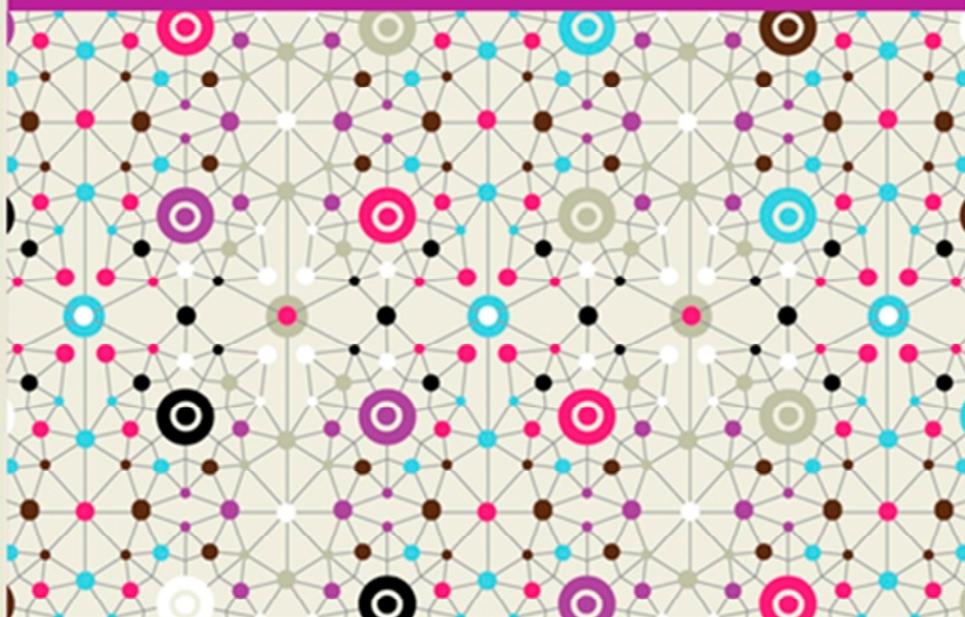


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Promoting a national policy forum: CIPPEC's "Agenda for the President 2011-2015"



LEANDRO ECHT | AGUSTINA ESKENAZI

VIPPAL

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Executive summary

Presidential campaigns in developing countries do not generally involve serious debates over strategic policy issues. On the contrary, they usually revolve around vague references to universally desirable aims without specifying how these initiatives will be financed, what is the concrete action plan that will be employed to reach the proposed objectives, and/or what are the different alternatives to consider. Moreover, discussions are sometimes reduced to the candidate's personal history and that of their parties rather than directing attention to their policy priorities and plans for much needed reforms. While some countries have a long history of having presidential candidates explaining and supporting the policies they promote in a national debate, others keep avoiding this healthy political practice.

Although there are numerous and well known cases in which the civil society, through think tanks and NGOs, has influenced policy options and decisions, the role of think tanks in presidential campaigns has been under-studied, particularly in Latin America.

Following other think tanks' experiences in the region (Fedesarrollo, CIES, Grupo FARO), in 2011 the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), in partnership with other civil society organizations, embarked on an initiative destined to improve the quality of the public debate. This experience is reflected and analyzed in *Promoting a national policy forum: CIPPEC's "Agenda for the President 2011-2015"*.

This case intends to help other peer organizations in the region and beyond to understand their potential role in electoral campaigns and provide a toolkit for think tanks' involvement in the matter. The document presents the context in which the initiative was developed, the strategies that the organization carried out to promote policy debate, a balance addressing internal and external issues, and some lessons we have learned from the experience¹.

We foresee in this systematization effort a key opportunity to empower civil society and to promote a more effective role of think tanks in the political arena. Moreover, this exercise contributes to an institutional reflexive process that could generate valuable learning for future activities.

¹ The framework is based on the presentation "Influence on electoral periods: Experience and lessons from the project "Elections 2011 - Focusing the Electoral Debate"", an initiative carried out by the Economic and Social Research Consortium (known as CIES for its Spanish acronym) in Peru. The presentation was made by Norma Correa Aste at the Panel "Political Influence during Electoral Periods" of the Regional Workshop "Use of knowledge for a better public policy influence", in Lima, Peru, August 11th and 12th, 2011. The workshop was co organized by CIPPEC, CIES and Grupo FARO, with the support of the Global Development Network (GDN), the Evidence Based Policy Development Network (EBPDN), and the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

1. Background

2011 marked twenty-eight years of uninterrupted democracy in Argentina. Although this period covers a total of six election campaigns, there has never been, to date, a debate between presidential candidates. Yet, it came close to happening several times: in 1989, the presidential candidates, Carlos Menem and Eduardo Angeloz, were going to take part of a highly anticipated debate in Bernardo Neustadt's show, *Tiempo Nuevo*, but, at the last minute, Menem withdrew his participation. Almost 20 years later, in 2007, US Network CNN proposed to organize the first presidential debate, but, again, it failed to go through. Along the same lines, in 2011, a presidential debate did not materialize, though a debate between some of the vice-presidential candidates took place².

