

## “ARGENTINA’S REJECTION OF BRICS ACCESSION AND THE IDEOLOGIZATION OF FOREIGN POLICY”

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**To Cite This Article:** Goncalves, W. (2025). ARGENTINA’S REJECTION OF BRICS ACCESSION AND THE IDEOLOGIZATION OF FOREIGN POLICY. Journal of Advance Research in Social Science and Humanities (ISSN 2208-2387), 11(3), 12-26. <https://doi.org/10.61841/vxahjp95>

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### ABSTRACT

*Argentina’s December 2023 withdrawal from Brics membership represents an unprecedented case of post-invitation reversal that challenges conventional understanding of multilateral institutional development and Latin American foreign policy behavior. This study examines how President Javier Milei’s ideological realignment overrode pragmatic economic considerations, establishing dangerous precedents for emerging multilateral organizations. Through analysis of diplomatic communications, official statements, and policy documents, this article demonstrates how domestic political calculations can abruptly reshape international commitments, exposing vulnerabilities in multilateral arrangements. Argentina’s decision marked a departure from its tradition of strategic autonomy, replacing nuanced balancing with explicit alignment. The case illustrates broader challenges facing Latin American countries as they navigate intensifying great power competition and highlights institutional vulnerabilities in emerging multilateral organizations that lack binding enforcement mechanisms.*

**KEYWORDS:** Argentina, Brics, foreign policy, multilateralism, Latin America, ideological alignment, institutional development

## INTRODUCTION

On 29 December 2023, Argentina formally renounced its planned accession to Brics; this paper analyses how ideological realignment under President Javier Milei presidency overrode prior hedging strategies. The South American country sent a letter to all Brics leaders on December 29, 2023, officially announcing its renunciation from the application process, marking the first time in the organization's history that an invited nation reversed course at the final implementation stage (Clarín, 2023). This decision by President Milei demonstrated how electoral politics and ideological realignment can abruptly reshape multilateral commitments.

Unlike Venezuela's contentious veto during the application process—where Brazil imposed democratic conditionality—Argentina's case presented a different institutional challenge: the post-invitation withdrawal flagged an 'incomplete contracting' problem in multilateral arrangements; which it will be discussed this concept and its implications in Section 2. According to media reports, Milei communicated with Brics leaders, stating that the current timing for Argentina to join the organization was "inappropriate," establishing a precedent for how domestic political shifts can override previously negotiated international commitments, and how ideological decisions could affect what could be a pragmatic choice.

The timing proved particularly consequential for the bloc's institutional development. While the bloc had successfully welcomed Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates in January 2024 without opposition, Argentina's withdrawal occurred after the invitation phase but before formal implementation. This created an unprecedented scenario that Brics governance structures had not anticipated—a situation where commitments existed but political will had evaporated, and ultimately misrepresented Latin America by reducing its presence to a single member state. This case exposed the fragility of international arrangements when they lack binding enforcement mechanisms and depend entirely on political consensus. In this case, the collapse of Argentina's accession reflected not pragmatic hesitation but an ideological subjugation, declared by President Milei, with Western powers—most visibly the United States and Israel.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW/RESEARCH CONTEXT/BACKGROUND

The theoretical foundations for understanding Argentina's decision not to join Brics draw on established scholarship on multilateral institutional development and Latin American foreign-policy behavior. The literature on pendular diplomacy in Latin America emphasizes how middle powers traditionally seek to maximize their autonomy through diversified partnerships rather than exclusive alignments. This approach can be first seen on Juan Perón's "Third Position" (formulated after WWII), a foreign-policy stance that rejected automatic alignment with Washington or Moscow and emphasized economic independence and political sovereignty — a precursor, in some respects, to later non-aligned thinking in the Global South.

Contemporary scholarship on Brics institutional development has highlighted both the organization's innovative aspects and inherent vulnerabilities. Analysis demonstrates how Brics represents a "coalition of the willing" that operates through consensus-based decision-making and informal governance structures. While this flexibility has allowed the organization to accommodate a diverse membership and adapt to changing circumstances, it also creates institutional vulnerabilities when member states experience dramatic domestic political and ideological transitions.

The concept of 'incomplete contracting' is particularly relevant for multilateral institutions. It refers to the fact that agreements often cannot specify procedures for every contingency, leaving gaps that domestic political changes can exploit. In the Argentine case, the post-invitation reversal illustrates how such gaps can create legal and operational uncertainty — for example, about the status of planned projects and disbursement schedules — when political will evaporates. This literature emphasizes the need for accession protocols and contingency clauses to manage post-invitation reversals (Stuenkel, 2020; Williamson, 1985). Historical analysis of Argentine foreign policy reveals enduring patterns of strategic autonomy that make Milei's approach particularly unprecedented. From Perón's "Third Position" through subsequent democratic and military governments, Argentina generally sought to diversify its international partnerships and avoid exclusive alignment with any single power bloc. Even in moments of unusually close cooperation—such as Carlos Menem's pro-U.S. turn in the 1990s—successive administrations typically maintained alternative relationships, whether through Mercosur, ties with Europe, or regional initiatives, to preserve negotiating flexibility and policy autonomy.

The literature on ideological factors in foreign policy formation provides theoretical insights for understanding Argentina's withdrawal. Research demonstrates how ideological frameworks can override apparent material interests, particularly during periods of significant domestic political change. The Argentine case exemplifies how new leadership can redefine national interests through ideological lenses that fundamentally alter existing international commitments, challenging traditional assumptions about rational state behavior in international relations.

Studies of Latin American regionalism and integration reveal broader patterns relevant to understanding Argentina's decision. The region's experience with various multilateral initiatives, from early attempts at economic integration to more recent political arrangements such as Unasur and CELAC, demonstrates both the potential and the limitations of regional cooperation. These

experiences provide important context for evaluating the significance of Argentina's Brics rejection of accession and its implications for broader patterns of South American integration. The emerging literature on great-power competition in Latin America sheds light on the pressures facing regional states as global polarization intensifies. Traditional strategies of hedging and non-alignment are coming under growing constraint as major powers increasingly press governments for clearer positions—an effect visible in Argentina's late-2023 and early-2024 policy shifts. For example, President Javier Milei formally declined Brics accession in December 2023 and, in April 2024, pursued a \$300 million deal to acquire 24 second-hand F-16 fighters, signalling a marked westward tilt; at the same time, China-Argentina ties remain consequential (notably the Chinese deep-space tracking facility in Neuquén) even as several China-backed Patagonian hydro projects have been stalled, and Chinese firms continue to expand lithium investments in the north—producing a layered, sometimes contradictory set of pressures that narrows the space for pure hedging.

