


# **CAPTURED STATES AND CAPTURED SOCIETIES**

**Douhomir Minev**



**Abstract:** The article explores the effects that undermine societies and their ability to function as autonomous social actors capable of identifying departures from their moral values and demanding compliance with them. The society's responses to such impacts are also examined. Many societies' replies demonstrate their ability to protect their identity, rationality, values, and judgments, as well as the social tissue that supports them, i.e. themselves. Furthermore, they defend states against capture by tiny small influential groups to establish social cohesion by weakening and capturing societies.

**Key words:** capture state, social cohesion, moral values, social capacity

**Author Biography:** Douhomir Minev is a professor and doctor of sciences in sociology and also holds a PhD in economics. He works in the fields of economic and social development, social risks, and knowledge society. He has longterm experience in public policy review, analyzes, and recommendations and has more than one hundred publications as a social scientist.

## ***Introduction***

The article discusses impacts that erode societies and their capacity to be autonomous social actors, possessing the ability to identify deviations from their moral values and demand compliance with those values. Society's reactions to such impacts are also discussed.

Erosive impacts on societies have been recorded by research based on the concept of the captured state, which in recent years has been expanded to include impacts aimed at reducing the ability of civil society, audit institutions and the media to uncover irregularities and demand improvements<sup>1</sup>. The expansion of the concept was a response to changes in the behavior of state-capturing groups, which in many modern cases have extended the scope of their influence on states beyond policy formation. Elizabeth David-Barrett notes that this created two additional pillars in the idea of capturing states, besides influencing policy formation<sup>2</sup>. One of them cov-

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Dávid-Barrett, "State capture and development: a conceptual framework", *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 26, (2023), 224–244.

<sup>2</sup> Dávid-Barrett, "State capture".

ers the control over the implementation of policies, which is carried out largely through the appointment of “right people” to key positions in the executive branch, through the allocation of budgetary funds, and through quasi-independent regulatory bodies (agency capture).

The other pillar of state capture encompasses the accountability ecosystem. It includes such impacts as: reducing the ability of audit institutions, civil society and the media to uncover irregularities and demand improvements; erosion of higher education (leading to a less skilled workforce) and restrictions on the media and freedom of speech; dismissals of academics who criticize the government, restrictions on university funding.

The inclusion of the last pillar in the concept of the captured state, and especially the deliberate reduction of civil society’s ability to expose irregularities and demand improvements, is an important step in the development of the concept of state capture.

But there are reasons to include other impacts in this pillar as well. These are impacts on societies that limit their capacity to be autonomous actors - opponents of state capture, by eroding the very foundations of societies, eroding their social tissue, and transforming societies into some other entities. These impacts go far beyond the impacts on civil society organizations, media, universities, and individual scientists.

### 1. *Rationality of Societies*

Societies’ capacity to expose irregularities and demand improvements, including resisting state capture, can be seen in terms of a specific kind of rationality that Max Weber calls value/intrinsic rationality. Action within this rationality is “[...] determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behaviour, independently of its prospects of success; [...] the more the value by which the action is oriented is elevated to the status of an absolute value, the more “irrational” the corresponding action is in this sense. For the more unconditionally the actor is dedicated to this value in itself, the less he is influenced by considerations of the conditioned consequences of his action<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. By Guenther Roth and Claus Wittlich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 24–26.



Or, as Kalberg notes, decisions within the framework of value rationality are made based on some “value postulate, and not by calculation, assessment of causal relationships between ends and means.” Therefore, value (intrinsic) rationality provides a “unique standard” on the basis of which continuous empirical events in reality can be selected, measured, and judged, writes Kalberg<sup>4</sup>. When a sufficiently large part of societies adheres to value rationality, this allows for the achievement of that broad “similarity in thinking” that K. Larsen writes about and which underlies the capacity of societies to be more or less autonomous social actors<sup>5</sup>.

But the notion of value rationality has another side as well. The same complex of values that forms value rationality is simultaneously a major component of the “glue” that binds individuals in a community, i.e., determines social cohesion. The “bonding” role of moral values has long been well known and has been specifically studied by many who, like Durkheim, believe that not only do moral bonds exist, but that they are the strongest bonds between individuals in society. Therefore, it was in strengthening moral bonds that Durkheim sought a solution to many social problems.

In short, there are reasons to believe that value rationality shapes the capacity of societies to reveal irregularities and demand improvements; to be a more or less autonomous social actor with its own identity, capable of making value-based judgments and asserting its identity and rationality.

From the above, it follows that the limitation, the erosion of the capacity of societies “to reveal irregularities and demand improvements” consists primarily in the erosion of their value rationality and, more specifically, the erosion of the moral values on which value rationality is based. In this, societies themselves, their social tissue, inevitably erode, since shared values are a fundamental component of this tissue. Furthermore, eroding the capacity of societies to be opponents of state-capturing groups involves limiting the creation and use of the shared knowledge that societies have access to and use to challenge and resist state-capturing groups.

