

Two Paths to Populism: Explaining Peru's First Episode of Populist Mobilization¹

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ABSTRACT:

Both major contenders in Peru's 1931 presidential contest made populist mobilization a centerpiece of their political strategies. Never before had a candidate for national office so completely flouted traditional channels of political power and so thoroughly staked his political aspirations on the mobilization of support from non-elite segments of the population. This paper asks: Why did these two candidates pursue novel populist strategies at this particular historical juncture? The first part of the paper identifies the conditions that encouraged Peruvian politicians to pursue populist mobilization in 1931; it also explains why populist mobilization had never before been undertaken in Peru. An adequate explanation of populist mobilization, however, must also trace the social processes by which objective conditions translate into the selection of specific lines of action by political leaders. The second part of this paper thus assesses the socially-conditioned strategic vision of the various political actors operating in 1931. Only by adding this second step to the inquiry is it possible to answer the question of why, if all encountered the same objective conditions, *some* actors in the political field pursued populist strategies *while others did not*. Ultimately, I identify two paths to populist mobilization: an ideological route and an accidental route. Other political actors chose *not* to pursue populist mobilization for one of two reasons: some saw it as *going too far* in undermining the elite bases of the traditional political structure; others saw it as *not going far enough* toward fostering revolutionary change.

¹ This paper will become a chapter of my dissertation (*Populist Mobilization: Peru's 1931 Presidential Contest in Comparative Perspective*). An abstract of the dissertation can be found on my website.

On August 22, 1930, Luis M. Sánchez Cerro—then a junior army officer stationed in the provincial town of Arequipa—staged a successful coup de'état, toppling the eleven year dictatorship of Augusto B. Leguía. This event precipitated one of the most tumultuous years in Peruvian history. The worldwide depression had already devastated the Peruvian economy. At the same time, Leguía had systematically undermined the country's traditional political institutions. Having assumed power as head of the military *junta*, Sánchez Cerro persecuted leftist dissidents and former supporters of the Leguía regime with equal fervor. By January, it had become clear that he intended to install himself as President. Displeased at this prospect, the junta forced Sánchez Cerro's resignation and exile in February of 1931 and reorganized itself under new leadership. Although the reconstituted junta occasionally clamped down on civil liberties, it enacted electoral reforms in May, allowed Sánchez Cerro to return to the country in June to campaign for the presidency, and oversaw free elections in October. The most important campaigns of this election relied on widespread populist mobilization.

The presidential contest that unfolded in 1931 is striking in two respects. First, it is significant for its historical novelty. Never before in the country's 110 year history as an independent republic had a candidate for national office so completely flouted traditional channels of political power and so thoroughly staked his political aspirations on the mobilization of support from non-elite segments of the population. Second, the election is unusual compared to other cases of Latin American populism, in that it did not pit a single populist candidate against one or more traditional candidates. Rather, in this case, each of the two most successful presidential contenders relied heavily on populist mobilizing. Opposing Sánchez Cerro was

Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, a prominent figure of the political left who had also recently returned from exile and was equally, if not more, prone to populist politics. This paper asks: Why did both Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro pursue novel populist strategies at this particular historical juncture?²

An adequate answer to this question must address two sub-questions. The first is that of why populist mobilization emerged as a viable political strategy for the first time in 1931. Part 1 of this paper identifies the conditions that encouraged Peruvian politicians to pursue populist mobilization in 1931; it also demonstrates the absence of favorable conditions prior to 1931. This in itself, however, does not constitute a sufficient explanation for the two candidates' pursuit of populist strategies. It cannot be assumed that favorable objective conditions automatically produce a given political outcome. Rather, it is necessary to illuminate the social processes by which these conditions translate into the selection of specific lines of action by political leaders. Part 2 of this paper thus assesses the socially-conditioned strategic vision of the various political actors operating in 1931. In addition to providing a link between objective conditions and political action, assessing the strategic vision of political leaders makes it possible to answer the second question that this paper must address: Why, when confronted with conditions favorable to populist mobilization, did *some* actors in the political field pursue populist strategies *while others did not*. Although Sánchez Cerro and Haya de la Torre relied on populist strategies, Peru's traditional political elite were antagonistic to the idea of populist mobilization, as was the

² To be clear: the outcome in question is not the ultimate success or failure of populist mobilization (or of populist policies or regimes), but the adoption of populist mobilization as a line of political practice. In my dissertation, I argue that populism is most productively treated as a particular type of political mobilization. I define "populist mobilization" as any political mobilization project that employs a rhetoric of "the people" while targeting a large number of potential supporters who are seen as particularly "available" for new political loyalties. As a *means* that political actors use to secure or maintain control of the state, it can be employed by challengers and incumbents alike in support of a wide range of social, political, and economic agendas. By this definition, populism is not inextricably linked to a particular developmental stage; yet it is more than an abstract ideology or mode of political incorporation.

revolutionary left. The analysis of the strategic vision of political actors will identify two paths to populist mobilization: an ideological route and an accidental route. It will also highlight conservative and revolutionary reasons why some political actors refused to pursue populist mobilization as a political strategy.

Part 1: The Preconditions of Populist Mobilization

Given the extent to which populism dominates the stereotypical image of Latin American politics, it is easy to overestimate its prevalence. Historically, populist mobilization has only been pursued under very specific circumstances. The goal of the first part of this paper is to identify the conditions that encouraged Peruvian politicians to pursue populist mobilization in 1931 and to explain why the political strategy was not pursued prior to this point. Chapter 2 of my dissertation identifies the conditions under which Latin American politicians have historically pursued populist mobilization. It highlights the importance of four main categories of conditions: (1) the availability of potential supporters; (2) expansion in the means of mobilization; (3) the development of populist ideas; and (4) political opportunity.³ As the following section will demonstrate, these factors are equally important for explaining the emergence of populist mobilization in the Peruvian case.

Peru underwent gradual modernization throughout the 19th century, but the pace of change quickened in the early 20th century—especially in the 1920s. While the guano boom of

³ It may be useful to provide a little more detail here on what is meant by each term. (1) Availability of Supporters: Potential supporters must be *legally* available (i.e., free to participate in the political process) and *socially* available (i.e., free from extra-legal social control over their political participation), but they must also be seen as *politically* available (i.e., as free from existing political loyalties). (2) Means of Mobilization: The development of civic and movement organizations, as well as expansions in state communicative and transportation infrastructure, make it possible for politicians to reach and organize new populations. (3) Populist Ideas: Populist ideas must be available to the political leadership; and there must be reason to believe that these ideas would resonate with popular sentiments at a grassroots level. (4) Political Opportunity: Elites, the military, and the existing political authorities must either be seen as unlikely or as lacking the capacity to repress or seriously challenge populist mobilization.

the mid-19th century played an important role in the growth of the Peruvian state and the emergence of a liberal elite, it did not massively reconfigure social relations. It was the industrialization of the sugar industry in the north and cotton in the south, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, that had a massive impact on Peruvian society. The migration of workers from highland haciendas to coastal plantations and urban textile mills disrupted old social relations and established new ones. The size of Lima and other cities grew enormously during this period. And the development of production for foreign markets spurred growth in shipping, attracted foreign investment, and led to the political ascendance of the liberal, export-oriented elite at the expense of the traditional, landed, conservative elite. Developments tied to these modernization processes directly and indirectly generated the availability of supporters, the means of mobilization, and new populist ideas.

