Resilience Barometer: countering malign foreign interference

**Methodology and results
of a pilot study in Moldova**

March 2024

About Resilience Barometer

This document presents the methodology and selected results of a survey conducted by Chatham House in cooperation with our Moldovan partner, WatchDog.MD. The purpose of the survey was to test a new methodology for measuring resilience against foreign encroachment. This will inform our efforts developing further our 'Resilience Barometer' - a tool that could be used by any country aiming to assess its resilience and improve it. We intend for the tool to provide guidance for government and civil society in identifying polices to counter malign threats and boost resilience.

The Resilience Barometer is designed to:

- measure internal resilience against foreign malign influence;

- measure the evolution of individual countries in terms of their internal resilience over time;

- compare resilience between countries;

- enable learning about what is effective in countering foreign encroachment.

Chatham House has been researching the topic of the resilience of societies experiencing Russian malign interference since 2017. We conducted case studies in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. The initial focus was to understand how hostile powers like Russia exert coercive influence and to map the level of vulnerability. We have focused on malign measures that take place below the threshold of direct military conflict. These have in the past been termed 'hybrid measures'. We approach them as part of the full-spectrum warfare that Russia deploys to achieve its objectives. They include, among others: economic pressure, information operations, cyber attacks, internal destabilisation, election interference, corruption and use of proxy groups.

The current phase of research is aimed at advancing our understanding of the constituent parts of a country's resilience and what enables it to successfully resist foreign pressure.

We decided to test the approach described below in Moldova. The country is an interesting case, because Russia invests significant resources in destabilising the national government and subverting its integration with the EU, and it deployed various interference tactics during Moldova's local elections (in October 2023). At the same time, the government of Moldova took active steps to counter such interference and strengthen the country's resilience. The present analysis focuses solely on Russian interference.

Definitions

Resilience – is defined as the capacity of a state and its society to exercise their sovereign powers when facing attempts to exert hostile influence, to prepare for disruption, to recover from shocks, to adapt, and to grow from a disruptive experience.

We considered *foreign encroachment* by Russia and analysed how Russia weaponizes domestic vulnerabilities to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

Vulnerability is the state of susceptibility to harm from exposure to stresses associated with malign actors, which emerges in the absence of a capacity to resist, adapt and transform.

About the survey

We applied a quantitative approach (a survey of experts) to capture the quality of resilience. Chatham House's research and extensive literature review provide ample evidence that the whole-of-society approach to understanding and sustaining resilience is the most appropriate framework. We place a premium on the involvement of society, acknowledging that it is an important source of resilience.

The survey captures the quality of resilience across the following five pillars:

1. **Human security**
2. **Social cohesion**
3. **Resilient governance**
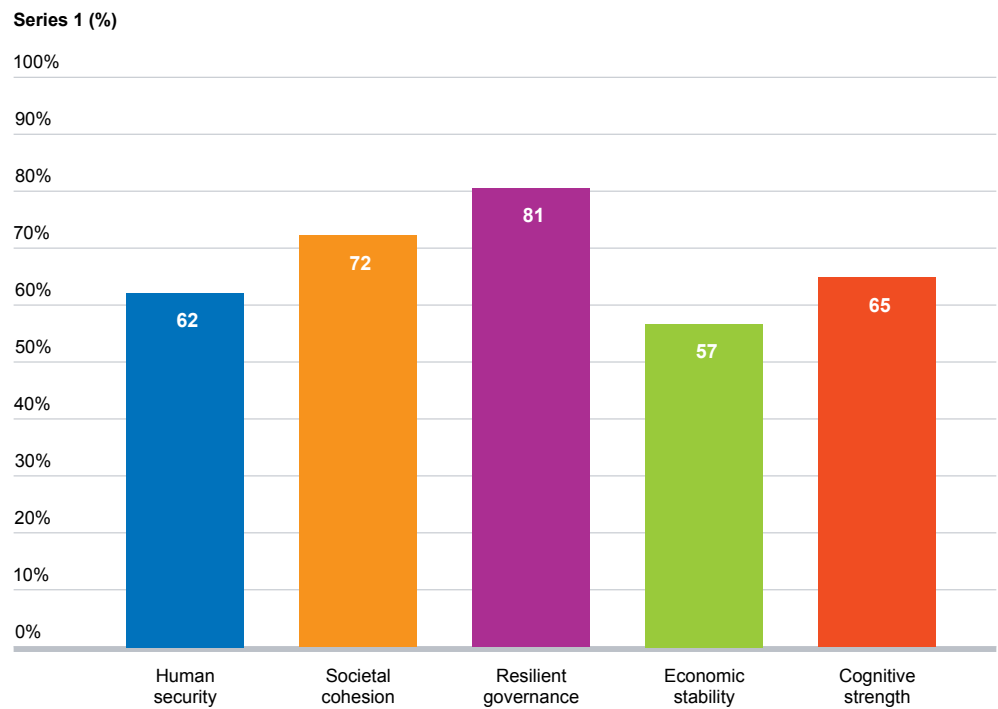4. **Economic agility**
5. **Cognitive strength**

Each pillar is composed of seven indicators that contribute to resilience, making a total of 35 indicators in the Resilience Barometer.

