

ARGENTINA

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

As outlined in its constitution, Argentina has a presidential political system in which the executive power is in charge of a president. In order to be eligible for the presidency, a candidate must be a natural-born Argentine citizen or – if born abroad – a child of an Argentine citizen, over thirty years old and have been an Argentine citizen for the previous six years. The president is in office for four years and may be re-elected for one additional term. He or she is elected directly in a two-round system and elections are held within two months before the president in office concludes their term. When the candidate with the highest number of votes achieves more than 45 per cent of the votes cast or 40 per cent along with a difference of more than 10 per cent with the candidate in second position, the candidate is pronounced president of Argentina. Where such a scenario does not occur, a second ballot between the two most successful candidates takes place within 30 days of the first round. *Political system*

As regards general responsibilities and powers, the president serves as the head of state, the chief executive of the federal government and the politician responsible for the general administration of the country, as well as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president manages the country's foreign relations, issues presidential decrees, appoints members of the Supreme Court of Justice, and proposes laws to the National Congress, promulgates and publishes them. Although the president is not entitled to issue legislative regulations under any circumstances, the constitution outlines an exception where constitutional procedures cannot be followed and as long as neither a criminal, electoral or taxation issue or the system of political parties is involved.

The two last presidential elections were held in 2003 and 2007, and on both occasions the Front for Victory (Frente para la Victoria – FPV) won. In 2003 the first round resulted in none of the candidates obtaining the necessary percentage of votes in order to be pronounced president. The two most successful candidates, Carlos Menem and Néstor Kirchner, were therefore set to contest a second-round runoff or ballottage. However, Menem stood down and Kirchner was then proclaimed president with 22.24 per cent of the vote. In October 2007 his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, won the presidency with 45.25 per cent of the votes, thus making a runoff unnecessary.

The current constitution of Argentina was introduced in 1994, when the original text of 1853 was modified. Other amendments to the original constitution were implemented in 1860, 1866, 1898 and 1957. The constitution enshrines several basic civil rights, such as the inviolability of the right of life; freedom of expression, religion and assembly (art. 14, 19 and 20); the right to work (art. 14 and 14b); the abolition of slavery (art. 15); equality before the law (art. 16); property (art. 17); and the right to a fair trial and due process (art. 18). The constitution also establishes that the National Congress, with a special majority, may bestow constitutional rank to international human rights treaties, conventions and declarations concluded between Argentina and other states or international organizations. To date 12 international documents enjoy this status. *Constitution*

In practice these rights are generally, but not fully, realized. Freedom of expression is guaranteed by law, although government officials are accused of mistreating independent journalists and media enterprises, and provincial governments favour with official advertising only those companies that are gentle to them.¹ The Freedom of Information Act is still to be issued by congress, even though the debate surrounding the act has gone on for years. Freedom of religion is also guaranteed by the constitution and the country's laws. Nonetheless, the Jewish community in Argentina was the victim of two bomb attacks, one on the Israeli embassy in 1992 and another on the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) Jewish community centre in 1994, neither of which has yet been solved. Freedom of assembly is usually respected and civic organizations play an important role in society.

The right to life is protected both by the constitution on the whole and by international documents with constitutional rank in accordance with article 75 (22) of the constitution. The right to work is protected by the work contract law, collective labour bargains, established in the constitution, and regulations of the International Labour Organization (ILO), of which Argentina has been a part since 1932. The judiciary was severely manipulated by former President Carlos Menem, and although positive steps were taken under Néstor Kirchner, corrupt and incompetent judges continue to be a problem. The police has been accused of misconduct and of being involved in drug trafficking, extortion and torture during detentions, especially in Buenos Aires province (Freedom House 2008).

With reference to the role of political parties, the constitution specifically establishes in article 38 that they represent a fundamental institution of the democratic system. It guarantees their free establishment and exercise of activities, as well as their democratic organization and performance, representation of minority groups, competition for the presentation of candidates for elective public positions, access to public information and diffusion of ideas. The state shall contribute to the economic support of their activities and the training of their leaders.

State of democracy Theoretically speaking liberal democracy is well institutionalized in Argentina. The features considered essential for a liberal democracy are mainly present: the vote is universal; elections are considered free and fair and take place regularly; the right to organize political parties is respected; the constitution protects civil and political rights and stipulates limits to the authority of the government; and the constitution establishes the separation of powers, an independent judiciary and a control system among the three powers of the executive, the judiciary and the legislature. However, these dispositions are not always reflected in practice.

