Possible Futures: Strategic Foresight and Anticipatory Decision-Making in CEE Countries

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Abstract

Futures modelling is a challenge to governments in times of dynamic disruptions and growing uncertainty, as the capacity to anticipate and act responsibly, before emerging crises, becomes a defining feature of competitive advantage. This paper is inspired by the insights from the book by Geert Bouckaert (et al.) "Futures of the Public Sector" (2025), other seminal scholarly contributions and debates on anticipatory governance, backsliding of democracy and strategic foresight (OPSI, 2025). Building on the concept of a "future-oriented public sector," grounded in resilience capacity, ethics, institutional learning, the paper explores, how public administrations can move beyond reactive towards more proactive and future-proof forms of governance. It bridges evidence-based and future-informed policymaking by examining how data, strategic foresight, resilience-building, and institutional capacity contribute to strengthening crisis preparedness and citizen security. It introduces a comparative framework (AGI), that assesses maturity, through three interconnected layers (7-dimensions): in strategic capacity (foresight and resilience), institutional capacity (digital government, democracy, trust, and state capacity), and structural constraints represented by vulnerability. Methodologically, the research combines comparative case analysis, policy document analysis, and secondary data from international and national sources, including JRC, Eurobarometer, V-DEM, BTI, UNDRR, OECD, and national institutions. The empirical analysis focuses on 12 CEE countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia). The AGI framework is applied to assess differences in institutional adaptability, coordination capacity, resilience, and the integration of foresight into governance systems. Findings reveal that capacity varies significantly across the region - some countries demonstrate stronger adaptive capacity, supported by digital transformation and institutional learning, others remain closer to reactive governance models due to shortened horizon-orientation, persistent vulnerabilities and weaker horizon-driven capabilities. Possible futures emerge, not only after scenarios or thinking beyond the boundaries of strategic vision alone, but anticipation requires capable institutions, democratic legitimacy, public trust, and ability to translate foresight into policy action. Two main research questions are addressed: *How can public administrations use foresight and predictive approaches to mitigate emerging risks? How can responsible public administration integrate foresight and anticipatory governance, navigating future megatrends with trustworthy and accountable democratic governance and avoid backsliding?* The paper provides recommendations for strengthening national foresight capacities, developing institutional mechanisms for foresight, and embedding innovative approaches in uncertainty.

Keywords: *Anticipatory Governance; Foresight; Public Integrity; Democratic Backsliding; Resilience*

Introduction

Future is not just time, as a quantum spark from past and present actions. It is a journey towards life to be, as driver of change and responsible sensemaking of every single decision and act, more important than the destination itself, impacting longue durée (Braudel). The futures-thinking governance models and public sector innovations, in times of disruptions, have fundamentally transformed the context in which public administrations operate. Geopolitical instability, democratic backsliding, and polarization have gradually challenged the capacity of governments to govern under conditions of persistent uncertainty. Public institutions increasingly face interconnected, systemic and unpredictable risks that require new forms of governance, capable not only of reacting to change, but of anticipating and shaping possible futures. Recent scholarship, has consequently shifted from traditional paradigm of evidence-based policy-making, towards future-informed governance, recognizing that historical evidence alone is no longer sufficient for decision-making under conditions of accelerating uncertainty. Strategic foresight has emerged as a governance capability enabling governments to identify emerging risks, explore alternative futures

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and strengthen long-term policy resilience. Simultaneously, public integrity, transparency, accountability and public trust, become indispensable foundations for responsible public administration and democratic legitimacy, as existing research has largely examined them as separate strands. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how these governance capacities interact and reinforce one another in strengthening the resilience of democratic institutions. This gap is particularly significant in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where democratic consolidation has increasingly been challenged by institutional fragility, declining public trust, political polarization, governance reforms of uneven effectiveness and concerns regarding democratic backsliding. This paper argues that strategic foresight, should be conceptualized as a core governance capability, supporting integrity-based and future-oriented public decision-making with ethical responsibility, transparency, accountability and long-term thinking into public policy processes. In this sense, it contributes to crisis preparedness and strengthening democratic resilience, through improved quality and institutional legitimacy. To address this research gap, the paper develops a comparative analysis and proposes an Anticipatory Democratic Governance (ADG) Framework, which conceptualizes the relationships between strategic foresight, anticipatory governance, public integrity, transparency, accountability, institutional learning and public trust as mutually reinforcing capacities supporting democratic resilience. This framework is applied through a comparative governance meta-analysis of selected CEE countries, combining international governance indicators, documentary analysis and an illustrative institutional case of Bulgaria based on original research and comparative governance evidence. The study addresses two research questions:

- *RQ1. How does strategic foresight contribute to strengthening public integrity, transparency, accountability and public trust under conditions of uncertainty?*
- *RQ2. How can the integration of strategic foresight and integrity-based governance strengthen democratic resilience and support responsible public administration in CEE countries?*

The central hypothesis proposes that stronger anticipatory governance capacities contribute to maintaining public integrity, institutional accountability, transparency, public trust and democratic resilience, in times of uncertainty. The paper contributes to contemporary public administration scholarship, advancing an integrated conceptual framework, bridging strategic foresight with democratic governance and public integrity. It proposes an operational framework and presents a specific case of Bulgarian democracy paradox, moving beyond reactive political crisis towards future-oriented public governance. The accompanying AGI operationalizes this conceptual framework by measuring governance maturity across these interconnected dimensions using comparative data from the OECD Digital Government Index, BTI, V-Dem, Eurobarometer, UNDRR Sendai Framework Monitor, and the European Commission Joint Research Centre.

Literature Review

Strategic Foresight and Anticipatory Governance have emerged as a conceptual framework due to the paradigm shift under the impact of uncertainty and disruption, complexity, and accelerating technological, environmental in geopolitical transformations. Disruptive technologies, geopolitical instability, and declining public trust have intensified debates about how governments can move beyond reactive crisis management toward more proactive and future-oriented forms of decision-making (OECD, 2021; UNDESA, 2024). The concept of anticipatory governance has emerged within this broader transformation as an attempt to redefine how societies engage with uncertain future, rather than understanding the future as a single predictable destination, anticipatory governance

conceptualizes futures as multiple possibilities, shaped through collective choices, institutional capacities, and ethical reflection (Miller, 2018; Poli, 2010). The philosophical foundations of anticipation can be traced to the idea that human systems are not only influenced by past experiences, but are also shaped by imagined futures. Rosen's (1985) theory of anticipatory systems introduced the idea that complex systems can contain internal models of themselves and their environments, allowing them to adjust behavior based on possible future states. Building on this perspective, Miller and Poli (2010) argue that anticipation represents a fundamental human and organizational capacity, rather than simply a technical forecasting activity and that "*anticipation concerns the capacity exhibited by some systems to tune their behavior according to a model of the future evolution of the environment in which they are embedded", allowing it to change its state"* (Poli, 2010). Futures thinking therefore becomes a way of organizing knowledge and action under uncertainty. Fuerth (2009) was among the early scholars connecting foresight with governance capacity, arguing that anticipatory governance requires institutions, that integrate foresight into policymaking not for predicting, but for improving present decisions by considering future outcomes (Fuerth 2009). Guston (2014) further developed the concept by bridging science, technology, and innovation policy, arguing that futures are not predetermined, but socially constructed through choices made by researchers, policymakers, business actors and citizens. Main focus is the idea, that it is a "*broad-based capacity extended through society, that can act on various inputs to manage emerging knowledge-based technologies, such management is still possible. It motivates activities designed to build capacities in foresight, engagement, and integration - as well as through their production ensemble" (Guston, 2014).* Therefore, governance must integrate civic engagement, public dialogue, and responsible innovation mechanisms, as a "*systems-based approach to cope with accelerating, complex forms of change; a "system of systems" to monitor and adjust*" (Fuerth 2009). Thus, it is understood, not as a comprehensive democratic process for shaping desirable futures, further expanded by Miller (2018), who provides a distinctive typology, including contingency, emergence, and transformative anticipation, particularly relevant for public administration, questioning existing assumptions and conventional wisdom, that "*proactively prepares for future challenges, risks, and opportunities by integrating foresight, scenario planning, early warning, and adaptive policymaking."* (Alberti, UN DESA 2025). Governments that adopt this perspective, develop the capacity to rethink institutions, policies, and societal relationships, because governments at present are "*fomented by a perceived disconnection between societal problems and the capacity of current governance systems to address them*" (Alberti, UN DESA 2025). The effect of these dynamics is that fundamentally different futures are overlooked and may reassert the status quo". (Muiderman, 2022). Alberti underlines the need to apply foresight in order to overcome the barriers of the contemporary *volatile*, unpredictable, complex and *ambiguous*, world".

