

2021

## How Democratic is Democracy? A History of Political Corruption in Peru

Kaitlyn Selzler

*University of Nebraska at Kearney*, selzlerkm@lopers.unk.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openspaces.unk.edu/grad-review>



Part of the [Latin American History Commons](#), [Latin American Studies Commons](#), and the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Selzler, Kaitlyn (2021) "How Democratic is Democracy? A History of Political Corruption in Peru," *Graduate Review*: Vol. 1 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://openspaces.unk.edu/grad-review/vol1/iss1/16>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by OpenSPACES@UNK: Scholarship, Preservation, and Creative Endeavors. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Review by an authorized editor of OpenSPACES@UNK: Scholarship, Preservation, and Creative Endeavors. For more information, please contact [weissell@unk.edu](mailto:weissell@unk.edu).

## **HOW DEMOCRATIC IS DEMOCRACY? A HISTORY OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN PERU**

**KAITLYN SELZLER**

Department of History, University of Nebraska at Kearney

Mentor: **DR. ROGER DAVIS**

### **ABSTRACT**

With the emergence of revisionist scholarship beginning in the 1960's and 1970's, scholars have taken terms which had absolute definitions, such as totalitarianism or democracy, and introduced different perspectives and methods which questioned the absolute authority of historical terminology. As a case study into these new historical methodologies, this essay seeks to answer the question: How democratic is Peru's democracy? To answer this question, this research explores the deep seeded corruption in Latin America, specifically Peru, beginning in 1985 with the election of Alan Garcia, continuing through the presidency of Alberto Fujimori, and eventually ending with the current state of political affairs in Peru. This essay will highlight some of the significant events of the 1980's and 90's which led to the political corruption, economic crisis, and social unrest that continues to plague Peru today. Though this is a micro-study of the country of Peru, similar themes can be seen across Latin America, so elements and problems discussed in this study could be applied to the continent as a whole.

### **INTRODUCTION**

On December 24th, 2017, Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski pardoned ex-President Alberto Fujimori. This pardon effectively terminated the 25-year sentence Fujimori was serving for crimes against humanity which resulted in the deaths of at least 25 people during his presidency. The pardon was viewed by many as a deliberate political stunt on behalf of President Kuczynski to avoid impeachment on corruption allegations. For observers worldwide, the events surrounding the pardon of Fujimori represent yet another example of the lack of democracy within the Peruvian government. The corruption, bribery, and political fast-tracking associated with such a scandal have been regarded as direct assaults to the true democratic principles which the country so desires. Just nine short months later, however, the Peruvian supreme court ruled against Fujimori's pardon and ordered that he be captured and returned to prison where he will serve the remainder of his sentence. What, then, does this say of Peruvian democracy? Anti-Fujimorista, naturally, will say democracy has finally prevailed. Those who remember Fujimori's presidency with fondness, however, will cite this event as another step backward for the government of Peru. Democracy, as evidenced by the above example, is not a concrete element.<sup>1</sup>

Historiographical research has, in recent years, taken on a variety of new methods and understandings in order to assess the world in which we live, and the events that have contributed to our present society. In doing so, several new tools and insights have been utilized to change and expand definitions which were once held as common and unimpeachable. As a result of these vast and changing interpretations, the historical definition of democracy has become convoluted and

mercurial. The conventional belief that a nation either has democracy or does not is flawed. Rather, democracy presents itself upon a sliding scale. A regime may certainly have no democracy, or it may have full democracy, but there is a myriad of smaller steps in between these greater extremes. To understand how historians can use the scale of democracy as a tool for historiographical research, several factors need to be addressed. The following essay will explore the elemental definition of democracy through a case study of Peru beginning with the 1968 Coup d'état by Juan Velasco Alvarado and ending with the 2018 reversal of Alberto Fujimori's pardon. Additionally, the scale of democracy cannot be used as a tool all on its own. For such a broad discussion, the historiographical elements of silences, continuity versus change, linear and nonlinear relationships, and cyclical history will be important elements in aiding the use of the democratic scale as a research tool.

In an effort to illustrate how a scaled definition of democracy and other historiographical elements can be implemented in historiography, this case study will be broken into four key parts. First, it is necessary to provide a definition of the scale of democracy through which regimes can be addressed. Second, the definition will be applied through the series of regimes leading up to the election of Alberto Fujimori. Third, a comparison of democracy and analysis of events under the government of Fujimori will provide insight into how democracy, both in theory and practice, is presented in comparison with the definition provided. Finally, this essay will answer the question: How democratic is Peru's democracy? Through this case study, it will become evident that despite historical evidence which indicates Peru has consistently aspired toward democracy, a more detailed investigation shows when compared to the factors which define a sustainable democracy, the democracy in Peru is limited.

### **DEMOCRACY: AN ELEMENTAL DEFINITION AND A SLIDING SCALE**

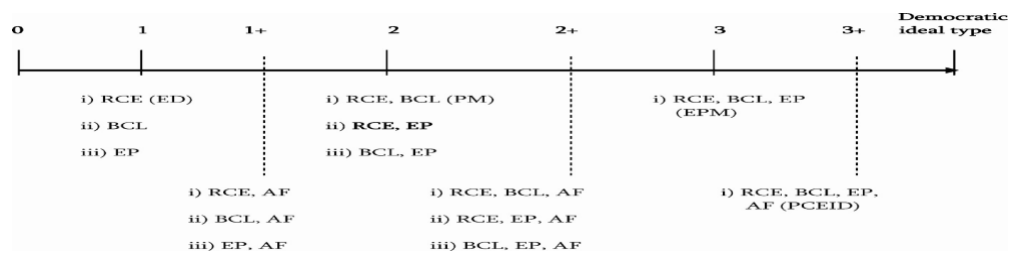
Traditionally, historians have operated on a three-part definition of democracy: competitive elections; broad adult suffrage; and respect for civil rights. In recent years, however, a mass of information and opinion surrounding the factors of democracy have contributed to a confusing amalgamation of elements. To assess the democratic nature of any regime, a historian must first untangle that mixed definition of democracy and assess which elements to consider, and which elements to ignore. More significantly, traditional definitions of democracy have continually left out any regime which has not followed the conventional patterns expected by the Western view. Thankfully, key historians have sought to rectify this complex situation. By providing an elemental, scaled definition for democracy, deciphering the determinants of a sustainable democracy, and analyzing democratic transitions from a top-down perspective, historians have clarified uncertainties regarding defining the democratic nature of any given regime.

