

## Bicentennial Generation: youth movements against former President Merino

*Generación del Bicentenario:  
movimientos juveniles contra el expresidente Merino*

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### **Abstract**

*This article studies, from the universe of identity and social movements, the leading role played by young Peruvians known as the Bicentennial Generation against the swearing-in of the then president of the Republic, Manuel Merino, in November 2020. In this context of citizen movements, we identify their main generational characteristics, ideological stances and modes of protest. We also address the way in which they define themselves in order to elaborate a conceptual approach to themselves as a social movement. The research has a mixed approach and exploratory level. In this regard, a survey was applied to 380 Peruvians over 18 years of age, most of them from Generation Y and Z. The results show a greater activism of women; a little partisan linkage with traditional political proposals; and the use of resources such as protests, cacerolazos and social networks. On the other hand, there were acts of solidarity such as the mobilization of demonstrators in cars, donations to brigades, posters on the facades of their homes or the use of Andean music instruments on public streets. We conclude that the Bicentennial Generation demystifies the disinterest of young people in political issues and organizes to defend democracy through two types of demonstrators: pro-democracy and anti-corruption.*

### **Keywords**

*Bicentenary Generation, social mobilisations, youth protests, Peru.*

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## **Resumen**

Este artículo estudia, desde el universo de la identidad y los movimientos sociales, el protagonismo que tuvieron los jóvenes peruanos conocidos como la Generación del Bicentenario frente a la toma de posesión del entonces presidente de la República, Manuel Merino, en noviembre de 2020. En ese contexto de movimientos ciudadanos identificamos sus principales características generacionales, posturas ideológicas y modos de protesta. Asimismo, abordamos la forma en que se autodefinen para elaborar una aproximación conceptual respecto a sí mismos como un movimiento social. La investigación es de enfoque mixto y de nivel exploratorio. En este sentido, se aplicó una encuesta a 380 peruanos mayores de 18 años, la mayoría de ellos de la Generación Y y Z. Los resultados muestran un mayor activismo de las mujeres; una poca vinculación partidaria con las propuestas políticas tradicionales; y el uso de recursos como marchas, cacerolazos y redes sociales. Por otro lado, identificamos actos solidarios como la movilización de manifestantes en autos, donaciones a brigadas, colocación de carteles en las fachadas de sus hogares o utilización de instrumentos de música andina en la vía pública. Concluimos que la Generación del Bicentenario desmitifica el desinterés de jóvenes en asuntos políticos y se organiza para defender la democracia a través de dos tipos de manifestantes: pro-democracia y anti-corrupción.

## **Palabras clave**

Generación del Bicentenario, movimientos sociales, movimientos ciudadanos, protestas juveniles, Perú.

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## **Introduction**

On the eve of the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Peru's independence, the country was overshadowed by a deep political and economic crisis that reached its peak between November 9 and 15, 2020. In this short period, Peru had three presidents. "All this occurred months before the General Elections of April 11, 2021 and in the midst of a global health crisis produced by Covid-19" (Jaramillo, 2021, p.1). The social explosion began with massive, decentralized protests in the interior of the country after the presidential vacancy against Martin Vizcarra Cornejo and culminated with the resignation of his successor Manuel Merino as head of state.

Part of the media attention focused on the protesters who were named as the Bicentennial Generation. Sociologist Noelia Chávez first coined the term on November 12, 2020, in a tweet: "The Bicentennial Generation. The

protesters. Merino must resign” (Chávez, 2020). Almost immediately, the concept gained media relevance and Chávez broadened its meaning to refer to a political narrative that generated a collective identity among a group of heterogeneous individuals that defended democracy.

Villanueva (2021) argues that the protests occurred in different scenarios such as the digital (social networks), homes (cacerolazos) and the street (mobilizations and protests). In addition to political activists, the author identified three types of protesters: a) the dedicated, who pursued social causes, b) the non-political, and c) the spontaneous, primary group actors, such as friends and students, who started as spectators but later joined the protests.

In November 2020, a study conducted by the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP) revealed that 13 % of Peruvians participated in the protests, i.e., around 4 million 290 thousand citizens. The research highlighted the main reasons of demonstrations were: the controversial vacancy against the former President of the Republic, Martin Vizcarra Cornejo; the swearing of Manuel Merino as head of state; the discredited Congress of the Republic, among others (Dargent and Rousseau, 2021).

