

PERU: DEEP POLITICAL DISSATISFACTION WEAKENS SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

Perú: la profunda desafección política debilita el apoyo a la democracia

Peru: profundo descontentamento político enfraquece o apoio à democracia

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Abstract

This paper analyzes support for democratic attitudes in Peru using data from the AmericasBarometer. It finds that democratic attitudes in Peru are consistently low, when compared to regional means. It also shows that the proportion of respondents holding consistent democratic values has decreased in the last decade or so. We attribute this decline to the growing dissatisfaction with the performance of the political system, as measured by the Satisfaction with Democracy item. We argue that this discontent expresses a dual failure of political representation: presidents do not follow the mandate they were given, and voters have no opportunity to castigate them and their parties at election time. In addition, the decision of the fujimorista party in Congress in 2016 to resort to extraordinary measures in confronting the executive branch opened a period of naked power political still affecting Peru. The failed presidency of Pedro Castillo, who disappointed even his own supporters, and this failed attempt to shut down Congress have deepened the crisis of representation.

Palabras clave:

Perú; apoyo a la democracia; satisfacción con la democracia; disfunción política; representación política

Resumen

Este artículo analiza el apoyo a actitudes democráticas en el Perú, usando los datos del Barómetro de las Américas. El trabajo encuentra que las actitudes democráticas en el Perú son consistentemente bajas cuando se las compara con los promedios regionales. El artículo muestra también que la proporción de entrevistados que tienen actitudes democráticas consistentes ha decrecido en la última década. Nosotros atribuimos esa caída a la creciente desafección con el desempeño del sistema político, medido a través del indicador de Satisfacción con la Democracia. Argumentamos que este descontento expresa una falla doble de representación política: los presidentes no siguen el mandato que se les da y los votantes no tienen la oportunidad de castigar a ellos y sus partidos al momento de las elecciones. Más aún, la decisión del partido fujimorista en el Congreso en 2016 de usar medidas extraordinarias en su enfrentamiento con el poder ejecutivo abrió un periodo de disfunción política que aún afecta al país. La fallida presidencia de Pedro Castillo, quién desilusionó incluso a sus propios seguidores, y su fallido intento de cerrar el Congreso, han profundizado esta crisis de representación.

Palavras-chave:

Peru; apoio à democracia; satisfação com a democracia; disfunção política; representação política

Resumo

Este artigo analisa o apoio às atitudes democráticas no Peru, utilizando dados do Barômetro das Américas. Constata que as atitudes democráticas no Peru são consistentemente baixas quando comparadas com as médias regionais. O artigo mostra também que a proporção de entrevistados que têm atitudes democráticas consistentes diminuiu na última década. Atribuímos este declínio ao crescente descontentamento com o desempenho do sistema político, medido através do indicador Satisfação com a Democracia. Argumentamos que este descontentamento expressa um duplo fracasso da representação política: os presidentes não cumprem o mandato que lhes foi conferido e os eleitores não têm a oportunidade de puni-los e aos seus partidos em época de eleições. Além disso, a decisão do partido Fujimori no Congresso, em 2016, de utilizar medidas extraordinárias no seu confronto com o poder executivo abriu um período de disfunção política que ainda afeta o país. A presidência fracassada de Pedro Castillo, que decepcionou até os seus próprios seguidores, e a sua tentativa fracassada de fechar o Congresso, aprofundaram esta crise de representação.

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy returned to Peru in 2000, when President Alberto Fujimori resigned via fax from Japan (Cameron, 2006). Popular pressure forced his two Vice Presidents to resign and Valentín Paniagua, President of Congress, assumed the presidency on an interim basis. The first round of new elections was held in April 2001 and the runoff in June. Alejandro Toledo won the presidency by defeating Alan García. Since then, presidential elections have regularly been held every five years. The record of five democratically elected presidents in a row is historic; never in Peru's 200-year history has such a succession of democratic elections occurred (Carrión, 2022b).

However, Peru's democracy is not well, as it persists amid severe political dysfunction.¹ The 2016 election produced a divided government. The combination of a minority President with an overreaching Congress controlled by an obstructionist majority marked the beginning of institutional instability. The 2021 general elections brought Peru to a perilous point. As in 2016, the runoff polarized voters and produced another divided government. Keiko Fujimori, Alberto's daughter, claimed her father's legacy and offered a right-wing alternative to the "communist threat." Pedro Castillo represented the informal coalition of those rejecting the fujimorista legacy and those embracing radical left-wing politics. Observers expected a narrow election but did not anticipate that the loser would reject the result. Keiko Fujimori refused to acknowledge defeat on the false premise that there was fraud in the vote count. Peruvian democracy survived because: 1) electoral institutions refused to buckle to the antidemocratic pressure and 2) the international community acknowledged that no serious irregularities had occurred. In its 2022 report, Freedom House acknowledged the successful elections and restored Peru's "free" status (Freedom House, 2022).

Still, problems remained during the presidency of Pedro Castillo.² His government was an unmitigated disaster, marked by incompetence and widespread accusations of corruption. His lackadaisical approach to governing produced a high turnover of ministers, unprecedented in the Peruvian context. By the end of his short-term presidency, he had named five prime ministers and appointed at least 78 ministers (Coca Pimentel, 2022). Conservative forces in Congress, on the other hand, unable to accept their electoral defeat and Castillo's legitimacy, devoted most of their time to trying to remove Castillo on the flimsiest of excuses, at least initially. When the Attorney General office started to seriously investigate the corruption surrounding the presidency, Congress initiated a third impeachment proceeding.

On December 7, as he was facing this new vote of no confidence, President Pedro Castillo announced on television that he was shutting down Congress and would rule by decree until new congressional elections were held. Peruvian institutions reacted swiftly to the threat. The armed forces refused to comply with Castillo's orders, and Congress quickly removed him from office. He was arrested under the accusation of rebelling against the constitutional order and Dina Boluarte, his vice president, took over. Peru's democracy reached a perilous point, and barely survived.

1. We define political dysfunction simply as political instability, i.e., the unscheduled but not necessarily unconstitutional change in the leadership of the executive branch and/or the dissolution of the existing legislature.

2. To understand the context of the 2021 election in Peru and the rise of Pedro Castillo see Asencio *et al.* (2021).

The transition to the Boluarte presidency was constitutionally valid. However, significant sectors of Peruvian society – who felt that their votes had been invalidated – rejected her government. Many citizens, especially those residing in the areas that voted overwhelmingly for Pedro Castillo in 2021, took to the streets to voice their displeasure. Public opinion polls showed that important segments of the public did not consider Castillo’s move as a coup and, in fact, believed him to have been the victim of a legislative coup.³ These protests were met with unprecedented violence, and at least 67 people died as a result (Briceño, 2023). Although the demands were varied, some people wanted Boluarte’s immediate resignation and Castillo’s return. Many wanted to dissolve Congress. The vast majority of Peruvians wanted early elections,⁴ but a dysfunctional Congress could not muster enough votes to satisfy this demand (Carrión, 2023). In reaction of these developments, Freedom House downgraded Peru to “partly free” in its 2023 report (Freedom House, 2023). Two well-known Peruvian political scientists write that Peru’s democracy has been hollowed out by “power dilution” (Barrenechea & Vergara, 2023: 82).

The extreme fragility of Peru’s democracy does not occur in a vacuum. We show here that, two decades after Peru’s democratic transition, nondemocratic attitudes have increased. We suggest that the reason lies in voters’ deep political discontent with the performance of the political system. We use the variable satisfaction with democracy (SWD) as our general indicator of political discontent. While there is a healthy debate about the merits and flaws of this indicator (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001; Linde & Ekman, 2003; Kim, 2009; Howell & Justman, 2013; Ferrín, 2016; Foa, Klassen, Slade, Rand, & Collins, 2020; Daoust & Nadeau, 2021; Ridge, 2022; Singh & Mayne, 2023), we agree with those who argue that SWD can be properly used as an indicator of mid-level political support, located between support for incumbents and the political regime as a whole (Singh & Mayne, 2023: 194). We document below how SWD has declined steadily in Peru in recent years, in a pattern that distinguishes this country from the regional average.

