

By Nigel Walker,
Tim Robinson

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Peru: 2021 presidential election



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Summary

Peru held a general election on 11 April 2021 to elect a President, two Vice-Presidents and members of the 130-seat Congress.

The country's National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) initially registered 22 candidates to contest the Presidency; however, by the time of the election, only 18 stood.

Opinion polls suggested none of the candidates would secure enough votes for an outright victory in the first round, with only seven likely to contest the run-off poll two months later.

The election took place under the cloud of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Government's response to the pandemic and the worsening economic situation were key factors for voters, as well as ever-present concerns about corruption.

As expected, no candidate won the 50 per cent of votes required for an outright victory, so a run-off poll between the top two candidates – Pedro Castillo and Keiko Fujimori – was held on 6 June.

Early results showed Castillo had secured a narrow victory, but Fujimori challenged the result and it took six weeks for Peru's National Electoral Jury to announce the official result.

Castillo won the election by a slim majority and will be sworn in as president on 28 July, the country's fifth president in as many years.

1 Background

Presidential elections in Peru take place every five years and a candidate must secure at least 50 per cent of valid votes to claim victory in the first round. If this does not happen the top two candidates from the first round proceed to a run-off two months later. In this case, Pedro Castillo and Keiko Fujimori were the top candidates and contested the second round on 6 June 2021.

Presidential candidates must be Peruvian by birth and at least 35 years old. Voting is compulsory for citizens aged 18 to 75.

More than 25 million Peruvians were eligible to vote in 2021 and the penalty for not voting is a fine ranging from \$6 to \$24¹.

Over the past five years, due to various corruption charges and scandals, Peru has had four presidents. The 2016 presidential election was won by Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, who was forced to resign in March 2018 after secretly recorded videos allegedly showed his supporters attempting to buy political support. Kuczynski's resignation came on the eve of a vote to impeach him for a second time².

He was replaced by Martín Vizcarra who, on 8 July 2020, called for a general election on 11 April 2021, stressing that the presidential term should not be extended by "political crises, or the pandemic, or any other factor"³.

Later that year, in November 2020, Vizcarra was impeached by Congress on bribery charges and for his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic⁴.

Following Vizcarra's impeachment, widespread demonstrations took place in protest against President Vizcarra's removal from office. Some accused the Congress of staging a parliamentary coup⁵.

The police responded forcefully to the demonstrations and two protesters lost their lives. Peru's interim President Manuel Merino (former Speaker of Congress) resigned in a televised address to the nation, after serving just five days in office⁶.

¹ [Explainer: Peru's 2021 General Elections](#), Americas Society / Council of the Americas (AS/COA), 6 April 2021

² ['Peru president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski resigns amid corruption scandal'](#), *the Guardian*, 22 March 2021

³ ['Peru's president calls general election for April 2021'](#), *Al Jazeera*, 9 July 2020

⁴ ['Peruvian Congress votes to impeach President Martín Vizcarra'](#), *BBC News Online*, 10 November 2020

⁵ ['Peru's President Merino resigns after deadly crackdown on protesters'](#), *BBC News Online*, 16 November 2020

⁶ *Ibid*

The current caretaker president, Francisco Sagasti, was elected by Congress on 17 November 2020 and tasked with steering the country towards the 2021 elections. Under Peru's constitution, presidents are barred from holding consecutive terms of office; so, Sagasti was not able to stand in this 2021 election, leaving the race wide open.

2 2021 Presidential election

2.1 Candidates

In December 2020, Peru's national elections authority registered 22 candidates for the 2021 presidential election⁷; however, by the time of the election in April, that figure had dropped to 18⁸.

According to the Peruvian Company for Market Research and Public Opinion (CPI)⁹ and a recent poll by the Peruvian Studies Institute (IEP)¹⁰, only seven candidates had a chance of going through to the second round.

The leading candidates – in alphabetical order – were as follows:

Pedro Castillo (Free Peru)

Pedro Castillo was born on 19 October 1969 in Puna, in the Tacabamba district in the north-west province of Chota. He gained a first degree and also a Master's in Education from the Cesar Vallejo University in 2006 and 2013 respectively.

