Neoliberalism in Translation: Transnational Advocacy Networks in Latin America's Free-Market Movement

Why and how do neoliberal think tanks develop partnerships across multiple transnational advocacy networks? And how does this process affect neoliberal diffusion? To answer these questions, this chapter draws upon a wide variety of data, including a database of 168 think tanks spanning Latin America, United States and Western Europe, network data on the presence of interorganizational partnerships among them, interview data with think tank directors working across ten countries, participant observation in events organized in Latin America, and archival sources on their historical roots.

In brief, I argue that diffusion through advocacy networks is a polycentric and multilayered process, as think tanks develop ties with actors located in multiple countries over time and put different amounts of effort in cultivating these ties depending on their shifting agenda. I term this process *Transnational Network Layering* and discuss its advantages vis-à-vis current approaches to the study of neoliberal diffusion (sections 1 and 2). Then, I analyze the structure of transnational advocacy networks in Latin America, describing its different layers (global, regional, and national) and showing how Latin American organizations attempt to create networking spaces and resources to overcome two main regional problems: a structural lack of funding for non-profits and the frequent instability of right-wing political parties (section 3).

Finally, I show that despite all think tanks analyzed in my sample are identified as neoliberal, they still have important differences related to the defense of personal values, which lead to three main ideological positions: libertarians, liberal-conservatives or center-right, and conservatives (section 4.1). Given the multi-layered structure of advocacy networks, I show that

developing interorganizational partnerships among them always involves an effort to *interpret* and *translate* the political position of their partners to that of their own country. This process of translation can create important mismatches between organizations. Therefore, I show that foundations from the Global North often work with local teams that act as mediators who transmit local political knowledge to reduce the chances of a mismatch happening. They do so in different ways, which are discussed in section 4.2.

1. The Global Diffusion of Neoliberalism: Advantages and Shortcomings of Current Approaches

There is an interdisciplinary consensus on the fact that neoliberalism emerged from a "network of Anglo-American-centric knowledge producers, expressed in different ways within the institutions of the postwar nation-state and their political fields" (Mudge, 2008: 706). However, scholars have developed three main approaches for understanding how such diffusion took place, focused on (1) the institutional pressures imposed by international financial organizations over nation-states, (2) the global rise of neoclassical economics and its legitimacy within national policymaking circles, and (3) the expansion of advocacy networks of intellectuals and right-wing champions of free-market ideas (Bockman, 2011: 2-3). While they do not necessarily represent alternative explanations, social scientists have focused on each separately as they emphasize different aspects of neoliberal diffusion.

In this section, I first briefly summarize each of these perspectives. Then, I show how they share two essential shortcomings: (1) an exclusive emphasis on North-South diffusion and (2) an untenable distinction between neoliberalism as policy and neoliberalism as ideas. These

shortcomings lead me to propose an alternative approach theorized in the next section, which focuses on the multi-layered and changing nature of transnational advocacy networks and the interactional work of their members to translate neoliberal advocacy to different national contexts.

1.1. Three Perspectives on Neoliberal Diffusion

The first account of the global spread of neoliberalism has focused on the coercive pressures of international organizations over peripheral nation-states, and particularly multilateral financial institutions. Mostly focused on the period of the so-called "Washington Consensus" emerging during the 1980s, scholars have shown that the practice of conditionality represented a strong international coercive pressure for states to adopt market liberalization and free-market institutional reforms (S. Babb & Kentikelenis, 2021; S. L. Babb, 2009; S. L. Babb & Carruthers, 2008; Henisz et al., 2005). Debt crises led peripheral states to adapt to the conditions imposed by lending financial organizations, thus being coerced into a standardized set of free-market policies pushed forward by the synchronized efforts of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (S. Babb & Kentikelenis, 2021).

Tracing the long-term effects of free-market policy adoption in peripheral economies, this first account has shed light on critical social outcomes such as welfare protection and bureaucratic capacity (Kentikelenis & Stubbs, 2023; Reinsberg et al., 2019; Schrecker, 2016), as well as resilient institutional changes such as central bank independence (Johnson, 2019), private pension systems (Orenstein, 2008), and capital controls (Chwieroth, 2010). Across all these

accounts, neoliberal diffusion is portrayed as driven by the coercive pressure of international organizations over nation-states.

The second stream of literature has focused on professional changes within economics as a driver of neoliberal diffusion. More specifically, it points at the rise of the neoclassical paradigm and its specific logic as underpinning a global consensus towards free-market policies through normative isomorphism – this is, organizational change derived from professionalization and expert-legitimated work (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Scholars have shown that the profession of economics became internationally legitimized in policy circles after the 1950s (Fourcade, 2003, 2006; D. Hirschman & Berman, 2014; Markoff & Montecinos, 1993). This global legitimacy reshaped states and political action around neoclassical economics by providing incentives for building professional trajectories in the periphery of the world system around free-market economics (S. Babb, 2001; Biglaiser, 2002; Centeno, 2004; Dezalay & Garth, 2002; A. O. Hirschman, 1984; Markoff & Montecinos, 1993; Montecinos & Markoff, 2009).

In studies of shifts towards neoliberal policymaking in peripheral nations, coercive isomorphism is indirectly connected to normative isomorphism, with evidence showing that the "technocrats" who became interlocutors of international financial organizations in peripheral nations have been predominantly professionals trained in American paradigms of economics such as monetarism – either in American universities or in local universities which followed American curricula (S. Babb, 2001; Biglaiser, 1999; Broome & Seabrooke, 2015; J. I. Domínguez, 1997; Fourcade & Babb, 2002; Montecinos & Markoff, 2009; O'Donnell, 1973). The diffusion of neoliberalism constitutes, in this account, a process that runs through

professional training and the application of the "style of reasoning" (Berman, 2022) of free-market economics to realms of policymaking across different national contexts.

Finally, a third growing body of literature has provided a more precise historical connection with the emergence of neoliberal thought by focusing on its early origins. A significant amount of work shows that neoliberalism emerged from a small circle of intellectuals who founded the *Mont Pèlerin Society* in Switzerland in 1947, society which grew steadily over the years and coalesced around annual meetings to foster debates over the efforts needed to defeat "collectivism" and defend the functioning of markets from social and political obstacles (Biebricher, 2018; Burgin, 2012; Chouhy, 2020; Hartwell, 1995; Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009; Peck, 2010; Plehwe & Walpen, 2006; Slobodian, 2020). Following this insight, scholars have shown that several members of the *Mont Pèlerin Society* later founded or became sponsors of non-profit advocacy foundations (Plehwe & Walpen, 2006), building organizations to advocate for neoliberal ideas outside the constraints of state bureaucracy and institutional arenas – with some scholars comparing this process to the development of an "intellectual movement" (Chouhy, 2020; Cockett, 1995) or a global "thought collective" (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009).

With the help of conservative political donors devoted to "spread the liberal creed," the number of free-market advocacy think tanks grew exponentially after the 1980s worldwide, connecting organizations from the Global North with local free-market advocates from Southeast Asia to Latin America (Ball, 2012; Djelic & Mousavi, 2020; Fischer & Plehwe, 2017; Mudge, 2008; Plehwe & Fischer, 2019; S. Teles & Kenney, 2007). Most work in this tradition therefore associates the diffusion of neoliberalism with the work of these intellectual entrepreneurs and the resources facilitated by their networks, leading to the presence of advocacy organizations across virtually every country in the world.

These three accounts of the global diffusion of neoliberalism are analogous to the three types of isomorphism initially described by the seminal work of DiMaggio & Powell (1983). The first focuses on *coercive isomorphism* at the level of supra-national organizations through the mechanism of conditionality. By forcing peripheral indebted nations to adopt free-market policies to receive financial aid, international financial organizations became crucial actors behind market-liberalizing reforms worldwide. The second focuses on *normative isomorphism* within the economics profession, primarily driven by status competition and the rise in prestige of neoclassical economics worldwide. By becoming trained in the "new economic science" in the United States, economists from peripheral countries became legitimized to drive significant changes toward free-market policies in their nations. Finally, the third approach emphasizes *mimetic isomorphism* by showing how free-market intellectuals coalesced around a global movement, which then adopted the model of the advocacy think tank to legitimate neoliberal ideas within countries.

1.2. Reconsidering the Directionality and the Object of Neoliberal Diffusion

Despite significant differences in how these three approaches account for the global diffusion of neoliberalism, they also share some shortcomings. I analyze here two of them: (a) the exclusive focus on North-South diffusion, which ignores the agency of Southern actors and therefore over-simplifies the directionality in the diffusion of neoliberal ideas and policies; and (b) the disconnection between studies that understand neoliberalism as a policy paradigm and those who portray it as an intellectual movement based on ideas. These two shortcomings

weaken current approaches by homogenizing the direction of neoliberal diffusion and the ideological underpinnings of global neoliberalism.

1.2.1. The Problem of Directionality

First, both *coercive* and *mimetic* accounts share the assumption that the direction of global diffusion runs from Global North to South – this is, from Western Europe and the United States to the rest of the world. Coercive approaches do so explicitly by examining how Northern institutions impose global norms. The diffusion of free-market policy is arguably different from similar dynamics within international institutions that need to reconcile the preferences of both central and peripheral countries during the process of norm-making – as in the case of the World Health Organization (Chorev, 2012b, 2012a). Given that the power imbalance in the World System between center and periphery entails that conditionality can only be imposed by the former to the latter, [1] this approach is highly attentive to hegemonic struggles but unidirectional in its analysis of the diffusion process.

Similarly, the *mimetic* approach to global diffusion has provided insights into how the think tank model expanded from Global North to South – primarily through the active work of foundations that act as "breeders" of think tanks worldwide by training other neoliberal entrepreneurs (Djelic, 2017; Djelic & Mousavi, 2020; Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009; Mudge, 2008; S. Teles & Kenney, 2007). Work in the same vein has identified transnational conservative

[1] Differently from "an ordinary transaction like a commercial loan, [where] the borrower consents to [terms] in order to get the loan," coercive isomorphism relies on international pressures to domestic political elites from nation-states who "should answer to the will of domestic electorates" (S. L. Babb & Carruthers, 2008: 14). Evidence shows that elites are willing to circumvent this will if they believe that free-market programs will help them stabilize the economy and thus receive further support for the next popular election (Stokes, 2006; Weyland, 1998).

networks comprising foundations located in the United States (Álvarez Rivadulla et al., 2010; Lievesley, 2011) and Western Europe (Fischer & Plehwe, 2017; Plehwe & Fischer, 2019) and the expansion of their ties to neoliberal actors in the Global South. Nevertheless, by only focusing on the agents of diffusion in the Global North and drawing upon descriptive network data, this approach lacks a clear account of whether and how diffusion occurs. As Teles & Kenney (2007: 137) have summarized, "Although the global libertarian network could draw on powerful ideas, ideas alone do not necessarily translate into organizational presence and policy influence."

As a result, we know that think tank advocacy networks span virtually every country of the world. However, the underlying assumption of a process of *mimetic isomorphism* does not go far in explaining whether neoliberal diffusion runs through these networks and, if so, whether the actions of such foundations are successfully implementing neoliberal ideas locally. In other words, it confounds diffusion as mimicry with diffusion as social learning (Strang & Soule, 1998: 269).

Similarly to world polity theory (Boli, 1999; Meyer et al., 1997), both *coercive* and *mimetic* approaches regard people in the periphery as "passive recipients, or inheritors, of 'Western' templates that are transferred to and/or imposed on them by Western actors" (Edwards, 2020: 3). This problem runs deeper than generally acknowledged, as we have evidence of cases in which the imposition of global norms does not occur or does occur but in the reverse direction – from South to North (Bockman, 2011; Carroll et al., 2019; Downey et al., 2020; Edwards, 2020; Ferguson, 2021; Peck, 2010; Rupprecht, 2020; Sikkink, 2014; Thornton, 2021). Furthermore, we lack studies considering whether ideas and policies from the Global South challenge or change those from the North through interactions happening along think tank

advocacy networks. This shortcoming is curious given the literature's notable focus on the early experiments of the Chicago Boys in Chile, which preceded the Thatcher and Reagan years (Fischer, 2009; Peck, 2010) – to mention just one example among others (Rupprecht, 2020; Slobodian & Plehwe, 2022).

This shortcoming has been less pronounced in accounts of *normative isomorphism*, with scholarship showing that policymakers who became interlocutors of international financial organizations in peripheral nations have been predominantly professionals trained in variants of free-market economics (S. Babb, 2001; Broome & Seabrooke, 2015; J. I. Domínguez, 1997; Heredia, 2018; D. Hirschman & Berman, 2014; Montecinos & Markoff, 2009; O'Donnell, 1973). By emphasizing the policy adaptations of technocrats embedded in local institutions, this account pays more attention to the actions of economists in the periphery and how they can shift the direction of local policy through different mechanisms. A growing literature has emerged from this insight, mapping how policy ideas are embedded in local institutional frameworks (Blyth, 2002; Campbell & Pedersen, 2014; Halliday & Carruthers, 2009) and highlighting how free-market actors often hybridize global and local ideas to respond to institutional and political pressures (Ban, 2016; Ban et al., 2021; Bockman, 2011; Bohle & Greskovits, 2012; Fourcade, 2010; Krippner, 2011).

