

Coca in Argentina: Resistance to being classified as a “narcotic”

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“...the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs ... includes the coca leaf as a narcotic, which should be considered a fundamental error because this plant in its natural state is not a narcotic, is not harmful to health and, on the contrary, is beneficial. It does not cause any kind of dependency and cannot be considered a vice,” (Opinion of Judge Falú in the “Coronel” ruling in the Salta Federal Court of Appeals, 1995).

Introduction:

This document addresses the status of coca in Argentina and is divided into three sections.

The first section analyzes the legal changes adopted since the second half of the 20th century. Restrictions on the circulation of coca in the country, followed by prohibition, were adopted in line with the international model regarding narcotics. Total prohibition was imposed in the 1970s to deal with historic coca consumption in the country’s northeast region (NOA). The law criminalizing possession was modified a decade later. It allowed for consumption for the purposes of chewing or brewing tea, but maintained all other prohibitions.

The second section looks at the repercussions of these legal changes, especially since prohibition, on the criminal justice system. While prohibition was implemented and applied by the security forces, judges in the NOA region interpreted the scope of criminal laws and determined that coca was not a narcotic substance. Nevertheless, criminal law continued to apply to different conducts related to coca, particularly its distribution, sometimes with serious consequences.

The final section describes the market for coca in the country and how it has reacted to legal changes. It places special emphasis on the situation that occurred during the COVID 19 pandemic and efforts to move forward with regulation of the coca market, which have been spearheaded in the NOA provinces.

1. History of the coca in Argentina: From restrictions to attempted prohibition:

The use of coca in Argentina dates to before the foundation of the republic and is part of the culture of the original peoples of the central Andes. In the 20th century, in line with development of the international system to control narcotics, Argentina adopted administrative and criminal norms to restrict the use of coca and, later, prohibit it. Despite these efforts, historic patterns of use, especially the country's northern region, made it impossible to consider it a banned substance or, more specifically, a narcotic.

Coca is consumed primarily in Argentina's northwest region (NOA), which includes the Catamarca, Jujuy, La Rioja, Salta, Santiago del Estero and Tucumán provinces. The NOA borders Bolivia to the north and Chile to the west. While coca has been used in this region for centuries, consumption has spread more recently to different parts of the country, including the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area or AMBA.ⁱ

While coca consumption in the NOA has features similar to those of the descendants of original peoples in other regions of the central Andes, some distinctive characteristics have developed over the years in Argentina. In addition to its use by descendants of original peoples, consumption has extended to other sectors as a form of regional identity, including among the elites in the NOA provinces. Consumption is not only found among campesinos and miners, but also among the region's middle and upper classes. It is not only used in rituals or trying to predict the future, but both during work and leisure time (Rabey, 1989; Abduca-Metaal, 2013).

Coca leaves are also consumed in other parts of the country, but not as extensively. This is the result of people from the NOA migrating to other parts of the country (De la Cruz Brabo Guerra, 2016) or part of the cultural heritage of migrants from Bolivia and Peru who have moved to Argentina. Increased use can also be attributed to people consuming it the same way they consume other beverages (coffee, tea or yerba mate).

In Argentina, similar to other countries in the region, regulations for substances that would later be labelled "narcotics" were first imposed toward the end of the second decade of the 20th century. These regulations followed along the lines of emerging international legislation. First, administrative norms limited the importation, transportation and sale to sectors that met specific requirements. Later, reforms to the Criminal Code in 1924 and 1926 added possession of "narcotics" and "alkaloids" (Corda, 2016; 2018).

Coca, however, is not specifically mentioned in any of the first changes. It is not included among the substances listed in Article 1 of Decree 126.351, passed in 1938, which established bylaws for trafficking in "narcotics" (it is one of the first norms that uses this word from the international system). The following year, Decree 27.808 placed the first limits on trade and wholesale of coca leaves,

requiring vendors to register with the National Department of Health.ⁱⁱ Two years later, Decree 88.096 prohibited the sale and acquisition of coca leaves in amounts greater than one kilo without authorization from the National Department of Health.

Rules and regulations multiplied over the following years. While they were aimed at limiting and eradicating the market for coca leaves, they still recognized its use. In 1945, Decree Law 31.208 called on the National Bureau of Public Health (the successor to the National Department of Healthⁱⁱⁱ) to establish the maximum amount of coca leaves that could be imported annually,^{iv} even though it appears that this decree was not applied until 1952. This norm and others like it from 1947, 1948 and 1949 were aimed at eradicating its use. At the same time, between 1947 and 1948, the Argentine and Bolivian governments agreed that for a five-year period (until 1952) Bolivia would export 500,000 kilos of coca leaves annually to Argentina (Rabey, 1989: 57-58; Abduca, 2010).

This regulatory focus (with the goal of eradication) appears to be in line with the changes concerning coca that were being crafted within the U.N. system. The U.N. Commission of Enquiry on the Coca Leaf concluded its report in May 1950. While the report characterized coca use as a “habit” and not an “addiction,” it recommended “controlling its distribution and finally of gradually eradicating the practice of chewing.” Regarding Argentina, the report states: “In view of the existence in the north of the Argentine Republic of a large group of chewers who ... consume annually a considerable quantity of coca leaf, it would be desirable that the Government of that country should be invited to collaborate to the extent it may deem necessary in the gradual suppression of the coca leaf in that area” (Op. cit.:104). A series of new resolutions were produced reflecting this approach from the health sector, now known as the Ministry of Health (Rabey, 1989: 59-60).

The following year, Resolution 34.869 listed the coca leaf as a narcotic, adding it to the list in Article 1 of Decree 126.351 from 1938, and established a “chewing zone,” which included the provinces of Jujuy, Salta and Tucumán (the last one removed after 1958) where coca could be imported, distributed and sold. For the first time, it established an amount that could be imported, starting with 250,000 kilos in 1952 and falling by 10,000 kilos annually until it was completely eradicated in 25 years (Rabey, 1989: 60-61).

The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs was signed in 1961, bringing together several treaties related to drugs that had been adopted over the previous years. Argentina signed the convention on July 31, 1961 and ratified it in 1963 through Decree 7.672 (Article 7), but with a reservation regarding the sale and use of coca. In addition, Law 17.818, which was approved in 1968 as part of the administrative structure of the treaty, clarified the issue of coca imports in Article 5, stating: “Narcotics can be imported, exported or re-exported only through ports and airports under the jurisdiction of Customs in the Federal Capital, with the

exception of coca, which can be sold in the region determined by the national health authority, and imported through customs agencies on the border with the Republic of Bolivia.” This legislation recognized the existence of a “legitimate” market for coca. Furthermore, its implementing bylaws (Decree 7250/68) clarified that the national health authority should “demarcate the zone where coca leaves can be sold, determine annual quantities that can be imported and award the corresponding import permits.” These norms are still in force today.

