

**PROSEGUR RESEARCH**

# The paradoxes of individual empowerment and security



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# 01

## Individual empowerment in the context of today's world



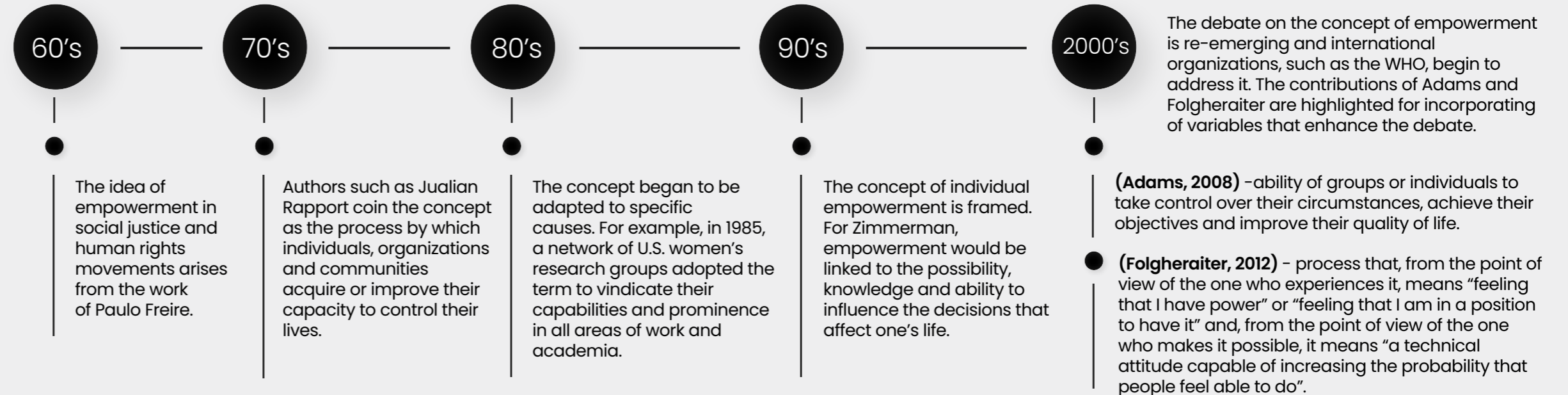


# 01

## 1.1 Empowerment as an evolving and debated concept

The concept of **empowerment** has gained relevance in recent years yet its meaning has been evolving and under debate since the 1960s. The philosophy around which the idea of empowerment arises is ancient and appears in the different schools of thought developed throughout the world.

Around the 5th century B.C., the philosopher Lao Tse - founder of Taoism - included in the oriental thought the need for men to culturally enrich themselves without requiring an outsider to impart training, work or culture.



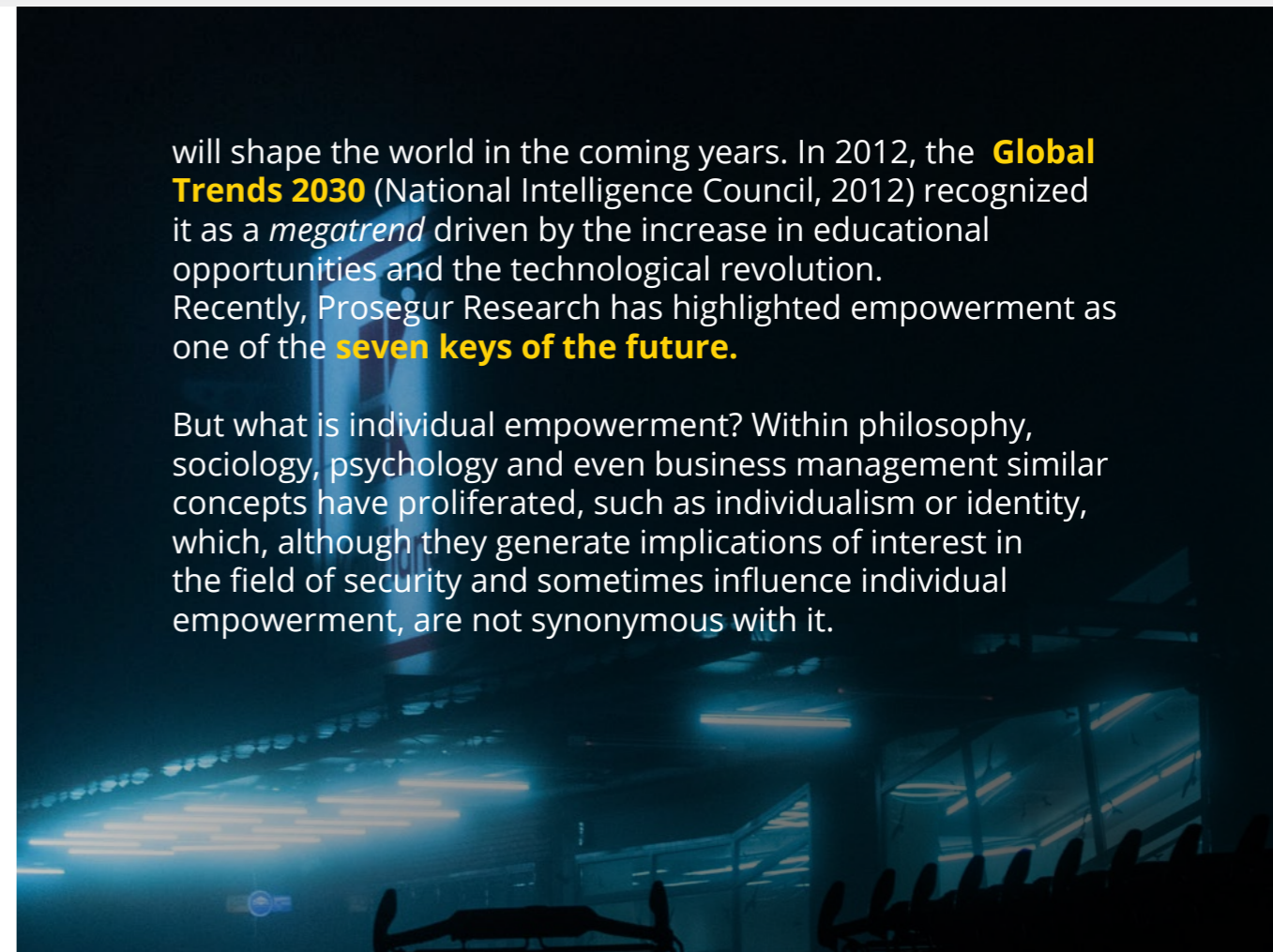
This philosophy was adopted by different civilizations over the years thus promoting the idea of empowerment throughout the world.

