

Peru: Amid nationwide rebellion, why hasn't Boluarte resigned?

Monday 30 January 2023, by [ESCALENTE Jorge](#), [FUENTES Federico](#) (Date first published: 30 January 2023).

With protests to demand early elections intensifying in Peru, a request by de facto president Dina Boluarte to bring them forward to December was rebuffed by the right-wing controlled Congress, on January 28.



Peru protest on Jan 19, 2023/ Protestors held the second 'March of the Four Nations' across Peru on January 19, to demand Boluarte resign. Thousands of Indigenous peoples descended on the capital, Lima. Photo: @amautanew/twitter

Boluarte was installed as president by Congress just seven weeks ago, after parliamentarians voted to impeach elected president Pedro Castillo, in a move viewed by many as a “legislative coup”.

With initially isolated protests in the south snowballing into a nationwide rebellion, the question many are now asking is why hasn't Boluarte resigned? And can she hold onto power?

Speaking to *Green Left* from Lima, Jorge Escalante, a leader of left-wing party Nuevo Peru (New Peru) and Súmate (Join Us), a revolutionary socialist tendency within it, discussed the protest movement, the nature of Boluarte's increasingly divided government and what it might take to bring it down.

Impeachment

Protests began almost immediately after Castillo's impeachment in the south, where he received his strongest vote in the April 2021 elections. The protesters' demands were soon taken up by a nationwide movement demanding: “Boluarte out”, “Close Congress”, for early elections and a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution.

Escalante said that while “there is still a sector that holds out hope for Castillo and wants him restored as president, they are a small minority within the protest movement, as many who voted for Castillo lost faith in him”.

This is due to the fact that “Castillo had begun to shift to the right by appointing a neoliberal cabinet, abandoning his electoral program and distancing himself from his base. He has also sought to negotiate with the right.

“The problem was that the reactionary right will always come for more and more, particularly as they can not tolerate as president a rural teacher who speaks quechua [an indigenous language] and wears a sombrero [straw hat associated with the countryside], due to their racism and class hatred.”

Escalante continued: “The right never recognised Castillo’s presidency and essentially waged a war to impeach him. This whole process played out over the year and seven months he was in power, during which there were two failed attempts at impeachment, until the third attempt on December 7 was successful.

“The right was helped by the fact that Castillo took the completely absurd step of closing Congress the same day as his impeachment was going to be debated — a decision he made all on his own, with members of his cabinet stating they had no knowledge of the plan. The right did not have the votes to impeach him, but after what Castillo did, the rest of Congress voted to go along with the impeachment and replace him with his vice president, Boluarte.

“The right thought that with this move they had triumphed. They thought the field was clear for them to move ahead with their project, because until then, there had been no large mobilisation of support for Castillo.”

From protests to rebellion

The protests started off small and isolated, however over the following weeks they swelled in size, particularly after the number of protesters killed by the armed forces grew. While a truce came into place over the holidays after a large demonstration in Lima on December 23, protesters hit the streets in even greater numbers and in more provinces on January 4.

A key turning point, Escalante said, occurred “on January 9, in Juliaca, a city in the Puno region, where 18 brothers and sisters were killed by repression. This massacre led to a change in the situation. Eighteen deaths in one day was too much for people to take.

“The result was that the south was now even more on fire, and Lima, which is a conservative city, began to see large demonstrations in rejection of the massacre. Human rights groups, professionals, doctors, lawyers began to speak out, calling for those responsible for the deaths to be investigated and punished.

“The response of the government has been more repression.”

The protests reached a peak with the January 19 nationwide strike, in what was dubbed the second “March of the Four Nations”, in reference to the march of the same name which took place in July 2000 against Alberto Fujimori, who was fraudulently declared president that year.

“Along with mobilisations in the provinces, people came from all over to Lima, particularly from the south. The size of the protests far exceeded the mobilising potential of the left and trade unions. What this shows is that a process of self-organisation has begun across the country.”

But a challenge that the movement faces, according to Escalante, is that “there is no coordinated leadership”.

“There is a united front, the National Assembly of the Peoples (ANP), which predates these mobilisations and includes the main trade union confederation, the CGTP, along with some women’s collectives, youth groups and left parties. But it is essentially an assembly where we discuss politics, but more than anything else coordinate protests and actions. This is how the national strike on January 19 was called.

“But there is no real coordination and in the different districts, there are different united fronts, with some provinces having up to two or three different such fronts.”

“We, as Nuevo Peru, form part of the ANP and its leadership. Our provincial committees have thrown themselves into the task of building the mobilisations and trying to strengthen the struggle. We have thrown everything into this process. We have sought to bring together everyone from the provinces who are in Lima to be part of the ANP and see if we can centralise the struggle.

“But this is very difficult, because many do not view the ANP as a kind of leadership. We need to continue advancing in our levels of coordination and organisation. Importantly, there was a call for more groups from the regions to participate in the ANP and a number came to the meeting — an important step forward because it’s necessary to have more organisation.”

Fissures in the civic-military government

The rising protests have had a clear impact on the government: “Boluarte came out after the strike on January 19 and said she would not resign, denouncing the protesters as terrorists. But the strike was a huge blow to her government.

“What we have now in Peru is essentially a civic-military government, in which the executive, the judicial power, the armed forces, and sectors of the congress are operating as a bloc and are dependent on the support of the armed forces and the police to remain in power.

“But fissures are opening up. First, among her government and political functionaries — already two of her ministers have resigned and called on Boluarte to do the same. And second, we are seeing that the middle classes, who initially supported Boluarte, have begun to distance themselves from her following the massacre in Juliaca. Each day, Boluarte is more and more isolated, with her only solid backing being the police, the armed forces, and the reactionary right in Congress.”

Which begs the question: why hasn’t she resigned? “The pact she made with the right prior to Castillo’s impeachment is the one of the principal reasons,” said Escalante.

“Boluarte had sworn loyalty to Castillo, saying she would resign if he was impeached. But about a week before the impeachment, she broke with Castillo, and made a pact with the right. Boluarte was facing a constitutional complaint against her that had been lodged by the right. The pact was: ‘We withdraw the complaint and in return you replace Castillo, but we will control the situation’.

“At that point, Boluarte became little more than a figurehead, a Trojan Horse of the right. That is why she was allowed to assume the presidency.

“After the first deaths, Boluarte tried to resign but the right prohibited her from resigning saying: ‘If you resign, the complaint against you will be resurrected and you will go to jail’. So they have her trapped. Congress does not want her to resign, because then Congress would also fall.

“Instead, they want to keep her there and obtain at least two key objectives: inflict a historic defeat on the social movements and recapture complete control over the state. This would allow them to deepen their neoliberal model and ensure the continuity of the current constitution, which is a constitution made under the dictatorship for the benefit of big business.

“But we believe that this government will fall. It might take more time, but don’t forget that when Fujimori fell in 2000, the whole country mobilised to Lima in July” — the first “March of the Four Nations” — only for him to resign in November.

“Hopefully Boluarte will fall sooner.”

Federico Fuentes

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<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/peru-amid-nationwide-rebellion-why-hasnt-boluarte-resigned>