Our argument is that growing political discontent expresses deep failures of political representation and increasing political dysfunction. Elections in post-2000 Peru have not resulted in greater political representation. Voters elect candidates who promise “security oriented” messages (more state intervention to address human insecurities) but get governments that privilege “efficiency”

3. In a poll conducted in early January of 2023 by the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (henceforth IEP), about 30 percent of the respondents approved of Castillo’s attempted coup, and 41 percent declared to be in favor of Castillo’s move to dissolve Congress (IEP, 2023a).

4. Polls conducted by IEP in January and February of 2023 show that about 90 percent of respondents wanted early elections in 2023 or 2024 (IEP, 2023b).

(Stokes, 2001). In addition, the widely noted absence of political parties and the banning of immediate reelection deprive voters to hold presidents and their parties accountable. This dual failure of representation fuels political disenchantment. We bring together into a single framework of representational failure issues that have been explored individually in several important works that we cite in the respective section. In addition, heightened inter-branch conflict has led to political dysfunction that further undermines citizen trust in their representatives.

In this article, we map the recent evolution of democratic and nondemocratic attitudes in Peru and use regional averages to provide a context. We do not claim that support for democracy in Peru has fallen more compared to the rest of the region. What we want to stress is that support for democracy in Peru is consistently lower than the regional average and that it has declined in the last 15 years. We argue that the deterioration of attitudes supportive of democracy is driven by political discontent caused in part by failures of representation and political dysfunction that emanate from the absence of political parties. This political discontent has increased dramatically in Peru in the last decade or so. The implicit claim we make is that the lower levels of support for democracy found in Peru are to be attributed to contextual factors rather than deep-seated authoritarian values. We buttress this claim in an indirect fashion, by showing that democratic and nondemocratic attitudes ebb and flow and therefore they are more likely to be associated with evaluations of regime performance (for which we use SWD as an indicator) than enduring authoritarian values.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the first section, we discuss the results of NORC's cluster analysis of democratic attitudes in Peru using the 2012–2021 waves of the AmericasBarometer survey. This analysis gives us a bird's eye view that includes only four surveys, given data availability. In the second section, we disaggregate and expand the timespan for the analysis of some of these variables by utilizing all the rounds of the AmericasBarometer surveys conducted in Peru (2008–2021). These two sections show a trend of increasingly nondemocratic attitudes, especially in support for executive aggrandizement. In the third section, we explain this trend by tracing citizen dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working in Peru. We then discuss two reasons for this dissatisfaction: failures of representation and political dysfunction caused by severe inter-branch conflict. A concluding section ends the paper.

2. CLUSTERS OF DISTINCT DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES IN PERU

NORC at the University of Chicago used data from the AmericasBarometer and cluster analysis to classify Peruvians into groups with specific profiles

regarding democratic attitudes.⁵ The aim of this analysis is to maximize similarity within each cluster while maximizing dissimilarity between clusters. One advantage of cluster analysis compared to other classification schemes is that it is highly inductive, meaning that it lets surveyed Peruvians speak for themselves without making assumptions in advance about how to group them. The introduction to this volume provides detailed information regarding the study's methodology. Five democratic attitudes were included in the analysis:

- *Support for democracy*: The extent to which Peruvians agree or disagree that “democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government.”
- *Opposition to military coups*: Whether Peruvians believe it would be justified for the military to take power in a military coup in certain circumstances.
- *Opposition to executive aggrandizement*: Whether Peruvians believe it would be justified for the president to close Congress and the Supreme Court and govern without them.
- *Tolerance of protest and regime critics*: The extent to which Peruvians support the right to protest and other political rights of regime critics.
- *Support for democratic inclusion*: The extent to which Peruvians support the political inclusion of homosexuals.

Questions to measure all five attitudes were available in four survey waves (2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019). Only three attitudes were available in 2021: support for democracy, opposition to military coups, and opposition to executive aggrandizement. The 2021 cluster analysis results are therefore not directly comparable to those of prior waves and are not discussed in this paper. The Appendix presents the main cluster analysis results for all waves.

The cluster analysis identified three clusters in 2012 and four clusters each in 2014, 2017, and 2019. In all waves, a small share of respondents was not classified into any cluster.⁶ Unclustered individuals are dissimilar from each other and from those included in other clusters. To facilitate comparisons over survey waves, the resulting clusters can be grouped into four families that share a set of defining characteristics (we use the labels as named by the editors):

- *Institutionalists (including both institutionalists and democratic institutionalists)*: Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by full opposition to military coups and executive aggrandizement. They represent “ideal” democratic citizens compared to the other cluster families.

5. For a full explanation of the technique and a justification of the labels given to each cluster see Cohen & Camacho's introduction to this issue.

6. The proportion of unclustered respondents was 3.5 percent in 2012, 6.3 percent in 2014, 5.7 percent in 2017, and 5.8 percent in 2019.

- *Military Interventionists*: Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition to executive aggrandizement but no opposition to coups.
- *Presidentialists*: Individuals in this cluster family exhibit full opposition to coups but no opposition to executive aggrandizement.
- *Authoritarians*: Individuals in this cluster family are characterized by basically no opposition to both coups and executive aggrandizement.⁷

Figure 1 shows the evolution of these families between 2012 and 2019. The first clear trend is the growth of the authoritarian cluster family. While this cluster comprised only 16.2 percent of respondents in 2012, they make up 34.8 percent of respondents in 2019. This cluster exhibits low support for democracy as a political regime, has very little to no opposition to both military coups and executive aggrandizement, and professes low support for democratic inclusion.⁸ The other noticeable change is the growth of the presidentialists cluster, which increased from 6.5 percent of respondents in 2017 to 18.3 percent in 2019. This cluster is characterized by relatively high support for the idea of democracy (in their answers to the question of Support for Democracy as a regime), very high opposition to military coups, average support for democratic inclusion and the right to protest, but no opposition to the expansion of presidential power.

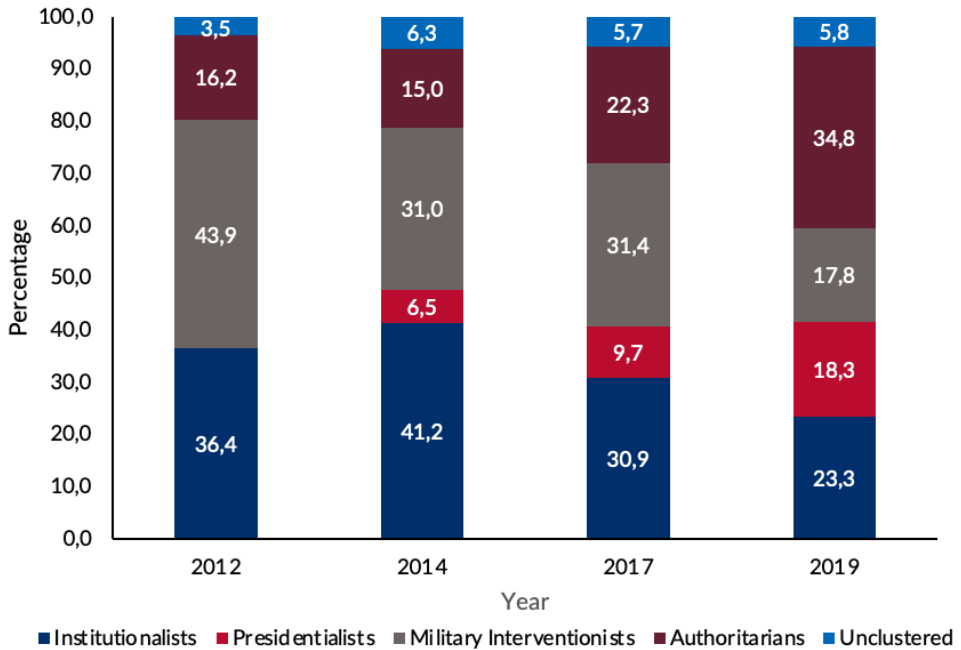
A third finding is the substantial reduction in the proportion of military interventionists. This cluster comprised about 43.9 percent of the sample in 2012 but only 17.8 percent in 2019. This cluster is primarily characterized by a strong endorsement of military coups but a strong opposition to executive aggrandizement. This group has a moderate-to-high level of support for democracy and middling levels of support for the right to protest and the democratic inclusion of historically marginalized groups. We also note the reduction of institutionalists over time. This grouping comprised 36.4 percent of respondents in 2012 and 23.3 percent in 2019, with some fluctuations in between. This cluster aggregates respondents who exhibit high support for democracy and the rejection of both military coups and executive aggrandizement.