---

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Kalberg, Max Weber’s Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 85, No. 5 (Mar., 1980), 1145-1179.

<sup>5</sup> Christian A. Larsen, *Social cohesion: Definition, measurement and developments* (Working paper/Preprint, Aalborg: Institut for Statskundskab, Aalborg Universitet, 2014), <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2014/LarsenDevelopmentinsocialcohesion.pdf>.

All this shows that it is possible to supplement and expand the third dimension in David-Barrett's concept of state capture and even to form an independent fourth pillar that would include the societies capture. The grounds for this proposal are obvious – the limitation of value rationality through the erosion of moral values and the limitation of the creation and use of knowledge are much broader and more significant than those included in the third dimension of state capture.

## **2. Decline of Value Rationality**

### *a. Moral Values and their Decline*

Regarding values, a preliminary note is necessary - it is important to take into account the opinion of A. Etzioni, who emphasizes that the sociological analyze of values is deeply paralyzed. He criticizes the use of the term "values" in a "neutral way" so that it includes all kinds of "values" or, in other words, the notion of values is expanded so that it can also include components that can hardly be considered values. "Relativism – he writes – is the curse of the good society, because taken to its logical conclusion, it means that if you believe in concentration camps, the Gulag, ethnic cleansing, sex slavery, homophobia, sexism, racism or whatever – for you that will be the good society.... In order to be able to have the moral discourse that is necessary for the very concept of a good society, we need a foundation that is post-relativist, as even the most hardened relativists increasingly recognize"<sup>6</sup>.

This ideologically and politically influenced neutrality makes it difficult to answer questions like "Where do these values come from?" Are they justified? Whose values are they? Are they good?"<sup>7</sup> In fact, values come from social evolution, from the very emergence of man and human communities; values are an effect of human evolution; values belong to communities and are a fundamental part of their construction.

This is why, according to Etzioni, breaking with relativism and finding a post-relativist basis for creating a notion of authentic values and distinguishing them from surrogates means, above all, a focus on values that

---

<sup>6</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 189.

<sup>7</sup> Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, 191.



emerged and developed in the course of social evolution as a means of self-construction of the human community. Based on an understanding of social evolution, it could be observed that not everything that some consider to be “values” participates (arises and is used) in the construction of human community. The evolutionary construction of communities can suggest which values are evolutionarily formed, authentic values.

Basic values can be considered those that have played a fundamental role in strengthening and developing communities (they were universal in nature or at least widespread) and have not been explicitly rejected to this day, although their social function may have weakened and deviations from them may be increasing. Habermas, for example, emphasizes the importance of four fundamental moral values (equality, justice, fairness, and reciprocity). All four values, in one way or another, have been present since ancient times. This is quite obvious about equality – that egalitarianism that Jonathan Sachs points out is fundamentally embedded in the Torah and which has been carried over into Christianity. Justice and fairness also have a fundamental presence in Judeo-Christianity<sup>8</sup>. The importance of reciprocity and honesty is highlighted in the fundamental research on cooperation conducted by Axelrod<sup>9</sup>. Emphasizing the important role of reciprocity for cooperation between individuals, Axelrod finds that without reciprocity, cooperation is impossible and is transformed into relations of slavery, exploitation, and oppression.

It is the decline of these authentic values that has attracted the attention of researchers recently. One of the most notable analyzes of this decline belongs to Jonathan Sacks (intellectual, rabbi, lord) who describes the trend of moral decline in Western societies as a shift in emphasis from “We” to “I.” Morality is being replaced by the market and the state, but they cannot replace it. Among the factors contributing to this change, Sacks points to social media, philosophy and economic theory, demands for political correctness, changes in personal identity, etc.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (Revised edition, New York: Basic Books, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Sacks, *Morality*.

In fact, as Tom Switzer notes, moral values have constantly evolved throughout history, with many societies in each period beginning to tolerate behavior that was previously considered deviant, abnormal, or offensive. Sometimes this change has been sensible and rational, but sometimes it has been degenerative<sup>11</sup>.

But in the past, societies have managed to correct degenerative changes in moral values, and therefore, over thousands of years of social evolution, moral values have not completely degenerated, and societies have managed to preserve features of human communities and, for long periods, follow a trajectory that allows them to achieve social progress.

This ability of societies noticeably began to change, and in the 1980s it was already clearly noticeable that a one-way and particularly intense erosion of the authentic, basic moral values that sustain societies was taking place. Moreover, according to Switzer, Western societies tolerate these failures and further contribute to the degradation of society by lowering their standards or compensating (through generous social payments) the victims of moral degradation, instead of taking measures against the degradation itself. According to Switzer, too many governments, for example, prefer to tolerate crime rather than address its root causes: drug trafficking, poverty caused by low achievement, and family breakdown, etc. There is a lack of serious political debate that could lead to addressing such problems. Behavior by the political class that a generation ago would have been considered unacceptable is now considered normal<sup>12</sup>. The same is probably true of that behavior of political classes which we call the state capturing.

