



## *Is the Autocratic Political System Smoother and More Inclusive Than the Democratic System In El Salvador?*

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### Abstract

*This paper analyzes the shift from democratic to autocratic rule in El Salvador, focusing on the period before and after the presidency of Nayib Bukele. It challenges the conventional view of autocracy as inherently oppressive, arguing that Bukele's administration has brought relative peace and stability to a nation previously plagued by gang violence and economic instability under democracy. The analysis explores three pillars of Bukele's governance—centralization of power, limited freedom, and nationalism—that have contributed to reducing El Salvador's homicide rate and enhancing social order. While democratic governments in El Salvador struggled with issues like gang violence, unemployment, and poverty, the Bukele administration's authoritarian measures have led to a significant decline in crime and economic improvement. However, the paper also highlights concerns regarding human rights abuses, loss of civil liberties, and the risk of long-term political suppression. By comparing the outcomes of both political systems, the paper seeks to shed light on whether autocracy, in this case, offers a more effective governance model than democracy, especially in addressing complex social challenges.*

### Keywords

*El Salvador, Democracy, Autocracy, Nayib Bukele, Gang Violence, Economic Stability, Human Rights, Governance.*

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The autocratic political system is associated with tyrannical rule, depicting autocratic ideology as a primitive, uneducated system of governance. In this system, the "tyrant leader" wields absolute authority, oppresses his people, destroys civil society, and inspires people to rise against those who oppose them. The despot uses nationalism as a tactic to bolster support for rule and keep that authoritarian system functioning smoothly. No one dares to question the tyrant's authority or intentions in the name of nationalism; if they do, they are labeled as anti-national or traitors to their country.

This is how the Western capitalist political system defines the Autocratic system.

We are often mistaken if we believe that an autocratic political system just looked like this. Every political system has advantages and disadvantages; the issue is primarily personal based on personal viewpoint. Not only are individuals at fault, but institutions that have already adopted a political ideology can make foolish mistakes, as noted by E.O. Wilson, who said that "political ideology can corrupt the mind and science."<sup>1</sup>

If someone adopts an inflexible ideology and does not revert to flexibility, this will only turn them into blind followers who are mentally corrupted. People, especially those enrolled at the educational institutions, should have a broadminded regarding ideologies and should be aware that not even a single ideology is a perfectly good political system.

### **Democracy: Perceptions versus Reality – Unveiling Imperfections:**

Abraham Lincoln's most well-known proclamation of democracy, "that government of the People, by the People, for the People,"<sup>2</sup> from His Gettysburg Address suggests that democratic government is the form of government chosen by and belong to the people. Its main purpose is to promote the welfare, economic growth, health, and prosperity of the people. People are the source of governance; people, as individuals, choose who will rule over us.

The annual report on democratic changes in a nation is released by international organizations like V-Dem. The report uses several indicators to measure democracy in a nation and ranks the nations according to degree of democracy; the higher a nation's rank, the more democratic it is and indicative of a happy nation. Democracy demonstrates the virtues and ideals that are prevalent in a nation. However, is that accurate?

Democracy is regarded as the ideal type of society since it is characterized by virtues and principles that prevail, despite its drawbacks and limitations. Democracy is viewed by many as a system that gives voice to unheard communities and is essential for establishing peace and progress.

However, this is not the case, I suppose, let us examine the case studies below of a nation El Salvador. This will show clear the viewpoint that whether democracy is an ideal form of government or else.

One of the prominent thinker worldwide H.L Mencken said "Democracy is a pathetic belief in the collection wisdom of individual ignorance".<sup>3</sup>

## **1. El Salvador's: Journey from Democracy to Autocracy**

El Salvador's historical trajectory following its independence from Spain in 1821 has been marked by considerable volatility, characterized by authoritarian regimes and instances of political violence. From the 1930s to the 1970s, the country witnessed a succession of dictatorships, interspersed with periodic, albeit fraudulent, electoral processes. It was during this period that the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a socialist organization, emerged. Supported by nations such as Cuba and the Soviet Union, the FMLN expanded its influence, ultimately encompassing various leftist guerrilla factions amid the Salvadoran Civil War. Against the backdrop of escalating hostilities, the ousting of President Romero in 1979 via a military coup saw the ascendancy of the Revolutionary Government Junta (JRG) to power. The United States harbored concerns that the remaining elements