Also absent during presidential campaigns is a public debate centered on strategic issues or on plans to reach the country's development goals. To a certain extent, this feature can be observed in other countries around the world, as well. But, in Argentina, it has become deeply ingrained in the political arena. Most of the time, presidential candidates make vague references to universally desirable aims ("improve education," "reduce poverty") without specifying resources, options, decisions and concrete action plans necessary to reach these objectives, and they talk about stereotypical "country models" without providing concrete examples or policy recommendations. These "empty" speeches have contributed to the strengthening of a public debate focused on the personal attributes of each candidate, rather than on key public policy issues.

On a regional level, the situation is quite dissimilar. Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay have institutionalized the practice of the debate. Accordingly, the debate has become an inescapable component of the presidential electoral process. The presidential debate can also be observed in other parts of the world, such as in the United States, Canada, Germany, France, Spain, Ghana and Nigeria. The interactions between candidates have opened the way for discussions on major challenges and proposals to solve them.

In many Latin American countries, the debate became a reality due to the efforts of non-state actors. The successful experiences of Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru are of particular relevance because local think tanks and NGOs were the ones that pushed forward the presidential debate.³ In most of these cases, these organizations produced policy briefs with the purpose of influencing the quality of public debate and strengthening the candidates' agendas and the quality of the next administration's public policies.

The logic at play nationally regarding debates, however, has seen some exceptions at the provincial and municipal level. Several candidates for the governor and mayor's office have participated in debates aimed at exposing their plans. Córdoba, Chubut, Mendoza, Buenos Aires, and Santa Fe are some of the cities where candidates have debated.

² In August 3th 2011 four vice-presidential candidates debated at a television broadcast in "Todo Noticias" channel: Mario Das Neves (Unión Popular), Javier González Fraga (Unión Cívica Radical), Norma Morandini (Frente Amplio Progresista) y Adrián Pérez (Coalición Cívica). One of the features of the debate was the absence of the candidate of the incumbent government's formula.

³ CIEPLAN in Chile, Fedesarrollo in Colombia, Grupo FARO in Ecuador, CADEP and Instituto Desarrollo in Paraguay, and CIES in Peru, led some of these initiatives.

With an encouraging provincial and regional background, in 2010-2011, the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), in partnership with other civil society organizations, embarked on an initiative to improve the quality of public policies and the public debate.

2. Rationality

In 2010, in preparation for the 2011 presidential election, CIPPEC⁴, with the collaboration of other organizations⁵ and the support of the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE⁶), began to work on “Agenda Presidencial 2011-2015 (Agenda for the President 2011-2015),” a project that sought to raise the quality of public policies and the public debate during the electoral campaign.

To achieve this goal, CIPPEC and its partners developed 15 Memos to the President (short policy documents) on issues of national importance. These documents offered more than 50 synthesized public policy recommendations, with their fiscal costs and political feasibility. Given the Memo’s analytical, practical and politically relevant character, CIPPEC hoped to increase the number of spaces for policy discussion and provide the material for these dialogues.

Additionally, CIPPEC implemented a strong outreach and political advocacy campaign to improve the content of the public and political debate. Through its meetings with presidential candidates and their technical teams, social leaders, businesses and other key stakeholders, CIPPEC sought to highlight positive initiatives that needed to be continued in the coming years and make public the presidential candidates’ positions on crucial issues. CIPPEC also envisioned these interactions as an opportunity to fortify the political parties, as many of them do not concentrate their resources in developing high quality proposals in issues regarding the country’s growth. Lastly, as Argentina suffers from a constant re-founding of policies, CIPPEC hoped to add traceability to the debate.

Last but not least, CIPPEC aspired to create the necessary conditions for the realization of the first televised debate between the presidential candidates. CIPPEC saw the debate as corollary of the project, but not as the only measure of success.

Overall, CIPPEC hoped that a positive execution of its planned strategies would not only result in the full or partial achievement of its main objectives, but also in the strengthening of democracy as a whole.

