

WHO REALLY THINKS FOR YOU?

Why Your Opinions May Not Be Your Own

What Is This About?

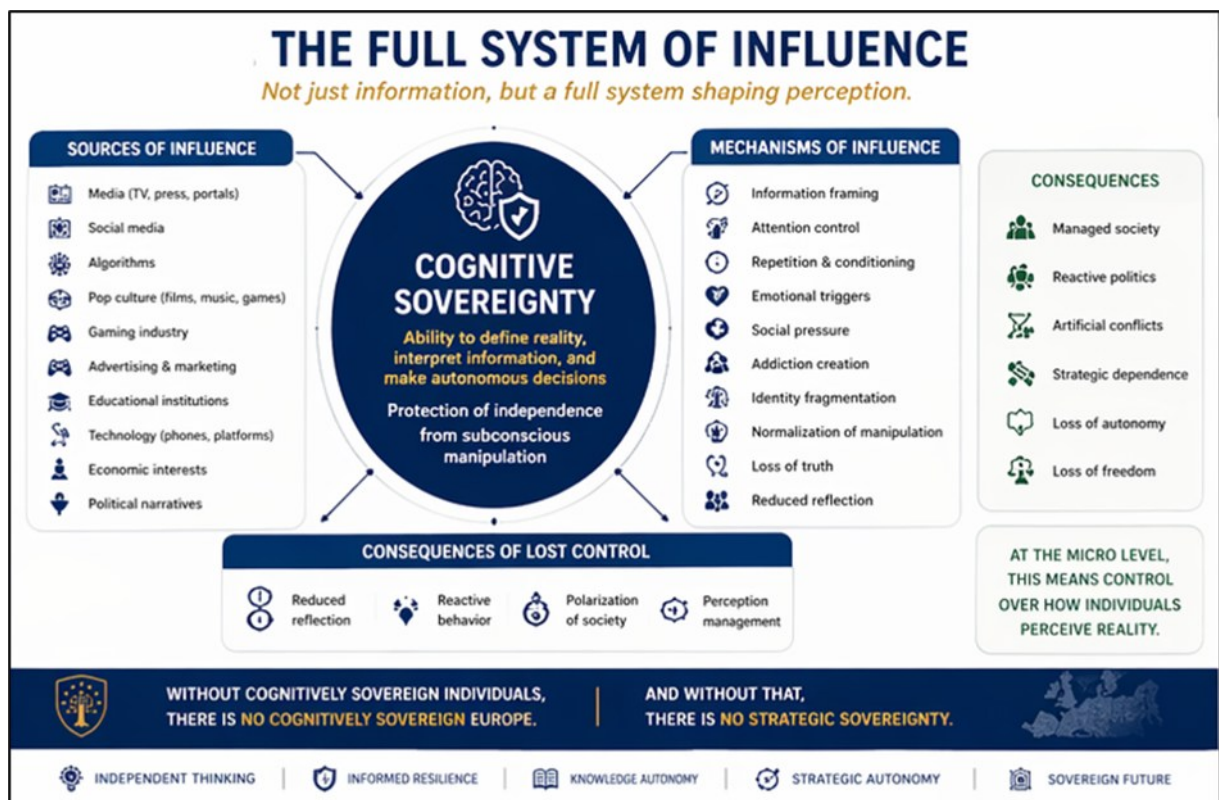
There is a quiet shift happening. Not in politics or technology – **in your own mind.**

You still believe you think for yourself. But more and more, your thoughts, opinions and decisions are shaped by systems you never chose:

- **News** that tells you what matters
- **Algorithms** that guess what you want
- **Politicians** who sell you stories
- **Corporations** that extract your attention

You are not using the system. The system is using you.

*Illustration: **Figure 1: The Full System of Influence** – a diagram showing how sources of influence (media, algorithms, politicians, corporations) lead to loss of control.*





What is cognitive sovereignty?

Cognitive sovereignty is the ability of individuals, societies and institutions to form judgments and make decisions independently within their own cultural, democratic and strategic frameworks.

It does not mean freedom from influence. Such freedom does not exist.

It means maintaining the capacity for independent judgment despite competing influences, narratives and systems of persuasion.

