

POLITICAL EXPRESSIONS OF YOUTH  
DISCONTENT: EXPLORATORY APPROACHES TO  
THE SITUATION IN ARGENTINA IN RECENT YEARS

*EXPRESSÕES POLÍTICAS DO MAL-ESTAR  
JUVENIL: ABORDAGENS EXPLORATÓRIAS DA  
SITUAÇÃO NA ARGENTINA NOS ÚLTIMOS ANOS*

*EXPRESIONES POLÍTICAS DE LOS  
MALESTARES JUVENILES: ACERCAMIENTOS  
EXPLORATORIOS A LA SITUACIÓN DE LA  
ARGENTINA EN LOS ÚLTIMOS AÑOS*

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**ABSTRACT:** The result of the 2023 presidential elections in Argentina generated diverse reactions and debates. Between surprise, concern, bewilderment, and enthusiasm, the public feelings and conversations of the last months of 2023 were decided. What was surprising in the Simultaneous and Mandatory Open Primaries (PASO) in August became a climate that oscillated between confusion and hope in the first round in October and a shock whose echoes are still felt when Javier Milei was elected president of Argentina in November 2023. Given this situation, we believe it is necessary to intensify our efforts to understand the dynamics of the Argentine political situation and the elements that led to the current political and social situation, which is also framed in regional and global disputes and currents. Based on our research work in recent years and the growing relevance they have had in resolving the results of the political process in Argentina and in other countries in the region, in this article, we will focus on the realities of young people who became

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visible because of the 2023 election results. Thus, we will identify six dimensions that make up the complex, invisible youth realities that emerged at the end of 2023 in Argentina. These are material and subjective precarization, the experience of young people in the pandemic and its echoes in the present, the digital world and its impacts on work, disputes over meaning in digital territories, disenchantment with previous political experiences, and the affective and emotional component of voting today.

**KEYWORDS:** Politics. Youth. Discontent. Far-right. Argentina.

**RESUMO:** *O resultado das eleições presidenciais de 2023 na Argentina gerou diversas reações e debates. Entre surpresa, preocupação, perplexidade e entusiasmo, as sensações e conversas públicas dos últimos meses de 2023 foram resolvidas. O que surpreendeu nas Primárias Abertas Simultâneas e Obrigatórias (PASO) de agosto tornou-se um clima que oscilou entre a confusão e a esperança nas primeiras rodadas em outubro e numa comoção cujos ecos ainda se fazem sentir quando, em novembro de 2023, Javier Milei foi eleito presidente da Argentina. Diante desta situação, pensamos que é necessário aguçar o esforço de compreensão para compreender a dinâmica da situação política argentina e os elementos que levaram à atual situação política e social, que também está enquadrada em disputas e correntes regionais e globais. Com base no nosso trabalho de pesquisa nos últimos anos e na crescente relevância que tiveram na consolidação dos resultados do processo político na Argentina e em outros países da região, neste artigo nos concentraremos nas realidades dos jovens que se tornaram visíveis a partir dos Resultados eleitorais de 2023. Assim, identificaremos seis dimensões que compõem as complexas realidades juvenis invisíveis que surgiram no final de 2023 na Argentina. São elas: a precariedade material e subjetiva, a vivência dos jovens em pandemia e seus ecos no presente, o mundo digital e seus impactos no trabalho, as disputas por sentido nos territórios digitais, o desencanto com experiências políticas anteriores e o afetivo e emocional componente da votação de hoje.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Política. Juventude. Descontentes. Ultradireita. Argentina.