Strategic foresight is another vector of analysis, as a systematic approach to anticipating and preparing for future challenges and opportunities and it involves analyzing trends, uncertainties, and emerging issues, to inform decision-making and strategic planning. In normative perspective, it is accepted that *"foresight is a tool to shape, not predict the future and deeper understanding of the critical drivers of change, may influence governance outcomes*." (Alberti, 2025). Although closely connected, both concepts represent different analytical levels: *'foresight'* refers primarily to methods, tools, and practices used to explore possible futures, '*anticipatory governance'* refers to the broader institutional capacity to incorporate future-oriented knowledge into decision-making (OECD, 2021; Tõnurist & Orlik, 2025). Heinonen and Hiltunen (2012) highlight the importance of "weak signals"- early indicators of emerging change, significant drivers of transformation. Such approaches expand the

analytical horizon of policymakers by allowing them to recognize developments, that statistical forecasting may neglect, shifting the mindset from "*reactive and siloed approaches to proactive, long-term, innovative and integrated strategies" (*Tõnurist, 2025). The tools for 'envisioning futures', range from scenario planning, horizon scanning, weak signal analysis, backcasting, to Delphi studies, and participatory futures methods, by analyzing trends, identifying risks and *"shape the governance of the future*". (Tõnurist, Orlik, OECD, 2025). Through the evolution of foresight into a governance capability, it is considered as a forward-looking monitoring process of envisioning alternative course of actions, for "*asking unasked questions, and issuing timely warning to avert a risk or seize an opportunity"* – neither just a *"prediction, nor a vision, nor intelligence"* (Stephens et al., 2025). Earlier administrative models emphasized stability, hierarchy, and efficiency, and contemporary governance requires flexibility, collaboration, and learning capacity. The OECD has increasingly promoted strategic foresight as a core public sector capability, emphasizing that governments need institutional arrangements that connect future-oriented analysis with policymaking, budgeting, regulation, and innovation systems (OECD, 2021; OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2025). In this context, UN has initiated in 2024 a *Pact for the Future*, however considering the challenge in institutionalizing the approach, by fostering the idea of *"leveraging science, data, statistics, and strategic foresight to ensure long-term thinking and planning, and to develop and implement sustainable practices and the institutional reforms necessary for evidence-based decision making, making governance more anticipatory, adaptive, and responsive to future opportunities, risks, and challenges*" (UN Future Pact, 2024). OECD research shows that successful foresight systems require organizational cultures, that value experimentation, cross-sector collaboration, and long-term thinking (OECD, 2021). Research on organizational foresight demonstrates that institutions, capable of systematically exploring future scenarios, are better positioned to adapt to uncertainty and improve strategic performance (Rohrbeck et al., 2015; Rohrbeck et al., 2018). A central dimension distinguishing the concept, from traditional forecasting is its normative orientation, according to which it is reflecting what should happen with the sense of responsibility, ethics, and democratic legitimacy with the obligation to consider long-term impacts on future generations. (Jonas, 2014).

Chart 1. Cycle of anticipatory governance process



Source: adapted from Stephens et al. (2025)

The essence of the concept incorporates dynamics and a responsibility dimension: governing today, requires consideration of those affected tomorrow. OECD frameworks on emerging technology governance emphasize that traditional regulatory approaches, which often intervene after technologies become widespread, are insufficient for rapidly evolving fields (OECD, 2023; OECD, 2024). Responsible innovation literature similarly emphasizes the importance of trust and social expectations, where McCrea et al. (2024) argue that public acceptance of disruptive technologies depends not only on technical effectiveness but also on whether citizens perceive innovation processes as legitimate, transparent, and aligned with societal values and reinforces the connection with democratic participation. It defines a new paradigm of public administration and it reflects a broader transition in

public administration theory: from government toward governance, from hierarchy toward networks, and from administrative control toward adaptive capacity. Jackson and Keys (1984) argue that complex societal problems require systems methodologies, capable of addressing interconnections, rather than isolated variables. Contemporary governance challenges increasingly resemble complex adaptive systems where outcomes emerge from interactions among multiple actors, institutions, technologies, and social dynamics. Mulgan's (2018) concept of collective intelligence further contributes to this debate by emphasizing that governments increasingly depend on distributed knowledge. "*Acceleration*" and "*complexity*" are real phenomena that have profound meaning, and technical implications, for the way we understand issues and organize policy responses. Complex or intractable, "wicked problems" are like fuzzy sets, and they cannot be broken apart and solved piece-by-piece, "they must be understood and addressed as a system because if not tacked, they "intrinsically unravel into chaos if not systemically managed, instead, they morph into new problems as the result of interventions to deal with them and cannot be permanently solved." (Stephens, 2025). Anticipatory governance requires mechanisms for knowledge co-creation, participation, and collaboration among governments, experts, citizens, and stakeholders (Kreiling & Paunov, 2021). Participatory approaches are particularly important, because futures are socially constructed, according to Schroth et al. (2020) and it demonstrates, that participatory agenda-setting contribute to experiential knowledge and shape future-oriented policy priorities. Such approaches challenge technocratic models of foresight and reinforce the democratic dimension of anticipation. According to the literature, anticipatory governance can be understood as a synthesis of three capacities*: Cognitive; Institutional and Democratic* in shaping future pathways. According to Tõnurist, it is essential to define the core requirements for anticipatory governance and innovations: *an agency and an authorizing environment*. *"Agency empowers individuals and organizations to proactively explore and experiment with innovative solutions, an authorizing environment provides the necessary validation, resources, and policy frameworks to facilitate such endeavors*" (Tõnurist, Orlik, 2025). Contemporary governance environments are characterized by what has been described as a "polycrisis" condition, where multiple interconnected crises: such as geopolitical instability, technological disruption, climate risks, economic uncertainty, and societal polarization - interact and amplify one another (Head, 2022; OECD, 2021). Under these conditions, administrative effectiveness can no longer be evaluated only through efficiency, stability, or the capacity to respond after disruption occurs. Instead, governments increasingly require the ability to anticipate risks, explore alternative futures, and develop adaptive responses, before crises fully materialize. This transformation reflects a broader shift from evidence-based policymaking, towards future-informed policymaking. Strategic foresight expands the policymaking horizon by incorporating scenario development, horizon scanning, weak signal analysis, and intelligence into decision processes (OECD, 2021; OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2025). The literature conceptualizes this shift as the emergence of a future-oriented public sector. Bouckaert et al. (2025) argue that the future of public governance depends on the ability of institutions to combine traditional administrative capacities with flexibility, innovation, and learning mechanisms. Future-oriented administrations are not defined by their ability to predict a single future but by their capacity to prepare for multiple plausible futures. Within this perspective, it represents a new paradigm, that integrates next level institutional learning, ethical reflection, and adaptive capacity, according to the research of Stephens, Awamleh, et al. (2025). This approach aligns with Miller's (2018) argument, that "anticipation is a process of creating the cognitive and institutional conditions necessary for transformation (Miller 2018).

Anticipatory governance and institutional resilience in Central and Eastern Europe

The development of this field of study is particularly relevant for Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. The public governance and public administrations reforms in the CEE Region have been linked to institutional learning, Europeanization, digital transformation, and crisis adaptation. However, reform trajectories have often been characterized by external drivers, fragmented implementation, and limited horizon of long-term strategic thinking (Bouckaert, Nakrosis, & Nemec, 2011; de Vries & Nemec, 2025). Research on public administration reforms in CEE demonstrates that many countries still face challenges related to coordination, strategic capacity, and administrative learning, particularly visible during crises, where administrative systems must balance immediate response with long-term transformation (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2003; Tomova & Petrov, 2017; Zankina, 2020). Therefore, foresight and resilience in CEE governance cannot be understood only as crisis-response capacity, but it increasingly depends on whether institutions detect emerging threats, coordinate across sectors, mobilize knowledge, and adjust policies under uncertainty. This study builds on this perspective, by conceptualizing, that foresight capacity and resilience, as the outcome of a governance, reflect the argument that anticipatory approach strengthens institutional preparedness and adaptive performance. The OECD Strategic Foresight Framework identifies several core dimensions, necessary for institutionalizing foresight: horizon scanning; identification of emerging signals; scenario development; strategic intelligence; integration of foresight into policymaking processes. Similarly, European Commission and Joint Research Centre (JRC) foresight approaches emphasize that governments require systematic mechanisms for exploring uncertainty and preparing for alternative futures. Building on these approaches, this research proposes a Strategic Foresight Capacity Index (SFCI) as a composite measure of maturity in CEE countries. The model reflects the argument, that forecasting capabilities alone are not enough and it represents a multidimensional institutional ecosystem combining knowledge, technology, legitimacy, and resilience. Rackwitz, Hustedt, and Hammerschmid (2022) demonstrate that digital transformation can contribute to a movement from hierarchical administrative structures toward network-based governance models. Similarly, OECD research on emerging technology governance emphasizes that artificial intelligence and digital technologies require anticipatory approaches because their social consequences cannot be fully addressed through traditional regulatory models (OECD, 2023; OECD, 2024). However, technological capacity alone does not guarantee effective anticipation, because public trust represents a critical enabling condition. The OECD (2022) and Edelman (2024) highlight declining trust in institutions as a major governance challenge. Without legitimacy and citizen confidence, even technologically advanced systems may face resistance and limited effectiveness. Therefore, it requires the integration of three dimensions: technological intelligence; institutional capability; democratic legitimacy. This perspective connects public governance with responsible public administration, where future-oriented decisions must be both effective and socially legitimate (Jonas, 2014; McCrea et al., 2024).

