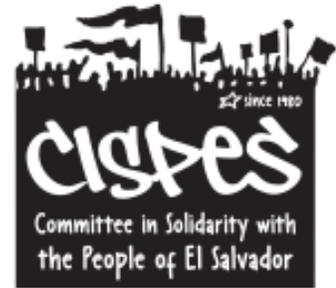


## ATTACKS AGAINST ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL IN EL SALVADOR THREATEN PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

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Media Contact: Samantha Pineda, (202) 820 - 1894,  
[samantha@cispes.org](mailto:samantha@cispes.org)



After the military takeover of the Salvadoran Legislature on February 9, 2020 human rights defenders and international organizations have raised alarms regarding President Nayib Bukele's growing authoritarian tendencies. Only one year into his presidency, Bukele's administration has been denounced for its confrontational attitude toward the other branches of government, alleged misuse of public funding, lack of transparency, and attacks on independent media and press freedom.

While those issues continue to be a major concern for international human rights groups such as CISPES, El Salvador now prepares to enter another electoral period scheduled to take place on February 28, 2021. In the context of the upcoming Municipal and Legislative elections, CISPES wants to raise awareness regarding recent actions prompted by President Bukele and carried out by his sympathizers directed towards weakening and discrediting the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), an institution that guarantees the free exercise of democracy and peace in the country.

On November 30, supporters of Bukele's political platform, the Nuevas Ideas party (NI), forcibly locked electoral officials at the TSE headquarters in the capital city of San Salvador. For approximately five hours TSE employees and journalists were illegally deprived of their liberty in an effort to pressure the Department Electoral Committee officials (JED, for its acronym in Spanish) into registering NI candidates who do not meet the legal requirements to run for office. [This is the case](#) with Yesenia Hernández who is aspiring to run for a legislative seat with NI for the Department of Santa Ana despite having been elected for a seat in the municipal council with the National Coalition Party (PCN) in 2018. Transfugism (changing party allegiance whilst in office) is [illegal according to El Salvador's Electoral Code](#).

Electoral Magistrates immediately called on the National Civilian Police (PNC) to intervene, but PNC Director Mauricio Arriaza Chicas claimed it was a "peaceful demonstration". Minister of Security Rogelio Rivas also dismissed the gravity of the situation, while President Nayib Bukele defended the actions claiming they were carried out in order to "avoid fraud." According to witnesses interviewed by investigative journalists from El Faro, those who coordinated the actions at the TSE headquarters were two electoral delegates from Nuevas Ideas.

On December 10, over twenty human rights organizations signed onto a [statement denouncing](#) the president's anti-democratic actions, "Bukele [is carrying] out an early electoral campaign, [using] public funds to promote his candidates and manipulates aid to the population for electoral purposes. In turn, militants of the Nuevas Ideas party, akin to the Government, assault

offices of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and commit the crime of deprivation of liberty by blocking access to exit of the institution's personnel." They went on to express, "The Government is placed in illegality, [it] does not comply with its obligations, disrespects the independence of powers, the Constitution and the laws..."

Despite sustained aggression, police officials have not acted in defense of electoral officials and have instead detained at least two election officials in Sonsonate and the capital city of San Salvador. In a statement from December 2, political analysts from the Processionals for the Transformation of El Salvador (PROES) also [denounced](#) the president's actions, "By exercising repression against the personnel of the TSE and violating the right to individual liberty of the employees of said institution, the New Ideas party violated democratic institutions, with the complicity of the PNC."

The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) is urging United States government officials and international human rights organizations to condemn President Nayib Bukele's attacks against the institutional legitimacy of El Salvador's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). The TSE was founded in 1991 as part of peace agreements between the Salvadoran state and the then organized popular guerilla. It is now the highest authority on electoral matters in the country.

*CISPES has accompanied the democratic process in El Salvador with delegations of international election observers since 1994. To get more information about developments taking place in relation to the elections or to schedule interviews with civil society leaders in El Salvador, please contact [samantha@cispes.org](mailto:samantha@cispes.org)*