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Extractivism as Authoritarianism

Abstract: Scholars characterize Latin American resource-dependent countries as "low-intensity democracies" with electoral competition and political rights. In this literature, undemocratic practices like participation exclusion and state repression are marginal phenomena. This article focuses on Peru—a country with many socio-environmental conflicts and a historical global provider of minerals—to understand the relationship between increasing extractive operations, social protests, and the enactment of emergency decrees as a crucial authoritarian feature of extractive states. By analyzing the case study of the "Southern Mining Corridor" and the emergency decrees enacted from 2015 to 2023 to protect mining, the article argues that emergency decrees have been normalized in extractive sites as a form of state control that excludes the political agency of Indigenous movements. Ultimately, the law establishes an unequal distribution of democratic institutions in Peru. The problem is not simply the "democratic deficit," but the political and economic regime that requires localized authoritarianisms.

Keywords: low-intensity democracies, authoritarianism, democratic deficit, Peru, extractivism

I. Introduction

The current climate crisis not only shows the limitations of the global economic system based on the massive extraction of natural resources and endless economic growth; it also unveils the incapacity of democratic systems to find meaningful solutions to the climate emergency. Instead of addressing this emergency, the rise of authoritarian populism in recent years has sought to pump some dynamism into faltering economies by intensifying extractivist processes (Adaman et al. 2021). In turn, Western progressive democracies announce green transitions in their economies while heavily fostering the extraction of critical minerals in the Global South, deepening extractive processes. While these Western states are considered democratic regimes, their investments rely on nondemocratic practices of host states, such as strong repression and rights suspensions of communities opposed to their projects (Dunlap et al. 2024). Resource extraction seems antagonistic not only to ecological sustainability but also to the ideal understanding of democracy as the political condition for the common good. Can democracy be meaningful in deeply dependent extractive economies? How does extractivism relate to authoritarian practices and regimes?

Whereas many studies have explained the economic and institutional effects of extractive dependence, such as economic stagnation in other sectors (the so-called Dutch disease), high vulnerability to external shocks, and clientelism, fewer studies have explained how it affects the

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political foundations of democratic regimes. With a focus on oil politics in the Middle East, studies on the "political resource curse" and the rentier state found a correlation between dependence on the extractive industry and the consolidation of already authoritarian regimes (Ross 2001; Wiens 2014). Few studies address how extractive dependency can lead to the rise of autocratic regimes, and they focus on the incentives it generates in electoral competition, whether it is resorting to noninstitutional channels to win elections or to stay in power (Wantchekon 2002). Other studies find that the increase in extractive dependency does not affect the democratic regime: The "political resource curse" would be a story about autocratic persistence and not about the origins of autocracy (Wiens 2014). The democratic question in this literature focuses on electoral competition, with little emphasis on how democratically elected governments can use authoritarian measures to impose extractive projects within formal democracy.

Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro (2020) expand the understanding of undemocratic practices to explain the correlation between extractivism and authoritarianism and argue that democracy is subjected to commodity price cycles. In this view, Latin American countries have experienced authoritarian periods linked to primary export accumulation, from military dictatorships in the 1960s to neoliberal and left governments in the 1990s and 2000s. These regimes do not hesitate to use repressive mechanisms to silence opposition to extractivism and use resource rents to co-opt resistance. In general, political ecologists and political sociologists explain how since the neoliberal turn in the 1980s and 1990s, democratic regimes in Latin America have been characterized as "low-intensity democracies" (Celis and Ortega 2017; Pelfini and Mena 2017), "captured democracies" (Pelfini and Mena 2017; Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro 2020; Martínez Espinoza 2018), or "delegative democracies" (Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro 2020; Gudynas 2014). These regimes implement electoral competition and broadly recognize political rights, but often exclude substantial citizen participation and political control of political elites. In privileging the interests of extractive industries over the rights and concerns of the local population, they reduce social and environmental standards and repress social mobilization.

This literature makes obvious contributions but also presents some gaps. Although these studies often examine undemocratic practices at the local level, they remain trapped in national assessments of democracy that are subject to technocratic discourses to measure the "quality of democracy." Under this category, democracies might be, in general, considered flawed or deficient at the country level, whereas the exclusion of substantial participation, state repression, and rights suspensions by decree are obscured in extractive zones. In this context, democracy's deficiencies can be fixed by improving transparency and the rule of law without addressing the legal infrastructure that sustains the extractive political economy. Rather, an analysis grounded on local struggles would suggest that democracy must be situated to understand how some spaces are continuously subjected to open authoritarianism. Cases of forced displacement of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral land to habilitate mining in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Merino 2021), agribusiness in Central Africa (Adeola and Viljoen 2018), and dam projects in India (Dukpa et al. 2018), and many others across the world, illustrate the systematic use of state repression to deal with social mobilization. This article addresses the case of Peru, a country with one of the highest levels of social conflicts associated with extractivism in the region and a historical global provider of mineral and other natural resources. The article aims to answer the following research question: What is the relationship between extractivism, emergency decrees, and authoritarianism in a resource-dependent country such as Peru?

To answer this question, the article analyzes the case study of the "Southern Mining Corridor" based on semistructured interviews with Indigenous leaders and activists, analysis of public declarations of state authorities and social leaders, and analysis of all emergency decrees and their explanatory statements in the period 2015–2023 that are directed to secure social order in the

Southern Mining Corridor with the support of the military. The Southern Mining Corridor is an extensive geographical area for the extraction, production, and transportation of minerals that includes fifteen mining projects in the departments of Cusco, Apurímac, and Arequipa. It covers around 400 kilometers used by some of the most important copper plants on the planet, such as Las Bambas, which once accounted for 2 percent of the world supply (Moreno 2022). Peru is also the third-largest global copper producer and copper represents 30 percent of its total exports (ibid.).

