

# COUPS TO SAVE DEMOCRACY

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After the last election in Peru in 2021, a group of military retirees went to the streets of Lima to ask active-duty military members to carry out a military coup to prevent the person who had won the election from taking office. The argument was to "save democracy" to avoid falling into "communism." Despite these requests – which became very explicit – the Peruvian active-duty military members remained respectful of the Constitution, ignoring calls for sedition.

This monograph addresses two main questions. First, why did some Peruvians want to defend democracy with a coup? Second, what has changed in the military that used to intervene in politics and now does not? The first section will address the challenging 2021 Peruvian elections. The second will analyze the current regional context in Latin American countries with a tradition of dictatorships. It contains a brief review of the current role of the military in the region as well as relevant events since the democratizing wave of the late twentieth century. Moreover, this section analyzes the general trust of citizens in their institutions and, specifically, in the military. The third section will explore the role of the military in the history of Peru and its current composition. The fourth will address some theories that explain the inability of certain groups to solve problems on their own and their defense of the *status quo* in their society. The last section will summarize the main findings of this research.

## Section 1

### SETTING THE STAGE: 2021 ELECTIONS IN A POLARIZED COUNTRY

Peru has a very weak political party system despite its comprehensive existing laws intended to promote and strengthen them. The lack of

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partisan life and commitment to the public agenda makes parties only relevant every five years during election time since Peruvian law only allows candidates from political parties to run for office. For this reason, parties become invisible most of the time and become “wombs for hire” for caudillos and independent candidates in election periods, leading to electoral alliances that generally do not survive the election. This has a negative impact on Peruvian politics as presidents, members of congress, regional governors, and mayors are elected with little or no political support and a very fragmented agenda. With regard to Congress, things become even more serious because in the first round of presidential elections, if none of the candidates obtains 50+1 of the valid votes, the two candidates with the most votes go to a run-off election. Since the 130 members of Congress come from all the competing parties and are elected in the first round, this means that the Congress can have a representation of more than 10 or 12 parties with none of them providing the president that is elected in a run-off with a majority. In recent years, the significant difference between the number of representatives in Congress from the president’s party and from the other parties has led to persistent political opposition and growing political and institutional crises.

The 2021 elections took place in an environment of extensive political polarization that had begun five years earlier. When Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (PPK) won the 2016 presidential elections by a small margin of votes over Keiko Fujimori, a period of political instability began that ended with four presidential impeachment motions in Congress, two resigning presidents, one impeached president, a dissolved Congress, and four people who held the presidential role. From the first day, Fujimori with her absolute majority (73) in Congress (elected in the first round) challenged PPK to govern, generating a permanent conflict between the Executive and the Legislative branches of government. Along the way, there were a series of attempts to impeach PPK, who ended up resigning in the midst of a legislators’ vote-buying scandal to avoid impeachment in Congress. His vice president, Martín Vizcarra, took office in March 2018. He dissolved the Congress in September 2019 and was later impeached by the new Congress in November 2020. On that occasion, he was succeeded by Manuel Merino, President of the Congress, following constitutional prescription. However, his assumption of the presidency was highly questioned because it was widely considered that Vizcarra's impeachment had been forced and, after days of riots, Merino resigned. Given the

*interregnum* the resignation generated, the Congress elected one of its members, Francisco Sagasti, to complete the presidential term that began in 2016 and to carry out the 2021 elections, which had already been called in July 2020.

Constitutionally the Peruvian electoral process begins with a call for an election, the approval of the voter registry, the registration of presidential tickets, and lists of candidates for Congress and for the Andean Parliament. For the 2021 election, a total of 20 lists were presented to Congress, 16 for the Andean Parliament, and 18 parties registered candidates for the Presidency (ONPE, 2021). The first electoral round was held on April 11, and 70% of eligible voters participated amid the Covid-19 health crisis. After the official count, Pedro Castillo of the Peru Libre party was in first place with 18.9% of the valid votes, while Keiko Fujimori of the Fuerza Popular party obtained 13.4%. Peru Libre is a party that has defined itself as a “Marxist-Leninist-Mariateguist” left-wing party, while Fuerza Popular is a right-wing conservative party. In the case of the election of members to congress, 2516 candidates participated in the 27 constituencies at the national level (JNE, 2021). Ten political parties are represented in the 2021-2026 Parliament with Peru Libre winning 37 seats and Fuerza Popular 24 (El Peruano, 2021).

The election was full of public unrest. Since none of the candidates obtained the required majority, a second round election was scheduled for June 6. Citizen participation reached almost 75% in this election. On election night, pollsters projected Fujimori as the winner by a very narrow margin. However, with the passing of days and the arrival of ballots from across the country and abroad, the results began to be favorable to Castillo. Then there were a series of accusations about non-existent voters, false signatures, and even a magistrate of the electoral court was suspended. There were hundreds of contestations of electoral ballots by Fujimori's party. More than a month after the election, the results were 50.13% for Castillo and 49.87% for Fujimori, a difference of 44,263 votes in a country of 25.3 million voters.

During the vote-counting days, there were allegations of electoral fraud as well as numerous voices asking that -- given the imminence of his victory -- Castillo not be "allowed" to take office, questioning his "communist background" and accusing him of being linked to pro-terrorist groups.

Military retirees, although not a very large group, were very vocal in their requests and displayed histrionic acts such as going out to march with their military swords. Grouped into various organizations, these retired commissioned-officers -- in addition to some newly elected congressmen who were also retired military -- led marches against Castillo and wrote letters to active-duty commissioned officers.

The speeches broadcasted by these military groups called for a coup by the Joint Command of the Armed Forces (CCFFAA) "and for them to execute Article 46 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to insurgency against a "'usurper' as they called Pedro Castillo" (Ojo Público, 2021). These speeches went beyond declarations. Some older retirees, in a personal capacity, approached the top commands of the military services to "share" with them how previous coups had been carried out and how the civilian command could be "neutralized" in order to carry out a coup.

The military retirees were very active on social media between the first round of voting and the second, "warning" about the supposed dangers of electing Castillo. However, these discussions did not have a major impact until they came to light in June, when letters were sent to the offices of the head of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces and the general commanders of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force with the names and identity documents of more than 1,500 retired officers, asking them not to recognize Castillo as president-elect, and suggesting a coup.

The letters garnered the immediate reaction of President Sagasti, who stated on national television that it was "unacceptable that a group of people retired from the Armed Forces intend to incite high command to break the rule of law" and added that "in a democracy, the Armed Forces are non-deliberative, they are absolutely neutral and scrupulously respectful of the Constitution" (La Vanguardia, 2021). President Sagasti ordered that these letters be sent to the Attorney General's Office to clarify whether they were an attempt at sedition, a crime prescribed in Article 347 of the Criminal Code<sup>2</sup> and punishable by imprisonment.