To make the definition of democracy a more useful tool for historical research, political lecturer Lise Storm has consolidated and clarified an elemental definition for democracy. For this definition, Storm builds on the work of notable historians David Collier and Steven Levitsky. In the traditional definition established by Collier and Levitsky, there are four critical components to democracy. These components are as follows: (1) RCE: reasonably competitive elections, devoid of massive fraud, with broad suffrage; (2) BCL: basic civil liberties: freedom of speech, assembly, and association; (3) EP: elected governments have effective power to govern; and (4) AF: additional political, economic, and social features associated with industrial democracy.<sup>2</sup> While Storm maintains that these are all accurate and essential components of democracy, her definition

calls for a more equitable value of the first three components, with the component of “additional factors” being relatively excluded. Storm explains, “I suggest assigning less value to the conceptual benchmark AF. The reasoning behind this modification is that I find that these additional features are exactly that, additional features. They have a complementary character and should accordingly only be taken into consideration when they appear together with at least one of RCE, BCL or EP.”<sup>3</sup> More importantly, the equal value being placed on RCE, BCL, and EP offers the opportunity for historians to define democracy as a continuum rather than a static concept in which each characteristic needs to be achieved in a specific pattern. The use of democracy as a continuum is supported by Poincare’s work on linear and nonlinear relationships resulting in the Chaos and Complexity theory. This theory suggests that linear and non-linear relationships could coexist and therefore patterns can emerge spontaneously. Understanding democracy regarding its linear and non-linear relationships is an important contribution to the historiographical tool kit as it offers historians the ability to present a broader and more neutral definition of democracy.

In her work, Storm presents readers with two important scales for understanding, and utilizing, the elemental definition of democracy. The first, shown below as Figure 1, illustrates how the equal value applied to the three components of democracy gives the benefit of being much more neutral than previous definitions. On this scale, readers see that a true authoritarian regime would be weighted at zero, as having no democratic characteristics. On the opposite end, we see that three or more of the defined characteristics would earn a rating of “democratic ideal type.”

Figure 1

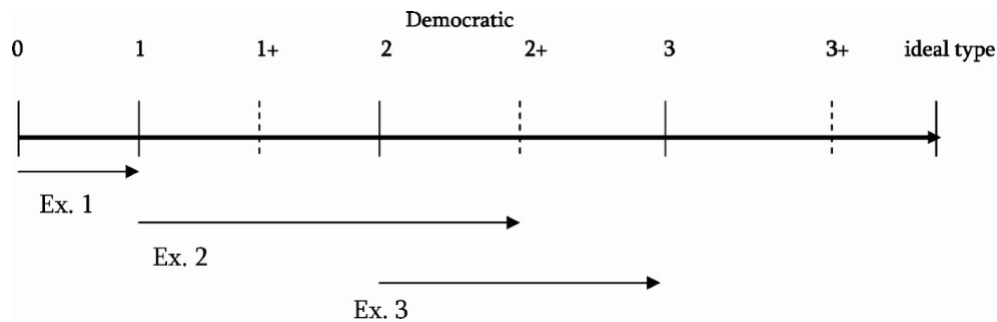


Source: Illustration from Lise Storm, *An Elemental Definition of Democracy and its Advantages for Comparing Political Regime Types*, *Democratization*, 15:2, Figure 5. (2008)

In the second illustration significant to the elemental definition, shown below in Figure 2, Storm shows how this definition portrays democratization as a motion up continuum. This scale effectively allows historians to use the elements of democracy with a more neutral mindset. Storm explains, “the elemental definition of democracy – by virtue of its focus on core democratic elements present – is much more neutral in its view of democratization compared to many contemporary definitions of democracy and democratization, which have the underlying assumption that democracy develops according to a particular pattern.”<sup>4</sup> Again, by prescribing the Chaos and Complexity theory to democracy; the elemental definition takes on more critical meaning.

Figure 2

Figure 2



Source: Data from Storm 2008, Figure 6.

With this elemental definition in mind, scholars can examine a regime's theories and practices of democracy to determine which, if any, of the three core elements they have been able to achieve. For the purposes of this paper, the author will refer to this elemental definition to determine the degree of democracy throughout significant events in Peru's history.

Within the parameters of the three key democratic characteristics: reasonably competitive elections, basic civil liberties, and effective power to govern, scholars can turn attention to more specific determinants of a sustainable democracy. Beginning with reasonably competitive elections, historians distinguish important guidelines for those elections. Aris Trantidis, for example, provides significant insight to this subject in his work "Is Government Contestability an Integral Part of the Definition of Democracy?" Trantidis argues that a degree of contestability is a critical factor in having reasonably competitive elections. He writes, "Government contestability is the necessary element of a democratic system that enables citizens to exert political influence and protect themselves from political domination, which is the minimum that a democracy can offer. Contestability is not simply a desirable outcome of the democratic process but a constitutive part of the definition of democracy."<sup>5</sup> This assessment adds an important layer to the elemental definition of democracy. To prove that a regime has achieved reasonably competitive elections, devoid of massive fraud, with broad suffrage one must prove a degree of contestability which marks the competitiveness of the election.

The second component, basic civil liberties, also has more specific and significant consequences to a true democracy. Jan Teorell's *Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change in the World*, provides valuable insight into the determinants of democratization and gives specific credit to the role of the media in supporting and sustaining democracy. Teorell explains, "As radios, TVs and newspapers spread in the population, anti-democratic factors driving and not driving the third wave coups are either deferred or aborted."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the right to free speech and freedom of the press plays an important role in aiding the development of democracy, as well as sustaining any of the key characteristics which have been pre-established.

The third component, effective power to govern, requires a two-part analysis. First, this must include balance of power. This power balance may take on any number of variations but is nevertheless critical to maintaining effective power to govern. In Marcus Melo's *Strong Presidents, Robust Democracies*, Melo argues that "democratic stability in Latin American countries is a function of an extended system of checks and balances."<sup>7</sup> Melo maintains that a strong system of checks and balances help to maintain governability and restrain presidential abuse of power. The second analysis of effective power to govern reminds scholars that economics, both

past and present, plays a critical role in determining a sustainable democracy. Just as Teorell's work outlined the significance of civil liberties in driving democratization, his work also serves as a foundation for understanding the role economics plays in sustaining democracy. Teorells writes, "Whereas societal modernization accompanying long-term economic development thus helps sustain democracy, the effect of short-term growth on the prospects for democratization is exactly the opposite. Economic upturns help sustain autocracies, whereas economic crises trigger transitions toward democracy."<sup>8</sup> This insight shows scholars that long-term economic development coupled with modernization is a significant factor in maintaining an effective power to govern. While an economic crisis may turn people towards democracy, sustaining that democracy is only accomplished by a successful long-term economic agenda.

