



In the Same Spirit. Looking for Political Legitimacy: Conservative Christian Alliances in Contemporary Peru

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Abstract

The relationship between religion and politics in recent decades has seen new actors, new strategies, and new objectives. In a global scenario marked by the empowerment of the political far right and the decline of democracy, the emergence of authoritarian religious leaders in politics stands out. In the last decade, this phenomenon has been evident in several Latin American countries, including Peru. This study analyzes the relationship between the political and religious fields, emphasizing the convergence of Catholic and Evangelical actors whose practices and discourses seem to be driven by the same "spirit." Although the roots of such relationships lie in the 1990s, this study focuses on the last decade. Faced with a severe political crisis and deep distrust of social institutions, far-right political leaders seek to regain legitimacy in the religious sphere, whose institutions are the only ones that still have significant credibility. Conservative religious authoritarianism in Peruvian politics has a serious impact on the weakening of democracy. This article examines this phenomenon of de-democratization linked to the erosion of fundamental elements of classical democracy. Theological resources and technical effects of new media are reviewed to understand their effect on transforming political adversaries into illegitimate "enemies." The study considers the importance of religion for the majority of the population, the specific weight of Catholics and Evangelicals, and the effect of the recent election of Pope Leo XIV on the balance of power—progressives versus conservatives—in Catholic leadership.

Keywords Conservative alliances · Religion and politics · Peru · De-democratization · Pope Leo XIV

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La teología política del conservadurismo católico en el Perú contemporáneoIntroduction

Several scholars and politicians have expressed their strong preoccupation for the evolution of the Peruvian democratic system. By doing so, they voiced loudly the thoughts of most Peruvians. In April 2026, general elections, involving the choice of a new president, national deputies and senators as well as deputies for the Andean parliament, will be held. More than 40 parties are competing between each other. The electorate card where voters mark their preference, will offer a few thousand names. At the present time, when we are writing this article, nobody still knows the total number of candidates. Humorists joke that Peru could win several Guinness records in the section of national elections. It could also win a record in terms of former presidents having transited in prison. As a matter of fact, all the former elected presidents have been jailed¹.

In 2016, Stephen Levitsky and Mauricio Zavaleta characterized the political regime of Peru as a democracy without party, with the exception of Popular Force (Fuerza Popular), the former president Alberto Fujimori's party that survived the collapse of his authoritarian government, under the leadership of his daughter Keiko Fujimori (2016). In spite of the "obscenity of power" during Alberto Fujimori's mandate, Juan Carlos Ubilluz considers that the Fujimori family kept its popularity, because there were some results in terms of globalization and elimination of the terrorist group, Shining Path. Moreover, the ideology of capitalism and neoliberalism associated with Fujimori has permeated the Peruvian imaginary so much so that even after several much-publicized scandals, in 2025, Keiko Fujimori, daughter of the former President, still remains a major political actor (Ubilluz 2006).

Recently, the institutional stability of the Peruvian State has undergone serious drawbacks. In the short span, from 2016 till 2025, six presidents have been in power in Lima. Keiko Fujimori's party has lost part of its popular base. Political parties, in general, have become irrelevant. They tend to be considered by many candidates as a mere "electoral vehicle", a formality to comply in order to get a seat of power (Barrenechea and Vergara 2024). Moreover, all political institutions are discredited. The president Dina Boluarte, the first woman to reach power in Peru, has kept, over the last year, a 3% of approval. Congress and political parties barely reach 7% (Latino-barometro, 2024). Those scores are the lowest in Latin America. On the other hand, Catholic and Evangelical churches enjoy a very high level of approval, around 60%². They are the best ranked institutions of the nation³.

In this horizon of weakened institutions and discredit of the governmental sphere, politicians, especially those situated at the (far) right of the spectrum, have been

¹ Valentin Paniagua (2000–2001) and Francisco Sagasti (2020–2021) were *ad interim* presidents, both were chosen by the congress among their pairs to call elections.

² In this paper, we use the word "evangelical", as it is commonly used in Latin America to refer to all Christians who are not Catholics.

³ The Latino-barometro has been surveying in Latin America for over thirty years. When asking about approval of ecclesial institutions, it simply mentions "church". By confronting their results with other polls, like the Pew Research Center or local survey from the IEP, even if we cannot evaluate precisely the rate of each Church, it still stands out that churches are considered as the most reliable institutions.

looking for legitimacy, outside of their field, in the religious sphere. By doing so, they follow a current global trend, at work in many countries of the hemisphere. As part of their strategies, they also intend to create enemies that appear diabolical and powerful to increase emotional engagement and mobilize militants who are always ready to fight, and not just simple followers. Our objective in this paper is to analyze the dynamic relations between the political and religious fields and to show the way alliances are woven within the conservative field. It is important to emphasize that the Peruvian religious field shows diverse nuances of political action and is not reduced to two sectors, conservatives versus progressives. Our focus on the political practice of religious conservatism does not negate the more or less progressive or more or less conservative political nuances. We understand that the religious field is not homogeneous. Also, the effect of the political practice of religious leaders depends on factors external to the religious field.

In the first part, we present the general context, giving some background on the relation between religious people and politicians in one of the more conservative countries of the hemisphere. Then, we approach the dynamic of conservative collaboration between religious leaders and politicians. We delve on their common agenda and on their tactical common foes. Finally, as an opening to present and future evolution, we focus on the impact produced by the election of Pope Leo XIV on Peruvian political and religious fields.

General Context

The current precarious condition of the political field helps explain the alliances woven with religious actors who still enjoy credibility. We present some salient traits of the political and religious fields. Our objective is to show how both resonate with each other and thus find common ground.

Political Background

Scholars identify two prevailing trends within the political sphere in recent years. The first is fragmentation and polarization, brought about by the process of political democratization. The second is a crisis of representativeness (Lecaros and Romero 2024), resulting from the de-formalization of political parties (Martuccelli 2019). To these longstanding tendencies, evident for over a decade, must be added a systematic “assault” on democracy, manifested in the concentration of power in the hands of a few. In this regard, it has been argued that “Peruvian democracy is being undermined not by a popular tyrant, but because it has become saturated with unpopular and inexperienced leaders, incapable of representing society and lacking the incentives necessary to sustain the democratic process” (Barrenechea and Vergara 2024, p. 13).