Empowerment takes place on **two levels**. First, at an **individual** or psychological nature, it is defined by the capacity of individuals to feel strong enough to make choices about their lives. The second, **collective** empowerment, refers to the capacity of a community to achieve its objectives through participatory systems. In this report we will analyze **individual empowerment**, although in many cases we will resort to the collective or generic concept of empowerment given the status of social being that individuals acquire in the system.

The concept of **individual empowerment** has been mentioned in a multitude of reports. Although there is no consensus on its meaning, most consulting firms and international organizations that have worked with this term agree that it is one of the trends

will shape the world in the coming years. In 2012, the **Global Trends 2030** (National Intelligence Council, 2012) recognized it as a *megatrend* driven by the increase in educational opportunities and the technological revolution. Recently, Prosegur Research has highlighted empowerment as one of the **seven keys of the future**.

But what is individual empowerment? Within philosophy, sociology, psychology and even business management similar concepts have proliferated, such as individualism or identity, which, although they generate implications of interest in the field of security and sometimes influence individual empowerment, are not synonymous with it.







This study opts for the conceptualization proposal developed by the United Nations (UN), where individual empowerment is the **process that allows people to have greater control over their own lives and over the factors and decisions that shape them.** This definition places the locus of control within the individual in various spheres of life, so that individual empowerment is configured as a determining factor for the **progress of societies.**

**Individual empowerment should not be confused with individualism,** since this can occur both in individualistic societies -such as the United States- and in collectivist societies -such as Mediterranean ones-.

The adoption of empowerment by the individual is an effect of **globalization.** Although it has been a continuous process throughout history, individual possibilities have never been as abundant as they are today, and the actions of individuals have never generated the global impact they have today.

However, this process of empowerment derived from globalization in turn generates a de-globalizing effect. An example of this is the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) phenomenon, which encourages the manufacture or repair of objects without the need for outside help and thus promoting creativity or manual skills, an apparently innocuous trend, but which is, however, in essence a countercultural movement characterized by anti-capitalism.

The evolution of this empowerment is being shaped by the combination of the individual power of networked citizens with new sensitivities and interests, evolving towards a collective intelligence that will gradually affect all spheres of societies. The study analyzes individual empowerment as a **trend that impacts many aspects of security from different disciplines.**

Therefore, although the approach values negative dynamics generated by this trend, as well as paradoxes and associated problems, empowerment is undoubtedly an important lever for **social progress.**







## 1.2 Individual empowerment in the context of today's world

Individual empowerment acquires a relevant weight on a multitude of variables of a political, economic, social or technological nature that give rise to the current world and alter the context of the future.

However, the weight that individual empowerment has acquired and will acquire cannot be understood without reflecting on the **change in social values**, reflected in both the individual and the collective, and the force that these exert on the **decision making of empowered people**.

In a context of **social hyperconnection**, feelings of loneliness have increased, as well as the tendency to live **alone**. Perhaps it is the overexposure caused by social networks that evokes the individual to seek certain isolation in order to rest. However, psychological studies have shown that the same brain centers are activated by feelings of loneliness as by physical injury or

illness, which is why it is beginning to be considered a public health problem. **Somes data** show that 34% of people between 20 and 40 years of age feel lonely and this sensation increases as they age until it reaches 48% in their 80s.

Some studies, such as the one by **Grossmann y Varnum**, relate these issues to the **rise of individualism**, which has been growing steadily over the past 150 years. In the words of these authors, "individualism is not a recent phenomenon. It is not consubstantial to the baby boomers, nor to generations X or Y, nor to the millennials: we began to look more to ourselves to the detriment of the common good more than 100 years ago".

Other studies link these behaviors to the modification of lifestyles, such as the increase in office labor, or the proliferation of jobs that promote independence and condition family ties, duty or conformity. Paradoxically, studies such as the one carried out by Juan Antonio Roche - professor of Sociology of Culture and the Arts - point to an increase in **solidarity**: values are strongly advocated towards others, but loosely for oneself. The ways of learning have also changed, making possible a much more democratic access to knowledge.

An example of **individual empowerment** in society is the acquisition of power by individuals involved in collective improvements or **demands** framed in causes such as the environment, the improvement of labor rights, feminism or the

preservation of the cultural heritage of minority or marginalized societies. This type of empowerment is directly related to diffuse power and social polarization, as it materializes in the form of mobilizations or activism capable of subverting the order or conditioning the decision-making of elites in power.

