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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

The Rise of Javier Milei and the Emergence of Authoritarian Liberalism in Argentina

Juan Cruz Ferre

Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey, US
Email: ferre@rowan.edu

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This essay reviews the following works:

Del antiperonismo al individualismo autoritario: Ensayos e intervenciones (2015–2023). By Ezequiel Adamovsky. Buenos Aires: Unsam, 2023. $18.00 ebook. ISBN: 9789878938494.

¿Por qué ganó Milei? Disputas por la hegemonía y la ideología en Argentina. By Javier Balsa. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica Argentina, 2024. $10.99 ebook. ISBN: 9789877194739.

El sueño intacto de la centroderecha. By Mariana Gené and Gabriel Vommaro. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2023. Pp. 320. $22.24 paperback. ISBN: 9789878012193.

El peronismo de Cristina: El Frente de Todos, entre la dolorosa unidad, la escasez y la guerra interminable con el establishment. By Diego Genoud. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2021, Pp. 336. $8.84 paperback. ISBN: 9789878010755.

El loco: La vida desconocida de Javier Milei y su irrupción en la política argentina. By Juan Luis González. Buenos Aires: Planeta Argentina, 2023. $4.99 ebook. ISBN: 9789504982890.

El kirchnerismo desarmado: La larga agonía del cuarto peronismo. By Alejandro Horowicz. Buenos Aires: Ariel, 2023. $10.99 ebook. ISBN: 9789878318608.

La hegemonía imposible: Veinte años de disputas políticas en el país del empate. Del 2001 a Alberto Fernández. By Fernando Rosso. Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2022. $7.99 ebook. ISBN: 9789876146531.

Está entre nosotros: ¿De dónde sale y hasta dónde puede llegar la extrema derecha que no vimos venir? Edited by Pablo Semán. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2023. $6.95 ebook. ISBN: 9789878012957.

¿La rebeldía se volvió de derecha? Cómo el antiprogresismo y la anticorrección política están construyendo un nuevo sentido común. By Pablo Stefanoni. Siglo XXI Editores, 2021. $9.99 ebook. ISBN: 9789878010533.

When Javier Milei came in first in Argentina's open primary elections in 2023, it took almost everyone by surprise. Yet upon closer inspection, several works written over the past few years illuminate aspects of the rise of the far right in Argentina as well as the causes behind it, from the decline of Kirchnerism to the emergence of a new "libertarian" political subject. In this review, I first briefly describe the books reviewed and highlight their contributions. I then discuss common themes that span across the different works.

Semán's *Está entre nosotros* is a magnificent work, published just before Milei's victory in the runoff but after his stunning performance in the primary and general elections. An edited volume collecting contributions from half a dozen authors, it is filled with stories and testimonies of real people, providing a colorful and complex picture of both the individuals supporting a libertarian project and the motivations behind it. The book analyzes Milei's party, La Libertad Avanza (LLA), on three levels, each in one chapter: the leaders, the youth organization and the creation of a mass culture, and finally, the link with working-class young people. Its main message is that libertarianism is not a passing phenomenon but is here to stay.

Adamovsky's *Del antiperonismo al individualismo autoritario* is a compilation of essays published by the author between 2015 and 2023. Together, they represent a lucid perception of social and political trends in the country. There is some repetition, as the essays were barely edited, and many of their themes overlap. Yet the works collected in this volume, especially the earlier ones, show the author's prescient assessment of political events and his ability to read substantial societal change in the molecular transformations, including in subtle changes in language, and to anticipate the emergence of a new political actor.

El loco by Juan Luis González offers a fascinating immersion into Javier Milei's life before he was president of Argentina and the circumstances surrounding his rise to power. The book is a formidable work of investigative journalism, and it can almost be read as a novel. Many stories, played by characters that appear to be taken from a fiction book, intersect to form the backdrop of Javier Milei's ascent to the presidential seat at the head of La Libertad Avanza. The book not only provides a comprehensive political and psychological profile of Javier Milei; it also makes clear that his ascent to power was facilitated by, on the one hand, powerful actors in the corporate media and, on the other hand, by longtime political players from both main national parties.

Mariana Gené and Gabriel Vommaro's *El sueño intacto de la centroderecha* is a detailed study of the center-right coalition Cambiemos, and more specifically of Mauricio Macri's party Propuesta Republicana (PRO). Gabriel Vommaro is the scholar who has probably written most extensively about PRO and Cambiemos, and his work is a standard reference on the matter. The book traces the trajectory of the coalition of forces that came together to form Cambiemos in 2015 behind the leadership of businessman Mauricio Macri: notably, his own party, PRO, the hundred-plus-year-old Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), and a layer of midrange (and a handful of high-profile) Peronists who broke with Kirchnerism. It is a well-researched study, based on dozens of interviews, archival research, and other sources, and it incorporates much of the English-speaking political science and public policy scholarship. Gené and Vommaro argue that, although Macri's presidency (2015–2019) is widely recognized as a failure, he retained 40 percent of the vote in the 2019 elections, consolidating a political force that would remain ready to vie for power in future elections.