The erosion of institutional capacity within political parties not only intensifies the fragmentation of the political sphere (Ilizarbe 2022), but also makes them susceptible to bargaining with informal and illegal interests. This clientelist dynamic, in turn, weakens the foundations of the democratic political pact and gives way to a culture of backroom deal-making (Barrenechea and Vergara 2024). In such a context, “short-

termism and particularism prevail; the environment is inhospitable to programmatic negotiation and the pursuit of the common good, yet conducive to actors who represent particular interests—whether legal, informal, or illegal” (Barrenechea and Vergara 2024, p. 29).

This process of fragmentation and polarization was sharply intensified in the context of social uprisings, giving rise to what Coronel, 2024a, b) terms “fragmented hatreds”. This became evident during the electoral campaign, in which Pedro Castillo was subjected to discriminatory rhetoric from certain sectors of Lima’s society, on account of his social background and provincial origins. Yet, this very factor contributed to the support his candidacy received from broad sectors of the so-called “deep Peru,” particularly from communities that shared his territorial roots and social stratum (Barrera 2021). Once again, the structural fissures and inequalities of Peruvian democracy—along with the intensification of political passions that fuel populism—produced a setting in which political exchange was permeated by stigmatizing language, strategically deployed to discredit opponents (Sobrevilla 2023; Perez Vela, Lecaros, 2025).

Religious Field and New Conservative Actors

In the survey carried out by the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP) in March 2024, Peruvians who self-identify as Catholic represented 64% of the population. Likewise, Evangelicals accounted for 22%, the non-religious 12%, and those belonging to other religions 3%. It is considered that almost all of this last group corresponds to members of Christian tradition denominations, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Adventists, and Mormons.

Ten years earlier, in 2014, a continent-wide survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that in Peru, 76% identified as Catholic, 17% as Evangelical, 4% as non-religious, and 3% as belonging to other religions. Although these surveys cannot be directly compared due to differences in methodology and wording of the questions, the trends are revealing. In previous decades, the Catholic population remained at very high levels in Peru and across the Andean region. However, today there is an apparently unstoppable decline among those who self-identify as Catholic. Evangelicals, whose numbers grew exponentially during the 1990s and early 2000s, are still attracting new members, though their growth rate has slowed. By contrast, the non-religious — including atheists, agnostics, and those distancing themselves from religious institutions — have shifted from being a small minority to the most rapidly expanding group. According to the Pew Research Center, in most countries of the region, the non-religious now represent the fastest-growing category. A Pew survey conducted in March 2025 further revealed that individuals with a university education are more likely to abandon religious affiliation than those with less formal education. In addition, younger generations are significantly more inclined to identify as non-religious. These trends suggest that the current patterns are likely to persist in the near future.

However, among those identifying as non-religious, as Catalina Romero and Veronique Lecaros argued, a high number, difficult to measure, come from an Evangelical background and are in the process of looking for another more suitable Church, pro-

cess that may last for years (Romero and Lecaros 2017). This configuration reveals that the influence of Evangelical narratives expands beyond their official percentage of the population. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the proportion of those in the category of other religions remains stable.

Beyond changes in affiliation, religion still occupies a central place in people's existence. According to the IEP survey (2024), when asked about "the importance of religion in their lives," 63% of the population responded that it is "very important" and 22% said "important." For 85% of the population, religion occupies a significant place in their lives. As a matter of fact, there is a significant difference between Evangelicals and Catholics. 85% of the Evangelicals responded that religion is "very important", whereas, only 62% of Catholics stated it.

The sociologist Jose Casanova considers that Latin America is experiencing a "light secularization" (2018). However, if the growing number of non-religious among educated and young people may point out to a rising gap between some individuals and religious institutions, secularization is not a shared Peruvian worldview. To describe the situation, most authors refuse to apply the notion of secularization forged in the Northern Hemisphere and prefer that of enchantment (Lecaros 2020). Using an expression of Max Weber, they characterize this situation as "enchanted" (Taylor 2015), "enchanted modernity" (Morello et al. 2017), and an "enchanted world" (Marzal 2003). According to the expression of Martin (2009), the sacred is "like a differentiated texture of the inhabited world". As Charles Taylor remarks, the enchanted world is constantly agitated by various forces, by powerful entities, good or bad spirits, energies that are concentrated in amulets, statues, and pious images (Taylor 2015). In this universe, God acts as a kind of counterweight to the devil. The enchanted world is plagued by conflicts in which human beings are involved (Piccone, Lecaros 2024).

From a legal point of view, the 1993 constitution declares that the Peruvian State is not a confessional State (Lecaros and Taussig 2023), as it used to be, till 1980, when Peru signed a Concordat with the Vatican. However, the worldview of most Peruvians is not rooted in a secular perspective. Thus, religion permeates the political field in the same way as it does with other fields. In contrast to the importance of religion in the lives of most Peruvians, two thirds of the population assert that they have little or very little interest in politics (IEP, 2024). Strong ideological convictions have lost most of their attractive power and on the contrary, religious imaginaries, coupled with a diffuse commitment to neoliberalism, keep their stronghold. Therefore, for politicians who have lost most of their credibility, through corruption and inefficiency, religion represents a handy tool that can be used to gain some legitimacy and therefore popularity. In keeping with a global conservative trend, politicians on the right and far right have been the keenest in making use of religious symbols.

To understand the connections within the religious field and between religious and political leaders, we have to bear in mind that the contemporary Catholic Church is also marked by internal polarization. Leaving aside sedevacantism—which rejects the legitimacy of the popes since the Second Vatican Council—the divisions between currents, though increasingly visible, do not primarily entail a radical rejection of doctrinal principles. Rather, they reflect divergent theological perspectives and pastoral priorities (Casey-Pariseault, 2022; Lecaros 2022; Piccone & Lecaros 2024). The

conservative current is generally characterized by a deductive mode of reasoning and regards Catholic doctrine as an ahistorical revealed truth. By contrast, the liberal or progressive current, in pursuit of the *aggiornamento* of Catholicism envisioned by Pope John XXIII, conceives revelation as incarnate—that is, as divine inspiration mediated through cultural and linguistic contexts. The discernment method of “see, judge, act,” first systematized by Catholic Action and later appropriated by Latin American liberation theology, builds upon the post–Vatican II emphasis on recognizing and valuing the significance of sociocultural contexts. Among Catholic actors aligned with religious conservatism, individual pietism and the so-called “moral agenda” hold a central place, whereas progressive actors direct their attention to the needs and demands of society’s most vulnerable sectors, particularly migrants and communities affected by violations of environmental rights (Lecaros 2022).

