Keiko Fujimori declared Peru's president: the historical roots of fujimorism and the bankruptcy of the pseudo-left

Part one

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Three weeks after Peruvian voters went to the polls, Keiko Fujimori was declared the winner of the presidential election. The National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) announced it had concluded counting 100 percent of the ballots, with Fujimori receiving 50.13 percent against 49.86 percent for her rival, Congressman Roberto Sánchez Palomino of the Together for Peru (JP) party. The margin was less than 50,000 votes out of nearly 20 million cast.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio congratulated Fujimori within hours of the ONPE announcement, hailing "her important electoral victory." The speed and warmth of the US response came after Ambassador Bernie Navarro had declared during the count that the US Embassy was "monitoring the electoral process"—when Peruvian law does not allow any such official capacity to foreign diplomatic missions.

Despite Sánchez's record as a faithful administrator of bourgeois interests—as trade minister under Pedro Castillo, he never challenged the Central Bank, the mining concessions, or Peru's IMF commitments—Peru's ruling class calculated that even the ambiguity of a "left" nationalist government, arriving wrapped in the expectations generated by the Castillo experience, was a risk it could not afford. Squeezed between mounting US imperialist pressure from above and a combative working class from below, the bourgeoisie could not leave even an inch of space for illusions in social reform that could fuel the class struggle. Fujimori offers no such ambiguity.

Harvard political scientist Steven Levitsky, co-author of the concept of "competitive authoritarianism," has identified Fujimori's 1992 self-coup as a template later replicated across Latin America—formal elections combined with the systematic erosion of democratic institutions, more recently visible in El Salvador under Nayib Bukele. Keiko Fujimori's 2026 victory extends that template into a much more advanced stage of the degeneration of bourgeois democratic institutions.

The 1980s: the conditions that made Fujimorism possible

Peru in the late 1980s was a country in freefall. Hyperinflation under Alan García's first APRA government reached 7,650 percent in 1990—among the worst in the world. The García government found itself isolated by international financial institutions after he unilaterally suspended debt payments in 1985, capping repayments at 10 percent of export revenues. Two guerrilla organizations—the Maoist Shining Path (PCP-SL) and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA)—were waging armed campaigns that had cost tens of thousands of lives by the end of the decade. Teachers, textile workers, miners, peasants, and neighborhood organizations mounted sustained strikes and mobilizations that put the García administration under severe strain from 1987 through 1989.

García proved no more capable than his predecessor, Fernando Belaúnde Terry of Popular Action, of resolving the crisis. His government was responsible for one of the worst atrocities of the entire internal conflict: in June 1986, he ordered the massacre of hundreds of Shining Path prisoners held at El Frontón, Lurigancho, and Los Molinos prisons. Despite its "democratic" credentials, the APRA government functioned as a vehicle for military repression, economic subordination to the IMF, and the corruption that spread through state institutions throughout the decade.

The nominal left, rather than offering a socialist alternative to this catastrophe, deepened its integration into bourgeois politics. The United Left (IU)—a coalition of Stalinist, Maoist, Guevarist, and Castroist tendencies—had won the Lima mayoralty in 1983 with Alfonso Barrantes and became the second force in Congress in 1985. Rather than use that position to build an alternative to oppose the right-wing government, Barrantes withdrew from the 1985 runoff to facilitate García's election and provided a "left face" for the APRA government. By the close of the decade, the United Left had imploded in factional disputes, thoroughly discrediting every tendency within it.

It was in this context of economic catastrophe, guerrilla war and political exhaustion that Alberto Fujimori burst onto the scene in 1990. He was an academic of Japanese descent, rector of the National Agrarian University, virtually unknown in politics. He advanced to the runoff by opposing the economic shock program proposed by right-wing novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, campaigning under the slogan "honesty, technology and work." The Stalinist Peruvian Communist Party and the remnants of the United Left called for a vote for Fujimori in the runoff, as a "lesser evil" than Vargas Llosa. Their leaders feared social revolution more than they feared the right. No sooner had Fujimori taken office than he imposed the drastic austerity program he had campaigned against—the "Fujishock"—multiplying poverty in both cities and the rural interior while imposing the structural adjustment demanded by the IMF and World Bank.

The self-coup and the dictatorship

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Fujimori's first two years were marked by constant confrontation with a Congress dominated by opposition parties. On April 5, 1992, he dissolved Congress with military backing, suspended the Constitution, imposed martial law across three-quarters of the country, and declared a "Government of Emergency and National Reconstruction." The self-coup was backed domestically by big business—its principal beneficiary—and internationally by Washington and the OAS, which provided democratic cover so long as Fujimori continued holding elections, however rigged.

In September 1992, the Special Intelligence Group (GEIN)—an agency operating separately from Fujimori's National Intelligence Service (SIN)—captured Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán in a Lima apartment. Fujimori and his intelligence chief Vladimiro Montesinos were caught off guard by the operation but claimed full political credit for the capture. The arrest gave Fujimori the popular legitimacy he needed to consolidate the dictatorship, and he used it to justify wholesale impunity for the security forces.

The most notorious crimes of the regime were committed by the Colina Group, a military death squad operating under the direct command of the intelligence apparatus. On November 3, 1991, eight masked men burst into a neighborhood gathering in the Barrios Altos district of Lima and killed 15 people, including an eight-year-old child. On July 18, 1992, soldiers abducted nine students and a professor from La Cantuta University, took them to a desolate location, tortured and executed them, and buried them in clandestine graves. A 2003 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report found that 69,000 people died or disappeared during the internal conflict between 1980 and 2000; 79 percent of victims lived in rural areas and 75 percent were Quechua or other indigenous language speakers.

