

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CRISIS¹

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ABSTRACT

When can we speak of democratic resilience, and why has this concept become more prominent in socio-political and governmental studies? In addressing these questions, the article provides an introduction to the concept of democratic resilience, its dimensions, the most notable theoretical frameworks, and the approaches used in its methodological analysis. The threats and challenges of contemporary society may lead to an erosion of democratic norms. Democratic backsliding, manifested through attacks on judicial independence, disinformation, civic disengagement, and political polarization, contributes to the weakening of democratic institutions and to the erosion of public trust in them. The more resilient democracies are, the less vulnerable populations will be in the future when facing upcoming crises. Strengthening democratic resilience involves not only a strong and active civil society and increasing public trust in institutions, but also requires viable measures to support institutional capacities and resources, and to reinforce democratic norms and values in order to sustain a democratic culture.

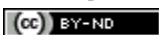
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INTRODUCTION

In a changing world facing political and social polarization and geopolitical fragmentation, democratic norms and values have become more vulnerable. Democratic systems are marked by numerous challenges and risks that threaten their stability and legitimacy. The contemporary society is facing multiple crises (global pandemics, economic crises, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, etc.) and challenges. The term of democratic resilience, as a key element in analyzing social systems and

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societies, has become the main element for understanding how democracies survive, adapt and recover after social, political, or/and institutional disruptions. The concept has gained attention in recent years in political and social research as “a potential new stage in the study of democratization”³.

The article highlights the concept of democratic resilience, its key determinants and indicators, methodological approaches to analysis, and the challenges and threats facing contemporary society. The study led to a deeper understanding of the vulnerabilities and the adaptive mechanisms of modern democratic governance. The importance of the study lies in the fact that it puts into discussion the threats to democratic resilience in contemporary society that may destabilize democracies’ capacity to respond to external shocks and challenges. The lack of trust in political institutions, civic disengagement, and political polarization contribute to the erosion of democratic norms and values and may weaken social cohesion. The limitations of the study concern the use of the existing literature and secondary data that may constrain the capacity to reflect the ongoing social and political changes. More than that, because of the complexity of democratic resilience as a concept, the existing theoretical framework and methodological approaches may not cover all the dimensions in a single study.

DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE-CONCEPT, DIMENSIONS

The term democratic resilience has become an increasingly used concept in political science, governance, and social and political sciences. In the academic literature, several attempts have emerged to define the concept of democratic resilience. Merkel and Luhrmann (2021, 872) defined democratic resilience as “the ability of a political regime to prevent and respond to threats without losing its democratic character”. Boese, V. et al. (2022) proposed two stages in the conceptualization of the democratic resilience: the first stage – “**onset resilience**” – “democracies exhibit resilience by maintaining or improving their level of democratic governance and avoiding backsliding towards authoritarian rule”; the second stage – “**breakdown resilience**” **refers to** “democracies that are experiencing authoritarian pressures and practice and can promote resilience by avoiding a further democratic breakdown”. Timothy Sisk (2017) notes in an article that a resilient democracy is characterized by the following attributes: flexibility, recovery, adaptation, and innovation – qualities capable of addressing complex challenges as well as responding to crises that affect the survival of the population. In line with these attributes, Sisk (2017, 5–6) states that a democracy is resilient to the extent that „the attributes of flexibility, recovery, adaptation, and innovation are conducive to addressing complex challenges as well as responding to crises that affect the survival of the population”. Other authors, such as Shabbir Cheema and Vesselin Popovski (2010) explained the term democratic

³ Hub, European Democracy, “A New Dynamic of Democratic Resilience?”, *European Democracy Hub*, April 29, 2025. <https://europeandemocracyhub.epd.eu/a-new-dynamic-of-democratic-resilience/>

resilience as a consequence of a strong civil society and argued that democracies with robust civil societies are more durable over time. The more active the civil society is, the more immune a democratic society becomes to shocks and external threats. Therefore, an important component in defining democratic resilience concerns citizens' civic culture. Civic engagement plays a crucial role in the functioning of a democratic system.

