



EMBASSY OF EL SALVADOR
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

February 10, 2021

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS OF AMB. MILENA MAYORGA AT THE WILSON CENTER EVENT:
[El Salvador's Legislative Elections: Whither Democracy?](#)**

I would like to thank the Wilson Center for allowing me to participate in today's panel.

I am still a member of the Legislative Assembly, El Salvador's legislative body, and have clearance to act as the ambassador to the U.S. I resigned the previous political party of which I was a member, due to the clear systemic corruption that I later came to know was endemic to that party.

I suffered 43 episodes of political violence and I never sought help. Why? Because the system is corrupt and dominated by the traditional parties. This is an attempt to undermine women's participation.

Now, women are more involved in our country's politics, and I have been the first to endorse young women getting involved in politics for the first time.

I was the most-voted assembly member as a newcomer in an election, and ever since that campaign I have always said I would do what is fair and what is right. I have always strived to construct bridges to achieve good governance.

Everyone here knows that the previous model of governance consisted of the executive branch simply bribing the legislative branch through shady deals using secret ledgers. This illegal and corrupt way of buying and selling influence is over.

The civil war caused the death of more than 80,000 Salvadorans. The post-war era prompted a second war, a war of a social nature, started by criminal gangs. This second war has brought about the violent death of more than 100,000 Salvadorans.



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Furthermore, this second war triggered the migration of three-quarters of our population, severely impacting the social fabric of our society.

Over the last 30 years, our diaspora settled here in the United States, in Canada, and in other countries. Its members have sent nearly \$100 billion dollars in remittances back to El Salvador. Nevertheless, the conditions that have caused Salvadorans to leave are finally changing under this government.

The Bukele government implemented a territorial control plan which aims to decrease violence in El Salvador and provide safety for its citizens. A government controls its territory, when it builds a school. A government controls its territory when it provides a quality health system to its citizens. A government controls its territory when the penitentiary system is under check. President Bukele's territorial control plan has allowed this.

I would like to remind you again that I am a member of the Legislative Assembly, and originally from a party that now opposes President Bukele. When it came to legislating on behalf of the citizens, they could always count on me. I was there on February 9, 2020, and can attest that our rule of law was not infringed – much less the strength of our democracy.

Our justice system, with all its flaws, sent several resolutions which have been followed completely, even when the government had been left without the proper means to protect its citizens from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In January 2020, we activated protocols to prepare ourselves for the pandemic. We were the first country in Latin America to do it, and in March, I witnessed for myself a strong resistance in the Legislative Assembly to adopt the measures set out by President Bukele.

The Government implemented measures very similar to the ones that the Biden administration is executing to contain the pandemic in the U.S., and we are already beginning to see positive results.



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Thanks to President Bukele, violent crime has plummeted. Gang violence and drug trafficking are being controlled for the first time. Critical prison reforms are being implemented, and investment in a much-needed law enforcement system is meaningfully improving life for the Salvadoran people and addressing the root causes of migration.

Public investment is also on the rise, specifically in green technology, sustainable energy, and infrastructure development. My country's roads, ports, bridges, tunnels, and airports are being improved and updated after decades of neglect.

It's no wonder why President Bukele enjoys such high approval ratings both at home and abroad. For the cynics who may dismiss domestic approval numbers as artificial, I would encourage anyone living here in Washington, or, say, New York City, Los Angeles, or Houston, to ask a Salvadoran what they think of President Bukele.

Ours is a citizen's government, and since January, 17 different polls have rated President Bukele with 96% approval.

Yesterday's events in the National Assembly are clear acts of desperation and a resistance to change.

Considering that today's panel discussion is about the risks to El Salvador's democracy, I believe it is important to recognize the events carried out yesterday against the rightfully elected president of El Salvador. At the recommendation of ex-president Mauricio Funes, the opposition parties – ARENA, FMLN, and PDC – began to implement a parliamentary coup d'état against President Bukele, the Salvadoran Director of Police, and the Minister of Defense. Please consider that under the governance of President Bukele, homicides have decreased by 48.6%, extortions have decrease by 35%, hate crimes against women have decreased by 43.9%, and so on with several other crimes. All of this data is from the Technical Group on Crime (National Police, Attorney General's Office & the Institute of Forensic Medicine).



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This action was taken against a president who has earned broad popularity among a strong majority of Salvadorans, and just weeks before a national legislative election that allows the voice of the Salvadoran people to be heard.

The members of the National Assembly who have taken this action are attempting to preempt pending defeat in the upcoming election and unlawfully remove President Bukele.

The principles of western democracy demand condemnation of this action from El Salvador's allies in the hemisphere and around the globe – and the members of this panel.

Our nation will hear the will of the people during the upcoming national legislative elections later this month, on Feb. 28. **We understand that the voice of the people must not only be heard, but respected.**