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<sup>2</sup> Criminal Code of 1991, article 347°. - Sedition

Anyone who, disregarding the legally constituted government, takes up arms to prevent the authority from freely exercising its functions or to prevent compliance with laws or resolutions or to prevent general, parliamentary, regional, or local elections, shall be sentenced to not less than five nor more than ten years of imprisonment.

The military demonstrations continued until the end of the Sagasti term. In fact, they continued after Castillo took office in small groups (Ojo Público, 2021), with different objectives, some calling for an insurgency<sup>3</sup>, others promoting presidential impeachment. In January 2022, the prosecutors in charge of the investigation of the alleged "electoral fraud" verified that there was no forgery of signatures or impersonation of voters in the voting centers, effectively ending the complaint of fraud initiated by Fujimori and the military groups against Castillo.

But who were the members of these groups? The communications sent and the public demonstrations showed that the great majority were commissioned officers up to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, with a minority being the highest-ranking officers. It should be noted that the generals and admirals and the group of commissioned officers who led their services at the time were not part of the protestors. During the events that occurred up until July 28, 2021, the active-duty military high command remained fully respecting of the Constitution and focused on enforcing it within their services. The few attempts at politicization -- soldiers inside the country producing a video that went viral, and the political opinions expressed on social media -- were duly contained and sanctioned.

## **Section 2**

### **LATIN AMERICAN ARMED FORCES AND DICTATORSHIPS**

#### **History**

There is a long history of Armed Forces participation in the political life of Latin America. Since the wars of independence, some 200 years ago, the military have taken over or actively participated in the governments of their countries, often through coups. The last was in Honduras in 2009. During the 1960s and 1970s, the region experienced a process of militarization through coups. In 1975, except for Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela, all Latin American countries had authoritarian governments.

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<sup>3</sup> Constitution of Peru of 1993, Article 46: Right of insurgency

Nobody owes obedience to a usurping government, nor to those who assume public functions in violation of the Constitution and the laws. The civilian population has the right to insurgency in defense of the constitutional order. The acts of those who usurp public functions are null.

State capture by the military was carried out through material and symbolic acts that facilitated taking over the ministries, the media, and universities as well as the introduction of the military into the daily lives of citizens through regulations and actions (Victoriano, 2010). In this process, the idea of “national state” and its ideological structure lost prominence in political and economic decisions, and military governments worked to depoliticize the public sphere.

Military coups, as a form of majority government in the region, began in Brazil in 1964 and crossed Latin America until the mid-seventies. Transformations took place in political and economic structures. Reforms of the State were launched along with a repressive policy on broad sectors of civil society. Coups opened the door to a new era and a strategy of international military integration whose objective was to eradicate the left in Latin America and the growing mobilization of broad social sectors. As Victoriano (2010) points out, the State and civil society militarization process occurred “chronologically and symptomatically in the first half of the seventies – Bolivia in 1971, Chile and Uruguay in 1973, and Argentina in 1976.” Moreover, dictatorships in Paraguay (since 1954) and Brazil (since 1964), led at the beginning of the seventies to a doctrinal change in the repressive profile shown until then. Later there were “coups within the coup” in Brazil and Peru, where a new military group overthrew the previous one.

Argentina, like Bolivia, had a history of coups prior to 1970 but a completely different experience from that of Uruguay and Chile. In Bolivia, since 1950, there have been 41 governments with 23 coup attempts, of which 11 were effective (Dasso Martorelli, 2021). In Paraguay, Alfredo Stroessner led the longest dictatorship in South America during the Cold War between 1954 and 1989. In the eighties, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil successively recovered democracy, ending military dictatorships, and in Chile popular protests against Pinochet increased. Mobilizations against the regime took place in Paraguay, promoted by the parties grouped in the National Accord and the unions. In the Brazilian case, where the dictatorship’s level of violence was not so high, the military attempted to preserve their image during this transition (Martínez et al., 2013) contrary to what happened in Argentina, where those in power established the conditions to end their time in office by avoiding demands for responsibility for the excesses of the past.

In other countries of the region, the Armed Forces had a different experience. The Mexican Armed Forces do not have a coup record and have received the support of more than 50% of the population across the last 30 years. After the end of the PRI party dictatorship at the end of the 20th century, the military continued with its rights and privileges without much problem. This is mainly because "no political force included defense matters and its institutional organization in its legislative agenda" (Benítez Manaut, 2021). Indeed, Mexican governments since 2000 have been adding roles to the military's activities such as the fight against drug trafficking, the reinforcement of border control, the fight against organized crime, and participation in public security. In some parts of the country, the military are the only ones to deal with governors and municipal authorities in matters of public security. In Colombia, the Armed Forces are a product of the country's history and, together with the police, are oriented toward internal security: there are not many differences in their roles, and they work in a coordinated manner. The military were first in charge of the fight against the liberal guerrillas, then against banditry, later against the Marxist guerrillas, and more recently against drug trafficking and terrorism. This focus on internal security issues has led society to accept military influence over civilian power while, at the same time, external security issues have been somewhat abandoned (Vargas, 2021).

In political terms, most Latin American countries experienced democratic transition processes in the last twenty years of the 20th century and had the dismantling of traditional party systems as a common dominator. Although they became formal democracies, they still had large deficits in terms of the democratic rule of law and civilian control over the Armed Forces. Even though interruptions in democratic governance are less frequent and the threat of coups seems more remote, the Armed Forces have still played roles in various crises, engaged in a wide range of activities, and even openly exerted pressure. For example, as reported by Pion-Berlin (2001), high-ranking military members defied President Lagos of Chile, when they gave a special welcome to Augusto Pinochet, who was returning to the country after being arrested in the United Kingdom for human rights violations. Seventeen of Colombia's highest-ranking officers announced their resignation in protest at President Pastrana's insistence on negotiating with the guerrillas. In 2000, Ecuador's Armed Forces overthrew the elected president, and much negotiation was required

before the vice president was allowed to take office. Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, as a colonel, led a failed military coup, but later won power through elections and appointed his comrades-in-arms to key government positions.

In Latin America currently there is no perception of military threats that stimulates the growth of armies, but the size, cost, and roles of the Armed Forces are debate topics in the region. And there is some military resistance to the recognition of civil authority. Indeed, in some cases the precariousness of government control over military affairs is evident. In short, since the authoritarian regimes of the 1970s, the form of government has changed but the influence of the Armed Forces remains.

