

**Perceptions of University Students about Politics and Political Parties in
Perú**

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	pg 3
a. Central Question	
b. Hypothesis	
c. Thesis	
2. The Era of Executive Instability (2016 – Present).....	pg 4
3. Origins of Party System Collapse: The Fujimori Era	pg 6
4. Populism and the Personalization of Peruvian Politics	pg 8
5. Transfuguismo and Declining Party Credibility	pg 9
6. Instability and the Weakening of Democratic Trust.....	pg 10
7. Theoretical Framework	pg 11
8. Research Design and Methodology	pg 12
9. Limitations	pg 14
10. Data	pg 14
11. Results	pg 15
a. Descriptive Statistics	
b. Correlation Analysis Overview	
c. Hypothesis Testing	
d. Additional Correlation Patterns	
e. Summary of Findings	
12. Discussion	pg 17
13. Conclusion	pg 20
14. Bibliography	pg 21
15. Appendix	pg 22
a. Appendix A: 2026 Presidential Election Context	
b. Appendix B: Descriptive statistics	
c. Appendix C: Correlation Matrix	
d. Appendix D: Hypothesis Testing and Significance Summary	
e. Appendix E: Theoretical Framework and Variable Operationalization	
f. Appendix F: Correlation Pairing	
g. Appendix G: Survey Instrument and Index Construction	
h. Appendix H: Full Survey Instrument	
i. Appendix I: Summary Results of the Full Survey Instrument	

Perceptions of University Students about Politics and Political Parties in Perú

Over the past three decades, Perú has become one of the most politically volatile democracies in Latin America. Since 2016 alone, the country has experienced repeated presidential removals, impeachment attempts, executive- legislative confrontation, and short-lived administrations. Nearly every recent president has faced corruption allegations, resignations, or institutional crises. Yet, despite regular elections and formal democratic procedures, Peru's party system remains fragmented, weakly institutionalized and characterized by low levels of public trust.

This persistent instability raises an important question: Why has democratic competition in Perú failed to produce strong, institutionalized political parties capable of generating credible and stable electoral options? and, How does growing up in this environment shape the political perceptions of younger generations?

This study advances a structural argument linking chronic political volatility to party system weakness and, ultimately, to youth political attitudes. I argue that repeated episodes of executive instability and institutional crisis do not merely reflect weaker parties, but that they actively reinforce that weakness. Political instability disrupts long-term party-building incentives, encourages short-term electoral strategies, and incentivizes the creation of personality-driven electoral vehicles rather than durable programmatic organizations. Over time, this dynamic weakens candidate recruitment, fragments legislative organization, and erodes institutional credibility. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle in which instability produces party weakness, party weakness degrades electoral quality, and exposure to these patterns shape increasingly negative political perceptions among younger citizens.

The origins of this dynamic trace back to the presidency of Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s, a critical turning point in Peru's democratic trajectory. The 1992 autogolpe and subsequent constitutional changes dismantled traditional party competition and normalized outsider-driven politics. Although later governments operated within a formal democracy, the collapse of stable party structures persisted, leading to high party switching, fragmented congress, and the rapid rise of political organizations.

The central questions of this study are: **(1) How do new generations perceive the quality of political parties and electoral campaigns?** and **(2) To what extent do structural weaknesses in Peru's party system undermine public confidence and contribute to limited or low-quality electoral options?**

To evaluate this argument, the study advances four testable hypotheses:

- 1) H1: *Higher levels of perceived political volatility are associated with lower evaluations of political party institutional capacity among younger generations.*
- 2) H2: *Lower perceived party institutional capacity is associated with reduced trust and confidence in political institutions, including parties, Congress, and the executive branch.*
- 3) H3: *Lower perceived party institutional capacity is associated with more negative evaluations of the quality and qualifications of electoral candidates.*
- 4) H4: *Lower levels of institutional trust are associated with more negative perceptions of campaign credibility and the overall quality of electoral competition*

The importance of this inquiry is heightened by the upcoming presidential elections scheduled for April 2026. Perú enters this electoral cycle amid extreme party fragmentation, historically low institutional trust, and the registration of an unprecedented number of political organizations (see Appendix A). University voters constitute a numerically significant and politically consequential segment of the population, understanding how this cohort perceives party quality, candidate credibility, and campaign seriousness is therefore critical for assessing the broader Peruvian democratic trajectory

The article proceeds as follows: it reviews relevant scholarship, outlines the theoretical framework and methods, and concludes with empirical findings and their implications for Peru's democratic trajectory.

The Era of Executive Instability (2016– Present)

Peru's contemporary political crisis is best understood not as a sequence of isolated scandals, but as a prolonged institutional struggle that has steadily eroded executive stability and democratic confidence. Over the past decade, the presidency has transformed from a position of electoral authority into one of constant vulnerability. The relationship between Congress and the Executive has hardened into a cycle of confrontation in which impeachment, resignation, dissolution, and censure are no longer extraordinary constitutional remedies, but routine political strategies. What distinguishes this period is not simply corruption, but the normalization of presidential turnover as an expected feature of governance.

Although corruption scandals have long shaped Peru's democratic history – from authoritarian consolidation under Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s to the later Odebrecht scandal that implicated former leaders such as Alan Garcia and Alejandro Toledo – the current phase represents something more structurally destabilizing (Bentin 2018; Nureña & Helfgott 2019). Early crises eroded legitimacy but did not trigger the rapid, repeated executive turnover that now defines Peruvian politics, driven by the interaction of weak party institutionalization, fragmented congressional coalitions, and expansive constitutional mechanisms for removal.

