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El Salvador: Election Outlook

Special National Intelligence Estimate

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SNIE 83.1-84
6 March 1984

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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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SNIE 83.1-84

**EL SALVADOR:
ELECTION OUTLOOK**

~~Information available as of 2 March 1984 was
used in the preparation of this Estimate.~~

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
KEY JUDGMENTS	1
DISCUSSION	5
The Stakes	5
Political Parties and Candidates	6
The Christian Democratic Party (PDC)	6
Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA)	7
Party of National Conciliation (PCN)	8
Salvadoran Authentic Institutional Party (PAISA)	8
The Smaller Parties	8
The Electoral Process	9
The Security Situation	10
Guerrilla Strategy and Capabilities	10
Government Strategy and Capabilities	11
Possible Outcomes	11
Runoff Election Possibilities	13
Implications of the Election	14
PDC Victory	14
ARENA Victory	15
ANNEX:	17

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

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[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]

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[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.

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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

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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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DISCUSSION

1. On 25 March, after four years of widespread violence, economic chaos, and social upheaval, Salvadorans will be able to vote for a president. If no candidate gets a majority of the votes, a runoff between the two top contenders will be held approximately a month later. After the inauguration, scheduled for 1 June, the new president will have five years in which to attempt to bring the war to an end while establishing the social and economic conditions necessary for stability.

The Stakes

2. Most Salvadorans are even more anxious for an end to the guerrilla conflict now than when they elected a Constituent Assembly in March 1982. At that time, 1.5 million voters turned out—estimated at some 80 percent of those eligible—to choose provincial representatives tasked with putting together a framework for democratic government that would achieve peace and stability. For many Salvadorans that goal probably appears as elusive as ever, and, for some, another election in the midst of war and considerable civilian displacement may seem futile. The US Embassy reports that over a quarter of a million citizens—mostly peasants—are displaced from their homes by violence and economic hardship within El Salvador. Conservative estimates suggest that a similar number have migrated to nearby countries and the United States since 1979.

3. Nevertheless, the psychological resiliency of the Salvadoran populace is impressive. Labor unions remain active, and democratic peasant organizations show increased political power and resolve despite rightist pressures. Meanwhile, the managerial sector—made up of businessmen and professionals—also appears committed to seeing the conflict through. Its political and economic pressure groups are now more active in public debate than at any time since the 1979 coup. Capital flight has slowed dramatically, and El Salvador's economic decline seems to have bottomed out. Indeed, some growth may be possible this year with continued international financial aid to cover

government debt servicing and generate investment credit for the private sector. If this trend is to continue, the population will need to perceive that the presidential election is a success.

4. Leaders of the political parties are conducting a vigorous election campaign. One opinion poll indicated that an overwhelming majority of the electorate would be voting in the hope that the election would bring peace, but the various political groupings have offered few substantive ideas about how to achieve it. Although the six registered presidential candidates recently participated in an unprecedentedly dignified public debate, the campaign has consisted largely of personal attacks and oratory about economic revitalization. This crude strategy could pay some dividends, however, at least for the more established parties. Name-calling between candidates tends to complement traditional Salvadoran emphases, especially among the less educated, on personalism, patronage, and loyalty to the group. Other recent opinion polls suggest that jobs and the cost of living may be of more immediate importance to a majority of Salvadorans than the less concrete notion of peace.

5. The issue for the Salvadoran elite, however, is more than just who wins. The quality of the election—turnout, procedures, results—ideally should equal or exceed that of 1982. A successful election with widespread participation and the formation of a broad-based government would improve the government's image at home and abroad, undermining the appeal of the guerrillas. It might lead some non-Marxist elements in the insurgent alliance to participate in the 1985 elections for the Legislative Assembly. A tainted and poorly run election would have largely the opposite effect. It would be likely to result in greater polarization, to increase the appeal of the guerrillas, and perhaps to renew coup plotting within the military.

6. The military plays a central role in the election by protecting the balloting and accepting the results. The transition to more democratic rule since the coup

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in 1979 has not been easy for the military, and political problems continue in the officer corps. A powerful minority of ultrarightist officers in the armed forces controls a significant number of troops.