This decree, however, defined coca as a “narcotic,” which would have legal consequences when applied in criminal law. As a result of this legislation, the Criminal Code from the 1920s was modified through Law 17.567 at the end of 1968. The new legislation also used the term “narcotics” to refer to the substances that it criminalized with sentences ranging from one to six years in prison. Possession for personal consumption was exempt, however. This law only lasted until 1973, when it was overturned for having been approved by the military government. The original law from 1926 was reinstated.

The first special narcotics legislation, Law 20.771, was approved in 1974. It broadened the scope of criminalized conduct and increased penalties. The crime of trafficking was punishable with prison sentences from three to 12 years, and possession, including for personal consumption, with one to six years in prison. The law called for the national health authority to determine the definition of “narcotics” and what should be included. The list was published in Resolution 162 by the Public Health Secretariat in 1974 and included “coca (leaves) - *Erythroxylum coca*.”

The different legislation created contradictions between a regulated market (with limitations) and conduct that there was being addressed with increasingly restrictive laws. The situation worsened during the 1970s, when the military government (1976-1983) went beyond just eliminating regulations for coca.^v

The last permit to legally import coca leaves (10,000 kilos) was granted in 1976 under the system that began operating in 1951. The following year, Article 1 of Law 21.671 prohibited (although without stipulating the legal consequences) “... planting, growing, cultivating and harvesting poppies (*Papaver somniferum* L.), marijuana (*Cannabis sativa* L.) and coca (*Erythroxylum coca* Lam),” even though coca was rarely cultivated in Argentina (Abduca, 2010: 241-2). In 1978, Decree 648 established a prohibition “... throughout the country for the import of coca leaves for habitual consumption or chewing.” Resolution 34.869 repealed the mechanism established in 1951, with narcotics regulated administratively through Law 7.818 and criminally through Law 20.771. The following year, Law 22.015 repealed the reservation regarding the sale and use of coca that the Argentine government included when it signed the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs.

Coca could no longer be legally imported to Argentina starting in 1977 and other norms were adjusted over the following years to strengthen the prohibition (in administrative and criminal terms) of the market for coca and consumption of coca leaves in Argentina.

This legislation facilitated the application of criminal law, particularly for people involved in importing and distributing coca. The return to democracy in 1983 would produce progress, but also setbacks, in the application of criminal legislation regarding narcotics, including coca (Corda, 2018: 20-1).

In 1986, the Supreme Court handed down the “Bazterrica” ruling, which determined that criminalizing possession for personal consumption included in Law 20.771 was unconstitutional. It reverted back to the previous law.^{vi} Also in 1986, different bills were submitted in the Senate to modify or replace existing legislation on narcotics. The bills included progressive aspects, such as decriminalizing possession for personal consumption and reducing sentences for small-scale trafficking, but there was no mention of a differentiated treatment with respect to coca or its consumption.

Different senators from the northern provinces vehemently argued that the use of coca in its natural state should not be included in criminal legislation.^{vii} A proposal from one senator was accepted, leading to the inclusion of following paragraph in the article defining the term narcotics: “Possession and consumption of coca in its natural state, used in the practice of *coqueo* or chewing, or as an infused beverage, will not be considered as possession or consumption of narcotics” (Daily Sessions of the Senate Chamber, 1986a and 1986b).

Different aspects of the legislation were modified when it reached the House of Representatives. Regarding coca, the paragraph added by the Senate was eliminated and a more restrictive paragraph was included as Article 15. This article stated that possession of coca in its natural state for chewing or an infusion was a crime, but gave the judge discretionary power to reduce or exonerate the penalty of possession for personal consumption (which ranged from one month to two years in prison) when the crime was committed in one of the “traditional chewing zones” and for “ancestral customs”^{viii} (Daily Sessions of the House of Representatives, 1989a).

The debate on the modified bill in the House of Representative began in February 1989. Two months earlier, Argentina had signed the U.N. Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, which focused on the repressive aspects of earlier treaties, but also had a clause on the situation of coca. Article 14 calls for measures to eradicate the coca bush (among other plants) and prevent illicit demand, but Section 2 also clarifies that: “The measures adopted shall respect fundamental human rights and shall take due account of

traditional licit uses, where there is historic evidence of such use, as well as the protection of the environment.”

The modified texts created a great deal of resistance among lawmakers. The most strenuous opposition came from House members from northern provinces, some of whom admitted during their floor interventions that they used coca, eliciting applause from their colleagues^{ix} (Daily Sessions of the House of Representatives, 1989b). The resistance of these lawmakers, along with others from different regions of the country that supported them, convinced more than half of the members to vote against the changes introduced through Article 15.^x Finally, one of the speakers proposed that the original text from the Senate version become part of Article 15 in the House version (Daily Sessions of the House of Representatives, 1989c). This version of the legislation was approved without modifications when it returned to the Senate (Daily Sessions of the Senate, 1989).

While the text that was approved recognized the use of coca in the country and determined that possession for personal use would not be criminalized, a review of the congressional debates shows that something far more ambitious had been considered. The debates show that the initial idea was to remove coca from the list of narcotics, but the final text only states that possession or consumption of coca leaves in their natural state and for use in chewing or infusion would not be a crime. In the end, the law still considered coca a narcotic and all other conducts involving it (importation, distribution and sale) as narcotics-related crimes.

Regardless of what was established in the text, resistance continued among people in the NOA and surrounding areas. Most importantly, judges in this part of the country began to interpret the law in such a way that it started to lose its operational applicability.

2. The phenomenon of application of the law with respect to coca:

The first section presented three distinct moments to analyze application of administrative and criminal legislation regarding coca: 1) Creation of the a regulated market in the region where coca is traditionally consumed with the eventual goal of its eradication, implemented in 1951; 2) Implementation of a system of complete prohibition with laws approved in 1977 and 1978; 3) Approval of Law 23.737 in 1989, which includes Article 15, which does not consider possession or use of coca leaves as possession of a narcotic.

While the approaches in these three periods are different, there is a common denominator that is still operative today -- judges in the northwest of the country, although there might be exceptions, do not consider coca a “narcotic.”^{xi} The opposite is true in the rest of the country, with judges, again with some exceptions, seeing coca as just another narcotic substance.

The summary of a 1976 ruling from the Córdoba Federal Court of Appeals (in the center of the country and outside the tradition zone where coca is used) shows that cases involving possession of coca leaves began around 1974.^{xii} In addition, the fact that coca was included in administrative legislation on narcotics (Law 17.818 of 1968) allowed for application of criminal law for possession as a narcotic.^{xiii} This occurred even before Resolution 164/74, which established the list of substances included for the first time in the Special Narcotics Law or Law 20.771 (*Revista Jurídica La Ley*, 1977:547).