**RESUMEN:** *El resultado de las elecciones presidenciales de 2023 en la Argentina generó diversas reacciones y debates. Entre la sorpresa, la preocupación, el desconcierto y el entusiasmo se dirimieron las sensaciones y conversaciones públicas de los últimos meses de 2023. Lo que sorprendió en las Primarias Abiertas Simultáneas y Obligatorias (PASO) de agosto se convirtió en un clima que osciló entre la confusión y la esperanza en la primera vuelta de octubre y en una conmoción*

*cuyos ecos aún se sienten cuando en noviembre de 2023 resultó electo presidente de la Argentina Javier Milei. Ante esta situación, pensamos que es necesario agudizar el esfuerzo de comprensión para entender las dinámicas de la coyuntura política argentina y los elementos que llevaron a la actual situación política y social, que se enmarca también en disputas y corrientes regionales y mundiales. A partir de nuestros trabajos de investigación en los últimos años y de la relevancia creciente que han tenido en dirimir los resultados del proceso político en la Argentina y en otros países de la región, en este artículo pondremos el foco en las realidades de las y los jóvenes que se visibilizaron a partir de los resultados electorales de 2023. Así, identificaremos seis dimensiones que componen las complejas realidades juveniles invisibilizadas que irrumpieron a finales de 2023 en la Argentina. Éstas son: la precarización material y subjetiva, la experiencia de las y los jóvenes en pandemia y sus ecos en el presente, el mundo digital y sus impactos en el trabajo, las disputas de sentido en los territorios digitales, el desencanto con experiencias políticas anteriores y el componente afectivo y emocional del sufragio en la actualidad.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Política. Juventudes. Descontentos. Ultraderecha. Argentina.*

## **Introduction**

The outcome of the 2023 presidential elections in Argentina has sparked various reactions and debates. Between surprise, concern, perplexity, and enthusiasm, public sentiments and discussions of the final months of 2023 took shape. What began as a surprise in the Open, Simultaneous, and Mandatory Primaries (PASO) in August evolved into an atmosphere oscillating between confusion and hope in October's first round, culminating in a wave of shock whose echoes are still felt following the election of Javier Milei as President of Argentina in November. Until 2021, he held no public office and was known only as a television commentator and economist famous for his flamboyant and explosive media performances.

In view of this situation, we believe it is essential to intensify efforts to understand the dynamics of Argentina's political situation and the factors that led to the current political and social environment, which is also framed within broader regional and global disputes and trends. Indeed, the rise of the so-called "new right"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is controversy over what to call these authoritarian, regressive, exclusionary, and anti-rights political groups that have grown in several countries, reaching the government in some. Bolsonaro, Bukele, Trump, and now Milei are exponents of these processes in America. The different ways of naming them may be due to two elements. On the one hand, to their national or regional singularities. For example, elements such as xenophobia, anti-immigrant discourse, nationalism, and security policies have different weights in each case. On the other hand, an effort to understand this is still underway, and that certainly requires different initiatives that can converge on a more comprehensive interpretation of

is a phenomenon that transcends the realities of Latin America and the Caribbean, extending across Europe and the United States, among other regions. It is important to note that these groups have gained traction due to the limitations and the exhaustion of certain governments from the progressive wave of the early 21st century, as well as the democratic structures built over recent decades—structures that have deepened social inequalities. Today, these groups are positioned to influence governments by proposing progressive changes (Vommaro, 2024).

Drawing from our research over recent years and the growing relevance of youth in shaping the political landscape in Argentina and other countries in the region, this article focuses on the experiences of young people whose realities were highlighted by the 2023 electoral results, though it is necessary to trace their defining characteristics back through previous years. This text is a synthesis of the author's prior work and includes an analysis of interviews conducted with young people engaged in various organizational spaces between 2020 and 2023, within the framework of the Group of Studies on Policy and Youth (GEPoJu-IIGG/UBA) and the Chair of Sociology of Childhood, Adolescence, and Youth at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires.

In response to the necessary conciseness of this article, after a brief mention of the situation in Argentina during Milei's initial months in office, we will identify six dimensions that constitute the complex, often invisible realities of youth that emerged prominently in Argentina at the end of 2023.

During his first seven months in office, Milei has emphasized two elements as economic achievements: the decline in inflation and a fiscal surplus. Beyond the strong liberal (and neoliberal) framework that regards these two factors as successes—without mentioning the reduction of poverty, much less inequality, increased production, or improvements in the quality of life of the population or workers—many analysts argue that the other side of these phenomena is a marked deterioration in the living conditions of the majority of the population. Regarding the fiscal surplus, many economists claim it is either misleading or tailored to suit President Milei's agenda, as it has been achieved by delaying payments, accumulating further debt, and restricting imports.

