

THE  
CARTER CENTER



## **Carter Center Preliminary Statement on Peru General Elections**

**April 14, 2026**

### **Executive Summary**

The Carter Center deployed a seven-member Election Expert Mission (EEM) to Lima on March 21, 2026, in response to an invitation from the Government of Peru to observe the April 12 presidential, Senate, Chamber of Deputies, and Andean Parliament elections. Due to its limited size, the Carter Center EEM did not conduct a comprehensive assessment of the electoral process but focused on key aspects: the legal framework, the work of the election management bodies, political party and candidate registration, the use of election technology, and voter education efforts. While team members visited a few polling centers in metropolitan Lima, the mission did not comprehensively observe election day processes.

The election process took place in a context of declining trust in both political and electoral institutions. Efforts to rebuild confidence included legal reforms and enhanced focus on transparency. However, a tradeoff is that changes have often introduced complexity in the process, at times creating challenges for election management bodies, polling station workers, and voters. These changes include increasing the number of polling stations, creating two new elections with the re-introduction of the Senate, requiring a single ballot for all five elections, retaining ballots after election day, and enabling recounts in some situations.

Despite the complexity of the legal framework, the Carter Center EEM found this aspect of the process to be largely consistent with international standards for democratic elections. Reforms to signature requirements and the reintroduction of the Senate as a second chamber of Congress contributed to a large number of political parties and candidates contesting the elections, offering voters a wide choice for all five races on the ballot. However, the legal provision to deregister political parties that do not obtain representation in the new legislature appears to be a disproportionate limitation on freedom of association.

The system of election administration is composed of three separate constitutional entities, the ONPE, the JNE, and the RENIEC.<sup>1</sup> These bodies overall carried out their responsibilities despite the challenges faced, with a notable exception related to the timely distribution of election day materials. Among the positive achievements of the election administration were the introduction of election technology in an appropriate manner, with an emphasis on transparency and election

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<sup>1</sup> The ONPE is the Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (National Office of Electoral Processes); the JNE is the Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (National Jury of Elections); and the RENIEC is the Registro Nacional de Identificación y Estado Civil (National Registry of Identification and Civil Status).

integrity during design and implementation; increased accuracy of the voter register, according to stakeholders; and extensive voter information efforts, with significant outreach to remote communities.

However, the conduct of election day operations at polling stations throughout the country and abroad was marred to some extent by logistical and planning failures in the delivery of electoral materials in the Lima metropolitan area. Late deployment of materials adversely affected opening times in some places and resulted in 187 polling stations in Lima not opening at all. The JNE took the laudable decision to prioritize voter participation, extending voting for the affected polling stations through April 13. The Carter Center EEM noted statements by other official bodies that appeared to infringe on the autonomy of the three election management bodies, as well as the initiation of criminal investigations against election officials.

The Carter Center EEM welcomes the measures adopted by the election authorities to guarantee the exercise of voting rights by extending voting. However, the mission also emphasizes the importance of conducting a transparent review of the logistical difficulties that occurred on election day and encourages all institutions and candidates to address these issues responsibly to ensure preparedness for the second round of the presidential election on June 7. The Center plans to deploy the EEM in advance of the second round.

## **Introduction**

The Carter Center was invited by the Government of Peru to observe the April 12, 2026, general elections. The elections were held for the president and two vice presidents, 60 members of the newly reinstated Senate, 130 deputies of the Chamber of Deputies, and five members of the Andean Parliament. Following an exploratory mission in August 2025, the Center deployed an Election Expert Mission (EEM) on March 21, 2026. The Carter Center EEM, comprised of seven election experts, is assessing targeted aspects of the electoral process, including the legal framework, the work of the election administration, political party and candidate registration, election technology, and voter education efforts. The Center assesses elections against the national legal framework and international standards for democratic elections and conducts its missions in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. Following the conclusion of the election process, The Carter Center will release a final report on the elections, with recommendations related to those aspects of the process it is observing.

## **Context**

The 2026 general elections were held in an environment marked by sustained political turbulence, characterized by frequent changes in executive leadership, recurring confrontations among branches of government, and a gradual erosion of institutional checks and balances. The political party system remains weak and increasingly fragmented.

Although Peru's electoral administration has a strong international reputation for efficiency and professionalism, public confidence in electoral institutions and processes has declined significantly, in part driven by unproven accusations of fraud in the 2021 presidential election. This mirrors a decline in confidence in political institutions and other state bodies, due to widespread perceptions of corruption that stakeholders frequently cite as undermining governance. Persistent concerns over illicit political financing have further deepened public

skepticism toward political actors. The current electoral process has also been impacted by inflammatory narratives, including unfounded allegations of fraud, which have heightened tensions.

