

opponents. Successful populism thus facilitated a plebiscitarian assault on liberal democratic institutions, which pushed Peru into competitive authoritarianism.

8.1 Populism, democracy, and competitive authoritarianism

Populists mobilize subaltern mass constituencies, in a personalistic manner, against the entire political and/or economic establishment (Di Tella 1965; Roberts 1995; Weyland 1996, 2001). Central to populism, then, is an anti-elite appeal, made by a politician who credibly presents himself or herself as an outsider. A central claim of this volume is that populism can be both friend and foe of democracy: populism's inclusionary tendencies often serve as a corrective to existing democratic regimes, but at the same time, its illiberal and hegemonic tendencies can pose a threat to those regimes. Although we share this view of populism as fundamentally double-edged, we offer a slightly different take.

In Latin America, populism tends to be inclusionary but is rarely democratizing. It is inclusionary in that it involves the mobilization of marginalized groups against the established elite. Successful populists at least partially displace the existing elite and open up the political establishment to new actors. They may appoint representatives of marginalized groups to positions in the state, create new channels of access, and/or use public authority to advance policies that benefit, materially and symbolically, previously excluded groups. In the 1930s and 1940s, many Latin American populists extended formal rights, including suffrage and basic labour rights, which had long been denied to important sectors of the population (Collier and Collier 1991). Contemporary populists have introduced constitutional reforms to enhance citizen participation, extended new rights to indigenous people and other marginal groups, and brought members of these groups into positions of authority.

Yet populism is not necessarily democratic. Populist majorities guarantee only a snapshot of democracy – a democratic moment rather than a democratic regime. For majority rule to be meaningful, popular majorities must be generated over multiple rounds. Democracy – or specifically, a democratic *regime* – can only be said to exist where existing majorities can be easily reconfigured and new majorities can freely emerge. In practice, this has always required the Dahlian (1971) set of liberal rights. In the absence of such rights, a government generated by a popular majority at $T=0$ may use state power to limit others' ability to construct alternative majorities at $T=1$ or $T=2$. In our view, then, what Rovira Kaltwasser and Mudde describe as the 'internal contradiction of liberal democracy,

8 Populism and competitive authoritarianism: the case of Fujimori's Peru

Steven Levitsky and James Loxton

Introduction

Populism is a remarkably recurrent phenomenon in Latin America. For nearly a century, whenever competitive elections have been permitted in the region, populist strategies of political mobilization have been widespread. Given this persistence, the question of populism's relationship to democracy is a crucial one. Is populism a threat to democracy, a corrective to democracy, or, as the editors of this volume contend, both?

This chapter raises questions about the 'double-edged' nature of populism, arguing that in Latin America, the notion that populism is a corrective to democracy works better in theory than in practice. The 'populism as corrective' hypothesis rests on an abstract definition of democracy as the 'combination of popular sovereignty and majority rule' (Chapter 1), in which liberal rights are not a defining feature. In practice, however, democracy without liberalism is always ephemeral. In the absence of liberal rights, those empowered by majority rule in round one all too frequently use the state to block or distort the formation of alternative majorities in subsequent rounds. Thus, although populism has typically been inclusionary in Latin America, it has rarely been democratizing in the sense of institutionalizing majority rule. Rather, successful populism frequently leads to competitive authoritarianism.

We illustrate the argument through an examination of the case of Peru under Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000). As a populist outsider, Fujimori won the presidency by successfully mobilizing marginalized sectors of Peruvian society against the political elite. In power, Fujimori's anti-political establishment discourse led to severe executive-legislative conflict and, in 1992, an *autogolpe* (presidential coup) that closed the congress, dissolved the constitution, and purged the judiciary. The *autogolpe* was backed by a solid popular majority, which allowed Fujimori to impose a new constitution and win re-election in 1995. However, the destruction of institutional checks and balances allowed Fujimori to massively abuse state institutions and skew the political playing field against

that is, the tension between the democratic promise of majority rule and the reality of constitutional protection of minority rights,¹ makes sense in theory, but breaks down in practice. Liberal rights may limit the scope of majority rule, but without them, majority rule is unlikely to persist.

In Latin America, successful populism has frequently pushed fragile democracies into competitive authoritarianism. Competitive authoritarianism may be defined as a civilian regime in which democratic institutions exist and are viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbent abuse of state institutions skews the playing field to such a degree that the opposition's ability to compete is seriously compromised (Levitsky and Way 2010). In such regimes, competition is real but unfair: although opposition parties play, and occasionally even win, the democratic game, they compete on a highly uneven playing field. Government critics are often harassed or arrested, access to resources and the media is skewed, and incumbents politicize state institutions – including the courts, tax authorities, security forces, and electoral authorities – and use them as weapons against the opposition. To quote Castañeda (1995: 131), competitive authoritarianism is like a 'soccer match where the goalposts [are] of different heights and breadths and where one team include[s] 11 players plus the umpire and the other a mere six or seven players.'

Successful populism tends to lead to competitive authoritarianism for several reasons. First, many populists are political outsiders who have little experience with, or interest in, the institutions of representative democracy. Most career politicians spend years working within parties, legislatures, courts, and local governments, during which they acquire skills – such as negotiation, compromise, and coalition building – that help those institutions work. And because working within the institutions of representative democracy is their livelihood, most professional politicians are committed to those institutions. Populists, by contrast, are often amateur politicians who emerge from outside the established party system.¹ Without experience in the day-to-day politics of legislative, judicial, or other democratic institutions, outsiders often lack the skills – or patience – to pursue their political objectives through those institutions. And many of them lack a serious commitment to the institutions themselves. Indeed, every Latin American president who has closed congress since 1990 – Fujimori, Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, and Jorge Serrano – has been an outsider.

¹ For example, Alberto Fujimori (Peru), Jorge Serrano (Guatemala), Hugo Chávez (Venezuela), Lucio Gutiérrez (Ecuador), and Rafael Correa (Ecuador) had never held elected office before winning the presidency.

Second, successful populists earn a mandate to bury the political establishment. The core message of populist campaigns is that the established political elite is exclusionary, corrupt, and unrepresentative, and that existing regime institutions are therefore not really democratic. Fujimori, Chávez, and Correa all claimed that their countries were not democracies but 'partyarchies' (i.e. a system of 'rule by the parties' rather than by 'the people'), and all of them campaigned on a pledge to destroy the old elite in the name of 'true' or 'authentic' democracy. Where such appeals succeed, populists win a mandate to sweep away the political elite and 'refound' the political order. The problem is that in contemporary Latin America, the system against which populists campaign is usually a democracy: thus, the 'corrupt' or 'unrepresentative' institutions that they promise to sweep away are political parties, legislatures, and judiciaries.

