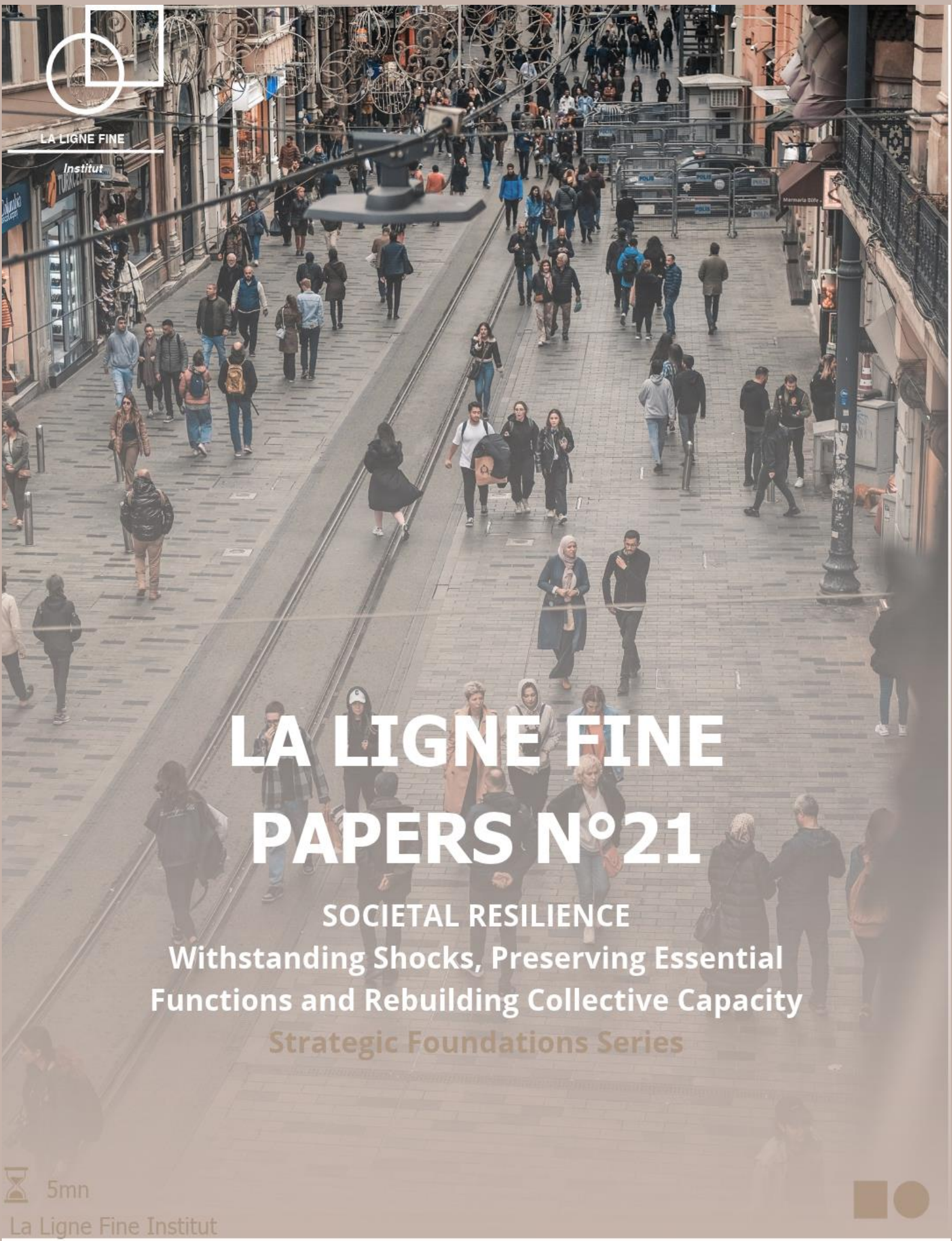


LA LIGNE FINE

Institut

LA LIGNE FINE PAPERS N°21

SOCIETAL RESILIENCE
Withstanding Shocks, Preserving Essential Functions and Rebuilding Collective Capacity

Strategic Foundations Series

5mn

La Ligne Fine Institut

Executive summary

Societal resilience is one of the fundamental dimensions of security, stability, and continuity in contemporary states. It refers to a society's ability to anticipate disruptions, absorb their consequences, maintain its essential functions, and regain acceptable operating conditions, while drawing the necessary lessons to reduce its future vulnerabilities. This capacity does not rely exclusively on the strength of infrastructure, the efficiency of administrations, or the available economic resources. It also depends on trust between citizens and institutions, the organization of solidarities, the preparation of populations, and the ability of public and private actors to cooperate in exceptional circumstances.

Contemporary crises highlight the limits of a sectoral approach to security. A natural disaster can disrupt electrical networks, disrupt telecommunications, compromise water supply, and limit access to healthcare facilities. A cyberattack can simultaneously affect administrations, businesses, and essential services. A health crisis can disrupt supply chains, economic activities, and ordinary solidarity mechanisms. The effects of a disruption therefore do not necessarily remain confined to the sector in which it occurs. They can be transferred to other functions, produce cumulative consequences, and test a company's overall ability to continue its operations.

This interdependence transforms resilience into a strategic issue. National security can no longer be considered solely through territorial protection, military capabilities, or maintaining public order. It also requires the continuity of civilian functions essential to collective life: energy, food, water, health, transport, communications, financial services, and public administration. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization explicitly recognizes this dimension in its doctrine of civil preparedness, based on continuity of public powers, essential services, and civilian sector support for military operations[1].

However, resilience is not an exclusively institutional property. Populations play a decisive role in preventing, managing, and overcoming crises. Knowledge of risks, the ability to recognize alerts, the existence of mutual aid networks, and the possibility of accessing reliable information directly influence collective behaviors. A society whose citizens have appropriate resources and knowledge can facilitate emergency response and reduce certain consequences of disruptions. Conversely, social isolation, economic inequalities, or distrust of authorities can complicate the implementation of protective measures.

The Covid-19 pandemic particularly illustrated this dimension. It revealed the interdependencies between health systems, economic activities, procurement, public communication, and individual behaviors. The World Health Organization's work on lessons learned from this crisis highlights the importance of preparedness, intersectoral coordination, community protection, and adapting responses to evolving knowledge[2].

