

Research Briefing

7 December 2023

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# Argentina: 2023 presidential election and future relations with the UK



## Summary

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## Summary

In 2023 Argentina held a general election, 40 years since the return to democracy in Argentina.

### PASO primaries

The PASO primaries (Open, Simultaneous, and Obligatory Primaries) took place on 13 August, the first key date in the 2023 electoral calendar.

The primaries were used to select the final candidates for coalitions and allowed voters to give an early indication of their preferences.

In a result that surprised many political commentators, Javier Milei, of the Liberty Advances party, won the PASO, securing 30% of the vote.

Of the 15 parties and coalitions that contested the PASO, five met the 1.5% threshold of total votes that would allow them to challenge the formal first round of the presidential election.

### First round of presidential election

The election campaign was dominated by economic concerns as inflation in Argentina approached 140%. Other key concerns for voters included corruption, unemployment, education and a perceived weakening of democracy.

On 22 October 2023 Argentina carried out the first-round vote to decide who would be the next president and vice president (President Alberto Fernandez had announced earlier in the year that he would not be standing for re-election). Congressional elections also took place on this date.

In a surprise to pollsters, who had predicted a Javier Milei victory, the election results showed Sergio Massa won the most votes, with almost 37%. Milei was second, taking 30% of votes.

As no candidate reached the threshold of 45% of votes, or 40% with a 10-point lead over their closest rival, the top two candidates were advanced to contest the second-round runoff poll on 19 November.

### Second round

In a reversal of the first round, Milei won the runoff, securing 55.69% of votes against 44.31% for Massa.

Milei's victory saw him winning the highest number of votes in Argentina's history, beating the previous record set by Mauricio Macri in 2015.

## Looking ahead

Despite Milei's clear victory, however, he faces major obstacles in pursuing his agenda, primarily from the Congress. Following the Congressional election on 22 October, Milei's Liberty Advances party controls just 38 of 257 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and eight of the 72 seats in the Senate.

Outside of Congress, Liberty Advances has no governors or major city mayors, which places additional limits for Milei in Argentina's strong federal system.

## International reaction

Leaders of other countries largely congratulated Milei for his victory, but there were mixed reactions from leaders across Latin America, depending upon their ideological viewpoints.

Lord Cameron, the UK Foreign Secretary, sent his congratulations and Argentine commentators have suggested it is likely that the Falkland Islands sovereignty dispute will have a lower profile in the new administration than it had in previous governments.

# 1

## Background

### 2023 elections

The 2023 elections marked 40 years since the return to democracy in Argentina.

On 16 March 2023 Argentina's National Electoral Chamber approved the timetable for the 2023 elections.

The body also outlined time periods for forming electoral alliances and candidacies, the length of the election campaign in its entirety and the dates of the compulsory presidential debates.<sup>1</sup>

On 21 April 2023 Argentine President Alberto Fernandez announced he would not be standing for re-election, opening a contest to lead the Peronist coalition.<sup>2</sup>

At the general election on 22 October 2023, Argentines voted to elect a president and vice president, and members of the legislature.

### Electoral system

#### Presidential elections

Presidential elections take place every four years. There is a term limit, with presidents allowed just one consecutive re-election. However, a president may later return to office after sitting out one term after serving in office.<sup>3</sup>

To win the Argentine presidency, a candidate must win 45% of the vote, or 40% plus a 10-point lead over their closest competitor.<sup>4</sup>

If no candidate meets these criteria, then the top two candidates from the first round advance to the second round runoff, which is decided by an absolute majority vote.

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<sup>1</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [Dates defined: Argentina's 2023 electoral timeline confirmed by court](#), 16 March 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lucila Sigal, [Argentine President Fernandez pulls out of 2023 election](#), Reuters, 21 April 2023

<sup>3</sup> Georgetown University, [Republic of Argentina electoral system](#), Political Database of the Americas [accessed 30 November 2023]

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Shamim, [Argentina election 2023: Here's what to know](#), Al Jazeera, 22 October 2023

## Congressional elections

Legislative power is vested in the National Congress of Argentina (Congreso de la Nación Argentina), comprised of the Senate (Senado) and the Chamber of Deputies (Cámara de Diputados).

The Senate has 72 members, with each of the 23 provinces in Argentina, and the capital Buenos Aires, electing three Senators.

The provinces and Buenos Aires are multi-seat constituencies, with each awarding two seats to the party winning the most votes in the election, and the remaining seat given to the party in second place.<sup>5</sup>

As all three senators must therefore be elected in the same year, only eight of the 23 provinces plus Buenos Aires hold elections in each electoral cycle.

The provinces electing Senators in 2023 were Buenos Aires, Formosa, Jujuy, La Rioja, Misiones, San Juan, San Luis and Santa Cruz.<sup>6</sup>

Senators serve six-year terms in office, with one-third of seats elected every two years.

The Chamber of Deputies had 257 members, each directly elected from multi-seat constituencies.<sup>7</sup> The d'Hondt system of proportional representation is used to elect Deputies.<sup>8</sup> In order to win a seat, a party must obtain 3% of votes cast in a constituency.<sup>9</sup>

Deputies serve four-year terms in office, with half of the seats up for election every two years.

