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## **Alberto Fujimori Wins Re-Election in Peru, Amid Wide Complaints of Fraud**

*by Guest*

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[The following article by John Ludwick is reprinted with the permission of Noticias Aliadas in Lima, Peru. It first appeared in the June 5, 2000, edition of the weekly publication Latinamerica Press.]

Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori retained his office in the May 28 runoff election, but many observers question whether his government will be considered legitimate, and whether he will be able to hold onto power. Election results were a foregone conclusion 10 days before ballots were cast, when opposition candidate Alejandro Toledo announced he would not participate in an election he called "fraudulent."

But after the election, a significant question remained: would Fujimori be recognized as the democratically elected president of a legitimate government, as he claimed, or leader of a pariah state, as the opposition said? First-round vote draws international criticism Peru's Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) was severely criticized for its handling of the first round of voting on April 9. It took three days to tally results of the presidential race and more than one month to announce results of congressional balloting. There were also numerous charges of irregularities at polling stations.

OAS observers especially criticized the vote-counting program, calling for an overhaul and rigorous testing. Election officials unveiled a new program less than two weeks before the election, too short a time for adequate testing, the OAS observers said. Peru's human rights ombud, the US State Department, the European Union (EU), various other governments, and a host of national and international organizations echoed the OAS request for postponement.

When no agreement was reached to postpone the balloting, the OAS withdrew its observers, saying, "The Peruvian electoral process is far from being considered free and fair." The European Union, the US-based Carter Center, and local watchdog groups also withdrew their monitors. Other problems criticized in the first-round campaign also persisted in the weeks before the runoff. Media outlets, especially television stations, continued their attacks on the opposition candidate, ignoring his rallies and denying him paid air time.

During the campaign, there was little emphasis on the usual issues, although incumbent Fujimori reminded voters of his record in battling terrorism and halting runaway inflation and promised to improve infrastructure and create jobs, while challenger Toledo spoke of the need to generate employment and restore democracy.

### ***Toledo opts out of race***

On May 18, Toledo announced he would not participate in the May 28 election, and he called for a postponement until June 18 to allow time to fix and properly test the flawed computerized

vote-tallying system. A delay also would have permitted him more time to reach voters with his message. Since early in the campaign, opposition candidates, backed by international observers, have complained that they have been denied air time and media attention (see NotiSur, 2000-04-28).

But Peruvian election officials said the date could not be changed, and Congress was unable to muster a quorum in the two days that the issue was on the agenda. Toledo continued campaigning in the hope that election authorities would relent.

Shouting "Democracia, si; dictadura, no!" at his rallies, Toledo urged Peruvians to stay home on election day. But voting is obligatory in Peru, and failure to cast a ballot carries a US\$33 penalty, which many Peruvians could not afford. In addition, electoral authorities aired ads warning that those who did not vote would not be able to do such things as cash checks or obtain passports.

Toledo quickly added a second option, urging supporters who voted to spoil their ballots by writing "No to fraud." Official results give Fujimori victory. Official election results showed spoiled and invalid ballots represented 29.9% of the total, with another 1.2% left blank. Fujimori received 51.2% "of the valid votes," and Toledo 17.68%. The official figures indicated that about 16% of voters stayed away, although some observers said absenteeism probably was higher. "We need a change, that's all," said Luis Armas, an unemployed teacher who spoiled his ballot for democracy.

Toledo supporters said the absenteeism, along with spoiled ballots and votes for Toledo, added up to defeat for Fujimori. But Toledo's only prospect now is that enough national and international pressure will be brought to bear to force Fujimori to step down and call new elections. Toledo said Fujimori's administration would lack credibility, adding that he hoped "God would enlighten Fujimori, so he would resign and call new elections."

Other observers speculated that the president would be forced to resign before the end of his mandate in 2005. "The Fujimori government will be very unstable, and it's very likely that he won't complete his five-year term, political analyst Fernando Rospigliosi said. "International pressure is going to come." Rospigliosi said the president and his advisers "are completely mistaken" if they think the international community will tolerate his decision to hold the election May 28, rather than postpone it several weeks as an Organization of American States (OAS) observer mission had recommended.

The US reacted shortly after the vote. On May 29, a US State Department spokesperson said that "in view of the refusal to accommodate international observers' complaints regarding lack of time to validate the newly installed vote-counting system, we do not see the election as being valid."

On May 31, Eduardo Stein, leader of the OAS delegation in Peru, delivered a highly critical report to the OAS Permanent Council detailing irregularities. In response, Peru's Ambassador to the OAS Beatriz Ramacciotti said the organization had overstepped its bounds in asking that the May 28 election be delayed, adding that the monitoring mission failed to respect "the principle of neutrality and objectivity."

The US, Canada, Mexico, and Costa Rica supported a proposal that the issue be discussed in the OAS General Assembly meeting that began June 4, while Brazil, Argentina, and Chile said they were studying the matter. "The question is whether they will be able to put together a negotiating team to go to Lima and really pressure Fujimori to set a timetable for new elections," Coletta Youngers of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) said.

A defiant Fujimori said, however, that he believed Peru's election troubles soon would be a distant memory. In an interview with The Washington Post, the president scoffed at the idea of serious consequences, asking, "Sanctions? What kind of sanctions? With our anti-drug cooperation?" But Youngers said Fujimori is mistaken. Although it is not clear how the US Congress will react, she said, political and economic pressure is likely despite Fujimori's cooperation with US anti-drug efforts.

"Peru gets more aid than any other Latin American country, other than Colombia, and for the first time the United States may actually [reduce funding]. What's clearly going to happen is no additional funding for Peru," Youngers said, adding that private investment could also suffer, as many political-risk analysts have categorized Peru as unstable. "They're a political pariah...and they are bucking the regional trends," Youngers said. "People in Washington like to portray Latin America as heading toward democracy, and Fujimori is heading in the opposite direction."

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