### 3. METHODS

This study employs a comprehensive case study methodology to analyze Argentina's Brics withdrawal as a critical case illuminating broader patterns of institutional fragility and foreign policy behavior. The research design combines process tracing with comparative analysis to identify causal mechanisms linking domestic political change to international institutional commitments. Primary data sources include official diplomatic communications, government statements, presidential speeches, and policy documents from Argentine ministries and Brics member governments. Contemporary media reports from major Argentine and Latin American newspapers provide detailed accounts of decision-making processes and political debates surrounding the withdrawal. International sources include statements from Brics institutions and member governments responding to Argentina's decision.

The analytical framework draws from multiple theoretical perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the withdrawal process and its implications. Content analysis of official statements reveals the role of ideological considerations versus pragmatic calculations in policy formulation. Timeline analysis maps the sequence of events from former President Alberto Fernández's interest in Brics membership to Javier Milei's electoral victory and the formal withdrawal announcement, identifying key decision points and its causal sequences. Comparative elements examine Argentina's rejection of the bloc's accession in light of historical patterns of Latin American foreign policy behavior and other cases of multilateral institutional participation. This comparative approach provides context for evaluating the nature of Argentina's decision and its broader implications for regional integration efforts.

### 4. RESULTS

The empirical analysis yields several key findings regarding the rejection of the accession process, decision-making dynamics, and institutional consequences. These findings are based on a comprehensive review of official documents, diplomatic communications, media reports, and a comparative analysis with historical precedents in Argentine foreign policy and the development of multilateral institutions.

#### 4.1 THE FERNÁNDEZ ADMINISTRATION'S PRAGMATIC FOUNDATION

Argentina's pursuit of Brics membership began as a pragmatic effort by the Fernández administration to diversify international partnerships amid severe economic constraints, including runaway inflation and complex IMF negotiations. Facing inflation rates exceeding 100% and ongoing talks with the International Monetary Fund over a \$44 billion debt restructuring, the Fernández Government viewed membership as a potential hedge against the conditionality of Western financial institutions (Ministry of Economy, Argentina, 2023). Foreign Minister Santiago Cafiero actively pursued membership as part of a broader strategy to reduce Argentina's dependence on traditional Western partners while maintaining access to alternative financing mechanisms. The Fernández administration's pursuit of membership reflected a classic example of a hedging strategy—where it seeks to diversify partnerships without abandoning existing relationships. This approach can be situated in Argentina's diplomatic tradition of seeking strategic autonomy — rooted in Juan Perón's "Third Position," which emphasized non-alignment and economic independence — although Fernández's Brics outreach was primarily a pragmatic hedge in response to acute macroeconomic pressures and IMF negotiations. The Fernández Government calculated that membership would provide access to the New Development Bank, facilitate trade in local currencies to reduce dollar dependency, and offer political support in multilateral forums. These calculations proved prescient given Argentina's chronic balance of payments difficulties and recurring need for external financing during economic crises.

The strategic rationale behind Argentina's candidacy extended beyond immediate economic benefits to encompass broader geopolitical considerations. The Fernández administration recognized that exclusive reliance on Western financial institutions had historically imposed significant conditionality constraints on Argentine policy autonomy. Previous experiences with IMF programs had demonstrated how structural adjustment requirements could limit government flexibility in addressing domestic economic challenges and social needs. Critics argue that IMF-style restructuring — by forcing fiscal consolidation, labor-market "flexibility," and pension adjustments — tends to deepen recessions, raise unemployment and poverty, and erode public-service provision, thereby limiting the developmental benefits of external finance. Empirical cross-national work finds that IMF

conditionality is associated with reductions in government health and social spending (Kentikelenis et al., 2016), a critique echoed in broader political-economic critiques of the Washington-Consensus model (Stiglitz, 2002; Rodrik, 2011) and in independent evaluations of Argentina's recent IMF-supported programs.

The adherence offered potential alternatives to this dependency relationship through access to development financing that prioritized infrastructure investment over fiscal austerity. The New Development Bank's emphasis on long-term development projects aligned with Argentina's infrastructure needs, particularly in transportation, energy, and digital connectivity sectors that had suffered from decades of underinvestment. These opportunities appeared especially attractive given Argentina's position as a commodity exporter seeking to diversify its economic base and add value to raw material exports.

China's bilateral relationship with Argentina has evolved significantly since the early 2000s, transforming from minimal interaction to a comprehensive strategic partnership spanning multiple sectors. Chinese investment in Argentine agriculture, mining, and renewable energy projects had provided crucial capital flows during previous economic difficulties. The bilateral relationship encompassed not only trade in commodities but also technology transfer, infrastructure development, and financial cooperation through currency swap mechanisms, which had proven essential during peso devaluation crises.

The currency swap arrangements with China, totaling \$18.5 billion by 2023, had provided crucial liquidity support during multiple Argentine financial crises. These mechanisms allowed Argentina to reduce dependence on dollar reserves for international payments while maintaining trade relationships during periods of currency volatility. The arrangements demonstrated the practical benefits of diversified financial partnerships that could provide alternatives to traditional Western institutions during crisis periods. Beyond bilateral relationships, China's support for Argentina's Brics candidacy reflected broader Chinese strategic objectives in Latin America. Beijing's approach emphasized economic cooperation and infrastructure investment rather than ideological alignment, making it attractive to countries seeking development financing without political conditionality. This approach contrasted sharply with traditional Western approaches that typically linked financial assistance to governance reforms and economic liberalization programs.

China's role proved essential to Argentina's candidacy, having overtaken the United States as Argentina's second-largest trading partner during the 2000s and retaining that position into 2023. This financial support helped stabilize the peso, while Beijing also invested heavily in renewable-energy and infrastructure projects linked to Belt-and-Road cooperation. However, it was Brazil's broader strategic interest in expanding Latin American representation that ultimately provided the decisive diplomatic push for Argentina's inclusion. At the 2023 Brics Summit in Johannesburg, President Lula emphasized that future expansions would prioritize countries based on their geopolitical significance rather than ideological alignment. This approach proved key to Argentina's inclusion, reflecting Brazil's commitment to strengthening regional ties and amplifying Latin America's voice in global governance. Brazil's regional vision was also evident at the 2023 South American Summit in Brasília, where Lula convened regional leaders to discuss collective solutions and reposition South America as a significant global actor.

Brazil's strategic calculations regarding Argentine membership reflected regional and global considerations. To improve the representation of South America in Global South institutions, Lula was willing to achieve a concrete achievement in regional representation following his return to power after Bolsonaro's confrontational approach or dismissal of Global South partners. Buenos Aires's inclusion in Brics provided an opportunity to showcase a strengthened Brazilian leadership in South American affairs while advancing the objectives of regional coordination in global governance forums. The Brazilian strategy also reflected concerns about Chinese dominance within Brics and recognition that expanded Latin American representation could help balance great power influences within the organization. A Latin American bloc including both Brazil and Argentina could coordinate positions on global economic governance, climate change, and South-South cooperation in ways that moderate Chinese and Russian approaches while advancing regional interests.

