

# FREEDOM'S CHAMPION

SPRING 2020

Atlas Network's quarterly review of  
the world's freedom movement

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By İsrail Özkan

## LEBANON'S LONG GAME

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## RON MANNERS: A MIND FOR LIBERTY & A HEART OF GOLD

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Cover: Lebanese demonstrators raise a large clenched fist with "revolution" written on it at the Martyrs' Square in the center of the capital Beirut on October 27, 2019, during ongoing anti-government protests. Tens of thousands of demonstrators joined hands in a human chain from Tripoli to Tyre, a 170-kilometer (105-mile) chain running through Beirut, as part of an unprecedented cross-sectarian mobilization.

Photo / Révolution au Liban, place des martyrs Flickr photo by tongeron91 ©

#### MISSION

Atlas Network increases global prosperity by strengthening a network of independent partner organizations that promote individual freedom and are committed to identifying and removing barriers to human flourishing.

#### VISION

Our vision is of a free, prosperous, and peaceful world where the principles of individual liberty, property rights, limited government, and free markets are secured by the rule of law.

#### STRATEGY

Atlas Network cultivates a network of partners that share this vision. To accelerate the pace of achievement by our partners in their local communities, Atlas Network's unique "Coach, Compete, Celebrate!" strategic model inspires our partners to improve performance and achieve extraordinary outcomes.

##### Coach

Atlas Network provides world-class seminars, workshops, mentoring, and other learning opportunities that inspire professionalism and build community among our independent partners.

##### Compete

Atlas Network offers grant and prize competitions that fuel our partners' efforts to develop, innovate, and succeed.

##### Celebrate

Atlas Network fosters camaraderie and stokes ambitions among our partners by celebrating their greatest accomplishments through events and media outreach.



Atlas Network has been a four-star Charity Navigator member since 2008.



Atlas Network is a GuideStar Exchange Platinum-Level Participant.



Atlas Network's donation payment processor is certified to PCI Service Provider Level 1, the most stringent level of certification available.

**FREEDOM'S  
CHAMPION**

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An Atlas Network Publication

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**ATLAS  
NETWORK**

# LIBERTY IS THE ANSWER

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

## LIBERTY IS THE ANSWER



We are all dealing with the changes of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as we prepare to go to press, Atlas Network and our partners around the world are dealing with situations that none of us could have imagined even two short months ago. This global crisis requires vigilant action in the short-term from health-care providers, from caregivers, and from all of us as members of communities that are stressed in unprecedented ways.

At the same time that we recognize the need for clear and effective governmental responses to this public health crisis, we must be wary of attempts to turn emergency exercises of government power into a permanent expansion of authority.

In 1794 James Madison, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, warned of “the old trick of turning every contingency into a resource for accumulating force in the Government.” This old trick reared its head in E. J. Dionne’s column on March 15 in *The Washington Post*, “A pandemic makes all of us a little bit more socialist.” Let us be clear: **Big government is the wrong response to a contagious disease.** Emergency powers must not be the new normal after the emergency has passed. The cause of limited government and free markets has never been more important than now.

In times of crisis, governments expand their powers, and after the crisis has passed, they almost never return to their prior levels. Ronald Reagan famously quipped in 1964, “A government bureau is the nearest thing to

eternal life we’ll ever see on this earth.” The economic historian Robert Higgs warned us of the “Ratchet Effect” of crises: “Throughout U.S. history, national emergencies have served as outstanding occasions for the (ratcheting) loss of liberties.” It is true in the United States. It is true everywhere.

Let us be clear: Big government is the wrong response to a contagious disease.



With the goal of saving lives, Atlas Network and our 506 partner organizations promote responses to COVID-19’s challenges based on evidence, proper public health measures, and sound economic principles. That includes defending free

enterprise and wealth creation, without which we are helpless in the face of this and future crises. We are focused on doing what needs to be done, which includes restraining governments from exercising powers unrelated to the crisis.

Supporting the cause of individual liberty, free markets, and limited government is not less important today. Indeed, **our cause is needed more now than ever before.** We thank you for joining with us in thoughtfully meeting the challenges of this moment, while defending for the duration the sacred cause of liberty.

  
Brad Lips  
Chief Executive Officer  
Atlas Network

For the latest updates on Atlas Network’s events around the world, please visit [AtlasNetwork.org](https://AtlasNetwork.org).





# LEBANON'S LONG GAME

By Erik Eppig

## Rumblings of Revolution

Clouds of dark black smoke billow from a pile of tires engulfed in flames. The sound of car horns is drowned out by hundreds of people echoing a chant of “bring down the regime” and “everyone means everyone.”

On October 17, 2019, hundreds of people flooded the streets of major cities in Lebanon, blocking traffic and protesting their government. The demonstrators demanded the immediate resignation of all elected officials, including the president, prime minister, and parliament—all of whom they deemed to be corrupt.

Corruption accusations are nothing new to Lebanon. This time, however, was different—the Lebanese people had united across sectarian lines in opposition to a government out of touch with the needs of its people.

“They realized that, despite their differences, they can influence a new government that serves their needs,” says Kristelle Mardini, Director of the Lebanese Institute for Market Studies

(LIMS). Outraged by a proposal of new taxes and an increase in existing value added tax (VAT) rates, young Lebanese orchestrated what has come to be known as the ‘uprising of dignity.’

## A Country in Turmoil

Throughout its history, Lebanon has demonstrated a tradition of economic freedom, characterized by its reputation as a trader nation. The Phoenicians were well known for their entrepreneurial abilities, constructing prosperous shipping ports in present-day Beirut and Tripoli. In the 1960s, Lebanon was even referred to as the “Switzerland of the Middle East,” due to its financial prowess and cultural diversity. On the outskirts of Tripoli, Lebanon stands the Rachi Karami International Fair Ground, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, the esteemed Brazilian architect best known for his design of Brazil’s capital city, Brasilia. Construction of the Tripoli International Fair began in 1963, riding the country’s economic boom as a means of attracting future tourism, foreign investment, and transnational exchange. Unfortunately, these aspirations would be short-lived.

With no simple solution in sight, Lebanese freedom fighters believe the time to act is now—for the future of their country



↑ Top: Dr. Michael Walker speaks at the Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture of Tripoli & North Lebanon.

← Left: The Fraser Institute's Fred McMahon and Dr. Michael Walker present their findings on improving the economic freedom of Lebanon.

