The Social Architecture of Integrity: Corruption Proofing of Legislation as a Socio-Legal Reform Capable of Building Public Trust

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Abstract

In democratic systems, public trust is increasingly undermined when law-making is perceived as susceptible to undue influence from corrupt or criminal actors. This paper explores Corruption proofing of legislation (CPL) as more than a procedural tool, conceptualising it as a socio-legal reform with implications for institutional legitimacy and public trust. Drawing on institutional theory, the study applies a qualitative comparative policy analysis of CPL designs in Moldova, Lithuania, and Albania. The findings identify two contrasting institutional approaches: an external model relying on independent oversight bodies (Moldova and Lithuania) and an internal model embedded within parliamentary procedures (Albania). While both seek to reduce corruption risks in legislation, the analysis demonstrates that institutional design plays a decisive role in fostering public trust. Independent CPL mechanisms appear better positioned to enhance trust by ensuring impartial scrutiny and reinforcing transparency and accountability. Ultimately, the paper argues that CPL's broader societal significance lies in its ability to reshape formal rules and informal normal of law-making, strengthening democratic resilience against state capture.

Keywords*:* institutional theory, state capture, legislative integrity, democratic governance, public trust, organized crime

Introduction

Democratic governments are entrusted with citizens' votes, promising in turn governing systems and decision-making that follow the common good, economic development and political stability. In this view, public trust influences political behaviours and institutional practices (Morris & Klesner, 2010). However, public

trust is threatened by the nexus of organized crime and corruption, which infiltrates in political, judicial and security systems, legislation and policy outcomes (Allum et al., 2003, Buscaglia & van Dijk, 2003). The most dangerous form of corruption happens when criminal networks instrumentalize the legislation for undue private gain, a phenomenon known as "state capture" (World Bank, 2000, Hellman et al., 2000). When legislation is perceived as a commodity for sale to the highest bidder - be it a corporate lobbyist or a criminal enterprise - it corrodes the social contract between citizens and the state. As a result, citizens withdraw from public and political engagement, as they feel less empowered to influence the government. This leads to lack of accountability and inefficient institutional performance (Kostadinova, 2009, Hitlin & Shutava, 2022). Weakened institutions generate more opportunities for corruption, which in turn intensifies citizens' distrust, creating what Rothstein and Uslaner (2005) describe as a "trust - corruption trap".

Considering the challenges corruption presents to democratic governance, it remains a persistent item on political agendas, shaping policy debates to this day. While traditional anti-corruption efforts often focus on reactive, punitive measures, recent scholars and practices have turned towards preventive mechanisms that enhance transparency, limit discretion and minimize opportunities for rent-seeking (Persson et al., 2013, Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). Among these, corruption proofing of legislation (CPL) has emerged as a significant innovation. CPL is the systemic process of screening the form or substance of draft laws to detect and minimise provisions that may facilitate corruption (Pope, 2006, Reed,2017). Legislative acts may contain ambiguous clauses, contradictions, wide discretionary powers to public officials, exemptions or complex provisions that create legal loopholes, enabling a narrow group of actors to benefit to the expenses of public interests. Such shortcomings in the legislation act thus as catalyst for corrupt practices once the legislation comes into force (Holmes 2002, Hoppe, 2014, Kotchegura, 2018). By addressing these vulnerabilities "*ex ante*", before the law is enacted, CPL aims at ensuring integrity in the legislative process and reassuring citizens that legislation serves the public good.

CPL has a multidimensional impact. It is not merely a procedural scrutiny tool that improves the legislative integrity, but a socio-legal reform with tangible implications for transparency, accountability and ultimately, contributes to rebuilding public trust in democratic institutions. By shifting the focus from punishing corruption to designing laws that are resistant to corruption, CPL serves as a promising tool to ensure that laws serve the public good rather than private interests. This paper reframes the analyses of CPL, by reorienting it from a policy strategy to a broader social science inquiry. Building on this conceptual framing, the paper examines CPL as a governance reform whose impact depends on how it is institutionally designed and perceived by the society. The central research question guiding this study is: How can the institutionalization of CPL, as a socio-legal reform, contribute to building public trust in democratic institutions and strengthening legislative resilience against state capture?