The constitutional foundation of this instability lies in Article 113 which allows Congress to declare the presidency vacant on grounds including “permanent moral or physical incapacity” – a clause sufficiently vague to invite broad legislative interpretation, transforming a constitutional safeguard into a political weapon. (Constitución Política del Perú, 1993, art. 113).

The escalation of volatility became especially visible during the presidency of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (2016-2018), when impeachment proceedings tied to the Odebrecht investigations revealed how vulnerable the executive branch had become to legislative maneuvering (Adrianzen, 2018). Rather than formally ousted, he resigned under mounting congressional pressure.

As this pattern deepened under Martin Vizcarra and later under Pedro Castillo, the presidency became structurally fragile. Castillo's failed attempt to dissolve Congress in 2022 and his immediate impeachment illustrated how constitutional confrontation has escalated into open institutional breakdown (Perez & Galvez 2022).

The fragility has accelerated dramatically in the most recent phase of the crisis. In October 2025, President Dina Boluarte was removed from office under Article 113 Section 2 for “permanent moral incapacity” (El Pais 2025). Her successor, Jose Jeri, assumed the presidency amid deep polarization but was censured (first censure impeachment) and forced out on February 17, 2026 only serving four months as President of the Republic (BBC 2026). Within months, Perú transitioned yet again to a new head of state, Jose Maria Balcasar, who now governs as the country approaches presidential elections scheduled for April 2026. The turnover of three presidents within such a compressed timeframe demonstrates how entrenched a self-perpetuating cycle has become.

What is unfolding, is not merely a pattern of individual misconduct but a structural condition of executive precarity. Congress has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to present and then remove presidents; presidents, in turn have governed defensively in anticipation of legislative challenge. The roots of this institutional fragility, however, extend further back, to the deliberate dismantling of Peru's party system during the Fujimori era.

Origins of Party System Collapse: The Fujimori Era

The extreme political volatility that characterizes Perú today did not emerge suddenly in the mid-2010s. Rather, it can be traced to the collapse of the country's party system during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a transformation that fundamentally altered how political competition operates.

During the late 1980s, Perú faced an atmosphere of profound crisis marked by economic collapse, political violence, and widespread disillusionment with politics. The country struggled to contain the insurgency of Sendero Luminoso (Shinning Path), a maoist guerilla movement led by Abimael Guzmán that sought to overthrow the state through armed revolution. The violence was widespread and devastating, claiming thousands of civilian, political and community victims between the 1980s and 1992(McClintock 1998). At the same time, Perú experienced severe economic instability and hyperinflation, further eroding confidence in democratic governance and traditional political parties.

Within this climate of insecurity and institutional distrust, Alberto Fujimori emerged as an unlikely presidential candidate. Fujimori campaigned as a political outsider who promised to restore order and address the crisis that established parties had failed to resolve (Adrienne 2024). His anti-establishment image resonated strongly with voters frustrated by years of instability and corruption. Once in office in 1990, Fujimori gained widespread support for addressing the country's most pressing threats. As scholars note, "Fujimori vanquished two forces that Peruvians had come to find unbearable: hyperinflation and the cycle of violence that had culminated in the terrorism of the Shining Path" (Levtisky & Cameron 2003, p 8). In doing so, he consolidated significant political legitimacy, posing himself as a leader capable of rescuing the state from collapse. However, the methods he employed to achieve this stability would ultimately transform Peru's political system in ways that reshaped its democratic institutions for decades to come.

However, the political legitimacy Fujimori gained from restoring economic stability and weakening the insurgency soon translated into a dramatic consolidation of executive power. In April 1992, Fujimori

carried out what became known as the *fujigolpe*, or self-coup, dissolving Congress, suspending the constitution, and assuming extraordinary authority over the state. Although such actions represented a clear rupture with democratic norms, they occurred with a broader context of institutional crisis that had already eroded confidence in the existing political system. As Seligson and Carrion (2022) note, the climate of political violence and institutional fatigue created conditions in which democratic norms could be easily challenged. Remarkably, “Nearly 8 out of 10 people surveyed in the capital, Lima declared support for the coup in polls conducted immediately after it took place” (Seligson and Carrion 2022, p 65). Public approval of the self-coup demonstrated how deeply disillusioned citizens had become with the existing political system.

Within this environment of institutional crisis, the traditional political parties rapidly collapsed. Parties that had dominated Peruvian politics for decades, including: Partido Aprista Peruano (APRA), Acción Popular (AP), the Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC), and Izquierda Unida (IU), experienced an extraordinary electoral decline. As Steven Levitsky notes, these parties, “Declined from 97% of the vote in 1985 to 6% combined in 1995” (Levitsky 2018, p 327).

Fujimori himself embodied this transformation. Running as a political outsider in 1990, he governed without relying on a traditional party structure and instead deepened heavily on the state and personal networks to consolidate power. In doing so, he demonstrated that electoral success and governing authority were possible without the organizational infrastructure that parties traditionally provide.

As a result, Peru’s party system shifted away from programmatic organization and toward highly personalized political movements. Levitsky describes this transformation clearly: “Parties were replaced by ‘coalitions of independents’ or short-lived alliance of political ‘free agents’ who come together on candidate slates for a single election cycle” (Levitsky 2018, p 362). Politicians increasingly abandoned party affiliation altogether, presenting themselves instead as independent candidates or forming a temporary electoral vehicle designed solely for a single campaign.

