

WORLD LIBERTY CONGRESS · PLAYBOOK FOR LIBERTY

PILLAR IV · PRINCIPLE 13 · CLOSING THE PLAYBOOK

Prepare for the Future to Win the Present

From resistance to governance: how the World Liberty Congress builds democratic leaders capable of winning, transitioning, and governing well

A strategic training guide for members of the World Liberty Congress and the World Liberty Academy. Thirteenth and final principle of the WLC Adaptations to Counter-Autocracy Strategic Framework (Berlin, November 2025), and the closing principle of Pillar IV: Winning and Defending the Future.

The principle, in one sentence. A democratic movement must not only oppose tyranny. It must become a credible alternative capable of winning public trust, leading a transition, governing responsibly, delivering results, and preventing the return of authoritarianism in populist, illiberal, or openly dictatorial forms. The Berlin Manifesto names this commitment directly: it is not enough to oppose the old. We must propose the new.

INTRODUCTION

Why the Playbook closes here

The Playbook for Liberty has set out twelve principles across four pillars. Pillar I prepared the moral and strategic foundation: clarifying the freedom-versus-oppression frame, the comparative discipline, the right mindset, the continuous strategy, and the nonviolent ethic. Pillar II built the strategic core: knowing the enemy, and building democratic power across multiple forms. Pillar III addressed acting together: across the democratic ecosystem, across the discipline of coordination without unanimity, and across the relationship between domestic leadership and international support. Pillar IV took up the discipline of victory: the multi-front strategy that prevents conformist drift, and the practice of converting repression into accountability.

Principle 13 closes the arc. It asks the question that every member of the World Liberty Congress should be willing to face honestly: when the dictator falls, when the opening arrives, when the moment of breakthrough finally comes, will we be ready to govern? The Berlin Manifesto names this preparation as one of the central commitments of the network. It is not enough to oppose the old. We must propose the new, preparing credible democratic alternatives to corrupt regimes. This essay sets out the operational discipline that turns that commitment into a working program.

The essay is built in twelve sections. It begins with the strategic error of assuming that anti-dictator sentiment is enough. It then states the WLC's explicit commitment to producing democratic political leaders capable of contesting and winning office at every level, from municipal to national. It addresses the dual threat (dictatorship and the illiberal populism that often follows), the operational practice of big-tent politics, and the specific role of party-coalition work as a WLC priority. It maps the Future-Ready Leadership Curriculum delivered through the World Liberty Academy, the Future Credibility Test, the First 100 Days framework, and the safeguards against conformist transition. It closes with the practical exercises, the role of the WLC across all of this, and the final synthesis of the Playbook.



SECTION I

Anger is not a mandate: why anti-dictator sentiment is not enough

Many pro-democracy movements are excellent at resisting. They mobilize citizens, expose abuses, defend political prisoners, document repression, and generate international solidarity. These are indispensable capacities. They are not the same as the capacity to govern. A movement can be morally right and still fail politically. It can defeat a dictator and still lose the next election. It can mobilize crowds and still fail to build a governing coalition. It can denounce corruption and still lack a credible economic plan. It can inspire activists and still fail to persuade exhausted citizens who simply want safety, jobs, services, and dignity.

A common opposition mistake is to believe that public anger against the regime will automatically become support for the democratic alternative. It rarely works that way. Anger is not the same as trust. Mobilization is not the same as a mandate. Rejection of the dictator is not the same as belief in the opposition. International

visibility is not the same as domestic credibility. Moral legitimacy is not the same as governing capacity.

This is especially true after long periods of authoritarian rule, or in the conformist plateau described in Principle 11 of this Playbook. Citizens who have lived through years of authoritarianism, corruption, instability, poverty, insecurity, propaganda, and political disappointment are often skeptical of everyone. They may hate the dictatorship and still distrust the opposition. They may want change and still fear chaos. They may reject repression and still ask, quite reasonably: can these people actually govern? Principle 13 answers them. The democratic movement must prove, before victory, that it is capable of governing after victory.

“Anger is not a mandate. Mobilization is not trust. Sacrifice is not a plan.”

A movement that speaks only about the dictator may win the activists. A movement that speaks credibly about the future can win the country. The discipline of Principle 13 is to make democratic freedom the most plausible answer in citizens’ lives to the questions that actually keep them awake: justice, dignity, prosperity, security, family stability, the rule of law, better services, and hope for their children.