### **The Military and Trust**

As shown in various Latinobarometro<sup>4</sup> studies since 1995, Latin America reports the lowest interpersonal and general trust in the world. There are data for a number of Latin America countries in Figure 1 that summarizes regional trust in the 2017-2020 period, The regional average for the countries reported is 9%, which contrasts with the 29% world average.

Other problems with Latin American regional democracies -- in addition to low institutional trust-- are reflected in the 2017 Latinobarometro study<sup>5</sup>. That survey shows that political institutions are the ones that raise the most suspicion among citizens of the region, despite being the ones that represent them and look after their interests. In addition, the report reflects concern about the decline in the quality of democracy, pointing to the beginning of a process of slow deterioration that is described as "a disease like diabetes, which is not visible to the naked eye, (... but) is not alarming enough to turn on the red lights, even though it is slowly eating one away, (...) without there being a concrete remedy to stop the decline and start the recovery".<sup>6</sup>

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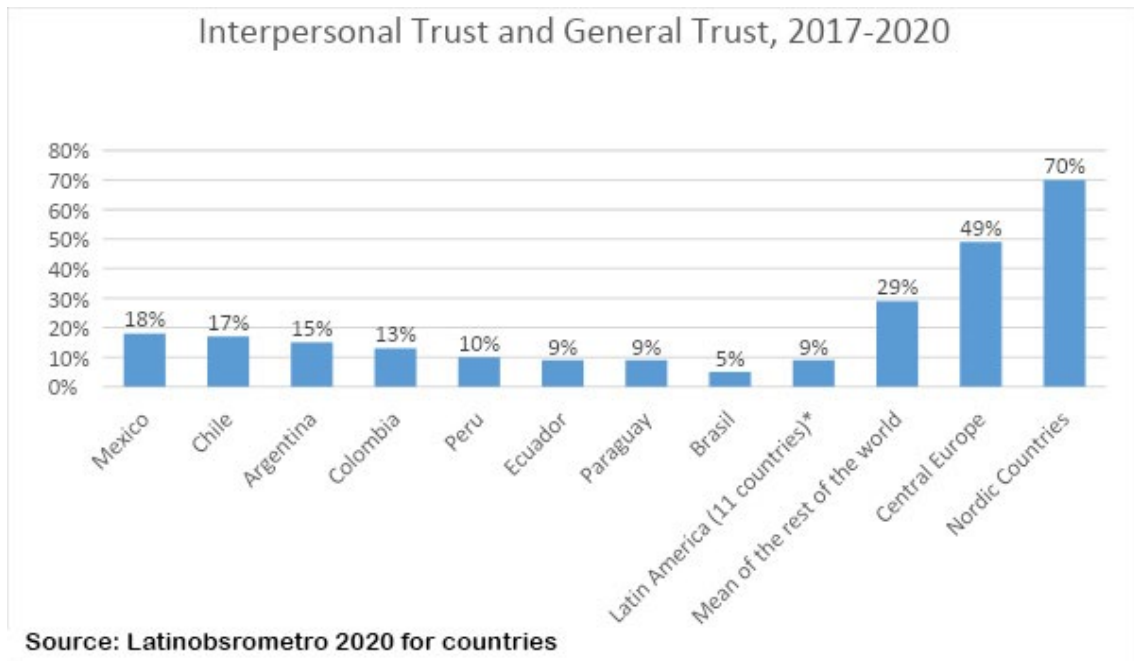
<sup>4</sup> The Latinobarometro is an annual public opinion study with around 20,000 interviews in 18 Latin American countries, to represent more than 600 million inhabitants, which has been published since 1995 by the Latinobarometro Corporation based in Chile. Information about this study can be found at <https://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp>

<sup>6</sup> Latinobarometro Report 2017, p. 12



Figure 1

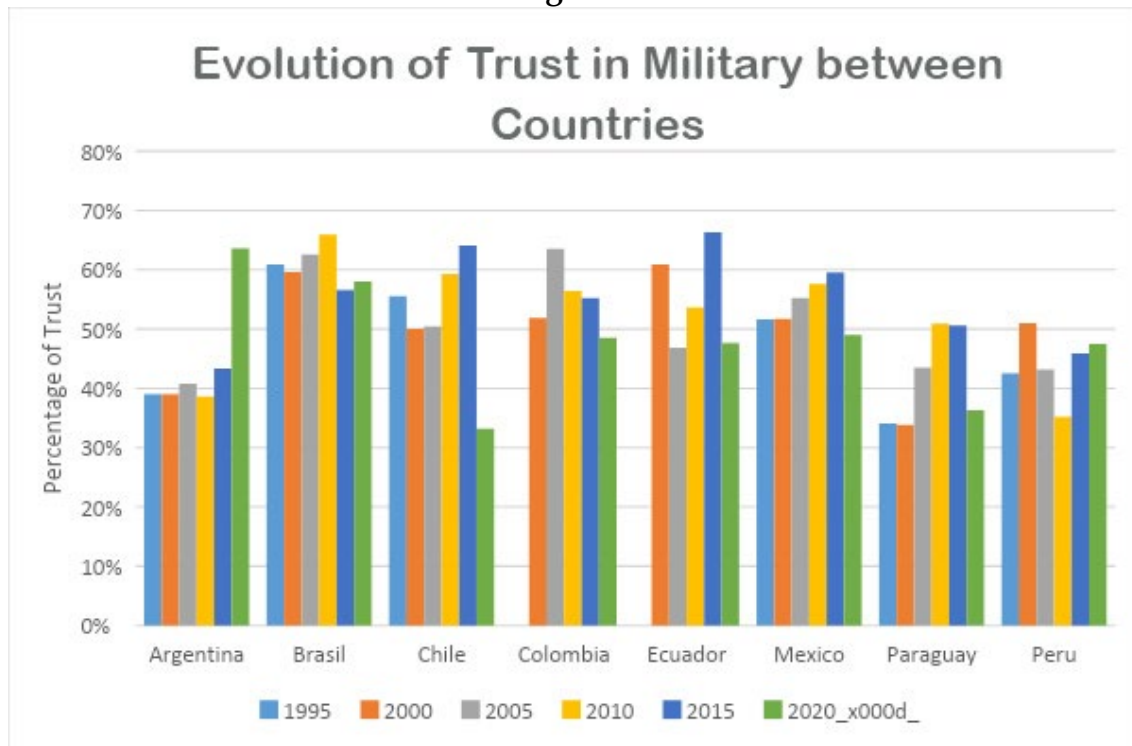


Sociologist Lucía Dammert (2004) conceptualizes trust as one of the central pillars of life in society, since it is the cohesive element representing the objectives, needs, and values of societies that facilitates them achieving common goals. She notes that institutional trust cannot prosper when interpersonal trust is eroded and, in the Latin American case, "institutional mistrust is linked to perceptions of inefficiency, corruption, negligence, and abuse of power by those who exercise political power as well as a growing distance between politics and citizens". However, Latin Americans do trust in some institutions. The Church is by far the institution that citizens of Latin America trust the most, and in the 2017 Latinobarometro study some 65% of those surveyed said they had a great deal or some trust in it. It was followed by the Armed Forces with 46%, the police with 35%, the electoral institutions with 29%, the judiciary and the government with 25%, the congress with 22% and political parties with 15%.