By expanding the reflections of settler colonial studies on Indigenous peoples as targets of exception (Rifkin 2009; 2015; 2017; Morgensen 2011; Havemann 2005; Dietrich 2023), this article shows that in the mining corridor, Indigenous communities are subjected to biopolitical, geopolitical, and tempo-political regimes of exception. Biopolitical mechanisms include stigmatization, rights suspension, repression of social protest, clearance of roads, and judicial persecutions aimed at disciplining protesters and communities. The geopolitical regimen of exception is shaped by the use of the corridor by mining trucks through community lands, legal recategorizations of the roads to facilitate the transport of minerals, and the exclusion of Indigenous territorial claims. The tempo-political regimen emerges through the formal and informal continuity of exception to ensure the endless circulation of mining commodities, making protesters a threat that might delay the temporality of extractivism.

Under these regimes, emergency decrees are not exceptional mechanisms to contain social unrest: They have been normalized in extractive sites as a form of state control and exclusion of the political agency of local and Indigenous movements. Normalization not only means the formality of enacting these decrees and extending their period but also the continued threat of living under the possibility of rights suspension. Normalization of exception is also a normalization of extractivism. This means making Indigenous territorial governance and claims abnormal threats that potentially might interrupt extractivism and also means making protesters intrinsically subversive actors who must be either disciplined or excluded. Emergency decrees thus become a state technology that continues colonial practices of dehumanizing Indigenous subjects through the law. These localized undemocratic practices are not merely excesses that reduce the general democratic score of a given country. In an extractive state like Peru, political exclusion, intrinsic to extractivism and exception, is not simply a malfunction but a critical foundation of political governance. Localized authoritarianism is the very foundation of extractivism.

The article is organized as follows: Part II presents critical approaches to democracy and extractivism and explains how settler colonial studies on exception and Indigenous peoples might complement these inquiries. Part III introduces Peru as an extractive state and Part IV focuses on the case study of the Southern Mining Corridor, where extractivism and exception coalesce to habilitate extractive operations. Part V connects the findings from the case study and the theory to discuss the relationship between extractivism and democracy. Part VI presents the conclusions and implications of the study.

II. Democracy in Extractive Countries

A few studies have analyzed how extractivism affects the democratic transition and consolidation of Latin America's countries after military dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s. These regimes are often characterized as "low-intensity democracies," as they established a formal and procedural democracy with electoral regularity and political rights, but with low citizen participation and legitimacy of state decisions related to extractive policies (Celis and Ortega 2017; Pelfini and Mena 2017). In this view, influential extractive industries such as mining would affect the representative character and the liberal foundations of representative democracy (Martínez Espinoza 2018). In

favoring mining, elected officials not only ignore and stigmatize social mobilization; they also impose pro-mining policies despite their electoral promises and the concerns of local populations. They also restrict fundamental rights, such as rights to information, participation, and a healthy environment, and at the same time, invoke the rule of law to justify the imposition of mining (Martínez Espinoza 2018). The resulting scenario is the intensification of economic inequality, social exclusion, ecological injustice, social conflicts, and criminalization of protests—all amounting to Gudynas's concept of "extrahections" (2017), meaning the uprooting of natural resources appealing to state power and violence.

These regimes are also conceived as captured democracies. With neoliberalism, the closeness of state officials to market actors implies plutocratic mechanisms, patronage links, conflicts of interest, and opacity in state-corporate relations (Martínez Espinoza 2018). State capture also implies different associations between extractivism and corruption, leading to situations that erode the quality of democracy, such as bribes in environmental assessments (Gudynas 2017). State capture also means that governments use clientelist practices for "fiscal pacification" and co-optation: They distribute resource rents to secure social acceptance (Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro 2020). Governments and elites also capture the media, polling firms, business consultancies, universities, foundations, and law firms to further diffuse discourses that seek to legitimize extractivism as the only means to fight poverty and underdevelopment (ibid.). Pelfini and Mena (2017) explain how, in Chile, elite networks captured environmental institutions and fostered cosmetic reforms about participation, while actually prioritizing investments.

Another common notion to describe democracies in deeply extractive contexts is "delegative democracy" (O'Donnell 1997). This concept refers to political regimes where the winner is represented as the embodiment of all the interests of the nation without ties to his promises, his party, the voters, or to parliamentary, judicial, or citizen controls; and therefore is clothed with enough powers to be exempted from accountability and institutional counterweights. Latin American "delegative democracies" would be exacerbated by extractivist logics that make democracies more electoral than participatory (Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro 2020; Gudynas 2014). Another expression of delegative democracy is "government by decree," or "decretism," a sign of Latin America's hyperpresidentialism or the concentration of power in the executive branch (Nino 1992; Gargarella 2010; Przeworski 1991). These political systems would contravene the deliberative nature of democracy, since they limit public discussions (Carey and Shugart 1998; Negretto 2002; Gargarella 2017). Along with the use of emergency decrees to impose extractive projects, this phenomenon has been recently expanded to fight organized crime, raising questions about the democratic character of Nayib Bukele's government in El Salvador, which uses them systematically and has influenced similar developments in Honduras and Ecuador (Meléndez-Sánchez and Vergara 2024).

All these approaches criticize a formal and procedural understanding of democracy in which even though the people are consulted at the polls, actual participation and social concerns are sidelined by the government (Gudynas 2014; Doran 2017; Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro 2020; Martínez Espinoza 2018). Low-intensity democracy, captured democracy, and delegative democracy are not competing analytical schemes to explain the impact of extractivism over democratic systems. They all overlap to describe the different features of political regimes conceived in general as "low-quality democracies." The key problem of these deficient democracies is the undermining of public confidence in political and legal institutions given government corruption and the breaking of campaign promises (O'Donnell 2001).

