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# Bilateral Relations Between El Salvador and the United States in the Period 2014-2023

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## EN | Abstract:

Foreign policy constitutes an institutional mechanism of a state, formed by a set of carefully analyzed, balanced, and articulated actions that facilitate relations with other countries. This type of policy is intrinsically linked to a state's domestic national policy and utilizes diplomacy as a fundamental tool for its implementation. It must be formulated considering the goals and interests of both the state and its wider society. This encompasses both specific objectives, such as cooperation and trade agreements, and broader engagement in bilateral and multilateral policies. From this perspective, governments develop their foreign policy based on a combination of factors: their own interests, the actions of other international actors, and their adherence to guiding principles. Foreign policy can thus serve to maintain or increase a state's presence and influence in international politics, whether through alliances or divergence from other actors, all within the framework of public international law. Drawing from an academic approach, this research analyzes the political-diplomatic relations between El Salvador and the United States (USA) from 2014 to September 2023, examining them through the lens of international law and diplomatic history from a Salvadoran perspective. This period witnessed a significant shift in government, from an administration aligned with Latin American values to one challenging the status quo of a traditional two-party system that held power for three decades. Furthermore, the research explores how the Salvadoran state's recent actions, particularly across its executive and legislative branches, reflect a departure from a foreign policy heavily reliant on the United States, suggesting a potential shift towards paradigms that may not always align with the decisions of this global power.

**Keywords:** foreign policy, diplomatic relations, public international law, SDG 10, SDG 16, SDG 17.

## ES | Abstract:

La política exterior constituye un mecanismo institucional de un Estado, formada por un conjunto de acciones, que, de manera analizada, equilibrada y articulada, permite la relación con otros países. Esta política no puede estar separada de la política nacional doméstica de un Estado y utiliza, como herramienta fundamental para su ejecución, la diplomacia.

Debe estar elaborada tomando en cuenta los objetivos e intereses de cada Estado y la sociedad en general. Es decir, enfocada en objetivos concretos de cooperación mutua, establecimiento de acuerdos comerciales y también en objetivos más abstractos, como las políticas a nivel bilateral y multilateral.

Desde esa perspectiva, los gobiernos de turno elaboran su política exterior según sus intereses y para responder al comportamiento de otros actores internacionales, o bien pueden actuar de manera general con sus principios; es decir, por medio de la política exterior, mantener o aumentar su presencia e influencia en la política internacional, ya sea de forma favorable o menos favorable con relación a otros actores internacionales, siempre en los marcos y principios de derecho internacional público.

En ese contexto, en el presente trabajo se desarrollan, desde un enfoque académico, las relaciones político-diplomáticas entre El Salvador y Estados Unidos en el período del 2014 a septiembre de 2023,

*desde la perspectiva del derecho internacional y la historia diplomática de El Salvador. Es el momento en que ocurre un cambio de gobierno, de una administración supuestamente apegada a preceptos de la izquierda latinoamericana, a un gobierno que rompe con el statu quo marcado por un bipartidismo de corte tradicional que por treinta años mantuvo el poder. Asimismo, se toman como relevantes las últimas acciones del Estado Salvadoreño, sus órganos ejecutivos, judicial y legislativo, permeados de un cambio en esa política exterior dependiente de los Estados Unidos de América, hasta una permuta de paradigma opuesto a las decisiones de esta potencia mundial.*

**Palabras Clave:** *Política exterior, relaciones diplomáticas, derecho internacional público, ODS 10, ODS 16, ODS 17.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In current international relations, we witness substantial geostrategic changes. The United States, once an unmatched superpower, has lost its status of absolute dominance in global relations, a title gained after the Soviet Union's dissolution in December 1991.

Today, China, allied with Russia, tilts the economic and military balance in their favor amidst a New Cold War with Ukraine as the battleground. Distant from the US, as desired by American politicians, but close to Russian missiles, as known by the Russian military.

Since the Soviet Union's collapse, NATO's eastward expansion, despite Western promises to the contrary and the US withdrawal from arms control treaties, marked a new arms race, breaking the agreements that ended the Cold War. The most significant was withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty), a cornerstone in the nuclear arms race control.

In Ukraine, the US's intervention, supporting a 2014 coup that changed its government, is evident. This move, typically inconsistent with Western-style rule of law and democratic governance, also had the backing of reactionary pro-Nazi Banderite groups. In this spiral of violence in international relations, all countries, including El Salvador's relations with the US, are affected.

