We-ID
Identities – Migration – Democracy

Report

Mind map of existing models on
identity, belonging, cohesion, resilience and democracy

IPHS-BAS
Antoaneta Hristova (PI)
Diana Bakalova
Ilina Nacheva
Tsvetelina Tsvetanova
Valentina Dolmova

We-ID deliverable D5.1.

August 2025

Funded by
the European Union

Suggested citation:

Hristova, Antoaneta; Bakalova, Diana; Nacheva, Ilina; Tsvetanova, Tsvetelina; Dolmova, Valentina (2025). Report. We-ID deliverables. University of Göttingen. Available at: www.uni-goettingen.de/We-ID

Report

EU-Programme
HORIZON.2.2 - Culture, creativity and inclusive society Main Programme
HORIZON.2.2.1 - Democracy and Governance

Topic
HORIZON-CL2-2024-DEMOCRACY-01-04 - The interrelation between social, cultural and political identities, as well as the sense of belonging, and democracies
Grant agreement ID: 101177925, DOI 10.3030/101177925

Dissemination Level	Public (PU)
Work Package	WP5 Identity, belonging, cohesion and democracy in the context of a front-line country (IPHS-BAS); WP5
Deliverables No	D5.1
Version	V1.0
Submission Date	29.8.2025
Due Date	29.8.2025

Funded by the European Union

We-ID Identities - Migration - Democracy is a three-year project (2025-2028) that analyses the transformation of individual and collective identities, social cohesion and democracy in the midst of migration, demographic change and current crises in Europe. The consortium includes eight partners: Georg August University of Göttingen, the University of St Andrews in Scotland, the Bocconi University, the Institute for the Study of Population and Human Studies (Bulgaria), the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar (Croatia), Max Planck Society (Population Europe), the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and The Civics Innovation Hub.

Website: https://www.uni-goettingen.de/We-ID

The We-ID project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the grant agreement No. 101177925.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the European Research Executive Agency, or their affiliated institutions. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Publication information:

[1] An AI tool (ChatGPT 5.0) was used for proofreading of text of the report

Content

Figures

1. Control Sheet

Version History			
Version	**Date**	**Modified by**	**Summary of Changes**
D5.1. Report V1.0	29.08.2025		Initial Version

2. List of Participants

Participant No.	Participant Organisation Name	Country
1 (Coordinator)	University of Goettingen (UGOE)	Germany
2	Bocconi University (UB)	Italy
3	University of St. Andrews (USTAN)	Great Britain
4	Institute for Population and Human Studies (IPHS)	Bulgaria
5	Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar (IPI)	Croatia
6	Max Planck Society (MPG)/Population Europe	Germany
7	Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)	IGO, Sweden
8	THE CIVICS Innovation Hub (CIVICS)	Germany

3. Objectives

The European Union's promise of prosperity and security is based on the principle of "unity in diversity" and the guarantee of fundamental freedoms, rights and democratic participation of its citizens. The vast majority of EU citizens share these values. At the same time, democracies are in crisis. Populist parties are fuelling fears and spreading the narrative that migration leads to a loss of identity. There is no doubt that migration always raises the question of identity and belonging. How do we organize integration and participation in such a way that cohesion is created despite diverse identities? The project "Identities - Migration - Democracy" (We-ID) is therefore concerned with the transformation of individual and collective identities, social and territorial cohesion and democracy under the conditions of demographic change, particularly with regard to migration and growing population diversity. We-ID follows an innovative research path by a) analysing the impact of migration on identities, belonging, cohesion and democracy, taking into account both the impact on host communities and the changes in the identities of migrants and their descendants, and b) elaborating

the interrelationship between identities, cohesion, resilience and democracy. In addition to quantitative data analysis, we will use qualitative methods at the local level (e.g. pilot study in a border region, content analysis, case studies) to look for factors that strengthen resilient democratic communities. By consistently pursuing a transdisciplinary approach within our Policy, Advocacy and Research Lab (We-PARL) throughout the project, we will create a platform for mutual learning between different stakeholders from the European to the local level, while at the same time contributing to evidence-based and thoroughly discussed policy recommendations. In addition, based on our findings, we will develop materials such as toolboxes that can be used by practitioners and local actors (We-SCOUTS).

In detail, We-ID pursues the following objectives:

Objective 1: Revise and evaluate the relevant conceptual issues concerning identities, belonging and cohesion, and establish their relationship with resilience and democracy, with a particular emphasis on migration.

Objective 2: Map trends and patterns of identities, belonging and cohesion together with their drivers, including geographic differences, gender, age and education, as well as immigrant status and employment.

Objective 3: Investigate how the social identities and political participation of immigrants and their descendants differ across European countries, what factors influence identity and participation of immigrants, and what assumptions can be made for the future.

Objective 4: Extending objectives 2 and 3 through a regional pilot study in a Bulgarian border region. To analyse, how migration flows affect both the migrant communities themselves and their identities, and the communities exposed to new and large-scale immigration.

Objective 5: Development of an inclusive concept for resilient democratic communities (ReDeCos), through the identification (five case studies) of local factors that hinder or strengthen belonging.

Objective 6: In addition, development of a Civic Competences Toolbox (CCT) for local actors (We-SCOUTS) equipped with civic skills and competences to support local communities, moderate conflicts and controversies and create spaces for participation.

Objective 7: Establish the We-PARL - Policy, Advocacy and Research Lab - transdisciplinary platform, the tool which supports all thematic research areas foreseen in the project.

Objective 8: To disseminate We-ID findings, drawing on the outcomes and findings from the We-PARL, communicating them to a broader audience.

Objective 9: The project will identify factors at both national and local level that hinder social and political participation and at the same time develop policy recommendations on how to achieve equality and mitigate discrimination against women, LGBTIQ+ and ethnic minorities.

4. Main Purpose of the Deliverable

The purpose of this deliverable is to map and synthesize existing models of identity, belonging, cohesion, resilience, and democracy through a structured mind map. This will provide a shared conceptual foundation for the We-ID project, highlight overlaps and gaps across disciplines, and guide the project's analytical, methodological, and policy-oriented work.

5. Operational Capacities

As laid out in the grant agreement, IPHS-BAS contributes to the We-ID project through its Department of Psychology, which is structured into four sections. The department has longstanding expertise in social, developmental, and applied psychology, with a strong focus on identity, belonging, and social cohesion. IPHS-BAS has assigned a full-time researchers to coordinate its contribution to the project. The IPHS-Bas project team has solid expertise in social and health psychology, project management, and European collaborative research, with prior experience in studies on migration, resilience, and intercultural dialogue. Their work will be supported by a team of doctoral researchers and early-career scholars who are trained in qualitative and quantitative methods, psychological assessment, and survey research.

For dissemination and communication of psychology-related outputs, IPHS-BAS draws on its academic journal Psychological Research (in the Balkans), as well as the National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers in Social Sciences. Both serve as channels for promoting results among academic peers and early-career scholars. In addition, IPHS-BAS maintains a bilingual institutional website and an active seminar series, such as the April 2025 event "Creativity in the Focus of Psychology", which provide platforms to engage with the broader public and stakeholders.

The psychology team also benefits from the Institute's participation in European networks such as EFPA, which enhances its operational capacity for collaboration and dissemination at the European level. Members of the department have presented project-related topics at international conferences such as the European Congress of Psychology 2025 in Cyprus, ensuring visibility of We-ID within the scientific community.

In addition to these institutional channels, IPHS-BAS is committed to using its own communication platforms, including its website, open-access publications, and social media presence, to maximize the reach of project outputs. A close collaboration has been established between the psychology coordinator at IPHS-BAS and the We-ID dissemination and communication leads to align strategies and ensure consistency in messaging. This effort strengthens the project's ability to connect scientific findings with policy dialogue and societal stakeholders.

6. Mind map

The WE-ID mind map illustrates the dynamic interrelations between key concepts at the core of the project: democracy, resilience, identity, belonging and cohesion. It visualizes how migration-related stress factors—political, institutional, cultural, and economic—interact with identity processes, community and societal resilience, democratic frameworks, and patterns of belonging.

The map depicts both risk pathways, such as conflict, polarization, and ontological insecurity, and protective mechanisms, such as inclusive policies, social trust, and democratic resilience. By connecting these concepts, the WE-ID mind map provides a systemic perspective on how societies manage diversity, adapt to migration pressures, and sustain democratic stability, ultimately determining whether they move towards greater ontological security or face growing insecurity and fragmentation.

Key elements of the WE-ID mind map:

- Stress Factors:
  - Political, institutional, cultural, and economic contexts are shaped by integration and multicultural policies, media framing, and policy–identity (mis)alignment. Therefore, they construct and likely apply pressure to the migrants–locals' relationship.
  - Such stressors create the context in which threat of conflict between locals and migrants becomes possible, in terms of competition for resources, cultural conflict, and threat to cohesion.

- Migrants–Locals Interaction:
  - Purported or actual threats to social stability and identity generate potential conflict.
  - Perceived or actual differences and inequalities potentially lead to a representation crisis, which in its extremes appears as polarization, or even radicalism and xenophobia.

- Democracy:
  - Provides the overarching framework, including satisfaction with institutions and support for the democratic order.
  - Inclusive and responsive democracy reinforces cohesion and resilience, whereas weak or exclusionary democracy promotes insecurity.
  - Functions as a result of strong belonging and as a condition for long-term resilience.

- Belonging (Group and Societal Level):
  - Is a product of perceptual recognition of common identity and inclusive conduct.
  - Enhances social cooperation, democratic orientations, and integration in plural societies.
  - Links identity and resilience to the larger democratic process.
  - Conditional belonging is an issue with risk of exclusion and social marginalisation.

- Identity (Group Identity):
  - Part of the self-derived from group memberships; includes self-definition and self-investment (e.g. group solidarity, satisfaction, centrality) Secure/civic forms are inclusive; narcissistic/ethnic national forms are exclusionary.

- When identity needs (esteem, continuity, meaning, etc.) are obstructed, threats to identity arise.
- Shaped by acculturation strategies (integration vs. assimilation, separation, marginalization) and stress/coping mechanisms.
- Identity dynamics directly affect and is affected by ontological security/insecurity and the sense of belonging.

