

# Peruvian Party Politics: Still some Signs of Life?<sup>1</sup>

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## Resumen

A partir de la década de 1980, el Perú, a diferencia de otros países de América Latina, ha sufrido un fuerte deterioro en sus fuerzas electorales, sobre todo en la organización y confianza que inspiran sus partidos políticos. No obstante, desde la época de Fujimori cuando los partidos sufrieron un ataque sistemático, lograron restablecer un espacio en la actividad electoral recuperando la actividad partidaria. La Ley de los Partidos Políticos del año 2003 tuvo la finalidad de fortalecer un sistema partidario pluralista; sin embargo, sus resultados fueron decepcionantes. En el año 2006 se realizaron tres rondas electorales que contribuyeron muy poco a renovar la confianza entre los votantes. Los partidos políticos cuentan con una estructura vertical, sin raíces profundas en la sociedad. No obstante, las elecciones municipales y regionales de noviembre de 2006 sugirieron la emergencia de nuevas fuerzas a nivel meso – de la política, junto con los movimientos sociales. El estudio de la política peruana requiere su propia descentralización.

Palabras clave: partidos políticos, procesos electorales.  
Códigos JEL: D72.

## Abstract

More than most Latin American countries in recent times, Peru has seen party voting strength, organisation and loyalties eroded. Since the Fujimori period, however – when parties found themselves under systematic attack – the return to more normal electoral activity has opened up a space for parties to re-emerge. The 2003 Law on Political Parties was designed to strengthen a

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pluralistic party system. However, the results proved disappointing. Three rounds of elections in 2006 did little to restore voter confidence in Peru's major parties; these remain 'top-down' affairs with only shallow roots in society. However, the November 2006 local elections suggested that new forces may be emerging at the meso- level of politics in tandem with social movements. Study of Peruvian politics requires its own decentralisation.

Keywords: party politics, elections.

JEL codes: D72.

## INTRODUCTION

Party identities and loyalties have been in decline in most countries of Latin America over the last quarter century, and the reasons for this have been closely studied in the academic literature, along with the implications this has for the development of more democratic and participative systems of government. In few countries has this demise been more evident than in Peru. Twelve years ago, I wrote a paper which asked whether Peru's then incipient party system had been effectively truncated (Crabtree 1995). However, this trend towards atrophy has not necessarily been a one-way street. The experience of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) in the 1980s and 1990s went contrary to the trends observable elsewhere in the region. More recently, the emergence of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) in Bolivia also suggests that new party (or quasi-party) formations can emerge from the ashes of the traditional party system in ways that few would have predicted even a few years before.

The purpose of this paper is to enquire into the institutional conditions that encourage party formation (or deformation) and the extent to which 'ordinary democratic practice' (meaning the holding of free, fair and regular elections) can bring with it the strengthening of party systems. The Peruvian case provides a particularly challenging one with respect to this notion. The ending of the Fujimori government and all the obstacles this placed in the way of party development brought with it a return to ordinary democratic practice, with elections – national, regional and local – held variously in 2001, 2002 and 2006. Furthermore, the 2003 Law of Political Parties involved a conscious attempt to craft a new set of rules that set out to strengthen the system by providing incentives to build more robust political parties and enhance their credibility. Three rounds of elections in 2006 – congressional and the first round presidential elections in April, the second round of presidential elections in June, followed by municipal, provincial and district elections in November -- provide a useful litmus test of the state of the party system and its prospects for the future.

The paper begins with a brief characterisation of the state of Peruvian party politics at the end of the 20th century, before it moves on to look at the aims, features and ostensible limitations of the 2003 legislation. The paper then turns to an examination of the 2006 elections and what they tell us about the state of the party system and individual parties within it. How did the more traditional parties fare? What new sorts of party identities emerged to challenge them? And how sustainable are these likely to prove? One of the conclusions reached is that Peruvian politics can no longer be regarded as being a single system but more an agglomeration of locally-based systems. So what chances are there of a revival of a more bottom-up style of politics breathing some new life into the political

system as a whole, possibly along lines being developed over the last few years in neighbouring Bolivia? The answers to these questions are, of course, extremely tentative, not least since the analysis of localised politics is increasingly important in understanding the politics of the country as a whole. The study of Peruvian politics itself requires decentralisation, and there is much work to be done in this respect.

