She said it is not easy to criticise public officials because "When one wants to tell the mayor or officials about things that are not doing well it is not easy because then they call you, [an] 'enemy'" (JAC Z 2, B). As Chapter 5 shows, criticism is not well received by officials and municipality supporters. The quote exemplifies it by noticing that those who criticise the mayor or municipality policies are flagged as enemies, so some leaders prefer not to criticise officials' decisions or behaviour.

There are subtle manifestations of the fear of upsetting officials or at least speaking up. A member of a Neighbourhood Board in Barranquilla who is a supporter of the political group in power shared a story regarding a football pitch that needed improvements. After several broken promises by politicians, "a locality councilman [edil] talked to the Infrastructure officer, and the municipality approved the fixing and presenting a design blueprint for the pitch had been promised for his neighbourhood". Then he stated: "I had to butt in" (JAC Zone 3, B) because he noticed the design lacked a sewer system. What stands out from the story is that the leader, despite being part of a board and having a good relationship with a locality councilman and municipality officials, felt he was being intrusive by signalling the flaws in the design, which might be explained by the idea of upsetting officials and losing the municipality's support for other activities led by community leaders.

Furthermore, fear also results from actions taken by other actors, especially considering the overall

national context of violence against leaders and militants of non-traditional political parties. At least one participant in each city mentioned being the target of threats to their lives or backlash from their communities. An activist in Cartagena stated that the city "has been captured by certain mafias, political clans or "businessmen" and that those, like him, who oversee public decisions and report wrongdoing "risk their own and families' safety" (Activist2, C). He continued, "when you stop a public work or take down a [unfair] fee, you are touching someone's pocket, and they might find it easier to send someone to hurt you, intimidate you". A similar story in Barranquilla was shared by a community leader whose family was intimidated by armed men, and he believes that it was a consequence of questioning officials for possible wrongdoing in the implementation of the paving roads programme. Despite these two participants continuing to oversee and speak publicly about possible wrongdoings, the threats against their lives might discourage others from confronting officials and other actors involved in the cities' governance.

7.5.2.   *Feelings of frustration also discourage citizens from providing feedback*

The research suggests that dispiritedness and frustration dissuade citizens from providing feedback. Those who shared feelings of weariness told stories about trying to take part in spaces, such as boards, but perceiving that the spaces do not work correctly. A member of a civil society organisation who took part in a recently formed advisory board for the implementation of a citizen participation policy said about the space:

> It was attended by council members and journalists, and it was a space in which we offered some recommendations. And we are disappointed that those spaces have been used to legitimise the municipality's image, but the recommendations have not been implemented (CSO1 M, B).

The quote brings to light that frustration arises when feedback is provided but not implemented, or there is no continuity to issues discussed at some point. It is not enough to create opportunities for

citizens or civil society to provide feedback; social accountability cannot be effective in holding public entities and officials accountable without addressing the issues raised by the citizenry.

The research also found that such frustration also occurs in relation to other authorities that are supposed to exercise other types of control over municipalities. An activist in Cartagena reflected on how such organisms have been co-opted for the benefit of politicians and public officials presumably corrupt.

> I mean, what do you do reporting for if you know that in the end, everything amounts to nothing, for example. For what reason you are going to follow up [something] and then report it if at the end you know all of them to go to bed under the same sheet (Activist 3, C).

Like her, other participants shared their apprehensions about reporting wrongdoings to other authorities. As with municipalities, participants showed frustration because public prosecutors or comptrollers did not follow up on reports. Hence, social accountability is disregarded not only as direct control over public officials but also as intermediated control which refers to imposing consequences through other types of control: judiciary, fiscal, and disciplinary.

Relatedly, stories shared by other participants help evidence that some officials do nothing with the feedback given by citizens. A community leader told a story about the response she received from a public official working at the Education department when she reported a failure in a public school in her neighbourhood:

> We have a school here, and I was worried because it is falling apart and it has a poor educational level. I took that concern to them, I told them this and that. But, let me tell you, to my surprise, they know all about the issues at schools (JAC Z 1, B).

Here it is important to highlight that public school management is monitored by municipalities that are deemed responsible for the service. Thus, it is striking that a public official seemed to know about

the issues reported by the interviewee, but improvements were not secured. The same interviewee continued: "Moreover, they were the ones who told me the kind of principals who are working at these schools, how irresponsible they are, a word that we use *tramoyero* [someone who likes to play the system]". Given the interest shown by this leader, the officials gave her advice on what she could do to demand improvements from the school's principal, but they did not proceed with any action based on her complaint. The next section shows that something similar happens with the feedback provided by citizens through surveys conducted by officials.

7.5.3. *Surveys are an underused tool to collect and respond to feedback*

The research shows that surveys are a tool implemented by officials to assess hearings and public performance. The Handbook for social accountability (p. 49) states that surveys "aim to know people´s perception regarding different topics. This tool proves of great benefit considering the ease of following up [perceptions] depending on the frequency of gathering information". The Conpes also mentions surveys as a mechanism to know citizens' perceptions regarding public performance, especially the implementation of development plans. The thesis argues that the questionnaire and sample do not allow a balanced and realistic assessment of citizens' perceptions, and there is no evidence that the information collected is used to change or improve performance.

Looking into the Internal Audit department's reports for public hearings, there is evidence that surveys are conducted at the end of these events. In both cities, reports include evaluations of the event itself and, in Barranquilla, a few questions regarding the municipality´s performance. Only two questions are dedicated to performance: "How do you perceive the following topics?" and "Broadly, how do you evaluate the implementation of the current development plan?" (Barranquilla Municipality, hearings minutes, 2017). The questions offer insight into what attendees perceive about public performance, and with the introduction of hearings by department or sector in Barranquilla in 2018, surveys cover more issues. For instance, the Culture, Tourism and Heritage department included questions about the satisfaction with art courses available or the preservation of historical buildings. Other departments,

like the Treasury, asked about public investments or tax collection. In this way, hearings by sector offer more opportunities for discussion and provide specific feedback to the official directly responsible for each area.

However, research shows that the current use of surveys has significant limitations because very few citizens participate, and there is no evidence of any follow-up strategies. As Chapter 6 shows, hearings tend to be attended by people linked to the municipality, such as workers, programme beneficiaries or those brought by clientelistic leaders. Moreover, it was noticeable that all the attendees did not fill in surveys: an Internal Audit department report for a hearing held in 2018 reported 1339 attendees and 130 surveys completed (9.7%); in others, the percentage of respondents varies, from 32% to 90%, and others do not include such information (i.e., Report Health department, 2019). Since officials can control who gets to attend hearings and not all who attend complete the surveys, their results might not be a representative sample of citizens' perceptions.

Moreover, not all departments conduct surveys in the same way, and some are able to collect more detailed feedback, but final reports include follow-up strategies. All questionaries have multiple-choice questions regarding citizens' perceptions, and possible responses rank from "things are on the right track" to "there are improvements but need to be reinforced" and "it seems nothing is being done". Some departments, such as Culture, include a why question allowing them to collect more information regarding areas where attendees assess the hearing itself and if it met their expectations. However, there is no evidence that officials use such information to improve their performance or future hearings. During interviews, only one official mentioned surveys as a tool to assess hearings and compare what departments had more acceptance than others (Public official 1, B). Research suggests that while surveys could be a helpful tool, officials seem to conduct them more as a legal requirement than as an input to modify or improve their performance, and they are not followed up by civil society organisations promoting social accountability either.

This section has argued that feedback given by citizens and their organised interests can be analysed as a possible consequence, understanding the latter as actions taken by citizens to reward or sanction public officials. Feedback has been placed last for analytical purposes, but as this section has shown, citizens have several opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns, including hearings and board meetings. However, findings suggest that fear and dispiritedness limit citizens' interest and capacity to provide feedback. Participants reported fear of losing municipality support and benefits, being ostracised or even fearing for their safety. They also shared stories denoting frustration after providing feedback not picked up by the municipality or other authorities. The section reveals the power dynamics and control exercised by officials over accountability spaces and some community leaders' resistance and continuous effort to hold officials accountable.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings that can help to answer how may societal actors impose consequences over public officials, and public officials respond (Bovens, 2007, 2010; Brummel, 2021). This conclusion argues that, in the case analysed here, institutional arrangements shaping consequences contribute to the weakening of social accountability, for two reasons. First, in Colombia, policymakers reinterpreted 'consequences' as incentives (Conpes 3654) and secondly, there is a disconnection between the behaviours associated with answerability and the ones deemed as consequences. Although these two aspects are highly interrelated, they will be discussed individually to facilitate their analyses against the literature.

