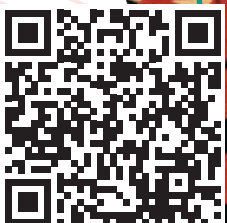


# BUILDING RESILIENT DEMOCRACIES

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS  
ACROSS THE GLOBE

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# EXPLANATORY REMARKS

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# Explanatory remarks

This policy study engages with the challenges that resilient democracies are currently facing across the globe, and puts forward a number of potential ways of responding to them. Some of the challenges presented here apply globally while others are more regional or local. The potential solutions are discussed through a politically progressive and global lens. Accordingly, this policy study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts by progressive democrats to collectively generate a programme of principles and concrete actions in order to foster resilient democracies; as a result, it does not intend to engage in full academic depth with the ongoing scientific debates on this topic, nor is it to be read as an academic piece.

Rather, this policy study maps out and further develops the challenges and solutions around democratic resilience that are presently being discussed in specific political circles. It does so by summarising and discussing a series of expert exchanges on building resilient democracies in all parts of the world. These exchanges took place

between 11 May and 6 July 2021 and included high-level progressive political stakeholders from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. They were hosted by the Progressive Alliance (PA), the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). Based on these exchanges, the policy study outlines a number of essential points that progressive democrats should consider when formulating an agenda for how to foster democratic resilience.

This policy study builds on an internal, unpublished report authored for the PA by Dominic Afscharian, Justine Gangneux, Marius S. Ostrowski, and Stine Quorning. While both constitute stand-alone pieces, this published policy study further develops ideas from the previous work. We want to express our gratitude to Justine Gangneux and Stine Quorning for their valuable contributions to the previous report, which laid the foundations for us to produce the following text.

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**GLOSSARY,  
ABBREVIATIONS,  
ABSTRACT &  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# Glossary

<b>Deliberative democracy</b>	A democracy that places considerable emphasis on deliberation in making political decisions. Among other things, this implies the need to foster democratic norms and institutions that aim to produce a rational consensus based on arguments and mutual openness to a plurality of viewpoints and values. This can be combined with majoritarian decision-making, for instance in cases in which deliberative processes fail to yield an acceptable consensus.
<b>Democratic resilience</b>	Three mutually overlapping abilities belonging to democratic societies and democratic structures. First, the ability to withstand stress without undergoing (major) institutional and procedural changes. Second, the ability to react to external stress by undertaking salutary internal changes. Third, the ability to recover after suffering initial damage, disorder, or any forms of authoritarian regression. These three abilities obtain at several societal levels. One is the fundamental constitution of society: the vertical and horizontal structures by which society is shaped and managed. Another level is the range of factions and movements circulating within society. A final level is the social community as a whole. Democratic resilience should apply to underlying ideals, to the political system itself, and to the ways of interacting that are inherent in a society.
<b>Participatory democracy</b>	A democracy that directly involves citizens in decision-making processes. This might entail mechanisms ranging from local-level consultations with citizen groups to national referendums. The degree to which the results of these processes are binding can vary considerably, from purely advisory indications of the electorate's preferences to holding formal legislative force.
<b>Progressive democrats</b>	Ideologically diverse stakeholders that are committed to leveraging advances in knowledge and understanding, technological capabilities, and social organisation and development to foster improvements in people's living conditions, especially those of the worst off in society. Today associated in particular with support for welfarism and public service provision, a broad spectrum of political, economic, and social rights, and the institutions of liberal democracy and an open society.
<b>Resilient democracy</b>	A democracy that performs well according to the above definition of democratic resilience.

# Abbreviations

<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FEPS</b>	Foundation for European Progressive Studies
<b>FES</b>	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
<b>LGBTQI+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and others
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>PA</b>	Progressive Alliance
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>YAN</b>	FEPS Young Academics Network



# Abstract

This policy study summarises four regional exchanges that took place among high-level political stakeholders from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe between May and July 2021, which addressed how to foster resilient democracies in the 21st century. It analyses their main concerns, and formulates recommendations for how progressive democrats around the world can repel challenges to democratic systems.

These recommendations cover four themes:

1. stronger **democratic institutions** throughout society;
2. a robust, democratically motivated **civil society**;
3. more functional **global co-operation and governance**; and
4. thorough analysis of the **actors implicated in democratic survival or decline**.

These inform calls to action oriented towards three key goals:

1. **Broader benefits for democratic states to provide to their citizens:** extending social protection for the needy, universal benefits and claimable social rights, redefining reciprocity towards mutual solidarity, responsibility, and participation.
2. **Closer imbrication between parties and civil society in political decision-making,** and actually delivering palpable policies due to civil society involvement.
3. **An agenda for genuinely democratic layers of supranational governance** with both authoritative policy competencies and effective means of implementation, via reforms of global, regional, and multilateral institutions.

Progressive democrats must embrace ambitious solutions to foster democratic resilience. These may differ between regional contexts, but they should flow from a joined-up agenda that can secure global agreement.

# Executive summary

From 11 May to 6 July 2021, the Progressive Alliance hosted four regional expert exchanges among a number of high-level political stakeholders, focused on Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. These exchanges dealt with key questions around how best to foster resilient democracies in the 21st century. This policy study summarises the essential takeaways from these exchanges. It analyses the main concerns, as expressed in response to the several guiding questions. It formulates a number of recommendations that progressive democrats around the world should engage with in order to be better prepared for both current and future global challenges to democratic<sup>1</sup> systems.

These recommendations revolve around four themes: (1) strengthening **democratic institutions** in all their societal variety; (2) building a robust, democratically motivated **civil society**; (3) working towards a more functional system of **global co-operation and governance**; and (4) developing a thorough analysis of the **actors implicated in democratic survival or decline**. These four themes can broadly be summarised as follows:

*Functional democratic institutions.* Strong institutional mechanisms and well-defined civic rights are needed to prevent executive control of other branches of government, and ensure a democratic rule of law. Policy-specific alliances can supplement traditional coalition and government/opposition politics to get majority buy-in for meaningful policy outcomes in ever more factionally fragmented legislatures. Meaningful, inclusive deliberation and participation are integral to democratic decision-making, and their

results must be taken seriously by policymakers to lend these processes lasting credibility. Anti-democratic and anti-system social forces must be isolated within the limitations of what is feasible in the respective political contexts, and democratic institutions must be empowered to withstand, react to, and recover from the pressures these forces impose on them; but this must be balanced against the risks of compromising on democratic principles.

*A strong democratic civil society.* Effective education for democracy is the linchpin of meaningful civic participation. Democracy needs to be set clearly apart from simple majoritarianism, by providing minority and marginalised groups the financial and informational preconditions for equal participation and representation. All citizens should feel the palpable benefits of democratic society, which requires a reconceptualisation of social and welfare policy towards inclusive and universal benefit and service provision. Delivering on social justice relies on universal, constitutionally guaranteed, fundamental social rights, which must be carefully balanced with the principle of democratic policy control. Political parties must intensify co-operation with civil-society actors and citizens more broadly, including via institutionalised forums for civic and expert engagement, oriented towards tangible solutions that can overcome antagonistic societal divisions.

*A global perspective.* Global co-operation between democratic actors must harness both new and established bodies with mandates for multilateral communication, collectively binding decision-making, and effective action. Robust systems and

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<sup>1</sup> This policy study consciously uses the term 'progressive democrats' as a broad category to describe ideologically diverse stakeholders that are committed to improving people's life situations, especially those of the worst-off in society, above all by supporting public policies that foster welfarism, personal rights, and the institutions of liberal democracy and an open society. Thus, the term is explicitly not limited to social democrats, democratic socialists, or even political parties in general. While this policy study draws on a series of predominantly social-democratic exchanges, it is clear that resilient democracies presuppose a constructive spirit of cross-ideological, cross-organisational co-operation. Progressive democrats of various backgrounds are thus invited to unite behind the common goal of fostering democratic resilience.

best practices to avoid miscommunication and interference must be developed and monitored. This includes transferring governance competencies and enforcing minimum standards in areas of global significance (for example, pandemic response, climate change, eradicating poverty), in order to make concrete the idea of uniting humanity across national boundaries. A priority for such forums is to reach a definitive agreement on the criteria for how to intervene against anti-democratic forces without undemocratically and imperialistically flouting national sovereignty, and to develop a robust agenda for establishing global social democracy.

*Actors integral to the success or failure of democracy.*

It is vital to comprehensively identify anti-democratic actors, especially in civil society and permanent state institutions, and find appropriate ways to either contain their societal influence or steer it towards fostering democracy and progressive values. When doing so, it is necessary to draw on both historical precedent and contemporary comparisons, in order to develop an accurate, granular, and nuanced understanding of the current state of democracy across the globe. The ultimate aim must be to strengthen social cohesion and limit polarisation, in order to prevent democracy from degenerating into factionalism and policy deadlock.

