

The 1993 Argentine Elections

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On 3 October 1993 Argentinians voted in mid-term elections for the Chamber of National Deputies for the second time since the inauguration of the Menem administration in July 1989. The incumbent Peronist party (PJ) obtained 42 per cent of votes (65 seats); its main contender, the Radical party (UCR) of former President Raúl Alfonsín, secured 30 per cent of the votes (41 seats). The government interpreted its victory as a popular endorsement of its economic programme that had brought skyrocketing Argentine inflation under control. Moreover, President Menem considered the results as a mandate to reform the Constitution and thereby allow him to seek re-election. The agreement of two-thirds of the Chamber of National Deputies and the Senate is necessary to call for a Constitutional Convention. The Peronist party is currently 45 deputies short of the two-thirds in the Chamber. President Menem has proposed a dialogue to the opposition and to the dissident Peronist senators (that include an alternative presidential candidate) to resolve this issue, while announcing his intention to call a plebiscite over the reform in support of his position.

Electoral System and Concurrent Elections

In 1983, after seven years of military dictatorship, Argentina returned to constitutional rule. The Argentine Constitution established a federal system of government that, at the national level, combines a presidency elected through an electoral college every six years, with a Congress divided into two chambers: the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. The Senate is composed of two senators per province, each elected for a nine-year term, and it is renewed by thirds every three years. The Lower Chamber is renewed by halves every two years. National deputies are directly elected in national elections, senators are indirectly elected through provincial legislatures.¹ At the provincial level of government, governors have four-year terms. Provincial legislators, city majors, and city representatives are usually elected every two or four years in elections that coincide with major national elections. This may vary according to provincial constitutions.

The 1983 return to constitutional rule was accompanied by a reintroduction of the proportional representation system that was first introduced in 1963. On 23 June and 12 July 1983 General Bignone, the last military president, issued Decrees No. 22838 and 22847 establishing essential electoral rules. These two decrees continue to be the current electoral law in Argentina and have never been reformed.

Decree 22838 instituted the d'Hont electoral formula of proportional representation and established a district threshold of 3 per cent of the votes. Decree 22847/83 transformed the magnitude of the electoral districts. The national Constitution of 1853 establishes provinces as geographical districts for the elections of national deputies and regulates the number of the representatives corresponding to each electoral district according to its population (to be determined every ten years through a national census). In addition, Decree 22847 arbitrarily added three representatives to the number corresponding to each electoral district and instituted a minimum representation of five national deputies per district. This transformation of the magnitude of electoral districts immediately produced a phenomenon of under-representation of the four largest districts and over-representation of the remaining provinces, augmenting the disproportionality in the distribution of seats.²

The general increase in the number of national deputies per district (Decree 22847) enhances the efficiency of proportional representation since the efficacy of an electoral formula depends largely on district magnitude.³ On the one hand, proportional representation allowed the decrease in the combined share of the national vote held by the Justicialista and the Radical parties ever since 1983. On the other hand, the concurrence of legislative elections with presidential and gubernatorial elections helped to maintain a high concentration of votes for the Radical and Peronist parties.

Presidential elections are held every six years, national legislative elections every two years, and elections for governors every four years. In 1983 all posts were elected. In 1985 and in 1993, the elections were held mainly to select national representatives. In 1983 and 1989, presidential and legislative elections were held concurrently. In 1983, 1987, and 1991 national legislative and gubernatorial elections coincided. Since national deputies are proportionally allocated, the combined vote share of the two strongest parties in these legislative elections is lower than that of presidential or gubernatorial elections. When legislative elections coincide with elections for president or governor, the legislative candidates are usually carried to office on the coat-tails of their corresponding presidential or gubernatorial candidate. This is why the concurrence of elections enhances the concentration of votes for the Radical and Peronist candidates.⁴ Thus, concentration of votes for the Radical and Peronist candidates in the 'concurrent elections' tends to be higher, and their corresponding level of fractionalization lower, than that in proportional representation 'non-concurrent' legislative elections.

The Previous Elections

In 1983 the Peronist party was defeated for the first time in free elections. The electoral triumph of the Radical presidential candidate Raúl Alfonsín, who obtained the majority of the popular vote in 1983, was a turning point in Argentine politics and a shock to traditionally unbeatable Peronism. In this election the Unión Cívica

Radical obtained 52 per cent of the vote for president, 48 per cent for national deputies, but it only acquired 32 per cent of the governorships of the country. The Peronist party gathered 40 per cent for president, 38 per cent for national deputies, but it obtained 54 per cent of the governorships. These results granted the Radical party both the presidency, and a narrow majority in the Chamber of Deputies (129 representatives out of 254), but only 18 of 46 senators (Peronists had 21 senators).