In the area of traditional consumption, however, no conflicts with the criminal code were registered, even though the regulated market coexisted with another clandestine market, with more coca than allowed by law entering the country (Rabey, 1989:61-64; Abduca, 2010:243-247). Even after the prohibition, in 1978 and 1979 the federal courts in Jujuy and Salta continued to use decriminalizing criteria.^{xiv}

Application of the law became more rigorous with the end of the earlier system and imposition of national prohibition between 1977 and 1978. This is illustrated in a National Supreme Court of Justice (CSJN) case from 1983.^{xv} On May 20, 1978, two months after Decree 648/78 was published imposing coca prohibition, 30 kilos of coca for sale were seized from a butcher shop located around 20 kilometers from the city of Salta. The judge in the trial adopted a decriminalizing position,^{xvi} but the Tucumán Federal Court of Appeals overturned the ruling and sentenced the shop owner to three years in prison for the sale of narcotics.

In September 1981, a prosecutor for the CSJN argued that the sentence should be confirmed. He argued that the law had allowed for exceptions regarding coca in Jujuy and Salta, areas of traditional consumption, but that ended in 1978 with the decree establishing national prohibition. This argument was accepted by the majority of the CSJN Justices in a ruling in July 1983. One of the five members on the court, however, dissented. The dissenting judge wrote that the 1978 decree only prohibited importation of coca and because it was a decree and not a law, it could not eliminate the exception for traditional coca-consuming provinces established in Argentina's reservation when it ratified in the Single Convention (Decree Law 7672/63) and the administrative law for narcotics (Law 17.818). The judge further argued that the reservation to the Single Convention was only removed in 1979 through Law 22.015, which means that it occurred prior to the incident included in the case and did not apply.

The return of democracy appears to have supported the idea that coca should not be classified as a narcotic, despite being listed as such in legislation. A CSJN decision from 1988 illustrates this point.^{xvii} The case involved three people who entered Mendoza, Argentina from Chile with 278 tea bags containing coca that had been previously acquired in Bolivia and Peru. They were arrested and given three-year suspended sentences (both by the local judge and then the Mendoza

Federal Court of Appeals) for bringing narcotics into the country. The CSJN ruled that for a substance to be considered a narcotic, it not only had to be included on the list, but also had to produce a physical or psychological addiction. In this case, the court ruled that while customs regulations might apply to the coca brought into the country, it did not fit the criteria or application of the narcotics law (20.771)

The same criteria is found in Article 15 from the 1989 law, adding to the argument that coca is not a narcotic. Two rulings from the Tucumán Federal Court of Appeals from late 1980 also reflected this criteria, although there was some dissent.^{xviii} The cases involved possession of coca, with one of cases including coca transported in a vehicle. One case ended with a one-year suspended sentence and the other with an 18-month suspended sentence for contraband. The prosecutors in both cases asked that the defendants be sentenced for trafficking, requesting three-year suspended sentences. Two of the three judges agreed with the contraband sentence, stating that coca is not a narcotic, so trafficking laws could not apply. They cited Article 15 in Law 23.737. The third judge, in a dissenting opinion, wrote that Article 15 should be declared unconstitutional because it violates the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and proposed a one-year sentence for possession of narcotics, also based on Law 23.737.

The criteria that conduct involving coca was not covered by the narcotics law (with the understanding that coca is not a narcotic) but, instead, considered a customs crime (depending on the value and quality) gained ground throughout the 1990s, primarily because of the legal interpretations of the majority of judge in the NOA,

The 1995 “Coronel” ruling by the Salta Federal Court of Appeals^{xix} not only reflected this legislative and jurisprudential evolution, but expanded its scope and criticized existing legislation for going against the reality in this region of the country. The ruling involved the case of three people who were each transporting around 15 kilos of coca leaves for personal use and retail sale in the zone. One of the three people fled, but the other two were found guilty of contraband, receiving suspended sentences of one and three years, respectively.

In addition to citing the first rulings from Salta and Jujuy responding to the prohibition of the 1970s, the court also cited precedents from 1994 and 1995, reiterating the criteria that coca should not be classified as a narcotic when it is used for chewing. The court, above all, invoked Article 15 in Law 23.737, dismissing the charge of trafficking, but allowing for administrative or customs violation if applicable.^{xx} One of the cases cited found that it was not a crime to transport 20 kilos of coca from Jujuy to the province of Catamarca if it was being transported by the person who would be using it for personal or family consumption.^{xxi}

The ruling determined that the events did not meet the criteria of narcotics trafficking included in Article 5 of Law 23.737 (with sentences between four and 15 years in prison), contraband of narcotics (with sentences from four years and six months to 16 years in prison), or aggravated contraband of substances that could affect public health (with sentences between four and 10 years). Depending on the value of the merchandise, they could be considered an administrative violation, with a fine between two and 10 times the value of the merchandise) or contraband (with sentences between two and eight years in prison). More recently, courts have been applying the figure of concealment of contraband, which carries sentences between six months and three years in prison).

Besides the legal solution, the ruling defended the practice of chewing coca, citing different national and international studies, criticized as a mistake the inclusion of coca as a narcotic in national and international law, and stated that prohibition could not eradicate such as deeply rooted custom, making the law ineffective.^{xxii}

This same criteria can be found in different rulings from both chambers of the Salta Federal Court of Appeals in recent years, including the “Fernández Acosta” ruling that was handed down in late 2018 from Chamber 1^{xxiii} and is similar to the “Coronel” decision. The 2018 ruling confirmed an innocent verdict for two people in a case involving concealment of contraband. They had been arrested in August 2017 with coca leaves within 50 kilometers of the Bolivian border. While the ruling does not specify the amount of coca, it does state that the amount was below what is considered an administrative violation under customs regulations. Seven months earlier, the same chamber adopted an identical ruling for two people detained in February 2016 with 350 kilos of coca approximately to 60 kilometers from the Bolivian border.^{xxiv} In this case, the chamber overturned the sentence of concealment of contraband and declared that the defendants were innocent. In 2021, Chamber 2 adopted the same criteria by overturning a sentence for attempted smuggling, finding innocent an individual who in 2015 tried to bring coca into Argentina from Bolivia across the Bermejo River 2021.^{xxv}

A text published in 2025 cited some of the precedent-setting decisions, including cases from 2022 and 2023 handed down by the Salta Federal Court of Appeals (Carrión de Vita, 2025). The text highlights the tension that exists between trial court judges, who tend to adopt decriminalizing criteria with respect to cases of coca trafficking, prosecutors who appeal these ruling, and federal appellate courts that establish criteria to distinguish between customs violations and contraband crimes.