Historically, democracy in Peru has been marked by episodes of corruption that have permeated the collective memory of its citizens, building a political system with fragile and unstable foundations (Paredes and Encinas, 2020). It is contrasted in the National Survey of Values and Citizenship 2020, where 7 out of 10 Peruvians considered corruption as the country’s main problem (Datum International, 2020). In this sense, the Bicentennial Generation is the result of a group of citizens who struggled to get rid of the worn-out political system on the eve of the commemoration of Peru’s 200 years of independence from the Spanish colony.

This academic article analyzes the Bicentennial Generation as a political generation given that its members “have experienced a drastic change during adolescence or early adulthood in the environment of power relations, which affects them distinctively with respect to their predecessors” (Koeneke, 2007, p. 367).

Political generations have been lines of study in several academic works (Laouni, 2020; Fisher, 2018; Wong *et al.*, 2017). Some of the research relate the emergence of these cohorts to youth citizenship movements (Hadj-Moussa, 2021). These references place special emphasis on the historical, social and political contexts. For example, Deau and Goery (2019) rescue

the historical importance and the intellectual imprint immortalized by the M20F Generation, a term that refers to young Moroccan Protestants who participated in the Arab uprisings of 2011. Likewise, Laouni (2020) elaborates a profile of these young protesters who demonstrated against corruption, nepotism and the favoritism of authoritarianisms. Through surveys, he characterizes youth participation based on gender, education, political affiliation and use of digital platforms.

On the other hand, political generations end the stigmas of the supposed youth disinterest in public affairs, as demystified by some authors (Ross, 2018; Quaranta, 2016). These generational issues escape from the traditional protests related to the struggle for labor and civil rights, and issues such as climate change (Waeterloos *et al.*, 2021; Boulianne *et al.*, 2020; Holmberg, 2021; Bowman, 2019; Dodson and Papoutsaki, 2016); racial discrimination and abuse of authority (Gallagher *et al.*, 2018; Williamson *et al.*, 2018; Reinka and Leach, 2017); as well as feminist (Baylina and Rodo-Zarate, 2020; Moraes and Sahasranaman, 2018); and LGTBIQ (Chironi, 2019; Peterson *et al.*, 2018) movements.

In the last ten years, a very recurrent variable or category in research is the use of digital platforms and how they help to enhance the collective and connective action of protesters (Enikolopov *et al.*, 2020; Raynauld *et al.*, 2018; Ang *et al.*, 2014; García *et al.*, 2014; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2012). Research concludes that digital media reduce the monetary costs of demonstrations; they surpass in immediacy and are more interactive than traditional media; they incorporate new actors with similar collective identities, among others.

In Latin America, there are interesting works on generations (Vommaro, 2020; Sandoval and Carvallo, 2019; Nessi, 2019; Blanco and Vommaro, 2018; Bonviallani *et al.*, 2008). They highlight the importance of youth participation, especially of university students in social mobilizations.

Regarding publications on the Bicentennial Generation in Peru, photojournalistic works can be highlighted (Asociación de Fotoperiodistas del Perú, 2021; Reyna and Sotelo, 2021), as well as testimonials of women protagonists of the Bicentennial Generation (Chávez, 2020; Motta, 2020; Purizaca, 2020). On the other hand, there are published books that compile the testimony of its members (Sifuentes, 2021; Raymundo, 2021).

Regarding the above, there are still not many academic works on the topic. One of these is an essay that compares two Peruvian youth generations

that developed in very different contexts (Burga, 2021); and another that analyzes the protests through the media's informative coverage using *framing* theory (Angulo and Bolo, 2021). However, no studies were found that use the protagonists of the Bicentennial as a unit of analysis. Because of the latter, we formulate the following problem: who were these young demonstrators who were protagonists during the protests, what were the political motivations that led them to demonstrate, how did they do it, and how do they define themselves?

## **Theoretical framework**

Longa (2017) makes a chronological and theoretical review of the first approaches on generations. In his article he highlights the work of Comte, Dilthey, Donati, Martin, among others. Although at first the term was related to the biological and quantitative age dimensions, these evolved to more complex and interpretative topics developed by structural sociology, such as socio-cultural, socio-historical, socio-political contexts, among others (De Oliveira, 2017).

Segura and García (2010) delve deeper into the typology of generations and identify five models: Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. The nomenclatures and age ranges vary depending on each author; however, it is worth highlighting the contribution of Comte, Dilthey, Ortega and Gasset, Gramsci and Mannheim (Leccardi and Feixa, 2011). For example, Comte conducted a more quantitative approach, Dilthey a more historical one, Ortega and Gasset focused on a generational mission, and Mannheim has a more sociological perspective.

