

Peru and Ecuador: Elections and Democracy in the Andes

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RESULTS – DATA

On April 11, 17.2 million Peruvians participated in the first round of our general elections (or 70% of total eligible voters (24.5m). We had a choice of 18 presidential candidates and 20 parties to represent us in Congress.

As we know, the first place went to schoolteacher and *rondero* Pedro Castillo of the *Peru Libre* party, with 19% of valid votes, and barely 11% of total voters (2.6m). Behind him placed veteran politician Keiko Fujimori of *Fuerza Peru*, with 13.3% of valid votes, and just 7.3% of total (1.8m).

However, blank and null votes came in at 17%. Meaning that more Peruvians voted blank (over 2 million) than for second place Fujimori (1.86m).

It means that just 20% of voters decided who goes into round 2 on June 6. Now the candidates have to convince the other 80% of us who did not want either of them, either by offering something new or – more likely – undermining their opponent.

One week later, the first post-electoral polls gave a strong lead to Castillo, with 42% in his favor versus 31% for Fujimori. However, 16% continue to say they will vote blank or null, and 11% say they are not made up their minds.

Class differences among voters appear to be stark. While 52% of upper class voters say, they will choose Fujimori, 50-56% of the poor are for Castillo, and the large but vulnerable middle classes are divided between the two.

Distance between Lima and the rest of the country is also notable. While a plurality of limeños (43%) say they favor Fujimori, 51% of the rest of the country favor Castillo, and 60% in rural areas. While Lima has the largest number of total voters at 34%, the city also houses large numbers of migrants and lower income citizens whose sympathies are not those of the elite.

At this point, 55% of voters say they would never vote for Fujimori – she remains the candidate with the strongest negatives in the race. However, there are 7 weeks to go in this campaign and either one could pull it off. It promises to be very intense (3m).

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

So is this a surprise outcome? On one level, it is not. Fragmentation of the vote is not new in Peru; in prior races, we have had large numbers of candidates running, divisions among the so-called Left, Right and Centrist groups, with a predominance of personalities over programs, and important differences between social classes, and between Lima and the rest of the country, with greater radicalism in the south and the Andean highlands.

It is also not new to have a dark horse, or lesser known candidate on the national scene, who emerges near end of the race – this has been happening since 1989 (Belmont), Fujimori did it in 1990, Toledo 2000, Humala 2006, Mendoza came close in 2016, and now Castillo 2021.

Therefore, the “surprise” here is largely on the part of the Lima-based media and political analysts whose own lenses make it harder to see what the rest of the country is going through. Even though we have more sources online than ever before and plenty of evidence of social tension and conflict in the past year suggesting fertile ground for more radical alternatives.

SO, WHAT IS DIFFERENT IN 2021?

Clearly, the economic and social context: The impact of COVID-19 and the economic crisis generated by our prolonged lockdown, combined with the incapacity of successive administrations to address either. High levels of political instability exacerbated and made blatantly clear our historically weak State and deficient public services.

Unbelievable numbers of people dead (equivalent of 1 in 200 Peruvians) due not just to COVID but lack of access to basic care to recover in time.

Dramatic reduction in GDP, increase in unemployment and poverty, with millions of Peruvians teetering on the line or falling backwards when someone gets sick or loses her job. Combined with loss of the entire school year for hundreds of thousands of children, and extraordinary stresses and violence at home.

Social conflict has persisted despite the pandemic, with major strikes by agricultural workers, transportation workers, communities along the southern mining corridor, among others.

People are stressed, frustrated and angry. Wanting more from our leaders and from the STATE. Fed up with all the politicians who promise and cannot deliver, and who waste our time in petty squabbles, revenge and backstabbing.

Hence, the size of the “disaffected” -- blank, null and absentee voters – was much higher, and support for frontrunners was the lowest in the past 40 years.

WHAT ELSE IS DIFFERENT?

