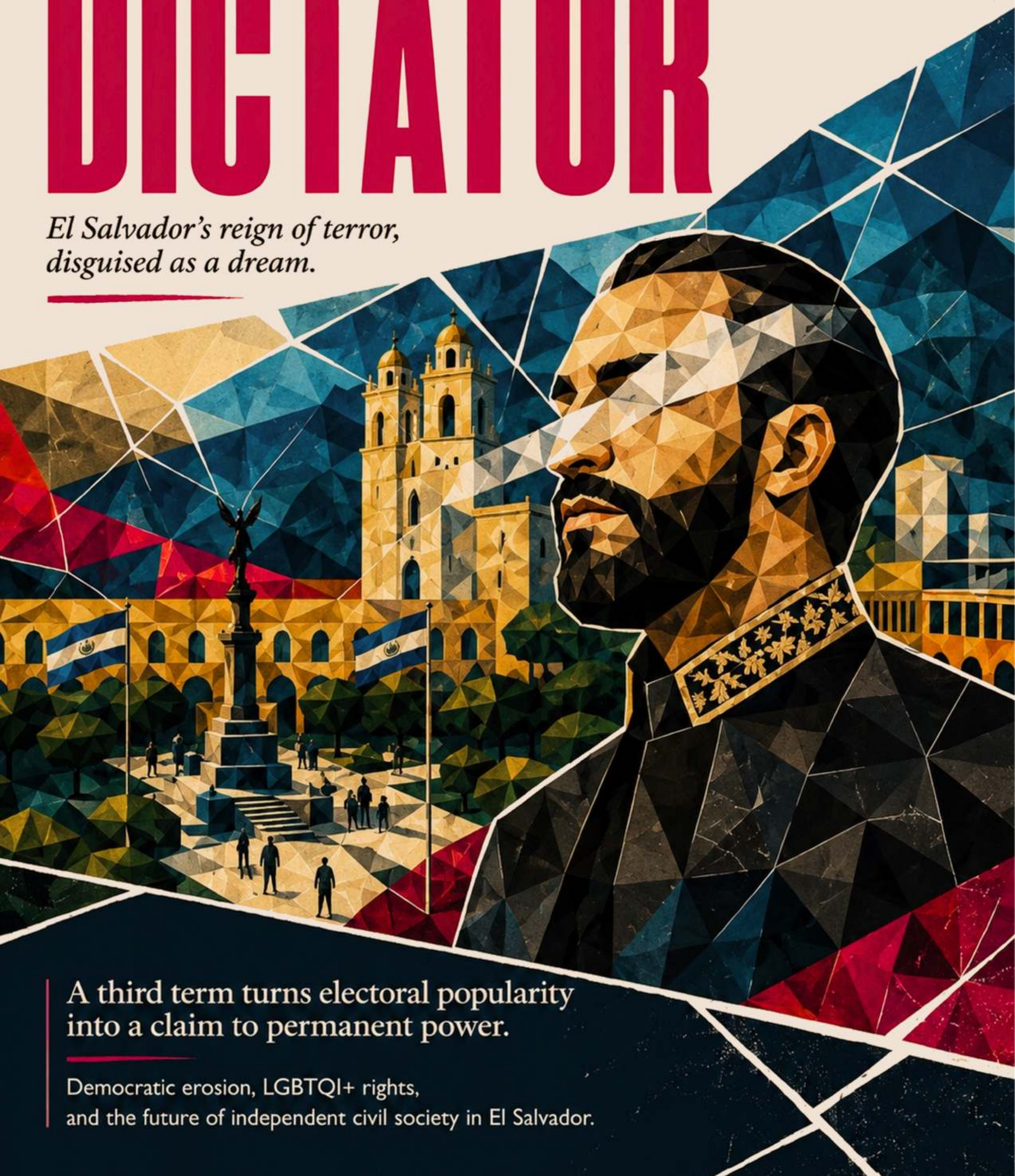
SANTA MARTA CENTER • VOLUME 1.2 • JULY 2026

THE REELECTION OF A DICTATOR

El Salvador's reign of terror, disguised as a dream.



A third term turns electoral popularity into a claim to permanent power.

Democratic erosion, LGBTQI+ rights,
and the future of independent civil society in El Salvador.

