

Argentine Presidential Elections

Article Summary

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Lesson One

On a recent boating trip, you and your group discovered a previously unknown island, uninhabited and unclaimed by any government. You would like to keep the island for yourselves, but you know that if you don't have an established and working government, some other country will claim the island. In order to avoid that, you need to get your new government up and running as quickly as possible. In the first meeting your group agreed that the government should be democratic and that there were several steps that you needed to take first:

- a. You must have a written Constitution. The Constitution will have to cover issues such as: What are the requirements for public office? What is the structure of the legislative body and what is its function? What are the functions of the leader of the nation and the judiciary? What are some of the basic rights that all citizens are guaranteed?
- b. Now that you have written your constitution, you must choose your legislative body and your chief executive: How will your country do this? What kind of electoral system will be in place? Who votes, when, and for whom? How will judges for the court system chosen be through election or appointment and at what levels?
- c. With an elected legislative body and an elected chief executive in place, you will begin the legislative process. Introduce one or two bills into your legislature to demonstrate the process of a bill becoming a law.

Lesson One Content Links

"Senado de la Nacion--Tour of the Argentine Senate: Como se hace una ley?"

<http://www.senado.gov.ar/web/lisandro/>

"Congress for Kids Homepage"

<http://www.congressforkids.net/>

"Ben's Guide to the Election Process for Kids"

<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/election/>

"CongressLink Lesson Plans: An Introduction to Representative Democracy"

http://www.congresslink.org/print_lp_introrepdemo.htm

"CongressLink Lesson Plans: Congressional Powers"

http://www.congresslink.org/print_lp_congpowers.htm

"Constitution of the Republic of Argentina"

http://www.argentina.gov.ar/argentina/portal/documentos/constitucion_ingles.pdf

"Constitution of the United States"

<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html>

"Elections Central: A History of U.S. Presidential Elections"

<http://www.multied.com/elections/>

"Elections Central: How Elections Work"

<http://www.multied.com/elections/HowElectionswork.html>

"Elections Central: Why Was the Electoral College Created?"

<http://www.multied.com/elections/Electoralcollgewhy.html>

"Project VoteSmart: Government 101: How a Bill Becomes a Law"

http://www.votesmart.org/resource_govt101_02.php

Lesson Two (for Spanish Language Classes)

As an average Argentine voter, you have to decide which candidate best represents your interests and political beliefs. Read a biography of each voter in Spanish and discuss the candidates with your friends and classmates in Spanish, trying to determine which candidate you prefer. Once you have decided, informally campaign and try to convince others to make the same choice you have. In the end, everyone will cast their vote and a winner will be decided by the majority of votes.

Argentina: Fifteen Candidates Will Compete In Presidential Election

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With just over a month before Argentines go to the polls to elect a new president, Nestor Kirchner, one of the three Partido Justicialista-peronista (PJ) candidates and the favorite of President Eduardo Duhalde, leads in the polls.

In the April 27 elections, voters will have to choose from among fifteen candidates. If no candidate receives 45% of the vote, the outcome will be determined in a runoff on May 18. The deadline for candidates to register was March 8. The last candidate to register, just before the deadline, was Juan Arcagni who said he was running for the until-then unknown Movimiento Renovar Argentina. The following day, the Camara Nacional Electoral (CNE) said fifteen candidates were confirmed for the election. Three of the top four candidates are members of the governing PJ, although none will appear on the ballot as a PJ candidate.

On Feb. 22, electoral Judge Maria Servini de Cubria ruled on a petition filed by former President Carlos Saul Menem (1989-1999) that neither his group nor the other PJ candidates could use the name or the symbols of the PJ or its founder Gen. Juan Domingo Peron (1946-1951, 1951-1955, 1973- 1974). The ruling barred Menem from using the name Frente Peronista, which he adopted after an earlier ruling stipulated that the party did not have to hold a primary and could run three candidates (see NotiSur, 2003-02-14). The PJ candidates are Santa Cruz Gov. Kirchner, who will run as the candidate of the Frente para la Victoria; Menem, running for the Frente por la Lealtad; and San Luis Gov. Adolfo Rodriguez Saa, for the Movimiento Nacional y Popular. A fourth PJ candidate is textile merchant Ricardo Mussa, although he has little support. Deputy Elisa Carrio, a former Union Civica Radical (UCR) member, is running for the center-left coalition Afirmacion para una Republica de Iguales (ARI). Another ex-UCR member, former economy minister Ricardo Lopez Murphy, is running for the center-right Movimiento Federal para Recrear el Conocimiento (Recrear). The Partido Socialista, which originally backed Carrio, is running Deputy Alfredo Bravo, president of the Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (APDH). The UCR, mired in crisis since the resignation of former President Fernando de la Rúa (1999-2001) in December 2001, is running Deputy Leopoldo Moreau, while the Democracia Cristiana's candidate is Manuel Herrera, former president of the business chamber Union Industrial Argentina (UIA).

