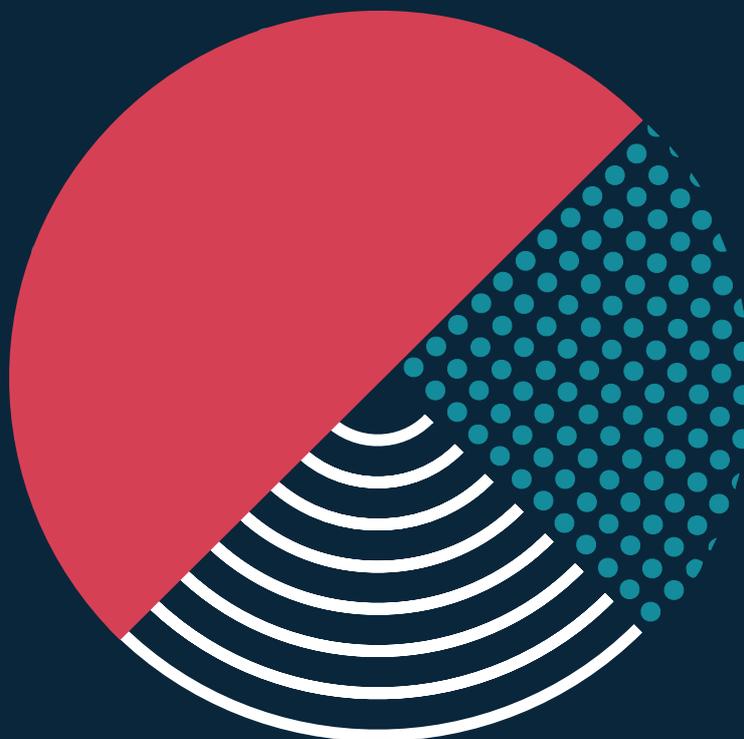


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REPORT

ARGENTINA GOES TO THE BALLOT BOX: CONTINUATION OR BREAK?

Buenos Aires, 7th August 2019

After almost 4 years of Mauricio Marci’s administration, Argentinians will choose whether they will continue along the path they started in 2015, or if they will go back to the Kirchnerist model that ruled the country from 2003 to 2015. To decide this, they will have to go to the ballot box at least twice this year: Aug. 11 (the primaries, a.k.a. PASO) and Oct. 27 (general elections to elect president, vice president, governors and members of Parliament, among others). There may even be a third election if the result must be clarified via balloting.

In this report, the LLYC Public Affairs team in Buenos Aires analyzes the electoral scenario, the main political forces that could win the presidency and the keys to understanding the process by which Argentina will choose its course in the coming years.

WHAT ARE THE PRIMARIES?

Aug. 11, Argentinians must go to the ballot boxes to participate in the Simultaneous and Mandatory Open Primaries (known as PASO for the Spanish acronym):

1. **Simultaneous:** This ballot is held on the same day across the whole country and for all political parties.
2. **Mandatory:** All citizens between 18 and 70 who are listed on the electoral register must cast their vote (it is optional for citizens between 16 and 18 or over 70).
3. **Open:** All citizens participate, regardless of whether they are members of a political party or not.
4. **Primaries:** The candidates being voted on are those who will represent each political party in the general election.

PASOs were established in the country in 2009, during Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner’s first presidency via [Law 26.571](#). PASOs determine two essential things: First, **which parties or groups will be eligible to participate in the general elections in October**, as only those with more than 1.5 percent of the total vote will be on that ballot, and second, **how the final lists will be**

defined. Each party or coalition may have more than one contender for the same position, which is solved by means of this vote.

“PASOs determine which parties or groups will be eligible to participate in the general elections in October and how the final lists will be defined”

PASOs are like a big national survey; they try to reduce the electoral options, settle disputes among candidates from the same party and help strengthen coalitions or alliances before the general elections..

WHAT POSITIONS ARE BEING VOTED ON NEXT AUG. 11?

This year, most provinces have moved the date of their local elections away from the presidential election to prevent the gubernatorial races from being “contaminated” by the national debate. As such, many districts have already elected their governors and provincial legislators. **The Aug. 11 primary elections will be held throughout the country for people to vote on national seats (president, vice president, national representatives and national senators).**

In addition, the primary elections for governor and vice governor will be held in the provinces of Buenos Aires, Catamarca and Santa Cruz, since they did not split their elections. For its part, Buenos Aires will also hold its primaries for city mayor.

2019 SCENARIO: MAIN FRONTS

Nine parties are competing for national president and vice president in the upcoming PASO: *Juntos por el Cambio*, *Frente de Todos*, *Consenso Federal 2030*, *Frente Despertar*, *Frente de Izquierda*, *Nuevo Más*, *Alianza NOS*, *Frente Patriota* and *Partido Autonomista Nacional*. Below we analyze the three groups with the highest voter intention:

- **Juntos por el Cambio: Mauricio Macri - Miguel Ángel Pichetto**

Mauricio Macri is running for reelection in a complex economic context, one with high inflation, an unstable exchange rate and extremely volatile local finances. Unlike in 2015, when he chose Gabriela Michetti to run beside him, this time he has chosen Peronist leader and current National Senator Miguel Angel Pichetto. With this unexpected announcement, the *Alianza Cambiemos* party renamed itself to *Juntos por el Cambio*. The markets approved of this change, which was matched by a rise in the stock market and appreciation of the local currency (dollar drop). This optimism has helped the incumbent party approach the elections in a more competitive position.