From 1975 to 1990, a multidimensional civil war ravaged Lebanon, costing the lives of over 120,000 and displacing many more. At the conclusion of hostilities, neighboring Syrian forces occupied Lebanon until the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and subsequent Cedar Revolution in 2005. Throughout the civil war, the fairgrounds were occupied by Syrian forces, who used it as a base and an artillery launch site. Today, the Tripoli International Fair is in a state of decay, a constant reminder of the aspirations of a by-gone era undone by government waste and identity politics. Lebanon continues to show scars of its tumultuous recent history. The country's major political parties fall exclusively along sectarian alliances forged during the period, establishing an unhealthy environment that policymakers have long exploited to pit neighbor against neighbor to achieve their political ends.

Since becoming independent, Lebanon has been plagued by government corruption and waste, which has contributed significantly to the country's high unemployment, inflation, shortage of dollars, and scarcity of imported products. For years, rival sectarian groups have pointed fingers at one another for the country's economic downturn, a response that today's protesters have largely rejected. "I think the most important part of our revolution is the accountability," says Ms. Mardini. "People are not willing to fund the government's expenses anymore. The people realized that their government is unable to deliver any decent services and they are now demanding a change of system."

Two weeks after the peaceful protests first began, violent sectarian groups attacked defenseless protestors in Beirut, setting fire to their tents. Unrelatedly, Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation the same day. Protestors considered the resignation of Hariri a major victory, yet continued using roadblocks as a tool to force sitting political leaders to resign. They sang patriotic songs and proudly waved the Lebanese flag, which features an iconic cedar tree, a symbol of national pride for Lebanese everywhere.

Rody Frangieh, an intern at LIMS, said "Lebanese people re-felt love and attachment for their country, in which they'd suffered under harsh economic and political conditions for so many years." This newfound love quickly took the form of dance

parties on Tripoli's Sahet al-Nour (light plaza) and yoga sessions in the middle of Beirut's Ring Bridge in hopes of forcing the appointment of a technocratic government, independent of all political parties and sectarian alliances. Several protesters even blocked a highway with kitchen appliances and pieces of living room furniture, declaring "Lebanon is my home."

### Economic Freefall

For years Lebanon has punched above its weight in one category—a skyrocketing national debt. Today, Lebanon's public debt hovers at \$85 billion, which is approximately 1.5 times the country's GDP. In 2019 alone, Lebanon incurred an estimated \$18 billion in expenses compared to \$11 billion in revenue. Despite massive amounts of public spending, Lebanon's government is unable to provide basic services to its people, including reliable electricity, clean water, decent roads, and consistent internet access.

Once a proud and wealthy trading nation, Lebanon is extremely poor today. In a country of just over six million people, nearly two million live in poverty, including over 250,000 that live in extreme poverty. Included in these totals are approximately two million refugees from nearby Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. Unsurprisingly, these refugees have become scapegoats for much of the country's recent economic struggles, notably the country's high unemployment rate (~7%). Many Lebanese with the means and connections to emigrate leave, establishing vibrant communities in their adopted homes. Entrepreneurs, unable to reach their full potential back in Lebanon, succeed with regularity abroad.

↓ Down: Lebanese activists, business leaders, and members of political parties participate in LIMS's Economic Freedom Audit, Tripoli, Lebanon.

↓ Bottom: Toufic Dabboussi, President of Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture of Tripoli & North Lebanon, thanks LIMS for hosting their audit event, Tripoli, Lebanon.





Today, there are more Lebanese living outside of the country (~7-8 million) than within it. Estimates put remittances from the Lebanese diaspora at approximately \$9 billion annually, or 18% of the country's total economy.

For years, the Lebanese Institute for Market Studies (LIMS) has closely monitored the country's debt crisis and prescribed solutions to save the future of the country. Led by Dr. Patrick Mardini, LIMS urged the government to eliminate needless debt-generating expenditures through privatization, which they argued would lead to increased competition, innovation, and revenue generation in the marketplace. Specifically, Dr. Mardini suggested an end to renting expensive power ships from Turkey and halting the construction of new dams, instead allowing the private sector to finance and operate these projects, thus shifting the cost from government to businesses.

LIMS's efforts paid off. As a result of their campaign, the Lebanese government approved a plan to open the electricity sector to private competition, resulting in an aggregate of \$5.4 billion—or \$125 per taxpayer per month—in savings.

Until recently, the Lebanese government had staved off economic collapse through appeals to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other foreign lenders to cover the needs of the Treasury and to roll over existing bonds. However, in 2019 interest rates on the country's loans rose to more than 10%, and it quickly became clear that the Lebanese government would be unable to pay back its debts.

In response to the impending economic collapse, the Lebanese government rolled out an austerity plan designed to boost revenue through taxation rather than by reducing wasteful spending. One of the proposals was a \$6 per month tax on the use of WhatsApp for WiFi voice calling. This was an unpopular choice: the government's monopoly on telecommunications services in Lebanon means that cellular coverage is both expensive and unreliable, making WhatsApp a preferred source of communication among young Lebanese.

### Shifting the Narrative

The question was never if economic, financial, and monetary collapse will occur, but when. This heightens the importance of decisions being made now, which will have huge ramifications for the future of Lebanon. "Any upcoming

cabinet will need to start a series of economic reforms," says Dr. Mardini, who believes Lebanon can learn from the experiences of Chile, the United Kingdom, and Ireland during their economic recoveries in the 1970s and 1980s. Crucial to each of these success stories was a commitment to curtail wasteful spending contributing to national debt and allowing the private sector to manage industry.

If implemented correctly, Dr. Mardini believes Lebanon can "recover the lost glory and prosperity of the 50s and 60s."

However, a socialist reform agenda has struck a chord with a significant number of the protesters. Based on the incorrect assumption that recovering stolen money from corrupt political leaders will solve the country's ailments, many young Lebanese continue to hold unrealistic expectations for the future of their country. Rooted in good intentions—providing free education, employment opportunities, and healthcare for all—these proposed expenditures have historically been proven to be inefficient at best and counterproductive at worst.

Even the few remaining billions that were transferred to Lebanese political leaders and their inner circles cannot be regained easily. Large chunks have already been wastefully spent and what remains is masked by an opaque network of lawyers, accountants, offshore accounts, and tax havens. "Populist promises of free goods and services that the Lebanese economy cannot afford is exactly what got Lebanon into the current economic disaster at the first place" says Dr. Mardini, "and will inevitably lead to scenarios like Argentina and Venezuela."

In order to be heard in the battle of ideas, LIMS has taken to the streets—and they intend to win. "I feel that some Lebanese are giving up now," says Ms. Mardini, "but for the first time in Lebanon, we have a window for radical change."

