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The (A)scientific Policy of Javier Milei, President of
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Dear *JLAG* readers,

Over the past months we have heard of the severe impact of the Milei government in Argentina on the academy with growing discomfort. We had hoped to dedicate an editorial to the problems facing researchers and teachers from geography and cognate disciplines under the Milei administration, but our distance prevented us from being able to provide an informed perspective. To this end, we have invited the researchers forming part of the Network of Institutes of Geography and Territorial Studies of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (Red de Institutos de Geografía y Estudios Territoriales del Área Metropolitana - REDIGET-AMBA) to write a guest editorial. We are privileged to publish and endorse their text here.

***JLAG* Editorial Team**

The (A)scientific Policy of Javier Milei, President of Argentina

The so-called scientists and intellectuals, who believe that having academic qualifications makes them superior and, therefore, that we should all subsidize their vocation. If they think their research is so useful, I invite them to enter the market domain like any other regular person. Do your research, publish your book, and see if people are interested in it or not, instead of insidiously shielding yourselves behind the protective security of the State.

Javier Milei, Vox Party Convention, Buenos Aires, September 5, 2024

ON NOVEMBER 19, 2023, JAVIER MILEI was elected President of Argentina, with 55 per cent of the vote in the runoff. The economist had achieved notoriety through his participation in political panel debates on television and in theaters, with performances that were both overly dramatic and politically incorrect. Milei presented himself as a right-wing libertarian. As a supporter of the Austrian school of economics, he never missed an opportunity to criticize Keynesian proposals and their implications for state policies. He rejected economic equality and social justice outright. Throughout his election campaign, he reiterated his plans to implement economic adjustment policies and to abolish state agencies, particularly those dedicated to culture, women's rights and transgender issues, as well as science and technology.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided the ideal conditions for his rise in popularity, especially among young people. Measures to mandate isolation and limit movement were portrayed as the restriction of freedom,

both on the streets and on social media. It was against this backdrop that the La Libertad Avanza party was able to organize under Milei's leadership, as his ideas became widely disseminated through online streaming channels and broadcast live via Instagram and Tik Tok.

Cyberspace enabled Milei and his ideas to spread across the country, even to regions that he never visited. Yet, was that enough to generate political support that cut across all sections of society? Seman and Welschinger¹ consider that, on the one hand, the vote for Milei represented a loss of confidence in and frustration with the state's handling of health, education, security and the economy, and on the other hand, it reflected disillusion with and questioning of the traditional and privileged political class (or "political caste" in his words). On top of this was an economy in which inflation had reached 211.4 percent in December 2023.² Furthermore, Milei's victory was also helped by support from Argentina's main economic sectors and some military factions. The latter,

represented by the Vice President, Victoria Villarruel, deny that the previous civilian-military dictatorship (1976-1982) encompassed state terrorism.

As soon as it took power, the new libertarian government launched a plan to eliminate the national deficit. This in turn justified rolling out policies to shrink the state and to question historically won social rights. In relation to education and research, its approach was aimed at: a) downgrading the status of the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Education by demoting them from ministries to secretariats; b) cancelling the budget allocated to science and technology, by withdrawing funding from research projects that had already been assessed and approved; c) suspending agricultural and industrial research and abandoning strategic projects such as satellite and nuclear initiatives; d) laying off staff employed in state science and technology agencies; e) reducing doctoral scholarships and post-doctoral grants; f) suspending the incorporation of researchers into the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas - CONICET); g) holding salary increases drastically below inflation for public university teachers and CONICET researchers; and, h) cutting ties between the national government and public universities, which had previously facilitated the joint formulation of public policies in the areas of economy, social issues, and culture.

The quotation from Milei at the start of this editorial illustrates how this defunding represents a vision that has no interest in understanding that the production of

knowledge contributes to economic independence, and instead ensures the reproduction of the extractivist model based on the exploitation of natural resources.

It is the humanities and social sciences that have been the most reviled by the libertarian approach. As these disciplines informed the formulation of policies that sought to fulfil demands for the expansion of social rights since the early 2000s, the libertarian perspective espoused by Milei accuses them of being embedded in cultural Marxism. The discomfort arising from these disciplines' critical approaches is usually framed by the media and neoliberal and conservative education stakeholders as the politicization of knowledge, indoctrination, or a lack of relevance to the market system.

Milei's (a)scientific policy has already had some effects, such as a reduction in the number of student enrolments in universities (an area that usually contributes to upward social mobility), and an increase in highly skilled researchers leaving Argentina to move abroad.

However, the situation has also prompted researchers and teachers to organize resistance against these policies. One such space is the Argentine Network of Science and Technology Institutes (Red Argentina de Autoridades de Instituto de Ciencia y Tecnología - RAICYT).³ Since January 2024 this network has been striving to: a) raise awareness among the public of the importance of the production of scientific knowledge for social development; b) call attention to the process of dismantling the institutions supporting science and technology, both within Argentina and internationally; c)

promote liaison with the relevant authorities to curb the progress of this policy; d) advise members of congress on the approval of regulations that would guarantee funding for science and technology; e) produce reports that are critical of the current government approach; and, f) prepare legal cases to challenge the consequences of the defunding of various research centers.

In parallel, several Geography and Territorial Studies centers in Buenos Aires have created the Network of Institutes of Geography and Territorial Studies of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (Red de Institutos de Geografía y Estudios Territoriales del Área Metropolitana - REDIGET-AMBA).⁴ This network has also taken action in defense of public education and the quality of national science and technology, both of which the members consider essential to build a fairer and more equal society.

The (a)scientific policy of the President of Argentina is being legitimized through shifting subjectivities, whereby claims made by those akin to flat-earthers via social media⁵ come to carry more weight than those based on scientific findings. Faced with the advance of the libertarian right-wing around the world, will Argentina become a laboratory for policies in the academic sector that could be emulated by other countries in the future?

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All the above research centers belong to the Network of Institutes of Geography and Territorial Studies of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (Red de Institutos de Geografía y Estudios Territoriales del Área Metropolitana - REDIGET-AMBA).

NOTES

- 1 Seman, P. & Welshinger, N. (2023). Cómo entender el “voto anticasta”. 11 tesis sobre Milei. Revista Anfibia. 18 de agosto. <https://www.revistaanfibia.com/11-tesis-sobre-milei/>
- 2 INDEC. Índice de Precios al Consumidor, diciembre 2023. https://www.indec.gob.ar/uploads/informesdeprensa/ipc_01_24DBD5D8158C.pdf
- 3 For more information on the activities of RAICYT, see <https://raicyt.org.ar/es/>, or follow @raicyt_ar on X.
- 4 “Territorial Studies” should be understood in terms of the Latin American conceptualization of territory. Members of the network are: Instituto de Geografía, Universidad de Buenos Aires; Centro de Estudios Geográficos, Universidad Nacional de San Martín; Centro de Investigaciones Geográficas, Universidad Nacional de la Plata; Centro de Investigaciones Geográficas y Geotecnológicas, Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero; Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales and Instituto de Estudios del Conurbano, Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento; Instituto de Investigaciones Geográficas, Universidad Nacional de Luján; and the Geography Program, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes.
- 5 The three conspiracy theories spread by the national congresswoman, Lilia Lemoine, in this viral video are misinformation: Chequeado.com, 12 de mayo 2025. <https://chequeado.com/ultimas-noticias/las-3-teorias-conspirativas-que-difunde-la-diputada-nacional-lilia-lemoine-en-este-video-viral-son-desinformaciones/>