Transparencia: The Importance of Neutrality
Providing Objective Information in a Difficult Political Situation

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(Disclaimer: The ideas and opinions presented in this article do not represent U.S. Embassy position on this matter)
Executive Summary

Transparencia is the Peruvian electoral watchdog organization that played a pivotal role during the controversial 2000 presidential elections in Peru and continues to be a key non-governmental organization (NGO) today. Using effective communication strategies, Transparencia accomplished what it planned at the beginning of its public relations campaign: to demonstrate that the 2000 electoral process was neither fair nor free – a statement that was widely accepted by an important number of Peruvians (not only influential opinion makers, but also millions of common citizens) and the international community. The campaign was characterized by 1) strong interpersonal communication that built a 19,000-person volunteer network; 2) media relations that worked to by-pass government-influenced media; 3) the use of social science research methods (polls and media content analyses) to present objective information and gain organizational legitimacy; 4) relationship building with international and Peruvian opinion leaders. Working in cooperation with other international nonprofit organizations interested in free elections, this nongovernmental organization set the stage for Peru to have free elections in the 21st Century.

Problem Statement

At the end of 1999, after almost ten years in power, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori decided to run for a third term - an unconstitutional initiative that heated up an already unstable political arena. Since his reelection to a second term in 1995, there had been discussion about his intention – in coordination with his powerful intelligence advisor Vladimiro Montesinos and the Army – to run for a third term. To achieve the objective, Fujimori and his allies used all they had built: a majority in the Congress, controlled judicial institutions, a politicized Army, an extended intelligence agency, and a group of loyal technocrats, along with media, politicians, and businessmen who owed them favors. One of the most controversial steps towards that end was the removal by a Parliament (dominated by representatives who supported Fujimori) of independent judges in the Constitutional Court, the board that would decide whether Fujimori’s third candidacy was in accordance with the Constitution.

At the other side of the political spectrum, small and weak opposition political parties tried unsuccessfully to create an alternative to Fujimori’s plans. Acting within the political system from seats in the Congress or in municipalities, the opposition’s political options were not a serious threat for Fujimori’s and Montesinos’ ambitions. At that time, there had been serious allegations about Montesinos taking advantage of his position for illegal activities such as drug and weapon trafficking, so Fujimori’s remaining in power was obviously beneficial for him.

Once initiated, it was clear that the government did not intend to organize an impartial, fair electoral process. The challenge for Transparencia was to work to reinstate democratic election practices without directly opposing Fujimori. The NGO had to communicate a clear message: the 2000 electoral process was neither free nor fair -- a
message that eventually allowed Peruvians to get democracy back after the scandalous fall of an authoritarian regime.¹

**Background**

**General**

Peru is an Andean country with a population of about 28 million, located in western South America. Famous for being the home of one of the most important pre-Columbian civilizations, the Inca, this former Spanish colony has had unstable political situations since its independence in 1821. In recent history, the country has suffered internal armed conflict due to domestic terrorism and the misbehavior of the military that caused almost 70,000 deaths, as reported in 2003 by the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

**Current economic situation**

In 2007, the Peruvian economy remained healthy, with a GDP growth of 8.2 percent, as noted by the United Nations’ Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC). According to official projections provided by the Peruvian Ministry of Economy, in 2008 the GDP will be about US $120 billion (exchange rate as of January 2008), with a GDP per capita of US $4,052. Despite this good macroeconomic performance, poverty continues to be the main challenge for policy makers: 48.6 percent of the population is impoverished, with higher rates in the Andean highlands’ rural areas.

**PR in Peru**

In Peru the public relations field is generally informal and most practitioners do not have professional training. There are several consulting firms specializing in media relations (called strategic communications) but the term public relations is not commonly used.

