

Atlas Network's review of the worldwide freedom movement

# FREEDOM'S CHAMPION

SUMMER 2025

# LIVE

# FREE

**Milton  
Friedman**

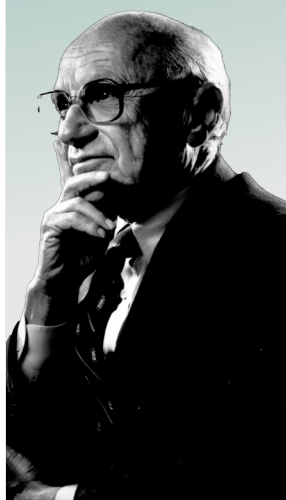
The Freedom  
Movement's  
Happy Warrior  
Continues  
to Inspire



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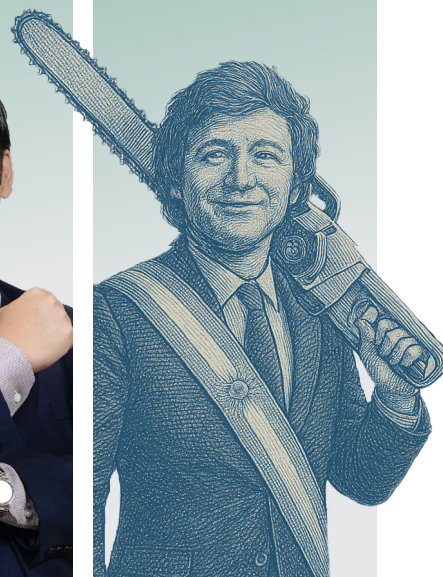
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**Cover image:** Milton Friedman's legacy—from economic theories to his support for institutions such as Atlas Network—proves more important and influential than ever. Turn to page four to read more. Cover by Steven Green



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# FREEDOM'S CHAMPION

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## Editor's Note

*Freedom's Champion* is a semiannual magazine published by Atlas Network, the leading organization for advancing liberty worldwide. Atlas Network partners with more than 500 independent think tanks and do-tanks in more than 100 countries. Each issue of *Freedom's Champion* puts a spotlight on the achievements of organizations in this network, and celebrates the unsung heroes who devote time and resources to the critical cause of building a freer future. In this special edition, we also look at the enduring influence of Milton Friedman and the underappreciated role he played in the founding of Atlas Network.

Clint Pagurko  
*Editor-in-Chief, Freedom's Champion*



# Is Milton Friedman Running the Show?

By Brad Lips

Despite claims that “Milton Friedman isn’t running the show anymore,” his ideas about free markets, inflation, and individual liberty continue to shape public debate and inspire the global freedom movement. Milton Friedman’s legacy—from economic theories to his support for institutions such as Atlas Network—proves more important and influential than ever.

In April 2020, then presidential candidate Joe Biden told *Politico*, “Milton Friedman isn’t running the show anymore.” Biden advocated for, and eventually signed into law, massive economic stimulus packages—first, to counteract the economic slowdown that accompanied COVID restrictions, and then, to prepare for the threat of climate change. These came on top of other multi-trillion-dollar bills signed in 2020 before the end of President Trump’s first term.

The late economist Milton Friedman was famous for warning about the inflationary effects of government stimulus. So the dismissive line from the *Politico* article was resurrected by Biden’s critics when inflation reared its head—just as Friedman would have predicted. Sound economics always gets the last laugh.

↑ A portrait of Milton Friedman by Robert Hannah, Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, 2004



“[Inflation is] always and everywhere a result of too much money, of a more rapid increase in the quantity of money than in output. Inflation in the United States is made in Washington and nowhere else.” Perhaps you’ve seen this Friedman quote in your social media feed—or others explaining the dangers of protectionist tariffs.

No 20th-century economist gets mentioned more often today than Friedman. According to data from Talkwalker, a consumer intelligence platform that uses social listening technology, Friedman has been referenced more in the past year than John Maynard Keynes, Paul Samuelson, and John Kenneth Galbraith combined. His social media presence also far surpasses that of fellow free-market thinkers such as F.A. Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Gary Becker, and Murray Rothbard.

But, of course, Friedman was quite a bit more than a social media influencer.

Raised by Jewish immigrant parents in Rahway, New Jersey, Friedman studied economics at Rutgers, the University of Chicago, and Columbia University. He met Rose Director while at the University of Chicago and they married six years later. Sixty years after that, they co-authored a memoir, *Two Lucky People* (1998), about their lives and their work together.

The University of Chicago was Friedman’s academic home from 1946 to 1976, the year he won the Nobel Prize in Economics. By that time, he had revolutionized macroeconomics by demonstrating the fallibility of Keynesian principles such as the Phillips Curve. He had

[Inflation is] always and everywhere a result of too much money, of a more rapid increase in the quantity of money than in output. Inflation in the United States is made in Washington and nowhere else.



↑ Milton Friedman attended Atlas Network’s 25th Anniversary celebration in 2006, and is greeted here by guest of honor John Stossel and Atlas Network board member Andrea Rich.

shown, in his books with Anna Schwartz, that the Great Depression had been misunderstood; its severity and duration was due principally to bad policy at the Federal Reserve. As an advisor to President Nixon, Friedman helped end the draft and create an all-volunteer military. As an advisor to President Reagan, he cheered on the reduction in marginal tax rates that boosted economic growth and living standards.

Friedman’s contributions to economics and public policy were visible to a public audience because his articles in *Newsweek* appealed to readers’ common sense as he argued against price controls, cronyism, and redistributionist economic schemes.

After Friedman relocated from the University of Chicago to the Hoover Institution in 1977, he began work on *Free To Choose*, an enormously popular 10-part television series that appeared on public television in 1980.

“*Free To Choose* was a phenomenon,” explained Rob Chatfield, who now runs *Free to Choose Network*, a non-profit that creates videos to make classical liberal ideas accessible to a popular audience. “Young people might not appreciate it today, but once upon a time, you could choose from only four broadcast television stations, and you had no remote control. So, if a program captured your attention for two minutes, there was a good chance you’d watch for an entire hour. *Free To Choose* made a huge impact on a huge audience in 1980 because its message resonated with the challenges of the times, and because Milton Friedman was a captivating messenger. Milton put things in terms that ordinary Americans could understand, while standing toe-to-toe with the brightest intellectuals.”

Proving that a mass audience could be persuaded to embrace free-market ideas by a video program is an underappreciated part of Friedman’s legacy. Chatfield noted, “But Milton was a skeptic at first.



He figured if someone could be influenced by watching one hour of television, they would just as easily change their mind with the next broadcast. It was producer Bob Chitester who convinced Milton of the impact that video could have, and now, decades later, many organizations in the freedom movement have put video communications at the center of their outreach efforts. I don't know if that would have happened without the example of Bob and Milton's collaboration on *Free To Choose*."

Would there even be a networked global freedom movement without Milton Friedman?