Even after the fall of Fujimori in 2000, these patterns persisted. According to Levitsky, “post-Fujimori politicians developed alternative strategies and technologies that enable them to succeed without parties, thereby weakening incentives for party building” (Levitsky 2018, p 327). In other words, the institutional damage inflicted during the 1990s proved difficult to reverse. Once politicians learned how

to win elections without parties, the motivation to reconstruct stable party organizations largely disappeared.

The consequences of this collapse have been profound for Peru's democratic system. The institutional fragmentation forms a critical link between the Fujimori era and Peru's contemporary cycle of instability: the dismantling of traditional parties encouraged personalized politics and temporary electoral vehicles, which generated fragmented legislatures and fragile governing coalitions. In this sense, the chain of causation connecting Peru's modern political crisis becomes clear, Fujimori's dismantling of the party system produced fragmentation, that fragmentation generated institutional volatility, and that volatility ultimately has culminated in the extreme executive instability that has defined Peruvian politics since 2016.

Within this environment of weakened parties and persisting institutional conflict, populism emerged as a powerful political strategy. As traditional parties lost credibility and organizational strength, candidates increasingly relied on personalist appeals, anti-establishment rhetoric, and outsider identities to mobilize voters. The next section therefore examines the rise of Peruvian populism and how these dynamics have shaped contemporary political competition.

Populism and the Personalization of Peruvian Politics

Following the collapse of Peru's traditional party system, populism emerged as an increasingly attractive alternative to institutionalized party politics. With established parties weakened and public trust in political institutions declining, electoral competition shifted toward personalistic leadership and short-term political movements rather than stable organizations.

In the context of Peru, the weakening of institutionalized parties after the Fujimori era created fertile ground for this style of leadership, where, as de la Torre explains, "Political parties ... were portrayed not only as out of touch with the needs and desires of the electorate but also as enemies of the people" (de la Torre 2017, p 198). Weak parties encourage short-term electoral strategies and undermine systematic candidate recruitment, often resulting in low-quality political alternatives. Rather than cultivating experienced leaders or coherent programs, many parties formed temporarily around individual figures and dissolved shortly after elections. As Grundberg (2002), drawing on Tuesta Soldevilla et. al (2019), observes, contemporary political dynamics are marked by increasingly short cycles in which "political franchises" emerge around individual leaders only to dissolve just as quickly.

Rather than operating as stable, long-term institutions, these organizations function primarily as temporary electoral vehicles.

Several of Peru's most prominent political leaders illustrate this dynamic. Alberto Fujimori, Ollanta Humala, and Pedro Castillo all emerged as strong personalistic figures who did not rely on established party structures. Instead, each leader constructed or relied on temporary political movements built specifically for electoral competition.

The persistence of this model has reinforced a broader structural pattern in Peruvian politics. Without strong parties to organize political competition or develop long-term policy agendas, elections often revolve around charismatic individuals rather than institutional programs. While populist appeals can mobilize marginalized voters and expand political participation, they rarely produce durable political loyalties or stable coalitions.

Transfuguismo and Declining Party Credibility

In the context of Peru, transfuguismo has become a central factor in the long-term erosion of political credibility and institutional trust, with particularly strong consequences for youth political attitudes. Following the collapse of traditional party structures after the Fujimori era, politicians have increasingly treated party affiliations as a flexible tool rather than a stable commitment. As Steven Levitsky observes, "It is widely expected that politicians will routinely switch partisan affiliation, often renegotiating their party ties at each election cycle" (Levitsky 2018, p 342). In Peru, this pattern is especially visible in Congress, where shifting alliances are common and often driven by short-term political survival rather than ideological alignment. For young voters, who are in the process of forming political identities, this lack of consistency makes parties appear unreliable and self-serving. Rather than seeing politics as a space for representation to change, many youth perspectives view parties as opportunistic and transactional. As a result, transfuguismo contributes directly to declining levels of trust and engagement among younger generations.

This environment of constant party-switching also deepens broader public distrust, but its effects are particularly pronounced among the youth who already feel disconnected from formal political institutions. As Javier Garcia Roca argues, transfuguismo seriously damages representative democracy by generating a sense of instability, confusion, and lack of governability, while conveying the image of politics as a marketplace of constant bargaining rather than principle competition (Garcia Roca 2007, p

28). In Peru, this perception reinforces the idea among young people that political participation is ineffective or meaningless. As Christopher Achen suggests, party identification typically relies on continuous retrospect evaluations of party performance to sustain voter loyalty (Achen 1992, cited in Calvares 2023). However, when political parties frequently abandon their parties, this evaluative link breaks down, making it difficult to form lasting attachments or trust in political actors. Furthermore as Chritistna Jarmaillo notes, new or shifting members often lack a genuine ideological connection and are more prone to dissent, weakening internal cohesion (Jarmaillo 2023, p 660). Ultimately, in Peru's case, transfuguismo not only undermines party discipline and long-term credibility but also plays a critical role in fueling youth distrust, disengagement,t and skepticism toward democratic institutions.

