

LI Congress Theme Resolution

The Future of Freedom: Uniting Liberals to Defend Democracy

Introduction

In a world where democratic ideals are under sustained attack, liberals face the critical challenge of defending the foundations of a free society. Rising populism, authoritarianism, and economic protectionism are undermining freedoms, and many citizens feel disconnected from traditional political systems.

Yet, the core principles that unite liberals – individual liberty, ensuring equal economic opportunities for all, democracy, free markets with responsibility, and environmental stewardship – remain essential to the vision of a just, prosperous world for all.

It is therefore critical that we gather and project a unified liberal front to champion these values, specifically to counter authoritarian trends, and restore faith in and action towards increasing democratic governance across the globe.

The theme of this year's Congress aims to explore actionable strategies for liberals to defend democracy, while also examining challenges that have limited liberal influence. This will then enable us, as a united group, to propose a path forward to more effectively engage with diverse communities, to drive the uptake and buy-in of the core values all liberals hold dear and to enable individuals to thrive and take advantage of opportunities that liberalism provides.

Uniting Liberals Around Shared Goals

1. Pushing Back Against Populism

Across the globe, populist movements have gained momentum by exploiting public frustrations, often providing oversimplified answers to complex issues. In places like the United States and parts of Europe, populist leaders have made political gains by framing economic challenges like job losses and stagnant wages as consequences of immigration, globalisation, or an out-of-touch elite. While these narratives may resonate with people's immediate concerns, they typically lack sustainable, long-term solutions.

As liberals, our responsibility is to acknowledge and address the legitimate anxieties of citizens without resorting to scapegoating or divisive rhetoric. Instead of dismissing fears about job security, inequality, and cultural shifts, we should engage directly with these issues, providing solutions that are practical and grounded in democratic principles. This approach respects citizens' concerns while proposing constructive, evidence-based policies.

This strategy could involve:

- *Building a Compelling Narrative around Liberal Democracy and Direct Engagement through Public Dialogues:*

For example, Canada's approach to immigration reframes the narrative, highlighting how newcomers strengthen the economy rather than posing a threat to local jobs. By demonstrating the positive contributions of immigration and diversity, Canadian leaders have created a narrative that promotes inclusivity and growth. Furthermore, New Zealand

have maintained high levels of public trust by prioritising transparency, community engagement, and inclusivity in policymaking.

By demonstrating our commitment to an open, evidence-based approach to governance, we can show that the quick fixes offered by populism pale in comparison to the sustained benefits of democratic institutions. This way, liberals can highlight how democracy, with its foundation in long-term stability and resilience, provides a more promising future for all.

2. Strengthening Multilateralism and Defending the Liberal World Order

The global landscape is increasingly marked by complex, interconnected crises – challenges that no single country, no matter how powerful, can address alone. From climate change and pandemics to economic inequality and cybersecurity threats, the issues we face transcend borders. The recent global experience with the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates this interdependence vividly.

As liberals, we understand that multilateralism is a vital mechanism for addressing the ever-increasing complex challenges faced globally and our response is to strongly advocate for the strengthening of international institutions like the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the International Monetary Fund, as well as trade blocs like the World Trade Organisation.

However, at the same time, we must also recognise that these institutions require reform to ensure inclusivity, transparency, and responsiveness to the needs of all countries, especially those in the Global South.

This approach to multilateralism could entail several key strategies:

- *Expanding Multilateral Cooperation to Include Diverse Stakeholders:*

If we want to address global issues effectively, the input and active involvement of civil society, local governments, and private-sector actors is required. For example, it has been noted that during the Paris Climate Agreement negotiations, the inclusion of civil society organisations, environmental NGOs, and indigenous groups strengthened the final commitments, by bringing critical perspectives on the environmental impacts of industrial activities and advocating for solutions rooted in social justice and environmental responsibility.

Similarly, partnerships with private companies have driven innovation in renewable energy, electric vehicles, and sustainable agriculture, underscoring the role of the private sector in achieving climate goals.

- *Supporting and Upholding International Agreements on Human Rights, Climate Commitments, and Development Goals:*

A key example is the European Union's Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), a comprehensive system that focuses on emissions allowances, that are set to decrease annually in line with the EU's climate targets. The revenue from the system flows back to the Member States who must use it to support investments in renewable energy and technologies that help reduce emissions. This initiative showcases how international agreements can drive progress and set benchmarks that encourage other regions to adopt similar goals. In addition, the recent

Glasgow Climate Pact demonstrated the growing momentum among countries to strengthen climate action, with wealthy nations increasing financial commitments to support climate adaptation in developing countries.

- *Promoting a Robust Framework for Global Health Cooperation:*

The establishment of the WHO's "Pandemic Treaty" discussions aimed to ensure that future health crises are managed more effectively through shared research, equitable distribution of resources, and transparency when rolling out response efforts. This proposed treaty has received support from nations around the world, highlighting a consensus on the need for stronger, more coordinated health governance.