The Institutionalists are the ones most consistently opposed to military coups while also exhibiting the highest or very high support for the idea of democracy (in the question of regime endorsement) as the least bad of political regimes. They also tend to score higher than other clusters in tolerance of protest and regime critics and support for democratic inclusion. This cluster comprised 36.4 percent of the sample in 2012, but only 23.3 percent in 2019. This is a worrisome

7. Only in 2012 did “authoritarians” show some degree of opposition to military coups. In all other rounds, they fully endorsed coups. See Table A.1 in the appendix.

8. The attitudinal profile of each cluster in each year of the surveys can be found in the Appendix.

Figure 1. Evolution of Cluster Families, 2012–2019



■ Institutionalists ■ Presidentialists ■ Military Interventionists ■ Authoritarians ■ Unclustered
 Source: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019.

development because it indicates a decline of the group of people who consistently hold democratic attitudes. Unfortunately, this decline is consistent with the weakening of support for democracy as a political regime, as we discuss in the next section.

NORC at the University of Chicago’s cluster analysis also identified the variables that significantly distinguish each cluster from all others. The variables examined include gender, income, race, education, experience with violence and corruption, political efficacy, and political participation. All clusters are statistically significantly different from the others on a few of these variables in each wave, but there are few patterns that hold across the 2012–2019 waves. Moreover, most statistically significant differences are substantially small, which suggests that the demographic and other characteristics examined do not structure attitudes toward democracy in a meaningful way.

With these limitations in mind, we found that military interventionists tended to be younger. The share of young people (18–29 years) among that cluster is higher than among the rest of the sample. Military interventionists also have

fewer average years of education than the rest of the sample. Additionally, presidentialists tend to be wealthier: the share of people in the lowest wealth quintile among this cluster is lower than among the rest of the sample.

The main conclusion of this cluster analysis is that the grouping with the most consistent democratic and institutionalist views has declined over time whereas those holding more authoritarian attitudes have grown.

3. SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC VALUES OVER TIME

To provide a closer and more extended look at the evolution of democratic attitudes in Peru, we examine three variables individually: support for democracy as a regime type, support for military coups, and support for executive aggrandizement. We compare Peru's trajectories with other countries in Latin America to better understand the significance of these changes.⁹

3.1. Support for Democracy

Every AmericasBarometer survey since 2006 shows that Peruvians exhibit lower support for democracy in the abstract than the regional average.¹⁰ In some years the gap between Peruvians and Latin Americans is substantial (2006, 2010, and 2021) and in others less so, but support for democracy is consistently low in Peru (represented by a solid line in Figure 2 and the following), when compared with the region (represented by a dashed line in Figure 2 and the others). Moreover, the difference in means for each of the reported years is statistically significant.¹¹ Overall, the highest level of support for democracy among Peruvians was registered in 2008 (62.5 percent), which was about 12 percentage points higher than what was found in 2019 and 2021. When the trajectories of the support for democracy in Peru and Latin America are compared, one notices that there was a noticeable decline in both Peru and the region between 2014 and 2016.

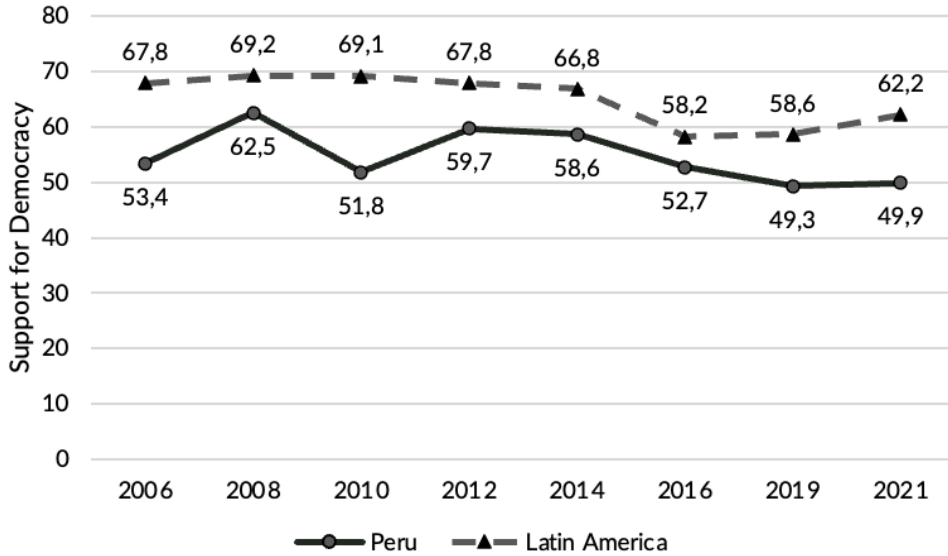
9. In all figures, "Latin America" excludes English- and Dutch-speaking countries. Peru is also excluded from the calculation of the average. Because surveys were not conducted in Venezuela in the 2018-2019 and 2021 rounds, we also exclude this country from the regional averages. The data start in 2006, the first year the AmericasBarometer survey was conducted in Peru.

10. The AmericasBarometer surveys use a seven-point Likert scale in this question, where one signifies strong disagreement and seven signifies strong agreement. In this paper, "support for democracy" is operationalized as the percentage of respondents who select values five, six, or seven in the scale. Values one to four are coded as "no support for democracy."

11. The 95 percent confidence intervals of the respective means do not intersect. The confidence intervals are not reported in the graphs but are available upon request.

However, while the average of support recovers in Latin America between 2016 and 2021, the decline continues in Peru (although it remained unchanged between 2019 and 2021).

Figure 2. Peru and Latin America: Support for Democracy, 2012–2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, version GM_20211108_authors.

