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# Strengthening Democratic Resilience and European Integration

## Lessons from Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine

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# Executive Summary

The study examines Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine as three distinct but comparable cases of democratic resilience under pressure. Together, they reflect shared exposure to regional security risks and hybrid threats, while differing in governance capacity, reform trajectories, and external alignment. Moldova illustrates resilience-building under persistent hybrid pressure, Ukraine under conditions of full-scale war, and Armenia in a high-sensitivity security environment shaped by geopolitical realignment. This comparative perspective helps identify both country-specific dynamics and transferable lessons for reform and international support.

## Country findings and priority recommendations

**Republic of Moldova** has emerged as a frontline case of democratic resilience in Europe, facing recurrent crises and sustained foreign interference since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. While the country remains a competitive democracy, major international indices continue to place it in the hybrid or "grey zone" category. Its resilience is supported by competitive elections, active civil society, comparatively stronger judicial constraints on executive power, and the EU accession process as a strong external anchor for reform. At the same time, persistent vulnerabilities continue to undermine democratic consolidation, including low public trust, corruption, weak implementation capacity, limited parliamentary oversight of the security sector, a deeply contested information environment, and chronic staffing shortages in public administration. Moldova's central challenge is therefore not only to withstand repeated shocks, but to institutionalize democratic resilience through stronger safeguards, more effective democratic oversight, sustained reform delivery, and deeper trust between institutions and citizens.

*Priority recommendations:* The Republic of Moldova should focus on institutionalizing democratic resilience by strengthening democratic oversight of strengthen parliamentary and judicial control of emergency and security measures; invest in administrative capacity, improving implementation capacity, and reinforcing societal resilience through support for independent media, civil society, strategic communication, and public trust.

**Armenia** has made notable democratic progress since 2018, but its reform trajectory in 2025–2026 is increasingly shaped by overlapping governance weaknesses, external security pressures, and sophisticated hybrid threats. The country's geopolitical reorientation toward the European Union, reflected in the launch of EU accession proceedings and strong public support for EU integration, has become the main external driver of reform. At the same time, persistent deficits in judicial independence, institutional trust, implementation capacity, and strategic coordination continue to constrain democratic consolidation. Armenia also faces growing vulnerability to disinformation and foreign interference, while the sharp reduction in US assistance in 2025 significantly weakened the financial sustainability of civil society and independent media, both of which remain essential resilience actors. Strengthening democratic resilience will therefore require more effective inter-agency coordination, stronger safeguards for judicial independence and accountability, sustainable domestic support for civil society and media, and a more proactive response to hybrid threats in the context of European integration.

*Priority recommendations:* Armenia should prioritise a coordinated democratic resilience agenda that strengthens strategic communication, judicial independence, and civil society sustainability, while improving preparedness against hybrid threats and embedding civil society in monitoring EU-related reforms

**Ukraine** presents a distinct case of democratic resilience under conditions of full-scale war, where the continuation of reforms and the preservation of democratic legitimacy must be balanced against the exceptional demands of wartime governance. Russia's full-scale invasion has accelerated centralisation, expanded emergency powers, and increased dependence on international support, while simultaneously making democratic reform part of the country's broader security and European integration strategy. Despite these pressures, Ukraine has maintained institutional continuity, preserved core public services, and advanced reforms in areas such as anti-corruption, public administration, media regulation, and legal approximation to the EU acquis. At the same time, important vulnerabilities persist, including weakened parliamentary and judicial oversight, uneven implementation of governance reforms, declining trust in civilian institutions, staffing shortages, fragile media and civil society funding, and constant exposure to disinformation, cyberattacks, and other hybrid threats. Ukraine's democratic resilience therefore depends not only on sustaining resistance to Russian aggression, but also on preventing the long-term normalisation of emergency governance, strengthening institutional accountability, and maintaining EU-oriented reforms as the principal framework for recovery, legitimacy, and state transformation.

*Priority recommendations:* Ukraine should strengthen democratic oversight of wartime governance by reinforcing parliamentary and judicial scrutiny of emergency powers.

It should protect the independence of anti-corruption and judicial institutions, while addressing staffing and implementation gaps across public administration. Sustained support for independent media and civil society is essential to preserve accountability and resilience against information manipulation and interference. Ukraine should also deepen coordination against hybrid threats and maintain EU-related reforms as the central framework for governance, recovery, and long-term democratic consolidation.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine are all pursuing democratic resilience under sustained security pressure, but through distinct trajectories shaped by their respective political, institutional, and geopolitical contexts. It shows that hybrid threats have become a structural condition of governance rather than an occasional disruption, that institutional resilience remains uneven and heavily dependent on implementation capacity, and that public trust varies significantly across cases, with stronger legitimacy where institutions are seen as capable of delivering protection and crisis response. It also confirms that civil society remains a core pillar of resilience in all three countries, albeit with different levels of autonomy and sustainability, and that European integration has emerged as the main external anchor for reform, serving as a source of legitimacy and conditionality in Moldova, an increasingly important driver of transformation in Armenia, and the central framework for institutional reform, recovery, and international support in Ukraine.

### Lessons learned

**Crisis governance must remain bound by enforceable oversight in practice.**

**Implementation capacity (staffing and coordination) determines reform credibility.**

**Trusted, timely communication reduces space for manipulation and polarisation.**

**Civil society, independent media and local governance multiply societal resilience.**

The report concludes that democratic resilience in Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine is shaped by sustained security pressure, hybrid threats, institutional strain, and geopolitical competition. Despite different national contexts, all three countries face the same core challenge: protecting democratic legitimacy while responding to crises, reform demands, and external interference.

Hybrid threats have become a permanent governance challenge. Moldova faces disinformation, illicit political financing, and foreign interference; Armenia is increasingly exposed to electoral vulnerabilities and AI-driven manipulation; while Ukraine's resilience is defined by the pressures of full-scale war, cyberattacks, and infrastructure targeting.

The report stresses that resilience depends on implementation capacity, not only formal reforms. Moldova has advanced through EU alignment and strategic communication structures but still faces administrative gaps. Armenia has adopted reforms but remains constrained by weak coordination and judicial vulnerabilities. Ukraine has shown strong wartime adaptability, though centralisation and oversight risks remain significant.

Public trust, civil society, and independent media are identified as essential pillars of resilience. Where institutions are seen as competent, fair, and responsive, resilience is stronger. However, trust remains uneven, and civic actors continue to face financial, political, and institutional pressures.

The European Union is the main external anchor for resilience, providing reform direction, legitimacy, and conditionality. Yet EU support will be sustainable only if matched by domestic ownership, democratic oversight, and credible implementation.



# Introduction

## Objectives and scope of the Study

This comparative analytical study examines how the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine are strengthening democratic resilience while navigating severe and evolving security pressures and advancing pathways of European-oriented reform. The study provides an in-depth analysis of the institutional, political, and civic conditions that shape reform trajectories, with particular attention to how each country addresses challenges associated with hybrid threats, disinformation, corruption, governance reform, and external influence. Structurally, the study is organized around three country case studies, complemented by a comparative synthesis. It combines context-specific findings with cross-country assessment in order to identify common patterns, constraints, and enabling factors, and to formulate policy-relevant conclusions and actionable recommendations for public institutions, civil society actors, and international partners.

Beyond its analytical contribution, the study is conceived as a strategic advocacy and knowledge-sharing instrument. It seeks to amplify Moldovan, Ukrainian, and Armenian expertise and to support evidence-based dialogue on democratic reform and resilience within the broader Eastern Partnership context.

To strengthen the comparative dimension of the analysis, the study also includes a comparative analytical table (See Chapter 5) synthesizing key findings across the three country cases. The table maps major trend areas and indicators related to the security–democracy nexus, institutional resilience and governance capacity, strategic communication evolution, public trust dynamics, integrity of elections, hybrid threat response, the role of civil society, reform sustainability risks, the European integration

process, and international partnerships. Its purpose is to provide a structured overview of both shared patterns and country-specific differences, making it easier to identify where challenges converge, where trajectories diverge, and which lessons or policy responses may be transferable across contexts. As such, the table serves as an analytical bridge between the individual case studies and the study's broader comparative conclusions.

## Rationale for country selection and situational context

The Republic of Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine constitute a strategically relevant comparative set because they share exposure to overlapping regional security dynamics and hybrid pressure, while exhibiting divergent reform trajectories, governance capacities, and external alignment pathways. Together, they illustrate how democratic resilience is shaped by the interaction between internal institutional performance and external security constraints—an increasingly salient question for European institutions engaged in supporting reform, stability, and rule-of-law-based transformation in the wider neighborhood.

The Republic of Moldova provides insight into resilience-building under sustained hybrid pressure, where the credibility of reforms depends on institutional capacity, public trust, and the ability to protect democratic processes and information integrity. Ukraine offers a distinct perspective on democratic resilience under conditions of extreme security disruption, where the continuation of reforms and the preservation of democratic legitimacy must be balanced against the exceptional demands of wartime governance, including centralised decision-making, rapid resource mobilisation, and sustained reliance on international support.

Armenia illustrates reform dynamics in a high-sensitivity security environment, where democratization processes interact closely with social cohesion, information integrity, institutional accountability, and changing external partnerships.

The comparative perspective is therefore both analytically valuable and policy relevant. It helps distinguish what context-specific is from what is transferable, and it supports the formulation of recommendations that can inform both national reform strategies and international assistance frameworks.

*The study is guided by five core analytical questions:*

-  How are Moldova, Ukraine, and Armenia strengthening democratic resilience in increasingly complex security environments?
-  What institutional, political, and civic factors most strongly influence reform outcomes in each country?
-  How do these countries respond to hybrid threats such as disinformation, external influence, and corruption?
-  What role do governance reforms, civil society, and international partnerships play in advancing European integration?
-  What lessons can be transferred across countries within the Eastern Partnership framework?

## **Methodology and research approach**

The study employs a comparative case study design that combines analytical depth with cross-country comparability. The research approach integrates: desk research of national strategies, legislation, policy documents, official statistics, and international assessments relevant to democratic governance, security, and European integration; country expert analysis, drawing on the professional experience and contextual knowledge of Moldovan, Ukrainian, and Armenian experts;

a common analytical framework applied to each country case to ensure methodological coherence and structured comparison; comparative analysis to identify convergences and divergences across countries, highlight causal patterns, and determine which practices show potential for transfer; synthesis of lessons learned, translating analysis into practical conclusions and policy-relevant recommendations addressed to institutions, civil society, and international partners.

Each country chapter follows a shared structure focusing on institutional and political context, governance and reform processes, civic engagement and societal resilience, and responses to hybrid threats and external influence. This common framework enables a systematic assessment of how resilience is constructed across different environments and political trajectories.

The comparative approach is particularly valuable because hybrid threats and governance vulnerabilities frequently transcend borders, while reform incentives and constraints are often shaped by regional dynamics and international conditionality frameworks. By comparing these three cases, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of resilience as a function of institutional accountability, reform implementation capacity, societal participation, and information integrity, offering evidence-informed options for improving policy design and support instruments aimed at strengthening democratic governance in the Eastern Partnership region.

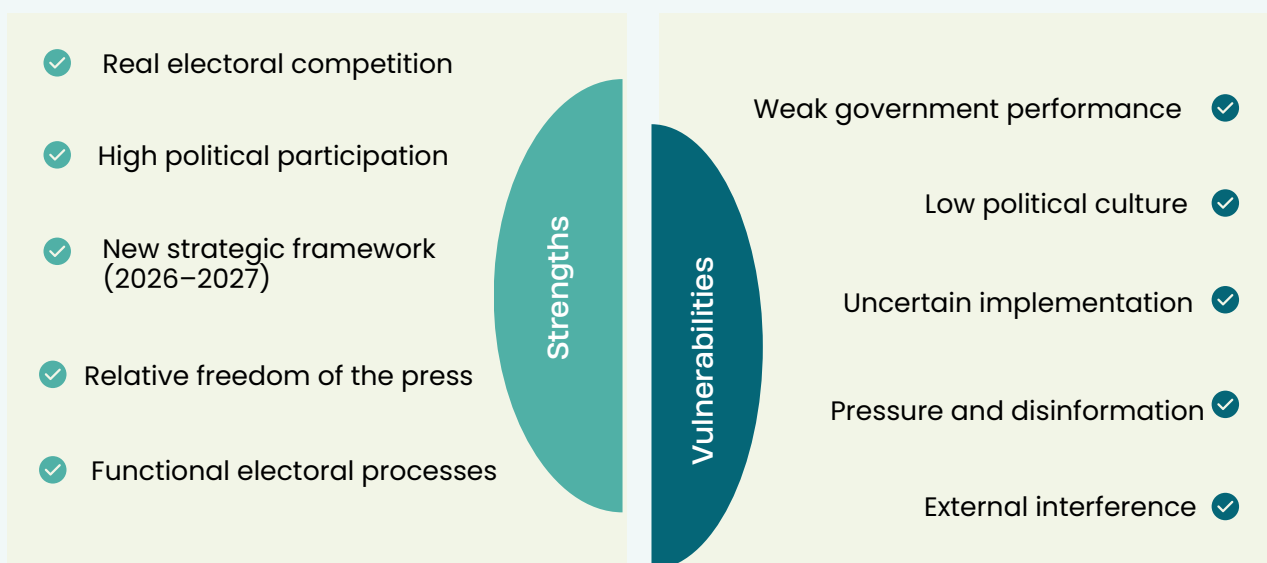


# Country Case Study: Republic of Moldova

Moldova is one of Europe’s clearest test cases of democratic resilience under hybrid pressure. By April 2026, it remains a competitive but unconsolidated democracy, rated Partly Free (60/100) by *Freedom in the World 2025*, 36/100 in *Nations in Transit 2024*, and 6.04 in the Democracy Index 2024, while V-Dem places it in Eastern Europe’s democratic “grey zone” rather than among consolidated liberal democracies (Freedom House 2025; Freedom House 2024; Economist Intelligence Unit 2025; V-Dem Institute 2026).

Its main strengths are competitive elections, relatively strong judicial constraints on executive power, active civil society, and a reform agenda anchored in EU accession; its main weaknesses are low public trust, persistent corruption, weak staffing and implementation capacity, limited parliamentary oversight of the security sector, and a highly contested information environment (European Commission 2025; Presidency of the Republic of Moldova 2025; Council of the EU 2025).

### Moldova’s Democratic Resilience: Strengths and Vulnerabilities



Source: author’s elaboration

This report argues that Moldova’s core challenge is not only defending democracy during crises, but to institutionalize democratic resilience. That requires stronger legal safeguards for emergency governance, more effective democratic control of security institutions, more professional and better staffed public administration, stronger protection of media pluralism, more sustainable civil society financing, and better trust-building between institutions and citizens. Moldova is not failing democratically. It is resisting unusually intense pressure. But resilience remains costly, uneven, and dependent on continued reform delivery. (European Commission 2025; BTI 2026; World Justice Project 2025).

#### Group 1: INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE FOUNDATIONS

##### Security–Democracy Nexus

*Regulation of emergency powers and crisis governance, and safeguards against democratic backsliding*

Moldova’s legal framework for emergency governance is built primarily around Law No. 212/2004 on the state of emergency, siege and war, together with constitutional provisions and implementing acts. The framework has been updated and used repeatedly in the context of the pandemic, the energy crisis, the war in neighbouring Ukraine, refugee inflows, and broader security risks.

The Ombudsman's 2025 thematic review notes that the state of emergency was imposed six times in the previous five years and extended twelve times and concludes that the framework has become more central to governance because Moldova is effectively operating in a "polycrisis" or even "permacrisis" environment. At the same time, the report stresses that emergency rules must remain bound by necessity, proportionality, and rule-of-law safeguards. (Ombudsman of Moldova 2025).

The key democratic issue is not the existence of emergency powers as such, but how they are controlled. The Ombudsman's analysis recognizes that Moldova now has a clearer legal framework than in earlier years but still identifies risks stemming from broad grounds for declaring emergencies, open-ended powers for the Commission for Exceptional Situations, and insufficiently explicit constitutional regulation of how far emergency derogations may alter the normal balance of powers. The report recommends clearer parliamentary control, explicit proportionality requirements, and stronger legal limits on derogation by executive bodies. This means the legal framework has improved, but the democratic safeguards surrounding crisis governance remain incomplete. (Ombudsman of Moldova 2025).

#### *The role of parliamentary oversight and judicial review in monitoring security-related measures*

Parliamentary oversight and judicial review remain the principal constitutional brakes on emergency and security measures. Moldova has an important precedent here: in April 2021, the Constitutional Court annulled a state of emergency that had prevented the dissolution of parliament. That case remains relevant because it demonstrated that judicial review could function as a real anti-backsliding mechanism. Yet parliamentary oversight remains less robust than it should be, especially in relation to the intelligence sector and exceptional executive powers.

The European Commission reported in 2025 that the Security and Intelligence Service last submitted an annual activity report to parliament in July 2024, and that a parliamentary working group discussed a new concept of parliamentary control over SIS in March 2024, but with no immediate follow-up. (OSCE/ODIHR 2021; European Commission 2025).

#### *Compliance of national policies with international democratic and human rights standards*

In terms of compliance with international democratic and human rights standards, Moldova's record is improving. The Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2025–2028 explicitly aims to align legislation, institutions, and practice with Council of Europe standards in democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. At the same time, Venice Commission opinions in 2026 on Moldova's 2025 amendments targeting electoral corruption and illegal political financing accepted the legitimacy of criminal-law responses to foreign-backed electoral corruption, while emphasizing the need for clear definitions, proportionality, and compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights and the ICCPR. In other words, Moldova is broadly moving within a European legal framework but still faces recurring rule-of-law tests when it legislates under security pressure. (Council of Europe 2024; Venice Commission 2026).