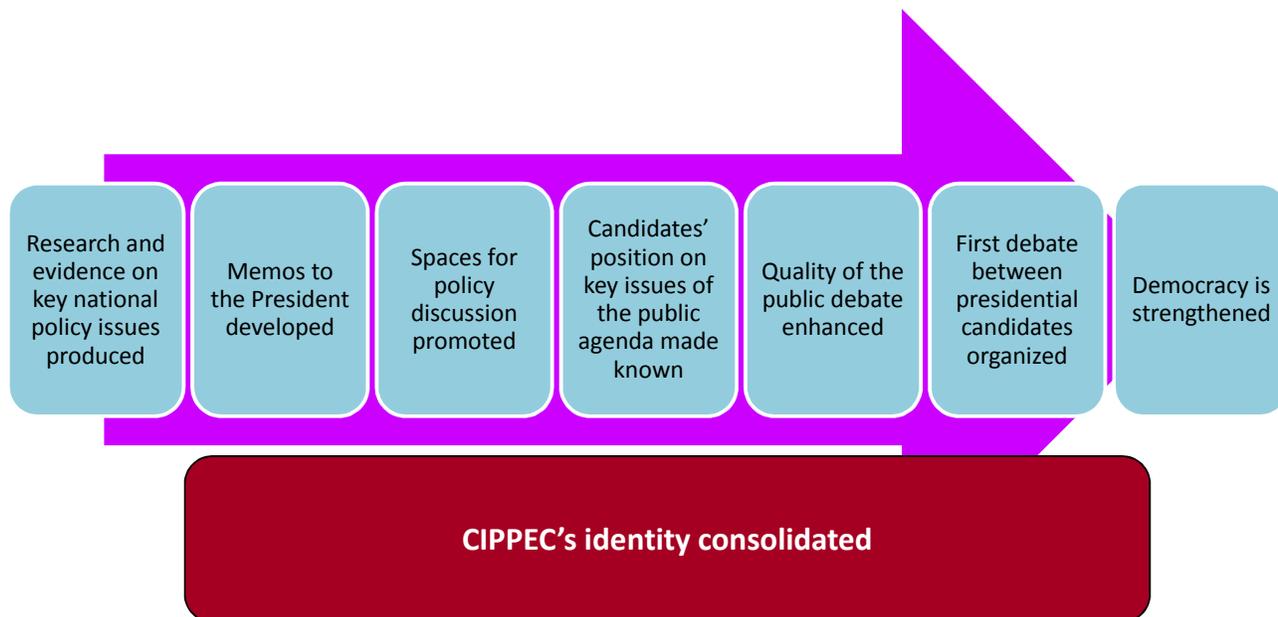
On an institutional level, CIPPEC saw the project as a means for consolidating its work and identity: the initiative would enable CIPPEC’s different policy areas to reflect on their decade-long work and help establish priorities and goals.

⁴ CIPPEC is a private, non-profit organization that strives to create an efficient, democratic, and just State to improve the quality of life for all Argentine citizens. It focuses its efforts on analyzing and promoting public policies that encourage equity and growth in Argentina.

⁵ Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina, an environmental NGO, produced the proposals on sustainable development, and the Agreement for Democratic Security policy from the CELS (Center for Legal and Social Studies) developed the proposals on security.

⁶ www.cipe.org

Table 1. Agenda for the President's Theory of Change



Source: CIPPEC.

3. Strategies

CIPPEC created a project committee composed of the Executive Director, the Communication's Director, a Coordinator especially hired to lead the initiative's managerial aspects, and other key stakeholders within the organization. The initiative's governance combined three essential factors: strong leadership, high policy knowledge (both general and sectorial), and communicative vision and skills. The Advisory Board and other internal groups also contributed to the project. It could be said that the whole organization was behind the project, acquiring a remarkable 'presidential feature' during the electoral year.

The project committee was in charge of designing and executing three main strategies in order to fulfill its set objectives: Making of the Memos to the President, Outreach Campaign, and Political Advocacy Campaign. Within these main categories, several other strategies and tools might be identified.

3.1. Strategy I: Making of the Memos

With the collaboration of other organizations and academics, CIPPEC elaborated 15 Memos on issues of national importance: education, health, social protection, social security, tax policy, monetary policy, global integration, transport, energy, justice, transparency, security, sustainable development, Chief of Staff and electoral processes. These 16-page documents synthesized more than 50 key public policy recommendations, with their fiscal costs and political feasibility, in addition to identifying for the would-be government the main challenges, the major dilemmas in each



area, and the policies in place or recent achievements on which to continue building. The Memos were directly addressed to the President, which influenced their style and content.

3.1.1. Learning from peers

CIPPEC's project committee analyzed similar initiatives from other think tanks also aspiring to improve the public debate through policy documents to get an overview of what was required for projects of this nature. Particularly, [Brookings' memos to the President](#), directed toward President Barack Obama, represented the main source of inspiration for the documents elaborated by CIPPEC. "Agenda for the President" was also influenced by similar projects of regional think tanks, such as "Centrando el debate electoral" by CIES in Peru (2006 and 2011); and another project by Fedesarrollo in Colombia (2010). Learning from peers was critical for the design of CIPPEC's project.

