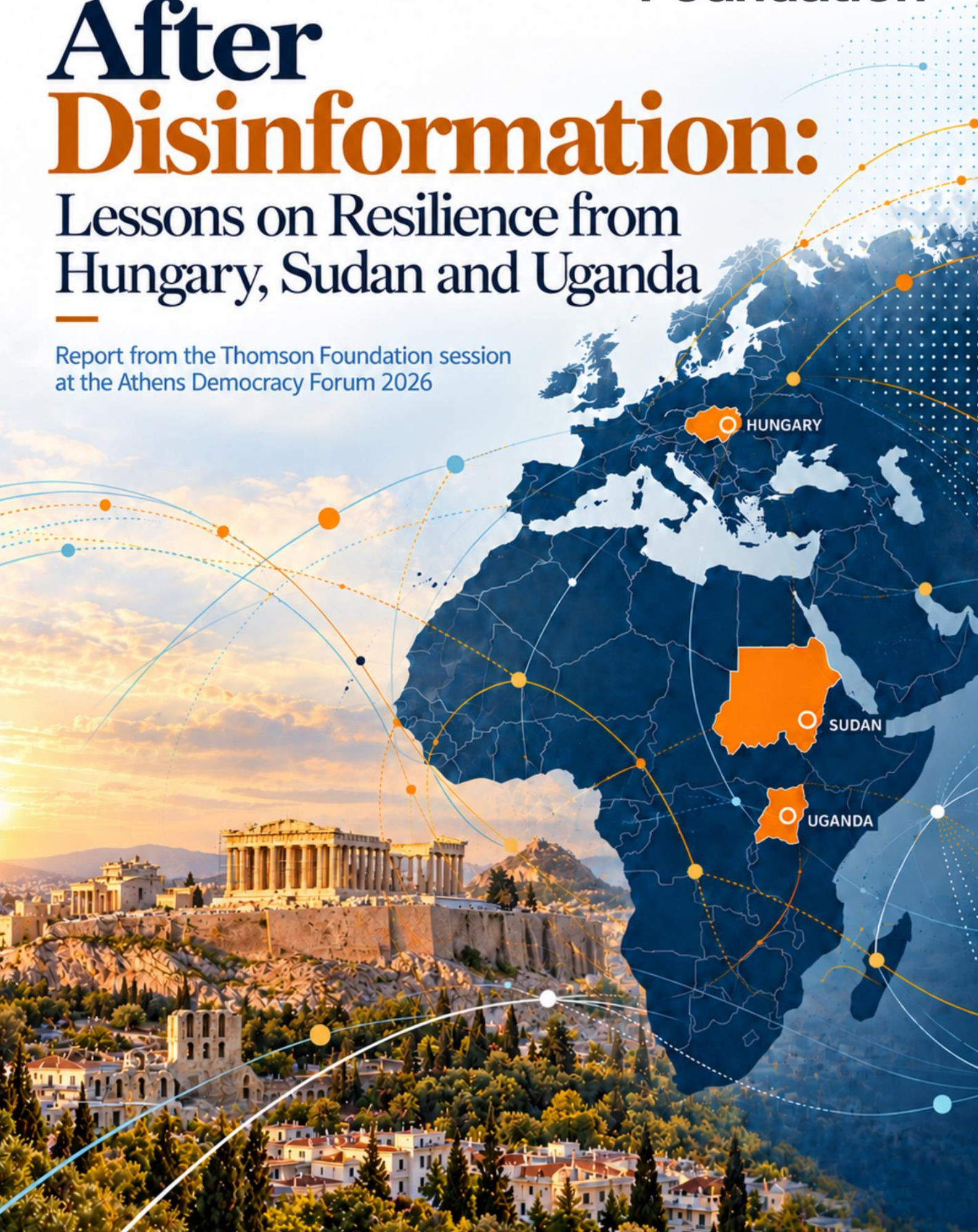
Thomson Foundation

After Disinformation:

Lessons on Resilience from Hungary, Sudan and Uganda

Report from the Thomson Foundation session at the Athens Democracy Forum 2026



Across three days of discussion about democracy at the Athens Democracy Forum, one issue cut across many of the challenges: the health of the information environment. Democracy depends on people being able to access credible information, debate competing claims and hold power to account. The resilience of media and information systems, and their capacity to sustain these functions under political, economic and technological pressure, is therefore central to democratic resilience.

It was against this backdrop that more than 50 participants joined Thomson Foundation's workshop, *After Disinformation: Lessons on Resilience from Hungary, Sudan and Uganda,* bringing together researchers, fact checkers and journalists working across very different information landscapes to tackle one of the defining questions of the digital age: how can societies become more resilient to disinformation?

Moderated by Gary Mundy, Thomson's director of Research, Policy and Impact, the discussion on 30 September 2026 explored four central themes: independent journalism, the public's ability to navigate information critically, the way digital platforms can shape the information people see and the governance systems that support or constrain them.

The panellists included: Dr Aida Al-Kaisy, international development consultant and academic researcher; Marius Dragomir, director of the Media and Journalism Research Center; Abaas Mpindi, co-founder and CEO of Media Challenge Initiative in Uganda; and Szilárd Teczár, editor-in-chief of Hungarian fact-checking site Lakmusz.

