

**‘YOUTH LIBERTY PRIZE 2026’**

SPONSORED BY THE ‘**FUNDACIÓN JESÚS HUERTA DE SOTO BALLESTER**’

**FULL COMPETITION RULES**

**1. Purpose of the Prize**

The “*Youth Liberty Prize 2026*” aims to recognise, **encourage and disseminate essays written by young authors** in the fields of economic theory, political philosophy, institutional analysis and social sciences, from the perspective of the Austrian School of Economics.

The prize is awarded to **completed works** consisting of original academic essays in English of between 2,000 and 3,000 words that analyse the concept of spontaneous market order and its current relevance in societies marked by statism, state interventionism and the crisis of individual liberties.

Each year, a principal theme related to the research conducted shall be proposed; the theme for the 2026 edition will be: ‘**When the state writes the Code: How does Digital Interventionism Impact the Prospect of Liberty?**’.

**2. Motivation of the prize**

Freedom and liberty are often tossed around in debates as political rallying cries, as personal ideals, or casual opinions. But without a firm grasp of the underlying principles that make a free society function, these conversations stay surface-level and open to distortion. This competition is built on the belief that defending liberty demands more: a deep dive into its theoretical backbone, institutional pillars, and logical coherence. It's about understanding why free societies consistently outperform centrally planned ones, drawing on historical lessons to avoid repeating cycles of coercion that exact real human tolls: economic stagnation, eroded rights, and widespread suffering.

If you're under 25 and drawn to these ideas, this is your arena to explore why liberty isn't mere absence of control but a sophisticated order of institutions that emerge organically: private property, voluntary exchange, prices as signals, sound money, and the rule of law. These aren't abstract inventions; they arise from human action in a world of incomplete knowledge, uncertainty, and diverse goals. To speak responsibly about liberty therefore requires engaging with the theory that explains why these institutions work, how they come into being, and what happens when they are undermined.

The Austrian School of economics has made foundational contributions to this understanding, rooted in individual choices and values. It highlights private property's role in enabling economic calculations, the limits of centralized planning, and how interventions, however well-intentioned, generate unintended consequences, from distorted markets, to reduced freedom and to stifled innovation and entrepreneurship. Think of it as a toolkit for analyzing real-world issues without relying on oversimplified models or top-down illusions.

This annual prize isn't for superficial takes or advocacy; it's an invitation for young scholars like you to rigorously apply these principles to contemporary challenges, such as the 2026 theme on digital interventionism. We value intellectual independence, analytical sharpness, and a commitment to reasoned arguments.

*Liberty endures not because it is trendy, but because it is understood.*

### 3. Eligibility and justification for focusing on young people

The competition is aimed at **young researchers**, defined as authors who, on 1 November of each year of the award call for entries, **are under 25 years of age**.

This age restriction is **intrinsic to the purpose of the award**, which is to:

- Reward early-stage research vocations.
- Encourage independent critical thinking in young authors.
- Stimulating scientific training in the tradition of spontaneous order.

Accordingly, the **age limitation does not constitute a restriction or discrimination unrelated to the essential nature of the prize**.

### 4. Subject Matter

Already completed works falling within the proposed general theme will be eligible for submission and may address, inter alia, the following: censorship and freedom of expression; digital IDs; Central Bank Digital Currencies; social credit score systems; other applications in the digital sphere; and the regulation of artificial intelligence and its implications.

All from the perspective of the Dynamics and Consequences of Digital Interventionism viewed through the lens of the Austrian School of Economics analysis and, in particular, authors such as the Spanish Scholastics, C. Menger, E. von Böhm-Bawerk, L. von Mises, F.A. Hayek, M. N. Rothbard, I. M. Kirzner, A. Benegas Lynch (h), Walter Block, H. H. Hoppe, J. Salerno, J. Huerta de Soto, P. Boettke and J.G. Hülsmann among others.

#### About the 2026 Topic

A new form of state intervention is emerging, one that operates not through prohibitions or prescriptions, but through systems designed to shape choices before they are made. Central bank digital currencies that can be programmed to restrict spending. Digital identity frameworks that gate access to services. Algorithmic content moderation that removes speech without a hearing. Social credit systems that condition participation in economic life on compliance scores. Unlike traditional regulation, which punishes and deters, digital interventionism embeds control into infrastructure itself, often invisibly, automatically, and at scale.

This marks a structural shift. When the government prints money recklessly, some distortions will eventually become visible, for example in rising prices. When it censors

a newspaper, the act is identifiable. But when compliance is coded into the architecture of payments, communication, and identity, intervention becomes the default and freedom becomes the exception that must be explicitly granted. In such cases, infrastructure designed to enable social interaction becomes a means of political control.

