

AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – April 7, 2016

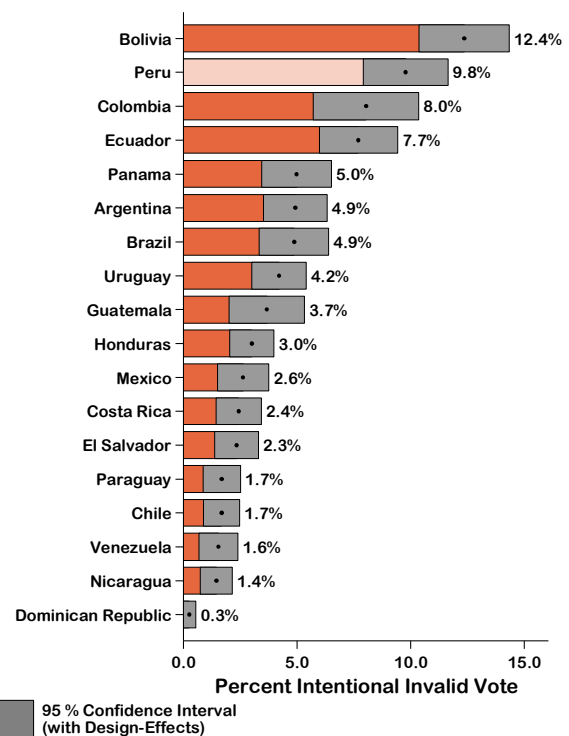
Declining Trust in Parties Likely to Increase Already- High Invalid Voting Rates in Peru's National Elections

By Mollie J. Cohen, Vanderbilt University

On April 10th, Peruvians will cast ballots in presidential and congressional elections. As of this writing, Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of Peru's former authoritarian leader Alberto Fujimori, is expected to win over 30 percent of the vote, putting her in first place and positioning her as a candidate in a likely runoff election. Running second to her, according to recent polls,¹ is the "voto blanco/viciado" – the invalid vote.

Across Latin America, voters regularly turn out to the polls and then opt to leave their ballots blank or to mismark the ballot paper. These "invalid" votes are counted but removed from the final election tally. Rates of blank and spoiled votes in Latin America are high enough to change electoral outcomes. Since 1993, the number of invalid votes has been larger than the margin of victory between first and second place candidates in nearly 40% of all first-

Figure 1. Intentional Invalid Voting Rates in Latin America



round Latin American presidential elections. In other words, in more than a third of presidential elections, the second place candidate could have won the presidency had he or she captured

¹<http://www.encuestas.com.pe/encuesta-presidencial-datum-01-abril-2016/>

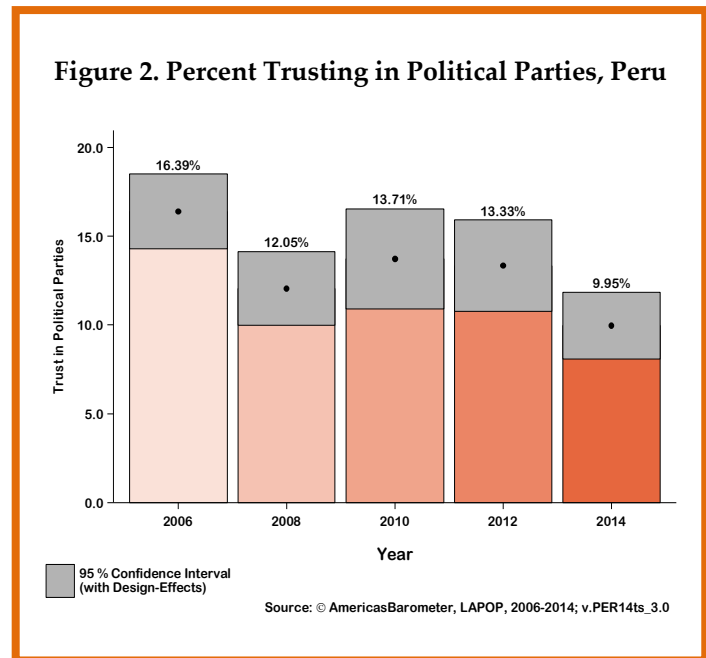
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these invalid votes. Rates of intentional invalid voting in Peru are comparatively high: Figure 1 shows the percentage of all self-reported voters in the 2014 AmericasBarometer survey^{2,3} who indicated having intentionally cast an invalid ballot in the last presidential election in countries across the region.⁴ Peru (9.8%) is second only to Bolivia (12.4%) in rates of intentional ballot invalidation in the region.