Castillo began a career as a primary school teacher in 1995 and only recently became involved in politics.

His candidacy for the presidential election was registered on 9 January 2021, although his campaign was temporarily suspended just three days later when he tested positive for Covid-19.

If elected President, Castillo pledged to prioritise education, health and the agricultural sector. He said he would guarantee the acquisition of quality vaccines against Covid-19 and the mass immunisation of the Peruvian people¹¹.

He also promised to convene a Constituent Assembly to create a new constitution that “has the colour, smell and flavour of the people” and

⁷ [‘Record 22 Candidates Register to Run in Peru’s April Presidential Election’](#), *the Rio Times*, 24 December 2020

⁸ [‘The election that voters don’t want anyone to win’](#), *CNN*, 9 April 2021

⁹ [‘Elections in Peru: 4 keys to understanding the most fragmented and uncertain presidential elections in recent years’](#), *BBC Mundo*, 10 April 2021

¹⁰ [IEP Informe de Opinión – Abril 2021: Intención de voto – Elecciones Generales 2021](#), Peruvian Studies Institute (IEP), April 2021

¹¹ [Biography: Pedro Castillo](#), BBC Monitoring – Peru, 12 April 2021

promised to call a national referendum to empower the government to take this step¹².

Hernando de Soto (Country Forward – Social Integration Party)

Hernando de Soto was born on 2 June 1941 in Arequipa, Peru's second largest city.

He gained a Master's degree in International Law from the University Institute of International Higher Studies, Geneva, Switzerland.

De Soto is an internationally recognised economist and author and, in 1980, founded the Lima-based neo-liberal think tank, the Institute for Liberty and Democracy. He currently serves as the institute's president¹³.

He has also served as a director at Peru's Central Reserve Bank and, in the 1990s, was economic adviser to then-president Alberto Fujimori¹⁴.

De Soto also advised and endorsed Fujimori's daughter, Keiko Fujimori, in her 2011 and 2016 presidential runs¹⁵.

On 25 September 2020, De Soto was announced as the Country Forward – Social Integration Party candidate for the 2021 presidential election.

A free marketeer, De Soto has advocated deregulating the purchase of Covid-19 vaccines by the state to allow the private sector to buy them directly¹⁶.

In March 2021 he was widely criticised after admitting that he had flown to the United States on two occasions to be vaccinated against Covid-19¹⁷.

George Forsyth (National Victory)

George Forsyth was born on 20 June 1982 in Caracas, Venezuela, where his father was serving as Peru's Ambassador to Venezuela at the time.

Before entering politics, Forsyth had a long career as a professional footballer from 2001-2016. As well as being goalkeeper for a number of Peruvian teams, Forsyth also had a season playing for Borussia Dortmund in Germany (2002/03) and Italian club Atalanta BC (2007/08).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ [Biography: Hernando de Soto Polar](#), BBC Monitoring – Peru, 8 March 2021

¹⁴ [Explainer: Peru's 2021 General Elections](#), Americas Society / Council of the Americas (AS/COA), 6 April 2021

¹⁵ [Meet the Candidates: Peru](#), Americas Quarterly, 13 April 2021

¹⁶ [Leading candidates in Peru's presidential election](#), BBC Monitoring, 9 April 2021

¹⁷ [‘Opus Dei, leftist, former goalie: who's who in Peru election race?’](#) Reuters, 10 April 2021

In Peru, Forsyth's team (Alianza Lima Club) won the national title in 2001 and 2004.

After retiring from football, Forsyth became more involved in politics and, as a candidate of the We Are Peru party, was elected mayor of La Victoria in October 2018, winning 30 per cent of the vote.

In September 2020 he became a member of the National Restoration Party (which later changed its name to National Victory) and then resigned as Mayor the following month in order to run for President in 2021.

National Victory launched its Government Plan ahead of the 2021 election. This focused on the economy and reducing poverty, providing quality health care, education and fighting corruption and crime. The party also pledged to immunise the country's entire population from Covid-19.

Forsyth proposed changes to the constitution that would see corruption being declared as a crime against humanity and anyone convicted would never be able to work for the State again.