Research gap and theoretical contribution

Despite growing literature on this relevant topic, important gaps remain and existing research often focuses on individual policy sectors, particularly technology governance, sustainability, or innovation policy. Less attention has been given to understanding it as s a general public administration capability and comparative research on CEE countries remains limited. Governance reform literature explains institutional transformation after 1989, it provides less insight into how these administrations develop capacities to govern future uncertainty. There is

insufficient empirical operationalization of anticipatory governance. The concept remains theoretically rich but comparatively difficult to measure. To address these gaps, this research develops an Anticipatory Governance Index (AGI), visualized below with indicators and it argues, that countries with stronger foresight capacities are more likely to demonstrate higher institutional resilience, stronger preparedness, and improved citizen security.

Research design and methodological approach

This study applies a mixed-method comparative research design to examine how public administrations in Central and Eastern Europe develop capacities for anticipatory governance. The methodological approach combines quantitative index construction with qualitative comparative analysis of institutional practices, policy documents, and crisis responses. The research design responds to the growing need to evaluate not only how governments respond to crises, but also whether they possess institutional capacities to anticipate emerging risks and prepare for alternative futures. Following the OECD strategic foresight approach, the concept is conceptualized as a multidimensional capability integrating foresight practices, institutional adaptability, digital intelligence, trust-building mechanisms, and security preparedness (OECD, 2021; OECD, 2024).

Research Hypothesis

H1: Futures thinking and data-driven risk preparedness are essential mechanisms for transforming public administration from reactive crisis management toward future-proof governance.

H2: Countries with higher foresight capacity demonstrate stronger governance resilience, higher institutional adaptability, and greater crisis-response effectiveness.

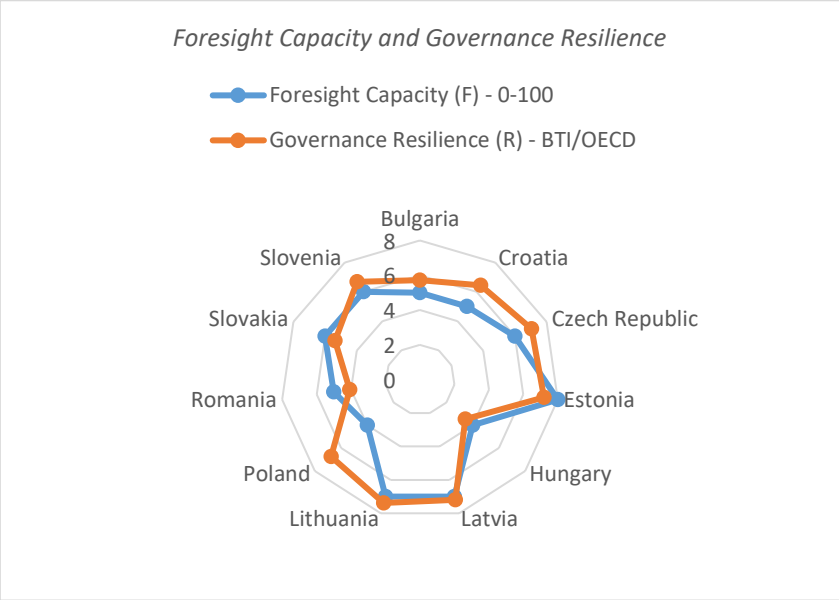
Methodology: Developing a Strategic Foresight Capacity Index (SFCI) and Anticipatory Governance Assessment Framework. The proposed index (AGI) is constructed around the assumption that future-oriented governance capacity emerges from the interaction between strategic capacity, institutional capacity, and structural constraints. The index integrates indicators related to foresight, resilience, democratic quality, digital transformation, public trust, security preparedness, and vulnerability. The empirical analysis focuses on selected 12 CEE countries (also EU member states), including *Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia*. These cases provide a relevant comparative setting because they share similar historical and institutional trajectories demonstrating different levels of administrative modernization, resilience capacity, digital development, and institutional adaptability. All indicators are normalized to a common scale to ensure comparability across dimensions. Positive governance indicators are interpreted as capacity-enhancing factors, vulnerability is treated as a structural constraint that reduces the ability of governance systems to anticipate and manage uncertainty.

The AGI therefore combines enabling governance capacities with a vulnerability adjustment:

- *Quantitative comparative assessment* through the Strategic Foresight Capacity Index (SFCI);
- *Qualitative case analysis of governance* responses to crises and disruptions*;*
- *Policy document analysis* examining national foresight strategies, risk management frameworks, digital governance policies, and institutional arrangements. The empirical analysis that constructs *AGI,* combines internationally validated governance datasets with a newly developed Strategic Foresight Capacity component. The index is designed on the basis of 7 dimensions and composite indicators for 12 CEE countries, to capture its multidimensional nature, recognizing that future-oriented public administration depends not only on foresight tools but also on institutional quality, democratic legitimacy, technological capacity, and security preparedness.

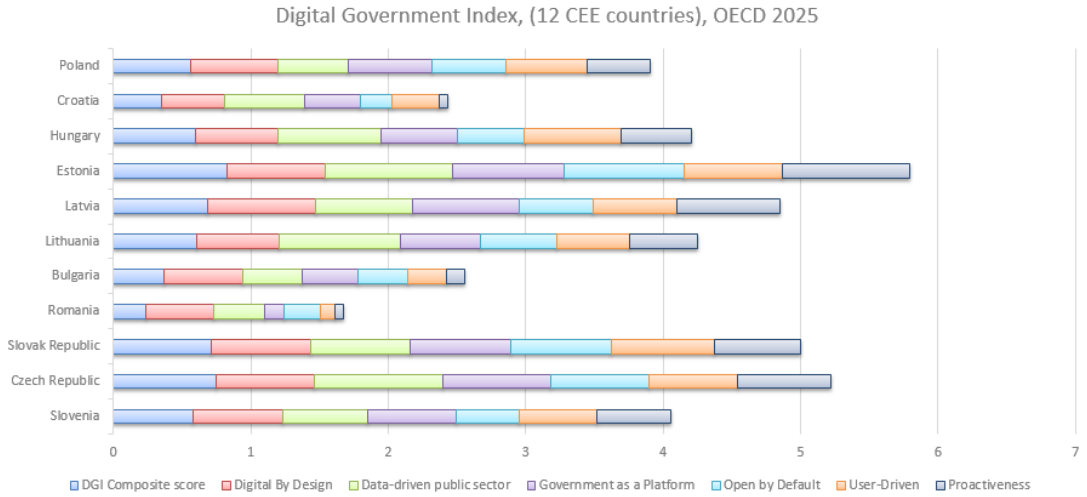
1.Foresight Capacity (F): Foresight capacity represents the ability of public administrations to anticipate emerging challenges, explore alternative futures, and integrate long-term perspectives into policy development. In this context, foresight is considered a critical strategic capability that allows governments to move beyond reactive crisis management toward proactive and adaptive decision-making. The assessment of foresight capacity is based on available evidence regarding national strategic planning, future-oriented policy instruments, institutional foresight mechanisms, and the integration of scenario-based approaches within public administration. Data sources include the Joint Research Centre (JRC) analytical work on strategic foresight and governance innovation, as well as national policy documents and institutional frameworks related to future-oriented policymaking. The indicator captures the extent to which governments demonstrate institutional readiness to identify emerging risks, consider alternative scenarios, and incorporate proactive innovative approaches into decision-making processes.

Chart 2. Foresight Capacity and Governance Resilience (2025)



2.Governance Resilience (R): Governance resilience reflects the capacity of public institutions to absorb shocks, adapt to changing circumstances, and maintain effective governance under conditions of uncertainty. It represents the adaptive dimension, recognizing that future-oriented governance requires not only the ability to predict change but also the institutional capacity to respond effectively. The resilience dimension draws on comparative governance assessments, particularly the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), which evaluates dimensions such as governance effectiveness, policy coordination, institutional performance, and the capacity of political systems to manage complex challenges. Additional insights are derived from OECD analyses addressing public sector resilience, crisis management, and adaptive governance. The indicator therefore assesses whether governance systems possess the organizational and institutional capacities necessary to transform foresight into effective public action.

Chart 3. Digital Government Index, OECD



3.Digital Governance Capacity (D): It is included as an enabling dimension, because modern public administrations increasingly rely on data infrastructures, digital tools, and evidence-based decision-making systems to anticipate and manage emerging risks. The digital governance indicator is based primarily on OECD Digital Government Index (DGI) data and complementary European assessments of digital transformation. The indicator captures dimensions such as digital-by-design governance, data-driven public sector capacity, government as a platform, and user-oriented digital services. Higher digital governance capacity is interpreted as an indicator for stronger ability to collect information, coordinate responses, and support predictive policymaking.

