

## The political use of terrorism in the 2021 Peruvian presidential campaign

### *La utilización política del terrorismo en la campaña presidencial peruana de 2021*

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### **Abstract**

*The 2021 presidential elections constituted a turning point in the recent history of Peru. In a context of sociosanitary crisis and impugnations to the political system, the Bicentenary Elections evidenced the profound social fragmentation and polarization between the representatives of the neoliberal project and those who promote a reformist alternative.*

*In particular, the presidential campaign for the second round between the right-wing candidate Keiko Fujimori and the left-wing candidate Pedro Castillo configured a favorable scenario for the instrumentalization of the “terruqueo”. This strategy, used by the dominant elites in the post-conflict period to discredit any person, act or group that constitutes a threat to the established order, was reconfigured at this juncture to avoid a potential victory of the Serrano candidate, constructing him as a terrorist threat that would put democracy at risk.*

*Through critical discourse analysis, it is analyzed which were the discursive resources used by the dominant elites to delegitimize the left-wing adversary, using for this purpose messages issued in the presidential debates, Keiko Fujimori’s government plan and the “anti-communist campaign” developed by the main right-wing representatives in the most important national and international media.*

*As main conclusions, it is observed that the three most widely used strategies were: 1. building a negative image of the left-wing candidate, presenting him as a terrorist enemy; 2. presenting the right-wing candidate as the protector of democracy and freedom against the communist threat; and 3. appealing to social memory about the internal armed conflict that fueled the fear of the return of terrorism. We maintain that these strategies managed to frame the media treatment of the presidential campaign as a confrontation between “us” the defenders of democracy and “them” the promoters of the communist dictatorship due to the persistence of socio-historical elements that systematically emerge in Peru in contexts of sociopolitical crisis.*

### **Keywords**

*Peru, terrorism, campaign, presidency, criminalization, bicentenary, internal armed conflict, internal enemy, terruqueo.*

### **Resumen**

Las elecciones presidenciales de 2021 constituyeron un punto de inflexión en la historia reciente de Perú. En un contexto de crisis sociosanitaria e impugnaciones al sistema político, las Elecciones del Bicentenario evidenciaron la profunda fragmentación social y la polarización entre los representantes del proyecto neoliberal y aquellos que promueven una alternativa reformista.

En particular, la campaña presidencial para la segunda vuelta entre la candidata de derecha Keiko Fujimori y el candidato de izquierda Pedro Castillo configuró un escenario propicio para la instrumentalización del “terruqueo”. Esta estrategia, empleada por las élites dominantes en el período posconflicto para desprestigiar a cualquier persona, acto o colectivo que constituya una amenaza al orden establecido, se reconfiguró en esta coyuntura para evitar un potencial triunfo del candidato serrano, construyéndolo como una amenaza terrorista que pondría en riesgo la democracia.

A través del Análisis Crítico del Discurso, se analiza cuáles fueron los recursos discursivos utilizados por las élites dominantes para deslegitimar al adversario de izquierda, utilizando para ello los mensajes emitidos en los debates presidenciales, el plan de gobierno de Keiko Fujimori y la “campaña anticomunista” que sostuvieron los principales sectores de derecha en los principales medios de comunicación nacionales e internacionales.

Como principales conclusiones, se observa que las tres estrategias más utilizadas fueron: 1. la negativización del candidato de izquierda mediante su construcción como un enemigo terrorista; 2. la presentación de la candidata de derecha como la protectora de la democracia y la libertad frente a la amenaza comunista; 3. y la apelación a la memoria social sobre el conflicto armado interno que avivó el miedo al retorno del terrorismo. Sostenemos que estas estrategias lograron encuadrar el tratamiento mediático de la campaña presidencial como un enfrentamiento entre “nosotros” los defensores de la democracia y “ellos” los impulsores de la dictadura comunista debido a la persistencia de elementos sociohistóricos que emergen sistemáticamente en Perú en contextos de crisis sociopolítica.

### **Palabras clave**

Perú, terrorismo, campaña, presidencia, criminalización, bicentenario, conflicto armado interno, enemigo interno, terruqueo.

## Introduction

The year 2021 was one of profound mutations for the Andean country. In a context marked by the expansion of SARS-CoV-2 that crudely exhibited the consequences of neoliberalism on a health system overwhelmed by lack of investment and the effects of the political crisis unleashed at the end of 2020, general elections were carried out for the period 2021-2026, in which the president, two vice-presidents, one hundred thirty congressmen and five representatives to the Andean Parliament were elected.

The first round, carried out on Sunday April 11, was disputed between eighteen parties and party coalitions, evidencing the profound fragmentation of the party system and the difficulty to establish alliances between sectors with shared interests.

The polarization between representatives of the radical right-wing and of the left-wing deepened in the face of the second round, disputed on June 6<sup>th</sup> between Keiko Fujimori from Fuerza Popular and Pedro Castillo Torres from Peru Libre, who was elected president by a margin of 0.252 % against Fujimori.

The Bicentenary elections constituted a faithful reflection of the historical dispute between the coast —core of the political and economic power and essential pivot for the primary resources exporting model— and the mountains —which generate this wealth and are at a place of subsidiarity from the central state processes—. Similarly, they exhibited the deepening to the political party fragmentation that Peru experiences from the collapse of the party system occurred at the end of the 1980s.

In this electoral scenario another continuity element of Peruvian history also became present, heir of the internal armed conflict period (1980-2000): the instrumentalization of terrorism to discredit the adversary. Indeed, although the figure of the terrorist gains strength during this phase of escalating violence, it is in the post-conflict period where an instrumental use of terrorism on the different forms of dissidence is observed. This use becomes increasingly frequent on those persons or collectives that constitute a threat —real or fictitious— to the established order.

