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This paper examines the impact of post-crisis austerity on democratic resilience across European Union member states by comparing those that implemented severe fiscal retrenchment with those that maintained more moderate budgets. Utilizing European Social Survey data from 2008 to 2022, the analysis focuses on Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy as cases of intense austerity alongside peers that experienced limited cuts. Economic strain is measured by subjective evaluations of household and national finances while institutional trust is assessed through confidence in parliament judiciary and public agencies. Democratic resilience is operationalized via indicators of conspiracy belief and endorsement of a strong executive bypassing legislative oversight. Findings indicate that in economies experiencing substantial spending reductions low institutional trust and dissatisfaction with democratic processes tend to manifest as conspiracy thinking or support for authoritarian leadership. In contrast limited austerity contexts reveal weaker links between economic frustration and illiberal attitudes. Institutional trust emerges as a moderating factor that filters how economic grievances translate into political behavior. Where trust remains relatively robust dissatisfaction seldom drives citizens toward anti-system sentiments. The results underscore that the political consequences of austerity are contingent upon citizens' perceptions of state legitimacy and responsiveness rather than austerity measures alone. This study contributes to scholarship on democratic backsliding by highlighting the role of policy-driven economic conditions in shaping political vulnerability and susceptibility to covert influence operations.