## Who can vote?

Voting is compulsory for Argentines between the ages of 18 and 70. If any citizens fail to vote, the penalty is a fine. Voting is optional for those aged between 16 and 17 and over the age of 70. Foreigners may vote in Argentina if they have permanent residence.<sup>10</sup>

There were 35,394,425 registered voters for the 2023 election.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems, [Election Guide: Argentine Republic](#), 22 November 2023

<sup>6</sup> Michael Soltys, [Election 2023: Not just a presidential vote](#), Buenos Aires Times, 21 October 2023

<sup>7</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems, [Election Guide: Argentine Republic](#), 22 November 2023

<sup>8</sup> The European Parliament (for which 16 Member States use the d'Hondt method in their elections), has a useful explainer on [Understanding the d'Hondt method](#) (PDF) [accessed 30 November 2023]

<sup>9</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Argentina: Cámara de Diputados \(Chamber of Deputies\)](#) [accessed 30 November 2023]

<sup>10</sup> Martina Jaureguy, [Voting as a foreigner in Argentina: what you need to know](#), Buenos Aires Herald, 11 August 2023

<sup>11</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems, [Election Guide: Argentine Republic](#), 22 November 2023

## Key dates for the presidential election

The timetable for the elections was set by Argentina's National Electoral Chamber in March 2023. The following were the key dates in the 2023 presidential election calendar:<sup>12</sup>

- 2 September: The presidential election campaign formally began.
- 1 and 8 October: Mandatory presidential debates took place.
- 20 October: Election campaigning ended, at the start of the pre-election curfew.<sup>13</sup>
- 22 October: The first round of the election took place.
- 12 November: A third presidential debate, between the final two candidates, took place.
- 19 November: The second-round presidential run-off took place.
- 10 December: The president-elect will be inaugurated on this date.

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<sup>12</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [Dates defined: Argentina's 2023 electoral timeline confirmed by court](#), 16 March 2023

<sup>13</sup> Argentina's National Electoral Code imposes an electoral curfew 48 hours before general elections, which bars political campaigning during this period. This includes holding rallies, campaigning online and the publication and distribution of surveys. There are also restrictions on the sale of alcohol, bearing arms, as well as public gatherings including sports and shows. See "[Argentina's electoral curfew kicks in ahead of general election](#)", Buenos Aries Times, 20 October 2023.



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## 2 2023 presidential election

### 2.1 PASO primaries

On 13 August 2023 Argentina held its presidential primaries, known as the PASO (which stands for Open, Simultaneous, and Obligatory Primaries).<sup>14</sup>

The primaries are open in the sense that voters are free to cast a ballot in any one contest they please, regardless of party affiliation. The system was established in 2009 and allows voters to give an early indication of their preferences.

For coalitions, the presidential primary provides an opportunity to select a candidate from rival contenders. And, if a candidate does not receive 1.5% of the total vote in the primary, they will not be on the ballot in the general election.

The most competitive primary in the PASO was expected to take place within United for Change, between former Security Minister Patricia Bullrich and the current Mayor of Buenos Aires, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta.<sup>15</sup>

In a result that surprised many political commentators, the libertarian candidate, Javier Milei, of the Liberty Advances party, took 30% of the vote. The centre-right Patricia Bullrich of United for Change came second with 28%. The Peronist candidate, Sergio Massa, endorsed by the current vice-president and former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, finished third with 27% of votes.<sup>16</sup>

Of the 15 parties and coalitions that contested the PASO, five met the 1.5% threshold of total votes to challenge in the formal first round of the presidential election.

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<sup>14</sup> Chase Harrison, [What Are Argentina's PASO Presidential Primaries and Who's Running?](#) Americas Society/Council of the Americas, 17 July 2023

<sup>15</sup> As above

<sup>16</sup> Uki Goñi, [Far-right outsider takes shock lead in Argentina primary election](#), the Guardian, 14 August 2023

Political Party/Coalition candidate	No of votes	% of total
<b>Liberty Advances</b>	<b>7,352,244</b>	<b>31.60</b>
Javier Milei	7,352,244	31.60
<b>Together for Change</b>	<b>6,895,941</b>	<b>29.64</b>
Patricia Bullrich	4,139,566	17.79
Horacio Rodríguez Larreta	2,756,375	11.85
<b>Union for the Homeland</b>	<b>6,719,042</b>	<b>28.88</b>
Sergio Massa	5,277,538	22.68
Juan Grabois	1,441,504	6.20
<b>We do for our Country</b>	<b>914,812</b>	<b>3.93</b>
Juan Schiaretti	914,812	3.93
<b>Workers' Left Front</b>	<b>642,773</b>	<b>2.76</b>
Myriam Bregman	451,275	1.94
Gabriel Solano	191,498	0.82
<b>Principles and Values</b>	<b>194,160</b>	<b>0.83</b>
Guillermo Moreno	189,756	0.82
Eliodoro Martínez	2,516	0.01
Paula Arias	1,507	0.00
Jorge Oliver	197	0.00
Carina Bartolini	184	0.00
<b>Freemen of the South Movement</b>	<b>158,840</b>	<b>0.68</b>
Jesús Escobar	158,840	0.68
<b>New Movement for Socialism</b>	<b>87,681</b>	<b>0.38</b>
Manuela Castañera	87,681	0.38
<b>Youth and Dignity Left Movement</b>	<b>84,361</b>	<b>0.36</b>
Santiago Cúneo	57,754	0.25
Raúl Castells	26,607	0.11
<b>Workers' Party</b>	<b>64,213</b>	<b>0.28</b>
Marcelo Ramal	64,213	0.28
<b>Federal Patriot Front</b>	<b>51,850</b>	<b>0.22</b>
César Biondini	51,850	0.22
<b>Neighbourhood Action Movement</b>	<b>43,480</b>	<b>0.19</b>
Raúl Albarracín	43,480	0.19
<b>Youth Project</b>	<b>24,304</b>	<b>0.10</b>
Mempo Giardinelli	11,944	0.05
Martín Ayerbe	8,829	0.04
Reina Xiomara Ibáñez	3,531	0.01
<b>Liber AR</b>	<b>23,554</b>	<b>0.10</b>
Ramiro Vasena	12,990	0.06
Nazareno Etchepare	7,732	0.03
Julio Bárbaro	2,832	0.01
<b>Union of the Democratic Centre</b>	<b>12,041</b>	<b>0.05</b>
Andrés Passamonti	12,041	0.05
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23,269,296</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: [Results of the PASO elections](#) (PDF), National Electoral Chamber [accessed 30 November 2023]