These four themes translate into calls to action oriented towards three key goals:

- First, and most immediately, progressive democrats need to broaden the horizon of which benefits a democratic state provides to its citizens. While fully maintaining and extending systems of social protection for the needy, progressive democrats should explore universal benefits and claimable social rights that are more directly palpable for lower- and middle-income classes. For this to work, ideas of reciprocity between citizens and the state must be redefined, away from progressives calling on citizens to fulfil their alleged 'duties' in order to be considered 'deserving', towards societies that foster intrinsic ideas of mutual solidarity, responsibility, and participation.

- Second, there is extensive further potential in fostering closer imbrication between political parties and wider civil society in the processes of political decision-making. While past attempts to achieve this have (partially) failed, future efforts will need to emphasise actually delivering palpable policies as a result of civil-society involvement for the latter to be sustainable.
- Third, progressive democrats should formulate an agenda for genuinely democratic layers of supranational governance that enjoy both authoritative policy competencies and effective means of implementation. This may be linked to structural reforms of global institutions, such as the United Nations, but may also involve more regional or multilateral associations.

Progressive democrats must take seriously the concerns, themes, and goals presented in this policy study, and not shy away from embracing ambitious and potentially disruptive solutions where they are needed to foster democratic resilience. While the most appropriate approaches might be specific and vary across regions, this policy study is designed to be used to inform a joined-up progressive agenda that can secure global agreement on how to build resilient democracies.

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# INTRODUCTION

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# Introduction

## 1.1 An urgent challenge

Across the globe, democracies are under intense pressure. The warning-signs come in the form of a number of different developments, which can be found to varying degrees across all continents without exception. If they persist, these developments threaten to have grave consequences for democracy as a pillar of modern, open societies. Since the start of the 21st century, the world has experienced an increasingly pronounced trend towards democratic erosion – both in the extent of democracy’s global reach and the quality of its instantiation. Long-standing democracies have faced unprecedented challenges to the integrity of their ideals, systems, and procedures; more recently established democracies have seen faltering consolidation and backsliding in their institutions. At the same time, a burgeoning ‘authoritarian international’ along with self-ascribed ‘illiberal democrats’ have asserted an ever more strident alternative vision for the administration and organisation of societies, which threatens not only to break down formal checks and balances but also to blur the distinction between elected governments and the branches of the permanent state. Thus, democratic erosion is not ‘purely statist’: it concerns democracy as an ideal, a system, and a process. As a result, the erosion of democracy as a system has faced difficulties that must be countered through democratic ideas and processes. Overall, this dynamic character of democracies implies that democracies must adapt to new challenges in an ever-changing global world.

The challenges that democracies face from such anti-democratic forces not only threaten the intrinsic value that attaches to the democratic construction of society, but also pose increasing risks to human progress as a whole. On this basis, the popular resonance and especially the electoral success of authoritarian movements must serve as a clear wake-up call to progressive democratic movements around the world. Further, the added challenge of

authoritarianism overpowering democratic structures must be addressed as well. If this anti-democratic and authoritarian trend is not stopped abruptly, societies across the world will rapidly start to lose the institutional basis through which meaningful emancipation and advances in people’s life chances can be achieved. The institutions of democracy are closely intertwined with those guaranteeing access to education and skills training, welfare and social support, health and care provision, free and reliable information, and public services infrastructure. By the same token, authoritarian assaults on democracy frequently take the dismantling of these institutions firmly into their sights. In other words, preserving democracy is a *sine qua non* of preserving social progress – not just its past achievements, but its future trajectory as well.

Progressive democrats accordingly need to formulate a new vision to protect and promote democracy and its associated institutions, in order to safeguard the prospects of positive future societal development for humanity as a whole. Central to this must be a coherent, comprehensive strategy to restore democratic resilience in the face of the current authoritarian challenge, both in terms of democracy’s ideological appeal and its practical efficacy. The ultimate goal of such a strategy is to enable democracies to withstand shocks – both external, in the form of economic disruptions or climate disasters, or internally from authoritarian forces.

## 1.2 Defining resilient democracies

Democratic resilience enjoys both intrinsic and instrumental value, and consequently needs to be situated at the core of progressive democrats’ agendas in the 21st century. To achieve this, progressive democrats first need to understand exactly what resilient democracy is: how to define it, and how to operationalise it. Merkel and Lüthmann define democratic resilience as ‘the ability of a political

regime to prevent or react to challenges without losing its democratic character'.<sup>2</sup> As a starting point, they conceptualise democratic resilience in terms of three mutually overlapping abilities belonging to democratic societies and especially democratic structures:

- First, the ability to withstand stress without undergoing (major) institutional and procedural changes.
- Second, the ability to react to external stress by undertaking salutary internal changes.
- Third, the ability to recover after suffering initial damage, disorder, or any forms of authoritarian regression.

These three abilities obtain – and can correlatively be both weakened and fostered – at several societal levels:

- One is the fundamental constitution of society: the vertical and horizontal structures by which society is shaped and managed, from branches of national government to legal systems, business enterprises to media corporations, faith-based organisations to charitable bodies.
- Another level is the range of factions and movements circulating within society: chief among them political parties, but also trade unions and other labour organisations, women's, youth, LGBTQI+, and students' groups.

- A final level is the social community as a whole: the bonds and divisions, inclusions and exclusions, and perceptions of identity, belonging, and difference, among society's members.

Implicit in this interpretation of democratic resilience is that it should apply to a society's underlying ideals, to the political system itself, and to the ways of interacting inherent within a society. As a result, democratic resilience must not only be theoretically compelling and practically effective in actual political systems, but also needs to translate into a broader resilient democratic culture. From this perspective, a progressive understanding of resilient democracy cannot merely be limited to ensuring that democratic elections are held, but also applies to the regular, everyday elements of democratic civic interaction. In more concrete terms, this translates into a need to introduce strong participatory and deliberative elements into all areas of society, within and beyond the electoral process.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.3 Scope of the policy study

This policy study has one pre-eminent goal: to assist progressive democrats in defining an agenda by which they can effectively foster democratic resilience. Such an agenda seeks to bolster the three constitutive capabilities of democratic resilience at the various levels mentioned above. Yet to be fully effective, such recommendations cannot simply be derived in abstraction, but rely on empirical inputs based on the real experiences democratic actors have undergone in resisting authoritarian challenges 'on the ground'.

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2 Wolfgang Merkel and Anna Lührmann, 'Resilience of Democracies: Responses to Illiberal and Authoritarian Challenges', *Democratization* 28(5) (2021), 869–84.

3 This policy study refers to participatory and deliberative elements of democracy in a broad sense. For participatory democracy, this means that citizens are more directly involved in decision-making, albeit not necessarily in the form of direct democracy at the national level. While such measures could be part of a more participatory democracy, this could also be realised through somewhat less binding or more localised participation, depending on what is appropriate in the context of the region in question. Linked to this, deliberative democracy emphasises a stronger role for deliberation to play in making political decisions. Among other things, this implies a need to foster democratic institutions and a democratic culture, which aim to find rational consensus based on arguments and mutual openness to a plurality of viewpoints and values. This can be combined with majoritarian decision-making, for instance in cases where deliberative processes fail to yield an acceptable consensus.

For this policy study, these inputs were elicited through four online seminars, co-organised by the Progressive Alliance (PA), the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), which ran from May to July 2021. The seminars were designed to bring together participants from a variety of backgrounds – including political representatives from social-democratic, socialist, and progressive political parties, as well as from the academic and policy research sectors – to discuss how to build and sustain resilient democracies as part of the progressive family. Seminars were conducted in four regions of the globe: Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, in order to reflect on the common threats faced by democracies and shed light on the contextual and historical specificities of each region. Thus, the seminars were designed to simultaneously explore regional threats to democracies and to cut across regional specificities with the aim of drawing lessons from the erosion of democracies around the globe, looking in particular at the role of transnational and international players.

To assist progressive democrats in developing an agenda to foster democratic resilience, this policy study discusses the findings that emerged from the four seminars. In doing so, the policy study draws on the specific views of the seminar participants, rather than systematically reviewing the scholarly literature on democratic resilience. It provides an overview of the themes that emerged from the four seminars, highlighting the key discussion-points and takeaways they elicited. By implication, this policy study is best understood as a collection and reflection of the first-hand experiences of key stakeholders in the global progressive-democratic movement – and is thus intended first and foremost as a contribution to political debates.

The discussions that took place over the course of the four seminars centred on four themes, which this policy study proposes as focal points for a future progressive strategy to ensure democratic resilience:

1. The ways in which *democratic institutions* can be made more resilient: ways to ensure a robust separation of powers and meaningful checks and balances; to guarantee a democratic rule of law,

or more acutely, the rule of democratic law; and to strengthen parliamentary assemblies and their affiliated bodies.

