

# Presidential and Congressional Elections in Peru: The Return of Alan García

Markus Rosenberger

## Executive Summary

The new Peruvian president who emerged victorious from the run-off vote on June 4 of this year is by no means unknown. Alan García Pérez was president of this South American country before, namely from 1985 to 1990. This time, he scored particularly in the northern coastal regions of the Andean country but was defeated by his rival, Ollanta Humala, in the south. After his former term in office he had left a disaster behind: In his day, hyperinflation, corruption, and nepotism, violations of human rights, the dilatory fight against terrorism, and a dramatic loss of international credibility overshadowed the image of Peru, making you wonder why he, who was responsible for all this, was given another chance.

García who, with 52.62 percent of the vote, won the elections by a narrow margin – Humala gained no less than 47.38 percent –, looks back on a successful political career whose first stage fell into the time of Alberto Fujimori's authoritarian rule, its second stage taking place after its end: In 1978, García was the youngest member of the national assembly, becoming chairman of his party, the socialist APRA, shortly afterwards. In 1985, the charismatic 36-year-old politician, who was liked by the country's poor in particular, succeeded in taking over the presidency, from which he had to resign after five years of completely unsuccessful rule. After Fujimori's coup d'état in 1992, García chose to live in exile in Colombia, whence he did not return until after Fujimori's inglorious exit from the political stage in 2001.

The second ballot on June 4 of this year had become necessary because none of the 20 candidates standing for president won the required majority of 50 percent of the votes in the first election round of April 9, although Humala of the UUP was considered the overall winner. In the second ballot, Humala was challenged by García, who had come in second in the first round, ahead of the Christian democratic candidate Lourdes Flores of the conservative alliance Unidad Nacional.

The struggle between Humala and García was marked by mutual disparagements as well as by the intervention of the Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez in favour of Humala. García's appeal to ignore this kind of interference was not in vain. When, moreover, Humala demonstratively arrived late for a battle of words between the candidates, which was scheduled for May, and expressed his contempt for the ruling political system, he drew the short straw against the rhetorically superior García, who knew how to prevent his own former failures from becoming an issue, and who spoke impressively about establishing the *sierra exportadora*, the exporting Andean region.

However, there was more that spoke for García. His APRA is Peru's best-organised party, a fact from which its candidate benefited particularly in the final stage of the election campaign. Furthermore, some parts of the middle-class camp, his actual political opponent, publicly spoke out in favour of García as the lesser evil compared with the populist Humala.

Ollanta Humala himself stands for an scintillating idea and a dubious political career. Together with his brother Antauro, the reservist of the Peruvian armed forces leads the Movimiento Nacionalista Peruano whose ultranationalist, anti-American, and antisemitic view of the world

puts him close to the Venezuelan Chávez. The active comrades-in-arms of the movement are mainly drawn from reservists. They fight for reviving the Inca culture within the framework of a new republic and, as a long-term objective pursued in step with Evo Morales' Bolivia, for establishing a new cross-border Inca empire to be called Tahuantinsuyu. The Humala brothers, whose movement formed an alliance with the Unión por el Perú (PP) for the elections, were the talk of the nation late in 2000, when they demanded Fujimori's resignation and barricaded themselves in a mine together with 60 like-minded soldiers.

To enhance transparency, and to counteract the lack of staying power and vision in many of the country's parties, a Party Act was passed not long ago; its performance so far, however, is hardly encouraging. Despite considerable hurdles, 33 parties were registered and acquired the right to participate in the elections. At the same time, progress was made in strengthening democracy within the Peruvian parties. For the first time, internal presidential candidates were elected by ballot under the supervision of the national election authority as, for example, in the Partido Popular Cristiano.

In times that are free of or precede election campaigns, the Peruvian parties generally have only a small budget at their disposal. However, the supervision of party finances is insufficient and calls for adjustments to stabilise confidence in the transparency of the political parties, the only exception being the APRA, García's party. It has a sound party structure and many donors, on whom the party relies not only in times of election campaigns.

García's lead may also be explained by his political appearance. In contrast to Humala, he was able to project his experience in the business of campaigning and ruling. The first thing he did was to submit a mini-plan consisting of a good dozen of emergency measures for his first 180 days of government to strengthen the people's trust in his leadership and to serve as basis for the following long-term government plans. This plan included, for example, halving the parliamentarians' and the president's salaries, hiring 20,000 new police officers, and increasing the capital of the national farmers' bank.

On June 3, the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) published the results of the congressional elections. According to the Office, the Unión por el Perú won 45 seats, the Partido Nacionalista Peruano around Humala won 36, Lourdes Flores' conservative Unidad Nacional 17, the *fujimoristas'* Alianza para el Futuro 13, and the Frente de Centro around the former caretaker president Valentín Paniagua five. What is needed now is a democrat's ability to form alliances together with a sense of responsibility – a postulate which particularly concerns the APRA, the Unidad Nacional and the Frente de Centro.

At the moment, it is impossible to predict the direction in which Alan García who, in contrast to his former term of office, does not hold a majority in parliament now, will steer this Andean country. The camp which is critical towards Chávez looks to the new government with expectation. García's relations with his Chilean counterpart, the socialist Michelle Bachelet, who has not long been in office, are by no means bad. The same holds true for the Brazilian Lula de Silva. And even with Uribe, the recently elected head of state of Colombia, in whose country García spent his years of exile, the Peruvian maintains the best of contacts. However, the development of the relations with Bolivia, led by Evo Morales, remains to be seen.

A mountain of work awaits García, particularly in domestic politics. In view of the nationwide regional and local elections scheduled for November, and the strong Humala opposition in large areas of the country, García should strive for a good start.

As far as the long-term development of the country is concerned, a meaningful prediction may certainly not be expected before the start of 2007.