In mid-term elections for deputies in 1985, the UCR maintained its majority of 129 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (obtaining 44 per cent of votes whereas the divided Peronists only captured 35 per cent).⁵ In the national legislative elections of 1987, the Radicals suffered a deep defeat. While traditionally strong provincial parties retained three governorships (Corrientes, Neuquén, and San Juan), the Radicals only retained two: Córdoba and Río Negro. On the contrary, the Peronists secured their control in the provinces they won in 1983, as well as in five of the seven districts won by the Radicals in 1983. This increased their share of governorships to 17. With regard to vote share, the Peronist party won 41 per cent of the vote for deputies whereas the Radicals only gained 37 per cent and lost their majority in the Chamber (their seat total decreased from 129 to 113 seats). At the same time, the Peronists achieved control of the Senate.

In 1989, the Peronist candidate, Carlos Menem, won the presidential elections with 47 per cent of the popular vote (and the required majority of electoral votes in the electoral college). The Radical candidate Eduardo Angeloz obtained 37 per cent of the vote. This election marked the first democratic partisan turnover since 1916. For national deputies, the UCR's share of votes decreased to 29 per cent, while the Peronist's increased to 45 per cent. The Peronist party did not obtain the majority of representatives in the Chamber of Deputies, but the seven votes needed to get that majority could be negotiated with minor parties historically allied to Peronism. The Senate remained completely under the control of the Peronist party.

President Menem's inauguration, originally scheduled for December, was advanced to July because of the sharp economic crisis. An outbreak of hyperinflation forced President Alfonsín to resign five months before the end of his term. The new Peronist president, from whom expansionist policies were expected, committed himself to economic stabilization. After a second hyperinflationary experience in 1990, he was able to reduce inflation to low levels. In the 1991 mid-term elections, the 41 per cent vote plurality obtained by the Peronists was interpreted as an endorsement to Menem's economic policies. The Peronists increased its national deputies to 124 despite its loss of three governorships (one to the Radicals). The Radicals maintained their 29 per cent of the vote.

In addition to the Peronists and Radicals, other national and provincial parties exist. Some of the provincial parties existed before the democratic transition and have maintained their strength during the ten-year democratic period (the local parties of Corrientes, Neuquén, and San Juan are the most representative examples).⁶ In Chaco, Salta, Tucumán and Jujuy, in the north of the country, local political parties with links with the last military regime emerged and won important places in the political spectrum in 1991. Additionally, three small national parties have won 5 or 6 per cent of the national votes since 1985: a centre-left party, Partido Intransigente, in 1985; the neo-conservative, Alianza de Centro, in 1987 and 1989; and MODIN since 1991.

The 1993 Elections

The 1993 national elections were non-concurrent elections.⁷ This election included two legal innovations of major political impact. First, Argentine citizens living abroad were allowed to vote. Secondly, the Congress passed a law in 1991 under which women must be granted a quota in the slates of at least 30 per cent of the candidates with possibilities of winning a seat.

Increasing apathy in the electorate after the peak of political participation in 1983 was seen throughout the electoral campaign. The two main contenders centred their strategies around the approval or rejection of government policies. The Peronist campaign presented the elections as a test to measure support for their economic programme. The Radical campaign concentrated on criticizing the social costs of adjustment and highlighting the fact that numerous government officials had been charged with corruption.

Before the election, the Peronist party had 117 of the 257 seats in the Lower Chamber; 55 of those 117 seats lapsed in 1993. With 42 per cent of the total vote, the Peronists obtained 65 seats (52 per cent of those distributed) and increased their share of seats to 127 out of 257. This new allotment of deputies still only constitutes a plurality of 49 per cent rather than a majority or the two-thirds needed to call a Constitutional Convention. The Peronists won in 18 out of 24 districts. These included three of the four largest districts: Federal District, Buenos Aires and Santa Fé (see Table 1).

The Radicals controlled 84 seats in the Chamber of Deputies as a result of the 1991 elections; half of them lapsed in 1993. With 30 per cent of the vote, they secured 41 seats (32 per cent of those distributed) and decreased their number of seats to 83. The UCR won elections in three districts (including Córdoba, one of the four largest). In addition, it prevailed in a fourth district, Catamarca, because of its alliance with other parties (see Table 1).

Among the other parties, the provincial parties obtained (together) 9.9 per cent of votes and nine deputies (7 per cent of those distributed) in this election. Before the 1993 election, 23 seats belonged to provincial parties and seven of those seats were renewed; therefore, the number of members belonging to provincial parties increased to 25 (10 per cent of Chamber seats). They won in two districts: Neuquén and Corrientes and obtained deputies in those two provinces as well as in Chaco, Mendoza, Salta, Jujuy, Tucumán and Tierra del Fuego (see Table 1).

