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Elsa Chanduvá Jaña

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President-elect Kuczynski Brings Ambitious Plan to Peru’s Government Palace

by Elsa Chanduví Jaña
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Following five days of tense waiting, the Peruvian government announced the results of the presidential runoff election on June 9: Peruanos por el Kambio (PPK) leader Pedro Pablo Kuczynski had defeated Fuerza Popular (FP) candidate Keiko Fujimori by more than 41,000 votes. Up until a week before the election, Fujimori—daughter of a former dictator serving a 25-year term in prison for corruption and crimes against humanity—had been favored to win (NotiSur, March 25, 2016, and April 22, 2016).

With 100% of the actas counted (equivalent to 99.77% of those turned in), the national elections office, Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) indicated that Kuczynski had 50.12% of the valid votes, while Fujimori obtained 49.88. loss Actas are the documents that each of Peru’s 78,000 voting centers hand over to the electoral authorities indicating the number of votes for each candidate and the number of null and blank votes. About 300 voters cast their ballots in each voting center. The Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (National Board of Elections, JNE) said results would be official on June 28, when it would deliver to Kuczynski the credentials as president of the republic for the 2016-2021 term.

“We are grateful for a democratic election. We accept these results with much modesty,” Kuczynski said when the ONPE results were announced. “Peru is a big country in heart and soul. I am going to dedicate myself to work for all of you so that in 2021, the bicentennial year, Peru will be a different country—a renewed country… Peru faces major challenges, and we want a united, reconciled country, ready for dialogue.”

The president-elect immediately began to receive congratulations from foreign heads of state and national political leaders. Nevertheless, Fujimori’s first reaction was to refrain from recognizing the results, though she finally did so reluctantly, saying they were confusing without explaining what she meant.

“Upon learning the results and even with some still uncounted votes in the Jurado, we democratically accept these ONPE results, because we are a serious political organization, and out of respect for the Peruvian people,” Fujimori said at a June 10 press conference. The 173 actas still to be reviewed by the special electoral commissions at the time were equal to 0.22% of the votes, which is to say that even if Fujimori had won all of them, the final election tally would still give Kuczynski the victory.

“The country has witnessed a campaign that promoted confrontation between Peruvians, that sought to and succeeded in awakening hatred and fanaticisms that weaken democracy,” Fujimori went on to say. “Even when the results are confusing, they also indicate that Fuerza Popular has been asked to be the opposition, and that is the role we will firmly fulfill. We will be a responsible opposition, with a matrix dedicated to representing the feelings of the more than eight million Peruvians who voted for our government plan. We have a legislative agenda that we will ask Congress to approve.”
As of press time, Fujimori has not met with Kuczynski and was waiting for the JNE to ratify his victory. This is Fujimori’s second consecutive loss in a presidential runoff.

**Victory for anti-Fujimorism**

An important factor in Kuczynski’s presidential victory was the reports—based on a recording of former US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) informant Jesús F. Vásquez—that FP Secretary General Joaquín Ramírez was being investigated for money laundering by the DEA (NotiSur, May 27, 2016). Added to that was the fact that FP vice presidential candidate José Chlimper gave Panamericana Televisión a tampered recording aimed at discrediting Vásquez, in which Vásquez appeared to deny what he had said in the original recording. This led to the cancellation of the program and the resignation of several Panamericana directors. The incident made many voters wonder whether a Fujimori government would be corrupt like her father’s.

“Drug trafficking, corruption, and crime are the three horsemen of the apocalypse... This is why it is so important to break with drug traffickers and have no association with money laundering,” Kuczynski said during the May 29 presidential campaign debate, which many analysts concluded he had won.

The “No a Keiko” collective, formed to oppose Fujimori, called for a second national and international march on May 31. The march was as well attended as the first one, held before the general election. Former presidential candidates Verónica Mendoza (Frente Amplio) and Fernando Olivera (Frente Esperanza), the former Supreme Prosecutor Avelino Guillén and former Anti-Corruption Prosecutor Julio Arbizu, as well as leaders of the workers group Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú (CGTP) among others, headed the rally.

Kuczynski, who at first had indicated he would attend the demonstration, later reiterated his support of its principles but said he would not participate. “The reason is simple: I, like Keiko Fujimori, am a presidential candidate; [therefore] it would be anti-democratic for me to say that she cannot participate.”

Mendoza, who had come in third in the general election, endorsed Kuczynski on the eve of the march.

“This is a totally peaceful demonstration because we are doing it for the love of our country, because we want to leave our children with a peaceful future... Because voting for a spoiler or leaving the presidential choice blank favors Keiko, checking the symbol of Peruanos por el Cambio (PPK) is the only alternative,” Mendoza said in a video in which, speaking in Spanish and Quechua, she announced her support for the PPK. The video, which went viral on social media, has been seen more than 2 million times on Facebook.

