

Peru: Nationalist ex-officer Humala to face APRA's Garcia in runoff election

César Uco
24 April 2006

Ollanta Humala, a former army officer who ran on a nationalist program denouncing the rich elite and foreign capital, won the first round of presidential elections in Peru. He will face former president Alan Garcia (1985-90) from the bourgeois APRA party (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance) in a runoff election scheduled for late May or early June.

As in the presidential elections of 2001, Garcia narrowly beat the candidate of the right, Lourdes Flores, for second place. With both Humala and Garcia vowing not to recognize the Free Trade Agreement recently signed between Peru and the US and calling for structural reforms, the vote signals a popular rejection of the free-market policies that Flores symbolizes and that have exacerbated extreme social inequality in Peru.

With 96.9 percent of the votes counted, Humala from Union por el Peru-UPP (Union for Peru) leads with 30.7 percent. He is followed by Garcia with 24.3 percent and Lourdes Flores from Union Popular (Popular Union)—an alliance of right-wing parties—with 23.5 percent. The difference between Garcia and Flores is only 91,150 votes according to the Oficina Nacional de Proceso Electoral (ONPE), the government entity responsible for counting the votes.

Virtually unknown as a political figure a year ago, Humala capitalized on growing poverty in the city and countryside, and the failure of the neo-liberal program—based on privatizations and free-market measures—to create jobs and wealth for the masses. In particular, he exploited the sharp racial divide between the indigenous people of Inca descent and the mainly white ruling elite that lives in the capital of Lima.

The election results provide a distorted reflection of the profound class divisions that exist in Peru.

Humala won in 18 out of 25 departments, 72 percent of the national territory. He won in the south, all the Andean departments and in the Amazon jungle region, where indigenous people make up the majority of the electorate. Humala got over 50 percent of the votes in Cuzco, Puno, Apurimac, Ayacucho and Huancaavelica. The latter three make up the poorest region in the country.

Lourdes Flores won in Lima, which represented nearly 40 percent of the national vote. Widely perceived as the “candidate of the rich,” Lourdes won overwhelmingly in the bourgeois and upper middle class districts, receiving 55-70 percent of the vote. By a lower margin, she also won in areas populated by the lower middle class and better off sections of the working class. But she lost to Humala in the city's poorest working class districts, where there are heavy concentrations of immigrants from the Andes.

As expected, Garcia won in the north—traditionally APRA's stronghold—the southern department of Ica and in the port city of Callao (beating Flores by less than 1 percent), but lost the northern Andean departments to Humala.

The “neo-liberal” program, as it is known in Peru, only favored a tiny minority of wealthy individuals in banking and industry.

Inequality in Latin America, a study published by the World Bank in October, 2003, classifies Latin America as one of the most unequal region in the world, where “The richest one-tenth... earns 48 percent of total income, while the poorest tenth earn only 1.6 percent.” It states:

“In Peru, although there is no clear evidence that *income distribution* became more unequal in the 1970s and 1980s, data for the 1990s suggests a significant movement toward greater concentration of income.” The study includes statistics showing that, beginning in the 1990s, inequality in Peru grew in terms of income, consumption, aggregate welfare, education, hourly wages, health and infant mortality.

The World Bank report also drew attention to inequality along racial lines, pointing out that “indigenous men earn 35-65 percent less than white men.”

In Peru, more than half the population lives on less than \$2 a day.

These alarming figures stand in stark contrast to the excellent macro statistics recorded under the Toledo government—a stable currency, low interest rates, large foreign currency reserves and a growing export sector—all of which have been welcomed by foreign capital as the precondition for investing in the country.

In spite of sustained economic growth, Toledo's administration was unable to fulfill its demagogic promises of higher wages and new jobs, instead witnessing a growing wave of strikes, including a series of 24-hour regional strikes, and popular marches by school teachers, industrial workers and public employees in every major city of the country. While attempting to identify himself as a “man of the people” because of his native Indian origins, he became one of the most hated presidents in Peruvian history.

Growing inequality, rampant corruption and the discredited Toledo regime have all intensified the fragmentation of bourgeois politics in Peru. Eighteen candidates belonging to different political organization ran for president. Many of these organizations were formed in the past few years, and not a few of them will be dissolved in the coming months.

The high vote received by Humala follows a trend by Peruvians to vote against what are identified as the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie, which are widely despised as unjust and corrupt.

This tendency can be seen clearly beginning in the 1990 presidential elections. That year, following a decade of growing economic hardship under regimes of the two most established parties of the Peruvian bourgeoisie—Accion Popular (1980-85) and APRA (1985-90)—an outsider of Japanese descent, Alberto Fujimori surprised analysts when he catapulted to second place in the first round of the presidential election, and went on to beat the frontrunner backed by the Peruvian bourgeoisie, novelist Mario Vargas Llosa.

And again, in 2001 Toledo's narrow victory over Alan Garcia was due in part to his appeal to the indigenous population. As the first Peruvian president from the Indian race, he raised hopes among the Inca people that his government would make amends for the five centuries of racial

oppression and humiliation at the hands of the ruling class.