The clarification of an elemental definition of democracy, combined with specific parameters for each of the three key elements allows scholars to accomplish the final task of analyzing democratic transitions from a top-down perspective. The analysis of democratic transitions proves critical to any case study endeavoring to place a country's democracy on the sliding scale. In doing so, historians can illustrate the long-term change and continuity between a nation's various political regimes. In *Democracy From Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*, Jon Pevehouse examines the ways in which regional organizations can influence and maintain democracy within a nation. Of his work, Pevehouse explains, "The proposition developed and tested here is that regional organizations can facilitate transitions to democracy as well as the survival of democracy."<sup>9</sup> In an effort to explain exactly how regional organizations influence democracy, Pevehouse writes,

With regard to democratic transitions, regional organizations can provide a low-cost forum for neighboring democracies to pressure non-democracies to liberalize. Through public delegitimization, political isolation, suspension of benefits from the organization, even economic sanctions, regional institutions can increase the costs of remaining a non-democracy for member states. This scenario will be especially likely in cases where a member state suffers from a breakdown of democratic rule (e.g., Peru).<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, the conclusion of Pevehouse's proposition supports the idea that democratic transitions can come from any number of places for any number of purposes. As such, and in accordance with the elemental definition, democratic transitions have no specific pattern, but instead can be illustrated by any combination of the three key components.

### **DEMOCRACY BEFORE FUJIMORI**

Historical work regarding the elemental definition of democracy, determinants and sustainability of democracy, and a top-down analysis of democracy are all effective tools in understanding how democracy, in both theory and practice, presents itself within a case study. Ultimately, however, the most important factor in determining democracy comes down to the people involved in the study. Regardless of the definition a historian chooses to abide by the sustainability a regime wishes to seek, or the overall analytical conclusions research suggests, it is the people who make up the study that determines its outcome. People, then, will be a significant variable to focus on for the case study regarding the level of democracy achieved in Peru.

Regarding "the people," Manuel Alcantra's *Politicians and Politics in Latin America* seeks to explore data gathered which shows how Peruvians feel about democracy, and the critical institutions democracy requires. Alcantra writes, "According to data presented by the PNUD in

2002, about 57 percent of the people interviewed in Latin America preferred democracy over any other political regime. However, similar to some legislators, a significant segment of the public also displayed doubts regarding such important democratic institutions as the parliament and political parties.”<sup>11</sup> Alcantra goes on to show that the data suggests the vast majority of Peruvians acknowledge the importance of political parties to democracy, but state that they do not strongly identify with any of the party platforms. By analyzing Peru’s road to democracy and comparing regimes along the way using the elemental definition, it will be shown that despite Peruvian’s belief in democracy, their government is still very limited.

In order to comprehend the events that would lead to the government of present-day Peru, it is important to examine not only the timeline, but the historical interpretations of that timeline as well. While the purposes of this essay begin with the 1968 military coup, Peru’s historians have been analyzing their own democracy for decades. In many ways, exploring historical interpretations of Peru runs parallel to exploring its democracy. For example, it can be understood that linear representation of history typically occurs when things are going well, and cyclical tends to be written during a pessimistic view of the period. Furthermore, in defining the historical path of democracy as it relates to the elemental definition of democracy, the silences, what is not said in historical sourcing, is just as critical as what is explained.

Mark Thurner’s *History’s Peru* examines the “postcolonial question” regarding whether Peru was ready to participate in a true democracy. In his work, Thurner discusses Peruvian historian Lorente and his findings regarding Peru’s democracy. Thurner writes, “Lorente’s narrative discourse would confirm, both on historical and theoretical or philosophical grounds, that Peru was inherently ready to partake in the contemporary age of democracy.”<sup>12</sup> More significantly, Thurner goes on to explain, is not the historical discussion regarding Peru’s readiness to participate in democracy, but the discussion such a question often led to regarding the nature of Peru and the nature of its people. What was said in these discussions, and what was not said, gives significant insight into the nature of democracy in Peru. Keeping in mind historical discussions regarding possibilities in Peru and using the concept of continuity and change as an analytical framework, scholars can explore the significant events of Peru’s past and determine their influence on Peruvian democracy.

In 1968 Juan Velasco Alvarado and his group, the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (RGAF) led a coup d’état which resulted in large scale nationalizations of key Peruvian industries. Carlos Aguirre’s *The Peculiar Revolution* offers insight into the RGAF military coup. In his work, Aguirre sets out to explain the goals outlined by Alvarado. Aguirre explains:

The message Velasco Alvarado broadcast to Peruvians was clear, though it took a while for them to digest it: he was leading a nationalist project aimed at radically transforming Peruvian society, eliminating social injustice, breaking the cycle of foreign domination, redistributing land and wealth, and placing the destiny of Peruvians into their own hands. Political parties, the military thought, had failed to represent the interests of the majority of Peruvians, so it was up to them to carry out the structural transformations needed to put the country on the path toward true sovereignty, independence, and social justice. <sup>13</sup>

The message sent by Alvarado to the Peruvian public was clearly one of democratic principles. Comparing Alvarado’s regime to the elemental definition of democracy, however, reveals limited democracy at best. To begin, a military led coup immediately implies absence of a reasonably

competitive election. Further research shows that Alvarado's nationalization of industry led to a certain amount of economic prosperity which allowed his regime to grant certain basic civil liberties. Ultimately, however, change would prevail over continuity and the economy would decline. In Peru's economic decline scholars see the final failure of Alvarado's government, which came in their inability to effectively govern. Aguirre explains, "We can regard the relationship between the economy and political stability as a kind of bargain. Public opinion tolerated dictatorship as long as the economy performed acceptably well. At first, the population was indeed quiescent even though it was not particularly supportive of the regime. After 1973, economic decline fed a loss of popular support and an accelerating tide of protests."<sup>14</sup> In summary, the analytical framework of change and continuity in Peru suggests that Peru's political and ideological structures are systems of an integrated whole, inseparable from its economic systems.

