



The Asia Foundation

A GLASS HALF-FULL

Civic Space and Contestation in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal

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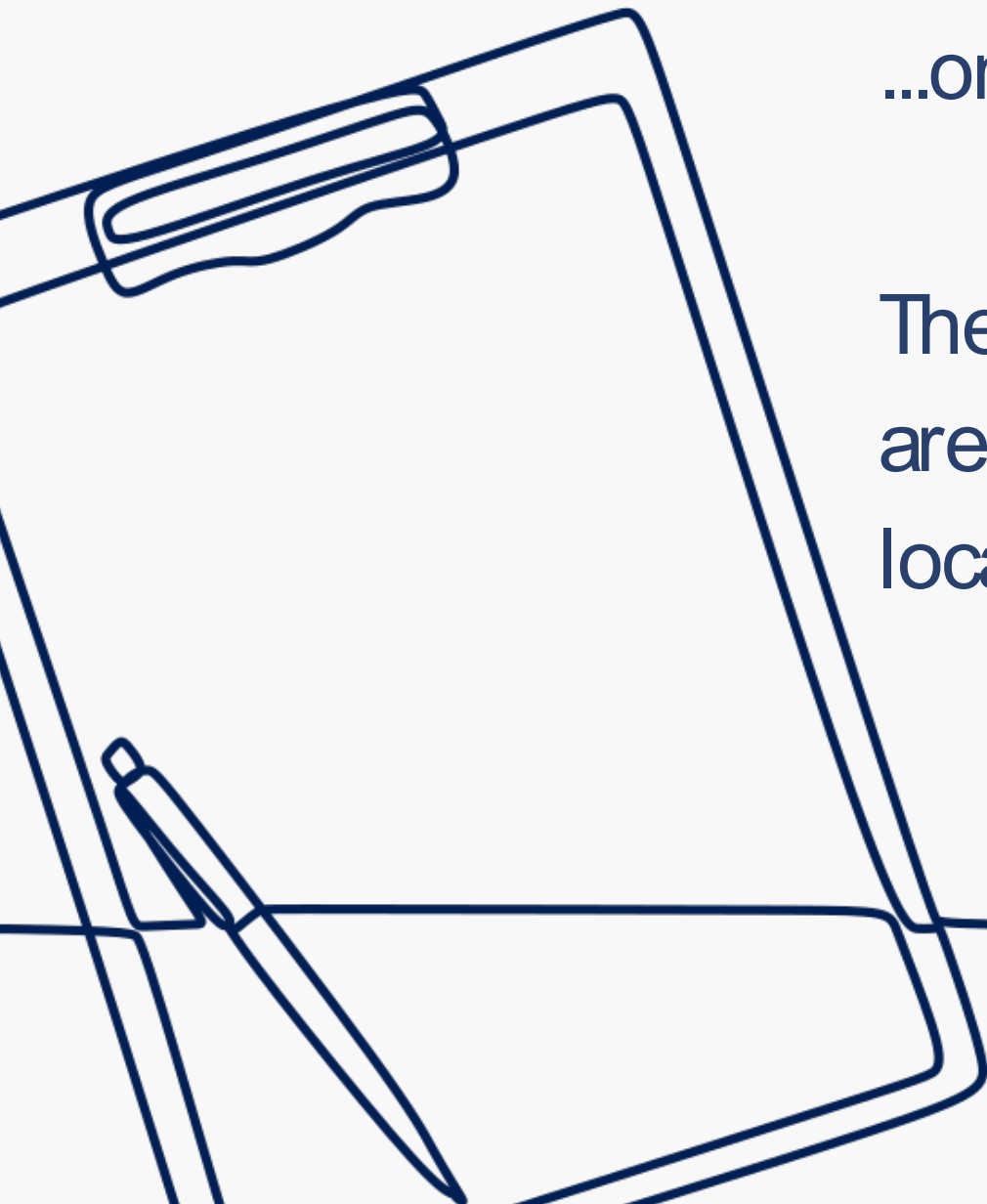


The Story...

