

Pedro Castillo declared president-elect of Peru

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Rural school teacher-turned-presidential candidate Pedro Castillo on Monday became the winner of Peru's presidential election

Lima, July 19 (RHC)-- Rural school teacher-turned-presidential candidate Pedro Castillo on Monday became the winner of Peru's presidential election after the country's longest electoral count in 40 years.

Castillo, whose supporters include Peru's poor and rural citizens, defeated right-wing candidate Keiko Fujimori by just 44,000 votes. Electoral authorities released the final official results more than a month after the runoff election took place in the South American nation.

Wielding a pencil the size of a cane, symbol of his Peru Libre party, Castillo popularized the phrase “No more poor in a rich country.” The economy of Peru, the world’s second-largest copper producer, has been crushed by the coronavirus pandemic, increasing the poverty level to almost one-third of the population and eliminating the gains of a decade.

The shortfalls of Peru’s public health services have contributed to the country’s poor pandemic outcomes, leaving it with the highest global per capita death rate. Castillo has promised to use the revenues from the mining sector to improve public services, including education and health, whose inadequacies were highlighted by the pandemic.

“Those who do not have a car should have at least one bicycle,” Castillo told The Associated Press in mid-April at his adobe house in Anguía, Peru’s third poorest district.

Since surprising Peruvians and observers by advancing to the presidential runoff election, Castillo has softened his first proposals on nationalizing multinational mining and natural gas companies. Instead, his campaign has said he is considering raising taxes on profits due to high copper prices, which exceed \$10,000 per ton.

Historians say he is the first peasant to become president of Peru, where until now, Indigenous people almost always have received the worst of the deficient public services even though the nation boasted of being the economic star of Latin America in the first two decades of the century.

“There are no cases of a person unrelated to the professional, military or economic elites who reaches the presidency,” Cecilia Méndez, a Peruvian historian and professor at the University of California-Santa Barbara, told a radio station.

Fujimori, a former congresswoman, ran for a third time for president with the support of the business elites. She is the daughter of imprisoned former President Alberto Fujimori.

Hundreds of Peruvians from various regions camped out for more than a month in front of the Electoral Tribunal in Lima, Peru’s capital, to await Castillo’s proclamation. Many do not belong to Castillo’s party, but they trust the professor because “he will not be like the other politicians who have not kept their promises and do not defend the poor,” said Maruja Inquilla, an environmental activist who arrived from a town near Titicaca, the mythical lake of the Incas.

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