Just as political sovereignty protects the independence of states, cognitive sovereignty protects the independence of thought.

When external narratives, values and interpretations systematically replace a society's own cultural and intellectual frameworks, some scholars describe such processes as forms of mental or cultural colonization. Cognitive dependency can be understood as one possible mechanism through which such processes occur.

Why is it different today?

A common objection is straightforward: "Propaganda, persuasion and influence have existed for thousands of years. What is actually new?"

The answer is that human cognitive vulnerabilities have changed very little. The environment surrounding them has changed dramatically. The difference is not psychology. The difference is scale, technology, automation, personalization, professionalization and the absence of adequate regulation.

Never before in history have billions of people been exposed continuously to integrated systems of media, algorithms, data analytics, behavioural science and narrative management operating in real time across national borders.

How Does It Happen?

This does not happen overnight. It grows slowly, through a repeating cycle:

1. **Exposure** – You see the same news, the same ads, the same stories every day.
2. **Repetition** – You hear the message again and again.
3. **Normalization** – What is frequent becomes normal. What is normal becomes true.
4. **Identity** – The message becomes part of who you are. If someone attacks it, they attack you.
5. **Dependency** – Without the system, you feel lost. You don't know what to think.
6. **Closure** – You reject opposing views without thinking.

Illustration: Figure 4: The Cognitive Dependency Cycle – a circular diagram showing these 6 steps.

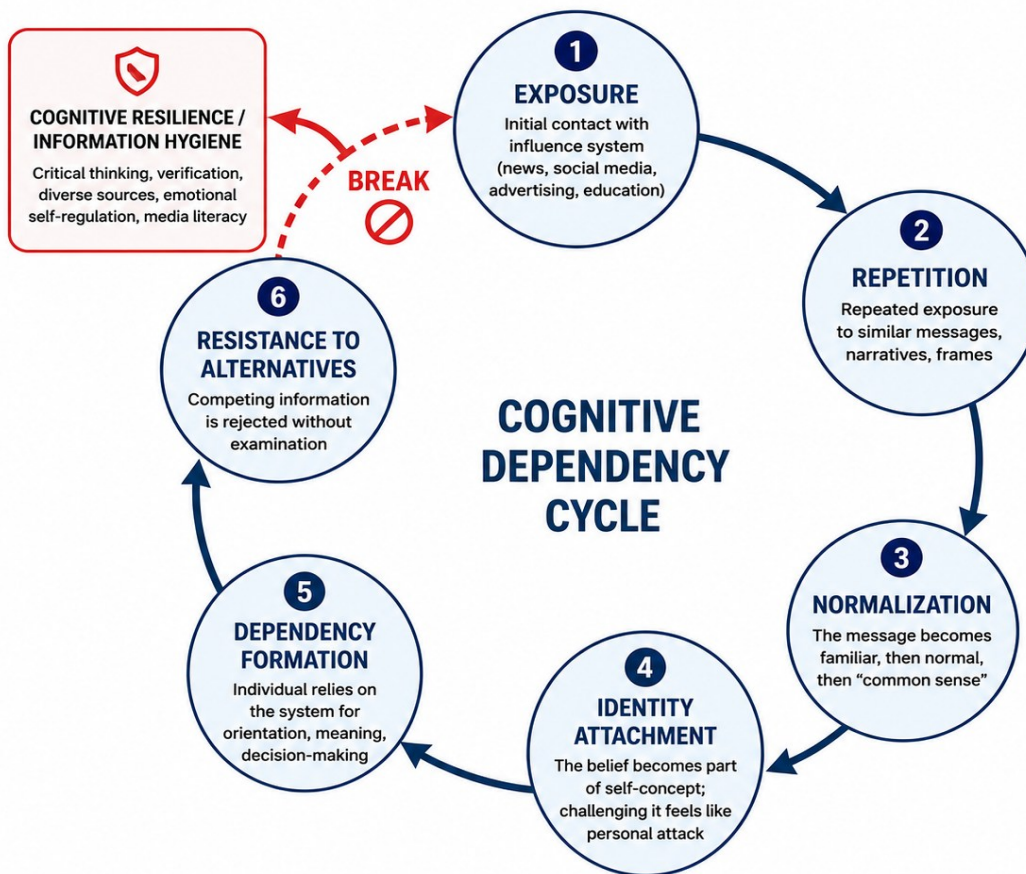


Figure 4: The Cognitive Dependency Cycle.