We know that the boundaries around civic space are tightening.

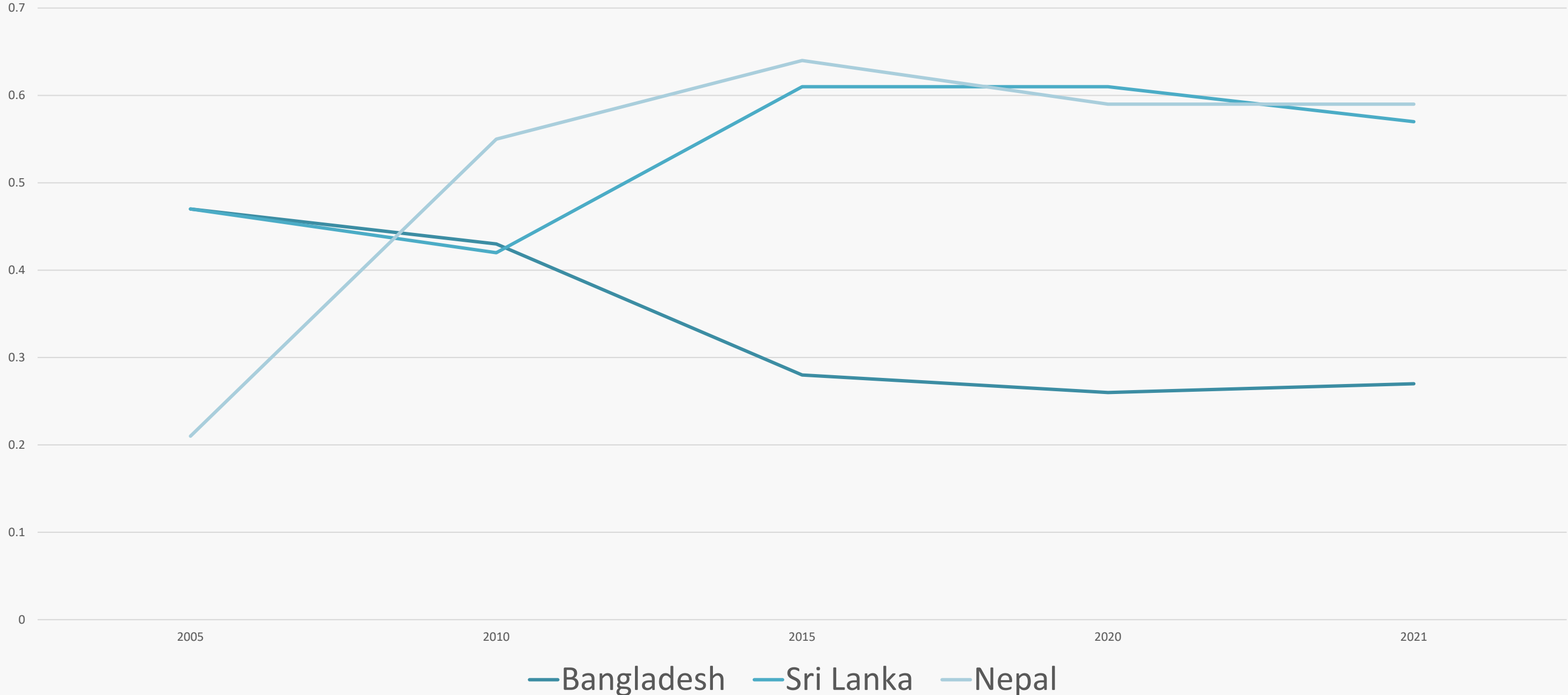
...only one half to the story

The other half is one in which affected citizens, collectives, & organizations are adapting, pursuing openings, and even defending the boundaries of their local and national civic spaces.



The experience also varies across and within countries

Democracy trends in South Asia 2005 – 2021: Liberal Democracy Index



Our focus

- How are civic spaces shifting in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal from the perspective of civil society organizations?
- How is civil society responding to and demonstrating resilience to these shifts and changes
- How and where can development partners engage with civil society in the region.



