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THE 1995 ELECTIONS  
IN PERU:  
END OF THE LINE  
FOR THE PARTY SYSTEM?

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## THE 1995 ELECTIONS IN PERU: END OF THE LINE FOR THE PARTY SYSTEM?

Throughout Latin America in the 1990s, political parties are facing testing times. Evidence from opinion polls across the region attests to the low esteem in which parties and their leaders are held. Indeed, in many countries, parliamentary institutions themselves command little respect. The emergence of political 'outsiders' and 'independents' on the political stage, often at the expense of party politicians, is another feature of this phenomenon.

So, while a process of 'democratic consolidation' may be taking place, there are certainly powerful counter-currents at work which, while not necessarily overturning formal democratic institutions, are tending to drain them of their real democratic content. Instead, they establish more 'top-down' authoritarian types of regime, underpinned by a new and sometimes charismatic rapport with a mass public, bypassing traditional forms of intermediation.<sup>1</sup>

President Alberto Fujimori of Peru is an egregious example of this style of leadership. Coming to office in 1990 on a wave of rejection of traditional parties, he consolidated his hold on power by means of a palace coup (or *autogolpe*) in April 1992. He proceeded to change the constitution to permit his own re-election in 1995. In doing so he consistently sought to mobilise public opinion against what he called the '*partidocracia*', which he lambasted as being responsible for the country's political and economic ills.

For the Peruvian party system, the general elections of 9 April 1995 and the campaign leading up to them were in some respects '*una crónica de una muerte anunciada*'. They confirmed what many political analysts had been pointing out repeatedly during the preceding five years: that the party system no longer represented public opinion. Indeed, they confirmed it more emphatically than most observers had expected. Not only did Fujimori – whose popularity during the previous five years appeared to vary in inverse proportion to that of the political parties – achieve re-election with an overwhelming 64.4% of the valid vote, but the total received by the traditional parties combined was reduced to a paltry 6.3%. As if to underline the point, the electoral law specified that each party automatically lost official recognition if it failed to reach 5% of the vote. Furthermore, in the

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<sup>1</sup> This has been referred to as 'neopopulism'. In the case of Peru, for instance, see Aldo Panfichi and Cynthia Sanborn, '¿Vino viejo en odres nuevos? Democracia y neo-populismo en el Perú,' *Márgenes* (forthcoming).

congressional elections held at the same time, the four main parties won only 17 seats out of a total 120, with the rest of the future legislature composed of non-party groupings, and Fujimori's own 'non-party' party, Cambio 90-Nueva Mayoría, enjoying an overall majority with 67 seats.

How was it that the major parties – which during the 1980s regularly accounted for at least 90% of the vote in successive elections – fell so foul of the electorate? How strong or representative was the party system in the first place? Are Peru's parties now spent forces, or do they have the capacity to recover? This brief essay seeks to broach some of these questions by examining the impact of extreme instability – both economic and political – on political behaviour and party loyalties. It poses the question of whether, indeed, it is possible to have a democratic dispensation at all without some sort of system of party representation bridging the gulf between civil society and the state, helping to aggregate political interests and facilitating the legitimisation of government.

The essay addresses four main questions. First it seeks to trace the development of Peru's political parties and to ask at what stage we can really speak of the appearance of a 'party system'. Secondly, it proceeds to examine the effects that both macroeconomic instability (in particular hyperinflation) and the growth of political and social violence had on the emergent party system. Thirdly, it addresses the phenomenon of 'plebiscitarian democracy' as practised by Fujimori in the early 1990s. Finally, it seeks to pose some general questions as to the conditions that might (or might not) be conducive to the recovery of the political parties.

### **The genesis of a party system**

Peru is not a country with strong democratic traditions.<sup>2</sup> Although civilian parties existed in the nineteenth century, they were not in any sense mass-based parties that integrated the whole population into politics. Nor did they survive long into the twentieth. Peruvian politics for much of this present century has been characterised by lengthy periods of authoritarian (often military) government, punctuated only by brief spells of more liberal governance emanating from a restricted franchise. Between 1920 and 1980, there were only twelve years in which we could say that there was some sort of democratic government.

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<sup>2</sup> John Crabtree, *Peru under García: An Opportunity Lost* (Basingstoke, 1992).

