RETHINKING LIBERALISM

IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

An Agenda for our Future

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ANALYSIS

Imprint

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Preface

The local project coordinators of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation from around the world   organized a Global Forum on "Rethinking Liberalism", the first time that we had an event conceptualized and organized by local colleagues collaborating across continents. All come from different cultural, economic, religious and social backgrounds, but they share the same commitment to fundamental human values, the idea of basic inalienable human rights, and the core idea of liberalism that the best way to organize a society is an open society that maximises individual freedom.

An open society is not one of chaos and lawlessness; it does require a strong institutional framework of three distinct elements: Rule of law, coupled with a strong system of human rights protection, upheld and enforced by a politically independent judiciary; A participatory democracy, with free fair elections, a free press, a vibrant civil society and a vertical division of powers in a subsidiary fashion, including strong local governments; and, lastly, a social market economy that maximises economic freedom for all, allows open competition safeguarded by independent monopolies watchdogs, but also has a redistributive element to give everybody access to health and education and capable of providing a safety net against extreme poverty.

Over the last 300 years, these ideas have gained wider acceptance and have transformed societies in more and more countries, with the last big wave of democratization starting in the 1980s and gaining speed in the 1990s, toppling communism in Eastern Europe and ending the Cold War. But in the last few decades, this trend has been reversed, and a growing number of countries have seen a reduction in their liberties, confronting attacks on the media and on civil society, experimenting erosion of the rule of law, or have turned into outright dictatorships, like Venezuela and Nicaragua. Even the most traditional democracies have seen challenges to the ideals of liberalism that we never thought would happen: First, Brexit in Britain, the so-called oldest democracy, a blow to the liberal dream of a single market in a politically united Europe; and then the election of Donald Trump in the USA, whose presidency ended in an actual coup attempt. The latest blow has been the Russian war of invasion against Ukraine, a direct attack on practically all the basic principles of the system of international rules enshrined in the UN: territorial integrity, prohibition of wars of aggression and conquest, and respect for international treaties.

At the same time, liberal democracies have woken up to the challenge and start to push back. The strong and indeed growing support for Ukraine from liberal democracies has taken Putin – and Xi Jinping – by surprise. At a more basic level, liberals are getting together to figure out how can we push back against the challenge of populism and authoritari-

anism that threatens our societies. This paper has its origin in that context. As a Foundation devoted to the construction and defence of open liberal societies, we realized that we need to focus more on this challenge and look for ways to counter it.

It is good that our agenda is a very comprehensive one, because the attack on the ideas of liberalism come on many fronts. Rule of law with protection of fundamental rights is both the most important and, at the same time, the least well understood element of liberalism. It is fundamental because it defines and upholds the rules of the game for society, politics and economics, and as any football fan knows, you need a neutral referee to have a decent game. This is the simple logic behind the independence of the judiciary and the limits of political power. However, we see many attacks on this fundamental idea: Populists think that a victory at the polls should give them full powers, and legal constraints just hinder the realization of the will of the people. Authoritarian regimes think the same, they just dispense of elections as well. In its authoritarian version, we do not have Rule of Law but rule by law, the law is rather used as an instrument of the ruling power with judges having to implement the will of the leader or, in China, of the Party.

The market economy has been in retreat, as well, after a long period of deepening globalisation. One shock has been the financial crisis that has exposed systemic flaws in our financial system, and we have not yet fully resolved those. The protectionist backlash against globalisation has undermined the efficiency of the WTO and we now have a fragmented landscape of bilateral free-trade agreements. Badly implemented privatisations, uneven growth and the series of crises have reinforced calls for more State intervention. This requires both introspection and new ideas from us Liberals.

Digitalisation and the rise of social media has both been a blessing and a curse; information is much more easily available, global communication has become cheap and easy, but so has propaganda and disinformation. The growing sophistication of artificial intelligence promises more challenges ahead. Liberal democracy needs a public space of discourse to work, to negotiate out different interests and ideas peacefully. The growing political polarization makes reasonable discourse more difficult, and both disinformation and an exaggerated tendency of critical theories to question concepts of truth and fact make it more difficult to agree on fundamental basic concepts. Even the shape of the earth is under dispute these days…

Finally, we face two challenges around the world: climate change and migration. Both will intensify and, to some extent, reinforce each other, as climate change affects the vi-

ability of agriculture in some regions. The world is not well equipped to handle such collective challenges, and in a time of growing and escalating conflicts, it is even harder. Migration, moreover, has to deal with the limited capacity of societies to accept and integrate immigrants. As Liberals, we face the challenge to develop and explain market-based solutions to manage the transition to cleaner production, and to find a way to manage migration and integration in an effective and humane way, respecting the fundamental desire of people to move in order to save their families or provide a better future.