## 2.2

# Candidates for president

Five candidates represented the parties and coalitions contesting the 2023 presidential election in Argentina: Myriam Bregnam, Patricia Bullrich, Sergio Massa, Javier Milei and Juan Schiaretti.

Of these, Bullrich, Massa and Milei were far ahead in opinion polls and in a position to win the election.

Profiles of these three leading candidates, in alphabetical order, are below.<sup>17</sup>

## Patricia Bullrich (Together for Change)

Patricia Bullrich was born on 11 June 1956 in Buenos Aires, Argentina's capital.

She graduated with a degree in humanities and social sciences, with a focus on communications and journalism. She also gained a master's degree and doctorate in political science.

Bullrich was born into a traditional Argentine political family and began her activism in the 1970s in the Peronist Youth. Later that decade her family was forced into exile during the military dictatorship (1976-1983), before later returning to Argentina.<sup>18</sup>

She distanced herself from the Peronists after being elected to Argentina's Chamber of Deputies in 1993, where she served one term until 1997.

Bullrich was appointed Minister of Labour during President Fernando de la Rúa's centrist government, serving from 2000-2001; and, in 2015, she joined the main conservative bloc, from where President Mauricio Macri later appointed her Minister of Security.<sup>19</sup>

In the 2007 elections Bullrich was once again elected to the Chamber of Deputies, serving until 2015.

### 2023 election

Bullrich is viewed as a centre-right candidate who is tough on crime and conservative on the economy.

She pledged to reduce restrictions on the police's use of force to fight criminals, and to involve the military in combating drug trafficking and organised crime. She committed to reducing taxes if elected, and to reach a

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<sup>17</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Names in the News: The leading Argentine presidential candidates](#), 18 October 2023

<sup>18</sup> Eliana Raszewski and Lucila Sigal, [Patricia Bullrich: Argentina election candidate pledges to fight inflation](#), Reuters, 20 October 2023

<sup>19</sup> As above

new deal with the International Monetary Fund that would include scrapping currency controls.<sup>20</sup>

Regarding foreign affairs, Bullrich said that, if elected, her government would not join the BRICS group,<sup>21</sup> which Argentina has been formally invited to join.<sup>22</sup>

## Sergio Massa (Union for the Homeland/Peronist movement)

Sergio Massa was born on 28 April 1972 in San Martín, in Buenos Aires province. He is married and has two children. He graduated from the University of Belgrano with a degree in law.<sup>23</sup>

From 1999 to 2002, Massa served as a provincial deputy for the Province of Buenos Aires. Then, between 2002 and 2007, he was head of the National Social Security Administration (ANSES) during the Peronist presidencies of Eduardo Duhalde and Nestor Kirchner.<sup>24</sup>

Massa was elected Mayor of Tigre, in Buenos Aires province, in October 2007. He served until July 2008, when he took a leave of absence to serve as chief of staff to then-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. He held this position for a year and then returned to his elected position of Mayor of Tigre, where he remained until 2013.<sup>25</sup>

During his second period as mayor, Massa split from Kirchner to compete against the president's movement in the midterms. He ran under the Frente Renovador, or Front for Reform, a coalition he formed in 2013 as a separate faction within Peronism. That year, he was elected to Congress as a national deputy.<sup>26</sup>

In 2015, Massa ran for president, finishing in third place in the first round of voting.

Between 2019 and 2022, he served as President of the Chamber of Deputies.

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<sup>20</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Names in the News: The leading Argentine presidential candidates](#), 18 October 2023

<sup>21</sup> BRICS is an intergovernmental organisation comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. In August 2023, at the 15th BRICS Summit in South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had been invited to join the organisation.

<sup>22</sup> Martina Jaureguy, [Bullrich says she would not bring Argentina into BRICS if elected](#), Buenos Aires Herald, 24 August 2023

<sup>23</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Name in the News: Argentine presidential candidate Sergio Massa](#), 16 November 2023

<sup>24</sup> As above

<sup>25</sup> Americas Society/Council of the Americas, [Sergio Massa: Minister of Economy of Argentina and Presidential Candidate. Unión por la Patria](#) [accessed 27 November 2023]

<sup>26</sup> Wilson Center, [Sergio Massa](#) [accessed 27 November 2023]

He was appointed Minister of the Economy in President Alberto Fernández's government in 2022; a position he held at the time of the 2023 presidential election.

### 2023 election

During the election campaign, Massa sought to distance himself from the outgoing Fernández administration, as Argentina's economic crisis, hyperinflation and growing poverty posed a threat to his candidacy.<sup>27</sup>

He made "national unity" a key slogan in his campaigning and pledged to maintain full political relations with Brazil and China, in contrast with the position taken by his main opponent, Javier Milei.

