

Electoral Reform in Peru (2002-2022): Institutional Stability, Political Volatility, and the PASO Experiment

I. Introduction (250 words)

Peru has maintained democratic institutions and regular elections since 2002, ensuring peaceful transfers of power, yet persistent corruption scandals and political turmoil have weakened governance. This article examines electoral policy formulation from 2004 to 2024, focusing on the case of the introduction and evolution of *primarias abiertas, simultáneas y obligatorias* (PASO) within broader electoral reforms. The discussion is divided into two phases: 2003-2015 and 2016-2024.

From 2003 to 2015, reforms aimed at improving electoral governance and transparency, including quotas for women and the 2003 Political Parties Law to strengthen party structures. However, these efforts were incremental and constrained by institutional weaknesses. The 2016-2024 period saw a reactive approach to electoral reform, with restrictions on preferential voting, gender parity in candidate lists, and steps toward bicameralism by 2026. In this context, the PASO mechanism was introduced to strengthen internal democracy in political parties, yet its implementation faced challenges due to political fragmentation, counter-reforms, and resistance from party elites.

This article examines the PASO reform as a case study, assessing its design, implementation, and impact in light of electoral system principles. It also explores the role of the Constitutional Commission, the Executive, party elites, electoral bodies, and international actors, such as the European Union and electoral observation missions, in shaping these processes. By analyzing PASO within Peru's unstable political landscape, the article highlights patterns in electoral reform-making and structural barriers to democratic consolidation.

II. Historical Context and Political Background (Peru, 2002-2022)

Between 2002 and 2022, Peru experienced significant political volatility despite maintaining formal democratic structures. Electoral democracy persisted, but weak institutions, party fragmentation, and recurrent executive-legislative conflicts undermined political stability and democratic consolidation. This section examines the constitutional framework, electoral administration, patterns of democratic fluctuation, and the composition of governing parties during this period.

2.1. Constitutional Structure

Peru's political system operates under the 1993 Constitution, enacted during Alberto Fujimori's administration following the 1992 autogolpe (self-coup). It establishes a unitary and decentralized presidential system with a unicameral legislature, a design that has fueled persistent executive-legislative tensions. The president, elected for a five-year term without immediate reelection, serves as both head of state and government, appointing the Council of Ministers, though Congress retains the power to censure ministers or the cabinet. The 130-member Congress, also elected for five-year terms, can remove the president through impeachment (*vacancia por incapacidad moral*), a provision increasingly used as a political tool. The Constitution also promotes regional and municipal autonomy, reinforced by the 2002 regionalization reforms, though weak institutional capacity at the subnational level has hindered effective governance. While the 1993 Constitution provides a formal democratic framework, its presidential-unicameral structure, coupled with a

fragmented party system, has exacerbated chronic political instability and frequent institutional crises.

2.2. Electoral Administration

Peru's electoral system operates under a specialized electoral governance model, managed by three autonomous entities with distinct yet complementary functions.

1. Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE) – The highest electoral authority responsible for guaranteeing the legality of elections, resolving electoral disputes, and proclaiming official results. It acts as an electoral court, adjudicating challenges related to candidacies, election outcomes, and party registration.
2. Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (ONPE) – The technical and operational body in charge of organizing and executing electoral processes at all levels (presidential, congressional, regional, and municipal). ONPE manages ballot design, vote counting, and results transmission, ensuring the integrity and efficiency of the electoral process. Additionally, it oversees political party and campaign financing, a critical function in promoting transparency in electoral competition.
3. Registro Nacional de Identificación y Estado Civil (RENIEC) – The agency responsible for maintaining and updating the electoral roll and civil registry, ensuring that eligible voters are properly registered. RENIEC plays a fundamental role in identity verification, biometric voter authentication, and preventing electoral fraud through robust digital and technological mechanisms.