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[Redacted] These officers might press for the overthrow of a new government led by the Christian Democrats, or readily carry out the draconian policies of a new administration under the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). [Redacted]

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7. The majority of the officer corps, however, probably adheres to the conservative pragmatism of Defense Minister Vides and officers of the high command, who have pledged that the military will respect the outcome. A top priority for the military will be protection of its institutional autonomy vis-a-vis an elected civilian government, and assurances that a new administration will not make political concessions to the guerrillas. According to the US Embassy, President Magana will attempt, prior to the election, to get all the political parties to approve a military position paper that expresses these concerns. [Redacted]

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8. The Marxist guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Movement (FMLN) and their political allies in the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) clearly regard the election as a major challenge, but it does not represent for them the critical test that it does for the Salvadoran Government and participating parties. The insurgents are concerned that—short of achieving a power-sharing arrangement with San Salvador—prospects for a successful Marxist revolution will worsen if the country institutionalizes its reforms and representative government, but they are unwilling to take part in elections for fear of losing. We believe this is due largely to the failure of the leftist alliance to widen its popularity with the electorate in the two years since the elections for the Constituent Assembly—now the Legislative Assembly. [Redacted]

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9. Nevertheless, the guerrillas have managed to maintain the strength of their combat forces and have scored significant tactical successes against the government. Though some insurgent leaders doubt they can overthrow the government as long as it continues to receive US aid, the momentum generated by guerrilla successes probably has convinced other commanders that military victory is possible. [Redacted]

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10. A successful presidential election would constitute a political setback for the insurgents. Locally, it probably would cause the insurgents morale problems and make it more difficult to attract new recruits. Overseas, it would lead to a dropoff in financial and political support from left-of-center backers in Western Europe, some of whom already appear to be reexamining their support for the guerrilla cause. [Redacted]

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11. Foreign military, financial, and diplomatic support will remain a key factor in the ultimate success of any government that is formed after the balloting. A well-run election would go a long way to achieve this, and it also is likely that San Salvador would achieve greater leverage in regional affairs—such as the Contadora peace initiative—discouraging outside sponsorship of power-sharing talks with the insurgents. Conversely, if the balloting is poorly run or the results are tainted, progress the government has made in diplomatic circles will be undermined and foreign aid to the country is likely to be in jeopardy. [Redacted]

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Political Parties and Candidates

The Christian Democratic Party (PDC)

12. As in past elections, the Christian Democrats will be on the left end of the political spectrum in the 25 March contest. According to most opinion polls, no other candidate is more popular than PDC candidate Jose Napoleon Duarte.¹ (See inset.) At age 58, and two years out of power, he is recognized as the country's preeminent reformist politician. Nevertheless, Duarte is not universally admired, and we believe he will not achieve a majority victory in the first round of the election. As titular head of the civilian-military junta from December 1980 to April 1982, Duarte presided over a nation racked by violence and precipitant economic decline. Despite his relatively pragmatic handling of most of the crises facing the government at that time, his stubborn personal idealism and his vanity reinforced his radical and intransigent image within the armed forces, the private sector, and probably among many citizens who voted against his party in the March 1982 Constituent Assembly elections. [Redacted]

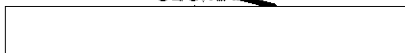
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¹ Biographic profiles on all six presidential and vice-presidential candidates appear in the annex [Redacted]

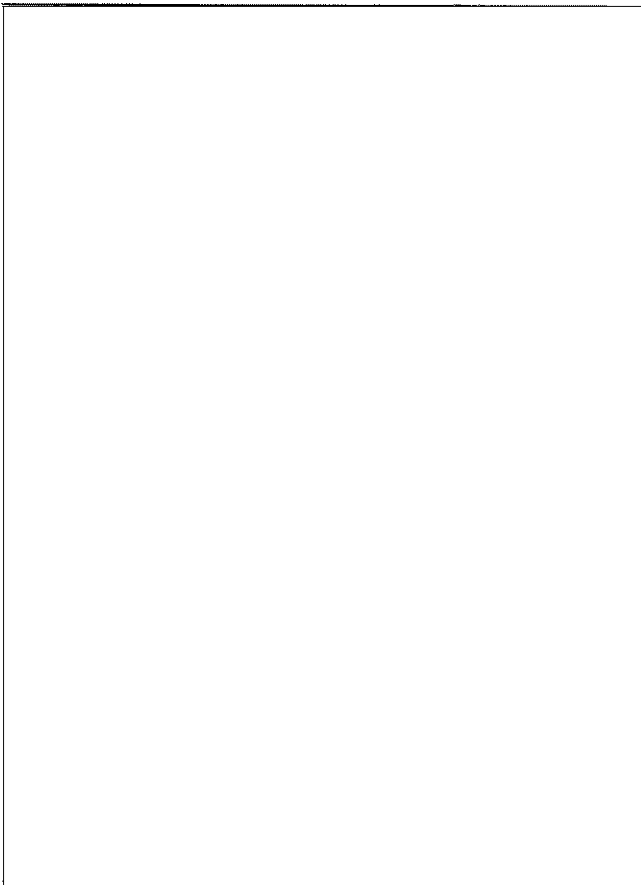
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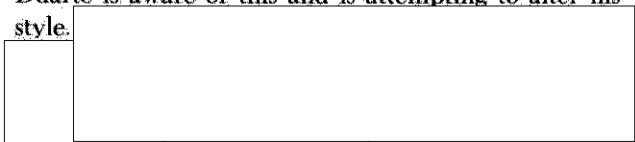