This research analyzes the political use of terrorism in the campaign for the first and second electoral rounds corresponding to the 2021 presidential elections in Peru, as a strategy to discredit the adversary and construct him/her as an enemy. Meanwhile, the dominant elites have been the ones that

have employed this characterization to delegitimize their leftist opponents or all who threatens the —neoliberal— established order; for the sake of developing this hypothesis, we will focus on the discourses and messages issued by the right-wing forces.

With the objective of elucidating which are the discursive strategies used by Peruvian dominant groups in the most recent presidential elections to erode the reputation of a candidate potentially dangerous for preserving their interests, a critical discourse analysis is conducted considering as elements the messages issued during the presidential debates, government plan, graphic campaign and public speeches of the right-wing candidates and forces in communication media. We inscribe this situational analysis in a long duration reading that enables to identify continuities and changes in the criminalization strategies deployed by elites, mainly from Lima, every time their privileges are questioned.

## **Studies about criminalization in Latin America**

The studies about criminalization have mainly focused on situations of social protest, which have been addressed from a diversity of perspectives in Latin American literature.

The predominant approach is the legal one, within which it is highlighted the new criminal law trend that warns about institutionalization of the criminal law of the enemy (Jakobs, 2006), focused on the preventive sanction of an individual considered dangerous, even when he/she has not committed any crime. The reflections by Máximo Sozzo (2016) are in this line of thought; he points out the increasing use of this sobering punitive model in South America, from the perspective of the Argentine critical criminology. Similarly, the Argentine sociologist and jurist Roberto Gargarella (2008) has denounced the judicialization of politics to control dissidence.

The works by Mirtha Vásquez (2015, 2018) stand out in the field of Peruvian legal studies; these works analyze the deployment of undemocratic mechanisms and the social protest “criminalizing policy” that Peruvian governments have implemented since Fujimori. Similarly, the work by Juan Carlos Ruiz-Molleda of the Legal Defense Institute (2020) performs a reconstruction of the legislations of the past two decades, which tended to an intensification of the penalties and a smaller tolerance to dissidence, espe-

cially related to the human rights defenders of the Andean country. These works are predominantly focused on the imprisonment rates and the prosecution procedures as an expression of criminalization.

In this paper, criminalization is understood as a process that includes imprisonment, but exceeds it, identifying other instances of isolation, stigmatization and persecution of criminalized groups to legitimate and naturalize the deployment of a violent response, such as the use of a qualifier that takes us back to the most recent period of social unrest to erode its legitimacy through its construction as a threat.

In coincidence with Calveiro (2012), terrorism is understood as a political, ideological and functional juridical construction to the actual forms of organization, accumulation and concentration of neoliberalism. The blurry borders exhibited by the term enable consolidating legal interstices that, although valid during states of emergency (Schmitt, [1932] 1991), are applied on populations identified as threats (Agamben, 2007).

This brings us to a specificity of the type of state violence typical of the region: its historical deployment not on a foreign enemy, but on an internal one (Centeno, 2014). From the second half of the twentieth century and up to the end of the 1990s, this internal enemy acquired the qualifier of subversive or terrorist, according to the terms delimited by the National Security Doctrine and under dictatorial political systems (Feierstein, 2014), and it was defined by its presumable link to communist groups. In the period analyzed in this paper, the use of the terrorist qualifier is reinterpreted, it is applied on different social subjects and, moreover, it takes place in a formal democracy scenario.

### **The political-media construction of the terrorist enemy in post-conflict Peru: genealogy and validity of the practice of “terruqueo”**

The research works that have focused on the political use of terrorism as a mean to delegitimize social struggles, expressions of dissidence or anti-neoliberal presidential candidatures, are scarce in the Peruvian field of study. However, some works contribute to understand the analysis proposed in this paper.

First, it is worth mentioning the work by Flores-Galindo, who in *Buscando un Inca* (1994) reflects about the Peruvian identity and the Andean imaginaries that conjugate in it. It is stated there that, during the internal ar-

med conflict, the language was slowly transformed in line with the tortures and murders perpetrated on Andean populations:

‘*Senderista*’ was replaced by ‘terrorist’ and this word became over time a synonym of “people from Ayacucho”, which in turn was equivalent to anyone who was Indian or mestizo, was poorly dressed, or made a deficient use of Spanish... To be called “people from Ayacucho” was to admit to have incurred in the antiterrorist law. In this manner, the end of the war in 1984, became an onslaught of the western side of Peru against its Andean region. (p. 334)

The doctoral thesis by Peralta-Ruiz (1996) entitled *Prensa, opinión pública y terrorismo en Perú (1980-1994)* stands out in a similar line; this work explores the news treatment of three newspapers with national (*El Comercio*) and international (*El País* from Spain and *The New York Times* from the United States of America) scope, about the political violence deployed by *Sendero Luminoso*. It concludes that the contents and comments of these media issued from the beginning of the internal armed conflict up to the capture of all the leaders of the organization contributed to spectacularize *senderista* political violence in front of public opinion.

In his analysis about the informative treatment of each media analyzed, he points out that the reference newspaper from Lima moved away from a “structural, historic and anthropological” discourse, as opposed to what he states was the discourse of the international newspapers analyzed, emphasizing on the “insane, criminal, resentful and polpotiana nature of *senderista* violence”. According to the author, this is in line with its identification with the current political power and, specially, with the Army and the national security doctrine.