Table 1. Digital Government Outlook, 2025, OECD

Category	Slovenia	Czech Republic	Slovak Republic	Romania	Bulgaria	Lithuania	Latvia	Estonia	Hungary	Croatia	Poland
DGI Composite score	0,58	0,75	0,71	0,24	0,37	0,61	0,69	0,83	0,6	0,35	0,56
Digital By Design	0,65	0,71	0,73	0,49	0,57	0,6	0,78	0,71	0,6	0,46	0,64
Data-driven public sector	0,62	0,94	0,72	0,37	0,43	0,88	0,71	0,93	0,75	0,58	0,51
Government as a Platform	0,64	0,78	0,73	0,14	0,41	0,58	0,77	0,81	0,55	0,41	0,61
Open by Default	0,46	0,72	0,73	0,27	0,36	0,56	0,54	0,87	0,49	0,23	0,54
User-Driven	0,57	0,64	0,75	0,1	0,28	0,53	0,61	0,72	0,7	0,34	0,59
Proactiveness	0,54	0,68	0,63	0,06	0,14	0,49	0,75	0,92	0,52	0,06	0,46

4. Democratic Capacity (DEM): It captures the institutional conditions that enable legitimate, accountable, and inclusive governance. Future-oriented policymaking requires not only technical expertise but also democratic mechanisms that ensure transparency, participation, and accountability. The democracy indicator is informed by comparative governance datasets and assessments, including the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) and international democracy monitoring frameworks. It reflects institutional quality, democratic accountability, and the capacity of governance systems to incorporate diverse societal perspectives into decision-making. Democratic capacity is therefore considered a key foundation for responsible governance, ensuring that future-oriented policies are both effective and legitimate.

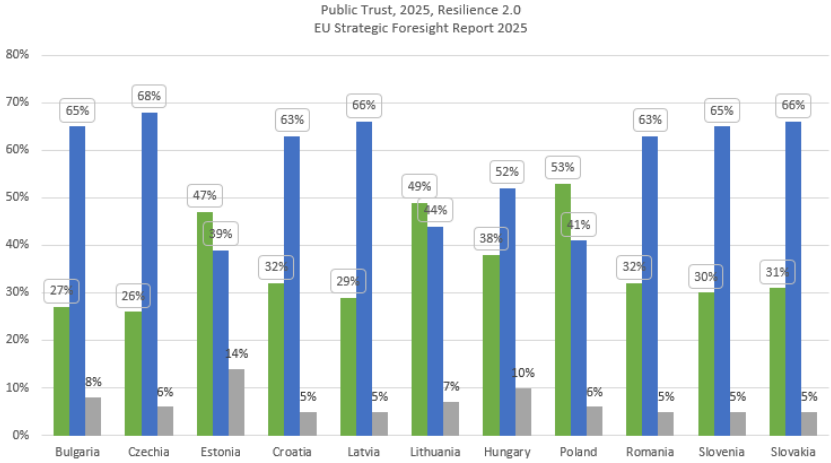
Chart 4. Democracy and Public Trust



Source: Datasets adapted from BTI Index, 2026[2] and Eurobarometer, Spring 2026[3]

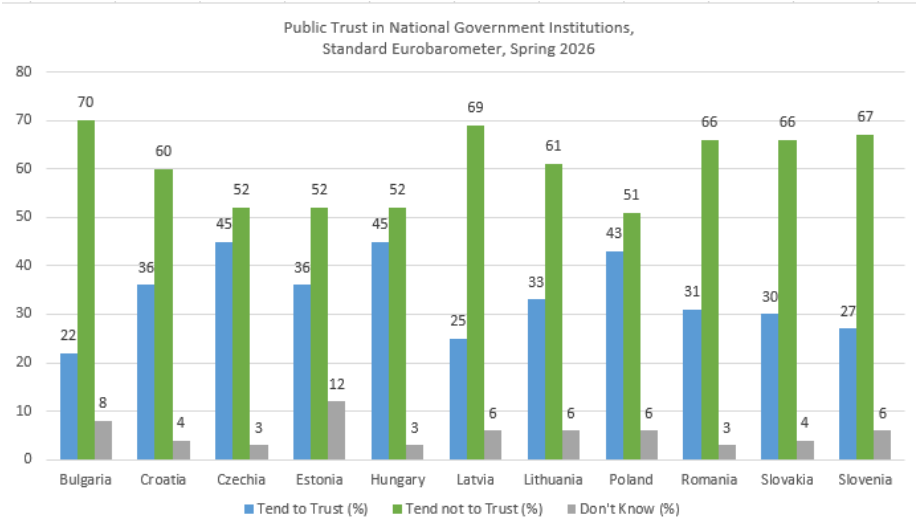
5. Public Trust (T): It represents the societal dimension and citizens' willingness to accept public policies, cooperate during crises, and support long-term governance reforms. Public trust is not a direct administrative capacity, it functions as an enabling condition that strengthens institutional effectiveness and policy legitimacy. The trust indicator draws on Eurobarometer surveys and international governance datasets, including OECD and democracy-related assessments. It captures citizens' perceptions of institutional reliability, government responsiveness, and confidence in public institutions. Including trust in the AGI reflects the argument that governance requires, not only capable institutions, but also social legitimacy.

Chart 5. Public Trust in EU, Eurobarometer (2025)



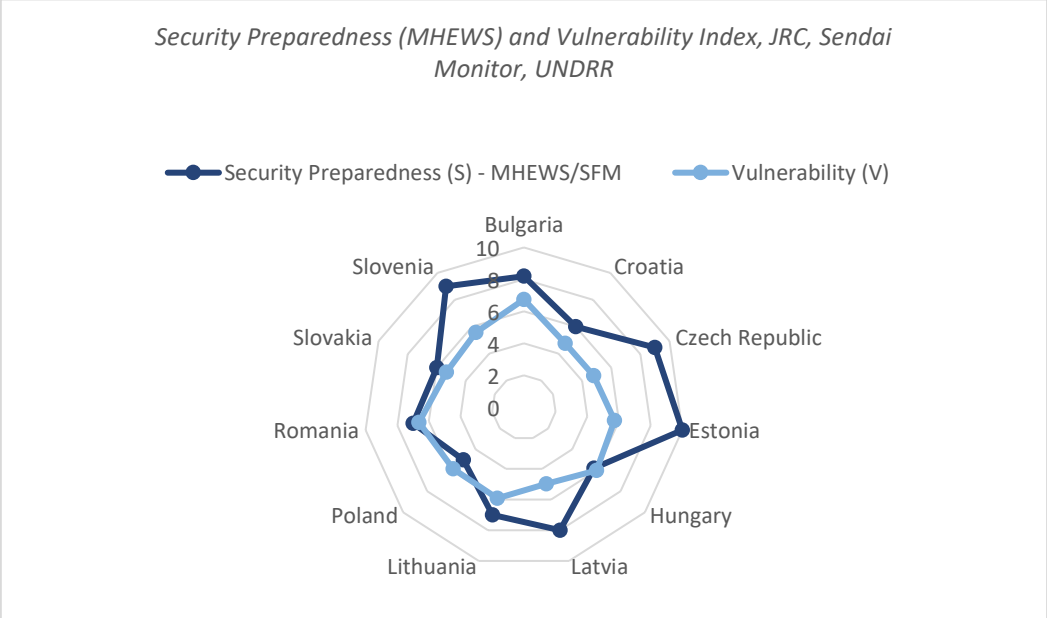
[2] BTI Index - https://atlas.bti-project.org/
[3] Eurobarometer, Spring 2026 - https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3613

Chart 6. Public Trust in EU, Eurobarometer (2026)



Source: Eurobarometer, Spring 2026

Chart 7. Security Preparedness and Vulnerability (2025)



Source: Datasets adapted from JRC[4] and Sendai Framework Monitor, UNDRR[5]

6. Risk Preparedness and Security Capacity (S): It measures the ability of governance systems to anticipate, monitor, and respond to complex risks, including disasters, climate-related threats, and emerging disruptions. This dimension links governance with resilience and crisis preparedness frameworks and it is measured, based on data from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), particularly the Sendai Framework Monitoring (SFM) system and Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (MHEWS) indicators. These sources provide internationally comparable information on disaster risk reduction capacities, early warning mechanisms, and institutional preparedness. The inclusion of this dimension reflects the growing importance of preventive governance approaches in managing uncertainty and protecting societal resilience.