Despite some efforts to empower the profession -- which included an act to create the National Association of Professional Public Relations Practitioners (or Colegio Profesional de Relacionistas Públicos del Perú) -- there is not a strong tradition of public relations academic programs. Public relations officers are usually retired journalists who have developed a network in the media, or professionals with a degree in social communication or communication sciences, as the profession is called in Peru. In fact, there is only one public relations master’s degree program in Peru. It is at Universidad de San Martin de Porres (USMP). Indeed, the headquarters of the Latin American Association of University Degrees in Public Relations (ALACURP) is located at the USMP campus. No undergraduate public relations program exists in the country. Recently, the Universidad de Lima started a Diploma in Corporate Communication, with a curriculum that includes some courses similar to those required for a public relations degree in the United States.
One of the movements gaining some credence among Latin American public relations practitioners is the “Latin American School of Public Relations” (Molleda, 2000). This school of thought focuses on social responsibility, especially in societies that are demanding more justice and equality. Practitioners adhering to this approach to public relations serve as social change agents in developing democracies. This case is a good illustration of public relations being used to further such democratic ideals.

Media

Probably the most interesting contemporary feature about Peruvian media is the rising ownership concentration, similar to media ownership trends globally. There are a few media conglomerates that are growing in multimedia, with print media starting broadcasting stations or vice versa, and with both using more technology.

The two most important conglomerates are RPP and El Comercio. RPP started as a news radio network and now owns at least six music stations with every style of music for a wide range of audiences. Additionally, RPP has started publishing some books and journals. Still, its key value is its reputation for being the fastest and widely listened to source of information.

Founded in 1839, El Comercio is the oldest Peruvian daily newspaper. With an award-winning staff of respected journalists, it is acknowledged to be the most influential newspaper and has the largest readership among elites. It is equivalent to the New York Times or the Washington Post, but slightly more conservative. Currently, the Corporation owns three dailies for different audiences, including El Comercio itself, and a wide range of publications and media-related businesses, including an advertising firm. El Comercio manages Plural TV, a firm that owns a cable network (Canal N) and also has an important stake in America TV, one of the largest TV networks and the most reliable television information source.

Contemporary Peruvian politics

In 1980, after 12 years of military rule and with a recently issued constitution, Peruvians elected Fernando Belaunde as president, starting a new democratic era. Belaunde’s performance was plagued with an economic crisis, social unrest and the birth and growth of the rebel group, the Shining Path. After this disappointment, the Social Democrat option lead by Alan Garcia from the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) defeated the leftist Alfonso Barrantes. Garcia’s administration not only did not solve all the problems left by his predecessors but made the situation even worse, due to a mix of economic and administrative mismanagement, corruption allegations, and poor performance fighting the Shining Path and a new terrorist movement, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA). Furthermore, it was during Garcia’s term when news spread about paramilitary groups funded by the government, as well as human rights violations cases regarding prisoners in state-managed jails.
Fujimori on stage

The 1980s, thus, caused a deep loss of legitimacy that made the emergence of independent candidates possible. When in 1990 Alberto Fujimori started his very poorly run campaign, nobody imagined that a difficult time for democracy was beginning. Fujimori proceeded to the election run-off with renowned Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, and got the informal support from both the APRA (García’s party) and the left, saying that despite the terrible economic situation, he would not apply shock policies, as those openly announced by Vargas Llosa. Once in office, Fujimori not only used Vargas Llosa’s platform but also hired some of his key economic advisors.

Later in his first term, it was obvious that Fujimori was not interested in maintaining democratic procedures and practices. He became a close ally of the Army. And his controversial intelligence advisor Montesinos started playing a low-profile, but key role in the administration. This was more evident after the 1992 Fujimori coup. The night of Sunday April 5th, 1992, Fujimori announced the closing and reorganization of the Congress and the Supreme Court, starting the so-called “Government for the National Reconstruction.” Some months later, after OAS pressure, he accepted the call for new elections for a Constitutional Congress. The new 1993 Constitution, created by a constitutional assembly with a majority of Fujimori’s group, was approved despite serious fraud allegations during the 1993 plebiscite. At the same time, the party that brought Fujimori to office was relegated to a minor role.

Since the 1979 Constitution, voting is mandatory in Peru – a requirement that remains in the 1993 Constitution. If a citizen does not vote, he or she must pay a penalty in order to reinstate paperwork with government agencies or even banking operations. Absenteeism from the polls is usually around 20 percent, due to lack of updated citizen records, geographic difficulties, or personal mismanagement.

