

PREFACE

Economic freedom, properly understood, is the freedom of the common man to control his own destiny, enjoy the fruits of his labor, and fully use his God-given talents for good. That freedom, rooted in the dignity of the human spirit, is indispensable to human flourishing and is the real wellspring of economic prosperity.

Since its inception in 1995, The Heritage Foundation's *Index of Economic Freedom* has served as an essential policy guide that analyzes and highlights the state of economic freedom in countries around the globe. Over time, the *Index* has recorded profound advances as the cause of freedom has swept the globe, empowering everyday families and workers to thrive and hold their political authorities accountable.

However, economic freedom is not a gift. It must be re-earned every generation. This is the challenge we now face.

Today, economic freedom is beset on all sides, both at home and abroad. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is working to constrain freedom not only within its own borders, but in nations around the world. Bureaucrats are more powerful than ever. They work with globalist organizations and multinational corporations alike to write regulations that stifle the freedom of the middle class while enriching the powerful under the guise of health emergencies, global warming, and environmental, social, and governance investment.

The result of this oppression is plain to see. For example, the CCP's "zero COVID" regime and social credit system is not an aberration: It is the unavoidable and intended result of bureaucratic rule. If left unchecked, it will replicate itself in economies around the world, empowering an unaccountable elite to control where citizens travel, who they may associate with, and whether they are allowed to get a loan or own property at all. The result will be tyranny and economic collapse.

In stark contrast, free nations that reward hard work, marriage, and thrift are promoting upward

mobility, fueling civil society, and creating generational family wealth. Nations that fight to empower their people through economic freedom reap the benefits, lifting their citizens to lead lives of quiet dignity.

The world and America are at a crossroads. They must choose either the narrow path of self-governance, human dignity, and ordered liberty or the broad path of an economy run by the managerial elite with no room for dissent or responsibility. One path leads to prosperity, and the other leads to ruin.

If we hope to recognize this country three or five years from now, and if we want to pass on to our children and grandchildren a nation that's at least as free and prosperous as the one we inherited, we must focus our efforts on turning everyday Americans away from the false promises of bigger government and sweeping economic programs while turning the rest of the world away from the CCP. And we must have greater education and outreach to do it. The data we present in the *Index of Economic Freedom* are the foundation for that discussion.

The 2023 *Index* documents a pattern of countries around the world holding true to the course of economic freedom. Like its predecessors, our latest edition of the *Index* provides ample evidence of dynamic gains from advancing freedom. Countries that have not joined the march of freedom have left their citizens lagging behind and, in the worst cases, stuck in stagnation and poverty. Such failures are inexcusable. Most important, they are preventable.

As the *Index* has shown in case after case, nations that find the political will and wisdom to advance economic freedom will see their citizens prosper in the years ahead.

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