96 survey respondents - 14 in-depth interviews - 3 validation workshops

Why civic spaces?

Set of institutional and practical conditions for individuals and groups to access information, express themselves, organize and participate in their societies.

At the center of participatory and liberal principles of democracy

"greatest defense of an open and democratic society" - Varieties of Democracy

CIVIL SOCIETY

It is why civil society often find themselves as the last line of defense, & changes to the ability of civil society to perform its functions are a compelling indicator of a democracy's health.



Four interconnected trends



#1 Civic space are under pressure and increasingly less vibrant

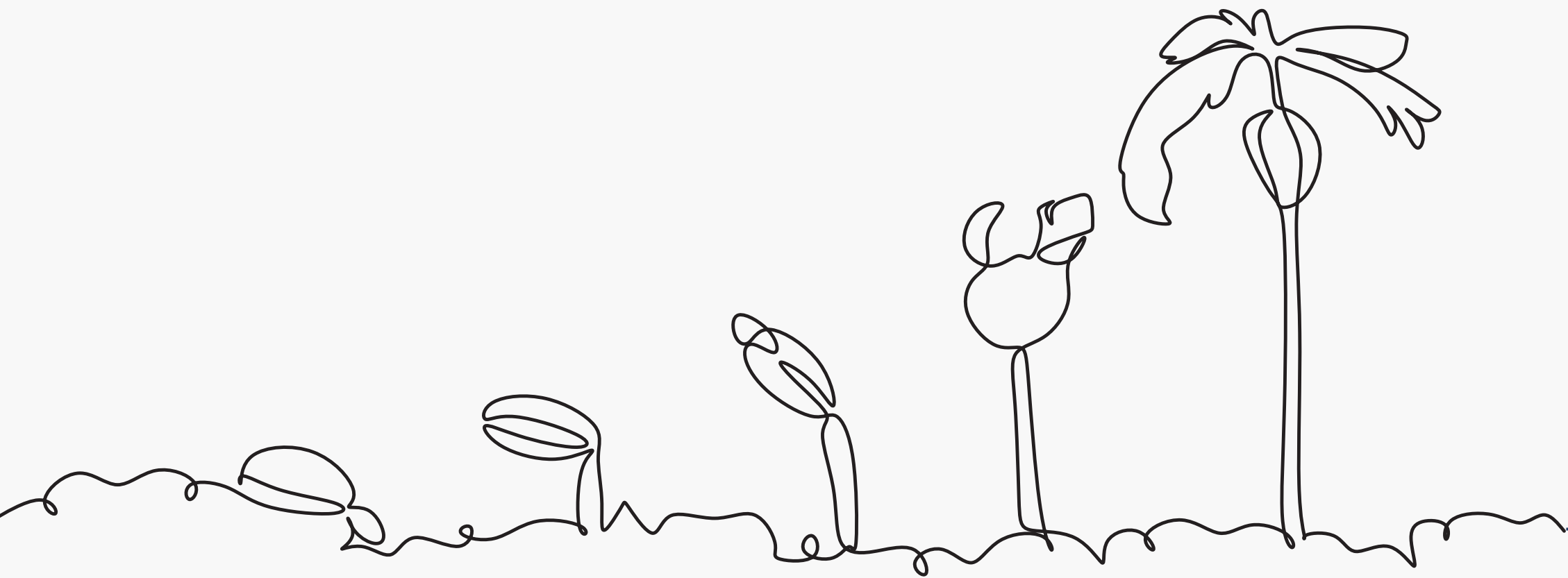
#2 Subnational civic spaces are expanding and shrinking at the same time

