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El Salvador: When Fear Changed Sides



The film "El Salvador" recalls a past marked by violence, the sacrifices of generations, and the country's transformation.

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The Opposition's Questionable Sources

Credible allegations require evidence and reliable sources.



False Journalism

The article challenges disinformation and defends professional rigor.



On the Eve of a New Election

On February 28, 2027, citizens will again decide the nation's future.



Honduras: Institutionalized Corruption

A critical reflection on institutions and corruption in Honduras.



Regarding the UCA

Remembering the six Jesuits, Elba, and Celina 37 years later.



The State Advances in Haiti

Reclaiming territory and restoring state authority.

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Barbecue and "Lanmo San Jou" Call for Peace

The article examines the gang leaders' statements amid security operations in Haiti.

> **Knowing our history helps us understand the country we live in today and appreciate the changes we have experienced.**

MEMORY AND TRANSFORMATION

NEWSLETTER • No. 62

Members of the Political Reflection Circle Siglo XXI

Juan Contreras • Oscar Martínez Peñate • Nelson Flores • Mélida Villatoro • Aldo Álvarez
René Martínez Pineda • Mauricio Rodríguez • Rafael Góchez • José Valdez • Christian Colón

NEWSLETTER

21st Century Political Reflection Circle

San Salvador, El Salvador • N°62 • November 16 to November 22, 2026

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Analysis, reflection and political debate aimed at strengthening democracy and national development.

El Salvador: When Fear Changed Sides



Mauricio Rodríguez, René Pineda Martínez, Oscar Martinez Peñate y Rafael members of the Círculo de Reflexión Política Siglo XXI, attended the premiere of the film *El Salvador*.

It is interesting to learn the background of how El Salvador was changing from different perspectives. We find ourselves in the midst of chaos, conflicts between political parties, and the situations experienced when attempting to block the participation of new political forces. All of this allows us to understand the various intrigues that have marked the country's history and, above all, how the Salvadoran population has lived through each of those stages, amidst an amalgam of political postures, interests, and events that shaped our national reality.



However, something else draws attention: the conditions in which State institutions worked, possessing scarce resources at that time. The National Civil Police and the Armed Forces had to carry out their duties even in situations where their own lives were in danger, or where enlisting was a cause of death for them or their families. It was a difficult reality where denouncing could mean death, and entering certain communities represented the risk of not returning. Even those who had the responsibility of fulfilling their functions lived under that fear.

Our grandparents and parents lived through one of the events that most impacted the country: the armed conflict in our nation. We, on our part, have grown up watching the different changes El Salvador has experienced, from those times when terrorist groups moved freely to the transformations we have lived through as a society. Now, our new generations are growing up in a different context, in a moment of peace and transformation, and we hope they can develop, take advantage of opportunities from their own capabilities, and also become protagonists of the changes our country still needs.

Now it falls to us to live in a different moment, a moment in which we can enjoy a freedom that, for many people, had a very high cost. It is important to think of those who lost their freedom and those who made

sacrifices so that others could live in different conditions. Therefore, I believe we must not forget those who, in one way or another, gave part of their lives and assumed great sacrifices during those moments of our history.

In the end, beyond the different political perspectives each person may have, there is something we must keep in mind: knowing our history allows us to understand the country we live in today and value the changes we have experienced, without forgetting the sacrifices behind them.

We recommend the film; it is crafted with high international standards of cinematographic quality and faithfully illustrates, in a documentary fashion, the transition from the old El Salvador to the new country. We take this opportunity to congratulate the team that produced it.

The Dubious Sources of the Political Opposition



The recent fraud conviction of an individual—who presents himself as a human rights defender, which he is by no means—has brought to light a major weakness in the allegations of alleged governmental abuses during the state of exception.

The anti-government circles reject the sentence, labeling it "political persecution," but the facts supporting the conviction are extensively documented. The matter acquires special relevance because this individual has been

one of the main sources used by organizations claiming to defend the innocent to sell the narrative of a "terrible dictatorship."

Among the convict's claims are grave accusations regarding the treatment of inmates in Salvadoran prisons, made without providing any evidence. When there is no evidence to back an allegation, the credibility of the witness becomes a fundamental element. In this case, the fraud conviction—and even a previous domestic violence process—seriously compromises that credibility and forces us to doubt the value of his testimonies.

This case should also prompt organizations using these sources to be more rigorous in verifying their informants. Thus far, among those who have served as the foundation for their complaints are fraudsters, criminals, gang members, freeloaders, and even serial killers with psychopathic profiles.

