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FEATURED Q&A

What Will Bukele's Second Term Mean for El Salvador?



Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele and his wife, Gabriela Rodríguez de Bukele, celebrated his re-election victory on Sunday night. The president spoke to supporters from the National Palace. // Photo: Facebook Page of Nayib Bukele.

Q Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele was re-elected Sunday in a landslide, garnering 83 percent of the vote, according to provisional results. Critics have said that Bukele's run for immediate re-election violated the constitution and that his security crackdown has led to human rights violations. However, his fight against gangs has also led to a dramatic decline in the homicide rate and has won him strong support in El Salvador. What did Sunday's results and voter turnout mean for Bukele and for the country's direction? What policies can Salvadorans expect from Bukele during his second term? To what extent will the results inspire leaders of other countries to pursue similar security policies?

A Leonor Arteaga, program director at the Due Process of Law Foundation: "Bukele declared victory before official results were announced, claiming to have won over 85 percent of the vote—a margin so large that the country comes close to being a one-party state. His consecutive re-election not only 'normalizes' a president staying in power despite legal prohibition; it also signals, dangerously, that combating crime while having no due process or judicial independence, negotiating with organized criminal groups and systematically using torture on people being held without trial are acceptable ways of governing. We will likely see increased media discourse stigmatizing the work of human rights defenders and vilifying those who seek government transparency, harassment of independent journalists and those voicing dissent, and concealment and manipulation of public information—all keystones of a country with no democratic rule of law. In El Salvador,

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

U.S. Increasing Military Assistance to Guyana: Report

The United States is reportedly increasing military assistance to Guyana amid border tensions with neighboring Venezuela. The Biden administration plans to provide Guyana helicopters, other aircraft and radar technology.

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BUSINESS

Shareholders Launch Tender to Take Cielo Private

The controlling shareholders of Brazilian payment processor Cielo have launched a tender offer to take the company private.

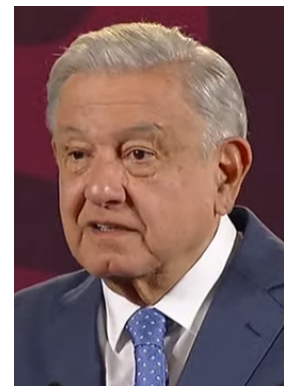
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POLITICAL

Mexico's López Obrador Proposes Sweeping Reforms

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Monday proposed broad constitutional reforms, including overhauls of pensions, electoral law, the judiciary and environmental regulations.

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López Obrador // File Photo: Mexican Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.S. Reportedly Increasing Military Assistance to Guyana

The United States is increasing military assistance to Guyana amid the country's border tensions with neighboring Venezuela, the Associated Press reported Monday, citing government officials. The Biden administration is vowing to assist Guyana in acquiring military drones, helicopters and other aircraft in addition to radar technology, the wire service reported. Guyanese officials declined to specify to the AP how much they expected to pay for the equipment. On Sunday, the White House's deputy national security director, Jon Finer and its senior director for the Western Hemisphere, Juan González, met with officials in Guyana about working together to bolster Guyana's military abilities. "That cooperation is fundamentally defensive in nature and grounded in our desire for Guyana to be able to defend its territorial integrity against any possible threats," Finer told reporters late Sunday, the AP reported. "We do not think that it is appropriate for countries to make threats or to contemplate publicly the use of force against another country," he added, in reference to Venezuela, which stationed a small number of troops late last year along its border with Guyana. In early December, Venezuelan voters expressed support in a referendum pushed by President Nicolás Maduro's government to annex Guyana's oil-rich Essequibo region, which makes up two-thirds of Guyana's territory but which Venezuela for more than a century has claimed as its own. Venezuela's claim to the region intensified after the discovery of large quantities of oil off Essequibo's coastline in 2015. Tensions between Venezuela and Guyana have ebbed since talks between representatives of the two countries in December and January. A summit is planned between Maduro and Guyanese President Irfaan Ali. "The composition of any U.S. security assistance to Guyana will be based not only on Maduro's threats against Essequibo but also on the long-term

needs of the Guyana Defense Force (GDF) and what it can sustain and afford," R. Evan Ellis, a Latin America research professor at the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Jan. 25. "It would certainly not include U.S. 'bases' in Guyana. It would likely focus on defensive capabilities, possibly including enhanced surveillance, training, mobility and other enhancement of GDF readiness," he added.