#### *Safeguarding the integrity of the information space, including media freedom and pluralism*

The integrity of the information space has become a central part of democratic security. Moldova has moved from fragmented reactions to a more structured approach that combines media regulation, anti-disinformation coordination, and strategic communication. The European Commission's 2025 report notes that the Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation supports interinstitutional efforts against disinformation and information manipulation.

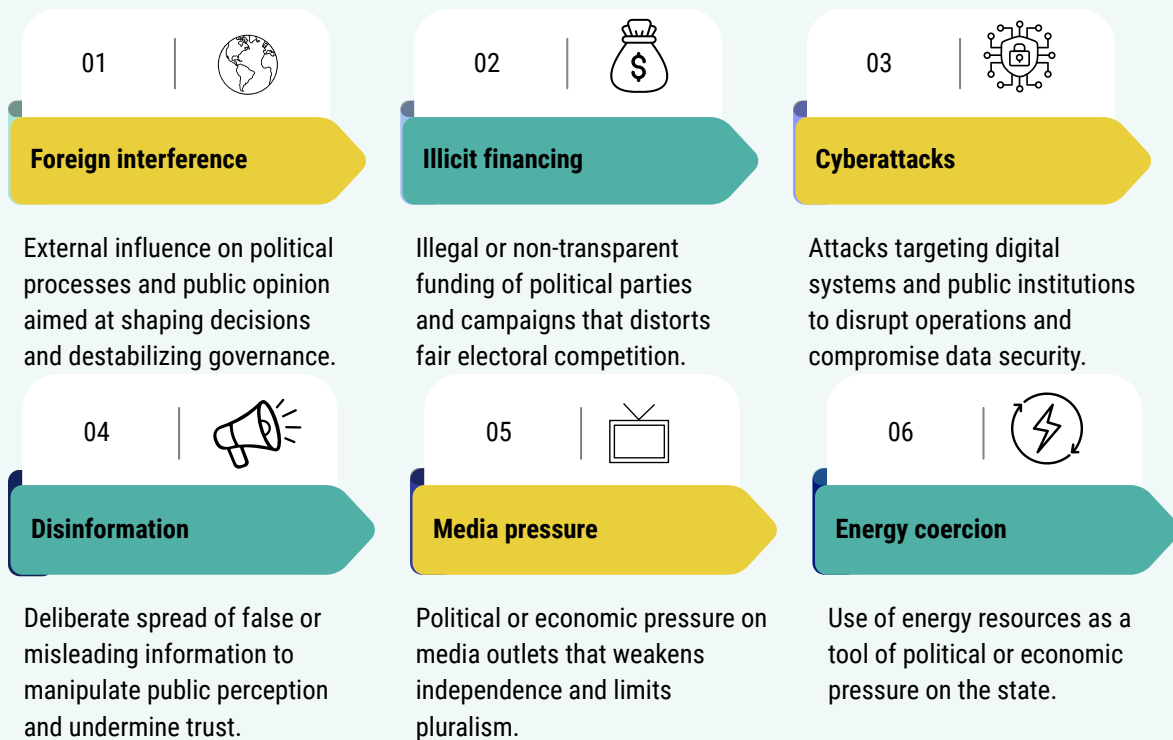
The same report also notes legislative changes to strengthen the public service broadcaster and media governance, while ODIHR's 2026 final report on the 2025 parliamentary elections warned that suspensions or withdrawals of broadcasting rights should only occur through independent oversight bodies or courts, reinforcing the need for proportionate safeguards. (European Commission 2025; ODIHR 2026).

*The impact of ongoing security pressures and hybrid threats on democratic reforms*

Security pressures and hybrid threats have become a major driver of democratic reform in Moldova, accelerating institutional change while also exposing the limits of state capacity and democratic control. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, reform has increasingly been framed not only in terms of democratization or EU accession, but as a matter of national resilience against foreign interference, illicit financing, cyberattacks, and disinformation.

This has pushed Moldova to adopt new legal and institutional tools, including the Democratic Resilience Strengthening Plan 2026–2027, the strengthening of the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, and reforms linked to election security, media regulation, and cybersecurity. At the same time, the pressure of hybrid threats has made democratic reform more difficult to implement consistently: ODIHR found that the 2025 parliamentary elections were competitive but undermined by foreign interference, illicit financing, cyberattacks, and widespread disinformation, while the European Commission concluded that Moldova's response capacity is improving but still constrained by weak staffing, uneven implementation, and limited institutional coordination. In this sense, security pressure has not displaced democratic reform in Moldova; it has redefined it, making the quality of resilience, oversight, and institutional credibility central to the future of democracy itself (European Commission 2025; ODIHR 2026; Presidency of the Republic of Moldova 2025).

**Key Hybrid Threats Affecting Democratic Resilience in Moldova**



Source: author's elaboration

## **Institutional resilience and governance capacity**

### *The effectiveness of state institutions in ensuring the continuity of public services during crises*

Moldova's state institutions have shown a reasonable capacity to preserve continuity of government and public services during crises. The European Commission's 2025 report states that the functioning of democratic institutions is generally stable and that service delivery to individuals and businesses is generally satisfactory. It also records ongoing expansion of digital services and the rollout of 22 new Unified Public Service Centres in the reporting period, bringing the total to 105, with a strong rural access function. This matters for resilience because continuity of service delivery is one of the clearest signals that a democratic state can govern effectively under stress. (European Commission 2025).

### *Challenges related to staff retention and institutional capacity in key governance bodies.*

The biggest institutional weakness is capacity, especially staffing and retention. The Commission reports that public service and human-resource management still need improvement; the civil service management system remains fragmented and understaffed; and the vacancy rate in the civil service is still 19.5% overall, rising to over 22% in central administration. This is not a marginal issue. High vacancy rates directly weaken reform implementation, crisis response, oversight, and memory retention across state institutions. Democratic resilience depends not only on good laws and external support, but also on whether institutions can recruit and keep competent personnel (European Commission 2025).

### *The functioning of inter-agency coordination mechanisms in times of crisis*

Inter-agency coordination has improved, but it remains uneven and often reform-driven rather than routine. The Commission notes the adoption of the National Development Plan 2025–2027, the

Government Action Plan for 2025, and the National Action Plan for EU Accession 2025–2028, alongside steps by the State Chancellery to improve strategic planning and a centralized online monitoring platform for inter-ministerial implementation. At the same time, the Commission explicitly states that the policy-development and coordination framework is in place, but institutional capacity still needs to improve. This suggests that Moldova is building coordination mechanisms but has not fully normalized them in administrative practice. (European Commission 2025).

### *The practical implementation of governance-related laws*

Governance-related laws are often stronger on paper than in practice. This is a recurring theme across public administration, intelligence oversight, anti-corruption, media regulation, and the judiciary. The same 2025 Commission report repeatedly uses formulations such as “partially implemented,” “capacity remains a challenge,” or “needs to be strengthened.” Moldova's reform problem is therefore less one of legislative absence than one of implementation gaps. This is especially important in a resilience context, because hybrid actors exploit implementation asymmetries, not just legal loopholes. (European Commission 2025; BTI 2026).

### *Judicial independence and its impact on democratic resilience*

Judicial independence has improved, and this matters directly for democratic resilience. The Commission states that the independence and impartiality of judges and prosecutors is improving through extraordinary evaluation (“vetting”), and that the Superior Council of Magistracy is fully functional and acts in full composition with vetted members. It also notes that Moldova adopted a new law on the Constitutional Court to enhance independence and operational efficiency. Budget allocations to the courts and prosecution rose in 2024 to EUR 33.2 million for courts and EUR 23.4 million for prosecution, representing

increases of 12% and 10% respectively over 2023. These are significant improvements, but they do not yet remove structural risks related to staffing, salaries, and uneven public legitimacy. (European Commission 2025).

### **Strategic communication evolution**

#### *National strategic communication framework*

Moldova now has a recognizable national strategic communication architecture. The National Security Strategy identifies the development of the national institution responsible for strategic communication and counter-disinformation as a strategic objective. That was followed by Law No. 242/2023, which created the Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation, and by the Concept of Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, Information Manipulation and Foreign Interference for 2024–2028, adopted at the end of 2023. By 2025, the European Commission was already describing the Centre as a functioning node for interinstitutional work against manipulation and disinformation. (Presidency of the Republic of Moldova 2023; IDEA 2025; European Commission 2025).

#### *Dedicated government structures for strategic communication and crisis messaging*

Dedicated government structures now exist, but implementation is still maturing. The Centre functions as the main national structure for strategic communication and counter-disinformation. It operates alongside the State Chancellery, the presidency, sectoral ministries, the intelligence service, and the audiovisual regulator. Moldova also benefits from the EU Partnership Mission in Moldova (EUPM), whose mandate was extended until 31 May 2027 with a budget of over EUR 19.8 million, and whose remit explicitly covers crisis management, cybersecurity, hybrid threats, and FIMI. This significantly strengthens Moldova's institutional ecosystem, but it does not eliminate domestic capacity

bottlenecks. (Council of the EU 2025; StratCom Moldova 2026).

#### *Coordination, proactivity and public trust in official narratives*

Official narratives in Moldova have become more coordinated and proactive in recent years, especially on elections, EU integration, cybersecurity, and disinformation, reflecting the creation of dedicated structures such as the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation and a broader whole-of-government approach to resilience. However, their effectiveness is still constrained by limited public trust in central institutions: according to the September 2025 Public Opinion Barometer, trust stood at 33.8% in government and 32.0% in parliament, which weakens the reach and credibility of official messaging even when coordination improves. As a result, Moldova has moved beyond ad hoc crisis communication, but official narratives are not yet consistently trusted enough to fully counter hostile information influence or societal polarisation.

### **Public trust dynamics**

#### *Levels of public trust in government, parliament, and the judiciary*

The most serious internal vulnerability in Moldova's democratic resilience is trust. Using the latest fully accessible, methodologically documented national poll identified for this review, the IPP Public Opinion Barometer of September 2025, trust in core representative and order institutions remains modest: 33.8% for government, 32.0% for parliament, and 27.5% for justice. By contrast, trust is substantially higher in the church (65.6%) and mayoralties (59.9%). This suggests that legitimacy remains localized and social rather than strongly institutionalized at the national level. (IPP 2025).

### Public Trust in Key Institutions in Moldova (2025)

	<b>Government</b>	<b>33.8%</b>
	<b>Parliament</b>	<b>32.0%</b>
	<b>Justice</b>	<b>27.5%</b>
	<b>Church</b>	<b>65.6%</b>
	<b>Mayoralties (Local authorities)</b>	<b>59.9%</b>

Source: author's elaboration

#### *The influence of transparency, integrity, and responsiveness on public trust*

The level of public trust in government, parliament and the judiciary matters because resilience depends not only on state capacity, but also on whether citizens believe democratic institutions deserve defence. In the context of disinformation and anti-system narratives, low trust increases the susceptibility of public opinion to manipulation and lowers the social cost of attacks on institutions. The same BOP dataset shows that 43.0% thought the country was moving in the right direction, while 45.4% thought it was moving in the wrong direction. This is not a collapse of legitimacy, but it is a fragile equilibrium. (IPP 2025).

#### *The impact of elections on perceptions of democratic legitimacy and governance quality*

Elections have a dual effect on democratic legitimacy in Moldova. On the one hand, they confirm competitive pluralism. On the other hand, repeated foreign interference and illicit financing weaken confidence in the fairness of the arena. ODIHR concluded that the 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum were well managed and provided real choice, while the 2025 parliamentary election remained competitive and professionally administered. Yet in both cycles, the process was marred by illicit foreign interference, disinformation, and unequal campaign conditions.

Elections therefore reinforce democratic legitimacy procedurally, but only partially substantively. (ODIHR 2025; ODIHR 2026).

### Group 2: RESPONDING TO HYBRID THREATS

#### Hybrid threats response

##### *National strategies and action plans to address hybrid threats and disinformation*

Moldova has also adopted a distinct hybrid-threat response framework. The Democratic Resilience Strengthening Plan 2026–2027, approved by the National Security Council on 2 December 2025, prioritizes preventing external interference, protecting democratic processes, strengthening cybersecurity, improving media integrity, and combating illicit political financing. The plan's public version also refers to a national program to strengthen the information space and civic culture, with emphasis on local content and communication. The EU's Growth Plan for Moldova complements this: in March 2026, the European Commission released a second regular payment of EUR 189 million after assessing that Moldova had met 24 reform indicators, including indicators on cybersecurity, emergency response, digitalization of government services, budget transparency, anti-fraud, asset recovery, and the judiciary. This is a strong sign that resilience-building is being tied to concrete reform conditionality. (Presidency of the Republic of Moldova 2025; European Commission 2026).

### *Institutions responsible for countering hybrid threats, including disinformation and foreign information manipulation*

Moldova has built a multi-institutional system to respond to hybrid threats. The main coordinating body for disinformation and foreign information manipulation is the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, created by Law No. 242/2023; its role is to strengthen interinstitutional efforts against disinformation, information manipulation, and foreign interference. Alongside it, key institutions include the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS), the Cybersecurity Agency, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) for election-related manipulation and illicit influence, the Audiovisual Council for broadcast regulation, and the State Chancellery and presidency for whole-of-government coordination. Moldova's Democratic Resilience Strengthening Plan 2026–2027 and the EU-supported EUPM Moldova further embed hybrid-threat response in a broader resilience architecture focused on elections, cybersecurity, crisis management, and FIMI (European Commission 2025; Presidency of the Republic of Moldova 2025; Council of the European Union 2025).

### *The allocation of financial and human resources for counter-disinformation and resilience-building*

Resources for counter-disinformation and resilience-building are expanding, but they remain modest relative to the scale of the threat. Moldova relies heavily on external support to supplement these domestic resources. The EU Partnership Mission in Moldova (EUPM Moldova) was extended until 31 May 2027 with a budget of over EUR 19.8 million, and external partners such as the EU, Germany, and Sweden are funding advisory support, training, election resilience, cybersecurity, and anti-disinformation programs for state institutions, media, and civil society. This means Moldova's resilience-building model is increasingly institutionalized, but still depends on a combination of limited domestic staffing and

substantial international technical and financial support (Council of the European Union 2025; GIZ 2025; Government Offices of Sweden 2025).

### *Types and frequency of hybrid threats*

The most prevalent hybrid threats in Moldova are now well documented. They include foreign information manipulation and interference, cyberattacks, electoral corruption, illicit party financing, vote-buying, bomb threats, pressure on media ecosystems, and energy coercion. ODIHR's 2026 final report on the 2025 parliamentary elections describes the campaign as framed by polarization and undermined by foreign interference, illicit financing, cyberattacks, and widespread disinformation. The EEAS's 4th FIMI Threat Report also highlights Moldova as a major case in the Russian FIMI infrastructure during 2025. In short, hybrid threats are not occasional anomalies in Moldova; they are now a recurring feature of the political environment. (ODIHR 2026; EEAS 2026).

### *The effectiveness of institutional responses to hybrid threats in practice*

Institutional responses have become more serious, but they remain only partly effective. Moldova has improved the coordination of security, cyber, and election integrity responses; criminal law has been strengthened against electoral corruption and illegal political financing; and international support is deeper than before. But ODIHR still found the 2025 election environment deeply affected by these threats, and the European Commission continues to describe implementation capacity as uneven. The right conclusion is therefore not that Moldova's response is ineffective, but that it is improving from a low base while facing a very high-intensity threat environment. (ODIHR 2026; European Commission 2025; Venice Commission 2026).

### Group 3: SOCIETAL ACTORS AND REFORM OUTCOMES

#### Civil society as a resilience actor

##### *CSO involvement in policymaking and reform*

Civil society is one of Moldova's strongest democratic resilience mechanisms. V-Dem's civil society participation index for Moldova stands at 0.777 in the latest publicly accessible data for 2024, indicating a relatively robust civic sphere in comparative terms, even though the score declined from 2023. The European Commission's 2025 report similarly states that cooperation with civil society at government level slightly improved and that, by the end of 2024, permanent consultative platforms had been established in all 14 ministries, though not all are yet fully functional. This shows that civic participation is real, but still only partly institutionalized. (V-Dem/TheGlobalEconomy 2024; European Commission 2025).

##### *The legal and operational environment for civil society organisations*

The legal and operational environment for CSOs is broadly enabling, though not free of stress. The Commission states that civil society organizations and human-rights defenders operate in an overall enabling environment, while the Council of Europe and EU roadmaps continue to treat civil society engagement as a key reform vector. Yet monitoring also shows that consultation quality remains inconsistent and that civil society's influence varies significantly across sectors. In practice, Moldova's CSO environment is open enough to contribute to resilience, but not yet strong enough to guarantee deep, routine co-governance. (European Commission 2025; Council of Europe 2024; EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society 2021).

##### *The accessibility of public and donor funding mechanisms for civil society*

Funding is the critical vulnerability. The 2025 CSO Compass Moldova study found that 61.6% of surveyed CSOs reported foreign donor grants as a source of financial

resources, and 39% identified them as the primary source. The European Commission adds that USAID funding cuts further highlighted civil society's reliance on international donors and challenged its long-term sustainability. This directly affects resilience because donor-dependent civil society can remain active but is less resilient as infrastructure. Moldova therefore needs a more stable mix of public-interest contracting, philanthropy, domestic giving, and donor support. (People in Need 2025; European Commission 2025).

##### *Pressures and restrictions faced by civil society*

The main pressures on CSOs are therefore less outright legal repression than funding fragility, patchy consultation, and politicized narratives. That said, civil society remains essential in election observation, media monitoring, anti-corruption advocacy, and rights protection. In Moldova's case, CSOs are not merely stakeholders in reform. They are part of the country's democratic early-warning and correction system. (Promo-LEX 2025; European Commission 2025).