To address this question, the study employs institutional theory and a qualitative comparative policy analysis of CPL frameworks in three post-transition democracies: Moldova, Lithuania, and Albania. These cases were selected because they share similar socio-political context as post-socialist democracies marked by persistent challenges in consolidating the rule of law and public trust. All three experience political polarization, the continued influence of informal norms and high perceptions of corruption, including in the legislative decision-making. Despite these shared characteristics, Moldova, Lithuania and Albania have pursued distinct institutional arrangements to mitigate corruption risks within the law-making process. Moldova and Lithuania exemplify external CPL models, where integrity assessments are conducted by independent anti-corruption bodies. Albania, by contrast, has recently institutionalized CPL within parliamentary procedures, assigning the assessment function to internal actors. Through this comparative design, the paper evaluates how alternative institutional choices, external versus internal oversight, shape the credibility, effectiveness, and trust-building potential of CPL. By analysing these models side by side, the study demonstrates that CPL's contribution to legislative integrity and public trust is not determined solely by the existence of the mechanism, but by the degree of independence, transparency, and consistency with which it is implemented.

Literature Review

The analyses of CPL is explored through three complementary analytical lenses: state capture, the role of institutional design in governance reforms, and social trust. This section first addresses the nexus between corruption and organized crime, as a manifestation of state capture, then applies institutional theory to conceptualize CPL as a governance tool capable of disrupting state capture and ensuring legislative integrity, and finally considers the extent to which CPL fosters social trust and democratic legitimacy.

Corruption constitutes a salient tool of organized crime to advance their agenda. Criminal networks exploit vulnerabilities and corrupt practices in public sector (Blackburn et al., 2017) to integrate within political, social and economic institutions. In seeking to safeguard their activities, organized criminal networks often extend their influence into the political, judicial and security systems of a state (Allum et al., 2003). State capture represents the most severe form of corruption. Unlike "administrative corruption", which involves bribing of public officials in exchange of undue decisions, state capture refers to formation of tailor-made laws that serve private interests (World Bank, 2000, Hellman et al., 2000) of either private or criminal entities. This type of corruption holds particular significance, as it relies on a symbiotic relationship between organized crime and those in power (Gilligan, 2013). However, organized criminal networks are not primarily driven by the pursuit of political power; rather they seek to maximise profits and political benefits. (Paoli, 2002, Barnes, 2017). By infiltrating political actors, organized criminal networks influence legislation and ensure favourable conditions for their illicit activities

(Buscaglia & van Dijk, 2003). The social consequences of this dynamic are profound. When laws serve private or criminal interests, they lose their role as trust-building instruments between the state and citizens. This undermines public trust and civic engagement, fosters perceptions of unfairness and impunity, ultimately deteriorating state-society relations.

To understand how CPL can address this challenge, this paper employs the lens of institutional theory. Institutional theory posits that institutions are the "rules of the game" that influence human interactions (North, 1990). From this perspective, institutions are shaped by both formal (laws and regulations) and informal rules (conventions, norms and code of behaviours). When formal rules are unclear or inconsistently applied, discretion expands and institutional credibility weakens, creating fertile grounds for corrupt behaviours. Lambsdorff (2007) follows on the same perspective, arguing that corruption is systematically fostered by ambiguous legal provisions and weak institutions. Corruption and state capture thus tend to flourish in environments where unclear formal rules interact with deeply entrenched informal norms that tolerate or even encourage illicit practices. These dynamics illustrate that corruption is sustained not merely by isolated legal shortcomings, but by a broader institutional equilibrium that shapes unethical or illicit behaviour. Governance reforms, therefore, should be understood not simply as technical adjustments, but as deliberate efforts to reshape this equilibrium between formal rules and informal norms. Within this framework, CPL can be understood as an institutional mechanism that strengthens formal rules by embedding integrity screening directly into the legislative process. The central analytical question, from this perspective, is whether and to what extent such a formal rule can influence the informal norms and practices of political actors.