In 2000, with the fall of the authoritarian government of Alberto Fujimori, new governing elites in Peru promised a return to democracy and social development. Fujimori carried out a self-coup

d'état in 1992, approved a neoliberal constitution in 1993, and bribed congressmen, the military, media CEOs, and high-level authorities to support his government. Fujimori's neoliberal program included public companies' privatization, relaxing foreign investment regulations, and promoting mining, oil exploitation, and agribusiness. Along with neoliberalization, Fujimori implemented a counterterrorist strategy against insurgent groups, such as the Sendero Luminoso, which also led to the unjust imprisonment of hundreds of people, abuse of military-police power, and the use of paramilitary forces, replicating illegal practices of previous governments. In a country where 25 percent of the population considers themselves Indigenous (INEI 2017), the Truth Commission created in 2002 estimated that 79 percent of the 69,280 dead victims of the internal armed conflict were Indigenous.

In the new millennium, post-Fujimori governments deepened the classic extractivist model, consolidating the policies promoted by Fujimori, whereas several countries associated with the political Left in the region (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay) reformed their extractivist model toward what is called "neo-extractivism." They used extractive rents to finance social programs and recognized some cultural and environmental rights of cultural minorities and Indigenous peoples (Burchardt and Dietz 2014). Despite maintaining neoliberalism, Peru achieved sustained economic growth between 2000 and 2019, and monetary poverty was reduced from 59 percent to 20 percent (World Bank 2023). Pro–free market analysts point out that the success of the "Peruvian miracle" was due to its persistence in the neoliberal political economy. Others explain the economic success of the country, and the good performance of its neighbors that implemented more socially oriented policies, as due to the international "commodities boom" starting in the 2000s and China's high demand for commodities (Balakrishnan and Toscani 2018).

In this period, Peruvian democracy has been characterized as both delegative democracy and captured democracy. The former is expressed in the rulers' lack of ties with their political base. For instance, in his presidential campaign, President Humala (2011–2016) promised to break neoliberalism and limit extractivism, but he resumed a conservative agenda and repressed citizen resistance against megamining (Gudynas 2014). The delegative character of Peruvian democracy is also found in its decretist tradition and continuity during and after Fujimori. The executive branch in Peru issued a total of 739 legislative decrees and 2,297 emergency decrees in the period 1990–2017, many of them related to economic policy and investment promotion (Crabtree and Durand 2017). Peru also portrays the model of captured democracy because extractivism penetrates and captures the state, distorting its ability to build public policies committed to social and environmental justice (Durand 2016).

With the end of the commodities boom and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Peruvian economic miracle came into question. Peru was one of the countries most affected by the pandemic due to poor public health (Horton 2021) and it is experiencing an unprecedented political crisis due to corruption scandals among the political class. All democratically elected post-Fujimori presidents faced preventive imprisonment, restrictive measures, or judicial persecution. The mandate of President Dina Boluarte (2022–2025), who succeeded Pedro Castillo after he attempted to close the Congress, was questioned by massive mobilizations that demanded new elections. During the first two months of her mandate, police and army forces killed more than fifty protesters (Merino 2023).

Despite continued social conflicts, rights suspension, and political exclusion, the general democratic assessment of the country has remained consistent in the last two decades. In the period 2005–2021 the Democracy Index assigned to Peru the label of "flawed democracy," meaning that it fulfills the general standards of democracy (free elections, recognition of political

rights) but has some problems in specific aspects, such as "political culture" and "electoral pluralism," given the precariousness of political parties and the negative perception of democracy. Only in 2022 did the score decline to "hybrid regime" because of the unstable political environment, weak political culture, and the erosion of state capacity (Economist Intelligence Unit 2022). These general assessments obscure how many local communities close to extractive projects have lived uninterruptedly in everyday authoritarianism since the 1990s.

These assessments also assume that the main problem of Latin American democracies is that the population lacks confidence in democratic institutions. After analyzing the cases of Mexico and Chile, Doran (2017) argues that simply conceiving this problem as one of loss of confidence misses the fact that the criminalization of protest targets the populations that are among the most actively mobilized for democratic practices "from below," such as popular consultations self-organized by communities (Hincapié 2017). This indicates that there is no generalized loss of democratic values or crisis of confidence in democracy. On the contrary, attempts to silence social mobilization raise the question of whether it might rather be that governments are the ones experiencing a crisis of confidence in the rule of law and democracy they trumpet. This would indicate—as Doran (2017) suggests—something more dangerous, the expression of particular forms of the state dedicated to the preservation of elite rule. For Vergara (2020; 2022), these structures express "systemic corruption," as they maintain the privileges of oligarchs regardless of the rights and aspirations of the majority. Furthermore, oligarchic domination not only affects the majority's immediate well-being but also whole ecosystems subjected to extractive modes of accumulation that ensure the elites' power. The democratic deficit, therefore, would not be an expression of specific malfunctioning institutions, but an intrinsic and structural feature of extractive states that requires the extinguishing, either by exclusion or inclusion, of others' views of sociopolitical order.

III. Exception, Extractivism, and Indigenous Peoples

Peru has historically been critical for the global extraction of natural resources. During colonization, gold and silver mining enriched the European powers. In the eighteenth century, guano exports contributed to agriculture in the Global North, and in the nineteenth century, the export of rubber from the Peruvian Amazon was vital for foreign industrial development. Nevertheless, extractive development has generated and deepened various inequalities in the country. During colonial times, mining involved the forced relocation of Indigenous rural populations from agricultural areas, generating social and cultural fractures (Dell 2010). During the rubber boom, Native communities in the Amazon were subjected to slavery conditions until the first quarter of the last century (Barclay Rey de Castro 2010). Since independence in 1821, the descendants of Europeans—the Creole elite—took control of the country, promoting the unrestrained expansion of agricultural haciendas on Indigenous territory. It was not until the 1960s that agrarian reforms sought to redistribute land to favor peasants and Indigenous peoples. However, the most privileged economic sectors in the country demonize this agrarian reform, accusing it of causing underdevelopment in rural areas and halting progress (Mayer 2009). Unsurprisingly, these sectors have been the dominant ones in the political sphere. Until the introduction of the 1979 Constitution, a large part of rural Peru was excluded from the political system because illiterate people were not eligible to vote or run for office.

