The Movimiento Democrático Peruano (MDP)

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Introduction

Our cluster, the Ochenio of 1948-1956, will explore the interplay between different political and social groups in Peru under the rule of the President Manuel Odría. Our committee, the Movimiento Democrático Peruano (MDP), is comprised primarily of politicians, lawyers, businessmen, diplomats, and media moguls—all decidedly right-wing—from the upper echelons of Peruvian society. Throughout the conference, we will interact with the ruling regime, in the form of Manuel Odría’s cabinet, and with the APRA, a left-wing party with socialist that is sometimes in favor and sometimes suppressed under the Peruvian political system.

Understanding the Ochenio:

Odría is in many ways the classic Latin American dictator—he rose to power in a military coup, is serially corrupt, and is highly authoritarian. To understand properly the interplay of factors that led to his ascent to power and the characteristics of his regime, this guide will consider two factors: his personal background and the political context of his time.

Manuel Odría

Manuel Arturo Odría Amoretti was born in Lima in 1896 in a relatively well-connected Peruvian family (though not nearly as established as many of the members of the Prado and Bustamante y Rivero regimes. He spent his formative years studying in the city of Tarma, and after graduation joined the Escuela Militar de Chorrillos, Peru’s military academy. He excelled there, graduating first in his class, and after further degrees in War Studies and Mathematics he returned to the military academy to teach.

He rose to fame as a result of the Peruvian-Ecuatorian War of 1941, during which he was praised for his actions in the Battle of Zarumilla that helped repel a key Ecuatorian attack. After the war, he became the Director-General of Peru’s Escuela Superior de Guerra (School of War).

It can be argued that Odría’s origins in the Peruvian elite and his time spent in the military contributed to his strong right-wing, anti-communist political beliefs. Odría was a strong “antiaprista” (opponent of the APRA, the country’s main left-wing political party). These convictions would
emerge later in the form of his policies as Minister of Government and Police under President Jose Bustamante y Rivero and as later as President of Peru.

**Bustamante y Rivero and the Coup**

In 1945, José Luis Bustamante y Rivero became president of Peru. He was initially supported by the socialist Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA); however, after much feuding between the two, the APRA began adopting guerrilla tactics and Bustamante severely limited their power. In 1947, the APRA assassinated Francisco Graña Garland, the president of the board of the rightist newspaper *La Prensa*. As a result, Bustamante dissolved his cabinet and brought in an entirely new one consisting primarily of highly anti-APRA military figures, and in this wave Odría was brought in as Minister of Government and Police.

In early 1948, Odría and the other military figures in Bustamante’s cabinet wanted him to ban the APRA and prevent the party from ever taking part in Peruvian politics. Bustamante refused to do this, and as a result Odría and the rest of the military officials resigned from his cabinet. The stage was set, and later that year the military carried out a coup and installed a ruling junta lead by Odría. Remarkably, they even enjoyed popular support, which they obtained by portraying Bustamante as being sympathetic with the socialists.

**The Ochenio**

For those who are familiar, the Ochenio bears a remarkable resemblance to Peronism in Argentina: a general rises to power as part of a coup, but through a combination of populism and authoritarianism grows to be loved by the masses and feared by the elite. In the Peruvian case, Odría initially ran the country as the leader of a military junta. To establish his own legitimacy as a ruler, he called for elections in 1950 (which he was naturally favored to win). He running unopposed after he banned the opposing candidate, Ernesto Montagne Markholz, and so from 1950-1956 Peru was governed as a de jure republic with Odría as its president.

**Accomplishments**

It must be noted that, due to Odría’s brand of populism, he was widely loved by the Peruvian masses. The president supported significant investment in public works, especially in the construction of schools; the government’s stated goal was for all Peruvian children to receive an education. His regime also focused on the
promotion of public health goals, building hospitals and clinics, and of support for the unemployed—social safety nets were established and strengthened under Odría. As such, the Peruvian masses (though not the elite) had many reasons to support Odría. Previous presidents (like those of Prado and Bustamante y Rivero) had always come from the Peru’s de-facto aristocracy. Odría was, in some ways, a remarkable change—he was a president who derived his support from the people, in part because of the manner in which he had feuded with and brushed aside the rest of the elite.