Milton and Rose Friedman were neighbors of Atlas Network's founder, Antony Fisher, and his wife, Dorian, when *Free To Choose* was first broadcast in 1980. By then, Fisher's first think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs in London, had grown famous for its inspiration on the recently elected prime minister Margaret Thatcher. Other groups that Fisher was involved in getting launched—Manhattan Institute and Fraser Institute, among them—were gaining influence too. In a letter dated May 8, 1980, Friedman reflected on the success of Fisher's "intellectual entrepreneurship" and wrote, "Any extension of institutes of this kind around the world is certainly something ardently to be desired." It was a letter Fisher used for fundraising during the first years of Atlas Network.

It is worth noting that Friedman had attended the first meeting of what became the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) at F.A. Hayek's invitation in 1947, and he called that the beginning of his active engagement in the world of ideas beyond a university setting. The idea of Atlas Network complementing the MPS's global network of scholars with a vision of a global network of think tanks, resonated with Fried-



↑ Milton and Rose Friedman, pictured with the Atlas Network staff of 2001, celebrating the organization's 20th Anniversary.

man, who was thinking deeply at the time about how nations can improve their public policies.

There is a famous passage in Friedman's introduction to the 1982 edition of *Capitalism and Freedom*.

Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.

I wish that Friedman had elaborated on a logical follow-up question: what's the best way to keep our ideas "alive and available" as he recommends? I imagine that Antony Fisher's dream of a global network of think tanks promoting liberty was in his mind.

Of course, others have projected something very different onto Friedman's observation that the opportunity for policy change is greatest when a crisis has shown that existing policies don't work. Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* alleges that Friedman conspired to create crises to ease the implementation of economic liberalization. She misrepresents a solitary meeting between Friedman and Augusto Pinochet in 1975 to suggest he was an advisor to the Chilean dictator with some level of responsibility for the coup two years prior.

Professor Robert Lawson clarified, "It's simple. Milton Friedman wanted to share sound economics with anyone who would listen. He offered advice to communist regimes in China and the USSR, just as he did to leaders in Chile. You can look at the work I've done with the Economic Freedom of the World (EFW) index as a continuation of that. After all, Milton and Rose inspired the index by teaming up with Fraser Institute founder Mike Walker after a spirited Mont Pelerin Society debate in 1984. They wanted an empirical answer to the question of whether free-

↓ In the *Free to Choose* documentary, Milton Friedman revisited Leonard Read's "I, Pencil" parable (first published in *The Freeman* in 1958) to explain how the institutions of free societies enable the creation of wonders through spontaneous order.





dom was increasing or decreasing—some at MPS said yes and others said no. This led to a series of six Liberty Fund conferences that laid the groundwork for the initial EFW index in 1996 that I co-authored with James Gwartney and Walter Block.”

The *Economic Freedom of the World* report has become a favorite tool for demonstrating the strong correlation between the economic freedom of a country and its level of prosperity. Atlas Network has teamed up with Fraser Institute and local partners in 34 countries to perform Economic Freedom Audits that identify areas ripe for reform based on the report’s methodology.

Where countries are improving in economic freedom, it’s often because the Overton Window has shifted on topics for which Milton Friedman used to present the case for freedom with a smile. Friedman’s 1962 book, *Capitalism and Freedom*, looks in retrospect like a playbook for pro-liberty think tanks, concisely providing a framework for critical public policy issues they would later take up—issues from liberalizing trade to ending rent control to scaling back occupational licensure.

One concept that Friedman championed as early as 1955 was school choice. Robert Enlow is president and CEO of EdChoice, which was founded by Milton and Rose Friedman to promote parental choice of the schools their children attend. Enlow explained, “Milton and Rose saw that it was tragic and ironic that our education system, which was supposed to deliver a common set of values about citizenship to everyone, was instead making social stratification worse. They wanted young Americans to benefit from better education, and they knew that our institutional arrangements around schooling made that unlikely.”

After decades of frustratingly slow progress, school choice policies have gained significant momentum in recent years. Fifteen states now claim to offer universal school choice programs. “It’s not time for a victory lap yet,” noted Enlow. “Having students eligible for school choice is a step forward, but the goal has always been bigger. That is, we want robust markets in education that innovate to serve families. We need to turn the dial up to 11 to support a market in education.”

Whether they work for educational freedom or for other liberties restricted by governments, think tanks connected to Atlas Network are indebted to the intellectual contributions of Milton Friedman.



↑ The cover of a 2006 newsletter marking **Milton and Rose Friedman’s** attendance at Atlas Network’s 25th anniversary gathering and sharing his encouraging words on our growing impact: “You certainly have done a marvelous job expanding the reach of Atlas [Network], of coming close to Antony Fisher’s dream of a worldwide network of think tanks promoting liberty .... In seventy or more countries Atlas [Network] is helping think tanks spread an understanding of free markets or engaged in creating think tanks that will do so. More power to it.”

Milton and Rose last appeared at an Atlas Network event when we celebrated our 25th anniversary in San Francisco on June 22, 2006.

Milton died less than five months later; news of his passing became public just hours before our third annual Freedom Dinner. Think-tank luminaries Ed Crane, Ed Fulner, and Michael Walker were on the program. Each adapted their assignment—offering a Toast to Freedom—into a toast “to Freedom and to Friedman!”

Ed Crane of the Cato Institute tied his remarks back to the importance of a freedom movement to carry forward, every day, the ideas Milton Friedman espoused so effectively. “Someone asked me, ‘Does Milton’s passing create a void?’ and I said, ‘Well, yeah, it creates a hell of a void. But there are a number of organizations out there that are just as passionately committed to liberty as he was, and he knew that.’ So let me toast one of the organizations that is right at the top of the list: Atlas Network.”

It is satisfying to realize that the work Milton and Rose Friedman conducted in their lifetimes, and the work they helped put in motion through their friendship with Antony and Dorian Fisher, continues to grow. Milton closed his remarks at Atlas Network’s 20th anniversary celebration in 2001 with a prediction: “We have the opportunity to create a freer world, and Atlas Network will play a foremost role in that effort.”

The opportunity that Milton observed—and yes, the responsibility that goes with it—is bigger than ever. Freedom movement aficionados should take this to heart.



# Reflections on The Future of Syria

By Dr. Tom G. Palmer

## The Decline

Syria is located in an area of the world known for conflict, but it had one of the freer economies in the world from the 1930s through 1950s. In 1958, Egypt's dictator, Gamal Abdel Nasser, connived with Syrian military officers to create a political union with Syria called the United Arab Republic. Though blessedly short term, the damage to Syria was enormous. The socialist Ba'ath Party took over power in a coup in 1963, and further nationalization and socialist controls led to a drastic economic decline. General Hafez al-Assad, a prominent member of the Ba'ath Party, was involved in that coup, as well as in another in 1966; he finally seized absolute power in 1970 and aligned the country more clearly with the Soviet Union. As nationalization and state control grew, so too did corruption, cronyism, and the entrenchment of dictatorial rule. The full horror of state power was seen in Hama, where al-Assad's military encircled the city and killed tens of thousands of people in indiscriminate shelling and bombing.