### Bilateral Relations El Salvador - United States

The historical relationship between El Salvador and the United States has been fundamental for the former, spanning various areas, including politics, economy, security, and culture. Based on a case study research report, this article examines the significance of these relations, their evolution, and their impact on both nations. Key historical moments, such as El Salvador's pursuit of U.S. diplomatic recognition in the 19th century and U.S. military and financial support during the Cold War, have shaped Central America's internal politics and regional conflicts.

Significant for both nations, particularly for El Salvador with its large expatriate population in the U.S., these relations have evolved across political, economic, social, and cultural areas. Economic and trade cooperation, along with remittances from Salvadoran migrants, have bolstered El Salvador's economy. Security and migration cooperation addresses critical challenges facing both countries. As the global landscape shifts, these relations continue to adapt, maintaining their future relevance.

The focus period, from 2014 to early 2023, is marked by changes, particularly in the political system of El Salvador post-Civil War Peace Accords. Political-diplomatic relations with the U.S. are significant for El Salvador, necessitating critical reflection for Salvadoran society. This research aims to provide insights for academics and policymakers in developing public policies that leverage national interests through foreign policy.

### **Study Objective and Justification**

This research delves into El Salvador's foreign policy dynamics with its major trade partner, the United States, from an academic and historical perspective grounded in facts. The temporal context spans from the start of Sánchez Cerén's presidential term in 2014, through the weakening of the traditional two-party system in 2019, to the onset of President Bukele's administration. Through bibliographic research and interviews with key actors, it aims to shed light on recent actions in El Salvador regarding executive, judicial, and legislative powers, signaling a shift in its traditionally U.S.-dependent foreign policy. The primary goal is to identify elements that have shaped the diplomatic relations between El Salvador and the United States from 2014 to September 2023.

#### **Specific objectives are the following::**

- Illustrate the political backdrop in which El Salvador and the United States have developed their foreign policy.
- Identify the outcomes of El Salvador's diplomatic relations with the United States and their impact on El Salvador's development.
- Define the strategies employed by Salvadoran governments in the political-diplomatic dynamics with the United States.
- Evaluate the feasibility of making recommendations for the relations between the two countries.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted with a qualitative approach tailored to the characteristics and needs of the research, considering knowledge and perceptions derived from applied techniques. The qualitative approach, defined by Hernández (2003), involves data collection without numerical measurement to discover or refine research questions and may or may not test hypotheses in the interpretation process.

Responses from individual interviews were analyzed and interpreted in an educational, social, and comparative context to establish the phenomenon. The study is mainly descriptive, gathering data from narratives and words of key informants, including interviews with internationalists, legal professionals, political analysts, and economists from El Salvador.

Additionally, bibliographic research was conducted to gather information and data foundational to the proposed work. This research, limited to the defined project, aimed to deepen understanding, identify contradictions, and address established assumptions. Bibliographic research, often involving content analysis, differs from documentary research because it does not include content analysis.

In this context, bibliographic and documentary research were combined to sequentially obtain relevant information from primary and secondary sources, shaping a chapter on the main actions underpinning the objectives of this work.

### Population, Sample and Applied Techniques

The study utilized structured interviews to collect information, focusing on the research topic and gathering insights from Salvadoran internationalists and professionals about the political-diplomatic relations between El Salvador and the United States during the specified research period. Folgueiras, P. (2020) states that the interview is a valuable and widely used technique in research processes.

The research applied cascading or snowball sampling, described by McMillan and Schumacher (2005) as a strategy where the preceding refers to each successive participant or group. The researcher creates a profile of specific characteristics or traits and asks participants to suggest others fitting this profile (p.446).

This method is suitable for cases where individuals are not in a confined group but dispersed. It was chosen for selecting subjects with relevant professional expertise and experience. However, due to the non-rigid nature of qualitative research, other relevant individuals within the research field were also included in the interviews.

### Sample Detail:

Tipo de Muestra	Muestra Teórica		Muestra de opiniones	
Técnica Cualitativa	Categorías Teóricas		Opiniones	
	Mujeres	Hombres	Mujeres	Hombres
Entrevista Semiestructurada	5	9	5	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>		<b>14</b>	

Source: Own elaboration.

Based on the above table, a profile was drawn up of the professionals to be interviewed, considering their profession, experience, age range, and the environment related to the topic under investigation. In this area, as established in the section on research methodology, the starting point was voluntary interviewees who were asked, based on their profile, to recommend new professionals to be interviewed. A defined and delimited intentional sample was obtained in order to obtain an adequate capacity of the results that would provide a reality and richness to the work under study.

