RADICALISATION AND FUSIONISM IN ARGENTINEAN RIGHT-WING YOUTH ACTIVISM AFTER 2001: A HISTORY IN THE PRESENT DAY

RADICALIZAÇÃO E FUSIONISMO NO ATIVISMO JUVENIL DA DIREITA ARGENTINA APÓS 2001: A ATUALIDADE DE UMA HISTÓRIA

RADICALIZACIÓN Y FUSIONISMO EN EL ACTIVISMO JUVENIL DE LAS DERECHAS ARGENTINAS TRAS 2001: ACTUALIDAD DE UNA HISTORIA

Matías GRINCHPUN[*]
Sergio MORRESI[**]
Ezequiel SAFERSTEIN[***]
Martín VICENTE[****]

ABSTRACT: This work proposes an approach to the various modalities assumed by young people who, identified with different ideologies of the Argentine right, and became politically active in the open cycle after the 2001 crisis. It does so by

[*] Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters and the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires. He holds a PhD in History from the University of Buenos Aires and has completed postdoctoral research with the National Scientific and Technical Research Council. Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3163-2548. Contato: matiasgrinchpun@gmail.com.

[**] Professor at the National University of Litoral, holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of São Paulo, and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Buenos Aires. He is an Independent Researcher with the National Scientific and Technical Research Council at the National University of Litoral. Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8287-5772. Contato: smorresi@gmail.com.

[***] Professor at the University of Buenos Aires and the National University of San Martín, holding a PhD in Social Sciences and a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of Buenos Aires, as well as a Master's degree in Sociology of Culture from the University of San Martín. He is an Adjunct Researcher at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council at the School of High Social Studies, National University of San Martín. Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1816-4164. Contato: esaferstein@unsam.edu.ar.

[****] Professor da Universidade Nacional de Mar del Plata, Doutor em Ciências Sociais pela Universidade de Buenos Aires, Mestre em Ciência Política pela Universidade Nacional de San Martín, Bacharel em Comunicação Social pela Universidade de El Salvador, Pesquisador Adjunto do Conselho Nacional de Pesquisas Científicas e Técnicas da Universidade Nacional do Centro da Província de Buenos Aires. Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6744-0268. Contato: vicentemartin28@gmail.com.

historicizing right-wing youth activism of the 20th century based on two families: the liberal-conservative and the nationalist-reactionary, then focusing on a tour of the situation opened by the breakup of 2001 itself and the successive moments of activist visibility, first in the center-right and then in radicalized expressions that from a fusionist effect managed to converge those traditions with a strong youth prominence.

KEYWORDS: Youth activism. Right-wing. Argentina.

RESUMO: *Este artigo propõe uma abordagem das diferentes modalidades assumidas pelos jovens que, identificados com diferentes ideologias da direita argentina, tornaram-se politicamente ativos depois da crise econômica e de representação política que teve lugar em 2001. Para isso, em primeiro lugar, coloca-se em perspectiva histórica o ativismo juvenil de direita no século XX em duas famílias ou tradições políticas argentinas: a liberal-conservadora e a nacionalista-reacionária. Seguidamente a atenção se concentra no cenário do século XXI, marcando os sucessivos momentos de visibilidade ativista juvenil, primeiro na centro-direita e depois em expressões radicalizadas que, a partir de um efeito fusionista resultou na convergência das famílias de direita em Argentina.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Ativismo juvenil. Direitas. Argentina.*

RESUMEN: *Este trabajo propone un abordaje de las diversas modalidades que asumieron los jóvenes que, identificados con distintos idearios de las derechas argentinas, activaron políticamente en el ciclo abierto tras la crisis de 2001. Lo hace historizando el activismo juvenil derechista del siglo XX en base a dos familias: la liberal-conservadora y la nacionalista-reaccionaria, enfocando luego un recorrido por la coyuntura abierta por el propio quiebre de 2001 y los sucesivos momentos de visibilización activista, primero en la centroderecha y luego en expresiones radicalizadas que desde un efecto fusionista logró que convergieran aquellas tradiciones con un destacado protagonismo juvenil.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Activismo juvenil. Derechas. Argentina.*

Introduction

Recently, the role of young right-wing individuals has gained centrality in the public agenda, often underscoring the surprise surrounding this phenomenon.

Far from being a novelty, the active presence of youth in right-wing ideologies has been an irregular constant in Argentina since the early twentieth century, linked to the broader movements within the local right. The position of youth actors was more visible in the nationalist-reactionary sphere than in the liberal-conservative realm until the democratic reconstruction post-1983, which is reflected in the bibliographical disparity favoring the former (Bohoslavsky, Echeverría; Vicente, 2021; Morresi; Vicente, 2023). The belligerent and visible nature of nationalism positioned young people at a central place, promoting intellectual endeavors and active, often violent, militancy, a topic widely addressed by analysts (Lvovich, 2003; Mcgee Deutsch, 2005; Padrón, 2017).