Following Assad's death in 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad, took over control of the state. Despite

some initial hopes for partial liberalization and economic revival, the iron grip of the dictatorship squeezed the space for both free enterprise and free discussion. Declining production in the nationalized oil industry put the state in a more precarious situation and led to even more extortion of private-sector producers. Economic crisis and more grotesque human rights abuses followed.

## The Collapse

The struggling economy and Assad's violent suppression of human rights and freedoms sparked an uprising in 2011. The repression was brutal. The Ba'athist-controlled military, now more clearly a tool of the Assad family, unleashed total war on the Syrian population, which led to the emergence of a multitude of resistance groups and militias, the influx of extremist foreign fighters hoping to build a religious dictatorship on the ruins of Syria, and the very direct intervention of the dictatorships of Russia and of Iran and its Lebanese proxy militia, Hezbollah. To raise money to bolster his regime and pay back Russian debt, Assad took to kidnapping and ransom demands from anyone he thought might have money, in addition to major narcotics trafficking.

The economy shrank from an estimated \$50 billion to less than \$8 billion. Dr. Mazen Derawan, a Syrian-American businessman who recently returned and is promoting free-market reforms, said, “It became more and more difficult to run a business. Assad activated the ministry of finance and customs authorities to extort money from businesses, pressuring people to pay them or they would delay their [shipments] or disrupt their business. . . . I had to go through seven checkpoints just to get from my home to my factory. I could have been kidnapped at any of those checkpoints. At one point I was sleeping in the factory to minimize mobility as a way of protecting myself.”

Eventually, Mazen was forced to flee the country; he could return secretly every few months to check on his business. Assad’s henchmen kidnapped one of his employees, put him in a dungeon, and demanded \$3 million in cash from the company to release him. As Mazen said, “We didn’t have that much money, so they kidnapped two more employees and demanded \$400,000 to release them. We ended up paying that because we didn’t want to exacerbate the problem, but the original employee stayed in prison for two years. They stripped him of his civil and legal rights.”

After more than a decade of internal conflict with various Syrian forces, in December 2024, Assad was forced to flee Damascus for Moscow and the safety of his sponsor, the Russian dictator Vladimir Putin who had bombed Aleppo and other areas into rubble to support Assad’s grip on power. Thousands and thousands of unjustly held people, including Mazen’s employee, were finally released. The collapse of the oppressive regime has inspired hope for a new future. But transitioning to a free society with a free economy will not be easy—as my decades of experience of working with partners to realize legal and economic reforms has taught me.

## The Potential

*The Economic Freedom of the World Report*, which is published by the Fraser Institute, measures economic freedom in 165 countries. It’s based on five measurable variables: size of government; legal system and property rights; sound, stable money; freedom to trade internationally; and regulation that interferes with voluntary exchange.

Each country receives a score and a ranking; the top-ranked countries are Hong Kong, Singapore, Switzerland, New Zealand, and so on. Countries



↑ In January, a contingent of Atlas Network staff members and local allies visited Syria to build connections with the nascent freedom movement in the country and present the ideas of free markets and a free society. Pictured here is a part of that contingent (left to right): **Dr. Tom Palmer**, **Dr. Mazen Derawan**, **Dr. Nohu El Harmouzi** (director of the Arab Center for Research), and **Dr. Mohamed Tamaldou** (former deputy prime minister of Morocco).

↑ **Dr. Palmer**, **Dr. Patrick Mardini** (CEO of the Lebanese Institute for Market Studies), **Dr. Tamaldou**, and **Dr. El Harmouzi** listen in as local residents ask tough questions of representatives of the new government

are ranked from the most free to the least free. After many years of socialism and cronyism, tyranny and dictatorship, where is Syria?

Syria is third from the bottom, followed only by Sudan and Zimbabwe. Let’s compare the third highest and third lowest in the degree of economic freedom with the results. If we compare per capita GDP per person, adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), in the two countries, we see that in 2022 Switzerland had US\$90,138, and Syria had US\$4,772. (The numbers are starker when comparing current US dollars, with Switzerland at US\$93,245 compared to Syria at US\$1,051.) The relationship between economic freedom and per capita output and income is quite clear and remarkable. Countries grow rich not because of geography or resources (Syria has a coastline, while Switzerland is landlocked; Syria has oil,





while Switzerland has mountains; etc.). They grow rich—in terms of the ability of the people to consume more, and thus to live longer, healthier, and safer lives—when they enjoy the institutions of freedom: the rule of law; protection of property in life, liberty, and estate; freedom of exchange both domestically and internationally; democratically accountable government; and the general presumption of liberty, rather than the presumption of state power over every decision in one's life.

We often hear from socialist ideologues that if you have economic freedom, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. We can check the data. The percentage of national income that goes to the poorest 10% of any population fluctuates around roughly 2.5% across all countries. To put it directly: if you're going to be poor, it's better to be poor in Switzerland than in Syria. A poor person in Switzerland lacks a new iPhone. A poor person in Syria lacks potable water, sufficient nutrition, and saline solution to prevent deadly dehydration from cholera-induced dysentery.

Freedom is about so much more than just money. Money is just a means to acquire what we desire in life. Sometimes it's a useful proxy measure of wealth. The evidence shows that more economic freedom leads to healthier and longer lives. In other words, health and long life are the gifts of economic freedom. Economic freedom enables you to see your children grow to adulthood and to hold your grandchildren, or even your great grandchildren, in your arms. It means seeing your children go to school, rather than to the fields. It means not living in fear of where the next meal for your family will come from.

Economic freedom brings more than just more and better consumption. It brings peace, as well. With more economic freedom comes greater willingness to live together in peace, as people realize mutual benefit through voluntary trade. When people exchange, rather than fight, to obtain what they want, the gain of one person does not have to come at a loss for others; as U.S. President John F. Kennedy famously said, "A rising tide lifts all boats." Economic freedom also reduces corruption. As the involuntary interactions between citizen and state are reduced,



↖ Dr. El Harmouzi and Dr. Derwan tour a now-bustling market in Damascus

↑ Dr. Palmer speaks at the Damascus Chamber of Industry

the opportunities for state officials to extort favors also decline. When you don't have to beg for permission, state officers can't shake you down.

### The Transition

Transitioning to a free state with a free-market economy will not be easy. Decades of government interventionism have generated a downward spiral. Revenge comes easily to people who have been wronged for decades. But following the collapse of the Assad regime, there is the potential for social reconciliation, prosperity, and harmony through a free-market revival.

Atlas Network is excited to support a newly established pro-liberty think tank, the Free Syria Center. Dr. Derawan is one of the founders; he is joined by a remarkable group of academics, analysts, lawyers, writers, and entrepreneurs. The Free Syria Center aims to "provide innovative scientific and practical approaches and solutions in order to lay the foundations" for a new legal system and institutions with "constructive discussion aimed at establishing an inclusive and dynamic Syrian economy that achieves the desired sustainable development and a decent life for the Syrian people."