El Kirchnerismo desarmado: La larga agonía del cuarto peronismo, by Alejandro Horowicz, is a provocative work. Horowicz is the author of several books, among which *Los cuatro peronismos* is particularly noteworthy as a historical and political analysis of Peronism since Peron's first presidencies in the 1940s and 1950s (first Peronism) and on to the period of exile (1955–1973, second), then his presidency in 1973–1975 (third), and from his death on (fourth). Written in plain, colloquial language, *El Kirchnerismo desarmado* reads like an unscripted monologue describing the exhaustion of Kirchnerism as a political movement

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as well as its broken political will. In fact, the name of the book ("Kirchnerism disarmed") alludes to Clausewitz's ultimate goal in seeking to disarm or defeat the enemy: to break its will to fight.[1] The author's main message is that, by 2023, Kirchnerism had become an exhausted political project and had nothing to offer, lacking even the will to fight.

Diego Genoud's *El peronismo de Cristina* is a Who's Who of contemporary Argentine politics. Readers who expect any of the claims in the book to be supported by a citation or a reference will be sorely disappointed: There is not one in the whole book. But Genoud's record as a journalist, and perhaps the reputation of the publisher Siglo XXI, may serve as proof of legitimacy for the reader. The invaluable insights into Argentina's political parties and players, combined with Genoud's acute political analysis, make this book an important contribution to understanding the political background for the rise of the far right—although, it should be said, it may not be appropriate for those who do not follow Argentinian politics closely, as many names and actors are assumed to be known.

Pablo Stefanoni's *La rebeldía se volvió de derecha* examines the new right in a global perspective, though with an eye set on the situation in Argentina. Because his book came out in 2021, his introductory statement, "The extreme right is weak in our country," serves as a measure of how much the political landscape has changed in only a few years. Stefanoni offers a survey of far-right movements and political actors in Europe and the United States, discusses differences and commonalities across cases, and brings us back to Argentina in chapter 3 to describe an "eccentric economist" (Milei) who entertains audiences in talk shows and theaters, and also to investigate a still-fledgling extreme right. Stefanoni's main argument is that the new right has constructed its discourse and found its identity as a rebel actor against the political correctness and social justice narrative that both the establishment (the government, in particular, but also universities and mainstream media) and the left have embraced.

Javier Balsa's *¿Por qué ganó Milei?* is the most recently published book. As such, it includes an analysis of the last few episodes of the electoral race, the results of the general elections, and the runoff between Unión por la Patria's (Peronism's) candidate, Sergio Massa, and Javier Milei. The book's biggest strength is that it is grounded in massive amounts of original survey data. Recovering a method first employed by Theodor Adorno and Erich Fromm in the 1930s and 1940s, Balsa and his team conducted very long surveys, with forty to ninety questions, inquiring not only about voting preferences but also about opinions on a diverse range of topics, including the economy, moral values, and social movements. Fifteen surveys, with thousands of respondents each, were used to inform this book. With such an enormous amount of empirical data, Balsa's work is a detailed X-ray of Argentina's public opinion in the early 2020s. His political analysis, in turn, may be more questionable. In parts of the book, his use of the concept of hegemony seems to imply simply electoral dominance. In addition, he often presents a sugarcoated view of Peronism (including its right and center wings, embodied in Sergio Massa and Alberto Fernández), and particularly of Kirchnerism, to which he expresses overt sympathy.

Who is Javier Milei, and how did he rise to power?

Javier Milei jumped onto the national political scene as a rather theatrical character. A polemic liberal economist whose defense of Austrian-school economics, punctuated with outbursts of rage, captivated audiences on prime-time television.[2] His eccentricity is in fact the result of an unstable psychological profile combined with mystical thinking, which his life in almost total isolation has exacerbated over the years. According to González, Javier

[1] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton University Press, 1976).

[2] In this article, *liberal* is used in its original (non-American) sense, to describe a promarket orientation, in favor of individual liberty and in opposition to state intervention.

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Milei had no real friends for most of his adulthood—he was close only to his sister, Karina. Victim of a tormented childhood, Milei became estranged from his abusive parents in early adulthood. For many years, his beloved English mastiff, Conan, was his only company during Christmas holidays and New Year's Eve. After Conan died, Milei quickly slid into more esoteric territory. Not only did he clone Conan and obtain *four* genetic copies of him; he also immersed himself into the underworld of paranormality. With the help of a medium, he was able to communicate with his dog. Later on, he established connections with dead philosophers and economists whom he admired, from whom he allegedly, still today, receives guidance on a daily basis: Ayn Rand and Murray Rothbard, among others. According to González, Milei claimed to have communicated with God himself.

