

Argentine students protest funding cuts to public universities

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Credit: JOSE LUIS VAZQUEZ from Pexels

Tens of thousands of Argentine university students took to the streets

Tuesday to protest cuts to higher public education, research and science under budget-slashing new President Javier Milei.

Joined by professors and alumni from the economic crisis-riddled South American country's 57 state-run universities, they rose up "in defense of free public university education."

Labor unions, opposition parties and private universities backed the protests in Buenos Aires and other major cities such as Cordoba.

Third-year medicine student Pablo Vicenti, 22, told AFP in the capital he was outraged at the Milei government's "brutal attack" on the system.

"They want to defund it with a false story that there is no money. There is, but they choose not to spend it on [public education](#)," he said.

Milei won elections last November vowing to take a chainsaw to public spending and reduce the [budget deficit](#) to zero.

To that end, his government has slashed subsidies for transport, fuel and energy even as wage-earners have lost a fifth of their purchasing power.

Thousands of public servants have lost their jobs, and Milei has faced numerous anti-austerity protests since taking office in December.

Under the poverty line

Universities declared a budgetary emergency after the government approved a 2024 budget the same as the one for 2023, despite annual inflation approaching 290 percent and a near 500-percent increase in energy costs which higher learning institutions say has brought them to their knees.

"At the rate at which they are funding us, we can only function between two or three more months," said University of Buenos Aires (UBA) rector Ricardo Gelpi.

As the ire has built, Milei conceded a 70-percent increase in funding for public universities' operating expenses in March, to be followed by another 70 percent in May and a one-off grant to university hospitals.

Operating expenses exclude teacher salaries, which make up about 90 percent of a university budget.

"Of the four teaching categories, three have fallen under the poverty line," said the rector of the National University of San Luis, Victor Morinigo.

In a post on X over the weekend, Milei called into question how public universities spend their funds, and said the institutions "are used for shady business and to indoctrinate."

Some 2.2 million people study in the public university system in a country where the poverty level has reached nearly 60 percent of the population, according to a recent study.

"Don't expect a way out through public spending," Milei warned on Monday, as he hailed Argentina's first quarterly budget surplus since 2008.

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