Self-Organized Rupture: The Pucallpazo and Bottom-Up Institutional Change in the Peruvian Amazon (1978–1981)

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Abstract

This article examines the Pucallpazo (1978–1981), a mass mobilization in the Amazonian city of Pucallpa that culminated in the creation of the Department of Ucayali and a reorganization of Peru's territorial state. Integrating Hogan's (2006) Remoulded Critical Junctures framework with insights from Mahoney & Thelen (2010) and adaptive complex-systems theory (Miller & Page 2007), the study diagnoses whether this transformation represented a case of gradual adaptation or a bottom-up critical juncture.

Using qualitative process tracing and hermeneutic reconstruction of fragmented local archives and oral histories, the analysis identifies a three-stage mechanism linking endogenous tension, emergent mobilization, and institutional rupture. The Pucallpazo satisfies Hogan's SSE criteria—significance, swiftness, and encompassing scope—confirming it as a self-organized rupture that redefined sovereignty relations between center and periphery.

Comparative evidence shows that while many Latin American bottom-up movements expand participation, few cross the threshold of reconfiguration. The Pucallpazo achieved this by combining cross-sectoral coalition-building, strategic non-violence, and the juridical translation of protest into law. The study concludes that subnational contention can generate state rescaling from below, offering new methodological and theoretical tools for understanding how emergent, peripheral mobilizations produce enduring institutional change.

Keywords

Critical junctures; bottom-up democratization; adaptive complex systems; institutional change; state rescaling; subnational politics; Peru; Pucallpazo; historical institutionalism; emergent coordination; self-organized mobilization; Amazonian region.

Introduction

In 1978, a mass mobilization erupted in the Amazonian city of Pucallpa, a peripheral district then belonging to the Department of Loreto. What began as a regional protest rapidly transformed into a political event of national resonance: within three years, this collective action led to the legal creation of a new department—Ucayali—thereby altering Peru's territorial and administrative structure. This episode, known as *the Pucallpazo*, stands as the only case in Peruvian history in which a district-level population successfully achieved the foundation of a new department. How can such an event be characterized in institutional terms? Was it a gradual adaptation of the centralist state, or did it represent a discontinuous rupture—a *critical juncture*—that redefined the country's political geography?

This article argues that the Pucallpazo constitutes a subnational critical juncture—a moment of discontinuous institutional change that reconfigured the Peruvian state's relationship with its Amazonian periphery. Following Hogan's (2006) *Remoulded Critical Junctures Approach*, a critical juncture occurs when a pre-existing structural cleavage generates a rupture that leads to *significant, swift, and encompassing* institutional transformation. In the case of Pucallpa, the *generative cleavage* was the long-standing distributional conflict inherent in the center–periphery divide, which had left the city politically and economically subordinated to Loreto's distant capital, Iquitos. The first Pucallpazo in 1978 activated this cleavage, marking the moment when subordinate actors ceased to comply with the existing institutional arrangement and mobilized to overwhelm the central state's capacity to sustain the status quo. The subsequent creation of the Department of Ucayali (1980–1981) produced a reorganization of state authority, not a mere administrative reform.

Not all institutional transformations arise from rupture, however. As Hogan (2006) emphasizes, many historical sequences unfold through *layering, conversion, drift,* or *displacement*, mechanisms of gradual change that modify institutions without breaking them. Building on this insight, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) argue that institutional change is not driven solely by exogenous shocks but can emerge endogenously, from within institutions themselves. Because rules are inherently ambiguous and their enforcement contested, institutions are political orders whose continuity requires active maintenance and mobilization. Change occurs when actors exploit these ambiguities or when power shifts weaken the coalitions that sustain compliance. Distinguishing between such internal, gradual adaptations and truly discontinuous ruptures is essential for identifying when a process constitutes a full critical juncture. The Pucallpazo cannot be categorized under any of these gradual mechanisms: it did not layer new rules atop old ones, reinterpret existing norms, or drift through neglect. Rather, it replaced the existing territorial order altogether through deliberate collective action and state negotiation—an abrupt and irreversible institutional rupture.

The literature on democratization and institutional change in Latin America has long been dominated by top-down, national-level explanations that emphasize elite pacts, negotiated transitions, and macroeconomic reform (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986; Huntington 2002). More recent scholarship, however, has turned attention to subnational and mobilization-driven

processes, where collective action, protest, and local experimentation challenge centralized authority. Studies from Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico, Argentina, and Chile reveal that bottom-up or hybrid movements can at times prompt negotiation or reform, but rarely achieve durable institutional redesign (Abers 2000; Leyva Solano 2005; Silva 2009; Postero 2017; Somma & Donoso 2022). Against this backdrop, the *Pucallpazo* stands out as a rare case in which collective protest produced a formal and enduring reorganization of the state, resulting in the creation of an entirely new department within Peru.

The analytical contribution of this study is twofold. First, it extends the critical juncture framework to the subnational scale, demonstrating that such ruptures can occur within the territorial dimensions of the state. Second, it proposes an integrated framework for identifying types of institutional change, combining Hogan's criteria for discontinuous transformation with Mahoney and Thelen's logic of endogenous change. This synthesis allows us to recognize how the endogenous tensions and distributional conflicts that Mahoney and Thelen identify as engines of gradual change can, under conditions of mass mobilization and shifting power balances, overwhelm an institution's adaptive capacity and trigger a Hogan-style critical juncture. In doing so, the paper bridges two strands of historical institutionalism often treated separately: the study of gradual change and the analysis of critical junctures.

Empirically, the paper relies on a combination of archival sources, press materials, and official documents from the late 1970s and early 1980s, complemented by interpretive analysis grounded in historical institutionalism. The approach follows a process-tracing logic, examining how structural conditions (the Amazonian cleavage) interacted with contingent events (mass mobilization, negotiation, and state response) to produce institutional transformation. Rather than viewing the Pucallpazo as an isolated rebellion, it is treated as the *critical node* in a longer trajectory of Amazonian political assertion.

The argument unfolds in five parts. The next section situates the study within the literature on institutional change and democratization, outlining the distinction between gradual and discontinuous transformations. The third section introduces Hogan's (2006) remoulded framework of critical junctures and operationalizes its criteria for the subnational context. The fourth section presents the empirical analysis of the Pucallpazo, identifying the generative cleavage and evaluating the *significance, swiftness, and encompassing nature* of the ensuing change. The fifth section contrasts this process with the mechanisms of gradual change described in Streeck and Thelen (2005) and Mahoney and Thelen (2010), underscoring why the Pucallpazo represents a discontinuous rupture. The conclusion discusses the broader implications for understanding state formation, regional autonomy, and democratization "from below" in Latin America.

