11-4-2011

Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner Wins Re-election

Andrés Gaudán

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur

Recommended Citation
Gaudán, Andrés. 'Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner Wins Re-election.' (2011).
https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/14008

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Notisur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner Wins Re-election

by Andrés Gaudín

Category/Department: Argentina

Published: 2011-11-04

Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (CFK) won a landslide re-election to a second four-year term on Oct. 23. The six parties and alliances, without leaders or programs, that ran against her were relegated to being minor players in the election. Beginning four months after the president was elected the first time, those parties and alliances had taken a position of systematic, and often destabilizing, opposition.

President Fernández de Kirchner obtained 54% of the votes, 6 points more than she received in 2007 and 37 points ahead of the party that came in second, a difference never before seen in Argentina's electoral politics. The poor and the middle class, workers and professionals, men and women, the old and the young all voted for her. Marxists, progressives, and centrists voted for her. She lost in only one of the country's 24 provinces. The election saw no social or generational divide but rather a cross section of society that transcended class and came together to re-elect CFK.

For the first time with this election, a new law—Ley 26.571, Democratization of Political Representation, Transparency, and Electoral Equality—was in effect, which required parties to choose their candidates in internal primary elections and required the state to guarantee them equal access to the media. Beyond a reading of the numbers and their meaning, this election provided some valuable elements for dissection by political analysts and academics. The most significant was young people's massive return to political activity.

Seldom has it been so easy to explain what happened. CFK presented the electorate with the achievements of a flourishing economy—favored by external markets that need the food that the country produces—and a political leadership willing to continue strengthening the guiding role of the state while developing a model in which social inclusion, more-equitable wealth distribution, and all rights are a priority.

What the opposition offered, however, might have been interpreted in some cases as insulting to the electorate. Such was the case of Alberto Rodríguez Saá, who came in fourth. His campaign slogan offered a perk that was not even on Argentine voters' list of priorities: "Free Wi-Fi for everyone!"

Such intellectual and conceptual poverty, the lack of leaders, led the corporations that financed the campaigns and the media that gave them a public presence to assume the opposition's ideological leadership. This occurred to such an extent that most analysts said that the election losers were not the opposition candidates—who were fighting among themselves—but rather the large media groups, especially those headed by Clarín and La Nación.

"In this election, the defeated were the media and the right," wrote Gustavo Cirelli, assistant director of the daily pro-government Tiempo. "The loser has a full name—Héctor Magnetto, and he is the CEO of Grupo Clarín," said Luis Bruschtein, an editorial writer for the independent Página 12.
Opposition unable to sway voters

Unable to read the reality that the electorate could read, the opposition did not design programs that might have been alternatives to CFK’s, and it made the mistake of merely repeating the discourse of the large dailies, which, using their complete freedom of speech, fiercely fought the government on political grounds but mostly because their economic interests had been affected.

This requires explanation. Three administration decisions have particularly hurt the major media: 1) Passage of a law—which the government says is democratizing, because it breaks the information monopoly—that prohibits the concentration of television and radio ownership in one company (NotiSur, Nov. 13, 2009). Grupo Clarín alone has more than 100 radio frequencies throughout the country. 2) A legal investigation into the 1976 acquisition of the country’s only newsprint factory (NotiSur, Oct. 1, 2010). The government alleges that during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship the business was seized from its rightful owner and turned over in a questionable deal to Clarín and La Nación. 3) Renationalization of the pension system (NotiSur, Dec. 12, 2008), which in the 1990s had been privatized in favor of several private pension funds (Administradoras de Fondos de Jubilaciones y Pensiones, AFJP). Clarín owns one of the AFJPs.

Voters supported president’s record

What was it that the opposition was unable to see because the media did not want it to see? That in 2007 the CFK administration—a continuation of the administration that came to power in 2003 under her late husband Néstor Kirchner, who died in October 2010—favored by the international situation, began to develop a model that brought sustained economic growth. GDP has increased by an average of 6% annually, and is expected to peak at 9.1% in 2011. That growth allowed the government to renationalize water, postal service, and aviation as well as part of the railway service, which had all been privatized along with the pension system. Lower unemployment is another achievement the president can point to. While unemployment reached 20.4% in 2003, in September 2011 it was at 6.9%, just above its historic low.