Besides being a major partner for Brazil, Lula's personal relationships with Argentine political figures, including past interactions with the Kirchner administrations, facilitated diplomatic efforts to secure Argentina's invitation. Brazilian diplomacy emphasized Argentina's economic potential, strategic location, and historical importance in regional affairs as justifications for membership. These arguments proved persuasive to other Brics members despite some concerns about Argentina's economic instability and history of policy volatility. The negotiation of Argentina's invitation represented a significant diplomatic achievement for Brazilian regional leadership objectives. However, the subsequent rejection under Milei would ultimately undermine these strategic objectives and leave Brazil isolated as the only Latin American voice within the organization. This outcome highlighted the risks inherent in regional integration strategies that depend on political continuity in partner countries.

Despite the diplomatic defeat for Brasilia, Argentina's underlying economic challenges persisted throughout the invitation process. Inflation rates exceeding 100% annually, chronic fiscal deficits, mounting external debt obligations, and recurring currency crises created ongoing instability that complicated integration into any multilateral economic arrangement. These structural problems raised questions about Argentina's capacity to fulfill potential Brics commitments and benefit from

membership opportunities. The continuity of these economic challenges also created domestic political vulnerabilities that opposition forces could exploit. Milei's electoral campaign successfully linked economic difficulties to previous governments' international partnerships, particularly relationships with China and other non-Western partners. This narrative resonated with constituencies frustrated by ongoing economic instability despite extensive international cooperation agreements.

#### 4.2 MILEI'S IDEOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

The election of Javier Milei on 19 November 2023 marked a dramatic departure from Argentina's traditional foreign policy approaches. Unlike previous transitions involving gradual shifts, Milei's victory ushered in a radical and ideologically charged foreign policy reorientation that explicitly rejected multilateral arrangements deemed incompatible with his libertarian worldview. This transformation occurred with speed and caught many off guard, affecting not only specific institutional relationships but fundamental approaches to international cooperation and diplomatic engagement. Milei's foreign policy framework drew heavily from Austrian School economic theory and classical liberal political philosophy, leading him to reject what he termed "collectivist" international organizations. His criticism of Brics as a "communist" bloc reflected a fundamental misunderstanding—or deliberate mischaracterization—of the organization's economic rather than ideological foundations. This ideological lens led him to view multilateral arrangements through the prism of regime type rather than economic opportunity, marking a sharp departure from Argentina's traditionally pragmatic foreign policy calculations.

The philosophical foundations of Milei's approach reflected a deep skepticism toward multilateral institutions in general, viewing them as constraints on national sovereignty and individual freedom. This perspective aligned with libertarian critiques of international organizations as bureaucratic entities that limit democratic accountability and impose external constraints on domestic policy choices. Such views resonated with constituencies frustrated by Argentina's economic difficulties — namely, young libertarians and anti-establishment voters, small business owners and informal workers, and classical-liberal business-oriented supporters — who blamed extensive international cooperation for limited domestic reforms. Milei's economic doctrine emphasized free market solutions and minimal state intervention, leading him to possibly consider alternative multilateral institutions like Brics with suspicion as potential instruments for expanding government control over economic activity. This ideological approach fostered a systematic skepticism toward cooperation arrangements that might involve coordinated economic policies or collective responses to global challenges. At times, he even threatened to withdraw Argentina from its most important regional bloc, Mercosur, of which it is a founding member.

The new administration's approach also involved explicit alignment with Western powers, particularly the United States and Israel, alongside confrontational stances toward regional left-wing governments. Milei openly referred to China as a "communist dictatorship" and vowed not to do business with communist regimes. Yet, after the election, he publicly thanked President Xi Jinping for a congratulatory letter, signaling a partial softening of tone. This rhetorical posture reflected both ideological conviction and an effort to appeal to domestic constituencies wary of Chinese influence, while behind the scenes, diplomatic contacts continued to preserve trade and political ties. Milei's foreign policy team included figures with strong pro-Western orientations and skepticism toward non-Western partnerships. The appointment of Diana Mondino as Foreign Minister signaled continuity with traditional Argentine diplomatic approaches in some areas, but ultimate decision-making authority remained concentrated in the presidency. This concentration of authority enabled rapid policy changes but also reduced institutional checks on potentially harmful decisions.

The speed of Milei's reversal caught experienced diplomats by surprise, revealing the highly personalized nature of foreign policy decision-making under the new administration. According to diplomatic sources, the withdrawal decision was communicated to Brics partners without prior consultation with Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reflecting abandonment of traditional institutional processes that had typically involved extensive interagency coordination and analysis (La Nación, 2023). The personalized decision-making process extended beyond specific policy choices to encompass questions about institutional authority and democratic governance. Career diplomats reported being excluded from major foreign policy decisions, while presidential advisers without diplomatic experience assumed increasing influence over international relationships. This pattern raised concerns about institutional capacity and continuity in the implementation of Argentine foreign policy.

International partners expressed confusion about communication channels and decision-making processes within the new administration. Traditional diplomatic protocols, which had facilitated international cooperation, faced disruption as authority became concentrated in presidential offices rather than being distributed across relevant ministries and agencies. These procedural changes complicated ongoing negotiations and international relationships across multiple issue areas.

The dramatic nature of Argentina's foreign policy transformation under Milei reflected broader patterns of political polarization and institutional disruption that characterized his approach to governance. Campaign promises to fundamentally reshape Argentina's international relationships provided electoral mandates for dramatic changes, but the speed and comprehensiveness of implementation created unnecessary uncertainty and potential costs for Argentine interests. Electoral politics clearly influenced the timing and manner of the withdrawal decision. Milei had explicitly criticized Argentine participation in Brics during the

campaign, characterizing it as alignment with authoritarian regimes incompatible with democratic values and free market principles. These campaign commitments created political pressure for speedy action following electoral victory, regardless of potential economic costs or diplomatic complications.

#### **4.3 ECONOMIC CALCULATIONS AND POLITICAL IMPERATIVES**

Economic factors influenced Argentina's withdrawal, though they operated through political rather than technocratic channels. Milei's economic team, led by Luis Caputo, calculated that closer alignment with the United States and international financial institutions offered more immediate prospects for economic stabilization than the longer-term, uncertain benefits of Brics membership. The administration prioritized access to IMF financing and potential foreign direct investment from Western countries over the alternative financial mechanisms that Brics could provide. However, this calculation overlooked several economic realities. China remained Argentina's second-largest trading partner, accounting for significant agricultural exports and providing crucial currency swap arrangements that had helped stabilize the peso during previous crises. The withdrawal decision effectively sacrificed these established economic relationships for uncertain promises of Western investment that had yet to materialize.

