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Legislative elections in Argentina on November 14 The health crisis votes in favor of Mauricio Macri

The September result surprised both the ruling party and the opposition.



Next Sunday, November 14, Argentines will renew half of the Chamber of Deputies and a third of the Chamber of Senators at the polls. It will be an important legislative election for the future of the South American country, hit by the impact of the pandemic, the economic crisis and rising poverty levels.

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If the results of the primary elections that have just been held on September 12, the PASO, (Primary, Open, Simultaneous and Mandatory) are confirmed, the Government runs the risk of losing the majority in the Senate, which would further complicate its management in the two years remaining until the presidential elections of October 2023. In these primaries, which serve to define candidacies and constitute a political thermometer, some 23 million voters participated, only 66% of the electoral roll, the lowest level in the history of the country. That marked abstention punished President Alberto Fernández's ruling *Frente de Todos*, which with just 31% of the vote was defeated by former President Mauricio Macri's *Juntos por el Cambio*, which won 40%. The left won 6% while the rest of the votes were divided into various minor forces.

Electoral earthquake

The September result surprised both the ruling party and the opposition. "For the government it was an unexpected defeat and for the right an unimagined triumph," says Victorio Paulón, a historic metallurgical union leader, head of Human Rights at the Central de Trabajadores de Argentina (CTA) and a refined political analyst for the daily *Página 12*.



Victorio Paulón

The low turnout punished Peronism in government, which recorded nearly 4 million fewer votes than the 2019 primary elections. For Paulón, the percentages reflect the widespread anger over the long confinement due to COVID 19 and the terrible economic situation that the country is experiencing. And they express the social demobilization, product of the sanitary measures of pandemic control imposed by the authorities. "The right deployed all its resources to mobilize voters, the ruling party did not," says the union leader. Paulón recalls that Argentina entered the quarantine only a few months after the government of Alberto Fernández assumed its functions on December 10, 2019. It was "in the midst of a prolonged crisis, inherited from the neoliberal adjustment imposed by the previous President Macri, with dire consequences at the level of jobs, wage level, crisis of small and medium enterprises, as well as a new and explosive indebtedness with the International Monetary Fund." The pandemic aggravated this situation and weakened the new government that despite the great effort to ensure public health and prevent mass deaths, was confronted with a "devastating anti-vaccine denialist discourse articulated by the opposition through the hegemonic private media."

El estilo presidencial conciliador de Fernández, que llamó en repetidas ocasiones al diálogo, no tuvo efecto y provocó una respuesta extrema de la oposición que usó un lenguaje casi fascista, evalúa Paulón. La imagen inicial positiva del *Frente de Todos* que hacia fines del 2019 llegaba al 70% cayó con el transcurrir de los meses. Así, las enormes expectativas sociales y las promesas de un cambio de rumbo con respecto al macrismo (2015-2019) se neutralizaron debido a las restricciones por el confinamiento y al aumento de la pobreza que golpea, en este momento, a más de un 40 % de la población. "Esta situación se reflejó en las primarias de septiembre, con el muy alto abstencionismo",

enfatisa.

Se perdieron bases históricas

Ese abultado abstencionismo se dio en barrios y distritos electorales históricamente afines al peronismo que en 2019 habían votado mayoritariamente a favor del actual gobierno. “Expresó la gran desilusión de mucha gente que manifiesta su reacción postraumática luego de la pandemia. Son, entre otros, sectores económicamente vulnerables, como jubilados con una sola renta o trabajadores informales, que no vieron un horizonte”, explica Daniel Gollan, ex ministro de Salud de la Provincia de Buenos Aires —decisivo distrito electoral a nivel nacional—y actual candidato a diputado nacional por el *Frente de Todos*.



Daniel Gollan, ex ministro de Salud . Candidato a Diputado Nacional por el Frente de Todos. Foto Sergio Ferrari

¿Podrá cambiar el próximo domingo el peronismo en el Gobierno la tendencia desfavorable de los resultados de septiembre? “No estamos en un escenario fácil”, responde Gollan, quien recuerda que tanto en Argentina como a nivel mundial, “las derechas están desbocadas, aprovechan de la pandemia, no quieren perder sus privilegios y para ello, no dudan en aumentar la desigualdad y la pobreza”.