Finally, populists' incentive to assault representative institutions is often reinforced by the fact that the political elite that they mobilized against and defeated in elections continues to control these institutions. Lacking strong parties, populists often fail to translate their electoral success into a legislative majority. And as outsiders, they generally have had little influence over the appointment of Supreme Court justices, electoral authorities, and other state officials. Indeed, most of these positions are held by established party appointees. Of course, populist presidents could respond by negotiating and sharing power with the established parties (as did Lula, for example, a non-populist leftist in Brazil). Having been elected on an anti-establishment appeal, however, such a move would constitute a betrayal of their mandate, which could be politically costly. Thus, populists have a strong incentive to assault representative democratic institutions: to circumvent or close the congress, pack or dissolve the Supreme Court, or rewrite the constitution.

For these reasons, the election of a populist to the presidency often triggers an institutional crisis in which a newly elected outsider with a mandate to sweep away corrupt and unrepresentative institutions is pitted against an established political elite who views those institutions as a last bastion of defence. In some cases, populists lose these showdowns and are removed from office – as in the cases of Jorge Serrano in Guatemala in 1993 and Lucio Gutiérrez in Ecuador in 2005. More frequently, however, the president wins, for several reasons. First, because populists win office in a context of widespread societal disaffection with the status quo, public opinion generally favours the president – often overwhelmingly.²

² Chávez and Correa, for example, both enjoyed very high public approval ratings when they launched their assault on existing constitutional arrangements, and Fujimori's public approval soared to eighty per cent following his 1992 coup.

At the same time, the 'traditional' parties that lead the opposition tend to be discredited and lacking in public support. Moreover, the opposition tends to suffer from organizational weakness. Populist victories almost invariably occur in the context of inchoate or collapsing party systems. The electoral success of an outsider often accelerates the deterioration of established parties by serving as a signal to other politicians to avoid association with 'traditional parties' (Levitsky and Cameron 2003). As the established parties decompose, the opposition as a whole fragments, and with it the capacity to act collectively and mobilize against governmental abuses.

When populist presidents prevail in such institutional showdowns, the result is usually a skewed playing field. Presidents may be able to close Congress and elect a new one with a pro-government majority; pack the judiciary, the electoral authorities, and other key state institutions with their supporters; rewrite the electoral laws to weaken opposition parties; and impose a new constitution that strengthens the executive branch and extends the president's term in office. In the absence of institutional checks and balances or strong opposition parties, little prevents presidents from violating other democratic norms and procedures, including basic civil liberties, in an effort to weaken or pre-empt future opposition. All of this is a recipe for competitive authoritarianism. In the sections that follow, we show how populism contributed to greater inclusion and a slide into competitive authoritarianism in Fujimori's Peru.

8.2 'A president like you:' populism and Fujimori's rise to power, 1990–1992

The presidency of Alberto Fujimori has been described as 'a prototypical case of neopopulist leadership' (Weyland 2006: 13; also Roberts 1995). Fujimori was a classic political outsider. Described by *The Economist* as 'the man from nowhere' (in Conaghan 2005: 16), Fujimori was a little known mathematics professor and university rector – of Japanese descent – who had never held elected office or belonged to a political party. His victory in the 1990 presidential election has been described as the 'biggest electoral surprise in the political history of [Peru]' (Panfichi 1997: 226–7). Unable to secure a nomination from a major party, Fujimori created his own party, Change 90, to run for senate in 1990 (Roberts 1995: 95). He reportedly tossed his hat into the presidential race only as a means to gain publicity for his senate bid (Schmidt 1996: 330–1). Six weeks before the election, Fujimori stood at less than one per cent in the polls (*ibid.*: 321); indeed, the erstwhile frontrunner, novelist Mario Vargas Llosa (1994: 434), claims

to have never given 'a single thought to him' until ten days before the election.

Fujimori's rise from obscurity to the presidency was rooted in a triple crisis. First, Peru suffered a spectacular economic collapse in the late 1980s, marked by a deep recession and hyperinflation. Second, the mounting insurgency of the Maoist Shining Path brought the Peruvian state to the brink of collapse. In 1989 and 1990 alone, police recorded nearly six thousand insurgent attacks and seven thousand deaths due to political violence (Tanaka 1998: 108). By decade's end, the guerrillas controlled a quarter of Peru's municipalities and had penetrated the shantytowns surrounding Lima, raising the spectre of a Shining Path victory (see Burt 2007; Mauceri 1996). A third, and related, problem was a crisis of political representation. In 1990, the four-party system that had existed in the 1980s was on the verge of collapse (Cameron 1994; Tanaka 1998). The two largest parties, Popular Action (AP) and the American Revolutionary Popular Alliance (APRA), had governed during the 1980s and were widely held responsible for the country's economic and security crises. The United Left (IU), which might have taken advantage of the major parties' failure, suffered a schism in 1989 and never recovered. The conservative Popular Christian Party (PPC) was an elitist, Lima-centred organization with little support among the urban poor or in the interior (Cameron 1994: 19). The crisis of representation was exacerbated by the growth of the urban informal sector, which encompassed roughly half of Lima's economically active population in 1990.³ Informalization eroded the established parties' already tenuous linkages to society, weakened class-based organizations, and inhibited collective action among the poor (Grompone 1991; Roberts 1998).

In this context of triple crisis, public disaffection with the established parties soared. A 1990 survey found that only ten per cent of respondents identified with one of the four major parties, down from forty-three per cent in 1986, whereas eighty per cent identified themselves as independents (Kenney 2004: 47). Another survey found that only seventeen per cent of respondents in Lima expressed any confidence in the country's political parties (Tanaka 1998: 226). Indeed, hostility towards all politicians soared, especially among the poor. According to Aldo Panfichi (1997: 230), a survey carried out in ten low-income districts in Lima found

almost unanimous negative views toward politicians. Ninety-four per cent of those interviewed said they were in agreement that 'the people are always deceived by

³ On the growth of the informal sector and its impact, see Cameron (1994), Grompone (1991), and Roberts (1995, 1998). For a dissenting view, see Kenney (2004: 48–59).

politicians.' The same percentage said that 'politicians always end up arranging things among themselves,' and 89 per cent agreed that 'the politicians and the wealthy are always in collusion.'

