

CARR CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY
HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL

Peru's Indigenous and Rural Grassroots Civil Resistance Against the Extractive Sector



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The Topol Research Fellowship recognizes and supports Harvard Kennedy School students interested in, and committed to, nonviolent action.

The Topol Fellowship aims to help students to develop a more robust, evidence-based and comprehensive understanding of nonviolent resistance movements, and to deepen their knowledge about nonviolent movements around the world. Topol Fellows support data collection at the Nonviolent Action Lab, attend a monthly discussion group on nonviolent action, and attend a global nonviolent action summit.

Peru is a resource-rich country where mining dominates the extractive industry, though hydrocarbon (oil and gas) extraction and logging are also present. In fact, the mining industry — which has around 200 active mines throughout the country and 48 mining projects worth \$57.7 billion in investment currently under development — accounts for 10% of Peru's GDP and 60% of its exports.¹ This creates an incentive for the government to protect and promote mining investment, many times at the expense of the interests of local communities.

Therefore, it's no wonder that some of the most visible social conflicts in Peru over the last two decades have been related to extractive industries. One example is the 2009 Baguazo massacre in the Amazonas region which resulted in at least 33 dead and many more wounded after police and military forces tried to forcefully remove indigenous protesters who had been blocking the highway for months in their fight against oil drilling that affected their land.² Another example took place in Cajamarca, also in northern Peru, where peasant patrols, or *rondas campesinas*, organized to protest the Conga mining project that risked polluting water sources and soil.³ Additionally, the *rondos* mobilized in support of Maxima Acuña Chaupe, an activist, who fought to keep her family's land out of the hands of the Yanacocha mining consortium that was developing the Conga project.⁴ Over the last decade, the *rondas campesinas* of Cajamarca have actively organized to fight the expansion of mining projects like Conga in the region despite continued state repression as activists are arrested, beaten, and killed by government security forces.

As of May 2021, Peru's ombudsman office registered 191 cases of social conflict in the country. Out of those, 124 were socio-environmental conflicts, 80 related to mining and 24 to hydrocarbon extraction.⁵ Out of the 124 cases, 95 are active

cases (60 mining and 23 hydrocarbons) and most are located in Loreto with 18, nine in Cusco, five in Puno, five in Junin, seven in Pasco, five in Apurimac, eight in Ancash, and six in Cajamarca.⁶ Out of the 95 active cases of socioenvironmental conflicts, 71 cases have transitioned into the dialogue phase, and the rest are mostly in the de-escalating phase (before the dialogue phase) or the initial phase where claims have been made and grievances have been stated but it's still unclear whether mobilization or active civil resistance will occur.⁷



¹ "Peru-Country Commercial Guide: Mining Equipment and Machinery." U.S. International Trade Administration, 11 Oct. 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/peru-mining-equipment>.

² "Dozens of Indigenous absolved in Peru's 2009 'Baguazo' massacre." *Bilaterals.org*, 22 Sept. 2016, <https://www.bilaterals.org/?dozens-of-indigenous-absolved-in>

³ Sullivan, Lynda. "Peru's Conga Mine Conflict: Cajamarca Won't Capitulate." *Upside Down World*, 1 May 2014, <https://upside-downworld.org/archives/peru-archives/perus-conga-mine-conflict-cajamarca>.

⁴ "Rondos se pronuncian ante el hostigamiento que ha puesto en peligro la vida de Máxima Acuña y su familia." *Grufides*, 6 Aug. 2015, <http://grufides.org/blog/rondos-se-pronuncian-ante-el-hostigamiento>.

⁵ "Reporte de Conflictos Sociales N. 207." Defensoría del Pueblo, May 2021, <https://www.defensoria.gob.pe/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Reporte-Mensual-de-Conflictos-Sociales>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ As categorized by the Ombudsman office in the "Reporte de Conflictos Sociales N. 207." Defensoría del Pueblo, May 2021.

What social conflicts related to extractive industries have in common is that they tend to originate in rural areas where the mining projects are located. The main protagonists are local community members, mostly from indigenous backgrounds, who want to stop the development of extractive megaprojects by large national and multinational private companies. Their claims against extractive projects often include a combination of environmental concerns, land rights, claims to self-determination, and demands for greater developmental and economic benefits from the mining activity to the local communities. Despite these similarities, not all cases of social conflict related to extractive industries reach the levels of mobilization or visibility as the Baguazo and Conga examples described above. In some cases, mobilization remains limited and localized without coordinated collective action or enough momentum to scale the efforts.