On the other hand, Aguirre (2011) analyzes the mutation of the word terrorist to “terrucó” in the context of the internal armed conflict and its further use as an insult directed to a diversity of players, from “human rights defenders, relatives of detained people and other victims of political violence, and people of indigenous origin in general” (p. 103). He states that, although the origin of the word is not clear<sup>1</sup>, its colloquial and daily use contributed to the naturalization of the link between indigenous or serrano and terrorist. Furthermore, such naturalization, operated in the framework of the

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1 Aguirre explores the possible origins of the term and concludes that the two more feasible hypotheses are that it was a military term taken in ownership by the local population of Ayacucho or a “quechuization” of the word terrorist (2011, pp. 117-119).

counterinsurgency policy to frighten people about the threat represented by a change of system, operates since then to discredit both indigenous people as well as people identified with leftist values, progressivism or the defense of human rights. Indeed, he refers to the 2011 presidential campaign, when Ollanta Humala, who by then showed himself as the representative of the “turn to the left”, and in his political campaign proposed the “great transformation”, was branded as “terrorco”, even when he, in his post of Army commander, had participated in countersubversive actions.

Similarly, the own Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR, Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2008) states that it was the government of Alberto Fujimori which, after capturing the leader of Sendero Luminoso Abimael Guzmán in 1992, and after the self-coup that installed a sort of “democradura” or “dictablanda”<sup>2</sup>, terrorism started to be instrumentally used with propaganda purposes in operations directed by the National Intelligence Service (SIN, Servicio de Inteligencia Nacional), mainly against members of the opposition and, even, of his own government.

With respect to the electoral context being analyzed, it stands out the work by Bedoya- Forno *et al.* (2021), who explore the use of the “terrorqueo” by Fujimorists towards Pedro Castillo. The “terrorqueo” is defined by these authors as an imaginary construction employed to:

Discredit a group or an individual, converting them in a clearly identifiable target. Maliciously represented as terrorists, these people become enemies, or at least are presented as such in political, military and media discourses. (p. 13)

Similarly, the paper by Álvarez Chávez (2021) constitutes a fundamental contribution, as it analyzes the social imaginaries present in the speeches issued during the second electoral round between Castillo and Fujimori and identifies the use of the “ghost of communism”, which is automatically assimilated to the terrorist, to the serrano and opposed to development indigenous, as well as the threat of “Venezuelization” that his victory would represent. The onslaught against the figure of Castillo and his accusation of being

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2 In April 1992, after the refusal of the Congress of granting him extraordinary powers, Alberto Fujimori ordered its dissolution and established the so-called “Emergency and National Reconstruction Government”. Since then, it started a period that combined censorship and authoritarianism with a limited functioning of democratic institutions. This is why the term dictatorship is used frequently to characterize Fujimorism, and it has been demonstrated that during his government, under the pretext of antiterrorist fight, human rights violations were committed.

a terrorist by the Fujimorist party lead the author to state the possible emergence of a phenomenon that he calls “Neo-Fujimorism” or “new Peruvian style fascism” (p. 339).

Huanca-Arohuanca (2021a) also refers to the ghost of terrorism and its presence in the first electoral round of 2021. He concludes that it is possible to evidence the validity of the ideological fight between a new ascending left-wing and a radical and outdated right-wing, the discrimination of the coast towards the mountain and the disinformation present in Peruvian communication media (p. 3). In a later paper, Huanca-Arohuanca (2021b) concentrates on the media power and the manipulation exercised by the multi-media disseminating hatred and racism messages towards the serranas and indigenous communities in general.

Similarly, Pierina Pighi-Bel, in a journalistic article published six days before the second round (BBC, May 30 2021), provides a brief reflection about how the “terruqueo” has been used in the campaign between these two candidates. Besides referring to the use of the term during the 1990s, when it was mostly employed to refer to the opponents of Fujimorism, from 2000, states Pighi-Bel, it is used to discredit those who support the convictions due to human rights violation by the ex-president. She even adds a use of the term to refer to those who criticize the neoliberal economical model.

María Sosa-Mendoza (June 2021) adds that, in this electoral scenario, the word communist was presented as a “synonym of expropriation, of misery, of terrorism, of reduction of freedoms, of Cuba and Venezuela (...) was equivalent to being a social resentful, but also being “Andean and ignorant”. Consequently, any candidate, politician, intellectual, journalist or voter who assumed a position of relative acceptance to a proposal by Castillo, was subject to the same stigmatization campaign.

As it is evidenced in the following sections, in the post-conflict period these practices are not implemented randomly, but on those personalities, movements or expressions of change that erode or are perceived as potential threats to the neoliberal model.

## **Materials and methods**

This research uses a qualitative methodology and, as it prioritizes the analysis of social, political and media constructions about terrorism that

were disseminated in the framework of an electoral process, it is chosen the technique of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

The classical approach proposed by Van Dijk, oriented to explore, from a multidisciplinary focus, the relationships between discourse and society and, particularly, the incidence of the discourse in reproducing the inequalities, invites to retake one of the main questions: “How are dominant groups capable of establishing, maintaining and legitimating their power, and which discursive resources are deployed in such domination? (1999, p. 24). This question leads us to focus on the “manipulation and domination resources used by elites, since they have a specific control on public discourse”.

First, it is worth mentioning that the capacity to access the media resources necessary to canalize their interests and disseminate their messages was unequal in the case of Castillo and Fujimori. Indeed, the figure of Keiko Fujimori was not unknown in the electoral scenario analyzed, since besides being the daughter of the ex-dictator and occupying a position as congresswoman between 2006 and 2011, she finished second in the presidential race in three opportunities (2011 against Ollanta Humala, 2016 against Pedro Pablo Kuczynski and 2021 against Castillo)<sup>3</sup>. In contrast, Castillo had a low level of national visibility when the first round took place and was made invisible by large Peruvian communication media and polling firms in pre-election analyses.

Second, it is pointed out that the capacity to control the discourses issued and with capacity of reaching people was neither equitable, with an overrepresentation of the proposals of Fuerza Popular and their presentation as the “saviors of the Republic” in front of the communist danger represented by Castillo.

