



**WZB**

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin  
für Sozialforschung

# What is Democratic Resilience & How to Strengthen it?

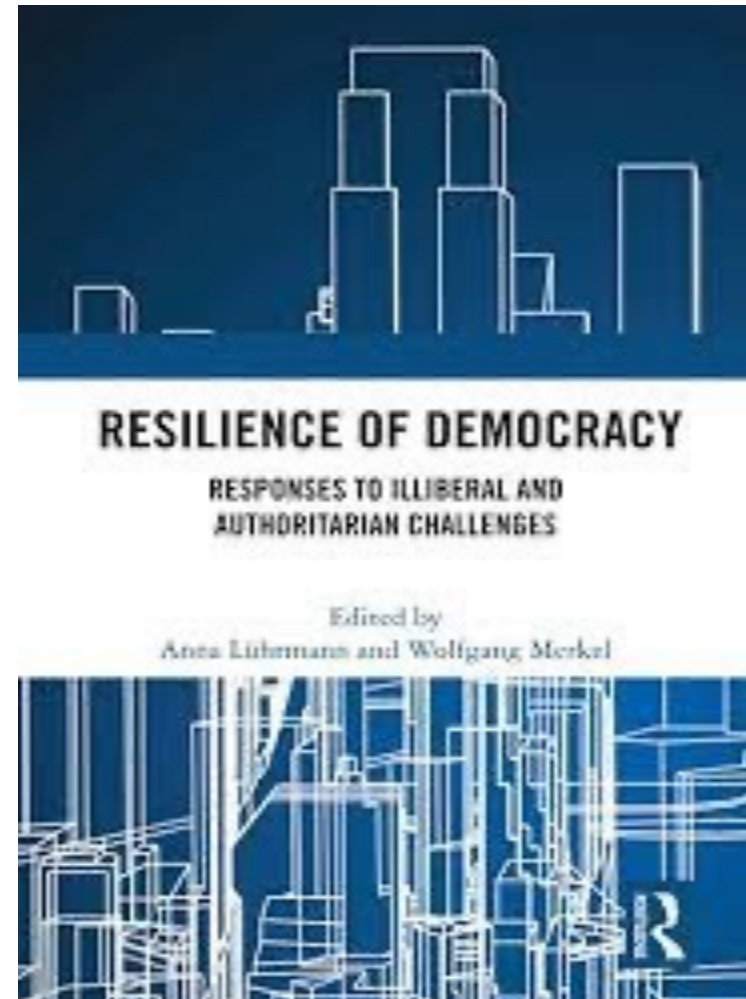
**Wolfgang Merkel**  
**Unity & Diversity**  
**Tallinn 12.11.2025**



*Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*



# Fragility and Resilience of Democracy

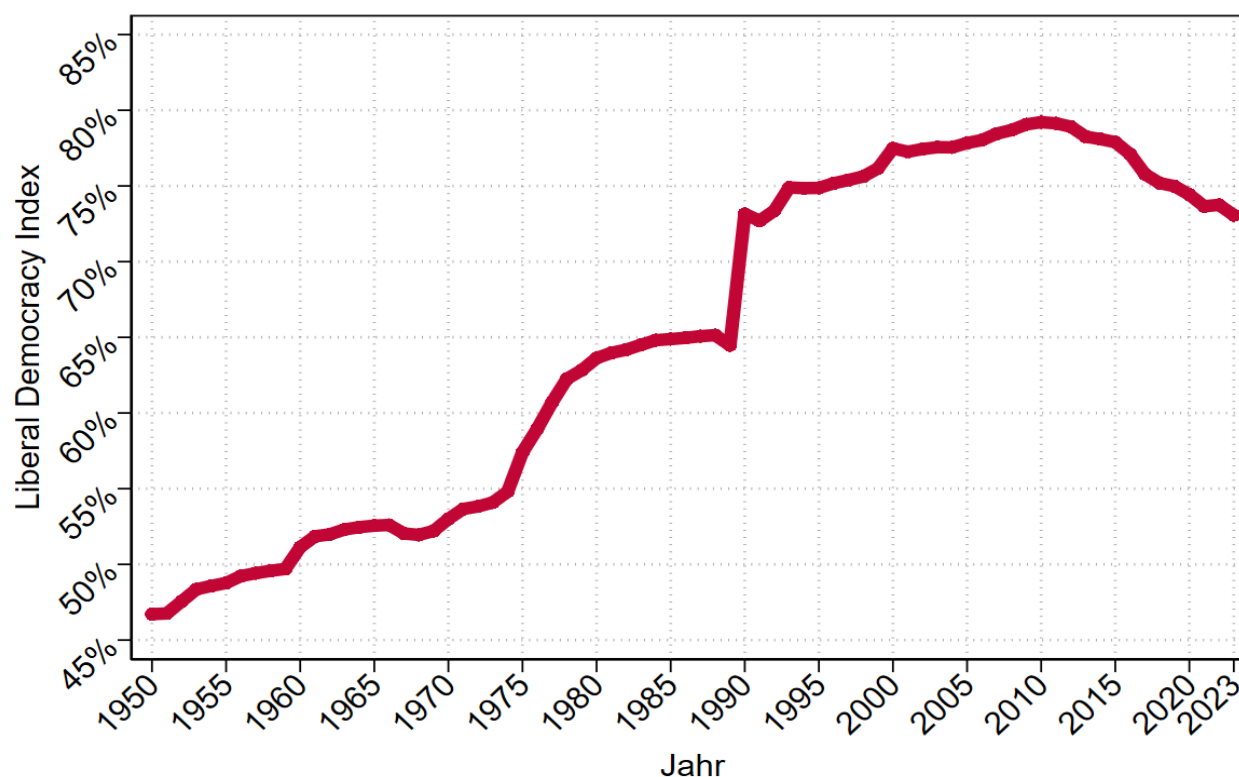


## *Structure: 4 Steps*

- Erosion of Democracy
- What is democratic resilience?
  - Building blocks of a concept
  - Structures, Actors, Functions, Interdependencies
  - Definition
- The Concept
- How can we strengthen Democratic Resilience?

## Liberal Democracy Index 1950-2024: Average

EU, UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, USA, Japan



Quelle: V Dem - Varieties of Democracy: Durchschnitt der 26 EU-Mitgliedstaaten (exkl. Malta), Vereinigtes Königreich, Australien, Neuseeland, Kanada, USA und Japan

