

Argentina: Outcome of the 2023 elections – Beginning of a new era?

In the run-off election on 19 November 2023, Argentinians elected right-wing populist Javier Milei, aged 53, as the country's new president. Four weeks earlier, on 22 October 2023, general elections had taken place to elect the president, vice-president, members of the national congress and the governors of most provinces. Following the primaries of 13 August 2023, to the great surprise of all experts, anti-establishment candidate Javier Milei, leader and founder of the La Libertad Avanza party, entered the presidential race as the favourite. Milei was unable to maintain his leading position in the elections on 22 October and was overtaken by Economy Minister Sergio Massa. Massa was running for the Unión por la Patria, a centre-left coalition of Peronist political parties that have dominated Argentine politics for decades. However, in the run-off election Milei won 55.7 % of the votes, while Massa received 44.3 %. Many commentators compare the self-proclaimed 'anarcho-capitalist' to former US President Donald Trump and former President of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro.

Background

On 22 October 2023, Argentina held [general elections](#) to elect the president, vice-president, members of the national congress (24 members of the Senate, and 130 members of the Chamber of Deputies) and the governors of most provinces. Argentina's executive power is vested in the [President of the Nation](#), who is also the head of state, head of government and supreme commander of the armed forces, and is politically responsible for the general administration of the country. The president is directly elected by a relative or simple majority of registered voters in the 23 provinces plus the City of Buenos Aires for a four-year term. The president is allowed one consecutive re-election, but then must sit out one term before being eligible to run again. In the 2019 general election, [Alberto Fernández](#), a Peronist and former cabinet chief, defeated the centre-right incumbent President [Mauricio Macri](#) from the Juntos por el Cambio, exceeding the threshold to win the presidency in a single round. Fernández was elected representing the centre-left Frente de Todos (FdT) alliance, a coalition composed of various factions of the Peronist movement, including Unidad Ciudadana (led by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who was [President of Argentina](#) for two terms between 2007 and 2015) and Frente Renovador (led by Sergio Massa). For the 2023 elections, Fernández – whose government had a [disapproval rate](#) of about 75 % – decided not to seek re-election. The 2023 general elections took place at a time when the country is undergoing [debt and economic crises](#), with [inflation](#) of over 135 %, a poverty rate above 40 % and GDP growth of -2.5 %. Argentina is facing its sixth recession in a decade.

Unexpected outcome of the primaries

Following the [PASO](#) (primarias abiertas, simultáneas y obligatorias), the primary elections of 13 August 2023 in which all parties had to participate, to the great surprise of [experts](#) and contrary to opinion polls, [Javier Milei](#), leader and founder of 'Freedom Advances' ([La Libertad Avanza/LLA](#)), an alliance of right-wing parties, including the Libertarian Party, founded in Buenos Aires in 2021, entered the presidential race as the favourite. Milei won 30 % of the votes. The centre-right opposition coalition 'Together for Change' (Juntos por el Cambio/JxC) won 28 % of the votes (with two candidates). After an internal power struggle, the alliance chose conservative former [Security Minister Patricia Bullrich](#) as their frontrunner. The big losers in the primaries were the Peronists, the ruling centre-left 'Union for the Homeland' (Unión por la Patria/UP), who gained just 27.3 % of the votes – a historically bad result (compared to 47 % in 2019). They nominated current [Economy Minister Sergio Massa](#) to run for president.

Javier Milei's candidature received strong media attention and many commentators compare the self-proclaimed '[anarcho-capitalist](#)' to other populists such as former [US President Donald Trump](#) and former President of Brazil [Jair Bolsonaro](#). His [programme](#) includes, among other things, a sharp cut in state public spending, the elimination of the Central Bank of Argentina and the adoption of the dollar as Argentina's



currency. Moreover, Milei has pledged to hold a referendum to [repeal abortion](#) access (in 2020, Argentina's Congress legalised the procedure up to the 14th week of pregnancy, permitting it at later stages as well as in cases of rape or risk to the mother's health). Milei's success is viewed as reflecting the [frustration](#) of large parts of the Argentine population with the traditional political parties and Argentina's demoralising economic situation that has lasted for decades.