In a post on X on 8 November, Massa declared:

I want to be the national unity President. I want to inaugurate a new phase in the country, with dialogue, democratic coexistence, and seeking of consensus.<sup>28</sup>

### Javier Milei (Liberty Advances)

Javier Milei was born on 22 October 1970 in Buenos Aires. He is in a relationship with Argentine actress and comedian Fátima Florez.<sup>29</sup>

Milei graduated with a degree in economics from the University of Belgrano in Buenos Aires. He then gained master's degrees in economic theory at the Institute of Economic and Social Development and in economics at Torcuato Di Tella University, both in Buenos Aires.<sup>30</sup>

Between 1992 and 1993 he was an intern at the Central Bank of the Argentine Republic (BCRA) and, from 1996 to 2002, served as a senior economist at HSBC bank.

Milei held several other economic positions in companies and institutions and, from 2004 to 2018, was also a university economics professor at the University of Buenos Aires and the Argentine Universidad del Salvador.<sup>31</sup>

In 2021 Milei was elected to Argentina's Chamber of Deputies, his only experience in elected office before running for the presidency in 2023.

### 2023 election

Milei's theatrical style, such as wielding a chainsaw to illustrate his plans to cut down the size of the state, and mocking his political rivals, led

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<sup>27</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Name in the News: Argentine presidential candidate Sergio Massa](#), 16 November 2023

<sup>28</sup> Sergio Massa (@Sergio Massa), [X \(Twitter\)](#), 8 November 2023 [accessed 27 November 2023]

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Politi, [Argentine presidential candidate Milei goes to the opera — and meets both jeers and cheers](#), AP News, 18 November 2023

<sup>30</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [The making of a president – Javier Milei's life before politics](#), 21 November 2023

<sup>31</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Name in the News: Argentine presidential candidate Javier Milei](#), 16 November 2023

commentators to compare him to Donald Trump in the United States or Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil.<sup>32</sup>

The media had referred to Milei as being libertarian, far right or anti-establishment, while he described himself as an “anarcho-capitalist” who is “above all for freedom”.<sup>33</sup>

Milei is opposed to abortion and sex education and does not believe humans are responsible for climate change.<sup>34</sup>

His campaign pledges centred on his plans to “blow up” the political status quo, including plans to close the central bank, dollarise the Argentine economy and massively shrink the size of the state.<sup>35</sup>

Regarding foreign policy matters, Milei said he would adopt a policy of “not dealing with communists”, ending formal bilateral ties with Argentina’s biggest trading partners, Brazil and China.<sup>36</sup>

As president, he pledged to “align” with the United States, Israel and “the free world”. He was also quoted as saying the Argentine embassy in Israel would be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in a show of support.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.3

### Election campaign

Argentina’s election came at a period of uncertainty for the nation, facing its worst economic crisis in two decades.<sup>38</sup> Two-fifths of Argentines live in poverty and, according to the nation’s statistics office, inflation hit 142.7% in October 2023.<sup>39</sup>

Consequently, high prices and inflation were the key issues for voters when deciding their vote.

In a survey asking respondents to identify “What are Argentina’s biggest problems right now?” the other key concerns for voters were: corruption;

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<sup>32</sup> Maximilian Heath, [Who is Javier Milei, Argentina’s new libertarian president?](#) Reuters, 20 November 2023

<sup>33</sup> The Journal (Ireland), [Profile: Who is Javier Milei, the chainsaw-wielding outsider who is Argentina’s new president?](#), 21 November 2023

<sup>34</sup> The Journal (Ireland), [Profile: Who is Javier Milei, the chainsaw-wielding outsider who is Argentina’s new president?](#) 20 November 2023

<sup>35</sup> Al Jazeera, [Who is Javier Milei, Argentina’s far-right populist politician?](#) 14 August 2023

<sup>36</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Name in the News: Argentine presidential candidate Javier Milei](#), 16 November 2023

<sup>37</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Argentina presidential front runner says if he wins, ‘my allies are US, Israel’](#), 15 August 2023 [translation of an article in La Nacion, Buenos Aires, in Spanish, 14 August 2023]

<sup>38</sup> Maximilian Heath, [Explainer: Argentina presidential election: Key takeaways from first-round vote](#), Reuters, 23 October 2023

<sup>39</sup> Miguel Lo Bianco and Claudia Martini, [‘Can’t buy new jeans’: Argentina inflation hits 143% as shoppers tighten belts](#), Reuters, 13 November 2023

insecurity; the economic situation; unemployment; education; impunity; and the perceived weakening of democracy.<sup>40</sup>

During the election campaign, Massa sought to defend his record as economy minister. He introduced measures to stimulate the economy in the months leading up to the election, including a \$1.3 billion loan he used to fund food security packages and provide credits to small and medium sized businesses. He also implemented an income tax relief measure for all workers.<sup>41</sup>

Milei's main economic policy was dollarisation: to scrap the Argentine peso and replace it with the US dollar. He also pledged to shut down the Central Bank and to shrink the state by eliminating several government departments.<sup>42</sup>

On foreign affairs, Argentina began the process of joining the BRICS bloc in August 2023, a move that Massa supported. He already had a strong relationship with China and, shortly before the election, financed a loan with a currency swap agreement. Milei, meanwhile, campaigned to cancel Argentina's application to join the BRICS.<sup>43</sup>