Ultimately, it is necessary to point out that these reflections pursue the purpose of making visible practices and discourses that exhibit the current existence of structural racism and the persistence of imaginaries that erode the democratic system and hinder the capacity of constructing alternatives to the neoliberalism prevailing from the 1990s. Then, elucidating how dominant elites contribute to reproduce racist and class-biased practices and discourses through the use of stereotypes and prejudices that takes us back to the era of armed conflicts with the purpose of propagating terror among people constitutes, thus, one of the main objectives of this research.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2011 she obtained 48.55 % against Ollanta Humala and in 2016 49.88 % against Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.

Based on these premises, it becomes evident that the focus of the “*terruqueo*” campaign was Pedro Castillo, his political allies and his supporters, being the right-wing supporters the ones who issued these messages. To develop the analysis, it is employed a combination of materials that enable constructing a diachronic reading about the use of these characterizations in the campaign official period, between March and June 2021<sup>4</sup>.

At first instance, the presidential debate corresponding to the first electoral round organized by the National Election Jury in three rounds on March 29th, 30th and 31<sup>st</sup>, transmitted through open television and the two debates corresponding to the ballottage carried out on May 1<sup>st</sup> in Chota (Cajamarca) and on May 30<sup>th</sup> in Arequipa constitute the core of the analysis<sup>5</sup>. The exploration of the proposals of the right-wing candidate, Keiko Fujimori, in her Government Plan, is added to the analysis, together with the posters that accompanied the “*anticommunist campaign*” and the public speeches and mediated messages of right-wing representatives for the second round, that contributed to the delegitimizing campaign of the “*antisystem*” candidate.

As a tool of political communication, the presidential debates enable, in articulation with government plans, to know the proposals of the candidates and their positioning around the main topics of the political agenda (Benoit & Henson, 2007), as well as analyzing the construction and representation of identities and alterities (Kanashiro, 2007).

In the case analyzed, as it is about a political scenario atomized by the political and social-health crisis, in a society with an endemic weakness of parties to solve people’s problems (Nercesian & Mendoza, 2020), this tool becomes useful to also make visible the discursive confrontation strategies between ideas and country models, Indeed, we agree with Giordano (2021) in that televised presidential debates constitute a tool “*mostly used to legitimate certain positions in contexts of strong institutional, political and/or economic crisis*” (Giordano, 2020).

On the other hand, the analysis of public speeches and campaigns of the right-wing representatives and forces aligned with the candidate who positioned herself as defender of the neoliberal model and the media treatment

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4 The campaign of the first round took place between March 12th and April 9th, while the second round extended between May 1st and May 31st.

5 The technical debate carried out on May 23rd between the members of the Fuerza Popular and Peru Libre teams are excluded from the analysis.

of the “anticommunist campaign”, enables to understand how such discourses circulated in the public arena.

## Results

### **First round: between the allegations of corruption, the “strong hand” discourse and the danger of “Venezuelization”**

The first electoral round was carried out on April 11<sup>th</sup> between eighteen lists and party coalitions. The effects of the political crisis that started in November 2020 would become present in the electoral scenario. In that opportunity, the street protests were quickly deployed in various cities of Peru —despite the social-health crisis— in light of the announcement of Martin Vizcarra’s removal of the presidency due to “permanent moral inability” and his replacement by an opposition leader —Manuel Merino— and a cabinet that people perceived as illegitimate since it had not emanated from a popular election.

Similar to other countries in the region, the protests combined with an impugnation of the neoliberal model that became a demand for a constitutional reform aimed at overcoming the Fujimorist Constitution of 1993 and start a refounding process. The year of the Bicentenary was headed towards becoming a hinge moment of Peruvian history. However, the elections would evidence more historical continuities than change signals.

Three processes articulated in the first round: multiple candidatures of different ideological expressions, dispersion of votes with low percentages obtained by every party coalition<sup>6</sup> and high levels of electoral abstention<sup>7</sup>. The polarization between right-wing and left-wing candidates started

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6 Among the six better positioned candidates, four of them obtained vote percentages close to 10%: Verónica Mendoza from Juntos por el Perú; 7.83 %; Yonhy Lescano from Acción Popular, 9.10 %; Hernando De Soto, from Avanza País, 11.65 %; Rafael López Aliaga from Renovación Popular, 11.68 %. The performance of the two candidates that reached the second round broke away by a bounded margin: Keiko Fujimori from Fuerza Popular obtained 13,35 % and Pedro Castillo Terrones from Perú Libre, 19.09 %.

7 According to data of ONPE (2021), participation of people reached 70.048 %, equivalent to 17,713,716 voters of the 25 million in conditions of casting their vote. Similarly, there was 12.364

to draw a second-round scenario: on one side, the dictatorial right-wing in the figure of Keiko Fujimori, its corporate side represented by Rafael López Aliaga and its orthodox liberalism variant represented by Hernando De Soto; on the other side, the most radical left-wing, represented by Verónica Mendoza, Marco Arana and the own Pedro Castillo, peasant leader and teacher from Cajamarca.

### **First presidential debate**

For the first presidential debate, organized by the National Election Board and broadcasted by *TV Perú*, the eighteen candidates were divided in three rounds, carried out on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>. Each event lasted for 2 hours and 20 minutes. The debate axes were: 1. Actions to face the pandemics, 2. Education, 3. Public security 4. Public integrity and fight against corruption and 5. Final arguments. For the purposes of this research, we focus on the speeches of the three right-wing candidates among the six that were better positioned in the first round:<sup>8</sup> Keiko Fujimori, Rafael López Aliaga y Hernando De Soto.