This final issue is problematic given Article 947 of the Customs Code, which differentiates between violation and crimes based values pegged to the peso.^{xxvi} Given that Argentina experiences recurring bouts of inflation, the amounts quickly become outdated. In other words, as inflation increases smaller amounts of coca meet the monetary values to be considered as crime, instead of a simple

administration infraction. As a result, a recent decision from the Salta Federal Court of Appeals created a real-time review of the amount set in the most recent reform of Article 497, which established around 412 kilos of coca as the limit between an administrative infraction and contraband violation. In four of the seven cases from 2022 and 2023 reviewed for the text cited above, the defendants were found innocent based on the amount of coca seized. In the other three cases, the criminal process continued because they were in possession of more than 412 kilos.^{xxvii}

In one of these three late cases, which was concluded at the end 2022, the defendant was transporting more than 700 kilos of coca, resulting in a suspended sentence of 18 months for concealment of contraband.^{xxviii} The same crime was confirmed in another case, which concluded in August 2020 in the Federal Criminal Court of Appeals. The court confirmed a ruling from the Second Oral Chamber of the Salta Federal Court of Appeals, which had sentenced two people to seven-month suspended sentences for transporting 550 kilos of coca leaves.^{xxix}

In the cases mentioned above, judges in the NOA established jurisprudence based on the amount of coca seized, considering small amounts (less than approximately 400 kilos for the Salta Federal Court of Appeals) as administrative customs infractions. For larger amounts, the violation can be either contraband or concealment of contraband. In the latter case, the sentences tend to be short and suspended. However, there can be much harsher sentences for cases that involve large amounts or complicated circumstances. Furthermore, given that transporting coca can be considered a crime means that there is a risk for people and, as recent cases show, it could have fatal consequences.

The risks for transporting coca:

Two people involved in transporting coca were killed by the security forces in incidents registered at the end of 2024 and beginning of 2025. The deaths occurred in the context of “Plan Güemes,” an operation the Ministry of Security began in December 2024 to increase control along the border with Bolivia.^{xxx} The operation sparked conflicts with workers along the border, known as “*bagayeros*,” including many involved in transporting coca to Argentina, known as “*coqueros*” or “*chancheros*”.

In the early morning hours of December 18, 2024, a conflict between a group of workers and the security forces erupted at a National Police outpost located 20 kilometers south of the Bolivian border and 20 kilometers north of the city of Orán in Salta. A 28-year old man, the father three children, was killed when the security forces opened fire. Three other people were wounded. The Security Ministry and provincial government in Salta claimed the operation was carried out against drug traffickers, but the dead man’s family said he was not a drug

trafficker, but transporting coca for sale in Argentina. He was only doing his job.^{xxxii}

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The second case happened on February 6, 2025 in La Quiaca, in Jujuy, located near the border with Bolivia. A 22-year old man had driven around 200 kilometers on his motorcycle to buy coca leaves to sell in his community. Four members of the National Police began pursuing him and fired. He died after being hit twice.^{xxxv}

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The two cases led to protests by civil society groups, several representing indigenous peoples. They not only criticized the excessive use of force by the security forces, but that the incidents were linked to the sale of coca for chewing. They claimed that coca chewing is part of the culture of the region's population and an economic subsistence activity for many people in the zone.

The situation is different in cases involving coca outside of the NOA. This is illustrated by a case concluded in 2024 in the Santa Fe Court of Appeals.^{xxxviii} On March 17, 2020, a truck driver was detained near the city of Rafaela in the Santa Fe province, located in the center of the country. He was transporting "... ten (10) rectangular parcels covered in black plastic, each containing twenty (20) separate packages with coca leaves in their natural state weighing approximately fifty (50) kilos."

The first judge to hear the case determined that it fell under the crime of narcotics trafficking. The defendant was charged in 2022 for the crime of "transporting raw material to produce narcotics" (Article 5, section "c" of Law 23.737). However, when the oral arguments began, the prosecutor asked that the defendant be charged with concealment of contraband and be given a six-month suspended sentence. The prosecutor argued that coca should not be considered a narcotic and that the packages contained in the shipment each weighed 250 grams and were for chewing, not narcotics production. The defense argued that it was a customs infraction, but the court decided that "customs agents did not intervene, with the case investigated along the lines of criminal conduct involving violation of Narcotics Law 23.737." They used a criteria different from that of the NOA judges. The court rejected the customs infraction argument and the defendant was sentenced for the contraband crime presented by the prosecution. The sentence was confirmed several months later by the Federal Criminal Court of Appeals.^{xxxix}

This approach had already been registered in an earlier case that had wide-ranging public repercussions (Corda, 2011). A Bolivian citizen was detained on March 30, 2006 on the outskirts of Buenos Aires after 5.4 kilos of coca were found in his store. He sold the coca to members of the Bolivian community in his neighbourhood. He was initially processed on the charge of narcotics trafficking (for possessing raw material used in narcotics production) and remanded. More than a year later, on April 19, 2007, he was released and found innocent because

of public outcry over the case and lobbying by different civil society organizations on his behalf.^{xl xli xlii xliii xliv}

A similar case began August 18, 2018 in the city of Buenos Aires, where two people were detained (one Bolivian, the other the child of Bolivians) while they were putting into a car "... a box with seventy seven (77) packages, which were wrapped in newspaper and in green plastic bags, containing coca leaves in their natural state." The box contained a total of 35.4 kilos of coca. They told the police that the coca was for consumption by their family and believed that what they were doing was legal. They were, nevertheless, charged with narcotics trafficking (storing raw material for production) and arrested. Their case did not go before a judge until October 3, 2018, at which time the court revoked the charge of narcotics trafficking, because there was no evidence the coca was going to be used for narcotics production. The judge ordered the immediate release of one of the defendants and suggested a review of the case against the other, which was complicated by the additional charge of trying to bribe the arresting officers.^{xlv xlvii}

Not all judicial personnel outside the NOA adopt incriminating interpretations related to the sale of small amounts of coca for chewing or tea. A case concluded toward the end of 2024 involved the investigation of a defendant who was arrested in mid-2023 for selling 125- and 250-gram packages of coca online to customers in Buenos Aires and surrounding areas. The prosecutor in charge of the case asked that it be closed after determining that coca is not a narcotic and invoking the jurisprudence from NOA cases outlined above. The court agreed.^{xlvii} Among the arguments, the prosecution concluded that it was impossible to determine that "... possession of coca to sell chewing can be considered a violation of criminal law...."^{xlviii}