Regarding the recent Israel-Hamas conflict, Massa said he would designate Hamas a terrorist group.<sup>44</sup> Milei also strongly condemned Hamas and has long attracted attention for his close relationship with Israel and Judaism in general. In a television interview in August 2023, Milei said: "Israel I consider such an ally that I've said I'd move the Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem."<sup>45</sup>

## 2.4

### Presidential election results (first round), 22 October 2023

On 2 November 2023 Argentina's National Electoral Chamber (CNE, by its Spanish initials) published the official, final vote count of the presidential election.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Chase Harrison, [Poll Tracker: Argentina's 2023 Presidential Election](#), Americas Society/Council of the Americas, 13 November 2023

<sup>41</sup> Chase Harrison, [Argentina's 2023 Runoff: Comparing Massa and Milei](#), Americas Society/Council of the Americas, 17 November 2023

<sup>42</sup> As above

<sup>43</sup> As above

<sup>44</sup> As above

<sup>45</sup> Marcelo Raimon, [Argentina chooses a pro-Israel president who has a rabbi as spiritual advisor](#), Buenos Aires Times, 23 November 2023

<sup>46</sup> Buenos Aires Herald, [Argentina 2023 elections: official tally confirms initial results](#), 2 November 2023

In a surprise to pollsters, who had predicted a Javier Milei victory, the election results showed Sergio Massa taking the most votes in the first round.<sup>47</sup>

Many commentators had believed voters would punish Massa for presiding over a financial crisis which had seen inflation in Argentina nearing 140%.<sup>48</sup>

The results showed Massa secured 36.8% of first round votes, with Milei taking 30%. The third major candidate, Patricia Bullrich, came third with 23.8% of votes.

The other two candidates, Juan Schiaretti and Myriam Bregman trailed with 6.73% and 2.7% of votes respectively.

Candidate	Party	No. of valid votes	% of valid votes
Sergio Tomás Massa	Union for the Homeland	9,853,492	36.78
Javier Gerardo Milei	Liberty Advances	8,034,990	29.99
Patricia Bullrich	Together for Change	6,379,023	23.81
Juan Schiaretti	We do for our Country	1,802,068	6.73
Myriam Teresa Bregman	Workers' Left Front	722,061	2.69
<b>Total</b>		<b>26,791,634</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: [Consulta de Escrutinios Definitivos](#), Justicia Nacional Electoral [accessed 22 November 2023]

There were 415,737 blank votes cast and a further 451,486 ballots were invalid. Turnout was 77.14%.

As no candidate reached the threshold of 45% of votes, or 40% with a 10-point lead over their closest rival, the top two candidates would contest the second-round run off poll on 19 November.<sup>49</sup>

## Nine million votes up for grabs

As well as keeping their own voters, both candidates sought to secure the almost nine million votes that had been cast for the losing candidates in the first round, as well as voters who had spoiled their ballot or submitted blank ballots.

<sup>47</sup> The Economist, [Argentina's presidential election delivers a surprise result](#), 23 October 2023

<sup>48</sup> Katy Watson and Malu Cursino, [Argentina presidential election: Javier Milei and Sergio Massa head for run-off vote](#), BBC News Online, 23 October 2023

<sup>49</sup> Tom Phillips, Uki Goñi and Facundo Iglesia, [Far-right populist Javier Milei fails to win first round of Argentina's presidential election](#), The Guardian, 23 October 2023



Theoretically, supporters of left-leaning Schiaretti and Bregman would vote for Massa in the runoff poll. Many of Bullrich's supporters were thought more likely to prefer Milei, but the moderates in her coalition could shift to Massa.<sup>50</sup>

## Losing candidates take sides

On 25 October Bullrich endorsed Milei's candidacy in the runoff poll, saying "the country needs a fundamental change" and that "the urgency of the moment forces us not to be neutral. Argentina cannot start a new Kirchnerist cycle headed by Sergio Massa."<sup>51</sup>

However, other members of the coalition announced they would not be transferring their support to Milei, with the leader of the Radical party, Gerardo Morales, saying he had felt "embarrassed" by Bullrich's decision.<sup>52</sup>

## Second round campaign

Both Massa and Milei appeared to move towards the centre ground ahead of the second round vote, at least in terms of their rhetoric.

Massa reiterated his earlier promise to build a unity government to tackle Argentina's economic problems and to build political bridges. Milei was reported to have replaced images of burning buildings and power tools used in his earlier campaigning with Argentine flags, and said his plans to significantly cut state spending wouldn't slash pensions or push state workers out of their jobs. However, Milei still repeated his pledges to scrap the central bank and dollarize the economy.<sup>53</sup>

## 2.5

## Presidential election results (second round), 19 November 2023

The National Electoral Chamber published the results of the presidential election's second round.

In a reversal of the first round, Javier Milei won the runoff poll, gaining almost three million more votes than Sergio Massa in second. Milei won 55.69% of votes against 44.31% for Massa.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Nicolás Misculin and Juan Bustamante, [Argentina's Massa, Milei battle to woo 9 million swing votes](#), Reuters, 24 October 2023

<sup>51</sup> Uki Goñi, [Javier Milei endorsed by defeated rival who once sued him for defamation](#), The Guardian, 25 October 2023

<sup>52</sup> As above

<sup>53</sup> See: "[A normal guy: Argentina's radical Milei struggles to rebrand for run-off vote](#)", Financial Times, 12 November 2023; and "[Argentina's presidential candidates clash ahead of pivotal poll](#)", Financial Times, 13 November 2023.