It looks like an enormous list of tasks. However, there is no alternative but to confront it. We do this in the knowledge that systems of freedom and openness are often messy and sometimes look chaotic, but they alone can produce the dynamism, creativity and voluntary cooperation that is needed to really ensure progress for all. Nevertheless, we also need to develop further the idea of Liberalism with far more input from societies around the world. Liberalism is often dismissed as a European concept. Our colleagues from around the world do not agree, they understand its universal value, but they also comprehend that it needs to be attuned far more to the concrete needs and concerns of their societies. This paper provides responses to the challenges outlined above from a perspective of our colleagues who, in many ways, stand at the frontlines of the fight free societies, often at great personal risks. Their ideas and views need to be heard.

Michael Link MP
Member, Board of Trustees, Friedrich Naumann
Foundation for Freedom

Introduction

Recently, countries around the world have been facing similar challenges: the rise of populist leaders and far-right movements, coupled with the ongoing invasion of Russia into Ukraine, have disrupted the global order and threatened the principles of liberal democracy. New technologies such as social media. and dynamic socio-political environments worsen this crisis, as they empower populist leaders to connect with voters more effectively. Populism is gaining traction worldwide, affecting politics and society, leading to crises, polarization, and extremism. Media outlets are also suffering significant challenges, especially with the spread of disinformation, which poses a substantial threat to human rights and freedom.

The future of liberalism relies on establishing a solid rule of law upheld by resilient institutions and legal frameworks. This ensures stability in social and economic aspects while safeguarding human rights. It also involves preserving democracy, promoting human rights, and fostering economic progress, as well as embracing uncertainty and responsibility, which can be challenging for societies. We live in an era of identity-driven ideologies, where various groups vigorously advocate for their agendas.

Against this background, the "Global Forum: Rethinking Liberalism", organized by local staff from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom offices in Mexico City, Dakar, Rabat, Hanoi, Tunis, Jerusalem and Sofia, brought experts to discuss the future of liberalism while shaping an agenda for the future. This document considers different backgrounds and contexts from around the world and is a joint effort to reshape and reposition liberalism by thinking globally and acting locally.

In the first section, we present an agenda for reevaluating liberalism, focusing on the rule of law and the role of institutions. In the second part, we explore an agenda for fostering innovation in the market economy, emphasizing small and medium-sized enterprises. The third section examines the dangers of disinformation, social media, and the power of narratives. Finally, in the fourth section, we outline an agenda for liberals to propose strategic measures in the fight against climate change.

In summary, this document is a call to action, a global conversation from individuals experiencing the same challenges around the world, bringing together diverse perspectives and backgrounds to chart a path forward for liberalism in our rapidly changing world.

Rethinking Liberalism:
A. Strenghthening the Rule of Law

In an era marked by the rapid ascent of populist movements, the concept of strengthening the rule of law against populism has emerged as a critical imperative for the preservation of democratic integrity. Populism, characterized and driven by charismatic leaders who often exploit divisive rhetoric and challenge established norms, has cast a shadow over the principles of liberal democracy. It poses a formidable challenge to the rule of law, a cornerstone of democratic governance, and raises profound concerns about the erosion of democratic values, principles, and institutions.

Every era is dominated by a master concept that determines social relations and shapes political organization, the legal order, and social conscience. The rule of law fulfills this function today and has been able to develop its hold with the decline of other systems.

The rule of law is based on a global vision of society and a formidable claim that the law has a vocation and an ability to organize society and uphold the social order. It is a legal order that enables the limitation and control of power and, consequently, the protection of human dignity. Any discourse on it requires the presentation of a catalog of principles, rights, and legal techniques, and defines the relationship between power and the individual through the medium of law, which is the exclusive instrument for regulating political and social organization.

The rule of law is now considered to be the main feature of democratic regimes, and the judiciary must be its guarantor. Ultimately, it is intended to implement the spirit of justice and presupposes the existence of independent and competent jurisdictions to settle conflicts between different legal persons, applying both the principle of legality and the principle of equality before the law, which is opposed to any differentiated treatment of citizens.

This principle of governance entails that all persons, institutions, and entities, whether public or private, including the State itself, are held responsible for complying with openly proclaimed, uniformly applied, and impartially determined laws. These laws must also align with international human rights principles and standards.

The challenge lies in the clash with populist narratives. Populist leaders, often propelled by a rhetoric of "us vs. them" and an appeal to the masses' emotions, frequently challenge legal and institutional norms, seeking to concentrate power in the hands of a few ("us"). The consequences are many: a weakening of checks and balances, a diminished role for independent institutions, and a potential disregard for the principles of accountability and transparency that are vital for the functioning of democratic societies.

We recognize that to preserve democratic integrity, it is essential to bolster the rule of law. This encompasses a multifaceted approach aimed at fortifying legal frameworks, institutions, and democratic norms against the encroachment of populist forces. It calls for a proactive response to the populist challenge that reinforces legal governance as a safeguard against arbitrary power and ensures that democratic principles endure even in turbulent political climates.

