

Article

Institutional Resilience and Democratic Sustainability in Post-Transition Europe: Lessons from Romania and Central-Eastern Europe

Cristian Pîrvulescu 

Faculty of Political Science, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA),
012104 Bucharest, Romania; cristian.pirvulescu@politice.ro or crpirvulescu@yahoo.fr; Tel.: +40-722617872

Abstract

This paper conceptualizes *institutional resilience* as a core condition of *democratic sustainability* in post-transition Europe. Building on neo-institutionalist approaches and recent scholarship on democratic resilience, we argue that democracies endure when three capacities align: policy coherence, procedural legitimacy, and civic/monitory participation. Using a comparative, theory-guided design, we analyze Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia (2007–2025), triangulating V-Dem/Eurostat indicators with documentary evidence (EU Rule of Law reports, CEPEJ) and interpretive analysis. Romania illustrates “reactive resilience” anchored in judicial independence and civic vigilance; Slovakia shows “restorative resilience” after corruption scandals; Poland exhibits “societal compensatory resilience,” where civic mobilization offsets institutional regression; Hungary demonstrates “instrumental resilience without democracy,” combining administrative capacity with normative decay. We integrate these findings into a three-dimensional model—institutional, normative, and communicative—showing how feedback loops convert crisis into learning. The paper concludes that sustainable democracy depends less on constitutional design alone and more on the institutionalization of learning: redundant veto points, impartial procedures that generate trust, and a monitory public sphere that sustains continuous accountability. For EU policy, the shift from conditionality to capacity (e.g., RRF) can foster endogenous resilience when supranational norms are domestically internalized rather than externally imposed.

Keywords: institutional resilience; democratic sustainability; neo-institutionalism; rule of law; governance; Central-Eastern Europe; Romania; civic participation; monitory democracy; policy coherence



Academic Editors: Akm Mohsin and
Markus Gerschberger

Received: 9 November 2025

Revised: 4 January 2026

Accepted: 8 January 2026

Published: 9 January 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the author.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

1. Introduction

Since the democratic transitions of the late 1980s and early 1990s, post-communist Europe has operated as a vast laboratory of institutional change, where the collapse of authoritarian regimes created both opportunities for democratic renewal and vulnerabilities rooted in fragile organizations, low trust, and systemic uncertainty. Three decades on, these democracies confront a different test: how to sustain legitimacy and policy coherence under overlapping crises—from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine to economic shocks and the rise of algorithmic populism [1,2]. In this context, institutional resilience, understood as the capacity of political systems to absorb stress while preserving democratic norms, emerges as a core condition of sustainable governance. It links the temporal

logic of sustainability—long-term orientation and equilibrium—to the procedural logic of democracy—participation, legitimacy, and accountability, transforming resilience from a technocratic response into a normative prerequisite for democratic sustainability.

Building on the neo-institutionalist tradition, this article conceptualizes resilience as institutional adaptation without normative decay. Following North's [3] idea of institutions as the rules of the game that structure incentives and behavior, and March and Olsen's [4] emphasis on the logic of appropriateness, durability derives as much from legitimacy and shared norms as from efficiency. Rothstein's [5] work on the quality of government further ties impartial procedures to public trust, while contemporary resilience scholarship adds a dynamic layer of feedback and learning. From this vantage, stability cannot be sustained without adaptability, and adaptability cannot be legitimate without procedural anchoring.

Central-Eastern Europe offers a particularly revealing terrain for testing these assumptions. After three decades of transformation, its democracies display both endurance and fragility. Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia share legacies of institutional volatility and contested reforms, yet their trajectories diverge markedly: Hungary and Poland have experienced visible backsliding, while Romania and Slovakia preserved electoral competitiveness and a minimal level of procedural legitimacy despite recurrent stress. Understanding these contrasts requires a shift from regime typologies to mechanisms of adaptation—how institutions cope, adjust, and survive under duress.

The notion of democratic sustainability advanced here captures this duality as the long-term capacity of democratic institutions to reproduce legitimacy, trust, and responsiveness through recurrent crises. Rather than equating democracy with electoral minimalism, the argument emphasizes continuity in the quality of governance, coherence of policies, and the moral credibility of power. Resonating with Luhmann's [6] understanding of political autopoiesis, the sustainability of post-transition democracies depends on whether they can regenerate legitimacy internally even amid external shocks. Romania's recent evolution illustrates this paradox: despite volatility and populist surges, EU anchoring, constitutional review, and a vigilant civil society have supported adaptive mechanisms—judicial independence, an anticorruption framework with residual credibility, and gradual administrative professionalization—that preserve procedural legitimacy while remaining vulnerable to erosion in the absence of internalized norms.

Methodologically, the study adopts a comparative, theory-guided design that triangulates documentary analysis and secondary indicators to identify the institutional mechanisms that convert crisis into learning. Substantively, the article proposes a tripartite lens—policy coherence, procedural legitimacy, and civic or monitory participation—through which to observe resilience as a relational capacity between institutions and society. The argument unfolds in six steps: a theoretical framework connecting neo-institutionalism and resilience; methodological considerations; an account of institutional adaptation in post-transition Europe; a case study of Romania's adaptive governance; comparative insights across the region; and a concluding synthesis that advances a model of sustainable democratic governance. In sum, the paper contends that the sustainability of democracy in post-transition Europe depends less on constitutional engineering or growth rates and more on institutionalized learning: redundant veto points, impartial procedures that generate trust, and a monitory public sphere capable of sustaining continuous accountability.

This article advances the literature on democratic resilience in three ways. First, it integrates neo-institutionalist theory with contemporary resilience research into a unified analytical framework. Second, it applies this framework comparatively to post-transition Europe, identifying distinct patterns of adaptive governance beyond regime typologies.

Third, it conceptualizes democratic sustainability as institutionalized learning, linking procedural legitimacy, policy coherence, and monitory civic participation.

2. Theoretical Framework: Neo-Institutionalism and Democratic Resilience

This section clarifies the conceptual scope of the article. Rather than multiplying analytical notions, the argument deliberately relies on a limited set of concepts, organized hierarchically, in order to preserve analytical clarity and theoretical coherence.

Institutional resilience constitutes the central analytical concept of the article. It refers to the capacity of political institutions to absorb shocks, adapt to crisis, and preserve procedural integrity over time, without collapsing into either authoritarian rigidity or institutional breakdown.

