

Peru's Oligarchy Overthrows President Castillo

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By Manolo De Los Santos



June 6, 2021, was a day which shocked many in Peru's oligarchy. Pedro Castillo Terrones, a rural schoolteacher who had never before been elected to office, won the second round of the presidential election with just over 50.13% of the vote. More than 8.8 million people voted for Castillo's program of profound social reforms and the promise of a new constitution against the far-right's candidate,

Keiko Fujimori. In a dramatic turn of events, the historical agenda of neoliberalism and repression, passed down by former Peruvian dictator Alberto Fujimori to his daughter Keiko, was rejected at the polls.

From that day on, still in disbelief, the Peruvian oligarchy declared war on Castillo. They made the next 18 months for the new president a period of great hostility as they sought to destabilize his government with a multi-pronged attack that included significant use of lawfare. With a call to “throw out communism,” plans were made by the oligarchy’s leading business group, the National Society of Industries, to make the country ungovernable under Castillo.

In October 2021, recordings were [released](#) that revealed that since June 2021, this group of industrialists, along with other members of Peru’s elite and leaders of the right-wing opposition parties, had been planning a series of actions including financing protests and strikes. Groups of former [military](#) personnel, allied with far-right politicians like Fujimori, began to openly call for the violent overthrow of Castillo, threatening government officials and left-leaning journalists.

The right-wing in Congress also joined in these plans and attempted to impeach Castillo on two occasions during his first year in office. “Since my inauguration as president, the political sector has not accepted the electoral victory that the Peruvian people gave us,” Castillo [said in March](#) 2022. “I understand the power of Congress to exercise oversight and political control, however, these mechanisms cannot be exercised by mediating the abuse of the right, proscribed in the constitution, ignoring the popular will expressed at the polls,” he stressed. It turns out that several of these lawmakers, with support from a right-wing German foundation, had also been [meeting](#) regarding how to modify the constitution to quickly remove Castillo from office.

The oligarchic rulers of Peru could never accept that a rural schoolteacher and peasant leader could be brought into office by millions of poor, Black, and

Indigenous people who saw their hope for a better future in Castillo. However, in the face of these attacks, Castillo became more and more distanced from his political base. Castillo formed four different cabinets to appease the business sectors, each time conceding to right-wing demands to remove leftist ministers who challenged the status quo. He **broke** with his party Peru Libre when openly challenged by its leaders. He **sought** help from the already discredited Organization of American States in looking for political solutions instead of mobilizing the country's major peasant and Indigenous movements. By the end, Castillo was fighting alone, without support from the masses or the Peruvian left parties.

The final crisis for Castillo broke out on December 7, 2022. Weakened by months of corruption allegations, left infighting, and multiple attempts to criminalize him, Castillo was finally overthrown and imprisoned. He was replaced by his vice president, Dina Boluarte, who was sworn in after Congress impeached Castillo with 101 votes in favor, six against, and ten abstentions.

The vote came hours after he announced on television to the country that Castillo was dissolving Congress. He did so preemptively, three hours before the start of the congressional session in which a motion to dismiss him for "permanent moral incapacity" was to be debated and voted on due to allegations of corruption that are under investigation. Castillo also announced the start of an "exceptional emergency government" and the convening of a Constituent Assembly within nine months. He said that until the Constituent Assembly was installed, he would rule by decree. In his last message as president, he also decreed a curfew to begin at 10 o'clock that night. The curfew, as well as his other measures, was never applied. Hours later, Castillo was overthrown.

Boluarte was sworn in by Congress as Castillo was detained at a police station. A few demonstrations broke out in the capital Lima, but nowhere near large enough

to reverse the coup which was nearly a year and a half in the making, the latest in Latin America's long history of violence against radical transformations.

The coup against Pedro Castillo is a major setback for the current wave of progressive governments in Latin America and the people's movements that elected them. This coup and the arrest of Castillo are stark reminders that the ruling elites of Latin America will not concede any power without a bitter fight to the end. And now that the dust has settled, the only winners are the Peruvian oligarchy and their friends in Washington.

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