The extension of this ideology to the ranks of the Armed Forces, the mass ideological press, and subnational derivatives has also received attention, again placing youth in a key position (Galván, 2013; Casas, 2018). The youthful aspect of the liberal-conservative family was less evident for much of the twentieth century, resulting in comparatively less focus from specific studies. The rise of young intellectuals, but not of youth per se, in the post-Peronist era should be marked as an exception prior to the democratic return in 1983 (Vicente, 2015). The framework established during this period was addressed through youth militant experiences within the liberal-conservative universe, a time when nationalism-reactionary ideology was pushed to the margins of public life (Vommaro; Morresi; Bellotti, 2015; Arriondo, 2015; Grandinetti, 2019).

The recent convergence of youth transitioning from the margins of the liberal-conservative right in the process of radicalization with other expressions of the right has gained political significance and has been analyzed by scholars (Goldentul; Saferstein, 2020; Morresi; Vicente, 2023; Vázquez, 2023), in parallel with an international transformation of the right marked by radicalism, hybridization, and a youthful component (Goodwin; Eatwell, 2019; Mudde, 2021; Stefanoni, 2021). From this perspective, we will analyze youth activism within the Argentine right. Following a panoramic overview of the key axes of youth presence throughout the twentieth century, we will address the emerging scenario in the twenty-first century and analyze the recent radicalization of right-wing youth. We aim to demonstrate that the political transformation following the 2001 crisis, which led to the fall of the Alianza government, the end of peso-dollar convertibility, and a gradual polarization among political spaces, recently allowed for the emergence of a radical right expression with a fusionist political perspective, which came to power in 2023 (Nash, 1987).

The hypothesis guiding this work posits that the radicalization of a segment of liberal conservatism has converged with other expressions of the right, with a central protagonism of youth sectors, leading to two changes in the Argentine right: the radicalization of a segment of liberal conservatism and a convergence with the

families of nationalism-reactionary ideology following their relative marginalization since the return to democracy. In light of these observations, the text proposes a dual reading of youth. On one hand, it follows the conceptions of youth present in the researched works, which focus on three moments of visibility: the early decades of the twentieth century, the so-called "long sixties," and the democratic recovery of 1983. In this context, the text concentrates on youth post-2001 rupture, understanding an approach to youth from the positions of the analyzed subjects, who present themselves as young and are perceived as such by the actors with whom they interact (i.e., positioned and represented as such in the political field, Bourdieu, 1982;).

Thus, the text is based on a reconstruction of the place of youth within the Argentine right in light of previous works, both from the authors and in dialogue with specialized production. This includes monitoring the social media of these sectors and fieldwork conducted during demonstrations, cultural and political meetings, and events from the 2021 and 2023 campaigns (including Javier Milei's presidential inauguration), which are detailed in the presented cases.

A Glance at the Twentieth Century

From their establishment as differentiated families, liberal conservatism and reactionary nationalism have engaged youth as active participants in their dynamics and themes of discourse. Around the Centennial of 1910, a nationalism emerged that distanced itself from the tutelary liberal conservatism, confronting the context opened by World War I, the Russian Revolution, and, subsequently, the rise of fascism. This differentiation was partly due to the protagonism of the youth: despite common concerns, the profiles of liberal conservatives and reactionary nationalists acquired distinct hues, with the youthful agitation of the latter sector being fundamental. While the former defended the politically republican ideology of the 1853 Constitution, a capitalist-mercantile conception of the economy, and a cosmopolitan and elitist sociocultural perspective, the latter questioned this model by appealing to political authoritarianism, corporatist economic schemes, and cultural traditionalism. Thus, they clashed over two ways of understanding reality and proposing a horizon: liberals labeled nationalists as narrow-minded and backward, while the latter blamed their opponents for the infiltration of dissolving ideas (Morresi; Vicente, 2023).

Such separation and disagreement were historically projected, but there were also moments of collaboration: during the coup d'état of 1930 against the second government of Hipólito Yrigoyen of the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) (1916-1922; 1928-1930), both sectors raised a discourse that enabled subsequent convergences, identifying majoritarian democracy with demagoguery and corruption. Among the reactionary nationalists, experiences such as the newspaper *La Nueva República*

and the sophisticated cultural magazine *Sol y Luna* flourished, propelled by young intellectuals, through the youth sections of organizations such as the *Acción Nacionalista Argentina*, the *Unión Nacional Argentina*, and the *Alianza Nacionalista de Libertação* (Buchrucker, 1987: 118-123).