The survey, conducted via SurveyMonkey in English and made up of 48 questions, was circulated to 83 experts. Of these, 37 experts completed the survey (a response rate of 44 per cent). The pilot survey was conducted in November-December 2023.

The research group selected a pool of Moldovan and international experts. We aimed to include respondents who have expertise in each pillar of resilience, and we succeeded in having each pillar well-represented.

Prior to answering the questions, the participants self-assessed their level of expertise, and were then directed to only answer the sections of the survey that corresponded to their expertise. For each pillar of resilience, over 50% of the experts self-attributed knowledge. There was a slight overrepresentation for governance (80%) and societal cohesion (72%) as compared to three other pillars.

Table 1: Survey respondents by area of expertise (self-assessment)

Series 1 (%)

Area	Percentage
Human security	62
Societal cohesion	72
Resilient governance	81
Economic stability	57
Cognitive strength	65

All questions were ranking questions, on a scale from 0 to 5. We also included an open-ended question about a specific measure that contributes to resilience for each pillar. This enabled the participants to identify areas that the research team might have missed. The results for each indicator are presented as weighted averages, and total pillar scores are average scores.

Link to the full survey:
https://uk.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-_2BQQhXjaBaHyHuN1Yc2GL0A_3D_3D/

Graph 1: How resilient is Moldova to foreign encroachment across key pillars?
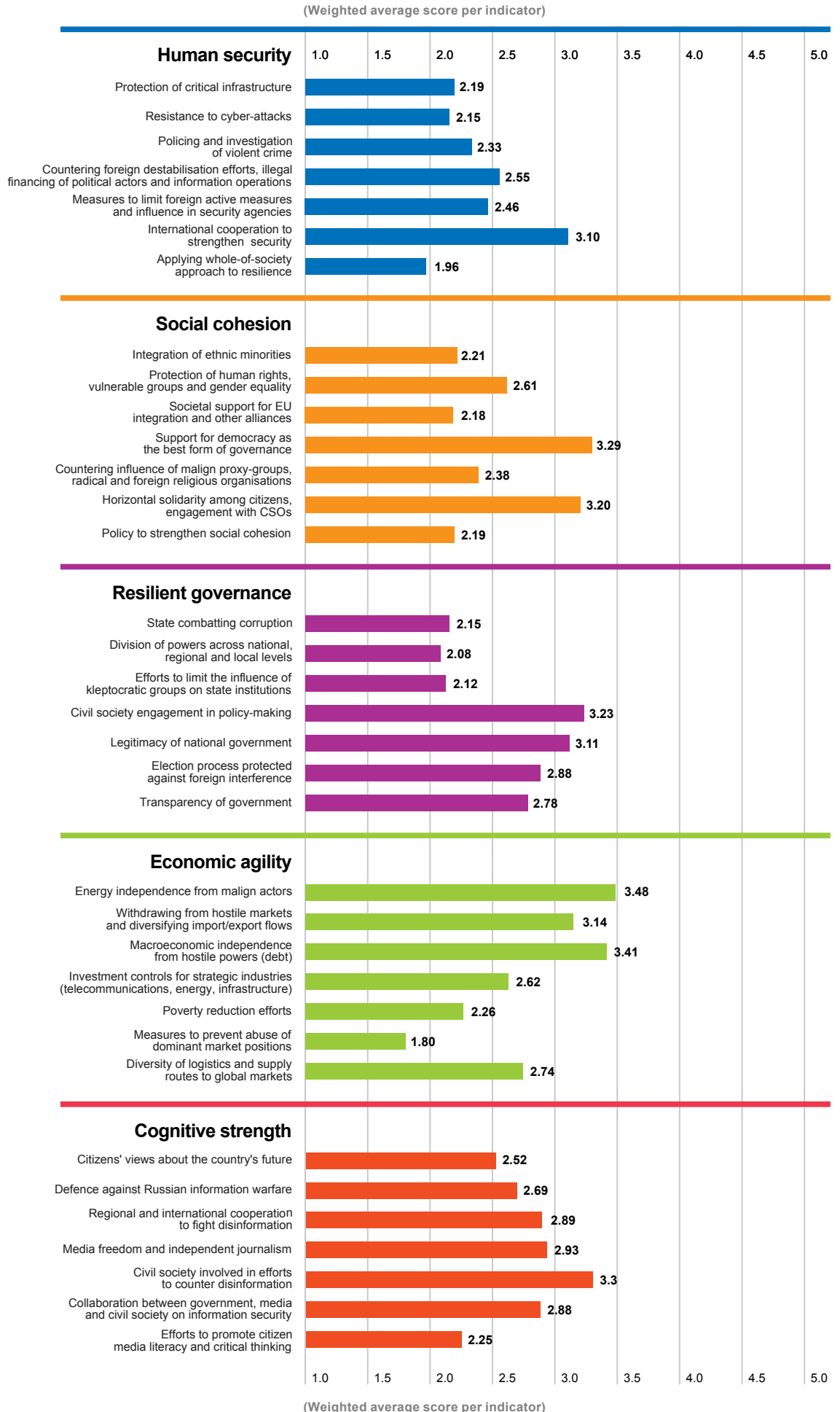
*NOTE: The graph pictured above is on a scale of from 0 to 5.
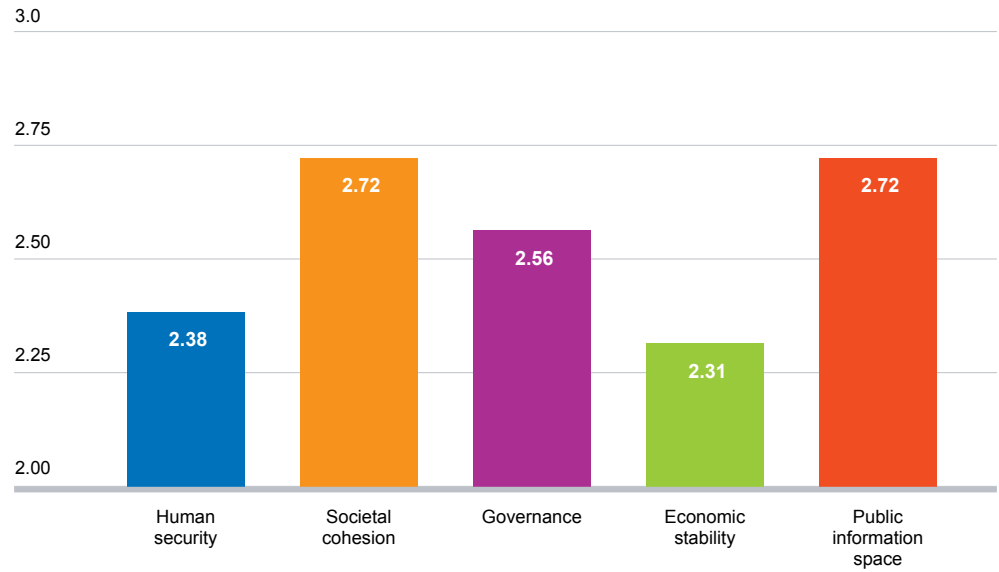The graph pictured below is on a scale from 2 to 3.*