Instability and the Weakening of Democratic Trust

The broader political culture has been shaped by repeated crises that have weakened institutional trust and reinforced skepticism toward democratic governance, particularly among younger generations. Rather than fostering strong partisan identification or long-term political engagement, the system has produced a fragmented and unstable environment. As scholars note, the rapid proliferation of political parties has not strengthened representation but instead contributed to fragmentation that weakens programmatic coherence and effective policymaking (Reyes 2025). This instability is further reflected in consistently low levels of public confidence: according to the *Encuesta Nacional de Hogares (2024)*, 79.4% of the population expresses dissatisfaction with the Peruvian democracy. Even more striking are the distrust levels toward specific institutions. According to the Peruvian *Instituto Nacional de Estadista de Informatica (2024)*: 93.3% of the population distrust political parties, 91.8% congress, and over 74% expressing distrust in regional and local governments (Garcia Castro 2025). These figures highlight not only a crisis of governance but also a deeper erosion of legitimacy across the political system. For young people, who are forming their political attitudes in this environment, such pervasive distrust reinforces disengagement and skepticism.

At the same time, these dynamics have contributed to the normalization of corruption and opportunistic behavior within Peru's political culture, further alienating young voters. As Alvarez 2015, explains, corruption tolerance can be understood as both citizen's support for corrupt politicians and their willingness to engage in corrupt exchanges themselves, creating a cycle that normalizes these practices both electorally and behaviorally. In this context, corruption is not always perceived as exceptional but rather an expected part of Peruvian politics. This normalization is reinforced by the institutional weakness, fragmentation, and lack of accountability mechanisms, which together have created this

environment where unethical behavior carries limited consequences. As a result, many young people come to see politics as inherently corrupt, self-serving and disconnected from public interest. This perception discourages participation and weakens democratic engagement, as youth feel that their involvement is unlikely to produce meaningful change. Combined with high levels of distrust and repeated institutional crisis, this contributes to a political culture where disengagement becomes the rational response. As a result, political culture in Perú is increasingly defined by low confidence, weak institutional attachment, and limited belief in the effectiveness of democratic participation.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on theories of institutionalism, party system institutionalization, and political culture to explain why democratic competition in Perú has failed to produce strong, credible, and stable political parties, and how this failure shapes youth political perceptions. Rather than treating instability as a temporary disruption, this framework conceptualizes it as a structural condition that both reflects and reinforces weak party development. In Peru, repetitive executive crises, fragmented political competition, and the absence of durable party organizations create a system in which democratic procedures exist formally but fail to generate meaningful or credible electoral options. These conditions are central to understanding how the new generation evaluates the quality of political parties and electoral campaigns. As a result, youth distrust is not examined in isolation, but as a direct response to the weaknesses of the party system itself. By linking structural deficiencies in party development to citizens' perceptions, this framework addresses both institutional and behavioral dimensions of the research question.

A central component of this framework is party system institutionalization theory and institutionalism itself, particularly as developed by Steven Levitsky. In weakly institutionalized systems like Peru, parties lack stability, ideological coherence, and long-term organizational capacity, which limits their ability to structure competition and produce credible candidates. This environment encourages short-term strategies, including transfuguismo, where politicians switch affiliations for electoral advantage, reinforcing perceptions of opportunism. As Levitsky notes, such patterns become expected, further weakening party credibility. In this context, populism emerges as both a consequence and a reinforcing aspect of the party system of weakness. As Carlos de la Torre argues, populist leaders frame traditional parties as disconnected from “the people,” positioning themselves as direct representatives of popular will. While this strategy can mobilize voters, it further delegitimizes already fragile party institutions and shifts competition toward personalistic leadership rather than programmatic

organization. Drawing on Christopher Achen, voters rely on consistent party performance to evaluate political options; however in a fragmented system, this process is disrupted. As a result, younger voters face difficulty identifying trustworthy parties or assessing candidate quality, shaping more negative evaluation for electoral competition.

Political culture theory helps explain how these structural weaknesses translate into broader attitudes. In Peru, long-term exposure to unstable parties and ineffective representation has contributed to a political culture marked by low trust and skepticism toward parties that are meaningful institutions. Rather than viewing parties as vehicles of representation, many - especially young people- perceive them as unreliable or disconnected from public interests. This perception is reinforced by the normalization of corruption, which further undermines party legitimacy. As Alvarez (2015) suggests, when corruption becomes tolerated both electorally and behaviorally, it shapes expectations about how politics operates. Together, these dynamics illustrate how weak party institutionalization not only limits the quality of electoral options but also directly shapes youth perceptions, reinforcing distrust and reducing confidence in democratic competition. This framework therefore conceptualized weak party institutionalization, transfuguismo, populism, and corruption tolerance as the central structural variables driving negative youth perceptions of political parties and electoral competition in Peru.

Research Design and Methodology

This study adopts a mixed- methods approach, coming from theoretical analysis with an original survey data to examine how structural weakness in Peru's party system shapes youth perceptions of political parties and electoral competition. The research is primarily qualitative- analytical, grounded in theories of party system, institutional, populism, and political culture, while incorporating quantitative survey data to capture contemporary attitudes among younger generations. This design allows for a direct connection between macro-level institutional dynamic and microlevel perceptions, aligning with the study's central research question.

The empirical component consists of a survey administered to university students in Peru, targeting individuals between the ages of 18 and postgraduate level across a range of academic disciplines. University students are selected as the primary sample because they represent a politically relevant segment of the population: they are first-time or recent voters, are actively forming political opinions and are more likely to engage with electoral processes. Additionally, focusing on students allows the

study to capture variation across fields of study, which may influence political awareness and attitudes. The sampling strategy follows a non-probability convenience sampling method, relying on distribution through university networks, social media platforms, and student organizations. While this limits generalizability, it is appropriate for exploratory analysis focused on youth perceptions.

The survey instrument is designed as a hybrid questionnaire, including adapted questions from the Latin Barometer with original questions tailored to assess perceptions of political parties in Peru.