One major change brought about by industrialization was the loosening of social controls on political behavior. Traditionally in Peru, the majority of the highland indigenous population lived either on *haciendas* or in “Indian municipalities.” In both cases, political loyalties were typically channeled through clientelistic relationships with the *hacendado* or *cacique*. As Aljovín de Losada (2005:40-1) notes, the indigenous vote was largely a corporate vote—members voted as a bloc in the interests of the hacienda and its patron, or municipality and its cacique. Beyond voting, the clientelistic structure of the haciendas and municipalities provided the channels (or in cases of rebellion, the targets) for the redress of grievances. In urban areas, relationships were similar between notable *patrones* and their workers. But the massive waves of migration initiated by economic hardship in the sierra, changes in the mode of production, and the development of transportation and communication infrastructure fundamentally altered these relationships. As Indian peasants migrated down from the sierra—to the coastal sugar plantations, to the urban

textile mills, and to new urban jobs in construction and shipping—they left the sphere of political influence of their former patron-client networks and entered into new productive relations that didn't capture their political loyalties in the same way. While these processes of “social mobilization” began toward the end of the 19th century, they really set in around 1925, during the Leguía dictatorship (Bourricaud 1970:16). Such social mobilization meant that individuals whose political loyalties had been locked in to clientelistic social relationships were now, at least potentially, available for new political loyalties and actions.

Another change brought about by Peru's gradual industrial development was the growth of new forms of social organization. The social dislocations of migration, urbanization, and new productive relations did not—contra some mass society theories—simply mean the emergence of an atomized society of individuals dislocated from social relations. Rather, new forms of social organization replaced the old. Peruvian civil society began to develop in the mid- and later-19th century, with the growth of mutual aid societies, elite social fraternities, and political clubs (Forment 2003). Artisanal guilds formed in urban areas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (García-Bryce 2004), and these were eventually followed by other worker organizations and labor unions. New migrants to cities formed associations based on their regions of origin in the sierra and, as migrants from the same region often lived nearby, these translated into neighborhood clubs. Lima in particular saw a florescence of sporting clubs, tourist clubs, and other recreational clubs in the 1920s, and these increasingly brought the participation of working class and poor residents.⁴ In rural areas, the increasing industrialization of agriculture brought workers together onto residential plantations, where they both worked and lived in close proximity. These plantations also eventually became targets for labor organizing in the early

⁴ Stein 1986 and 1987 provide a good picture of the everyday life among the Lima working classes in the first part of the 20th century.

1910s and 1920s. These new forms of social organization provided the foundation on which populist politicians built their organizational apparatuses.

The rise of new modes of work, shifting class structures, new forms of social organization, and the general facilitation of the spread of ideas through easier communication and travel led to the rise of new political and intellectual movements. These movements developed sets of ideas that would become the cornerstone of populist ideology and rhetoric. Contra the famous argument of Benedict Anderson, Peruvian imaginings of the national community distinctly excluded the indigenous population at the time of independence and in the early Republican era. At the same time, as Aljovín de Losada (2005:72) has argued, neither was there a developed sense of structural injustice or class confrontation during the 19th century. Both of these ideas only developed in the course of the political and intellectual movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Probably the earliest development along these lines was the elaboration of “peasant nationalism” in the course of the War of the Pacific and subsequent Chilean occupation. Then, in the late 19th century, as elsewhere in Latin America, an influx of southern European migrants to new urban industries brought with them anarcho-syndicalist ideas and began to organize. These movements were supported by a handful of professionals and social elites, most notably, the famous anarchist politician and writer Manuel González Prada.⁵ The growth of the middle class and greater accessibility to education in the early 19th century led to the development of *indigenista* and socialist movements in the 1920s. Although elite intellectual currents, *indigenista* and socialist thought were resonant at a popular level in the late 1920s and the early 1930s precisely because of the earlier development of peasant nationalist and anarcho-syndicalist thought at the grassroots level.

⁵ Anarcho-syndicalism would be the dominant ideological force among the organizing working class until the rise of socialism in the 1920s (Pareja Pflucker 1978). The writings of González Prada would influence Peruvian radicals for years to come.

Alongside these social dimensions of modernization, there were technological changes as well. The modernization of the Peruvian economy went hand in hand with the efforts of liberal politicians to modernize infrastructure. Some of this took place as a result of the guano boom of the mid-19th century, which spurred the building of Peru's (indeed, Latin America's) first railroad in 1851. Rail development was driven first by mining interests, and later by coastal plantations to bring goods to market. Leguía undertook the most dramatic infrastructural modernization project, even going so far as to re-institute a system of obligatory Indian labor on road projects that had been abolished in the late colonial era. Also under Leguía, there were massive expansions in telegraph communications, the national mail service, and steamship and air travel. While generally neglected in studies of populism, these infrastructural features were crucial for enabling populist politicians to organize efficiently at a national scale and to reach populations who had never before participated in national politics. Even more important in this regard than the absolute degree of infrastructural development was the rapidity of the pace of that development.

Finally, the modernization of the Peruvian economy played an important role in rendering Peruvians vulnerable to the impact of worldwide depression. Peru had enjoyed an economic boom during and immediately following the First World War. Indeed, this boom played a decisive part in fueling the modernization of the late 1910s and 1920s. But Peru's increasingly export-oriented and foreign corporation-dominated economy was particularly susceptible to economic downturn. Upon the crash of October of 1929, foreign investment and demand for exports dried up, hitting the cotton and textile industries particularly hard. Unemployment skyrocketed. Indeed, unemployment was so bad that the Peruvian state fielded a

special census of the unemployed of Lima-Callao in 1931.⁶ All of this was occurring at a time of rising expectations based on recent experience of economic prosperity, more widespread access to imported consumer goods, and a growing middle class with higher levels of education.

Economic hardship alone is not a sufficient explanation for populist mobilization. After all, it is hardly exceptional in Latin American history; and the depression of 1929 did not spur populist mobilization in other, equally hard hit Latin American countries. Such hardship does, however, provide a reason why many Peruvians participating freely in politics for the first time would be interested in the mobilization efforts of populists.

While such modernization processes played a key role in generating potential supporters, in providing the means of mobilization, and in fostering the development of populist ideas, these processes alone are not sufficient for explaining why populist mobilization was such a favorable strategic option in 1931. The Peruvian political process, while rarely stable for more than a few years, had historically been very efficient at preventing the influence of non-elites on national political outcomes. It was only in 1931 that this process opened up in a way that would make populist mobilization a strategically appealing option.

In the first half of the 19th century, republican political institutions—modeled on the Spanish *Cortes de Cádiz* and implemented by a succession of military caudillos—restricted non-elite influence on political outcomes by establishing a system of indirect, multi-stage elections.⁷ As is typical of indirect electoral systems, suffrage was remarkably inclusive, generally allowing the participation of the indigenous population.⁸ This inclusivity, however, was filtered through a

⁶ The 1931 Lima and Callao census was conducted on November 13, 1931, just six days after the presidential election (Basadre 1999b:3135).