Today, Peru remains a deeply extractive country. As of 2020, the country's major exports were copper (22.8 percent), gold (15.9 percent), vegetable products (about 10 percent), petroleum gas (3.48 percent), and zinc (2.5 percent) (MIT 2022). Its main export destinations were China, the United States, and Europe. The country is also at the center of the energy transition because it has the essential natural resources for the substitution of hydrocarbons. It is a world leader in copper exports (Seck et al. 2020), and recent discoveries suggest that, in the coming years, it will be a major

exporter of lithium and rare earth minerals (Lèbre et al. 2020). Along with extractivism, social conflicts associated with the questioning of or resistance to extractive operations have been permanent in the country.

The Ombudsman's Office has identified an average of 190 social conflicts monthly for at least the last fifteen years.[1] Seventy percent of these conflicts are "socio-environmental," namely, related to the scarcity, deterioration, or deprivation of natural resources (SINIA 2021). Most conflicts and the deaths resulting from these conflicts have occurred in regions inhabited by Indigenous peoples. 31.7 percent of mining conflicts are concentrated in departments inhabited by a high percentage of Indigenous populations in the Peruvian Andes, such as Cusco, Apurímac, and Puno, whereas 42.6 percent of conflicts are concentrated in departments of the North Amazonian areas, such as Cajamarca, Loreto, and Amazonas, which also have a high percentage of the Indigenous population (Mining Conflict Observatory 2022; 2023).

For extractive industries to operate, national governments have resorted to emergency decrees on internal order, suspending fundamental rights and guarantees in conflict zones. From 2000 to 2018, different governments issued 272 emergency decrees declaring a "state of emergency" (Tafur and Quesada 2020), mainly in rural areas where there are primarily Indigenous peoples. For example, Peruvian governments declared seventeen states of emergency in rural areas of Cusco between 2000 and 2018, with a total duration of 7,860 days of suspension of rights and guarantees (ibid.). Many of these states of emergency were imposed in districts of the province of La Convención, where Quechua, Kichwa, and Matsigenka communities live, and in Cusco generally, 76.1 percent of the population self-identifies as part of an Indigenous population (Ministry of Culture 2020).

In conflict zones, demonstrations have resulted in the disproportionate use of force against protesters, generating many deaths and injuries. For example, the National Human Rights Coordinator, the country's most prominent human rights organization, identified 128 deaths linked to socio-environmental conflicts between 2009 and 2022, mostly in regions such as Amazonas, Arequipa, Cajamarca, and Puno (CNDDHH 2023). Furthermore, human rights activists and lawyers have continuously stressed that the legal framework of emergency has facilitated a disproportionate exercise of force while condoning the responsibility of public agents, empowering the armed forces, and permitting companies to sign deals with the police to act as private security agents (Saldaña and Portocarrero 2017). In addition, leaders of social movements have been harassed and accused of various crimes, from extortion and kidnapping to terrorism (Merino and Quispe 2021). For example, in the conflict known as Baguazo in the Department of Amazonas in June 2009, Indigenous communities opposed a controversial package of decrees aimed at fostering agribusiness in the Peruvian jungle. The conflict ended with the tragic death of thirty-four people (among police and protesters) and led to criminal proceedings against fifty-three Indigenous leaders, accusing them of aggravated homicide. For years, the prosecutor demanded life imprisonment against the leaders, but the Supreme Court eventually acquitted them (Merino 2020).

Settler colonial studies have theorized how, in settler states, Indigenous peoples have been subjected to mechanisms of exception as a form of forced sociopolitical inclusion or open exclusion (Morgensen 2011; Rifkin 2009; Havemann 2005). In Agamben's classic work, sovereignty power implies the potential to rule by exception, suspending the regular operation of the law and the protection of entire groups of people. This presupposes the power to conceive these peoples as "bare life" or "naked life," abandoned in a zone of indistinction beyond law and

[1] The reports of the Ombudsman's Office are available on its institutional website: https://www.defensoria.gob.pe/categorias_de_documentos/reportes/.

politics (outside) but, at the same time, remaining inside the orbit of state power (Agamben 2005). This operation subjects them to potentially infinite violence, such as in the Nazi concentration camp or, more contemporarily, in the ambiguous status of the refugee, a stateless and aterritorial subject exposed to coercion and elimination (Rifkin 2015).

Agamben focuses on the biopolitics of exception. The creation of zones of bare life presumes a coherence between territory and political entity, between the space of the nation and the governance of the state (Rifkin 2015). Indigenous peoples, though, have been subjected to both the biopolitics and geopolitics of exception (Morgensen 2011; Rifkin 2009). Biopolitical forms to regulate Indigenous peoples have included assimilation, education, administration, surveillance, and disciplinary regimes aimed at depoliticizing them into a population subjected to control based on racial essentialism and denial of their sovereign claims (Dietrich 2023; Havemann 2005). The geopolitics of exception means the forced incorporation of Indigenous peoples' territory into the "domestic" space of the settler state. The spaces occupied by Indigenous peoples within the settler state often have an ambiguous status, conceived as an anomaly whose aberrance vis-à-vis the rest of the state's legal structure makes them exceptional (Rifkin 2015). The state of exception, foundational for Western sovereignty as a practice of "inclusive exclusion," is thus redimensioned with the geopolitical operations of subsuming Indigenous lands within settler-state territoriality, and more generally to the settler colonial norm (Dietrich 2023). Whereas Agamben (2005) asserts that everyone incorporated into Western law may be assigned to the state of exception, this actually depends to a great extent on the colonial hierarchies still embedded in the discourses and structures of nation-states (Morgensen 2011).