SECTION II

The WLC commitment: from activists to credible governing leaders

Members of the World Liberty Congress should hold no ambiguity about this. The WLC is not only a human-rights advocacy network. It is not only a network of dissidents. It is not only a coordination space for resistance. The Berlin Manifesto sets out a broader and more demanding ambition: the WLC commits to identifying, mentoring, and supporting the next generation of pro-democracy leaders, so that they can not only challenge dictatorships but one day govern their countries justly. In many autocracies, talented democratic leaders are already present in the dissident movements. They face enormous barriers. They are jailed, exiled, slandered, or banned from political office. They often lack resources, training, and international connections. The WLC was founded, in part, precisely to address that gap.

This is a deliberate strategic choice, not a sideline. Human-rights advocacy is essential, and political prisoners, survivors, exiles, families of victims, journalists,

lawyers, and human-rights advocates remain part of the moral backbone of the network. But the WLC's purpose extends further. It is an activist-led, transnational strategic infrastructure designed to help democratic actors move from fragmented resistance to organized democratic power. The Berlin Manifesto pledges that the network will scout and support promising democrats from repressive environments, connecting them with mentors, including experienced former statesmen from democratic countries and veteran activists from earlier transitions, and that it will provide political training in campaign strategy, communications, policy development, and party-building, to help members become effective candidates and public officials when the opportunity arises.

“It is not enough to oppose the old. We must propose the new.”

The operational consequence of this commitment is that members of the WLC are encouraged to think of themselves not only as dissidents, witnesses, or activists, but as the future political leadership of their countries. Some members will choose to remain in civic and human-rights work, and that work is essential. Others will move into political life: contesting elections at the local or municipal level, running for legislative office, leading parties, joining or founding democratic coalitions, building governing teams in waiting, or eventually contesting national executive office. The WLC supports all of these trajectories, and it actively builds the infrastructure that increases the probability of success.

What the network offers is not symbolic encouragement. It is a structured pipeline. The pipeline runs through the World Liberty Academy and is connected to the Bringing Democracy to Power program, the WLC's Theory of Change, and the working partnerships with research institutions, former heads of state, veterans of democratic transitions, professional political operatives, and electoral-integrity specialists that the network has assembled across more than sixty countries. Section V of this essay describes the Academy's political coaching infrastructure in detail.



SECTION III

The dual threat: dictatorship and the illiberal populism that often follows

Democratic movements must not define the enemy too narrowly. The threat is not only the fully closed dictatorship, the totalitarian state, or the military junta. The threat also includes illiberal populism: leaders who win elections or exploit democratic openings while attacking institutions, minorities, independent media, courts, legislatures, civil society, and constitutional constraints. Illiberal populists are, in many cases, the second wave of democratic erosion. They arrive after the first wave of authoritarianism has been defeated, and they exploit precisely the conditions that the first wave produced: insecurity, corruption fatigue, elite distrust, social resentment, and the perception that democracy is slow, weak, or irrelevant.

Illiberal populists do not always arrive wearing the uniform of dictatorship. Sometimes they arrive with ballots, slogans, charismatic language, simple emotional narratives, and promises to clean up the system. They speak the language of democracy while building the infrastructure for its destruction. They claim to represent the people while attacking every institution that can hold them accountable to the people. The recent decade in multiple regions has shown that the illiberal populist is, in some respects, the more strategically sophisticated adversary, because the public mobilization tactics that worked against open dictatorships often falter against leaders who can claim electoral legitimacy while dismantling the foundations of electoral accountability.

This is why governing competence is itself a democratic defense mechanism. A democracy that cannot deliver basic security, justice, anti-corruption work, and public services becomes the soil in which illiberal populism grows. If democratic actors cannot connect freedom to dignity, justice, security, and tangible improvements in daily life, authoritarianism gains passive acceptance. Principle 13 therefore insists on a discipline that is too often neglected: freedom must be made credible in the lives of ordinary people. Movements that prepare to defeat only the dictator may win the first contest and lose the second.

What this means for the leadership group. When you sit with your leadership team and plan the next eighteen months, ask explicitly: what is our strategy to defeat the illiberal populist who would emerge if we won tomorrow? If the answer is not in your plan, the plan is incomplete. The dictator is the immediate adversary. The populist who would feed on a chaotic transition is the next adversary, and the discipline of Principle 13 is to prepare for both contests at once.