3.2. Support for Military Coups

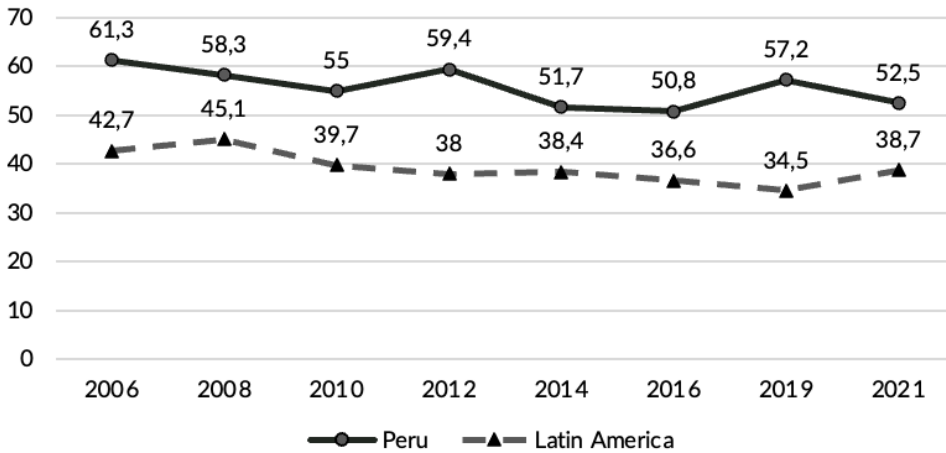
Another way to probe the strength of democratic convictions is to ask people about their willingness to support the democratic regime during difficult times. In this case, the question is whether military coups could be justified when there is widespread corruption.¹² Unfortunately, and consistent with the weak endorsement of democracy that we found, Figure 3

suggests that potential support for the interruption of democracy is high in Peru. As in the previous case, support for the democratic option is consistently lower in Peru than in the rest of the region: between 2006 and 2021, support for

12. The survey question asks: "Some people say that under some circumstances it would be justified for the military of this country to take power by a coup d'état (military coup). In your opinion would a military coup be justified when there is a lot of corruption?" The options are "yes, it would be justified" and "no, it would not be justified."

military coups when there is a lot of corruption ranged from 50 to 60 percent in Peru, compared to the regional average of between 34 and 45 percent. In each of these years, the difference in means was statistically significant. Perhaps the good news here is that support for military coups has dropped a bit in 2021 in comparison to 2019, a year that saw a noticeable increase in relation to 2016. But even in 2021, support for military coups in cases of high corruption is almost 14 percentage points higher in Peru than the regional average. We have argued elsewhere that this greater predisposition to support military intervention under this condition is related to the larger concern Peruvians have about corruption as their country’s most pressing problem and their widespread belief that an overwhelming majority of public officials and politicians participate in it (Carrión *et al.*, 2020). Considering that every elected president since 2001 has been investigated for corruption tells how salient the issue of corruption is for most Peruvians.

Figure 3. Support for Military Coups When There Is Widespread Corruption in Peru and Latin America, 2012–2021



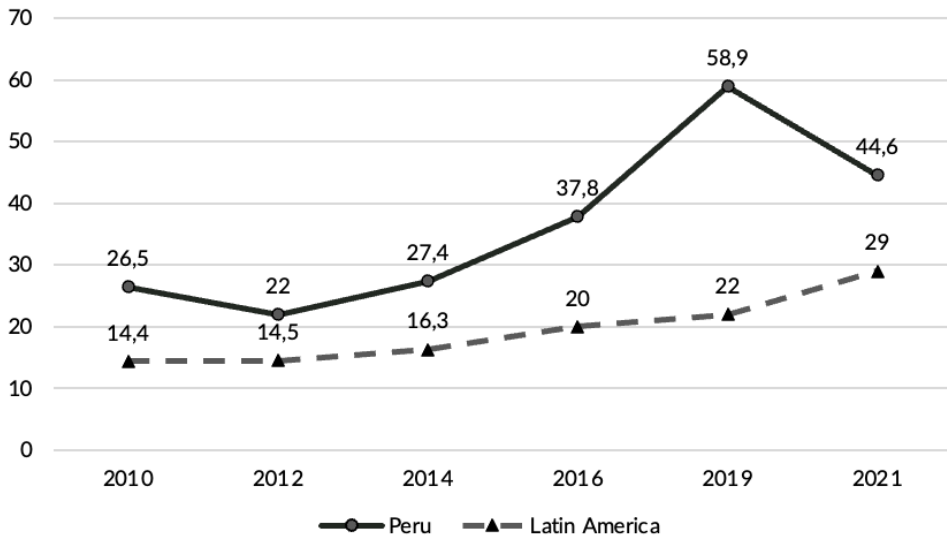
Source: AmericasBarometer, version GM_20211108_authors.

3.3. Support for Executive Aggrandizement

Democratic backsliding, or the weakening of democracy “from within” as chief executives abuse their formal and informal prerogatives to aggrandize their power, is a contemporary global trend (Bermeo, 2016; Lührmann & Linberg, 2019; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Carrión, 2022a). Peru unfortunately has a long history of backsliding. On April 5, 1992, President Alberto Fujimori, with support of the

armed forces, shut down Congress, dismissed the Supreme Court, and informed the nation that he would rule by decree (Conaghan, 2005; Carrión, 2006). Figure 4 shows that Peruvians have a strong disposition to support the aggrandizement of executive power, especially when the incumbent is popular.¹³ As in the previous cases, the differences of the means found in Peru and the region are statistically significant for each of the reported years. It also worth mentioning that the level of support for executive aggrandizement via the shutting down of Congress is lower than that of support for military coups in cases of widespread corruption. In 2010, about one in four respondents (26.5 percent) said that the President shutting down the legislative and judicial branches would be justified when the country is facing “very difficult times.” That was almost twice as much as the regional average (14.4 percent). In 2019, support for the extraconstitutional increase in executive power reached its highest point (58.9 percent) at a time when a popular president (Martín Vizcarra) was confronting an overreaching congress. This

Figure 4. Support for Executive Aggrandizement in Peru and Latin America, 2012–2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, version GM_20211108_authors.

13. The specific question measuring this attitude is “Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Congress/Parliament and govern without Congress/Parliament?” The options were “yes, it is justified” and “no, it is not justified.” Data are not available before 2010.

statistic was more than 30 percentage points higher than the regional average for that year. In 2021, with a new Congress in place and an interim president in charge, that level of support fell, but was still 15.6 percentage points higher than the regional average.

Inter-branch conflict has become, as we discuss later, a central feature of Peruvian politics in the last decade. Each branch has utilized “the nuclear option” available to them (either removing the president or dissolving Congress) as part of this confrontation. The data reported in Figure 4 show that there is potential support for a highly popular president to move antidemocratically against Congress. In the case of Vizcarra, when he dissolved Congress in late September of 2019, his action was not openly unconstitutional and was later approved by the Constitutional Tribunal, but there was enough uncertainty about its constitutionality because he argued that Congress has “tacitly” denied him a vote of confidence.

4. WHY ARE NONDEMOCRATIC VALUES GROWING? DECLINING SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY

In the preceding sections we showed that the percentage of institutionalists has decreased in the last decade, while the percentage of Peruvians in less-democratically-inclined clusters has increased. We also documented a general decrease in support for democracy in the abstract and an increase in support for executive aggrandizement. While support for military coups remained relatively stable in this period, it is quite high: about half of Peruvians would justify a military coup when corruption is high. Why has the total proportion of people holding non-democratic attitudes increased between 2012 and 2021?

The short answer is that there is growing political discontent with the performance of the political system. How do we capture this disappointment or discontent? We argue that the best indicator is the general question about satisfaction “with the way democracy works in Peru.”¹⁴ There is a healthy debate in the public opinion literature about the satisfaction with democracy (SWD) item and its utility. Some have criticized SWD for failing to indicate what dimension of political support is measuring and even suggested that “the item should not be included on future surveys” (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001: 526). Others disagree and argue that this item does not try to measure support for the principles of democracy; instead, it is one indicator of literal “support for the performance of

14. The specific question measuring this attitude is “In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Peru?” The response options were “very satisfied,” “satisfied,” “dissatisfied,” and “very dissatisfied.” Figure 5 plots the percentage of respondents who choose “very satisfied” or “satisfied.”