During his administration, President Néstor Kirchner took steps to extradite and judge former military officials accused of human rights abuses during the last military dictatorship, and in 2003 decreed the public's right to information and other transparency guarantees. Furthermore, in 2006 a decree was issued to remove judges from the Supreme Court of Justice, considered the country's most corrupt institution.

However, these steps towards transparency were overshadowed by the law of "superpowers" (Law no. 26.124, which introduces an amendment to article 37 of the financial administration and control systems of the National Public Sector Act [Law 24.156]) and the controversial reform of the Council of Magistracy, in addition to several corruption cases. The so-called "superpowers" act was passed in August 2006, enabling the executive to reassign budgetary allocations as it sees fit as long as the budget's total remains the same.

In 2006 the Council of Magistracy – an organ in charge of preparing lists of candidates for national and federal judges, administrating and controlling the judiciary, enforcing sanctions, and initiating impeachment procedures against judges accused of grave misconduct – was reformed by decree. The number of members was reduced from 20 to 13, increasing – up to half of the total board – the proportion of political figures at the expense of judges and lawyers, and therefore breaking the balance of power. In March 2007 government officials were accused of accepting bribes from companies overseeing a gas line project. Three months later, a bag with USD 60,000 was found

in Economy Minister Felisa Miceli's office bathroom, leaving her forced to resign. During August of the same year, USD 800,000 was discovered in the suitcase of a Venezuelan businessman travelling on a private plane chartered by Argentina's state oil company as it arrived at Buenos Aires international airport (Freedom House 2008). The source and destination of the funds remain under investigation, although there are allegations indicating that they were destined for Fernández de Kirchner's electoral campaign.

Supervisory institutions have also experienced conflict, and doubts have been cast over their autonomy. In November 2008 the national solicitor general limited the powers of the Office of Administrative Investigations, an organ which investigates national officials' crimes, when Head Prosecutor Manuel Garrido initiated several investigations related to corruption cases during Kirchner's administration. In March 2009 Garrido resigned and in his place an interim prosecutor has been appointed until a public contest takes place. Furthermore, in February 2009 the government presented a bill to redefine the level of independence and functioning of the General Accounting Office of the Nation, an organ that controls government accounts and reports to the National Congress. Lastly, the 2009 legislative elections were brought forward by law from October to June after the government presented a project aimed at avoiding any potential political fallout while the country's economic conditions continue to worsen.

Executive power in Argentina is exercised by the president. In the case of illness, absence from the capital, death, resignation, or the removal of the president from office, executive power shifts to the vice-president, who is elected together with the president and who has the same powers in their absence. *Separation of powers*

The legislative branch is embodied in the National Congress, which is comprised of two houses: the Senate, which represents the country's 23 provinces and the city of Buenos Aires,² and the Chamber of Deputies, which represents the citizens of the nation. Argentina is a federal country where each province and the city of Buenos Aires have their own constitutions, authorities and political parties.

At the sub-national level, article 5 of the national constitution establishes that each province shall enact its own constitution under the republican representative system, in accordance with the principles, declarations and guarantees of the national constitution, ensuring the administrations of justice, the municipal regime and elementary education. Consequently, provincial legislative powers can be composed of either one-chamber or two-chamber assemblies, depending on the province. On the other hand, while provinces are allowed to single out particular areas for social and economic development or celebrate treaties concerning the administration of justice, economic interests and works of common benefit, they cannot exercise power delegated to the nation, nor can they celebrate treaties of a political nature, enact laws regarding certain issues, mint money or establish banks with the power to issue money without authorization from congress, among others.

The judiciary is vested in the Supreme Court of Justice and the lower courts established by the National Congress. The reform of Law 26.183 in 2006 decreed that the Supreme Court of Justice would be composed of five judges, to be appointed by the president with the consent of the Senate. In order to reduce the number of judges from nine to five, from 2006 onwards the vacated seats have simply not been filled. The main responsibility of the Supreme Court of Justice is to hear and decide on cases arising under the constitution, the laws of the nation and treaties concluded with foreign nations; cases concerning ambassadors, public ministers and foreign consuls; cases related to admiralty and maritime jurisdiction; issues in which the nation shall be party; and actions between provinces, their inhabitants, and foreign states or citizens.