## 1. THE FUJIMORI LEGACY

The Fujimori government famously sought to ostracise political parties and to drain the pool in which their leaders swam. The 1992 *autogolpe* and the subsequent rewriting of the constitution in the year that followed helped centralise political power in the hands of the presidency. Fujimori's discourse railed against the *partidocracia*. His system of 'direct democracy' deliberately sought to marginalise the parties as mechanisms of political mediation, making the office of the presidency the key institution in bridging the divide between the state and society. His own personal popularity, coupled with his highly effective brand of clientelistic politics, sought to create a new type of political system that, while respecting democratic formalities, was fundamentally authoritarian in orientation<sup>2</sup>. Changes both in the nature of the state – the privatisation of public functions – and in society – the breakdown of collective identities -- greatly helped in this endeavour. In creating this top-down system, Fujimori picked up on the long tradition of authoritarian populism that stretched back to the early years of the 20th century.

However, as many authors have observed, the *fujimorato* was as much (if not more) a product of the weakness of representative democracy in Peru and of the political parties as it was the author of their demise. The marginalisation of mass-based political parties – notably APRA – from the 1930s onwards meant that an inclusive party system as such failed to develop. The army and the social elite effectively controlled the terms on which mass politics were conducted, and while the emergence of reformist parties like Fernando Belaunde's Acción Popular (AP) helped create channels for public participation, these were neither very inclusive nor very durable. The military coup in 1968 showed clearly the limited appeal of party politics and the pull of authoritarian populism.

The emergence of a party system of sorts in the 1980s attracted attention, not least because it was so novel in the Peruvian setting. Although regular elections encouraged party formation with new actors coming to the fore, it is still debateable the extent to which

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2. See Levitzky and Way (2002), who argue that it is inappropriate to call the Fujimori government a 'democracy' (even one with an adjective). They adopt the term 'competitive authoritarianism'.

this became solidified and properly embedded in society. Even groupings like the United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU), in which member parties enjoyed some close organisational ties to civil society organisations, operated essentially on a top-down logic of mobilisation. The political and economic instabilities of the 1980s – especially as the decade came to a close and Peru confronted problems of hyperinflation and insurgency – provided a particularly testing time for the development of bottom-up representative institutions; but in retrospect the speed at which party identities collapsed in the 1990s suggested that these were not nearly so socially embedded as they had seemed to many at the time. More detailed research on the limitations of party penetration into the social fabric at this time would be useful, particularly at the 'meso' level of provincial and departmental politics. While APRA retained some of its once legendary tight organisational discipline, it was more of an 'apparatus' than providing a channel for mass political participation, particularly in those parts of the country (like Lima and the south) where its presence in society had never been strong.<sup>3</sup> With some important exceptions, the grass-roots of the IU were never properly structured, and the leadership of the main parties involved was distinctly *limeño*. On the right, AP remained a largely inorganic party with Belaunde, its founder, providing the main source of cohesion, and with the Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC) enjoying little by way of cohesive support beyond the *limeño* middle and upper classes.

The weakness of this incipient party system was made manifest by the turmoil of the late 1980s, which shook Peruvian political life to its foundations (Morón and Sanborn, 2004). Divided, undermined by political violence and lacking convincing responses to the crisis, the IU fell apart. In the 1990 elections, AP and the PPC subsumed themselves to the unsuccessful 'libertarian' project of Mario Vargas Llosa, losing much of their identity in the process. And APRA, battered by its negative experience in government, found that the appeal it had evoked in 1985 was much reduced; the fact that it still polled nearly a quarter of total valid vote in the 1990 elections was perhaps remarkable. The great beneficiary of the political vacuum that the crisis had generated was, of course, Alberto Fujimori, the quintessential outsider who proved so capable when it came to profiting from the poor performance of the traditional parties. The results of the 1995 presidential elections were eloquent testimony to the lack of presence of the traditional parties: APRA polled 4%, the PPC (in alliance with others) 2.2%, AP 1.6% and the IU just 0.6%. The decline in the standing of the traditional parties went hand-in-hand with the emergence of new, independent groupings, highly personalist, organisationally inchoate and lacking in either ideological content or any real roots in society.