There is also a temporality of exception. The settler state denies Indigenous temporal sovereignty by imposing its own way of experiencing time as the only temporal formation (Rifkin 2017). In this operation, Indigenous peoples are converted into ghostly remainders outside contemporary life, and as such, they cannot be meaningful participants in current political events, actors in decision-making, or political and social agents with whom nonnatives must engage (ibid.). This operation supports the refusal to accept the (geo)political implications of persistent Indigenous becoming, the ways that the presentness of Native peoples challenges settler claims to territorial sovereignty now and for the future (ibid.). It also refuses the fact that in settler colonial contexts there is a "coexistence of temporalities"—one that is absolutist and universalizing, along with Indigenous timescales that insist on a plurality of temporal frames (Little 2022). In this way, the exceptional situation of deviance in which Indigenous peoples and the continued open power over them are located become normality in settler time.

As a result of this biopolitical, geopolitical, and tempo-political regimen, both Indigenous political bodies and Indigenous individuals are perceived as existing in a state of exception, in which state imposition of force is not registered as a violation of rights of either the individual body or the body politic of Indigenous peoples (Dietrich 2023). As exception becomes regularity and expression of the "settler colonial norm" (ibid.), the insistence on the integrity of Indigenous peoplehood is an interruption of this norm. This interruption does not appear as legitimate political opposition, but as an inexplicable eruption, an abnormal and alarming rupture in time, rather than a response to increasing forms of state-sanctioned invasion (Rifkin 2017; 2015). More deeply, it is considered a deviance from the modern-life norm—a deviance that deserves to be targeted and marked for elimination (Dietrich 2023). In these regimes, therefore, violence cannot be seen as isolated incidents that disrupt the status quo; violence is rather so ordinary an aspect of the settler state that it constitutes the status quo and expresses the longstanding structures of dispossession and colonization (ibid.).

Settler colonial studies on exception provide important insights into understanding the "democratic deficit" in extractive states in Latin America. In this region, state repression also goes beyond occasional "excesses" or "abuses" by security forces and rather seeks to legitimize a state that sacrifices human rights in the name of a certain idea of security and democracy (Doran 2017). This exclusion can be understood as the result of exceptional regimens over Indigenous and rural populations in biopolitical, geopolitical, and temporal terms. These people are controlled by biopolitical mechanisms of assimilation into extractive activities and the stigmatization of resistance. The state maintains absolute and "exceptional" control over their territories on behalf of the "national interest," and these biopolitical and geopolitical operations are normalized on a temporal scale that depends on the necessities of resource extraction. Particularly in Peru, the continued enactment of emergency decrees in Indigenous areas, the denial of their political agency by practices of stigmatization and open repression, and the exclusion of their different temporalities of resource extraction show the foundational relationship between extractivism, exception, and authoritarianism. The next part delves into this operation through the analysis of the Southern Mining Corridor.

IV. Ruling by Exception: The Southern Mining Corridor

The "Southern Mining Corridor" is a mining hub that connects important mining projects located in the departments of Apurímac, Cusco, and Arequipa with national and international logistical circuits. There are fifteen mining projects along its 482,200 kilometers, three of them in the exploitation stage and currently transporting minerals (O'Brien 2021). The Ministry of Energy and Mines (MINEM) projected investments in new mineral exploitations in these areas of around 30 billion dollars for the period 2016–2026 (Huañahui 2018). Officially, the corridor crosses thirty-seven Quechua peasant communities: twelve located in the province of Cotabambas (Apurímac), twenty-four in Chumbivilcas and Espinar (Cusco), and one in Caylloma (Arequipa) (Ojo Público 2021).

In 2015, the most important mine in the country, the copper mine Las Bambas, started to transport minerals from the province of Cotabambas in Apurímac to the port of Matarani in Arequipa, crossing the provinces of Chumbivilcas and Espinar in Cusco from north to south (O'Brien 2021). The trucks, also known as "encapsulated" trucks (they transport copper concentrate in hermetically closed containers), travel 320 kilometers. Other trucks from the Constancia mine operated by the Canadian company HudBay and from the Antapaccay mine operated by the Swiss company Glencore join the way in Cusco (O'Brien 2021). The mining corridor facilitates moving the production of these three mines, which together accounted for around 27 percent of the copper exports from the country in 2019–2020 (ibid.). This production represents 3 percent of the national gross domestic product (GDP), equivalent to $6.9 billion US. Mining activity also provides almost 70 percent of the income received by regional and local governments in these zones (ibid.). However, the corridor is also a scenario of social conflicts. According to the Ministry of Energy and Mines, one day of blockades implies an economic loss of $11 million US.

Most of the conflicts involve the Las Bambas mine. In August 2004, the Swiss company Xstrata acquired concession rights for mining exploration (and then became Glencore-Xstrata). To erect the mining complex in the province of Cotabambas, Xstrata relocated the community of Fuerabamba to a new town completely built by the company. Xstrata also created a trust of $63 million US for the development of Cotabambas. In 2014 the Chinese Minerals and Metals Group (MMG) acquired all rights over the project. In March 2014, a month before the formal involvement of MMG in Las Bambas, Glencore-Xstrata filed before the Ministry of Energy and Mines (the authority in charge of approving mining activities) a modification of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the project. The modification request was aimed at updating the

system of water management and the environmental and social baselines. This petition did not mention a change in the mode of mineral transport, planned through a pipeline. For this reason, the modification procedure did not include as a requirement the technical opinion of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, and the stage of citizen participation did not include issues of mineral transportation. After an initial assessment, the Ministry of Energy and Mines issued one observation requiring complementary information. In October 2014, MMG was already in charge of the project and filed the complementary information. This information included a change in the form of mineral transport, from a pipeline to overland transport on the highway. This change also reduced the project's area of influence, excluding those communities considered in the initial pipeline plan. State authorities approved the EIA modification in November 2014.[2]

The lack of provision of information from MMG to local communities about these changes created distrust in a population with high expectations about promised benefits (Leyva 2019). As a result, a series of protests began in February 2015 and continued until 2016, resulting in the death of four peasants by police gunfire (CNDDHH 2023). In fact, since 2015, both the government and the company have incriminated peasant leaders for exercising their right to protest, requesting up to seventeen years in prison for nineteen peasants of the Cotabambas community and civil reparations (Red Muqui 2023). The conflict deepened in 2017 and 2018, when the national government enacted two resolutions to "reclassify" the routes of the corridor—from being, in some sections, rural, local, or provincial routes to becoming a "national highway." For the government, this change allows better national investment for paving the corridor, but some communities opposed the change, arguing that these were "communal routes" owned by the communities, and the company should pay compensation for their use. As a "national highway" there would not be any compensation for it (Leyva 2018). Besides, according to a former peasant leader in the corridor,[3] the corridor cannot be a "national highway" because "it is not used by public transportation or automobiles, only mining trucks pass through it day and night . . . Because of the noise, they do not allow young people to study or sleep at night."