- **Frente de Todos: Alberto Fernández - Cristina Fernández de Kirchner**

May 18, former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner announced [via a video on Twitter](#) that she would run beside Alberto Fernandez in the presidential race, going on the ticket as vice president. In addition to the peculiarity of being the first time in history that a vice presidential candidate has announced the presidential candidate's intent to run, the gesture showed an attempt to open a Kirchnerist space. In this way, and without Cristina at the head, the Fernandez-Fernandez ticket was able to bring Peronism into the fold and unite candidates who were facing the opposition leader.

- **Consenso Federal: Roberto Lavagna - Juan Manuel Urtubey**

Roberto Lavagna, former minister of the Economy from Nestor Kirchner's presidency, confirmed his intent to run beside current Governor of the Province of Salta, Juan Manuel Urtubey. This team is working to capture center voters disappointed with the Macri government, but who also do not want to return to Kirchnerism. The ruling party is closely watching Lavagna's candidacy, as it could take votes from the Macri-Pichetto ticket in the October general elections.



EXTREME POLARIZATION

Almost all national surveys began to show a significant increase in polarization between the two main groups after the candidacy announcements. The addition of Peronist Miguel Angel Pichetto into the incumbent party and Sergio Massa's return to Kirchnerism caused *Alternativa Federal*, which intended to be a competitive third option in October, to almost disintegrate. However, against all odds, Roberto Lavagna decided to compete in the elections alongside Governor of Salta Province Juan Manuel Urtubey.

In Articles 97 and 98, the Argentine Constitution establishes that a president takes office when their ticket has obtained more than 45 percent of the vote, or at least 40 percent with a more than 10 point lead over the next highest ticket. If neither of these conditions are met, a runoff election must be held within 30 days of the previous election.

“Almost all national surveys began to show a significant increase in polarization between the two main groups after the candidacy announcements”

When this article was written, most polls confirmed the combined votes for *Juntos por el Cambio* and *Frente de Todos* would add up to almost 80 percent of the total. If this is confirmed in the primary elections, both groups will focus all efforts on continuing to increase this polarization, with an eye to getting the highest number of votes from the remaining 20 percent and thus being able to win in the first round.

GROWING FROM THE RIGHT OR FROM THE LEFT

After the primary elections, **Juntos por el Cambio** will attempt to recover the votes it lost following the emergence of two political forces to the right on the ideological spectrum. One is *Frente Nos*, represented by candidate Jose Gomez Centurion, who questions the government for promoting the debate on decriminalizing abortion in Congress.

The other is *Frente Despertar*, led by economist Jose Luis Espert, who criticizes the government for adopting “gradualist” measures to normalize the economy instead of implementing “shock” policies. In short, this means there are two new groups that might split the voters who, theoretically, supported *Cambiamos* in 2015 and 2017 but are now looking for other options.

As *Frente Nos* may fail to exceed the 1.5 percent minimum required to compete in October, it is Espert who most worries *Juntos por el Cambio*. In addition, it is estimated that there is a large percentage of Roberto Lavagna voters who are disenchanted with the government's economic management but who, in light of a potential return of Kirchnerism, would support Macri. The ruling party will try to increase polarization to recover these votes for October.

Instead, **Frente de Todos** will try to attract the young electorate (“Generation Z”) with proposals such as supporting legal voluntary termination of pregnancy (rejected by the Senate in August 2018). In addition, Fernandez will go for Macri voters who are disenchanted with the current economy, also seeking to draw some of the voters who made up the 54 percent Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner obtained in 2011, but later moved away from her due to—according to the candidate—“matters of form rather than substance.” Due in part to this, Cristina's image has moved to the background as they try to showcase Alberto Fernandez as a more moderate, centrist candidate.

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FEAR AT THE CORE OF BOTH CAMPAIGNS

Fear is one of the most powerful feelings, pushing us to do some things and paralyzing us before we can do others. In addition, fear is also the main element of what is known as a “*negative campaign*.” **Negative campaigns** are not, as it is often thought, dirty campaigns, but rather **discursive ways to trigger feelings toward opposing candidates**. Studies show that the penetration and memorization rates of negative advertisements is five times higher than those of positive or constructive messages (Shapiro and Rieger, 1992¹), their effectiveness being higher when the message’s driver has already been experienced by society.