The cycle begins with exposure to an influence system. Through repetition, the message becomes normalized and attached to identity. Dependency forms, followed by resistance to alternatives. The cycle then repeats, each iteration deepening dependency. Breaking the cycle requires cognitive resilience and information hygiene.

About the model

The Cognitive Dependency Cycle is an author's conceptual model developed by Libertas Europa (2026).

It describes one possible mechanism through which repeated exposure, normalization and identity attachment can gradually reduce independent judgment and increase dependence on external systems of influence.

The model is intended as an analytical framework rather than a deterministic description of all human behaviour.

Who Shapes You?

There is no secret conspiracy. There is a **system**.

Who Shapes Your Thinking?	How They Influence You
Governments	Stories about homeland, enemy, security
Media	They choose what you think about
Platforms	Algorithms feed you what keeps you hooked
Corporations	Advertising that knows more about you than you do
AI	By "thinking" instead of you

None of them want to harm you. They just want your **attention**, your **trust**, your **compliance**.

*Illustration: **Figure 11: Actors of Cognitive Influence Map** – a network diagram showing states, media, platforms, AI, corporations, academia, NGOs, influencers.*

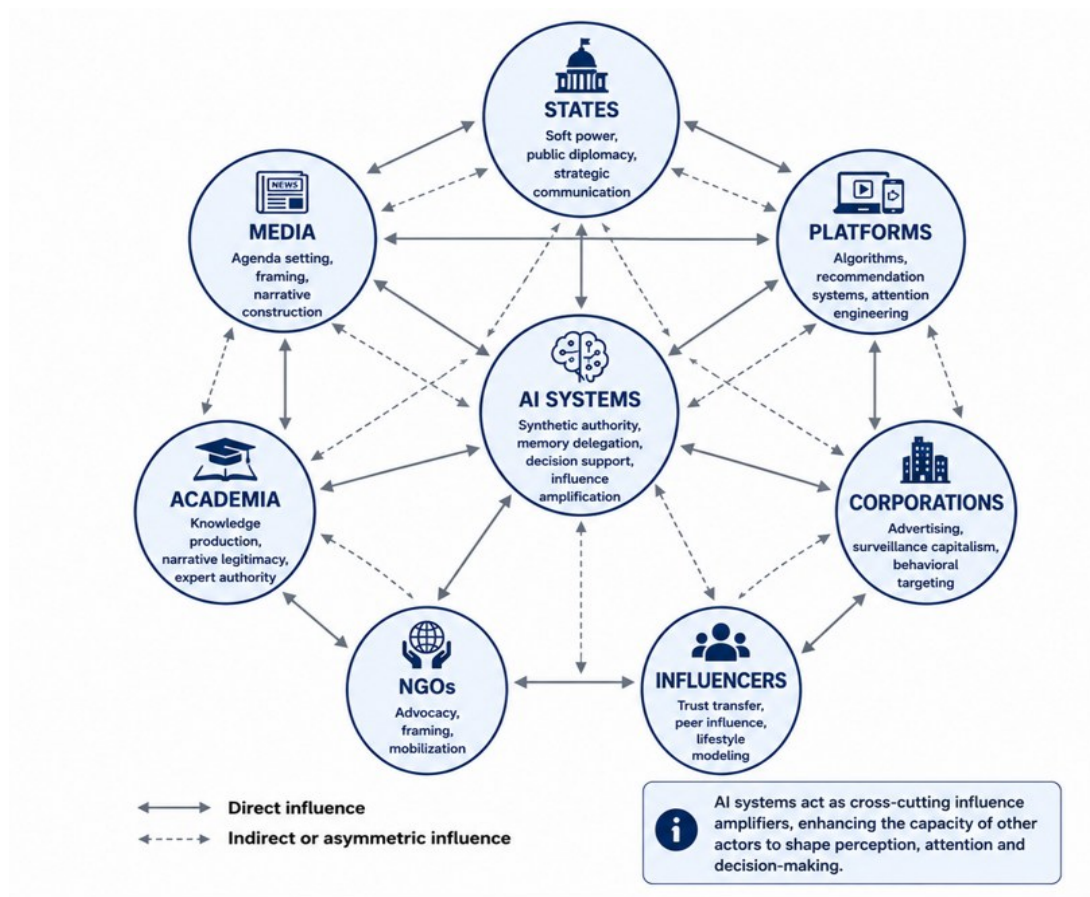


Figure 11: Actors of Cognitive Influence Map

Cognitive dependency emerges from a distributed network of interacting actors, including states, media systems, digital platforms, corporations, academia, NGOs and influencers. AI systems increasingly function as a cross-cutting influence amplifier, strengthening the capacity of other actors to shape perception, attention and decision-making. Influence flows are multidirectional and often asymmetric; no single actor controls the system. Dependency emerges from the cumulative interaction of multiple actors operating through different mechanisms.



Why Is This Different Today?

Human influence is not new.

Religions, empires, political movements, advertisers and educators have always attempted to influence beliefs and behaviour.

What is new is the environment.

Today influence operates:

- at global scale
- continuously rather than occasionally
- through personalized algorithms
- across multiple institutions simultaneously
- with immediate behavioural feedback
- often without transparency
- within a largely unregulated space

The difference is not psychology. The difference is organization, technology, scale and automation.

This emerging environment can be described as cognitive engineering: the systematic shaping of perception, judgment and behaviour through media, politics, education, technology, culture and social influence systems.

What Are the Consequences?

What Happens When You Stop Thinking for Yourself?

- You trust yourself less.
- You react more and reflect less.
- You become easier to manipulate.
- You seek approval instead of truth.

For society:

- People split into tribes
- You trust only "your" sources
- Democratic debate replaces facts with emotions
- Foreign actors manipulate you easily

*Illustration: **Figure 12: Consequences of Cognitive Dependency Map** – a central diagram with consequences at five levels: personal, social, democratic, strategic, economic.*