The central figure of the repressive apparatus was Vladimiro Montesinos—Fujimori's principal adviser and de facto head of the SIN. A former army captain dismissed for making unauthorized contact with the CIA, Montesinos had built a legal career defending drug traffickers before becoming the most feared figure in Peruvian politics. He assembled a library of thousands of compromising videotapes of politicians, judges, military officers, and media owners—the "Vladi-videos"—giving him extraordinary leverage over the entire political elite. His ties to international drug trafficking ran deep: it is alleged he received $700 for every kilogram of cocaine that left Peru.

The 1993 Constitution drafted by Fujimori's constituent assembly became the framework within which every subsequent Peruvian government has operated. It dismantled labor protections, opened Peru's natural resources to unrestricted transnational exploitation, privatized state enterprises, and imposed a model of governance centered on executive power and weakened judicial independence. Wall Street celebrated. Fujimori was the darling of international financial institutions even as he carried out low-budget public works, riddled with corruption, in depressed areas which he exploited for political gain.

The collapse came in September 2000, when footage emerged of Montesinos handing $15,000 in cash to opposition congressman Alberto Kouri to switch his allegiance to the governing bloc. Cornered, Fujimori traveled to an APEC summit in Brunei, proceeded to Japan, and sent his resignation by fax on November 19, 2000. The remaining Fujimorista-aligned Congress refused to accept the resignation and voted instead to remove him on grounds of "permanent moral incapacity." He lived in Japan for five years before traveling to Chile in 2005, calculating he could return to Peru. The Chilean government arrested him; he was extradited to Peru in 2007, tried, and sentenced to 25 years for crimes against humanity, including the Barrios Altos and La Cantuta massacres.

Fujimorism after the fall

The end of the Fujimori regime was managed, under Washington's oversight, to preserve both the neoliberal constitution and the economic model intact. The transitional government of Valentín Paniagua (November 2000 – July 2001) created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, reinstated Peru to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and simultaneously reached an agreement with the IMF to continue austerity. The nominal left, marginal but still present through its grip on certain unions—the Stalinist Peruvian Communist Party controlled the CGTP and the Civil Construction Federation; the Stalinist-Maoist Red Fatherland party controlled the teachers' and state workers' unions—provided political backing for this operation.

Keiko Fujimori, who had served as first lady during her father's presidency after her parents' separation, systematically built Fuerza Popular through the 2000s. She reached the runoff in 2011, losing narrowly to Ollanta Humala; in 2016, she lost to Pedro Pablo Kuczynski by 0.24 percentage points; in 2021, she lost to Pedro Castillo by 44,058 votes. Through all three cycles, Fuerza Popular held substantial congressional power and deployed it to obstruct, destabilize, and remove presidents it opposed. Between 2016 and 2021, a fujimorista-dominated Congress removed one president (Kuczynski), forced another out (Martín Vizcarra via impeachment), and installed a third (Francisco Sagasti). The pattern—using parliamentary power as a battering ram against the executive—reflected not legislative principle but the class interests of the Peruvian oligarchy in preventing any government from encroaching on the constitutional framework Alberto Fujimori imposed in 1993.

Castillo and Sánchez: two dead ends of bourgeois nationalism

Pedro Castillo, a rural schoolteacher and union leader from Cajamarca, won the 2021 runoff by the narrowest margin in Peruvian electoral history, drawing his support overwhelmingly from the poorest Andean regions. His capitulation began before he took office. He publicly pledged to keep the right-wing Julio Velarde at the helm of the Central Bank. Four days into his presidency, he dispatched his prime minister to suppress a peasant strike against the Chinese-owned Las Bambas copper mine, where police gunfire had left sixteen people wounded. When nationalization of the Camisea gas consortium was briefly raised, his own Economy Minister Pedro Francke clarified immediately that the word "nationalization" did not imply "in any way... taking state control over a private activity."

His government cycled through five cabinets and 80 ministers in 17 months, never appealing to the working-class and peasant base that had elected him, and deploying the armed forces against protesters demanding he fulfill his campaign promises. Facing a US-backed impeachment plot by the right-controlled Congress, Castillo attempted to dissolve Congress on December 7, 2022—a move that his own legal team had not vetted and that was immediately ruled unconstitutional. He was arrested within hours. His vice president, Dina Boluarte, assumed the presidency and responded to the popular uprising of December 2022–March 2023—concentrated in the same Andean regions that had elected Castillo—with live ammunition. At least 70 protesters were killed.

Roberto Sánchez, the only Castillo-era minister to survive all five cabinet reshuffles, built his 2026 campaign explicitly on Castillo's legacy—the Andean hat, the promise to pardon the jailed former president, the inclusion of Castillo's relatives on his electoral lists. He repeated the same preemptive capitulations point by point: he brought back Pedro Francke as his chief economic advisor, promised to keep Velarde at the Central Bank (just like Fujimori), and publicly described himself as "a social Christian, not a communist or a statist." His defeat against Fujimori

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reflected not an active popular rejection of a left-wing program—no such program was on offer—but the exhaustion of an approach that millions of Peruvians had already experienced, in the immediate form of the Castillo government, as yet another dead end.

To be continued

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