

## What is Democratic Resilience and How Can We Strengthen It?

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### Introduction

Resilience has risen to become a key concept in science and society. It has come out of nowhere, as the state and constitutional theorist Gunnar Folke Schuppert (2021) writes. This is true for the first two decades of the 21st century. Today, resilience is used in scientific disciplines as diverse as materials science, architecture, engineering, health research, psychology, sociology, ecology, sustainability science and now, for some years, political science.

The term originates from materials physics, where it describes the ability of "materials to return to their original state after temporary deformation" (Bröckling 2017, p. 1). More generally, resilience means the ability of an object or a system to withstand external and internal disturbances, impositions and shocks without giving up its fundamental structures and functions. Resilience enables transformation but prevents systemic change. As a scientific concept, resilience is, on the one hand, an analytical category that seeks to grasp empirically "what is" (what resilience potential does a particular democratic system have?) and, on the other hand, postulates normatively "what should be" (how is a desirable resilient democracy to be established?). The empirical and normative dimensions of the concept of resilience must at first be kept apart. This applies not least to democracy research. This policy brief wants to transform the simple use of the term "democratic resilience"<sup>1</sup> into

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<sup>1</sup> In this policy brief, I will use "democratic resilience" and "resilience of democracy" as synonyms.

an analytical concept which allows us to explore the state of resilience of real existing democracies and to discuss the methods, instruments, and ways to strengthen it in times of multiple challenges.

## Two Conjectures of Democracy

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist dictatorships of Eastern Europe in 1989, a mood of democratic awakening prevailed. Autocracies became democracies and, even in the established democracies of the West, it was about nothing less than the "democratisation of democracy". The optimism died down after two decades. Now the debate in both East and West focuses on democratic self-defence and the resilience of democracy. Why is the resilience of democracy the big issue at the moment? Why is it necessary to strengthen it, and what do we see as the forces that are draining it?

The first answer is: because democracy today is in danger of losing its ability to control political affairs both internally and externally (Lührmann and Merkel 2023). It is also challenged as a system by efficient autocratic (People's Republic of China or PRC) or hybrid (Singapore) regimes. In particular, the capitalist dictatorship of the PRC today appears to some as a competitor to liberal democratic (capitalist) systems in terms of efficiency. Unrivalled high economic growth rates, tremendous economic potential and a perceived effective mode of governance in fundamental crises, such as the Covid 19 pandemic, appear from a distance as a seductive dispositive in view of the weaknesses and slowness of democracy in economy, society and more specifically in crises.

How a society—and its professional interpreters—looks at itself and its political constitution says as much about the prevailing "zeitgeist" as it does about the state of democracy. For almost ten years, academic books by renowned Western authors have flooded the market, their titles already proclaiming their essence: *Life and Death of Democracy*, *How Democracies Die*, *The End of Democracy*, *Decline of Democracy* or, more succinctly, *Democrisis*. The optimistic exuberance of the first decade after 1989 has turned into its opposite in analogous exaggeration. Recently, however, a different perspective has begun to emerge in sync with the chants of doom and crisis. It can be briefly described as "democratic resilience" or "resilience of democracy". It does not deny the unresolved challenges of democracy or the discernible tendencies of democratic erosion. However, it does not take them as a fatal result, but rather as the starting point to reflect on the conditions of possibility for democratic resilience in the years to come.