Burnell and Calvert (apud Merkel and Luhrmann 2021, 871) view democratic resilience as an "attachment to democratic ideals (...), in spite of hostility from the officially prescribed values and norms and apparent indifference from many elements in society". Concerning this, Merkel and Luhrmann (2021, 871) defined democratic resilience as "the ability of a political regime to prevent or react to challenges without losing its democratic character". Democratic resilience largely takes into account citizens' attitudes and their electoral rights. The erosion of democracy also leads to various forms of populism. As the Global State of Democracy Report 2021⁴ states, "political drivers that may lead to populism include declining trust in political parties, as well as increasing polarization and social fragmentation". Democratic resilience can encourage actors to become involved in the democratic process. The more resilient democracies are, the less vulnerable populations will be in the future when facing upcoming crises. People are vulnerable in many ways and for different reasons. Hogue (2020) identifies two types of vulnerabilities related to democratic resilience: "a universal vulnerability inherent to life, and a contingent vulnerability – which is relative, asymmetrical, and systemic". By analyzing both systemic and structural vulnerabilities, the concept of resilience – particularly democratic resilience – becomes a powerful driver for risk management.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As the report of the V-Dem data set⁵ points out, democracies are resilient if they manage to face and to adapt to the changing environments. In constructing the concept, Boese et al. (2022) adopted a functionalist perspective, defining the term "as the capacity to resist, adapt, and recover as an element of democratic resilience". Other theoretical perspectives focus on the relationship between economic factors and democratic stability. Seymour Martin Lipset argued that "the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democratic processes" (Lipset 1994). Building on Lipset's theory, as noted by Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "democracies become resistant to collapse once they surpass a certain threshold of income level" (Przeworski and Limongi apud Geddes 2009). Some theories suggest that economic growth factors lead to social mobilization, which in turn generates political mobilization and, eventually, changes in democratic regimes (Heo and

⁴ IDEA Global State of Democracy Report, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-2021/>

⁵ V-Dem Institute, *Defending Democracy against Illiberal Challenges. A Resource Guide*, Varieties of Democracy Institute/University of Gothenburg, May 2020.

Tan 2001). Larry Sirowy and Alex Inkeles (apud Heo and Tan 2001) note that “democratic processes and the exercise of civil liberties and political rights create social conditions that are most favorable for economic development”.

Contrary to Martin Lipset’s argument, Mancur Olson, in his work *The Rise and Decline of Nations*, suggests that “the institutional structure of the political system has a decisive effect on economic development” (Olson 1982 apud Heo and Tan 2001). Steffen Ganghof (2012) noted, in a presentation titled “*Pattern-s of Resilient Democracy: A Comparative Analysis*”, that “the pattern of a democracy can be resilient when there is an interaction between behavioral changes and institutional changes”, particularly between electoral behavior and the institutional transformations that accompany it. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996) advance an institutional theory of democratic resilience, arguing that democracies are resilient when core institutions (parliament, juridical institutions, media, public administration) are well consolidated against abuses of power. The authors also observe that democratization is a matter of “political engineering”, involving decision-making processes, stages of transition, and the coalitions formed during these transitions. Citizens’ trust in fundamental institutions (both traditional and political) is a key factor in strengthening democratic resilience. McSwiney et al. (2024) proposed the normative theory of *deliberative democracy*, suggesting communicative space and public discourse as central elements of democratic resilience. Different normative theories can lead to different institutional designs. Thomas Christiano (1996 apud Ganghof 2012) mentioned that the “equal treatment of citizens” is a fundamental normative value of democratic resilience, whereas for Gerald Gaus (1996 apud Ganghof 2012), political equality is subordinate to other moral principles. For the latter, the “protection of citizens from unjust interference” constitutes the fundamental value of democracy.

Contrary to the theory proposed by McSwiney et al. (2024), Volacu and Aligica (2023, 631) argued for the “application of minimalist conceptions of democracy”, meaning that in electoral competition, the capacity for political decision-making plays a crucial role. The idea of the “minimalist account”, underlined by the authors Volacu and Aligica (2024, 631) is that “the resilience of a representative democracy should be mainly understood in relation to its electoral process”. The erosion of the election processes led to “a failure of the democratic resilience”. As shown by Bănică et al. (2021) and Volacu and Aligica (2023), there is an analytical distinction between “what a system is (resilience as performance)” and “the ability of a system to remain resilient to sustain democratization processes (resilience in terms of capacity)”. The eminent Italian political scientist Giovanni Sartori argues that “aspects such as the design of the presidential system, the design of the electoral system, and the delineation of internal boundaries together with decentralized governance (as in federal systems) can promote certain desired outcomes in democratic systems, particularly stability, inclusion, or a politics that transcends social divisions” (Sartori, 1997 apud Reynolds 2011; Norris 2004). An application of this perspective can be found in the design of electoral systems (Reynolds 2011; Norris 2004).