Given this environment of weak political parties, non-democratic traditions, and acute economic and social crises, it was not difficult for Fujimori to soon become a charismatic leader. Thus, his self-coup of April 1992 received immense acceptance from the public. Note Fujimori’s approval rating in March (53 percent) versus April (81 percent), according to the poll firm Apoyo, reported by a Peruvian political analyst (Tanaka 1998). Although now it is clear that the country’s problems could be solved within democracy without a need for authoritarian solutions, some of Peru’s most challenging problems were solved in the first years of his term, thus providing him a good base for his later intentions to remain in power for a long time, with questionable allies, measures, and policies.

By the second half the 1990s, already in his second term, Fujimori and Montesinos accumulated enormous power with no democratic control. In the Congress, their government had a majority that made all his policies possible without any discussion and supervision, and minority groups were not successful in setting a new agenda. After the self-coup, the Judiciary worked with an intervening commission,
appointed by Fujimori and his allies. Intelligence advisor Vladimiro Montesinos kept and strengthened his controversial operations, which included spying on opposition leaders and independent journalists, as well as civil society representatives. At the same time, the government used social welfare programs to create a base of supporters among less privileged citizens, managing politically to create need and dependency.

In addition, according to the Columbia Journalism Review, Montesino’s secretly recorded videos also showed his corruption of many broadcast companies and the penny press (Felch, 2004). Because of advertising declines and tax reforms, broadcasters were deeply in debt. Montesino offered cash in amounts of $500,000 to $1.5 million per month in exchange for banning television appearances of the political opposition. By the end of 1999, Montesinos controlled five broadcast channels (in addition to Channel 7, which was already state-owned). In addition, to influence the penny press, he paid the papers’ owners for favorable front-page headlines.

Although it formally respected democratic institutions, the control the regime had over different societal sectors made the rampant corruption and abuses possible. It is not surprising that democracy in Peru is full of fragile institutions, weak parties, and highly personalized politics – features that remain even in the current stable political situation. As in other countries in the region, democracy is regularly affected by social unrest and structural problems that together with poverty make the situation a permanent challenge.

The reelection option
In August 1996, Congressman Carlos Torres y Torres Lara, one of the leaders in the majority, initiated the so-called Authentic Interpretation Law, to interpret the 1993 Constitution in a way that allowed Fujimori to run again in 2000. The project was rashly criticized by independent and opposition leaders, who presented a case in the Constitutional Court, TC – a judicial body that remains partially independent; thanks to the good reputation of five of its seven members (the other two were Fujimori’s puppets). Three out of the seven members of the TC said the project was unconstitutional, which caused their dismissal from the tribunal. Afterwards, an effort to call for a referendum to vote in favor or against this law was stopped in the Parliament. In 1998, numerous student protests took place in Lima and in various cities in the interior, which were the first important public social resistance movements that Fujimori and Montesinos faced.

By the beginning of 1999, the public expected an early announcement of Fujimori’s candidacy for a third term. It did not happen. But by August, the phrase “Perú: País con futuro” (Peru, a country with future) appeared in various parts of the country, and in key avenues in every part of Lima – even on the San Cristobal mountain, one of the hills that surrounds Lima and easily seen from downtown. This was the first, yet not official, announcement that Fujimori was running again, and a statement that he was also planning to use a new slogan, different from those he used in the past: Cambio 90 (1990), Nueva Mayoria (1993), or Vamos Vecino (1998). Indeed, some months later the electoral alliance Peru 2000, formed by all of Fujimori’s parties, was announced. Using a slogan
similar to the “Peru, country with future” phrase Fujimori registered his candidacy on December 28, 1999 – a day in the middle of the holiday season, usually a slow news week.

In the meantime, emerging independent opposition leaders (Lima Mayor Alberto Andrade and former Social Security Agency Chief Luis Castañeda Lossio) had already started their campaigns, which spurred harsh attacks from the media associated with Fujimori and Montesinos. Among all the opposition leaders, including those from the older parties such as APRA or Acción Popular (which had fewer possibilities of being elected), the key question was whether it would be possible for them to run an impartial campaign, when it was obvious that all the conditions boded an uneven process.

Organization overview
The nonprofit electoral watchdog Transparencia was born in 1994, after talks among civil society leaders about the need to improve citizenship and citizen education in Peru. The board was comprised of prominent intellectual and academic representatives. One year later, Transparencia observed the first electoral process: the 1995 elections that kept Fujimori in office. The organization continued its role in the municipal elections that followed.

