

THE IMPACT OF POPULISM ON ARGENTINA: LIBERTARIAN PRESIDENT JAVIER MILEI

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Argentina, the second largest country in Latin America, is one of the most significant nations in the region economically, politically, and culturally. With its strategic location, abundant natural resources, dynamic culture, and complex history, Argentina plays a crucial role both regionally and internationally. However, throughout its history, it has faced a series of challenges such as political instability, economic crises, and populist governments. These challenges have deeply impacted the country's political and economic structures, shaping Argentina's internal dynamics.

Argentina is one of the largest economies in Latin America and wields significant influence over regional economic dynamics. Located in the southern part of South America, with coastlines on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Argentina serves as a vital transit point for regional trade and maritime transportation. Additionally, the country's agriculture, mining, and industrial sectors play a crucial role in regional and international trade, contributing significantly to Latin America's gross domestic product.

Politically, Argentina has assumed a leadership role in the region and is recognized as an influential actor in international relations. The country's diplomatic efforts and contributions to regional cooperation significantly contribute to the overall political stability of Latin America.

Furthermore, Argentina boasts a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Cultural symbols such as Tango, literature, and art have been embraced and valued by a wide audience across Latin America, forming an integral part of regional cultural interaction. Taken together, these factors establish Argentina as one of the leading countries in Latin America, playing a critical role in the region's overall stability and development.

Argentina, the second largest country and the third largest economy in Latin America, has long been grappling with economic and political dysfunction. Having gained independence from Spain in 1816, Argentina encountered populist governance known as Peronism, created by Juan Peron, in 1943, and has been under the sway of populist politics ever since. As of 2024, Argentina continues to struggle with economic and political issues alongside human rights violations.

In this context, the policies pursued by current President Javier Milei stand out. Milei's electoral victory has underscored

the growing public discontent with the longstanding Peronist rule and signaled a strong desire for radical changes in domestic policies amidst a deteriorating socio-economic crisis. An ultra-libertarian economist, Milei has conducted a disruptive campaign advocating for a significant reduction in the state's role in the economy, the adoption of dollarization, and the abolition of the central bank. Since being elected, Milei, a leader who has sparked significant controversy within society, has drawn attention with radical changes. Milei's failures both economically and in paving the way for human rights

violations in the country are seen as the most debated topics.

This study, focusing on the impact of populism in Argentina, examines the rise of libertarian President Javier Milei. It delves into how populism has shaped the political landscape in Argentina throughout history and how Milei has emerged as a new voice against populism. “What impact can Milei’s leadership have on Argentina’s political and economic future, and what alternative can it offer to populist tendencies?” These are among the key questions addressed in this study. The historical and political tradition of Argentina will be discussed, and the current political and economic situation of the country will be analyzed. Milei’s electoral process and campaign will be thoroughly examined. The support Milei receives from certain states and the negative perception from others will also be discussed. Particularly, the significance of the changes under the leadership of Javier Milei, a figure rising on the country’s political scene in recent times, for Argentina and the Latin American region will be emphasized. Argentina’s role in international relations and its relationship with states like the United States will also be taken into consideration. The aims and characteristics of the emerging social movements in the country will be examined. Finally, the discussion will revolve around how Argentina’s future will be shaped in the context of Milei’s policies.

Political changes in Argentina and the rise of Milei are a current issue that has recently gained significant media attention and aroused wide interest. Therefore, this study provides readers with an opportunity to deeply understand and analyze these important developments. Themes such as the changes under Milei’s leadership and Argentina’s international relations hold

significant places within today’s complex and evolving world politics.

Historical Background: Peronism

To understand Argentina’s political situation, it is necessary to first understand what populism entails. Populism, evolving since the 19th century, is a political stance that often pits a morally upright “people” against a corrupt and self-serving “elite.” Populist leaders present themselves as the voice of the ‘real people’ and often prefer direct democracy. Populists typically claim to represent only themselves as the ‘true people’ or ‘silent majority.’ Additionally, exclusionary policies are often implemented against those who do not share in the construction of the ‘real people’ (Müller, 2018). Therefore, populism is also associated with authoritarianism and paves the way for the emergence of dictatorial leaders (Molloy, 2018). Populist parties can exist across the political spectrum. While right-wing populism relies on conservatism, such as nationalism, anti-immigration, and economic protectionism, left-wing populism emphasizes progressive values like social justice and equality. Both tendencies employ simplified language and polarizing rhetoric.

