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Argentina's First Lady Elected President

By **ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO**

BUENOS AIRES, Oct. 29 — Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, the wife of [Argentina's](#) president, [Néstor Kirchner](#), has become the first woman to be elected president in the country's history, according to the latest official results published today.

Mrs. Kirchner, 54, the center-left Peronist party candidate and a senator, defeated a fractured opposition and avoided a runoff.

With 96 percent of the voting locations reporting, Mrs. Kirchner had 45 percent, ahead of Elisa Carrió, a center-left congresswoman, who had 23 percent, and [Roberto Lavagna](#), a former finance minister, who had 17 percent, according to figures from the Ministry of Interior.

Mrs. Kirchner needed 45 percent of the vote outright, or 40 percent with at least a 10 percentage-point lead, to avoid a runoff.

Rival candidates accused her party of "theft" of ballots and other irregularities.

Mrs. Kirchner is the second woman to be elected leader of a South American nation in two years, after Michelle Bachelet, who became president of Chile last year.

Mrs. Kirchner declared victory late Sunday. In a speech, she said she felt a responsibility not only to lead her country, but "an immense responsibility for my gender." She also paid homage

to her husband's accomplishments.

Mr. Kirchner, who sat behind her, stood as supporters chanted, "Olé Olé, Olé, Néstor, Néstor!" He raised her arm.

"She is going to improve the country much more than her husband," said Graciela Aballay, 38, who watched Mrs. Kirchner's speech with her 9-year-old daughter, María Victoria.

More than anything, Mrs. Kirchner's victory would serve as a referendum on the past four years under her husband, who steered Argentina out of its worst economic crisis in 2001, when it defaulted on \$80 billion in loans.

Argentina is poised to record a sixth year of growth averaging about 8 percent. It is enjoying higher prices for exports of soybeans, corn and meat, has increased its reserves and reduced unemployment and inflation.

While voters appeared to favor a continuation of Mr. Kirchner's policies, the next president faces the challenge of taming inflation and a looming energy crisis.

Despite approval ratings of more than 60 percent, Mr. Kirchner decided in July not to run for re-election, in what many analysts believe is a strategy to rotate the couple through the Pink House, the presidential palace here, for 12 years. Argentine election law allows a former president to run again after waiting four years on the sidelines.

Mrs. Kirchner, who was born seven months after Evita Perón died, grew up in La Plata, where the couple met in law school and were activists in the Peronist movement. They later moved to Mr. Kirchner's home province of Santa Cruz, in Patagonia, where Mrs. Kirchner was elected a

senator before her husband began his political career.

Early in her political career, Mrs. Kirchner was nicknamed “Queen Cristina” by other politicians, a reference to her controlling personality. Facing a fractured opposition in the current election, she campaigned lightly, spending much of the past two months traveling in Europe and the United States trying to woo foreign investors and making it clear that, if elected, she would seek to improve Argentina’s standing abroad.

Argentina under Mr. Kirchner has embraced the notion of regional integration and has benefited from a stronger relationship with Venezuela’s president, [Hugo Chávez](#), who agreed to refinance \$5 billion of Argentina’s debt.

Despite Mrs. Kirchner’s apparent victory, several rival candidates on Sunday reported voter irregularities in some Peronist strongholds. “Each time a citizen went to vote, the voting authority at the table said there aren’t ballots for your party,” said Patricia Bullrich, the campaign chief for Ms. Carrió. “They said: ‘O.K., you still have to vote. Vote for a blank slate, but you have to vote.’”

Ms. Bullrich singled out La Matanza, an industrial town on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, but also said that ballot theft had occurred throughout the province of Buenos Aires.

Political analysts called the charges exaggerated.

Vinod Sreeharsha contributed reporting.