In July 1999, Transparencia observed the “elecciones complementarias,” supplementary municipal elections used to correct minor Election Day noncompliance issues in various districts all over the country. In one of them, Miraflores, an upper middle class neighborhood in Lima, the process received significant media attention, due to the participation of Fernando Andrade, the brother of Lima Mayor Alberto Andrade, a future presidential candidate. It was said that Fujimori and Montesinos played key roles in the elections and that Montesinos gave money to the final winner, Luis Bedoya – a charge that later proved to be true.

Transparencia’s involvement
The 1990s were a good opportunity to develop a better trained staff and to learn that irregularities were possible not only on Election Day but in the entire election process. After five years observing domestic and international electoral processes, Transparencia had enough experience to understand the importance of enacting a neutral role. Within Transparencia the challenge was how to monitor the fairness and freedom of the elections, and how to communicate to the public (including within the international community) about its findings. Transparencia started a public relations campaign, whose two main characteristics were simple yet innovative in a highly politicized situation. The first was positioning itself as neutral and independent of all political groups, although being a democracy advocate was already a political statement for the authoritarian regime. The second feature was Transparencia’s commitment to promptly communicating objective information about the electoral process, meaning being ready for daily challenges in a very unstable time. These two factors were possible thanks to the volunteer network all over the country and a small but effective paid staff that
Transparencia created, funded by international contributions and personal contributions from its associates.

Transparencia formulated a plan to observe the entire election process and to communicate those observations throughout it. In doing so, it allowed strong participation from the Peruvian civil society. “By making the decision to adopt a comprehensive observation role that includes pre-electoral observation, its traditional information on the day of the elections, and post-electoral observation, Transparencia opened new opportunities for citizen collaboration,” according to a thorough evaluation of Transparencia’s role in the 2000 Elections (Bernbaum, Lopez Pintor, & Sanborn, 2001, p. 109). Furthermore, as the following section will show, Transparencia was successful in raising awareness of the importance of having a free and fair electoral process.

**Goals and Measurable Objectives**

Although Transparencia began its public relations program in 1999 with savvy positioning and a clear mission, there was not an official public relations program with measurable objectives and established goals. “There was not a plan as it is,” admitted Rafael Roncagliolo, then the General Secretary of Transparencia. “It was in the field that we established fluid work” (R. Roncagliolo, personal communication, January 12, 2008). Indeed, the controversial electoral process showed that a flexible approach was extremely useful when dealing with a powerful authoritarian regime.

Regarding public relations message strategies, Transparencia was clear that it was necessary to provide objective information and not opinion to the public. “While the opposition’s role was to denounce, Transparencia’s role was to inform,” said Roncagliolo. According to Roncagliolo, who led the overall monitoring process, Transparencia had just a general strategic direction, but was 100 percent clear about what to say. “The information we provided was based on facts, not on opinions,” added Roncagliolo.

The following discussion of the public relations program is based on the review of Transparencia’s 2000 election final report, Bernbaum et al’s work, interviews with three key players in Lima about Transparencia’s performance, and personal experience of one of the authors.

**Establish volunteer networks in all 194 Peruvian provinces by March 2000**

The first objective for the organization was to establish a well-managed and effective network of volunteers. In July 1999, Transparencia began to set up working committees in 194 Peruvian provinces. It was clear that without a strong social base it would have been impossible to get public support and legitimacy.
At this point, it is important to mention that Transparencia’s public relations objectives were more related to building knowledge about the unfairness and lack of freedom in elections than geared to building a better reputation for the organization. However, the NGO’s focus on building knowledge among key stakeholders had a positive effect on its reputation, as well.

To build international relationships and get international support
Transparencia understood from the beginning the role of the international community in a very difficult political process. In a time when the possibilities of garnering local financial resources were limited, cooperation from foreign sources – especially in North America and Europe -- was fundamental. While Transparencia did not yet have the background in 1999 to set a specific financial target, its second objective was to gain enough international funds to accomplish its mission. Additionally, the third objective was to build long-term relationships with international organizations concerned about fair elections. Furthermore, political concerns in governments and institutions from neighboring countries were very important when discussing the situation in future Inter-American settings, such as the Organization of American States.