He said his decision to run for President was because of his "desire to change Peru, to build a fairer country in which citizens have a better quality of life that really corresponds with the wealth of our country"¹⁸.

Keiko Fujimori (Popular Force)

Keiko Fujimori was born on 25 May 1975. Her father, Alberto Fujimori, was President of Peru from July 1990 to November 2000.

She graduated with a degree in Business Administration from Boston University in 1997 and a Master's degree in the same subject from Columbia University in New York in 2008.

Keiko Fujimori was a member of Congress from 2006 to 2011 and has run for president twice – in 2011 and 2016 – and narrowly lost both times.

In April 2020 she was released from 15 months pre-trial detention, to which she had been sentenced in connection with an investigation into illegal campaign financing involving her presidential bids¹⁹. Although she is currently out of jail, Fujimori's trial is ongoing and a prosecutor is reported to be pushing for her to serve a 30-year sentence on charges of money laundering²⁰.

Fujimori's Popular Force party registered her as their presidential candidate – for the April 2021 election – in December 2020.

¹⁸ [Biography: George Forsyth](#), BBC Monitoring – Peru, 8 April 2021

¹⁹ [Biography: Keiko Sofia Fujimori Higuchi](#), BBC Monitoring – Peru, 19 January 2021

²⁰ [Explainer: Peru's 2021 General Elections](#), Americas Society / Council of the Americas (AS/COA), 6 April 2021

If elected President, Fujimori has pledged to pardon her father, who is serving a 25-year sentence for crimes against humanity.

She is right-wing and has promised an “iron fist” approach to crime and corruption²¹.

Yonhy Lescano (Popular Action)

Yohny Lescano was born on 15 February 1959 in Puno, in the south-east of Peru on the shore of Lake Titicaca.

He graduated with a Law degree from the Santa Maria Catholic University, Arequipa, and a Master’s degree in Private Law from the Graduate School of the University of Chile²².

Lescano was a lawyer and radio host before serving four terms as a congressman for the Popular Action party, representing Puno and Lima twice each from 2000 to 2019. From 2011 to 2019 he also served as the party's national secretary-general.

Lescano has been described as a left-leaning populist with some socially conservative views, such as opposing further abortion rights and same-sex marriage²³.

Critical of the distribution of wealth from the mining industry, which makes up 60 per cent of Peru’s exports, Lescano wants more of the revenues to stay in Peru to help the country’s relatively poor population²⁴.

Rafael López Aliaga (Popular Renewal)

Rafael López Aliaga was born on 11 February 1961 in Lima and is known by the nickname “Porky”²⁵.

He began studying civil engineering at the Pedro Ruiz Gallo National University, but transferred to the University of Piura from where he obtained a degree in Industrial Engineering.

López Aliaga later gained an MBA from the University of the Pacific and attended the Senior Management Programme at the University of Piura.

²¹ [‘Peru faces polarizing presidential runoff as teacher takes voters by surprise’](#), *the Guardian*, 12 April 2021

²² [Biography: Yonhy Lescano](#), BBC Monitoring – Peru, 11 March 2021

²³ [Meet the Candidates: Peru](#), Americas Quarterly, 13 April 2021

²⁴ [‘In Peru, populist front-runner Yonhy Lescano wants to spread mining wealth’](#), *NBC News*, 16 March 2021

²⁵ [Biography: Rafael López Aliaga](#), BBC Monitoring – Peru, 16 March 2021

Before entering politics, he was a businessman and founded several companies: Peruval Corp (a securities company), PeruRail and Acres Finance. He is also a shareholder of Ferrocarril Transandino (Transandino Railway).

According to information submitted to the National Electoral Court (JNE) for the 2021 presidential election, in 2019 he declared an income of 7,648,981.00 million soles (approximately £1.48m)²⁶.

A member of the National Solidarity party, in October 2020 López Aliaga announced the party would change its name to Popular Renewal for the 2021 elections.

He is a member of Opus Dei and regarded as being ultra-conservative; he is opposed to abortion and gay marriage, although he supports a “solidarity pact” to protect same-sex couples²⁷.