The institutional design of a reform is critical to its success. In the context of CPL, the choice between an internal or external mechanism plays a crucial role. An external model (Moldova, Lithuania) has the advantage of greater institutional independence and credibility, since an anti-corruption body outside the Parliament is presumed to provide more objective assessments, disregard political pressure and strengthen public trust through transparent and expert oversight. Such a model may be better equipped to challenge entrenched informal norms within fragile and polarized political systems. By contrast, an internal parliamentary CPL model (Albania) is easier to mainstream into everyday legislative work, build internal ownership of integrity standards and reduce delays by embedding assessments within committees' work. However, CPL checks risk being perceived as less impartial and more vulnerable to political bargaining, potentially failing to achieve their objective. In such context, the adoption of formal structures risks becoming a mean to primarily signal legitimacy, without ensuring substantive implementation (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This suggests that CPL assessments risk becoming symbolic if not embedded into organisational routines and backed by political will. Formal rules change behaviour when they are accepted and valued by those who apply them. This

means that CPL builds public trust only when it becomes an accepted, expected and meaningful safeguard in the legislative process rather than a box-ticking exercise.

The ultimate significance of strengthening formal institutions lies in their ability to generate positive social outcomes, chief among them being social trust. Public trust grows when institutions are seen as impartial, fair, and guided by clear and consistent rules. When laws are predictable and serve the public interest, citizens are more likely to regard institutions as legitimate and to comply with their decisions. By contrast, when legislative processes appear opaque or influenced by private interests, trust erodes and citizens tend to withdraw from political and civic engagement (Mishler & Rose, 2001, Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). By increasing transparency in law-making and reducing discretion through ex-ante integrity screening, CPL can contribute to rebuilding institutional credibility and public trust. Publicly accessible CPL assessments that identify corruption risks and prompt corrective amendments provide visible evidence that legislative processes are subject to meaningful scrutiny. In this way, CPL operates not only as a preventive anti-corruption instrument, but also as a mechanism through which institutions can demonstrate integrity in practice, creating conditions for building public trust.

Methodology

This paper employs the institutional theory framework and a comparative case study methodology to investigate how different CPL institutional designs contribute to legislative integrity and trust-building outcomes. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of how distinct CPL institutional architecture influences informal behaviours, disrupts state capture and fosters accountability, transparency and public trust in comparable socio-political contexts. The analyses focuses on comparing the institutional design of CPL and the procedural framework in Moldova, Lithuania and Albania.

The selection of these three cases is purposive. All are post-transition democracies in Eastern Europe that share structural similarities, including legacies of centralized governance, exposure to corruption risks, and pressures linked to democratic consolidation and European integration. At the same time, they differ in the maturity and institutional embedding of their CPL frameworks, allowing for meaningful comparison of how similar anti-corruption efforts are addressed through distinct institutional designs. Moldova and Lithuania were selected as comparative cases because they represent two consolidated examples of CPL implemented through external, independent oversight mechanisms within post-transition governance contexts. Their experience offers valuable insights into how independence, procedural clarity, and transparency shape the effectiveness and credibility of CPL mechanisms over time, particularly in environments vulnerable to legislative capture. While Albania offers a distinct example. CPL is incorporated within the Parliament and parliamentary committees' work. As such, all cases provide referencing points to

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critically explore the central research question regarding the relationship between CPL architecture and its potential social outcomes.

Data for this paper were collected primary through a comprehensive review of documentary and legal analysis, including national laws, CPL methodologies, parliamentary rules of procedure, and reports issued by responsible institutions. Primary data were supplemented by a review of academic literature, particularly focusing on institutional theory, corruption, state capture and organized crime.