Neoliberalism under more explicit attack and the Fujimori-sponsored Constitution of 1993 is identified with that. People want something different, a STATE that works for them. Moreover, a majority say they favor a new Constitution, even when the reasons are not specified.

“No más pobreza en un país rico” – No more poverty in a rich country is the slogan of Castillo, and very effective.

Resource nationalism is more appealing, especially in those regions where large mines and hydrocarbon projects are based, Castillo and PL did very well.

They are not “anti-mining;” on the contrary, they are critical of the Green left and especially environmentalist NGOs (and most especially, those funded by the US). However, they favor putting exploitation of mineral resources in national hands, giving communities’ property rights over them, and extracting more revenue for the State. This pitch echoes with those who see all the wealth created and exported, and wanting a bigger share.

Democracy is also more severely stressed: Both candidates have played by the rules, yet the institutions and rights associated with Democracy per se, are under stronger attack.

Authoritarian positions are prominent in both camps. Fujimori embraces the legacy of her father’s regime and preaches a “hard line” on crime; Castillo advocates eliminating the Constitutional Tribunal, enacting popular vigilante justice. Both favor expanding the death penalty, challenging Pact of San Jose.

One more thing important here... Role of EDUCATION, and teachers.

As mentioned, having schools closed for a full year has brought unimaginable stress to families with children at home, lack of access to internet or even radio & TV options, no teachers to guide them as parents are busy, limited space to study. Schools in Peru have been buffers, places to send the kids during the day, as well as a channel for social mobility.

Although Castillo is not necessarily representative of the majority of teachers, the symbolism of “el maestro” is important, and most parents want the teachers back in schools.

Over half of the 37 members of Congress elected by PL may be public school teachers.

CONGRESS – WHAT STANDS OUT IS DIVERSITY OVER EXPERIENCE

Congress: 130 members total. 79 men, 51 women (record). 9-10 parties

Peru Libre: 37 (28.4%)

Fuerza Popular: 24

More women than ever in Peruvian history, and may have a woman president (or at least Vice President). That does not necessarily mean more support for gender equality or progressive family issues, as many were elected from groups with socially conservative banners. Explicitly AGAINST a feminist agenda, and even more so an LGBTQ one.

The majority (78%) are newcomers; only 9 have served in a Congress before, **and 101 to 130 have no prior experience in public office.** A third are not members of the party that elected them, and 54% affiliated at the last minute, in September 2020.

This is also not new – the majority of EACH congress in recent times has turned over, as voters are dissatisfied with the whole lot and vote them out. Now “institutionalized” with the ban on reelection promoted under Vizcarra.

Result: Gridlock or...?

Congress likely be more emboldened with a minority president, who will have to reach out and build coalitions issue by issue. High chances of confrontation.

Yet this could also provide opportunities for a well-organized minority to persuade the majority to vote on more “populist” and nationalist economic measures, and more conservative social ones

IMPLICATIONS FOR PERU’S BATTLE WITH COVID-19, ECONOMIC RECOVERY & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS?

Let us hope the Sagasti administration hurries up and buys more vaccines!

Both candidates criticized the lockdown measures and called for lifting them. Castillo's main proposal calls for more vaccination, Fujimori for wider testing and contact tracing. Castillo wants to reopen schools, Fujimori churches, and both appeal to small businesses and rural producers who want to get back to work.

IR and foreign policy issues were NOT important in the campaign, but there are significant differences in what they propose to do with an economy highly dependent on international commodity markets, trade and foreign investment.

PL proposes to reevaluate or rescind free trade agreements, Alianza del Pacifico, APEC and other trade measures.

Also strong criticism of Inter-American human rights system. Contra OEA, CIDH, Corte IDH, and international arbitration.

But all of the heavy artillery is aimed at the US. **No mention of China, for example.**

FUJIMORISMO; Supports open trade regimes her father helped to promote, Alianza del Pacifico, prioritize free trade as well as a harder line on Venezuela (though not necessarily embracing Venezuelan refugees, an issue sensitive to voters).

