February 2024

General elections in El Salvador
Pre-election report
Election keys

1. On February 4, El Salvador’s general elections will be held, in which the President for the period 2024-2029 and the new composition of the Legislative Assembly for the next three years, until 2027, will be defined.

2. In the absence of any presidential candidate reaching 50% of the valid votes cast, a run-off election may be held on March 3. The electoral roll, including voters from abroad, is made up of 6,214,399 people, although voting is not mandatory.

3. The focus of the election will be on the candidacy for reelection of President Nayib Bukele (Nuevas Ideas), which, despite being forbidden by the Constitution, was enabled by the Justice. He will face 5 opposition formulas, including traditional parties such as ARENA and FMLN, although polls predict that the sitting President will easily win in the first round.

4. The other main focus of the race will be on whether the ruling party manages to increase the absolute majority it has had in the Assembly since 2021, which would allow Bukele to deepen his government's agenda without major obstacles.

5. The elections will be held under a state of exception to combat high crime rates. Part of Bukele's popularity is explained by his security measures.
According to available polls, President Nayib Bukele is the strong favorite to win reelection against five opposition lists. If these projections are confirmed, Bukele is most likely to win in the first round.

The classic bipartisanship of ARENA and FMLN, which dominated the Salvadoran political arena in the 90's and early 21st century, is eclipsed by the arrival of Bukele to the Presidency in 2019. These parties are expected to fall short of 10% of the vote, something that will happen for the first time since their entry into politics, and which marks a decline that was mainly observed after the legislative elections of 2021.
Since the end of the civil war in 1992, El Salvador has been characterized by high rates of violence and insecurity related to organized crime, especially gang activity.

Faced with this problem, Bukele focused his presidency on the fight against these organizations, starting his mandate with an ambitious security plan. Within this framework, in 2022 he implemented the regime of exception, a constitutional tool that suspends certain rights and constitutional guarantees**.

In force since March of that year in the face of an increase in murders, the emergency regime has led to the detention of more than 75,000 people and has become one of the most popular measures of the Bukele government.

Thanks to the qualified majority achieved by Nuevas Ideas in 2021, this instrument has been extended 21 times, although its scope has been relaxed over time.

However, while there is a consensus among political forces of the improvements in the country's security situation, Bukele's opponents question the extension in the use of this tool. In addition, they have denounced human rights abuses with this instrument.

**Constitutional rights and guarantees currently suspended: the right to be informed of the reasons for detention, the right of the detainee to be brought before a judge within a maximum of 72 hours, and the right to the inviolability of correspondence.
Why is Bukele eligible to be a candidate?

The road to re-election

September 3, 2021
Supreme Court enables the reelection

September 22, 2023
Bukele announces his intention to run for office

November 3, 2023
Electoral Tribunal makes Bukele's candidacy official

November 30, 2023
Bukele takes leave of absence to run in the elections

The country's Constitution prohibits reelection, implicitly or explicitly, in several articles. Specifically, Article 152 establishes the conditions that bar a presidential candidacy. Thus, it states that "whoever has served as President of the Republic for more than six months, consecutive or not, during the immediately preceding period, or within the last six months prior to the beginning of the presidential term, may not be president".

Based on this last part of the Magna Carta, the Supreme Court, appointed by the ruling-party majority that took office in the Assembly in 2021, gave a new constitutional interpretation of the presidential term. Thus, President Bukele was allowed to run for a second time, with the condition that in order to participate in the election he had to take a leave of absence or resign from office in the last 6 months of his term, a period that began on December 1, 2023.

Thus, on November 30, 2023, the Legislative Assembly passed a 6-month leave of absence for Bukele and his vice president, Félix Ulloa, so that they could compete in the 2024 electoral contest. With this leave of absence, the Head of State did not lose his position or his prerogatives, but only delegated his duties to a presidential designee, the private secretary of the Presidency, Claudia Rodríguez de Guevara.
Bukele: the favorite of the election

Profile

Businessman, 42 years old. Before entering politics, he worked mostly in his father’s advertising companies. Then he was mayor of Nuevo Cuscatlán (2012-2015) and of San Salvador (2015-2018) for the FMLN.

In 2019 he reached the Presidency with GANA, as he was unable to register his party Nuevas Ideas. Thus, Bukele broke 30 years of bipartisanship of the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). Finally, Nuevas Ideas was able to participate in the legislative elections of 2021, which gave it a majority in the Assembly.

Lines of government

Bukele did not present a government plan nor is he actively campaigning. The focus of his electoral messages is to continue and deepen the lines of government of his current mandate. Among them, the following stand out:

- Extension of his campaign against organized crime.
- Trade facilitation and simplification measures.
- Liberalization of monetary policy through Bitcoin and digital assets.
- Incentives for attracting investment, especially in the area of technological innovation, such as fintech and artificial intelligence.
- Creation of new regulatory entities
**Profile**

**Manuel Flores**  
(Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional)

Aged 58, he has a degree in Biology from the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua-Managua.

He was a councilman (2000-2003) and mayor of Quezaltepeque (2003-2012), as well as a deputy of the Legislative Assembly between 2012 and 2021. He presents his campaign as a renewal within the FMLN.

**Proposals**

- Guarantee legal certainty and division of powers to attract investment
- Generate employment through greater measures in favor of companies
- Ensure food security and invest in agroindustry
- Zero hunger plan (land tenure, access to inputs and technical assistance) to generate a supply chain and supply
- Eliminate VAT on medicines

**Profile**

**Joel Sánchez**  
(Alianza Republicana Nacionalista)

55 year old businessman, he studied Business Administration at Keiser University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA.

Most of his business experience was developed in the United States. He focuses his campaign on "making neoliberal models work". He also presents himself as the renovation of ARENA, as a candidate more from civil society than from party politics.

**Proposals**

- Guarantee legal certainty and the division of powers to generate conditions to attract investment
- Eliminate Bitcoin monetary policy
- Create tax incentives for the opening and diversification of the economy
- Establish government programs that allow for temporary VAT exemptions
- Investments in the healthcare system to avoid drug shortages
- Promote environmental protection, pollution reduction and promotion of recycling
The other major issue in the election will be whether Nuevas Ideas manages to increase its majority in the Assembly, where it currently holds 64 of the 84 seats, counting its allies (GANA, PCN and PDC).

Now the seats up for grabs are 60, after a reform to the Electoral Code reduced its composition as of the 2024 elections. Also, a new method of distribution of seats will be used, which will be proportional by constituencies.

According to pollsters' projections, Nuevas Ideas would increase its majority, reaching a qualified majority without the need of its allies, where it is estimated that it will obtain 52 of the 60 seats.

The ruling party remarked the importance of retaining the majority, which allowed it to pass the President's initiatives without major obstacles, as well as measures, such as the exception regime, which need special numbers. The argument is that this scenario would maintain the Bukele's governability, who had a hostile relationship with the Assembly in his first two years of government when it was controlled by the opposition.

In the projected scenario, a loss of opposition representation is predicted, further increasing the predominance of Nuevas Ideas. This puts minority parties at risk, given that the law on political parties enables a party to be canceled if it does not obtain 50,000 valid votes or does not obtain at least one seat in the Assembly.
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