### Description of the Analysis and Interpretation of Findings Process

In order to present the findings, the first step was the analysis of the data obtained from the structured interview instrument conducted with fourteen Salvadoran professionals with experience in foreign policy and experts in the political-diplomatic relations between El Salvador and the United States. The second step was reducing the information obtained from constructing a thematic reading and open coding matrix, which contains three specific objectives of the research: the establishment of the categories and the questions asked to establish the findings.

In this matrix, the keywords of each of the responses were color-coded, and from this information, all possible subcategories were formulated in each category defined.

In the third step, a summary matrix of the categorical system for the information collection was prepared, containing the categories and the selection of subcategories obtained from comparing the answers to the questions related to the specific objectives.

As a fourth step, matrices were developed with each of the selected categories and subcategories and their definition based on words from the knowledge acquired to elaborate the interpretation of the qualitative data.

### **III. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

For the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data, different categories were chosen according to the topic and the specific objectives of the research. In the same logic, in each category, a series of subcategories were defined in response to indicators provided by the different informants and directly linked to the central theme.

#### **Dynamics of Foreign Policy:**

When interpreting the results of the interviewed individuals, it's noticeable that there are various opinions regarding foreign policy in this category. However, the majority expressed that they observed a positive and stable dynamic in foreign policy with the United States during the presidential period from 2014 to 2019. This period did not show significant differences from the previous administrations governed by the ARENA party.

#### **Government Administration of the FMLN Party:**

In line with the above, for some, it was even in this administration that international cooperation was most evident through flagship projects, such as FOMILENIO. This project was one of the significant advances that the FMLN administration promoted in relation to its friendship with the U.S. government.

#### **National Interest Priority:**

Regarding this subcategory, some interviewees gave their perspective on how the priority of national interest was presented, according to their appreciation for the investigated temporal level. They expressed that the FMLN party in 2014-2019 did not maintain this interest.

While the government of the period 2019-2023, according to some responses from the interviewees, seems to have as its primary objective to defend the national interest in its political decisions and actions: "The current government appears to flaunt more sovereignty in its decisions, regardless of how the United States might react." (Interviewee No. 12).

### **New Partner Countries:**

This subcategory is considered as the new partners with whom El Salvador has strengthened and consolidated its bilateral relations, or those with whom it may do so in the future.

Upon analyzing the thematic reading and open coding of the results obtained, the interviewees revealed that the shift in El Salvador's foreign policy with the United States took a turn due to discrepancies in the relations with the Biden administration.

As a result, due to the importance of the United States as a partner in cooperation, migration, and the economy of El Salvador, there was a need for a different geopolitical vision. This led to the emergence of other significant countries in the international sphere, as observed according to the responses:

Clearly, there has been a change in the course of El Salvador's foreign policy with the United States. El Salvador's interests in this country persist, but the change in administration with Biden's arrival generated a shift in the current administration's foreign policy vision in El Salvador. Along the same lines, the current international power scenario brings China into El Salvador's foreign policy, which affects the influence of the United States (Interviewee No. 14).

### **Ideological Discrepancies:**

This is another essential element in understanding the category under analysis. For some actors interviewed, ideological clashes between the United States have always existed, in some administrations more evident than in others. For example, in the case of the FMLN administration, the perception of those interviewed is that they kept this confrontation behind the scenes. "In the eyes of the population, it was seen that they maintained stable relations between the United States and El Salvador during the FMLN governments, even though they maintained some ideological differences with the internal policies of the party." (Interviewee N°11)

Although the central premise of the analysis is indeed the good political-diplomatic relationship between both countries, the ideological clash that the United States will have with a leftist government is also interpreted, especially if it was a government created by a party that comes from the guerrilla, with whom it fought in the conflict of the 80's of the last century.

The analysis arises when investigating the perceived confrontation between the current administrations, which is not an ideological cause but more of a personal nature of the rulers.

This interpretation will be made in the following subcategory to be interpreted.

### **Bukele Government Administration:**

The relations of the current administrations of the governments of El Salvador and the United States, notoriously for most of those interviewed, have changed concerning the one led by the FMLN administration with the administrations in office in the North American country.

Some have considered that the relationship has become less dynamic, cooperation cuts, a break with classic U.S. interventionism, and the consolidation of relations with other countries.