Díaz *et al.* (2017) argue that: a) Baby Boomers have an active presence in organizations in positions of power and is a generation concerned with the pursuit of status, loyalty and quality of life; b) Generation X grew up with liberal ideas, without a particular political affiliation and relate education with job opportunities; and c) Generation Y, also known as millennials, embrace technology as a lifestyle and have a detachment to any political affiliation, as well as to institutions such as the church. On the other hand, Dutra (2017) identifies Generation Z as digital natives, dependent on technologies and who manage to better accept changes, are multitaskers, among others.

In practice, generational models are so complex that there is a solid and legitimate criticism of them. From this perspective, structural segmentations such as age and socio-cultural experiences have gone from being very marked to infinite or invisible, even in small units of analysis. For example, most generational models have age ranges as their backbone. On this point, we agree with Leccardi and Feixa (2011) in recognizing that generations do not have a temporal moment as established by some academics, so their rhythm cannot be measured or predicted.

On the other hand, the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the emergence of phenomena such as digital gap have directly affected the stratification of generations. In this sense, the models present a wide variety of operational applications that must be reformulated in each case if better results are to be obtained (Guisado and Agoiz, 2013).

Despite this operational complexity, the academic field has used the term generations to refer to literary, artistic, and political cohorts. Braungart and Braungart (1986) develop three definitions of generation: a) as a descend; b) as a cohort or age group; and c) as a political generation or special age group working for social change. For the authors, the age group is more related to biological factors, while a generation or political cohort considers the needs and interests of the subjects. For the study on political activism and social mobilizations, the latter two meanings have been used more (Longa, 2017).

According to Galais (2012), unlike the cohort as an age group whose classification depends mainly on age ranges, political cohorts become a factor of cultural change influenced by their values and attitudes in social, historical and political contexts. Braungart (1984) defines political generations as a group that constructs an identity based on a generational mission that determines the public sphere by breaking a pre-existing order. On the other hand, Brea (1983) argues that “the basic element of a political generation consists in the experience, in a given period of life, of a historical experience” (p. 50).

Muñoz (2011) establishes elements to be considered to identify political generations: a) they go beyond age dimensions; b) they do not have a determined biological moment, but rather factors such as memory, identity, historic moments, among others; c) identities can be diverse within the same group; d) they appear in processes of historical change. From a sociological point of view, it should be noted that collective identities are constructed

in a group of people who identify themselves as similar by sharing average goals and environments that create group cognitive schemes based on common experiences and interests (Chihu, 1999).

On the other hand, it is important to highlight how some authors relate political generations to youth citizen movements, “youth movements behave in the public arena similar to other social protest movements as conscious agents of social and political change” (González, 2004, p. 227).

De Oliveira (2017) identifies four dominant structures of youth confrontation: a) the student mob, related to the role of school and university students in social mobilizations; b) the party youth, composed of young people organized for policy advocacy; c) the paramilitary organization, related to youth participation in armed conflicts; and d) the social movement of a new generation, composed of pacifists, environmentalists, anti-nuclear, pro-civil rights, among others.

Besides their lack of experience, there are people who highlight their impetus to modify social and political practices through demonstrations (Vázquez and Vommaro, 2008). In Latin America, these protesters are characterized by demanding better educational and socio-political demands to put an end to oppressive relations in everyday life (Acevedo and Correa, 2021).

Agurto *et al.* (1985) emphasize the importance of youth participation as they not only rebel against the *status quo*, but also impose a new social order through their activism. In the same sense, Aguilera (2014) analyzes them as actors of social change who struggle to build an alternative order.

Therefore, political generations and youth citizen movements translate not only into the externalization of youth discomfort, but also as an accumulation of needs and proposals that need to be satisfied.

## **Method**

This research has a mixed approach and exploratory level. A survey was used based on a non-probabilistic convenience sampling. The research tool was used to identify the generational and political characteristics and the forms of protest of Bicentennials. Perceptions that these citizens had about themselves were also collected

The instrument was applied digitally from November 9 to 11, 2021, days that commemorated one year of the protests of the Bicentennial Generation. The channels used for the promotion of the survey were Facebook groups related to this new political cohort; the support of a public educational institution through mailing; and its dissemination thanks to the support of Instagram users with more than ten thousand followers, who also participated in the mobilizations.

The data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics and ATLAS.ti statistical software. The population consisted of Peruvians over 18 years of age. The sample consisted of 452 people; however, 380 respondents were selected who, through the questionnaire, considered themselves as part of the Bicentennial Generation.