<sup>54</sup> Election Tracker (@Vote\_Tracker), [X \(Twitter\)](#), 20 November 2023 [accessed 24 November 2023]

Milei's victory saw him winning the highest number of votes in Argentina's history, beating the previous record set by Mauricio Macri in 2015, in which Macri collected 12,988,349 votes.<sup>55</sup>

Candidate	Party	No. of valid votes	% of valid votes
Javier Gerardo Milei	Liberty Advances	14,476,462	55.69
Sergio Tomás Massa	Union for the Homeland	11,516,142	44.31
<b>Total</b>		<b>25,992,604</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: [Consulta de Escrutinios Definitivos](#), Justicia Nacional Electoral [accessed 22 November 2023]

The results also showed 417,515 blank votes were cast, with a further 453,127 invalid votes. Turnout was 76.33%, slightly lower than in the first round.

Milei won 20 of Argentina's 23 provinces, as well as the capital Buenos Aires.<sup>56</sup>

In Chaco province, Milei's vote tally was roughly equal to the sum of the votes won by Liberty Advances and Together for Change in the first round. This was also seen in other provinces and suggests most people who voted for Patricia Bullrich in the first round opted for Milei, rather than Massa, in the runoff.<sup>57</sup>

Milei also managed to win the most votes in some Peronist strongholds, such as Tucumán province, where he edged Massa 51.9% to 48%.

In his victory speech, President-elect Milei pledged to "end Argentine decadence" and to restore the nation to economic growth and stability, adding:

Today begins the reconstruction of Argentina. Today begins the end of Argentina's decline. Today ends the impoverishing model of the omnipresent state, which only benefits some while the majority suffers.<sup>58</sup>

Milei's inauguration as president will take place on 10 December.

## 2.6 International reaction

Leaders from across Latin America and worldwide responded to Javier Milei's election win.

<sup>55</sup> Juan Martinez, [Milei is Most Voted President in Argentina's History](#), The Rio Times, 21 November 2023

<sup>56</sup> Chase Harrison, [Libertarian Javier Milei Wins Argentina's Presidency in Runoff](#), Americas Society/Council of the Americas, 20 November 2023

<sup>57</sup> Martina Jaureguy, [Argentina 2023 election results map: who won in each province?](#) Buenos Aires Herald, 24 November 2023

<sup>58</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [President-elect Javier Milei vows to end 'Argentine decadence' in victory speech](#), 19 November 2023

## United Kingdom

The UK's Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron, spoke to Milei on 22 November to “congratulate him on his election victory and to wish him well as he prepares to take office”.<sup>59</sup>

And, on 4 December 2023, in response to a Parliamentary Question, UK Foreign Office minister David Rutley also congratulated Milei on his election victory and said he looks forward to “developing a stronger and more constructive relationship” with Argentina.<sup>60</sup>

## United States

On 19 November, after the result was known, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued a press release on behalf of the Biden Administration, congratulating Milei on his victory and praising the electoral process:

The United States congratulates Argentine President-elect Javier Milei on his victory in today's election, and we applaud the robust democratic process through which the Argentine public has spoken. The strong turnout and peaceful conduct of the vote are a testament to Argentina's electoral and democratic institutions.

We look forward to working with President-elect Milei and his government on shared priorities that benefit the people of both countries, including protecting human rights and democracy, addressing climate change, and investing in the middle class.<sup>61</sup>

US President Joe Biden later telephoned Milei to congratulate him on his election win and to discuss “the importance of continuing to build on the strong relationship between the United States and Argentina on economic issues”.<sup>62</sup>

During the call, Biden also confirmed that he would not be able to attend Milei's inauguration.<sup>63</sup>

## Latin America

There were mixed reactions from leaders across Latin America, depending upon their ideological viewpoints.

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<sup>59</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (@FCDOGovUK), [X \(Twitter\)](#), 22 November 2023 [accessed 28 November 2023]

<sup>60</sup> PQ 3194 [on [Javier Milei](#)], 22 November 2023

<sup>61</sup> Antony J. Blinken, US Secretary of State, [Election Results in Argentina](#), US Department of State press release, 19 November 2023

<sup>62</sup> White House press release, [Readout of President Joe Biden's Call with President-elect Javier Milei of Argentina](#), 22 November 2023

<sup>63</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [Argentina's Javier Milei receives congratulatory call from US President Joe Biden](#), 22 November 2023

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the president of Brazil, wished “good luck and success to the new government in Argentina” and said Brazil would be ready to “work together with our Argentine brothers”.<sup>64</sup>

The president of Chile, Gabriel Boric, “salute[d] Javier Milei for his triumph” and pledged to “work tirelessly to keep our sister nations united”. These sentiments were echoed by President Laurentino Cortizo of Panama, President Santiago Peña of Paraguay and President Luis Lacalle Pou of Uruguay.<sup>65</sup>

Other Latin American leaders, who are considered left-wing, were less congratulatory.