The Armed Forces are highly valued by their country populations. This can be seen in Figure 2 that shows general trust in the military from 1995 to 2020 in eight countries in the region. According to the Latinobarometro, trust in the Armed Forces has remained above 40% across the past thirty years, something that cannot be said for other institutions. These results

reveal the existence of a significant degree of citizen recognition: The Armed Forces “are not considered distant or threatening, rather they are considered the only ones with a forceful response versus the State” (Pérez Enríquez, 2021). These data might explain in part the occasional calls to transfer them more power not only in social life but at times in politics.

Figure 2



The role of the Armed Forces has been transformed in parallel with regional democratization. Even though it is difficult to talk about Latin America as a whole due to the diversity among countries, there are some common aspects in the region, such as the high prestige and respect in general for the armed forces, the development of new missions that are more of a social nature and even focus on technological development, the existence of a certain corporatism with a focus on maintaining some of its privileges, and, the incorporation of women (Martínez et al., 2013).

However, despite the general trust in the Armed Forces, the past weighs heavily. Although the military are viewed critically in countries that have endured dictatorships, they are also regarded as the heroes of the wars of independence against Spanish colonial rule. That is why in some Constitutions they are called "guarantors of law and order" (Grabendorff, 2021). Although there is a general perception that the military should not

return to power and that, in general, there are no projects on the Armed Forces side that necessitate them directly exercising government roles, the military continue to be relevant political and social actors. In fact, some elected governments continue to use the Armed Forces as an important symbol in maintaining power, as evidenced by the frequent presence of the military in civilian activities and events. Moreover, the Armed Forces have been used to arbitrate political disputes in Ecuador, to repress protests in Venezuela, to guarantee public security in exceptional circumstances in Brazil, to fight drug trafficking in Colombia, and for humanitarian missions in Haiti.

### **Today's Armed Forces**

Today the Armed Forces are multifunctional actors in the region. Increasingly, they have assumed roles beyond the defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity and have begun to perform development roles, considering that in many countries they are the only representatives of the State in remote areas. Even though the intervention of the military in cases of natural disasters and difficult infrastructure problems seems reasonable given their logistical capabilities, the truth is that countries have been giving them more and more such roles. Thus, in some countries, the military support the police and border and migration control; protect water resources; do environmental damage control; work in air traffic, prison, and health care facilities; and provide personal protection, the secret service, weapons production, customs, infrastructure measures, airline operation, hotel and hospital management, and food distribution (Grabendorff, 2021). A recent example of these additional roles that they can play happened during the Covid-19 pandemic. They have been on the front line when States saw their capacities exceeded during this health emergency; they have even supported the provision of vaccinations. Additionally the Armed Forces are often called upon to support the national police in combating drug trafficking, terrorism, and other forms of organized crime. In countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru, the Armed Forces engage permanently and directly in these missions.

In short, even though in the last 30 years we have seen changes in military doctrine and education as well as subordination to civilian power, the Armed Forces exercise political influence that guarantees them a level of

institutional autonomy. Public opinion gives the military a high level of legitimacy, as does the weakness in some civil institutions and the low capacity to implement public policies. Corruption, weak institutions, and organized crime tend to undermine democratic governance and weaken civil authority leading to a dependence on the Armed Forces (Pérez Enríquez, 2021).

It is true that the military is not eager to govern directly again, but it has exerted its influence, at least on defense and security policies in the region (Martínez et al., 2013). In a crisis scenario, with the Armed Forces having more and more roles, the low credibility of civil institutions could encourage military institutions to increase their political influence over the State. As a result, although we may not be quite there at this point, danger to democratic governance does exist.

### **Section 3**

## **THE MILITARY AND PERU**

### **Background**

Throughout the republican history of Peru that began in 1821, there have been 118 governments. Of these governments, 65 were constitutional ones to the extent that they originated from an electoral process and complied with the constitutional law in force at the time. The remaining 53 can be classified as authoritarian governments, because they originated by way of a coup, by self-proclamation, or through other ways of exercising power. In total, during 200 years of republican history, 129 years (60%) were constitutional governments and the remaining 71 (40%) were authoritarian governments.

The 19th century was characterized by instability in Peruvian governments generated by constant coups and self-proclamations of power. Some rulers were in power for a few days during periods of high political instability. Only in the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century did the Peruvian constitutional democracy develop as we now know it.

The first years of the 20th century resulted in economic prosperity. Then, from 1919 to 1930 (a period that was called the "Oncenio de Leguía" by the

president at the time), labor in the mines and estates was consolidated and expanded, financial and commercial activity increased, manufacturing development took place, and American capital displaced English. Leguía developed an aggressive plan of public works and urbanization of cities that enormously indebted the country. However, Peru's semi-feudal regime did not disappear; on the contrary, it grew stronger. As historian Jorge Basadre (1965) points out, "under the protection of the Leguía regime, new provincial caciques emerged, or existing ones were consolidated." During this period, regulations such as the Compulsory Military Service Law, the Road Conscription Law, and the Vagrancy Law were enacted that allowed the use of the indigenous labor force for infrastructure work almost free of charge. Links with the agrarian bourgeoisie, the bosses of the mountains, and the local authorities were reinforced. Public agencies multiplied and the Navy and the Air Force received a major modernization boost: The Las Palmas Aviation College and the Navy War College were created, both promoted and directed by American officers.

The 1929 world depression really hit Peru hard because its economy was highly dependent on foreign capital. The middle class who had supported Leguía stopped doing so, followed by social movements composed of students and peasants. In August 1930, Army Lieutenant Colonel Luis Sánchez Cerro staged a coup against Leguía, leading to a period of high instability and political struggle. The masses went to the streets hand in hand with the Aprista Party and the Communist Party, which had anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist ideologies. It was a period when the country was close to civil war and ended after eight transitory governments and one elected one along with the Constitution of 1933 that was contradictory itself. While it regulated the existence of a liberal democracy, it also maintained the social conditions that made that existence impossible. It reinforced the political power of the landowners and their domination over the peasants. Thus, while the equality of citizens under the law was enshrined, the scheme that deprived peasants of their elementary rights, including individual freedom, was maintained. In short, the constitutional model was sharply opposed to reality. It should be noted that the Constitution referred to the Armed Forces in Article 213, stating that they are intended to "ensure the rights of the Republic, compliance with the Constitution and the laws, and the preservation of public order." In

subsequent years, this article was used by high-ranking military commanders to legitimize coups.