The defense of human rights demands rigor, evidence, and reliable sources; it is not enough to make light accusations and present them as unquestionable truths to deceive the gullible.

False Journalism



The practice of journalism constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of any democracy. Its mission is to oversee power, investigate matters of public interest, and offer verified information (not warmed-over leftovers) to the citizenry.

Journalism cannot become an ideological trench where truth is subordinated to partisan, personal, or economic interests. Nor can freedom of expression be confused with a license to manipulate events, take statements out of context, or construct "news" lacking documentary substance. An authentic journalist is both ethical and objective; professional credibility is not obtained through incendiary speeches or permanent, sterile confrontations, often using social media as a platform for attacks.

In El Salvador, we currently have a sector of "pseudo-journalists"—some of them foreigners who, having neither space nor credibility in their countries of origin, come to ours with airs of supposed greatness that deep down only denote a lack of values and a balanced self-esteem. Yet there they are, attacking every good Salvadoran who consciously defends the process of transformation we Salvadorans are experiencing and which President Bukele has propelled since coming to power in 2019.

On the other hand, we find Salvadoran journalists who are now victims of their own words, and I refer to the self-exiled. I put it this way because they are people who, due to their ties with gangs, for having coexisted with them, and for having publicly acknowledged that gangs were an important element for our country—although they do not have open judicial processes (as far as is known)—are right there attacking the Salvadoran people and government with fake news.

The members of the Círculo de Reflexión Política Siglo XXI have been the target of attacks by these pseudo-journalists and certain individuals whom some media outlets give a microphone to, making them believe they are "political analysts." Deep down, what is simply observed is a spectacle where they question and attack one another, and outside the country, they even invent awards and give them to each other.

It's utterly pathetic...

At the Threshold of a New Election

Facing a new electoral contest, a few months before the population exercises its sacred right and duty to choose the country's direction, certainly—each time there is an election—questions of great sociopolitical importance and relevance will arise regarding the work accomplished at the governmental level.

Master Andrés Bello once stated: "Only the unity of the people and the solidarity of their leaders guarantee the greatness of nations." That is to say, what has been built in the country is no small matter; it is the solidary foundation of a dignified vision of the homeland, and that is precisely what will be demonstrated at the polls. The work carried out by the Salvadoran president, in conjunction with the vice president, is undoubtedly a path never before traveled in the country—a people who finally feel deserving.



As the wise Phocylides once expressed: "The people, fire, and water can never be tamed." And the Salvadoran people have shown popular wisdom at every stage of history; they have installed and deposed governments and leaders who have known how to tremble before the overwhelming wave of a society tired of abuses of power.

However, under that same dynamic of the Salvadoran's inherent intelligence, our current mandate holder was placed in office to resolve the state in which our country found itself—abandoned and plunged into chaos by previous administrations. Thus, popular power (democracy) has handed over power in its entirety to the current president, Nayib Bukele.

Now we are moments away from the sovereign people taking into their own hands once again the decision of the homeland's course. They will decide, based on the perception of what they have lived through in these years and what has or has not been resolved for them. What cannot be denied are three avenues of social improvement over these seven years: public security, the health system, and the educational system.

Three areas that have been staked upon with everything possible and with available resources, knowing they are the foundation of any developed and dignified nation. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that when deciding on February 28, the population asks themselves the following questions:

- How long has it been since you last felt that climate of dignity as a Salvadoran?
- How long has it been since you had peace of mind walking out on the street?
- How long has it been since our sons and daughters were given computers, tablets, school supply kits, and schools with proper infrastructure?
- How long has it been since the health system improved its efficiency in care and structure?
- How long has it been since we had this number of foreigners visiting the country and thereby dynamically boosting the economy?
- How long has it been since youth were given hope of accessing university education for free?

Each of these questions—which seem simple in their exposition, but contain profound philosophical and social weight—is a central theme when speaking of governing. Therefore, there is no room for error in the upcoming elections, for there may still be things to resolve, but what is undeniable is what has been achieved, and that deserves the people's approval.

¡Coniuncti patrie propósito! United by the nation project!

Honduras: Institutionalized Corruption



The panorama in Honduras has become so complex that the corrupt have declared war on the population. A population that knows who the true criminals of Honduras are, but watches how justice and investigative institutions—such as the Public Ministry and the National Police, through the DPI and other agencies created to guarantee internal order and security—stage their bread-and-circuses spectacle and go "after" maras and gangs, while refusing to touch the root of the problem: the corrupt politicians who allowed that monster to grow for decades under the shelter of impunity and who, in some cases, have been pointed out for their ties to criminal structures, as documented in judicial proceedings before U.S. courts, given that in Honduras not a single one of them even has a traffic ticket.

