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FORTALECEMOS  
LAS DEMOCRACIAS  
DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING  
DEMOCRACIES  
IN LATIN AMERICA

NOVEMBER 2021

# Argentina

## Legislative elections

### Pre-election report

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## Executive summary

On November 14, legislative elections will be held in Argentina to renew half of the Chamber of Deputies and one third of the Senate. A total of 127 deputies will be elected throughout the country and 24 senators in 8 provinces (Catamarca, Chubut, Córdoba, Corrientes, La Pampa, Mendoza, Santa Fe and Tucumán). The candidates to compete in the elections were chosen two months ago, on September 12, through the Primary, Open, Simultaneous and Mandatory Elections (PASO in Spanish).

The PASO is a tool designed to identify who will stand in the elections proper. As such, it produces two main outcomes. First, only parties that have obtained at least 1.5 percent of the votes in the primaries may participate in the legislative elections. Second, through the PASO citizens choose the individuals appearing on the candidate lists. Beyond this, the PASO is useful in acting as a gauge of public sentiment.

At the national level, Juntos por el Cambio received 40.6% of the votes versus 30.2% for Frente de Todos (ruling party). It won in the four provinces with the highest number of voters and seats: Buenos Aires, City of Buenos Aires, Córdoba and Santa Fe, as well as in six of the eight provinces renewing senators. The defeat in the PASO of the Frente de Todos reflected growing social discontent. Meanwhile, Juntos por el Cambio (opposition) capitalized on the climate of polarization and voters' wish to send a message to the government while simultaneously wooing many of its erstwhile supporters.

However, the PASO results may not accurately predict the legislative elections and, consequently, there is uncertainty over the future composition of Congress. To raise its stock after the primaries, the Government of the Frente de Todos has promoted a series of economic and political measures aimed at appeasing a discontented public. The most favorable forecasts for the ruling party indicate a closer fought race than last time, but still no victory.

Should the election results mirror the outcome of the PASO, the ruling party could lose the quorum in the Senate and some seats in the Chamber of Deputies. If that happens, the Frente de Todos would be forced to reach a consensus with allies and opponents on the legislative agenda. In addition, it would find it more difficult to advance in its government program. Meanwhile, Juntos por el Cambio could gain seats in both Chambers. More radical forces in ideological terms, such as the Frente de Izquierda Unida (FIT Unidad) and Avanza Libertad, would also make gains.

# Basic questions

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## What is being voted for?

On November 14, Argentines will elect 127 deputies nationwide and 24 senators in 8 provinces (Catamarca, Chubut, Córdoba, Corrientes, La Pampa, Mendoza, Santa Fe and Tucumán). Those elected will be part of the new composition of the National Congress as of December 10.

## How are deputies and senators elected?

The Chamber of Deputies comprises 257 deputies directly elected by the population of the provinces and the City of Buenos Aires. The number of deputies per district is proportional to the number of inhabitants. This Chamber is renewed in halves every two years through a proportional representation approach, referred to as the D'Hondt system. Under this, seats are assigned to the candidate lists in proportion to the number of votes received.

The Senate is composed of 72 senators, three for each province and three for the City of Buenos Aires. It is renewed by thirds every two years through a majority representation system. That is to say, the electoral list that obtains the most votes gets two seats, while the remaining one corresponds to the party that follows it in number of votes.

## Changes in the Covid protocol

The National Electoral Chamber, through [Extraordinary Resolution 124](#) brought modifications to the sanitary protocols that governed the PASO. In order to speed up the voting process, on this occasion voters will be allowed to wait their turn to vote inside the electoral precinct. In this way, the aim is to avoid idle periods between the exit of one voter and entrance of the next one.

In addition, capacity and strict distancing will not apply, although health prevention measures such as the use of masks, sanitization with gelled alcohol and ventilation of the voting precincts, must be maintained. However, local health authorities should evaluate the epidemiological situation of each district for the organization of the election day.