In accordance with the 1994 reform, Argentina's constitution no longer supports the principle of balanced executive-legislative power. On the contrary, the legislative power of the president is greater than that of congress. The executive has a legislative initiative, the power of decree, legislative delegation, a total veto and an allowance to partially promulgate partial vetoes (Mustapic 2008). Moreover, although the constitution stipulates that the president shall under no circumstances

exercise judicial functions, the fact that he or she can issue decrees on the grounds of necessity and urgency distorts the balance between executive and judicial power. In any case, the 2006 reform of the Council of Magistracy and the aforementioned law on "superpowers" are also detrimental to the separation of powers because they hamper the maintenance of balances and counter-balances within the democratic system. A positive step was taken in 2006 with the creation of the Permanent Bicameral Commission, as determined by the 1994 constitutional reform, which controls regulations issued by the executive as decrees of necessity and urgency, delegated legislation or the partial promulgation of laws.

National assembly The main responsibilities of the National Congress are to allocate public resources via an annual general budget and to control the executive power. Its other functions include borrowing money; establishing and regulating a federal bank entitled to mint money; enacting codes; accepting or rejecting the resignation of the president or the vice-president; approving or rejecting treaties concluded with other nations and international organizations; authorizing the executive to declare war or make peace; authorizing the entry of foreign troops into national territory; and allowing national troops to leave the nation, among many others. In addition, the National Congress has the capacity to serve as a check on the executive by requesting reports, carrying out research and receiving a monthly report from the cabinet chief.

The importance of the National Congress has been subject to fluctuation since 1983, when Argentina returned to democracy. While during the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983–1989) the national assembly was erected as a keystone of the restored democratic system, President Menem (1989–1999) made strong use of decrees, avoiding discussion around legislature, and President Fernando De la Rúa (1999–2001) plunged it into notoriety owing to a scandal involving payoffs in the Senate.

Since Néstor Kirchner took office (2003–2007), the role of the National Congress has eroded. While Alfonsín issued 10 decrees of necessity and urgency during the entire duration of his presidency, De la Rúa issued 73, Menem 208 and Kirchner 270, a number far in excess of the 205 law projects of public policies sent to congress. During the administration of President Fernández de Kirchner (2007–present) the National Congress has seen its importance grow once more owing to its role in protests from the agricultural sector in 2008. President Fernández de Kirchner in March of that year oversaw an increase in export taxes on soybeans by introducing a new sliding-scale taxation system, effectively raising levies on soya from 35 to 44 per cent. The measure encountered fierce opposition from farmers and farming associations, leading to a nationwide protest involving strikes, mass protests and roadblocks. After four months, the farm exports tax proposal was finally sent to the National Congress. Although it was passed by the Chamber of Deputies, it did not reach the necessary majority in the Senate, where the vice-president cast the tie-breaking vote against the measure proposed by his own government.

The National Congress consists of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The former represents the citizens of Argentina. Its members are elected directly and proportionally, with an electoral threshold of 3 per cent of the votes. The current proportion in the Chamber of Deputies is one deputy to every 161,000 inhabitants with standard rounding, though every province is entitled to five deputies even if its population does not reach the minimum population quota. Moreover, this proportion was established in 1983 by Law No. 22.847 using the 1980 population census, meaning that the present distribution does not accurately reflect Argentina's contemporary demographic composition. This means in effect that there are some provinces which are overrepresented within the chamber, while others are underrepresented. Deputies are elected for a period of four years with the possibility of re-election. Every two years, half of the seats are renewed through mid-term elections.

The Senate consists of three senators for each province and the city of Buenos Aires, amounting to two seats for the party with the highest number of votes in a direct election and one for the second highest. One-third of the senators are elected every two years for a six-year term with no restrictions on re-election. The vice-president of the nation is also president of the Senate and has

the decisive vote in the case of ties. At present, the Chamber of Deputies consists of 257 members divided into 39 political blocs, while the Senate is composed of 72 members distributed among 18 political blocs. The blocs assemble legislators according to political affiliation and common interests in order to support similar opinions and political strategies. Following the most recent parliamentary election in 2009, the distribution of seats is shown in the following two tables.

Table 1.1 | NUMBER OF SEATS IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES ⁽¹⁾