The ascension of Milei as a media celebrity is without a doubt a sign of change in people's political beliefs. The protracted economic crisis and discontent with the governments of both main parties created a fertile ground for it, as I discuss here. But it would be mistaken to assume that Milei's popularity was a spontaneous development or an exclusive result of his capacity to connect with popular sentiment. Milei's close relationship with one of Argentina's media moguls is central to understanding his rapid ascent to power. Eduardo Eurnekian, the sixth-richest man in the country, with a fortune estimated at $1.5 billion, is the owner of Corporación América, a conglomerate that includes fifty-two airport management companies worldwide and, notably, several media outlets in Argentina. Eurnekian requested airtime at various TV shows (in broadcasts owned by him or by friends) to "install" Milei in the media (González, chap. 6). Milei's interventions on TV had two main purposes: on the one hand, to barrage president Macri's government; on the other hand, to lay out a radical neoliberal agenda, which included the privatization of public companies, dollarization of the economy, a war against progressivism and "gender ideology," the "elimination of the central bank," and more (chap. 6). His irruption onto the political stage automatically shifted the conversation to the right.

Although Milei branded himself as a political outsider, the backing of a media mogul is not the only realpolitik stain on his record. As González recounts, when the Partido Libertario of Buenos Aires was founded in 2019, he was anointed "honorary president." The party was growing rapidly, but only two years later, Milei abandoned this project to take a path of compromise that led him to the "darkest places in Argentinian politics" (chap. 2).

The presence of career politicians with questionable records, some of them linked to Peronism, others to Macriism, qualitatively altered the political space around Milei. One of them was Ricardo Bussi, the son and collaborator of Antonio Bussi (governor during the last dictatorship, convicted of overseeing more than eight hundred kidnappings and murders), whose incorporation caused the rupture of the local chapter of the Partido Libertario in Tucumán: An alliance with the Bussi family was not in line with the principles of freedom they advocated.

Milei's 2023 presidential campaign was a result of the most pragmatic, unprincipled negotiation of power with longtime political brokers. An example of this was the agreements with rubber-stamp political parties—empty shells that offer their ballot line (obtained and maintained through dubious practices) to the highest bidder, usually political figures without a party apparatus in this or that electoral district. In exchange, the "owner" of the rubber stamp receives government-provided campaign funds—which they manage at their own discretion—and sometimes one or more positions for local legislature attached to the main candidate's ballot. These down-the-ballot candidacies were also secretly "auctioned"—González reports that likely-to-win candidacies for a seat in the City of Buenos Aires's legislature were offered at $500,000. When people within the ranks of LLA started to question the incorporation of politicians of the ilk that Milei's own antiestablishment rhetoric derided and the heavily top-down internal dynamics of the organization, a massive purge (which included many founders of the movement)

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consolidated this path. Last, González relates that, in 2022, many Peronist mayors in the province of Buenos Aires helped finance Milei's ticket so they could draw votes from the center-right Juntos por el Cambio (JC), which they considered their main competition.

Emergence of libertarianism in Argentina

The LLA voter is different from the typical voter of the center-right coalition, Juntos por el Cambio: The latter is highly educated and middle class, whereas that is not necessarily the case for LLA voters. In addition, LLA supporters are younger and disproportionately male, the opposite of JC supporters. Not all of Milei's voters are ideologically aligned with libertarianism. Many of them share an aspiration for individual economic improvement, safety, anticorruption, state efficiency, and market rule, as Semán describes.

Melina Vázquez's chapter in *Está entre nosotros* describes the emergence of a militant phenomenon, a layer of young political activists for LLA, distinct from the PRO's previous middle-class, educated base: "We are not posh, like PRO members . . . we are spicy, we are the *peronchos* of liberalism."[3] Balsa, in turn, provides data from 2021 to 2023 showing a substantial conservative reaction among the population against the progressive advances of the past decades: the expansion of welfare, the right to abortion, and especially the use of inclusive language. Other authors have also captured this trend. From a global perspective, Stefanoni observes that the central idea among those who reject political correctness is that there is a progressive elite that controls the world and imposes its values. According to this narrative, the "left" sides with the political establishment in defending inclusive language and "gender ideology," it has turned "white man" into an insult, it bans smoking, and it labels as "fascist" anyone who disagrees with open borders or gay marriage. "Transgression changed sides," he asserts; now the left defends the status quo, and the right is coming to subvert things (chap. 2).