The first day were called César Acuña from Alianza para el Progreso, Keiko Fujimori from Fuerza Popular, George Forsyth from Victoria Nacional, Verónica Mendoza from Juntos por el Perú, Alberto Beingolea from the Partido Popular Cristiano and Marco Arana from the Frente Amplio.

In her intervention regarding the first axis, Keiko Fujimori stated that: “The pandemics has undressed two very significant facts: the fact that the presidents of the Republic are completely incapable, inefficient and have ideological limitations” (National Election Board, March 29 2021), referring to the pandemics management by Vizcarra and interim president Francisco Sagasti, who took office after the Merino’s resignation. The candidate of Fuerza Popular would explain that these “ideological limitations” had prevented the country from obtaining economic aid by the private sector and, when vaccines started to be commercialized, acquiring them from other laboratories besides the Gamaleya National Research Center in Epidemiology and Microbiology, from Russia.

After the speech by Marco Arana, who stated that the problems related to the social-health crisis had their origin in the Fujimorist Constitution,

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% of blank votes and 6.340 % of null votes.

8 See footnote 6.

Keiko responded with a defense of this Magna Carta, to which she attributed the capability of generating “peace and development”, in contrast with the 1979 Constitution that would have generated “chaos, violence, poverty”. According to the candidate, it was “thanks to the savings of this sustainable economy that have been possible thanks to the 1993 Constitution”, that bonuses could be given to the families mostly affected by the confinement preventive measures.

In the second axis, referred to education, she stated that it was necessary to eliminate the school books whose contents point out that “terrorism is an armed conflict. That is a barbarity”. In the public security axis, she proposed “a strong hand” to “stop crime and corruption”, and she invoked the need to reform the prison system and construct new jails that offer a solution to overcrowding, opportunity that she used to refer her own experiences as inmate, considered as unfair by the candidate.

Then, the candidate acknowledged “to the Armed Forces and to the National Police for giving us security during so many years, for helping us to overcome terrorism and for continuing to put the chest to face the pandemics”. She ended her intervention in this axis reiterating that the crime promoted by “weak and softy governments” could only be overcome with strong hand and concluded: “as Alberto Fujimori defeated terrorism, I, Keiko Fujimori, will defeat crime”.

In the hand in hand dialog with Arana, corresponding to the section of questions from people, the candidate directly related the left-wing with lack of investment, chaos and violence dissemination and destruction of economy: “We, from Fuerza Popular, will fight and we will not allow that You condemn Peru to poverty, to inequality, to poverty. I say no to radical left-wing.”

The second event occurred on March 30 between Daniel Urresti from Podemos Perú, Pedro Castillo from Perú Libre, Hernando de Soto from Avanza País, José Vega from Unión por el Perú — who retired at the beginning of the debate stating that it did not guarantee democracy — Andrés Alcántara from Democracia Directa and Ollanta Humala from Partido Nacionalista Peruano.

Hernando De Soto took Ollanta Humala as the axis of his main attacks and in various opportunities he made reference to his own contribution in the fight against terrorism and the capture of Abimael Guzmán, attributing such victory to himself and minimizing, at the same time, the participation of the candidate Humala in such fight, for not being a victim of SL as he had

been. Similarly, aligned with his economic thinking, he attributed to himself the liberal transformation of the country and his protagonist participation in the writing of the 1993 Constitution as his main political achievements.

The last day were called Rafael López Aliaga from *Renovación Popular*<sup>9</sup>, Julio Guzmán Cáceres from the *Partido Morado*, Yonhy Lescano from *Acción Popular*, Rafael Santos from *Perú Patria Segura*, Daniel Salaverry from the *Partido Democrático Somos Perú* and *Ciro Gálvez* from *Renacimiento Unido Nacional*.

Corruption occupied an important part of the first axis, with mutual accusations about who had been direct and indirect responsible of the social-health crisis, the lack of investment in health and the collapse of intensive care units.

In the axis of public security, López Aliaga stated that, if elected, he would propose a change in the Criminal Code to guarantee that minor crimes that “take off peace and tranquility to Peruvians” are punished with effective prison, major crimes are processed in the *Colonia Penal Agrícola del Sepa*<sup>10</sup> — which, therefore, implied its reopening — including life imprisonment to “rapists, presidents, congressmen, regional governors, majors, judges, prosecutors and other corrupt officials”, and expulsion to foreign people that commit crimes “against Peruvians” (JNE, March 30, 2021).

Similarly, he proposed to eliminate “the communist caviar laws<sup>11</sup> to defend our Police and Armed Forces from the abuse and persecution of civil judges as it occurs at present”. He closed his speech referring to the need of controlling the *VRAEM*<sup>12</sup> region “currently dominated by terrorists and drug dealers” and exploiting the region through agro-exporting and touristic activities and reestablish the self-defense committees against terrorism.

In his final arguments, he warned about the danger of “Venezuelization” of Peru: “Peruvians, this July 28<sup>th</sup> is different. Or we move on to be a world

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9 The participation of López Aliaga attracted the attention of both own and others, since he had to appeal to the reading of his notes for all his interventions, and in practically two hours and a half of debate he kept the eye on them, repeating even textually the same proposals.

10 The Sepa is a prison for inmates condemned to long sentences or recidivists, located in the Amazon jungle. It was created in 1948 during the military government of Manuel Odría and operated between 1951 and 1993.

11 In reference to the political left-wing (Calvo Pérez, 2016). *Diccionario de peruanismos*. Peruvian Language Academy).

12 Valleys of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro River, considered as an area of confluence of terrorist remnants.

power or we move on to be Venezuela and we will continue with the same corruption after many years of corrupt presidents and congressmen”.