### A Party in the Streets

Music blares from car speakers; balloon vendors make their way through the crowd; the smell of cumin-covered corn fills the air. Young people lock arms as they sway back and forth next to a blazing bonfire. The scene very well could be that of a fairground. Instead, it's a protest.

Volunteers cook and hand wrap pita sandwiches and distribute them among the protesters. Local lawyers meet for a rudimentary roundtable discussion. Nearby, a tent dubbed

As a result of LIMS' campaign, the Lebanese government approved a plan to open the electricity sector to private competition, resulting in an aggregate of \$5.4 billion—or \$125 per taxpayer per month—in savings.

↓ Bottom: Demonstrators attend LIMS's public presentation on "Creating a Better Future for the People of Lebanon," Al-Nour Square, Tripoli, Lebanon.



“The Revolutionary Library,” provides donated books to interested readers on topics ranging from political philosophy to self-help. A sign above the bookshelves reads “Danger: Free Thought” in Arabic. Included among the stacks are several copies of “Poverty & Freedom,” edited by Atlas Network’s Matt Warner, and “Why Liberty” and “Self-Control or State Control,” both edited by Atlas Network’s Tom Palmer.

In November 2019, LIMS hosted representatives from Atlas Network and the Fraser Institute at a series of events in Tripoli that focused on the findings of the most recent *Economic Freedom of the World* report. Despite challenging realities on the ground, including roadblocks and power outages, LIMS successfully implemented an unconventional, yet dynamic approach to the prototypical audit process.

LIMS opted to engage protesters in al-Nour Square, Tripoli’s primary meeting place and the location of some of the country’s largest and most active protests. The public event featured the Fraser Institute’s Fred McMahon and Michael Walker, who provided presentations on the importance of economic freedom in Lebanon and answered questions posed by the protesters. Lebanese from all walks of life attended the event, posing crucial questions about the future of their country. The event was a success, attracting over a hundred participants in person, with many others contributing questions live via social media. While not all attendees were convinced of the merits of free-market reforms, their presence alone spoke volumes about LIMS’s ability to engage the public in meaningful discussion. According to Fred McMahon, “LIMS understands that for free-market reforms to develop and, most importantly, be durable, informing the public is essential. Their efforts, and success, in doing this and generating the detailed policy proposals that Lebanon needs are astonishing.”

### The Path Forward: A Blueprint for Lebanese Prosperity

Leveraging their findings and years of experience, the LIMS team produced a roadmap of tested reforms able to extricate Lebanon from the expected collapse, aptly titled BELIEF-Blueprint to Elevate Lebanon’s Infrastructure, Economy, and Finance. The purpose of BELIEF is to fill the current gap and move the discussion from empty promises and populist rhetoric to specific reform policies. The blueprint for reform includes a series of propositions that would cut public spending, dismantle monopolies, and ensure checks and balances on all remaining public expenditures.

LIMS is also exploring the idea of opening their Leaders’ Academy, a capacity-building program for young activists, to the leading grassroots groups engaged in the current protests. A greater understanding of market-oriented policies can provide these young leaders with the ability to address economic challenges that are of immediate concern. The LIMS Leaders’ Academy, along with BELIEF, seeks to unite a diversity of opinions around on a common project and allow leaders

The immediate future for Lebanon may look bleak, but now is the time to lay the groundwork for long-term prosperity and freedom.



to find common ground. LIMS hopes to find ways to engage protesters without losing rapport that the organization has worked years to establish with different political parties. LIMS faces an uphill battle, but they are taking steps to help decisionmakers steer the economy back onto solid ground. In Lebanon’s largely dollarized economy, bank deposits in U.S. dollars account for 80% of the country’s currency market. Dollarization is a byproduct of the volatile Lebanese pound, which has lost over 40% of its value since the economic crisis began. Responding to this devaluation of the national currency, Lebanese policymakers artificially lowered the USD/LBP exchange rate and limited bank withdrawals to the Lebanese pound only—in effect, imposing a 42% levy on all bank deposits in dollars and hurting the poorest of the poor.

After months of media exposure and meetings with policymakers, LIMS convinced central bank officials to adopt measures aimed at mitigating damage caused by the ongoing currency crisis. As a result of their efforts, small depositors with less than US\$3,000 in their account are permitted to withdraw currency at market value (currently LBP2,600/\$) as opposed to the “official rate” set by the central bank (currently LBP1,500/\$). The central bank also formally recognized that the “official rate” is not set by the currency market.

LIMS’s campaign contributed to unfreezing over 1.7 million small deposits, representing the poorest 61.8% of all depositors, who, as Dr. Mardini points out, usually keep their assets in dollars. According to Dr. Mardini, “This success proves that the best way for doing development and helping the poor is through lifting institutional barriers and allowing freedom.”

With LIMS’s help, Lebanon has begun to lay the groundwork for long-term prosperity.

Erik Eppig is an Institute Relations Manager at Atlas Network, where he manages a number of grants and awards programs, including the Economic Freedom Audit program. Kristelle Mardini and Dr. Patrick Mardini are graduates of the Atlas Leadership Academy, and LIMS has been an active participant in Atlas Network’s conferences and grant opportunities. In 2019, LIMS was a finalist for the Templeton Freedom Award.



↑ Top: Protesters blocking access to the Ring bridge in Beirut, Lebanon. October 26, 2019.



# THE NEW THREAT TO PROPERTY RIGHTS

By Steven D. Anderson

It is alarming and paradoxical that property rights are increasingly under attack in many Western nations

In recent decades—thankfully—policymakers around the world have come to appreciate more fully the importance of private property rights as a requirement of individual freedom, a critical foundation for the rule of law, and a powerful tool for alleviating poverty and promoting human flourishing. The legal right for citizens to own and make use of their property as they choose is rightly understood as a source of empowerment.

That's what makes it so alarming and paradoxical that property rights are increasingly under attack in many Western nations. The most critical threat is the most covert: the use of stealth regulations by state and local bureaucrats to harass and intimidate private property owners.

The trend is perhaps best illustrated by the United States. Americans have long benefited from a strong tradition of respect for private property rights, based on English common law and our own constitutional protections. As a result, it's less common for governments to directly seize property in the U.S. than it is to regulate how landowners can use it.

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Despite our history, respect for property rights has declined in the United States in comparison to other countries, including the United Kingdom, France, and even Estonia and the United Arab Emirates, according to the

Heritage Index of Economic Freedom. Why? Because U.S. state and local officials are less overt and more subtle and creative in their assault on property rights, exploiting the regulatory process to achieve their desired ends. We see this in onerous environmental regulations, unreasonable limits on development, and abuse of the permit process to shake down property owners for money.