A key question is: how are communities converging around extractive issues able to organize and engage in active civil resistance? What facilitates collective action and protest movements in these contexts? Though there are many factors that influence grassroots mobilization, it is important to recognize the community organizations and shared identities among protestors in this context that have been vital to overcome the challenges to collective action and facilitate the development of protest movements despite limited resources.

The Baguazo example showcases one of the most visible episodes of indigenous protest movements that were met with brutal police repression. The massacre was the climax of years of conflict between Amazonian indigenous peoples and the government's interest in expanding the exploitation of natural resources through land concessions for mining and oil drilling in the region. The Awajún and Wampi peoples were

protagonists of the protests against extractive industries in the Amazonas region. To fight the state and protect their land, they drew from their shared indigenous identity to organize around their community.⁸ At a regional level, they relied on existing organizations such as the Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (Interethnic Association of Development of the Peruvian Jungle, AIDESEP), which was founded in the early '80s by indigenous communities and currently represents 1,809 indigenous communities.⁹

As part of a larger transnational network of organizations that aim to bolster indigenous rights, AIDESEP was able to engage other environmental organizations.¹⁰ The collective power of the indigenous communities and their organizational capacity helped them mobilize at a regional level on a scale that the government had not expected.¹¹ Ultimately, the events at the Baguazo catalyzed key national legislation in the form of the Law of Prior Consultation of Indigenous and Original Peoples to be approved in 2011.¹² This law requires the government to consult and try to get approval from indigenous populations for any decisions regarding concessions that could affect them. Despite the limitations of the law and how it's implemented — ranging from consultations that are done too quickly, too late in the process, or not taken seriously¹³ — this law now forms part of the legal toolbox that helps protect the interests of indigenous communities.

The Conga case in Cajamarca presents a different context and way of organizing. Though the Peruvian highlands are also highly populated by indigenous peoples, communities are not as organized around the indigenous identity as they are in the Amazon region. Instead, people are organized around the often denominated peasant communities, or *comunidades campesinas*, that exist as agricultural communities.¹⁴ This means that mobilizing and civil resistance in this context

⁸ Arce, Moises. *Resource Extraction and Protest in Peru*. 2014.

⁹ "Quienes Somos." AIDESEP, <http://www.aidesep.org.pe/index.php/quienes-somos-interno>

¹⁰ "Peru-Bagua: Derramamiento de Sangre en el del paro Amazonico urge abrir dialogo de buena fe." *Federacion Internacional de Derechos Humanos*, Oct. 2009, <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/amer/pe529e.pdf>

¹¹ Arce, Moises. *Resource Extraction and Protest in Peru*. 2014.

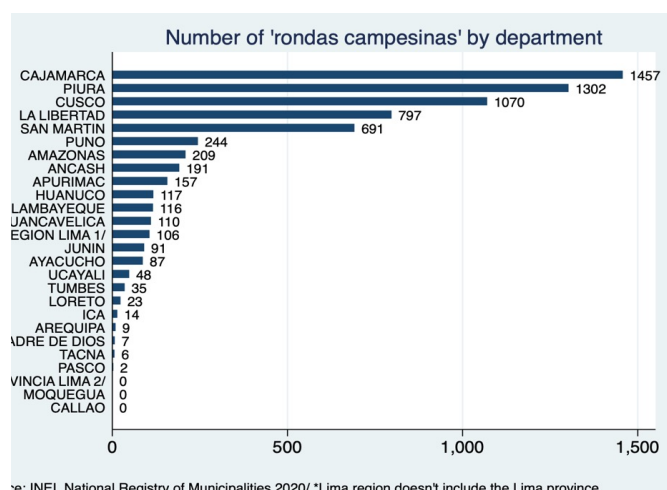
¹² Sanborn, Cynthia & Paredes, Alvaro. "Consulta Previa Perú." *Americas Quarterly*, <https://www.as-coa.org/sites/default/files/ConsultaPreviaPeru.pdf>.

¹³ "Cuales son las limitaciones de la Consulta Previa?" *SERVINDI*, 2018, <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/25/01/2018/cuales-son-las-limitaciones-de-la-consulta-previa>.