2. The methods to boost democratic resilience where *civil society* plays a key role, including the expansion of education and eradication of poor literacy; to bring about widespread capacity for equal participation; and to proliferate civic support for democratic values and processes, including human rights and civil liberties.
3. The *global perspective* on democratic resilience, speaking to the existing and potential co-operation among democratic actors and movements as well as their authoritarian counterparts; the role of regional, continental, and transnational institutions; and the global dimension of the main current external shocks to democratic systems, from incipient climate catastrophe, large-scale migration, financial crises and neo-colonial exploitation to public health emergencies (such as the Covid-19 pandemic).
4. The *actors implicated in the survival or decline of democracy*, who need to be either countered by or co-opted into progressive strategies to boost democratic resilience, including: military and security forces; politicians with autocratic tendencies as well as weakly pro-democratic or outright anti-democratic parties that can act as ‘gateways’ for authoritarian mass politics; churches and denominational organisations; and ineffectual pro-democratic parties that fail to provide effective governance or deliver social justice and progress and thereby create spaces for authoritarian actors to ‘fill in the gaps’.

Altogether, these four thematic categories form the backbone of the ideological vision and practical proposals developed in this policy study. Crucial for progressive democrats of all stripes to consider is the question of the preconditions that allow democratic resilience to flourish: not just political considerations, but economic and cultural factors as well. A truly social, progressive account of resilient democracy must see the abilities to withstand, react to, and recover from the stress of authoritarian challenges spread to every corner of society. This

requires a push for democratisation on every social level – from the structures that constitute society to the groups that populate it, and ultimately how all of society’s members conceive of their relationship to one another.

The policy study is structured as follows: Section 2 examines in greater depth the common themes that emerged from the four regional seminars, including

both their commonalities and differences; Section 3 compiles a series of policy implications aimed at approaching and devising a progressive agenda for resilient democracies; and Section 4 summarises the policy study’s findings and offers some concluding remarks.



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# **TOWARDS AN AGENDA FOR RESILIENT DEMOCRACIES**

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## 2. Towards an agenda for resilient democracies

In some respects, the circumstances that democratic actors face in different global regions vary considerably – not least in the severity of the threat posed by authoritarian tendencies, or the role of specific actors such as churches or military and security forces. In any analysis of global democracy, it is vital to distinguish between *young* and *established* (that is, more *fragile* and more *robust*) democracies. These are not always evenly represented within each region or even country, and they may lay quite a different emphasis on fundamental questions of democratic transition, consolidation, or preservation. Similarly, it is important to be sensitive to democratic societies' different contexts and frameworks, including the complicating factors and intricacies presented by their surrounding localities.

All the same, there are many shared elements between these regional cases from which a global agenda for fostering resilient democracies can be derived. Since any such agenda must be broadly applicable within various contexts, it has to contain at least a modicum of simplification, so that the relevant commonalities between various regions can be addressed without ignoring other, potentially unique conditions that characterise each one separately. Certainly, an effective framework for a global democratic resilience agenda would benefit from taking into account both the overlapping and cross-cutting themes that emerged from the regional sessions that underpin this policy study.

Since it is possible to catalogue a host of themes that would quickly become impractical from an analytical perspective, we took the following steps when identifying the final list of themes to shore up their practical value:

- First, we considered factors that have *undermined* democracies in the past. While these factors may exhibit a range of detailed manifestations, they nonetheless share some overarching commonalities. For instance, specific institutional weaknesses tended to be largely context-specific, but the fact that institutional strength mattered was to all intents and purposes a global constant.
- Second, conversely, we engaged with factors that have *helped stabilise* democracies in various contexts. These do not necessarily have to be antithetical to the earlier destabilising factors: for instance, military actors may have contributed to democratic erosion in some cases, but can also occasionally act as clear democratic stabilisers whenever they are not explicitly anti-democratic in orientation.
- Third, we examined the *intersection* of these first two steps, and asked what potential factors might have stabilising effects in the face of specific destabilising conditions. This is by no means a trivial step. Democratic resilience is not simply achieved by adding any stabilising factor whatsoever to an otherwise unstable context; at the same time, some factors with potentially beneficial effects for democratic resilience cannot be straightforwardly derived from observations of the past, since they rely on as-yet undeveloped, hypothetical preconditions such as the achievement of stronger global co-operation. The need for more speculative, purely logically

derived points is inherent in any progressive policy agenda, on the basis that progressiveness in an ever-changing world is always in the position of having to apply innovative and tailored solutions to new problems as and when they arise.

- Finally, we formulated the *common themes that emerged from our findings* in such a way that they complement each other to give a coherent picture of the factors that underpin democratic resilience (or the lack thereof).

This overall approach allowed us to develop a framework of thematically guided factors that have to be taken into consideration when seeking to foster democratic resilience in the 21st century at a global scale. Of course, more fine-grained approaches might be more suitable in specific supranational, national, or subnational contexts. Nonetheless, the framework below strikes a practical balance between broad applicability and in-depth engagement with some of the key issues surrounding resilient democracy.

This list of themes represents the results of critical engagement with the core priorities voiced by the activists, leaders, and policy thinkers who participated in these discussions on democratic resilience, in the specific contexts and in response to the particular challenges that progressive democrats face in 2021. Instead of providing an academic treatment of these themes, this policy study aims to take the perspective of democratic actors specifically and thoroughly into account. Thus, the thematic discussion below serves as a unique reflection on the experiences of high-level stakeholders from four very different regions, and consequently harbours considerable potential for concrete political action. This can be substantiated by deriving some key social and political implications from the observations outlined above. Based on their thematic division, we have identified four fundamental pillars, which represent essential components of a 21st-century agenda for progressive democrats around the world.

Four main themes emerged from the regional sessions, which are of global significance for fostering democratic resilience today, irrespective

of contextual specificities: **(1) functional democratic institutions; (2) a strong democratic civil society; (3) a democratic layer to global action; and (4) (anti-) democratic actors.** Each theme contains a number of sub-themes that help make sense of the larger picture, and flesh out their potential implications for progressive democrats around the world. These sub-themes can also be formulated as factors involved in the erosion or development of democratic resilience. Table 1 summarises them at a glance.

The following sections elaborate the different themes in more detail, outlining their respective sub-themes along with explanatory remarks about their meaning, and addressing the relevance of the various issues presented in a larger context.

## 2.1 Functional democratic institutions

Functional democratic institutions are a frame for democratic resilience that is directly linked to the day-to-day operations of progressive democratic parties. Here, four interrelated sub-themes around democratic institutions are of particular importance.

The first is the stable **separation of powers**. There is some variation regarding which branches of government are currently the most acutely endangered in different regions. Yet a consistent example of democratic erosion through attacks on this principle has been the politicisation and manipulation of the judiciary – the safeguard of democracy par excellence – coupled with efforts to undermine independence and judicial autonomy. Here, it becomes especially clear why it is important to develop an understanding of resilient democracy that takes the intersection between the various sub-themes seriously. While the separation of powers must be clarified legally and politically, such as through constitutional arrangements, attacks on the separation of powers remain a threat to democratic resilience as long as civil society remains insufficiently informed, engaged, and empowered (see the second theme). Further, supra-national institutions can play their part in helping to ensure the separation of powers, although this assumes that

**Table 1: Factors affecting democratic resilience**

Functional democratic institutions	A strong democratic civil society	A democratic layer to global action	Anti-democratic actors
Separation of powers	Civic education	Global co-operation between democratic and progressive actors	Military actors
Democratic rule of law	Equal participation, deliberation, and representation	Global democratic institutions	Anti-democratic politicians
Strong parliamentary bodies	Inclusivity, universality, and empowerment	Global external shocks	Weak pro-democratic actors
Beyond representative democracy	Social justice		Organised crime
	Opportunities for civic action		Anti-democratic actors with control over capital
	Civic support for democracy		

they have the authoritative competencies necessary to do so (see the third theme).

Issues around the judiciary are often linked to a second sub-theme, namely the **democratic rule of law**. Crucially, democratic, social, and progressive principles have to be inherent in the fundamental makeup of the laws in question. Institutions are of vital importance in enshrining a democratic rule of law in the legal fabric of democratic societies, but

civil society and a global community of democrats must also do their fair share to sustain stability during periods where anti-democratic political attacks are emanating from within the system. This underlines why it is insufficient to conserve the *status quo* in order to make democracies truly resilient. As ever more sophisticated strategies of democratic erosion emerge, properly designed institutions by themselves are no longer enough to preserve societies' democratic character. Rather, their stability

depends fundamentally on an understanding of democracy that is (1) much more strongly rooted in civil society, and (2) nested in a global democratic space that is geared towards mutual safeguarding and shared objectives.