“This caused a section of the electorate, especially young students, one of the largest population segments in urban areas, to consider non-economic issues, such as human rights and the fight against corruption,” Noam López, a political scientist, told the newspaper El Comercio.

Political analyst Carlos Bedoya noted that the democratic liberalism of the PPK had had to join the anti-Fujimori front in order to defeat the FP candidate, but even that was not enough. Bedoya attributed the PPK victory “to Verónica Mendoza, the undisputed leader of the national leftist electorate, who still asserted her differences with Kuczynski’s neoliberalism, but who campaigned
hard in the seven days before the election (in both Spanish and Quechua), calling on her supporters to vote for the PPK as a vote against the return of the narcos to the Government Palace.”

Alfredo Torres, CEO of the Ipsos polling firm, compared the results of the voting with the results of a mock vote Ipsos released a week before election day, noting that the blank (or null) vote had contracted from 13.5% to 6.5%. “That is to say, many who had planned to leave their vote for president blank opted to vote for the PPK,” he said in an article in El Comercio titled “Defeat of the Favorite.”

Outlook for the administration

Kuczynski, who has started to work on forming his first Cabinet, announced that Alfredo Thorne, the chief spokesman and head of his economic plan, will be the minister of economy and finance. None of the 18 PPK congressmen-elect will likely be included in the Cabinet, since that would weaken the party’s parliamentary representation in a chamber with a strong Fujimorista majority—the new legislature will have 73 pro-Fujimori representatives, even though only 11 of them are affiliated with the FP.

“We will try to have a broad-based Cabinet that presents the country’s diverse points of view, a Cabinet with people from different regions, high-level professionals,” said Kuczynski, who takes office on July 28. “We want ministers who will welcome and listen to the people.”

Kuczynski “has the great advantage of being an experienced politician, but he doesn’t have a humanistic view of politics, and his team is as technical as he is,” Pablo Quintanilla, a professor at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, told the daily Uno. “But seeing some good intentions to correct the country’s course does give me confidence.”

Kuczynski, 77, had been minister of energy and mining during the second term of President Fernando Belaunde Terry (1980-1985) and minister of economy and finance and chief of staff during the government of Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006).

Mendoza has indicated that her Frente Amplio, which has 20 representatives in the legislature, will not form part of the Cabinet. After a June 20 meeting with Kuczynski, she said her party would not be an obstructionist opposition party. “We will be a democratic, proactive, constructive, and vigilant opposition, providing public and private oversight,” she said.

The president-elect has indicated that one of the first steps he will take will be to confront Peru’s crime problem by implementing the security measures he laid out in his government plan. “We have to change the system of cumulative sentences, in addition to building and reforming prisons to make them productive and allow people held there without sentencing to rejoin society if there is nothing important preventing that,” he said.

His government plan also includes professionalization of the military and modernization of the armed forces. He favors decentralization to ensure that regional governments are closer to the central government and that their projects are studied and carried out in the shortest time possible to foster modernization. With that end in mind, he will create a Ministry of Regional Support. He proposes to re-energize the country’s economy by offering small and mid-sized companies regulatory and fiscal incentives that will allow them to create jobs. He has proposed the creation of an Oro Limpio (Clean Gold) program to bring informal miners (NotiSur, April 27, 2012) into the formal economy; an expanded forestry conservation program; and a climate change law. Also on
his government agenda is the creation of mechanisms to strengthen the judicial system, including a comprehensive reform of the justice system and specialized anti-corruption training for judges.

Pre-election promises

On May 29, two days before the anti-Fujimorism demonstration, Kuczynski signed an agenda document that includes respect for labor rights, sustainable socio-economic development that respects indigenous peoples and their territory, justice for women sterilized in the 1990s, reparation for those affected in the armed conflict, fighting corruption, continued imprisonment of former dictator Alberto Fujimori, fighting drug trafficking and contract killings, and respect for the right to protest and the decriminalization of protestors. It was written by members of the human rights group Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDDHH), and by members of a war victims group and of union organizations from the mining, textile, fishing, oil, and telephone industries, as well as students from various universities, and the LGBT community.

“These agreements and intentions that I myself received, discussed and signed, are going forward,” Kuczynski said. He added he would comply with agreements made with workers’ groups such as the Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú (CGTP) and the Sindicato Unitario de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú (SUTEP). He said he is committed to increasing teachers’ wages and reiterated his commitment not to privatize the state-owned water and sewage service, the Servicio de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado de Lima (SEDAPAL). He pledged to back a massive program of new water and sewer connections in Lima and throughout the country (NotiSur, Feb 24, 2012).

Kuczynski made commitments to win the votes that brought about his victory, so he is now obligated to fulfill them. None of the sectors are willing to give him much of a honeymoon period in the presidency. As political analyst Sinesio López said, “He will tend to make agreements with Fujimorism in terms of the economic model and to make agreements with the center and the left in everything that has to do with the deployment of social policies and respect for freedoms and human rights.”

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