International institutions have gradually integrated this expanded approach. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 sets out four priorities: understanding risks, strengthening their governance, investing in their reduction, and improving preparedness and reconstruction capacities[3].

---

[1] NATO, 2026, *Resilience, Civil Sector Preparedness and Article 3*, https://www.nato.int/fr/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/resilience-civil-preparedness-and-article-3

[2] WHO, 2024, *Learnings from COVID-19 for Future Respiratory Pathogen Pandemic Preparedness*, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240086531

[3] United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2015, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030

The European Union has also initiated a doctrinal evolution with its strategy for a preparedness union, presented in March 2025. This strategy favors an integrated approach to all risks, simultaneously mobilizing administrations, businesses, social organizations, and citizens. It notably provides for actions related to vital functions, population preparedness, civil-military cooperation, and coordination of crisis [4]responses.

France is part of this evolution. The update of the National Strategic Review in 2025 and the refocusing of the National Resilience Strategy reflect a desire to strengthen the continuity of vital functions and mobilize society as a whole in the face of major crises. Resilience thus becomes an explicit component of national preparation, involving public authorities, local authorities, economic actors, and citizens[5].

This Paper defends a central proposal: **societal resilience does not correspond to the simple ability to withstand a crisis. It is based on a society's ability to preserve its essential functions, protect its most vulnerable members, maintain the legitimacy of its institutions, and transform its modes of organization when previous conditions no longer guarantee its security.**

The strategic challenge is therefore not to make societies invulnerable, an unrealistic goal, but to reduce their structural vulnerabilities, limit the cascading effects of disruptions, and preserve their collective capacity for decision-making and action.

Introduction: Resilience, a new condition for the continuity of societies

Contemporary societies rely on systems of increasing complexity. Energy supply, food distribution, digital infrastructure, transport networks, health services, and public administrations operate through ongoing interactions between institutions, businesses, territories, and populations. This organization allows for considerable gains in efficiency, productivity, and specialization. It also creates dependencies whose consequences become particularly visible when a major disruption occurs.

A prolonged power outage can affect communications, transportation, electronic payments, and certain water distribution facilities. A telecommunications disruption can slow down emergency interventions and complicate administrative coordination. A disruption in the supply of medicines can compromise continuity of care, even when healthcare facilities have sufficient staff and equipment. The vulnerability of a system therefore lies not only in the fragility of its components but also in the dependency relationships that unite them.

This interdependence requires moving beyond a security concept based solely on identifying and neutralizing threats. States cannot prevent all natural, health, technological, or geopolitical events likely to affect their populations. They must also prepare to operate under degraded conditions, prioritize their priorities, and restore essential services after an interruption.

The notion of resilience meets this requirement. Initially used in various scientific fields, it has gradually gained an important place in security, development, and risk management policies.

---

[4] European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2025, *European Strategy for a Union of Preparation*, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025JC0130

[5] General Secretariat for Defense and National Security [SGDSN], 2025, *National Strategic Review 2025*, https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/publications/revue-nationale-strategique-2025

Its growing use reflects an evolution in public concerns: it is no longer enough to try to prevent crises; it is also necessary to understand how companies can limit their consequences and continue operating despite themselves.

This evolution does not mean that all risks are new or that contemporary societies are necessarily more fragile than those of the past. Famines, epidemics, wars, and natural disasters have always affected human communities. On the other hand, technological, economic, and institutional transformations are changing the mechanisms by which these events spread and the resources available to respond to them.

Digital systems facilitate coordination and access to information, but their failure can simultaneously affect many activities. International trade allows for diversification of supplies, but it also exposes economies to external disruptions. Urban concentration promotes access to services and economic interactions, but it can increase the consequences of disruption of certain infrastructures. Resilience must therefore be understood in the context of these contradictory transformations.

The social dimension of this issue is fundamental. Individuals do not have the same resources to cope with crises. Households with sufficient income, suitable housing, and strong relational networks can generally mobilize more alternative solutions than people facing hardship, isolation, or health constraints. A resilience policy that ignores these differences risks reinforcing the inequalities it claims to reduce.

Resilience also has a political dimension. Decisions made in emergency situations can impose significant constraints on citizens. Their acceptance depends in particular on the credibility of institutions, the transparency of information, and the perception of the fairness of measures. The continuity of the State therefore does not rely solely on its administrative capacity: it also requires that its decisions remain sufficiently legitimate to allow collective cooperation.

The stakes are particularly high in a strategic environment characterized by geopolitical tensions, hybrid threats, and climate risks. Disruptions can be accidental, natural, or intentional. They can also combine, complicating their identification and the mobilization of response instruments.

The central issue of this study is as follows: **under what conditions can a society anticipate, absorb, and overcome major crises while preserving its vital functions, collective cohesion, and the legitimacy of its institutions?**

To answer this, the analysis examines the foundations of societal resilience, transformations in the risk landscape, interdependencies of essential functions, the role of trust and solidarity, inequalities in the face of crises, preparedness mechanisms, and the strategic dimensions of resilience. Finally, it offers forward-looking reflection on possible trajectories by 2035 and on the conditions for a sustainable public resilience policy.

I. Understanding societal resilience: resisting, adapting, and transforming

Societal resilience is a multidimensional concept whose meaning varies depending on the disciplines and institutions that use it. In risk management policies, it generally refers to the ability of a system or community to cope with disruption and return to acceptable functioning. In social and institutional approaches, it also includes the capacity for learning, adaptation, and transformation of organizations.

The first dimension of resilience concerns resistance. It refers to a system's ability to withstand a disturbance without experiencing excessive degradation of its functions. In the field of infrastructure, this resistance may depend on the strength of installations, the physical protection of equipment, or the availability of backup systems. In the institutional domain, it may rely on continuity of decision-making chains, the existence of emergency procedures, and the availability of qualified personnel.

However, resilience does not guarantee that a system can handle all situations. Protection capabilities are necessarily limited by technical, financial, and organizational constraints. An infrastructure designed to withstand certain events may remain vulnerable to a higher intensity disruption or a combination of risks that had not been anticipated.

