

# Peru at the Brink of Civil War? The Uprising of the Dispossessed

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*On 28 July 2021, Peru, with her 33 million inhabitants, celebrates 200 years of Independence. The People of Peru may have chosen this Bicentennial celebration, to bring about a drastic change to their foreign and national oligarchy-run country. In a neck-on-neck national election run-off on 6 June 2021, the socialist **Pedro Castillo**, a humble primary school professor from rural Cajamarca, a Northern Peruvian Province, rich in mining resources, but also in agricultural land, seems to be winning by a razor thin margin of less than 100,000 votes against the oligarch-supported **Keiko Fujimori**, daughter of former President Alberto Fujimori, currently in prison – or rather house arrest for “ill-health” – for corruption and crimes against humanity during his presidency 1990-2000.*

Election results have been considered as fair by the pro-US, pro-capitalist Organization of American States (OAS). The same organization that supported the post-election US-instigated coup against Evo Morales in November 2019. Either they have learned a lesson of ethics, or there were too many international observers watching over OAS’s election observations. Or, as a third option, Washington may have yet a different agenda for this part of their “backyard”.

Keiko Fujimori, before becoming a Presidential candidate she was in prison under preventive arrest, while under investigation into corruption and human rights abuse. She is currently collecting millions from her ruling-class elite supporters and spending her own ill-begotten money to turn the election result around. Ten days after the elections, there has no definite result been published yet. For Keiko becoming President is not only a question of power, it is also a question of freedom under government immunity, or back to prison, at least until the investigation into her alleged crimes is completed.

All is possible in a country where money buys everything, and may convert clearly and visibly intended cast votes either as invalid or as a vote for the opponent. This is Peru, but to be sure, election fraud happens even in the most sophisticated countries, including in Peru’s North American neighbor, who pretends to run the world.

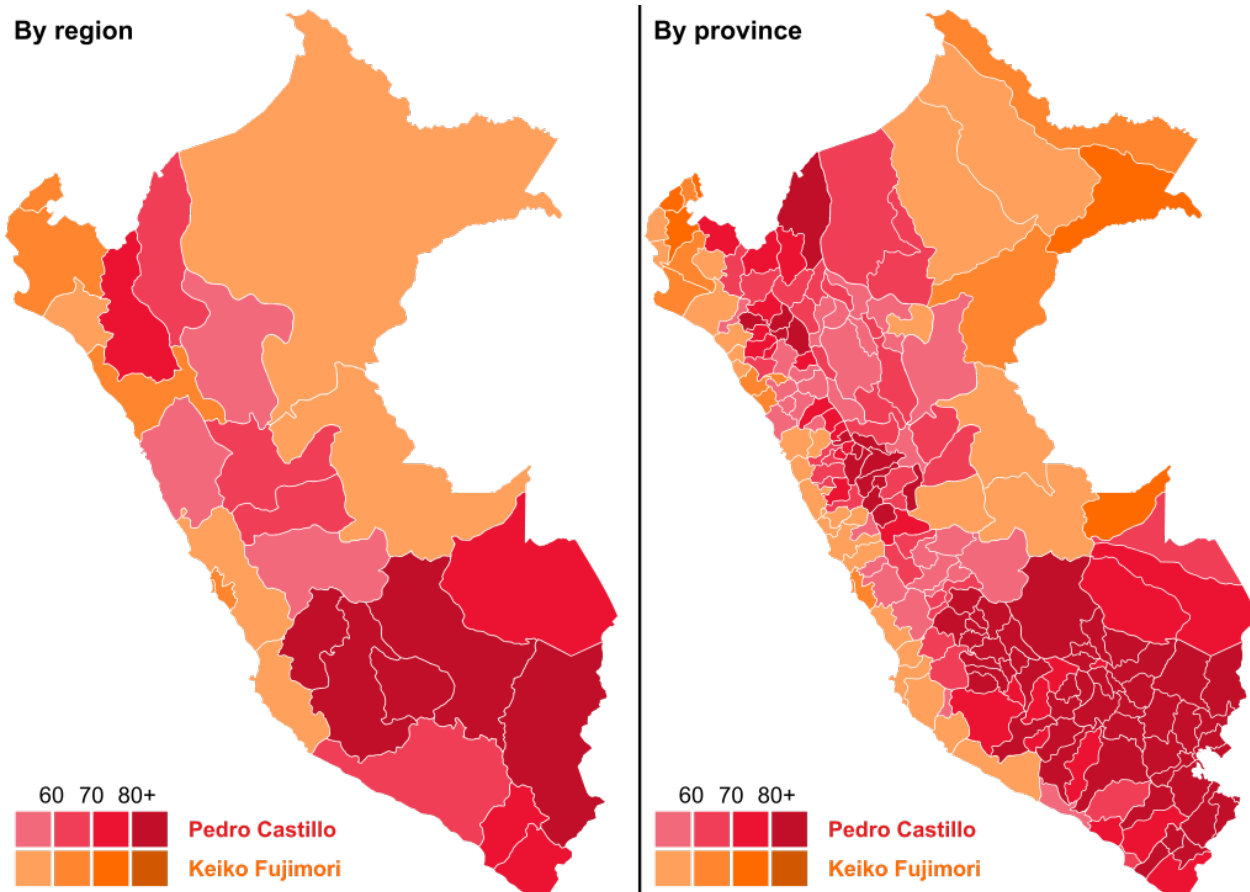
However, should this turn-around happen, Keiko Fujimori and her capitalist supporters are working so hard to achieve, the country risks a civil war. Because this is *the moment* for the vast majority of Peruvians that they have been waiting for; those Peruvians that have