While the liberal sphere displayed the primacy of adult actors and distant tones from youthfulness, nationalists pledged to give their lives for the cause, adopting a militant tone that permeated the 1930s and 1940s, referring to themselves as young. By the mid-1930s, both from the nascent Peronism and among anti-Peronist sectors, young actors raised their voices, protagonized cultural endeavors, and virulently clashed after the re-election of Juan Perón (1946-1952; 1952-1955), exemplified by the notable youth civil commands, which engaged in attacks and anti-government sabotage (Bartolucci, 2018). Reactionary nationalists and liberal conservatives converged there, along with radicals, socialists, and non-partisan Catholics. The coup d'état of 1955 was welcomed by liberal conservatives who narrated their experience as generational resistance against a reversal of totalitarianism, albeit without appealing to youthfulness (Vicente, 2014). Reactionary nationalism became divided: some young individuals held positions in the fleeting dictatorship of the nationalist Eduardo Lonardi, seeking revenge against Perón, who regarded them as "vote-stealers," but were relegated following the rise of the liberal Pedro Aramburu, opting for ideological journalism through the extremist *Combate* or *Azul y Blanco*, which achieved notable circulation and later drew closer to Justicialism (Galván, 2013).

Certain young nationalists gradually rediscovered Peronism as their activism brought nationalism to the streets and the headlines of the mass media. By the end of the 1950s, groups such as the Union of Secondary Nationalist Students (UENS) formed the Tacuara Nationalist Movement, which articulated youth militancy through anti-imperialist, anti-communist, and anti-Semitic slogans. Tacuara constructed a vitalist identity expressed both in street graffiti and in acts of intimidation, fatal beatings, and even torture-related kidnappings. This made the reactionary nationalist youth visible in public discussions and raised concerns among authorities and the U.S. embassy (Rein, 2007: 250-273). The gradual fragmentation toward different ideological horizons demonstrated that, despite their differences, these groups shared a common ideology of hostility toward the presidencies of Arturo Frondizi (1957-1962) and Arturo Illia (1963-1966) (the latter coming to power through illegal Peronism), as well as an expectation for the rise of General Juan Carlos Onganía following the coup of 1966, whose cabinet brought together nationalists, liberals, conservatives, and fundamentalists.

Disappointment arrived swiftly: the economic policy was condemned as liberal in nationalist publications, which also could not tolerate that the dictatorial government condemned the young nationalists who hijacked a plane to travel to the

Falkland Islands to assert sovereignty. From *Azul y Blanco* and the fundamentalist *Jauja*, their "courage" was claimed, and the authorities who judged them were admonished (Grinchpun, 2022). As with the coups of 1930 and 1955, nationalists ultimately grew frustrated with what they described as a capitulation to liberalism, particularly when General Alejandro Lanusse led the second phase of the dictatorship from 1970 and articulated an electoral solution, allowing for the return of Peronism in 1973. The end of the proscription that began in 1955 was shocking for liberal conservatives: the liberal sector of the Armed Forces, previously fiercely anti-Peronist, favored an electoral reopening that, according to the magazine *El Burgués*, surrendered the country to Perón (Vicente, 2019).

Within reactionary nationalism, there were those who were enthusiastic about the return of Peronism, including groups such as the Iron Guard, the National Student Front (FEN), the Command of the Organization (CdO), the National University Concentration (CNU), and the Peronist Youth of the Argentine Republic (Denaday, 2022). In this context, there was a rapid militant activation of youth who had not previously identified with reactionary nationalist positions, just as others abandoned leftist Peronism in favor of right-wing "orthodoxy," provoking violent internal conflicts. No less virulent were the young individuals who clung to dogmatic anti-Peronism, such as the Catholic traditionalists who launched the magazine *Cabildo*, whose invectives led to two government prohibitions (Ruiz, 2024).

The unstable scenario accelerated a radicalization of the liberal-conservative vocabulary, which drew closer to reactionary nationalism in constructing a broad figure of the "internal enemy" (Franco, 2012). After Perón's death in 1974, the coup d'état of 1976 proposed a "National Reorganization Process" capable of "changing the mentality" of society and forging a young generation inheriting its values (Vicente, 2015). With the victory in the 1978 World Cup, crowds of young people surrounded the dictator Jorge Videla, just as they took to the streets during the events of the Falklands War in 1982, scenes intertwined with the dictatorial discourse about youth, which coordinated the meanings of liberal-conservatism and reactionary nationalism. On one hand, an approach was promoted that exalted the liberal tradition and focused on youth as entrepreneurs; on the other, youth were positioned as a potential target of "cultural subversive penetration" (Manzano, 2017: 375-377).