### **Legal Framework**

The electoral legal framework has undergone significant amendments in the lead-up to the 2026 elections, including a partial constitutional reform adopted in 2024. These reforms restored a bicameral Congress by reintroducing the Senate alongside the Chamber of Deputies, reinstated parliamentary reelection, introduced compulsory primaries, and revised seat allocation rules. Additional legislative measures, such as the introduction of a single ballot, the retention of ballots after election day, and a recount mechanism, have increased the complexity of the electoral process, with significant legal and operational implications.

Overall, the legal framework is extensive and highly detailed, and its frequent amendments risk hindering its consistent application. With limited exceptions identified below, the legal framework is broadly in line with international and regional standards for democratic elections and provides a solid basis for their conduct.

### **Electoral System**

Peru's electoral system is complex, combining majoritarian (absolute and relative), proportional, and mixed mechanisms. The president and two vice presidents are elected on a single ticket for a five-year term by direct popular vote. An absolute majority – more than half of the valid votes – is required to win in the first round; otherwise, a runoff is held between the two leading candidates.

The Chamber of Deputies consists of 130 members elected from 27 multi-member districts, and two representatives elected from an out-of-country district. Seats are allocated based on population size, resulting in significant variations in district magnitude. Deputies are elected through an open-list proportional representation system in which seats are allocated based on the number of votes each party receives using the D'Hondt method, with voters able to indicate two preferred candidates. The newly established Senate is composed of 60 members elected through a mixed system. Half of the seats are filled through a single nationwide vote. The remaining 30 are elected at the district level. Of these, 26 are elected through multi-member districts where the candidates with the most votes win. The other four seats, in Metropolitan Lima, are filled through an open-list proportional representation system with a double preferential vote, similar to that used to elect members of the Chamber of Deputies.

The legal framework establishes a new dual electoral threshold aimed at limiting the current party system fragmentation by reducing the number of parties gaining representation in the new Congress. Political organizations must meet two criteria to obtain representation: (a) secure at least 5% of valid votes nationwide, and (b) win a minimum number of seats – seven in the Chamber of Deputies or three in the Senate.

### **Election Administration**

Peru's electoral management system is composed of three autonomous constitutional bodies: the National Jury of Elections (JNE), the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE), and the

National Registry of Identification and Civil Status (RENIEC). This model combines functional separation with operational interdependence, requiring a high degree of coordination.

The division of responsibilities gives rise to ambiguities in some cases where mandates overlap – for example, political and campaign finance (ONPE and JNE), political party registration (ONPE, JNE, and RENIEC), and voter information (ONPE and JNE). Similarly, recount procedures fall under JNE authority, but ONPE also regulates aspects of the process. Despite these challenges, the three election management bodies (EMBs) have the technical expertise and capacity to administer complex electoral processes. Their work is supported by forward planning, inter-institutional coordination, and a decentralized structure that facilitates implementation across the territory.

However, some legal reforms introduced after initial planning phases placed considerable strain on ONPE’s capacities, particularly in terms of logistics, costs, and operational adjustments. These included the first-time implementation of political party primaries, the introduction of a formal recount mechanism, and the requirement to use a single ballot to conduct the five concurrent elections.

The EMBs undertook substantial efforts to address these challenges. These included increasing the number of ONPE and JNE sub-offices around the country, adding polling stations, expanding the use of electoral technologies, and strengthening transparency measures. Training for polling station workers has been improved since previous elections; however, gaps in procedural training for polling station staff remain an operational vulnerability. Nonetheless, a logistical failure led to delays in the delivery of election materials in parts of Lima and affected the opening of polling locations, as described in the Election Day section below.

### **Voter Registration**

A reliable and credible voter register is a key element of electoral integrity. In Peru, the voter register is managed by RENIEC and is derived from the civil registry database (RUIPIN). RENIEC appeared to have effectively improved the accuracy of the register and communicated its work in a transparent manner. To enhance accuracy and public confidence for the 2026 elections, RENIEC took steps to strengthen inter-institutional coordination and verification mechanisms, including regular updates of death records, field verification campaigns, and public outreach initiatives.

Voting is compulsory for citizens aged 18 to 70. The voter register included 27,325,432 voters when it was closed six months before election day. Deaths and image updates after that date were marked in the voter lists.

### **Voter Information**

The EMBs have thus far carried out extensive voter information efforts, including on how to mark the new, complex ballot. Although there was overlap in their messaging, ONPE focused its communication on operational, logistical, and procedural matters (how to participate), and the JNE promoted the concept of “informed vote” (*voto informado*), providing information on parties and candidates, explanations of institutional roles, and targeted outreach to foster participation among vulnerable groups. Their campaigns were widely covered on social media,

radio, television, and through outreach activities in public places. Civil society organizations, universities, and others supported voter information efforts.

For the first time, the three EMBs conducted information campaigns targeted at remote communities. They also ran dedicated campaigns to address election misinformation and disinformation, including RENIEC's initiatives on "pre-bunking" to provide information on issues that might generate confusion or false narratives.

### **Political Parties**

To participate in general elections, organizations must be included in the Register of Political Parties prior to the official call for elections, which occurred on April 12, 2025. In this process, 43 parties registered, of which 42 (35 parties and three alliances) ultimately contested the elections.