Ultimately, this article argues that the Pucallpazo stands as a paradigmatic case of critical-juncture-driven institutional change at the subnational level. Through collective action, a marginalized region compelled the Peruvian state to reconfigure its own architecture—an outcome rarely observed in the country's highly centralized history. By clarifying the type of change the Pucallpazo represents, the paper contributes to both theoretical refinement and empirical understanding of how endogenous institutional tensions, when activated by structural

cleavages and political mobilization, can generate transformative and enduring institutional outcomes.

2. Theoretical Framework: Diagnosing Institutional Rupture

The study of institutional change has long been structured by a fundamental dichotomy between theories of gradual evolution and models of abrupt rupture. For decades, the punctuated-equilibrium model, which posits long periods of stability interrupted by exogenous shocks, dominated the field. More recently, scholars have argued that significant change often occurs incrementally through endogenous processes within institutions. This *gradualist turn* provides powerful tools for explaining adaptation but risks overlooking moments of genuine discontinuity. This section develops an integrated framework to distinguish between these modes of change, combining the logic of endogenous tension with clear criteria for identifying ruptural transformation.

2.1 The Foundations of Endogenous Change

Following Mahoney and Thelen (2010), institutions are best conceived not as neutral rule systems but as distributional instruments laden with power implications. Rules embody political compromises, and sustaining them requires continuous mobilization by those who benefit. Because rules are ambiguous and enforcement contested, stability is never automatic. Actors continually interpret and renegotiate rules to advance their interests. Institutional continuity is therefore a dynamic political outcome, and institutional change a potential product of internal properties—shifting power balances, erosion of compliance, or strategic reinterpretation.

2.2 The Mechanisms of Gradual Transformation

Building on this view, Streeck and Thelen (2005) systematize the study of endogenous change by identifying five distinct modes of gradual transformation. These mechanisms demonstrate how institutions can be fundamentally altered without overt breakdown or replacement and provide a diagnostic baseline: if an empirical case cannot be characterized by one of these modes, a more discontinuous dynamic is at work.

1. Displacement – the rise of subordinate or latent institutions through *defection* from the dominant logic.

2. Layering – introduction of new rules atop existing ones, producing change through *differential growth*.

3. Drift – shifts in outcomes from *deliberate neglect* amid changing environments.

4. Conversion – *reinterpretation* or *redirection* of existing institutions toward new purposes.

5. Exhaustion – gradual *self-undermining* or depletion of an institution's capacity to reproduce itself.

These modes reveal that stability and change are deeply intertwined but share a premise: transformation occurs *within the shell* of the existing order. They explain adaptation, not replacement.

2.3 Critical Junctures: The Criteria for Discontinuous Rupture

In contrast, the critical-juncture framework explains moments of discontinuous rupture. For Hogan (2006), a critical juncture is not merely rapid change but a historical moment when a pre-existing structural cleavage—a deep line of political or social division—is activated, producing a rupture that is significant, swift, and encompassing (SSE). The framework identifies when endogenous tensions exceed an institution's adaptive capacity, leading to a decisive break from the past.

- Significant change redefines core authority relations and redistributes power, transforming the institution's purpose rather than merely adjusting policy.

- Swift change unfolds within a compressed temporal window, accelerating political realignment and setting a durable trajectory.

- Encompassing change extends beyond a single institution to reshape adjacent structures and relationships, altering jurisdictional or territorial boundaries with systemic consequences.

Together, these SSE criteria establish the empirical threshold for a critical juncture—a discontinuity in institutional logic and historical tempo that reorders the political system.

2.3.1 Micro-foundations of activation.

While Hogan defines *what* constitutes a critical juncture, insights from adaptive complex-systems theory (Miller & Page 2007) clarify *how* such ruptures emerge from decentralized dynamics. In adaptive systems, heterogeneous agents interact locally, producing non-linear feedback and sensitivity to initial conditions that allow small disturbances to scale into systemic transformations. Applied to Hogan's model, the "activation" of a cleavage can be understood as an emergent process: uncoordinated actors, responding to shared constraints, form unexpected alignments that overwhelm an institution's capacity for incremental adaptation. This perspective provides Hogan's framework with a behavioral foundation, explaining how bottom-up mobilization can trigger rupture through the self-organizing logic of complex systems.

2.4 An Integrated Diagnostic Framework

Bringing these perspectives together enables a precise diagnosis of institutional change. Mahoney and Thelen explain *why* institutions are vulnerable to transformation through internal conflicts and ambiguous enforcement. Streeck and Thelen specify *how* gradual change unfolds through identifiable mechanisms. Hogan defines *when* tensions culminate in rupture. The adaptive-systems lens adds *how* heterogeneous actors' interactions activate these tensions and push them beyond institutional thresholds.

This synthesis produces a continuum for analysis:

- Under low or managed tension, change proceeds through gradual mechanisms such as layering or conversion.

- Under escalating tension and weakened enforcement, drift or displacement become more likely.

- When accumulated endogenous tension intersects with a structural cleavage and emergent, uncoordinated mobilization generates unexpected alignments, the result is a critical juncture that overwhelms institutional adaptation.

This integrated model functions as a diagnostic tool. It first tests whether a case fits gradual-change patterns; if not, it evaluates the evidence against the SSE criteria for rupture. It also situates bottom-up democratization within this continuum, showing how collective mobilization—normally an engine of incremental reform—can, under specific conditions, yield emergent, discontinuous transformations in state structure.

2.5 Research Question and Analytical Expectation

This framework leads to the central question guiding this study:
Under what conditions can bottom-up democratization processes produce a discontinuous reconfiguration of state institutions, rather than being absorbed through gradual adaptation?

Applied to the Peruvian case, the analysis asks whether the *Pucallpazo*—a subnational episode of collective mobilization—represented a process of incremental adjustment within a centralized state or a critical juncture that redefined the territorial architecture of the Peruvian state.

The study adopts a diagnostic testing logic in which rupture (Hogan 2006)—an endogenous critical juncture characterized by significant, swift, and encompassing change—constitutes the null hypothesis, and gradualism (Streeck & Thelen 2005)—endogenous, incremental adaptation through mechanisms such as layering, drift, or conversion—serves as the alternative hypothesis.
 The following analysis proceeds by first assessing whether the *Pucallpazo* can be explained through any gradual-change mechanism; only if these alternatives fail to account for the

evidence will the event be evaluated against Hogan's criteria to determine whether accumulated endogenous tensions between center and periphery, activated through mass mobilization, produced a rupture that was significant, swift, and encompassing.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design centered on process tracing to reconstruct, interpret, and empirically contrast the stages of the subnational democratization process triggered by the *Pucallpazo*.

The objective is to diagnose whether this episode constitutes a critical juncture in Hogan's (2006) sense—an institutional rupture that was significant, swift, and encompassing (SSE)—or a case of gradual institutional adaptation, as conceptualized by Streeck and Thelen (2005).

The investigation unfolds in four stages:

1) Historical antecedents—the long-term configuration of the center–periphery cleavage;
2) Activation of the potential juncture—the protest cycles known as the *Pucallpazos*;
3) Bottom-up democratization—the movement's immediate effects and legacies; and
4) Interpretive synthesis—integration of empirical evidence to determine whether the transformation meets Hogan's SSE criteria, distinguishing rupture from gradual evolution.

