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Humala Headed to Runoff

by LADB Staff

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Voters in Peru's April 9 presidential election handed the most votes to nationalist Ollanta Humala, but the name of the opponent he would face in a runoff was still unavailable ten days after the vote. The numbers for former President Alan Garcia (1985-1990) and Lourdes Flores were extremely close, with the two candidates fighting for every vote as results trickled in from the national electoral authority.

Election officials, blaming the Easter holiday for delays in the count, said they expected 100% of the results to be available the week of April 24-28. As of April 19, the Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) had counted 91.6% of the vote, showing that the difference between Garcia, of the center-left Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), and Flores, of the business-friendly Unidad Nacional (UN), had shrunk from more than 100,000 to 67,499 votes. This count left Garcia with 24.30% of the vote and Flores with 23.71%. By the next day, Garcia's lead had grown slightly to 74,403 votes with 92.3% of the vote counted. This still left Garcia and Flores with almost the same percentage of the vote, although it made APRA's preparations for the second round seem more credible.

Humala ahead by more than five points, far from majority

Humala's tally of 30.77% of the total was insurmountable for his two closest competitors, giving him more than 3.5 million votes, while Garcia and Flores each took between 2.7 and 2.8 million votes. The face of the Partido Nacionalista Peruana (PNP), also known as the Union por el Peru (UPP), Humala is riding on a wave of popular resentment against the administration of President Alejandro Toledo as well as resentments against larger economic powers in the region, like Chile (see NotiSur, 2005-11-18) and the US.

The press has almost universally condemned Humala's stance, saying his and his family members' ethnonationalist ideas (see NotiSur, 2005-01-14) would lead to an authoritarian, racist government and to abuses of power. Humala faced accusations that he was involved in human rights abuses when he held a military command in the 1990s (see NotiSur, 2006-03-10). Nonetheless, the allegations did little to stop his continued upswing in opinion surveys prior to the vote, although what their ultimate effect on his second-round campaign will be is not yet clear.

No other candidates were serious contenders in the race. Martha Chavez of the Alianza por el Futuro (AF) received 7.4% and Valentin Paniagua of Frente de Centro (FC) got about 5.7% of the valid votes. In sixth place was Humberto Lay of Partido Restauracion Nacional (PRN) at 4.4% and in seventh was Susana Villaran of Convergencia Descentralista at 0.6%. Those were the figures available on April 20 with just under 93% of the vote counted.

As of April 20, there were approximately 1.6 million blank votes, 417,000 nullified votes, and 884 impugned votes of a total of about 13.6 million votes. All Peruvian citizens of voting age were required to vote in the election, though the group Transparencia estimated abstention at 10.77%, a significant drop of 7.82% from the 2001 ballot. While Humala had the strongest showing of all candidates, he did not come through with his prediction that he would win in the first round.

Pollsters praised themselves after the vote, saying their findings prior to the election had been vindicated and demanding apologies from candidates who called them wrong or liars during the campaign. Garcia in particular said the pollsters lied and he would provide proof of it on April 10. He has yet to do so following the vote. Earlier polls showed Garcia significantly behind then frontrunners Flores and Humala, but that shifted as the ex-president attempted to attract more young voters by featuring popular "reggaeton"-style dance music during his campaign stops.

Some more cynical press analysts saw Garcia's appeal to younger voters as an effort to attract votes from a constituency that would not remember the extensive failures of his first administration, which paved the way for the bloody and authoritarian government of Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000). For a period after the polls closed, APRA officials sought to annul the vote coming in from foreign polling stations, saying they had video proof that Flores supporters had continued campaigning abroad after the legal close of the campaign.

The foreign vote heavily favored Flores and appeared to have the potential to reverse her fortunes, but as Garcia's lead surpassed 100,000 voters, APRA chose to abandon its call for annulling the vote from polling sites in cities like Miami, Buenos Aires, and Madrid. Afterward, the APRA lead narrowed, but the vote from Peruvians living abroad has yet to give Flores the upper hand. The results as they stand look strikingly similar to the 2001 vote that sent Toledo into a runoff with Garcia (see NotiSur, 2001-04-20).

Lima daily El Comercio showed preliminary vote results from 2001 that had Toledo in first place, with Flores and Garcia in another virtual tie. A similar graph put the pair of old rivals in contention again with an advantage for Humala where Toledo had once stood. Humala is not in quite as strong a numerical position as Toledo was, especially since Toledo then was able to take some credit for the removal of Fujimori. Peruvian analysts have differed regarding whether Humala would do better in a runoff against Flores or Garcia.

The more left-leaning ex-president may be able to eat into Humala's anti-US, anti-elite platform, while attracting some of the Flores voters who could prefer Garcia's relative moderation. As Garcia prepared for the second round, attempting to project the image of someone who had already won, increasing numbers of analysts said that his victory would be less desirable for the Humala camp than a Flores victory, since her conservatism would provide him with a strong foil. The UN showed strength in the country's primary population center, Lima and among Peruvians living outside Peru, but it was weak nationally, despite Flores' ambitious campaign to travel to all 197 provinces of the country.

In Flores' travels, Humalistas frequently appeared at her campaign stops, hurling insults regularly and sometimes hurling rocks. "Peru needs a high dose of tolerance, and I have been rejecting this

intolerance without losing my calm, my good humor, or my spirit of appealing broadly to everyone," Flores said. Yet a video journalist caught Flores on March 12 raising her middle finger to a group of Humala supporters during a caravan ride. The moment may have eaten into her effort to project a warmer image to the nation in the crucial weeks prior to the vote, when the large bloc of still-undecided voters were the main object of the campaigners.

Final tally may not be ready until two weeks after vote

The biggest loser in the April 9 vote could arguably be the electoral authority that was unable to provide a conclusive result in a timely manner. Early prognostications by the ONPE estimated that the final results might not be ready until 20 days after the vote, though ONPE officials later said that it would not take quite that long. ONPE chief Magdalena Chu partly blamed the April 10-14 Holy Week holiday, when, for example, delivery service DHL, which was charged with delivering some of the results sheets, was not operating. She said on April 17 that the body had nearly all of the domestic votes and most of the votes cast in foreign countries.

On April 18 ONPE planning chief Carlos Loyola said that the body had counted all but 33% of the vote from abroad and some blocks of votes from remote parts of the country, leading him to promise that the count would be done, at latest, during the following week. The remaining ballots covered some 161,000 votes, diminishing the possibilities for a Flores win. The Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE), the country's top electoral court, blamed the ONPE for delays in the ballot-counting process on April 13.

Toledo signs AFTA, pushes ratification

Toledo tried to bolster his legacy as president after the election by signing the Andean Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) and calling on the Congress to ratify it as soon as possible. Negotiations on the treaty between Peru and the US ended in December 2005 as Peru's government broke with Colombia and Ecuador to unilaterally join the agreement (see NotiSur 2006-01-13). Toledo apparently hopes to lock in his economic policies so that an incoming president like Humala or Garcia could not change the direction of the nation's fiscal structure.

In public, Toledo says that the Congress needs to approve the deal before December of this year, when the US Andean Trade Preference and Drug Enforcement Act (ATPDEA) will expire, an act that US officials claim offers economic alternatives to the cultivation and processing of illicit crops by giving preferential treatment to Andean countries. Toledo called for meetings with all three presidential candidates on the issue of the treaty, but Humala and Garcia rejected Toledo's invitation. Garcia's thinks the treaty ought to be renegotiated while Humala says he would like a popular referendum on whether it should be approved.

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