The consequences for people who consume coca go beyond problems with criminal law. In September 2016, several bus drivers transporting students on a high school trip to Bariloche, in southern Argentina, were stopped near the city of Bahía Blanca, located on the southern coast. Four of them tested positive for the presence of cocaine and they were not allowed to continue with the trip.^{xlix} One of them stated that they had not consumed cocaine, but had chewed coca, which is a widespread practice among truck and bus drivers in the country.^{li} Despite the explanation, the judge fined them and prohibited them from driving for nine months.^{lii liii} This case led to a reaction in the provincial legislature in Jujuy, which approved a resolution on October 5, 2016 that called for the provincial governor to organize "... a campaign to disseminate and clarify in local, national and social media the use, consumption, medicinal properties and socio-cultural importance of coca in its natural state in accordance with Article 15 of Law 23.737."^{liv} A similar bill was presented in the Senate for a national campaign on coca awareness.^{lv}

While coca is listed as a narcotic in administrative and criminal law, consumption in the NOA region has resisted this definition. The judges in that region have for

some time handed down rulings along these lines and while there are cases in which conduct related to distribution has been punished, they involved customs violations or the crime of contraband, without considering coca a narcotic. This criteria, while not always followed in other parts of the country, has grown in acceptance in recent years. However, risks involved in transporting and consuming coca are still present and, at times, can have deadly consequences.

3. The market for coca leaves in Argentina and regulation initiatives:

As with any other illegal phenomenon, it is difficult to determine the scope of the market for coca. While coca consumption in Argentina has a long history, it is difficult to estimate use. The Programming Secretariat for Prevention of Drug Addiction and to Fight Drug Trafficking (SEDRONAR)^{lvi} has carried out surveys since 1999 concerning consumption of psychoactive substances, which include a list of several narcotics, but coca is not included in any of them.

There are different estimates about the number of people who consume coca in the country. Some estimate that around 500,000 people consume coca on a regular basis (Chulver Benitez; 2020:81), while others claim the number is higher. In a newspaper article from 2020, a senator representing the Salta province claimed that 700,000 people in the province consumed coca.^{lvii} Years earlier, Ricardo Abduca claimed that that only "... in Salta and Jujuy ... more or less half of the adult males consume it regularly, occasionally or sporadically..." (Abduca, 2007). Women also consume coca, but it is not as visible (De la Cruz Brabo Guerra, 2016:67-71).

According to the 2022 census (National Statistics and Census Institute, 2025), nearly 4 million people live in three provinces that form the NOA (Jujuy, Salta and Tucumán), which are the traditional zones where coca is consumed.^{lviii} Close to 1 million people would consume coca based on the estimate that one-quarter of the population use it. Traditional uses of coca are also present in the neighboring provinces of Catamarca, Chaco, Formosa, La Rioja and Santiago del Estero, which have a population 3.5 million.^{lix} Based on this, it would not be a stretch to estimate that more than 1 million people consume coca in this region of the country. The number would be even higher if it included people who have moved from the NOA to other parts of the country or people from other countries (Bolivia and Peru) who live in Argentina and consume coca.^{lx}

In addition, information on coca exports from Bolivia, the principal source of coca consumed in Argentina, provide some details to determine the size of the market and understand what has occurred since the second half of the last century. The data shows the legal restrictions imposed since the middle of the 20th century have not eradicated the market for coca. On the contrary, they reveal that the market has likely grown. In recent years, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic

in 2020, different representatives from Jujuy and Salta have proposed bills to regulate the market.

Coca consumed in Argentina comes principally, although not exclusively, from Bolivia. During the 1920s, around 87 percent of Bolivia's coca exports went to Argentina. Between 1920 and 1925, 1,897,544 kilos (an annual average of more than 300,000 kilos) were exported to Argentina, representing more than 11 percent of Bolivia's coca production during these years. In the following two decades, the amount increased to approximately 800,000 kilos annually (Carter y Mamani; 1986:119-120).

Coca imports from Bolivia were set at 500,000 kilos (500 tons) until 1951. The amount was established at 250,000 kilos for the following year and was supposed to fall by 10,000 kilos annually until 1977, when it was supposed to reach zero. While coca exports decreased in the 1940s as a result of restrictions that Argentina began adopting, the situation would change in the 1970s.

Bolivia's coca exports increased between 1968 and 1977, with 97.5 percent of exports going to Argentina. Bolivia exported 671,328 kilos in 1968, increasing to 867,992 kilos in 1976. The highest amount, 938,507 kilos, was recorded in 1974 (Carter and Mamani; 1986:122-123). While Argentina was reducing the amount of coca imported, Bolivia's exports increased, but not through official channels. As Abduca observed: "The so-called reduction in the quota opened the way for profit from contraband that would later appear" (Abduca, 2010:246).

Coca continued to enter the country even when full prohibition was in place in 1977 and 1978. This led to an increase in contraband and the "border profit," with the price of coca increasing by ten times in nominal terms, and eight times when adjusted to inflation, during the first year of prohibition (Abduca, 2010:247-252)

More recent sources calculate that the amount of coca that enters Argentina from Bolivia exceeds 1,000 tons. In 1997, the estimate was that at least 2,000 tons were coming into the country from Bolivia (Abduca and Metaal, 2013). In 2013, a Bolivian authority stated during the presentation of the Integral Study on Demand for Coca in Bolivia, that 1,479 tons of coca were exported to four neighboring countries, with 92% (1,375 tons) exported to Argentina.^{lxi} In addition, 40 percent of the coca traded near border crossing would end up across the border, "above all in Argentina."

The 2013 Coca Crop Monitoring Report, produced annually by the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, mentioned that in Tarija department there was "...a growing demand for coca for sale in the border towns of Yacuiba and Bermejo on the Bolivian-Argentine border" (UNODC-Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2014:39). This report also states that the amount of coca sold in Tarija increased by 83 percent, from 1,736 to 3,186 tons, between 2004 and 2013. In Potosí, another border department with Argentina, coca sales increased 46

percent, from 1,422 to 2,073 tons, during the same period. A later report indicated that these two border departments represented 29 percent of the coca sales in Bolivia in 2022. During the 2012-2022 period, the amount of coca sold in the two departments increased, but by less than 10 percent. In 2022, the amount of coca sold in Tarija reached 3,969 tons, while it was 3,319 tons in Potosí (UNODC-Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2023:45).