Similarly, the decrease in inflation was made possible largely due to a significant economic recession, which reduced economic activity and sales by between 25% and 70% over three to four months, depending on the sectors involved. Moreover, investments in social areas, such as those allocated to individuals

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this phenomenon, which means that the ways of naming it do not find consensus. Here, we will base ourselves on the denominations that appear in the book coordinated by Pablo Semán (2023), where these groups are named as new right, radical right, and extreme right, without ignoring that in other situations, these groups can be named as neofascists. Just as an example of another form of naming, Enzo Traverso (2021) names these groups as the new *faces of the right*.

with disabilities, chronic illnesses, food programs, and higher education, among others, were either reduced or eliminated. Strategic and essential ministries, such as Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, Environment, and Women and Diversity, were also closed.

For instance, economist Julio Gambina (2024, n.p.) argues that “the issue of the recession is exacerbated by the decreasing purchasing power of the population,” that “there is a growing recession,” and that “there is much uncertainty surrounding the exchange rate.” We must not forget that addressing the dollar exchange rate issue was a central promise of Milei’s campaign, yet as of August 2024, it remains an unfulfilled commitment.

Among the negative social and economic indicators from the first six months of Javier Milei’s administration, we note that the unemployment rate has reached its highest level since 2020 (the pandemic year), standing at 7.7% (as of April 2024), compared to 6.9% in the same period of 2023 (INDEC, 2024). According to several studies, just over 150,000 jobs have been lost in the first half of this government, with more than 70% of these being in the private sector (data from the Argentine Integrated Social Security System (SIPA), as reported by Reina in 2024). In terms of poverty, other studies indicate that in just the first quarter of Milei’s government, 3.2 million new people fell into poverty in Argentina, with the poverty rate rising from 45% in November 2023 to over 50% in April 2024 (Observatorio de Deuda Social de la UCA, 2024).

On another note, violent, authoritarian, and hateful rhetoric has surged in Argentina’s public discourse, encouraged directly by the president himself. In the same vein, everything related to the public sphere, community networks, territorial organizations, and organizational networks has become the target of attacks aimed at weakening, if not dismantling, them. Indeed, the public and the common good are targets for erosion by Milei’s government, and this is likely one of the areas that will have the most lasting effects among the policies he intends to impose (Vommaro, 2024).

In summary, wage erosion, increasing poverty, disdain for the public sphere, and rising levels of hatred could encapsulate the early months of the *La Libertad Avanza* administration (Arcidiácono; Luci, 2024; Graña, 2024).

After providing a possible overview of Argentina’s current situation, we will proceed with a brief explanation of each of the six dimensions selected for this article, focusing on the situation of young people<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> To expand on these dimensions, you can consult the note *Muy hablados, poco escuchados*, published in Revista Anfibia on October 31, 2023, by the same author of this article and available at: <https://www.revistaanfibia.com/muy-hablados-poco-escuchados/>.

## **Precarious Lives in the Material and the Subjective**

This process has been ongoing in Argentina since at least 2014 and has deepened in recent years, both due to policies adopted by those who governed from 2015 to 2019 and the consequences of the pandemic, which were insufficiently mitigated, particularly concerning young people. Some figures may illustrate this. In 2021, the poverty rate stood at 48% for individuals aged 15 to 29, while it was 36% for the 30 to 64 age group (INDEC, 2022). Similarly, in 2021, overall unemployment was 10.2%, but for those aged 16 to 29, it was more than double, at 21%.