The analysis adopts a comparative institutional perspective to examine how different CPL models operate within their respective governance environments. Rather than detailing procedural steps, it focuses on how key design features, such as the independence of the assessing body, the substantive scope of CPL reviews, transparency requirements and follow-up mechanisms, shape the capacity of CPL to constrain legislative discretion and limit opportunities for state capture. Particular attention is paid to how these features influence the credibility of integrity checks and their ability to signal impartiality and fairness to the wide public.

While recognizing the importance of empirical evaluation, this study does not seek to empirically measure the impact of CPL on public trust, nor does it provide causal evidence linking CPL to disruption of corruption and state capture. Nevertheless, by examining institutional design from a trust-oriented perspective, it delivers a theoretical and policy-focused analyses of CPL as a governance intervention with capacity to generate social outcomes.

Analyses of CPL models: a comparative perspective

The institutional design of CPL varies across the selected cases, reflecting divergent approaches to incorporating integrity mechanisms within the state apparatus. This section analyses the CPL model in Moldova and Lithuania compared to the model adopted by Albania, evaluating them through the lens of institutional theory to understand their potential for fostering legislative quality, transparency, accountability and ultimately, public trust.

The external oversight CPL model: Moldova and Lithuania

In Moldova, CPL assessments on all legislative acts registered in the Parliament are performed by the National Anticorruption Centre (NAC), a specialized independent public institution. The NAC experts are protected by law, ensuring thus greater independence and impartiality of the CPL assessments. Moreover, the independence of the NAC from the Parliament or the government is also a safeguard to the objectivity of assessments and advancement of anti- corruption efforts. The CPL process is governed by a special law and a detailed methodology that guides the identification of corruption risks and corruption risk factors, such as ambiguous provisions, excess discretion, lack of accountability mechanisms, etc. NAC holds a crucial role, not only because it is tasked with the responsibility of integrity checks of legislative acts, but it also provides specific amending recommendations. The CPL

report is then submitted to the initiator of the legislative act who holds the final word on the acceptance/rejection of recommendations. The initiator is however obliged to state the reasons for such a decision. Accepted recommendations are then incorporated into the final version of the legislative act. Furthermore, CPL reports are made available to the public (Law "On regulatory acts", 2017, Methodology "On conducting anticorruption expertise of draft legislative acts", 2017).

Similarly, the CPL assessments in Lithuania are carried out by the Special Investigation Service (SIS), an independent public institution. The regulatory framework is comprehensive and includes a specific law, the Statute of the Parliament and a detailed methodology. Diverging from the Moldova model, not all draft-laws are subject of SIS anti-corruption reviews. Under this model, the initiation of CPL assessments by the SIS is conditional upon a request from the Speaker of the Parliament and other parliamentary bodies, and is limited to draft laws regulating high-risk sectors such as: public procurement, public and political finances, energy, etc. However, SIS may proactively initiate CPL assessments on draft-laws (or even existing legislation) provided that they pose corruption risks. CPL reports contain recommendations and are published online. However, the acceptance or rejection of recommendations remains in the discretion of the draft-law initiator or the Parliament (Law "On prevention of corruption", 2002, Statute of the Parliament of Lithuania, Methodology "On the anticorruption assessment procedure of existing or draft legislation in Special Investigation Service", 2002). This is a rational design choice, because CPL is advisory by nature, while the final decision-making authority and the political accountability rests with the legislator. The Lithuanian model has demonstrated positive records regarding the rate of adopted CPL recommendations (90%) (OECD, 2024), highlighting that the SIS' expertise and competence are highly respected within the political system.

From an institutional perspective, both models from Moldova and Lithuania function as formal checks. They introduce an external oversight architecture, where independent bodies "control" how legislative powers are exercised. An external model offers the public stronger assurance that draft-laws undergo two layers of scrutiny for legislative integrity. In this context, transparency of recommendations, the requirement to justify non-acceptance and the external expert objectivity are foundational elements for building or strengthening public trust. Furthermore, even if legislators retain discretion on whether to follow recommendations, transparency is a critical feature. It allows citizens, civil society and other interested parties to evaluate responses from their representatives, creating thus a public accountability loop.