# What would the Congress be like if the PASO results were repeated?

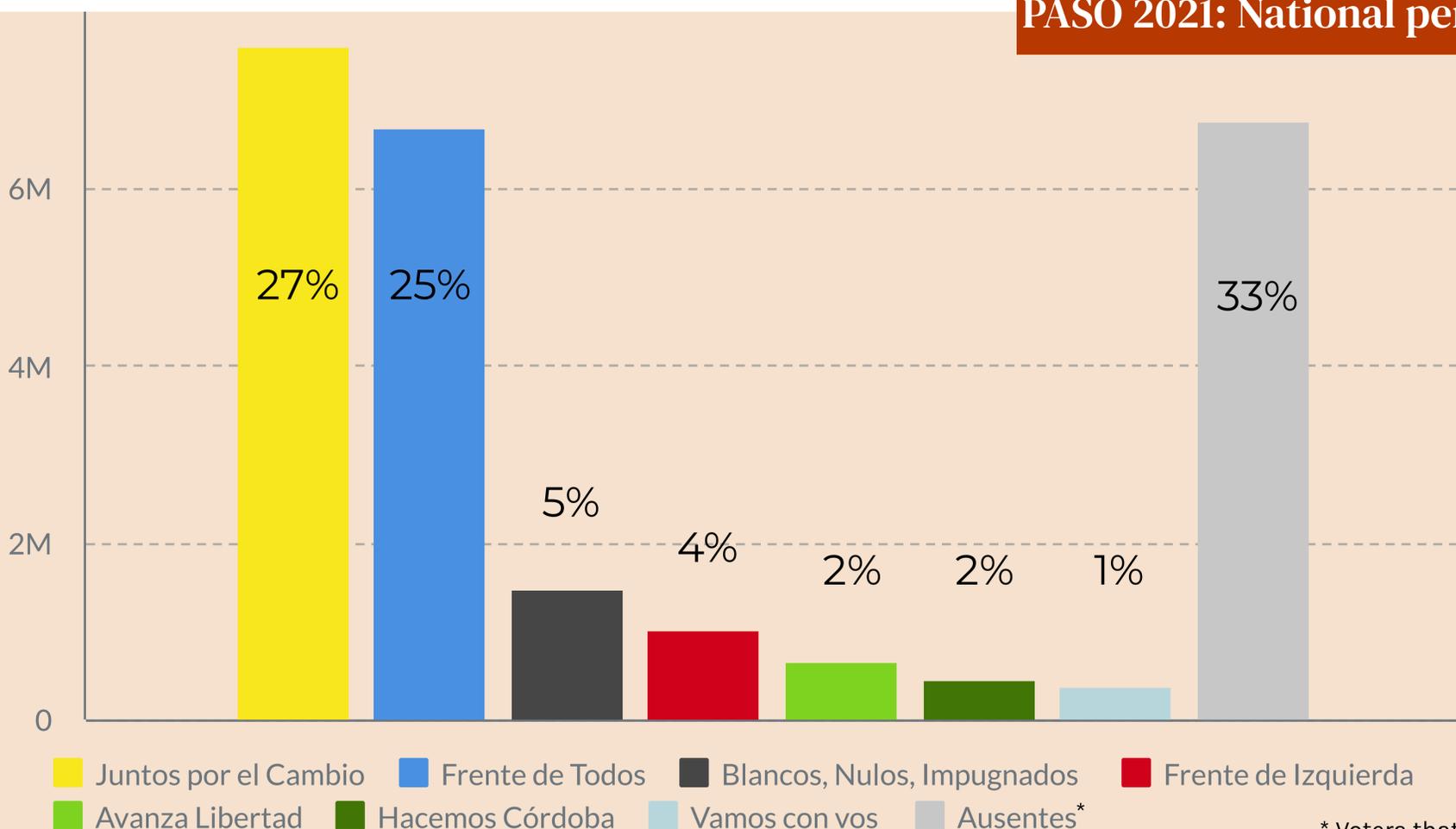
In the PASO the Frente de Todos lost support in a large part of the country, while Juntos por el Cambio won in most of the districts. In terms of legislative projection, if the PASO results are repeated, the ruling party will lose the quorum in the Senate and some seats in the Chamber of Deputies. In this scenario, the ruling party would be forced to reach a consensus with allies and opponents on the legislative agenda and it would be more difficult to advance in its government program. Meanwhile, the main opposition coalition, Juntos por el Cambio, could gain seats in both Chambers. More radical forces in ideological terms, such as the Frente de Izquierda Unidad (FIT Unidad) and Avanza Libertad (Avanza Libertad), would also make gains.

## Can Frente de Todos turn things around?

The results of the PASO might not be repeated and, consequently, there is uncertainty over what the Congress will look like. In the primaries the vote tends to disperse because the electoral offer is bigger - i.e spread across a wider number of candidates - while turnout is also lower than in the elections proper.

The most favorable polling from the ruling party's perspective points to a tighter run race rather than a widening of the gap between itself and Juntos por el Cambio. That is to say, the Frente de Todos could "lose by less" or, as some ruling party leaders prefer to call it, "lose by winning".

### PASO 2021: National performance



\* Voters that did not participate in the PASO2021

## The PASO fallout

If we think of the PASO as a touchstone on the management of the Frente de Todos, its results clearly reflect growing public discontent with the government. The triumph of the main opposition coalition even in Peronist strongholds reflects, to a great extent, strong voter inclination to "punish" the government. But it also shows how Argentina's bipartisan political climate, far from fading following Macri's presidential defeat, is actually consolidating.

The socioeconomic impact of the pandemic affected perceptions of governments in most countries of the region. Argentina was no exception. However, in addition to Covid-19, public approval of the Frente de Todos administration dropped for other reasons, too, such as when it became known shortly before the PASO that the president had breached lockdown measures at the height of the pandemic. Also, at the beginning of the vaccination rollout, it was revealed that people close to the then Minister of Health, Ginés González García, had been jabbed in secret. These events, combined with the societal strain of what the opposition described as the "longest quarantine on the planet", help explain Frente de Todos poor showing in the PASO.