- "Project and program cuts in the current administration." (Interviewee No. 1)
- "There has been a confrontational shift with the change of administration to the Democratic party." (Interviewee No. 2)
- "A different approach, other forms of governance, and also a response to the current scenarios of the international community... Geopolitics is changing significantly from traditional trends." (Interviewee No. 3)
- "There is less dynamism in the relationship." (Interviewee No. 4)
- "We are now orbiting other States as project sponsors." (Interviewee No. 5)
- "The current administration's notable lack of strengthening and creating new foreign policies is perceived as a certain disjunction with the United States; this situation is very tangible." (Interviewee No. 6)
- "There is a search for independence in terms of El Salvador's political decision-making." (Interviewee No. 7)
- "Attempts have been made to seek support and cooperation alternatives that go against the geopolitical agenda of the United States, which has created roughness in the relationship." (Interviewee No. 8)
- "Now we believe we are self-sufficient and capable of receiving Salvadorans under TPS and even more people. When you depend on someone, you cannot want to be the one who commands the issue." (Interviewee No. 9)
- "This is because there have been some discrepancies between the policies enacted by the current government, which have somehow caused displeasure to the U.S. government, leading to some fractures in the political relations between both nations." (Interviewee No. 10)
- "The current government has not fully accepted the intervention of the United States in some economic and political processes, as it has tried to minimize in some way the hegemony the United States had at one time; in short, it is utopian, but it has wanted to break the center-periphery paradigm." (Interviewee No. 11)
- "The current government seems to flaunt more sovereignty in its decisions, regardless of how the United States may react." (Interviewee No. 12)



- "There has been a change in the course of El Salvador's foreign policy with the United States. The interests of El Salvador in that country persist. However, the change of administration, with the arrival of Biden, has generated a change in the vision of foreign policy of the current administration of El Salvador. Along the same lines, the current international power scenario brings China into El Salvador's foreign policy, a situation that affects the influence of the U.S." (Interviewee No. 14)

Beyond the results obtained in the interviews, it should be understood that the execution or strategy of implementing a foreign policy, even its design, are actions susceptible to change with the arrival of a new government. From their field and academic discipline, the interviewees have interpreted it this way.

### **Relevance of the United States for El Salvador:**

The following Category, in which four subcategories to be analyzed were defined, is related to the specific objective that seeks to establish the results obtained from the political-diplomatic relations between El Salvador and the United States in the temporally determined period (2014-2023).

### **World Power:**

The United States' capacity for traditional influence and decisive participation in most areas of international geopolitics is no exception for El Salvador for various reasons, which, according to the respondents' answers, attest to the importance of this category and its subcategories.

Prior to interpreting and analyzing the results obtained from the interviews, it can be assumed that most countries in the world, due to convenience, strategy, fear, or other conditions, desire to maintain good and solid political-diplomatic relations with the United States. Since the end of the Cold War in the 20th century, the U.S. emerged as the uncontested global hegemonic power and solidified a unipolar international architecture, which is currently challenged by the Russian-Chinese alliance, leading to a new multipolar architecture.

Following this context, delving into the analysis of why El Salvador has long perceived this importance towards the United States, the interviewees respond that the significance of the U.S. for El Salvador lies in two fundamental aspects: convenience and strategy. Within these two elements, for some, fear and respect for this country could also be included.

Moreover, most of the interviewees who view this subcategory as very important tend to attribute it more to previous governmental administrations than to the current one, which is demonstrating a disregard for the economic, military, and diplomatic power of the United States.

### **Migratory Issues:**

The United States remains the most sought-after destination for Salvadorans who migrate irregularly for various reasons. These flows of irregular migration to that country date back a long time but intensified during the armed conflict of the 1980s. Subsequently, other causes converged that prompted more Salvadorans to migrate from the country. This has resulted in the current reality: approximately 3 million Salvadorans reside in the United States, primarily in irregular conditions.

This situation leads many analysts to opine that this is one of the most critical factors in the political-diplomatic relationship between El Salvador and the United States. This analysis aligns with the views of some interviewees, who express the following assessments:

- "Due to the close relationship with the migration issue." (Interviewee No. 14)
- "El Salvador's geopolitical position, irregular migration from El Salvador." (Interviewee No. 6)
- "Statistically, as the primary factor, the number of compatriots living there and the implications it has for regional security and bilateral cooperation." (Interviewee No. 7)
- "Because there is significant migration of Salvadorans to the USA, the economy of El Salvador is largely sustained by remittances from that country." (Interviewee No. 8)
- "Because the other half of their population lives there. Because they control the currency. Too many reasons to enumerate." (Interviewee No. 10)
- "Due to the issue of migration, family remittances, because it is an important market, and because of its historical ties." (Interviewee No. 13)

Undoubtedly, for the critical actors interviewed, if anything keeps or should keep El Salvador working on maintaining political-diplomatic relations with the United States, it is the migration issue.

