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Changing Political Engagement in the Peruvian Andes: From Defense of Livelihood to Building a Lifestyle

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Abstract

Political engagement in highland Peru has changed over the past half century along with the economic, policy, and institutional environment, as demonstrated through this case study. Allpachico, a legally recognized peasant community (*comunidad campesina*), participated in a national peasant association that actively defended shared livelihood interests based on small-scale farming in the 1970s. Political and economic crises in the 1980s and 1990s undermined both protests and organizations. In the current neoliberal era, the state has promoted large-scale mineral extraction and municipal government while sidelining peasant farming and the *comunidad*. With few local jobs and scant returns to agriculture, Allpachiqueños have migrated to Lima, but many maintain their houses in the community. Despite the increasing diversity among Allpachiqueños, they continue to unite for projects for the common good, now manifesting in lobbying the local municipal government for improvements to urban structure. A communal habitus persists even though the scope of what is possible to demand has shifted from livelihood to lifestyle concerns.

Keywords: livelihood; lifestyle; communal habitus; peasant community; political mobilization

Resumen

La participación política en la sierra peruana ha cambiado durante el último medio siglo, junto con el entorno económico, político e institucional, como lo demuestra este estudio de caso. Allpachico, una comunidad campesina legalmente reconocida, participó en una asociación campesina nacional que defendió activamente los intereses compartidos de subsistencia basados en la agricultura a pequeña escala en la década de 1970. La crisis política y económica de las décadas de 1980 y 1990 socavó tanto las protestas como las organizaciones. En la actual era neoliberal, el Estado ha promovido la extracción minera a gran escala y el gobierno municipal, marginando a la agricultura campesina y a la comunidad. Con pocos empleos locales y escasos ingresos de la agricultura, los allpachiqueños han migrado a Lima, pero muchos mantienen sus viviendas en la comunidad. A pesar de la creciente diversidad entre los allpachiqueños, continúan unidos en proyectos de bien común, lo que ahora se manifiesta en la presión al gobierno municipal local para mejoras en la estructura urbana. Persiste un *habitus* comunal, aunque el alcance de lo que se puede exigir ha pasado de las preocupaciones por la subsistencia a las relacionadas con el estilo de vida.

Palabras claves: medio de vida; estilo de vida; *habitus* comunal; comunidad campesina; movilización política

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There has been a seismic shift in political activism in Peru over the past half century, from broad, interest-based coalitions of peasants and unions mobilizing against the state to improve their material well-being to fragmented, particularistic struggles increasingly focused on improving the quality of rural and urban infrastructure. In mid-twentieth-century Peru, peasant movements organized around land claims to gain and protect access to key economic resources. A national umbrella organization, the Confederación Campesina del Perú (CCP, the Peruvian Peasant Confederation), represented the interests of legally recognized peasant communities. In the following decades, rural demands continued to address livelihood concerns by calling for local development and better terms for agricultural markets. The mining of that era was labor-intensive, and national-level unions were organized to represent the workers. Those workers tended to be from peasant communities, leading to political activism based on commonalities among farming and employment in the mines. That period was brought to a close when insurgent political violence and state repression in the 1980s and 1990s eviscerated both the unions and the CCP.

With greater political stability since 2000, Peru's economy has rebounded as a result of natural resource extraction, but under new technical norms and in a neoliberal regime. The mines offer fewer jobs for local workers, who are hired by nonunionized subcontracted firms rather than the former single-employer workplace. The current political priorities have also sidelined state support for small-scale agriculture, and instead of supporting peasant communities, legislation has been put in place to permit their dissolution. The state now addresses the needs of rural dwellers through poverty alleviation funds and transfers resources to lower levels of government for local development and public works. The projects supported by these municipal governments tend to focus on lifestyle, that is, improving the quality of life through installing water and sewerage infrastructure, beautifying plazas, and building stadiums rather than dealing with economic livelihood. A smaller percentage of the population now engages in farming as rural dwellers migrate to cities. This article argues that, as the ways Peruvians engage with the political economy have changed, so too have their institutional mechanisms of political engagement and the demands they make of the state. Importantly, they do continue to unite to work toward communal interests, albeit in localized collectivities in place of national coalitions.

Allpachico, a legally recognized *comunidad campesina* (peasant community) in the central Peruvian highlands, provides an excellent depiction of this process, as it represents a wide spectrum that highlights both change and continuity.¹ Fifty years ago, in the 1970s, Allpachiqueños were very politically vociferous. Indeed, and astonishingly given its size, the *comunidad* was the site of a national conference of the CCP. Today, the CCP is a shadow of its former self, and the demands Allpachiqueños make of the state have shifted from the concerns of farmer-workers to infrastructural improvements. Recently, for example, community residents organized to insist that the district mayor complete the construction of a sports stadium, a project initiated during an earlier mayor's term. These concerns reflect fundamental transformations: from being an agricultural community with incomes complemented by male wages in the regional mines to a place with little farming and few permanent residents, alongside a significant number of migrants who maintain houses there and visit regularly. This case study demonstrates the complex ways that material interest, what I call *livelihood*, and the meaningful and aspirational ways people go about their lives, what I call *lifestyle*, are intertwined and rebalanced as they unite to make political demands of the state. A sense of identity connected to place and an embedded

¹ *Community* is a polyvalent term that can refer to clearly defined legal or residential sites, as well as to affective and identity-based groups (see Williams 1976, 65–66). I use the Spanish term *comunidad* to refer specifically to the legally recognized polity, and the English term *community* for other groupings.

practice of pursuing common purpose have been constant over the past fifty years, although both the purposes and the institutional channels employed have changed.