Mexico's López Obrador Proposes Sweeping Reforms

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Monday proposed broad constitutional reforms, including overhauls of pensions, the judiciary, electoral law and environmental regulations, Reuters reported. "The reforms that I propose seek to establish constitutional rights and strengthen ideals and principles related to humanism, justice, honesty, austerity and democracy," López Obrador said in a speech on Constitution Day, a national holiday. López Obrador lacks the congressional two-thirds majority that would be needed to achieve the reforms, but the package is expected to shape debate ahead of Mexico's presidential election in June, Reuters reported. The reforms include cutting the number of legislators in Congress, direct election of judges, requiring annual minimum wage increases above the rate of inflation, outlawing the practice of the oil and natural gas drilling practice of fracking and providing pensions that are equal to workers' final salaries.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Guatemala Eyes China Trade Ties: Foreign Minister

Guatemala is considering formalizing a commercial relationship with China despite

NEWS BRIEFS

Death Toll Rises to 123 in Chile Wildfires, Hundreds Remain Missing

The death toll from wildfires in Chile rose to 123 on Monday, and hundreds of people are still missing, the Associated Press reported. The fires appeared to have lessened in intensity after burning strongly since Friday on the edge of the city of Viña del Mar, the wire service reported. The towns of Quilpé and Villa Alemana in the Valparaíso region have also been hit hard by the fires. On Sunday, President Gabriel Boric said at least 3,000 homes had been destroyed. The mayor of Viña del Mar, Macarena Ripamonti, said at least 370 people have been reported missing.

Argentina's Milei Departs for Trip to Israel, Italy

Argentine President Javier Milei set off Monday on a trip to visit Israel and Italy, Reuters reported. In Israel, Milei will meet with rabbis, visit historical sites and commemorate the Oct. 7 attacks that sparked the current Israel-Hamas war. Milei also plans to meet Pope Francis during his Italy visit, despite having strongly criticized the pope during his campaign, as well as Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Rio de Janeiro Declares Dengue Public Health Emergency

The city of Rio de Janeiro on Monday declared an outbreak of dengue to be a public health emergency, the Associated Press reported. The announcement came only days before the planned start of Carnival celebrations on Friday. City government officials announced plans to spray insecticide into the air using "smoke cars" in key areas and to open 10 care centers to treat dengue patients. Some 10,000 dengue cases have been reported since the start of 2024, as compared to 23,000 cases in total for all of 2023.

its longstanding relationship with Taiwan, the Central American nation's foreign minister, Carlos Ramiro Martínez, told Reuters in comments published today. Guatemala intends to maintain its relationship with Taiwan but is poised to be the latest in a series of Latin American countries that have pursued closer trade ties with China in recent years. Under the "One China" policy, China claims Taiwan as its own. "We are going to continue working with Taiwan at the levels we have been doing," Martínez told Reuters. "But the president has pointed out that we cannot ignore the weight and power China represents," he added. Newly elected President Bernardo Arévalo, who took office on Jan. 15, promised to establish a relationship with China during his campaign. "We are interested in approaching [China] to try and develop some relationship around trade," Martínez told Reuters, but he stressed that the decision was not intended as an "ambush" against Taiwan. The Chinese foreign ministry, in response to Martínez's comments, said the "One China" policy is "the fundamental premise and political basis for China's cooperation with all countries, including Guatemala," Reuters reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Shareholders Launch Tender Offer to Take Brazil's Cielo Private

Cielo, Brazil's largest credit and debit card operator, announced Monday that the firm's controlling shareholders had launched a tender offer alongside three Brazilian firms to take the company private, Reuters reported. Lenders Bradesco, Banco do Brasil and their shared holding company, Grupo Elopár, are leading the offer, a deal which could be worth more than 5.90 billion reais (\$1.18 billion). In separate filings, Banco do Brasil and Bradesco said the offer would be 6.4 percent above Monday's closing price, coming to 5.35 reais per share. The proposed deal would value the company at around 14.5 billion reais.

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the picture is frightening. The government and security forces are rapidly accruing power while Salvadorans are stripped of rights, protections and freedoms. Rather than resulting in a stronger government, these changes create a system easily manipulated by a few individuals. Today, Bukele and the nation's focus is on gangs. But who will it be on tomorrow?"

A Peter Hakim, member of the Advisor board and president emeritus of the Inter-American Dialogue: "There is no question that President Bukele has made life better for the great majority of El Salvador's citizens. The proof is the election result, which gave Bukele 83 percent of the vote for a second term. In just four years, he has succeeded in ending the security nightmare confronting Salvadorans, who had been subjected to a reign of terror: sexual abuse, homicides, extortion and other horrors. El Salvador is now a peaceful country. This was an extremely rare accomplishment in Latin America. But it was only achieved by massive violations of basic human rights, judicial standards and the rule of law. The victims are the large numbers of Salvadoran youths arrested and imprisoned on little or no evidence and with little prospect of a fair trial or minimally humane treatment. While a few nations are considering the adoption of similar measures in the interests of security and safety, human rights advocates along with many democratic governments across the globe have forcefully and persistently condemned Bukele's approach. Still, the central question remains without an answer. Is there is an effective alternative? Could the hellish situation of El Salvador have been remedied without massive arrests and jailings? What can and should countries overwhelmed by the ravages of vicious gangs do to control the gangs and end their destruction? At this point the only choice seems to be either the government's expansive disregard for human rights or the population as a whole suffering

the continued destruction of their livelihoods and lives."

the continued destruction of their livelihoods and lives."