To gain opinion leaders’ support
Through intensive work with independent, democratic journalists, scholars, political analysts and NGOs representatives from all types of ideologies, Transparencia knew that relationship building with opinion-makers in Peru was urgent. The NGO understood that approaching opinion leaders, who usually have more knowledge and information and can influence others, was the only way to access the few outlets provided by independent media. Transparencia intended to become a reliable source of information, since there was no media trust in the electoral authorities. “We wanted to provide elements for a further discussion among opinion leaders,” said Percy Medina, the Director of Institutional Relations in 2000 and currently the head of Transparencia (P. Medina, personal conversation, December 14, 2007).

To build public knowledge about the unfair election process
Through the implementation of a very active network of volunteers, Transparencia aimed to reach, directly and indirectly, a wide range of the public that was otherwise inaccessible, since most of the media were managed and influenced by the government. “The 2000 electoral process was marked by the near absence of political information and debate on national television, as well as a lack of access to mass media on the part of opposition parties as well as independent observers,” (Bernbaum et al., p. 36).

Strategic Tactics and Techniques
Evaluation statements released to media
From its previous experience, Transparencia knew that addressing the general public through the independent media (those not under the influence of the government)
was an effective way to reach wide audiences. Thus, Transparencia released various evaluation statements of the electoral process, especially when something important happened. The most important were released after the April 9 Election Day and in the days around the run-off, where Fujimori was running with no opponent due to the resignation of Alejandro Toledo. These denounced the absence of conditions for a fair Election Day. For example, on May 29, the day after the election runoff, Transparencia released a report saying that the process was not democratic, free and fair because of “(1) partial and insufficient legislation, (2) loss of impartiality on the part of the stated, (3) absence of electoral competition, and (4) incompetence and partiality of the electoral authorities” (Bernbaum et al., p. 82).

Exit poll
Because of the unreliable electoral authorities, from the beginning of the electoral process Transparencia had planned to develop a “quick count,” a statistically valid exit poll garnered from a sample of polling stations to compare with the official results. On Election Day, an early exit poll reported the victory of opposition candidate Alejandro Toledo. Later, the National Office for Electoral Processes (ONPE) released partial results implying that the winner was Fujimori and a run-off election was not needed. (According to Peruvian law, there is no need for a run-off if a candidate receives 50 percent plus one vote.) In the evening, the results of Transparencia’s quick count were the only reliable results, and generated a lot of media attention, nationally and internationally. Transparencia said, overall, that a run-off was needed, while Fujimori claimed he was the victor.

Approaching opinion leaders
Before the official start of the electoral process, Transparencia contacted key members of influential communities (academia, diplomatic missions, media, donor, both Peruvian and international), in order to keep them informed about facts regarding the electoral process. Transparencia mailed them regular reports and newsletters about the campaign, and invited them to gatherings and events about the electoral process. This strategic mix alternated interpersonal communication with controlled tools.

Assistance to international missions observing the elections
Transparencia also assisted its international counterparts in observing the whole electoral process and the Election Day itself. In October 1999 Transparencia started inviting electoral observers from various countries to visit Peru for field experiences. In helping them, Transparencia received international media attention and presented itself as the most reliable source of information. Thus, assisting other election observers was not only a matter of providing accurate information for an impartial assessment, but a way for Transparencia to gain endorsement from the international community – a wise step when facing harsh attacks from the government-influenced media.
Datos Electorales

 Probably the most effective tool for reaching the media was the weekly newsletter Datos Electorales (issue numbers 8 to 38), which reported all the inequalities of the campaign. Using quantitative content analyses of Peruvian media, Transparencia documented the unfairness of the electoral process that a wide range of independents, opposition leaders, and external observers knew through anecdotal evidence. Analyses published in the newsletter included unequal access to media, uneven coverage of the candidates’ activities, and controversial use of public funds favoring Fujimori’s candidacy.

Budget

 For all its operation in the first round, between August 1999 and April 2000, Transparencia devoted US $1,268,000 coming from seven foreign sources: USAID, the German Government, the Spanish Government, the Canadian Government, the Finnish Government, the Swiss government and an NGO from Belgium. It is important to clarify that this amount was used for Transparencia’s overall operation, including the establishment of the volunteers network, civic and electoral education programs, the quick count and related expenses. The organization did not break out communication expenses separately.