Another key issue concerning democratic institutions consists in the preservation of **strong parliamentary bodies** as bulwarks against authoritarianism. This can take various concrete forms in practice, ranging from formal institutional capacities to the de facto ability of democratically elected members of parliament to implement policies that bolster democratic resilience. But in all cases it must include measures to shore up the credibility of local and national elections (since these are increasingly at risk of rigged or disputed results), prevent the emergence of one-party states, maintain the principle of alternation-in-power, and protect the democratic opposition from oppression and muzzling. As some authoritarian movements have managed to undermine such principles in line with parliamentary procedures, strong parliaments must (1) still be subject to a guaranteed division of powers, (2) operate under non-negotiable democratic standards which they can only expand, not roll back, and (3) ensure minority representation and alternation, such as through strict term limits.

The implications of these considerations are linked to a final sub-theme: democratic systems must evolve **beyond purely representative democracies**, in particular by gradually introducing more deliberative and participatory elements. Of course, participatory democracy also carries certain potential risks, in the form of binding referendums with potentially detrimental impacts on minority protections (see the second theme). But this does not fundamentally obviate the need for democratic institutions to evolve further – especially with a view to stabilising a democratically minded civil society.

This first theme overlaps in its implications for concrete action with several of the others below. Deliberative and participatory democratic mechanisms both foster and depend on a strong, democratic civil society. They can be introduced gradually and be initially focused on non-authoritarian action in selected policy areas. In addition, they can be used as a powerful tool to strengthen civil society:

political parties might join and deepen deliberation-oriented associations alongside members that could include – but are not limited to – civil-society stakeholders such as trade unions, social movements, religious communities, academic actors, and NGOs. In these associations, actors would participate in deliberative processes to develop and commit to concrete policy proposals, which would then feed through into the processes of electoral competition within the institutions of representative democracy. If organised and further developed at a regional or global scale, such associations could also achieve far more co-ordinated global action while simultaneously sustaining democratic checks and balances. In this way, deliberative democracy could be dovetailed with representative democracy to make policy development more accessible, strengthen the democratic involvement of civil society, and modernise democratic processes overall.

## 2.2 A strong democratic civil society

The second theme of particular relevance for democratic resilience is a strong, collaborative democratic civil society. It represents the social foundation of resilient democracy and should be interpreted not as a sufficient, but as a necessary condition. While democratic institutions can be built without a strong democratic civil society, they are much easier to erode and harder to revive without civic support.

A healthy and pluralist civil society is a key necessary condition for a democracy to be resilient, although the concept of civil society is somewhat broad, and can have competing meanings in different social contexts. In general, however, a democratic civil society needs **civic education and widely available high-quality information**, in order to ensure that citizens are able to engage with, and develop their interest in, public affairs. This is a crucial precondition for them to develop a fuller sense of common democratic belonging, as well as a more sophisticated understanding of the characteristics and benefits of democratic settings.

To turn the argument around, a lack of civic education endangers democratic resilience in two

basic ways. First, when democracies are already in place, the absence of education and information, and of civic engagement, allows anti-democratic actors to spread misinformation easily, hampering the possibility of democratic participation and reducing the opportunities that democracy can offer to its citizens. Second, when democracies have already been eroded, lack of information or outright disinformation campaigns place obstacles in the way of democratic mobilisation, and tend to stabilise autocratic tendencies.

Here, there is an important distinction between basic education in schools (such as the fundamental aim of overcoming mass illiteracy and innumeracy), and the further-reaching education of members of the population to become fully fledged democratic citizens (such as critical thinking and civic literacy). This has been pointed out by stakeholders from younger democracies such as in Africa and Asia in particular. Citizens at all ages must learn the values of democracy, how democracies work as a form of governance, and what being part of a democracy entails. In terms of concrete action, this means that democratic education must be uncompromisingly supported and – perhaps more importantly – prioritised by all democratic actors. It must have a strong core that is free of partisan conflict and revolves around common agreements on the most fundamental democratic values shared across political cleavages. One way of achieving this could be a more deliberative approach to policymaking that mitigates the influence of fluctuating majorities over this specific field. Thus, this sub-theme overlaps with the earlier sub-theme of pushing democracy beyond mere representation.

Closely related to these mechanisms are several other sub-themes that feed into a strong civil society. One is the **capacity for equal participation, deliberation, and representation**: democratic resilience presupposes not only the equal right to vote, but also a system in which this right (1) is actually used to an equal extent across all groups in society, and (2) also translates to meaningful influence. This explicitly implies a need to incorporate strong protections for minorities and other vulnerable groups in a constitutional form – including social rights that guarantee universal

access to healthcare and education. It also suggests that urgent measures are required to mitigate the growing distance between social classes, and the increasing disconnect of meaningful accountability between citizens and social elites. Democracy must be able to demonstrate fair, robust, transparent, and non-corrupt fiscal and judicial powers that can provide effective alternative solutions to common social problems, improve the life chances of all (especially of the worst-off), and maintain the economic and legal basis of equal citizenship and civil-society representation. This is key to ensuring that democratic state institutions once again enjoy a high level of civic trust and legitimacy, and convincing citizens that all classes can benefit from the democratic organisation of society. Crucially, sufficient funds for actors such as NGOs must ensure not only a *de jure*, but also a *de facto* right to participation.

One caveat that must be borne in mind, however, is that a strongly participatory civil society can become toxic if it starts to resemble a mobilisation of the masses against minorities. Such cases run wholly counter to the progressive agenda, which is characterised by bringing together people and communities from all backgrounds. Progressive democracy must thus be mindful of fostering both 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital within societies – that is, the social ties and relationships not only *within* (mostly homogeneous) social groups, but *between* (mutually differentiated) groups as well. It is important to explore how societies can overcome the widespread temptation for citizens to support charismatic leaders who mobilise masses but do not consolidate democratic representation – especially since this tendency is by no means just restricted to the ultraconservative and fascist right.

Concrete action in this regard can result from another sub-theme, namely **empowerment, inclusivity, and universality**. Democratic empowerment has to have a palpable dimension beyond simply formal rights on paper, and the benefits of democracy must reach all groups in society – including not only citizens, but also refugees, migrants, and unregistered residents. On one level, this is tied to the importance of completely involving all societal stakeholders when

drafting constitutional arrangements or governing coalition agreements, to avoid fuelling discontent, loss of trust, and instability. But this is not limited to democratic processes alone. Rather, developments like globalisation and liberalisation that have so far accompanied democratisation – by coincidence or otherwise – cannot further marginalise those individuals who are already struggling. A truly resilient democracy must be for the benefit of all people, which is not just a question of economic prosperity but also a matter of social advancement. For the first time in generations, parents and grandparents are faced with a future in which their children and grandchildren may not be better off than they were themselves, leaving people with a sense of stagnation and concern about what the future may bring.

But the concrete implications of these considerations pose a serious challenge for progressive democrats from different backgrounds. As resilient democracies depend on the support of their civil societies, every single individual in these societies must feel that they derive palpable advantages from living in a democracy. This can imply that market mechanisms need to be organised in a way that mitigates stark inequalities, but also that social, health, and education policies might have to be oriented towards more inclusive provision and universality, and away from stigmatising means-testing. As authoritarian systems typically privilege specific groups over others, democracies could instead centre increased inclusivity, and embrace universalism and empowerment to offer clear advantages over anti-democratic temptations to the many. In particular, as pointed out especially by stakeholders from African countries, democracies need to integrate subnational/local groups and leaderships into their institutions, which includes a potential role for greater federalisation to ensure effective and equitable vertical diffusion of political empowerment.

This ties into the need for democracies to foster **social justice**. Crucially, this is not just an automatic outcome of all the other criteria for democratic resilience being met. Rather, democracies must actively work towards and clearly prioritise social justice, as

otherwise anti-democratic actors will seek to fill this gap. Latin America, for instance, has seen the rise of religious-inspired moves to retrench the social rights of women and indigenous populations, and attempts to shift fiscal policy debates away from values of solidarity (among active citizens) to those of charity (towards passive recipients). However, a conceptual tension emerges in this context. As social justice is a claim that is quite readily appealed to by various actors with fundamentally incompatible meanings, it can quickly become little more than an empty signifier. Yet if a certain understanding of social justice is immutably enshrined in democratic institutions, this risks excessively constraining the principle of democratic majoritarianism. Should, for instance, a specific social-democratic interpretation of social justice be constitutionally mandated, this would limit democratic control and influence in a way that might rule out conservative or economically liberal conceptions of the term.