### **International Cooperation:**

Although international cooperation has been a constant and convenient variable for El Salvador, it is less important than the previous subcategories from the perspective of the people interviewed. In this line, in cooperation, the most outstanding in public opinion is FOMILENIO.

- "A close bilateral working relationship with financial support for different programs and projects." (Interviewee No. 1)
- "Our major partner in import and export of products. Additionally, it is the country that has contributed the most financially to social development and infrastructure programs since the peace agreements." (Interviewee No. 9)
- "One of the most important milestones that has forged our country's dependency ties to the USA has been dollarization, as well as the financing from U.S. organizations towards policies and programs within El Salvador that have been in line with public policy creation." (Interviewee No. 12)

As can be seen, the informants interviewed maintain that the dollarization issue was a mechanism of cooperation and, simultaneously, domination by the United States. The truth is that, over the years, the United States has supported the Salvadoran governments in office, which in turn have supported the United States at the international level, often applying the guidelines dictated by them in the international arena and domestic policy.

### **Impact on the Sovereignty and Independence of the Salvadoran State::**

This Category, which includes the analysis of five subcategories, is directly linked to the specific objective of defining the strategies adopted by the Governments of El Salvador.

### **International Positioning:**

According to the results, this subcategory suggests that the United States influenced or tried to influence the sovereignty and independence of El Salvador during the presidential period of the FMLN party, more so than in the current administration. In response to the question (in relation to the current government), 57.1% of the interviewees said no (it does not influence), against 28.6% who said yes, and 14.3% who did not know.

Analyzing the subcategory, the United States, with the FMLN government, continued to dictate the course of some of El Salvador's actions on the international stage, such as in international organizations like the UN and OAS, and support in U.S. military maneuvers in certain regions of the world. This was evident in 2011, when the government of the former Salvadoran president, Mauricio Funes, sent a military contingent to Afghanistan.

The mission was to last a month and a half, ending on October 13 of that year, but with an option for extension, as occurred with the Cuscatlán Battalion, which made 11 deployments to Iraq for an equal number of semesters between 2003 and 2009, during the administration of the ARENA government.

This led to responses to the following question: How do they consider the dynamics of diplomatic relations between El Salvador and the United States?

- "Much interference from the United States." (Interviewee No. 8)  
Regarding the current administration, the perception is that there is an effort to overcome that stage of dependence from previous governments:
- "There is a search for independence regarding El Salvador's political decisions" (Interviewee No. 7).

### **Public Policy Actions and Changes:**

This subcategory is closely related to the previous one, considering that with Biden's rise to power, his presidency in the central US office has conditioned any aid to specific parameters applicable to all government administrations in El Salvador. For El Salvador, this is linked to the structural problems that have always been conditions for the need for funds: unemployment, economic stagnation, corruption, environmental vulnerability, and irregular migration.

In line with this, the United States conditions its support on these issues to implement actions and changes in public policies, as in the case of FOMILENIO, Partnership for Growth, military support during the armed conflict, migration issues, and financial cooperation from any US administration. However, it should be noted that some comments from interviewed individuals revolve around the fact that the current administration of El Salvador will not accept the imposition of guidelines for the application of domestic policies, as seen in the following response:

- "The current government has not fully accepted the intervention of the United States in some economic and political processes, as it has tried to somewhat diminish the hegemony that the United States once had. In short, it is utopian, but it has sought to break the Center-Periphery paradigm." (Interviewee No. 11)

### **Diplomatic Relations:**

In this subcategory, it is also perceived that before Biden's arrival to the US presidency, the United States decisively influenced the moment El Salvador established or broke diplomatic relations with a country it considered an ally or enemy. For example, in the case of Cuba, the FMLN party established diplomatic relations, as the Obama administration was not opposed, given the warming ties between the North American nation and the island. Under US pressure, previous ARENA governments did not re-establish diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Despite this, as part of El Salvador's foreign policy strategy, it challenged the United States in 2018 by severing political and diplomatic relations with Taiwan and establishing them with the People's Republic of China, a geostrategic adversary of the United States. The Bukele administration continued this policy, defying the United States and consolidating relations with this Asian country.

According to key informants interviewed, China is increasingly influencing El Salvador to the point of being an actor that guarantees El Salvador in the face of the possibility of worsening relations with the United States.

- "Clearly, there has been a shift in El Salvador's foreign policy towards the United States. El Salvador's interests with this country persist, but the change in administration, with Biden's arrival, has brought about a change in the current Salvadoran administration's vision of foreign policy. Along the same lines, the current international power landscape brings China into El Salvador's foreign policy, a situation that affects the influence of the United States" (Interviewee No. 14).

