

POPULAR SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN NEWLY ESTABLISHED
DEMOCRACIES: THE CASE OF PERU AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN
ALTERNATIVE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

By

Jorge Aragon

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Chair: Leslie Anderson
Major Department: Political Science

My study concerns popular support for democracy, particularly in newer and less consolidated democracies. Political scientists who deal with contemporary processes of democratization and the prospects for democratic consolidation have devoted much attention to the role of political elites, and to the merits and liabilities of different institutional designs. They have devoted less attention to the role played by ordinary citizens. Without neglecting the importance of elites and institutions in the creation and maintenance of democracy, I argue that overlooking the role of ordinary citizens is a serious limitation when we try to understand the advances and setbacks common to newly democratic regimes. As numerous historical and contemporary cases show, much of what elites attempt to do is conditioned by their judgments of what ordinary people think and how they behave.

My focus on the political development of these newly and less consolidated democracies is organized in terms of two fundamental questions. First, what are the political consequences of a prevalent and persistent lack of support for democracy among the majority of a country's population? Second, what is the explanation for the current degree of support for democracy that we witness in countries that have only recently become democratic?

Unfortunately, much of the recent literature on popular support for democracy in newly established democratic regimes is of limited utility when it comes to providing answers to the two main questions posed here. In most cases, studies of popular support for democracy adopt theoretical approaches and methodological strategies that are ill-equipped to grasp the full complexity of the phenomenon. In the face of these deficiencies, I developed a new theory and method to account for the multi-dimensional nature of the relationships at hand, and the multiple factors that influence the degree to which ordinary citizens support democracy.

This dissertation is based on an empirical analysis of Peru, a good example of a recently established democratic system that is profoundly challenged by low levels of popular support for democracy among its citizens. In order to support my argument, I interviewed more than 400 individuals living in Metropolitan Lima, and analyzed these data using various statistical methods. The findings indicate that popular support for democracy is a multi-faceted phenomenon, encompassing very different dimensions of democratic rule (i.e., a general support for democracy as a form of government, support for democratic procedures, and support for democratic institutions). Moreover, each one of these dimensions is determined by a particular set of factors or variables. Equally significant are findings that note that the degree of support for the various dimensions of democracy is associated with perceptions of a government's performance, with people's social and economic preferences, and with structural factors, such as social class or socio-economic status. The approach and the findings presented in this study advance our understanding of the factors that determine the prospects for democratic consolidation in newly established democratic regimes.