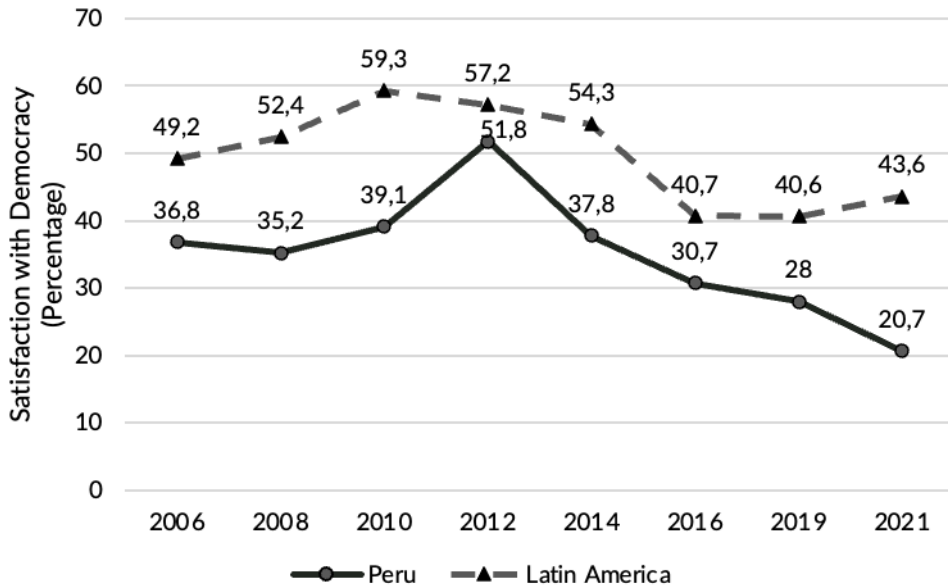
a democratic regime” (Linde & Ekman, 2003: 401). In a recent and exhaustive review of the vast literature on the topic, Singh and Mayne (2023: 194) conclude that “a consensus has emerged among SWD scholars that the standard item is a mid-level indicator of popular support... lying between more diffuse support related to regime-type preferences and commitments and support for specific actors and institutions.” We agree with this conclusion even though we recognize that SWD is contaminated with assessments of regime as well as incumbents’ performance (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001; Wagner, Schneider, & Hall, 2009; Daoust & Nadeau, 2021). We do not need to adjudicate whether regime-level or government-level assessments are more important in determining SWD. We use it here to make a more limited claim: that it is an indicator of political discontent that captures assessments of regime as well as incumbent’s performance.

Figure 5 shows that SWD in Peru has plummeted in recent years, when compared with the regional average. In 2012, slightly over 50 percent of respondents felt satisfied with the way democracy was working in Peru. A decade later, that satisfaction more than halved, dropping to 20 percent. Although we also see a downward trend in Latin America overall, the regional decline stabilized between 2016 and 2021. That was not the case in Peru, where the decrease in SWD levels, which had already fallen quite dramatically since 2012, dropped by an additional 10 percentage points between 2017 and 2021. Recurring issues of representation and the political dysfunction opened after the 2016 election are partly responsible for this decline, as we show below.

Figure 5 dispels the idea that Peruvians are “always unhappy with the system.” SWD seems to capture not only assessments of regime performance but also evaluations of the incumbent. There was a marked increase in SWD between 2006 and 2012, as Peru’s economy grew at record levels, poverty diminished, and standards of living generally improved (Carrión & Palmer, 2014). Data from the AmericasBarometer confirm that Peruvians were being more optimistic regarding their economic outcome. The 2006 poll conducted in Peru showed that 27.1 percent of respondents described their current economic situation as “bad” or “very bad.” When a similar question was asked in 2012, that percentage dropped to 15.2 percent. In 2012, 85 percent described their economic situation as “good” or “fair,” quite a contrast from the 73 percent who had reported similar condition in 2006. During his two first years in office, Ollanta Humala was quite a popular president and started a series of social programs as part of his campaign promises to deliver greater social inclusion (Perú–Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social, 2012). SDW grew accordingly, as we can see in Figure 5. Certainly, Peru still faced significant developmental challenges, and the political system was largely operating without parties with national reach and societal penetration. And Humala ended his administration with very low levels of approval and the sense of disillusionment was generalized. The cycle of political dysfunction opened in 2016

is still ongoing, as we discuss below, and has led to a significant drop in SWD. In 2021, only about two in ten Peruvians proffered to be satisfied with democracy.

Figure 5. Satisfaction with Democracy in Peru and Latin America, 2012–2021



Source: AmericasBarometer, version GM_20211108_authors.

We argue that two factors drive this political discontent: the dual crisis of political representation and the political dysfunction that emanates from severe inter-branch conflict. These are not the only factors of political discontent but are the ones that speak more directly to citizen engagement with the political sphere.

5. THE DUAL CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION

Despite Peru's clear success in holding free and fair elections since the fall of Fujimori in 2000, elections are not "inducing representation," to use the language of Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes (1999: 16). Elections are expected to foster representation at two levels. First, voters are asked to choose among competing political platforms, and elected representatives are expected to deliver on the promises they make. This is what Maning and colleagues call "the mandate conception of representation" (Manin, Przeworski, & Stokes, 1999: 30). But elections also give voters the opportunity to punish politicians and their parties for their

failure to deliver on their promises. Manin and co-authors denote this as “the accountability conception of representation” (*ibid.*: 40). In Peru, political representation fails at this dual task. Elected leaders frequently pursue policies that are different from what they promise on the campaign trail (Dargent & Muñoz, 2012: 264; Vergara & Encinas, 2016: 160-161), and voters have no opportunity to punish them at the ballot box (Vergara & Watanabe, 2016: 149; 2019: 32).

Of course, Alberto Fujimori was a prime example of bait-and-switch candidates who run against neo-liberalism but adopt it once in power (Stokes, 2001). What is surprising is that this phenomenon of “mandate violation,” as Stokes calls it, continues after his fall. Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006), Alan García (2006-2011), and Ollanta Humala (2011-2016) ran on political platforms that offer more state intervention, or what Stokes (2011: 2) labels as “security-oriented campaign messages,” but ended up embracing the neo-liberal economic orthodoxy prevalent in Peru since the early 1990s, policies described as “efficiency-oriented” (Stokes, 2001). Toledo ran a campaign marked with populist overtones, playing up his indigenous origins, and offering to fight poverty, create jobs, fight corruption, and the satisfaction of basic human needs (Schmidt, 2002: 344). However, Toledo would not deliver on the promise of reducing social and economic inequalities (McClintock, 2006). Alan García offers another example of policy switch. As a candidate, he offered economic reforms with a degree of greater state intervention but respecting democracy and the market (Vergara, 2007: 93). Once in government, García fully embraced economic policies that rest on the exploitation and export of natural resources. Despite his promises, and like Toledo, García paid little attention to economic redistribution and institutional reform. He opted instead for a discourse of order and authority and criticized those who opposed his extractivist policies (Tanaka & Vera, 2008: 352).

The 2011 elections pitted Keiko Fujimori against Ollanta Humala, who ran this time on a more moderate platform promising social inclusion and a “Great Transformation” in democracy. The electoral outcome showed that there was pent-up demand for a candidate offering significant economic reform to reduce inequality (Levitsky, 2011; Tanaka, Barrenechea, & Vera, 2011). Humala won 18 of Peru’s 25 departments, losing in the most developed areas.¹⁵ He was the poor people’s candidate. His election represented a rejection of the establishment and hope for more inclusive socioeconomic policies (Dargent, 2011). Humala tried to deliver on his promises of greater social inclusion, but he eventually provided more continuity than change in policy terms (Dargent & Muñoz, 2012: 246). As with previous administrations, he let technocrats in charge of the finance ministry. His

15. Ollanta Humala won in districts located in the bottom three quintiles of the Human Development Index, whereas Keiko Fujimori prevailed in the top two quintiles (Zacharias, Sulmont, & Garibotti, 2015).

government ultimately failed to satisfy voters' expectations of greater social inclusion (Barrenechea & Sosa Villagarcía, 2014; Meléndez & Sosa Villagarcía, 2013; Carrión, 2022b). When faced with an economic slowdown, Humala did not change pre-existing economic policies, despite his campaign promises.¹⁶ Accordingly, his popularity, which hovered between 50 and 60 percent during his first year in office, fell to the low 30s by the second year and settled at about 20 percent by the end of his presidency (Muñoz & Guibert, 2016: 328).