[4] JRC, Risk Data Hub 2026, DRMKC, European Union[4]
[5] UNDRR-SFM 2024, https://sendaimonitor.undrr.org/analytics/global-targets-all/22

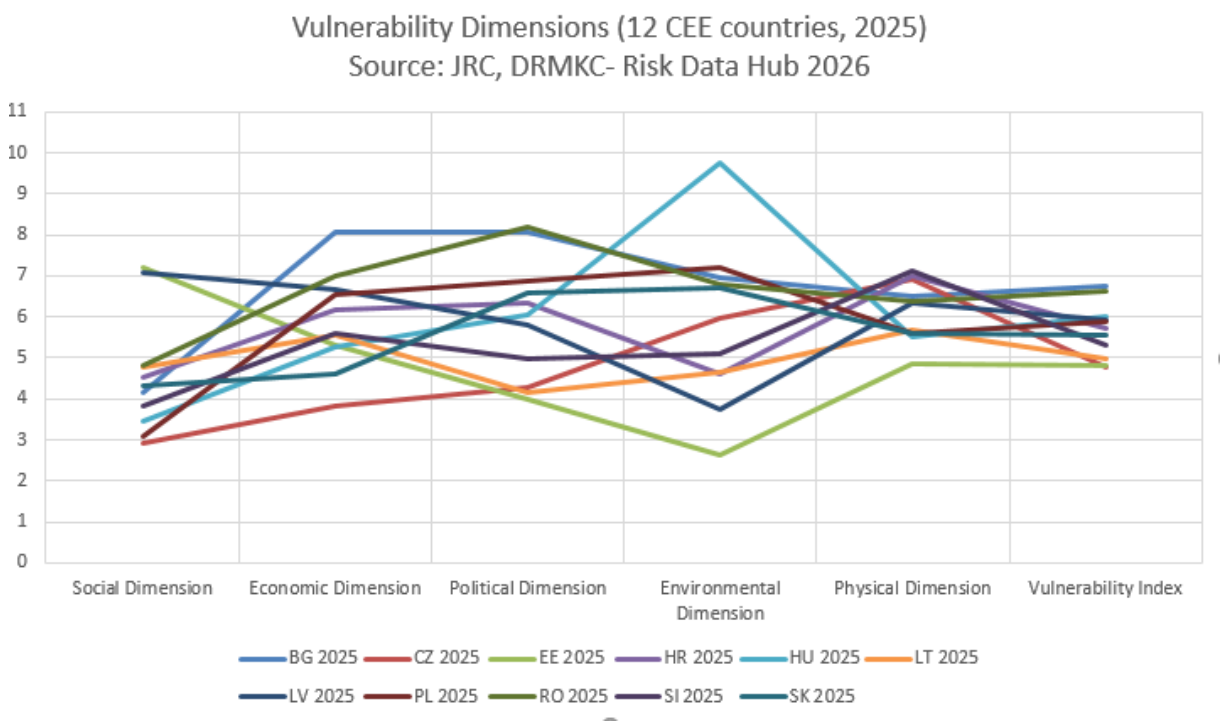
Table 2. Vulnerability Index, JRC (2025)

Country Code	Year	Social Dimension	Economic Dimension	Political Dimension	Environmental Dimension	Physical Dimension	Vulnerability Index
BG	2025	4,16	8,08	8,05	6,96	6,49	**6,75**
CZ	2025	2,92	3,81	4,28	5,95	6,91	**4,77**
EE	2025	7,22	5,31	4,01	2,63	4,84	**4,8**
HR	2025	4,52	6,16	6,32	4,62	6,98	**5,72**
HU	2025	3,45	5,25	6,06	9,75	5,52	**6,01**
LT	2025	4,79	5,57	4,16	4,64	5,69	**4,97**
LV	2025	7,06	6,65	5,8	3,76	6,33	**5,92**
PL	2025	3,1	6,56	6,88	7,22	5,58	**5,87**
RO	2025	4,83	6,99	8,17	6,77	6,37	**6,63**
SI	2025	3,82	5,61	4,96	5,1	7,11	**5,32**
SK	2025	4,33	4,6	6,59	6,71	5,61	**5,57**

Sources: JRC, Risk Hub, DRMKC, Country Profiles, 2025[6]

7. Vulnerability (V): It is treated as a structural constraint rather than a governance capacity. Higher vulnerability levels indicate greater exposure to social, economic, environmental, and institutional pressures that may limit the ability of governments to anticipate and respond effectively. The vulnerability dimension incorporates assessments from the Joint Research Centre (JRC), UNDRR risk-related datasets, and other international vulnerability monitoring frameworks. It captures the contextual conditions that influence governance performance and the capacity of institutions to implement anticipatory strategies. Unlike other indicators, vulnerability enters the AGI as a negative adjustment, reflecting the assumption that higher structural vulnerability reduces effective capacity.

Chart 8. Vulnerability dimensions (12 CEE countries) (2025)



Source: OECD, Digital Government, 2025 [7]

[6] JRC - https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/risk-data-hub#/vulnerability/country_profiles

[7] OECD (2026), *Digital Government Outlook 2026: From Foundations to Transformational Impact*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/0496b2bc-en. -oecd.org/en/publications/digital-government-outlook_0496b2bc-en.html

Discussion

The final AGI combines the selected dimensions into a composite measure of governance maturity and the weighting structure, reflects the argument that it depends on both strategic and institutional capacities, being constrained by vulnerability. The model assigns higher importance to foresight, resilience, and state capacity as core drivers of future-oriented governance, recognizing the supporting role of digital transformation, democracy, and public trust. Vulnerability is incorporated as a negative factor, because it represents external and structural constraints, rather than an institutional capability. The resulting index, enables comparative assessment of governance maturity across CEE countries and supports analysis of the transition from reactive governance approaches toward more adaptive and anticipatory governance models. The index is constructed around the assumption that the ability of governments to anticipate, prepare for, and shape future challenges depends on three interrelated dimensions: strategic capacity, institutional capacity, and structural constraints. The weighting framework reflects the theoretical proposition that governance requires the ability to imagine and prepare for alternative futures, as well as the institutional capabilities required to translate foresight into effective public action. The AGI therefore combines positive governance capacities with a vulnerability penalty:

AGI= (Strategic Capacity+Institutional Capacity) −Structural ConstraintsAGI= (Strategic/ Capacity + Institutional/ Capacity)-Structural/ Constraints or AGI= (Strategic Capacity+Institutional Capacity) −Structural Constraints

**Note: The final index is normalized on a 0–100 scale.*

All indicators were normalized to a common 0–10 scale to ensure comparability across dimensions. Higher values indicate stronger governance capacity, except for vulnerability, where higher values represent greater structural constraints. The AGI combines positive governance capacities with a vulnerability penalty.

Strategic Capacity (40%) =Foresight (20%) + Resilience (20%)

Strategic capacity represents the government's ability to identify future challenges, anticipate uncertainty, and develop adaptive responses before risks materialize. It captures the forward-looking dimension of governance. Foresight receives a 20% weight, because it fundamentally depends on the ability to explore possible futures, identify emerging risks, and integrate long-term perspectives into policymaking. *Strategic foresight* allows governments to move beyond short-term crisis response toward proactive decision-making under uncertainty. A higher foresight capacity indicates stronger ability to: identify future challenges; use evidence and scenarios in decision-making; incorporate long-term perspectives into public policy. *Resilience* is weighted equally because anticipation without adaptive capacity does not guarantee effective governance outcomes. Resilience reflects the ability of governance systems to absorb shocks, adapt to changing conditions, and maintain essential functions during periods of uncertainty. The equal weighting of foresight and resilience reflects the relationship between: *anticipating change → preparing for disruption → adapting effectively*

Together, foresight and resilience constitute the core of governance capacity.

Table 3. AGI, Weight distribution

Dimension	Weight	Rationale
Foresight	20%	Core anticipatory capability
Resilience	20%	Core adaptive capability
Digital Government	15%	Enables anticipatory action
Democracy	15%	Supports inclusive, accountable governance
Trust	10%	Provides legitimacy and public support
State Capacity	20%	Enables implementation of anticipatory policies
Vulnerability	−10%	Structural constraint that reduces effective capacity

Institutional Capacity (50%) =Digital Government (15%) + Democracy (15%) + State Capacity (20%) + Trust (10%). Institutional capacity represents the ability of governance systems to operationalize strategic visions through effective, legitimate, and coordinated public action.