⁷ On the origins of the 19th century Peruvian system in the *Cortes de Cádiz*, see Chiaramonti 2005.

⁸ Civic registries from various provinces in the 19th century show suffrage at a level of around 10% of the total population (there exist no systematic data on voter participation in this period; these data are from isolated archival sources). Given that this number excluded women, and that children made up a large segment of the population, this is a quite high percentage (Aljovín de Losada 2005).

hierarchical system of electoral processes that kept non-elite participation local and that provided a high degree of autonomy and power to local elites. A first electoral stage took place at the parish level, with broad participation, to elect local notables as electors to represent the parish at the provincial level electoral colleges. These officials, who by law had to be literate and capable of paying a series of taxes, then participated in elections for national office. This created a system that involved broad participation, but that channeled this participation into hierarchical, clientelistic structures, ensuring power and autonomy to local elites—especially municipal authorities and priests—and curbing popular influence on national outcomes by the mediation of elite notables. During this period, “political organizations” were little more than patron-client social networks. This meant a high degree of local autonomy, independence between first and second stage elections, and that church and military officials were in positions of advantage, as these organizations provided the only national-level networks or sources of political experience.⁹

In the second half of the 19th century, the growth of political organizations provided a new mode of elite control over the political process. In the 1840s and ‘50s, Peru experienced a boom in guano exports that lifted the country out of the economic doldrums of the post-independence years.¹⁰ Guano revenues fueled the growth of the Peruvian state; this included an expansion of both the country’s transportation infrastructure and the state’s administrative capacity.¹¹ The guano boom also funded the political activities of a growing liberal elite.

⁹ This paragraph is based on Aljovín de Losada 2005. On caudillo politics in Peru, see Aljovín de Losada 2000; Gootenberg 1997; and Walker 1999 (Chapter 5). For more general treatments of caudillismo in Latin America, see Lynch 1992 and Wolf and Hanson 1967. For electoral politics of the republic through 1860, see Chiaramonti 2005.

¹⁰ Guano deposits hundreds of feet thick—the product of seabirds feasting on the marine life that thrived in the cold Humboldt Current—had been accumulating for centuries on the rocky islands off Peru’s central coast. Mid-century European industrialization, and the drive for greater efficiency in agricultural production that this occasioned, prompted a surge in demand for the high-grade fertilizer (Stein 1980:22). On the guano boom, see Bonilla 1974; Gootenberg 1990 and 1993; and Hunt 1973.

¹¹ Ramón Castilla and his successors began “to forge the beginnings of a national state, with working congresses; legal codes and statutes; expanded governmental agencies and ministries; and, for the first time, a national budget”

Together, these two factors led to the growth of political organizations. What began as local political clubs grew into regionally- and nationally-articulated networks of clubs, and eventually full-fledged parties.¹² As political organizations became stronger, more complex, and less local, they eroded the independence of the two electoral stages. Political organizations expected—and could increasingly demand—the loyalty of the candidates to whom they provided support. The more that political clubs and parties could claim responsibility for producing the success of candidates at a local level, the more that candidates were beholden to these organizations when it came to national level voting (Aljovín de Losada 2005:36-7; see also 55-6).¹³ A consequence of this dynamic was that local electoral outcomes became increasingly determinative of national outcomes. The new political organizations thus focused their energies on controlling local elections; they did this through political propaganda (which really developed during this era), bribery (of voters and officials), corruption (by control of voting institutions), and the orchestration of street violence.¹⁴ But while the early parties effectively controlled the processes of political representation and influence by these means, the system was far from stable—especially in an era marred by the devastation of the War of the Pacific and its aftermath.¹⁵

In the years following the War of the Pacific, elites consolidated their control over the parties, all of which rejected popular campaigning on principle (Aljovín de Losada 2005:70; Stein 1980:25). In 1895, leaders of the two most powerful parties—the Partido Civil and the

(Klarén 2000:162). This burgeoning state undertook projects to expand its reach into the provinces, relying on new communicative and transportation technologies, such as the telegraph, the railroad, and the steamship.

¹² On the growth of political clubs, as well as other civic organizations, in the 19th century, see Forment 2003. On the development of local political clubs into national parties, see Aljovín de Losada 2005.

¹³ While the autonomy traditionally enjoyed by local elites was already being eroded by the increasing infrastructural capacity of the state at this time, the growth of national parties—and the concomitant undermining of the independence of the two electoral stages—furthered this erosion (Aljovín de Losada 2005:59-70). Aljovín de Losada (2005:59) identifies the Presidential election of 1851, in the middle years of the guano boom, as the turning point at which the rise of political clubs began to erode the autonomy of local elites in the political process. Chiaramonti 2005 places the turning point a decade later, at the promulgation of the 1861 constitution.

¹⁴ On electoral politics during the time of the guano boom, see Peloso 1996 and 2001 and Velázquez 2005. For a good description of corrupt electoral practices in the second half of the 19th century, see Villarán 1918.

¹⁵ On the political disruptions of the War of the Pacific and the civil conflicts that followed, see Mallon 1995.

Partido Demócrata—cooperated to oust the military from power, inaugurating a 24 year period of stable, civilian, elite rule that Peruvian historian Jorge Basadre famously termed the *República aristocrática*. One of the first things that the newly cooperating elites did was to reform the electoral process. The ability of indirect elections to serve as a barrier against popular participation had been eroded by political organizations; at the same time, these organizations were forced by the indirect system to rely on less than reliable measures to secure political victories. In response, the parties passed an electoral reform in 1896 that moved from a two-stage to a single-stage electoral process, while ensuring elite control over this process by limiting the franchise to propertied and literate men over 21 and assigning control of the electoral registries and vote counting activities to a centralized body composed of the country's largest taxpayers.¹⁶ These reforms were implemented under the pretext of modernizing the electoral system and doing away with the irregularities and corruption produced by a decentralized system that gave too much power to local elites.¹⁷ The reform marked the end of broad participation at the local level (Aljovín de Losada 2005:70). The power-sharing agreement between the parties quickly dissolved; but this meant only that the *República aristocrática* would be governed almost entirely by the indomitable Partido Civil rather than by elite pact.

The stability of the *República aristocrática* represented the dominance of the liberal branch of the oligarchy (represented by the Partido Civil) over the more traditionally conservative elements of the Peruvian elite. But the Partido Civil was plagued by infighting almost from the start. This infighting was not motivated by ideology or social position, but was rather characterized by conflicts between factions who supported particular figures within the party. As the old guard aged, a lack of clear successors further undermined party unity. By the

¹⁶ On the 1896 electoral reforms, see Chiamonti 1995 and 2000 and Peralta 2005:77-81.

