

Bishop: Vote for 2 Presidential Hopefuls Would Be 'a Sin'

A Peruvian archbishop told congregants they would be committing "a sin" if they vote for two left-leaning presidential candidates because of their stances on abortion and gay rights.

The comment on Sunday by Javier del Rio, responsible for the archdiocese of Peru's second biggest city Arequipa with more than one million Catholics, was aimed at Veronika Mendoza and Alfredo Barnechea, who were virtually tied for third place in opinion polls two weeks before the April 10 election.

Mendoza and Barnechea both believe abortion should be legal in the case of rape and support civil unions to give same-sex couples the legal benefits of marriage.

"Alfredo Barnechea and Veronika Mendoza have openly said that they favor abortion and gay marriage. A Catholic cannot vote for those candidates. It's a sin!" Del Rio told a crowd at Easter Mass.

It was unclear why del Rio did not also single out second-placed Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, a former World Bank economist who has also proposed civil unions.

Frontrunner Keiko Fujimori has also said she supports a legal framework that gives gay couples more rights but is against allowing them to adopt children. Both center-right Fujimori and Kuczynski oppose abortion unless the life of the mother is in jeopardy.

Peruvians took to Twitter to criticize the archbishop and the state subsidies that the Catholic Church enjoys in Peru. They

shared a picture of del Rio posing next to the running mate of presidential contender Alan Garcia, a former president trailing behind Mendoza and Barnechea in opinion polls.

The election winner would replace President Ollanta Humala, whose five year term ends this year.

Mendoza vowed to make Peru more secular if elected and said religious leaders such as del Rio should not meddle in elections.

"I'm going to pray to illuminate the Archbishop of Arequipa so he doesn't use the pulpit for political commentary," Barnechea said. {eo}

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