3.1 A Qualitative Process-Tracing Approach

At the core of this research is a process-tracing methodology (Collier 2011) designed to uncover the causal mechanisms linking the pre-existing center–periphery cleavage to the eventual institutional outcome. Process tracing functions here as a diagnostic instrument rather than a linear narrative, allowing systematic evaluation of competing causal explanations of institutional change.

The study adopts a diagnostic testing strategy in which *rupture*—a critical juncture producing significant, swift, and encompassing change—constitutes the null hypothesis, and *gradualism*—Streeck and Thelen's incremental mechanisms—serves as the alternative hypothesis. The analysis seeks to falsify the rupture hypothesis by testing the fit of gradual mechanisms; only if none suffice is the null retained, confirming that the *Pucallpazo* represents a critical juncture.

As Mahoney and Thelen (2010) note, earlier theories of institutional change often relied on exogenous shocks—wars or crises—as triggers of transformation. Their critique, echoed by Streeck and Thelen (2005) and Hogan (2006), highlights that durable institutions contain the seeds of their own change. Transformation is primarily endogenous, emerging from power asymmetries, rule ambiguity, and accumulated tension. Exogenous events may activate these

contradictions but do not determine outcomes. Accordingly, this research tests only between endogenous pathways: gradual adaptation and discontinuous rupture.

While Hogan provides the diagnostic criteria, the micro-dynamics of activation can be illuminated through adaptive complex-systems theory (Miller & Page 2007). The *Pucallpazo* evolved through decentralized interactions among heterogeneous actors that generated non-linear feedback and emergent coordination without centralized control. The "unexpected alignments" that Hogan associates with critical-juncture activation can thus be understood as the product of an adaptive system sensitive to initial conditions, where minor local triggers produced cascading effects that overwhelmed the state's capacity for incremental adjustment. Integrating this perspective clarifies *how* bottom-up democratization can move from dispersed contention to systemic rupture.

3.2 Data Collection and Triangulation

Given the fragmentary nature of the local historical record, the study relies on methodological triangulation to ensure validity across heterogeneous sources. As Tuesta (2005, 14–15) reports, most local newspapers and magazines documenting Pucallpa's mobilization were lost in fires during the 1980s or discarded in the 1990s. To compensate for this archival void, three complementary data streams were employed:

1. Documentary analysis – systematic review of official records, decrees, press coverage, and union or civic-organization documents.

2. Audiovisual materials – journalistic documentaries and video archives containing direct testimonies from social leaders, journalists, and officials.

3. Oral history and interviews – fieldwork interviews with union leaders, political authorities, and journalists, providing insight into internal dynamics and contested interpretations absent from formal archives.

The interview material reveals multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the events. These divergences are treated not as inconsistencies but as part of the social construction of the episode itself. Their analytical implications are examined in Section 4, where the heterogeneity of testimonies becomes central evidence for tracing the emergent and uncoordinated character of the *Pucallpazo* mobilization.

3.3 Analytical Procedure: Diagnosing a Critical Juncture

The empirical analysis follows a structured diagnostic sequence mirroring the theoretical framework:

1. Establishing the cleavage (4.1): trace the long-term center–periphery divide.

2. Analyzing mobilization (4.2–4.3): reconstruct the protest cycles of 1978–1981.

3. Testing gradual mechanisms (4.4): compare evidence to Streeck & Thelen's five modes of gradual transformation.

4. Evaluating rupture (4.5): apply Hogan's SSE criteria to determine whether the creation of the Department of Ucayali constituted an institutional rupture.

This sequence functions as a falsification test: if any gradual-change mechanism plausibly accounts for the process, the rupture hypothesis is rejected; if none do and the SSE conditions hold, a bottom-up critical juncture is confirmed.

3.4 Methodological Constraints and Ethical Considerations

Evidence is incomplete and uneven. Triangulation mitigates these limitations, and cross-checking oral testimonies against contemporaneous documents reduces memory bias. Each account is contextualized within its institutional role and historical moment to avoid over-reliance on retrospective interpretation.

All interviews were handled with ethical sensitivity and confidentiality, recognizing participants' right to interpret their own histories. Contradictions among sources are approached as indicators of political contestation—an intrinsic feature of the *Pucallpazo*'s democratizing process.

By combining process tracing with a triangulated, multi-source evidence base, this research reconstructs how a peripheral protest evolved into a potential institutional rupture. The next section applies this design to trace the historical antecedents of the center–periphery cleavage that made the *Pucallpazo* possible.

4. Empirical Analysis: The Pucallpazo and the Activation of the Center–Periphery Cleavage

This section applies the diagnostic framework developed earlier to the Peruvian case, tracing how long-standing structural dependence evolved into an episode of collective mobilization and institutional rupture. The analysis proceeds sequentially—from the historical formation of the cleavage to its activation, escalation, and resolution—culminating in a systematic test of whether the *Pucallpazo* represents a gradual adaptation or a bottom-up critical juncture.

4.1 Historical Antecedents and the Long Arc of Peripheral Dependence

The 1978 *Pucallpazo* was not an isolated outburst but the culmination of a long-simmering distributional conflict rooted in Pucallpa's subordination within the Department of Loreto. This enduring center–periphery cleavage, established between the creation of the Province of Coronel Portillo in 1943 and the late 1970s, was institutionalized through administrative neglect, fiscal extraction, and a fragmented jurisdictional system that systematically disadvantaged Pucallpa while concentrating power and resources in Iquitos. Three dimensions defined this latent tension: (i) rapid urban growth without commensurate authority, (ii) entrenched political and infrastructural subordination, and (iii) the emergence of a civic coalition demanding institutional change.

4.1.1 Lopsided Development: Urban Growth amid Institutional Constraint

Pucallpa's transformation from a remote settlement into a commercial hub deepened its subordinate status. The completion of the Federico Basadre Highway in 1943, linking Pucallpa to Lima, redefined the city as a "commercial center of the first order" (Ortiz 1962, 202) and "the most important commercial city in the Peruvian Amazon" (Dourojeanni 1990, 95). The road catalyzed demographic expansion: by 1972 Pucallpa and Iquitos together concentrated 34 percent of Loreto's population and nearly 70 percent of its urban residents (San Román et al. 1994, 231). Hospitals, schools, an airstrip, and a volunteer fire brigade signaled modernization—but not autonomy.

Material progress contrasted sharply with limited administrative prerogatives. Rapid urbanization created complex demands for services and infrastructure that the city's provincial status could not meet. The stage was set for confrontation between economic vitality and political marginalization—a classic *distributional conflict* over resources and authority.