To illustrate the evolution of collective political activism from supporting livelihood to improving lifestyle, I begin by discussing the theoretical framework used here involving the linked concepts of livelihood, lifestyle, and collective habitus. I then describe the two major collective institutional forms through which people have made demands of the state over the past century, the *comunidad campesina* and the municipality. This sets the context for the case study, which traces how the aims of collective action have shifted as the basis of livelihood of the population has changed, and with the limitations and opportunities embedded in available institutional forms.

The evidence for this article is based on information I have accumulated over the past four decades. I have had the privilege of visiting Allpachico since the 1980s, with over twenty trips of stays between one week and seven months. I have gathered evidence through ethnographic field methods, principally involving participant observation, but also including interviews, photos, video, and analysis of documents, policies, and archives. Over the past ten years, I have also been in frequent contact by phone or social media with some community members. The focus of my research has been on livelihood strategy. Initially, this addressed how Allpachiqueños survived in the hyperinflationary 1980s, then turned to examine how development projects by both nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the clientelistic government of Alberto Fujimori were accessed. These were sought less for the objective of the projects and more for the handouts associated with them. Thus, part of my focus has been on the changing role of the state. In addition, I have observed an increase in long-term out-migration over the past thirty years. This has led me to interview Allpachiqueños in Lima, their primary destination. The people have continuously shown great generosity in educating me about their lives.

Livelihoods, lifestyles, and communal habitus in Peru

My approach builds on material realities. While I employ a conceptual distinction between livelihood and lifestyle, the two are integrally connected. In Norman Long's (2000, 194–195) words: "Livelihood best expresses the idea of individuals and groups striving to make a living, attempting to meet their various consumption and economic necessities, coping with uncertainties, responding to new opportunities, and choosing between different value positions In addition, we need to take account, of the normative and cultural dimensions of livelihoods, that is, we need to explore the issue of life styles and the factors that shape them." This perspective encompasses not only the economic activities people undertake to survive but also the meanings they attach to what they do, why and how they do it, and the social relations they engage in. Both are embedded in culture and change in concert with how and why people engage in the wider political economy, transforming it and their own cultural visions of a good life in a mutual feedback process. I use the term *livelihood* to denote when the emphasis of an articulated goal is on matters centrally related to production and provisioning; in this article, these include small-scale farming, waged employment, and informal-sector work. For example, when peasant farmers organize to demand more land, better prices, or technical assistance, the obvious issue relates to livelihood. In contrast, I use the term *lifestyle* to refer to efforts to improve such areas as residential infrastructure, town beautification, and similar things. The distinction is intended not to imply that they are separable, but to point to the relative balance of the symbolic motivating factor for mobilization.

The linkages between the two concepts, livelihood and lifestyle, are clearly seen in the collective habitus associated with Andean societies. Bourdieu's concept of habitus encapsulates a dynamic process that builds from experience as well as innovation and

reflects both structural strictures and creative agency. *Habitus* is a disposition, an inertial force that marks a tendency to a certain practice, in accordance with circumstances that may support it, cause it to change, or to end altogether, and acknowledging the agency of actors. It is neither essential nor determinative (Bourdieu 2016).

The image of Andean society as collectivist has been widespread for over a century, developing from such indigenist writers as Hildebrando Castro Pozo and José Carlos Mariátegui. Diez (2012a, 8) posits that this image of peasants is not only shared by racist neoliberal governments and businesses that see them as standing in the way of investment but also provides a powerful symbolic tool for peasant political organizations that seek to protect their lands. In this way, a value for communality (i.e., an aspect of lifestyle) impels movements that support livelihood. A communal *habitus* unites livelihood and lifestyle, for example, through reciprocal exchanges of labor and goods, community works, and community celebrations. This does not imply that peasant communities are homogeneous and unchanging, but it calls attention to collective action and orientation as tools that are continually practiced even while they are oriented to diverse and new situations (see Vincent 2018b for a more detailed exploration).²

Communities, municipalization, and the state

The Andean collective *habitus* is manifest in both informal and institutionalized forms. State-sanctioned institutions give shape to and provide tools to communities. The stereotypical institutional form in highland Peru is the legally recognized polity of the *comunidad campesina*, or peasant community. More recently, different levels of municipal governments have had their importance boosted. These levels are nested; from largest to smallest, they include provincial and district municipalities, as well as *centros poblados menores* (small population centers). While there is an overlap in functions between *comunidades* and municipalities, the former are designed around common ownership and management of territorial resources (i.e., explicitly livelihood-type concerns), whereas the latter have the purpose of managing the civic needs of residents (tending toward what I call *lifestyle* here). Both provide avenues to mediate demands between the state and the people. For example, the legal framework for indigenous or peasant communities to be recognized as polities was established in the 1920 Constitution, which, as Florencia Mallon (1983, 232) has pointed out, made the state the channel through which members interacted with one another and the wider nation.³ In this way, the establishment of the *comunidad* gave the state access to peasant labor to build highways and other public works (Urrutia 1992), while the communities that applied for status tended to be those that leveraged the advantages of official recognition alongside participation in regional commercial and labor markets (Long and Roberts 1978, 4–5).