In sum, Presidents Toledo, García, and Humala governed during years of significant economic growth. Social spending grew from 2007 on, but the economic policy continued to be on "autopilot" (Meléndez & Sosa Villagarcía, 2013). Modernization occurred and poverty declined, but while these presidents offered on the campaign trail policies that called for greater state intervention and more redistributive policies, their governments delivered continuity rather than change. José Luis Ramos (2022: 63) puts this situation in stark terms, "victory is achieved with the vote, but in the end those who lost govern." Not surprisingly, these governments became so unpopular that each of their political parties nearly faded from the political arena at the end of their terms. President Humala's failure holds particular significance because he ran on a platform that promised greater equality for Peruvians residing in the poorest areas of the country. The subsequent lack of progress deepened cynicism and discontent among his supporters.

Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (colloquially known as PPK in Peru), won the presidency in 2016 in a campaign characterized by a different political dynamic. The race was not about promises of greater income redistribution or social inclusion. It was a contest between those who defended the Fujimori legacy and those who rejected it. Veronika Mendoza, the leftist leader who came in third, threw her support behind center-right PPK because he represented the rejection of *fujimorismo*. And yet, once in the presidency, PPK adopted a conciliatory approach towards the *fujimorista*-controlled Congress. To avoid being impeached, he cut a deal with a faction of the *fujimorista* party (led by Keiko's brother) to save his presidency. This led him to pardon Alberto Fujimori (the Constitutional Tribunal eventually invalidated the pardon). The very act of freeing the symbolic leader of the party against which he ran is yet another example of representational failure, in this case betraying the anti-*fujimorista* vote. This betrayal doomed PPK, for the left filed another impeachment motion in March 2018, and PPK resigned the presidency when it was clear that few of his former supporters would defend him.

The victory of Pedro Castillo in the 2021 elections marks a watershed moment. The victory of a rural teacher and radical union leader, representing a

16. Peruvians joked that the only "great transformation" occurring during the Humala administration was his own.

self-described Marxist party with a rather tenuous commitment to pluralistic democracy, was *prima facie* evidence that, despite all its flaws, Peru's electoral democracy was real. Despite the deep fears of the establishment, Castillo took office as he was the undisputable winner of the runoff. Symbolically, he represented the presidency of the Indigenous and those who had been historically marginalized from the centers of power. His campaign motto was "no more poor people in a rich country." His disinterest in matters of governance, however, belied that promise. He made no attempts to change the orthodox economic policy, nor did he offer congressional legislation to raise taxes to increase funding for existing social programs. Almost a year after taking office, only 19 percent of Peruvians approved of his performance in office. In November of 2022, weeks before his ill-advised coup against Congress, his popularity rate barely exceeded 30 percent (IEP, 2022a). He had a mandate for a more progressive agenda, but his inattention to governing prevented him from any serious policy initiative.

Toledo's party no longer exists. García's historic party, the APRA, lost its electoral registration in 2021 due to poor electoral performance (it regained it in 2023). Humala's party is a shell of its former self. PPK's party is nonexistent. Castillo resigned from the party who took him to victory. Voters could not punish any of these presidents at the polls because they were prevented from running for immediate reelection. But the incumbent parties could not be punished either because they did not put forward a presidential candidate in the subsequent election. This was true in 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021. This is a failure of representation as accountability. Some scholars denote this as "weak vertical accountability" and argue that it "drives Peruvians' deep dissatisfaction with politics" (Vergara & Watanabe 2019: 32). The electoral system provides perverse incentives that weaken political parties and favor fragmentation. Party-switching, access to free media, "party substitutes" (free agents), the success of local-based parties, and legislation that bans immediate reelection have prevented the development of strong parties (Zavaleta, 2014; Levitsky & Zavaleta, 2016). Indeed, the absence of political parties — noted by so many observers of Peruvian politics (Levitsky & Cameron, 2003; Tanaka, 2005; Crabtree, 2010) — has a pernicious consequence for representation because it disconnects presidents from voters, depriving them of their right to punish presidents' policy switches and their bad performance in office (Vergara & Watanabe, 2016: 153). Perhaps the most important "cost" of this absence is that voters have no chance "to vote retrospectively" (Zavaleta, 2014: 147). This dual failure of representation in Peru fuels political discontent.

With the demise of parties, we see the rise of outsiders and the turning of political parties into mere labels with no societal implantation (Zavaleta, 2014; Levitsky & Zavaleta, 2016). And the end-result of banning reelection is not only

the vanishing of parties *but also* of politicians (Barrenechea & Vergara, 2023: 82). This explains the chasm between politics and society, between presidents and voters, that several authors have pointed out (Muñoz & Guibert, 2016: 335; Barrenechea & Vergara, 2023: 85; Dargent & Muñoz, 2012: 255; Vergara & Watanabe, 2016: 153).

6. INTER-BRANCH CONFLICT AND POLITICAL DYSFUNCTION

Issues of representation have been combined in recent years with political dysfunction, fueling even more citizen disenchantment with politicians. Divided government — different parties (or coalitions) in control of the executive and the legislature — is a frequent occurrence in presidential systems. In Peru, unfortunately, it has led to crisis of governance (Kenney, 2004). In 1992, for instance, Fujimori could not or would not find accommodation with a Congress where his party lacked a majority, leading him to shut it down unconstitutionally (Kenney, 2004; Conaghan, 2005; Carrión, 2006). With the return to democracy in 2000, the first three presidents (Toledo, García, and Humala) did not enjoy an outright majority in Congress but their delegations were strong enough to build majority coalitions, although they thinned as time went by due to party switching and party fragmentation in Congress, enduring problems in Peru (McNulty, 2017: 577; Muñoz & Guibert, 2016: 329).

This situation changed dramatically in 2016, when PPK won the presidency by 41,000 votes, but Keiko Fujimori's *Fuerza Popular* obtained a large congressional majority (73 of 130 seats in the unicameral legislature). Unable to process her defeat, Keiko Fujimori used that legislative majority to obstruct PPK's presidency. In fact, she announced that her party would use it to turn its party platform into laws, tacitly stating that she intended to govern from Congress (El Comercio, 2016). Instead of seeking an alliance with a center-right president who was close to her own ideological leanings, she and her party decided to engage in open confrontation. The *fujimorista* majority flexed its congressional muscles to censure competent ministers, like Jaime Saavedra, the education minister. When Marilú Martens, also education minister, was impeached by the *fujimorista* majority, PPK made it a matter of confidence, which ultimately led to the censure of the cabinet headed by Fernando Zavala, in September 2017.

The confrontation escalated when the *fujimoristas* tried to vacate PPK due to “permanent moral incapacity”, over undisclosed ties with the Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht revealed in December 2017. Although this effort failed, as noted previously, the *fujimoristas* crossed a red line. The only other recent time that a Congress had taken a vote to remove a president using the “moral incapacity” clause was in 2000, when Alberto Fujimori had already left the country and

faxed his resignation from Japan.¹⁷ The use of this procedure to remove a minority president raised the stakes of political conflict and opened a cycle of political dysfunction still affecting Peru. Congress tried again in March 2018, citing promises of public works that PPK and his ministers had made to some members of Congress in exchange for their votes against the first impeachment. Confronted with evidence of the dealings, and without political support given his pardon of Alberto Fujimori, PPK resigned after less than two years in office. The congressional “nuclear option” against presidents had been used and it will remain part of the standard political arsenal in the following years.

