

# [***With public universities under threat, massive protests against austerity shake Argentina***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BW3-8RX1-JC5B-G4WJ-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Raising their textbooks and diplomas and singing the national anthem, hundreds of thousands of Argentines filled the streets of Buenos Aires and other cities on Tuesday to demand increased funding for the country’s public universities, in an outpouring of anger at libertarian President Javier Milei’s harsh austerity measures.

The scale of the demonstration in downtown Buenos Aires appeared to exceed other massive demonstrations that have rocked the capital since Milei came to power.

Students and professors coordinated with the country’s powerful trade unions and leftist political parties to push back against budget cuts that have forced Argentina’s most venerable university to declare a financial emergency and warn of imminent closure.

In a sign unrest was growing in response to Milei's policies, even conservative politicians, private university administrators and right-wing TV personalities joined the march, defending the common cause of public education in Argentina that has underpinned the country's social progress for decades.

“It is historic,” said Ariana Thiele Lara, a 25-year-old recent graduate protesting. “It feels like we were all united."

Describing universities as bastions of socialism where professors indoctrinate their students, [*Milei*](https://apnews.com/article/javier-milei-profile-argentina-election-82488d49cca5aee10d4b911bde530922) has tried to dismiss the university budget crisis as ***politics*** as usual.

“The cognitive dissonance that brainwashing generates in public education is tremendous,” he said.

At the University of Buenos Aires, or UBA, halls went dark, elevators froze and air conditioning stopped working in some buildings last week. Professors taught 200-person lectures without microphones or projectors because the public university couldn't cover its electricity bill.

“It's an unthinkable crisis,” said Valeria Añón, a 50-year-old literature professor at the university, known as UBA. “I feel sad for my students and for myself as professor and researcher."

In his drive to reach zero deficit, Milei is [*slashing spending across Argentina*](https://apnews.com/article/milei-economy-union-protests-strike-jobs-state-argentina-6b9b41603dcc2b9cbcf23e5654bd4e30) — shuttering ministries, defunding cultural centers, laying off state workers and cutting subsidies. On Monday he had something to show for it, announcing Argentina’s first quarterly fiscal surplus since 2008 and promising the public the pain would pay off.

“We are making the impossible possible even with the majority of ***politics***, unions, the media and most economic actors against us,” he said in a televised address.

On Tuesday, the footfall of protesters resounded in the city center. “Why are you so scared of public education?” banners asked. “The university will defend itself!” students shouted.

“We are trying to show the government it cannot take away our right to education,” said Santiago Ciraolo, a 32-year-old student in social communication protesting Tuesday. “Everything is at stake here.”

Since last July, when the fiscal year began, the state has provided the University of Buenos Aires with just 8.9% of its total budget as [*annual inflation*](https://apnews.com/article/argentina-inflation-december-annual-milei-economic-measures-68f27bf0473590fabb5b6c1aff80579f) now hovers near 290%. The university says that's barely enough to keep lights on and provide basic services in teaching hospitals that have already cut capacity.

The university warned last week that without a rescue plan, the school would shut down in the coming months, stranding 380,000 students mid-degree. It's a shock for Argentines who consider a free and quality university education a birthright. UBA has a proud intellectual tradition, having produced five Nobel Prize winners and 17 presidents.

“I've been given access to a future, to opportunities through this university that otherwise my family and many others at our income level could never afford,” said Alex Vargas, a 24-year-old economics student. “When you step back, you see how important this is for our society.”

President Milei came to power last December, inheriting an economy in shambles after years of chronic overspending and suffocating international debt. Brandishing a chainsaw during his campaign to symbolize slashing the budget, he repeats a simple catchphrase to compatriots reeling from budget cuts and the peso’s 50% devaluation: “There is no money.”

Overall, Argentina puts 4.6% of its gross domestic product into education. Public universities are also free for international pupils, drawing legions of students from across Latin America, Spain and further afield. Critics of the system want foreign students to pay dues.

“Where I'm from, high-quality education is unfortunately a privilege, not a basic right," said Sofia Hernandez, a 21-year-old from Bogota, Colombia studying medicine at UBA. “In Argentina there is a model that I wish more countries could have.”

The government said late Monday it was sending some $24.5 million to cover maintenance costs at public universities and another $12 million to keep medical centers operating.

“The discussion is settled,” presidential spokesperson Manuel Adorni said.

University authorities disagreed, saying the promised transfer — which they still have not received — covers a fraction of what they need. For UBA, that means a 61% annual budget cut.

The teachers also need attention, said Matías Ruiz, UBA’s treasury secretary. They have seen their income decline in value more than 35% in the past four months. Staff salaries can be as low as $150 a month. Professors juggle multiple jobs to scrape by.

“We’ve had funding and salary freezes under previous right-wing governments but these cuts are three times worse," said Ines Aldao, a 44-year-old literature professor at UBA.

The angry students, teachers and workers snaked through the capital's streets just hours after Milei declared economic victory from his presidential palace.

“We are building a new era of prosperity in Argentina,” Milei told the public, boasting that Argentina had posted a quarterly fiscal surplus of 0.2% of gross domestic product.

A huge banner hanging over downtown Buenos Aires presented a choice: Milei or public education?

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