Another example of individual empowerment in society is the **maker culture** - popularly known as the *maker* movement. This movement erupted in the early 2000s although it was from 2016 when it began to have an impact in academia, relating it to revived debates, such as that of empowerment. At that time, at the TrendSpain event, this current was pointed to as the basis of the **third industrial revolution**. Makers defend their philosophy based on the **passion** that moves them to carry out their work, as well as creativity, horizontal power and collaboration with collective ideas.

In the professional context, from the point of view of empowerment, the so-called *power skills* or **empowerment skills**, related to networking, communication, leadership and flexibility, which position any employee in professional growth, to the detriment of traditional "know-how" skills, are gaining prominence.

By its nature, **individual empowerment has a cross-cutting impact** on other future trends. The following is an analysis of the relationship of influence between empowerment and the other six keys to the future identified by Prosegur Research.









## 1.2.1 Diffused power

As evidenced by data from **ACLED**, in recent years social tension and conflict have increased. This phenomenon of disaffection, apathy and even **anomie** has been enhanced by the involvement of more and more citizens in political issues, criticizing political decisions perceived by citizens as backward steps. An example of this is the measures implemented globally in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, sometimes considered as the adoption of authoritarian and interventionist measures and, at other times, as insufficient and not very protectionist, in both cases leading to mobilizations all over the world.

This individual empowerment has coincided with the **advancement of rights and freedoms gradually acquired** in recent decades, as well as **the rise in awareness in relation to them**, promoted globally by governmental organizations such as the United Nations, non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, and activists whom, through their actions, training or speeches have involved the population of different countries around the world.



Some authors have defined this social awareness as **citizen empowerment**.

Likewise, the individual empowerment acquired with respect to power cannot be understood without considering **new technologies**. The **communication capabilities** enhanced by technological development and convergence has allowed citizens to participate in political affairs that were hitherto reserved for institutions and governments, as well as to extend their demands to remote areas of the planet where, for cultural and academic reasons, there was no previous development of social awareness of certain aspects.

This situation has increased the number of **non-state actors with growing power and influence** in matters of national, regional

and global interest, even changing the profile of political leaders. For example, presidents such as Volodymir Zelenski (Ukraine), Donald Trump (USA) or George Weah (Liberia) have won elections without having previously been involved in politics.

Likewise, new technologies have facilitated the emergence of specific causes that have also blurred the traditional perception of power. Currently, political claims and social demands such as environmentalism, feminism or anti-capitalism, among others, have their **own power structures**. In this sense, different non-state actors -mostly members of civil society- lead each of the causes, acquiring greater influence than traditional politicians and being used by political parties to increase their power.





Similarly, individual actions carried out by citizens of a given State may have repercussions on diplomatic issues and generate inter- and intra-State conflicts. For example, in the context of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, there has been a proliferation of recommendations regarding good practices to be followed by visitors to reduce disturbances to public order caused by socio-cultural differences. For its part, one of the triggers of the protests that occurred in 2019 against the Algerian government, then led by Abdelaziz Bouteflika, were the demands emanating from the population due to the contrasting lifestyles in the country between the Western foreign population - considered socioeconomically advantaged - and the local population.

Finally, the paradoxes arising from the new **modes of urbanization** are pointed out for their impact on the conception of power. Differences arise at this point between individual empowerment arising in **urban environments** and that which proliferates in **rural areas**.

In this process of decentralization of power to non-state actors, **cities** acquire more decision-making capacity than rural areas, and it is in rural areas that many of the movements, currents and hotspots for future conflict are generated. Cities, which are the ecosystem of social coexistence in which the social fabric and quality of life are not exempt from risk, are increasingly fragmented. In terms of security, **urban violence** as a new paradigm of criminality is one of the trends that will require special attention in the coming years.

For its part, the **rural environment** has acquired relevance in the political sphere coinciding with the rise of movements against depopulation, as it happened with the political party Teruel Existe which obtained a congressman in the 2018 general elections in Spain. In this sense, **a study by Fundación Alternativas**, from October 2022 has analyzed the

**empowerment of the rural population** and its influence on the acquisition of political and social weight in Spain. This rural empowerment, in addition to contributing to the ideologization of the environment, has led to the polarization of the discourse regarding the status of rural areas in comparison to urban ones. In addition, it includes issues related to environmentalism - claiming for the care of the environment - and feminism - claiming for the inclusion of women in primary sector.

This approach has also acquired special relevance in Asian and sub-Saharan contexts where the demographic density of rural environments is very large and the empowerment discourse has boosted women's access to labor in the primary sector, as well as children and adolescents' access to schools and vocational training centers.





## 1.2.2 Social polarization

Empowerment, both individual and collective, has enhanced **social polarization** by contributing to the proliferation of **atomized demands**.

**Recent academic studies** have pointed out the existing confrontation between politically opposed individuals on social networks as an enhancer of affective polarization: it is not isolation that directly causes polarization, but inappropriate interaction with people with ideas contrary to our own. Lapuente, PhD in political science from Oxford University and professor at the University of Gothenburg (Sweden), explains that, at present, worldviews are forged and consolidated based on an “us vs. them” or, ultimately, an **“me vs. the world”**.

In this sense, **abstract labels** based on which people are classified according to their ideology, hobbies, religion or sexual tendency, among other things, have increased. Social atomization and the requirement to form part of specific currents of thought or abstract labels has become part of people’s daily lives. An example mentioned by different authors, such as Lapuente, is the requirement to fill in fields such as political ideology in online dating applications.