## What Does "Resilience of Democracy" Mean?

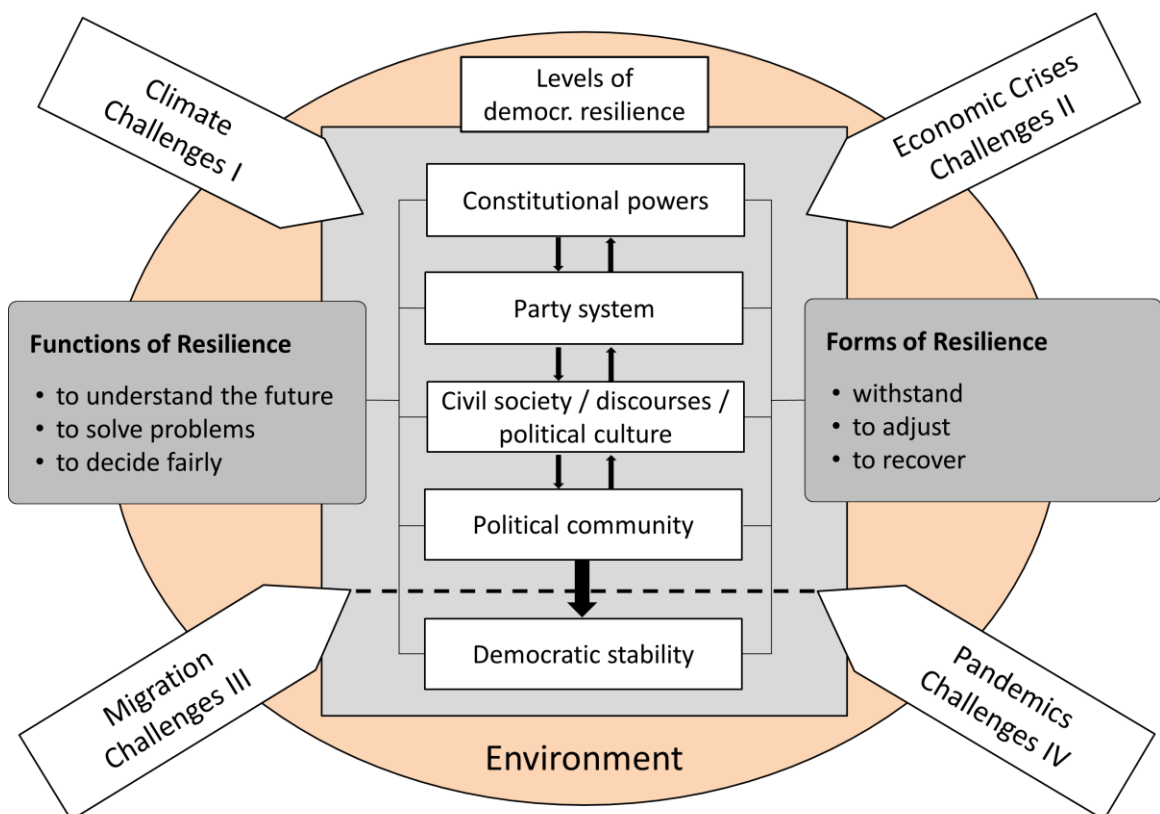
I am sceptical about the ubiquitous diagnoses of crisis, decline and end of democracy (Merkel 2018). "The" democracy in the singular is an abstract that cannot be found in the real world. Denmark is not the USA, Finland not Romania, Canada certainly not Poland or Hungary. Nevertheless, one can doubt whether the democracies of the liberal West are equipped to master the great challenges of the current decade of major transformations in such a way that their basic liberal structure is not damaged, the executive competence to solve problems is assertive and society does not break apart. Whether these three functions,

which are vital for the survival of democracy, can withstand, for example, the post-fossil transformation of industrial society with a fair distribution of burdens, is decided by the resilience of democracy. But what is democratic resilience, what functions must it fulfil and what structures and actors does it need? I define "democratic resilience" as follows:

Democratic resilience is the capacity of a democratic regime to absorb external challenges and internal stressors and to dynamically adapt to the changing functional conditions of democratic governance without falling into regime change and abandoning or damaging democracy's defining principles, functions and norms.

In other words, it is about the way in which structures, functions and actors should interact within a democratic system of rule so that they can react as effectively and democratically as possible to changing system contexts, such as external crises. Such a concept can be developed by combining "actor-centred institutionalism" (Scharpf 1997) and system-theoretical functional considerations.

Fig. 1: Multi-level model of democratic resilience (Wolfgang Merkel 2022)



Graphically, this basic definition can be differentiated in a concept of democratic resilience as illustrated in Figure 1. The corners paradigmatically outline four fundamental challenges that the liberal democratic system must overcome in the 2020s, in such a way that it does not lose the defining character of the liberal constitutional state and neither does the validity of participatory-representative popular sovereignty suffer substantial damage. These four challenges are: CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral conversion of the fossil industrial state, economic crises and socio-economic inequality, migration pressure, and pandemic. These are by no means the only impositions for the current decade, but they are probably the most pressing.