These corrupt politicians decorate one another, embrace, applaud, and celebrate amidst parties, alcohol, vices, orgies, and debauchery, as in the times of Sodom and Gomorra. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Hondurans flee toward the United States. A new caravan is crossing Mexico and, according to some media outlets, exceeds 2,000 people, mostly Hondurans. Neighborhoods, housing developments, hamlets, and municipalities continue subjected to the violence of organized crime, among whose actors are political activists, maras and gangs, drug traffickers, and money laundering networks who mock and laugh at the people.

Political parties talk about renewal, but the only thing they are doing is dusting off their junk: their baby dinosaurs and their usual dinosaurs. Political products manufactured for decades, financed and sustained through the embezzlement of the State and by the exact same government structures for over 40 years.

And they still have the nerve to question citizens who have never participated in a popularly elected office or held public positions, telling them they have no background or prospects because they do not belong to their lineage. For them, being a thief, drug trafficker, money launderer, rapist, murderer, ex-con, or having looted the State and belonging to one of their criminal bands they call political parties is the most important requirement and credential to aspire to steer the destinies of the country.

The National Congress, with its 127 deputies voted for by the people plus one whom nobody voted for and who arrived through political wheeling and dealing, has ceased to be a legislative institution to become the crematorium of Honduras. There, birds of prey fly every day, waiting for victims to rot even further before swooping down to devour them.

Meanwhile, the people observe, analyze, and prepare for 2029. A few step forward, publicly question, protest, and, above all, encourage and lead that noble Honduran people—strong and brave, who believe in their democracy—to rescue the homeland in 2029 and dispense justice in 2030.

War is declared. The battlefield is defined. The corrupt have entrenched themselves and declared war on the Honduran people.

But they are mistaken if they believe a noble people means a submissive people.

Regarding the UCA



November 16 marks 37 years since the assassination of six Jesuit priests: Ignacio Ellacuría, Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Juan Ramón Moreno, Amando López, and Joaquín López y López; and their two collaborators: Elba and her daughter Celina, both surnamed Ramos. The latter was only 16 years old. The crime was committed by members of the Atlacatl Battalion during the armed conflict, in the framework of the offensive launched by the FMLN against San Salvador and neighboring localities during those days.

According to extrajudicial statements of those prosecuted for the crime, gathered in Report 136/99 of the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights—and a CIA memorandum leaked in 2007—in the early hours of that fateful day in 1989, members of said battalion arrived at the Jesuits' residence from inside the UCA.

Neighbors reported that Ellacuría and Montes reprimanded the troops for the outrage. "I know what you've come for," Montes told them. They indicated that Martín-Baró called them "carrion" upon seeing them aim at Elba and Celina. It was then that they were ordered to lie face down on the grass, and neighbors stated they heard the religious men break into prayer before hearing the gunfire that ended their lives.

All of this was documented in the trial of those who executed the order, for which they were convicted.

The UCA played an important role in favor of the country's population during those hard years when the people and their defenders suffered repression—some massive, especially against popular sectors, both rural (*Río Sumpul*, *San Francisco Guajoyo*, *El Junquillo*, *Río Lempa*, *Santa Cruz*, *La Quesera*, *El Aceituno*, *El Mozote* and surrounding hamlets, *El Calabozo*, *Las Hojas*, *Tenango and Guadalupe*, *Copapayo*, *San Francisco Echeverría*, *La Carrasca*, *Los Llanitos*, etc.) and urban (FENASTRAS massacre, COMADRES, demonstration of the Revolutionary Coordination of Masses, demonstration of University of El Salvador students, etc.). Likewise, institutional leaders suffered assassinations (Archbishop Óscar Romero; Rector Félix Ulloa Sr.; the majority of the board of the Revolutionary Democratic Front, headed by its president, Enrique Álvarez Córdova, etc.).

Regrettably, the UCA's role changed during the presidency of Nayib Bukele, whom it accuses of human rights violations without considering that the gangs—who consolidated their criminal power during the two FMLN presidential terms—had cornered the population with demented acts. Nor did they consider the limitations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself, which states in Article 1 that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," without acknowledging that, unfortunately, not all of us are born with the same dignity and rights...

Nor do they consider that there are 54 countries in the world—of varying political orientation—that have legalized the death penalty, among which El Salvador is not included. That is to say, those countries consider there are inmates who cannot be reintegrated into society. In contrast, the current government of El Salvador not only gives detained individuals without gang ties the opportunity to learn a trade, but also makes them productive, which allows their sentences to be reduced for each day worked.