HOW HE FORCED US HERE

Bukele's path to a third term was built step by step. Each institution that could have limited presidential power was captured, weakened, or used to remove the next obstacle.



01

FEBRUARY 28, 2021

Nuevas Ideas wins control of the Legislative Assembly.

The presidency gained control of the institution responsible for checking executive power.



02

MAY 1, 2021

The new Assembly removes the Constitutional Chamber and the attorney general.

The court responsible for interpreting the Constitution was brought under the influence of the same political project it was supposed to restrain.

03

SEPTEMBER 3, 2021

The new Chamber permits immediate presidential reelection.

A constitutional prohibition was neutralized through judicial interpretation, without changing the text of the Constitution.



04



NOVEMBER 3, 2023

The electoral authority registers Bukele for a second consecutive term.

The electoral authority converted the court's reinterpretation into an enforceable candidacy.

FEBRUARY 4, 2024

Bukele wins reelection and his party preserves legislative dominance.

A legally disputed candidacy became an electoral victory, allowing popularity to be presented as proof that the constitutional issue no longer mattered.

05



06



APRIL 29, 2024–JANUARY 29, 2025

The Assembly changes how the Constitution can be amended.

The waiting period designed to prevent one political majority from rewriting the constitutional order was removed.

JULY 31, 2025

The Assembly legalizes indefinite presidential reelection.

The temporary judicial permission granted in 2021 became a permanent constitutional system designed to allow Bukele to remain in power indefinitely.

07



JUNE 29–JULY 12, 2026

Bukele enters the race for a third term.

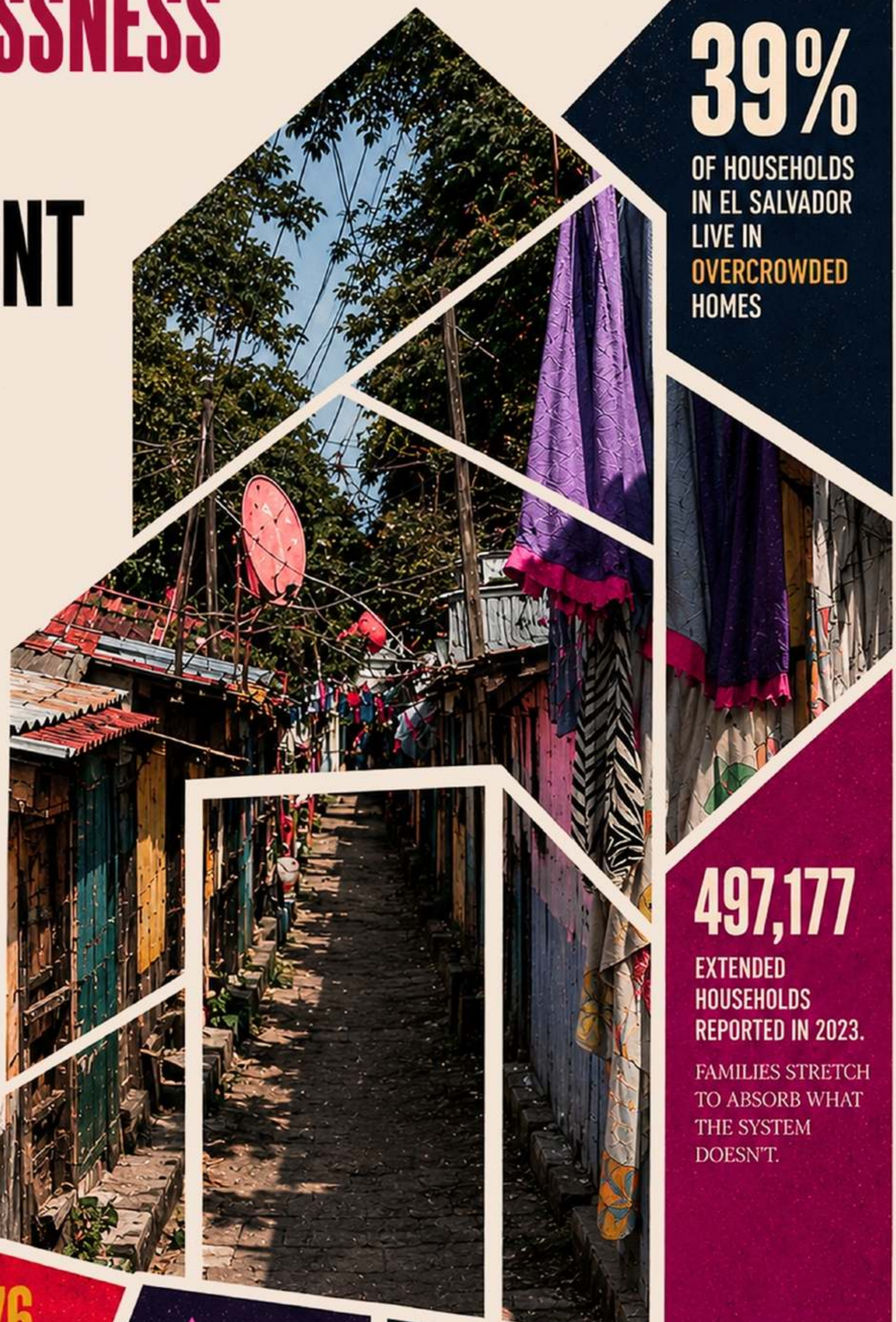
The institutional path is complete. The Assembly changed the rules, the Chamber supplied the interpretation, the electoral authorities implemented it, and the ruling party converted it into another candidacy.