The initiative of Syrians is necessary to free Syria from decades of oppression and poverty. No outsiders can resolve the problems for them. The Free Syria Center is working to generate broad public understanding of how a rising tide can lift all boats, regardless of sect, language, or ethnicity, and to work with legislators and policymakers to navigate the paths of reform that can lead a pluralistic and independent Syria to shared prosperity, security of life and possessions, democratically accountable government, the rule of law, and peace.

Dr. Tom G. Palmer is executive vice president of International Programs at Atlas Network and the George M. Yeager Chair for Advancing Liberty.



# Make Worldwide Freedom Part of Your Legacy

Since 1981, Atlas Network has helped organizations around the world unshackle the power of individual liberty, free enterprise, and voluntary cooperation. This is a multi-generational project, and we need your help to carry it forward.

Atlas Network is grateful to those who have already become a part of the Fisher Legacy Society, making their mark on the future of individual rights and economic freedom around the world.

Anonymous  
Brad and Stephanie Lips  
Brian Huber  
Bruce Jacobs  
Charles Albers  
Connor Boyack  
Dan Grossman  
David Boaz  
Debbi Gibbs  
Deroy Murdock  
Dorian Fisher  
Edward Hochman  
Francis and Linda Whetsone  
George and Marilyn Pearson  
George Hesse  
George Lengvari, Jr.  
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Scan here to  
find out how  
you can create  
a legacy for  
freedom







## ALUMNI IN FOCUS

*Atlas Network partners in their own words*

# Anton Rizki

CEO, Center for Indonesian Policy Studies

Raised across Iran, Indonesia, and Europe, the CEO of the Center for Indonesian Policy Studies shifted from early leftist views to championing free markets—shaped by global experiences, private sector work, and mentorship through Atlas Network.

My professional journey began long before I ever imagined becoming a CEO of a think tank. I was born in Tehran, Iran, in 1981 during a time of profound political upheaval, the Iranian Revolution. My father, a diplomat, was stationed there, which molded my earliest memories of political complexity. As a result, my early life was shaped by diverse experiences that would profoundly influence my understanding of society, democracy, and individual freedom.

At five years old, I returned to Jakarta and was struck by the stark differences between Iran and Indonesia. Despite the revolutionary turmoil in Iran, the country appeared more developed compared to Indonesia at the time. My young eyes immediately noticed the widespread poverty in Indonesia. The country was under the authoritarian Suharto regime, known as the New Order. I witnessed elections for the first time but quickly understood these were not genuine democratic processes. Suharto would always emerge victorious.

My childhood travels continued, and a move to Brussels exposed me to another model of society, one more prosperous and seemingly freer. These childhood observations of Iran, Indonesia, and Europe became foundational in solidifying my understanding of individual freedom and democracy and how these principles are crucial to creating a free and prosperous society.

In 1998, when the New Order era ended and Indonesia began political reforms and democratization, I was naturally drawn to political science. Like many of my contemporaries,





I initially held predominantly leftist views, believing government was the primary agent of development and social change. This perspective was common in a society where liberalism was not well rooted. The prevalent narrative in Indonesia was deeply skeptical of the private sector, viewing multinational corporations and capitalism as tools that had supported Suharto's oppressive regime.

My perspective began to shift dramatically when I went back to Belgium to study. While seeking a part-time job to finance my education, I joined a small startup with an innovative food delivery concept. It was there that I had an epiphany: entrepreneurs, with their ideas and innovative spirit, could create opportunities and generate income in ways government intervention could not.

After completing my studies, my subsequent work in public affairs consulting further solidified this idea. I helped corporations navigate business-society issues, corporate responsibility, and sustainability issues. I began to understand the nuanced role of the private sector in driving economic growth and how misguided government policies could significantly hinder progress. I realized that free markets and capitalism weren't inherently problematic but were, in fact, significant contributors to unprecedented global economic prosperity.

After nearly 15 years in the private sector, I found an opportunity to reconnect with my roots in political science by joining the Center for Indonesian Policy Studies (CIPS). This was more than a career change—it was an intellectual journey into classical liberal ideas that resonated with my lived

↓ Anton met with **Bona Kusuma**, assistant deputy for Agricultural Facilities and Infrastructure, to discuss ways to improve Indonesia's fertilizer subsidy scheme.



↵ Anton presented CIPS' Policy Communique at the closing of DigiWeek 2024, highlighting key insights from a week-long discussion on building a responsible and inclusive digital economy. DigiWeek is CIPS' annual flagship event that brings together government, business, and academic representatives to discuss policies shaping the digital landscape.

↑ Representing CIPS, Anton joined the inaugural Future Foods Forum—a cross-sector platform to foster collaboration in transforming Indonesia's food system. The event brought together businesses, academics, communities, and government institutions.

experiences but which I had not previously examined philosophically.

Atlas Network played a pivotal role in this transition. Atlas Network's mentorship program, where I had the chance to have Parth J. Shah from the Centre for Civil Society in India as my mentor, was transformative. My interactions with Parth helped me understand the intricacies of managing and building a think tank while deepening my comprehension of classical liberal concepts and market-oriented policy approaches.

The Executive Accelerator program further enhanced my strategic thinking, offering opportunities to learn from and share experiences with think-tank leaders from around the world. The program also gave me the opportunity to reflect deeply about myself and my leadership style, motivating me to push further and create more impact in what we do. More importantly, it made me feel welcomed into the broader liberty movement—a community dedicated to promoting individual freedom and economic opportunity.

Today, as CEO of the Center for Indonesian Policy Studies, I continue to learn and grow. My journey has been a constant reminder that our understanding of the world is never fixed. It evolves through experiences, conversations, and a willingness to challenge our own assumptions. If there's anything my path has taught me, it's the importance of remaining curious, listening to different perspectives, and always being open to new ideas.



ATLAS NETWORK PARTNERS SPUR REFORM

# Sharpening Milei's Chainsaw

It's striking what's happening in Argentina, but it's no surprise. For decades, Argentinians were forced to struggle under one of the world's most unpredictable and unstable economies. But over the last year, a wave of free-market and liberty-inspired reforms have taken hold.

Record-setting inflation is receding, the country has budget surpluses for the first time in over a decade, housing is plentiful and affordable, prices have stabilized, and economic and financial experts—perennially bearish on the country's outlook—are now optimistic.

While remarkable, these victories are the predictable outcomes when free markets, economic liberty, and personal freedoms are allowed to flourish.

President Javier Milei's election has been the catalyst for these reforms. But numerous Atlas Network partners have been laying the foundation for Argentina's transformation for decades. The hope that permeates the country today is a result of that work.

For generations, Argentina was controlled by "Peronism," a unique mix of statism and unionism ushered in by President Juan Perón post-World War II. In the early 1900s, Argentina was one of the world's



most free and prosperous countries. But decades of Peronist politicians, corruption, and failed leadership pushed it towards record poverty, hunger, joblessness, and the brink of hyperinflation.

A year of free-market reforms, however, have begun to turn the tide.

Arguably, the country's most significant achievement has been bringing inflation under control. When Milei was elected, Argentina's annual inflation rate was over 200%, it peaked at almost 300% in May 2024.

