

## Polity IV Country Report 2007: Argentina

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td colspan="3">24</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	8	8	0	<b>Democ:</b>	8	8	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	0	0	0	<b>Durable:</b>	24			<b>Tentative:</b>	No			
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SCODE	<b>ARG</b>	CCODE	<b>160</b>	Date of Report	<b>1 November 2008</b>																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	6	2	4																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date	30 October 1983		Begin Date	31 October 1983																					
<b>Polity Fragmentation: No</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>	1853/1994																								
<b>Executive(s)</b>	President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Front for Victory Alliance); directly elected, 28 October 2007, 44.9%																								
<b>Legislature</b>	Bicameral: Chamber of Deputies (257 seats; directly elected, half elected every two years to four-year term; most recent elections, 28 October 2007) Front for Victory Alliance (FVA): 153 Radical Civic Union (UCR): 30 Civic Coalition Confederation (CCC): 27 Republican Proposal: 13 Other parties: 34 Senate (72 seats; directly elected, one-third elected every two years to six-year term; most recent elections, 28 October 2007) FVA: 44 UCR: 10 Other parties: 9 Provincial parties: 9																								
<b>Judiciary</b>	Supreme Court																								

## **Narrative Description:<sup>1</sup>**

### **Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)**

Argentina's long tradition of political turmoil and authoritarian rule was halted by the establishment of an elected civilian government in 1982. Since the return of civilian rule in 1982, the core institutions of democratic competition have remained strong: elections have been clean, civil liberties have been broadly protected and the military – instigators of six coups between 1930 and 1976 – have remained in their barracks. Even when the country's economic collapse in 2001 triggered massive popular protests which culminated in the resignation of President Fernando de la Rúa's Alianza government and produced a quick succession of interim presidents, the military choose not to reenter politics. Unlike the past, the crisis, and subsequent political instability, was handled through a constitutional process that finally resulted in the election of a new president by a special joint session of congress and provincial governors. Eduardo Duhalde of the Peronist Justicialist Party (PJ) was elected president on 1 January 2002, to complete de la Rúa's term in office.

While respect for constitutional institutions and procedures has largely taken root in the post-1982 era, nonetheless, the political arena continues to be dominated by one large, albeit highly fractionalized, political party: the Peronist Justicialist Party (PJ). The UCR – the only other significant national party since the 1940s – has increasingly ceased to be a national political force. The Radicals' share of the presidential vote fell from more than 50% in 1983 to just 2% in 2003 while their representation in Congress dipped to a historic low in 2007, holding just 30 of 257 seats. With the collapse of the UCR, the Peronist block has become a fragmented collection of personalist vehicles, local patronage machines and short-lived programmatic parties. In the run-up to the 2003 elections the Justicialist Party split into competing factions. During the first round balloting two of the PJ candidates, Carlos Saul Menem (24%) and Nestor Kirchner (22%) emerged as top vote-getters and a runoff election was scheduled for 18 May 2003. However, anticipating an impending loss, Menem withdrew from the election on 14 May and Kirchner was declared the winner and inaugurated President on 25 May 2003.

The Kirchnerist faction, operating under the banner of the Front for Victory, consolidated its control of the Peronist Justicialist Party during Nestor Kirchner's term and was able to hold the president's office for a second term when his wife, Cristina Fernández, won the October 2007 presidential election in first round balloting (44.9%). Cristina Kirchner's victory, over a slate of fourteen candidates, was rooted in the success and popularity of her husband, the continued strength of the Peronist party machine, and the disintegration of any effective national opposition party in the country.

### **Executive Constraints: Near Parity (6)**

While the Argentine constitution limits the powers of the executive, nevertheless, President Menem was able to dominate the political arena in this country for a decade (1989-1999). President Menem sought to rule by decree, often bypassing Congress, and limited the oversight powers of the judiciary by packing the Supreme Court with political supporters. Through his political skills Menem was able to change the constitution to allow for a second (although not a third) term in office. While the 1994 constitution attempted to increase horizontal accountability in government, Menem's dominance over the institutions of governance was not significantly altered. As head of the dominant political force in Argentina, the Peronist Justicialist Party (PJ), Menem continued to exert considerable power over the institutions of governance. However, the UCR candidate Fernando de la Rúa, who was elected president in December 1999, was unable to rule with the same decree of impunity as his predecessor. Given that the Congress, judiciary and regional governorships were all dominated by members of the Peronist party, and that de la Rúa was the candidate of a compromise among the opposition Alliance coalition, the power of the executive branch was significantly reduced. The severe economic crisis that consumed Argentina in 2001 and led to the collapse of the Alianza coalition government, the resignation of President de la Rúa in December 2001, and a quick succession of interim presidents, finally resulted in the 1 January 2002, special election of Peronist Eduardo Duhalde as President. Duhalde was elected by a joint session of parliament and provincial governors to complete de la Rúa's term.

