

# Peru election won't end Chavez's influence

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**LIMA, Peru** - President-elect Alan Garcia says Peru's voters sent a clear message to Hugo Chavez: Stay out.

But with the Venezuelan president's ally Ollanta Humala controlling the largest faction in Peru's Congress, Chavez's confrontational, leftist brand of politics may be here to stay.

A majority of Peru's voters effectively anointed a regional rival to Chavez by returning Garcia, 57, to the presidency he left in disgrace 16 years ago. Garcia drove home that point in his victory speech when he denounced the growing influence of oil-rich Venezuela in Latin America.

"Our homeland's independent destiny was at stake here, threatened by total domination and imperialism," Garcia told supporters Sunday night. "Imperialism does not come only from great powers but also from nearby domination, by those who seek to subordinate and steer us because they have wealth."

A moderate leftist, Garcia held an insurmountable lead of 53.2 percent against 46.8 percent for Humala with 92.5 percent of the vote counted, the national electoral authority said Monday.

The country's financial markets rallied, with the stock market's broad general index gaining 2.82 percent and shares of mining company stocks up even more.

"Garcia's victory eliminates a key link in the Andean chain that Hugo Chavez is forging," political analyst Mirko Lauer said.

Many Peruvians saw Humala, who once led a military uprising as an army lieutenant colonel, as unpredictable and dangerous to democracy. They were apparently wary of electing another ally of Chavez, who already has extended his influence to Bolivia, where the Aymara Indian Evo Morales was elected president in December.

Humala opposes U.S.-backed eradication of coca leaf, the raw material for Peru's thriving cocaine industry, saying no other crop would bring a decent income to the impoverished farmers who grow it.

He also is against a U.S.-Peruvian free trade pact, and has pledged to increase taxes on foreign mining enterprises, including a huge gold mine owned by American capital. During the closing days of the campaign he accused Garcia of being a pawn of American imperialism.

Like Bolivia's Morales, Humala had pledged to punish a political class widely perceived as corrupt and redistribute wealth to his country's poor Indian and mestizo majority.

But halting a Chavez-fueled domino effect - the political mobilization of Latin America's downtrodden - may be easier said than done.

Despite his loss at the polls, Humala's message resonated among many Peruvians - and that could pose a major obstacle to Garcia's presidency.

Humala's party won 45 seats in the 120-member Congress in April 9 elections. He also won in 14 of Peru's 24 states Sunday, giving him a power base in the country's poorest regions.

"Ollanta Humala will continue to be a formidable opponent for Garcia," Lauer said.

Humala, 43, vowed not to let his loss halt his "grand transformation" of the country.

"We have managed to awaken the Peruvian people's awareness," he told supporters. "In only one year we have constructed a movement that changed the political map of the country and created a new political agenda that gives priority to the real problems of most Peruvian families."

Chavez may continue to try to influence events in Peru, said former U.S. Ambassador to Peru Dennis Jett, who directs the University of Florida's Latin America studies program.

"Chavez has no constraints - he has the money, he has the ambition," Jett said.

"And if imitation is the highest form of flattery, if you can create imitators, then you flatter yourself," Jett added. "That is, I think, what he's trying to do: demonstrate his model works not only in Venezuela, but also in Bolivia and, by extension, in Peru and other places."

Sunday's runoff vote in South America's third-largest country comes amid a contest for ideological pre-eminence in Latin America - between moderate-left, market-friendly leaders such as those in Brazil and Chile, and anti-American, populist leftists with authoritarian tendencies such as Venezuela's and Bolivia's.

The leftward trend largely grew out of disenchantment with free-market capitalism, which failed to reduce poverty in much of the region.

Colombia's re-election of President Alvaro Uribe in May was a big win for conservatism, while Mexican conservative Felipe Calderon has caught up with leftist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in the presidential race.

Chavez thrust himself into the Peru race by enthusiastically endorsing Humala and trading insults with Garcia, calling him "a thief for real, a demagogue, a liar." But Garcia adroitly turned the race into a referendum on the Chavez factor, depicting Humala as an aspiring authoritarian Chavez copycat.

Speaking Sunday night, Garcia said Chavez "should understand that Peru has told him no to international interference."

Peru's outgoing president, Alejandro Toledo, also rallied against Chavez. His government sought support Monday for a formal complaint against Chavez's "meddling" in the election during a meeting of Organizations of American States foreign ministers in the Dominican Republic.

Also at the OAS meeting, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick said Peruvian voters rejected Chavez by electing Garcia. "Chavez overplayed his hand," Zoellick said.

Articulate, charismatic and strong-willed, Garcia seemed to be looking forward to taking on Chavez in the political arena.

"In Latin America, there was no leader who was confronting Hugo Chavez," Jorge del Castillo, secretary-general of Garcia's Aprista Party, said Monday. "Now there is one."