There is an enormous literature on Peruvian peasant communities reaching back to the early twentieth century, to the extent that Jaime Urrutia commented on it in his 1992 review. While Urrutia noted that they had fallen out of both academic and political favor, Alejandro Diez (2012b, 2012c, 2017, 2022; Diez and Ortiz 2013) has led a new generation

² See Gavin Smith (2024) for a richly nuanced and sophisticated picture of a sense of community among people from Huasichanca, Peru, across five decades and international migration.

³ Legal recognition is currently complicated given the state's opposition to the communal landholding. Before the 1990s, *comunidades* were in the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture, but there since has been no single government agency with responsibility. The Peruvian office of defending citizens' rights, Defensoría del Pueblo (2018, 51), calculates that, as of 2015, there were 6,190 legally recognized peasant communities (*comunidades campesinas*). However, because of the proliferation of government agencies, a community might be recognized by any one of several bureaus but lack some of the multitude of requirements, such as georeferenced land title, to be registered by others.

of Peruvian anthropological analysis. Many different approaches have been used to categorize and understand peasant communities, of which I highlight two overarching ones here: those that emphasize their collective nature or practices (e.g., Ferreira and Isbell 2016) and those that emphasize their relationship to the state (e.g., Diez 2022). With respect to the first of these, if a collective habitus helped spur people to claim *comunidad* status, the legislation (Law 24656) also includes requirements for communal land, other property, work, and management, governed by internal statutes they develop themselves. Meeting this requirement entrenches collective action as a habitus among Andean people. Alongside this is an expectation that benefits are for everyone. Asensio (2019) refers to this the “Andean moral economy,” emphasizing the same treatment for all, rather than targeting programs such as those aimed at reducing inequality. Leaders risk charges of favoritism when more resources flow to certain areas or sectors of the population.⁴ This expectation limits the ability of more powerful and influential groups to orient *comunidad* resources or projects to their own advantage. Everyone watches *comunidad* leadership—and one another—carefully and evaluates their actions and inactions.

With respect to the second grouping of approaches, Diez (2022, 120) posits that belonging to a state in a subordinate political status is a point of departure for understanding the legal polity of the *comunidad* while also acknowledging the agency of its members. Over the past hundred years, he traces three major periods with distinct features regarding the state-*comunidad* relationship. First, from about 1920 to the 1960s, the state instituted a legal polity of the “indigenous community” (the original denomination of the *comunidad campesina*) over which it had a trusteeship role to integrate the people; *comunidades* sought this status to protect and claim collective territory, which made their processes subject to state oversight. Diez distinguishes that period from the late 1960s to 1980s, when, in addition to state trusteeship and the ongoing bureaucratization of recognized communities, both state and *comunidades* prioritized development. For my purposes, I combine this long period into one, to highlight both state trusteeship and the focus on economic issues. Diez’s third period covers the years after 1990, when the trusteeship role of the state vanished; while *comunidades* have still wished to protect territory, especially in the face of intensifying mineral extraction, the state has endeavored to privatize land and to reduce communal ownership and governance. In my discussion, I separate the 1990s from the 2000s, seeing the 1990s as a period of transition when much of the legal restructuring was put in place for operationalization in the 2000s, on which I focus. This era has seen an increase in the number of legally recognized *comunidades* as they strive to defend territory in the face of state disinterest.

While the state may have established the institution of the *comunidad campesina*, it does not determine what they are like. Rather, communities are extremely diverse and are affected by various pressures in diverse ways.⁵ They are large and small—Diez (2017)

⁴ Certainly in Allpachico I have frequently heard that all should benefit. This discourse has come to the fore as programs targeted at sectors deemed to have specific needs have expanded. These have built from the 1980s with the venerable *vaso de leche* (glass of milk) and *comedores populares* (popular kitchens), both aimed at poor women (Jelin and Pereyra 1990, 10–14). People express resentment when they or their kin are not included in handouts. The *vaso de leche* program, for example, is municipally run and directs food to malnourished children younger than seven (which is all of them), but there is a widespread belief that it should go to others, especially elders who might have inadequate income. A collective habitus does not mean that people readily and willingly cooperate, but it does offer a framework for making some goals more likely to be pursued than others, in the name of being for all.

I am hesitant to attribute this as peculiarly Andean. At time of writing there is a political debate in Canada about a carbon tax exemption for home heating oil, a fuel used primarily in Atlantic Canada. The critical response has been that all home heating hydrocarbons should be exempt.

⁵ Diez (2012b) lists some of the pressures that affect different communities in distinct ways: migration, demographic growth, changes in consumption and integration into markets, impact on self-identification of Peru’s ratification of the right to prior consultation of Indigenous peoples (in the UN Declaration on the Rights of

mentions one that has twenty-five thousand active members (*comuneros*), while Allpachico has had fewer than one hundred over the time I have known it. Moreover, they are long-standing and recently formed; in processes of formation or dissolution; at different altitudes and in different parts of the country; with economies based on agriculture, livestock, mining, tourism, and fishing; and so on. Diez (2012b) sets out a continuum between *comunidad-ayllu*, a smaller community with members joined through kinship or propinquity who resolve matters in face-to-face meetings, and *comunidad-colmena* (i.e., beehive), which are large complex political structures. Allpachico is a small (tiny) *comunidad-ayllu* type, but there are migrants living elsewhere who still have influence on local decision-making.

