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Peruvian Runoff Veers Right  
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Results from the April 10 election to choose the president, two vice-presidents, 130 congressional representatives and five Andean parliamentarians in Peru confirm what polls and political analysts forecast: The person who will occupy the presidency for the 2016-2021 term will be chosen in a June 5 runoff election (NotiSur, March 25, 2016).

Although all the recent polls predicted that Keiko Fujimori, the right-wing candidate of Fuerza Popular, would get the most votes, it was uncertain whether her opponent in a runoff would be the neoliberal Pedro Pablo Kuczynski of Peruanos por el Kambio (PPK) or the leftist Verónika Mendoza of Frente Amplio. In the end, the conservative nature of Peruvian society helped eliminate the possibility that the more than 21 million Peruvian voters would participate in an election—unprecedented in Latin America, not just Peru—between two women candidates with completely opposite platforms.

With 97.58% of the ballots counted, the Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) reported Fujimori received 39.8% of the valid votes; Kuczynski, 21%; and Mendoza, 18.8%. The difference between Kuczynski and Mendoza was just over 321,000 votes. After that, Alfredo Barnechea of Acción Popular received 6.9% of the vote; Alan García of Alianza Popular, 5.8%; Gregorio “Goyo” Santos of Democracia Directa, 4%; and the remaining four candidates—including former president Alejandro Toledo of the Perú Posible party—got between 1.31% and 0.42%. Toledo received 1.31%.

Many political analysts believe Fujimori won because she is the daughter of Alberto Fujimori, who governed the country between 1990 and 2000 and is credited by some with freeing the country from terrorism. Alberto Fujimori has been serving a 25-year prison term since 2009 for crimes against humanity and corruption (NotiSur, May 1, 2009). It was his government that was responsible for promoting the notion that he had freed the country from terrorism, when in reality the defeat of terrorism and the capture of Sendero Luminoso leader Abimael Guzmán in 1992 was the result of the patient and efficient work of an intelligence agency (the Grupo Especial de Inteligencia, or GEIN) composed of officers from the National Directorate Against Terrorism. That fact was concealed by the Fujimori regime. Keiko Fujimori served as Peru’s first lady from 1994 to 2000.

A 10-year campaign  
César Lévano, editor of the newspaper Uno, said that Keiko Fujimori’s strong showing is explained by “an election campaign that has lasted nearly 10 years, with money as abundant as popcorn. In addition, it inherits the legacy of the [Alberto] Fujimori government that—even though he robbed and killed and lied about the war on terrorism—embodied at the start the public discontent against the political class and also did material work in the provinces.” Its electoral strength was evident in departments in the Peruvian jungle, in Northern Peru (with the exception of Cajamarca, won by Gregorio Santos, leader in the fight against the Yanacocha mine), as well as in Lima and other regions in the center of the country.

Pre-election polls indicated a technical tie between Kuczynski and Mendoza. During the run-up to the April 10 vote, parties on the right unleashed a dirty attack against Mendoza, making false
charges against her family and accusing her of bringing terrorists to her congressional list and of being a follower of the late Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. It appears that the negative campaign against Mendoza pushed her into third place. The fact that Gregorio “Goyo” Santos didn’t run on a Frente Amplio ticket also contributed in part to Mendoza’s third-place showing.

“Goyo should have been first in the congressional list in Cajamarca for the Frente Amplio party, followed by Marco Arana as the number two,” said Carlos Bedoya in his Uno newspaper column. “That way, the two would have entered Parliament, and the Frente Amplio would have had a spot in the runoff. But the resolution of last year’s division in the left, which was achieved in the heat of the rise of Mendoza’s candidacy, did not reach Cajamarca, where Arana’s Tierra y Libertad and Goyo’s political organization (exPatria Roja) never came to a unifying agreement.”

Arana ran as a candidate for first vice president on the Frente Amplio ticket. Santos received close to 600,000 votes in the first presidential election round.

New political scene

Having twice as many votes as Pedro Pablo Kuczynski puts Keiko Fujimori in a good position heading into the runoff election, noted Fernando Tuesta Soldevilla, a political analyst who was head of ONPE from 2000 to 2004. “In any case, the next administration, with or without Keiko, will have in Fujimorism the most important political group in the next five-year period,” he said.

Fujimori’s votes were distributed throughout the country, and her Fuerza Popular party won 71 congressional representatives, which will give her an absolute majority in the 130-seat Congress. Her brother, Kenji Fujimori, appears to be the congressional candidate to have received the most votes. If that holds true, he will be in charge of the swearing in the new members of Congress.