3.1.2 Building strategic alliances

To make the project more comprehensive, CIPPEC reached out to organizations specialized in issues of national importance in which CIPPEC had no expertise. Accordingly, CIPPEC established strategic alliances with the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS) and Fundación Vida Silvestre (FVSA), which developed the security Memo and the sustainable development Memo, correspondingly. Furthermore, Poder Ciudadano, a major NGO devoted to transparency issues, was a key ally in promoting the debate between the candidates. As these partnerships reflected a broad ideological spectrum, they served to strengthen the legitimacy of the initiative.

3.1.3 Establishing content and writing guidelines

Before the project started, CIPPEC's project committee decided to establish certain content and writing guidelines. These were: the Memos' extension, tone, structure, sections, and addition of comments and suggestions (both in terms of edition and content). This standardization had a powerful communicative identity.

Specific to the content, as CIPPEC wanted to include proposals that could be readily used by decision-makers, it made an extensive effort to ensure the political and budgetary feasibility of each one of them, thus addressing the political economy of the country. Additionally, the memos included a section called "ongoing policies" to highlight the progress made during the last years and emphasize the advantages of its continuity. This strategy also served to get the attention of the incumbent government, which had very good chances of being re-elected.

3.1.4 Review process

Every week, the project's committee got together to discuss the progress of each one of the memos to ensure that they were following the guidelines established at the beginning of the project. Moreover, the committee decided on a very rigorous editing process -assigned to the editor within CIPPEC's communication team-, in order to make sure that the Memos' proposals were in tune with each other, which guaranteed the project's coherence and consistency.

3.2. Strategy II: Outreach Campaign

3.2.1. Memos

CIPPEC produced high-quality printed versions of the Memos that were only given to key stakeholders, such as the presidential candidates, high-ranked officials and governors. For mass dissemination, the online version and [CIPPEC's annual magazine "Agenda for the President"](#) substituted the printed version due to its high costs of production.

3.2.2 Agenda for the President's Website

Presidential Agenda's website (www.agenda-presidencial.org) was introduced in April during CIPPEC's annual dinner, the organization's main event which usually convenes key political, economic and media actors. Aside from including online versions of all the Memos in the section called "Proposals," the website documented all of CIPPEC's interactions with high-ranked officials, politicians, and national and international organizations under the section "Other Voices," and kept track of CIPPEC's appearances on the news in "In the Media." Under "Debates," CIPPEC presented summaries on the history of presidential debates from countries all around the world. Additionally, to make presidential candidates known to the general public, the section "Candidates" contained



their basic information (website, social media, profession and current occupation), as well as their respective positions on most national issues (education, social security, energy, and so on) and their answers to the questions, "Why do you want to be President?" and "What should the priorities of the next government be?" It is important to note that, in order to gather the aforementioned information, CIPPEC had to reach out to the presidential candidates. On another note, this section offered three documents that compared most candidates' proposals on social protection, economic policy, and sustainable development. The tab "Magazine" included a brief description and an online version of Agenda for the President magazine. Another category, called "Blog," was intended to display the opinion pieces of CIPPEC's staff, but after a few posts, the blog was abandoned. The last section, "About," presented a short summary of Presidential Agenda 2011-2015.

This inclusive website represented the project's main dissemination tool, as CIPPEC included all the information concerning the project. CIPPEC tried to position the website as a platform to spark discussion on proposals made during the campaign and as a source of information on electoral debates in the world and in Argentina. It was not only aimed at key stakeholders, but at the general public as well.

CIPPEC also used social media, Facebook and Twitter, to post updates and the most relevant material of the website.

3.2.3. Yo quiero saber and Vota Inteligente

Through candidate-feedback sheets composed of key questions for each of the candidates, CIPPEC helped develop and launch two websites: www.yoquierosaber.org and www.votainteligente.com.ar

“Yo quiero saber” was an initiative of the University of Buenos Aires and Torcuato Di Tella University that, with CIPPEC’s completed candidate-feedback sheets, provided information about the candidates and their proposals. The website was introduced just before the primary elections. On the other hand, CIPPEC and Poder Ciudadano launched “Vota inteligente.” The website, based on the responses to the questionnaire elaborated by CIPPEC, allowed each citizen to pick answers in key policy areas and compare them to those of each candidate. The exercise enabled visitors to measure the level of "political compatibility" with each presidential candidate (overall and in each policy area). The application also allowed to compare candidates among different realms and to inspect each candidate's profile. Intended to raise awareness in society about each candidate’s position in each topic, both projects complemented CIPPEC’s policy discussion-oriented project very well.