SECTION IV

Big-tent politics as operational practice

To win and govern, democratic movements must practice big-tent politics. Big-tent politics is not opportunism. It is not ideological emptiness. It is the democratic art of building a broad coalition around a shared civic minimum while allowing legitimate pluralism. It recognizes that after authoritarianism, societies are wounded, distrustful, polarized, and tired. They need leaders who can lower fear, not inflame it. They need coalitions whose breadth is the message, not coalitions whose narrowness has been mistaken for purity.

Principle 9 of this Playbook taught the operational distinction that big-tent politics rests on: agreement on the rules that allow disagreement, rather than agreement on every policy outcome. Principle 13 takes that distinction into the electoral and governing arena. The minimum democratic agreement that holds the tent together is built around a small number of commitments, none of which is ideological in the partisan sense. Free elections. Release of political prisoners. Independent courts. Freedom of religion and conscience. Freedom of speech and association. Anti-corruption. Public security under the rule of law. Economic opportunity. Human dignity. National reconstruction. These are not the platform of any one party. They are the conditions under which all democratic parties can compete fairly.

Big-tent democratic leadership requires:

- Speaking across ideology, not only to one's own ideological community.
- Respecting religious and secular communities as equal participants in the democratic project.
- Welcoming conservatives, liberals, social democrats, religious democrats, independents, and civic actors who share the minimum democratic agreement.
- Building bridges with business, labor, youth, women, rural communities, and professional sectors who may not vote with you on every issue but who share the commitment to free institutions.
- Avoiding language of revenge, while never abandoning the language of justice.
- Distinguishing justice from vengeance, both in rhetoric and in policy.
- Offering institutional guarantees to those who fear domination by the opposition, so that democratic transition does not feel like the simple inversion of who holds power.
- Building a minimum democratic program that can be signed by parties whose programs differ substantially on questions that lie outside the minimum.

A movement that cannot build common ground before victory will struggle to govern after victory. The big-tent practice begins in opposition, not in office. The relationships, the trust, the working coalitions, the mutual veto on certain rhetorical excesses, the institutional habits of consultation: these are built in the years when there is no power to share, so that they exist in the moment when power must be shared.



SECTION V

The World Liberty Academy Political Leadership Pipeline

The operational vehicle through which the WLC fulfills its commitment to producing democratic political leaders is the World Liberty Academy, working in partnership with the Bringing Democracy to Power program named in the Berlin Manifesto. The Academy treats political-leadership development as a primary discipline, comparable in importance to civic-resistance training, security training, and human-rights documentation. It is not a side activity. It is one of the main reasons the Academy exists.

The Academy's political coaching infrastructure is organized to address the realistic trajectories that members of the WLC actually pursue. Not every member will run for national executive office. Many will engage politics at the level where most democratic governance actually happens: the municipality, the local council, the legislature, the political party, the cabinet ministry, the policy team. The Academy structures its support across these levels, and members are encouraged to engage the track that matches their context, their stage of struggle, and their personal trajectory.

The five tracks

Track 1. Local and municipal leadership

Mayors, city councilors, district representatives, regional governors, and local political organizers. The track addresses the disciplines that local democratic leaders actually need: budget management, service delivery, public safety, urban and rural governance, citizen consultation, anti-corruption controls in local procurement, the politics of building credibility one neighborhood at a time. Local office is, in many countries, the most accessible democratic foothold. It is also

where citizens experience democracy most directly, and where illiberal populists are often defeated or fail to take root.

Track 2. Legislative leadership

Candidates and current members of national parliaments, congresses, and regional assemblies. The track addresses legislative drafting, oversight of the executive, committee work, building cross-party caucuses on democratic minimums, the interaction between legislative work and party-building, and the public-narrative work that converts legislative achievement into electoral support. The legislature is where the slow, patient work of institutional construction happens, and the discipline of legislative leadership is rarely available outside formal training.

Track 3. Party leadership and political-vehicle development

Founders and senior leaders of democratic political parties, party officials, candidate-recruitment teams, and political directors. The track addresses party organization, internal democracy, candidate selection methodology, party finance and integrity, the management of internal disputes, and the building of structures that can survive electoral defeat. Strong democratic parties are the institutional substrate of any sustainable democracy, and the WLC works specifically to support members building and reforming such parties under difficult conditions.