In this way, Switzer, as well as Jonathan Sachs and other authors, emphasize an important feature of the contemporary crisis of values - the deliberate impacts on them. On this occasion, Christian Larsen notes the pressure on basic pro-social values exerted by the increase in cultural diversity, emigration policies, etc. Larsen also notes that it is difficult to achieve similarity in thinking in diverse, multicultural and highly differentiated societies,

---

<sup>11</sup> Tom Switzer, *Instead of facing up to moral decline, west is lowering its standards* (The Centre for Independent Studies, December 30, 2023), <https://www.cis.org.au/commentary/opinion/instead-of-facing-up-to-moral-decline-the-west-is-lowering-its-standards/>.

<sup>12</sup> Switzer, *Instead of facing up to moral decline*.



which is directly related to the erosion of value rationality, which is the basis for similarity in thinking.

Convinced that it is necessary to build a common moral foundation for societies, Sachs emphasizes the need for change that would heal declining moral values. According to him, history shows that such a change is possible, as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "I"-oriented societies were successfully transformed into "We"-oriented societies.

Logical results of the decline of moral values are the decline of trust, which many empirical studies have recorded, and the emergence of an anomic crisis. According to Larsen, the observed decline in trust levels also reflects a decline in the moral standard of the societies studied, which Switzer also notes.

In conditions of declining values and anomic crises, lies, fraud, and manipulation widely penetrate models of political and economic behavior as well as interpersonal relationships. Moreover, these changes are combined with a decline in justice systems, which is characteristic of captured states.

Thus, the decline of value rationality deprives individuals and societies of the main tool through which they can identify and challenge irregularities and demand changes; it deprives them of identity and the ability to be an autonomous social actor. In this way, the conquest of states expands and turns into the conquest of societies, which acquire features of totalitarianism. For example, Switzer calls one of the most depressing collapses facing Western society the restriction of opportunities to question actions and ideas that are clearly absurd, such as biological males self-identifying as female and participating in women's sports. Others ridiculous, even crazy ideas become possible, such as that people who are not women (i.e. men) can menstruate; biological men may win "Woman of the Year" awards or win women's competitions; a man convicted of a crime can claim to be a woman and the court grants his request to be transferred to a women's prison. How all this helps the cause of biological women, Switzer writes, is unclear, but the examples provide evidence that a number of societies accept as normal ideas, statements and behavior that would be considered abnormal by any earlier standard. According to Switzer, absurd argu-

ments and claims are respected mainly by those who are afraid to question them, and because the fearful are so numerous, open individual resistance is relatively rare. But the main reason why absurdities are not challenged is another – the main tool through which people can identify absurdities and challenge them – their value rationality – has weakened. Therefore, in societies where moral decline is relatively weaker, statements, ideas, and behaviors like those mentioned above are considered abnormal – not because fewer people are afraid, but because their value rationality is better preserved and moral values generate a different kind of judgment.

### ***b. Decline of Knowledge***

Weber does not include knowledge in his definition of value rationality, but it is not possible for people to make decisions and take actions without using some knowledge. They use knowledge they possess even without realizing it. Therefore, the state of knowledge is also considered here as a component of societal capacity to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, truth from untruth, etc.

The examples Switzer gives of absurd ideas and statements entering the public sphere are a small part of the flood of absurdities that floods the mainstream of entire sciences and the knowledge they create. It is no coincidence that Jonathan Sachs linked moral decline to philosophy and economic theory, but one could also add at least the decline (crisis) of the social sciences. In the decline of knowledge creation, several main aspects can be distinguished - a decline in the creation of knowledge (a crisis in the social sciences, in particular - sociology); a decline in the use of created knowledge; and a decline in the transfer of knowledge (education), which finds expression in the state of educational institutions and levels of education/literacy.

The crisis in knowledge production is mainly due to the mechanisms for controlling and directing scientific research, giving rise to a standard model of social research. About the effects of this standard model, Steven Pinker writes: "Leading social researchers can claim all sorts of absurdities as long as they fit the Standard Model of social science." It is hard to believe that



the authors themselves believe what they claim. Claims are made regardless of whether they are true. They are part of the catechism of our century. Contemporary social commentary remains based on archaic concepts.”<sup>13</sup>

As for the decline in the use of knowledge, it is expressed in the fact that, like moral values, surrogates are used instead of knowledge. Knowledge is often replaced with ideological postulates - which is especially characteristic of economics, social sciences, and when creating economic policies. A striking example is a Senate Committee hearing of former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, who, on the occasion of the 2008 financial crisis, stated that the crisis had revealed an “error” in the ideology by which he had been guided during his 18-year management of US monetary policy. The error that Greenspan has in mind is clearly due to replacing knowledge with ideological dogmas, or “supplementing” knowledge with such dogmas. Whatever the case, the fact remains that for 18 years, ideology has replaced knowledge in the formation of monetary policy. This is, of course, not the only such case. As a rule, many policies are formed largely on ideology.

As long as adequate knowledge is still created, special studies have found that politicians use only that knowledge that corresponds to their prior intentions<sup>14</sup>.