For most of this period, the majority of the population was effectively excluded from the formal political system. Whereas in countries like Mexico, the mass burst upon the scene as a consequence of revolutionary upsurge, or in Argentina by virtue of populist-style mobilisation, in Peru the process of political integration was long delayed. In large part, this was because the country's largest mass-based political party, Haya de la Torre's Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), was anathema to the Peruvian elite and armed forces. Even though by the 1940s it had dropped most of its more radical pretensions, it was effectively excluded from government.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, by the late 1960s, it seemed that the armed forces themselves had assumed APRA's agenda of social reform (thereby threatening to render the party obsolete) in an attempt to break traditional economic and political structures 'from above' through bureaucratic and authoritarian means.

This, of course, is not to argue that political parties like APRA lacked importance, nor that they failed to reflect live forces in society, but rather to question the existence of a *party system* as such. Of the two major parties to emerge from the economic dislocation of the late 1920s, APRA became much more significant than the Communist Party (PCP) in terms of the numbers it could mobilise, in part because of the untimely death of José Carlos Mariátegui, the PCP's founder and mentor. Under Haya's charismatic leadership, APRA was able to build up a mass following, bound together by a tight organisational structure, a strong system of party discipline, and a pronounced regional concentration in the northern part of the country. It proved capable of surviving lengthy periods of fierce repression, which indeed helped it forge a degree of organisational solidity. In the 1950s a new party, Acción Popular (AP), founded by Fernando Belaúnde around a reforming ideology, arose to challenge the primacy of APRA, although it never managed to reproduce the same degree of party cohesion. Drawing on a widespread spirit of anti-Aprismo, Belaúnde was able successfully to challenge APRA in the 1963 elections. Furthermore, with the emergence of a Christian Democrat party in the 1960s, paralleling those of many other Latin American countries, it is perhaps possible to speak of a party system emerging. However, this period of incipient party competition was to prove short-lived, brought to an abrupt end by the 1968 coup of General Juan Velasco Alvarado.

The main characteristics of these party formations were their authoritarian, hierarchical and *personalista* nature, traits common enough in Latin America generally but especially typical of Peru. They were particularly the hallmark

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<sup>3</sup> The party participated only as a junior partner during two brief spells, the first in the late 1940s under President José Luis Bustamante y Rivero, and then in the late 1950s under Manuel Prado.

of APRA, over which Haya's dominance was only brought to an end by his death in 1979. Haya ruled APRA in an autocratic and paternalistic fashion from the top down. Being the source of party doctrine and strategy, he discouraged internal party democracy and tolerated no dissent. He elicited almost religious loyalty among his followers, insisting on absolute discipline and acquiescence and establishing the party machinery to that end.<sup>4</sup> The same was the case, but to a lesser degree, of AP, whose ideological stance was a close reflection of the preoccupations of Belaúnde, its founder and leader. The Christian Democrat Party (PDC) and its right-wing offshoot, the Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC), had similar traits, being 'top-down' parties with dominant leaders. Furthermore, the left-wing Marxist parties, stimulated by the 1959 Cuban revolution, also developed along these hierarchical and *personalista* lines. While the need for such an approach could be justified by adherence to Leninist vanguardism and democratic centralism, the authoritarianism that these principles embodied reflected strong local traditions.

Not only was there no strong legacy of a functioning party system, but none of internal party democracy either. Reflecting the gulfs in society itself, there tended to be a deep divide between the leaders and the led. While parties could represent an important avenue of social advancement in an otherwise stratified society in which mobility was restricted, decision-making was generally monopolised by a small group or a single person. As a result, parties tended to develop on a weak institutional basis with a lack of intermediate cadres linking the rank and file with the leadership. They remained highly dependent on the survival of leaders, and prone to crises on their demise, the succession crisis within APRA on Haya's death being a notable case in point. They also lacked the mechanisms by which internal dissent could be resolved through compromise, thus tending to lead to the reproduction of small parties with similar characteristics, themselves prone to further fragmentation. Peru's parties therefore failed to provide an effective link between the interests of the majority of the population and decision-making at government level.

The 1968 coup brought the democratic opening, which had begun with the inconclusive 1962 presidential elections and Belaúnde's election victory the following year, to an abrupt end. The coup took place amid charges of corruption and incompetence, and a widespread perception that democratic institutions were unsuitable for a country like Peru that required radical

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<sup>4</sup> On the way in which APRA sought to capitalise on popular religiosity in the creation of a political movement in which 'faith' underscored loyalty, see Imelda Vega Centeno, *Aprismo popular: mito, cultura e historia* (Lima, 1985; first edition).

structural change and where the political elite had shown itself ill-suited to expediting the task. The criticisms of politicians and party politics at this time foreshadowed some of the debates thirty years later.