The following years saw a system of domination based on force and violence with reduced room for consensus. The ruling classes were unable to consolidate political parties beyond electoral alliances. The majority sectors of the population were excluded from all forms of political participation. The governments that followed, regardless of whether they came from elections or coups, were characterized by their authoritarian and repressive nature. The Army became a key element in the political life of Peru, a pillar for the defense of the oligarchic order. It was precisely in these years that the phrase the Armed Forces are "fundamental pillars of democratic society" was coined.

With the arrival of President Bustamante in 1945, a period of freedom, as yet unknown in the political environment of Peru, was inaugurated, using democratic institutions as support. These were years of progress, but also of struggles by popular movements and political organizations. When the oligarchy felt threatened, it used Congress as a mechanism to paralyze Executive Power, while the social effervescence continued. This period of progress was cut short when in 1948 the oligarchic forces resorted again to the Army and overthrew President Bustamante with General Manuel Odría taking office through a coup in 1950 that lasted until he won the electoral process to govern until 1956.

General Odría's administration was characterized by pragmatism and nationalism. It is remembered as a regime of great public works, but also of great political repression and the corruption of the military allied with the oligarchy. Although the large-scale works modernized the country in terms of infrastructure, in political terms the ironclad military government -- anti-Aprista and anti-communist -- faced many conflicts and repressed popular movements. The abundance of public works and the lack of oversight caused a great deal of corruption, from which Odría and those close to him benefited. This corruption was not investigated because Odría negotiated with his successor, Manuel Prado, the return to democracy in exchange for total immunity. Later, Odría tried to recover the Presidency by democratic means in the presidential elections of 1962 and 1963, but did not achieve his aspirations, thus ending his political career.

Manuel Prado, serving as President from 1956 to 1962, had to face serious social and fiscal crises. His economic policy oscillated between eliminating fuel and food subsidies (which were followed by strikes and riots), restricting capital outflows, and beginning the nationalization of oil production. It should be noted that Prado created the Joint Command of the Armed Forces in 1957, an institution that brings together the commands of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. In addition to the economic crises the country was suffering, an agitation arose in the countryside in favor of carrying out agrarian reform and for an energetic campaign of national scope for the recovery of the oil fields of La Brea and Pariñas, illegally exploited by the International Petroleum Company (IPC), an American company. The opposition leadership was assumed by Fernando Belaúnde, who organized a new mass party, Acción Popular, in preparation for the following general elections where he would be the protagonist. Ten days before the end of his term, Prado suffered a military coup after refusing to annul the result of the 1962 elections, where Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre won, a candidate who displeased the military of the time. Thus, after the coup, the Government Military Board annulled the elections and called new ones for 1963.

In the new elections, Fernando Belaúnde was elected constitutional president for the 1963-1969 period. His administration was oriented toward large public works such as the construction of highways, airports, and housing complexes as well as the restitution of democratic institutions. However, the Belaúnde administration faced two major crises: a political crisis, because he did not have a parliamentary majority, and an economic crisis, because he was unable to control inflation. In trying to resolve the oil issue with IPC, he signed the Act of Talara<sup>7</sup>, described by the opposition as a "surrogate" for IPC which led to the institutional coup of the Armed Forces overseen by General Juan Velasco on October 3, 1968.

The reformist government of General Velasco (1968-1975) meant a change of direction in the history of Peru. While in the first half of the 1970s in other countries of the region, the military led repressive dictatorships

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<sup>7</sup> In August 1968, the Act of Talara was signed, by which IPC returned the oil fields to the Peruvian State, but kept the Talara refinery and the fuel distribution network. Shortly afterwards, the government was accused of covertly favoring IPC. After the coup led by Velasco, he ordered the military takeover of the Talara facilities. IPC ceased its operations in the country and its expropriated assets were transformed into PetroPerú.

inspired by the National Security Doctrine, in Peru there was a national-popular dictatorship.

The agrarian reform, which expropriated the large agro-industrial haciendas, marked the end of the power of the traditional oligarchy, so the impact of his intervention should not be underestimated: it could be said that the Velasco government marks a before and an after in Peruvian history. Despite the anti-oligarchic and socially democratizing character of Velasquism, we must not forget that it was an institutional government of the Armed Forces, which sought to contain the expansion of communism. This allows us to understand the fact that, while the most reformist sector identified with Velasco was advancing, an opposition was generated from the conservative sectors of the Armed Forces, which later became visible with the Morales coup in 1975 and the measures that he would implement in his administration (Tanaka, 2021).

In August 1975, there was a "coup within a coup." Francisco Morales-Bermúdez led a military coup in southern Peru that overthrew Juan Velasco. Morales-Bermúdez began transforming some of Velasco's reforms in a more conservative manner. His administration faced the crisis by appealing to market-oriented structural adjustment policies as in other South American dictatorships as well as the containment of social movements, although without reaching the repressive extremes of other countries (Tanaka 2021). After almost 10 years in power, the Armed Forces found it unsustainable in the midst of an economic crisis, social protests, and various internal and external democratizing political pressures. Thus, a democratic transition was negotiated that involved the election of a Constituent Assembly in 1978. Subsequently general elections were held in 1980.

The Armed Forces were, however, far from withdrawing into their barracks because on May 17, 1980, the day before elections, the Shining Path carried out its first attack on a Chuschi town in the Ayacucho region, leading to the beginning of a long counter-subversive process carried out by the Armed Forces. They assumed control of the zones declared in crisis. As the Truth Commission (CVR, 2003) documented at length, the counter-subversive fight went through at least two stages that can be summarized as follows: the first one was marked by repression and serious violations of human rights, and the second, the search for citizen support and intelligence work. The intelligence work allowed for the defeat of the subversion through capture of its leaders and the dismantling of the



movements in 1992. After the defeat of the subversion, the military received a high level of recognition and legitimacy for their behavior, but they also inherited numerous complaints and documentation of cases of serious human rights violations.

In the 1980s, the crisis generated by the subversion was compounded by the serious economic debacle caused by the government of Alan García, (1985-1990). For this reason, the administration of Alberto Fujimori--an unknown person without a political party and support elected in 1990--relied on external actors to balance the economy, defeat subversion, prosecute drug trafficking, and reduce drug production (Cotler, 2011). Although the Fujimori administration began democratically, it broke down in 1992 when he carried out an *autogolpe* (self-coup) and dissolved Congress with the support of the Armed Forces. The military little by little became involved in government activities. At the end of Fujimori's three terms, several high-ranking officers were imprisoned for corruption and for crimes against humanity.