Regulatory compliance is a powerful tool that severely limits a property owner's ability to do as she pleases with her own property, forcing her to accede to the unreasonable wishes of







Photo / Timothy Eberly

unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats. Even where the regulation is obviously unconstitutional, illegal, or otherwise ill-conceived, many property owners lack the financial and legal resources to fight back—so they quickly surrender, leaving progress quite literally in the dust.

Because bureaucrats—not elected officials—are the most aggressive abusers of property rights, we can't rely on the political process to protect our rights. Instead, we need to utilize an institution that is more resistant to political pressure and cronyism: the judiciary.

In the United States, legal advocates like my organization, Pacific Legal Foundation, have notched significant victories in state and federal courts to vindicate the right to own and use property. In June 2019, for instance, we

The right to property is the foundation of all other freedoms. The U.S. and other nations should do everything they can to protect this fundamental right.



scored our latest U.S. Supreme Court win in *Knick v. Township of Scott, Pennsylvania*. This landmark decision makes it possible for more U.S. property owners to challenge regulatory abuse in our federal courts.

Although the bureaucratic threat against property rights has grown, we've seen undeniable progress in clawing back those rights. The challenge now is to extend and build upon that progress. The right to property is the foundation of all other freedoms. The U.S. and other nations should do everything they can to protect this fundamental right.

*Steven D. Anderson is president and CEO of Pacific Legal Foundation, which litigates nationwide to achieve court victories enforcing the Constitution's guarantee of individual liberty.*





SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

RON MANNERS

# A MIND FOR LIBERTY & A HEART OF GOLD

Ron Manners has a heart of gold.

Perhaps it's because he descends from generations of Australian gold miners, beginning with his great-grandfather, one of thousands who prospected the newly-discovered fields around Ballarat in the mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps his heart of gold came from his own career as an engineer who took over the business established by his grandfather in Kalgoorlie and built it into one of Australia's most successful gold mining operations. Or maybe it's because anyone spending time with Manners is inspired by his deep commitment to liberty and the decades of generous educational support that he's made possible for more than 1,500 young leaders.

As the elder statesman of Australia's liberty movement and the author of 5 books, including his most recent memoir *The Lonely Libertarian*, Manners' knowledge and experience has been shaped by his natural curiosity and his belief that individualism and personal responsibility are powerful drivers of change. "I believe that economic literacy, and an appreciation of free markets and small government is of the utmost importance to the next generation of business leaders," says Manners, "so that they can more adequately combat overbearing government regulations and increasing tax burdens."

I believe that economic literacy, and an appreciation of free markets and small government is of the utmost importance to the next generation of business leaders.

Atlas Network caught up with Manners to ask about his introduction to the ideas of liberty, the challenges we face, and his passion for educating young people through the Mannkal Economic Education Foundation.

**Atlas Network: How did you come to understand the ideas of liberty?**

Ron Manners: My initiation into 'libertarian' principles was accidental. At the age of sixteen I happened to be working after school at my father's business unpacking crates. I noticed

that the packing material was made of crumpled magazines which I smoothed out to read. The magazines were called *The Freeman* from the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) in New York. They contained information about individual responsibility, the free market and the words of luminaries such as Thomas Jefferson—very stirring and inspirational stuff! I was also influenced by four remarkable individuals to whom I credit my modest successes: Leonard Read, Friedrich Hayek, John Hospers

and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh (Prince Philip) have resulted in the unique recipe we call the Mannkal Foundation.

**AN: Tell us about Mannkal Foundation—you've created life-changing experiences for students. What gave you the idea to invest in educating young people?**





↑ Top: Ron (center right) signing his book *The Lonely Libertarian* with Rainer Heufers (far left), Joe Lehman (center left), and Eva Christensen (far right).

RM: I was once offered advice by Leonard E. Read (founder of the Foundation for Economic Education) on how to best be effective in the field of activism and he presented me with four fields of endeavour from which to choose: education, civil disobedience, war/violence and political activism. The advice was to pursue what I was most drawn to and to leave the rest to others who may have more aptitude for them than myself. Although I did dabble in tax minimisation when I successfully fought the Australian Tax Office for seven years, I have been most drawn to education as a means to effect the most change. The results are long-lasting. That is the inspiration behind the establishment in 1997 of the Mannkal Economic Education Foundation, which provides scholarships to Australian students to attend conferences, participate in study tours, and connect with the ideas of liberty both domestically and internationally.

**AN: What do you see as the largest challenges for supporters of liberty and free markets?**

RM: One challenge is that we have travelled too far down the obsessive Politically Correct road of victimhood, toward the ‘snow-flake’ culture which some people refer to as the ‘grievance industry.’ A decaying civilization lies at the end of this road, and history shows repeatedly that bad things

→ Right: Ron speaks during a Speed Networking session at one of Atlas Network’s events.

↓ Bottom: Ron (center) serves as a judge in Atlas Network’s annual Think Tank Shark Tank competition.



happen when good people do nothing. Thankfully in Australia there is no shortage of good people, and I’m encouraged by the stirring of them, all seeking the company of other similarly concerned citizens.

The good news is that we will see continuing digital disruption in much the same way that the anticompetitive taxi cartel has been utterly smashed by Uber. We will see a similar disruption taking place, but it will be far bigger. It will be nations and countries themselves who will be disrupted. If I can make one bold prediction now it is this: children born today will grow up with a radically different understanding of how governments should serve them. Governments will be forced back to their legitimate role of protection of property rights because property rights are vital to a prosperous society—and free trade is our future.

**AN: What persuaded you to support Atlas Network?**

RM: I am most drawn to organisations that seek to tap into the potential of our youth, by introducing them to the ideas of individualism, personal responsibility, free markets and small government. I have a lot of respect for the work of Atlas Network. Each individual who graduates from Atlas Network’s leadership training goes on to take on a responsible position in their chosen fields. By working toward a reduction in the size and power of governments and by learning how to strengthen property rights they are maximizing the freedom of the individual and, in turn, our creative capacity. The Atlas Network training guides them on how to reach their true potential, as individuals, working for their own individual goals—which aligns very well with my own work through the Mannkal Economic Education Foundation and our Leadership Development Program in producing a fine, young, new generation of leaders. I am also in agreement with the new Atlas Network approach to poverty and the important role of private philanthropy, and its ability to outperform government interference.