2.3. Patterns in the Trajectory Towards and Away from Democracy

Between 2002 and 2022, Peru's democracy oscillated between electoral continuity and governance crises. While elections remained competitive, democratic erosion manifested in executive-legislative deadlock, frequent presidential removals, and social unrest. Three distinct periods illustrate these trends:

a) Democratic Expansion and Institutionalization (2002-2011)

The 2002 regionalization reform marked a pivotal shift toward decentralized governance in Peru, establishing 25 regional governments with directly elected presidents. This structural transformation aimed to enhance local autonomy and political representation, yet its implementation was marred by institutional weaknesses at the subnational level. The absence of strong political parties facilitated the rise of independent movements and clientelistic networks, often lacking ideological coherence and programmatic agendas.

Despite these limitations, electoral processes during this period remained highly competitive, with peaceful transitions of power. However, the party system experienced growing volatility, as traditional political parties struggled to maintain electoral relevance, gradually ceding ground to populist outsiders and non-traditional political movements. This fragmentation was further exacerbated by the electorate's increasing disillusionment with established political elites.

The 2006 and 2011 presidential elections reflected shifting ideological dynamics and increasing polarization. The rise of leftist political projects emphasizing social inclusion—exemplified by Ollanta Humala's victory in 2011—demonstrated the electorate's demand for a redistributive economic model and greater state intervention in social policies. However, Humala's eventual

moderation in office underscored the institutional constraints on radical policy shifts within Peru's neoliberal economic framework.

b) Political Fragmentation and Corruption Crisis (2016-2020)

The period from 2016 to 2020 was characterized by severe political fragmentation and institutional erosion, primarily driven by the fallout from the Odebrecht corruption scandal. This transnational scandal implicated all Peruvian presidents since 2001, exacerbating the legitimacy crisis of political elites and deepening public distrust in democratic institutions.

The executive branch became increasingly precarious, with presidents struggling to maintain stable governance amid congressional hostility. Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (PPK) (2016-2018) was forced to resign under allegations of corruption and congressional pressure, while Martín Vizcarra (2018-2020) assumed the presidency without a solid party base, further exacerbating executive-legislative tensions. Lacking partisan support, Vizcarra relied on anti-corruption rhetoric and direct appeals to the public, which escalated confrontations with Congress.

The 2019 dissolution of Congress marked a critical turning point in Peru's democratic trajectory. Frustrated by congressional obstructionism, Vizcarra invoked constitutional mechanisms to call for extraordinary legislative elections in 2020. This unprecedented move highlighted the fragility of executive-legislative relations and underscored the weak institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution within Peru's democratic system.

c) Democratic Backsliding and Presidential Volatility (2021-2022)

The 2021 presidential election was one of the most polarizing in Peru's history, exposing deep societal cleavages along urban-rural, class, and ideological lines. Pedro Castillo, a rural teacher and union leader from Perú Libre, capitalized on popular frustration with political elites and economic inequality. However, his presidency faced immediate resistance from political and economic elites and an adversarial, fragmented Congress.

Castillo's tenure was marked by governance instability and repeated impeachment attempts under the *vacancia presidencial* mechanism, increasingly used as a tool for political destabilization. His attempted self-coup in December 2022, aimed at unilaterally dissolving Congress, led to his immediate removal and arrest, deepening the cycle of presidential instability.

The rise of Dina Boluarte (2022-) further exposed democratic vulnerabilities, as her administration faced mass protests and allegations of excessive state repression. The violent crackdown heightened concerns over democratic backsliding, militarization of public order, and human rights violations.

Between 2016 and 2022, Peru transitioned from democratic volatility to systemic instability, with executive-legislative conflicts, judicialized politics, and public discontent eroding democratic legitimacy. Electoral democracy persisted, but democratic consolidation remained elusive, reinforcing Peru's status as a hybrid democracy, where formal institutions endure but fail to guarantee political stability and accountability.

4. Electoral Results and Governing Parties (2002-2022)

Despite regular elections, Peru's party system remained highly fragmented and unstable, characterized by weak partisan identities and high electoral volatility. No political force dominated for long, and coalition-building was often transactional rather than ideological.