in El Salvador, influenced by the communist revolutions in Cuba and Nicaragua, would overthrow the Revolutionary Government Junta (JRG) and replace it with a communist regime hostile to U.S. interests. Given the favorable diplomatic ties and economic connections between the United States and El Salvador, this prospect was viewed with apprehension. In an effort to broker a peace settlement between the government and the FMLN rebels, the United Nations intervened in 1991. This intervention culminated in the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords in Mexico on January 16, 1992, officially bringing an end to the conflict. As part of the agreement, significant reforms were implemented, including the establishment of a civilian police force, the transformation of the FMLN from a guerrilla organization into a political party, and the restructuring of the Salvadoran armed forces. During the war, over a million people in El Salvador were displaced, with many seeking refuges in the United States, where they were granted temporary protected status. However, facing challenges such as discrimination and poverty, some of these immigrants found themselves drawn into gangs as a means of protection and survival. Consequently, some individuals were convicted of crimes and subsequently incarcerated. With the enactment of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, immigrants who had served a year or more in jail became subject to deportation. This legal change led to the deportation of numerous individuals from El Salvador. Upon their return, some found themselves coerced or lured by financial incentives into joining gangs. Consequently, El Salvador experienced a significant surge in violence post-1996, reminiscent of the tumultuous years of the civil war. Many Salvadorans now live in fear and aspire to emigrate to the United States in pursuit of a better life.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Democracy condition in El Salvador:**

The state of the nation was worse under a democratic government. Under democratic leadership, gangs have ruled the country for 20 years; a leader of the nation cannot end this supremacy and improve the lives of the populace. 2015 saw gang atomization, conflict within the country, and vigilantism came in El Salvador together to make it the bloodiest nation in the Western Hemisphere. *La Prensa Gráfica* reports that at least 6,640 homicides took place in El Salvador at the end of the year. According to the report, the startling statistic puts the country's homicide rate at 104.2 per 100,000 inhabitants, over 70% higher than the number of homicides in 2014.<sup>5</sup> In 2015, El Salvador was one of the most violent countries in the world, with 103 homicides per 100,000 people, a number that fell to 2.4 in 2023, according to government figures.<sup>6</sup>

#### **The event led to the transition of the political system of El Salvador:**

##### ***Political Aspect:***

Prisons became hubs for gang recruitment and leadership; in El Salvador, in the early 2010s, gang members were reported to have coordinated 84% of extortion operations from prison itself. The Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) has seen a decline in economic possibilities due to decades of insecurity, financial inequality, and bad governance. Additionally, the region's poorest residents have been disproportionately affected by unforeseen events like storms and the COVID-19 pandemic. Till 2019, almost two million people have left the area due to these difficulties; the majority have traveled from the north via Mexico to the southern border of the United States. Along the way, they encounter extortion from officials and criminal gangs that harass, rob, abuse, and kidnap them. In addition, individuals who enter the country illegally run the risk of maltreatment, incarceration, and deportation. However, there are some areas under the control of criminal organizations over which the government has no jurisdiction, and there is a (Daugherty, 2016) history of public officials working with criminal organizations. Numerous mayors have faced (Broadcasting) allegations of aiding and abetting extortion rings, carrying out assassinations, and purchasing political backing from criminal organizations and gangs.<sup>7</sup>

Salvadorans till today are worried about international companies having sway over national and local government representatives. Separately, in August 2018, the administration declared that it would sever ties with Taiwan and establish a diplomatic relation with China in response to a lobbying campaign by China. In response to the move, the US promised harsh penalties but ultimately withdrew.<sup>8</sup>

Barrio 18 and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), two most violent criminal gang in the country, were brought to justice by Salvadoran authorities for a spate of violence that claimed the lives of at least 87 people between March 25 and 27 in 1972. March 26, 1992, was the deadliest day ever recorded since the end of the Civil War, with nearly 60 people dying in one day. The demographics of the victims were widely distributed, and most of them didn't seem to be part of any gang.<sup>9</sup>

#### ***Economic Aspect:***

El Salvador has maintained an average Growth rate of 2 percent between 2000 and 2019. Its profitable performance is nearly linked to the US frugality, particularly Through high remittance rates (26% Relative to GDP) and trade overflows. Poverty And vulnerability are high. Slightly further Than one- fourth of the population live on lower thanUS\$6.85/ day, while two- thirds live on lower than US\$ 14/ day. Inequality, in discrepancy, is among the smallest in the region. still, El Salvador faces patient structural challenges, including low productivity and mortal capital scarcities forming from issues similar as malnutrition and shy training situations.<sup>10</sup>

