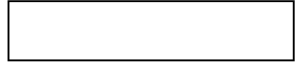


*Pres has seen*



Special National Intelligence Estimate

# El Salvador: Election Outlook

APPROVED FOR RELEASE  
DATE: NOV 2003

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Key Judgments

**for the President**

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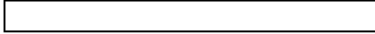
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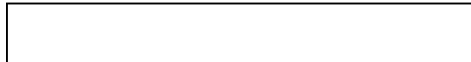
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EL SALVADOR:  
ELECTION OUTLOOK

KEY JUDGMENTS



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THIS ESTIMATE IS ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE.

THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS.

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:*

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organization of the Department of State.

*Also Participating:*

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

The Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

We believe the 25 March presidential election in El Salvador will take place on schedule. Questions concerning voter registration, balloting procedures, and development of an adequate security plan remain to be resolved, but there appears to be little chance that the contest will be canceled or postponed.

The stakes seem to be high for all elements in this election. Reporting indicates that public interest is as keen as it was during the voting for the Constituent Assembly in 1982. In several opinion polls, produced by a variety of sponsors, over 80 percent of the respondents said they want to vote. Nevertheless, difficulties with the election registry and guerrilla disruptions could result in a voter turnout somewhat below the 1982 level. Indeed, the government, because of its inability to provide security, plans not to place ballot boxes in over 70 of 261 municipalities.

Six parties have chosen presidential and vice-presidential candidates and are actively campaigning. With the exception of the Christian Democrats, the parties are to varying degrees conservative. No party to the left of the Christian Democrats is expected to participate in the election.

The military views the election as an essential factor for improving its international image and maintaining US assistance. It has pledged to remain neutral in the election and has reprimanded some officers for partisan political activities. At the same time, however, the military is concerned about potential postelection tampering with its own prerogatives by the winner, and it is seeking to protect those prerogatives by coordinating a policy position paper with all parties prior to the balloting. Such a pact would do much to allay military concerns, but would not preclude coup plotting before or after the election, particularly if the Christian Democrats win.

The Marxist guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and their political allies in the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) clearly regard the election as a major challenge. The guerrillas appear especially concerned that an honest election with a large voter turnout could strengthen the legitimacy of the government and harm their cause as the election did in 1982, but the coming election does not represent for them the critical test that it does for the Salvadoran Government and participating parties.

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[REDACTED]

The FDR-FMLN alliance has denounced the balloting as a US-inspired farce, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In our judgment, the insurgents are likely to step up attacks on selected towns and cities and to attempt various sabotage, terrorist, and other spectacular operations against public utilities, bridges, and military installations. [REDACTED] the guerrillas are not likely to mount a general nationwide offensive because they consider it too costly in men and materiel and fear it would be politically counterproductive. Instead, guerrilla actions probably will be aimed at eroding confidence in the government, undermining military morale, distracting attention from the electoral process, and reducing voter turnout in some key areas.

The armed forces will be stretched thin, and the insurgents may adjust their strategy depending on the results of the initial balloting. On balance, however, we believe that the armed forces can provide sufficient security in most areas of the country to ensure a large election turnout and protect both rounds of balloting.

It is unlikely that any of the slates for the three largest parties could win a majority in the 25 March balloting. Instead, the two top parties probably will face one another in a runoff election, which must be held within 30 days after the initial balloting results have been certified. The party coming in third on 25 March is likely to play a significant role in determining the outcome of the runoff election.

The Christian Democratic Party (PDC) is likely to win a plurality of between 40 and 50 percent in the first ballot. The ultraconservative Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) probably will place second, followed by the moderately conservative National Conciliation Party (PCN). Hence, a runoff probably will take place in late April or early May between the PDC and ARENA candidates, with the PCN in the swing position. Although the PDC might be able to win a runoff without direct support from the PCN, ARENA probably cannot. In the event that the PCN agrees to support the PDC, as one source reports has already occurred, the Christian Democrats' chances of winning would be enhanced.

The assassination of a leading presidential contender would change the electoral situation dramatically. The loss of Roberto D'Aubuisson would be a serious blow to ARENA, but the assassination of Jose Napoleon Duarte would not necessarily harm—and might even improve—prospects for the Christian Democratic Party because it could offer a strong replacement candidate. The assassination of either major presidential candidate, however, would undermine the credibility of

the electoral process and could precipitate serious partisan violence after the balloting.

Whoever is elected president of El Salvador will be constrained in exercising his power by the military, by the current Legislative Assembly and that elected in 1985, by the new Constitution, and, inevitably, by US policy demands. At the top of his agenda will be the need to reach an accommodation with the military and opposition political parties, to mollify the private sector, and to assure a continued flow of US military and economic assistance.

The victory of a conservative coalition headed by ARENA leader Roberto D'Aubuisson would probably result in the eventual undoing of reforms and the loss of needed domestic and international support. The first reaction of the military will be to keep him in line, and support from the armed forces and the private sector could sour over time. An attempt to further politicize the military, for example, could lead to a crisis within the officer corps. Moreover, if a cutoff in US assistance appeared imminent, a major confrontation between the government and the military could ensue.

Despite D'Aubuisson's views on counterinsurgency tactics, he is not likely to deal more effectively with the guerrillas. D'Aubuisson has a simplistic prescription for the insurgency—the "scorched earth" approach—that does not deal with the current reality of the war. The Army would be no more capable than before of dealing with trained and well-coordinated insurgent units that can draw on considerable external support. Furthermore, a campaign of brutal repression would cause popular support to drop and provoke a cutoff in foreign aid. Moreover, some officers and men would recoil from the tactics of suppression. There would be desertions to the guerrillas, increasing popular support for the guerrillas, and a large refugee exodus.

Meanwhile, ARENA's unsavory image abroad would limit its ability to secure foreign economic loans and aid, further reducing the potential for businessmen to invest in the economy. Most labor organizations dislike ARENA policies, and intimidation of moderates and liberals by ARENA could cause members of the democratic opposition to side with the insurgents or leave the country. Clearly, such a government would also face negative public opinion in the United States, particularly if the human rights situation did not improve. This would make it even more difficult for Washington to carry out its policies in El Salvador and elsewhere in the region.

We believe the implications of a victory by a centrist coalition led by Christian Democratic candidate Duarte for the future of El

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Salvador—and for US regional policy—would be significantly more favorable than would be the case with an ultraright victory. The standing of El Salvador with some Latin American and West European countries would improve, and US policy toward San Salvador would be more acceptable internationally. Moreover, in an effort to secure a political solution to the conflict, a centrist government would probably be more inclined to move toward reconciliation with those insurgent elements who could be persuaded to participate in the democratic process.

Nevertheless, a victory by a Christian Democratic-dominated coalition would be divisive if Duarte and the rest of the Christian Democratic leadership were to pursue policies that the private sector and the armed forces perceived to be inimical to their institutional interests and their ability to conduct the war—such as a more vigorous reform program or a restructuring of the military command. Even if the Christian Democratic leadership and its coalition partners respected the military's prerogatives, political machinations by the extreme right and disinformation by the extreme left could reinforce the armed forces' deep suspicion of the Christian Democrats, generating major tensions and impeding the leadership's ability to govern.

The elections are a necessary step in the transition to democracy, but by themselves they will not provide a near-term solution to endemic political, social, and military institutional problems. Violence will continue, and US pressure and support will still be required to achieve political, economic, and military progress.



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