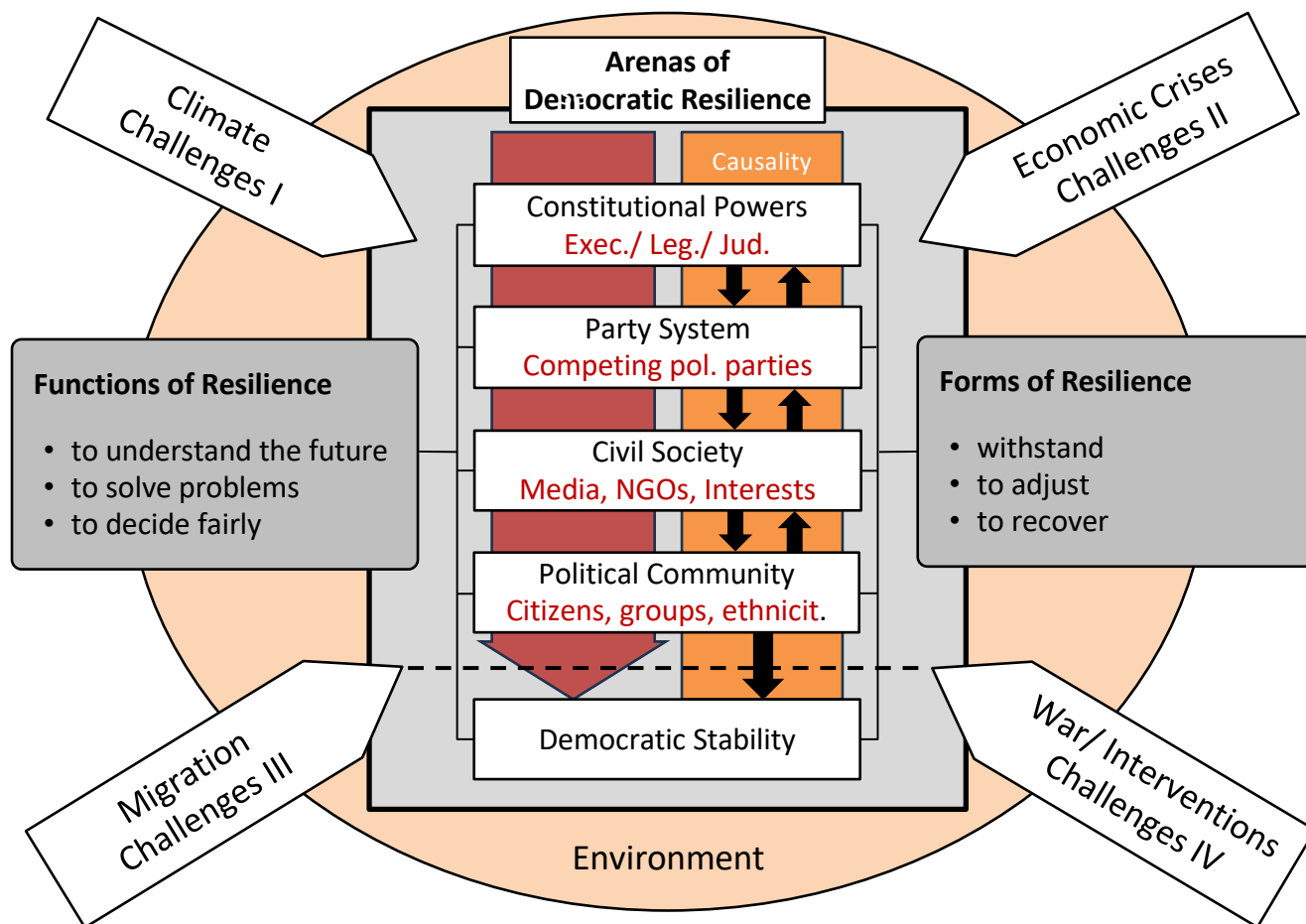
## *What is (democratic) resilience?*

- A scientific key concept in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Used in many disciplines of science
- **Definition:**
- ***R. is the ability of a system to absorb, withstand or recover (from) disturbances and stressors without undergoing a regime change, while maintaining its basic structure and functions.***
- R. has a double meaning: it is an analytic-descriptive term and a normative action orientation in terms of governmental interventions

## *Theory: Building Blocks*

- Function: basic functions
- Structure: Institution(al arenas)
- Actors/ Actions: forms of resilience
- System: Challenges, interdependence, feed back

# A multi-arena model of democratic resilience



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## *Strengthening democratic resilience on 4 levels:*

### *1. Constitutional Powers*

- Rebalancing executive – legislative (in/ after „new“ crisis)
- Judiciary: AC & CC checking the executive
- Re-strengthening parliaments
- Complementing parliaments by opening deliberat. arenas
- Rebalancing input-, throughput-, output legitimacy



## *2. Parties & Party Systems*

- Isolating anti-system parties
- Converting semi-loyal parties
- Reviving democratic opposition
- Strengthening representativeness and responsiveness

### *3. Civic Culture & Civil Society*

- Reducing societal polarization
- Producing bridging social capital
- Reducing bonding social capital
- Opening new participatory spaces

## *Political Community*

- Strengthening common sense of belongingness
- Paying respect to diversity
- Avoiding moralistic exclusion/ polarization
- Softening socio-econ. and socio-cultural cleavages
- Fair burden sharing (esp. In times of crises)

## *The Importance of Output/ Outcomes*

- Input, throughput, output
- Growing importance of output in times of T & I
  - Solving problems
  - Understanding future
  - Deciding fairly

## *Conclusion I: Strengthening Democratic Resilience*

- Decade of multiple unresolved/unresolvable crises
- Major attack comes from RWP illiberalism
- Avoiding Illiberal reactions of liberal parties in „new crises“
- Do not exclude moralistically!

## *Conclusion II: Building Bridges*

- Nationalists & Supranationalists
- Cosmopolitans & Communitarians
- Well educated & less educated
- Epistemizers & Deniers (climate; pandemic)
- Social Classes: Supporting the poors
- Fair burden sharing in crises among social classes
- Depolarize conflicts, don't depluralise politics



# Thank You Aitäh!