Latinobarometer questions provide a reliable baseline for measuring trust in institutions, satisfaction with democracy, and political engagement, ensuring comparability with existing regional data. These are complemented by original questions that specifically target evaluations of party quality, candidate credibility, campaign effectiveness, and perceptions of opportunism (see Appendix H). This combination strengthens both the validity and specificity of the data, allowing the study to situate its findings within broader trends while directly addressing its research focus.

The questionnaire includes a mix of closed and open-ended and Likert-scale questions, enabling both descriptive and analytical insights. Likert-scale items are used to measure perceptions of trust, credibility, and party effectiveness, while multiple-choice questions were structured as more direct, point-blank yes/no responses to capture clear positions on key questions. The survey was administered digitally to maximize accessibility and participation.

To facilitate statistical analysis, Likert-scale responses were combined into composite indices representing the study's core concepts: **political volatility, institutional capacity, institutional trust, candidate quality, campaign credibility, and corruption**. Each index was constructed by averaging conceptually related questions, producing a single continuous measure per participant.

The political volatility index captures perceptions of instability, including support for executive removal, evaluations of national direction, short-term political strategies, and the presence of improvised candidates. The institutional capacity index measures confidence in political parties through trust, representation, and alignment with voter preferences. The institutional trust index, reflects broader confidence in political institutions, including perceived representation, party closeness, and satisfaction with democracy.

The candidate quality index evaluates perceptions of candidates based on preparedness, populism, ideological clarity, and the effects of party disorganization. The campaign credibility index captures perceptions of electoral fairness, trust in the electoral system, and political disengagement. Finally, the corruption index measures both perceived levels of corruption and its influence on political outcomes.

All indices were calculated as mean scores on a 1-5 scale; however, the corruption index corroborates one item originally measured on a 0-10 scale, allowing for greater variation in capturing perceptions of corruption.

Limitations

The study faces limitations related to both data collection and sample scope. The survey sample is limited to university students in Lima, with a large proportion drawn from Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola (USIL). While it provides insight into a politically engaged and educated population, it does not capture perspectives from other regions of Peru, particularly the provinces, where there is likely greater variation in political attitudes. The use of a non-probability convenience sample and a relatively small sample size ($N = 45$) further limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, reliance on self-reported survey data introduces potential response bias, as well as inconsistencies due to unreliable internet connection that may have affected participation or response quality. Finally, corruption in Peru is a deeply entrenched and highly polarizing issue, with multiple generations having experienced different forms of political instability and corruption. This broader historical context may shape respondents' perceptions in ways that are difficult to fully isolate within a survey framework, influencing attitudes beyond the specific variables measured in this study.

Data

The final dataset consists of survey responses from 45 university-level participants based in Lima, Peru, with each observation representing an individual respondent. The dataset includes one value per participant for each constructed index, enabling direct comparison across variables and supporting correlation and regression analysis.

The sample reflects a diverse range of academic institutions and fields of study. The largest representation comes from Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola ($n = 22$), followed by Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos ($n = 5$), Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicada ($n = 4$), and Universidad de Lima ($n = 3$), with additional participants from other universities. Respondents represent

a multidisciplinary population, with fields including law, international studies, engineering, psychology, culinary arts, and business among others.

Geographically, participants reside across multiple districts in Lima, including Centro Lima, La Molina, and Santiago de Surco, capturing variation in socio-economic and urban contexts.

The dataset was derived from a 59-question original survey organized across multiple thematic categories, including political institutions, democracy, corruption, electoral process, and political participation. After index construction, the data were structured into continuous variables representing each key concept, allowing for the identification of patterns in responses, particularly relationships between perceptions of political instability, institutional trust, and electoral credibility.

Overall the dataset provides a diverse cross-section of young, educated voters, making it well-suited for analyzing how structural weaknesses in political parties shape youth political perceptions in Peru.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The dataset consists of a total of 45 participants, and descriptive statistics were calculated for all six core variables included in the analysis (see Appendix B). The results indicate that the mean level of perceived political volatility is 2.91 (SD = 0.35), while institutional capacity has a mean of 1.98 (SD = 0.43). Institutional trust is comparatively lower, with a mean of 1.43 (SD = 0.24). In contrast, candidate quality is rated higher on average (M = 3.26, SD = 0.30), while campaign credibility has a moderate mean of 2.31 (SD = 0.34). Finally, corruption is the highest-rated variable, with a mean of 5.36 (SD = 0.65). These results indicate variation across all variables, with the greatest dispersion observed in corruption and institutional capacity, and the least variation in institutional trust.

Correlation Analysis Overview

A total of 15 pairwise correlations were computed across the six variables to examine the relationship between key concepts (see Appendix C: Correlation Matrix, and Appendix D: Correlation Significance table). Of these 15 relationships, only three correlations are statistically significant, while the remaining twelve are not. The statistically significant relationships include a strong positive correlation between institutional capacity and trust ($r = 0.64$, $p < .001$), a moderate negative correlation between institutional capacity and corruption ($r = -0.46$, $p < .01$), and a strong negative correlation between trust and

corruption ($r = -0.56$, $p < .001$). All other relationships, including those involving volatility, candidate quality, and credibility, do not reach statistical significance. These results indicate that statistically meaningful relationships are limited and concentrated among a small subset of variables.

Hypothesis Testing

For **Hypothesis 1 (H1)**, which proposes that higher levels of perceived political volatility are associated with lower evaluations of institutional capacity, the results show a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.14$) that is not statistically significant ($p = 0.38$) (see Appendix B). Therefore, H1 is not supported.