As **delivering on a progressive ideal of intersectional social justice** is a vital precondition for democratic resilience, this is a tension that has to be urgently addressed. Any such ideal must include specific wealth redistribution measures to reverse increasing inequality and halt the virtually unchecked accumulation of capital, in order to guarantee a fair distribution of profits for all and address the tension between simultaneous resource exploitation and many countries' inability to meet their populations' basic needs. The dimension of 'pre-distribution' must also be more prominent: if the ideal of all people being born equal is to be taken seriously, basic rights and opportunities must be provided from the start.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, progressive ideals of social justice also imply undoing the political-economic reforms that led to the privatisation of key public service institutions – with particular emphasis on levelling up public welfarist provisions in policy areas where social indicators have significantly worsened, such as employment, health, and education. Again, elements of deliberative democracy could be explored to engage with this tension outside simple political power hierarchies. Similarly, principles of inclusivity

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4 Jacob S. Hacker, *The institutional foundations of middle-class democracy* (London: Policy Network, 2011).

and universalism could be introduced as baseline requirements into social policy. Universal social policies could avoid situations where majorities use judgments about who is supposedly 'deserving' of social support to hierarchically exclude specific groups such as minorities.

In line with social justice, a strong civil society must be accompanied by **opportunities for civic action**, not only by mobilising citizens around specific democratic moments of electoral campaigns, but also by continuing to engage them in between these moments. Such opportunities typically take the form of strikes or protests, and rely on full rights to freedom of thought, expression, and assembly. They should explicitly seek to rally, corral, and consult existing networks of grassroots movements, drawing on the mutual support and unity between women's, labour, youth, LGBTQI+, and students' organisations – especially in regions, such as Africa, where rapid urbanisation has generated new civic groups and social constituencies. Only in the presence of such opportunities can a 'progressive orchestra', to which everybody is able to contribute their own particular voice, truly emerge. A cornerstone of such a progressive orchestra is a free and independent press, trade unions that can voice the rights of workers and can act within tripartite summits, and organisations such as citizens' assemblies – pioneered by indigenous peoples in Latin America – that have the capacity to assure citizens of meaningful participation, representation, and policy influence. It also relies on far-reaching access to effective means of communication, in order to give poorer and less advantaged members of society an equal voice.

All of the issues mentioned above feed into a final sub-theme of a strong civil society, namely thriving **civic support for democracy**. This can take the shape of democratic enthusiasm, participation in elections, or in more general engagement with democratic processes via interest groups or activist organisations. This factor ultimately relies on many of the other issues being addressed and is yet another necessary condition for democracies to be resilient. However, it ultimately also depends on progressive democrats making the case for a valued, ethical society, which means that they need not

only to generate attractive narratives based around people's lived realities, but also to **create ideological clarity around their vision**, focused on solidarity, justice, equality, freedom, and above all social progress. At the same time, it is essentially linked to two crucial factors: being able to participate in terms of (1) material means, and (2) available time and information. Besides the need for more inclusive, universal, and empowering policies along with civic education, policies like significant working-time reductions at equal pay could further contribute to civil societies with stronger participatory capabilities.

### 2.3 A democratic dimension to global action

Resilient democracies in a globalised world must span from the local to the global level. This means that democratic orders can no longer sustain themselves appropriately without a global framework to protect them, and accordingly have to embrace the idea of a democratic dimension to global action. However, such a framework has to have democratic elements to be legitimate. While democratic institutions provide the framework for democracies to be resilient based on the foundation of civil society, an additional democratic layer at the level of global action can shelter national democratic institutions and civil societies from external and internal threats. In order for this to function in practice, democratic institutions from the local to the global level must mutually reinforce each other and function in as synchronised a way as possible.

Several particularly challenging problems emerge from this main theme – problems that have the potential to spur extensive discussions among progressive democrats. The first, fairly uncontroversial, sub-theme is the need to achieve extensive national, subnational, and supranational **co-operation between democratic actors**. This is meant both in the sense of a global 'club of democracies' that acts to sustain democratic societies and celebrate their achievements, and as a series of local, regional, and continental alliances that are able to offer support in a more context-specific, targeted way. The starting point for diagnosing the problem that progressive democrats face today is the observation that, in several regions of the world, anti-democratic



actors have not shied away from transcending their familiar nationalistic discourse and co-operating beyond their national borders in order to achieve their primary goal of eroding democratic structures.

In this context, progressives' priority must be to consolidate their ability to fight back and speak out against democratic backsliding – in particular dictatorial tendencies and human rights abuses. Core to this is the imperative to **deepen the progressive understanding of power**, specifically through the need to link with marginalised people and how power affects them from the ground up. Progressive democrats have to clarify what power is and what using it means; which, when they are in government, is integrally connected with taking a proactive approach to designing forward-thinking policies. But they cannot simply wait until they are in government to work on deepening the democratic character of their societies: building progressive forces and strengthening their ability to maintain solidarity relies first and foremost on (1) building up progressive democratic opposition, and only afterwards on (2) supporting the actions of progressive ruling parties when they are in government.

At the same time, this problem is exacerbated by the fact that similar co-operation between democratic actors has been partly stymied by ineffective and inadequate co-ordination – as well as often an inconsistent application of democratic values in the foreign policies of more established democracies (such as those in Europe). In short, the **global mutual support systems amongst progressive democrats must be substantially strengthened**. There are several examples for concrete action that fit into these overall observations. For instance, the concept of global associations between political stakeholders and civil society mentioned earlier could be applied to democratic actors as well. Democratic parties from different ideological backgrounds must embrace taking part in processes of democratic deliberation between one another across party lines, with the aim of reaching agreement on common basic standards of democracy. Further, democratic actors need to learn to co-operate beyond ideological lines in a systematic, institutionalised, and regular exchange of best practices for fostering democracy. This could entail expanding the global network of democratic

research institutions with commonly supported, nonpartisan bodies that have the explicit mandate of monitoring threats to democracies and developing mutually acceptable recommendations. Crucially, it also implies that democratic actors ought to commit to prioritising democratic resilience over other, potentially secondary preferences they might hold.

This would be a relatively soft approach with limited disruptive potential. However, it ties into a much more complex sub-theme: the role of **local, regional, continental, and global institutions**, ranging from extra-continental states, especially former colonial states, as well as international organisations and private entities (for example, NGOs). The various challenges to democratic resilience, along with the general effects of globalisation, make supranational institutions unambiguously necessary. But at the same time, there is widespread consensus among progressive democrats that the existing supranational institutions have largely under-delivered or outright failed in their responsibilities in the light of democratic erosion. This, in turn, calls into question their fitness for addressing other current and future challenges, such as climate change, natural disasters, and global misinformation.

With the exception of 'soft', observatory practices such as monitoring elections, there is a clear hesitancy among progressive democrats towards normalising intervention by supranational institutions, which carries the cost of leaving anti-democratic actors with the leeway to pursue their agendas without facing international resistance. This is especially the case if other global players let their focus on business, trade, or commercial interests take priority in their dealings with authoritarian states, and undermine democracy by supporting the dictatorial status quo, elevating stability-promotion above democracy-promotion. But this is the result of various controversial challenges, ranging from the (often questionable) democratic legitimacy of supranational institutions and the risks of insufficiently developed progressive agendas to an overly pronounced focus on economic integration and concerns about national sovereignty and integrity. The latter becomes particularly clear with respect to international intervention in cases of anti-democratic developments. While some progressive democrats argue that international intervention by

extra-national democracies is necessary in cases of anti-democratic *coups d'état* – such as by the military – others warn that interventions of this kind can easily reproduce imperialistic and colonial dynamics.

Nevertheless, leaving aside country-specific issues, it is clear that many current, often global problems cannot be solved via a purely national logic any more. This implies that, if they are to help protect democracy, international actors have to be fundamentally re-engineered so they have the palpable competencies to enforce meaningful standards of democratic conditionality – such as giving them the power to impose financial sanctions or reforming the unanimity principle for institutional votes. These standards should include the presence of multi-party systems and elections, liberalisation of the media, release of political prisoners, and institutional transparency and accountability as a *quid pro quo* for international support. But they also include conditions around economic fairness, and upholding a global system that lets those left behind by globalisation benefit equally with regard to everyone else. Specifically, this entails a comprehensive global re-evaluation of the punitive programmes of debt restructuring and governance reforms that have left less wealthy countries, especially in Africa and Latin America, vulnerable to rule by 'debtocracy'.

In the light of these challenges, the crucial first step that must be taken is **the establishment of a democratic dimension to global action**. If one takes seriously the need for some authoritative action at the global level to sustain democratic resilience, such action would need to be democratically legitimated in some way. Otherwise, global intervention to prevent democratic erosion would in and of itself introduce democratic erosion through the back door. On this basis, it should be a priority for progressive democratic actors to develop clear criteria for when, and how, intervention might be legitimated, within the framework of global deliberative processes.