The contraband sale of coca from Bolivia is done with varying levels of organization and logistics. It includes people who cross the border with small quantities, those who drive into Argentina with their vehicles and those who transport shipments in trucks. There is plenty of news about contraband in local and national newspapers and the websites managed by the provincial and national security forces. The images generally show coca coming into the country already packaged for consumption, normally in 250-gram packages, as can be seen in the following photographs taken by the National Police at the end of 2024 in Jujuy. The vehicle in the photo was transporting 223 kilos of coca in packages of individual use.^{lxii}



With respect to the sale of coca in the NOA region, it is sold in markets, shops, and corner kiosks throughout the day and without any interference from the security forces, as can be seen in the following photo taken from a daily newspaper in Jujuy in mid-2023.^{lxiii}



The price of coca varies, depending on the quality, with packages containing 250 grams or one-quarter of a kilo. According to a newspaper article from October 2024, the least expensive coca sold between 6,000 and 7,500 pesos, while the “*machucada*” cost \$10,000 and the “select” sold for \$12,000.^{lxiv} According to another article, this one from February 2024, “common” coca sold for \$4,500 pesos, “special” coca for \$7,000 and “chosen” coca between \$10,000 and 12,000 pesos.^{lxv} Based on the unofficial exchange rate with the US dollar during the months the articles were published, the lower-end coca sold for between \$3.65 and \$6.22, the mid-range coca for between \$5.69 and \$8.29, and the high-end coca from between \$8.13 and \$9.95 for 250 grams.^{lxvi}

Another article, this one from January 2025, included amounts similar to those of October 2024, but listed additional varieties, including one that was even more economical. It reported that “... the common *paceña* (La Paz variety) can be found for 7,000 pesos a quarter (kilo). The *hojeada* (leafy) cost between 9,000 and 10,000 pesos, depending on the quality. The special *hojeada* sells for 11,000 pesos and the *machucada* (ground) between 6,000 and 7,000 pesos. In the case of the *elegida*, it can cost 11,500 pesos, although in other market stalls it sells for between 11,000 and 12,000 pesos. The *cochala* variety, which can come with stems and seeds, is often darker and keeps for less time, can cost 4,000 pesos for a quarter kilo.”^{lxvii} So, in January 2025, the *machucada* sold for between \$4.89 and \$5.71, the *hojeada* between \$7.34 and \$8.16, and the *elegida* (chosen) between \$8.97 and \$9.79.^{lxviii}

The flow of coca from Bolivia slowed during the COVID-19 pandemic after the border was closed on March 16, 2020. A daily newspaper in Jujuy reported that “a

quarter kilo of “special” coca went from 900 pesos in December 2019 to 3,500 pesos a month after the quarantine, the *hojeada* from 700 to 2,500 pesos and *común* (common) from 600 to 2,000 pesos, an increase of more than 300 percent in the past four months.”^{lxxix} In mid-May, a national newspaper reported that the prices continued to increase “...up to five times its value” and the Jujuy governor grew so concerned that he asked the judiciary to release coca that had been seized as contraband instead of incinerating it stipulated in the narcotics law.^{lxxx}

A few days after the request, in late May 2020, authorities provided the governor with coca. Federal prosecutors from Jujuy and Salta, along with the head of the anti-drug prosecutor’s office (PROCUNAR), agreed to hand over to the provinces “... in an exceptional manner...” 1,700 kilos of coca that had been seized in different criminal case so it could be distributed to original peoples’ communities in these two provinces.^{lxxxi} According to the prosecutors, the decision was made to satisfy the “...schizophrenic situation created by the deeply rooted custom of coca chewing in the Jujuy and Salta society, because on the one hand northern lawmakers managed to have coca chewing recognized as licit through Article 15 in Law 23.737, but on the other hand, not the importation of coca,” which leads the security forces and other agency to seized coca that comes in illegally.” They later suggested that “...this situation be addressed through regulations that harmonize the tensions at play...” They also cited a bill presented in the Salta provincial legislature, which had been partially approved, to regulate coca.^{lxxxii}

Several weeks later, on June 11, 2020, the Salta Provincial Senate established a special committee to study regulation for supply and sale of coca in its natural state. On November 12, 2020, the Senate partially approved a bill that created a regulatory framework for importing, storing and selling coca for domestic consumption and scientific research. The bill’s nine articles created a “Provincial Public Registry for People and Establishments that distribute and sell coca in its natural state” that would include anyone involved in this activity to produce, among other things, statistical information. People included in the registry could not have a criminal record, and needed commercial authorization and prior registration in national and provincial tax agencies. The legislation included fines for violations. The bill went from the Senate to the provincial House of Representatives for discussion, but did not advance and, according to the Senate website, has since expired.^{lxxxiii}

Bills to regulate the coca market have also been presented in the National Congress. A bill was presented in 2016 (and again in 2018) to create the National Coca Institute and establish state control over coca.^{lxxxiv} In 2020, four national bills were presented by lawmakers representing the provinces of Jujuy and Salta.^{lxxxv} They proposed striking down or modifying administrative norms and criminal laws that prohibited the market for coca and established – with varying degrees of detail – that the state would regulate the importation, distribution and sale of

coca through quotas, registries and licenses. Three of these bills were reintroduced in 2022, but only one of them in 2024.^{lxxvi} This final bill advanced somewhat and was remitted to three committees. The possibility exists that it will be brought to the floor for a vote in the House of Representatives.

Conclusion:

Throughout this text, which presented the history and current state of coca in Argentina, it is possible to conclude that coca was never fully considered a “narcotic,” in spite of the restrictions introduced throughout the 20th century that adhered to the international drug control system.

An important factor is the deeply rooted historic use of coca in the NOA, which is an element of regional identity that cuts across social classes in that region. The resistance in the NOA, particularly among the regional elites, not only blunted the restrictions and prohibitions approved, but established an exception for coca used in chewing and for infusions.

Despite this, coca continues to be included in criminal laws and applied by the criminal justice system, which corresponds to the country’s provinces. In the NOA region, the system focused on contraband and transportation of coca, but not its sale, which is done without problems. Regarding other conducts, the judges in the NOA have used different interpretations, such as customs infractions or merchandise contraband (as opposed to narcotics), which normally carry suspended sentences. On this point, it is important to stress that judges have not considered coca a narcotic. Nevertheless, the actions of the security forces remain a risk with serious, and even fatal, consequences.

The situation is not the same in the rest of the country. In cases that are not in the zone where coca is traditionally consumed, coca is often considered a narcotic and possession, except in very small quantities, is considered drug trafficking and leads to prison time. While this has normally been the case, jurisprudence established by the NOA justice is beginning to appear in sentences in other parts of the country. This could be a consequence of coca consumption spreading outside the NOA region.

