

Political Correlates of a Democracy without Parties Peru

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Abstract

Peru constitutes a paradigmatic case of a democracy without bona fide political parties. This makes it an ideal “most likely case” of democratic dysfunction for examining key theoretical tenets about the relationship between political parties and democracy. Political science theory confers upon political parties several key functions of democratic governance and holds that, in the absence of bona fide parties, several dysfunctional political correlates should materialize: nonresponsiveness to societal policy preferences, serious deficits in electoral (vertical) accountability, flourishing populism, imperiled governability in state-society relations, and vulnerability to democratic breakdown. These five theoretical predictions are examined by way of perusing the empirical workings of Peruvian democracy along these dimensions in the post-2001 democratic era. Overall, Peru’s democratic experience bears out the predictions in stark fashion, thus providing confirming evidence in favor of the real-world centrality of political parties for the functionality of democracy as a system of representation, governability, and accountability. The expectation that populism will flourish has been borne out, but of a low-intensity variety, such that radical populism has been kept at bay. Only the last prediction is not confirmed by the empirical record, insofar as Peruvian democracy has not been vulnerable to breakdown during the last two decades.

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Political science theory holds political parties to be central to the functionality of democratic governance. More specifically, parties are theoretically deemed to be necessary for the adequate functioning of democratic responsiveness,

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governability, and vertical and horizontal accountability.¹ Institutionalized political parties are posited to be the key entities that aggregate societal preferences and mediate between state and society. Parties also recruit and train political cadres for the exercise of public office, which becomes inestimable in the development of a professional political class knowledgeable in the management of public affairs. In the exercise of these functions, there are no good substitutes for political parties. At best, there are partial substitutes in organized civil society regarding representation and aggregation of interests. But in their mediating function between state and society, parties are nonsubstitutable. Similarly, institutionalized and programmatic parties help citizens choose between different sets of public policy options, allowing for policy responsiveness. Parties help enact changes to public policy in response to new societal preferences and demands. Elections can act as mechanisms of effective vertical accountability only to the extent that institutionalized political parties populate a democracy, according to standard democratic theory. Political parties hold incumbents to account should there be deviations from their programmatic offering. Moreover, institutionalized parties give politicians incentives to protect party brands and stay faithful to their programmatic identity, as well as constrain deviations from the party platform, thus fomenting accountability. Voters also are afforded the opportunity to reward or punish incumbents based on the degree to which party governments follow electoral mandates while governing. Furthermore, institutionalized political parties act as a bulwark against the siren calls of populism because they uphold the legitimacy of democracy as a system, as well as contribute to popular satisfaction with its workings. Anti-establishment, populist strategies on the part of political entrepreneurs have limited space to grow when political parties encapsulate the bulk of the electorate. Finally, standard theory posits that institutionalized political parties help prolong the longevity of democracy and avert its breakdown, because they enhance the legitimacy of democracy qua political regime, provide a ready-made organizational opposition to would-be autocrats, strengthen the fortitude and autonomy of legislatures, and contribute to the pluralism, impartiality, and strength of institutions that uphold the rule of law, among other functions.² While Peru showcases political parties in the minimalist sense of entities that field candidates for office, it is generally devoid of parties in a more substantive sense. Following a new and groundbreaking

¹ The following three works provide an excellent theoretical account about the linkages between political parties and the aforementioned elements of democracy: Scott Mainwaring, ed., *Party Systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, Decay, and Collapse* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, eds., *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); and Adam Przeworski, Susan Carol Stokes, and Bernard Manin, eds., *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

² Mainwaring and Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions*, and Mainwaring, *Party Systems in Latin America*.

theoretical taxonomy of underinstitutionalized parties, which classifies electoral vehicles in terms of their ability to fulfill horizontal coordination and vertical aggregation functions,³ most Peruvian parties fail at both, which earns them the label “independents” in this classificatory scheme. The Luna et al. study makes clear why only some of the electoral vehicles we observe in the developing world deserve the label of a “political party.” The electoral entities we observe in Peru clearly qualify as diminished subtypes of political parties.⁴ In analyzing their inner workings and membership, Mauricio Zavaleta has compellingly labeled Peruvian electoral vehicles “coalitions of independents,” underscoring the fact that they tend to be ephemeral associations of free agents.⁵ John Aldrich famously conceptualized political parties as *institutionalized* coalitions of elites that aim to capture and use political office—coalitions that adopt rules, norms, and procedures.⁶ Peruvian electoral vehicles fall well short of this standard. In acknowledging that Peru is bereft of entities that rise to the level of a political party (defined in a nonminimalist fashion), political scientists properly use the phrase “democracy without parties” or party-less democracy.⁷ Analyses of individual Peruvian electoral vehicles show them to lack internal rule-based organization, societal linkages, social rootedness, and internal coherence.⁸ They are entities that field candidates for office (and even this, sometimes in intermittent fashion⁹), but little more.

³ This theoretical work, with case studies from Latin America, is the following: Juan Pablo Luna, Rafael Pinero, Fernando Roseblatt, and Gabriel Vommaro, eds., *Political Parties and Diminished Subtypes: Democratic Representation in Contemporary Latin America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁴ The term “political party” is retained throughout this essay out of convention. But the reader should bear in mind that individual Peruvian electoral vehicles can be placed in the lowest level of the institutionalization continuum, as they fail to possess key attributes of standard political parties.

⁵ Mauricio Zavaleta, *Coaliciones de independientes: Las reglas no escritas de la política electoral* [Coalitions of independents: The unwritten rules of electoral politics] (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2014).

⁶ John Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁷ See Martin Tanaka, *Democracia sin partidos: Perú 2000-2005* [Democracy without parties: Peru 2000–2005] (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2005), and John Crabtree, “Democracy without Parties? Some Lessons from Peru,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* (2010): 357-382.

⁸ For an analysis of individual Peruvian parties in terms of coherence and social rootedness, see Omar Sanchez-Sibony, *Democracy without Parties: The Case of Peru* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2021), chap. 2. For another work that delves into the traits of individual parties in Peru, see Barry Levitt, *Power in the Balance* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2011), chap. 4.

⁹ It has not been infrequent for Peruvian electoral vehicles not to field presidential candidates at particular electoral cycles—either because the party founder cannot run, the initial candidate is retired because he or she proves electorally uncompetitive, or a candidate finds little support among party notables, a function of a lack of internal rules for candidate selection. In failing to field a candidate, a political party renounces its *raison d’être*.

The quip that “democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties” is one of the most quoted among students of party politics. The advent of “democracies without parties,” such as Peru¹⁰ or Guatemala,¹¹ affords comparativists the opportunity to evaluate whether the workings of these party-less polities conform with established political science theory. In methodological terms, the Peruvian and Guatemalan democracies are “most likely cases” of democratic dysfunction: these democracies should be incapable of performing their most important representation and accountability roles. If the theory that explains how parties affect democratic functioning is not corroborated in the empirical examination of these democracies, that would represent important and partially disconfirming case-based evidence against the theory. This essay engages in this exercise by examining the workings of Peruvian democracy post-2001 in five areas: democratic responsiveness to societal preferences; election-based vertical accountability; the relative prevalence or absence of populism; governability in state-society relations; and the consolidation of democracy defined in the classic way as invulnerability to breakdown.

The empirical perusal of Peru’s practice of democracy is here found to conform with theoretical expectations; a party-based framework can indeed explain many of the key dysfunctions afflicting Peru’s wretched low-quality democracy. However, there are two addendums worthy of note. First, Peru has been spared radical populism and evinces only a low-intensity variant. Second, the last dimension constitutes a partial deviation from theoretical expectations in the sense that democracy has not been under threat in the past two decades.

The Absence of Democratic Responsiveness: Institutionalizing Policy Certainty

After the competitive authoritarian period of Alberto Fujimori’s reign,¹² Peru’s return to democracy was much celebrated. Party system collapse contributed decisively to the soon-to-follow collapse of democracy. But Peru’s post-2001 democratic regime evinces significant political continuity with the competitive authoritarianism of the 1990s regarding the underlying moving parts of the

¹⁰ Steven Levitsky, “Peru: The Institutionalization of Politics without Parties,” in *Party Systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, Decay, and Collapse*, ed. Scott Mainwaring (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For an account of the structural determinants of party system underinstitutionalization in Peru, see Steven Levitsky and Maxwell A. Cameron, “Democracy without Parties? Political Parties and Regime Change in Fujimori’s Peru,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 3 (2003): 1-33.

¹¹ Omar Sanchez-Sibony, “Guatemala’s Predicament: Electoral Democracy without Political Parties,” in *Guatemala: Gobierno, Gobernabilidad, Poder Local* [Guatemala: Government, governability and local power], ed. Gemma Sanchez Medero and Ruben Sanchez Medero (Valencia, Spain: Editorial Tirant Humanidades, 2016).

¹² Julio Carrion, ed., *The Fujimori Legacy: The Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism in Peru* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2006).

political system, some political practices, and the political culture of that decade. The continued extreme weakness of political parties post-2001, along with feeble state institutions, has preconfigured a very weak democracy.

Alternation in office has scarcely been a problem in Peru's democracy. The absence of partisanship alongside failures of government performance in the delivery of public goods has systematically doomed governing parties in their attempts at re-election. Voters have consistently used the electoral process to "boot the rascals out," such that elections have operated to deliver thin vertical accountability in this limited sense. However, elections have not served as instruments to deliver public policy attuned to popular demands. In fact, intertemporal alternation in office has not delivered noticeably different public policy outputs. Elections bring new parties to the executive branch, but the country's policy trajectory does not change. This phenomenon strips elections of much of their key presumed role as an instrument of democracy,¹³ for electoral processes have demonstrably not translated voter demands into corresponding social and economic policy. Adam Przeworski famously called democracy "the institutionalization of uncertainty," insofar as elections entail uncertainty about winners (the composition of future governments), and thereby uncertainty about future government policies as well. Peru certainly conforms to the first part of the dictum, but not the second. The extreme uncertainty of electoral outcomes has coexisted with remarkable continuity in enacted economic policy.