The same logic also justifies the formation and further development of international platforms such as the PA: mediating spaces to build capacity of and within progressive parties, share knowledge gained from past experiences among different members from across the world, and promote solidarity and cross-

pollination of democratic ideas and best practices. The aim of such spaces should be to support democracy on the ground, fostering party proliferation and preventing violations against democratic opposition, and insisting on parties' democratic alternation-in-power, but also consolidating internal democracy within civil society and progressive parties. This is because, while external help has historically proven pivotal for democracy-promotion, it cannot ultimately take the place of internal actions by domestic actors, as democracy stands or falls on the support and involvement of the general population. For the international platforms that already exist, their concrete capacities, relevance, presence, and overall significance could be further developed – especially accompanying the other steps towards global democratisation proposed throughout this policy study.

The question of making global institutions ready for meaningful action does not only apply in terms of democratic interventions, but is also closely linked to the sub-theme of **global external shocks**. Developments like the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change, as well as anti-democratic misinformation campaigns and the increasing global political influence of autocracies, imply that nation-states have to some extent reached the limits of their capacities wherever global action is needed. In Africa and Asia especially, but to some extent in Europe and Latin America as well, opportunistic authoritarian actors have used the recent spate of crises to expand their influence, amassing unprecedented concentrations of power, implementing draconian and discriminatory security measures, and dividing societies into supporters and opponents of their respective regimes to create a polarised dynamic that hampers pro-democratic tendencies. The implications of this tie closely into the sub-theme of fostering meaningful global institutions with tangible capacities to act effectively, and are therefore indirectly linked with all of its associated complexities and challenges.

## 2.4 Anti-democratic actors

The fourth and final theme differs from the other themes in some regards. While the other themes

allow for a differentiated examination of various ways of fostering democratic resilience, the fourth theme is associated with one seemingly simple task: **identifying and addressing anti-democratic actors** who foster trends towards 'autocratisation' and carry the threat of internal *coups d'état*. Across the world, a key challenge is that democracy is not primarily threatened by external factors, but is instead more susceptible to threats coming from within.

However, the potential for concrete steps forward is slightly more differentiated than this overall theme might suggest at first sight, and its constitutive sub-themes essentially consist of the various actors involved. These include the direct or indirect intervention of **military and security actors**, various **autocratic politicians** – often right-wing populists – who aspire to establish themselves as future 'strongmen', occasionally **weakly pro-democratic actors**, and **organised crime**. In Asia, for instance, the military and other authoritarian actors have started to influence education through curricula, thus taking control of the crucial element of civic information, while also supplementing brute violence with populist rhetoric to build an alternative basis of mass legitimation to remain in power. Latin America, meanwhile, has witnessed the emerging role of specific **churches**, which have historically played a key role in domestic politics, as pro- or anti-system political players; this is mirrored especially in Africa by the consolidation of anti-democratic chauvinist **religious extremism**. However, there is a more generalisable concept behind this: the **influence of potentially anti-democratic actors via capital**, which also entails, for instance, the influence secured through strategic investment or technological provision – including but by no means limited to the efforts of authoritarian global players such as China and Russia – most recently including concerted engagement in 'vaccine diplomacy'.

Not all of these actors play equal and identical roles around the world. For instance, churches might undermine democratic institutions in some Latin American countries while at the same time contributing to social security as part of various European welfare systems. However, the overarching takeaway from this main theme consists in the fact that it is crucial to identify and assess in a granular

way which actors play significant pro- and anti-democratic roles in each country's political system, in order to be able to craft well-tailored strategies for democratic resilience at the national level. This can be closely linked to the overarching state of democracy at a supranational or regional level, but it is equally important to account for context-specific historical lessons, as this can help provide a better understanding of which warning signals to look out for.

It is vital to acknowledge that careful evaluation of the historical trajectory of democracy and authoritarianism across all regions can indicate the conditions that tend to lead to the weakening of democratic institutions and ultimately the erosion of democracy. That said, some concrete steps forward can be taken to reduce the anti-democratic potential of some of the actors in question. Learning from the experience of Asia and Latin America, it is vital to ensure that transitions from authoritarianism to democracy include measures to fully integrate potential anti-democratic forces into the new regimes. These include exhaustive punitive actions to redress criminal behaviour, and meaningful conflict resolution as well as truth and reconciliation processes between the perpetrators and victims of authoritarian excesses, to reduce both the capacity and willingness of (for instance) authoritarian politicians and military forces to erode the successor democracies.

Regarding the erosive effects of weak pro-democratic actors, potential remedies might be found in establishing more productive co-operation beyond party lines. This is not to be read as a bid to abolish clear differences between parties' policy demands. Rather, a common pro-democratic agreement needs to take into account the value of stable governments, policy-oriented political action, and constructive deliberation between actors with different preferences. This should also consider the need to jointly improve public debates and constructively – rather than only competitively – sketch out commonalities and differences in policy proposals.

Opening up political organisations and parties could also aim to connect with under-represented

demographic groups, including young people, who might otherwise be deterred by rigid partisan structures and divisive disputes. Crucially, this does not mean limiting such aims to progressive parties. Rather, all pro-democratic parties need to jointly develop strategies and structures to involve under-represented groups in the processes of political deliberation and participation. Once general participatory potential is achieved, constructive competition for votes can then be focused on policy proposals, rather than undermining trust in democracy as a whole through divisive campaigns. Similarly, civil-society actors in particular could be

included more actively in a broader understanding of policy-proposal development, for instance via the deliberative associations of pro-democratic stakeholders outlined earlier. However, this does not remove the need for additional effective measures designed to ensure that openly anti-democratic actors are unable to access capital and other resources intended to support pro-democratic forces. As any such intervention can run the risk of being abused in an anti-democratic fashion itself, the criteria for this must be transparent and closely monitored.

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# **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

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## 3. Policy implications

The challenges that democracies face across the world can be addressed in various ways. To organise the complex issues involved in their potential solutions, this policy study offers a series of guiding questions that progressive democrats must answer if they are to achieve democratic resilience in the 21st century. Some of these questions might prove particularly challenging for some of the stakeholders involved; but even so, they should not for that reason be dismissed prematurely as overly ambitious.

It is a fallacy to assume that simply conserving the status quo is a sustainable strategy for democracies. As the world evolves, democracies have to adapt and find strategies to respond effectively to new challenges as and when they arise. On that basis, serious engagement with different visions of fundamental progress is no academic exercise conducted from the lofty heights of an ivory tower, but rather a necessary part of the daily practical struggle to preserve democracy, waged in the trenches of social activism. Progressive democrats around the world are therefore invited to develop ambitious answers to the questions presented below. To provide a stronger basis for upcoming debates, this policy study also provides some potential thought-provoking starting points for how to answer these questions, which stakeholders might agree or disagree with depending on their respective perspectives. These proposals should not be seen as imperatives, but instead as possible ways of working towards democratic resilience.

### 3.1 Functional democratic institutions

Regarding functional democratic institutions, one key question concerns the separation of the branches of government: how can democratic mechanisms be institutionalised that effectively prevent executive control over the other branches of government, especially the judiciary? A strong separation of

the three branches of government is needed to effectively prevent executive dominance, especially over the judiciary, in order to safeguard fundamental democratic pillars such as a democratic rule of law. As there is no simple catch-all solution to this issue, thoroughly examining when and why the separation of these branches has collapsed in the past and compiling context-specific best practices is the most promising starting point here. This should be done in co-operation with researchers and national practitioners dedicated to this topic.

Another important practical question is how thoroughly civic rights have to be defined to ensure a democratic rule of law. If civic rights are formulated too loosely or vaguely, anti-democratic actors can easily find ways to circumvent them. However, there will always be gaps, especially as overly specific formulations can cause issues as well. To engage with this, progressive democrats could use global platforms to compile civic rights formulations from all around the world, both in terms of the 'state of play' of the existing law and the application of progressive ideals. Researchers could then compare them systematically and develop more penetrating insights into their respective strengths and weaknesses. Based on this, a global definition of progressive civic rights could be developed, in the form of a compact to be signed by progressive democratic parties worldwide.

Beyond such commitments, democrats should discuss whether coalition governments alone are still the best way to deliver sufficiently meaningful policies beyond provisions that target the lowest common denominator. Given the increasing partisan and ideological fragmentation of parliaments, for instance throughout Europe, progressive democrats cannot bank on non-cooperative single-party majorities to address this. If governmental coalitions cannot agree on urgent issues, parties could open up their coalition agreements for one-off policy-specific

alliances with opposition parties in certain areas on which they have previously come to an agreement. Such approaches should be trialled first with only a few policies and rolled out slowly in order not to disrupt the remaining stability of coalitions. After all, coalition governments still safeguard reliable government terms in many democracies. This might enable governments that are stable overall through coalitions, and which can still effectively implement reforms in areas that are pressing but controversial within the coalitions that comprise them.