This groundbreaking theoretical intervention, however, has been almost exclusively focused on the role of economists, with most case studies concentrated on Western and Eastern Europe and the United States (but see Madariaga, 2020). Furthermore, it shares with the literature on coercive isomorphism the focus on nation-states as the unit of analysis, thus becoming comparative but rarely transnational and global in analytical scope (Bockman, 2011:

13-14).[2] Finally, it also homogenizes neoliberalism by equating it with neoclassical economics, as I argue in the next section. In sum, while this scholarship underscores the need to analyze the relationship between global ideas and their local adaptation within peripheral policy arenas, the focus of analysis is the receptive role of economists and policymakers within nations rather than the process of diffusion itself.

1.2.2. What Is Being Diffused? Neoliberalism Between Policy Paradigm and Intellectual Movement

The second shortcoming relates to the theoretical disconnection between studies focused on neoliberalism as a set of *policies* emerging around the Washington Consensus on the one hand and studies focused on the birth and historical evolution of neoliberal *ideas* on the other. While these two perspectives are not necessarily incompatible, they consider different objects of diffusion and, therefore, point towards different temporalities and modes of neoliberal diffusion.

In the first strand of work, neoliberalism is considered a "policy paradigm," defined originally by Hall as "a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing." (Hall, 1993: 279). In this approach, policies rest on broad ideas about "how the economy is put together and how it operates in normal times," slowly becoming conventions that policymakers follow routinely, but can permanently change in response to crises (Blyth, 2002: 35-41).

[2] In fact, some of the most insightful analyses on neoliberal policy during the Reagan and Thatcher years do not consider the global dimension at all (Pierson, 1994; Prasad, 2006). Similarly, the literature on varieties of capitalism has focused on neoliberalization as a question of policy convergence (Berger & Dore, 1996; Hall & Soskice, 2013), remaining methodologically nationalist (for a critique, see Brenner et al., 2010).

Within studies of neoliberal diffusion, most scholars identify in the "Washington Consensus" a clear set of policies that constitute the neoliberal paradigm *by excellence*, legitimated through both expert knowledge and nation-states' increasing adoption of its main recipes. In doing so, the concept brought together *coercive* and *normative* traditions by showing that neoliberalism "derives legitimacy from expert knowledge, such as international economics scholarship [but is] also embedded in the practices of organizations with coercive authority, such as national governments, which gives them relative durability" (S. Babb, 2013: 272).

Williamson most famously summarizes the specific policies included in the paradigm in his piece called "What Washington Means by Policy Reform" (Williamson, 1990), ranging from fiscal discipline to economic deregulation and the removal of restrictions on foreign imports and direct investment (Mudge, 2008: 718). The adoption of this new regulatory framework took place during the 1980s and 1990s, and was symbolized by the set of policy prescriptions identified by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (S. Babb & Kentikelenis, 2021; S. L. Babb, 2009; Evans & Sewell, 2013; Goldman, 2008).

In analytical terms, the equation of neoliberalism with the term "Washington Consensus" as a policy paradigm allowed scholars to avoid the thorny problem involved in the identification of what neoliberalism really is (S. Babb & Kentikelenis, 2021; Brenner et al., 2010). Given that the problem of defining neoliberalism is an issue that scholars have repeatedly raised given its pejorative valence and the fact that neoliberals rarely identify as such (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Dunn, 2017; Mirowski, 2018), this definition provided an advantage vis-à-vis other terms by focusing on a specific set of neoliberal policy.

This reduced scope, however, undermines the insight that ideas guide policy by deviating the focus from the origins and evolution of those same ideas. Even when acknowledging that

free-market ideas underpin neoliberal policy, these ideas are pitched at a high level of abstraction and analyzed independently from the trajectories and objectives of their proponents, indirectly disconnecting institutional analyses from the intellectual roots of neoliberalism.

This weak spot is the point of departure of the second stream of work, which focuses on neoliberalism as an intellectual project and its variegated, multiple, and sometimes even contradictory implementation. Intellectual historians have unpacked the different traditions of free-market thought emerging in early 20th century Europe in response to a perceived decline of 19th-century liberalism and the rise of the Keynesian policy paradigm. These traditions include the Austrian School of Economics (Bockman & Eyal, 2002; Boettke, 1995; Von Mises, 1969), German Ordoliberalism (Biebricher, 2018; Germann, 2021; Ptak, 2009) and the Geneva School (Slobodian, 2020), with further American additions post-WWII, such as Chicago's monetarism (Tavlas, 2023; Van Horn et al., 2011) and Virginia's school of public choice (Boettke et al., 2021; Tullock et al., 2004). A group of intellectuals heading each of these traditions coalesced around the *Mont Pèlerin Society*, thus leading some scholars to use this membership criterion for defining neoliberalism as an intellectual and political movement coalesced by its opposition to "collectivism" and their concern about the institutional preconditions for the proper functioning of markets (Chouhy, 2020; Mirowski, 2009; Plehwe & Walpen, 2006).

Given these strong ideological and professional differences, however, the movement never reached a consensus about such preconditions. Substantial differences among neoliberal intellectuals arose regarding how to scientifically understanding market dynamics, the institutional frameworks that would allow market societies to thrive, and the relationship between individual freedom and democratic institutions (Biebricher, 2018; Mirowski, 2009; Slobodian, 2020). In fact, debates within the *Mont Pèlerin Society* have been marked by intense

confrontation rather than consensus over the core ideological pillars of the neoliberal paradigm and its application to specific policies (Hartwell, 1995; Plehwe, 2009; Skousen, 2005).

As argued by scholars focused on the *mimetic* approach to neoliberal diffusion, think tanks and non-profit foundations founded by members of the *Mont Pèlerin Society* became the primary international vehicles for neoliberal ideas. Early free-market entrepreneurs followed Friedrich Hayek's initial call to challenge the climate of ideas during the Cold War (Hayek, 1949), expanding the work of publicly-minded intellectuals through think tank advocacy (Fischer & Plehwe, 2017; Jones, 2014; Plehwe & Walpen, 2006). But precisely due to these ideas' contested and multiple roots, their implementation was marked by local hybridization and translation efforts across "transnational dialogues" (Bockman & Eyal, 2002). A growing literature has been focused on the variegated emergence of neoliberal projects worldwide, emphasizing the different temporality and ideological roots of neoliberalism across nation-states of both North and South (Bockman, 2011; Bockman & Eyal, 2002; Brenner et al., 2010; Dezalay & Garth, 2002; Peck, 2010; Rupprecht, 2020; Slobodian & Plehwe, 2022; Tuğal, 2009).

Despite its relevant understanding of neoliberalism as an intellectual and political movement that expanded through think tank networks across countries, this work has remained disconnected from the scholarship on policy paradigms. By recentering the scholarly discussion over neoliberal ideas and traditions, it has remained more focused on policy divergence than convergence and less attentive to how think tanks effectively translate these neoliberal ideas into policy.

In the next section, I propose a new approach to understanding processes of neoliberal diffusion by directing theoretical and empirical attention to think tank advocacy networks. I do so for two main reasons. First, tracing the evolution of advocacy networks illuminates different

strands of neoliberal thought, therefore opening its *multiple* and *contentious* nature to empirical study. As shown in this section, while literature on neoliberalism as a policy paradigm focuses on the global diffusion of the "Washington Consensus" after the 1980s, neoliberal ideas had been present and diffused through think tank networks since at least the 1950s. However, the diffusion direction was not unique, and the object of diffusion varied and was hybridized across countries. Second, focusing on advocacy networks as diffusion channels allows for a *relational* and *polycentric* understanding of diffusion. Most literature focusing on normative isomorphism and policy arenas focuses on nation-states as the unit of analysis while coercive isomorphism focuses on the global arena but from a Northern-centric standpoint. On the contrary, I argue here that tracing the diffusion process through advocacy networks can help current scholarship to move beyond mimetic approaches and recenter the analysis on the nature of transnational ties and the diffusion process itself.

2. An Alternative Approach: Transnational Network Layering

To overcome the two shortcomings exhibited in the previous section, in this section I conceptualize a process termed "transnational network layering." To do so, instead of starting from the assumption that the world system is divided between North and South, I propose to conceive the world system as polycentric, and divided upon different *domains*, this is, "more or less bounded parts of the global social space within which connections are dense and actors are often aware of each other, while across their boundaries connections are sparser and actors don't know about or perceive each other as less relevant" (Wimmer, 2021: 1390-91, see also Bail et al., 2019, Hoang 2022).

While domains can vary in their degree of institutionalization and structural characteristics (Wimmer, 2021: 1404-8), I define the domain of *transnational neoliberal advocacy* as comprised of a wide set of actors connected by their shared self-understanding as active participants in a global movement concerned for the preconditions of a "free society."[3] This is what many of the advocacy organizations that I study in this dissertation refer to as the "global freedom movement:" interconnected networks of exchange among similarly-minded advocates of free-market and conservative ideas.

While similar to the domains established by transnational social movements, which are often polycentric and weakly institutionalized (Wimmer, 2021: 1405-6), the global domain of transnational neoliberal advocacy is better captured by the concept of "transnational advocacy networks" given its slightly more institutionalized nature than social movements. Following mimetic approaches, we know that global neoliberalism is articulated through networks of think tanks with hegemonic goals (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009; Plehwe & Walpen, 2006). Thus, I pose that transnational advocacy networks are the main structuring dimension – and the best way to empirically capture – the broader domain of neoliberal advocacy.

I draw upon the concept of *transnational advocacy networks* to signal two main features of the neoliberal domain: (1) the structuration of advocacy in networks of non-state actors working internationally, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information (Keck & Sikkink, 1999: 89); and (2) the fact that these non-state

[3] As Chouhy (2020) has noted, despite neoliberals' reluctancy to being identified as such (which works against the idea of neoliberalism as an identity), they do share an active and collective self-understanding of their task. Thus, I follow here his proposal – which builds upon (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) – of understanding neoliberal networks as united by their shared self-understanding of their position and role rather than their explicit articulation of a collective identity. In the next section I showcase their internal ideological differences.

actors are always based in one country and form advocacy networks with similar entities in other countries to influence ideas and policies within them (Bob, 2013: 72).

While this definition follows the main tenets of existing literature on advocacy networks, I should also note that the neoliberal advocacy networks that I focus on are not organized by issues and rarely prone to seeking influence over international organizations and/or the development of global norms. Instead, the structure of transnational advocacy networks make them country-centric (Beckfield, 2003; Velasco, 2018): nationally-rooted organizations develop ties to actors engaged in these same efforts across countries, creating international partnerships to support the advocacy work that they develop within nation-states. In this sense, neoliberal advocacy networks can be seen as different from the most commonly identified networks of international nongovernmental organizations in the field of international relations, which are issue-based – i.e., human rights, environmental, humanitarian – and attempt to pressure nation-states and multilateral organizations to implement certain policies (Boli, 1999; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Krause, 2014; Von Bülow, 2010).[4]

Now, while transnational advocacy networks involve at least two organizations by definition (a think tank in one country that attempts to influence ideas and policy by establishing ties with a think tank in another), their broad mechanisms of evolution have been identified by network theorists focused on global interorganizational networks (Atouba & Shumate, 2010; Fuhse & Gondal, 2022). Think tanks in the same country or region learn from one another (propinquity),[5] thus developing communication ties with similar organizations (homophily) and

[4] The use of the notion of advocacy networks can also be differentiated from the commonly used notion of "epistemic communities" for the study of think tanks (Haas, 1992; Stone, 1996). As I will show in the next section, neoliberal think tank professionals do not necessarily share professional identities or knowledge, and do not always focus on effecting policy change as their main goal.

[5] The mechanism of social learning due to adjacency is different from mimetic isomorphism, as they adopt best practices in response to the development of shared social norms rather than adoption given increased competition (Hadden & Jasny, 2019; Strang & Soule, 1998).

sharing information about other relevant members within transnational advocacy networks for collaboration (transitivity). These ties facilitate the exchange of information and material resources, minimizing their dependence from other types of actors (reciprocity). Also, given that we know that neoliberal advocacy networks initially stemmed from efforts of organizations in the Global North to create a global coalition of free-market actors, it is highly likely that their reputation as "foundational fathers" of neoliberal advocacy and the resources they offer for other think tanks worldwide will lead them to present a higher degree of centrality (Doerfel & Taylor, 2004; Hervé, 2014).

But precisely because there are *multiple* think tanks that engage in these breeding efforts and respond to *different* strands of neoliberal thought and practice, the structure of what I have called above the domain of transnational neoliberal advocacy is geographically and organizationally complex. For instance, the think tank *Libertad y Desarrollo* (Liberty & Development) is embedded in a local network of free-market think tanks in Chile. However, it has developed ties with other Latin American partners (in Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela) over time to develop joint efforts and learn from their similar experiences. These partners, as well as Liberty & Development, have simultaneously developed ties with foundations hosted in the United States and Western Europe, and frequently attend their meetings to meet other free-market advocates from Latin America as well as other continents. All these partners offer the members of Liberty & Development a different set of resources, networking opportunities, information, and expertise. And the same is true, to a higher or lesser degree, in the case of every Latin American think tank belonging to the "global freedom movement."

The structuration process by which the domain of transnational neoliberal advocacy evolves is therefore what I term *Transnational Network Layering* (TNL). As illustrated by the

case of Liberty & Development above, think tanks develop ties both horizontally (with think tanks located within their own countries, albeit perhaps in other cities or regions) and vertically (with think tanks located in other countries of their same continent, or other continents). Because these partnerships rarely disappear, they become *superimposed* over time, generating a multiplicity of layered networks through which diffusion unfolds. This is the first main characteristic of TNL: the temporal and geographical superimposition of ties between organizations across multiple transnational advocacy networks, which leads to a multi-layered and polycentric movement of free-market advocates.