In this chapter, we delve into this imperative, exploring strategies and measures that can be implemented to strengthen the rule of law as a shield against populism. By doing so, we want to illuminate a path forward that upholds the principles of justice, equality, and human rights and reaffirms the enduring resilience of liberal democracy in the face of populist threats.

Strategies

1 Enriching Legal Sources through Parliamentary Endeavors for Enhanced Legitimacy

A strategic route to bolster the credibility and significance of institutions involves expanding legal sources via parliamentary initiatives. This course of action aims to elevate the legitimacy of legal procedures by actively involving a diverse range of stakeholders in law formation. As expounded by Keane (2018), integrating inputs from multiple sources into the lawmaking process, particularly those from elected representatives, bolsters the democratic underpinning on which institutions stand. This diversity of inputs nurtures a sense of democratic validation, as laws crafted through this collaborative approach encapsulate a broader spectrum of societal viewpoints, values, and concerns, in contrast to laws rammed through legislatures by governments without much parliamentary input, scrutiny, or debate. Consequently, these laws more authentically mirror the diverse population composition they intend to govern, fostering heightened public reliance on the institutions accountable for their creation.

2 Championing Good Governance: Transparency and Accountability

The urgency to champion good governance practices is grounded in their inherent contribution to nurturing institutional transparency and accountability. Drawing insights from Transparency International's Corruption Perception Assessments (2020), nations embracing robust governance mechanisms commonly display lower corruption levels. Sound governance transcends mere procedural adherence, embodying principles encompassing transparency, answerability, participation, and the supremacy of law. This comprehensive approach establishes a structured framework that cultivates an environment conducive to institutional integrity.

By embedding lucid guidelines, enabling adequate checks and balances, and establishing channels for citizen involvement, sound governance acts as a sentinel against the looming threat of undue influence.

3   Vitality of an Independent Judiciary in Effectiveness

The pivotal role of an independent judiciary as the cornerstone of a functional democracy cannot be overstressed. Dahl's seminal work (2001) underscores that an impartial judicial system safeguards against the potential concentration of power and reinforces adherence to the rule of law. As exemplified by Helmke and Rosenbluth's study (2008), substantive research bolsters this idea by revealing a robust correlation between judicial independence, economic development, and political stability. An autonomous judiciary forms a formidable defense against populist attempts to undermine institutional integrity. By upholding principles of equity and justice, an independent judiciary plays a pivotal role in ensuring institutions remain resilient and continue to uphold democratic ideals.

4   Prioritizing Education and Countering Misinformation

The significance of robust education and the battle against misinformation takes center stage in immunizing societies against populist threats. Previous research underscores that individuals with critical thinking skills are less susceptible to misinformation. Promoting comprehensive civic education emerges as a cornerstone strategy, empowering citizens to discern reliable information from propagandistic narratives.

As our next chapter emphasizes, there is an urgency to counter misinformation with evidence-based narratives rooted in factual accuracy. By nurturing a population capable of distinguishing fact from fiction, institutions cultivate a more informed citizenry proficient at critically evaluating populist assertions, thereby fortifying the resilience of democratic institutions.

5   Fostering Social Diversity and Democratic Pluralism

Embracing and nurturing social diversity and democratic pluralism are pivotal to solidifying institutional value. The potency of diverse societies lies in their capacity to foster a rich tapestry of perspectives that invigorate robust policy debates. The practice of inclusivity in decision-making processes stands as a testament to the values inherent in liberal democracy.

By facilitating a participatory approach that encompasses myriad viewpoints, institutions undercut the appeal of populist narratives that exploit societal divisions. The cultivation of a pluralistic society elevates institutions to platforms that honor and incorporate a mosaic of perspectives, ultimately infusing democratic resilience into their very fabric.

6   Confronting Social and Economic Inequality through Collaborative Efforts

Confronting the challenge of social and economic inequalities through strategic alliances and redistributive measures emerges as a potent strategy to counteract the dissemination of populist narratives. Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz asserts that unchecked inequality corrodes social cohesion and undermines institutional foundations. The proposition of forming international coalitions to address global economic imbalances signifies a collaborative approach by liberal democracies to recalibrate opportunities on a more equitable scale. Initiatives encompassing foreign aid and trade agreements testify to nations' concerted endeavors to foster stability and cooperation, eroding the fertile ground upon which populist movements often take root.

In conclusion, the multifaceted approach outlined - encompassing parliamentary initiatives, good governance, judicial independence, education, promotion of diversity, and the fight against inequality - emerges as a comprehensive framework for reinforcing institutions and the rule of law against the threats posed by populism. These strategies collectively contribute to fortifying democratic principles, enhancing institutional credibility, and nurturing resilience in the face of challenges brought about by populist ideologies.