- Identity Complexity vs. Identity Fusion
  - Low identity complexity or strong identity fusion can polarize relations into rigid “us vs. them” divides, undermining cohesion.
  - When personal and group identities are totally overlapped or fused into rigid in-groups, conflict and insecurity increase.
  - When high identity complexity is embraced, plural identities coexist, supporting resilience, cohesion, and inclusive democracy.

- Cohesion:
  - Defined by interpersonal and social trust, social support and quality of relations, civic participation, openness and legitimacy of institutions.
  - Central to securing systematic and ontological security.
  - Acts as a mediator, facilitating both identity adaptation and resilience.
  - Depending on the values and perceptions held within groups, strong cohesion levels may suppress or even prevent integration in the migrant-locals relationship.

- Resilience (Level of Plasticity):
  - Community level social networks, trust, and cohesion depend upon resilience.
  - It relies on democratic quality, inclusive policies, and responsiveness at the societal level.
  - Low resilience leads to crises of representation, inequalities, and the diffusion of nationalism, xenophobia, or polarization.
  - Strong resilience promotes adaptation, which strengthens democratic stability.

- Systematic and Ontological Security/Insecurity:
  - The final outcome of all interactions.
  - Security is achieved when identity adaptation, high cohesion, belonging, resilience, and democracy reinforce each other simultaneously, leading to stability and trust.
  - Insecurity follows when stressors, conflict, and poor democratic practices undermine identity, belonging, and cohesion, and result in polarization, distrust, and fragmentation of society.

Interdependence is very high for belonging, identity, cohesion, resilience, and democracy. Their balance determines whether societies facing migration-related stress are able to achieve ontological security and democratic stability or fall into insecurity and fragmentation.

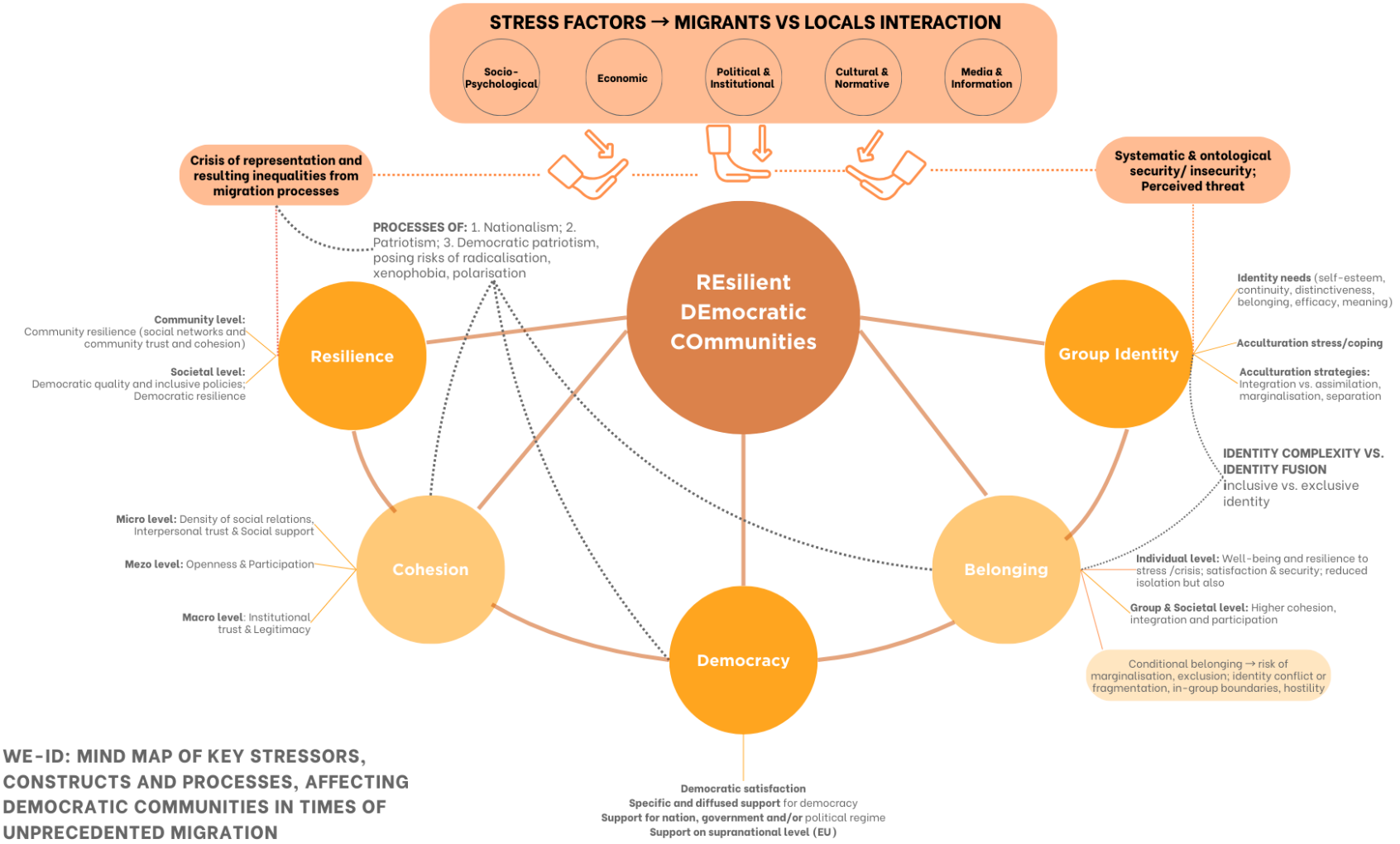

Figure 1: Mind map of existing models on identity, belonging, cohesion, resilience and democracy

7. Conceptual overview

In contemporary societies that are experiencing rapid migration and social change, the concepts of democracy, identity, social cohesion, belonging and resilience have become the deeply interlinked pillars of academic and policy discourse. Understanding how diverse communities can remain inclusive, stable and resilient in the face of challenges hinges on grasping these five constructs. The Horizon Europe We-ID project explicitly aims 'to establish the links between identities, belonging, cohesion, and democracy under conditions of ongoing migration, in order to develop a concept for resilient democratic communities (ReDeCos)'. In other words, fostering cohesive communities where individuals have a sense of identity and belonging is considered vital for resilient democratic societies. This report provides a comprehensive synthesis of these five key concepts. First, it defines each concept through relevant academic and project-based perspectives. Then, it explores how these concepts connect: how personal and collective identity shape belonging; how cohesion strengthens democracy; how belonging builds resilience; and more. The goal is to present a coherent overview that aligns with academic and policy standards and that elucidates how democracy, identity, cohesion, belonging and resilience together form the social glue and adaptive capacity of communities.

7.1 Democracy- the attitude towards the democratic system: both a cause and a consequence of encounters between migrants and locals

The world at the beginning of the 21st century is a world of huge flows of people, against the backdrop of a highly uncontrolled information environment, dynamic conflicts, and the dominance of globalism. The main motivating forces driving large groups of people are, on the one hand, reasons related to problems in their home countries - conflicts, poverty, climate change, unstable state systems, civil wars. On the other hand, there are attractive conditions abroad - safety, economic opportunities, and hope for prosperity in the host countries. In 2016, a peak was reached after World War II, when the number of refugees and internally displaced persons reached about 60 million. Data for the European Union show similar trends: 1.9 million immigrants in 2020, 2.3 million in 2021, a sharp increase of 7 million, of which 5 million are Ukrainian refugees, in 2022, and a slight decline of 0.8% in 2023. Thus, the EU population grows from 447.6 million in 2023 to 449.2 million in 2024, of which 1.2 million is a natural decline and 2.8 million is migration compensation[2]. The available data highlights the unprecedented scale of migration and humanitarian challenges in recent years.

Democracy as a concept and its operationalization

The established form of government in the EU and its Member States is liberal democracy. As a result of an analysis of many indicators, data and their aggregation, G. L. Munck and J. Verkuilen (2002) summarize the logical structure of the concept as shown in Figure 1 in their publication. Based on the authors perspective (Munck, G.L. & Verkuilen, J., 2002) democracy has two attributes – *contestation* and *participation*. Each attribute has different components. For c*ontestation*, they are the following: right to form political parties and freedom of the press and for *participation* – right to vote, fairness of the voting process, access of parties to public financing and extent of suffrage. When measuring democracy, the starting point is usually one (or more) of the components.

The attempt to make the concept more unambiguous and operationally measurable dates back a long time in social science against the backdrop of ambiguous attitudes towards trust in democratic regimes. Schumpeter (1976, p. 250), in his 18th century Philosophy of Democracy, defines 'democracy' by the following definition: 'the democratic method is the institutional arrangement for decision-making which realizes the common good by allowing the people themselves to decide matters by electing persons to assemble to carry out their will'. In the name of seeking a more operational definition, Adam Przeworski (2000) defines a "minimalist", institutionally based definition - democracy is a political regime in which contested elections are held. The comparative advantages of the minimalist, institution-based definition are analytical rigor, precision, and clarity (Przeworski et al., 2000) (Schumpeter-Przeworski). Diamond (1999, p. 9) also looks for more specific and measurable characteristics by outlining the 'fallacy of electoralism' in many countries where there is an established democratic regime and looking for such characteristics in institutional safeguards. One paradigmatic list of such "institutional guarantees" can be found in Robert Dahl's Polyarchy (1971, p. 3), which includes, for example, freedom of expression and alternative sources of information. Beetham adds that "The basic idea of democracy is that of popular rule or popular control over collective decision-making" (1999, p. 90) and adds political equality as a second criterion. Institutions are considered democratic only if they contribute to popular control over politics and political equality.

[2] www.oecd.org , www.un.org

Political science has a variety of methods for examining the levels of democracy in a country or in a social process primarily by examining levels of satisfaction. Contemporary analysis of democratic processes from the perspective of citizens has also had its development.

The Theory of Democratic Support (Claasen, 2019) argues that democracy is rooted in the attitudes and orientations of society, which is enduring and attractive. Lipset (1959) emphasizes the importance of "political legitimacy"-"the conviction that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or the right ones for society"-is one of the basic "conditions" for a stable democracy (Lipset 1959, p.83). Easten distinguishes three "objects" that citizens can support. The most abstract of these objects is the nation or political community; the most concrete are government and other political actors. Of interest here is Easten's intermediate object of support: the regime, or the basic rules and principles by which power is exercised in a state. Public support for the regime (i.e., public support for democracy) can be diffuse or specific. 1 Concrete support for democracy focuses on the outcomes of the regime and is therefore instrumental, while 2. Diffuse support focuses on the principles of the regime and is therefore normative. Diffuse support is also more durable than concrete support, helping to soften the blow on regimes in political or economic crises. A related concept to democratic support is satisfaction with democracy. Some authors treat it similarly to democratic support (e.g., Armingeon & Guthmann, 2014). Others use it as a summary measure of political support (e.g., Anderson & Guillory, 1997). A careful reading of Easton suggests that even for him, specific and diffuse support are less distinct than is often thought. He suggests the existence of a "complex relationship between outcomes and diffuse support" (Easton 1975, p. 445) by which "the persistent failure of government to produce satisfactory outcomes for members of a system may lead to demands for regime change" (Easton 1957, p. 397).