¹⁷ As Stein (1980:189-190) put it, the electoral reforms meant that "...behind-the-scenes machinations perpetrated by the government replaced mob violence as the dominant means of engineering political succession...."

time of the 1919 election, as Steve Stein (1980:38) colorfully put it: “[The traditional parties] resembled the imposing colonial houses still owned by many of their most prominent members; impressive façades that hid aging structures beset by internal decay.” In this unstable moment, Augusto B. Leguía—a Civilista leader at the center of party conflict—took power by coup. Once in office, Leguía began almost immediately to dismantle his own party. With military support, Leguía ruled as a dictator for eleven years (a period universally known in Peru as the *oncenio*). During this period, he thoroughly dismantled the remnants of the old parties. After overthrowing Leguía in 1930, Sánchez Cerro he persecuted former Leguistas,¹⁸ and the post-Sánchez Cerro military junta was both anti-Leguía and anti-Civilista.¹⁹ Thus, by the time of the declaration of the 1931 election, the traditional political parties had been thoroughly dismantled and delegitimated, and the old party leaders were aging and out of politics.

1931 thus brought an election in a political vacuum. But this was not all. Electoral reforms enacted by the Samánez Ocampo junta in May of 1931 significantly expanded the franchise and made voting obligatory. It removed property qualifications. Interestingly, the otherwise progressive electoral reform maintained the literacy requirement. Still, by opening the vote to all literate men over the age of 21, it expanded the electorate by nearly 60%, from 203,882 voters in the 1919 election to 323,623 (Drinot 2001:333). The 1931 reforms also altered the political process. It instituted the secret ballot, guaranteed minority representation in Congress, and instituted departmental scrutiny of the ballots—taking the process out of the hands

¹⁸ Sánchez Cerro convened an tribunal to judge and punish former Leguista officials. On this *Tribunal de Sanción*, see Basadre (1999b:3104-3110).

¹⁹ On the prevalence of anti-civilista sentiment among workers, students, and leftist intellectuals after the 1930 coup, see Basadre (1999b:3114-3115).

of the centralized voting authority.²⁰ This opening up of electoral politics, against the backdrop of modernization processes, made populist mobilization an appealing strategy in 1931.

I have argued in this section that populist mobilization was appealing as a political strategy in 1931 because of a political institutional opening that took place against the backdrop of modernization processes, which provided both the reasons for and the means of mobilization. But the crystallization of these conditions in 1931 did not render populist mobilization inevitable. In the absence of creative political leaders able to recognize and inclined to act on these opportunities, it is entirely possible that the remnants of the old elite parties might have reached an accord—among themselves and with the junta—to arrange a peaceful transfer of power that would maintain the trappings of democracy while ensuring yet another elite-controlled political outcome. Indeed, as will be discussed in the final section of this paper, Peruvian elites *did* make such overtures to the junta. It was only when outsider candidates began to rely on populist strategies—and especially when a populist victory began to appear inevitable—that elites abandoned their hopes of a traditional political pact. Thus, simply examining the conditions that characterized the political moment in 1931 does not in itself provide an adequate explanation for the populist mobilization of that year. An adequate explanation for the emergence of populist mobilization in 1931 must also include an analysis of the strategic vision of the political actors. Only by illuminating the processes by which objective conditions translated into political action is it possible to explain populist mobilization.

²⁰ A good summary of the 1931 electoral reforms can be found in Basadre 1980 (Chapter 6).

Part 2: Strategic Vision in the 1931 Election

An adequate explanation for the emergence of populist mobilization in 1931 must not only demonstrate the existence of favorable historical conditions; it must also explain how these conditions produced political outcomes. This requires an analysis of the “strategic vision” of political leaders. Only by illuminating the social processes by which objective conditions translated into the selection of specific lines of political action is it possible to explain fully the populist mobilization of Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro in 1931. At the same time, considering the strategic vision of the various actors—populist and non-populist—in the political field of the 1931 election enables a more complete understanding of the political outcome. It makes it possible to answer the question of why, when confronted with conditions favorable to populist mobilization, some actors in the political field pursued populist strategies while others did not.

In this section, I examine the strategic vision of political leaders. This involves assessing how political leaders viewed both the objective conditions and their political options. Rather than assuming a universal rationality, it is useful to look instead at how the political rationality of the actors is socially conditioned. While this is in part about “getting into the heads” of the candidates, it is equally about getting into the socially-shared assumptions and logics of the political cultures. While data on the strategic vision of movement *followers* may be difficult or impossible to obtain, such data are available—in the form of biographies, memoirs, correspondence, party propaganda, and newspapers—for major political actors. Thus, it is possible to base arguments about strategic vision on empirical foundations rather than relying solely on assumptions about rationalities.

A complete explanation for why Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro pursued populist mobilization in 1931 also needs to be able to account for why other political actors *did not*. First, I will compare the strategic vision Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro. Then, I will discuss two groups that did *not* pursue populist mobilization in 1931. While dealing with the parties separately, I will be attentive to the fact that all were operating within the same political field and developing their strategies interactively, in response to a changing strategic environment.

TWO PATHS TO POPULIST MOBILIZATION

The two major candidates in the 1931 election relied heavily on populist mobilization. Both Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro had a clear understanding of the possibilities for mobilization that existed in 1931; and each was enough of a political pragmatist to take advantage of these while other politicians balked. At the same time, the two candidates came to their reliance on populist mobilization by somewhat different paths. For Haya de la Torre, populist mobilization resonated with the quasi-revolutionary political ideology that he had developed over the course of ten years of radical political activity. Sánchez Cerro, on the other hand, stumbled into populist mobilization more accidentally. If anything, he was ideologically *opposed* to the direct involvement of the masses in politics; but the overwhelming popular support for his coup against Leguía demonstrated to him the potential utility of populist mobilization as a route to political power.

Haya de la Torre: An Ideological Populist

Haya de la Torre was a pragmatic political strategist, open to whatever means were most likely to result in political success. Over the course of his career, he was directly or indirectly

involved in mutinies, coup attempts, revolutionary uprisings, and the brokering of backstage deals with his political competition. Still, the strategy of populist mobilization resonated particularly well with Haya de la Torre's social and political ideology. Haya's ideological perspective—coupled with his past experience leading student and worker movements—also meant that he was particularly attuned to the conduciveness of current social and political conditions to populist mobilization, in a way that other politicians were not. It is thus unsurprising that Haya de la Torre pursued populist mobilization so single-mindedly and with such savvy in 1931.²¹

Haya de la Torre entered the 1931 presidential contest with a good deal of experience in radical politics. He emerged onto the political scene through his leadership of the 1919 student movement. This translated into his playing of a prominent role in the protests of that same year that demanded (and achieved) an eight hour work day. In the early 1920s, Haya continued to play an important role in organizing students and workers, collaborating closely with the prominent socialist intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui to found a string of “popular universities” in which student activists acted as “professors,” instructing worker “students” in a range of subjects. Haya's role in student-worker leadership reached its pinnacle in 1923, when he led the protests against Leguía's attempt to consecrate Lima to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. But although the anti-consecration movement was ultimately successful, Leguía exiled Haya de la Torre for his role.