Rethinking Liberalism:

B. A Path towards a Balanced Market Economy

In a world where populist narratives often blur the lines between liberalism and capitalism, it becomes imperative to disentangle them to effectively counter misconceptions and promote a nuanced understanding of their roles in shaping societies. This chapter delves into the critical distinction between liberalism and capitalism, shedding light on their unique characteristics and how they coexist within a well-regulated market economy. By doing so, we pave the way for a deeper exploration of the future liberal agenda for the market economy, which seeks to harmonize individual freedom with social responsibility, inclusivity, and sustainability.

The initial section of this chapter elucidates the fundamental disparities between liberalism and capitalism. While both can operate in tandem, they are by no means interchangeable. Liberalism champions individual liberties, limited government intervention, and civil rights protection. At the same time, capitalism predominantly concerns private ownership of the means of production and market dynamics. This clarity is vital to challenge misleading populist narratives and highlight the potential synergy between these ideologies.

With this foundational understanding established, we explore the future liberal agenda for the market economy. This forward-looking vision aligns with the core principles of liberalism, emphasizing individual rights and social responsibility. It identifies four key pillars encapsulating the liberal approach to a balanced market economy: empowering entrepreneurship, fostering local economies, embracing collective action, and emphasizing responsible governance.

Distinguishing Liberalism from Capitalism

Populism often thrives on portraying liberal economic policies as favoring the elite at the expense of the working class. This misconception arises due to a fundamental misunderstanding between liberalism and capitalism. It is crucial to clarify this distinction to counter populism effectively.

Liberalism, as a political and economic ideology, emphasizes individual freedoms, limited government intervention, and the protection of civil liberties. At its core, liberalism seeks to establish a society where individuals have the autonomy to make choices about their lives and pursue their own goals. Liberalism advocates for a strong rule of law, prioritizing civil rights and liberties and providing social safety nets.

On the other hand, capitalism is primarily an economic system characterized by private ownership of the means of production and the operation of markets. It does not inherently prescribe political values or social policies. Capitalism includes a free market, property rights, and pursuing profit as a driving force.

While liberalism and capitalism can coexist, they are not synonymous. It is essential to recognize that liberal democracies adopt market economies with varying degrees of regulation through institutional frameworks and the rule of law. Liberalism also promotes private ownership; nevertheless, the distinction relies on the accumulation on several hands from government corruption, rather than on the different opportunities brought within the market economy, and competition.

This synergy between liberalism and capitalism is highlighted by scholars like Rawls (2001), who argues for a "just market" within a liberal framework that addresses inequalities and ensures a fair distribution of resources. Furthermore, Stiglitz (2019) emphasizes the need for progressive capitalism, which combines market mechanisms with robust social policies to reduce inequality and address societal challenges.

By clarifying the distinction between liberalism and capitalism, we can counter populists' misleading narratives and highlight their commitment to individual freedoms within a well-regulated market economy. This nuanced approach can resonate with a broader audience and foster a more accurate understanding of liberal values.

Fostering a Market Economy with Social Responsibility: The Future Liberal Agenda

In an era marked by diversity and the pursuit of unconventional paths, the liberal agenda for the future market economy is poised to address the evolving needs of society. It seeks to uphold individual rights, create opportunities for all, and promote economic growth that is inclusive and sustainable. This vision aligns with the principles of liberalism that emphasize individual liberty and social responsibility.

1 Empowering Unconventional Entrepreneurship and Protecting Minority Views

The future liberal agenda favors protecting those who choose unconventional routes or hold minority views, extending this principle to the economic sphere. We believe in safeguarding individual rights and opportunities, especially for those venturing into non-traditional entrepreneurial endeavors. We embody the belief in equal opportunity by removing barriers and supporting diverse entrepreneurial efforts.

2 Fostering Robust Local Economies

Central to our vision is recognizing the pivotal role that local economies play in fostering economic growth. We firmly believe that robust local economies create diverse and inclusive opportunities, embodying the principles of equal opportunity and community engagement. This approach encourages entrepreneurship, strengthens community bonds, and ensures that economic growth benefits all members of society.

3 Embracing Collective Action and Cooperative Governance

We acknowledge the importance of collective action and cooperative governance in shaping a market economy that balances individual freedom with collective responsibility. Our advocacy involves forging synergies with existing organizations to create sustainable economic systems. This cooperative approach ensures that the benefits of economic growth are widely distributed, and that society collectively addresses its challenges.

4 Responsible Governance and Market Stabilization

While we emphasize individual agency and entrepreneurship, we also recognize the vital role of government in stabilizing economies and addressing market failures. Responsible governance is essential to ensure economic stability and fairness. Our commitment to effective government involvement is rooted in the belief that a well-regulated market is essential for protecting individual rights and promoting social responsibility.

Solutions for a Balanced Future Market Economy

To realize our vision, we propose two critical solutions:

1. Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship: We advocate for policies that enable entrepreneurship for all. These policies remove barriers to entry and create an environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds can participate in the market. Our commitment to equal opportunity means that everyone should have the chance to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions.