Within this framework, democracy is understood neither as an idealized normative model nor as a purely electoral regime. Drawing on post-foundational and institutional approaches, democracy is conceptualized as a procedural order characterized by institutionalized uncertainty, the contestation of power, and the continuous reproduction of legitimacy through accountability and public scrutiny.

Other notions employed throughout the article—such as learning, legitimacy, monitory participation, or feedback—are not treated as autonomous theoretical concepts. They are used as analytical dimensions or mechanisms through which institutional resilience operates in democratic systems. This conceptual discipline allows the argument to remain focused while accounting for the complexity of democratic adaptation under stress.

The sustainability of democracy requires a conceptual bridge between institutional theory and the emerging scholarship on resilience. Although the term “resilience” originates in ecological and systems thinking, its adaptation to political science—particularly to the study of democratic institutions—has been mediated by the neo-institutionalist paradigm. This section revisits the main theoretical foundations of institutional analysis and integrates them with contemporary understandings of resilience and adaptive governance, proposing a unified lens for examining how post-transition democracies maintain legitimacy and procedural integrity under stress. Neo-institutionalism emerged as a corrective to behaviorist and rational-choice approaches that had reduced politics to individual incentives and instrumental calculations. In contrast, North [3], March and Olsen [4], and later Rothstein [5] shifted attention to the rules, norms, and meanings that structure collective action and confer legitimacy upon institutions. For North, institutions are the rules of the game that constrain and enable behavior, but they also evolve through feedback and learning, producing path-dependent trajectories. March and Olsen [4] distinguished between a logic of consequentiality—action based on expected outcomes—and a logic of appropriateness—action grounded in shared norms of legitimacy. More recent strands of neo-institutionalism have shifted the focus from institutional stability to gradual but consequential change, emphasizing mechanisms such as layering, conversion, and drift as key sources of institutional adaptation [7,8]. From this perspective, institutional resilience derives not from rigidity but from the equilibrium between efficiency and legitimacy: systems that privilege performance over moral acceptance risk collapse when crises undermine trust, whereas those anchored in normative expectations can adapt without losing procedural continuity.

Rothstein [5] deepened this framework by linking the quality of government to impartiality and fairness. Democratic institutions are resilient when they are perceived as just and predictable, when citizens believe that decisions are taken without favoritism and that procedural transparency ensures equal treatment. Trust thus becomes both a cause and a

product of legitimacy: institutions generate compliance through fairness, and compliance reinforces trust, creating a virtuous circle that stabilizes governance even under uncertainty.

Resilience theory complements the neo-institutionalist framework by adding a dynamic dimension of adaptation, highlighting feedback and learning as mechanisms that sustain institutional continuity under stress. Borrowed from ecological systems, resilience denotes the ability to absorb shocks, reorganize, and retain essential functions. In political terms, it is the capacity of democratic institutions to confront crises—economic downturns, populist mobilization, or external threats—without compromising procedural norms. Duit [9] and Scharpf [10] emphasize that resilient systems are neither rigid nor chaotic; they adjust through controlled flexibility, combining continuity of rules with adaptability of processes. In this sense, resilience is not the opposite of stability but its condition: only institutions that can change appropriately are capable of enduring.

Recent analyses of democratic backsliding have reinterpreted the resilience of institutions as their ability to resist illiberal stress and restore legitimacy after degradation. Lührmann and Merkel's [2] typology distinguishes preventive resilience (anchored in constitutional safeguards), reactive resilience (institutional adaptation during acute crises), and restorative resilience (post-crisis recovery of legitimacy). These forms overlap in practice: democracies that survive turbulence usually combine preventive and reactive capacities, transforming crisis into learning. Merkel [11] further argues that democracies endure when institutions remain normatively intelligible to citizens—when power continues to operate within the moral grammar of democracy.

From this intersection of neo-institutionalism and resilience research emerges the conclusion that the endurance of democracy depends on the interdependence of structure, legitimacy, and communication. Bo Rothstein's [5] moral dimension ensures that procedures retain fairness; John Keane's [12] notion of monitory democracy adds a communicative dimension, emphasizing the continuous scrutiny exercised by civil society, media, and watchdog institutions. These monitory actors form a distributed feedback network that detects abuses and pressures the political system to self-correct. Democratic resilience, therefore, is not confined to governmental design but extends to the entire ecosystem of vigilance linking institutions and citizens.

In Luhmann's [6] systems theory, political systems reproduce legitimacy through communication. Resilience thus signifies their capacity to remain coherent and self-referential while responding to environmental complexity. The endurance of democracy arises from its ability to generate legitimacy internally through differentiation—legal, administrative, and communicative subsystems that stabilize expectations even under pressure. When these subsystems coordinate effectively, legitimacy reproduces itself; when they fail, resilience declines.

Synthesizing these perspectives, this article defines institutional resilience as the capacity of democratic systems to preserve procedural legitimacy and normative coherence while adapting to both internal and external shocks. Resilience operates across three interdependent levels: structural (the durability of formal institutions and rules), normative (the continuity of fairness and trust), and communicative (the feedback loops between citizens and institutions). When these dimensions reinforce one another, adaptation becomes self-corrective and learning becomes institutionalized. In post-transition democracies, where institutional architectures are young and social trust remains fragile, this multidimensional equilibrium determines whether adaptation leads to consolidation or decay.

3. Methodological Considerations

The methodological design of this study is grounded in the neo-institutionalist understanding of institutions as historically embedded systems of rules, meanings, and

expectations. This approach privileges interpretive comparison over statistical generalization and focuses on the relational capacity of institutions to adapt, learn, and maintain legitimacy under stress. Rather than treating resilience as a measurable variable, the analysis interprets it as a dynamic quality emerging from the interaction between formal structures and informal norms.

Two epistemological assumptions guide the inquiry. The first is that democracy in post-transition Europe is not a binary state—either consolidated or eroded—but a continuum of procedural quality and adaptive capability. The second is that institutional performance cannot be assessed without reference to its normative and cultural environment. North's [3] distinction between formal and informal rules captures this relationship: formal institutions endure only when supported by underlying conventions and shared expectations. Consequently, legitimacy cannot be inferred solely from compliance; it must be interpreted as a socially sustained perception of fairness and appropriateness.