State, political and societal actors such as governments, political parties, interest groups, NGOs, courts, but also citizens are available to deal with these transformative tasks. For their part, they must act according to democracy and rule of law principles and procedures, at least in their clear majority. If actors, such as the presidential executive under Putin in Russia or Erdoğan in Turkey, act consistently with all their power resources against the rule of law, democracy and the democratic opposition, then rudimentary democratic regimes tip over into autocratic rule. If actors, such as the Hungarian government under Orbán's Fidesz or the PiS in Poland, act illiberally, corruptly and undemocratically, they encounter harsh European legal and political restrictions that considerably limit their scope of action. Therefore, they do not simply tip over into comparably authoritarian regimes, but transform themselves from liberal to illiberal-defective democracies. If anti-system or semi-loyal populist parties challenge liberal democracy, as in Italy, it will depend on the anticipations and reactions of democratic parties and citizens as to how they can preserve or even strengthen the resilience of the democratic.

There are four elementary structural levels of a democratic system (see Fig. 1) on which actors interact and democratic resilience is produced or lost. The four levels, in turn, are in a dynamic relationship with each other through their institutional interdependencies and the respective actors. As a result, positive and negative (anti-)democratic infections can quickly spread to the next levels. It is precisely this dynamic interdependence that must be kept in mind when analysing the democratic resilience of the system as a whole. I will briefly examine the four levels and their actors and indicate where the risks and opportunities of democratic resilience lie in the present decade. The focus will not be on the (neo)-authoritarian or illiberal regimes, but on the resilience of the currently (still) liberal democracies of Western Europe.

### **Control and balance of powers**

In the course of globalisation and Europeanisation, the balance of power between the executive, legislative and judicial branches has shifted in most democracies. The executive in particular has benefited from this ongoing "denationalisation" of policy-making (Zürn 1998), as it is primarily governments that carry the decision-making at the G7, G20, the WTO (World Trade Organization) or the EU (European Union). National parliaments remain largely excluded from this and have consequently suffered a creeping loss of power.

This shift in power was reinforced by the mode of governance fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. In Germany, as in other European democracies, the executive branch took further decision-making power by decree or through emergency-like powers. They justified this

shift of power by citing time pressure due to the progressing pandemic that would not allow for "time-consuming" parliamentary debates. In terms of legitimacy theory, this meant that the source of legitimacy of the participatory input of citizens and parliaments was reduced in favour of the output, understood as problem-solving by the executive. This does not have to be illegitimate in an absolute emergency situation, but it threatens to leave behind sediments of memory among politicians willing to take action, among sluggish institutions and citizens with an affinity for paternalism. Two recent surveys conducted by Diermeier and Niehues (2021) or Svulik et al. (2023) show that this is not only a plausible assumption, but has been empirically observed in Germany and other liberal democracies. In the case of controversial political issues such as migration, climate policy and the corona pandemic, the authors find that considerable groups of the population are willing to forego "time-consuming processes" of parliamentary decision-making in times of crisis if it helps the presumed efficiency in solving the problem. This applies, for example, to AfD (Alternative for Germany) supporters on the migration and refugee issue, to Green supporters on the climate issue and in the Corona crisis across parties and social classes. However, a rule of thumb might serve: the higher the level of education, the lower the tendency to sacrifice democratic principles and procedures for presumed efficiency (*ibid.*). This fact also provides initial insights into how democratic resilience can be strengthened at this point through better (political) education.