Following the defeat, existing tensions within the government coalition intensified – to such an extent that, immediately after the elections, ministers and officials of the Executive branch tendered their resignations to the President. Days later this prompted a reshuffle of the Cabinet of Ministers. However, this hardly quelled intra-party tensions.

On the contrary, after the PASO internal wrangling rumbled on and so it is plausible following the general elections that the Frente de Todos will embark on further shake ups. For one thing, the political groups that make up the coalition disagree over next year's budget. Kirchnerist figures want to increase public spending to drive an economic recovery, and they accuse the "Albertistas" of preferring 'excessive fiscal moderation'. This is one of the great pending issues that the Government will have to face, internally and with the opposition, after the legislative elections.



## Post-PASO government management

After the defeat, the government developed a strategy on two fronts -political and economic- with the purpose of improving its showing in the November elections. Politically, the Executive renewed its Cabinet in an attempt to change the image of the administration and project a sense of dynamism. On the economy, the Government deployed a series of relief and promotion measures under the banner of "post-pandemic economic recovery".

### Political dimension: "Cabinet Relaunch"

After the PASO, President Alberto Fernández and Vice-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner agreed that changes should be made in the Cabinet. Although this idea was already on the Kirchnerist agenda, it was not until after the primary elections that the "re-launching" of the ministerial team materialized. The turnover of ministers usually comes amid internal squabbling.

The novelty this time round was that the government failed to keep a lid on this, with political tensions visibly flaring and picked up by the media.

Summing up: the ministers loyal to Vice-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner presented their resignations not to the President but via the press, amid a leaked recording of a pro-Christina Congresswoman lambasting Alberto Fernández as a threat against the coalition (using harsher words than the opposition itself) and, as a corollary of the tensions, a letter from Cristina Kirchner emerged supporting the Cabinet resignations and questioning the economic policies of the Executive.



These internal tensions resulted in a partial renewal of the Executive. New civil servants were appointed in key areas: Juan Manzur took over as Chief of Cabinet, Aníbal Fernández as Minister of Security, Julián Domínguez in Agriculture, Daniel Filmus in Science, Jaime Perczyk in Education and Santiago Cafiero (until then Chief of Cabinet) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Government management post-PASO

After these changes, the focus in the Executive Branch turned to shunting the infighting into the background and with more management than wrangling behind closed doors. However, post PASO tensions and reappointments raise several questions: Do these officials have the capacity to translate their management and stature into votes this Sunday? And have the tensions really eased? Have the negotiations that resulted in the ministerial changes been efficient enough to avert a possible new electoral defeat this Sunday?

On the first point, it should be noted that most of the new officials have their own political status and certain autonomy. However, many of them (Fernández, Filmus, Domínguez) have a background within Kirchnerism, especially during Néstor Kirchner's administration. In this sense, it can be said the Cabinet veered more toward Kirchnerism.

With respect to the second point, the ministerial changes were aimed at demonstrating executive capacity. In general, the designated leaders carry some political weight. That is, by virtue of their trajectory and networks, they have demonstrated a certain capacity at a high stakes political level. That said, these are not particularly vote-drawing figures. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the impact of the ministerial restructuring in electoral terms.

## Economic dimension: Main economic measures

After the electoral defeat, the government launched economic measures to improve the income level of the population and to control price increases. Policies to promote certain productive sectors were also promoted and health containment measures were made more flexible.

In order to recover the purchasing power of the population, the Government ordered an increase in the minimum wage (which will reach a 52.7% increase between March 2021 and March 2022) and raised the minimum non-taxable income tax (from \$150,000 to \$175,000) and personal property tax (from \$2 million to \$6 million).