The 1979 constitutional efforts to delimit the scope of the Armed Forces activity obviously made in 1979 did not lead to the expected effects, that is, military subordination to civil government and their prohibition from intervening in political affairs. The 1979 Constitution established a chapter on the Armed Forces called "National Security and Defense" (Article 278) that specified as follows: "The Armed Forces and the National Police are not deliberative. They are subordinate to the constitutional power." Constitutionalist debated the scope of these norms for a long time. Rubio and Bernalles (1988) warned that Article 278 was intended to distance the military from political affairs and prevent coups, since by not being deliberative the military could not form a pressure group toward the power in office. Although this article was an attempt by the political class to avoid military intervention and highlight subordination to civilian power, the 1992 coup showed that this norm, like so many others, was captured only on paper (Godoy Mejía, 2002).

The authoritarian regime that began in 1992 had the passive support of the population, with active support from business organizations and technocrats who argued that their decisions responded to the need to promote political and economic stability, in addition to being more effective against subversion (Cotler, 2011). However, international pressure on the regime forced the convening of a Constitutional Congress

that drafted the 1993 Constitution, in force until today. Fujimori was re-elected in 1995<sup>8</sup> in the midst of great popularity based on the implementation of market-oriented economic reforms that put an end to the hyperinflationary process and recession being experienced by the population and reactivated the economy as well as for his defeat of the subversion. However, even at that time there were already signs of corrupt government actions that strengthened those who defended democracy, while social protests grew.

During the Fujimori regime, the Armed Forces, victorious in the counter-subversive fight, lost legitimacy as a result of their involvement in serious human rights violations, corruption, and support for the authoritarian government (Tanaka 2021; Cotler, 2011). Fujimori had two advisors of particular importance to him: his intelligence adviser, Vladimiro Montesinos, and the head of the Joint Command, Nicolás Hermosa. The latter developed extensive networks of corruption. The military institutions were seriously affected in these years, the lowest point being the so-called "binding act" signed in 1999 by high-ranking officers, at the request of Montesinos. A video<sup>9</sup> by this adviser records the process where the signatories endorsed the 1992 coup and undertook to support each other in case anyone of them was accused for their actions in the counter-subversive fight. Consequently, at the end of the 20th century, the Peruvian Armed Forces were wounded. In addition to the human rights violations reported by the Truth Commission, the military had supported an authoritarian government, and there were reports of serious cases of corruption too (Tanaka, 2021). Thus, after the fall of Fujimori -- who fled the country, resigned by fax, and later took refuge in Japan for a few years -- the military went through a difficult period as both the transition administration of Valentín Paniagua and the administration of President Alejandro Toledo, elected in 2001, "punished" the Armed Forces and their high command by cutting their budget. High-ranking officers involved in corruption were arrested and the Truth Commission issued its final report identifying some military commanders for excesses in the counter-subversive fight.

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<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that, in Peru, there was no immediate presidential re-election in the 1979 Constitution, Fujimori interpreted that, since there was a new Constitution, the rules should be applied as of 1993 and 1995 would be his first term under the new constitutional rules.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gC4TiLrpfDQ>

In 2005, the White Paper on National Defense was published that disclosed the objectives and policies of Security and National Defense, identifying the risks, threats, and challenges to the country. This White Paper clarified the role of the Armed Forces and stated the tasks where they would be involved. Among others, it stated the need to exercise a dissuasive role in the face of possible border disputes, to respond to transnational organized crime, and to provide assistance to the civilian population in emergencies and disasters. In 2006, when Alan García was elected constitutional president for the second time, he strengthened the budget of the Armed Forces and gave the National Defense Fund a new profile oriented toward the recovery of military operational capacities. García also promoted the professionalization of the Armed Forces and the incorporation of International Humanitarian Law into their curriculum. By 2014, when a Hague Court ruling closed the last border dispute between Peru and Chile, the military had recovered its deterrent capacity.

### **French Influence on the Peruvian Military**

The Army was created a few days after Peru's declaration of independence in 1821, along with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its profile was defined in 1895 when a French military mission arrived in Peru to reorganize the Army after the defeat in the War of the Pacific (Godoy, 2002). The then president, Nicolás de Piérola, considered that a small, strong, professional, and politically subordinate Army was required, and opted for the French school. The French thought that the man-at-arms is more of an administrator than a combatant. In fact, most of the instructors had served in the French African colonies where decisions were made independently of the metropolis and based on their experience. They understood that the Armed Forces were the only civilizing and honest entities that the society could count on for their subsistence (Masterson, 2001). Over time, France exerted its influence on Peruvian military thought through the Total War and the Revolutionary War Doctrines.

The Total War Doctrine held that in modern war there are factors other than military--such as economic, social, and psychological factors--that are important in determining conflict strategy. War involves civil society and all State resources must be used to win, concentrating in a single person both military and political power (Rospigliosi, 2000). The Revolutionary

War Doctrine highlights population control and the need to combine military measures with others focused on welfare projects carried out by officers. In addition, in any war against subversion the role of intelligence is dominant. If civilian politicians failed to establish these policies, the Armed Forces should consider themselves called upon to execute them (Rospigliosi, 2000). Both doctrines, as is evident, are incompatible with the rule of law.

French ideas were developed and adapted in Peru in two military institutions, that is, at the Centro de Altos Estudios Militares (*Center for Advanced Military Studies* or CAEM—today the Centro de Altos Estudios Nacionales or *Center for Advanced National Studies*) and at the Army Intelligence Service or SIE (Masterson, 2001). The CAEM was created in 1951 during the Odría dictatorship and introduced economic and social problems into Peruvian military thought. The Army Intelligence Service was created in 1959. In its early years, it focused on the emergence of subversive groups influenced by the Cuban revolution, and on developing theories that complemented the military perspective with the study of the country's social and economic problems, in order to prevent the emergence of subversion (Rospigliosi, 2000). Through these institutions, the Peruvian military adapted French theories, concluding that given the apparent failure and inability of civilians to solve the country's problems, the Armed Forces had to assume the responsibility of organizing and directing the country (Rospigliosi, 2000). In other words, as Chiri (2001) points out, the armed services were transformed into democracy guardianship entities. The last two interventions of the military, in the 1968-1980 and 1992-2000 periods, were guided by the idea that they were called to govern when the homeland was in danger given civilians cannot save it (Godoy Mejia, 2002).