On this occasion, Nobel laureate Angus Deaton writes that politicians use economic analyze the way a drunkard uses streetlights - to lean on the poles, not for lighting<sup>15</sup>.

Other authors also emphasize the replacement of knowledge with surrogates in politics. Yaron Ezrahi has described the decline of the use of knowledge in political life through a series of transitions to new means of knowledge and policymaking: from wisdom to knowledge, from knowl-

---

<sup>13</sup> Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (Penguin Books, 1997), 57.

<sup>14</sup> Carol H. Weiss and Michael J. Bucuvalas, “Truth Tests and Utility Tests: Decision – Makers’ Frames of Reference for Social Science Research”, *American Sociology*, Vol. 45, № 2 (1980), 320–333.

<sup>15</sup> Angus Deaton, “Is economic failure an economics failure?” *Project Syndicate* (December 12, 2022), <https://www.project-syndicate.org/magazine/economists-responsibility-for-bad-policies-and-outcomes-by-angus-deaton-2022-12>.

edge to information, and from information to outformation. According to him, outformation differs from scientific knowledge in that, like literature, poetry, and the arts, it directly engages the emotional, aesthetic, and more generally sensual essence of the individual<sup>16</sup>.

When using outformation, the communication between politicians and citizens turns into a kind of performance in which the performers - politicians use ignorance, ideology and forms of art in communication with the audience - citizens. The reason given by Ezrahi for the transition to outformation also points to this - the desire to make politics visible and entertaining enough to attract the attention of the viewers in front of the TVs (in which they also get a sense of participation), otherwise they will stop paying attention to politics and will switch to purely entertainment programs.

At the same time, Ezrahi points out, the status of science as an authority and social institution is also changing - a decline is occurring, in which the role of science as a factor in modern mass democratic politics is declining. Science is no longer the resource through which policies and public choices can be legitimized as impersonal, objective, and technical. Science is no longer as important a component of modern state power as it once was. That is why scientists are much less sought after than politicians, who seek to legitimize their positions and actions before a public that is neither informed nor skeptical<sup>17</sup>. In fact, not only politicians, but also citizens are less and less interested in social scientists and the knowledge they produce.

The state of education in general can be judged by the results of international standardized tests, where not Western, but East Asian and Singaporean students consistently win first places in the 2010s<sup>18</sup> and 2020s<sup>19</sup>. But there is no room here to discuss this vast topic, and therefore only some notes by the aforementioned Tom Switzer are given. They are interested in

---

<sup>16</sup> Yaron Ezrahi, "Science and the Political Imagination in Contemporary Democracies", in *States of Knowledge. The Co-Production of Science and Social Order*, ed. by Sheila Jasanoff (Routledge, 2004), 255.

<sup>17</sup> Ezrahi, *Science and the Political Imagination*, 273.

<sup>18</sup> Drew DeSilver, *US students' Academic Achievement Still Lags that of Their Peers in Many Countries* (Pew Research Center, February 15, 2017), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/02/15/u-s-students-internationally-math-science>.

<sup>19</sup> Leigh Thomas, "Mathematics, Reading Skills in Unprecedented Decline in Teenagers", *Reuters* (December 5, 2023), <https://www.reuters.com/world/mathematics-reading-skills-unprecedented-decline-teenagers-oecd-survey-2023-12-05/>.



that he connects changes in education with changes in values. According to him, one of the consequences of the decline of values is poor school performance, which is exacerbated by poor or sometimes absent parenting, but also by the ideologically motivated refusal of teachers and other educational professionals to insist on more academic persistence and rigor. Schools, for example, make the situation worse by allowing students to stay out of classrooms, and in the education system, professors are less and less regarded as authorities, and in some American universities, professors live in fear of their students.

Switzer emphasizes the influence of changes in values on changes in education, also highlighting the implications of university policies towards "diversity, equality and inclusion." In a number of universities, racial and gender-based preference policies take precedence over academic qualifications and administrative experience. Switzer cites one expert's opinion that Harvard's experience shows the dangers of "identity politics" - once the standards for hiring administrators and admitting students are lowered, the standards for evaluating their behavior and achievements must inevitably be lowered as well. The result is that prestigious universities like Harvard hire people who have no place there to manage people who also have no place there.

### **c. *Decline of truth***

It can be expected that changes in moral values and knowledge, by limiting value rationality, will limit the ability of individuals and societies to make judgments of fundamental importance such as distinguishing between good and evil, between knowledge and ignorance/non-knowledge, truth and untruth/deception, etc. This effect is particularly evident with regard to "outformation". It is no coincidence that the claim that we live in a "Post-Truth Era" has emerged.

It is precisely a weakening ability to distinguish truth from falsehood that a study by the RAND Corporation with the meaningful title finds: "Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life"<sup>20</sup>. According to the study, over the past two de-

---

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael Rich, *Truth Decay. An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of*

ades, national political and civic discourse in the United States has been characterized by a “Truth Decay”, due to the decline of factual information and analyze in American public discourse. Authors Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael D. Rich identify four key trends shaping this decay: growing disagreement about facts, blurring of the lines between opinion and fact, increasing influence of opinion over fact, and declining trust in previously respected sources of factual information.