always been considered as “non-people” by the oligarchy. They should now finally get their justice, get their piece of the very rich pie that is Peru. After two hundred years of an oligarchy-ruled nation, this mostly silent majority truly deserves a break. They were good enough to work, to rake in the millions from low paid, health-risky mining jobs, from low-paid agriculture work, from living lives at the margin by discrimination from their white capitalist rulers. No more. “Pedro Castillo is one of us.”

Looking back in history just blending in a few landmark moments. The 1989 Washington Consensus that not only “coincidentally” preceded the collapse of the Soviet Union, but more importantly perhaps for the Global South, it meant the rolling out in “warp speed” of neoliberal politics and economics, the enslavement of the Global South into poverty – many of them into extreme poverty. There was no escaping. The IMF, World Bank FED and all related so-called regional development banks played along.

Why is it that Peru is so different in how they treat their natives, the so-called indigenous people, the original landowners of their country, if you will, so different from, for example, neighboring Bolivia, Ecuador and even Colombia? And why do these discriminated “lesser” people react so different in Peru than they do in neighboring countries?

It is my guess that it has a lot to do with the Kingdom of Spain officially creating on 18 August 1521 (500 years ago – by coincidence?) the Kingdom of “New Spain” in what today is Peru. It later became the first one of four Viceroyalties Spain created in the Americas. Ever since Peru became the first Spanish Viceroyalty, the white descendants of Spain, later extended to the immigrants from the “Old Continent”, had the audacity to oppress and discriminate the natives.



Vote strength results of the second round of the 2021 Peruvian presidential election. (CC BY-SA 4.0)

As of this day, this is the impression I get as a foreigner having been partially working and living in Peru for almost the last four decades. Especially the Lima elite they treat the indigenous as lesser people, even though they invaded their territory, but they feel and many of them still pretend being descendants of the Royal Court of Spain. That gives them a superiority which is hard to ignore. It is also reflected in the still largely centralized education system, where Lima decides what the pluri- and multi-ethnicities cultural nation of Peru should be taught in uniformity.

Aside from the different ethnicities, Peru is divided economically and culturally into three distinct geographic areas: The Coastal Region, mostly deserts, but very fertile when irrigated, where 70% of Peru's agricultural produce is grown; the Highlands of the Andes, also called the Sierra, where people survive on patch-work agriculture on small pieces of land; and then there is the Amazon area that covers about 70% of Peru's landmass, with only about 5% of the country's population. They are the most independent people, with a culture close to Mother Earth. Their lives are still largely tied to traditional shamanism, starkly different from western values.

Education, basic infrastructure but foremost exploitation of Peru's enormously rich natural resources is all decided by Lima, by the oligarchs, the self-styled descendant of the Spanish Royals - not in spoken words, of course, but in deeds and behavior. Lima has a population of 11 million, i.e., a third of the country's population, of which about two thirds live at the edge of poverty or below. This situation may have become worse during covid-times. The lack of proper and appropriately decentralized education, has left the original owners of Peru, the indigenous people, including a high proportion of ethnic mixtures, at a stark and decisive disadvantage.