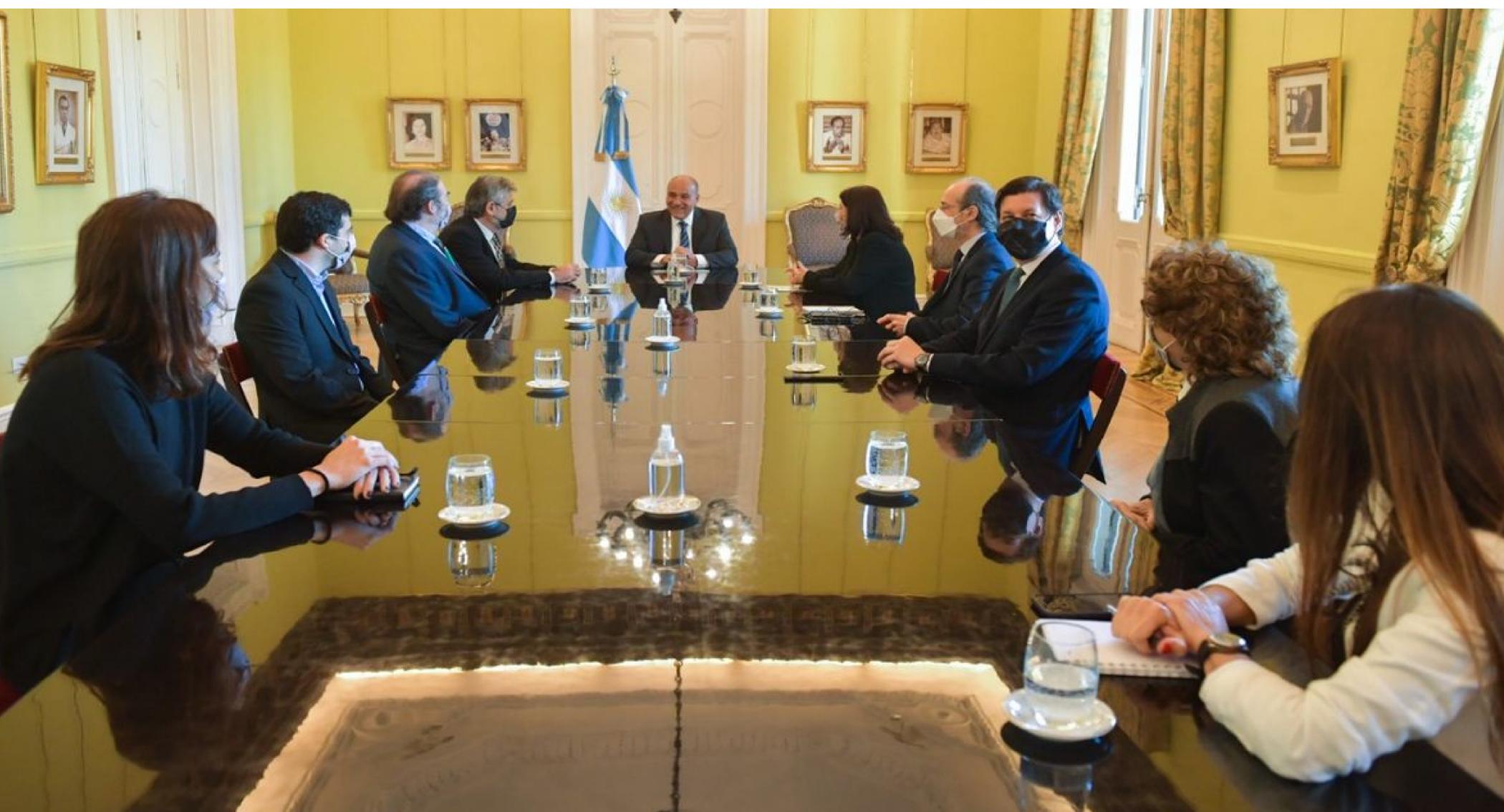
In addition, the Congress approved a tax relief law, which foresees the remission of debts for small taxpayers and non-profit entities, and the expiration dates of unemployment benefits were extended. At the same time, the Secretary of Domestic Trade promoted the freezing of the price of 1,482 products of the basic food basket and medicines.

## Economic dimension: Main economic measures

On the other hand, the Executive Branch agreed with the agricultural and livestock sector to relax the restrictions on meat exports and announced the presentation of the bill for the promotion of agro-industrial development. The Government also presented the bills for the promotion of sustainable mobility, with the purpose of expanding the capacities of the domestic automotive industry, and the bill for the promotion of hydrocarbon investments. Meanwhile, in order to support the knowledge economy sector, the Executive confirmed the elimination of taxes on the export of services as from 2022.

Finally, the Government accelerated discretionary transfers to provinces and municipalities to finance public works, the payment of administrative personnel salaries and social programs. On this point, referents of the opposition coalition, Juntos por el Cambio, pointed out to Frente de Todos for considering that the transfers had a marked electoral bias.

Once again, the question that remains for November 14 is whether these measures are enough to change the social mood and, ultimately, the results of the PASO. In this regard, the ruling party recalibrated the electoral objective and no longer expects to become the majority in both chambers for the 2021-2023 Congress. The intention of the ruling party is to obtain an electoral improvement, with the purpose of transmitting a recovery after the defeat in the PASO. This would allow the Frente de Todos to increase the political flow to reach the 2023 Presidential elections as a competitive party.