The left, which was unable to come together around one candidate, will have four: Deputy Patricia Walsh of the Izquierda Unida (IU); Jorge Altamira of the Partido Obrero; Guillermo Sullings of the Partido Humanista; and Jorge Mazitelli of the Partido Socialista Autentico. Lawyer and journalist Carlos Zaffore is running for the Movimiento de Integracion y de Desarrollo. UCR candidate optimistic despite party's decline UCR candidate Moreau said on

Feb. 18, the day after he defeated Sen. Rodolfo Terragno in the party primary, that the party would surprise people and do better than expected. He predicted that the party would capture between 12% and 15% of the vote and be in the runoff, although few analysts agree.

Moreau said that 550,000 Argentines voted in the UCR primary, showing a significant interest in the party. The party had held a primary on Dec. 15, but there were so many irregularities and fraud accusations that electoral officials insisted the primary be held again. The prolonged crisis took its toll on party support.

Another problem for the UCR is that its last two presidents, de la Rúa and Raul Alfonsín (1983-1989), had to leave office before their terms were up (see Chronicle, 1989-05-23). Peronistas caught in personal battle between Menem and Duhalde The serious rift in the PJ is between its two leading politicians: former President Menem and sitting President Duhalde, who is not running for re-election. Duhalde was Menem's running mate in 1989 when Menem won his first term. He later resigned to run for governor of Buenos Aires. The relationship soured after Menem engineered a constitutional change that allowed him to run for a second term (see NotiSur, 1994-10-07). Since that point, the two men have been engaged in a bitter fight for control of the party.

"Both men are after power," said economic consultant Luis Secco. "It is very personal and it could lead to a split in Peronism. There is an ideological divide between them, too. Peronism today is very vague, and Menem represents the right wing of the party, while Duhalde stands for the left wing." The Argentine Congress appointed Duhalde president in January 2002 after two presidents, one of them being Rodríguez Saa, had been forced to resign in as many weeks (see NotiSur, 2002-01-11). While Duhalde survived, he was forced to move the elections forward, from December 2003 to April. Duhalde has thrown his political weight behind Kirchner as the person with the best chance of blocking Menem from being elected. Some observers say that Duhalde's drive to defeat Menem is stronger than his support for Peronism. In a move to raise the stakes in the Duhalde-Menem feud a notch, on Feb. 25, Kirchner named Tourism Minister and former Menem protégé Daniel Scioli as his running mate, saying that, in politics, "no one is anyone else's property." "I feel proud and honored to join his fight for the presidency," Scioli said. "I'm convinced Argentina's best times lie ahead."

Several Menem stalwarts in the Tourism Ministry resigned to protest Scioli's defection from the Menem camp, and others close to Menem called Scioli an opportunist. Political analyst Julio Burdman said the intensity of the dispute within the PJ is partly because the party is the only political force with a chance to win the April election. "The basic problem is that today the PJ is the only political party that survived after the crisis," said Burdman, research director at the Centro de Estudios Nueva Mayoría. And, he said, the problem was exacerbated by the court decisions to allow the PJ to run three candidates, while banning all of them from using the party symbols and identification.

Widely despised Menem could still become president

Professor Enrique Peruzzotti with the private Universidad Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires said, "All the candidates will lack the authority to carry out the reforms that Argentina needs and

will have to connect with other political leaders. But Menem is blamed for many of the country's ills and is the most polarizing figure in Argentine politics." Menem is the candidate with the highest rejection level among the candidates. In several Ibope polls during the past two months, between 60% and 70% of those questioned named Menem as the candidate that they "would never vote for under any circumstances." None of the other principal candidates had a rejection level even close to that. Carrio was second, with only 8%. Analysts say the high level of rejection is not only because many Argentines consider Menem responsible for the political, social, and economic crises but because his government was marked by rampant corruption. Nevertheless, Menem is consistently among the top three names in voter-preference polls, giving him a good shot at making the runoff.

Menem's campaign has relentlessly proclaimed that during his presidency Argentina belonged "to the first world," and the peso retained its parity with the dollar. "Who gave us stability? Who will quickly get us out of this chaos? You know," say the Menem posters. Appealing to the shrinking middle class, Menem's ads also remind Argentines that during his presidency they were able to travel abroad. Aware of the high level of rejection, Menem does not frequent the talk shows or make many public appearances, relying more on paid announcements comparing statistics from his presidency with now. He speaks often of "the salvation of the country," for which he promises to return to dollar parity, use the military to restore security, and align the government with the US policies.