In the 1970s and 1980s, Liberation Theology with one of its most preeminent founders, Gustavo Gutierrez, exerted a strong influence on the Peruvian Church. CEBs (Ecclesial Base Communities) were burgeoning and the two-weeks summer course, under the leadership of Gutierrez, attracted thousands of religious people, catechists and lay Catholics (Espinoza 2016; Zegarra 2023). Within the context of the cold war, under the papacy of the Polish, John Paul II, nominations coming from the Vatican reoriented the Peruvian Church and propitiated the leadership of conservative currents. Among them, Opus Dei reached a considerable influence. The first cardinal of Opus Dei was the archbishop of Lima, Mgr. Juan Luis Cipriani (Casey-Pariseault, 2022). At the beginning of Frances’ papacy, Opus Dei affiliates were leading more than a quarter of all dioceses. Moreover, bishops from other conservative trends were holding most of the major Peruvian dioceses.

In Peru, as in other Latin American countries, the relation between Catholic and Evangelical leaders have evolved quite recently from public hostility to open collaboration. The expansion of evangelicalism generated significant tensions with the Catholic hierarchy. While evangelical proselytizing campaigns denounced what they perceived as Catholic paganism and drew large crowds through their enthusiasm, hospitality, and promises of miracles, at the political level the Catholic clergy—drawing on its prestige and networks of influence—sought to prevent the State from granting legal recognition to evangelical churches, along with the symbolic and financial benefits such recognition entailed. These tensions reached their peak in 1990 with the election of the then little-known “Brother” Alberto Fujimori, who actively sought and obtained evangelical support, incorporating several well-known evangelical candidates into his electoral lists (Lecaros 2022).

Some twenty years later, however, the landscape had shifted. On the one hand, over time and through steady growth, evangelicals had consolidated into a powerful and recognized collective actor. In 2010, the conflict over their lack of legal recognition was resolved with the passage of the Religious Freedom Law, despite some lingering criticism. On the other hand, a convergence emerged among the conservative wing of the Catholic Church—promoted under John Paul II and embodied in the figure of Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani (Opus Dei)—dominant evangelical groups, and neoliberal political movements linked both to the parties inheriting the legacy of Alberto Fujimori and to the APRA, which under the leadership of Alan García had repositioned itself along neoliberal lines. By 2010, alliances grounded in the

so-called “moral agenda” were already being forged (Lecaros 2022). As Pérez and Amat y León have shown, religious membership does not imply a voting discipline (2018). Evangelicals may be more actively involved in their churches but in terms of politics, they do not strictly follow their pastors’ orientation. The political and religious mediatized alliances exerted a strong influence on voters mostly because they resonated with the conservative, machisto and capitalist-prone general tendencies of most of the Peruvian population (Rosa 2019).

In his study on evangelicals and electoral politics, Boas (2023) identifies two moments that mobilize alliances in the conservative religious field towards greater political protagonism: in 2011 Catholics and evangelicals unite in demonstrations against LGBT rights, and in 2016 against bills on sex education in schools and against same-sex marriage. Both moments constitute scenarios in which popular pressure and maneuvers in the legislature are combined. Studies on conservative collaboration between evangelicals and Catholics in Peru have focused more on the reasons for the growth and decline of each, without considering their impact on democracy. Evangelical prominence in Peruvian politics is seen as limited by its growth resulting from Catholic migration and the personalism of its protagonists. The fall of the Berlin Wall is also considered to have ended evangelical “anti-communism” (Pérez 2018). Other studies, such as Motta’s (*La Biología del odio* 2019), consider the emergence of religious fundamentalisms against minority rights to be dangerous because they mobilize popular bases and strengthen naturalized hatreds. Our analysis in this text pays attention to the impact of the conservative religious alliance on the fragile Peruvian democracy in a regional scenario of evident de-democratization in the last ten years.

By 2016, as part of the broader wave that swept across the continent, Peru’s long-consolidated conservative alliance materialized in massive demonstrations—drawing up to one million participants—against so-called “gender ideology,” same-sex marriage, and abortion, under the slogan *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* (“Don’t Mess With My Children”).⁴ This movement, framed as a moralizing initiative, also enjoyed significant political and financial backing. It was promoted and strategically leveraged at the time to destabilize President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski. This dynamic has been widely examined in the literature (Barrera, 2017; Lecaros 2022).

The pluralization of Peru’s religious and political field has thus entailed the consolidation of alliances that transcend confessional boundaries in order to advance a particular conception of society and ethics centered on the defense of family and moral values. Intra-institutional pluralization has, in turn, facilitated the formation of bonds through extra-institutional affinities. These alliances are not publicly forged between institutions—as in the case of interreligious or ecumenical coalitions—but instead present themselves as joint support for a common cause. Thus, even though evangelical growth continues to come at the expense of Catholic affiliation, and Catholics maintain a degree of suspicion toward evangelicals, it has nevertheless been possible to construct a common front on the basis of a shared moral agenda—without

⁴ Studies on this phenomenon in the Latin American region that take into account its implications for democracy are still scarce. Among the few studies available, we can cite: Biroli, Campos and Vaggione (2017) and the recent Barrera, Lecaros and Carbonelli (2025), Vol I on Peru, Argentina and Brazil, and Vol II on Chile, Colombia and Central America.

entering into formal public commitments that might unsettle their respective constituencies (Lecaros 2022).

The collaboration within the religious field and with the political field has reached an unprecedented level with the formation of the political party Popular Renovation (*Renovación Popular*), founded by Rafael López Aliaga, an Opus Dei Numerary. López Aliaga invited Milagros Aguayo, an Evangelical pastor, to occupy the first place in the ranking of candidates for congress. Additionally, he called upon other preeminent Evangelical leaders to rally his political party as congress candidates. Among them, two were elected, Esdras Medina for the district of Arequipa and Alejandro Muñante for Lima. Aliaga also invited high-ranking former military officers to join the list of candidates, including Jorge Montoya and José Cueto. Both were elected, and in their political practice, they strategically use their conservative Catholic principles. In spite of the fragmentation of the political field, Popular Renovation has succeeded in maintaining a certain public relevance. It was the third party most voted in presidential election in 2021. Moreover, in 2022 Rafael López Aliaga was elected mayor of Lima.