Results Achieved

 The plan would have benefited from more specific, measurable objectives at the outset. Some of the objectives were very general because this was a new endeavor. However, Transparencia achieved the following results related to its objectives:

• Met its objective of creating a volunteer network in all 194 provinces by March 2000. By the end of March, Transparencia had an overwhelming number of more than 19,000 volunteers nationwide.

• Raised US $1,268,000 in funds from the international community from August 1999 through April 2000. Raised US $672,700 from April to June, although it did not use the money (or make a new commitment with the donors about funding other programs), due to the decision for not observing the run-off.

• Increased the number of opinion leaders with whom Transparencia extended a relationship by the end of the campaign. For instance, while it enlisted 13 international observer organizations to partner with it in overseeing the 2000 election, it received 28 observer organization commitments to oversee the run-off. For the run-off, an important number of irregularities remained and only Fujimori kept campaigning, despite Toledo’s withdrawal from the race. Transparencia ultimately chose not to observe the run-off.

Transparencia also achieved the following results related to its strategies and tactics:

• Provided facts about an uneven campaign. Through an imaginative approach, Transparencia was able to provide objective data about an electoral process that
was perceived as unfair since the beginning, due to all the illegal steps taken to make possible the new, unconstitutional candidacy of Fujimori. “It was very helpful to be able to put numbers to the perceptions that so many people had but that they couldn’t prove,” said Alfredo Torres, director of national opinion poll firm Apoyo (Bernbaum et al., 2001, p. 63).

- **Made some unfair elements of the campaign newsworthy.** Transparencia was successful in identifying the key stages of the electoral process and monitoring the performance of the electoral authorities. This allowed Transparencia to report impartially about developments in the campaign, and was especially useful for other electoral observers. For example, Eduardo Stein, the head of the OAS’s Electoral Observation Mission, said that “Transparencia helped significantly in refocusing the problem of the role of the media in a political campaign” (Bernbaum et al., 2001, p. 93). For Stein the materials and analysis provided by Transparencia allowed the OAS mission “to understand much better the seriousness of the problem.” This also generated media attention in international publications because international journalists used Transparencia as a major source of information for their reports. (Regularly, Transparencia approached the international media through the Foreign Press Association, APEP, providing them not only the information contained in Datos Electorales, but also legal and electoral analysis). A search of the Lexis Nexis database of major U.S. newspapers showed that there were 84 articles in major dailies or wire service stories (e.g., Associated Press, Knight Ridder) that mentioned Transparencia’s role in the elections and/or included quotations from Transparencia officials from November, 1999 through the runoffs in June, 2001.

One of the main tactics for communicating campaign unevenness was the newsletter, Datos Electorales. “What was original about Datos Electorales was that it quantified the inequity,” said Santiago Pedraglio, a Peruvian political analyst and journalist who was the Datos Electorales editor (S. Pedraglio, personal communication, December 14, 2007). In a situation where the electoral authorities were unreliable and the media remain mostly closed to opposition candidates, the information provided by Datos Electorales was particularly important. “In a time when all the electoral authorities were more interested in assuring the Fujimori’s reelection, the information released by Transparencia was especially useful,” said Jacqueline Fowks, a communication analyst and author of a book about the role of the media in the 2000 Elections (J. Fowks, email communication, December 28, 2007).

For instance, in November 1999, Transparencia reported that Fujimori got 83 percent of the coverage among the four potential candidates: himself, Andrade (10 percent), Toledo (4 percent), and Castañeda (3 percent). In public television that was expected to be neutral, the situation was even worse, as Figure 1 reflects. It was the first time that such a report was issued. A later report from February-March while the official candidates were already campaigning showed that Fujimori generated more than one-third of the TV coverage (35 percent), while the other eight candidates received the remaining amount.
Datos Electorales also was successful when reporting about the use of penny media to attack opposition campaigns (see Figure 2). Although the coverage seemed to be more equitable in quantity, the headlines were full of adjectives that framed the opposition presidential candidates as unskilled. Transparencia was able to present the information about the candidates’ coverage in a way that showed how the media focused on opposition candidates’ negative attributes (see Table 1).