The second main characteristic relates closely to the first one. Precisely because TNL makes the neoliberal domain multi-layered and dynamic, partnerships need to be cultivated across different cultural backgrounds and political affiliations. Therefore, the work to establish and maintain interorganizational partnerships is not automatic, nor constant over time. Think tank entrepreneurs need to establish relationships of trust and "culturally match" the political goals of their partners – be them in other country, region, or continent.

This is easier said than done. As mentioned above, intellectual historians have shown that multiple strands of neoliberal thought and practice co-exist, and advocacy actors often disagree significantly on the meaning of basic neoliberal notions – such as the role of individual choice or the institutional foundations of freedom. Thus, to generate stable partnerships based on mutual trust, I argue that actors are forced to culturally "translate" these political traditions in their own terms (Jijon, 2019; Kay, 2023; Levitt & Merry, 2009). This brokerage role implies interpreting these traditions through their own lenses, and therefore assessing which partnerships are more closely tied to their own hegemonic goals.

Interorganizational partnerships are, in sum, based upon mutual interpretations of what their political identities are, where are other think tanks positioned in the ideological spectrum of free-market and conservative ideas, and what advantages can that partnership bring their organizations in the future.

To make this problem of translation even more salient, we can expect changes in the organizational goals and/or political positioning of these organizations within their own countries to lead to mismatches between organizational goals, the destabilization of mutual projects, and the need to develop new partnerships. We know that, at the national level, think tanks are connected to their peers but also actors across the political, media, business and state fields (Medvetz, 2012; Stone, 1996). Therefore, their needs may vary depending on the constraints of this context and the strategies they adopt over time to influence this wide array of actors.

From this standpoint, what initially seemed a "global freedom movement" becomes internally complex given the multi-layered, dynamic, and ideologically multiple partnerships established within it. For this reason, the theoretical standpoint adopted here is different from the mimetic approach to transnational advocacy networks, which portrays the neoliberal movement as a unitary and invariant actor without a clear response to the question of how actors with different cultural backgrounds and from different nations develop close interorganizational partnerships if important political and ideological differences remain in place (Djelic & Mousavi, 2020; Fischer & Plehwe, 2017; Plehwe & Fischer, 2019).

In this sense, the study of *Transnational Network Layering* flips the focus of current analysis of transnational advocacy networks. Instead of first mapping the structure of transnational advocacy networks and then derive conclusions about their evolution, functioning and strength based on secondary sources, I argue that to understand how local organizations

exploit transnational advocacy networks we need to recenter the analysis on local actors' strategies and the role that transnational interactions play in their evolution. This is what I do in the next section, focused on mapping the structure and evolution of neoliberal advocacy domain in Latin America.

To sum up, in this chapter I take a new approach to understand neoliberal diffusion through interactions happening across transnational advocacy networks, which constitute the core structure of a global neoliberal domain. I argue that the process of diffusion through these advocacy networks is polycentric and multilayered, as think tanks develop ties with actors located in multiple countries over time and put different amounts of effort in cultivating these ties depending on their shifting agenda. This is what I term *Transnational Network Layering*. Finally, I argue that to understand how diffusion unfolds within TNL we need to pay attention to how these layered interorganizational structures open spaces for interactions among free-market advocates, and how think tank directors put effort in building alliances and translate neoliberalism in ways that are beneficial for their own interests by developing partnerships. These interorganizational ties can shift their meaning and therefore become activated or deactivated over time depending on the ever-changing agenda of the actors involved in the partnership.

3. Transnational Network Layering in Latin America's Free-Market Movement

In this section I illustrate the process of transnational network layering by analyzing the structure of the main free-market and conservative transnational advocacy networks spanning contemporary Latin America. I first explain why I choose Latin America to test my theoretical

framework. Then, I analyze a hierarchical network based on an original database of 159 think tanks distributed across every country of the region and their partnerships with six advocacy foundations located in the United States, Germany, and Spain, as well as three advocacy networks hosted by Latin American leaders themselves. I show that what scholars term "neoliberalism" is ideologically and organizationally diverse and is organized across both horizontal and vertical layers of partnerships that evolve over time. Finally, I draw upon 135 interviews with Latin American think tank directors to show how developing partnerships among advocacy think tanks involves culturally matching political traditions by interpreting actors' ideological positioning across different national cultural backgrounds.

3.1. Latin America: From Early Neoliberal Experiments to Expanding Advocacy Networks

As argued above, there is consistent evidence pointing to the *Mont Pèlerin Society* assembled in Switzerland in 1947 as the point of origin of neoliberal ideas (Cockett, 1995; Foucault, 2008; Hartwell, 1995; Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009; Peck, 2010; Slobodian, 2020). The post-war period was marked by the predominance of Anglo-American members, many of whom were the first founders of advocacy think tanks. In fact, one of the core members of the original MPS circle was key in diffusing the 'think tank model:' Antony Fisher. A British businessman who wanted to jump to party politics, he was personally advised by Friedrich Hayek to promote free-market ideas through funding what would later become the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in London. Funded by Fisher in 1955, the IEA became the prototype of the advocacy think

tank, and key to the rise of Thatcherism and the New Right in Britain (Cockett, 1995; Desai, 1994; Hall, 1992).

Due to the Institute's success, Fisher was invited to co-found or assess in the launching of the Adam Smith Institute (UK), Fraser Institute (Canada), Manhattan Institute, Pacific Research Institute and National Center for Policy Analysis (USA), and Center for Independent Studies (Australia) during the subsequent decades (Cockett, 1995; S. M. Teles, 2008). In America, some of these institutes joined efforts within a growing conservative ecosystem that benefited from the exile of many free-market advocates from Europe and combined with local corporate support, leading to the emergence of many renowned institutions, such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Foundation for Economic Education, the Heritage Foundation, and the CATO Institute (Medvetz, 2012: 124-29).

Fisher's last accomplishment would be the most influential in expanding the think tank model across the world: the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, known as the main 'breeder' of think tanks worldwide. Created by Antony Fisher in 1981, the organization was founded with the mission to help set up think tanks across the world. Atlas started with limited funding provided by Fisher's wife and a handful of donors from the US and Canada, although by 1985 it had already helped to set up 25 "partner" organizations, ranging from the Icelandic Research Center for Innovation and Economic Growth to the Peruvian Institute for Liberty and Democracy (Djelic, 2017). Many of the founders and/or directors of these think tanks were MPS members or were brought into the MPS by invitation of Fisher and his close colleagues – who included core members such as Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, John Blundell, and Murray Rothbard.

Atlas Foundation – later renamed Atlas Network – not only provided some financial support to its partners through small grants, but later extended its reach through the organization

of regional workshops – which transformed into massive forums – and short courses to teach entrepreneurs how to run a successful think tank. Over time, the organization professionalized in several ways, becoming a hub for different types of aid to their partners: annual awards, regional forums, podcasts, training for COOs, training for fundraising, mentorship programs, competitions for seed grants, etc. (Djelic & Mousavi, 2020). By 1995 Atlas was leading a network of 95 partners across every region of the world, which would expand to more than 170 in 2015.

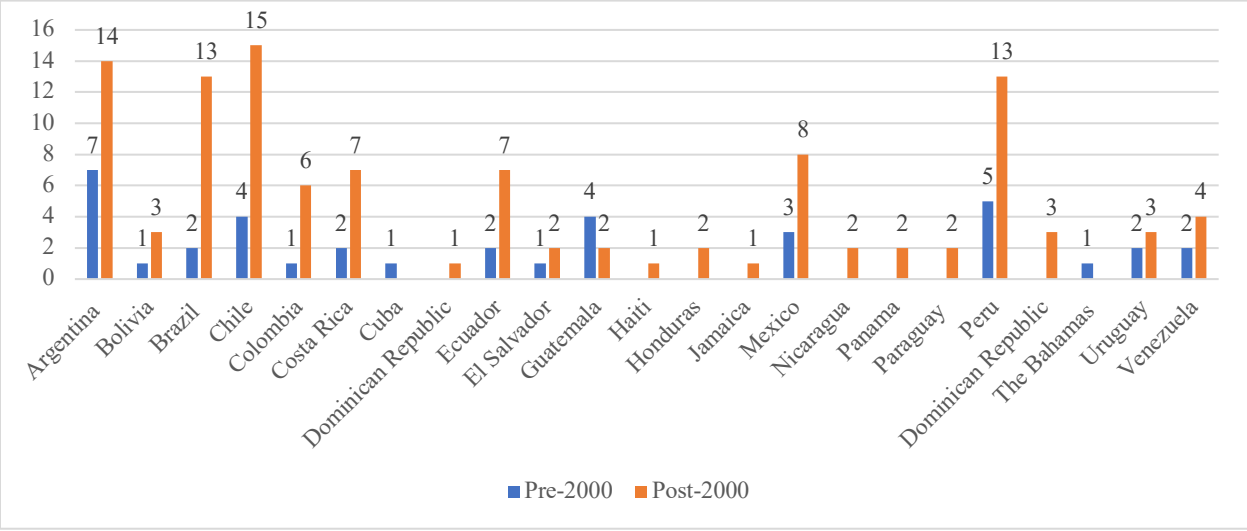
Latin America was particularly relevant both for the *Mont Pèlerin Society* and the Atlas Foundation. First, although the region counted with only one member in the founding circle of the MPS, it soon became the third runner in number of members behind the US and Europe (Plehwe & Walpen, 2006). These free-market conservatives often founded institutes and universities to spread neoliberal ideas in the region during the 1950s. For example, the first MPS member was the Guatemalan businessman Manuel Ayau, who would later become the founder of the famous Francisco Marroquín University (Fischer & Waxenecker, 2020) – the most important free-market university in the region. Similarly, Alberto Benegas Lynch (father) was a founder of the first Argentine think tank (Center for Liberty Studies) in 1957, which was inspired in the work of the American Foundation for Economic Education via his friendship with its founder, Leonard Read – a disciple and friend of Ayn Rand and Henry Hazlitt (Burns, 2011; Morresi, 2009). Similar efforts were later undertaken by groups of MPS-affiliated businesspeople in Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela, establishing a basis of free-market tradition decades before the Washington Consensus (Henderson, 2016; Nylen, 1993).

This made Latin America a key place of struggle for and against neoliberal expansion during the second half of the twentieth century. As scholars have acknowledged, early neoliberal

experiments were run in the region by members of the MPS such as the reforms of the "Chicago Boys" in Chile or the proposals of Hernando de Soto in Perú, which were eagerly discussed in subsequent MPS meetings. These experiments *preceded* the Thatcher and Reagan years but marked the ascendance of Friedmanite-style Chicago economics worldwide, in detriment of other strands of neoliberal thought (Peck, 2010). In fact, some recent historical studies suggest that the set of policies of the Washington Consensus were a top-down response to the perceived hegemony of heterodox economics in Latin America – particularly the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) (Fajardo, 2022).

During the 2000s, the number of think tanks in the region increased significantly in response to a period known as the "left turn" or "pink tide," when left-of-center Presidents were democratically elected across most Latin American countries (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of Active Think Tanks Across Latin American Countries



Source: own elaboration

The left turn symbolized a backlash against the Washington consensus, with its leaders mobilizing against "the idea that unregulated market forces can be relied on to meet social needs" (Levitsky and Roberts 2011: 5). They devised new redistributive welfare policies and sought to enhance the participation of grassroots organizations and marginalized popular sectors, sometimes incorporating them within state institutions (Silva & Rossi, 2018).

This regional expansion of free-market advocacy networks has therefore been captured by scholars and investigative journalists, who have described think tanks as an ideological and transnational network of power that constantly fuels the neoliberal right in the region, and has expanded as a backlash against a perceived left-wing hegemony (Cannon, 2016; Fang, 2018; Lievesley, 2011; Plehwe & Fischer, 2019; Ramirez, 2020).

Sociologists aiming at explaining the network structure of this neoliberal advocacy network have found a strong overlap between MPS and Atlas membership, showing that 51% of the region's think tanks are tied by brokerage positions that have one foot in each organization (Fischer & Plehwe, 2017). However, these are not the only foundations operating in the region. In more recent work, Fischer and Plehwe (2019) mapped five different transnational advocacy networks across the United States, Spain and Germany, complicating the core role previously granted to the MPS. Similarly, work by Álvarez Rivadulla et al. (2010) traced the ties of the CATO Institute and Heritage Foundation in Latin America, finding a more complex and decentralized network.

Thus, while the literature has remained focused on the role of MPS members given their important role in spreading neoliberalism during the 1950s and 1960s, we have evidence that several advocacy networks expanded ever since. However, given this literature's overreliance on the mimetic approach to diffusion, we still do not count with analyses showing how these

networks overlap, and the effects of this structuration process over the advocacy efforts of their members. In sum, little is known about how advocacy networks operate, how and why they have expanded over time, and what is the role attributed to partnerships by neoliberal advocates. In the next section, I leverage a novel database of free-market think tanks in the region and in-depth interviews with think tank directors to unpack this black box.