*Government Plan “Rescue 2021”*

The second document used for this analysis is the Government Plan 2021-2026 of Keiko Fujimori called “Rescue 2021”. The Introduction, signed by the own candidate, makes reference to a categorical distinction between two models that have governed the country during the last fifty years. In line with her intervention in the presidential debate, this document distinguishes between a model, dominant between the 1970s and 1980s, that generated “poverty, insecurity and chaos” and a weak State that enabled “that terrorist groups impose violence and fear among the population”, whose germ may be found in the 1979 Constitution; and a model, established by her own father, whose essential pivot is the 1993 Constitution, axis for an open economy. This aperture evidenced that her space would not promote nor endorse a new Constitution.

In section 2.3 National Security and Defense (p. 39), the Government Plan makes reference to the new threats doctrine to point out that, in the fight against these new enemies, “our true heroes”, i.e., the members of the Armed Forces and of the National Police, “have been maltreated and are also maltreated today, not recognized, vilified and even humiliated by communist sectors that seek to destroy the institutionality and stability of the country (...) that sector that seeks to put us away and divide us”. Finally, the Vision of the Government Plan retakes the heroic rhetoric deployed in the presidential debate and establishes a line of historic continuity between the restoration process initiated by her father and the one that her government would develop: “Is the moment of rescuing our country. Fujimorism already made it before when we were in the middle of the terrorist attack and the hyperinflation generated by the populism always toxic for the economy of a nation” (p. 85)

During the campaign for the first round, Castillo was not the focus of the attack of his right-wing adversaries, in part because they did not expect that he would have a good performance. The result obtained in the first round by the peasant candidate surprised even political analysts and pollsters, who placed him below the fourth position. Indeed, experts predicted that the second round would be disputed between right-wing representatives (Global

South Observatory, 2021)<sup>13</sup>. Consequently, the target of the attacks were mainly Verónica Mendoza, who had already been a victim of a fear campaign in the 2016 elections and Marco Arana, who were pointed as apologists of terrorism and linked to communist ideas that would transform Peru into “another Venezuela”.

The analysis of these two elements enables us to visualize that, during the first round, it was configured a scenario of polarization between two country models that maintains continuity with the dynamics adopted by electoral campaigns in the post-conflict period: on one side, the representatives of the authoritarian neoliberal model proposed by Fujimori and, on the other side, those that hold a reformist standpoint, with larger presence of the State and people participation in decision making. The representatives of the dominant sectors issued a discourse invoking the past and the historic achievement of Fujimorism during the 1990s materialized in the defeat of subversion and the establishment of a neoliberal economic model.

The figure of Keiko was positioned, as in previous electoral scenarios, as the representative of such interests and both in the debate as well as in her government plan, she established a line of continuity between that process initiated by her father and his own historic achievement: the rescue of the country from the danger of “Venezuelization”. At this instance, the negation discursive strategies were focused on the link of the left-wing with lack of investment, violence and destruction of economy, and the presentation of economic liberalism, the strong hand and the defense of the 1993 Constitution as the safeguard against such threat.

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13 For a territorial analysis of the vote in the first round, see the Electoral Report of the Global South Observatory (2021). It is specified there that: “Castillo won in 16 departments (Cajamarca, Amazonas, San Martín, Áncash, Arequipa, Moquegua, Ayacucho, Tacna, Puno, Cusco, Apurímac, Huancaavelica, Junín, Pasco, Huánuco and Madre de Dios), whereas Keiko won in 7 (Callao, Ica, Lambayeque, Loreto, Piura, Tumbes and Ucayali). On the other hand, De Soto won in Lima and Cesar Acuña in La Libertad. The regions where Castillo had a greater percentage, especially the south and central mountains, are those that, in 2016, voted for Verónica Mendoza (in that election she ended in the third place with 18.74 %) and in 2011 voted for Ollanta Humala, there the anti-neoliberal and anti-Fujimori vote occurs with more strength”.

## **Second round: between the anticommunist campaign, the demonization of Castillo and the instrumentalization of terrorist imaginaries**

As established by the Peruvian electoral system, a party must obtain 50 % of the valid votes casted to be considered as winner in the first round. Since none of the lists obtained such percentage, June 6<sup>th</sup> was set for the development of the second round between the two candidates with the greater number of votes.

### *Second debate of presidential candidates*

The presidential debate between the two candidates was carried out on May 1<sup>st</sup> in the central square of the city of Chota, Arequipa (Cajamarca region), home of teacher Castillo. The topics addressed in this instance were: 1. Health, 2. Education, 3. Economy and economic recovery, 4. Security and fight against corruption. Many of the proposals disseminated by the candidates had been announced through other media. The fear campaign, however, was protagonist again.

In the axis of Economy and economic recovery, after the intervention of Castillo, Fujimori stated that “Communism has a policy to lie, lie, so that something remains in the people” (*La República*, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021), relating in the popular imaginary the candidate of Peru Libre with the manipulation exercised by the right hand of Hitler, Joseph Goebbels. In her final speech, she mentioned again the heroic crusade of Fujimorism and the “people united” to face terrorism.

After the debate, the journalists of *La República* in charge of covering the event pointed out the Fujimorist candidate as clear winner, by forcing Castillo to explain and clarify points of his government program and evidence the radicalization of his political discourse. With respect to the proposal of Keiko of directly distributing 40 % of the canon among the people from mining regions, the journalist qualified the measure as “revolutionary”, whereas Castillo “has moved more to the left of nationalization”.

Similarly, she accused Castillo of “ideologizing the topic of vaccines” and proposing unrealistic and counterproductive policies, such as the proposals of nationalization, in words of the journalist, of the extractive resources and “all private property”.