The former Minister of Energy and Mines, Liu Yonsen, acknowledged that the definitive solution to the demands of the populations located along the road is the construction of a mineral pipeline. However, he argued that this project would take too much time, so the government decided to implement other options, such as paving the road, to reduce dust and negative environmental impacts (MINEM 2019). A new Minister of Energy and Mines, Oscar Vera, declared—in a more confrontational way—that the government was evaluating moving the corridor to a less conflictive zone (Llontop 2023). As this proposal does not seem technically viable, the different governments have continued to secure mineral transportation through the use of decrees that declare a "state of emergency" in the corridor and the militarization of the area.

In the period 2015–2023, the Peruvian governments enacted thirty-two emergency decrees, which entailed 1,005 days of suspension or restrictions of fundamental rights, such as personal freedom and security, free movement, freedom of assembly, housing inviolability, and others in the provinces of the mining corridor. It must be noted that in 2015, the government also polemically enacted "military authorizations"[4] that allowed the army to intervene in these areas without a state of emergency from October 2015 to December 2016, based on a decree enacted under the Fujimori counterterrorist strategy in 1991.[5] In total, these areas have been under military intervention for more than 1,300 days within eight years. There have been short periods with no formal exception and larger periods during the pandemic in 2020–2021 (because generalized

[2] Directorial Resolution No. 559-2014-MEM-DGAAM, Nov. 17, 2014.
[3] Former peasant leader, telephonic interview with the author, Oct. 6, 2023.
[4] Supreme Resolution No. 200-2015-IN, Sept. 25, 2015; Supreme Resolution No. 227-2015-IN, Nov. 13, 2015.
[5] Legislative Decree No. 738, Nov. 12, 1991.

policies of isolation made it unnecessary) and during the government of Castillo, which implemented a different approach to dealing with social conflicts (from July 2021–December 2022). The geographic coverage of the decrees has also been extended through the years. From August 2017 to January 2018, the decrees included specific districts. Starting in January 2018, the decrees have covered the whole "Apurímac, Cusco, Arequipa corridor."

A. Regimes of Exception: Normalizing Extractivism, Stigmatization, and Violence

A common argument explicitly stated in emergency decrees is the need to return to "normality" given the "disturbance of peace and alteration of the internal order and the normal development of activities."[6] These decrees relied on police reserved reports quoted in their preambles or explanatory statements. They explicitly justified military and police interventions in defending mining activities as normal activities: "The people of the peasant community of Nueva Fuerabamba constantly block the South Corridor, impeding the normal transit of trucks that transport minerals from Las Bambas mine, arguing that the terrain where the trucks pass through is their property."[7] The explanatory statement of Supreme Decree No. 020-2020-PCM[8] also cited a police report that accused Espinar communities of building rustic houses near the road "obstructing normal transit, arguing that the road passes through their territory." The reports also connect this normality with the general economy of the southern part of Peru: "The protests of people from Cancahuani demand the execution of compromises regarding jobs, socio-environmental issues, and compensation for the use of the road. . . . All this affects economic activities in the South."[9]

High authorities constantly appeal to this normality as a precondition for dialogue. Former Minister of Energy and Mines Liu Yonsen stated that the clearing of the road by police and military forces "is positive news because copper exports are normalized and it allows us to resume the dialogue and continue solving problems" (MINEM 2019). However, normality has another meaning for the communities. The environmental enforcement agency, OEFA, concluded that the areas closer to the corridor have been impacted in air quality and noise levels. The biggest fear for the communities is not knowing what will happen with their crop and livestock: "Our products are no longer normal. When we go to the market nobody buys our potatoes and meat. They tell us that our products are contaminated. What are we going to live on?" (Moreno 2022). In the view of authorities, whereas transporting minerals through peasant communities is normal, demands for compensation, environmental concerns, and social inclusion are anomalies or suspicious interruptions of extractivism.

Another feature of the emergency decrees is that they do not depend on an actual situation of unrest; they might be applied as a preventive mechanism given the potentiality for interruption of extractivism. For instance, to justify the extension of the state of emergency, a police report stated that people from the peasant community of Nueva Fuerabamba live in rustic houses (*chozas*) on both sides of the road, and that "they might be willing to make human blockages in the South Corridor once the state of emergency ends."[10] Justifications based on "potential conflicts" are reproduced in several decrees. For instance, a police report cited in the preamble of the Supreme Decree No. 060-2020-PCM[11] justified the extension of the state of emergency by citing the "imminent restart of violent actions by the communities" given the economic crisis that

[6] Supreme Decree No. 068-2015-PCM, Sept. 28, 2015, preamble and explanatory statement.
[7] Supreme Decree No. 115-2018-PCM, Nov. 25, 2018, explanatory statement.
[8] Supreme Decree No. 020-2020-PCM, Feb. 8, 2020, explanatory statement.
[9] Supreme Decree No. 169-2019-PCM, Oct. 15, 2019, explanatory statement.
[10] Supreme Decree No. 038-2019-PCM, Feb. 23, 2019, explanatory statement.
[11] Supreme Decree No. 020-2020-PCM, Feb. 8, 2020, preamble.