The internal parliamentary model: Albania

Albania has adopted a different institutional path, integrating CPL process within the Parliamentary procedures. However, CPL is not a concept introduced just recently. Since 2022, the Ministry of Justice has been mandated to perform CPL assessments of

draft-laws submitted by the Government to the Parliament. This process has often left out draft-laws proposed by members of the Parliament or citizens. In January 2025, the Parliament approved statutory amendments and a comprehensive methodology on CPL assessments. The decision to embed CPL within the Parliament reflects a set of pragmatic and institutionally grounded advantages. This internal model preserves parliamentary sovereignty and fosters institutional ownership, framing legislative integrity as a core responsibility of Parliament rather than an externally imposed control mechanism. It also allows CPL checks to be more closely integrated into the legislative workflow, facilitating early-stage scrutiny and continuous interaction with parliamentary committees and staff. Moreover, in a context of limited administrative capacity, the internal approach reduces the costs and complexity associated with establishing a new independent institution, while still enables Albania to demonstrate compliance with EU-driven anti-corruption standards.

Following the amendments, CPL assessments are now carried out within the Parliament, as part of the parliamentary committees' work. All draft laws, despite the initiator, shall be subject to CPL review, provided that they reach a certain threshold. The responsibility to prepare the CPL assessments falls to the legal advisors and the rapporteur of the parliamentary committees reviewing the draft-law. The final decision to accept or reject the opinion relies on the parliamentary committee. (Rules of Procedure, Methodology on preventive assessment of corruption). CPL assessment becomes part of the explanatory notes of the draft-law and is published on the Parliament's website.

Evidently, the internal parliamentary model is a recent development and there are yet not sufficient results or practical evidences to evaluate whether this approach performs better or is less effective compared to the external models established in Moldova and Lithuania. However, from a theoretical perspective, this internal model might present vulnerabilities. A key concern is lack of institutional independence. Advisors and rapporteurs are embedded within the same institutional and political environment. They risk being constrained by partisan consideration, political bargains and informal norms that govern parliamentary consensus. As a result, the CPL process may be exposed to subtle pressures that limits its capacity to function as a genuinely independent integrity safeguard. This weakens the objectivity of assessments and reduces the likelihood that corruption risks embedded in politically sensitive draft-laws are fully addressed. While the intent may be to incorporate integrity considerations seamlessly into the legislative workflow, CPL risks being transformed into a procedural formality rather than a tool capable of functioning as credible constraint on rent-seeking behaviours or tailor-made laws.

Another limitation presented in the Albanian model pertains to the statutory threshold to perform CPL assessments. According to the Rules of Procedure, CPL assessment shall be mandatory provided that the parliamentary committee amends more than 30% of the draft-law. This creates a significant structural loophole that may undermine the preventive logic of CPL. Corruption risks may be introduced

through targeted amendments that remain below the threshold. Initiators of draft laws may fragment amendments, particularly in politically sensitive or interest-laden legislation, escaping thus the threshold. When rules are designed with predictable escape routes, actors tend to adapt their behaviour accordingly, preserving existing informal practices rather than altering them. Moreover, reliance on a numerical threshold fails to account for the qualitative significance of amendments. Even minimal changes may carry high corruption risks, despite representing less than 30% of the content.

These vulnerabilities may have implications for public trust. If CPL process is seen as internally managed and politically negotiable, it fails to signal impartiality and integrity to citizens. Furthermore, when citizens observe that certain draft-laws or amendments escape the integrity screening due to technical limitations, perceptions of selectivity and unequal scrutiny may arise. From a trust-building perspective, this institutional proximity may struggle to be perceived by the public as impartial compared to the external model in Moldova and Lithuania.

