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Candidates With Shady Pasts in Peru’s Local Elections
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Category/Department: Peru
Published: 2014-09-19

Peru’s regional and municipal elections scheduled for Oct. 5 are clouded by a considerable number of candidates with shady pasts convicted of graft, embezzlement, drug trafficking, and aggravated theft.

The Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE) reported that, as of the July 7 deadline, some 14,171 lists of candidates and 116,252 resumes had been submitted nationwide to the Sistema de Registro de Personeros, Candidatos y Observadores Electorales (PECAOE). There were 322 candidates for regional elections, 1,930 for provincial municipal districts, and 11,919 in municipal districts. In Metropolitan Lima, 13 candidates registered to run for provincial mayor. In all, 2,036 mayors and 25 presidents of regional governments will be elected.

On Aug. 8, the JNE issued a list of 2,131 candidates who are also on the Registro Nacional de Condenas (national registry of convicted persons), including those in various regional movements who had been convicted of drug trafficking or terrorism.

Verita, a candidate-resume search engine created this year by the Utero.pe Web site and the civil association Transparencia, revealed on July 16 that 1,395 candidates throughout Peru have civil and criminal convictions. The largest category, numbering 871, was for failure to pay alimony or child support, followed by 113 candidates sentenced for graft.

Verita works with data that candidates declared on their resumes. So the difference (736) between the JNE’s report and Verita’s data in the number of applicants with current judgments against them is the number of candidates who did not declare their convictions on their resumes.

"Unfortunately when someone convicted of drug trafficking or terrorism has completed their punishment, nothing prevents them from running for office," Francisco Távara, JNE president, explained on a television program. If they had not indicated it on their resume, then they could be excluded from being a candidate.

On Aug. 12, the JNE reported that at least 345 candidates still have pending sentences for illicit acts. This report includes 41 candidates sentenced for graft—taking public funds or goods—and 20 for falsifying documents.

Delinquent child support payments most common crime
The most common conviction among candidates who haven’t served time is for failure to pay child support (80). There are 871 candidates who have been ordered to pay child support, 21 of whom are three consecutive months behind, Minister of Women and Vulnerable Populations Carmen Omonte said on Aug. 19.

Omonte also said eight have been convicted of sexual offenses. "We have obtained this information because declarations have been made as they should be," she said. "However, the figure may be higher because some have not been recorded."

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Of the 345 candidates with pending sentences, 190 represent regional and local movements. Another 155 come from political parties such as the Partido Aprista Peruano (APRA), 9; Acción Popular (AP), 23; Somos Perú (SP), 11; Perú Posible (PP), 8; and Partido Solidaridad Nacional (PSN), 2.

"We have more than 1,000 candidates in the entire country and that only 23 [have pending sentences] means this is a small percentage, though nonetheless troublesome. Undoubtedly, the selection filters must improve," Víctor Andrés García Belaúnde, an AP deputy, told El Comercio.

On Aug. 11, Interior Minister Daniel Urresti gave the JNE president a list of 124 candidates with links to drug trafficking: seven running for regional presidencies, 15 for provincial mayors, and 42 for district offices. Rounding out the list are candidates for provincial, district, and regional councilors.

Urresti’s report is based on intelligence reports from the Dirección Antidrogas (Dirandro). Most candidates on Dirandro’s list live in the Huallaga valley and in the VRAEM (Valle de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene, y Mantaro) where drug trafficking is prevalent.

The Political Party Law stipulates that a person who has a pending sentence for an intentional crime cannot run for office in regional and municipal races. The exclusion applies to an individual candidate, not the political organization that proposed his candidacy.

"Some political parties have to be more discerning in their internal democratic processes because that is the first filter on the selection of candidates," JNE legal advisor Virgilio Hurtado told La República.