The crisis also eroded public confidence in Peru's democratic system more generally. A 1990 survey in Lima found that fifty-nine per cent of respondents believed that the country was 'only a little democratic' or 'not at all democratic' (Mauceri 2006: 252). In another survey, carried out in low-income neighbourhoods in Lima, only forty-four per cent of respondents believed that Peru had a democratic system (Roberts 1995: 98).

The triple crisis provided fertile ground for political candidates who could present themselves as 'outsiders' (Roberts 1995). A radio personality, Ricardo Belmont, won the 1989 Lima mayoral election as an outsider, and as the 1990 presidential race approached, celebrated novelist (and political neophyte) Mario Vargas Llosa emerged as the early front-runner. However, Vargas Llosa's free-market platform and open call for economic shock measures limited his appeal among the poor (Conaghan 2000: 264). Moreover, his decision to align himself with two established conservative parties, AP and PPC, undermined his 'independent' or 'outsider' status in the eyes of many voters (Cameron 1994: 123-4). It was ultimately Fujimori, not Vargas Llosa, who tapped most successfully into the public disaffection with the political elite.

Fujimori's presidential campaign was populist in several senses. First, it mobilized groups and individuals who felt excluded under the existing political system. Lacking a party or strong ties to the establishment, Fujimori had little alternative but to build a coalition of outsiders. Thus, he mobilized constituencies that operated at the margins of politics, particularly evangelical Christians and the informal sector (Daeschner 1993: 170-4; Murakami 2007: 207-8; Roberts 1995: 99-100). These constituencies 'shared a sense of alienation from a political system that had historically accorded special favors to a privileged few' (Schmidt 1996: 328). In line with this strategy, Fujimori named as his two vice-presidential running mates Máximo San Román, the president of Peru's most important small business association, and Carlos García, an influential Baptist minister. He also appointed an evangelical Christian as general secretary of his party, Change 90 (C90), and awarded fifty of the party's 240 congressional candidacies to evangelical Christians (Conaghan 2005: 17). Several other C90 candidates 'spoke Quechua and worked in the informal economy' (Daeschner 1993: 261). By contrast, the legislative candidate list presented by Vargas Llosa's Democratic Front (FREDEMO) coalition 'read like a who's who of the Peruvian political establishment' (Cameron

1997: 43).⁴ Fujimori's campaign explicitly targeted the informal sector. His platform included promises to legalize street vendors and create a new bank to provide credit to the informal sector (Roberts 1995: 100). During the second-round debate, he declared:

Those Peruvians who work in the streets ... are a labor force that we must respect. They have chosen the path of honesty and work instead of vagrancy and crime. For that reason, we will recognize their associations and ... integrate them into a legal and formal framework, as is their aspiration. (In Intercampus 1990: 67)

These alliances were critical to Fujimori's initial success. Badly outfinanced by FREDEMO and other major parties,⁵ Change 90 had no choice but to adopt a grassroots campaign based on word of mouth rather than mass media (Daeschner 1993: 171-2; Murakami 2007: 208). Informals and evangelicals served as the campaign's 'muscle' and 'arms and legs' (Daeschner 1993: 174; also Degregori and Meléndez 2007: 26-7). Evangelical pastors distributed Fujimori campaign materials while conducting door-to-door missionary work; truck drivers provided transportation between Lima and rural areas; and businesspeople campaigned for Fujimori among the urban poor (Daeschner 1993: 171-4; Murakami 2007: 208).

Second, Fujimori successfully presented himself as an outsider and a 'man of the people.' Surveys showed that Fujimori's 'newness' and lack of partisan ties were his greatest electoral assets, while Vargas Llosa was hurt by his perceived ties to established parties (Cameron 1994: 140).⁶ Yet Fujimori's outsider status went beyond partisanship. As a (non-white) child of working-class Japanese immigrants, Fujimori could credibly present himself as a Peruvian everyman who stood outside (and ultimately, in opposition to) the entire social, economic, and political elite (Panfichi 1997). The fact that he was a child of poor immigrants who had worked their way out of poverty resonated with Lima's poor, since many had migrated from the countryside to the city in search of a better life (Daeschner 1993: 144-5; Panfichi 1997: 228-30).

Fujimori's campaign made effective use of his non-elite background. Adopting the slogan 'A President Like You,' Fujimori mixed freely with the poor in rural villages, urban slums, and public marketplaces. He drove

⁴ FREDEMO included Vargas Llosa's Liberty Movement, the PPC, AP, and the smaller Solidarity and Democracy (SODE).

⁵ According to Schmidt (1996: 321), Vargas Llosa's advertising spending exceeded Fujimori's by a twenty to one margin.

⁶ Alma Guillermoprieto (1995: 81) reports an exchange in which a street vendor is asked by a left-wing politician why she intends to vote for Fujimori, and she responds: 'Because he hasn't done anything yet.'

a tractor, dubbed the 'Fuji-mobile,' in order to illustrate his connectedness to the rural poor (Murakami 2007: 207–8). As Conaghan (2005: 17) put it, 'Fujimori was at ease in his role as "man of the people" – riding a bicycle, wearing a poncho, speaking his folksy and ungrammatical Spanish.' By contrast, Vargas Llosa 'arrived at events in an armor-plated Volvo, surrounded by bodyguards, and appeared to suffer through the long programs of speeches and folklore,' all of which made him look 'like an envoy from the upper class.'

Fujimori's ability to present himself as a 'man of the people' was reinforced by his ethnic and family background (Degregori and Grompone 1991). As a Japanese Peruvian, Fujimori belonged to a small ethnic minority. However, given widespread disaffection with Peru's predominantly white political elite, Fujimori's ethnic background proved to be 'an asset rather than an obstacle,' as his 'facial features, migratory experience, and modest origins were more reminiscent of Peru's *mestizo* and indigenous majority than those of the Europeanized Vargas Llosa' (Roberts 1995: 95). For many Peruvians, Fujimori's ethnic origins 'meant, above all, that he was not white, and was therefore one of them' (Guillermoprieto 1995: 78). Deftly taking advantage of this status, Fujimori embraced the nickname 'El Chino,' often referring to himself as such during campaign events (*ibid.*: 82). The racial background of Fujimori's vice-presidential candidates, Máximo San Román (a dark-skinned *mestizo*) and Carlos García (who was of partially African ancestry), further differentiated him from the political elite. As San Román put it: 'We were the ticket most representative of Peru: the *Chino*, the *Cholo*, and the *Negro*' (in Daeschner 1993: 122).