3.2.4. CIPPEC’s Annual Dinner

During CIPPEC’s Annual Dinner, which took place on April 4th at the Hilton Hotel of Buenos Aires, CIPPEC presented “Presidential Agenda 2011-2015.” The dinner was an opportune occasion to launch the Project as more than 1,100 politicians, high-ranked public officials, businessmen, academics, and journalists attended the event. All of the attendees left the evening with a printed version of CIPPEC’s annual magazine, “*Agenda for the President*,” which contained shorter versions of each of the memos.



To encourage participation, CIPPEC designed a panel with post-its so that guests could leave their suggestions about the main challenges for the next President. On another note, [a video featuring the key points of the project](#) was also shown. Overall, the dinner served to make the project known to important players, start building the “critical mass” needed to promote the presidential debate and approach the candidates (many of them present at the dinner), and gain visibility in the media and public debate.

3.2.5. Agenda for the President publication

Agenda for the President magazine presented 4-page summaries of each of the memos. Besides offering an abridged version of the 15 memos, the magazine included opinion pieces from academics, experts and journalists on the main challenges for the would be government, on the electoral scenarios of all provinces, on key issues of national importance, and on Argentina’s electoral process. Additionally, a few former presidential candidates expressed their views on the main priorities of the future President. At the end of the magazine, CIPPEC dedicated ten pages to social and economic indicators of the country. The magazine served as one of the main tools to widely disseminate the project to the general public as well as to important players because it presented an easily readable version of the memos and displayed a comprehensive overview of Argentina’s future. Contrary to the printed version of the Memos, the magazine’s costs of production were significantly low. As follows, CIPPEC distributed Agenda for the President magazine during its annual dinner, sent a personal letter and a copy of it to 500



business and social leaders, journalist, and main advisors of all the candidates, and handed a copy of the magazine to the attendees of CIPPEC's presentations.

3.2.6. Presentations

Throughout the electoral year, CIPPEC presented Agenda for the President to many different audiences in a variety of events (see "Balance" for further information). Most of the presentations were followed by a Q&A section, and attendees were handed a copy of the magazine. From the onset, CIPPEC envisioned these presentations as a means to gather large-scale support from different actors in order to improve the public and political debate and promote the presidential debate, and to receive constructive feedback. Many organizations took up this challenge by giving candid comments in the Q&A section, and some of them went as far as to put in writing their proposals.

The following were the main types of presentations within this strategy:

- a) Events organized by other institutions: Some Memos presentations were organized by other institutions (the National Congress, chambers, agencies, national and international universities, NGOs, think tanks and companies). Contrary to the other Memos presentations, many of these events opened up new and diverse audiences to CIPPEC, as the authors not only presented to specialized bodies, but to the general public, too.
- b) Ad hoc presentations: Memos presentations were also requested by some of the project's donors, which mainly included multinational and national companies and other important organizations. These special requests were of high relevance to secure donors' support for future projects and gain new financial resources. Some memos' presentations were also demanded by companies dedicated to specific issues (e.g. health, energy).

3.2.7. Media Presence

Much of Agenda for the President's media space was due to the activities carried out by CIPPEC to promote the project, as was the case of CIPPEC's Annual Dinner, which attracted a great deal of media coverage. To increase the project's media presence, CIPPEC established links with the media so that the authors of the memos could be interviewed, publish opinion pieces and in-depth analyses of the Memos and discuss them in the radio and on TV. To keep matters efficient, CIPPEC's Communications program formulated a schedule for the authors' media presence. The Communications director also made sure to have a wide and diverse coverage, contacting newspapers and magazines from all over the country. In every case, CIPPEC took advantage of the political climate to advance medium-term discussions of public policy issues addressed in the Memos.

3.3. Strategy III: Political Advocacy Campaign

3.3.1. Meeting with the Presidential candidates and their teams

CIPPEC tried to build dialogues with all the presidential candidates and their teams in different policy sectors. The purpose of the dialogue was twofold: 1) with candidates, CIPPEC sought to legitimize the initiative and build consensus, and, 2) with their respective teams, CIPPEC wanted to discuss the content of the Memos to strengthen the quality of the candidates' proposals. At the

same time, CIPPEC saw these interactions as an opportunity to express to the candidates what its views regarding key national policy issues were.

Before approaching the candidates, CIPPEC believed in building “critical mass” with key stakeholders through its other strategies and tools. Thus, after carrying out several presentations and other activities with important players, CIPPEC began its campaign to meet with the presidential candidates. CIPPEC prioritized setting a meeting with President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner. This was in part due to her large advantage in presidential polls throughout the electoral year. Behind this choice is also the assumption that meeting with the other presidential candidates too early might have put at risk CIPPEC’s impartiality since the project could have then stood to represent the ideas and proposals of the opposition. CIPPEC tried to set the meeting with the President mainly by engaging with high-ranked officials and other politicians who have strong links to the President.