When discussing left-wing populism in the Latin American context, prominent political figures like former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and current President Nicolas Maduro, former Bolivian President Evo Morales, former Brazilian President Lula da Silva, and current Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador come to mind. In the latter half of the 20th century, populism became synonymous with the political style of Latin American leaders (Munro, 2024). This study will focus on Peronism, an example of left-wing

populism shaped by Juan Perón, who served as President of Argentina for a long time.

Peronism is an ideology and movement that holds an important place in Argentina's political history, profoundly influencing and shaping the country's political and social dynamics. The roots of Peronism are closely associated with the political and economic uncertainties Argentina faced in the early 20th century.

Juan Perón, who served as President of the Justicialist Party, emerged as a leader embracing social justice, economic nationalism, and international non-alignment policies (Oxford Reference, n.d.). Understanding Peronism and its impact on the country is crucial for making sense of current events. Colonel Juan Perón's successful participation in a military coup in 1943 and subsequent appointment as Minister of Labor marked a turning point for the country. Perón, who won the favor of the masses over time, was elected President in 1946 with strong support from workers and labor unions. One of the fundamental features of Peronism is its close relationship with civil society organizations such as unions and labor groups, unlike classical political parties. The movement led by Perón embraced basic principles such as social justice, economic nationalism, and workers' rights. Additionally, populist rhetoric and a cult of leadership were notable elements of Peronism.

In 1955, Perón was overthrown by the military, resulting in his exile. Peronism, a belief supported by elements from left-wing unionists to right-wing authoritarian nationalists, lost its power over time. However, even after Perón's resignation in 1955, the influence of Peronism continued

in Argentine politics. The main opposition to power in Argentina remained Peronism. The Justicialist Party, allowed to participate in the elections in 1973, returned to power. Perón's return from exile and his reassumption of power marked another significant milestone for the country. In 1974, following Perón's death, the disagreement between right-wing and left-wing Peronists escalated into violence, leading to the overthrow of Perón's wife Isabel Perón by the military in 1976.

Peronism has experienced periodic fluctuations in Argentine politics but has left a long-lasting and significant impact. During Juan Perón's first two terms (1946-1955), Peronism effectively governed, but after Perón's overthrow and during subsequent years of military rule, the Peronist movement was banned and suppressed. However, following the reestablishment of Argentine democracy in the late 1980s, Peronism experienced a resurgence and continued to play a significant role. Although the Peronists lost the elections in 1983, they returned to power in 1989. Despite losing the 1999 presidential elections, Peronists were re-elected after a deep economic and political crisis in 2001. Divisions within the Peronist movement since 2003 have significantly affected political life. In the 2015 elections, Peronist Daniel Scioli and Mauricio Macri faced off. The winner of the election, Macri, put an end to the Peronist rule that had shaped the country for a long time (Britannica, 2024). Finally, in the 2023 elections, Peronist candidate Sergio Massa, who was the Economy Minister, was defeated by economist Javier Milei, an extreme right-wing libertarian candidate.

Populism has penetrated the depths of the Argentine political scene and can be defined as a political phenomenon that

historically emphasizes the tension between the people and the elites. Milei's election can be seen as a concrete reflection of these contradictions. Milei's economic liberalism and harsh rhetoric have shaken traditional political structures and deeply impacted society. However, such a rise is often associated with polarization and political instability. Therefore, Milei's leadership raises important questions about Argentina's political and economic future. While Milei's discourse and policies have raised expectations among supporters, there are uncertainties regarding their feasibility and effects. In this context, it is important to thoroughly examine the potential impacts of Milei's leadership to understand Argentina's political and economic dynamics.

