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Rule of Law and Democracy in Our Nation



The registration of Nayib Bukele and Félix Ulloa for the 2027 election renews the debate on the rule of law, electoral participation, and popular sovereignty.

▶ FEATURE STORY



Nayib Bukele Registers with the TSE

The president and Félix Ulloa submitted their applications to register for 2027.



The New Sovereign Paradigm

El Salvador confronts old international formulas and debates over sovereignty.



Second International Conference on State and Democracy

Members of the Circle attended CIED 2026, held on November 16–17.



CIED 2026: Epicenter of Democratic Debate

Delegates from 25 nations discussed security, governance, and integration.



State and Democracy in Today's El Salvador

A historical look at civic participation, institutions, and security.



Honduras: State and Democracy

The article examines institutional corruption, impunity, and democratic challenges.

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State and Democracy Serving Everyone

Democracy requires a State that can solve collective problems and strengthen institutions.

> **Democracy is not sustained by elections alone. It is sustained when the State fulfills its basic duty: solving collective problems rather than managing private privileges.**

STATE AND DEMOCRACY
NEWSLETTER · No. 63

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NEWSLETTER

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

Rule of Law and Democracy in Our Nation



The recent registration of the candidacies of President Nayib Bukele and Vice President Félix Ulloa for the 2027 presidential elections has once again placed two fundamental concepts for any politically organized society at the center of the national debate: the rule of law and democracy. Beyond partisan passions, ideological sympathies, or antipathies, the discussion demands to be addressed with legal seriousness and intellectual honesty.

For years, a significant portion of the international community and certain domestic political sectors have maintained that democratic deterioration exists in El Salvador. However, it is impossible to analyze the current political reality while ignoring an elementary fact: never before has a ruler enjoyed such high and sustained

levels of popular backing, nor achieved such visible results in matters of security, infrastructure, health, education, and State modernization. This is an objective political reality that any serious analysis must recognize.

Precisely for this reason, the registration of these candidacies acquires special relevance. Democracy does not consist solely of the existence of periodic elections or alternation as a mechanical principle. The democratic essence lies in the citizen freely deciding who should govern. When the people are prevented from voting for a political option backed by the majority, democracy is not strengthened; it is limited.

The statements given by President Bukele after formalizing his registration are particularly revealing. He maintained that democratic conditions exist in El Salvador for the participation of all political parties, that electoral competition is open, and that it will once again be the popular will that determines the outcome of the elections. Likewise, he called on the citizenry to turn out massively at the polls and affirmed that the country has become an example for many nations.

Naturally, there are sectors that disagree with this vision and consider that certain constitutional or institutional changes generate legitimate concerns regarding the balance of powers. In a healthy democracy, such opinions must not only be respected, but also heard. Yet it must equally be recognized that popular backing constitutes an essential element of democratic legitimacy.

The true challenge for our nation is not deciding between democracy or the Rule of Law, as if they were opposing concepts. The challenge consists of consolidating both simultaneously. As we have pointed out previously, and at this moment it is no less true: "A Rule of Law without popular backing runs the risk of becoming an empty formal structure, and a democracy without solid institutions can devolve into arbitrariness."

Therefore, the political moment El Salvador is experiencing demands civic maturity. Let all candidates participate. Let citizens express themselves at the polls. Let institutions guarantee transparency. And let the result be respected by all. Because, ultimately, the foundational principle of our Republic remains the same: sovereignty resides in the Salvadoran people, and it is solely the people who hold the final word on the destiny of our nation.

Nayib Bukele, Registered at the TSE



President Bukele's arrival at the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) received a tremendous welcome from supporters who gathered amidst shouts of joy and jubilation, chanting his name and demonstrating once again their love for the leader who gave them the freedom and social peace they now enjoy. Upon stepping out of his SUV, the President raised his hand in a greeting, and the crowd erupted with emotion upon seeing their leader arrive at the tribunal.

Together with the Vice President, President Bukele submitted his registration application before the TSE to run for another presidential term under the banner of Nuevas Ideas. Upon leaving the Tribunal, the President was greeted with shouts of joy, centering his speech on the need to go out and vote massively, motivating all citizens and families to participate in the upcoming electoral event.

If there is something important to highlight, it is the example El Salvador sets for the world, promoting participatory democracy among citizens in a climate of security, where all political aspirants participate on equal terms, promoting their electoral platforms to capture the voter's interest and attention. With this, El Salvador once again stands out as a country with solid democratic foundations where rulers are elected by popular will and not by impositions.

The New Sovereign Paradigm: El Salvador Facing Old International Recipes



Recently, the second edition of the International Congress on State and Democracy was held in El Salvador, a space designed to dialogue and share with international actors regarding the real transformation of the country in matters of security, health, education, tourism, human rights, and, fundamentally, the Salvadoran vision of what democracy means.

This event constitutes a forceful response to those international organizations that insist on imposing the failed narrative of recent decades—a theoretical model that has failed to generate any real development in terms of institutionality or citizen well-being. This is not a diagnosis exclusive to El Salvador: entities such as Latinobarómetro and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) itself have extensively documented the sustained drop in trust in the State and the democratic deterioration in the region, phenomena responding to an ever-deepening gap between people's expectations and the actual performance of their institutions.