Results of the general elections of 22 October

More than [27 million Argentini](#) exercised their right to vote in the general elections of 22 October (77.65 % of the more than 35 million who were eligible to vote). It was the second lowest turnout since the recovery of democracy after the last military dictatorship (1976-1983). Sergio Massa from the UP was the surprise winner, gaining 36.7 % of the votes, almost 7 % more than Javier Milei in second place. Massa received 9.6 million votes and won in 13 provinces. Milei, on the other hand, got practically the same number of votes as in the primaries (30 %). He won in 10 provinces, including some of the most important in the country such as Córdoba, Santa Fe and Mendoza. However, as Massa did not win more than 45 % of the votes, or more than 40 % with a more than 10-point lead over Milei, a run-off had to take place on 19 November. Defeated candidate Bullrich and former President Macri [publicly endorsed Milei](#) ahead of the run-off election.

After the [elections](#) for the [Congress of the Argentine Nation](#) (bicameral), UP has 108 of the 257 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, followed by JxC with 94 seats. Milei's party has 38 seats. In the [Senate](#), where 24 of the 72 seats were to be filled, UP has 33, JxC 21 and LLA 7 seats.

Outcome of the 19 November run-off election

Almost 27 million Argentini

voted in the 19 November election, which represents a participation rate of 76.3 %. Javier Milei won the presidential vote by more than 11 % over Sergio Massa and will assume office as Argentina's President on 10 December 2023. Milei gained [55.69 % of the votes \(representing 14 476 462 votes\)](#) and won in [21 out of 24 electoral districts](#). Massa, who admitted defeat and congratulated Milei, gained 44.30 % (representing 11 516 142 votes). According to analysts, [Milei's votes](#) came primarily from the middle and lower classes, especially young people. According to the last opinion poll published before the elections, Milei's support was stronger among men. However, a slight majority of women also intended to vote for Milei over Massa. Following his victory, President-elect Milei [said](#) that the reconstruction of Argentina would begin and that the impoverishing model of the omnipresent state was at an end.

The President of the European Council, [Charles Michel](#), and the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, [Josep Borrell](#), both congratulated Milei. In his statement, Borrell stressed the importance of finalising the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement. The [United States](#) also congratulated Milei on his victory and applauded the robust democratic process. [Brazilian President](#) Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva extended best wishes to the newly elected government in Argentina, without making direct mention of Milei, who has previously criticised Lula. [Victoria Villarruel](#), Milei's running mate, a right-wing conservative opposing abortion, will become vice-president of Argentina. Incoming President Milei will face a series of challenges: an economic crisis with hyperinflation, corruption, social inequality and poverty. Moreover, Milei will not have a majority in [Argentina's congress](#) for the next two years. From an EU perspective, the outcome is also interesting, as it might influence the talks between the EU and Mercosur to finalise the Association Agreement. During his election campaign, [Milei threatened](#) to take Argentina out of Mercosur and described the trade deal with the EU as a 'low-quality customs union that leads to trade diversion and harms each of its members'. He also vowed on the campaign trail to [cut ties](#) with China and to decline the offer to join the [BRICS grouping](#) next month.

Argentina is a member of the G20, and is Latin America's third-largest economy. In 2019, the EU concluded negotiations for a [trade agreement](#) with Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) as part of a bi-regional Association Agreement. After the EU submitted a proposal for an additional instrument to strengthen sustainable development provisions in the agreement to Mercosur in March 2023, on 14 September Mercosur transmitted to the European Commission a counter-proposal; these will serve as a basis for further negotiations between the parties. The European Parliament fosters closer relations with Argentina, in particular through its [Delegation for relations with Mercosur](#) (DMER).

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