The most harmful consequences of decay are cited as the erosion of civic discourse, political paralysis, alienation and detachment of people from political and civic institutions, and uncertainty about national politics. Overall, the report highlights that the truth decay poses a threat to the political process and democracy.

## ***2. Consequences of the erosion of value rationality***

The answer to the question of what is the meaning of these impacts on societies, eroding their rationality, is clearly evident in the consequences of this erosion. Generally speaking, the consequences are a weakening of the capacity of societies to resist the capturing elites who have captured the state and are imposing profound changes on the very foundations of societies, eroding their ability to make sense of and resist the state capture and the other changes that the elites who captured the state are imposing. The erosion of value rationality is an erosion of the capacity of societies to identify the very capture of the state and of themselves.

From another perspective, the impacts on the rationality of societies facilitate the achievement of a “consensus” between societies and capturing elites and increase cohesion in society, as the erosion of value rationality and the limitation of social capacity reduce potential tensions and conflicts between capturing elites and societies.

a. Changes in individual attitudes towards maintaining and upholding notions of justice

At the individual level, a noticeable consequence of the described changes is, for example, the tendency towards weakening attitudes towards

---

*Facts and Analysis in American Public Life* (RAND report, 2018), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2314.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2314.html).



upholding notions of justice. The trend manifests itself as a small and decreasing share of people who are inclined to actively oppose injustice. Individual behavior becomes more passive and conciliatory.

The aforementioned Switzer notes people's fear of questioning actions and ideas that are clearly absurd and calls it one of the most depressing collapses facing Western society. As the trend toward weakening morally based judgments increasingly draws attention, one website asks the question: „Why is there a lack of people fighting injustice?“<sup>21</sup>. Individual people answer and discuss different factors, but what the platform's AI assistant provides them with, as a summary of possible answers, are the following most likely reasons:

**Fear and risk:** Many people may fear consequences for speaking out, such as social rejection, job loss, or even physical harm.

**Apathy and decreased sensitivity:** In a world saturated with news of injustices, some people become desensitized to injustice or feel overwhelmed.

**Lack of awareness:** Some people may not be fully aware of the injustices that exist.

**Social norms and individual behavior conditioning:** In many societies, there are norms and expectations that discourage dissent or activism. Therefore, people may be more inclined to accept the status quo rather than challenge it.

**Limited resources:** Activism often requires time, money, and energy. People facing economic hardship or personal challenges find it difficult to find resources to engage in activism.

**Fragmentation:** Sometimes social movements can be fragmented, with different groups focusing on different issues. This fragmentation can reduce efforts and make it difficult to coordinate collective actions.

**Psychological barriers:** Cognitive dissonance can prevent people from acting against the injustices they witness, especially if acknowledging these injustices conflicts with their beliefs or identity.

---

<sup>21</sup> Quora, Why is there a lack of people fighting against injustice? <https://www.quora.com/Why-is-there-a-lack-of-people-fighting-against-injustice>

Cultural factors: In some cultures, there may be a stronger emphasis on conformity and harmony within the community, which may inhibit individual action against perceived injustices.

In most of the reasons listed by the site, a connection can be noticed with the reasons for the weakening of public capacity: insufficient “similarity in thinking”, i.e. weakening of value rationality, which determines similarity; weakening of commitment to shared basic moral values, which determines value rationality; weakening of the relevant moral feelings (reduced sensitivity), which activate behavior to uphold values and thus determine the tendency towards decreasing activism.

A connection between the reasons stated on the website for the “lack of people fighting against injustice” and the weakening of the public capacity to maintain and uphold justice is also noticeable in the proposed measures to engage people in the fight against injustice. Most of these activities are aimed at strengthening the components that form public capacity: community building: fostering a sense of solidarity and shared purpose that motivates people to join collective efforts; creating forums or discussion groups where people can share and engage in dialogue about injustices; supporting open conversations that promote understanding and empathy; engaging communities: mobilizing local communities; creating grassroots movements that encourage community participation and engagement; collaboration with other organizations and movements to enhance efforts and share resources; building coalitions focused on intersecting issues; increasing education and awareness.

### ***b. Changes in civil society organizations***

Some authors raise the question of whether civil society can oppose the state<sup>22</sup>. From the perspective of the topic under discussion, the question can be formulated as follows - can civil society organizations oppose the capture of the state and societies? As Kabakchieva’s work shows, such a confrontation did not take place. Civil society fails to effectively influence the state and its policies (respectively – the capturing elites who shape policies) and fails to make adjustments to the political agenda when policies

---

<sup>22</sup> Petya Kabakchieva, *Civil Society Against the State* (Sofia: LIK, 2001), in Bulgarian.



or legal norms are judged to be unjust. This weakness of civil society and its organizations is not unique to Bulgaria. The situation is similar in many other countries, where research shows that the policies being implemented are judged to be unjust, and civil society organizations cannot influence this situation.