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13. US Embassy and other reporting suggests that Duarte is aware of this and is attempting to alter his style.

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Some members of Duarte's party want the PDC ticket to make a greater effort to attract middle-class professional voters, lest they cast their lot with conservative parties that could strengthen D'Aubuisson's hand in a runoff.

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14. The PDC leadership is upbeat about the coming election and its "peace and jobs" platform. Reporting suggests the party has accumulated a respectable war chest from local fundraising activities and donations from international democratic organizations. Well-attended rallies in the cities and towns and stumping in the countryside suggest greater momentum for the Christian Democrats than they had during the 1982 campaign. Although several opinion polls conducted

by various sponsors lack consensus on the margin of voter preference, all seem to indicate that the PDC ticket is likely to receive a plurality at least as solid as the 40 percent captured by the party in 1982.

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Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA)

15. Nearly three years have passed since the ARENA party was founded, essentially as a political vehicle for former Army major D'Aubuisson (see inset) and some ultrarightist associates engaged in coup plotting and terrorist activities. Since then, the party has used its highly nationalistic, anti-Communist, economically conservative message to secure significant financial resources and to develop an impressive political machine with a broad constituency. Sizable portions of both the urban working classes and the

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(b)(3) peasantry voted for the party in the 1982 Assembly election, and attendance at recent ARENA rallies reportedly has been high. Although D'Aubuisson remains the party's charismatic leader and was chosen unanimously as its presidential candidate, the organization appears to be managed by upper-middle-class professionals and businessmen like vice-presidential candidate Hugo Barrera. A variety of conservative pressure groups also have affiliated themselves with ARENA. [redacted]

(b)(3) 16. According to the US Embassy, D'Aubuisson is exuding confidence at press conferences and political rallies, but it is doubtful that ARENA is significantly stronger than in 1982. Indeed, rather than enhancing its popular mandate on 25 March, ARENA could have problems maintaining its 1982 voting share of 30 percent. Since the Assembly elections, a few reports have suggested that D'Aubuisson has lost favor among some conservative backers because of his inability to control either the provisional government or the armed forces, and because of his ineffectiveness in blocking reform legislation. Past reporting also has suggested that some followers recruited earlier from more moderate parties may have defected back, perhaps alienated by the political extremism and anti-US sentiment associated with ARENA and, in particular, by D'Aubuisson's notoriety as a sponsor of death squads. The 25 March balloting will see ARENA sharing the conservative vote with at least four other parties, and reportedly its leaders are concerned about their prospects if they face the Christian Democrats in a runoff. No moderate conservative party is committed now to any coalition building with ARENA. [redacted]

Party of National Conciliation (PCN)

(b)(3) 17. The PCN, formerly the official party, appears to be in a stronger position than in 1982 despite a major internal split. Led by moderately conservative landowners, businessmen, and professionals, PCN ranks are made up of middle- and lower-middle-class workers and peasants. According to US Embassy officials, some 10,000 supporters—many of them apparently bused in from the countryside by party organizers—attended the December nominating convention in San Salvador. Judging from media accounts, presidential and vice-presidential candidates Francisco Guerrero and Pio Ayala have carried on an active campaign, particularly in the small rural towns. The

PCN may be short of money. The US Embassy has reported that PCN leaders have suggested that Washington finance the party. [redacted]