In reviewing the literature, the thesis called attention to the assumptions regarding citizens' capacity and interest in engaging in social accountability (Boräng and Grimes, 2021) but also on how some spaces in the 'participatory sphere' offer opportunities to build such capacity (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). This chapter has shown that because rules or the design of social accountability include incentives as one of its constitutive elements, it is possible to find that municipalities and some civil

society organisations provide training or prepare community leaders to engage in social accountability spaces, intervene in public hearings or submit freedom of information requests. However, civil society organisations seem to provide more opportunities since spaces designed by municipalities can replicate exclusionary or limiting practices. Moreover, rules have included incentives as a reinterpretation of consequences (Schedler, 1999; Bovens, 2010) understood as attempts or imposition of sanctions, rewards or calls for redress. While the reinterpretation creates opportunities to learn and prepare to engage in social accountability (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Gaventa and Barret, 2012), it has diluted the importance of consequences to secure responsiveness and citizens' participation in governance (McGee and Gaventa, 2011). Next, this conclusion discusses sanctions and rewards and later on it analysis redress which for analytical purposes and given the empirical data, has been discussed as feedback.

Despite rules at the local level do not include the possibility to sanction or reward, findings show citizens engage in practices such as protests or show overall support to municipalities and mayors. Conceptualisations of social accountability emphasizing mechanisms available to citizens (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006) would see such actions as social accountability themselves or at least the 'voice' element of social accountability (Fox, 2015). With an understanding of social accountability as a subtype of public accountability and with a more relational approach (Schedler, 1999; Bovens, 2007; Brummel, 2021; Houtzager et al., 2020) protest and support can be analysed as informal sanctions or rewards, respectively which can be more symbolic and affect reputation. It is important to bear in mind that consequences identified in the research do not seem to have a direct connection with the behaviours associated with answerability (e.g., access to information, deliberation).

Although practices are not directly connected to what are seen as social accountability spaces (reports, hearings, board meetings), an institutional lens helps to understand how practices that favour opacity and their interplay with clientelism allow citizens to report possible wrongdoing. Similarly, symbolic

consequences, such as popular support, seem connected to officials' 'good news' narrative, as seen in previous chapters. Initially, the findings seem to confirm Schedler's (1999) conceptual premise that accountability can manifest as either answerability or consequences. However, the thesis has argued that both elements are necessary to secure accountability and therefore, social accountability (Bovens, 2007, 2010; McGee and Gaventa, 2011; Fox, 2022). Hence, this thesis' proposition is to understand access to information, justification, deliberation and consequences as interdependent elements. It is the interaction between answerability and consequences that can further explain social accountability's stability, weakness or deinstitutionalisation in different contexts (see also, Fox 2015).

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2 and this chapter, feedback can be seen as a process to secure adjustments or improve public performance in response to citizens' input. For this reason, despite the information exchange can occur at any point, there is analytical value in discussing how such interactions can be conducive or not, to redress, this is officials' commitment to improve or change past decisions or actions (Cunill-Grau, 1997; 2006; Tsai et al., 2019). The findings show that despite rules include feedback as a mechanism to voice concerns and to which officials are expected to redress, practices and narratives limit citizens because they fear retaliation or ostracism, although more research is needed to analyse how feedback provided through surveys is taken by officials and how they respond. This thesis suggests that officials' power to determine what themes are included in surveys plus the low response to them corroborates Fox's argument that "institutional response capacity often remains elusive; in practice feedback loops rarely close" (Fox, 2015, p. 356), this is, social accountability seems to lack 'teeth' or municipalities' capacity to respond to citizens' voice (Fox, 2015; Aston, 2020).

As in previous chapters, findings reveal institutional arrangements shaping accountable behaviour reinforce power asymmetries between officials and citizens. Regarding consequences, such asymmetry seems stronger because is not officials who seem to fear facing consequences, instead

citizens fear local officials will retaliate if they voice their concerns (Fox, 2015), or what Pettit (2013) refers to as invisible power. Moreover, officials are also protected from sanctions because they have co-opted the authorities that citizens approach to report possible wrongdoings, showing the connection between social accountability and other institutions, such as corruption. Still, more research is needed to analyse if within municipalities, there is more capacity or 'teeth' to respond to citizens' concerns by imposing sanctions.

Finally, these findings suggest that understanding social accountability as a process with differentiated stages – information, discussion and consequences – as proposed by Bovens, is not straightforward and an institutional lens might help to better understand social accountability dynamics. There is value in recognising social accountability as a messy institution (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) and uncovering and analysing actions that seem disconnected from each other. Social accountability can be strengthened by understanding the interdependence between answerability and consequences and attempting to secure the alignment between rules, practices and narratives shaping citizens' access to public information, discussing it with officials and then deliberate to assess the consequences they consider adequate.

The next chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the main arguments shown so far and their implications for the literature on social accountability and new institutionalism. It also includes reflections on the methodology, recounting the strength of a case study design to identify and analyse the interplay between rules, practices and narratives considering precedent and neighbouring institutions. Additionally, the next chapter reflects on the limitations of the research and identifies how further research can add to the understanding of social accountability from a relational and institutional viewpoint.

8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.1. Introduction

The last three chapters have shown how institutionalism can help to uncover the structures and dynamics shaping social accountability in Barranquilla and Cartagena. Chapter 5 focused on the identities and roles of public officials as account-givers and citizens as account-holders and introduced the role of civil society organisations as intermediaries or advocates. It highlighted the asymmetries between the actors as a result of their socio-economic status and also the social accountability arrangements. Chapter 6 showed that despite municipalities producing ample information, public officials designing and implementing social accountability strategies tend to disseminate highly technical reports and promote 'good news' instead of a more balanced account of public performance. Simultaneously, most citizens are perceived as lacking the resources and interest in accessing information. Those who do are usually community leaders or CSO members who still find it challenging to access and understand available information despite having professional degrees. Moreover, the spaces designed for discussing information are dominated by public officials who use their discretion to avoid citizens' questions and share stories that ostracise those who might criticise municipalities' performance.

This concluding chapter will analyse these findings in connection with the theoretical and analytical chapters to answer the research questions:

- To what extent do public officials align with the role of 'account-givers' and societal actors that of 'account-holders'?

- How may societal actors assess the performance of public officials?

- How may societal actors impose consequences on public officials, and public officials respond?

The answers to these questions help to respond: How may social accountability be secured in weak democratic contexts? Before answering the research questions, the chapter summarises the thesis. Then it presents the answers, contributing to a relational approach to social accountability beyond initiatives or mechanisms. The findings also challenge assumptions regarding who is accountable to whom, the role of civil society organisations, and the effect of other institutions in the institutionalisation of social accountability; for example, clientelism competes with it, hindering its aim to prevent or sanction wrongdoing. Then, the chapter presents the theoretical and analytical contributions of the thesis. Finally, it discusses its limitations and introduces new questions that can help broaden the understanding of social accountability.

8.2. Summary of the thesis

The starting point for this research was the concern with the role of citizens in maintaining and strengthening democracy at the local level in weak democratic contexts such as Colombia. Situations like narcotrafficking, illegal armed groups, a fragmented party system, clientelism, corruption and other issues make Colombia a 'semi-democratic' country (Mainwaring et al., 2001; Bejarano and Pizarro, 2002; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, 2013). These challenges configure a weak democratic context and raise questions regarding the relationship between citizens and the state at the national and local levels.

In 2010, the Colombian government introduced a new policy for social accountability aiming to strengthen democracy, fight corruption and improve public performance (Isaza, 2017). The policy responded to "inadequate social accountability practices", such as information restrictions, scarce opportunities for dialogue and insufficient incentives for officials to give account and for citizens to demand it (Conpes, 2010, p. 35). Implementing such a policy at the local level created an opportunity to respond to emerging questions in the social accountability literature, such as how the relation between state and citizens influences the success of social accountability interventions. Instead of

focusing on mechanisms or widgets (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012), the focus changes to what structures shape the relationship between account-givers and account-holders, considering the dynamics of power and politics (Hickey and King, 2016).