In sum, the relationship between government effectiveness and attitudes toward democracy remains unclear. Some studies suggest that such effectiveness is related only to satisfaction with democracy, leaving principled support for democracy untouched. Others suggest that effectiveness may actually reduce support for democracy, either directly or indirectly (i.e., through dissatisfaction).

Factors of Influence on Attitudes to Democracy in the Context of Migration Processes

The optimistic reading of the future of relations between so-called locales and immigrants is a rapprochement with immigrants. However, the facts point to worrying data. For example, an increase in terrorism sourced from first- and second-generation immigrants. This is one of the factors that creates fear and resistance in the rapprochement process. Terrorism is associated with the 'other', the 'foreigner', the 'enemy force' - Islam, with invasions of the European Union and the United States by Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis. A hypothesis explaining the different educational profiles of migrants is the distance travelled hypothesis. Muslims who move to Western societies can be divided into two groups (Kahneman, 2011): 1) Those who want to escape the constraints of traditional Islam, seeing a need for "reformation" in Islam, and 2) Those who continue to embrace traditional Islam, attempting to spread traditional Islamic values in their new location. Most of the more highly educated immigrants from Muslim lands fall into the first category, while most of those with less education fall into the second category. "The distance travelled hypothesis postulates that the tangible and intangible resources available to immigrants and refugees will determine the distance they will be able to travel from their lands of origin. The greater the distance between the land of origin and the host country, the greater the resources required to successfully complete the move. In practice, this means that

Muslims moving to the European Union need fewer resources; they are less likely to be among the West's educated, multilingual, secular Third World elite who could fit into Western societies relatively easily (Kahneman, 2011).

The tension factors that generate the need for policy change in institutions are directly related to the distance travelled hypothesis. It generates problems related to demography, work capacity, skills for highly skilled work and jobs for low-skilled work in European countries.

A materialist approach, could explain the manifestations of conflict between migrants and locales through competition for material resources. On the other hand, theories that attach greater importance to psychological factors as drivers of conflict, such as psychodynamic theory and social identity theory, argue that the deeper causes of conflict are related to collective identity, unconscious emotions (e.g. irrational hatred of the out-group) and other non-material factors.

Another factor of the local-immigrant confrontation is the reaction of certain groups in increasing nationalist support as a result of experiencing a threat. Mogghadam (2019) provides an explanation for this process through threatened identities and "Catastrophic Evolution". By "catastrophic evolution", he means "a rapid, abrupt and often fatal decline in the numbers of a particular life form". Catastrophic evolution is more likely to occur after sudden contact, the rapid amalgamation of life forms with no previous history of contact and with low rates of adaptation after contact. Thus, in the face of a collective threat to their "sacred group" (native, indigenous, local, national), members develop a variety of defensive behaviors ranging from prejudice and discrimination to collective violence and genocide. The psychological mechanisms of the push towards closure and the erection of barriers appear as a defensive reaction. Moghaddam argues that it is through reinforcing the practice and appreciation of group traditions that a sense of resilience is restored, and this in turn is the basis of nationalism and patriotism.

The distinction between nationalism and patriotism is widely used in political psychology to explain people's attachment to the nation (Ariely, 2020; Huddy et al., 2021). Despite the widespread use of the distinction, it has been argued that 'nationalism' and 'patriotism' are difficult to distinguish. Scholars concerned with nationalism, such as Brubaker, R. (2004), argue that the distinction "ignores the inherent ambivalence and polymorphism of the two" and call for a synthesis of the two concepts (p. 120). Mußotter, M. (2024) proposes a novel conceptual approach: the triad of attachments. This approach generalizes research on nationalism and patriotism and uses it to interpret processes in the European Union by adding a new phenomenon called "democratic patriotism". In other words, the belief in the superiority of one's own nation is strongly intertwined with the belief in the superiority of one's own people. Thus, nationalism, with the nation as the object of attachment, is formed by five coherent basic characteristics: 1. the belief in the superiority of one's own nation 2. The belief in the superiority of one's own people, 3. The belief that the nation should strive for dominance, 4. The sense of being chosen or "chosen" by God, and 5. The ethnic concept of nationhood. In this context, Blank (2003) relates nationalism to Easton's (1975) "diffuse support" for democracy.

Patriotism, in turn, is defined as love of country. In political psychology and beyond, the dominant line of research typically understands patriotism as emotional attachment or love of country (Primoratz, 2017; Theiss-Morse, 2009). Thus, patriotism is largely defined by an emotional component. Based on the analysis, Mußotter, M. (2024) includes two sub-present feelings in the content of patriotism - love of country and strong loyalty to country.

The third introduced concept "democratic patriotism" is directly related to the processes of increasing attachment to the European Union. The main question that Habermas is concerned with is how to promote social cohesion in multicultural societies (Habermas, 1996). He argues that democratic values and principles are the necessary glue that holds diverse societies together. In essence, constitutional patriotism is defined as an attachment to democratic principles (Müller, 2008), accompanied by a strong loyalty to (democratic) political institutions (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Davidov, 2009). Understood in this way, constitutional patriotism is considered an enduring and, importantly, political project (Müller, 2008). Consciously assuming a "constitutional culture that mediates between the universal and the particular", constitutional patriotism is also characterized by an inherent transnational scope (Müller, 2008, p. 89). Thus, the European Union as a transnational community based on democracy and the rule of law is seen as an example of constitutional patriotism. This strand of research typically defines patriotism as an adherence to democratic principles that "has the potential to support tolerance of out-groups" (Blank & Schmidt, 2003, p. 294; Davidov, 2009; Huddy et al, 2021; Wamsler, 2022). Mussotter, M. (2024) defines democratic patriotism through three coherent core characteristics: 1. strong democratic attachment leading to strong support for democratic values; 2. civic engagement with democracy; and 3. support for social cohesion and inclusive coexistence.

Contemporary Research on Challenges in Migrant-Local Relationships

Recent research has increasingly gone in the direction of seeking explanations through deeper psychological processes such as ontological and systemic uncertainty and the influence of culture (Gellwitzki, Nicolai, Anne-Marie Houde, 2023; Besen, 2025; Veri & Maier, 2025)

The processes of extension of patriotism and nationalism are associated with systemic insecurity, referring to threats to physical security that take material form, such as the military threat. While threats to ontological security take the form of insecurity and existential anxiety, which destroy participants' sense of self and prevent them from taking action (Mitzen, 2006). Ontological security, security of self, therefore ultimately refers to participants' ability to avoid and manage anxiety (Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi, 2020), which in turn "enables and motivates action and choice" (Mitzen, 2006, p. 344). Particularly fruitful here is the idea of what Klein (1975) calls the paranoid-schizoid position, a situation in which subjects find themselves when they are experiencing crises and the world seems out of their control. According to Klein, three defense mechanisms can explain to us the psychological processes underlying ontological practices of security seeking: separation, introjection, and projective identification. They allow the removal of uncertainty, ambiguity and ambivalence (Klein, 1975). In the paranoid-schizoid stance, "the way subjects think and relate [is] dominated by [the] psychic process of separation" through which "self and other are divided into wholly good and wholly bad," resulting in the construction of a world that is "populated by idealized 'partial objects' [...] and vilified, feared, and despised 'partial objects' [...]" (Cash, 2009, pp. 95-96). Subjects' ability to cope with complexity is greatly reduced as the world is divided into 'good' and 'bad' and 'emotions cluster around the two poles of hated and loved - the other and the self' (Cash, 2017, p. 395).

From a hungry point of anthropological inquiry, Francesco Veri and Franziska Maier (2025) introduce the idea of cultural consensus theory. Cultural consensus and cultural competence can be seen as seriously at stake as a result of the clash of cultures, religions and different traditions. Shared cultural knowledge shapes the beliefs, values, norms and expectations of individuals, thereby establishing a shared framework for understanding in culture.

From the perspective of the need for change (i.e. adaptation) or sustainability, it is essential to ask which parameters of democracy are those that should be conservatively preserved and which should be subject to change and adaptation to the coming different? What matters, then, is how models of democratic sustainability, and their associated support and satisfaction, might respond to external pressures on and resistance to the system, including the risk of deformation of democratic principles and practices.

References:

Anderson, C. J., & Guillory, C. A. (1997). Political Institutions and Satisfaction with Democracy: A Cross-National Analysis of Consensus and Majoritarian Systems. American Political Science Review, 91, 66-81.

Ariely, G. (2020). Measuring dimensions of national identity across countries: Theoretical and methodological reflections. National Identities, 22(3), 265–282.

Armingeon, K., K. Guthmann. (2014). Democracy in crisis? The declining support for national democracy in European countries, 2007–2011, European Journal of Political Research 53: 423–442

Beetham, D. (1999). Democracy and Human Rights. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Besen, B. (2025). The construction of threatening Others: Discourses and agendas of the Brazilian and German radical right. Political Psychology, 00, 1–17.

Blank, T. (2003). Determinants of national identity in East and West Germany: An empirical comparison of theories on the significance of authoritarianism, anomie, and general self-esteem. Political Psychology, 24(2), 259–288.

Blank, T., & Schmidt, P. (2003). National identity in a united Germany: Nationalism or patriotism? An empirical test with representative data. Political Psychology, 24(2), 289–312.

Brubaker, R. (2004). In the name of the nation: Reflections on nationalism and patriotism. Citizenship Studies, 8(2), 115–127.

Cash, J. (2009). Negotiating insecurity: Law, psychoanalytic social theory and the dilemmas of the world risk society. Australian Feminist Law Journal, 30(1), 87–107.

Cash, J. (2017). The dilemmas of ontological insecurity in a postcolonising Northern Ireland. Postcolonial Studies, 20(3), 387–410.