But thanks to necessary reforms, Argentini-ans finally have some stability back in their economy.

As the Associated Press explains, "One year ago, Argentine supermarkets were marking price increases on an almost daily basis and middle-class families tried to spend their rapidly depreciating pesos as quickly as they got them. [...] On taking power, Milei slashed energy and transportation subsidies, laid off tens of thousands of government workers, froze public infrastructure projects and imposed [state workers] wage and pension freezes below inflation. [Because of those reforms], inflation slowed from a monthly rate of 25.5% in December 2023 to just 2.7% in October—its lowest level in three years."

Although these policies were implemented within months of the new administration, the Atlas Network partner organization Fundación Libertad y Progreso (LyP) worked for years to lay their foundation. LyP has regularly published its Policy Handbook to provide guidance for Argentine taxpayers, the media, and policymakers on ways to make the government affordable and the state prosperous. The handbook, now in its fifth edition, steadily moved the Overton Window on what inflation-reducing reforms were needed and more importantly "realistic." Now, many of them are helping bring the country back from the brink of hyperinflation.

LyP also launched a campaign to engage low-income Argentini-ans struggling with job insecurity, high food prices, and limited access to quality education. They conducted surveys to better understand which issues most impacted these groups and produced engaging videos to show them the free-market solutions. All this empowered everyday Argentini-ans with ways to engage lawmakers and push reforms through Congress.

In addition to taming inflation, the new administration has dramatically downsized and optimized the government. Over the course of 2024, the adminis-

tration slashed the number of government ministries from 21 down to 9 and closed over 200 government offices that were either duplicative or better suited for the private sector. These reforms all led to the country's first budget surplus in over 10 years.

Burdens on everyday Argentini-ans have also been cut. A massive tax on imports called the PAIS tax was allowed to sunset (a rarity for any government), and food import laws were changed to make it easier and cheaper to import food.

Asociación Argentina de Contribuyentes (AAC) is another Atlas Network partner that's been instrumental in reducing the government's burden on taxpayers. Their efforts have received the support of Milei, who was an early backer of AAC's strategies even before he took office. In addition to pushing for tax cuts, AAC helped prevent tax increases on healthcare, food, and education that were being pushed by Peronist politicians. AAC also united a multipartisan coalition to eliminate the monthly tax on credit card holders in Buenos Aires. This tax cut amounted to \$300 million in annual savings for three million Argentini-ans and resulted in Asociación Argentina de Contribuyentes winning Atlas Network's 2024 Latin America Liberty Award.

Finally, thanks to Fundación Libertad, a Rosario-based public policy institute and Atlas Network partner organization, many aspects of the country's

↓ **Jonas Torrico** and **Pablo Dono** of Asociación Argentina de Contribuyentes, winner of Atlas Network's 2024 Latin America Liberty Award







↑ **Agustín Etchebarne**, managing director of Fundación Libertad y Progreso, speaks at Atlas Network's Latin America Liberty Forum 2025

labor law (which can be notoriously complex and expensive) have finally been reformed.

For years, Argentina required all employers to register their workers as if they were full-time employees, even if a worker was on contract, part time, or temporary. While requirements like these might have offered some protections for workers, they also made it harder for businesses to hire and forced companies to hire people off the books. In the first quarter of 2024 alone, 37% of the Argentine workforce and 57% of workers aged 18–25 worked jobs

↓ **Marcos Falcone**, a project manager at Fundación Libertad, speaks at a workshop at Latin America Liberty Forum 2024



that were off the books. And even though many businesses were forced to hire workers informally, employers who failed to register employees (even if those workers weren't technically employees) were at risk of being fined, arrested, and even convicted.

But thanks to Fundación Libertad, employers now have more flexibility to work with contractors and freelancers without having to register them as "employees." Employers won't face possible prison time for failing to properly register actual employees. And labor costs such as required severance payments and the "probationary" period for new employees have all been lowered. By reducing both the number of regulations and the associated punishments for the remainder, these reforms have made it easier to build businesses and hire both formal employees and contractors, setting the stage for a growing economy.

For too long, owning a home, becoming an entrepreneur, or simply earning a reliable wage were fantasies for everyday Argentinians. Today, that's changed.

Marcos Falcone, a project manager at Fundación Libertad, explains, "Milei has been able to balance the budget in a way no one thought possible, and we have seen the largest spending cuts in history that did not coincide with hyperinflation or a default."

Or as Aldo Abram, executive director of LyP describes, the policy achievements that took place in 2024 "will be remembered as a historic turning point for Argentina."

These reforms have not come without challenges and pains. Peronism spent decades wrecking Argentina, and that won't be repaired in a year. Unemployment is still high and, despite the progress, so is inflation. And it's been a struggle for the people who (because of Peronists' false promises) have been sucked into reliance on government handouts and jobs.

But the future for Argentina is bright and real.

Argentina's turnaround is just one of many examples of what can happen thanks to the work of Atlas Network's partner organizations. The success of AAC, LyP, and Fundación Libertad has set an inspiring example for civil society leaders around the world who are dedicated to tackling the challenges of runaway inflation, excessive government spending, overregulation, and other anti-freedom policies and practices. By building connections between our partners, Atlas Network helps each of them become more effective, efficient, and ambitious than ever before, creating a freer and more prosperous world.



# The Censorship Arms Race

By Jacob Mchangama



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Jacob Mchangama is the executive director of The Future of Free Speech and a research professor at Vanderbilt University. He is also a Senior Fellow at The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) and the author of *Free Speech: A History From Socrates to Social Media*.



“It is a universal truth that the loss of liberty at home is to be charged to provisions against danger, real or pretended, from abroad.” This prophetic warning came from James Madison in 1798 as the young American republic saw a rise in reactionary crackdowns in response to the French Revolution. Passed in the name of national security, the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 struck at the heart of the very liberties Madison helped enshrine in the Bill of Rights. Alarmed by the rush to repress dissent in the name of national security, Madison saw clearly how external threats—whether real wars or political panics—often became justifications for silencing critics and curtailing fundamental freedoms.

Madison’s insights remain strikingly relevant today in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the escalating Israel-Palestine conflict. Governments around the world—authoritarian and democratic alike—have used war and instability to justify sweeping new limits on freedom of expression. Protest bans, media blackouts, blasphemy laws, and vague disinformation rules have proliferated under the banner of preserving public order or combating extremism. Once again, free speech has been caught in the crossfire.

The battlefield has also shifted into the digital realm. Social media platforms are no longer hailed as tools to give voice to the voiceless but are now

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→ **Jacob Mchangama** delivers a Cornerstone Talk at Atlas Network’s Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner 2024





seen, along with new generative AI platforms, as threats to democracy that require preemptive control. The story of how we got here is not one of a single villain or ideology but a tale of democratic backsliding, elite panic, and assaults on dissent, both online and in the real world.