To operationalize this approach, the study employs a comparative design that examines four post-transition democracies—Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia—selected according to the logic of most-similar systems. These countries share historical trajectories of communist legacies [13], European Union accession, and exposure to conditionality, yet they differ in their patterns of adaptation to democratic stress. Romania represents a case of partial institutional adaptation, where procedural legitimacy persisted despite recurrent crises. Poland demonstrates resilience under pressure but reveals normative regression as judicial independence eroded. Hungary exemplifies the consolidation of an illiberal regime through institutional capture, while Slovakia offers an intermediate pattern of corruption and recovery. By tracing these contrasting experiences, the analysis identifies the mechanisms that enhance or undermine democratic resilience within comparable structural contexts.

The empirical material derives from three complementary categories of sources. Quantitative indicators, including the Varieties of Democracy dataset [14,15], World Bank Governance Indicators [16], Eurostat [17], CEPEJ [18], and EESC [19] reports, provide baseline measures of rule of law, policy coherence, and government effectiveness. Documentary evidence—constitutional and legislative reforms, European Commission Rule of Law Reports [20,21], and national strategic documents—captures institutional responses to major crises such as the 2008 financial downturn, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. Qualitative material—political discourse, party manifestos, civil society communications, and secondary interviews—complements these data by revealing the normative perceptions of legitimacy and fairness that cannot be quantified.

The analytical strategy follows a theory-guided process tracing logic. It identifies sequences of crisis and response, focusing on the moments when institutions confronted stress and examining the adaptive mechanisms that followed. This approach makes it possible to connect structural features, such as judicial autonomy or administrative professionalism, with horizontal dynamics of societal feedback, such as civic protest and media scrutiny. For instance, in Romania, the interaction between independent courts and the #Rezist movement demonstrates how vertical and horizontal accountability reinforce each other. In Hungary, by contrast, the systematic erosion of independent media and civil society weakened feedback loops and increased institutional rigidity.

The concept of institutional resilience is operationalized along three interdependent dimensions—policy coherence, procedural legitimacy, and civic participation—observed longitudinally between 2007 and 2025 [22]. Policy coherence refers to the alignment between short-term crisis responses and long-term institutional objectives. Procedural legitimacy denotes the perceived fairness and predictability of decision-making. Civic participation captures the extent to which society remains involved in monitoring and

influencing governance. Each dimension serves as a lens for detecting whether institutions evolve toward greater adaptive capacity or slide into normative decay. The analytical dimensions of democratic resilience used in this study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Analytical dimensions and indicators of democratic resilience (2007–2025).

Dimension	Definition	Indicative Variables	Data Sources
Policy coherence	Alignment between short-term crisis responses and long-term institutional goals.	Fiscal stability, governance continuity, EU policy compliance.	EC Country Reports, Eurostat, World Bank.
Procedural legitimacy	Perceived fairness, transparency, and predictability of decision-making processes.	Rule of law index, corruption control, judicial independence.	V-Dem, CEPEJ, Transparency International.
Civic participation	Societal involvement in monitoring and influencing governance.	Voter turnout, NGO density, public consultation mechanisms.	EESC, CIVICUS, national reports.

Source: Author’s own conceptualization, based on the conceptual framework in Lührmann & Merkel [2], supplemented with comparative insights from Béné [22] and the V-Dem Democracy Reports [14,15].

This framework necessarily faces limitations. Resilience is context-dependent: what appears as adaptation in one setting may represent regression in another. Quantitative indicators, though indispensable, often capture formal structures while obscuring informal practices that sustain or undermine legitimacy. Moreover, the temporal horizon of this analysis, limited to 2007–2025, constrains its ability to evaluate long-term sustainability. Yet, within these constraints, the comparative approach enables analytical generalization. It allows the identification of institutional constellations—judicial autonomy, participatory feedback, procedural trust—that constitute necessary conditions for democratic resilience across post-transition Europe.

In summary, the study’s methodology combines comparative neo-institutional analysis with mixed-method triangulation and a processual focus on adaptation. By tracing how institutions recover legitimacy after crisis, it captures democracy as an evolving system rather than a static arrangement. This design aligns with the central argument of the paper: that sustainable democracy in post-transition Europe depends not on institutional perfection but on the ability of institutions to learn, recalibrate, and transform vulnerability into legitimacy.

4. Institutional Resilience in Post-Transition Democracies

The fall of state socialism between 1989 and 1991 inaugurated one of the most ambitious transformations in modern European history. The post-communist states of Central and Eastern Europe entered a long and uneven process of institutional reconstruction that combined political liberalization, constitutional design, and accelerated Europeanization. What initially appeared as a linear path toward democracy soon revealed itself as a complex and contingent trajectory, where formal institutions could be imported but legitimacy could not. The early optimism of the 1990s, grounded in the belief that the imitation of Western institutions would secure stability, gradually gave way to a more sober understanding of the fragility of democratic norms in contexts lacking deep social trust and institutional memory.

During the first decade after the revolutions, the main objective of political elites was the creation of minimal democratic infrastructure—constitutions, electoral laws, and multiparty competition. These frameworks provided the procedural skeleton of democracy but not its moral substance. In many countries, laws were drafted under uncertainty, institutions improvised, and power redistributed through negotiation rather than design.

The European Union's pre-accession conditionality later became the external stabilizer of these fragile democracies. The Copenhagen criteria, emphasizing rule of law and administrative capacity, offered a surrogate source of legitimacy by anchoring domestic reforms to supranational expectations. In Romania and Bulgaria, the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism functioned as a disciplinary device that compensated for weak internal trust, while in Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, the accession process itself created powerful incentives for rule-based governance.

Yet this external scaffolding also generated a paradox. Once accession was achieved between 2004 and 2007, the incentives for reform weakened and the disciplinary effect of conditionality faded. The very mechanisms that had promoted democratization began to foster complacency. Without the constant pressure of EU monitoring, domestic elites recalibrated institutions to serve partisan purposes. Hungary and Poland, initially celebrated as success stories, became emblematic of illiberal consolidation. In both cases, formally democratic institutions were gradually subordinated to executive power through legalistic means, transforming constitutionalism into a tool of control. These developments confirm Merkel's and Lührmann's [2] warning that institutional design alone cannot guarantee resilience; democratic sustainability requires an ongoing commitment to normative coherence.

