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Garcia and Ollanta in Presidential Runoff

by LADB Staff

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The official results of Peru's April 9 presidential election were finally released May 3, with former President Alan Garcia Perez (1985-1990) barely beating former congressional deputy Lourdes Flores Nano for the second-place spot in a runoff election. Electoral officials had already determined that former military officer Ollanta Humala Tasso would win the first round, well ahead of his two closest competitors (see NotiSur, 2006-04-21). Garcia, of the center-left Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), and Humala, of the nationalist Union por el Peru (UPP), will now vie for the presidency in a second round of voting June 4.

Lourdes Flores loses by 64,000 votes

Flores, with the Union Nacional (UN), had presented various appeals and objections to electoral authorities, all of which failed. She conceded defeat on May 3, after failing to gain an edge on Garcia. While she conceded defeat after the Jurado Nacional Electoral (JNE) had announced her loss, she claimed that vote-counting irregularities meant that she had "the perception" that she lost not at the "polls, but rather at the ballot-counting tables." Flores, 46 and in her second failed campaign to become the country's first woman president, had a hard time deflecting depictions of herself as the candidate of Peru's rich, white elite. The final count left Humala with 30.6% of the vote, Garcia with 24.3%, and Flores with 23.8%. Flores trailed Garcia by about 64,000 votes out of about 12.3 million valid votes.

Garcia beats Humala in poll

Polling analysts and news reports generally regarded Garcia as the more difficult of the two candidates for Humala to face, since a large number of the voters who backed conservative Flores could turn to the centrist ex-president rather than let Humala, a radical nationalist, win. Garcia would beat Humala in a runoff, according to the first poll published since the election. Garcia had 54% of voter support, while Humala had 46%, according to a survey by Lima-based polling firm Datum Internacional. Datum surveyed 1,126 people nationwide from April 19-21. The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. Although the election was far from decided during that time, Garcia had been behaving as though he had already won the first round and was campaigning for the runoff.

A major upcoming event that may alter public perception of the two candidates is a debate set for May 12 at the newly opened National Library in the capital. The 43-year-old nationalist candidate has upset many middle- and upper-class Peruvians with pledges to radically redistribute the nation's wealth, increase government control over key sectors of the economy, and end US-backed eradication of coca, the raw material for cocaine. But poor voters have supported his program in increasing numbers.

Garcia, 56, considered an impressive orator and charismatic campaigner, is seeking a second chance to govern after a 1985-1990 presidency marked by hyperinflation and the beginning of a bloody insurgency by Maoist Sendero Luminoso guerrillas. Garcia has been attempting to win patriotic points by rhetorically baiting Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez (see other story in this issue of NotiSur). The support Humala has received from the leftist Venezuelan executive has been a repeated source of tension between the two countries (see NotiSur, 2006-01-27).

Garcia continues the very public exchange of insults with Chavez, evidently believing that Peruvian voters will side with him and that Chavez's backing will be a bigger liability for Humala than a benefit. Although Garcia is at this point an anti-Chavez figure, he still represents a center-left political stance. Flores' failure at the polls was one more setback for Latin America's conservatives as a wave of left-leaning leaders have gained top office and broad popularity in recent years.

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