

# As Ex-President Faces Trial, a Reckoning for Peru

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LIMA, [Peru](#), Sept. 24 — Both critics and admirers of the former Peruvian strongman [Alberto K. Fujimori](#) long argued that he deserved his day in court to explain the political killings, abductions and corruption during his rule. Mr. Fujimori even said so after the Chilean Supreme Court ruled in favor of extraditing him last week, claiming that the court case was part of a “strategy” to return to Peru.

A monument to war victims was vandalized in orange, the color of Mr. Fujimori’s party.

But as Mr. Fujimori settles into a jail cell here before his trial, the prospect of that day coming to pass is creating little but unease. A country that may have preferred to forget about the methods used by Mr. Fujimori to vanquish leftist insurgents and economic instability is now being forced to reckon with them.

“The ugly truth of Fujimori was the tacit support that many Peruvians had for his tactics,” said Jorge Bruce, a prominent political analyst here. “This judgment will be of him but also of our society.”

Peru has changed dramatically since Mr. Fujimori faxed in his resignation seven years ago from Tokyo. Buoyed by demand for exports like copper and zinc, the economy has grown for six consecutive years. Economists here and abroad speak glowingly of Peru as the “new Chile.”

Many Peruvians — almost one in four according to some research firms — admire Mr. Fujimori for laying the foundation for today’s stability, regardless of who may have suffered during that process. “Thanks to him, Peru is on the march again,” said Héctor Díaz Mori, 48, a computer technician. “He will be judged for saving Peru.”

Even today, that support is reflected in an important voting bloc of Fujimoristas — Fujimori supporters — in Congress, among them his daughter Keiko Fujimori, who received more votes than any other legislator in last year’s election, positioning her as the political heir to her father’s legacy.

Editorialists and government officials here expressed satisfaction at Mr. Fujimori’s extradition, portraying it as an illustration of how institutions have matured. But the mood on the streets is much less smug. Some people are less subtle than others when voicing support for the man who ruled Peru from 1990 to 2000.

“It was a terrible time of bombs and blackouts, and who brought us peace?” Bonifacia Morena Sotomayor, 65, a retired schoolteacher, said in an interview as she recalled the fear that had gripped many people here as Maoist guerrillas laid waste to targets in the heart of Lima at the start of Mr. Fujimori’s rule. “El Chino,” she said, using the term of

affection evoking his Asian heritage that is still used by many to refer to Mr. Fujimori, who holds Peruvian and Japanese citizenship.

“Were there deaths?” Ms. Morena asked, while exiting a supermarket with bags of groceries. “Of course there were,” she said, again answering her own question, explaining that Mr. Fujimori must have been manipulated by his former intelligence chief, [Vladimiro Montesinos](#).

While Mr. Fujimori was in self-imposed exile in Japan and Chile, Mr. Montesinos was a useful scapegoat. Reports of the spymaster’s excesses were legendary, including bribing journalists and congressmen, wiretapping politicians, embezzling public funds and creating secretive death squads.

Mr. Fujimori says he is innocent of all charges linking him to those activities, but evidence accumulated by state investigators suggests otherwise. The most damning testimony connects him to the Colina Group, a group of former military intelligence officers created to carry out assassinations in the early 1990s.

That may explain why Mr. Fujimori’s supporters here have begun trying to portray him as a victim, shifting their focus to his age, 69, and the conditions of his detention. Keiko Fujimori, 32, who visited her father over the weekend, complained to reporters that his bed was small and that sunlight barely entered his cell through tiny windows.

“He is in worse conditions than Abimael Guzmán,” Ms. Fujimorisaid, referring to the imprisoned leader of the [Shining Path](#) insurgency. His capture by Mr. Fujimori’s government in 1992 was a turning point in the war that left 70,000 dead from 1980 to 2000.

Now Mr. Guzmán, the unrepentant guerrilla; Mr. Montesinos, the overzealous spy; and Mr. Fujimori, the fallen president, all sit in jail cells here as the wheels of Peruvian justice turn. This would be comforting to many, if not for the anxiety that Mr. Fujimori’s extradition seems to have already sowed.

For instance, indignation followed an attack by vandals over the weekend on “El Ojo Que Llorá” (“The Eye That Cries”), a vivid monument here to the victims of Peru’s internal war. Before his extradition Mr. Fujimori’s admirers considered the monument, by the Dutch-born sculptor Lika Mutal, an affront to his legacy.

“Fujimori’s supporters are resorting to violence like they have always done,” said Francisco Soberón, a human rights campaigner, in reaction to the attack. “This was an act of barbarism.”