(b)(3) 18. Although some of its leaders reportedly expect to place second in the March balloting, PCN probably will receive the third-largest bloc of votes in the election—perhaps 15 to 20 percent, according to recent polls. It has moderated its policies to appeal to a centrist constituency and hopes to present a middle ground between the far-right ARENA and the left-of-center Christian Democrats. The PCN also views itself as a swing party in any runoff between ARENA and the PDC. Moreover, Guerrero and other PCN officials probably maintain many traditional links to the armed forces, who founded the party as an electoral vehicle to legitimize military rule. Most officers probably would prefer to see the PCN ticket prevail in the coming election. PCN leaders know that is unlikely, but they hope that the military will look favorably on them in a coalition. [redacted]

Salvadoran Authentic Institutional Party (PAISA)

(b)(3) 19. PAISA was formed in October 1982 by its presidential candidate, former Army colonel Roberto Escobar Garcia. Once a stalwart of the PCN, Escobar served as a cabinet minister in two military governments before retiring in the aftermath of the 1979 coup. Escobar's new political grouping grew a year ago when nine of 14 PCN deputies in the current Legislative Assembly announced they would switch allegiance to PAISA from the more moderate leadership of the PCN. Current Assembly President Julia Castillo and her colleagues had represented the right wing of an already conservative PCN, and their defection gave the new PAISA a particularly hardline orientation. The party has been hoping to capture the support of conservatives disillusioned with D'Aubuisson's ARENA and the PCN. Nevertheless, we believe that PAISA will have to struggle just to place fourth in the balloting and is likely to seek alignment with ARENA during the election and its aftermath. [redacted]

The Smaller Parties

(b)(3) 20. According to the US Embassy, four other small conservative parties have legally qualified to participate in the March election. The Democratic Action (AD) party remains an enigma to most observers. The

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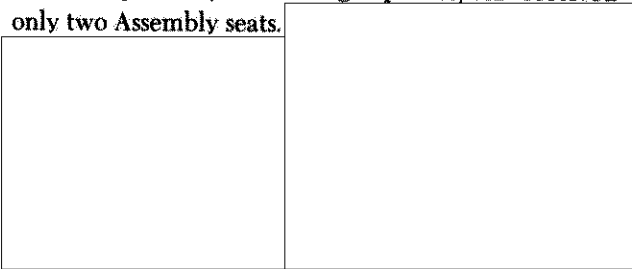
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US Embassy views the party's constituency as somewhat right of center, but its leadership appears increasingly populist and centrist. The party's presidential aspirant, Rene Fortin Magana, claims that his two-year-old party is a social democratic movement led by reform-minded intellectuals and professionals. Despite its tiny membership and lack of funding and organization, AD received 8 percent of the vote in 1982. Because of a system of proportional representation that generally favors larger parties, AD received only two Assembly seats.

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The party may raise its share of the 1982 vote and would be likely to side with the Christian Democrats in a runoff election against the rightwing parties.

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21. The Salvadoran Popular Party (PPS) is an ultra-conservative grouping that represents the interests of bankers, agrobusinessmen, and other industrial and commercial elites. An early rightwing splinter of the old ruling National Conciliation Party, the PPS has run candidates in every election since its founding in 1965. Its candidate for the March presidential contest is Francisco Quinonez, a wealthy entrepreneur who recently stepped down as head of the government's Peace Commission. The December nominating convention for the PPS attracted perhaps 1,000 supporters. The party is unlikely to improve much upon its 1982 share of 3 percent of the ballots, which won it a single seat in the Constituent Assembly. Two other far-right parties—the Popular Orientation Party (POP) and the Centrist Stable Republican Movement (MERCEN)—are unlikely to attract significant support and would side with ARENA along with the PPS.

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The Electoral Process

22. As in 1982, the mechanics of the March balloting are being handled by the Central Elections Council, representing most of the political parties in the Assembly. Council plans for running the polling centers, distributing the ballots, and tabulating the votes

are similar to those of 1982. During the 1982 contest, the council printed and numbered 2 million ballots, some 1.5 million of which were used in the election. Approximately 300 polling places housing 4,500 voting tables were open during 1982, and most were supervised by more than one independent observer and protected by security personnel. This year, some 8,000 voting boxes capable of handling 500 ballots each are to be distributed. We believe that most supervisory measures to discourage fraud that were effective in 1982 will again be used by the council. The use of indelible ink to mark the fingers of voters will probably be more effective than the invisible ink and black light method used in 1982.

