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# I INTRODUCTION

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The institutions of Western democracies have not been as robust as expected in the face of the economic and political volatility of the past decade. The checks and balances of democratic systems have proven insufficient as economic turbulence has gone hand in hand with a polarization of society and with the emergence of populist regimes. Democracy itself seems to be on the defensive.<sup>1</sup> It seems more important than ever to further our understanding on the vulnerabilities of modern society and how its institutions can be affected by increasing political pressures. In response to these trends, there has been an increasing interest in the resilience of society to current and future challenges in various governmental reports, but also in scholarly research.<sup>2</sup>

This handbook is intended to serve as a contribution to the analysis of political vulnerabilities and resilience in Finland. The study is intended to raise awareness and debate on the dynamics and vulnerabilities of our society so that we can continue to develop the resilience of our institutions in a volatile world. Previous studies of resilience in Finnish society have largely focused on the functioning of public authorities – and have in many cases reflected an internal perspective to developing resilience by government.<sup>3</sup> This handbook seeks to take an external perspective to the dynamics of the development of key elements of Finnish society. It identifies vulnerabilities and strengths in key areas of Finnish society and seeks to consider them from the perspective of a critical outside observer.

Finland has enjoyed decades of stable development and may appear as a prime model of the Nordic welfare state. However, this study has originated in the observation of apparent contradictions in Finnish policies and a perceived lack of transparency of Finnish policy processes. Finnish policies and political processes have been subject to varying degrees of external influence – especially during the cold war period. Finland also has a corporatist history as regards economic and industrial structures that has affected legislative and domestic policy processes<sup>4</sup>.

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1 “Democracy’s Retreat”, *The Economist*, 51-53; see also Kurlantzick, *Democracy in Retreat*.

2 Chandler, *Resilience: The Governance of Complexity*

3 Ministry of Finance, “Uudistuva, vakaa ja kestävä yhteiskunta, Valtiovarainministeriön virkamiespuheenvuoro”.

4 Lehto, “Elinkeinoelämän kelkka kääntyi täysin.”

This handbook is written for persons who are interested in Finland in a professional capacity – foreigners and Finns alike. The book is intended to give a snapshot of Finland behind the sometimes overly simplified headlines and statistics. The book is not intended as a comprehensive introduction to Finnish society; nor is it intended to discuss Finnish phenomena at an introductory level only. Instead, it will endeavour to make selected reviews of social, economic and political dynamics of our society for the reader to have a better understanding of the workings of our country.

As an introduction, the handbook first seeks to give appropriate context to assessing Finnish society in terms of vulnerability and resilience. Finland has excelled in international rankings and in statistics related to key elements of developed societies, such as educational matters, safety and general contentment of the population. The handbook looks beyond these statistics and seeks to provide relevant context for them to present a fuller picture of Finnish society, before discussing the concept of resilience in a Finnish context. The handbook then turns to different aspects of society and, in separate chapters, considers the vulnerability and resilience of the Finnish economy, the political system, the development of the welfare state, the security environment and the media and information environments. The handbook then provides short case studies regarding external hybrid influencing in Finland (vulnerability) and the management of the Covid-19 crisis (resilience). The concluding chapters of the handbook include a discussion on how current trends are affecting the path of Finnish society and contemplates possible future scenarios for the country before brief concluding remarks. In this respect, the handbook emphasizes the importance of increased awareness of the drivers underlying societal cohesion and calls for a better understanding of the elements that support societal resilience in rapidly evolving global environment. The study is a joint project of researchers from different academic institutions in Finland with a common interest in promoting a better understanding of the dynamics of Finnish society. The handbook has been published by the University of Jyväskylä.

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