The second dimension concerns absorption. When a disruption exceeds ordinary resilience capacities, a society must be able to limit its consequences. This capacity requires having mobilizable resources, alternative solutions, and mechanisms to maintain priority functions. An administration can, for example, pursue certain essential missions through degraded procedures, even when its usual systems are no longer available.

Absorption necessarily involves trade-offs. Not all activities can be maintained at the same level when resources become insufficient. Authorities must then identify the essential functions for protecting populations and organize their continuity. The quality of this hierarchy depends on prior preparation, availability of information, and clarity of responsibilities.

The third dimension concerns adaptation. A resilient society does not merely reproduce its usual procedures in exceptional circumstances. It must be able to modify its practices, redistribute certain resources, and evolve its organizations when conditions require it. This adaptation may concern working hours, the distribution of essential goods, the organization of care, or the means of communication between institutions.

The fourth dimension concerns recovery. After a disruption, it involves restoring services, infrastructure, and social conditions necessary for collective life. Recovery should not be confused with an immediate return to the previous situation. Some consequences may persist long after the initial danger has disappeared, notably when households have lost their income, infrastructure is destroyed, or social relations have been permanently affected.

Finally, the fifth dimension concerns transformation. Some crises reveal structural vulnerabilities that cannot be corrected by simple reconstruction as it is. Resilience then requires changing the operating conditions of the system to reduce its future exposure. This approach is notably present in the Sendai Framework, which encourages reconstruction that includes risk reduction rather than mechanical restoration of pre-existing vulnerabilities[6].

These different dimensions allow us to distinguish resilience from several related concepts. Robustness mainly refers to the ability to withstand a disruption. Redundancy corresponds to the existence of alternative capabilities that allow replacing a failing function. Preparedness refers to measures taken before a crisis to facilitate the response. Business continuity concerns maintaining priority functions under degraded conditions. Resilience encompasses these elements, but it also includes adaptation, recovery, and learning.

Resilience must also be distinguished from national cohesion. Cohesion concerns the quality of social ties, the sense of belonging, and the ability of a political community to maintain solidarities. It is an important resource for resilience, but it is not enough to guarantee the continuity of infrastructure or the competence of institutions. Conversely, a society may have

[6] UNDRR, 2015, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030

efficient technical arrangements while facing cooperation difficulties related to distrust or inequalities.

This distinction leads to considering societal resilience as the result of interactions between several levels. Individuals have personal capacities for preparation and adaptation. Local communities organize solidarities and local responses. Companies ensure the continuity of many economic functions. Local authorities participate in protecting populations. The State retains the responsibility to coordinate resources, guarantee legal order, and protect the fundamental interests of the nation.

Resilience cannot therefore be attributed to a single actor. It constitutes a collective capacity that depends on the quality of relationships between these different levels.

II. Contemporary societies facing interdependent risks

The risks faced by contemporary societies have diverse origins. Some result from natural phenomena, others from technical failures, health crises, economic tensions, or intentional actions. Their diversity makes it necessary to adopt an approach capable of going beyond the administrative and sectoral boundaries traditionally used to organize prevention.

Natural hazards constitute a first category. Floods, storms, droughts, fires, and landslides can affect populations, infrastructure, and economic activities. Their severity depends not only on the intensity of the phenomena but also on the exposure of people and property, the vulnerability of buildings, and local preparedness capacities.

Climate change alters the conditions of several of these risks. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change emphasizes that the risks and damages associated with warming increase with its intensity, while adaptation opportunities remain unevenly distributed. Interactions between climate risks and social vulnerabilities can also produce cumulative consequences[7].

Technological risks constitute a second category. Industrial, energy, and digital infrastructures can experience failures whose consequences go beyond the directly affected facilities. Concentrating certain activities around critical equipment can increase the importance of their protection and maintenance. Dependencies between systems also require the existence of backup capacities and degraded operating procedures.

Health crises form a third category. A major epidemic can simultaneously increase care needs, reduce the availability of certain personnel, and disrupt economic activities. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that hospital capacities, supply chains, surveillance systems, and collective behaviors must be considered interdependent components of the health response. WHO work emphasizes the need for integrated preparedness, involving health institutions but also other sectors of society[8].

Geopolitical risks constitute a fourth category. Armed conflicts, trade tensions, economic sanctions, and disruptions to logistics routes can affect the supply of energy, raw materials, medicines, or foodstuffs. States heavily dependent on particular suppliers or corridors may be exposed to disruptions that are difficult to compensate for quickly.

Hybrid threats add an intentional dimension to these vulnerabilities. They can combine cyberattacks, sabotage, information manipulation, economic coercion, and pressure on infrastructure. Their particularity lies notably in the possibility of targeting civilian functions to produce political, economic, or security effects. The protection of critical networks then becomes a component of deterrence and defense.

However, these categories should not be considered as independent entities. A natural disaster can cause a technological failure. An energy crisis can weaken health services. A cyberattack can affect logistical infrastructure at the moment a population needs to be evacuated. The severity of a crisis thus depends on the possibility that several disruptions reinforce each other.

---

[7] IPCC, 2023, *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report*, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/

[8] WHO, 2024, *Learnings from COVID-19 for Future Respiratory Pathogen Pandemic Preparedness*, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240086531

This dynamic can be described as a cascading effect. An initial failure affects a first function, on which a second depends, then a third. Propagation can be rapid when systems are highly interconnected and have few alternative solutions. It can also be gradual when stocks, financial resources, or backup capacities allow delaying the consequences.

Risk analysis must therefore incorporate interdependencies. It is not enough to separately assess the likelihood of a power failure, communication interruption, or transport disruption. It is also necessary to understand the consequences of simultaneous or successive failure of these functions.

The geographical concentration of certain infrastructures reinforces this requirement. Large urban areas, industrial zones, and logistics platforms group together equipment whose importance sometimes far exceeds their area of presence. A local disruption can thus produce national or international consequences.

The globalization of supply chains adds an additional dimension. Companies and administrations may rely on products manufactured in multiple countries, transported through complex networks, and distributed according to precise schedules. This organization improves economic efficiency but can reduce room for maneuver when stocks are limited or substitution possibilities are insufficient.