### *Third debate of presidential candidates*

The second and last debate was carried out on May 30<sup>th</sup> in Arequipa and lasted for three hours. The topics were organized in six blocks: 1. Peru of the Bicentenary; 2. Health and management of the pandemics; 3. Economy and employment promotion; 4. Education, science and innovation; 5. Fight against corruption and public integrity; and 6. Human rights, social policies and attention to vulnerable populations.

In block 1, Fujimori made Castillo responsible “for his language and messages of hate, division and class struggle” for generating aggressions against journalists and citizens that mobilized on Saturday May 29<sup>th</sup> in Lima in support of Keiko under the slogan “Civic Caravan for the Family and Democracy”. At the closure of block 2, dedicated to the state management of the pandemics, she stated that “Our sick people will not heal with communism, the COVID will not stop with class struggle, the pandemics is not debated with rocks”.

In block 3, aimed at debating their proposals about economy and employment promotion, the candidate Castillo exhibited two covers of *El Comercio* and *La República* newspapers referred to his proposal of modifying the pension system, in which it was evident a clear intention of the former of spreading the fear to communism and nationalization. Whereas *La República* stated that “Peru Libre proposes the reform of AFP without touching funds of the affiliates”, *El Comercio* titled “Castillo proposes a confiscation of the savings of the affiliates to the AFP”.

Besides the focus of the attack on the figure of Castillo, the use of the word confiscation showed a clear intentionality of linking the possibility of Castillo’s eventual presidency with a policy of nationalizations and expropriations. He continued his speech clarifying his proposals: “We are not going to take away the savings of the working people, we will respect private property (...). We will promote a popular economy with market, the market cannot control the State” (JNE, May 30, 2021).

The debate reached its most critical point in the dialog section belonging to block 5, aimed at the proposals to fight against corruption. Castillo stated that the candidate Fujimori had no moral authority to speak about this topic, accusation that Keiko responded to by faking a confusion of Castillo with Cerrón to make a direct reference to the regional ex-governor of Junín and founder of the party, accused and sentenced for corruption in 2019 (Chanian *et al.*, June 29, 2021).

Afterwards, Fujimori stated that:

I committed at all times, at the start of the campaign, to not “terrorize”, and I have complied that fully. Here the only ones that “terrorize” are yourselves, when media reports are published (...) where there are over 240 members of the MOVAREDEF<sup>14</sup> (...) actively participating in your party.

Throughout the entire campaign for the second round, the attack to Pedro Castillo progressively added adepts from different social, political and cultural sectors. He was accused of running for the presidency to install a communist dictatorship that enabled a takeover by the terrorism of Sendero Luminoso (Noriega, 2021).

In her multiple public speeches, Keiko accused him of being violent, a liar and aligned with corrupt people, and instilled among the people fear to poverty, unemployment and lack of investment, distorting the proposals of Castillo and turning them into threats of nationalization, closing of imports and shortage.

*The building of the “us” vs. “them” approach in political and media discourses*

The threat of a peasant and elementary school teacher, representative of a left-wing party, from the northern city of Chota (province of Cajamarca) could become president, activated all the alarms among the dominant elites, the big businessmen and the media conglomerates related with the neoliberal model, who aligned themselves in a firm support to Fujimori.

The possible reconfiguration of a “new us”, in words of Montoya-Rojas (2021) “identified with the others of before, the ignored, the invisible, the unnamed, the ‘fucking cholos’, ‘the fucking indians’, ‘the fucking blacks’”, promoted a campaign of hate, fear and racism to discredit the candidate and, by extension, his voters and supporters<sup>15</sup>.

In a press conference after the confirmation by the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE, Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales) of

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14 Movement for Amnesty and Fundamental Rights. It is considered the political arm of Sendero Luminoso. Since 2012 it tries, without success, to be recognized as a party to participate in democratic elections.

15 It would be interesting to resume the analysis laid out in this paper to investigate about the spread of racial and classist insults about Peru Libre, Castillo and his voters in social networks. An article by the EFE Agency proposes a preliminary analysis. See: Samon Ros (June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

her participation in the second round against Pedro Castillo, Fujimori issued a message of union and reconciliation. She even stated that she would avoid “acting the easy way” of building a fear campaign exploiting the “weaknesses” of her opponent. However, before the end of the conference she stated that “the opponent has laid out the old communist thesis of class struggle, hate and confrontation” (RPP, April 14, 2021).

Posters quickly appeared in the streets of Lima, Arequipa and Cajamarca with anticommunist slogans: “Protect your job and freedom. No to communism”, “Think about your future. No to communism”, “Did you know that a blank vote favors communism?”, “Communism breeds misery and poverty”, “Let’s protect investment and employment”, “I vote for democracy. No to communism”, “A blank vote is a red vote” and “10 soles, minimum wage in Venezuela. I vote for my family”.

Although Fuerza Popular denied the authorship of these posters and attributed it to their supporters, element that has little credibility because of the high cost of maintenance that they imply (Durand, May 27, 2021), further investigations revealed that one of the advertising agencies involved, particularly the one that put most of the posters in the city of Arequipa, was linked with Fujimorism (El Búho, May 12, 2021).

The right-wing presidential ex-candidates that lost in the first round aligned themselves to support Keiko, stating that they would launch a national campaign to explain “what is the communism proposed by Castillo”, as expressed by López Aliaga (Nodal, May 21, 2021). Twelve players for the national team also joined the campaign “No to communism”, showing their support of democracy in their social media<sup>16</sup>.

The writer Mario Vargas Llosa also called people to vote for Keiko Fujimori as she represented the “lesser evil”. In an extensive analysis published in the *Diario Crónica* of Mexico, he stated that Castillo would establish a popular economy with markets, inspired in the ideas of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa. He also warned about the threat of what his eventual government could mean for the country: nationalization of companies and mining, oil and energy reservoirs, derogation of the Constitution and a re-founding of the country in a process “that copied the one unveiled by commander Chávez in Venezuela, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Socialism, that has forced over 5 mi-

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16 Fear of communism unites thousands in favor of Keiko Fujimori (May 30, 2021). DW. <https://bit.ly/3By6FsR>

llion Venezuelans to migrate to neighboring countries to not die from hunger” (Crónica, June 4, 2021).