However, in spite of its pretensions to mobilise the masses within a framework of popular participation, the military government proved no more successful than the political parties it replaced in forging new links between civil society and the state. Instead, by removing some of the traditional mechanisms of social control and awakening expectations through its rhetoric of social transformation, it contributed to the involvement of the mass in politics, but not in the orderly way it had hoped. Contrary to the intentions of the army, the Marxist left took advantage of the climate of mobilisation and, in the absence of other parties, made important gains in terms of establishing control of representative institutions, particularly among the trade unions, peasant federations, and to a lesser extent in the rapidly growing urban shanty towns.

By the end of the military government in 1980, the nature of politics had changed, with the mass much more engaged in the political process than before. Recognising this fact, the 1979 constitution established universal franchise for all over the age of 18, irrespective of social status, sex or literacy. The political parties that emerged during the transition to democracy between 1977 and 1980 thus found themselves having to compete for votes in free elections, conducted reasonably fairly, among an electorate of less passive subjects than in the past.<sup>5</sup> Party political activity coalesced around three ideologically distinct blocs, reflecting the wide political diversity to be found in society as a whole. On the right, AP and the PPC supported Belaúnde who returned as president in 1980, favouring a neo-liberal approach tempered by the president's own more populist inclinations; on the centre-left, Alan García sought to breathe new life into APRA, to expand its appeal among new sectors and to turn its traditionally ambiguous ideology in a social-democratic direction; and on the left, the formation of the Izquierda Unida (United Left) in 1980 created an electoral vehicle capable of bridging the sectarian divides and reversing the earlier tendency towards atomisation among the Marxist left. To varying degrees, then, all these forces were obliged to put down roots in civil society in order to compete electorally, while at the same time trying to devise workable programmes of government. In the early 1980s, there was an air of optimism about the prospects for creating a functioning democracy in Peru, in spite of the difficult economic problems afflicting the country (exacerbated after 1982 by the debt crisis) and

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<sup>5</sup> Fernando Tuesta, *Perú política en cifras: élite política y elecciones* (Lima, 1994). This provides a useful description of the workings of the party system, with details of electoral outcomes from 1931 to 1993.

the persistence of deep economic, social and cultural divides. Although election results during the 1980s revealed a strong degree of volatility<sup>6</sup> – suggesting that party loyalties were still weak – it is therefore possible to talk of an emergent party system.

### **The Crisis of Political Representation.**

By 1990 the party system was in tatters. The first round of presidential elections in April 1990 was characterised by deep public disillusion in all the political options on offer. It was a measure of the political vacuum that a month before polling day few had ever heard of the candidate (Alberto Fujimori) who was to emerge in second place, going forward to beat Mario Vargas Llosa, the internationally famed novelist and candidate for the right-wing Fredemo coalition, in the second round by a decisive margin of 56% to 34%. Alberto Fujimori possessed neither a well-oiled political machine nor a copious campaign war-chest, yet he was able to exploit a deeply-felt antipathy to the parties that voters believed had brought Peru to the edge of the abyss.

The crisis of the political parties is, of course, a phenomenon that affects most of the other countries of Latin America and, indeed, well beyond. It has been derived from a number of factors that are common throughout the region. Prime among them has been the apparent failure of conventional political leaders to deal with the economic and social problems that have afflicted the whole of Latin America as a result of the debt crisis. Politicians have seemed to be powerless to rescue their countries from the negative effects of the crisis, and in particular from the assault on living standards. The debt crisis also gave rise to a fiscal crisis of the state, which greatly reduced the resources available to politicians to distribute as largesse to, and thus command loyalty among, their specific clienteles. Another common feature, much in evidence throughout Latin America has been the growing influence of television in political campaigning. This has changed the nature of political debate, reducing (often radically) the extent of personal contact between politicians and their public. The political rally, and the oratory that went with it, is now much less in evidence than it used to be, even in election campaigns. The television personality himself has become a major political figure in his own right in some instances. In Peru, the election of chat show

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Dietz, 'Aspects of Peruvian Politics: Electoral Politics in Peru, 1978-1986', *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 4, Winter 1986-87.



impresario Ricardo Belmont as mayor of Lima in 1989<sup>7</sup> and his re-election in 1993 is a case in point. Finally, and as many authors have noted, the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of Soviet communism removed one of the major ideological divides that had separated right and left in Latin America for some fifty years, giving rise to a new and much less ideological sort of politics.