Turning Point: Javier Milei

Javier Milei, a 53-year-old Argentine economist known for his analyses on the economy and sharp criticism, is a prominent figure. Milei was elected as the President of Argentina in the 2023 elections. Shaking up Argentina's political order, Milei proposed tough measures to curb rising inflation and pledged to combat the spread of socialism. With his character and anti-establishment approach, Milei has been compared to former US President Donald Trump and former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. Milei was elected as the President of Argentina, winning approximately 55% of the popular vote in the general elections held in October 2023 (Dirección Nacional Electoral, 2023). Asserting that he has initiated the rebuilding of Argentina, Milei stated that the end of Argentina's decline has come and there is no turning back. Milei's statement, "Argentina will return to the place in the world it should never have lost.

We will work shoulder to shoulder with all nations of the free world to build a better world," drew attention (BBC, 2024).

Advocating for minimal government intervention in society and describing himself as an anarcho-capitalist libertarian, Milei's economic plan revolves around replacing the local currency, the peso, with the US dollar. Milei, who believes that the only way to solve the problem of high inflation is to end the printing of money, stated that he would eliminate half of the government ministries, including health, agriculture, and education (Biller and Politi, 2023). Additionally, Milei promised to reduce employers' costs, loosen labor laws, and not increase taxes (Wallenfeldt, 2024).

During his election campaign, Milei appeared at rallies with an electric saw, a loud and powerful symbol of his policy. After being elected, Milei dismissed ministers, halted new infrastructure projects, and laid off public employees. Milei, who claims that these measures will reduce Argentina's budget deficit, aims to attract foreign investment to the country (Ioanes, 2023). Peronism, on the other hand, is based on narrow-minded economic policies. Therefore, it is observed that there is a lack of liquid foreign assets in Argentina. Without foreign exchange, it is unlikely that the country will be able to participate in the global economy. Additionally, paying off the country's external debts also seems challenging.

The rise of Javier Milei in Argentina can be considered a disruptive event in the traditional political paradigm. Milei's economic and political rhetoric stands out as a reflection of a quest for radical change in Argentina's troubled history. Particularly as a figure emerging outside traditional political structures, Milei's policies have

garnered significant attention in Argentine society.

Milei's economic perspective focuses on minimizing government intervention and strengthening the market economy. However, serious questions arise about the feasibility and social impacts of these radical policies. Especially steps such as restricting welfare programs and reducing social security networks can lead to increased social inequalities and human rights concerns.

Milei's leadership has deeply impacted Argentina's political and social dynamics. Especially, his harsh and controversial rhetoric may increase polarization in society and create a contentious political atmosphere. Additionally, Milei's stance on feminist policies, abortion, and other social issues raises important questions regarding gender equality and human rights.

Milei's election has raised important questions about Argentina's political and economic future. The feasibility and effects of Milei's policies will be decisive in how Argentina tackles its current problems and progresses towards social development. Additionally, Milei's leadership should be closely monitored for its potential impact on Argentina's political atmosphere and social dynamics, as well as the country's long-term stability.

Regional and International Reactions

The impact of the 2023 general elections in Argentina on a regional and international scale is significant. Latin American countries have reacted differently to the election results in Argentina. Some countries may have welcomed Milei's election, believing that it could open the door to possible new cooperation and

relations with Argentina. On the other hand, some countries may have viewed Milei's radical policies with concern, fearing that these policies could increase instability in the region or affect regional relations.

While countries like Brazil and Uruguay expressed positive thoughts after Milei's election, some countries like Colombia made negative remarks. This situation indicated that political tensions and polarizations in Latin America would increase. Lastly, Milei's statements to the foreign press about President Petro in March 2024 led to tensions in relations. The Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered the expulsion of Argentine diplomats from Colombian territory (Telesur, 2024).

When examining international reactions, the statements of the US, Russia, and Ukraine stand out. The US emphasized the importance of free and fair elections, highlighting the importance of human rights and democratic values (Berg, Lopez, and Cardenas, 2023). Former US President Donald Trump congratulated Javier Milei on his convincing victory in the Argentine presidential race, stating, "Congratulations to Javier Milei for the Argentina presidential race. The whole world was watching! I am proud of you. You will turn your country around and truly make Argentina great again!" (Aljazeera, 2023).

Regarding relations with China, it is noteworthy that Milei stated that he would not collaborate with communists. However, China is one of Argentina's largest trading partners. It is clear that the continuous flow of investment and finance from China to Argentina fills a significant void in South America. Milei's strong statements for change will determine

whether he can reduce Argentina's dependence on China, Russia, and neighboring Brazil.