López Aliaga has pledged to cut government red-tape by reducing the number of ministries from 19 to nine and getting rid of so-called “parasites” who were getting rich off the state²⁸.

These anti-elitist views have led to comparisons with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro; something López Aliaga has rejected, saying Bolsonaro “is an extremely intolerant person”. Rather, López Aliaga has expressed his admiration of former British Prime Ministers Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher for the way they faced challenges “on the basis of uniting the people”²⁹.

Verónica Mendoza (Together for Peru)

Veronika Mendoza was born on 9 December 1980 in Cusco Province, in Peru’s southern Andean highlands. Her mother is a French national and, as such, Mendoza has dual Peruvian and French nationality; something she has vowed never to give up³⁰.

Mendoza studied Architecture at university in Cusco, before gaining a degree in Psychology at the University of Paris and a Master’s in Anthropology from the New Sorbonne University in Paris.

In April 2011 Mendoza was elected to Congress, representing the Win Peru party. She resigned from the party in June 2012 and later joined the newly-formed Popular Action – Broad Front bloc in Congress.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ [‘Peru’s Bolsonaro? The Opus Dei ultra-conservative who would kick out Odebrecht’](#), *Reuters*, 18 March 2021

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ [Biography: Rafael López Aliaga](#), BBC Monitoring – Peru, 16 March 2021

³⁰ [Biography: Veronika \[Vero\] Fanny Mendoza Frisch](#), BBC Monitoring – Peru, 20 January 2021

Mendoza contested the 2016 presidential election as candidate for the Broad Front and came third.

On 2 December 2016 she launched a new political party – New Peru – and, in October 2019, New Peru allied with other political parties to form the Together For Peru alliance.

Mendoza was announced as the presidential candidate for Together for Peru on 29 October 2020, to contest the April 2021 election.

Mendoza is left-wing and plans to review tax exemptions for larger firms and create a wealth tax for the super-rich if elected president³¹.

She has also proposed taking temporary control of the production and supply of medical oxygen, due to shortages amid the Covid-19 pandemic³².

Other candidates

The following candidates also contested the 2021 presidential election: César Acuña (Alliance for Progress), Andrés Alcántara (Direct Democracy), Marco Arana (Broad Front), Alberto Beingolea (Christian People's Party), Ciro Gálvez (National United Renaissance), Julio Guzmán (Purple Party), Ollanta Humala (Peruvian Nationalist Party), Daniel Salaverry (We Are Peru), Rafael Santos (Peru Secure Homeland), Daniel Urresti (We Can Peru) and José Vega (Union for Peru).

2.2

Election campaign

Peru's election campaign took place under the cloud of Covid-19 and widespread discontent over the Government's handling of the pandemic.

Peru is among the countries that have been hardest-hit by the pandemic: more than 54,600 people have died from Covid-19, from a total population of 33 million. This represents 190 deaths per 100,000.

In addition, four million people have lost their jobs, and a further five million dropped into poverty³³.

Peru's GDP decreased by 11 per cent in 2020 – the biggest contraction in the region – as the Government introduced a strict lockdown which crippled businesses³⁴.

³¹ ['From 'Porky' to goalie: Peru's presidential candidates'](#), *BBC News Online*, 10 April 2021

³² ['Opus Dei, leftist, former goalie, political heiress: who's who in Peru election race?'](#) *NBC News*, 8 April 2021

³³ ['Far-left candidate leads Peru into run-off presidential polls'](#), *Al Jazeera*, 12 April 2021

³⁴ ['Far-left activist leads in Peru presidential election upset'](#), *Financial Times*, 12 April 2021

The pandemic exposed the country's faltering health care system, with many Peruvians having difficulty accessing care. Medical personnel are scarce in rural areas and a shortage of medical supplies and protective equipment allowed Covid-19 cases to rapidly rise³⁵.

The main concern for voters during the election campaign – even ahead of coronavirus – was corruption. Trust in politicians is low and the country has lurched from one political crisis to another, experiencing three presidents in the past year. Indeed, most of Peru's living former presidents are under investigation for corruption³⁶, as well as more than half of the members of the 130-seat Congress³⁷.