One of the strategies of López Aliaga may be described as political-religious imitation. He often draws on the playbook of evangelical conservatism by publicly highlighting pietistic practices and presenting them as a model of religious life sanctioned by God. Roy (2008) calls this process “formatting religion”: the way groups adopt the practices or actions of others in order to gain recognition or adapt to changing circumstances. Roy shows how some Muslim movements in Europe reshape their rituals by borrowing from aspects of the Christian model. In Peru, we also find evangelical groups that, in different settings, shape their public engagement using Catholic criteria (Lecaros and Taussig 2023). But in the case, we are looking at, the borrowing is mutual: Catholic actors imitate certain practices of minority groups like evangelicals. With increasing religious pluralization, such dynamics are becoming more common.

For Catholics, the Second Vatican Council officially drew a line between politics and religion: clergy and religious were forbidden from running for office, and preaching political propaganda from the pulpit was banned. In practice, however, pastoral guidance, political hints, and even photos could still be used for electoral purposes. The rise of new conservative movements has blurred these boundaries once again. Since the medieval creation of third orders, lay members of religious congregations—and later Catholic Action groups—have entered politics.

The return of these conservative movements has broken the post-Vatican II separation, with López Aliaga standing as a striking example. Both during his campaign and then as mayor, he openly presents himself as a numerary of Opus Dei and speaks of his ascetic practices, especially the cilice (a pre-Vatican II custom). Combined with the theatrics of political spectacle—like calling himself “Porky”—such displays of religiosity helped secure the support of a significant portion of voters. In a country like Peru, where suffering is often seen as a mark of holiness, these references resonate strongly with public opinion. We find a parallel in Chile: José Antonio Kast, leader of the Republican Party, highlights his membership in the Schoenstatt movement and the fact that he is the father of nine children. Luis Silva, one of his most popular allies, is also a numerary—like López Aliaga—and makes much of his sacrificial practices. The unique status of Opus Dei as the only prelature, recently

redefined by Pope Francis, helps explain the ambiguity surrounding numeraries both legally and in the eyes of outsiders.

This mimicry goes beyond ascetic practices: it extends to theological frameworks that shape ethical behavior. One example is the prosperity gospel, deeply rooted in certain conservative evangelical circles that enter politics. López Aliaga presents himself as a successful businessman running prominent companies with national visibility. In doing so, he creates the image of a religious-political leader who embodies values that appeal to Peruvians across social classes: on one hand, the pietistic believer who practices asceticism to the point of suffering; on the other, the prosperous entrepreneur-citizen (Perez Vela, Lecaros, 2025). Further on, we will see how the religious composition of RP expands to include conservative Catholic ex-military personnel.

In Search of Legitimacy

In 2016, Roberto Blancarte observed that politicians often turn to religious leaders in search of moral legitimacy, hoping to counterbalance the deeply negative image they have earned (Blancarte 2016, p. 334). This is no longer, as in earlier times, about justifying the social order (Morello et al. 2017, p. 318), nor is it, what Peter Berger described as a “sacred canopy”.

In Peru, religious figures are regularly invited to participate in political events or initiatives, where they serve as moral guarantors of public life. In a political climate marked by repeated accusations of corruption, their presence lends trustworthiness and a sense of respectability to politicians. It is not uncommon to see public officials—from the president to local mayors—appearing alongside clergy in public ceremonies or invoking biblical references in their speeches, particularly when their administrations face criticism from citizens and opinion leaders (Lecaros 2020). This has been especially evident with President Boluarte, who, at the time of her controversial rise to power in 2022, made a concerted effort to appear surrounded by religious leaders, regardless of denomination (Perez Vela, Lecaros, 2025).

The recent weakening of multilateral institutions and of the global consensus on democratic ideals, as Eduardo Dargent has phrased it (2025), reinforces the process of legitimacy via religion. Up till now, the global shared perspective on democracy, that developed as an outcome of the collapse of the Berlin wall, gave to Peruvian political actors a guidance and norms. A pressure from diverse governments and international institutions, such as the San Jose court, provided boundaries for political decisions and consequently cautioned them. This consensus offered crucial sources of legitimacy.

The disappearance of this consensus has reinforced religious values as a way of creating common ground within several conservative sectors of the public opinion. In Peru, since the image of God, as an almighty and omniscient judge, has lingered on, religion becomes eventually a strong source of legitimacy, replacing partly the democratic paradigm (Lecaros 2017). In other words, conservative leaders pretend that if God’s norms, I.E. moral agenda, are obeyed, then Peruvians will enjoy God’s blessing. By doing so, they connect, although on different basis, with the international trend that fosters religious normativity.

Local actors establish connections with regional and global conservative networks, particularly through their alignment with the so-called “cultural battle.” This strategy “has succeeded in channeling the sense of threat felt by certain sectors of society in the face of progressivism, advances in gender equality, cultural diversity, and sexual rights” (Augusto and Quiñon 2024, p. 210). The constant alert against a great enemy is an important tool in the far right’s success in mobilizing popular bases. As recent literature shows, digital technology and the “plataformization” of politics have enhanced the effectiveness of this tool (Cesarino 2022). In Peru, important sectors of the conservative evangelical field are quite sensitive to this discourse of fear. As we will see in the second part of this text, theological perspectives accustomed to a binary worldview, “us” vs. “them,” can help to understand the far right’s success with conservative Christianity.

Not all elements of the global conservative agenda, however, resonate with the Peruvian public. For example, unlike in the United States or other countries in the region, abortion does not generate strong currents of public support or passionate activism in Peru. Congresswoman and pastor Milagros Aguayo launched a campaign from Congress in defense of the rights of the unborn child and has managed to approve the law on the rights of the unborn (Barrera 2025), but it achieved little traction. Similarly, Congressman Alejandro Muñante used his parliamentary platform and some media spaces to promote a bill prohibiting individuals from accessing public restrooms designated for the opposite sex. His proposal sparked more controversy than broad support in public opinion.

Homosexuality, on the other hand, is a subject that arouses strong affections. The massive demonstrations of *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* were tied to fears of the supposed “homosexualization” of children in public schools—a recently coined term with no scientific basis, yet one that has become central to a discourse designed not only to oppose but also to delegitimize gender-based policies and public agendas focused on defending fundamental rights (Augusto and Quiñon 2024; Lecaros 2020). Peru is among the few countries in South America—alongside Guyana, Paraguay, Suriname, and Venezuela—that allow no form of civil union. Beyond biblical references to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, public resistance is rooted not only in religious motivations but also in the ways these issues are framed by conservatives, which resonate strongly with the patriarchal norms deeply embedded in Peruvian society (Fuller, 2012). Homosexuality thus becomes, in Peru, the central point of convergence with the cultural battle, linking domestic politics to international campaigns and media strategies (Perez Vela, Lecaros, 2025).