What continues to engage me in promoting liberty is the urgent need to combat the dominant cultural narrative that relies on centralised control and loss of personal liberties in order to ‘do good’. This is mostly manifest in government programs that fail to achieve their intended aims, in fact quite often produce the opposite effect!

Atlas Network will honor **Ron Manners’** extraordinary legacy of liberty with the **2020 Sir Antony Fisher Achievement Award**, which will be presented on Thursday, November 12 during **Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner** in New York City. Sponsorships are available by contacting Kam Griffin at 202-449-6491.

THIS QUARTER IN

# WORLD

10

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01

## PERC'S WILD HORSE ADOPTION INCENTIVE PROGRAM INCREASES ADOPTIONS 62%

Since the U.S. Bureau of Land Management adopted an incentive program in March 2019, recommended by The Property and Environment Research Center, private adoptions of wild horses have increased 62 percent. The incentive program offers \$1,000 to help cover the cost, training, and caring of these animals that have overpopulated the American West in recent years.



## SOLE EMPOWERS WOMEN TO OVERCOME CULTURAL BIASES IN SOUTH SUDAN

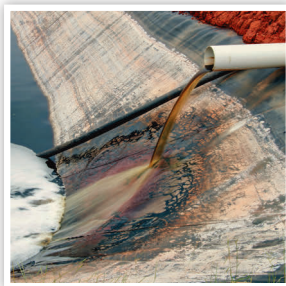
02

Although South Sudan has adopted legal protections that explicitly recognize the rights of women, laws are often ignored in isolated areas of the country—especially laws that ensure women's right to own land. For most women, a lack of education and entrenched discrimination have kept them from changing their lives for the better. Students' Organization for Liberty and Entrepreneurship (SOLE) is helping to lay the foundations for change in a system that continues to push women out of home-ownership.

03

## STATE CAPABILITY AND LIBERTY MUST ADVANCE TOGETHER TO END POVERTY | MATT WARNER IN DEVEX'S GLOBAL VIEWS

Balancing the role of the state with the needs of local interests is key to transformative change, says Atlas Network's President Matt Warner in his column for Devex's *Global Views*. Warner points out that change comes when free people are able to make choices that work best for local needs, using their knowledge to reshape and strengthen opportunities for economic freedom.



## DUMPING THE WASTE IN BRAZIL'S SEWAGE SYSTEM

04

When Livres surveyed young and low-income Brazilians about what worried them, one of the most frequent answers was Brazil's decaying public sewage system. Livres made access to a functional sewage system a policy priority, advocating for private investment while working closely with the Speaker of the House of Representatives for real change. As a result of their work, a new legal framework is under consideration in the Congresso Nacional.

05

## RIGHT-TO-WORK TAKES CENTER-STAGE IN SERBIAN DOCUMENTARY

*Pravo na rad* (Right to Work), a new documentary featuring the hoops that three Serbian entrepreneurs must jump through in order to comply with overregulation, is the latest effort by the Center for Anti-Authoritarian Studies (CAAS) to demonstrate how entrepreneurs fight obstacles to opportunity. CAAS' companion photography exhibit, which debuted at a local gallery, showcases the daily struggles that entrepreneurs face just to make ends meet.





## 06 COSTA RICA ENDS ITS LUXURY PENSION SCHEME

After Instituto de Desarrollo Empresarial y Acción Social successfully made Costa Rica's luxury pensions to over 4,000 retirees a national issue, the Costa Rican Legislature approved a bill to reduce the controversial pensions. These entitlements were previously awarded to a group dubbed "Ticos Con Coronas," (Costa Ricans with Crowns) with some even receiving more than US\$30,000 a month.



## CIPS' NEW SHORT FILM DELIVERS OPEN FOOD TRADE MESSAGE TO NEW AUDIENCES

Designed to target a younger audience, "Bakoel Kosong" (Empty Bowl), is a humorous short film created by the Center for Indonesian Policy Studies in collaboration with the Cameo Project that explains how trade restrictions cause higher food prices, especially for those living in poverty.

## 08 AELSO CELEBRATES 10 YEARS OF ADVANCING FREEDOM IN AFGHANISTAN

"I knew they had been doing very good work, but I admit I was amazed and impressed when I saw with my own eyes the progress they have made," said Atlas Network's Dr. Tom Palmer, who celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the Afghanistan Economic and Legal Studies Organization (AELSO) with a speaking tour in and around Kabul.



## BULGARIAN LIBERTARIAN SOCIETY HELPS BLOCK 20% VAT ON FOOD VOUCHERS

A 20 percent value-added tax (VAT) on food vouchers in Bulgaria has been blocked, thanks to the Bulgarian Libertarian Society. Food vouchers are a common employee benefit in Bulgaria, and research shows that they increase motivation and job satisfaction while helping employees and their families meet their daily needs.



## 10 TOOTLING TOWARDS PROSPERITY IN NEPAL

Business creation is now quicker and easier in Nepal, thanks to a regulatory change that reduces the paperwork required for incorporation. Samriddhi Foundation led the fight for this change and is now encouraging the adoption of another amendment that will legitimize mobile businesses like Tootle, a ridesharing app for two-wheelers. Tootle and its founder, Sixit Bhatta, enable other entrepreneurs to pursue economic independence, and the Samriddhi Foundation is actively working to make this goal achievable.



İSRAFIL ÖZKAN

# RECONSTRUCTING THE RULE OF LAW IN TURKEY

By İsrail Özkan

Executive Director of Freedom Research Association

My professional career started just before the coup d'état attempt in Turkey in 2016, so I haven't worked a day without seeing firsthand the erosion of the rule of law in the country. However, these severe political conditions have encouraged my organization, the Freedom Research Association (FRA), to work harder to re-establish our democratic culture. Atlas Network and other pro-liberty partners have helped us develop our personal and institutional capacities to challenge the status quo. FRA has a demonstrated resiliency to the repeated unlawful acts of our government and succeeded to show solidarity with all pro-liberty friends in Turkey.

After a while in the libertarian movement, I came to realize that it would have been impossible to fulfill myself if I did not embrace my true identity. I've found a philosophical base, liberating practices, supportive people, and all kinds of resources in the libertarian movement to become the best version of myself.

Thus, promoting the ideas of liberty to those who are stuck with suffocating mindsets has become one of my primary goals.