Graph 2: Pillars of resilience

NOTE: 1 means less resilient and 5 means maximum resilience.

(Weighted average score per indicator)

Human security

Indicator	Score
Protection of critical infrastructure	2.19
Resistance to cyber-attacks	2.15
Policing and investigation of violent crime	2.33
Countering foreign destabilisation efforts, illegal financing of political actors and information operations	2.55
Measures to limit foreign active measures and influence in security agencies	2.46
International cooperation to strengthen security	3.10
Applying whole-of-society approach to resilience	1.96

Social cohesion

Indicator	Score
Integration of ethnic minorities	2.21
Protection of human rights, vulnerable groups and gender equality	2.61
Societal support for EU integration and other alliances	2.18
Support for democracy as the best form of governance	3.29
Countering influence of malign proxy-groups, radical and foreign religious organisations	2.38
Horizontal solidarity among citizens, engagement with CSOs	3.20
Policy to strengthen social cohesion	2.19

Resilient governance

Indicator	Score
State combatting corruption	2.15
Division of powers across national, regional and local levels	2.08
Efforts to limit the influence of kleptocratic groups on state institutions	2.12
Civil society engagement in policy-making	3.23
Legitimacy of national government	3.11
Election process protected against foreign interference	2.88
Transparency of government	2.78

Economic agility

Indicator	Score
Energy independence from malign actors	3.48
Withdrawing from hostile markets and diversifying import/export flows	3.14
Macroeconomic independence from hostile powers (debt)	3.41
Investment controls for strategic industries (telecommunications, energy, infrastructure)	2.62
Poverty reduction efforts	2.26
Measures to prevent abuse of dominant market positions	1.80
Diversity of logistics and supply routes to global markets	2.74