The domestic political context also significantly shaped Milei's decision: his coalition included voters who expressed suspicion about foreign economic ties and elite deals — a recurring theme in his campaign rhetoric that later led to pragmatic adjustments in government policy. Milei's rhetoric about "not doing business with communists" resonated with these constituencies, even though it potentially harmed Argentina's economic interests and demonstrated what scholars term "audience costs"—the domestic political price leaders pay for backing down from public commitments to their base.

#### **4.4 REGIONAL AND DIPLOMATIC CONSEQUENCES**

The withdrawal coincided with broader regional political shifts that complicated Latin American integration and revealed growing ideological polarization across South America. Argentina's move was matched by an unmistakable tilt toward closer ties with Washington: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Buenos Aires in February 2024 and publicly praised Milei's economic agenda, while Milei later travelled to the United States and met with high-level U.S. figures and tech executives — signals of a rapid diplomatic warming. At the same time, several neighbors were facing their own governance crises that sapped regional coherence: Peru's prolonged instability (with repeated waves of protest and a rapid turnover of presidents in recent years) and Chile's deep political polarization over constitutional reform are concrete examples of domestic turbulence that hampered collective action. Together, these developments made it harder for Brazil to sustain a coordinated South American response to global governance questions: countries were increasingly choosing between competing geopolitical poles rather than pursuing strategic autonomy — a pattern Stuenkel has identified in his recent work on the region and Brics dynamics.

These political shifts reflect deeper structural changes in Latin America's political economy and external relations. The end of the commodities supercycle — with average prices for oil, copper, and soybeans falling sharply after 2011 — eroded fiscal revenues and foreign reserves, reducing the policy space that had been sustained by left-of-center governments across the region in the 2000s. Countries such as Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela, once beneficiaries of high export rents, experienced slower growth, rising debt burdens, and more frequent balance-of-payments crises. These economic pressures intensified political polarization and accelerated ideological realignment, as voters alternated between statist and market-oriented leadership in search of stability. Governments facing fiscal strain and currency volatility increasingly weighed immediate bilateral partnerships — such as U.S. financial support, Chinese credit lines, or IMF stabilization packages — against longer-term commitments to multilateral or South–South frameworks. The weakening of regional consensus has undermined bargaining capacity in global governance forums. Latin American states had historically exercised greater influence when presenting unified positions, as seen during the WTO Doha Round, the Copenhagen climate negotiations, and debt-restructuring debates in the UN General Assembly. Argentina's withdrawal from Brics thus represented a significant breach in regional solidarity, raising the prospect that other governments might privilege transactional, independent strategies over coordinated approaches in their external alignments.

Within Mercosur, the legal framework still requires bloc-level coordination for external trade agreements; however, political frictions have intensified as members test the limits of this rule. Uruguay's unilateral pursuit of an FTA with China, and Paraguay's unusual stance—maintaining diplomatic recognition of Taiwan while at the same time declaring openness to China trade through Mercosur and even expelling a Chinese envoy in 2024—illustrate how domestic and geopolitical factors complicate collective decision-making. These examples demonstrate that the risk to regional integration does not stem from a single country, but from the cumulative effect of divergent strategies among members, which can hinder or fragment common external policies.

Itamaraty had regarded a Milei-led reversal as a strong possibility rather than a foregone conclusion: Milei's campaign and early transition signals opposed Brics and closer ties with China, so Brazilian diplomats saw withdrawal as credible, even while Lula's government continued last-minute lobbying in the hope the incoming administration might moderate. Argentina's formal rejection nevertheless produced consequences, particularly undermining Brazil's efforts to strengthen South American integration through Brics expansion. The Lula administration had actively supported Argentina's candidacy as part of a strategy

to build a Latin American bloc within Brics that could help balance Chinese and Russian influence. With Argentina's reversal, Brazil was left as the only South American presence in the organization, reducing the region's collective leverage within Brics and complicating Lula's agenda for regional coordination.

The decision also introduced diplomatic strain with Beijing: Chinese officials publicly expressed disappointment and warned that cutting ties would be a "serious mistake," even as they maintained standard diplomatic language about respecting sovereign decisions. The political fallout quickly politicized financial and commercial links — currency-swap talks and some investment negotiations were slowed or re-examined — though several Chinese-backed lithium projects and other contracts continued to advance, producing an uneven mix of economic disruption and ongoing commercial engagement. Mexico offered little public comment on Buenos Aires' withdrawal. Mexico attended the last summit as an observer and has shown no explicit intention to join Brics, suggesting a posture of engagement without commitment. Although Mexico invokes the Estrada Doctrine, scholars show its policy choices are bounded by asymmetric interdependence with the United States; Mexico therefore signals independence where costs are low, but converges with Washington on trade, migration and security issues where the penalties for divergence would be high.

A closer look at the neighboring Chilean relationship with Argentina reveals that dense trade links, institutional cooperation, and a long shared border give Santiago good reason to take Buenos Aires' decisions with importance; however, that relationship is often mediated by differing multilateral memberships and pragmatic calculations. As an associate of Mercosur and a Pacific-oriented economy with deep exposure to the Chinese market, Chile typically favors balanced, interest-driven diplomacy rather than automatic bloc solidarity. Recent political frictions between leaders, including President Gabriel Boric and Javier Milei, have also made public backing more cautious. Chile's participation as a guest at Brics summits underscores that Santiago treats new multilateral options instrumentally, weighing commercial opportunity against existing Western ties. Colombian and Peruvian considerations reflected their own complex relationships with both Western and non-Western partners, particularly in terms of security cooperation, trade relationships, and development financing. These countries faced similar pressures to choose between competing partnerships, making Argentina's experience potentially relevant for their own strategic calculations.

The precedent established by Argentina's rejection of accession could influence other countries in Latin America facing similar domestic political transitions. If explicit ideological alignment became more common throughout the region, traditional approaches to regional integration and collective bargaining in global governance forums could face systematic erosion. This dynamic would particularly affect smaller countries that depend on regional coordination to influence global governance processes.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The empirical findings bring light to several theoretical implications for understanding multilateral institutional development and may reflect Southern Cone pendular foreign policy behavior. Argentina's Brics withdrawal challenges existing theoretical frameworks while providing insights into the dynamics of institutional fragility in emerging multilateral arrangements. The case exemplifies complex interactions between domestic political transitions, ideological realignment, and international institutional commitments, which have broader implications for understanding contemporary international relations.

### 5.1 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING STATE BEHAVIOR

The Argentine case provides important insights into ongoing debates about the relative importance of material versus ideational factors in foreign policy formation. Traditional realist approaches emphasize how states pursue material interests through rational calculation of costs and benefits. Argentina's rejection of accession appears to contradict these expectations by sacrificing clear economic advantages and future multilateral arrangements for ideological alignment. This pattern suggests that personified choices can systematically override material considerations under specific conditions, particularly during periods of rapid domestic political change.