Election Year	President	Political Party
2001	Alejandro Toledo	Perú Posible
2006	Alan García	APRA
2011	Ollanta Humala	Gana Perú
2016	Pedro Pablo Kuczynski	Peruanos por el Cambio
2021	Pedro Castillo	Perú Libre

III. Overview of electoral reform over a 20 year period (1,500 words)

The period between 2002 and 2022 in Peru's electoral history is marked by two major moments of reform, each occurring under very distinct political and institutional conditions. The first reform wave took place in the early 2000s under the government of Alejandro Toledo, following the fall of the Fujimori regime and the transition back to democracy. This reform cycle laid the foundation for a new electoral order, characterized by stability, institutional strengthening, and minor, incremental changes over the following decade. The second, in contrast, emerged during the administration of Martín Vizcarra in the context of deep political crises, congressional confrontations, and an increasingly volatile institutional environment. While Toledo's reforms aimed to consolidate democracy and establish long-term electoral rules, Vizcarra's introduced significant changes in a highly unstable setting, generating a period of electoral normative volatility with authoritarian undertones.

The early 2000s represented a crucial juncture in Peru's democratic reconstruction. After the collapse of Fujimori's autocratic government, the transitional government of Valentín Paniagua and later the administration of Toledo prioritized institutional reforms designed to prevent a return to authoritarian practices. Electoral laws were revised with the objective of ensuring transparency, independence of electoral management bodies, and inclusivity in political participation. The National Elections Jury (JNE), the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE), and the National Registry of Identification and Civil Status (RENIEC) gained greater autonomy, reducing executive interference and aligning Peru with regional democratic standards. Political parties and civil society organizations played an active role in advocating for these reforms, emphasizing the need for stronger democratic safeguards.

Among the key measures introduced was the regulation of party registration and internal democracy within political organizations, ensuring that candidate selection was more transparent and competitive. The reforms also improved electoral observation mechanisms, allowing greater oversight from domestic and international actors. Campaign finance rules were also debated, although more stringent measures were postponed for later discussions. By the mid-2000s, the new electoral framework had largely stabilized, and Peru entered a period of relative predictability in its electoral processes, with only minor adjustments made to refine the system in subsequent years.

In stark contrast, the reform initiatives under Vizcarra emerged in a climate of acute institutional instability. His administration, which began in 2018 following the resignation of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, was defined by persistent confrontations with Congress, widespread political discontent, and a series of corruption scandals that eroded trust in the political class. Electoral reform in this

period was not driven by the pursuit of long-term stability, but rather as a response to immediate crises and a mechanism for political confrontation.

Unlike the Toledo-era reforms, which were primarily guided by electoral management bodies and expert commissions, the changes during Vizcarra's presidency were largely executive-driven and presented as part of a broader anti-corruption agenda. The reforms sought to modify party structures, campaign financing, and the internal dynamics of candidate selection. The most controversial of these was the introduction of the Simultaneous and Mandatory Open Primaries (PASO), a mechanism borrowed from the Argentine model but implemented without thorough consideration of its implications for Peru's fragmented party system. The push for PASO was framed as a means to strengthen internal democracy within parties, but its rushed approval and subsequent repeal in 2023 exemplified the volatility of the reform process under Vizcarra.

During this period, electoral management bodies such as ONPE and JNE played a more limited role in shaping reforms compared to the 2000s, as legislative debates were driven more by political urgency than by technical expertise. The introduction of gender parity and alternation measures in candidate lists was one of the few lasting reforms that aligned with regional trends toward greater political inclusion. However, many other proposed changes, including modifications to the electoral threshold and restrictions on party alliances, were highly contested and often reversed within a short time frame.

A defining characteristic of this second wave of reforms was its normative inconsistency. Electoral laws were subject to frequent modifications, often dictated by shifting political alliances and short-term calculations rather than comprehensive institutional strengthening. The use of executive authority to push through reforms without broad consensus, combined with congressional resistance and counter-reforms, resulted in a legal framework that lacked stability. The repeated changes to electoral rules in the lead-up to the 2021 general elections generated uncertainty among political actors and the electorate, undermining confidence in the system.

International organizations and civil society groups, which had been influential in the early 2000s, faced greater difficulties in contributing to the reform agenda during the Vizcarra years. While organizations such as the OAS and IDEA Internacional provided technical support, the highly politicized nature of the debates limited their impact. Similarly, party coalitions were often divided on reform issues, with opposition groups using legislative maneuvers to block or delay executive-led changes. The absence of a stable consensus-building process made these reforms more susceptible to reversals, as seen in the case of PASO and the fluctuating campaign finance regulations.

