

Vigilante Lynchings Go Viral in Peru

Social Media Catalyzes Pent-Up Hunger for Justice

ADAM DUBOVE SEPTEMBER 16, 2015 AT 11:31 AM



Peruvian authorities urge citizens to hand over criminals to the police instead of beating them. ([Youtube](#))

“We have lost faith in the police,” explained Cecilia García Rodríguez, the creator of Catch Your Thief (*Chapa tu choro*), a nationwide campaign to promote vigilante justice in Peru. +

Español

On August 18, García Rodríguez put up the first sign in her neighborhood: “Crooks, if we catch you, we won’t call the police, we are going to lynch you.” +

She made the decision following an episode in early August when she caught a thief, only to have police officers release him 30 minutes later. +

As the campaign went viral, social media users began posting pictures and footage showing alleged criminals receiving punishments ranging from brutal beatings to forced military exercises. +

The luckiest ones are those who just get handed over to the police. +

Chapa tu choro: comerciantes capturan ladrón y así lo castigan



Thousands of Peruvians have adopted García's cause as their own in a country where one third of the population has fallen victim to a crime, according to the 2014 Americas Barometer authored by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). +

In late August, a Facebook event called "Catch Your Thief and Leave Him Paralytic" amassed 60,000 attendees before it was taken down, according to local daily El Comercio. +

Of all the Americas, Peruvians are the least confident in their judiciary. A mere 34 percent told LAPOP that they trusted the enforcement of the law. Only Dominicans (42.8 percent) and Paraguayans (42.3 percent) approve of vigilante justice more than Peruvians (40.6 percent).



To address crime, President Ollanta Humala claims he has hired 30,000 new National Police officers, and last month he promised he would purchase motorbikes and helicopters to bolster their capacities. 🗨️ +



The original banner that launched the controversial campaign. ([Facebook](#))

However, a former police director has been questioning the president since he made the announcement back in 2014. Luis Montoya says there is no way the Humala administration could have added 30,000 officers in such a short period. 🗨️ +

He explained that the country has 27 training schools, each one graduating between 250 and 300 officers every year. “[At the most], you get 8,100 new police agents,” he told *La República*. “I don’t know where the government gets its numbers.” 🗨️ +

Lawlessness in Lima

In late August, citizens were outraged after more than 56 individuals burst into a home in the outskirts of Lima, causing roughly US\$20,000 in damages, and tried to steal electrical appliances, jewellery, and PER\$20,000 (US\$6,240) in cash. National Police officers subdued the assailants after a four-hour confrontation. 🗨️ +

Peruvian media reported that the crimes could land those arrested between five to 12 years in prison, yet nothing happened. On September 1, Judge Haydée Vergara Rodríguez released 53 out of the 56 accused. 🗨️ +


“How can you explain that? We don’t understand how they were freed when the police caught them red-handed,” Interior Minister José Pérez Guadalupe said. “And they faced several charges, usurpation among them, which carries a minimum five-year prison sentence.” 🗨️ +

The minister told local daily *Peru 12* that he supports the citizens’ arrest law enacted in 2009, but not the lynchings. 🗨️ +

“Catch your thief, okay. But you should immediately hand him over to the police. Don’t kill

him, don't cripple him," he urged.  +

Vigilantism Gone Awry


On September 3, a mob almost lynched an innocent man whom they mistakenly accused of robbing a truck driver in the northern department of Cajamarca. It turned out he was just a curious neighbor who got out of his home to see what had happened with the truck when the neighbors grabbed him.  +


 +

The police intervened and the man walked off unharmed. Despite the confusion, the crowd assured reporters they would continue to "capture and beat anyone committing crimes in the neighborhood."

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Veiled Political Stunt?

Peruvian daily *La República* reported that Catch Your Thief's creator, García Rodríguez, was once close to the political movement led by Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of former President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) who was convicted for human rights abuses. She also served as an advisor to Congressman Federico Pariona, punished in 2012 for doctoring his resumé.  +

"I can't deny that I was a supporter of Fujimori when I was younger, but I'm not an activist and I haven't talked with Keiko Fujimori," she told *La República*, and did not rule out running for Congress in 2016.  +



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