Claasen, Ch., (2019). Does Public Support Help Democracy Survive?, American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 00, No. 0, xxxx 2019, Pp. 1–17,

Dahl, R. (1971). Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition. Yale University Press.

Davidov, E. (2009). Measurement equivalence of nationalism and constructive patriotism in the ISSP: 34 countries in a comparative perspective. Political Analysis, 17(1), 64–82.

Diamond, L. (1999). Developing democracy: Toward consolidation. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Easton, David. (1965). *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: Wiley.

Easton, David. (1975). A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support. *British Journal of Political Science* 5(4): 435–57.

Gellwitzki, C. Nicolai L., Anne-Marie Houde, (2023). Narratives, Ontological Security, and Unconscious Phantasy: Germany and the European Myth During the so-called, Migration Crisis, Political Psychology, Vol. 44, No. 2.

Gustafsson, K., & Krickel-Choi, N. (2020). Returning to the roots of ontological security: Insights from the existentialist literature. European Journal of International Relations, 26(3), 875–895.

Habermas, J. (1996). Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy. MIT Press.

Huddy, L., Del Ponte, A., & Davies, C. (2021). Nationalism, patriotism, and support for the European Union. Political Psychology, 42(6), 995–1017.

Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, fast and slow. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Klein, M. (1975). Envy and gratitude & other works, 1946–1963. Edited by M. Masud R. Khan. The Hogarth Press

Lipset, Seymour Martin. (1959). "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy." American Political Science Review 53(1): 69–105.

Mitzen, J. (2006). Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma. European Journal of International Relations, 12(3), 341–370.

Mogghadam, F., (2019).Threat to democracy, American Psychological Association,

Müller, J.-W. (2008a). A general theory of constitutional patriotism. International Journal of Constitutional Law, 6(1), 72–95.

Munck, G.L., Verkuilen, J., (2002). Conceptualizing and measuring democracy, Evaluating Alternative Indices, Comparative political studies, Sage Publications, Vol. 35 No. 1, 5-34

Mußotter, M. (2024). On nation, homeland, and democracy: Toward a novel three-factor measurement model for nationalism and patriotism. Evidence from two representative studies. Political Psychology, 45, 903–921.

Primoratz, I. (2017). Patriotism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy. https:// plato. stanf ord. edu/archi ves/ sum2017/ entri es/ patriotism/

Przeworski, A., Alvarez, M. E., Cheibub, J. A., & Limongi, F. (2000). Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Theiss-Morse, E. (2009). Who counts as an American? Cambridge University Press.

Veri, F., & Maier, F. (2025). Migration discourses from the radical right: Mapping and testing potential for political mobilization. Political Psychology, 00, 1–19.

Wamsler, S. (2022). Violated entitlement and the nation: How feelings of relative deprivation shape nationalism and constructive patriotism. International Journal of Comparative Sociology.

7.2. Belonging: The Emotional Core of Community

Belonging is both an affective state and a political force (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It is the felt sense of being "at home," grounded in recognition and emotional safety (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Belonging differs from "fitting in": the former affirms identity, the latter demands conformity (Allen, 2021).

Theories of belonging—from Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)—emphasize its centrality to flourishing. Migration highlights "belonging work" (Antonsich, 2010), as migrants actively build home through language learning, citizenship, or community ties. Yet belonging is always shaped by others' recognition—or its absence (Hou et al., 2017).

Belonging intersects directly with identity and cohesion. Hybrid cultural spaces (Teerling, 2011) show that belonging thrives in diversity. Its absence, however, is linked to loneliness, radicalization, and democratic fragility (Cartmell & Bond, 2015). Conversely, strong belonging supports resilience and participation (Allen et al., 2021; Quinn et al., 2020).

Belonging is one of humanity's deepest needs. From an evolutionary perspective, the drive to connect and to be accepted has been as vital to survival as food or safety (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belonging is also more than a private sentiment—it is a political and cultural force that shapes identities, strengthens or fractures communities, and determines how resilient democratic societies can be in the face of migration, diversity, and crisis.

The We-ID project explores these dynamics, examining how identity, cohesion, and democracy transform when migration and diversity challenge traditional notions of community. At stake is the resilience of European democracies themselves. If belonging is not fostered across diverse groups, societies risk alienation, division, and vulnerability to extremism. If it is cultivated, democracies gain cohesion, trust, and resilience.

Understanding Belonging

Belonging is at once subjective and relational. It is the perception of being an integral part of a group, place, or system (Allen, 2021; Malone, Pillow & Osman, 2012). It is experienced as a deep connection with people, places, and values, and it carries with it a sense of emotional safety and "being at home" (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yet belonging cannot be reduced to the number of social ties one has. People may be surrounded by others and feel profoundly excluded, or maintain only a few strong bonds and feel entirely at home (Allen et al., 2021).

The ordinary and sensory often anchor belonging: the sound of a familiar accent, the taste of traditional food, the rhythm of a community event. These micro-experiences accumulate into powerful attachments (Jones & Krzyzanowski, 2008; Billig, 1995). They can also be contradictory, pulling individuals between multiple identities—family, community, nation—yet together they weave the layered fabric of belonging.

Importantly, belonging is not the same as "fitting in." Fitting in implies altering oneself to gain acceptance, while belonging implies being accepted for who one already is (Allen, 2021). Migrants often illustrate this difference. Distance from home can intensify attachment to heritage rituals, leading diasporic communities to maintain traditions even more strongly than in their country of origin (Hesse, 2000). In this sense, belonging is both fluid and resilient, adapting to new contexts while retaining continuity.

Distinctions Within Belonging

Belonging reveals itself in multiple forms. Affective commitment refers to the emotional bond and loyalty that develops when belonging is achieved. Affiliation is the behavioral pursuit of connection—the active effort to join groups, build friendships, or participate in communities. Solidarity emerges through shared struggles, binding people together through moral alignment and collective purpose (Jetten et al., 2014). Acceptance represents the emotional foundation of belonging: the recognition of individuals as they are, rather than conditional tolerance (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Finally, commonality captures the initial similarity—shared language, traditions, or values—that often makes affiliation possible.

Together, these distinctions reveal belonging as both an emotional experience and a social practice, something we feel internally but also enact in relation to others.

Theories of Belonging

Belonging has fascinated scholars for decades, spanning psychology, sociology, and political science. Maslow (1971) placed it at the heart of his hierarchy of needs, following safety and preceding esteem. Baumeister and Leary (1995) described it as a fundamental drive: humans seek not just relationships, but enduring and meaningful ones.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) views belonging as a product of group membership and shared identity, while Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) situates it among three universal needs. Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) shows how early secure bonds set the foundation for belonging in adulthood, while Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1986) demonstrates how belonging shields against existential fears. Elias (1978, 2000) highlighted the "I-and-we" dynamic, showing how individuals are never isolated but always bound in networks of interdependence. Bronfenbrenner (1979) added an ecological view, locating belonging across layers from family to culture. Honneth (1995) went further, arguing that recognition is the very grammar of social life: without being seen and approved of, belonging cannot take root.

These perspectives converge on one point: belonging is not optional—it is central to human flourishing.

Belonging in the Context of Migration

Migration brings belonging into sharp focus. Migrants navigate attachments to homeland while negotiating new identities in host societies. Early theories of assimilation assumed that these ties would fade over time, but research has shown that many sustain transnational identities, forming hybrid and layered selves (Madsen & van Naerssen, 2003; Amit & Bar-Lev, 2014).

Berry's (1997) acculturation framework maps different strategies: integration, where both heritage and host ties are maintained; assimilation, where heritage ties are lost; separation, where only heritage ties remain; and marginalisation, where neither sphere provides belonging. Integration is linked to the most positive outcomes, while marginalisation is often associated with exclusion and vulnerability.

Yet belonging is not just a state, but also a practice. Antonsich (2010) describes "belonging work"—the actions migrants take to establish home in new places. Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior supports this, showing how intentions to belong can drive decisions to learn the language, apply for citizenship, or build networks. Scannell and Gifford (2010) add that belonging is grounded in attachment to place—both emotional and practical investments that make a new environment feel like home.

At the same time, exclusionary discourses, conditional citizenship, and discrimination remind us that belonging is not always freely given. It is shaped as much by recognition from others as by the aspirations of migrants themselves (Hou, Schellenberg & Berry, 2017).

Drivers of Belonging

Belonging arises from the interplay of many forces. Psychologically, it depends on safety, recognition, and continuity of identity. Culturally, it is strengthened by language proficiency, shared traditions, and aesthetic familiarity. Socially, networks, friendships, and the absence of discrimination are key. Politically, belonging is tied to legal status, access to rights, and civic participation. Economically, it depends on employment, housing, and security. Symbolically, it is reinforced through national narratives, representation, and emotional ties to land. Institutionally, schools, urban design, and anti-discrimination policies shape inclusion. Finally, temporality matters: belonging shifts with age at migration, time spent in a country, and life experiences, including trauma.

These layers do not always align neatly. Someone may be legally included yet symbolically excluded, or culturally connected but socially isolated. Belonging is therefore often partial, conditional, and uneven.

Belonging and other constructs

Belonging and identity are inseparable. Belonging shapes the narratives people construct about who they are, grounding their self-concept in relationships, communities, and cultural traditions (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Migration often brings this dynamic to the surface: crossing borders requires individuals to renegotiate identity, weaving heritage and new affiliations into hybrid forms that challenge fixed ideas of nation or culture (Madsen & Naerssen, 2003; Amit & Bar-Lev, 2014). Yet belonging is also contested through the "politics of belonging," where societies draw boundaries around who qualifies as a member. These boundaries—based on ethnicity, religion, or values—can limit recognition, leaving some with only partial belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2003). At the same time, national belonging itself carries a temporal dimension, linking individuals' past, present, and future lives to a shared collective (Kolesovs, 2021).

From identity, belonging extends into cohesion—the glue of social life. When individuals feel included, they are more likely to trust others and contribute to collective solidarity (Sandelind, 2016). This cohesion can form within groups through close, homogenous ties ("bonding social capital"), or across groups through more inclusive connections that reduce prejudice and encourage cooperation ("bridging social capital") (Calhoun, 2003; Baker & Shryock, 2009). Migrants often create hybrid cultural spaces where belonging is forged through shared practices and values, demonstrating that cohesion need not rest on sameness but can thrive in diversity (Teerling, 2011).