Ultimately, the comparison between these two reform periods underscores the profound differences in Peru's democratic trajectory over two decades. The Toledo-era reforms, while not perfect, provided a foundation for electoral stability and institutional predictability. They were crafted with the aim of reinforcing democratic governance, with input from a broad range of actors and a relatively structured deliberative process. In contrast, the reforms under Vizcarra reflected a period of high political volatility, where electoral changes were driven more by the dynamics of power struggles than by a coherent long-term vision. The instability of this latter period highlights the risks of enacting sweeping electoral changes without a stable institutional and political foundation, demonstrating the need for a more deliberate and inclusive approach to electoral reform in the future.

IV. Internal case study (2,000).

The section aims to analyze how the PASO mechanism was designed, tracing its policy transfer process from Argentina and the domestic adaptations that shaped its final version. This case study follows a comparative and analytical approach, leveraging archival research, legislative reviews, and interviews to understand the rationale behind the reform and the role of key political actors in its implementation.

4.1. The context

The process of designing internal elections in Peru between 2018 and 2020 unfolded within a broader context of institutional instability, executive-legislative confrontations, and ambitious political reform efforts spearheaded by President Martín Vizcarra. These dynamics reflect long-standing tensions within Peru's semi-presidential system, where the balance of power between the executive and the legislature has often been a source of political deadlock and crisis.

Following the resignation of President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski in March 2018, Vizcarra assumed office amid heightened political uncertainty. His administration sought to consolidate legitimacy and advance political reforms to address rampant corruption, party system fragmentation, and declining public trust in political institutions. One of his most significant initiatives was the constitutional referendum of December 9, 2018, which introduced key amendments aimed at reducing political clientelism and strengthening institutional frameworks.

In June 2019, the Executive, leveraging the vote of confidence mechanism, introduced a package of political reforms, including the open, simultaneous, and mandatory primaries (PASO). The use of a confidence vote was a strategic maneuver aimed at pressuring Congress into approving the reforms. If Congress rejected the vote, Vizcarra could constitutionally dissolve the legislature, an extreme measure that demonstrated the growing power struggle between both branches of government.

Despite opposition from various political factions, Congress approved PASO on August 27, 2019, through Law No. 30998, along with three additional laws. However, a key modification was introduced: political organizations already registered for the 2021 General Elections would be exempt from PASO requirements. This limitation diluted the impact of PASO as an instrument of party system reform in the short term.

The institutional crisis escalated when, on September 30, 2019, Vizcarra dissolved Congress, citing obstructionism and resistance to reform. This decision followed prolonged gridlock, where opposition forces within Congress sought to block reforms aimed at regulating campaign finance, internal party democracy, and political transparency. In response, new congressional elections were held in January 2020, forming a transitional legislature for the 2020-2021 period.

The new Congress revisited PASO, eventually passing Laws No. 31028 (July 2020) and No. 31038 (August 2020), which effectively suspended PASO's implementation. Parliamentary debates highlighted opposition to mandatory electoral body participation, particularly that of ONPE (National Office of Electoral Processes), in primary elections. Many legislators argued that ONPE's involvement undermined party autonomy, while others feared that the requirement of primaries would disproportionately disadvantage smaller political organizations.

Parallel to these legislative debates, Vizcarra became embroiled in corruption scandals, further weakening his presidency. On November 9, 2020, Congress invoked moral incapacity to remove him from office, triggering mass protests and two civilian deaths, underscoring the deep political polarization in Peru. His removal was widely perceived as politically motivated, with critics arguing

that Congress had weaponized impeachment procedures to assert legislative dominance over the executive.

This period ultimately demonstrated a persistent cycle of executive-legislative conflict, electoral reform debates, and institutional fragility, culminating in the political reconfiguration of the country. Peru's case exemplifies how political instability can hinder the successful implementation of electoral reforms, despite their legal adoption.