### Group 4: EXTERNAL DRIVERS OF REFORM

#### Role of European integration

##### *The influence of the European integration process on governance and democratic reforms*

European integration is now the most important external driver of democratic reform in Moldova. The accession process has moved from symbolic anchoring to operational conditionality. The European Commission states that bilateral screening meetings started in July 2024 and concluded in September 2025, while Cluster 1 reforms in democracy, rule of law, and public administration have already generated roadmaps and monitoring structures. The Growth Plan and Reform and Growth Facility add strong financial leverage to this political process. (European Commission 2025; European Commission 2026).

### *Progress in aligning national legislation with the EU acquis*

Alignment with the EU acquis has accelerated. In May 2025, the government adopted the National Action Plan for EU Accession 2025–2028 and the Reform Agenda 2025–2027, the latter underpinning EU support worth EUR 1.9 billion. By March 2026, the Commission reported that further reform indicators had been met in areas including cybersecurity, emergency response, budget transparency, anti-fraud, and judicial strengthening. This is exactly the kind of external incentive structure that can help lock in democratic resilience measures that might otherwise remain politically fragile. (Government of Moldova 2025; European Commission 2026).

### *The strength of public support for EU integration*

Public support for European integration remains high, even if not uniform. In September 2025 BOP, 77.3% expressed trust in the European Union, and 52.7% said they would vote for EU accession in a hypothetical referendum, against 25.0% who would vote against. These numbers matter because the EU remains both a reform anchor and a source of democratic legitimacy for many Moldovans. At the same time, support is not overwhelming enough to eliminate geopolitical contestation, which means European integration remains a mobilizing but also polarizing issue. (IPP 2025).

### *The link between EU financial and technical assistance and governance reforms*

The link between EU financial and technical assistance and governance reforms to support economic transformation and EU-related reforms. The European Commission's 2025 Moldova report states that this assistance is linked to progress on governance, public administration, rule of law, judicial reform, budget transparency, anti-fraud measures, cybersecurity, and emergency response, while the Facility itself is designed around reform milestones and implementation benchmarks. In practice, this means EU financial and technical

assistance is no longer only supportive, but functions as a governance-reform lever: funding, advisory support, and technical assistance are increasingly released and structured in line with measurable progress on national reform priorities and accession-related obligations.

### **International partnerships**

#### *The contribution of international partners to democratic resilience and security reforms*

A broad group of international partners contributes to Moldova's democratic resilience and security reforms through political support, technical assistance, institutional capacity-building, and targeted sectoral cooperation. The United Kingdom has expanded cooperation through the Moldova-UK Strategic Dialogue, with emphasis on resilience, governance, and security. Sweden remains a major bilateral donor supporting democratic governance, social cohesion, and long-term institutional development. Germany plays a significant role in energy resilience, police cooperation, border security, and administrative modernization, including through GIZ and ministerial partnerships. France has increased its engagement in economic resilience, political cooperation, and strategic sector support. Poland contributes to public-administration reform and supports Moldova's European path politically and technically, while the Czech Republic has provided practical support in customs, border management, and institutional capacity-building. Moldova also benefits from the work of the Council of Europe, OSCE/ODIHR, the World Bank, and other multilateral partners in justice reform, election integrity, governance, and democratic standards. Together, these partnerships form a diversified external support network that strengthens Moldova's capacity to respond to hybrid threats, sustain reforms, and protect democratic institutions under pressure (Council of Europe 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Moldova 2025; Government of Moldova 2025; Ministry of Energy of Moldova 2025; Ministry of Internal Affairs of Moldova 2025; Government of Moldova 2026; World Bank 2025)

### *The effectiveness of donor coordination mechanisms*

Donor coordination has improved because Moldova's reform agenda is now clearer and more centralized around accession and resilience, but coordination still depends heavily on executive capacity. The strongest evidence of alignment is that major external support instruments are now explicitly tied to national strategies and reform roadmaps, rather than operating as parallel agendas. Even so, donor coordination remains only as effective as Moldova's own administrative coordination mechanisms. (European Commission 2025; Government of Moldova 2025). Several institutions (for example the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Crisis Management Centre) have institutionalised donor coordination platforms and organise frequently meetings to align priorities and projects.

### *The alignment of external assistance with national strategies and reform priorities*

The alignment of external assistance with national strategies and reform priorities has strengthened significantly in Moldova, especially since EU accession became the central framework for governance reform. External support is now increasingly linked to national planning documents such as the National Action Plan for EU Accession 2025–2028, the Reform Agenda 2025–2027, and sectoral priorities in rule of law, public administration, cybersecurity, anti-corruption, emergency response, and democratic resilience. This is most visible in the EU's Reform and Growth Facility, where disbursements are tied to concrete reform milestones and indicators, but the same logic is also reflected in broader donor support from the Council of Europe, the World Bank, and bilateral partners. As a result, external assistance is no longer operating mainly through parallel donor agendas; it is increasingly structured around Moldova's own strategic documents and accession-related commitments, although the quality of alignment still depends on the state's administrative capacity to coordinate, absorb, and implement reforms effectively.

## **Reform sustainability and risks**

### *Risks threatening the sustainability of democratic and governance reforms*

The main risks to sustainability are clear: electoral volatility, corruption, political polarization, weak staffing, and uneven implementation. Corruption remains a structural drag. Moldova scored 42/100 in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2025, indicating stagnation rather than breakthrough. The Rule of Law Index 2025 score of 0.53 and rank of 68/143 similarly suggest moderate but incomplete institutional resilience. These are not failing-state numbers. They are the numbers of a reforming state that has not yet crossed into institutional consolidation. (Transparency International 2026; World Justice Project 2025).

### *The effects of electoral volatility, corruption, and political polarisation on reform outcomes*

Political polarization remains high and is reinforced by geopolitical cleavage. ODIHR's 2026 final report repeatedly describes the 2025 parliamentary elections as taking place in a polarized political environment marked by deep divisions between the ruling party and the opposition over geopolitical orientation. In such a setting, even valid reforms can be interpreted through a zero-sum lens, which complicates implementation and weakens the social base of democratic resilience. (ODIHR 2026).

### *Societal resilience to disinformation and divisive narratives.*

Society's resilience to disinformation has improved but remains uneven. Moldova has more institutional tools, more civil-society monitoring, and stronger EU support than before. Yet the scale of FIMI during the 2025 parliamentary campaign shows that state and society are still struggling to keep up with adaptive hostile actors.

### *The role of free and independent media in sustaining democratic reforms*

Free and independent media therefore remain indispensable. Moldova's ranking of 35th out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index 2025 is relatively strong for the region,

but RSF still places the wider regional media environment under intense strain. For Moldova, independent media are not simply a normative democratic good; they are part of the country's resilience architecture. (RSF 2025; European Commission 2025).

## CONCLUSIONS

Moldova is best understood as a democracy that is holding and adapting. It has avoided democratic collapse, maintained real political competition, improved judicial and anti-corruption frameworks, created strategic communication institutions, and tied major reforms to the EU accession process. It has also responded to hybrid threats more coherently than in previous cycles. But the country still operates with low institutional trust, uneven implementation capacity, vulnerable media financing, donor-dependent civil society, and a security environment in which foreign interference is now recurrent rather than exceptional. (Freedom House 2025; European Commission 2025; ODIHR 2026).

The central policy implication is straightforward. Moldova should continue to strengthen democratic control of security not by weakening security policy, but by embedding it more deeply in parliamentary oversight, judicial review, proportionate legality, public transparency, and civic participation. In Moldova's case, democratic resilience and security resilience are no longer separate agendas. The question is whether they can be institutionalized together before repeated shocks turn resilience into permanent emergency governance. (Ombudsman of Moldova 2025; Council of the EU 2025; European Commission 2026).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Republic of Moldova should prioritise turning crisis-era resilience into routine democratic governance. The priority is to tighten democratic control over emergency and security powers by clarifying the legal limits of exceptional measures, strengthening ex ante and ex post parliamentary scrutiny, and ensuring that

judicial review remains fast, accessible, and meaningful in periods of crisis. At the same time, the state should invest in the administrative foundations of resilience: better staffing and retention in central government, stronger policy coordination, more stable implementation capacity in ministries and local authorities, and stronger oversight tools for parliament, especially in relation to elections, online campaigning, and the security sector. These recommendations follow directly from the main institutional gaps identified by the European Commission, which stresses Moldova's limited implementation capacity, the need for stronger parliamentary oversight, and the importance of giving the Central Electoral Commission adequate resources, as well as from the Ombudsman's warning that emergency governance must remain proportionate and tightly bounded by rule-of-law safeguards (European Commission 2025; Ombudsman of the Republic of Moldova 2025).

A second priority is to strengthen societal resilience as a democratic security function. Moldova should expand support for independent media, media literacy, and strategic communication while ensuring that counter-disinformation measures remain proportionate and compatible with European standards. Civil society should be treated as democratic infrastructure, with more predictable consultation, stronger access to funding, and a clearer role in monitoring elections, public policy, and hybrid threats. In parallel, the government should focus on rebuilding trust through transparency, visible anti-corruption enforcement, and clearer public communication about why resilience policies are needed and how they are legally controlled. This is especially important because ODIHR found that the 2025 parliamentary elections were competitive but still undermined by foreign interference, illicit financing, cyberattacks, and widespread disinformation, while the European Commission concluded that foreign interference, partisan media coverage, and limited public-administration capacity continue to weaken democratic resilience (ODIHR 2026; European Commission 2025).

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# Country Case Study: Armenia

The Armenia case study analyzes the country’s democratic trajectory since 2018, defined by notable democratic progress but currently complicated by a fundamental geopolitical realignment toward the European Union. The reform process in 2025–2026 is increasingly shaped by a complicated external security environment, persistent internal governance deficits, and sophisticated hybrid threats. The launch of EU accession proceedings and strong public support for European integration have

established the EU as the primary external driver for transformation. However, this pivot is simultaneously challenged by persistent deficits in judicial independence, institutional trust, and implementation capacity.

This chapter will examine how Armenia is attempting to strengthen its democratic resilience while operating in a high-sensitivity security environment.

**TABLE: Factors of Democratic Resilience vs. Vulnerability in Armenia**

Dimension	Positive Elements (Resilience)	Vulnerabilities / Risks
 <b>Geopolitical</b>	Initiation of EU accession process (2025)	External hybrid pressures
 <b>Security</b>	Washington Declaration reduces military risk	External electoral interference
 <b>Institutional</b>	EU–Armenia Strategic Agenda	Institutions exposed to manipulation
 <b>Electoral</b>	Competitive elections (2026)	Early disinformation campaigns (14 months)
 <b>Civil Society</b>	Key role in resilience	Weakened following the termination of US assistance

Source: author

A key focus is the growing vulnerability to disinformation and foreign interference. The analysis is structured around the interaction of internal institutional performance - including the security-democracy nexus, governance capacity, and public trust dynamics - and external pressures, concluding with recommendations to prioritize a coordinated resilience agenda that addresses these acute structural and hybrid threats.

### Group 1: INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE FOUNDATIONS

#### Security–Democracy Nexus

*Regulation of emergency powers and crisis governance, and safeguards against democratic backsliding*

Armenia’s Constitution (amended 2015) permits declaration of martial law and a state of emergency, each requiring parliamentary ratification within 48 hours. Martial law was invoked during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and during the September 2023 Azerbaijani military operation. Formal safeguards include sunset clauses and legislative ratification; however, the Venice Commission (2022) noted that executive decision-making has in practice preceded parliamentary scrutiny. The adoption of the Law on Cybersecurity and the Law on Public Information as a legislative package (December 2025) represents a significant step toward regulating Critical Information Infrastructure, though a “readiness gap” persists, as the autonomous oversight body mandated by

the new cybersecurity law was not yet fully operational at the time of the June 2026 election cycle (Armenian First Draft, 2026). The 2018 shift to a parliamentary system strengthened formal oversight, but Civil Contract's supermajority limits substantive opposition scrutiny.

#### *The role of parliamentary oversight and judicial review in monitoring security-related measures*

The National Assembly exercises oversight through committee hearings, ministerial interpellations, and emergency ratification. A significant episode in 2025 was the NSS arrest of alleged coup plotters in June 2025 – involving religious and political figures – after which the National Assembly stripped parliamentary immunity from three opposition MPs, a move their allies characterized as politically motivated (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). The Constitutional Court holds judicial review powers but retains legacy independence deficits. Civil society and independent media continue to compensate for oversight gaps in security-related domains.

#### *Compliance of national policies with international democratic and human rights standards*

Armenia is a Council of Europe member and ECHR signatory. The EU–Armenia CEPA (in force since March 2021) provides the primary normative framework, deepened by the EU–Armenia Strategic Agenda adopted on 2 December 2025 (European Commission, 2025). The U.S.–Armenia Strategic Partnership Charter, signed in January 2025, strengthened cooperation in democracy, human rights, and cybersecurity (U.S. Mission Armenia, 2025). Armenia cooperates with Venice Commission and UN human rights bodies, though implementation gaps persist in judicial independence and anti-corruption enforcement.

#### *Safeguarding the integrity of the information space, including media freedom and pluralism*

Armenia ranked 34th out of 180 in the 2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index

(score 73.96), a consistently positive regional position (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). Public broadcaster ARMTV is state-funded; major private channels retain business-political ownership links. Independent outlets – Factor TV, CivilNet, Hetq – are essential for accountability journalism but face funding pressures, exacerbated by US aid cuts in 2025. A Strategic Communication Department was established in the Prime Minister's Office in 2025, alongside implementation of the National Concept of the Struggle against Disinformation (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). Facebook (55%) and YouTube (21%) dominate political information consumption, creating vulnerability to algorithmic manipulation (IRI, 2026).

#### *The impact of ongoing security pressures and hybrid threats on democratic reforms*

The loss of Nagorno-Karabakh (2020) and the forced displacement of approximately 120,000 ethnic Armenians in September 2023 have reshaped Armenia's reform trajectory. The Washington Declaration of August 8, 2025, initialing an Armenia–Azerbaijan peace agreement, reduced the probability of military escalation to “highly unlikely” for 2026, while creating a new hybrid threat environment: the Foreign Intelligence Service of Armenia (FISA) assessed that influence operations targeting the June 2026 elections would be “comprehensive, complex and large-scale” (FISA, 2026). Armenia's CSTO membership suspension (effectively permanent, per FISA assessment) and the launch of EU accession proceedings in early 2025 represent a fundamental geopolitical realignment that directly shapes the security–democracy reform nexus.

#### **Institutional resilience and governance capacity**

##### *The effectiveness of state institutions in ensuring the continuity of public services during crises*

State institutions have maintained core service continuity under sustained crisis conditions. The December 2025 legislative package – comprising the Law on

Cybersecurity, Law on Public Information, and establishment of a new Regulatory Body of Information Systems - strengthens the infrastructure for continuity of digital public services. IRI (2026) recorded 61% satisfaction with the Police and 46% with the Prime Minister's Office. The absorption of approximately 120,000 displaced Karabakh Armenians strained social services but was managed without institutional breakdown.

#### *Challenges related to staff retention and institutional capacity in key governance bodies*

Armenia faces significant human capital deficits driven by emigration and economic insecurity. Civil service reform programmes have introduced merit-based recruitment and salary harmonisation. However, the drastic reduction of US foreign assistance in 2025 - on which approximately 40% of Armenian CSOs relied for substantial portions of their budgets - forced programme closures and severely curtailed institutional capacity across civil society and media organisations (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). Government ministries and reform-adjacent bodies have similarly struggled with retention of qualified staff (World Bank, 2024).

#### *The functioning of inter-agency coordination mechanisms in times of crisis*

The National Security Council provides formal inter-agency coordination. The December 2025 Law on Cybersecurity establishes an autonomous oversight body to coordinate Critical Information Infrastructure protection across the NSS, sectoral regulators, and private operators. An Anti-Corruption Committee (est. 2019) coordinates anti-corruption policy. The Department of Participatory and Open Government Issues, established in 2025 within the PM's Office, is tasked with coordinating CSO engagement and participatory governance (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026).

Operational coordination between security services and civil oversight bodies in hybrid threat response remains uneven (OSCE, 2023).

#### *The practical implementation of governance-related laws*

The 2025 legislative activity represents Armenia's most significant governance reform cycle since 2018: the Cybersecurity Law, Law on Public Information, and related amendments were adopted by the National Assembly on December 4, 2025. The 2024-2026 Action Plan against Disinformation formalises a "pre-bunking" approach to information security. Despite these legislative advances, Transparency International's 2024 CPI assigned Armenia a score of 46/100. EU progress reports note the persistent gap between legislative adoption and enforcement capacity (European Commission, 2024).

#### *Judicial independence and its impact on democratic resilience*

Judicial independence remains a structural challenge. Only 40% of citizens expressed satisfaction with the courts and 32% with the National Assembly as of February 2026 (IRI, 2026). Armenia's Freedom in the World score for 2025 was 54/100 ("Partly Free"), reflecting persistent deficits in judicial accountability and legislative effectiveness (Freedom House, 2025). The stripping of parliamentary immunity from three opposition MPs in June 2025 - amid contested claims of political motivation - raised concerns about the selective application of legal process.

## Timeline: Armenia's Strategic Reorientation (2023 - 2026)



Source: author

### Strategic communication evolution

#### National strategic communication framework

A significant institutional development in 2025 was the establishment of a Strategic Communication Department within the Prime Minister's Office (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). This was complemented by the 2024-2026 National Concept and Action Plan against Disinformation, which emphasises "pre-bunking" over reactive debunking - a structural shift toward anticipatory narrative defence. However, critics from civil society, including the Yerevan Press Club, have raised concerns that the definition of "critical information" in the framework remains vague and could inadvertently constrain media freedom during election-year tensions (Armenian First Draft, 2026).