The dynamics are self-reinforcing. Digital interventionism tends to generate interventionist spirals. Initial regulations alter incentives and behavior, producing new distortions that are then used to justify further controls. AI governance frameworks, ostensibly designed to ensure safety, risk centralizing decisions that obstruct the entrepreneurial process of creating, discovering, and applying new knowledge.

The Austrian School of Economics offers a uniquely powerful lens for this analysis. Its emphasis on dispersed knowledge, subjective value, and the impossibility of rational central planning illuminates precisely what digital interventionism threatens: the capacity of individuals to coordinate through voluntary exchange, price signals, and private property. Where designed systems presume that regulators can acquire the knowledge needed to coordinate and optimise outcomes, the Austrian tradition shows why this is impossible and why attempts to do so generate consequences far beyond intention or foresight.

This year's prize invites entrants to bring these principles to bear on any dimension of digital interventionism: freedom of expression and its suppression, programmable money and financial autonomy, digital identity and anonymity, AI regulation and the control of knowledge, or the broader institutional consequences of embedding political authority into code. The topic is inherently multidisciplinary, intersecting economics, law, political philosophy, computer science, and history. We encourage entrants to draw on these fields while grounding their analysis in the economic and institutional logic of liberty.

## **5. Nature of the works**

Entries must be:

- completely original;
- without future compensation;
- without transfer of intellectual property rights.

The authors will retain full ownership of their intellectual property rights; however, the Foundation reserves the right to disseminate and publish the awarded essays on a non-profit basis and for a period not exceeding six (6) months.

## **6. Awards**

- **1<sup>st</sup> Prize:** 100,000 €
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Prize:** 25,000 €
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Prize:** 10,000 €

- **4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Prizes:** 5,000 € each
- **11<sup>th</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup>:** special mention on the Foundation's website

The prizes shall be awarded **outright** and **unconditionally**, with no subsequent obligations, and they will under no circumstances constitute prior or simultaneous funding of the awarded works.

The three highest-ranked entrants will present and defend their essays, without any additional monetary consideration, at the “**MADRID ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS**”, sponsored by the Jesús Huerta de Soto Ballester Foundation, which is held each year at Rey Juan Carlos University during the month of October; for these purposes, the Foundation will reimburse, upon submission of the corresponding supporting documentation, their travel expenses to Madrid.

### **7. Submission of applications**

Applications must be submitted electronically via the website set up for this purpose by the Foundation, attaching:

- the essay in PDF format, with the title and author's name on the cover,
- ID card or passport,
- a statement of originality and personal authorship, as well as a declaration that no use has been made of artificial intelligence,
- a brief CV (max. 150 words) in a separate PDF file.

The deadline for submitting applications will be from 12:00 noon on June 15 to 8:00 p.m. on June 30 of each year in which the award remains valid (Spanish time). Applications submitted after the deadline or that do not meet the requirements of this call for applications will not be accepted.

### **8. Jury**

The jury will be composed of internationally renowned specialists:

- **Prof. Jesús Huerta de Soto**
- **Alexander Tamas**
- **Prof. Philipp Bagus**
- **Prof. Niall Ferguson**
- **Prof. Miguel Ángel Alonso Neira**
- **Prof. Tom Ginsburg**
- **Prof. David Howden**
- **Joana Cotar**

The jury's decisions will be final and unappealable.

### **9. Assessment criteria**

The assessment criteria taken into account by the jury will be as follows:

- Degree of originality and innovation (30%)

The novelty of the ideas, creativity in the approach and the author's own intellectual contribution will be assessed.

- Depth of the Austrian perspective (30%)

The rigour with which the essay incorporates and develops concepts specific to the Austrian School of Economics will be taken into account.

- Clarity of presentation and soundness of argument (20%)

The coherence of the reasoning, the quality of the evidence used, and the logical structure of the argument will be evaluated.

- Relevance to the proposed topic (15%)

The degree to which the work fits the central theme and the topics suggested in the call for papers will be measured.

- Literary quality and style (5%)

The quality of the language, fluency, precision, and writing quality of the essay will be considered.

### **10. Resolution and awarding**

The Foundation will publish the decision on its website. The prizes will also be announced at a public ceremony at the event and venue indicated in the final paragraph of Section 5 above.

The Jury may declare any of the prizes provided for in these Rules void, in which case its decision will be final and not subject to appeal.