Over the past two decades, as the state has attempted to sideline the *comunidad*, it has promoted municipal-level governments, a process referred to as municipalization by John Cameron (2009). This is a major development in Peru, where the government had hitherto been highly centralized. The state has allocated revenues from the resource sector to lower levels of government in support of this decentralization. Local-level government has displaced national-level politics in importance as offering more scope for citizens to influence government officials (Vincent 2018a). Not surprisingly, the situation has led to an increase in applications to establish new municipal structures, especially at the smallest level: Between 2007 and 2022, the number of *centros poblados menores* (CPMs), which get their own budget, rose steeply from 2010 to 2859 (INEI 2007, 2022), whereas larger municipal structures rose only slightly.

A couple of contributions to a collection edited by Alejandro Diez (2012c) provide some interesting comparisons to the case discussed here. These relate to the balance between what could be characterized as municipal concerns (e.g., residential infrastructure, or lifestyle issues) on the one hand, and *comunidad* concerns (e.g., communal production and other economic issues, or livelihood issues) on the other hand. Claudia Chávez (2012) discusses two communities in the Mantaro Valley, not far from Allpachico. Both are also close to Huancayo, the major city in the area. One, San Jerónimo de Tunán, dates back centuries and received legal recognition as a *comunidad campesina* in the 1930s. As the economic base diversified into individual businesses and jobs, and communal resources shrank when land title was given to *comuneros*, the *comunidad* has lost members and purpose. Additionally, a significant part of the population arrived as refugees from the political violence in their regions during the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, the district municipal government has taken over local governance. In contrast, Cochas Chico made an application to become a *comunidad campesina* on the basis of a diverse economy driven by agriculture, artisanal production, and tourism, but unlike in San Jerónimo, all are promoted collaboratively. The *comunidad* also takes charge of urban infrastructure.

In contrast to Cochas Chico and more like San Jerónimo, the case of Chacán in the southern Andes reflects how a process of urbanization and the private working of land led the people to “municipalize” by applying for *centro poblado menor* status (Barrio de Mendoza 2012). Like Allpachico, Chacán hosted a meeting of the Confederación Campesina del Perú in the 1970s, suggesting a vibrant peasant consciousness and activism at that time. However, as people moved their residences together, the building of urban infrastructure was necessary, and the logic of management became bureaucratized. Communal space was transformed into public space. Already a *comunidad campesina*, Chacán became a *centro poblado menor* in the 1990s, and that political organization gradually took over many of the responsibilities of the *comunidad*.

Importantly in these cases, whether the *comunidad* controlled significant communal resources that were worked collectively was pivotal. Individual family control of land in

Indigenous Peoples), increasing bureaucratization of legal requirements for status, and the proliferation of new resources.

San Jerónimo and Chacán displaced a core function of the *comunidad*; as municipalities had more funds and responsibility for urban infrastructure, they gained sway. In contrast, Cochabamba used the *comunidad* structure to promote common economic interests, and it was also able to manage the urban infrastructure. The choice of institutional vehicle for channeling demands is thus linked to what those demands are. The case study shows that, regardless of the institutional structure, collective interests continue to pertain, at least in smaller *comunidades* where the population has long-standing roots.

Allpachico

To illustrate how the impetus for political mobilization has changed from livelihood to lifestyle issues, I turn to a case study. Allpachico is located in a narrow valley or canyon of the Mantaro River, to the west of the Mantaro Valley. Its historical roots are deep, but only the past century is relevant to my purposes here. I organize the presentation into two main periods, that leading up to the end of the 1980s and since 2000. I touch on the 1990s as a period of transition between the two. The presentation focuses on the local collective form (those institutionalized by the state, as well as some self-organized ones) and the goals the people have tried to achieve. This is set against the general trends of how people have earned their livelihood in the political and economic context.

1920s–1980s: The primacy of the *comunidad campesina*

As noted earlier, Alejandro Diez (2022) characterized the years between 1920 and the 1980s as characterized by the state taking a trusteeship role with respect to peasant communities, with the interactions between the two involving economic resources and development. In the 1920s, Allpachiqueños bought land collectively and individually. Soon thereafter, they applied for status as a *comunidad campesina*. The status and the shared property required communal management, keeping in practice the collective habitus. Not only is Allpachico's existence as a *comunidad* intrinsically intertwined with the state; it also arose alongside their engagement with the national economy. Peasant farming and migrant work have been complementary activities in Allpachico's history. While the *comunidad* reflects the agricultural interests of the people, the land purchase and subsequent local economy have long been supported by labor migration, which in the twentieth century revolved around the regional mining industry. Men worked in the mines and on the railway, and women generated income in those work centers through informal food sales or performing services such as doing laundry. The work centers were close enough for the people to commute to the *comunidad* on weekends and holidays.