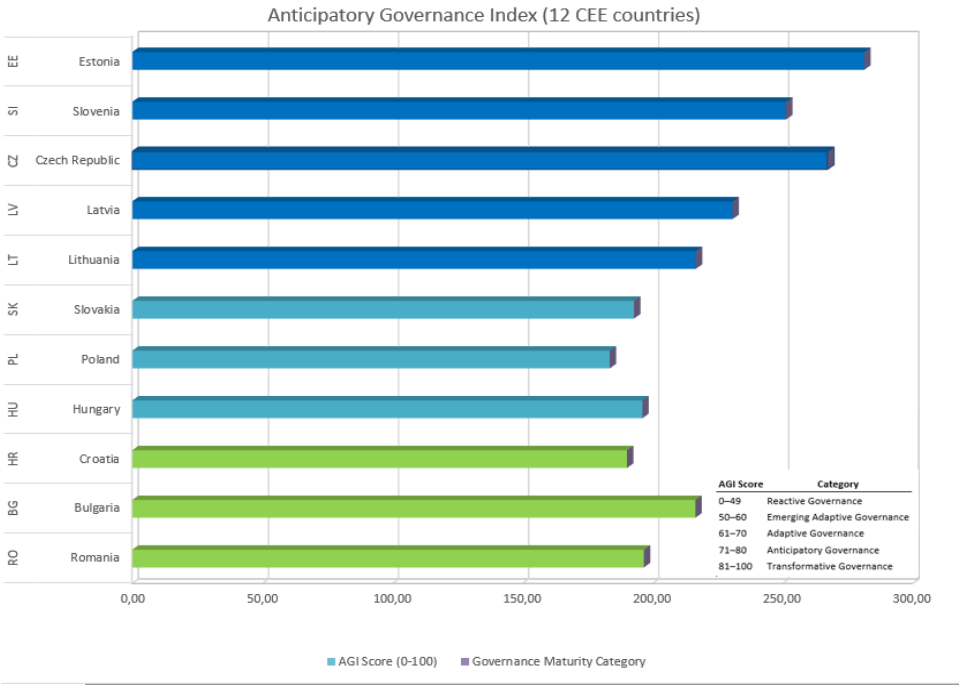
- *State capacity* receives the highest individual weight, because governance ultimately depends on the ability of public institutions to implement decisions, coordinate across sectors, mobilize resources, and translate strategies into outcomes. Strong state capacity enables governments to: coordinate complex policy responses; implement long-term strategies; maintain administrative continuity; respond effectively to uncertainty. Without sufficient state capacity, foresight remains largely symbolic rather than operational.
- *Digital government* is included as an enabling dimension, because contemporary governance increasingly relies on data, digital infrastructures, and technological capabilities. Digital capacity supports: real-time information collection; evidence-based decision-making; predictive analytics; citizen-oriented public services. The 15% weighting recognizes digitalization as an important accelerator, avoiding the assumption that technological advancement alone produces better governance.
- *Democracy (15%). It* is weighted equally with digital government, as anticipatory governance requires not only technical capacity but also legitimacy, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Democratic institutions contribute through: transparency; participation; accountability mechanisms; inclusion of diverse perspectives in future-oriented decisions. A governance system may anticipate effectively, but without democratic legitimacy its decisions may lack public acceptance and sustainability.
- *Public Trust (10%).* Trust receives a slightly lower weight, as it functions primarily as a supporting condition rather than a direct governance capacity. Public trust influences: compliance with public policies; acceptance of reforms; cooperation during crises; legitimacy of government decisions. The lower weight reflects the assumption that trust is essential for effective governance but is also partly an outcome of broader institutional performance.
- *Structural Constraint: Vulnerability (-10%).* Vulnerability is treated differently from other indicators because it does not represent governance capacity itself. Instead, it represents the environmental, social, economic, and structural conditions that constrain government ability to anticipate and manage risks. A higher vulnerability level reduces governance capacity because it increases: exposure to shocks; policy uncertainty; pressure on public institutions; difficulty in implementing long-term strategies. Therefore, vulnerability is introduced as a negative adjustment: -10% Vulnerability, rather than as a positive contribution, reflecting the distinction between: *capacity to govern and conditions that make governing more difficult.*

Table 4. Indicators for AGI

Country Code	Country	F (20%)	R (20%)	D (15%)	DEM (15%)	T (10%)	S (20%)	V (10%)	AGI Score (0-100)	Governance Maturity Category
BG	Bulgaria	4,5	5,72	6,9	3,7	2,2	8,2	6,75	48,19	Moderate Adaptive Governance
HR	Croatia	4,3	6,45	8,6	3,5	3,6	6	4,77	50,48	Emerging Adaptive Governance
CZ	Czech Republic	4,2	7,04	9,2	7,5	4,5	9	4,8	65,23	Adaptive Governance
EE	Estonia	4,2	7,2	9,6	8,3	3,6	10	5,72	67,53	Adaptive Governance
HU	Hungary	7,2	3,45	6,2	6	4,5	5,8	6,01	49,69	Moderate Adaptive Governance
LV	Latvia	4,2	7,2	9,4	6,9	2,5	8	4,97	60,78	Adaptive Governance
LT	Lithuania	6,7	7,38	9,2	6,1	3,3	7	5,92	62,49	Adaptive Governance
PL	Poland	6,6	6,76	8,4	5,6	4,3	5	5,87	56,15	Emerging Adaptive Governance
RO	Romania	5,8	4,08	7,1	2,4	3,1	7	6,63	44,48	Moderate Adaptive Governance
SK	Slovakia	6,3	5,37	8,62	7,1	3	6	5,32	56,60	Emerging Adaptive Governance
SI	Slovenia	6,8	6,69	9,3	5,8	2,7	9	5,57	64,76	Adaptive Governance

Sources: Datasets adapted from: SGI – Governing with Foresight Ranking[8] (F); BTI Index –Resilience (R); OECD- Digital Government (D); BTI (DEM); Eurobarometer- Public Trust (T); Danai Monitor (S) and JRC- Vulnerability (V)

Chart 9. AGI Score



Source: Datasets, based on resources above (DH)

Table 5. AGI Score range

AGI Score (0–100)	Governance Maturity Category	Description
0-49	*Reactive Governance*	Governance remains primarily response-oriented, with limited foresight integration and constrained capacity.
50-60	*Emerging Adaptive Governance*	Initial capacities are developing, although governance performance remains uneven across key dimensions.
61-70	*Adaptive Governance*	Governance demonstrates established capacities for learning, adaptation, resilience, and institutional coordination.
71-80	*Anticipatory Governance*	Strategic foresight, resilience, and institutional capacities are systematically embedded in policymaking.
81-100	*Transformative Governance*	Governance is highly future-oriented, innovative, and capable of shaping long-term societal transformation under uncertainty.

[8] SGI- https://www.sgi-network.org/2024/

Methodological justification of weights: The weighting strategy follows the logic of public governance literature:

- 25% Foresight Capacity: Highest weight because foresight is the defining element distinguishing anticipatory governance from traditional administration. (Fuerth, 2009; Guston, 2014; OECD, 2021)
- 20% Resilience: Because foresight must translate into institutional adaptation.
- 20% Digital Capacity: Because contemporary anticipation increasingly depends on data and analytical infrastructure.
- 15% Trust/Democracy: Because anticipation requires legitimacy.
- 20% Security: Because contemporary governance is increasingly shaped by systemic risks.

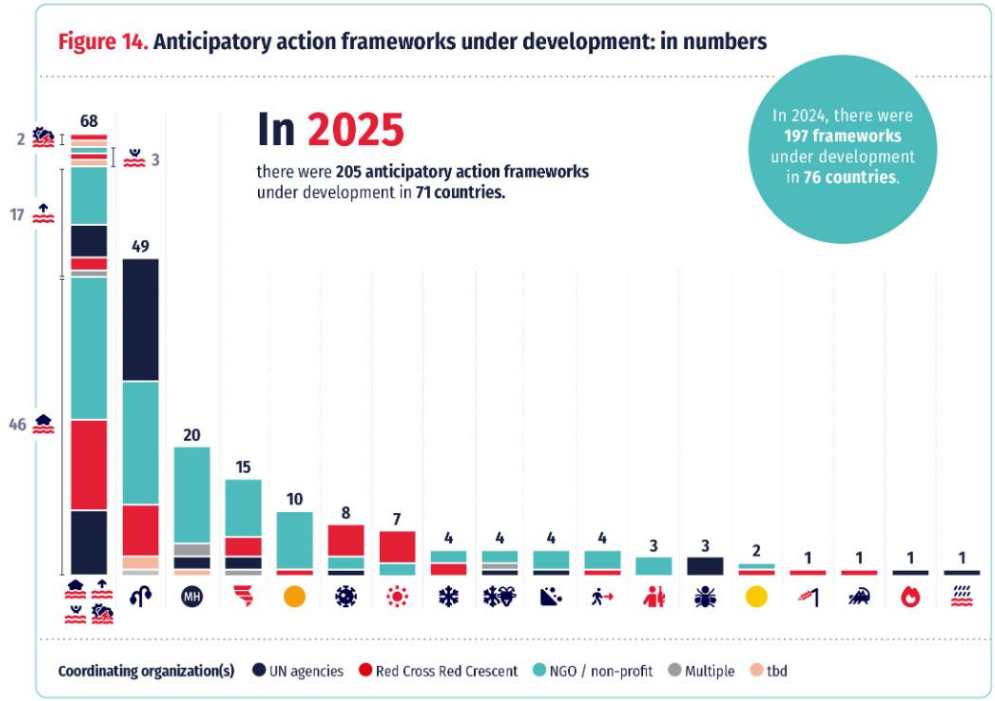
Stronger research hypothesis after adding these datasets

H1: Countries with higher Strategic Foresight Capacity demonstrate stronger governance resilience and crisis preparedness.

H2: Democratic quality, digital maturity, and institutional trust strengthen the relationship between foresight capacity and governance resilience. (see illustrative chart with frameworks in action in 2025)

H3: CEE countries differ not only in administrative performance, but in their ability to institutionalize future-oriented governance.