4.1.2 The Architecture of Dependence: Political and Infrastructural Subordination

Pucallpa's subordination was institutionalized through a fragmented system of governance. While administered from Iquitos, judicial matters fell under Huánuco, educational affairs under Huancayo, and the mayor of Coronel Portillo was often appointed directly by the central government in Lima. This bizarre arrangement ensured that decisions on budgets, public works, and policy were made remotely, crippling local self-determination and generating chronic inefficiencies.

Fiscal and infrastructural neglect mirrored this hierarchy. In 1981, Maynas (Iquitos) absorbed 43 percent of Loreto's public investment, while Coronel Portillo received barely 11.7 percent (Vivanco Pimentel and Benzaquén Rengifo 1997, 246). As one local leader recalled, *"The largest percentage of the department's budget was absorbed by Iquitos... leaving almost nothing for our province"* (M. Vásquez Valera, interview, April 21 2022). Electricity functioned only a few hours a day, potable water was scarce, sewage systems were virtually nonexistent, and both the airport and river port remained precarious despite booming trade (Ortiz 1962; Vásquez Valera 2022). Education reflected similar neglect: only 4 percent of the population had tertiary training (J. Flores, interview, October 18 2022). Such deficits reinforced a collective sense of stunted development and exclusion.

4.1.3 From Malcontent to Movement: The Emergence of a Civic Coalition

Amid this context, a loosely connected civic coalition began translating diffuse grievances into a coherent demand for territorial autonomy.

- Media and Public Sphere. Outlets such as *Rumbos Amazónicos* and *Radio Pucallpa* amplified calls for self-government, cultivating a regional identity distinct from Iquitos and Lima and framing departmental creation as the solution to institutionalized neglect.

- Labor and Professional Unions. The Drivers' Union—led by Carlos Pezo Sánchez and Julio Flores—mobilized around road conditions and fuel shortages. Alongside bank employees (FEB, STBN), teachers (SUTEP), and other guilds, they formed the backbone of organized protest. Their ability to secure funds for road paving in 1977 demonstrated the power of coordination.

- Broader Civic Networks. The Catholic Church, through Father Ángel Saboya Cachique, lent moral legitimacy. Business groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, frustrated by exclusion from regional decision-making, joined the cause. The *Septrionist*[1] network—professionals, entrepreneurs, and politicians—drafted proposals for a new region with its capital in Pucallpa.

This coalition was emergent rather than orchestrated: independent actors with disparate agendas converged around a shared narrative of territorial injustice. The accumulated endogenous tensions of marginalization, extraction, and neglect had crystallized into an organized civic force. By 1978 the latent cleavage described by Hogan (2006) was primed for activation—ready to transform long-standing dependence into open contestation.

4.1.4 Sources and Analytical Implications

Local newspapers that chronicled these conflicts were destroyed in 1980s fires or discarded in the 1990s (Tuesta 2005). This reconstruction therefore relies on secondary histories, official reports, and oral testimonies collected in later decades. Despite fragmentation, these materials converge on a coherent portrait of structural exclusion.

This long arc of dependence establishes a crucial baseline for the diagnosis: the institutional relationship was characterized by stasis, not gradual change. Loreto's authority over Pucallpa was not slowly exhausting itself, drifting, or being subtly converted; it remained a resilient yet contested structure. This persistent stability underscores that the eventual rupture would be a decisive break from a durable institutional order, not its gradual evolution. The accumulated and unaddressed tensions over decades thus created the very conditions of significance that would define the coming change.

4.2 Mobilization Dynamics and the First Pucallpazo

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[1] A mystic community that has had a relevant presence in the Amazonian regions.

As the previous section established, the structural conditions for rupture were in place. The *Pucallpazo* of 1978 activated this center–periphery cleavage. What had long been a structural tension—between an economically vibrant yet politically subordinate province and a distant, extractive capital—suddenly crystallized into collective action. The trigger was modest but symbolically charged: chronic shortages of fuel and cooking gas that paralyzed transportation and commerce. Local organizations read these shortages as evidence of systemic neglect by Loreto's authorities in Iquitos.

The protests that began as small, sectoral stoppages rapidly expanded. Drivers, bank employees, merchants, teachers, and students launched their own marches, yet no central authority coordinated the movement. Through local radio, personal networks, and ad hoc committees, disparate sectors synchronized within days. In the language of adaptive complex systems (Miller and Page 2007), this was an instance of emergent coordination: local interactions generated city-wide organization without hierarchy. Small triggers—roadblocks, impromptu rallies—produced feedback loops that magnified participation.

4.2.1 Fragmented Coalitions and Emergent Coordination

Participant testimonies underscore the decentralized character of the mobilization. Each group saw itself as the movement's nucleus and downplayed others' roles—revealing, paradoxically, the absence of a single organizing center.

> "We were the first—the first attempt to unify several guilds, and as you can see, there was no drivers' union there at all."
> — *Fernando Alfaro Venturo, former Secretary General, Bank Employees' Union*

> "A journalist who appears as a leader of the first great *Pucallpazo*: Marino Ganoza Trevitazzo—a corrupt journalist, from the yellow press, who I think came fleeing from Lima, but someone brought him."
> — *Fernando Alfaro Venturo*

Such contradictions exemplify what Hogan (2006) calls *unexpected alignments*—temporary convergences among actors who share no ideology but find joint purpose against entrenched authority. From an adaptive-systems perspective, these are traces of a self-organizing process in which heterogeneous actors generate coordination without central design.

4.2.2 Negotiating Restraint and Preserving Autonomy

Early coordination meetings revealed sharp tactical debates. Left-leaning activists proposed confrontational actions, while leaders of the Drivers' Union and local journalists insisted on a strictly civic and non-violent protest. As Eulogio Medina Ortiz, then Secretary of Coordination for the Drivers, recalled:

 "The Drivers' Union did not practice any partisan politics… The leftists always sought sectarianism and violence… and [Marino Ganoza Trevitazzo] told them to their faces: you are

reds, you seek blood, you are vampires." [2]

This exchange reflected a deliberate effort to block external ideological influence and maintain autonomy from party agendas.

The Drivers' Union ultimately initiated the protest, calling a city-wide stoppage that other groups soon joined. The paralysis of Pucallpa was total but bloodless—a stark contrast to the violent demonstrations seen elsewhere in Peru during the 1970s. By privileging discipline and civic legitimacy over confrontation, organizers preserved broad public support and reinforced the image of the *Pucallpazo* as an authentically local, non-partisan expression of collective will.

4.2.3 Political Parties and the Transitional Context

Although defense fronts and unions were not formally created or directed by political parties, partisan actors were present within the wider civic network. Comparative research shows that in subnational contexts with limited participation, parties often embed themselves—formally or informally—within civic networks (Kitschelt 2000; Levitsky and Cameron 2003). Their influence operates through personal ties and symbolic exchanges rather than organizational control.