In contrast, Romania and Slovakia illustrate a more adaptive trajectory. Despite chronic instability and recurring corruption scandals, both countries managed to maintain procedural legitimacy through pluralistic institutional arrangements and periodic civic mobilization. Romania's judiciary, anchored in constitutional review and sustained by civic movements, repeatedly resisted political interference. Slovakia's recovery after the 2018 Kuciak crisis demonstrated the restorative potential of civil society and the judiciary to re-establish trust. These experiences suggest that resilience does not result from elite virtue but from institutional pluralism—a system of multiple veto points and social checks that prevents the monopolization of power and forces self-correction through conflict.

The resilience of post-transition democracies thus depends on the interaction of three functional dimensions. Structural capacity refers to the administrative and fiscal ability to implement decisions and maintain the coherence of governance. Procedural integrity involves transparency, predictability, and impartiality in decision-making, which generate legitimacy and voluntary compliance. Civic embeddedness encompasses the strength of participatory and deliberative mechanisms connecting institutions with society. The equilibrium among these dimensions forms the triangle of democratic sustainability. When one side collapses—typically the civic dimension—the others gradually erode, leading to what Larry Diamond [23] has described as the “ill winds” of hollowed democracies that preserve formal pluralism but lose moral cohesion.

Crises have served as decisive tests of resilience. The 2008 financial collapse exposed fiscal fragility but also stimulated technocratic learning and the professionalization of central banks and fiscal councils. Romania and Poland, by enforcing rule-based fiscal management, achieved relative stability and gained institutional maturity. The COVID-19 pandemic presented a different challenge, testing executive accountability and administrative coordination. States that had developed digital infrastructures and inter-ministerial cooperation—such as Estonia, Slovakia, and to a lesser extent Romania—managed the crisis more effectively, while others experienced a decline in transparency and a rise in populist narratives. The war in Ukraine since 2022 has provided yet another stress test, compelling CEE democracies to balance national security imperatives with procedural norms. The region's collective response, characterized by support for Ukraine and alignment with EU sanctions, demonstrated an emerging form of reactive resilience built on coordinated policy coherence.

At the core of these responses lies the issue of trust, the most fragile and yet decisive resource of institutional endurance. Eurobarometer data reveal persistently low levels of confidence in national governments across the region, oscillating between 20 and 35 percent, while trust in the EU and judicial institutions remains comparatively higher. This asymmetry suggests that legitimacy can migrate from one institutional level to another: when national institutions lose credibility, supranational or judicial ones temporarily absorb it. Rothstein's [5] thesis that impartial institutions create self-reinforcing trust finds particular resonance here. Where fairness is perceived, compliance follows; where elites exploit institutions for private gain, cynicism erodes the very basis of democratic endurance.

Over the last three decades, post-transition democracies have demonstrated that institutional endurance requires continuous adaptation rather than static preservation. The European Union's evolving governance instruments—the Rule of Law Mechanism, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and the conditional link between funding and democratic performance—reflect a gradual shift from external conditionality to internal capacity-building. The emphasis now falls on fostering learning rather than punishing deviation. For Romania and Slovakia, these tools have encouraged administrative modernization and judicial reform; for Hungary and Poland, they have provided counterweights to domestic illiberalism in contexts of constitutional and judicial erosion [24]. In both scenarios, resilience emerges as a negotiated equilibrium between national autonomy and supranational oversight.

In the long run, democratic sustainability in post-transition Europe cannot rely on constitutional engineering or electoral alternation alone. It depends on institutional reflexivity—the ability of political systems to interpret crises as opportunities for recalibration and to renew legitimacy through transparent adaptation. Echoing Luhmann's [6] idea of autopoietic systems, such democracies survive not by avoiding instability but by transforming it into learning. In this transformation lies the deeper meaning of resilience: the conversion of vulnerability into coherence and of uncertainty into renewed legitimacy.

5. Case Study: Romania's Adaptive Governance (2007–2025)

Romania offers a revealing case of how democratic resilience can emerge from systemic fragility. Over the past two decades, the country has experienced chronic political volatility, elite fragmentation, and low public trust. Yet, despite these vulnerabilities, Romania has maintained procedural legitimacy and avoided the institutional breakdown that might have followed repeated crises. This paradox—fragile stability—illustrates Douglass North's [3] idea of path dependence with adaptive feedback: institutions that evolve incrementally under constraint, learning from stress rather than collapsing beneath it.

Since its accession to the European Union in 2007, Romania's governance has been shaped by the dual influence of external oversight and domestic contestation. The Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), established to monitor judicial reform and the fight against corruption, functioned as both a source of legitimacy and a political weapon. Between 2007 and 2019, the CVM reports were invoked alternately by reformist and conservative actors, reflecting the ambiguous role of conditionality as both a disciplining and polarizing force. The formal closure of the CVM in 2023 marked a symbolic turning point: the country was now expected to sustain rule-of-law standards through internal mechanisms of accountability rather than external supervision.

This institutional transition coincided with the introduction of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) in 2021, which provided a new architecture for linking EU funding to structural reform. Unlike the CVM, the PNRR relies on performance and learning rather than monitoring and sanction, fostering horizontal coordination across ministries and encouraging public consultation in strategic planning. The mechanism

thus represents a shift from externally imposed compliance to domestically owned reform, suggesting that resilience can become endogenous when procedural norms are internalized rather than merely observed.

Romania's experience between 2007 and 2025 reveals three major dynamics of adaptive governance. The first concerns policy coherence. Despite recurrent political instability and alternating coalitions, the technocratic core of the state—the Ministry of Finance, the National Bank, and the Fiscal Council—managed to preserve continuity and professionalism. Institutional memory survived cabinet turnover, regulatory learning occurred across governments, and European coordination provided a stable reference point for fiscal and administrative discipline. Over time, ministries began to treat EU procedural requirements as internal governance instruments, transforming imported norms into domestic habits. This evolution exemplifies what Scharpf [10] described as anticipatory governance: a capacity to learn proactively from external feedback.