In Peru, the unpopularity of the political parties has probably been more pronounced than in most other countries of the region. To understand the reason for this, it is necessary to focus on the particularly severe nature of the political and economic crisis that afflicted the country in the last three years of the 1980s, since it sets Peru apart from the rest of Latin America. On the one hand, Peru underwent a process of hyperinflation with prices rising by as much as 7,000% in the last year of the García government. On the other hand, it faced one of the most severe public order problems anywhere in the region.<sup>8</sup> The government was pitched against the Maoist-inspired Sendero Luminoso, a ruthless and implacable guerrilla organisation, which had surfaced in 1980 in Ayacucho and surrounding areas. By 1990 it appeared to be losing the battle. Sendero had spread its influence over much of the country (including Lima), and had perpetrated a civil conflict in which more than 20,000 people had been killed. At the same time, the government faced another, perhaps less serious guerrilla challenge from the Cuban-inspired Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru (MRTA), all amid a climate of generalised social violence in which the authorities appeared incapable of imposing law and order.

These two elements – each present individually elsewhere in Latin America but not in the same combination – created a ‘psychosis of insecurity’ among all sectors of the public, especially among the poor, those least able to protect themselves from either. In the process, it became evident that neither the state nor, still less, the political parties, could provide adequate protection to the population as a whole. Their utility was therefore called increasingly into question.

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<sup>7</sup> The municipal elections of 1989, rather than the presidential elections of 1990, were the first clear sign of the public’s reaction against the traditional parties and their leaders, and its preference for ‘independents’ promising honesty and efficiency. Belmont’s grouping, Obras, swept the board in Lima, winning 45% of the vote, almost twice that of his nearest rival.

<sup>8</sup> On Sendero, see Gustavo Gorriti, *Sendero* (Lima, 1990); Simon Strong, *Shining Path* (London, 1992), and John Crabtree, *Peru under García*, chs. 3 and 6.

There is little doubt that periods of very high inflation are extremely harmful to living standards, especially for those unable to fix the market price of their labour. The Peruvian experience of hyperinflation and economic contraction – referred to by some as ‘hyper-stagflation’ – further exacerbated poverty and accentuated income and wealth disparities. The real purchasing power of wages for the majority sank rapidly, unemployment and sub-employment increased to levels unknown before, and government social spending dried up. Not only did this process further dramatise the incapacity of the political elite to manage the economy successfully<sup>9</sup> – APRA was immediately to blame in 1990 but the incapacity of the previous AP-PPC coalition had also led to *desgaste* – but the crisis had social effects that undermined party organisation. Moreover, the influx of labour into the informal sector of the economy expanded a highly heterogenous social formation, occupationally fragmented and notoriously difficult to organise politically. The informal sector is typically composed of individual producers, pitted against one another in intense competition and bound together by little sense of class solidarity. The rapid expansion of this sector, however, has made it a crucial electoral resource in the competition for political power.

By the same token, the crisis had a crippling effect on formal sector employment, and in particular on the trade unions, the backbone of a number of parties, especially on the left. The waning influence of the unions is shown by their inability to protect their members’ interests, especially wages, from the ravages of hyperinflation in the late 1980s. Beyond unions, the effects of economic dislocation also debilitated other organisations in civil society, some of them highly politicised, which had previously sought political expression through the party system. Grass-roots organisations found themselves obliged to react to the immediate and practical demands of their public. This was the case, for example, of the *comedores populares* which proliferated in areas of urban poverty as a means by which families managed to sustain the most basic levels of nutrition. Frequently, neighbourhood associations had also tended to be closely associated with parties, especially those of the left. However, the struggle for survival often had a de-politicising effect, especially when the parties were blamed for the economic problems in the first place.

The climate of violence also helped weaken party loyalties, especially in the areas most directly affected. Once again, worst hit were the parties of the left which enjoyed more of an organised presence in these areas than those of the right. In the crossfire between Sendero and the military, there was

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<sup>9</sup> Luis Pasara, ‘El ocaso de los partidos’, in Augusto Alvarez (ed.), *El poder en el Perú* (Lima, 1993).

little room for independent party activity. Both sides cared little for those organised groups they could not control: the military chose not to distinguish too closely between Senderistas and other more democratically-inclined leftists, while for Sendero all those who accepted what it termed 'parliamentary cretinism' were enemies of the revolution and therefore legitimate military targets. The army's strategy of counter-insurgency involved the creation of militarised zones, in which there was little scope for party activity (except perhaps at elections) and in which elected public authorities were subordinate to the military in everyday decision-making. The expansion of the radius of Sendero's activities led to a corresponding growth in the number of provinces and departments placed under such regimes of exception; by 1994, there were 66 provinces affected in this way, many of them under direct military jurisdiction. The scope for normal democratic activity therefore became circumscribed. Meanwhile, in Lima, party leaders failed to produce convincing alternatives for quelling Sendero, beyond simply ceding further responsibility to the military authorities. Even the left, which criticised the violation of human rights by the security forces, did little to formulate an effective alternative strategy.

