

Crisis election in Peru yields fractured Congress

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In an extraordinary congressional election dominated by a crisis of bourgeois rule and overwhelming popular hostility to the entire political setup, Peruvian voters on Sunday failed to give any of the nine parties to win congressional seats more than 10 percent of the ballots cast. The election was a devastating defeat for the right-wing *fujimorista* party that had previously dominated the legislature.

The largest share of the vote consisted of blank and spoiled ballots cast by nearly a quarter of the Peruvian electorate. Only four of the 130 members of the previous Congress managed to hold onto their seats.

The election was the product of a protracted constitutional crisis that has its roots in the exposure of the wholesale corruption of the entire Peruvian political establishment, centered in a bribes-for-contracts scandal surrounding the operations of the Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht.

President Martin Vizcarra called the election after dissolving the Congress last September over its refusal to debate a vote of confidence. He had called for the vote of confidence after the Congress stonewalled a series of anti-corruption measures he had proposed.

Vizcarra's action marked the first such dissolution since the so-called "self-coup" staged by President Alberto Fujimori in 1992, which allowed Fujimori to consolidate a right-wing dictatorship with the support of the military. Fujimori is currently serving a 25-year prison sentence for his role in massacres and other human rights abuses as well as corruption.

The *fujimorista* Fuerza Popular (Popular Force) party, led by the former president's daughter Keiko Fujimori, which controlled an absolute majority in the Congress, denounced Vizcarra's action as a "coup" and attempted to declare the country's vice president, Mercedes Araoz, as president. Vizcarra prevailed,

thanks to both the overwhelming popular hostility to Fuerza Popular's corrupt running of the Congress, which provoked street demonstrations, and, most crucially, a declaration of support issued by the chiefs of the Peruvian security forces.

Peru's high court ruled Vizcarra's action constitutional only on the eve of the election.

Fuerza Popular was the biggest loser in the election, placing sixth with just 7.2 percent of the vote. It collapsed from its previous 73-seat absolute majority in the Congress to a 12-seat minority. On Tuesday, party leader Keiko Fujimori was sent back to prison for 15 months of preventative detention. She is charged with using her party as a criminal organization to launder some \$1 million in illegal contributions from Odebrecht to finance her 2011 presidential campaign.

Perhaps even more significant was the rout suffered by the APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance) party, a major force in Peruvian politics since its formation in 1917. It won just 2.7 percent of the vote, failing to clear the five percent cut-off for representation in Congress.

A bourgeois nationalist party that previously had a base in the working class, it was repeatedly the target of military repression in the 20th century, including a military coup staged in 1962 to prevent its founder, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, from taking office after having been democratically elected. It subsequently turned increasingly to the right, forging alliances with right-wing bourgeois forces and integrating itself into the ruling establishment.

APRA served as the main ally of the *fujimoristas* in the Congress and was deeply implicated in the Odebrecht corruption scandal. Alan Garcia, its most prominent figure and two-time Peruvian president, shot himself to death in April of last year, just as police

were coming to arrest him on bribery and corruption charges. He is only one of four former presidents to be charged. Two—Vizcarra's immediate predecessor, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, and Ollanta Humala—are detained in Peru, while Alejandro Toledo is jailed in the US facing extradition proceedings.

Placing first in Sunday's election was the right-wing bourgeois party Acción Popular. It is associated with the former two-time president, Fernando Belaunde Terry. It captured just 10.31 percent of the votes. Acción Popular is a reliable representative of Peruvian and international capital and enforcer of the dictates of the International Monetary Fund.

Coming in second and third were the Frente Popular Agrícola Fia del Perú (Frepap), with 8.27 percent, and Podemos Perú, with 8.06 percent. The first is a right-wing religious party with a rural base. Its origins lie in a Messianic religious cult known as the Evangelical Association of the Israelite Mission of the New Universal Covenant (Aeminpu), founded by Ezequiel Ataucusi, who cast himself as the reincarnation of the Holy Spirit. Upon his death in 2000, his followers waited in vain for three days for him to resurrect.

Podemos Perú is an outgrowth of the Partido Nacionalista Peruano founded by the former army officer Ollanta Humala, who is now in prison. Humala who won the presidency in 2005 by casting himself as a somewhat more moderate version of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, subsequently shifted sharply to the right.

The party's most prominent candidate, who received more votes than anyone else running for Congress, was Daniel Urresti, who served as Humala's interior minister, establishing a "tough on crime" image. Urresti, who was an Army intelligence officer in the 1980s during the dirty war against the Maoist Sendero Luminoso guerrilla movement, has been accused of participation in massacres, torture, disappearances and extra-judicial executions. Prosecuted in connection with these crimes in 2018, he was acquitted, but the Supreme Court overturned the verdict and ordered his re-trial. As a result of the election, he will be protected by parliamentary immunity.

Another party connected to Humala, the Unión por el Perú, also won congressional seats. It is a vehicle for the imprisoned former president's brother, Antauro Humala, who is in jail for staging a 2005 abortive coup against the government of Alejandro Toledo. The party,

which announced that one of its main goals would be passing legislation to free Antauro Humala, ran on a program of extreme xenophobia and support for the death penalty and the deployment of troops in the streets. Antauro Humala has called for executing homosexuals.

One pseudo-left coalition, the Frente Amplio, won representation in Congress with 5.7 percent of the vote. The failure of the Peruvian pseudo-left to gain any broad support under conditions of overwhelming popular hostility to the capitalist ruling establishment is due to its refusal to wage any genuine struggle against the right-wing capitalist policies of the Vizcarra administration, which has dedicated itself to handing over the country's mineral resources to transnational mining corporations and enriching a thin layer of the Peruvian financial elite. Instead, the pseudo-left organizations worked to channel the growing social anger of the working class exclusively against the right-wing *fujimoristas* in the Congress, while lending credibility to Vizcarra's pose as a crusader against corruption.

The new Congress, which merely serves out the term of the old one dissolved by Vizcarra, will face a fresh election in barely 18 months. Vizcarra himself has said he does not intend to remain in the presidency after 2021.

The latest elections will do nothing to resolve the profound crisis of bourgeois rule in Peru, under conditions in which the entire capitalist ruling class has been exposed as wallowing in corruption while presiding over ever-widening social inequality.

The greatest fear within the Peruvian bourgeoisie is that the country will confront an eruption of class struggle that will go beyond even the mass upheavals that have broken out all around it, from Chile to Bolivia and Ecuador. The decisive question posed is the forging of a new political movement, independent of the Peruvian bourgeoisie and its "left" representatives, to unite all sections of the working class around a genuine socialist and internationalist program.



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