Discussion

The comparative analyses of CPL models in Moldova, Lithuania and Albania demonstrate that the institutional design chosen to address legislative corruption significantly shapes both the effectiveness of governance reforms and their capacity to build public trust. From the lens of institutional theory, these models illustrate how variations in independence, oversight architecture and procedural constrains influence the effectiveness, legitimacy of integrity safeguards and the ability to curb state capture and strengthen public trust.

The external model employed by Moldova and Lithuania, whereby CPL assessments are delegated to institutions independent from both the executive and the legislative, represents a more robust intervention against state capture and legislative corruption. Institutional independence reduces conflicts of interest, ensuring that corruption risks are identified by actors who are not directly involved in political negotiation or legislative compromise. Moreover, the NAC and SIS are better positions to apply CPL assessments consistently across politically sensitive draft-laws, limiting selective scrutiny. As a result, attempts to introduce tailor-made laws are more likely to be exposed, making such practices politically costly. In line with the institutional theory, such external oversight systems function as formal constrains designed to disrupt the informal norms of political deal-making that facilitate corrupt legislation.

A defining strength of both models lies in their institutional independence combined with transparency requirements. Publishing of CPL reports provide citizens with tangible evidence that legislation is subject to integrity checks beyond partisan interests. In turn, CPL reinforces perceptions of fairness and accountability. Although CPL opinions remain advisory, parliaments should publicly justify deviations from the recommendations of NAC or SIS. Public justification does not eliminate political discretion, however, it creates political costs to those legislators seeking to introduce

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tailor-made laws to the expense of public good. This process of external scrutiny and public accountability constitutes a key mechanism through which CPL contributes to institutional credibility and strengthening of public trust.

By contrast, the internal model to which Albania has opted faces potential limitations in achieving similar social impact. Lack of independence creates the perception that a CPL assessment might be under the influence of political actors, failing to achieve its objective. While a positive assessment will be accepted without objections, an assessment that identifies red flags and affects underlying private interests might be disregarded or dismissed. Despite the formal requirement to publish CPL opinions online, their capacity to trigger public scrutiny remains limited. Unlike CPL assessments by an independent institution, parliamentary ones do not carry the same weight or distance from political actors. Citizens are more likely to trust integrity assessments issued by actors perceived as impartial and professionally detached from political bargains. In the absence of such independence, transparency alone is insufficient to generate public accountability or social pressure. As a result, the trust-building function of CPL procedure may be limited. From an institutional perspective, the proximity undermines CPL's ability to disrupt informal practices and state-capture dynamics, causing citizens to be sceptic regarding the meaningful control of the legislative process. Consequently, the internal parliamentary model struggles to deliver the signalling effect necessary to strengthen public trust, particularly when compared to external CPL mechanisms embedded in independent oversight institutions.

The analysis further underscores that institutional design alone is insufficient to ensure the effectiveness of CPL. Even in Moldova and Lithuania, where independent models are in place, successful implementation depends on enabling social and political conditions. These include sustained political commitment, adequate institutional resources, and an active civil society and media capable of using publicly available CPL findings to demand accountability. In the absence of these supporting factors, even well-designed integrity mechanisms risk becoming marginal or symbolic. In the Albanian context, these challenges become more evident. Making the internal parliamentary model effective would require deeper changes in political culture, including greater cross-party commitment to integrity standards, transparency that extends beyond partisan interests, and systematic capacity-building for parliamentary staff involved in CPL assessments. Ultimately, the effectiveness of CPL depends less on the formal adoption of procedures and more on the extent to which integrity principles become embedded in everyday legislative practices and values.

Conclusions

This study has examined CPL as an institutional response to legislative corruption and state-capture, capable of strengthening governance and public trust. By combining institutional theory and case studies from Moldova, Lithuania and Albania, the

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analysis draws on the conclusion that the effectiveness of CPL is fundamentally shaped by how it is institutionally designed. However, as emphasized by North (1990), institutional credibility depends on the clear, predictable, and consistent enforcement of formal rules - an insight that is central to understanding why CPL may produce different outcomes across institutional settings.