Nevertheless, corruption and oppression intensified under both the Fujimori and Toledo regimes.

Two years after taking office, Fujimori dissolved Congress and established a de-facto dictatorship. With his second in command and chief of intelligence, the infamous Vladimiro Montesinos, he presided over a police state characterized by corruption and violations of human rights during the dirty war against the Maoist guerrillas of Shining Path.

Throughout his administration's tenure, Toledo's regime was dogged by accusations of corruption and illegal deals involving members of his family.

With this history as background, Ollanta Humala demagogically exploited the racial tensions inherent to Peruvian society, while raising the banner of nationalism and the fight against corruption. During his campaign, he employed populist demagoguery to incite the masses against the political representatives of ruling elite.

In a public rally a few days before the elections, speaking in front of thousands, Humala said that among the army troops, "I never found a Kuczunski, a Diez Canseco, a Ferrero [all names of members of white bourgeois families in government posts]. There were only Huaman, Quispe, Condori... [all indigenous, peasant names]. They are the true Peruvian people."

At the rally, he denounced the relatively high salaries of congressmen and the chief of state—calling them "the morally collapsed political class"—contrasting them to the miserable wages of teachers, police, nurses and soldiers.

"We view the Argentine government, as well as other governments in the region, like the government of Lula, Chavez, Evo Morales, Tabare Vasquez and Michelle Bachelet, as part of the progressive forces that are building a great Latin American family. We want to be part of that family," Humala told the Argentine *Pagina 12* a few days before the elections.

Humala's program has raised tensions among foreign investors and members of the Peruvian ruling elite, who are concerned that his call to repudiate the Free Trade Treaty signed last week between Peru and the US will trigger capital flight, forcing Humala to dip into the national reserves.

In his speeches, Humala also invoked the nineteenth century Pacific War, which ended with Chile annexing large portions of Peruvian and Bolivian territory. He said that today there is a "dictatorship of the interest of large economic groups present in Peru," a clear reference to US and, particularly, Chilean capital in banking, utilities and commerce.

Humala's nationalism is based on the indoctrination officers receive in the Peruvian armed forces. It appeals to the masses by making reference to Peruvian heroes who sacrificed their lives for the fatherland. With populist rhetoric he says: "We represent a modern nationalism that seeks to defend our natural resources and recover our sovereignty."

Humala has declared his admiration for General Juan Velasco, who led a military dictatorship in the early 1970s. Velasco called for the end of the oligarchy, nationalized the copper mines and oil fields and tried to implement land reform.

Humala's political origins are to be found in the Movimiento Etnocacerista—named after Andres Avelino Caceres, the Peruvian general who refused to surrender to the Chileans during the Pacific War, choosing instead to retreat to the Andes where he organized peasants' resistance.

Founded by his father Isaac Humala, a lawyer from the southern Andean region and former member of the Peruvian Communist Party, the Etnocaceristas maintain the superiority of the Inca race and vow to reestablish its old glory by re-conquering the Four Sullos. This territorial division of the Inca Empire encompasses a vast area including Pasto in the south of Colombia, all of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, and reaching as far south as Tucuman in Argentina and the north of Chile.

In the late 1980s, Ollanta and his brother Antauro, both young officers

in the Peruvian Army, founded a movement called "Militares Etnocacerista" within the Armed Forces itself. For this action, the Humala brothers were punished with six days in detention.

On October 29, 2000, Ollanta and Antauro Humala led a military uprising by a small group of army reserves. Significantly, the rebellion coincided with Vladimiro Montesinos's attempt to escape to Venezuela after his corrupt and criminal activities were exposed. Many believe that Ollanta had ties to Montesinos, and that the rebellion was designed as a diversion.

Once reinstated in the army, Humala studied political science in Lima's Universidad Catolica, and was awarded the post of military attaché in France and later South Korea under the Toledo regime. In December 2004, he was discharged from the army. Failing in his efforts to be reinstated, he decided to try politics.

In the early weeks of 2005, Ollanta was in conversations with the Frente Cacerista of his brother Antauro. When his brother was jailed for an assault on a police station in Andahuaylas, in which four cops died, Ollanta distanced himself from Antauro and started shopping for another organization.

After unsuccessful negotiations with the petty-bourgeois left, Ollanta decided to create his own organization—the Partido Nacionalista Peruano—in order to run for president. Finally, he took over UPP, a political shell created for former United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar's unsuccessful 1995 presidential bid. Nevertheless, Humala's principal political social base remained with former officers and members of the army reserves.

Ollanta's claims to have distanced himself from his family, notwithstanding, his political formation has been among people advocating dictatorial, even fascist measures. In the months leading up to the elections, his wife, father, mother and brother made calls for shooting homosexuals, shooting corrupt people, shooting Toledo and his ministers, as well as setting free Shining Path prisoners and their leader Abimael Guzman.

While Humala denounces corruption, his list of candidates contains former army officers who played an active role under the Fujimori-Montesinos police state.