Chart 10. Anticipatory Action 2025



Source: Global Outlook. Anticipation Hub[9]

Case Study as an Illustration: Bulgarian Paradox at the Crossroads of Democratic Backsliding

Bulgaria provides a particularly revealing case for understanding the challenges of anticipatory governance in Central and Eastern Europe. The country formally meets the criteria of an electoral democracy, it continues to experience persistent weaknesses in institutional effectiveness, democratic quality, public trust, and policy coordination. This combination of relatively stable democratic institutions and comparatively weak governance

[9] Anticipation Hub - https://www.anticipation-hub.org/Documents/Reports/overview-report-2025/Fig14_AH-GOR25.jpg

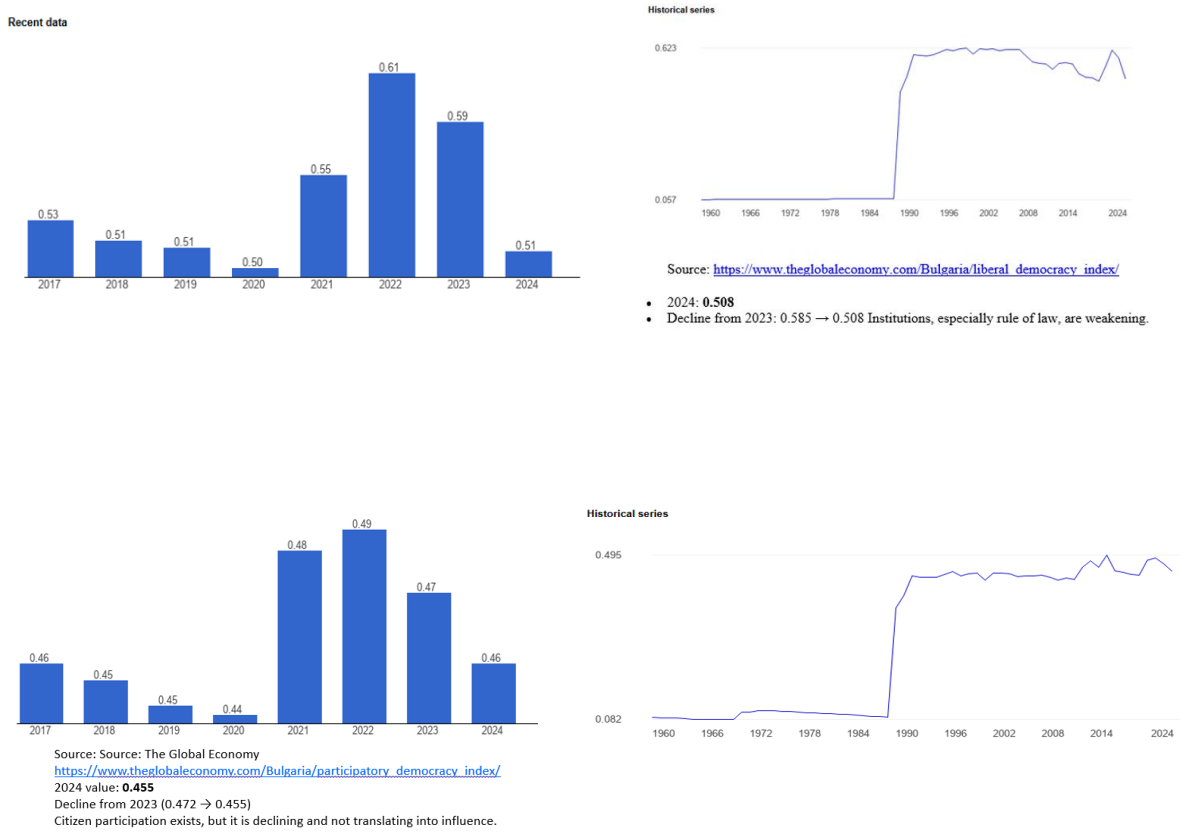
outcomes illustrates what this paper conceptualizes as the Governance Paradox of Central and Eastern Europe. This finding is consistent with recent scholarship arguing that future-oriented governance depends not only on democratic institutions but also on institutional learning, strategic foresight, and adaptive capacity (Bouckaert et al., 2025; OECD, 2025). Across Europe, democracy is not collapsing but gradually eroding. According to the Varieties of Democracy Institute, global democratic standards have declined to levels last observed several decades ago, with autocracies now outnumbering democracies (V-Dem Institute, 2026). Across Europe, democracy is not collapsing, but it is *gradually eroding.* According to the Varieties of Democracy Institute, global democratic levels have declined to levels last seen decades ago, with *autocracies now outnumbering democracies* (V-Dem, 2026). Within this broader trend, Bulgaria represents a particularly revealing case: It remains an *electoral democracy*. Yet exhibits *systemic weaknesses in governance, rule of law, and institutional trust*. *An important research question in this aspect, is: How do government collaboration and civil society organizations shape local democracy and trust in Bulgaria (2025–2026)?*

Chart 11. V-DEM Indicators for Bulgaria, 2026

Indicator (V-Dem Figure)	Global trend (democratizing countries)	Bulgaria (2025–2026)
Clean elections	Improving strongly	Relatively strong ✅
Civil society engagement	Increasing	Strong but limited impact ⚠️
Freedom of expression	Improving	Under pressure ⚠️
Judicial independence	Improving	Weak ⚠️
Public administration	Improving	Weak enforcement ⚠️

Many CEE countries demonstrate relatively strong formal governance structures - including electoral democracy, digital government, and strategic planning - simultaneously experiencing lower public trust, institutional fragmentation, policy discontinuity, and structural vulnerability. This paradox suggests that governance cannot be achieved through institutional modernization alone but requires stronger integration between strategic foresight, administrative capacity, democratic legitimacy, and resilience. Bulgaria reflects this broader European trend, simultaneously illustrating the specific governance challenges facing many post-transition democracies. Although the country remains an electoral democracy with functioning electoral procedures, it exhibits persistent weaknesses in the rule of law, institutional accountability, administrative coordination, and public trust (V-Dem Institute, 2026; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024). The indicators of V-DEM for 2025-2026 period, clearly illustrate this democratic imbalance. According to the indicators, Bulgaria records an Electoral Democracy Index of 0.646, suggesting that electoral institutions continue to function relatively well. However, considerably lower scores are observed for the Liberal Democracy Index (0.508), Participatory Democracy Index (0.455), and Deliberative Democracy Index (0.536) (V-Dem Institute, 2026). These findings indicate that electoral competition remains largely intact, democratic governance is considerably weaker in dimensions related to institutional constraints, citizen participation, policy deliberation, and accountable decision-making.

Chart 12. Liberal Democracy and Civic Participation Index, Bulgaria 2025



The empirical evidence of the Bulgarian case, points to a central paradox: active citizen participation with weak institutional performance. This paradox can be conceptualized as a participatory–institutional gap, where civic engagement exceeds the capacity of public institutions to translate societal participation into effective policy outcomes. Civil society remains relatively active, with a Civil Society Participation Index of 0.761, reflecting frequent public engagement, civic initiatives, and protest activity (V-Dem Institute, 2026). Yet this participatory potential coexists with weaker institutional quality, reflected in the comparatively lower Liberal Democracy and Participatory Democracy indices. Consequently, strong societal mobilization has not been matched by corresponding improvements in policy coordination, institutional accountability, or public trust. This relationship can be summarized as follows: Bulgaria has active civil society (0.761), but weak institutional quality (0.508), which leads to limited policy implementation and coordination and low public trust, resulting in recurring active protests (in December 2025), political instability and public dissatisfaction and mistrust in governmental institutions and parliament. (Eurobarometer, 2025).

Chart 13. Electoral democracy, Bulgaria

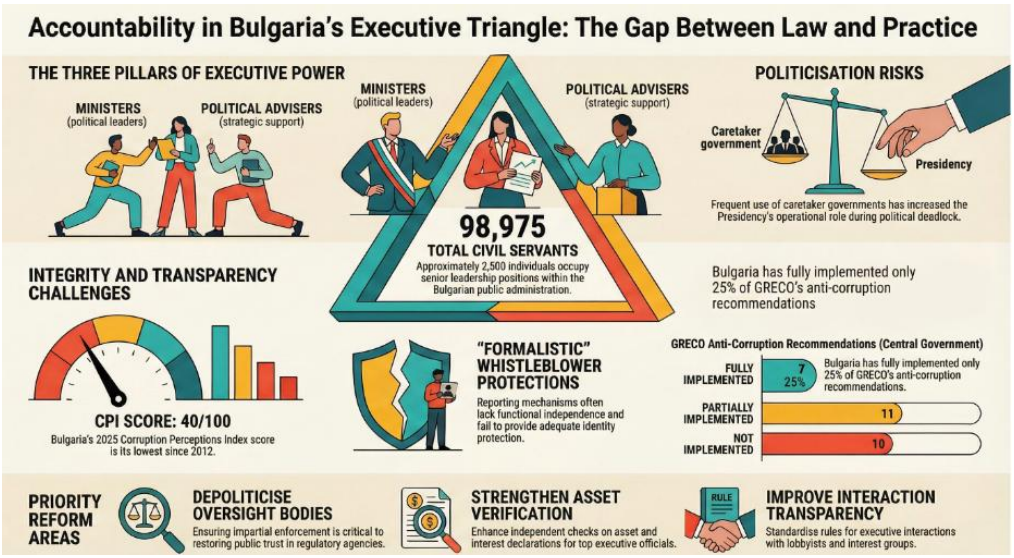
Strong	Weak
Elections	Participation quality
Formal rules	Institutional enforcement
Civil activity	Policy impact

Dimension	Value	What it measures
Electoral democracy	0.646	Free & fair elections
Liberal democracy	0.508	Rule of law & checks
Participatory democracy	0.455	Citizen engagement
Deliberative democracy	0.536	Quality of decision-making

The Bulgarian experience therefore demonstrates that participation alone is insufficient for governance, when institutional capacity remains limited. Democratic resilience depends not only on active citizens but also on capable public institutions able to integrate participation into policymaking, coordinate across sectors, and implement long-term reforms (Bouckaert et al., 2025). Political instability has further reinforced this governance imbalance. Between 2021 and 2026, Bulgaria experienced eight parliamentary elections, representing one of the most prolonged periods of political instability in post-communist Europe. Frequent changes of government significantly weakened intergovernmental coordination, disrupted policy continuity, reduced strategic planning capacity, and undermined administrative effectiveness. Rather than enabling long-term governance, political fragmentation encouraged short-term crisis management and reactive policymaking, a pattern that the OECD identifies as a major obstacle to strategic foresight and anticipatory governance (OECD, 2025).