### **Current Peruvian Military**

After many years of active participation in Peruvian political life, today the military seem not to be interested in entering it. Active-duty military members are convinced that politics has undermined their ranks and that recovering institutional morale has had a cost. In addition to this conviction, several events and milestones have marked this change, which

has allowed, as one general said, the barracks to "remove doorbells" to avoid calls for coups.<sup>10</sup>

The counter-subversive fight is a case in point. The Armed Forces went to the emergency zone to fight an unconventional enemy, in a low-intensity war. The most usual forms of armed violence were ambushes on the military, selective assassinations, and massacres, while the military counterattack consisted mainly of intelligence work, cooperation with the peasant patrols, and selective armed interventions – on a larger and smaller scale – in places known as “red zones,” taken over by Shining Path members (CVR, 2003). The military had to adapt to this form of combat along the way, making new manuals and regulations as well as generating new doctrine as they engaged the enemy. In the process, there were excesses and violations of Human Rights that were reported and, for the most part, punished. During the years of the counter-subversive fight, many soldiers deserted due to their lack of experience, their young age, for family reasons as well as difficulties in adapting to the conditions of war in the emergency zone. All the above made a dent in the morale of the units.

The Fujimori administration and its subsequent fall were probably the events that most affected the military institution in recent years. Many commissioned and non-commissioned officers saw their careers end because they were involved in acts of corruption themselves or for their bosses. Some became collaborators with the justice system. Many finished their careers dishonorably. The relative peace that was experienced after the democratic recovery of 2001 was used by the armed services to rebuild their institution, adapt to the times, and commit to democratic values. Curricula were changed in training schools and subjects related to International Humanitarian Law and constitutional institutions were incorporated. Even military doctrine and the way of studying history changed. This adjustment of the military profile has allowed higher levels of professionalization and the development of a new identity and goals to shape the next generation (Tanaka 2021).

Another key milestone was the granting of the right to vote to the military and police in 2006. After the fall of Fujimori, a series of adjustments were

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<sup>10</sup> This was said by Peruvian Army General César Astudillo, former Chief of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces 2019-2021

made to the 1993 Constitution, among them were granting the military the right to vote in hopes of strengthening relations between civilians and the military, promoting democratization in the country so that more people commit to the democratic system, and guaranteeing the right to political participation (ONPE, 2006). The constitutional amendment did indicate that active-duty members of the Armed Forces could not participate in political parties, engage in political proselytism, or be elected unless they retired from active service. It is important to point out that, between the active-duty military and police there are about 250,000 troops, all legal age voters, who could move the needle of an election. In fact, in the last two general elections, the difference between the candidates who made it to the run-off was about 50,000 votes.

It is also important to mention that since 1997 women have been incorporated into commissioned-officers academies, forcing the revision of manuals and regulations in the three services. Today, 13% of military personnel are female, and there are already female officers in the rank of colonel in the Air Force, captain in the Navy, and colonel in the Army. The presence of Peruvian women in military peacekeeping missions has far exceeded what was planned a few years ago. Peru currently has 29 women deployed in UN peacekeeping forces. In addition, there was a social democratization in commissioned-officers academies. Little by little people with fewer resources have started joining these academies, breaking the unwritten tradition of incorporating only persons from the wealthiest families in the officer corps, expanding the social base of the Armed Forces. It can be affirmed that military members today are no longer part of the ruling oligarchy of the 20th century.

#### **Section 4**

#### **EXPLANATIONS FOR COUPS TO "SAVE DEMOCRACY"**

In Latin America there have been many coups built around the excuse of "saving democracy." Many times the term "democracy" is used to justify taking political control that often leads to just the opposite. There are two types of relationships that appear to lead to these "moderating coups." The

first is between society and the government, where important groups in society promote military interventions to disrupt a democratically elected government due to a lack of adherence to constitutional rules and group interests. In other words, they justify the intervention of the Armed Forces as being at the request of civil society (Martínez et al., 2013). The second relationship is between the government and the Armed Forces. The military feel that they are the guarantors of democracy and order and justify an anti-democratic act to maintain the *status quo*. In both cases, the military are the powers that resist change in a system where they enjoy privileges or advantages that they are not willing to give up.

To explain this resistance to changing the course of the political system, the idea of system justification, developed in political psychology, can be applied. This theory proposes that people tend to favor the *status quo* in the social system even when it promotes injustice. Jost, Banaji, and Nosek, (2004) have done an extensive review of the empirical evidence surrounding this theory that shows that the preference to maintain the known system is greater in societies with significant rates of inequity, where privileges are concentrated in a few. This phenomenon generates rationalizations and justifications (conscious or not) based on stereotypes and social biases that accommodates perception of the facts to the prejudices and motivations of previous ideologies and experiences in order to maintain the existing social system. The authors point out that this also implies that even people who are in a less favorable social status can come to justify the system by showing favoritism for the characteristics of high-status groups and disapproval for the characteristics of low-status groups, even when that favoritism plays against them.

This preference to maintain the status quo represents less psychological and social "expense" for the viewer. Although the tendency to defend the *status quo* feeds on the need to defend one's own, identity, preferences for what is familiar and tensions with different groups do not stop there. In fact, in justifying the existing social order, people internalize an image of others--of those who are different--as inferior, especially among members of disadvantaged groups. This happens mostly at an implicit level of awareness, that is, people do not always realize how their cognitive processes and evaluations of circumstances are responding to a bias that justifies the existing system. This bias could explain why different social groups become polarized and lose empathy, favoring certain types of

political systems with little willingness to dialogue and to be democratic in the process. To the extent that the justification of the *status quo* is stronger in people with a greater preference for social dominance and conservative positions, authoritarianism may be the result which, as Dammert (2004) points out, "is a modality of exercising authority in social relations where the absence of consensus, irrationality and the lack of foundations in decisions are extreme."

There is a social tendency to lose neutrality when evaluating the social behaviors of people and groups with which one identifies. In the field of political behavior this can be seen in the tendency to favor and justify the behavior of those who are perceived as equals and develop a negative bias toward people who identify themselves as belonging to a social or political group that is different or opposed to one's own (Jost, Kay and Thorisdottir, 2009). The bias to evaluate the behaviors of groups one belongs to as positive are part of social behavior that is difficult to change. The development of behavioral alternatives that do not include rejection of others and polarization requires much more energy than maintaining the already known dynamics. This is a theory that helps explain why polarization and system justification tend to gain predominance. The justification of the current system requires less psychological and social "expense."