### The Free Speech Recession Escalates

A few days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the European Union banned Russian state-sponsored media outlets, Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik, from broadcasting to the EU. Officials cited Russia's systematic attempts to manipulate democracies through disinformation, requiring search engines like Google to delist all search results from Sputnik or RT and mandating social media companies prevent users from sharing content from the blacklisted propaganda outlets.

In response to the EU's ban, Russia cut its citizens' access to Western state-sponsored media, such as the BBC and Deutsche Welle, which the Kremlin accused of spreading "false information" and "anti-Russian" sentiments. As of July 2024, more than three hundred people—among them prominent journalists, human rights defenders, and opposition politicians like fierce Putin critic Vladimir Kara-Murza—had been arrested in Russia for "dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Russian Armed Force," a crime punishable by up to fifteen years in prison under a new provision added to the criminal code shortly after the invasion.

Across all these efforts, our goal remains clear: to restore a resilient, principled, and global culture of free speech in the digital age.

Soon, Europe opened up another front in the war against Russian disinformation with the adoption of the Digital Services Act (DSA), which significantly increased the European Commission's powers to regulate online communication. The DSA aimed to replace the supposed Wild West of the internet with a rules-based digital order, where democratic institutions, not private tech companies and their billionaire owners, were the ultimate arbiters of the public square. Online platforms are required to

quickly assess and remove illegal content, such as hate speech and other vaguely defined concerns, or face fines of up to 6% of their global revenue. The law also empowers the Commission to pressure companies into banning or blocking content that may be seen as unfavorable by bureaucrats in Brussels.

Free speech has been caught in the crossfire—again—as governments use war, instability, and vague disinformation laws to justify sweeping new limits on expression.

The largest search engines and social media platforms are also required to assess and mitigate "systemic risks," which include vague and undefined categories of "disinformation" and the "manipulation of electoral processes." As of now, what this means is anybody's guess. But there are good reasons to fear that platforms will come under pressure to remove even legal content that the European Commission views as constituting "disinformation" or "foreign propaganda" or over-remove content to avoid massive fines.

In the United States, the First Amendment has prevented the federal government from imposing the same kind of overt political control of social media platforms that the EU's DSA aims for. Nevertheless, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Biden administration pressured social media platforms to remove public health misinformation through a practice known as "jawboning," in which the government leverages its influence to encourage platforms to remove content they are not legally required to delete. The Supreme Court declined to rule on the merits of a complaint against this practice, but it suggested that plaintiffs will need to clear a high bar to prove that communications between the government and social media platforms have violated the First Amendment.

More worrying free speech developments followed after the 2024 U.S. election, when Donald Trump secured a second term as president. His appointee and current FCC chairman, Brendan Carr, announced investigations into ABC for its DEI practices and CBS for various kinds of reporting.



Meanwhile, Trump's libel lawsuit against CBS is ongoing, while the Supreme Court dismissed a Trump ally's effort to reverse a landmark decision—*New York Times v. Sullivan*—which shields newspapers from libel suits pursued by the government.

### How to Fight Back

With democracies abandoning classical liberal values, emboldened authoritarians, increased political polarization, and collapsing trust in institutions, it is easy to despair. But there is reason for hope. Recently, widespread protests in Turkey, Serbia, Hungary, and Georgia have made a valiant effort to push back on regimes that punish dissent, although they, too, have been met with retaliatory crackdowns and arrests of protestors, both online and in the streets.

We are not just diagnosing the free speech recession; we are tracking it, analyzing it, and fighting back with data, tools, and policy blueprints. We have produced a suite of high-impact reports and resources to arm advocates, lawyers, and lawmakers with the tools to understand and counter the forces eroding free expression.

Despite this democratic backsliding, a recent global survey produced by my organization—*The Future of Free Speech*—found that respondents from both Hungary and Venezuela were among the most supportive of free speech among 33 countries surveyed, not just in principle but in practice. We are not just diagnosing the free speech recession; we are tracking it, analyzing it, and fighting back with data, tools, and policy blueprints. We have produced a suite of high-impact reports and resources to arm advocates, lawyers, and lawmakers with the tools to understand and counter the forces eroding free expression.

For instance, we recently mapped 217 legal developments across 22 democracies and found nearly 80% were speech-restrictive. From criminal defamation laws in Chile to sweeping online speech regulation in the EU, our findings show how censorship is creeping into open societies—

and how international human rights norms offer a critical path forward.

We have also investigated how platforms are shaping public discourse. One report tracked the expanding scope of hate speech policies across eight social media platforms, showing how vague rules often silence minority speech. Another found that in France, Germany, and Sweden, up to 99.7% of deleted Facebook and YouTube comments were legal, raising concerns about over-removal in the wake of sweeping digital regulations. While concerns about its threat to democracy have been overblown, our review of generative AI policies found sweeping, ill-defined restrictions on controversial content, raising urgent questions about information access in the AI era.

But we aren't just highlighting threats—we are focused on finding resilient solutions that empower individuals to harness the power of free speech to address societal harms. Through toolkits and trainings, we are arming practitioners, students, and the public with proven counterspeech methods like debunking, pre-bunking, amplifying alternative viewpoints, and fostering empathy to combat hate speech and disinformation.

We are also working with researchers to create a “prosocial media” ecosystem—one that treats users as citizens capable of democratic engagement, not just data points to be mined or manipulated. Inspired by approaches used in Taiwan and community fact-checking models, this vision reimagines platforms around inclusive dialogue and collective problem-solving rather than outrage and division.

By partnering with Atlas Network, we are able to connect with classical liberal organizations in more than 100 countries that want to do something about the decline of free expression amidst war and widespread democratic backsliding. We look forward to working alongside fellow think tanks and civil society organizations to push back against anti-speech policies and to create environments where the right to free speech is valued and respected.

Across all these efforts, our goal remains clear: to restore a resilient, principled, and global culture of free speech in the digital age. That starts with understanding the threats—and arming those who care about freedom with the facts they need to defend it.



A portrait of Medeni Sungur, a man with a beard and short brown hair, wearing a dark brown blazer over a white shirt. He is standing with his arms crossed, looking directly at the camera. The background is a solid red color with a pattern of small white circles.

## SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

# Medeni Sungur

## CEO, DIGIMAR INSTITUTE

Medeni Sungur is CEO of the Atlas Network partner organization Digital Media and Research Institute (DIGIMAR Institute), which focuses on reaching Turkey's youth with the ideas of liberty and free markets through engaging content.

Medeni is a graduate of Think Tank MBA, a program previously offered by Atlas Network Academy. He credits this training with revolutionizing his approach to being involved in the liberty movement and his decision to give back by becoming an Atlas Network donor.

**Freedom's Champion:** How did you get involved in the liberty movement?

**Medeni Sungur:** In 2008, I was a freshman in college and really interested in theoretical ideas. I was a bit of a nerd at the time, and I stumbled into this other group of young people from elite universities in Istanbul who were coming together in different cafes to talk about things that I could not find discussed at my own university or in my own political theory classes—like Mises and Hayek. We were really deeply discussing Austrian economics, spontaneous order, Popper's epistemology—all the ideas that we couldn't find, especially in our freshman year, in our universities.