Faced with this exhaustion, an urgent need arises to place viable alternatives on the table. The historical moment El Salvador is traversing is the ideal setting to detonate a revolution in the collective thinking of societies. The Salvadoran case has demonstrated in practice that the traditional formulas imposed on us to combat delinquency, inequality, and underdevelopment never worked. Moreover, it has proven that daring to do things differently does not lead to social collapse; on the contrary, nations have much more to gain when they act with true sovereignty, responding to their own reality rather than foreign recipes designed under petty interests.

This second edition of the congress is merely the beginning of a platform that positions El Salvador as a regional and global benchmark in the debate on the modern State. Today, the country possesses every credential to present itself with authority on the matter. The great protagonist of this feat is the Salvadoran people, who since 2019 decided at the polls to dismantle the old political apparatus. However, none of this would have been materially possible without the vision, unshakeable will, and leadership of the man guiding this process: Nayib Bukele.

Societies demand statesmen with character and intelligence to steer a nation's course, far removed from false leaders who, armed solely with empty rhetoric and backed by hidden financiers, reach power only to abuse it. Bukele is fully aware that the Salvadoran transformation is the result of an absolute synergy between the ruler and his people. The citizenry backs his administration because they see results, and he works tirelessly to honor that trust.

Precisely because he understands this social pact, the president submits himself without fear to the scrutiny of the ballot box. The day the population ceases to support this project, the effort will lose its *raison d'être*, for no historical process makes sense without popular consent. That mutual trust is the root of the fruits El Salvador harvests today and is, ironically, the weakest point of traditional democracies, trapped in a total divorce between their political elites and their citizens.

With the formalization of his candidacy toward the 2027 elections, Bukele's message to the international community has been clear and direct: respect for the will of the Salvadoran people and national sovereignty. It is time to leave behind tutelary discourses that only seek to keep countries subjected to external agendas. While traditional media and forums financed by obscure interests attempt to sustain an obsolete model,

initiatives like the International Congress on State and Democracy will gain ever greater relevance, illuminating the path toward the peace, security, and prosperity every people deserves.

II International Conference on State and Democracy (CIED) 2026



One of the central questions of the philosophy of the State or political philosophy is: How must human accord be established to achieve order, justice, and the common good without abolishing sacred individual and collective freedom? Clearly, the social pact or contract, State institutions, and the legitimacy enjoyed by a ruler are fundamental to achieving and maintaining that freedom and social well-being—something El Salvador is experiencing and which has been embraced by its people and by different nations of the region and the world.

At one point during his presidency, former U.S. President Thomas Jefferson stated: "Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government." That must be the essence of every sociopolitical act; and the II International Conference on State and Democracy (CIED) 2026, organized by Félix Ulloa Jr. and the Vice Presidency of the Republic this past November 16 and 17 of this year, is proof of what the celebrated American thinker and politician proposed.



José Valdez, Nelson Flores, Oscar Martinez Peñate, Juan Contreras y Christian Colón members of the Círculo de Reflexión Política Siglo XXI, attended the II International Conference on State and Democracy.

At this event of great importance for the region, topics relevant to the new vision of State and Democracy—initiated under our country's example—were addressed. Listening to officials from El Salvador present figures and data backing the narrative set forth in the nation project, alongside speakers from diverse countries holding our nation up as an example, allows us to maintain the stance that we are on the right path.

Among the presentations over the two days of the conference, we are pleased to recall the data presented by Alejandro Gutman, president of the Council of the Directorate of Integration, who showed that through the work carried out under the new Social Development Model, nine out of ten people confirm the transformation in social development currently being built—allowing us to understand the sense of belonging Salvadorans now enjoy.

Thus, an event of this caliber materializes in data the great work and vision of our President Nayib Bukele leading the Republic. Above all, the fact that speakers from the countries in attendance expressed their approval of the security model El Salvador has implemented—and the fact that crime can be effectively tackled without eroding democracy—provides a major endorsement to continue along the charted path, a posture shared by all domestic speakers and the majority of participating countries.

As Master Raúl Alfonsín once stated: "With democracy one eats, one is educated, one is healed." Today, under this nation project, we shall say that with democracy crime is also repressed, and prevented through integration across all fields. A homeland organized in pursuit of its population will always succeed and enjoy its backing.

Hence the importance of the closeness of both the President and Vice President of the Republic of El Salvador and their officials, who, with honesty and sincerity, stand ready to listen and attend to every citizen who seeks them out.

Likewise, what was stated at the Conference by Spanish lawyer and former deputy Macarena Olona—that in El Salvador, with President Bukele's new security model, a "spiritual battle, a battle between good and evil, is being waged"—is not far-fetched, since behind all forms of crime and violence lies the cause and trigger of psycho-spiritual aspects that lead to every kind of social chaos.

In this manner, what was presented on November 16 and 17, from a contractualist perspective—which holds that society and the State arise from a commitment or agreement among individuals to guarantee social order and the defense of rights—demonstrates that El Salvador has utilized humanist and progressive reason (under the proper usage of the term) to improve the Salvadoran quality of life and restore greater dignity, which had been stripped away for decades.