2. Nurturing Local Economies: We propose the creation of ecosystems that nurture local economies, with a particular focus on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). To facilitate this, government spending should be guided by the efficient use of taxpayers' contributions. SMEs need to be supported by better regulatory frameworks and simpler taxation rules. This approach fosters economic diversification in community development, ensuring that economic growth is sustainable and socially responsible. Moreover, the digital transformation of governments worldwide, and the adaptation of models to open businesses online and with no cost, can decrease costs for entrepreneurs and contribute to transforming informal economies into more formal economies.

In conclusion, the future market economy liberal agenda strives to balance individual liberty and social responsibility. It promotes economic growth that is inclusive, sustainable, and considerate of diverse perspectives and unconventional paths. By empowering entrepreneurship, strengthening local economies, embracing collective action, and advocating for responsible governance, we aim to create a market economy that benefits all members of society.

Rethinking Liberalism:
C. Freedom in the Context of Disinformation

Freedom of information is one of the bedrock values of liberalism. The possibility of the public accessing fact-checked, truthful information influences many liberties essential for the functioning of the democratic apparatus, such as freedom of speech, participation, and political organization. For centuries, journalists and media outlets were the leading depositories of this liberty since, historically, it has been through them that society articulates what Habermas called the *public sphere*[1]. In the 18th century, newspapers allowed people outside the political system to peek for the first time at the discussions and battles of aristocrats (Curran, 2011). The feelings and preferences of individual citizens became relevant in the process of making and applying policies. Thus, the public sphere became the mediator between State and society, and citizens won institutionalized influence over their government (Habermas, 1964).

In the 20th century, with the prevalence and expansion of technological advances such as television, radio, data processing, and the Internet, media gained significant relevance in building informed public discussions in democracies around the world. According to Curran, the relevance of journalists and their outlets in safeguarding liberal values incited concepts such as "Fourth State," "Fourth Power," and even "Watchdogs" when discussing the power of media. This influence, however, has not always worked to the benefit of the public: political actors rapidly learned to advance their agendas through media and coveted the attention of journalists. The conjoined campaign of government, newspapers, and network television that resulted in the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 serves as a powerful warning against the unchecked power of public actors.

Misinformation and Populism

The relationship between populist leaders and the media has historically been one of mutual dependency (Fernandes et al., 2021). This has enabled populist discourse to extend through the public sphere. Even if mainstream journalistic media may criticize populist politicians, their activities, agenda, and ideas are still given coverage and generate views and revenue. It must be underlined that populist politicians are not interested in discussing political concepts. Their emotionality-driven messages and personality tend to create an enraged and irrational communication that popular masses may reject or absorb but that is still propagated. They are popular and entertaining, and perhaps this explains the pervasiveness of populist right-wing figures in the first years of the 20th century. For example, former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlus-

coni was a prominent media mogul. His charisma and influence allowed him to become Prime Minister without holding any kind of public office before.

However, since 2016, we have witnessed a reconfiguration in the relationship between populist leaders, journalists, media, and the public and the emergence of what some authors called "digital populism." Essentially, populist leaders now use social media to communicate directly to their base (Flew and Iosifidis, 2020), and by circumventing traditional channels of information, they promote "de-mediatized" communication with their followers. The journalists and outlets that used to be the mediators between society and power have now been dubbed the "enemy" by both right-wing and left-wing populist figures such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Rodrigo Duterte, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and the leaders of nationalist parties and movements like Brexit.

Populist leaders argue that information spread by traditional media benefits only the *elite,* emphasizing, for example, that the owners of liberal media outlets have particular economic interests that they advance through their corporations (Tant, 2021). While the intersection of journalistic and economic interest is sometimes undeniable, it bears a much less pre-meditated and controlled relationship than populist figures present. In contrast, these leaders offer "real information" that supposedly comes from "common sense" and is to the "benefit of the people". In *The Routledge Companion to Media Disinformation and Populism*, Tumber and Waisbord (2021) characterize disinformation as a deliberate attempt to confuse the public. In comparison, misinformation refers to false information about relevant political and social topics. Furthermore, journalism's seminal practices such as moderation, fact-checking, and neutrality are now deemed "elitist restrictions" to information by populist leaders, attacking the very fabric of the public sphere (Durazo-Herrmann, Gosselin and Harell, 2021). Populists have created a narrative of the pure people vs. the elite (Shulz et al., 2018) in which the media is part of this said elite that withholds and corrupts information.

While it can be argued that the atomization of information means greater diversity of opinions and topics, the populist discourse tends to homologize differences and promote a single monolithic political and social ideal. Any attempt to dialogue or dispute this ideal is attacked under the label of elitism and conspiracy, thus creating a "polarized, anti-rational, post-fact, post-truth communication championed by populism" (Tumber and Waisbord). Social media allows for any number of expressions of the self. However, it also isolates

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[1] The "public sphere" is generally conceived as the social space in which different opinions are expressed, problems of general concern are discussed, and collective solutions are development communicatively. (Wessler and Freudenthaler, 2017).

people and creates virtual echo chambers in which individual citizens communicate solely with people of similar ideas and are never compelled to dialogue with their counterparties, thus rapidly eroding the *Habermasian* public sphere (Flew and Iosifidis, 2020). This results in a "post-truth" society in which evidence seems no longer relevant to people's political and social beliefs, which are instead guided by feeling and emotion (McIntyre, 2018).