The statements made by Russia and Ukraine after the election are also noteworthy. Milei's previous remarks about the need to reassess relations with Moscow and his support for Ukraine have influenced these statements. Russia stated that it followed Milei's statements but wanted to maintain strong ties. While Russia made cautious statements, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made clearer statements. Zelensky said, "I congratulate Javier Milei on his convincing victory in the Argentine presidential elections. I appreciate his clear stance supporting Ukraine. I look forward to strengthening our cooperation and restoring the international order based on international law" (Reuters, 2024).

It is evident that Argentina's strategic importance has increased in recent years with its impressive resources. The competition between the US and China is clearly visible in Latin America and especially in Argentina. It is known that the US wants to cooperate in many areas such as clean energy, space cooperation, mining, and illegal fishing. Milei's election may expand US interests and commercial networks in Argentina. China's continuously growing influence in the region is also too important to ignore. Especially Argentina's desire to join BRICS+ and Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative are significant in terms of relations with China. Additionally, considering the unclear reactions of other Latin American countries, Argentina's support for Ukraine is noteworthy, and how it will affect its relations with Russia is important.

The recent general elections in Argentina and the policies of the new leader, Javier Milei, have resonated both domestically and internationally. Milei's extremely libertarian approach seems to have the potential to change political and economic balances in Argentina. However, the effects of these policies on Argentine society and their repercussions on regional relations carry worrying uncertainties.

The regional and international dimensions of Milei's policies paint a more complex picture. Especially, how relations with other Latin American countries will shape up and what impact Argentina's regional leadership role will have remained uncertain. While some countries welcome Milei's policies, others are concerned that these policies may harm regional stability.

Social Reactions and Protests

Milei's economic reform proposals also face challenges in terms of political opposition and social acceptance. Milei's economic policies generally reflect a radical liberal approach, aiming to minimize state intervention, strengthen market economies, and promote free trade. While these policies encourage economic freedoms and entrepreneurship, they tend to limit social safety nets and welfare programs. However, the effects of such policies on the poor and disadvantaged groups, as well as their impact on human rights, are controversial. Particularly, the restriction of social aid programs or the reduction of the government's role in essential services such as health and education could be concerning from a human rights perspective. Additionally, the restriction of labor rights and union organization is also a significant issue from a human rights standpoint.

Looking at the data from February 2024, Milei's actions in his first 100 days are controversial. In February, inflation soared to 276%. The Argentine currency depreciated by 50% against the US dollar. Additionally, the poverty level in the country reached its highest level in 20 years, reaching 57.4% (Kozul-Wright, 2024). Children are said to be the most affected by poverty (Telesur, 2024). The increase in prices of internationally obtained goods such as medicines; cuts in funding in many areas including health, social assistance, culture, and science have led to increased unrest within the country. Tensions have escalated between workers and unions, leading to numerous strikes and protests. The call for a general strike by the General Confederation of Labor and the subsequent closure of businesses and educational institutions are noteworthy (Moore and Zorzoli, 2024). Thousands of Argentinians have taken to the streets to protest against the funding cuts and Milei's indifferent attitude. Milei may come out of his gamble with the Argentine people harmed. The failure of policies to yield results soon may result in protests turning violent in the country.

Perhaps one of the most contentious moves is Milei's Decree 70/2023 (Argentina Presidencia, 2023). The implementation of this decree will affect the quality of life of millions because it eliminates protection mechanisms and prioritizes profitability as the fundamental principle of social life. It is known that the decree contains human rights violations and is also unconstitutional.

The Argentine State Workers' Association has rejected Milei's salary adjustments and the closure of key institutions. The Workers' Union has announced that it will hold a general strike due to cuts and high

inflation (Telesur, 2024). Serious budget constraints in the education sector have also prompted the Argentine University Federation to call for mobilization (Telesur, 2024). Many reactions, protests, and strikes like these are seen every day in Argentina. It is also observed that Argentine police forces are trying to suppress the movements of social organizations (Telesur, 2024).