Haya de la Torre continued his political education and activities in exile, throughout the Americas and in Europe. He first spent time in Mexico, where he met leaders of that country's recent revolution and where, in 1924, he founded his APRA party as a pan-continental political

²¹ [Key sources for this section will include Alexander 1973; Ciccarrelli 1973; Haya de la Torre 1977; Klarén 1973; Martínez de la Torre 1934; North 1973; Pike 1986; Planas 1986; and Stein 1980 and 1982, as well as periodicals, published sources, and archival documents collected in Peru.]

movement.²² He visited Moscow in 1924, where he was a “visiting spectator” at the fifth World Congress of the Comintern and participated in the World Congress of Communist Youth. He enrolled at the London School of Economics and then at Oxford, where he studied anthropology, constitutional law, English politics, and economics. In 1927, on a break from his studies, Haya and other Peruvian exiles founded an APRA cell in Paris. That same year, he led an APRA delegation to Brussels, to attend the International Congress Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression. On a return trip to the Americas, he organized APRA cells in New York, Mexico City, and Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. Finally Haya de la Torre spent his last years in exile elaborating his Aprista ideology and working for the economist Alfons Goldschmidt in Berlin, as the Nazi party began its rise to power. Throughout this period, Haya was a prolific writer, penning ideological tracts and journalistic pieces, as well as corresponding with Peruvian radicals (in Peru and in exile).²³

Haya de la Torre was an ambitious political leader, an organizer, and a political pragmatist. He studied briefly for the priesthood; and while he ultimately decided that the “calling” he felt to politics overrode his calling to the Church, religious overtones continued to infuse his thought and rhetoric (see Stein 1980:175-6, 265 [fn. 39-40]; Pike 1986). Haya believed himself destined for greatness. Upon receiving an article written by Alberto Hidalgo, “in which he praised Mussolini and Hitler as super-heroes, and affirmed that in Latin America Haya de la Torre more than any other was the man destined for greatness,” Haya responded enthusiastically: “Until today, only my conscience has said to me, ‘greatness calls you.’ But now...you have spoken to me in the name of destiny” (Pike 1967:261). When asked about Haya’s political loyalties, a former Leguía minister replied: “Haya has never been anything else but ‘hayista’”

²² APRA stands for *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*, or the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance.

²³ On Haya de la Torre’s activities in exile, see Chang-Rodríguez 2007:94-101 and Salisbury 1983.

(Klarén 1973:109). At the same time as Haya de la Torre had a strong sense of personal destiny, he was extremely interested in the problem of political organization. In a 1971 interview with historian Steve Stein (1980:134), Haya described his childhood obsession with organizing:

We had some very spacious rooms to play in, and we created a republic there. We had a President, we had cabinet ministers, deputies. We had politics. And there we practiced...at reproducing the life of the country with spools of thread. [...] I used to receive very nice toys: locomotives, trains. But I was not interested in these things. What interested me was to have an organized setup, like a country... When I recall this, you can see how early I had a political imagination. It was quite noteworthy, because we imitated life, but we assured a life of order. Now I tell myself, how I've always had this thing about organizing.

Haya de la Torre's personal ambition and organizational acumen came together in a directed and skillful and political pragmatism. This can be seen in Haya's political involvements prior to his 1931 campaign for the presidency. From 1919 through his exile in 1923, Haya de la Torre maneuvered himself into a position of leadership within both the student and labor movements. While he grew up and first attended university and became involved in university politics in the north coast city of Trujillo, Haya left for Lima in 1917—in large part to play a larger role in national student politics (Klarén 1973:91-2). Quickly maneuvering himself to the center of Peru's university reform movement, Haya then became the principal liaison between students and workers in the 1919 general strike for an eight hour work day (Stein 1980:130). Haya became the chief negotiator for all of the student and worker strikers, and this position—along with his already powerful oratorical skills and open defiance of government troops—earned him a popularity among workers as well as students (Stein 1980:130-1). Haya then

leveraged this popularity to take a central role in the labor movement—presiding over the founding of Federation of Peruvian textile workers (which would soon become a powerful force in the Peruvian labor movement) and co-founding the *Universidades Populares* and socialist periodical *Amauta* with José Carlos Mariátegui. Haya corresponded with Mariátegui from exile, but split with him on issues of party leadership and political strategy. Two issues led to the ultimate split between Haya's APRA party and Mariátegui's socialist movement (what would later become the Peruvian Communist Party). First, the two split over Haya's desire to run in the 1929 election. This election was largely understood to be rigged by Leguía, and rumors had it that Haya had a mutiny and rebellion in the works to respond to his inevitable electoral defeat. Mariátegui disagreed with both the decision to campaign and the decision to rebel openly at that time. Second, and possibly more importantly, was Haya's inability to participate in a political movement in which he was not the undisputed and sole leader.

But while Haya de la Torre's personal ambition and political pragmatism played an important role in his decision to pursue populist mobilization in 1931, his assessment of political conditions and strategic options was conditioned by years of experience with popular movements and an ideological disposition to populist mobilization. Haya de la Torre's writings place a heavy emphasis on the political participation of students, urban workers, coastal plantation laborers, and highland peasants, as well as middle class professionals. They carry heavy doses of anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchical rhetoric and are clear about the importance of coordinating the political support of various social sectors. Even from exile, Haya de la Torre maintained close ties in Trujillo, among the organized working class and middle classes. He was closely involved with the labor movement, through Mariátegui, Arturo Sabroso, and others; and he maintained

ties with student organizations.²⁴ Haya also maintained close ties with elements of the Lima professional middle class. It was through these networks of social relationships, and his ideological sensitivity to the importance and historical position of these sectors, that Haya de la Torre decided to pursue populist mobilization in 1931.

Sánchez Cerro: An Accidental Populist

Sánchez Cerro came to his reliance on populist mobilization by a somewhat different path. Like Haya de la Torre, Sánchez Cerro was a pragmatic political outsider who accurately discerned the potential political utility of populist mobilization as a route to political power in 1931. But unlike Haya, Sánchez Cerro was not already inclined to populist mobilization for ideological reasons. In keeping with his martial and paternalist views, Sánchez Cerro's clear preference was for a military authoritarian solution to the problem of political succession. It was only when faced with limited options and a clear opportunity for capitalizing on the mass support for his overthrow of Leguía that Sánchez Cerro allowed his top advisers to construct a populist campaign around his already popular persona.²⁵

Sánchez Cerro was only a lieutenant colonel when he led his successful coup against the Leguía dictatorship. He was neither a general nor from an elite family; nor, on the other hand, was he a political radical. Rather, Sánchez Cerro was a product of the professionalization of the Peruvian armed forces that began in the wake of the War of the Pacific and that continued

²⁴ Haya's ties in the South, and with highland communities, were significantly weaker; and he clearly overestimated their level of support.

²⁵ [Key sources for this section will include: Castillo Ochoa 1990; Ciccurrelli 1969; Loveday 1973; Martínez de la Torre 1934; Miro Quesada Laos 1947; Molinari Morales 2006; Stein 1980; and Ugarteche 1969a and 1969b, as well as periodicals, published sources, and archival documents collected in Peru.]

through the 1920s.²⁶ Born in the northern town of Piura to middle class parents (his father was a notary), he attended public schools and later enrolled in the national military academy at Chorrillos (Stein 1980:85). Yet while military careers had always provided a unique route to social mobility in Peru, they rarely led to real political power, economic wealth, or social prestige.