The foundations of resilience

Marius Dragomir reminded the audience that disinformation isn't new or just a temporary by product of the digital age. He argued that resilience must be understood in the context of the wider information ecosystem.

Drawing on comparative research into information ecosystems, Marius described trust as something that circulates between public institutions, knowledge institutions, including journalism, and the wider public. The strength of these relationships can vary significantly between countries, even where they are exposed to similar technologies and regulatory frameworks.

Different interventions also work at different levels and over different timescales, he said. Legislation can be introduced relatively quickly but may have limited reach. Fact checking is valuable but cannot address the problem alone. Institutions can take years to build trust, while the benefits of sustained media literacy may only become fully visible across a generation.

The implication was clear: there is no one solution to building resilience to disinformation. Success can depend on how the wider information system functions in individual countries.

Journalism strengthens democratic resilience

"Disinformation never happens in a vacuum," Szilárd Teczár told the audience. For him, Hungary's experience demonstrates how strongly the effects of disinformation depend on the political, economic and social environment in which it circulates.

He argued that the impact of political messaging changes as public concerns, economic conditions and the domestic political landscape evolve, making it difficult to isolate disinformation from the wider context in which people make their political choices.

The role of fact checking and independent journalism, he said, is to enable democratic choice by giving people access to reliable information and preserving the principle that political statements can be tested against underlying facts.

That role becomes even more critical where independent media face political hostility, legal pressure or efforts to brand journalists as agents of foreign influence, he adds. Journalism's democratic value lies not in producing a preferred electoral result, but in keeping evidence, scrutiny and accountability within public reach.

When online manipulation has offline consequences

For a country like Sudan which is in the grip of a devastating conflict, information resilience has an immediate operational dimension. “We see a battleground of ideas online in the Sudanese digital ecosystem,” said Dr Aida Al-Kaisy who described to the conference Thomson’s work to monitor and identify harmful narratives and understand the actors and tactics behind information manipulation in the country.

The work includes monitoring AI-manipulated content, hate speech, narrative laundering and coordinated cross-platform activity. It informs early-warning work and helps journalists, fact checkers and content creators respond to online developments.

Aida described patterns in which hate speech and manipulated material targeting particular communities appear ahead of offline attacks. She also highlighted narratives attacking the intentions and credibility of humanitarian organisations, as well as foreign information manipulation and interference narratives used to discredit diplomatic engagement around the conflict.

The value of the research is not limited to documenting misleading content after it has spread. It can help identify patterns of escalation, strengthen conflict-sensitive reporting and inform efforts to protect humanitarian access and opportunities for peace.

The Sudan experience also challenges narrow approaches to media literacy because people may share content they know to be manipulated because it affirms their political position or identity. Teaching audiences how to recognise false material remains important, but technical verification skills alone cannot address the deeper social and political incentives that drive engagement.

Making resilience a life skill

“People out there are making disinformation a business,” said Abaas Mpindi who described how the Media Challenge Initiative is responding to that by making information resilience accessible, practical and relevant to everyday life. He gave two examples of their approach: Fact Lens and Love Facts. The former makes the verification process visible to audiences in Uganda, and Love Facts provides activities to engage young people.

The aim is not simply to teach people how to identify a false claim. It is to help them recognise that the quality of the information environment affects their communities, their democratic participation and their own lives.

Abaas compared the challenge with public health: long-term change requires more than occasional expert interventions. It involves schools and universities, families, journalists, community organisations, religious and cultural leaders, and the local media people already use and trust.

“It cannot be a one-off engagement. It has to be a whole ecosystem approach,” he said.

From individual interventions to resilient systems

The panel took questions from the engaged audience which ranged from whether regulation can keep pace with platforms and AI, to how trusted information can reach rural or underserved communities and how democracies can embrace different viewpoints without becoming vulnerable to manipulation.

The central conclusion was that no single intervention offers a complete answer to the question of what it takes to build information resilience: regulation frequently moves slower than technology; fact checking alone can't rebuild institutional trust; media literacy has limited effect if people have no access to reliable local journalism; and independent media cannot fulfill their democratic role without viable organisations, supportive governance and meaningful access to audiences.

Information resilience is not simply the ability to identify whether an individual social media post is true or false. It is also the capacity of an information system itself to maintain evidence, accountability and informed public participation under pressure.

Assessing what democracy depends on

Strengthening these systems effectively requires a clearer picture of where they are resilient, where they are vulnerable and how they are changing. This will require a shared approach to evaluating audiences' ability to access, assess and use information; the independence, viability and reach of media; how digital platforms shape what people encounter; and whether government and regulatory systems protect open debate and accountability.

Researchers, media organisations, platforms, policymakers and funders need to develop and use a shared assessment framework that is sensitive to national context, tracks change over time and enables meaningful comparison across countries. Such an approach would help identify where systems are most vulnerable, target support more effectively and assess whether investment is strengthening the conditions democracy needs to thrive.

Thomson's work on information integrity

Across its programmes, Thomson supports independent journalists, media organisations and locally led partners to monitor and investigate manipulation, produce trusted public-interest journalism, strengthen verification and digital safety, and develop more effective ways of engaging audiences. In Sudan and Uganda, this includes connecting research and monitoring with practical support for journalists, fact checkers, content creators and media organisations.

By investing in organisations rooted in their own information environments, Thomson aims to strengthen not only individual responses to disinformation, but also the systems that allow credible information and democratic participation to endure.

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