CIPPEC held this type of meetings with 3 of the 8 presidential candidates⁷, between July and October, and handed them a customized pack containing the memos and a copy of the magazine. The meetings constituted an important part of the project’s communication impact and reinforced its legitimacy.

3.3.2. Presentations

As stated above, throughout the presidential year, CIPPEC’s staff presented Agenda for the President to a variety of actors. Most presentations were followed by a Q&A section, and attendees were handed a copy of the magazine. These types of presentations mostly involved key stakeholders. As such, the “Presidential Memos” cycle and Presidential Workshops served to receive constructive feedback, and to gather support from different actors for CIPPEC’s presidential meetings and debate initiative. The bilateral meetings, on the other hand, were the best scenario to encourage key players to take concrete measures.

The following were the main types of presentations within this strategy:

- a) “Presidential Memos” cycle: Each of the authors presented his/her Memo separately in presentations held at CIPPEC. The audience varied with each memo, but, in general, important current and former politicians, businessmen, specialized NGOs personnel, diplomats, and academics and experts on their corresponding fields attended the presentations. These served as a great opportunity to convene important players who could have a positive impact in the country.
- b) Bilateral Meetings: They were mostly carried out with specialized NGOs, governors, ministers, high-ranked public officials, and the presidential candidates and their teams. The bilateral meetings represented the best means to lead key stakeholders into action. As they only involved two parties, the meetings encouraged dynamic discussion, candid criticism, information exchange, and so on.

⁷ Main candidates were: Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Frente para la Victoria), Ricardo Alfonsín (Unión para el Desarrollo Social), Elisa Carrió (Coalición Cívica), Eduardo Duhalde (Unión Popular), Alberto José Rodríguez Saá (Compromiso Federal), Hermes Binner (Frente Amplio Progresista), Alcira Argumedo (Proyecto Sur) and Jorge Altamira (Frente de Izquierda).

- c) Presidential Workshops: CIPPEC and Poder Ciudadano organized workshops with the media, academics, politicians and advisors in order to create awareness and buildup a coalition to impulse the presidential debate.

4. Balance

4.1. External

Concerning the objective of “increasing the quality of the public debate,” although difficult to assess, it should be highlighted that the content of the project was discussed and analyzed by numerous key stakeholders in addition to attracting considerable attention in the media.

This media presence came in different forms: general overviews of the project, in-depth analyses of some of the memos/proposals, authors’ opinion pieces, coverage of some of the most relevant events CIPPEC organized with key actors to present the memos and interviews with the authors. In total, the project was featured 142 times in print media; 50 appearances in national newspapers, 29 in provincial newspapers, and 43 in news portals and websites. 49 of the 122 appearances in the media during the execution phase correspond to opinion pieces written by the authors of the memos. On another note, the project was featured 38 times in the radio and on TV (9 were on TV and 29 in the radio).

Moreover, the project’s official website had approximately 23,000 visits between May and December. The website “Yo quiero saber” received about 60,000 visits in total and “Vota Inteligente” got around 15,000 hits a day during the two weeks previous to the election of October 23.

In terms of presentations, CIPPEC presented the project 69 times to different audiences, including experts, academics, businessmen, party experts, high-ranked public officials, legislators, diplomats, and governors.

One of the most important presentations were the bilateral meetings with the presidential candidates. CIPPEC discussed the project with 3 of the 8 candidates, who were very receptive to it. CIPPEC tried through both informal and formal channels to arrange a meeting with the President, but it did not end up taking place. At CIPPEC, some have suggested that the failure to meet was due to the nature of the project, as it could have been perceived by the government more as a critic than as constructive and unbiased proposals on which to continue building.

Despite the President’s rejection, CIPPEC did manage to present the project and discuss concrete policy reforms with the Chief of Staff, high-ranked officials, ministers, governors and legislators aligned to the government. These meetings and presentations represented the best means to improve the quality of public policies, one of CIPPEC’s main objectives.

Although no direct public policy influence from CIPPEC has been observed, a few proposals from the Memos were adopted by opposition political parties and others were even implemented by the government. Thus, it could be said that CIPPEC was part of a set of actors which contributed to a tacit agreement on certain policy priorities and solutions.

Table 2. Memos' proposals contributing to the public debate

Education. Since 2011, the Ministry of Education is directing a national program to extend the school day at the Primary Level. While the legal objective to extend the time was first established in 2006, no significant progress took place until 2011. The Education program was one of the forces pushing forward this policy. It included the policy in the Education Memo and discussed it with various key stakeholders.

On another note, in June 2013, the Federal Council of Education approved the realization of two "National Workshops on School, Family and Community" in order to fortify the integration between schools and families. The education memo called for a similar initiative.

