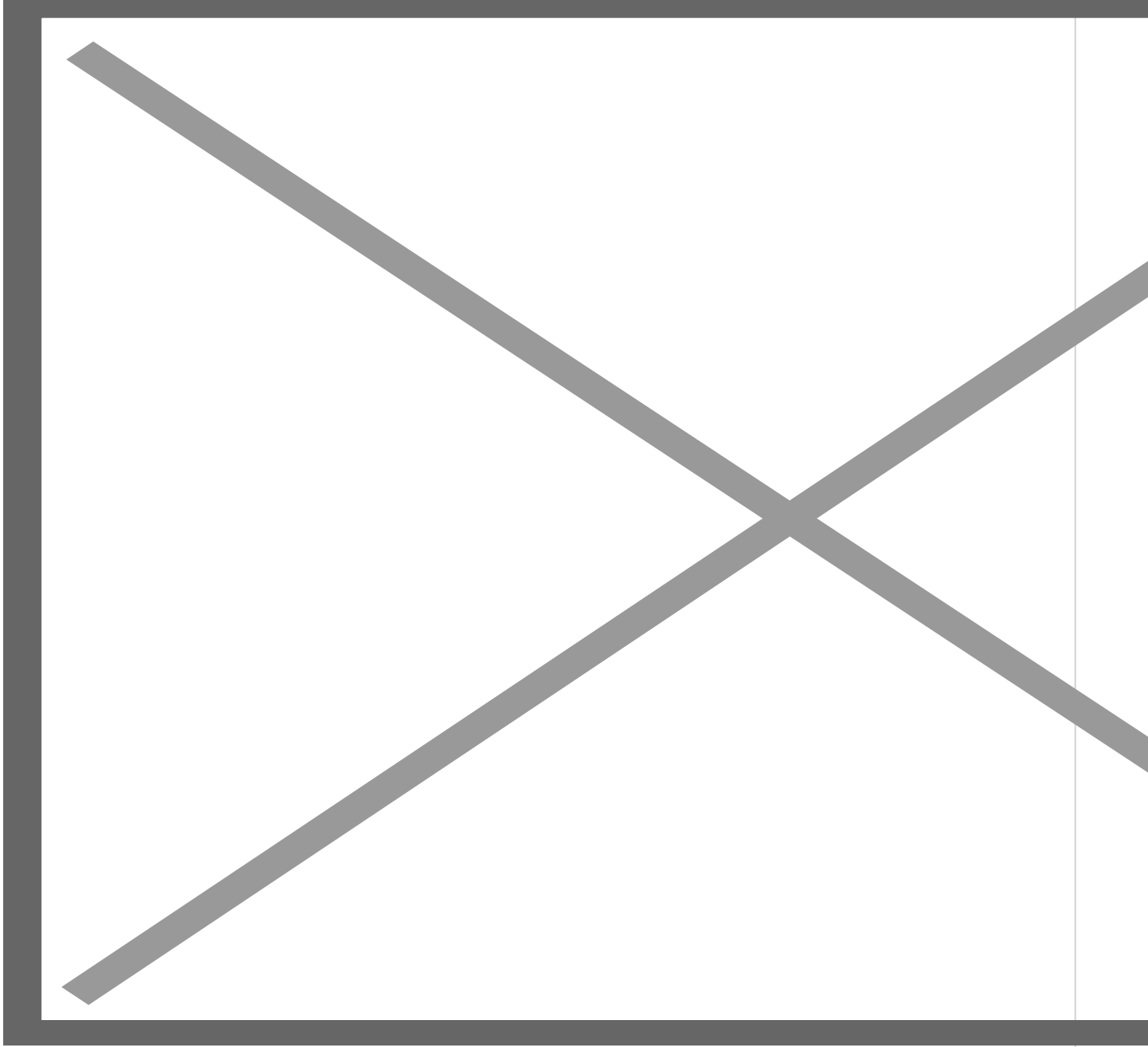


*Peru's legislature shoots down
proposal to hold elections this
year*

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Protesters in Peru have demanded new elections following the removal of President Pedro Castillo [File: Martin Mejia/AP Photo]

Lima, February 2 (RHC)-- Peru's Congress has rejected a proposal to move elections forward to December 2023, despite nearly two months of protests that have left dozens dead following the removal of former President Pedro Castillo.

Legislators will continue debating a different proposal to hold early elections, a key demand of the protesters. The first proposal – one of several motions – was rejected by 68 legislators and voted for by 54, with two abstentions.

Within the deeply fragmented Congress, some politicians wish to finish their original term, while others want to go further and hold a referendum for a new constitution, another demand of protesters. Congress had previously supported a proposal to move the scheduled 2026 elections to April 2024, but the move failed to quell the unrest that has gripped the country.

Over the past several weeks, protesters have blocked roads, taken over airports and set some buildings on fire, with demands that include early elections, Congress's closure, the resignation of President Dina Boluarte and Castillo's release from jail.

Castillo had been propelled into power in 2021 thanks to support from Peru's south and poorer rural Andean regions where some of the most intense protests have occurred. Dozens have been killed in a crackdown on protesters by government security forces, with much of the violence in rural areas.

A leftist former teacher, Castillo was embroiled in multiple corruption investigations and went through five Cabinets and more than 80 ministers during his 17 months in power. He was impeached and arrested on December 7 and is being held in pre-trial detention after he tried to illegally dissolve Congress. His vice-president, Boluarte, who was sworn in hours after his removal from office, is Peru's sixth president in five years.

A January survey by local pollster IEP found that Congress, seen by critics as corrupt and self-serving, has an approval rating of just 7 percent. Boluarte fared a little better at 17 percent, while 73 percent backed new elections this year.

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