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23. The major difference in the running of this election will be voter registration. In 1982, open registration governed the balloting, enabling anyone with a valid identification card to vote for the party of his choice anywhere in the country. Although fraud was not a significant factor in the 1982 election, some Salvadoran political leaders and members of the election council have insisted on local registration as a guard against voting irregularities. The council has installed new computers to facilitate both the registration process and tabulation of votes. Registration of voter IDs depends on local municipal records, however, and some identification records no longer exist because of guerrilla attacks on townhalls. A new registry should be completed on time, although it may omit a relatively small number of eligible voters.

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24. The balloting is structured so that most voters will cast their ballots in the municipalities where their identification cards were issued. The new electoral law states, however, that some people will be allowed to vote in surrogate polling centers—a procedure that will help reduce the threat of lowered turnout. This will relieve the burden on tens of thousands of displaced adults now living in refugee camps inside El Salvador.

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25. The quality of the election should be equal, if not superior, to that of 1982 to undercut critics and guerrilla propagandists who are ready to denounce the election as a sham. Almost certainly there will be mechanical problems that will affect the speed and efficiency of balloting and tabulation in some jurisdictions. Many technical assistants and observers hired by the elections council in 1982, for example, were poorly trained and needed constant supervision to avoid

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multiple errors. This was partly offset, however, by foreign observers and journalists who generally put logistic problems into perspective and lent important legitimacy to the balloting process. A number of West European and Latin American governments and organizations have accepted San Salvador's invitations to send observers, but most of those invited have declined. There is no word yet on whether the government will issue credentials to all media representatives who request them. [redacted]

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26. The military has once again announced that it will abstain from the voting. Some elements within the military, however, probably will attempt to influence the way people vote in certain localities. For example, Defense Minister Vides and other senior officers reportedly have reprimanded at least two field commanders for intimidating peasants to vote for D'Aubuisson. Although the high command will discourage intimidation, we believe that some individual commanders will attempt to influence voters. [redacted]

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The Security Situation

27. In the period leading up to the Constituent Assembly elections, we had good information that the guerrillas planned to disrupt the balloting. The guerrillas followed their plan closely, including penetrations of the capital on election day, but the military effectively countered this offensive, and the electorate successfully cast ballots in most areas of the country. [redacted]

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28. The 1982 elections were a major setback for the guerrillas and caused serious infighting and tactical dislocations among their various factions for several months. In mid-October 1982, however, a new dual political-military strategy was introduced by the FMLN-FDR alliance that has kept the Salvadoran military largely on the defensive. The guerrillas have launched repeated offensive operations employing larger and more sophisticated units that now can threaten lightly equipped 350-man Army battalions. The guerrillas also have been scoring propaganda points by pushing for a power-sharing arrangement with San Salvador. Information indicates that insurgent leaders believe that, if they could achieve a cease-fire and integrate cadres into the government and the armed forces, they could inspire popular support, control the military, and eventually consolidate full power over the country. [redacted]

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Guerrilla Strategy and Capabilities

29. The 1984 presidential election, however, complicates the guerrillas' quest for power. With the installation of a popularly elected government—a new Legislative Assembly is to be elected in April 1985—San Salvador stands to receive greater domestic and international support, political and military. We lack good information, however, on guerrilla military strategy and intentions in dealing with the election. So far, the guerrillas have denounced the balloting as a fraud, and stated that, while they will not attempt to disrupt the voting nationwide, they will continue normal military operations and prevent balloting in areas they control. [redacted]

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30. We do not believe the guerrillas will allow the elections to take place unimpeded, or that they will launch a general offensive to disrupt the elections nationwide. The guerrillas recognize the damage that the election can do to their cause, but are also aware that their ability to disrupt or postpone it is limited. They would calculate that a nationwide general offensive would be extremely costly in men and materiel, would fail militarily, would not prevent the elections, and would be likely to undercut their international standing. [redacted]

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31. The guerrillas are more likely to coordinate concentrated attacks on civilian and military targets during the election period. Their objective would be to erode confidence in the government, undermine military morale, reduce voter turnout in key areas, and tarnish the image of the newly elected government. [redacted]