4.2. Who made the proposal?

On December 21, 2018, the Peruvian government created the High-Level Commission for Political Reform, chaired by Fernando Tuesta, to assess weaknesses in the political system and propose institutional reforms. The commission was composed of Paula Valeria Muñoz Chirinos, Milagros Campos Ramos, Jessica Violeta Bensa Morales, and Ricardo Martín Tanaka Gondo, experts in political science, law, and electoral governance. Their mandate was to identify structural deficiencies in Peru's political institutions and propose corrective measures to enhance democratic legitimacy and promote party system institutionalization.

The commission's report (CANRP, 2019) identified key deficiencies in the party system, particularly lack of representation, party fragility, and excessive fragmentation. It described many Peruvian parties as "shell parties," weak and highly personalized organizations that functioned as temporary electoral coalitions or "rented wombs," where candidacies were commercialized.

To address these structural flaws, the commission proposed modifying internal democracy rules, aiming to:

1. Eliminate weak and non-representative parties
2. Implement a mandatory candidate selection mechanism involving citizen participation
3. Require a minimum period of party affiliation for candidates

The rationale behind PASO was linked to broader governance concerns, particularly the lack of institutionalization in political parties and their failure to represent diverse societal interests. The commission argued that the absence of competitive, transparent, and inclusive candidate selection processes had led to the emergence of opportunistic and clientelist political formations.

Based on these recommendations, the Executive submitted twelve legislative proposals to Congress on April 10, 2019, of which six were approved, and four became law in August 2019. These included Law 30998, which formally established PASO by amending Title V of Law 28094 (Law on Political Organizations). However, the final law included modifications that differed from the original commission proposal.

The PASO system as envisioned in Peru shared similarities with Argentina's PASO, yet the political dynamics surrounding its adoption diverged significantly. While Argentina institutionalized PASO through consensus among political actors, Peru's PASO was embedded within a highly contentious political environment, shaped by executive-legislative confrontations and power struggles.

4.2. What was proposed?

The Political Organizations Law (Law 28094, hereinafter LOP) established three possible modalities for candidate selection processes (referred to in the LOP as "internal democracy"): (a) closed pure primaries, (b) open pure primaries, and (c) internal elections through delegates (who are chosen by

party affiliates to select candidates). These mechanisms applied to all candidates for public office, except for 25% of congressional, regional council, and municipal council lists, where candidates could be directly appointed by the corresponding party body, allowing them to occupy top positions on the lists. Additionally, since electoral bodies were not required to oversee candidate selection processes, compliance with legal standards and competitiveness could not be verified (Rodríguez Patrón, 2016).

To address this, the commission proposed the implementation of open pure primaries—one of the existing modalities—for selecting presidential, congressional, senatorial, regional governor, and mayoral candidates. These primaries would be simultaneous, mandatory for all citizens, and organized by the state through electoral authorities, similar to the Argentine model. The commission also introduced a participation and cancellation threshold of 1.5% and 4% of voters in the last national and regional elections, respectively.

A comparative table (Table 2) presents the main characteristics of the commission's PASO proposal, contrasting it with existing regulations, the law approved by Congress, and the Argentine case. It highlights the significant differences between PASO and the previous candidate selection mechanisms in Peru as of July 2019, particularly because PASO would become the sole mechanism for selecting most elected positions in the country. However, there is a strong resemblance between the commission's proposal and Law 30998, despite some design modifications.

(Table)

4.2. Why it was proposed?

PASO is a rare regional model that emphasizes competitive candidate selection and state intervention in primaries (Rahat, 2013). Inspired by the U.S. system, it aims to renew leadership, mobilize citizens, and legitimize candidacies (López, 2017). Until 2013, Uruguay was the only country using PASO multiple times, holding primaries in 1999, 2004, and 2009 (Altman, 2013). Argentina adopted PASO in 2011.