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3. For the history of APRA in the 1980s, as well as that of other parties, see Crabtree (2005) and Graham (1992).

## 2. THE LAW OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The collapse of the Fujimori regime at the end of 2000, following the flawed presidential elections earlier that year, and the convening of fresh elections for president and Congress in April 2001, brought about a determined effort to introduce institutional reforms to restore the standing and credibility of the party system.<sup>4</sup> The weakness of representative institutions was widely held responsible for the excesses of the Fujimori decade. Under the aegis of the National Accord (*Acuerdo Nacional*), in which political parties and other institutions were present, this drive to improve the workings of the party system enjoyed cross-bench support.<sup>5</sup> Broadly speaking, the 2003 Law of Political Parties – which passed Congress with unusual unanimity – sought to fulfil two main objectives: to strengthen the party system by reducing the degree of fragmentation within Congress; and to oblige parties to adopt transparent and democratic processes in conducting their own affairs, especially in electing their candidates and making public their sources of income. The Law of Political Parties, the first legislation of its kind in Peru, was therefore seen by many as a key step towards building a more solid, democratic and responsible party system (Schmidt 2006).

The aim of reducing the number of parties involved in electoral activities was an implicit goal of those who designed the new law, one which commended itself to the larger parties already represented in Congress (Tanaka 2004). In order to operate within the electoral system, parties would have to show that they had a solid institutional base and a genuine presence in society. To this end, they would need to satisfy the electoral authorities (the *Jurado Nacional de Elecciones*, JNE) that they are legally constituted entities, are representative (submitting the signatures of no less than 1% of those who had voted in previous elections), and have a structure of local committees in no less than a third (193) of all the provinces in the country. In theory, this constituted a formidable obstacle to the registration of smaller, less institutionalised parties which, it was assumed, would find it hard to meet these ostensibly exacting requirements. As such it would be a powerful defence against the return to the style of politics that typified the Fujimori decade.

The second main objective was to oblige political parties to adopt minimum standards of internal democracy and to force upon them a degree of transparency with respect to the murky world of party funding. In Peru, as in many other countries of Latin America,

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4. For a detailed account of the party system in recent years and a physiognomy of the parties themselves, see Carlos Meléndez (2007). For an analysis of the negative impact of these reforms on party performance, see Alberto Vergara (2007).

5. The proposal also had the backing of local NGOs, like *Transparencia*, and international organisations like Stockholm-based *International IDEA*.

political parties had long tended to be top-down, unaccountable structures in which party members (if these actually existed as such) exercised little influence over party leadership. The new law, it was hoped, would change all this by encouraging internal democracy and rendering leaders more accountable to the rank and file. It set out a number of requirements, including the establishment in each party of an office responsible for holding internal elections for authorities and candidates, both centrally and at the local level. It offered to provide help and supervision by the electoral authorities – in this case the Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) – and specified the frequency at which party elections should be held.

The law also laid down conditions under which parties could receive public and private funding, both for their own running expenses and to cover the costs of electoral activity. Political parties had never before been required by law to reveal the sources of their funding, always an opaque area. The new law outlawed some types of party funding (e.g. foreign contributions). Public funding was to be made available for electoral propaganda on a pro rata basis according to previous performance, though the availability of public money to pay for ordinary current spending was postponed until after the 2006 elections. So far as private funding was concerned, the new law imposed rules about the identification of donors and the maximum permitted contributions they could make. It also set rules with regard to penalties for infraction.

The new law therefore sought to regulate political and electoral activity in new ways, premised on the centrality of party politics to the workings of democracy. But even before the 2006 elections, its efficacy was already being called into question (Schmidt 2007). It conspicuously failed in its aim – arguably the easier objective to achieve -- of reducing the number of political parties that registered for the 2006 presidential and congressional elections. For the presidential elections, no less than 29 parties registered to take part (the great majority barely known entities) and of these 20 actually did so (the highest number since the 1980 elections). The JNE office responsible for extending recognition did remarkably little to check the real identities of those who signed forms supporting the registration of particular parties. Nor, it seemed, did it check out the addresses and other data on the existence of local committees in the requisite one-third of the country's provinces. Allegations were made in the press about addresses being disused buildings, construction sites and parking lots. In one case the address of a local party branch turned out to be that of a circus, an irony not lost on those who publicised the fact.