Following **Moisés Naím**, **populism and post-truth** are pointed out as the potentiating variables of the increasingly extreme social polarization, which blurs power in the face of the spread of social, economic and/or political actors with a growing influence in societies. For the author, **populism, polarization and post-truth** are the variables that reconfigure the current times.

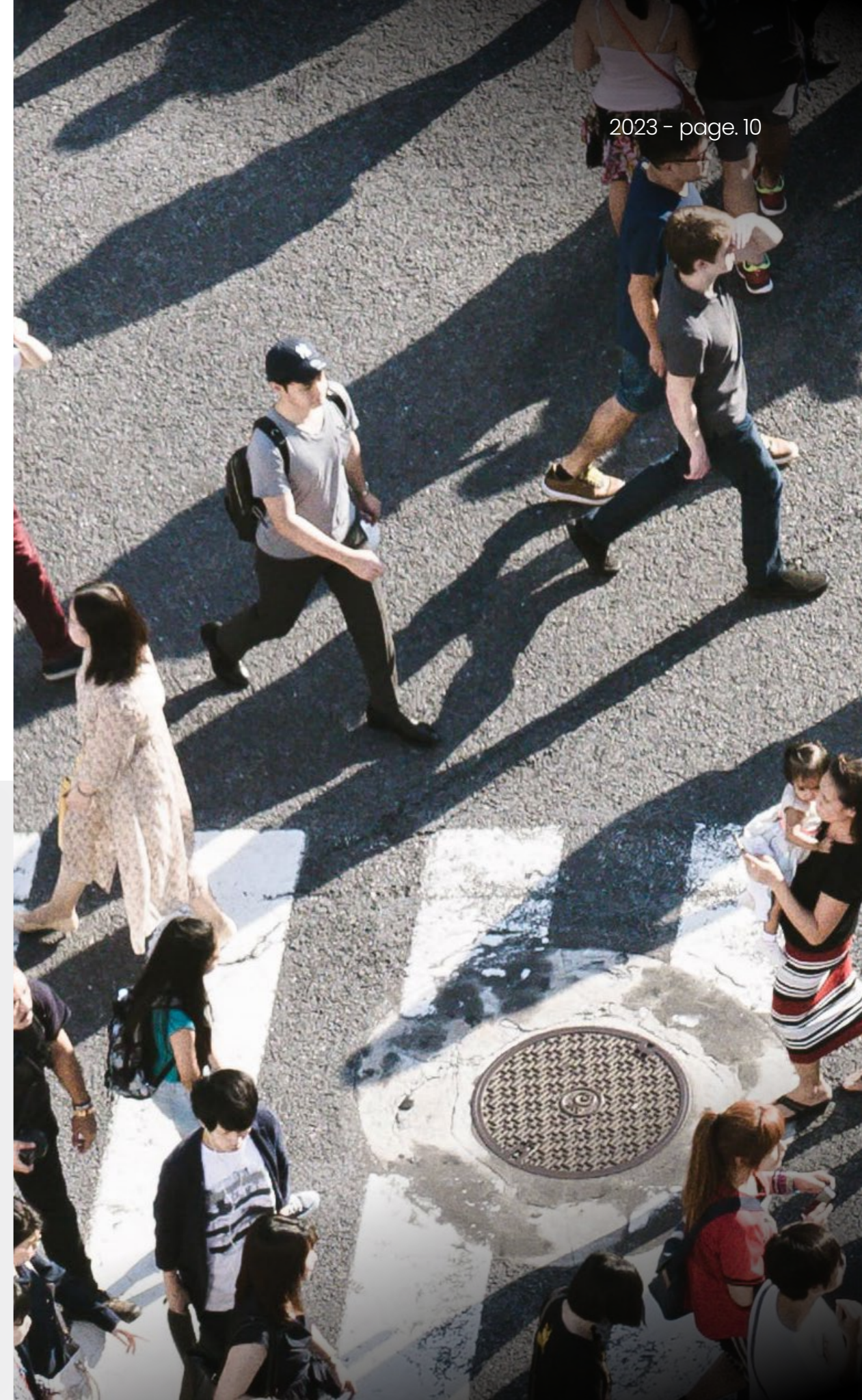
# Populism ⊕ Post-truth

Understood as a modus operandi to reach or retain power by taking advantage of the fissures and problems that societies present.

Understood as the prioritization of emotions, especially in politics, over the objective data that support a certain statement.



They encourage the creation of discourses with apparently simple solutions to complex problems (for example, on how to solve an economic crisis with a markedly global character and a multitude of interrelated variables).







### 1.2.3 Stakeholder economy

Over the years, research has been conducted on the influence of individualism and collectivism on the economy, in many cases including empowerment as part of its derived products. Individual empowerment has been especially reflected in economic issues in the **traditional phases of economic activity**: production, distribution and consumption. In recent years, trends with respect to work and productivity have changed: in societies, it is no longer well regarded to have free time or not to be stressed, as these variables are what drive the perception of success at work.

This obsession with productivity can be seen, for example, in the burnout syndrome - better known by its Anglo-Saxon term burnout - which is consubstantial to our times. Data published by **Deloitte** shows that 91% of workers consider that they have an "unmanageable" amount of stress and that 87% are passionate about their work,



demystifying the idea that those who enjoy what they do at work are immune to stress or burnout. The **American Psychological Association (APA)** has warned about demotivation and the physical effects, such as fatigue, that can result from it.

Another major manifestation of individual empowerment in economics is so-called **entrepreneurship**. The popular philosopher Byung Chul in his book *The Fatigue Society* has highlighted the hidden "trap" of entrepreneurship, which leads the proletariat to become entrepreneurs, being themselves the ones who exploit themselves (self-exploitation) and work outside the socially conquered labor conditions.