At one level, Peru's policy continuity is surprising in that it defies established political science theory about the relationship between party systems and economic policy. Inchoate party systems foster a climate of high uncertainty in the political realm,¹⁴ and by extension, in the economic realm as well.¹⁵ Underinstitutionalized governing parties face fewer political constraints to embark upon changes or even radical departures from the status quo in economic policy. That helps explain why, during the 1980s, governing parties in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil implemented "radical heterodox stabilization programs that violated party programs,"¹⁶ while governments operating amid institutionalized party-system settings did not. Gustavo Flores-Macias's well-crafted study on this topic shows that party system underinstitutionalization enhances both the likelihood that outsiders come to office and "the ability to carry out economic reform once they are in

¹³ The classic statement is found in Bingham Powell, *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, "Introduction," in *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*, ed. Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 1-36.

¹⁵ Gustavo Flores-Macias, *After Neoliberalism? The Left and Economic Reforms in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

office.”¹⁷ *Ceteris paribus*, given the extremely inchoate nature of Peru’s party universe and the concomitant frequency with which political outsiders access the presidency, we should expect large volatility in economic policymaking and other areas of public policy across presidential administrations. Yet, the country evinces strict continuity in the economic policy realm: a neoliberal orientation has been intact since the first Alberto Fujimori presidential term.¹⁸ Peru, then, is a case study that deviates radically from Flores-Macias’s general theory. While the two variables are related in probabilistic fashion, party-system institutionalization is not a *necessary* condition for policy stability. Peru shows that policy continuity is possible amid very inchoate party universes. Because of their political feebleness and lack of technical cadres, political parties can be irrelevant for the conduct of economic affairs, and powerless to change the established course of economic policy. When parties and politicians are irrelevant for the formulation of economic policy, influence in this area is bound to be confined to the technocracy and the organized business community. In post-1990 Peru, economic policies have not been crafted, defended, and preserved by political parties, nor are such policies the result of partisan convergence around a given economic orientation; there is no interparty consensus to forge state-level public policies that supersede partisanship or *politicas de estado*. Peru’s volatile and feckless party universe precludes interparty pacts from materializing or lasting into the future. But more fundamentally, such pacts are irrelevant for practical purposes, for the partisan arena is not where economic policy is crafted; rather, Peruvian state-level policies have been conceived, shaped, and refined by Peru’s technocracy. One key factor explaining why the neoliberal policy regime has become consolidated and unaltered, regardless of which political party or political entrepreneur wins high office, is the acute weakness of the political class (comprised of free agents) vis-à-vis the technocratic class ensconced in key economic agencies of the state.¹⁹ Peruvian electoral vehicles lack the political clout that comes with intertemporal social rootedness, and they also are bereft of party cadres with highly specialized knowledge of economics (or cadres in any other area of policymaking)—with few partial exceptions. Incoming Peruvian governments are therefore in need of borrowing independent technocrats to staff key ministries. A second reason accounting for Peru’s economic *piloto automatico*—the moniker used to denote the invariant neoliberal orientation—lies in Peru’s remarkable macroeconomic performance (in GDP growth) from

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁸ IMF, *Peru: Staying the Course of Economic Success* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2015).

¹⁹ Alberto Vergara and Daniel Encinas, “Continuity by Surprise: Explaining Institutional Stability in Contemporary Peru,” *Latin American Research Review* 51, no.1 (2016): 159-180. See also, Eduardo Dargent, *Technocracy and Democracy in Latin America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

1990 to about 2015, situating Peru as an economic superstar in Latin America. This widely recognized legitimacy of (macroeconomic) performance has endowed the Peruvian technocratic class with ample credibility and political clout, both domestically and in international circles—particularly in relational terms vis-à-vis discredited politicians. Indeed, high level technocrats atop the Central Bank and the Finance Ministry, such as Julio Velarde, have won international awards and recognition for their stewardship of the economy. Peruvian technocracy has acquired an important degree of political power as well as political autonomy, as Eduardo Dargent has shown.²⁰ Peruvian economists enmeshed in the bureaucracy are not a mere conduit for the business class to impose its preferred policy options. These technocrats have acted as a straight-jacket on politicians' entertaining statist or otherwise non-market-friendly economic policies, thus annulling the possibility of political responsiveness to public demands.

Another reason for the observed continuity in economic policy (the so-called automatic pilot) lies in the instrumental and structural power of organized business. As the economy has grown enormously over the last quarter century, the instrumental power of the business community has grown in tandem.²¹ Peru's stellar macroeconomic performance and the concomitant growth of the private sector since the early 1990s have endowed the organized private sector with a level of political power it did not previously enjoy. Its instrumental power is also large, if not embodied in a concrete political party. While Peru's organized business has historically eluded serious investments in party-building, it is quite forceful in exercising direct leverage vis-à-vis the state when it perceives that its key economic interests are at stake. Presidents willing to move economic policy in a direction that differs from the neoliberal agenda would face the wrath of a powerful and vocal (not least, via its control of key mass-media outlets) business community.

Electoral outcomes have been irrelevant for shaping the contours of economic policy because Peruvian politicians—largely a collection of free agents—are exceedingly feeble not only in relational terms (vis-à-vis the technocracy) but also in a more fundamental, absolute manner. Presidential and congressional candidates lack programmatic agendas and political parties with cadres and trained personnel to buttress those agendas. Since 1990, national electoral contests have been marred by high doses of populism and personalism, to the detriment of programmatic, ideas-based campaigning.²² Presidents-elect come to office bereft of ideas, resources, party-based advisors, societal allies, and other important and necessary tools for charting a distinct and coherent policy

²⁰ Dargent, *Technocracy and Democracy in Latin America*.

²¹ John Crabtree and Francisco Durand, *Peru: Elite Power and Political Capture* (London: Zed Books, 2017), chap. 5.

²² Taylor Boas, *Presidential Campaigns in Latin America: Electoral Strategies and Success Contagion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), chap. 4.

course. The successful formulation and enactment of economic or political reforms require such instruments. In part, policy continuity has proceeded *by default*, for parties' lack of basic human capital (i.e., no economically trained party cadres) and political resources to steer public policy in a different direction. Elected politicians are exceedingly powerless vis-à-vis nonelected actors. In good measure, this general landscape explains why no governing political party has been either able or willing (campaign utterances aside) to wrestle control of the economy from the "automatic pilot" that commands the economy.

The neoliberal economic regime, however, runs afoul of citizen preferences. Peru's economic automatic pilot, and the neoliberal political order that sustains it, is utterly unresponsive to social preferences. Many public opinion polls reveal an immense state-society disconnect. A March 2016 Datum poll, for instance, showed that a sky-high 91 percent of Peruvians want to change the economic model (29 percent desire a total change; 34 percent voice preference for a partial change; and 28 percent want to alter some aspects of the model), whereas only a marginal 3 percent is content with it. The manifest utter inability of Peru's feckless party universe to channel (even partially) these demands comes with visible political costs in terms of trust in political institutions and system legitimacy. Only 49.3 percent of Peruvians supported democracy as a system in 2019, the lowest percentage over the 2006–2019 period.²³ In 2019, only 28 percent of respondents were satisfied with the workings of Peruvian democracy, also the lowest figure in that fourteen-year interval, while confidence in political parties reached a new nadir at 21.2 percent in 2019.²⁴ A staggering 89 percent of Peruvians did not identify with any political party by 2019. The poll Latinobarometro placed Peruvians among the three citizenries most dissatisfied with the working of their democracy in Latin America.²⁵ Only 9 percent of Peruvian respondents were pleased with the performance of the economy,²⁶ which places the country among the five lowest degrees of satisfaction in Latin America. The gap between objective macroeconomic performance—which sizably increased the scope of the middle class and reduced poverty levels—and citizens' approval of that performance over the years, is particularly notorious in Peru. This poses something of a riddle. Part of the answer to this apparent incongruity

²³ Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), Americas Barometer 2018/19 (2019), Vanderbilt University, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2018/2018-19_AmericasBarometer_Regional_Report_10.13.19.pdf (accessed August 23, 2020).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "The Latinobarómetro Survey: Dejected about Democracy," *Economist*, November 10, 2018, 35-36.

²⁶ See Latinobarometro, 2018, https://www.latinobarometro.org/latdocs/INFORME_2018_LAT_INOBARO_METRO.pdf (accessed August 23, 2020).

lies in deficient delivery of public goods and a low level of national social spending.²⁷ Peru's inordinately low level of public and social spending, among the lowest in Latin America on a per capita basis, is clearly at odds with public preferences, affecting both system legitimacy and the (evanescent) popularity of incumbents. Similarly, spending on antipoverty conditional cash transfer programs is very low, and studies find that the overall redistribution effect of such expenditure is null.²⁸ Overall, social outlays and the expansiveness of social programs in Peru are substantially more restricted than in most other Latin American countries of comparable GDP per capita,²⁹ fomenting serious deficiencies in the delivery of social services. A predictable correlate of this state of affairs is perpetual social discontent, contributing to short honeymoons for new chief executives. Candelaria Garay's work empirically shows the importance of political competition among institutionalized political parties and attendant links between parties and social movements in fostering the expansion of social policy.³⁰ The upshot is that Peru's partyless landscape has attenuated the political incentives that compel presidential candidates and incumbents to address and respond to enormous social needs. This partly explains why both Alejandro Toledo and Alan Garcia obviated a great opportunity to use the enormous incoming foreign exchange resources accruing to the national treasury during the commodity boom (2003–2013) to sizably expand social policy. They lacked political incentives to do so, nor did they face pressure from organized social movements pushing for social policy expansion. Institutionalized left-wing parties, which in other countries have taken up the mantle of ramping up and reallocating social spending,³¹ are absent in Peru, where the political left has a very poor record of electoral performance.

In Peru, the pervasive and continued unresponsiveness of the political system to social preferences has contributed to the perpetuation of an acutely underinstitutionalized partisan landscape and, for a time, the steady rise of a party (Fujimorismo) that derives political capital in no small measure from its popular reputation for delivering results. For as long as popular demands are not channeled by political parties, Peruvian voters' dissatisfaction can be expected to build, regardless of favorable or even stellar macroeconomic

²⁷ Steven Levitsky, "Paradoxes of Peruvian Democracy: Political Bust amid Economic Boom?" *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* 14 (2014): 2-6.

²⁸ Miguel Jaramillo, "The Incidence of Social Spending and Taxes in Peru," *Public Finance Review* 42, no. 3 (2014): 391-412.

²⁹ Nora Lustig, "Inequality and Fiscal Redistribution in Middle Income Countries: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru and South Africa," *Journal of Globalization and Development* 7, no. 1 (2016): 17-60.

³⁰ Candelaria Garay, *Social Policy Expansion in Latin America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³¹ Evelyn Huber and John Stephens, *Democracy and the Left: Social Policy and Inequality in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

indicators. Policy performance has conventionally been held to be the most important determinant of regime support. Peru deviates from this common wisdom, but so do countries like Venezuela (which under Hugo Chávez displayed strong regime support despite poor performance) or post-Pinochet Chile. Rhodes Purdy's work does much to illuminate what explains such gaps by focusing on how policy decisions are made.³² In polities where there are extensive opportunities to participate in the policy process, citizen feelings of efficacy are strong and regime support is high as a result. Peruvian technocracy's sway over the management of the economy has depoliticized many aspects of economic policy de facto, contributing to citizens' low sense of efficacy, and concomitantly to low regime support—notwithstanding remarkable (if territorially uneven) economic growth performance. The visibly lower economic performance after the commodity boom period is contributing to lower levels of regime support among a now more precarious and vulnerable middle class.

Susan Stokes has averred that the impact of political parties on democratic responsiveness “depends on what parties are”—their objectives and organization.³³ The Peruvian case lends support to this conclusion, in a basic manner. Insofar as parties in Peru are purely office-seeking and largely epiphenomenal, they do not alter or shape the policy status quo to align it with public preferences: their policy preferences, insofar as they can be discerned, are rather irrelevant, because policy is set by the *poderes facticos* (de facto powers), domestic (technocracy, organized business) and international.

Vertical Accountability: Repeated Betrayal of Mandates

Mandate reversals have occurred with troubling regularity in Third Wave Latin America.³⁴ Economic constraints feature prominently in the explanation behind this insidious phenomenon. During the 1980s and 1990s, economic crisis incentivized many parties' campaigning on statist and redistributionist platforms to enact neoliberalism once ensconced in office. The policy latitude to enact left-of-center economic policymaking was meager. However, changed economic conditions during the 2000s substantially reduced the incidence of mandate reversals in Latin America.³⁵ The commodities boom amplified the latitude of many governments (particularly rentier states), enabling them to

³² Matthew Rhodes-Purdy, *Regime Support beyond the Balance Sheet: Participation and Policy Performance in Latin America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³³ Susan Stokes, “Political Parties and Democracy,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 243-267.

³⁴ Susan Stokes, *Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁵ Jorge Domínguez, “Three Decades since the Start of the Democratic Transitions,” in *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America*, 3rd ed., ed. Jorge Domínguez and Michael Shifter (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

follow through on promises of expansive social policy and statist economics, because favorable terms of trade endowed the region's treasuries with unprecedented financial windfalls.³⁶ Secondly, the (partial) delegitimation of the Washington Consensus neoliberalism agenda—in good part due to lackluster economic growth performance—amplified the range of economic policy choices policymakers were bound to consider.³⁷ From the early 2000s onward, the United States came to exercise less leverage vis-à-vis Latin American to impose its preferred free-market policies than in times past. Given an international and economic context that enormously amplified the economic room for maneuver, governments throughout the region followed through on the broad outlines of their campaign promises, including the many leftist parties-in-the-executive during the 2000s³⁸—such as Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, and others. Peru qualifies as a resource-rich country, a rentier economy. High raw material prices showered post-2003 Peruvian governments with ample resources, which offered the opportunity to enact large increases in public and social spending. Popular demand for statist policies and ambitious social policy find much echo in the interior impoverished regions of the country, where the neoliberal model is least supported. In short, since the early 2000s, both (voter) demand and (financial resources) supply factors have been present for pushing forward with an ambitious redistributive, leftist public policy agenda in Peru. Toledo, García, and Ollanta Humala campaigned on a left-of-center economic agenda. Nevertheless, they did not govern with a programmatically leftist bent. Enacted public policies in Peru maintained a highly conservative bias before, during, and after the resource boom years (2003–2013). This poses something of an intellectual puzzle: why have incumbents betrayed their campaign mandates with such unflinching regularity?

The feckless nature of political parties in Peru, better understood as electoral vehicles, partly explains the repeated betrayals of mandate. Firstly, their socially uprooted character affords such “parties” a high level of political autonomy from society. While the absence of organic linkages with society deprives them of political clout or claims to intertemporal representation, it concurrently grants them ample autonomy in the conduct of policy vis-à-vis their (atomized) voters and social constituencies. Incumbents enact betrayals of mandate in the knowledge that “their” voters cannot punish or constrain their actions (except in the court of public opinion polls), for voters do not have channels of voice and representation (corporatist or otherwise) within governing parties. A second reason underpinning betrayals of mandate centers

³⁶ Sebastián Mazzuca, “Lessons from Latin America: The Rise of Rentier Populism,” *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2013): 108-122.

³⁷ Peter Kingstone, *The Political Economy of Latin America* (London: Routledge, 2011).

³⁸ Flores-Macias, *After Neoliberalism?*

on time horizons.³⁹ Institutionalized political parties lengthen the time horizon of political actors because, as collective entities, parties are concerned about future elections. However, in a landscape made up of electoral vehicles with short shelf-lives, political entrepreneurs heavily discount the future. Secondly, the short and uncertain nature of political careers in Peru also militates against respecting electoral mandates. Career politicians have every incentive to think about future elections, and thus to avoid decisions or political actions that might compromise their future careers. Peru, however, lacks a bona fide political class. Because outsiders and amateurs are the numerical norm in the Peruvian political landscape, the future is heavily discounted.⁴⁰ Peruvian political entrepreneurs work on the assumption that their political careers will be very short. Re-election rates for lawmakers, for example, averaged a strikingly low 20 percent during the 1995–2008 period, a much lower figure than in other Latin American countries.⁴¹ Similarly, low re-election rates apply for other elected officials (including governors). Consequently, Peru’s free agents do not have strong incentives to be ideologically or programmatically faithful to the voters who elected them to office. The policy promises made during campaigns are promptly forgotten by elected politicians. In sum, the institutional prerequisites, as well as the individual-level incentives for lengthening political time horizons, are absent. The short-termism afflicting the Peruvian landscape inexorably creates very perverse dynamics for responsiveness. Thirdly, electoral vehicles—or otherwise organizationally feeble parties—cannot constrain party leaders, giving the latter much room for maneuver in policy choices. Leaders atop taxi parties or functionally equivalent ones (i.e., *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* [APRA], or *Partido Popular Cristiano* (PPC, post-2001)), do not face internal formal party rules, norms, or powerful party notables who can constrain their actions. Nor do electoral vehicles evince a party brand that needs to be protected. In general, it is personal brands that have value in Peruvian politics, not party brands.⁴² Personalism militates against responsiveness, as it grants leaders policy leeway and de facto autonomy from voters.

The power of markets in constraining the viable choice set of economic policies, coupled with increasing disrepute and weakness of parties throughout Latin America, account for evident vertical accountability deficits throughout

³⁹ John Carey and Andrew Reynolds, “Parties and Accountable Government in New Democracies,” *Party Politics* 13, no. 2 (2007): 255–274.

⁴⁰ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty Riedl, “Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies,” *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 11 (2013): 1339–1365.

⁴¹ Martin Tanaka and Rodrigo Barnechea, “Evaluando la oferta de los partidos: ¿Cuál es el perfil de los candidatos al próximo Parlamento?” [Evaluating the party supply: What is the profile of candidates to the next parliament?], *Revista Argumentos* 5, no. 1 (2011), <https://argumentos-historico.iep.org.pe/articulos/evaluando-la-oferta-de-los-partidos-cual-es-el-perfil-de-los-candidatos-al-proximo-parlamento/> (accessed September 28, 2020).

⁴² See Omar Sanchez-Sibony, *Democracies without Parties*, chap. 3.

the region. However, it is difficult to name another country where the deficits in vertical accountability have been as acute as in Peru,⁴³ because in few other places are the institutions of interest aggregation and state-society mediation as feeble. In light of these considerations, it is not surprising that Peruvian democracy is beset by repeated betrayals of mandate, a dynamic observed ever since the party system collapsed. Let us delve into the empirical evidence showcasing this repeated phenomenon.

Mandate Reversals across Time

Alejandro Toledo campaigned for the 2001 presidential election on a “vaguely centrist” platform, “emphasizing job creation, decentralization and the satisfaction of basic human needs.”⁴⁴ Toledo promised to increase public-sector salaries. Once ensconced in office, it became clear that, notwithstanding his promises, Toledo’s economic policies would continue those of Fujimori. In a signal to markets and investors, the new president hired Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, a well-known neoliberal technocrat and a member of the country’s economic elite, to run the Ministry of Finance. Later, Kuczynski was named prime minister. Toledo’s economic agenda followed strict free-market orthodoxy: he privatized state-owned enterprises, imposed discipline on national budgets to keep expenditures in line with revenues, dismantled barriers to trade and capital movements, and pursued trade agreements with China, the United States, and other countries. While the economy performed well during 2001–2006, the benefits of growth accrued to “the top one-third of the income distribution, and barely reached the poor and the extreme poor, which made up around half of the population.”⁴⁵ The absence of an active social agenda betrayed his electoral mandate and constituted a chief reason many observers regarded his administration as a lost opportunity for inclusive growth. Toledo relied on a strictly trickle-down approach to economic development, governing to the satisfaction of economic elites, but much more to the right than he had promised voters.

Alan Garcia, ever the astute politician, approached the 2006 presidential election cognizant of the widespread popular demand for change, which had catapulted the outsider Ollanta Humala and his radical proposals to a high place in the polls. The economic growth model pursued since the time of Fujimori’s neoliberal turn had generated very uneven growth, benefiting Lima and the Peruvian coast, but leaving the country’s interior neglected. Demands were rife for the renegotiation of taxes levied on large mining and hydrocarbon

⁴³ Alberto Vergara and Aaron Watanabe, “Delegative Democracy Revisited: Peru since Fujimori,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 148-157.

⁴⁴ Gregory Schmidt, “The 2001 Presidential and Congressional Elections in Peru,” *Electoral Studies* 22, no. 2 (2003): 344.

⁴⁵ Ronald Bruce St John, *Toledo’s Peru: Vision and Reality* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 194.

corporations, which were obtaining enormous profits amid an explosion of commodity prices. This allowed the possibility for large increases in public spending on education, health, and propoverty programs. The emerging social consensus that the commodity boom should be parlayed into increased social spending shaped the campaign. Garcia sought to position himself as the candidate of *el cambio responsable* (responsible change), embodying implicit demands for departure from economic policy continuity, while concurrently seeking not to antagonize and lose the votes of conservative, middle-class Lima voters. During his campaign, Garcia proposed a number of initiatives less drastic than those of Humala, which deviated from the extant promarket and proinvestment economic regime: the revision of mining contracts between the state and foreign multinational corporations; the augmentation of social programs and agrarian credit; changes to the Free Trade Agreement with the United States; and not least, changes in the Constitution of the republic. Indeed, Garcia “cast himself as a moderate social democrat in the mold of Chile’s Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet.”⁴⁶ However, once ensconced in the presidential palace, Garcia governed from the right. He presided over economic policy so conservative that the Christian People’s Party’s (PPC’s) Lourdes Flores could credibly label the Garcia administration *el gobierno para los ricos* (a government for the rich). Despite copious amounts of revenue flowing into government coffers, a result of the commodity boom and attendant economic growth, the proceeds were not used in any substantial way to combat inequality or poverty. During Garcia’s term, the Peruvian ship of state sailed on (neoliberal) “automatic pilot” and ignored the mass of Peruvian citizens who had accrued few benefits or had been left behind by the prevailing economic model.⁴⁷ Garcia’s government missed a clear opportunity to enhance social spending, renegeing on his “responsible change” campaign promises and thus violating his electoral mandate.

Ollanta Humala ran a very radical and populist campaign in 2006, which earned him some comparisons with Chavismo in Venezuela.⁴⁸ By the 2011 election, he had internalized the reasons for his 2006 second-round defeat, prompting his calculated shift toward the center of the political spectrum.⁴⁹ But his programmatic agenda was still center-left. His campaign slogan was *La Gran Transformacion* (The Great Transformation), which sought to attract

⁴⁶ Hector Schamis, “Populism, Socialism and Democratic Institutions,” *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 4 (2006): 29.

⁴⁷ For an account of Garcia’s second presidency from a renown Peruvian sociologist, see Sinesio Lopez, *Alan Garcia: Los años del Perro del Hortelano* [Alan Garcia: His second administration] (Lima: Lapix Editoriales, 2013).

⁴⁸ Maxwell Cameron, “Peru: The Left Turn That Wasn’t,” in *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*, ed. Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

⁴⁹ Omar Sanchez-Sibony, “The 2011 Presidential Election in Peru: A Thorny Moral and Political Dilemma,” *Contemporary Politics* 18, no. 1 (2012): 109-126.

many Peruvians disgruntled by the failure of trickle-down economics to benefit the country's interior provinces. As soon as Humala won the 2011 presidential election and assembled his governing team, he rushed to reassure the business community by reappointing the incumbent president of the Central Bank and naming an orthodox economist of unquestionable market-friendly credentials, Miguel Castilla, to the powerful Ministry of Finance. His government also negotiated directly with business a tax on mining earnings that was acceptable to mining corporations. Less than a hundred days into Humala's government, the head of *Confederacion Nacional de Instituciones Empresariales Privadas* (CONFIEP), Humberto Speziani, could say that the initial doubts of the business community "had been dissipated" and that "overall, the balance [we assess of the government] is definitely positive." Polls conducted early in the administration showed the government losing support most rapidly in the southern interior regions where voters had electorally backed Humala by large margins, and whose votes had been decisive for his first-round victory. Humala's Great Transformation had turned into the great continuation of neoliberal policies.⁵⁰ Yet another Peruvian president had betrayed his mandate, and undermined vertical accountability.

Pedro Pablo Kuczynski's government incurred in yet another betrayal of mandate, following on the footsteps of predecessor administrations. This mandate reversal was of a political nature. He had been elected president in 2016 largely as a reaction against Fujimorismo, on the back of many voters who were mindful of democracy, the rule of law, and the imperative to fight corruption. Kuczynski, cognizant of these popular sentiments, ran in a second round as the candidate who would protect such rule of law aspirations against the predations of Fujimorismo. But rather than maintaining and building political capital based on the defense of democracy and the rule of law, he veered off track. Soon after taking office, the new president reverted to the technocratic profile he had eschewed during the campaign and focused on a preoccupation with macroeconomic indicators and the attraction of foreign direct investment. His cabinet was almost entirely comprised of technocrats and figures from the private sector. As in previous governments, the cabinet lacked professional politicians who could provide a narrative of the government's vision in the public sphere or defend it against criticism. In this context, it was easy for Fujimorismo to cast and disparage the Kuczynski administration, not without some truth, as "the government of lobbyists." Rather than confront the aggressive abuse of congressional power that gave rise to *Fuerza Popular*, Kuczynski appeased Fujimorismo by meekly conceding to the illegitimate censure of his ministers, naming replacements that were amenable to *Fuerza Popular*, and seeking a *modus vivendi* with the very political formation his voters had rejected. Indeed, "keeping Congress mollified so that it would

⁵⁰ See William Aviles and Yolima Rey Rosas, "Low Intensity Democracy and Peru's Neoliberal State," *Latin American Perspectives* 44, no. 5 (2017): 162-182.

go along with plans for modernizing the economy became [Kuczynski's] priority number one."⁵¹ The democratic, anti-Fujimorismo agenda that had won Kuczynski the 2016 election was ignored before the altar of economic considerations. The president's pusillanimous behavior and his about-face in his treatment of Fujimorismo came at a very high cost in terms of the government's public approval numbers, which plummeted. Kuczynski's taxi party went as far as to concoct an under-the-table deal with Kenji Fujimori to grant Alberto Fujimori a presidential pardon to free him from jail in the hope that this would allow his government to survive—effectively making a mockery of Kuczynski's voters, as well as the political left, which had backed him in the second round of campaigning. Even before Kuczynski was ousted from office, his political capital had been irredeemably dilapidated because he had openly betrayed his explicit and implicit electoral mandate.

Repeated betrayal of electoral mandates is not cost-free for Peruvian democracy. The phenomenon carries pernicious consequences: the delegitimation of the political class and electoral processes—and if the betrayals are frequent, even of democracy as a regime. When policy switching is practiced successively by different governing party labels, “citizens may become disaffected with democracy more generally, abstain from voting, or support maverick parties and charismatic politicians, often with anti-democratic appeal.”⁵² It is revealing that, amid the backdrop of an economy considered a superstar performer in the developing world during the past quarter-century⁵³ evincing remarkable reductions in absolute and relative poverty and the growth of a sizable middle class (until the mid-2010s), public support for democracy has not increased in the two decades since its return.⁵⁴ Macroeconomic performance and rising prosperity have not bridged the chasm between Peru's state and society.

Serial, Low-Intensity Populism in Peru

Political science theory posits that institutionalized political parties that can encapsulate most of the electorate act as the best antidote against the rise of populism.⁵⁵ Populism irrupted in Peruvian politics in the 1930s as the pan-Latin

⁵¹ Alberto Vergara, “Latin America's Shifting Politics: Virtue, Fortune, and Failure in Peru,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4 (2018): 65-76.

⁵² Herbert Kitschelt, Kirk A. Hawkins, Juan Pablo Luna, Guillermo Rosas, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, *Latin American Party Systems* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵³ IMF, *Peru: Staying the Course of Economic Success*.

⁵⁴ See Latinobarometro polls, 2001–2017, <https://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp> (accessed August 27, 2020).

⁵⁵ Patricio Navia, “Partidos políticos como antídoto contra el populismo en América Latina” [Political parties as antidotes to populism in Latin America], *Revista de Ciencia Política* 23, no. 1 (2003): 19-30.

American movement known as Aprismo came onto the political scene and the ensuing decades were rife with political instability. The advent of Third Wave democracy in Peru appeared to usher in a party-centered regime, but political parties proved incapable of channeling and structuring political preferences. Even in the 1980s, the heyday of political parties in Peru, personalism constituted a strong force, notwithstanding the ideological underpinnings of that proto-party system. Since the collapse of the party system, personalism has remained the central feature of the country's party-voter linkage profile.⁵⁶ The space vacated by the generalized absence of political parties in Peru since 1990 has been filled by populists, using their personal brands as their chief selling points. If, following Robert Barr,⁵⁷ we define a populist candidate as having outsider or maverick status (vis-à-vis the traditional parties), engaging in anti-establishment discourse, and linked to plebiscitarian action, the most prominent political figures of the past quarter of a century in Peru fit the label, partially or fully: Alberto Fujimori, Luis Castaneda, Alejandro Toledo, Alan Garcia, Ollanta Humala, Julio Guzman, and Keiko Fujimori, among others.⁵⁸ Virtually all Peruvian presidents since 1990 (Fujimori, Toledo, Garcia, Humala) can be considered populist per the ideational variant of the concept.⁵⁹ Cas Mudde has defined populism as “an ideology that considers society to be separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people,’ versus the ‘corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people.”⁶⁰ Thus conceived, Peru's party-less landscape has yielded serial populism, in that populism is wielded by various competitive candidates during every electoral cycle. Elections have generally offered little more than a choice set of populist options comprised of candidate-centered electoral vehicles, including Fujimorismo.

Even political entrepreneurs who pertain to the establishment, such as Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, have sought to portray themselves as outsiders and made calculated use of an anti-establishment discourse for the consumption of some audiences, thus running (at least partially) as mavericks (“political parties stink,” Kuczynski famously uttered). The well-entrenched distrust of

⁵⁶ See Sanchez-Sibony, *Democracies without Parties*, chap. 2.

⁵⁷ Robert Barr, “Populists, Outsiders and Anti-establishment Politics,” *Party Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 29-48.

⁵⁸ Raul Madrid, “The Rise of Ethnopolitism in Latin America,” *World Politics* 60, no. 3 (2008): 475-508. See also, James Loxton and Steven Levitsky, “Personalistic Authoritarian Successor Parties in Latin America,” in *Life after Dictatorship: Authoritarian Successor Parties Worldwide*, ed. James Loxton (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁹ Kirk Hawkins, Ryan E. Carlin, Levente Littvay, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, eds., *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Concept, Theory, and Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2018). For an application of the ideational variant to the Peruvian case, see Robert Barr, “The Persistence of Neopopulism in Peru? From Fujimori to Toledo,” *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 6 (2003): 1161-1178.

⁶⁰ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 3 (2004): 543.

politicians and institutions writ large among Peruvian voters is manifested in the prevalence of negative partisanship and negative identities, empirically found to be more widespread than positive identities.⁶¹ This environment incentivizes newcomers as well as “establishment” politicians to avail themselves of the populist ideational toolbox in the quest to be electorally competitive. It is not coincidental that the political formation with the most loyal base of voters post-2001 was not a programmatic party, but rather a party of populist origins—Fujimorismo. Programmatic-minded parties, to the limited extent that they have sporadically emerged in Peru, have not been able to appeal to anything other than narrow sectors of society.

Peru’s democracy may be best conceived as a land of pervasive but low-intensity populism. The term low-intensity populism is utilized here as a variant of the populist phenomenon that stands in contraposition to what Carlos De la Torre has labeled radical populism.⁶² The radical version is characterized by a political rhetoric that “divides society into two antagonistic camps, promises forms of direct democracy...and centers its legitimacy in permanent elections.”⁶³ Radical populists such as Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, and Evo Morales displayed anti-imperialist, nationalist rhetoric and strategized so as to profoundly polarize societies, subvert democratic institutions, amass a great amount of personalized power, and construct self-sustaining electoral authoritarian regimes. To undertake such actions, they engaged in a logic of populist permanent campaigning to lend legitimacy to the overhaul of the inherited institutional infrastructure. Peru has been free of radical populism in the post-Alberto Fujimori era—except for Ollanta Humala’s 2006 presidential campaign. Empirical evaluations of populism conducted by Kirk Hawkins and Castanho Silva⁶⁴ show that Peruvian political parties score low on populism,

⁶¹ On negative identities in Peru, see the following: Jennifer Cyr and Carlos Meléndez, “Nascent Negative Partisanship in Fluid Party Settings,” paper presented at the 89th Southern Political Science Association Annual Conference, New Orleans, 2018. A version of this paper is published in Spanish in Jennifer Cyr and Carlos Meléndez, “Una exploración de la identidad (y la antiidentidad) política en nivel subnacional: el fujimorismo y el chavismo en perspectiva comparad” [An exploration of identity (and anti-identity): Politics at the subnational level: Fujimorismo and Chavismo in comparative perspective], in *Partidos políticos y elecciones: Representación política en América Latina* [Political parties and elections: Political representation in Latin America], ed. Fernando Tuesta (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Peru, 2017), 211-228; see also, Carlos Melendez, *El Mar Menor: Vinculos Politicos en el Peru Posterior al Colapso* [The lesser evil: Political linkages in post-collapse Peru] (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2019), chap. 4.

⁶² Carlos De la Torre, “The Resurgence of Radical Populism in Latin America,” *Constellations* 14, no. 3 (2007): 384-397.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁶⁴ See these scores in appendix A in Kirk Hawkins and Bruno Castanho Silva, “A Head-to-Head Comparison of Human-Based and Automated Text Analysis for Measuring Populism in 27 Countries” (Manuscript, Department of Political Science, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 2017).

measured by way of content analysis of party manifestos and public speeches. Even Peruvian parties that are conventionally labeled as populist, such as *Fuerza Popular* (Fujimorismo), or *Partido Nacionalista Peruano* (PNP), exhibit scores that place them as low and moderately high in populist discourse, respectively. Post-2000, Alan Garcia's APRA radically toned down its populist rhetoric with respect to the past. On a 0 to 2 scale of lower to higher levels of populism, the Fujimorista party scores 0.025, Humala's PNP scores 0.92, Castaneda's *Solidaridad Nacional* scores 0.8, and Toledo's *Peru Posible* scores 0.05. In comparison, radical populist parties in Latin America display scores of a higher order of magnitude: Bolivia's *Movimiento al Socialismo* scores 1.5; Venezuela's *Partido Socialista Venezolano Unificado* (PSVU) scores 1.72; and Ecuador's *Movimiento PAIS* scores 1.42. While many Peruvian candidates and party leaders have paid some lip service to anti-establishment politics, these empirical findings give validation to the notion that Peru has not been beset by radical populism in the post-Fujimorato era.

Without aiming at definitional rigor, we can broadly define low-intensity populism as a thin ideology that utilizes, in constrained form and moderation, some anti-establishment rhetoric and a plebiscitarian appeal strategy; moreover, these rhetorical devices are circumscribed to the campaign season, and have little practical consequence beyond the election. That is, in this variant of populism, populist ideas are utilized to access power, but are disavowed in the *exercise* of power, cast aside as a governing strategy. Low-intensity populists are not change agents; they aim at winning elections, but not at institutional re-engineering—unlike radical populists. They are, therefore, not antisystemic actors. They work within the established institutional framework, and are ready to ally with, or work alongside, establishment parties and politicians. Low-intensity populists also eschew the politics of permanent campaigning, whereby divisive rhetoric is used throughout an incumbent's tenure in office.⁶⁵ In good part, the absence of radical populism in Peru is an outcome emanating from the incentive structure facing politicians in the Andean nation, new and old. First, the need to appeal to at least sections of an enlarged middle class limits the electoral value of radical populism for office-seekers—as Ollanta Humala learned after his failed 2006 presidential bid.⁶⁶ Second, Peruvian political entrepreneurs availing themselves of the populist discourse find that their ability to mobilize citizens and count on their steady political loyalty outside elections is extremely limited. The inability of Peruvian populists to galvanize fervent and lasting political support from the mass public precludes the possibility of overhauling extant institutions, let alone the construction

⁶⁵ For the use of this concept in a particular case study, see Catherine Conaghan and Carlos De la Torre, "The Permanent Campaign of Rafael Correa: Making Ecuador's Plebiscitary Presidency," *International Journal of Press/Politics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 267-284.

⁶⁶ Cameron, "Peru: The Left Turn That Wasn't."

of an avowed people-centered regime. Third, radical populism meets the opprobrium of *poderes facticos* (mass media, the business community), whose acquiescence is needed to govern effectively. There are strong incentives to avoid alienating these powerful political actors. In the final analysis, the same societal and structural conditions in post-2000 Peru that fragment power and constrain politicians' authority and societal reach writ large, limit populists when they arrive at the presidential palace.

The pervasive nature of populism in Peruvian politics inevitably impoverishes the quality of programmatic-based politics and pre-empts institutional strengthening. It also debases politics as a profession and political parties qua organizations, because the rhetoric that dominates campaigns perpetuates the (misleading) received wisdom among voters that professional politicians and parties are always detrimental for democratic governance, responsiveness to popular demands, and the attainment of desired outputs. This feedback mechanism, amplified by much of the Peruvian press and mass media, contributes to the perpetuation of low system legitimacy and a party-less landscape. Programmatic and ideological discourses are viewed with suspicion by the mass public. Presidential candidate, Jaime Guzman, summarized this widespread notion in his 2016 campaign: "Peruvians do not want ideologies, they want results." Guzman aimed to peddle the notion that his ideologically vacuous political formation was centered on the delivery of solutions to the nation's problems, as proof that he was attuned to citizen demands, wearing his nonprogrammatic campaign and appeals strategy as a badge of honor.⁶⁷ To the extent that his statement faithfully reflects the demand-side of Peruvian elections (voter preferences), it conditions the supply-side insofar as it shapes actors' incentive structure, inhibiting the emergence of programmatically oriented candidates, parties, and politics. The disdain for programs or ideological stances has become the operative *sentido comun* (common sense) in Peru, ever since Alberto Fujimori irrupted onto the political scene in 1989.

Given Peru's political and structural societal environment, which provides fertile soil for populism, it is not surprising that Fujimorismo attained significant and growing electoral clout throughout the 2000s and 2010s. This party-movement's political behavior in the post-2001 era has worked at cross purposes with the deepening of Peruvian democracy. Its anti-institutional tendencies have remained in place from the 1990s. It did not abide by the "loser's consent" precept necessary for the consolidation of democracy, insofar as it did not accept the legitimacy of presidential election winners in 2011 and 2016. Moreover, Fujimorismo abused its parliamentary power as soon as it seized it. The party enjoy an absolute majority in Congress for much of the 2016–2020 term; it exercised its institutional role as the main political opposition to presidents Kuczynski and Vizcarra in a demonstrably abusive manner,

⁶⁷ Julio Guzman, *Nuestro Propio Camino* [Our own pathway] (Lima: Editorial Planeta, 2016).

subverting the functioning of the legislature and key democratic institutions. While Fujimorismo's political power steadily grew, in terms of both the scope of its social support and institutional clout (controlling over 50 percent of the seats in Congress), its capacity to undermine the rule of law, foment political intolerance, and promote ungovernability grew in tandem. The intolerance, venality, and narrow-mindedness that pervade Peruvian party formations and are manifested in the workings of democracy at large have all been deepened by Fujimorismo. Peru as a case study provides another reminder that party institutionalization does not ensure democratic deepening or consolidation—contra what is normally theorized. While the institutionalization of any large party can contribute to structuring and rationalizing the party system and enhancing political order, party institutionalization is not a sufficient condition to ensure democratic behavior. Peronismo in Argentina, PRIismo in democratic Mexico (2012–2018), and Chavismo in Venezuela, among others, provide clear case studies of how institutionalized parties can erode democracy. Peru's two most relevant parties over the past forty years, Aprismo and Fujimorismo, have contributed to damaging democratic governance. Their antidemocratic and corrupt commonality of interests have prompted these two parties to concoct a ghost congressional alliance for years, which has aided their legal impunity.⁶⁸

The perpetuation of populist politics in Peru, then, comports with theoretical predictions that affirm the likely prevalence of populism in partyless environments. The indifference of Peruvian political entrepreneurs and established politicians alike toward party-building and institution-building continues to create space for populists at every electoral cycle, thereby perpetuating serial populism. However, Peru's "democracy without parties" provides an interesting addendum to the theory: personalistic politics need not translate into radical variants of populism. Populism empirically has been found to correlate with democratic backsliding outcomes in Latin America.⁶⁹ However, populisms differ in intensity and intent. Peru has obviated radical populism in the post-2001 era not least because even electorally successful populist figures are unable to amass sufficient and lasting political capital to entertain concocting a new populist regime based upon newly created institutions. Peru's structural conditions (growth of its middle class, socio-regional divides in voting preferences, the power of the private sector) militate against radical populism both as a strategy to access and exercise executive power.

⁶⁸ Rodrigo Alvarez Rodrich, "Por que el Fujiaprismo nunca Muere" [Why Fuji-Aprismo never dies], *La Republica* (December 7, 2018), <https://larepublica.pe/politica/1371270-fujiaprismo-muere/> (accessed September 28, 2020).

⁶⁹ Christian Houle and Paul D. Kenny, "The Political and Economic Consequences of Populist Rule in Latin America," *Government and Opposition* 53, no. 2 (2018): 256-287.

Imperiled Governability in State-Society Relations

In *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Samuel Huntington famously undermined modernization theory by showing that economic progress is no guarantee of political development. When a polity's level of social mobilization runs ahead of its political institutionalization, instability ensues, and with it the prospect of sustaining a political regime. Political parties, when they are reasonably institutionalized and can channel interests reasonably well, are prone to foment and consolidate institutional forms of political behavior on the part of key political actors, and thus reduce the overall level of praetorianism in a polity. The existence of institutionalized political parties "help[s] control and contain conflict, directing it towards legislative and electoral channels."⁷⁰ Institutionalized and societally rooted parties incentivize political and social actors to channel their disputes through peaceful means. An inevitable correlate of Peru's party-less landscape has been the polity's inability to channel and contain social conflict. Aggrieved social sectors cannot count on Peru's political parties to incorporate social demands, and therefore such sectors have little alternative but to engage in highly visible praetorian actions so that governmental authorities in Lima take note of their grievances.⁷¹

Low presidential popularity stems in no small measure from very low state infrastructural power, which condemns successive incumbent parties to malperformance in office regarding the provision of many public services—particularly in the interior provinces where the Peruvian state is more absent. Unmet popular expectations mean that chief executives become de facto lame-duck incumbents early into their constitutionally mandated terms in office. Since 1997, no Peruvian president has maintained a public popularity level above 50 percent. While absolute state capacity improved in some dimensions during the economic bonanza of the resource super-cycle (2003–2013), the boom concurrently empowered nonstate actors—such as narcos, racketeers, and illegal miners—who successfully challenged the authority and territorial reach of the Peruvian state,⁷² thus neutralizing greater state capacity, measured in relational terms (i.e., stateness).

Since 1990, Peru has been governed by the politics of antipolitics. The (mistaken) popular belief is widespread among voters that professional politicians are so inimical to good governance that democracy is better served

⁷⁰ Mainwaring and Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions*, 26.

⁷¹ Carlos Melendez, *La Soledad de la Política: Transformaciones Estructurales, Intermediación Política y Conflictos Sociales en el Perú (2000-2012)* [The solitude of politics: Structural transformations, political intermediation and social conflicts in Peru] (Lima: Mitin, 2012).

⁷² Eduardo Dargent, Andreas E. Feldmann, and Juan Pablo Luna, "Greater State Capacity, Lesser Stateness: Lessons from the Peruvian Commodity Boom," *Politics & Society* 45, no. 1 (2017): 3-34.

by individuals from outside the political system. Peruvian governments often have been led by neophyte presidents who have hired *tecnicos* to staff government cabinets and other high offices. No less than three presidents in the post-2001 era reached the presidential palace without any prior experience of holding elected public office (Alejandro Toledo, Ollanta Humala, and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski). This has come at a high cost in several respects, not least from the viewpoint of governability. Successive governments have lacked genuine and experienced *politicos* or “technopols,” to use Jorge Domínguez’s term,⁷³ who can do the job of selling and explaining governmental initiatives. The absence of experienced *politicos* within governing cabinets also affects the ability of ruling parties to fend off criticism and opposition from other parties or civil society, undermining the government’s popularity, and by extension, compromising governability. The Toledo, Humala, and Kuczynski administrations illustrate the cost of governing with cabinets comprised of a surplus of *tecnicos* and a concomitant deficit of experienced politicians who can mediate between state and society to enhance governability. So-called *escuderos* (shield-men), experienced in the rough-and-tumble, unsavory aspects of politics, constitute critical agents who protect chief executives from (fair and unfair) opposition criticism, while *politicos*, practiced in political communication, are essential to explaining and selling government initiatives and achievements. *Escuderos* are even more essential in executing “damage control” to cover for governmental failures and tame discontent. The absence of such figures within political parties contributes to the rapid erosion of governmental approval and political capital. The Toledo, Humala, and Kuczynski administrations were seriously hobbled by the absence of party cadres in government, let alone cadres comprised of seasoned *escuderos* and politicians. The Pedro Pablo Kuczynski government (2016–2018) illustrates well the dynamics of vulnerability afflicting governments that lack experienced politicians. The Fujimorista opposition in Congress, aiming to delegitimize the Pedro Pablo Kuczynski government, made several spurious accusations against key cabinet ministers which the government proved unable to counter and discredit, in good part for lack of seasoned *politicos* in the government. This damaged President Kuczynski’s approval ratings very early in his tenure. Bereft of adequate partisan defense mechanisms, the road was paved for the censure and ouster of some of his principal ministers by the Fujimorista legislative caucus.⁷⁴

The fact that most Peruvian presidents have been political neophytes has

⁷³ Jorge Domínguez, *Technopols: Freeing Politics and Markets in Latin America in the 1990s* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1996).

⁷⁴ Marco Sifuentes, *K. O. PPK: Caida Publica y Vida Secreta de Pedro Pablo Kuczynski* [K. O. PPK: Public fall and secret life of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski] (Lima: Editorial Planeta, 2019); also see, Alberto Vergara, “Latin America’s Shifting Politics: Virtue, Fortune, and Failure in Peru,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4 (2018): 65-76.

predictably hampered their ability to maintain public support, with attendant implications on governability. The politically neophyte status of chief executives (Alan García and Martín Vizcarra excepted) has been manifested in many ways, but two stand out: first, their inattention and/or inability to forge political alliances in and outside the legislature, and second, their inadequate management of governmental communication vis-à-vis citizens. The first problem has resulted in executives who were increasingly isolated politically, while the second has resulted in a citizenry that is at a loss to make sense of the government's overarching vision and policy priorities—offering at best a fragmentary and unintelligible picture of their tenure, let alone their *raison d'être*. The underutilization and/or misuse of mass media and social networks to communicate with citizens hobbled even a politician who enjoyed a very favorably predisposed mass media environment like President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.⁷⁵

There is another well-known avenue through which the party-less landscape has affected governability: an inability to pre-empt, alleviate, or channel social protest. A visible feature of the Peruvian sociopolitical landscape in the twenty-first century is the pervasiveness of large-scale protests against natural resource extraction projects throughout the country.⁷⁶ New mining technological conditions increase the need of multinational companies for water, energy, land, and landscape, particularly in the case of extractive mega-projects. In Peru, both urban and rural populations have been affected by the mining demands of multinational corporations for greater access to these resources. Protest activity in relation to the mining projects of Tambogrande, Bagua, Yanacocha, Tia Maria, and many others have captured national headlines and revealed the structural incapacity of the political system either to pre-empt such repeated episodes of social contestation or to bring about their satisfactory resolution. A standard tenet of political theory holds that political competition is a primary source of government responsiveness.⁷⁷ Amid a climate of high political competition, politicians are presumed to have incentives to enact policies that reduce protest activity, in a quest not to damage their popularity at election time. Peru showcases a great level of political competition: the political system is open to candidacies and political entrepreneurs, and election outcomes are highly uncertain in a context of exceedingly low partisanship. However, political competition clearly has not translated into political responsiveness. The country's lack of functional political parties and the

⁷⁵ Jorge Acevedo, "A la Deriva? Los Problemas Político-Comunicativos de PPK" [Lost at sea? The communication problems of PPK], file:///C:/Users/Omar/Downloads/Dialnet-ALaDerivaLosProblemasPoliticocomunicativos DePPK-6325982.pdf (accessed September 28, 2020).

⁷⁶ Moisés Arce, "Parties and Social Protest in Latin America's Neoliberal Era," *Party Politics* 16, no. 5 (2010): 669-686.

⁷⁷ Stefano Bartolini, "Collusion, Competition and Democracy: Part II," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 12, no. 1 (2000): 33-65.

fragmentation of the party universe have precluded the operation of this causal mechanism. The connection between public preferences and public policy is virtually undetectable in Peru. The preferences of Peruvians most affected by the activities of extractive industries—whose material wealth-creation they hardly benefit from—are not prominent in partisan programmatic platforms and ignored when election winners take office. Political parties are also bereft of links to the social movements advocating a new investment regime⁷⁸—one that better reflects the demands of local communities in extractive areas. The subnational governmental level also evinces a high level of political competition but mirrors the entrenched problems that hobble political mediation at the national level: evanescent, feckless parties and electoral movements without societal moorings, and very high fragmentation.⁷⁹ Thus, protest movements surrounding the activity of multinational corporate activity do not find useful and workable channels of articulation at the subnational level either. Parties at both the national and subnational levels have been utterly unable to demobilize praetorian activity by way of channeling social-sector grievances toward democratic institutions. Rather, they have sought to craft ad hoc solutions only once the political visibility of confrontation damages the image of the ruling party. The social uprootedness of parties at the regional and national levels undermines the durability of such ad hoc “solutions.”⁸⁰ Ruling parties also have lacked experienced political operatives who can mediate between warring factions in the numerous social conflicts engulfing the Peruvian territory. Incumbent governments repeatedly mishandle legitimate social protests, and often opt to try to delegitimize them in public opinion. If such events have not destabilized or ousted sitting governments, it is largely because social protests remain localized and atomized, unable to aggregate and scale up demands and grievances. This reflects an atomized civil society landscape, a structural feature that has contributed to the political survival of otherwise politically feeble governments.

Moreover, the consolidation of the so-called “Lima Consensus”—the Peruvian elite consensus on virtues of neoliberalism—has translated into welcoming foreign investment with few strings attached.⁸¹ President Alan Garcia famously criticized protestors of mining activities, arguing that

⁷⁸ Melendez, *La Soledad de la Política*.

⁷⁹ Julio Cotler and Romeo Grompone, *Poder y Cambio en las Regiones* [Power and change in the regions] (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2009).

⁸⁰ Intermediaries exist, but they are not effective substitutes for socially rooted parties. While acknowledging that a chasm exists between state and society, Tanaka and Melendez persuasively show that “there are connections between politics and society and varied forms of mediation between both spheres. They relate to parties without politicians, politicians without parties, and brokers.” See Martin Tanaka and Carlos Melendez, “The Future of Peru’s Brokered Democracy,” in *Clientelism, Social Policy and the Quality of Democracy*, ed. Diego Abente and Larry Diamond (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

⁸¹ See Crabtree and Durand, *Peru: Elite Power and Political Capture*, chap. 4.

such citizens presumably do not wish to enjoy the material fruits of economic progress and that, by opposing and blocking foreign direct investment, protestors prevent other Peruvians from prospering materially.⁸² While his comments came under intense criticism in some quarters, Garcia was effectively summing up the attitude and worldview that have informed elites and successive Peruvian governments since the turn toward neoliberalism. Social science research also shows that countries with weak institutions, including underinstitutionalized parties, display greater recourse to protest activity as an instrument to influence public policy.⁸³ Peru certainly conforms to this pattern: its party-less landscape foments the incidence of violent protest, while the capacity of ruling parties to pre-empt praetorian behaviors, or contribute to social peace once such protests erupt, is minimal and short-lived at best. Bereft of an institutional political party, chief executives are devoid of key instruments (organizational power in the legislature, experienced party cadre mediators, organized social constituents) to address and quell social unrest.

Democratic Consolidation? Avoiding Democratic Breakdown by Default

Peru is far from exhibiting the traits of a consolidated democracy—defined broadly as one where the main political actors accept and play by the rules of democracy, and thus democracy becomes the “only game in town,” to rescue Guillermo O’Donnell’s turn of phrase. Yet, democracy at the national level has not been under threat since the fall of Alberto Fujimori. Wherever party systems have crumbled in Third Wave Latin America,⁸⁴ democracy either has perished via a thousand blows or decayed. Peru was a trailblazer in that it was the first country where party system collapse was followed by a post-Cold War brand of competitive authoritarianism. Some years later, the crumbling of party systems in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia also spawned competitive authoritarian regimes.⁸⁵ What the four examples showcase is that institutionalized political parties and party systems are important not only for the quality of democracy, but also constitute an essential bulwark against democratic breakdown. That is, political parties are important for the *viability* of democracy as a regime type. The empirical record in contemporary Latin America gives this assertion much sustenance. While this association is yet to be rigorously theorized in the field of political science, the literature is not silent on it. The partisan

⁸² See Lopez, *Alan Garcia*.

⁸³ Fabiana Machado, Carlos Scartascini, and Mariano Tommasi, “Political Institutions and Street Protests in Latin America,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 3 (2011): 340-365.

⁸⁴ Jana Morgan, *Bankrupt Representation and Party System Collapse* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2011).

⁸⁵ Steven Levitsky and James Loxton, “Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes,” *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (2013): 107-136.

representation of societal interest groups of systemic importance can pre-empt antidemocratic behaviors. Gibson shows that conservative parties can protect the economic elite interests by providing institutionalized partisan channels of influence, thus reducing the incentives of such elites to “kick the chessboard” (i.e., conspire against democratic governance) when its material interests are threatened.⁸⁶ Working classes also can have a destabilizing effect on democracy in the absence of labor-mobilizing political parties, so the existence of such parties can make democracy more viable as well.⁸⁷ In short, if the party system provides effective representation to systemic players such that they are stakeholders in the democratic system, they have fewer incentives to support praetorian actions; democracies that effectively incorporate the key systemic actors face much better odds of survival into the future. In addition, political parties matter for democratic survival not only because they help channel the demands and rein in the social constituencies they represent, but also because they endow liberal institutions of horizontal accountability with more clout and make them less prone to capture or cooptation by the executive branch.⁸⁸ Peruvian parties, given their uprootedness and ephemeral nature, cannot, by definition, offer key political actors any means of reliable representation of their interests. In sum, a polity devoid of institutionalized parties, according to standard political science theory, is more prone to praetorian behaviors and democratic breakdown.

One key reason why party-less environments should be more prone to democratic backsliding is that the party opposition is weak, fragmented, and socially uprooted. It is thus unable to confront and provide checks and balances vis-à-vis incumbents bent on power accretion. However, a democracy without parties also evinces governments that organizationally are weak and uprooted, not unlike their party opponents. In Peru, feeble and isolated executives—bereft of robust political parties, organized societal allies, or lasting public support—are hampered in their capacity to take advantage of a weak and fragmented partisan opposition. Chief executives prove unable to amplify their political power, whether in formal or informal ways. The polarization and heated campaign rhetoric of electoral campaigns, or the exclusive focus on the traits of individual political entrepreneurs, can lead to the erroneous inference that some candidates pose a mortal danger to democracy. Such a focus can hide the invariant structural and institutional factors that work against power-accretion in Peru, leading to faulty political analysis. One prominent example

⁸⁶ Edward Gibson, *Class and Conservative Parties: Argentina in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁸⁷ Ruth Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2002).

⁸⁸ Scott Mainwaring and Christopher Welna, eds., *Democratic Accountability in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

of such misguided analysis occurred when many Peruvian commentators and intellectuals regarded the irruption of outsider Ollanta Humala as a threat to democracy—particularly in his 2006 version, but also in his more moderate 2011 iteration. Much of the Peruvian press (dominated by right-wing outlets) portrayed both his candidacy and future presidency in alarmist tones, forecasting presumed dire consequences for democratic governance. Yet, Humala’s presidency (2011–2016) posed no such threat. It proved to be a “non-event” that was easy to predict by making use of standard political science analytical tools. Humala lacked governing experience, commanded a party that was a personalist vehicle without organic societal allies, was hobbled by a minority presence in the legislature, and faced a hostile business community and mass media establishment which distrusted the new chief executive’s intentions and set out to closely scrutinize the government. Former President Toledo was beset by the same absence of partisan and congressional power-resources, as was Alan Garcia—to a lesser degree. Pedro Pablo Kuczynski did not lack governmental experience, and obviously did not face opposition from business, but much like his predecessors in office, he lacked a socially rooted party as well as the parliamentary strength to accrue substantial power. Kuczynski incarnated yet another iteration of politically feeble chief executives in a land without political parties proper. In short, Peru’s personalistic and socially uprooted parties have militated against power-concentration and attendant democratic erosion. Peru has thus escaped the competitive authoritarian fate of its Andean neighbors, by default rather than commission.

To be sure, independents in high office potentially can accrue much power and destroy democracy if they exercise astute, strategic, political agency and benefit from a conjuncture that helps to concentrate power in the executive branch. A contextual factor keeping modern forms of authoritarianism at bay in Peru has been the absence of a broad political environment for power-accretion. The absence of an epochal crisis like the one Peru underwent in the late 1980s has deprived governing parties of a favorable political opportunity structure that would allow them to undertake power-grabbing maneuvers. State crises have been an important background factor facilitating executive power-grabs in recent Latin American history—as seen in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador.⁸⁹ Peru suffers from chronic state weakness in its ability to deliver many public goods, but its macroeconomic performance has been stellar for most of the post-2001 period and it has avoided a recurrence of the widespread political violence that it experienced in the 1980s with the Shining Path. Therefore, the background conditions of nation-wide acute economic and political malperformance that facilitate executive branch power-aggrandizement have

⁸⁹ Samuel Handlin, *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

been absent. The upshot is that Peru's weak democratic institutions have not been seriously tested by crisis since the early 1990s. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that democratic institutions have acquired the autonomy and strength (let alone popular support) to withstand a coordinated assault on their independence and functionality. If Peru has not experienced democratic erosion since the early 2000s, it is in good measure an outcome that exists by default, emanating from the absence of facilitating environmental conditions for an incumbent takeover. The political actors who pose the greatest potential obstacle to a government with hegemonic inclinations are not found in Congress, in political parties, or in other (weak) institutions of horizontal accountability, but rather in the country's core de facto powers: the mass media, the Lima elite, and the business community. These de facto powers have not shown a substantive commitment to democratic principles. Their avowed democratic principles are on parade only intermittently and opportunistically to oppose candidates and governments that are deemed to pose a risk to their material interests and preferred economic agenda. The upshot is clear: a future right-wing electoral vehicle or candidate who does not threaten the economic status quo would stand a much better chance at building an electoral authoritarian regime than a leftist one. It follows that Fujimorismo constituted a graver danger to Peruvian democracy in the post-2001 period than any other party rival. This inference stems not simply from the party's illiberal value system, but crucially from the fact that it counted with an array of functional (if not overt) allies among key national power brokers. The Lima elite and business community, satisfied with Fujimorismo's economic orientation, could not be counted on to exercise a reliable accountability function, as they demonstrated throughout the 2010s. In fact, in the 2011 presidential election, the support of the *poderes facticos* for Fujimorismo became all too clear when faced with the prospect of an Humala administration that was deemed capable of deviating from the reigning neoliberal model. Nor could parties such as APRA, showcasing a recent past of interparty alliances with Fujimorismo for mutual benefit, be relied upon. Rather, the real opposition to a Fujimorista administration would likely have emerged from the streets, in the form of the widespread anti-Fujimorista negative partisanship that congealed in the 2010s.⁹⁰ The recent implosion of Fujimorismo in the 2020 election and in the court of public opinion seemingly has foreclosed this threat. It is not coincidental that, amid an environment devoid of bona fide parties, the one political party to have attained a measure of institutionalization and societal rootedness⁹¹ could have posed a greater danger to democracy, insofar as institutionalization also can be conceived as a power resource.

Another explanation for Peru's avoidance of the creeping national-level

⁹⁰ Cyr and Melendez, "Nascent Negative Partisanship in Fluid Party Settings."

⁹¹ See Sanchez-Sibony, *Democracies without Parties*, chap.3, and Levitsky, "Peru: The Institutionalization of Politics without Parties," 347-348.

authoritarianism afflicting its Andean neighbors in the 2000s lies in the acute de facto fragmentation of power that characterizes the country at every level, national, regional, and local. Fujimori's decentralization reforms,⁹² coupled with the atomization of social actors, yielded this inauspicious landscape. Aggregating power and projecting authority vertically (across administrative levels) and horizontally (across territory) constitutes an exceedingly difficult—indeed, so far elusive—enterprise in Peru. The de facto authority of national chief executives—Toledo, Garcia, Humala, or Kuczynski—does not extend to the provinces or to lower levels of public administration. Nor do they have any control of the “street,” in Lima or elsewhere, for lack of organizational prowess. The fact that presidents lack socially rooted parties with loyal followers seriously weakens their authority and renders them highly vulnerable to volatile cycles of popularity—as even the once-popular Alberto Fujimori found out during the second half of the 1990s.⁹³

No Peruvian president post-2001 has enjoyed an overwhelming electoral mandate or amassed while in office public opinion favorability levels (say, approval numbers like those enjoyed by chief executives such as Chavez, Morales, or Correa) to enable the enactment of power-accretion maneuvers. The territorial division of political preferences between Lima—dominated by conservative electorate defense of the status quo—and the “interior”—showcasing a preference for candidates who advocate upending the status quo—militates against the emergence of a leader endowed with nation-wide popularity. Political science research shows that as polities become middle-class societies, they tend to gravitate toward a conservative defense of the status quo, for they have sizable material gains to defend. As Peru has grown a sizable middle class, the appeal of a transformative political project finds more societal resistance. That is the lesson Ollanta Humala learned in 2006 and what prompted a change in his appeals strategy during the 2011 election. Presidents in Peru thus face structural constraints to their power that can be marginally modified only via astute political agency. President Martin Vizcarra provides a clear example: lacking a political party of his own, he has built political capital by spearheading a reformist, anticorruption drive attuned to public sentiment. However, much like previous presidents, his political clout will vanish should public sentiment sour on him, for he lacks organizational sources of power (above all, an institutionalized party and a strong presence in Congress).

⁹² Stephanie McNulty, *Voice and Vote: Decentralization and Participation in Post-Fujimori Peru* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁹³ Kurt Weyland, “The Rise and Decline of Fujimori’s Neopopulist Leadership,” in *The Fujimori Legacy: The Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism in Peru*, ed. Julio Carrion (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006).

Conclusion

This essay has evaluated some of the chief theoretical tenets surrounding the centrality of political parties for democratic representation, governability, accountability, avoidance of populism, and democratic consolidation in one case study, Peru's "democracy without parties," during the 2001–2020 period. It yields an unambiguous conclusion: basic functions of democracy are unfulfilled in the absence of bona fide parties. Enacted economic policies and (barely recognizable) social policies have elided the representation of public preferences. Economic policy has followed a steady neoliberal course, divorced from public demands of state-delivered public goods across a range of services, including social expenditure, as shown by public opinion polling. Vertical accountability has been largely absent in Peruvian democracy, best manifested by the repeated betrayals of mandate on the part of successive presidential administrations. The weakness and uprootedness of political parties confer upon them enormous autonomy vis-à-vis voters after elections, which renders parties free to pursue courses of action that negate their political and economic campaign promises. These empirical realities comport with party politics theory. Populism conceived as a "thin ideology" flourishes in Peru, as theory predicts would be the case in a polity without programmatic and institutionalized parties. However, the country evinces a low-intensity populism that has not threatened democratic institutions and rules. It has largely avoided the radical populist variants observed in some of its Andean neighbors in recent years. This is not least because of the structural impediments that would-be radical populists face, both politically and electorally, in the context of an enlarged middle class and an empowered private sector over the past three decades. The persistence of ideational populism, however, has impoverished the quality of public debate as well as militated against the emergence of more programmatic representation and high-quality voter-party linkages. Governability has been imperiled because Peruvian political parties are unable to channel societal demands and grievances, such that the latter do not find a voice in the executive, legislative activity, or in day-to-day party opposition behavior. Every Peruvian government has engaged in ineffective "damage control" measures or resorted to delegitimizing and repressing social protests, while the party universe has demonstrated an incapacity to pre-empt or channel recurrent praetorian political activity toward democratic institutions. Again, this empirical reality comports with theoretical predictions.

Political parties are posited to be relevant for the viability and longevity of democracy. Peru has been able to avoid the scourge of competitive authoritarianism in the twenty-first century thus far, and it has not evinced incumbent-driven democratic backsliding. However, the persistence of democracy in Peru is largely an outcome that in good measure prevails by default, due to the absence of facilitating conditions for power-accretion.

Chief executives are not ushered into power with large electoral mandates, lack majorities in the legislature, and also are burdened with low and rapidly declining public approval numbers while in office. An electorate of floating voters lacking partisan attachments constitutes a relevant (and often-ignored) factor underpinning these executive-constraining conditions—though other structural factors are certainly very relevant as well. It is not coincidental that no post-2001 chief executive has attempted to embark upon a power-accretion political adventure (nor attempted to reform the Constitution). However, the robust underpinnings of democratic governance are absent in Peru—a democratic political culture, strong check-and-balance institutions, and so on. A business-friendly government utilizing an epochal crisis to usher in electoral authoritarianism in the future cannot be ruled out.

In conclusion, the past two decades of Peruvian “democracy without parties” provide relevant empirical evidence corroborating the theoretical credo that political parties are essential for the health of a democracy. In the absence of political parties or in the wake of their acute deinstitutionalization, democratic governance transmutes into a dysfunctional regime bereft of vertical accountability, representation of public preferences, or effective governability.