The second dynamic is procedural legitimacy, consolidated through judicial independence. The judiciary became the central pillar of Romania's democratic resilience, particularly during the 2017–2019 political crisis, when legislative attempts to weaken anticorruption laws provoked massive civic protests. Institutions such as the Constitutional Court, the Superior Council of Magistracy, and the National Anticorruption Directorate acted as veto players that constrained political interference and preserved the rule of law. Their resistance created what Merkel [11] terms reactive resilience—legitimacy generated through opposition to abuse. Yet this came at the cost of deep public polarization. According to Eurobarometer data, trust in the judiciary hovers around 37 percent, while confidence in Parliament and Government remains below 20 percent. The judiciary's endurance thus stems not from perceived efficiency but from its symbolic role as the moral boundary of democratic order, embodying the procedural integrity that citizens defend even when they doubt its performance.

The third dynamic involves civic participation and the rise of a monitory public sphere. The wave of protests under the #Rezist banner between 2017 and 2019 transformed the relationship between citizens and institutions. These movements were not partisan but procedural: they defended the independence of the judiciary and the idea of fairness itself. They also represented the Romanian variant of what John Keane [12] calls monitory democracy—a permanent, decentralized vigilance exercised through civic networks, digital platforms, and investigative media. This vigilance gradually institutionalized itself, giving rise to watchdog NGOs, participatory policy platforms, and ministerial consultation mechanisms integrated into PNRR implementation. While civic mobilization has fluctuated since 2020, its cultural impact endures: participation evolved from street protest to policy monitoring, transforming civic outrage into a modest but functional infrastructure of accountability.

Nonetheless, Romania's resilience remains constrained by structural weaknesses that continue to threaten sustainability. Corruption and clientelism persist in public procurement and local governance, reflecting the unfinished character of administrative reform [25]. Political polarization, often amplified by populist narratives, erodes trust in representative institutions and weakens democratic culture. Bureaucratic inertia and politicized appointments drain institutional energy and discourage innovation. These limitations confirm Bo Rothstein's [5] argument that impartiality and fairness are not permanent achievements but ongoing practices. Romania has learned to withstand crises but has not yet learned to prevent them.

The cumulative lesson of Romania's experience is that resilience can be constructed through conflict and maintained through procedural fidelity rather than consensus. Three mechanisms explain this paradoxical endurance. First, external anchoring through EU

oversight remains essential, but it succeeds only when coupled with domestic ownership of reform. Second, judicial independence functions as a compensatory source of legitimacy when political institutions fail. Third, sustained civic vigilance transforms democratic fragility into participatory learning. In this sense, resilience emerges not from stability but from the institutionalization of contestation—the ability to manage conflict within the boundaries of democratic procedure.

As Romania advances toward the late 2020s, the key challenge is to consolidate endogenous resilience, the capacity to generate legitimacy from within rather than through external conditionality. The post-CVM and PNRR frameworks have laid the foundations for such an evolution, but the outcome will depend on whether procedural integrity can be translated into public trust. If this internalization succeeds, Romania could transition from a resilient democracy by default to a resilient democracy by design. If not, it risks remaining trapped in a cycle of dependence on external discipline and periodic civic correction. Ultimately, the Romanian case demonstrates that democracy survives not because it is immune to crisis but because it learns to transform crisis into a resource for reform.

6. Comparative Insights: Central-Eastern Europe

This section adopts a focused comparative strategy in order to balance analytical depth and regional scope. Romania and Hungary are treated as the two central case studies, as they represent contrasting but analytically revealing trajectories of institutional resilience under democratic stress. Romania illustrates a pattern of adaptive, procedurally anchored resilience within a formally democratic framework, while Hungary exemplifies authoritarian adaptation through institutional capture and instrumental governance.

Poland and Slovakia are retained strictly as contextual reference cases rather than as full case studies. Poland serves to illustrate a form of societal compensatory resilience under conditions of institutional regression, while Slovakia provides a background example of post-crisis restorative adjustment. Their inclusion is intended to sharpen the contrast between the two central cases—Romania and Hungary—rather than to extend the comparative analysis symmetrically.

Yet, over the years, they have followed increasingly distinct paths of adaptation, regression, or recovery. Their experiences demonstrate that institutional design and formal compliance are necessary but not sufficient conditions for democratic resilience. What differentiates these countries is the degree to which institutions have internalized normative legitimacy and developed the capacity for learning under crisis.

Hungary represents the archetype of autocratic adaptation, a system that has preserved the formal façade of pluralism while hollowing out its substance through legal manipulation and administrative centralization. Romania, as shown earlier, illustrates a contrasting pattern of reactive democratic resilience grounded in judicial autonomy and sustained civic vigilance. By contrast, Poland exhibits a dual trajectory in which civic mobilization partially compensates for institutional regression at the national level [1,22], while Slovakia occupies an intermediate position characterized by post-crisis restorative adjustment following the 2018 corruption scandals [1,12]. These trajectories can be synthesized through the tripartite framework developed earlier—policy coherence, procedural legitimacy, and civic participation—which provides a multidimensional lens for comparing resilience across the region. Comparative patterns of democratic resilience across Central-Eastern Europe are summarized in Table 2.

The comparison suggests that resilience in the region is not monolithic but relational. States may fail in one dimension yet compensate through another. Poland's civic energy has mitigated institutional decay, Romania's judicial autonomy has compensated for political instability, and Slovakia's civic awakening has restored legitimacy after moral crisis. Hun-

gary, by contrast, demonstrates that administrative capacity without normative constraint leads to autocratic entrenchment rather than democratic sustainability.

Table 2. Dimensions of Democratic Resilience in Central-Eastern Europe (2007–2025).

Country	Policy Coherence	Procedural Legitimacy	Civic Participation/ Monitory Capacity	Overall Pattern of Resilience
Hungary	High administrative efficiency but centralized decision-making subordinated to party control.	Systematic erosion of judicial and media independence; legality used to legitimize authoritarian practices.	Shrinking civic space and restricted pluralism.	Instrumental resilience leading to systemic rigidity.
Poland	Initially coherent policy framework undermined by constitutional disputes and judicial politicization.	Partial decline of checks and balances at the national level but strong local governance.	Persistent civic mobilization and EU leverage reinforcing accountability.	Societal resilience compensating for institutional regression.
Slovakia	Incremental administrative reform and fiscal stabilization.	Post-2019 judicial reform restoring public confidence after corruption scandals.	Youth-led activism and NGOs rebuilding legitimacy.	Restorative resilience after crisis.
Romania	Moderate policy coherence sustained through EU anchors and fiscal learning.	Enduring judicial independence amid political volatility.	Stable ecosystem of NGOs and digital activism ensuring accountability.	Reactive resilience under sustained political stress.