### **Trade Relations:**

The United States is El Salvador's primary extra-regional trade partner and, in this regard, represents a critical and significant actor for El Salvador. Through the CAFTA-DR, the United States imposed its commercial will on the countries of Central America, which in some ways is a form of economic domination and also of potential impositions that undermine the independence and sovereignty of the Salvadoran state.

Despite this, in commercial matters, even for the current Bukele administration, which is more challenging than its predecessors, the issue becomes complicated because El Salvador cannot compete with its products and services; consequently, the trade balance is and will always be negative for El Salvador. Along these lines, the interviewees observed this commercial weight primarily during the administration of the FMLN party.

- “Balanced, with clear results in cooperation and trade.” (Interviewee No. 2)  
However, indirectly, in terms of trade relations, El Salvador, adhering to a series of commercial legal precepts established in free trade agreements, remains a country with little independence in the global trade game, where the United States still needs to play a determining role.  
Nevertheless, a new path is currently being explored to overcome this situation by consolidating trade relations with China. This global commercial giant is presenting significant competition to the United States. These economic relations even hold the possibility of signing a trade agreement between China and El Salvador.

### **Economic-Political System:**

This system is considered a set of factors interacting within a specific country and region, forming a structure resulting from the production, distribution, and consumption of services and products. Without a doubt, the most significant intervention and intrusion of the United States in El Salvador, in the eyes of Salvadorans and the world, occurred in the 1980s, "justified" by a flow of financial and military cooperation in favor of the military governments in power.

However, as mentioned, the United States has traditionally been determined to structure economic-political systems that reflect its mirror and principles. Regarding the results from the surveyed individuals, they did not mention whether the United States has "affected" El Salvador's economic-political system. However, they indirectly suggested that there have been negative influences.

- “One of the most significant milestones that has forged our country's dependency ties with the United States has been the dollarization, as well as the financing from American organizations towards policies and programs within El Salvador that have been part of public policy creation” (Interviewee No. 12).

For instance, in this argument, the interviewee refers to dollarization as an intervention tool in El Salvador's economic and political system. Indeed, the dollarization did not occur under the current government administration. Still, its impact persists today, dependent on the monetary policy of the United States and the decisions of the Federal Reserve System. In the same context, detaching from the U.S. monetary issue would have severe short-term consequences for El Salvador, especially for the less privileged sectors.

From this subcategory, it is notable that dependency and sovereignty are affected not only by migration, military issues, and international stances, among others, but also by less publicly mentioned aspects such as the monetary issue.

### **Strengthening of Bilateral Relations:**

Like the previous one, this category relates to the potential impacts on the sovereignty and independence of the Salvadoran state, directly linked to the specific objective of defining the strategies adopted by the Governments of El Salvador during the analyzed period. Five subcategories were examined in this category.

### **Diplomatic Representation:**

While it may be a less relevant element for some interviewees, for others, it is an essential factor for the utilization and achievement of the goals and national interests that Salvadoran foreign policy pursues. For some interviewed academics, the current Salvadoran diplomatic representation in the United States requires a change towards a more strategic approach; this is reflected in comments like the following:

- "Change the diplomatic representation of El Salvador in the United States." (Interviewee No. 1)  
Generally, diplomatic representations are the first to be pointed out in stagnation and lack of political or diplomatic interaction between two countries. However, often, there is a mosaic of reasons why such contexts occur, which go beyond the will of the diplomatic officials.

### **Conciliatory Discourse:**

El Salvador and the United States are currently experiencing one of the worst diplomatic and economic estrangements in their recent history, even greater than when left-wing parties were in power in the Central American country. Recent confrontations between President Nayib Bukele and Joe Biden's government have reduced U.S. cooperation with official institutions to historic lows since the return of democracy in El Salvador in 1992, and both countries have exchanged strong criticisms that were unthinkable until recently.

This situation is visible to the populations of both countries, especially the Salvadoran people. El Salvador's traditional ally is changing course in relations with the Bukele administration. This context is perceived by key actors in this research. In this regard, they consider that to improve the conditions in the relationship with the United States and to capitalize on the pursuit of national interests and objectives, a bilateral scenario of dialogue and cooperation should be sought, overcoming the current actions of disagreement and confrontation.