Despite being used in only two South American countries, PASO differs significantly:

- Uruguay: Voluntary participation; applies only to presidential candidates.
- Argentina: Mandatory for voters and candidates; applies to all national-level candidates (Gallo, 2018b).
- Threshold for General Elections: Argentina requires 1.5% of valid votes, while Uruguay requires 500 votes (Gallo, 2018b).
- Candidacy Restrictions: Argentina prohibits primary losers from joining presidential tickets, unlike Uruguay (Gallo, 2018b).
- Legal Framework: Argentina's PASO was introduced via law, while Uruguay's stems from a 1996 constitutional reform.

Peru's PASO (Law 30998) closely follows Argentina's model with key differences:

- Extends to regional governors and mayors, as in some Argentine provinces.
- Allows 20% of congressional, regional, and municipal candidates to be directly appointed.
- Uses individual parliamentary candidate ranking, unlike Argentina's party lists.

- Originally included automatic cancellation of parties failing the 1.5% threshold, adapting Argentina's model through "adaptive transfer" (Minkman, van Buuren, & Bekkers, 2018).

Policy mediators play a role in PASO's adoption (Howlett & Saguin, 2019). Instrument constituencies promote it as a universal solution, shaping narratives (Voß & Simons, 2018). Argentina's PASO addressed party fragmentation and institutional weakness, increasing voter participation and reducing political parties (Procesos de Selección de Candidaturas, n.d.), though criticisms persist (Gallo, 2018b). Lessons from Argentina and Uruguay suggest cautious adoption (Stone, 2017).

In 2016, a Peruvian reform committee, including JNE officials and Fernando Tuesta, informally considered PASO. Tuesta advocated a model similar to Argentina's but with a mandatory participation threshold to ensure political organizations demonstrated voter support (personal communication, JNE official 1, July 15, 2019). Although this was not documented in the reform project (personal communication, JNE official 2, August 14, 2019), Tuesta publicly supported simultaneous, supervised primaries with a minimum participation requirement (Guzmán, March 13, 2016). In 2017, he proposed open internal elections with at least 100,000 voters (Tuesta, May 4, 2017).

By 2019, Tuesta's advocacy had limited traction within JNE's reform agenda. However, both his 2016 proposal and the 2019 Commission's version included a cancellation threshold, reinforcing PASO's role in reducing party fragmentation while addressing its limitations in Argentina (see Table 3).

4.2. Why it was never implemented?

Amid tensions between the Executive and Legislative branches, the former exerted political pressure on the latter through a vote of confidence tied to the approval of political reform bills, including PASO. This explains why the reform was approved in the Plenary debate of Congress, despite visible opposition from several legislators (personal communications with Mercedes Carrillo, March 12, 2020; former official of the Constitution and Regulations Commission, March 20, 2020; Flor Bazán, March 9, 2020; and Daniel Rodríguez, March 20, 2020). Despite this pressure, Congress introduced modifications to the Executive's proposal and added special rules applicable only to the 2021 General Elections (EEGG). These changes were driven by the following logic:

- a) Preserving the registration of political organizations
- b) Mandating closed lists in the 2021 EEGG
- c) Easing new affiliate registrations (only for the 2021 EEGG) and adjusting the PASO schedule.

However, to date, this system has not been implemented in any subsequent electoral process. The first suspension occurred in August 2020 with the enactment of Law No. 31,028, in response to the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result, the April 2021 general elections were held without this pre-selection mechanism. The second suspension took place in September 2021, this time for the 2022 subnational elections, through Law No. 31,357. In both cases, the suspensions were part of a set of regulatory adjustments to adapt to the pandemic context, and alternative mechanisms were implemented for candidate selection instead of reinstating the pre-reform system.

Law No. 31,981, enacted in January 2024, formally repealed PASO. However, this law introduces a hybrid system combining elements of open, closed, and delegate-based elections, where delegates are elected by party affiliates. Unlike previous systems, this new legislation imposes stricter conditions, including a minimum participation threshold of 10% in any of the modalities. This threshold is significantly higher than what was proposed or implemented in previous elections,

where participation rates were typically below this percentage, except in the case of delegate-based elections. This suggests that the law may be designed to discourage the use of open or affiliate-based modalities, instead favoring the delegate election system.

V. Analysis of internal case study (1,500 words)

Below is an evaluation of the introduction and subsequent repeal of PASO (Simultaneous and Mandatory Open Primaries) in Peru, using the established principles and key indicators as a framework for analysis.