What could have motivated the change in the UCA's stance? Where did the "security and audacity" promoted by the martyrs go? As a hypothesis, one can point to the differing access to financial resources the institution has had between the FMLN governments and President Bukele's administration. Let us look at some facts:

According to *Diario El Mundo*, during Rector Andreu's appearance before the Legislative Assembly on February 3, 2022, during President Funes's term, the UCA received a total of US7,100,000 from the State between 2011 and 2013 -without specifying what was received in 2009 and 2010- as well as US 2,400,000 in 2014, the year of the presidential transition between Funes and Sánchez Cerén. During the latter's presidency,

reported amounts totaled US14,700,000 between 2015 and 2019, although in the final year (US3,600,000) it was already mixed with the first six months of the Bukele administration.

That is to say, just what is reported there makes a total of US$20,600,000 across the eight full fiscal years of the two FMLN governments; meaning, without considering 2009 and 2019. Information is not available on how much of that was as a subsidy, donation, or project financing.

However, in October 2021, the UCA claimed it had not received governmental subsidies or donations since 1976, but *La Prensa Gráfica* reported that the university acknowledged having executed projects financed by the government.

In a UCA document titled "Projects implemented by the UCA for the Ministry of Education between 2011 and 2020," funds are separated between the Sánchez Cerén and Bukele administrations in 2019, indicating it received US 499,164 from the new government and reimbursed US 11,265.56; whereas in 2020 those figures were US1,357,165 and US 35,240.48, respectively.

In the 2021 Annual Report (*Memoria de Labores*), the UCA reported signing three agreements, two of which are relevant to this article: one with the Presidency of the Republic and another with the government, though without reporting amounts. The 2022 Report does show an amount: US$19,235 originating from the Government. Likewise, the 2023 report lists a project financed by the Government without stating the amount.

This would tend to support the hypothesis advanced previously: the UCA's stance has changed in years when governmental financial support to that private institution was also reduced.

However, it must be noted that the government has financed education through other institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, the University of El Salvador, *Caja Mutual*, *Bienestar Magisterial*, *Conapina*, *Instituto Crecer Juntos*, etc. If we focus solely on the first two institutions and strictly on the period of the current government, we observe that the budget of the aforementioned Ministry went from US1,022,400 in 2020 to US1,683,354 in 2026. For its part, the University of El Salvador went from receiving US 91,697,552 from the State to US 116,500,000 between those years. That is to say, the educational topic has enjoyed increasing financing during the indicated period.

In summary, while on one hand the Bukele administration has reduced financing to the aforementioned private institution, on the other hand it has increased it to various public bodies dedicated to education, including the University of El Salvador. Article 61 of the current Constitution establishes both the autonomy of this institution and the State's obligation to finance public universities. In other words, the Bukele government has done nothing more than comply with the Constitution; whereas the UCA has strayed from the path marked by the martyrs whose sacrifice is commemorated these days, placing itself among those institutions and individuals who defend the rights of gangs instead of defending those of the honest majority who lived terrified by mareros.

It would seem that the current leadership of the UCA has forgotten what was maintained by the martyr Ellacuría regarding the necessity of adapting to new phases in Salvadoran reality, originally published in 1989 in ECA 485 (pages 167–197):

El Salvador faces a new historical opportunity. It is not solely or principally that new political agents[1] have been constituted, and that these new agents have changed with respect to their immediate predecessors, but that the process itself is new and forces changes upon those who momentarily appear at the head of it. That qualitative novelty is reflected, above all, in the significant transformation that forces such as the FMLN, ARENA, and the Bush administration have been forced to undergo. But those are only the reflections of something deeper, of something more serious, which if not adequately faced with courage and audacity, with prudence and creativity, can become not only a new frustration over a lost opportunity, but a new worsening that leaves the country more exsanguinated than it is.[2]

[1] He was referring to Bush, Gorbachev, Cristiani, the Christian Democratic Party, etc. Now it must be adapted to the new actors in national and international politics.
[2] Ellacuría, I. "A New Phase in the Salvadoran Process" (*"Una nueva fase en el proceso salvadoreño"*), in *Political Writings: Twenty Years of History in El Salvador* (*Escritos Políticos. Veinte años de historia en El Salvador*), Volume III, UCA Editores, p. 1895.