The literal reading of the bible involved in this process of religious legitimacy fuels the cultural war and presupposes a hidden justification of certain ways of violence. Biblical narratives, read without contextual interpretation, portray a violent God prepared to impose His “moral” order, no matter the amount of destruction implied. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the battles fought during the exodus and the conquest of the promised land are some of the most violent episodes of the Bible and the cultural war draws on them. This warlike, radical, and punitive imaginary, which feeds on biblical literature, does not contribute to any democratic dialogue or debate. On the contrary, it promotes the rejection of all that is different and its delegitimization.

The Construction of the “enemy” in the Christian Field

Evangelicals frequently refer to “enemies” and not adversaries. This perspective is contrary to a fundamental element of the democratic tradition. Democracy is a space for dialogue, for expressing differences, for building consensus among rivals, and for hearing dissent of opponents. This is also a fundamental question in the concept of “public sphere”, idealized by Habermas (1990) for European countries and taken up again in recent studies (Brown 2019) on the political crisis in a consolidated democracy like the USA (before Trump). An anti-democratic policy would be on the rise in the West, as Brown states in the subtitle of her book. The processes of de-democratization in Latin America must be seen as a result of the shortcomings of liberal democracy (Felipe 2018, Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), and in this sense, overcoming them necessarily requires expanding debate and dialogue. We believe that in contemporary Peru, radical religious conservatism reduces the democratic space, therefore, studying this phenomenon of de-democratization requires understanding the role of evangelicals in politics, as demonstrated in studies on the prominence of evangelicals in the far right in Brazil (Biroli et al. 2020; Pinheiro-Machado 2019). In this part We analyze two remarkable elements for understanding Evangelical political practice in Peru.

Anti-democratic Basis

Recent literature on the crisis or decline of democracy in the last two decades is quite consistent. These studies show that the most esteemed system of political organization (“The Democracy”) is weakening (Felipe 2018, Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023). Several concepts have been used to explain this phenomenon. In this text, we prefer the concept of “de-democratization”. Instead of more democracy, we have less democracy. Democracy is going backwards because it reduces citizen equality. We abandon a binary perspective of democracy x dictatorship and move toward Gramsci’s perspective: (1) the State maintains a balance between civil society and political society. (2) Greater participation of civil society implies prioritizing consensus-building over imposition: of law, of authority, of police, etc. And vice versa.

In this scenario of de-democratization, the far right plays an important role by transforming political adversaries into enemies. Enemies lack political legitimacy. For this reason, politics is reduced to a confrontation between us and them (enemies). There is a clear difference between political opponent or political rival and enemy. This last one is a category for war, not appropriate to politics. There would, then, be an incompatibility between the extreme right and democracy, a relationship between the advance of the far right and a process of “de-democratization.” The question that interests us is to analyze the role of religion in this reduction of politics. What would be the impact of religious neoconservatism on the process of de-democratization? And specifically in the perspective of transforming adversaries into enemies. It is necessary to take into account a prominent aspect of Pentecostal theology: the place of the great enemy. The place of the Devil in Pentecostal theology is central. The Pentecostal understanding of the world, of society, of social and family relations is marked by constant vigilance against the Devil. He is an enemy that must always be

rejected, expelled, exorcised. Our hypothesis is that this binary perspective of reality is brought into politics by evangelical leaders and, a second aspect we should highlight, these perspectives are easily accepted by the evangelical public accustomed to this binary perspective. We have, then, two things that combine in Pentecostal theology and are reproduced in politics: a great ever-present enemy and a perspective of reality reduced to two irreconcilable battlefields: “we”, with the truth and “they”, enemies to be fought. In Peru the frontiers between “us” and our enemies are building and emphasized in the discourse of Popular Renovation.

Three aspects of the political discourse of conservative evangelical leaders in Peru are related to our hypothesis:

a) The role of the Armed Forces and the police in politics,

In recent decades, there has been an increase in the number of former military personnel in Peruvian politics. Legally, there is nothing that prohibits this. However, a military career is marked by unrestricted obedience to superior orders. Orders cannot be questioned, let alone disobeyed. Any disobedience or dissent is harshly punished, even with expulsion. Any kind of consensus-building is foreign to the military field. If we think of it in Weberian terms, the legitimacy of military authority does not include the consent or participation of the “dominated.” It is purely and simply the imposition of those in command based on their position in the institutional hierarchy. The military field is, therefore, the antithesis of politics. It is an institution that cultivates among its members blind obedience to superior orders to the point of “embodying” them. Obedience is a naturalized reflex. Obedience is an extension of the body. On the Peruvian right and far right in the 21st century, there are highly visible political leaders. They were Navy commanders and generals in the National Police. Among the highest-ranking leaders of Popular Renovation, two of them were Admirals of the Navy. The question of how people who, during their military careers, “incorporated” a hierarchical and authoritarian culture that exalts blind obedience could act in politics, a field par excellence of dialogue and consensus-building, is inevitable. Evangelical politicians from Popular Renovation share the same binary perspectives on politics and society with former military personnel.

As it is well known, in the second half of the 20th century, most Latin American countries suffered coups d'état and experienced long military dictatorships. These clearly anti-democratic periods were justified with the argument of the risk of communism, a narrative that was in tune with the United States' interests of strategic domination in the region. The final decades of the last century saw a return to democracy that did not necessarily imply the withdrawal of the military from politics. In the case of Peru, Alberto Fujimori, democratically elected, staged a coup d'état with the support of the armed forces. In the recent case of Brazil, the Bolsonaro government (2018–2022) had the strong participation of many military personnel in the highest government positions. And after its defeat in the 2022 elections, the far right attempted to retain power through various anti-democratic means. This is evidence that the relationship between politics and the armed forces remains an unresolved problem. In the Brazilian far right's version, the armed forces are seen as a moderating power. We propose that former military personnel in the Peruvian legislative branch express this unresolved problem. In fact, former Peruvian Navy personnel have expressed, in many opportunities, the need for military intervention.

b) The messianic imagery of the Christian politician: they are the ones who will save Peru.

