

Javier Milei

Javier Milei (born October 22, 1970, Buenos Aires, Argentina) is a confrontational right-wing outsider who rose to the presidency of Argentina in 2023 on a tide of voter dissatisfaction with a political elite whom his supporters blamed for endemic hyperinflation, a currency in free fall, and increasing poverty. A libertarian economist who describes himself as an anarcho-capitalist, Milei first came to national prominence as a flamboyant television pundit and outspoken critic of the country's ruling class. His brash personality and antiestablishment approach brought comparisons to former presidents Donald Trump of the United States and Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil.

Early life and education

The son of Alicia Lujan Lucich, a homemaker, and Norberto Horacio Milei, a bus driver of Italian descent who became a successful entrepreneur, Javier Milei grew up in the upper-middle-class Villa Devoto neighborhood of Buenos Aires. He has described his childhood as troubled and said that he had a complicated relationship with his parents, who reportedly physically and verbally abused him and with whom, as an adult, he ceased talking for some 10 years. Support during his early years came from his maternal grandmother and his younger sister, Karina Milei, who has long played a pivotal role in his life. As a schoolboy he earned the nickname “El Loco” (the Madman) for his aggressive rhetoric, outspokenness, and anger. Early on his passions were music and football (soccer). He was the lead vocalist for a Rolling Stones cover band and an accomplished goalie for teams in the lower ranks of the Chacarita Juniors football club.

Deeply affected by hyperinflation's disruption of life in Argentina, during the late 1980s he put music and football behind him to study economics. While at the University of Belgrano, Milei immersed himself in Keynesian economics and worked as an intern at the Central Bank. After obtaining an economics degree, he continued his studies with graduate work at the Institute of Economic and Social Development and Torcuato Di Tella University, earning a pair of master's degrees. In the process Milei became disillusioned with Keynesianism, especially after his exposure to the libertarian thought of Murray Rothbard, who framed the political-economic theory of anarcho-capitalism, which advocates for the voluntary exchange of goods and services in a society broadly regulated by the market rather than by the state. Milei then explored the ideas of the classical liberal economists F.A. Hayek and Ludwig von Mises of the Austrian school of economics and came to view government regulation of the economy, generous spending, and high taxation as detrimental to a country's economic success.

Economics career

After completing his formal education, Milei began a career in the private sector as an economist, working for HSBC Argentina, one of the country's largest banks, and as the head economist of Máxima AFJP, the private pension fund created in the 1990s by then economy minister Domingo Cavallo, which served as a major component of Argentina's social security system until that responsibility was fully returned to the state in 2008. That year Milei became an economist and financial analyst for Corporación América, the large conglomerate controlled by billionaire Eduardo Eurnekian, which has interests in the energy, infrastructure, and agribusiness sectors in addition to operating the majority of Argentina's airports. Milei also served as the chief economist for a think tank, Fundación Acordar, and as a university professor. Controversially, earlier in his career Milei acted as an adviser to Antonio Bussi, a former general who in 2008 would be sentenced to life in prison for his role in Argentina's Dirty War (1976–83), during Bussi's term as governor (1995–99) of Tucumán province.

Over-the-top television punditry

In the mid-2010s Milei began appearing on television as a pundit discussing economics and politics. He railed against the administrations of presidents Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Mauricio Macri, and Alberto Fernández and denounced the country's ruling political elite in angry, expletive-laden rants, characterizing them as corrupt thieves and branding them "the political caste." As his TV appearances became increasingly flamboyant and theatrical, his fame grew. On one occasion he smashed a piñata representing Argentina's Central Bank. On another, he assumed the role of a masked, costumed alter-ego super hero, General Ancap, the leader of the fictitious "Liberland" (a country without taxes) breaking into operatic song about the perils of the Argentine economy. By 2018 he had become an ever more frequent guest on television and radio shows, invited as much for his entertainment value as for his insight and indignation. With the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Milei gained further attention by criticizing the government's handling of the outbreak and expressing skepticism regarding the COVID-19 vaccine.

Entry into politics and presidential run

Encouraged by supporters to enter politics, in 2021 Milei formed a new political coalition, La Libertad Avanza ("Liberty Advances"), and ran for and won election to a seat representing the city of Buenos Aires in the Chamber of Deputies, the federal government's lower house. Once in office, he seemed little interested in participating in the business of government, but he kept himself in the public eye by raffling off his salary to supporters every month on social media. Seemingly intent on establishing himself as a player within the international far right, in June 2022 he attended the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) Brazil in Campinas, where he was welcomed by Brazilian Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, a son of authoritarian former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro. As Milei became more prominent and his aspiration to the Argentine presidency more apparent, the media began comparing his

flamboyant, pugnacious outsider style and antiestablishment ambitions to the right-wing populism of ex-president Bolsonaro and former U.S. president Donald Trump.

