

SAFEABROAD



SafeAbroad Horizon Report

# Argentinian General Elections

SAFETY IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

## Overview

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SafeAbroad analysts have assessed the upcoming 2023 election in Argentina will have a moderate impact on travelers in the country. The heated election is likely to create frequent and possibly intense political demonstrations in the days leading up to the vote, but said demonstrations have a low chance of turning violent. However, these risks could increase in the event of a runoff or contested election following the October 22 vote.

## Key Takeaways

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1. **Argentina's escalating economic crisis is causing significant divisions within the country, with rampant inflation leading to a severe cost of living crisis.** The population's growing desperation for reform is fueling a shift toward more radical political choices in the upcoming election.
2. **Argentina has seen increasing political unrest in its last two elections, and this trend may continue if the 2023 election is closely contested.** After the historic 2015 runoff and the rising anti-administration sentiment of 2019, which both led to widespread protests and demonstrations, a similarly contested 2023 election could lead to major protests and travel disruptions in urban centers across the country.
3. **Political protests in the days leading up to and following the election are likely to cause travel disruptions in affected areas.** Political demonstrations are most likely to impact areas surrounding major civic squares and government buildings. Argentina has a vibrant culture of frequent civil demonstrations, which, although causing widespread traffic disruptions and prompting an increased police presence, rarely escalate into violence.

## Prior Elections

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**Argentina's past two elections have shown trends of divided electorates, a decrease in satisfaction with the government, and an increase in politically motivated civil unrest, which are likely to continue into the 2023 election.**

The 2015 presidential election in Argentina marked a shift in Argentina's political environment. Neither candidate received more than 45% of the vote, resulting in the country's first runoff election, ultimately won by Mauricio Macri.<sup>1</sup> In the lead up to the 2019 election, these political divides manifested again into frequent, large-scale demonstrations expressing extreme discontent over the government's handling of Argentina's economic crisis. In the month prior, thousands rallied outside the National Legislature to condemn cuts to welfare programs and other attempts to balance the national budget.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2019 vote, current President Alberto Fernández managed to gain a slim majority of 48% to secure victory over Macri, which many have attributed dissatisfaction with the prior administration's handling of the economic crisis, which had led to a 6.2% increase in poverty rates.<sup>3</sup> While major political demonstrations were common in the days before the election, Argentina's 2019 transition to the Fernández administration saw few significant bouts of unrest. This quiet transition, however, came in contrast to more common post-election violence in the region such as neighboring Brazil and Chile over recent years.<sup>4</sup>

## 2023 Election Key Issues and Risks

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**The tensions driving this year's election, which will take place on October 22, are likely to result in disruptive protests and increased crime rates.**

- **Three front runners have emerged in the election thus far: Javier Milei, Sergio Massa, and Patricia Bullrich.** Melei, leading in the polls, is running on a libertarian platform pushing for de-regulating the Argentine economy, as well as dollarization. The center-left Massa, conversely, is advocating for deeper regional economic integration and a continuation of select government economic policies seeking to control inflation. Finally, in a close third place, the right-leaning Bullrich focuses more on increasing government action to combat narcotics trafficking and organized crime, but also advocates for partial dollarization, lower taxes, and a reduction of currency controls.<sup>5</sup>
- **A run-off election may take place on November 19.** In the event of none of the three top candidates receiving more than 45% of the vote on October 22, a runoff between the top two candidates will take place on November 19. In that case, election-related protests are expected to continue up to and after November 19.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/23/conservative-wins-argentinas-presidential-election>

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/9/13/the-situation-is-dire-argentinians-protest-over-food-crisis>

<sup>3</sup><https://theconversation.com/as-latin-america-revolts-in-argentina-the-insurrection-was-at-the-ballot-box-125630>

<sup>4</sup><https://theconversation.com/as-latin-america-revolts-in-argentina-the-insurrection-was-at-the-ballot-box-125630>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/meet-the-candidates-argentina-2/>

- **A decades-long and deteriorating economic crisis is the key issue of debate in the 2023 election.** Overspending and deteriorating economic conditions have led to an erosion of public trust in the government. These factors have also led many Argentinians to use U.S. Dollars instead of Argentine Pesos, further depreciating the latter's value.<sup>6</sup> As of September 2023, the inflation rate in Argentina reached 124%, its highest since 1991.<sup>7</sup> Argentina's Central Bank has hiked interest rates to 118%, while the country is also in a recession following a three-year drought which severely diminished agricultural exports. These economic conditions have resulted in a cost-of-living crisis pushing over 40% of the population into poverty.<sup>8</sup>
- **Post-election unrest could erupt in the event of a runoff or contested vote, but large-scale protests are not anticipated in the days before the election.** Due to the divisive nature of the upcoming election, disgruntled voters are likely to stage turbulent demonstrations in the aftermath of the election. Protest activity usually takes place in metropolitan areas, the most common being Buenos Aires. Plaza de la Republica, Plaza de Mayo, Plaza del Congreso, and Plaza Lavalle are common sites of protest activity in the city. Protests may also take place near polling centers and government buildings.
- **Increasingly divisive politics in Argentina could lead to political violence as seen in neighboring Brazil and Ecuador.** Brazil saw multiple instances of political violence before and after its 2022 election, including attacks on government buildings following contested election results.<sup>9</sup> In Ecuador, the political scene has become increasingly militarized to feature the assassination of a high-profile candidate in August, and severe threats launched at other candidates. This intersection of political polarization and crime has echoes in Argentina's election, with unrest growing on both sides.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/argentina-dollar-love-affair-agonizes-over-divorcing-peso-2023-09-05/>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.npr.org/2023/10/12/1205357408/in-argentina-everyone-is-living-through-record-inflation-and-political-upheaval>

<sup>8</sup>[https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/argentina-poverty-rate-rises-401-first-half-2023-2023-09-27/#:~:text=BUENOS%20AIRES%2C%20Sept%2027%20\(Reuters,reported%20a%20rate%20of%2036.5%25.](https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/argentina-poverty-rate-rises-401-first-half-2023-2023-09-27/#:~:text=BUENOS%20AIRES%2C%20Sept%2027%20(Reuters,reported%20a%20rate%20of%2036.5%25.)

<sup>9</sup> <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2022/10/02/brasilenos-votan-polemicas-elecciones-violencia-miedo-trax/>

<sup>10</sup><https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/argentina-arrests-dozens-looting-attempts-amid-fear-growing-102510234>

## Implications for International Education

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**SafeAbroad Analysts predict the 2023 Argentine National Election will pose moderate risks to travelers. Frequent political demonstrations in the days leading up to and immediately following the October 22 vote will likely create localized traffic disruptions and evoke an elevated police presence near major squares and civic centers. These demonstrations are unlikely to become violent, but that risk could increase in the event of a runoff or contested election.**

With proper training, preparedness, and practical safety precautions, travelers can navigate these risks confidently.

The following recommendations may help mitigate the risks outlined in this report:

- Travelers should avoid polling locations or major civic centers in the days leading up to October 22, as these places are the most likely to see political demonstrations.
- Monitor local government and media outlets for updated information on demonstrations, unrest, or site closures.
- Continue to avoid political demonstrations. Though the risk of political violence is low, area disruptions are likely, unrest is still a possibility.
- Expect large crowds near political demonstrations, resulting in traffic disruptions and an increased police presence.
- Expect election related disruptions to continue and potentially increase in intensity through November 19, as current polls show a runoff election is likely.
- Travelers should register their travel with the U.S. State Department STEP system in order to receive emergency alerts. Carry contact information for the nearest Embassy or Consulate.