Within the separation of powers, questions of democratic resilience are not least about containing the privileged position of the executive in times of renationalisation and external crises through well-functioning legislatures and judiciaries. On the positive side, for example, it should be noted that within the control of powers, the administrative courts in particular effectively fulfilled their control function under the rule of law during the corona pandemic – at least in Germany. Thus, administrative courts repeatedly "overturned" executive decrees as disproportionate. On the other hand, it was problematic that the Green opposition did not fulfil its opposition role during the pandemic. In the future, however, it is precisely parliament that will have to be strengthened as the legitimising core of representative democracy. For climate policy, the de-parliamentarized pandemic policy during the Corona crisis must not be a blueprint. In the CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral transformation of the fossil industrial society, parliaments must once more exercise their rights as standard-setting and controlling institutions. In general, the three constitutional powers will have to organise decision-making and control issues in such a way that the democratic system is open to content and the future even in crises. At the same time, decisions must remain bound to the validity of fundamental rights and basic democratic norms. Within the framework of the existing constitution, the three powers must enable social change to take place in a constitutionally stable manner. This is a fundamental condition for the resilience of democracy (Schuppert 2021).

### **Parties and party systems**

Political parties are the dominant actors in most parliamentary democracies. This is particularly true for the member states of the European Union. The average voter turnout in the EU is about two-thirds of eligible voters. That is not outstanding, but it is certainly solid legitimacy. At the same time, serious surveys, such as those of the Eurobarometer, show dramatically low levels of trust in political parties among citizens. Moreover,

members have left political parties in droves or died off in the last twenty years. The Greens in Germany and the right-wing populists in Europe are the exceptions here. The electoral successes of the right-wing populists point to a significant weakness in the representation of the established democratic parties. The particular problem here is that the right-wing populist parties are at best "semi-loyal" to democracy. In some countries, they have even taken on an anti-systemic character. The democrats must succeed in drawing semi-loyal party supporters (Juan Linz) of the right-wing populists back into the democratic camp and at the same time isolate the openly anti-system (Giovanni Sartori) forces. A simple legal ban on right-wing populist parties would mean restricting illiberalism with illiberal methods. It would be, above all, a slippery slope for liberal democracies.

With the weakness of leftist parties in Western Europe, the right-wing populists have been able to claim something like a monopoly on systemic opposition to established politics and "those up there" over the past two decades. This has given them a significance and visibility that usually go beyond their share of the electorate. Resilient democracies, however, need strong parties in both government *and* opposition that are loyal to democracy and willing to cooperate among each other. Even during profound crises, such as the pandemic and climate change, the democratic opposition—however intensively it perceives its role—must not be delegitimised or temporarily disempower itself. Particularly in times of crises, when the executive is still attracting power and competences, the opposition has a democratic watchdog role to play. Moreover, democratic parties must strengthen their representativeness and responsiveness, especially towards the vulnerable lower half of society. At the same time, they should promote and not block other participation procedures such as referendums or citizens' assemblies. For in the individualised societies of the 21st century, parties will no longer be able to guarantee social representativeness in the political system on their own. In this respect, additional opportunities for participation and representation also represent a relief for the parties and their responsibilities.

### **Civil society**

In the last three decades, real existing civil society has not kept pace with the career of its theoretical concept. In theory, it was often considered as a remedy for all conceivable malaises of democracy. Empirically, there has been a flight from small associations and large social organisations. At the same time, political NGOs gained strength. This part of civil society has its undoubted strength in activism as well as extra-parliamentary control of the powerful and ruling. Amnesty International (AI), Transparency International (TI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) or Fridays for Future (FFF) uncover human rights violations and corruption scandals or bring violations of environmental standards to streets and courts. These are important transparency functions. However, these politicised NGOs can hardly take over the social bridging functions of the classic civic associations. This is because political civil society "associations" (Tocqueville 1835) are increasingly formed today only within their own social classes and moral milieus, narrowly defined moral-cultural milieus or sexual preferences and identities. This trend towards subcultural segmentation of society has intensified in many Western (civil) societies. Thus, they tend to deepen the already existing cleavages in society. This is particularly visible in the debates on immigration, Covid-19 and climate change. They tend to discursively tear down bridges in society rather than build and strengthen them. The exclusion of "others", rather than the inclusion of "all",

characterises the current texture and core dynamics of our (civil) societies. What is well advanced in the USA seems once again to be spreading in Europe with a certain time lag. If Tocqueville and Marx are each right in their own way, then the United States of America is once again holding up the mirror of its future to the old continent of Europe. Not a pleasant outlook.