This context has led to collective reflection on the economic model and the meaning of work. Thus, stakeholder-based models are now being advocated, such as the so-called "stakeholder capitalism", promoted by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which broadens the range of stakeholders with interests that must be taken into account by business activity when making decisions.

These actors exert, from **individual empowerment**, influence and pressure on economic sectors, even **modifying strategies**, such as the traditional position of the customer at the center of business **strategies and production and consumption trends**.

Given the irruption of stakeholders in today's economic systems and the changes they have already brought about, interested parties or stakeholders are becoming an essential element for the economy of the future. We are also witnessing a more investigative, demanding and unfaithful consumer **profile** which is forcing private corporations to modify the traditional relationship with them as passive subjects.

However, there are still certain paradoxes that show that we are in a moment of transition. **Accenture** points out in a recent report the importance of moving from thinking about customers to thinking about people. Nevertheless, there are still certain paradoxes, such as the fact that a customer may value certain aspects of a company - such as sustainability or its responsibility with regard to working conditions - but will not solely stop consuming a product whose characteristics make it more interesting than the values expressed.





## 1.2.4 Technological convergence

Technological development has led to individual empowerment in various sectors of society. Technology gives **self-sufficiency** to those who use it as we no longer need a publisher to publish a book, or a photographer to remember an event, or newspapers to inform us.

Applied examples of individual empowerment in technology are the philosophy behind open *hardware* and *software*, which is an open-source platform that makes it possible to develop projects on drones, home automation or robotics, sharing access publicly and free of charge, promoting free culture. Likewise, the no-code movement is based on the development of websites and applications without code, so no programming knowledge is required.

The application of this self-sufficiency to **collective intelligence**, through social networks or through information dissemination channels, is called Technology of Empowerment and Participation (TEP). Thus, the empowerment associated with technology also acquires a collective character.

However, the acquisition of power by technology has produced **generational inequalities** and has revealed imbalances between different social strata. In view of this, there is a need for the **qualification** of non-technologists in the use of technology. In this sense, **Alfabetización Media and Information Literacy** (MLI), promulgated by the United Nations to raise awareness of continuous learning and the acquisition of the knowledge necessary for technological empowerment, has gained importance.

The proliferation of the use of technology in the workplace has also encouraged different corporations to promote technological empowerment training aimed at employees. In this regard, a **study commissioned by Lenovo and Intel** in 2020 confirmed the existing dissonance between the requirements regarding the proper use of technology to ensure hybrid work and the perceptions regarding the use of technology by employees.

In addition to the above, technological convergence gives strength to phenomena such as **oversocialization** and **overdependence**, derived from the **stimuli** produced individually by the use of technologies and their connivance with the social sphere. Technologies influence networks of relationships, allowing the individual to live autonomous lives in collective contexts. For example, in social circles such as families, there is the paradox that members remain disconnected from each other while in external networks they maintain a multitude of connections. Individuals feel strong with their smartphone in hand and extremely vulnerable when they leave it at home.

The social polarization discussed above has been enhanced by the **hyper-individualization** emanating from the widespread use of social networks, as well as by the confrontation between groups and communities - **through technology** - exacerbating the idea of "us vs. them" and "me vs. the world".

Likewise, technological development is boiling. In this respect, there are new concepts that will be **expanded** by the irruption of new technological conceptions, such as the **metaverse**, which will increasingly become part of every individual's daily life, also acquiring a relevant role in **individual empowerment**.

However, the **excessive use** of technologies to the detriment of traditional behaviors framed in social coexistence also brings with it damages that have repercussions on the individual's behavior. Recent examples conceptualized by their general incidence are **vamping** (digital hyperconnection that impairs rest and causes damage associated with the light from screens), **phubbing** (abusive use of mobile technology to the detriment of social relationships), **smombie** (walking while paying attention only to the electronic device) and **nomophobia** (irrational fear of being without a cell phone).







## 1.2.5 Health and wellbeing

Health empowerment encompasses both individual and collective perspectives:

- ▶ For the individual, it refers to a person's ability to make decisions and exercise control over his or her personal life.
- ▶ For the community, it refers to individuals acting collectively to achieve greater influence and control over the determinants of health and quality of life in their community (WHO, 1998).

Health awareness in recent years and the acquisition of relevance in the public debate has developed in parallel with the spread of individual empowerment philosophies associated with **wellness**, such as **Mindfulness** or coaching. However, the use of the term empowerment in relation to health is related to the **Health Promotion** models of the 1970s, in the Anglo-Saxon world, so it is not a novelty.



Since then, the importance of empowerment for the prevention and treatment of numerous diseases has been recognized. In this regard, according to the WHO, patient empowerment determines health outcomes. In Europe, the European Network Patient Empowerment (**ENOPE**) has been created to facilitate individual patient empowerment. Likewise, in Spain, the National Strategy on Addictions (2017-2024) promotes individual empowerment as a basis for psychological treatments in favor of the patient.

However, empowerment associated with concern for physical and mental health also acquires negative aspects when, for example, the cult of the body is **overemphasized**. Thus, greater self-care and increased interest in the fitness sector may a priori represent an improvement in health due to its recognizable fight against sedentary lifestyles but can sometimes turn into **various problems** arising from its socio-psycho-biological risks. Another example is the **dietary decisions** which is oriented towards self-care as a way of life with obvious positive effects but can also lead to certain nutritional **imbalances** and eating disorders.