The pluralist system also takes into account the existence of social networks that influence political decisions. Within this system, voluntary associations and

civic participation become pillars of democracy. Political participation and participation in civic associations, as shown by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963), are important when analyzing the functioning of a democracy, in strengthening democratic resilience. Beyond institutions and economic performance, Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2005) emphasize the role of citizens' values and normative orientations when discussing democratic resilience. From the perspective of modernization theories, democratic resilience can be shaped by citizens' political attitudes, "formed through learning from other contexts or through the diffusion of international norms" (Geddes 2009). Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2005) argue that modernization is a process of human development in which economic prosperity leads to cultural changes that, in turn, foster individual autonomy and the promotion of democratic values. Thus, the process of modernization unfolds in two phases: first, the transition from agrarian to industrial societies, marked by bureaucratization and a shift from traditional to secular-rational authority; and second, the transition to post-industrial societies, where individualization leads to processes of emancipation. Survival values are replaced by self-expression values. Economic factors (such as economic growth – GDP per capita) that drive the transition from one type of society to another are followed by cultural factors, namely the value orientations of the population. The aforementioned authors note that, among other indicators, the Human Development Index is an important driver of economic development. Theories of democratic resilience emphasize both the capacities of a system and its ability to respond to external shocks and pressures.

APPROACHES USED IN METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

There are different approaches to measuring democratic resilience, especially since it involves both latent capacities and observable factors in response to political and geopolitical shocks. Some authors have taken into consideration the *analysis of vulnerability and resilient capacities*. Boese et al. (2022) noted that "resilience can only be observed retrospectively, as there is no established measure of a democracy's capacity to withstand future shocks". Southwood (2015) noted the fact that democracy is "a Modally Demanding Value" – the resilience depends on how it would respond to hypothetical threats. Volacu and Aligica (2023) mentioned "the Attachment Account of democratic resilience" – "a certain type of attitude shared by some significant portion of citizens in a society". This "Attachment Account" is relatively easy to measure through surveys. The same authors, Volacu and Aligica (2023), propose an approach to democratic resilience that distinguishes between *ex ante measurement*, referring to a state's capacity for democratic resilience based on its resources and capabilities, and *ex post measurement*, which evaluates resilience following a shock or challenge. Aurel Croissant and David Waldner (2025 apud Biddle et al. 2025) emphasize the distinction between *resilience capacity* – which considers resources, attitudes, and latent dispositions – and *resilience performance*, which reflects how these capacities are concretely activated and used in times of crises.

From an analytical perspective, measures of “onset resilience”, oriented toward the “prevention of autocratization” (Boese et al. 2022), are distinguished from “breakdown resilience” measures, which focus on the capacity to recover after a crisis. In this context, the academic literature proposes measurement instruments with different purposes – descriptive, diagnostic, and evaluative – each capturing distinct dimensions of democratic resilience (Biddle et al. 2025). At the same time, in comparative case studies, democratic resilience can be analyzed at regional, national, institutional, or sub national levels (states, communities), depending on the unit of analysis and the objectives of the research.

INDICATORS TO MEASURE DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

There were studies⁶ that revealed that among the indicators used to measure the democracy index are those concerning *free elections, electoral participation, civic engagement, and a democratically elected government*. The article presents some of the most actual methodological instruments and indexes constructed to measure the democratic resilience. For the purpose of developing a unified instrument that integrates empirical data for research on democracy, particularly regarding imbalances along the autocracy–democracy axis, some authors (Popescu, Zamfir and Sadu 2021) constructed a *Democratic Resilience Index*. The authors analyzed democratic resilience by considering four categories on the vertical axis (1. Politics, 2. Society, 3. Foreign Affairs, 4. Economy) and four categories on the horizontal axis (1. Institutions and structures, 2. Elite action, 3. Critical junctures and path dependency, 4. Shock mitigation and legacies). The index developed in this study draws on major democracy research projects in terms of measurement strategy, with the pilot project consisting of an expert survey conducted across countries and domains, as outlined in the methodology of the Varieties of Democracy Project (Coppedge et al. 2018). As described in the “Methodology” section, the authors selected survey participants based on the vertical categories and their areas of expertise, enabling them to respond to the expert survey questionnaire. The survey design required the participation of at least 30 respondents for each vertical dimension per country; however, the authors note that the actual number of participants was higher.