On a larger scale of systemic questions, progressive democrats should find answers to how deliberative and participatory democratic elements can be embraced in a way that makes them actually meaningful and inclusive for decision-making. However, the extensive risks involved in this need to be taken into account *ex ante*. Once deliberative and participatory formats are offered to a democratic citizenry, the results have to be taken seriously to sustain the credibility of the process. One approach might be for parties to include broader civil society actively in the development of their policy proposals. Parliamentary opposition proposals could be discussed in councils composed of civil society and expert members and – if approved – be reintroduced into parliament with added credibility.

A highly complex issue in liberal democracies concerns the question of whether and how anti-democratic and anti-system movements or parties are to be isolated through a *cordon sanitaire* without compromising on democratic principles. Isolating such actors is only possible if they are not already large and pivotal – in which case other proposals presented throughout this policy study that focus more on ‘restoring’ rather than ‘preserving’ democracy might become more pressing. Furthermore, such isolation carries short-term risks in terms of finding popular majorities, but co-operating with such actors could legitimise them in a way that is detrimental to progressive democracy in the medium to long term. Both can be risky from the perspective of democratic resilience. First, one could consult with experts on this issue to identify the empirical democratic impacts of policy-specific co-operation with anti-democratic actors. Building on this, democratic actors could come to binding agreements (1) within

their local, regional, and global networks, (2) among pro-democratic parties with different ideological positions at the national or subnational level, and potentially (3) pro-democratic parties with different ideologies at the transnational level on the red lines that must not be crossed. One could further institutionalise cross-partisan committees that are tasked with deciding on whether specific actors are considered anti-democratic.

More generally, it remains to be answered how democratic institutions can be designed that can withstand, react to, and recover from external and internal authoritarian pressures. What characteristics should such institutions have? While this comes with practical challenges of implementation, it is also an issue of insufficient consolidated knowledge. In order to address this, democratic actors could set up global, cross-partisan, pro-democratic institutions – for example, a jointly financed think tank – that are dedicated to conducting research on these issues with practically applicable policy recommendations.

### 3.2 A strong democratic civil society

Democratic resilience depends on a civil society that is democratically educated. However, education policy is ultimately at least partly designed by parties, who might consider specific attitudes to be democratically essential and which other parties might not agree on. So how can an effective democratic education be successfully implemented while avoiding the risk of partisan biases? Generally, democratic parties need to prioritise democratic education in school curricula, regularly inform adults on options for democratic participation, and increase investment in research on democratic resilience. For any issues that go beyond this, cross-partisan think tanks and non-partisan expert committees could jointly aim to deliver complementary information in cases of uncertainty.

However, democracy is not only a matter of education. An unequal distribution of capital can translate to unequal *de facto* opportunities for political participation. A major challenge is how equal participation and representation for marginalised groups can be ensured, even if the

majority or the most resourceful parts of the electorate want to prevent this. How can this be done in a way that does not counteract the principle of democratic majoritarianism? Outside of governments, options in this regard are limited but could revolve around outreach programmes by think tanks or other associated organisations. However, once in government, progressive democrats need to implement policies that provide marginalised groups with (1) the financial means necessary to prioritise democratic participation in everyday life as well as (2) proactive information outreach campaigns on democratic opportunities, while (3) eradicating as far as possible ways of influencing political decisions through capital (such as via political donations or electoral campaign financing).

Linked to but also going beyond issues of capital, not all members of society might feel that they benefit from democracy as much as they would from a non-democratic system. For instance, workers might feel left behind, the needy might feel stigmatised, and the middle class might feel that they are net contributors to social policies that they do not benefit from. But which policies must be reformed to make them universal and inclusive in order for every single member of society to realise the palpable benefit of living in a democracy? To address this issue, the role of social policy and welfare states needs to be reconceptualised, away from a mere security net towards a constant provider of universal benefits that are materially tangible for every single member of society. More inclusivity and universalism in social policies can ensure that (1) more citizens see the system they live in as beneficial and desirable, and (2) fewer citizens develop an aversion towards the democratic state because they associate it with being subjected to stigmatising and demeaning means-testing and bureaucratic processes.

These considerations are also tied to the idea of social justice. What fundamental rights have to be introduced and enforced to ensure that a democracy delivers on this principle, irrespective of the specific socio-economic policy preferences of the governing parties? Further, how can measures designed to achieve this be prevented from counteracting the principle of democratic policy control? The main issue here is that there are pro-democratic actors who do

not consider social equality crucial for democracies, although a dearth of equality can erode democratic resilience. In order to ensure stability, progressive democrats should work towards constitutionally guaranteed, meaningful, *de facto* claimable social rights. This must include at least a guarantee of not living in poverty, as well as meeting social, cultural, and care needs, and could be expanded to set an upper limit to inequality. By working with basic, legally claimable rights, policy flexibility is still assured within these basic boundaries.

A fundamentally difficult task for democratic parties to address concerns these parties themselves. In some societies, democratic parties might lack public backing. For instance, they may no longer be perceived as fully genuine advocates of the people, or they might be seen as divisive contributors to tribalism. This could make it easier for anti-democratic actors to gain popularity. Progressive democrats must ask themselves whether the way in which political parties currently function is the optimal way to (1) involve all parts of civil society democratically, (2) prevent divided and antagonistic electorates, and (3) foster solution-oriented political processes. Hence, political parties need to involve civil society more actively and democratically by breaking with hierarchical structures and thus enabling more low-threshold ways of influencing policy agendas. This includes deepened co-operation with civil-society actors when it comes to policy development, while maintaining a focus on representing the interests of non-organised individuals and communities as well. Legally binding and effectively implemented rules regarding ethical and fair electoral campaigns should further prevent antagonising and dividing parts of the electorate. Parties must also be incentivised to foster solution-oriented political processes rather than blocking policies out of purely strategic considerations.

Closely related to the latter point is the question of how democratic opposition can be revived to ensure a resilient democracy. In some regions, democratic opposition lacks meaningful influence and thus corrective potential against democratic erosion. However, governments also need to be able to make policies smoothly so that democracies are perceived to be effective. One solution to this might be to strengthen deliberative and participatory democratic



processes. This could allow opposition proposals to be discussed in institutionalised forums of citizens and experts outside of parliament and – if approved – reintroduced into parliament with added pressure on governments to take them seriously.

### **3.3 A democratic dimension to global action**

Some of the biggest challenges and furthest-reaching needs for reform concern the global stage. Many challenges to democracies and to human prosperity more generally have become increasingly globalised. Similarly, globalisation applies to areas like the economy and social life. So can global co-operation between democratic actors go beyond mere communication and involve some degree of globally organised decision-making and action? Increased co-operation could work independently from established systems such as the UN and does not have to erode them. Political actors could develop supranational associations with different but like-minded actors to deliberately develop binding commitments to shared policy proposals. For instance, global partisan associations could receive stronger mandates and aim to agree on specific policies that all members adopt simultaneously. Global networks of nonpartisan pro-democratic think tanks could further be established to deliver institutionalised exchanges of best practices for fostering resilient democracies.

But the global dimension of democratic control could go still further. This begs the question of what empowerment supranational institutions need to receive to be able to (1) deliver on universal basic rights and (2) take meaningful, swift action regarding global challenges. Are progressive democrats willing to move these and other capacities from the national to the supranational level? After all, the Westphalian system rests on the principle that each state has sovereignty over its territory and domestic affairs, but the global challenges of today do not respect national borders. Current developments indicate that supranational institutions must be given authoritative and binding competencies in areas that cannot effectively be addressed nationally, such as action during global pandemics, the eradication of global poverty, and the fight against climate

change. Pro-democratic actors should agree on mutually binding minimum standards for resilient democracies that are clearly defined, so that ideas such as ‘illiberal democracy’ can clearly be called out as undemocratic. Depending on the competencies transferred, the institutions in question need to be made more democratic at a global scale. Transferring powers must not lead to an erosion, but rather to a strengthening of democratic principles.

All these considerations are tied to the observation that the evolution of political globalisation has slowed down in response to new global challenges, and lacks supranational democratic influence and meaningful decision-making. Hence, progressive democrats must decide whether they are willing to take concrete steps towards more substantively realised global governance. If yes, what are these steps? If not, what is the alternative? Such steps could include concrete commitments to the age-old idea of uniting humanity beyond national borders. For progressive democrats, this implies moving such ideas forward actively through campaigns and policies. The development of policies pursued at the global level but implemented within national logics could be one example of a first step towards more meaningful global governance. A system of global subsidiarity could be the result. In the long run, this could be further developed in order to break out of national and regional divides.

