

Traditional parties take beating in Peru elections

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On October 4, 12.7 million Peruvians went to the polls to elect mayors and regional presidents. In the election for mayor of the capital, Lima, the second most important political post in the country following the presidency, Susana Villaran from Social Force has a narrow lead over her principal rival, Lourdes Flores from the Christian Popular Party-National Unity coalition.

Six days after the vote, the victor has yet to be declared. According to the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE), as of last Friday, with 73.14 percent of the votes counted, Villaran had 38.47 percent, and Flores 37.64 percent. The difference of less than 30,000 votes is too small to declare Villaran the winner, as ONPE still has to review over 1 million ballots.

The significance of Lima's mayoral elections is underscored by two facts: first, Lima accounts for close to a third of all votes in the country and, second, its outcome is seen as a prelude to the presidential elections to be held in April of next year.

The international press as well as many national political analysts have portrayed the large vote obtained by Villaran as a resurgence of the left in Peru. The Spanish newspaper *El País* wrote a few days after the elections:

"The surprising rise of Fuerza Social, a young grouping of the moderate left formed a year ago beginning with various regional organizations and one national party, has awakened hostility among conservative sectors, who criticize its alliances with more radical left groups, a very sensitive theme in a country which lived through decades of Sendero Luminoso's terrorist violence."

"In any case, it remains to be seen if the vote for Fuerza Social represents the birth of a new left option on the national scene, distinct from the nationalism of Ollanta Humala, from whom Villarán has distinguished herself."

Ollanta Humala is the former army officer who won the first round of the presidential elections in 2006, only to lose in the second round to current president Alan García. García benefited from the enormous fear that Humala—an ultranationalist who employed incendiary rhetoric aimed at stoking racial hatred against the white population based on the centuries of brutal and humiliating exploitation of the indigenous people—awakened among large sectors of the bourgeoisie and the middle class in Lima.

Writing for the Peruvian daily *La República* days before the election, Antonio Zapata, a historian and political analyst identified with the left since the early 1970s, said:

"Susana heads a political group with a very definite profile within the left. Her origins lie in the Christian movement committed to the poor, which, oriented toward liberation theology, sought to promote liberating education. For a long time it has been clear that Susana has built a group oriented towards making a synthesis between democracy and socialism. Her aim has been to seek the best of liberalism and socialism."

Those attacking Villaran for allegedly reviving the "left," a term historically associated with the struggles of the Peruvian working class, employ cheap slanders about "Marxist-terrorists." This has been the

method employed by Lourdes Flores once she realized that Villaran was rising in the polls to upset an election that the right thought it had in its pocket. (Flores had already lost two presidential elections in 2000 and 2006, in which she had started as the front-runner only to be overtaken by other candidates in the final weeks.)

From the point of view of class issues, there is neither a single article nor programmatic document of Social Force that makes mention of the working class. Its program calls for more transparency, better government and socially responsible investments.

Social Force does criticize in its founding documents the ruling Apra party and the presidency of Alan García. But this did not stop Villaran from declaring this weekend that she is ready to work with the president. Another indication that she does not and never did represent any "leftist" threat is the endorsement she just received from the novelist and winner of the 2010 Nobel Prize for literature, Mario Vargas Llosa, who declared, "Susana is not a danger." Vargas Llosa, a pro-Castro leftist in his youth, had by the 1980s made a 180 degree turn to become a supporter of free market capitalism.

So, how has a virtually unknown party like Social Force become the front runner in the mayoral elections in Lima? It is remarkable that only three months prior to the elections, Villaran registered less than 5 percent support in the polls and by the end of August less than 20 percent.

In the last month, the media helped Villaran elevate her stature and to sink that of her opponent. In the final weeks before Election Day, Jaime Bayle, who hosts the most popular political program on local television—"The Sniper"—was given a daily time slot instead of his normal weekly hour. An intelligent journalist who loves to throw low blows, Bayle used it to conduct propaganda for Villaran, while attacking Lourdes.