Fujimori's outsider status helped catapult him into a second-round runoff against Vargas Llosa. Fujimori's populist strategy deepened in the second round. Vargas Llosa was backed by virtually the entire Peruvian elite, including the business community, the Catholic Church, the bulk of the media, and most of the cultural and intellectual elite. This enabled Fujimori to run as a David against the Goliath of Peru's discredited political establishment – a strategy facilitated by racist and xenophobic attacks against Fujimori carried out by some of Vargas Llosa's supporters (Guillermoprieto 1995: 82; Vargas Llosa 1993: 472–3, 476).⁷ Fujimori's discourse grew increasingly Manichean in the second round, dividing society into 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite.' He defined the election as a 'confrontation between the white elite ... and the nonwhite common people' (de la Torre 2000: 124), positioning himself as the representative of Peruvian *cholos* (brown-skinned poor), in opposition to the

⁷ It should be noted that Vargas Llosa himself publicly rejected these racist attacks.

blanquitos (whites), the *ricos* (the rich), and the *pitucos* (wealthy whites) (Carrión 1996: 286–7; Degregori and Grompone 1991: 96–7). Fujimori claimed to represent the 'real Peru, *cholo* Peru' (in Intercampus 1990: 22), declaring at one campaign rally: 'We may be *chinitos* and *cholitos*, but we are the real people' (in Daeschner 1993: 241). If Vargas Llosa won, Fujimori declared, Peru would be governed by 'whites,' but if he were elected, the government would be made up of a '*chinito* and four *cholitos*' (in Carrión 1996: 287). Fujimori relentlessly portrayed Vargas Llosa as out of touch with the common people and scarcely even Peruvian. In the second round debate, he attacked Vargas Llosa for having taught at foreign rather than Peruvian universities and at one point declared: 'You think we Peruvians are monkeys' (in Daeschner 1993: 252).⁸

Fujimori's strategy was effective. Vargas Llosa was unable to shake the image of being a 'white, privileged member of the Peruvian social elite with little understanding of the problems facing *las clases populares*' (Conaghan 2000: 264). Fujimori won the runoff election overwhelmingly, with 62.5 per cent of the vote. Whereas Vargas Llosa's vote was drawn primarily from the better-off strata of society, Fujimori won overwhelmingly among the poor (Cameron 1994: 127, 143).

8.3 Populism in power: political conflict and democratic breakdown, 1990–1992

The character of Fujimori's populist appeal changed somewhat after he assumed the presidency in 1990. Facing deep economic and security crises, Fujimori turned programmatically to the right, borrowing much of Vargas Llosa's platform and several of his top advisors (Conaghan 2000: 256; Murakami 2007: 228–33). Indeed, '[t]he most notable characteristic of Fujimori's first cabinet was that it included no one who had voted for him in the April elections' (Kenney 2004: 126). Fujimori's shift to the right permitted a rapprochement with Peru's economic and technocratic elite. By 1992, he had forged a 'tacit alliance' with the '*de facto* powers of Peruvian society – the military, leading elements of the business community, major media outlets, and transnationalized technocrats linked to international financial institutions' (Conaghan 2000: 257). This new alliance undermined Fujimori's original coalition of outsiders. Although marginal groups were well represented in Change 90's legislative bloc, Fujimori kept the party at a distance, ignoring its legislators, sacking its

⁸ The reference to monkeys was based on a FREDEMO television spot that featured a monkey dressed as a civil servant defecating on a desk, apparently in order to illustrate the need for state reform (Daeschner 1993: 108–9).

evangelical general secretary, and closing down its main headquarters (Planas 2000: 347–51). Emblematic of the rupture was the fact that Fujimori's two vice presidents, evangelical leader Carlos García and small business leader Máximo San Román, became two of his most trenchant public critics.

Notwithstanding these changes, however, Fujimori remained unmistakably populist after assuming the presidency. Although he dropped the class-based elements of his anti-elite discourse, he stepped up his attacks on the *political* elite: 'no longer "the people" versus "the oligarchy," it became instead "the people" – represented by their elected president – versus the "political class"' (Roberts 1995: 98). Indeed, soon after taking office, Fujimori launched a 'systematic attack on Peru's political elites and the establishment institutions they controlled – namely, the political parties, Congress, and the judiciary' (Ibid.: 97). He publicly attacked legislators as 'unproductive charlatans' and judges as 'jackals' (in Conaghan 2005: 30), and he decried politicians' 'irresponsible, sterile, antihistoric, and antipatriotic behavior, which favors the interests of small groups and party leaders over the interests of Peru' (in Gorman 1997: 325).

Using the presidency as a bully pulpit, Fujimori attacked 'the party system as a whole' (Conaghan 2000: 265), claiming that the established parties were corrupt and unrepresentative – and that they were actively blocking his efforts to carry out the public will and resolve Peru's economic and security crises. Indeed, he began to argue that Peru was not really a democracy, or rule by the people, but rather a 'partyarchy,' or rule by the parties (Roberts 1995: 98; Kenney 2004: 220). In a speech to business leaders, Fujimori asked:

Are we really a democracy? And the democracy (...) is it a government of the people, by the people, and for the people or a government of the majority? I find it difficult to say yes. We are a government that in truth has always been governed by powerful minorities. (In Conaghan 2005: 30)

Fujimori's populist strategy contributed to a regime crisis. Change 90 controlled only thirty-two of 180 seats in the chamber of deputies and fourteen of sixty-two seats in the senate. The vast majority of legislative seats remained in the hands of the established parties.⁹ Moreover, the judiciary, a key player in Fujimori's counterinsurgency programme and in evolving constitutional battles between the executive and the congress, was in the hands of judges appointed by APRA and other established

⁹ In the chamber of deputies, APRA controlled fifty-three seats, AP held twenty-six seats, the PPC held twenty-five seats, and the IU held sixteen seats (Kenney 2004: 91).

parties (Conaghan 2005: 32; Kenney 2004: 196–7). Rather than negotiate with the established parties, however, Fujimori continued to attack them, entering into a 'chicken game' with both the congress and the judiciary (Tanaka 1998: 212–13). Fujimori increasingly circumvented Congress via executive decrees (Kenney 2004: 172–7). Calling Fujimori 'The Emperor,' congressional leaders moved to limit his presidential powers and threatened to impeach him (ibid.: 177–91). As one government official put it, the conflict reached a point 'where either the Congress would kill the president, or the president would kill the Congress' (in Cameron 1997: 56).