I couldn't imagine it at the time, but everything started with an invitation to a meeting a friend of mine had organized. There I met for the first time a real liberal organization called 3H Movement. I was then studying political science and thought that liberalism is only possible in the books and in the "West!" The ideas and the way of expressing them were fascinating and encouraging, so I went to another meeting, and then another. After a short period, I knew exactly what I wanted to do in the future. I first became a member of the 3H Movement and later became their Ankara coordinator.

After two years of volunteering and reading *Atlas Shrugged* for the first time, I knew that my career path had been fundamentally changed.

I've found a philosophical base, liberating practices, supportive people, and all kinds of resources in the libertarian movement to become the best version of myself.





FRA is an independent and strictly non-partisan public policy research institute dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government/ rule of law, and the free market. Our experts produce commentaries, reports, and policy papers from a liberal perspective to help advance liberty-based policymaking in Turkey and in the European Parliament. I think all these efforts and achievements are just the beginning of our work in Turkey.

Following my graduation in 2015, I started looking for a position in the libertarian movement in Turkey and abroad. I had the chance to network in the liberal movement in Turkey while organizing events for 3H Movement but was not expecting any offer from local institutions. However, Prof. Bican Şahin invited me to join the team of Freedom Research Association (FRA). It was hard for me to believe, but I found the job I had been looking for in my beloved city.

In the following years, I ran different projects for FRA and other liberal-minded associations. I helped establish new associations and think tanks, gave seminars, and did workshops with young liberals. I joined Students for Liberty as a local coordinator and as a board member to several national organizations. Most importantly, I developed plenty of skills to run Freedom Research Association as an executive director after four challenging years.



During my time in the liberty movement, I have learned a lot from my colleagues. It would have taken me a lot longer to develop such project management, strategic planning, coalition-building, fundraising, and marketing skills had it not been for the training, mentorship, and significant support of Atlas Network.

Most of all, participating in the Think Tank Essentials Program in 2018 was a milestone for me. I left inspired and more determined to become a manager in an institution. I found the courage to do more and then completed several other Atlas Network programs, including the online Think Tank Navigator course. This intense learning process led me to apply to Leader Lab 2019.

Just before Leader Lab, FRA unexpectedly needed to hire a new executive director. Thus, the Leader Lab program became a priceless experience for me before applying to the vacancy. I had the opportunity to learn from experts about how to run an institution effectively. The training's one-on-one sessions allowed me to dive deeper into fundraising, long-term strategies, and the process of defining a clear vision and mission.

My graduation day from Atlas Leadership Academy was also the day I became the new executive director of Freedom Research Association. As long as our cooperation with Atlas Network and other partners continues, FRA will continue to be a guide for our government to restore the liberal democratic and economic institutions and to end the violations of basic human rights.



↑ Top: Özkan delivers the opening speech celebrating the 4th anniversary of Freedom Research Association.

← Left: Özkan speaks at a seminar of Freedom of Association of LGBT+ and Students for Liberty Turkey.

↓ Bottom: Özkan speaks at a regional conference of Students for Liberty Turkey and Freedom of Association in Turkey.





Caracas, Capital District, Venezuela

Photo / Jorge Salvador

# A JOURNEY THROUGH VENEZUELA

By Antonella Marty

A few weeks ago I returned from a road show that took me through Venezuela, a country that has been torn apart by socialism and is now a showcase for misery, hunger, and scarcity. Totalitarianism, combined with the worst anti-western criminal mafias in the world, has devastated this beautiful country. Twenty years of *Chavismo* has left the country looking like it has been ravaged by several world wars. The facades of the houses are deteriorated. There are no colors, there are no new materials—everything is precarious and in bad condition.

This is the reality of the consequences of socialism.

When you first set foot in Maiquetía International Airport, the results of bad socialist policies are clear: this “international” airport that was once the largest air hub in Latin America is now virtually empty. Venezuela has isolated itself from the world. Only a few countries still have close ties: Iran, Turkey, Russia, China, and Cuba. All of them have great interests in

Venezuelan territory. It’s worth remembering, too, that today more than five Hezbollah camps operate on Venezuelan territory, and that the regime has a strong relationship even with Islamic terrorism. The airport has something called the “Islamic Center of Venezuela.”

International drug trafficking operates freely on Venezuelan soil with the total backing of the regime and the armed forces. At El Vigía, another airport about 45 minutes from Mérida, small abandoned planes—leftovers of the drug trade—litter the runway. This is the city of Tareck El Aissami, a high-ranking official who is at the head of the terrorism and drug networks that flourish here. When I landed at El Vigía, after seeing that cemetery of drug planes and a somewhat worn and colorless gigantography of Maduro, I looked for the bus that would take me to the city of Mérida (I didn’t have to look far because there is only one). I had to wait for it to fill up with passengers from several flights, because, as there is no gasoline, they can’t make many trips. No gas means no taxis, either. The bus leaves all the passengers in the same point in Mérida. I asked the driver if there was a chance that he could drop me off closer to the hotel where I would be staying and his answer was: “If we have enough gas I can take you, but only if we have enough gas.”

It is incomprehensible that Venezuela has the largest volume of crude oil reserves in the world, and yet there is a shortage of gasoline. As the economist Milton Friedman said, “Put the government in charge of the Sahara desert and all you will get is a shortage of sand.” I have seen with my own eyes rows of cars more than thirty blocks long waiting to fill up. Nobody knows when the pumps will open again, so people wait for days. Jorge, a worker from Mérida, told me that he was missing a full day of work every week so that he could wait in line for gas. “On those days I don’t produce,” he said. “I don’t generate income and I spend the whole day in line, exposed to insecurity.”





Maiquetía International Airport—once the largest air hub in Latin America—is now virtually empty. Photo / Pedro Felipe ©



Antonella Marty delivers a talk to a local audience during her travels in Venezuela.

Problems related to infrastructure and public services abound everywhere. All public services have collapsed in Venezuela: there is almost no drinking water, roads and bridges are falling down, hospitals have no supplies, telecommunication is almost nonexistent, electricity is constantly cut off. One of my first conferences in the state of Carabobo—where it was nearly 90°F—was held without light or air conditioning. A professor at the University of the Andes joked that “the light doesn’t go out. Sometimes it comes in.”

A woman in Caracas told me with tears in her eyes about water rationing, saying that they generally have about an hour’s worth of water a day in her condominium in Caracas, “We get a daily notice from a group of WhatsApps that we have in the condominium and our concierge. In that group, the building manager tells us every day what time we will have water. There is almost always a total of one hour of water per day and in that hour one has to do all the tasks that require water such as washing clothes, washing dishes and bathing.” There is usually half an hour in the morning from 6 to 6:30 a.m. (so she wakes up early to take advantage of the day’s water), and then again in the evening usually between 7 and 7:30 p.m. Sometimes her condo building goes two or three days without water because there isn’t any. Everywhere I went there was a lack of toilet paper, but the plumbing doesn’t work anyway. People use buckets of water to flush. I only found two or three places with toilet paper, and it was stored under lock and key.