Perhaps more damaging was when another television station made public a taped conversation in which, in response to a fall in the polls, Lourdes Flores furiously told a high-ranking member of her Christian Popular Party: "*Me interesa un comino esta elección ... Metanse la alcaldia al poto.*" ("I could care less about this election ... They can put the mayoralty up their ass.")

So much for the intellectual caliber of the standard bearer of the Peruvian right. This statement is significant in light of the election results, which saw a dramatic loss of support for Peru's traditional parties.

The day after the elections, the Peruvian daily *El Comercio* reported: "The parties have been overcome by independent movements in the contests for the principal provincial capitals."

The governing party Apra lost its "solid north," the region in which it had consistently won by huge margins since the party was founded some 80 years ago. In particular, it lost for the second time the mayoral election in Trujillo, the birthplace of its leader and party founder Victor Raul Haya de la Torre.

Other parties of former president Alejandro Toledo (Peru Posible) and Keiko Fujimori (Fuerza 2011), the daughter of former president Alberto

Fujimori, recently sentenced to 25 years in prison for having ordered death squad massacres, got very little support, and in some cases shamefully small votes. Accion Poplar, which ruled the country on two occasions—once in the 1960s and again in the 1980s—saw its representation reduced to a handful of Lima districts and a few other districts in the country.

Lourdes Flores' Christian Popular Party-National Unity coalition got most of its vote in Lima. Ollanta Humala's Peruvian Nationalist Party, which in the presidential elections five years ago won by a landslide in Lima poor districts and throughout the southern region of Peru, had no significant following, with a few exceptions in which it entered into coalition with regional organizations.

Examples of who will be the new—or sometimes re-elected—regional leaders:

The presidency for the region of Arequipa, home of Peru's second largest city was won by Alianza por Arequipa (a coalition of regional organizations and Humala's Nationalist Party) with 31.6 percent, beating Fuerza Arequipa, with 21.6 percent. The traditional parties, Christian Popular Party-National Unity, polled just 0.85 percent; Apra, 2.8 percent; and, Peru Posible (Toledo), 0.8 percent.

The race for mayor of Arequipa was won by Arequipa Renace with 40.6 percent. None of the traditional parties got more than 2.5 percent of the vote.

The presidency for the region of Cajamarca was won by Restauracion Nacional with 39.1 percent, compared to Apra's 14.9 percent. Once a stronghold of Apra, Cajamarca is of vital importance to the Peruvian economy because of its gold and other mineral resources.

The results in most other important cities and regions tell a similar story: The rise of regional movements and the lack of any significant following for the traditional parties. Some of the winning organizations' names have little transcendence beyond a single slogan: Manos Limpas (Clean Hands) in Chiclayo, Tacna en Accion (Tacna in Action) in Tacna, Justicia Regional (Regional Justice) in Madre de Dios, and Fuerza Amazonense (Amazon Force) in the Amazon region.

The emergence of these regional movements and the rise of Social Force are a manifestation of deep structural changes that have been developing in Peru since the neo-liberal model of privatizations and accommodation to the world market was introduced under president-dictator Alberto Fujimori and subsequently maintained by Presidents Alejandro Toledo (2000-2005) and Alan Garcia (2006-2011). It corresponds to a need by the Peruvian bourgeoisie to cope with a new reality. Social Force Decentralized Party is born of the coalition of Susana Villaran's Party for Social Democracy and six regional movements.

Historically, Lima has been the economic and political center of Peru. Most development and budgetary decisions benefited the capital at the expense of the regions. This began to change with a program of decentralization that coincided with the privatization of key industries and natural resources. With the new structural changes implemented by the state, the regions began to rise in importance and to receive a larger share of tax revenues. According to a formula developed in a series of laws passed in recent years, the local and regional governments were entitled to a higher percentage of taxes originating from the exploitation of "their own" natural resources.

To a certain extent, globalization indirectly acted as a force favoring decentralization. Most transnational and foreign direct investment is going to the oil- and gas-rich regions in the Amazon and southern Peru. Investments in mining are distributed along the Andean region. In 2006, taxes from mineral extraction were distributed as follows: Cajamarca received \$115 million, Ancash \$22 million, Arequipa \$28 million, Moquegua \$79 million, Puno \$48 million and Tacna \$75 million. In contrast, Lima received only \$8 million. Since 2006, these numbers have increased significantly, but the point remains that the regions have sources

of wealth independent of Lima.