This linkage between the *comunidad* and labor migration continued through the twentieth century. Some men opted wholly to become workers, leaving family land for their siblings. Others, more invested in farming, used their wages to buy land. Work experience, kin ties, and ongoing relations with migrants resulted in a strong combined identity as peasants and workers. The 1970s were an important time, with a military government that had nationalized the mines and proclaimed support for peasant farmers. Along with an agrarian reform, there were various agricultural outreach programs. In this context, the state became the recipient of demands from both workers and farmers. Mine workers participated in unions to represent their class interests, while the CCP promoted those of peasants, but in fact, both were closely intertwined in the community.

While the unions were the primary vehicle for worker demands, the *comunidad* did the same for peasants. Then as now, decision-making takes place in assemblies held under its auspices. From the beginning, Allpachiqueños mobilized their status to make claims for economic resources and the limited services the state was willing to provide. Among the

first actions on gaining status in the 1930s was to petition for additional land and for state recognition of its school (which would involve the state paying for the teachers). In keeping with wider trends observed by Diez (2022), the 1970s and 1980s saw Allpachiqueños using the *comunidad* to lobby for improvements to agricultural production and to implement development projects designed to reinforce the *comunidad* and support the economic base.

Small as it was, Allpachico hosted a national conference of the CCP, which was a major political force at the time (Caro Cárdenas 2015; Ribeiro 2017). This was a very significant achievement for the *comunidad* and put it on the national stage. The conference came about through the connections of one young man, a university agriculture student who was the son of a worker. Various people told me stories of the event, about which they were enthusiastic. Andrés Luna Vargas himself, secretary general of the CCP, was in attendance, as were representatives from throughout Peru. Members of the *comunidad* kept watch on the various accesses to Allpachico to be on the alert in case of the appearance of the police or military. The period surrounding the conference was effervescent, with young people attending education sessions and putting together a public newspaper that was posted publicly. I heard of one family that did not participate, but the rest of the *comunidad* seemed to do so, based on the nostalgic reminiscences of this time of political engagement I heard in later years. Murals painted inside public buildings showed figures wearing miners' hard hats brandishing agricultural implements and holding José Carlos Mariátegui's famed indigenist book *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (*Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*; Mariátegui [1928] 1988).

The interconnections between workers and farmers were more than symbolic in mobilizations and continued into the next decade. During my first fieldwork in 1984, workers organized sacrifice marches (*marchas de sacrificio*) to Lima to protest high inflation and deteriorating work conditions. Allpachiqueños and members of other *comunidades* along the way cheered them on and provided support. That same year, the *comunidad* itself participated in a march to the district municipality to which Allpachico belongs as part of a national strike. The slogans called out included the names of all the *comunidades* in the area, celebrated peasant unity, and complained of the low price they received for potatoes and the high cost of living. Allpachico was not alone in all this activism. Peasant movements in the 1960s challenged the existing regime of large landholdings that accessed peasant labor in feudal-like relations. These were broad, class-based struggles that showcased livelihood concerns involving claims for land and rights (Arce 2015; Eguren 2009; Kay and Salazar 2001).

Clearly, the *comunidad* provided a helpful institutional structure for making economic demands of the state on behalf of peasant farming. It also constituted a local management system for carrying out a range of collective lifestyle-type endeavors, including with other groups. For example, migrant Allpachiqueños have organized informally and formally for about one hundred years for both their own interests (such as to play soccer) and in support of the *comunidad*. They helped the construction of urban infrastructure to support a lifestyle congruent with the kinds of services workers had experienced in the work centers. Cultural practices evolved as migrants encountered new ideas and adapted them to the community. For example, in 2000, an eighty-four-year-old told me that his grandfather had told him of workers carrying a newly made church bell to the community from La Oroya, a work center within eighty kilometers that was the location of a foreign-owned smelter from the 1920s on and where many Allpachiqueño men worked.⁶ Over the

⁶ Cultural practices changed as they moved back and forth between the community and the urban areas, as migrants came to be those who sponsored the fiestas, and instituted new aspects to the celebrations that they had learned from other workers or developed out of new commercial products. In turn, they brought their practices to their work places. See also Vincent (2025) with respect to architectural changes.

years, the people built the school and a church, a water system with public taps, maintained the cemetery, cleaned the streets, plaza, and sports field, and so on.

While the *comunidad* still organized matters, over time the partners it worked with began to diversify. In the 1980s, NGOs came to the fore, with interventions that focused on the local economy. At the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, funds raised by the migrants, along with some from the sale of equipment a foreign NGO had left, were used to buy a generator and finally install the first electrification system.

But the 1980s was a time of tremendous political and economic crisis that led to the transition between the two periods being discussed here. Government-mandated price controls on staple goods led to shortages. Violence escalated through the actions of the Shining Path (SL, for Sendero Luminoso) insurgency group as well as of military and paramilitary operations. Inflation was rampant, and the currency was devalued and renamed twice—in 1985, the inti replaced the sol at a rate of one to one thousand, and in 1991, the nuevo sol replaced the inti at a rate of one to one million (Banco Central de Reserva del Perú 2025). Wages did not keep pace, nor did the prices farmers received for their goods—hence the protests mentioned above. But as the danger increased, overt political activism gradually subsided. The community offered a relative haven from both market forces (one could grow much of one's food) and violence. Allpachico was not often directly affected by the conflict, although both the military and SL made appearances. The return of migrants to Allpachico in the 1980s kept the *comunidad* vibrant, even while their stay there reminded them of why they had had to leave in the first place.