The third national party in this election was the MODIN party, which was headed by Aldo Rico, the leader of the 1987 and 1988 military rebellions against President Alfonsín. On those occasions he had demanded a halt to the trial of military officers accused of human rights violations under the preceding military regime. In 1993, running with a campaign that strongly opposed the official economic programme, Rico's MODIN obtained 5.8 per cent of votes and four seats, increasing its legislative share to six seats. Most of its votes were obtained in the province of Buenos Aires, where it acquired its four seats with 11 per cent of the vote.

The neo-conservative alliance, which used to be the third national force in 1987 and 1989, obtained only 3.1 per cent of votes and one seat (in Córdoba). The centre-left was divided between the Frente Grande and the Unidad Socialista. The former acquired 3.7 per cent of votes and three seats (two in the Federal District and one in Buenos Aires province), whereas the latter received 1.6 per cent of votes and two seats (one in the Federal District and the other in Santa Fé).

TABLE 1. National electoral results

	Peronist party		UCR		'Third party'*	
	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats
Argentina	42.3	65	30	41	5.8	4
Federal Capital	32.5	5	29.9	5	13.6	2
Buenos Aires	48.1	20	25.9	10	11	4
Catamarca†	39.4	1	47.4	2	5.2	0
Córdoba	36.5	4	44.1	4	12.2	1
Corrientes	36.7	1	12.6	0	46.7	2
Chaco	37.4	2	23.7	1	32.4	1
Chubut	44.8	1	43.3	1	8.7	0
Entre Ríos	45.5	3	42.3	2	6.8	0
Formosa	56.4	1	39.8	1	2.3	0
Jujuy	37.2	1	26.2	1	25.2	1
La Pampa	43.9	2	29.6	1	16.1	0
La Rioja	61.7	1	34.8	1	1.7	0
Mendoza	48.7	3	30.6	1	15.8	1
Misiones	50.6	2	44.2	1	3.2	0
Neuquén	27.3	2	29.2	1	31.9	1
Río Negro	29.9	1	41.9	1	17.7	0
Salta	39.7	2	17.8	0	33.8	1
San Luis	51.4	2	34	1	7.5	0
San Juan	23.4	1	11.5	0	12.9	0
Santa Cruz	57.5	2	33.8	1	4.3	0
Santa Fé	37.9	4	34.9	3	9.9	1
Sgo. del Estero	28.8	1	50.4	2	19.4	0
Tucumán	40.9	2	20.9	1	33.7	1
Tierra del Fuego	42.3	1	23.4	0	26.1	1

*The 'third party' is: MODIN in Buenos Aires, Frente Grande in the Federal Capital, Bloquista in San Juan, Demócrata in Mendoza, Demócrata Progresista in Santa Fé, Fuerza Republicana in Tucumán, Mov. Popular Neuquino in Neuquén, Autonomista-Liberal in Corrientes, Patagónico Popular in Río Negro, Popular Jujeño in Jujuy, Renovador in Salta, Convocatoria Independiente in La Pampa, Acción Chaqueña in Chaco, Popular Fueguino in Tierra del Fuego.

†In Catamarca the Radicals allied with other parties won.

Most analysts, as well as the government, believe the electoral outcome of 1993 can be interpreted as strong support for President Menem's economic programme. The value of this victory was enhanced by the fact that it was in the second mid-term election of the tenure of President Raúl Alfonsín (in 1987) that the UCR started its decline and sharp loss of popularity. To the contrary, the Peronists not only won nine new seats (over its previous 116); they also gained a plurality of votes in the Federal District, a traditional Radical bastion, and surpassed the Radicals by 22 per cent in the Buenos Aires province, where more than a third of the national population lives.

Before the elections, President Menem attempted to pass an initiative in the Senate to call for a constitutional convention to reform the Constitution in order to suppress the ban on presidential re-election. The attempt failed because of a lack of quorum (due to the absence of the Radicals and two dissident Peronist senators). President Menem interpreted the 1993 electoral results as an endorsement of his

re-election ambitions. Indeed, he announced that he was considering calling a plebiscite to show the popular support for constitutional amendment. Menem has also tried to establish an agreement with the Radicals over that topic, but the accord seems difficult to arrange because the Radicals are reluctant to support the President's re-election aspirations.

The Radicals' presidential ambitions have also been affected by the 1993 electoral outcome. The governor of Córdoba, Eduardo Angeloz, who obtained an important victory in his province, emerged as the most feasible presidential candidate. His main opponent, Fernando De La Rúa, is a senator and party leader in the Federal District, a region where the Radicals performed poorly.