The number of people who consume coca in Argentina is not known, but a cautious guess puts the number at more than 1 million people. Data on coca exports from Bolivia (not the only source of coca used in Argentina, but the main one) shows that efforts to restrict and prohibit coca did not succeed. On the contrary, the data shows that imports have increased and created an illegal market that generates important economic benefits.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the contradictions of the current legal framework, with authorities convincing federal prosecutors to release coca that had been seized as contraband given the scarcity and corresponding jump in the

price of coca at the border. This situation led the NOA provinces to increase their lobbying efforts, including the presentation of several bills in the national Congress, to regulate the coca market.

As has been shown here, coca in Argentina is trapped between legislation aimed at classifying it as a narcotic and a reality in which it is conceived as something altogether different. Despite efforts of the national government (encouraged by international policies) to eradicate its use, resistance from the population in the NOA have stopped authorities from considering coca a narcotic. The law, while still on the books, has been modified and, as Judge Falú wrote in the “Coronel” decision: “Reality, custom (and) tradition have been much more powerful than the legal norms that tried to eliminate them.”

It is time to recognize reality and modify legislation to reflect it, not only to reassess what coca means in the identity of Argentina but to change legislation that is destined to fail.

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ⁱ AMBA encompasses the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) and part of the Buenos Aires province that surrounds it.

ⁱⁱ The recitals in this decree include provisions of "...Decree 126.351... (and) the existence of international pacts and covenants on trade in coca."

ⁱⁱⁱ The National Bureau of Public Health was created in 1943 (Decree 12.311) within the Interior Ministry. Several agencies, including the National Health Safety Department, were under it.

^{iv} "...as an annual average of imports from 1940 through 1944..."

^v In addition to the plan to kidnap, torture and kill opponents and dissidents, the military government also killed the hemp industry, which had developed during most of the 20th century (Corda, 2018: 19-20).

^{vi} The "Colavini" sentence from 1978.

^{vii} Among them was Senator Manuel D. Vidal, representing the Formosa province, Senator Arturo Jiménez Montilla from Tucumán and Senator Luis A. León from Chaco. Vidal introduced the proposal that would eventually be adopted as Article 15 in the law.

^{viii} Article 15 states: "If it concerns possession of coca leaves in their natural state for the purpose of chewing or as an infusion for personal use in zones where it is traditionally chewed as part of ancestral customs, the judge can, according to the circumstances of the case, reduce the penalty included in the second paragraph of the preceding article to the legal minimum or exempt its application." The preceding article is the current Article 14. Its second paragraph establishes possession of narcotics for personal use as a crime with a prison sentence ranging from one month to two years.

^{ix} While there were others, among the most noteworthy speeches were those by Congressman Juan Carlos Castiella, from Salta, and Fernando Enrique Paz, from Jujuy.

^x Among a total of 141 lawmakers present, 87 voted against the changes, 47 voted in favor and 6 abstained.

^{xi} On this point, it is important to point out that both the crimes of narcotics trafficking and those involving customs violations and crimes correspond to the federal justice system. There are two appellate courts in the NOA region, in Salta and Tucumán, that cover most of the provinces. The Tucumán Federal Court of Appeals reviewed decisions from the courts in Catamarca, Jujuy, Salta, Santiago del Estero and Tucumán. It was the only one for the region until 1993. On November 15, 1993, the Salta Federal Court of Appeals was created to review sentences from the federal courts in Jujuy and Salta.

^{xii} Córdoba Federal Court of Appeals, "Córdoba, Néstor R. and other", from 17/3/76 (also cited in Abduca, 2010: 245).

^{xiii} A similar criteria was used by the National Supreme Court of Justice (CSJN), which adopted the prosecution's arguments in the case "Ríos, M. A. and others for violation of Law 20.771" from 1/10/1981 (Rulings 303:1464)

^{xiv} See note xix. It recalled the "... decriminalizing criteria in jurisprudence regarding coca chewing from the federal courts in Salta and Jujuy, inaugurated with the cases 'López, Sergio M. and others for contraband' (File 91256/78) and 'Marín, Héctor E. for violation of Law 20771' (File 1149/79), respectively."

^{xv} CSJN, "López, D and others for violation of Law 20.771," from 7/7/83 (Rulings 305:887).

^{xvi} The first judge to intervene had argued that permission established in Law 17.818 regarding coca (in Article 5) was not explicitly struck down by Law 20.771. As such, this law should apply "only for cases in which coca was meant for uses other than chewing."

^{xvii} CSJN, "Estrin, R. E. and other for violation of Law 20.771," from 1/12/88 (Rulings 311:2540).

^{xviii} Tucumán Federal Court, "Aparicio, M. M. for violation of Law 20.771" and "Frías, F. E. for violation of 20.771", both from 29/12/89.

^{xix} Salta Federal Court of Appeals, "Coronel, J. R. and others for contraband," from 3/10/95.

^{xx} In this sense, rulings cited include "Vargas, S. and others for contraband," from 30/3/94, and "Aparicio, E. D. C. for contraband," from 2/5/95. This final case found that transportation of 30 kilos of coca for use by workers on his father's farm constituted a customs violation.

^{xxi} Salta Federal Court of Appeals, "Vacasur, A. R. for contraband," from 30/11/94.