The consequences of this post-truth society are evident. Traditional truth-seeker institutions like journalism and science have been questioned, creating a communicational space where fake news, conspiracy theories, and un-scientific thought can prevail and spread (Fernandes et al., 2021). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, reliable, scientific information was diluted in a sea of panic, disbelief, and misinformation, often promoted by populist heads of governments who feared the sanitary crisis would evolve into popular discontent and criticism.

Possible Strategies

In his analysis of Le Média[2], Tant identifies that participation in economic liberalism is often a nodal point of criticism from populist media branches. This is no coincidence, for liberalism advocates diversity and opportunity based on truth, evidence, and freedom. As liberals, we must strive to repair the public sphere in our countries by strengthening media that promotes social dialogue between individual citizens and public actors and still acts as a counterbalance to power. Nonetheless, returning to the golden days of journalism is out of the question. In recent years, the technological and economic landscape has changed too much to rely solely on privately owned media outlets. Immediate or reactive solutions to populist attacks must be avoided as well. We achieve a competent and civil level of public discourse and discussion only through long-term, durable changes in how we produce and consume content. One that withstands the populist temptation while promoting democratic dissent and diversity of opinion. What follows are possible strategies that individual citizens can carry out in their countries to promote free journalism and better media practices:

1 Promote Media and Digital Media Literacy

To modern populists, any institution that does not align with their ideals must be considered elitist and wrong. These include the media, science, and even schools. Promoting media and digital media literacy in the educational system and through webinars, social media, and social institutions is a fundamental tool to fight disinformation and promote critical thinking among younger generations. According to Ranieri (2018), media and digital media literacy substantially influence how students create meaning and analyze knowledge. By having better prepared and more critical students who not only use but also dare to question mainstream and social media, young people become political actors instead of targets of political messages and propaganda. Students

must be educated in subjects that were mainly considered irrelevant or already surpassed before the arrival of widespread social media, such as hate speech, fake news, scientific methods, racism, and free speech.

2 Support Fact-Checking Networks

Populism takes different forms depending on location, but it generally tends to question rationality models (Laclau, 2005). Supporting and strengthening civil bodies that promote good journalistic practices and fact-checking can help contain populism's influence in the public sphere and create more informed discourses and debates. The Poynter Institute for Media Studies is a groundbreaking institution in this regard but is far from enough. As individual citizens, we should support the use of fact-checking networks and reliable sources.

Another vital action to contain the atomization of public interest is to promote media alliances and the partnership between fact-checking networks, mainstream media, and journalists' unions to create common ground for the reporting and publishing of news. Tant argues that journalism is a discipline that creates conditions for evolution and improvement through its constant self-critique and meta-journalistic discourse (2021). Suppose we add the expertise of fact-checkers, experts, and academics. In that case, the media should be able to find new revenue opportunities based on truth-seeking practices.

However, the prevalence of fake news renders fact-checking insufficient. Müller and Denner explain that erasing or discursively attacking fake news creates a vicious cycle in which people feel more alienated from traditional journalists. Instead, disinformation should be countered through integral efforts that rely on the public's media literacy and by reaching out to people who have diverged from "mainstream media" to more questionable outlets (2019). This dialogue would reinforce the public sphere and permit the resurgence of consensus based on science and facts.

3 Support New Types of Journalism

Traditional journalism and the publication of information are no longer enough to create and influence the public sphere. Never before have we possessed the technological capacities that we currently have, yet they seem to have empowered isolationism and fragmentation of the public discourse instead of dialogue and communication. Newer generations see traditional journalism's straightforward narrative and informative nature as obsolete and little appealing. Developing and training other kinds of journalism that help us better understand our current reality might benefit both consumers and media producers. For example, solution journalism, policy editorial, citizen journalism, entrepreneurial journalism, investigative journalism, social media journalism, and accountability of public actors.

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[2] A French press body with close ties to the populist party La France Insoumise.

4 Digital Advocacy

Finally, even if, in this chapter, we have been critical of the use of social media by populist leaders, the same social media may be used for digital advocacy and awareness of disinformation. Liberal activists can use these platforms to challenge fake news spread by populist outlets and actors. Mobilizing public opinion is essential to demand more active and current policies to combat disinformation. Despite the overwhelming changes that the media and technological landscapes have gone through in the last decades, a strong democracy still needs reliable counterweights to power.