Thus, by 1990, on the eve of the elections, none of Peru's major political parties or coalitions offered the electorate a coherent vision of how to stem the apparently inexorable drift towards poverty, violence and despair. The terrain was propitious for the emergence of independents, capable of exploiting the deeply-felt disenchantment towards the political establishment. In such circumstances, to vote to re-elect APRA – and remarkably 22% of the electorate still did so in the first round of polling in 1990 – was to vote for more of the same. To vote for the left, which had recently split into two feuding camps, was to opt for an ill-defined radical alternative which many thought would just make matters worse. And to vote for the right, which had united in the Fredemo coalition (a combination of AP, PPC plus a number of independents) was to invite 'shock treatment without anaesthesia', the remedy prescribed by Vargas Llosa. In this context, a little-known agronomist, promising 'honesty, work and technology' and challenging the ideological posturings and double-talk of the traditional politicians, found that he was able to make an entrée into the political arena. No-one guessed, however, including Fujimori himself, that he had any hope of clinching the ultimate political prize.

### **Fujimori and plebiscitarian democracy**

Fujimori's extraordinary election victory in 1990 was a manifestation of the breakdown of that party system which had begun to take root ten years before, a breakdown hastened by the twin 'earthquakes' of hyperinflation and

terrorist violence.<sup>10</sup> His simple anti-ideological message struck a chord among an electorate tired of the much-vaunted promises of the party leaders, and anxious more for a return to stability than for further leaps into the unknown. His fairly humble social origins and his Japanese ancestry distinguished him from the traditional political elite. However, while the 'Fujimori phenomenon' was a vote of no-confidence in the political alternatives on offer, it led to the installation of a government which lacked any organised base in society. Fujimori's 'party', Cambio 90 (subsequently known as Cambio 90-Nueva Mayoría), was a motley assortment of individuals, some with ties to the evangelical churches or small-scale business, but most lacking any organised presence in society. Because of the circumstances of the election, Cambio 90 was the first ruling party since 1980 not to hold a majority in Congress, where Vargas Llosa's Fredemo followers formed the largest single bloc. It was a government, therefore, which seemed weakly constituted, lacking a specific constituency in society and dependent on alliances in Congress to pass legislation.

Fujimori was aware of these weaknesses. Even before taking office he sought to develop a much closer relationship with the military than his predecessors had done; and the military – struggling to subdue Sendero Luminoso – was content to find itself in a situation in which its leverage over the executive power was greatly increased. Fujimori thus sought to develop a wider system of alliances which by-passed the established parties. On the one hand, by initiating a programme of radical liberalisation of the economy, he attempted to build links with the private sector and to exploit its long-standing mistrust of party politics.<sup>11</sup> On the other, he tried to develop a rapport with the public at large by building on his electoral success. His ability to maintain high indices of personal popularity despite the severe social cost of his initial stabilisation policies, showed that it was possible to pursue unpopular adjustment policies without sabotaging personal popularity, so long as the net result was the maintenance of stable prices. He turned out to have considerably more political room for manoeuvre than had appeared at first sight.

Fujimori's *autogolpe* on 5 April 1992 aimed to take advantage of the low standing of the politicians in Congress and their parties and to further expand

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<sup>10</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa, *El pez en el agua: memorias* (Barcelona, 1993); Carlos Ivan Degregori and Romeo Grompone, *Demonios y redentores del nuevo Perú: una tragedia en dos vueltas* (Lima, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Francisco Durand, *Business and Politics in Peru* (Boulder, 1994).

that room for manoeuvre.<sup>12</sup> The president had noticed in opinion polls how his attacks on what he called the '*partidocracia*' had boosted his own personal popularity. Indeed, the polls suggested that his popularity varied almost in direct proportion to those of the parties. At the same time, the *autogolpe* further solidified the relationship between the president and the military. Army leaders had been antagonised by Congress's voting down of legislation the previous November, intended to give them wider legal powers to conduct counter-insurgency operations with greater impunity. Closure of Congress therefore not only removed an obstacle both to legislative change and to Fujimori's own authority; it also permitted him to rewrite the rules of the political game along lines that suited him best.