Sánchez Cerro, however, was not without ambition. In fact, his ambition—along with the nationalist sentiment that he developed in the military—seemed periodically to get the better of him. As a young officer, he was wounded while participating in the 1914 coup against Guillermo Billinghurst (Basadre 1999a:2726-2727). He later would spearhead two coup attempts against Leguía—one in 1919 and one in 1922—prior to his successful toppling of the dictatorship in 1930. The punishments that he endured for his role in the earlier actions—including imprisonment, removal to remote military outposts, and a quasi-exile to Europe to pursue “professional training”—only strengthened his resolve. Upon Sánchez Cerro’s return from Europe in late 1929, he is reported to have declared (at the home of José Carlos Mariátegui): “I must be president; I must overthrow this wretch... These are not idle boasts; what I say I do... I swear by my mother that you will continue to hear about me” (Stein 1980:86). Still, this was not the first time that Sánchez Cerro had voiced presidential aspirations. Ten years before, in 1919, he is reputed to have remarked to an orderly at the Palacio de Gobierno (probably in jest), “When I am president, I’ll take care of such things”; and that same year he alluded, this time in writing, to what he would do when he was in power (Stein 1980:85-6).²⁷

But while Sánchez Cerro clearly aspired to political power, he evidenced no predisposition to populist mobilization as a strategy for achieving it. If anything, his clearly

²⁶ On the modernization and professionalization of the Peruvian military, see Masterson 1991 (Chapter 1).

²⁷ The latter example comes from an entry that Sánchez Cerro wrote in the yearbook of a fellow officer, one Capitán Peralta, on September 27, 1919. This quite telling entry is reprinted in its entirety in Ugarteche 1969a (27).

demonstrated preference was for a clean ascension to power through non-electoral means. Sánchez Cerro did have opinions on how he thought the masses should be “handled” politically. Essentially, he was a paternalist and an authoritarian, believing that they needed to be shepherded by a strong hand and rewarded, like children, with favors when appropriate (Stein 1980:104-5). As he explained to a fellow officer in 1919, it is the job of a political leader to map out the right path and direct the “indolent and lazy rabble, with a piece of bread in one hand and a whip in the other” (Stein 1980:86). Some historians have interpreted this paternalism as evidence of Sánchez Cerro’s latent populist tendencies. But while such paternalist sentiment may resonate or be compatible with populist strategies, the two should not be confused as the same thing. Sánchez Cerro’s paternalism did not actually speak to the role of the masses as a basis for political support, so much as address how a political leader should manage their incapacity and unruliness. Sánchez Cerro’s military experience and paternalist views point more to an inclination to military authoritarianism than to a tendency to pursue populist mobilization. His childhood schoolmates, after all, nicknamed him “El Dictador” (Stein 1980:85), not “El Salvador.”

This estimation of Sánchez Cerro as more inclined to military paternalism than populist mobilization is supported by the way that he came to power in 1930 and how he operated once seated as the head of the provisional junta. While mass support erupted in *response* to Sánchez Cerro’s 1930 overthrow of Leguía, the coup itself was a military act not strategically premised on popular support. It was based rather on a savvy assessment of schisms between junior and senior officers in the Arequipa garrison; of disenchantment in Arequipa, among both the military and liberal intellectuals, with the Leguía regime; and of the likelihood of support for a coup among Lima’s higher ranking officers (Stein 1980:86-7). The “Manifiesto de Arequipa” that

Sánchez Cerro proclaimed at the time of the coup was a combination of xenophobic nationalism, paternalist social reformism, and—most of all—anti-Leguiismo. Once in power, Sánchez Cerro shepherded the lower classes exactly as he had indicated he would in 1919—with both a firm hand and the dispensation of favors. While implementing what have been referred to as “populist” programs to create employment and distribute resources, Sánchez Cerro also vigorously repressed protests, strikes, unions, and the APRA and communist parties.²⁸ Finally, and possibly most importantly, when the time came to determine how he would perpetuate himself in power, Sánchez Cerro did not undertake a mass mobilization of his already enthusiastic popular supporters; rather, he attempted to orchestrate a sham election from his seat as head of the junta.

Sánchez Cerro’s pursuit of populist strategies in the 1931 election was thus not a result of his political ideology so much as a pragmatic response to the contingent circumstances that he confronted.²⁹ One of these circumstances was his loss of support within the provisional junta, whose members strongly opposed Sánchez Cerro’s intention to run for president without first stepping down from power.³⁰ As a result of this opposition, Sánchez Cerro’s options were severely limited by early 1931. When the reconstituted junta declared elections for October, Sánchez Cerro pushed to be allowed to return to campaign. Confronted with the necessary evil of a political campaign, Sánchez Cerro and his political advisors made the astute decision to capitalize on the popular support that he already enjoyed as the “Hero of Arequipa” who had ousted Leguía. Sánchez Cerro’s popularity must be viewed in the context of the intense

²⁸ On the importance of the programs that Sánchez Cerro enacted while provisional President in 1930, see Castillo Ochoa (1990:61).

²⁹ Tirso Molinari (2006:20) emphasizes the pragmatic side of Sánchez Cerro’s political character, referring to him as “Machiavellian.”

³⁰ As provisional president, Sánchez Cerro controlled the electoral apparatus and surely would have won an easy victory.

opposition to Leguía that had existed by 1930 (Molinari Morales 2006:18-9). At the same time, the Sánchez Cerro clearly must have been aware of his own popularity: his overthrow of Leguía “produced a veritable popular explosion...; [he was] received as a hero, perhaps as no other political figure had been received in Lima” (Villanueva Valencia 1962:65); he received a constant stream of visitors to his temporary residence; the newspapers brimmed with congratulatory telegrams from military officers, politicians, political clubs, and ordinary citizens alike; and patriotic Sánchezcerrista clubs formed throughout the country. For Sánchez Cerro, political pragmatism trumped a more conservative ideology when confronted with a blocked route to power and pre-existing popular support.

In a sense, Sánchez Cerro realized the power of populist mobilization after having already (but inadvertently) enjoyed some of its fruits. While he initially considered linking up with the proto-fascist party *Concertación Nacional*, Sánchez Cerro quickly decided to preserve his own, already privileged political profile by going his own way (Molinari Morales 2006:41-2). In his correspondence from exile, Sánchez Cerro praised Mussolini and wrote of the urgency of forming a party in Peru—a party that should remain under his absolute control—to channel his pre-existing support and serve as an apparatus for winning the election (Molinari Morales 2006:42-3). The party, *Unión Revolucionaria*, was not formed until July 30, 1930, upon Sánchez Cerro’s return from exile. As recounted by one of his closest advisors, Sánchez Cerro realized that “the times had changed, and leaders could no longer be elected by small coterie of distinguished personages, but only by powerful political organizations” (Ugarteche 1969b:xxxvi). Sánchez Cerro’s political genius was in realizing—in a way that should not be taken for granted for this era—that the tools for political success were already before him, in the

form of popular support; and that neither the military establishment nor the traditional elite would be able to compete with this political resource.