However, the prospects for such systems currently seem somewhat remote. More acutely, anti-democratic movements often do not abide by the rules of democratic societies and ultimately do not respect the right of the people to self-governance. However, external interventions run the risk of also violating societies’ autonomy, especially when it is unclear at what point such interventions are justified at all. Are there unexplored yet appropriate criteria to determine when, and whether, to invoke global democratic interventions against anti-democratic movements? How far can such interventions go without undemocratically and imperialistically interfering in national sovereignty? Democratic actors around the world need to work towards an agreement on when global democratic interventions against anti-democratic movements are necessary and when they are not acceptable. An internationally institutionalised council of democratic countries

could be one platform for such deliberations – perhaps also including non-partisan pro-democratic actors, for instance from civil society, in an observer capacity.

### 3.4 Anti-democratic actors

A common thread throughout many of these considerations consists in the challenge posed by anti-democratic actors gaining ground. If they remain undiscovered or underestimated, it is difficult to anticipate democracies' potential weak points. Progressive democrats thus need to engage with the question of whether there are anti-democratic actors that are as yet still flying under their radar. If so, what are their strategies and how can they be appropriately contained without undermining democratic rights? Further promoting research on this issue that takes local, national, regional, and global perspectives into account might be one way to approach this. Democrats could establish and co-finance research institutions such as cross-partisan, global think tanks dedicated to democratic resilience, including this issue.

However, dealing with anti-democratic actors can quickly become complicated in practice. Some actors that have eroded democracies in the past – such as some military and security forces – are integral parts of their respective 'permanent states' and civil societies, so simply shutting them down is not a viable option. Democrats therefore must answer what has to be done to ensure that such actors cannot undermine democratic structures. Attached to this is the question of whether such containment is even possible at all without a significant role for global governance. One potential first step might be to involve some actors actively in fostering democracy, either by co-opting them directly into democratic processes (such as civil-society actors) or by enshrining symbols and traditions of democracy in the establishment of their identity (like the military). Progressive actors must foster a relationship of democratic inclusion rather than antagonism with actors that enjoy close links to civil society or permanent state institutions. While some of these actors may nonetheless still develop anti-democratic tendencies, civil-society actors

in particular also have the potential to stabilise democracy by reaching citizens on levels that traditional political actors have little or no access to. However, parties themselves must remain or become independent political stakeholders that represent otherwise unorganised individuals and communities along the way. Ultimately, more reliable, long-term solutions need to be found to this problem – such as, perhaps, entrenching co-operation and security systems beyond national borders.

At a larger scale, history might be a useful guide in these contexts. However, it is unclear whether (1) the same mechanisms of the past always apply unchanged to different contexts in modern times, and (2) there is a risk that information about past developments is either forgotten or not kept as prominently present as it ought to be. So what lessons can actually be learned from history, and what do these imply for the current state of democracy? As a general step, the history of democracy and its potential erosion could be expanded within curricula and public education. Public policy advisory teams could further be strengthened by including experts on historical developments more prominently. Research on this issue could be further promoted by emphasising its importance in career consultations for young people, by significantly expanding funding, and by making the field comparatively more attractive for the best researchers through stable career guarantees.

Finally, while democratic competition is indispensable for achieving accurate and responsive representation of citizens' interests, it runs the risk of increasingly fostering division, antagonism, and conflict if it is not carefully organised. Progressive democrats must hence answer the question of how political cohesion is to be strengthened despite disagreements, and how bridges can be built during times of intense ideological polarisation. The steps towards more deliberative democratic processes and cross-partisan action and institutions mentioned above could certainly help achieve such goals. Progressive democrats should consider legally binding guidelines for fair campaigns and enforce them, and foster research on ways of institutionalising constructive, policy-oriented rhetoric and political action.

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# CONCLUSION

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## 4. Conclusion

As the exchanges between high-level progressive stakeholders from across Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe made unequivocally clear, democratic actors around the world face challenges that may appear quite different at first sight, but which share several fundamental commonalities. These commonalities imply that stakeholders in all of these regions conceive of democratic resilience in terms of a common architecture, in which the framework of democratic social institutions builds on the foundation of a highly democratically motivated civil society, and is crowned with global pro-democratic co-operation. The latter in particular appears repeatedly as a form of potential protective layer, which has so far remained under developed and consequently often proved ineffective in supporting democracy around the world.

However, strengthening the capacity of global governance to take meaningful action in order to protect democratic structures and basic rights is not a blanket solution for all problems. As the erosion of younger democracies appears to be revolving strongly around civil society, and as older democracies struggle with attacks on long-established democratic institutions, progressive democrats have to tackle challenges locally, regionally, and globally. But any action taken has to be understood merely as a piece of a larger picture, irrespective of how long a democracy has been in place up to now. Building resilient democracies works outside the logic of sufficient conditions; no single factor can guarantee democratic resilience, but the more such factors are cumulatively present, the higher the likelihood of democracies withstanding pressures from within and without.

The factors identified in this policy study as potential contributors to democratic resilience have implications that might require a transformation in the way that national democratic actors think of democracy overall. Resilient democracies are not

top-down processes, in which citizens are only to be involved intermittently, specifically during occasional election periods. In order to ensure resilient democracies, they have to be fundamentally centred around the people, building on their involvement, contributions, and creativity. However, this does not mean that participatory democracy alone is a catch-all solution either, given its potentially serious pitfalls regarding pure forms of direct democracy. Instead, deliberative elements need to be woven into the institutional fabric of representative democracies in innovative ways, while ensuring through the affirmation of fundamental, inalienable rights that principles such as equality, freedom, solidarity, social justice, and social progress are irrevocably guaranteed to all members of society.

As such fundamental rights are at the same time human rights, they also have a global dimension that progressive democrats need to embrace more seriously through concrete commitments and action. Global co-operation is the most fundamental tool at the disposal of progressive democrats in tackling challenges to democracies, as it can be carried out swiftly and flexibly, and comes at relatively low cost if it is focused on exchange and co-ordination. However, communicative efforts will not be sufficient to address the manifold challenges involved. Rather, progressive democrats need to develop concrete visions for global democratic structures that (1) give all humans an equal say in global matters such as climate change, (2) mutually stabilise more local democratic institutions, (3) provide international institutions with the necessary legitimacy to act in a more meaningful way against global challenges such as Covid-19 and climate change, and (4) effectively guarantee the implementation of human rights and social justice.

Engaging with such transformative change will result in controversial choices which cannot be made without their own underlying democratic processes.

As a result, this policy study has treated the regional exchanges between political stakeholders only as a starting point for deliberative processes. The four sets of recommendations we have outlined are all crucial points that progressive democrats must engage with to ensure that resilient democracies endure stably in future. While some of them are detailed and technical, others are more broad-brush, fundamental, and perhaps in turn correlatively more controversial. It would be easy for decision-makers to avoid the latter and hope that engaging with the more manageable points will suffice. However, it is crucial not to prematurely discard the more fundamental considerations out of an abundance of caution, even if these might at times have more complex implications for progressive policy.

In summary, three goals stand out:

- First, and most immediately, progressive democrats need to broaden the horizon of which benefits a democratic state provides to its citizens. While fully maintaining and extending systems of social protection for the needy, progressive democrats should explore universal benefits and claimable social rights that are more directly palpable for lower- and middle-income classes.

- Second, there is extensive untapped potential in fostering closer imbrication between political parties and wider civil society in the processes of political decision-making.
- Third, progressive democrats should formulate an agenda for genuinely democratic layers of supranational governance that enjoy both authoritative policy competencies and effective means of implementation. This may be linked to structural reforms of global institutions, such as the UN, but may also involve more regional or multilateral associations as well.

As the exchanges between experts around the world showed, large parts of the erosion of democracy are rooted in the failure of pro-democratic actors to deal with new challenges as soon as they emerge, and to adapt their strategies accordingly. Thus, bold visions and ambitious commitments are needed to build resilient democracies in the 21st century.

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The Karl Renner Institute is the political academy of the Austrian Social Democratic movement. It is a forum for political discourse, a centre for education and training, and a think tank on the future of social democracy.

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- establishing a discourse between experts from various fields and the Austrian Social Democratic Party in order to develop and realise new political positions;
- generating a forum for political discussion and thus helping to introduce social democratic positions into the public discussion;
- training representatives of the Austrian Social Democratic Party so that they are optimally prepared for their present and future tasks;
- fostering the organisational development of the Austrian Social Democratic Party in order to open up and modernise party structures.

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The FEPS Young Academics Network was established in March 2010 with an aim to gather promising progressive PhD candidates and young PhD researchers ready to use their academic experience in a debate about the Next, Progressive Europe. Realised with the support of Renner Institut in the framework of the FEPS 'Next Left' Research Programme, the project has gathered throughout the years more than 250 members – many of whom are today professors of renowned universities, prominent experts in their respective fields and front-bench politicians. Their exchanges and interdisciplinary research at the time of their involvement have resulted in a number of stimulating studies, providing a relevant contribution to the European progressive movement.

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