This is the ethnic composition of Peru: Amerindians (or purely indigenous people) account for 45 % of the population; 37 % is mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white), 15 percent is white, and 3 percent is black, Japanese, Chinese and other. See [this](#).

In other words, 85% of the population is ruled by a white immigrant minority. It is high time that Peru gets an indigenous president who pays attention to the real needs and interests of the majority of the Peruvian population. This time, it seems, after more than 500 hundred years of a lopsided rule, the 85% of the population will demand a government of more equilibrium. Pedro Castillo may be their man.

Here some history to connect the dots up to June 2021 and to help understand what is happening now in Peru. Extreme social injustice and differences between the majority peasant society and a small ruling elite, brought about the revolutionary "Shining Path" in 1980, led by Abimael Guzmán, or by his "nom de guerre", Chairman Gonzalo. He was a professor of philosophy strongly influenced by the teachings of Marxism and Maoism. He developed an armed struggle, what became to be known as the "Shining Path" - Spanish, "Sendero Luminoso" - for the empowerment of the neglected and disadvantaged indigenous people. Acts of terrorism abounded throughout the 1980's, also and largely to the detriment to the peasant population.

The Shining Path emerged as the country had just held its first free elections after a 12-year military dictatorship, first by Juan Francisco Velasco Alvarado (1968 - 1975), pursuing what the Peruvians called a Maoist socialism. Velasco organized a disastrous totally unprepared land reform, and nationalized most foreign investments, creating massive unemployment

and perpetuating poverty. Towards the mid-1970s, Velasco was very sick with cancer and appointed on 29 August 1975 his Prime Minister, Francisco Morales Bermúdez, as his successor. Bermúdez began the second phase of the Peruvian armed Revolution, promising a transit to a civilian government.

However, Bermudez soon became an extreme right-wing military dictator, pursuing a policy of *leftist cleansing*. He kept his promise, though, and led Peru to democratic elections in 1980, when Fernando Belaúnde Terry was elected, the very Belaúnde, who was deposed as president in the 1968 Velasco military coup.

There was no doubt, that a clear pattern of US-influenced brutal right-wing military dictatorships became omnipresent throughout Latin America, with General Jorge Rafael Videla in Argentina (1976-1981); General Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973 to 1981); Alfredo Stroessner of Paraguay (1954 - 1989); General Juan María Bordaberry of Uruguay (1973 - 1985); the Brazilian military dictatorship of various successive military leaders (1964 - 1985). The Bolivian history of successive military dictatorships (1964 - 1982), also fit the pattern of the epoch.

The South American US-supported military dictatorships, prompted the creation of the Shining Path in Peru, loosely following the objectives of the Uruguayan Tupamaro guerilla organization, named for Túpac Amaru II, the leader of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century revolt against Spanish rule in Peru.

The Shining Path was open and transparent about its willingness to inflict death and the most extreme forms of cruelty as tools to achieve its goal, the total annihilation of existing political structures.

“We are a rising torrent at which they will launch fire, stones and mud; but our power is great. We turn everything into our fire, the black fire will become red, and red is the light.” *Abimael Guzmán*

Guzman was caught in 1992 and convicted to life imprisonment.

In 1990, Alberto Fujimori, a little-known Rector of and professor at the Agrarian State University of Lima, with the support of Washington, became President, defeating Nobel Prize-winner adversary Mario Vargas Llosa, in a landslide victory of 62.4% against 37.6%. Fujimori imposed neoliberalism in Peru from the get-go of his presidency in 1990. He followed closely the mandates of the IMF and the World Bank. His other main objective was to finish with the Shining Path.

Other than stopping terrorism for humanitarian reasons, there were a myriad of commercial and economic interests at stake. For example, the entire mining industry was largely in control of foreign corporations. As soon as elected, Fujimori was “given” a top CIA „advisor“, *Vladimiro Lenin Ilich Montesinos*. The CIA agent soon called the shots for all affairs of international importance. There was little left for Fujimori to decide, let alone for the Peruvian Parliament.

In 1992 Fujimori instigated an auto-coup, with Washington’s tacit consent, dissolving Parliament and becoming the sole ruler, who also changed the Constitution allowing him to be “reelected” for another 5 years, until 2000, when he fled the country returning to his “native” Japan. Many analysts say he was actually born in Japan and was lying having been

born in Peru, so he could ascend to the presidency. Just for the record, his registered birthday 28 July – Peru’s Independent Day – is kind of suspicious. Fujimori was accused of corruption, abuse of power and human rights violations.