Many historians and social scientists object to labeling Sánchez Cerro a “populist,” precisely because he lacked the sort of thoroughgoing ideological commitment to social change and real popular inclusion evidenced by Haya de la Torre and others. They often prefer the labels “conservative authoritarian” or “fascist,” based either on Sánchez Cerro’s expressed views or, more often, the interests served by his policies or the factions of the elite who threw their support behind him. I do not dispute these characterizations of Sánchez Cerro. However, my approach is somewhat different, as I am focused on political strategy rather than the “tendencies” of candidates or the “nature” of their policies. From the perspective of political strategy, Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro shared a good deal in common in the 1931 election. Setting the two side by side highlights, precisely *because* of the differences emphasized by historians, two quite different paths to a similar outcome—an ideological route and an accidental route.

TWO PATHS TO NON-POPULIST STRATEGIES

Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro were undoubtedly the most important political figures of 1931, having received a combined 86% of the national vote (Tuesta Soldevilla 2001:607). Still, an exclusive focus on these “outsider” candidates would produce a distorted impression of the political field by ignoring important political actors who, for various reasons, disapproved of populist mobilization. Most significantly, Peru’s traditional political elites faced a dilemma regarding their political strategies in 1931, as most were opposed on principle to popular participation in politics. At the same time, Peru’s communist party—though formally excluded from political participation—was an important feature of the political landscape, and

critic of populist strategies, in 1931. Overall, through for different reasons, Peru's fractured elite and politically excluded communist party shared an ideological opposition to the practice of populist mobilization.

Maintaining Tradition

At Leguía's fall from power, Peru's traditional elite parties were in a state of disarray. The once formidable parties of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—the Partido Constitucional, the Partido Liberal, the Partido Demócrata, and the most powerful Partido Civil—had been built around the personalities of their founding members. By 1919, when Leguía took power, the founding members were aging and struggles for succession by the younger generation had left the parties fragmented. During the next eleven years, Leguía systematically dismantled what was left of the traditional parties in order to preserve his own position. As was discussed above, the resulting political vacuum was part of what encouraged Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro to pursue populist mobilization in 1931.

But just because the traditional elite parties were in a state of disrepair did not mean that Peru's liberal oligarchy had disappeared. Many had been hit hard by the depression, and the most prominent leaders of the Partido Civil had suffered economic and political persecution under Leguía. But a new generation began to advocate for a traditionalist restoration, often looking to fascist models. These favored a dramatic reversal of Leguía's modernizing policies and a return to a more traditional brand of political dominance by the liberal oligarchy.³¹ Others in the new generation of Peru's social elite advocated a more moderate approach that continued Peru's

³¹ The term "liberal oligarchy" is somewhat misleading, in that Peru's liberalism was remarkably conservative by any comparative measure. Historically in Peru, as in much of Latin America, lines of conflict were drawn in the 19th century according to "liberal" and "conservative"; but liberals gained significant power in the wake of the guano boom and solidified this power during the República Aristocrática.

trajectory of gradual modernization—either in line with what Leguía had begun, or in some modified form. But while different elements of the elite differed in their visions of the future, they shared a desire to maintain political control at elite levels.

But given the extent to which conditions in Peru in 1931 favored populist mobilization, why did at least some elements of Peru's political elite not attempt to regain political control by pursuing this strategy? The answer varies, depending on the sector of the elite in question; but it amounts to some combination of a failure to see political conditions clearly and an opposition, on principle, to popular participation in politics.

The moderate elites most involved in the political process in 1931 apparently failed to recognize that the rules of the political game in Peru had fundamentally changed. Early in the campaign, dissatisfied with the options of APRA on the one hand and Sánchez Cerro on the other, a group of moderate professionals—doctors, lawyers, intellectuals—formed a coalition party called *Concentración Nacional*.³² Their goal was to present an alternative to the two populist candidates—one who would be a satisfactory compromise for the various elements of the fragmented elite. *Concentración Nacional* approached the junta with a proposal for a negotiated agreement that would bypass the election altogether and award their candidate with the presidency. The elite had put their differences aside to reach similar agreements in past moments of crisis—in 1899 and 1915—and it was the hope of the *Concentración Nacional* leadership that a similar agreement would be possible in 1931. In retrospect, this project appears sadly naïve and incognizant of the changes that had taken place in the intervening years.

Other elements of the moderate elite appear to have been equally naïve. A small handful began campaigns when the election was declared in May, and two—José María de la Jarra y

³² On *Concentración Nacional*, see Ugarteche 1969b:xxxv-xxxvi.

Ureta and Antonio Osores—ran all the way through to Election Day. While successfully garnering some elite support, both candidates performed exceptionally poorly at the polls. Of 299,827 valid votes cast, de la Jarra y Ureta secured only 21,950 (7.3%) and Osores won 19,640 (6.6%) (Tuesta Soldevilla 2001:607)—the remaining 86% were split between the populist candidates. Neither of the two elite candidates mounted anything even approximating a popular campaign. Notably, Jarra y Ureta—then the Peruvian ambassador to Brazil—did not even return to the country to campaign. He rather operated in the old political style of relying on his colleagues to conduct a letter-writing campaign in support of his candidacy. All told, the moderate, professional elites simply failed to recognize that no candidate who did not pursue intense populist mobilization would be able to compete with Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro in the 1931 election.

The more traditionalist elites appear in some respects to have been less naïve. They apparently did recognize that new political rules were in operation, as indicated by their failure to support the moderate elite candidates. At the same time, however, the populist route to power remained abhorrent in their view—it simply went too far in undermining the bases of the traditional power structure. This was the paradox that Peru's traditional elite faced in 1931: they wanted to control the political process; but it was clear that control of the political process would go to those who encouraged (and so reaped the most benefits from) popular participation. This meant that the elites, if they wanted to maintain some control in the political sphere, would have to throw in behind one of the two major populist candidates.

The important questions for them then became those of which candidate would best safeguard their interests, over which they could maintain the most influence, and whose mode of popular incorporation clashed least their vision for Peru's future social order. For most, Sánchez

Cerro appeared to be the lesser of two evils. The candidate's mode of popular mobilization seemed to have its roots more in traditional, authoritarian, Peruvian paternalism than in a genuinely revolutionary project; and his nationalism was of a fundamentally reactionary type, promising to restore Peru to its pre-Leguía state and little more. Finally, social networks between Sánchez Cerro's key advisors and conservative elites ensured some semblance of political control. But this support for Sánchez Cerro only evolved over time. Most traditional elites only became willing to support a populist candidate once it had become clear that a populist would inevitably win the election.

For both moderate and traditional elites, their primary concern in the 1931 election was the maintenance of tradition and ensuring what they saw to be political and social stability. Moderate elites attempted to hold on to tradition in the political process, not recognizing that this process had already been fundamentally altered. Conservatives decided to maintain *social* tradition by conceding to the violation of *political* tradition.