**Political Repression and the Domestic Security Law**

While part of Odría’s success originated from the support of the Peruvian poor and middle class, he only held on to power for so long by efficiently identifying and quelling any resistance from the opposition. This opposition came both from the right (in the form of the many members of our committee, the Movimiento Democrático Peruano) and from the left (in the form of the APRA). Because the APRA was a large political party with grassroots support, suppressing it required greater effort on the part of the regime, and so many of the laws enacted in the name of national stability and security were deployed disproportionately against the leftist opposition.

The most notable of these was the Domestic Security Law (Ley de Seguridad Interior). The legislation was championed by Odría’s trusted advisor Alejandro Esparza Zañartu, who used the law to imprison the vast majority of the APRA’s leaders. In general, the law authorized the censure of press and radio, imprisonment without trial, torture, and deportation, all in the name of national security.

This law is one of the key reasons for resistance to Odría’s rule; despite initial economic prosperity, many felt that their fundamental political liberties were at stake. This is one of the key causes of the rise of the Movimiento Democratico Peruano, the committee that we will simulate. The members of the committee, many of whom come from the elite, were relatively free of economic concerns; at the same time, they were disproportionately targeted by Odría’s regime in the name of security. The same applies to the APRA committee, whose members are reeling from constant supervision from the Odría government.

While these interests were essentially opposed to Odría from the start, we should also take into account that many people
from the Peruvian lower and middle classes joined them in opposition to Odría as time went on. This was caused in part by economic concerns including rising unemployment and inflation in the mid-1950s. By 1955, levels of discontent had increased significantly, enabling members of different socioeconomic classes to unite in their opposition to Odría. The 1955 Arequipa Revolution, in which seasoned politicians and masses of workers came together to campaign for the end of the Ochenio, is an excellent example of this cooperation, and of the kind of conflicts that may emerge in committee.

Committee context:

Our committee takes place starting around the last year of Manuel Odría’s rule in Peru. As a result, delegates should be especially conscious of the political climate of 1955-1956. Odría has declared elections, and different individuals are jostling to be nominated as candidates for the presidency. The newly founded Movimiento Democratico Peruano (MDP) plays a special role in this process, as many of its members are experienced leaders in politics, business and the media who have the power to directly and indirectly influence the outcome of the electoral process. In addition, it is likely that many of the candidates for president will originate within the MDP. Odría is not running (though it is feasible that someone from his cabinet might), and at the start of committee, the left-wing Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) is banned from electoral process. Delegates certainly have the flexibility to change this—you are under no obligation to follow the true course of history, and in fact are encouraged to deviate from it. However, it is still true that much of MDP delegates’ interactions with the Odría Cabinet and APRA committee will be comprised of appeals for financial and political support. If the MDP or any of its candidates is to form a cohesive government, the backing of the aforementioned groups will be crucial.
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**Positions:**

**Manuel Prado Ugarteche**
Prado was the president of Peru from 1939-1945 and is a de facto leader of the Movimiento DEMOCRATICO PERUANO (in English, the party is known as the Pradist Democratic Movement in reference to him). As the son of former president Mariano Ignacio Prado, he maintains powerful connections within the Peruvian political establishment. He also yields economic influence, having served as the President of the Central Reserve Bank of Peru in the 1930s. His relationship with the APRA is complicated; while the APRA backed his candidacy in 1939, he went on to oppress the left-wing party while in office, limiting the party’s power in an effort to appease the largely conservative military. These efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, and so the military staged a coup that led to General Odría’s ascension to the presidency.

**José Bustamante y Rivero**
Bustamante is also a former president, serving from 1945 to 1948. He is a widely respected legal scholar and professor, and maintains connections in Peru’s universities. He also maintains connections with many foreign powers, having served as ambassador to Bolivia and Peru. His relationship with the APRA is also complicated; like Prado, he received their support during his campaign, but as president he severely limited the party’s power in an effort to appease the largely conservative military. These efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, and so the military staged a coup that led to General Odría’s ascension to the presidency.