Although the 2003 law created new norms on internal elections and funding, the extent to which these would actually operate in practice would depend greatly on the extent to

which they are actively enforced. Not only have the electoral authorities – notably the JNE – been criticised for their lax enforcement of the new requirements, but these institutions lack the machinery and budgets for this to happen. There have been some attempts to build administrative capacities, but the three organisations with responsibility for overseeing elections – the JNE, the ONPE and the Registro Nacional de Identificación y Estado Civil (RENIEC) – are still highly centralised in the way they operate. Moreover, the Law of Political Parties applies only to national parties, not local ones. This means that an important area – arguably an increasingly important one – of political activity remains largely unregulated (Vergara 2007). Although restricting access at the national level while allowing free access at the local level could be interpreted as having beneficial effects, the law effectively blocked the participation of regional parties in national elections.

Nor did the Law do much to encourage party discipline by clamping down on *transfuguismo*, the tendency of politicians to hop from one party label to another.<sup>6</sup> This, the emergence of the so-called 'combi' party, had been a salient feature of Peruvian politics in the 1990s and one which helped erode the distinctiveness of party labels. This could have been addressed, for example, by forcing those resigning the party whip to resign their seats. It could also be argued that the objective of restricting access to the electoral arena was achievable without the provisions of a Law of Political Parties, simply through the so-called *valla*, the mechanism which withdraws legal recognition to those parties which fail to achieve a certain given percentage of the vote in national elections.

Finally, perhaps too much emphasis was placed on narrowly conceived institutional legal compliance in a country where institutionality has traditionally counted for little and the dominant cultural trait is one of non-compliance with formal legal requirements. Creating new legal regulations possibly just stimulates new (albeit different and perhaps more subtle) forms of evasion. The architects of the new system of party rules could be criticised for putting too much faith in essentially technocratic devices and failing to grasp the need to understand better the socio-political context in which these were supposed to operate.

### 3. LESSONS FROM THE 2006 ELECTIONS

The holding of three separate rounds of elections in a single year, as we have suggested, provides an important test of the controls introduced to regulate party activity and the extent to which these strengthened the party system and thereby provided more effective

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6. Lewis Taylor (2005) argues that the opportunism of congressmen, reflecting the atomisation of politics, reinforces clientelistic-type relations and does much to discredit the political class.



channels for political communication and representation. This section seeks to examine the election results in view of these aims. The first electoral contest was the first round of presidential elections, held on April 4, 2006 concurrently with elections to Congress and the Andean Parliament; the second was the second round of presidential elections on June 4; and the third was the November 19 election for regional presidents and *consejales*, as well as for their counterparts at provincial and district levels.

Perhaps the most obvious lesson from these elections was to underline the very stark cleavage in Peruvian politics, made clear five years earlier in 2001, between the political preferences of the more urbanised and prosperous coastal area of the country and the more rural and poverty-stricken hinterland. In 2001, voters had predominantly opted for two party options – APRA and Unidad Nacional (an alliance between the PPC and some other less structured groupings) – in the coastal region. The same pattern repeated itself in both rounds of presidential elections in 2006.<sup>7</sup> The vote for Alejandro Toledo and his party Peru Posible (PP) in 2001 was concentrated in many of the same regions of the country where people opted for Ollanta Humala five years later. Indeed, the 2006 elections revealed the abject failure of Toledo's PP to build any genuine organisational presence within society, and the previously ruling party was all but wiped from the political map. Like Toledo, Humala's support was highest in those areas where the traditional parties lacked real presence. These also tended to be areas where poverty levels were highest and where economic growth rates in the previous five years had been weakest. They were therefore areas which had benefited least from Peru's engagement with globalisation. A study on political attitudes in these less developed parts of Peru, carried out in 2005 and published in early 2006 by the UNDP, revealed the depth of the antipathy felt towards the traditional parties and the Lima-based 'political class' as a whole (UNDP 2006). The Humala phenomenon was a powerful statement of those feelings of antipathy and alienation.