For the resilience of democracy, it must be beyond doubt that the division of civil society into friend and foe is overcome, or at least stopped. *Bridging social capital* must be built between the diverse spheres of society. *Bonding social capital*, on the other hand, deepens the divides and undermines the communal sense of social belonging. The right divides society with its ethno-nationalism. But it is not only the right that divides liberal societies. The educated, socio-economically mostly privileged left-liberal cosmopolitans also use their widely fringed (fighting) terms such as racism, sexism, corona and climate denial to set themselves apart as enlightened and moral and to exclude the dissenting "others" from the community of the sensible, truthful and decent. This also dries up the humus of commonality. Without a certain degree of empathy, tolerance and a sense of community, free democracies with little repression cannot flourish. In particular, the opinionated left-liberal forces and media should renounce exclusionary narratives, and support the depolarisation of society. If they dogmatise their political positions as the only valid and correct ones, they lose their liberal character and take on illiberal features. In times of polarising crises, this weakens democratic resilience at the grassroots.

### **Political community**

*E pluribus unum* or contemporary *diversity in community* is the ideal formula for successful community building in the 21st century. Western European and North American societies are diverse and characterised by different identities. This offers a rich reservoir of cultural creativity and democratic pluralism, especially if it is possible to unite the different social identities in a tolerant society. Every single minority and community-compatible identity should be protected. Only then can its members see themselves as mutually recognised and feel they belong to a larger whole. But if identities—be they of nationalist, religious, sexual or ideological provenance—take on mutually intolerant forms and do not develop a sense of what is necessarily communal, political democracy loses its social basis. It disintegrates.

The protagonists of public discourses should learn to distinguish again the relevance that exists between the correct recognition of even miniscule gender and trans-groups and the comprehensive scandal of justice, which is that capitalist democracies give both the upper and lower classes a guarantee of existence that can by no means be legitimised: As a rule, the top 20 per cent remain at the top, the bottom 20 per cent at the bottom. To emphasise this once again: The free choice of one's sex and gender identity should be protected in a democratic society even for the smallest minorities, but the systematic disconnection of the lower classes from fair life chances and career opportunities is an incomparably more relevant problem for just and peaceful societies. For typically, the former do have a relevant voice of their own in politics and the media, while the latter hardly ever do and, if at all, only in an advocacy capacity. However, the twenties of the 21st century, with the post-fossil transformation of the industrial state, will bring the social question back to the fore with justification and force. Only if the "great transformation can be organised through a fair

distribution of burdens" (Rawls 1975) for the higher and lower classes can we avoid the drastic American (North and South) inequality distortions and keep society together. This will become more important for society, community and democracy than conducting post-materialist identity discourses in the most current correct terminology.

So, does the political and social community need an identity narrative for its resilient self-description? A nationalist-chauvinist one, as the right-wing populists of many developed countries seek to evoke? Certainly not. The attempt to write this has drawn nothing but a trail of blood through Europe in the past century. Whether this can be fundamentally different in the 21st century is doubtful. Not least for this reason, Dolf Sternberger and later Jürgen Habermas, two eminent German intellectuals, opposed the "thick" ethnic-nationalist narrative of ethnic nationalism with the "thin" identity offer of constitutional patriotism. As elaborate and democratic as this offer may be, it appears too intellectual to convey a crisis-proof sense of belonging to the people of a mass society. But this sense of belonging is the indispensable foundation that can be strengthened by an open society in which fair institutions and procedures allow for a just distribution of material goods, ideal values and equal life chances; not only on paper, but also in constitutional reality. For this, the twenties of this century could provide a kind of new "saddle time" (Koselleck) for advanced societies if climate policy measures can be successfully combined with the necessary social burden-sharing.

## Resilience Functions

If a democratic system wants to secure its democratic existence, it must fulfil certain functions. Three such fundamental political functions, which not least in times of crisis determine the resilience potential of a democracy, are: *understanding the future, solving problems, deciding fairly*.