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<sup>1</sup> The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

With the return to power of the Peronist party in 2003, executive power was once again enhanced. President Kirchner, like Menem, governed at the margins of Congress and other institutions of horizontal accountability. Through November 2007, Kirchner had issued over 230 executive orders (on par with the number issued by Menem). In addition to retaining the emergency powers delegated by Congress during the 2001 financial crisis, in 2006 Congress granted President Kirchner vast discretionary powers to modify the budget after its legislative approval. While the government defended the need for the new powers, claiming the economy was still in “emergency mode,” some analysts suggested that it was a violation of the constitution and eroded separation of powers.

Despite the erosion of legislative oversight on the executive branch in recent years, the judiciary has become increasingly accomplished and independent since the return of civilian rule in 1982. In June 2003, at the urging of President Nestor Kirchner, the impeachment commission of the Chamber of Deputies began proceedings against Julio Nazareno, President of the Supreme Court, and his eight colleagues, charging them *inter alia* with corruption (Nazareno subsequently resigned). Moreover, in an attempt to limit the politicization of the judiciary in the future, on 19 June 2003 Kirchner signed a decree limiting the power of the president to appoint justices. Nominees would now be screened by professional panels before being accepted or rejected by the Senate.

The Supreme Court flexed its increasing institutional power in June 2005 when it directly confronted the military establishment over the issue of amnesty. In a decisive ruling the judges repealed the laws promulgated in the 1980s which provided members of the armed forces with immunity from prosecution for crimes committed during Argentina’s “dirty war” of the 1970s. By the end of 2005 over 1,000 former military personnel were awaiting prosecution for their past crimes.

#### **Political Participation: Democratic Retrenchment: Limited and/or Decreasing Overt Coercion (9)**

Political participation in Argentina, while close to being “competitive” in nature, still suffers from factional tendencies. Personality-based factions and social movements, rather than political parties per se, continue to define much of the political arena in Argentina. Since 1946 Argentina has been a country divided between Peronist and anti-Peronist (and allies of each in the armed forces) coalitions. However, despite this fundamental factional division in Argentine politics, intense political rivalries *inside* the Peronist movement have long dominated and shaped political competition in this country. Neither left-wing nor right-wing in orientation, Peronism is more like a political club with a diverse membership and decentralized centers of political loyalties than a unified party sustained by a common ideology and command structure. While the Peronist presidential administrations of Alfonsín (1983-89), Menem (1989-99) and Kirchner (2003-2007) have sought to weaken the party’s traditional ties with the military and have moved away from the central role of the state in the economy (both key elements of Peronist governance in the past), nevertheless, factional struggles inside the Peronist party persist. These internal struggles within the Peronist movement were vividly demonstrated in October 2006 when some 40 people were injured in clashes during a ceremony transferring the remains of three-time president Juan Perón to his country estate. This violence was reminiscent of Perón’s return from exile in 1973 in which over 400 people died in fighting between Peronist factions.

Despite the electoral loss of the Peronist candidate for President in the 1999 elections, Peronism continues to be the dominant political force in this country. The legacy of Peronism as a hegemonic political movement still shines through in the manner in which it organizes and mobilizes its followers and in its treatment of opposition forces. The electoral success of the opposition Alliance coalition in 1999 offered some promise that we might see a gradual change toward institutionalized two-party competition in Argentina. However, economic mismanagement and internal factionalism within this coalition quickly led to its collapse. Just as the Peronist Party is plagued by internal factional struggles, the Alliance, which was composed of the middle class-based Radical Civic Union (UCR) and the left-wing Front for a Country in Solidarity (Frepsa), had tenuous institutional foundations at best and could not weather the country’s deep financial and political crisis of 2001. In the wake of President de la Rúa’s resignation in late 2001, Argentina witnessed a procession of four interim presidents in the span of two weeks (all four were members of the Peronist party).

Early elections were held on 27 April 2003 and revealed the deep fissures within the Peronist party. In these elections PJ-candidate Kirchner was named president when rival PJ-candidate Menem withdrew from the runoff election scheduled for 18 May 2003. President Kirchner immediately instituted a purge of the high command of the armed forces, senior command of the federal police force, as well as the Supreme Court. The 2005 legislative elections solidified the dominance of the Kirchner faction within the

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Argentine political system as his allies came to control the Senate and became the largest political block in the lower house. The Kirchnerists continued to consolidate their control of the party with their victory in October 2007 general elections; anti-Kirchner factions of the Peronist party held only nine seats in the Chamber of Deputies and four seats in the Senate.

Further contributing to the consolidation of the dominance of the Kirchner faction in Argentine politics is the fact that none of the non-Peronist opposition parties that emerged in the wake of the UCR's collapse possess a national organization or a significant activist base. The dearth of an effective national opposition has produced an increasingly relevant rural-urban political divide in the country. The political activities of the non-Peronist opposition tend to be confined largely to urban centers, leaving the Kirchner faction free to control the rural vote in the country. In 2007 Cristina Kirchner lost in Buenos Aires, Cordoba and Rosario – the three largest cities in the country – but won the presidency by a considerable margin.