PPK’s replacement, his vice president Martín Vizcarra, was a more seasoned politician and understood that the *fujimorista* opposition was not going to end with PPK’s demise. Soon after being sworn as president, Vizcarra took the initiative and leveraged popular antipathy toward the *fujimorista*-dominated Congress to gain the upper hand. He too would resort to another “nuclear option” – the dissolution of Congress – in the face of congressional reluctance to support his policies. The Fujimori-enacted Constitution of 1993 has strong presidentialist overtones and gives chief executives the power to dissolve Congress and call for new legislative elections if Congress votes down two questions of confidence. This is a powerful tool that forces the legislature to agree with key policy initiatives, including constitutional reforms, if they come as a “matter of confidence.”¹⁸

Vizcarra used this mechanism to force Congress to allow a referendum on political reform that sanctioned, among other things, the banning of immediate congressional reelection. This was a very popular measure that solved an in-existent problem, given the low rates of reelection, and had unintended consequences by shortening the time horizons of legislators. The inter-branch conflict continued and when Vizcarra posed as a matter of confidence a bill to regulate the selection of magistrates to the Constitutional Tribunal, Congress passed it *after* it elected the new members using the old legislation. Vizcarra considered that such move was a “de facto” rejection of the matter of confidence and therefore he announced, on September 20 19, that he was dissolving Congress and calling for new congressional elections. Discounting the unconstitutional dissolution of Congress that Fujimori declared in 1992, this was the first time that a president used this mechanism to dismiss Congress. Vizcarra’s interpretation was controversial,

17. In 1914 Congress had called for a vote on those grounds against Guillermo Billinghurst. When he tried to dissolve Congress to avoid impeachment, the military moved against him (Levitt, 2012: 9). In 1992, after Fujimori shut down Congress, many of its members met in a private house and voted to remove him from the presidency. It was a symbolic gesture with no practical effect (Carrión 2022a: 113).

18. In 2021 Congress passed a law that watered down significantly this provision by delineating the kind of issues that could qualify as a vote of confidence. Constitutional reforms are no longer allowed to be submitted as a matter of confidence (Canal N, 2021).

so it was challenged, but the Constitutional Tribunal approved it. Years later, in June of 2023, a new Constitutional Tribunal issued a ruling establishing that only Congress can explicitly state the sense of its approval or rejection of any vote of confidence (Tribunal Constitucional del Perú, 2023). Under the new criteria, Vizcarra's action in 2019 would not have passed constitutional scrutiny.

Thus, the inter-branch conflict initiated by the *fujimorista* party's decision to play power politics against PPK had turned into an open conflict by 2019, when both Congress and the Executive have used their respective nuclear options to prevail against the other. The political dysfunction deepened even more after 2019. The January 2020 congressional elections resulted in another highly fragmented Congress. Despite a dramatic shift in seat allocation, the conflict between the executive and the legislature did not end.¹⁹ The pandemic did not pause this dysfunction either. In November 2020, a majority from different ideological persuasions, led by the center right Acción Popular party, impeached President Vizcarra over corruption allegations. As there was no replacement Vice President, Congress appointed its own President, Manuel Merino, as interim chief executive. Peruvians saw this as an open power grab and mobilized in the thousands, all over the country, to demand Merino's resignation (Zárate, 2020). In the face of this unprecedented popular rejection, Merino resigned less than a week after he was sworn into office. Congress then voted Francisco Sagasti, from the small and centrist Partido Morado, to complete Vizcarra's term.

In downgrading Peru's political status from "free" to "partly free" in its 2021 report, Freedom House noted that the change was "due to extended political clashes between the presidency and Congress since 2017 that have heavily disrupted governance and anticorruption efforts, strained the country's constitutional order, and resulted in an irregular succession of four Presidents within three years" (Freedom House, 2021). A poll conducted after Vizcarra's dismissal documented Peruvians' lack of trust in their institutions: 65 percent of respondents said that no party represented them, and 60 percent said that no political leader did so (IEP, 2020). This political dysfunction was not only an institutional failure caused by the short-term calculations of political actors but also an obstacle for implementing an agenda that put the reduction of social inequalities and the development of the poorest regions at its center. Political immobilism is perhaps the most corrosive consequence of this inter-branch conflict. Citizen concerns with rampant corruption among public officials and politicians and widespread fears associated with crime undermine support for democracy (Carrión, Zárate, Boidi & Zechmeister, 2020; Carrión & Balasco, 2016).

19. The *fujimoristas* lost their majority and most of their seats (73 to 15). Congress was now under control of a group of center-right, personalistic, and clientelist parties. A religious millenarist party obtained 15 seats.

It is in this context of crisis of representation and severe inter-branch conflict that the 2021 presidential elections took place. Eighteen candidates split the vote in the first round with the candidates who made it to the runoff collectively receiving 38 percent of the vote. Over 60 percent of voters were to choose a candidate that was not their first choice for president.

Castillo was another example of a minority president, given that the conservative opposition had control of Congress. As in 2016-2019, the legislature assumed an aggressive stance against the executive, seeking to remove Castillo on the flimsiest of excuses. President Castillo, as noted, was uninterested in governing and frequently use his bully pulpit to attack Congress and the media. He quickly faced credible accusations of corruption. On the day Castillo was to present his defense in Congress against a third motion to vacate him due to permanent moral incompetence, he took to the airways to announce that he was dissolving Congress and was going to rule by decree until new congressional elections were held. His effort was an empty gesture, and, in his isolation, he was quickly removed from office and arrested. This episode fueled a wave of mobilization in the regions that have heavily voted for him. They felt that their votes have been overridden by the congressional majority, even though it was Castillo who tried to end Peru's democracy. Heightened inter-branch conflict ended up worsening deficits of political representation and fueling political discontent in the process.

7. CONCLUSION

Dahl (1971: 1) writes that responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens is “a key characteristic of democracy”. Pitkin (1967: 209) similarly argues that representation is “acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them”. If both Dahl and Pitkin are correct, then Peru's democracy is deeply flawed. For the reasons we noted above, political representation is defective. Governments usually do not follow the general platforms they offer in the campaign trail and, due to the absence of political parties and no immediate reelection rules, voters did not have the opportunity to castigate the party or the candidate at election time. This dual failure of representation, as mandate and accountability, along with the political dysfunction created by intense executive-legislative conflict, have fostered political discontent and weakened support for democracy in Peru.

NORC at the University of Chicago's cluster analysis indicated that, between 2012 and 2021, the percentage of Peruvians who can be classified as institutionalists has decreased while the percentage of Peruvians in less-democratically-inclined clusters has increased. We also documented a general decrease in support for democracy in the abstract and an increase in support for executive

aggrandizement. While support for military coups remained relatively stable, it is high: a whopping one in two Peruvians would justify a military coup when corruption is high.

We argue that political discontent, caused among other things by representational failures and political dysfunction, is driving this declining support for democracy. We measure political discontent by employing the traditional SWD item. While acknowledging the shortcomings of SWD, we believe that this indicator taps mid-level assessments of political performance, one that combines in unknown proportions evaluations of the political system and the incumbents. After increasing between 2008 and 2012, the years of economic bonanza and promises of greater social inclusion with Humala, SWD drops significantly from 2012 to 2021. To the accumulated effects of the dual crisis of representation we now add the cycle of political dysfunction opened in 2016. The result is a steady decline in SWD and, in so doing, a weakened support for democracy.

In this paper we discuss two of the key reasons behind deep political discontent. The first is the dual failure of representation. Failure to get the kind of government citizens voted for, and failure to have the opportunity to punish the elected leaders and their parties for their policy switches. The second is heightened inter-branch conflict, which produces political dysfunction and immobilism. We do not claim that political discontent is entirely driven by these two factors. Levitsky (2011: 88) correctly notes that state weakness is a central reason for political discontent in Peru (see also Mainwaring, 2006). The bureaucratic capacity of the state is low in Peru and severe state failures in the delivering of basic services such as health and education are manifestations of this weakness. In addition, the state and the political system do not yet offer “the full inclusion of marginalized social groups” by granting them full rights (McNulty, 2017: 574). If we stress here aspects more associated with the performance of the political system, it is because they have gotten worse in recent years, fueling political discontent.