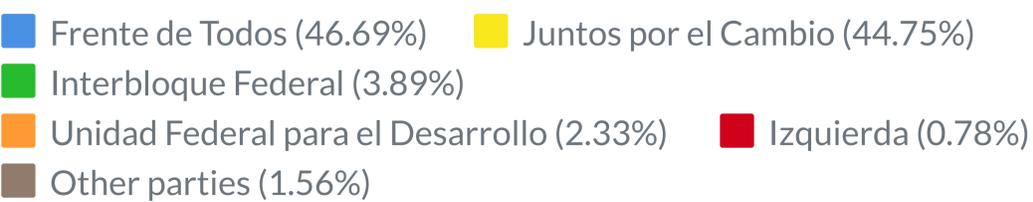
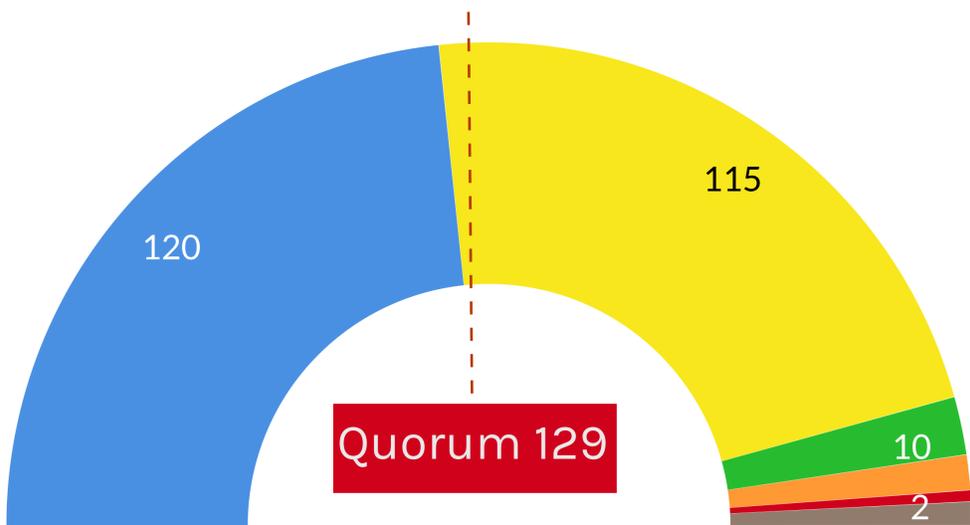


# Electoral projections

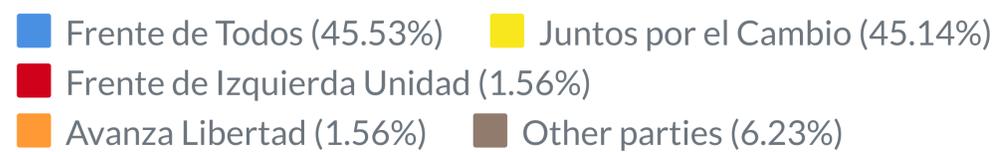
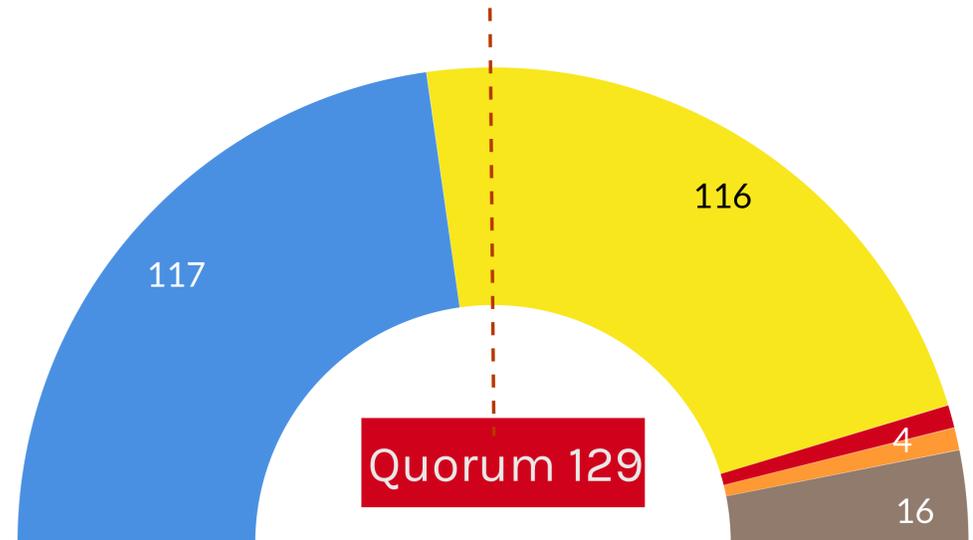
## Deputies

The Frente de Todos (ruling party) would lose 3 seats and would be far off a majority (129 deputies). Meanwhile, Juntos por el Cambio (opposition) would retain all its seats and would be one deputy away from the governing party. In addition, FIT Unidad and Avanza Libertad would obtain 4 deputies each. Some local parties would also obtain representation: Frente Renovador de la Concordia Misionero, Movimiento Popular Neuquino, Juntos Somos Río Negro and Partido Ser.