Why do so many Peruvians opt to invalidate their ballots? The most recent AmericasBarometer survey asked those respondents who indicated having cast a blank or spoiled vote why they had chosen to do so.⁵ More than 55% of those responding to the item in Peru indicated that their decision was made in protest against the available candidate options.

For years, scholars of Peruvian politics have written about the country's crisis of political parties (Levitsky and Cameron 2003, Mainwaring and Torcal 2006). Recent electoral reforms have made it difficult for parties to run under the same name across elections, which has resulted in unstable party options

over time. Because parties rarely keep the same name across election cycles, voters tend to cast ballots for candidates rather than parties, which has arguably aggravated the hyper-personalization of Peruvian politics that began in the 1990s (McNulty 2011).



The AmericasBarometer has measured trust in political parties in Peru since 2006. Figure 2 shows that the percentage of Peruvians indicating they trust political parties has declined from 16.4 percent in 2006 to 9.9 percent in 2014.⁶ In

² Prior issues of the *Insights Series* are at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>.

³ Funding for data collection for AmericasBarometer project has come from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the Tinker Foundation, Vanderbilt University, and others. This *Brief* is solely produced by LAPOP and the opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the point of view of USAID or any other supporting agency.

⁴ **VB3N.** "Who did you vote for in the last presidential elections of [year]?" Response options are not read aloud. Non-voters were filtered out using item **VB2.** "Did you vote in the [first round of the] last presidential elections of

(year of last presidential elections)?" The United States, Canada, and the parliamentary Caribbean countries are excluded from this analysis.

⁵ **VB101.** "Why did you cast a null or blank ballot in the last presidential election?" [response alternatives coded but not read aloud]: (1) Was confused, (2) Wanted to express their discontent with all of the candidates; didn't like any of the candidates, (3) Do not believe in democracy, wanted to protest against the political system, (4) Do not believe in elections/ electoral authorities, (5) Not interested in politics, (6) My vote does not make any difference, (7) Another reason.

⁶ The question (**B21**) asked respondents to indicate on a 1-7 scale how much trust they have in political parties. The

regional terms, this places Peru second from the lowest in terms of trust in political parties, between Brazil at the bottom and Guatemala (result available from the author upon request).

The 2016 campaign has done little to inspire good will toward the country's political parties or electoral institutions. In February and March, the Peruvian national electoral commission (the *Jurado Nacional de Elecciones*, or JNE) removed two presidential candidates from competition for failure to comply with the norms codified in the country's Law for Political Organizations (La Prensa 2016, RPP 2016). Some political observers have decried the process as undemocratic given the perceived uneven application of the law across candidates (Levitsky 2016). The popular press has indicted *all* candidates, even those against whom no formal complaint has been registered. Yet, while Keiko Fujimori's candidacy survived accusations of breaking the law, one of her main opponents was removed from contention for a seemingly minor violation. The removal of candidates and accusations of bias in the process have implications for citizens' trust in politicians, parties, electoral institutions (i.e., the JNE), and elections, themselves. On the other hand, the late-surging leftist candidate Veronika Mendoza—a fresh face in Peruvian politics, running under a new

party banner—may win over some of these potential protest voters.

A national context marked by low and declining trust in political parties, coupled with a democratic crisis caused by the perceived uneven application of electoral law, is setting the stage for even higher than usual rates of invalid voting in this weekend's elections.

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figure displays the percentage of individuals in each year who gave a positive response (i.e., 5, 6, or 7).

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Full results of the 2014 AmericasBarometer and previous rounds can be consulted on-line at www.LapopSurveys.org. The full data set is available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.