3-18-2011

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Anything Can Happen in Peru's April Elections

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Category/Department: Peru

Published: Friday, March 18, 2011

Less than a month before Peru's April 10 general elections in which 11 candidates will compete for the presidency, four have a sizeable lead over the others, and the fight seems to be for second place.

Former President Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006), candidate for Perú Posible (PP), remains in first place in nationwide voter-preference polls, with 30% support but with no possibility of winning in the first round, according to the national Imasen poll taken in early March.

The same poll put Luis Castañeda Lossio, former Lima mayor and candidate for the Partido Solidaridad Nacional (PSN), in second place with 19.6% of voter support, followed by Fuerza 2011 candidate Keiko Fujimori, with 19.2%. Keiko is the daughter of former President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), who is serving a 25-year sentence for human rights violations.

In fourth place in the Imasen poll was retired Army Col. Ollanta Humala, candidate for the Gana Perú alliance, with 14.1%, almost eight points ahead of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski of the Alianza por el Gran Cambio, with 6.4%. Other polls put the four leading candidates in the same order and gave them similar percentages.

The other parties and alliances running presidential or congressional candidates are doing everything possible to meet the required threshold of 5% of the vote for representation in Congress. The latest national urban/rural poll by Compañia Peruana de Estudios de Mercado y Opinión Pública (CPI), published March 11, suggests that only six parties or alliances will obtain the necessary 5% in this year's congressional elections.

The CPI survey indicated that PP would receive 26.7% of the valid votes and win 38 seats in the unicameral Congress; Fuerza 2011, 19% and 27 seats; PSN, 17% and 25 seats; Gana Perú, 10.6% and 16 seats; Alianza por el Gran Cambio, 9.4% and 14 seats; while the governing Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) would receive 6.9% of the votes and take 10 seats.

With six parties expected to divide the 130 congressional seats, dialogue and negotiation will be necessary.

Although Lima Mayor Susana Villarán's party, Fuerza Social (FS), allied with leftist parties such as the Movimiento Nueva Izquierda (MNI) in the October 2010 municipal and regional elections, this time it has decided to run alone. The FS will run as its presidential candidate Manuel Rodríguez Cuadros, who had to resign as ambassador to Bolivia to run. Many observers feel that this decision may prevent the FS from meeting the 5% bar, although its spokespersons disagree.

"Fuerza Social has an important presence in various regions, as it does in Lima. We believe that we will easily overcome the hurdle," FS leader Eduardo Zegarra told the daily.

For Catholic priest Marco Arana, leader of the Tierra y Libertad (TyL) movement and a precandidate for the FS nomination, the FS's decision to leave aside its alliance with the MNI will cost the party dearly.
Meanwhile, the MNI announced that its Lima city councilors would keep an eye on Susana Villarán's administration, to which Zegarra replied, "We're not concerned; it's part of the political game. I work with [MNI] councilors; we've been elected for the city of Lima. We are loyal to our voters, and we are all clear that our role is, first, that of overseer and then to fulfill the government plan; in that there are no discrepancies."

**Anti-system candidate?**

This is the electoral scene. What the April elections will determine is who will face Toledo in the June runoff. Political analysts generally concur that the three candidates with the best chances offer essentially the same platform regarding fighting poverty, supporting social programs, increasing the budget for education, and improving infrastructure, health, and security for everyone. They presented those ideas at a forum held by the daily on March 3 at its main office in Lima.

What differentiated the 11 candidates at the El Comercio event was Humala saying that the 10 million Peruvians living in extreme poverty are the result of an economic policy that does not fairly distribute the benefits of economic growth.

"Wealth is poorly distributed, the poor distribution of wealth goes back 30 years. That is why I aspire to be president, to make the great transformation," said Humala in his speech.

Toledo told that for García there are "only two candidates—Keiko Fujimori and Luis Castillo," which is why Toledo asked García to not meddle in the campaign.

Press reports from mid-2010 quote García as saying that he expected either Castillo or Fujimori to succeed him, which he saw as positive because both would "continue the economic model."

Analyst Nelson Manrique says that Humala has possibilities of continuing to climb in popularity—he rose 2 points since January, according to Imasen—because the population wants a change in the economic model and wants to punish corrupt politicians. "Ollanta Humala's poll numbers have risen because 70% of the population demands a change in the current economic model and is fed up with the political class that is always involved in corruption cases," Manrique told the daily.

**Wikileaks enters the campaign**

What has also helped Humala's poll numbers is the information, leaked by Wikileaks, that Ministerio del Interior functionaries during the Toledo administration tried to get the US Embassy to intervene against him in the 2006 presidential campaign. In cable 46333 from November 2005, former interior minister Fernando Rospigliosi and Rubén Vargas, former director of national defense, requested help from the US Embassy to block Humala's electoral aspirations.

"They had few ideas on how to arrest Humala's rise, suggested that the USG review its options, and proposed that the Embassy should expand the role of its communications contractor NEXUM to monitor coverage of Humala and promote anti-Humala news and commentary in the coca regions," said the summary of the cable.

The cable also quoted former US Ambassador to Lima James Curtis Struble as saying, "We have no intention of involving the Embassy in anti-Humala information or commentary campaigns; that is a task for the competing political parties. We agree with Rospigliosi's suggestion that we expand NEXUM's monitoring functions to include Humala, given his pro-coca policies and the likelihood that he will form alliances with cocalero organizations."
The issue dominated Peruvian media for several days, which helped portray Humala as the candidate opposing the current economic model. In addition, in his campaign Humala has distanced himself from Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and has expressly said in statements to the press that he prefers "to learn from Brazil's former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva."

In the 2006 runoff elections in which García beat Humala, the former soldier received the open backing of Chávez, whose statements caused a diplomatic row between Venezuela and Peru (NotiSur, June 16, 2006). Humala now assures voters that he "rejects any foreign political interference in the campaign."

Three weeks before the elections, however, it seems that most Peruvians have not decided whom they will vote for, with a relatively high (35%) rate of undecideds, according to Imasen.

"Given the number of undecideds, anything can happen," Imasen analyst Giovanna Peñaflor told La República on March 9. "The apathy regarding Congress has to do with the low approval indices. People do not feel represented and ask themselves, "Why vote?" Added to that is the lack of familiarity with the candidates: Lima is full of panels, but 64% don't know any candidates. A large segment of the population has no interest in politics, and that is expressed in chronic indecision and dissatisfaction."

Contributing to the electorate's apathy is the lack of clarity regarding the parties' campaign finances. Spending declarations do not coincide with real expenses, creating suspicions that contributions have been mishandled. There are also complaints that the slates of candidates of some parties include people tied to drug trafficking or facing corruption charges, especially Keiko Fujimori's slate.

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