Trust in politicians was further eroded by the so-called “vaccinegate” scandal, the revelation in February 2021 that previous- and current-government officials secretly got vaccinated early against Covid-19³⁸. This saw almost 500 of the political elite receiving their vaccine ahead of schedule³⁹.

Despite the crises affecting the country, Peruvians had little interest in the 2021 presidential election and the candidates in particular.

A poll by the Institute of Peruvian Studies found 28 per cent of Peruvians would not choose any candidate. There was a deep sense of disenchantment and few of the 18 candidates standing – the highest number in living memory – sparked passion from voters⁴⁰.

Voting is compulsory in Peru and, with a fine of up to \$24 for not voting, many planned to submit a “no vote” to express their dissatisfaction⁴¹.

2.3

Election results (first round), 11 April 2021

Following the presidential election, Peru's National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) published the final results⁴².

³⁵ [‘Peru’s Election Is About to Make Its Problems Worse’](#), *Foreign Policy*, 8 April 2021

³⁶ [‘Far-left activist leads in Peru presidential election upset’](#), *Financial Times*, 12 April 2021

³⁷ [‘Peru’s Election Is About to Make Its Problems Worse’](#), *Foreign Policy*, 8 April 2021

³⁸ [‘Peru election: Pedro Castillo to face Keiko Fujimori in run-off’](#), *BBC News Online*, 13 April 2021

³⁹ [Explainer: Peru’s 2021 General Elections](#), Americas Society / Council of the Americas (AS/COA), 6 April 2021

⁴⁰ [‘People don’t want any of them’: Peru election sees unpredictable contest’](#), *the Guardian*, 11 April 2021

⁴¹ [‘Peru votes in ‘most fragmented elections in history’’](#), *Al Jazeera*, 11 April 2021

⁴² [Presentation of Results: General Election and Andean Parliament 2021](#), National Office of Electoral Processes (Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales, ONPE) [accessed 7 May 2021]

In addition to announcing the number of valid votes received by each of the candidates, the results showed 2,190,059 “no votes” were cast, as well as 1,123,027 “null votes”⁴³.

Together, this figure is higher than the number of votes secured by the leading candidate and highlights the levels of disinterest and distrust between the electorate and the politicians.

Table 1 Election results, first round

Candidate	Party	No. of valid votes	% of valid votes
Pedro Castillo	Free Peru	2,724,752	18.92
Keiko Fujimori	Popular Force	1,930,762	13.41
Rafael López Aliaga	Popular Renewal	1,692,279	11.75
Hernando de Soto	Country Forward – Social Integration Party	1,674,201	11.63
Yonhy Lescano	Popular Action	1,306,288	9.07
Verónica Mendoza	Together for Peru	1,132,577	7.87
César Acuña	Alliance for Progress	867,025	6.02
George Forsyth	National Victory	814,516	5.66
Daniel Urresti	We Can Peru	812,721	5.64
Julio Guzmán	Purple Party	325,608	2.26
Alberto Beingolea	Christian People’s Party	286,447	1.99
Daniel Salaverry	We Are Peru	240,234	1.67
Ollanta Humala	Peruvian Nationalist Party	230,831	1.60
José Vega	Union for Peru	101,267	0.70
Ciro Gálvez	National United Renaissance	89,376	0.62
Marco Arana	Broad Front	65,300	0.45
Rafael Santos	Peru Secure Homeland	55,644	0.39
Andrés Alcántara	Direct Democracy	50,802	0.35
TOTAL		14,400,630	100.00

Source: [National Office of Electoral Processes \(ONPE\)](#)

⁴³ Ibid

2.4

Election results (run-off poll), 6 June 2021

As none of the candidates secured the 50 per cent required for an outright victory in the first round, a run-off poll was held between the top two candidates – Pedro Castillo and Keiko Fujimori – on 6 June.