Difficulties in deliberations and the exercise of democratic practices, such as the ability to reach consensus, have also been associated with polarization (Singer et. al, 2019). In this sense, favoring a particular opinion or a position and perceiving those with different positions as part of the opposition and sometimes threatening even in the face of evidence that refutes one's perceptions implies an inability to recognize the other, to admit the plurality of reasons, and to accept different ways of interpreting reality. Singer et al. (2019) also observe that polarization is not associated with a lower ability to reason. Even in people with high levels of education, polarization processes occur in debates and in making judgments about reality. Polarization then leaves the realm of irrational emotion and becomes a social phenomenon that is not differentiated by class or level of education. In addition, social networks play a key role in spreading these perceptions and in generating currents of opinion hand in hand with algorithms that allow selecting those who receive the information. In the Peruvian case, polarization makes it impossible to recognize intolerance,



to establish democratic dialogues, and to think about the evolution of the political system as including a diversity of positions.

Why in some circumstances is an authoritarian regime preferred to a democratic one? In 1994, Cotler offered an account of Peruvian society where he provides a contextual framework to explain why democracy fails in this country. He pointed out the contradictions among the social sectors and the inability of the ruling class and the State to generate an adequate process to account for citizen needs, leading to a breakdown in social trust. Cotler (1994) helps us understand how the democratic system is not appreciated by the majority because the bases for generating trust in the system have not been developed. Although the vote is a procedure that allows citizen participation, it is insufficient by itself to channel social expectations. Riker (1982) points out that modern democracy requires three elements that feed each other: freedom, participation, and equality. These guarantee that everyone can participate in political processes. However, democracy implies more. It also requires a process of metaregulation, that is, it consists of creating a government system that regulates social practices and power relations and that citizens trust.

In Peru, the rules that regulate the political process respond to structures that are not consistent with reality. Most Peruvians identify democracy with the act of voting and freedom of speech. They neither trust the parties nor the politicians as opinion surveys show again and again. Mistrust is the breeding ground for authoritarianism, fragmentation, and violence as well as for the quality of the relationship with peers and institutions (Dammert, 2004). As mentioned above, trust is a social bargain. In this sense, when mistrust grows, the appreciation of others as subjects with opinions and needs different from our own, with different ways of perceiving order and ways of building it can cause a crisis. It is in this scenario in Peru that voices arise calling for military intervention. Interpersonal and institutional mistrust justify authoritarianism as a way of providing social order and protecting democracy against its so-called "enemies."

The demand for the intervention of the Armed Forces in the government reveals not only the weakness of the respective political leadership, but also the lack of citizen trust. It makes clear that the stability of the system can only be guaranteed internally by resorting to military violence

(Grabendorff, 2021). Thus, the direct participation of the military in state power or in the government apparatus modifies not only the role of the Armed Forces, but also the political process in general. Those political actors who support “coups for democracy” are circumventing the search for dialogue and consensus. Instead, they desire a strictly hierarchical and authoritarian government that marginalizes those who disagree with their ideology.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding sections, we have tried to understand the context, the history, and the reasons that could help us answer the two questions asked at the beginning of this monograph. Why do some groups ask the military to carry out a coup to “save” democracy? And what has changed in the military that leads them to no longer get involved in politics despite the requests of these groups? We can summarize the answers to these questions in the following conclusions.

1. In Latin America, there have been many coups under the guise of “saving democracy,” even though the term “democracy” has been used to justify actions of political control that are contrary to it. Due to regional historical experiences, even when civilian elites fear the return of direct military influence in the political process, they are increasingly in need of resorting to military support in crisis situations in order to ensure governance or to restore it.
2. Citizens acknowledge that the Armed Forces are an institution with marked organizational superiority, the ability to engage in rapid response, and a monopoly on weapons. The Armed Forces are in the top three of the rankings of trust in institutions across all Latin American countries. This level of legitimacy, the weakness of some civil institutions, and the State’s low capacity to implement public policies encourage dependence on the Armed Forces and explain, in part, the occasional calls to transfer greater power to them not only in social life but, at times, in politics.
3. The Peruvian democratic state is very weak and its citizens’ trust in its institutions is very low. The inability to reach an agreement and the lack of representative channels means that democratic institutions

do not generate order or stability through political means. The impossibility of carrying out constructive dialogue leads groups that see their interests attacked to defend the *status quo* and when the defense of said interests exceeds their possibilities of intervention to reestablish said *status quo* through “moderating” authoritarian mechanisms. Thus, the relative inability of Peruvian democracy to resolve its conflicts through dialogue leads some groups to work to grant this arbitration role to the Armed Forces.

4. Since the beginning of the Republic, the Armed Forces have had an important political presence either by governing institutionally or by being instruments of groups incapable of generating order through political means. Historically, the Peruvian ruling classes have been unable to consolidate political parties beyond electoral alliances, while important sectors of the population have been excluded from political participation. For this reason and the prevailing doctrines in the Armed Forces in the 20th century, the apparent failure and inability of civilians to solve the country's problems endangered national security and the military “had to assume” responsibility for organizing and leading the country. In this scenario, the Armed Forces became a guard for the interests of certain groups that responded by granting the military the status of “fundamental pillar of democratic society” a concept that is deeply engraved in Peruvian society and used in situations when there is a governance crisis in order to “recover” the democratic order.
5. After many years of active participation by the military in Peruvian political life, today they seem not to be interested in dabbling in it. Active-duty military members are convinced that politics has dented their ranks and that it has been difficult to recover institutionally. This conviction is based on several events and milestones that have marred the Peruvian Armed Forces and made possible the “removal of doorbells” from the barracks. In the first place, under the Fujimori regime, the Armed Forces, victorious in the fight against subversion, lost legitimacy due to their involvement in serious cases of human rights violations, corruption, and support for the authoritarian government. Recovering from these institutional strikes against them has taken several years. Important efforts have been made to review their doctrines and generate new manuals and procedures as well as

to adapt to the new times and to their constitutional and legal roles. This has led to military academies having new curricula that are constantly being updated. Other milestones that have changed the profile of the Peruvian military are access to the vote in 2006, the admission of women to commissioned-officers academies, and the social democratization of the Armed Forces.

6. Even when there are no threats or evidence that a new wave of military governments could take place in Latin America, the military continue to be relevant political and social actors. In fact, the roles of the Armed Forces have expanded. In addition to the defense of sovereignty and their independence and territorial integrity roles, the following tasks have been added: internal security, support in development and disaster responses, and tasks within the civil state structures. There is a general perception that the military should not return to power. At issue is what happens in a crisis scenario when the Armed Forces are given more and more roles? The low credibility of civilian institutions could encourage military institutions to increase their political influence over the State. For this reason, attention should be paid to countries with weak citizen trust in the institutions that underpin democracy and its processes, since these are the scenarios that present greater vulnerability to authoritarian tendencies and a takeover by the military.

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