The failure of the RGAF to attain reasonably competitive elections or an effective power to govern leaves their regime as a less than democratic ideal type. Furthermore, their failure would lead to yet another critical event in Peru's political history; the rise of the communist party known as the Shining Path. Jaymie Heilman's *Before the Shining Path: Politics in Rural Ayacucho* outlines some of the elements which allowed Shining Path to gain support of the very people they suppressed. In her work, Heilman explains that divides between race and class inside rural indigenous communities repeatedly led to violent abuses of power across the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> More significantly, Heilman argues that the repeated violence as a result of these divides coupled with the failure of previous governments, such as the RGAF, to deliver on their democratic promises led rural indigenous people to support a regime which would ultimately destroy them. The unfinished revolutions of the RGAF allowed Shining Path to gain a foothold in the impoverished regions of Peru, and from there it continued to spread. Throughout the 1980's, the Shining Path army would interfere with any attempt at democracy in Peru. This complex relationship between indigenous people and the Shining Path insurgency represents yet another opportunity for historians to formulate research using the complex relationship between linear and non-linear variables. The ability of the Shining Path insurgency to interfere with democracy and commit catastrophic human rights abuses is made only more complex by the interference of Peru's law and order. In many cases, the Peruvian military and government officials were just as guilty of committing atrocities in this decade of violence as the insurgents themselves. The crimes committed on both sides amounted to extreme acts of violence, a historical record silenced by a mass of disappearances, and a decade of cyclical failures in democratic endeavors.

In attempts to deal with the blows dealt by Shining Path insurgents and the leaders who opposed them, each new leader sought to instill various elements of democracy, but none ever saw much success. In a work written just as Alan Garcia was about to take power, John Crabtree discusses the state of Peruvian democracy. "Since 1980 a democracy of sorts has taken root in Peru. But as in other countries in Latin America, it is essentially a controlled democracy in which governments continue to function in an authoritarian way and in which decision-making is carried on with extremely little public participation."<sup>16</sup> Under the likes of Presidents Belaunde and Garcia, Peruvians saw little increase in civil liberties and while elections were held, they often failed to meet the requirement of being reasonably competitive.

In 1985, Peru saw the first government of Alan Garcia, an American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) candidate. In many ways, Garcia's service as president would represent an amalgamation of the failed revolutions of the past, and the continuity of limited democracy in Peru's future. Though the election of Garcia saw some interference from groups like Shining Path,



his election can be considered reasonably competitive. Garcia won fifty-three percent of the vote, with twenty-five percent going to his biggest opponent, the United Left, suggesting a reasonable level of government contestability. 17. On the scale for the elemental definition of democracy, the election of Garcia can categorically be considered a plus one. As for civil liberties and effective governance, however, Garcia ultimately failed. Reporters of the time frequently discussed the shortcomings of Garcia's democracy. Lucy Komisar, a foreign affairs journalist, discusses a common concern around Garcia: "Garcia's first year has raised serious doubts about his commitment to social change and his support for the substance as well as the form of democracy. The evidence increasingly indicates that his chief interest is in building a party machine that will keep him in power."18.

Journalists during Garcia's presidency were not the only ones with concerns over his popularity, and the true intentions of his so-called "democratic ideals." Author turned politician, Mario Vargas Llosa also discussed his reservations regarding Garcia. Discussing Garcia's nationalization of the financial system, Llosa writes, "Alan Garcia was going to obtain total control of information through credits and publicity, in the meanwhile maintaining the appearance, in the Mexican fashion, that the media was independent."19. A media under control of an outwardly appearing democratic president who truly desires an authoritarian regime suggests that though Garcia initially earned one point on the elements of democracy scale, his regime lacked any true elements of democracy. Garcia's intentions to violate civil liberties and build a single party machine to maintain his own power shows that he was missing two of the three democratic elements. The third element, effective power to govern, was also missing from Garcia's regime. Komisar's assessment of Garcia's presidency also suggests he had a careful grip on the country's military. For many, this was seen as Garcia's attempt at preventing a military coup. While fear of a coup is a justifiable concern when leading a country, who was ruled by generals for over a decade, it also suggests lack of effective governance under Garcia's authority. Thus, democracy under Garcia can be weighted at a zero on the scale of elemental democracy. The Peruvian cycle continued considering what Garcia created was, in all reality, yet another authoritarian regime.

Historical evidence suggests that though Peruvians supported Garcia he failed, like so many others before him, to deliver on the promises of instilling democratic elements into Peru's government. In his final days as president, Garcia would resign under threat of arrest on charges of corruption. These charges, which eventually Garcia would be convicted of, set the stage for a new attempt at democracy in Peru. In June of 1990, Alberto Fujimori would defeat Mario Vargas Llosa in a runoff election with fifty-six and a half percent of the vote. Many Peruvians voted for Fujimori on the basis of his populist rhetoric, and his win represented a protest of the existing party system. Fujimori's campaign of democracy for the people is yet further evidence that the people of Peru desperately sought a change in their government which would bring about some of the core elements of democracy. Unfortunately, democracy under Fujimori would never come.

### **DEMOCRACY UNDER FUJIMORI**

Just as Garcia was elected under what appears to have been a reasonably competitive election, the election race between Llosa and Fujimori also seems to have been reasonably democratic. Even from Llosa's account, Fujimori was a long-standing underdog in the early election days, but his populist position earned him great popularity among the impoverished Peruvians. Additionally, Llosa acknowledges that his economic platform was extreme, and Peruvians were not ready for such radical policy decisions. Thus, Fujimori's middle of the road

democracy prevailed. 20. What, then, happened to this proposed democracy? How did the cycle of failed democracy continue and where did the elements of democracy lose out under Fujimori's leadership? While it appears Fujimori started his presidency with good intentions, legislative roadblocks led Fujimori to a self-coup in which he used the military's support to dismantle congress and call for a new constitution. The basis of this autogolpe, according to Fujimori, was to rebuild the constitution and congress with the elements of democracy in mind. With interference from the Organization of American States (OAS), Fujimori rescheduled elections for a new congress, who would also be responsible for drafting a new Peruvian constitution.