Under democratic governance, El Salvador's unemployment rate increased annually from 6.5% in 2015 to 6.9% in 2016, 6.8% in 2017, and 7% in 2018 and 2019. A democratic administration is incompetent when it goes from 6.5% to 7% in just 4 years. GDP growth rates ranged from 1.9% in 2007 to 2.5% in 2018.<sup>11</sup>

#### ***Social condition:***

In 2018 gangs persisted in controlling territory and extorting citizens in localities around the nation. They enlist minors against their will and enslave certain women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender etc.) people.<sup>12</sup> Government officials, security personnel, and journalists are among the people who are killed, abducted, sexually assaulted, or driven from their homes by gangs. A requirement that it stay out of law enforcement. At least 247 of the 262 towns in the nation are home to about 60,000 gang members, according to numbers that have been publicly publicized. They guard the boundaries of their domains, extort locals and visitors, and gather information about them, especially in the vicinity of marketplaces, schools, and public transportation. Numerous officials, both domestic and foreign, think that child abuse is pervasive. The Attorney General's Office reports that at least 20 girls and 14 boys went missing in 2017, while the Institute of Legal Medicine reports that 311 boys and 46 girls were murdered in that same year. If two people "formed a home" or had a child together, judges cleared off rapists with crimes against minors as young as twelve. At least 7 journalists have been killed in the last ten years. Salvadoran courts found gang members guilty in three cases from 2011 to 2016 who had attacked journalists for their reporting.<sup>13</sup>

#### ***Autocracy Over Democracy: Achieving Peace and Stability:***

Following a time of extreme chaos from the start of a civil war in 1979, the country's structure was destroyed, with an estimated cost of overUS\$1.5 billion. Nayib Bukele, the recently appointed President of El Salvador, took charge in the office on Saturday (2019) and promised to heal the Central American nation, which he called a " sick child," after times of migration and bloodshed that had strained ties with the United States. The two- party system that has ruled the nation for 30 years was overthrown by the 37- time-old former mayor of San Salvador, who entered further votes than any other contender in the February presidential contest.<sup>14</sup>

The government established a "state of exception" In March 2022, giving it broad authority to hold and arrest suspected malefactors without a leave or any supporting documentation. Since also, further than 75,000 people have been arrested, making up around 2 of the adult population, including further than 1,600 children. Authorities reported that 7,000 people had been released from prison since the launch of the state of emergency that is confined moment. The authorities bettered security by planting the army against lawless gangs and resorting to mass apprehensions and extrajudicial killings. But the plan was “created by a government that won the popular vote. And people are satisfied with that,” says Dr. Artiga, moment there’s “zero debate, zero analysis, zero discussion” in the Legislative Assembly, which is controlled by Mr. Bukele’s party, says Eduardo Escobar, executive director of Acción Ciudadana, a San Salvador- predicated nongovernmental association promoting transparency in El Salvador. But that means that laws passes quickly, and the president can affect change efficiently. “People are in view of that, ‘Republic was not serving us ahead, but now it’s delivering!’ And for that they are satisfied, indeed if it’s against the universal generality” of democracy, Mr. Escobar says.<sup>15</sup>

The country’s longstanding high homicide rate, which peaked at 105 per 100,000 people in 2015, has sprucely lowered since 2019, reaching a major low of 2.4 in 2023, according to sanctioned numbers. gouging has also dropped, authorities reported. once administrations’ responses to felonious violence have oscillated between obscure accommodations with gangs and iron- fisted security programs. Both have redounded in renewed cycles of violence and mortal rights violations. This is a drop from the 495 murders that passed in 2022. UN agencies calculated that the rate was about one- third below the global normal which is around 6.1 per 100,000 people.<sup>16</sup>