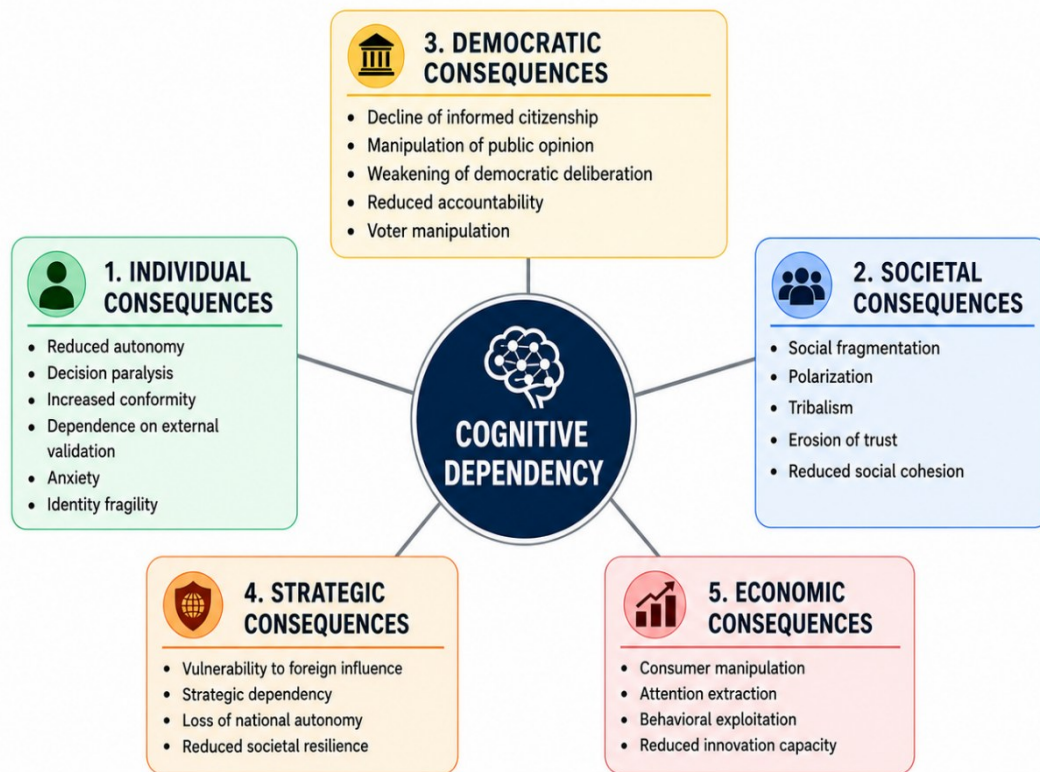


Figure 12: Consequences of Cognitive Dependency Map

Cognitive dependency produces cascading consequences across five interconnected domains: individual (loss of autonomy, anxiety), societal (fragmentation, polarization), democratic (erosion of deliberation, voter manipulation), strategic (vulnerability to foreign influence, loss of autonomy), and economic (consumer manipulation, attention extraction).

What Can You Do? Information Hygiene

Just as you wash your hands to prevent infection – **clean your information environment.**

Practice	How It Helps
Check the source	Don't trust headlines. Read the article.
Wait 24 hours	Don't share immediately. Verify first.
Seek the other side	What does someone you disagree with say?
Turn off notifications	Don't let algorithms run your day.
Schedule your reading	No endless feed. Have time and place.

