

Argentina's 2015 Presidential Election

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Argentines went to the polls on October 25, 2015, to vote in the first round of a presidential race to succeed President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who hails from the Peronist party's leftist faction known as the Front of Victory (FPV). The close results set up a second round on November 22, 2015, between [Daniel Scioli](#), governor of Buenos Aires province running under the banner of President Fernández's FPV, and [Mauricio Macri](#), mayor of Buenos Aires, heading the Let's Change coalition that includes center-right and center-left opposition parties. In the first round, with [97% of the votes counted](#), Scioli received 36.86% of the vote, Macri received 34.33%, and [Sergio Massa](#), a deputy in Argentina's Congress who heads a centrist dissident Peronist faction known as United for a New Alternative (UNA), received 21.34%. A second round is required since no candidate received 45% of the vote or 40% of the vote with a 10-point lead.

The contest is significant since it is the first time in 12 years that a Kirchner will not be president. Fernández is serving her second term since 2007, when she succeeded her husband, the late Néstor Kirchner, who served one term beginning in 2003. Fernández is ineligible to run for a third consecutive term, although she would be eligible to run again in 2019. Going into the first round, many observers believed that any of the leading candidates for president would espouse more market-friendly policies than those of the current government, which include currency and price controls and import restrictions. Many also believed that Argentina's next government will be more committed to maintaining constructive relations with the United States, including a resolution of the long-standing dispute with holdout creditors who did not participate in previous debt restructurings.

Scioli Versus Macri

Going into the first round, Scioli had been topping opinion polls and won a [combined open primary](#) in August with 38.7% of the national vote. Macri placed second in the primary with 30.1% of the vote, while Massa came in third with 20.6%. Leading up to the first round, [some polling](#) saw a second round as likely, while [other polling](#) had shown Scioli having enough support to win in the first round. Macri and Massa had been battling for second place and a chance to confront Scioli in a second round.

Scioli is the governor of Buenos Aires province and 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 and benefitted from the president's rising public support. Fernández endorsed Scioli after he accepted as his vice presidential running mate the Kirchners' long-time supporter Carlos Zannini, who serves as the president's legal secretary. During the primary campaign, Scioli vied to win the support of the Kirchners' leftist supporters by emphasizing continuity with the government programs and a strong government role in the

economy. Scioli's challenge in the first round was to attract the support of more moderate Peronists. While Scioli led voting in the first round, he lost ground compared to the August primary, dropping almost 2%.

Macri is the leader of the center-right Republican Proposal party and is in his second term as mayor of Buenos Aires. Macri 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 have a nationwide reach. During the 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. He polled strongly in the first round, between 5 and 8% higher than polls had predicted and more than 4% higher than his performance in the August primary.

Outlook and Potential Implications

While Macri appears to have significant momentum going into the second round, a key will be whether he will be able to capture the votes of moderate Peronists who supported Sergio Massa in the first round. During the campaign, Massa emphasized an anti-corruption message and criticized the Fernández government's high-profile corruption scandals. Some observers contend that Massa could serve as [kingmaker](#) in the second round by throwing his support to either Macri or Scioli. An important factor is whether Peronists voting for Massa would be willing to support a non-Peronist candidate for president.

Scioli could potentially face a more united and stronger opposition wanting to return the government to more centrist policies after 12 years of Kirchnerismo. Given Scioli's loss of support in the first round compared to the primary, it appears that Argentines have voted for change.

If Scioli wins, some analysts believe that President Fernández will be able to exert [continued influence](#) in the government; others contend that the strong role of the presidency in Argentina's political system would ensure that Scioli would be in charge. If Macri wins in a second round, Fernández could effectively become the leader of the opposition and perhaps be in a position to seek a return to the presidency in 2019.

Both Scioli and Macri espouse market-friendly economic policies that could renew [investor confidence](#) in the economy, but the pace of change appears to be the key policy difference. Scioli has promised to pursue gradual economic reforms to spur growth, and has vowed not to dismantle social programs. Macri has vowed to undertake economic policy reforms more quickly, including a quick resolution to the long-standing [dispute with holdout creditors](#), although he has also promised to attack poverty.

Whoever wins, the 2015 presidential election will likely bring to power a government 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 bilateral relations under the Kirchner governments, including over the current [U.S. judicial case regarding the holdout creditors](#).

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