Institutional fragility is also reflected in declining deliberative quality. The Deliberative Democracy Index decreased from 0.588 in 2023 to 0.536 in 2024, indicating deterioration in policy justification, public consultation, evidence-informed decision-making, and inclusive deliberation (V-Dem Institute, 2026). This decline suggests that governance has become less capable of incorporating diverse societal perspectives into strategic decision-making, an essential prerequisite.

Chart 14. Accountability in the Executive triangle, Bulgaria 2026[10]



[10] Research within COST-COREX Project on the Executive Triangle, WG4

The Bulgarian case also highlights the interaction between governance quality and resilience. Although Bulgaria has strengthened aspects of disaster risk management and early warning capacities under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR, 2025), comparatively high levels of structural vulnerability continue to constrain long-term governance effectiveness (EC, JRC, 2025). This finding supports the argument that vulnerability should be treated not as a governance capacity but as a contextual condition influencing governments' ability to anticipate and respond to complex risks. More recently, Bulgaria has entered a new phase of political development. The establishment of a more stable governing majority after the prolonged cycle of elections offers an opportunity to strengthen policy coherence, improve administrative coordination, and restore strategic continuity. However, this development also introduces a new democratic dilemma. Stronger executive leadership may enhance governmental effectiveness and facilitate long-term reforms, it may simultaneously weaken political pluralism, reduce institutional checks and balances, and increase the concentration of executive power. Government collaboration has therefore shifted from ineffective fragmentation toward the possibility of excessive centralization, changing rather than resolving Bulgaria's core governance challenge.

Chart 15. Elections results, Bulgaria, April 2026

Results of the general elections held on 19 April 2026 in Bulgaria

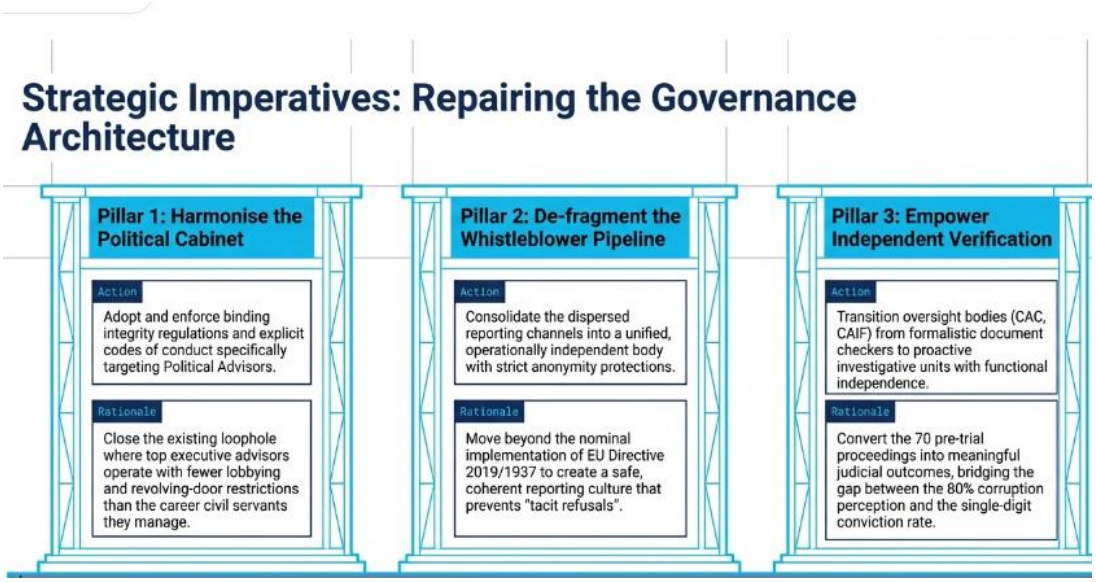
Turnout: 50.2%

Political parties	Number of votes won	Number of seats	Percentage of votes won
Progressive Bulgaria (PB)	1 444 924	131	44.59 %
Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)	433 755	39	13.38 %
We Continue the Change – Democratic Bulgaria (PP-DB)	408 845	38	12.61 %
Movement for Rights and Freedoms – New Start (DPS)	230 693	20	7.12 %
Renaissance (Vazrazhdane, V)	137 940	12	4.25 %
Morality, Unity and Honour (MECh)	104 506	0	3.25%
Greatness (Vel)	100 752	0	3.1 %
BSP (Socialist Party)	97 753	0	3.01 %
Siyanie (Light)	93 554	0	2.88 %
None of the above	50 772	0	

Source : https://results.cik.bg/pe202604/rezultati/index.html

The Bulgarian case demonstrates that governance maturity cannot be understood solely through electoral competition or administrative modernization, but instead, it depends on the interaction between strategic, institutional capacity, and legitimacy[11]. This finding forms the basis of the proposed (AGI). The model argues that it emerges from the integration of strategic foresight and resilience, effective institutions, democratic legitimacy, public trust, and the capacity to manage structural vulnerabilities (Bouckaert et al., 2025; OECD, 2025).

[11] Research conducted within COST-COREX Executive Triangle Project, WG4, in the period 2025-2026. https://www.cost-corex.com/



Even now, Bulgaria stands at a critical crossroads, because political stability may provide an opportunity to strengthen institutional coordination, reinforce judicial independence, deepen accountability, and embed foresight within public administration. Equally, if stability is accompanied by growing concentration of power and weaker democratic oversight, the country may face an increased risk of democratic backsliding. The Bulgarian experience illustrates the central argument of this paper: anticipatory governance is not achieved through stronger executive authority or digital modernization alone, but it emerges from the dynamic interaction of democratic quality, institutional effectiveness, public trust, strategic foresight, resilience, and the ability of governments to transform uncertainty into coordinated, future-oriented public action (Bouckaert et al., 2025; OECD, 2025). As the scholar underlines: "trust becomes a *'sine qua non'* for democratic governance" (Bouckaert, 2009, 2025).

Conclusion

This study examined the development of anticipatory governance capacities in CEE countries through the construction of the Anticipatory Governance Index (AGI). Moving beyond traditional assessments of administrative performance that focus primarily on existing institutional capacities, the AGI conceptualizes governance maturity as the interaction, between strategic capacity, institutional capacity, and structural constraints. The index emphasizes that the ability of governments to navigate uncertainty depends not only on foresight and resilience, but also on the institutional foundations required to translate future-oriented thinking into effective public action. The empirical findings demonstrate significant variation in transformative governance, several countries demonstrate stronger adaptive capacities. Estonia, Slovenia, Latvia, and the Czech Republic show relatively advanced performance, particularly due to stronger digital government capabilities, institutional capacity, and resilience-related factors. At the same time, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania remain closer to a reactive governance model, reflecting constraints related to resilience, trust, democratic capacity, and vulnerability. These differences indicate that it is not a linear outcome of modernization but rather the result of multiple interacting institutional and societal conditions. The results support the argument that the model should be understood as a gradual process of institutional transformation rather than a single governance capacity. Strategic foresight alone is insufficient; it must be supported by capable public institutions, digital infrastructures, democratic legitimacy, and societal trust. The AGI therefore highlights the importance of combining future-

oriented approaches with the practical ability of governments to implement decisions and adapt under conditions of uncertainty. The analysis also suggests that vulnerability plays a critical role in shaping governance trajectories. Countries facing higher levels of structural vulnerability experience greater constraints in developing capacities, demonstrating that governance innovation cannot be separated from broader social, economic, and institutional contexts. Reducing vulnerability and strengthening resilience should therefore be considered central components of long-term governance transformation. The proposed AGI contributes to the emerging literature on governance by offering a comparative analytical framework that connects foresight, resilience, institutional capacity, and democratic governance. As the index provides an initial comparative assessment, future research should further validate the model through longitudinal analysis, additional country cases, and empirical testing of the relationship between capacities and policy outcomes. Hopefully, the transition from reactive to anticipatory governance might represent a fundamental shift in how public institutions understand and manage uncertainty. The truth however is in the light of the opinion distinguished scholars, including Geert Bouckaert (2025), that "*the future way of governing our democratic states, seems to demonstrate the need for more and different forms of participation how to combine increasingly complex systems and citizens in a collaborative way, in realising priorities and sustainable goals."* For CEE countries, the key challenge is not only improving administrative performance, but developing governance systems capable of anticipating change, learning from emerging risks, and shaping more resilient and sustainable futures.

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