Gustavo Petro, President of Colombia, posted on social media: “The far right has prevailed in Argentina; it is their society’s decision. A sad day for Latin America.”<sup>66</sup>

Mexico’s President, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, said he respected the decision of Argentina’s electorate, but added the result was an “own goal” and that Milei’s win would not help Argentina.<sup>67</sup>

Venezuela’s left-wing president, Nicolas Maduro, described Javier Milei as representing “the neo-Nazi extreme right” and said his victory at the ballot box posed a threat to Latin America.<sup>68</sup>

## Other countries

Despite Milei’s critical stance on China, Beijing congratulated him on winning the Argentine presidential election. Speaking at a regular press briefing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters: “First of all, we congratulate Argentina on the smooth and successful running of the current election. And we also congratulate Mr Milei on his election as president of Argentina.”<sup>69</sup>

On 21 November China’s President, Xi Jinping, sent Milei a personal congratulatory note.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Lula (@LulaOficial), [X \(Twitter\)](#), 19 November 2023 [accessed 28 November 2023]

<sup>65</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [Governments in Americas congratulate Javier Milei on election triumph in Argentina](#), 19 November 2023

<sup>66</sup> Richard Emblin, [Milei’s election victory in Argentina puts Petro on the defensive](#), The City Paper Bogota, 20 November 2023

<sup>67</sup> Milenio (Mexico), [AMLO criticizes Milei’s victory in Argentina: “it was an own goal and it will not help them”](#), 21 November 2023

<sup>68</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [Venezuela’s Maduro slams Milei, says ‘neo-Nazi extreme right’ won election in Argentina](#), 21 November 2023

<sup>69</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Beijing congratulates Argentine president despite his China criticism](#), 20 November 2023 [translation of an article on the Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times) website, in Chinese, 20 November 2023]

<sup>70</sup> Javier Milei (@JMilei), [X \(Twitter\)](#), 23 November 2023 [accessed 28 November 2023]

Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, sent a message of congratulations, writing: "Russian-Argentinian relations rest on the good traditions of friendship and mutual respect."<sup>71</sup>

In a call with reporters, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also supported the development of bilateral relations between Russia and Argentina, but "noted a number of statements that Mr. Milei made during the election campaign". Peskov added Russia "will focus on and judge him mainly by the statements that he makes after the inauguration"<sup>72</sup>.

Russian newspapers also reported on the outcome of Milei's election win, as in the campaign he had proposed cancelling Argentina's application for BRICS membership. Mikhail Rostovsky, a columnist for Moskovsky Komsomolets (a popular daily), wrote:

Brics will surely survive without Argentina. It is not a political and defence bloc like Nato, nor is it a political and economic association like the European Union. It is just an interest club that may transform into something more tangible in the future, or it may not.<sup>73</sup>

Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, congratulated Milei on his victory and said he "appreciate[s] his clear stance of support of Ukraine."<sup>74</sup> And, in a telephone conversation between the two leaders, Milei offered to host a Ukraine-Latin America peace summit to discuss efforts towards achieving peace in Ukraine.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> President of Russia, [Congratulations to Javier Gerardo Milei on his election as President of Argentina](#), 20 November 2023

<sup>72</sup> Reuters, [Kremlin notes Argentina President-elect Milei's comments on Russia, but hopes for good ties](#), 20 November 2023

<sup>73</sup> Mikhail Rostovsky, [Who is Milei to Russia?](#) Moskovsky Komsomolets, 21 November 2023

<sup>74</sup> The New Voice of Ukraine, [Zelenskyy congratulates Milei on winning presidential election in Argentina, thanks him for supporting Ukraine](#), 20 November 2023

<sup>75</sup> Deutsche Welle, [Milei offers Zelenskyy Ukraine-Latin America peace summit](#), 23 November 2023

## 3 Looking ahead

In an interview on the morning following his election win, Javier Milei confirmed his intention to privatise a number of state media outlets and the YPF SA government-controlled energy firm, saying: “Everything that can be in the hands of the private sector will be in the hands of the private sector.”<sup>76</sup>

YPF, the state oil and gas company, was nationalised in 2012 under former president Cristina Fernández de Kichner. The company is a big player in Argentina’s energy sector, although Milei has said the company had “deteriorated in terms of results” since its nationalisation.<sup>77</sup>

Milei also vowed to sell the state broadcasters TV Pública and Radio Nacional, as well as the Télam state news agency, describing what he considered to be their bias in favour of Peronist governments:

We consider that TV Pública has become a mechanism for propaganda.

Seventy-five percent of the time that our space was talked about [on state media], it was done in a negative way, with lies, and in support of the [government’s] campaign of fear.

I do not subscribe to these practices of having a ministry of propaganda.

I do not support a covert ministry of propaganda: it has to be privatised.<sup>78</sup>

In an interview broadcast on 26 November 2023, by LN+ TV, Milei announced his plans to call Congress into an extraordinary session on 11 December (the day after his inauguration), to send a large package of reforms to stabilise Argentina’s economy. Milei said the situation was “urgent” and that Argentina can’t wait for the usual start of congressional sessions in March 2024.<sup>79</sup>

### Potential obstacles

Although some analysts suggest Milei’s high vote share will mean he has a robust mandate, he could face major obstacles ahead.

<sup>76</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [YPF, TV Pública, Télam, Radio Nacional – Javier Milei confirms privatisation plans](#), 20 November 2023

<sup>77</sup> As above

<sup>78</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [YPF, TV Pública, Télam, Radio Nacional – Javier Milei confirms privatisation plans](#), 20 November 2023

<sup>79</sup> Buenos Aires Times, [Milei to send ‘shock’ package to Argentina’s Congress on day one](#), 27 November 2023

In the first round of the election Milei secured the votes of less than a third of voters, meaning his more mainstream backers from the conservative opposition coalition Together for Change, such as Patricia Bullrich, played a significant role in his later success. This may lead him to moderate his plans for shutting the central bank and dollarising the economy.<sup>80</sup>

The Argentine Congress will potentially be the main obstacle to Milei's agenda to carry out dramatic change.