"In a context of economic stability, higher domestic consumption, promotion of domestic production, and a rise in exports reactivated an economy that was able to escape the international crisis and achieve levels of sustained growth," said Radio Nederland in a pre-election assessment published on Sept. 30.

"In a context of economic stability, higher domestic consumption, promotion of domestic production, and a rise in exports reactivated an economy that was able to escape the international..."
crisis and achieve levels of sustained growth," said Radio Nederland in a pre-election assessment published on Sept. 30.

"It is necessary to defend and preserve this economic model that has brought the longest cycle of economic growth in history and fostered a rise in domestic consumption to unprecedented levels," said José Ignacio de Mendiguren, president of the powerful business group Unión Industrial Argentina (UIA), days before the election.

In the social arena, the government implemented two measures that had profound repercussions. The most far-reaching was the Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH), which gives a monthly stipend of US$98 to those who are unemployed or work in the informal economy and have children under 18 years of age. As a condition for the stipend, parents must ensure that their children receive preventive medical care and childhood vaccinations, and remain enrolled in public schools.

A report by the state-run Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones Laborales said that the AUH serves more than 3.5 million children and adolescents. Although its concrete impact will have to be evaluated over the long term, "a year after its implementation, the demand for enrollment in public schools has increased by 23%," said an Associated Press wire story, quoting the ministry of education.

The second measure is the Asignación por Embarazo para Protección Social, which provides pregnant women—including foreigners with more than three years of residency and who work in the informal economy and have no health coverage—a stipend equivalent to US$98 a month from the 12th week of pregnancy until the birth of the child. The Ministerio de Bienestar Social says the program, implemented last April, reaches 270,000 low-income women. Both programs are financed with resources generated by renationalizing the AFJP.

The government's human rights policy, which allowed the trial and sentencing of hundreds of persons responsible for crimes against humanity, has expanded to other levels. It has led to the passage of a marriage-equality law that made Argentina the first Latin American country to permit same-sex marriage and give such couples the same rights as heterosexual couples (NotiSur, July 30, 2010). The program to broaden and universalize rights includes opening public universities in economically and at-risk areas, which will provide access to higher education to thousands of young people whose parents, in many cases, lack even a primary education. In addition, the amount of the national budget earmarked for technological and scientific research, defined as engines of development, has almost doubled.

Unfinished business

The opposition was unable to see that, in addition to the list of favorable indicators, there are outstanding debts for which CFK has as yet had no answers. One is the high inflation rate, which the government puts at 10% annually and a committee of opposition legislators puts at 24%. The government figure is based on a study by the distrusted Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INDEC), and the second is based on studies by a group of private consultants whose methodology is also suspect. However, citizens' perception is that the rate of inflation is much higher than the official 9.9% but far below the 24% claimed by the private consultants.

Another overdue debt is poverty reduction. While the poverty rate dropped from the 49% recorded in 2001 to just above 19% in 2010, the index continues to be intolerable in a country that is growing...
at an unprecedented pace and that produces enough food to feed at least three times its population. These are not insignificant problems nor are they the only ones. CFK and the 10 million Argentines who voted for her—giving her healthy legislative majorities—can only, with their actions and their votes, take responsibility for building a truly equitable government where those basic indices will turn around and show values consistent with those that led to the Oct. 23 victory.

Another overdue debt is poverty reduction. While the poverty rate dropped from the 49% recorded in 2001 to just above 19% in 2010, the index continues to be intolerable in a country that is growing at an unprecedented pace and that produces enough food to feed at least three times its population. These are not insignificant problems nor are they the only ones. CFK and the 10 million Argentines who voted for her—giving her healthy legislative majorities—can only, with their actions and their votes, take responsibility for building a truly equitable government where those basic indices will turn around and show values consistent with those that led to the Oct. 23 victory.

-- End --