#3 Civil society is less able to act collectively

#4 There remain spaces for engagement and creativity



Supporting democratic resilience in the region



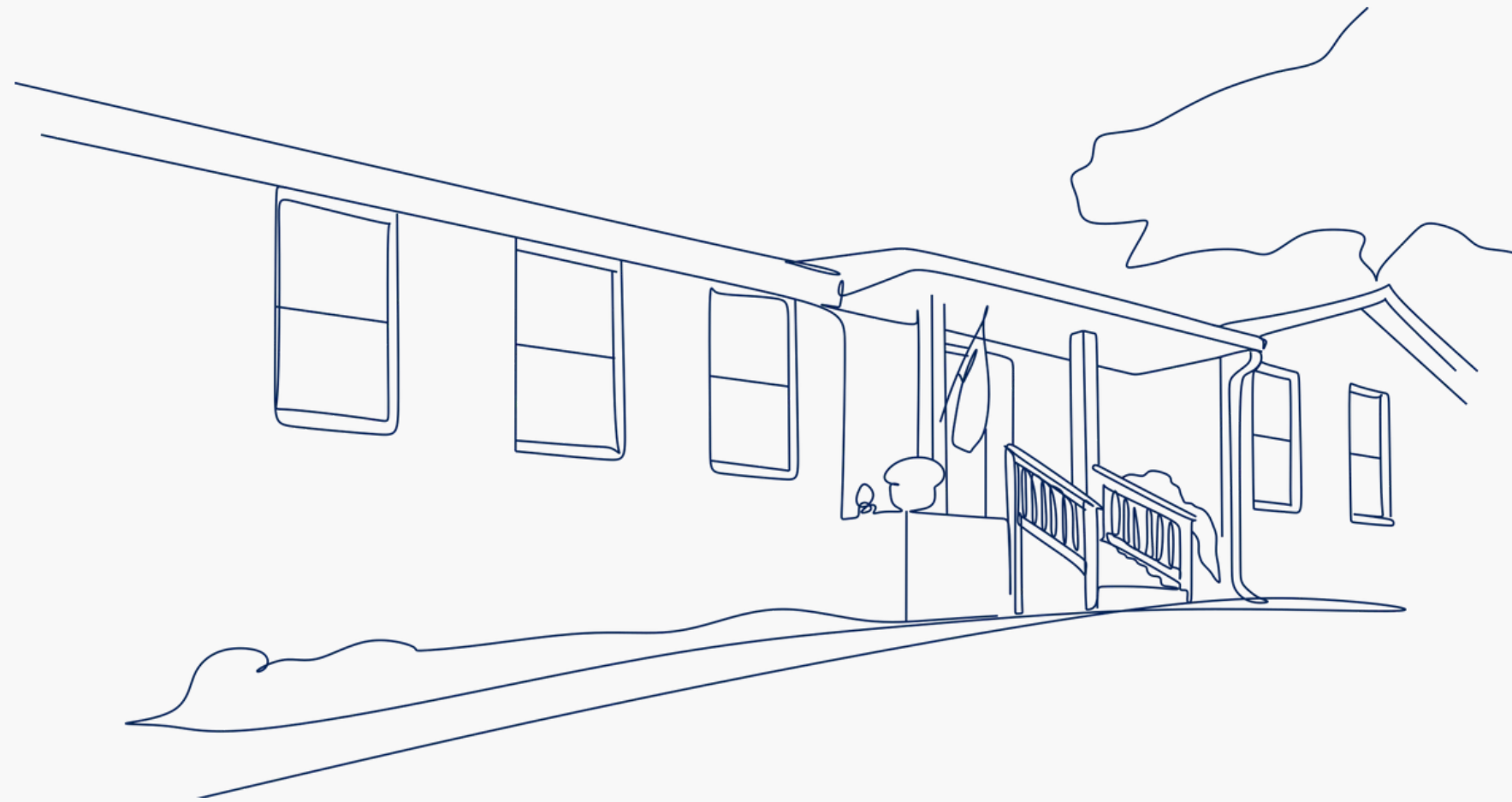
Understand civil society resilience strategies

Invest in transformative agendas

Increasing need for politically informed and locally-led investment decisions



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