Likewise, a total of 243 responses were analyzed at a qualitative level to create a conceptual approximation of the perception of young people about their political activism. For this purpose, an axial open coding process was carried out, which involved reading the data, recognizing patterns and linking codes generated inductively.

## **Results**

Of the 452 respondents, 380 Peruvians over the age of 18 considered themselves part of the Bicentennial Generation, i.e., 84.1 % of the total sample. 71.32 % live in Metropolitan Lima, while 28.7 % live in other regions of Peru. Likewise, 65.8 % of the respondents were female and 34.2 % were male.

On the other hand, 362 respondents who considered themselves part of the Bicentennial Generation were from urban areas, while 18 were from rural areas, i.e., 95.3 % and 4.7 %, respectively. Considering that Peru is a multicultural country, it is worth noting that 64.2 % identified themselves as mestizos; 10.4 % as Quechua; 7.1 % as white; 6.8 % as black, brown, Zambó, mulatto or Afro-Peruvian; 1.1 % as Aymara; 0.8 % as native or indigenous to the Amazon; among others. 1.6 % did not identify with any of their origins or customs.

## Generational characteristics

Regarding generational characteristics, the results were grouped through the age ranges used for international marketing studies. For this purpose, the sociological classification made in 2016 by *The Center for Generational Kinetics*, which has already been applied by other researchers (Gómez *et al.*, 2020), was used as a reference.

Table 1 shows that more than 80 % belong to Generation Z and Generation Y. The former grew up in a digital era, while the latter grew up in the early Internet era. Likewise, both generations are characterized by a dependence on mobile devices; however, this trend in Generation Z is more marked and hyperconnectivity is observed.

**Table 1**

*Age segmentation results*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid	From 18 to 27 years old (Generation Z)	164	43.2	43.2	43.2
	From 28 to 40 years old (Generation Y)	148	38.9	38.9	82.1
	From 41 to 52 years old (Generation X)	36	9.5	9.5	91.6
	Over 53 years old (Baby Boomer)	32	8.4	8.4	100.0
	Total	380	100.0	100.0	

## Political characteristics

Since 1980 to date, Peru has had mostly democratic governments of the center and right parties. As a result, there has generally been a greater number of demonstrators from the left-wing political party in the protests. It is worth noting that a significant 33.4 % of protesters do not identify with any political ideology, while 12.9 % do not know or do not have an opinion.

**Table 2**  
*Segmentation results by political ideologies*

		Frenquency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid	None	127	33.4	33.4	33.4
	Right	97	25.5	25.5	58.9
	Left	60	15.8	15.8	74.7
	Do not know / do not answer	49	12.9	12.9	87.6
	Others	23	6.1	6.1	93.7
	Center	21	5.5	5.5	99.2
	Center Right	1	0.3	0.3	99.5
	Maoist	1	0.3	0.3	99.7
	Progressive	1	0.3	0.3	100.0
	Total	380	100.0	100.0	

A similar trend is observed in Table 3, where it is seen that respondents show an apathy towards traditional political parties. A total of 72.4 % of participants did not have any type of sympathy or party affiliation. This could be related to the weariness of young Peruvians towards their democratic institutions, a problem that cannot be overcome in spite of the new parties that are being established and whose proposals do not satisfy their preferences.

**Table 3**  
*Segmentation results by party affiliation or sympathy*

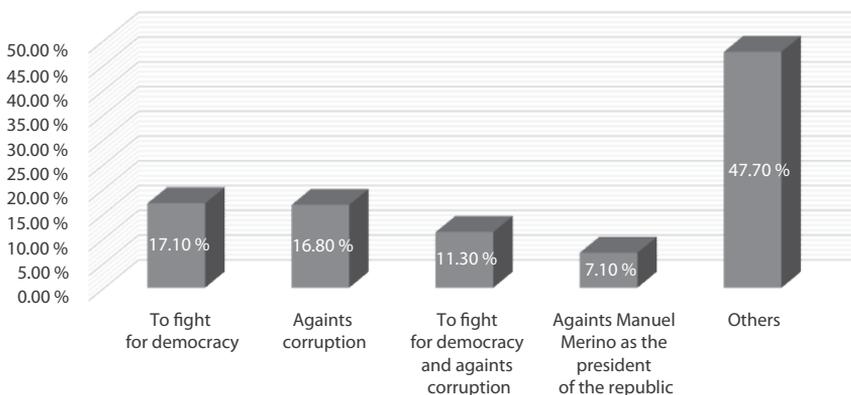
		Frenquency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
Valid	None	275	72.4	72.4	72.4
	Do not know / do not answer	32	8.4	8.4	80.8
	Other	14	3.7	3.7	84.5
	Partido Morado	14	3.7	3.7	88.2
	Acción Popular	11	2.9	2.9	91.1