For **Hypothesis 2 (H2)**, which examines the relationship between institutional capacity and institutional trust, the analysis reveals strong positive and statistically significant correlations ($r = 0.64$, $p < .001$) (see Appendix B and Appendix C). This indicates a robust association between higher perceived capacity and higher levels of trust. Therefore, H2 is supported.

For **Hypothesis 3 (H3)**, which tests whether lower institutional capacity is associated with more negative evaluations of candidate quality, the results indicate a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.23$) that does not reach statistical significance ($p = 0.13$) (see Appendix D). Therefore, H3 is not supported.

For **Hypothesis 4 (H4)**, which examines the relationship between institutional trust and campaign credibility, as well as corruption and credibility, the results show no statistically significant relationships. The correlation between trust and credibility is negligible ($r = -0.05$, $p = 0.76$), and the relationship between corruption and credibility is also weak and non-significant ($r = -0.10$, $p = 0.50$) (see Appendix C and Appendix F). Therefore, H4 is not supported.

Additional Correlation Patterns

Beyond the hypothesized relationships, additional correlations were examined to assess broader patterns within the dataset (see Appendix F). The results show that volatility does not have a statistically significant relationship with any other variable. Similarly, candidate quality and campaign credibility do not exhibit statistically significant correlations with other variables in the model. In contrast, institutional capacity, institutional trust, and corruption are the only variables involved in statistically significant relationships. Specifically, institutional capacity is positively correlated with trust and negatively correlated with corruption, while trust is also negatively correlated with corruption. These

patterns indicate that statistically significant associations are limited to a specific cluster of variables within the dataset.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the results indicate that only one of the four hypotheses is supported, while the remaining hypotheses are not supported (See Appendix D: Summary Table of Hypothesis Testing). The only statistically significant hypothesized relationship is between institutional capacity and trust (H2). In contrast, H1, H3 and H4 do not demonstrate statistically significant relationships. Across all tested relationships, only three out of fifteen correlations are statistically significant, indicating that the overall structure of relationships in the dataset is limited. The significant findings are concentrated among institutional capacity, institutional trust, and corruption, while variables related to volatility, candidate quality and campaign credibility do not show statistically meaningful associations.

Discussion

The results of this study provide a clear answer to the central questions: How new generations perceive the quality of political parties and electoral campaigns, and to what extent structural weakness in Peru's party system undermines public confidence and electoral quality. Across both the statistical analysis and the broader survey findings, the evidence consistently points in the same direction: **University students hold a predominantly negative perception of politics in Peru, particularly toward political parties and the quality of representation they provide.**

This baseline is not abstract but directly reflected in the data. A large proportion of participants identified corruption as the most important problem facing the country, while institutional trust remains low ($M = 1.43$) and perceived corruption remains high ($M = 5.36$). Many respondents also indicated that no political party adequately represents their values (see Appendix I). These patterns are reinforced statistically: although only three out of the fifteen correlations are statistically significant, the strong positive relationship between institutional capacity and trust ($r = 0.64$, $p < .001$) stands out, alongside the negative relationships between capacity and corruption ($r = -0.46$) and trust and corruption ($r = -0.56$). Together, these results anchor the broader narrative, **institutional weakness and perceptions of corruption are central to how young voters understand politics.**

This matters because these perceptions are not neutral, they are formative. The respondents in this study are not passive observers; they are a part of a generation that is entering political life already skeptical.

When institutional capacity is the only variable that meaningfully correlates with trust, it highlights something deeper: trust is not being built through ideology, campaigns, or candidates, but through the perceived basic functioning of institutions. And even then, trust remains low overall. This suggests that young voters are not rejecting politics entirely, but that they are reacting to what they see as a system that fails to meet even minimal expectations of organization, coherence and integrity.

At the same time, the absence of strong relationships across the rest of the model is just as telling. The lack of statistically significant findings for H1 (volatility to capacity, $r = -0.14$), H3 (capacity to candidate quality, $r = -0.23$), and H4 (trust and corruption to credibility, $r = -0.05$ and $r = -0.10$) indicates that many dimensions of political evaluation are not tightly connected. Candidate quality and campaign credibility, for example, do not meaningfully connect to trust or institutional evaluations. This disconnect suggests that elections are not perceived as spaces where institutional legitimacy is reinforced, but rather as isolated events detached from a broader sense of democratic commitment. Participation in elections, in this sense, does not necessarily translate into belief in the system itself. That gap is critical.

What emerges from the data, is not simply distrust, but fragmentation. The data suggests that participants are not evaluating politics as a coherent system, but as a set of disconnected components. Institutional capacity matters for trust, but trust does not extend to credibility. Candidates are evaluated independently of party strength. Volatility does not significantly shape institutional perceptions. In effect, the system lacks the internal cohesion necessary to produce consistent or reinforcing political evaluations.

When placed in the context of Peru's political trajectory, these findings take on broader significance. The perceptions captured in this study reflect a generation shaped by the era of executive instability, where repeated presidential removals, scandals, and governance crises have normalized political disruption. For young voters, instability is not an exception, it is the baseline. The lack of a significant relationship between volatility and institutional capacity in the data reflects this normalization: instability is no longer something that alerts perceptions.

These attitudes are also rooted in deeper structural transformations, particularly the collapse of the party system during the era of Alberto Fujimori. The dismantling of traditional party structures and the shift toward personalized, candidate centered politics created a fragmented system in which parties often lack

ideological coherence and organizational depth. The survey findings, especially the widespread perception that no party represents respondent's values, reflect the long-term consequence of this transformation.