Balsa documents a backlash against progressive policies. Survey results show a strong percentage in support of inequalities and against redistributive policies: Half the respondents agreed with the sentence "social assistance programs make people lazy" (chap. 4). Similarly, an important minority blamed poor people for their own situation. At the same time, 57 percent of respondents considered that workers' rights should be expanded so that everyone is covered, including informal workers. Here, just as in pretty much all questions regarding workers' rights, democratic rights, and welfare policy, women are more progressive, responding positively to the expansion or protection of rights.

Young people showed a more neoliberal kind of sensibility, with 63 percent of them accepting capitalism as the best possible system. Interestingly, 12 percent in the general sample agreed that "capitalism is bad and we should try out some kind of modernized socialism or communism that avoid the mistakes from the past." Balsa notes that the neoliberal discourse against the state has been very effective, with 71 percent of respondents viewing the state negatively, associating it with "corrupt politicians" (44 percent), lazy public employees (14 percent), and taxes (12 percent). Only 29 percent associated the state with public services.

Yet Balsa's view appears a little fatalistic. Drawing on Albert Hirschman, he argues that *all* progressive advances are met with a conservative reaction. In addition, he offers no connection between the disappointment with the Kirchnerist government—that touted and campaigned on those policies—and the conservative backlash.

Adamovsky describes the meteoric rise in the use of the term *entrepreneur* in Argentina. "Any twerp describes themselves as an entrepreneur now, even in dating apps" (chap. 11). He points out how PRO leaders used public schools to inculcate the culture of

[3] *Peronchos* is a derogatory term to describe lower-class Peronist supporters.

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entrepreneurship among students. This point of view not only embraces the accumulation of wealth as the main life goal but also indicts all other occupations that do not play a role in the valorization of capital, such as state employees, politicians, teachers, scholars, and artists. It rejects the poor, too, for not being able to get out of poverty.

Semán and Welschinger's chapter in *Está entre nosotros* observes a widespread zeal for an "optimization of the self" in the physical as well as emotional and professional sense. Entrepreneurship is, above all, a moral position. Entrepreneurs seek to improve themselves, gain new skills, and become more competitive. In Balsa's words, in a highly individualized culture, they tend to see themselves as a product, and they work on themselves to become more marketable.

Belén is a case in point. She is a woman Semán and colleagues interviewed who does delivery work through an app. Her situation of precarity and economic insecurity did not push her to support social protection or other regulations—quite the contrary. Because she learned through her own experience that she is the only one responsible for her economic well-being, she does not want the state to get involved. "Don't bother me with rights that make you poorer," she says (chap. 4). The subjects interviewed by Semán and colleagues show a strong moral commitment to the principles of meritocracy. For them, it is justified to receive government assistance only if you are engaged in a productive activity. They do not believe, like progressives in the twentieth century did, that progress is an inevitable historical process. They believe in an individualistic kind of progress, one based on effort, opportunity, and self-optimization. This view is not unique to Milei voters, as it extends to Juntos por el Cambio's and, to a lesser degree, to Peronist supporters.

Ideological traditions: The Austrian school of economics, liberalism, and authoritarianism

Stefanoni points out that, though usually thought of as proponents of two very distinct ideologies, libertarians and "reactionaries" (conservatives) have a lot in common: rejection of egalitarianism (as a human fact and as a social ideal), loathing of political correctness, and, above all, apprehension toward social justice and all movements pushing for feminism, racial justice, or other forms of equity. Yet we can find signs of a convergence as far back as in Hayek's early twentieth-century writings. Hayek warned against the danger of anticapitalism—not only because the millions of signals the market constantly generates would be lost, but also because it threatened the very moral institutions that allowed for human progress, such as the family and religion. Stefanoni finds in the writings by the American economist Murray Rothbard the key to understanding the seemingly contradictory assemblage of ideas and values amplified by Javier Milei and other vernacular intellectuals of the new right, such as Agustín Laje or Nicolás Márquez. Semán, Balsa, and González also trace that connection. Rothbard theorized that freedom would flourish in a "bourgeois and Christian culture," and therefore, the defense of what he understood as bourgeois institutions, like the family, the church, and private firms, went hand in hand with the goal of undermining the state as much as possible. In a landmark article in 1992, Rothbard coined the term *paleo-libertarianism* to describe this political ideology and advocated for a "right-wing populism"—blending conservative values with Austrian economics—that could win an electoral majority for a libertarian project. Javier Milei is explicit about the influence Rothbard exerted on him ("he blew my mind"), to the point that he embraces the label "paleo-libertarianism" (Stefanoni, chap. 3).