The interference of the OAS has brought some debate to historians of Peru's politics. Some, like Pevehouse, argue that the OAS proved a success in the situation with Fujimori, and true democracy in the region won out. The OAS, a group Pevehouse categorizes as a regional institution, would threaten Peru with restrictions which made it difficult for Fujimori to run his country. For Pevehouse and supporters of this argument, Fujimori's swift return to democracy represents a win for the OAS, and a win for the survival of democracy in Latin America. Further inspection, however, reveals a different outcome. Using the elemental democracy definition, it becomes clear that Fujimori failed to institute democracy, even under the watchful eye of other democratic authorities. As Teorell explains, Fujimori controlled the entire process of rebuilding the government. His own allies gained a majority power in congress, excluded other prominent parties, and Fujimori's regime became more consolidated and powerful than ever. Teorell writes, "In fact, what Fujimori seems to have accomplished was mostly to untie his hands and dictate a solution to a crisis his own autogolpe had spawned."<sup>21</sup>

Critique of Fujimori's alleged democracy is not limited to Teorell. Catherine Conaghan, author of *Fujimori's Peru*, provides an in-depth assessment of the length Fujimori's administration went to in order to appear to achieve the elements of democracy, all the while upholding a truly authoritarian regime. Conaghan maintains that Fujimori's phony democracy relied on two fronts. First, he would have to assemble democratic institutions which at least appeared to meet the standards for democracy. Second, he would have to create a public sphere which emphasized democracy but did not actually maintain any elements of democracy. Conaghan writes, "In other words, all the processes and institutions associated with public deliberation and formation of public opinion, especially the media, had to look like they were functioning in standard democratic fashion."<sup>22</sup> Essentially, Fujimori built what Garcia had attempted and failed to: an institution in which it *appeared* Peru was meeting the elements of democracy. Elections appeared reasonably competitive, although they were truly rigged. Civil liberties appeared to be met, although the press was strongly censored and no attacks on individual rights could be reported. Finally, Fujimori maintained the appearance of effective government by "never losing an opportunity to trumpet his government's achievements in economic reforms, counterterrorism, and counter-narcotics policies."<sup>23</sup>

Over the course of Fujimori's presidency, which reigned from July of 1990 to November of 2000, Fujimori would be responsible for collapsing Peru's party system, waging a gruesome conflict against Shining Path, and implementing socially devastating economic policies. The fact that Fujimori won a second term shows the extent to which his government was successful in their manipulation. By the time Fujimori was ready to run for his third term as president, a vast and corrupt re-election machine was in place. Fujimori's regime had gained effective control over the judiciary, congress, military, and the media. This combination proved lethal to true democracy in Peru and, in 2000, Fujimori was poised to begin his third term as the faux-democratic president.

24. For every critic of his regime, Fujimori discounted their concerns with reforms cloaked in elements of democracy. Despite this control, Fujimori faced increasing opposition in Peru. By November of 2000, corruption and scandal would be the only remnants of Fujimori's Peru, and a new political regime would attempt their own democratization of the country.

The fall of Fujimori's regime, and the aftermath of his scandal provide historians deep insights into the discourse of democracy in Peru. It is clearly evident that when compared to the elemental definition of democracy, the government under Fujimori was entirely authoritarian. Fujimori gave the outward appearance of building democracy in Peru but a lack of competitive elections, affronts to basic civil liberties, and an inability to effectively govern prove democracy was nowhere to be found. In order to fully utilize the historiographical tool of elemental democracy, however, it is important to understand the aftermath of such a scandal in Peru. In what several historians would classify as a "rupture transition,"<sup>25</sup> the fall of Fujimori's regime left Peru with a rare opportunity to dispel any authoritarian remnant from the government. After Fujimori fled Peru, his supporters in power failed to implement any real safeguards that would limit the opportunities for democratization, and it appeared that the cycle should be broken and Peru should have democracy at last. Once again, however, democracy would not come for Peru. In the continually cyclical nature that is Peru's attempts at democratization, no new political pact was created. The vacuum left by Fujimori's regime resulted in yet another procedural view of democracy where none of the three core elements would be genuinely instituted.

### **HOW DEMOCRATIC IS PERU'S DEMOCRACY? A CONCLUSION**

In an attempt to determine how democratic Peru's democracy truly is, based on the elemental definition, it is necessary to understand the profound impact the years preceding Fujimori, and the years during his regime, had on the economy, institutions, and people of Peru. Failed attempt after failed attempt at democracy left Peru with a decimated economy, weakened political institutions, and a cynical public. Ultimately, the actions of Fujimori and his predecessors led to a decommissioning of any governmental accountability. For decades, authoritarian regimes in Peru would not answer to economic consequences, institutional authorities, or even the citizenry. The five presidents who followed Fujimori would continue a rhetoric of democracy while maintaining the status quo and accepting no accountability. This is the legacy of factitious democracy that lives on in Peru today.

As previously mentioned, people play a critical role in understanding the determinants of democracy. In Alberto Vergara's *President's Without Roots*, he seeks to explain the deep dissatisfaction Peruvians have with their current democracy and traces it back to the consequences of Fujimori's regime. For Vergara, Peru appears to have achieved a level of democracy. He calls this democracy, a "delegative democracy" which "rests on the premise that whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office."<sup>26</sup> Vergara's work makes it evident that Peru has at least achieved one point on the elemental scale of democracy: reasonably competitive elections. However, he goes on to explain that once elected, presidents of today's Peru quickly abandon all democratic promises made during their campaign. This abandonment of ideals has two motivating factors, each caused by Fujimori's regime. First, Fujimori deeply entrenched the technocrats of Peru, so much so that they now control major policy decisions regardless of who is president. Second, the decimation of political parties and the people's abandonment and dissatisfaction with government has permanently severed the important

democratic tie of state and society. In regard to the elemental definition of democracy, Vergara illustrates that Peru may have reasonably competitive elections, but consequences of decades of authoritarian regimes have terminated new presidents abilities to effectively govern.