#### Dedicated government structures for strategic communication and crisis messaging

The 2025 establishment of the Strategic Communication Department in the PM's Office marks the first institutionalisation of government-level strategic communication capacity. PM Pashinyan's extensive use of Facebook Live for direct public engagement provides an informal but high-reach supplementary channel. Despite this progress, no whole-of-government crisis

communication doctrine integrating security services, line ministries, and civil society has yet been operationalised - a gap that the FISA has identified as a vulnerability in the pre-election environment (FISA, 2026).

#### Coordination, proactiveness and trust in official narratives.

Official narratives are primarily disseminated through the PM's social media channels and government press briefings. The polarised political climate - illustrated by the government-Armenian Apostolic Church confrontation of May-June 2025, which generated significant public criticism - has affected the credibility and tone of official communications (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). Satisfaction with the PM's Office stands at 46% (IRI, 2026). The 2025 disinformation landscape, characterised by 45 million views of Russian false claims (NewsGuard, 2025), underscores the inadequacy of reactive communication strategies.

#### Public trust dynamics

##### Levels of public trust in government, parliament and the judiciary.

IRI (2026) data: Armed Forces 73% satisfied, Police 61%, PM's Office 46%, Human Rights Defender's Office 46%, Courts 40%, National Assembly 32%. A June-July 2025 IRI poll

found that 49% of respondents believed Armenia was heading in the “wrong direction”, with 61% reporting trust in no political figure (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). By February 2026, right-direction confidence had recovered to 47% (IRI, 2026), suggesting some stabilisation, though trust deficits in legislative and judicial institutions remain structurally entrenched.

### *The influence of transparency, integrity, and responsiveness on public trust*

Formal accountability mechanisms have improved through the Corruption Prevention Commission and mandatory asset declarations. However, a high-profile October 2025 incident involving leaked intimate recordings allegedly obtained through unlawful surveillance of a private apartment exposed systemic gaps in privacy protection and fueled concerns about politically motivated misuse of surveillance tools (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). Digital Rights and Right to Privacy CSO Meter scores declined in 2025 (4.4 and 4.8 respectively), reflecting these deteriorating practical conditions alongside legislative improvements.

### *The impact of elections on perceptions of democratic legitimacy and governance quality*

The June 2026 parliamentary elections are described by FISA as a “strategic inflection point” — effectively a referendum on Armenia’s pro-European course (FISA, 2026). 84% of likely voters expressed intent to participate as of February 2026 (IRI, 2026). Concerns about opaque party financing and the potential return of oligarchic influence in the legislative process — as identified by Freedom House — create backsliding risks. FISA assesses that foreign actors will attempt to delegitimise electoral outcomes through hybrid interference.

## **Group 2: RESPONDING TO HYBRID THREATS**

### **Hybrid threat response**

#### *National strategies and action plans to address hybrid threats and disinformation*

Armenia has adopted a 2024–2026 Action Plan against Disinformation, the Law on Cybersecurity (December 2025), and an NSC-level national security framework that incorporates hybrid threat assessment. FISA’s 2026 Annual Report explicitly defines hybrid warfare and identifies five operational categories: hostile cyber operations, malign information operations, activation of agents and political actors, economic and energy pressure, and other forms of pressure (FISA, 2026). Armenia has also signed the US–Armenia Strategic Partnership Charter (January 2025) and deepened EU cooperation frameworks, integrating external hybrid resilience support into national strategy.

### *Institutions responsible for countering hybrid threats, including disinformation and foreign information manipulation*

The NSS is the primary institution for counterintelligence and cybersecurity. The newly mandated Regulatory Body of Information Systems (established under the December 2025 cybersecurity legislative package) will assume oversight of Critical Information Infrastructure. FISA provides strategic intelligence assessment on hybrid threats, as demonstrated by its comprehensive 2026 Annual Report. Civil society actors — CivilNet’s fact-checking unit, Media Initiatives Centre, DFRLab-linked researchers — play critical supplementary roles. The PSRC regulates broadcast media but has no explicit disinformation mandate (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026).

### *The allocation of financial and human resources for counter-disinformation and resilience-building*

The severe reduction of US foreign assistance in 2025 critically impacted counter-disinformation capacity: approximately 40% of Armenian CSOs — including many engaged in media literacy and fact-checking — relied on USAID grants for substantial portions of their budgets (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). This funding crisis forced programme closures and left media organisations especially exposed.

Government resources for counter-disinformation remain opaque and insufficient. A state foundation supporting audiovisual broadcasters was established in 2025, providing limited structural support (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026).

#### *Types and frequency of hybrid threats*

FISA (2026) documents five categories of hybrid activity against Armenia: cyber operations targeting electoral and critical infrastructure; malign information operations using AI-generated content, bot networks, and narrative laundering; agent activation and political engineering; economic coercion including confiscation of goods and criminal cases against exporters; and smear campaigns against officials. NewsGuard (2025) identified 18 specific Russian false claims generating 45 million views across 11 platforms in 8 languages since April 2025, attributed to Storm-1516 and the Foundation to Battle Injustice (Prigozhin-linked). The “Matryoshka” AI bot network deployed deepfakes impersonating Euronews and E! Online to promote fabricated narratives about PM Pashinyan (Armenian First Draft, 2026). In July 2025, a multilingual nuclear waste hoax was amplified by AI chatbots including Perplexity, Meta AI, Copilot, and Mistral (NewsGuard, 2025).

#### *The effectiveness of institutional responses to hybrid threats in practice*

Institutional responses remain predominantly reactive. FISA’s public annual reporting represents a significant advance in transparent threat communication. The 2025 establishment of the Strategic Communication Department and the adoption of the disinformation Action Plan demonstrate emerging proactive capacity. However, the absence of an operational Common Operational Picture (COP) framework – which would synchronise cyber and narrative threat intelligence across institutions – limits response coherence (Armenian First Draft, 2026). Russian disinformation campaigns began 14 months

before the June 2026 elections – earlier than comparable efforts in Germany (3 months) and Moldova (5 months) – underscoring the inadequacy of a reactive posture (NewsGuard, 2025).

### **Group 3: SOCIETAL ACTORS AND REFORM OUTCOMES**

#### **Civil society as a resilience actor**

##### *CSO involvement in policymaking and reform*

The CSO Meter 2025 overall score for Armenia’s civil society environment was 4.8/7 (unchanged from 2024), with the Right to Participation in Decision-Making scoring 4.9/7 (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). Positive 2025 developments include: the establishment of a Department of Participatory and Open Government Issues in the PM’s Office; new PM regulations requiring all draft strategies and programmes to be discussed with public council members; and the relaunch of the Public Council after years of inactivity, including the establishment of a Fact-Finding Commission. Meaningful CSO engagement remains most consistent in anti-corruption, human rights, and EU integration advocacy.

##### *The legal and operational environment for civil society organisations*

Armenia’s legal environment for CSOs scores 5.7/7 for Freedom of Association (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). As of August 2025, 7,148 public organisations and 1,854 foundations were registered (29.2 CSOs per 10,000 inhabitants). The Law on Public Organisations (2016) provides a permissive framework; no foreign-agent-type legislation has been enacted. Key operational constraints include: no online CSO registration; administrative burdens related to Ultimate Beneficial Owner disclosure requirements; VAT applied to grant project revenues; and absence of tax incentives for individual and business donations. State-CSO Cooperation scored the lowest at 4.0/7, reflecting the absence of an overarching national CSO policy.

### *The accessibility of public and donor funding mechanisms for civil society*

The Access to Funding score of 5.3/7 reflects an adequate legal framework but deteriorating practice, as the 2025 US foreign assistance termination devastated the sector: approximately 40% of Armenian CSOs relied on USAID grants for a substantial portion of their budgets, and the funding cuts forced programme closures and sharp operational scaling-back (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). Media organisations were particularly hard hit. Despite appeals to the government, no substantive fiscal relief or tax incentives were introduced. Crowd funding efforts yielded limited results. EU funding – through NDICI, the EU Roadmap for Civil Society, and the December 2025 Strategic Agenda – partially compensates but does not fully substitute.

### *Pressures and restrictions faced by civil society*

The 2025 CSO Meter documents a trend of stigmatising independent CSOs for critical opinions, creating a chilling effect on freedom of expression (score: 4.7/7, down from 4.9). CSOs face strategic litigation (SLAPP threats), polarisation-driven reputational pressures, and a hostile political climate characterised by verbal attacks and smear campaigns against journalists (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). The “Eurasia” NGO, linked to Russian actors and the Ilan Shor network, employs “charity-washing” tactics to recruit domestic influencers for pro-Kremlin content (Armenia Election Resilience, 2026). Privacy violations – including October 2025 leaked surveillance recordings – reinforce concerns about state-linked surveillance of civil society.

## **Group 4: EXTERNAL DRIVERS OF REFORM**

### **Role of European integration**

#### *The influence of the European integration process on governance and democratic reforms*

EU integration is now Armenia’s primary external governance driver. In early 2025, the National Assembly adopted the Law on

Initiating the Process of Armenia’s Accession to the EU – a citizen-initiated legislative measure reflecting broad public and political will (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026). The EU–Armenia Strategic Agenda, adopted on 2 December 2025, deepens the CEPA framework. The EU Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, handed to Armenia in November 2025, sets reform benchmarks on document security, border management, data protection, and fundamental rights.

#### *Progress in aligning national legislation with the EU acquis*

The December 2025 legislative package (Cybersecurity Law, Law on Public Information, Regulatory Body of Information Systems) represents significant acquis-aligned legislation. The Visa Liberalisation Action Plan provides a structured alignment agenda. Progress is uneven: judiciary, AML, and public procurement frameworks have advanced with persistent implementation gaps. EU progress reports acknowledge positive legislative momentum while noting enforcement deficits (European Commission, 2024). Armenia’s non-candidate status limits formal acquis obligations, though the accession process initiation in 2025 signals a shift toward candidate-track alignment.

#### *The strength of public support for EU integration*

Public support for EU integration is strong. IRI (February 2026): 72% support EU accession; 51% would vote to join in a hypothetical referendum. Support is highest among youth and urban populations. Primary perceived benefits: economic strengthening (26%), security and stability (14%), visa liberalisation (10%) (IRI, 2026). The National Assembly’s adoption of the EU Accession Law in early 2025 following a citizen legislative initiative reflects deep grassroots support for EU integration that transcends partisan divisions.

#### *The link between EU financial and technical assistance and governance reforms*

EU assistance instruments include macro-financial assistance, EU4Business, NDICI, and the EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil

Society in Armenia (updated June 2025), which identified financial sustainability as a priority challenge and provided strategic guidance for CSO's role in democratic governance. These instruments are benchmarked against judicial independence, anti-corruption, and good governance milestones (European Commission, 2024). The December 2025 Strategic Agenda creates new conditionality frameworks linked to the accession process.

### **International partnerships**

#### *The contribution of international partners to democratic resilience and security reforms*

Key partners include: the EU (CEPA, Strategic Agenda, Visa Liberalisation); the US (US–Armenia Strategic Partnership Charter, January 2025, covering democracy, human rights, and cybersecurity; TRIPP infrastructure declaration, August 2025); the Council of Europe (judiciary and human rights); OSCE (election observation); and France (bilateral security and cultural cooperation). Following Armenia's CSTO exit, US and French defence cooperation has expanded significantly. The US–Armenia Strategic Partnership Charter explicitly addresses cybersecurity and hybrid threat resilience as bilateral priorities.

#### *The effectiveness of donor coordination mechanisms*

Donor coordination has been seriously disrupted by the 2025 US foreign assistance termination, which removed USAID – a major actor in Armenian civil society and media – from the coordination landscape. The EU Roadmap updated in June 2025 acknowledged the funding crisis and offered strategic guidance but cannot fully compensate for USAID's withdrawal. Coordination between remaining EU, multilateral, and bilateral donors continues through government-led platforms. Gaps between EU and remaining US programming persist, and competition rather than complementarity characterises some civil society support areas.

#### *The alignment of external assistance with national strategies and reform priorities*

International assistance is broadly aligned with Armenia's Anti-Corruption Strategy

2023–2026, Judicial Reform Strategy, Disinformation Action Plan 2024–2026, and emerging EU accession agenda. The EU Roadmap for Civil Society 2021–2027 (updated June 2025) provides a structured alignment framework for CSO support. However, TIAC's CSO Meter notes that donor-driven programming sometimes prioritises internationally legible outputs over domestically owned reform processes, and the lack of a tax-enabling environment and social entrepreneurship legal framework constrains the shift to domestically sustainable civic financing (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026).

### **Reform sustainability and risks**

#### *Risks threatening the sustainability of democratic and governance reforms*

FISA (2026) identifies the June 2026 elections as a primary risk vector, predicting that hybrid interference will become "comprehensive, complex and large-scale." Economic risks include continued secondary sanctions exposure from the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the targeting of Armenia's export activities through artificially created barriers (FISA, 2026). The US aid withdrawal has destabilised civil society as a reform support infrastructure. Azerbaijan's military budget increased 44% for 2026 (versus 7.4% for other sectors), maintaining military pressure on the peace process (FISA, 2026).

#### *The effects of electoral volatility, corruption, and political polarisation on reform outcomes*

IRI (2026) shows 24% support for Civil Contract with 30% undecided ahead of June 2026 elections. Freedom House (2025: 54/100) identifies opaque party financing and the return of oligarchic influence as democratic backsliding risks. The State–CSO Cooperation score of 4.0/7 – the lowest of all CSO Meter areas – reflects weak institutionalised dialogue between state and civil society that amplifies reform polarisation. The government–Armenian Apostolic Church conflict of May–June 2025 illustrated how domestic political tensions compound foreign hybrid interference environments.

### *Societal resilience to disinformation and divisive narratives*

Armenia is “currently a laboratory for advanced FIMI tactics” (Armenian First Draft, 2026). The “Matryoshka” network’s AI deepfakes, the multilingual nuclear waste hoax (amplified by major AI chatbots), and Storm-1516’s 45-million-view disinformation campaign demonstrate the scale of the challenge. Facebook (55%) and YouTube (21%) remain primary political information platforms, creating systemic vulnerability to algorithmic disinformation amplification (IRI, 2026). Positive resilience factors include CivilNet factchecking, government-CSO collaboration on media literacy under the Disinformation Action Plan, and FISA’s transparent public threat reporting.

### *The role of free and independent media in sustaining democratic reforms*

Armenia’s 34th-place RSF ranking (2025) reflects genuine press freedom gains since 2018. Independent outlets – Azatutyun, CivilNet, Hetq, lin.am – provide indispensable investigative and accountability journalism. However, the 2025 US aid cuts severely impacted media financial sustainability; the state foundation for audiovisual broadcasters and the draft Law on Public Information (pending parliamentary approval at end of 2025, adopted December 2025) provide partial structural support. Freedom of Expression scored 4.7/7 (down from 4.9 in 2024), driven by a polarised climate, smear campaigns against journalists, and concerns about disproportionate application of hate speech provisions (Transparency International Anticorruption Center, 2026).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Armenia’s democratic trajectory is defined by a fundamental geopolitical realignment toward the European Union, evidenced by the launch of accession proceedings and the strong public support for a pro-European course. However, this pivot to EU is simultaneously challenged by persistent internal trust deficits and an acute external threat environment. To navigate this highly volatile environment, the immediate priority must be shoring up the nation’s democratic

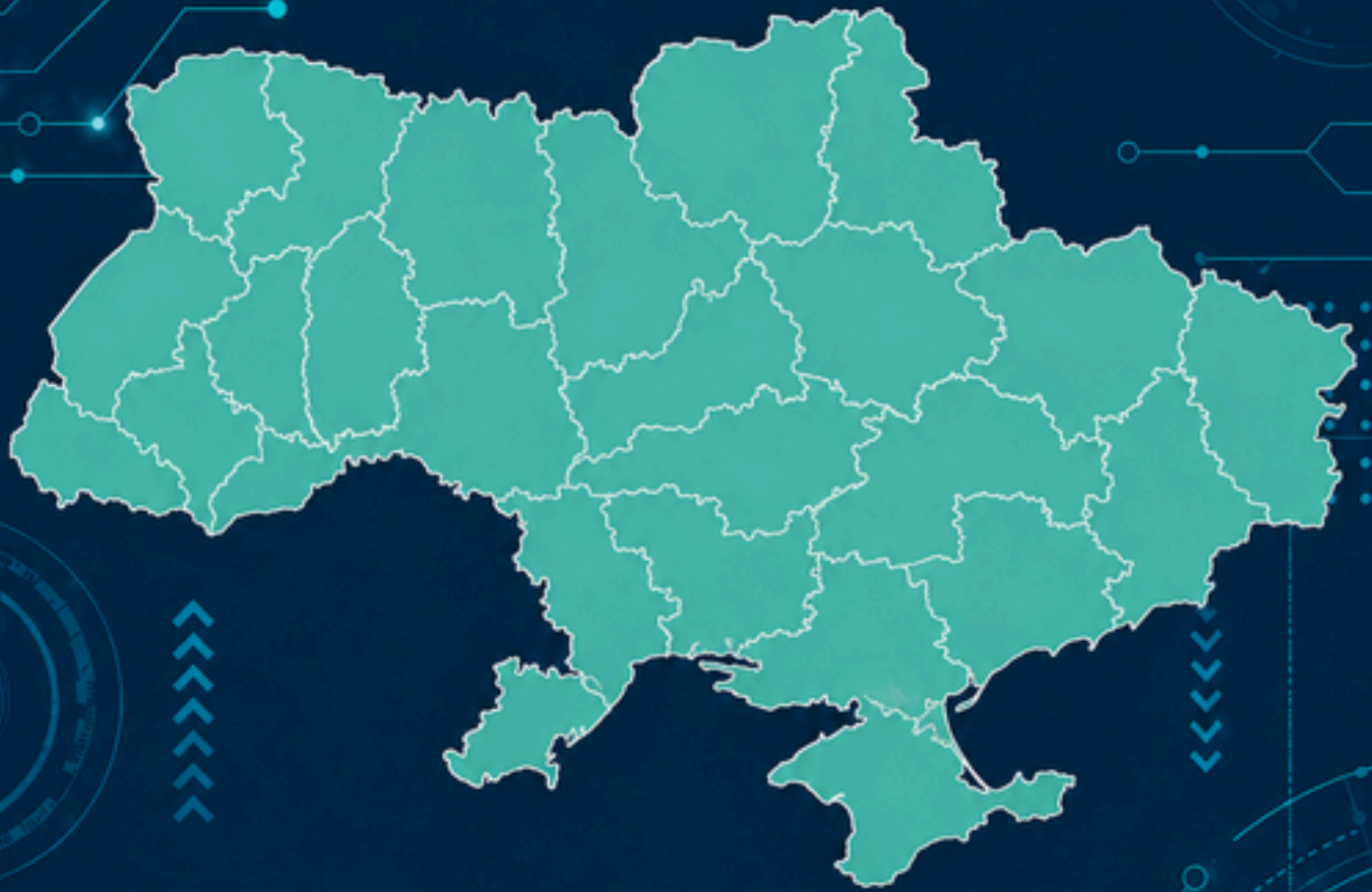
resilience infrastructure. Crucially, the capacity of civil society and independent media—which serve as vital compensatory mechanisms for institutional oversight gaps – has been severely degraded by the 2025 US aid withdrawal. Addressing this financial destabilization through a government-led domestic funding framework is long overdue. Another key challenge is accelerating structural governance reforms, particularly in judicial independence and implementing a synchronized, proactive national strategic communication capacity.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES**