¹⁴ Merritt Fulmer, Amanda. "Human Rights and International Law from the Ground Up: Mining, Indigenous Communities, and the Community Consultation Movement in Latin America." University of Washington, 2020, https://digital.lib.washington.edu/research-works/bitstream/handle/1773/46161/Fulmer_washington.

relies on pre-existing community organizations that support the agricultural economy.¹⁵ In Cajamarca, as well as throughout much of northern and southern Peru, *rondas campesinas* have been a type of community organization that played a key role in facilitating grassroots mobilizations within and across communities at the local and regional levels.

Rondas campesinas emerged in the 1970s as community organizations that organized men in the community to carry out night watch activities to combat cattle theft. However, over time, they developed organizational legacies and built internal capacity as their roles evolved.¹⁶ Despite government attempts to co-opt the rondas and repress them when co-optation didn't work, rondas become stronger organizations that spread throughout the country, but especially in the northern and southern regions in Cajamarca, Piura, Cusco, La Libertad, San Martín, and Puno (see figure below).¹⁷



The local and autonomous nature of the rondas, along with their democratic structure, ensures full community participation and engagement. This has strengthened the *rondero* identity and made rondas permanent organizations ingrained in many aspects of community life.¹⁸ The role of the rondas now goes beyond just fighting crime, as they often help fill gaps in governance due to low state presence.¹⁹ In addition to patrolling their communities, rondas engage in local organizing and development projects often in parallel or in conjunction with the official elected government.²⁰ The *ronderos* act as representatives of their communities, organize communal work, establish order in community activities, help settle disputes among community members, and even dole out communal justice.²¹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, many rondas have implemented and monitored compliance with safety protocols in their communities.²²

Rondas have formed and coalesced around regional and national *rondero* organizations, like the Central Unica Nacional de Rondas Campesinas del Peru (Single National Center of Rondas Campesinas of Peru, CUNARC-P), which also has regional bases, that help coordinate activity and agendas at a larger scale. However, unlike other types of rural organizations that are vulnerable to fragmentation when interests and ideologies diverge, rondas are able to remain cohesive at the local level even when conflict emerges at the regional or national level because of their decentralized structure and community role. For example, even though Cajamarca's rondas campesinas were divided into two factions at the regional level — the Federación Departamental de Rondas Campesinas y Urbanas de Cajamarca (Departmental Federation of Peasant and Urban Rondas of Cajamarca)

¹⁵ Arce, Moises. *Resource Extraction and Protest in Peru*. 2014.

¹⁶ "Fundación de las Rondas Campesinas." CUNARC Peru, <https://www.cunarcperu.com/index.php>.

¹⁷ According to statistics from the National Registry of Municipalities

¹⁸ Merritt Fulmer, Amanda. "Human Rights and International Law from the Ground Up: Mining, Indigenous Communities, and the Community Consultation Movement in Latin America."

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Cornejo, Mayumi. "Development of Civil Society: The Effect of State Intervention on Peasant Auto-Defense Organizations in Peru." 2015.

²¹ Piccoli, Emmanuelle. "Las rondas campesinas y su reconocimiento estatal, dificultades y contradicciones de un encuentro: un enfoque antropológico sobre el caso de Cajamarca, Perú." *Scielo*, vol. 22, no.71, 2009, http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_art-text&pid=

²² Morales Tovar, Mirelis. "Coronavirus en Perú: la región que contuvo con éxito la pandemia (y qué papel jugó la "violencia simbólica" de las rondas campesinas)." BBC News, 13 July 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-53340207>.

How are communities
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and the Federación de Rondas Campesinas Femeninas de Cajamarca (Women's Federation Peasant Rondas of Cajamarca, FEROCAFENOP)²³ — due to ideological and political differences, the rondas in Cajamarca remained strong. Even as the FEROCAFENOP lost legitimacy due to its short-lived alliance with the Yanacocha mining company, the rondas have mostly remained unified under the CUNARC-P.²⁴

This resiliency is due in large part to the fact that each local ronda is autonomous with power that is derived directly from the community. This creates a strong pre-existing structure that facilitates the recruitment and mobilizing of people in a coordinated manner at various levels and can fuel mobilizing activities.²⁵ A key example is the conflict over Mount Quilish in Cajamarca during 1999-2004, which was key in starting the anti-mining movement in the region and was the precursor to the Conga mining conflict.²⁶ When the Yanacocha mining consortium sought to expand its mining activity into Mount Quilish, putting key water sources at risk, thousands of ronderos mobilized to stage protests, block roads used by the mining company, and temporarily drive out the mining company's heavy machinery.²⁷ The struggle further intensified in 2000 when a liquid mercury spill contaminated three small towns, including Choropampa, and poisoned more than 900 people.²⁸ As people sought to make Yanacocha take responsibility for the spill and the consequences on the health of those affected, ronderos were able to bolster the movement fighting for Quilish.