In the months that followed the *autogolpe*, Fujimori consolidated the new order by holding fresh congressional elections to a single-party assembly which, in addition to normal legislative tasks, was vested with powers to reform the constitution. Having set the rules governing participation in the elections, and exploiting the divisions among the parties over whether to stand or not, Fujimori managed to ensure that his partisans attained an absolute majority.<sup>13</sup> During the election campaign, his standing was given a sudden and unexpected boost by the capture of Sendero's founder and leader, Abimael Guzmán.

The reformed constitution reduced the powers and autonomy of the legislature, increased those of the military (especially in adjudicating cases of terrorism), introduced the death penalty for terrorism, and – most importantly – lifted the legal bar on a president seeking immediate re-election. In order to seal its legitimacy, Fujimori ordered that the new constitution be put to a referendum. This was held in October 1993, and to the surprise of both the government, its opponents and other observers, the 'yes' vote won only by the slimmest of margins. The result served as a salutary reminder to Fujimori that he could not take his popularity for granted, especially in rural areas outside Lima.

The Fujimori government, as it evolved between 1990 and 1995, therefore represented something of a hybrid regime. While it did not involve a return to the sort of military dictatorship that had ruled Peru in the 1970s, it was not a government that sought to develop or consolidate the democratic institutions that had begun to take root in the 1980s. Fujimori made no pretence of his

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<sup>12</sup> See Eduardo Ferrero Costa, 'Peru: Presidential Coup', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 14, no. 1, January 1993.

<sup>13</sup> John Crabtree, 'The Peruvian Congressional Elections of 1992', *Electoral Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1993.

distaste for consensus government in which representative institutions were integrated into the processes of government. His focus on efficiency and *gerencia* in government led him to run the country almost as if it were his own private company. In this scheme of things, the pattern of command was highly hierarchical, with ministers enjoying little autonomy of action.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of its allowing political parties to function and take part in electoral contests, there could be no hiding the fact that Fujimori had arbitrarily overturned the established rules of the game, and created a new order in which his own executive power was enhanced at the expense of the other powers of the state. This concentration of power in the executive was, of course, not new; both Presidents Belaúnde and García had been variously criticised for their disdainful attitude towards Congress and the judiciary. Fujimori, however, took this to new lengths, justifying his stand by arguing that tough and authoritarian government was indispensable to deal with the country's problems. Arguments over whether the *autogolpe* was justifiable seem set to continue, with Fujimori's critics pointing to the support afforded by the majority in Congress to his economic policies prior to April 1992, and questioning Fujimori's view that Guzmán's capture would have been impossible under the old rules.

Also characteristic of the Fujimori government was its *personalismo*, a trait which – as we have also seen – has a long track record in Peruvian political history. The concentration of power was, in part, a product of Fujimori's unwillingness to trust in, or work with other political leaders, and his own dominance over his own partisans, most of whom depended on him for their positions and who had little or no experience of elective office prior to 1990. Wishing himself to be the mainspring of political action, he sought to spurn rather than coopt rivals, and to develop a direct rapport with the mass public. He preferred to work through a small group of trusted sympathisers (often his family), and distance himself from those who might appear to have ambitions of their own. Embedded in Peruvian political tradition, this style of politics is perhaps not best suited to the development of democratic institutions.

The country's party system also suffered as a result, with the president constantly seeking to profit from the discomfiture of the parties, and the difficulty they faced (especially after 1992) in articulating public concerns. Furthermore, the parties also suffered the consequences of his government's

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<sup>14</sup> In his stimulating biographical sketch of Fujimori's background, Luis Jochamowitz concludes that Fujimori possessed three key characteristics that underscored his life and which determined his approach to politics: pragmatism, authoritarianism and a highly secretive nature (*hermetismo*). See Luis Jochamowitz, *Ciudadano Fujimori* (Lima, 1993).

neo-liberal economic policies, especially those on the left. If the rise in unemployment and the fall in living standards had eroded union support in the late 1980s, the government's privatisation strategy and its liberalisation of labour markets compounded their problems in the early 1990s. The unions, in particular, found themselves powerless to resist, even in sectors where once they had been strong, and the parties of the left – removed from the areas of decision-making and political power – could offer little by way of support.