The strategic challenge is not to consider all interdependence as a weakness. Interconnected networks also allow pooling resources and compensating for certain local shortcomings. Diversification of supplies, energy interconnections, and international cooperation can strengthen resilience when they offer alternative solutions.

Vulnerability mainly appears when dependencies are insufficiently identified, excessively concentrated, or lack replacement mechanisms. Resilience therefore requires precise knowledge of essential functions, their relationships, and the conditions necessary for their continuity.

III. Continuity of vital functions: the material foundation of resilience

A society's ability to weather a crisis largely depends on the continuity of its essential functions. Some activities can be temporarily interrupted without immediately compromising collective security. Others are essential to protecting populations, functioning institutions, and maintaining the minimum conditions of economic life.

Identifying these functions constitutes a strategic responsibility. It requires distinguishing services whose interruption can be tolerated for a limited time from those whose failure would quickly cause serious consequences. This prioritization must take into account the needs of populations, technical interdependencies, and available resources.

Energy occupies a central place in this organization. Electrical networks supply healthcare facilities, water treatment facilities, communication systems, transportation, and many industrial activities. Their failure can produce multiple consequences, especially when it persists. Energy resilience therefore requires combining infrastructure protection, diversification of sources, maintenance, backup capacities, and recovery procedures.

Water is a second essential function. The supply of drinking water depends on collection, treatment, pumping, and distribution systems that may themselves require electricity and operational communications. Water disturbances can simultaneously affect public health,

economic activities, and the living conditions of populations. The continuity of this function requires monitoring devices, alternative solutions, and close coordination with other essential operators.

Food systems constitute a third function. The availability of foodstuffs depends on agricultural production, processing, transport, storage, and distribution. A crisis can affect several of these stages. Food resilience therefore does not rely solely on national production volumes, but also on the diversity of suppliers, logistical capacity, stocks, and the economic accessibility of products.

Health services represent a fourth function. Their continuity requires available staff, operational infrastructure, medicines, equipment, and reliable information systems. A health crisis can simultaneously increase the demand for care and the constraints weighing on their organization. Preparation must therefore provide for additional mobilization capacities, prioritization procedures, and cooperation mechanisms between institutions.

Communications constitute a fifth essential function. Digital networks and telecommunications enable administrations, businesses, and citizens to exchange information, organize their activities, and coordinate their responses. Their interruption can slow down emergency response and complicate the dissemination of public instructions. Communication resilience notably requires alternative capabilities, backup devices, and procedures adapted to network degradation.

Transport plays a cross-cutting role. It enables the delivery of essential goods, the movement of rescue personnel, access to healthcare facilities, and, in certain circumstances, evacuations. Their operation itself depends on energy, digital infrastructure, and staff availability. Substitution capacities and coordination between modes of transport therefore constitute important elements of collective continuity.

Financial services and means of payment also deserve special attention. Ordinary economic exchanges largely depend on digital and banking systems. Their interruption can complicate the purchase of essential goods, payment from suppliers, and continuation of business activities. Preparation must take these dependencies into account without assuming that a single technical solution could guarantee continuity of all uses.

Finally, public institutions must retain decision-making and communication capacity. A major crisis can affect administrative buildings, staff, digital networks, or chains of command. The continuity of the state therefore requires replacement procedures, clearly established responsibilities, and means to maintain sovereign functions.

NATO has translated these requirements into its civilian preparedness doctrine. The seven basic requirements defined by the Alliance concern continuity of public authorities, energy resilience, management of population movements, food and water supplies, management of casualties and health crises, civil communications, and transportation. Their update in September 2026 confirms the importance of interdependencies, coordination with operators, and repair and recovery capabilities[9].

The European Union has also strengthened its legal framework. The directive on the resilience of critical entities notably provides for the identification of key operators, risk assessment, and

[9] NATO, 2026, *2026 Resilience Baseline Requirements*, https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2026/09/15/2026-resilience-baseline-requirements

the adoption of technical, organizational, and security measures aimed at preventing incidents, limiting their consequences, and restoring services[10].

The SRI 2 directive, also known as NIS 2, complements this approach in the field of cybersecurity. It sets requirements related to risk management affecting the networks and information systems of many essential or important entities. Its existence highlights that the continuity of civilian functions now depends closely on digital security[11].

However, the protection of vital functions cannot rely exclusively on regulation. It requires investments, exercises, controls, and up-to-date knowledge of dependencies. A continuity plan that has never been tested may prove insufficient when actual conditions differ from the assumptions adopted.

A society's material resilience thus depends on its ability to identify essential services, organize their degraded functioning, and quickly restore affected capacities. This preparation must be carried out before the crisis, when institutions still have the time and resources needed to address their vulnerabilities.

[10] European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2022, *Directive (EU) 2022/2557 on the resilience of critical entities*, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2557/oj/fra

[11] European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2022, *Directive (EU) 2022/2555 on measures to ensure a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union*, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2555/oj/fra

IV. Trust, cohesion, and solidarity: the social resources of resilience

Societal resilience does not rely solely on infrastructure and administrative arrangements. It also depends on relationships between individuals, trust in institutions, and the ability of communities to organize forms of solidarity. These dimensions influence how populations understand risks, respond to alerts, and participate in collective efforts.

Institutional trust plays an important role in the acceptance of decisions made in crisis situations. Authorities may be led to request evacuations, temporarily limit certain activities, or modify the organization of services. The effectiveness of these measures depends in particular on their understanding by the population and the credibility of the information that justifies them.

This trust does not mean that citizens must accept all public decisions without question. It is rather based on the perception of competence, integrity, and transparency of institutions. When authorities recognize uncertainties, explain their decisions, and correct their mistakes, they can preserve their legitimacy even in difficult circumstances.

Conversely, unexplained contradictions, lack of communication, or the perception of unfair treatment can weaken cooperation. A protective measure may be technically relevant while encountering resistance if populations do not understand its objectives or consider its costs unfairly distributed.

OECD data highlight the importance of this issue. In its survey on the determinants of trust published in 2024 and conducted among thirty countries, the organization observed that 39% of respondents reported high or moderately high trust in their national government, while 44% expressed low or no trust. These results do not constitute a direct measure of resilience, but they illustrate the difficulties institutions may face when mobilizing sustainable collective cooperation[12].