2019-2021



Projections 2021-2023

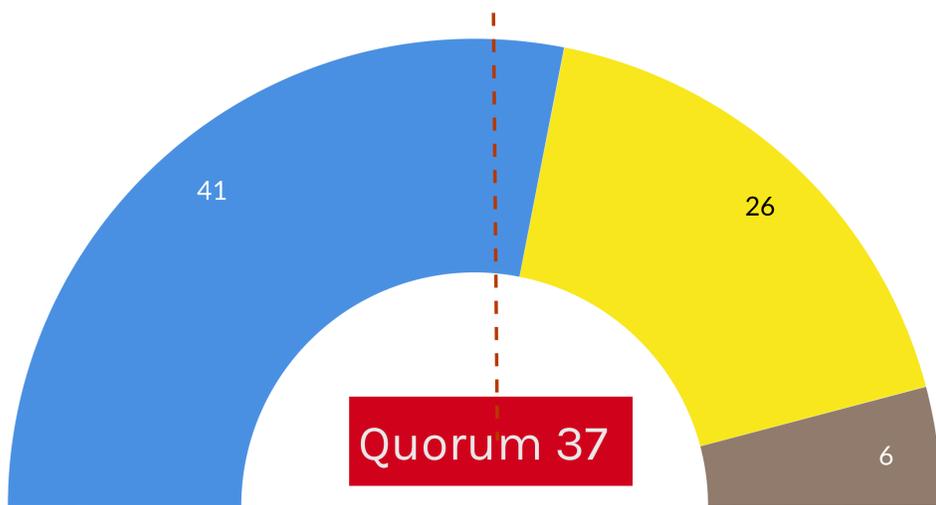


# Electoral projections

## Senate

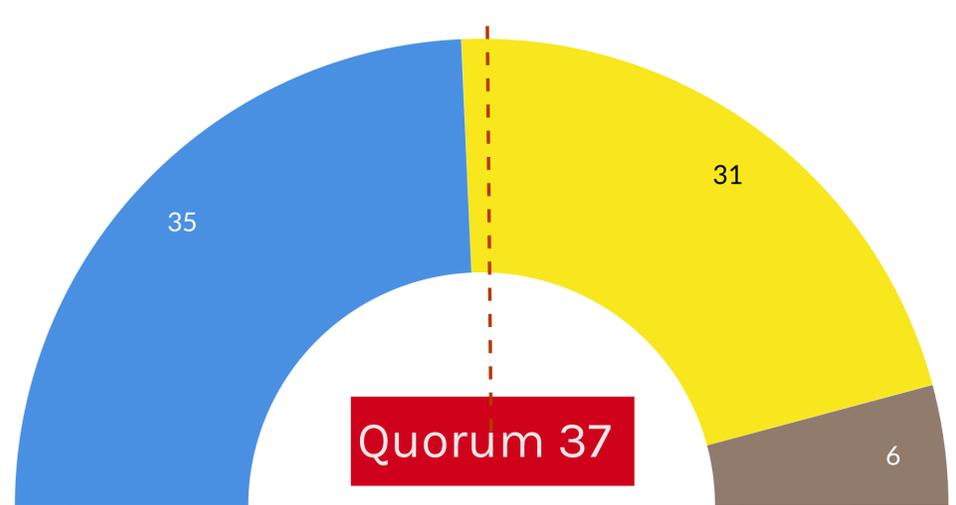
The Frente de Todos (ruling party) would lose 6 seats and, thus, its majority. Meanwhile, if Juntos por el Cambio (opposition) wins again in the provinces of Corrientes, Córdoba, Mendoza, Chubut, Santa Fe and La Pampa, it would add 6 seats and become the second minority with 31 senators. Also, if the results are repeated, the provincial party Hacemos por Córdoba would obtain one seat.

2019-2021



■ Frente de Todos (56.16%) ■ Juntos por el Cambio (35.62%)  
■ Other parties (8.22%)

Projections 2021-2023



■ Frente de Todos (48.61%) ■ Juntos por el Cambio (43.06%)  
■ Other parties (8.33%)



# Challenges for the government

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The results of the PASO could experience variations and, consequently, change the projections on the future composition of the Congress. In the primaries the vote tends to disperse because the electoral offer is bigger, whilst the electoral participation tends to be lower than in the general elections.