The material deterioration of young people's lives is also reflected in their working conditions, marked by increasing precarity. In addition to high rates of precarious employment (when combining unregistered and insecure work, this rate is 66.4% for workers aged 16 to 18 and 31.3% for those over 18), an alarming trend has emerged in recent years: registered employment with degraded conditions and wages insufficient to rise above the poverty line. In other words, it is increasingly common for individuals to hold registered jobs that are still characterized by precarious conditions. Many young people find themselves in this situation; thus, today, the primary issue facing young people is working conditions rather than unemployment itself. The phenomenon described as "*Milei's Rappi*" (as proudly presented by Melina Vázquez, 2023) epitomizes these precarious young workers whose material circumstances have (unsurprisingly) influenced their political allegiances and commitments.

This situation is further entangled with the degradation of living conditions in many marginalized neighborhoods, characterized by inadequate services, limited public transportation that restricts mobility, and few non-commercialized spaces for youth to meet and socialize. These interconnected inequalities form a web of generational experiences in which most young people shape their lived worlds.

For these young people, discussions of defending rights and the public sphere may seem distant and even irritating, as they see these concepts as detached from their everyday lives—something others might enjoy, yet irrelevant to their immediate realities. Undoubtedly, it is essential to strengthen the public sphere and fully secure the rights of the majority before advancing narratives that seek to defend or protect them (Vommaro, 2023, Vommaro, 2024).

## **The Pandemic Continues to Resonate in Young People's Lives, Even if Unacknowledged**

Indeed, the pandemic still inhabits the lives of young people, though the adult world (and the political system) seems eager to deny, silence, and forget it. In all

*Political expressions of youth discontent:  
exploratory approaches to the situation in argentina in recent years*

interviews conducted with young people (especially those under 24), the pandemic emerged as a generational experience that has marked their lives, serving as a pivotal and deeply personal event. Much has been said about young people during the pandemic, but little has been heard or recognized regarding their experiences and the ways in which their life worlds were altered. As we have stated on other occasions, much is said about young people, but little is heard from them. The pandemic was no exception to this disregard and undervaluation of young people's realities by the adult world and the political system. In the same vein, young people were among the social groups whose experiences of the pandemic's impact have received the least recognition (Vommaro, 2022).

In fact, very little consideration has been given to the ways in which the pandemic disrupted the daily lives of young people (and also of children). This is evident, for example, in their modes of sociability and social interaction; in the virtualization of education<sup>3</sup>; in gender inequalities; in territorial appropriations and adaptations; and in telework and the precarization of employment. On the contrary, young people were frequently blamed for infections or stigmatized for wanting to meet others in person, in addition to being harassed, criminalized, and even physically assaulted by security forces.

The data on adolescent and youth suicides (which rose from the sixth leading cause of death in this social group in 2014 to the second leading cause today) reveal an aspect of reality scarcely acknowledged by the adult world, yet it persists and cries out loudly for attention. We are the adults who are not listening.

As noted above, the pandemic constituted a challenging period for young people due to the disruption of their material networks of sociability in educational and recreational spaces. The forced virtualization of these networks had negative repercussions on young people, repercussions which have not been fully assessed due to the predominance of adult-centric perspectives on this period (Vommaro, 2022).

The closure of public spaces and restrictions on mobility also limited the opportunities for young people to meet, particularly affecting those in marginalized neighborhoods, who lost their street corners, parks, or plazas as venues for socialization and peer interaction.

According to testimonials from various young people and studies conducted by different institutions (e.g., Fundación SES, the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Buenos Aires, and the Argentine Pediatric Society, all in 2020), the social, supportive, and belonging-oriented nature of public spaces could not be fully replaced by virtual or digital environments.

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<sup>3</sup> According to UNICEF data, in 2002, among those who received the Universal Child Allowance (AUH), 28% did not have internet for their use, and 53% studied without a computer (UNICEF, 2020).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020a, p. 3, our translation) describes the pandemic's youth as a "generation of confinement," deeply affected by reduced participation in the labor market. In Argentina, we observed a 7% drop in labor force participation and a 5% increase in unemployment among young people between 2019 and 2020 (INDEC, 2020). Once again, it is women and young people with the lowest social and educational credentials who have been the most affected by occupational contraction.

