

Peru and Ecuador: Elections and Democracy in the Andes

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Remarks by Carlos Basombrío Iglesias



This election has taken place in the worst political and social scenario Peru has experienced, since the 80s and 90s, horrible years of hyperinflation and economic collapse, that overlapped with the Shining Path terrorism and the inability of the State to confront it, with the tools democracy provided.

These five years have been times of disillusionment and tragedy. We have experienced a deep political crisis generated by the irresponsible performance of the Fujimori's-controlled Congress that sought, from the first minute, to lay down the PPK government. Not only did they achieve this, but also the country entered a situation of instability that ended up also with president Vizcarra dissolving that Congress and the new one being even worse. Vizcarra was also impeached and his ousting was followed by a brief interregnum when huge mass mobilizations against Merino appointed by the Congress as interim president, a decision that was widely repudiated and contested in the streets with huge demonstrations not seen in the country for decades. The defeated Congress, reluctantly appointed Francisco Sagasti as president, who not without difficulties will finish PPKs term in July. Four presidents and two congresses in five years.

Add to it the effects of corruption crises that confirmed how rotten the Peruvian political class was, particularly for the Lava Jato scandal, but also for other lesser-known cases outside the country. All six former presidents (Fujimori, Toledo, Garcia, Humala, Kuczinsky and Vizcarra) are in a way or other under investigation, trial or already convicted for corruption.

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Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic ended up destroying our hopes that Peru was coming forward. We did the earliest and strictest quarantines in Latin America and they destroyed the economy and brought millions into poverty, but were unable to contain the virus. The thousands of people who died on the waiting list to access intensive care units that could save their lives and the long daily lines outside the providers for getting an oxygen balloon for a relative have been and are still habitual images in the media. All Peruvians, but especially those most in need, have horror stories to tell that affected very close people and we have felt helpless to see how because of these deficiencies their lives could not be saved.

The true numbers of deaths from the virus and as a direct consequence of its existence, exceed 150,000. The second wave has been much worse than the first wave (an average of more than 1000 daily deaths in March and April) being the week before voting, decision of who to vote for was the worst of the pandemic so far.

To understand the deep detachment of the vast majority of voters from the election campaign, it is important for you to know that 18 candidates were in competition and that the electoral offer was so mediocre that until the last few days there were up to seven candidates that they could be the ones moving on to the next stage.

Are Pedro Castillo and Keiko Fujimori an expression of the polarization of most Peruvians between a hard, conservative forehead and an ultra-radical left? Not in the first round, but this will be true for the run off.