

V.I.P. ARTICLE SUBMITTED BY:

Juan Pablo Micozzi
Ph.D. Student in Political Science
Rice University

Elections in Argentina

Argentina is a federal republic that, like most Latin American democracies, has historically adopted a presidential system of government. Using the US Constitution as a blueprint (which also inspired most of the constitutions of the region), Argentina originally chose its president and vice-president using an Electoral College. In doing so, a more relative weight to the small and less inhabited provinces was guaranteed, which was a necessary condition for the agreement of provincial elites to delegate power to the central government.

Although many cycles of democratic and military governments took place during of the great part of the XXth century, every democratic restoration tended to adopt the original constitution of 1853, which also maintained the same indirect mechanism for electing the president. This system remained until 1994, when a constitutional reform abolished the Electoral College and enacted a popular direct election at large.

From then on, a presidential candidate needs to get 45% of the votes, or a percentage between 44.9 and 40 yet keeping 10 points of distance with the second candidate, in order to win in the first round. Otherwise, a runoff will be held between the two most voted formulas.

As every presidential design, executive and legislative elections are held separately. A president has a 4-years mandate and can be re-elected only once, and with simultaneous terms. If he/she has won two consecutive mandates, he/she must wait one whole period to run again for the position. This is an important difference from the American case, where presidents cannot serve more than two terms ever.

The legislative branch is composed by a House of Deputies and a Senate. Deputies are elected for four years and don't have any term limit; they are chosen at the provincial level, and each district's number of deputies is a function of its population. Half of the House is renewed every two years. On the other hand, each province chooses three senators, whose mandates last six years. The senate is renewed every two years by thirds, where eight provinces at a time hold the elections. Term limits are also absent here.

Unlike the US, there exist no legal obligations for holding presidential primaries. Each party chooses its mechanism for selecting candidates. Historically, mechanisms have included elite agreements, intra-party assemblies, closed primaries and open primaries. In those cases where primaries have been used, all the provinces have voted at the same time. This is in contrast to the American case where the results of early states voting for presidential candidates may affect the sequence of results in other districts.

Finally, voting is mandatory in Argentina. Every citizen reaching the age of 18 is automatically registered and must go to the polls, which always take place the last Sunday of October.