Interpersonal trust is a second resource. Individuals can provide immediate help to their loved ones, neighbors, or people facing particular difficulties. These local solidarities can complement the actions of public services, especially during the early phases of a disruption.

However, their importance should not lead to idealizing local communities. Mutual aid networks are unevenly distributed and may remain limited to certain groups. Isolated individuals, recently settled, or with few contacts may face greater difficulties accessing informal assistance. Collective resilience therefore requires that spontaneous solidarities be complemented by institutional mechanisms capable of identifying people who do not benefit from such networks.

Associations constitute a third level of organization. They sometimes have in-depth knowledge of territories, vulnerable populations, and local needs. They can contribute to the dissemination of information, the distribution of essential goods, and support for affected individuals. However, their intervention must be coordinated with the competent authorities to avoid duplication, security difficulties, or breaches of responsibility.

Local authorities also play an essential role. Their proximity to the population allows them to identify certain vulnerabilities and mobilize resources adapted to local realities. The

[12] OECD, 2024, *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en

preparation of municipalities and intercommunalities can facilitate the organization of rescue services, informing residents, and the continuity of local services.

Resilience thus requires a connection between different levels of solidarity. Family and associative networks can meet certain immediate needs, local authorities can organize local resources, and the State can mobilize greater coordination and support capacities. None of these levels can completely replace the others.

National cohesion plays a role in this structure. A society whose members consider collective obligations sufficiently reciprocal may have favorable conditions for cooperation. However, cohesion should not be confused with unanimity. Political disagreements, public debates, and criticism of government decisions remain compatible with resilience, as long as they do not prevent the recognition of the essential rules of collective life.

Democratic resilience even involves the possibility of evaluating decisions made during a crisis. Control mechanisms, press freedom, and accountability procedures make it possible to identify shortcomings and strengthen future capacities. A concept of resilience based on erasing dissent could confuse institutional continuity with concentration of power.

Trust and solidarity must therefore be considered strategic resources, but not instruments of social discipline. Their contribution is based on citizens' ability to understand decisions, participate in responses, and retain recognition of their rights.

V. Inequalities in the face of crises: socially and territorially differentiated resilience

Crises do not affect all populations uniformly. The consequences of an event depend on exposure to danger, but also on economic resources, housing conditions, health status, mobility, and available social networks. Societal resilience cannot therefore be assessed solely based on the overall capacities of a state. It must also be examined through differences in vulnerability between individuals and territories.

Economic inequalities are a primary factor. Households with sufficient resources can more easily build up reserves, finance temporary relocation, or endure a disruption of activity. People facing precariousness generally have more limited financial margins. A crisis can thus produce particularly significant consequences when essential expenses already absorb a large part of income.

Housing conditions also influence exposure and protection options. Homes located in flood-prone areas, poorly insulated, or with insufficient technical characteristics can increase certain vulnerabilities. The ability to stay home during a disruption depends in particular on access to water, energy, and appropriate sanitary conditions.

Age and health are other important dimensions. Elderly people, children, people with disabilities, or those requiring regular care may face specific difficulties in case of evacuation, supply disruption, or interruption of medical services. Preparedness arrangements must take these needs into account without treating these populations as homogeneous categories.

Social isolation can increase difficulties. A person with few contacts may receive certain information late or face obstacles in obtaining assistance. Public systems must therefore provide mechanisms for identifying and supporting people who cannot rely on mutual support networks.

Territorial divides constitute another source of differentiation. Response capacities can vary depending on population density, infrastructure accessibility, the presence of emergency services, and local administrative resources. Rural areas can experience significant distances between inhabitants and essential services. Large urban areas, for their part, can concentrate large populations around highly interdependent networks.

Overseas territories also have particular configurations, notably related to their geography, climatic conditions, infrastructure, and supply relations. A national resilience strategy must integrate these specificities rather than assuming that devices designed for a continental territory can be replicated without adaptation.

The Sendai Framework emphasizes the need to understand risks based on exposure, vulnerabilities, and available capacities. This approach avoids an analysis focused solely on the intensity of natural phenomena. Two territories facing a comparable event can experience very different consequences depending on the quality of infrastructure, population resources, and preparedness mechanisms[13].

The Covid-19 pandemic also showed that health and social consequences could be deeply differentiated. Employment conditions, telework opportunities, occupational exposure, and access to healthcare influenced individual experiences of the crisis. WHO work on community protection highlights the need to integrate inequalities and trust in health [14]preparedness.
These differences lead to a fundamental requirement: a resilience policy must not be limited to asking individuals to prepare. It must also examine the means they actually have to implement public recommendations.

Building food reserves, purchasing equipment, or organizing evacuation can represent significant constraints for some households. People who lack the necessary resources should not be considered insufficiently responsible. Individual preparation must be accompanied by collective measures to reduce material barriers.

Equity is therefore an operational dimension of resilience. A society where a significant part of the population remains exposed to insufficiently addressed risks can face major difficulties when a crisis occurs. Protecting vulnerable groups contributes not only to social justice but also to the stability of the collective system.

Resilience must therefore be measured by the company's ability to protect its most exposed members, not just by how quickly its economic or administrative activities return to their previous level.

VI. Preparing populations: from risk culture to capacity for action

Preparing populations is an essential component of societal resilience. Citizens are often the first witnesses to an event and sometimes have to make decisions before emergency services arrive. Their ability to recognize risks, understand instructions, and adopt appropriate behaviors can help reduce certain consequences of crises.

---

[13] UNDRR, 2015, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030
[14] WHO, UNICEF & International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2024, *Defining Community Protection*, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240096134

The culture of risk is based primarily on information. Individuals must be able to know the main dangers to which they are exposed and the recommended behaviors in different situations. This knowledge cannot be produced exclusively through occasional communications. It requires regular transmission, adapted to territories, ages, and the abilities of the audiences.

Alert systems play an important role, but their effectiveness depends on understanding the messages. An alert that does not clearly specify the nature of the danger, the areas concerned, or the expected actions can create uncertainty. Authorities must therefore prepare accessible, coherent communications adapted to multiple dissemination channels.