1990s: Transition

Fear and distrust in the late 1980s and 1990s arising from the insurgency and heavy-handed military responses undermined national-level class-based organizations such as the CCP and unions. President Alberto Fujimori came to power in the 1990s and implemented further state repression. This gradually brought about calm, and over the decade, Allpachiqueños left to seek better incomes elsewhere. Fujimori instituted intensely neoliberal policies, in particular reducing any existing supports for the *comunidad*. He introduced provisions to allow for their dissolution and gutted the bureaucratic institutions that oversaw them. Allpachico has only a small amount of land at an altitude of 3,500 meters along the river, and most of the fields are on slopes or higher plains. There is no irrigation, and erosion is a problem. Without irrigation for year-round pasture, raising livestock is also a challenge. Over time, the fields lost fertility. Combined with decreasing government support and ever-lower prices for small-scale producers, farming became unable to meet the growing consumption demands as Allpachiqueños yearned for modern lifestyles.

In addition, Fujimori restructured industry. Labor laws were relaxed, and state-owned enterprises were privatized (Balbi 1997). The regional mines were sold primarily to foreign investors. This situation led to layoffs and retirements, and few Allpachiqueño men were able to get permanent jobs that provided benefits in the area. Without customers, women and other informal workers had a hard time of it. Some men got work in rock quarries, usually on contracts and less well-paid than the earlier mining jobs. With scarce employment and a high cost of living, more people left for informal work in Lima. Most migration until the 1990s had been regional, allowing the people to maintain fields either directly or through sharecropping. Lima, at between six and twelve hours' distance, made weekend commuting much more difficult, and the poor returns to farming offered too few advantages to be worthwhile. The close association between farming and waged and informal work was stretched and broken for most people, although many retained close contact with Allpachico.

State presence at the local level changed from agricultural extension that supported agriculture to workfare projects. These offered money or food to participants who undertook public works like building or improving paths and tracks. Such activities would have been coordinated by the *comunidad* in earlier times, but under Fujimori, the *comunidad* was bypassed in favor of clientelistic groups that were purpose formed to bolster electoral support for him in exchange for handouts.

Another important turn began in the 1990s, when a foreign development agency worked with the community on an infrastructure project, the type of improvement I am classifying here as addressing lifestyle concerns rather than livelihood. As with other public works, most urban infrastructure up to this point had been carried out by the *comunidad*, including its initial electrification project. The foreign NGO replaced the existing system that relied on generators by improving the distribution network and connecting it to the wider grid. The system was eventually taken over by the state utility. This project, and a potable water project that took place in the early 2000s, worked with groups of beneficiaries in a way that was ambiguously related to the *comunidad*. While the *comunidad* provided organizational capacity and its meeting space and resources were used, the committees were distinct, and the beneficiaries included both members of the *comunidad* and migrants who visited only occasionally. In all cases, labor was supplied by the people in communal work bees. The project designs incorporated such unpaid labor contributions by the people, and they complied amid a general expectation of a communal habitus.

2000s: Migration, municipalization, and lifestyle projects

While Fujimori intended to promote foreign investment with his neoliberal restructuring, international business remained wary because of his authoritarianism. With his departure and the “return to democracy” after 2000, the political situation stabilized. At the macro-level, the Peruvian economy has been strong, but the big gains have been for large-scale extractive industries, which do not directly employ the numbers they did in the twentieth century. The result is about 70 percent of the economically active population in informal work, often highly precarious and with volatile earnings. Instead of formal unionized employment, especially in large enterprises, the state has facilitated subcontracting and the development of small and medium businesses, many of which fill contracts for larger firms (Lust 2018). The state has also promoted access to credit and banking, as a way for small business owners to fund their own enterprises (MEF 2016). People have thus become responsible for creating their own livelihoods in the capitalist sector. Small-scale agriculture continued to decline as the state promoted commercial production, especially for export.

In consequence, in Allpachico, while a few households are trying to produce for sale, most aspire only to eat some good home-grown food. Without irrigation, it is improbable that agriculture, whether crops, livestock, or small animals like chickens or guinea pigs, can be profitable. The low returns to farming and lack of good local jobs have led to an increase in migration to Lima, with people mostly taking up informal work, contracts, or small businesses. As a result, Allpachico is a much different community from the 1980s. The population is less than half what it was then, and it was never large—from over six hundred people to slightly more than two hundred. The age distribution has also changed: the proportion of children and youth has roughly halved to about 20 percent, while the over-sixty range is about five times greater, at over 30 percent. Pensions and remittances vie with wages for monetary income, and most farming is destined for household use. Just over 60 percent of the livable houses belong to people not living in Allpachico on a permanent basis but who visit at least occasionally. It is becoming more of a residential

and vacation community (albeit of interest only to those from there) than a farming community.