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
	Frente Amplio	11	2.9	2.9	93.9
	Fuerza Popular	8	2.1	2.1	96.1
	APRA	5	1.3	1.3	97.4
	Perú Libre	3	0.8	0.8	98.2
	Alianza Para el Progreso	2	0.5	0.5	98.7
	Avanza País	2	0.5	0.5	99.2
	Partido Popular Cristiano	2	0.5	0.5	99.7
	FREPAP	1	0.3	0.3	100.0
	Total	380	100.0	100.0	

On the other hand, the Bicentennial Generation stated that among the main political motivations for protesting were the fight for democracy and corruption. Some respondents stated other reasons such as the economic crisis, health, a new constitution, their grandchildren, or the mismanagement of the Peruvian National Police.

### Graph 1

*Segmentation results by political reasons*

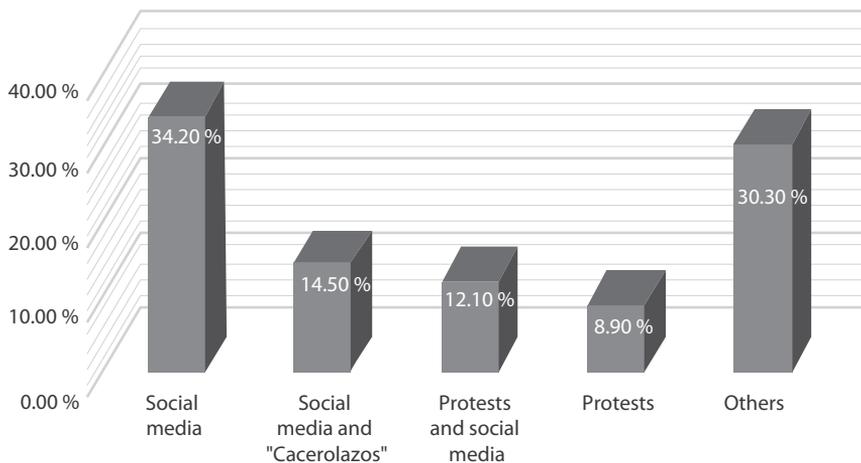


## Characteristics of the forms of protest

In terms of how they protested, most did so through digital platforms. Some participants indicated that they participated in the protests by driving the protesters to their homes; making donations to brigades; placing posters in front of their homes; creating meme pages; and playing Andean musical instruments as other forms of protest.

### Graph 2

*Segmentation results by form of protest*



## Self-perception

Regarding the conceptual self-perception of the Bicentennial Generation, the protagonists used more than 1200 words for answering.



Number	Words	Similarities	Total
6	Corruption	Corrupt, corrupts, etc.	39
7	Youth	Youth, young.	33
8	Bicentennial		20
9	Law	Rights.	29
10	Against	Contrary.	24
11			Others

*Note:* The words in the “Similar” column were written that way by the respondents.

On the other hand, after processing the data and taking as main reference the most used words in the responses, the codes were inductively grouped into three categories: a) conceptual approaches, b) collective identities and objectives, and c) characteristics.

Regarding the results on conceptual approaches, four types related to age, mobilizations, as well as a positive and a questioning connotation about the Bicentennial Generation were identified.

**Table 5**

*Results of conceptual approaches*

Code	Comment
Generational and age	It is defined around the age of people during the country’s bicentennial. It is an objective and simple approximation.
Protest November 2020	The Bicentennial Generation is identified as the group of Peruvians, with an emphasis on young people who participated in the protests of November 2020.
Generation that fights	The Bicentennial Generation is described as the one that is “ready to fight” and seeks to generate social and political change. Emphasis is usually placed on the youth.
Follow the herd	They are considered to be “ideologized”, manipulated, or only follow what is indicated by the majority.

Table 6 shows the values and objectives related to the Bicentennial Generation that would lead to consolidate their political motivations and demands.