Health. CIPPEC was part of the "National agreement for Health Inclusion," which brought together the most prominent health experts and helped form a community that is currently debating the need for a Health National Law, one of the memo's proposals. Furthermore, in June 2011, the National Congress passed a Law that regulates the purchase and the publicity of cigarettes in the entire country and prohibits smoking in the workplace and public spaces. Stricter smoking regulation was one of the health memo's proposals.

Global Integration. In this memo, CIPPEC recommended to deepen the integration among South American countries through the Mercosur. CIPPEC continued working on this issue beyond the electoral campaign and was invited to present its research findings to the European Union.

Energy, Fiscal and Transportation. After the elections, the government implemented a series of measures aimed at partially reducing the energy and transportation bill. The authors of the energy, fiscal and transportation memos, along with other actors (think tanks, experts, and members of the opposition), signaled the need to reduce energy and transportation subsidies. Two years after the elections, CIPPEC started to work directly with the national government in redesigning transport subsidies.

Justice. CIPPEC and other CSOs participated in Congress commissions to advocate for the need to amend the penal, civil and commercial codes. This was one of the proposals of the Justice memo.

As for the objective of "organizing the first presidential debate," CIPPEC did not succeed in executing it. The reason behind this mostly lies in Argentina's ingrained political dynamics, which CIPPEC was unable to redress.

In Argentina, the candidates with the most favorable ratings in public opinion polls usually consider the debate, not as a means to attract more constituents, but as a practice that can jeopardize votes. Additionally, as participating in a debate directly entails making promises to the constituents, some candidates wrongfully perceive it as a powerful accountability instrument.

The candidates' behavior are aided by two factors: (1) society does not penalize their undemocratic actions, and (2) the presidential debate is not signed into national law and is absent from the National Electoral Code (Código Nacional Electoral).

In this particular election, however, the most important factor that reduced to a minimum the chances of the debate was the lack of real competitiveness. Throughout the electoral year, presidential polls predicted a big win for President Fernandez de Kirchner, which was later reinforced by her landslide victory in August's primary election. Following these rationales, the President had no incentive to expose herself to public scrutiny, while the opposition took a defeatist attitude given the large difference, and quickly abandoned any real intention of debating.

Notwithstanding this failure, since the election year, some measures and actions have been taken which seem to be changing, though slowly, the political dynamic. During the 2011 election year, two representatives sponsored bills attempting to amend the electoral code in order to include a mandatory presidential debate. Although at different degrees, CIPPEC was instrumental in drafting them. Additionally, before the 2011 elections, CIPPEC organized a debate between the candidates for the mayor office of Moron, a highly populated municipality in suburban Buenos Aires. While in 2013, the province of Chaco sanctioned a law that guarantees the debate among governor candidates and provincial deputies' candidates. This was followed by a debate - organized by CIPPEC- in July 2013 between the main legislative pre-candidates (with a special focus on economic issues) in virtue of August's primary elections.

4.2. Internal

"Agenda for the president" represented a holistic exercise in which all CIPPEC's different areas contributed with their knowledge. As a consequence, an important tension emerged between the research agenda (and activities) of the different policy programs and the institutional agenda; the programs regarded the project as interfering with their work. Given the different priorities, the project committee decided to abandon the idea of a blog where the Memos' authors could contribute with their thoughts.

Notwithstanding the organizational tension, the project allowed the organization to compile, organize, and present in non-technical language more than 10 years of research.

The practice of defining and summarizing in the Memos the most important challenges and the proposals to solve them led many of CIPPEC's programs to set their priorities and goals. Yet, in the process, some contradictions among the Memos arose. To reach the required cohesion, CIPPEC's project committee had to intervene in cases in which two or more memos indicated contradictory proposals or diagnosis. Thus obtaining the project's compatibility helped align CIPPEC's overall mission as well.

As a product of the dialogue around the Memos to the President, CIPPEC developed in 2012 the book "[100 policies to foster development](#)," with the purpose of advancing an agenda of key challenges and options for the 2012-2015 period. The book contains enriched proposals, -many of them based on those of the Memos-, and high quality infographics.



Moreover, upon the suggestions of other civil society organizations, CIPPEC added new issues to the book that were not considered for the Memos and expanded its strategic partnerships with other organizations. For instance, CIPPEC included the issue of Housing, and invited "ProVivienda Social Foundation," an institution that seeks to improve housing and living conditions for low-income families, to be the author of its proposals.

On another note, due to its efforts, CIPPEC was accepted as a member of the International Network for Electoral Debates.

As can be observed, CIPPEC was more successful in reaching its institutional goals than in achieving its external goals. Regardless of the visible results, the experience and lessons acquired from the process were invaluable and only made CIPPEC an even stronger organization.