*Illustration: **Figure 15: Information Hygiene Model** – three columns: personal hygiene, public health, information hygiene.*

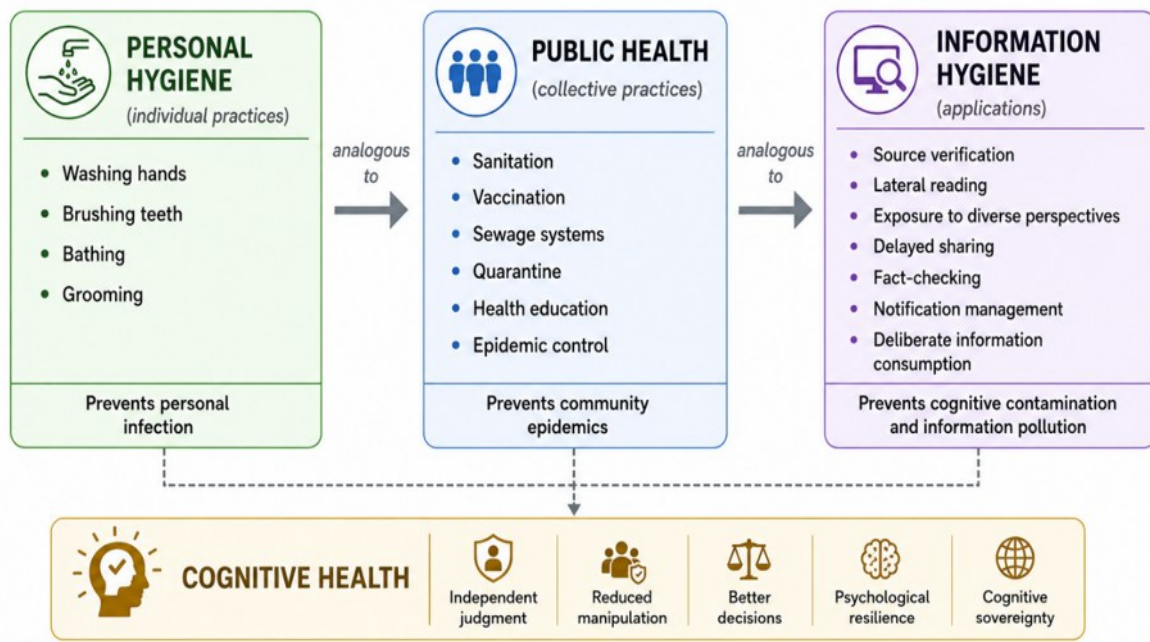


Figure 15: Information Hygiene Model

Information hygiene is analogous to personal hygiene and public health. Personal hygiene practices help prevent individual infection, while public health measures protect entire populations. Information hygiene applies the same logic to the information environment. Practices such as source verification, lateral reading, exposure to diverse perspectives, fact-checking and deliberate information consumption help prevent cognitive contamination and reduce vulnerability to information pollution. Just as personal hygiene and public health are complementary, individual information practices and collective information governance reinforce one another and contribute to long-term cognitive health and cognitive sovereignty.