Milei's withdrawal demonstrates how electoral incentives and audience costs can cause ideational commitments to override material calculations in foreign policy. Shifting focus from foreign policy, in February 2025, the president appointed two Supreme Court nominees by decree — a step criticized by legal experts as bypassing normal confirmatory procedures (Human Rights Watch, 2025) — and, as his delegated legislative powers expired, issued a rapid series of decrees changing multiple agencies (Zilla, 2025). At the same time, international NGOs and press-watchers documented repeated hostile public attacks on independent journalists (Reporters Without Borders, 2025). Taken together, these episodes do not establish a causal link to the Brics decision, but they amplify the perception that democratic checks and institutional independence in Argentina were weakening, while ideologically driven choices were becoming more pronounced.

Constructivist theory also helps us understand how leaders shape interests by framing external actors. Javier Milei's refusal to engage with Brics — and his repeated line that "we don't make deals with communists"—functions as an identity-and legitimization-driven move that recasts the grouping as an ideological threat for domestic audiences, thereby altering which foreign

partners are politically acceptable. Yet in a multilateral reality composed of diverse, capitalist states with differing models and priorities, that characterization tells us little about Brics' actual dynamics: ideological labels are softened by institutional complexity and transactional interests.

## 5.2 INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

Argentina's withdrawal exposed structural weaknesses in Brics' institutional architecture. The grouping's reliance on consensus-based decision-making and informal governance—while permitting broad participation and respect for sovereignty—left no pre-established procedures for managing post-invitation reversals. Because the country did not proceed with accession after receiving a formal invitation but before implementation, it produced legal and operational uncertainty about the status of planned projects, pending commitments, and the timetable for accession; such uncertainty risks undermining future enlargement and the grouping's wider credibility.

Comparative experience with the accession of institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the New Development Bank (NDB), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) indicates that resilience to domestic political turnover is enhanced when adherence and contingency rules are written into founding or operational instruments. To reconcile institutional predictability with respect for state sovereignty, a calibrated package of limited, binding procedures is recommended: (i) a short accession protocol accompanied by a parliamentary or legislative assurance documenting domestic approval; (ii) a modest minimum membership period with staged access to financial entitlements; (iii) a structured dispute-management sequence consisting of consultation, followed by mandatory mediation, and—if necessary—limited arbitration confined to procedural questions; (iv) phased disbursement and escrow or guarantee mechanisms alongside contractual continuity clauses to protect large projects and third parties; and (v) modest institutional supports, including a small legal and accession unit in the secretariat, pre-accession parliamentary briefings, and a suspension-and-re-entry mechanism.

## 5.3 LATIN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Empirical evidence (timeline, diplomatic notes) shows the withdrawal represented a decisive break from Argentina's prior strategy of diversified hedging toward explicit alignment with Western powers (Milei, 2023; Mondino, 2023). The region's experience with great power competition during the Cold War created strong preferences for non-alignment and hedging strategies that allowed countries to maximize benefits from relationships with competing powers while avoiding exclusive alignments that might limit policy flexibility. The concept of strategic autonomy has evolved significantly since its original formulation during the Cold War era. Still, its core emphasis on preserving policy flexibility through diversified partnerships remains relevant to contemporary international relations. Argentina's abandonment of this approach represents a fundamental shift that could influence broader regional patterns if other countries follow a similar path during their domestic political transitions. Perón's "Third Position", which provided intellectual foundations for subsequent Argentine foreign policy approaches, explicitly rejected binary choices between great power blocs in favor of independent paths that maximized national autonomy. This tradition influenced not only Argentine diplomacy but also broader Latin American approaches to international relations, which emphasized sovereignty, non-interference, and pragmatic cooperation across ideological boundaries.

The erosion of strategic autonomy traditions in Argentina reflects contemporary pressures facing middle powers in an increasingly polarized international system. Rather than a binary choice, Argentina's behavior sits mid-spectrum — pragmatically hedging by still holding economic ties with China (including a renewed US\$5bn activated swap line) while politically signalling closer alignment with Western institutions and the United States. This dynamic creates particular challenges for democracies where electoral politics may reward ideological consistency over pragmatic flexibility. Regional implications of Argentina's strategic realignment extend beyond bilateral relationships to affect broader efforts of Mercosur, Latin American integration, and collective influence in global governance. The fragmentation of regional approaches to international cooperation reduces collective bargaining power and limits the South American ability to influence global governance processes through coordinated positions. Brazil's regional leadership strategy, which had relied on expanded Latin American representation within Brics to balance great power influences, faces significant setbacks from Argentina's rejection. This outcome demonstrates how domestic political transitions in key regional powers can disrupt broader integration strategies and limit collective approaches to global challenges.

## 5.4 ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

The economic ramifications of Argentina's withdrawal extend far beyond immediate diplomatic relationships to affect fundamental aspects of development strategy and economic policy flexibility. The decision almost eliminated access to alternative financing mechanisms precisely when Argentina faces severe economic challenges that require maximum policy flexibility and diverse international partnerships to improve or mitigate its financial situation and debt conditions.

The New Development Bank represented a particularly significant opportunity cost given Argentina's chronic infrastructure deficits and limited access to traditional development financing. The bank's focus on infrastructure investment and sustainable development projects dovetailed with Argentina's pressing development needs—especially in transportation, energy, and digital

connectivity, sectors long weakened by chronic underinvestment stemming from fiscal constraints exacerbated by austerity measures and restricted access to international capital markets (New Development Bank, n.d.; World Bank, 2024). At the same time, Argentina's currency-swap arrangements with the People's Bank of China have continued to function as a pragmatic stabilization tool: by supplying yuan liquidity for imports and payments, the activated tranche of the swap has helped the Central Bank of Argentina (BCRA) preserve scarce dollar reserves and smooth international payments during episodes of peso volatility and capital flight (Banco Central de la República Argentina, 2025; Reuters, 2025). That said, the activated swap tranche is limited in scale relative to Argentina's structural financing shortfalls and remains politically contested, making it a useful backstop rather than a solution for external-sector vulnerability (International Monetary Fund, 2025; Chow, 2025).

Trade relationship disruptions pose risks across multiple sectors of the Argentine economy, from agricultural exports that provide crucial foreign exchange earnings to manufactured goods seeking access to the Chinese market. The uncertainty created by political tensions could impact long-term business planning and investment decisions of firms engaged in Chinese trade, potentially reducing export competitiveness and hindering economic diversification efforts. The broader message sent by Argentina's withdrawal regarding policy stability and international cooperation could affect investor confidence across multiple sectors and partner countries. International investors typically evaluate political risk when making long-term commitments, and dramatic policy reversals signal potential for future instability that increases risk premiums and reduces investment attractiveness.