1. Parties in government or in support of the president	Newly elected MPs	Previously elected MPs ⁽²⁾	Total
Frente para la Victoria – PJ	40	56	96
Frente Cívico por Santiago	3	4	7
De la Concertación		3	3
Encuentro Popular y Social		3	3
De la Concertación/Forja		1	1
Sub-total for FPV-PJ and closely allied parties/alliances	43	67	110
2. Parties and alliances with ad hoc support to the president			
Movimiento Popular Neuquino	2	1	3
Proyecto Sur	4	1	5
Frente Nuevo Encuentro	2		2
Libres del Sur		2	2
Diálogo por Buenos Aires		1	1
Buenos Aires por el Cambio		1	1
Solidaridad e Igualdad		3	3
Sub-total for FPV-PJ and ad hoc allied parties/alliances	8	9	17
3. Opposition parties			
PJ disidente	26		26
UCR	21	11	32
Coalición Cívica	7	15	22
PRO	8	4	12
Consenso Federal	6	3	9
PS	1	5	6
Provinciales	8	3	11
Frente de Todos		1	1
Partido Liberal		1	1
Partido Renovador de Salta		1	1
Unión Celeste y Blanco		2	2
Unión Peronista		4	4
Frente Justicia Unión y Libertad (FREJULI)		3	3
Sub-total for opposition	77	53	130
Total	128	129	257

⁽¹⁾ Of a total 257 seats. After 28 June 2009 elections.

⁽²⁾ In office until 2011.

Source: *Parlamentario*, <http://parlamentario.com/miembros-congreso.php> (last accessed on 15/09/09); *members of congress (miembros del Congreso)*.

Table 1.2 | DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE SENATE ⁽¹⁾

Party/Alliance	Seats after the 2009 election	Seats prior to the 2009 election
1. Parties in government or in support of the president		
Frente para la Victoria – PJ	25	17
Alianza Frente Justicialista para la Victoria	5	5
Partido de la Victoria	2	2
Partido Justicialista		10
Alianza Frente Justicialista Chaco Merece Más	2	2
Frente Renovador de la Concordia	2	2
Sub-total for FPV-PJ and closely allied parties/alliances	36	38
2. Parties and alliances with ad hoc support to the president		
Movimiento Popular Neuquino	1	1
Movimiento Santiago Viable	1	1
Partido Nuevo		1
Alianza Unión Córdoba		1
Sub-total for FPV-PJ and ad hoc allied parties/alliances	2	4
3. Opposition parties		
Coalición Cívica	2	2
Partido Justicialista Disidente	6	6
Partido Socialista	1	1
Unión Cívica Radical	9	7
Afirmación para una República Igualitaria (ARI)	2	2
Unidad Federalista	1	1
Alianza Frente Producción y Trabajo	1	1
Frente Cívico por Santiago	2	2
Alianza Frente de Todos	3	1
Frente Cívico y Social de Catamarca	2	2
Concertación para el Desarrollo	1	1
Fuerza Republicana		2
Alianza Frente Nuevo		1
Frente Jujeco	1	1
Encuentro por Corrientes	1	
Frente Cívico de Córdoba	2	
Sub-total for opposition	34	30
Total	72	72

⁽¹⁾ Of a total 72 seats.

Abbreviations: PP = party of the president | P/supp. = parties that support the president
O = party is in opposition.

Source: Parlamentario, <http://parlamentario.com/miembros-congreso.php> (last accessed on 15/09/09); members of congress (miembros del Congreso).

II. PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM

II.1 Party system

Political parties are permitted and their position is guaranteed by the national constitution and the laws derived from it. Their tasks and organization are regulated by the Organic Law of Political Parties (OLPP-Law No. 23.298, 1985) that determines the rules for party participation in national elections. According to this law, there are two types of parties: district and national. While the former can act only in the district where their legal personality (*personería jurídica*) is recognized, national parties can act in all jurisdictions where they have been enrolled, provided that they are constituted by at least five district parties, and they are the only ones allowed to present candidates for presidential elections. *Legal regulation*

As regards the rules for legal approval, district parties have to provide a formal founding dossier detailing the party's name, address and enrolment of at least four per thousand registered voters in a given district up to a total number of one million registered voters; i.e., that a minimum of at least 4,000 registered voters as enrolled founding members is also constant in bigger districts (OLPP-Law No. 23.298, Title II, Chapter 1, art. 7 [a]). A party is considered to have ceased to operate when it fails to hold internal elections within four years; when it fails to present candidates in any electoral districts for three consecutive elections without justified reason; when it fails to attain a minimum of 2 per cent of the votes in two consecutive elections in any district; or if it is unable to provide details of its inventory, cash, acts or records of decisions taken.

The d'Hondt system used to calculate the number of seats corresponding to each party establishes that in order to reach parliamentary seats, parties must attain a threshold of at least 3 per cent of the votes cast in each district. In accordance with article 37 of the constitution, from the year 2000 Law No. 24.012 has established that women shall represent at least 30 per cent of the party list.