- ^{xxii} “Reality, custom (and) tradition have been much more powerful than legal norms that tried to eliminate them. Coca leaves continued coming into the country through illegal avenues without the capacity to stop it” (Judge Falú’s opinion).
- ^{xxiii} Salta Federal Court of Appeals, Chamber 1, “Fernández Acosta, S. and other for contraband.” From 28/12/18.
- ^{xxiv} Salta Federal Appeals Court, Chamber 1, “Luna, M. J. and other for violation.” From 9/5/18.
- ^{xxv} Salta Federal Court of Appeals, Chamber 2, “Torres for violation of Law 22.415,” from 26/11/21.
- ^{xxvi} The current terms of Article 957 of the Customs Code set the limit at 500.000 pesos, but this amount came into force in the final days of 2017 and its application was retroactive to benefit earlier cases (such as those in notes xiii, xiv and xv). This norm modified the previous amount of 100,000 pesos that had been set at the beginning of 2005.
- ^{xxvii} In the four case that ended with innocent verdicts, the amounts were 176 kilos (“Flores”, 2022), 91 kilos (“Villalba”, 2022), 60 kilos (“Arauz, 2022) and 150 kilos (Morales, 2023). Those that continued with the criminal procedure involved 700 kilos (“Santos”, 2022), 1,400 kilos (“Herrera”, 2023) and 620 kilos (“Aramayo”, 2023).
- ^{xxviii} Salta Federal Court of Appeals, Chamber 2, “Santos, M. F. hearing to defend ruling” (Article 362 of the CPPF),” from 8/11/21.
- ^{xxix} Federal Criminal Court of Appeals, “Palacios, S. M. and other to challenge the ruling,” from 4/8/20.
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- ^{xxxi} elDiarioAR: “Salta: A young man dead and more than 50 injured from police repression of coca traders,” 20/12/24.
- ^{xxxii} Mariano Gil: “White Waters: Clashes on the northern border. A smuggler killed and several others injured in police operation,” El Tribuno, 18/12/24.
- ^{xxxiii} Página 12, “Güemes Plan: One dead and three injured on the border,” 18/12/24.
- ^{xxxiv} Laura Urbano: “They went after drug traffickers and killed a coca trader,” Página 12, 20/12/24.
- ^{xxxv} Mariana Mamani; “La Quiaca: Racist crime committed by Rodrigo Torres denounced,” Página 12, 8/2/25.
- ^{xxxvi} Red Acción, “Jujuy: Police officers assassinate indigenous man transporting coca leaves,” 7/2/25.
- ^{xxxvii} Urbana Play 104.3 FM: “Young man died in La Quiaca, Jujuy, after being shot by police,” from YouTube, 10/2/25.
- ^{xxxviii} Oral argument in the Santa Fe Criminal Court, “Baldiviezo, R. S. for violation of Law 23.737”, Case FRO 24890/2020/TO1, from 6/5/24.
- ^{xxxix} Federal Criminal Court of Appeals, Chamber 4, “Baldiviezo, R. S. appeal arguments”, from 8/11/24.
- ^{xl} Lepcovich, Pedro; “Ignorance and discrimination in the justice system,”” Página 12, 29/1/07.
- ^{xli} Lepcovich, Pedro; “The justice system will address case of a Bolivian jailed for coca trading,” Página 12, 27/2/07.
- ^{xlii} Lepcovich, Pedro; “One year in jail, but no crime committed,” Página 12, 24/4/07.
- ^{xliii} La Plata Federal Court of Appeals, Chamber 3, Case 4347 “annulment hearing,” from 19/4/07.
- ^{xliv} Ary Kaplan Nakamura, “Irineo: One year in jail for selling coca leaves,” YouTube 20/10/07 (available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFjR964s_Ig).
- ^{xlv} Federal Criminal and Correctional Court, Chamber 5, “Zurita Delgadillo, J. L. and other for violation of Law 23.737 and bribery,” Case 14084/2018, from 14/7/18.
- ^{xlvi} Federal Criminal and Corrections Court, Chamber 2, “Zurita Delgadillo, J. L. and other for processing with p.p. and embargo,” from 3/10/18.
- ^{xlvi} Dismissed that this conduct was for production of narcotics.
- ^{xlvi} Ruling of Federal Prosecutor Franco Picardi in Case 3482/23 from 17/12/24.
- ^{xlix} Bermúdez, Gabriel; “Four drivers bringing students to Bariloche failed a drug test,” Clarín, 29/9/16.
- ⁱ Infobae: “One of the drivers bringing students to Bariloche admitted to chewing coca,” 30/9/16.
- ^{li} Roffo, Julieta; “Trip into the mind of an exhausted driver: ‘We all chew, the problem is we do not rest,’” Clarín, 8/10/16.
- ^{lii} Página 12: “Banned drivers,” 6/10/16.

- ^{liii} La Brújula 24: "Sentence confirmed for drivers who tested positive for drugs," 7/12/17.
- ^{liv} Resolution 24/16 from the Jujuy Provincial Congress.
- ^{lv} Bill S-4178/16.
- ^{lvi} Established in 1989 and as of 2017 called the Secretariat for Comprehensive Policies on Drugs of Argentina.
- ^{lvii} Ahora Salta: "The market for coca moves \$2 million a month in Salta," 13/7/20.
- ^{lviii} The census recorded 811,611 people in Jujuy, 1,441,351 in Salta, and 1,731,802 in Tucumán, for a total population in the three provinces of 3.984.782 people.
- ^{lix} In Catamarca, 429,562 people recorded, 383,865 in La Rioja, 607,419 in Formosa, 1,129,606 in Chaco and 1,060,906 in Santiago del Estero 1.060.906, for a total population of 3.611.358 in the five provinces.
- ^{lx} According to data from the 2022 census, 338,299 people born in Bolivia and 156,251 people born in Peru currently live in Argentina.
- ^{lxi} Urgente 24: "Bolivia exports nearly 1,400 tons of coca to Argentina," 14/11/2013.
- ^{lxii} Argentina.gob.ar: "Jujuy: Police seize more than 427 kilos of coca in two operations," 4/12/24.
- ^{lxiii} Jujuy al momento.com.ar: "The price of coca increased again in Jujuy," 4/5/23.
- ^{lxiv} Que pasa salta.com.ar: "The new price of coca in Salta: Common, select and ground," 28/10/24.
- ^{lxv} Todo Jujuy: "The price of coca in Jujuy down," 17/2/24.
- ^{lxvi} An average buy-sell rate for the floating peso exchange (the so-called 'blue dollar') on the dates of the articles was used for this calculation: 1,230 pesos on February 17, 2024 and 1,205 pesos on October 28, 2024.
- ^{lxvii} El tribuno de Jujuy: "Coca vendors warn about low demand," 19/1/25.
- ^{lxviii} The average price of the "blue dollar" on January 19, 2025 was 1,225 pesos.
- ^{lxix} El Tribuno de Jujuy: "Coca leaves in short supply and a kilo from 8,000 pesos," 15/4/20.
- ^{lxx} Ziblat, Gabriel: "Quarantine has coca leaves in short supply and Morales says not to 'burn them,'" Perfil, 12/5/20.
- ^{lxxi} Messi, Virginia: "Coronavirus in Argentina: The judiciary releases 1,700 kilos of coca leaves for the return of chewing Salta y Jujuy," Clarín, 22/5/20.
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- ^{lxxiii} Salta Provincial Senate: <https://senadosalta.gob.ar/proyectos/caducados/expte-no-90-28-775-2020-14-05-20-importacion-acopio-fraccionamiento-y-venta-con-fines-de-uso-domestico-y-de-investigacion-cientifica-de-la-hoja-de-coca/>, last consultation 28/3/25).
- ^{lxxiv} This bill was first presented with Number 8366-D-2016 and two years later as 1009-D-2018. Both were signed by Congressman Alfredo Horacio Olmedo of the Salta Provincial Congress.
- ^{lxxv} The four bills were presented with the following numbers: 1407-S-2020, 2193-D-2020, 2475-D-2020 and 3946-D-2020.
- ^{lxxvi} The three bills presented in 2022 had the following numbers: 0731-D-2022, 0907-D-2022 and 0561-S-2022. The first bill was presented again in 2024 with the following number, 2303-D-2024.