"probably" will be produced by the period of social isolation ordered by the government to contain the diffusion of COVID-19. The explanatory statement of Supreme Decree No. 092-2023-PCM cited a police report that states: "[A]lthough there is a perception of apparent calm, the situation might change because there are forthcoming negotiation tables whose outcomes might alter the status quo."[12]

Arguments for halting the potentiality for conflicts are often accompanied by stigmatizing views of peasant communities:

> The distant geography of the Corridor from police offices . . . [make] difficult the opportune actions of police forces in case of protests. . . . Considering the often-belligerent attitude of protestors . . . [i]t is possible that radical groups take advantage of the context to perpetrate criminal infractions and property damage.[13]

Another police report[14] states that potential protests might be "promoted by leaders or social organizations that have possible connections with terrorist organizations." The report also stated that "social leaders from the provinces of Chumbivilcas and Espinar are instigating the population . . . with the only intention of exacerbating the opposition and restart protests once concluded the state of emergency." Another police report[15] also recommends the extension of the emergency because "the belligerent and intransigent aptitude of people from the provinces of Espinar and Chumbivilcas have been proved in different protests in the past . . . that is why we suppose that once the state of emergency has ended, they will adopt again radical measures such as the blockage of the corridor."

If people are always "belligerent and intransigent" no matter if there is a real situation of social unrest, then, their mere existence not only justifies the extension of the exception but also the constant intervention of the army as "a highly dissuasive force" able to protect "essential and strategic services."[16] This image is not new in these areas. During the "war against terrorism" in the 1980s and 1990s peasant communities were targets of "pacification" by army forces. For instance, in 1993, Supreme Decree No. 087-93-DE CCFFAA[17] declared for sixty days a state of emergency in various Provinces of Cusco, including Chumbivilcas, "in order to facilitate the conduct of anti-terrorism operations . . . and preserving and restoring Public Order."

For Mirtha Vasquez,[18] environmental activist and former premier in the government of Pedro Castillo (2021–2022), the intervention of the military is particularly traumatic for the communities because, during the internal war between the state and terrorist groups in the 1980s, the military systematically violated the human rights of peasants in the Andes. The result of systematic stigmatization and the constant or potential use of force explains why the feeling of exception in the communities is constant. For José Saldaña,[19] a human rights lawyer and environmental activist who has worked in this area, although there are some gaps in the periods declared under decrees of emergency since the start of operations, there is always a feeling of insecurity in the communities. Luis Huamaní, a former peasant leader in the corridor,[20] said that "nobody wants to

[12] Supreme Decree No. 092-2023-PCM, Aug. 12, 2023, explanatory statement.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Supreme Decree No. 060-2020-PCM, Apr. 5, 2020, explanatory statement.
[15] Supreme Decree No. 043-2020-PCM, Mar. 7, 2020, explanatory statement.
[16] Supreme Decree No. 020-2020-PCM, Feb. 8, 2020, explanatory statement; Supreme Decree No. 060-2020-PCM, Apr. 5, 2020.
[17] Supreme Decree No. 087-93-DE CCFFAA, Nov. 12, 1993.
[18] Mirtha Vasquez, interview with author, Lima, July 19, 2023.
[19] José Saldaña, interview with author, Lima, June 23, 2023.
[20] Luis Huamaní, telephonic interview with author, Oct. 6, 2023.

assume leadership . . . we are afraid of military attacks." Military intervention to control the population is a constant threat.

Some attach to the communities a less violent stigmatization. As communities living in conditions of structural deprivation and abandonment by the state demand jobs and compensation for the use of the land by the roads, they are accused of being "political rent seekers" since "they have internalized the idea that they should be benefited (they have obtained that privilege) by just the fact of living in a place where mining activity takes place" (O'Brien 2021, 8). As the different communities along the road have no unified agenda, but rather fragmented redistributive demands, they would be competitors in the race to obtain economic benefits from the mines. There is indeed political fragmentation, and there are obviously socioeconomic demands. For instance, Romualdo Ochoa, president of the Huancuire community, asserts that the community should be a shareholder in Las Bambas: "We want to negotiate, they half, we half. They provide their technological and engineering inputs, and we provide our territory. We both win, or we both lose" (Moreno 2022). But socioeconomic expectations and demands should be conceived as a form of exercising self-determination over the communities' territories, instead of simply denigrating them as mere privileges with no legal justification or rationality beyond greed.

Peasant communities formulate both redistributive and environmental demands. Unlike redistribution for workers, peasant redistributive demands are not simply about acceding to better economic benefits. This means fundamentally the recognition of their ancestral land rights and, on this basis, the possibility to negotiate shared benefits and environmental conditions on equal terms. The authoritarian problem, then, cannot be solved simply by providing more money. What defines grassroots politics and state politics (authoritarian or otherwise) is not the material characteristics of the industry (see Mitchell 2011 for the coal and oil industries in the Middle East). What defines state authoritarian ethos in extractive zones is extraction in itself or the imperative to extract resources disregarding ancestral rights.

B. The Biopolitics, Geopolitics, and Tempo-Politics of Exception and Democracy

The analysis of the emergency decrees, the army and police force interventions, and the views of state and social actors in the period 2015–2023 in the Southern Mining Corridor provide crucial insights to understand the relationship between extractivism, exception, and democracy. Regimes of exception conceive extractivism as normality. The normal functioning of mining and its relevance for the regional economy is explicitly cited as justification for enacting emergency decrees. The decrees are also explicitly "preventive" regarding the possible rise of social conflicts. This possibility is repeatedly based on assumed future occurrences, such as the economic crisis resulting from COVID-19 in 2020–2021 or the possible failure of negotiation tables. Regimes of exception also rely on the stigmatization of protesters as intransigents, belligerents, or even "terrorists"—even in the absence of specific situations of social unrest. The need to protect normality, to prevent potential interruptions of extractivism, and the inherent belligerent identity attached to protesters justify the continuity of exception and habilitate the constant intervention of the army as a "dissuasive force" to protect "essential assets."