For this election, parties were required to show membership of at least 0.1%, of the electoral roll (i.e., 24,288 people). This was an improvement, as parties previously had to provide signatures of 3% of actual voters. This change, combined with the increase in seats following the reinstatement of the Senate, has contributed to a record level of party participation. However, most stakeholders agreed that many political parties are primarily vehicles for candidates rather than organizations with a clear ideology and dedicated membership.

By law, a party's legal status is withdrawn if it fails to secure representation in Congress. While this threshold is designed to structure the party system, using non-representation in Congress as grounds for deregistration appears disproportionate given its impact on freedom of association. This legal provision does not align with international good practice.<sup>2</sup>

### **Candidate Registration**

A total of 38 political organizations (35 parties and 3 alliances) submitted 1,900 lists comprising 36 presidential tickets and 1,864 legislative and Andean Parliament lists. This amounted to 9,069 candidacies, of which 7,484 (82.5%) were approved by JNE.<sup>3</sup> This represents a significant increase compared with the 2021 general elections, when 477 lists and 2,518 candidacies were registered. This expansion reflects both the increased number of elective positions and lower barriers to entry.

The 1993 Constitution guarantees equal rights for women and men and prohibits discrimination on any grounds, including gender. Following the introduction of parity and alternation in candidate lists in 2020, women's representation in the Chamber of Deputies increased from 28% in 2016 to 38% in the outgoing legislature, reflecting the positive impact of this measure. Only four of the 36 presidential tickets (11%) were headed by women.

### **Election Technology**

Peru's electoral authorities have increasingly adopted digital tools to support the administration of elections. Following earlier pilot projects that tested moving toward full electronic voting in a

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<sup>2</sup> See International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), article 22(1), and Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, Second Edition, paras 99 and 101, December 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Of these, 2,549 correspond to the Senate, 4,508 to the Chamber of Deputies, and 423 to the Andean Parliament.

limited number of polling stations, the ONPE has since refocused on paper ballots supported by technological solutions aimed at improving efficiency, traceability, and transparency. A pilot digital voting system for some sectors of the population was developed but was not deployed for these elections.

A key technological tool deployed by ONPE in metropolitan Lima was the *Solución Tecnológica de Apoyo al Escrutinio* (STAE), covering approximately one-third of polling stations countrywide. This system enables software-guided generation of digital polling station result forms (*actas*) by poll workers, aimed at reducing common errors when *actas* are completed by hand. They are digitally signed and electronically transmitted to the national tabulation system. For polling stations where STAE is not deployed, ONPE utilizes paper results forms, transported physically to district offices, where they are digitized and transcribed, and subsequently transmitted electronically.

Election results are published through a web-based platform that provides near real-time updates based on data received from the national tabulation system. Results can be downloaded and are disaggregated by polling station, consistent with international good practice.

As a transparency measure, ONPE set up a dedicated room for political parties and the media, where it offers demonstrations of its systems as well as screens for source code review. Its systems have also been audited by an external company.

The JNE has also expanded its use of digital tools, including applications based on artificial intelligence. These are used, inter alia, to monitor online information environments and to support the processing of candidate registration files and electoral disputes.

### **Election Day and Tabulation of Results**

The Carter Center visited 12 polling centers in metropolitan Lima on April 12 but did not comprehensively observe election day processes. The domestic observation group *Transparencia*, which deployed observers to more than 1,000 polling centers across the country and conducted a quick count, reported that election day was largely free of irregularities.

However, as observed by *Transparencia* and others, election day was impacted by logistical shortcomings, resulting in delayed delivery of electoral materials, particularly in Lima. This delayed the opening of many polling stations. Although the situation improved somewhat over the course of the morning, an undetermined number of polling stations in metropolitan Lima had not opened by the legal deadline of 12 p.m. To address this situation, the JNE extended the deadline for the opening of polling stations nationwide to 2 p.m. and extended the closing time from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. By the afternoon, 99.8% of polling stations nationwide had become operational, according to ONPE. The election administration bodies have not yet provided official data on the extent of the delayed opening issues.

Nevertheless, 187 polling stations in southern Lima were unable to open at all due to the non-delivery of electoral materials, affecting an estimated 55,261 voters. The JNE announced that voting in these polling stations, as well as in a few out-of-country locations, would be

rescheduled for April 13. The delays in the opening of polling stations led to heated public statements by some candidates against ONPE, as well as to unprecedented declarations and interventions by other public institutions during election day. Subsequently, criminal investigations were initiated against EMB officials. Together, these events could further affect public confidence in the electoral process.

Counting and results transmission were slow, due in part to the number of races and the complex ballot. The ONPE has thus far adhered to its initial plan to publish partial results in real time via its website. In line with international standards and good practice, results information is available online by polling station, allowing for verifiability against results posted at polling centers. As of the time of this statement, final results for all five elections were pending.

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