In April 1992, Fujimori – backed by the military – carried out a presidential coup (*autogolpe*), closing the congress, dissolving the constitution, and purging the judiciary and other state institutions. Most major media outlets were occupied by the armed forces, several leading journalists and members of congress were arrested, and ex-president Alan García was forced into exile (Cotler 1994: 209–10). Fujimori defended the coup as a step towards what he called a 'true' (in Daeschner 1993: 289) and '*sui generis*' democracy (in Conaghan 2005: 7). He claimed that the pre-existing regime was not a democracy but a 'dictatorship of *partidocracia*,' or a 'government supposedly of the people but in reality by the parties and for the parties' (in Kenney 2004: 220). Thus, Fujimori asserted that the coup was 'not a rupture of democracy but rather a rupture of the chain of corruption' (in Cameron 1997: 63). As he later explained: 'I had two remaining options: to defend a minority of the population or the vast majority. Obviously I chose the majority' (in Daeschner 1993: 294).

Populism was a central cause of the 1992 coup. First, as a political outsider, Fujimori lacked partisan allies in other branches of government (Kenney 2004: 91, 196–7). Thus, in addition to assuming office in the worst possible circumstances, including hyperinflation and a raging insurgency, Fujimori faced the challenge of divided government. Scholars have argued that opportunities existed for Fujimori to forge the legislative alliances necessary to govern democratically (Cameron 1997: 54–5; Cotler 1994: 206–8; McClintock 1996: 64), much as Presidents Cardoso and Lula da Silva would later do in Brazil.¹⁰ Many of Fujimori's programmatic initiatives in 1990–2 enjoyed legislative support, particularly on the right (Kenney 2004: 129, 136) and within APRA (Daeschner 1993: 276–7). However, this legislative support was not automatic, but rather 'subject to renegotiation' (Conaghan 2000: 257). In other words, the construction

¹⁰ Indeed, Vargas Llosa (1994: 470–1, 475) even claims to have offered to drop out of the second round of the 1990 election and forge a coalition government under Fujimori's leadership. For more pessimistic accounts about the prospects for forging a legislative coalition, see Kenney (1996) and Murakami (2007: 272–80).

of a legislative majority would have required consultation, negotiation, and power sharing. Yet as a political amateur, Fujimori lacked experience with legislative coalition building, and indeed, he showed little interest in such arrangements (McClintock 1996: 64–6). Rather, he viewed the congress as ‘worse than a nuisance’ (Cameron 1997: 49). According to one of Fujimori’s aides, he simply ‘couldn’t stand the idea of inviting the President of the Senate to lunch in the Presidential Palace every time he wanted to pass a law’ (in McClintock 1996: 65).¹¹

In part, Fujimori’s lack of interest in legislative coalition building was rooted in a different conceptualization of democracy. Fujimori viewed democracy in terms of results that benefitted the majority, even if that meant circumventing liberal democratic procedure. Thus, his attitude ‘was that of responding to the expectations of the people with specific results, worrying more about the efficiency of the procedures used to obtain these concrete achievements than their democratic or anti-democratic character’ (Murakami 2007: 274). Often described as ‘the politics of anti-politics’ (Degregori 2000; Panfichi 1997), this plebiscitarian, result-oriented approach to democracy had little room for what he called ‘*palabrería*,’ or the ‘excessive, useless talk’ of the political parties and political elite (in Conaghan 2005: 4). As Fujimori put it:

Democracy now should not include the participation of political parties. The people have learned a lot. They have said: Enough of this kind of democracy. We want a democracy that is more efficient, that resolves our problems. Democracy is the will of the people – good administration, honesty, results. (In Conaghan 2005: 3)

Efficient problem solving on behalf of the people required a free hand in decision making, rather than having to seek out ‘understandings, consensuses or broad agreements’ (Murakami 2007: 224).

Whatever his view of democracy, it is clear that a populist strategy worked to Fujimori’s political advantage. Fujimori had won the presidency with an anti-elite discourse. Taking advantage of broad public disaffection with the political elite, he effectively sought and won a popular mandate to sweep away that elite. Now, as president, Fujimori confronted a congress dominated by the established political parties he had vilified, and defeated, in the 1990 campaign. Although Fujimori could have negotiated alliances with those parties, such alliances would have betrayed his popular mandate. Given widespread public hostility towards

¹¹ As Cameron (1997: 50) writes: ‘Having built his career by attacking major institutions in Peruvian society – political parties and politicians, the bureaucracy, the courts, even the Catholic Church – Fujimori’s *autogolpe* was consistent with his anti-political style.’

the congress, the judiciary, and the established parties,¹² a plebiscitarian attack on these institutions was more likely to mobilize public support than were efforts to negotiate with them (Cameron 1997: 50). Indeed, public opinion data suggest that conflict with the political elite worked to Fujimori’s advantage: public confidence in the congress, the judiciary, and political parties declined further in 1991 and 1992, while support for Fujimori increased (Kenney 2004: 234–5; Tanaka 1998: 225–6). Thus, a populist strategy not only won Fujimori the presidency but also proved essential to his political success in office.

Perhaps the clearest evidence that successful populism contributed to the 1992 *autogolpe* was the public reaction to it. Peruvians overwhelmingly *supported* the coup. Post-coup surveys found more than eighty per cent supported the dissolution of the congress and ninety per cent supported the reorganization of the judiciary (Conaghan 2005: 33; Kenney 2004: 228). Likewise, Fujimori’s approval rating soared from fifty-three per cent to eighty-one per cent (Carrión 2006: 129). Thus, while the president ‘was greeted enthusiastically by crowds’ as he walked through the streets of Lima in the aftermath of the coup (Cameron 1997: 50), ‘[v]eteran politicians were mortified by the jeers that greeted them in Lima’s cafes and restaurants’ (Conaghan 2005: 45). Indeed, most Peruvians not only endorsed the closure of the congress but accepted Fujimori’s interpretation of the events as a ‘popular uprising’ rather than a coup (in *ibid.*: 33). According to an April 1992 poll in Lima, fifty-one per cent of respondents characterized the coup as ‘democratic,’ while only thirty-three per cent viewed it as ‘dictatorial’ (Kenney 2004: 231).