Therefore, we believe what was presented during the two days of the conference serves as an example in two ways: on one hand, the support of broad social, academic, and international sectors for the path charted in our nation; and on the other hand, the data confirming the narrative demonstrated across these seven years of government. If the path leads to the right places, that road must be continued; therefore, keeping this government, its officials, and those who provide governability (deputies) in place will be fundamental to preserving and continuing this nation project, which germinated from the feelings and demands of the Salvadoran people.

Finally, one thing must be firmly established: everything accomplished during these years of a new way of governing, while undeniably carried out within the unrestricted framework of the law, is more than clearly sustained by the overwhelming backing of the people—just as the contractualist social philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau exhibited in linking political legitimacy with the collective will and popular sovereignty. Legality and legitimacy are the two great tools of a leader to govern and improve the lives of the governed.

CIED 2026: El Salvador, New Epicenter of the Democratic Debate



The holding of the II International Conference on State and Democracy (CIED 2026), which took place in San Salvador on November 16 and 17 under the auspices, logistics, and excellent organization of the Vice Presidency of the Republic, constitutes an event of singular relevance for contemporary political science and international relations in the hemisphere.

By bringing together delegations from twenty-five nations across the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia—including high-level dignitaries, academics, jurists, and representatives of multilateral organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Central American Integration System (SICA), and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI)—the conclave transcended a merely protocolary character to stand as a laboratory of strategic reflection on 21st-century institutional architecture. In continuity with the inaugural 2024 edition, the forum allowed for auditing the advances and challenges recorded over the past biennium, contrasting traditional paradigms of liberal democracy with emerging governance models oriented toward state efficacy.

One of the core outcomes of CIED 2026 lay in systematizing the indissoluble link between citizen security, territorial sovereignty, and democratic legitimacy. The presentation of the public security policies implemented by the Salvadoran State, delivered by El Salvador's Minister of Public Security and Justice Gustavo Villatoro, generated intense comparative scrutiny regarding the recovery of the legitimate monopoly of force against transnational organized crime.

This axis acquired a practical and urgent dimension during the panel dedicated to the institutional reconstruction of Haiti, materialized in the participation of Haitian Justice Minister Patrick Pélissier, who even inspected the facilities of the Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) with the purpose of evaluating measures applicable to his country's governability crisis.

In parallel, the roundtables on governance and justice models fostered a pluralistic dialogue among actors from dissimilar ideological and geographical latitudes—from Chinese and Russian delegates to Latin American legislators and African ministers—evidencing the necessity of building pragmatic consensuses in the face of global fragmentation.

Beyond the security agenda, the gathering consolidated a multidimensional vision of development where institutional stability operates as a catalyst for investment, innovation, and social cohesion. In the forums dedicated to State transformation and the business climate, as well as presentations on repositioning El Salvador as a regional tourism benchmark and strengthening comprehensive health, it was underscored that sustainable economic growth requires predictable regulatory frameworks and proactive economic diplomacy.

Of special academic and social significance was the focus on integration as an innovative model to overcome structural poverty. The closing ceremony at Parque El Cafetalón in Santa Tecla, which brought together thousands of young scholarship recipients from the Directorate of Integration alongside international experts and the diplomatic corps, symbolized the convergence between higher education, social mobility, and the sustainability of the democratic project.

That El Salvador served as host for this interregional dialogue carries a profound geopolitical resignification. Historically perceived from centers of power as a peripheral nation and a passive recipient of external diagnoses, the country today projects a renewed soft power that positions it as a valid interlocutor and a neuralgic center for debating the future of Central America and Latin America. Ultimately, CIED 2026 ratifies that the vitality of contemporary democracies is not measured solely by their formal procedures, but by the tangible capacity of the State to guarantee security, education, investment, and citizen well-being; by leading this conversation, El Salvador not only showcases its empirical experience, but consolidates its protagonism in redefining the modern State.

State and Democracy in Present-Day El Salvador



Introduction

The link between State and democracy is a fundamental topic, both for the daily life of the citizenry and for political philosophy and social organization. From ancient Greece to the present day, humanity has sought structures of political organization that reconcile State authority, the exercise of power, citizen liberty, and the pursuit of the common good.

The State is a political and legal organization created by a given society to guarantee security, order, justice, and the conditions necessary for the development of its population—with the population being one of its fundamental elements, alongside territory, government, and sovereignty. For its part, democracy is a form of legitimization and exercise of political power, where sovereignty resides in the people.

Both concepts must complement one another. A State without democratic legitimacy runs the risk of becoming an instrument of domination, while a democracy without a State capable of guaranteeing security,

enforcing the law, and protecting citizen rights can end up as a facade institution, unable to respond to the real needs of its population.

a. The Origins of Democracy

The Greek root of democracy means it is the power of the people: *demos* (people) and *kratos* (power). In the 5th century BCE, Cleisthenes and Pericles established a system of citizen participation in public affairs, which excluded women, slaves, and resident foreigners. Despite those limitations, decisions could be discussed and adopted through citizen participation. Later, Aristotle and Plato underscored the virtues and dangers of different forms of government.