Chapter 1 of the thesis showed that current debates on social accountability in the international development literature had responded to the limitations of 'mechanistic' approaches focused on initiatives. There has been a shift in the analysis to focus on the structures and contextual factors explaining social accountability (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Hickey and King, 2016; Boräng and Grimes, 2021). The literature review showed that public administration literature had already moved towards this type of analysis by looking into the institutional arrangements regulating how public organisations were held to account (Bovens et al., 2008; Skelcher and Torfing, 2010). The research then identified a contribution to the theorisation of social accountability by identifying the structures shaping it at the local level in weak democratic contexts.

In order to identify and analyse structures shaping social accountability, Chapter 2 introduced new institutionalism as a valuable analytical framework. Analysing social accountability as an institution, a set of arrangements shaping actors' roles and behaviour (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Scott, 2001; March and Olsen, 1989) that empower or constrain actors. An institutional analysis also considers that actors interact with social accountability arrangements (Scott, 2001; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) and such interaction can strengthen or weaken the institution. Additionally, institutions are immersed in 'institutional matrixes', hierarchical institutional orders (Crawford and Ostrom, 1995) and interact with other institutions and are affected by the effects of old ones as well (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; see also Lowndes and Lemprière, 2018). The multiple interactions (between arrangements, arrangements and actors, and other institutions) can enhance or hinder social accountability desired effect of citizens exercising control over public organisations and officials. In other words, the institutional dynamics

can lead to institutionalisation or deinstitutionalisation (weakness, failure, or incompleteness) of institutions.

Chapter 3 described the methodology adopted in the thesis, an embedded single case study (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2018) that focuses on social accountability as the object of study through two cities as units of analysis. It argued that an institutional analysis requires the use of different methods to identify the institutional arrangements. Documentary evidence helped identify rules, while observation and interviews allowed practices and narratives to be identified. Three iterative analysis processes (pre-fieldwork, the compiling of data and the refinement) helped to identify the findings and organise the key insights regarding social accountability and the study of institutions in weak democratic contexts.

Moving from the theoretical to the empirical second part of the thesis, Chapter 4 provided a contextual setting for the research findings. It drew upon the concept of an 'institutional matrix' and discussed three institutions with potential interactions with social accountability. The legacy of exclusionary bipartisanism in the organisation of the state and ideas held by the political elite and officials. Also, how clientelism and decentralisation manifest in Colombia and the Caribbean cities, the first providing incentives for corruption and depoliticization. Decentralisation provides local governments with autonomy from the national level but manifests differently in the cities where analysis was conducted. The chapter also argued that the social accountability national policy is situated within a highly complex and aspirational context. Chapter 4 also characterised the socio-economic context of actors showing that citizens and civil society organisations have faced significant constraints associated with poverty and inequality.

Chapters 5 to 7 showed that power asymmetries resulting from socio-economic characteristics (i.e., officials are part of the economic elite while citizens live in poverty or are under-resourced) are reinforced by institutional arrangements. The introduction of the social accountability policy has met resistance from officials, hampering its institutionalisation. However, the gap has been exploited by

civil society organisations to strengthen social accountability by facilitating access to information and fostering debate and deliberation. Other institutions have also affected institutionalisation: the legacy of exclusionary bipartisanism by perpetuating adversary and exclusionary practices and narratives, corruption by incentivising opacity, and decentralisation within cities by dynamising governance and expanding opportunities to engage in local governance and hold officials and service providers accountable. Section 8.3. discusses the in light of new institutionalism to provide key insights into the understanding and theorisation of social accountability.

8.3. Discussion of findings: contributions of new institutionalism for the analysis of social accountability

This section aims to consolidate and articulate the analytical leverage into social accountability provided by an institutional and relational approach. The analytical framework has been used to examine the case study of social accountability in two Colombian cities as subunits of analysis. Colombia faces several democratic challenges including limited social accountability explained by the existence of "inadequate practices" such as lack of access to information, few opportunities for dialogue and insufficient incentives (Conpes 3654, p. 35). The country presents a significant opportunity to analyse social accountability as an institution - a set of arrangements shaping behaviour – because it has a policy designed to strengthen social accountability, a key starting point for institutional analysis.

In this way, the thesis adds to existing work on social accountability (e.g., Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Hickey and King, 2016) asserting the need to pay closer attention to state and citizen interactions and what structures them, instead of specific mechanisms or initiatives, the more traditional approach to understanding social accountability (e.g., Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Fox, 2015; Isunza-Vera and Gurza, 2014). The thesis contributes to the recent body of knowledge in three ways: developing new institutionalism as a lens to analyse social accountability beyond mechanisms and focusing on what

shapes actors' roles and behaviour. Secondly, it adds to the institutional lens found in the field of public administration which has focused on formal rules and seems more common in more 'settled polities' (Olsen, 2013; Bovens et al., 2014; Mathur and Skelcher, 2007; Brandsma and Schillemans, 2012) whereas this research also investigates how practices and narratives interact with human action to shape behaviour (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) and in less settle polities. Third, it helps to uncover how context matters in understanding social accountability, arguing that it is important to analyse the interplay between different institutions and the effect of old and neighbouring institutions, such as bipartisanism or decentralisation, on social accountability.

Regarding the analysis of social accountability through new institutionalism, the thesis argues that social accountability is commonly seen as a key aspect of democracy (Mainwaring, 2003; Malena et al., 2004; Boräng and Grimes, 2021; Fox, 2022), a democratic value or principle to be secured (Bovens, 2007; Gaventa and Barret, 2012; Pettit, 2013; Kosack and Fung, 2014). Instead, the thesis has analysed social accountability as an institution, a set of rules, practices and narratives shaping accountable identities (account-giver and account-holder) and behaviour which contributes towards its theorisation. The design of new rules to establish or strengthen social accountability does not secure the desirable change or result (Cornwall et al., 2008; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Blanco et al., 2022) since institutions also encompass practices and narratives and depend on human action to be animated (Scott, 2001). However, officials and societal actors are immersed in socioeconomic contexts that can either facilitate or hamper their interaction with the new rules. Moreover, given that institutions distribute power, new arrangements themselves can reinforce existing asymmetries in power and agency (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

As Olsen (2013) claims, institutions shape actors' identities and are an arena to decide who deserves to be accepted as legitimate actors. The analysis of the empirical data shows that despite social accountability, a subtype of accountability, is in essence a way to control power (Schedler, 1999;

Mulgan, 2000) this cannot be secured by the simple introduction of new rules. As other researchers have shown those who are part of the elite, such as public officials in some cases, would like to maintain the status quo (Baiocchi et al., 2006; Rodan and Hugues, 2012), they do so by resisting new rules and by exercising power through practices and narratives (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) that effectively allow officials to limit societal actors' role as account-holders. However, seeing social accountability as an institution and therefore an arena for political struggle, helps to uncover the combative agency of certain actors (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Olsson, 2016). For instance, in certain contexts, civil society organisations can engage in practices and offer counter-narratives to those mobilised by public organisations to secure social accountability. By doing so, these organisations expand their role of account-holders to supporters or intermediaries between municipalities and citizens. This intermediation in social accountability differs from other types, rather than speaking for marginalised citizens (Grimes, 2013; Piper and von Lieres, 2015), civil society organisations can, through new practices and narratives, make public information more accessible (Hernández et. al, 2021) or support citizens to discuss public decisions or impose consequences over officials (see a similar argument in Blanco et al., 2022).

Furthermore, analysing social accountability as an institution following the framework proposed by Lowndes and Roberts (2013) also requires identifying practices and narratives shaping behaviour. This adds to a type of analysis of accountability, not so common in weak democratic contexts such as Latin America, that has focused on how formal arrangements "govern the behavio[u]r of public agents" (Bovens et al., 2014, p. 22; Mathur and Skelcher, 2007; Brandsma and Schillemans, 2012). In this way, it is possible to recognise that institutional formation is a dynamic process in which formal arrangements interplay with informal ones that result from 'how things are done around here' and the values and ideas held by different actors. Analysing the interplay between institutional arrangements allows seeing the political struggle between different actors who might want to favour opacity (e.g., officials) and those trying to enforce social accountability (e.g., community leaders or civil society

organisations) (Blanco et al., 2022; Olsen, 2013; Gaventa, 2006; Hickey and King, 2016). The thesis adds to the understanding of political struggle around social accountability by showing that tension or struggle also results from the misalignment between the rules, practices and narrative enacted by account-givers or account-holders. For example, public officials can enact rules requiring the publication of information but how this information is shared (practices) can be rendered inaccessible if is highly technical and complemented by narratives that promote disbelief in organisations or leaders offering counternarratives or criticise public officials. Then, tension is produced between two institutional processes, stability produced by the enactment of rules and weakness produced by the subversion of rules through practices and narratives hindering social accountability.