5.1. Political Consensus

The reform process was politically charged and did not enjoy widespread consensus. From the outset, two opposing coalitions emerged: a "reformist" coalition led by the executive branch and a group of academics advocating for PASO, and a "counter-reformist" coalition composed of political parties seeking to retain control over their candidate selection processes. While the executive branch strongly supported the initiative, major political parties in Congress viewed PASO with skepticism, fearing it would undermine their control over candidate selection. The government, under President Martín Vizcarra, leveraged a vote of confidence mechanism to push the reform package through, effectively pressuring the legislature into approving it. Despite these tactics, the final version of PASO reflected compromises designed to placate party leaders. The provision allowing parties to directly appoint a portion of their candidates was one such concession. Furthermore, the law's implementation faced additional delays and modifications in Congress, which sought to dilute its effects. The most significant challenge came with the decision to suspend PASO for the 2021 elections, demonstrating the ongoing institutional resistance to fully implementing open primaries.

5.2. Transparency

The approval of PASO in Peru occurred within a context of political crisis, driven by executive pressure and without sufficient deliberation. While the reform was framed as a mechanism to enhance democratic governance within political parties, the process lacked transparency. There was no thorough assessment of PASO's applicability to the Peruvian political system, and the influence of the Argentine model was not critically evaluated. This suggests that the reform's justification and implementation lacked the necessary transparency.

5.3. Inclusion

Although PASO was promoted as an inclusive mechanism allowing all citizens to participate in candidate selection, in practice, broad stakeholder engagement was limited. The reform was designed by an expert commission without meaningful consultation with political parties or civil society. The Congress approved PASO without substantive debate, and its repeal also occurred without a participatory process. This lack of inclusiveness undermines the legitimacy of the reform process.

On the other hand, his process of counter-reform or gradual reform regarding PASO is characterized by the introduction of a new standard in candidate selection. Since the introduction of PASO, the established and/or implemented modalities have been defined by ensuring the meaningful participation of party affiliates in internal elections. In this sense, while some observers might interpret these reforms as a counter-reform that limits the system's openness, they can also be seen as an attempt to consolidate certain democratic quality standards in internal party processes, aligning with Rahat's definition of competitive primaries.

Two additional features of this gradual reform are the flexibility in primary modalities and the oversight by electoral bodies. These two aspects have remained unchanged since 2019, although the latter was first introduced in that year.

While this reflects the use of an operational definition of primaries, questions arise as to whether other key criteria should be considered in this operationalization within the framework of electoral reform. Other dimensions of the concept, such as competitiveness and participation, directly impact the effectiveness and legitimacy of primaries as a candidate selection mechanism.

5.4. Evidence-Based Decision Making

Despite extensive evidence on the shortcomings of PASO in Argentina, these lessons were not systematically considered in the Peruvian debate. The High-Level Commission for Political Reform (CANRP) proposed PASO as a solution to the country's weak party system, yet without critically assessing its empirical effectiveness elsewhere. Similarly, the repeal of PASO was carried out without a comprehensive evaluation of alternative mechanisms.

One major flaw in the decision-making process was the lack of rigorous comparative analysis. While Argentine PASO had been implemented multiple times by 2019, generating clear patterns of elite control, limited competitiveness, and strategic candidate manipulation, Peruvian policymakers did not thoroughly evaluate these dynamics. Instead, they adopted PASO as a symbolic reform, assuming it would democratize candidate selection without addressing structural party weaknesses. The CANRP's justification relied more on theoretical expectations than on empirical data, ignoring crucial variables such as Peru's highly volatile electoral landscape and the absence of institutionalized political parties.

Furthermore, the repeal of PASO was equally devoid of evidence-based reasoning. Rather than being guided by a structured policy review or a comprehensive impact assessment, the decision to eliminate PASO in 2023 was driven by partisan interests and elite resistance. No alternative mechanisms were seriously considered, nor was an ex-post evaluation conducted to determine whether PASO could have been modified or adapted to better fit Peru's political context. Instead, the repeal was justified using broad, unsubstantiated claims about its impracticality, mirroring the lack of analytical rigor that characterized its initial approval.