Much later, the independence of the United States (1776) and the French Revolution (1789) contributed to the evolution of democratic thought, especially by establishing that government authority proceeds from the will of the citizenry. Both helped lay the foundations of the modern State. The United States Constitution (1787) and its subsequent Bill of Rights allowed for the development of institutions based on government control, separation of powers, and the protection of individual liberties. For its part, the French Revolution deepened those principles by questioning inherited privileges and defending that citizens must be equal before the law.

b. The Modern State and Representative Democracy

The European Enlightenment enabled the development of the foundations of the modern State. Among other thinkers, Locke defended fundamental rights; Montesquieu, the separation of powers; and Rousseau, popular sovereignty. Thus emerged the conception of the democratic State based primarily on electoral legitimacy, enforcement of the law, protection of rights, accountability of rulers, and the orientation of institutions toward the general interest.

Democracy, then, cannot be limited to holding elections; it must also be evaluated by its capacity to solve the problems of the collectivity, guarantee coexistence, and provide dignified living conditions.

c. El Salvador: Transformation of the State up to the Bukele Administration

Since its emergence as an independent nation, El Salvador suffered from serious structural problems characterized by a lack of democracy and conditions that eroded citizen trust in institutions. All of this led to a painful armed conflict at the end of the last century, which culminated with the Peace Accords signed on January 16, 1992. What followed was a series of corrupt governments—both from the right, through four ARENA administrations (Cristiani, who had begun in 1989; Calderón Sol, Flores, and Saca), and two from the left under the FMLN (Funes and Sánchez Cerén).

In parallel to all of them, the real power of the *maras* and their connections with international crime organizations grew gradually and increasingly, keeping the population subjugated. During the recently passed decades, the country was regrettably distinguished by criminal violence, gang expansion, corruption, inequality, and governmental inability both to administer the State and to combat crime—even going so far as to pact with it, counting on the "blessing" of churches and international organizations for doing so.

Faced with that scenario of governmental corruption and incapacity, and growing control by organized crime, Nayib Bukele was massively elected President of the Republic by popular vote in 2019—after carrying out successful terms as mayor in Nuevo Cuscatlán and later in the country's capital—with a proposal for political and institutional transformation.

A key aspect during his term has been the recovery of public security, starting with the state of exception (2022), which produced a drastic reduction in homicides and gang activity. This resulted in an increased sense of security among citizens—by recovering territorial control and combating criminal structures—as well as the exercise of public liberties, the political-administrative reorganization in 2023 by reducing—in a country of only approximately 20,000 km²—from 262 to 44 municipalities, as well as the number of deputies—from 84 to 60—to improve resource administration and public policy coordination in a less fragmented State.

In 2025, constitutional reforms were approved that extended the presidential term from five to six years, eliminated the runoff election and limits on presidential reelection, considering that—if an administration achieves results well-evaluated by the citizenry—its voters should have the option to keep it in power through elections.

d. Democracy, State Effectiveness, and Popular Will

A widespread error in political analysis is comparing institutions against models from other societies. Democratic institutions must respond—among other things—to the historical, social, economic, and cultural conditions of each country, guaranteeing that their functioning includes citizen participation, legitimacy of power, and protection of fundamental rights.

Democracy requires state institutions that are effective and efficient, not merely that they exist. The Bukele administration has not only shown the recovery of security in the country, but—unlike in previous governments—the various Ministries of State have demonstrated concrete results benefiting the citizenry, transforming the relationship between citizens and public power. This has led to sustained popularity for the president, even measured by polls conducted by the political opposition through different institutions that may or may not organically depend on it, all of which have been respected by the government.

e. Conclusion and Proposal

From Athenian democracy to contemporary ones, political history demonstrates that the State and democracy are not immutable institutions, but rather social constructions subject to transformations that respond to the needs and aspirations of each era.

The Greeks introduced a principle that retains validity: citizens must play the leading role in public decisions. They are not spectators of those who exercise power. Although several sectors of the population were excluded in that era, they did establish the foundation of political participation as an expression of popular sovereignty.

The United States Declaration of Independence (1776) introduced a new dimension: governments are vested with legitimate power by the consent of the governed. Later, its 1787 Constitution incorporated mechanisms of representation, separation of powers, and protection of individual liberties through the first ten constitutional amendments and the development of its republican institutions.

The French Revolution (1789) deepened the process by eliminating inherited privileges and proclaiming liberty, equality before the law, and national sovereignty. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen established that political authority must submit to general legal principles.

Each country must generate the institutions required by its own conditions and needs. The connection between these events and the transformations introduced by Bukele lies in the vindication of popular sovereignty and the need for State institutions to respond to real societal demands. Just as the aforementioned historical-political movements questioned power structures that had lost legitimacy, the Salvadoran process has questioned a political system that, since independence, failed to provide satisfactory responses to problems as serious as socioeconomic inequality and, more recently, violence, insecurity, and the territorial dominance of organized crime.

The recovery of public security is one of the significant changes of this process. By re-establishing state authority in territories previously subjected to criminal control, indispensable conditions for exercising individual and collective liberties have been recovered. Security allows people to move around, work, study, carry out activities for socioeconomic development, and coexist without the threat of violence. However, the transformations of the Salvadoran State must not be examined exclusively from the perspective of security: their economic, technological, and social dimensions must also be considered, particularly the modernization of public services, especially access to health and education.