During a visit to Chile in 2005, Fujimori was arrested and eventually extradited to Peru where he was convicted in 2009 to 25 years in prison for corruption, human right abuses and for his role in killings and kidnappings by the *Grupo Colian Death Squad* during his government’s battle against the *Senderos Lumiosos* in the 1990s.

During the two decades of Shining Path, some 69,000 people, mostly Peruvian peasants died or disappeared. According to the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (PTRC), at last as many people died at the hands of the Fujimory military commandos, as were killed by the Shining Path. The PTRC is also called *Hatun Willakuy*, a Quechuan expression meaning *the great story*, signifying the enormity of the events recounted. Before the commission, Peru had never conducted such a comprehensive examination of violence, abuse of power, or injustice. See [this](#).

To this day father Fujimori is in prison – or under house arrest for his alleged ill-health – while his daughter Keiko Fujimori was largely running Congress with a majority of her Party “Popular Force” – *Fuerza Popular*. It is not exaggerated to claim that during the past three decades *Fujimorismo* and the APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance – a left-turned-right party) largely ran the country with crime and corruption, selling off the country’s riches to international corporatism, mainly in the US – and for the benefit of Peruvian oligarchs, but leaving the large majority of Peruvians behind.

Peru has a wealth of mineral resources. Copper, iron, lead, zinc, bismuth, phosphates, and manganese exist in great quantities of high-yield ores. Gold and silver are found extensively, as are other rare metals, and petroleum fields are located along the far north coast and the northeastern part of Amazonia.

Peru’s GDP of US\$ 270 billion (World Bank – 2019) is misleading, as a great proportion is generated by mostly foreign majority holding extractive industries, manufacturing and ever-increasingly also agriculture, leaving little in the country which is why the poverty level has hardly changed over the last 30 years. While in the first decade of 2000 Peru had a phenomenal GDP growth, between 5% and 7% annually – about two thirds went to 20% of the population and the rest was trickling down to the other 80%, with the bottom 10% to 20% getting next to nothing.

The poverty rate after covid encompasses at least two thirds of the Peruvian population, with up to 50% under extreme poverty. Exact figures are not available. Those listed by the World Bank indicating a 27% poverty rate are simply fake. In addition, the informal sector in Peru amounts to at least 70%. While it is informality that keeps Peru somewhat going, it is also the informal sector that has plunged masses of people into poverty.

Candidate Pedro Castillo, if finally declared the winner, has a challenging job ahead. He is aligned with a seasoned and well-experienced and nationally respected politician, socialist Veronica Mendoza from Cusco. She also identified the current economic advisor for Mr. Castillo, Pedro Francke, who has a center-left reputation.

Mr. Francke served as director of the Cooperation Fund for Social Development (FONCODES), a Peruvian government -controlled social services and small investments

institution, promoting small and medium size enterprises and creating jobs. He also had several roles at the Peruvian Central Bank and worked as an economist at the World Bank.

In a political statement, Francke separated a potential Castillo presidency from what he called Chavez socialism of currency control, nationalizations and price controls. In fact, this is an easy and purely partisan statement, because the two economies are so fundamentally different that there is simply no comparison. But the intent is to tranquilize a worried and right-wing media indoctrinated populace. The right-wing, mostly *El Comercio* and affiliated media dominated news outlets, control about 90% of Peruvian media.

Mr. Francke told Reuters, “Our idea is not to have massive interventionism in the economy”, indicating that Castillo would respect market economy. Francke also said that a Castillo Government would not proceed with nationalization and expropriation at all. They may, however, renegotiate some of the corporate profit-sharing. Having experienced the Velasco Government in the 1970s, this is one of the major worries of more senior Peruvians, who lived through the Velasco years.

Pedro Francke also repeated what Castillo said in his campaign speeches, that he would encourage local over foreign investments, a valid assertion, because at present the Peruvian economy is to about 70% dollarized, meaning that local banks finance themselves largely by Wall Street, while locally earned money is invested abroad rather than at home. Hopefully Castillo will be able to muster the necessary trust to bring about local investments with local money. If so, this would be among the healthiest economic moves for Peru – moves towards fiscal autonomy and monetary sovereignty.

At the time of this writing, 10 days after the ballot, the vote recounts and quarrels over voter fraud is growing, creating a chaotic ambiance, one that becomes increasingly volatile. We can just hope that the Peruvian Election Commission applies fair rules and is able to avoid civil unrest.

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