In this case, both sides have chosen fear as the core of their campaigns. **While the incumbent party is basing its campaign on fear of “the return of Kirchnerism”** (with allusions to corruption, authoritarianism and Cristina as the real holder of power), **Frente de Todos is using the fear of “what may happen after four more years of Macri”** (referring to reductions in purchasing power, increased poverty and labor

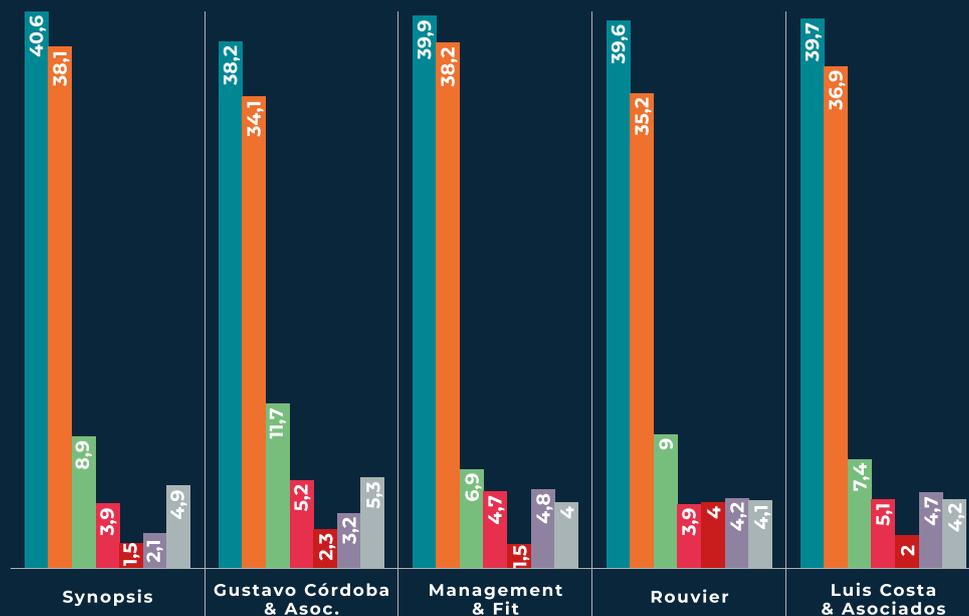
and pension system reforms). Both sides have based their campaigns on “how bad the other is,” rather than highlighting their own positive qualities. **This has meant a lot of attack and few proposals.**

BUENOS AIRES, THE MOTHER OF ALL BATTLES

The province of Buenos Aires represents 37 percent of the electoral register and more than 30 percent of national GDP. Since the return of democracy in 1983, Peronism has only lost two elections to govern this district: One in the year Herminio Iglesias lost against Alejandro Armendariz (UCR), and one in 2015, when Anibal Fernandez ended up in second against Cambiemos candidate Maria Eugenia Vidal. This unexpected victory drastically changed the electoral environment facing the second round and allowed Macri to completely twist the course of the election.

Now, **Vidal will be running for reelection against Axel Kicillof’s** (former minister of the Economy during Cristina Kirchner’s second administration) and **Veronica Magario** (current mayor of La Matanza, the municipality with the most voters in the entire province). In these elections, Governor Vidal is one of the politicians with the most positive image, and her management is highly valued by many Buenos Aires residents. **However, her party’s political leader, Mauricio Macri, is far below her in surveys carried out in this district.** As such, Governor Vidal’s reelection will depend on the “ballot cutoff,” in the Argentine electoral system, one ticket includes the presidential (and vice presidential) candidates, as well as the candidates for national representatives and senators and provincial and local positions. With this, there is “drag” effect, in which each voter’s decision for their priority position (usually the president) affects the rest, unless the voter decides to cut the ballot. Vidal’s luck will be tied to where this weight is placed: either on rejecting the current president or supporting her administration.

¹ Shapiro, M. y Rieger, R. (1992): Comparing positive and negative political advertising. Journalism Quarterly. 69: 135-144.



WHAT DO SURVEYS SAY?

After the announcement of the official Macri-Pichetto ticket, surveys started seeing a sustained recovery in the political party's image and voter intention. In May-June, some polls showed a difference of over 9-10 points between the two sides, but today that gap has shrunk to just 1-4 percentage points.

Exchange rate stability, the slowdown in inflation and large number of public works inaugurated has created fertile ground for the growth of Macrism. On the other hand, errors and campaign inconsistencies (due to the use of multiple spokespeople who are not internally aligned) seem to have allowed Alberto Fernandez to break the electoral ceiling he inherited from Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner.

From the surveys we can conclude the following:

- Polarization is increasingly stark.
- The distance between *Juntos por el Cambio* and *Frente de Todos* is increasingly small.
- If the difference between the two parties is really only a few points, polarization may increase in advance of the October elections; it would not be surprising if one of them reached 45 percent of the vote, winning in the first round.
- In elections as close as this, the undecided voters are those who will end up defining the result..

Aug. 11, we will have the first glimpse of the electoral path Argentina will take, but we will have to wait until Oct. 27 (or even one month more, should there be a runoff) to know whether Argentineans will choose the path of continuation or break away for something new.

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