In Pucallpa, this hybridization was clear. Journalists in *Rumbos Amazónicos* and *Sideral* were sympathetic to the Partido Aprista Peruano (APRA) (Matos Tuesta 2005, 81–136). The Drivers' Union maintained links with Acción Popular, while teachers' and bank-workers' unions leaned toward the Izquierda Unida (Tapuya Huamán 2024). Yet interviewees consistently emphasized territorial and civic identities over partisan ones, indicating that parties acted as allies, not organizers.

The *Pucallpazo* also unfolded within a national transition: the military regime of Morales Bermúdez was preparing to return power to civilians in 1980. This liberalization gave parties an incentive to seek electoral visibility through civic causes. Party involvement was thus opportunistic and symbiotic—politicians used the mobilization to re-enter public life, while civic leaders leveraged party support to amplify demands. Still, the initiative, framing, and mobilizing energy were rooted in local grievances, confirming that the activation of the cleavage was endogenous to the periphery rather than orchestrated from the center.

The mobilization's character—emergent, synchronized, and city-wide—defies the logic of incremental substitution. The shift in allegiance from Loreto to the cause of Ucayali was not a slow "defection" or "layering" but a sudden, collective break that manifested with overwhelming force in a matter of days. This explosive activation demonstrates the swiftness inherent in a ruptural process, where accumulated pressures bypass incremental channels and produce immediate, system-wide effects. The next phase would test how this civic rupture interacted with national politics and the state itself.

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[2] "Rojos" (literally "reds") was a colloquial term in 1970s Peru used to denote members or sympathizers of left-wing, often communist, political movements.

4.3 Negotiation and Resolution: From Protest to the Creation of Ucayali

Following the 1978 uprising, contention evolved through three cycles between 1978 and 1981. Each deepened the rift with Iquitos and expanded the scope of demands. The first Pucallpazo demonstrated collective power; when negotiations failed, later waves pressed for departmental autonomy. By the second Pucallpazo (1979) a coordination committee uniting unions, businesses, and civic leaders under the slogan *"Ucayali para los ucayalinos"* had emerged—marking the shift from protest to project.

Government responses oscillated between repression and co-optation. The Morales Bermúdez regime first deployed police control, then opened dialogue as the 1980 democratic transition neared. Local actors framed their demands as both a developmental necessity and a democratic right to self-government. National decentralization debates created a permissive context, but the initiative and pressure came from below.

Politically, several leaders later translated movement capital into electoral success: Francisco Odicio Román, an APRA-affiliated journalist, became Ucayali's first College of Journalists dean (1982); Manuel Vásquez Valera, teachers' union leader and Frente de Defensa secretary, twice won the Coronel Portillo mayoralty for Izquierda Unida. Their trajectories confirm that political rewards followed, rather than caused, the mobilization.

Ultimately, the civilian government that succeeded the military regime conceded to the movement's demands. Law No. 23099, enacted June 1981, created the Department of Ucayali with its capital in Pucallpa. The process—from first protest to legal enactment—spanned less than three years, an exceptional pace for Peruvian institutional reform. The outcome was not a reinterpretation of old rules but their formal supersession by a new legal and territorial reality. The creation of Ucayali did not merely adjust Pucallpa's status within Loreto; it eliminated that relationship entirely, carving out a new, co-equal unit within the national state. This reconfiguration was not contained but encompassing, automatically altering fiscal flows, political representation, and administrative hierarchies across the region and re-scaling the Peruvian state itself.

4.4 Testing Gradual Mechanisms: Why Incremental Explanations Fail

To assess whether this transformation fits gradualist models, the case is compared with Streeck and Thelen's (2005) five mechanisms of incremental change. None captures the *Pucallpazo*'s speed or magnitude.

Table 4.1. Diagnostic Checklist: Testing Gradual-Change Mechanisms against the Pucallpazo

Mechanism	Core Logic of Change	Pucallpazo Evidence	Verdict

Layering	New rules are added atop existing institutions.	The demand was for replacement, not addition, culminating in a surgical separation, not a new layer (§4.2–4.3).	No fit
Conversion	Existing institutions are redirected to new goals.	The institutional framework was superseded, not reinterpreted; rules were rewritten, not repurposed (§4.1–4.3).	No fit
Drift	Change arises from neglect of adaptation.	Change was deliberate and organized, not passive; the framework was stable until directly challenged (§4.1–4.2).	No fit
Displacement	Slow rise of subordinate institutions through defection.	The shift in allegiance was a sudden, collective break, not a gradual transfer (§4.2).	No fit
Exhaustion	Gradual breakdown through self-undermining dynamics.	Loreto's authority was stable and entrenched, showing no internal decay prior to rupture (§4.1).	No fit

Source: author, based on empirical evidence from §§ 4.1–4.3.

Each gradual mechanism presupposes change *within* an existing institutional framework. The *Pucallpazo*, by contrast, shattered that framework—a rupture from below that displaced the territorial order and compelled the state to adopt a new configuration.

4.5 Evaluating Rupture: Applying Hogan's SSE Criteria

Having ruled out gradualism, the final step tests whether the *Pucallpazo* meets Hogan's (2006) criteria for a critical juncture: significance, swiftness, and encompassing scope (SSE).

- Significance

The change redefined authority relations within the Peruvian state. By creating Ucayali, the episode elevated a province to co-equal status with its own budget, representation, and policy capacity. This was not a mere administrative redistribution but a reorganization of sovereignty,

altering who held power and how resources flowed. It constituted a fundamental reconfiguration of the distributional order (Mahoney and Thelen 2010), permanently changing access to state resources and decision-making power. For Pucallpa, it signified long-denied political recognition—a transformation of both structure and meaning.

- Swiftness

The transformation unfolded within a compressed three-year window (1978–1981). After decades of administrative stasis, this rapid sequence of mobilization, negotiation, and legislation marked a temporal rupture. Accumulated tensions reached a threshold that precluded incremental resolution.

- Encompassing Scope

The effects extended beyond Pucallpa. Ucayali's creation redrew Peru's territorial architecture, shifted power balances within Amazonian governance, and inspired other regional movements. It reshaped fiscal flows, bureaucratic hierarchies, and political representation, transforming multiple arenas simultaneously. The rupture was not confined to one policy domain but re-scaled the Peruvian state.

Table 4.2. Diagnostic Checklist: Applying Hogan's (2006) SSE Criteria to the Pucallpazo

Criterion	Definition	Pucallpazo Evidence	Verdict
Significance	Change redefines core authority relations.	The outcome was a fundamental reconfiguration of the distributional order, creating a co-equal department and permanently altering access to state power (§4.1–4.3).	Confirmed
Swiftness	Change occurs within a compressed temporal window.	The transformation—from activation to legal enactment—was a sudden break, unfolding in under three years (§4.2–4.3).	Confirmed
Encompassing Scope	Change reshapes adjacent structures	The creation of Ucayali re-scaled the state, altering fiscal, administrative, and	Confirmed

	and systemic boundaries.	political structures across the region (§4.3).	