Independent media reaction to Datos Electorales was overwhelmingly positive. International observers such the OAS or the joint mission Carter Center/National Democratic Institute also used Transparencia’s Datos Electorales when reporting about the electoral process. On the other hand, Peruvian television remained closed to opposing viewpoints and the penny-newspapers -- most of them de facto controlled by the government -- were reluctant and hostile to Transparencia.

The newsletter was easy to read and had newsworthy information. Although newsletters were posted to the web site, Internet technology in 2000 was not as fast as it is now (at least in Peru). However, Transparencia’s staff ensured that the newsletter reached the journalists quickly in other ways. As soon as they were produced, the newsletters were faxed to the media, with hard copies following by mail. Occasionally they were hand-delivered to journalists’ offices.

- **Raised awareness about the importance of assessing the whole process.** Transparencia understood that monitoring elections was not a matter of observing just the Election Day but the conditions and the role of the electoral bodies. In doing so, Transparencia used international standards extensively. Since Transparencia was founded with an educational purpose, it also devoted important efforts to educate and empower the options the elector has, as he or she has the final decision. They also educated the members of each polling station, as they were the starting point of ensuring a fair vote counting. “Over a seven-month period leading up to the elections, Transparencia educated the Peruvian public about what was required for free and fair elections,” said Bernmaun et al., adding that the domestics electoral watchdog also “documented irregularities in a way that had not been done before, and channeled this information to opinion leaders who interpreted this information and disseminated it both nationally and internationally” (2001, p. 86). Although the “quick count” exit poll is a statistical tool, it also was used as an important communication tactic because communicating the data demonstrated Transparencia’s capability and helped reach some of the campaign’s objectives.

- **Achieved positioning itself as a reliable source of information.** From the beginning, Transparencia rapidly positioned itself as a consistent and permanent resource for gathering and obtaining objective data. A 2001 poll in January found that 56 percent of the public described Transparencia as an impartial, neutral observer. By June, that had increased to 81 percent of respondents surveyed.

- **Provide a basis for future activities.** The 2000 elections provided Transparencia an exceptional base for its actions in the following years. By July 2000, when it
was clear that Fujimori would remain in office, Transparencia was in good standing to push for democratic changes, from negotiations called by the OAS.

Conclusions and Discussion of Implications

Transparencia’s role during the 2000 elections was fundamental for recovering democracy in Peru. By November, when Fujimori resigned after a proven corruption scandal, Transparencia was acknowledged as a key player for preparing the transitional process, including the assurance of having a new free and fair electoral process in the following year. The organization was also essential in suggesting and implementing accountability actions for government agencies in the transition regime led by Valentin Paniagua.

Currently, Transparencia continues with its educational role and its observation activities for a wide range of electoral processes. For instance, it was involved in the 2006 general elections and the 2006 regional and municipal elections. Since 2000, there has not been a similarly difficult political situation, so Transparencia’s role has not been as relevant as it was in the 2000 electoral process. The organization has promoted important legislation about the democratization of the political parties, but changes by the Congress reduced their expected effectiveness. Nevertheless, Transparencia has been providing assistance in the region and developing advocacy campaigns about the importance of being an informed voter.

For public relations practitioners and students, this case is an example of the ideals of the Latin American School for Public Relations because the Transparencia communication campaign was used to promote social change in Peru’s evolving democracy.

TEACHING NOTES

Discussion questions

- What can public relations practitioners working for non-governmental organizations in other evolving democracies learn from the experiences of Transparencia?
- What are the challenges for public relations practitioners working in settings where media are not free to write what they want, due to corruption or pressures by government officials?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of Transparencia’s decision to choose a strategy of information-based communication, rather than persuasion-based communication that directly opposed Fujimori’s illegal attempt to earn a third presidential term?
- Select one of the general objectives of the Transparencia campaign and rewrite it to ensure that it is specific, measurable, and time-oriented.
• If you could go back in time and design this campaign, what evaluation measures would you have suggested at the outset? What information would have been necessary to evaluate the campaign effectively?
• In public relations planning, we discuss using research in the planning and evaluation stages. In this case, Transparencia also used research as a strategic tactic (content analysis of Peruvian media; public opinion polls). Discuss this strategy.
• Given the changes in communication technologies since 2000, what are some of the digital communication tactics that Transparencia could add in the future (funding permitting)?
• Could Transparencia have achieved as much as it did without the help of international funding? Could it have achieved as much as it did without the exposure from international media?
• If you were a public relations officer or advisor to the president of your country, would you advise that your government provide financial assistance for election oversight in other countries? Why or why not? Is this the role of governments, non-governmental organizations, or both?
• Discuss how knowledge of relationship management theory, agenda-setting theory, and framing theory could improve the strategic choices in this case.