By strongly advocating for a stronger multilateral framework, we as liberals can foster a world where cooperation replaces conflict, with international law and global justice serving as the foundation for peaceful, democratic societies. For example, the African Union's mediation efforts in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict showcase the potential for regional multilateral bodies to prevent and resolve conflicts. However, we must also acknowledge that there are deliberate efforts by autocratic regimes to undermine the liberal world order and human rights, as evidenced by the refusal of certain countries to uphold fundamental human rights. By building and reforming these frameworks, liberals can champion a collaborative, just, and democratic approach to global governance, which strengthens international cooperation and upholds and legitimises shared liberal values.

3. Crafting New Messages to Enhance Democratic Competitiveness

We are living in an era where disillusionment with democracy has risen, especially among younger generations. This fact requires us as liberals to work to reinvigorate democratic ideals by showcasing that democratic governance not only preserves freedom but also creates tangible economic opportunities.

To regain public trust and appeal to a diverse, modern electorate, liberals need a refreshed, compelling narrative that resonates with both current and future challenges. This revitalised message could include:

- *Highlighting the Economic Benefits of Democracy:*

Democracies have historically provided fertile ground for economic growth, innovation, and personal freedom. Examples from countries like Germany and South Korea illustrate how democratic governance can drive economic success. Germany's social market economy balances economic freedoms with robust social protections. Similarly, South Korea has become a global leader in technology, demonstrating how democratic policies can create competitive industries. By promoting policies that support innovation, protect intellectual property, and enable fair competition, we can illustrate that democratic systems empower people to succeed based on merit rather than connections or government patronage, a hallmark of many authoritarian regimes.

- *Addressing Job Security Concerns in a Changing Workforce:*

The rapid advancements in automation, AI, and digitalisation have generated widespread concerns over job security and economic inequality. Countries like Denmark and Singapore

provide examples of how democracies can balance economic dynamism with worker security. Denmark's "flexicurity" model combines a flexible labour market with robust welfare protections and comprehensive reskilling programs. Singapore, while less traditionally democratic, has focused on skills upgrading as a national priority, investing in lifelong learning initiatives to help workers adapt to a rapidly evolving job market.

- *Supporting Inclusive Growth through Entrepreneurship and Innovation:*

In a world where young people are increasingly drawn to entrepreneurial careers, democracies can foster inclusive growth by creating ecosystems that support startups, small businesses, and innovation. This includes advocating for access to capital, simplified regulatory environments, and initiatives that promote digital literacy and financial literacy. Local governments in places like Barcelona have created "digital hubs" to support startups, especially those focused on tech and sustainability. By aligning democratic values with economic opportunity, liberals can appeal to voters who value both personal freedoms and career prospects.

- *Demonstrating Democracy's Adaptability to Contemporary Challenges:*

Authoritarianism is often marketed as a "quick-fix" model capable of addressing complex issues swiftly, particularly around technology and economic growth. However, democracy's strength lies in its adaptability and resilience. By actively addressing issues like data privacy, cyber threats, and climate change, we can demonstrate that democracies are far more responsive and, critically, accountable to citizens in the long run.

By connecting democratic governance to economic opportunity, job security, and responsive policies, we can show that democracy is not only relevant but also essential in addressing the challenges of the 21st century. This narrative offers a compelling alternative to authoritarian models, demonstrating that democracies are dynamic, equitable, and capable of delivering results that improve people's lives while safeguarding their rights.

4. Addressing Free Speech and Media Freedom Amidst Polarisation

One of the cornerstones of any democratic society is the protection and promotion of free speech and media freedom, to foster accountability, and fuel informed decision-making. However, in today's hyper-polarised and social media driven climate, these freedoms are increasingly at risk of being exploited to spread misinformation, promote divisive narratives, and incite hostility.

To protect the integrity of democratic discourse, we must employ innovative channels and strategies to champion open dialogue that empowers citizens without fuelling harmful rhetoric. This approach could involve several key strategies:

- *Advocating for Media Literacy Programmes:*

With the rise of digital platforms, misinformation and "fake news" are more pervasive than ever, far too often fuelling polarisation. It should be our mission as liberals to advocate for media literacy education in schools and communities to better equip citizens with the tools needed to discern credible information from manipulation.

Initiatives like Finland's nationwide media literacy curriculum provide a valuable model, helping students critically evaluate news sources and understand the impact of disinformation.

- *Supporting Policies that Protect Free Speech While Encouraging Respectful Discourse:*

Maintaining the right balance between free expression and respectful communication has increasingly become a challenging but equally vital. Liberals should support policies that protect freedom of speech, while actively discouraging hate speech and incitement to violence. We can promote approaches that encourage platforms to address harmful content transparently and responsibly, protecting public discourse while preserving free speech.

- *Promoting a Responsible and Independent Media Landscape:*

It is commonly held that an independent and pluralistic media is essential to a thriving democracy. To support and promote this, liberals should advocate for policies that support journalistic freedom, ensuring that media outlets can operate without undue influence or fear of repression.