This fragmentation is further reinforced by practices such as transfuguismo. For new generations of voters, this undermines the very idea of party identity. Parties are no longer seen as stable vehicles of representation, but as temporary platforms used for electoral convenience. In this context, it is not surprising that institutional capacity emerges as the only meaningful predictor of trust, because consistency, structure, and coherence are precisely what voters perceive to be missing.

The rise of populism and the personalization of politics deepens this dynamic. When political competition revolves around individuals rather than institutions, electoral choices become less about programmatic alternatives and more about personality, visibility, and/or short-term appeal. This helps explain why candidate quality does not strongly correlate with institutional capacity in the data: candidates are not being evaluated as products of party systems, but as independent actors. This further weakens the roles of parties as intermediaries between citizens and the state.

All of these dynamics converge in a broader pattern: the erosion of democratic trust. Importantly, this erosion is not necessarily expressed as outright rejection of democracy, but rather as a lack of confidence in the actors and institutions that are meant to sustain it. The data reflects this nuance, trust is low, corruption is perceived as high, and credibility is not strongly anchored to institutional evaluations. Together, these patterns suggest a political environment in which legitimacy is fragmented, conditional, and unstable.

This raises a critical forward-looking concern. If young voters are entering the political system with already-formed negative perceptions, these attitudes are likely to reproduce themselves over time. Distrust becomes cyclical: weak institutions generate low trust, which in turn reduces engagement, accountability, and incentives for institutional improvement. Without meaningful structural reform, the system risks reinforcing the very conditions that sustain instability.

Recent developments surrounding the 2026 presidential elections further illustrate this dynamic. Reports of delays in ballot counting, logistical challenges, and widespread public frustration reflect ongoing concerns about the organization and credibility of electoral processes (Castilla, 2026). In a highly

fragmented electoral field with numerous candidates and limited programmatic differentiation, the system continues to exhibit the same structural weaknesses identified in this study. For a generation that already views political parties with skepticism, such developments do not challenge existing perceptions, they reinforce them.

In this sense, the findings of this study are not isolated, they are embedded in an ongoing political trajectory. The data suggests that unless there are substantial improvements in institutional capacity, coherence, and credibility, the current cycle of distrust and instability will persist. More importantly, it indicates that this cycle is already being internalized by a new generation of voters, shaping how they understand politics before they have fully entered it.

Conclusion

This study examined how new generations perceive the quality of political parties and electoral campaigns in Peru, as well as the extent to which structural weaknesses in the party system undermine public confidence and electoral outcomes. The findings consistently show that university participants hold a negative perception of politics, particularly toward political parties, which are viewed as weak, unrepresentative, and lacking credibility. Low levels of institutional trust, high perceptions of corruption, and the widespread belief that no party adequately represents citizens' interests all point to a broader crisis of confidence. While only the relationship between institutional capacity and trust was statistically significant, the overall pattern of results reinforces that institutional weakness and corruption are central to how young voters evaluate the political system.

These perceptions are shaped by Peru's broader political trajectory, including the collapse of the party system during the era of Alberto Fujimori and the ongoing period of political instability. As a result, young voters are entering political life already skeptical, reinforcing a cycle in which weak institutions generate low trust, and low trust limits the potential for institutional improvement. Unless meaningful reforms strengthen party organization, coherence, and credibility, this cycle is likely to persist. Ultimately the study highlights that improving institutional capacity is key not only to restoring trust, but to ensuring the long-term stability and legitimacy of democracy in Peru.

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Appendix

Appendix A: 2026 Presidential Election Context

The 2026 Peruvian general election is characterized by a highly fragmented political landscape, with numerous parties and candidates competing for limited electoral support. Several established and emerging political organizations have positioned themselves in the race, reflecting ongoing party system volatility.

Key political actors and parties include:

- Keiko Fujimori representing Fuerza Popular
- Verónica Mendoza associated with Nuevo Peru
- Rafael López Aliaga from Renovacion Popular



Appendix B: Descriptive statistics

This table presents the summary statistics for the 45 participants (N) across all analyzed variables. It details the Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD), Minimum (Min), Maximum (Max), values for the dataset, providing a baseline for the levels of political skepticism and institutional evaluations observed in the university student sample.

Index	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	N
Volatility	2.91	0.35	2.00	3.40	45
Capacity	1.98	0.43	1.33	3.33	45
Trust	1.43	0.24	1.25	2.50	45
Candidate Quality	3.26	0.30	2.60	4.00	45
Credibility	2.31	0.34	1.25	3.00	45
Corruption	5.36	0.65	2.00	6.00	45

Appendix C: Correlation Matrix

This correlation matrix displays the Pearson's r coefficients for all 15 possible pairwise relationships between the variables. This grid identifies the direction and strength of associations, ranging from strong positive relationships, such as between capacity and trust, to negligible associations, such as between volatility and candidate quality.

Correlations	Volatility	Capacity	Trust	Candidate Quality	Credibility	Corruption
Volatility	1.00	-0.14	-0.22	0.03	0.02	0.05
Capacity	-0.14	1.00	0.64*	-0.23	-0.09	-0.46*
Trust	-0.22	0.64*	1.00	-0.02	-0.05	-0.56*
Candidate Quality	0.03	-0.23	-0.02	1	-0.08	0.14
Credibility	0.02	-0.09	-0.05	-0.08	1.00	-0.10
Corruption	0.05	-0.46*	-0.56*	0.14	-0.10	1.00

Appendix D: Hypothesis Testing and Significance Summary

This appendix presents the formal results of the four primary hypotheses (H1–H4) examined in this study. The table provides a quantitative summary of the relationships between key variables, including the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) and the exact p -value for each pairing.