Rethinking Liberalism:
D. The Fight Against Climate Change

Climate change poses a unique challenge to liberalism and democratic societies all over the world. While socio-political issues like populism, misinformation, and the rule of law are essential to advancing free, liberal countries and individuals, climate change and its consequences interest us more urgently, for they bear an imminent risk for humanity.

In recent years the liberal doctrine has been called into question for its inefficiency in tackling climate change. Green parties, activists, and academics have justly criticized liberal ideas of the free market as insufficient for dealing with the climate crisis. Shaw (2024) is emphatic in saying that liberal policies are aimed at softening the impact of climate change within the free market instead of recognizing the incompatibility between a free market and saving the environment. Another common criticism is liberalism's emphasis on individual liberty, which hinders the government's ability to reach common ground and enact more drastic environmental policies. In their analysis of liberalism's challenges regarding global warming. Wainwright and Mann say that in making the individual the center of our political and economic system the collective and the communal have become an afterthought (2018).

The nature of the crisis and the perceived passivity of liberal developed countries in dealing with it has provoked the proliferation of green parties and politicians who call for a bigger participation of the government in economic and environmental matters, even arguing for the creation of supra-national entities that police climate-change policies (Pennington, 2008). Wainwright and Mann argue that if liberal democracies are not able to deal with the environmental crisis, it is possible that we will see the uprising of green nationalism and even eco-fascism around the world, and that such a government would have little regard for concepts as democracy and human rights arguing the sake of "the greater good" (Ibid).

As liberals, we accept the dire nature of the climate crisis, its challenges, and governments' shortcomings so far in enacting decisive action to mitigate further climate change. However, we also consider it important to not fall into panic thinking or turn to non-democratic forms of government as a sort of "last resource" for dealing with the climate crisis. We argue that liberal democracies are still the best system of government to fight climate change, that economic freedom and stability help to develop sound environmental policies, and that personal responsibility is necessary to achieve long-term results.

Discourse & Communication

Shaw's (Ibid) virulent book "Liberalism and the Challenge of Climate Change" argues that all efforts coming from developed liberal countries constrict climate change into verbal constructs that eliminate all possibility of thinking about environmental solutions that escape from the liberal agenda, which includes values as personal freedom, a free market, and democratic processes. It is easy to see his point. In most international summits, while there is an acknowledgment of the urgency behind climate change, the discourse usually targets long-term objectives or entirely focuses on how many degrees Celsius it is safe for Earth to increase, instead of considering the possibility of a world without global warming. There is also an emphasis placed on developing sustainable technology that would greatly limit climate change, for example, electric cars that would reduce CO_2 emissions.

It is essential to accept that even when innovation will play an impactful role against climate change (as we will discuss in section 4), whatever clean technology we have today cannot be massively produced and adopted and therefore, is insufficient to contain climate change within the 1.5 ºC established in the Paris Agreement. It is necessary to spread a more urgent kind of communication, using a language that correctly conveys the nature of the crisis without compromising democracy or freedom in any way.

Our goal should be to raise public awareness, change the discourse towards a more decisive tone, and transfer knowledge through educative programs, webinars, and workshops on how to reduce the carbon footprint. We propose reinforcing the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN) role to create a new kind of global ecological citizenship. One that is not only symbolic nor carried by a few "virtuous citizens" (Fischer, 2017), but that aims to make every single free citizen aware of their responsibility to reduce our carbon footprint. Another strategy is to bolster innovation through market economy instruments to achieve a more sustainable world through the development of smart cities.

Political Action and International Cooperation

Although liberal democracies have failed to produce satisfactory results against climate change, they are still the best form of government to deal with its impact. Fredriksson and Neumayer (2013) argue that democratic institutions by them-

selves are not enough to stop climate change, but they do emphasize that long-standing democratic governments can reach better environmental policies in due time. In a democracy, the environmental agenda can be pushed by different advocacy groups, and the change of government creates, at least in theory, more capable leaders in dealing with crises, such as the climatic one. Ward (2008) proved statistically that core autocratic countries performed much worse in environmental indicators than core democratic nations. The short life of autocrats makes them focus only on short-term solutions that would economically benefit their regime. The environmental consequences of their policies in 50 or 100 years are not a priority for them. This is tangible in the discourse and actions of both right-wing and left-wing populist leaders. Donald Trump pulled the United States from the Paris Agreement, arguing that it would bear economic ruin on his country. In Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador has openly harassed companies that work with clean energies, favoring instead the country's national oil company: Pemex. Neither of these decisions were democratically discussed in either country, rather they were part of a political platform from two populist politicians.

So, as liberals, it becomes crucial to defend democratic values and their importance in fighting climate change. We propose to foster free trade, enabling the transfer of green technologies and knowledge to fight climate change, as well as increasing international cooperation with clear governing rules. The enforcement of international laws, treaties, and agreements should be a priority for liberal governments and environmental crimes should be prosecuted expeditiously. We also support the creation of a "New Green Deal" which, Lang remarks, would be suitable to end the environmental crises and solve the political upheaval it has caused. In 2021, the UN recognized the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment (/HRC/RES/48/13). Even if this was a soft policy action, it marks a legal and political pathway for liberal countries to fight climate change without disregarding democratic processes.