The losers in the election were García of Alianza Popular and Partido Aprista, Lourdes Flores of Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC), and Toledo, along with their respective parties.

They perhaps bring to an end a generation of politicians of the last century, Tuesta Soldevilla noted, adding, “The possibility opens, particularly for Apra and the PPC, of reconstituting their organizations with new generations.” On April 12, García resigned from the presidency of the Partido Aprista, an office he held for three decades, indicating that the time of change and renovation was here, and that the party should look for “new leadership.”

The PPC, which didn’t win a single seat in Congress, has been waiting for internal elections since November, but they were postponed because of the general election.

A loss for the ruling party and a win for the left

The ruling Partido Nacionalista was suffered defeat. In March, it withdrew from the campaign once it saw it would not have significant support, and therefore will not have representatives in the new Congress, which will be installed July 28.

Even though Mendoza did not make the runoff, the left has scored significant victories, as the Frente Amplio established itself as the second congressional force with 20 seats, three more than the PPK. Its electoral strength rests in the southern Andes—mostly in mining districts—where voting in its favor was overwhelming. After three decades, the left will arrive in Congress with its own party. Consolidating similar electoral strength in regional and municipal elections in 2018 is one of the major challenges the Frente Amplio faces now.
Tuesta Soldevilla pointed out that the Frente Amplio “now has its own caucus, which opens the possibility of uniting a left that has been erratic and disunited for so long.”

“In the span of a year or a year and a half, the left has renovated itself. [It is now made up of] young people, politically agile and clear. Perhaps with more time it would have managed to become the face of what we define as the ‘pro-change’ [movement]. Apurímac is the area with the most mining projects in Peru, and more that 50% voted for the Frente Amplio. This entire sector, which has made its position clear and is asking for changes, cannot be disregarded, whether the PPK or Keiko takes power,” the analyst José Luis Incio told El Comercio. Incio, along with the Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE), presented the political electoral map of Peru in 2012.

For his part, Acción Popular candidate Alfredo Barnechea helped his party elect its own caucus again, with five seats. The Alianza para el Progreso got 10 seats, despite its presidential candidate, César Acuña, being excluded from the election by the JNE at the beginning of March for having given out money during his electoral campaign.

**Bleak future**

In the runoff, the two candidates will try to capture the voters from the center and the left. The losing parties will have to decide which of the two candidates they will support.

Fujimori doesn’t have it tied up. Stacked against her is a 51% “anti-vote”—voters who say they won’t vote for her. An example of that was the recent series of demonstrations against the “auto-golpe,” led 24 years ago by her father, who dissolved Congress and intervened in the attorney general’s office and judiciary. More than 50,000 people took to the streets of Lima on April 5 under the slogan “No to Keiko,” and thousands of other Peruvians did the same in cities across the country and abroad.

If Fujimori wins the runoff, Uno’s Lévano said, “the abuse of authority, the insolent arrogance and its links with the national and international extreme right, especially from Latin America, indicate that a Fujimori government with a strong party in Congress will be the most reactionary and corrupt in a country that has already suffered Alberto Fujimori and Vladimiro Montesinos.” (Montesinos was the head of Peruvian intelligence under Fujimori.)

Should Kuczynski win, he will have to ally with the Fujimorists in Congress since he wouldn’t have a majority, even with all the other parties on his side. This won’t be very difficult for him, as in 2011, when he didn’t make the runoff and wanted to keep President Ollanta Humala from winning because he considered him “a jump into the abyss,” Kuczynski supported Fujimori (NotiSur, June 24, 2011).

Regardless of the outcome of the voting, writer and analyst Gustavo Faverón told the newspaper Uno, “Alberto Fujimori soon is going to be deciding the future of the country, whether it be through his daughter or through his giant puppet.”

Sinesio López, another analyst, told Uno, “I would say that it’s going to be an overwhelming majority, a little dictatorial, and I don’t know what capacity minorities will have to defend themselves against the overwhelming majority [of Fuerza Popular]. That’s in Congress. Now if they win the presidency, God help us, because they would have all the power to do whatever they want.”

Social movements, workers, women who were victims of forced sterilizations during Alberto Fujimori’s government, communities that oppose mining operations that contaminate rivers and
lakes, indigenous communities that demand title to their lands, young people who want labor rights and dignified work ask: Which of the two electoral rivals represents for me a real change and respect for my rights? The obvious answer is distressing.

“The Peruvian people expect us to be firm and scrutinize the opposition, and that will be our role from now on—not only in Congress but in all public spaces,” Verónica Mendoza told reporters. We will be watchful for any unjust act or any attempt to reduce or weaken our institutions, which is what we fear will happen with the forces that made it to the runoff.”

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