Despite differences in primary place of residence and means of income among Allpachiqueños, they retain a communal habitus that is ingrained in social and economic interdependencies. For example, the close ties that villagers have with their migrant kin constitute a channel to access remittances or income possibilities alongside all the affective significance of those bonds. Allpachiqueños are very well aware that migration may be in their future, if they do not already regularly seek income in places far from the community. There are certainly tensions and conflicts over collective projects, especially with respect to the transparency of accounting and who does the work. Migrants prefer to support activities by contributing money rather than labor. They resent it when they do not get clear reporting about how their money has been spent. Residents, for their part, feel they are shouldering the heavier burden when they are expected to carry out the work. Despite these differences in how projects get done, I am not aware of conflicts over project goals. Rather, there is a sense that any improvement is worthwhile. Decisions are made on the basis of the expressed interests of Allpachiqueños and also on what is possible. This latter pragmatic concern has much to do with the institutional mechanisms available to them to make demands of the state.

While the *comunidad* continues to serve as the default organization for local action, over the past fifteen years, the municipality has risen to challenge the *comunidad* for relevance as a local state-mandated institution. As Peru's economy burgeoned through natural resource extraction, royalties have trickled down to lower levels of government. As outlined earlier, the result is empowered municipal governments that have more funds than ever before, municipalizing Peruvian politics (Cameron 2009). The district municipality to which Allpachico belongs has its capital in a neighboring town and two other *comunidades* belong to it. There is, thus, no complete overlap in territory between the municipality and Allpachico, which must compete for resources. There was an attempt in Allpachico to apply for *centro poblado menor* (CPM) municipal status in 2011, which would offer direct access to state transfers. Enough resident and migrant Allpachiqueños signed the necessary papers to reach the threshold number, which, at one thousand, was far beyond the actual population in the community. The petition was rejected: Although they had the necessary number of signatures, these had to be of people whose official place of residence was in Allpachico. Official residence determines where one votes (an obligation in Peru sanctioned by fines) and access to various government services. People told me of a neighboring community that had managed to convince enough migrants to switch their residence for the purpose of obtaining CPM status, and for a few years, they benefited from substantial government transfers. Significantly, some of that money was dedicated to a collective economic resource. I was informed that funding became jeopardized when the migrants reverted to their former residence for convenience.

With the possibility of becoming a CPM foreclosed, and given the state neglect of the *comunidad*, the people have had to turn to the district municipality. For Allpachico, though not for all *comunidades* (see, e.g., Orellana 2012), the municipality has far more funds available than the *comunidad*. While there are various funds that the municipality administers, the participatory budgeting (*presupuesto participativo*) program is the major permanent one and is of particular interest (Vincent 2010, 2014, 2018a). Significantly, it is a *participatory* process—even in these institutional structures, the state assumes that the communal habitus will pertain.

In Allpachico, the municipal government's participatory budgeting fund has almost exclusively been dedicated to infrastructure, although it could be directed to local economic development. This happened in the neighboring community just mentioned, as well as in others with significant communal resources that can provide viable incomes for members (Vincent 2010). The project Allpachiqueños would like, and the one that would

have the greatest chance of improving agriculture—irrigation—would cost much more than the amount that is available through the participatory budgeting program. Even the technical study necessary as an initial step for the project has been turned down because of insufficient funds. A different government program that provides support for irrigation projects would, like CPM status, require far more registrants than there are in the whole district, let alone Allpachico. In my conversations with both residents and migrants, I have heard universal support for the possibility of irrigation. Even though most migrants do not cultivate fields in the *comunidad*, as they live too far away and labor is too expensive to have others do the work, they would welcome the revival of farming. This is not only because they appreciate home-grown food during their visits but also because it would be good for the community in general. No other viable economic venture has presented itself that could be initiated through the participatory budgeting process.

In the absence of communal productive possibilities in Allpachico, the tendency has been to request infrastructural projects. The inclusion of migrants in the population with an interest in how local development funds are spent is a factor here, but residents also appreciate modern conveniences. Improving roads, beautifying public areas, installing public lighting, and so on, appeal to those who live in Allpachico as well as migrants who have houses or visit there regularly (Vincent 2014). Discussions take place in the *comunidad* as well as when migrants are present during fiestas, and by phone and social media at other times, to talk about what should be done, what is possible, and how to do it.

Pursuing these improvements takes combined effort and political mobilization. This now takes the form of making demands of the local mayor to carry out lifestyle projects. The building of a small stadium in Allpachico is a case in point. Initially approved by a previous mayor, the construction was incomplete at the end of his term. The stadium has been a dream of the *comunidad* for years, for playing soccer and to provide a covered public venue for fiestas and other major events. These uses ensure its appeal to both migrant and local Allpachiqueños. While a stadium might seem to bolster gendered inequalities, all ages and genders have plans for it: the school, for the children to play sports; men, for playing soccer; women, for playing soccer and volleyball; sponsors of the fiestas, for dancing and activities; and the community in general, for holding a wide variety of public events and celebrations. Even before it was finished, one family held a wedding banquet there. The budget had been approved for the full design, so the outrage when the work stalled was widespread. In consequence, there have been two protest visits to the district capital. The first demanded the completion of the building. A roof and certain other features were eventually added, but the quality of the materials has been intensely criticized. The *comunidad* refused to accept the project as final, and there has been a second protest visit to the mayor.⁷

These mobilizations, along with the discussions to plan a direction for the *comunidad*'s future, are the current manifestation of political actions in Allpachico. Allpachiqueños always had a concern for lifestyle issues, but in the past, they largely addressed these themselves and called on the state to attend to the broad policy changes that would improve livelihood. As the state now expects them to achieve their livelihood themselves, they have pragmatically turned to making the demands that are possible.