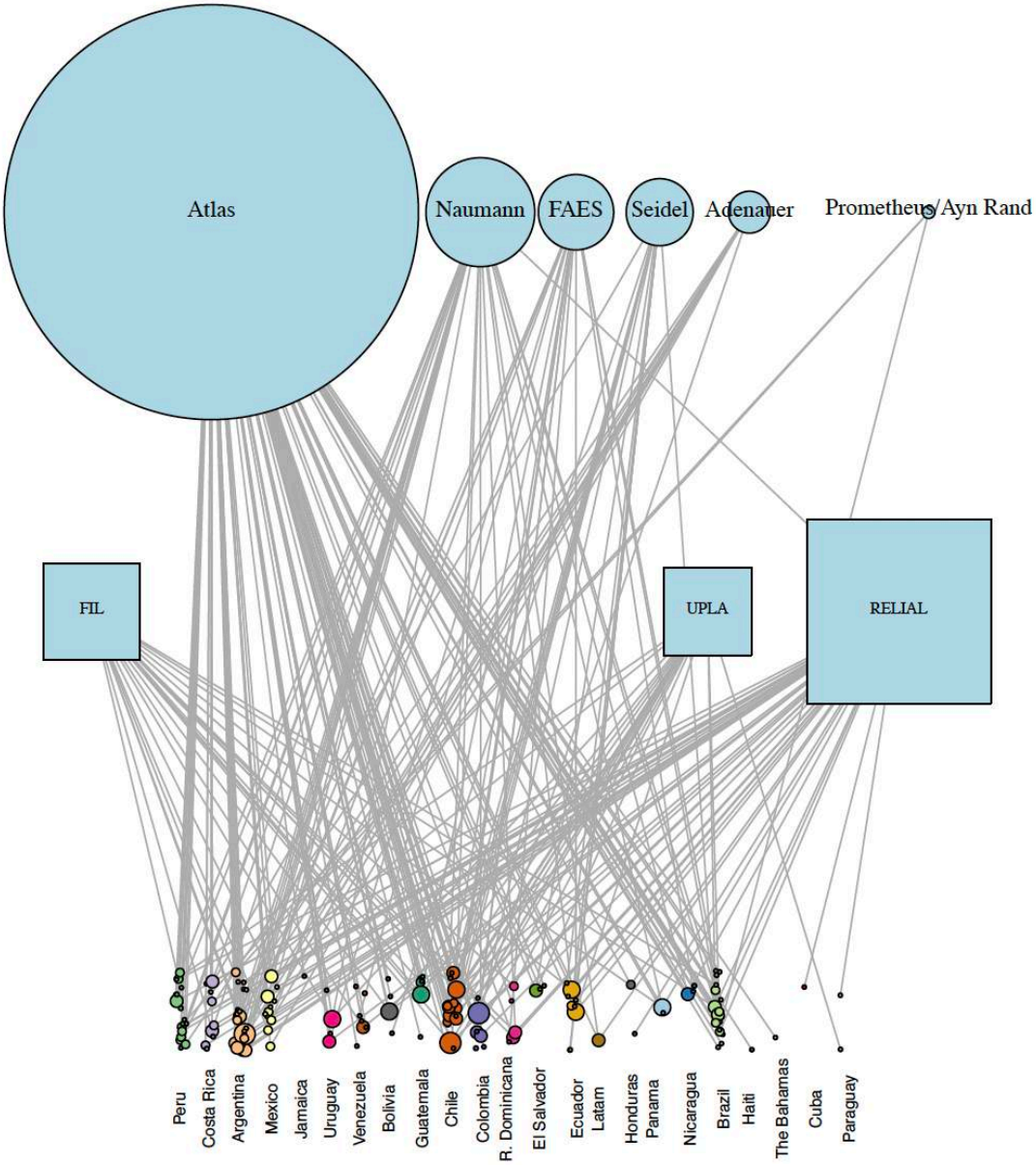
3.2. The Layered Structure of Free-Market Transnational Advocacy

To understand the structuration process of free-market advocacy networks, in this section I analyze an original database of 159 think tanks distributed across every country of the region and their partnerships with six advocacy foundations located in the United States, Germany, and Spain, as well as three advocacy networks created and hosted by Latin American leaders themselves. I complement this data with in-depth interviews conducted with think tank directors from each of these foundations – both from the Global North and South – and secondary sources on the history of each organization. I draw upon notes from participant observation conducted in events organized by foundations in Latin America.

This combination of descriptive network data with qualitative data led me to engage in what some scholars have called "qualitative network analysis" (Ahrens, 2018). I was not only interested in the interorganizational structure of networks themselves, but on understanding the different types of connections (i.e., ties) established through partnerships, the different levels or dominant action spaces, and the types of variation in the goals, values and functioning of the organizations (Ahrens, 2018: 6). Only the combination between both types of data would allow me to understand the process of Transnational Network Layering.

Figure 2 leverages the network data to showcase the structure of transnational network layering in the region.

Figure 2. Hierarchical Network of the Transnational Partnerships of Free-Market Advocacy Think Tanks in Latin America (2019-2023)



Source: own elaboration.

First and foremost, the plot signals the muti-layered structure in which think tanks develop their partnerships. From top to bottom, three different geographical layers can be identified: (a) foundations established in Western Europe and the United States with a *global scope* of action, (b) foundations legally established in Latin America and Spain with a *regional scope* of action, and (c) foundations located within each Latin American country with a *national scope*. As the multiplicity of ties show, partnerships among actors can span the three levels, but organizations are always based on – and have a scope of action that spans – only one of the three.

The first layer of actors from top to bottom is comprised of foundations in Western Europe and United States whose main objective is to support the efforts of advocacy think tanks in the Latin American region. Differently from other institutes around the world, these foundations are committed to advancing *stable* advocacy efforts, rather than temporal issue-based projects. Put more bluntly: they do not fund projects, but partners who advocate for their same ideas within other countries.

This is a key difference with a wide set of right-wing and free-market foundations that operate in the Global North but develop temporal ties with think tanks in Latin America, such as the IRI (International Republican Institute), CATO Institute, FEE (Foundation for Economic Education), Leadership Institute, Acton Institute, Mises Institute, Fraser Institute, CIPE (Center for Private Enterprise), WFD (Westminster Foundation for Democracy), among others. Temporal partnerships with these foundations exist and were mentioned by my interviewees in Latin America as organizations that "support their work," but they are based on the allocation of small grants for global initiatives in specific topics, which are imposed unilaterally from North to South. Therefore, despite these grants might be relevant for local advocacy efforts in specific

contexts, I decided to leave them outside my sample given that my participants consider these partnerships more feeble, unidirectional, and rarely focused on political advocacy.

On the contrary, the foundations identified in the first layer of Figure 3 are frequently mentioned by think tank directors in the region to signal their importance given that partnering with them often secures a more stable access to resources and knowledge. However, they do not partner in the same way, and they do not offer the same type of support (see Table 1).

Table 1. Main Characteristics of Globally-Oriented Advocacy Foundations

Foundation	Country	Explicit Partisan affiliation	Ideological Affiliation	Presence in local countries	Support to political parties	Type of Support
Friedrich Naumann Foundation	Germany	Free Democratic Party (FDP)	Classical Liberal / Ordoliberal	Local offices by country / sub-region	Partisan-affiliated foundations	Stable partnerships w/ access to resources
Hanns Seidel Foundation	Germany	Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU)	Conservative / Christian-Social	Local offices by country / sub-region	Partisan-affiliated foundations	Stable partnerships w/ access to resources
Konrad Adenauer Foundation	Germany	Christian Democratic Union (CDU)	Classical Liberal / Liberal-Conservative	Local offices by country / sub-region	Partisan-affiliated foundations	Stable partnerships w/ access to resources
Prometheus Foundation & Ayn Rand Institute	United States	N/A	Objectivist	N/A	No	Stable partnerships w/ access to resources
Foundation for Social Analysis and Studies (FAES)	Spain	People's Party (PP)	Liberal-Conservative	Local chapters of alumni	Yes	Training of young advocates with political aspirations

Atlas Network	United States	N/A	Libertarian / Libertarian Conservative	N/A	No	Competitive grants, professional training, networking spaces

The first four of the six actors in Table 1 establish the most stable and long-term partnerships. Three of them are commonly known as the "German partisan foundations:" the *Naumann*, the *Seidel* and the *Adenauer*. Created after the second world war in a geopolitical attempt to strengthen a pluralistic and democratic image of Germany through civic involvement, these foundations are tied to the projects of specific German political parties, and are financed by public funds in proportion to the amount of seats the party is able to secure in Congress during previous elections (Dakowska, 2005). Given that funds come from the National Government through the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), these foundations are not allowed to support political parties in other countries, but can channel funding to non-profit organizations connected to like-minded political parties (Pinto-Duschinsky, 2001). Due to this reason, the partisan profile of each one of them is fundamental for establishing transnational ties: they find advocates of their same political ideas across the world and invest in them so they can become disseminators of these values within their own countries.

In Latin America, the *modus operandi* of the three German foundations is similar. The central office in Germany selects a Regional Director, which then coordinates a set of regional offices spanning two or three countries (e.g., an office in Lima which coordinates work across Bolivia, Chile, and Peru), which are run by Project Directors and a small team of one to five Project Coordinators. While the Regional Director and the Project Directors are appointed by the German central office and come from within each party, the Project Coordinators are recruited

within local countries, and therefore provide political and cultural knowledge of each country to the organization. This local team oversees the annual budget proposed by local partners and tracks the evolution of specific projects, which involves an assessment of how well their partnerships evolve over the years.

Each of the German foundations therefore counts with a stable group of local partners, that usually ranges from one to eight think tanks in each country. This group works closely in some topical projects of interest to the German foundation, but also present an annualized budget of events and activities that are financed by the organization. Furthermore, each year the local office selects a group of young people with political aspirations through their local partners to travel for a week-long training seminar in Germany. This stable funding is an enormous asset for many foundations across the region, as I argue below.

The fourth category in Table 1 involves two foundations that advocate for the ideas of American philosopher Ayn Rand and have recently expanded to Latin America: the Prometheus Foundation and the Ayn Rand Institute. They are collapsed in a single node in Figure 2, given their common objectives and related organizational structure. The Ayn Rand Institute (ARI) was co-founded in 1985 by Leonard Peikoff and Ed Snider, two of Rand's friends and closest followers, with the objective of preserving her legacy and spread her ideas in the United States. Combining the work of public-oriented philosophers and businesspeople following the main tenets of Objectivist philosophy, the ARI is particularly youth-oriented, providing online courses, free books and book translations, essay contests, and a new online school of philosophy (the "Ayn Rand University"). In turn, the Prometheus Foundation was founded by Carl Barney, an

entrepreneur follower of Rand's ideas, with the objective of providing stable financial support to ARI and similarly-minded institutes across the world.[6]

Relatively new to the global arena compared to the German foundations, Objectivists are making sustained efforts to find partners to advance Rand's ideas in Latin America. While they still count with a low number of official partners, they have recently organized nation-wide conferences in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Mexico, with the objective of explaining "the deep, fundamental philosophical causes of the misery and regress in Latin America."[7] The events were coordinated by Maria Marty – an Argentine entrepreneur, founder of the Ayn Rand Center Latin America – with the financial support of these two American foundations.

The remaining two global foundations do not establish formal partnerships with actors in Latin America as the previous ones, but they have been incredibly relevant for the advancement of free-market and conservative ideas by providing rotating competitive resources, as well as training and open networking opportunities: FAES and the Atlas Network.

FAES was a project originally intended as a partisan think tank able to supply José María Aznar with an electoral platform of vibrant ideas to reach the position of Prime Minister in Spain. It was constituted by a particular organizational mix of British, German, and American think tank styles that were explicitly brought together by Aznar's close advisors between 1991 and 1996.[8] During Aznar's tenure as Prime Minister (1996-2004), FAES was vacated to supply

[6] https://carlbarney.com/

[7] https://newideal.aynrand.org/ari-makes-big-impact-with-latin-america-conferences/

[8] First, they borrowed the tradition of the Chatham House Rule from the British think tank Royal Institute of International Affairs. Thus, FAES usually organized private roundtables with journalists, professionals in the fields of Law and Economics, and politicians to discuss specific topics (ranging from energy reforms to human rights), allowing Aznar to use this information and professional recommendations without revealing the identity of any of its participants. Similarly to the German foundations described above, FAES was sponsored by the state due to its close ties to the People's Party, the liberal-conservative party within Spain. And similarly to American think tanks, and particularly the Heritage Foundation, it adopted a model of policy influence, adopting a "proactive partisan agenda" and locating their main venue a few blocks away from Congress (Interview with Miguel Angel Cortes, Co-Founder and General Director of FAES between 1989-1996).

the government of partisan cadres, but after exiting office it became his main organizational basis of political leverage, both nationally and internationally. Since 2004 then, FAES expanded its international scope by attempting to achieve Aznar's original goal of creating a federation of center-right partisan actors in Ibero-America. While this goal was never fully achieved, FAES developed three influential training programs for partners in Latin America – which are also implemented in North Africa and the Middle East since 2011.