The Global Development Indices report⁷ considers five dimensions for analyzing democratic systems:

1. “Representative government – referring to equality in accessing political power. Subcategories include: free elections, free political parties, and elected government.
2. Fundamental rights – involving “free access to basic resources” and “the degree to which civil liberties are respected”.

⁶ The Democracy Index, <https://www.eiu.com/n/global-themes/democracy-index/>

⁷ Global State of Democracy. Exploring Democracy’s Resilience, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2017.

3. Checks on government – referring to how executive power is exercised and constrained.

4. Impartial administration – the way in which public decisions are implemented, reflecting key aspects related to the rule of law.

5. Participatory engagement – the extent to which instruments for political participation are accessible and the degree to which citizens make use of them”. The proposed indices identify varying degrees of change across these dimensions of democratic governance. The indicators within each dimension are aggregated into a single composite index.

The Democracy Index, calculated by Economist Intelligence Unit, covers 167 countries and measures electoral processes and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, democratic political culture, and civil liberties. These five dimensions are interconnected and form a unified whole. The results indicate that “more than one third of the world’s population lives under authoritarian rule, while only 6.4% of the population enjoys full democracy”⁸. A study developed by Croissant and Lott (2024) presented an explorative analysis concerning the Resilience Capacity Index (Resilience Capacity (ResCap)-Index) that “combines different approaches of measuring autocratization to capture varieties of resilience performance in democratic regimes”. According to the authors, resilience capacity has an important effect regarding the prevention of the loss of democratic qualities, in other words, it shows “the breakdown of a democratic regime” (Croissant and Lott 2024). There are many instruments that can be used and developed to measure democratic resilience, as well as many combinations of indicators. Many measurements are conducted using opinion barometers or databases that assess the perception of democratic values (for example, the European Values Survey and/or the World Values Survey), but it would be interesting to develop databases and questionnaires, taking into account the specificities of each country and region. More than that, measurements concerning democratic resilience may take into consideration some *status (structural) indicators* of the system, indicators that may reflect the vulnerabilities of the systems or societies (socio-demographic, institutional, economic indicators, quality of life indicators, infrastructure etc.), but also the *dynamic indicators* – the systems in their dynamic, studying the ongoing processes of democratization in societies. In this way, it is possible to identify the vulnerabilities of a democratic system that may make it more fragile in the context of crises.

THREATS TO DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF CRISIS: POLITICAL POLARIZATION, DISTRUST, AND CIVIC DISENGAGEMENT

Multiple international crises (economic, health, and military conflicts – such as the conflict in Ukraine) have highlighted various risks and vulnerabilities at both global and regional levels. While some democracies have maintained their institutional

⁸ Democracy Index 2022, <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/>

balance and public trust, others have experienced significant imbalances and an erosion of trust. According to international indices such as Freedom House⁹ and Economist Intelligence Unit¹⁰, “global democracy has been in decline for more than a decade”, being largely affected by pressures and threats targeting democratic regimes. A first set of threats refers to democratic backsliding, manifested through attacks on judicial independence, disinformation, and political polarization, all of which contribute to weakening the functioning of democratic institutions and eroding public trust in them. Another set of threats emerges in the context of the erosion of democratic norms. The weakening of democratic norms and values also gives rise to various forms of populism. As noted in the Global State of Democracy Report 2021¹¹, “political drivers that may lead to populism include declining trust in political parties, as well as increasing polarization and social fragmentation”.

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit¹², the 2024 index score recorded a decline in democracy across almost all regions of the world, except Western Europe, where the average index score increased by 0.01 points. As the Economist Intelligence Unit shows, the most pronounced declines in the index were observed in the Middle East and North Africa (–0.11) and in Australasia (–0.10). Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as well as Sub-Saharan Africa, “registered modest declines in the average index scores of 0.02 and 0.04 points, respectively”¹³. Even in resilient democracies, institutions may function under pressure; however, in times of crisis, weak institutions, especially those with lower levels of public trust, may not function properly and may facilitate democratic backsliding. Data from the World Values Survey¹⁴ shows that the lowest levels of public trust are in political parties and government (Croatia, Greece, and Slovenia record the lowest levels of trust in political parties, as well as in government). Sweden, Austria, and Denmark enjoy higher levels of trust in political institutions. Romania continues to show high levels of trust in the Church and the Army, and low levels of trust in political parties, the government, and Parliament. As an OECD report¹⁵ points out, trust in government is also linked to perceptions of corruption within it. In 2021/2022, more than half of respondents (54%) reported that corruption is widespread within government institutions. Denmark and Sweden recorded the lowest levels (below 20%), while Colombia and Slovakia showed the highest levels (above 80%). The report also indicates that perceptions of corruption exceeding 80% are also found in OECD partner countries such as Bulgaria, Peru, Romania, and South Africa. As Merkel and Luhrmann (2021, 870) underlined, “support for democratic norms and values is still