Track 4. Coalition and big-tent leadership

Members whose work crosses parties: coalition negotiators, civic-political bridge-builders, primary commission leaders, and shadow-government conveners. The track is the operational continuation of Principle 9's work on coordination without unanimity, applied specifically to electoral and governing coalitions. Section VI of this essay treats this work in expanded depth, because the WLC has identified party-coalition work as a particular priority.

Track 5. National executive and cabinet readiness

Members preparing for national executive office, cabinet appointments, or senior public-administration leadership. The track addresses cabinet formation, civil-service management, national-security oversight, fiscal policy, foreign policy, the management of governing coalitions, communication with diverse national constituencies, and the deeper disciplines of governing under the conditions that follow authoritarian rule. This is the track most closely aligned with the Bringing Democracy to Power program, which scouts and supports promising democrats from repressive environments and connects them with experienced former statesmen from democratic countries.

The instruments of political coaching

Each track is supported by a portfolio of coaching instruments that members can engage in combination. The instruments are designed to fit the realities of life under authoritarianism and exile, with secure delivery, flexible time commitments, and discretion when needed.

- One-on-one mentoring with veteran political leaders from comparable transitions, drawn from the WLC's network of former presidents, prime ministers, ministers, parliamentarians, and senior party leaders.
- Peer-learning circles among WLC members preparing for similar roles in different countries, run on regular cycles with structured curricula.
- Master classes on specific disciplines (campaign strategy, debate preparation, cabinet formation, legislative oversight, anti-corruption design, judicial reform sequencing), delivered by recognized practitioners and academics.
- Country-team strategy retreats that convene a member's broader leadership group for two or three days of structured planning, supported by Academy facilitators and Regional Secretaries.
- Simulations and role-playing exercises (the cabinet-formation exercise, the first-hundred-days simulation, the coalition-negotiation simulation, the populist-debate simulation) that build the muscle of governing under pressure.
- Policy-paper development support, pairing members with research institutions to produce credible policy proposals before they are needed.
- Communications and public-narrative coaching, including media training, speech preparation, and the construction of a personal political narrative that connects biography to mission.
- Connections with electoral-integrity specialists, including those who participated in the WLC-supported observation work in Bolivia, Honduras, and other contexts described in Principle 8.
- Access to the comparative knowledge accumulated in the Pro-Democracy Playbook and the WLC's case-study library across more than sixty countries.

The Academy works on the principle that political coaching is most effective when it is sustained over years, not delivered as one-time training. Members who engage the pipeline early, while still in opposition, arrive at the moment of opportunity with relationships, frameworks, and operational capacity that cannot be assembled in the weeks after the regime weakens. The investment must precede the moment. That is the operational meaning of governing in advance.

The pathway from activist to public leader. The trajectory the WLC supports is well-documented across decades of democratic transitions: the jailed

opposition figure who becomes a president, the protest organizer who transforms into a reformist lawmaker, the exiled journalist who returns to lead an independent media institution, the human-rights lawyer who builds the post-transition judicial reform, the youth organizer who wins a city council seat and demonstrates, ten years later, that democracy can deliver. The Berlin Manifesto names this trajectory directly: democracy needs champions, brave individuals with the integrity, vision, and skill to lead their nations out of tyranny and into freedom. The Academy's political coaching pipeline exists to make that trajectory more probable, more frequent, and more successful, by providing in advance the disciplines that veterans of earlier transitions had to learn the hard way.



SECTION VI

The work with political parties: why coalition-building is a WLC priority

Principle 8 of this Playbook treated the structural relationship between civic actors and political parties: why parties cannot be ignored, why parties cannot dominate, and why bridging the party-civic divide is a strategic priority of the WLC. Principle 13 takes that doctrine into the operational arena of forming successful coalitions, supporting party-building, and increasing the probability that democratic forces win when the moment arrives. This is not a peripheral activity of the network. It is one of the core practices through which the WLC operationalizes its commitment to producing governing leaders.

There is a precise reason for this priority. In country after country, opposition movements have produced individuals of extraordinary courage and credibility, and have nonetheless lost contests to authoritarian incumbents or illiberal populists, because the democratic side could not assemble a coalition broad enough to win. The technical work of coalition formation (negotiating shared platforms, selecting unified candidates through legitimate processes, managing the post-primary integration of losers, distributing offices and influence in ways that hold the coalition together, communicating breadth without dilution) is the work that turns democratic potential into democratic victory. It is also the work that, when neglected, hands transitions to whoever is best positioned to fill the vacuum, which is rarely the most democratic actor.