A Beatrice Rangel, member of the Advisor board and director of AMLA Consulting in Miami Beach: "As much as I would love to see a Latin America characterized by liberal democracies, the truth is that the region is not ready to achieve such a feat. Election results in El Salvador attest to the state of the region. For over 30 years, democratic rules were followed in the country. And for over 30 years, the living conditions of most of the population deteriorated to where people were subject to self-imprisonment in order to preserve their lives. Income per capita during this time grew between 4.3 percent and 5.2 percent. Inequality progressed and so did migration outflows. Over this period, the country was run by either the party representing the interests of the economic groups or former guerrilla leaders. None seemed to have answers to the people's plea for security, economic advancement or improved public services. This despite having the benefit of being party to a free trade agreement with the United States. In comes Bukele, who takes care of the security concerns. The people's response has been astounding simply because they feel he is working for them. Bukele, however, does not seem to care much about rule of law, constitutional acuity and prisoners' human rights. And the people are ready to overlook this flaw as long as they feel their interests are taken care of by his administration. It remains to be seen whether Bukele will seek to remain in office indefinitely. This would make him a dictator—effective as a public manager but an elected dictator, nonetheless."

A Douglas Farah, president of IBI Consultants: "Nayib Bukele's landslide victory signals the consolidation of Latin America's latest ideologically agnostic dictatorships, and his model closely follows the playbook

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of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, who was once popular. Bukele's vice president explicitly acknowledged that Bukele's goal was to eliminate democracy. Bukele's re-election, powered by a massive and dominant social media propaganda and disinformation machine, was unconstitutional. His anti-gang strategy's main component is negotiating pacts with the gangs to keep homicide rates low in exchange for financial benefits. He has incarcerated more than 75,000 people, and human rights groups estimate that less than 20 percent could be gang members.

“Bukele's attractiveness as a modern-day caudillo will fade.”

— Douglas Farah

He has staged joint mass trials of up to 900 people while denying all due process. He has named tainted Supreme Court magistrates and an attorney general illegally. He has allowed harassment of independent media and human rights groups and has maintained complete opacity on government operations and spending, enabling massive corruption. These are all harbingers of policies that will accelerate in his second term. While the trade-off of security for democratic governance is popular now, it is not a sustainable model and it will lead to further repression. Daniel Ortega has shown that repression drives mass irregular migration, and unfettered power inevitably leads to criminalizing all opposition. Unfortunately, until the model collapses, it will be attractive to leaders across the hemisphere who are dealing with the intractable problems of citizen insecurity and violence. History shows that dictatorships end badly, and Bukele's attractiveness as a modern-day caudillo will fade. But that will not happen before El Salvador's democratic institutions are in ruins.”

A **Tiziano Breda, associate analysis coordinator for Latin America at the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project:**

“The results of El Salvador's elections are the chronicle of a landslide victory foretold. On the one hand, they have to do with Bukele's unwavering popularity, boosted by undisputable results in the security realm, having shepherded the country from one of the most violent in the world to one with a murder rate comparable to many European countries. On the other, they are related to his government's gerrymandering in reducing the number of legislative seats and municipalities and channeling the vote of the diaspora in the San Salvador district. For his part, Bukele's speech on election day, before electoral authorities had announced any preliminary results, offered hints about what to expect in terms of ruling style and very little in terms of government plans. Bukele just merely said ‘wait and see what we are going to do’. For now, the combination of results and popular support will likely keep nurturing the appeal of Bukele's methods elsewhere in the region. But the extent to which they are going to be mimicked will depend on his ability to sustain these results in the medium run, find alternatives to maintaining a perpetual state of exception, the continuous deterioration of security in other countries and the lack of an alternative security model that yields similar results without resorting to jailing 2 percent of a country's population. Furthermore, elections in Paraguay, Guatemala, Ecuador and Argentina have shown that offers to replicate Bukele's model are insufficient to win elections alone, and that concentration of power is a precondition, not a consequence, to be able to do so.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.

LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue ISSN 2163-7962

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Latin America Advisor is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at 1155 15th Street NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005 www.thedialogue.org

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