With the democratic transition that began in 1983, the progressive narrative of President Raúl Alfonsín from the UCR (1983-1989) welcomed the youth away from previous right-wing perspectives. However, in the latter half of the decade, several analysts emphasized a "liberal boom" in which youth played a central role, illustrated by phenomena such as the Union for University Opening (UPAU). This shifted the visibility relationship of right-wing youth: for the first time, the liberal-conservative spectrum prevailed at this level over the nationalist-reactionary one,

as part of a broader process within the right (Morresi; Vicente, 2023). Like other militants of the period, liberals distinguished themselves from their adult leaders. For those who joined the Union of Democratic Center (UCEDE) or remained within the Democratic Party (PD), this meant marking differences concerning the dictatorial experiences: leaders who had not compromised with them were praised, while those who had were compelled to recant. These youths perceived themselves ideologically as "purer" than their leaders, also seeing themselves as international references and theorists within the space, to the extent of criticizing Milton Friedman for what they deemed insufficiently liberal positions: thus, they presented themselves as "the Trotskyists of liberalism". As UCEDE first and then the Alliance of the Center saw their voter base grow, these youths gained influence in internal struggles and contested positions with historical leaders.

Part of this youthful power was exhausted in these internal struggles and was undermined by leader Álvaro Alsogaray's decision to join the government of Peronist Carlos Menem (1989-1995; 1995-1999), a watershed moment for the youth of UCEDE. Some shifted from anti-Peronism and embraced the new phase, but for others, it meant denying their identity and preferring to withdraw from politics, coinciding with a chronological issue: the youths who had become active in 1983 were now professionals, forming families and choosing to dedicate themselves to private life (Arriondo, 2015). Meanwhile, within reactionary nationalism, various publications and groups of diverse inspiration proliferated during the early years of democracy, ranging from Catholic traditionalism to neo-Nazism, alongside approaches from the Nouvelle Droite, promoted by a young generation of intellectuals and activists from the margins of a system they repudiated. This intellectual renewal did not always translate into practical innovation: most of these organizations resorted to the familiar repertoire of demonstrations, conferences, and violent actions. Behind these initiatives were leaders who, despite being over 30 or 40 years old, had no qualms about assuming the voice of future generations, adopting youthful rhetoric and aesthetics in an effort to recruit young people. In alignment with certain policies of previous dictatorships, admonitions regarding pornography, drugs, and rock music maintained a predominant presence in nationalist-reactionary media, which condemned them as part of the "democratic unveiling." Paradoxically, in the vilified spaces of concerts, arcades, tattoo studios, or alternative bookstores, several young individuals connected with anti-system discourses, including nationalism, which offered a common identity, even adopting transnational models like skinheads until the mid-1990s.

Menem was able to articulate a coalition of orthodox Peronists from the nationalist tradition with emphatic neoliberals, while politicians, technicians, and young public figures played prominent roles in praising the model of reconciliation between Peronists and anti-Peronists, as well as the youth aesthetic culture promoted

during the peso-dollar convertibility. Despite being unable to approve an electoral reform to lower the voting age from 18 to 16, the president boasted of thinking like a young person, confident in his popularity among the youth. The banner of convertibility was raised by the Alliance, the coalition that opposed right-wing Peronism from the progressive side and won the 1999 elections. Young individuals who entered the political arena during Menem's regime found a space for dialogue as technicians in the fields of Economics, Education, and Culture, surrounding President Fernando De la Rúa (1999-2001). The traumatic end of his government, which marked the 2001 crisis, heralded a new phase for Argentine politics. In this context, youth gradually emerged as a prominent force on the right, distinctly different from the dominant narratives of the previous century, presenting themselves as "the new party".

After the Crisis

Around the 2001 crisis, the protagonism of young people was highlighted during the December protests that led to the president's resignation and in the subsequent transition that brought Peronist Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) to power. Analysts focused on the new governmental activism, but recent discussions have emphasized how youth actors became active in defending neoliberal policies or were relevant in various right-wing manifestations (Morresi; Saferstein; Vicente, 2021). In this context, businessman and football leader Mauricio Macri established his political space in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) with Peronist and UCR politicians, small right-wing parties, and social activists. This became the core of the Republican Proposal (PRO), which presented itself as "the first party of the 21st century" and "the new politics," transcending traditional ideologies. The PRO successfully attracted young individuals from social activism (particularly Catholics) and students who opened militant spaces in private universities and later in public ones, even rebranding the image of Ernesto Guevara to promote "Macri is revolution".

