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Uncertainty Following Polarized Elections in Peru

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Uncertainty has characterized Peru's Oct. 3 municipal and regional elections, and two weeks after the voting, the winner of the Lima mayoral race is still unknown. Apart from the still-undecided race in the capital, ten regions will have runoffs. The only thing not in doubt is that Lima will have a woman mayor for the first time.

In Lima, leftist Fuerza Social candidate Susana Villarán is ahead of rightist Partido Popular Cristiano-Unidad Nacional (PPC-UN) candidate Lourdes Flores by 31,164 votes, according to the results announced Oct. 5 by the Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) with 100% of the votes counted, 73.8% of which are unchallenged.

In the ONPE results to date, Villarán has 38.29% of the valid votes and Flores 37.58%. Both exit polls and the quick count on election day confirmed a Villarán victory, but, until the 1.6 million challenged ballots (26% of the total) are reviewed, the winner cannot be announced.

More than 8,300 tally sheets were challenged by the ONPE because they had tallying errors, were illegible, lacked the required fingerprint and signature of the poll worker (4,233), or were challenged by official observers of the various political parties (146).

The slowness of the review process has raised suspicions among many voters, especially Villarán supporters.

The ONPE blames the delay in releasing the municipal-elections results on the national election board (Jurado Nacional de Elecciones, JNE), which did not issue its final instruction on handling challenged ballots until Sept. 22. But the JNE says the delay shows a lack of training in the ONPE. "It's not that the ONPE's training has been inefficient but rather that it gave us the regulatory provisions very late," Javier Palomino Sedó, advisor at the ONPE national headquarters, told the press.

"The people say 'fraud, fraud,' but there is no fraud; there is, however, an unacceptable slowness by the Jurado and that makes people suspicions," Villarán told Perú 21. She also emphasized the need to install electronic voting once and for all in the country.

What raised even more suspicions were the 503 polling-station tallies that were lost in the ONPE and found the following Monday in the institution's storeroom in seven urns. Four of the urns were from Villa María del Triunfo, one from Villa El Salvador, and two from San Juan de Miraflores—Lima neighborhoods where Villarán won handily and where many of the tallies were challenged.

The complaint was made by the TV program Prensa Libre, which pointed out that, although the tallies were finally recovered and counted in their entirety, the chain of custody was broken, and no election authority was present when the tallies found in the urns were unsealed.

Flores has maintained her optimism regarding the results released so far. She noted that it only takes one vote for one of the women to win and said it is necessary to be patient until the official count is finished.
JNE president Hugo Sivina says that the challenged tallies will be reviewed in public proceedings open to the press and the interested candidates.

In the event that the parties in dispute do not agree with the first-instance findings, they can appeal, at a cost of about US$20 per tally. Flores' PPC-UN can undoubtedly cover the cost that would be involved, but this is not the case with Villarán's organization, which has run one of the most austere campaigns in memory. Fuerza Social has initiated an "adopt-a-tally" campaign to raise funds to appeal any ruling it considers unfair.

**Reasons for suspicions**

Not only has the slowness of the review process and the number of tallies challenged—thanks to the ruling given just days before the elections—raised suspicions, but so has the fact that 6,195 challenged tallies are from districts where Fuerza Social won handily.

Five special elections juries (Jurados Electorales Especiales, JEE) must review the challenged tallies. Of concern to many is that Juan Pablo Quispe has been named to head the East Lima JEE. Earlier, Quispe was accused of leniency with a confessed drug trafficker, whom he gave a 14-year prison sentence instead of the 30-year sentence that the crime he committed called for.

Political analyst Fernando Rospigliosi told the daily La Primera that interested citizens, the media, and political actors "should be very vigilant" regarding the East Lima JEE's performance since Quispe's "history in the judiciary is questionable, given that he has been accused of leniency toward drug traffickers."

Fuerza Social has also requested an investigation of the distribution of flyers on election day with the photo of Villarán and the symbol of another party, evidently in an effort to confuse voters in Villa El Salvador, one of the most densely populated areas of Lima.

One of the five people detained in the three trucks containing the flyers turned out to be an employee of the Municipalidad de Lima, as were the people who, before the election, hung banners from at least one pedestrian bridge over the Paseo de la República, which said, "No to closing the Solidaridad hospitals. No to Susana Villarán." The image was captured by América TV cameras.

The Solidaridad hospitals are administrated by the Municipio de Lima. During her campaign, Villarán pointed out the need to integrate them with the agencies of the Ministerio de Salud so that clinical histories can be accessed throughout the health system.

However, one of Flores' repeated rallying cries against Villarán during the campaign was that she wanted to get rid of the Solidaridad hospitals.

**Dirty war**

But Flores' main criticism of Villarán was the accusation that she was a member of the radical left group Patria Roja. And, in the final debate between the two candidates on Sept. 27, Flores accused her rival of "not guaranteeing peace and order because of her radical, pro-violent allies in Patria Roja and their statist ideas."

Among the rightist candidate's repeated attacks against the Fuerza Social candidate was the attempt to link Villarán to the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso. "What did you do in London in October 2003 with the Peru Support Group [PSG], a support group for Sendero Luminoso?" asked Flores.
Villarán responded that the PSG, a British group, had played an important role in the defense of Peruvian democracy.