In health, efforts stand out to renew primary public care facilities, incorporate digital tools, and expand telehealth modalities. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has documented advances in the digital integration of the Salvadoran health system, including electronic management of consultations, appointments, clinical records, and remote care services. These initiatives are aimed at facilitating access for people living far from hospital centers and improving continuity of medical care. Likewise, an increase in public health spending has been recorded, rising from 4.6% of GDP in 2017 to 6.1% in 2024, according to PAHO indicators.

In education, renovating schools, incorporating technological resources, supporting early childhood education, delivering computer equipment to primary and secondary students, increasing the budget for the public university, and so on, are important components of social modernization. Initiatives such as *Mi Nueva*

Escuela ("My New School") and *Enlaces con la Educación* ("Links with Education") seek to improve learning spaces and reduce barriers to technology access. Investment in educational infrastructure and digital competencies has strategic importance: it not only improves students' current learning conditions, but also helps prepare new generations to participate in an increasingly technological and competitive economy.

These advances must translate into verifiable improvements in educational quality, healthcare coverage, and equal opportunity. The construction or remodeling of schools, for example, must be accompanied by sufficient teachers in quality and quantity, educational materials, and effective learning. In the same way, the modernization of hospitals and health units must materialize with medication availability, sufficient medical and paramedical staff, and timely care.

On the other hand, still on the topic of service modernization, the digitalization of administrative procedures, simplification of government processes, and investments in road infrastructure, connectivity, and transport are relevant. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that El Salvador has simplified more than 600 administrative procedures and digitalized more than 200, in addition to driving investments in strategic infrastructure. These changes can translate into lower costs and times for citizens and businesses, greater administrative effectiveness, and better conditions for economic activity.

There is also a connection with the Athenian democratic tradition regarding the importance of participation and popular will. The electoral support obtained by Bukele and his political party expresses a citizen decision to modify the country's institutional course. The administrative, legislative, and constitutional reforms driven by his government form part of that transformation process.

Evaluating the path traveled by the current administration must recognize both the results achieved and the challenges remaining. It means recognizing that El Salvador has undertaken a profound modification of its state organization, its security policy, and its public services, responding to social demands that long remained unattended.

True success will depend on its capacity to turn the advances achieved into lasting institutions, preserve the liberties won, guarantee due process, and ensure that the State continues responding to the general interest, regardless of who exercises power in the future.

From Athens to Philadelphia and Paris, and from those experiences to contemporary El Salvador, there is a common thread between State and democracy: the pursuit of an institutionalization in which the people are always the source of legitimacy of power, and the State constitutes an instrument to guarantee their well-being and rights.

Ultimately, democracy must not be solely the right of citizens to choose their rulers; rather—regardless of who governs—it must also be the effective capacity to demand results from them, transform institutions when they cease to respond to collective needs, and preserve the liberties that make coexistence possible. The State must be at the service of the people, and democracy must allow those people to be the true protagonists of their destiny.

El Salvador has before it the opportunity to continue demonstrating that it is possible to recover public authority, modernize institutional structures, and build new stages for national development. The transcendence of the experience spearheaded by Nayib Bukele will depend, finally, on whether—among other things—security, education, health, modernization, liberty, justice, and collective well-being become consolidated as permanent and continuously updated achievements for Salvadoran society.

State and Democracy in El Salvador: The Challenges of the Bukele Conjuncture



El Salvador is going through a political and institutional transformation that forces a rethinking of the debate on the nature of the State and the quality of its democracy. Since President Nayib Bukele arrived at the Executive Branch in 2019, the country has experienced profound changes in the relationship between citizenry, political power, and public institutions.

The main backing for the government project is linked to public security. The reduction of violence and the dismantling of gang structures have generated a new social scenario, with popular approval above ninety percent toward the actions executed by President Bukele.

In the institutional sphere, the opposition resorts to delegitimizing the fact that, by mandate of the population, the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches work in unison for the benefit of the population—the very same population that made the decisions at the ballot box.

The constitutional reforms modifying issues related to presidential reelection extended the term of office to six years (*sexenios*) and eliminated the runoff election, as well as repealing political debt—political actions that modernize the Salvadoran State and make its procedures more expeditious, while at the same time generating questioning from certain international organizations. Historically, these organizations are known to view such changes with suspicion, since a colonialist matrix is observable in their political DNA in their intent to keep poor countries subjugated; such was our sad history, which changed with the arrival of President Bukele.

Salvadoran democracy is not limited to voting at the ballot box; it seeks to modernize a State that had fallen into a kind of structural stagnation, affecting conjunctural processes and generating regression for a country demanding entry into modernity.

El Salvador's historic challenge consists of building a State capable of guaranteeing security, education, health, housing, recreation, and work, always placing the human person at the center of State attention.

State and Democracy: An Equation in the Process of Being Solved



This past November 16 and 17, El Salvador hosted the II International Conference on State and Democracy (CIED, 2026), organized by the Vice Presidency of the Republic. The topics discussed at said conference provide grounds for analyzing, from a sociological perspective, the new relationship between State and democracy within the framework of current political logic. Indeed, in some way, the relationship between State and democracy is an equation in the process of being solved—a social equality between two political expressions—readjusting the definition of its members, whose unknown variable is the welfare society. That being so, the premise of democracy is a State functioning for the vast majority of the population, and that implies that said State reinvents itself as a social actor.