Source: Author's own conceptual model, based on the framework of democratic resilience proposed by Lührmann & Merkel [2] and informed by insights from the V-Dem Democracy Reports [14,15].

European integration has played a decisive but ambivalent role in shaping these outcomes. Initially, the EU functioned as a powerful external anchor through pre-accession conditionality and post-accession monitoring. More recently, however, the nature of this influence has evolved. The Rule of Law Mechanism and the Recovery and Resilience Facility introduced a new mode of conditionality based less on punishment and more on performance. This shift from compliance to capacity has favored states like Romania and Slovakia, which use EU instruments as frameworks for learning and modernization, while it has triggered nationalist backlash in Poland and Hungary, where external oversight has been framed as an intrusion upon sovereignty. The effectiveness of European leverage thus depends on legitimacy transfer: resilience is enhanced when supranational norms are internalized as shared values, but undermined when they are perceived as external coercion.

Another important factor shaping resilience is the persistence of informal institutions—networks of patronage, clientelism, and oligarchic influence—that coexist with formal legal frameworks. In Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Poland, informal hierarchies have supplanted the rule of law, creating hybrid regimes where legality is subordinated to political loyalty. In Romania and Slovakia, informality persists but cohabits with legalist tendencies, producing hybrid accountability regimes that oscillate between compliance and contestation. North's [3] concept of institutional layering helps explain this phenomenon: formal reforms are often built upon, rather than in place of, preexisting informal norms. True resilience depends on whether these layers converge toward coherence or perpetuate contradiction. Path dependence also shapes how resilience unfolds. In the region's political history, crises have frequently become moments of accelerated learning. The 2012 constitutional confrontation in Romania, the judiciary crisis in Poland, and the aftermath of Ján Kuciak's assassination in Slovakia each triggered waves of mobilization and reform that

rebalanced power. This cyclical pattern—crisis, learning, consolidation—illustrates Duit and Galaz's [26] idea of adaptive governance as a self-correcting process.

The rise of digital activism has further transformed the ecology of resilience in Central-Eastern Europe, introducing new systemic pressures related to algorithmic mediation, informational asymmetries, and the acceleration of polarization [27]. Hashtag movements such as #Rezist in Romania, #WolneSady in Poland, and *Za slušné Slovensko* in Slovakia have expanded the monitoring function of civil society, linking national debates to transnational networks and amplifying accountability through visibility. Yet, as much as digital media empower participation, they also amplify polarization and disinformation. Romania and Slovakia have preserved relative pluralism thanks to an active NGO sector and professional journalism, while Hungary's media ecosystem has been largely captured by governmental interests. The quality of democratic resilience, therefore, depends on whether digital communication fosters deliberation or reproduces propaganda.

From these comparative observations emerge three distinct models of adaptive governance. The first, exemplified by Romania and Slovakia, may be described as *resilient legalism*, where judicial independence and procedural norms constitute the core of legitimacy. The second, illustrated by Poland, is *societal compensatory resilience*, in which civic mobilization substitutes for institutional weakness. The third, represented by Hungary, is *instrumental resilience without democracy*, where administrative control and policy coherence coexist with normative decay. These classifications are not intended as regime typologies in a strict sense, but as analytical heuristics derived from the literature on democratic backsliding and illiberal transformation. Hungary has been variously described as an "illiberal democracy" or as a case of authoritarian drift within the EU [2,28], reflecting an ongoing scholarly debate rather than a settled definition. These models highlight that resilience, in itself, is politically neutral—it can sustain democracy or entrench authoritarianism, depending on its moral direction.

At a structural level, four conditions seem to determine whether resilience supports democratic sustainability: institutional pluralism that prevents the concentration of power, normative alignment between procedural rules and social expectations of fairness, synergy between civic participation and institutional accountability, and the presence of learning infrastructures that convert crisis into institutional memory. Romania and Slovakia exemplify how modest but cumulative reforms grounded in these conditions can stabilize democracy even without spectacular economic success. Conversely, Hungary and Poland demonstrate that economic performance cannot compensate for the erosion of moral legitimacy.

As the region faces new geopolitical, economic, and technological challenges—from the consequences of the war in Ukraine to the social dislocations of digital transformation—the question of resilience becomes inseparable from that of sustainability. The European Union's post-2025 governance architecture, which links rule-of-law compliance to access to funding, will test whether these democracies can institutionalize learning rather than merely react to crisis. Should Romania and Slovakia succeed in transforming procedural discipline into internalized trust, and Poland restore judicial independence through renewed consensus, the region could shift from reactive to proactive resilience. If not, democratic sustainability will remain contingent—an achievement maintained through vigilance rather than conviction.

Ultimately, the experience of Central-Eastern Europe affirms Luhmann's insight that complex systems do not survive by eliminating instability but by learning to live with it. The region's democracies endure not because they are stable, but because they have learned—sometimes painfully—to transform instability into self-understanding.

7. Discussion and Conclusions: Toward a Model of Sustainable Democratic Governance

The experience of post-transition Europe over the past three decades provides an extensive field for observing not only the fragility of democratization but also its extraordinary capacity for survival. The endurance of these political systems through recurrent economic, social, and geopolitical crises suggests that democracy, even in its most vulnerable form, possesses adaptive intelligence. Yet the central question is no longer whether democracies can survive, but whether they can evolve toward sustainability—whether resilience can mature into a stable equilibrium in which institutions do not merely endure stress but regenerate legitimacy and trust through it.

Resilience alone, as both Keane [12] and Merkel [11] remind us, is not a sufficient guarantee of democratic quality [29,30]. Authoritarian regimes can also be resilient in maintaining control. Democratic sustainability, by contrast, requires that resilience remain normatively bounded—that adaptation and flexibility serve pluralism, accountability, and fairness. This distinction helps explain why the same structural capacity can produce divergent outcomes: Hungary’s administrative coherence supports illiberal consolidation, while Romania’s procedural persistence sustains democracy despite volatility [31].