- “Moving away from confrontation and better defining foreign policy guidelines, that is, a strategy of foreign policy actions with countries like the United States and China, which maintain clashes in international politics, needs to be formulated.” (Interviewee No. 12)
- “Resuming diplomatic and strategic dialogue on topics of common interest.” (Interviewee No. 3)  
El Salvador should eliminate, or at least minimize, confrontation with the United States and engage in a process of presumed peaceful alignment in the bilateral relationship, which does not seem to be the interest of the current Salvadoran government.

### **Governmental Changes:**

The ascensions of Bukele and Biden to power in El Salvador and the United States, respectively, brought a change in the management of bilateral foreign policy by both administrations. The foreign policy began to be perceived as affected by each other; that is, when President Bukele came to power, the friendly relationship with the United States was maintained due to the figure and coincidence of positions with Donald Trump. However, with Biden's arrival and a new approach to foreign policy for different regions, El Salvador had to redesign its approach to the United States. In this sense, for a change in the political-diplomatic relations between the two countries, the interviewees point out the need for a change of government in one or both countries.

- ““We know that with the entry of new governments, internal and external interests are maintained, created, or replaced. The important thing would be to focus on the true geopolitical and geostrategic stance of the current Salvadoran government regarding the interventions and cooperation aids that the United States may offer.” (Interviewee No. 11)

In this category, with a delicate subject, some key informants refrained from making any statements, responding with the following:

- “No advice.” (Interviewee No. 9)  
One of the weaknesses of foreign policy is its flexible nature and dependence on the governments in power, hence, with changes in governments, it is affected.

### **Meddling in Internal Affairs:**

This subcategory is closely related to the third category; however, here, it was analyzed from a perspective of assessing how the political-diplomatic relations between El Salvador and the United States could be strengthened, starting from the fact that, as stated in the analysis of the third category, the United States has intervened both directly and indirectly in the internal affairs of El Salvador in all areas.

For some of the surveyed individuals, an essential element that should occur to improve the current relations between El Salvador and the United States is for the United States not to interfere in El Salvador's internal affairs, respecting the principles of both positive and customary international law, emanating from the spirit of the Charter of San Francisco.

- “The United States should respect the political decisions of El Salvador and not try to interfere in the social context of our country.” (Interviewee No. 8)
- “The best way to conduct political relations between states is to respect the sovereignty of each. Specifically, between El Salvador and the United States, I believe these relations should be maintained for the benefits they bring to our country. However, the Salvadoran state must ensure that these relations do not affect our sovereignty or change our already established culture just to receive support in various areas.” (Interviewee No. 10)

There are few doubts that the principle of non-intervention, or the duty of a state not to interfere in the domestic affairs of another, is a fundamental norm of international law and one of the guiding principles of contemporary international relations.

In the international law that began to develop after World War II, the principle of non-intervention became one of the basic rules of international relations, even though its compliance has been questioned on many occasions. This is recognized by the OAS Charter and other international organizations' constitutive instruments.

This principle was enshrined in essential resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly. The jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial body of the international community, has also endorsed non-intervention as a fundamental norm of the current international law.

Beyond the analysis pertinent to this research, this is a universal principle that should be respected in all international relations between two or more states. The responses of the critical actors interviewed suggest that they perceive this premise in the same way, particularly in the case of the relationship between El Salvador and the United States.



### **Cooperation Agenda:**

Another important subcategory to which the interviewees referred, both directly and indirectly, is the development and implementation of a bilateral cooperation agenda. With such a cooperation pathway, the way would be paved for an improved relationship in political and diplomatic relations.

- "Strengthen cooperation ties, joint work on migration, and ensure that our country develops policies to seek mutual understanding with the United States." (Interviewee No. 7)
- "Create a foreign policy strategy based on professional diplomacy, cooperation, and transparency." (Interviewee No. 2)

For the interviewees, in line with their conciliatory discourse, defining an agenda with objectives and common points to better drive and direct political-diplomatic relations is an action that is urgently needed in the present and for future scenarios.

Besides the study conducted in each of the categories and subcategories, covering all aspects that allow us to conclude in relation to the researched topic, the analysis of independence and sovereignty goes beyond international actions and positioning. Political and military decisions at the international level are affected by other factors that can become difficult for El Salvador to control.

This last interpretation is essential. However, it should not be overlooked that the critical actors interviewed, as part of a society like the Salvadoran one, have their political-ideological positions, and logically, these intervene in their deliberative processes and perception of the various events of bilateral relations and the economic, political, social, and historical reality.

## **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

Regarding the dynamics of foreign policy with the United States, it can be concluded that during the FMLN party government from 2014-2019, the relationship remained "stable" and showed few differences compared to the previous ARENA party administrations. The same policies were maintained in migration and cooperation through projects like FOMILENIO, without displaying, as everyone expected, discrepancies or political confrontations between the two nations; on the contrary, the 2014-2019 administration was considered by most key informants interviewed as non-confrontational to U.S. foreign and international policy.