Historically, Argentina's 20th- and 21st-century experience is best read as a sequence of cyclical policy regimes and recurring balance-of-payments vulnerabilities rather than as a simple story of "alignment = success." In the early 20th century, Argentina experienced export-led prosperity tied to British and global markets. This alignment was rooted in deep commercial and financial links, including British demand for agricultural exports, major British investment in railways and ports, and institutional affinities among Argentine elites. These factors simultaneously generated growth and embedded external dependence. The Great Depression and the 1930s turn toward protectionism set Argentina on a long path of import-substituting industrialization and expanded state intervention under Perón in the 1940s and 1950s. While these policies expanded manufacturing capacity and extended social provision, many historians and economists argue they also produced enduring structural rigidities — protected, often low-productivity sectors; persistent fiscal and external constraints driven by import-dependent capital goods; and political path dependence created by vested interests that made subsequent liberalization both costly and conflictual. (Cassini et al., 2021; Della Paolera & Taylor, 2003; Galiani & Somaini, 2018; Prebisch, 1950).

The late 20th century saw alternating attempts at market opening and stabilization (notably the 1991 Convertibility plan), which initially reduced inflation but left the economy exposed to shocks and fiscal rigidities culminating in the 2001–02 default and devaluation. The 21st century brought a commodity-driven recovery after 2003, followed by renewed macro stress and large IMF engagements (including the 2018/2019 program and the major IMF agreement and fiscal adjustment under the Milei administration in 2024–25); bouts of inflation, debt cycles, and political instability have repeatedly limited the gains from either exclusive Western alignment or inward isolation. The dominant lesson is that outcomes turned on policy design, sequencing, institutional capacity, and external shocks — not merely geopolitical alignment.

## 5.5 GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL COMPETITION

Argentina's withdrawal occurred within a broader context of intensifying competition between established Western institutions and emerging alternative arrangements that reflect fundamental changes in global power distributions and governance preferences. The case highlights how this institutional competition affects middle powers that have traditionally benefited from competing institutions to maximize policy flexibility and resource access. The proliferation of alternative multilateral institutions during the past two decades, including the Brics, G20, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the New Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and various regional arrangements, reflected widespread dissatisfaction with Western-dominated governance structures and a desire for greater representation of emerging economy perspectives. However, Argentina's episode demonstrates how domestic political volatility can undermine these alternative arrangements and potentially strengthen established institutions by default. The institutional competition between Western and non-Western arrangements creates both opportunities and challenges for middle powers like Argentina. Opportunities include access to alternative financing, reduced conditionality, and greater policy flexibility through institutional competition. Challenges include pressures to choose between competing arrangements and the potential for exclusion from institutional networks if relationships with key partners deteriorate.

Milei's choice of Western alignment eliminates these hedging opportunities and reduces bargaining power with other international partners. By abandoning alternative relationships, Buenos Aires potentially strengthens the negotiating position of Western institutions that no longer face competition for Argentine partnership. This dynamic could result in less favorable terms for international cooperation and reduced policy autonomy. The precedent established by Argentina's withdrawal could influence other countries facing similar domestic political transitions and pressures from great power competition. If explicit ideological alignment becomes more common, the foundation of contemporary institutional competition could face systematic erosion as countries adopt exclusive partnerships over diversified approaches.

## 5.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND FOREIGN POLICY

The Argentine case raises important questions about democratic governance and foreign-policy formation, particularly regarding the balance between electoral mandates and professional expertise in international relations. Milei's campaign promise to decline Argentina's scheduled Brics accession — and the December 22, 2023, letter formalizing that decision — helped generate rapid domestic momentum to reorient the country away from Global South multilateral frameworks. Additionally, excluding diplomatic professionals from key decision-making forums likely reduced careful consideration of the costs and practical complications of such shifts.

Democratic theory generally assumes that electoral competition and open public debate produce more informed and accountable foreign-policy outcomes than policies personalized by individual leaders. Yet the Argentine case suggests electoral politics can also create incentives for dramatic gestures that satisfy constituency preferences rather than maximize national interests — a tendency reinforced when executive authority is concentrated and professional input sidelined. This pattern extends beyond Brics: for instance, the government has announced its withdrawal from the WHO and plans to move its embassy to Jerusalem, following Washington's lead, even as it continues to engage with the IMF. Additionally, Milei's sharp anti-China rhetoric resonated with voters struggling with economic hardship, presenting Beijing as a convenient scapegoat. This narrative was amplified by partisan outlets and social media, turning foreign-policy rhetoric into a tool for political gain. Milei also blamed Argentina's crisis on the legacy of economic policies associated with Kirchnerismo and Peronism, which he argues exacerbated fiscal deficits, inflation, and unsustainable debt through extensive state intervention, unsustainable welfare programs, and protectionist measures. Moreover, he criticized the IMF for perpetuating Argentina's economic dependency and emphasized the need for market-driven reforms and privatization as part of his vision for recovery. His economic platform framed the crisis as an expanded failure of left-wing economic ideology, positioning himself as the solution to Argentina's chronic instability.

## 5.7 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Argentina's Brics rejection of accession opens several important avenues for future research on multilateral institutional development, Latin American foreign policy, and the intersection of domestic politics with international cooperation. The case provides a real experiment for testing theories about institutional resilience, member commitment, and the conditions under which ideological factors override economic considerations in foreign policy formation. Argentina's Brics decision exemplified what can be termed the "pendular trap"—the tendency of countries to swing between opposing international alignments rather than maintaining consistent strategic autonomy, a pattern typical of hedging states. Unlike traditional pendular diplomacy, which sought to balance competing powers while preserving independence, Milei's approach involved explicit alignment with one geopolitical bloc at the expense of relationships with others. This represented a fundamental departure from Argentina's historical foreign-policy tradition: from Perón's Third Position to the Kirchners' emphasis on South-South cooperation, Argentina long sought to maximize autonomy through diversified partnerships; even during periods of closer U.S. alignment, such as under Carlos Menem's administration in the 1990s, the country maintained significant relationships with alternative partners. By explicitly choosing sides in great-power competition, Milei reduced Argentina's diplomatic flexibility and potential bargaining power with other international partners.

## 5.8 INSTITUTIONAL VULNERABILITIES AND GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

Argentina's withdrawal exposed significant institutional vulnerabilities within Brics governance structures that have broader implications for emerging multilateral organizations. The organization lacked formal procedures for handling post-invitation withdrawals, reflecting broader challenges in institutional development for consensus-based arrangements. The incident revealed the problem of "incomplete contracting," in which accession rules failed to specify procedures for unexpected contingencies such as outright rejection. While Brics had developed criteria for membership expansion, it had not anticipated scenarios where invited countries would reverse course at the implementation stage. This gap in institutional design created uncertainty about the organization's ability to manage future expansion processes effectively. The withdrawal also highlighted the tension between the bloc's aspirations, lack of institutionalization, and an informal governance culture. Informal institutions offer flexibility but sacrifice predictability and binding commitment. Argentina's case demonstrated how this trade-off could undermine organizational credibility with potential future members, who might question the permanence or real interest of their accession.

