

# Nayib Bukele, El Salvador's would-be dictator, re-elected president

Andrea Lobo  
7 February 2024

The fascistic president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele was reelected for another five-year term in violation of the country's constitution, but much else remains uncertain about Sunday's general elections.

Two hours after the polls closed, Bukele announced that he had won and his party, New Ideas, had taken 58 of the 60 seats of Congress. But as of Wednesday, there were still no official results.

On Monday, the electoral court announced that its software for preliminary counting crashed after recording 70 percent of votes for the Presidency and only 5 percent for Congress. As a result, it is manually counting 30 percent of the ballots for president and 100 percent of those for the legislature.

Then on Tuesday, the electoral authorities announced that three voting centers would be reopened on a future date in the US, where 2.5 million Salvadorans live, compared to 6.5 million in El Salvador, citing complaints that many did not get to vote. The far-right party Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) has threatened to request the invalidation of the elections if this takes place.

Bukele has so far received 83 percent of the votes for the presidency, followed by Manuel Flores of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) with 6.95 percent and Joe Sánchez of ARENA with 6.15 percent. New Ideas is currently leading the congressional race with 61 percent of the votes.

The election took place under what was effectively martial law. A state of exception has been in place for 22 months, suspending the freedoms of association and assembly, due process, and other fundamental democratic rights.

Having placed loyalists in the Constitutional Court and winning a super-majority in Congress in 2021, Bukele was allowed to name his private secretary Claudia Rodríguez as president for six months, pretending to respect the constitutional ban on consecutive terms.

Enjoying free rein, the military and police have arrested more than 75,000 people, or 1 in every 45 adults. Currently there are 110,000 people behind bars in overcrowded and

inhumane conditions, including 40,000 in a new "Terrorism Confinement Center"—one of the largest prisons in the world.

At least 224 people have died in custody during the 22-month state of exception, according to the NGO Socorro Jurídico, amid numerous legal complaints of torture.

*El País* reported recently on the case of Verónica Reyes, whose husband Roberto, a 38-year-old worker at a cooking oil company with no criminal record, was detained in December 2022 while buying groceries. While waiting for a hearing in 2025, Verónica sent him food and supplies every two weeks, but on January 27 she was notified that her husband had passed away.

Asked to identify him, she said, "I was looking at a body that died of starvation... When it was discovered, it was a skeleton."

Governments and politicians across Latin America, from the openly right-wing Daniel Noboa in Ecuador to the pseudo-left Xiomara Castro in Honduras, have openly embraced the political formula of Bukele's hardline on organized crime.

Bukele himself was in turn widely described as El Salvador's Trump and was evidently inspired by the Hitler-emulating billionaire and his efforts to mobilize fascistic layers within the state apparatus and the lumpen middle class.

The Biden administration had declared in September 2021 that a reelection would undermine democracy in El Salvador, but Secretary of State Antony Blinken congratulated Bukele on Monday. Clearly, earlier criticisms had nothing to do with "democracy" or "human rights," but were aimed against Bukele's growing ties with China.

While his balancing act with Beijing continues, a shift away from seeking Chinese credits to requesting an IMF loan and the exclusion of Chinese companies from the development of 5G telecommunications have led to a warming of ties with Washington. Bukele has also collaborated with the US on blocking migrants heading north.

Bukele is the descendant of a Palestinian bourgeois family, which developed a textile business in the 1970s that later grew into a major conglomerate. His father became a sponsor of the FMLN following the end of the civil war in 1992, when the former Stalinist-led guerrillas handed in their weapons and took up seats in Congress as a right-wing bourgeois party.

After dropping out of college and running the family businesses, Bukele entered politics and was elected mayor of Nuevo Cuscatlán in 2012 and then of the capital San Salvador as a candidate of the FMLN.

Having decided to run for the Presidency in 2017, internal scuffles led to his fortuitous expulsion from the party. Ever since, Bukele has capitalized above all by targeting the FMLN and its rival ARENA, the far-right party founded by the infamous army torturer Maj. Roberto D'Aubuisson. The two former enemies had shared power since 1992 and become extremely discredited as a result of their policies of social austerity, deals with gangs and corruption.

Two incidents from his first term sum up his political program. In February 2020, he led troops invading Congress to demand at gunpoint a loan for the military, while his fascistic hardline supporters rallied outside demanding the heads of legislators.

Shortly after, in May 2020, he held an extraordinary meeting with El Salvador's three richest oligarchs—Roberto Kriete, Ricardo Poma and now deceased Roberto Murray Meza—to draw up plans to let COVID-19 run rampant by “reopening” all workplaces. During the first two years of the ongoing pandemic, Bukele sacrificed the lives of 23,245 people to profits, according to excess death estimates.

While claiming to oppose the corrupt oligarchy, Bukele's policies have all been tailored to serve its interests and those of its imperialist paymasters on Wall Street. The same handful of inbred families of the local aristocracy have long used the state for one purpose: to protect their wealth and power against the oppressed classes. The ruling elite used it to enslave the indigenous population into semi-feudal estates and armies in the early 1800s. Toward the end of the century, they expropriated peasants to exploit them in the rapidly expanding coffee plantations.

Throughout the 20th century US imperialism and its junior partners in the coffee oligarchy crushed all opposition by installing a series of military dictators and set up death squads that massacred over 100,000 workers, peasants and youth between 1932 and 1992.

In response to globalization, the oligarchy has only deepened its subordination to imperialism, after branching out as local administrators for multinational corporations and banks. The economy is heavily dependent upon the US market and remittances from migrants.

Today, Bukele seemingly enjoys unlimited popularity due to an enormous reduction in gang activity like homicides and extortion. But this is merely a byproduct—and a tenuous one at best—of the establishment of a police state and dictatorial forms of rule.

The ruling class in El Salvador and internationally support “Bukelismo” knowing they have no other answer than dictatorship to the deepening crisis of global capitalism and the emerging upsurge of the class struggle globally.

Under Bukele, employment, education and healthcare have continued to deteriorate as poverty has risen. Foreign direct investment has not increased. A majority of exports to the US, generally clothing, are produced by about 60,000 workers in extremely oppressive sweatshops that have seen thousands of layoffs in the past two years.

About three out of every 10 Salvadorans remains under the official poverty line, and seven out of 10 scrape by in the informal sector. The cost of basic goods rose 30 percent in three years, with real wages falling behind. Public spending stands at 22 percent of GDP, remaining one of the lowest rates in the region, and the IMF is demanding further cuts as a condition for a loan given a growing deficit.

The molecular processes that will push Salvadoran workers into struggle against Bukele and to join their class brothers and sisters internationally in fighting social inequality, war and fascism are already far advanced.

What is urgently required is a political leadership in the working class that gives conscious expression to this process. This means the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in El Salvador and across Central America, armed with the program of Trotskyism and the historical lessons of its struggle against Stalinism, all forms of bourgeois nationalism like the FMLN and their Pabloite apologists who have repeatedly paved the way to fascist reaction.



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