Following the Congressional election on 22 October, Milei's Liberty Advances party controls just 38 of 257 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and eight of the 72 seats in the Senate.<sup>81</sup>

The Peronists hold the largest number of seats in both chambers: 108 Deputies and 32 Senators.<sup>82</sup>

Together for Change is the second-largest party in each chamber and Milei will need their support if he has any hope of advancing his agenda.

Outside of Congress, Liberty Advances has no governors or major city mayors, which places additional limits for Milei in Argentina's strong federal system.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Maximilian Heath, [Explainer: Argentina presidential election: Key takeaways from Milei's win](#), Reuters, 20 November 2023

<sup>81</sup> Europa World, [Argentina: Directory – Government and Politics](#) [accessed 1 December 2023]

<sup>82</sup> As above

<sup>83</sup> Chase Harrison, [Libertarian Javier Milei Wins Argentina's Presidency in Runoff](#), Americas Society/Council of the Americas, 20 November 2023

## 4

## Future UK-Argentina relations

During the election campaign Milei went further than most Argentine politicians in advocating policies that would bring closer relations with the United Kingdom.<sup>84</sup> And, in the final presidential debate on 12 November, he praised Margaret Thatcher as one of the “the great leaders in the history of humanity”.<sup>85</sup>

Milei has also departed from previous Argentine policy on the Falkland Islands (known in Argentina as the Malvinas) by saying that the future of the islands should be decided in accordance with the wishes of its residents.<sup>86</sup>

In response to criticism from his opponents, Milei insisted he supports Argentina’s long-standing position regarding the Falkland Islands, and that his country has “non-negotiable sovereignty” over the islands. He also vowed to get the islands back through “diplomatic channels”.<sup>87</sup> Milei said in the debate:

What do I propose? Argentina’s sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands is non-negotiable. The Malvinas are Argentine. Now we have to see how we are going to get them back. It is clear that the war option is not a solution. We had a war – that we lost – and now we have to make every effort to recover the islands through diplomatic channels.<sup>88</sup>

Milei had earlier proposed that the UK hand over the Falkland Islands to Argentina in a similar way to how Hong Kong was given back to Chinese rule in 1997.<sup>89</sup>

The UK Prime Minister’s official spokesperson said the issue was “settled decisively some time ago” and that the UK would “proactively defend” the islanders’ right to self-determination.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>84</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Explainer: Argentina's Milei plans shift in foreign policy](#), softer on Falklands, 24 November 2023

<sup>85</sup> Uki Goñi, [Argentina’s far-right Milei angers Falklands veterans with Thatcher praise](#), the Guardian, 13 November 2023

<sup>86</sup> Stephen Gibbs, [Margaret Thatcher ‘a great leader’, Argentine candidate declares](#), the Times, 14 November 2023

<sup>87</sup> Sam Francis, [Falkland Islands sovereignty not up for debate, says Rishi Sunak’s spokesman](#), BBC News Online, 21 November 2023

<sup>88</sup> Rachael Burford, [Defence Secretary Grant Shapps slaps down new Argentina president over Falkland comments](#), Evening Standard, 21 November 2023

<sup>89</sup> Sam Francis, [Falkland Islands sovereignty not up for debate, says Rishi Sunak’s spokesman](#), BBC News Online, 21 November 2023

<sup>90</sup> Pippa Crerar, [Falklands sovereignty not up for discussion, says Rishi Sunak](#), the Guardian, 21 November 2023



On 23 November 2023, a few days after the election, the British Embassy in Buenos Aires hosted an event to celebrate HM King Charles III's 75th birthday, a celebration attended by 900 guests.

In her speech, UK Ambassador Kirsty Hayes reflected that 2023 marks the 200th anniversary of the appointment of Woodbine Parish as the first British Consul General in Buenos Aires. Ambassador Hayes noted this started “a bilateral relationship that, despite its ups and downs, has been the broadest and busiest that the UK has had in this region”.

The Ambassador also took the opportunity, during her speech, to congratulate President-elect Javier Milei on his recent election victory, saying:

The UK is ready to start a new chapter in our long and rich bilateral relationship, and to keep strengthening links between Argentines and Britons.<sup>91</sup>

The following day prominent media outlets in Argentina reported that at least two members of the future government's cabinet attended the reception at the British Embassy: Milei's designated Foreign Minister, Diana Mondino, and his choice for Justice Minister, Mariano Cúneo Libarona.<sup>92</sup>

In its reporting, Clarín, a leading daily newspaper, said the Embassy reception “served as a backdrop to stage what could be the beginning of a new bilateral relationship between Argentina and the United Kingdom.” The article, written by the newspaper's international affairs correspondent, also noted:

Judging by the expressions of Milei and Mondino during the electoral campaign, it is likely that in the next government the [Falkland Islands] sovereignty dispute will maintain a lower profile than the one it had in the current administration, and that the commercial aspects of the bilateral relationship will be prioritised.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> British Embassy Buenos Aires, [King Charles's Birthday Party at the British Embassy in Argentina](#), 28 November 2023

<sup>92</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Briefing: Some Argentine media see possible better UK-Argentina ties under Milei](#), 24 November 2023

<sup>93</sup> Natasha Niebieskikwiat, [In a message to Javier Milei, the ambassador of the United Kingdom called to “write a new chapter” with Argentina](#), Clarín, 24 November 2023

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