Obviously, changes in individuals' attitudes to maintain and uphold notions of justice also affect the state of civil society organizations. Lichterman highlights the major concerns that are being raised by debates about the state of (American) civic engagement<sup>23</sup>. Analyzers are interested in why civic engagement is declining when it is expected that civic associations can and should cultivate ordinary citizens' ability for social self-organization, their ability to develop interactions with the public. Obviously, the state of civic associations today is far from the state that made a strong impression on Alexis de Tocqueville. Democracy also suffers from these changes, as it depends not only on government, but also on citizens who can "do things" together with a wide range of other people, groups, and institutions, instead of being just obedient subjects of the state<sup>24</sup>.

But in captured states, the role of NGOs is changing. Empirical research shows that many NGOs are transforming, acquiring more characteristics of business structures and operating as such. Researchers also notice a tendency for nonprofit organizations to adopt market approaches and values, which reduces the ability of these organizations to create and maintain a strong civil society. This trend emerges when examining the main market practices in the nonprofit sector – generating commercial revenue, competing for contracts and funding, donor influence, and the development of social entrepreneurship – and examines their adverse impact on the contribution of nonprofit organizations to the state and development of civil society<sup>25</sup>.

The situation is similar for NGOs, which have explicitly declared that their mission is to support and promote social justice. But what are the specif-

<sup>23</sup> Paul Lichterman, "Social Capacity and the Styles of Group Life: Some Inconvenient Wellsprings of Democracy", *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 52, №6 (2009), 846-866.

<sup>24</sup> Lichterman, *Social Capacity*, 847.

<sup>25</sup> Angela M. "Eikenberry and Jodie Drapal Kluver, The Marketization of the Nonprofit Sector: Civil Society at Risk?" *Public Administration*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (2004), 132-140.

ic activities through which they achieve this goal is not entirely clear. For example, out of a dozen such organizations randomly selected in the US, four work to achieve racial justice by ending mass incarceration, excessive punishment, and police brutality by organizing and educating young black people. Two organizations support social justice by supporting LGBT communities. One organization strives to uphold the values of democracy and advocates for equality and the rule of law, and another works for fair elections.

The situation is similar for other civil society organizations. Sandra Kröger, based on a large-scale literature review, has examined the role of civil society organizations in policy-making in various areas in the EU, and her conclusions about their state are very pessimistic<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, it appears that decision-makers maintain a perception of consultations and other interactions with NGOs, but select those that share the views of the relevant state institutions. Some researchers, who are even more critical of civil society organizations, directly write about “bad civil society.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***c. Reactions of local communities***

Local communities seem to be less affected by the erosion of value rationality and social capacity. A number of signs show that at the level of local communities, the capacity to maintain and uphold values, including notions of justice, is relatively better preserved. It can be said that local communities are particularly prone to making “conscientious objections” that Ceva<sup>28</sup> writes about.

It is these communities that react most intensely in cases where their judgments about a given policies are negative. For example, when their natural environment is damaged, including in cases where the damage is the result of activities to implement the green transition. This higher “reactivity” is obviously related to a relatively strong commitment of community members to common (and authentic) values and shared knowledge (in-

---

<sup>26</sup> Sandra Kröger, *Nothing but Consultation: The Place of Organized Civil Society in EU policy-making across policies* (European Governance Papers (EUROGOV) No. C-08-03, 2008), <http://www.connex-net-work.org/eurogov/pdf/egp-connex-C-08-03.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, *Bad Civil Society*, *Political Theory*, Vol. 29, № 6 (2001), 837.

<sup>28</sup> Emanuela Ceva, “Political Justification through Democratic Participation: The Case for Conscientious Objection”, *Social Theory and Practice*, Vol. 41, No 1 (2015).

cluding local knowledge), which also determines the achievement of similarity in thinking and a capacity for collective action. It is no coincidence that the most impressive studies of successful community action concern local communities. In local communities, especially in small ones, the level of attachment to basic moral values is higher compared to large urban conglomerates and their characteristic anonymity. In small communities, people know each other better, the level of trust is much higher, and in any case, people know well who can be trusted and who cannot. The sense of belonging, of obligations to the community, of solidarity, mutual assistance, etc. is also stronger. This specificity of local communities stands out particularly clearly in the works of Elinor Öström, who shows that local communities can be independent social actors and more – they can deal with problems without government interventions (setting goals, regulations, control) and without the “invisible hand” of the market mechanism. Specifically, through joint voluntary action, communities can maintain justice both in the collective use of limited common resources and in their conservation and preservation of opportunities for their future use.

But this capacity is not fully utilized for effective action in defense of justice. The reason is that local communities do not have enough power to influence the main problems of the community.

This lack of power is one of the effects of state capture. The researchers attributed the lack of sufficient power of local communities to two reasons. One is the incompatibility of their power and capacity with the systems of state governance and economic management. The other reason is the lack of democracy at the local level, where alliances between local government and local business are often not only a generator of corrupt practices, but also possess and use the means to control local communities.