What Is Mental Resilience?

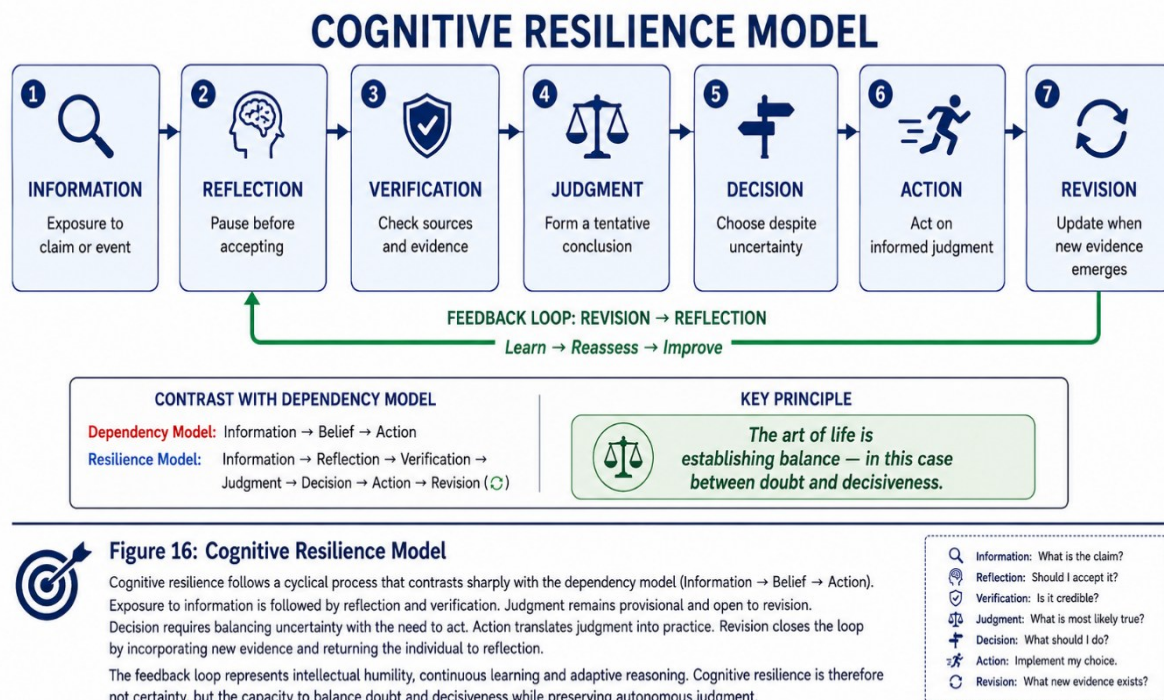
Mental resilience is your inner shield. It is the ability to:

- Recognize manipulation
- Manage fear and anger
- Delay judgment
- Verify facts
- Admit that you might be wrong

The mental resilience model:

Information → Reflection → Verification → Judgment → Decision → Revision

Illustration: Figure 16: Cognitive Resilience Model – a linear diagram with six steps and a feedback loop.



What Is Thinking for Yourself?

It is not freedom from all influence – that does not exist.

It is the continuous effort to keep your own judgment despite all the influences around you.

Thinking for yourself stands on **five pillars**:

1. **Control over your information** – what you see and read
2. **Your own knowledge** – not just consuming, but producing
3. **Your own stories** – the ability to shape your own narrative
4. **Mental resilience** – your inner shield against manipulation
5. **Your own values** – not values forced upon you

Illustration: Figure 18: Five Pillars of Cognitive Sovereignty – five pillars with arrows leading to political, economic and technological sovereignty.