From the perspective of critical sociology, the State and democracy enter into a social relation—as complex as it is changing—in which political power (and the political leadership that makes it tangible), given and forthcoming institutions, and civil society come together in the *habitus* of citizens' everyday life in order to regulate excesses, norm social relations, and resolve, from the logic of the greater good, primary, secondary, and tertiary conflicts stemming from particular interests.

Until today, the State has been conceived as an abstract institutionality (merely bureaucratic or administrative) whose corporeality is reduced to a network of public buildings. However, the new political conjuncture opened in 2019, which introduced the country into the 21st century, obliges us to readjust its definition as a social construction—from the social sphere—of living conditions and the collective imaginary of a population yearning to organize society as a space of social justice sustained by democratic political culture.

Common sense, more than sociological theory, has demonstrated that the State is not—nor has it been—a neutral entity unaffected by groups, parties, and social classes, and therefore has shown itself incapable of balancing diverse interests. That was the case because the State deliberately neglected, up until before 2019, the public sphere as a balancing factor that provides access and full standing to the category of "citizen"—and that is being achieved under the benchmark that "the public must be better than the private."

Within that logic, the social relation between State and democracy is resolved and made visible through collective reflection in which all sectors (public and private) do their part to resolve, gradually at first, the originating problem (the key one) behind all other problems: social inequality. Regarding the formal relation between both aspects, it must be weighed that democracy is not reduced to the technical procedure (virtual or in-person) of periodically going to the polls, but rather incorporates and demands a cultural component and an institutionality not governed by corruption and impunity.

Undoubtedly, over these seven years we have understood that democracy, from the sphere of the State, demands a continuous relationship between citizenry and government, such that the latter thinks and plans as a country, not as a political party, and such that the Constitution is not a straitjacket, but a social contract under constant modification.

The main challenge to solving the State-democracy equation is that the socioeconomic inequality variable ceases to be an unknown of corruption, violence, and impunity, so that the welfare society becomes both premise and result of democracy.

State and Democracy at the Service of All



Democracy is not sustained by elections alone. It is sustained when the State fulfills its basic function: solving collective problems rather than administering particular privileges.

That is the practice we come from. For years, the State and democracy were at the service of opportunist politicians, influential officials, and, above all, economic power groups.

El Salvador has almost never had a State in favor of the majority. If we start from the contemporary history of the 1980s, institutions—the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches—and others as important as the Attorney General's Office, the Court of Accounts, and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal remained captured by delegates at the service of corrupt political and economic power, not the citizenry.

However, the State collapses when taken over by officials who confuse the public with the private. It happens when office is used to get rich, to protect a group, to pay off campaign favors, or to guarantee impunity. At that moment, the institution stops serving the population and begins serving itself off of it.

It is a secret to no one that corrupt officials from the "polarized" era between ARENA and FMLN occupied institutions to the point that even gangs and organized criminals managed to infiltrate from municipalities up to high-level entities.

Corruption is not just stealing money; it is diverting the function of the State. A mayor who charges for a permit, a deputy who negotiates a law, a judge who sells a ruling—all produce the same effect: citizens stop believing, and the public sphere loses legitimacy.

Now, under the governance of President Nayib Bukele, the State has a presence starting from the community; sectors favorable to the security policies of recent years point out that recovering territorial control has been indispensable to re-establishing governability.

By guaranteeing the legitimate monopoly of trust and force and reducing homicidal violence, mobility, local commerce, and access to basic services in historically marginalized communities have been reactivated, laying the foundations for exercising other rights that the democracy of before did not allow.

When public administration loses its orientation toward solving structural problems—such as health, education, or local economic development—the legitimacy of the democratic system erodes; that is the fabric being rebuilt today.

The true test of this democracy will not be maintaining order, but sustaining it with strong institutions, honest officials, and citizens who demand that the State remain everyone's, not a few's.

State and Democracy: Their *Raison d'Être*



The purpose of the State is the person. Its *raison d'être* is to constitute a social contract that guarantees the rights, security, and well-being of citizens. Democracy, for its part, is a set of principles and procedures that must be understood as instruments to achieve those ends; consequently, it cannot become an end in itself nor a dogma whose mechanisms are untouchable, even when they obstruct the fundamental mission of the State.

The Salvadoran experience following the Peace Accords illustrates this contradiction. A formal democracy existed that met traditional standards, yet was sustained by a corrupt bipartidismo incapable of resolving the country's fundamental problems. The division of powers and checks-and-balances mechanisms ended up becoming instruments of obstruction, subordinated to the particular interests of political actors. Meanwhile, the country sank under gang dominance, and the State showed itself incapable of responding to the population's most urgent needs.

Starting in 2019, a transformation process began anchored in an elementary exercise of democracy: popular will. The citizenry granted President Nayib Bukele the Executive branch and, subsequently, granted Nuevas Ideas a broad legislative majority with the purpose of guaranteeing governability. Within the constitutional framework, the Supreme Court of Justice was changed and second-tier officials were elected, seeking to align state institutions around a priority objective: dismantling the gang structures of organized crime.

These changes respond to criteria of political realism and pragmatism. It is not about defending procedures for their formal value, but about evaluating their usefulness based on results. Democracy must serve the State, and the State must serve the person. That is the fundamental hierarchy. Institutional mechanisms make sense insofar as they allow that mission to be fulfilled, and not when they end up impeding it.