Morresi and Vicente's chapter in *Está entre nosotros* traces the origins of two right-wing traditions in Argentina since the early twentieth century: conservative liberalism, which was promarket with a restricted vision of democracy and republicanism, and reactionary

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nationalism, which contained corporatist and authoritarian features, advocating for a "dirigiste" kind of government. These currents were born at odds with each other, but they also converged in specific historical moments: in 1930 to support a military coup, or after Perón's death, to support the 1976 military coup that declared war against a left insurgency, in an international scenario marked by the Cold War. They also found themselves in the same boat during Carlos Menem's presidency, when a figure of conservative liberalism, Alvaro Alsogaray, was incorporated into a government that was otherwise neoliberal through and through.

For Adamovsky, however, liberalism has always contained a level of authoritarianism. He describes how the nineteenth-century Argentine statesman Bartolomé Mitre—just like James Madison or Alexis de Tocqueville—praised the egalitarian aspect of republicanism but warned against the risk of a "turbulent democracy." Adamovsky contends that this is a universal feature of liberalism and not only typical of its vernacular political culture. In fact, he recounts, liberalism was born as a current to curtail the most radical tendencies of the Enlightenment: It sought to diffuse the revolutionary idea that men owned their destiny, that they could live as equals, unsubordinated to any divine law. Liberal thinkers proposed that social life could not be entirely ruled by the community. They proposed instead what, according to him, scholars call "metaphysical individualism," that is, the idea that the individual exists prior to society and therefore has rights that are preexisting and *external* to society. In this way, a "private sphere" shielded from collective decisions was created—notably, private property fell in this realm. "[Liberalism's] main thrust was to put limits to democracy, not to expand it" (Adamovsky, chap. 2).

Adamovsky comments that Friedrich Hayek, like Alexis de Tocqueville, supported a *limited* democracy but was quick to ditch his support for this limited version of democracy for the sake of market rule. This led Hayek to support what he called a "liberal dictatorship" (referring to Augusto Pinochet's military government in Chile). Adamovsky concludes, "When popular sovereignty faces the 'institutional corset' liberals designed to protect private property, their commitment to democracy vanishes" (chap. 2).

Balsa provides empirical evidence for this ideological marriage. He proposes a framework with two axes, each featuring two poles, to analyze political views. One axis assesses preferences in values, placing respondents on a continuum between progressivism and conservatism. The other one classifies respondents according to their vision of economic policy, ranging from *nacional popular* (an interventionist state that seeks economic development and to reduce inequalities) to neoliberalism. In his surveys, high levels of conservatism (conservative ideology) were associated with high levels of neoliberalism (promarket, antistate economic policy preferences), and there were very few respondents who ranked high both on a neoliberalism scale and on progressivism (in values and social rights). The conclusion is that there are no "pure" or classic liberals, that is, ones who favor market rule and, at the same time, defend rights and democracy (chap. 5).

Like Adamovsky, Balsa analyzes the growth of individualism and authoritarianism in association with conservatism. He argues that this enhanced individualism in a situation of structural, permanent uncertainty leads to a psychological reaction by which individuals resort to "traditional values" as a principle to organize their lives. He also sees a close connection between this and the preference for a harsh disciplinary state because such a high level of individualism can coexist only with a strong rule of law, under which anyone who breaks the law is swiftly disciplined (chap. 5).

What explains the rise of the far right in Argentina? Why now?

González offers some insightful reflections on the historical context for the emergence of LLA. An inevitable background is the many years of economic stagnation or weak growth and the poor performance of the governments of Mauricio Macri (2015–2019) and Alberto

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Fernández (2019–2023). Against that backdrop, the COVID-19 pandemic only worsened the economic situation for the vast majority of people. The government imposed a strict and protracted lockdown that became more and more unpopular as months went by, and much of the discontent with the government, or with the high levels of poverty and unemployment, found expression in protests against social confinement. Libertarians played a prominent role in calling for these actions and gained momentum while the demand for "freedom," a staple of libertarian politics, took on a new meaning (González, chap. 15). In addition, several scandals demolished the little political capital left in the Fernández administration: the prioritization of cronies in the early vaccination efforts (later known as "vacunatorio VIP") and especially a clandestine gathering celebrating the first lady's birthday in the presidential residence during strict lockdown, a point compellingly stressed by Horowicz: "If the months-long forced confinement cultivated a horrible social mood, now it was plain, justified anger that pervaded those who had nothing to celebrate" (chap. 1). Here is where Balsa's praise for the "excellent vaccination campaign" (chap. 1) falls a little flat, whereas Semán and Welschinger, as well as González, Adamovsky, Horowicz, and Rosso, all point out how the many pitfalls in the government's handling of the pandemic fed popular discontent.