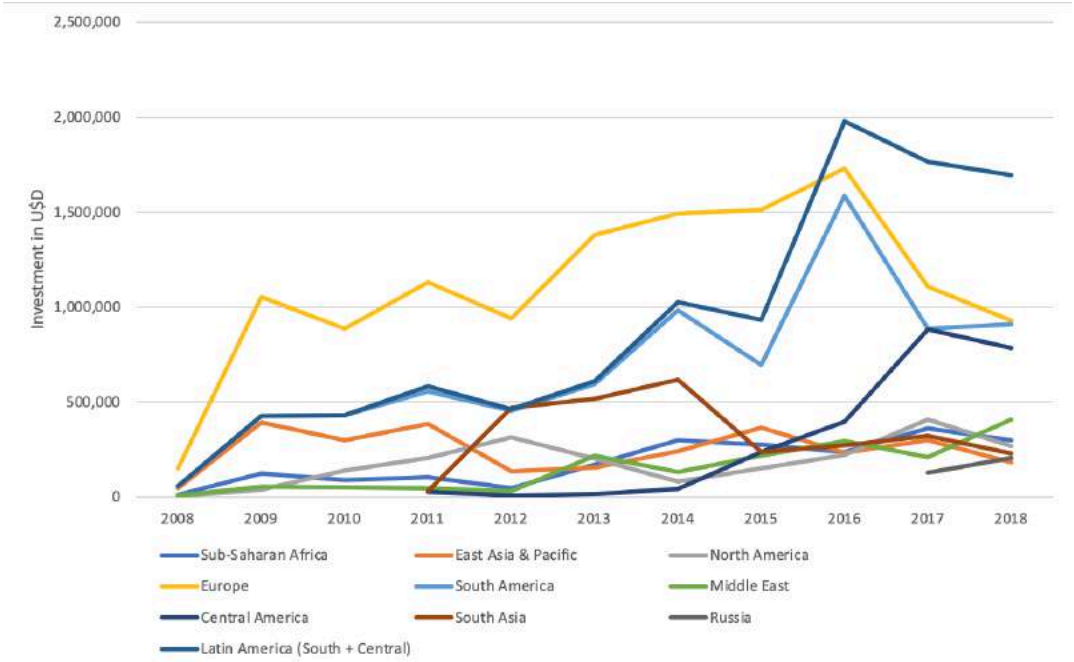
The first one is "Campus FAES," an annual summer camp in FAES' Spanish headquarters, which gathers young political leaders and the main political heads of center-right parties across Latin America together for a week. Once established, the program has additionally been reproduced in three or four Latin American countries on a yearly basis, implemented by FAES' alumni chapters. The second program consists of a full-paid scholarship for a 1-year master's program in Public Administration, aimed at "reconstructing a liberal-conservative ideological movement" in the region (Interview with Jose Herrera, Director of International Relations at FAES). As one of their trainees in Argentina mentioned, the focus of this program is to "train young party cadres that could return to their countries and apply this expertise" (Interview with Julian Obliglio, Argentine think tank director and FAES fellow). The third one, the "excellence program," was launched in 2008 for senior politicians and policy experts working in right-wing think tanks across the region, with the aim of providing elite networking opportunities for high-profile partisan leaders. All three types of partnerships offered by FAES aim at building organizational strength for center-right parties in Latin America and are channeled through think tanks affiliated to (or informally associated with) such parties.

Finally, the Atlas Network has been a long-standing source of support for free-market and conservative think tanks worldwide. As explained in the previous section, Atlas has been the only

organization focused explicitly on "breeding" free-market think tanks outside of the Global North. Significantly for regional efforts, the person who replaced Antony Fisher as CEO of the Atlas Foundation in 1991 was Alejandro Chafuen, an Argentine free-market entrepreneur who had been trained in Buenos Aires by Benegas Lynch and in Pennsylvania by Hans Sennholz – both MPS members and followers of the Austrian School of Economics after its late revival in the US (Henderson, 2016; Slobodian, 2019). During Chafuen's tenure as CEO (1991-2009), Atlas achieved a major global outreach, significantly expanding its number of partnerships, and creating guidelines for helping advocacy organizations across the world to thrive. Many of these guidelines were developed in dialogue with think tanks of Latin America given that the region was strategic for Chafuen himself – who serves currently as the International Managing Director of the Acton Institute.[9] Since his departure, however, the annual investment of the organization in Latin America has surpassed any other (see Figure 3), counting with more than 130 partners across each and every country of the region (Figure 1).

[9] In fact, the first conversations regarding the foundation of the Acton Institute took place between Alejandro Chafuen and Father Sirico during Atlas Foundation's Latin American regional meeting in Guatemala City, in 1990 (Interview with Roberto Salinas-Leon, Director of the Center for Latin America, Atlas Network)

Figure 3. Evolution of Atlas Network's Annual Investment by Region (2008-2018)



Source: own elaboration, based on 990 income tax forms from Internal Revenue Services, Department of the Treasury, US. There is no publicly available information on investment per region in IRS documents prior to 2008.

Now, while Atlas has undergone several organizational changes since its inception in 1981,[10] nowadays it offers three broad set of opportunities for their partners. The first are grants designed to sustain different aspects of think tank's work. The disbursement of these grants is based on bottom-up competition, one of the trademarks of the organization. Atlas opens several application cycles yearly, combining grants for developed think tanks to embark in major multi-year projects, and startup funds for helping new organizations to thrive. While during the 1980s and early 1990s these grants helped to foster the model of the think tank in the region by

[10] Most scholarship on neoliberal advocacy networks has focused on the role of Atlas. For a more detailed account of its organizational trajectory and the different strategies it developed towards global partners, see (Djelic, 2017; Djelic & Mousavi, 2020; Fischer & Plehwe, 2017; Plehwe & Walpen, 2006).

providing personalized evaluations,[11] increasing professionalization led Atlas to develop standardized metrics for evaluating projects after Chafuen's step down as CEO in 2010 ("Atlas Network Collection," Hoover Institution, Box 3, Folder 11). Similarly to FAES, organizations that had already been evaluated as strong performers are often selected by Atlas to serve as mentors for younger ones within their specific countries.

The second opportunity, which for a long time has been the trademark of Atlas, is the professional training for think tank staff. The organization has provided professionalization courses to free-market advocates since its inception (see Figure 4), which are organized under the umbrella of the "Atlas Academy" since 2012. Most of these certifications entail the development of organizational and marketing skills applied to think tank advocacy, but also include short trips to Atlas' headquarters in Virginia – which opens possibilities of networking at important institutions such as the CATO Institute, Heritage Foundation, and George Mason University's Mercatus Center.[12] As one of my interviewees mentioned:

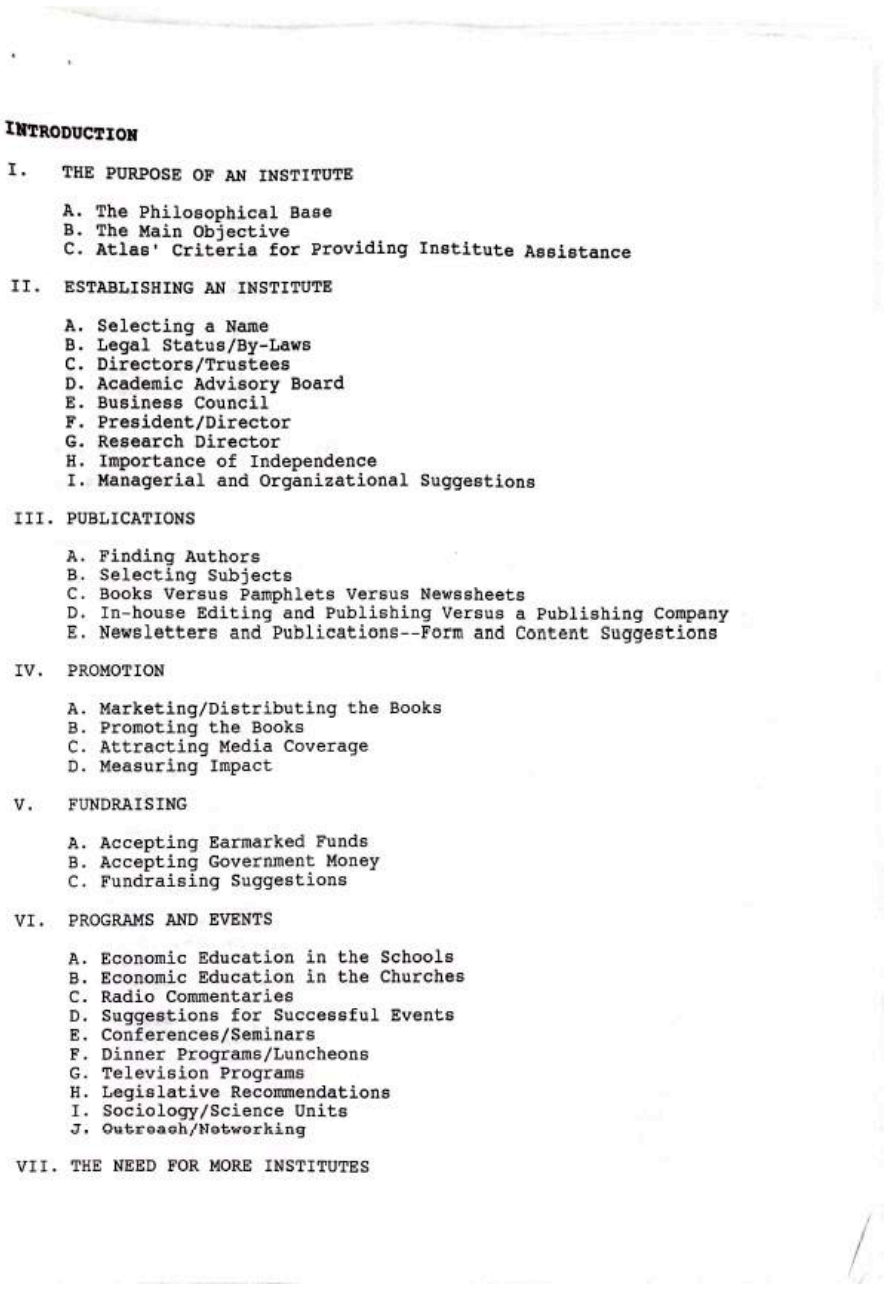
"I was part of the think tank MBA [a specific program that preceded the Atlas Academy]. They locked me inside a hotel for twelve days with twenty people like me, all think tank COO's [Chief Operating Officers] from England, Burundi, Argentina, Honduras, Philippines… And we learned how to professionalize our fundraising, our strategic planning, the way in which we handled our information… It was really interesting. And then you come back to your country with this mindset of 'I can change the world.' […] Years after this experience I returned to the United States with a Smith fellowship from Atlas, to stay in Washington DC for three weeks. They gave me an office in Atlas headquarters, I participated of several meetings that they arranged, but they also organized meetings with specific people I wanted to see. I mean… I said,

[11] Early ties between Alejandro Chafuen and Gordon St. Angelo from the Lilly Endowment led to a constant support for think tanks in Latin America during this period (Djelic & Mousavi, 2020: 267). This disbursement of funds was seen as more discretionary but also more helpful for their partners. As Gerardo Bongiovanni, head of the famous *Fundación Libertad* (Liberty Foundation, Argentina) mentioned in our interview, "Atlas used to be more focused on supporting us. I remember that there was a time that Argentina had a lot of interest in establishing relationships with Hong Kong, and I write to Alex [Chafuen] and he tells me 'Ok, let's bring Richard Wong', and only a month afterwards we were coordinating an event at FIEL [another economics-focused think tank] with this Richard Wong, a very important economist. I mean… the relationship with Atlas worked really well. It was a more "handcrafted" way of working, more discretional, but it worked better."

[12] While these courses are today offered entirely online, in the past they constituted part of a "Think Tank MBA," which covered all foundational aspects of think tank management. See (Djelic & Mousavi, 2020)

'I want to meet with X from CATO Institute' or 'I want to meet with Y from George Mason [University], from a specific economic institute,' and they put me in touch and organized a meeting. […] It was fabulous." (Interview with Candelaria de Elizalde)

Figure 4. Index of Document "Guidelines, Suggestions, and Ideas for Public Policy Institutes," Atlas Economic Research Foundation's (n/d, c. 1984)



INTRODUCTION

I. THE PURPOSE OF AN INSTITUTE

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C. Atlas' Criteria for Providing Institute Assistance

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G. Television Programs
H. Legislative Recommendations
I. Sociology/Science Units
J. Outreach/Networking

VII. THE NEED FOR MORE INSTITUTES

Source: "Atlas Network Collection," Hoover Institution. Box 4, Folder 5.

Finally, Atlas has been key in fostering spaces for networking to exchange ideas and experiences between partners. The reason for the overlapping membership between *Mont Pèlerin Society* members and think tank directors in Latin America signaled in the literature (Plehwe & Walpen, 2006) is explained by Fisher and Chafuen's strategy to recruit new free-market advocates by organizing Atlas Foundation's annual meetings the day before or after the annual MPS meeting (see letter between Antony Fisher and Sergio Ricossa, "Atlas Network Collection, Hoover Institution, Box 14, folder 10). In doing so, he was able to recruit elites invested in fostering free-market advocacy within their own countries, while reducing the costs of paying for transportation and lodging costs. However, concomitant with Atlas' financial and organizational growth after the 2000s, new regional centers were created to coordinate specific projects and an annual "Liberty Forum" hosted by local organizations for each set of regional partners.

Nowadays, the Latin American Liberty Forum brings together Atlas' partners to showcase their current work, recruit new members, and generate coalition-building by fostering professionalization activities applied to specifically regional issues (see Figure 5). With hundreds of participants and the attendance of prominent right-wing politicians and free-market businesspeople, it is an opportunity for partners to meet donors, get a sense of where Atlas is focusing its attention, and generate partnership efforts with other Latin American organizations.

Figure 5. Picture of Atlas Network's Partners at the Latin American Liberty Forum 2023, Punta del Este, Uruguay.