**Table 6**  
*Results of collective identities and objectives*

Code	Comment
Democracy	Defense of democracy in the face of abuses by traditional political actors and the search to improve the country's political system.
Awareness and social justice	Demands for social justice, fight against racism, classism, machismo; environmental justice, social development, education, health, decentralization and interculturalism, diversity. Solidarity and unity.
Equity and equality	Improve the social conditions, living conditions and opportunities of Peruvians, regardless of their condition.
Anticorruption	Fight corruption identified as one of the country's most entrenched and harmful social problems. One of the objectives of the Bicentennial Generation is to eliminate corruption.

Finally, generational characteristics such as information and technology, weariness and indignation, political and civic participation, changes, critical thinking, among others, were identified.

**Table 7**  
*Characteristic results*

Code	Comment
Information and technology	Access to technology, network activism, ability to access information quickly, pursuit of technological development.
Fed up and outraged	They express their annoyance at the various social problems identified (corruption, injustice, abuse of authority, etc.).
Political and civil participation	They are recognized as active actors in the political and civil participation of the Peruvian democratic system.
Longing for change	There is a desire for a better country, one that is fairer, supportive, equitable and free of corruption. There is a commitment to work towards this goal. Emphasis is placed on the need to generate changes at the political and social levels.
Critical thinking	Individuals capable of seeking information and developing opinions in a critical, independent way.
Determined and courageous	They are attributed with the capacity to express their opinions, defend their rights, generate claims. Reference is made to the fact that they have "lost their fear". Decision-making capacity.
Free and independent	Also linked to the idea of the bicentennial, the importance of preserving freedom and independence is revalued.

## Discussion and conclusions

In terms of the characteristics of the Bicentennial Generation, it can be stated that a large part of the respondents who protested on social networks are part of Generation Z or Y. As also happened with the Egyptian uprising in 2011 (Lim, 2012), social networks helped activists to frame problems, propagate symbols and transform *online* activism into *offline* protests using human and material resources, which were characterized by solidarity help among its members, such as the use of vehicles to move the protesters, placing protest messages on the facades of some houses; and, even, playing Andean musical instruments.

The results also show that there is no identification of the protagonists of the Bicentennial Generation with the ideologies or political groupings that represent them. Thus, it cannot be stated that the protests against former President Merino have allowed us to recognize the emergence of a leftist youth movement in Peru, but rather that it has been the result of an ethical stance that demands greater non-partisan political participation.

As for the terms that respondents most used to make a perception of themselves, there are key words that were widely used by traditional and digital media. In this sense, terms such as “generation”, “youth”, “protest” and “democracy” are relevant to make a consensual meaning.

It should be noted that not all the people who define themselves as part of the Bicentennial Generation have a positive version of themselves. There is a group whose discourse is related to weariness and indignation, and they think that their members only followed the majority without having an individual identity that mobilizes them. Despite the different positions, both discourses are characterized by rapid access to information and technology, by revaluing the democratic system and interpreting Peru’s bicentennial as an opportunity for change.

From a sociological point of view, this research concludes that the Bicentennial protesters can be considered as a political generation given that: a) they marked an important milestone in Peru’s contemporary history; and b) they created heterogeneous collective identities that were united through a generational mission. Most of the demonstrators were young people who fought for democracy and against corruption, during the crisis following the swearing-in of former president Manuel Merino in November 2020.

On the other hand, we were able to identify two types of protesters in the Bicentennial Generation: pro-democracy and anti-corruption. The former has a positive perspective of its members, as well as a generational mis-

sion focused on revitalizing democracy. It also assimilates social changes as positive. The second has a questioning vision of the system and is related to the fight against anti-values such as corruption and the traditional political system. It has a radical discourse and a critical conception of its members.

While it is true that the discussion around the identification of a generation can cause debate, we found evidence that outlines that the protesters who marched against Merino are a generation. Considering Braungart and Braungart (1986) we conclude that as an age group it is driven by the participation of millennials and centennials, and as a special cohort, through the results obtained, we did identify common values and attitudes that lay the foundation to be considered as such.

Díaz-Albertini (2022) argues that the success of the mobilizations is based on the indignation of a large number of people, the construction of a collective identity and a conviction that large-scale citizen changes are possible. Therefore, we consider that the activism of the Bicentennial Generation was successful, but its victory or failure will depend on its long-term contribution and participation in relevant issues of Peruvian politics. In this sense, since this paper is one of the first to use the Bicentennial Generation as a unit of analysis, it will enable scholars to go deeper into the subject.

Even though society's perception of politics in Latin America is characterized by a disinterest provoked by politicians (Ramos-Galarza *et al.*, 2018), the protests against the administration of former President Merino demonstrate that when young people sense the political consequences generated by their authorities, they can organize and rise up against regimes that they consider threatening.

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