At bakeries and restaurants, menus are limited due to food shortages. At a modest bar in the country’s interior I asked for a ham and cheese sandwich, and the waiter told me that they were out of cheese and could only offer me a little ham, “because we don’t have that much left either.” Yes, thank you, I said. Perhaps I might have some mayonnaise for my sandwich? “We don’t have any mayonnaise either,” he told me, “but I can see if there is any butter left.”

This is the reality of the consequences of socialism.

What people go through just to get food is incredible. Adela, who I met at one of my conferences, told me about her struggle just for basics. The average salary in Venezuela is 50,000 bolívars—about \$US 2 a month—but when there’s nothing to buy, money doesn’t matter. So Adela takes the bus from Mérida to

A country that was once rich, prosperous and had everything, but that twenty years ago—after decades of flirting with socialist policies—has fallen into the clutches of the worst carnivorous socialism our hemisphere has ever seen: *Chavismo*.



a market just over the border in Cúcuta, Colombia, leaving at midnight for the 4-hour ride. She pays off the border guards, known as the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) of Venezuela, and waits for the market to open at 7 a.m. Rice costs more than

60,000 bolívars, meaning that an average salary is not enough to buy a bag. She finally gets on another bus at 9 p.m. The GNB checks everything when she returns and confiscates most of her food or any dollars she manages to get. “Our savings are no longer in bolívars or dollars,” she told me. “They are in food.”

People are scared—but worse, they lack hope. I talked with Alberto, a car mechanic, who told me that he no longer goes out on the streets to protest against the lack of public services or the political situation in the country. “The young people who were protesting have already left the country. We can no longer protest. We had to get used to it. Besides, if you bother too much, the special forces

come and...” Alberto made a hand signal: a weapon with the thumb and index finger raised.

This is the reality of the consequences of socialism.

Something that struck me strongly was my visit to the state of Carabobo, a territory governed by Chavista Rafael Alejandro Lacava of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). This young governor is obsessed with Count Dracula: he calls himself “Dracula,” drives around in a black car with the image of a vampire (he calls the car the “Dracumobile”), holds monthly parties which he calls “Dracufest” and sells beer which he calls “Dracubeer.” Every city in Carabobo State is filled with the symbol of a bat representing Governor Lacava. The toll booths (part of the “TransDracula” public transport system) have a huge image of a bat, the police patrols have a huge image of a bat, and the phone number of the Carabobo police is 0-800 3722852 (i.e. 0-800 DRACULA). All this in a state that is falling apart and where living is becoming more difficult every day!

This is Venezuela, a country with some of the most beautiful landscapes in all of Latin America and even the world. A country that was once rich, prosperous and had everything, but that twenty years ago—after decades of flirting with socialist policies—has fallen into the clutches of the worst carnivorous socialism our hemisphere has ever seen: *Chavismo*.

# BRINGING INTEGRITY TO PENSION REFORM

There is currently over \$6 trillion in unfunded public pension liabilities across the United States, more than the annual GDP of Italy, Spain, and Canada combined.

Government employee pension systems across the nation are in crisis and threaten to bankrupt government at all levels—but Reason Foundation is achieving meaningful reform that addresses defined-benefit pension plans in a number of U.S. states by developing defined-contribution plans that ensure employees' futures are secure.

Reason's work on pension issues dates back to 2005 with *The Gathering Pension Storm*, the first study that looked at a looming but little-known crisis that threatened to derail financial management at the state level. The Pension Integrity Project was launched in 2016 to provide pro bono consultations to elected officials regarding their specific pension challenges. Reason's team of researchers, quantitative analysts, and government affairs experts meets with policymakers, employee

groups, and other stakeholders across the country, helping them understand the scope of the problems they face and assisting in designing what a properly functioning retirement system looks like for each community.

Since Reason started the Pension Integrity Project, 44 pieces of successfully enacted reform legislation have gone into law in six states.

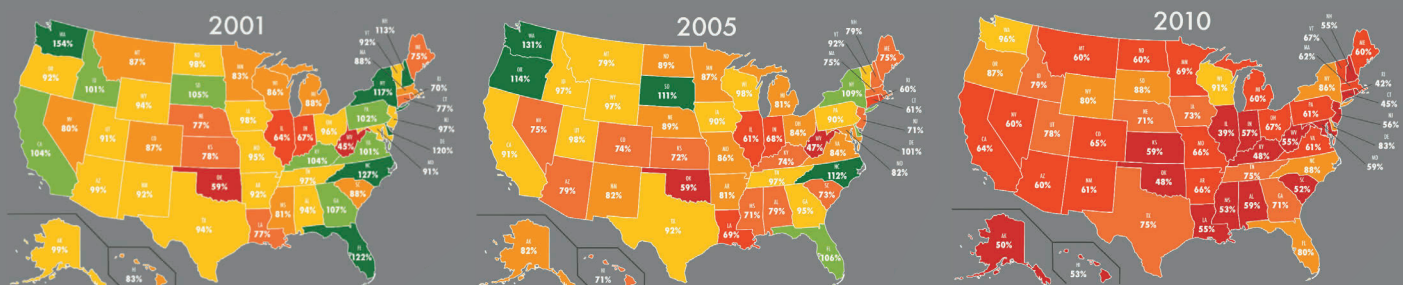


Reason also partners with stakeholders who are impacted by the existing crisis associated with pension systems, including center-left NGOs and trade unions. One of the main reasons so many think tanks and NGOs have been unable to advance meaning-

ful pension reform is that they haven't engaged with all stakeholders—especially the hostile ones. They have only ever spoken to people who already agree with them. “The center-right and the center-left have talked past each other for years on this critical issue,” explained Vice President of Government Reform Leonard Gilroy,