Lord Avebury, president of the PSG, did not hesitate to send a statement to the Peruvian press in which he "rejects in the strongest possible terms the suggestion that [the PSG] has at any time had a connection with any terrorist group."

"The PSG invited Susana Villarán to participate in our Annual Conference in December 2006 where she spoke about democracy and civil rights. We felt that she was well-qualified to do so given her background as a minister of women's promotion and social development during former President Valentín Paniagua's interim government in 2000-2001 and as a member of the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2002-2005)," explained Avebury.

The attempt to link Villarán with Sendero Luminoso typified the dirty war waged by both her rival and various rightist media outlets. The ultraconservative daily Correo even ran a fake photo on its front page showing Villarán with a raised-fist salute alongside Sendero Luminoso top leader Abimael Guzmán, with the same salute.

The dirty war against Villarán, especially in the week before the elections, and the stance assumed by Flores in the debate, to which the leftist candidate did not respond, apparently played a significant role in producing the closeness of the results. Before the elections, polls had Villarán ahead by 8, 10, and even 15 points.

Villarán's rise in the voter-preference polls came in August when the JNE ruled that Alex Kouri for the rightist Cambio Radical could not run for president because he did not fulfill the requirement to have had a Lima residence for at least two continuous years prior to July 5, 2010. Many political analysts say that, if Kouri's name had remained on the ballot, the contest would have been between him and Flores, and Flores would likely have won.


The dirty war also splattered Flores when a tapped telephone conversation was leaked in which she let it be known that she might meet with Spanish and Brazilian business leaders to discuss municipal issues. In another tapped phone call broadcast on TV, Flores is heard in a conversation with former deputy Xavier Barrón expressing her anger at the results of a poll and saying that she did not care about being elected mayor.

"It was a filthy campaign, plagued with lies and dirty-war tactics, Lourdes, it's necessary to say it clearly. This was not something apart from her. She participated actively in it," said Rospigliosi in his La República column. "Lourdes mistakenly believed that her defeats in 2001 and 2006 [in presidential elections] were because she played fairly and now she was willing, from the beginning, to play dirty. She lost because her evaluation was erroneous."

Flores' Achilles' heel during the campaign was the work relationship that she, as a lawyer, maintained until 2009 with businessman César Cataño, who is under investigation for money
laundering. (Reporter Jaime Bayly said that the relationship continued until the middle of this year.) Flores said repeatedly that she had the peace of mind of knowing that she acted correctly.

**Fragmentation and rise of the left**

While Lima's mayoral contest is between candidates of two political organizations, nine political parties participated in the elections. The fragmentation was greater in the areas outside Lima, where some 200 political organizations participated to elect 25 regional presidents, 195 provincial mayors, and 1,638 district mayors.

In the regions, voters chose independent regional movements (76%) that supported development with social inclusion and respect for the environment rather than traditional political parties (24%). Exit polls by polling firm Ipsos-Apoyo indicate that, in at least 18 of the 25 departments, regional movements will win.

"This is not a whim of the regions, the people opted for movements that they think will defend them and rejected groups they feel have mistreated them," Julia Cuadros of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) CooperAcción told La República.

The governing party Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), one of the most organized traditional parties, suffered a devastating defeat in its historic bastion of Trujillo, capital of the northern department of La Libertad. The Trujillo mayoral post remained in the hands of the Alianza para el Progreso, which captured it from APRA in 2006. Now, both parties are vying for the regional presidency of Lambayeque.

"The results show that we have an ultrafragmented national panorama. APRA, the country's great party and, it is said, the only organized party, practically did not exist in these elections. This speaks of the absence of a party system," political analyst Luis Benavente told El Comercio.

Political analysts believe that presidential candidates in the 2011 general elections who form alliances with regional movements will have a better chance of winning.

Carlos Monge, researcher with the NGO DESCO, told La República that Villarán's victory in Lima and the victory of the regional movements show that there is space for a leftist candidate in the 2011 elections. "What remains to be seen is who will be able to occupy that space, to lead and coordinate in a united national platform all these faces of the left," he said.

Sociologist and historian Nelson Manrique said in an interview with La República that, "win or lose, Susana is the winner."

"I believe that we have one of the most foolish right wings on the continent—it was the rightist press that made Susana known—and now it is so obsessed with Lourdes winning that it is incapable of understanding that the best thing that could happen would be for Susana to be in the municipality. If Lourdes eventually obtains, through the review process, what she was unable to win in the ballot boxes and they give her the 1% that she lacks, Villarán will automatically be the left's candidate in 2011."

Nevertheless, for other political analysts, the vote for Villarán has not been an ideological vote with Villarán bringing in other candidates: the district Fuerza Social candidates have not won in those places where, at the provincial level, Villarán received the largest number of votes.
"The fact that Fuerza Social has not won any district mayoral post shows clearly that it was not a party vote. But Susana's victory undoubtedly strengthens a democratic, moderate, and liberal center-left," said Rospigliosi in his La República column.