Basic civil liberties also continually fail to be met under Peru's present leadership. In the decades preceding Fujimori's reign, and all throughout his decade as the Peruvian president, human rights abuses plagued the nation. From the violent tactics of terrorist groups such as the Shining Path, as well as the extreme measures taken by those who claimed to be fighting terrorism, a persistent system of abuse seemed to cement itself as a Peruvian institution. Pascha Bueno-Hansen's *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru* outlines the stories of those who disappeared during the reign of terror which occurred from the 1980's to the 1990's and makes critical use of historical silences in supporting her research. Corrupt authoritarian regimes who wished to silence critics developed a skill of abducting outspoken citizens and removing them from the equation. These mass abductions bring up the important historical tool of silences. To understand the history of democracy in Peru, it is important to understand what is not said. Though these abductions are but one of the civil rights abuses that continue to plague hopes for democracy in Peru's present, they offer critical insight into the effects these abuses have on society and on historical interpretation. Hansen explains of her work, "This book positions itself within the paradox of rights: the tension between the need for human rights law to document and prosecute violations and the inability of the human rights framework to address the full scope of harm."<sup>27</sup>. Hansen focuses her work on the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was established by Valentin Paniagua after taking control in the wake of Fujimori's exit, and was continued by President Alejandro Toledo with a focus on human rights violations committed during Peru's violent decade.

The committee allegedly sought to put an end to the silences that negatively impacted Peruvian democracy both in historical understanding and in practice. In the committee's findings, they revealed that extreme violence exacerbated historical trends of racism against the indigenous and already impoverished citizens of Peru. In exploiting ethnic prejudices, authoritarian regimes left in their wake ideals of modernity and citizenship that continue to perpetuate human rights violations today. The committee's findings on ethnic prejudice are supported by several historical accounts of Peru. Throughout the study of the scale of democracy in Peru, ethnic prejudices permeate every topic, especially against the indigenous. Marisol Cadena's essay "Silent Racism and Intellectual Superiority in Peru," seeks to explain how race evolved as an analytical category for Peruvian scholars into a tool of class analysis used by political parties to define problems and suggest solutions for the nation. In her work, Cadena shows that silent racial prejudice against indigenous peoples shaped social interactions between all people in a way that would evolve into class-based rhetoric which would ultimately be used as a political tool. Referring to the leaders of Peru's authoritarian regimes, Cadena explains, "When 'culture' and 'class' rhetorically replaced race, they also derived their political legitimacy from the belief in the social superiority of 'proper' morality, higher intelligence, and academic education."<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, Cadena suggests:

Disavowing biologically defined race, while simultaneously considering that exclusions legitimately resulted from 'natural' cultural features or 'inevitable' class hierarchies, intellectuals are trapped in a discourse of silent racism that continues to abide by the historically forged Peruvian definition of race that privileged invisible, yet innate, qualities over biology and phenotype. Rather than cancelling it, 'culture' and 'class' silently

reproduced the Peruvian scientific version of race coined at the turn of the century and fostered the hegemony of racist practices among leftists and conservatives.<sup>30</sup>

The racist practices utilized by leftists and conservatives throughout Peruvian history are emphasized by the rampant racism and violence Peru experienced during the 1980's and 1990's. Cadena's work shows that the findings of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported by Hansen have roots much deeper than the authoritarian regimes of the eighties and nineties. As Hansen explains, success for ending inherent racism and repetitive human rights abuses hinges on Peru's ability to "give attention to multiple exclusions based on ethnic and linguistic factors, class, and rurality."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, historical understanding of the types of silences and what silences say about Peru's democracy allow historians to gain critical insight into the way democracy has been presented by historians and present-day politicians alike.

The findings of Cadena and Hansen regarding historical silences in Peru are furthered by Hansen's illustrations that most cases brought against perpetrators of human rights abuses rarely make it out of preliminary investigation. This research can be further corroborated by cases against each of the five presidents who gained power after the fall of Fujimori. Interim president Paniagua and his successor Alejandro Toledo may have instituted a hunt for the truth about human rights violations, but they are failure to convict based on the commission's findings shows a failure of their administrations to provide basic civil liberties. Furthermore, many scholars contend that the commission's attempts at reconciliation were an empty rhetorical gesture meant to instill a sense that democracy had prevailed, when in reality it had not. The harsh wording coupled with the lack of any effective action taken on behalf of the commission seems to justify this contention. In their report, the Truth Commission writes:

As Peruvians, we are ashamed to have to state this, but it is the truth, and we have the obligation to make it known. For years, the forces of order forgot that human beings are the supreme end of order. Instead, they adopted a strategy of massive violation of the rights of Peruvians, including the right to life. Extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, torture, massacres, sexual violence against women, and, due to their recurring nature and widespread occurrence, other equally condemnable crimes confirm a pattern of human rights abuses that the Peruvian state and its agents must recognize in order to take a step toward rectifying their actions.<sup>32</sup>

As evidenced in Hansen's work, and in the aftermath of Peru's ineffective government, this fulmination against those in charge during Peru's violent decade resulted in little actionable change.

In 2006, when Alan Garcia claimed victory to his second term as Peru's president, he would only add to the deficiency of change and further the cycle of abuse. In 2010, President Garcia enacted a series of decrees which changed procedures for convicting those accused of human rights violations, and essentially afforded them universal amnesty. Ollanta Humala, the successor of President Garcia, would run Peru from 2011 to 2016 and continue the vicious cycle of suppressing human rights violations. Accused of committing abuses during the 1990's, Humala bribed witnesses to keep them from testifying, and continued to aid in the governments cover up of their egregious crimes. Finally, the example of Fujimori given at the beginning of this essay provides yet another testament to Peru's violation of civil liberties. In 2017, President Pedro Kuczynski was

facing impeachment. In what many believe to be an attempt to maintain his authority, Kuczynski pardoned Alberto Fujimori, where he was released from his 25-year sentence after being convicted of human rights abuses. In Peru, basic civil liberties continue to go unmet, and ineffective government institutions continually fail to appropriately prosecute those responsible.<sup>33</sup>

