

# Argentina's President Steps Aside to Support Wife as His Successor

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BUENOS AIRES, July 2 — Néstor Kirchner announced Monday that he would not seek a second term as president of [Argentina](#) but would instead support his wife, Senator Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, as the candidate of the Peronist movement in October's presidential election.

“Why not finally a woman to be the one to deepen change and transformation?” Mr. Kirchner, with his wife at his side, asked during an afternoon event at the presidential palace. Argentina needs “to renew and generate new ideas,” he said, and “all of us profoundly believe in the capacity to excel that Cristina is going to offer.”

Mr. Kirchner's decision to step aside in favor of his wife is seen as a maneuver meant to allow the couple to take turns running the country for a dozen years or more. Presidents in Argentina are restricted to two consecutive four-year terms, but can run again after a term on the sidelines.

Mrs. Kirchner is so strongly identified ideologically with her husband's administration that critics say any government she leads would be the “same package in a different wrapping.”

The decision is in line with a long Peronist tradition of pushing wives of powerful leaders into positions of power, starting with Evita Perón, the wife of the movement's founder, Gen. Juan Domingo Perón, in the 1940s. In the 1970s, General Perón's last wife, María Estela Perón, known as Isabelita, stood as his running mate. She succeeded him when he died in July 1974, and she was overthrown in a military coup in March 1976.

Many Argentine political analysts prefer to compare the Kirchners to Bill and [Hillary Clinton](#). Mrs. Kirchner, 54, is a lawyer with a political base of her own, having served in the lower house of Congress before being elected to the Senate.

Argentina's power couple has been playing coy about their political intentions for more than a year. At one point, Mr. Kirchner, 57, teasingly said the Peronist candidate would be "a penguin," mentioning both the masculine and feminine forms of the word, which is used as a nickname for people from Mr. Kirchner's native Patagonia region.

The declaration of Mrs. Kirchner's candidacy comes a week after the Peronists suffered two setbacks in municipal and provincial elections. In the capital, voters elected as mayor Mauricio Macri, a conservative soccer club executive who is one of the president's most bitter enemies. And in Tierra del Fuego, in the south of the country, they chose a member of a left-leaning party that is outside the governing coalition.

Recent polls show that either of the Kirchners would be the front-runner in the Oct. 28 election. Mr. Kirchner's level of support is about 10 points higher than that of his wife, but surveys show her winning just over the 45 percent of the vote she would need to avoid a second-round runoff.

If the Kirchners do not change their minds before the official registration period closes, Mrs. Kirchner would have a lead of more than 30 points over two candidates who are already in the race.

Her closest rival is Elisa Carrió, a gadfly congresswoman and former beauty queen who heads a center-left coalition that attacks the corruption and machine politics she says the Kirchners have perpetuated despite promises to modernize the country.

The other contender is [Roberto Lavagna](#), a former economy minister who is widely credited with engineering Argentina's spectacular comeback after the worst economic crisis in the country's history in 2001 and 2002. But he was forced to resign late in 2005.

Interior Minister Aníbal Fernández said Mrs. Kirchner would formally announce her candidacy on July 19 in her home town, La Plata.