3-29-2013

Lima Mayor Wins Partial Victory in Recall Referendum

Elsa Chanduvà Jaña

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Lima Mayor Wins Partial Victory in Recall Referendum

by Elsa Chanduví Jaña

Category/Department: Peru
Published: 2013-03-29

"Today in Lima unity has prevailed, and while official results are not yet ready, what can be said with complete confidence is that today no one lost, Lima won," said Mayor Susana Villarán after hearing the results of the recall referendum against her and the 39 members of the metropolitan council.

Nearly 3 million Limeños—82% of eligible voters—participated in the March 17 referendum in which Villarán, the first woman to serve as mayor of Peru's capital city, emerged victorious, but she will face a unique situation: she will have lost almost all the councilors from her coalition.

On March 19, the Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) released partial results after processing 54% of the ballots cast. Those results showed the "No" option winning, with 51% of voters opting against recalling the mayor, from the leftist coalition Fuerza Social (FS), and 48% voting "Yes."

The preliminary results also indicated that 21 councilors would be recalled, 19 from the FS and 2 from Solidaridad Nacional, the party led by Luis Castañeda Lossio, Villarán's predecessor. If those results hold, new municipal elections would have to be held around November 2013 to choose new councilors for those recalled. In the meantime, they will be replaced by their alternates.

To finalize the official results, the ONPE must review the remaining 46% of ballots that were observed but not officially counted. This will take about one month. Election officials say that the final result will not affect the mayor's outcome, but it will confirm which councilors will be recalled.

Villarán said that her municipal administration would work for all Limeños, whether they voted for or against the recall. She said that she is meeting with district authorities to work together on the urgent problems facing citizens in her jurisdiction. "As the metropolitan authority, I have a duty to everyone, and that is what I want to convey to them. They have a mayor to initiate public works, to work with the district mayors, all together, united, to do things better, more quickly, and we will do so for the benefit of the residents," Villarán told the press.

One or more contingencies

Villarán took office for a four-year term on Jan. 1, 2011, and practically the next day a recall campaign began, headed by lawyer Marco Tulio Gutiérrez, the front for Solidaridad Nacional, whose leader Castañeda Lossio faces corruption allegations (NotiSur, Nov. 30, 2012).

Although throughout the recall process, Castañeda Lossio never admitted that he was carrying the baton for the campaign, various audio tapes released by journalist Rosa María Palacios on her television program two days before the referendum made it clear that the former mayor was running the recall effort through Gutiérrez, Solidaridad Nacional Deputy José Luna Gálvez, and others.

Backers of the recall effort received support from former President Alan García of the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA, Partido Aprista Peruano), while those calling for a No
vote were backed by leftist parties and unions as well as rightist leaders such as former presidential candidate Pedro Pablo Kuczinsky, former President Alejandro Toledo of Perú Posible (PP), the longtime former leader of the Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC) Luis Bedoya Reyes and the current PPC leader Lourdes Flores Nano, who ran against Villarán in the 2010 mayoral election. For those calling for a No vote, what was at stake in the recall was democratic institutionality.

Until two weeks before the referendum—which cost approximately US$40 million—polls indicated a victory for the Yes vote, but that began to change rapidly just ahead of the balloting.

For many, the failure of referendum backers to show up at a forum to present their reasons for the recall (exposición de motivos), held a week before the vote at the office of the Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE), marked the unraveling of the pro-recall effort. Only one backer of the Yes vote appeared, Patricia Juárez, whose input centered on repeating what had become the slogan of the campaign: Villarán has not carried out public works; she is ineffective. In addition to the less-than-successful forum were the tapes making it clear that Castañeda Lossio was heading the recall effort.

But analysts agreed that what tipped the balance in Villarán's favor was the strategy of her campaign advisor, Argentine publicist Luis Favre, who brought together artists and athletes to transmit the value of No, with slogans such as NO to corruption, NO to the mafia, NO to chaos.

And more than anything else, the backing of Flores Nano was crucial. "For undecideds to decide to vote No, Lourdes Flores had to appear," said political analyst Carlos Meléndez in statements to the magazine Velaverde.

The No vote won in 23 of Lima's 42 districts, many with higher-income populations, including districts whose mayors are in the PPC. The Yes vote was concentrated in nine districts that at one time were considered leftist.

Ten days before the vote, Villarán apologized for mistakes made in her administration and promised that, if she was retained as mayor, she would take "the municipal administration in a new direction."

"I am aware of the discontent and frustration of a sector of the population, I admit that not everything has been good. We have done much for Lima, we could have done more and done things better. We did not know how to build alliances and consensus to improve our administration," she said in her speech. "If the people give me this opportunity, I propose a broad-based municipal administration, inviting all the forces that defended the No vote to participate, to work together for the good of Lima."

The use for the first time of the recall process for elected officials in Lima, after 19 years of being used in the provinces, has opened a debate on whether it should continue in effect.

After the vote, Villarán expressed support for eliminating the recall for democratically elected officials, saying it is "a waste of time and money and creates anxiety in the people," and adding that Congress should address the matter.

"What must be done is to revoke the revocation....I do not support this process. We have gone through this difficult time, Lima should never have had to go through this....We must concentrate resources on public works," she said in statements published in El Comercio.

The president of the Tribunal Constitucional (TC) Óscar Urviola brought up the need to initiate a debate regarding an eventual constitutional and legal amendment to the recall law (Ley de los
Derechos de Participación y Control Ciudadano) to clarify the specific grounds for recall and the special conditions for convoking a recall or to eliminate it from the democratic system.

Urviola said that, besides being very costly, in most cases the recall process is used with a "spirit of revenge to bring down the victorious candidate in district towns." Nearly 1,500 district and provincial mayors and councilors have been recalled since the law went into effect.

-- End --