The institutional lens can also help to understand how context matters for the institutionalisation or effectiveness of social accountability since it can further explain the misalignment between arrangements which can be connected to how social accountability interacts with other institutions. Drawing on Helmke and Levitsky's typology (2004, p. 728), the thesis argues that any institution, formal or informal can have competing, complementary, substitutive or accommodating effects on others. In the instance of social accountability in Colombia, this thesis looks at how exclusionary bipartisanism (García, 2008; Gutierrez-Sanin et al., 2007), and clientelism, an old formal and a current informal institution respectively, are in a *competing* relationship with social accountability's rules. Actors must choose between risking ostracism or attempting to voice their concerns or sanction wrongdoing or favour opacity instead of transparency and dialogue. Similar historical trajectories have been analysed in other countries, such as Brazil (Cornwall et al., 2008) or the Philippines and Cambodia (Rodan and Hugues, 2012). Institutionalism provides a language that helps to explain the effect of the political and historical context on current arrangements.

Still, other institutions might have a positive effect on social accountability and bolster meaningful and ongoing interactions between actors. The thesis proposes that decentralisation within cities can have

a *complementary* effect on social accountability, creating incentives to enact social accountability at localities or neighbourhood levels. The empirical data shows that citizens would have more opportunities to be informed, discussed and call for redress when they can engage with other authorities or actors who are also responsible for the delivery or services or to whom municipalities have transfer some of their functions.

The thesis also argues the importance of analysing context at the local level. Previous research paying attention to the settings in which social accountability emerges have focused on the national history and politics (e.g., Grandvoinnet et al., 2015; Odugbemi and Lee, 2011; Sarker et al., 2022). By analysing social accountability at the local level, the research acknowledges that despite attempts to design a complete institution (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Durose and Lowndes, 2021), they are animated and depend on the interaction with human action. National policy designs and practitioners (international or civil society organisations) aiming to strengthen social accountability need to consider that power dynamics and political struggles vary at the local level, even in cities with similar historical trajectories such as Barranquilla and Cartagena.

All three points discussed above regarding analysing social accountability as an institution shaping the relationship between public organisations and societal actors show an ongoing tension between enactment and resistance to social accountability arrangements. There are two types of tension, one that results from the political struggle between those who resist social accountability and those who attempt to secure it. The second type of tension results from how a singular actor, for example, public organisations, subverts rules (Olsson, 2016) through practices and narratives. Both types of tension could be interpreted as deeming social accountability weak for not effectively securing answerability and consequences (Levitsky and Murillo, 2014; Brinks et al., 2020) or instrumentally incomplete because it has been stalled or subverted (Durose and Lowndes, 2021). These categorisations can be highly normative, informed by an understanding of social accountability as a desirable value or virtue

(Durose and Lowndes, 2021; Bovens, 2007) while understanding as an institution itself requires empirical examination of how it interacts with actors across different contexts and provides a less pessimistic view of institutional dynamics in weak democratic contexts.

An institutional approach such as the one proposed by Lowndes and Roberts (2013) can better explain the nuance of social accountability. For instance, in this case, it has shown that rules have been enacted, even partially; that new practices are emerging such as increasing public hearings, providing training or narratives supporting social accountability and offering counter-discourses to those mobilised by public officials. The case analysed in this thesis suggests that to further the understanding of institutional dynamics, beyond design, change and failure it is necessary to pay closer attention to the tension between stability and weakening. Usually, institutional change is analysed as either punctuated or incremental (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Scott, 2001) but linear. However, similar to what Blanco et al. (2022) argue regarding participatory governance, social accountability can also be a continuing terrain of conflict, understanding the source of tension can help advocates of social accountability to attempt to further strengthen it. This proposition is further discussed in the next section presenting the thesis' contributions to the literature on social accountability, new institutionalism as an analytical framework and other lessons for practitioners and policymakers interested in strengthening social accountability.

8.4. Contributions of the research

The research sheds new light on social accountability, usually understood as mechanisms available to citizens and their organised interests to hold public organisations or officials to account. It contributes to more recent definitions that analyse it as a relationship between officials and societal actors, allowing a deliberative oversight and forcing modification of public decisions or sanctioning wrongdoing. The findings respond to a gap identified in the literature on social accountability that argues there is not enough understanding of the structures and historical trajectories shaping social

accountability (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Olsen, 2013; Boräng and Grimes, 2021). The innovative analysis of social accountability in a weak democratic context using new institutionalism (sp. Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) provides a deeper understanding of the different degrees of relationality (Bartels and Turnbull, 2020) between public officials, citizens and civil society organisations. For instance, officials have more sustained interactions with the elite civil society organisations than grassroots.

An institutional analysis of social accountability in contexts such as Colombian cities also contributes to expanding the understanding of institutional dynamics and the tensions resulting from the overlapping between institutions. The insights gained by the institutional and relational approach to social accountability contribute to the literature on social accountability, new institutionalism as an analytical framework and policy and practice. First, in terms of the theorisation of social accountability, the thesis argues that social accountability involves more than two roles, account-giver and account-holder, because other actors, such as civil society organisations, can be advocates or intermediaries. Then, it is highlighted that despite social accountability assuming societal actors' capacity to hold officials accountable, the interplay between rules, practices and narratives can empower officials instead. Thus, social accountability arrangements can favour opacity and hinder citizens' capacity to hold officials to account.

Secondly, the research contributes to new institutionalism, suggesting that Lowndes and Roberts' (2013) analytical framework could be adjusted to differentiate practices from norms (the desirable, what should be done), supporting Scott's (2014) conceptualisation of practices as 'carriers' that embody institutions, but they are not constitutive elements. The thesis also contributes to understanding institutions as overlapping and dynamic structures whose (de)institutionalisation results from permanent tensions produced by how actors enact, resist or change institutions (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Brinks et al., 2020; Durose and Lowndes, 2021). Finally, the section argues that the

findings could interest policymakers and practitioners who conceive of social accountability as inherent to democratic governance to identify points of entrance to strengthen it.

8.4.1.   *Contributions to social accountability literature*

This section presents two ways in which the thesis contributes to a better understanding of social accountability in weak democratic contexts, first, regarding how actors relate to each other and second, by showing how institutionalism helps to answer how context matters. A prominent approach to social accountability in the development literature focuses on the actions of civil society or mechanisms available to societal actors to prevent or sanction corruption or improve performance (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Isunza-Vera and Gurza, 2014). Still, more recently, others have maintained the need to pay more attention to the relationship between the state and society (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Hickey and King, 2016; Joshi, 2023) to understand better and improve social accountability and to strengthen citizen participation (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Gaventa and Barret, 2012). Joshi and Houtzager (2012, p. 146) define social accountability as "ongoing political engagement by social actors with the state", a definition similar to the ones that conceptualise social accountability as involving two actors, an account-giver and an account-holder (e.g., Brummel, 2021). The thesis builds on a relational account and argues that social accountability can be more than a binary relationship between the state and societal actors (citizens, civil society organisations).

Borrowing from the analysis of relationality by Bartels and Turnbull (2020), the thesis shows that three sets of actors, public officials, citizens and civil society organisations relate to each other in different forms and degrees. Two key lessons are drawn from looking at how these three actors interact with each other. First, civil society organisations do not always play the role of account-holder but can act as intermediaries, not speaking for citizens (Piper and von Lieres, 2015) but supporting citizens through training or by facilitating access to public information. For example, in Cartagena, workshops run by CSOs help community leaders build capacities to engage with the municipality and redress some concerns. Second, not all citizens or CSOs relate in the same way with officials who seem to have more

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sustained interactions with elite civil society organisations than grassroots, showing that social accountability arrangements can reinforce existing asymmetries instead of empowering poor or disadvantaged groups (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Joshi, 2023). Thus, social accountability encapsulates multiple relationships that can manifest as a network of interconnected actors instead of a binary between account-givers and account-holders. Each of the three actors has different degrees of capacity and power (agency) to enact social accountability arrangements. The asymmetries between them and their motivations create tensions between the enactment of social accountability and its weakening.