The Law on Financing of Political Parties (Law No. 26.215, 2007) determines that parties are financed by public and private contributions. The national government contributes to the functioning of political parties through the Permanent Party Fund, administered by the Ministry of the Interior. Twenty per cent of the fund is distributed annually between all recognized parties, and the remaining 80 per cent is divided proportionally according to the number of votes each party obtained in the last national deputies election. Only parties that have achieved at least one per cent of the total votes participate in this distribution. *Party financing*

With regard to private financing, parties can obtain contributions from their members and other contributors (including juridical persons), as well as from the profitability of their own assets and activities. In election years the national government also makes additional funds available for electoral campaigns. Parties cannot accept or receive, directly or indirectly, contributions or donations from public entities; from subsidiary companies related to national, provincial or municipal works and services or those of the city of Buenos Aires; from people in the gambling industry; from governments or foreign public entities; from foreign persons who do not reside in the country; from persons who were obliged to donate by their superiors; or from unions, employers and professional associations.

As stated in article 38 of the national constitution, parties must make public the origin and allocation of their profits and assets, a provision regulated by Law No. 26.215. In practice there are several irregularities with regard to party financing. During the presidential campaign in 2007, for instance, there was evidence of undervaluing and the concealment of income and outgoings, the use of public resources – such as official means of transport, buildings and the media – to campaign both in national territory and in foreign countries, and problems in the reception of public contributions (Poder Ciudadano 2008).

Relevant parties At the national level there are currently four principal parties or alliances in Argentina. The largest party is the Justicialist Party (Partido Justicialista – PJ) or Peronismo, founded in 1947 by Juan Domingo Perón. Since the 1990s PJ has split into various factions in the face of sharp internal differences. At the current time there are many Peronist parties or alliances besides the PJ, the most important one being the Front for Victory (Frente para la Victoria – FPV), the party in office. The FPV is an electoral alliance composed of several Peronist and non-Peronist parties aligned with Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner. In 2008 Néstor Kirchner was appointed president of the PJ without internal elections owing to the existence of irregularities with the opposition's list.

The oldest party is the Radical Civic Union (Unión Cívica Radical – UCR), founded in 1891. Although it is the only opposition party with a nationwide structure, it has experienced poor electoral performance and serious fragmentation, with many governors, mayors and other representatives aligning themselves with the FPV under the name of "Radicals-K", the K standing for "Kirchner". They support the FPV in elections and proposed legislation, as well as in its governing strategy.

New emerging political forces include the centre-right electoral alliance Republican Proposal (Propuesta Republicana – PRO), which integrated the Compromise for Change (Compromiso para el Cambio – CPC), the Federal Party (Partido Federal – PF), Recreate (Recrear) and other smaller parties founded in 2005, and the left-leaning Civic Coalition (Coalición Cívica – CC), an alliance formed in April 2007 between the Affirmation for an Egalitarian Republic (Afirmación para una República Igualitaria – ARI), the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista – PS),³ the Union for All (Unión por Todos – UPT), and the Generation for a National Meeting (Generación para un Encuentro Nacional – GEN), among others.

Over the last five years the number of political parties has decreased, while alliances have notably increased. According to the National Electoral Chamber, whereas over the period 2004–2007 224 political parties were recognized, 212 ultimately ceased to operate. The most common reason behind a party's expiration is the failure to provide the documentation requested by law, followed by the inability to reach 2 per cent of the votes in at least two districts in two consecutive elections, and the absence of internal elections for four years. On the other hand, the number of alliances has increased, especially in electoral years, as a result of parties' inability to reach a sufficient vote by running alone in elections.

Party families Traditionally, the Argentine party system has been mainly composed by labour parties, generally based on the social democratic ideology. In the few last years some liberal parties have founded, representing the right on the ideological spectrum. Parties with religious values and conservative and extremist parties are rare and they hardly ever obtain a significant number of votes in elections. Rural and green parties are nonexistent in Argentina.

Table 2 | IDEOLOGICAL COMPOSITION OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

	Name and founding year ⁽¹⁾	Present situation (2009)	Situation prior to the present (2007)
Labour parties	Partido Justicialista (PJ), 1947	PP	PP
	Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), 1891	O	O
	Afirmación para una República Igualitaria (ARI), 2000 (part of Coalición Cívica – CC)	O	O
	Generación para un Encuentro Nacional (GEN), 2007 (part of CC)	O	O
	Unión por Todos (UPT), 2003 (part of CC)	O	O
	Movimiento Popular Neuquino (MPN), 1961	O	O
	Partido Socialista (PS), 1896 ⁽²⁾	O	O
	Partido Comunista de Argentina (PCA), 1918	NR	NR
Parties with religious values, programmes, voters	Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC), 1954	NR	NR
Liberal	Compromiso para el Cambio (CPC), 2003 (part of Propuesta Republicana – PRO)	O	O
	Recrear (Recreate), 2002 (part of PRO)	O	O
	Partido Federal (PF), 1973 (part of PRO)	O	O
Conservative	Alianza Republicana (AR), 1999	NR	NR
Extremists	Internacional Socialista (IS), 2006	NR	NR
	Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), 1982	NR	NR

⁽¹⁾ The total number of recognized parties in Argentina is 37. Therefore, only relevant parties were considered for this table.