Why this is hard, and why the WLC can help

Coalition-building is hard for reasons that are visible to anyone who has tried it. Parties have legitimate ideological differences. Personal histories include grievance and rivalry. Donor incentives sometimes reward fragmentation rather than unity. International actors sometimes pick favorites. Civic organizations sometimes distrust parties as a category. Younger leaders distrust older leaders. Exiles and inside actors disagree about timing. The regime infiltrates and exacerbates every fault line. None of these difficulties is unique to any one country. They recur, and the WLC's value is precisely that it operates as a transnational network where the patterns are visible across cases, where comparative experience is available, and where neutral facilitation can sometimes succeed where domestic mediators cannot.

The WLC's contribution to coalition-building is therefore both material and structural. Materially, the Academy provides the technical training that coalition negotiators actually need: facilitation skills, comparative knowledge of how successful coalitions have been structured, model agreements adapted to different regime types, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and the operational design of joint platforms. Structurally, the Regional Secretaries serve as neutral conveners who can bring together leaders who would not, in normal circumstances, sit at the same table, because the WLC carries no national stake in any single faction's primacy. The network's breadth is its credibility. A facilitator with no horse in the race is the facilitator who can sometimes broker the agreement that no domestic actor could broker alone.

What WLC support for coalition-building looks like in practice

- Facilitation of party-civic dialogues at the early stage, before the coalition is being negotiated under the pressure of an electoral calendar.
- Comparative briefings drawing on coalitional experience from Spain, Poland, Chile, South Africa, the Philippines, Korea, and recent Latin American cases, so that the parties at the table know what has worked and what has failed elsewhere.
- Methodological support for primaries and other candidate-selection processes, drawing on the disciplines set out in Principle 9 of this Playbook and the working experience of recent cases including Venezuela 2023.
- Drafting support for the minimum democratic agreement that holds the coalition together, including model language adaptable to different national contexts.
- Technical support for the design of post-primary integration mechanisms, so that losing candidates and their supporters remain inside the coalition rather than defecting.

- Electoral-observation coordination, both as a tool of electoral integrity and as a coalition-building activity that requires civic and party actors to work together on a shared technical task.
- Protection support for coalition leaders facing transnational repression, regime smear campaigns, or legal harassment during the electoral period.
- International accompaniment that signals to the regime and to international audiences that the coalition has serious external support without substituting for domestic legitimacy.
- Post-electoral coaching for the moment after victory, when coalition cohesion is most strained and most strategically important to preserve.

The strategic principle behind this work is that the WLC takes no side among the legitimate party traditions of its members. The network includes liberals, conservatives, social democrats, religious democrats, and movements that resist easy ideological classification. It refuses to favor any of them at the expense of others. What the WLC insists on, in every coalition it supports, is the minimum democratic agreement: parties compete for office; democratic coalitions cooperate to restore the rules of freedom. The two activities are different. Conflating them produces failures of both kinds. Members are encouraged to engage the Regional Secretary at the earliest stage of any major coalition effort, both to draw on comparative experience and to access the facilitation that makes the difficult conversations possible.



SECTION VII

The Future-Ready Leadership Curriculum

The disciplines below are the working content of the Academy's political-leadership tracks. They are presented compactly here, because each is delivered through the coaching instruments described in Section V. Members preparing for political life do not need to master all ten clusters before engaging. They need to know which clusters are most relevant to the trajectory they are pursuing, and to engage them in sequence.

1. Public-policy literacy

Problem definition, policy design, evidence use, cost-benefit analysis, stakeholder mapping, implementation planning, monitoring and evaluation, policy communication. The discipline that allows democratic leaders to move from slogan to program. Practical question: can we explain not only what is wrong, but what we would do differently?

2. Political leadership

Adaptive leadership, public narrative, decision-making under uncertainty, team building, conflict management, ethical authority, crisis leadership, leadership succession. The discipline that distinguishes leadership in office from leadership in resistance. Practical question: are we building leaders, or are we building followers of one leader?

3. Big-tent coalition leadership

Common-ground negotiation, coalition messaging, religious-secular bridge-building, urban-rural outreach, youth and elder integration, women's leadership, minority inclusion, exile-inside coordination, party-civil society coordination. Practical question: who can we include without sacrificing democratic principles?

4. Electoral strategy

Voter segmentation, candidate selection, campaign management, message testing, field operations, volunteer management, poll watching, parallel vote tabulation, digital campaigning, debate preparation, rapid response to disinformation. Practical question: do we know who our persuadable voters are?

