

World

**TURKEY
DIVIDED OVER
EAST-WEST
TUNNEL
P28**



**RAINFOREST
LOSS TWICE
AS BAD AS
THOUGHT
P31**

President Kirchner's dynasty rejected by Argentina's voters

Defeat in mid-term elections signals end to her chances of running for power in 2015

By **ED STOCKER**
in Buenos Aires

President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's government has taken a battering in key mid-term elections in Argentina, calling into question the durability of the outspoken President's political model. The results are also a rebuff of the 60-year-old leader's chances of standing for re-election in the presidential elections in 2015, a defeat that would mean more than a decade of family rule could be coming to an end.

The mid-term elections became a litmus test for Kirchnerism, the "national and popular project", as it is referred to by its followers, that has become government doctrine since Ms Fernandez's now-deceased husband Nestor Kirchner assumed the presidency in 2003, passing the mantle to his wife in 2007. Sunday's elections – in which 16- and 17-year-olds voted for the first time

While holding on to both houses, the government fell short of a two-thirds majority

– took place on the third anniversary of his death, with government coalition Victory Front candidates emphasising his legacy in a last-minute drive to improve their tally.

It had been widely suggested that the President wanted to change the constitution in order to be able to run for a third term in two years' time when her current mandate ends. But despite hanging on to majorities in both chambers of Congress – subject to negotiations – the government fell far short of the two-thirds majority it would have needed to push the reforms through.

Although the government improved its nationwide tally to over 30 per cent of the vote – up from 26 per cent at a primary ballot in August – the Victory Front coalition lost in the provinces of Mendoza, Santa Fe, Cordoba and Buenos Aires, the latter representing a third of the electorate. There was also a defeat in the capital, where coalition senator Daniel Filmus lost his seat.

Ms Fernandez has been markedly absent from the campaign trail for the elections in which half the seats in the Chamber of Deputies and a third in the Senate were up for grabs. Recovering from brain surgery earlier in the month, she reportedly didn't follow events in the media, complying with



The PRO party's Mauricio Macri (above) carries his daughter on his shoulders as he celebrates in Buenos Aires. Florencia and Maximo (left), the daughter and son of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (far left) wait to vote AFP/AF/GETTY

NESTOR AND CRISTINA TIMELINE

2003 A lawyer by training, Nestor Kirchner is sworn in after a succession of presidents in the wake of the major financial crisis which hit Argentina in 2001.

2005 Kirchner declares the restructuring of the country's debt a success, and a year later announces that Argentina had paid back multi-billion dollar debt to the International Monetary Fund.

2007 Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner sworn in as president in December, succeeding her husband. They are criticised for working together to side-step presidential term limits.

2010 Nestor Kirchner dies from heart attack.

2011 Fernandez is re-elected in a landslide victory.

2013 Banned from running again in 2015, Fernandez had hoped to win enough support in October's mid-terms to allow the constitution to be changed to allow her a third term.

doctors' wishes that she take a month away from office.

"As the primaries suggested, the government's chances of continuing after 2015 are smaller," said a Buenos Aires-based analyst Federico Thomsen. "The results, plus the President's disappearance from the political scene for health reasons, show the government project is drying up. Even if Fernandez de Kirchner returns, it calls into question whether she could run again."

The biggest blow for the government was in Buenos Aires Province, Argentina's agricultural heartland, where the rebel Senate candidate Sergio Massa easily defeated the officially nominated contender Martin Insaurralde. The latest figures gave

him 43.92 per cent of the vote compared to 32.18 per cent for the Victory Front nominee.

"These election results are a defeat for the government," said Ignacio Labaqui, professor of Latin American politics at the Argentine Catholic University in the capital. "This is the beginning of a transition that is open-ended."

Sergio Massa, the current mayor of Tigre, is the President's former cabinet minister who broke away from the coalition earlier in the year to form his own Renewal Front. For Facundo Martinez, head economist at M&S Consultants, Mr Massa showed a "different interpretation of day-to-day realities in Argentina during his campaign".

While the centre-right, business-friendly candidate hasn't abandoned Peronism altogether, he has looked to mop up the disenchanted vote – those tired of the antagonistic language employed by the government, as well as perceived spiralling crime levels, currency controls and an inflation rate thought to be around 25 per cent, according to private economists.

Mr Massa has also promised to get tough on crime, even drafting in the former mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, to make a speech about his "zero tolerance" record at a campaign rally earlier in the month.

"People want an end to politics that divides and causes conflict and confrontation," Mr Massa told the Todo

Noticias news channel yesterday. When asked about his aspirations for the 2015 presidential election, he replied that he wasn't thinking about it.

If he does run, he will face Mauricio Macri, the right-wing mayor of Buenos Aires, who used the victory of his PRO party in Buenos Aires City last night to launch his 2015 campaign.

The government, meanwhile, has no clear successor, though it is thought the Victory Front governor of Buenos Aires Province, Daniel Scioli, will stand. The Vice-President, Amado Boudou, is currently out of favour, as he has been embroiled in several corruption scandals.

Leading article **PAGE 14**