Hypothesis	Relationship	r	p -value	result
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H1	Volatility → Capacity	-0.14	0.38	Not Supported
H2	Capacity → Trust	0.64*	<.001*	Supported
H3	Capacity → Candidate Quality	-0.23	0.13	Not Supported
H4a	Trust → Credibility	-0.05	0.76	Not Supported
H4b	Corruption → Credibility	-0.10	0.50	Not Supported

Appendix E: Theoretical Framework and Variable Operationalization

This appendix outlines the conceptual structure of the research model, identifying the specific variables used to measure political attitudes among university students in Peru. It defines the specific indicators for each concept and their functional role (Independent Variable or Dependent Variable) within the tested hypotheses.

Concept	Variables Used	Role in Model
Volatility	Coup, vacancy, short-termism, etc.	IV (H1)
Capacity	Trust in parties, representation	DV (H1), IV (H2/H3)
Trust	Representation, democracy satisfaction	DV (H2), IV (H4)
Candidate Quality	Preparation, populism, ideology	DV (H3)
Credibility	Elections, trust, apathy	DV (H4)
Corruption	Perception + impact	IV (H4)

Appendix F: Correlation Pairing

This appendix provides the formal results for the four primary hypotheses (H1–H4) . It includes the calculated r values, t -statistics, and exact p -values for each relationship, clearly indicating which hypotheses were statistically supported ($p < 0.05^*$) and which were not supported by the data .

Pair	r (Correlation)	t -stat	p -value
Vol–Cap	-0.14	-0.90	0.38
Vol–Trust	-0.22	-1.46	0.15
Vol–Quality	0.03	0.22	0.83
Vol–Credibility	0.02	0.22	0.83
Vol–Corruption	0.05	0.32	0.75
Cap–Trust	0.64*	5.47	0.00

Cap–Quality	-0.23	-1.53	0.13
Cap–Credibility	-0.09	-0.60	0.55
Cap–Corruption	-0.46*	-3.41	0.00
Trust–Quality	-0.02	-0.12	0.91
Trust–Credibility	-0.05	-0.31	0.76
Trust–Corruption	-0.56*	-4.38	0.00
Quality–Credibility	-0.08	-0.50	0.62
Quality–Corruption	0.14	0.94	0.35
Credibility–Corruption	-0.10	-0.67	0.50

Appendix G: Survey Instrument and Index Construction

This appendix details the specific survey questions used to construct the six indices analyzed in this study . Each index was developed to capture a distinct dimension of the political environment in Perúas perceived by university students .

Index	Questions
Volatility	1. How likely do you think a coup d'état could happen in Peru? 2. In your opinion, how justifiable do you consider the frequent use of presidential vacancy or extraordinary measures to remove a president in Peru? 3. Would you say that Perú...? (progressing, stagnant, decline) 4. To what extent do you think Peruvian politics encourages short-term campaigns rather than long-term plans? 5. In general, do you think the rules of the current political system favor the emergence of improvised candidates?
Institutional Capacity	1. In general, how much trust do you have in the political parties participating in the 2026 presidential elections? 2. In general, do you trust Peruvian political parties? 3. Do you consider that any political party represents or encompasses the values most important to you?
Institutional Trust	1. Do you feel politically represented in the parliament/congress? 2. Is there any political party you feel closer to than others? 3. In general, would you say Perúis governed by a few powerful groups for their own benefit, or for the good of the entire population? 4. In general, would you say you are ___ with how democracy works in Peru?

Candidate Quality	1. In general, to what extent do you believe political candidates in Perú have the preparation and technical knowledge needed to govern? 2. Thinking about recent electoral campaigns, how common do you think populist or unrealistic promises are made by candidates? 3. In your opinión, to what extent does the lack of organization and internal discipline in parties affect the quality of candidates? 4. To what extent do you think candidates' lack of ideological clarity affects voter confidence? 5. Would you say the low quality of political candidates has reduced your interest in voting or participating in politics?
Campaign Credibility	1. In general, do you believe elections in this country are clean or fraudulent? 2. In general, do you trust the Peruvian electoral system? 3. In general, do you trust Peruvian political parties? 4. Do you think dissatisfaction with political candidates has increased political apathy among younger generations?
Corruption	1. To what extent do you think corruption influences candidate selection and campaign credibility? 2. Do you think the perception of corruption reduces citizens' trust in political candidates? 3. On a scale where "0" is NOT AT ALL CORRUPT and "10" is TOTALLY CORRUPT, how corrupt do you think Perú is?

Appendix H: Full Survey Instrument

This appendix presents the complete 59- item questionnaire administered to university students. The survey was designed to capture a comprehensive range of political attitudes, with specific items aggregated to form the indices used in the primary analysis of this study.

[Senior Seminar Questionnaire](#)

Appendix I: Summary Results of the Full Survey Instrument

This appendix provides a descriptive summary of the responses for all 59 items administered in the "Encuesta Sobre Percepción Política en Jóvenes Universitarios". The data represents the collective sentiment of the 45 participants, highlighting the prevailing trends in political attitudes, institutional evaluations, and perceptions of governance.

[Senior Seminar Results Summary](#)