Cohesion and belonging also underpin resilience. Individuals with a strong sense of belonging are better equipped to manage stress, adapt to change, and recover from hardship (Allen et al., 2021;

Malone, Pillow & Osman, 2011). For migrants and refugees, belonging can buffer the dislocation of resettlement, easing homesickness and supporting integration (Watt & Badger, 2009). Its absence, however, is linked to chronic loneliness, radicalisation, and even violence (Cartmell & Bond, 2015). Communities, too, become more resilient when belonging is nurtured. For example, Arab and Chaldean groups in Detroit drew on solidarity and inclusion to thrive during political crises (Baker & Shryock, 2009).

Finally, belonging shapes the health of democracy itself. Citizenship provides formal rights and responsibilities, but it also depends on a felt sense of inclusion and recognition (Yuval-Davis, 2003; Lynn-Ee Ho, 2009). Competing models of belonging illustrate different democratic outcomes: nationalism ties it to ancestry and culture, often excluding migrants; contribution-based views reward economic and civic participation; institutional approaches root belonging in democratic values and citizenship, treating diversity as less of a threat (Sandelind, 2016). Cultural citizenship further broadens this by affirming the right to be different while still belonging (Ong, 1996; Baker & Shryock, 2009). Yet democracy is also emotional—political leaders invoke metaphors of "home" and "family" to strengthen allegiance, while exclusion and disenfranchisement can erode belonging and undermine trust (Lynn-Ee Ho, 2009).

Taken together, these links show that belonging is not an isolated experience but a connective force. It informs identity, sustains cohesion, fosters resilience, and secures democracy.

Conclusion: Belonging and Resilient Democracies

Belonging is ancient and urgent. It explains why exclusion wounds so deeply, why migration reshapes identities, and why democracies must care about not only laws and rights but also feelings of recognition and home.

The We-ID project situates belonging as central to democratic resilience. Without it, societies fracture; with it, cohesion thrives. Belonging allows diversity to become a resource rather than a threat, and democracy to remain strong even in turbulent times.

Ultimately, resilient democratic societies are those where belonging is not conditional but shared—where people are not asked to erase themselves to fit in but are embraced as they are. In such societies, belonging is the foundation of trust, solidarity, and civic life. It is the thread that binds individuals into a collective "we," sustaining cohesion and strengthening democracy for the challenges ahead.

References

Ajzen, I. (1991). *The theory of planned behavior*. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50(2), 179–211.

Allen, K. A. (2021). *The psychology of belonging*. Routledge.

Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Rozek, C. S., McInerney, D. M., & Slavich, G. M. (2021). Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research. *Australian Journal of Psychology, 73*(1), 87–102.

Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.

Amit, V., & Bar-Lev, S. (2014). Cultural hybridity and identity complexity in migration. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 37*(6), 958–976.

Anant, S. S. (1966). The need to belong. *Canada Mental Health, 14*(2), 21–27.

Antonsich, M. (2010). Searching for belonging: An analytical framework. *Geography Compass, 4*(6), 644–659.

Baker, W. E., Jamal, A., & Tessler, M. (2009). Local and global social capital. In Detroit Arab American Study Team, *Citizenship and crisis: Arab Detroit after 9/11* (pp. 165–190). Russell Sage Foundation.

Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N., & Blanc, C. S. (1994). *Nations unbound: Transnational projects, post-colonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states*. Gordon and Breach.

Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. Sage.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press.

Calhoun, C. (2003). *Belonging in the cosmopolitan imaginary*. University of Minnesota Press.

Corrigan, P., & Sayer, D. (1985). *The great arch: English state formation as cultural revolution*. Basil Blackwell.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. Springer.

Elias, N. (1978). *What is sociology?* Hutchinson.

Elias, N. (2000). *The civilizing process*. Blackwell.

Erlinghagen, M., Ette, A., Schneider, N. F., & Witte, N. (2021). *The global lives of German migrants: Consequences of international migration across the life course*. Springer.

Greenberg, J., Pyszczynski, T., & Solomon, S. (1986). The causes and consequences of a need for self-esteem: A terror management theory. *In R. Baumeister (Ed.), Public self and private self* (pp. 189–212). Springer.

Hagerty, B. M., & Patusky, K. (1995). Developing a measure of sense of belonging. *Nursing Research, 44*(1), 9–13.

Hesse, B. (2000). Diasporicity: Black Britain's post-colonial formations. In B. Hesse (Ed.), *Un/settled multiculturalisms*. Zed Books.

Honneth, A. (1995). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Polity Press.

Hou, F., Schellenberg, G., & Berry, J. W. (2017). Patterns and determinants of immigrants' sense of belonging to Canada and their source country. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

Jetten, J., Haslam, C., & Haslam, S. A. (2014). *The social cure: Identity, health and well-being*. Psychology Press.

Jones, P., & Krzyzanowski, M. (2008). *Identity, belonging and migration*. Liverpool University Press.

Kolesovs, A. (2021). Sense of belonging to country: Conceptualization and scale development. *Psychological Reports, 124*(6), 2341–2363.

Leary, M. R., Kelly, K. M., Cottrell, C. A., & Schreindorfer, L. S. (2013). Construct validity of the Need to Belong Scale: Mapping the nomological network. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 95*(6), 610–624.

Malone, G. P., Pillow, D. R., & Osman, A. (2012). The General Belongingness Scale (GBS): Psychometric properties of a short-form. *Personality and Individual Differences, 52*(3), 311–316.

Madsen, K. D., & van Naerssen, T. (2003). Migration, identity, and belonging. *Journal of Borderlands Studies, 18*(1), 61–75.

Maslow, A. H. (1971). *The farther reaches of human nature*. Viking.

Ong, A. (1996). Cultural citizenship in the era of Pacific Rim capital. *Current Anthropology, 37*(5), 737–762.

Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology, 49*, 65–85.

Rosaldo, R. (1994). Cultural citizenship in San Jose, California. *Polar, 17*(2), 57–63.

Sandelind, C. (2016). Constructions of identity, belonging and exclusion in the democratic welfare state. *National Identities, 18*(4), 441–458.

Scannell, L., & Gifford, R. (2010). Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 30*(1), 1–10.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations*. Nelson-Hall.

Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(1), 82–96.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice, 40*(3), 197–214

7.3. Cohesion: The Glue of Democratic Societies

The concept of cohesion in human groups is complex and unclear in many aspects. The term's content varies depending on the perspective adopted. It may refer to the reduction of economic or political inequalities, the promotion of social fairness, or the fostering of integration, solidarity and inclusion.

In the APA Dictionary of Psychology, cohesion is defined as a group attribute that is directly related to group dynamics. The concept is represented in a more complex, ambiguous and multifaceted way. According to the widely accepted definition, cohesion is "the unity or solidarity of a group, including the integration of the group for both social and task-related purposes. Group cohesion is indicated by the strength of the bonds that link members to the group as a whole, the sense of belongingness and community within the group, the feelings of attraction for specific group members and the group itself as experienced by individuals, and the degree to which members coordinate their efforts to achieve goals, although these factors are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for cohesion. In many cases, the higher the cohesion, the stronger the members' motivation to adhere to the group's standards and the more stable the group's membership. Group cohesion frequently is considered essential to effective group therapy" (APA, n.d.).

Bollen and Hoyle (1990) introduced the distinction between two different perspectives of cohesion: objective and perceived. The first one refers to objective attributes of the group as a whole, involving members' self-reported closeness to other members of the group and the second perspective relates to a member's perception of their own position within the group.

The most extensive and comprehensive attempt to conceptualise social cohesion is arguably that of Jenson (1998), who identifies five dimensions of social cohesion as follows:

1. Belonging Vs. Isolation: this refers to shared values and the presence of a collective identity.
2. Inclusion Vs. Exclusion: this is about making sure that everyone has the same opportunities in the economy.
3. Participation Vs. Non-participation: this term is used to refer to the levels of political and social engagement.
4. The concept of Recognition Vs. Rejection is closely linked to respect and tolerance for diversity.
5. The issue of Legitimacy Vs. Illegitimacy – is pivotal in determining the maintenance of institutional credibility.

Chan et al.'s (2006) conceptualisation is probably the most influential to date. It is a measurement scheme that includes two dimensions. Horizontal relationships refer to those between individuals and groups within society. Vertical relationships are those between the state and its citizens. Chan et al. (2006, p. 290) provide a definition of the concept of social cohesion, clarifying its meaning as follows: "Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations".

Model of Cohesion

The WE-ID project acknowledges that social cohesion denotes a shared sense of purpose and trust among members within a specific group and/or locality. It fosters a willingness among group members to collaborate and cooperate for mutual survival and prosperity. This explanation is both

straightforward and comprehensive, incorporating the most frequently used definitions of social cohesion in the conceptual literature and the six dimensions most commonly measured in the empirical literature. The factors to be considered are as follows: trust, collective action norms, belonging, identity, attitudes towards out-groups and civic engagement.

Taking all points in consideration, the project focuses on the model of Bottoni (Bottoni, 2018). This model combines three levels – micro, meso and macro – with two dimensions – subjective and objective. As outlined by the author, *institutional trust* and the *legitimacy of institutions* are positioned at the macro level. *Openness* and *participation* fall under the meso level, while *interpersonal trust*, *density of social relations* and *social support* are concentrated at the micro level. In his model, Bottoni synthesises the two perspectives on the topic, highlighting that cohesion can be conceptualised as a "systemic property". In this instance, "the collection of data takes place at the aggregate level". At the same time, the author acknowledges that "following a methodological individualism approach, social cohesion is considered an effect of individual attitudes and behaviours". The work of Bottoni (2018) provided a multilevel social cohesion model that has shown its validity across 29 countries. This model reveals how the mechanisms of social cohesion work in the same way across cultures. What is even more important is that it showed that social cohesion is a “multidimensional construct of second order. This means that social cohesion does not directly affect individuals' attitudes and behaviours; rather, it is a more general concept that influences its multiple sub-dimensions, which in turn affect the individual attitude and behaviour" (Ibid).

In addition, social cohesion is usually described as a highly desirable characteristic: it implies a sense of togetherness and orientation towards the common good. This frame reflects the positive aspects of cohesion in human groups and represents probably the best possible scenarios.

Drivers of cohesion

Following comprehensive data analysis, a 2024 report (Eurofound, 2024) concluded that there is no evidence of a decline in political social cohesion in Europe over the past 20 years. Additionally, the report found that Europeans' engagement levels appear to increase during times of crisis. Other key findings include a positive correlation between engagement in political activities and institutional trust, a link between electoral and political legitimacy, and the identification of unemployment as a key factor in political participation.