Source: picture taken during fieldwork

For example, the Executive Director of an important institute in Colombia (*Instituto de Ciencia Politica*, ICP) recalls that:

"Last year, during Atlas' regional meeting in Santo Domingo [Dominican Republic] we developed some ties with faculty from the University of Arizona, which ended up being a great opportunity for us because we started a course for faculty here in Colombia who were trained by these Arizona professors, and now we created a course that faculty affiliated with our Institute are using in secondary schools. […] We also learned a lot from think tanks in Argentina and Chile, which transformed into key actors in terms of generating new narratives and using them politically. It is key for us to learn from these best practices, and [in these meetings] you can be up to date with what other organizations within the right-wing sector are doing across the region." (Maria Clara Escobar, Executive Director)

This type of interaction is quite common during Atlas' Forums, and most of my interviewees talk about this annual event with excitement, as one of the main opportunities they have to increase the global reach of their organizations.

3.3. Regional Problems, Regional Solutions

For most Latin American foundations, the opportunities opened by the six organizations summarized above are key for sustaining their advocacy efforts in the long-term, due to two reasons that were often by almost every think tank director I interviewed: (1) a structural lack of funding and (2) the historical lack of popularity of free-market and conservative political parties.

The first problem relates to fundraising. In the United States, the federal legal framework allows individuals who donate money to non-profit and charity foundations (known as "501(c)(3)" given their legal codification) to deduct a significant amount from their income taxes, which usually ranges from 50% to 60% of the gross income. This "laissez-faire" legal structure (Brody, 2006) has led to the proliferation of conservative foundations, especially through coordinated efforts of free-market corporate actors after the early 1980s (Hertel-Fernandez, 2019; Jenkins, 2016; Medvetz, 2012; Skocpol & Hertel-Fernandez, 2016). In Latin America, on the contrary, private philanthropy constitutes less than 10% of the third-sector organizations' revenues, mainly due to complex legal frameworks that undermine fiscal incentives to engage in donations. In fact, Latin America ranks last among the regions of the world regarding philanthropic donations from wealthy individuals, with only 3% contributing with small philanthropic allocations in their portfolios (Layton, 2010).

This feeble philanthropic culture has been traditionally the case for both left- and right-leaning advocacy non-profits, leaving governments and international foundations as the main donors within the region (Levy, 1996: 92-112). But as most organizations included in my sample refrain from government support given their free-market ideological leaning, one of the main issues they face is how to generate a steady fundraising scheme by combining international and private local support.

This makes the role of international foundations crucial for advocacy efforts in Latin America, especially during the first years of an organization's life cycle. Fundraising issues were raised constantly by my interviewees as one of their main problems, and have been a long-standing concern of organizations such as the Atlas Network and the German foundations. For example, Atlas' ex-CEO Alejandro Chafuen organized a seminar in Miami for their partners in 2001, titled "Fundraising in Difficult Contexts." The sole objective of the seminar was to share the successful fundraising experience of two Latin American think tanks: *Fundación Libertad* (Argentina, founded in 1988) and *Libertad y Desarrollo* (Chile, founded in 1990). The seminar was later edited as a book and distributed among Atlas' partners. Similarly, German foundations are aware that they constitute an important source of financial support, and therefore do not cover operational costs because "we do not want to become the typical paternalistic international organization. […] We prefer to open opportunities for local partners to develop projects and compete for funding." (Interview with Silvia Mercado, Project Manager of RELIAL).

But even in those cases in which think tanks are successful in developing a sustainable fundraising strategy, a second problem emerges: the chronic instability of right-wing political parties. Latin America suffers from a general and long-standing weakness of partisan actors, with frequent deinstitutionalization, decay, or the rapid but ephemeral emergence of new alternatives

(Levitsky et al., 2016; Mainwaring, 2018). Except for Chile, El Salvador and Mexico, institutionalized right-of-center parties are rare, making free-market initiatives difficult to achieve beyond relatively short periods of neoliberal reform (Luna & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014a). Given the high levels of inequality in the region, the median voter leans invariably to the left, difficulting the construction of popular coalitions (Gibson, 1996; Luna & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014b; Pribble, 2013), and making business elites wary of investing in free-market political projects in the long term (Middlebrook, 2000; Roberts, 2014).

This partisan weakness constitutes an important problem for advocacy foundations, for two reasons. First, many free-market think tanks rely on political parties to channel their efforts towards policy change – a pattern that has been well studies in the United States (Domhoff, 2014; Hertel-Fernandez, 2019; Rich, 2005). Without political parties able to open these channels and making them stable, think tanks' efforts might turn to ashes and entire projects could lead to sudden failures. But second and most importantly, when parties disappear or are subject to scandals that damage their legitimacy as agents of popular representation, their breakdown could drag associated think tanks down with them. As argued by Medvetz (2012, 2014), the main power of think tanks resides in their capacity to remain relatively autonomous from the fields in which other actors interact (political, economic, journalist, intellectual, etc.). By associating themselves with an unstable right-wing party, think tanks and their donors often put themselves at risk of not being able to claim their independence, thus rapidly falling in disgrace in the eyes of the public.

These two factors, financial and political instability, led local think tanks to multiply their partnerships with global foundations to seek new opportunities and expertise on how to generate

strategies to solve them. However, it also led them to join efforts in creating different initiatives to explicitly address these regional problems.

Over time, these initiatives constituted a regional layer composed of three main political federations: RELIAL (Liberal Network of Latin America), UPLA (Union of Latin American Parties), and FIL (International Foundation for Liberty).[13] Differently from the foundations positioned at the global level described above (Table 1), the regional level is comprised of collective efforts to create synergy between the work of Latin American think tanks, right-wing political parties, and business elites (see Table 2).

Table 2. Main Characteristics of Regional-Oriented Advocacy Foundations

Foundation	Ideological affiliation	Sponsored by	Coordination w/ political parties	Type of Support
RELIAL	Classical Liberal / Ordoliberal	Friedrich Naumann Foundation	Yes	Think Tank & Partisan Networking
UPLA	Conservative / Christian-Social	Hanns Seidel Foundation	Yes	Think Tank & Partisan Networking
FIL	Classical Liberal / Liberal-Conservative	Mario Vargas Llosa + Board of LatAm Business Elites	Yes	Corporate and Partisan Networking

[13] According to my interviewees, an additional Christian-Democratic federal organization was supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation across the region, named Christian Democrat Organization of the Americas (OCDA). Given the general decline of Christian Democracy in the region (Mainwaring & Scully, 2003), most center-right parties within the organization moved to UPLA over time.

UPLA and RELIAL are financially supported by the *Hanns Seidel* and *Friedrich Naumann* respectively (see Table 2 above) and represent efforts by these German foundations to increase coalition-building among their regional partners in Latin America. However, their functioning is autonomous from the German foundations, and their directors and boards are composed entirely of Latin American staff. As UPLA's regional director recalls:

> "The logic behind creating UPLA was related to the fact that center-right political parties in Latin America were isolated in two different senses. First, there wasn't a regional integration between them, but second, they were not integrated internationally, they were not integrated to the international center-right. Why? Because many of them had been related to dictatorships. And they had been isolated by the international right as a result. By the 'international right' I'm referring here to the Republican Party in the US, the Conservative Party in the UK, the Spanish People's Party, the German CDU and CSU, see? […] UPLA was founded 30 years ago to foster both types of relationships: between the center-right across countries, and between the Latin American right and the international right." (Interview with Jorge Sandrock, UPLA's Director)

While UPLA is officially a network of regional center-right political parties, it is organized around seven or eight topical working groups that meet in annual events during the year, and one of those groups is constituted by think tanks close to the political parties affiliated to the organization. Thus, it provides further support and networking opportunities for partisan-oriented foundations close to the goals of the organization.

With a similar focus, RELIAL was founded in 2004 as an attempt of the Naumann foundation to engage in the same type of political coordination. In a clear example of how transnational network layering unfolds, the initial group of professionals behind RELIAL had been trained by the Atlas Network during the previous decades, and therefore represented some of the most established think tanks across the region.[14] In fact, Alejandro Chafuen himself

[14] The list includes Gerardo Bongiovanni (*Fundación Libertad*, Argentina), Bertha Pantoja (*Caminos de la Libertad*, Mexico), Dora de Ampuero (*Instituto Ecuatoriano de Economia Política*, Ecuador), Rocío Guijarro (*Centro de Divulgación del Conocimiento Económico*, Venezuela), Enrique Ghersi (*Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Legales*, Peru), Cristián Larroulet (*Libertad y Desarrollo*, Chile), Roberto Salinas León (ex director of the

participated of the foundational efforts as CEO of Atlas given his interest in the regional integration of right-wing efforts. As RELIAL's regional coordinator explained to me, the Naumann took advantage of the fact that the Atlas Network had not created their regional Centers yet, and therefore exploited their partners' need to "formalize a network […] with political purpose […] and open opportunities to share best practices and generate common efforts." (Interview with Silvia Mercado, Project Manager of RELIAL). The implicit focus of RELIAL was therefore, in her words, to "harmonize the relationship between think tanks and political parties."

But difficulties in generating this harmonious relationship soon arose when accusations of corruption involved the Costa Rican Libertarian Movement party, one of their initial affiliated partners. Since then, RELIAL has been more focused on coordinating think tank activities, albeit the participation of political parties has slowly increased in the last few years. As one its founders acknowledges,

> "RELIAL is first and foremost a networking platform, a network of colleagues that allows us to share best practices and organize events. It is more horizontal, it allows us to decide collectively where are we going, what do we want to do, and discuss the content of the meetings" (Interview with Bertha Pantoja, Executive Director of *Caminos de la Libertad*, Mexico).

Finally, FIL is perhaps the most particular in terms of its origin and organizational structure. Free-market thinkers close to Nobel Prize and ex-Presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa founded FIL in 2002, with the objective of promoting the ideas of liberty in Ibero-America. Located formally in Spain, where Vargas Llosa resides, the work of FIL is twofold. First, it promotes public events with the participation of high-profile right-wing political figures

Mexican Business Forum, now director of Atlas Network's Center for Latin America), and Alejandro Chafuen (ex CEO of Atlas Network).

(i.e., Presidents, Ex-Presidents, Congresspeople) and think tank intellectuals to discuss the political conjuncture. These events are often coordinated by Argentine think tank entrepreneur Gerardo Bongiovanni but organized by affiliated think tanks across Latin America, and leverage the publicity involved by the participation of Vargas Llosa to attract media attention. This role in Latin America is complemented by the organization of an annual meeting, the "Transatlantic Forum" in Madrid, which gathers the main heads of center-right political parties to discuss the future of the region.

The second type of work developed by FIL is more subterranean and involves tightening relationships between free-market minded business elites that form its Business Advisory Council. As one of the affiliated members explained:

> "The Business Council supports the work of FIL [financially], but at the same time receives information [from FIL] to support business actors in their own countries. Some business members are constantly attacked in their own countries, so […] the idea of having a Business Council was to support and defend the importance of private enterprise in our region. […] They have constant meetings, and they share what they are doing, how are their businesses doing during the pandemic, if they have interactions with their governments, or open possibilities to shape public policies. And these businesspeople are really important within each of their countries." (Interview with Rocio Guijarro, Director of *Centro de Divulgación del Conocimiento Económico*, Venezuela)

This council is coordinated by Vargas Llosa's son, Álvaro, a political commentator and Senior Fellow at the libertarian foundation Independent Institute in the United States. The Council involves more than 50 business leaders from virtually every Latin American country, who often support the work of think tanks. As Bertha Pantoja – a Mexican think tank leader – mentioned to me, this brokerage role makes FIL a quite unique organization:

> "FIL is an 'umbrella' for businesspeople across Spain and Latin America. […] Listening to their voice is fundamental because they are the ones who generate wealth and employment in our countries, and without their financial support we [think tanks] would not exist. […] Atlas and

the Naumann help us with financial support and training, and RELIAL helps us with networking. But we all live from businesspeople, and we often need their help. This is FIL's trademark, and I think it is great." (Interview with Bertha Pantoja)

The three federations presented in this subsection – UPLA, RELIAL, and FIL – have formal independence from the Western foundations that constitute the Global Layer of transnational advocacy networks. As a result, think tanks within Latin American countries are often affiliated to actors *across* layers because they offer different resources and opportunities. As argued above, regional organizations try to foster spaces of networking to tighten the ties between think tanks and intellectuals, political parties, and business leaders. However, they rarely offer financial resources and/or training opportunities. In turn, global foundations such as the Seidel, Naumann, Prometheus, or Atlas Network complement this work by offering stable financial support and training opportunities for their affiliates. However, as described above, they develop partnerships in specific ways and important ideological differences remain across them.

To these two interorganizational layers of advocacy networks – global and regional – we must finally add partnerships within and across Latin American countries. While in some countries we find only one or two active organizations, countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, or Peru count with more than ten advocacy foundations tied to international advocacy networks (see Figure 1). Given the important differences in political junctures *across* countries, most coordinating efforts are channeled through regional federations such as RELIAL, UPLA and FIL. However, some think tanks develop specific issue-based projects within Latin America based on their common interest. For example, given their focus on the training of young right-wing political cadres, the organizations *Nuevas Generaciones* (Argentina) and *Fundación Jaime Guzmán* (Chile) have established an exchange program for young party members to visit the partner foundation for a week, being able to network with each other and learn from the other

country's political system. As the director of *Nuevas Generaciones* clarified: "We don't only seek for them to learn, but also to generate friendship bonds with young Chilean political leaders. As it happens with my generation today, the idea is for them to be close partners when they are in office, 20 years from now." (Interview with Julian Obiglio).