Although the thesis focuses on municipalities as the account-giver, findings show that citizens also relate to public service providers or other public organisations. In a context where the municipality or the mayor figure is perceived as weak and/or there are robust decentralisation arrangements, citizens engage more easily with other authorities (see also Cornwall et al., 2008). While Bovens (2005) used the "problem of many hands", referring to the dilemma faced by account-holders to identify who to hold accountable within an organisation. The thesis extends the argument by noticing that the complexity of governance nowadays means that citizens must engage with multiple actors who have power or authority over public issues such as public services provision or who can take decisions over local amenities such as parks or roads.

The thesis also contributes to answering recent questions about how the context and power relations at a particular place and time (Gaventa, 2006; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Pettit, 2013; Hickey and King, 2016; Boräng and Grimes, 2020) shape accountable behaviour. Previous research in developing countries has highlighted the role of historical trajectories and socio-economic inequalities in the success or failure of social accountability initiatives (e.g., Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Grandvoinnet et al., 2015) or citizen engagement (Coelho, 2007; Cornwall et al., 2008). In the Philippines and Cambodia, Rodan and Hugues (2012) identified the effects of the Cold War regimes on civil society fragmentation,

empowering already powerful groups to co-opt initiatives. Similarly, Joshi and Houtzager (2012) suggest that what might explain why collective actors engage in different social accountability activities (i.e., hearings or formal grievances) is their past and ongoing connection to national policy networks. Meanwhile, Lakha et al. (2015) argued that local elites in Karnataka-India have co-opted audit mechanisms to maintain their status. The thesis has shown that new institutionalism can contribute to advancing such understanding by analysing social accountability as an institution interacting with the actors within a broader 'institutional matrix' (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, see also discussion on pages 70-2 of the thesis).

The thesis argues that institutionalism provides a framework to better understand the interaction between social accountability arrangements and human action, and the effect of other institutions on the formation or institutionalisation of social accountability by looking into how actors interact with multiple and sometimes contradictory institutional arrangements. By looking into rules, practices and narratives, institutionalism provides insights into what lies behind the gap between the expectations generated when an institution is designed, and the actual behaviour (Mayka, 2019). Other scholars have proposed explanations for this gap or citizen inertia or inaction. However, while authors such as Joshi (2023) frame historical legacies and social norms as 'contextual features', the thesis identifies old and current institutions as external but interacting with social accountability; and social norms as intrinsic to social accountability. Including social norms (practices and/or narratives) as inherent to institutions along with rules provides explanatory insights to better understand the interplay and gaps between the three types of arrangements, which in turn helps explain social accountability's institutionalisation or weakening.

For example, analysing the role of public officials as account-givers through the lens of new institutionalism reveals that they interact with rules enacting or embracing their role but exercise power through practices and narratives in ways that resist it. Officials' capacity to decide what

information to share and how to frame it might comply with the duties imposed by rules. Nevertheless, their practices can hinder access to information if what is shared is highly technical or framed using narratives that impede meaningful engagement with it or debate it (Bovens et al., 2014; Graves and Wells, 2019). The institutional perspective on account-givers and how they enact or reject social accountability arrangements helps to explain the tension between stability or social accountability achieving its aim and weakening. Moreover, this type of analysis opens opportunities for practitioners and officials themselves to identify points of entrance to strengthen social accountability.

Lowndes and Lemprière (2018, p. 229) stated that institutions are "interconnected with a range of other institutions, which reinforce or undermine its effects" (see also Cornwall et al., 2008). Three institutions that interact with social accountability were identified by this research: exclusionary bipartisanism, clientelism and decentralisation. Decentralisation's effects complement social accountability by facilitating citizens' engagement with organisations and officials that have a crucial role in their livelihoods. However, the research shows that other institutions can compete and displace social accountability. For instance, the legacy of exclusionary bipartisanism has significantly affected narratives, especially in officials' discouraging scrutiny. Although social accountability aims to prevent and sanction misconduct, practices of clientelism compete and accommodate against social accountability arrangements since actors decide which arrangements to enact, those that favour opacity or report possible wrongdoing. In this way, clientelism undermines social accountability, which the power exercised by officials facilitates. In other words, social accountability arrangements (rules, practices, narratives) can facilitate the co-option of societal actors when they empower officials in ways that might favour opacity and limit societal actors' capacity to hold officials to account.

### 8.4.2. Contributions to institutionalism as an analytical framework

New institutionalists have argued that institutions are not merely implemented or rejected (Streeck and Thelen, 2005; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) but depend on the constant actions of actors. The research supports the importance of looking at human action to analyse institutional dynamics arguing

that institutions and actors' behaviour are mutually constitutive. More efforts are needed to detangle how agency informed by one institution, such as clientelism, can shape another institution, such as social accountability. As Olsson (2016) suggests, there is a need to look into 'micro-mechanisms of action' to uncover the tension between different logics of action behind particular behaviours (see also Olsen, 2013). For example, public officials adopt rules in sync with national legislation but seem to use their power or recur to clientelism to subvert the rules. The tensions between logics of action might increase the challenges for institutional effectiveness, that is, shaping behaviour according to the values carried by the institution (e.g., transparency, dialogue, responsiveness).

The research has shown the importance of embracing the complexity and messiness of institutional processes (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). While Scott (2001, p. 95) maintained that analysts faced the dynamism of institutions by focusing on a specific moment of either institutional formation or change, the research argues that more than linear processes of incremental or punctuated change (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) researchers need to pay attention and help to understand the ongoing tensions between institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation. This tension is represented in Figure 8.1. which is an update of Figure 2.1. (Chapter 2, p. 76) showing the connections between the institutional concepts mobilised in the thesis. A new element has been added between stability and weakness to portray the tension between these two processes. Recognising this tension invites to consider that in addition to the effect of deinstitutionalisation emerging from weakening, the ongoing tension between weakening and stability produces variations in the behaviour of different actors (i.e., citizens, officials, CSOs) depending if they perceived the institution (e.g., social accountability) is achieving its aim or not.

Figure 8.1. Institutionalism conceptual connections updated
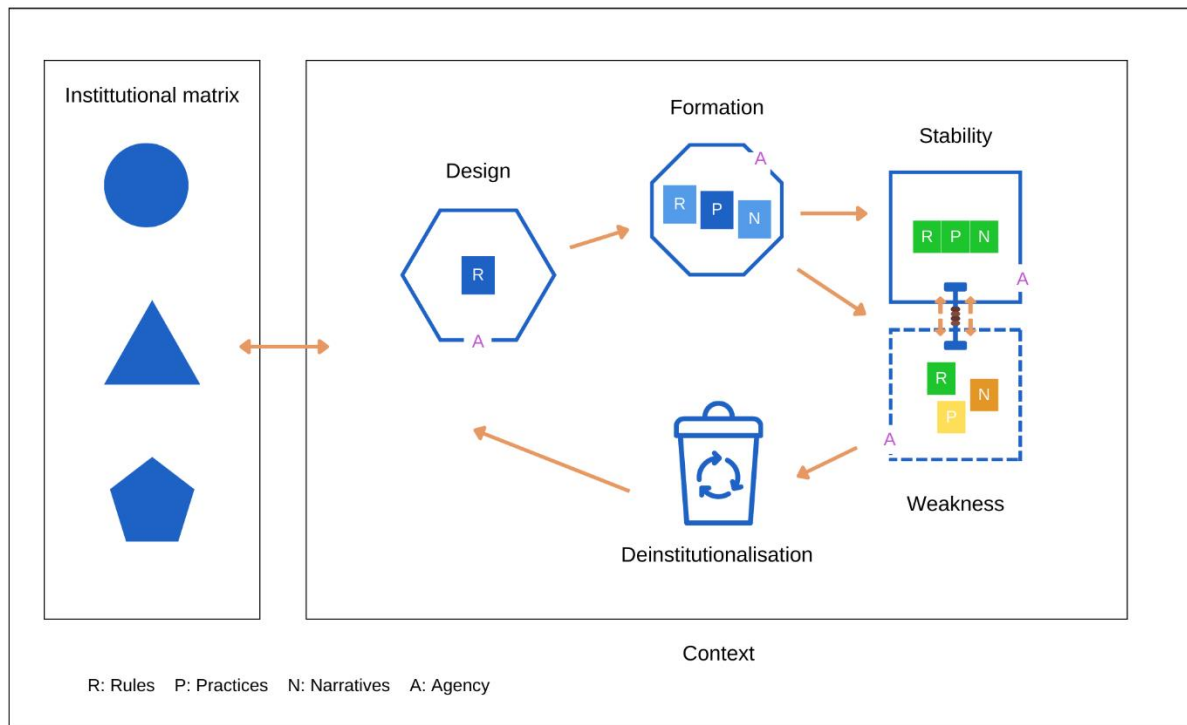
Author's own elaboration