5. Public administration

Cabinet formation, civil-service management, budget management, procurement transparency, interagency coordination, local government, service delivery, anti-corruption controls, emergency management, administrative law. Practical question: could we run ministries six months after a transition?

6. Rule of law and justice reform

Judicial independence, prosecutorial reform, police accountability, transitional justice, constitutional safeguards, anti-corruption institutions, prison reform, human-rights compliance, due-process restoration. Practical question: how do we pursue justice without revenge?

7. Security and defense governance

Civilian control of security forces, police reform, intelligence oversight, military professionalization, transitional security arrangements, disarmament and reintegration where relevant, public-safety strategy, protection of former regime victims and democratic actors. Practical question: who will control the guns the day after?

8. Economic credibility

Macroeconomic basics, inflation and currency stability, job creation, private-sector confidence, social protection, anti-poverty policy, international finance, investment

climate, public-private partnerships, anti-kleptocracy recovery. Practical question: what is our economic message for the first year, and is it credible?

9. Strategic communications

Values-based messaging, narrative discipline, crisis communication, speechwriting, media interviews, disinformation response, storytelling, patriotic democratic language, communication with skeptical audiences. Practical question: can a tired, apolitical citizen understand why our vision matters in their daily life?

10. Transition planning

Scenario planning, first 100 days planning, constitutional transition, election timetable, political-prisoner release mechanisms, civil-service continuity, emergency economic stabilization, international recognition, humanitarian response, institutional reform sequencing. Practical question: what would we do in the first 72 hours, 30 days, 100 days, and first year?



SECTION VIII

The First 100 Days Framework

Authoritarian collapses can be sudden. Movements that are not prepared inherit chaos. The First 100 Days framework below is the operational discipline for the moment of breakthrough. It must be drafted in writing, with named teams for each domain, before the moment arrives. The leadership group that is still drafting this framework after the regime falls is a leadership group that has already lost ground to whoever drafted theirs in advance.

FIRST 100 DAYS · TEMPLATE

First 72 hours

Signal calm, authority, and constitutional purpose. Protect political prisoners and at-risk communities. Prevent revenge violence. Secure basic government continuity. Open channels with international allies. Communicate a message of national unity, not factional triumph.

First 30 days

Release or review political-prisoner cases. Restore civic space. Reopen independent media where possible. Announce transitional-justice principles. Create emergency anti-corruption measures. Begin security-sector stabilization. Launch a national listening process that signals broad consultation.

First 100 days

Present a reform agenda. Establish judicial-reform roadmap. Create electoral-integrity plan. Protect victims and families. Launch economic-stabilization program. Build a plural transition council. Announce civil-service protections. Begin public-administration review. Set timelines for constitutional or institutional reform.

First year

Implement electoral reform. Advance judicial independence. Strengthen local government. Begin security-sector reform. Institutionalize anti-corruption bodies. Expand civic education. Rebuild international partnerships. Prepare democratic consolidation beyond the first election.

The Berlin Manifesto announced the WLC's commitment to a comprehensive Pro-Democracy Playbook, derived from the lessons of successful movements and transitions worldwide, designed as a living document updated with input from members on the frontlines. The First 100 Days framework is one of the most practical instruments that Playbook produces. Members preparing for an electoral or transitional moment are encouraged to draft their own version through the Academy's coaching infrastructure, well before the moment when the framework will be needed.



SECTION IX

The Future Credibility Test

Before claiming to be a national alternative, a democratic movement should answer the ten questions below. The test is not designed to discourage. It is designed to surface gaps that can still be closed. A movement that answers seven of the ten questions positively is a movement that is well on its way. A movement that answers fewer than five is a movement whose first work is to build the conditions for the test, not to enter the contest yet.

THE FUTURE CREDIBILITY TEST

- › *Can we explain our vision in one page that an ordinary citizen would actually read?*
- › *Can we name the first five problems we would address, and how, in the first year of governing?*
- › *Do we have credible people prepared for public security, economy, justice, education, health, and foreign policy?*
- › *Do citizens beyond the activist base trust us, and do we have evidence of that trust beyond our own perception?*

- › *Can we win elections, not only protests?*
- › *Can we speak to people who are afraid of change, in language they recognize?*
- › *Do we have a written plan for political prisoners, victims, and those who suffered under the regime?*
- › *Do we have a plan to prevent revenge, retaliation, and the chaos that authoritarian regimes leave behind?*
- › *Do we have a strategy to defeat illiberal populists who will compete for the same democratic opening?*
- › *Do we have a written first-100-days agenda that the leadership team has rehearsed?*

Members are encouraged to take the test as a working group, with the leadership team gathered, in writing, with the discipline that surfaces honest disagreement rather than producing artificial consensus. The questions where the answer is uncertain are the questions that define the next phase of work.