The authors of the report identify three groups of drivers related to social cohesion: economic, social and political.

Cohesion and other constructs

As per the model established by Bottoni (Bottoni, 2018), cohesion is associated with key concepts such as trust, legitimacy, transparency, involvement, social relations and social support. According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, the concept is defined as being closely related to unity, solidarity, integration, social and task-related purposes, bonds that link members to the group, a sense of belonging and community, feelings of attraction for specific group members and the group itself, and the degree to which members coordinate their efforts to achieve goals. There are two further possibilities to consider: stronger members' motivation to adhere to the group's standards and stable group membership.

Furthermore, cohesion is a pivotal concept in the realm of social psychology and the psychology of small groups. This is particularly evident in the context of group dynamics theory. The concept of cohesion refers to the formation of bonds that bind members of a social group to one another and to the group as a whole. The dynamics of a group are constituted by all internal changes within it. It is important to note that these changes can trigger a series of actions and reactions. Consequently, the group's structure and its members' behaviours are being affected. In relation to this, cohesion is also regarded as a dynamic construct rather than a stable characteristic of groups. Festinger's (1950) famous work defines cohesion as "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group". According to him these forces depend on the *attractiveness or unattractiveness/ or the prestige of the group and/or members of the group*; or on the *attractiveness or unattractiveness/ or the prestige of the activities* in which the group engages. These two factors are described by many researchers and are known as "*task cohesion*" and "*social cohesion*". In this conceptualization groups with high cohesion are expected to have: a strong degree of *unity and solidarity (group members stick together)* in order to satisfy the members` *affective needs*; in addition, there will be good *cooperation* between members in order to achieve the agreed upon *(group) instrumental goals, targets and objectives*.

From this perspective, two key concepts emerge as being closely related to group cohesion. The terms 'in-group favoritism' and 'groupthink' are used to describe situations in which members of a group favour each other's opinions or adopt a unified opinion at the expense of their individual judgment.

According to Social Identity Theory, an individual's sense of social identification with a particular group is influenced by both perceived similarities with group members and perceived differences between group members and the external world. In practice, this mechanism is demonstrated as follows: even if strangers are grouped randomly, the information about the presence of a common characteristic between them very quickly triggers a process of identification at the group level. As Turner et al. (1979) noted, this is associated with a feeling of connectedness (unity) and with manifestations of in-group favoritism. The term refers to a heightened inclination towards cooperation and helping behaviour among group members, as opposed to individuals outside the group.

Despite the benefits associated with high levels of cohesion, researchers have also observed risks that arise from it. For example, in his classic 1972 work on "*groupthink*" Irving Janis (Janis, 1972) describes situations in which members are so focused on maintaining "groupness" and consensus that at the end of it all this affects negatively their ability and capacity to critically analyse and evaluate alternative ideas and perspectives.

Is cohesion always a positive characteristic of groups?

From the perspective of politics and economics social cohesion is considered predominantly as a positive, strongly desirable characteristics of groups, communities and societies. It is even believed to have potential "to ensure the well-being of all its members" (Council of Europe, 2010:2). On the other hand theory and practice of Social psychology and especially Psychology of small groups show that in high cohesive groups there are processes and effects – for example in-group favoritism and groupthink – that can be counterproductive and bring for the rigidity (rather than for the resilience) of the group.

The question remains open: What is the "optimal dose" of cohesion? How can researchers, policy makers and communities monitor if the levels of cohesion are high enough in order to play its key role to be – metaphorically speaking - the "social clue" that keeps the groups united? And what are

indicators when we reach the point where cohesion has become too strong and the group starts to build impenetrable social bubble around its members, that it has become a rigid structure because of its internal drive to stick together at all costs?

References:

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Just-world hypothesis. In APA dictionary of psychology. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from https://dictionary.apa.org/group-cohesion

Bollen, K. A., & Hoyle, R. H. (1990). Perceived cohesion: A conceptual and empirical examination. *Social Forces, 69*(2), 479–504.

Bottoni, G. (2018). A multilevel measurement model of social cohesion. Social Indicators Research, 136(3), 835-857.

Chan, J., To, H. P., & Chan, E. (2006). Reconsidering social cohesion: Developing a definition and analytical framework for empirical research. Social indicators research, 75, 273-302.

Council of Europe. (2010) New Strategy and Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Eurofound (2024), The political dimension of social cohesion in Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Festinger, L. (1950). Informal social communication. *Psychological Review*, *57*, 271-282.

Janis, I. L. (1972). Victims of groupthink: A psychological study of foreign-policy decisions and fiascoes.

Jenson, J.(1998). Mapping social cohesion: The state of Canadian research. Paper SRA-321, Family Network, Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc.

Turner, J. C., Brown, R. J., & Tajfel, H. (1979). Social comparison and group interest in ingroup favouritism. European journal of social psychology, 9(2), 187-204.

7.4. Identities in Migration: A Problem-Focused Report for the Bulgarian Context

Migration reshapes how people see themselves and others. Migrants and host communities negotiate personal, ethnic, national, religious, and supranational (e.g., European) identities in unfamiliar settings, often under pressure from institutions, media, and policies. *Identity* is "an individual's sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles. Identity involves a sense of continuity, or the feeling that one is the same person today that one was yesterday or last year (despite physical or other changes). Such a sense is derived from one's body sensations; one's body image; and the feeling that one's memories, goals, values, expectations, and beliefs belong to the self" (APA, n.d.). Contemporary identity research shows that identities are dynamic, multi-layered, and context-dependent; they evolve through social comparison, categorization, and motive-satisfying processes of preserving belonging, continuity, esteem, distinctiveness, meaning, and efficacy (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Breakwell, 1986; Vignoles et al., 2006).

Core lenses: how identity works in migratory communities

7.1.1. 7.4.1. Social identity and self-categorization

Social Identity Theory (SIT) holds that a portion of the self is defined by group memberships; people favour in-groups, compare with out-groups, and manage group status and distinctiveness. In migration settings, salient ethnic/national lines may harden "us vs. them," especially under threat or status anxiety (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1978). *Self-Categorization Theory (SCT)* explains when a given identity becomes salient (e.g., neighborhood, "host," or migrant), why prototypical members gain influence, and how depersonalization explains norm-conformity and local mobilization. Together, these phenomena guide behaviour and predict shifts between ethnic, national, and religious identities across context. In migration, "who we are" is negotiated on a daily basis. Identification is multidimensional, including self-definition and self-investment facets (Leach et al., 2008). Field studies show that when minority or religious identity is primed in exclusionary contexts, public self-presentations align with that identity; conversely, relational identification (ties, positive affect) is linked to smoother acculturation (Bilewicz et al., 2021).

7.1.2. 7.4.2. Acculturation and (mis)alignment of orientations

Acculturation Theory (AT) models two orthogonal orientations – maintain heritage vs. adopt host culture – yielding four identity/behavioural strategies – *integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization* (Berry, 1980, 1997; Berry et al., 2006). The *Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM)* adds that mismatches between migrant and host orientations (e.g., assimilationist policies vs. migrant integration preferences) produce stress and intergroup conflict. Meta-analytic and survey evidence links integration/biculturalism to better adjustment, though hostile contexts can blunt these benefits (Bourhis et al., 1997; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). *Ethnic Identity Development* (Phinney, 1990) shows identity as a process of exploration and commitment. In European settings, positive ethnic identity buffers discrimination and supports well-being; dual (ethnic + national) identification most consistently predicts adjustment and belonging (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Sabatier, 2008).

7.1.3. 7.4.3. Identity motives and threats

Identity Process Theory (IPT) and *Motivated Identity Construction (MICT)* explain why identities shift under migration: people seek self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, efficacy, meaning, and belonging. Migration and perceived discrimination often threaten these motives, triggering coping

strategies (intrapsychic, interpersonal, intergroup) and reconfiguration of identities or identity trade-offs (e.g., belonging vs. distinctiveness) that shape local integration trajectories (Breakwell, 1986; Vignoles et al., 2006; Jaspal, Lopes, & Wignall, 2020).

7.1.4.7.4.4. Social identity complexity and identity fusion

Social Identity Complexity (SIC) describes how people relate multiple in-groups (e.g., "ethnic," "Bulgarian," "European," "local neighbour," "parent") by keeping them integrated or compartmentalized. High identity complexity (keeping identities integrated; "merger") predicts tolerance and flexibility, while low identity complexity (intersection or dominance) narrows boundaries and can raise bias (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Brewer & Pierce, 2005). A recent work shows that high complexity can reduce immigrant exclusion by tempering glorified national identification (Sekerdej et al., 2024). *Identity Fusion* is an extreme overlap between personal and group selves. While fusion can power in-group solidarity and extreme pro-group behaviour, under threat (in polarized local conflicts) it also predicts willingness to defend the in-group at any cost — a risk for community cohesion and democratic deliberation, which can increase radical endorsement (Echelmeyer et al., 2023).

Linking Identity to Belonging, Cohesion, Resilience, and Democracy: Virtuous & Vicious Cycles

A synthesis of core theories and findings shows that the links between social identities and the other key WE-ID concepts (belonging, cohesion, resilience, and democracy) can be illustrated like positive and negative *context-dependent scenarios/cycles*:

- Virtuous cycle - inclusive identities (i.e. high social identity complexity, bicultural integration, dual/multiple/secure identities) bolster belonging and cohesion, seeding community resilience, support for democracy and democratic participation, which in turn, foster inclusive identities. For example, disaster research shows that emergent shared identity under stress enables collective psychosocial resilience – support, coordination, "we're in this together" – strengthening ties and future civic action (Drury et al., 2019; Erfurth et al., 2021; Ntontis et al., 2021). Recent work also shows high identity complexity reduces exclusionary stances among majority populations through lower national glorification (Sekerdej et al., 2024), while new host-society identities among refugees (e.g., Ukrainians) can buffer stress and enable growth, and well-being.

