



Oxford Analytica Latin America Executive Summary

Monday, March 27 2006 12:00 GMT

PERU: Democratic values are scarce

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» [See today's PERU: Democratic values are scarce.](#)

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EVENT: The UN Development Programme (UNDP) on March 22 published a report, which points to a paucity of democratic values in Peru.

SIGNIFICANCE: With presidential and legislative elections on April 9, the report picks up on widespread disaffection with democratic institutions. This is fuelling the campaign of Ollanta Humala, whose rise in the polls owes much to his strident attacks on the 'political class'.

ANALYSIS: Presidential and legislative elections are due in Peru on April 9, with a second round of presidential voting in May if no one candidate wins a plurality of valid votes in the first round ([see PERU: Garcia rises, but many voters undecided - March 1, 2006](#)). The most notable feature of the presidential campaign so far has been the rise of Ollanta Humala from relative obscurity six months ago to a position where opinion polls put him in first place:

Humala, a former military officer accused of human rights violations in the 1980s, has benefited from the unpopularity of the political class.

He takes an authoritarian line, adopting a stridently nationalist position on a number of key issues ([see PERU: Humala rise sparks fears - January 18, 2006](#)).

UNDP survey. With just over two weeks before voting, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has published the findings of a nationwide survey into political values:

The survey, carried out at the beginning of 2006 in 104 (out of a total of 194) provinces, has attempted to test political attitudes across the country, both geographically and socially.

Broadly speaking, its findings back up the results of other Peruvian barometers of public opinion, as well as international comparative surveys such as Latinobarometro ([see LATIN AMERICA: Strong economy does not help democracy - November 4, 2005](#)).

The extent of the survey, and the fact that a UN agency conducted it, lends it credibility. From the point of view of the consolidation of democratic values, its data is striking:

A large proportion of the population (almost 35.0%) said they had no idea what democracy means. Over one-quarter of the population (26.5%) said they knew what democracy was, but had little interest in it.

The preference for authoritarian government is notable. Just under 13% responded that they thought an authoritarian government preferable. Another 13% said they were indifferent about democracy. Only 18% considered that they live in a democracy.

Those consulted had a particularly negative view of political parties. Almost 70% of those who can identify the country's major national parties have any sympathy for them. The level of sympathy is even lower for those with knowledge of how parties work locally.

Attitudes towards the legislature and the judiciary were the most negative of a range of state institutions. Only 3.6% of those asked thought the judiciary worked "well" or "very well", while 3.0% considered this true of Congress.

There is a strong culture of physical punishment for wrongdoing, especially in poorer and rural households. However, within the structure of employment, employees were more fearful of the threat of being dismissed than confrontation with their employer.

Levels of participation are fairly low -- whether in the community, church groups, sporting associations or labour unions. The church is the most important point of affiliation.

Attitudes towards the rich usually are extremely negative, while towards the poor condescending. More than two-thirds believe that the rich are "exploitative".

Nearly 70% of the population believes child molesters should be executed. Nearly 30% (mainly young males) think that violence is justified to establish authority.

Expectations are low of upward social mobility, especially among the poor. More than 60% said they would emigrate if they had the opportunity.

Authoritarian tradition. Scepticism about the virtues of democracy and a preference for authoritarian modes of government are nothing new in Peru. Even in the 1980s, when civilian government was relatively new, and memories of military dictatorship were fresh, opinion polls pointed to nostalgia for authoritarian governments. However, three key factors since then have compounded ordinary people's doubts about democratic government:

Political and social violence. The proliferation of political violence, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, brought with it demands for security. They were part of the justification for former President Alberto Fujimori interrupting constitutional rule in 1992, a move that enjoyed strong popularity at the time. Lawlessness and the high incidence of violent crime -- especially in urban areas -- have compounded demands for greater security.

Economic instability. The experience of hyperinflation in the late 1980s, and its highly negative effects on real incomes (especially those of the poor), was attributed to civilian governments, especially that of former President Alan Garcia (1985-90).

Corruption. Politicians became associated with using political power for personal enrichment. This tarnished the reputation of Garcia, but particularly Fujimori, whose government collapsed in 2000 following revelations of massive corruption.

The last five years of civilian government under President Alejandro Toledo, whose term expires on July 28, have done little to restore faith in the probity or efficacy of the political class. After a period of initial popularity, Toledo's approval ratings have mostly languished in single digits. In spite of several years of solid growth ([see PERU: Growth will slow in 2006 - November 30, 2005](#)), over half the country still lives in poverty -- officially defined. Levels of inequality have increased. Toledo's government has suffered from a perennial ambience of sleaze and poor management.

Humala phenomenon. It is in this context that a politician such as Humala has emerged with such force, campaigning on a 'anti-system' ticket. It is not so much his personal popularity or proposals that have buoyed him, but rather the fact that he has managed to articulate a profound sense of disaffection towards more established politicians and their parties, as well as democratic institutions more generally.

This feeling is most evident in two groups:

The poor. Support for Humala is strongest among social groups 'C' and 'D', much less among wealthier and more educated groups, which distrust his anti-business discourse and apparent lack of concern for legal rights.

Those living outside Lima. Humala picks up on feelings of resentment against the capital, where the economic and political life of the country traditionally has been centred and some 30% of the population lives. His support is particularly strong in the south of the country.

CONCLUSION: Whoever wins the presidency, Humala or others will continue to exploit 'anti-system' sentiments, creating a long-term source of political instability.

LATIN AMERICA: Pipeline favours politics, not markets

LATIN AMERICA: At the beginning of March, Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela agreed to conduct a 9.2 million dollar feasibility study for the 'Great Southern Gas Pipeline', and to send a delegation to Bolivia to inform that country of the progress made so far. While it is highly questionable whether the economic and technical data will justify the initiative, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the project serves different political agendas.

» [See today's LATIN AMERICA: Pipeline favours politics, not markets.](#)