Bearing in mind that Ecuador will have a conservative government, Chile and Brazil may also, hard to know how this would play out in diplomatic terms, but at first glance, neither bodes well for regional collaboration on issues so vital to our common development.

Final comment:

In 7 weeks for voters to decide between two very problematic alternatives, either could result.

In political and economic elite that is “reaping what they have sown” (or not sown) in recent years – especially, triumphant stance on economic growth and insufficient attention to public and social services -- rather than learning from past mistakes

MAIN PARTIES & PROPOSALS

How much can we judge the candidates by their proposals? Difficult to tell, given how many must pass through this Congress.

A. PERÚ LIBRE vs. CASTILLO?

This is a more ideological party – old-school socialist, Marxist and anti-imperialist, very critical of the “New Left” – of environmentalists, feminists, LGTBQ, and mainstream human rights organizations. Identified with “Peru Profundo” & Los Andes, as well as LA leaders such as Castro & Chavez, Evo, Lula, Correa... (Ortega).

Less likely to modify its proposals. However, Castillo was invited by the party founder to run on this ticket, having previously affiliated with Alejandro Toledo's group, Peru Possible.

“La lucha de clases no solo se circunscribe al plano económico, político o social, sino también a los planos ideológicos y culturales. *“¡No más pobres en un país rico!*. (Ideario Cerrón, feb 2020. Líder Fundador).

In the first 6 months, Castillo promises to promote a new Constitution, one that strengthens the role of the State and makes education and health care RIGHTS guaranteed to all, not services (to those who can pay).

SUMMARY:

- New Constitution, eliminate the neoliberal elements, bolster the role of state and state enterprise and control over strategic sectors /Investment.
- Nationalize key industries (Extractives), and if necessary, recreate State enterprises
- Decentralize power, subnational governments and “el pueblo communal, campesino y native”, including ownership of underground resources (subsuelo) and prior consent (not just consultation) that is binding.
- Nationalist, anti-imperialist (USA). Critique of NGOs, human rights, environmental and feminist organizations, and LGTBQ. For their international (read US) funding and agendas, seen as a Left that sold out to translational capitalism.

DOES NOT MENTION: COVID-19 and plans to confront it (even though Cerrón is a doctor by training). The Bicentennial. Indigenas (otros terminus). Afrodescendientes (absent). China. **No un plan de gobierno.** Does Castillo have one?

But has smart moves:

- Nueva Constitución, is popular? Even if no real content
- Tribunal Constitucional – specific groups have beefs (ronderos, pensionistas, maestros who oppose new evaluation measures). As did Fujimori, building blocks
- 67% of public does not favor marriage equality also

B. FUERZA Y FUJIMORI/ISMO

As mentioned, Keiko has the highest negatives of any candidate. Legacy of her father (hero to many, dictator to others), corruption charges associated with campaign contributions, also seen as obstructionist vs. PPK, Vizcarra, supporting Merino, etc. **Therefore, a large part of her “victory” (of just 13%) is due to the fragmentation of**

the Right, with more conservatives going to Lopez Aliaga and more neoliberals supporting de Soto. Can she bring them back together? Seems likely given the threat that PL poses to their economic interests, but they are not enough.

Plan de Gobierno 2021.2026. “Plan de Rescate y Reconstrucción Nacional”. Starts out with the Bicentenario, Covid and need for reconstruction.

As Alberto Fujimori “rescued” the country from terrorism and economic crisis and launched radical neoliberal reforms, Keiko Fujimori promises to rescue the country from COVID19 and the current economic crisis and get people back to work, while cracking down hard on crime and corruption (the irony...).

Inspired by their reading of HISTORY, “two models”, 1970s-80s and failed Statist regime, versus ¡Fujimorismo exitoso! Fully embracing the Fujimori legacy of the 1990s and the 1993 Constitution as a banner. Defends that constitutional process as result of a popular vote, and stresses the economic gains made, while blaming subsequent governments for the limitations of the State and social issues.