It is impossible to understand the rise to power of Javier Milei without grappling with the disillusion with the most popular political project of this century, Kirchnerism, and the failure of its main opposition, Cambiemos (later renamed Juntos por el Cambio), to rise as a political alternative. It is not a coincidence that many of the authors reviewed here resort to Juan Carlos Portantiero's concept of a hegemonic tie (*empate hegemónico*) to describe the situation in Argentina in the 2010s and early 2020s (Rosso, chap. 1; Balsa, chap. 2; Gené and Vommaro, 295). Portantiero crafted the term in the 1970s to express the idea that the bourgeoisie and the working class were both strong enough to derail the other's project, but neither had the ability to impose a project of its own in a durable way.

After taking power with a very low percentage of the vote and against the backdrop of a crisis of legitimacy, Néstor Kirchner rolled out a wide array of policies to build popular support. Fernando Rosso contends that the 2001 crisis and ensuing mass mobilization are the key to understanding the following two decades of politics in Argentina. Amid widespread social unrest, Néstor Kirchner took office in 2003 with only 23 percent of the vote. To co-opt and institutionalize the most mobilized sectors of society, the Kirchner administration incorporated leaders of social organizations into the functions of government and established friendly relations with the more active wing of labor, represented by Hugo Moyano. In addition, it nationalized a slew of companies that used to be state-run and had been privatized in the 1990s: Correo Argentino (postal service), Aguas Argentina (water supply), Aerolíneas Argentinas (flagship airway), half of YPF (oil and gas), and, maybe the most radical measure, the private pension funds (known as AFJPs).

Rosso finds Gramsci's concept of passive revolution particularly useful for understanding Kirchnerism.[4] A process of passive revolution transforms and at the same time reproduces. It is a movement from above to subordinate and subsume action from below, says Rosso, quoting Gramsci.

Just as with other Latin American progressive governments, Rosso explains, Kirchnerism promoted a controlled politicization and mobilization, resulting ultimately in the *passivization* of social movements, unions, and subaltern organizations: "Paradoxically, therein lies one of the unspeakable secrets of its decline" (chap. 3). Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner strove for years to avoid a scenario like the 2001 popular uprising, and they succeeded. The flip side of this success is that, once

[4] Other authors have also employed it to describe other Pink Tide governments. See, e.g., Franck Gaudichaud, Massimo Modonesi, and Jeffery R. Webber, *The Impasse of the Latin American Left* (Duke University Press, 2022).

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the country was "normalized," with the streets quiet and the combustive energy of social unrest deactivated, the ruling classes came back for more.

After a few years, the Kirchnerist coalition not only gobbled up social movements and parties on the left but also co-opted many figureheads from the main opposition, the UCR—a party that, after the catastrophic performance of its last president, Fernando de la Rúa (1999–2001), was in agony. In fact, the majority of UCR would later, in 2015, join the right-wing party PRO to form Cambiemos. As Kirchnerism grew, a countermovement developed fueled by the Kirchners' combative rhetoric and some questionable, if not outright undemocratic, actions—chief among them, the intervention in the country's national statistics institute (INDEC) to tinker with the official inflation rates. This polarization between those supporting Kirchnerism and those against it came to be popularly referred to as *la grieta* ("the crack" or "the rift"), and it would mark Argentinian politics through the 2010s and until the arrival of Javier Milei.

Rosso explains that hegemony is when a dominant class (or a fraction of it) becomes a "leading" one, that is, achieves a successful combination of consent and coercion and thereby manages to present its own interests as universal. According to Rosso, there were two periods in which a kind of hegemony prevailed: during the governments of Carlos Menem and during those of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Rosso (chap. 1) identifies three "foundational elements" for these "hegemonic" moments: a crisis of origin, a reconfiguration of the balance of forces, and a favorable international cycle. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's second term, as well as Macri's and Alberto Fernández's presidencies, were nonhegemonic periods, in Rosso's terms, or expressions of an "impossible hegemony." The proposals of the main political forces in the last period, he argues, oscillated between a hard neoliberalism that could not be implemented without dealing a resounding defeat to working-class organizations and a soft statism (or state interventionism) that could not be successful outside of extraordinary circumstances (i.e., the mid-2000s to early 2010s).

In a similar vein, Gené and Vommaro describe the key conundrum for the Macri administration after taking power: how to pass an austerity program without eliciting widespread social unrest. It was a dilemma between incrementalism and shock therapy. Macri favored the former for the sake of governability. In the words of Fernando Rosso, the ruling party was being "as neoliberal as the relation of forces allow[ed] it to be" (chap. 6). In practical terms, this meant that the government established a cordial relationship with the most potentially disruptive social organizations, such as Movimiento Evita, or the fledgling informal economy workers' federation, Central de Trabajadores de la Economía Popular. But the approach was not shared by everyone in Cambiemos. It is not far-fetched to speculate that this continuity in clientelist practices helped solidify the idea that Cambiemos did not offer an alternative to Kirchnerism and boosted the discontent with the political establishment—what Milei would later call "the caste."