Social reactions and protests demonstrate that Milei's economic reform proposals create difficulties both politically and socially. Milei's generally radical liberal approach and the goal of minimizing state intervention often involve restricting social safety nets and welfare programs. Such policies, while promoting economic freedoms and entrepreneurship, make the impact on the poor and disadvantaged groups and their human rights effects controversial.

Especially when looking at the results of the policies Milei is trying to implement, the data from February 2024 is very striking. The rapid increase in inflation, currency depreciation, and record levels of poverty have caused serious concerns among the public. These economic hardships have led to increased protests and strikes against the government. In particular, labor unions and other social organizations have opposed Milei's policies by calling for general strikes.

The social and economic impacts of Milei's policies also pose a significant problem from a human rights perspective. Especially measures such as the restriction of social aid programs or the reduction of the government's role in essential services may endanger human rights and social justice. Additionally, practices such as the restriction of labor rights and pressure on

social organization may undermine democratic rights.

The increasing social reactions against Milei's policies threaten political and social stability in Argentina. The government needs to adopt more comprehensive and inclusive policies, considering the concerns of society. Otherwise, the inevitability of protests turning violent and social unrest increasing. Therefore, it is important for Milei's government to consider not only the economic but also the social and political consequences of its policies.

Conclusion

This study provides an important foundation for understanding the political future of Argentina. Despite being the second-largest economy in Latin America, Argentina is known as a country that frequently struggles with stability in the political arena. Throughout its long history, Argentina has grappled with political fluctuations and economic crises, reflecting its internal challenges and potential for transformation. Factors such as economic instability, high inflation, fluctuations in the exchange rate, and increasing public debt play a critical role in shaping the popularity of governments and political stability by determining the political orientation of the country.

Political competition is a significant factor in determining Argentina's political future. Under the influence of the Peronist movement, Argentina struggles to balance political struggles between left and right. However, emerging new political actors and parties in recent years have the potential to change traditional political dynamics. In Argentina, a new type of politics is taking shape, led by a politician compared to former US President Donald

Trump and Brazil's former leader Jair Bolsonaro. In a country where current inflation stands at 276% and two out of every five people live in poverty, Milei's victory in the elections proves that Argentines are tired of traditional politics and economic disasters. This situation could be decisive in shaping the future political landscape.

Another important factor influencing Argentina's political future is social demands and protest movements. Issues such as income inequality, unemployment, and corruption play a significant role in shaping the political demands of the people. How these demands are addressed will be critical in determining future political stability. However, recent developments under Javier Milei's leadership have also led to concerns about political and human rights issues in society. Milei's policies have faced allegations of human rights violations and police brutality in some quarters. In particular, the excessive use of force by security forces to suppress protests and the government's harsh stance against critical voices have increased concerns about democratic rights and freedoms in society. The government led by Milei has taken some tough measures to suppress criticism and opposition. Allegations have emerged of restricted freedom of expression, censorship of opposition media outlets, and increased judicial persecution of dissenting voices. This situation has raised concerns about the weakening of democratic institutions in Argentina and the increasing authoritarian tendencies.

Additionally, economic difficulties such as increased layoffs and reduced social assistance resulting from Milei's economic policies have also led to social unrest. Particularly, economic reforms and

austerity measures have caused significant dissatisfaction among certain segments of society and contributed to rising unemployment rates and deepening income inequality.

These developments could have a negative impact on Argentina's political stability and social harmony. The struggle to defend democratic rights and promote political participation in society highlights the need for Milei's leadership to strengthen democratic mechanisms and adopt a more responsive approach to the demands of the people. Otherwise, political, and social instability in Argentina could increase, and the country's democratic gains could be jeopardized. Therefore, it is essential for the government under Milei's leadership to secure Argentina's political future by respecting social demands and upholding human rights.

The significance of emerging new political leaders and movements in Argentina should not be overlooked. Particularly, radical politicians like Javier Milei could herald a new era in Argentine politics. Milei's widespread support among the masses and the reception of his radical policies with hope and a quest for change in society indicate that political dynamics are changing in the country.

This study makes a significant contribution to understanding the implications of Argentina's political future and the role of new leadership figures in this context. Argentina's political and economic stability is critical to the overall stability of Latin America. Therefore, understanding political changes in Argentina and assessing their regional and international impacts are of great importance for understanding political balances in the region.

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