The evidence discussed throughout the study supports a tripartite model of sustainable democratic governance grounded in the interaction between institutional, normative, and communicative dimensions. The institutional dimension concerns the durability of formal rules and structures—the constitutions, courts, and administrations that provide predictability and constraint. It draws from North’s [3] notion of institutions as the rules of the game and reflects the structural continuity necessary for stability. The normative dimension refers to the moral foundations of legitimacy: fairness, impartiality, and trust, as articulated by Rothstein [5] and Merkel [11]. Institutions that are perceived as just elicit voluntary compliance, creating a self-reinforcing circle of legitimacy. The communicative dimension, inspired by Keane’s [12] concept of monitory democracy, highlights the importance of feedback between citizens and institutions through participation, deliberation, and transparency.

When these three dimensions function together, they form a recursive system in which institutional stability supports normative trust, normative trust sustains civic participation, and civic participation, in turn, revitalizes institutions. The equilibrium among these elements transforms resilience from a reaction to crisis into a permanent capacity for renewal. The model also implies a shift from viewing resilience as a static attribute to understanding it as a learning process. Democracies that endure are those capable of converting crisis into knowledge and reform. This learning logic unfolds through three interrelated capacities: absorptive, adaptive, and transformative. Absorptive capacity allows institutions to mitigate shocks through established procedures. Adaptive capacity enables the modification of these procedures in response to new circumstances. Transformative capacity involves the re-legitimation of democratic norms through public debate and institutional innovation. Romania’s evolution from externally monitored compliance under the CVM to domestically managed accountability through the PNRR exemplifies this process, as does Slovakia’s post-2018 reform trajectory that converted civic indignation into administrative modernization.

This understanding of resilience as institutional learning resonates with Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic systems. Democracies sustain themselves not by external validation but by reproducing legitimacy internally through communication. When feedback mechanisms between citizens and institutions are transparent and functional, legitimacy regenerates organically; when they are obstructed, democratic reproduction falters. Sustainable democracy therefore depends on embedding learning into bureaucratic routines, civic

education, and policy evaluation—transforming adaptation from an emergency response into an ordinary practice. At the supranational level, the European Union has evolved from disciplinarian to facilitator, shifting from conditionality to capacity-building. The Rule of Law Mechanism and the Recovery and Resilience Facility embody this transformation. Rather than policing deviations, the EU now seeks to enhance member states' ability to self-correct through performance-based incentives. This reflects a deeper understanding that the legitimacy of European integration rests not on uniformity but on the ability of diverse systems to learn collectively [31]. For Romania and Slovakia, the EU has functioned as both a mentor and a mirror—a source of procedural learning and a platform for internalizing democratic norms. For Hungary and Poland, however, this transformation remains contested, as external oversight continues to be framed in nationalist terms.

These findings can be synthesized in a conceptual framework that captures the interdependence of institutional, normative, and communicative dimensions. The dimensions and mechanisms of sustainable democratic resilience are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Dimensions and Mechanisms of Sustainable Democratic Resilience.

Dimension	Core Mechanism	Outcome	Empirical Illustration
Institutional	Stability through procedural continuity and plural veto points.	Structural endurance of democratic institutions.	Judicial independence in Romania; constitutional checks in Slovakia.
Normative	Fairness and impartiality generating voluntary compliance.	Reproduction of legitimacy and trust.	Post-crisis legitimacy in Slovakia and Poland.
Communicative	Continuous feedback between citizens and institutions.	Adaptive learning and civic monitoring.	Digital activism and watchdog NGOs across the region.

Source: Author's synthesis based on the conceptual frameworks of North [3], Rothstein [5], and Lührmann & Merkel [2], informed by Keane's [12] account of monitory democracy.

This model demonstrates that democratic sustainability depends on feedback loops among the three dimensions: institutions must embody stability without rigidity, norms must generate legitimacy without dogmatism, and communication must empower participation without chaos. The interaction of these mechanisms creates what might be called *self-correcting democracy*, a system that maintains equilibrium through learning and deliberation rather than through coercion or inertia. The conceptual model of sustainable democratic resilience is illustrated in Figure 1.

These dimensions are mutually reinforcing: institutional endurance requires normative trust; normative trust requires communicative transparency; communicative transparency, in turn, stabilizes institutions. Their integration defines *sustainable democratic resilience*—a self-correcting system capable of maintaining democratic quality under permanent uncertainty.

The broader policy implications of this model extend beyond the CEE region. First, institutional design should prioritize redundancy and pluralism. In fragile democracies, overlapping mechanisms of accountability—constitutional courts, fiscal councils, ombudsmen—are not inefficiencies but safeguards against concentration of power. Second, civic infrastructure must be strengthened as a structural component of governance, not as an accessory. Media, NGOs, universities, and other intermediaries constitute the connective tissue of communicative resilience. Finally, governance should integrate a long-term temporal perspective that transcends electoral short-termism. Embedding foresight and continuous evaluation in policy cycles is essential to transform resilience from crisis management into preventive governance.

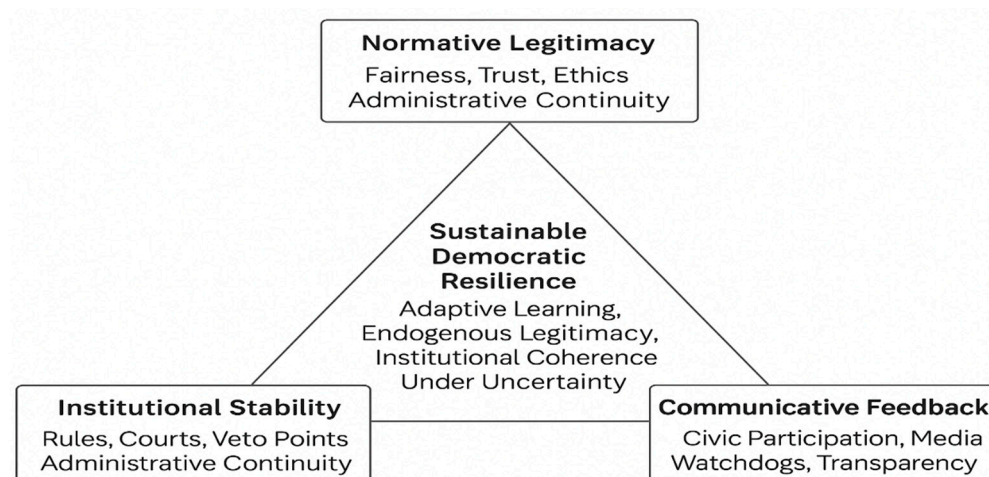


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Sustainable Democratic Resilience. Source: Author’s own conceptual framework.