The evidence confirms the *Pucallpazo* as a bottom-up critical juncture. Endogenous tensions, long embedded in Peru's territorial order, were activated through emergent, self-organized mobilization, producing change that was significant, swift, and encompassing. Neither gradual adaptation nor top-down reform explains its scale or tempo. The *Pucallpazo* thus stands as a paradigmatic self-organized rupture—a moment when bottom-up democratization transcended gradualism and redefined the state's territorial architecture.

5. Diagnosing the Outcome: From Mobilization to Institutional Reconfiguration

This section interprets the empirical findings through the integrated framework developed earlier. It revisits the hypothesis that the *Pucallpazo* constituted a bottom-up critical juncture, reconstructs the causal mechanism that transformed long-standing endogenous tensions into institutional rupture, and situates the case within comparative debates on democratization from below. The goal is not only to confirm that the *Pucallpazo* meets Hogan's (2006) SSE criteria—significance, swiftness, and encompassing scope—but to show how its bottom-up, emergent logic distinguishes it from other, less transformative mobilizations in Latin America.

5.1. Revisiting the Hypothesis

The empirical analysis confirms the study's working hypothesis: the *Pucallpazo* was a bottom-up critical juncture that redefined the Peruvian state's territorial architecture. Evidence presented in Section 4 demonstrates that all five gradual mechanisms of institutional change identified by Streeck and Thelen (2005)—layering, conversion, drift, displacement, and exhaustion—fail to account for the event's pace, scope, and institutional outcome (Table 4.1). None of them captures the abrupt substitution of one jurisdictional order for another.

Conversely, the *Pucallpazo* satisfies Hogan's (2006) three diagnostic criteria for discontinuous rupture (Table 4.2): it was significant, transforming authority relations between the state and the periphery; swift, occurring within a compressed three-year window; and encompassing, reorganizing multiple institutional domains simultaneously. The cumulative evidence demonstrates that the *Pucallpazo* cannot be understood as adaptive reform or elite-led decentralization. It was a self-organized rupture, endogenous to subnational actors, that forced the Peruvian state to redraw its own territorial boundaries.

This finding invites a closer look at how such an endogenous rupture unfolded—the mechanism through which structural dependence translated into systemic change.

5.2. Mechanisms of Rupture: From Endogenous Tension to Systemic Change

To explain how structural dependence evolved into institutional rupture, this section outlines a three-stage mechanism linking endogenous tension to systemic reconfiguration.

Table 5.1. Mechanisms of Bottom-Up Rupture

Stage	Mechanism	Description	Theoretical Link
1. Accumulation of Endogenous Tension	Structural exclusion within a rigid institutional framework	Decades of administrative subordination and fiscal extraction entrenched the center–periphery divide, generating latent conflict between Pucallpa and Iquitos (§4.1).	Mahoney & Thelen (2010): institutions as *distributional orders* sustained through continuous political mobilization.
2. Activation through Emergent Mobilization	Self-organization of local actors around shared grievances	Civic, labor, and media networks synchronized collective action around fuel shortages, resisting partisan capture and mobilizing across sectors (§4.2).	Hogan (2006): *activation of a latent cleavage*; Miller & Page (2007): local interactions generating *emergent coordination*.
3. Institutional Rupture and Reconfiguration	Overload of the state's adaptive capacity	Sustained mobilization overwhelmed Loreto's institutional equilibrium, forcing rapid negotiation and legal creation of a new department (§4.3–4.5).	Hogan (2006): rupture marked by *significant, swift, and encompassing* change.

This mechanism clarifies that critical junctures can emerge from within the periphery, not as exogenous shocks but as cumulative products of internal contradictions. When distributional tensions exceed the system's adaptive capacity, emergent mobilization can push the state into a new equilibrium—what Hogan would term a "remoulded critical juncture."

5.3. Comparing Bottom-Up and Top-Down Pathways

5.3.1. Situating the Pucallpazo in Comparative Perspective

In most theories of democratization, change originates from above—through elite pacts, exogenous shocks, or deliberate reforms (Huntington 2002; O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986). Subnational mobilizations are often treated as secondary or derivative. Yet recent studies show

that local movements can generate autonomous democratizing dynamics, reshaping institutions from the margins inward.

Within this landscape, the *Pucallpazo* stands apart. It was not merely a by-product of Peru's 1980 democratic transition but rather a subnational antecedent that helped shape the political context for that transition. Whereas top-down pathways depend on elite negotiation, the *Pucallpazo* arose from civic synchronization without central coordination. The national opening merely provided a *permissive context*, not the *causal origin* of change: parties and elites adjusted to a process already set in motion by Pucallpa's mobilization.

5.3.2. Comparative Evidence: Varieties of Bottom-Up Change

To situate the *Pucallpazo* within broader debates, this subsection compares it with other cases of subnational or popular mobilization that pursued institutional change under varying conditions of state involvement. Comparative evidence across Latin America and beyond demonstrates that not all bottom-up mobilizations democratize or achieve institutional transformation. They vary in origin, mechanism, and institutional effect.

- Designed participation from above. Rebecca Abers (2000) examines participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre as a reform driven by a progressive local government. While participatory, the process was top-down in logic: the institutional design, rules, and scope were defined by the state. Change unfolded sequentially and cumulatively, reflecting gradual adaptation rather than rupture.
- Hybrid transformations. Nancy Postero (2017) documents how Bolivia's *Estado Plurinacional* emerged from bottom-up indigenous mobilization but was later recentralized under the MAS government. The process combined grassroots origin with elite consolidation, producing a contingent but state-absorbed transformation.
- Emergent self-organization from below. Xóchitl Leyva Solano (2005) presents the Zapatista autonomy project as a non-state, bottom-up experiment in self-organization—durable yet operating outside state institutions. Eduardo Silva (2009) analyzes Argentina's 2001 crisis as spawning temporary networks of self-management that reconfigured social relations but lacked institutional continuity. Sebastián Somma and Nicolás Donoso (2022) describe Chile's 2019 uprising as a contingent, decentralized mobilization that opened a constitutional process but failed to produce lasting reform.

Table 5.2. Typology of Institutional-Change Pathways

Logic of Change	Typical Drivers	Process Features	Representative Cases	Institutional Outcome

Top-Down Sequential	State elites, reformist governments	Planned, rule-bound, incremental	Abers (2000); Lust-Okar (2005)	Controlled participation within stable institutional design
Hybrid / Mixed	Grassroots → state incorporation	Early mobilization later institutionalized from above	Postero (2017); Stroschein (2012)	Partial transformation; re-centralization of authority
Bottom-Up Emergent (Non-Critical)	Local civic networks	Spontaneous, contingent, often temporary	Leyva Solano (2005); Silva (2009); Somma & Donoso (2022)	Expanded participation, limited institutionalization
Bottom-Up Critical-Ruptural	Civic coalitions compelling state redesign	Emergent, self-organized, systemic	*Pucallpazo* (Peru 1978–81)	Enduring reconfiguration of state structure and authority

Source: Author's synthesis based on Abers (2000); Postero (2017); Leyva Solano (2005); Silva (2009); Somma & Donoso (2022); and this study[3].