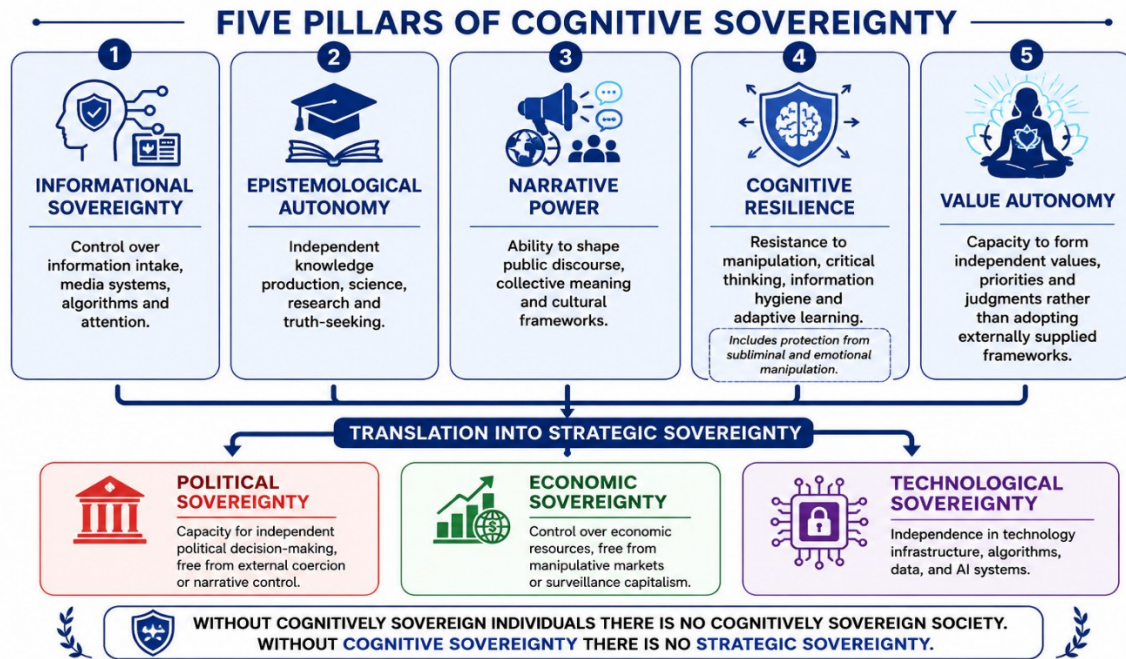


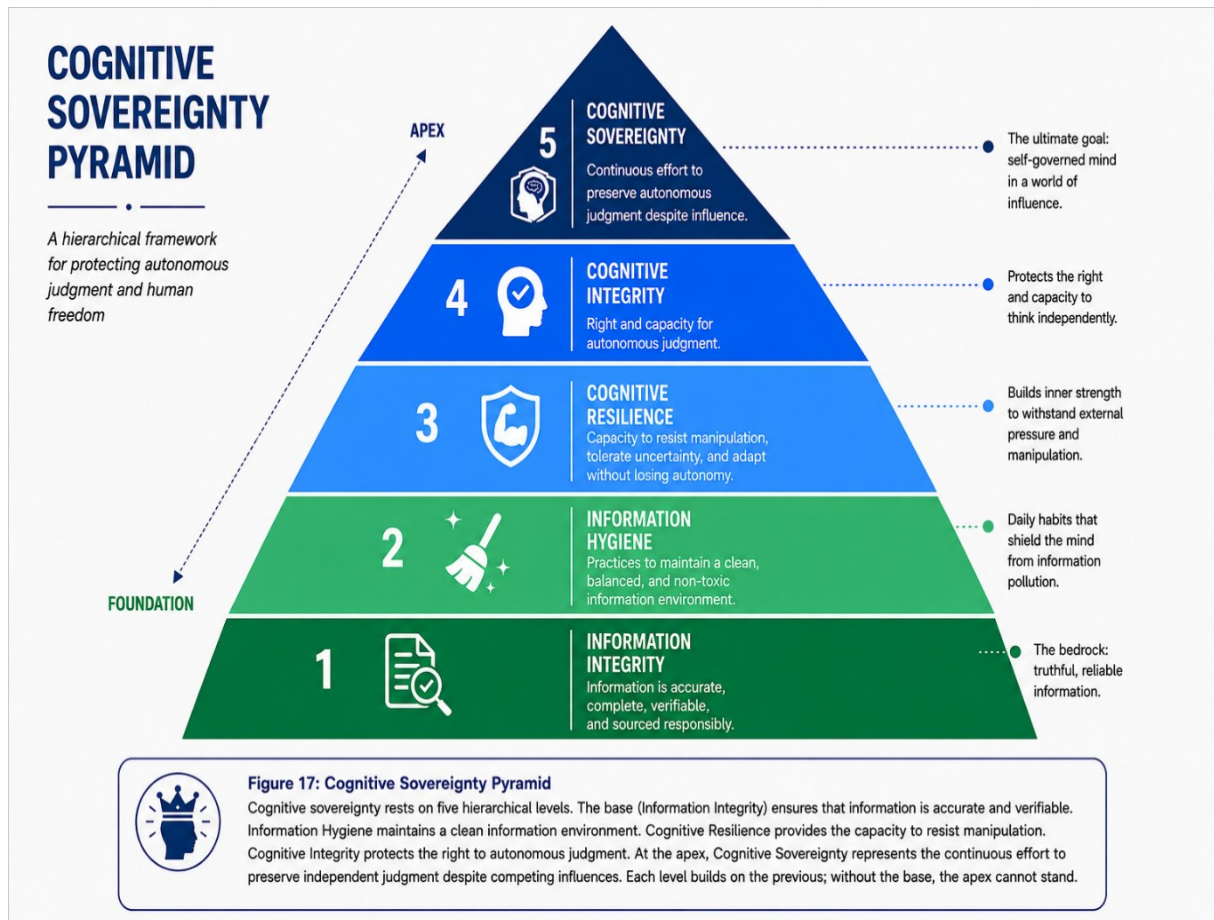
Figure 18: Five Pillars of Cognitive Sovereignty
Cognitive sovereignty rests on five interconnected pillars. Together they translate into three higher-order forms of sovereignty: political, economic and technological. These sovereign capabilities depend on citizens who can think independently, access truth, shape meaning, resist manipulation and form their own values. Protecting and strengthening these pillars is the foundation for a free, prosperous and technologically independent society.

The Path to Independent Thinking

Information integrity (accurate facts)
↓
Information hygiene (clean environment)
↓
Mental resilience (inner shield)
↓
Mental integrity (right to your own judgment)
↓
Thinking for yourself (continuous effort)



Illustration: **Figure 17: Cognitive Sovereignty Pyramid** – a pyramid with five levels.



How to Start. Today.

Step	What You Can Do Right Now
Tomorrow	Turn off notifications. Check one source you don't trust.
This week	Share nothing for 24 hours. Check three sources on one topic.
This month	Read a book about logic. Talk to someone with a different opinion.

Europe Needs Citizens Who Think for Themselves

**Without citizens who think for themselves, there is no Europe that acts for itself.
Without that, there is no real independence.**

Why Does It Matter?

Physical violence is regulated. Financial fraud is regulated. Environmental pollution is regulated. Yet systematic cognitive influence remains largely outside democratic oversight.



As societies become increasingly dependent on information systems, cognitive sovereignty may become as important in the 21st century as political sovereignty was in previous centuries.

The challenge is not to eliminate influence. The challenge is to ensure that influence remains transparent, accountable and compatible with democratic freedom.

Final Words

Losing your own judgment is not about being stupid, uneducated or uninformed.

It is the slow transfer of your judgment to external systems of influence.

Thinking for yourself is not about being free from influence.

It is the continuous effort to keep your own judgment despite all the influences around you.

The art of life lies in the balance between doubt and determination.

A democratic society should ensure that this balance remains possible – for individuals, for democracy, and for the state.

HOW COGNITIVELY SOVEREIGN ARE YOU?

- Do you regularly verify information using multiple sources?
- Can you easily explain the strongest arguments of the opposing side?
- Do you often share news or information without verifying it first?
- Do different opinions quickly make you angry or defensive?
- Are you willing to change your position when presented with credible new evidence?

Test yourself: <https://libertaseuropa.eu/civic-tests/>

Cognitive Sovereignty Signal

2 minutes – anonymous.

Document: Libertas Europa

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