While some actors engage in 'window dressing', others are combatting noncompliance via practices or offering counter-narratives in an attempt to strengthen institutions. The 'messiness' of institutions (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) results not only from the variety of political issues they configure or the interplay of institutional arrangements, but institutional dynamics are messy too. The analysis of social accountability shows that actors, especially officials, simultaneously enact and resist accountability arrangements. At the same time, other actors attempt to strengthen social accountability by trying to enforce rules. In cases where tensions arise from processes of institutionalisation and weakness, Durose and Lowndes's (2021) nuanced approach to incompleteness offers a better analytical framework than weakness (Brinks et al., 2020). For example, window dressing institutions might not be failing but in the process of formation/incompleteness, and the idea of 'failure' might hinder processes aiming to strengthen democratic institutions such as social accountability. For instance, the social accountability policy was created in 2010, and although there are still critical challenges to its

institutionalisation, the research shows that it is not a weak institution but an incomplete one facing tensions towards institutionalisation and weakness simultaneously.

8.4.3. Contributions to policy and practice

This research responds to the need to better understand the structures shaping social accountability and also to strengthen it, especially in contexts where "inadequate practices" (Conpes 3654) exist. The findings of this research have a number of practical implications for policymakers and actors involved in social accountability: officials, civil society organisations and organised citizens. The research argues that besides paying attention to power dynamics and historical trajectories (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Hickey and King, 2016; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007), policymakers and practitioners could help to improve social accountability by changing their focus from particular initiatives such as hearings or scoreboards to identify the structures shaping the roles and actions of public officials, citizens and civil society organisations.

Reflecting on how the interplay between rules, practices and narratives shape their behaviour, public officials can better engage with citizens and embody the values associated with social accountability. Given the power officials have they do not only enact rules in the sense of checking a box, how they do it on every day basis can facilitate or hinder citizen engagement which call for detail attention to what information is more relevant to discuss, for example. But, officials are also constrained by practices connected to informal institutions which include narratives that favour opacity, such as seeing criticism as opposition which is sometimes wrongly linked to violence. A possible path to acknowledge these restrictions is to access training to recognise biases against social accountability and identify mechanisms to engage with citizens in an ongoing and meaningful manner.

Another important challenge to strengthening social accountability is improving the capacity of citizens and their organised interests or grassroots organisations to access public information and create independent spaces to assess public performance. However, this capacity is highly dependent on other

factors such as poverty, access to education and other essential services. The thesis identified that community leaders can be unfamiliar with the rights and responsibilities they are expected to fulfil (rules), or that they perceived others as uninterested in engaging in public affairs. The findings of the research can be an input for guidebooks written in more accessible everyday language that community leaders and citizens can refer to and discuss to identify actions to demand information, deliberate and design strategies to reward or sanction officials.

In contexts in which officials show resistance to social accountability arrangements and citizens are more constrained than empowered by institutional arrangements, the role of civil society organisations as enforcers can have a significant impact. Understanding CSOs can have roles other than account-holders, such as intermediaries between officials and citizens, might contribute to increasing and improving citizens' access to and understanding of public information. Appropriating the role of intermediation also implies changing narratives about citizens as uninterested or incapable to hold officials to account. Organisations in Barranquilla, Cartagena and other places interested in contributing to social accountability might continue assisting citizens via training but the thesis indicates that they can further develop their role through practices like creating opportunities to deliberate about public performance, as well as supporting citizens' efforts to sanction and reward officials symbolically (e.g., protests, media).

These findings enrich the understanding of social accountability and institutions with practical implications. Still, the following section recognises the limitations of the research, including the challenge of bringing together different fields analysing accountability, as well as methodological weaknesses such as the difficulty of trying to use the same explanations in other contexts or inconveniences resulting from the fieldwork. The following section also identifies insights for future research to overcome limitations and expand what is known about social accountability and its relation to other institutions.

8.5. Limitations and future research

Although the research contributes to a better understanding of social accountability and demonstrates the pertinence of new institutionalism in exploring the relationship between officials and societal actors, it is important to recognise the limitations of the thesis and possible next steps in research.

8.5.1. *Limitations*

The thesis recognises there are limitations to the methodological approach of the research. First, although a case study was deemed appropriate for institutional analysis of social accountability, the focus on a single term of elected mayors does not provide enough data to explain institutional change. This research is valuable for analysing institutional dynamics and the tensions between institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation. Still, a longitudinal study allowing more extended observation and data is required to explain institutional change processes understood as an institution's displacement by another.

The analysis of social accountability as an institution, a set of rules, practices and narratives shaping behaviour and being shaped back by actors (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), requires a diversity of methods to capture the interactions of each type of arrangement. The constraints of time and resources of doctoral research with fieldwork in another country limited the available time to observe everyday practices and narratives. With the available resources and using rules as a starting point, the research focuses on 'invited spaces' (Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007) which are formal and designed by public officials. Analysing other spaces, created or claimed by societal actors could provide more opportunities to observe other interactions between public officials, civil organisations, and citizens could provide a better understanding of how practices and narratives shape their relationships and how their everyday inform behaviour in spaces designed specifically for social accountability.

Although the thesis has argued that institutions are shaped by their interaction with actors and has identified the structures empowering or limiting actors' behaviour, more data is needed to analyse the

'logics of action' informing how actors respond to institutional arrangements. Further research can contribute to the analysis of social accountability using other techniques such as surveys instead of interviews to expand the number of officials and citizens involved as research participants. Surveys can introduce new questions that better explain why actors enact, resist or reject social accountability arrangements.

8.5.2. Future research

The thesis' institutional analysis of social accountability pays attention to the overlap between social accountability and other institutions such as exclusionary bipartisanism, clientelism and decentralisation. These institutions were selected because participants emphasised them. More research is needed to explore the dynamics resulting from how other prevalent institutions, such as the patriarchy or racism, empower or constrain certain groups to engage in social accountability.

This research has also signalled that inequality affects how different actors interact with public officials. Acknowledging the different degrees of relationality raises questions regarding how specific sectors such as health, culture or education are advanced through social accountability. A comparison of how social accountability varies across communities and their relationship with officials using action-research approaches might increase the understanding of social accountability and increase or strengthen disadvantaged groups' capacity to hold public organisations accountable.

The complexity of institutional dynamics requires paying attention to the interactions between different institutions and the tension between stability and weakening. This research has raised new questions regarding how practices work to empower or constrain behaviour. For example, this thesis has shown that clientelism competes with social accountability, and actors might choose to follow clientelistic practices (e.g., opacity) instead of accountability ones (e.g., transparency). The research also argue that tension can better explain institutional dynamics beyond change or failure but this proposition needs to be further tested in other contexts. Additionally, the findings discussed here raise

the question if Lowndes and Roberts' analytical framework (2013) could be modified to include norms as a type of arrangement and practices as carriers? This is, identifying practices as a way in which institutions are transmitted but not part of their configuration, as seen by Scott (2014) or Pettit (2016).

Finally, further research could connect social accountability literature to democratic innovations and the participatory sphere. Elstub and Escobar (2019) define democratic innovations as either institutions or practices, and they refer to practices as initiatives that have not been formalised or are not long-lasting. What lessons could be drawn from an institutional approach to democratic innovations? This is to look beyond specific initiatives such as mini-publics, citizen assemblies or participatory budgets and pay more attention to the structures empowering or constraining citizens' engagement. Similarly, the analysis of social accountability can be further developed by bringing together the lessons and frameworks from development studies, especially those regarding the 'participatory sphere' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007) and analysing the institutional dynamics of state-citizen interactions in claimed or created spaces in which citizens have more control over the design of the space.