In this context, a peculiar mix of democracy and authoritarianism – labelled '*democradura*' by some analysts – emerged in which the legitimacy of government based itself on a 'direct link' without intermediaries between president and the people. Democratic forms persisted, but without much content; and indeed the democratic forms themselves were not immune from arbitrary and unconstitutional moves by the executive, as the 1992 *autogolpe* showed. It is therefore pertinent to ask whether such a system will prove sustainable, or whether a more party-based alternative will eventually reassert itself. As in the past, the problems of succession may eventually prove Fujimori's undoing, a problem at least postponed by the removal of the constitutional bar on immediate re-election.

### Pointers to the future

The 1995 presidential elections proved Fujimori unstoppable. His main opponent, the former UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar – chosen because of his potential for uniting a divided opposition around a single candidate – failed to capture the popular imagination. Most of the main established political parties, concerned not to let the opportunity pass to reassert themselves on the political stage, ended up fielding their own candidates.<sup>15</sup> Fujimori, who won outright by a large margin on the first ballot, had shown himself immune from criticisms that in other circumstances might have caused him considerable political damage. For instance, at the beginning of the election campaign, accused by none less than his estranged wife of encouraging corruption at the heart of government, Fujimori managed to shrug off the charges. Then, with only two months to go before the elections, he successfully minimised the impact of Peru's humiliation at the

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<sup>15</sup> The exception here was the PPC, which only presented candidates for the congressional elections.

hands of Ecuador following the border skirmish in the Cordillera del Condor.<sup>16</sup>

His election landslide helped Fujimori to consolidate his grip on power and to legitimise his government both at home and abroad with respect to the 1992 *autogolpe*. Not only did he deal a humiliating blow to his rivals, and a devastating one to the parties, but – against most predictions – he clinched an absolute majority in Congress. At the very least, his opponents had been hoping that a sufficient proportion of the electorate would split their ballots (rather than vote for the uninspiring names which made up most of the Cambio 90-Nueva Mayoría list) and thereby maintain a counterweight to executive power. In the event, Cambio 90-Nueva Mayoría won 67 seats in the 120-seat Congress. Moreover, in the presidential election, Fujimori won a commanding lead, even in those parts of the country where opposition was best organised and anti-government sentiment (as measured by the 1993 constitutional referendum result) strongest. In Puno, for instance, long a bastion of the left where nearly 80% had voted ‘no’ in the referendum, Fujimori polled nearly 65%.<sup>17</sup> In La Libertad, traditionally the APRA heartland, Mercedes Cabanillas, the party’s presidential candidate, managed only a meagre 14%, compared with 59% for Fujimori.

The prime causes of this electoral landslide in Fujimori’s favour were his success in slaying the twin dragons of hyperinflation and terrorist violence. As we have seen, together these produced a climate of insecurity which upset party allegiances, producing a situation in which firm, decisive and successful government brought enormous dividends. In addition, the economic recovery in 1993 and 1994 – albeit from an extremely low base – generated an ethos of optimism about the future which stood in stark contrast with the profound pessimism prevalent a few years earlier.<sup>18</sup> In such circumstances, it proved very difficult for the opposition to mobilise public

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<sup>16</sup> Polls conducted in March 1995 suggested that only 6% of those interviewed thought that the border war with Ecuador was a major issue, an extraordinary finding in view of Peru’s traditionally nationalistic reflexes in domestic politics.

<sup>17</sup> Evidence of fraud in favour of Fujimori and Cambio 90 came to light in the wake of the elections, but the scale was not such as to call his victory into doubt.

<sup>18</sup> According to a survey conducted by the Datum polling agency shortly before the elections, 79% of those interviewed believed that economic performance would continue to improve in the following five years, while only 2% thought it would deteriorate.



opinion around issues such as democratic rights, greater accountability or decentralisation. The opposition's strongest card was its ability to exploit discontent about the very high levels of unemployment still prevalent. But while opinion polls attest to the fact that this was a major preoccupation, it does not appear to have been the decisive criterion at the moment of voting.

Fujimori's other great advantage was that for two whole years he had been on the campaign trail, touring the country, especially in areas furthest from Lima where the outcome of the referendum had been least favourable to him. Often for three or four days a week, he would absent himself from Lima, visiting as many as six communities a day. There can be little doubt that this personal contact, combined with the distribution of gifts and promises of public works (usually subsequently fulfilled), help explain the turnaround in voting behaviour in his favour. The opposition candidates, starting late in the day and lacking access to official resources, found themselves at a considerable disadvantage.