Across these cases, the pattern is consistent: mobilization is a necessary but insufficient condition for democratization. Many bottom-up movements generate participation and visibility yet fail to produce institutional transformation. A critical juncture occurs only when collective action crosses the threshold of reconfiguration—altering authority relations and formal rules.

The *Pucallpazo* exemplifies this rarer form: an emergent yet successful bottom-up rupture that achieved state restructuring. Unlike participatory designs (Abers 2000) or hybrid consolidations (Postero 2017), it compelled the Peruvian state to redraw its own territorial boundaries. And unlike self-organized movements that remained extra-institutional (Leyva Solano 2005; Silva 2009; Somma & Donoso 2022), it produced a legally recognized, enduring institutional outcome. In this sense, the *Pucallpazo* bridges two traditions—it shares the spontaneity and civic energy of emergent mobilizations but culminates in a formal redistribution of sovereignty.

5.4. Broader Implications for Subnational Democratization

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[3] Analytical note: Among these pathways, only the bottom-up critical-ruptural type satisfies Hogan's (2006) SSE criteria—producing change that is significant (altering authority relations), swift (temporally compressed), and encompassing (systemic in scope). This typology also reinforces that while gradual mechanisms (Streeck & Thelen 2005) explain adaptive continuity, only the critical-ruptural pathway captures the nonlinear dynamics and institutional scope of a full state reconfiguration.

The comparative synthesis highlights three broader implications for understanding democratization and state power in Latin America.

1) Agency of the Periphery. Peripheral regions are not passive recipients of national reform. The *Pucallpazo* demonstrates that subnational actors can be producers of institutional innovation, generating democratizing impulses from below. The creation of Ucayali reinserted historically marginalized citizens into state decision-making, institutionalizing their political presence.
2) State Rescaling from Below. The Peruvian case reveals that state rescaling can result from civic pressure, not just technocratic decentralization. Bottom-up mobilization forced the central state to redefine its own territorial boundaries, showing that decentralization can emerge as a *conflictual* yet *democratizing* process rather than a bureaucratic reform.
3) Conditions for Successful Bottom-Up Democratization. Comparative evidence suggests that success requires a particular combination:
   a) a deep structural cleavage concentrating tension;
   b) a broad yet disciplined civic coalition maintaining cross-partisan unity; and
   c) a non-violent, inclusive repertoire that sustains legitimacy while applying pressure.

Where these align—as in the *Pucallpazo*—emergent mobilization transcends expressive protest to produce constitutive institutional change. In doing so, the *Pucallpazo* provides a clear empirical benchmark for identifying when bottom-up contention moves beyond participation to produce lasting institutional redesign.

Section 5 consolidated the argument: the *Pucallpazo* represents a bottom-up critical juncture that transformed Peru's territorial order through emergent civic mobilization. By contrasting it with other Latin American and comparative experiences, the analysis demonstrates that while bottom-up processes are widespread, few cross the threshold into institutional reconfiguration. The *Pucallpazo* thus stands as a paradigmatic case of self-organized democratization, where local contention, rather than elite reform, became the driver of state transformation.

6. Synthesis and Conclusions

This study has examined the Pucallpazo (1978–1981) through the lens of institutional change, testing whether it represents a case of gradual adaptation or a bottom-up critical juncture. By combining insights from Mahoney & Thelen (2010), Streeck & Thelen (2005), and Hogan (2006), the analysis has shown how a long-standing center–periphery cleavage—rooted in distributional inequality and administrative dependence—was suddenly activated through emergent collective mobilization, producing a significant, swift, and encompassing (SSE) institutional rupture.

The argument unfolds in three dimensions. First, the Pucallpazo exemplifies how subnational contention can reach the threshold of institutional reconfiguration, challenging gradualist accounts that attribute change only to slow, negotiated adaptation. Second, it demonstrates that bottom-up democratization can generate not merely participation or protest, but a full reordering of the state's territorial authority. Finally, the case illustrates the theoretical and methodological payoffs of integrating process tracing with the logic of adaptive complex systems—revealing how micro-level coordination can yield macro-level transformation.

6.1. Confirming the Diagnosis

The empirical evidence confirms the study's working hypothesis: the Pucallpazo was a bottom-up critical juncture that redefined the Peruvian state's territorial architecture.

Section 4 demonstrated that none of the five gradual mechanisms proposed by Streeck and Thelen (2005)—layering, conversion, drift, displacement, or exhaustion—fit the Peruvian case. The process was neither additive, interpretive, nor erosive. Instead, it involved the abrupt replacement of Loreto's jurisdiction by a new territorial entity: the Department of Ucayali.

In contrast, the episode meets Hogan's (2006) SSE criteria for a critical juncture. The transformation was significant, redefining authority relations between center and periphery; swift, compressed within a three-year window; and encompassing, simultaneously reshaping fiscal flows, administrative hierarchies, and political representation. The rupture thus constitutes a decisive bottom-up reconfiguration of sovereignty—an event both subnational and systemic.

6.2. Mechanisms of Rupture: From Endogenous Tension to Systemic Change

The Pucallpazo followed a clear causal sequence linking endogenous tension to institutional rupture. The mechanism can be summarized as follows:

Table 5.1. Mechanisms of Bottom-Up Rupture

Stage	Mechanism	Description	Theoretical Link

1. Accumulation of Endogenous Tension	Structural exclusion within a rigid institutional framework	Decades of administrative subordination and fiscal extraction entrenched the center–periphery divide, generating latent conflict between Pucallpa and Iquitos (§4.1).	Mahoney & Thelen (2010): institutions as *distributional orders* requiring continuous political reinforcement.
2. Activation through Emergent Mobilization	Self-organization of local actors around shared grievances	Civic, labor, and media networks synchronized collective action, resisting partisan capture and mobilizing across sectors (§4.2).	Hogan (2006): *activation of a latent cleavage*; Miller & Page (2007): *emergent coordination* through local interaction.
3. Institutional Rupture and Reconfiguration	Overload of the state's adaptive capacity	Sustained mobilization overwhelmed Loreto's institutional equilibrium, compelling rapid negotiation and the legal creation of a new department (§§4.3–4.5).	Hogan (2006): rupture marked by *significant, swift, and encompassing* change resulting from a *failure of institutional absorption*.

Source: Author's synthesis, based on Hogan (2006), Mahoney & Thelen (2010), and Miller & Page (2007).

This mechanism demonstrates that critical junctures can emerge endogenously—from the accumulation and activation of structural contradictions—rather than from exogenous shocks. In this sense, the Pucallpazo exemplifies a remoulded critical juncture, where local coordination among heterogeneous actors drives systemic institutional transformation.