As other local organizations and environmental NGOs joined the struggle, the movement to protect Mount Quilish from mining

continued to gain momentum at the provincial and regional levels.²⁹ In fact, in September 2004, thousands of people, largely ronderos, mobilized and blocked access to the mine for two weeks. Though faced with police violence and repression, the protestors achieved their goal when in November 2004, the mining company announced that it would stop mining exploration activities in Mount Quilish.³⁰

The fight to protect Mount Quilish was a key precedent for the rondas of Cajamarca. It established the foundation to build an anti-mining movement in the region, continued mobilizing against several mining projects including Conga, and offered support to other rondas engaged in similar conflicts in other regions. Thus, throughout the country, rondas campesinas have become key stakeholders in leading socio-environmental mobilizations to protect their communities and interests against the extractive industry.

In areas of the country where rondas campesinas are not as prevalent, there have also been cases of large-scale anti-mining mobilizations, as is the case of the protests against the Tía María mining project by Southern Peru Copper mining company in Arequipa. In cases like these, other types of civil society organizations and community organizations like irrigation committees, local defense fronts, unions, neighborhood associations, agricultural organizations, and NGOs served to mobilize the population.³¹ Still, it is important to recognize that while rondas campesinas are not necessary for grassroots mobilization, the shared rondero identity throughout communities and pre-existing local organizational structures

²³ Seo, Ji-Hyun. "Neoliberal Extractivism and Rural Resistance: The Anti-Mining Movement in the Peruvian Northern Highlands, Cajamarca (2011-2013)." University of Liverpool, Sept 2014, <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/2004499/1/JIHYUN%20SEO%20PhD.pdf>.

²⁴ López Meza, I. D. P. "Discursos de las rondas campesinas de Cajamarca en el contexto del conflicto y su resistencia frente al megaproyecto minero Conga." Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, 2019, doi: <https://doi.org/10.19083/tesis/625282>

²⁵ Seo, Ji-Hyun. "Neoliberal Extractivism and Rural Resistance: The Anti-Mining Movement in the Peruvian Northern Highlands, Cajamarca (2011-2013)." University of Liverpool, Sept 2014, <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/2004499/1/JIHYUN%20SEO%20PhD.pdf>.

²⁶ Isla, Ana. "The Guardians of Conga Lagoons." Canadian Woman Studies, vol. 30, no. 2, 3, 2015, <https://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/viewFile/37448/33996>.

²⁷ Chacon, E. Raul. "El caso Yanacocha: crónica de la lucha frente a una contaminación minera inevitable." Ecología Política, no. 26, 2003, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=1255881>.

²⁸ Isla, Ana. "The Guardians of Conga Lagoons." Canadian Woman Studies, vol. 30, no. 2, 3, 2015.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ "Yanacocha." Earthworks, <https://www.earthworks.org/stories/yanacocha/>.

³¹ Condori, Zenaida. "Tía María: distintos gremios convocan a paro indefinido desde el 5 de agosto." Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina, 4 Aug. 2019, <https://www.ocmal.org/tia-maria-distintos-gremios-convocan-a-paro-indefinido-desde-el-5-de-agosto/>

that rondas create makes grassroots mobilization easier for these communities, ensures a strong and cohesive foundation for movement building, and increases the capacity for cross-regional cooperation and organizing.

Extractive activity throughout Peru tends to more heavily impact indigenous peoples and rural communities, putting rondas campesinas and indigenous communities at the forefront of socio-environmental conflicts. This makes the autonomy of rondas campesinas and indigenous communities critical as they continue to strengthen their organizational capacities and create mobilizing power to protect their interests, all while facing challenges and repression from the state. Thus, to protect their organizational structures, their legacy, and their legitimacy, it is critical that they avoid co-optation by government or political forces. Ultimately, the organization of rondas and indigenous communities around shared cultural identities and interests, as well as their pre-existing organizational structures, is what makes their capacity to facilitate grassroots mobilization and civil resistance at various levels one of the most valuable resources that indigenous peoples and communities have.

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