⁽²⁾ Since 2002 PS is composed of Democratic Socialist Party and Popular Socialist Party.

Abbreviations: PP = party of the president | P/supp. = parties that support the president
O = party is in opposition | NR = no parliamentary representation.

Argentina's two traditional parties, the UCR and the PJ, both originated as a result of ideological clashes within society which motivated members of a group to gather in order to achieve certain collective goals. For instance, the UCR emerged as a splinter group from within the governing elite when one faction expressed its discontent with the voting system and requested a universal vote. The PJ on the other hand was in its origins a party destined to defend the rights of the labour class in the 1940s and conceived as a channel for the demands of the new urban popular sectors (Malamud 2003).

Origins of parties

Almost every political party created since the mid-20th century has appeared as a reaction to internal developments within the PJ or the UCR. It is difficult as a result to explain the origins of new

parties without acknowledging their relation with these two. Parties created from the 1990s onwards have mainly been internal blocs of Peronists or radicals. However, they have generally failed to sustain their political momentum. Following the 2001 crisis new parties essentially emerged as ad hoc institutions structured around a relevant leader who would seek to reach office based on social prestige, leading these groups to be dubbed “flash parties” (Kerz/Pomposo 2006).

General significance of parties Although the constitution does not specifically address political candidates, the Organic Law of Political Parties (OLPP) determines that political parties are the only institution allowed to present candidates for elections (OLPP, article 10). This makes political parties in Argentina key actors behind the democratic selection of candidates at the national, provincial and municipal levels, since no citizen can run for office without being backed by a party. Parties are also essential for the safeguarding of good governance, due to party discipline. The fact that legislators of one party tend to vote the same way gives a certain stability to the National Congress, as well as to the executive, who can predict what type of support a proposal will encounter or with whom he or she should negotiate.

However, following the institutional crisis of 2001 new parties emerged with the sole purpose of serving as vehicles for individual candidates to pursue their objectives; namely, to gain office. For the average voter, individual candidates are more important than parties, and elections constitute the moment when leaderships are strengthened or weakened. Therefore, electoral triumph is the principal factor for cohesion (Mustapic 2003).

Voter-party relations Examining electoral preferences reveals that some voters mark their ballot for individuals rather than for parties. In a “pragmatic vote” they choose the candidate that most appeals to them and that they consider most qualified to respond in a crisis, regardless of political proposals. Others vote according to party affiliation or sympathy, based on bonds of tradition and solidarity (Kerz/Pomposo 2006).

Ideology plays almost no role in how people vote, nor do party programmes. Voters do not feel represented by parties, and although they do not deny their necessity, generally they do not trust them. Because of this, the relation between voters and parties is unstable, and it has become even more unsteady over the past five years. This is related to the lack of strong party programmes and the greater relevance of individual personalities when people come out to vote.

II.2 Individual Parties

Party membership Formal membership figures for 2009 are yet to be measured; those available are from 2007–2008. Electoral rolls are yet to be fully updated as there are people affiliated to two parties at the same time, there are those deceased who have yet to be removed from the lists, and new members who are not yet registered. Therefore, only a few parties have been able to keep accurate records of their membership (see Table 3).

There are parties in which particular social groups are overrepresented. Considered on a regional basis, the PJ maintains much of its support on the outskirts of the city of Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires province and among unions and the unemployed. On the other hand, the PRO is stronger in the city of Buenos Aires and among young adults. As regards political parties’ association with particular social groups, the PJ was originally a labour party representing the interests of the working class. However, during the 1990s the party also began to attract a management class thanks to its neo-liberal politics, a situation that altered following the 2001 crisis. Nowadays, the PJ is on the whole a lower-class party and it is normally most voted for by workers, union members and the unemployed. From its origins the UCR has essentially been an urban middle- and upper-class party, and although over the last years it has lost many followers, it still commands the support of part of the middle class. The CC targets the same large urban middle class, especially those disaffected with the consequences of the 2001 crisis, while the centre-right PRO is generally associated with a higher-class social strata, although part of the middle class also supports it.