Material preparation is a second element. Some essential equipment can help protect households during the first hours of a disruption. Their nature depends on the risks considered and individual needs. Water reserves, essential medicines, lighting devices, and devices for receiving information can notably help reduce certain immediate vulnerabilities.

In France, Civil Security recommends preparing an emergency kit that provides three days of autonomy and offers an Individual Safety Plan designed to help people identify risks in their environment, prepare their equipment, and recognize alert instructions[15].

The European strategy for a preparedness union, presented in 2025, also provides for the development of guidelines aimed at promoting a minimum autonomy of 72 hours in emergency situations. This orientation fits into a broader conception of preparedness, involving citizens, schools, businesses, and public institutions[16].

This recommendation should not be interpreted as transferring security responsibility solely to households. Public authorities retain their obligations of protection, assistance, and coordination. Individual preparedness aims to facilitate the management of the initial phases of a crisis, not to replace essential services or justify their prolonged interruption.

Education is a third lever. Learning protective behaviors can be integrated into school pathways, vocational training, and associative activities. Exercises allow theoretical knowledge to be transformed into practice. They also help identify difficulties that would not necessarily be visible in a planning document.

However, preparation must be adapted to the diversity of audiences. Information intended for children, the elderly, people with disabilities, or those who do not sufficiently master the language used by authorities must be designed according to their needs. Accessibility is a condition for the effectiveness of alert and prevention systems.

Local authorities have a particular role here. Their knowledge of local risks allows for the dissemination of contextualized information and the organization of appropriate exercises. Municipal and inter-municipal safeguard plans are tools for collective preparation, linking local responsibilities and civil security systems[17].

Business participation is also necessary. Employees may be exposed to particular occupational risks, while economic organizations provide a significant share of essential

---

[15] Directorate General of Civil Security and Crisis Management, n.d., *The individual security plan*, https://www.securite-civile.interieur.gouv.fr/reagir/comment-se-preparer-face-aux-risques/plan-individuel-de-mise

[16] European Commission, 2025, *EU Strategy for a Preparedness Union*, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/preparedness_fr

[17] Directorate General of Civil Security and Crisis Management, n.d., *How to prepare for risks*, https://www.securite-civile.interieur.gouv.fr/reagir/comment-se-preparer-face-aux-risques

services. Business continuity plans, staff training, and crisis exercises can help preserve essential functions.

Public communication must finally take digital transformations into account. Social networks allow for rapid information flow, but they can also encourage the dissemination of inaccurate or misleading content. Authorities must therefore have identifiable channels, maintain regular communication, and correct incorrect information without equating any criticism with a threat.

Preparing populations thus relies on a combination of knowledge, material resources, skills, and trust. It cannot be achieved through a simple one-off campaign. It must become a continuous practice, integrated into educational institutions, communities, businesses, and social organizations.

VII. Societal resilience as a component of national security

Societal resilience now occupies an important place in security and defense doctrines. This evolution reflects the recognition of the role of civil functions in the continuity of the state and in the armed forces' ability to carry out their missions. Energy infrastructure, transport, communications, and supplies are not only economic resources: they also contribute to the preparation and support of defense operations.

In contemporary states, military capabilities largely depend on civilian systems. Personnel and equipment movements use transport infrastructure, a significant part of which is operated for commercial purposes. Communications rely on digital networks and equipment whose uses are often shared. Energy, food, and health supplies mobilize businesses and civil administrations.

This interdependence means that significant disruption of civilian functions can affect a State's defense capacity, even when its armed forces remain directly operational. Infrastructure protection and the continuity of essential services therefore become elements of strategic preparation.

NATO bases this approach on Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which provides for the maintenance and development of the individual and collective resistance capabilities of the Allies. Civilian preparedness relies on three functions: continuity of public powers, maintenance of essential services to the population, and support of the civilian sector for military operations. This doctrine establishes a direct link between national resilience, deterrence, and collective defense[18].

Resilience also has a deterrent dimension. When a potential adversary believes that a company has significant protective, substitutive, and recovery capabilities, the expected benefits of a disruption may be reduced. However, this relationship should not be interpreted as a guarantee: resilience can help reduce certain vulnerabilities without necessarily preventing hostile action.

Hybrid threats reinforce the importance of this preparedness. Cyberattacks, sabotage, and manipulation operations can target civilian functions with the aim of disrupting collective life or

[18] NATO, 2026, *Resilience, Civil Sector Preparedness and Article 3*, https://www.nato.int/fr/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/resilience-civil-preparedness-and-article-3

weakening trust in institutions. The response requires coordination between security services, administrations, infrastructure operators, and economic actors.

However, resilience must not lead to a general militarization of society. Civilian functions retain their own purposes, and cooperation with defense institutions must respect the legal responsibilities of each actor. Civil-military preparedness is a coordination tool, not a principle of systematically subordinating social activities to military needs.

The European Union has also integrated this dimension into its strategy for a preparedness union. This strategy notably includes exercises involving civilian and military actors, better consideration of dual uses of infrastructure, and enhanced cooperation with NATO. It is based on an approach involving all administrations and society[19].

France has undergone a similar evolution. The update of the 2025 National Strategic Review makes resilience a component of preparedness for major crises and hybrid threats. It combines the continuity of vital functions, the mobilization of economic actors, and citizen participation in a broader conception of national security[20].

The refocusing of the National Resilience Strategy, decided in June 2025, is based on two priorities: preserving the vital functions of collective life and making every citizen an actor in their own resilience and that of the nation. These priorities have been broken down into eleven operational actions, according to the SGDSN presentation[21].

In July 2026, a new Interministerial Committee for National Resilience notably adopted guidelines regarding securing strategic supplies, preparing for a major power outage, and mobilizing citizen engagement. These decisions demonstrate a commitment to translating resilience objectives into operational measures[22].

The main difficulty lies in moving from doctrine to actual capacity. The existence of a national strategy does not guarantee that actors have the necessary resources, skills, and procedures. Resilience must be tested through exercises, assessed using indicators, and adapted to lessons learned from crises.

It thus constitutes a dimension of national security that cannot be reduced to a discourse about unity or mobilization. It requires material capacities, clearly defined responsibilities, and sustainable institutional cooperation.