The "*nuevismo*[1]" championed by young political scientist Marcos Peña was characterized by a clear image associated with the color yellow and later with an ecumenical multicolor aesthetic. Dances featuring cumbia and pop hits, simple clothing, and messages characterized by colloquial speech and neologisms imbued the space with a tone markedly different from the technocratic profile of liberal right-wing leaders and the class background of the more visible figures (Vommaro; Morresi; Bellotti, 2015; Grandinetti, 2019). Young cadres occupied significant posi-

[1] Nuevism is a concept that combines elements such as creative destruction, hyper-competition, and globalization, reflecting extreme consumerism and the celebration of innovation.

tions, particularly from the *Jóvenes PRO* group, established in 2005, which became visible through its management in CABA starting in 2007. Unlike the "Trotskyists of liberalism" from the 1980s, it was easier for PRO youth to attain positions of power and implement youth-oriented policies or institutionalize youth spaces, all while closely following the positions and styles of adult references, to the extent that those who approached the PRO Youth group were assessed as potential militants through a business interview format.

The PRO style was intolerable for nationalists, including leaders associated with Cabildo, and forums such as *El Nacionalista*, which was linked to the traditionalist Vanguard of Nationalist Youth, where conspiratorial and antisemitic messages circulated among young forum members. To the right of the PRO, a dynamic emerged, channeled by youth actors demanding a "true right," a demand that extended beyond this small universe and caught the attention of analysts, exemplified by the letters of high school student *Agustín Laje* published in *La Nación* (Ferrari, 2009: 76-77). Nationalists also aligned with the "complete memory organizations" that called for a review of the 1970s and other militant spaces confronted by the Kirchnerist governments (2003-2007, 2007-2011, 2011-2015), where young people were seen insulting the "resentful *montoneritas*" of the ruling party.

In *El Nacionalista*, there were numerous calls to march against the government and proposals such as "equal marriage," in harmony with the adoption of digital media as an instrument of protest and a platform for mobilizing both old and young, liberals and nationalists. This was not an automatic confluence, as criticisms and doubts persisted despite the shared rejection of the ruling party; nonetheless, it signified the emergence of a new space for reactionary nationalism, in contrast to the condemnation that had weighed upon them in previous decades, when Alfonsín labeled them as authoritarian and Menem as anachronistic. Some young conservatives sought to draw the PRO closer to these nationalist expressions, particularly regarding the revisionism of the 1970s and anti-Kirchnerism, but the leadership repudiated and even expelled voices from the right that had opened conflicts with the party's style.

References such as the lawyer Federico Young and the writer Abel Posse, who were formed before the return to democracy, were admonished by the organic sectors of the youth as "old conservatives" (a rejection similar to that of young UCEDEists towards the older "dinosaurs"). Although criticism of Kirchnerist youth served as an intergenerational banner, the PRO youth replicated the verticalism that they imposed on the official organization La Cámpora, a phenomenon noted by other young people seeking to push the PRO more emphatically to the right or opposing it from the right. This revealed two relevant aspects: on one hand, the rightward boundaries of the PRO represented a space of tensions; on the other hand, there was the growth of a dynamic that sought to approach an organized space incessantly, pushing its ideas

forward. These points were momentarily set aside when the PRO joined the national government (2015-2019) by leading the Cambiemos coalition (which included the UCR, the Civic Coalition, and smaller parties), whose centrist character was not free from challenges posed by young militants, as illustrated by a scene during the same electoral celebration when a core group of youth censured Macri for acknowledging certain policies of Kirchnerism.

The process of governance led to the dispersal of PRO youth dynamism and resulted in divisions, with a turning point occurring in the final stretch of the mandate, as movements critiquing the management from the right manifested in two dimensions. One was economic, with voices alerting that measures had not achieved the projected effects, while the other expressed cultural values. This became especially evident with the president's authorization to discuss the law on voluntary termination of pregnancy (IVE) in 2018, which divided the political spectrum and the ruling coalition (Faur, 2020). Here, rejection of the government was driven by youth sectors demanding a more emphatic right and building affinities with figures increasingly present in the media, both liberal and nationalist.

Neoliberal economists such as Javier Milei and José Luis Espert pointed to both their area and cultural and ideological facets, a front where former coalition members such as ex-military Juan José Gómez Centurión or religious activist Cynthia Hotton were also visible. Additionally, high-profile references on social media, like the already mentioned Laje (a young author of successful essays), promoted critiques of value without neglecting the technical-economic aspect. Within this universe, connections were established with youth groups engaged in these ideas, circulating critiques through a broad and heterogeneous network of spaces and expressions: media, books, digital productions, and cultural events. The party's organizational attempts were, in fact, part of a radicalized narrative and practice that gained traction in the public debate to the right of the PRO, straining its limits and creating a cleavage zone that began to have a longitudinal impact on politics.

