8-30-2013

Peru's President Ollanta Humala Sees Popularity Plummet

Elsa Chanduvá 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.
Peru's President Ollanta Humala Sees Popularity Plummet

by Elsa Chanduví Jaña
Category/Department: Peru
Published: 2013-08-30

President Ollanta Humala began the third year of his term on July 28 isolated politically, with the lowest approval rating since he took office and facing constant social protests against his administration.

In the latest Ipsos national urban poll commissioned by the daily El Comercio in August, Humala's approval rating fell to 29%, four percentage points lower than in July, when it had dropped eight points; since April Humala's approval rating has declined 22 points, based on previous Ipsos polls.

In the most recent poll, 64% of respondents said they disapprove of Humala "because he does not fulfill his promises/lie;" 53% "because of crime/a lack of citizen security;" and 38% "because prices are rising." At the same time, 38% believe "there is corruption in his administration" and 32% "that he has appointed the wrong people to public positions."

"Humala's betrayal of his electoral and governmental promises is his worst liability," said political analyst Raúl Wiener, a columnist with the daily La Primera.

During his campaign, Humala promised to build a pipeline to transport natural gas from the Camisea fields in Cusco to areas in southern Peru. This project has been plagued by government delays in getting the project off the ground. Although the government insists that it will finish construction in the first half of 2016, specialists say that the goal is impossible to meet.

Humala also promised to maintain a permanent dialogue with workers. However, reforms in the health system, universities, and public administration promoted and pushed by the administration have been implemented without the participation of workers and civil society.

"While the protests have various causes, undoubtedly the practice of imposing and approving first and informing and dialoguing later is the most important," Carlos Tapia, a former Humala advisor, told La Primera.

"Outraged" citizens
"Outraged" university students and activists from leftist parties, unions, and youth groups took to the streets on July 27 to protest against Congress and legislative measures from the Humala administration. It was the third mass demonstration in less than 10 days in July.

On July 17 and 22, thousands of students and ordinary citizens held a protest against the deal negotiated by deputies from the governing Gana Perú and its allies, Fuerza Popular, Perú Posible, and Alianza por el Gran Cambio, who used their superior numbers to fill 10 vacancies in the Defensoría del Pueblo (1), the Tribunal Constitucional (6), and the Banco Central de Reserva (3), institutions responsible for fundamental legal issues in the country, protection of the rights of society and of persons, constitutional guarantees and rights, and management of the currency and public finances.
By voting for all nominees in a unit (not individually) on July 17, the deputies were able to impose their choice of candidates even though in previous weeks some political sectors and civil-society groups had seriously challenged some nominees because of their anti-democratic past and lack of professional qualifications. The most serious case was that of Rolando Sousa, who was named to fill a vacancy on the Tribunal Constitucional. Sousa defended jailed ex-dictator Alberto Fujimori (1980-1990) and was the architect in 2010 of Decreto Legislativo (DL) 1097, which allowed shelving trials on human rights crimes. The DL was immediately used by jailed members of Grupo Colina to petition for their release. The DL was rescinded following a national and international outcry (NotiSur, Sept. 24, 2010).

The second-most-controversial appointee was lawyer Pilar Freitas, candidate of her ally former President Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006) of Perú Posible for Defensoría del Pueblo, who had been involved in several scandals throughout her political career. The most serious complaint against Freitas is her alleged participation in falsifying signatures to register Perú Posible with the Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE) ahead of the 2000 elections.

When the outraged young people, organized through social media, protested against the move by the governing-party legislators and their allies, they were met with police repression.

"Those who promoted or accepted this infamous pact colluded against democracy, trading principles for ulterior interests by appointing persons with corrupt backgrounds and involved in dismantling the rule of law to posts at key institutions for defending human rights," wrote José Ugaz, a member of the board of Transparency Internacional (TI).

The scene of outraged citizens' taking over the streets caused the executive to reverse course a week later, practically forcing Congress to rescind its questionable election. Despite the reversal, citizen groups called a new march to defend democracy for July 27.

"We are seeing a mobilization, led by young people, demanding improved functioning of the key institutions of democracy. It is a protest not just against Congress but also against taking political and personal advantage of the institutions," political analyst Aldo Panfichi told La República. "They are rebelling against the idea of bribery, corruption in institutions such as the judiciary, cronyism in filling posts, and dividing up appointments. They say, 'I won't be an accomplice to this.'"

"Turning his back on the street"

In this context, the annual presidential message on July 28 created expectations among most people for a real change in the government. Workers hoped that the president would announce steps to correct government-approved measures cutting labor rights such as the Ley del Servicio Civil, which restricts collective bargaining and union freedom.

However, the opposition and political analysts characterized Humala's message to the nation as insignificant, scattered, assistance-oriented, and imprecise. "He lacks a central message to reconnect him with the country," said political analyst Carlos Monge.

"He turns his back on the street," was the title of Frente Amplio de Izquierda's press release distributed minutes after Humala finished his address to the nation. It did not mention anything about the scandal in Congress, or workers' demands, or the gas pipeline, or the economic slowdown caused by the drop in mineral prices.
"Much of what was said in the speech is a copy of what was said a year ago and will probably be repeated in next year's speech," said historian and political analyst Nelson Manrique in his column in La República. "Faced with corruption—a fundamental national issue—he again promised to demand no statute of limitations on crimes and added 'civil death' for criminals, but the announcement was not accompanied by a legislative initiative to make it happen," said Manrique.

Neither the gender parity in his Cabinet, with nine women ministers—half the Cabinet, not counting Prime Minister Juan Jiménez—nor the joint police and armed forces operation that recently killed two important Sendero Luminoso (SL) leaders in the VRAEM (Valles de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene, y Mantaro) have raised Humala's approval ratings.

Moreover, the latest Ipsos poll also revealed that 50% of respondents believe that there is serious drug-trafficking influence in the government. They also clearly believe that former Deputy Nancy Obregón—detained on allegations of drug trafficking—entered politics thanks to Humala putting her on the legislative slate in 2006.

In an effort to reverse this situation, the prime minister has called on opposition political forces to initiate a dialogue with the government.

Humala recently remarked that the economic crisis is now being felt in the country, which brought harsh criticism from political leaders like former Presidents Alan García (1985-1990, 2006-2011) and Alejandro Toledo, as well as Keiko Fujimori.

The president responded to the criticism, saying, "I have said that the crisis has arrived, but we have a solid economy, which makes us confident that we will come out ahead. Peru is a leader in Latin America."

For many, the government needs political operatives who go beyond responding to opposition criticism. The government boasts of having a technocratic Cabinet, but for analysts like Alberto Adrianzen, this hides "the government's political isolation and solitude, precisely because of the growing personalization of power and the active presence of the lobbies from organized economic and political sectors."

-- End --