

Argentina: After the primaries, the elections

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The election primaries [Simultaneous and Mandatory Open Primaries (PASO)] held on 13 August in Argentina to determine candidates for the presidential and legislative elections on 22 October 2023 did not illuminate any of the pre-existing unknowns. On the contrary, they worsened the crisis, generated greater uncertainty and left the result of the next presidential election open. The following days worsened the general picture.

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The open and mandatory internal elections made it clear that the wave of extreme right-wing politics that is sweeping the world has also reached our country. If 2001 saw the crisis of the traditional parties and led them to form coalitions, this result puts all coalitions in crisis, increases the prevailing economic-political uncertainty and deepens the crisis (the first manifestation of which was the hasty devaluation of the Argentine peso on Monday without even a minimum compensation plan).

The general framework of this electoral course is the beginning of a change of cycle characterised by:

- The crisis of Kirchnerism, until now the dominant current within Peronism, which is transferred to the movement as a whole. This is a crisis that has been brewing for years and that will deepen with this strong defeat. [1] It does not imply that Peronism cannot be reconstituted nor that Kirchnerism cannot be reinstated as an internal current.
- The reconfiguration of the bloc of the dominant classes, with the question of what role industry will play as well as the incorporation of the knowledge industry sector. In addition the leadership of the bloc will pass into the hands of those sectors of capital that benefit from income from the land (agrarian, hydrocarbon and mining) along with the always present financial capital.

Why?

However, this general context does not explain the increase in abstention, as these PASOs have been the most competitive in the last 20 years. Nor does it explain the surprising percentage obtained by right-winger Javier Milei, whose transversal vote had both a popular and youthful content. A rather impressionistic look would explain this as both a punitive vote and one of anger. However, there seem to be deeper causes. Resignation and fatigue in the face of a social crisis that has lasted through three governments (each one leaving the situation worse than the one before), seems more

likely to justify absenteeism. Nevertheless, the hopelessness that exists across vast social sectors, the feeling that their future has been ripped from them and that they see no other perspective than the worsening of present conditions, would have a lot to do with the vote for Milei.

It could be said that it is a vote of the hopeless who are looking for hope. This hope is found in those who promise to change everything from the roots, with these sectors unaware of the consequences.

And now what?

The pre-electoral consensus: extractivist, exporting, stabilising (adjusting) the economy, was definitively imposed. There are no longer disputes about models (the three possibly successful candidates share the broad strokes of this orientation, although they may differ in methods, in the timings and in the specific legalities). But beyond that consensus, both Milei and Patricia Bullrich of the right-wing PRO (Republican Proposal) aim for a qualitative leap that the primaries have enhanced. They go beyond adjustment and extreme exploitation of nature. They aim for profound structural changes that affect both economic and social relations, as well as civil rights and the insertion of the country into the international order...

In other times, proposals like those of Milei and Bullrich required a coup d'état to be put into practice, but within the phenomenon of the current global far-right wave they can come to political power through the popular vote and a regime of liberal democracy. In our view, whoever finally wins the presidential elections it will be a party government, and they will not control the executive. The issue is that within the current regime, parliament also counts.

“The labour and popular movement face an all-out offensive against historical social achievements and the expansion of rights achieved in recent decades, but the country has social and political reserves to face this offensive.”

With the forty deputies that La Libertad Avanza [LLA or Liberty Advances coalition] would obtain, it could block a parliamentary quorum, but it would also have difficulties passing its own laws, which is the same case for both the Juntos por el Cambio [Together for Change] and Unión por la Patria [Union for the Homeland] coalitions. Not in vain is Milei already talking about resorting to popular consultations, a way to obtain mobilised social support in case of having to govern by Decreto de necesidad y urgencia [Necessity and Urgency Decree or DNU] now called “elective authoritarianism” by social scientists. Faced with this panorama, strengthening the bench of left-wing deputies acquires no less importance.

Turbulence on the horizon

The labour and popular movement face an all-out offensive against historical social achievements and the expansion of rights achieved in recent decades, but the country has social and political reserves to face this offensive. Will the movement for human rights allow the review of the trials

against humanity and the imprisonment of those responsible? Faced with the attempt to annul the laws on legal, safe and free abortion and comprehensive sexual education, will the powerful women's movement simply sit back and watch the parliamentary debate? Will the traditional union leadership simply allow the annulment of the ultra-activity clause, which would collapse all agreements and open the door to company-based unions, destroying single representation industry-wide branches? Will the huge environmental movement not react to extreme exploitation of nature and its consequences on climate change and the country? The answer is that there will be battles and that the responsibility of the party and social left is to bring these future struggles together without subsuming them.

However, this reaction will not be immediate, it will have to face current and future adjustment, but more generally it will take time to debate and mature. In the meantime there are the general elections in October and then November if there is a runoff...

Wholesale uncertainties

In the days after the primaries the situation has worsened. Both economically and socially due to the devaluation, and in the electoral perspectives, according to the latest data Milei's candidacy continues growing with already around 37%. Is Milei's vote consolidated or is it a fragile vote subject to volatility? Are his economic proposals consistent and, if applied, could they end up generating great chaos?

The polls showed a three-way tie, with little difference between first and third of the pre-candidates, a difference that will be reduced even more with the official count, predictably in favour of Sergio Massa of the UP. Therefore the result of the general election becomes even more uncertain. Milei may end up winning in the first round or he may only end up with the most votes. Massa may come in third or he may manage to reach enough votes to compete with Bullrich in the the runoff. The flipped coin is in the air.

The debate

This coming electoral stretch is also a battlefield. How to stop this electoral dilemma is being discussed throughout the popular camp. There are not many alternatives: blank votes and abstention have been ruled out because they do not provide any solution. It remains to vote for the complete list of the Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores - Unidad [FIT-U or Workers Left Front-Unity] [\[2\]](#) in order to collaborate in strengthening the resistance or vote in favour of Massa to stop a possible Milei-Bullrich runoff and to strengthen the left bench.

All this is and will be present in the coming weeks in the discussions in the working class and popular camp. The only certainty is that future will indeed be turbulent and that the broadest social unity will be necessary. On the near horizon, a crisis of governance cannot be ruled out.

EDUARDO LUCITA

P.S.

• IVP. THURSDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2023:

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8258>

• Translated by David Fagan for *International Viewpoint* from *Viento sur*:

<https://vientosur.info/argentina-tras-elecciones-las-primarias-paso/>

Footnotes

[1] There are many indicators of this crisis. Already after the 2009 defeat, the mandatory internal elections of PASO sought to strengthen already quite weakened bipartisanship, as well as containing the different factions of Peronism in crisis. The current candidacy of Juan Grabois of the Frente Patria Grande, part of the UP coalition, has the same meaning. When Minister of Economy, Martín Guzmán resigned, it was clear that there was no Plan B. Two months before the internal elections, Peronism had no candidate or programme; governors and mayors alike privileged their territories more than the national elections. Neither of the two pre-candidates who starred in the internal election comes from Peronism. One is social-Christian and the other, in the best of cases, evolved out of necessity to social-liberalism. Today Peronism is without leadership and traditional verticalism has fragmented.

[2] The FIT-U is an alliance of the Workers Party (Partido Obrero or PO), the Socialist Workers Party (Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas or PTS), the Socialist Left (Izquierda Socialista or IS) and the Workers Socialist Movement (Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores or MST).