This type of educational initiatives is the most commonly shared type of project across Latin American organizations. For example, the *Political Science Institute* (ICP) in Colombia brought Axel Kaiser – a famous libertarian intellectual who acted as head of the *Foundation for Progress* (FPP) in Chile – to teach them how to generate narratives against populism in their country. Similarly, other institutes work closely together to develop educational programs together. The Ayn Ran Center in Buenos Aires often partners with the objectivist institute *Instituto Liberdade* (Liberty Institute) in Brazil, directed by Roberto Rachewsky – a businessman follower of Ayn Rand's ideas and co-founder of the famous *Instituto de Estudos Empresariais* (IEE), one of the oldest advocacy institutes in Brazil. Together, they organize "tours" within Argentina and Brazil to "spike the interest in Ayn Rand's work" (Interview with Maria Marty, Executive Director of Ayn Ran Center Latin America).

This type of horizontal cooperation is not very frequent though, because the institutional, economic, and political conditions under which think tanks operate in each country are very different. As the Executive Director of the famous Chilean think tank *Libertad y Desarrollo* mentions:

> "At the end of the day, each country looks towards its own belly bottom. […] The regional networking is, first, useful for us to know how other organizations tackle problems like ours, and second, to meet speakers that you can bring for internal seminars. […] Now that we have a Constitutional Reform process, the experience of Colombian partners is useful to us because they went through the same process. […] The [left-wing] narratives and the political actors that we need to face are very similar, if not the same." (Interview with Bettina Horst, Executive Director of *Libertad y Desarrollo*, Chile)

Virtually all my interviewees reaffirmed this pattern: vertical partnerships across international layers are more common than horizontal partnerships across Latin American countries, as policy arenas are embedded within nationally-determined institutions (see Campbell & Pedersen, 2014). Regional federations of think tanks are therefore crucial for networking and generating collective cumulative knowledge on how to best develop advocacy efforts in particular contexts, but these efforts are always determined by national contexts.

4. Neoliberalism in Translation, or How Think Tanks Develop Partnerships Across Advocacy Networks

In the previous section I fleshed out the main structural components of transnational advocacy networks in Latin America. Illustrating the process I theorized as "Transnational Network Layering," I showed that tanks in Latin America develop both horizontal and vertical partnerships with other foundations, with these partnerships generating advocacy networks that are both geographically and temporally layered. On the one hand, think tanks in each country establish ties to national, regional, and global foundations simultaneously to access different resources and networking opportunities. On the other hand, newer foundations learn from what previous foundations did, and in some cases, they are even built upon layers of previously accumulated knowledge and expertise themselves.

A paradigmatic example is RELIAL, a federation of regional think tanks founded by a group of core free-market advocates originally trained by Atlas Network but funded by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation. Another example is FAES, which merged the organizational

model of state-sponsored German Foundations and combined it with the advocacy model of the Heritage Foundation. At the Latin American level, partisan foundations such as *Fundación Pensar* (headed by Mauricio Macri before ascending to the Argentine Presidency, 2015) or *Fundación Avanza Chile* (headed by Sebastián Piñera between his two tenures as Chilean President, 2014-2018) were explicitly modeled after FAES, with think tanks facilitating the transatlantic diffusion of Aznar's organizational model within different nation-states.

Local think tanks, in turn, develop different partnerships across several layers. To put just one example of many: the foundation *Libertad y Progreso* (Liberty & Progress) develops projects with the Atlas Network, the CATO Institute, and is a local partner of the Friedrich Naumann in Argentina, but is also an active member of RELIAL, a partner of *Fundación para el Progreso* in Chile and the *Centro de Divulgación del Conocimiento Económico* in Venezuela, and coordinates a number of activities with other national partners such as *Fundación Libertad*, *Federalismo y Libertad*, *Club de la Libertad*, and *Fundación Bases* – all of them located in different subnational locations.

Given this multiplicity of partnerships, then, the remaining question is: How are the members of Liberty & Progress able to distinguish their closest allies? Or put more bluntly: how do the directors of Liberty & Progress identify similarly-minded organizations across these multi-layered advocacy networks with which they establish long-term partnerships?

Consistent with the model of Transnational Network Layering, in this section I show that think tanks' staff must constantly engage in *translation efforts* to develop partnerships. Every international foundation remains tied to a specific strand of neoliberal thought and practice, as evidenced by Tables 1 and 2 above. Thus, while all of them recognize themselves as part of the "global freedom movement," they often have profound differences that shape their local and

international partnerships. Precisely for this reason, Northern actors such as the Atlas Network, the Prometheus Foundation, FAES, or the Hanns Seidel Foundation need to count with local teams of experts and/or local partners in which they trust to establish local partnerships. And due to this need, Latin American professionals occupy significant positions within the organizations, providing local knowledge to facilitate the expansion of their advocacy mission in the region.

4.1. Disentangling Positions Across the Ideological Spectrum

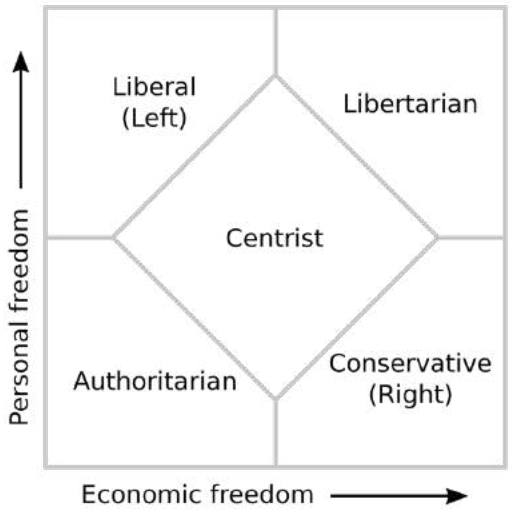
The professionals I interviewed often referred to their ideological differences by mentioning broad political positions along the ideological spectrum, such as "Catholic-Conservative," "Libertarian," or "Center-Right." However, given that they understand these terms in a relational manner, when I asked them what they exactly mean by them, they often recurred to graphical devices and historical examples.

The most intuitive of these graphical devices is the Nolan Chart, conceived by David F. Nolan, one of the founders of the American Libertarian Party in 1971. Many free-market advocates do not identify as 'left' or 'right' because they understand their role as "defending individual liberties" from both left- and right-wing threats. The political taxonomy devised by Nolan therefore allows them to explain their position while circumventing the traditional left-right distinction.

The Chart is composed of two axes; the X-axis denotes the degree of "economic freedom" of a specific political position, whereas the Y-axis denotes the degree of "personal freedom" (see Figure 6). The effect of juxtaposing both entails that higher degrees of state intervention in the economy are seen as inherently authoritarian or leftist (the two squares on the

left side of the chart). However, it also leads to the conclusion that higher degrees of economic freedom can be combined with the defense of personal freedom in several ways.

Figure 6. Nolan Chart



Source: Wikipedia

This reading of the Nolan Chart maps quite well how think tank directors imagine the ideological lineages of transnational advocacy networks. They consider all of them defenders of relatively high degrees of economic freedom, which probably explains why scholars who studied these networks have decided to term them "neoliberal." However, important differences remain regarding their defense of personal freedom. This is why most of my interviewees consider the term "neoliberal" too simplistic to capture the nuances of their movement. In response, they often drew upon Nolan's chart to make a tri-partite distinction between "libertarians," "center-right" or "classical liberals" and "conservatives." While these are all right-wing positions, they acknowledge that their ideological differences often led to significant fractures within the

international "freedom movement," because they translate imperfectly to political positions within different countries. As Maria Clara, the Executive Director of ICP in Colombia, explains:

> "There is a difference between a center-right liberal, a libertarian, and a conservative. All of them are positioned to the right in the X-axis of the Chart, but libertarians are really high in terms of both economic and personal freedom, right-liberals or center-right are in that quadrant but a bit lower, and then conservatives are to the right but definitely lower, especially given their defense of traditional values, their agenda against LGBT rights, against abortion. What unites all these positions is the defense of economic freedom. […] Now, of course everything is a matter of degree. There are libertarians who believe that the State should not interfere at all in any aspect of social life. That's close to what has been called "anarchocapitalism." But at least in the Colombian context and in my personal opinion… That position would not serve the interests of the Institute. Because we want to have influence in terms of state policy. [Anarchocapitalism] is just not a very realist position, and therefore defending libertarian conceptions would not have a positive impact on our work, it wouldn't make sense for our Institute."

This value-based distinction within the political right is often used by think tank directors to identify partners across advocacy networks, because foundations from the Global North are based on different historical political traditions. As Mudge (2008: 716-18) has accurately mapped out, there are three main international political organizations that mark "the political institutionalization of dominant schools of economic thought:" the Centrist Democrat International (CDI), the Liberal International (LI), and the International Democrat Union (IDU).

Partnering these organizations with the advocacy networks stemming from foundations described in Table 1 is a useful exercise for understanding their value-based distinctions. The CDI represents Christian-democratic values, and therefore is most closely aligned with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and center-right positions – although it also includes some centrist or center-left partners. The LI represents European ordo-liberalism, and thus emphasizes the centrality of free-markets but coupled with a concern for the institutional foundations of social justice and the wariness of monopolistic economic concentration. This mix of free-market liberalism and communitarian values lies closer to the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Table 1, a

position that some of my interviewees term “liberal-conservative” or “center-right.” Finally, the IDU was founded by neoconservatives who adopted the Thatcher-Reagan synthesis in the 1980s and defend a more aggressive free-market stance with less regard for traditional and communitarian values. This brings the IDU closer to libertarian foundations in the United States – such as the Atlas Network – and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Europe, and is closer to what most people understand as “neoliberal” politics (Mudge 2008: 717).

Given that global foundations have clearer historical trajectories tied to these international political organizations, it is relatively easy for Latin American think tanks to evaluate where are they positioned in this complex ideological spectrum. Returning to the example of the Argentine organization Liberty & Progress described at the beginning of this section, we can see that their ties to organizations such as the Friedrich Naumann, CATO Institute, Atlas Network and RELIAL indicate the defense of a libertarian-leaning stance in detriment of more conservative positions. On the contrary, the Colombian think tank ICP is closer to liberal-conservative networks, and is therefore partnered with the Konrad Adenauer, FAES, and the Atlas Network.

4.2. The Thorny Work of Political Translation

But while understanding these distinctions could be relatively intuitive for Latin American organizations, partnerships are not developed unilaterally. In fact, global foundations put a lot of effort in understanding which organizations within each country can represent their same ideological position, and advance efforts in the directions that they would like to see. If this does not happen, their global reputation is at stake.

One illustrative example of this problem is summarized in the political tensions generated by the "Madrid Letter" in 2020. The Madrid Letter was a political statement issued by members of an international Forum organized by Dissensus (*Disenso*), a think tank affiliated to the Spanish far-right political party Vox. The letter voiced a call to save Ibero-America from the advancement of "totalitarian regimes inspired by communism," which the letter identified in the Sao Paulo Forum and the Puebla Group, two collective efforts of Latin American left-of-center political leaders. Thus, some Latin American partners of the Friedrich Naumann foundation and RELIAL who agreed with the letter proceeded to sign it.

But because the letter was signed by political actors associated with the Latin American right, the fact that it was sponsored by far-right Spanish party Vox generated a problem of translation for the Naumann Foundation. Given that Vox is associated to conservative values and policy positions within the European Union (i.e., anti-immigration, anti-LGBTQ rights) that are inconsistent with the positions of the German party FDP – sponsor of the Naumann and RELIAL –, the signature of the Letter by Latin American think tanks associated with these networks became a problem of diplomatic proportions. As a result, the regional office of the Friedrich Naumann in Mexico distributed a letter to their Latin American partners stating that they should not associate themselves with the Madrid Letter and the far-right movements in Europe, which are considered by their own organization as illiberal.

This reaction, in turn, irritated some of their Latin American counterparts. As a member of an associated Argentine think tank mentioned:

> "It was a recommendation. It was not enforced, really. But the message [from the Naumann] basically was: 'If you want to keep cooperating with the Naumann you cannot do this.' It was shocking for many partners because it was perceived as a form of censorship… I mean, not exactly censorship, but you understand what I mean… […] It shows that [liberals] are concerned with the far-right in Europe, but this is not a concern in Latin America. We are not

concerned so much by the extreme right but rather by the extreme left…" (Interview with Jose Guillermo Godoy, Executive Director of *Federalismo y Libertad*, Argentina)

Figure 7. Madrid Letter, published by the Madrid Forum and *Disenso*.

FORO MADRID
IBEROSFERA Y LIBERTAD

CARTA DE MADRID:

IN DEFENSE OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY IN THE IBEROSPHERE

More than 700 million people live in the Iberosphere, **a community of free and sovereign nations** that share a deep-rooted cultural heritage and possess a significant economic and geopolitical potential to tackle the future.

The Iberosphere has all the conditions to be a region of **freedom, prosperity and equality under the law.** Its people are not condemned by any kind of historical determinism.

However, a part of the region is kidnapped by totalitarian regimes inspired by communism, supported by drug trafficking and allied countries. All of them, under the umbrella of Cuba and initiatives such as the **São Paulo Forum and the Puebla Group**, infiltrate the circles of power to impose their ideological agenda.

The threat is not limited exclusively to countries suffering from the totalitarian yoke. The ideological and criminal project **that is suppressing the liberties and rights of the people of the region** seeks to advance in other countries and continents, with the goal of destabilizing liberal democracies and the Rule of Law.