State Without Democracy: The Years We Lived in Danger



We live in a conjuncture that can be defined as "limbo-time," insofar as it allows reinventing the country or returning it to the past of death—that depends on the correlation of forces that for seven years has favored reinvention; a particular time that is more complex than a labyrinth without a center, in which Salvadorans are witnesses for the prosecution of the past's attempts to happen again.

In this conjuncture turning into structure, we see the opposition—which ceased to be political because it holds no share of power, neither in the State, nor in the streets, nor in the popular imaginary—perfecting its "negationism" due to a lack of historical leadership and a platform facing the people. We also see that it has made lies, noise, and fake news its doctrine, such as that claim that "El Salvador is invading Haiti." Its tactic is rustic: deliberately perverting the social utopia for which thousands gave their lives; that has been its political

mission, and, honestly, it has fulfilled it very well and with enviable discipline, since great discipline is required to be, at the same time, corrupt and a habitual perverter.

Amidst the tumult stirred up by social actors fighting to the death in the limbo-time of change stand out social media; artificial intelligence affecting democratic political culture; mediocre buffoons, like pathetic sophists of the past; and a stale lineage of embalmed leaders who ignore—out of convenience or stubbornness—the inevitability of social transformation, even though they live off mentioning it, which they expose through their actions, omissions, and demagogic speeches in which *sopa de patas* and confiscating computers are the central points.

Beyond that tumult, the sociology of reinvention raises its hand to assume its role as midwife of the social utopia which—in an act of dignity initiated by Nayib—reclaims its crooked lines and transforms itself from its margins. It is sociology, alongside political theory, that allows decoding the process in which social behavior organically fuses with utopia, leading us to understand that the latter is not made of words, but of concrete actions and projects with a future.

Indeed, social utopia is the epistemology for reinventing it and breaking the paradigm of negationism (which carries no particular ideological sign), and that is a way to expand presences in the present, reduce forgetfulness, and thus limit the future to experiencing a few, yet certain, feasible stories that will reproduce in the imaginary and memory as the historicity of consciousness—which, to come out ahead, nests in a figure who summarizes it and who is, on his own merits, the reference point of everything that happens, because he is a sociological singularity. In the Salvadoran case, that figure is, without a doubt, Nayib Bukele.

Social utopia in times of reinvention is not a given answer, but many questions unfolding. Beyond the fact that we were victims of expropriation and repression since the nation's first cry, El Salvador was baptized by a utopia that moved between nightmares and dreams: the nightmares of massacres, corruption, impunity, forced emigration, delinquency, electoral fraud, and minimized minimum wages; and the dreams of liberty, self-determination, sovereignty, social equality, peace, food security, and, as a corollary, the "greater dream" that the public be better than the private and be within reach of the poor, so that they may be treated with dignity as citizens.

As a country, we remained a colony after Independence: the colony of the oligarchy, and that is the reason why we are the people of the hard-soft paradox. The greater dream accompanying us bordered, to the west, on

coffee estates that expropriated our communal lands, *ejidos*, and hands; to the north, on the genocidal army that invented a war to halt popular organization on the banana plantations and disguise, in a hundred hours, decades of ferocious unemployment; to the east and southwest, on the mangroves that replicated social inequality; and in every direction, the Lempa River—all of them like the geographical limits in which the consciousness of the barefoot who rose up in the 2019 elections was born. That consciousness is what we call utopia during those years we lived in danger.

Indeed, ever since we opened our eyes as a newborn country, we embraced a utopia we did not understand, although we felt and celebrated it, despite being a homeland without patriots because the majority lacked—and lack—inheritable patrimony. If we had to name the many ghosts social utopia had before Nayib, by reflex we would go back to the *mestizo* founding fathers of Independence, to the decrees of Tepetitán, drafted by an illiterate indigenous man who was more than a century ahead of the declaration of human rights; to the consciousness healed with the balm of Teotepeque; to the general sit-down strike that betrayed itself in 1944 simply because it found nothing better to do, nor anyone to send a telegram celebrating the triumph; to the ideas of social justice that gave meaning to Archbishop Romero's homilies; and, as a corollary, to the electoral rebellion of February 2019 which—making sky blue an existential version of spilled blood—brought us into the 21st century, nineteen years after it had begun, and after having archived the years we lived in danger.

Honduras: State and Democracy



Corruption in Honduras has not only destroyed security, increased poverty, driven hundreds of thousands into destitution, and scared away investment. The problem runs much deeper: it is a State hijacked by the interests of the National, Liberal, and LIBRE parties, under the so-called tripartisanship, where the population's needs are sidelined. Among themselves, they negotiate quotas of power and turn State institutions into trenches to protect their past, cover up their present actions, and secure their future.

Millions of Hondurans face extortion, violence, unemployment, and a lack of opportunities. Meanwhile, tripartisanship politicians, their families, and their allies appear to live under different rules, enjoying greater guarantees and protection than the rest of the population. The economy and legal certainty end up favoring those very same sectors. The rest of the population must settle for announcements in the media and on social networks.