Growing to the Right

The triumph of the PRO was welcomed by various youth leaders as a welcome shift to the right; however, others portrayed it as "kirchnerismo in polite society" or "progressives in the closet," as several interviewees informed us. Among these youths, the alternatives of supporting a rightward shift from within the party or conditioning it from the outside became a crossroads. As one of them pointed out, it was a matter of choosing between two options: pragmatic and identity-based. This narrative, circulated by several young activists within the digital sphere, was present and palpable at cultural events that served as spaces for sociability and gatherings of

young people prior to the political organization articulated for the 2021 legislative elections: La Libertad Avanza (LLA), led by the aforementioned Javier Milei.

A fundamental step toward convergence was taken in December 2018 when the Democratic Party (part of the PRO, but relegated from the national assembly) organized the "Conversation for the 2019 Elections," sponsored by Prensa Republicana and Fundación Libre. These spaces were led by lawyer Nicolás Márquez and Laje, respectively, who presented *O Livro Negro da Nova Esquerda* (The Black Book of the New Left). The moderator was party leader Juan Carlos de Marco, who was joined by experienced intellectuals such as nationalist Vicente Massot (associated with the Cabildo in the 1970s and an official under Menem in the 1990s) and economist Agustín Monteverde from the neoliberal Center for Macroeconomic Studies of Argentina (CEMA), demonstrating the generational breadth and the presence of both families of the right. Activists from the revisionist initiative "*Memoria Completa*" and the anti-abortion initiative "Save Two Lives" were invited by both religious and secular figures, including Catholics and evangelicals. Among them were Segundo Carafí from the Cruz del Sur Study Center, Enzo Difabio from the Movement for Values and Family in Mendoza, as well as young militants from smaller parties and conservative "pro-life" movements such as the Party of Life and the Federal Front for Family and Life.

Before an audience predominantly composed of non-activist youth, the adherence to the ideas and values proclaimed by Laje (a few years older than the audience) and Márquez exemplified how visibility extended from digital networks to physical gatherings, and how neoliberals and confessional figures, conservatives, and nationalists intersected. Some wore badges of the Libertarian Party, founded months prior to Espert's entry into party politics, while many identified as dissatisfied voters of the government, with even some former PRO militants distancing themselves from the party due to its "mistreatment of family values," as another student informed us. The search for cultural and political references to the right of the government was explicitly articulated among many youths as a reason for attending and validating a space of confluence.

Another participant stated that they followed Laje and Márquez "because of how they think; I agree with their entire struggle. I follow them faithfully [...] I am not a member of any party, but I am willing to help in any capacity." Digital sociability, which had already hosted a similar conversation and fostered active communities of debate and activism through forums and social networks, began to find a physical counterpart, where young people distinguished themselves by their presence and their search for events that were previously associated with adults or progressive practices. At the forefront of these events was the fight against "gender ideology," alongside "the defense of family values." The discussion surrounding abortion in 2018, and subsequently in 2020 (when it was approved), spurred the organization

and mobilization of young activists and party militants, both from established institutions and in more spontaneous forms (López *et al.*, 2021). Cultural figures such as Laje and Márquez, alongside others like Catholic activist Lupe Batallán and conservative essayist Pablo Muñoz Iturrieta, gained traction on social media, with their ideas being replicated in mobilizations and gatherings. In these contexts, the thesis presented in The Black Book..., asserting that the left had succeeded in winning the "cultural battle" for "common sense" following its political defeats and the retreat of the right to the economic plane, emerged from a belligerent discourse.

The "gender ideology" was presented as part of a "Gramscian cultural revolution" that needed to be combated against a common sense that was unconsciously leftist. The topic, which circulated internationally, had local particularities related to the Kirchnerist era and the Macri administration: the former promoted it from a progressive standpoint, while the latter "deepened the cultural disaster," as Laje noted during the aforementioned event. If the government had contributed to winning the presidential election against Kirchnerism, there remained a lack of a "true cultural revolution" that Macri's administration would have overlooked in pursuit of centrist and even progressive votes. Monteverde spoke about the infeasibility of the government's "gradualist" economic plan, which he emphasized resulted in "prolonging the suffering" of society by failing to adopt drastic measures to reduce the fiscal deficit, since state spending was deemed the "primary illness": "The state is a 'sacred cow'; it is not touched, but rather fattened." He called for a fiscal rebellion against a state that treated citizens as "serfs".

This trend had a more significant impact on the youth due to another economist, the already mentioned Javier Milei, who has been gaining visibility in the media and on social networks since 2015. With a strident discourse, he attacked what he presented as a model where the state and "collectivist" measures were the main problems, which he then articulated with a decadent perspective (Morresi; Vicente, 2023).