Armenia has made significant democratic progress since 2018, but the 2025–2026 environment presents acute structural and hybrid threats. First, the Strategic Communication Department in the PM’s Office must be resourced and operationalised as a genuine inter-agency function, incorporating civil society and media as institutional partners and establishing a Common Operational Picture (COP) to synchronise cyber and narrative threat intelligence ahead of the June 2026 elections. Second, judicial independence reform must be accelerated: courts at 40% and the National Assembly at 32% public satisfaction (IRI, 2026) represent legitimacy deficits that hybrid actors actively exploit. Third, the catastrophic impact of the 2025 US aid withdrawal on civil society – affecting approximately 40% of CSOs – must be addressed through a government-led domestic funding framework, including tax incentives for private donations and a legal basis for social entrepreneurship. Fourth, mandatory AI content labelling and Armenian-language platform safety filters must be legislated for the election period, to counter the “Matryoshka” network and Storm-1516’s AI-driven disinformation (FISA, 2026; NewsGuard, 2025). Fifth, civil society must be formally embedded as independent monitors of EU accession reform benchmarks under the 2025 Strategic Agenda. Sixth, Armenia should establish a real-time technical threat-sharing mechanism with Moldovan and Ukrainian civil society partners to track indicators of compromise from shared threat actors.

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# Country Case Study: Ukraine

Ukraine presents a unique case of carrying out fundamental reforms amid a large-scale war. Democratic changes are increasingly framed in the country as a tool to counter Russian aggression and hybrid threats. At the same time, the challenges posed by war make governance transformation and the country's stability heavily dependent on international partners' support. Russia's full-scale invasion has forced Ukraine into an extreme stress test of democratic governance: war requires centralised decision-making, rapid procurement, resource reallocation and operational secrecy. However, such centralisation can also undermine the checks, fairness and participation necessary for democratic legitimacy. Ukraine's leadership must balance deterring Russian aggression, maintaining public trust, securing Western support and advancing EU accession, all at the same time.

## Group 1: INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE FOUNDATIONS

### Security–Democracy Nexus

#### *Regulation of emergency powers and crisis governance, and safeguards against democratic backsliding*

Martial law, introduced on 24 February 2022, grants broad emergency powers to the executive and security sector to deter aggression, but is formally constrained by the Constitution, international obligations and an explicit ban on using martial law to seize power. It allows general mobilisation and temporary restrictions of constitutional rights under a special law and constitutional provisions (Official website of the Parliament of Ukraine, 2026). In practice, war has led to high concentration of power in the Office of the President. Military administrations headed by presidential appointees have taken over part or all of the powers of state administrations and elected local governments, including in some regions far from the frontline. At the same time, safeguards exist. Martial law, imposed by presidential decree, must be approved by the parliament, its extension every 90 days is adopted by separate law.

The list of rights that may be restricted is exhaustive and must comply with international standards of proportionality and temporality. Ukraine has notified derogations from certain provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights but has already reduced their scope.

#### *The role of parliamentary oversight and judicial review in monitoring security-related measures.*

Despite wartime conditions, the Verkhovna Rada has preserved a basic check on executive power, but with reduced capacity and effectiveness. It operates with only about 392 of 450 MPs. With onset of war, the core oversight tools were initially constrained: committee control became irregular, "Question Time to the Government" was suspended, the government functioned without an approved programme and live broadcasts were halted. From 2024–2025 most mechanisms were gradually restored, urgent procedures used more sparingly, and key security decisions adopted with broad cross-party support, alongside steps such as strengthening the Accounting Chamber and creating a Temporary Investigative Commission on martial-law abuses. However, further oversight-enhancing initiatives have been blocked or delayed by the President. The World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index shows a slight decline in the legislature's ability to limit government power, from 0.53 out of 1 in 2024 to 0.52/1 in 2025 (WJP Rule of Law Index, 2025). Judicial review formally remains in place. A notable instance of this occurred when the Constitutional Court overturned emergency provisions permitting the continued detention of individuals without a new court order (Constitutional Court of Ukraine, 2024). However heavy caseloads, displacement and evidentiary obstacles severely constrain courts' practical capacity. World Justice Project's 2025 Rule of Law Index records a particularly low score of 0.31/1 for the judiciary's ability to constrain executive power (WJP Rule of Law Index, 2025).

### *Compliance of national policies with international democratic and human rights standards*

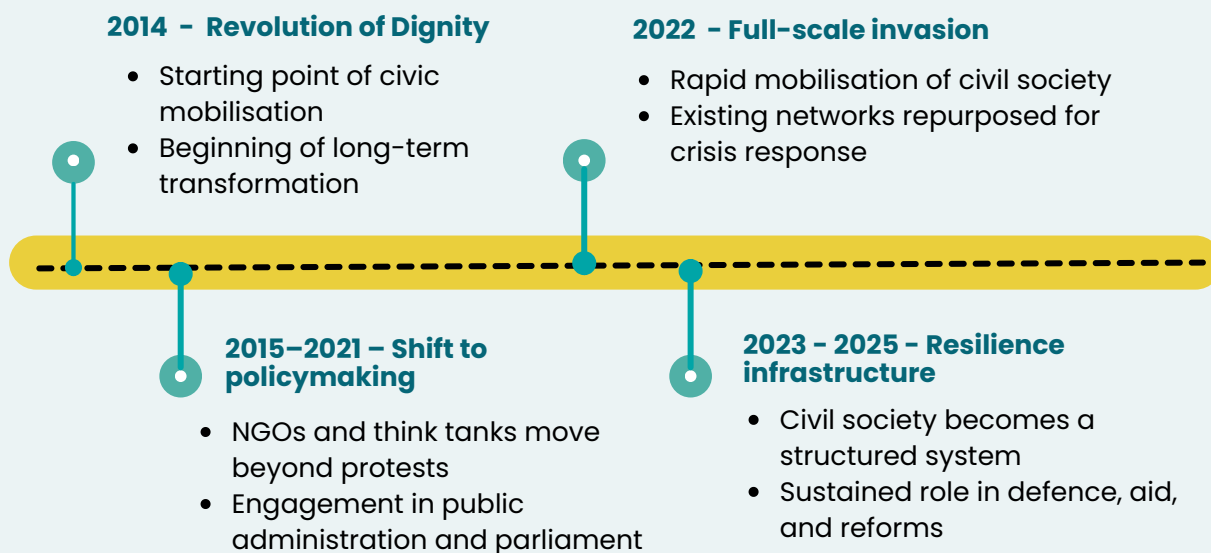
Ukraine has ratified core European and international human rights instruments and, at the level of laws and institutions, broadly complies with international standards. EU enlargement reports describe the overall framework for fundamental rights as satisfactory and note recent legislation on victims' rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities (European Commission, 2025). Yet recommendations on journalist safety, impact assessment of draft laws, effective investigations and parliamentary oversight remain only partially fulfilled. UN reporting points to problems in applying collaboration

laws, restrictions on movement (notably for men of conscription age) and access barriers for vulnerable groups during evacuation and resettlement (United Nations, Ukraine, 2025; Ohchr.org,2025).

### *Safeguarding the integrity of the information space, including media freedom and pluralism*

Since 2014, Ukraine has built a multilayer system to protect the information space, banning Russian TV channels, restricting Russian social networks, transforming state broadcasting into an independent public service (Suspline) and building a robust framework to counter disinformation and foreign information influence.

### *Evolution of Civil Society in Ukraine*



Source: author

A new Media Law (2024) modernises regulation of audiovisual and online media, recognises online outlets, strengthens the independent regulator and begins to align rules with EU standards on platforms and political advertising. Legal guarantees for freedom of expression are in place, but concerns remain about media pluralism, especially under the state-coordinated “United News” telemarathon, which dominates nationwide TV broadcasting. The situation surrounding the social network Telegram is becoming increasingly alarming. It has become the dominant news source for over half of Ukrainians, yet it is also a key platform for disseminating

misinformation and harmful information operations. Media funding is fragile, especially after the abrupt halt of major USAID support. Furthermore, Russia’s ongoing aggression endangers the physical safety of journalists. As of 10 March, Russia had killed at least 145 media representatives. In the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (2025), Ukraine ranks in the middle of the chart (62nd out of 180 countries).

### *The impact of ongoing security pressures and hybrid threats on democratic reforms.*

Democratic reforms are very clearly security driven. Most changes are framed and perceived by society as instruments to

counter Russian aggression and to protect the state and its citizens. EU-related reforms, especially in the judiciary and anti-corruption sphere, are widely seen as part of the war effort and as tools for defending democracy and sustaining international support. At the same time, the prolonged need to resist aggression also drives centralisation, normalises far-reaching emergency powers and weakens parliamentary oversight, creating long-term risks for democratic governance.

### **Institutional resilience and governance capacity**

#### *The effectiveness of state institutions in ensuring the continuity of public services during crises*

Ukrainian state institutions have demonstrated remarkable resilience and a high level of continuity in delivering core public services. They have also shown rapid responsiveness to new needs, such as supporting internally displaced persons, providing social payments and issuing new types of documents. Four factors underpin this resilience: contingency planning, local authorities empowered by decentralization reform, intensive digitalisation of key administrative services and flexible personnel management (remote work, reallocation, emergency recruitment) (Stativka, N. and Orel, Y., 2024). The State Emergency Service also plays a key role, carrying out rescue operations, clearing rubble and disposing of unexploded ordnance, restoring access roads and evacuating civilians, thereby maintaining access to essential services and humanitarian assistance for local communities.

#### *Challenges related to staff retention and institutional capacity in key governance bodies*

Staff retention and institutional capacity are becoming structural vulnerabilities for Ukraine at all levels of governance, from local communities to central authorities. The shortage of qualified personnel directly impacts the quality and sustainability of reforms, as well as the country's ability to fulfil its EU-accession-related obligations.

Key problems stem from the wartime loss of specialists due to mobilisation into the defence forces, relocation to safer locations abroad, and internal displacement. Tens of thousands of civil servants have exited the civil service since 2022, while those remaining face salary cuts, soaring workloads, burnout and degraded motivation. Wartime pays caps and bonus restrictions further erode competitiveness vis-à-vis private or international employers. Open competitions for civil service positions were suspended for security reasons, limiting renewal and recruitment of young professionals (National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service, 2023). Surveys show rising stress, falling motivation and looming "capacity gaps" at central and local levels (Podolchak, Tsygylyk, Chursinov, 2025). The need for comprehensive public administration reform and a strategic approach to human resources has become acute.

#### *The functioning of inter-agency coordination mechanisms in times of crisis*

While inter-agency coordination under martial law is effective in ensuring the functioning of core state services and enabling a rapid response to crises, it is distinctly centralised. Under the wartime conditions a multilevel coordination system has emerged where the President's Office and the security sector take on a leading role, supported by sectoral working groups and local crisis response networks.

The National Security and Defence Council acts as the main strategic hub, defining threat assessments and overseeing implementation through presidential decrees. Civil-military cooperation structures link the armed forces, State Emergency Service, Ministry of Reintegration and others to manage responses in frontline and liberated areas. Regional state and military administrations ensure vertical integration with Kyiv, forming a multilayer crisis-management system, while local governments, NGOs, businesses, volunteers and IDPs collaborate in community-level networks to organise evacuations, shelters, aid and counter-disinformation.

This web of cooperation has strengthened local resilience and legitimacy, even as

tensions between elected councils and military administrations sometimes surface.

**Local crisis response mechanisms and their impact on resilience**

Local cooperation mechanisms	Impact / Outcomes
Joint crisis centres (evacuation, shelters)	Faster and more coordinated response
Shared information channels on humanitarian needs	More efficient information distribution
Co-designed systems for identifying vulnerable populations	Better targeted support
Cooperation between authorities, NGOs, volunteers, and businesses	Improved resource sharing
Shift from ad hoc coordination to structured mechanisms	Increased preparedness
Involvement of civil society in decision-making	Greater local legitimacy
Community participation in processes	Sustained democratic participation
Cooperation under martial law conditions	Increased public trust

Source: author

**The practical implementation of governance-related laws**

Reforms in rule of law, anti-corruption and public administration continue despite the war, but implementation lags behind formal adoption. According to the World Justice Project’s Rule of Law Index, Ukraine’s Regulatory Enforcement score is one of its lowest factor scores, placing Ukraine near the bottom of the global ranking (112th out of 148 countries) (WJP Rule of Law Index, 2025). EU reports repeatedly note that many structural reforms are only partly implemented and that existing legislation is applied in an inconsistent manner (European Commission, 2025). While a shadow rule-of-law report by Ukrainian civil society further highlights attempts to weaken anti-corruption institutions, including legislative changes that undermined the independence of NABU and SAPO, which were enacted in violation of democratic procedures (European Endowment for Democracy, 2025).

**Judicial independence and its impact on democratic resilience**

International assessments confirm that, despite recent reforms, the courts remain vulnerable to political influence and corruption, and there are still capacity gaps. The Global State of Democracy Index gives Ukraine a score of around 0.42 out of 1 for judicial independence (The Global State of Democracy, 2025) while The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2025 puts Ukraine 90th of 143 countries (WJP Rule of Law Index, 2025). At the same time, EU institutions acknowledge progress through renewed vetting, reactivated judicial governance bodies and integrity checks with international experts, which have partly restored public trust (Gahler, 2023). Structural problems persist, including excessive caseloads, shortages of judges, delays in setting up higher administrative courts and stalled or politicised appointments to key bodies such as the Constitutional Court and the High Council of Justice (ZMINA, 2025).

## Strategic communication evolution

### *National strategic communication framework*

Ukraine has developed a functioning strategic communication framework largely tool shape before the full-scale war. Russia's hybrid aggression in 2014 prompted institutional and doctrinal response: adaptation of core documents (Information Security Doctrine, Cybersecurity Strategy), promotion of the "single voice" principle in government communications, launch of specialised institutions (Centre for Countering Disinformation and the Centre for Strategic Communications), and close cooperation with NATO and the EU. Since 2022, this framework has become more crisis-oriented and integrated. It features tightly coordinated communication by security forces, diplomats and the government; daily briefings by political and military leaders, consistent narratives across channels, active use of digital platforms, and international campaigns to sustain support. Although the formal doctrinal architecture is still being finalised, in practice strategic communications operate through executive decisions and inter-agency coordination.

### *Dedicated government structures for strategic communication and crisis messaging*

Strategic communications are handled by a mix of defence, security, governmental, private and civic institutions. Core state players include the Ministry of Defence's Department of Strategic Communications, relevant General Staff and security-agency units, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Security and Defence Council with its Centre for Countering Disinformation, and local military and civil administrations. These are complemented by partnerships with private tech companies and NGOs that provide monitoring, factchecking, analysis and rapid responses to hostile information operations. The 2025 reshuffle formally reassigned overall responsibility for StratCom to the Cabinet of Ministers, downgraded the former Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications, and left the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security outside the state structure.

So that this one of the key bodies in building the state's strategic communications now functions as a civil-society organization. The Office of the President remains the informal coordination hub, with the President as the key public communicator domestically and internationally.

### *Coordination, proactivity, and public trust in official narratives*

Ukraine's official narratives are generally well coordinated and often proactive, but public trust in them is asymmetrical: information from the military and crisis-management bodies remains relatively highly trusted, while confidence in political and socio-economic messaging from civilian authorities has declined compared to the early phase of the war. Recent polls show that 64% of Ukrainians trust the General Staff and Ministry of Defence as information sources (down from 79% in 2022), whereas trust in the Office of the President has fallen to about 51% (from 73%), in government pages to 47% (from 60%), and in local authorities to 42%, while the state-run national TV telemarathon is the least trusted medium (around 39% express distrust) (Rating Group, 2025). Against this backdrop, citizens increasingly rely on social media, personal networks and independent journalism for information and scrutiny, making the effectiveness of official narratives depend not only on message coordination, but also on their credibility and alignment with real political, diplomatic and military actions.

