

Election Watch for the Digital Age



Peru

Preelection assessment

General elections set for April 2021

Peru's April election is seen as a test of stability following a political crisis that saw three presidents hold office over the course of one week in November 2020. The vote will determine the country's fifth president in under five years and all 130 members of Congress. A highly fragmented political landscape consisting of generally unpopular political parties and a large, ideologically diverse candidate pool set expectations that the presidential election will progress to a runoff on June 6.

Peru has a history of generally credible and competitive elections, but an ongoing power struggle between the legislative and executive branches has disrupted the political landscape. Congress impeached President Martín Vizcarra in November 2020 over unproven allegations that he had received bribes during his time as governor. As president of Congress, Manuel Merino succeeded to power for five days before resigning under public pressure. The impeachment and Merino's ascension prompted mass protests by Peruvians who viewed the impeachment as overtly political; demonstrations were further fueled by the killing of two protesters by the police. Congressman Francisco Sagasti was subsequently installed as interim president. Disillusionment with Peruvian governance will not be the only challenge to the country's general elections; insufficient regulation of campaign financing, inadequate representation of indigenous groups, an alarmingly disproportionate level of deaths from COVID-19, and widespread corruption allegations against top officials may further chip away at public trust in the electoral landscape.

Freedom House has identified the following as key digital interference issues to watch ahead of election day:

- **Harassment and violence for online activity:** Digital journalists and online commentators sometimes receive death threats for reporting on links between the government and organized crime groups or for satirizing politicians. Political figures have instigated online harassment. In April 2019, a Congressman accused a news site director of being responsible for the suicide of a former president via a series of tweets. Intimidation by state and nonstate actors often leads to self-censorship, which could reduce the prevalence of critical and independent information ahead of the election.
- **Laws criminalizing online activity:** Peruvian law assigns criminal penalties and civil liabilities for a number of online activities, and sentences for defamation can be harsher for internet-related offenses. Though laws criminalizing online activity are rarely used in Peru, at least one investigative journalist was recently charged with defamation. The ongoing existence of these laws could contribute to self-censorship during electoral periods.

- **Cyberattacks:** Government institutions have succumbed to politicized cyberattacks in recent years. In November 2020, five days after Vizcarra’s removal, Anonymous hacked and temporarily shut down the website of the Peruvian Congress, reportedly in retaliation for police violence against protesters. Cyberattacks in Peru also have a history of tangible political repercussions. In July 2014, information taken from the Council of Minister’s network and shared online by a group known as “LulzSecPeru” helped launch a no-confidence vote against top Cabinet ministers. Reports of cyberattacks ahead of the election could disrupt the political landscape, impact the electoral administration, or undermine trust in the electoral process.

Peru has a score of 75 out of 100, with 100 representing the least vulnerability in terms of election integrity, on Freedom House’s Election Vulnerability Index, which is based on a selection of key election-related indicators. The score reflects unequal access to political processes for ethnic and cultural minorities, rule of law deficits, and a lack of government transparency regarding defense and security policies within a relatively vibrant, though tumultuous, political and electoral environment. The country is rated **Free** in *Freedom in the World 2020*, with a score of 72 out of 100 with respect to its political rights and civil liberties. To learn more about annual Freedom House assessments, please visit the Peru country reports in [Freedom in the World](#).