Extractivism operates thus by creating biopolitical, geopolitical, and tempo-political regimes of exception (Dietrich 2023; Rifkin 2015; 2017). In the corridor, stigmatization, rights suspension, repression of social protest, clearance of roads, and judicial persecutions are biopolitical mechanisms aimed at disciplining individual protesters and the body politics of peasant communities. The use of the roads, the legal recategorizations, the disregard for environmental impacts, and the exclusion of territorial demands are geopolitical mechanisms to legitimate extractivism excluding other Indigenous and peasant ways of territorial governance. The formal

and informal continuity of exception to ensure the endless circulation of mining commodities is also a tempo-political mechanism that makes protesters a threat that might delay the temporality of extractivism.

Biopolitical, geopolitical, and tempo-political forms of state violence are only noted when specific situations of human rights violations become visible and, therefore, these actions are simply conceived as excesses or isolated misconduct. But this violence is intrinsic to the everyday operation of extractivism. Since the start of operations of the Las Bambas mine, the communities surrounding the project and the highway have lived either formally or informally in a regimen of sociopolitical and legal exception. If the human rights of historically racialized and marginalized sectors are constantly restricted and they are treated as threats to the political economy that sustains the country, then there is an intrinsic problem with the meaning of democracy in which all, especially those directly affected by state projects and decisions, must have human rights and a voice in public affairs.

This situation obliges us to rethink the meaning of democracy in states heavily dependent on extractive industries. In Peru, extractivism has been developed thanks to the imposition of a low-intensity and localized authoritarianism. This authoritarianism is localized because the authoritarian actions are focused on some territorial regions considered critical for developing extractive activities. This authoritarianism is of low intensity because it relies on a regimen of fear: There might be spectacular situations of social unrest, but most of the time, the army and police forces are there to dissuade the population from protesting. Ultimately, extractivism expresses authoritarianism in its most crude sense, as large segments of citizens can be considered public enemies without the right to a voice in matters that directly affect them.

The case of Peru suggests that measuring democracy in terms of the regularity of electoral processes and macro indicators of separation of powers, political culture, and so forth is insufficient to understand the profound democratic deficit concerning historically racialized and excluded sectors. This article does not suggest that the general Peruvian political regimen is authoritarian in its formal and classic formulation. Rather, it suggests complexifying the political category of "authoritarianism" by disaggregating democratic deficit through territories. Categorizing a country as a "low-quality democracy" entails a general assessment that obscures the authoritarian forms and nature of extractive economies. This article suggests that a flawed democracy, such as Peru, is also crucially characterized by localized authoritarianism. While this political system does not prevent formal electoral competition, it allows the deepening of social inequalities, the normalization of racial stigmas, and the perpetuation of the exclusion of political agencies that question extractive operations under such conditions.

The crucial characteristic of this regimen is not the weakness of democratic institutions, but the fact that extractivism has given rise to a political regime in which democracy is subordinated to the intensive extraction of natural resources. This means that extractivism requires authoritarianism to ensure the endless operation of the extractive cycle (extraction, production, transportation, distribution); and authoritarianism is justified in the need to avoid the interruption of extractivism as this is crucial for national development. Both extractivism and authoritarianism are ontologically entrenched.

Is there a way to break this vicious circle? Social forces persist in providing real meaning to democracy (Doran 2017), challenging the constituted power of current extractivist institutions (Martínez Espinoza 2018). This is the case because, as suggested by Camila Vergara (2022), the inability of the current system to make space for alternatives to extractivism implies a fundamental tension between the constituent power of social mobilization and the constituted power of current

legal and political structures. It is important to dialogue with the efforts to reconceptualize popular sovereignty and create nonelitist and nonextractivist forms of democracy based on local assemblies (ibid.). This would entail pluralizing territorial governance arrangements and modes of self-determination beyond their incorporation or translation into settler temporal frames of reference (Rifkin 2017). Otherwise, formal democracy will continue to obscure aggressive forms of localized authoritarianism.

V. Conclusion

This article contributes to scholarly discussions on the meaning of democracy in extractive states. Specifically, it examines the limitations of characterizing democratic regimes under extractivism in Latin America as captured, delegative, or "low-intensity democracies." By engaging with settler colonial studies that focus on Indigenous peoples as targets of exception, the article argues that the biopolitical, geopolitical, and tempo-political regimes of exception in extractive zones compel us to question the very meaning of democracy in these contexts.

The case study of the Southern Mining Corridor illustrates how the constant enactment of emergency decrees suspends human rights and represses social mobilization, leading to a localized form of authoritarianism in extractive sites. In this mining corridor, the biopolitical regime of exception creates a constant threat of military intervention, direct repression, and stigmatization to discipline protesters. The geopolitical regime of exception involves disregarding Indigenous forms of territorial governance, ignoring their distributive and environmental claims related to land rights, and establishing a legal framework that allows for absolute control over the mining circuit. The tempo-political regime of exception normalizes the temporal framework of extractivism as a fundamental and endless process of commodity extraction and transportation, rendering peasant temporal frameworks as anomalous risks that could disrupt extractivism.

The interplay between resource extraction, potential or actual social protests challenging extractivism, and the enactment of emergency decrees forms a contentious process that highlights the deep relationship between extractivism and authoritarianism. This ontological relationship suggests that general categorizations of extractive states as flawed or deficient democracies are limited, as they obscure the systemic authoritarianism experienced by many local communities that question extractive operations. A crucial feature of these regimes is localized authoritarianism, where sectors deemed sacrificial for economic development lack voice and rights when extractive endeavors are involved.

Given this reality, it is essential to rethink democratic institutional arrangements, taking into account those who struggle for democracy from below. This is especially important today, as extractivism empowers national and international elites, profoundly impacting the search for alternatives to address the climate emergency.

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