Cognitive strength

Indicator	Score
Citizens' views about the country's future	2.52
Defence against Russian information warfare	2.69
Regional and international cooperation to fight disinformation	2.89
Media freedom and independent journalism	2.93
Civil society involved in efforts to counter disinformation	3.3
Collaboration between government, media and civil society on information security	2.88
Efforts to promote citizen media literacy and critical thinking	2.25

(Weighted average score per indicator)

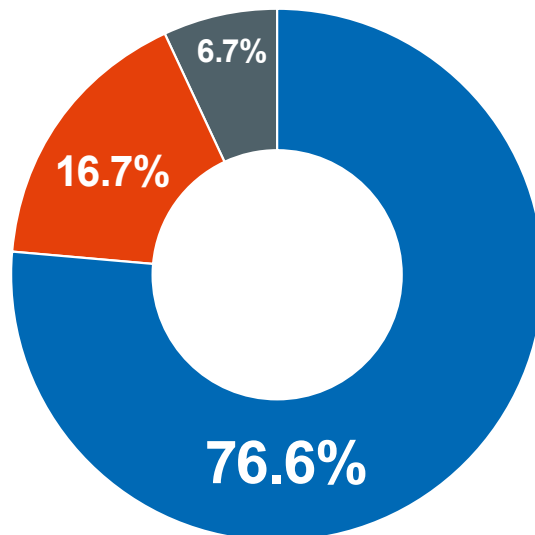## Graph 3: Strength of malign influence in Moldova by domain

Weighted average

NOTE: Survery was originally taken on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning low level of influence and 5 meaning high level of influence.

Graph 4: Is Moldova becoming more resilient against malign Russian interference?

■ **Yes** ■ **No** ■ **Don't know**

Limitations

The current assessment of resilience is based solely on the expert survey. It offers a qualitative assessment of perceived resilience and has a degree of bias. Respondents who self-assessed their level of expertise may not always answer truthfully or may not fully understand the questions being asked. For example, responses to the question '*What is the level of societal support for democratic values, where democracy is viewed as the most desirable system of governance*?' could be distorted depending on the interpretation of democracy in Moldovan society.

There is also the limitation of access to information. The sample of respondents included only independent, non-governmental experts, who might have lacked access to information, especially related to the real influence of malign actors on the law-enforcement agencies and their penetration of them or the influence of kleptocratic groups on formal politics.

The survey was also administered in quite a short period, and the research team felt it could have benefited from a longer response period and more precise targeting of experts. No incentive was provided to the respondents.

Those limitations could be mitigated in the future by the following steps:

- More careful composition of the sample by pre-identifying experts according to their expertise for each pillar of resilience. The sample should include an equal number of experts for each pillar, otherwise there will be gaps in the results.

- Inclusion of respondents from government agencies, who have access to information and implement the relevant policies. For example, a representative from the newly created Moldovan Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation. This could also increase the chances of the tool being used by creating a sense of ownership.

- Provide explanatory notes for each indicator. For example, elaborate what 'the whole of society approach to resilience' means.

- Complement the expert survey with quantitative data from relevant global surveys. This will help offset expert bias by bringing together more points of relevant information. These might include attitude/opinion surveys, as well as the EBRD/World Bank Business Enterprise Performance, National Cyber Security Index, Gallup Law and Order Index, CAF World Giving Index, etc. This data will show key trends or changes over time for indicators that are related to resilience.

- Finally, accompany the expert survey results for each pillar with a short descriptive text explaining key trends and elaborating on changes of policies that either support or corrode resilience.

The methodology of the Resilience Barometer and the results for Moldova were presented and discussed at the Chatham House research round table on 5 December, 2023.

About the Authors

Orysia Lutsevych is deputy director of the Russia and Eurasia Programme and head of the Ukraine Forum at Chatham House. Orysia's research focuses on social change, the role of civil society in democratic transition in Eastern Europe and, most recently, democratic resilience to foreign encroachment. She is the author of several Chatham House research publications, including Giving civil society a stake in Ukraine's recovery: how government, citizens and donors can work together to embed trust in reconstruction (2023) and Resilient Ukraine: Safeguarding Society from Russian Aggression (with Mathieu Boulègue, 2020). Her media work includes contributions for the BBC, CNN, the Guardian, The Times, the Financial Times and the New York Times.

Tatiana Cojocari is a sociologist and disinformation expert at Chişinău-based think tank WatchDog.MD Community. She wrote a PhD thesis on Russian religious diplomacy in Eastern European countries. Her previous roles include: Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Romanian Centre for Russian Studies, working on the subject of Transnistria; Fulbright Scholar at Georgetown University; and Think Visegrád Fellow at the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) in Warsaw. Her main research interests are: political sociology; Russian interference in Eastern European countries' foreign policy; and conflict studies.

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Acknowledgements

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