Evangelical Christianity has a characteristic that marks its vision of the world, society, and the future. This is a very important factor in its theology. It is probably a reminiscence of Calvinism and the belief in God's action in his chosen ones. We are referring to a messianism based on the conviction that the final, decisive, and ultimate solution to social problems will necessarily come from outside. An external and superior agent. A divine intervention, according to Pentecostal theology and its followers, accustomed to extraordinary experiences in their daily lives. It is evident that this contradicts the basic idea of politics as an autonomous space in which human beings take the reins of their own destiny (Gauchet 2005). When Pastor Aguayo occupies the legislative branch to recount miraculous divine interventions, she acts against the grain of politics, in a movement that tends to subject politics to divine designs. It's possible to make a comparison between the messianism of evangelicals and the former military members of Popular Renovation. For the military, the decision to solve the country's major problems would ultimately be the intervention of the armed forces. For evangelicals, it would be a divine intervention. These are two forces superior to politics, very present in the legislative practice and speeches of congressmen.

It is possible to distinguish nuances of this messianism, depending on the greater or lesser influence that religion has on legislators. It is strongest in the discourse of Aguayo, who is a pastor and founder of her own Church. She frequently confuses or superimposes the pulpit of the Church with the legislative political platform. It is more subtle in the discourse of Alejandro Muñante, who has a law degree. But in both cases, the defense of religious principles is present. For example, in their fight against abortion or same-sex marriage, the fundamental reason for their opposition is God, who "defends life and the family". Muñante tends to appeal more to the idea of the "natural family" to argue that he is not defending religious principles but scientific truths. Ultimately, for them, the greatest problem facing Peruvian society is a moral one, a threat to sacred principles and values. And they would be the ones called upon to save the country from ruin. They feel they act in politics in the name of God; which evidently, means a devaluation of the people vote. For these congressmen, the reason for being politics is more religious than political.

c) The aggressiveness against the left, redefined by the use of the term "caviar": from terrorist to "caviar."

The binary perspective on politics in the discourse of evangelical politicians has important antecedents. To understand the construction of the enemy in the discourse of the extreme right in Peru, it is necessary to go back, albeit briefly, to the last two decades of the last century. During this period, two political groups abandoned the rules of the democratic game and turned to clandestine armed struggle with the goal of seizing political power: Shining Path (SL) and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA). Studies of this phenomenon leave no doubt that both movements used terrorist methods. At the same time, studies show that the actions of the government, the police, and the armed forces to combat SL and the MRTA were also terrorist. The enormous social impact of these two decades of terrorism in the country is clear in the number of victims: 90,000 dead, most of them unrelated to the terrorist groups (Truth Commission Report). The government of Alberto Fujimori

managed to defeat terrorism using terrorist methods and systematically violating the human rights that a democratic political regime should guarantee. The best evidence of this could be Fujimori's subsequent conviction for human rights violations. In this sad period of Peruvian history, a figure emerged who would occupy a prominent place in the political life of the following decades: "the terruco." This is the popular expression used to refer to a terrorist, stigmatizing the entire left and stripping it of political legitimacy. The "terrorist" had to be fought not in the political arena, within democratic norms, but militarily or with the weight of the law imposed, even by "faceless judges." Since then, the right has used the expression as an electoral campaign strategy, even when terrorism has been defeated and lacks any political force. The emergence of the verb "terruquear" in Peru is very meaningful. It is not simply a noun related to a past overcome. The verb has entered the contemporary political arena. It occupies an important, and sometimes decisive, place in electoral campaigns as a tool to delegitimize adversaries, to transform them into enemies, to expose them to physical, legal, or military violence. The far right terrorizes ("terruquea") anyone who thinks differently or disagrees with its moral principles. It does so in the media, in legislative debates, and in the public sphere in general.

The intensive use of the verb "to terrify" transformed the social image of the "terruco" in the 21st century, when terrorism had already been defeated. It would be the militant of those two terrorist groups who remain infiltrated in the most diverse social organizations and even in state organizations. This stigma was powerfully projected across the entire left and was effectively used by right-wing candidates in the electoral campaigns after the defeat of terrorism. It can be seen, however, that after several decades of defeat, the use of the verb "to terrify" has been losing its effectiveness as a political tool, because terrorism has been defeated and has no relevant influence in the country. However, the far right has given its new nuances with the same intention of nullifying adversaries. Evidence of this is the expression "caviar." The "caviar" left is a moderate left formed by intellectuals with better economic conditions. Although they do not commit terrorist acts, they are, in essence, a secret terrorist organization. The founder of Popular Renovation, Rafael López, is the political leader who uses frequently this expression. He defines it as follows: "A caviar is a communist who infiltrates state institutions, lives off a state salary, destroys the church, and hates the armed forces". He and his congressmen strategically use the expression "caviarism" as a simplistic explanation for all the country's problems, but they pay special attention to the supposed moral damage to society. It is the fight against the "caviarism," which has allegedly taken root in all social, political, and educational institutions, that mobilizes sectors of the armed, police, and religious forces.

Popular Renovation congressmen, both former military personnel who appear to be very Catholic, and evangelicals, frequently use the term "caviar." In the case of former Navy legislators, they use this to restore the credibility of the armed forces, which would have been tarnished by the caviar speech. For example, former Navy congressman Jorge Montoya advocates for the need to restore the Armed Forces to their proper place, which had been damaged by the "caviar agenda". He believes that the Armed Forces have been mistreated, defiled and humiliated" since 2001 when the Fujimori dictatorial regime fell. Montoya understands and disseminates ideas such as the following: caviar ideology has destroyed values, has infiltrated various spaces to

the point of controlling education and “gender ideology”, and must be totally eliminated.⁵ In his discourse, the existence of a dangerous enemy, always amorphous, nebulous but latent, is simultaneously present. At the same time, this speech expresses the willingness to eliminate the enemy. We could use “disposition” in Bourdieu’s sense because it is a fact cultivated throughout his military career. The willingness to eliminate the enemy is typical of the military field. But it is absolutely contrary to the pillars that support democracy. The broad use of the term “caviar” in political discourse serves a polarized perspective of society because it divides it into an us and the caviars, thereby limiting the democratic space (Dargent, 2025a, b).

