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Peruvians Opt for Change in First-Round Presidential Voting

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The results of Peru's April 10 general elections seem to be a slap in the face by marginalized and poor sectors—those who demand that the economic-growth boom reach their pockets—to the rest of the country. More than 55% of voters said 'enough!' to continuing an economic model that does not take them into account.

Nationalist leader Ollanta Humala of Gana Perú won the first round with 31.8% of valid ballots, followed, with 23.5%, by Fuerza 2011 candidate Deputy Keiko Fujimori, daughter of former President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), who is serving a 25-year prison sentence for crimes against humanity (NotiSur, May 1, 2009). The two candidates are now in full campaign mode to win the trust of the electorate, who, on June 5, will choose which one will hold the presidency during the next five years.

A month before the election it was clear that none of the candidates would obtain the necessary 50% plus one to win in the first round and that a runoff would be necessary. All polls predicted that former President Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006) of Perú Posible would obtain the most votes and that the contest would be for second place.

Fighting for the number-two spot at that time were (in order of voter preference) former Lima mayor and Solidaridad Nacional candidate Luis Castañeda Lossio, Fujimori, Humala, and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski of Alianza por el Gran Cambio.

But, from that point on, the polls began showing a shift in the electorate's preferences, and, a week before the election, Humala enjoyed an 8-point lead over second-place candidate Fujimori. Kuczynski and Toledo followed the front-runners, with some polls showing them tied and others with Toledo trailing. By election day, Castañeda was basically out of the running. The results confirmed what the polls had predicted.

Enormous discontent

Toledo, who in four weeks went from leading the voter-preference polls to being eliminated from the presidential contest, said to the press after conceding defeat, "Peru has explicitly expressed its anger at the ballot box because the economic growth does not touch [certain sectors], and they have found a candidate [Ollanta Humala] who conveys that protest."

A recent World Bank study, "Peru on the threshold of a new era: lessons and challenges for sustaining economic growth and a more inclusive development," indicates that in the rural Peruvian highlands—Puno, Ayacucho, Huánuco, Apurímac, and Huancavelica—the poverty rate exceeds 60%. In all these departments, Humala's Gana Perú party obtained a majority of the votes, leaving Fujimori in the dust. In Ayacucho, for example, Humala beat Fujimori by 28 percentage points, and he won by almost 43 percentage points in Huancavelica.
The vote for Fujimori also came from marginalized sectors that remember that when her father was in office he brought water, electricity, and basic services to areas where the state had never had a presence.

"That sector remembers well the assistentialism of Alberto Fujimori's government. That sector opts for a solution that does not consider such concepts as democracy, institutions, corruption, because they find [such concepts] complicated. They only ask, 'And who is going to help me now?" psychoanalyst Jorge Bruce told the daily.

The Fujimori campaign was characterized by widespread distribution of T-shirts, caps, cookers, utensils, soccer balls, almanacs, and other articles, all with the candidate's logo. And, in the final days of the campaign, Keiki referred to her father's administration as "our government."

**Congress will be fragmented**

During the campaign, Toledo, Kuczynski, who was Toledo's economy minister, and Castañeda, who represented the right, resorted to attacking each other rather than laying out and explaining their proposals. Toledo also neglected to mention during his campaign that he was the one who convoked the multitudinous Marcha de los Cuatro Suyos July 26-28, 2000, which signaled the last gasp for the administration of Fujimori, who tried to be re-elected for a third consecutive term (NotiSur, Aug. 4, 2000) and (Aug. 25, 2000). In 2001, Toledo won the runoff against current President Alan García by only four points (NotiSur, June 15, 2001).

None of the political forces won a majority in Congress. Six political groups will divide the 130 congressional seats. With 81.4% of the votes counted, the Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) gives Gana Perú 47 seats; Fuerza 2011, 37; Perú Posible, 21; Alianza por el Gran Cambio, 12; Solidaridad Nacional, nine; and the governing Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), four.

