

SAFEABROAD

SafeAbroad Forecast Report

# Argentinian Reforms and Unrest Under Milei

SAFETY IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

## Overview

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SafeAbroad analysts have assessed that there is a high degree of likelihood that the majority of the Milei Government's reforms will be approved by the National Congress, at the latest by February 14. This is predicted to generate significant civil unrest throughout the country, including disruptive protests, which have a high risk of devolving into unrest or being forcibly broken up by authorities.

## Key Takeaways

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1. **The most likely scenario is one in which both the DNU and Omnibus bills pass with the majority of the legislation intact.** Despite lacking a congressional majority, Milei's willingness to make concessions significantly boosts his chances of building a successful coalition in Congress. With only the approval of one of the houses needed for the bill to pass, there is a significant likelihood that while some particularly distasteful sticking points may be removed, the majority of both bills, including measures against protesters and the right to assembly, will remain in place.
2. **A nationwide protest organized by the General Workers Union (CGT) on January 24 will be a litmus test of how disruptive major anti-government protests will be and how the government intends to respond to them.** CGT protests and strikes are forecasted to cause significant traffic and transportation disruptions, particularly given the participation of mass transit and taxi drivers. Although it is unclear if they will persist, solidarity protests will also occur in cities across the globe on January 24.
3. **Political demonstrations in some form are likely to continue regardless of whether or not the DNU and Omnibus Bill are approved.** Argentina has a history of political demonstrations, meaning that Argentinians are likely to continue protesting until they feel their demands are being met by the Milei administration. Looking at the Milei government's reaction to protests, a compromise is not likely to happen soon.

## Background and Argentine Reforms

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**Since taking office in early December, Argentina's President Javier Milei has introduced two major pieces of legislation as part of a series of austerity measures and reforms aimed at revitalizing the Argentine economy.**

One of Milei's first acts as president was to introduce the Decree of Necessity and Urgency (DNU), which is aimed at radically deregulating the economy in the hopes of boosting exports, foreign investment, and international trade. Of particular note are the restrictions that this legislation places on the right to freedom of expression and assembly throughout the country. The restrictions allow authorities to shut down protests that block freedom of movement or disrupt economic activities, as well as impose increased penalties on protesters. The restrictions also ban employees in "essential services" from participating in strikes, including health care, education, banking, energy, transportation, exports, industries, and hospitality. Foreign travelers are at particular risk, as anyone attending demonstrations on some sort of

temporary permit will be added to a registry by Immigration Services with the obvious implication of potential deportation.<sup>1</sup> The DNU also threatens to significantly erode the democratic quality of Argentinian governance. The bill calls for emergency measures that would essentially transfer legislative power to the executive branch until the end of 2025, giving Milei nearly unchecked power.<sup>2</sup>

While Milei's government is a minority party in the National Congress, and he was originally insistent upon passing both reform measures without change, recent concessions on certain economic aspects of the omnibus bill, as well as an extension of the congressional review to February 14, has significantly increased the chances that the reforms are allowed to remain in place more or less as originally constructed.<sup>3</sup>

To further complicate matters, the CGT, one of the largest labor federations in the world, representing close to two in every three unionized workers in Argentina, has called for mass protests in public squares and around government facilities to take place in response to the legislation on January 24.<sup>4</sup> These protests, especially given the participation of taxi cab and mass transit unions, are likely to violate the stipulations against protests that impede economic activities. As a result, these protests are likely to be a good litmus test as to how the government plans to respond to mass protests that violate these new laws in the future, especially if they are to pass in their entirety. In addition, in solidarity with these protests, activists in urban centers across the globe, including several countries in Western society as well as South America.

### Forecast for the Approval of the DNU

**In the case that the DNU and Omnibus bill are approved largely intact, especially as they relate to restrictions on freedom of expression and economic deregulation, protests are likely to increase in intensity and number.**

- With Argentina's history of protests, a restriction on demonstrations is only likely to provoke more. The general sentiment among protesters is that the reforms are unconstitutional and therefore illegal, even if they pass through Congress.<sup>5</sup> The DNU's provisions against demonstrators perceived to be impeding the flow of traffic increase the likelihood of violent dispersion and arrests.
- The DNU reduces or cuts many government services, subsidies, and services and further devalues the currency. 40% of Argentina's population lives in poverty,<sup>6</sup> and cuts in the services that people at or below the poverty line depend on will provoke further civil unrest, especially if reforms do not yield results quickly.

<sup>1</sup><https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-12-15/javier-mileis-government-announces-plan-to-crack-down-on-argentina-protests.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dyami.services/post/intel-brief-argentina-president-milei-controversial-economic-reforms>

<sup>3</sup><https://worldview.stratfor.com/situation-report/argentina-oppositions-amendments-omnibus-bill-increase-chance-passage>

<sup>4</sup>[https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2024/01/argentina-activists-plan-nationwide-general-strike-demonstrations-jan-24-against-policies-of-president-javier-milei?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=618396&utm\\_source=push&utm\\_campaign=Crisis24](https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2024/01/argentina-activists-plan-nationwide-general-strike-demonstrations-jan-24-against-policies-of-president-javier-milei?utm_medium=email&utm_content=618396&utm_source=push&utm_campaign=Crisis24)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dyami.services/post/intel-brief-argentina-president-milei-controversial-economic-reforms>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dyami.services/post/intel-brief-argentina-president-milei-controversial-economic-reforms>

## Forecast for the Rejection of the Bill

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**In the case that the DNU and/or Omnibus bill are rejected, protests are likely to continue; however, they are not likely to increase in intensity.**

- A rejection of the DNU/Omnibus Bill does not preclude President Milei from attempting to introduce more legislation to a similar effect. The DNU and Omnibus Bill are the first reforms in Argentina's history to use executive power to introduce such sweeping legislation.<sup>7</sup> President Milei was elected on promises of massive government deregulation, and he is unlikely to give up on his campaign goals after his first failure.
- Protests against any potential future legislation are likely to be just as fervent and consistent as the ones against the current ones and have the potential to increase in intensity depending on the nature of future legislation and the state of the Argentine economy.

## Implications for International Education

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**SafeAbroad Analysts predict the protests surrounding President Milei's reforms will pose moderate risks to travelers. Frequent political demonstrations leading up to and in the wake of the bill's approval or rejection will likely cause traffic disruptions and an increased presence of security forces. The protests are unlikely to become violent; however, police may use force to disperse protests in accordance with the new protest restrictions.**

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 protests and demonstrations to minimize the chance of being associated with protests and possibly being detained by police in the event that a demonstration is dispersed.
- Monitor local government and media outlets for updated information on demonstrations, unrest, or site closures.
- Expect large crowds near political demonstrations, largely in major public spaces such as squares or around government facilities, resulting in traffic disruptions and an increased police presence.
- In the case of the DNU's approval, expect an increased number and intensity of protests and strikes, likely provoking an increase in police presence throughout the country.
- 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.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dyami.services/post/intel-brief-argentina-president-milei-controversial-economic-reforms>