#### ***d. Transformation of societies. Decline in social cohesion and trust***

As might be expected, the decline of authentic moral values gives rise to a decline in social cohesion. The results of a number of empirical studies confirm this expectation. In an extensive review of the literature on the concept of social cohesion, David Schiefer and Jolanda van der Noll write

that most researchers consider cohesion to be a desirable characteristic of societies, but they usually emphasize that it is in decline<sup>29</sup>.

Using levels of social trust as an indicator of the state of social cohesion, Larsen obtains a result that is typical of most other studies – a decline in trust and social cohesion<sup>30</sup>. The decline of social cohesion is the other face of growing individualism, which goes so far that, according to some, if the trend continues, the person of the future will be a sociopath or psychopath. It is clear that such individuals cannot be “fighters against injustice.”

Based on data from the World and European Values Survey, Larsen shows that high levels of social trust are found in only five of the 52 countries covered by the World Survey (the Netherlands, China, Sweden, New Zealand, and Australia). In these countries, respondents who indicate that “most people can be trusted” outnumber those who answer that “one has to be very careful.” In the remaining 47 countries, those who responded that “one has to be very careful” outnumbered the group showing social trust. Among societies where less than ten percent of citizens believe that most people can be trusted are countries such as the Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Ghana, Ecuador, Cyprus, Romania, Zimbabwe, Peru and Malaysia.

According to Larsen, this result is actually optimistic because the picture would change and the result would become even darker if one takes into account that some of the respondents expressing trust in most people actually have very little trust in a person they are meeting for the first time. If such an adjustment is made for the level of trust, only one of the 52 countries - New Zealand (57%), crosses the threshold for a majority of trusting people. Sweden (46 percent) is close to this threshold, while social trust falls significantly in Australia (33 percent), the Netherlands (25 percent) and China (14 percent).

The findings of the ESS show that improvements in objective living conditions do not lead to greater social cohesion. Larsen noted that this is not really surprising given what we know about social trust - it is unlikely to be

---

<sup>29</sup> David Schiefer and Jolanda van der Noll, “The Essentials of Social Cohesion: A Literature Review”, *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 132, (2017), 579-603.

<sup>30</sup> Larsen, *Social cohesion*.



created simply because a society is wealthier.

One expected result that Larsen notes is that social trust is negatively related to levels of corruption in the state apparatus. The attitude towards corruption is also an attitude towards the conquest of the state, since the level of corruption is a key indicator of the conquest of the state.

The above-mentioned consequences of the erosion of value rationality and knowledge are significant enough and, if they persist in the future, it can be expected that profound transformations will occur in societies themselves. The weakening of social cohesion, the strong growth of individualism and, along with this, the retention of power and control over societies through weak democratic political institutions can transform societies into what some scholars call Artificial Social Systems (ASS) or – according to Wallerstein’s prediction – lead them to a state of historically unprecedented system of slavery.

#### ***d. Reactions of societies. Conscientious Objection and Political Activism***

A number of events in recent years have shown that societies have the ability to recover from the erosive impacts to which they are subjected to by the elites conquering the countries. Banfield has long noticed this and writes that there is no evidence that the ethos of a people can be changed by plan. It is one thing to create consent through techniques of mass manipulation, but to directly change people’s fundamental view of the world, i.e. the guiding beliefs, ideals or ideologies that guide behavior, is quite another<sup>31</sup>.

This is the opinion of other scholars, who believe that levels of social trust are “sticky”, i.e. quite stable over time and emphasize the sustainability of the “bonding” of social groups over time<sup>32</sup>.

A clear sign of the resilience of moral values, or rather, of a self-protective reaction of societies, can be seen in the changes occurring in the values of

---

<sup>31</sup> Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (The Free Press, 1958), 165, <https://coromandal.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/edward-c-banfield-the-moral-basis-of-a-backward-society.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Larsen, Social cohesion; Alexandre Marc, Alys Willman, Ghazia Aslam, Michelle Rebosio and Kanishka Balasuriya, *Societal Dynamics and Fragility. Engaging Societies in Responding to Fragile Situations* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2013).

Generation Z. The generation was born and grew up during a period of the aforementioned impacts on authentic prosocial values and has undoubtedly been significantly influenced by these impacts. But as research shows, Generation Z is beginning to shift from left-wing political beliefs to right-wing beliefs.<sup>33</sup> The more important change, however, is another one – the generation is changing its value system and reorienting itself towards more “traditional” i.e. authentic pro-social values. This transition from one value system to another raises the question of what was the source of the values that the generation is abandoning. Obviously, the main source may be the education system, where the educational process is constructed in such a way as to erode authentic values and replace them with others. And this is probably a technology for the deepest erosion of the social tissue of societies. Only with the acquisition of life experience and increased knowledge of the social world do young people begin to abandon the matrix created by deformed education. From a political point of view, such an impact on the education system means that in the captured state, education serially produces citizens with certain value systems and political beliefs, which is simply a manipulation of the democratic political system.