Speaking of labor inequality may seem redundant under capitalism. However, Harvey (2020) reveals a new working class (the "precarariat" as described by Standing (2013)) that bears the brunt of the crisis, both because it is the labor force most at risk of exposure to the virus in their work and because it can be dismissed without compensation, given the economic contraction and instability of their rights. In the context of telework, who can afford to work from home and who cannot? Who can afford to isolate or quarantine (with or without pay) in case of exposure or infection? This exacerbates multidimensional inequalities, intersecting with gender, territory, class, race/ethnicity, and generation. For this reason, Harvey (2020, p. 93, our translation) refers to this pandemic as a "class, gender, and race pandemic." Based on our analysis, we could also add "generational" to this characterization.

Adultcentrism is defined by Klaudio Duarte Quapper (2022) as a system of domination that enables the control and subordination of young people by adult generations. This is manifested in the fact that young people are spoken about and constructed by the adult world but are scarcely heard or recognized as producers. During the pandemic, this was expressed in a lack of listening, recognition, consideration, and visibility of young people's voices in public discussion, which is evident in at least two dimensions. First, there was a limited call for students (particularly at the secondary and university levels) to participate in decisions on issues related to education and virtual, in-person, or hybrid dynamics. Second, young people were held accountable or blamed for outbreaks of contagion in different countries and times.

In this regard, a UNICEF report (2021, p. 22, our translation) indicates that young people "express disgust and discomfort at being considered responsible for neglecting care and spreading contagion," while also "feeling unheard, lacking both voice and vote, and demanding greater participation and prominence in school care protocols." The same study interprets that "stigmatization, coupled with the perception of not being considered as subjects with agency capable of transforming and contributing to the improvement of living conditions and their environment, constitutes elements that foster discredited identities which do not support the construction of citizenship" (UNICEF, 2021, p. 22, our translation).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic officially ended in 2023, its effects persist in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres. Its remnants allude



to new forms of articulation, but also to emerging subjectivities shaped within a situation in which states assumed a central role in managing and implementing preventive measures that some sectors of the population resisted, particularly in response to restrictions on freedom of movement and work. Some emerging studies (Semán, Welchinger, 2024; Morán Faúndes, 2023) link these sentiments to the victory of Javier Milei's libertarian party in Argentina's 2023 presidential election. Undoubtedly, this scenario of discontent, dissatisfaction, and unrest has deepened within the context of the profound economic crisis following the pandemic, marked by the destabilization of the national currency and rising inflation, which have significantly reduced the wages of most workers.

Thus, the elements described above configure a situation of youth discontent, unease, dissatisfaction, and anger that seeks—and finds—channels of expression in spaces that allow it to question and demonstrate the capacity to voice rupture and the long-awaited outcry for enough (Vommaro, 2024).

## **Labor Precarization and the Digital World: The Persistence of Youth Associativism**

As noted, the precariousness of work and multidimensional social inequalities were exacerbated by the pandemic. Both processes intersect in the distribution of goods and services linked to app-based and platform economies, which was one of the sectors that grew most rapidly during the pandemic (Adamini, 2023). These jobs typically employ young people<sup>4</sup>, who were often the ones continuing in-person work throughout the pandemic without adequate support or protection.

These jobs expanded in tandem with rising employment insecurity. Thus, a paradox emerged during and after the pandemic: while youth unemployment (which is currently 2.5 to 3 times higher than general unemployment) may have declined, these jobs have become increasingly precarious, offering fewer rights and deteriorating working conditions.

This is further demonstrated in a study conducted by the Ministry of Labor of the Province of Buenos Aires (Argentina) on digital platform delivery work, which aligns with data from the ILO (2020b). According to these data, nearly two-thirds of workers in this sector (62%) are under 30 years old and, on average, work 9 hours per day on motorcycles or bicycles. Additionally, 70% work every day of the week (without defined days off), and 97% lack health coverage or occupational risk insurance.