### Understanding the future

Understanding the future and acting in the long term according to knowledge of the future is one of the weak points of democracy. Here, the political system and its decision-making elites must open up to the insights of the sciences. But how can the sciences help to reduce these weaknesses? The relevant scientific disciplines can draw attention to problems in the future better than politics, which is bogged down in everyday business. Climate change is an outstanding example of this. Climate research has been publicly pointing out its destructive explosiveness for at least three decades. In open societies, however, the scientific findings, admonitions and warnings have found a broad public resonance only in the last decade. The classical democratic amplifiers, such as social movements, NGOs, civic associations, public discourses, courts and finally parties, have expanded, sensitised and filled this resonance space. However, one problem has become visible in the process. Social movements, such as Fridays for Future (FFF), have a naive and ultimately problematic understanding of science(s) and their role in a democratic society. *Follow the science* or *Science has told us* suggest that science exists in an unambiguous singular and that it not only unmistakably diagnoses the problem in unison, but also proposes the only practical solutions with scientific authority. Scientific knowledge in the singular may still exist in the



general diagnosis that climate change is caused by humans. However, even scientific strategies (fortunately) differ on how global warming can be stopped or reduced most effectively.

The question of strategy for effective and socially acceptable solutions is, of course, not primarily a scientific one. It is deeply political because, depending on the policy decision, different individuals, groups, strata and classes will win and lose. Right at the beginning of the current "traffic light coalition" of SPD, FDP and Greens, this dilemma became clear when the European Commission, and, with it, countries like France, the Netherlands, Finland, the Czech Republic and other countries in Eastern Europe, saw the civil use of nuclear energy as a proven means of CO<sub>2</sub> neutral climate policy. However, parts of the German "traffic light coalition", especially the Greens, strictly reject nuclear energy. This example shows that the civilian use of nuclear energy is not primarily a scientific question, but rather a genuinely political question in the subsequent evaluation of scientific findings.

*Follow the science* is a problematic myth. Which science should politics follow? *The sciences* must make their knowledge and problem diagnoses available to politics. However, when it comes to problem-solving strategies, they can only model different paths with their respective risks and opportunities. Climate research can talk only about the climate. It has no competence to assess the economic, employment or social consequences associated with climate policy. As a science, it must remain silent about this. This is ultimately a matter for politics. It alone can make generally binding decisions according to democratic procedures. But politics must remain open to the various sources of independent research. It must promote them without wanting to influence them. It must also accept the pluralism of scientific knowledge. This in no way precludes it from relying particularly on certain research findings in internal discourse and decision-making. What is important here is that an epistemisation of politics as well as a politicisation of science is avoided. What a future-oriented policy needs is the always open "loose coupling" (Luhmann 1984) of the subsystems "science" and "politics".

### **Solve problems**

The sciences and experts play an important role not only in identifying problems, but also in solving them. In recent years, the development of effective vaccines against the coronavirus or, in climate policy, the development of regenerative zero-carbon energy production have been outstanding.

But why are scientific findings not simply implemented 1:1, for example in climate policy? Firstly, the sciences usually provide diagnoses, models and scenarios, not implementation strategies. And where they do, they often cross the line between science and politics. Secondly, unlike highly specialised scientific research, politics is necessarily a generalist. Thus, in the migration issue, pandemic control and climate policy, there is not just one problem, but in dealing with the problem, multiple consequential effects of a policy area must be taken into account, which affect civil rights, economic growth, the labour market, inequality, generational and gender issues. The multidimensionality and the sometimes-conflicting goals must therefore be integrated into a multidimensional network of interests,

values, trade-offs and compromises. Research usually focuses on only one knowledge goal; politics is necessarily multi-objective.

At present, activists and committed scientists like to pit the supposed unambiguity of scientific truth against the ambiguity of political communication and compromise-based decision-making. Then—according to the criticism—at best "small climate parcels" are put together and not the necessary "big climate packages". This is then called state failure by climate activists—when science has supposedly already shown the right way. That kind of scientific populism, which is so unintentionally succinct in the imperative *Follow the science*, ultimately leads to the elimination of democratic politics. If science determines the solution and the solution path, politics is left with hardly any significant autonomous space. It becomes superfluous. This is a form of technocratic populism that weakens the resilience and legitimacy of democratic politics. At this point, we should once again recall Niklas Luhmann, who worked out the specific communication codes of partial social systems such as science, the economy and politics. Only if these codes are not usurped from the outside or even mutually reshaped do they retain their efficiency. This applies to both science and politics.