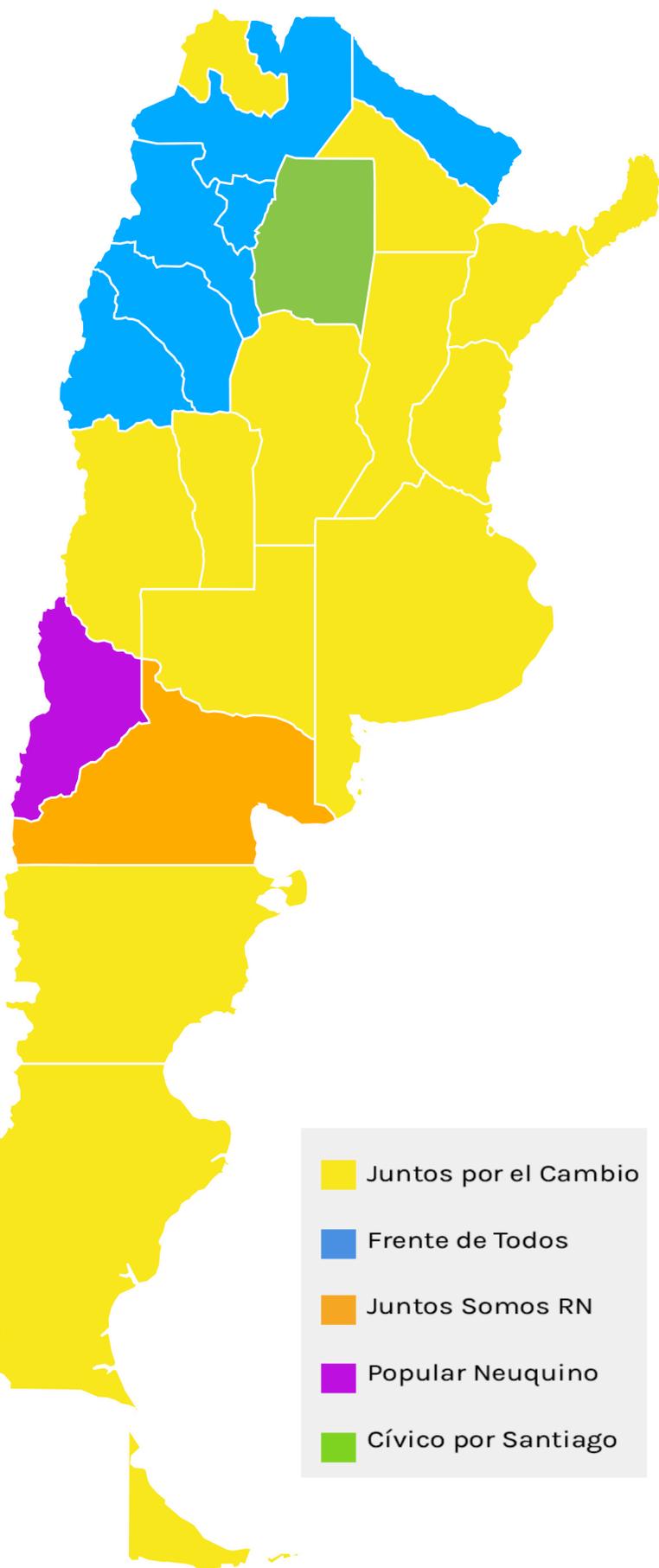
However, the PASO results operate as a large-scale opinion poll and, in that sense, social discontent is clearly deep seated. In addition, since the creation of the primaries there are only two precedents where the Frente de Todos managed to turn around an adverse result. In the PASO of 2017, Juntos por el Cambio had won in the provinces of La Pampa and San Luis. In spite of this, in the general legislative elections, due to the political input of the local governors and the launching of a package of economic measures, the results were reversed, positioning Peronism (today Frente de Todos) as the winner.

This time, the most favorable forecasts for the ruling party show a tighter result than that of the PASO, rather than an intensification of the difference with the main opposition, Juntos por el Cambio. That is to say, the Frente de Todos could "lose by less" or, as some ruling party leaders bizarrely call it, "lose by winning".

There are some points of encouragement for the government coalition. On the one hand, the level of absenteeism was higher than average in territories usually favorable to Peronism, which offers some margin for growth in case electoral participation increases. On the other hand, in the general elections the electoral offer is reduced. On this point, the reading of the ruling party is that in the PASO the disenchanted Peronist voters chose parties -different from Juntos por el Cambio- that will not be available this time, which also offers a margin to improve its performance. In sum, the elections are unlikely to yield victory for the ruling party. The uncertainty resides in how much power the Frente de Todos will lose in Congress and to what degree the main opposition coalition, Juntos por el Cambio, will be strengthened.

## Key districts

In the mid-term elections, the legislative distribution depends on the results obtained by the party lists in each electoral district. That is to say, they are national elections because voting takes place throughout the country, but their results are also measured province by province. For this reason, unlike the presidential elections, what happens at the sub-national level acquires particular importance. It is possible to distinguish certain "key districts" for these elections, either because they elect senators, because of their weight in the electoral roll or because, having shown a close result in the PASO, they offer a margin for a change in the distribution of votes.



### Buenos Aires

It elects 35 deputies. In the PASO, Juntos por el Cambio won with almost 38% of the votes over 34% of the votes of Frente de Todos. If this scenario is repeated, the opposition would obtain 16 seats, 2 more than those it currently holds. According to the latest projections, in the best scenario for the ruling party, the difference could be shortened from 4 to 2 points.

### Santa Fe

It elects 9 deputies and 3 senators. In the PASO, Juntos por el Cambio was 10 points ahead of Frente de Todos. If this scenario is repeated, Juntos por el Cambio would keep the 2 senators for the majority and 5 deputies. On the other hand, Frente de Todos would retain 1 senator for the minority and 3 deputies. The latest projections do not show major changes in the distribution of votes.

### Córdoba

It elects 9 deputies and 3 senators. In the PASO, Juntos por el Cambio won with almost 50% of the votes, followed by Hacemos por Córdoba (provincial ruling party) with 24.5%. If this scenario is repeated, Frente de Todos would be left out of the distribution of seats in the Senate. In Deputies, Juntos por el Cambio would keep 5 seats and Frente de Todos 3. According to the latest projections, the expectations of improving the election for the ruling party are low.

### Chubut

It elects 2 deputies and 3 senators. In the PASO, Juntos por el Cambio obtained 39.48% of the votes. If this scenario is repeated, it would obtain 2 senators and 1 deputy. On the other hand, Frente de Todos would retain 1 seat in each Chamber. According to the latest projections, Juntos por el Cambio continues to lead the preferences in the district.