A more conservative wing within Cambiemos, led primarily by Macri's security minister Patricia Bullrich, advocated for a more antagonistic approach, pushing for the criminalization of protest and to stop the allocation of welfare programs through social organizations. This wing became stronger and emboldened during the Peronist government (2019–2023) and as libertarians such as Milei won more traction. Macri himself radicalized his discourse, abandoned political correctness, and promised that, if given another opportunity, he would "do the same but faster" (Gené and Vommaro, 19). Bullrich and Macri would become major players after the 2023 general elections, when they struck an agreement with Javier Milei and publicly endorsed him for the runoff against Sergio Massa.

Gené and Vommaro remind us that Macri and his party, PRO, explicitly avoided confrontation, unsuccessfully trying to eschew the *grieta*. They presented themselves as professional state administrators who sought to leave enmity behind. Their detailed

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campaign manuals directed candidates to use a "conciliatory tone" ("it's been enough fighting") and to emphasize personal stories over policy proposals (Gené and Vommaro, 162–63). An interesting aspect of this ascendant Cambiemos of 2015 is that it made an effort to avoid any branding associated with the old right; in two cases, elected officials who expressed sympathy with the last dictatorship or denied the number of disappeared people during its rule were quickly removed from their posts. These examples contrast with the overtly disruptive rhetoric of Milei and LLA, who were willing to work with politicians who collaborated with the military government in the 1970s. The new right in Argentina overflows the boundaries of this declining political paradigm—the one marked by the rivalry between Cambiemos and Kirchnerism. It rejects the taboo of identifying as right wing and challenges both the "electoral floor" of Peronism and the notion of electoral alternation (see Morresi and Vicente's chapter in *Está entre nosotros*).

Macri's PRO was the first party in Argentina's recent history to have big business as its main constituency and personnel. President Macri's cabinet was filled with businesspeople: Even after two years in office, more than half his ministers held executive roles in private corporations. Ironically, one of the main reasons for his demise was the lukewarm support from business. Building on classical studies on Latin American business classes, Gené and Vommaro contend that the Argentine capitalist class was unable to overcome its historical lack of coordination and cohesion.[5] Macri's "party managed to express the interests of businessmen, but it failed to articulate [the interests of] the business *class*" (209). One reason is that the government did not establish an organic communication channel with businesses' peak associations, not even with the economy-wide Asociación Empresaria Argentina. But more importantly, Macri overestimated the effect his victory would have on foreign investments. He anticipated a "flood of investments" if he were to win the elections, the result of a hefty and immediate boost in business confidence in the country. But the government only saw a trickle (Gené and Vommaro, 223). The main problem, an industrial businessman told Gené and Vommaro, was that the government assumed that a favorable macroeconomic policy would attract large investments, but industrial investors were deterred by a depressed economy and relatively high labor costs. On top of that, a government-fueled anticorruption lawsuit targeting Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (the "causa de los cuadernos") ended up implicating many high-ranking executives from leading companies in the country, irreversibly straining their relationship with the Macri administration.

Lacking the increased revenue expected from the elusive "flood of investments," the government set out to cut costs and wasted most of its political capital on passing a deeply unpopular pension reform. Four years later, Macri would write that, that night, they "won a battle, but lost the war" (in Gené and Vommaro, 283). This was the beginning of the end. But the final blow came from big capital. On the morning of April 25, 2018, JP Morgan initiated a devastating move against the government when it sold $800 million in government bonds. Merrill Lynch, Deutsche Bank, HSBC, and Morgan Stanley followed suit. The sales caused a fiscal imbalance that left the state in a dire financial situation and the government deprived of any credibility. Macri's reelection hopes quickly deteriorated.

There are a few more causes of the rise of the far right in Argentina. One of them is the aforementioned discontent with the political establishment, a sentiment that was best articulated by Milei's diatribes against the "political caste." Horowicz contends that all governments since 1975 have implemented the same kind of economic policy, characterized by a cycle of hyperinflation, devaluation, and then cutbacks on public spending to pay the foreign debt. Although the Kirchners' governments promised and had