The results of the election sent a powerful and depressing message to the parties and their leaders. Together they polled only 6.4% of the vote, compared with well over 90% throughout the 1980s. The party with the strongest vote was APRA with only 4.2%; AP won 1.7% and the Izquierda Unida 0.6%. Having failed to reach 5% of the vote, they automatically lost official recognition. However, in analysing the implications for the future of the parties, it is important to bear in mind two points. First, a large proportion of those who would normally have voted for political parties probably voted for Pérez de Cuéllar, aware that he represented the only realistic possibility of preventing Fujimori winning a second term. The 6.4% combined vote for the parties therefore probably understates their real electoral support, even though this was clearly much diminished. Secondly, Fujimori's popularity does not necessarily translate into public support for those seeking public office on his coat-tails. Thus, in elections in which the president is not himself standing, the parties could reasonably hope to fare better.

The November 1995 municipal elections may produce results more favourable to the parties than the general elections seven months earlier. This was the case, for instance, in the January 1993 municipal elections when, in spite of Fujimori's very high popularity rating, the parties were able to win the municipalities of a number of departmental capitals, taking advantage of the inability of Cambio 90-Nueva Mayoría's inability to field credible candidates or to organise itself nationally. The 1993 referendum result also suggests that the personal popularity of the president did not necessarily translate into approval of many of his government's policies, and that in certain circumstances he could be made to look vulnerable.

Looking further ahead, however, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Peru's political parties are not likely to recover, at least in the form that we have known them since 1980. While Fujimori remains president, he will probably do his best to prevent their revival.<sup>19</sup> He himself has made it clear that he will resist the temptation to try to convert Cambio 90-Nueva Mayoría into a fully-fledged party. However, as we have seen, while Fujimori has benefited from the unpopularity of the parties, his rise to power was more a consequence than a cause of their decline. Their predicament was made worse by the actions taken by Fujimori to marginalise them, but the real reasons for their decay lay elsewhere.

Whether or not party political activity begins to reassert itself during Fujimori's second government will depend on whether he manages to maintain his popularity and that of his government. As the traumas of hyperinflation and political violence begin to fade in people's minds, it may become more difficult for the government to rally public support around condemnation of the '*partidocracia*'. At the same time, if widespread social discontent begins to reassert itself it will need to express itself politically in one form or another. Furthermore, the *personalismo* of the Fujimori government raises the problem of succession and the issue of which candidate people will support if he can no longer stand.

Whether the traditional parties prove capable of rising from the ashes will depend on their ability to renew their leadership, reformulate the ways they organise themselves, and present the public with credible alternatives. There are some indications that a few of the hard lessons learnt by the parties since the late 1980s have been assimilated and that this could lead in some cases to changes in their political personality. One aspect of this *autocrítica* is the admission among many politicians that parties should seek to become more open, democratic and responsive to their grass roots. However, the extent to which this *autocrítica* translates into tangible changes in political methods remains to be seen. The parties which are probably most vulnerable are those which are most *personalista* in the sense that they are little more than vehicles of individual politicians. Those that should have greater staying power are those with stronger roots in popular political culture. For this

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<sup>19</sup> Fujimori and his supporters are capable of using the advantages at their disposal to put further difficulties in the way of the parties. One example was the passage of a law through Congress with lightning speed in May 1995 greatly to increase the numbers of signatures required by parties to achieve official recognition. The idea appears to have been to profit from their poor performance in the April elections to prevent them fielding candidates in the November 1995 municipal elections.

reason, APRA's chances of long-term survival are probably better than those of AP.

If old parties are to revive, or if new parties are successfully to emerge, they will do so reflecting the changed political and economic conditions in the country. The main forms of popular organisation within society have undergone drastic change in the decade 1985-95, with the weakening of such traditional forms as the trade union and other kinds of *gremio*. Other forms have emerged with greater force, such as neighbourhood organisations and other kinds of collective self-help. At the other end of the divide that parties are expected to bridge, the state has also undergone radical change, shorn of almost all its major public companies and many of its other functions. The ways in which state patronage affects party development will differ from the past.

It seems reasonable to believe, therefore, that, as memories of the destructive crisis of the late 1980s fade, as the public starts to look forward rather than backward, new political cleavages will begin to emerge around new issues, and that new forms of party organisation will begin to emerge. Whether these bear the names of the old parties or not, such groupings are likely to be very different creatures from their forbears.