Another impressive protective reaction of societies can be considered the so-called „populist breakthroughs“ that took place in a number of countries in Europe, the United States, Latin America, and Asia. These breakthroughs, aimed at removing ruling political forces from power, are usually interpreted as tendencies towards authoritarianism and dictatorships. In reality, there is no convincing explanation for these changes in political behavior.

In the literature, the rise of so-called “authoritarian populism” has received three types of explanations. According to one of them, economic problems caused by globalization, including growing income inequality, have led voters in the “abandoned” industrial and rural regions of the West to support extremist parties. According to the second explanation, the cause of authoritarian breakthroughs is the decline of state capacity – the capacity

---

<sup>33</sup> Henry Samuel and James Jackson, “How European Young Voters Flocked to the Hard-Right”, *The Telegraph* (June 10, 2024); Gus Carter, “Meet the Zoomer Doomers: Britain’s Secret Right-Wing Movement”, *The Spectator* (Sept. 4, 2025).



of governments to formulate and implement adequate policies.<sup>34</sup>

According to a third explanation, the turn in electoral behavior represents a “retroactive reaction” to “. cultural changes that threaten the worldview of once dominant sectors of the population.”<sup>35</sup>

The first two explanations are obviously related to negative assessments (including morally based assessments related to violating notions of justice) of the effects of laws and implemented policies, i.e. at least some of them can be seen as reactions against captured states. But in the third explanation (“cultural changes that threaten the worldview of once dominant sectors of the population”), changes in values are quite clearly seen as the cause of “authoritarian breakthroughs.” The authors citing this reason define it as a “retro reaction” to groups that “once dominated”, but in fact, the reaction can be explained in a completely different way. The reaction is the resistance of societies against what the authors call “cultural changes”, but are actually the impacts eroding the basic value complexes of societies.

As societies perceive ruling elites as the primary cause of the erosion of their moral complex and identity, societies become activated and take action to remove these elites from power.

The radicalism of this political reaction to the erosion of values may also be contributed by ineffective democratic institutions and participatory mechanisms that are unable to “transmit” demands “from the bottom up” and do not allow citizens, sharing common moral values, to influence unwanted changes.

Signs of resistance by politically active societies against their erosion can also be seen in another change – the looming crisis of the liberal international order.

Authors of Foreign Affairs write that “the liberal international order is dying, and its transatlantic supporters are mourning [...]. Some are angry and condemn the US president for needlessly destroying what they hold dear,

---

<sup>34</sup> Roberto Stefan Foa, “Why Strongmen Win in West States”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 32, № 1 (January 2021), 52.

<sup>35</sup> Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, “*Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*”, Faculty Research Working Paper Series, Harvard Kennedy School, 2016, 1.

and they promise to move forward to strengthen global institutions.”<sup>36</sup>

Existing explanations for this crisis focus on the uneven distribution of wealth and values, which creates losers and thus breeds discontent. But the authors emphasize that there is no answer to the important question of why this discontent turns into a loss of legitimacy and a crisis of the liberal international order, rather than a challenge to policies.<sup>37</sup>

An analyze by John Mearsheimer seems to answer this question.<sup>38</sup> Seven years ago, he predicted that in international relations, the liberal “grand strategy” of spreading human rights and liberal democracy was doomed to failure. The reason for this is that a strategy based on liberal assumptions about human nature overvalues individual rights and ignores nationalism and realism, and therefore cannot be successful. According to Mearsheimer, in politics, human beings care more about the interests of their groups than about individual rights, and in international relations, social groups (nation-states) are sensitive to their sovereign rights. In other words, liberal assumptions about human nature do not correspond to the nature (identity, rationality) of the human societies in which liberal ideology spreads. Therefore, a conflict arises between the liberal ideology and the societies (their value rationality) in the countries where the ideology is transferred. This conflict causes a deterioration in relations between countries and wars.

The above reactions of many societies prove that they have the capacity to defend their identity, rationality, values, judgments; to defend the social tissue that builds them, i.e. to defend themselves. Moreover, they also defend states, as they oppose their capture by small influential groups that seek to achieve social cohesion by weakening and capturing societies.

---

<sup>36</sup> Stacie Goddard, Ronald Krebs, Christian Kreuder-Sonen and Berthold Rittberger, “Liberalism Doomed the Liberal International Order. A Less Legalistic System Would Help Protect Democracies”, *Foreign Affairs Today* (July 28, 2025), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Christian Kreuder-Sonnen and Berthold Rittberger, *The LIOn's Share: How the Liberal International Order Contributes to its Own Legitimacy Crisis*, (Open Forum Series, Center for European Studies, Harvard, 2025), 2.

<sup>38</sup> John Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).



***Acknowledgment:***

This article was prepared as part of the research project “Public Capacity for a Just Green Transition” funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science (under contract КП-06-Н55/13) within competition for funding of fundamental scientific research – 2021, with the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences as the beneficiary.