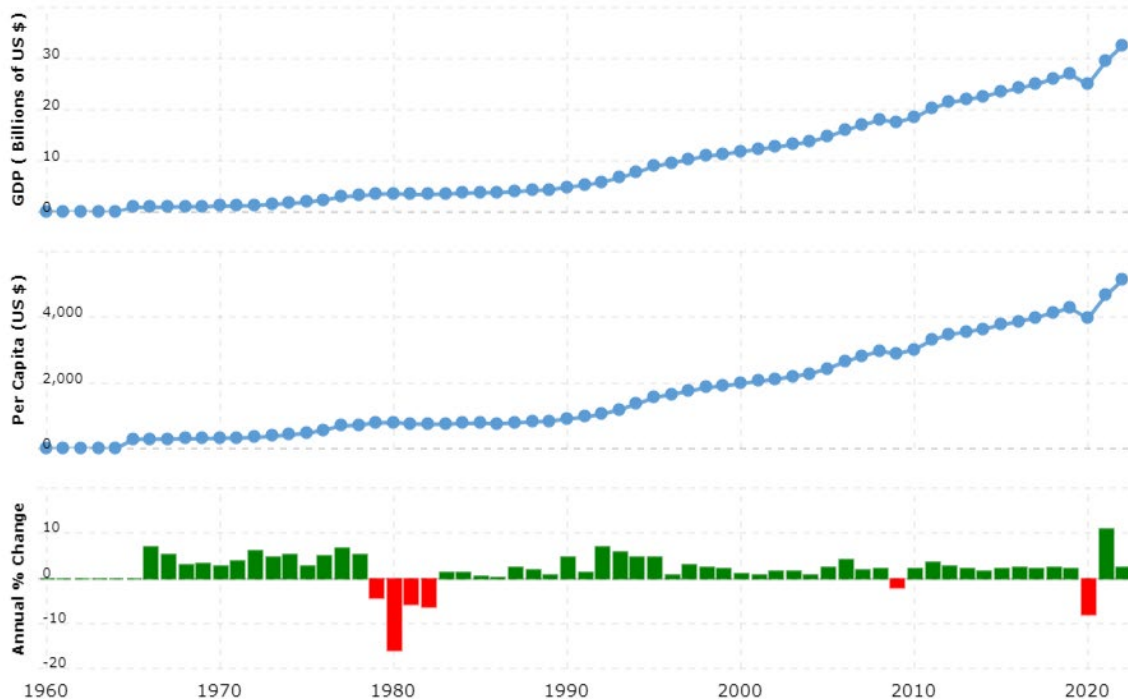


Fig-1 El Salvador GDP 1960-2024

Source: World Bank

***In the figure the growth clearly shows the development of El Salvador in terms of GDP, Per Capital after 2019***

El Salvador's GDP reached \$26.88 billion in 2018, a significant growth in just four years, and reached \$32.49 billion in 2021.<sup>17</sup> The country's employment rate, which was 57.2% in 2019, showed a steady but progressively expanding workforce.<sup>18</sup> However, recent forecasts show a positive trend, with an increase in the employment rate to 60.34% expected in 2024.<sup>19</sup> This gain points to a promising trend in economic expansion and job creation, which could result in increased financial stability and prosperity for the country. An increase in employment prospects like this strengthens the nation's economy and promotes social well-being by giving people the tools to become self-sufficient and advance the nation as a whole.

In the social domain, Before President Nayib Bukele, no authority's management turned into a success in destroying the country's maximum lethal and unfavorable gangs. In the early 2000s, El Salvador's government applied numerous strategies to fight gang violence below the La Mano Dura ("Firm Hand" or "Iron Fist") program, proceeding to overpower the gangs. However, the gangs constantly devised new techniques for reorganization and retaliation. This modified below El Salvador's new President, Nayib Bukele. In March 2022, the Bukele management initiated an accidental crackdown, putting forward a nation of emergency (régimen de excepción) which has given his authorities almost limitless strength in its combat towards the gangs for the beyond 20 months. The operation has succeeded in apprehending a vast wide variety of those gangsters' street-stage contributors and accomplices, disrupting their communications and restricting their potential to address abduction or drug trafficking companies, that are their important sales sources. It has destroyed the command shape and fractured their hierarchies, stopping them from launching a coordinated response. In this case, it ended up leaving them stunned. The mystery to Bukele's relative achievement in hurting gang formations is primarily based totally on 3 primary pillars: the deployment of excessive felony policies, a bigger definition of gang connection, and the crackdown commenced with the announcement asserting a country of emergency. Following a chain of savage gang killings in overdue March 2022 that killed 87 people, MPs assisting Bukele subsidized the president's request to claim a month's country of emergency. As of November of 2023, the moves have been in pressure for 20 months in a row and have been scheduled to be prolonged in December. The emergency measures deny Salvadorans critical constitutional rights, which include the proper to symbolize themselves in courtroom docket and freedom of movement, even as additionally loosening policies on arrests and allowing the authorities to snoop on civilian communication.<sup>20</sup> Analysis of the methods and effects employed by the El Salvadoran government reveals that three principles are crucial for fostering stability and development while addressing violence and notorious activities. These principles are: 1) Centralization of Power, 2) Limited Freedom, and 3) Nationalism.