For example, in countries like Norway, public funding supports a diverse media landscape, fostering an environment where various perspectives can be shared freely and responsibly. By supporting independent media through public funding, anti-monopoly policies, and press protections can counter the concentration of media ownership and prevent echo chambers from dominating the narrative.

- *Fostering Online Platforms that Encourage Productive Dialogue:*

In our increasingly digital age, social media has become a primary platform for public discourse, yet it is also a major site of polarisation. To mitigate the risks and to bring forward to positive potential of social media, liberals should support initiatives that encourage tech companies to design platforms that promote productive dialogue. This could include algorithms that favour diverse viewpoints and moderation policies that prioritise constructive debate over divisive content. For example, the social media platform Reddit has experimented with community-based moderation and rule enforcement, which can foster constructive discussion.

5. Reaching Out to Marginalized Communities, Including the Role of Women and the LGBTQ+ Community

Despite the proliferation of channels to connect with citizens, there are still segments of society that feel neglected by mainstream politics, creating a divide between the government and its constituents. These groups include the historically marginalised, such as rural populations, ethnic minorities, women, and the LGBTQ+ community.

The gap that exists presents a significant challenge to modern, liberal democracies, making it essential that we connect with these citizens with the aim of promoting and protecting healthy democracies.

Some strategies to address this gap could include:

- *Creating Targeted Policies:*

Developing policies that speak specifically to the unique economic, social, and cultural challenges faced by marginalized communities is essential. Initiatives such as targeted job programmes can ease unemployment in rural areas by offering skills training and encouraging local businesses to hire residents. Inclusive urban planning must ensure that infrastructure developments, like affordable housing and accessible public transport, cater to the diverse needs of these populations. Community-based healthcare services, including mobile clinics and culturally competent resources, can significantly improve health outcomes by meeting the specific needs of these groups.

- *Building Local Alliances:*

By joining hands with trusted local leaders within marginalized communities, we can foster trust and open communication. These leaders can effectively bridge the gap between their communities and policymakers by voicing their needs and concerns. Encouraging civic engagement through workshops and forums empowers community members to actively participate in the political process and advocate for their rights. We must also recognize the important role that women have played in championing liberal ideals, as evidenced by the success of women leaders in movements like the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Latin America and the significant impact of women in the microfinance sector.

By making a concerted effort to include communities that are currently excluded from political dialogue, we can strengthen the democratic fabric of society. With this approach, we can become more inclusive and broaden our support base while also promoting a more equitable and just society where every voice is valued and heard. Ultimately, by engaging marginalised communities in policymaking processes, we can contribute to a healthier democracy that reflects the diversity and needs of the entire population.

Our vision must be bold and comprehensive - one that empowers citizens from all walks of life to participate fully in the democratic process. Whether it is rural workers, ethnic minorities, women, or the LGBTQ+ community, we must ensure that no one is left behind. By amplifying these voices and centring their experiences, we can build a liberalism that is truly representative and responsive to the real-world challenges faced by all people.

Therefore, as we chart the future of freedom, let us commit ourselves to an inclusive, participatory vision of liberal democracy. By empowering the marginalized and elevating their rightful place at the table, we will forge a path toward a more just, equitable, and vibrant world - one that fulfils the promise of liberalism for all people.

Conclusion

The threats to freedom and democracy are grave, but the path forward is clear. As liberals, we are called to action. The future of freedom rests on our unity and our unwavering dedication to the values that make democracy worth defending.

Across the globe, authoritarian forces are on the march, seeking to undermine the liberal world order and the hard-won rights of citizens. They exploit economic anxieties, sow division, and manipulate the digital landscape to gain influence. Yet, we know that their promises of simplistic solutions are hollow, masking a thirst for power at the expense of true progress.

It is our duty, as champions of individual liberty, social justice, and democratic governance, to push back against these threats. We must craft a compelling narrative that showcases the tangible benefits of liberalism - from economic opportunity to responsive policymaking. By investing in media literacy, defending a free press, and fostering productive public discourse, we can inoculate our societies against the virus of misinformation and demagoguery.

Moreover, we must actively reach out to marginalized communities, ensuring that the diversity of our nations is reflected in the leadership and decision-making that shapes their futures. Women, the LGBTQ+ community, and other historically underrepresented groups must be empowered as the vital voices they are in the liberal movement.

Uniting across borders, we must strengthen multilateral institutions and defend the rules-based international order. Only by working in concert can we tackle the global challenges that know no boundaries - from climate change to pandemic preparedness. By upholding human rights, promoting sustainable development, and fostering a spirit of global cooperation, we can build a more just and prosperous world.

The path ahead is not easy, but the stakes have never been higher. As we gather in Santiago, let us rededicate ourselves to the ideals that have animated liberals throughout history. Let us embrace the changes of our time, using innovation and technology to amplify our message and expand our reach. And let us forge a bold, cohesive vision that inspires citizens everywhere to join us in defending the future of freedom.

The time for action is now. United in purpose, we will reclaim our rightful role as the champions of democracy, safeguarding the liberties that are the birthright of all humanity. This is our sacred charge, and together, we can and will triumph.