Table 3 | MEMBERSHIP FIGURES

Party/Alliance	2000	2007–2008	Present membership density ⁽¹⁾
PJ	3.856.084	3.586.326	13.21
UCR	2.552.429	2.500.237	9.21
ARI	–	48.063	0.17
PRO (alliance)	–	104.929	0.38
PS	No information available	115.423	0.42

⁽¹⁾Members/voters x 100.

Source: National Electoral Chamber (2008).

In order to be recognized by the National Electoral Chamber, all parties must have a charter sanctioned and adopted democratically by their funding assembly. Article 21 of the OLPP explains that the charter constitutes the fundamental law of the party, which outlines its powers, rights and obligations, as well as the guidelines behind members' activities. The charter covers all matters related to the internal functioning, authorities and organs of each party, and is to be known and understood by all party members.

Party organization

Argentina's electoral power is decentralized for the national and provincial levels, with each province constituting a multimember electoral district. National political parties therefore reflect the administrative organization of the country and organize themselves along federal lines in two authority structures, the national and provincial levels. Local branches of parties operate their own constitution and platform, create rules and procedures to decide on local issues, elect their own leaders and officers, and keep a record of their members and activists. In some cases, provincial parties produce a third authority structure, the municipal one, based on provincial electoral laws. As Argentina is a federal country and its provinces possess a substantial degree of political autonomy, provincial-level offices are very important in the electoral process. This means that provincial branches of parties generally enjoy considerable autonomy in activities such as the creation of party lists and the formation of electoral alliances for provincial elections (Jones 1997). However, local branches generally remain idle save during campaigns and elections. In some cases (the PJ, the UCR, the ARI) provincial or municipal branches organize activities during non-electoral years, but this is not the general trend.

All parties have associated organizations, but because of the manner in which internal decisions are made they hardly ever influence the policymaking and programme debates within parties. The UCR has a youth structure, a university political organization present in almost all the country's public universities, a national organization of radical workers, a foundation for technical and political formation, and an institute of formation and thinking. Peronist Youth is the youth branch of the PJ, currently divided into several organizations, with the most important being The Cámpora (La Cámpora) and the Evita Peronist Youth (Juventud Peronista Evita). The ARI, the UPT, the PRO and the PS have institutes for political thinking and formation, as well as youth branches.

Parties have no formal relationship to civil society organizations, although in practice some parties, especially the PJ, maintain strong bonds with social movements such as the so-called "piqueteros", unemployed workers who claim for economic and social benefits and who support the PJ in political acts and demonstrations.⁴ What is more, certain piquetero leaders have taken office in secretaries or ministries during Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner's administrations. Among the unions, the General Workers' Federation (Confederación General de Trabajadores – CGT), led by Hugo Moyano,

Societal entrenchment

have generally supported the PJ, as well as the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo) and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (Madres de Plaza de Mayo), organizations of mothers and grandmothers of people disappeared during the previous dictatorship, who in January 2006 declared that they no longer had an enemy in the government.

Internal decision-making The most influential decision-maker over a party's basic principles is generally the party president, who is normally a charismatic leader. Although the OLPP determines that in order to nominate candidates for president and vice-president, internal party elections shall be conducted democratically and in accordance with the principles established in charters, with the results made public and communicated to the supervising electoral judge, this hardly ever occurs in practice.

Both the PJ and the UCR have adopted direct elections to choose candidates for national elections, and they have also included in their charters a clause to give representation to minorities, although this has a threshold of 25 per cent. However, on many occasions internal elections are not observed as party leaders simply make prior agreements and present a single list of candidates. In some provinces, the PJ resolved the problem of internal elections by introducing a double simultaneous voting system called "Law of Lemas" (Ley de Lemas), which allows one party (lema) to present different candidates or lists of candidates (sublemas). The votes obtained by each sublema are added together to determine the winning party. Within this party, the winning sublema is the one that has obtained more votes. Once this is established, seats are distributed proportionally between the sublemas using the d'Hondt method, thus replacing intra-party for inter-party competition (Mustapic 2000).

Internal relations within relevant parties are generally hierarchical, meaning that decision-making, communication and participation are from top to bottom. The party president determine lines of action that are respected by local branches, who despite their primary role when attempting to win national elections and their autonomy in certain activities fail to be taken into account in the core internal activities of the party.

Stability of party ideology/programmes Party and alliances' names have little significance and are regularly changed according to political circumstances. Although the two traditional parties – the PJ and the UCR – have preserved their original names, their current meaning differs from the original one, just as happens with party programmes.