### **Public trust dynamics**

#### *Levels of public trust in government, parliament, and the judiciary*

After the initial "rally-around-the-flag" effect, trust in most political institutions has fallen back to or below pre-war levels. The Armed Forces (93.5%), State Emergency Service (85.5%) and volunteers (85.5%) enjoy very high and stable trust, reflecting their front-line role and perceived integrity. By contrast, parliament (-77.4%), government (-54%), courts (-35.2%) and the prosecutor's office (-32.2%) all suffer from strongly negative trust balances (Kyiv Security Forum, 2026).

The President still retains a positive trust balance (61% trust vs 32% distrust at end-2025) (Kyiv International Institute for Sociology, 2025a). This pattern underscores a deep gap between confidence in security institutions and growing scepticism towards the broader system of democratic governance.

#### *The influence of transparency, integrity, and responsiveness on public trust*

Transparency, integrity and responsiveness have an immediate and visible impact on public trust in wartime Ukraine with two recent in two high-profile episodes as evidence. The July 2025 attempt to curb the independence of anticorruption institutions, widely seen as orchestrated by the presidential camp, triggered the largest protests since the full-scale invasion. The events led to a drop in trust in President Zelenskyy from 65% to 58%, while distrust rose from 30% to 35% and the trust–distrust balance fell from +35 to +23 points. The decline is particularly sharp (15 pp) among Ukrainians under 30, who were most active in protests (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2025b). The energy-sector scandal involving a close associate of the president further reinforced perceptions of high-level impunity, with polls indicating that citizens primarily blame central authorities, the President and parliament for wartime corruption and cite these episodes as key reasons for falling trust in civilian institutions. Although confidence in anti-corruption bodies has grown somewhat due to their role in exposing such cases, more respondents still distrust than trust them. Corruption remains consistently ranked as the country's second most important problem after the war itself (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2025c).

#### *The impact of elections on perceptions of democratic legitimacy and governance quality*

Under martial law, Ukraine cannot hold presidential, parliamentary or local elections, current mandates are automatically extended.

Public opinion broadly supports postponing elections until hostilities end: 57% of Ukrainians believe elections are acceptable only after a final peace settlement and full end of hostilities, just 9% support holding them before a ceasefire, and 25% would consider elections in the event of a ceasefire with credible security guarantees. However, the longer the war-time extension continues, the more risks eroding perceived democratic legitimacy, especially amid declining trust in institutions and absence of electoral accountability.

## **Group 2: RESPONDING TO HYBRID THREATS**

### **Hybrid threats response**

#### *National strategies and action plans to address hybrid threats and disinformation*

Ukraine has adopted several sectoral strategies to address hybrid threats rather than a single overarching strategy. The Information Security Strategy (2021) sets out state policy for protecting the information space, countering disinformation and coordinating relevant public authorities. The State Security Strategy (2022) identifies the fight against hybrid threats as one of the key priorities of national security, while the Cybersecurity Strategy (2021) focuses on countering cyber operations and other digital components of hybrid warfare.

#### *Institutions responsible for countering hybrid threats, including disinformation and foreign information manipulation*

Responsibility is distributed across a multi-layered system. At the strategic level, the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) oversee hybrid and information security including through the Centre for Countering Disinformation (CCD). CCD monitors the information space, identifies and assesses threats, and counters disinformation, propaganda and other forms of foreign information manipulation. Operationally, specialised units in the security and defence sector address both cyber and information components of hybrid warfare. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) investigates and disrupts

foreign information operations, cyber sabotage and propaganda networks. The Ministry of Defence and General Staff lead on wartime strategic communications and information-psychological operations. The State Service of Special Communications provides cyber protection of state information systems and coordinates the national cybersecurity system. This institutional architecture is complemented by non-governmental fact-checkers, investigative journalists and civilian tech groups.

#### *The allocation of financial and human resources for counter-disinformation and resilience-building*

Public funding covers core institutions and relatively small teams within state bodies, while a significant share of expertise and operational capacity is sustained by international donors and implemented through media outlets and NGOs. NATO (via NATO-Ukraine Platform on Countering Hybrid Warfare) and the EU provide training, advisory support and project funding for strategic communications, cyber defence and resilience. This “hybrid” model has proven effective in mobilising expertise and rapid response but is vulnerable to abrupt funding shifts, as shown by the sharp cut in US support in 2025, when some key independent media and watchdog projects reportedly lost up to 90% of their donor income and had to scale back staff and investigations (Dickinson, 2025).

#### *Types and frequency of hybrid threats*

Hybrid threats are multi-domain, continuous and increasingly intense, combining kinetic and non-kinetic, military and non-military tools. The most prevalent forms for Ukraine are information-psychological operations (disinformation and manipulation), cyberattacks, and hybrid attacks on the energy sector and critical infrastructure, whose intensity has only grown since 2022. Of particular concern is the rising use of social media, particularly Telegram, to recruit Ukrainians, especially teenagers, for acts of sabotage and terror. Information operations are a constant backdrop to the war. International monitoring shows that Ukraine

is the primary target of Russian foreign information manipulation, accounting for more than half of all recorded incidents (European External Action Service, 2025; (EUvsDisinfo, 2026). Cyberattacks have surged from roughly 2.2–2.5 thousand recorded incidents in 2022–2023 to nearly 5,927 in 2025, primarily against local authorities, central government, security institutions, energy companies, businesses and telecoms. Yet the number of truly critical incidents is declining sharply, indicating improving defensive capabilities. These efforts are reinforced by hybrid attacks on energy and critical infrastructure with near-daily missile and drone strikes on power, water and heating facilities.

#### *The effectiveness of institutional responses to hybrid threats in practice*

Ukraine has strengthened its cyber and information-space defence capabilities through the work of the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection, CERT-UA, the IT Army and plans for a dedicated military cyber branch, alongside broader digital-governance reforms driven by the Diia platform and the Ministry of Digital Transformation. In the information domain, a decentralised “beehive” model that links state bodies with digital volunteers, civic tech groups and open-source investigators has proved effective in rapidly exposing Russian narratives, maintaining coherent messaging during operations and blunting some psychological campaigns. However, the scale and sophistication of Russian activities force institutions to operate in permanent crisis mode, and many resilience functions depend on unstable external funding and public-private partnerships. Hybrid threats remain frequent and adaptive, exploiting governance gaps, resource constraints and political controversies.

### **Group 3: SOCIETAL ACTORS AND REFORM OUTCOMES**

#### **Civil society as a resilience actor**

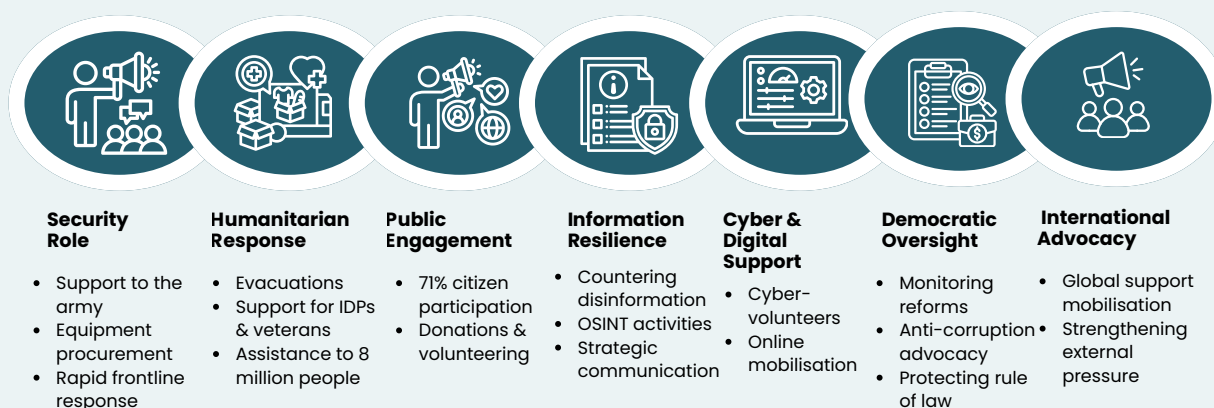
*CSO involvement in policymaking and reform*

Societal resilience in Ukraine remains exceptionally strong under full-scale war and daily Russian terror attacks, driven by high public cohesion, robust volunteer and civil-society mobilisation, and adaptive local

self-government. Civil society in Ukraine plays a central role in sustaining state resilience and driving democratic reforms during the war, relying on high public trust.

## Civil Society as a Security and Democracy Actor

*Civil Society (CSOs & Volunteers)*



Source: author

However, the actual influence of CSOs on decision-making remains only partial and is often formalistic, particularly at the central level. CSOs are deeply involved in EU-related reforms as experts, implementers and watchdogs, producing policy analysis, monitoring implementation and submitting detailed shadow reports. Yet only a small share of organizations considers government consultations to be genuinely effective (Lutsevych, 2024). At the local level, new rules on transparency and public consultations have expanded channels for participation, and CSOs are increasingly involved in coordination hubs, working groups and advisory councils, making their role in recovery planning and local governance more tangible (CSOMETER, 2024).

### *The legal and operational environment for civil society organisations*

Formally, legislation largely aligns with European standards on freedom of association: CSO Meter 2024 rates the overall environment at 4.7/7 and the participation framework at 5.1/7 (CSOMETER, 2024). In practice, however, CSOs still face significant operational constraints: registration can be bureaucratic and slow, e-tools used for businesses are not fully

available to NGOs, volunteering law is outdated, and access to banking services is increasingly problematic due to risk-averse compliance with anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorism rules. Overall, the legal environment is supportive, with clear improvements over time, while implementation is uneven and administrative friction remains high, especially for smaller organisations, limiting their ability to operate at full capacity.

### *The accessibility of public and donor funding mechanisms for civil society*

Access to public and donor funding for Ukrainian civil society is formally broad but in practice highly uneven and precarious. Financial insecurity has become the main operational challenge: reliance on individual donations and membership fees has dropped (from about 69% in 2022–2023 to 46.1% in 2025), while the share of organisations working entirely on unpaid voluntary labour has more than doubled (from 12% to 26.7%). International grants now account for roughly a quarter of CSO income. At the same time, competition has intensified, especially after major US programmes were suspended in early 2025. Large EU and international calls are accessible only to organisations with strong

administrative capacity, English-speaking staff and prior grant experience. Public funding remains marginal despite some policy efforts: only around 8% of CSOs receive any state or local budget support. Income from own economic activity stays modest (around 14–18%), while corporate donations have shifted almost entirely to military needs (Ednannia, 2025).

### *Pressures and restrictions faced by civil society*

Ukrainian CSOs face a mix of political and wartime pressures that constrain their work. Reported incidents include pressure on anti-corruption activists, investigative journalists and human rights defenders, although the authorities do cooperate with civil society in investigating such cases (European Commission, 2025). At local level, organisations describe selective inspections, arbitrary enforcement of rules and attempts by some municipal actors to control or sideline independent initiatives, especially around procurement, land use and reconstruction, which reinforces perceptions of political bias and risks of retaliation (Ednannia, 2025). Wartime conditions and martial law add a further layer of restriction: movement limits, heightened security controls, the centralisation of power in military administrations and constant security threats, including drone and rocket attacks, narrow civic space in frontline regions and direct physical danger.

## **Group 4: EXTERNAL DRIVERS OF REFORM**

### **Role of European integration**

#### *The influence of the European integration process on governance and democratic reforms*

European integration has become the main external driver of Ukraine's governance and democratic reforms. EU accession has reframed reforms as an existential, security-linked project rather than a purely economic choice, which is supported by public opinion (Kyiv International Institute for Sociology, 2023). EU candidate status and the launch of negotiations have rapidly advanced fundamental reforms in the judiciary, anti-corruption system, media, competition

policy and decentralisation, with many laws tailored directly to European Commission recommendations. The process is now guided by detailed joint planning through three roadmaps (rule of law, public administration, democratic institutions) and an action plan on national minorities. At the same time, the politically motivated blockade on opening negotiation clusters risks undermining elite incentives and could lead to stagnation or backsliding.

### *Progress in aligning national legislation with the EU acquis*

Ukraine completed a voluntary self-screening of its legislation against EU law in 2023 and finalized formal screening with the European Commission by September 2025. The Commission confirmed the country is technically ready to open all six negotiation clusters. Further steps in the accession process are politically blocked. But the innovative front-loading approach suggested by the Commission allows Ukraine to work against agreed detailed benchmarks and implement the full package of legislative and technical reforms without waiting for the Hungarian veto to be lifted. The government has approved the National Programme for the Approximation of Ukrainian Legislation to EU acquis. The programme lists all outstanding EU legal acts that still need to be transposed. In total, it contains around 1,850 tasks covering the implementation of more than 1,600 EU legal acts. Ukraine's objective is to complete full alignment of its national legislation with EU law by 2027, considering possible transitional periods.

### *The strength of public support for EU integration*

Support for EU membership is exceptionally high and stable, exceeding 80% since the full-scale invasion and reaching record levels in 2025–2026, while only around 11% oppose membership (Kyiv Security Forum, 2026). This confirms a major shift since 2021. Ukrainians increasingly view the EU primarily as a security guarantor rather than merely an economic partner, and a 2025 survey shows that 68% believe Ukraine will be able

to implement the reforms needed for accession, indicating strong confidence in the feasibility of the European integration path (Rating Group, 2025).

#### *The link between EU financial and technical assistance and governance reforms*

Since 2024, the Ukraine Facility has become the main EU financial instrument for Ukraine, with a total budget of up to EUR 50 billion in grants and loans for 2024–2027. Disbursements depend on quarterly milestones set out in the Ukraine Plan, covering public administration, public finance management, anti-corruption, rule of law and sectoral reforms. Failure to meet indicators has already led to the loss or delay of substantial amounts: EUR 3.9 billion in 2025. For the EU and member states, progress under the Facility is a real-time test of Ukraine's reform capacity and political will. For Ukraine, it is both a fiscal lifeline and a powerful incentive to push forward difficult governance reforms.

#### **International partnerships**

##### *The contribution of international partners to democratic resilience and security reforms*

Under wartime conditions, international partners' support is crucial for Ukraine's democratic resilience and security reforms. Security initiatives such as the Coalition of the Willing, capability coalitions under Ukraine Defence Contact Group (Ramstein) and the EU Advisory Mission aim to provide long-term deterrence and drive security-sector reform toward NATO and EU norms. At the same time, the loss of the United States as a robust security guarantor since 2025 has exposed serious capability gaps. Due to protracted war external support underwrites Ukraine's fiscal and governance stability. Ukraine's uncovered external financing gap for 2026 is estimated at about 18.1 billion USD, largely due to defence spending that crowds out salaries for public-sector workers and basic services. Macro-financial support from the EU and IFIs is closely linked to public finance, anti-corruption and governance reforms. In the domain of reconstruction, international partners provide financial backbone and strategic

direction, combining large-scale investment with governance and transparency conditionality.

##### *The effectiveness of donor coordination mechanisms*

Donor coordination for Ukraine is institutionally robust and improving. The Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform, created by the G7, EU, IFIs and the Ukrainian government, and the Ukraine Donor Platform align macro-financial, energy and reconstruction support with the Ukraine Plan and damage-and-needs assessments. With donor backing, Ukraine has financed about 20.3 billion USD in urgent repairs and early-recovery measures, equivalent to roughly 3.5% of identified recovery and reconstruction needs (Fifth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment, 2025). However, independent assessments point to persistent fragmentation: many donors do not consistently use shared digital tools such as the DREAM platform, central tracking is not mandatory, and significant project volumes bypass common monitoring, undermining transparency, increasing duplication risks and complicating assessment of regional balance (Betliy, Kosse, 2025).

##### *The alignment of external assistance with national strategies and reform priorities*

At the strategic level, alignment is strong. Major donors base their programmes on the Ukraine Plan 2024–2027 and on national recovery priorities, and EU reports highlight that support in 2025 closely followed Ukraine's priority list. The Commission reports that donor support in 2025 aligned "closely" with Ukraine's priority list, and that new project-preparation facilities (the Government Project Preparation Facility and the FIRST facility at EIB/EBRD) aim to turn donor pledges into bankable projects more efficiently (Enlargement and Eastern Neighborhood, 2025).

#### **Reform sustainability and risks**

##### *Risks threatening the sustainability of democratic and governance reforms*

Ukraine's reform sustainability is shaped by overlapping war-related and structural risks:

security shocks could derail implementation and push the state back into survival mode, while a prolonged high-intensity war risks power concentration in the executive, erosion of parliamentary and media oversight, and the normalisation of emergency measures. Any major weakening of external financial and security support would jeopardise basic budgetary stability and increase the likelihood of backsliding on macro-financial, anti-corruption and sectoral reforms, especially given a wartime parliament with limited capacity and no possibility of renewing legitimacy through competitive elections. Stalled EU accession progress would further undermine the credibility of EU conditionality as the main external anchor, just as destruction, reconstruction burdens, human-capital loss, entrenched corruption risks and post-war uncertainty strain implementation capacity.

#### *The effects of electoral volatility, corruption, and political polarisation on reform outcomes*

Wartime conditions have temporarily frozen national elections and muted over polarisation, but underlying divides and declining trust in parliament, government and courts mean that once competitive politics resumes, volatility and polarisation could again weaken consistent support for difficult reforms.