Last year, the arrogance of the central government provoked a confrontation between the police and the indigenous people of the Amazon because President Garcia insisted he did not have to consult with anyone to assign jungle territory to foreign companies seeking profits from oil, gas and lumber. A number of indigenous people and policemen died as result of Garcia's intransigence. Finally Garcia caved in to the International Labor Organization agreements, which state that indigenous people must be consulted on the use of territories traditionally considered as theirs, but not before the incident provoked mass demonstrations of national proportions against the government.

The growth of regional political organizations and the loss of influence by the traditional parties represent a repudiation of Garcia's government and its bullying policies. The declining economic dependence on the United States also undermines Lima's old yoke over the regions. While the US remains Peru's main trading partner, it accounts for less than the combined trade with China, Brazil, Chile and Europe. China is rapidly challenging the US position. While 20 percent of Peru's exports go to the US, 15.2 percent go to China. With imports, 23.4 percent come from the US, while 10.5 percent and 8.7 percent come from China and Brazil, respectively. A new transcontinental road connecting Peru's jungle to Brazil's development regions is about to be completed.

Though Peru has grown significantly in the past five years—nearly 10 percent annually in 2007 and 2008, with similar numbers expected for 2010—the unemployment rate had increased to 8.8 percent by January 2009, and the average wage is \$380. Peru remains a country with a substantial poor population. Lima's poor account for 18.5 percent of the population, with most living on the outskirts of the city. In the Andean regions, poverty reaches 65 percent.

An analysis of how Lima voted is consistent with the antagonism between the capital and the rest of the country that for so long was kept under its control and exploitation. It also indicates that Social Force is not much of a force, lacking presence and unable to fill the political vacuum left by the declining traditional parties. For example, the Christian Popular Party-National Unity coalition won the mayoral races in over 15 districts in Lima. Social Force won none.

It was only in the poor and fast-growing districts surrounding Lima, where a high concentration of immigrants from the other regions live, that Villaran won a significant number of votes over Flores for the Lima mayor election. Nevertheless, in the elections for district mayors, many "local" or regional organizations won, paralleling the lack of control of the traditional parties in the Andes, the Amazon, and the northern and southern regions of the country.

For example, in Los Olivos, located to the north of Lima, at the district level, the local group Siempre Unidos received 40.8 percent, compared to 11.9 percent and 14 percent, respectively, for Villaran and Flores.

The Peruvian ruling elite will lose no sleep if Villaran is declared the next mayor of Lima. Villaran is a very moderate representative of the Christian, democratic "left"—someone the Lima bourgeoisie considers as one of their own. That she took many of the votes that went to Humala five years ago was very comforting for the Peruvian bourgeoisie.

It is hard to make predictions as to what these results mean for the presidential elections in April 2011. Many of the regional organizations that won locally are either not positioned or lack the legal status to compete for the presidency. Left-wing journalists are already analyzing what kind of alliances Villaran will have to make. Some speculate that Social Force may go it alone with its own candidates; others predict that it might form an alliance with Alejandro Toledo.

The rejection of injustice, inequality, and the bullying practices of the Apra government has found a distorted expression in the vote for the "new face" in Lima. Outside the capital, the vote for regional organizations expresses the general rejection of the old bourgeois political

structure. These regional organizations, however, are formed by merchants, professionals, farmers, peasants, workers and teachers, among others. They are not built along class lines.

As in the rest of the world, the composition of the Peruvian working class has changed. Services account for 53 percent of GDP, industry 22.3 percent and extractive industries only 15 percent. It is only a matter of time before the world crisis wreaks its full havoc on Peru. What is posed by this coming catastrophe is the need for the emergence of a party independent from the ruling class and its ^left^h representatives, which unites all the sections of the working class around a genuine socialist and internationalist program.



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