For Romania specifically, the consolidation of endogenous resilience will require translating procedural credibility into societal trust. This entails embedding civic monitoring into formal decision-making and institutionalizing participatory consultation as a norm rather than an exception. For the region as a whole, democratic sustainability will depend on whether institutions can remain responsive without becoming reactive—adaptable without losing their moral compass.

Ultimately, the European post-transition experience confirms that democracy’s greatest strength lies not in its perfection but in its capacity to persist through reinvention. Romania’s adaptive governance, Slovakia’s restorative reform, and Poland’s civic vitality testify to the enduring creativity of democratic systems that refuse to capitulate. Sustainability, in this sense, is not the absence of crisis but the ability to derive meaning from it. Democratic institutions that endure are those that transform vulnerability into self-awareness, conflict into communication, and uncertainty into legitimacy. In that transformation resides the moral intelligence of democracy—the very capacity to remain faithful to its principles while continuously reinventing its practices.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are based on publicly available secondary sources, including the V-Dem Dataset, at <https://v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/country-year-v-dem-fullothers-v15> (accessed on 25 December 2025), and V-Dem Democracy Reports, at https://v-dem.net/documents/61/v-dem-dr_2025_lowres_v2.pdf (accessed on 25 December 2025), European Commission Rule of Law Report 2025, at https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/annual-rule-law-cycle/2025-rule-law-report_en (accessed on 25 December 2025), World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators> (accessed on 25 December 2025), Eurostat Database, at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (accessed on 25 December 2025), CEPEJ judicial statistics, at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-stat> (accessed on 25 December 2025), and documents of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), at <https://edz.bib.uni-mannheim.de/www-edz/doku/wsa/2021/ces-2021-3684-en.pdf> (accessed on 25 December 2025).

Acknowledgments: During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used AI-assisted tools for language editing, clarification, and structuring of the text. The author reviewed, edited, and takes full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Levitsky, S.; Ziblatt, D. *How Democracies Die*; Crown: New York, NY, USA, 2018.
2. Lührmann, A.; Merkel, W. *Resilience of Democracies: Responses to Illiberal and Authoritarian Challenges*; Routledge: London, UK, 2023.
3. North, D.C. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1990.
4. March, J.G.; Olsen, J.P. *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*; Free Press: New York, NY, USA, 1989.
5. Rothstein, B. *The Quality of Government: Corruption, Social Trust, and Inequality in International Perspective*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 2011.
6. Luhmann, N. *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*; Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 1997.
7. Mahoney, J.; Thelen, K. *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2010.
8. Streeck, W.; Thelen, K. *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2005.
9. Duit, A. Resilience thinking: Lessons for public administration. *Public Adm.* **2016**, *94*, 364–380. [CrossRef]
10. Scharpf, F.W. *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1999.
11. Merkel, W. *Im Zwielficht: Zerbrechlichkeit und Resilienz der Demokratie im 21. Jahrhundert*; Campus Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2023.
12. Keane, J. *The New Despotism*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2020.
13. Pop-Eleches, G.; Tucker, J.A. *Communism's Shadow: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Political Attitudes*; Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, USA, 2017.
14. V-Dem Institute. *V-Dem Dataset v-15*; Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg: Goteborg, Sweden, 2025. Available online: <https://v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/country-year-v-dem-fullothers-v15/> (accessed on 25 December 2025).
15. V-Dem Institute. *Democracy Report 2025: Democracy Report 2025. 25 Years of Autocratization—Democracy Trumped?* Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg: Goteborg, Sweden, 2025. Available online: https://v-dem.net/documents/61/v-dem-dr_2025_lowres_v2.pdf (accessed on 25 December 2025).
16. World Bank. DataBank, Worldwide Governance Indicators. Available online: <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators> (accessed on 25 December 2025).
17. Eurostat Database. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (accessed on 25 December 2025).
18. Council of Europe, European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ). Dynamic Database of European Judicial Systems. Available online: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-stat> (accessed on 25 December 2025).
19. European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The Impact of COVID-19 on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law Across the EU and the Future of Democracy. Opinion. Brussels. 2022. Available online: <https://edz.bib.uni-mannheim.de/www-edz/doku/wsa/2021/ces-2021-3684-en.pdf> (accessed on 25 December 2025).
20. European Commission. Rule of Law Report 2025. Available online: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/annual-rule-law-cycle/2025-rule-law-report_en (accessed on 25 December 2025).
21. European Commission. Standard Eurobarometer 104—Autumn 2025. Available online: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3378> (accessed on 25 December 2025).
22. Béné, C. Resilience of democracy: A systemic perspective. *World Dev.* **2022**, *157*, 105921. [CrossRef]
23. Diamond, L. *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency*; Penguin Press: London, UK, 2020.
24. Sadurski, W. *Poland's Constitutional Breakdown*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2019.
25. Mungiu-Pippidi, A. *The Quest for Good Governance: How Societies Develop Control of Corruption*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2015.
26. Duit, A.; Galaz, V.; Eckerberg, K.; Ebbesson, J. Governance, complexity, and resilience. *Glob. Environ. Change* **2010**, *20*, 363–368. [CrossRef]

27. Helbing, D.; Mahajan, S.; Fricker, R.H.; Musso, A.; Hausladen, C.I.; Carissimo, C.; Carpentras, D.; Stockinger, E.; Sanchez-Vaquerizo, J.A.; Yang, J.C.; et al. Democracy by Design: Perspectives for Digitally Assisted, Participatory Upgrades of Society. *J. Comput. Sci.* **2023**, *71*, 102061. [[CrossRef](#)]
28. Rupnik, J. Orbán's Hungary: From "Illiberal Democracy" to the Authoritarian Temptation. In *Contemporary Populists in Power*; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2022. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Schmitter, P.C. Crisis and transition, but not decline. *J. Democr.* **2015**, *26*, 32–44. [[CrossRef](#)]
30. Bohle, D.; Greskovits, B. *Capitalist Diversity on Europe's Periphery*; Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, USA, 2012.
31. Bruszt, L.; Vukov, V. Making states for the single market: European integration and the reshaping of economic states in the Southern and Eastern peripheries of Europe. *West Eur. Politics* **2017**, *40*, 663–687. [[CrossRef](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.