It is very important to pay attention to the form (or rather, amorphous) in which the discourse presents the danger of “caviarism”: opaque, ambiguous, and nebulous. These elements are very important in the “digital age” because the new platformed media generates engagement, strong sympathy and affection among followers, never with clear and well-founded ideas. Clear ideas or complex discourses are never presented, because it is about appealing to affection and emotion rather than reason. Recent literature in the field of digital anthropology and communication on the effects of new media on politics reveals non-rational processes at work. As Cesarino points out, analyses based on linear cause-and-effect, planning, and rational calculation prove insufficient to explain non-rational processes, “primary processes” involved in platformized political interaction (Cesarino 2022). For her part, Enli highlights the importance of authenticity in politics, and how in digital politics an important component of authenticity is ambivalence: “Ambivalence is considered a marker of authenticity because ambivalent performance and hesitant revelation of the “truth” tend to come across as more trust worthy than unambiguous performance without hesitations” (Enli 2024, p. 9). In her study of the use of Twitter in Donald Trump’s election campaigns, the author draws our attention to the platform’s limited space (140 characters), leaving no room for lengthy explanations, thoughtful speeches, or coherent arguments (Enli 2017).

While Montoya presents an enemy to be eliminated with police or military forces, evangelical congresswoman Milagros Aguayo presents a moral enemy, but equally dangerous. In her speech at the 49th OAS Assembly in July 2019, she stated: “The natural family is in danger of extinction. And this endangers the security, well-being, and development of our peoples. Latin America is a continent that values and loves the natural family...”.⁶ Similarly, Congressman Alejandro Muñante denounces the United Nations and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights as enemies to be fought in the cultural, political and cultural fields. Both institutions are allegedly part of a “globalist system” that attempts to limit religious freedom.⁷ Jorge Cueto, former marine and congressman from PR, organized the “Forum Batalla Cultural” against progressivism, caviarism and globalism.⁸ He emphasizes the objective of this event: “to prevent children from being harmed by its effects”.

⁵ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIVYsUEwDgg> (Accessed: 02/27/2021).

⁶ Available: https://youtu.be/7K_7uRN9Ic4?si=GvftiDv3v7AukaDn Access: 08/25/2025.

⁷ Available at: <https://youtu.be/bN4gYUsY7DA?si=qGVCaG71AC203z8M> Access: 08/30/2025.

⁸ Available at: <https://youtube.com/shorts/mqZKGtXVtts?si=VuUtVwlnvZwTg8mi> Access: 09/30/2025.

The Devil and the Web in Politics

The opposition friend vs. enemy (the Devil) has been very important in Christian theology, especially in the Evangelical field and with emphasis on the Pentecostal theology. It is widely used to simplify the understanding of social reality. When Evangelicals entered politics, they bring this resource with them, creating favorable conditions for reconstructing new forms of a great enemy, this time in the political arena.

One of the Pentecostal churches with the largest following is the “World Missionary Movement” (Rolleri 2025). It is probably the church that most contributes to the growth of the evangelicals we highlighted in the first part of this text. Its followers are strongly engaged in public demonstrations against minority rights, abortion, gender equality, and same-sex marriage. It is the church attended by Congressman Muñante. As it is characteristic of Pentecostal worship, in this church all kinds of problems find their fundamental explanation in the Devil. For most of their history, Pentecostal churches stayed away from politics. During this long period, they did not need a political theology. Unlike the progressive Catholic and evangelical sectors which had already embraced the ideas of Liberation Theology in 70s. In the 21st century, Pentecostalism enters politics without a political theology or a theology about politics. Therefore, it is not surprising that their explanation of social and political problems stems from a belief in satanic forces acting within left-wing parties, organizations and individuals fighting for gender equality, and proposals for Comprehensive Sexual Education, among others.

According to that perspective, we can say Pentecostals have brought the Devil into politics. However, in legislative debates, Popular Renovation congressmen cannot use religious arguments to support their moral principles. The secular nature of the political arena serves as a restraint. Faced with this, evangelical legislators mobilize conservative Christian professionals from a wide range of fields to give public lectures in Congress auditoriums: doctors argue that abortion is murder, psychologists demonstrate that homosexuality is a disease and that gay cures result from therapy, and lawyers demonstrate that the World Health Organization and the United Nations interfere in internal affairs and endanger national sovereignty. An example of the many events organized is the “Symposium on Creationism: the identity of the human being” held at an Adventist university. In this event Muñante denounced that religious freedom is under constant attack in Peru by many international organizations such as the United Nations and the OAS (Organization of American States), for proposing the concept of “hate crime”.⁹

Political-religious conspiracy theories always keep this imminent, permanent, and non-negotiable risk latent. Same examples: The “new world order”, vaccines during the pandemic would be part of a massive Chinese communist project to reduce population, distrust of public education, which poses a risk to children, and the breakdown of “the family”. The examples cited are part of this new great enemy.

As we indicate lines above, we consider it very important to pay attention to technical issue that is part of the effectiveness of information and disinformation, which

⁹ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgdKPIImE74M> Access: 03/09/2025.

is very present in politics today. New media, which are new especially due to new digital media and the popularization of access to platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc. This phenomenon has a major impact not only on communication but on the existence of human beings in general. There are reasons to consider that new media create conditions for a “digital existence” because major of our activities, time and decisions is linked to new media. Recent census data on connectivity in Brazil shows that more than 90% of the population uses the internet (IBGE 2020). It also reports that this percentage is even higher among evangelicals. Undoubtedly, the political field and the public sphere are undergoing unprecedented expansion.

The recent literature on digital politics helps to understand the radicalism of the far right and the engagement of its followers. One of the hallmarks of the 21st-century far right is questioning the structures of certainty that sustain collective existence and give us the certainty to live and project our existence. “Digital anthropology” research uses the concept of “structure” differently from the Marxist tradition, which focuses on the economic and political structures of the capitalist system. For digital anthropology, structures of certainty result from social organization founded on the legal system and on the truths that come from science and knowledge. Trust in medical knowledge, the educational system, laws, etc., result from this organized system we need and are beyond question among the general population.

It is curious that precisely in the “digital age” the far right manages to disseminate “information” that leads to distrust of these structures. The truth about health and the efficacy of medicine was widely questioned during the pandemic and after it. Truth no longer comes from science in general. Alternative and parallel truths about government, health, our history and the role of schools would have been hidden by a global order. The widespread dissemination of these ideas, reaching the majority of the population, constitutes an anti-systemic movement, not only against the political left but also against the political system, including democracy. Political institutions are considered dangerous and should be distrusted. As mentioned at the beginning of this text, social institutions in Peru have very little credibility. Several conspiracy theories promote this distrust that makes the political crisis in the country more serious. Left-wing or centrist governments (a disguised left) allegedly plan to implement communism, child sodomy, and vaccines that cause heart problems. Schools are considered centers of indoctrination and early homosexuality of children, etc.