Other assignments
Look at Transparencia’s web site at http://www.transparencia.org.pe. (If you are not fluent in Spanish, Google for the English-language translation.) Discuss Transparencia’s name, how it brands itself, and how it positions itself relative to other non-governmental organizations. If you were the organization’s webmaster, what would you add to the web site?

Look at an issue of El Comercio (if available in your library) or at El Comercio online at http://www.elcomercioperu.com.pe. Now look at a major newspaper in your country (online or in hard copy). How do they compare? If you were an international public relations practitioner working with both newspapers on a story, how would media relations with the two newspapers be similar? How would media relations be different?

Bibliography


generales en el Perú. Lima: Fundación Friedrich Ebert.


Endnotes
1 There is an extensive bibliography about Fujimori’s regimen, from its origin to its fall. In English, see Fujimori’s Peru: Deception in the Public Sphere by Catherine Conaghan (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005) and The Fujimori Legacy: The Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism in Peru, a compilation of contributions by scholars based in the U.S. edited by Julio Carrion (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). In Spanish, some key titles are Lecciones del final del fujimorismo by Jane Marcus-Delgado and Martín Tanaka (Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2001), La década de la antipolítica. Auge y huida de Alberto Fujimori y Vladimiro Montesinos, by Carlos Iván Degregori (Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2000) and El fujimorismo: ascenso y caída de un régimen autoritario, by Julio Cotler and Romeo Grompone (Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2000). About Montesinos, it is useful to read El espía imperfecto, by Sally Bowen (PEISA, 2003), also available in English as The Imperfect Spy.

2 Toledo became president in 2001, in an electoral process organized by new electoral authorities during the so called Transition Government headed by Valentin Paniagua.

3 Indeed, an attack campaign on Transparencia was released by at least two major TV networks, many month before the Election Day, when the watchdog started reporting about the lack of access to open TV. The reaction to these attacks was to keep working. Involuntary victimized, Transparencia also got a lot of sympathy from the international community and the independent media.
Figure 1
Time devoted to potential candidates on public television, November 1999

Source: Datos Electorales 14
(Note: neither Toledo, nor Castañeda got any coverage)

Figure 2
Presidential candidates on the cover of the newspapers that cost less than one sol (US$ 0.15), January 10-March 10, 2000

Source: Datos Electorales 27.
Note: the rest of the candidates were not mentioned on the cover page.
Table 1
What cover pages’ headlines of the newspapers that cost less than one sol said about the candidates, January 10-March 10, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Andrade</th>
<th>Castañeda</th>
<th>Toledo</th>
<th>Fujimori</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He is against the poor</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>He has emotional problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has dubious earnings</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He likes protest and violence</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is pro-terrorist</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is bourgeois (pituco)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is fraudulent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has links with Alan Garcia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated with homosexuals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is a liar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He helps the poorest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He supports good works</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is against terrorists</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Datos Electorales 27.

Relevant Web sites
International Public Relations Association
http://www.ipra.org

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management
http://www.globalpr.org

Inter-American Confederation of Public Relations (CONFIARP)
http://www.confiarp.org/1_home.htm

Latin American Association of University Careers in Public Relations.
http://www.alacaurp.org

InterAmerican Press Association
http://www.sipiapa.org

Foreign Press Association of Peru
http://www.apepweb.org

Freedom House
http://www.freedomhouse.org
Transparencia
www.transparencia.org.pe

Peruvian Office of the National Elections
www.onpe.gob.pe

Peruvian National Elections (legal)
www.jne.gob.pe

Election-related blog
http://dia.pucp.edu.pe/proyectos/fernandotuesta/