⁹ Freedom House. Freedom in the World. The Data. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world#Data>

¹⁰ The Democracy Index, <https://www.eiu.com/n/global-themes/democracy-index/>

¹¹ IDEA Global State of Democracy Report, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-2021/>

¹² EIU’s 2024 Democracy Index – what is wrong with representative democracy?, February 2025.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ World Values Survey – online dataset, wave 2017–2022.

¹⁵ OECD. (2023), Government at a Glance 2023, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

at high levels but trust in specific democratic institutions such as political parties and parliament is declining or simply very low”.

Among the trust in institutions, equally important is the role of the civic culture. The more prevalent democratic values and norms are within a society, and the more active civil society is, the more resilient democracy becomes. The World Values Survey data for the period 2017–2022¹⁶, regarding the dimension of civic engagement, show that higher levels of civic participation are observed in the Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom, particularly in relation to sports and recreational activities. In Greece and Romania, civic engagement is the lowest. Romania ranks among the countries with the highest percentage of membership in religious organizations. Citizens’ active participation in religious, community, and advocacy organizations constitutes an essential pillar in strengthening social capital and a stabilizing factor with regard to societal resilience. The role of civil society is important in promoting and protecting democratic values. An Euro barometer survey on Citizenship and Democracy from December 2023¹⁷ shows that “the proportion of respondents who consider the role of civil society to be important remains above 80% in all Member States, except three Member States: Greece (71%), Slovenia (77%), and Slovakia (79%), where it is only slightly lower”. The same report mentions that “the involvement of civil society organizations in the decision-making process at both national (56%) and European (54%) levels would be necessary”.

Romanian youth “reported no recent involvement in any political or civic activities” (Bădescu et al. 2024). Moreover, Fejes et al. (2024), based on Eurostat data, argue that Romania has one of the lowest levels of participation in voluntary activities within the European Union. The same study, signed by Fejes et al. (2024) mentioned the fact that “those (the Romanians) who participate in various ways in politics have more volunteering experience than those who choose not to participate”. As Fejes et al. (2024) underlined, there is an association between volunteering and political efficacy and volunteering and trust in institutions. The same study mentioned that respondents that showed great confidence in institutions “have volunteered in a higher proportion than those who do not trust institutions and those with higher political efficacy may be more inclined to volunteer as a way to enact change in their communities” (Fejes et al. 2024, 38).

Political participation is key factor for democratic resilience. The erosion of trust may lead to extremism or the rise of the populist leaders. As Merkel (2023, 6) mentioned, even in profound crises, both the government and the opposition must cooperate, “the democratic opposition – however intensively it perceives its role – must not be delegitimised or temporarily disempower itself”. In a society marked by crises, where there is no consensus between the government and the opposition, destabilization occurs

¹⁶ Author’s processing based on data from World Values Survey online data analysis, <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>, 2017–2022 wave.

¹⁷ Eurobarometer Flash 528. Citizenship and democracy. December 2023. Ipsos European Public Affairs, pag. 32.

at all levels: societal, economic, political, institutional, etc. In these contexts, societal divisions may deepen, amplifying political distrust and institutional dysfunctions. As a result, political polarization may be more pronounced. The V-Dem report¹⁸ shows that “political polarization has been rising globally since 2005”. Somer, McCoy, and Luke (2021) were talking about “pernicious polarization” and its harmful effects on democracy. The authors defined the term as “the division of society into mutually distrustful us versus them camps in which political identity becomes a social identity”. This kind of polarization erodes democracies and strengthens autocracy. Analysis based on V-Dem data on polarization showed “a negative relationship between the *level of political polarization* and liberal democracy ratings” (Somer, McCoy, and Luke 2021). As the authors underline, polarization may be facilitated by “exogenous factors” (economic, institutional, historic etc.), but also may be driven by political actors in their efforts to achieve their goals. As McCoy et al. (2022) mentioned, “‘us versus them’ polarization is increasing worldwide. Every region in the world except Oceania has seen polarization levels rise since 2005”. The experts from the V-Dem project measured the Political Polarization Score, “the extent to which society is divided into hostile political camps and political differences”¹⁹.