The State Advances in Haiti



If security, freedom, democracy, and economic development are not phenomena that occur naturally, they are the direct consequence of institutional capacity to impose the rule of law against those who seek to replace it through violence. Where the State empties out, this vacuum is filled almost immediately by criminal organizations. It is also true that where the State reappears, crime inevitably begins to retreat. And that is happening in Haiti; we can witness it in real time.

For decades, Haiti has been under the almost total control of armed gangs that replaced the State, imposed their own rule of law (criminal state), exercised almost total territorial control, and turned entire communities into criminal fiefdoms. However, recent cooperation between the Haitian government and El Salvador is beginning to produce a phenomenon that long seemed impossible: the return of the State.

Operations carried out by Haitian forces with the support of the Salvadoran contingent have already produced significant results. Recently, strategic positions of the criminal structure *400 Mawozo*, one of the most violent organizations in the country, were attacked. The residence of its ringleader, Wilson Joseph, known as "Lanmò San Jou," as well as the organization's headquarters, were destroyed during a military operation. Various international reports also point to the elimination of numerous members of these criminal structures and the progressive recovery of spaces previously dominated by gangs.

Even more important is the political significance of these events. It is not simply a matter of destroying houses, mansions, or criminal operations centers. It is about something much deeper: re-establishing state authority in territories where for years only brute force reigned.

Even the Haitian government itself has recognized that these operations are helping to recover territories and restore state authority. In other words, where gangs previously ruled, the Law begins to rule once again.

Naturally, "the usual suspects" have already appeared. The self-proclaimed "Human Rights defender" organizations—the exact ones that for years demanded special considerations for Salvadoran gang members while millions of honest citizens remained kidnapped by violence, fear, and terror—are once again demanding guarantees for those who have turned Haiti into the greatest insecurity hell in the world. Organizations like Amnesty International have already requested special monitoring and warned about potential human rights violations during joint operations.

Nevertheless, the fundamental question remains intact: no country can survive when criminals exercise functions belonging to the State. Haiti seems to begin understanding a universal truth that El Salvador already demonstrated in practice: where the Law does not prevail, order cannot exist; and where order does not exist, prosperity ends up being impossible. For the first time in a long time, the State is advancing in Haiti. And when the State advances, criminals retreat. It's as simple as that!

Barbecue and "Lanmò San Jou" Beg for Peace



The gang leaders, Barbecue and Lanmò San Jou, are among the most bloodthirsty criminals the Haitian population has endured for many years. They display themselves in luxury houses, amalgamating piles of money on large tables and in sacks, boasting that millions and weapons give them power and influence reaching up to the highest spheres of government. Only Salvadorans can understand what it is like to suffer that scourge, from gangs that for many years subjugated the nation without anyone defending them. Back then, there were no human rights commissions speaking out, nor international community organizations demanding justice and respect.



The army and the police hid under the shadow of corrupt rulers who never wanted to solve the problem—until President Bukele arrived and proved that it *could* be done. The people of Haiti suffer that exact same thing today: massacres and homicides without anyone answering for them, gangs arming themselves to the teeth in complicity with the state apparatus to attack their own people, with the consent and approval of NGOs and an international community that remains silent while the population is bled dry.

However, today—as President Bukele's army arrives in Haiti to rescue their kidnapped aeronautical soldiers—they realize it *can* be done, with fewer soldiers and scarce financial resources, but with the ironclad will to exterminate this gang cancer. The results are demonstrating it; the results are shutting the mouths of so-called experts, and the entire world is realizing that no one wanted to solve Haiti's problem, but many who call themselves human rights defenders were indeed enriching themselves through the billions received from the international community.

Today, the gangs—seeing themselves cornered and realizing their end is a matter of days—raise their voices begging the United Nations for help. Today they want peace—the peace they stole from the defenseless population for decades. Fearing being taken down or going to prison in foreign prisons, they cry out for help

to accomplice NGOs, talking about negotiating. That would be the worst mistake. Haiti wants to be free, and its people have shown they will fight alongside those who help secure their freedom.

These two aforementioned ringleaders, who today talk about peace and release communiqués, are heads of the most violent and bloodthirsty gangs in the Haitian nation, with a strong presence in the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets. They are bands specializing in kidnappings, extortion along commercial and border routes; they are attributed with the kidnapping of 17 foreign missionaries, and million-dollar bounties are offered for their capture.

We believe their final moment has arrived, and it is a matter of days before we see them captured. The entire nation leans toward and yearns for that day of seeing them behind bars, paying their sentences in foreign prisons, and breathing the air of freedom already being experienced in the cities and sectors rescued by multinational and Salvadoran forces.

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