Conclusion

Political activism has changed radically in the Peruvian Andes over the past half century. In the 1960s, the cry “land or death”—the title of Hugo Blanco’s (1972) famous book on

⁷ The single person I heard object to this second protest did so because they thought the *comunidad* should have checked the materials before they were installed rather than complaining once the work was finalized.

Peruvian peasant movements to claim land—captured the imagination of national and international audiences. Importantly, Blanco was a leader of the CCP, although in exile at the time of the meeting in Allpachico. That cry is light-years away from Allpachico's recent call for the district mayor to complete their stadium in an appropriate manner. Allpachico is not alone in turning to localized and issue-specific political action (Arce 2015). There are still protests, including those that involve material class concerns (Veltmeyer 2019), but they lack the national-level coordination and united front of the earlier period as civil society and political parties alike have become fragmented, failing to achieve widespread, enduring support (Vincent 2018a; Crabtree 2011; Levitsky and Cameron 2003; Remy 2005; Tanaka 2005; Tanaka and Meléndez 2014; Vergara and Watanabe 2016). Broad collective action is further undermined when protests are framed as criminal and individual (Lindt 2023), or when the state cedes place to mining corporations to negotiate with individual communities rather than regionally (Gustafsson 2016).

On the surface of it, the activism of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s placed livelihood issues at the core, whereas many of the more recent protests have centered on improvements to lifestyle. As I set out earlier, however, livelihood and lifestyle are entwined: People meet economic needs in culturally infused ways, informed by their values and by accessing social relations. This is a dynamic process that is guided by what is *desired* for survival and what is *possible*, the latter structured by the political economy and state policies. The political economy of Peru has changed, affecting how people access what is needed: No longer do workplaces bring together large numbers of workers who can join unions to lobby for collective demands, and peasant communities have become internally diverse, with members relying on a wide range of sources of income and living in distinct locations. The environment has thus foreclosed how people used to unite and what they could demand, as the state has replaced these with new structures and opportunities.

The case study of Allpachico clearly demonstrates this transformation: In the 1970s, Allpachiqueños had a place in the political economy that was recognized by themselves and by the state as peasant farmers and as workers. Using the state-implemented institution of the *comunidad*, they organized in conjunction with national-level, class-based movements involving peasants and unions to gain access to land, for improvements to agricultural production and markets, and for better wages and working conditions. These commonalities based on material livelihood have receded, with people having to leave rural communities to earn their own income through informal work, small businesses, or as contracted and subcontracted workers. It is more challenging to mobilize collectively around livelihood needs given this out-migration, diversity of incomes, and individualization.⁸ Instead of ensuring viable returns to peasant farming or stable employment, the Peruvian neoliberal state has offered poverty alleviation funds to individuals and transfers to local governments, which are most easily used for urban infrastructure.⁹ This coincides with the sidelining of the *comunidad* in favor of the municipality.

This constitutes a new landscape of what is possible in terms of what can be demanded and how. *Comunidades* and municipalities are both political structures that people can use to make demands of the state, which remains the primary source of policy and funds. The former is first and foremost a communal polity based on shared economic interests, whereas the latter is less obviously so. As the literature discussed here has shown, in some cases, communities have opted for municipal over *comunidad* status as the grounds for common purpose have changed to attachment to place over shared material concerns. In

⁸ In urban areas, it is not impossible to mobilize collectively, as the Argentinean *piqueteros* movement showed (Perez 2018).

⁹ These include the Juntos conditional cash transfer to parents of young children living in poverty, and Pensión 65, a modest payment to seniors living in poverty. There is no space to discuss them further here (see Vincent 2020, 2021).

others, common property has kept the *comunidad* vibrant. Allpachico gives insight into another situation, one where livelihood activities are no longer closely aligned but municipal status is not possible. Still, the people continue to mobilize to express collective will, taking advantage of the organizational capacity of the *comunidad* to lobby the municipal government. This shows the importance of the communal habitus that spurs a willingness to work for the common good. If Allpachiqueños no longer engage in the same livelihood activities, they do still share a common interest in the place, and that includes both its economic viability and its attractiveness as a location. The affective commitment to Allpachico of both residents and migrants, their social interactions, their desire to live comfortable and pleasurable lives—the stuff of lifestyle—provide the impetus for their current political mobilization to improve their community. Hence, they work together to build the plazas, stadiums, public lighting, paved streets, and so on, because this is what they can do now.

This is a very different form of political activism from that of forty years ago, in terms of goals as well as being highly localized instead of linked to national organizations. In some places, those localized goals involve a defense of territory, the environment, or a share of the profits from mineral extraction (e.g., Gustafsson 2016). If in others, as in Allpachico, they seek improvements to lifestyle rather than demanding assurance of livelihood from the state, it is because that is what is possible, a politics of the pragmatic. As set out here, lifestyle and livelihood are integrated in common purpose, and common purpose still inspires people to political mobilization. This keeps alive the collective practices that could be accessed in the future for broad movements for better lives for all.

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