However, Percy Medina of the Asociación Civil Transparencia told the magazine that "there will not be six groups but rather 12 because of electoral alliances made before the April elections," which could mean as many as 15 mini-caucuses in the Congress—a huge dispersion.

"We're headed for a complex runoff, and those who have won seats in Congress must act calmly and consolidate their political loyalties," political analyst and former senator Enrique Bernales told, adding that the massive defections should be sanctioned.

**Fears on both sides**

"I want to issue a call for the unity of all Peruvians who want the great transformation within the framework of ethics and no corruption," said Humala in a press conference following the initial election results. "We cannot rest until we win the [runoff] election and begin on July 28 to make a new Peru," added the candidate who has appeared closer to creating a government in the style of Brazil's ex-President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva than that of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.

Fujimori will have to convince voters that she will not break with democracy and Humala that he will not adversely affect the economy. Fujimori has assured voters in recent statements to the press that if she wins the runoff she will not pardon her father, although she hopes that appeals to his 25-year sentence will be successful.
Because he was convicted of crimes against humanity, the former president, who was sentenced for two massacres, is not eligible for a pardon. However, exceptions for humanitarian reasons can be made, for example, in the case of a terminal illness, without regard to the type of crime committed. Fujimori has been operated on for tongue cancer, which raises the fear of a possible pardon should his daughter win the runoff.

Two years ago, the former president's defense team presented a writ of habeas corpus asking that the court re-evaluate the challenges it presented against the judges who ratified the 25-year sentence. The Tribunal Constitucional (TC) ruling is still pending regarding whether due process was guaranteed in the criminal proceedings against Fujimori. It appears that the TC ruling will not be made until after the runoff.

**Humala tries to quell fears**

In statements to Colombia's Radio Cadena Nacional (RCN), Humala said, "We are not proposing abandoning the economic model; however, wealth is poorly distributed, and that must be corrected." To achieve that, Humala raised the need to achieve a consensus.

The principal criticisms against Humala are now focused on some points in his governing plan such as writing a new Constitution, a proposal that the right sees as having authoritarian and re-electionist ends. The Gana Perú candidate has assured voters that creating a new Constitution will not be rigidly imposed. He also insists that if he wins he will only govern for five years.

"If there is no political consensus, we will look for other paths. It is the most convenient, but it is not a primary issue and it will be the topic for political debate with the other players. In any case, once the Congress has been formed, it would be the body to analyze this possibility," Humala told La República, at the same time showing his willingness to make concessions regarding the governing plan that he defines as a proposal to be discussed to find convergences.

On April 18, Humala presented a group of well-known persons and experts who will join forces to improve his governing plan, including economist Kurt Burneo, former head of Toledo's economic team, who said that he was participating as a private citizen. Burneo is not a member of Perú Posible.

Also in the group are Luis Arias Minaya, former head of the Superintendencia Nacional de Administración Tributaria (SUNAT); Carlos Herrera Descalzi, minister of energy and mines in the 2000 transition government; Oswaldo de Rivero, diplomat and UN consultant; Modesto Montoya, nuclear physicist; Ruth Shady, anthropologist and director of the archaeological project Caral, among others.

The daily ran an article about the intellectuals and experts who accepted Humala's call under the headline, "A staff to hide the radical side." While some hailed "Humala's inclusive spirit," others, like Fujimori, called the group opportunists.

Writer Mario Vargas Llosa, in an interview with the Argentine daily, said, "The entire team of Fujimori's daughter is the team of her father's accomplices. To vote for them is to vote to open the jails and let the murderers and thieves govern again." For Vargas Llosa, Keiko Fujimori is the greater evil in the runoff. Humala continues to be a threat to the democratic system, but he is the lesser evil.
"Without happiness, with a lot of fear, I am going to vote for Ollanta Humala, and I am going to ask democratic Peruvians to do the same. My hope is that what candidate Humala says now is the truth," said the writer.

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