5.5. Timeliness and Feasibility

PASO's introduction in Peru was rushed. The reform was passed in a politically charged atmosphere, under executive pressure, and without sufficient time for deliberation. The Congress swiftly approved it in 2019, and before it could be implemented, it was repealed in 2023. The lack of proper planning and phased implementation demonstrates that the reform process did not adhere to an adequate timeframe for effective execution.

5.6. Accountability

Neither the introduction nor the repeal of PASO in Peru was accompanied by clear accountability mechanisms. There was no systematic evaluation of its feasibility before approval, nor was there an institutional framework for monitoring its potential impact. The repeal process similarly lacked transparency, as it was driven by political calculations rather than empirical assessments. The absence of accountability mechanisms underscores a major institutional weakness in the reform process.

The analysis of PASO’s trajectory in Peru reveals deficiencies across all evaluated principles. The reform was introduced without political consensus, transparency, or broad stakeholder inclusion. It lacked an evidence-based foundation, was rushed into approval, and was subsequently repealed without proper evaluation. Moreover, there were no clear mechanisms for ensuring accountability. The case of PASO in Peru exemplifies how electoral reforms driven by short-term political considerations, rather than comprehensive institutional design, can lead to ineffective and unsustainable policy outcomes.

Barriers to the principles and how they could be prevented

Several barriers hindered adherence to the key principles in the PASO reform process. Below are the main obstacles and possible preventive measures:

<i>Barrier</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Prevention Strategies</i>
Political Polarization	The reform was framed as a battle between "reformists" and "counter-reformists," preventing genuine consensus.	Broad stakeholder engagement: Create multi-party commissions and citizen consultations before enacting major electoral reforms.
Lack of Evidence-Based Decision Making	Despite available research on PASO in Argentina, Peruvian policymakers failed to critically assess its effectiveness in their context.	Empirical policy assessments: Require comparative studies, pilot testing, and structured evaluation periods before full implementation.
Executive Pressure and Hasty Implementation	The reform was passed quickly under executive pressure, leading to a rushed and unplanned policy rollout.	Deliberative policy cycles: Establish minimum deliberation periods and require impact assessments before legislative approval.
Weak Public Communication	The objectives and implications of PASO were not effectively communicated to the public, reducing citizen buy-in.	Transparent public engagement: Conduct public forums and information campaigns to build trust and understanding.
Elite Resistance to Change	Political elites had a vested interest in maintaining control over candidate selection, undermining the reform’s intent.	Institutional safeguards: Implement binding mechanisms that prevent arbitrary repeal without clear performance evaluations.

Conclusions (250 words)

The trajectory of electoral reform in Peru between 2002 and 2022 highlights the complex interplay between institutional design, political volatility, and democratic consolidation. The comparison of the Toledo and Vizcarra reform periods underscores the impact of political stability on the formulation and implementation of electoral policies. Under Toledo, reforms emerged from a structured deliberative process aimed at reinforcing democratic institutions, leading to long-term stability in electoral governance. In contrast, the Vizcarra-era reforms reflected a highly reactive and

polarized political environment, where electoral changes were enacted under executive pressure, often lacking broad consensus and empirical justification.

The case of PASO illustrates the challenges of implementing electoral innovations in an unstable political system. Designed as a mechanism to democratize candidate selection, PASO was introduced without adequate feasibility studies, stakeholder engagement, or long-term institutional safeguards. Its subsequent repeal, driven by political opposition rather than systematic evaluation, further exemplifies the volatility of electoral policymaking in Peru. This pattern of reform and counter-reform weakens public trust in electoral institutions and undermines efforts to strengthen democratic governance.

Key lessons from this period suggest that successful electoral reform requires broad political consensus, institutional stability, and evidence-based policymaking. The role of international actors, civil society, and electoral management bodies must be reinforced to ensure that reforms are not solely dictated by short-term political interests. Moving forward, Peru's electoral system must prioritize mechanisms that enhance democratic participation while ensuring predictability and resilience in the face of political turbulence.

References (500 words)

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