



Harvard Model Congress Boston 2024

CIVIL LIBERTIES IN EL SALVADOR UPDATE

By Hayden Fredrickson

El Salvador is set to hold its next presidential election on February 4, 2024. At time of writing, incumbent President Nayib Bukele appears likely to easily win reelection, as a recent poll showed him with a 71% lead over his closest challenger (Renteria, 2024). After Bukele appointed several new justices to the country's Supreme Court, the Court ruled that a second consecutive term was constitutionally permissible as long as the incumbent steps down six months before the election. As a result of this, Bukele moved into an interim role distinct from the Presidency on November 30th to campaign ("How Nayib Bukele," 2023).

In addition to repeated states of exception, Bukele's tenure has seen El Salvador grow increasingly close to China. In early November, Bukele toured a \$54 million library in San Salvador with the Chinese ambassador ("China's Influence," 2023). At the end of the month, Bukele announced the construction of a soccer stadium, paid for by China ("How Nayib Bukele," 2023). Since joining the Belts and Roads Initiative, El Salvador has seen nearly \$500 million of foreign investment. The Chinese government has offered to pay off all Salvadoran debt off to prevent a default (Moscat, 2023).

Under further extensions of the state of exception, 15,000 more Salvadorans have been arrested (Renteria, 2024). Additionally, Bukele's aggressive tactics have been embraced by President Daniel Noboa of Ecuador. After gang members stormed a TC Televisión studio, Noboa declared a "state of internal conflict," effectively declaring war against domestic gangs. In the first week after the declaration, more than 1,100 people were arrested and five were killed by police. Noboa has also stated that he wants to build a "mega-prison," modeled off of a prison built by Bukele in El Salvador. The attack came during an existing state of emergency, declared as the result of a major gang leader escaping from prison.

These recent developments highlight several challenges policymakers will face when trying to address the ongoing situation in El Salvador. First, the increased aid from China will make influence through grants more difficult. Second, an overwhelming reelection of Bukele could further embolden his authoritarian tendencies and lead to more democratic backsliding as he becomes more established in his second term and possibly tries to pursue a third term. Finally, the case of Ecuador shows that Bukele's ideas are becoming

more popular and beginning to spread. As more leaders influenced by Bukele take power through Central and South America, more action will be necessary throughout the region to promote human rights and fight increased Chinese influence.

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