**Manuel Cisneros Sánchez**
Sánchez is a close ally of Prado and the original founder of the Movimiento Democratico Peruano. Trained as a lawyer, he developed connections in the financial sector and in the oil and copper industries after representing several leading banks and companies in Peruvian court. He also is a significant player in Peruvian media; Sánchez previously served as the head of the newspaper *La Crónica* and is currently president of the board of the *La Crónica* Publishing Company. He also served as Minister of Justice and Religion in Prado’s first cabinet.
Pedro Beltrán Espantoso
Another member of the Peruvian political elite, Beltrán was educated at the London School of Economics and served as president of the Central Reserve Bank of Peru. Uniquely, he is very involved in the Peruvian agricultural sector, and served as the president of the National Farming Society. He has close diplomatic contacts in the United States government, having served as ambassador to the US under Prado. Currently, he serves as the owner and de facto director of La Prensa, one of Peru’s most influential newspapers. He is heavily anti-communist and anti-APRA, and is unwilling to accept even limited influence from left-wing parties in government.

Pedro Roselló
Roselló is a strong critic of the Odría government. Along with Beltrán, he was one of the leaders of the Arequipa Revolution of 1955, which is widely viewed as a key motivator of Odría’s decision to eschew another term as president. He has strong ties with civil society, as he worked with local political groups and unions to organize the 1955 protests. Earlier, he also was a co-founder of the Independent Civic Movement, a heavily anti-APRA group that actually supported Odría’s rise to power in reaction to APRA presence in the Bustamante y Rivero government.

Hector Cornejo Chávez
Cornejo Chávez is the founder of the Christian Democratic Party (Partido Demócrata Cristiano, or PDC), which was formed in early 1956 by a group of relatively young politicians whose views were somewhat more left-wing than those of the Pradist establishment. The center-left party endorsed the political philosophy of Christian socialism, which combined some of the socialist viewpoints visible in the heavily secular APRA with a commitment to Christian belief. As a result, Cornejo Chávez is more accepting of the APRA than many MDP members, and furthermore maintains strong ties with the Catholic Church and its religious and political representatives in Peru.

Luis Gallo Porras
Gallo Porras, another member of the Peruvian political elite, served for many years as the mayor of the city of Lima. During his time in office, he focused on the modernization of city infrastructure. Gallo Porras was the president of the Club Nacional, the gathering place for the
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aristocratic families of Lima, and as a result is friends with many leaders in Peruvian business and politics. He is also an aviation enthusiast, serving as president of the National Aviation League.

Javier Ortiz de Zevallos
Ortiz de Zevallos is a close confidant of Prado and is a committed antiaprista (one who opposes the APRA). During Bustamante y Rivero’s presidency he co-founded the Independent Civic Movement (Movimiento Cívico Independiente) to protest the incorporation of APRA influences in government, and actually supported Odría’s rise to power. However, they soon clashed and Odría fled to Panama, from where he has only recently returned to help create the MDP. He is a founder of the newspaper Última Hora.

Victor Manuel Arévalo Delgado
Arévalo is a trained lawyer who served several terms as a Diputado (member of the lower house) and Senator in the Peruvian legislature, first serving in 1919 at age 24. He maintains connections in the military, and is active on matters of foreign policy. Historically, he is particularly opposed to economic policies that favor foreign companies and investment. He is a member of the elite Club de la Unión.

Carlos Moreyra y Paz Soldán
Moreyra served as Minister of Development and Public Works during Prado’s presidency. His connections lie in the agricultural sector, as he is an agricultural engineer by training and worked for many years as an exporter of foodstuffs. He is extremely wealthy, having inherited the fortune of the Count of San Isidro; in other words, he comes from an old, well-off business family lineage. He maintains a strong friendship with Prado, and is anticipated to contest or receive some sort of high office in the upcoming elections.

Hernando de Lavalle
Lavalle, a prominent Lima lawyer, is also considering running for president. Unlike many of the other members of the Movimiento Democratico Peruano, he did not serve in the Prado administration, and therefore is theoretically able to dissociate himself from the crackdown on the APRA that took place during the 1940s. Unlike those figures, he (for now) supports the eventual legalization of the APRA as a political party. He is considered to be in Odría’s good graces (though, it must be
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noted, the general is known for changing his
mind quickly).

Javier de Belaúnde Ruiz de Somocurcio
Belaúnde, a prominent lawyer and historian,
is a passionate advocate for democracy.
From the beginning of Odría’s rule, he was
one of its most outspoken critics,
participating in the Arequipa Revolutions of
1950 and 1955. He is a co-founder of the
Christian Democratic Party (Partido
Demócrata Cristiano), which advocates for
both public education and for an overall
decentralization of government. He is highly
suspicious of authoritarian rule, having
criticized at different times both Prado’s
democratic but tightly controlled
government and Odría’s dictatorship.