The results of the regional and municipal election in November 2006 also reflect the strong aversion to the more institutionalised parties in the interior of the country, as well as Humala's signal failure to build on the political momentum he had achieved earlier in the year (Ballón 2006). Like so many other parties, Humala's Unión por el Perú-Partido Nacionalista Peruano (UPP-PNP) lacked any real local presence. APRA, which had benefited in the 2002 local elections from Toledo's unpopularity, also saw its regional presence drastically reduced. Occupying the space opened up by the poor performance of APRA and the UPP-PNP, there emerged an array of left-of-centre local parties. Elected largely on regional tickets, these encouraged some on the left to think that they betokened a realignment

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7. For an analysis of *humalismo* and the 2006 election results, see Cameron (2007).

that would give political expression to increasingly restive social movements of one kind or another.<sup>8</sup> Of the 25 regional presidents elected in 2006, eleven had a past in the various different parties which had made up the Izquierda Unida in the 1980s. It remains to be seen whether this alignment proves durable and whether these local politicians will be able to extend their support base beyond their own immediate constituencies. In the past, local politics have tended to be fairly volatile and unpredictable, and politicians from the regions have encountered great difficulty in establishing themselves as important actors at the national level. However, in some cases, local politicians with substantial grass-roots support have begun to construct local organisations based on repeated bids for power. This may, in time, provide the starting point for a projection into national politics. What is important for party politics is the creation of a 'meso' level organisation that can provide local social movements with a political voice.

So, what of the state of Peru's main parties? It has often been pointed out that APRA is Peru's only durable mass-based party. Its electoral history has proved volatile since it first launched itself in the national elections of 1931. Historically, the party has been a well-organised, disciplined force with a strong hierarchical structure. However the ability of party militants to build wider circles of sympathy and support has varied considerably over time. The pinnacle of that support was achieved with the election in 1985 of Alan García (who successfully took on the leadership left after internal disputes arising after the death in 1979 of Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre), an election which gave the party undisputed control over government for the first time in its history. Probably the nadir of that support was the election of 2000 when, with the opposition broadly backing Toledo as the most viable anti-Fujimori candidate, APRA garnered a mere 1.1% of the vote. However, the party quickly recovered its poise the following year when, with García as its presidential candidate, APRA scored 25.8% of the vote in the first round (narrowly beating Unidad Nacional (UN) into third place) and 46.9% in the second round. With 28 seats in the 120-seat Congress, it became the main party of opposition. Five years later, the party won 24.3% in the first round (again narrowly beating UN into third place) and achieved 52.6% in the second. It won 36 seats in the new Congress.

On the face of it, it would seem that APRA had managed to maintain its position as a leading political party, commanding the support of around a quarter of the electorate. With its support concentrated mainly in the more developed and prosperous coastal departments, the consistency of the APRA vote between the first rounds in 2001 and 2006 is striking. However, much appears to have depended on the figure of Alan García whose

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8. Interviews with Susana Villarán, Javier Diez Canseco and Eduardo Ballón in December 2006.

return to Peru from exile at the beginning of 2001 did much to reverse his party's previously dismal electoral performance. The organisational weakness of APRA during his absence for most of the *fujimorato* was clear even in those areas of the country where Aprista loyalties were historically strongest.<sup>9</sup> Although the party provides a useful electoral machine, it has never been a responsive party that articulates grass-roots opinion or in which the rank and file exercised any control over the leadership. Rather, the opposite has been the case; from its earliest days and born out of a culture of repression and semi-clandestinity, the leadership has demanded loyalty and discipline, making clear its refusal to tolerate criticism or dissidence.

This seems as true today as ever, notwithstanding APRA's support for the Law on Political Parties. García appears to hold his party in disdain, making little pretence of any willingness to heed the wishes of the grass roots. During his first administration, and also since taking office for the second time, he has frequently overridden party interests, consulting it only when absolutely necessary. The weakness of party organisation became patently obvious in the November 2006 regional elections when, in striking contrast to 2002 (when APRA won the presidencies of twelve of the 25 regions), only two APRA candidates were elected president (in La Libertad and Piura). Even more poignant was the defeat of the Aprista candidate for mayor of Trujillo. This was partly due to the party leadership seeking to impose a candidate who lacked strong grass-roots sympathies, but it was also the consequence of long-term decline in party organisation in this traditionally Aprista bastion. It was indicative of a weakening of the party's loyalties more broadly.