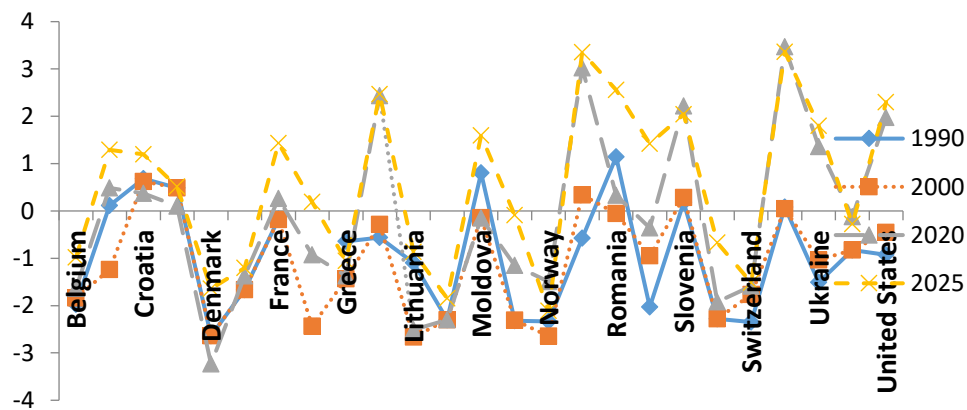


Figure 1. Political polarization score.

Source: Political Polarization Score, V-Dem data, Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/political-polarization-score?tab=table&time=1990..latest&tableFilter=countries>

The political polarization in 2025 was higher in Poland, Romania, Turkey, Hungary and the United States, and the lowest in Northern countries (Finland, Norway), Luxembourg, and Denmark, also in Greece, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. In 1990, the political polarization score was positive in Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria,

¹⁸ Democracy Reports – V-Dem.” Accessed May 27, 2026. <https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/>

¹⁹ Political Polarization Score, Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/political-polarization-score?tab=table&time=1990..latest&tableFilter=countries>

Slovenia, and Turkey; then, after 2020, the score was higher in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Turkey, Ukraine, United States. V-Dem data show that in 2000, Romania had a negative score, but in 2020 the score was positive (0,3) and in 2025 the score was 2,55. The political polarization score in Romania increased by 2,25 points in five years. Political polarization poses various threats to democratic norms and institutions. Haggard (2021) and Lee (2022) apud Cruz and Larreguy (2025) mention the fact that “polarisation can erode informal norms – mutual tolerance, forbearance, and respect for institutional constraints – that sustain democratic governance”. The same authors underlined the fact that “affective polarization is correlated with democratic backsliding” (Cruz and Larreguy 2025, 10). The causal relation between affective polarization and democratic backsliding was also mentioned by Somer and McCoy in their chapter, Affective polarization and democratic backsliding from the volume “*Handbook of affective polarization*”²⁰. Draca and Schwarz (2024), apud Cruz, Larreguy (2025, 10), emphasized that some “ideological clusters” marked by systemic distrust in institutions may appear, leading to “populist disruption and weakening citizen commitment to democratic norms”. The rising of the polarization led to a weakening of the democratic norms and of the social cohesion. Concerning these, democracies become more fragile and less vulnerable to external challenges.

CONCLUSION

The world is constantly changing. A resilient democracy is capable of surviving, adapting and recovering from contemporary threats and challenges. Democratic resilience has become the most studied and debated subject in social, political, and governmental studies. It has emerged as a main concept in many domains and has been studied by social and political sciences as essential for institutional stability and for maintaining the fundamental values of freedom, transparency, and pluralism. The erosion of institutional trust, the deepening of social polarization, and civic disengagement are among the challenges facing today’s world, with destabilizing effects at the global level. Strengthening democratic resilience involves not only implementing measures aimed at supporting institutional capacities, but also reinforcing the norms and values that sustain civic participation and engagement – in other words, fostering a democratic culture.

It is important to consider not only the condition of a society at a given moment, but also to analyze the capacities of a system, its capabilities and the way in which it could cope with any internal or external shocks. Democratic resilience takes into account the ability of a system to adapt and survive even after experiencing a series of shocks or going through economic, social, health, or political crises. In a

²⁰ Torcal, M. and Harteveld, E. (Eds.). (2025). *Handbook of affective polarization*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

time of multiple social and political crises, to counter possible risks and threats, policies are needed that take into account the development of societal capacities and resources, as well as the regional and international alliances necessary for designing effective strategies to strengthen democratic resilience.

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