

be much easier and less invasive to administer than those that must cross the blood–brain barrier, the brain’s first line of defence against pathogens and other insults from the body.

In the reverse direction, the effects of our emotions or mood on our capacity to recover from illness could also be exploited. There is, for instance, preliminary work under way testing whether stimulating certain areas of the brain that respond to reward and produce feelings of positivity could enhance recovery from conditions such as heart attacks. Perhaps even more exciting is the possibility that making changes to our behaviour – to reduce stress, say – could have similar benefits.

For neuroscientists, it’s time to look beyond the brain. And clinicians treating the body mustn’t assume the brain is above getting involved – its activity could be influencing a wide range of conditions, from mild infections to chronic obesity.

1. Koren, T. et al. *Cell* **184**, 5902–5915 (2021).
2. Taylor, K. R. et al. *Nature* **623**, 366–374 (2023).
3. Lovelace, J. W. et al. *Nature* **623**, 387–396 (2023).
4. Finn, E. S., Poldrack, R. A. & Shine, J. M. *Nature* **623**, 263–273 (2023).

Argentina’s economy won’t be fixed by cutting science funding

The nation must consider the wider benefits of research as it chooses its next president.

At the end of last month, people in Argentina voted in the first round of presidential elections. Sergio Massa, the current economy minister for the ruling centre-left party, took a narrow lead over economist and television personality Javier Milei of the far-right Libertarian party. Neither candidate secured the required majority, so there will now be a second round of voting on 19 November.

If elected, Milei plans a radical reshaping of funding for science, the environment, health and education. His aim is to shrink spending by Argentina’s heavily indebted government by 15% of gross domestic product (GDP).

Milei’s plan would see the closure of Argentina’s main public science-funding agency, the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), which provides funding for 12,000 researchers at 300 institutions at an annual cost of US\$400 million. Furthermore, he says he would axe three ministries – environment, health and the Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity. Milei wants



Sergio Massa (right) and Javier Milei are battling for Argentina’s presidency.

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private companies to run primary, secondary and university education, with parents and students given vouchers to spend in educational institutions of their choice. He also intends to cut what he sees as barriers to trade, which could include health and environmental regulations.

Many in Argentina’s science community are alarmed. Victor Ramos, president of Argentina’s National Academy of Exact, Physical and Natural Sciences in Buenos Aires, wrote in *Nature* that he has “never heard a politician propose such extreme ideas” in his country in the nearly 60 years since he graduated from the University of Buenos Aires in 1965.

There’s no doubting that Argentina’s leaders have let their people down. Around 40% of the population lives in poverty, caused in part by inflation running at more than 100%. The country is the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF’s) largest debtor, and owes around \$46 billion. In June, the IMF threw Argentina a lifeline, which allowed the nation to continue borrowing to keep up with its loan repayments to the fund and other creditors.

Yet it is worth pausing to take in Milei’s proposal, and whether it will kick-start Argentina’s stuttering economy. The world economy as a whole is experiencing a period of low growth. But the solution is not to cut back on research and development (R&D), let alone abolish an entire science-funding agency. The opposite needs to happen, on the basis of much evidence that investment in R&D – including basic science – boosts economic growth (see, for example, A. J. Salter and B. R. Martin *Res. Policy* **30**, 509–532; 2001).

Argentina currently spends just 0.5% of its GDP on R&D, which is low even by the standards of some middle-income countries, notably Brazil (which spends around 1.2%). The average for high-income nations was around 2.7% in 2020. That is what Argentina should aspire to. The change won’t happen overnight, and needs stable economic management. Instead of abolishing its funding agency and key ministries, the nation’s leaders need to work closely with scientists and tap into their knowledge and skills. Researchers are ready to play their part. They just need an opportunity to contribute.