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<sup>4</sup> According to a study carried out by the Ministry of Labor in 2019, the average age of workers is 29 years, with 61.5% of the workers surveyed being between 20 and 30 years old (López Mourelo; Pereyra, 2020). Studies from 2020 indicate that around 66% of the workers surveyed are under 30 years old, and among them, 35% are between 18 and 25 years old (Haidar, 2020).

In apps like Glovo, Rappi, Pedidos Ya, and UberEats, the company-delivery worker relationship is structured such that companies avoid assuming the legal responsibilities of employing those who make deliveries. This includes the workers' classification as independent contractors, the absence of Occupational Risk Insurance (ART), and the lack of employment stability, masked by a discourse of flexibility and dynamism, presenting employment as adaptable to workers' needs and allowing them the possibility to "be their own boss" (Haidar, 2020, pag. 63, our translation). Amid the pandemic, this sector experienced a surge in demand for its services and was classified as essential, enabling continued in-person work and bypassing mobility restrictions.

In this context, young workers using these types of applications reinforced the actions of at least two pre-existing organizations: the *Agrupación Trabajadores de Reparto* (ATR) and the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de Reparto por Aplicación* (SiTraRepa) (Camerata, 2023). Both organizations share some commonalities, such as aligning their political ideals with left-wing party spaces and using and appropriating social media as the primary means of communication with workers. However, there are also notable differences. ATR began its activity prior to the pandemic (in 2018), while *SiTraRepa* was created after the pandemic had begun, distinguishing itself from another group, the Young Precarious Workers, to focus on workers in the delivery sector.

The use of social networks for youth movement organization and activism is not a new phenomenon. As indicated by Palenzuela (2018) and Rivera, De la Barra-Eltit, and Rieutord-Rosenfeld (2023), the political dimension of digital spaces and social networks has been enhanced in recent years, even shaping modes of organization and associativity, particularly among young people. With the pandemic, this process intensified, and with it, the frequency of posts by these two organizations on social media increased (Camerata, 2023).

However, the power of in-person activities also grew. For example, caravans in which delivery workers occupy the streets of Argentina's major cities with their motorcycles, bicycles, and backpacks, making their demands and their existence as precarious workers visible. This is accompanied by collective calls on social media, such as "tweetstorms" aimed at making slogans go viral through hashtags like #YoNoReparto and #ParodeRepartidores.

Both organizations maintain discourses in which the State is portrayed as complicit with companies, endorsing worker exploitation. However, *SiTraRepa* emphasizes that the Ministry of Labor recognizes the organization as a legally registered union, allowing it to intervene in company delivery negotiations and improve working conditions. This emphasis on seeking State recognition gives *SiTraRepa*'s discourse a hopeful tone, motivating its members through the pursuit of better working conditions and the strengthening of their organizational structures.

These experiences of organizing young precarious workers within platform economies are not incompatible with potential electoral support for Milei. Indeed, the aforementioned figure of “*El Rappi de Milei*” (Vázquez, 2023) demonstrates that these forms of associativity do not immediately translate into electoral sympathy, although they constitute collective expressions of discontent arising from the growing deterioration of material conditions among young people.

## **Digital Territory Disputes**

Undoubtedly, the rise of social networks and the intensity of digital society have become increasingly evident in recent years, driven, among other factors, by the characteristics of contemporary capitalism and the virtualization of life during the pandemic. Today, social networks and the digital world are a contested political territory, and young people predominantly inhabit them. In this framework, groups identified with the so-called new right, libertarian, or regressive and authoritarian tendencies have demonstrated skill and aptitude in contesting meanings within the digital territory—not only through the production of fake news or by contributing to cancel culture.

As Melina Vázquez (2023) notes, for many young people, Milei is seen as an influencer rather than a politician. Additionally, the digital activism promoted and amplified by Milei has advantages over that of other political spaces, presenting itself as more authentic, direct, and disruptive. An example of this is the charismatic leader’s larger following on TikTok compared to all other candidates combined, and as Juan Elman (2023) points out, Milei’s growth had already been taking place in earlier digital communities, such as the gaming community. In this phenomenon, we can also identify the causes of his rise.