Pursuing the Revolution

The Peruvian communist party—the *Partido Comunista*—was officially barred from participating in the 1931 election by the *Estatuto Electoral* of May of that year. While Leguía had viewed the socialists and communists as less of a threat than APRA (because of APRA's potential appeal to middle class supporters), Sánchez Cerro's response was more hostile. During his brief tenure as head of the provisional junta, he persecuted socialist and communist unions and party members, repressing worker cells (Ramos Tremolada 1990:97) and notably banning the *Confederación General de Trabajadores del Peru*—an important labor federation that

claimed more than 19,000 members.³³ Later, the Samánez Ocampo junta suspended active repression of the *Partido Comunista*, although it did not allow the party to participate in the election. Still, the communist party was an important actor in the political field in 1931, in that it anchored the extreme left, exercised influence among significant sectors of the working class, and conflicted publicly with APRA over strategy.³⁴

The leadership of the *Partido Comunista*, at the time of the 1931 election, was strongly opposed to populist mobilization. The question was not one of whether the political strategy was likely to bring success at the polls. Unlike Peru's traditional elites, the communist leadership understood the potential political utility of populist mobilization in 1931. They recognized that either Haya de la Torre or Sánchez Cerro would be victorious at the polls.³⁵ The issue was that the communist leadership was opposed to populist mobilization on principle. There is ample evidence to indicate that *even if* the communists had been allowed to participate in the 1931 election, they would not have pursued populist mobilization.

The communist leadership had two fundamental problems with populist mobilization. The first was that it encouraged premature political activity from Peru's poor masses. Communists portrayed populist rallies and marches as manifestations of a disorganized *lumpenproletariat*, which was clearly not participating in politics *as a class* or with a clear consciousness of the meaning of its political activities. Any movement built on indiscriminate mass mobilization was, according to the communist argument, intrinsically unstable and easily undermined or co-opted. The second argument made by the communist leaders was that populist

³³ Stein (1980:78) indicates that these membership claims were largely unfounded, although it is difficult to estimate a more modest figure. Regardless of the size of the membership, however, the *Confederación* was a particularly central institution of the labor movement in 1930.

³⁴ [This section is based on correspondence among prominent Communist Party leaders and between these leaders and prominent Apristas. It also draws on the critiques of APRA's tactics that were common in communist propaganda. Unfortunately, I haven't had the time to revisit these documents in writing this preliminary draft.]

³⁵ They were less certain as to whether the junta, and the military in general, would allow an APRA victory; but this is a somewhat different matter.

mobilization mistakenly pursued the co-equal participation of the middle classes and *petit bourgeoisie* alongside workers and peasants. These sorts of conflict-bridging class coalitions were seen by the communists as inexcusable, especially given that they would not be led by a strong working class movement. Populist mobilization was seen, then, as producing a movement that would be easily undermined or co-opted by political elites, providing a veneer of “popular” political legitimacy to traditional exploitative class relations.

Despite (or because of) apparent similarities between the Aprista and socialist-communist movements, the communists directed their critiques most vociferously against APRA.³⁶ Haya de la Torre had emerged from the ranks of the radical Peruvian left, and his movement competed directly with the communists for organized labor and student support. Haya de la Torre broke definitively with Mariátegui and his *Partido Socialista* in 1929, over Mariátegui’s refusal to back him in the scheduled (but later aborted) election of that year. At this time, Mariátegui critiqued Haya de la Torre’s personalism, his refusal to submit to a party organization, and the political pragmatism that led him to pursue an electoral victory by attempting to forge class coalitions. The rift between APRA and the socialist-communist movement became more pronounced after Mariátegui’s death, and the Partido Comunista published a number of polemics condemning APRA’s mass mobilizing practices.³⁷

The leaders of the Partido Comunista, as might be expected, favored a more disciplined, patient, and (eventually) revolutionary, approach to social and political change. They favored the pursuit of the long-term goal of social revolution, not of the short-term goal of electoral victory. In 1931, the Communist Party had made inroads in organizing a number of industries; but they

³⁶ While the communist leadership were probably more opposed to the candidacy of Sánchez Cerro, they had no need to focus their attacks on his political strategy. The communists saw Sánchez Cerro as a quasi-fascist civilista and a pawn of the traditional political elite.

³⁷ Mariátegui’s Partido Socialista became the Partido Comunista upon the leader’s death in 1930.

remained far from the realization of any kind of real, organized, communist labor movement. Labor organizing by the traditionally powerful anarcho-syndicalist movement, and later by APRA, competed with communist organizing—and many factories and industries remained unorganized. While APRA explicitly divorced labor organizing from political organizing, preferring to treat the two as separate activities, the communist leadership believed that social, labor organization must precede political organization. Thus, the important work for the communist part, as its leadership saw it, was at the level of production, not on the national electoral stage. In the end, even if it had been allowed to participate in the 1931 election, all indicators are that the communist party would have continued to pursue their disciplined, gradualist approach, shunning mass mobilization.

Conclusion

The 1931 election marked the first emergence of populist mobilization as a viable political strategy in Peru, despite 110 years of electoral politics as an independent republic. Modernization processes, which began with the guano boom of the mid-19th century but that became much more dramatic in the 1920s, directly and indirectly provided the available supporters, organizational and infrastructural means, and populist ideas necessary for populist mobilization. Changes in electoral institutions and the dissolution of the traditional elite parties provided a crucial political opportunity in 1931 that played an important role in determining the timing of Peru's first instance of large-scale populist mobilization.

Peru's various political actors had a range of responses to these conditions. Both Haya de la Torre and Sánchez Cerro took advantage of them as a possible opportunity to secure political power. Haya de la Torre, with a personal history of radical political activity, recognized the

favorability of the conditions quite clearly and pursued a line of political action that was in keeping with his ideological commitments. Sánchez Cerro, while in some ways ideologically hostile to populist mobilization, stumbled into a position of mass popularity and was enough of a political pragmatist to take advantage of the situation in which he found himself. These two political actors thus followed two different paths to populist mobilization: an ideological route and an accidental route.

At the same time, other political actors operating in 1931 were actively hostile to the idea of populist mobilization. The remnants of Peru's elite political parties were ideologically opposed to populist mobilization because of the threat that it posed to the traditional social and political order. The more moderate elites failed to recognize the extent to which the political situation in 1931 was fundamentally different from past moments of "crisis." The more traditionalist elites eventually recognized how times had changed, though this did not temper their fundamental discomfort with populist mobilization. On the other end of the political spectrum, the leadership of the newly formed *Partido Comunista* were equally opposed to populist mobilization. Their objection was not that populist mobilization *went too far* toward toppling the old order, but rather that it *did not go far enough*. Even if they had been allowed to participate in the political process, the communist party would have maintained their long view, preferring gradual labor organizing to what they saw as short-sighted populist mobilization in the service of an immediate electoral victory. Assessing the strategic vision of the political leadership makes it possible to explain why some political actors, when facing the same objective conditions as the others, pursued populist mobilization while others did not. It also enables the identification of two different paths to populist mobilization, as well as two divergent paths to non-populist strategies.

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