The rise in awareness of wellness, with a strong focus on mental health, has also had repercussions in the **workplace**. Job seekers and workers of various corporations have increased the standards required in this regard, materializing the requirements in demands directed towards companies. Currently, there has been a **humanization of work**, materialized through an upturn in demand in companies with well-being purposes: up to 76% of workers demand greater care of their psychological well-being by the organization. However, feelings of skepticism still prevail in relation to the adoption of this philosophy by corporations.

Likewise, **leadership** figures have been promoted within companies to the detriment of the traditional conceptions of power and team management. In this sense, definitions of business leadership issued by large international companies include bidirectional empowerment (of both the leader and the team) as one of the fundamental characteristics of leadership, as well as one of the variables to be taken into account in order to achieve the desired results.





## 1.2.6 Environment and sustainability

Extreme weather events are generating an increasing impact on societies.

At an **individual level**, people are adopting behaviors - framed in individual empowerment – **to preserve the environment**. In this sense, there has been an exponential growth of vegetarians and **vegans** or the growing awareness and implementation of recycling and circular economy behaviors by people around the world.

From the collective point of view, one of the main consequences is the worldwide rise of environmental movements in recent decades - especially since the second half of the 20th century - and their recent **atomization**.

In addition, the new environmentalist groups have acquired special relevance in the creation of **identities** framed by this ideology. Likewise, individual empowerment has been reinforced



by these groups. With Extinction Rebellion as one of the major examples, the groups encourage individual action or local nodes to carry out their actions, without dependence on a central and hierarchical structure to direct them.

Also noteworthy are the performative activities, in which the aim is to generate a strong media impact in order to amplify a specific message. However, these modus operandi are not new, but respond to **resignifications of previous currents**. In recent weeks, the actions carried out by activists in various museums around the world have gained media relevance, although the avant-garde movements of the first half of the 20th century were already rethinking the value of everyday objects, prioritizing the discourse and intention of the artistic work rather than the technical -for

example, the **Futurist Manifesto** of 1909 backed the idea of “destroying and burning museums”-. Therefore, vandalism against works of art, blocking a certain installation or tying oneself to trees to stop a logging operation is but one step in this movement in which the **political and social struggle against global problems has been incorporated into individual action**.

In this regard, the increase in **ESG** (environmental, social and governance) **requirements** issued by users to companies is highlighted. This results in changes in consumer behavior, in the public intention of a transition of companies and public administrations towards a more sustainable energy model, and in the empowerment of individuals and companies in areas such as recycling or moderate consumption.





# 02 Individual empowerment from a security perspective





# 02

## Individual empowerment from a security perspective

From the above discussion, we can see elements associated with security that are directly and indirectly related to individual empowerment.

Technological development has amplified the surface for potential attacks and has exponentially increased the commission of cyberattacks against individuals, companies and public institutions, in addition to enhancing phenomena such as hacktivism or radicalization, which we will see below.



### 2.1 Social unrest and activism

The discourse of empowerment has brought with it a greater demand for political and social issues, which has led to an increase in **social conflict**. Although most of the protest movements that are currently emerging are encompassed within the framework of collective empowerment, it is the individual adoption of the causes being protested against that is the determining factor in the organization of active social movements.

As some authors have argued, empowerment **has political and social repercussions**. On the one hand, activism encourages political participation and involves individuals in collective causes, usually based on conceptions of social improvements, giving rise to **citizen empowerment**.

The growing atomization of social movements into groups that embrace more complex and specific social causes, together with the use of **technology** for the promulgation of such causes, has led to an **increase in the impact of social conflict** at the global level in the last decade. In various parts of the world, women's empowerment, indigenous empowerment and rural empowerment, among others, have gained special relevance.

The **identity link** between activists involved in specific causes has allowed **social issues arising in specific contexts to spread to the rest of the world**. A recent example of this is the international protests that took place to denounce the death of a young Iranian Kurdish woman, allegedly murdered by Iranian security forces. The adhesion of **influential personalities** to this type of demands favors the sum of activists and facilitates empowerment in social matters.

In terms of security, activism accelerates **processes of change** that can result in political involution - associated with greater authoritarianism with the aim of reducing social mobilization, as it occurs in countries where Internet connection is suspended in the face of waves of mobilizations - but can also lead reverse in progress. Both extremes act as mobilization boosters and inhibitors, although this phenomenon encourages polarization and can give rise to hate speech and violent extremism.





## 2.2 Hate speech and violent extremism

From the relationship between identity and individual empowerment emanate some **exacerbated positions** that have led to hate speech and violent extremism - including terrorist actions.

Already in 2019, the UN highlighted that a worrying wave of xenophobia, racism and intolerance was being experienced. As stated by this body in its Strategy and Plan of Action against Hate Speech, hate is considered to be “any form of communication in speech, writing or behavior that is an attack or uses derogatory or discriminatory language in relation to a person or group on the basis of who they are or, in other words, on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender or other identity factor”.

Extremism has materialized through verbal and physical confrontations between people or groups identified as different. In addition to insults or threats, there is a growing number of reports of physical aggressions, occurring in tumultuous brawls or fights carried out on the fringes. In its most extreme version, this type of aggression has historically led to homicides and even genocides.

The role of technology in promoting hate speech against people of another racial origin (racism), another ethnic origin (xenophobia), another sex (misogyny), another sexual orientation or identity (homophobia, biphobia, transphobia), a certain religion (Christianophobia, Islamophobia) or a precarious social stratum (aporophobia), for example, in turn generates the perfect scenario for **violent extremism**.

Following the warnings issued by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office, **United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office**, the **young population** is the target of recruitment and radicalization by violent extremist organizations. In this sense, the impunity offered by the anonymity of social networks and online navigation allows a process of normalization of hate speech, including the consumption and dissemination of disinformative content and advocacy of violence against groups in its various forms.

