

Argentina Votes for Change in 2015 Presidential Election

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On November 22, 2015, Argentines went to the polls in the second round of a presidential race and opted for change by electing [Mauricio Macri](#) of the opposition Let's Change coalition representing center-right and center-left parties. Macri defeated [Daniel Scioli](#), the candidate of the leftist Peronist party faction known as the Front of Victory (FPV) of outgoing President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. In a close race, Macri, the mayor of Buenos Aires, took 51.4% of the vote compared to 48.6% for Scioli, the governor of Buenos Aires province. Macri will be inaugurated on December 10, 2015. His election ends the 12-year run of so-called Kirchnerismo that helped Argentina emerge from a severe economic crisis in 2001-2002, but also was characterized by protectionist and unorthodox economic policies and at times difficult relations with the United States. The Macri government is expected to usher in market-based economic reform efforts and more constructive relations with the United States.

Macri is the leader of the center-right Republican Proposal (PRO) party and is in his second term as mayor. He has a business background and also served as president of one of Argentina's most popular football clubs, Boca Juniors. One difficulty for Macri's candidacy was that his Buenos Aires-centered political party was thought not to have a nationwide reach. During the August 2015 primary campaign, Macri moved more to the center so as not to alienate those Argentines supportive of the government's social programs. As part of an attempt to expand his base, Macri supported protests by farm groups who oppose the government's imposition of export taxes.

Scioli won the first presidential round held on October 25, with 36.9% of the vote, compared to 34.3% for Macri, and 21.3% for [Sergio Massa](#), a deputy in Argentina's Congress who headed a centrist dissident Peronist faction known as United for a New Alternative (UNA). A second round was required between Scioli and Macri since no candidate received 45% of the vote or 40% of the vote with a 10-point lead. Macri's strong performance in the first round, between 5 and 8% higher than predicted, gave him significant momentum going into the second round. A key factor in the November 22 vote was whether Macri would be able to capture the votes of moderate Peronists who had supported Sergio Massa.

President Fernández is finishing her second term. She was first elected in 2007, when she succeeded her husband, the

late Néstor Kirchner, who served one term beginning in 2003. Kirchner had been poised to run again for the presidency, but his death from a heart attack in 2010 changed the political landscape. Instead, Fernández ran for reelection and won a second mandate in October 2011 with 54% of the vote, the largest percentage in a presidential race since the country's return to democratic rule. In the 2015 presidential race, Fernández was ineligible to run for a third consecutive term, although she will be eligible to run again in 2019. Scioli was a close ally of President Kirchner, serving as his vice president from 2003 to 2007. Going into the presidential race, Scioli reportedly was not close to President Fernández, but ultimately received her endorsement. Some observers contend that Scioli was burdened by being tied to the Kirchners and in particular, the polemic figure of President Fernández. [According to press reports](#), a growing number of Argentines had become fatigued by her strong governing style and reports of corruption by her prominent supporters.

Outlook and Potential Implications

While some observers have described Macri's victory as a [political earthquake](#) in Argentina that constituted a rebuke for Kirchnerismo, the close presidential race (with less than 3% separating Macri and Scioli) reflects a deeply divided electorate. Perhaps as a reflection of this close divide, Macri said his victory was "[the changing of an era](#)," but would not be about "revenge" or "settling scores."

In Argentina's Congress, Macri's Let's Change coalition will not enjoy a majority on its own. Legislative elections were held on October 25, the same day as the first presidential round. In the Chamber of Deputies, which elected one-half of its members, the FPV will hold 102 out of 257 seats, while Macri's Let's Change coalition will have 93, and Sergio Massa's UNA will have 43. Likewise in the Senate, which elected one-third of its membership, the FPV will hold 38 seats out of 72 seats, while the Let's Change coalition will hold 15 and the UNA will hold 10. In order to gain a working majority, Macri will need to reach out to Peronist factions. In the aftermath of Macri's victory, Massa pledged that Macri could count on [UNA's support](#), but that he would not give Macri a blank check.

The Macri government will face significant economic challenges as it contends with low economic growth (less than 1%), high inflation (over 25%), and a large fiscal deficit. During the campaign, both Scioli and Macri espoused market-friendly economic policies that could renew [investor confidence](#) in the economy, but the pace of change was a key difference between the candidates. Macri vowed to undertake economic policy reforms more quickly, including an adjustment of currency controls and elimination of exports taxes. He also pledged to combat poverty.

Macri's election brings to power a government that is likely to be more committed to maintaining constructive bilateral relations with the United States. [U.S.-Argentine relations](#) generally are characterized by robust commercial relations and cooperation in such issues as nonproliferation, human rights, education, and science and technology. At times, however, there have been tensions in relations under the Kirchner governments, including over the current [U.S. judicial case regarding the holdout creditors](#) who did not participate in previous debt restructurings. Macri has [vowed to resolve](#) the long-standing dispute. Macri has similar views as the United States regarding concerns about human rights problems in the Americas. For example, just after his election, Macri pledged to call for [Venezuela's suspension from the Common Market of the South \(Mercosur\)](#) because of the country's violation of rights against its political opponents.

For background, see CRS Report R43816, [Argentina: Background and U.S. Relations](#), by Mark P. Sullivan and Rebecca M. Nelson.