

Environmentalists worry as Fujimori nears victory

Peru

Peruvian environmental and human rights advocates this month sensed hard work ahead as the vote-count following the country's June 7 presidential runoff showed right-wing candidate Keiko Fujimori leading leftist Roberto Sánchez.

Fujimori—daughter of the late Alberto Fujimori, Peru's authoritarian president from 1990 to 2000—was 49,641 votes, or 0.27%, ahead of Sánchez as of June 29, with 100% of ballots tallied. However, authorities had yet to issue an official declaration of the outcome.

During the campaign, neither Fujimori nor her Fuerza Popular party made significant mention of environmental-governance challenges such as deforestation, mercury contamination from illegal mining and incursions into Indigenous territories by illegal loggers, drug runners, miners and more. Though Sánchez and his Juntos por el Perú party focused on wealth and land redistribution, they advocated for forest protection and Indigenous land rights.

The word “Indigenous” only appears four times in Fuerza Popular's 144-page proposed governing program for 2026-2030. The document makes no mention of semi-nomadic peoples who shun contact with outsiders yet are increasingly seeing natural lands they depend on consumed by development, legal and illegal.

“Fujimori's party is obsessed with industrialization and stimulating economic growth,” says Julia Urrunaga, director of the Peru program at the Environmental Investigation Agency, a global nonprofit that spotlights environmental crimes worldwide. “We are afraid they will continue to diminish environmental standards to make investing in the Amazon easier for companies in agribusiness or oil.”

Environmental rollbacks

In recent years, the Peruvian Congress has weakened the country's environmental laws. (See “Amid chaos, Peru eases environmental restrictions”—EcoAméricas, Nov. '25.) Fuerza Popular had a majority in Congress during those years, and Fujimori was the party leader, although she held no government office.

One legislative change made it easier to retroactively legalize deforestation that was prohibited when it occurred. Another, to take effect in January, will require nonprofits receiving international funding to file a detailed work plan with the government at the start of each year—and to obtain authorities' approval for it.

The law also prohibits advocacy groups with foreign funding from participating in lawsuits against the Peruvian state, thus curbing legal actions brought in defense of the environment. “It's censorship,” Urrunaga says. “They can forbid you to work in a certain region or with

a certain community.” Some groups are already changing the wording they use in their plans, she says. Noting Fuerza Popular accomplished this in concert with other right-wing parties without holding the presidency, she adds, “It's really scary what they will be able to do” assuming they will now control the executive branch.

The environment barely figured in the two pre-runoff debates, one involving Fujimori and Sánchez and the other featuring their technical teams. But the Development Analysis Group (Grade), a nonprofit Peruvian research center, organized a separate session in late May in which one campaign advisor from each of the opposing camps presented their candidate's positions on such issues as conservation areas, Indigenous rights and environmental law.

Focus on investment

Fujimori's representative, Carlos Paredes, told the audience of environmentalists, lawyers and scientists that her party seeks sustainable development for the entire country, and that deforestation cannot be controlled unless companies invest in the Amazon. If people have jobs, he said, they'll be less inclined to fell trees. He added Fujimori would combat illegal economies “head on,” deploy the military and police to illegal mining areas, and promote ecotourism and the sale of carbon credits.

Catherine Eyzaguirre, representing Juntos por el Perú at the Grade event, said Sánchez sought economic development, too, but without harming the environment and with an emphasis on land-use planning and community involvement. Sánchez had also pledged to repeal the law that facilitates the legalization of deforested land and promote ratification of the Escazú accord, a regional treaty that requires protection of environmental activists and transparency in environmental decision-making.

“What I missed in both party proposals was that they grasp the important role environmental governance plays in Peru's development,” says moderator Mariano Castro, a former environment vice minister now with Grade.

Lucila Pautrat, director of Kené, a green group focused on Amazonian issues, agrees. “[P]rotected areas generate income for Peru and its regions,” she says. “Protected areas don't prevent economic development.” Pautrat says her main concern is that a Fujimori government would undercut basic rights: “We will not have a state that guarantees rights, but rather one that promotes mercantilism, mining and industry.”

Urrunaga acknowledges “many reasons to be nervous,” but adds: “We'll find a way to fight back. Peruvians are very resilient people.”

—Noah Moeys



Keiko Fujimori (top) narrowly led Roberto Sánchez (below left) as of June 29, with 100% of ballots counted.

(Photos by Noah Moeys)

Contacts

Mariano Castro

Project Director
Resilient and Fair
Amazon Initiative
Development Analysis
Group (Grade)
Lima, Peru
mcastrosm@grade.org.pe

Lucila Pautrat

Director
Kené
Lima, Peru
Tel: +(511) 265-0452
lpautrat@keneamazon.net
keneamazon.net/

Julia Urrunaga

Environmental Investigation
Agency
Panama City, Panama
Tel: +51 980 731 328
julia@eia-global.org

Documents & Resources

Fuerza Popular Party:
<https://fuerzapopular.com.pe>

Juntos por el Perú Party:
<https://jp.org.pe>