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Peru's Chaotic Political Scene
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During celebrations of the city of Lima's 476th anniversary on Jan. 18, Mayor Susana Villarán, eyeing the April presidential elections, called on the political class to "raise the level of the campaign."

As part of the anniversary celebrations, Villarán inaugurated the "Arguedas Hoy" exposition in the Municipality of Lima, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of indigenist writer José María Arguedas. "Today, I would like us to pay homage to a very important man in our literature and culture, José María Arguedas," said Villarán. "In the midst of this electoral campaign, whose standards have really sunk, in which there are very controversial ethical issues...let us dedicate ourselves to him, let us we recover from him the source and roots of the values that we are lacking."

During the celebration, the mayor presented the City of Lima Medal to the historic leader of the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), also called the Partido Aprista Peruana (PAP), Armando Villanueva del Campo, who is hospitalized in the city. "This act recognizes [Villanueva del Campo's] political trajectory and his place as an illustrious citizen of Lima," Villarán told the press.

Villarán also said that she was sorry that Mercedes Aráoz, former minister of economy and finance in the administration of President Alan García, had withdrawn from the presidential race. "It saddens me...and I hope that the party of the people, the Partido Aprista, which is so important, will go back to its roots and emerge from the crisis that the political parties are in and that cannot please anyone," said Villarán in statements published in the daily La Primera.

Crisis in the governing party
Aráoz, an independent, was the APRA presidential candidate. On Jan. 16, she submitted her resignation to the Jurado Electoral Especial (JEE) following the party's election of secretary-general Jorge del Castillo, who is under investigation for corruption, to head its congressional slate in the elections.

Del Castillo, a former prime minister, has been under investigation by the Ministerio Público since April 2010 for alleged influence peddling on behalf of Julio Vera Gutiérrez, owner of Petrolera Monterrico (NotiSur, Oct. 31, 2008). Del Castillo was forced to resign because of the scandal. The investigation includes looking into del Castillo's alleged swap of his apartment in the Surco neighborhood in Lima for that of Vera Gutiérrez in the San Isidro residential area.

"It's a matter of principle. From the first moment they offered me the candidacy...the only thing I requested was that people with corruption investigations not be put on the list. It's necessary to be firm in this, and, where there is evidence or doubt, it must be cleared up to avoid hurting the party," Aráoz had said 10 days before withdrawing from the presidential contest. Now APRA will run candidates for congressional seats only.

Aráoz's resignation was followed by that of longtime APRA militant and former prime minister Javier Velásquez Quesquén as candidate for first vice president on the party slate. This caused a group of Aprista leaders to propose that the party withdraw from the electoral process, convoke a reorganizing party congress, and return for the 2016 elections. But the proposal was rejected.
Although Aráoz had said in November that President García had convinced her to become the APRA candidate, in the midst of the crisis, García denied having made a proposal to her and said he had told party associates that he did not agree with running a candidate who was not a party member.

Many analysts now doubt that the governing party has the strength to surpass the electoral hurdle of 5% of the vote to remain a recognized party. In voter preference polls, Aráoz did not obtain 5%.

**Seats for sale**

In four separate polls, the three leading candidates are former President Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006) of Perú Posible; Deputy Keiko Fujimori, daughter of ex-dictator Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), now serving a prison sentence for corruption and human rights violations ([NotiSur, May 1, 2009](http://www.notisur.com.pe)), of Fuerza 2011; and former Lima mayor Luis Castañeda of Solidaridad Nacional. In fourth place is retired Army Lt. Col. Ollanta Humala of Gana Perú, who is backed by numerous leftist organizations. The other nine presidential candidates are polling at less than 4%.

In the electoral timetable, parties have until Feb. 10 to register their 130 candidates for Congress and 10 for the Parlamento Andino. The Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE) will have until April 9, one day before the general election, to withdraw a candidate for president or Congress if it finds any false information in the candidate's sworn statement.

In the meantime, on Jan. 19, the provincial bases of Perú Posible complained of irregularities in the party's election of its slate of congressional candidates, alleging that it contains names of invited candidates who belong to other parties. "People who were just invited are on the list, people who do not have the required five years of party membership called for by the by-laws of Perú Posible," Doris Rojas Fuentes, a representative from Huancavelica, told Radio Programa del Perú. "I want to let our president Toledo know that, if he wants to govern, he should govern cleanly."

With marches and countermarches, Perú Posible approved its congressional list headed by former deputy Cecilia Tait, who just days earlier had been number 14 on the party's list posted on Twitter. Initially, actress Ebelin Ortiz was at the top of the list, but that was changed following an avalanche of "tweets" complaining that the party wanted to exploit her celebrity status.

Fuerza 2011 has not completed its list because of public reaction when the list of possible candidates became known. On Jan. 20, Keiko Fujimori announced that she was taking Óscar Cáceres off the list. Cáceres is a former bodyguard of Vladimiro Montesinos, presidential advisor and ex-head of the Servicio de Inteligencia Nacional (SIN) during the Fujimori dictatorship who is now in prison ([NotiSur, Oct. 6, 2006](http://www.notisur.com.pe)). Keiko Fujimori said she was taking this action "even though [Cáceres] has no criminal process pending."

However, still on the Fuerza 2011 list are Carmen de Lozada and Mari Elena Mendoza, whose husbands are wanted on charges of having been Montesinos' accomplices. As if that were not enough, Keiko has been accused of charging US$200,000 for a position on the congressional slate for Junín department.

Complaints have also been made that Solidaridad Nacional has been involved in a pay-to-run scheme for its congressional slate. The daily Perú 21 said it has audio tapes showing that the SN candidate for second vice president, Rosa Nuñez de Acuña, offered up to US$250,000 to be put on the ticket.
"It is regrettable that parties have now become a space for big business, where unscrupulous people who dream of a congressional seat and see Congress as an opportunity to expand their interests pay an amount of money to achieve it," said historian and political analyst Nelson Manrique in an interview with.

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