Fernando Tuesta Soldevilla, who served as chief of the Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) from 2000 to 2004 told Diario Uno: "The electoral process has become a stage where individuals and groups who think that gaining power will bring them benefits are entering, and weak parties unable to generate candidacies from within are postulating candidates with links to drug trafficking, to the mafia."

**Lima also involved**

A recent investigative report published by the magazine Poder linked the firm Comunicore and persons closest to former Lima mayor Luis Castañeda Lossio with firms dedicated to money laundering. Castañeda is once again a running for mayor (NotiSur, Nov. 30, 2012).

Comunicore was set up during Castañeda’s last term (2007-2010) expressively to purchase part of the Municipality of Lima’s debt to the Brazilian cleaning company Relima, in an irregular operation of 35.9 million soles (US$12.8 million based on the current exchange rate) in 2006. The operation was approved following the renewal of a contract for services with Relima for a 10-year period, from 2005 to 2015. The contract was worth approximately 550 million soles (US$196.4 million).

Diario Uno quoted Yomar Meléndez, spokesperson and council candidate in the Municipality of Lima for Diálogo Vecinal, as saying, "It worries me greatly that drug traffickers are making inroads not only in district posts but in Lima as well, and it seems even more serious because we are talking about money that comes from a crime that destroys life, youth, families while providing funds for assassins." Mayor Susana Villarán launched her re-election campaign from Diálogo Vecinal, which brings 12 political groups together.
Poder based its information on an investigation by the Unidad de Inteligencia Financiera (UIF), which worked with the Procuraduría de Lavado de Activos.

"The UIF report indicates the real head of Comunicore was Alex Montoya Agüero, a fugitive drug dealer," David Rivera Aquila, Poder’s managing editor, told La República. "Now the man who wants to be mayor of Lima [Castañeda] must tell us how he intends to be the mayor when he allegedly had managers who did whatever they wanted to do without him being aware."

Castañeda, mayoral candidate for the Partido Solidaridad Nacional (PSN), has denied having any ties to drug traffickers and said that his former municipal managers in the Comunicore money-laundering case are not part of his team. The candidate called the accusations against him a "dirty war."

Meléndez responded through Diario Uno, "It can’t be a ‘dirty war’ when your key officials—we’re talking about the municipal manager and the chief financial and administration officers, the top trusted staff—are involved in the money-laundering investigation. They are people who were on his administration in the Municipality of Lima."

**Castañeda can stay on ballot**

The JNE ruled Sept. 6 that Castañeda could stay on the Lima ballot even though he had withdrawn his candidacy five days earlier because his resume had stated he graduated from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCL) when he had really graduated from the Universidad de San Martín de Porres (USMP). It was first said that he had entered false information, which Castañeda appealed. The JNE accepted the appeal, noting that the information had not been precise.

Castañeda not only has remained in the running but all polls project he will win the election. In the CPI poll published Sept. 8, Castañeda Lossio is the frontrunner with 54.7% of the vote, followed by Salvador Heresi of Perú Patria Segura (PPS) with 9.4% and incumbent Lima Mayor Susana Villarán with 8.85%. A straw poll by Datum Internacional showed Castañeda Lossio with 51.7% of valid votes (not counting blank or nullified ballots), Villarán with 10.3%, and Heresi with 7.7%.

Villarán says that Castañeda continues to lead in the polls because her own reforms—such as reforming transportation in the capital to eliminate unregulated service and chaos—aren’t popular (NotiSur, June 29, 2012, and March 29, 2013).

Castañeda criticizes the transportation reform because, he says, it is being done on the fly. Most media echo that criticism and do little more than repeat passenger complaints about the changes underway.

"Transportation reform may cause problems, but it is for the public benefit. Help me continue this project that works and doesn’t steal," Villarán said when candidates addressed the public at a Diálogo Vecinal event.

Other problems in this election include armed attacks and death threats against candidates. Between March 1 and Sept. 9, according to La República, 215 regional and local candidates have reported being victims of these threats and attacks, and many of them have considered withdrawing from the race.
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