Only deviating from this relationship was the FMLN government's decision in 2018, towards the end of its term, to break diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan) and initiate diplomatic, political, and economic relations with the People's Republic of China. This can be seen as the only aspect that questioned the protocols of stability and dependence on the United States.

Regarding the current administration, as analyzed in the literature review and open coding of the obtained results, most respondents indicated that there had been a shift in El Salvador's foreign policy with the United States, resulting from the discrepancies in the Biden administration's relations with the Bukele government. The Salvadoran government has opted for a geopolitical vision involving other significant international players, like China, with which it has strengthened ties, somewhat diminishing U.S. influence in El Salvador.

Moreover, the Salvadoran government, for the 2019-2024 period, aims to defend national interest in its internal decisions. It is also worth noting that while the current administration has not accepted U.S. intervention in its institutional decisions, internal politics, economic processes, and actions to make the country attractive for investment, there are processes that are also considered priorities in the bilateral relationship, such as migration and dependence on the dollar as the currency of circulation.

Regarding migration, given the reality of approximately 3 million Salvadorans residing in the United States, most of them in irregular status, this issue becomes one of the most important factors in the political, diplomatic, and economic relationship, which, according to the interviewees, should be taken into account when defining political and diplomatic relations with the United States.

As for the impact of U.S. influence on the sovereignty and independence of the Salvadoran state, the subcategories related to international positioning were established. In analyzing the interviews, when asked whether they perceived that the United States affected the sovereignty and independence of El Salvador during the 2014-2019 presidential period, the response (from the 15 interviewees) indicated that 64.3% versus 35.7% believed that Salvadoran state sovereignty was maintained despite U.S. actions.

Regarding the perception of key actors interviewed about whether they believe that the Salvadoran state in the current presidential administration is being affected or influenced in its sovereignty and independence by the United States, 57.1% said no, against 28.6% who said yes, and 14.3% who said maybe.

We highlight that while these responses are present in all the discourses examined and encompass all the categories and subcategories analyzed, they lead to the conclusion that due to the dynamics, scenarios, results, and strategies involved in the presidential administrations of the specified period, that independence and sovereignty in international positioning, geopolitical decisions, and institutional decisions have been maintained. There are other factors that might be more difficult to control and that require planned strategies for medium-term solutions, such as the case of bilateral exchange.

It is important to mention that, although an exhaustive qualitative study was conducted to arrive at the most objective theses on the analyzed topic, it must be considered that one cannot overlook the ideological positions of the interviewed actors, involving deliberative processes of perception among the various events of political, economic, social, historical, cultural reality, among others.

Internal policy actions have repercussions on El Salvador's foreign policy, mainly with those countries that defend so-called Western-style democratic systems, preaching rules in governance that they later fail to comply with.

In line with the above, we mention the studied topic and, as a particular case, that of the United States, a country that condemns many of the actions executed by El Salvador – in particular, the dismissal of judges, the implementation of the state of emergency, and the adoption of Bitcoin as legal tender – leading to the weakening of bilateral relations between the two countries.

With the actions implemented, the state of El Salvador has demonstrated sovereignty and imposed the authority to implement actions legitimized by its three powers, which goes beyond the acceptance of a third country, in this case, the United States. The government of President Nayib Bukele has been characterized by not being influenced by countries that have traditionally been influenced, such as the United States, which has permanently marked the political and development agenda of El Salvador.

While granting sovereignty to El Salvador, this action has consequences in the bilateral and multilateral spheres. Bilaterally, the main effect is the rejection by the United States concerning the actions taken by the Government of El Salvador in its domestic policy. These actions have led to a deterioration in development cooperation and a shift in U.S. support favoring private, not public, organizations. Also, there is the possibility of El Salvador being excluded from deliberative processes in multilateral spaces, reduced or no migration cooperation for Salvadorans residing in El Salvador; retaliation against political figures of the current Salvadoran administration, intensified investigations into alleged corruption in the current administration, decreased trade flows, and the possibility of exclusion from the CAFTA-DR Free Trade Agreement.

Finally, we consider that the Bukele administration's break from the traditional political, economic, cultural, and social paradigm that prevailed in the bilateral relations between the United States/El Salvador, to the detriment of its sovereignty and independence, for others, represents a context of deterioration of the Rule of Law and implies positions in favor of or against the international relations of the current Salvadoran government.

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