The government's inability to institute basic civil liberties or effective government continues to be exacerbated by a military which has historically operated under strict authoritarian regimes. Cynthia Milton's *Conflicted Memory: Military Cultural Interventions and the Human Rights Era in Peru* discusses the military campaign which seeks to shift cultural opinion regarding the violent decade of Peru's history. Milton explains that with the fall of Fujimori came the fall of the military. Unfortunately, any true attempts to reform the military and prevent it from being under authoritarian control were weakly made. Furthermore, Milton proves that despite the Truth Commission's findings which reported the Peruvian military was responsible for nearly a third of the killings in its violent decade, military officials persisted in a cultural campaign to instill in civilians a different memory of their legacy. The Armed Forces of Peru argue, according to Milton, "the human rights violations and crimes against humanity were "errors" by individuals, produced in moments of distress, and the product of "excesses"; they exhibited the suffering of their own members and the great sacrifices they had made; they pointed to their own heroism; and, at times, they hinted at contrition."<sup>34</sup> This argument was made by military officials out of sheer necessity. The allegations of corruption and excessive violence plagued members of the military, and slowly the military was removed from their connection to the public and Peruvian politics. In a country that had been for decades manipulated by and in control of leading military members, this severed connection could not stand. So, in yet another affront to civil liberties, the military engaged in using books, films, and media to shift public opinion and fill the silences in public memory. As Milton explains, "The Army's efforts to repair its image—which employed many cultural works along with other more formal, institutional venues—succeeded not only in reattaching the Army to the body politic but also in shifting the content of Peru's memory."<sup>35</sup>

Despite consistent subversion of the three core democratic elements, and the limited democracy which persists within Peru; historical research shows that Peruvians persist in their fight for a democratic ideal type. Just as Alberto Vergara sought to explain the deep dissatisfaction Peruvians have with their current democracy, Stephen Levitsky also seeks to explain low presidential approval ratings. As mentioned earlier, fifty-seven percent of Peruvians agree that democracy is preferable over any other system of government. This majority alone proves that Peruvians value democratic ideals. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that deep dissatisfaction with the government is a manifestation of the average Peruvian's persistent efforts to maintain a true democracy. Levitsky argues two factors contribute to this dissatisfaction. First, Levitsky highlights institutional weaknesses, "state weakness brings ineffective governance, and ineffective governance generates discontent, which, if persistent, may erode citizens' trust in democratic institutions."<sup>36</sup> Second, Levitsky explains the recent governments reluctance to advocate for or maintain effective social policy. As this paper has illustrated, these factors are not new to historical interpretations of Peru. Levitsky's conclusion, however, offers a cynical and new insight into Peru's current limited democracy. Ultimately, Levitsky concludes, "The post-Fujimori regime has now survived for 13 years—longer than any other democracy in Peruvian history. But it has survived largely by default. Peruvians remain deeply dissatisfied with their governments, even in the very best of economic times. When the boom ends, as booms inevitably do, democracy may again be in for a challenge."<sup>37</sup> Although Levitsky suggests democracy is poised to fail, his cynical

view of Peruvian democracy unintentionally supports the notion that Peruvians are persistent in their fight for democracy. When scholars consider the reality of the limited democracy operating in Peru, it seems only natural that Peruvians would be dissatisfied with their government. Thus, it stands to reason that when faced with economic collapse, Peruvians will once again begin their calls for a true democracy; one that achieves all three of the core elements.

New research suggests that a number of historians are becoming intrigued by the persistence of Latin American democracy. Omar Encarnación's "The Strange Persistence of Latin American Democracy" provides a perfect example of this new and critical insight. In his essay, Encarnación analyzes the political learners curve that nations across Latin America have faced since the early 1970's. Peru's repetitive cycle of authoritarian regime's makes their present limited democracy no exception to this strange persistence. This persistence can certainly be attributed to the strong, and often complex, attachment Peru's citizens have to democracy. While some may be quick to dismiss the notion of persistence based on the fact that Peru has achieved a limited democracy at best, Encarnación offers a different analysis. Encarnación explains, "The most compelling indicator of democratic persistence in Latin America is that not a single democratic transition in the last three decades has succumbed to an authoritarian reversal. This is no small achievement in a region where, historically, democracy's central dilemma has not been its absence or its retarded development but rather the inability of countries to make it stick."<sup>38</sup> While Encarnación offers a much more favorable view of Peruvian democracy, his point stands. As previously discussed, the last five presidents of Peru, all of whom have served after the fall of Fujimori's regime, have maintained a limited democracy at best. Still, none of these regimes have fallen back into purely authoritarian practices. Maybe, then, the persistence of the Peruvian people offers some hope for an ideal democratic type of government to prevail.

In October of 2018, ex-President Fujimori's pardon was reversed by a recently strengthened judiciary. For many, this reversal represents a turn toward a more effective government conscious of civil liberties, and ultimately, a true Peruvian democracy. Despite these recent developments, historical research shows that today's Peru is operating on a very limited version of elemental democracy. While they have achieved reasonably competitive elections, administrations continually fail to achieve an effective power to govern or basic civil liberties for the Peruvian public. On the scale provided under the definition of elemental democracy, Peru seems stagnant at a plus one. The case study of Peru using the elemental definition of democracy offers a unique opportunity for historians to understand it's practical approach as a research tool. When coupled with other historiographical elements such as linear and nonlinear relationships, continuity versus change, silences, and cyclical history, elemental democracy helps sort through competing definitions of democracy and allows for a broader, more neutral understanding of a nation's history. In dissecting what the term elemental history means and using it as a tool to compare the regimes prior to Alberto Fujimori to Fujimori's decade as president, the question regarding Peru's level of democracy has effectively been answered. As the research shows, Peru has experienced a complex mixture of undeniable change and a string of cycle and continuity limiting their democratic achievements. Despite the persistence of the Peruvian people and historians in ending the silences and navigating the complicated dynamics of linear and non-linear relationships, Peru has achieved a limited democracy. Peru has, at long last, achieved reasonably competitive elections. What remains to be seen, however, is whether Peru will sustain this democratic trend and gain the ability to defend basic civil liberties and effectively govern its

people. In the end, history will reveal whether Peru will break the vicious cycle in which they are trapped, and finally achieve the ideal democratic type.



