

# Kirchner ally loses gubernatorial race

The Miami Herald  
Sep. 02, 2007

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina --

A socialist beat a candidate allied with Argentine President Nestor Kirchner for the governorship of a key province late Sunday, in a test of the strength of Kirchner's ruling coalition ahead of next month's presidential vote.

Supporters cheered and tossed confetti as official returns showed Hermes Binner winning the Santa Fe race with 46.2 percent of the ballot and 77 percent of the vote tallied. His rival - Kirchner's former foreign minister, Rafael Bielsa - had just 41 percent.

Bielsa declared the trend "irreversible" on television Sunday night, conceding defeat in a province dominated by Kirchner's Peronist party for the past 28 years. Binner also becomes the first socialist governor in Argentina.

In central Cordoba province, another Kirchner ally, Juan Schiaretti, had a strong early lead with 44 percent, although only 10 percent of the ballots had been counted. His two rivals, Mario Negri of the Radical party and Luis Juez of the Social and Civic Front, were each polling about 25 percent.

The twin elections are seen as a major test of Kirchner's center-left Front for Victory as his first lady, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, campaigns to succeed him in the Oct. 28 presidential vote.

Coalition victories in the two gubernatorial races would have cemented her front-runner status, although seven recent polls predict she will win on a first ballot by capturing at least 45 percent of the vote.

Fernandez has united a broad coalition of leftist Peronists, supporters from Argentina's centrist Radical party and several smaller parties against a divided, feuding opposition.

Buenos Aires province, which is home to a quarter of Argentina's 40 million people, will pick its governor on the same day as the presidential vote.

Kirchner's candidate for that race, Vice President Daniel Scioli, is the favorite to win the last and biggest gubernatorial election this year.