## 5.9 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

Section 4.2 documents Milei's ideological rhetoric and rapid policy reversal; this pattern suggests that ideational commitments can reweight material incentives, implying that leaders may prioritize domestic signalling over international economic benefits when audience costs and electoral competition are high. Theoretically, this supports a constructivist refinement of standard materialist accounts, and practically suggests that multilateral bodies seeking durable enlargement should adopt contingency clauses, phased accession, and minimal binding guarantees to protect projects and third parties from post-invitation political volatility.

The case also supports institutional analysis, emphasizing how domestic political transitions can rapidly reshape international commitments. The speed and comprehensive nature of Argentina's foreign policy reorientation under Milei demonstrate the

vulnerability of multilateral arrangements that depend primarily on political consensus rather than binding legal frameworks. The withdrawal exposed weaknesses in Brics institutional architecture that extend beyond Argentina's specific case. The organization's reliance on consensus-based decision-making and informal governance structures, while providing flexibility for diverse membership, exposed critical vulnerabilities when faced with rapid domestic political transitions. Unlike other more established international institutions with comprehensive legal frameworks and binding commitments, Brics operates primarily through political agreements and voluntary cooperation. This institutional design reflected the organization's origins as an alternative to Western-dominated institutions, emphasizing sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. However, these same principles that attracted diverse membership also made the organization vulnerable to sudden policy reversals. The absence of formal procedures for handling post-invitation withdrawals creates future uncertainty about implementation processes and organizational credibility. The institutional implications extend to further expansion processes and mechanisms for member commitment. Argentina's case demonstrated that even formal invitations backed by extensive diplomatic negotiations could be reversed through unilateral domestic political decisions. This precedent potentially undermines the organization's appeal to future candidates who might question the permanence and value of membership offers.

Argentina's withdrawal can be understood within broader patterns of Latin American responses to the intensification of great power competition. The region's countries are increasingly facing pressures to choose between competing geopolitical alignments rather than maintaining their traditional strategies of strategic autonomy. Brazil's continued commitment to Brics despite Argentina's withdrawal illustrates different approaches to managing these pressures, with Brasília maintaining its emphasis on regional leadership and South-South cooperation. The contrast between Argentine and Brazilian approaches reflects different interpretations of national interest and regional responsibility. While Argentina under Milei prioritized ideological consistency and Western alignment, Brazil under Lula continued emphasizing regional integration and alternative multilateral arrangements. This divergence potentially weakens Latin American collective influence in global governance forums and complicates regional integration efforts. Regional capitals have adopted a range of strategies for managing great-power competition — from Chile's relatively pro-Western posture, which pairs strong institutional and normative ties to the United States and Europe with pragmatic economic engagement with China, to Mexico's constitutionalized non-intervention and pragmatic North-America-oriented hedging — while Argentina's explicit rejection of Brics represents a sharper departure from this middle path, signaling a comprehensive realignment toward Western institutions and values.

The economic consequences of Argentina's withdrawal extend beyond immediate diplomatic relationships to affect concrete trade and investment patterns. China's position as Argentina's second-largest trading partner made the ideological rejection of Brics membership particularly costly. The decision effectively prioritized symbolic political alignment over established economic relationships that had provided crucial support during previous financial crises.

Currency swap arrangements with China, worth approximately \$18.5 billion, had provided essential liquidity during peso instability and inflation crises. These mechanisms enabled Argentina to reduce its dependence on dollar reserves and maintain its international payments capacity during economic turbulence. Milei's ideological opposition to Chinese cooperation potentially eliminated these stabilizing mechanisms precisely when Argentina faced severe economic challenges. The New Development Bank represented another significant economic opportunity sacrificed through withdrawal. As an alternative to traditional Western financial institutions, the bank offered potential financing for infrastructure and development projects without the conditionality typically imposed by the IMF and World Bank. Argentina's exclusion from this financing source occurred during a period when the country desperately needed investment capital for economic stabilization and growth.

Agricultural trade relationships with Brics members, particularly China's imports of Argentine beef, soybeans, and other commodities, face potential disruption from deteriorated political relationships. While economic logic suggested these trade flows would continue regardless of political tensions, the withdrawal created unnecessary uncertainty in crucial export markets during a period when Argentina needed maximum export revenue to address balance of payments challenges. The domestic political context surrounding Milei's decision reveals complex interactions between electoral promises, ideological commitments, and practical governance challenges. Milei's electoral coalition included significant constituencies opposed to Chinese influence in Argentina, viewing previous governments' partnerships with Beijing as proof of ideological compromise. This sentiment particularly resonated among urban middle-class voters who supported Milei's libertarian economic agenda and anti-establishment rhetoric.

The speed of the withdrawal decision reflected Milei's campaign promise to fundamentally reorient Argentine foreign policy away from what he characterized as authoritarian partnerships. His electoral victory provided a mandate for dramatic policy changes, but the unilateral nature of the Brics withdrawal suggested decision-making processes that bypassed traditional institutional consultations and analytical frameworks. Audience costs theory helps explain why Milei felt compelled to fulfill this particular campaign commitment despite obvious economic disadvantages. Having publicly criticized Brics as a "communist" organization and promised withdrawal during the campaign, reversing course would have imposed significant political costs on his electoral base.

This dynamic illustrates how electoral politics can constrain foreign policy flexibility and force suboptimal decisions from broader national interest perspectives. The personalized nature of foreign policy decision-making under Milei contrasted sharply with traditional Argentine diplomatic processes that emphasized institutional consultation and gradual policy evolution. Career diplomats and foreign policy experts were reportedly excluded from the withdrawal decision, reflecting broader patterns of institutional disruption that characterized Milei's approach to governance across multiple policy areas. Argentina's withdrawal occurred within a broader context of intensifying global polarization that increasingly constrains traditional middle power strategies. The multipolar international system that emerged following the Cold War allowed countries like Argentina to pursue diversified partnerships and strategic autonomy. However, renewed great power competition between the United States and China has created pressures for more explicit alignment, which limits traditional hedging strategies. The timing of Argentina's decision coincided with similar pressures on other middle powers worldwide to choose sides in great power competition. European countries faced analogous pressures regarding Chinese technology and investment, while Asian nations navigated between U.S. security partnerships and Chinese economic relationships. Argentina's explicit choice of Western alignment represented one extreme response to these systemic pressures. The institutional implications extend beyond Brics to other alternative multilateral arrangements that challenge Western institutional dominance. Argentina's withdrawal potentially signals broader fragility in South-South cooperation mechanisms when they conflict with domestic political imperatives in member countries. This dynamic could impact other initiatives, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank or regional organizations in Africa and Asia.