VIII. Rebuilding after the crisis: learning, adaptation, and transformation

Resilience does not end with the disappearance of immediate danger. Crises can produce economic, social, and institutional consequences that persist for several years. Infrastructure

---

[19] European Commission & High Representative, 2025, *European Strategy for a Union of Preparation*, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025JC0130

[20] SGDSN, 2025, *National Strategic Review 2025*, https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/publications/revue-nationale-strategique-2025

[21] SGDSN, 2025, *Local authorities: better understanding the national resilience strategy*, https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/publications/collectivites-territoriales-mieux-connaitre-la-strategie-nationale-de-resilience

[22] SGDSN, 2026, *Strengthening the country's resilience to increased risks and threats*, https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/publications/renforcer-la-resilience-du-pays-face-lamplification-des-risques-et-des-menaces

must be repaired, activities reorganized, populations supported, and public capacities rebuilt. Recovery therefore constitutes a strategic phase in its own right.

Reconstruction first raises a question of prioritization. Resources available after a crisis are often limited, while needs can be considerable. Authorities must determine which functions to restore first, which populations to protect, and the investments necessary to prevent reoccurrence of damage. These decisions can have lasting consequences on resource distribution and territorial trajectories.

A reconstruction exclusively based on returning to the previous situation can reproduce the vulnerabilities revealed by the crisis. Bringing infrastructure back into service without changing its protection conditions can allow for rapid recovery while maintaining significant exposure to future disruptions.

The *Build Back Better* principle, integrated into the Sendai Framework, is based on the idea that recovery and rebuilding phases should be used to strengthen prevention and reduce future risks. It is not simply about rebuilding more, but about rebuilding under safer conditions better suited to identified vulnerabilities[23].

This approach involves complex trade-offs. Populations may wish to quickly return to their usual housing, activities, and infrastructure. However, authorities may consider that certain settlements or practices present too high a risk. Reconstruction must then combine security, social continuity, financial constraints, and participation of the affected populations.

Institutional learning constitutes a second dimension. Crises allow observation of the actual performance of preparedness mechanisms. They sometimes reveal coordination difficulties, communication shortcomings, or dependencies that had not been properly identified. Their analysis should allow for correcting procedures and improving future capacities.

Feedback plays an essential role here. They must examine the decisions made, the information available, the responsibilities exercised, and the observed consequences. Their goal should not be exclusively to look for individual faults, but to understand the organizational mechanisms that facilitated or complicated the response.

This approach requires an institutional capacity to recognize errors. Organizations that systematically seek to present their decisions as optimal may face difficulties in identifying necessary improvements. Resilience therefore requires an administrative culture in which critical evaluation contributes to the quality of public action.

Transformation can also concern the relationships between institutions and citizens. A crisis can reveal difficulties in accessing information, inequalities in protection, or deficiencies in local participation. Reconstruction policies can then become an opportunity to strengthen consultation mechanisms and better integrate the needs of the population.

Nevertheless, a systematically positive conception of crises should be avoided. Major disruptions cause human, economic, and social losses that cannot be justified by the learning opportunities they open. Resilience must not lead to presenting disasters as desirable opportunities.

The goal is rather to reduce harm and, when the crisis occurs despite preventive measures, to use the lessons learned to avoid its recurrence. Transformation is a component of resilience when it effectively improves protection and collective capacities.

---

[23] UNDRR, 2015, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030

Reconstruction must finally integrate long-term social effects. Restoring infrastructure does not necessarily mean that households have regained their income, housing, or solidarity networks. A resilience assessment limited to recommissioning equipment could therefore underestimate the human consequences of the crisis.

Resilience thus requires considering recovery as a material, institutional, and social process. Its success depends on the ability to restore essential functions while correcting vulnerabilities that have worsened the consequences of the disruption.

IX. Societal resilience by 2035: three possible trajectories

The evolution of societal resilience over the next decade will depend on technological, economic, environmental, and geopolitical transformations, but also on decisions made by states and other collective actors. Risks will not mechanically determine response capacities. Societies exposed to comparable disruptions may experience different trajectories depending on their infrastructures, institutions, and solidarity mechanisms.

A first trajectory would correspond to a gradual strengthening of integrated resilience. In this configuration, States would develop a more precise understanding of interdependencies, improve the continuity of essential functions, and invest in preparing populations. Local authorities, businesses, and associations would be associated with regular cooperation mechanisms. The exercises would help identify shortcomings and adapt procedures.

This trajectory would not eliminate crises but could reduce certain consequences and accelerate recovery. It would also require special attention to vulnerable populations to prevent resilience gains from remaining concentrated in territories or organizations with the largest resources.

A second trajectory would correspond to technically strengthened but socially differentiated resilience. States and large companies could improve the protection of certain infrastructures, while precarious households, small organizations, and territories with limited means would remain insufficiently prepared. The continuity of economic functions could then progress without population protection experiencing an equivalent improvement.

This configuration would present a particular risk: resilience could be assessed mainly based on technical indicators, while the social consequences of crises would remain significant. Differences in resources could widen disparities between populations and territories.

A third trajectory would correspond to an accumulation of systemic vulnerabilities. Interdependencies would continue to intensify without adequate progress in protection and substitution arrangements. Crises could then produce cascading effects that are more difficult to control. Budgetary constraints, geopolitical tensions, and institutional distrust would complicate the coordination of responses.

This trajectory is not a certain forecast. It represents a risk scenario that allows identifying the possible consequences of insufficient preparation. It highlights the importance of preventive investments and the ability to maintain cooperation between public and private actors.

These three configurations are not necessarily exclusive. A single state may have robust energy infrastructure while facing difficulties in health preparedness or protecting certain territories. Resilience capacities can also improve in some sectors and deteriorate in others.

The assessment must therefore be based on several dimensions. The availability of essential services, recovery times, relief capacities, population preparedness, protection of vulnerable groups, and the quality of institutional coordination are complementary indicators.

By 2035, the main challenge will not be to guarantee the absence of disruptions, but to reduce their capacity to sustainably disrupt society. Resilience must be considered a permanent public policy, integrated into investments, territorial planning, industrial strategies, and social protection mechanisms.