Conclusion

Argentina's democracy is ten years old. During this period, the UCR's vote total for deputies decreased from 48 per cent in 1983 to 43 per cent in 1985, to 37 per cent in 1987, finally stabilizing at 29 per cent in 1989 and 1991 and slightly increasing to 30 per cent in 1993. By contrast, the Peronist party's electoral experience has been more irregular. In 1983 it suffered its first national electoral defeat for president and obtained 38 per cent of the vote for national deputies. In 1985 its share decreased to 34 per cent. Its vote total started to increase in 1987 when it received 41 per cent of the vote. In 1989 the Peronists continued to grow and received 45 per cent of the vote. In 1989, its vote share decreased again to 41 per cent. Finally in 1993, Peronists won 42 per cent of the vote (see Table 2).

With this electoral pattern, the only party that had a majority in the Chamber of Deputies was the Radical party (between 1983 and 1987). While the Radicals had a majority, the Peronists had 44 per cent of the Chamber until 1985, when it was reduced to 40 per cent of the seats. In 1987 the decline of support for the Radicals did not impede them from obtaining a plurality of seats (44 per cent), whereas the Peronists maintained their 40 per cent of seats. In 1989, the Peronist party increased its presence in the Chamber, obtaining 47 per cent of the seats while the Radicals' share declined to 35 per cent. The Peronists slightly increased their share in 1991 (48 per cent) and 1993 (49 per cent) thereby retaining their plurality. On the contrary, the UCR saw its share of seats fall to 34 per cent in 1991 and to 32 per cent in 1993. In ten years the Radicals' presence in the Chamber has declined from a majority to a third. Over the same time period, the Peronists increased their share of seats from 40 per cent to 49 per cent.

Despite the high vote shares of the Peronists and Radicals, a process of increasing fractionalization and pluralization has taken place in Argentina since 1983. The

TABLE 2. Percentage of votes of the Peronist and Radical parties in Argentine national elections for deputies

	1983	1985	1987	1989	1991	1993
Peronist party	38	35	41	45	41	42
UCR	48	44	37	29	29	30
Peronists+UCR	86	79	78	74	70	72

Source: Figures from Departamento Estadísticas de la Dirección Nacional Electoral, Ministerio del Interior.

combined national vote share of the two strongest parties (PJ and UCR) for legislative elections declined from 86 per cent in 1983 to 79 per cent in 1985, 78 per cent in 1987, 74 per cent in 1989, and 70 per cent in 1991 (see Table 2). However, this combined vote share has increased again to 72 per cent in the recent 1993 elections. Surprisingly, the combined vote share of the PJ and UCR has been higher in the non-concurrent 1993 elections than in the 'concurrent' 1991 elections when the coat-tail effect of gubernatorial elections should have been noticeable. This fact indicates that the trend of vote deconcentration from Peronists and Radicals has suffered an interruption and that together, these parties will probably obtain more than the current 72 per cent of votes in the 1995 elections, when presidential and legislative elections will be held simultaneously.

Notes

1. With the exception of the Federal District where the two senators are indirectly elected through an electoral college.
2. The four largest districts (Buenos Aires, Capital Federal, Córdoba and Santa Fé) with more than half the population of the country elect more than half of the national representatives. The median districts (Corrientes, Chaco, Entre Ríos, Jujuy, Mendoza, Misiones, Salta, San Juan, Santiago del Estero, and Tucumán) elect between six and ten representatives each; the remaining ten smaller districts together elect less than a fifth of the national representatives.
3. Nevertheless, the enlargement produced by the decree is not enough to make PR work effectively in the smaller districts. There, the established minimum of five representatives per district means a district magnitude of two or three seats every two years because of the renewal of the Chamber by halves.
4. There is only one ballot per party which includes executive and legislative candidates. Thus, it is necessary to physically cut the ballot to combine a vote for a presidential candidate of one party and a legislative candidate of another party. This reality enhances presidential coat-tails, by discouraging split-ticket voting (and, relatedly, fractionalization in the legislative level). Despite exceptions, there is a historical tendency towards straight ticket voting (at each electoral level).
5. In some provinces (mainly in Buenos Aires) Peronism split into two different factions and ran on two different tickets.
6. The three parties won the provincial elections in 1983 and two of them (PAL in Corrientes and MPN in Neuquén) have just won again in 1993.
7. Only one election for governor was held. In the province of Corrientes, the Pacto Autonomista-Liberal won the elections for governor with 46.7 per cent. However, 'ballotage' elections should decide the governorship in the absence of a majority. This 'ballotage' electoral system replaces the previous electoral college that had produced deadlocks in the 1991 and 1992 gubernatorial elections. These deadlocks were followed by federal intervention.