Javier Milei on the campaign trail

Javier Milei campaigning for president of Argentina with a chainsaw, a symbol of his promise to cut government spending, San Martín, Buenos Aires, Argentina, September 2023.(more)

Positioning himself to become La Libertad Avanza's candidate for the 2023 presidential election, Milei outlined a radical platform calling for sweeping changes that were familiar to those who had followed his television appearances. He proposed combating inflation by doing away with the Central Bank and replacing the national currency, the Argentine peso, with the U.S. dollar. As part of his pledge to downsize government and drastically reduce spending, he promised to eliminate the ministries of education, health, and public works and to rely instead on private investment in the sectors they oversee. Moreover, he vowed to lower costs for employers, relax the country's labor laws, and never raise taxes. He brought a chainsaw with him on the campaign trail as a loud, powerful symbol of his policy intentions. Among Milei's other controversial positions were his denial of a human role in climate change, calls for deregulation of gun possession and legalization of the sale of human organs, and opposition to mandatory sex education in schools (which he characterized as a Marxist plot to undermine the traditional family) and abortion, which is legal in Argentina.

Milei was the unpredictable X factor as Argentines went the polls in August to participate in the simultaneous primaries (PASO), in which most citizens are required to vote and which most political parties use to determine their nominees. Although preelection preference polls indicated that only about 20 percent of the electorate supported Milei, he emerged as the surprising winner of the primaries, capturing about 30 percent of the vote. Minister of Economics Sergio Massa finished second with about 22 percent of the vote to become the nominee of the ruling Peronist party (which altogether claimed some 27 percent of the vote). In the contest to determine the nominee of the conservative Juntos por el Cambio (Together for Change), Patricia Bullrich, a onetime security minister, captured the majority of the coalition's roughly 28 percent share of the vote to best Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, the mayor of Buenos Aires.

Massa won the first round of the general election in October by taking some 37 percent of the vote. Milei finished second with about 30 percent, and Bullrich trailed with 24 percent. Because none of the candidates garnered more than 45 percent of the vote or at least 40 percent with a 10 percent lead over the second-place finisher, a runoff, scheduled for November 19, was required between Massa and Milei.

As the election approached, the Argentine economy continued to struggle mightily. Some two-fifths of Argentines were living at the country's poverty level, inflation had skyrocketed to more than 140 percent (one of the highest rates in the world), and the value of the peso had fallen from 300 pesos to the U.S. dollar in July 2022 to 950 pesos. With that dire scenario as the backdrop, the Argentine electorate appeared to be divided between those who were furious at what they viewed as the political establishment's failure and those who feared the potential transformation portended by Milei's radical agenda. Added to the mix was Milei's claim that fraud had occurred in the first

round of voting and his attempts to sow doubt on the integrity of the runoff. That preemptive rearguard action proved unnecessary when Milei won big, taking some 56 percent of the vote, compared with about 44 percent for Massa. Whether the new president would have the legislative backing necessary to effect the changes he promised remained an open question, as his party held just 38 seats in the 257-seat Chamber of Deputies and 8 of 72 Senate seats.

Personal life

Milei's unkempt long hair and bushy sideburns have earned him the nickname "the Wig" and comparisons to comic-book character Wolverine of the Marvel universe. He is the owner of four mastiffs (named for some of his economist heroes) who were cloned from Conan, a deceased pet with whom Milei was said to have had a deep connection. According to Juan Luis González, the author of *El loco: La vida desconocida de Javier Milei y su irrupción en la política argentina* ("El Loco: The Unknown Life of Javier Milei and His Emergence into Argentine Politics"), an unauthorized biography of Milei, the politician has employed a medium to communicate with and seek advice from Conan.

Although raised a Roman Catholic, Milei has been highly critical of Pope Francis and has indicated a desire to convert to Judaism. Milei is unmarried. From his first television appearances, he has presented himself as an expert in tantric sex (a meditative form of sex in which the goal is not orgasm but instead enjoyment of the sexual journey and bodily sensations). In July 2023 he began a romantic relationship with actress and impressionist Fátima Flórez, who came to fame with her impersonation of former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Notwithstanding his relationship with Flórez, Milei has jested that the role of his first lady might be filled by his sister, Karina Milei, who managed his presidential campaign and whom he has called the architect of his rise to power.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Argentine-Mens-Basketball-Team-Gold-for-the-Golden-Generation-1844190>

Other websites :

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/argentinas-javier-milei-tv-pundit-presidency-2023-11-19/>