The case also illustrates limitations of economic incentives in maintaining multilateral cooperation when they conflict with domestic political requirements. Despite clear economic benefits from Brics membership, ideological factors ultimately determined policy outcomes. This pattern suggests that emerging multilateral institutions may require stronger institutional mechanisms to insulate cooperation from domestic political volatility if they aim to establish sustainable alternatives to established Western arrangements.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Argentina's withdrawal from Brics membership represents more than a single policy reversal; it illustrates fundamental challenges facing Latin American countries navigating intensifying great power competition and the broader fragility of emerging multilateral institutions in an era of domestic political volatility. The decision marked a clear departure from Argentina's historical tradition of strategic autonomy, replacing nuanced balancing with explicit alignment that sacrificed diplomatic flexibility for ideological consistency. The episode revealed critical institutional vulnerabilities of emerging multilateral organizations that lack binding enforcement mechanisms and depend entirely on political consensus. As global polarization intensifies, these institutions face growing pressure from domestic political changes that can abruptly reshape international commitments. The challenge for organizations like Brics lies in developing institutional frameworks robust enough to weather such political volatility while maintaining the flexibility that attracts diverse membership. Argentina's case demonstrates that informal governance structures, while providing operational flexibility, create dangerous precedents when political will evaporates suddenly.

The theoretical implications extend beyond institutional design to fundamental questions about state behavior in contemporary international relations. The Argentine case challenges traditional assumptions about rational state behavior by demonstrating how ideological frameworks can systematically override apparent material interests. This finding has particular relevance for understanding foreign policy behavior in polarized domestic political contexts where electoral coalitions reward ideological consistency over pragmatic calculation. For Argentina specifically, the long-term consequences of this strategic reorientation remain profoundly uncertain. While Milei's ideological approach may satisfy immediate domestic political constituencies, it has demonstrably reduced Argentina's international bargaining power and limited access to alternative financing mechanisms during a period of severe economic crisis. The country's historical experience suggests that exclusive alignment with Western powers rarely yields substantial economic benefits, while the abandonment of diversified partnerships eliminates crucial policy options for managing future crises. The decision's economic ramifications extend far beyond symbolic politics to affect concrete trade relationships, investment flows, and financial stability mechanisms. By rejecting currency swap arrangements and potential New Development Bank financing, Argentina sacrificed essential economic tools for managing balance of payments pressures and development financing needs. These costs become particularly significant given Argentina's chronic economic instability and recurring financial crises that have historically required diverse international partnerships for successful resolution.

Regional implications prove equally consequential for broader patterns of Latin American integration and collective influence in global governance. Argentina's withdrawal left Brazil isolated as the primary South American voice within Brics, potentially reducing the region's collective influence within the organization and limiting opportunities for coordinated regional approaches to global challenges. This fragmentation reflects broader difficulties in maintaining South American unity amid divergent domestic political trends that prioritize ideological alignment over regional cooperation. The broader lesson extends beyond Argentina to other Latin American countries facing similar pressures to choose sides in intensifying great power competition. The traditional strategy of pendular diplomacy—seeking to balance competing powers while preserving autonomy—faces growing constraints as geopolitical polarization intensifies and major powers increasingly demand explicit alignment rather than

neutral positions. Countries that abandon this approach risk losing the diplomatic flexibility that has historically allowed smaller powers to maximize their interests in an anarchic international system. The case illuminates persistent tensions between domestic political imperatives and strategic foreign policy considerations that characterize democratic governance in volatile political contexts. Electoral promises and ideological commitments can create powerful constraints on foreign policy flexibility, forcing leaders to pursue suboptimal strategies from a broader national interest perspective. This dynamic suggests that emerging multilateral institutions may need to develop mechanisms for managing domestic political transitions that threaten institutional continuity and member commitment.

Argentina's experience also highlights the continuing relevance of ideological factors in international relations, even in an era supposedly dominated by economic considerations and pragmatic calculation. Milei's decision demonstrated that leaders' worldviews can systematically override apparent economic interests, particularly when domestic political coalitions reward ideological consistency over material benefits. This dynamic complicates efforts to build stable multilateral institutions based purely on functional cooperation and shared economic interests. The institutional implications extend beyond Brics to broader questions about building sustainable alternatives to Western-dominated global governance structures. If emerging multilateral institutions cannot maintain member commitment through domestic political transitions, their ability to provide credible alternatives to established institutions becomes severely limited. This vulnerability may require a fundamental reevaluation of institutional design principles that strike a balance between flexibility and binding commitment mechanisms. Historical precedents suggest that Argentina's explicit Western alignment may prove economically disappointing while eliminating crucial policy options for managing future challenges. The country's experience during the 1990s under Carlos Menem, when close U.S. relations failed to prevent the 2001 economic crisis, offers a cautionary reminder that ideological alignment rarely translates into substantial material support during times of crisis. Argentina's abandonment of diversified partnerships may therefore prove strategically myopic, as it eliminates hedging options precisely when economic volatility requires maximum diplomatic flexibility.

The timing of Argentina's withdrawal, occurring amid broader global institutional upheaval and great power competition, may have established precedents that extend far beyond this specific case. If other countries facing domestic political transitions follow similar patterns of abandoning multilateral commitments for ideological reasons, the foundation of contemporary international cooperation could face systematic erosion. This dynamic would particularly affect emerging economies that depend on diverse international partnerships for development financing and trade opportunities. As the global order continues evolving toward increased multipolarity and institutional competition, Argentina's Brics withdrawal serves as a cautionary tale about the risks of abandoning strategic autonomy for ideological alignment. The decision demonstrated how domestic political considerations can supersede apparent national interests, with consequences that extend far beyond immediate policy reversals to impact long-term strategic positioning in an increasingly complex international system. The case highlights both the vulnerability of emerging multilateral institutions to domestic political volatility and the enduring significance of ideological factors in shaping state behavior, even when they contradict apparent material interests and historical strategic traditions.

The broader significance of Argentina's withdrawal, therefore, lies not merely in its impact on Brics institutional development or regional integration prospects, but in what it reveals about fundamental challenges facing international cooperation in an era of domestic political polarization and intensifying great power competition. These dynamics may require entirely new approaches to institutional design and member commitment that can weather the storms of domestic political change while preserving the flexibility that makes multilateral cooperation attractive to diverse membership. Argentina's case provides both a warning about institutional fragility and an opportunity to develop more robust frameworks for sustainable international cooperation in an increasingly volatile global political environment.

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