[5] Studies such as Tasha Fairfield, *Private Wealth and Public Revenue in Latin America. Business Power and Tax Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Ben Ross Schneider, *Business Politics and the State in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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the opportunity to depart from the pernicious cycle, they were no different, he claims, apart from some cosmetic changes. It is hard to square his view with the bulk of scholarship describing the expansion of social policy in Argentina as part of a regional trend.[6] But his point about the lack of sharp distinction between the main contending electoral parties (Peronism and Macriism) holds water. The view is reinforced by Peronism's half-hearted opposition during Macri's presidency, as well as the fluid exchange of actors between the two political forces. For example, the presidential candidate for the unified Peronist coalition in 2023 was Sergio Massa. Although Massa was a known right-wing or center-right Peronist, his bid was justified in Kirchnerist milieus as the only (or the best) chance to defeat JC (Macriism). Yet only eight years prior, in the 2015 presidential elections, after collecting 21 percent of the national vote and coming in third at the head of a dissident Peronist coalition, Massa had thrown his weight behind Macri's candidacy in the runoff against Peronist candidate Daniel Scioli. Another example of the permeability between parties is Miguel Ángel Picchetto, a thirty-year-long Peronist politician who was the president of the Peronist bloc in the Senate during Macri's presidency. Not only did he provide the votes for many of the incumbent's neoliberal reforms; he jumped ship and joined his ticket as vice president in the 2019 elections.

In addition to these underlying trends, a clear ideological transformation has taken place among the Argentine population over the past decade or two, with the emergence of the authoritarian individualism described here. This includes a drive for self-development and success and a zeal for autonomy, exemplified by phrases like "No one gave me anything for free" and "You're not going to tell me what I have to do" (Semán and Welschinger's chapter in *Está entre nosotros*). But it would be incorrect to believe that these ideological movements take place in a vacuum or detached from historical experience.

In this regard, Semán offers probably the most lucid assessment of Kirchnerism's responsibility in the rise of libertarianism. The author proposes that the critique of the state by young people expresses discontent with the "mimic of the state," that is, the inconsistency between the narrative of a "present state" and the reality of its absence. "Public education is good, but if the school building falls apart, or you freeze your ass off in it, it's crap," says the twenty-three-year-old Damián (Semán, chap. 4). The idea of public goods is not questioned, at least not in the abstract, but there is a critique of the state of public goods and services. It takes only one step further to connect the poor performance of public services under a political project that has made social inclusion and a "present state" its favorite slogans, with the meteoric rise of liberalism and libertarianism.

The reason the right has been so successful in engaging this youth, Semán and Welschinger contend, is because the prevailing social conditions have created a subjectivity that connects more strongly with the liberal discourse: these new political forces are saying out loud what many young people thought—and no one else was saying. The far right synthesizes the way many young people see themselves and their life experiences. The narrative gains more traction when a person's experience translates into a questioning of politics, the state, and the economy. The anti-Peronist propaganda resonates because it speaks to their own experience of frustration for having to work ever more hours to sustain themselves, become independent from their parents, or pursue a university degree.

Adamovsky borrows from Gilles Deleuze the idea of microfascism, a world alliance that coordinates all our fears, one in which "we" become in charge of repressing any discord in everyday life (chap. 7). The reason this microfascism has emerged now (wrote Adamovsky

[6] See, e.g., María Candelaria Garay, *Social Policy Expansion in Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens, *Democracy and the Left: Social Policy and Inequality in Latin America* (University of Chicago Press, 2012); Jennifer Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

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in 2017) lies in the disappointment in Kirchnerism. Kirchnerism galvanized voters with its rhetoric of confronting corporations, promising rights for the subaltern. As long as that horizon was compelling and it felt like the country was on the right track, some "disorder" (or dissonance) was tolerable. "The fight for the collective and for our rights was fueled by an illusion of the future that is now exhausted" (Adamovsky, chap. 7). Exploiting this disillusion, Macriism found new ground. The transformation brought about by PRO recentered the individual horizon, and it invited everyone to take responsibility for their own situation and eliminate all unwanted interference of politics in our lives.

González and Semán both stress, as well, the changes in the structure of society that took place over the past few decades: the decline of an industrial working class and the rise of informal, atomized work, along with many modalities of self-employment that are only a cover for precarious work. The new generation has a different lived experience, a sense of self that departs from the collective, estranged from the rest of the working class. They have a heightened sense of individualism, and they believe, more than previous generations, that their success depends on themselves more than on anyone else. If the state shows up, it is to meddle in their business, to tax them, and so on.

This trend toward individualism is, however, not set in stone. Milei's first year in power proved contentious: There has been no lack of mobilization or mass protest, and even two general strikes in response to his policies. These instances of collective action have the potential to transform people's vision, inspire cultures of solidarity, and counteract the rise of the liberal ideology.

Juan Cruz Ferre (MD, PhD) is an assistant professor of sociology at Rowan University. His areas of research are political economy of Latin America, medical sociology, social welfare, and Marxist theory. His book, Political Economy of Welfare in 21st Century Latin America: Universalism Deferred (Edward Elgar, forthcoming), offers a historical-materialist assessment of recent transformations in welfare policy across Latin America.

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