SECTION X

Avoiding the conformist transition

Principle 13 must be read together with Principle 11 and the Theory of Democratic Conformism. The danger after a breakthrough is not only authoritarian restoration. It is also shallow democracy: elections without rule of law, peace without justice, stability without accountability, pluralism without institutions, freedom in formal speech but not in lived practice. The most vulnerable moment in democratic construction is often not the dictatorship that preceded it, but the illusion of sufficiency that follows early success. Democracies do not always die at the hands of dictators. Many of them settle into institutional mediocrity that leaves them permanently vulnerable to populist or authoritarian return.

For WLC members preparing to govern, this means a series of disciplines that the moment of victory rarely demands but that the long horizon of consolidation absolutely requires:

- Do not stop at elections.
- Do not stop at prisoner releases.
- Do not stop at international recognition.
- Do not stop at the first transition agreement.

- Do not stop at the first peaceful transfer of power.
- Do not stop when the streets become calm.
- Do not stop until institutions are deep enough that no future demagogue can dismantle them with a single electoral majority.

A successful transition must keep moving toward institutional depth. The reform calendar set out in Principle 11 is the operational discipline for sustaining that movement, and the leadership team that has internalized it before victory is the team most likely to use it well after victory.



SECTION XI

Practical exercises for the World Liberty Academy

The seven exercises below are used in the Academy's political-leadership tracks. They are designed to be conducted with working leadership groups bringing real material from their own context, and they are most effective when several are completed in sequence over a two- or three-day retreat.

Exercise 1. The voter skeptic

A participant role-plays a citizen who dislikes the dictatorship but distrusts the opposition. The democratic leader must persuade without slogans, addressing fear, fatigue, and disappointment. The exercise reliably reveals how often movements address only the activists they already have.

Exercise 2. The first 100 days cabinet

Participants build a transition team with named individuals, real or hypothetical, for justice, economy, security, health, education, foreign affairs, communication, and anti-corruption. Empty positions become the recruitment agenda for the next year of preparation.

Exercise 3. From slogan to policy

Participants take a slogan such as justice, security, or dignity, and turn it into three concrete policies with timelines, indicators, and named owners. The exercise builds the muscle of converting moral language into governable programs.

Exercise 4. Big-tent coalition simulation

Participants must build a common platform among conservatives, liberals, social democrats, religious leaders, youth activists, business leaders, women’s groups, and former prisoners. The exercise teaches the discipline of separating the minimum democratic agreement from the policy program of any one faction.

Exercise 5. The illiberal populist challenge

A facilitator role-plays an illiberal populist who attacks the democratic movement as weak, elitist, foreign-funded, and unable to provide order. Participants design responses that are firm, hopeful, and credible, without descending to the populist’s rhetorical level. The exercise is uncomfortable, and it is exactly the rehearsal democratic leaders typically do not get before the contest arrives.

Exercise 6. Conformism prevention plan

Participants design the reforms that must happen in the first 180 days of a transition, before the political space for deep reform closes: judicial reform, electoral rules, civil-service protection, security oversight, anti-corruption design, media freedom guarantees. The exercise is the operational continuation of the work begun in Principle 11.

Exercise 7. Governing under scarcity

Participants receive a scenario with high inflation, weak courts, overcrowded prisons, polarized society, transnational pressure, and limited international support. They must choose priorities for the first 100 days. The exercise rehearses the realistic conditions that most transitions face, rather than the idealized conditions that planning documents sometimes assume.



SECTION XII

The World Liberty Congress and the work of governing in advance

Principle 13 closes the Playbook by returning the responsibility to the network itself. The disciplines set out in this essay are not aspirational. They are operational, and they are delivered through specific WLC instruments that members are encouraged to engage well before the moment when the disciplines will be tested.

- The Bringing Democracy to Power program identifies, mentors, and supports the next generation of democratic leaders, connecting them with experienced former statesmen and veterans of earlier transitions.