**Centralization of Power:**

The concentration of power is a key component of El Salvador's strategy for gang violence. This technique entails concentrating authority within the executive branch to ensure that anti-gang actions are implemented quickly and without controversy. Centralization of power involves consolidating decision-making authority within a few hands or a single entity, ensuring that policies can be enacted swiftly and uniformly without the impediments typically posed by a more distributed governance structure.

**1. Emergency Legal Measures:** The Bukele administration's use of emergency legal measures, such as permitting arrests without warrants and increasing incarceration periods without judicial review, is a clear example of concentrated power. These acts allow the government to avoid customary legal safeguards, speeding up the process of apprehending and

arresting alleged gang members. The concentration of authority enables quick and decisive measures, which are critical in a high-stakes war against organized crime.

**2. Judiciary Reforms:** By reorganizing the court to fit with administrative aims, the Bukele administration assures that judicial proceedings enhance its anti-gang efforts. The appointment of judges who support the administration's agenda minimizes the probability of legal challenges to problematic initiatives, furthering power concentration. This alignment of the administration and judiciary presents a single front in the battle against crime, increasing the government's efficacy in enforcing its laws.

**3. Legislative Control:** The administration's supermajority in the legislative assembly makes it easier to pass strict anti-gang legislation. This legislative authority allows the government to quickly implement extensive reforms, hence concentrating power. The capacity to pass legislation that increases jail sentences and lowers the age of trial for gang-related crimes illustrates how concentrated power can accelerate policy implementation.

#### **Limited Freedom:**

The principle of limited freedom is shown by the El Salvadoran government's suspension of certain constitutional rights and the deployment of strict legal measures to maintain civil order. These acts, while appearing restricting, can effectively implement regulations that limit excessive liberties, improving societal security and stability.

**1. Suspension of Constitutional Rights:** During the state of emergency, the Bukele administration has implemented provisions that enable warrantless arrests, extended imprisonment without judicial scrutiny, and the interception of civilian communications. These steps constitute a significant decrease in personal liberties, justified by the necessity to improve security and curb gang activity. Limiting freedoms allows the government to more effectively target and counter threats.

**2. Enhanced Surveillance and Checkpoints:** The authority to intercept communications and set up roadblocks severely restricts civil freedoms. These techniques allow the authorities to track and control the movements of people, particularly those suspected of gang involvement. While these acts improve security, demonstrating the trade-offs inherent in restricting freedoms for the sake of order.

**3. Legal Reforms:** Legal reforms that improve jail sentences and eliminate pre-trial custody for gang-related offenses also limit individual liberties. The government's goal in eliminating legal protections is to prevent criminal activity and keep suspects in prison for longer periods. These measures demonstrate how restricting freedoms improves the government's ability to maintain order.

#### **Nationalism:**

Nationalism involves cultivating a strong sense of national pride and unity among citizens, often through policies that emphasize the collective good and national security.

**1. National Unity Against Gangs:** The Bukele administration's aggressive stance against gangs can be seen as an effort to unify the country against a common enemy. By framing gang violence as a significant threat to national security, the government seeks to galvanize public support for its measures. This approach fosters a sense of collective responsibility and nationalism, as citizens are encouraged to view the fight against gangs as a shared mission.

**2. Government Speech and Communication:** The administration's communication strategies likely play a crucial role in fostering nationalism. Through speeches, media campaigns, and public statements, the government emphasizes the importance of solidarity and collective action. Highlighting the efforts and successes of law enforcement can strengthen national pride and citizens' connection to the state.

**3. Collective Security Measures:** Security measures impacting the entire population, such as roadblocks and surveillance, foster a sense of collective security. When citizens perceive that the government is taking decisive action to protect them, it enhances their trust and nationalism. The notion that everyone is part of a unified effort to combat crime reinforces national pride.

**4. Cultural and Educational Initiatives:** The government may implement programs that emphasize national unity and the fight against crime. These initiatives can instill a sense of duty and pride among young people and the broader population, supporting the government's narrative and efforts to build a cohesive society.

**5. Symbols and Celebrations:** National symbols, holidays, and celebrations can reinforce nationalism. Promoting events and symbols that celebrate national identity and the government's achievements in combating gang violence can strengthen the public's connection to the state.

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