#### *Societal resilience to disinformation and divisive narratives*

Ukrainian society and institutions have demonstrated a high level of resilience to disinformation and manipulation, strong shared threat perception, and high trust in the armed forces and volunteer networks. But as war drags on, the mental state of the population is deteriorating, citizens become more emotional and sensitive to any kind of influence. Disinformation and polarisation along war-related fault lines (“stayed in the country-fled”, “served in the army-avoided” and others) are benign actively exploited in Russian influence campaigns and could erode institutional trust and weaken societal ownership of the reform agenda. The growing reliance on opaque platforms like Telegram is another major vulnerability factor.

#### *The role of free and independent media in sustaining democratic reforms*

Free and independent media, together with investigative NGOs, have been crucial in sustaining democratic reforms by exposing high-level corruption and attempts to weaken anti-corruption institutions, but their ability to play this watchdog role is constrained by financial fragility (including the loss of major US funding), safety risks for journalists, and the dominance of the state-coordinated telemarathon, which limits pluralism on national television and pushes critical scrutiny into less regulated online spaces.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Ukraine’s democratic resilience will ultimately hinge on the duration and outcome of the war: the longer high-intensity conflict continues, the greater the risk of further power centralisation and the gradual normalisation of emergency measures that constrain democratic processes, while the eventual terms of peace will determine both state survival and the longer-term trajectory of political development. International support therefore remains decisive across all dimensions: sustaining Ukraine’s war effort, underpinning macroeconomic stability and providing the financial, political and normative backing needed to keep democratic institutions functioning under extreme stress. At this stage, core governance and rule-of-law reforms are anchored in the European integration process and EU membership conditionality, and Ukraine continues to demonstrate political will to move forward. Yet parliamentary capacity constraints, together with the informal nature of front-loading initiative, limit the EU’s leverage. Only the formal opening of negotiation clusters can fully restore incentives for difficult reforms. At the same time the Hungarian veto episode has also underlined that Ukraine must recalibrate its external communication strategy toward systematic engagement with national capitals, not only Brussels-based institutions, and be prepared to address

bilateral sensitivities with each member state as negotiations deepen. At the same time, people are key to Ukraine's democratic resilience and reform trajectory. Sustaining progress on rule-of-law, EU integration and reconstruction ultimately depends on a sufficiently large, skilled and motivated pool of public servants, local leaders and civic activists. This makes comprehensive public-administration reform a strategic priority.

Ukraine's experience of pursuing democratic reforms and building societal resilience under conditions of full-scale war offers a unique laboratory: effective policies and practices should be carefully studied and adapted by countries such as Moldova and Armenia, but also the EU.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Information integrity and strategic communication

- Adopt and implement a phased plan to move from the unified tele marathon to a diversified public-interest broadcasting offer, while guaranteeing stable funding and independence for public service media and the regulator.
- Regulate high-risk platforms such as Telegram, including exploring phased ID-verification requirements and transparency obligations that are consistent with human-rights standards. Experience with sanctions on Russian social media V Kontakte and Odnoklassniki can also serve as an example.
- Update key strategic communication doctrines, clearly designate and empower a central coordination body for strategic communication under the Cabinet of Ministers, and secure a dedicated budget line. Retain the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security within the state structure and provide stable financing to preserve its expert team.

### People and public administration

- Treat comprehensive public administration reform as a cornerstone of Ukraine's democratic and EU-integration agenda, focusing on competitive pay, modern HR

management and better working conditions to retain skilled staff under wartime pressure.

- Restore open, transparent competitions for civil-service posts as security conditions allow and revive the pre-war model of embedded reform experts in ministries with remuneration closer to private-sector levels, including through donor-financed programmes.

### Hybrid threats and policy transfer

- Establish formal mechanisms for two-way policy transfer between the EU and Ukraine on hybrid-threats response, including integrating Ukrainian experts into EU rapid-response teams, StratCom task forces and the planned European Centre for Democratic Resilience.
- Use the accession track to promote mutually beneficial sectoral integration in security and hybrid-threats domains, enabling Ukraine and Moldova to bolster EU capabilities in threat assessment, strategic planning and response mechanisms as de facto contributors to the Common Security and Defence Policy.
- Scale up open joint hybrid-threats monitoring tools and dashboards, building on Ukrainian initiatives such as independent trackers, and extend participation to partners like Armenia to improve shared situational awareness.

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# Cross-Country Comparative Analysis

**The comparative analysis shows** that Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine are all strengthening democratic resilience under sustained security pressure, but through distinct political, institutional, and geopolitical trajectories. Ukraine represents the most acute case, where full-scale war has accelerated centralisation while also generating strong institutional and societal resilience. Armenia reflects a context of geopolitical realignment combined with growing exposure to hybrid interference, particularly in the pre-electoral environment and amid the weakening of civil society and independent media. Moldova illustrates a case of persistent hybrid pressure, in which reform has become increasingly linked to European integration and the institutionalisation of democratic resilience.

**A key conclusion** is that hybrid threats have become a structural condition of governance in all three countries. Democratic resilience therefore emerges not as an abstract reform objective, but as a continuous response to multidimensional pressure. At the same time, institutional resilience remains uneven and highly dependent on implementation capacity. Public trust also remains a decisive variable: legitimacy is strongest where institutions are seen as capable of delivering protection and continuity, but remains fragile where corruption, politicisation, weak transparency, or limited accountability persist. **The analysis confirms** that civil society and independent media remain essential pillars of resilience, despite differing levels of autonomy and sustainability, and that European integration has become the principal external anchor of reform in all three cases. Taken together, these findings suggest that democratic resilience in the three countries depends on the ability to combine effective institutions, public trust, civic participation, and external support within a coherent and sustainable reform framework.



TREND AREA	INDICATORS	MANIFESTATION ACROSS COUNTRIES	MOLDOVA	ARMENIA	UKRAINE
<p align="center"><b>SECURITY-DEMOCRACY NEXUS</b></p>	<p>1. Legal safeguards on emergency powers; 2. Parliamentary oversight during crises; 3. Judicial review of security-related measures. 4. Compliance with international standards 5. Safeguarding the integrity of the information space 6. Free and independent media 7. Boosting societal resilience and citizens' engagement (*How are democratic reforms shaped by ongoing security pressures and hybrid threats?)</p>	<p>Democratic reforms shaped by security pressures.</p>	<p>1. The National Crisis Response Platform is as an inter-institutional structure, with the role of ensuring decision-making support for the National Crisis Management Commission as well as coordinating, at the national level, response actions in crisis and major crisis situations. 2.3.4. Parliament and the Constitutional Court remain the main safeguards. Parliamentary oversight of the security sector. Overall direction is aligned with EU/Council of Europe standards. 5. Information space and media safeguarded through amendments to the Audiovisual Media Services Code, stronger autonomy rules for the Audiovisual Council and public broadcaster, the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, and the Democratic Resilience Strengthening Plan 2026–2027. 6. Moldova ranked 35/180 in the 2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index. 7. Civil society remains a major resilience actor; Moldova's V-Dem civil society participation index was 0.777 in 2024, above the world average. Democratic reforms are explicitly framed as existential necessity for resilience</p>	<p>1. 2. 3. Armenia's Constitution permits the declaration of martial law and a state of emergency. 4. Armenia is a Council of Europe member, and key laws and constitutional amendments are reviewed by Venice Commission and recommendations are taken into consideration. 5. New Regulatory Body of Information Systems mandated by <u>Cybersecurity Law</u> (Dec 2025). 6. Severe capacity curtailment in CSOs/media due to 2025 US aid cuts. 7. Judicial independence is a structural challenge (IRI Survey, 33% public satisfaction). <u>Disinformation Action Plan (2024–2026)</u>.</p>	<p>1. Martial law since 24.02.2022: extensive emergency powers to the military and executive limited by Constitution. 2. Constrained under martial law but gradually being restored. 3. Formally sustained but constrained by implementation gaps and practical pressures. 4. Formally aligned with international democratic and human rights standards and institutionally embedded in European democratic standards, but with uneven. 5. Reforms in legal and institutional framework since the start of Russian aggression in 2014 to protect information space from Russian influence, featuring a vibrant media-civil society ecosystem. 6. 62/180 in 2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index with security-based restrictions, political interference and economic fragility. 144 journalists killed by Russia during full-scale invasion (as of 06.03.26). 7. Democratic reforms are explicitly framed as existential necessity for resilience against Russian aggression and hybrid threats.</p>
	<p align="center"><b>Group 1: INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE FOUNDATIONS</b></p>				

<p><b>INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE AND GOVERNANCE CAPACITY</b></p>	<p>1. Continuity of public services during crises. 2. Staff retention in key institutions. 3. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms. 4. Laws and implementation 5. Judicial independence Score/Rankings</p>	<p>Institutions adapt to unevenly sustained pressure.</p>	<p>1.Continuity of services generally maintained during crises; the EU assessed service delivery as “generally satisfactory.” More than 50% of mapped services are fully or partly digital, and there are now 105 Unified Public Service Centres. 2. Human resources if a challenge civil-service vacancies remain 19.5% overall and over 22% in central administration. 3. Coordination improving through the State Chancellery and new planning tools. 4. Implementation of laws and adoption of new laws according to the EU standards. 5. Judiciary independence is improving through vetting. Moldova ranked 68/143 with 0.53 in the WJP Rule of Law Index 2025 (European Commission 2025; World Justice Project 2025).</p>	<p>1. The Armenian Constitution includes specific provisions for emergency situations, crises and the role of Government bodies and institutions. 2. Civil service reform programmes have introduced specific measures to address the significant human capital deficits and retention issues. 3. The newly established Stratcom body addresses inter-agency coordination mechanisms. 4. Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) assigned Armenia a score of 46/100. 5. Armenia's Freedom in the World score for 2025 was 54/100 ("Partly Free"), reflecting persistent deficits in judicial accountability and legislative effectiveness. Only 40% of citizens expressed satisfaction with the courts as of February 2026.</p>	<p>1.Key doctrines and institutions emerged after 2014, stress-tested in war. 2. Mixed ecosystem of defence, security, governmental, private and civic institutions. 3. Highly trusted military and crisis-management narratives, while low confidence in political and socio-economic messages from civilian authorities.</p>
<p><b>STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION EVOLUTION</b></p>	<p>1. National strategic communication framework. 2. Dedicated government crisis messaging. 3. Public recognition of official narratives.</p>	<p>Move from reactive to proactive narratives.</p>	<p>1. Moldova has moved from reactive to more structured strategic communication. It now has a national strategic communication framework through the National Security Strategy, Concept of Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, and the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation. 2. Dedicated structures exist and are increasingly coordinating crisis messaging. 3. Official narratives are more proactive, especially on elections, EU integration, and hybrid threats, but limited public trust reduces their reach</p>	<p>1. 2. The Strategic Communication Department was established in the Prime Minister's Office in 2025. 3. Ahead of the upcoming election cycle Armenia's Government has become more proactive at pushing narratives and refuting disinformation.</p>	<p>1. Continuity ensured amid war largely due decentralization reform and digitalization. 2. Human-resource depletion is a structural vulnerability. 3. High level of centralization and strong security-sector coordination. 4. 112/143 in 2025 WJP Rule of Law Index in regulatory enforcement dimension. 5. 90/143 2025 WJP Rule of Law Index with declines in “Constraints on Government Powers” and “Fundamental Rights”. 0.42/1 score in the Global State of Democracy Index on Independence of Judiciary Index.</p>

<p><b>PUBLIC TRUST DYNAMICS</b></p>	<p>1. Trust in government, parliament, judiciary, scores. 2. Transparency and integrity of crisis communication.</p>	<p>Trust fluctuates with crisis governance quality.</p>	<p>1. Trust in representative institutions remains low. In September 2025 Public Opinion Barometer, trust stood at 33.8% for the government, 32.0% for parliament, and 27.5% for justice. Only 30.0% said the country is governed by the will of the people. At the same time, 43.0% said the country is moving in the right direction, and 37.2% said elections are free and fair. 2. Moldova scored 42/100 in CPI 2025 and 0.53 / rank 68/143 in the WJP Rule of Law Index 2025. Elections sustain procedural legitimacy, but repeated interference weakens trust in fairness and governance quality. 3. Frequent communication during a crisis by the Centre for Crisis Management, Ministers, Prime-minister, and other authorities, depending on the crisis and mandate of authority.</p>	<p>1. 2. Structurally low trust in legislative and judicial institutions (National Assembly 32%, Courts 33%, IRI 2026). Incident of leaked surveillance recordings (Oct 2025), exposed privacy gaps and fuelled concerns about misuse of surveillance tools. 3. The Armenian government has had periods of high-frequency crisis communication and periods, where the public had to rely to foreign sources (i.e. from Azerbaijan, EU, Russia, etc.) to find out what their government is doing. During the Covid-19 crisis, as well as the 2020 war in Azerbaijan, Armenian Government used to have very high-frequency communication, however, it was mostly discredited when the public found out that most of the communication included propaganda, rather than objective information. Now the newly established Stratcom body is trying to regain this trust and the Government is becoming much more responsive and quicker to respond.</p>	<p>1. High and stable trust in security-related institutions &amp; very low and declining confidence in civilian branches. The President retains a positive trust balance. 2. 104/182 countries in 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) by Transparency International (36 points out of 100). OECD Public Integrity Indicators (2026): high compliance in strategic frameworks, fulfilling 73% of criteria for the quality of strategic framework and 80% for implementation, significantly exceeding OECD averages. 3. Daily briefings of political and military leadership.</p>
<p><b>PUBLIC TRUST DYNAMICS</b></p>	<p>1. Stronger democratic institutions. 2. Free and fair elections.</p>		<p>1. Moldova has stronger electoral institutions than some regional peers, but elections remain the main target of hybrid interference. 2. The 2024 presidential election/referendum and 2025 parliamentary elections were judged competitive and professionally administered, but both were affected by foreign interference, illicit financing, cyber incidents, and disinformation. Public confidence remains mixed: only 37.2% in BOP September 2025 considered elections free and fair. The key challenge is protecting the wider electoral ecosystem, not just election-day administration</p>	<p>1. Armenia is a Council of Europe member and ECHR signatory, with its primary normative framework being the EU-Armenia CEPA (in force since March 2021). However, while the 2015 Constitutional amendments shifted the country from Presidential to a Parliamentary system, it also mandated supermajority limits for the ruling political party, which effectively allowed them to discard and avoid substantive opposition scrutiny. 2. Urgent amendments to the Electoral Code (Jan 2026) require observers to maintain strict political neutrality, which critics argue restricts independent oversight and favours the ruling party.</p>	<p>1.2 Elections suspended under martial law, which is largely supported by the public.</p>

Group 2: RESPONDING TO HYBRID THREATS					
<p><b>HYBRID THREAT RESPONSE</b></p>	<p>1. National hybrid threat or resilience strategy adopted. 2. Dedicated counter-hybrid institutions. 3. Budget allocation for counter-disinformation/FIMI. 4. Number of reported hybrid incidents. 5. Institutional response.</p>	<p>Hybrid treated as permanent governance conditions.</p>	<p>1. Adopted Resilience Plan for 2 years. 2. Institutions focused on Cyber, StratCom, Crisis Management 3. Budget allocated for countering disinformation via the Centre for Countering Disinformation and StratCom. 4. Hybrid threats are treated as a permanent governance issue. 5. Moldova now has a National Security Strategy, a Concept of Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, a Cybersecurity Law in force since January 2025, and the Democratic Resilience Strengthening Plan 2026-2027. Key institutions include the StratCom Centre, Cybersecurity Agency, SIS, Audiovisual Council, and CEC. The most common threats are FIMI/disinformation, cyberattacks, bomb threats, illicit political financing, and vote-buying. Response is more coordinated than before, but still partly reactive relative to the scale of the threat.</p>	<p>1. FISA predicts "comprehensive, complex and large-scale" foreign influence operations to delegitimize the outcome of the June 2026 elections. The country adopted 2024-2026 Action Plan against Disinformation and Law on Cybersecurity (Dec 2025). 2. 5. Institutional response remains predominantly reactive, but the newly established Strategic Communication Department is tasked with providing a more coordinated response. 3. 4. N/A,</p>	<p>1. A series of sectoral strategies adopted prior to full-scale war. 2. Multi-layered system including state institutions at strategic and operational level and non-governmental and private actors. 3. Public funding for small teams within support for media outlets, watchdogs and NGOs. 4. Exponentially growing number of cyber incidents; information-psychological operations, hybrid attacks on the energy sector and critical infrastructure. 5. Overall effective response, but the scale and scope of threats is growing.</p>
Group 3: SOCIETAL ACTORS AND REFORM OUTCOMES					
<p><b>CIVIL SOCIETY AS A RESILIENCE ACTOR</b></p>	<p>1. CSO participation in policymaking; 2. Legal environment for CSOs; 3. Access to public and donor funding; 4. Incidents of pressure or restrictions.</p>	<p>CSOs act as watchdogs, service providers, and communicators.</p>	<p>1. CSOs in Moldova participate actively in consultations on governance, justice, elections, media, and EU-related reforms. 2. The legal environment is broadly permissive and generally aligned with European standards. There is no foreign-agent law. 3. Access to donor funding is significant, but the sector remains heavily dependent on external support. Public funding exists but is limited, unevenly accessible, and not sufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. 4. CSOs face indirect pressures. These include stigmatisation, financial insecurity, and concerns about hostile narratives.</p>	<p>1. CSO participation is moderate (4.9/7). However, State-CSO Cooperation is the lowest scoring area (4.0/7). (CSO Meter) 2. The legal environment is permissive (Freedom of Association 5.7/7); no foreign-agent legislation is enacted. 3. CSOs face increased pressures, including stigmatization (Freedom of Expression 4.7/7) and concerns about state-linked surveillance. (CSO Meter). 4. Russian-linked "Eurasia" NGO employs "charity-washing" to recruit domestic influencers.</p>	<p>Exceptionally strong societal resilience stress-tested by war. Overall 4.8/7 score by CSO Meter. 1. Active involvement, but limited influence on actual decisionmaking. 2. Formally enabling and in line with EU standards with implementation gaps. 3. Declining share of private donations, rising reliance on unpaid labour, intense competition for international grants, only marginal public support. 4. Few reported cases of political pressure and wartime restrictions.</p>