However, democracy has a particular problem when it has to decide rationally and implement politically effectively long-term reforms. One can call this problem the "dilemma of asynchrony" of political investment and payback. Democracy has short electoral cycles, often four years. These often tempt rational, vote-maximising politicians to take short-term action because they want to be re-elected. This leads to problems. Long-term reforms, such as climate policy, pensions or education, are also tackled too little because high economic, social and political investments are made at the beginning, but the electoral amortisation of these investments can possibly only be collected in the following legislative period and then perhaps by the political opponent. The classic example of these divergent time horizons in the recent past was provided by the second Red-Green coalition government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (2002-2005). The implementation of Agenda 2010 and the Hartz reforms, however useful they were for the economic recovery of the country and society as a whole, caused discursive and electoral damage, especially in their own camp. Ultimately, they led to the SPD's electoral defeat in 2005 and, thereafter, to long-term losses of voters and members for the social democracy. The beneficiaries were the CDU/CSU parties, because the newly-won growth and employment boosts now paid into their government account. Also benefiting was Die Linke (The Left) which, after Agenda 2010, was able to present itself as the only true left party and defender of social justice.

The current traffic light coalition (since 2021) could be confronted with a similar asynchrony problem of political investment and its electoral amortisation in climate policy. The phase-out of old fossil energy sources is likely to produce economic, social and political costs in the short term which exceed the gains in production, consumption and climate protection generated by renewable energy sources. The time span between investment and payback would then prove costly, both socially and politically, for the acting government. Only if the traffic light coalition can distribute the costs incurred in a socially fair manner and maintain hope and confidence in a not-too-distant better future in large parts of the population will it not be punished at the ballot box. If it fails to do so, the whole of democracy

in Germany will suffer. Confidence in the democratic system's ability to solve problems, in the resilience of its institutions and trust in the political elites will continue to decline.

### **Decide fairly**

Resilient democratic politics must therefore decide fairly. The equal value of the interests of all citizens worthy of recognition plays an important role here. Taking this into account is not easy even in normal times. In deep crises it is particularly difficult. In major transformations, which usually involve economic, social, technological and political upheavals, the aforementioned rule of thumb comes into play: it is especially the lower strata or the lower income half that have to bear the greatest burden. Opportunities and risks in crises are highly unequally distributed even in (capitalist) democracies. The socially privileged activists of FFF may not be aware of this. But democratic decisions must not only follow the specific views of one-dimensional social movements or a single scientific discipline. The internal strength of democratic politics can be their weakness. Science, social movements or democratic politics each have their own logic. These specific logics make up their respective strengths. Resilient democratic politics must guarantee these and fair decision-making results. It is precisely in this respect that liberal democratic regimes are usually superior to other political regimes. Liberalism guarantees openness and pluralism, while democratic procedures allow citizens to exert pressure on decision-making. Fair procedures and fair procedural outcomes are indispensable components for strengthening democratic resilience.

### **Forms of Resilience**

The *functions* of democratic resilience are to be juxtaposed with their various *forms*. Forms means how democratic systems react when they are exposed to exogenous shocks and internal stress, as they were in the 1920s. Drawing on the existing literature on the subject, I have proposed three forms (characteristics) in my multi-level model of democratic resilience: resist, respond and recover (see Fig. 1). The three terms suggest a timeline. When stress hits a democratic system, its institutions and actors often respond with resistance. In doing so, they mobilise resilience potentials that are sometimes built into democratic institutions. The judiciary, for example, can react to the expansion of executive power. Democratic parties can agree on a *conventio ad excludendum*, which, as in Germany, excludes the right-wing populist AfD from all government coalitions and political alliances. Bans against political organisations can be issued by the institutions authorised to do so (executive, legislative, judiciary). Civil society can organise counter-demonstrations and rock concerts "against the right". In the Federal Republic of Germany, anti-democratic hostility is often met with calls for surveillance by the Internal Secret Service (Verfassungsschutz). Surprisingly, such measures are currently often demanded by the Left and the Greens, whose forebears were themselves observed by the "Verfassungsschutz" or affected by "occupational bans" in the 1970s. At that time, this was done by conservative circles with the temporary approval of the federal SPD including the then chancellor, Willy Brandt. However, the more that observations by the Internal Secret Service and bans as preventive measures come to the fore, the more a democratic order runs the risk of promoting illiberal tendencies, which in turn cause stress in the liberal texture of