## **Third Time’s the Charm**

Over the past eight years, Argentine society has experienced two failed political experiments, which have led to disenchantment, disillusionment, frustration, and discontent among their electoral bases and broader social groups. Both the Cambiemos and Macri governments from 2015-2019 and the *Frente de Todos* and Alberto Fernández governments from 2019-2023 are perceived as failures by growing sectors. In this context, neither of the two forces that have governed or are currently in office and are competing in the 2023 elections are doing so with the self-criticism demanded by voters. One proposes doing the same as in 2015, only faster and with more determination or force; the other wants us to forget the current

unfulfilled administration and remember how good (or at least not bad) they were before 2015. Undoubtedly, neither discourse is compelling to young people.

Thus, it should not be surprising that a third option emerges, one that sharply contrasts with the previous two. This option is aligned with a longing for something new that breaks free from the inertia of disillusionment, and it is the youth who most enthusiastically embrace this possibility. Faced with a State (or political system) that has abandoned society in various respects, it is unsurprising that society itself rebels against the abandonment of institutionalism, even preferring a leap into the unknown that resets the system, rather than persisting in a situation perceived as stagnant and increasingly showing signs of exhaustion. As Nacho Muruaga (2023) suggests, one of the key terms for understanding a component of the vote for Milei is dissatisfaction.

We agree with Grimson (2024) when he argues that the crisis of representation, incubated in Argentina due to the failure of the previous two governments, opened the door for the rise of a disruptive leader who appealed with his provocation to turn the political chessboard upside down. As a result, Argentine society has been subjected to the daily onslaught of policies that reconfigure the economy and a government that openly insults feminists, *leftists*, *activists*, popular artists, public employees, political leaders, and journalists.

In this same vein, it is essential to examine the conflicts arising from the significant shift occurring in Argentina and the region. In both 2015 and 2023, the sectors identifying as more progressive or populist (perhaps with the exception of Juan Grabois, who also sparked enthusiasm among many young people<sup>5</sup>) found themselves on the side of conservatism, defending the status quo or promising a return to a supposedly better past. This stance holds little appeal for broad social sectors, and even less so for young people, as it is perceived as an invitation to perpetuate the deteriorated and precarious conditions in which they live.

In other countries (such as Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Honduras, and now Guatemala), this struggle has been resolved—at least in presidential elections, in favor of populist governments that seek to expand rights and combat inequality by strengthening the public sphere. In Argentina, however, the opposite seems to be occurring, and we will need to work with great intelligence and empathy to reclaim the meanings of change from the right.

The political socialization of new generations in contexts of populist or progressive governments, as Pablo Stefanoni (2021) suggests, could explain these dynamics. As they are perceived as failed or exhausted, young people seek reactive

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<sup>5</sup> Juan Grabois is an Argentine social and political leader, founder of the Union of Workers of the Popular Economy and the Frente Patria Grande, as well as a member of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. He was a pre-candidate for the presidency of PAHO on August 13, 2023 for the *Unión por la Patria* party, obtaining 21.5% of the votes in that political group and almost 6% overall.

paths to experiences that disappointed their expectations without assuming responsibility for the resulting consequences. In the aforementioned countries of the region, the process differed because the alternatives proposing to expand rights and combat inequality took over from governments perceived as regressive, authoritarian, and exhausted (or perceived as such).

## **The Vote for Milei is Not Merely Ideological**

According to our analyses and empirical research, Milei's voters do not always agree with his ideas and proposals. This insight, based on multiple studies and surveys, underscores emotional dimensions, highlighting empathetic and hopeful attachment (even if based on anger and disillusionment) and subjective affinity rather than a programmatic or ideological vote. Once again, it is a form of support forged at the emotional and affective levels (the "common affects" Chantal Mouffe speaks of), and this should not be so difficult to understand and incorporate, as Pablo Semán and Nicolás Welschinger (2023) note in a recent study.