X. The conditions for a public strategy for societal resilience

A societal resilience strategy must start from a simple principle: crisis preparedness cannot be separated from the ordinary functioning of institutions. The capacities needed in emergency situations are built mainly before disruption, through investments, skills, procedures, and cooperative relationships.

The first priority is to improve risk awareness. Authorities must have up-to-date assessments of territorial exposure, infrastructure vulnerabilities, and interdependencies between essential functions. These assessments must integrate natural, technological, health, economic, and security risks, as well as the possible consequences of their combination.

The second priority concerns the continuity of vital functions. Administrations and operators must identify essential activities, plan alternative capacities, and organize degraded operating procedures. Plans must be regularly tested to verify their relevance under conditions close to those of a real crisis.

The third priority concerns the diversification of critical dependencies. Supplies, infrastructure, and essential skills must be examined to identify excessive concentrations. Responses may include alternative suppliers, stocks, national production capacities, or international cooperation mechanisms. Their choice should be based on an assessment of costs and risks rather than an undifferentiated goal of self-sufficiency.

The fourth priority concerns preparing populations. Information campaigns, exercises, training, and alert systems must enable citizens to understand the main risks and appropriate behaviors. This preparation must be accessible to different audiences and accompanied by support measures for people with limited resources.

The fifth priority concerns territorial cooperation. Local authorities must have the means and information necessary to organize the local response. Relations between administrations, economic operators, associations, and emergency services must be prepared before crises. Territorial proximity is an advantage when it allows for the rapid identification of needs and the mobilization of available resources.

The sixth priority concerns institutional trust. Authorities must develop clear, transparent communication adapted to uncertainties. Recognizing difficulties, explaining arbitrations, and the existence of control mechanisms help maintain the legitimacy of decisions. Democratic resilience requires that the effectiveness of the response is not sought at the expense of fundamental safeguards.

The seventh priority concerns learning. Real exercises and crises must be subject to structured feedback, followed by corrective decisions. Lessons must be shared among institutions and

integrated into planning procedures. The ability to change organizations is an essential dimension of resilience.

Finally, the eighth priority concerns evaluation. Resilience policies must have indicators to assess their effectiveness. Service recovery times, availability of emergency equipment, frequency of exercises, coverage of alert systems, and protection of vulnerable populations can contribute to this evaluation.

However, these indicators should not be interpreted in isolation. A reduction in the average recovery time may mask persistent difficulties in certain territories. An increase in the number of trained individuals does not necessarily guarantee effective control of protective behaviors. The evaluation must therefore combine quantitative data, operational exercises, and qualitative analyses.

France already has a strategic framework to develop this approach. The National Resilience Strategy, civil security planning, business continuity schemes, and European guidelines are complementary instruments. Their effectiveness will depend on their articulation and their translation into truly mobilizable capacities.

Societal resilience must thus become a cross-cutting criterion of public action. Decisions related to infrastructure, spatial planning, health, education, or supply must take into account the possible consequences of a major disruption. This approach does not mean that every policy should be organized exclusively around crises. It rather assumes that foreseeable vulnerabilities are taken into account before they cause damage.

Preparedness represents an immediate cost, while its benefits often appear in the form of avoided losses. This characteristic can make investments difficult to justify politically when no crisis occurs. Yet, the absence of disruption during a given period does not prove the uselessness of prevention measures.

The governance challenge is therefore to maintain regular preparedness efforts despite uncertainty about the date, nature, and intensity of future crises.

Conclusion: Making resilience a sustainable collective capacity

Societal resilience is an essential dimension of the security and stability of contemporary states. It is not limited to the resistance of infrastructure, nor to the efficiency of administrations, nor to the spontaneous mobilization of populations. It results from the articulation between material capacities, credible institutions, social solidarities, and mechanisms to anticipate, absorb, and overcome disruptions.

Economic, technological, and geopolitical transformations have strengthened the interdependencies between the essential functions of collective life. Energy, digital, health, food, and logistics systems can no longer be considered independently of each other. A localized failure can produce widespread consequences when substitution mechanisms are insufficient or dependencies have not been properly identified.

This reality requires an evolution of public preparedness. Prevention remains essential, but it cannot guarantee the absence of crises. States must also develop capacities for degraded functioning, coordination, and recovery. The continuity of vital functions thus constitutes a fundamental component of national security.

The social dimension of resilience is just as important. Populations do not have the same resources to cope with disruptions. Economic inequalities, housing difficulties, isolation, and territorial divides can increase the consequences of crises. A resilience strategy that ignores these differences risks preserving certain infrastructures while leaving significant human vulnerabilities to persist.

Institutional trust and solidarity also contribute to collective responsiveness. Citizens must be able to understand decisions, access reliable information, and participate in protection mechanisms. However, resilience cannot be equated with obedience or the absence of challenge. In a democratic society, transparency, decision control, and the ability to correct mistakes are long-term resources.

The developments undertaken by the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, and France demonstrate a growing recognition of these challenges. The Sendai Framework, NATO's civilian resilience requirements, the European strategy for a preparedness union, and the French National Resilience Strategy converge towards an approach in which preparedness goes beyond specialized services alone to involve society as a whole.

However, this doctrinal convergence does not guarantee operational effectiveness. Strategies must be translated into investments, exercises, continuity procedures, and evaluation mechanisms. Resilience cannot be proclaimed: it must be built, proven, and regularly adapted.

By 2035, companies will face significant trade-offs between economic efficiency, supply security, climate adaptation, social protection, and institutional continuity. The quality of these trade-offs will influence their ability to limit the consequences of crises and preserve their essential functions.

The goal should not be to seek impossible invulnerability, nor to see any disruption as a sign of collective failure. A resilient society can experience severe crises. What sets it apart lies in its ability to reduce avoidable harm, protect exposed people, maintain legitimate institutions, and rebuild capacities without systematically reproducing previous vulnerabilities.

Societal resilience is therefore not measured by the absence of crises, but by the ability of a political community to continue to exist, to protect its members, and to decide collectively when its ordinary operating conditions are deeply disrupted. In this respect, it is much more than a risk management objective: **it is a condition for the effective sovereignty of states, democratic continuity, and the capacity of societies to preserve their collective future.**