May this Charter of Madrid, **supported by political and social leaders with different and even divergent visions and ideas,** serve to affirm that:

- The advance of communism poses a serious **threat to the prosperity and development** of our nations, as well as to the freedoms and rights of our fellow countrymen.
- The **Rule of Law, the separation of powers, freedom of expression and private property** are essential components that guarantee the well-functioning of our societies, and therefore must be especially protected against those who seek to undermine them.
- The defense of our liberties is a task **not only for the political sphere,** but also for institutions, civil society, the media, academia, etc.
- The future of the countries of the Iberosphere must be based on the respect for democracy, human rights, pluralism, human dignity and justice, and therefore the undersigned, **express their commitment to work together** in defense of these values and principles.

Source: https://foromadrid.org/carta-de-madrid/

This type of translation issues is common given the multi-layered structure of transnational advocacy networks. Due to important cultural differences between Latin American political traditions and those from the United States and Western Europe, international foundations struggle to translate local political positions to those from their original countries.

This was clearly stated by Lars-André Richter, the German regional director of the Naumann's office in Buenos Aires, who clarified that the misalignment in the defense of personal and social values is often problematic for the organization:

"Many liberals or even libertarians here [in Argentina] and in Chile are against the legalization of abortion, and they are quite aligned regarding this topic. Even Javier Milei [the current libertarian Argentine President] is against abortion, whereas libertarians usually claim that it is completely up to women to decide what they do with their bodies. But even within libertarians there are two positions, one more conservative and one more liberal. This is sometimes more complicated given the fact that some topics are not even debated in Germany, such as gun possession. The [German] Liberal Party does not have a political position in that debate. Or environmentalism: Milei is against the environmental agenda, and that is a challenge for our foundation. In terms of the climate change issue we are more critical than our partners."

This problem of translating political positions is most clear in Chile, given the left-wing-leaning of the local Christian Democratic Party. Whereas the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is partnered with center-right advocacy foundations in countries such as Argentina and Colombia, it finances the center-left in Chile, because the Christian Democracy has historically been tied to the Communist Party and the left political camp. Thus, as the executive director of the Chilean conservative think tank Liberty & Development amusedly clarifies:

"So if we were in another country, the Konrad would probably fund our work. In fact, there are members of RELIAL who receive funds from the Konrad Adenauer in other countries. […] You see what I mean? The Christian Democracy here is weird. Normally in other countries the Christian Democracy is right-leaning, or center-right. Here in Chile it has always been a party of the center-left since 1990 … That's why they have so many problems nowadays… [she laughs]" (Interview with Bettina Horst)

Furthermore, the fact that the Adenauer supports the Chilean center-left meant that all conservative right-wing organizations in Chile were up for grabs. Thus, it is unsurprising that most right-wing think tanks in Chile are associated with the Hanns Saidel foundation, the other

conservative German foundation with Catholic roots. As Saidel's coordinator in Chile mentioned in the interview:

> "The Adenauer obviously lost its right-wing counterparts here in Chile, and they are now informally poaching the partners of the Hanns Seidel. But it's not easy for them to start working with our partners because, by principle, we [the German foundations] are not allowed to fund the same organization in a country; our funding cannot overlap. Therefore, they cannot slide right in and partner with our organizations, it is not that easy. They have to look for agreements, and… create certain spaces. But the problem is that they have lost their counterparts, and if you loose them, you probably loose them in the long-term" (Interview with Jorge Sandrock)

To avoid falling into the trap of financing partners who do not lie close to their international political position or committing this type of strategic mistakes, global foundations often recruit local regional teams that serve as cultural and political brokers. These brokers do not only link disconnected actors across networks, but represent what Mische (2008: 50) has termed "mediators:" they lie at the intersection of several identities and projects and generate coalition-building between them.

The way in which these brokers mediate between actors varies across foundations given their different organizational structures (see Tables 1 and 2). German foundations use the local knowledge of the teams recruited by the regional offices to assess the work of their partners, as illustrated above. But institutions such as FAES, Atlas Network, or the Ayn Rand Institute have different approaches, because they do not count with local offices in Latin America.

FAES relies heavily on its national chapters of alumni, decentralizing decisions to them and increasing their autonomy. Thus, although they do not count with their own national offices, all these chapters are connected via online communication with the regional coordinator in Spain and have a broadly similar perspective given that they were trained in FAES headquarters beforehand.

During the first years, the program coordinator selected one national coordinator in each country based on their assessment of leadership during their training in Spain. Then, he asked all affiliated organizations and center right-networks to send profiles from their preferred young applicants. This worked well, but after a few cycles of application,

"… the network started to come alive within each country […] and the leaders of the national chapters themselves selected the applicants that they considered worth training. And you could see the differences. Because for example in Argentina they had a list and they clarified to us 'this person comes from the PRO party, this person comes from right-wing Peronism, this one comes from Santa Cruz, or the Liberty Foundation.' […] But for example in Ecuador, our contact was Guillermo Lasso [first conservative President of Ecuador, 2021-23], and he transformed the local chapter in a scholarship program from his bank, the Bank of Guayaquil. So then he started a program that consisted in offering a special type of bank account for young people that automatically allowed them to compete for a scholarship to come to Madrid or some of the other training programs Lasso ran in Ecuador. So he used to ask them for their CVs, and he channeled them to other scholarship programs. […] In Bogotá [Colombia] the local chapter organized a local seminar every Thursday at the think tank ICP, and therefore our alumni became part of the same tight group, right? This strategy worked to transform them in a very well-structured elite, that shielded them [from external threats] when ascending to power. So when Ivan Duque [conservative President, 2018-2022] arrived to the Presidency, they had fifteen young successful profiles from our FAES Network to offer to him, saying 'look, we have an expert in Defense matters, in Economic matters, etc.' I have every participant in our program, from 2005 until today, in a Whatsapp group, in my phone. And they are all active, they send texts, they constantly let us know what is happening in their countries." (Interview with Jose Herrera)

This decentralized strategy allows us to see how each country responds to its political context, and therefore translates international support in different ways. This worked well for FAES, except in those few cases were problems of translation emerged, such as Mexico, given the hegemony of a single party within the center-right.

"Well in Mexico the PAN [National Action Party] was the party that controlled our circuit. So they used to send me their candidates according to the criteria of the Central Committee of the Party, right? So I used to receive only three CVs, which were from the son of the Party's President, and two other young cadres. That's when I used to intervene, when I was seeing some sort of bias that wasn't fair to me, or at least some procedure that tried to transform an opportunity into a privilege." (Interview with Jose Herrera)

The curated strategy developed by FAES has some similarities with the one developed by the Atlas Network, although given the high number of partnerships developed by Atlas, the organization has professionalized over time. During the early 1980s, Alejandro Chafuen would organize international workshops before the *Mont Pèlerin* Meetings to identify possible partners, to which they added regional workshops after 1987. This first regional meeting was organized for Latin American think tanks in Jamaica, but since then the meetings were celebrated annually, progressively adding other sub-regional networks after 1990 – especially Asia and Eastern Europe (Djelic & Mousavi, 2020). Similarly to FAES, all the ultimate decisions regarding partnerships were channeled through Chafuen and his close circle of advisors.

After the 2000s, with the creation of regional centers with organizational autonomy, the strategy started to shift. Each Center hired a limited number of think tank professionals from their respective regions to manage grant applications and organize networking events. With the support of their most long-standing partners across several countries, Atlas could therefore provide an accurate assessment of new initiatives, but the decisions remained nevertheless within the organization. Furthermore, after Chafuen stepped down from his role as CEO in 2009 but especially after his departure from the organization in 2018, Atlas introduced new metrics devoted to "leveling the playing field" among competitors, adopting a more bottom-up competitive approach to partnerships. Roberto Salinas-Leon, the new Director of the Center for Latin America, explained it to me in the following way:

> "Our approach has been more quantitative than qualitative, which is not necessarily the right approach. […] Part of the agenda that I want to explore is for Atlas to become a *capital bencher fund*, that classifies projects based on risk assessment. So we will have to cut down some partners from our network, or at least, have a fund to give them one last chance. Let me be clear: one thing is to produce a paper that was read by three people, and the other is to produce a policy that reached the cabinet of a President in office. […] Part of my job is to inform myself of which are the institutes that are having a major influence in Ecuador, in Paraguay, in Brazil, in

Argentina. […] You have no idea of how many petitions I receive from think tanks across the region asking me for grants, but I tell them 'Well, there is an independent procedure to follow,' even though afterwards I meet with them on a weekly basis to follow up. […] I believe in the merit of the proposals we receive, and the impact that they can have in terms of policy wins." (Interview with Roberto Salinas)

This new approach to identify adequate partners combines bottom-up applications with the on-site identification of relevant partners. When I conducted participant observation during the Latin American Liberty Forum 2023 in Punta del Este (Uruguay), several activities were coordinated by staff members from the Center for Latin America to transmit to their partners the type of practices that would make their think tanks sustainable in the long-term. For example, in the panel titled "Selling your vision," coordinated by Matt Warner (President of the Atlas Network) and Antonella Marty (Associate Director at the Center for Latin America), approximately thirty professionals belonging to Latin American think tanks were prompted to discuss how their own organizations assess their projects on a number of issues – including their strategies, their unique advantages versus their competitors, and the measurement of their outcomes. However, I noticed that these collective instances of reflection were not only useful for partners to assess the type of projects that Atlas favors and therefore is more likely to approve, but also for Atlas Network's staff to scout relevant projects and outstanding partners in which they might want to invest in in the future. In fact, before Atlas recruited her, Antonella Marty was a fellow at *Fundación Libertad* in Argentina, one of Atlas' partners.

This scouting process is especially important for those global foundations that have less experience working in the region, such as the Ayn Rand Institute. As part of my fieldwork, I attended the Ayn Rand Conference in Buenos Aires (2022), where I was invited to a cocktail party that was taking place after the panels of the first day. With some of the young attendants to the conference we walked to a nearby hotel, and after some chatting, we moved upstairs to a

spacious and fancy salon that had an open bar and tables with finger food. After talking to some people I had ran into during my fieldwork, I started chatting with Tara Smith, a professor holder of the BB&T Chair for the Study of Objectivism at the University of Texas at Austin, and member of the board of directors of the Ayn Rand Institute. After sharing some details about my research project, I asked her why the Ayn Rand Institute was investing in events across Latin America. Her answer was very clear: funding wasn't a problem for them, but instead it was "fundamental" to find someone capable of "understanding local culture" to take care of the organization of the events. She clarified that they did this same work in Eastern Europe during the 1990s, but they previously did not have a trustful relationship in Latin American to do so until María Marty decided to create the Ayn Rand Institute Latin America in Buenos Aires.

María had been trained in the Objectivist philosophy through courses offered by the American Ayn Rand Institute for three years and participated of several annual Objectivist Conferences in the United States, meeting Tal Tsfany – ARI's President. Over time, she proposed them to generate a new regional Institute in Buenos Aires to coordinate activities in the region, which became funded through the Prometheus Foundation. As Tara Smith told me during the Conference dinner, given her background the leaders of ARI saw in María a person that could be trusted and was also willing to take care of all the "bureaucratic burdens" of organizing an event of such proportions.

For both María and ARI's leadership, organizing the Ayn Rand Conference across different countries allows them to scout new possible partnerships while spreading the Objectivist creed. As María mentioned in an interview:

"All our activities and the conferences trigger a lot of interest in Ayn Rand. One thing that we saw after the conference of last year [2018]… and this is something I noticed, I don't have objective measures… is that the interest in Ayn Rand grew a lot. People started to contact me,

they ask me all the time about lectures and readings, and the amount of people who signed up in our webinars grew exponentially." (Interview with María Marty)

In a similar fashion, generating relationships of trust is crucial for members of RELIAL. As one of its founding members recalls, when she entered the organization as a partner,

"There was a Mexican party, New Alliance, which was part of RELIAL and the Liberal International, but it belonged to the National Educational Workers Union. I was super ashamed, and there were a series of internal conflicts because I told them 'I cannot belong to an organization with these people'." (Interview with Bertha Pantoja)

Now, organizations that want to partner with RELIAL need to go through a series of steps to certify their ideological position, which allows them to be shielded from scandals:

"We have filters. Two full members of RELIAL need to submit an application to include a new organizations, which is then discussed by the Board of Directors. If the application is approved, the new organization needs to spend two years as 'observer' before becoming full members. We put these filters in place because there are organizations that do not share our same values, but they want to show that they belong to our organization for some reason, it's useful for them. […] Given our experience and networks, we often can tell quite fast if they are also free-market or not. However, sometimes we don't know some organizations. So if they become observers we can look closely at what they are doing, their staff, their projects, their trajectory. […] We had some unpleasant surprises, because […] some of them support left-wing groups. That was the case of a Salvadorean foundations that supported both free-market and left-wing organizations, and we kicked them out from RELIAL. But we used our Salvadorean networks to assess them, there is no other way to know in advance" (Interview with Bertha Pantoja)

All the examples across the global and regional foundations fleshed out above illustrate why analyzing diffusion in terms of North-South or South-North directionality does not make analytical sense. Given the virtual or real problems of translation involved in the development of partnerships, even the most powerful foundations need to involve the expertise of actors located in multiple geographical locations. Constant interactions between these brokers and their partners on the ground are the most reliable way of making sure that partnerships work in the way that

they intend to, although given the enormous political turmoil in the region, partnerships are always subject to destabilization and change.

5. Conclusion [to be written]