## State Funded Ratios Over Time: Market Valued Funded Ratios For State-Administered Pension Plans

Funded ratios weighted by size of plan liabilities



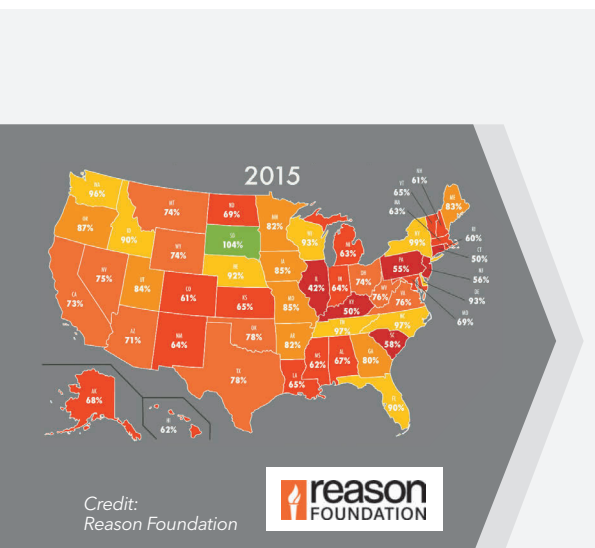
Source: Public plan actuarial valuations. Funded ratios represent the combined market valued assets of a given state's state-administered pension plans divided by the combined actuarially valued liabilities of those plans



who leads the project. “We are encouraging people to talk to each other!”

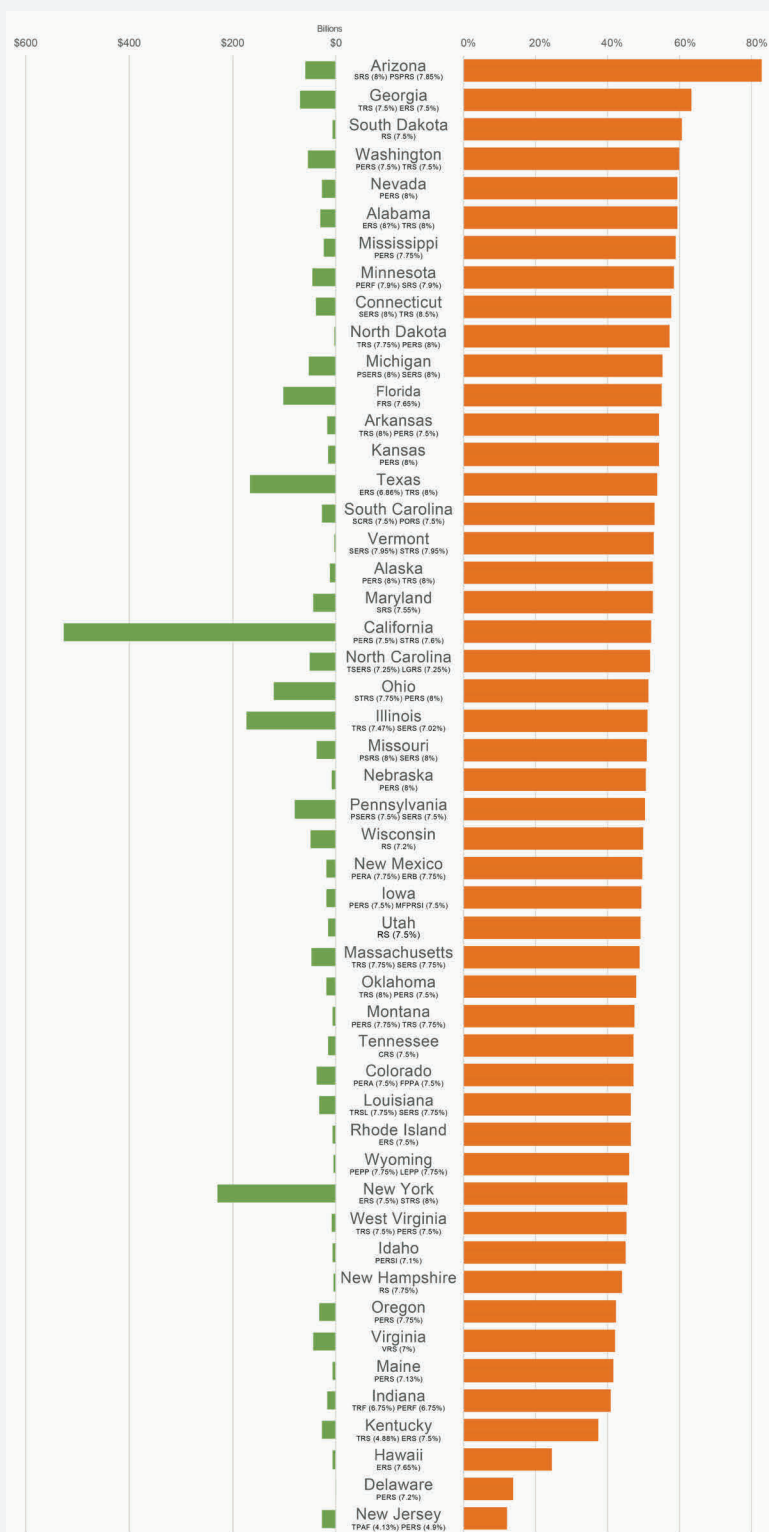
Since Reason started the Pension Integrity Project, 44 pieces of successfully enacted reform legislation have gone into law in six states. In 2017, Reason successfully upended the beleaguered teacher pension system in Michigan, developing a plan to chip away at the debt and reform the retirement system, so the debt problem would go away for good. Individualized reforms to the Michigan teachers’ pension system included the creation of a new choice-based retirement system, a plan to phase in a lower assumed rate of return, and shortened amortization of the pension debt. Following the reforms, Standard & Poor’s, one of the major credit ratings agencies in the U.S., increased Michigan’s credit rating from AA- to AA, citing teachers’ pension reform as a key factor for their decision.

Beyond the initial success, the team at Reason has plans to continue growing the Pension Integrity Project into 2020 and beyond. This includes expanding the focus on reforming the underfunded teacher pension plans, hosting a pension webinar series for policymakers, and creating a pension database with all available data on the subject. Reason has even created a unique alternative retirement plan, “Defined Contribution 3.0,” and is promoting it to policymakers and workers around the country.



↓ Down: How much do reported pension obligations increase when using a market valuation of the promised benefits?

Dollar and percentage increase in liabilities when switching from the actuarial valuation of liabilities to a market valuation of liabilities; FYE 2015 data



Source: Actuarial valuations for top 649 public sector defined benefit plans as reported by Hoover Institution's "Hidden Debt, Hidden Deficits: 2017 Edition"

Credit: Reason Foundation

“I am most drawn to organizations that seek to tap into the potential of our youth, by introducing them to the ideas of individualism, personal responsibility, free markets and small government. That’s why I support Atlas Network.”



– RON MANNERS

RON  
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