The Inter Press Service News Agency (IPS) posted an article on its web site entitled "Elections-Peru: The Disturbing Past of Humala's Men," revealing that "most of the officers who are now close associates of the nationalist Humala—who is himself a retired lieutenant colonel—signed the 'Acta de Sujeción', a document drafted by Montesinos, in March 1999... opposing any investigation of members of the military who took part in Fujimori's April 1992 'self-coup' or are accused of committing human rights violations during the 1980-2000 'dirty war' against the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) Maoist guerrillas."

Among the men in Humala's camp—many of whom are in jail undergoing or awaiting trial for human rights violations and drug trafficking—cited in the IPS article are two campaign managers, a former interior and defense minister during the Fujimori years, and, his brother-in-arms in Madre Mia, General Benigno Cabrera.

Another military supporter remaining on active duty is Colonel Jorge Zerillo, who now works in the army personnel office, where documents from Humala's military service record, relating to his counterinsurgency activities, disappeared from the files.

Humala himself has a dubious past. The IPS article revealed, "Cabrera and Humala are both under investigation for human rights abuses committed in Madre Mia in 1992, while serving in the army fighting Shining Path."

In its August 2003 report, the Truth Commission documented nearly 70,000 victims in the military's counterinsurgency war on Shining Path, the majority of them non-combatant Inca peasants. The report details atrocities committed by the armed forces, including torture, genocide

(killing entire peasant communities), disappearances (presumably murdered and never found) and rape.

In some ways, Ollanta Humala's story is similar to that of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Lucio Gutierrez in Ecuador. The three served in the armed forces of their countries, tried to rebel against their governments, were jailed and finally successfully ran for president.

It's worth noting that Gutierrez, like Humala, ran as a nationalist and populist, railing against the Ecuadorian "oligarchy" and identifying himself with the indigenous population. Sections of the Ecuadorian left called him the "colonel of the people." Once elected, Gutierrez gave in to the dictates of the International Monetary Fund, imposing a wage freeze and raising transportation and electricity rates. He was quickly deposed following student riots.

One major characteristic of the current elections has been the collapse of the traditional petty bourgeois left. In the 1980s, the left electoral front, Izquierda Unida (United Left), was the second largest political force in Peru. It was even capable of electing the first "socialist" mayor of Lima, Alfonso Barrantes.

Today, its best-known representative, Javier Diez Canseco, who has occupied a seat in Congress since 1980, got less than 1 percent of the vote. Another figure identified with the 1980s Izquierda Unida running for president—Alberto Moreno Rojas—got even less votes than Diez Canseco.

Coming ahead of the petty-bourgeois left was Marta Chavez, the candidate of Fujimori's party, which won 15 seats in the Congress, and the candidate put forward by an evangelical Christian group, which won three seats.

The petty-bourgeois left and the Stalinist Peruvian Communist Party have played a treacherous role of creating the illusion that an honest, nationalist military government is capable of introducing a program of social reforms.

In the early 1970s, they backed the Velasco dictatorship. Taking populist measures, Velasco used an iron fist against sections of the working class that opposed him or protested against working conditions. He also tried to build government-controlled trade union movements among the peasants and workers; the latter to compete with the Communist Party-led General Confederation of Peruvian Workers.

Following a powerful general strike in July 1977, the military decided to put an end to the dictatorship and called for a constituent assembly. The petty-bourgeois left and the Stalinists responded by working to divert the militancy of the Peruvian proletariat back into the channels of bourgeois parliamentary democracy.

Today, former Izquierda Unidad member and presidential candidate, Alberto Moreno Rojas, calls Humala's vote a "victory for the left."

With Alan Garcia being the most likely contender for the second round in the presidential elections, the Peruvian bourgeoisie has a tough pill to swallow. They face the predicament of voting for the man that nationalized the banks in the 1980s.

Garcia managed to defeat Lourdes Flores with the vote of the youth, which constitutes the largest group of the electorate, and with his ability to deliver a "convincing" public speech. This talent, the Peruvian bourgeoisie hopes, will give Garcia an edge over Humala in the proposed TV debate between the two candidates.

During his five-year presidency, Garcia unilaterally stopped paying interest on the foreign debt and tried to implement social reforms. Eventually, the economy collapsed under the weight of an inflation rate that reached 7,000 percent. Many Peruvians remember his regime for the long lines to buy bread and sugar.

Garcia presided over a corrupt government and has his own share of blood on his hands. The most notorious crime of his regime was ordering the massacre of Shining Path members in the prison El Fronton. Thus, the run-off pits against each other two men who could both be tried for war crimes.

The economic disaster of the Garcia government in the 1980s demonstrated the unviability of a reformist program. Likewise, Humala's call to create a front with Chavez, Morales and Lula is part of a desperate attempt by the Latin American bourgeoisie to confront its losses in the world market to the emerging economies in Asia and Eastern Europe.

Neither Humala nor Garcia will be able to meet the demands of Peruvian workers and the poor. The rising wave of strikes that discredited Toledo's regime will not subside and the next government will have to resort to violence to maintain bourgeois rule.

In Peru, as in Latin America as a whole, the working class has to build its own independent party and put forward a socialist program as an alternative to capitalist rule, either in its free-market or national-reformist form, and as a means of defending itself against the danger of a repressive military regime.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact