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# Peru's 2011 Elections

## A VOTE FOR MODERATE CHANGE

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International and domestic observers alike were astonished by the results of Peru's recent presidential election. In the 5 June 2011 runoff against Keiko Fujimori, Ollanta Humala, the 2006 runner-up, won office with 51.5 percent of the vote. Analysts felt baffled that despite Peru's steady progress since the 2000 fall from power of Alberto Fujimori (Keiko's father) amid massive antiauthoritarian and anticorruption protests, voters' top two choices for president were an antisystem outsider and the daughter of the disgraced former president.

After all, had it not been the consolidation of democratic institutions that had made possible Alberto Fujimori's 2007 extradition from Chile and his 2009 trial and sentencing to 25 years in prison for crimes (including kidnapping and murder) committed on his watch? Had not Peru's decade of democratization also yielded the highest economic-growth rates and largest reductions in poverty and inequality in all of Latin America? Why, then, did the first round of voting on April 10 result in what political scientist Alberto Vergara described as a repudiation of the "democracy of the market"?<sup>1</sup>

The 2011 presidential contest—the third since the fall of *fujimorismo*—highlighted both the scope and limitations of the democratic gains made in the last ten years. Foremost among those gains was the return to multiparty electoral competition and political pluralism. Peru's political parties are extremely weak, however, serving as little more than a can-

didate's calling card at election time. They are not tied to any particular ideology and do not represent specific segments of the population; thus neither do they direct the course of public policy. The weak, personalistic nature of Peru's political parties helps to explain the continuity of neoliberal economic policies and outcomes under different leaders, and why those leaders—at the helm of a resource-rich country—failed to implement social policies that would have helped them to cultivate political legitimacy. In addition, the 2011 election confirmed what the 2006 contest had already shown—that, as a consequence of decentralization and neoliberal policies, rich and poor and urban and rural voters are divided, but with extremely volatile allegiances. The key to success this year, however, was credibly selling a centrist identity.

### Democracy Without Parties

Democracy disappeared in Peru during the 1990s under the competitive authoritarian regime of Alberto Fujimori.<sup>2</sup> The country had only returned to a constitutional system in 1980, after fifteen years of military rule. The 1980s were marred, however, by a severe economic downturn (save for a brief recovery in 1986–87) and political rivalries, culminating in the surprising election of Fujimori in 1990. It was not until his April 1992 *autogolpe*, however, that representative government finally collapsed, its political parties replaced by *fujimorismo* as the sole, hegemonic actor. The final months of *fujimorismo*, characterized by official-corruption scandals and disputes over the legality of Fujimori's second reelection bid in 2000, spawned protest movements and a broad opposition front that boasted the participation of important figures from traditional political parties.<sup>3</sup> Fujimori won only after his toughest rival, Alejandro Toledo, dropped out of the race. Several months into his third term, Fujimori finally ceded the presidency, and Valentín Paniagua, the leader of Popular Action (AP; the governing party from 1980 to 1985) became the interim president. Paniagua called for elections in 2001, the first step in the transition back to democracy.

Alejandro Toledo of the Peru Possible coalition won the 2001 presidential runoff. The other top contenders that year were former president Alan García (1985–90) of the Peruvian Aprista Party (APRA), who lost in the second round, and Lourdes Flores of the Christian People's Party (PPC), who came in third in the first round. These elections appeared to mark the “resurrection” of the traditional parties that had dominated the political landscape during Peru's short-lived constitutional governments in the 1960s and the 1980s—in the center, APRA, and on the right, the PPC and the AP.<sup>4</sup> Only the left was missing from this re-creation of the 1980s-era party system.

Under Fujimori, political institutions were managed from the highest reaches of power. The transition to democracy promised institutional re-

newal: the separation of state powers, the eradication of corruption and clientelism, and the implementation of various institutional safeguards against authoritarianism, such as decentralization and greater public participation in governance. As Peru transformed from a hegemonic regime into a truly multiparty system, there was, in fact, a fundamental change in how the government operated. The political opening and newfound pluralism gave state institutions far more independence, without which a fugitive ex-president could not have been brought to justice.

The return of party politics, however, was an illusion. In the wake of the sudden fall of *fujimorismo*, political hopefuls with little capacity to launch campaigns attached themselves to the old parties for organizational support rather than because of ideological affinity or the parties' capacity to credibly represent social interests or drive policy. The precariousness of these parties was evident in their ever-diminishing presence in regional and local politics in the following years, in their lack of discipline and fragmentation in the National Congress, and in extreme electoral volatility.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, government institutions proved to be weak and inefficient, with the state's authority throughout the country tenuous at best. As a result, Peru's public institutions registered low levels of legitimacy—among the lowest in Latin America.<sup>6</sup> It was in this context that Humala mounted his radical antisystem presidential campaign in 2006. In the end, former president García won a narrow victory over Humala in the runoff and went on to preside over a period of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity. Hence the great paradox that still puzzles Peruvian political scientists: Despite an expanding economy and shrinking levels of poverty and inequality, the legitimacy of public institutions remained very low. Does this paradox explain the 2011 vote against “democracy of the market”? And if so, what then explains this paradox?

Recent explanations for the coexistence of high economic growth and low institutional legitimacy in Peru have emphasized the “unsatisfactory distribution of the fruits of economic growth,” and the “ineffectiveness of the state apparatus in alleviating poverty and including the . . . larger public in the market.”<sup>7</sup> Before addressing the paradox, however, we must first explain how the economy grew in spite of serious political and institutional disorder, and why the García administration did not follow the lead of neighboring governments in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela—which also had inefficient states—and implement aggressive social policies such as conditional-cash transfer (CCT) programs in order to build political legitimacy. The answer to both questions lies in the weakness of Peru's political parties.

After years of *fujimorismo*, Peru's political parties had become weak and personalized organizations, vehicles for the pursuit of political power that lacked roots in society and were virtually devoid of ideological contours or policy positions. Since then, the governing party—no matter which one—has been committed above all to delivering patronage

rather than public policy. The Toledo and García administrations both showed little will for reform, adopting only small changes in response to immediate, short-term challenges. Under the first two post-Fujimori presidents, inertia, path-dependence, and the continuation of the market-oriented policies initiated under Fujimori ruled the day.

Although the process of implementing structural reform has stalled, the Peruvian state contains “pockets of efficiency” which together form a sort of technocratic neoliberal policy network whose origins lie in the years of *fujimorismo*. Afterward, the political parties showed neither the interest nor the capacity to replace this network of technocrats with any alternative. It was responsible for creating the dynamic of stability and fostering economic growth and poverty reduction, and its longevity helps to explain the continuity of the macroeconomic policies that succeeded in interrupting the logic of the “Peruvian pendulum.” This network’s isolation within the state apparatus, however, explains the government’s inability to implement more complex and ambitious “second-generation” structural reforms. In turn, the lack of reforms explains the paucity of redistributive achievements. Beyond small-scale initiatives of little political note, the Toledo and García administrations both failed to implement policies specifically oriented to reducing poverty and attacking inequality. During the same period, every other country in the region took advantage of a fiscal bonanza (much of it fueled by a global commodities boom) to implement social policies such as the CCT programs that have proven so effective.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, both presidents had low public-approval ratings, among the worst anywhere in Latin America, according to surveys conducted by Mitofsky International. According to an October 2010 survey, García was one of the two lowest-rated presidents in Latin America in the fifty-first month of his administration. Furthermore, at the end of their terms, neither of their respective parties fielded presidential candidates, and the congressional presence of both parties plummeted: Peru Possible won only two legislative seats in 2006, and APRA won only four in 2011.

García’s passivity on social matters is especially surprising, since he had enacted populist and strongly clientelistic policies during his prior administration in the late 1980s. The second time around, he presided over a period of strong growth (including the notable expansion of the national budget), but his government never managed to allocate available resources efficiently. This deficiency existed not only at the national level, but extended to the subnational and local levels as well.

The weak parties were again among the culprits. The absence of teams of experts within parties is a huge problem. Even if they had such expertise within their ranks, however, the parties hand out state positions as patronage rather than assigning them to the most able and qualified professionals. This limits any possibility of enacting innovative and effective social policies. The personalistic nature of the parties

is another impediment. They are completely dependent on their leaders and the posts they hold. The Toledo administration, coming as it did on the heels of *fujimorismo*, arguably had neither the time nor the resources for ambitious social-policy ventures.

García, for his part, faced constraints that were different but also serious. Having won only 24.3 percent of the first-round vote in 2006, he triumphed in the runoff against Humala only thanks to conservative groups that grudgingly backed the former populist in order to prevent a Humala victory. Knowing his party was weak, García shrewdly calculated that his administration's viability depended on the maintenance of his alliance with conservatives. Erasing the bad memory of his disastrous first administration—notable for irresponsible policies that led to hyperinflation and economic crisis—became the top priority of his second. It seems that García was always behind the curve, however, implementing outdated and inappropriate populist policies during his first term and applying neoliberal orthodoxy during his second, when what was needed was the harmonization of free-market policies with more sophisticated redistributive and interventionist social policies.<sup>9</sup>

García trusted that wealth redistribution would occur through growth and a sort of trickle-down effect, and this was true to a point: Between 2005 and 2009, GDP grew by 5.6 percent, giving Peru the fifth-largest growth rate of all thirty countries in Latin America and the Caribbean; the poverty rate fell from 44.5 percent in 2006 to 31.3 percent in 2010, making Peru the country that reduced poverty the most in the region between 2005 and 2009; and inequality in income distribution narrowed during the growth period of 2001 to 2006, according to the available data. Yet the government failed to introduce any grand social-policy initiatives, while adopting a strongly probusiness rhetoric that opposed the demands of the less-privileged members of society. The president himself even penned a series of essays known as the “perro de hortelano” articles, lashing out against critics of his policies.<sup>10</sup> Rather than quelling criticism, however, the essays stoked popular outrage against the president, helping to make his administration one of the least popular in Latin America.<sup>11</sup>

## Interpreting the Outcome

Despite García's missteps and widespread popular discontent, however, Peru had nonetheless experienced five years of economic growth and poverty reduction. Thus many analysts understandably anticipated that the “antisystem” vote in 2011 would be smaller than it had been in 2006. Yet with 31 percent of the vote, Ollanta Humala virtually replicated his 2006 results in the first round of the 2011 voting and went on to win the runoff. Did this mean that—in spite of democratization, economic growth, and poverty reduction—the antisystem vote had in fact grown? Could insufficient redistribution and poverty reduction explain the 2011 vote?

Many observers interpreted the results of the 2011 elections as a kind of protest vote against democratization and the liberal economic model. Alberto Vergara wrote:

What happened on April 10 . . . is really an x-ray of a political and economic regime whose legitimacy has decayed in every respect. This political and economic regime that combines democracy with free-market economics is supported by a minority and has been brought to its knees . . . What happened was not a conjunctural detail, but instead was the massive, reissued, and radicalized rejection of the 2006 election of the “democracy of the market” . . . Two democratic administrations [Toledo’s and García’s] have completely failed at the crucial work of legitimizing democracy and the free market.

From this perspective, the institutionalization of democracy, economic growth, and reduction of poverty and inequality would not have had positive political effects, and thus the discontent would have driven voters toward the antisystem candidacies of Humala (who rejected the economic model) and Keiko Fujimori (who rejected political institutionalization). To the extent that the sources of frustration registered during the 2006 elections were not addressed in the following five years, the discontent would have grown by 2011, enabling Humala to secure the win. And indeed, Humala’s 2011 support appears to have had a similar makeup to that of 2006: The correlation between the pro-Humala votes across different provinces is 0.801 for the first rounds of the 2006 and 2011 elections and 0.804 for the runoffs.<sup>12</sup> Still, Humala’s support among poor people, urban dwellers, residents of the Andean south, and the indigenous population—in other words, among those who have benefited least from recent political and economic developments—surpassed the number of votes he received from the rest of the electorate.

This interpretation is plausible, but wrong. It assumes a continuity of support for Humala through time that simply did not exist. Opinion polls show that Humala’s campaign did not gain steam until the beginning of March, shortly before the April 10 elections. Before that, he did not seem to have a realistic shot at victory. His early poor polling mirrored the poor performance of his Peru Nationalist Party (PNP), which is mired in internal conflict and lacking in discipline. Between 2006 and 2011, the PNP’s coalition split, leaving the PNP with 22 rather than its previous 45 seats in Congress. In the April 2006 national elections, the PNP won 21 percent of the congressional vote; yet only five months later in the regional elections, it barely reached 8.6 percent. In the October 2010 regional elections, just six months before the general elections, the PNP eked out a mere 5.4 percent of the vote.<sup>13</sup> These numbers show that voters were not loyal to the PNP or PNP candidates, as such. Across the board in Peru, party identification is weak, and the electorate is volatile and unpredictable. Only *fujimorismo* could claim a relatively “loyal” voter base.

Humala's 2011 campaign shared very little with his 2006 effort, which also goes against the hypothesis of a "repeat" of the 2006 vote. In short, Humala did not win by drawing disaffected and marginalized voters who cast their ballots in protest against a system that had left them behind. Rather, he took advantage of his opponents' mistakes, and he prudently chose a strategic orientation for his candidacy. A May 2011 national survey conducted by the Catholic University of Peru showed that 43 percent of Peruvians preferred only partial reforms in economic policy, while 26 percent preferred radical change, and 22 percent preferred to stay on the current track. Sensing the mood of the electorate, Humala moved from the extreme left to the center of the political spectrum, particularly in the second round. Likewise, Keiko Fujimori, who had concluded the first round defending her father's political legacy, began the second round by asking forgiveness for his offenses. In the end, the key to Humala's success in 2011 was his recently adopted moderate stance, not the antisystem radicalism that had propelled him to the second round in 2006. Even if Humala had more support than the other candidates among the poorest voters in both 2006 and 2011, the level of that support actually dropped in 2011, which suggests that he extended his voter base beyond discontented and marginalized groups.<sup>14</sup>

Is it a contradiction to say that Humala's victory stemmed from the volatility of the electorate even as the socioeconomic profile of the typical Humala voter remained remarkably consistent from 2006 to 2011? Does the continuity of a *humalista* vote undermine an explanation based on the contingency of electoral volatility and sustain the thesis of a vote motivated by discontent with the system? The logic of political supply and demand may help to explain the coexistence of continuity and contingency in the Humala vote. What seems to be solidifying in Peru, and marking a certain structural continuity, is the fragmentation of the electorate along socioeconomic and regional lines. This is in part a consequence of decentralization, which has accentuated regional dynamics and identities, and also of neoliberal policies implemented during the García administration, which have accentuated political differences among regions and socioeconomic sectors. A June 2011 IPSOS-APOYO poll shows that García's approval rating was 67 percent among the wealthiest socioeconomic class but only 29 percent among the poorest. It was 41 percent in Lima, but only 24 percent in the south and 16 percent in the eastern (Amazonian) districts.

The Peruvian electorate may be divided, but not along partisan lines. Humala won over the same types of voters in 2006 and 2011 with dramatically different strategies and discourses. In other words, as the electorate moved slightly to the center in 2011, so did Humala. This shift allowed for a near repeat of his 2006 performance, but with somewhat less support from the poorest segments of society and somewhat more support from the middle and upper classes.



Given the radical economic and political proposals that Humala ran on in 2006 versus the moderate reformist program he put forward in 2011, it is hard to predict with any certainty what path his government will follow. Humala probably intends to maintain the García administration's macroeconomic policies in order to preserve the dynamic of growth. Unlike his predecessor, however, Humala hopes to implement some ambitious social policies, and he will likely use Lula's Brazil as a point of reference. Humala has some hurdles to overcome, however, including his inexperience, the makeshift character of his ruling coalition, and the weakness of his own PNP. For example, in order to attain a majority in Congress, Humala's Win Peru Alliance, which has 47 of 130 representatives, needs the 21 votes of Alejandro Toledo's Peru Possible representatives. Moreover, 19 of the 47 Win Peru congressmen are independents, and only 7 of the 21 Peru Possible congressmen are members of that party.

Now, after several months to consider the election's outcome, most observers in Peru are asking whether Humala's government will most resemble that of Lula or that of Chávez. The answer, most likely, is neither. Instead, it may look like the Toledo administration, marked by incoherence and improvisation. Nonetheless, there is still cause for optimism: Despite a long history of political disorder, Peru has advanced on the path to democratization, institutionalization, and economic growth. There are now incentives to move forward with policies promoting social inclusion, which have been key in legitimizing the political system in other countries. Such reformist social policies are likely to progress in a piecemeal and incoherent fashion rather than in a comprehensive, orderly, and systematic way. Many years ago, Albert O. Hirschman warned that Latin America was prone to "fracasomanía," an obsession with failure that ultimately explains the discontinuity of development efforts. Peru still has many problems to overcome—notably, persistent social discontent despite strong economic performance. Yet now, at least, there are strong political incentives for making sure that the dividends of democracy reach all rungs of society.