So I started going to these discussions, and from there I came across an event called Liberty School, put together by what at the time was probably the only classical liberal organization in Turkey. It was a small event, with maybe 50 or 60 students like me who wanted to talk about the history of political thought. The organization was based in Ankara, but they were organizing this event to draw in young and ambitious students and introduce them to the ideas of classical liberalism.

I met another student there who I became friends with, then I figured out there was a small, independent group of students that were coming together in Istanbul to discuss these ideas. I joined them, and from time to time we would use the Friedrich Naumann Foundation office to organize small events. It sounds like an underground club for non-mainstream economics, but we weren't secretive; there just were very few people like us who were deeply interested in ideas. We had a group of about ten people, and we called ourselves the "3H Movement,"





each “H” representing one of the Turkish words for “liberty,” “rule of law,” and “tolerance.”

**FC:** How were you introduced to Atlas Network?

**Medeni:** The secretary-general of the organization that put together the Liberty Schools introduced me to Tom Palmer. Tom has become one of the primary impacts and drivers in my life—early on as someone who is in the freedom movement and later as a mentor and a friend. Both his intellectual grasp and his humility have had a huge influence on me.

About a year later, in 2009, Tom invited me to attend Liberty Forum, back when it was held in Washington, D.C. It was actually my first transatlantic flight. I met more people in the freedom movement from around the world and became friends with many of them.

After a time, I graduated both from university and from the 3H Movement and went into the startup world, but I kept my foot in the liberty movement, and I kept attending Liberty Forums as a young business owner.

Eventually, I found my way back to the movement. I wanted to be involved in changing the course of my country, so I became one of the co-founders of Turkey’s first classical liberal policy think tank. Atlas Network Academy’s Think Tank MBA was a huge part of making that possible.



↩ **Medeni** takes part in a Think Tank MBA workshop

↑ **Medeni** speaks on a panel at Atlas Network’s Europe Liberty Forum 2022

**FC:** How did Atlas Network Academy impact your role in the freedom movement?

**Medeni:** Think Tank MBA is the single best training I’ve ever taken, and it changed the course of my life early on. I was in the 2013 cohort, and since then I have founded two liberty organizations in Turkey, thanks to the know-how I gained in that program. I am still actively using that know-how to run my organization, contribute to the organizations I’m on the board of, and design effective liberty-advancing programs. I still retain the amazing friendships I made there. I can think of few other worthy contributions that would personally satisfy me so much. Atlas Network Academy is a force that needs to keep on advancing.

**FC:** Why did you decide to donate to Atlas Network and become an Atlas Club member?

**Medeni:** I’m part of a lot of different networks right now, all around the world, but none of them ever feel remotely like Atlas Network. The connection I have with people from so many countries, from Indonesia to Brazil, is something unique.

I always joke that I don’t get my inspiration from people like Steve Jobs but rather from my peers who are trying to do what I do, but in much worse conditions, such as Khalid Ramizy from Afghanistan.

The overwhelming majority of my giving goes to support the victims of the recent earthquake in Turkey, but when I had the opportunity to support Atlas Network, I knew I had to take it. Giving back to Atlas Network Academy is the giving that makes me the happiest.

**Supporter Spotlight** highlights some of our most generous and engaged donors and why they stay involved with Atlas Network. Membership in Atlas Club offers special opportunities to donors who invest at least \$1,000 per year, while Fisher Legacy Society provides planned giving options to ensure a strong future for the freedom movement.

Scan the code to discover how you can get involved:





WHY ATLAS NETWORK SUPPORTERS WERE RIGHT ALL ALONG

# A Reckoning *for* Foreign Aid

By Matt Warner



→ Mary Ayoub, a South Sudanese entrepreneur who benefitted from Atlas Network's support for a local partner's work advancing women's property rights.

Foreign aid has often failed by undermining local self-determination, but Atlas Network argues that true localization—empowering local leaders to drive change—is a more effective and dignified path to lasting development.

The late Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène, whose stories shed light on everyday injustices in post-colonial Africa, was once asked whether he thought his work would resonate with European audiences. He said that he hoped that it would, but that this was not his primary concern.

He then delivered the now famous line, “Why be a sunflower and turn towards the sun? I am the sun.”





← **Papa Coriandre**, a Burundian entrepreneur who is one of many to have been helped when an Atlas Network partner organization streamlined the process for small business registration

“Good intentions, and buckets of money, will never be fair compensation for violating a people’s right to shape their own futures.”

His quip reveals something deeper than just the ego of an artist. It’s the human desire for primacy in determining one’s own value. It’s the desire for self-determination.

Foreign aid, in its quest to make the world a better place, has long failed to account for the role of self-determination in human affairs. Criticisms of foreign aid run far deeper than just its violation of self-determination, though many of the unintended consequences can be traced to this original sin.

Foreign aid for development wastes a lot of money while leaving many worse off. It invites corruption, disincentivizes progress, undermines recipient country leaders’ accountability to citizens, contorts development aims around unrelated foreign policy interests, and ultimately fosters resentment and opposition towards donor countries’ liberal ideals.

In response to those injustices, for many years now, a movement of diverse voices has rallied

around a call to “decolonize aid.” The implication of this protest language is clear. Good intentions, and buckets of money, will never be fair compensation for violating a people’s right to shape their own futures.

The remedy has been a push for what is called localization, a concept that promises a major shift in leadership from foreign experts to local voices in honor of self-determination.

For former USAID administrator Samantha Power, localization meant setting, and then never coming close to reaching, funding targets designed to get more USAID dollars to local organizations. But even success on this score would have been inadequate. Funding local organizations is only a first step. Finding the right organizations to fund and then balancing their autonomy with real accountability are critical, too. I remain skeptical that any taxpayer-funded agency, subject to political influence as it must be, is well suited to achieve true localization.

I see a drop in foreign aid as an important opportunity for local voices to take a more prominent, independent role in determining their own futures and for private philanthropy to step up its game to support them.

USAID, which was the largest foreign aid agency in the world in absolute dollars spent, has now been shuttered. The large majority of its programs and personnel have been cut, and what remains will be absorbed by the U.S. State Department.



Is this cause for alarm or for celebration? In my view, neither response is quite right. Instead, I see a drop in foreign aid as an important opportunity for local voices to take a more prominent, independent role in determining their own futures and for private philanthropy to step up its game to support them.

Of course, private philanthropy's natural advantages over government-funded aid can be squandered if a robust localization model is not adopted. Localization is not just about who gets funding. It's about who leads the change processes for the results we all seek. Getting localization right means understanding the difference between hiring a contractor and investing in an entrepreneur. In the former case, grantmakers outsource the implementation of plans they control; in the latter case, grantmakers empower the visions of leaders with local knowledge to fuel their own plans.

Atlas Network's model is true localization. We are ready to meet this moment thanks to the generosity of our donors, the scalability of our grantmaking processes, and the impressive capacity that our local partners continue to build.