Opposition parties’ efforts to mobilize resistance to the coup failed (Cameron 1997: 62–4). Already discredited, the established opposition parties weakened and fragmented after the coup (Tanaka 1998: 229–30). As the success of Fujimori’s plebiscitarian strategy became clear, politicians began to abandon the established parties en masse, reinventing themselves as ‘independents’ (Planas 2000: 42, 370–4). Consequently, the opposition that led the defence of democracy after 1992 was fragmented, disorganized, and lacked even a minimal capacity to mobilize resistance to the new regime (Levitsky and Cameron 2003).

In sum, Fujimori’s decision to carry out an *autogolpe*, and his ability to get away with it, were rooted in his populist rise to power. Fujimori was elected in opposition to the entire political elite, effectively earning

¹² Polls in late 1990 found public approval of President Fujimori to be nearly triple that of the congress (Kenney 2004: 235). In an early 1991 survey, only nineteen per cent of respondents expressed confidence in the legislature, sixteen per cent expressed confidence in the judiciary, and thirteen per cent expressed confidence in political parties (*ibid.*: 234).

a mandate to bury that elite. Negotiating an alliance with the elite after coming to power would have constituted a betrayal of his mandate. Moreover, given widespread public disaffection with the old elite, a plebiscitarian strategy clearly worked to Fujimori's political advantage. Thus, the logic of populist mobilization led to a severe institutional crisis and, ultimately, the breakdown of Peruvian democracy.

8.4 The rise of competitive authoritarianism, 1992–2000

The regime that emerged after the April 1992 *autogolpe* was competitive authoritarian (Levitsky and Way 2010). Initial plans to govern in a dictatorial manner were abandoned due to international pressure, which forced the government to restore an electoral regime (Ferrero 1993: 34–7; McClintock and Vallas 2003: 136–8).¹³ Elections for a constituent assembly (CCD) were held in late 1992, followed by a referendum on the constitution in 1993 and presidential elections in 1995. In addition to writing a new constitution, the CCD would serve as an interim congress until legislative elections were held in 1995.

Although these steps satisfied the international community by restoring the outward appearance of democracy, the regime that emerged after 1992 was not democratic. For one, Fujimori took advantage of the seven-month 'institutional vacuum' (Conaghan 2005: 43) to reconfigure state power in ways that facilitated authoritarian rule. In the absence of checks and balances, the government issued hundreds of decrees 'recasting government institutions and their operating procedures' in ways that 'concentrated more powers and control in the executive branch' (ibid.: 41). The decrees legalized the purge of the judiciary and other public agencies that occurred after the coup, dramatically elevated the status of the National Intelligence Service (SIN), and created a new presidential 'superministry' that enhanced the executive's ability to distribute patronage (ibid.: 41–3). In addition, millions of dollars in public money were siphoned into slush funds in the SIN to be used for Fujimori's re-election campaigns and other political purposes (ibid.: 41).

Moreover, between 1992 and 1995, Fujimori used his broad public support to consolidate authoritarian rule through plebiscitary means. Fujimori's public approval rating remained steadily above sixty per cent throughout the 1992–5 period (Carrión 2006: 128–9), which enabled him to win successive electoral majorities. Fujimori's C90/New Majority coalition won an outright majority of seats in the new constituent

¹³ On the initial plans for dictatorial rule developed by the military in the late 1980s, see Cotler (1994: 208); Cameron (1997: 51, 57); and Rospigliosi (2000: 74–86, 106).

assembly, which allowed him to dominate the new body and unilaterally impose a new constitution expanding executive authority and permitting presidential re-election (Conaghan 2005: 56–9). In 1995, Fujimori was overwhelmingly re-elected, capturing sixty-four per cent of the vote (defeating former UN secretary-general Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, a prominent member of the old elite) and an outright majority in the congress. These popular majorities allowed Fujimori to describe the post-1992 regime as a 'truly representative democracy' (in Kenney 2004: 220).

Yet if Fujimori enjoyed clear majority support between 1992 and 1995, he used those temporary majorities to skew the playing field in ways that would distort or prevent the emergence of alternative majorities in the future. In the absence of institutional checks and balances, Fujimori and his intelligence advisor, Vladimiro Montesinos, were 'able to monopolize a level of power unheard of in Peru in decades' (Degregori 2003: 220). Montesinos used this power to construct a vast illicit network that systematically corrupted state institutions and deployed them against opponents (Conaghan 2005; Rospigliosi 2000). Montesinos used the SIN to spy on opposition and media figures (Bowen and Holligan 2003: 290–1; Rospigliosi 2000: 157–8, 202), and 'as videotapes later documented, he bribed and blackmailed hundreds of public officials, legislators, judges, military commanders, media owners, journalists, and opposition politicians.'¹⁴

Fujimori and Montesinos used the SIN's shadow state to skew the political playing field in several ways. First, they established a firm grip on the judiciary. Not only did the government engage in a massive court-packing scheme in the aftermath of the 1992 coup,¹⁵ but a 'staggering' number of judges, including several Supreme Court justices, received bribes or favours from the SIN in the post-1992 period (Conaghan 2005: 167). The politicized courts served as a 'shield for friends of the regime and a weapon against its enemies' (Durand 2003: 459). Judicial and tax authorities became 'instruments of persecution' (ibid.: 463), targeting opposition politicians, businesspeople, journalists, and media owners, forcing some of them into exile (Avendaño 2001; Durand 2003: 459–61).¹⁶ The National Elections Board (JNE) was also packed, and as

¹⁴ At least sixteen hundred people, including four Supreme Court justices, a majority of the National Elections Board, two attorneys general, and dozens of legislators, were videotaped accepting bribes or favours from Montesinos (Cameron 2006; Conaghan 2005; Rospigliosi 2000).

¹⁵ Eighty per cent of sitting justices, including thirteen Supreme Court justices, were sacked (Pease García 2003: 286–90, 300–1; Rospigliosi 2000: 103–4; Youngers 2000: 26–32).

¹⁶ For example, after the Channel 2 television network ran a series of critical news stories in 1997, the government revoked the citizenship of its owner Baruch Ivcher, a naturalized Peruvian citizen, and forced him into exile on tax charges (Conaghan 2005: 141–53).

a result, complaints of electoral abuse were routinely buried (Conaghan 2005: 92–3, 168).