### San Luis

It elects 3 deputies. In the PASO, Juntos por el Cambio won with 46.86% of the votes. If this scenario is repeated, Juntos por el Cambio would get 2 deputies and Frente de Todos 1. However, in 2017 Peronism managed to reverse an adverse result in this district. The aspiration of Frente de Todos is to repeat this precedent.

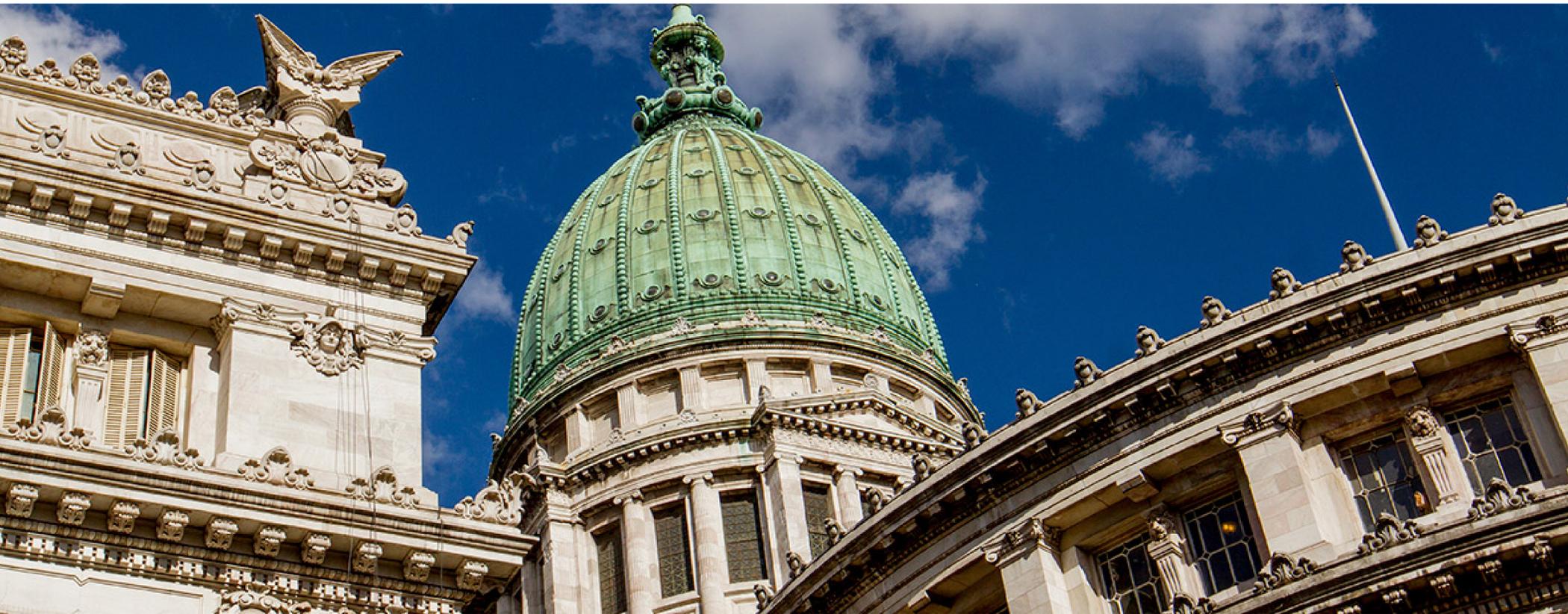
### La Pampa

It elects 9 deputies and 3 senators. In the PASO, Juntos por el Cambio won with 48.76% of the votes. If this scenario is repeated, Juntos por el Cambio would keep 2 senators for the majority and 1 deputy. Meanwhile, Frente de Todos would keep 1 senator for the minority and 1 deputy. However, being a close result (approximately 20 thousand votes difference) and being a historically Peronist district, the Frente de Todos aspires to reverse the results.

### Other provinces

On the other hand, the ruling party will seek to maintain the victories obtained in September in some provinces, such as Tucumán and Catamarca. It will also try to add deputies in Río Negro and Neuquén, since in these districts the ruling party lost by fewer points. Finally, the Frente de Todos will seek to make gains in Mendoza and Corrientes, although local forecasts do not show changes for these elections and the candidates of Juntos por el Cambio are better placed.

# Challenges for the ruling party in Congress amid an adverse electoral scenario



Governing without a legislative majority is a difficult task, even more so when the possibilities of obtaining allies are reduced. If Juntos por el Cambio (opposition) is only one deputy away from Frente de Todos (ruling party), the more radical political spaces (FIT Unidad and Avanza Libertad) make gains and Frente de Todos loses its majority in the Senate, it will be very difficult for the Government to pass contentious bills.

The alliances that the ruling party has forged with the provincial parties (Frente de la Concordia Misionero, Juntos Somos Río Negro and Movimiento Popular Neuquino) become indispensable in this context, so the Government will need to maintain at whatever cost.

In view of this outlook, the current president of the Chamber of Deputies, Sergio Massa, announced that after the elections they will work to form "a great national agreement", not only with the political opposition, but also with business, unions and civil society organizations.

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