Institutional choices condition incentives, structure behaviour, and influence how reforms are perceived by citizens, particularly in environments vulnerable to unethical or illicit practices. Institutional choices are however related to the socio-political context of each country. Moldova and Lithuania have approved CPL procedure years before Albania, when corruption in post-transition countries was perceived as deeply integrated within state structures. While Albania has just recently institutionalized the CPL assessment as part of parliamentary procedure, in a time when democratic governance has shown notable progress and oversighting mechanisms have been put in place. Nonetheless, Albania remains committed to further advancing governance reforms and strengthening public trusts, especially in the context of its European Union accession path.

The key finding of this research suggests that an external, independent mechanism as implemented in Moldova and Lithuania, remains an optimal choice compared to an internal parliamentary model like in Albania. An independent CPL mechanism strengthens public trust precisely because it is perceived as impartial and professionally detached from day-to-day political bargaining. In contexts where citizens remain cautious toward political institutions, independence functions as a credibility anchor: it reassures the public that integrity assessments are not influenced by partisan interests or short-term political calculations. By clearly separating legislative decision-making from corruption-risk evaluation, independent CPL bodies reduce conflicts of interest and close institutional spaces that could otherwise be exploited for state-capture purposes. This separation is particularly relevant in transitional democracies, where informal norms may persist alongside formal reforms.

At the same time, the Albanian experience should not be viewed as a failure, but rather as an important stage in an evolving governance reform process. The decision to extend CPL assessments to all draft laws, regardless of the initiator, represents a meaningful step toward equal treatment, procedural fairness, and legislative transparency. Embedding CPL within parliamentary work contributes to the gradual internalisation of integrity norms among legislators and parliamentary staff, fostering a culture of prevention rather than reaction. With sustained political commitment, enhanced professional capacity, and clearer safeguards, the internal model holds the potential to mature into a more effective integrity mechanism.

Nevertheless, this study suggests that, in its current form, the internal parliamentary model alone may struggle to deliver the strong trust-building and capture-resistant effects observed in systems with external oversight. Independence remains a decisive factor for ensuring that CPL operates as a genuine constraint on discretionary power,

rather than as a procedural requirement vulnerable to selective application. Strengthening Albania's CPL framework through complementary external review, reinforced transparency obligations, or hybrid oversight arrangements could therefore enhance both its preventive impact and its legitimacy in the eyes of citizens.

Lastly, another important dimension emerging from the comparative analysis is the role of CPL in mediating the relationship between political culture and public trust. Beyond its immediate function as a safeguard against legislative corruption, CPL can influence how both legislators and citizens understand the meaning of responsible law-making. When integrity screening becomes an integrated and visible component of legislative scrutiny, it signals a willingness on the part of political actors to subject their own decisions to constraint. In Moldova and Lithuania, the external CPL model not only enforces oversight but also communicates a clear normative message: corruption-risk assessment is a non-negotiable element of democratic governance. This repeated exposure to integrity review contributes to normalizing higher standards of transparency and accountability within political practice. For citizens, consistent application of CPL checks can gradually strengthen public trust in the law-making process, as it demonstrates that legislators are not merely producing laws, but actively seeking to ensure that those laws serve the public interest rather than private interests.

In the Albanian context, where the internal CPL model is still consolidating, the trust-building effect is necessarily more incremental. Nevertheless, even a developing CPL framework can influence political culture by prompting legislators to address integrity risks at earlier stages of law-making process. Over time, this approach may discourage informal bargaining and tailor-made laws, bringing legislative practice closer to citizens' expectations of fairness and impartiality. Crucially, public trust does not emerge solely from successful enforcement outcomes, but from the perception that political actors are willing to bind themselves to integrity standards. When CPL is consistently applied and visibly integrated into parliamentary scrutiny, it can function as a signal of political commitment to corruption-free legislation. In this way, CPL contributes not only to preventing legislative capture, but also to reinforcing the "social contract" between citizens and their representatives, reinforcing trust through demonstrated adherence to institutionalized integrity norms rather than through rhetoric alone.

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