**Group 4: EXTERNAL DRIVERS OF REFORM**

<p><b>ROLE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION</b></p>	<p>1. EU acquis alignment rate; 2. Accession benchmarks ; 3. Public support for EU integration; 4. EU funding linked to governance reforms.</p>	<p>The EU acts as reform anchor and legitimacy source.</p>	<p>1.4. Primary reform driver EU integration is the main external driver of reform. Moldova completed bilateral screening in September 2025; adopted the National Action Plan for EU Accession 2025-2028 and the Reform Agenda 2025-2027, and is implementing reforms through the EU's EUR 1.9 billion Reform and Growth Facility. 3. Public support remains high: in BOP September 2025, 52.7% said they would vote for EU accession in a referendum, and 77.3% assessed Moldova's relations with the EU positively. EU integration acts as reform anchor, legitimacy source, and resilience framework.</p>	<p>1. EU integration is the primary external governance driver. The National Assembly adopted a Law on Initiating the Process of Armenia's Accession to the EU (early 2025). 2. Key frameworks include the EU-Armenia Strategic Agenda (Dec 2025) and the EU Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (Nov 2025). 3. Public support is high, with 72% supporting EU accession. 4. EU financial assistance increasingly acts as a conditionality framework and political resource.</p>	<p>Primary reform driver 1.84% implementation of Association Agreement, self-screening finalized, technically ready to open all six negotiation clusters. 3. Exceptionally high and stable, exceeding 80%. 4. Conditioned by implementation of the quarterly milestones set out in the Ukraine Plan.</p>
<p><b>INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS</b></p>	<p>1. Active cooperation frameworks; 2. Donor coordination mechanisms; 3. Alignment of aid with national strategies</p>	<p>External partners are central to resilience-building</p>	<p>1. Progress on Moldova's resilience-building. Moldova works with the EU accession framework, the Reform and Growth Facility, the Council of Europe Action Plan, and sectoral partnerships in energy, justice, cybersecurity, and refugee coordination. These frameworks make external support more structured and increasingly tied to democratic resilience and governance reform. 2. Coordination has improved because external assistance is increasingly aligned with national reform and accession priorities. 3. External assistance is now closely linked to the National Action Plan for EU Accession 2025 - 2028, the National Development Plan 2025-2027, and the Reform Agenda 2025-2027</p>	<p>1. Significant realignment after de-facto CSTO exit, expanding cooperation with the EU (CEPA, Strategic Agenda, Visa Liberalisation Action Plan) and the US (Strategic Partnership Charter). US and French defense cooperation has expanded significantly. 2. There are occasional donor coordination meetings held by various initiatives, but there is no persistent donor coordination mechanism. 3. The EU Roadmap for Civil Society 2021-2027 (updated June 2025) provides a structured framework for CSO support, ensuring alignment in that sector. International assistance is generally aligned with Armenia's Anti-Corruption Strategy 2023-2026, Judicial Reform Strategy, Disinformation Action Plan 2024-2026, and its emerging EU accession agenda.</p>	<p>1. Coalition of the Willing, Ukraine Defense Contact Group (Ramstein), EU Advisory Mission, EU's Ukraine Facility, assistance under reconstruction efforts. 2. The Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform, created by the G7, EU, IFIs and the Ukrainian government. 3. Aligned with Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment and Ukraine's priority lists.</p>

REFORM SUSTAINABILITY RISKS		Risk of rollback once pressure eases.	<p>Electoral volatility. Safeguarding the integrity of the information space. Stronger democratic institutions. Free and fair elections. Boosting societal resilience and citizens' engagement.</p> <p>Reform sustainability is threatened by electoral volatility, corruption, polarization, weak implementation, staffing shortages, donor dependence in civil society and media, and repeated foreign interference. V-Dem data already show some slippage in 2024: Electoral Democracy Index 0.632; legislative constraints 0.693, and clean elections 0.778, all down from 2023. The greatest risk is not abrupt authoritarian reversal, but gradual erosion through cumulative pressure and weak implementation.</p>	<p>1. Structurally low trust in legislative and judicial institutions (National Assembly 32%, Courts 33%, IRI 2026). Incident of leaked surveillance recordings (Oct 2025) exposed privacy gaps and fuelled concerns about misuse of surveillance tools.</p> <p>3. The Armenian government has had periods of high-frequency crisis communication and periods, where the public had to rely to foreign sources (i.e. from Azerbaijan, EU, Russia, etc) to find out what their government is doing. During the Covid-19 crisis, as well as the 2020 war in Azerbaijan, Armenian Government used to have very high-frequency communication, however, it was mostly discredited when the public found out that most of the communication included propaganda, rather than objective information. Now the newly established Stratcom body is trying to regain this trust and the Government is becoming much more responsive and quicker to respond.</p>	<p>Ongoing high-intensity war and risk of major security shocks.</p> <p>Centralisation of power and erosion of parliamentary/media oversight.</p> <p>Dependence on external financial and security support.</p> <p>Weakened parliamentary effectiveness and frozen nationwide elections.</p> <p>Uncertainty and delays in EU accession and conditionality leverage.</p> <p>Destruction, reconstruction burden and loss/out-migration of skilled staff.</p> <p>Persistent corruption risks and uneven implementation capacity.</p> <p>Disinformation and polarisation along war-related social fault lines.</p>
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# Conclusions

This report finds that democratic resilience in the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine is being shaped under conditions of sustained security pressure, institutional strain, and geopolitical contestation. While the three countries differ significantly in conflict intensity, governance structures, and external alignment trajectories, they face a common challenge: preserving democratic legitimacy while responding to hybrid threats, reform demands, and rising societal expectations. Across all three cases, resilience emerges not as a static institutional quality, but as a dynamic process requiring effective public institutions, enforceable safeguards, societal trust, and sustained reform capacity.

A central conclusion of the report is that hybrid threats have become a structural condition of governance rather than an episodic challenge. In Moldova, this is reflected in recurrent foreign interference, illicit political financing, disinformation, and pressure on the information space. In Armenia, hybrid vulnerabilities are increasingly linked to electoral risks, AI-enabled disinformation, and the weakening of civil society and media sustainability. In Ukraine, full-scale war has amplified cyber, information, and infrastructure attacks to an unprecedented degree, while embedding resilience into the core logic of wartime governance. In all three cases, democratic resilience must therefore be understood as the capacity to manage continuous multidimensional pressure without undermining democratic accountability, pluralism, and public trust.

The report also confirms that the effectiveness of resilience depends less on the formal adoption of reforms than on the ability to implement them consistently and credibly. Moldova has made visible progress in institutionalising resilience through dedicated structures and closer alignment with the European Union, yet continues to face serious implementation gaps, staffing shortages, and uneven oversight capacity

Armenia has undertaken notable legislative and institutional reforms, but persistent weaknesses in judicial independence, inter-agency coordination, and operational readiness continue to constrain democratic consolidation. Ukraine has demonstrated exceptional institutional continuity and administrative adaptability under wartime conditions, but at the cost of high centralisation, staff depletion, and growing risks to democratic oversight. The comparative findings thus underscore a shared regional lesson: implementation capacity is as important as political commitment.

Public trust emerges as another decisive factor. In all three countries, resilience is stronger where institutions are perceived as capable of delivering security, continuity, and practical responses to crisis. Yet trust remains fragile and unevenly distributed. Moldova continues to face low confidence in representative institutions, despite some signs of gradual improvement. Armenia experiences more deeply rooted distrust in parliament and the judiciary, reinforced by polarisation and concerns over selective application of state power. In Ukraine, trust is concentrated overwhelmingly in security institutions, while civilian branches of government face much greater scepticism. These patterns indicate that democratic legitimacy depends not only on institutional design, but also on visible integrity, responsiveness, and fairness in public action. The report further demonstrates that civil society and independent media remain indispensable pillars of democratic resilience. In Moldova, civil society plays an important watchdog and advocacy role and contributes directly to electoral integrity and public accountability. In Armenia, civic and media actors continue to compensate for institutional oversight deficits, despite growing financial insecurity and political pressure. In Ukraine, civil society has become a critical actor in reform monitoring, local recovery, volunteer mobilisation, and resilience-building under wartime conditions

Across all three countries, however, these actors remain vulnerable to donor dependence, politicised pressure, and limited institutionalised cooperation with the state. Their sustainability should therefore be treated as a strategic governance priority.

A final cross-cutting conclusion concerns the role of European integration. The report shows that the European Union has become the principal external anchor of democratic resilience in all three countries, albeit in different forms. For Moldova, the EU provides legitimacy, conditionality, and a practical framework for reform delivery. For Armenia, European integration is emerging as a new strategic driver of institutional transformation and geopolitical reorientation. For Ukraine, the accession process has become the central framework for wartime reform, recovery, and external support. The EU therefore functions not only as a normative point of reference, but also as a practical source of direction, pressure, and validation for democratic resilience reforms. The sustainability of this process, however, depends on whether external support is matched by domestic implementation capacity, democratic oversight, and social legitimacy.



# Policy Recommendation

## Transferable Models and Cross-Country Learning

The comparative analysis suggests that the three countries should not only be assessed separately but also viewed as sources of transferable practice. Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine have developed different resilience responses under distinct conditions, and several of these approaches could usefully inform policy adaptation across cases. The report therefore recommends a stronger emphasis on structured cross-country learning, particularly in the areas of strategic communication, crisis governance, civil society resilience, and the use of European integration frameworks as drivers of reform.



**Armenia could draw on Moldova's model of institutionalised strategic communication and democratic resilience planning.**

Moldova's experience with a dedicated Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation, together with a formal resilience plan linking electoral integrity, cybersecurity, media resilience, and protection against external interference, offers a useful model for moving from reactive responses to a more coherent whole-of-government framework. This is particularly relevant for Armenia, where strategic communication capacity remains relatively new and where hybrid threats are becoming increasingly sophisticated in the electoral context.



**Ukraine, particularly in the transition from wartime governance to long-term institutional consolidation, could draw on Moldova's practice of embedding resilience reforms within a structured EU-conditionality framework.**

Moldova's use of accession-related benchmarks in areas such as cybersecurity, emergency response, judicial reform, and

public administration demonstrates how resilience measures can be anchored in a more routinised and accountable reform process. For Ukraine, this model may be particularly relevant in ensuring that democratic resilience remains linked to post-war institutional normalisation rather than to the prolonged logic of emergency rule.



**Moldova and Armenia could both learn from Ukraine's whole-of-society resilience model.**

Ukraine demonstrates how decentralised local governance, strong civic mobilisation, digital service delivery, and close cooperation between state institutions, volunteers, civil society, and local communities can sustain public services and societal resilience even under extreme stress. While neither Moldova nor Armenia faces the same scale of military threat, both could adapt elements of this model to strengthen local preparedness, citizen engagement, and the practical integration of civil society into crisis response and reform delivery.

Armenia's recent efforts to establish a dedicated Strategic Communication Department and adopt a pre-bunking-oriented disinformation action plan may also offer useful lessons for Moldova and Ukraine in anticipating emerging AI-driven and platform-based information threats. Although Moldova has a more institutionalised strategic communication architecture and Ukraine has a broader wartime communication ecosystem, Armenia's newer focus on anticipatory narrative defence highlights the growing importance of adapting resilience frameworks to fast-changing technological forms of manipulation.

Finally, all three countries would benefit from establishing a more systematic trilateral platform for technical exchange on hybrid threats, democratic oversight, strategic

communication, and civil society resilience. Given that Moldova and Ukraine already participate in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, this platform could serve as a practical reference point for expanding technical exchange on crisis preparedness. In this context, Armenia could be encouraged to explore closer engagement with, and eventual participation in, the Mechanism as part of a broader effort to strengthen resilience cooperation with European partners. Such a mechanism could support regular sharing of policy practices, indicators of compromise, communication approaches, and lessons learned in responding to disinformation, institutional stress, and electoral vulnerability. In the longer term, this would strengthen not only national resilience capacities, but also regional democratic security within the broader Eastern Partnership context.

All three countries should strengthen democratic oversight of crisis and security governance. Exceptional powers must remain subject to effective parliamentary scrutiny, judicial review, and clearly defined legal limits in order to prevent the long-term normalisation of emergency rule and to preserve democratic legitimacy under sustained pressure. Implementation capacity should be treated as a strategic reform priority. Across the three cases, staffing shortages, weak coordination, and uneven administrative delivery repeatedly undermine reform credibility. Greater attention should therefore be given to professional public administration, institutional continuity, and inter-agency coordination.

Strategic communication should be strengthened as a core governance function. Communication must be proactive, coordinated, credible, and citizen oriented. In all three countries, the quality of public communication directly affects trust, resilience to manipulation, and the social legitimacy of reform. Governments and partners should provide more sustainable support to independent media and civil society. These actors are not peripheral to resilience; they are part of the democratic

infrastructure that supports accountability, public awareness, and resistance to manipulation. More predictable domestic support mechanisms and stronger consultation frameworks are therefore needed.

When building or updating national preparedness systems, Moldova, Armenia and the EU should draw systematically on Ukraine's experience of decentralised crisis response and societal resilience, including the use and limits of military administrations with emergency powers. In the future emergency-governance model, ensure a clear division of competences between military administrations and elected local self-government, preserving the role of mayors wherever possible and relying on their local legitimacy and knowledge.

Support and formalise local resilience networks that connect self-government bodies, volunteers, business and NGOs, and embed whole-of-society principles so that civil protection services, local authorities, CSOs, business and media are recognised and resourced as integral security actors. Organise regular national and cross-border simulation exercises that explicitly include local authorities, CSOs, businesses and communities, to identify coordination gaps, legal bottlenecks and communication failures in whole-of-society responses to aggression or large-scale shocks.

### **Recommendations for the Republic of Moldova**

The Republic of Moldova should prioritise the institutionalisation of democratic resilience by strengthening parliamentary and judicial oversight over emergency governance and security institutions. It should address chronic staffing shortages and implementation gaps in public administration, improve the routine functioning of coordination mechanisms, and continue investing in media pluralism, public communication, and trust-building between institutions and citizens. Civil society should remain financially viable and meaningfully involved in democratic oversight. Within this framework, EU accession should continue to serve not only

as a reform incentive, but also as a practical mechanism for embedding democratic safeguards into resilience policy.

### **Recommendations for Armenia**

Armenia should prioritise a coordinated democratic resilience agenda that strengthens judicial independence, inter-agency preparedness, and strategic communication capacity, especially in the context of electoral vulnerability and sophisticated hybrid interference. It should address the destabilising effects of the 2025 reduction in U.S. assistance by developing a more sustainable domestic support framework for civil society and independent media, including fiscal and legal measures that reduce external dependence. Armenia should also improve preparedness against AI-driven disinformation, strengthen institutional safeguards around elections, and embed civil society more systematically in the monitoring of EU-related reforms and democratic accountability.

### **Recommendations for Ukraine**

Ukraine should reinforce democratic oversight of wartime governance by strengthening parliamentary and judicial scrutiny of emergency powers and reducing the long-term risk of accountability erosion under martial law. It should continue protecting the independence of anti-corruption and judicial institutions while addressing staffing depletion and implementation gaps across public administration. Maintain strong civic oversight even in wartime by replicating models such as the Civic Anti-Corruption Council at the Ministry of Defence, which has structured access to procurement documentation, including on sensitive and classified items under clear safeguards. Prepare and disseminate practical, scenario-based guidance for local authorities, private sector, NGOs and citizens on a range of crises, including temporary occupation, covering personal safety, continuity of services and, where appropriate, basic frameworks for reserve and volunteer military training.

Sustained support for independent media and civil society remains essential for preserving accountability, public trust, and resilience against disinformation. At the same time, Ukraine should continue treating EU-oriented reforms as the principal framework for governance, recovery, and long-term democratic consolidation, while ensuring that wartime centralisation does not become entrenched as a post-war governance model.

### **Recommendations for international partners**

International partners, and particularly the European Union, should continue to support democratic resilience in the three countries through assistance that is closely aligned with national reform priorities while placing stronger emphasis on implementation, institutional sustainability, and domestic ownership. Priority should be given to strengthening public administration capacity, judicial and parliamentary accountability, strategic communication, and the long-term sustainability of civil society and independent media. External support yields the greatest impact when it reinforces national institutions rather than replacing them, and when it contributes to democratic legitimacy alongside technical reform delivery. In parallel, the European Union should consider extending the core principles and enforcement mechanisms of the Digital Services Act to candidate countries, beginning with Ukraine and Moldova, as part of a broader effort to align the governance of the information space with the EU acquis.

Overall, the report concludes that democratic resilience in Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine will depend on the ability to align security responses with democratic safeguards, reform ambition with implementation capacity, and external support with domestic legitimacy. In this sense, resilience is not only about resisting shocks; it is about ensuring that reform under pressure remains democratic, credible, and sustainable.



## ABOUT PLATFORM FOR SECURITY AND DEFENSE INITIATIVES (PISA)

The Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives (PISA) is an independent non governmental organization dedicated to promoting a secure and resilient Moldova. PISA provides expertise through analysis, training, publications, and events, contributing to democratic oversight and public engagement in the security and defence sector. Through education, research and advocacy, the organization supports institutional and societal capacity building, civil society involvement in governance, increased awareness of security issues, and improved efficiency of public policies and international assistance, with a focus on areas such as Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), strategic communication, security sector reform and democratic governance.

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