Cesarino (2022) emphasizes, digital system, the platforms, function to bring together only like-minded people. This is the effect of algorithms capable of processing enormous amounts of information and data in a few seconds, selecting similar preferences and rejecting those that differ. The result is the emergence of digital bubbles where there is no room for dissent, neither for questioning. It’s important to emphasize, digital system was not created with this intention, but it fulfills this function. It is from this perspective that Cesarino asserts that technology has a political stance favoring the far right, which rejects dialogue with any different or opposing ideas.

Another effect of new media is the type of information disseminated that causes high willingness to take action. Evangelical politicians feed the networks with information (real, false, or imagined) in any case, always exaggerated to provoke engage-

ment. This state of mind results from an understanding of the timing of an imminent and permanent danger. A time of crisis is different from a “time of permanent crisis”. This idea, “temporality of permanent crisis”, come from Chun (2016). A state of alert in face of an imminent powerful enemy in times of crisis. The “caviarism” place well the roll of this permanent danger that requires a permanent state of alert. Muñante congressman emphasizes: “The caviars are not a minority; they dominate the system and are supported by some mass media outlets, which propagate their agenda. Therefore, opposing them is not only a burning display of love for one’s country, but is a truly revolutionary act”.¹⁰

Catholic Side in the Cultural War

In relation to the cultural war, Lopez Aliaga has been particularly outspoken, in keeping with the Evangelical members of his party. On the contrary, the Catholic institution has kept low profile, avoiding systematically, aggressivity. Peruvian bishops published a few declarations against “gender ideology” during the period of the massive demonstrations related to the movement Do Not Mess With My Children (2016). Mgr. Juan Luis Cipriani was archbishop of Lima. Conservative bishops nominated by popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI dominated the Peruvian Bishop Conference (Casey-Pariseault, 2022). Since then, during pope Francis’ papacy, the renewal of bishops has changed the equilibrium of forces (Lecaros, Romero, 2024). Although progressist bishops do not hold an absolute majority, they exert a considerable influence and occupy key positions. Mgr. Carlos Castillo, archbishop of Lima, cardinal and primate of Peru, is known to have been a disciple of Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the founders of Liberation Theology. Mgr. Alfredo Vizcarra SJ holds the seat of Trujillo, the second city of Peru.

In September 2025, the reaction toward the amnesty law voted by the Congress reveals the deployment of a new dynamic. The law came out in spite of the opposition of the Human Right Court of San Jose and other human rights activists. It conceded amnesty to militaries convicted of crimes in the repression of the terrorist group Shining Path and of other massive political demonstrations. On the second of September, twelve bishops signed a declaration against the law. Among them figure Mgr. Castillo, archbishop of Lima, Mgr. Vizcarra, archbishop of Trujillo, Mgr. Izaguirre, bishop of Chosica. They represent about a quarter of the Peruvian episcopate. This situation signals a lack of unity within the Episcopal Conference. All the bishops who did not sign cannot be considered against progressist positions. They refused to do it for whatever reason escaping our knowledge. However, on the contrary, all conservative bishops did not sign. Arguably, conservative bishops prefer to remain silent. Considering the context, they may want to keep a low-profile attitude. It is difficult to foresee the way Leo XIV’s papacy will develop. Moreover, we should not forget that he personally knows all of them. Additionally, this group of bishops have lost their most vocal spoke-men. The Sodalicio, a conservative and powerful Society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical Right, has been recently dissolved, one of its preeminent

¹⁰ “La Agenda caviar”. Available at: <https://xn--alejandromuante-8qb.com/la-agenda-caviar/> Access: 10/09/2025.

member Mgr. Eguren was archbishop of Piura, a major Peruvian city. The cardinal Cipriani, upon the request of Pope Francis, was set aside all public appearances in Peru, due to a credible testimony of sexual abuse.

Concluding Comments

In a country experiencing an extreme political crisis that has lasted for several years, we have shown how religion remains a highly relevant existential dimension for the vast majority of Peruvians. Many politicians treat it as an asset to legitimize their plans. The political practices of the religious leaders we have analyzed demonstrate a clear affinity with the emergence of anti-democratic politics and the empowerment of the far right. This process involves, on the one hand, theological elements to delegitimize political adversaries and transform them into enemies to be eliminated. On the other hand, the mobilization of affective dispositions facilitated by new media. Conservative Christians in politics are not called upon by their leaders to be simply followers, but rather to be activists, protagonists, fighters against powerful forces.

In the evangelical field, the main political leaders are young, consequently with good prospects for a long political career. In the Catholic field, since so little is known at this stage about the direction Pope Leo XIV will take in his papacy, we have refrained from examining the topic in depth. For Peruvians, however, Leo XIV is regarded as one of their own, and the news of his election was received with great enthusiasm. His position gives him the potential to influence Peruvian politics—whether he chooses to exercise that influence is another matter. President Boluarte, for her part, made every effort to be seen attending Pope Leo XIV's Inauguration Mass. In September 2025, without much previous planification, the then mayor, Rafael Lopez Aliaga, intended going to Rome and have a brief meeting with pope Leo XIV. However, the pope's secretary refused to accept such meeting. They probably realized that this meeting and the pictures that would be taken in such circumstances, might serve some political purpose. In this way, pope Leo XIV, has clearly stated his awareness of political strategies and his refusal to get involved in it.

On the occasion of Social Week, held from August 14 to 16, Pope Leo XIV (2025) addressed a message to the Peruvian bishops, who organize this annual seminar to reflect on the country's social situation. Quoting two of his predecessors, Paul VI and Francis, Leo XIV urged his "brother bishops" to avoid a disembodied piety and to respond to the thirst for justice among the entire population, especially the marginalized.

Leo XIV concludes: "Dear brothers and sisters: it is not two loves, but rather one and the same, that moves us to give both material bread and the bread of the Word that, in turn, by its very dynamism, will give rise to hunger for the Bread of Heaven, which only the Church can give, by the mandate and will of Christ, and which no human institution, however well-intentioned it may be, can replace". At this point, it is unclear whether this general message has had any impact on the Peruvian bishops, though more direct statements in the future may prove more influential.

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