- Vicious cycles emerge where identities become exclusive (i.e. low social identity complexity, fused/narcissistic identities) in ways that delegitimize out-groups, fuelling affective polarization and zero-sum politics (policy-host/migrant identity misalignment or exclusionary frames), which in turn, breeds exclusive identities. For example, when local or national narratives expect assimilation while migrants prefer integration, stress and conflict are very likely to ensue. When multiple identities are compartmentalized/fragmented or fused, people struggle to bridge groups; this fuels everyday segregation and weakens democratic deliberation (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Swann et al., 2009, 2012). Research evidence shows that a glorified/exclusive national identity correlates with out-group derogation and support for restrictive policies, while a civic (inclusive) identity can energize turnout and cooperation across difference (Pinto et al., 2020; Sekerdej et al., 2024). Furthermore, bidirectionality matters: exclusionary politics amplify ethnic nationalism and polarize local arenas, while inclusive democratic institutions nurture civic identities, which in turn sustains democratic norms. When social bonds erode, both trust and

participation decline (Putnam, 2000), leaving communities brittle in crises. Positively, group memberships can be a "social cure", i.e. provide meaning, support, and control—key psychological resources that buffer adversity and improve well-being (Haslam et al., 2009). Intentionally building group ties (clubs, associations, neighborhood projects) can therefore raise resilience and civic capacity.

Evidence with a focus on Europe and Bulgaria

- **European patterns**

Across Europe, minorities are often "othered"; acceptance increases when perceived cultural/religious similarity rises, and inclusive civic national identities mitigate threat responses (SIT/SCT). Biculturalism generally shows positive associations with adjustment (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). Social-cure research links group belonging to health and well-being across settings (Haslam et al., 2009). SIC interventions that encourage complex, cross-cutting identities can reduce out-group exclusion (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Sekerdej et al., 2024).

- **Bulgarian studies and specificities**

Bulgaria's history includes 5-century Ottoman Dominance (1396-1878) and forced assimilation ("Revival Process") against ethnic Turks (1984–1989), shaping 20th century identity politics and expectations around "fit" in the country. More recent comparative studies show Turkish-Bulgarian adolescents maintain strong ethnic identities; acculturation orientations relate to well-being, with integration generally adaptive. Turkish-Bulgarians tend to orient more to mainstream culture than Turkish-Dutch peers (lower life satisfaction overall), highlighting context effects of stigmatization vs. pluralism (Dimitrov, 2000; Dimitrova et al., 2013; 2014). Among Turkish-origin youth in Bulgaria and Germany, religious identity and Turkish heritage predict positive adjustment; orientations mediate links to mainstream adaptation (Dimitrova & Aydinli-Karakulak, 2016).

Recent refugee work in Europe suggests new national identifications in the host can reduce PTSD and increase growth (Ukrainians in Poland/Ireland: Skrodzka et al., 2024) and that identity needs (belonging, efficacy) can shield health from discrimination (Syrians in Turkey: Çelebi et al., 2017). These mechanisms are likely relevant in Bulgaria, which is simultaneously an EU border country (frontline in terms of receiving refugees) and a society with assimilationist legacies (policy-identity misalignment risk).

Key problems & research gaps (for Bulgaria)

- *Limited coverage of current refugee groups in Bulgaria.* Evidence on Ukrainians, Syrians, Afghans, and Pakistanis in Bulgaria is scarce relative to neighbouring contexts. We lack evidence of whether new host identities (e.g., "Bulgarian citizen" or "resident of [city/region]") buffer stress as in other European settings, or whether "refugee" identity salience entrenches marginalization.

- *Under-study of majority identities and social identity complexity among Bulgarians*. Majority-group SIC (complex vs. glorified national identity) strongly shapes openness to immigrants. There is little evidence on whether increasing social identity complexity reduces support for restrictive and exclusionary norms.

- *Insufficient attention to fusion and risk.* Identity fusion can be prosocial (solidarity) but also correlate with extreme endorsement in threat contexts; Bulgarian evidence on fusion with origin/host groups and its ties to well-being or radicalization risk is scarce.

- *Policy–identity (mis)alignment and media frames remain under-measured.* IAM predicts stress and conflict when host expectations (e.g., implicit assimilation demands) clash with migrant integration preferences. However, policy–identity alignment (IAM) or the role of exclusionary vs. inclusionary media frames in heightening identity threat and narrowing identities (low SIC) remain understudied.

- *Temporal dynamics are poorly captured.* Cross-sectional snapshots dominate the research scene. Longitudinal designs tracking identity motives, social identity complexity, and acculturation strategies from arrival through settlement are rare in Bulgaria. Without time-sensitive data, we risk conflating early identity threat with stable dispositions.

- *Geographic and life-course blind spots.* Most studies focus on adolescents or students; we need adult samples and border regions, where cross-border identities and contact patterns may distinctively shape acculturation, social identity complexity, and democratic participation.

Open questions to guide local inquiry

- How do identities (ethnic, national, religious, EU) evolve over time in Bulgaria's specific context? Do residents in Bulgarian border regions – migrants and hosts – show distinctive social identity complexity profiles and acculturation trajectories compared to interior regions, and how do these relate to local cohesion, resilience, and democratic engagement?

- What are the correlates and consequences of high identity complexity and identity fusion with origin and/or host communities among refugees in Bulgaria? When does a salient ethnic/national identity mobilize belonging and civic involvement, and when does it promote exclusion or conflict?

- How does perceived (mis)alignment between migrants' preferred acculturation strategies and EU/ Bulgarian institutional/community norms shape identity threat and motives, acculturation stress, and integration outcomes?

- Under what conditions do dual identities merge into a superordinate civic identity that protects well-being and democratic participation?

Conclusions

Identity in migration is not a simple "switch" from one label to another; it is an ongoing negotiation across multiple group memberships, motives, and contexts. Inclusive, complex, and bicultural identity configurations tend to support belonging, cohesion, resilience, and democratic engagement (virtuous cycles), whereas exclusive, fused, or threatened identities—especially under policy-identity misalignment and exclusionary frames – can feed polarization and disengagement (vicious cycles). Bulgaria's unique mix of *border-state pressures* and *assimilationist legacies* calls for research that measures *social identity complexity/fusion, identity motives,* and *(mis)alignment of host-migrant acculturation orientations* longitudinally and comparatively across regions and groups.

References

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Identity*. In *APA dictionary of psychology*. https://dictionary.apa.org/identity

Berry, J. W. (1980). Acculturation as varieties of adaptation. In A. M. Padilla (Ed.), *Acculturation: Theory, models and some new findings* (pp. 9–25). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 46*(1), 5–34.

Berry, J. W., Phinney, J. S., Sam, D. L., & Vedder, P. (2006). Immigrant Youth: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation. Applied Psychology: An International Review, 55(3), 303–332.

Bilewicz, M., Skrodzka, M., Olko, J., Lewińska, T. (2021). The double-edged sword of identification. The divergent effects of identification on acculturation stress among Ukrainian immigrants in Poland. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 83*(5):177-186.

Bourhis, R. Y., Moïse, L. C., Perreault, S., & Senécal, S. (1997). Towards an interactive acculturation model: A social-psychological approach. *International Journal of Psychology, 32*(6), 369–386.

Brewer, M. B., & Pierce, K. P. (2005). Social identity complexity and outgroup tolerance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*(3), 428–437.

Breakwell, G. M. (1986). *Coping with threatened identities*. Psychology Press.

Çelebi, E., Verkuyten, M., & Bagci, S. C. (2017). Ethnic identification, discrimination, and mental and physical health among Syrian refugees: The moderating role of identity needs. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 47*(7), 832–843.

Cuellar, R. (2009). *Social Cohesion and Democracy*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Dimitrov, V. (2000). In search of a homogeneous nation: The assimilation of Bulgaria's Turkish minority, 1984–1985. *JEMIE, 1*(4), 1–22.

Dimitrova, R., Bender, M., Chasiotis, A., & Van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2013). Ethnic identity and acculturation of Turkish-Bulgarian adolescents. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 37*(1), 1–10.

Dimitrova, R., Chasiotis, A., Bender, M., & Van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2014). Turks in Bulgaria and the Netherlands: Acculturation orientations and outcomes. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 40*, 76–86.

Dimitrova, R., & Aydinli-Karakulak, A. (2016). Acculturation orientations mediate the link between religious identity and adjustment of Turkish-Bulgarian and Turkish-German adolescents. *SpringerPlus, 5*, 1024.

Drury, J., Carter, H., Cocking, C., Ntontis, E., Güven, S. T., & Amlôt, R. (2019). Facilitating collective psychosocial resilience in the public in emergencies. *Frontiers in Public Health, 7*, 141.

Echelmeyer, L., Slotboom, A. M., & Weerman, F. (2023). Identity and extremist radicalization: A systematic review. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–42.

Erfurth, L. M., Hernandez Bark, A. S., Molenaar, C., et al. (2021). Social identity as a collective resilience factor in flood-threatened areas. *SN Social Sciences, 1*, 272.

Haslam, S. A., Jetten, J., Postmes, T., & Haslam, C. (2009). Social identity, health and well-being. *Applied Psychology, 58*(1), 1–23.

Jaspal, R., Lopes, B., & Wignall, L. (2020). The Coping with Identity Threat Scale. *Identity, 20*(4), 225–238.

Leach, C. W., et al. (2008). Group-level self-definition and self-investment: A hierarchical model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*(1), 144–165.

Nguyen, A.-M. D., & Benet-Martínez, V. (2013). Biculturalism and adjustment: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 44*(1), 122–159.

Ntontis, E., Drury, J., Amlôt, R., Rubin, G. J., & Williams, R. (2021). Collective resilience in the disaster recovery period: Emergent social identity and observed social support. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 60*(3), 1075–1095.

Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, *108*(3), 499–514.

Phinney, J. S., & Ong, A. D. (2007). Conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 54*(3), 271–281.

Pinto, I.R., Carvalho, C.L., Dias, C., Lopes, P., Alves, S., de Carvalho, C. and Marques, J.M. (2020). A Path Toward Inclusive Social Cohesion: The Role of European and National Identity on Contesting vs. Accepting European Migration Policies in Portugal. *Front. Psychol. 11*:1875.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Roccas, S., & Brewer, M. B. (2002). Social identity complexity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 6*(2), 88–106.

Sabatier, C. (2008). Ethnic & national identity in France. Journal of Adolescence, 31, 185–205.

Sekerdej, M., Kołeczek, M., Rupar, M., & Jamróz-Dolińska, K. (2024). Social identity complexity decreases exclusion of immigrants. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 28*(2), 377–392.

Skrodzka, M., McMahon, G., Griffin, S. M., & Muldoon, O. T. (2024). New social identities in Ukrainian refugees. *Social Science & Medicine, 353*, 117048.