Bukele did not break a single barrier.
His government removed them in sequence, until the institutions created to limit presidential power became the instruments of its continuation.

HOMELESSNESS LOOKS DIFFERENT HERE

Santa Marta works where hidden homelessness and family rejection meet.

In El Salvador, homelessness stays invisible because housing and extended families absorb the crisis. Behind that invisibility are overcrowded homes and impossible choices that shape everyday life.



39%

OF HOUSEHOLDS IN EL SALVADOR LIVE IN OVERCROWDED HOMES

497,177

EXTENDED HOUSEHOLDS REPORTED IN 2023.

FAMILIES STRETCH TO ABSORB WHAT THE SYSTEM DOESN'T.

$124 → $276

AVERAGE MONTHLY COST OF THE CHEAPEST RENTAL (2021 TO 2024)

Rents keep rising.
Wages don't.
For many families,
a roof is now out of reach.

QUEER KIDS, NOWHERE TO GO

When an LGBTQI+ young person is expelled because of homophobia, they can lose that entire network at once.

SOURCES

- DIGESTYC. (2023). Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples 2023.
- MULTIDATA / FUSADES. (2024). Boletin de inflación – Abril 2024.
- UNDP EL SALVADOR. (2022). Diversidad sexual e identidad de género en El Salvador: Diagnóstico de situación.
- HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. (2021). "We Can't Go Home": Family Rejection of LGBTIQ People in El Salvador.

A CROWN BUILT ON FEAR OF CIVIL SOCIETY

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL PRESSURE

The 2025 Foreign Agents Law requires registration, imposes a 30% tax on covered foreign funds, and gives authorities broad powers to inspect, fine, suspend, or cancel organizations.

WE KNOW THIS PRESSURE FIRSTHAND

Eduardo and Joseph first worked together at Cristosal. Between 2020 and 2021, Pegasus spyware infections affected journalists and civil-society workers, including a member of Cristosal, revealing the level of surveillance facing organizations that investigate corruption and defend human rights.

YOU CAN HELP

Support Santa Marta financially.

Connect us with donors and diplomatic partners.

Share our documentation internationally.

Stand with LGBTQI+ organizations and human rights defenders in El Salvador.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SANTA MARTA

The tax, registration requirements, and legal uncertainty have made international agencies increasingly reluctant to fund small Salvadoran organizations. Rainbow World Fund has helped Santa Marta preserve international support and continuity of services.

LGBTQI+ ORGANIZATIONS ARE ESPECIALLY EXPOSED

Our work depends on freedom of association, confidential records, international funding, public advocacy, and the ability to document abuses. When those protections narrow, queer people lose both political representation and practical protection.

SANTA MARTA RESPONDS BECAUSE OUR COMMUNITY CANNOT WAIT

Santa Marta provides shelter, food, psychological support, protection, and a path toward stability when public institutions fail LGBTQI+ people. We do this while protecting residents, staff, sensitive information, funding relationships, and our ability to operate independently.

A third Bukele term would prolong surveillance, legal uncertainty, donor withdrawal, and shrinking space for independent LGBTQI+ services.