5. Lessons Learned

- 1) This type of initiative represents an opportunity for policy research organizations because it pulls together the knowledge of their different areas. However, embarking the whole organization in an institutional project can cause problems. As mentioned above, tension might arise between the research agenda (and activities) of the different policy programs and the institutional agenda because the project could change the priorities of the staff's work, and/or demand additional effort.
- 2) Producing the Memos required a large amount of time. In order to reach the set objectives in the desired schedule and avoid difficulties along the way, it is important to establish beforehand what is expected from the participants in the process (authors, editors, IT, project leader(s) and staff).
- 3) Not all presidential campaigns represent a window of opportunity for policy influence, since sometimes the context may end up dictating how events unfold. In the case of Argentina's political and economic context in 2011, the lack of political competitiveness and the economic growth of the country restricted the public debate of ideas. In contexts where uncertainty about the governments and the economy's direction prevails, new contributions will likely acquire great importance in the policy-making environment.
- 4) CIPPEC tried to solve the political dynamics and hence organize the debate by building a coalition of a wide variety of actors which would promote it. In this coalition, however, the citizenry was not involved. As such, it remains to be seen if involving the citizenry in the coalition and designing strategies aimed at making a more conscientious society can increase the chances of organizing a debate.
- 5) The coalition built to boost the debate was not strong enough. To achieve the presidential debate, a larger pro-debate coalition, one that includes the press, social organizations, business and labor, and forces of the entire political spectrum must be created. The coalition must be apolitical and independent (as a way to increase participation of political forces), and should be joined by a public awareness campaign.
- 6) Some memos attracted more the attention of the media and key actors than other memos. This was partly due to the topic in question and the authors' interests in promoting their memos and capacity to generate meetings and debates. To obtain a stronger impact in terms of both media presence and public policy influence, it should be established from the beginning what activities are demanded of each author. Additionally, incentives should be created so that authors, who might not be very interested in doing their own advocacy campaign, end up getting more involved.

- 7) As seen in the section “Balance,” CIPPEC was unable to meet with all presidential candidates and get their opinion on the Memos. This showed CIPPEC that it is crucial to have an organized process through which to obtain the stance of the different candidates.
- 8) “Agenda for the President,” as well as other similar initiatives in the region, have the potential to become a framework for future interventions of think tanks and other civil society organizations in presidential campaigns. An example of this is “Paraguay Debate,” a similar initiative in Paraguay that started in 2012 and was led by two think tanks, CADEP and Instituto Desarrollo. This approach to influencing the public debate can contribute to bridging innovative ideas and policy discussion during electoral periods.
- 9) Policy influence initiatives in electoral campaigns in Latin America could improve its synergies and learn from other models in the United States, Europe, Africa and Asia. The methodology could be refined with new inputs from the experiences in other contexts.
- 10) Data visualization could be considered as an innovative format to communicate policy evidence in a more dynamic, attractive, and practical way to decision makers and society.

Annex - Sources of information

People interviewed

Diego Moreno, Executive Director at Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina (FVSA) and author of the Sustainable development Memo.

Francisco Resnicoff, Coordinator of “Agenda for the President 2011-2015”.

Axel Rivas, Former Director and current Principal Researcher at CIPPEC’s Program of Education and member of the “Agenda for the President 2011-2015” Committee.

Fernando Straface, CIPPEC’s Executive Director and member of the “Agenda for the President 2011-2015” Committee.

Soledad Zarate, Assistant of the Executive Director at CIPPEC and member of the “Agenda for the President 2011-2015” Committee.

Laura Zommer, CIPPEC Former Communications Director and member of the “Agenda for the President 2011-2015” Committee.

Web sites

Agenda for the President 2011-2015 (CIPPEC): www.agenda-presidencial.org

Focusing the electoral debate (CIES): www.elecciones2011.cies.org.pe

CIPPEC: www.cippec.org

Memos to the President (Brookings): www.brookings.edu/about/projects/presidential-transition/memos-to-the-president

Paraguay Debate: www.paraguaydebate.org.py

100 policies to foster development: www.cippec.org/100politicass

About the authors

Leandro Echt: Coordinator of the Influence Monitoring and Evaluation Program. BA in Political Sciences, Universidad de Buenos Aires. Professor of Social Sciences, Universidad de Buenos Aires. Master in Public Policies and Development Management of the Georgetown University and Universidad de San Martin (thesis pending).

Agustina Eskenazi: International relations student at the University of Pennsylvania.

Federico Frascheri, consultant of the Influence, Monitoring and Evaluation Program of CIPPEC, and BA in Political Sciences, Universidad Católica Argentina, collaborated as research assistant in the production of this document.

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Av. Callao 25, 1° C1022AAA, Buenos Aires, Argentina
T (54 11) 4384-9009 F (54 11) 4384-9009 interno 1213
info@cippec.org www.cippec.org
www.vippal.cippec.org @VIPPALCIPPEC

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