## NOTES

1. Alberto Vergara Paniagua, "El sopapo electoral," *Poder* (Peru), April 2011.
2. See Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Martín Tanaka, "From Crisis to Collapse of the Party Systems and Dilemmas of Democratic Representation: Peru and Venezuela," in Scott Mainwaring, Ana María Bejarano, and Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, eds., *The Crisis of Democratic Representation in the Andes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 47–77.
3. Martín Tanaka, "Peru 1980–2000: Chronicle of a Death Foretold? Determinism, Political Decisions, and Open Outcomes," in Frances Hagopian and Scott P. Mainwaring,

eds., *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261–88.

4. See Charles D. Kenney, “The Death and Rebirth of a Party System, Peru 1978–2001,” in *Comparative Political Studies* 36 (December 2003): 1210–39; and Carlos Meléndez, “La insistencia de los partidos. Una aproximación sobre la permanencia de los partidos políticos tradicionales en los países andinos,” in Martín Tanaka, ed., *La nueva coyuntura crítica en los países andinos* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2009).

5. See Steven Levitsky and Maxwell A. Cameron, “Democracy Without Parties? Political Parties and Regime Change in Fujimori’s Peru,” in *Latin American Politics and Society* 45 (September 2003): 1–33; and Martín Tanaka, *Democracia sin partidos: Perú, 2000–2005. Los problemas de representación y las propuestas de reforma política* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2005).

6. See *Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano Perú 2009: Por una densidad del Estado al servicio de la gente* (Lima: PNUD, 2010).

7. Julio Cotler, “Capitalismo y democracia en el Perú: La tentación autoritaria,” in Luis Párasa, ed., *Perú ante los desafíos del siglo XXI* (Lima: PUCP, 2011), 519.

8. See Aaron Ansell and Ken Mitchell, “Models of Clientelism and Policy Change: The Case of Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes in Mexico and Brazil,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 30 (July 2011): 298–312.

9. See, for example, Nancy Birdsall, Carol Graham, and Richard H. Sabot, eds., *Beyond Tradeoffs: Market Reforms and Equitable Growth in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998).

10. President García published two articles in the daily *El Comercio* in 2007: “El síndrome del perro del hortelano” on October 28, and “Receta para acabar con el perro del hortelano” on November 25; on 2 March 2008, he published “El perro del hortelano contra el pobre,” criticizing those who question the promotion of investment as a path out of underdevelopment.

11. See C. Felipe Jaramillo and Carlos Silva-Jáuregui, eds., *Perú en el umbral de una nueva era: Lecciones y desafíos para consolidar el crecimiento económico y un desarrollo más incluyente*, vol. 1 (Lima: Banco Mundial, 2011); Miguel Jaramillo and Javier Saavedra, *Menos desiguales: La distribución del ingreso después de las reformas estructurales* (Lima: GRADE, 2011); and Martín Tanaka, “Del voluntarismo exacerbado al realismo sin ilusiones: El giro del APRA y de Alan García,” *Nueva Sociedad* 217 (September–October 2008): 172–84.

12. See Martín Tanaka, Rodrigo Barrenechea, and Sofía Vera, “Cambios y continuidades en las elecciones presidenciales de 2011,” *Argumentos*, May 2011.

13. See Martín Tanaka and Yamilé Guibert, “Entre la evaporación de los partidos y la debilidad de los movimientos regionales. Una mirada a las elecciones regionales y municipales desde las provincias, 2002–2006–2010,” in María Ana Rodríguez and Omar Coronel, eds., *El nuevo poder en las regiones: Análisis de las elecciones regionales y municipales 2010* (Lima: PUCP, 2011), 18–28.

14. If we make a correlation between the percentages of Humala’s vote in all Peruvian provinces with their poverty levels, we find a correlation of 0.49 in 2006 and of 0.39 in 2011. See Tanaka, Barrenechea and Vera, “Cambios y continuidades.”