Early results showed Castillo had secured a narrow victory over Fujimori in an election the US, the European Union and the Organisation of American States had said was fair⁴⁴. A US Department of State spokesperson went as far as describing the election as “a model of democracy in the region.”⁴⁵

However, Fujimori rejected the result and made allegations of fraud. On 9 June, three days after polling day, her party requested the annulment of votes from 802 polling stations – equal to 200,000 votes. She later made further challenges⁴⁶

There was a lot at stake for Fujimori in this presidential election: she faces trial on money laundering and corruption charges, over claims she received \$1.2m from Brazilian construction company Odebrecht to fund previous presidential campaigns in 2011 and 2016⁴⁷. Winning the election would provide Fujimori with legal protections⁴⁸.

However, on 19 July, in a televised address six weeks after voting took place, Peru's National Electoral Jury (JNE) announced Castillo had won.

Again, the results showed significant numbers of people had spoiled their ballot, with 121,489 “no votes” and 1,106,816 “null votes” cast.⁴⁹

Castillo will be sworn in on 28 July 2021.

Table 2 Election results, run-off poll

Candidate	Party	No. of valid votes	% of valid votes
Pedro Castillo	Free Peru	8,836,380	50.126
Keiko Fujimori	Popular Force	8,792,117	49.874
TOTAL		17,628,497	100.000

Source: [National Office of Electoral Processes \(ONPE\)](#)

⁴⁴ [Leftist Pedro Castillo finally confirmed as Peru's next president](#), Financial Times, 20 July 2021

⁴⁵ [The United States and Peru: Partners in Democracy and Development](#), US Department of State, 22 June 2021

⁴⁶ [2021 presidential election results](#), BBC Monitoring, 20 July 2021

⁴⁷ [Court rejects call to return Keiko Fujimori to jail for graft](#), Al Jazeera, 22 June 2021

⁴⁸ [New Peru president to be announced July 20, says electoral body](#), Buenos Aires Times, 13 July 2021

⁴⁹ [Presentation of Results: Second Presidential Election 2021](#), National Office of Electoral Processes (Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales, ONPE) [accessed 7 May 2021]

3 UK-Peru relations

The UK and Peru have enjoyed close relations for 200 years and diplomatic relations continue to strengthen.

Peru proclaimed its independence from Spain in 1821 and, the following year, the first diplomatic mission was sent from Peru to the UK to discuss recognition of an independent Peru. Then, in 1823, the first British Consul General arrived in Peru.

Relations between the two countries grew rapidly and many Britons emigrated to Peru, with investors putting their assets into mining, railroad construction and other projects across the country.

This investment continues to this day and the UK is the second-largest foreign investor in Peru⁵⁰.

In recent years the UK has provided support in the development of Peru's National Infrastructure Plan, as well as advice on major projects for the benefit of Peru, such as the Pan American Games Lima 2019⁵¹.

In 2018 Boris Johnson, then-UK Foreign Secretary, visited the site of the Pan American Games on an official visit to Peru. This was the first visit by a British Foreign Secretary in over 50 years and, speaking ahead of the visit, Johnson said:

I am delighted to be the first British Foreign Secretary to visit Peru in over 50 years. I look forward to meeting President Vizcarra to strengthen our relationship and discuss areas that we both care passionately about, such as protecting the biodiversity of the Amazon, as well as underlining the opportunities for British business in South America⁵².

Recently, the Trade Agreement between the two countries came into force, whereby British investments and exports to Peru and vice versa have no additional tariffs or barriers.

⁵⁰ [What do we do?](#) Embassy of Peru in the United Kingdom [accessed 7 May 2021]

⁵¹ [Peru Day: Peruvian-British alliance will generate business opportunities for entrepreneurs from both countries](#), British Embassy Lima press release, 25 March 2021

⁵² [Foreign Secretary arrives in Peru for first visit of a British Foreign Secretary in over 50 years](#), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office press release, 20 May 2018

Peru has also welcomed the UK's interest in joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)⁵³.

In February 2021 the UK donated dozens of ventilators and monitors to Peru, to assist with the country's efforts to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic⁵⁴.

⁵³ [Peru and UK meet virtually to discuss issues of bilateral importance](#), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office press release, 2 February 2021

⁵⁴ [UK donates equipment to Peru to fight the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office new story, 19 February 2021

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