The Fujimori government also skewed access to resources and the media. At least \$146 million was transferred illicitly from various state agencies into Fujimori's campaign coffers between 1992 and 2000 (Conaghan 2005: 164). Moreover, the SIN organized and financed Fujimori's electoral campaigns, and the army was mobilized to campaign for him (Bowen and Holligan 2003: 344–72; Rospigliosi 2000: 202). The government controlled much of the private media through manipulation of debt and judicial favours, strategic use of state advertising, and massive bribery (Ames et al. 2001: 229, 232; Bowen and Holligan 2003: 340–4, 361–2). By the late 1990s, four of Peru's five private television networks were receiving monthly payments from the SIN; likewise, more than a dozen tabloid newspapers received up to \$2 million a month to publish articles faxed from the SIN (Bowen and Holligan 2003: 361–2; Fowks 2000: 68–72).

The authoritarian nature of the regime became particularly manifest during Fujimori's second term. Fujimori faced two major challenges after 1995. First, his public support began to erode, slipping below fifty per cent for the first time since 1991 (Carrión 2006: 130). Second, his own constitution barred him from seeking a third term in 2000. Unwilling to give up power, yet lacking a viable successor, the government adopted a strategy of 're-election at any cost' (Cotler 2000: 53). In 1996, Fujimori's majority in congress passed the Law of Authentic Interpretation, which declared that because Fujimori's first term began under the old constitution, it did not count under the new one, therefore leaving him free to seek another re-election in 2000 (Conaghan 2005: 121–2). The law was 'considered absurd by most constitutional experts' (McClintock and Vallas 2003: 144). However, when the constitutional tribunal voted to declare the law 'inapplicable,' the government ignored the ruling and, shortly thereafter, the congress impeached the three members of the court who had voted for it (Conaghan 2005: 126–30). Opposition groups launched a petition drive to call a referendum on the re-election issue. Despite broad public support for the referendum (Carrión 2006: 143), this, too, was derailed through institutional manipulation.¹⁷ Finally, the government packed the National Elections Board in order to ensure that Fujimori's candidacy would not be disqualified (Avendaño 2001: 131–3).

¹⁷ In 1996, the congress passed a law requiring that referenda be approved by forty per cent of the congress, which 'ensured that no referendum could pass without the support of the government' (Conaghan 2005: 124). The referendum project ultimately died in the congress.

The 2000 election was unfair. Opposition parties 'faced a steeply tilted playing field – indeed, a virtual cliff' (McClintock 2006a: 255). Candidates from the opposition were spied on and their campaigns were disrupted by SIN-orchestrated mob attacks and power outages (Youngers 2000: 63–4). Media coverage was biased, and the SIN-controlled media launched a 'dirty war' against opposition candidates, accusing them of everything from terrorism to homosexuality.¹⁸ On election night, the government appeared to manipulate the results in order to avoid a runoff against Alejandro Toledo.¹⁹ External and domestic pressure forced Fujimori to accept a second-round vote (McClintock and Vallas 2003: 150), but an opposition boycott – in the face of the government's refusal to level the playing field – allowed Fujimori to run uncontested in the runoff. Although the regime imploded soon thereafter,²⁰ Fujimori succeeded in securing an illegal third term.

In sum, although Fujimori's popular majorities enabled him to declare his government 'truly democratic,' they also facilitated a slide into competitive authoritarianism. The 1992 coup and electoral victories in 1992 and 1995 effectively eliminated institutional checks on Fujimori's power, which enabled him to skew the political playing field against opponents. In effect, temporary majorities were used to inhibit the emergence of future alternative majorities. A majority of Peruvians eventually came to oppose Fujimori's increasingly authoritarian behaviour in the late 1990s; by then, however, that majority lacked the institutional mechanisms to stop him.

8.5 How inclusionary was *Fujimorismo*?

The case of Fujimori's Peru clearly illustrates the potential of populism to weaken the contestation dimension of democracy. But how inclusionary was *Fujimorismo*? Borrowing from Filc (2010), this section evaluates *Fujimorismo*'s inclusionary effects along three dimensions: material, political, and symbolic.

¹⁸ Studies found that Fujimori received more than twice as much coverage as all other candidates combined (Boas 2005: 36; García Calderón 2001: 52). Television networks generally ignored opposition candidates and often refused to run their ads (Ames et al. 2001: 78). On the media 'dirty war,' see Bowen and Holligan (2003: 377–8), Degregori (2000: 151–68) and Fowks (2000: 69–70).

¹⁹ Credible 'quick counts' showed Fujimori ahead of Toledo but short of the fifty per cent needed to avoid a runoff (Ames et al. 2001: 139). When Fujimori's official vote share began to rise later in the evening, OAS representative Eduardo Stein declared that he had 'no idea where these results [were] coming from,' and that 'something sinister [was] going on' (in Bowen and Holligan 2003: 384).

²⁰ In November 2000, a leaked videotape showing Montesinos bribing an opposition legislator triggered a regime crisis, forcing Fujimori to call new elections and eventually abandon the presidency (and the country). See Cameron (2006).

In terms of material inclusion, that is, an improvement in the 'material conditions of subordinate groups' (Filc 2010: 13), *Fujimorismo* brought relatively little change. Fujimori had campaigned in opposition to neo-liberal 'shock' policies in 1990, but he reversed course upon taking office and 'administered what is considered one of the most drastic economic restructuring programs in Latin America' (Carrión 2006: 135). The economic reforms succeeded in ending hyperinflation and restoring growth, thereby earning broad public support (Weyland 1998: 556), and the government used revenue from privatizations to increase public spending, mainly in the form of expanded public works and large-scale state clientelism (Roberts 1995; Schady 2000). However, *Fujimorismo* did little to redistribute wealth, create jobs, or create enduring social welfare policies. Indeed, with respect to employment and average income, 'Peruvians were no better off in 2000 than in 1990' (Carrión 2006: 126).

In terms of political inclusion, which Filc (2010: 14) defines as providing marginalized groups with 'access to political power,' Fujimori's record was mixed. In his initial presidential bid, Fujimori clearly mobilized previously marginal groups, most notably evangelical Christians and the informal sector. As a political outsider without a real party or ties to the establishment, Fujimori needed allies in order to mount a presidential campaign, and the groups available for mobilization were those that remained at the margins of the political system. Thus, Fujimori built a coalition of outsiders, and his victory in 1990 brought these outsiders unprecedented access to power. For example, *Fujimorismo* dramatically increased the presence of evangelical Christians in public office: in 1990, evangelicals won the second vice presidency, fourteen seats in the chamber of deputies and four seats in the senate (López Rodríguez 2008: 134).