Milei's volcanic style translated into viewership of the programs in which he participated and began to be replicated in the virtual sphere, where young people circulated videos of him "attacking" his opponents from the Peronist spectrum, members of the PRO, or television interlocutors. The economist focused on two ministers: the economic minister, Alfonso Prat Gay, whom he deemed "*Keynesian*," and the chief of staff, the aforementioned Peña, whom he characterized as the progressive responsible for the government's centrism. Since 2017, dozens of YouTube accounts replicating Milei's appearances gained traction, many with hundreds of thousands of followers, such as "*Milei Presidente*," a title he adopted in July 2017:

> " Javier Milei is the ideal person to lead us out of the decadence we have been living in Argentina for 80 years. He is our best candidate to head a liberal and

> libertarian list. This channel is an attempt for Milei to gauge the number of people who support him and to consider the possibility of running for office. Let us work to make this happen".

In our fieldwork during 2019 and 2020, this appeal appeared repeatedly, and this type of video multiplied in circulation with Milei's shift to electoral politics in 2021 when he launched *La Libertad Avanza* (LLA). Hundreds of comments from young people defined the economist as the "last hope," urging him to run for election and applauding his identification of the culprits behind the "disaster": from theorists like Karl Marx and John M. Keynes to traditional politicians, alongside the culture of statism. Dozens of accounts of Milei's followers emerged on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and subsequently, Instagram and TikTok, forming a digital sphere of sociability and support that later manifested in physical spaces and street activism.

This dynamic intensified during the socio-sanitary measures against COVID-19 implemented by the Peronist government of the Frente de Todos (FdT, 2019-2023), where there was a densification of social relations in the digital sphere that highlighted the movement of cultural and political actors around "libertarian" ideas (as defined by Milei) and was expressed through the convergence of traditions, leaders, and activists in the streets. From virtual presentations featuring ecumenical panels of the right to the coexistence of libertarian and nationalist militants in protests, unusual connections between the two right-wing traditions became visible in 1983, with radical youth activism at the center. The aforementioned ideas of "occupying" spaces previously reserved for the elderly or progressivism gained greater impact, as exemplified by the symbolic *Feria Internacional del Libro de Buenos Aires* (Saferstein; Goldentul, 2023).

The same phenomenon occurred at the events and rallies in which Milei participated, which became meeting spaces for young people who engaged with the authors referenced by the economist or represented symbolically his most resonant ideas, such as the burning of the Central Bank in the play "The Office of Milei," from 2019. In this context, the relationship with Espert, which alternated between personal meetings and political divergences until 2023, when Milei ran for president, functioned almost as a metaphor: Milei inspired neoliberal leaders but expressed differences with them that did not surface when he included nationalist, conservative, or religious actors and incorporated elements of their agendas. While issues of identity and method were often prioritized with the former, with the latter there was a fusionist effect that brought together different concepts and phraseology to confront a common enemy. This was demonstrated by the interventions of Milei, Laje, and Márquez at the first event that publicly brought them together, in March 2019, hosted by Cruz del Sur. This articulating and controversial effect excited young activists and militants, with youth leaders emerging on social networks and

experiencing Milei at events, organizing the distribution of ballots and overseeing votes in the three electoral rounds of 2023 that crowned him president while waving libertarian and conservative flags.

During the campaign, a pluralistic collective emerged, ranging from young self-identified "mejoristas[2]" (Semán; Welschinger, 2023) who adhered to an anti-state, entrepreneurial economic ideology, to activists who recognized themselves as part of various expressions of conservatism, including youth interested in politics from a rebellious standpoint (Stefanoni, 2021). Initially libertarian, then ideologically expanded from this belligerent positioning, youthful tone, and adherence to a broad and radical right-wing grammar, it consistently manifested as rebellious youth activism. As stated by a Peronist militant who approached the armed group LLA: "We are rebels; we are anti-system. Furthermore, Milei is a guy who behaves like a child, dresses like a child, a rock star." This notion also emerged among those seeking to dissociate themselves from the "*chetos*" of the PRO, emphasizing a popular and "spicy" militancy, as well as among young women seeking their place in a predominantly male environment (Vázquez, 2023). Young people who were intellectually and ideologically shaped by the discourses and cultural products offered by Milei also arrived at this space, as recounted by a libertarian streamer:

> "There are many small children, including myself, who were educated on why we were the way we were. When we talk about the 'State of the State' (...) it resonates with Rothbard, Henry Hazlitt, many articles that Milei has been saying for a long time, and there were the answers, and we sought them out. Milei educated many people".