8.6. Conclusion

The institutional analysis of social accountability in Barranquilla and Cartagena shows that there are rules, practices and narratives shaping and being shaped by three sets of actors: officials, civil society organisations and citizens. The configuration of institutional arrangements can result in different degrees to which officials relate to distinctive groups of citizens or organisations, and in a context like Colombia, the combination of aspirational rules, practices informed by clientelism, and exclusionary narratives hinder the institutionalisation of social accountability as a mechanism to secure responsiveness and avoid or sanctioning wrongdoing. Still, more research is needed to understand the logics of action behind human action, especially when there are tensions between overlapping institutions such as social accountability and exclusionary bipartisanism.

The analysis of social accountability as an institution in the Colombian context can also contribute to the consolidation of new institutionalism as an analytical framework. Acknowledging that political institutions are dynamic not only because they are permanently interacting with human action but also because the multiplicity of actors and the institutional context might result in three processes happening at the same time: formation, institutionalisation or deinstitutionalisation. Researchers can be interested in one of them but recognise that they can be simultaneous, especially in a context like Colombia with democratic deficits. Moreover, policymakers and practitioners also need to acknowledge how their attempts to strengthen democracy through social accountability might be affected by the same institutions they need to fight back such as corruption or clientelism.

APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDES

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

1. I would like to start but asking you about yourself and your path to get where you are now. Could you tell me about how you get involved in politics?
   1.1. What did you do before occupying this office?
   1.2. What do you think is your role's main responsibility?
   1.3. How would you describe your relationship with citizens?

2. Now, moving on the topic of social accountability. How your involvement is in the preparation and operation of public hearings for social accountability?
   2.1. Do you have a strategy or plan for social accountability for the whole year?
   2.2. Is that strategy informed by the national guidelines?
   2.3. Whom you identify as channels or partners?
   2.4. What type of information do you use and share previously to the hearing?
   2.5. Do you keep records or minutes of these events? What use do you give to that information?

3. Can you tell me about other activities you are involved with related to social accountability?

4. Thinking about the implementation of all these activities in your municipality, tell me about the biggest challenges you have faced with the community?
   4.1. Has been easy for you to connect with different groups?
   4.2. In your experience, are citizens appealed to engage in these spaces?
   4.3. The Caribbean region is usually associated with political problems such as clientelism and patronage. Do you believe these issues have an impact on the relationship between government and citizens?

5. Reflecting upon the three past years. What is the most valuable lesson you have learned?
   5.1. What practices and lessons learned during your term in office related to social accountability do you think are important to maintain in the following period?
   5.2. What do you think is the biggest challenge to overcome in the upcoming years?
   5.3. This is the final year of this administration. What are your plans for the near future? Do you see yourself working in the same area?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CITIZENS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

1. Could you tell me how your usual relation with the municipality is?

2. In your experience, is the municipality accessible to citizens?
   2.1. Could you give examples about your engagement with the municipality in relation to the planning, execution and monitoring of public policy?
   2.2. Where do you get information about municipality's plans or decisions?
   2.3. What are the constraints for engagement?

3. Have you participated in social accountability hearings?
   3.1. How do you prepare for going to those or similar meetings?
   3.2. For what purpose do you attend these events? Do you do any other thing to get same results?

4. Thinking about your relationship with the current government, tell me about the best and worst interactions you have had with public officials working there
   4.1. What are things you value the most and want the upcoming Mayor to keep
   4.2. Which experiences would you think need to be improved
   4.3. What do you think you as community leaders can improve?

APPENDIX 2. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study Title: Social Accountability Implementation in Colombia: An Institutional Analysis

Researcher: Adriana Algarin Castillo, Doctoral Researcher at the Institute of Local Government Studies (Inlogov) sponsored by Colciencias

This project aims to examine and explain how social accountability has been enacted in Colombian local governments. Decentralisation arrangements allow local governments to interpret and implement the policy with some discretion, which offers the possibility to analyse the formal and informal rules that public officials and citizens use in their social accountability relationship. The research aims to contribute towards advancing a relational concept of accountability, especially in developing democracies such as Colombia, and use lessons learned as tools for democracy and policy improvement.

The study will involve interviews with public officials such as mayors and/or bureaucrats involved in social accountability practices at the Mayor's Office. I will also conduct focus groups with community leaders and/or Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) directors who are highly recognised for their political involvement with issues concerning local government responsibilities. The aim is to know the perspectives and experiences of both groups in relation to citizens' participation and political control over local government's performance. Contact details of mayors, governmental bureaucrats and CSOs will be obtained from official websites, public documents, local press and snowball queries.

You are cordially invited to be involved in this research by participating in a personal interview of approximately one hour. The contribution you make will help to develop further our understanding of how local governments appropriate national legislation and how they made themselves accountable to citizens. The interview will involve questions relating to your role as mayor, your views on social accountability and the context in which citizens participate in your municipality.

Your participation on the project is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time until six (6) months after your interview. With your consent, the interview will be recorded using a digital recorder. You can request to have the recorder switched off at any time, and you can choose not to answer questions. The researcher will transcribe the interview and will not share the information with any third parties. Furthermore, in reporting the findings of this research, your opinions and responses will not be attributed directly to you either by name or by municipality. The researcher will undertake every precaution to ensure your identity is not revealed but due to the fact that participants are well known public figures, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. The data analysis will use pseudonyms instead of your real name. Participation in this project carries no risk of psychological or physical harm. However, should you have any concerns about the research you may contact Dr Catherine Durose the supervisor for this research.

The data will be stored at University of Birmingham Research Data Store system. A summary of the findings will be provided to you by the researcher at the end of the project. In addition to the PhD thesis, the material gathered in this research may be included in published journal articles and conference proceedings.

Many thanks for participating in this research. If you have further question or enquires feel free to contact the persons below: Researcher contact details:

Adriana Algarin Castillo
Doctoral Researcher
Institute of Local Government
Room 1027- Muirhead Tower
University of Birmingham
B15 2TT

Supervisor contact details:

Dr. Catherine Durose
Reader in Policy Sciences
Institute of Local Government

APPENDIX 3. CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Social Accountability Implementation in Colombia: An Institutional Analysis
Name of Researcher: Adriana Algarin C.

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with understanding social accountability implementation by Colombian local governments by a doctoral researcher at the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at the University of Birmingham. The information, which you supply and that which will be collected as part of the research project, will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this information you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018. No identifiable personal data will be published.

Based upon the above and after reading the Participation Information Sheet-PIS, I have understood the nature of the research being conducted and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I understand that the interview will take about one (1) hour.
- ☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time and to withdraw any traceable data to me up to 6 months after the day of the interview.
- ☐ I agree / do not agree to be digitally recorded.
- ☐ I understand that if the interview is audio-taped I can ask for the recording to be turned off at any time and that I may choose not to answer questions.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will undertake every precaution to ensure my identity is not revealed but I also understand that due to participants are well known public figures, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will transcribe the interview and that the data will not be shared with third parties.
- ☐ I understand I will receive a summary of the results at the end of the project.
- ☐ I understand that the electronic data (including transcripts) will be kept in a secure electronic storage at University of Birmingham for 6 years, after which time they will be destroyed.

Name of participant………………………   Date……………   Signature………………..

Name of researcher………………...........   Date……………   Signature………………..

A copy of the signed and dated consent form and the participant information leaflet should be given to the participant and retained by the researcher to be kept securely on file.

APPENDIX 4. LIST OF CONSULTED DOCUMENTS

At the national level

Congreso de la República de Colombia (2015) *Ley Estatutaria - Por la cual se dictan disposiciones en materia de promoción y protección del derecho a la participación democrática.* http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/ley_1757_2015.html.

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Departamento Administrativo de la Función Pública (2014) *Manual Único de Rendición de Cuentas* Versión 1 (Not available online. Current version https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/web/murc/inicio)

Barranquilla

Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2013) *Manual de Rendición de Cuentas – Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla Versión 2.* (Not available online. Current version https://www.barranquilla.gov.co/transparencia/planeacion/politicas-lineamientos-y-manuales/b-manuales)

Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2017) *Informe de rendición de cuentas 2016.* 21 January.

Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2017) *Decreto 086 Por medio del cual se convoca a una audiencia pública de rendición de cuentas a la ciudadanía en el Distrito industrial y portuario de Barranquilla*. 13 January.

Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2017) *Evaluación de la audiencia pública Alcaldía distrital de Barranquilla periodo 2016*. 17 April.

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Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2018) *Informe de rendición de cuentas 2017.* 28 February.

Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2018) Presentation public hearings by sector 2017 (7 Power Point presentations)

Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2018) *Acta de la audiencia pública Alcaldía distrital de Barranquilla periodo 2017.* 16 April.

Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2019) *Decreto 333 Por medio del cual se convoca a una audiencia pública de rendición de cuentas a la ciudadanía en el Distrito industrial y portuario de Barranquilla*. 25 January.

Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2019) Presentation public hearings by sector 2018 (14 Power Point presentations)

Alcaldía Distrital de Barranquilla (2019) *Informe de rendición de cuentas 2016-2019.* 02 December.

Cartagena

Alcaldía Distrital de Cartagena (2017) *Decreto 514 Por medio del cual se convoca a una audiencia pública de rendición de cuentas sobre los primeros cien días de gestión de la administración distrital 'Primero la gente'*. 18 March.

Alcaldía Distrital de Cartagena (2017) *Decreto 1640 Por medio del cual se convoca a una audiencia pública de rendición de cuentas a la ciudadanía en el Distrito de Cartagena de Indias*. 15 November.

Alcaldía Distrital de Cartagena (2017) *Conclusiones/Acta de la audiencia pública Alcaldía distrital de Cartagena periodo 2016.* 15 December.

Alcaldía Distrital de Cartagena (2018) *Presentación Buenos días Alcalde.*

Alcaldía Distrital de Cartagena (2019) *Plan Anti-Corrupción y de Atención al Ciudadano*.

Alcaldía Distrital de Cartagena (2019) *Informe técnico de seguimiento y evaluación del plan de desarrollo "Primero la gente para una Cartagena competitiva y sostenible 2016-2019" Corte junio 30 de 2018 – 2019.* August.

Alcaldía Distrital de Cartagena (2019) *Decreto 1129 Por medio del cual se convoca a una audiencia pública de rendición de cuentas a la ciudadanía en el Distrito de Cartagena de Indias*. 20 August.

Alcaldía Distrital de Cartagena (2019) *Conclusiones/Acta de la audiencia pública Alcaldía distrital de Cartagena periodo 2018.* 24 October.

APPENDIX 5. CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Appendix 5.1. Glossary

Appendix 5.2. Local governance bodies

Appendix 5.3. Map showing the location of Barranquilla and Cartagena

Appendix 5.4. Barranquilla and Cartagena socioeconomic characteristics

Appendix 5.1. Glossary

The definitions included in this section have been redacted by the author based on constitutional and legal definitions.

Municipalities (municipios or alcaldías): local tier of government, they are geographical and administrative units with a recognised legal identity. In each municipality, a mayor is elected every four years to act as the local authority, chief of the local administration and legal representative. Municipalities are responsible for the administration of resources and providing wellbeing to their inhabitants. Municipalities with certain special characteristics (i.e., touristic, industrial, ports) are recognised as districts and receive larger transfers from the national budget.

Municipality or city councils (concejos municipales): elected officials who are responsible for co-administrate municipalities' resources and exercising political control over the officials appointed by the mayor.

Locality councillors (ediles): elected officials who integrate Administrative Local Boards (Juntas Administradoras Locales – JAL). They serve in municipalities with administrative subunits (localidades, comunas, corregimientos) created by municipality councils. They are responsible for helping to improve public service provision and facilitate citizen participation.

Locality mayors (alcaldes locales): official appointed by city mayors from a shortlist presented by locality councillors. They are responsible for administrating the resources established by the municipality and work along with other authorities to monitor and control different aspects of the locality such as construction, safety or public services.

Neighbourhood boards (Juntas de Acción Comunal): civic organisations integrated by volunteers who reside in the same neighbourhood aiming to work together for the full and sustainable development of their communities.

Planning advisory boards (consejos territoriales de planeación): citizen participatory mechanism integrated by citizens who represent different sectors (e.g. culture, business, health, education). Among their functions are to coordinate the discussion of development plans, diagnose priorities and follow up on development plans. They exist at municipality and locality levels.

Policy boards (consejos de política): citizen participatory mechanisms aiming to discuss and decide over several policy sectors such as health, culture, disability or childhood. Usually presided by the city mayor or another municipality's official and integrated by representatives of different government authorities and civil society organisations.

Public hearings (audiencias públicas): public meetings mandatory by law but designed and organised by municipalities to present, discuss and evaluate public performance.

Appendix 5.2. Local governance bodies

Figure Appendix 5.1. Local governance bodies
Author's own elaboration

The Figure above offers an overview of the complex relations between different governance and participatory bodies at the local level in Barranquilla and Cartagena. The three blocks show tiers at the local level, from municipality or city, through localities as municipal subunits and neighbourhoods. At each tier, there can be three types of organisations or bodies involved in local governance: government bodies, which are elected and appointed public authorities. The second type are hybrid bodies or 'invited spaces' (Cornwall, 2004) that are designed and organised by public authorities but where citizens and their organised interest are also expected to participate. The third type are autonomous organisations whose members are citizens or private organisations.

At each block, Figure 9 shows what bodies or organisations exist or are expected to exist at that level. At the city level, the main government bodies are city councils and municipalities. The latter are directed by an elected mayor and heads of departments are appointed by the mayor and other staff can be appointed or be part of the civil service. Hybrid spaces at the city level referenced in the thesis include planning advisory boards, policy boards and public hearings. The thesis also refers to civil society organisations such as the 'Cómo Vamos' initiatives that are present in twenty cities or municipalities in Colombia. Although these bodies are independent some of them (i.e., neighbourhood boards federation) need the support of local governments to function.

At the locality level, the government authorities are the locality councils and the locality mayors. Some 'invited spaces' such as public hearings or meetings can be organised at each locality. Civil organisations working at this level are usually the neighbourhood boards associations although there might be other organisations that limit their work to certain localities instead of working at the city level.

Finally, at the neighbourhood level, the most prominent body involve in local governance are neighbourhood associations. Still, authorities and organisations existing at the city or locality level can also work on specific programs or projects in specific neighbourhoods.

Appendix 5.3. Map of Colombia, Barranquilla and Cartagena location

Figure Appendix 5.2. Map of Colombia

Source: Instituto Geográfico Agustin Codazzi. Highlight of cities, mine.

Appendix 5.4. Barranquilla and Cartagena socioeconomic characteristics

Table Appendix 5.1. Cities' socioeconomic characterisation

	Barranquilla	**Cartagena**	**Colombia**
Area	166 km²	559 km²	1139 million km²
Population	1243056	1003685	48258494
Localities	5	3	NA
Monetary poverty index	25.60%	34.30%	35.70%
Unemployment rate	7.80%	6.80%	10.50%
Social progress index	64.76	63	70.73
Basic human needs	70.4	71.2	79.61
Nutrition and basic medical care	68.5	70.9	87.87
Water and sanitation	98.2	97.1	90.45
Shelter	65.4	66.7	87.62
Personal Safety	49.6	50.1	52.49
Foundations of wellbeing	63.9	61	73.32
Access to basic knowledge	74.7	73.9	78.21
Access to information and communications	70.2	62.9	84.58
Health and wellness	58.9	60.7	64.92
Environmental quality	51.9	46.6	65.55
Opportunity	59.9	56.8	59.26
Personal rights	68.3	64.8	73.66
Personal freedom and choice	64.6	57.3	63.4
Inclusiveness	49.5	49.2	42.33
Access to advanced education	57.4	55.8	57.66

Author's own elaboration.

Sources:

For area and population, National Planning Department-TerriData https://terridata.dnp.gov.co/

For monetary poverty index, unemployment and Social Progress Index: cities scores are available at Reporte metodológico y de resultados del Índice De Progreso Social (IPS) para 15 ciudades de Colombia 2016-2020, http://redcomovamos.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/IPS2021_InformeResultados.pdf.

Country IPS scores are available at https://www.socialprogress.org/global-index-2022overview

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