

*Keiko Fujimori clings to fraud
claim as Pedro Castillo nears
official win*



Keiko Fujimori claims fraudulent elections in Peru?

Lima, June 14 (RHC)-- A Peruvian presidential candidate who is likely to lose a runoff election against her socialist rival has led a protest in the capital, Lima, calling again for the annulment of votes that do not favor her. "If the (electoral) jury analyses this, the election will be flipped, dear friends," Keiko Fujimori told thousands of her supporters, many waving Peru's red-and-white flag, on Saturday. "I'm the sort of person who never gives up."

Frontrunner Pedro Castillo, a member of the left-wing Free Peru party, is close to being named the Andean country's next president, despite Fujimori's unsubstantiated claims of fraud, as the count from the second round of voting earlier this month nears an end.

Castillo, an elementary school teacher who was raised in an impoverished village, was leading the count by 50,000 votes on Saturday evening, with only about 16,000 votes remaining to be counted. But Fujimori, who risks imminent trial on corruption charges if she loses the election, has increasingly doubled down on allegations of fraud this week. The right-wing candidate says supporters of Castillo stole votes in rural areas where she got no votes and is seeking the annulment of 200,000 already-counted ballots.

The majority of those requests were submitted after a critical deadline, however, meaning they are unlikely to be considered. International observers have said there is no evidence of fraud and that the election was clean.

Fujimori has also blamed the “international left” for pushing for a Castillo victory, citing how Argentina and Bolivia, countries led by left-wing leaders, have been quick to recognise the socialist candidate as Peru’s president-elect. “Peru is a country that is strategically, geopolitically speaking, crucial in Latin America, and that is why the international left is trying this,” Fujimori said in a news conference with foreign media on Saturday morning.

Political commentators say with Castillo apparently poised to win, Fujimori is trying to sow doubt about the legitimacy of the election so as to salvage her political image. “She is clinging to the fraud claim because if she does not, everything she has accomplished comes tumbling down. It is her way of avoiding failure and collapse,” said Hugo Otero, who advised former Peruvian President Alan Garcia.

Fujimori, the daughter of ex-President Alberto Fujimori – who is in prison for human rights abuses and corruption charges – faces legal woes of her own and could be going to prison instead of the presidency.

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