The ideological richness of parties is weak owing to a lack of long-term programme discussion. As traditional parties weaken and split into many factions, people cast their vote according to the personalized leadership of charismatic politicians without taking into account party programmes. Charters determine that programmes shall be decided or ratified by each party's national assembly before elections, but in general programmes reflect the views of the party leader.

Communication In order to communicate with their members and voters, parties make use of various media, including television, newspapers, radio, promotion on the street and the internet. Television has increased in its importance since the last presidential campaign, in light of the fact that relevant parties have recorded that, on average, more than half of their promotional budgets was destined for television advertisements. Promotion on the street is also extensive, followed by graphic advertisement and, to a smaller extent, the radio. Some parties organized activities and events but, save for the PJ, their use was limited. All relevant parties make use of professional agencies, as well as campaign advisers, allocating an average 15 per cent of their promotional budgets to this. The main objective of agencies is to develop television slots and to organize the campaign. According to figures provided by the parties to the electoral justice, big parties spend on average 76 per cent of their campaign budget on publicity, while smaller parties spend 27 per cent. However, because of underestimation and the concealment of incomes and outgoings it is not possible to accurately determine what percentage of a party's budget is spent on communication and advertising (Poder Ciudadano 2008).

One of the most frequent problems for more effective political communication is the lack of interest among citizens who, despite abundant advertising, information and media coverage, are either not interested or unable to understand what politicians say in campaigns (Amado Suárez 2006). Although parties receive an amount of money from the national government for campaigning by law, small parties meet budgetary problems in comparison to full-size parties. What is more, in the last presidential campaign three parties declared that ten days before elections they still had not received these funds (Poder Ciudadano 2008).

Parliamentary groups are normally the "arm of the party" in the National Congress and they respond to the lines of action determined by the party. Party discipline is essential for legislators who seek re-election or to be appointed to legislative or executive offices. Parliamentary bloc leaders are important for controlling and coordinating parties in the National Congress, as well as for maintaining the internal balance among legislators. Aside from this, the president of the governing bloc is also a central figure in the relation between the legislative and the executive, as he or she promotes government proposals in the National Congress, brings legislators' positions to the cabinet and negotiates with other bloc leaders (Mustapic 2000).

*Relationship
between party
and parliamentary
groups*

III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

In general, political parties in Argentina fail to fulfil their functions of discussing policies, offering political alternatives, forming government teams, imparting civic knowledge and training members and leaders (Hernández 2003). Although they participate in elections and play an important role in selecting candidates for public office, they are unsuccessful in integrating and politically socializing voters.

When considering central aspects of party democracy, it is possible to conclude that this is weakly institutionalized in Argentina. Parties are poorly organized at the local level and they perform activities only during campaigns and elections. National structures control the most important decision-making and have the final word when arranging candidacies. Social entrenchment is poor and parties have little in the way of a relationship to civil society organizations, which prefer not to be related to parties because of their negative image in society. The essential crisis of representation leads voters to fail to find a viable political option, meaning they instead vote for individuals rather than parties. Although the PJ and the UCR have kept their original names, the alliances they form dissolve and reappear under a new name in every election, as happens with other main parties. Party programmes are ideologically weak and voters seldom know about their content. Finally, the party in government acts on its own and leaves little space for opposition, which in any case shows no cohesion and is strongly divided.

Among the major obstacles to the institutionalization of party democracy in Argentina are the lack of open and simultaneous internal elections for all parties and a stricter finance control system. Compulsory internal elections would prevent party leaders from appointing candidates at will, and stricter control of party financing would avoid concealing and undervaluing income and outgoings, making party performance more transparent.

- 1| *A recent case is the one presented to the justice by the newspaper "Perfil", in order to be included in the distribution of official governmental advertising, arguing that the state awards or punishes a newspaper due to its editorial opinions, affecting the functioning of the democratic system.*
- 2| *The City of Buenos Aires has a particular status, because it is neither a province nor a city. Since the reform of the constitution in 1994, Buenos Aires has been an autonomous city with its own legislative and jurisdictional offices and a chief of government elected by its citizens, as well as its own deputies and senators in the National Congress.*
- 3| *The PS and the CC formed an alliance only for the 2007 presidential elections, but they remained separated for the 2007 legislative elections. Along with the UCR, the PS and the CC are currently part of the Social and Civic Agreement, an alliance created for the 2009 legislative elections.*
- 4| *Piqueteros are groups of activists who block roads or streets with the purpose of demonstrating and calling attention to a particular demand.*

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