- The World Liberty Academy delivers the political-leadership pipeline across five tracks: local and municipal, legislative, party, coalition, and national executive.
- The Academy's coaching instruments include one-on-one mentoring, peer-learning circles, master classes, country-team retreats, simulations, policy-paper development, communications coaching, and electoral-integrity training.
- The Regional Secretaries serve as neutral conveners for coalition work, party-civic dialogue, and the cross-border peer learning that allows members in one country to draw on the experience of members in others.
- The Pro-Democracy Playbook (this document and its companions) holds the network's accumulated knowledge in usable form, updated continuously by members on the frontlines.
- Free Them, Freedom in Exile, the Decentralized Resistance Program, the Against Gender Apartheid Task Force, Make Freedom Investable, and the Democracy Security Compact provide the operational infrastructure that allows democratic leaders to survive the years of preparation that political leadership requires.

The network commits, in the language of the Berlin Manifesto, to turning resistance into governance. The dictators of today claim that only they have the experience to run a country, that the opposition is feckless or divided or extremist. The WLC's answer is to prove them wrong by building responsible, visionary democrats who can lead their nations to a better future. That work happens through the instruments named above, and members are encouraged to engage them not in the year before an election but in the years before the year before. Political coaching delivered in advance is the most reliable predictor of political success when the moment arrives.



CONCLUSION

Democracy must deserve to win

Principle 13 is the final principle of the Playbook for Liberty because it completes the arc of the work. A movement begins by understanding the struggle. It builds power. It acts together. It resists repression. It rejects silver bullets. And then, at the end of every other discipline, it must prepare the future. This is where many movements have failed. They assumed that history would reward sacrifice automatically. It does not. Sacrifice creates moral authority. Governing requires capacity. Courage opens the door. Competence keeps democracy alive.

The World Liberty Congress exists, in significant part, to build the generation of democratic leaders who can resist, win, transition, govern, and renew democracy after victory. This is how the network helps activate the fourth wave of democratization that the Berlin Manifesto envisions: not only by confronting autocracy, but by proving that democratic leadership can deliver a better future. The discipline of governing in advance is the practice of becoming, before victory, the leadership the country will require after victory. Members of the WLC are not only dissidents. They are the people who, when the moment arrives, will be ready to govern.

The Berlin Manifesto closes its section on Bringing Democracy to Power with a sentence that members of the WLC carry as a working principle: democracy will not defend itself, and it needs champions, brave individuals with the integrity, vision, and skill to lead their nations out of tyranny and into freedom. Principle 13 is the discipline of becoming those champions. It begins with the recognition that anger is not enough, that mobilization is not a mandate, and that the citizen who has lived through years of authoritarianism deserves a democratic alternative that can answer not only what we are against, but what we will build.

Win elections, not only protests.

Persuade citizens, not only allies.

Govern institutions, not only crowds.

Defeat the dictator. And defeat the populist who follows.

Democracy must deserve to win.

For WLC members, this principle closes the Playbook for Liberty. The thirteen principles, across four pillars, are the working doctrine of the network. They are not a recipe. They are a compass. They were written by activists for activists, and they will be revised continuously as the network learns from new contexts, new regimes, new transitions, and the new generation of leaders that the WLC is helping prepare. Members are encouraged to engage the Playbook not as a reference text to consult occasionally, but as a working set of disciplines to practice, debate, adapt, and improve.

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THE PLAYBOOK FOR LIBERTY CLOSSES HERE

The thirteen principles, across the four pillars (Understanding the Struggle, Building Power and Strategy, Acting Together, and Winning and Defending the Future), set out the working doctrine of the World Liberty Congress. The Playbook is not a recipe, and it is not finished. It is the accumulated discipline of more than sixty countries, written by activists for activists, drawing on the contributions of dissidents, exiles, scholars, technologists, lawyers, religious leaders, donors, and former heads of state who have lived through what the next generation will face. It will be revised, updated, and deepened continuously by members on the frontlines. The work begins, every day, in the disciplines these principles teach. The discipline begins again every morning that the struggle continues.

From Vilnius to Berlin, and onward to every capital of every currently unfree land, the network carries the flame of liberty until the day those nations join the family of democracies. Members of the WLC are not asked to memorize the Playbook. They are asked to practice it, debate it, improve it, and use it to do the work that this generation has been called to do.

Fuerza y fe.

World Liberty Congress · Playbook for Liberty