Nuestra perspectiva, subraya el candidato a diputado, está puesta a mediano plazo. “Debemos actuar para mejorar efectivamente la situación de la gente, volver al Programa de Gobierno con el que llegamos en 2019, apostar a la reactivación económica — con perspectivas de crecimiento posibles del 8 % para el año en curso— y asegurar una equitativa redistribución de los ingresos para que los sectores vulnerables recuperen

posiciones”.

Es fundamental, agrega, “recomponer una alianza real con la gente, especialmente la que se abstuvo de participar en las elecciones primarias, y ofrecerles medidas y propuestas concretas, como la reciente decisión de congelar y controlar los precios de los productos de primera necesidad”.

Además, debemos operar un viraje profundo en la metodología de nuestra presencia: “estamos retomando la comunicación directa con el pueblo, en los barrios, los sindicatos, los centros de jubilados, con la juventud. Vamos a visitar a cada vecino, pero no por un mero interés electoral, sino para recuperar la relación histórica de cercanía que nos caracteriza como movimiento de masas. Debemos escuchar, elaborar y proponer políticas concretas.

And specifically electoral, "we have intensified the proactive tone of the campaign," explains the former health minister. With the prospect that even if the result of the primary is not reversed, we can reduce the difference in votes and thus create better conditions in the medium term for the 2023 presidential elections.



In recent weeks, the *Frente de Todos* intensified its electoral campaign in the neighborhoods, especially in the Province of Buenos Aires, which has the highest demographic concentration in the country. The intention of the ruling party is to cut distances with the Macrista right in this electoral district (even try to win it) and at the same time recover votes in some of the eight provinces where senator positions are disputed to avoid losing the majority in that chamber. However, many of the latest polls — which had mostly failed in the primaries — point to similarities in September's electoral behavior for Nov. 14.

On October 17 and 18, the ruling party called for two massive public events in the Plaza de Mayo and in the General Central of Workers. On the 27th, he held another rally at the premises of the Deportivo Morón Football Club to remember the 11th anniversary of the death of former President Néstor Kirchner. Tens of thousands of people on the streets in a superlative effort to regain positions against the clock.



Official mobilization in a neighborhood of Rosario during the campaign for the primaries in September 2021



Proselytizing activity of the Frente de Todos in the city of Rosario on November 6, 2021

Pastor Aníbal Sicardi and the Argentine situation

"Two opposing projects are facing each other"



Pastor Aníbal Sicardi directs the Evangelical Methodist Church of the city of Bahía Blanca, in the south of the Province of Buenos Aires. He is part of the sector of progressive Christians and as a journalist he directs the Ecupres News Agency.

What have been the main causes of the government's electoral defeat in the September primaries?

Anibal Sicardi: The government team abused its excellent leadership during the pandemic and transferred it to the political-social sphere without prioritizing contact with popular opinion. Although the population accompanied the pandemic management obeying directives, it did not receive adequate explanations to accept the precarious economic-social situation it lived. The leadership did not approach her. The population felt abandoned, the inclusive proposal was broken. The pandemic had a negative impact, as in the whole world, since it demanded and diverted enormous forces that would have had to go to the productive and social reconstruction of the country after the four years of pure neoliberalism of Macri.

Q: Apart from this distancing that you criticize, have there been very serious management errors on the part of the Government to receive a punishment vote of this dimension in September?

AS: No. Not at all. It is incredible what the government should have done, given that it encountered a public health system destroyed by the previous administration. He made enormous efforts: such as the benefits granted to retirees and deferred sectors, the payments to support the unemployed. All this, enduring the fierce and unhealthy criticism of the opposition. And, by the way, seeing how to negotiate the enormous foreign debt contracted by Mauricio Macri that remains a brutal burden for the country without a definitive resolution, for the moment.

Is a change in the way last September's elections change?

AS: I think that what happened in the PASO can be partially modified. Especially if there are more voters going to the polls. In any case, we do not have certain tools to know what the current mood of the population is. The opposition has installed a position of fierce hatred while the Government continues with the proposal of a different country that has new positions such as the value of justice and social care, which we will have to see what effect they have. We are talking about two very different projects in dispute. We have to see if the electorate realizes what is really at stake this November 14. (Sergio Ferrari)

Sergio Ferrari, from Bern, Switzerland to La Pluma, November 11, 2021

Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

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