Swann, W. B., Jr., Gómez, Á., Seyle, D. C., Morales, J. F., & Huici, C. (2009). Identity fusion and extreme group behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96*(5), 995–1011.

Swann, W. B., Jetten, J., Gómez, A., Whitehouse, H., & Bastian, B. (2012). When group membership gets personal: A theory of identity fusion. *Psychological Review, 119*(3), 441–456.

Tajfel, H. (Ed.). (1978). *Differentiation between social groups.* Academic Press.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.

Vignoles, V. L., Regalia, C., Manzi, C., Golledge, J., & Scabini, E. (2006). Beyond self-esteem: Influence of multiple motives on identity construction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*(2), 308–333.

7.5. Understanding Resilience

Resilience has become a critical concept for understanding how individuals, communities, and democratic systems adapt to disruption. Once rooted in psychology and ecology, resilience is now recognized as a dynamic process of adaptation, learning, and renewal that is shaped by individual traits, social support, and broader cultural and political contexts. This report situates resilience within the framework of the We-ID project (Identities–Migration–Democracy), emphasizing how identity negotiation, belonging, and cohesion contribute to resilient democratic societies.

Introduction: Resilience in the We-ID Project

Resilience has become central to understanding how individuals, communities, and democratic systems adapt to disruption. It is now seen as a dynamic process of adaptation, learning, and renewal shaped by individual traits, social support, and broader socio-political contexts (Herrman et al., 2011).

The Horizon Europe project *Identities–Migration–Democracy (We-ID)* examines how migration and demographic change affect collective identities, social cohesion, and democratic structures. It investigates how identity negotiation influences belonging and participation, and how resilient democratic communities can be fostered. Through tools such as the Civic Competences Toolbox and We-SCOUTS, the project aims to co-design interventions that strengthen inclusion, trust, and civic engagement.

Conceptualizing Resilience

Resilience is commonly defined as positive adaptation despite adversity (Herrman et al., 2011). The APA describes it as "the process and outcome of successfully adapting" to challenges (APA, n.d.). Literature emphasizes five themes: recovery, dynamic processes, positive adaptation, coherence, and life purpose (Sisto et al., 2019). Folke (2006, 2016) highlights resilience as ongoing adaptability and innovation in changing environments. Wu et al. (2013) stress its multifactorial nature, involving biological, psychological, and social dimensions. While early views treated resilience as a trait (e.g., optimism, self-efficacy, hardiness; Rutter, 1985; Block & Block, 2014), contemporary perspectives see it as a dynamic process of adaptation over time (Luthar et al., 2000; Galli & Vealey, 2008). Resilience is shaped by personal strengths, supportive environments, and cultural frameworks. It is not innate but developable across the lifespan, varying in different life domains (Herrman et al., 2011). In migration contexts, resilience requires supportive environments, inclusive policies, and democratic structures to help individuals and communities thrive.

Predictors, Outcomes, and Mechanisms

Resilience predictors include optimism, cognitive flexibility, self-efficacy, supportive relationships, and community networks (Rutter, 1985). Outcomes are observed in positive adaptation—such as reduced distress and faster recovery. Higher resilience is consistently linked with better mental health and life satisfaction post-crisis (APA, 2011). Mechanisms explain *how* adaptation occurs. Cognitive appraisal, meaning-making, and positive coping styles (Lazarus, 1999), alongside supportive relationships, are crucial. Biological systems such as the HPA axis regulate stress responses (Wu et al., 2013). These interdependent mechanisms underline that resilience is not a single trait but a systemic process.

Community Resilience

Community resilience highlights the collective capacity to adapt through shared resources, networks, and action. It depends on economic resources, competence, information, social capital, and shared beliefs (Olcese et al., 2024).

Host communities play a pivotal role. Migliorini et al. (2023) show that Ukrainian refugees' resilience was strengthened by cultural exchange, social support, communication, and economic inclusion in host settings. Reciprocal resilience emerges: refugee communities also contribute assets to hosts, enhancing cohesion.

Community-based approaches—such as participatory research and local dialogue forums—are critical to build inclusive, bottom-up resilience (Norris et al., 2008; D'Souza, 2023). This aligns with We-ID's focus on identity infrastructures grounded in local relationships and shared trust.

Resilience and Other Constructs

Migration contexts highlight resilience as relational and cultural. Strong family ties, cultural values, and community support enhance adaptation among migrants (Ellis et al., 2016; Abraham & Holtzkamp, 2007; Arenliu et al., 2019). Ciaramella et al. (2022) show resilience is increasingly seen as a process shaped by environment and relationships, not just personal traits.

Protective factors include self-efficacy and emotional regulation, but also family structures, belief systems, and social ties. Risk factors such as trauma, discrimination, and exclusion undermine resilience. Interventions that integrate trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and participatory methods are still rare but essential (Ciaramella et al., 2022).

Recent studies illustrate variability: migrants in Spain and international adolescents reported higher resilience than host populations (Solà-Sales et al., 2021; Gatt et al., 2020), while Bulgarians abroad showed lower resilience linked to reduced belonging and support (Mihaylova, 2024; Stoyanova, 2024). These findings confirm that community cohesion and belonging strongly influence resilience outcomes.

Resilience intersects with social cohesion, belonging, and identity. Democratic resilience, as Merkel & Lührmann (2021) note, requires not only institutions but also engaged civil society. Active belonging improves well-being in recovery (Quinn et al., 2020). Belonging can itself serve as a social resource of **resilience**, particularly for refugees (Gruttner, 2019).

Identity provides both protection and growth: cultural continuity supports adaptation, while overcoming adversity strengthens identity. Cohesion and belonging act as socio-environmental buffers (Bardsley et al., 2021; Davis & Davies, 2025). Communities that nurture recognition and trust become reservoirs of resilience that safeguard both individuals and democratic systems.

Policy Recommendations

- Invest in community resilience: support dialogue forums, associations, and local audits of cohesion.
- Strengthen belonging and identity: promote intercultural education, storytelling, and civic identity-building.
- Foster inclusive participation: co-design participatory tools and expand migrants' roles in decision-making.

- Implement trauma-informed, culturally sensitive interventions: train professionals and tailor psychosocial programs.
- Measure resilience across levels: apply validated tools (CD-RISC, T-CRS) in policy monitoring.
- Frame migration as a resource: highlight migrants' contributions to host societies.

Conclusion

Resilience is both an individual capacity and a collective democratic imperative. It thrives when people are recognized, connected, and empowered. Migration and diversity, if supported with inclusive policies, can strengthen resilience and democratic cohesion. The We-ID project illustrates how resilient unity in diversity can be achieved: by linking identity, belonging, and cohesion with adaptive policies and practices, Europe can build communities that not only recover from crises but also bounce forward together.

References

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Identity. In APA dictionary of psychology.

Abraham, P. G., & Holtzkamp, J. (2007). The prevalence of resilience in migrant families. *Family & Community Health, 30*(2), 186–200.

Arenliu, A., Weine, S. M., Bertelsen, N., Saad, R., & Abdulaziz, H. (2019). Displacement stressors and coping mechanisms of Syrian urban refugee families living in Istanbul. *Journal of Family Psychology*.

Bardsley, A., Chen, A., Owens, R., Gluckman, P., & Spoonley, P. (2021). *Societal resilience and cohesion: Identifying contributing factors and their interactions*. University of Auckland.

Block, J. H., & Block, J. (2014). The role of ego-control and ego-resiliency in the organization of behavior. In *Development of cognition, affect, and social relations* (pp. 39–101). Psychology Press.

Cénat, J. M., et al. (2021). The transcultural community resilience scale. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 713477.

Ciaramella, M., Monacelli, N., & Cocimano, L. C. E. (2022). Promotion of resilience in migrants: A systematic review. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health, 24*(5), 1328–1344.

Connor, K. M., & Davidson, J. R. (2003). Development of a new resilience scale: The CD-RISC. *Depression and Anxiety, 18*(2), 76–82.

Davis, S. F., & Davies, M. (2025). Understanding the effects of social cohesion on wellbeing: A scoping review. *International Journal of Public Health, 70*, 1607414.

Ellis, H. H., et al. (2016). Relation of psychosocial factors to diverse behaviors among Somali refugees. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 86*(4), 393–408.

Folke, C. (2006). Resilience: The emergence of a perspective. *Global Environmental Change, 16*(3), 253–267.

Folke, C. (2016). Resilience (republished). *Ecology and Society, 21*(4), 44.

Gatt, J. M., et al. (2020). Trauma, resilience, and mental health in migrant and non-migrant youth. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 10*, 576758.

Gruttner, M. (2019). Belonging as a resource of resilience. *Student Success, 10*(3), 36–45.

Herrman, H., Stewart, D. E., Diaz-Granados, N., Berger, E. L., Jackson, B., & Yuen, T. (2011). What is resilience? *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 56*(5), 258–265.

Lazarus, R. S. (1999). *Stress and emotion: A new synthesis*. Free Association Books.

Luthar, S. S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation. *Child Development, 71*(3), 543–562.

Migliorini, L., Olcese, M., Cardinali, P., & Prestia, D. (2023). Community resilience among Ukrainian refugees. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 14*, 1206304.

Norris, F. H., Stevens, S. P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K. F., & Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2008). Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, and strategy. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 41*(1), 127–150.

Olcese, M., Cardinali, P., Madera, F., Camilleri, A. P., & Migliorini, L. (2024). Migration and community resilience: A scoping review. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 98*, 101924.

Quinn, T., Cinderby, S., & Cambridge, H. (2020). *Community resilience and well-being: Relationality and belonging after a flood*. University of Exeter.

Rutter, M. (1985). Resilience in the face of adversity. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 147*(6), 598–611.

Sisto, A., Vicinanza, F., Campanozzi, L. L., Ricci, G., Tartaglini, D., & Tambone, V. (2019). Towards a transversal definition of psychological resilience. *Medicina, 55*(11), 745.

Solà-Sales, S., et al. (2021). The role of resilience for migrants' mental health in COVID-19. *Healthcare, 9*(9), 1131.

Stoyanova, S. (2024). Mental resilience and state anxiety in Bulgarians at home and abroad during COVID-19. *Journal of Psychology: Research and Practice, 14*(1), 23–34.

Wu, G., et al. (2013). Understanding resilience. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience, 7*, 10.