## ENDNOTES

1. Vergara, Alberto. "Virtue, Fortune, and Failure in Peru." *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4. (October 2018): 73.
2. Lise Storm (2008) An Elemental Definition of Democracy and its Advantages for Comparing Political Regime Types, *Democratization*, 15:2.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Trantidis, Aris. 2017. "Is Government Contestability an Integral Part of the Definition of Democracy?" *Politics* 37 (1): 79
6. Teorell, Jan. 2010. *Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change in the World, 1972–2006*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 5.
7. Melo, Marcus. (2008). Strong Presidents, Robust Democracies? Separation of Powers and Rule of Law in Latin America. *Brazilian Political Science Review* (Online). 4.
8. Teorell, Jan. 6
9. Pevehouse, Jon C. *Democracy From Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 3
10. Ibid. 199
11. Manuel, Alcantara. *Politicians and Politics in Latin America*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Reinner Publishers. 2008. 68
12. Thurner, Mark. 2011. History's Peru: The Poetics of Colonial and Postcolonial Historiography. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 142
13. Aguirre, Carlos, and Paulo Drinot. 2017. *The Peculiar Revolution: Rethinking the Peruvian Experiment Under Military Rule*. Vol. First edition. Austin: University of Texas Press. 192
14. Ibid. 199
15. Heilman, Jaymie. *Before the Shining Path: Politics in Rural Ayacucho, 1895-1990*. Stanford University Press. 2010
16. John Crabtree. 1985. "Peru: From Belaúnde to Alan García." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 4 (2): 83
17. Komisar, Lucy. 1986. *Nation*. 243 (6): 174.
18. Ibid.
19. Vargas, Mario. *A Fish in the Water*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux. 1994. 33.
20. Ibid. 446
21. Teorell, Jan. 96

22. Conaghan, Catherine. *Fujimori's Peru: Deception in the Public Sphere*. University of Pittsburgh Press. 2006. 10.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid. 200-220
25. Santander Joo, Carlos Ugo, Carlos Federico Domínguez Avila, and Kristi M. Wilson. 2019. "The Fall of the Alberto Fujimori Government: New Evidence and Interpretations." *Latin American Perspectives* 46 (5): 22
26. Vergara, Alberto, Aaron Watanabe, and Kristi M. Wilson. 2019. "Presidents without Roots: Understanding the Peruvian Paradox." *Latin American Perspectives* 46 (5): 26
27. Bueno-Hansen, Pascha. 2015. *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru: Decolonizing Transitional Justice*. Dissident Feminisms. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 153.
28. Ibid.
29. Marisol de la Cadena. 1998. "Silent Racism and Intellectual Superiority in Peru." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 17 (2): 144
30. Ibid. 144
31. Bueno-Hansen. 12
32. CVR. Hatun Wilakuy. 6-7
33. Bassel, Hala. 2020. "Acts of Truth Telling and Testimony in the Conceptualization of Reparations in Post-Conflict Peru." *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations* (1)
34. Conaghan, Catherine. *Fujimori's Peru: Deception in the Public Sphere*. University of Pittsburgh Press. 2006. 188.
35. Ibid.
36. Levitsky, Stephen. 2014. "First Take: Paradoxes of Peruvian Democracy." *Harvard Review of Latin America*. (1)
37. Ibid.
38. Encarnación, Omar G. 2003. "The Strange Persistence of Latin American Democracy." *World Policy Journal* 20 (4): 31.

## REFERENCES

- Aguirre, Carlos, and Paulo Drinot. 2017. *The Peculiar Revolution: Rethinking the Peruvian Experiment Under Military Rule*. Vol. First edition. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bassel, Hala. 2020. "Acts of Truth Telling and Testimony in the Conceptualisation of Reparations in Post-Conflict Peru." *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations* 34 (1): 84
- Bueno-Hansen, Pascha. 2015. *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru: Decolonizing Transitional Justice*. Dissident Feminisms. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Conaghan, Catherine. *Fujimori's Peru: Deception in the Public Sphere*. University of Pittsburgh Press. 2006
- Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación del Perú (CVR). Informe final. 9 vols. Lima: CVR, 2003. <http://www.cverdad.org.pe>
- Crabtree, John. 1985. "Peru: From Belaúnde to Alan García." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 4 (2): 75.
- Edwards, Sebastian. *Left Behind: Latin American and the False Promise of Populism*. University of Chicago Press. 2010
- Encarnación, Omar G. 2003. "The Strange Persistence of Latin American Democracy." *World Policy Journal* 20 (4): 30–40.
- Ewig, Christina. 2013. "Ethnicity and the Persistence of Inequality: The Case of Peru - by Thorp, Rosemary and Paredes, Maritza." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 245.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. *The Landscape of History*. Oxford University Press. 2002
- Heilman, Jaymie. *Before the Shining Path: Politics in Rural Ayacucho, 1895-1990*. Stanford University Press. 2010
- Howell, Martha, and Walter Prevenier. *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*. Cornell University Press. 2001
- Komisar, Lucy. 1986. *Nation*. 243 (6): 174.
- Lewis, Paul. *Authoritarian Regimes in Latin America*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. 2006.
- Lise Storm (2008) An Elemental Definition of Democracy and its Advantages for Comparing Political Regime Types, *Democratization*, 15:2, 215-229
- Manuel, Alcántara. *Politicians and Politics in Latin America*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 2008
- Marisol de la Cadena. 1998. "Silent Racism and Intellectual Superiority in Peru." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 17 (2): 143
- Melo, Marcus. (2008). Strong Presidents, Robust Democracies? Separation of Powers and Rule of Law in Latin America. *Brazilian Political Science Review* (Online). 4.

- Mendoza, Montaner, and Alvaro Llosa. *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot*. New York: Madison Books. 1996
- Milton, Cynthia E. 2018. *Conflicted Memory: Military Cultural Interventions and the Human Rights Era in Peru*. Critical Human Rights. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Pevehouse, Jon C. *Democracy From Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Santander Joo, Carlos Ugo, Carlos Federico Domínguez Avila, and Kristi M. Wilson. 2019. "The Fall of the Alberto Fujimori Government: New Evidence and Interpretations." *Latin American Perspectives*. 46 (5): 13–24
- Strong, Simon. *Shining Path*. New York: Times Books. 1992
- Teorell, Jan. 2010. *Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change in the World, 1972–2006*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thurner, Mark. 2011. *History's Peru: The Poetics of Colonial and Postcolonial Historiography*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Trantidis, Aris. 2017. "Is Government Contestability an Integral Part of the Definition of Democracy?" *Politics* 37 (1): 67–81
- Vargas, Mario. *A Fish in the Water*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux. 1994
- Vergara, Alberto. "Virtue, Fortune, and Failure in Peru." *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4 (October 2018): 65–76
- Vergara, Alberto, Aaron Watanabe, and Kristi M. Wilson. 2019. "Presidents without Roots: Understanding the Peruvian Paradox." *Latin American Perspectives*. 46 (5): 25–43.