In *Borom Sarret* (1963, translated as *The Wagoner*), Sembène's camera follows his protagonist as he leaves his wife and child in the morning, taking his horse-drawn cart around Dakar as a taxi for hire. Throughout the day, he suffers a range of abuses at the hands of fraudsters and police, returning home to his hungry family worse off than he started. The short film ends with the wife setting off ominously into the night to earn the family its only meal of the day.

Atlas Network's local partners are tackling, and solving, the institutional problems Sembène featured indirectly in his films. Do we need USAID's \$50 billion budget to meet this moment? No. Our local partners achieve verified results for pennies on the dollar compared to foreign aid largesse. We vet 800 projects a year and select roughly one-third for funding with a typical grant size that is between \$30,000 and \$50,000.

### You can support Atlas Network's ongoing mission!

Scan here to watch  
A Prosperous Future  
is Possible—Burundi.



Scan here to read the  
story: Property Rights  
In The World's Newest  
Country—South Sudan



Scan here to read the  
story: Uplifting A Nation  
With The Freedom To  
Work—Brazil



For that kind of money, you wouldn't think our local partners could, for example, successfully:

- Secure property rights for women in South Sudan
- Ease business licensing in Burundi
- Increase freedom to work in Brazil

But they do. That's the power of localization done right. When our grantees report their success, we do not celebrate ourselves as foreign experts who solved a problem. We, along with our grantees, celebrate the power of freedom to unleash human potential. We marvel at the ingenuity of free people who prove fully capable of ending poverty for themselves.

Transitioning away from foreign aid will be disruptive, but it will be worth it. There is a better way. Atlas Network's supporters have been right about that all along.



When you support Atlas Network, you're investing in today's very best projects for freedom around the globe. You're also investing in tomorrow as we work alongside a growing network to build its capacity to achieve future results. Transitioning away from foreign aid will be disruptive, but it will be worth it. There is a better way. Atlas Network's supporters have been right about that all along.

*Matt Warner is president of Atlas Network and co-author of Development with Dignity: Self-determination, Localization, and the End to Poverty (Routledge, 2022). Get your free paperback copy when you donate \$25 or more at [AtlasNetwork.org/books](https://AtlasNetwork.org/books).*



# A Landmark Victory for Property Rights in Colombia

When laws fail to check the power of government, private property rights are often in danger.

In Colombia, decades of legal uncertainty, government overreach, and internal armed conflict have left millions of its rural citizens without official land titles. Despite these challenges, the Instituto de Ciencia Política Hernán Echavarría Olózaga (ICP) has won a major victory in safeguarding private property rights.

Under socialist President Gustavo Petro, the ideological drive for redistributive land policies has raised serious concerns about the erosion of constitutional guarantees surrounding private property. Expanding the grounds for property forfeiture and bypassing mandatory court oversight, Article 61 of the National Development Plan (NDP) sought to grant the government broad authority to undermine private property rights over land it deemed “underutilized.” Although presented as tools for agricultural reform, such policies posed a direct threat to rural landowners and economic stability.

Carlos Augusto Chacón, executive director of ICP, told Atlas Network that without constitutionally secure land tenure, rural Colombians are at the mercy of powerful forces that don't have their best interests in mind.

“The government is trying to establish a system of central planning for the economy,” Carlos said. “They're trying to impose a model of development, but they also have been trying different ways to take private property rights from the people.”

ICP raised a strong defense of property rights in spite of the huge odds they faced. With support from Atlas Network, their efforts resulted in notable government concessions as well as a decision by the Colombian Constitutional Court rejecting major procedural flaws in the implementation of Article 61. This not only protected landowners' rights but also made a strong statement on the need for openness and democratic debate.

Before ICP's advocacy efforts, rural landowners were ill-prepared to counter government overreach. A widespread lack of understanding about the potential scope of the regulation, and how it could affect their property rights and land titling processes, left them particularly vulnerable to losing ownership and decision-making power over the use of their land.

Recognizing the importance of clearly defined and protected property rights for economic development and individual success, ICP has focused its efforts on fighting for laws that maintain constitutional landowner protections while also promoting a stable investment climate.

In response to the threat posed by Article 61, ICP launched a multidimensional strategy to stop it before it could take effect. The think tank convened expert roundtables to assess the potential consequences of the proposed National Development Plan, bringing together legal scholars, economists, and other stakeholders to examine its likely impact on landowners, the broader rural economy, and related issues. ICP published its analysis and concerns in accessible formats, aiming to inform poli-



cymakers, the media, and the general public about the potential effects of the proposed policy shift.

ICP filed a constitutional challenge, arguing that Article 61 violated due process and property rights. It also submitted formal legal comments to the Ministry of Agriculture, contributing to revisions of the draft decree intended to further regulate and define the scope of Article 61. The Constitutional Court later ruled in favor of the challenge, striking down the contested sections of Article 61 and nullifying the legal basis for the proposed expansion of asset forfeiture powers.

Without constitutionally secure land tenure, rural Colombians are at the mercy of powerful forces that don't have their best interests in mind. ”

ICP's communications campaign earned coverage in more than 20 major media outlets, including Mañanas BLU on Blu Radio—Colombia's most widely listened-to station—amplifying public awareness and prompting responses from key figures like journalist Darcy Quinn and former minister Andrés Valencia.

Additionally, ICP mobilized civil society actors to take part in the public consultation, leading to over 90 formal comments submitted, including input from nearly 20 major business associations. This coordinated response demonstrated broad support for defending constitutional principles and property rights in Colombia.

In 2023, ICP was chosen as a finalist for Atlas Network's Latin America Liberty Award for their outreach and training program, "ICP Academy." In 2025, they were named the winner of the Latin America Liberty Award for their success de-

fending property rights and economic freedom in Colombia.

"Winning the Latin America Liberty Award is really exciting for us," Carlos said. "It motivates us to continue working for the protection and promotion of private property rights and the rule of law. In Colombia, we are facing increasingly aggressive policy proposals that directly threaten economic freedom and private property rights, and groups like ICP have the authority to take action."

Looking ahead, ICP is dedicated to advancing policies that promote economic opportunity and improve the rule of law in Colombia. The group promotes a clear policy agenda to defend economic freedom and liberal democracy, by strengthening property rights, entrepreneurial initiative, and placing individuals at the center—so they can unleash their potential and, in doing so, unlock the country's potential to create value, wealth, and opportunities. ICP believes that by creating a safer and more predictable climate for investment and innovation, they can help Colombians live more prosperous lives. Protecting property rights is a key part of that plan.

→ **Carlos Augusto Chacón**, executive director of ICP, receiving the Latin America Liberty Award at the Latin America Liberty Forum 2025.







“You certainly have done a marvelous job expanding the reach of Atlas [Network], of coming close to Antony Fisher’s dream of a worldwide network of think tanks promoting liberty. ... In seventy or more\* countries Atlas [Network] is helping think tanks spread an understanding of free markets or is engaged in creating think tanks that will do so. More power to it.”

—MILTON FRIEDMAN  
SEPTEMBER 2005

\*Since then, the number has grown to 527 think tanks and do-tanks in 103 countries.