To the right of the political spectrum, Peru's other well-established party, Acción Popular (AP) seemed to have suffered worse than APRA. The death of Fernando Belaunde in 2002 deprived it of its main figurehead. Then the death of Valentín Paniagua, its presidential candidate in 2006 and briefly president between 2000 and 2001, removed Belaunde's most credible successor from the scene. Ailing physically in the first round of presidential polling, Paniagua achieved only just over 5% of the vote.

Part of the ideological space left by Belaunde was occupied by the PPC, AP's centre-right ally during Belaunde's second administration (1980-85). Under the leadership of Lourdes Flores, the PPC was arguably more successful than AP in doing what APRA had managed to achieve in the 1980s by outliving the demise of its founding figure.

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9. Interviews conducted with various APRA militants in Trujillo in 1994 showed how weak the party's organisation and appeal had become at this time in its electoral heartland.

Flores contested the presidency first in 2001, winning a respectable 24.3% of the vote for the UN ticket. However, her ability to build on this in the 2006 elections proved illusory. Having started the 2006 campaign well in the lead, she ended up in third place with 23.8% of the vote. Much of this support came from the capital city where she entered into an alliance with the popular mayor, Luis Castañeda Lossio. This helped offset a sharp decline in UN's performance in the interior of the country. Historically, the PPC has failed to build much of a presence outside Lima except where it has managed to forge alliances with credible local politicians. Its performance in 2001 was unusually good in this respect. The PPC's Lima-centricity was highlighted even more clearly in the November 2006 municipal elections in which the UN, with Castañeda Lossio as its mayoral candidate in Lima, swept the board in the capital. However, the UN vote owed more to Castañeda than it did to the PPC, especially in low-income neighbourhoods. The party itself only won in a handful of better-off municipalities in Lima; elsewhere the winning candidates were *invitados*, not militants. Beyond the confines of the capital, UN only presented lists in eight of the 25 regional contests and failed to make headway in any of these. Then, no sooner had the García government taken office than the new president adroitly sought to co-opt a number of leading figures of the PPC and steel its ideological clothes by adopting the liberalising economic agenda with which it was widely associated. With Flores poorly placed to develop a space of her own, Castañeda seemed better placed to inherit the leadership of the right.

Of all the parties and coalitions which had had influence in the 1980s, the 2006 elections appeared particularly disastrous for the traditional left. Divided into three separate factions, the main ex-parties of the Izquierda Unida managed to poll a paltry 3% of the vote between them. Many erstwhile leftwingers opted instead to jump on the ideologically ambiguous Humala bandwagon which proved to have far more pulling power than the old parties of the left. Of these probably the Maoist-inspired Patria Roja (renamed the Movimiento Democrático de Izquierda, MDI) retained the most solid organisational base, taking full advantage of its control of the national teachers' union, SUTEP. Other than SUTEP, the organisational linkages between the old left and the country's social movements were much debilitated. However, the November elections showed that Humala had signally failed to provide leadership to the majority of voters who had opted for him in the first round seven months earlier, winning in only one region (Cusco). The collapse in the *humalista* vote in the regional elections showed that there was still space for left-wing politics, especially when attuned to local realities and responsive to the demands of social movements. In a number of cases, left-wing victories were the product of a sustained build-up in local grass-roots organisation. Still, they did not represent anything approaching a unified force. Nor was there any guarantee of their continuity. Whether they would

amount to more than the sum of their parts would depend on their capacity to build on their political capabilities at the 'meso' level and forge common agendas and alliances with other local administrations over such issues as decentralisation, demands for improved infrastructure or disputes with local extractive industries. The García government was, in principle, well-placed to indulge in tactics of 'divide and rule' privileging relations between the central government and some regional administrations (the more moderate) at the expense of others (the more radical). But this ability would itself depend on the government's capacity to forestall the likely erosion of its popularity and its standing in the country.<sup>10</sup>