Corruption scandals, once again, transcend borders. On November 16, 2026, in the United States, the Federal Prosecutor's Office charged Ada Evila Serrano Núñez, a member of the LIBRE party and former Honduran consul in Atlanta, for allegedly demanding bribes in exchange for consular services in a scheme reportedly

exceeding $375,000. While U.S. authorities investigate, to date there is no known investigation by the Honduran Public Ministry into this case. Politicians avoid speaking about the scandal.

The National Electoral Council, the Electoral Justice Tribunal, and the National Registry of Persons—fundamental bodies for democracy—have fallen under the influence of political parties, which act as referees and players at the same time. In 2025, the CNE left six minority parties out of the elections, which today also face the threat of losing their legal status. In contrast, Jorge Cálix—whom the CNE initially barred from running as a congressional candidate in the general elections for having competed as a presidential pre-candidate in the primaries—ended up occupying the seat of Samuel García, elected for Olancho, following his resignation. In January 2026, Cálix was accredited as a deputy and subsequently assumed leadership of the Liberal bench. They block, unblock, and remain silent according to their convenience.

Thus, electoral processes, investigations, and judicial decisions end up conditioned by the interests and agreements among political parties. Impunity is the main actor.

Every four years, political campaigns have shifted from promising changes for the country to competing over who promises to be less corrupt than the predecessor. The irony is that, very often, it is the very same corrupt official who asks for the vote again to be re-elected.

Honduras needs a State that belongs to its people, a democracy that allows electing rulers with integrity and love for the homeland.

2029 represents a turning point for Hondurans: either they reclaim power over their country, or they remain under the yoke of the corrupt and impunity.

State and Democracy: The Salvadoran Paradigm Facing Institutional Wear



The contemporary debate on the relationship between State and democracy often gets trapped in legal formalisms that ignore an elementary premise: without a legitimate monopoly of force and citizen security, democracy is reduced to a procedural fiction. El Salvador's recent experience, presented with doctrinal rigor by Vice President Félix Ulloa and Security Minister Gustavo Villatoro before international delegations, marks a turning point in 21st-century political theory.

For decades, nations in crisis were prescribed managing violence through opaque pacts and bureaucratic tutelage that ended up weakening the rule of law. Faced with that exhaustion, the interventions of Ulloa and Villatoro demonstrated that recovering territorial sovereignty and institutional purging do not contradict democratic principles; on the contrary, they constitute their indispensable condition of existence. As Ulloa underscored from his legal and international experience, a State captured by illicit economies lacks real legitimacy, while Villatoro evidenced with verifiable metrics how operational firmness and penitentiary order return to the ordinary citizen the effective exercise of their fundamental rights.

The role assumed by El Salvador before the participating nations transcends the local conjuncture. By financing its own stability and projecting a doctrine based on tangible results, the country stands as a

benchmark of practical sovereignty: it demonstrates that a small State, free of internal complicities and led with political will, can reverse institutional collapse where decades of traditional recipes failed.

Ultimately, the Salvadoran example challenges contemporary democracies with an inescapable truth: the State does not exist to protect unpunished structures, but to guarantee the peace, dignity, and real freedom of its citizens.

State and Democracy: What We Understand



We understand the State as the most evolved legal-political form of organization of society—particularly the liberal-bourgeois State—where power relations exercised by economic-political-military-bureaucratic groups are expressed. These groups impose their hegemony and subordinate broad, diverse, and generally dispersed groups through rules defined by the correlation of forces they control via a historically built bloc, through which they establish norms and patterns that legitimize specific political-economic relations of domination in a particular society.

And we understand democracy as the political system—a system of government—where the power of majorities is expressed over minorities. That is sovereignty: the exercise of power resides in the people, and the result of government policies—the "public goods" created—must align with citizens' present needs and future expectations. Those goods must ensure protection and cohesion within a welfare State, and if those created goods are not solutions—if they do not resolve the anxieties of the people—that political system is not democratic.

Now then, if the purpose of the political community (the State) is more than living together—that is, living well—when the ruler or rulers are not oriented toward the common good, then that particular political community (State) has deviated from its ends. If, in our case, the Salvadoran State were to fail to fulfill its

purpose by ensuring freedom, education, health, culture, economic well-being, and social justice, then this State would have deviated from its ends.

Public power within the State develops within a dynamic social relationship where needs are expressed, objectives are defined, and interests are defended; where contradictions are manifested, agreements and disagreements are forged, and alliances (tactical or strategic) are built between groups with greater accumulation of power and groups with less power—involving internal struggles, conspiracies, and essentially the construction of correlations of force that determine the domination and subordination of some groups over others.

Therefore, State and democracy do not always share sides of the same coin—the coin of citizens' well-being in a given community—and consequently each generation has the right to adjust them and channel them toward the cause of the common good. That is what is happening in El Salvador: a process of change driving the rebirth of the country with a State at the service of the nation and the integral development of its people.

In El Salvador, having overcome the phase of the captive State (by oligarchic sectors) and later the failed State (due to the terrorist control of gangs), the possibility opened up in 2019, with Nayib Bukele, for institutional social change that builds well-being and justice with a political governance system of broad participation for Salvadoran society—untying the country's future from oligarchic and imperial interests. This is the great task; that anti-oligarchic commitment gave President Bukele part of the trust with which he won in 2019, and it remains substantial in the revalidation of his leadership at the head of the government for a third term in 2027.

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