In the social base supporting Milei, youth activism played a crucial role in the transition toward political-electoral militancy (as highlighted by Vázquez, 2023). This evolution unfolded in three phases: the first involved the activation of small parties and liberal-libertarian spaces, as well as marginal or short-lived right-wing armed groups; the second phase was linked to the transition to militancy in the aforementioned debates for the IVE; and the third wave entailed mass mobilization, spurred by protests during the pandemic and participation in Milei's events. In this process, libertarian militancy drew on repertoires of action from other youth movements, including mobilization and liturgy (such as chants and songs during demonstrations), organizational strategies related to party formation and proselytism, and a broad ideological spectrum that, under a doctrinal framework, incorporated various right-wing expressions in a fusionist manner. The emerging fusionism of

[2] The term 'improvement' refers to individuals or groups who promote the idea of improvement or evolution, usually in a political or social context. It is often used to describe a type of progressivism that focuses on practical action.

Milei's movement featured, at its core, youthful traits along with nationalist-reactionary sectors, fundamentalist and conservative ideas, or elements derived from the right margins of Peronism or previous PRO voters allied with libertarian activism, creating a vibrant radicalization of right-wing protest, as promoted in the genesis of the concept (Nash, 1987).

Milei's transition to the presidential candidacy marked the beginning of a phase of political sedimentation characterized by the activism of "cultural fighters" who were nonconformist and rebellious but pragmatically articulated their growth. The LLA incorporated candidates from Peronism and radicalism, the PRO, and expressions of nationalist right-wing factions (such as the Bussi family in Tucumán), capable of representing their diverse banners, from anti-abortion to entrepreneurship, all while criticizing traditional politics (Morresi; Ramos, 2023). This dynamic was evident in party building, the integration of youth in university and secondary school environments, and within the battlefield of ideas, striving to synchronize their objectives with the construction of political volume. Ultimately, the arrival of the LLA to power demonstrated that this fusionist aspect continued to flourish through the expansion of youth initiatives in membership campaigns, the formation of groups such as *Avancemos and Agrupación por la Unidad, Libertad y Amplitud de los Secundaria* (AULAS) (aimed at "eradicating indoctrination"), and the consolidation of new think tanks, while also perpetuating the narrative of the "cultural battle," exemplified by the "II Pan-American Forum of Young Politicians" (which seeks to contrast its narrative with that of the "*Foro de São Paulo*").

If these three strands of activism illustrate how pragmatism and identity coexist in tension, with youth as a fundamental element and the inclination to fuse actors, identities, and ideas, on the other hand, small nationalist spaces that had supported Milei during the campaign turned to opposition due to his liberal economic measures, the economist's identification with Israel and Judaism, or the emergence of corruption cases. Nonetheless, sectors such as the Argentinian Nationalist Forum positioned themselves as part of the LLA. Both dynamics signal that the process, which culminated in electoral and institutional terms, represented a turning point that had begun years earlier, stemming from the convergence and radicalization of the Argentine right, with youth activism and militancy at the center. Distinctive characteristics mark this process in terms of speed and radicalism, yet its development remains an open dynamic.

Final considerations

Milei's presidential inauguration was celebrated by thousands of people in Plaza de Mayo and its surroundings, where youths whose activism predated the

economist's candidacy gathered with others who became active upon his entry into electoral politics, alongside less committed but equally sympathetic voters. Amid Gadsden flags and chants against traditional politics, light blue scarves inscribed with "Save Both Lives" and religious references from Catholic or evangelical backgrounds were present, along with T-shirts advocating for the "*Malvinas* cause" claimed by nationalism, Israeli flags like those raised by Milei during his campaign, and copies of books by the now-president and his inspirations were prominently displayed. Fusionism was enacted by the youth surrounding the event and in the presidential inauguration speech, which was symbolically delivered with the National Congress at their backs.

While this scene may depict a rapid process of politicization and the rise to power of a youth-driven right-wing expression, the electoral triumph of the LLA must be understood within a broader perspective, surpassing this text's objectives. Here, we focus on the historical significance of the role that youth actors have occupied within Argentine right across two cycles: from the early 20th century to the 2001 crisis and from that moment to the present. Several key points should be underscored: throughout the period under consideration, both liberal-conservative and nationalist-reactionary families expressed youthful faces; however, until 1983, these were more visible among the latter than the former. This dynamic shifted with the restoration of democracy when youth liberalism gained prominence.

In the post-crisis context, also stemming from the liberal-conservative axis, youth activism occupied a central role in the experience of the PRO, as it operated within a radicalization of the right, with its more acceptable expression articulated through Milei's libertarianism, which targeted not only progressivism but also the dominant and centrist right. The economist was adept at appealing to conservative, nationalist, and religious sentiments by implementing a political fusionism that his followers embraced openly, in part because it had already been circulating among activists and militants. This movement pulled nationalist-reactionary expressions from the margins where they had resided since 1983, intertwining them with the radical aspect of the liberal-conservative family. In this fusion, the formation of a new face for the Argentine right remains an open possibility, wherein the role of youth has been central, and whose dynamics continue with the LLA in power.

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Received on: 02/07/2024

Approved: 02/09/2024