6.3. Beyond Gradualism: The Limits of Incremental Change

The Peruvian case highlights the analytical boundary of gradualist models. Streeck and Thelen's framework explains many forms of adaptive evolution, yet its scope ends where endogenous tension produces rupture. In Pucallpa, the equilibrium of Loreto's governance structure did not decay slowly—it was overturned by the activation of a dormant cleavage.

The process did not fit the logic of "differential growth" (layering) or "reinterpretation" (conversion), nor did it result from institutional neglect (drift) or exhaustion. Instead, collective mobilization shattered the existing shell of authority, forcing the creation of a new institutional core. This marks the empirical boundary where gradual adaptation yields to systemic discontinuity, the key distinction Hogan (2006) sought to formalize.

6.4. The Nature of Bottom-Up Democratization

The Pucallpazo demonstrates that bottom-up democratization is not synonymous with spontaneous protest or expanded participation. It can involve institutional creativity from below—moments when excluded actors compel the state to reconstruct its own boundaries.

Three causal mechanisms made the Pucallpa experience distinctive and were critical for translating mobilization into institutional rupture:

A. The mechanism of cross-sectoral coalition-building. Civic, professional, religious, and business actors aligned around a territorial grievance, achieving breadth without ideological uniformity.
B. The mechanism of strategic non-violence. The Drivers' Union's insistence on a bloodless paralyzation preserved legitimacy and enabled mass participation.
C. The mechanism of institutional translation. Mobilization achieved juridical codification through Law No. 23099 (1981), transforming protest into a durable administrative reality.

Together, these mechanisms converted collective contention into systemic change, demonstrating that democratization from below can entail the redefinition of authority relations, not merely contestation within them.

6.5. Comparative Implications

Comparative analysis underscores the rarity of bottom-up processes that cross the threshold of reconfiguration. Across Latin America, similar mobilizations—such as participatory budgeting in Brazil (Abers 2000), the Bolivian plurinational reform (Postero 2017), the Zapatista autonomy (Leyva Solano 2005), or Argentina's post-crisis assemblies (Silva 2009)—expanded participation yet seldom redefined state sovereignty.

The Pucallpazo differs in that it compelled the state to redraw its own administrative and jurisdictional map, converting contentious politics into a formal reorganization of the state's territorial sovereignty. This shift from contesting power within institutions to redefining the

institutions themselves is what marks it as a critical juncture rather than an episode of expanded participation.

6.6. Methodological Contributions

Methodologically, this study contributes to the intersection of process tracing, adaptive complex systems (ACS) theory, and hermeneutic interpretation. Each approach addressed a distinct challenge in reconstructing the Pucallpazo.

Process tracing provided the temporal scaffolding to identify causal sequences connecting mobilization and institutional change. ACS concepts illuminated how decentralized interactions among heterogeneous actors produced large-scale coordination without central control, revealing the self-organizing logic of bottom-up transformation.

Confronting a fragmentary and contested archive—where sources were destroyed, collections lost, and testimonies partial and politically inflected—the study adopted a hermeneutic approach inspired by Ricœur (2009, 2010). This treated inconsistencies and silences not as flaws but as traces of plural memory and contested meaning. Through cross-reading divergent narratives, the analysis reconstructed the underlying structures of experience: exclusion, grievance, and moral claims to autonomy.

This hermeneutic triangulation complements causal process tracing. While process tracing reveals how events unfolded, hermeneutic interpretation recovers what they meant to historical actors. Combined, they yield a methodology that is both explanatory and interpretive—capable of reconstructing causal mechanisms and recovering the subjective meanings that animated them.

The study's broader methodological contribution thus lies in fusing causal reconstruction with interpretive depth, demonstrating that understanding a bottom-up critical juncture requires not only tracing its mechanisms but also reinterpreting its lived significance across fragmented historical memory.

6.7. Future Research: From the Pucallpazo to Gen-Z Uprisings

The dynamics identified here—endogenous tension, emergent coordination, and systemic rupture—display a striking resonance with contemporary Gen-Z mobilizations across the Global South. Youth-led, digitally networked protests in Indonesia, Nepal, Madagascar, Kenya, and Peru exhibit parallel patterns of self-organization, rapid diffusion, and decentralized leadership (Bennhold 2025; Mia & Hasan 2025; Venus et al. 2025). They harness online networks, memes, and influencers to mobilize civic energy, yet they rarely achieve the durable institutional outcomes observed in Pucallpa.

Venus et al. (2025) show that exposure to political influencers fosters interest and internal efficacy but not necessarily sustained organization. Mia and Hasan (2025) find that these digital movements rely on algorithmic amplification and affective solidarity rather than long-term institutional design. Bennhold (2025) documents how Gen-Z protests in Nepal and Madagascar toppled governments yet failed to institutionalize change—illustrating the recurring paradox of mobilization without institutionalization.

Future research can directly extend the diagnostic model developed here by asking whether such digitally mediated uprisings constitute bottom-up critical junctures or merely transient cycles of expressive politics. The two-step diagnostic—(1) testing for misfit with gradual mechanisms and (2) applying Hogan's (2006) SSE criteria—provides a clear framework for identifying when emergent contention crosses the threshold of reconfiguration.

Three research frontiers stand out:

1. Mechanisms of Digital Self-Organization: How do algorithmic platforms structure emergent coordination, and what conditions allow these dynamics to persist beyond a single protest cycle to form lasting institutions (Venus et al. 2025)?

2. Thresholds of Institutionalization: What specific factors distinguish cases like the Pucallpazo—which achieved legal-territorial restructuring—from those that remain symbolically expressive (Mia & Hasan 2025)? The role of coherent coalitions and a clear, translatable demand appears critical.

3. New Geographies of Rupture: Do youth-driven uprisings reveal that the periphery—now generational as well as territorial—remains the frontier of democratization (Bennhold 2025)?

The integration of Adaptive Complex Systems (ACS) theory in this study also opens the door to computational exploration. Here, Agent-based modeling (ABM) serves as the methodological counterpart to ACS, allowing researchers to formally test the emergent dynamics identified qualitatively through process tracing. By modeling heterogeneous actors, feedback loops, and nonlinear thresholds, ABM would allow for the systematic testing of when micro-interactions generate large-scale institutional rupture versus adaptive stabilization.

This pattern of mobilization without institutionalization is also evident in the Arab Spring, which serves as a confirming negative case. Those uprisings exhibited the same traits of horizontal coordination and rapid diffusion but lacked the mechanisms of institutional translation, ultimately failing to produce durable reconfiguration of state power in most countries (Jones et al. 2022). Integrating such comparative evidence can refine models of emergent democratization by distinguishing systemic mobilization from critical institutional rupture.

By merging qualitative historical reconstruction with computational experimentation, future research can advance a more integrated science of self-organized democratization, systematically linking micro-level contention to macro-level institutional change across both historical and contemporary contexts.