
Elections in Latin American countries. La Bella (Uni. Modena): “The second round of elections is confirmation of long-standing, deep-seated problems”

At the height of the pandemic, two in three Andean countries are still committed to democracy, despite widespread uncertainty, crisis and discouragement, as revealed by record-low voter turnout. While Ecuador (with 17% no-show vote) chose liberal former banker Guillermo Lasso (who garnered 52.5% of the vote), thereby leaving small chances for the political prospects of Rafael Correa, by contrast, at the culmination of a political, institutional and ethical crisis with few prospects of recovery, Peruvian citizens have surprisingly voted the two most radical candidates out of a list of 18 (with nearly 30% voting abstention): Pedro Castillo, a left-wing outsider backed by the population of remote regions (winning almost 19% of the vote, with the count now almost over), and far-right party leader Keiko Fujimori, daughter of dictator Alberto (at 13%). In addition to being bordering countries, the political situation in Ecuador and Peru has a number of similarities along with marked differences. *In both cases, over the past two years the two Countries saw street protests and demonstrations expressing strong distrust of the political leadership, the latter being frequently accused of corruption and cronyism, including in its handling of the pandemic.* All this had an impact on the electoral process. **In Ecuador**, the two contenders reached the run-off vote almost by inertia, while the new candidates on the political arena - indigenous leader Yaku Pérez, out of the runoff for a few thousand votes, and social democrat Xavier Hervás – were defeated. Lasso won at the third round, after his 'worst' first electoral round, largely thanks to the combined vote of the two defeated candidates. The loss of political credibility and repeated scandals **in Peru** levelled out the race, which resulted in the most bizarre and surprising runoff election. An huge chasm at the centre of the political spectrum exposed two major rifts in Peruvian politics, already severely devastated: one between the right and the left, and one between the centre and the suburbs, between Lima and the rest of the forgotten country (this is reflected particularly in the votes cast for Castillo in the peripheral areas). *"This round of elections - remarked Gianni La Bella, Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, co-author with Massimo De Giuseppe of a recently published book on the history of contemporary Latin America – is confirmation of underlying and long-term problems.* Moreover, notwithstanding their respective differences, it highlighted the extent to which the experiences of Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Alberto Fujimori in Peru have permeated society.”

Polarisation and disillusionment in Ecuador. As a result of these elections, *"Ecuador proved to be a polarised country, with citizens casting their vote regardless of the candidates' profiles. It was, in all evidence, a reprisal vote against Correa",* states La Bella, referring to the former president, currently living in Belgium, unable to return to his country, having been sentenced to eight years on corruption charges. But the vote “is also the product of the negative experience with Lenín Moreno's presidency that failed to foster the country's growth, leaving room for pessimism and resignation.” Lasso will have a hard time governing now, since Arauz's party has a relative majority in parliament. He will inevitably have to reach an agreement with Pérez's Pachakutik party and with Hervás's Social Democrats. According to **Damiano Scotton**, Professor of International Relations at the University of Azuay in Cuenca, 'Lasso remains the representative of the moderate political right. Now it is hoped that the new political players will help reshape Ecuador's political bipolarity. Mr Arauz has tried to distance himself from Correa over the past few weeks, but was prevented by the former president's overly suffocating embrace.” Nevertheless, *concerns are mounting within social and progressive Catholicism, over the erosion of a number of Correa-era achievements in the area of social justice, many of which have already been challenged by Moreno, who had been originally elected with the support of his predecessor.* **Giuseppe Tonello**, former managing director of the country's largest NGO, the Ecuadorian "Popolorum Progressio" Fund, denounced: “A large part of the welfare state has been dismantled in the last four years. Not even the national postal service was left untouched,

almost everything is being privatised. *The national poverty rate increased from 28% to 47%. Formal work dropped to 30.8%. We now expect a further concentration of wealth in the hands of a few.*"

Peru, two extremes battle in runoff amidst State "rubble". Back to Peru and the surprising presidential runoff between leftist and right-wing candidates. *The dynamics of the second round are bound to be unpredictable.* Pedro Castillo (Peru Libre) is a newcomer: schoolteacher, union leader from the Cajamarca region, he fought against inequities of gold mine extraction. He hardly uses social media and on Sunday he arrived on horseback to vote. He garnered twice as many votes as the official leftist candidate, Verónica Mendoza, and won over 40% of the vote in a number of inland and Andean provinces. His programme features nationalisation and redistribution policies. Keiko Fujimori (Fuerza Popular) is running for the third time in a row, after having been defeated twice. She too won against a candidate of her same political group, Rafael López Aliaga, with 12%. The indications of the defeated candidates, the more moderate ones, are highly anticipated. These include economist Hernando de Soto, who had long hoped for a run-off yesterday, Yonhhy Lescano of Acción Popular (currently below 10%) and Julio Guzmán, member of the Purple (Morado) Party, of incumbent president Francisco Sagasti (at 2.5%). La Bella went on: *"What we are seeing in Peru is a marked institutional collapse, with virtually no State, not least because of rampant corruption, which implicated all past presidents. What is needed today is a re-foundation of ethical standards.* Moreover, there is a problem between Lima, home to more than half the population of Peru, and the rest of the country, somewhat comparable to what happens with Paris and France." Admittedly, he added, "there is one unavoidable question: how can this happen in a country that remains Latin America's Catholic country par excellence, even more so than Mexico and Colombia? It strikes me that not many people are asking this question. *The Episcopate has clearly voiced its opposition to corruption, and called for transparency.* But a step further should be taken, raising awareness on the contradiction between strong religiosity and a Catholicism that does not have a political and cultural impact. Nevertheless, I personally have great faith in the moral authority and intellectual standing of a minister like the current Archbishop of Lima, Msgr Carlos Castillo." *Journalist, "La vita del popolo"

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