

# Democratic Resilience Beyond Institutions: Lessons from Georgia's Civil Society

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In recent years, Georgia has emerged as one of the most visible examples of democratic fragility and societal polarization in Eastern Europe. Yet beyond the headlines about democratic backsliding lies another important and often overlooked story: the evolving resilience of civil society and the emergence of new forms of democratic cooperation under pressure. As an EU candidate country with a strong historical and societal aspiration toward European integration, Georgia also demonstrates the complexity and contradictions of democratic development in an increasingly interconnected world. At times, understanding these dynamics requires looking beyond surface-level political developments and examining the deeper societal processes unfolding beneath them.

This intervention reflects on Georgia not only as a country facing political, institutional, and social polarization, but also as a case study in how democratic actors adapt, endure, and continue to mobilize in increasingly difficult environments. Drawing from practical experience in civic activism, election observation, strategic communication, and coalition-building, the presentation will explore how civil society organizations are rethinking their role in a rapidly changing political, social, and technological landscape.

Alongside civic mobilization, democratic actors in Georgia continue to pursue institutional and legal avenues – including constitutional litigation and international legal mechanisms – demonstrating that democratic resilience must operate simultaneously at societal, institutional, and human levels.

Particular attention will be given to the growing importance of broad and often unconventional partnerships. In contexts of polarization and shrinking trust, democratic resilience can no longer rely solely on traditional NGO networks. Stronger cooperation between civil society, academia, media, business communities, religious institutions, youth movements, diaspora networks, and informal civic initiatives is becoming essential not only for advocacy, but for societal endurance itself.

The presentation will also address the changing information environment shaped by disinformation, emotional manipulation, algorithmic polarization, and emerging AI-driven communication dynamics. In an era where trust itself is becoming a strategic

battlefield, democratic actors must learn not only to provide facts, but also to communicate with empathy, authenticity, and relevance while maintaining close ties with their communities. At the same time, technological change also presents opportunities for civic education, coalition-building, and democratic engagement if approached responsibly and ethically.

Finally, the presentation will reflect on a dimension that is often underestimated in discussions on democratic resilience: the human and emotional sustainability of civic engagement. Prolonged uncertainty, polarization, and continuous pressure place significant emotional strain on activists, journalists, educators, and community leaders. One of the central lessons emerging from Georgia's experience is that democratic resilience is not sustained by institutions alone, but by human relationships, solidarity, adaptability, and the refusal to disengage or grow indifferent despite fatigue and uncertainty.

While Georgia's experience is unique, many of these challenges are increasingly global. The Georgian case demonstrates that the future of democratic resilience may depend less on isolated actors and more on societies' ability to remain connected, supportive, adaptive, and present for one another during periods of profound change. It also reminds us of the importance of occasionally "zooming out" – seeing the broader picture beyond immediate political crises and recognizing that the long-term strength of democracy ultimately depends on the resilience, trust, and interconnectedness of people themselves.

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