In terms of **terrorism**, there are multiple examples in which individual empowerment has been a driver in the development of attacks or criminal campaigns. The **individual actor**, known in the media as a lone wolf - or foreign fighter - has been a historical figure in terrorism. This phenomenon was born at the end of the 19th century, in the midst of the wave of international anarchism, and consolidated in the United States with the white supremacist movement - whose greatest exponent was Timothy McVeigh, perpetrator of the **Oklahoma City bombing** - although it has been in recent years - coinciding with the rise of violent actions carried out in Europe by followers of Islamic radicalism - that its use has become widespread thanks, in part, to the access to information provided by technology.







The logistical ease acquired by an individual compared to a group of people has been one of the elements that has historically facilitated the proliferation of this figure. The commission of attacks by individual actors is linked to individual empowerment in two ways:

A



On the one hand, there are individuals who resort to **self-reliance** to undertake terrorist attacks. One example is Theodore Kaczinski, known as the Unabomber, who in 1978, after issuing the manifesto *Industrial Society and its Future*, under the pseudonym Freedom Club, launched a letter bombing campaign.

B



On the other hand, there are individuals who carry out this type of actions under the **false conception of individual empowerment**, previously analyzed. These types of individuals carry out actions framed in causes defended by a collective that has influenced the decision to carry out the attack. Examples of this are the actions carried out by followers of Al Qaeda or Daesh in Western countries.

## 2.3 Organized crime and cybercrime

**Innovation and technology**, supported by the greater possibilities of access to information, allow any potential criminal to have new modus operandi to execute any type of attack and support their criminal activity.

The digital environment is expanding which in turn increases the attack vectors. The main attacks on individuals are conducted through e-mails, messaging tools (video calls and mobile messaging) or mobile applications (apps). **Global Initiative** (2020) highlights how confinements and limitations to mobility increase electronic transactions.

COVID-19 has accelerated an ongoing process, which already made it possible to identify various facilitators of **digital fraud**: digital transformation, the development of new forms of payment, the long value chain of companies (suppliers, carriers, intermediaries, customers), 24/7/365 exposure, the proliferation of mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, health applications, apps), outsourcing (in a hyper-specialized environment, companies outsource non-essential services), cloud computing, the advance of the Internet of Things (IoT), the rise of **"crime as a service"** or crime as a service. This term coined by **Europol en 2014**, and explained by **Fiadys**, can be defined as the offer, on the one hand, and the outsourcing, on the other, of illegal services by (cyber)criminals in order to commit crimes, avoiding the need for specialized technical expertise. Crime as a service is therefore a paradigmatic example of possible **individual criminal empowerment from the technological vector**.

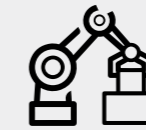
## Facilitadores del fraude digital



Digital transformation



Development of new payment methods



The long value chain in companies (suppliers, carriers, intermediaries, customers)



Exposure 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



Outsourcing (outsourcing of services)



Cloud computing



"Crime as a service"





Attacks contain essential characteristics are often closely linked to psychological aspects of the potential victim rather than to technological features, employing **social engineering**, taking advantage of information biases that lead to assume the content of false notifications and misinformation, online consumer habits that facilitate phishing that simulate mail and parcel companies, the acceleration and rush in work performance, which limit the ability to analyze the risks of an e-mail before triggering a response or action or personal vulnerabilities (consumption, leisure, sex, loneliness), among others.

Technological empowerment for illegal purposes is applied **much faster** than for legal activities since there is no need to respect the regulations in force and a disregard towards safety or ethical aspects. This implies that criminal technological empowerment is much higher than that of users who respect the rules; an example of this can be the significant boom in the illegal arms market thanks to 3D manufacturing workshops. Likewise, technological empowerment allows for a higher degree of **criminal innovation**. An example of this is the use of a drone by a single person to move a significant amount of drugs across a border.

Paradoxically, **individual empowerment facilitates recruitment to criminal and terrorist** ranks as through social networks and video games platforms due to the existing anonymity which **difficult monitorization**. In this context, **immersive gamification** facilitates the systematic desensitization of the user involved in the radicalization process, through exposure in virtual

reality to violent content. The use of technological advances decision making at an **individual level** such as lone wolf activities through cyber-attacks or hackers.

It is also of particular interest to carry out prior **training in digital environments**, as was the case of the three 9/11 terrorists, who trained to fly large aircraft in a flight simulator. In this regard, the Mislim video game genre of **military simulation** and its effort to faithfully represent military infrastructures, equipment, weaponry, tactics or procedures, which despite not implying malicious intent, is configured as a potential risk of such knowledge ending up in the hands of criminals or terrorist actors.

Nevertheless, **individual empowerment benefits the potential victim as well as the perpetrator**. For example, online scams in Spain have systematically increased during the last years according to data from the Ministry of Interior, with a 90% of impunity. The absence of regulation in certain areas and the obstacles to prosecute and judicialization of digital behaviors allow criminals to act in a privilege manner, at the same time placing the victim in a situation of **defenselessness and easy re-victimization**.







Consequently, it is imperative to remember that behind every screen there is a person, regardless of whether they are a victim or perpetrator, which has implications that are still being understood:

→ (A) **Every cyber-attack has been committed by a person or group of persons for some reason**

It may be motivated by profit, political demands or illegal activism; thus it is **essential to understand people and analyze cyberattacks from human perspectives**. In the specific environment of cybersecurity, skills such as creativity, critical thinking or teamwork are central elements to ensure greater protection which is why they have gained great prominence in recent years.