democratic societies. The "militant democracy", which the sociologist Karl Mannheim wanted to locate primarily in civil society in the 1930s, is today seen by the left as a legitimate policy against the populist right. Nevertheless, it runs the risk to foster an illiberal state-oriented "culture of observation and prohibition".

If the resistance potentials of the democratic system are not effective enough or are exhausted, the efforts to *adapt* routines, procedures and institutions intensify as a second form of resilience. This could be observed particularly well during the Corona crisis in Germany. The behaviour of citizens was subjected to strict regulations, mainly at the beginning of the crisis. For this, fundamental rights and freedoms had to be suspended at times. At the same time, the Infection Protection Act was amended in record time. But not only laws were changed; informal forms of governance were also tried. The so-called "Conference of Prime Ministers" is the best-known example of this. This was the hour of executive power and legislative self-restraint. This is not to be judged here, but only described. However, it shows the rapid and profound adjustment reactions of the political actors, the majority of which caused the legally compulsory vaccination obligation to fail in the Bundestag in spring 2022. After months of excessive executive power, the reawakened liberal resilience of the parliamentary system became apparent. The dramatic phase of the pandemic was over. With it, the restrictive limitations on democratic freedoms also ended. Despite all the criticism of the individual measures, this can also be described as an example of democratic-parliamentary resilience in the face of a paternalism willing to continue at the expense of fundamental rights.

After resisting and adapting, *restoring* is the third form of democratic resilience. This means repairing crisis-related damage to or restrictions on democracy and restoring the institutional and procedural status quo ante. For even if restrictions on democratic rights may be justified or constitutional in dramatic crises, once the crisis is over it is a matter of re-establishing the principles of the rule of law and the democratic culture of a society. However, a restoration of democratic rights can also happen through new democratic institutions and actors. An indispensable condition for this is that they have been established through democratic procedures that conform to the constitution. It is a special form of democratic resilience when such new procedures "adapt" to the changed conditions and continue to enforce the essential principles of democracy, perhaps even better. This is possibly the most prerequisite-laden of the three forms of democratic resilience. We are seeing this in the US after Donald Trump and in Brazil after Jair Bolsonaro, although the process is far from complete in both countries. The defective democracies of Poland and Hungary still face such a liberal democratic new beginning otherwise they will continue down the slippery slope of illiberalism.

Despite the extraordinary popularity of the term democratic resilience, the question may be asked in conclusion: What is new about the term? Scientific terms that quickly migrate into fashionable everyday usage often lose their contours and analytical suitability. What new insights does the term allow in the study of political regime dynamics? What explains democratic resilience better than the concepts "democratic stability" or "democratic consolidation"? The very concept of democratic consolidation also has an analytical dual character: it allows for differentiated descriptions of the status quo, just as it allows for explanations of the process of consolidation of a democracy over time. In such a process,

too, functions, institutions and actors can be deciphered in their respective interdependencies (Merkel 1998).

Ultimately, I see two new aspects of scientific added value. The first certainly contains traces of banality. Democratic resilience is here and now more connectable to the relevant democratic discourses. The term and concept of democratic consolidation carry the dust of past debates. They are more reminiscent of the democratic awakening after 1989 than of the creeping decline of democratic standards today. In this respect, the change of term has its own diagnostic value because of its discourse-connectivity per se. But there is a second aspect. Democratic resilience emphasises more the resistance potential of democratic systems. It focuses more on functions that are open to variation than on static structures. This is no small feat in times of multiple crises. But it is also typical of them. Democracy research today is not so much about democratising democracy as it was thirty years ago, but about defending it. Perhaps this is the conceptual proof that it is not necessarily "democracy" per se that is in crisis, but that many actually existing democracies are affected by an erosion of their liberal democratic standards.

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