In an unexpected development, the constitutional succession that put Dina Boluarte as president at the end of 2021 — which caused so many protests in parts of Peru — has resulted in a reduction of inter-branch conflict. While Congress is still largely controlled by center-right forces, and Boluarte was elected as part of Pedro Castillo’s leftist coalition, they seemed to have found a working relationship. Both Congress and President Boluarte share an interest in not holding early elections and stay in their respective offices until 2026. This arrangement may ease the inter-branch conflict that characterized Peru since the 2016 but deepens the crisis of representation that we have discussed. After a highly contested election that pitted an anti-establishment candidate against an establishment defender, the losers seem to be governing again.

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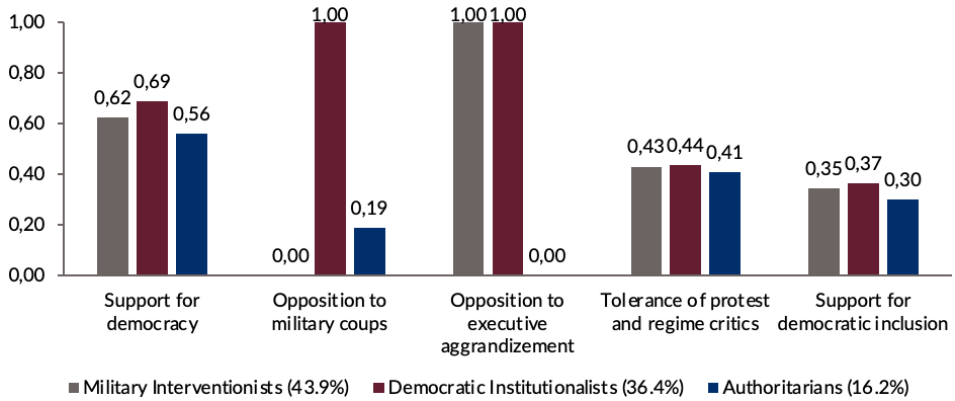
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APPENDIX. CLUSTER ANALYSYS RESULTS

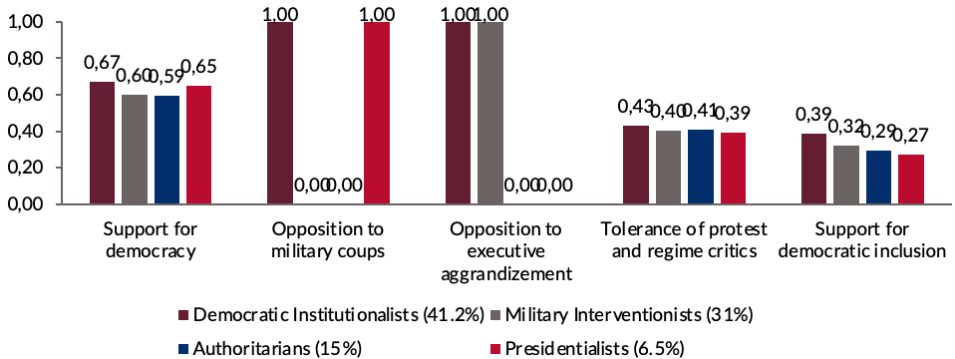
The bar graphs below present the main results of the cluster analysis. There is one bar graph per wave studied: 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2021. The bars indicate the average scores for the attitudes for each cluster. All attitude scores range from zero (least democratic) to one (most democratic). The percentages next to each cluster label in the legend indicate the share of respondents that was classified into the cluster. Thus, the graphs allow for comparing the clusters in terms of their democratic attitudes and their relative size.

Figure A.1. 2012 Cluster Results



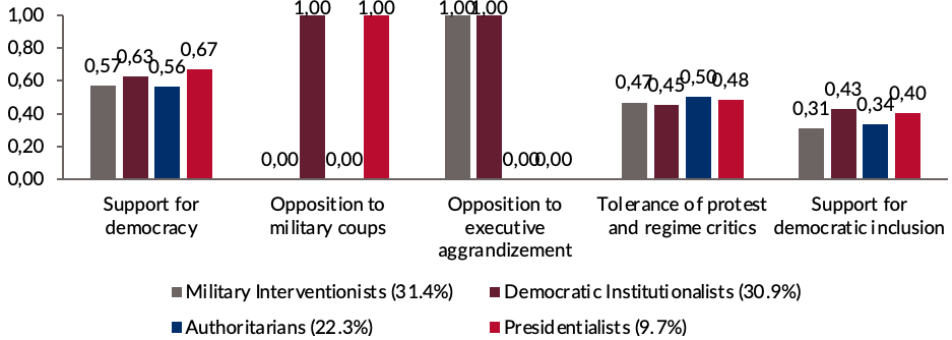
Source: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

Figure A.2. 2014 Cluster Results



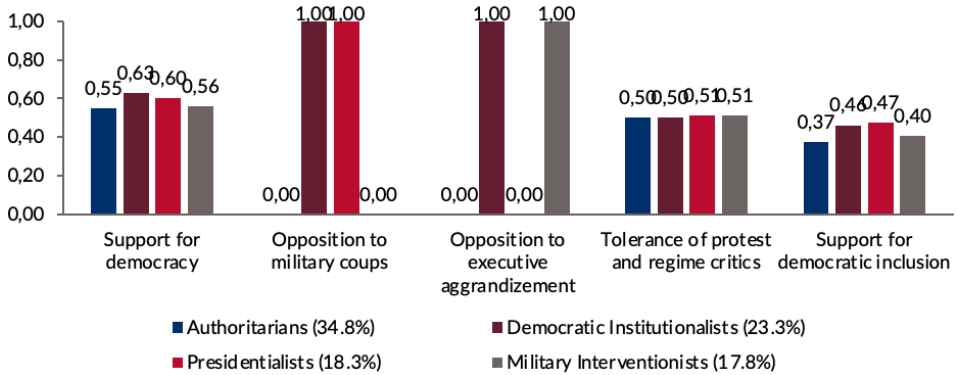
Source: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

Figure A.3. 2017 Cluster Results



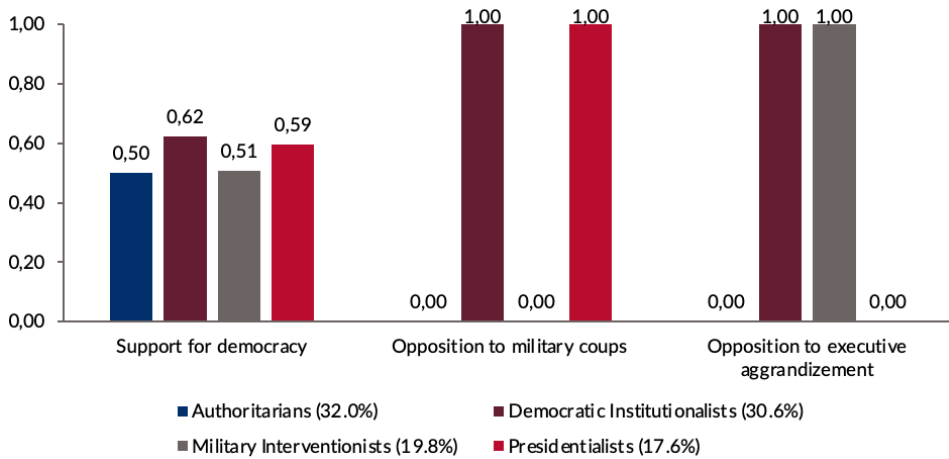
Source: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

Figure A.4. 2019 Cluster Results



Source: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

Figure A.5. 2021 Cluster Results



Source: NORC at Chicago, data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop, waves 2012-2019

PERU: DEEP POLITICAL DISSATISFACTION WEAKENS SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

Julio Carrión and Patricia Zárate

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