→ (B) **All cyber-victimization has an impact on a person in the physical world**

With possible affectations to their physical, psychological and moral integrity. This implies that **people suffer similar processes whether for an online or offline crime**. In terms of cyber-incidents, IBM states that more than 90% of these crimes are due to human error, so in terms of **victimization** it seems that risk and vulnerability factors do not only depend on digital aspects.

→ (C) **The security measures taken in digital or mixed environments are real actions**

And they can have spring-loaded reactions and even cascading impacts. If technology is the medium and the actions are carried out by people, **the response to cybercrime must combine technical and human aspects**, highlighting sometimes forgotten disciplines such as sociology, economics, information sciences, psychology, criminology, political science, history, as well as computer engineering and mathematics, essential fields of knowledge that support both the development of evidence-based policies and the design of solutions to today's social and technological problems.







## 2.4 Internal fraud and leaks

One of the threats that every organization must face is the possibility that **members or former members of its staff may commit actions against its interests**. These people, called insiders, take advantage of their position within the company and the information to which they have - or have had - access to commit acts of sabotage, industrial espionage and information theft or kidnapping.

The impact of an insider's action is conditioned by the position he/she holds within the company, as well as by the information he/she possesses and the know-how he/she has.

In many cases, **knowledge of the company's vulnerabilities** cannot be protected without reducing the employee's operability in the company. For example, a security manager cannot perform his job without knowing these elements since his negative actions have a high impact on the company.

In this context, the individual empowerment of a potential insider must be taken into account when assessing the implications of a potential insider threat. Individual empowerment can also make it easier for the insider to prioritize his or her own interests over

those of the company, reducing the effect of external control over the subject and, consequently, increasing the risk that he or she will carry out actions detrimental to the company.







## 01

Although there are **few studies on this phenomenon of crime in against companies**, there are many known cases of harmful acts carried out by **insiders intentionally**. In this regard, the information theft carried out in 2015 by a chief engineer of Google's automobile project, who leaked secret business information before leaving that company to form his own (Otto), stands out. The former employee downloaded directly from Google's servers all kinds of files related to the technology and testing of the automotive project, including videos. A few months later, Uber would acquire the company founded by the engineer, **benefiting the subject himself**, and raising suspicions of industrial espionage. Moreover, **there are the statements from disgruntled former employees** and Amazon employees who informed investigative journalists (**NY Times y Wall Street Journal**) about the poor working conditions inside the company. The information provided to journalists included work schedules, benefits status, staff composition, possible unfair dismissals, and corporate strategy.

## 02

Undoubtedly, another example is the well-known leak by Edward Snowden, former CIA and NSA employee. The information concerned a surveillance program carried out by the U.S. government that violated the fundamental rights of citizens. According to Snowden himself, **his motivations were purely moral**. Likewise, the **leaks** made by Frances Haugen - former manager of Facebook's civic integrity department - who, after witnessing practices related to disinformation and, **after the dissolution of her departamento**, sent to the US Securities and Exchange Commission and the Wall Street Journal confidential information demonstrating the malpractices and manipulations carried out by the social network. Although at the time of the leaks the identity of the whistleblower was not known, sometime later Frances herself would make her identity public in an interview, where she continued to denounce the practices, she witnessed at Facebook.

## 03

In terms of sabotage, the one carried out against TESLA in 2018 stands out. According to the company's own sources, an employee had altered the production system of the Tesla Model 3 and leaked sensitive information to third parties, causing economic damage to the company. According to Tesla CEO Elon Musk, the culprit had been an **employee who was denied a promotion**. Also, the **sabotage** against a Georgia medical device packaging company where an **employee recently suspended** due to the COVID-19 crisis edited and deleted tens of thousands of records contained in the company's database. As a result, the company's shipments were delayed, resulting in financial losses.

All these examples highlight the ability of a single individual to shake up the structures that have sometimes underpinned security. Empowered actors who not only communicate or influence, but also affect power structures.





# 03

## Individual empowerment as a trend of the future





# 03

## Individual empowerment as a trend of the future

**Individual empowerment is unstoppable and positive.** Technology is its main driver and its impact on the common good is evident.

Individual empowerment is generating several paradoxes: contradictions between desires and actions, a feeling of freedom that may be more like alienation, a perception of individual empowerment when the truly empowered are external agents and corporations, etc.


One of the great paradoxes of our time is how it is possible that at a time when all the information is at our fingertips, and with more tools for its analysis, we are increasingly prisoners of “echo chambers” and the “**filtered bubble**” effect pointed out by authors such as Eli Pariser.

We feel fully free to choose (job, housing, partner, hobbies), with much greater capabilities and options than previous generations. We look for what is most comfortable, regardless of having to force or be contradictory to our values, but to a large extent we choose everything that makes us feel part of a homogeneous group: the ‘ideological tribe’.

**However, empowerment can lead to new forms of criminality** - with the **metaverse** as a paradigm of these new traditional formulas - and others that are more traditional but evolving towards new forms of hate speech, extreme polarization and cybercrime, among others.

In short, **individual empowerment brings with it extraordinary and fascinating positive trends and, in turn, new variables to complex problems in an interdependent and systemic ecosystem** where people act with a sense of responsibility and capability. We must harness this energy to contribute to movements for true social progress.

A fulfilling society requires strong and empowered citizens. Contributing to the common good depends on all of us, and the future we leave for generations to come rests on us.



We must be aware of the limits of our power, its costs and risks.





We guarantee safety for people,  
businesses and society as a whole.