We can assert that Milei's support was forged in four stages. The first stage occurred during the mobilizations for and against the Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy Law in 2018. We concur with Melina Vázquez (2023) that the core of his activism is constituted and grouped within this context, at times reviving affinities and traditions from earlier periods (such as UCeDe and UPAU in the 1980s). The second stage encompasses the pandemic and the street and digital protests that arose to express rejection of the isolation measures and mobility controls, which, far from being understood as collective care, were decoded in terms of restrictions on individual freedoms and the subjugation of individual lives by the State. The third stage refers to the electoral situation of 2021 when Milei was elected as a national deputy. This stage could be described, following Semán and Welschinger (2023), as the second ring of affiliations. The fourth stage is represented by the campaign for the OPAs (Open Primaries) and beyond, where his electorate expands, expressing a cross-cutting vote at the levels of class, territory, and generation, though less so in terms of gender, as pointed out by Sergio Morresi and Martín Vicente (2023), resulting in a third circle that sustains the outcomes achieved in the primaries.

In 2021, a study by Zuban Córdoba applied to individuals aged 16 to 30 revealed that public policies aimed at material and symbolic well-being received high support among the youth. For instance, nearly 80% supported the PROGRESAR program, a higher percentage supported AUH (Universal Child Allowance), 73% endorsed *Conectar Igualdad*, 71% backed the legalization of cannabis for medicinal use, and gender equality policies also received significant approval ratings. When the same young individuals were asked about their electoral or political-party prefer-

ences, the responses were much more dispersed, with many expressing a preference for either Bullrich or Milei while simultaneously supporting the very policies they criticized. It is clear that most of these are not new public policies, as they have existed since before 2015, showing signs of exhaustion and a lack of updating or innovation. However, that is another matter.

In a similar vein, we can analyze the speech delivered by the national deputy on Sunday, August 13, following the announcement of the OPAs election results. Watching and revisiting this speech, it is striking that during the several minutes, Milei dedicated to denigrating social justice and disqualifying the statement that “where there is need, there is a right,” there was silence in the auditorium (which was by invitation only and after passing through several filters); his declarations were not celebrated. The applause returned when he resumed his slogans against the “*elite*” and revisited the phrase “let everyone go”.

As one person who voted for Milei in the OPASA stated in a television interview: “I do not agree with any of his proposals and believe he would lead a poor government, but I voted for him to slap the face of the political system, to show that we are fed up and that it cannot continue like this.” Perhaps the ability to articulate or catalyze these various types of disparate and sometimes porous support is one of Milei’s strengths, as Morresi and Vicente (2023) alert.

This outlines the three nuclei of support for Milei discussed by Semán and Welschinger (2023), two of which Vázquez (2023) examines in depth.

## Final considerations

In this article, we aim to share some insights that help us understand the current political, social, and cultural situation in Argentina, particularly the experiences of youths that are being configured and reconfigured within this context. Articulating a problem is the first step toward understanding it, and comprehending it is a prerequisite for overcoming it or finding alternatives that reposition the terms of the conflict. In this text, we attempted to do so empathetically, understanding and not denigrating the realities that contributed to the political situation Argentina is facing today.

In conclusion, we believe it is essential to intervene in the disputes over meaning and the cultural and ideological battles being fought in the region and the world today. An important part of the current disputes unfolds in these arenas, where meanings, representations, and aspirations are resolved, with direct and immediate political and social implications. The term “change” and the conflicts surrounding the public sphere—characterized by forces seeking to undermine, degrade, or destroy it, as well as groups positioning themselves as its defenders, yet not always

being consistent with the construction of a more vibrant and better public realm, are examples of these battles that need to be engaged.

We must be able to demonstrate that freedom and equality are not contradictory or mutually exclusive terms (although they have often been presented in this manner over the past few decades), and that truly free societies are those that are the most egalitarian and least unequal; these societies must be the freest to continue on the path toward building equality. In this way, we will be better positioned to effectively contribute to the intellectual and cultural battles aimed at fostering consensus among communities and territories striving for more just, egalitarian, free, and democratic societies in our region and the world.

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