The chances of the left taking advantage of the geographical cleavage and building alliances between social movements behind a political project, akin to that of the MAS in Bolivia, seem fairly remote in Peru where regions have never become sufficiently powerful to impose terms on the centralised state or capable of developing broad alliances on common issues. But, at the time of writing, there were signs that social movements of different sorts in the regions – trade union, peasant organisations and local defence fronts -- were adopting an increasingly assertive posture in their demands on the government, in many cases leading to overt confrontation. In several instances, they involved those elected the previous year as regional presidents or local mayors, keen to enhance their status as political intermediaries between civil society and the state. By doing so, they were potentially able to open up the space – historically lacking in Peru – for bottom-up representation to take place. At the same time there were signs of collaboration between the new regional administrations around some common issues. Still, movement in the direction of greater popular participation in politics at the local level and the building of institutions to channel it remained at a very incipient stage, with wide differences between one locality and another. It is a case, therefore, of 'watch this space'.

## CONCLUSIONS

The preceding discussion suggests that the role of institutional reform, in this case the Law on Political Parties, may have a significant impact on political behaviour, but that it is seldom determinant. This is particularly true of countries, like Peru, whose institutional structures are poorly developed and tend to command scant respect. Not only does the effect of legislation depend on the capacity to regulate and impose penalties for deviance, but legal norms have to be finely attuned to the political realities they seek to influence. The Law on Political Parties sought to create a more stable and stronger party system,

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10. García's personal popularity fell substantially during 2007. A Datum poll in November 2007 put his approval rating at 28%, with a full 69% registering disapproval.

based on stimulating greater internal democracy and openness and inspiring trust among voters. Although it may have been a move in the right direction, it has seemingly had only a limited effect in bringing about the substantial or lasting changes that those most intimately involved in its drafting had hoped to engineer. Peru's parties remain top-down entities with little real internal democracy, creations whose presence in society – at least in many parts of the country – is either superficial or virtually non-existent. They remain objects of widespread public scorn and their activities are not much more noticeably transparent than before. They are, effectively, electoral machines designed to turn out the vote for different formulae on a periodic basis; they still do not channel 'bottom-up' demands in any significant way.

The problem is perhaps more one of history and political culture than the lack of institutional incentives. Peru has never had a strong party system, and the brief appearance in the 1980s of what seemed to be one in the making was just that: brief. Political parties became easy targets for those like Alberto Fujimori, whose popularity was clearly correlated to his rejection of the traditional parties. Their failure to act as representative institutions – their 'bottom-up' functions – were matched by their failure to deal with the grave problems that afflicted Peru in the late 1980s. The hopes of those who saw in the fall of Fujimori the chance to build a more effective and credible party system were never properly fulfilled. It may be the case that four years is insufficient time to judge the merits of the Law on Political Parties, but the results of the 2006 elections do not give the impression that the traditional parties had been transformed or had gained a new lease of life as a consequence. Indeed, the regional and local elections exposed yet again the unpopularity of traditional political parties across much of Peru.<sup>11</sup>

So under what conditions could a more vibrant, 'bottom-up' party system take root? Here the November 2006 local elections suggest that, in some regions at least, there was emergent organisation taking place at the 'meso' level of politics, providing something of an organic linkage between social movements and the state. Whether these will continue to flourish will depend heavily on the way in which these incipient regional party formations relate to the centralised state in Lima. Interestingly and perhaps significantly, these were formations that were not subject to the regulation imposed under the Law of Political Parties. There were also signs that social movements – of one kind or another – were becoming less

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11. The 2007 *Latinobarómetro* (2007) provided further evidence (if this were needed) of the fact that distrust of democratic institutions was higher than in almost all Latin American countries. To the question "how satisfied" people are with the way democracy works in Peru, Peru came second to bottom of 18 Latin American countries in 2007 (higher only than Paraguay), with less than 20% expressing satisfaction.

quiescent than they had been since the 1980s. But it is important to stress here the extent of fragmentation and the apparent absence of unifying rallying calls that would help create bridges between separate regional movements and project them politically on the national stage. The conclusions drawn here are therefore highly tentative, and much will depend on how political conflict is articulated and managed over the next few years. However, one of the challenges facing politicians – and indeed those seeking to study politics in Peru – is that much greater attention will need to be paid to what is going on at the sub-national level.

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