Platforms differ little, have few concrete planks

None of the leading presidential hopefuls talk of transforming the current economic model or the way of doing politics, nor do they differ significantly among themselves. Candidates responded to a written questionnaire by the Argentine newspaper Clarin asking whether they considered it necessary to maintain the subsidies provided by the Jefes y Jefas de Hogar program, which aides 2 million poor families, or whether the program should be replaced with something else to fight poverty and unemployment. Kirchner, Menem, Saa, Carrio, Lopez Murphy, Moreau, Brazo, and Walsh all had problems with the plan, a cornerstone of the Duhalde government. In general, they all wanted to link the program to jobs promotion, but they also had fundamental differences in how to finance social programs to deal with the 37.7% unemployment and more than 20 million people below the poverty line.

Kirchner and Carrio both emphasized the need for a tax reform so that social programs were financed more through taxes on earnings rather than on consumption like the IVA (impuesto al valor agregado). Rodriguez said he would obtain the money by "eliminating corruption." Menem proposed increasing salaries by reducing the "taxes on work" referring to the contributions for social benefits that businesses pay, and Lopez Murphy referred to "structural reforms," implying more fiscal adjustment policies. The candidates' written responses were among the few significant exchanges of ideas in the campaign, which has been marked by the infighting in the PJ, personal insults, and personality clashes.

Public frustration

Whoever wins will have to build a coalition to govern Argentina, which will not be easy. And even more difficult will be regaining any public support for the political process and the political

class. In the October 2001 presidential elections, 27% of the electorate either did not vote or spoiled their ballots. Political apathy is even more widespread now. And for many, the apathy is coupled with disappointment that the massive protests of late 2001 did not develop into a viable political alternative. The election offers no candidate who reflects the public's calls for change during those protests. The slogan "throw them all out!" [referring to the country's political leaders], which spontaneously emerged during the protests, did not lead to grooming new political leaders, analysts agree. "There is an inversely proportionate relationship between the outbreak that occurred in 2001 and the possibility of building an electoral tool in tune with the rage and the sense of being fed up that the people expressed in the streets," wrote journalist Eduardo Aliverti in a column in the Buenos Aires daily Pagina 12. Aliverti said that phenomenon was the product of a protest movement that "was not accompanied by leadership or by a growth in popular awareness."

No candidate has reached a support level of 20%, which Marcos Novaro of the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) said was a relatively positive phenomenon, because "no one should indulge in false hopes of an easy solution to this crisis. The next government is going to be weak, and will have to face many difficulties center," he said. Developments like the split in the PJ, the decline of the UCR, and the appearance of new center-left and center-right leaders have not satisfied most members of the neighborhood assemblies that emerged during the December 2001 crisis. Nor have they satisfied the growing movement of unemployed who frequently block roads and occupy public buildings to demand jobs and subsidies for the poor.

"We have had success at the level of community action, but on the political level we have no influence to change anything at all," said Carmen Gonzalez, who has participated in a neighborhood assembly since December 2001. "We have carried forward a number of initiatives to block hikes in utility rates, provide jobs, or help the neediest, but we turned into mutual-help associations, with no political weight." Many members of the associations are calling for voters to abstain in the coming elections, arguing that all candidates represent a continuation of the status quo. In a Graciela Romer y Asociados poll published in Pagina 12 on March 19, Kirchner continued to lead in the polls with 16.7% of voter preference, ahead of Rodriguez Saa by two points. Rodriguez Saa's 14.7% was followed by Menem with 13.5%, and Carrio with 12.8%. Lopez Murphy had 9.5%, while Moreau had 2.6%.

[Sources: The Financial Times (London), 02/18/03; Associated Press, 02/25/03; Clarin (Argentina), 02/22/03, 02/23/03, 02/25/03, 02/26/03; Inter Press Service, 03/11/03; Notimex, 02/16/03, 02/18/03, 02/19/03, 02/21/03, 02/25/03, 03/07/03, 03/13/03; El Nuevo Herald (Miami), 03/04/03, 03/17/03; Spanish news service EFE, 02/16/03, 03/01/03, 03/09/03, 03/20/03]

Standards

National Standards (McREL) <http://www.mcrel.org/>

"Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government"

"Understands the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited governments"

"Understands the sources, purposes, and functions of law, and the importance of the rule of law for the protection of individual rights and the common good"

"Understands the concept of a constitution, the various purposes that constitutions serve, and the conditions that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government"

"Understands the central ideas of American constitutional government and how this form of government has shaped the character of American society"

"Understands how the world is organized politically into nation-states, how nation-states interact with one another, and issues surrounding U.S. foreign policy"

"Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how these elements were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Right"

"Understands patterns of nationalism, state-building, and social reform in Europe and the Americas from 1830 to 1914"

"Uses the target language to engage in conversations, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions and information"

"Understands and interprets written and spoken language on diverse topics from diverse media"

"Presents information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics"

"Understands traditional ideas and perspectives, institutions, professions, literary and artistic expressions, and other components of the target culture"



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