In short, Vargas Llosa defined the possible victory of Castillo as the inexorable arrival of all bad: hunger, poverty, lack of investment, unemployment, electoral fraud. And an unavoidable coup to restore the order. In a video sent from Spain to support the candidature of Fujimori, he stated that Castillo would impose a dictatorship and his government would be synonym of backlog.

Thanks to the media and corporate support that Fujimorism has since the 1990s, the candidate was able to establish in the collective imaginary that Castillo’s presidency would be equivalent to a dictatorship, positioning herself as the protector of democracy. From the political arc of the right-wing, this campaign was accompanied by the statements by López Aliaga of “Death to communism, death to Cerrón and Castillo” in the rally held in May 8<sup>th</sup> under the slogan “Let us save democracy and our freedom”, as well as the call by Hernando De Soto to world leaders like Bush, Clinton and Macron to unite efforts against the “communist attempt to control Latin America” (RPP, May 29, 2021).

From an intellectual standpoint, the concerns of Vargas Llosa with respect to the threat of a coup as a consequence of Castillo’s victory; and from a media sphere, the support to Fujimori and the bigger coverage of the right-wing candidate, converged to a shared goal: spread terror around the figure of Castillo and present Fujimori as the representative of democracy.

Definitely, the strategy of creating a negative image of the left-wing that had operated during the first round was revealed in the instance of ballottage on the figure of Castillo, his allies and supporters. In the candidate debates, the central element of Fujimori’s discourse was the risk that a potential win of Castillo would represent for democracy and freedom, trying to capitalize on civilian discontent faced with the idea of impoverishment and unemployment that lies under the imaginaries about Venezuela and other countries of the region that opted for a reformist alternative, described by her and other representatives of the right-wing as “communists”. But in this stage, she takes it a step further and presents the figure of Castillo as a terrorist enemy, linked with “senderistas” remnants.

## Conclusions and discussion

The preceding analysis enables visualizing the discursive strategies that were deployed during the 2021 Peruvian presidential campaign by the dominant elites and their representatives. These were: 1. creating a negative image of Pedro Castillo, through his depiction as a terrorist enemy; 2. the presentation of Fujimori as the protector of democracy and freedom against the communist threat; 3. and the appeal to social memory about the internal armed conflict that revived the fears about the return of terrorism. These strategies did not occur in a linear manner, but were reconfigured as the campaign developed.

The critical discourse analysis enables us to understand this instrumental use of imaginaries, perceptions and social fears in a basic strategy of polarization and of establishing frontiers between us and them (Van Dijk, 2003), which operated through a media overrepresentation of the proposals of Fuerza Popular and their presentation as “saviors of the Republic” against the danger of communism represented by Castillo.

This polarization between us, the defenders of democracy, and them, their detractors that attempt to establish a communist dictatorship, it was evident with bigger emphasis in the second electoral round. To this regard, it is stated that social memory around the internal armed conflict and the reading of “the two demons” that dominated the CVR Report, shaped and still shapes the perceptions and popular imaginaries used to analyze almost every conflictive situation in contemporary Peru, from the one that occurred in the framework of an anti-extractivist protest<sup>17</sup>, popular demonstrations such as the one in 2020, or the ones that happen during a presidential election.

Similarly, the demonization of Castillo was constructed appealing to mental models present in people. It was through the instrumentalization of the fear to the return of terrorism that was possible to polarize the election as a situation of “heroes” and “villains”. The figure of a serrano teacher, from the left-wing, that proposed to end with the Peru of elites, was easily related to the figure of the “senderista” leader. Once Castillo was constructed as enemy, the attacks against his candidature and against him appeared legitimated in front of the threat that his government would represent.

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<sup>17</sup> In a previous work, it is analyzed the criminalization of the indigenous and peasant-indigenous communities from Chile and Peru that opposed to extractive activities between 2000 and 2018, making visible practices and stigmatizing discourses typical of authoritarian neo-liberalization.

Although the “terruqueo” against the current president Pedro Castillo does not constitute a novelty in the post-conflict Peruvian history, the 2021 scenario was made visible as a historic opportunity, an inflexion point, both for those who advocated a deepening of extractivist neoliberalism as well as for those who proposed a change of system.

To the symbolic load represented by the Elections of the Bicentenary, we should add the impuginations to neoliberalism made visible in the 2020 protests occurred in the middle of a social-health crisis that revealed the limitations of the model. The elites as a whole perceived these events as real threats to the preservation of their interests, protected by the “economic model that concentrates wealth” (Durand, 2021) designed by the Fujimorism and their neoliberal Constitution, and articulated all the economical, political and media scaffolding<sup>18</sup> to safeguard them.

However, the proposed circumstantial approach, the previous analysis should be inscribed in a long duration reading that enables understanding the instrumentalization of terrorism in the political context of the 2021 elections. Indeed, the criminalization of serrano and jungle people through their homologation with terrorism responds to legitimated and naturalized practices of stigmatization and discrimination of these populations. Their transformation during the internal armed conflict period led to the passage from the “idle indian” to the “dangerous indian”, starting the “terruqueo” practices and their use in formal democracy contexts by dominant elites to delegitimize their adversary, constructing them as a dangerous enemy.

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18 Durand (May 27, 2021) points out that in this election the “scare of the riches” lead to increase the legal and illegal, informed and hidden donations to Keiko’s campaign.

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