Responsibility

A lot of the attacks that liberalism has undergone from Marxist and green academics deal with the concept of "individual freedom". Since individuals are not incentivized to put "the greater good" before their gains, there seems to be no necessity to take action to avoid climate change. However, this grim view of the free individual is fueled by fear and cynicism. Barrett and Graddy (2000) argue that in a strong economy where the economic necessities are satisfied by the market, individuals are more able to develop an interest in environmental matters and push for stringent climate change policies. While we advocate for personal freedom, we must also push for personal and national responsibility when dealing with climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's AR6 report underscores the need for action at every level. To ensure compliance, we should implement stringent penalties for non-compliant entities and incentivize businesses that transition to greener practices. Support mechanisms, like grants and loans, can aid small and medium enterprises in this transition. Tax credits for sustainable start-ups can further environmental goals.

Advocating for a Free Market

Contrary to Shaw's argument against economic liberty, we argue that a Free Market is necessary to develop solutions and agreements against climate change. Pennington (2008) argues that solutions for climate change come from the recognition that "everything is connected to everything"; thus, a market that promotes connections, exchange, and innovation will produce better solutions than isolationist nations working separately. Imposing a tax on pollution, an idea underlying trade in carbon certificates was proposed by liberal economists like Walter Eucken more than 70 years ago. This integrates the actual costs of pollution into the calculations of businesses and incentivizes them to address pollution seriously. Additionally, we should focus on promoting the exchange of adoption strategies for cleaner forms of energy and transform the education and R&D model to support the creation of green jobs capable of finding solutions to climate change and accelerate the establishment of a sustainable economic model.

As we've emphasized, addressing the challenges posed by climate change requires a concerted effort, encompassing personal, financial, and governmental responsibility. While classical liberalism champions personal development and financial prosperity, it does not condone unchecked resource exploitation or neglect the ethical considerations of economic growth. Given the urgent need for innovative and effective solutions to climate change, a conscientious and sustainable free-market approach emerges as the most viable strategy for achieving enduring outcomes.

Conclusions

This document presents a comprehensive and interrelated approach to rethinking liberalism, offering a blueprint for addressing the pressing challenges of our current time. This approach encompasses various dimensions that collectively contribute to reshaping liberal principles in response to the complexities of our era.

We underscore the foundational importance of enhancing legal systems and ensuring legal certainty. We advocate for principles of good governance and transparency while emphasizing the necessity of accountable institutions. Additionally, fostering an informed and engaged citizenry through education and dispelling misinformation is vital. Addressing social and economic inequality is essential to advancing a fair and just society.

Within the economic sphere, we call for empowering entrepreneurship and innovation as catalysts for economic growth, job creation, and greener technologies. We highlight nurturing local economies and support for small businesses as integral components of achieving economic resilience and community well-being. Emphasizing collective action and cooperation in the business world ensures that market forces are harnessed for the greater good, while responsible governance and corporate social responsibility mitigate the adverse impacts of unchecked capitalism.

We also address the pressing challenge of disinformation in the digital age. Support for fact-checking networks and initiatives is paramount in countering the proliferation of false information. Encouraging the development of new forms of journalism prioritizing accuracy and objectivity contributes to restoring trust in the media.

Finally, we recognize the existential threat of climate change and the urgency of immediate action. Transforming the discourse and communication about climate change is crucial to garnering public support for mitigation efforts. Political action at national and international levels is imperative to drive systemic change and global cooperation. Promoting personal and national responsibility in mitigating climate change through sustainable practices and policies represents an ethical imperative for safeguarding the planet.

Collectively, these proposals offer a holistic and interconnected approach to revitalizing liberalism in the modern context, reaffirming the core values of liberalism: freedom, justice, and sustainability. By adapting these principles to the challenges of the 21st century, we can collectively strive toward a more equitable, prosperous, and liberal world for all.

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From June 1-4, 2023, the *Global Forum: Rethinking Liberalism* was held in Mexico City, Mexico, where experts from different countries debated the future of liberalism and developed a liberal agenda based on lessons learned from the threats of populism around the world.

The participation and contributions of the following people made this document possible.

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Mexico

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Alfredo Suárez

Claudia Terzi

Daniela Domínguez

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Fernando Cervantes

Francisco Padilla

Irina Burgaza

María José Salcedo

Octavio García

Oscar Rivas

Panambí Garcés

Ricardo López Cordero

Sebastian Erdmenger

Morocco

Chaimae Bourjij

Khadija Janati Idrissi

Souad Azemmat

Palestinian Autonomous Territories

Amir Bakri

Khaled Faqih

Rana Amad

Philippines

John Nery

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Daouda Seck

Thierno Bocoum

Tunisia

Jasser Jebabli

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