Once he was securely in power, however, Fujimori's need for outsider allies diminished. Consequently, *Fujimorismo* grew less inclusionary after 1992. The number of 'technocrats, specialists and businessmen' in Fujimori's cabinet increased over time (Murakami 2007: 251), and whereas Fujimori's first party, Change 90, had recruited numerous politicians from marginal groups, his second party, New Majority (created in 1992), was an 'exclusive club' composed mainly of technocrats drawn from the Lima elite (Conaghan 2005: 52–3; Degregori and Meléndez 2007: 49–61). At the same time, Fujimori's alliance with evangelicals and informal business associations broke down. As early as 1990, the president purged Change 90 of many of its evangelical leaders, and a number of evangelical deputies resigned from the party (Degregori and Meléndez 2007: 37–42; Kenney 2004: 172). By 2000, the number of *Fujimorista* evangelicals in the congress had dwindled to one (López Rodríguez 2008: 135).

Fujimori's most significant and enduring move towards political inclusion came in the area of women in politics. Prior to 1990, women were 'almost invisible in the Peruvian political system' (Schmidt 2006: 150). No women were appointed to cabinet positions between 1980 and 1987, and relatively few were elected to the congress. The rise of *Fujimorismo* triggered a 'feminization of Peruvian politics' (ibid.: 173). As part as of Fujimori's coalition of outsiders, numerous women gained increased access to positions of power after 1990. In 1990, for example, women represented 9.4 per cent of Change 90 deputies and 14.3 per cent of its senators, compared to 5.4 and 4.5 per cent, respectively, for all other parties (ibid.: 154). Women were also appointed to a variety of key positions in the Fujimori government, including attorney general, minister of the presidency, minister of industry, and ambassador to the Organization of American States (ibid.: 153–5).

Unlike other marginal groups, women continued to make political gains throughout the Fujimori period. Three women served as president of congress between 1995 and 2000 and, when Fujimori took office for his illegal third term in 2000, all four members of the congressional leadership were women – unprecedented for Latin America (Blondet 2002: 51–2). The Fujimori government also created a Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Human Development in 1996, and in 1997 it pushed through a gender quotas law that required that women make up at least twenty-five per cent of each party's legislative candidate list (ibid.: 49–51). As a result, women's overall representation in the congress increased from six per cent in 1990 to twenty-two per cent in 2000 (Schmidt 2006: 154, 167). Although it is likely that women would have made political gains in the 1990s regardless of who was in power (Blondet 2002), the rise of Fujimori clearly accelerated this process (Schmidt 2006). The legacy of this advance was evident in the number of women holding high-level government positions in the post-Fujimori era.²¹ Thus, the 'feminization of Peruvian politics' appears to be an enduring legacy of *Fujimorismo*.

Finally, Fujimori's most significant and lasting impact was almost certainly in the area of symbolic inclusion, which Filc (2010: 14) defines as a process in which 'the excluded group becomes part of the common "we."' *Fujimorismo* clearly opened up Peru's political class to historically marginalized groups. The visibility and stature of evangelical,

²¹ These included prime minister (Beatriz Merino), finance minister (Mercedes Araoz), interior minister (Pilar Mazzetti), president of congress (Mercedes Cabanillas), and mayor of Lima (Susana Villarán). Others, including Lourdes Flores and Fujimori's daughter, Keiko, emerged as leading contenders for the presidency.

female, and *mestizo* politicians increased markedly under Fujimori. As one *Fujimorista* congressman put it:

The members of the ... opposition are the ones who have always held power. With Fujimori, people like me are in Congress. The opposition would never have allowed me into their ranks because I'm not like them. I'm not white. I'm not from Lima. And I don't have money.²²

This symbolic inclusion appears to have had a lasting impact on the face of Peruvian politics. Whereas nearly all of the top politicians in Peru were white men drawn from a narrow socio-economic elite prior to 1990, this ceased to be the case after Fujimori. Indeed, the first president elected after Fujimori's fall from power, Alejandro Toledo, was of indigenous descent, and several of the leading contenders for the presidency in the 2000s were non-white (Ollanta Humala), female (Lourdes Flores), or both (Keiko Fujimori).

Overall, then, *Fujimorismo*'s record in terms of political inclusion was mixed. Although Fujimori mobilized the poor electorally, and although his initial victory clearly opened up politics to previously marginal groups, he did little 'to construct institutionalized partisan or corporatist channels' of access for marginalized groups (Roberts 1995: 100). Like many populists, Fujimori was not an institution builder and thus left behind few new mechanisms of popular participation.

Perhaps the clearest manifestation of the limited impact of Fujimori's inclusionary politics was the rise of Ollanta Humala, another populist who nearly captured the presidency in 2006 by appealing to the poor with a promise to bury the political elite in the name of 'authentic' democracy (McClintock 2006b). Humala subsequently won the presidency in 2011, albeit with a less populist appeal. This continued 'demand' for populist candidates suggests that *Fujimorismo* brought little permanent change in the area of political and socio-economic inclusion.

Conclusion

The Peruvian case confirms Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's hypothesis that populism in power weakens unconsolidated democracies. Populism in contemporary Latin America is almost always inclusionary, but rarely democratizing. Thus, in line with the editors' introductory propositions, Alberto Fujimori mobilized and gave voice to excluded groups, and his rise to power helped to revitalize public opinion. However, *Fujimorismo* also exhibited many of the negative effects of populism highlighted in

the introduction, including a 'plebiscitary transformation of politics' in which popular majorities are used to undermine checks and balances, minority rights, and other key elements of liberal democracy. More generally, this chapter has argued that in fragile democracies, the ascent to power of populists frequently triggers institutional crisis and, in many cases, a slide into competitive authoritarianism. Although we have focused on the case of Fujimori's Peru, the elective affinity between populism and competitive authoritarianism can be seen in other cases as well, including Argentina under Juan Perón, Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, Ecuador under Lucio Gutiérrez and Rafael Correa, and Bolivia under Evo Morales.

The evidence from Latin America thus suggests that populism is more of a threat than a corrective to democracy. To function as a corrective, Latin American populism would have to emerge in the context of strong liberal democratic institutions. In general, however, populists fare poorly in countries where liberal democratic institutions are strong (e.g. Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay). Paradoxically, then, democracies strong enough to potentially benefit from populism's corrective effects are unlikely to experience populism, whereas the democracies that experience populism are unlikely to survive it.

²² Congressional deputy Erland Rodas, interviewed by Liz Mineo, 4 May 1999.