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32. Recent reports indicate the insurgents are planning concentrated attacks in San Salvador and selected departmental capitals. Guerrilla forces have been concentrating in traditional staging areas north of San Salvador, and all five FMLN factions reportedly will carry out operations to discourage voter turnout. [redacted]

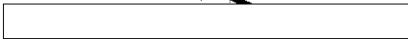
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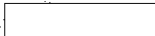
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33. This is to be accompanied elsewhere in the country with a steady increase in terrorist bombings and assassination attempts against politicians and possibly US personnel. The guerrillas also are capable of various spectaculars, including, for example, another attack on Ilopango airbase, sabotage of major hydroelectric facilities and key bridges, or the destruction of oil storage tanks at the modern port of Acajutla in western El Salvador. 


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that entails large-scale patrolling operations in the countryside until shortly before the elections, when it will assume a more static defense posture. As a result of recent command changes, more competent and aggressive officers are directing their forces against some areas of guerrilla concentration to keep the insurgents from mobilizing for raids on population centers, military outposts, and important economic targets. 

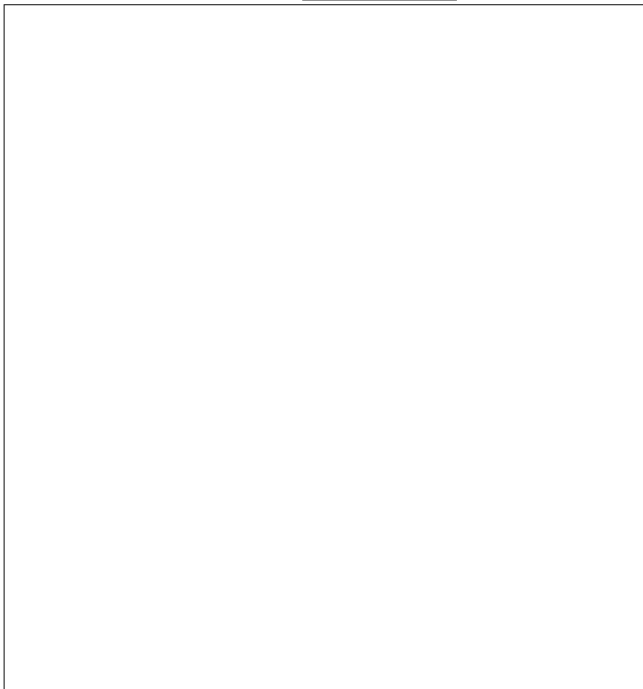
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34. In the event of a runoff election, the insurgents may change their strategy. If it appears on the basis of the first-round balloting that the election is going badly from their point of view—a large turnout, with a stable coalition government likely—they may decide to launch a major offensive to prevent a second round. On the other hand, if the turnout is low, ARENA looks like a winner, or coup plotting is under way, they may take a hands-off attitude. 


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38. The armed forces lack sufficient personnel to simultaneously garrison population centers, defend economic and military installations, and pursue the enemy in the field. An effort is under way in some areas to supplement small security forces with local civil defense forces, but the lack of weapons, training, and proper leadership will continue to hinder progress. 


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39. The government will have difficulty establishing adequate security in much of the north and east before the election. In 1982 the government placed no ballot boxes in about 30 municipalities located in areas of guerrilla concentration. This time, because the insurgents have greater mobility, firepower, and influence in some conflict zones than in 1982, the government plans not to place ballot boxes in over 70 of the 261 municipalities nationwide. (See map.) The insurgents may seek to capitalize on this by claiming they have significantly expanded their areas of control since 1982. Moreover, some guerrilla leaders might declare a "liberated zone" for propaganda effect, although they would be unlikely to try to hold their ground if the armed forces challenge them. 

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40. Nevertheless, we believe that the armed forces can provide adequate security in most areas of the country to ensure a successful election turnout and to protect the balloting. The guerrillas lack the strength to overrun all major population centers in the east simultaneously, but the armed forces will be stretched thin and the insurgents may be able to make successful incursions into one of the departmental capitals, as they did in 1982. Although the insurgents can temporarily disrupt major road links with the north or east, they cannot isolate those entire regions to prevent all balloting. 

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 Although there is little chance for a dramatic near-term consolidation of the five factions into a single guerrilla army, we expect more interfactional cooperation during this election period than in 1982. 

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Government Strategy and Capabilities

37. The military—with considerable US assistance—is developing a comprehensive security plan

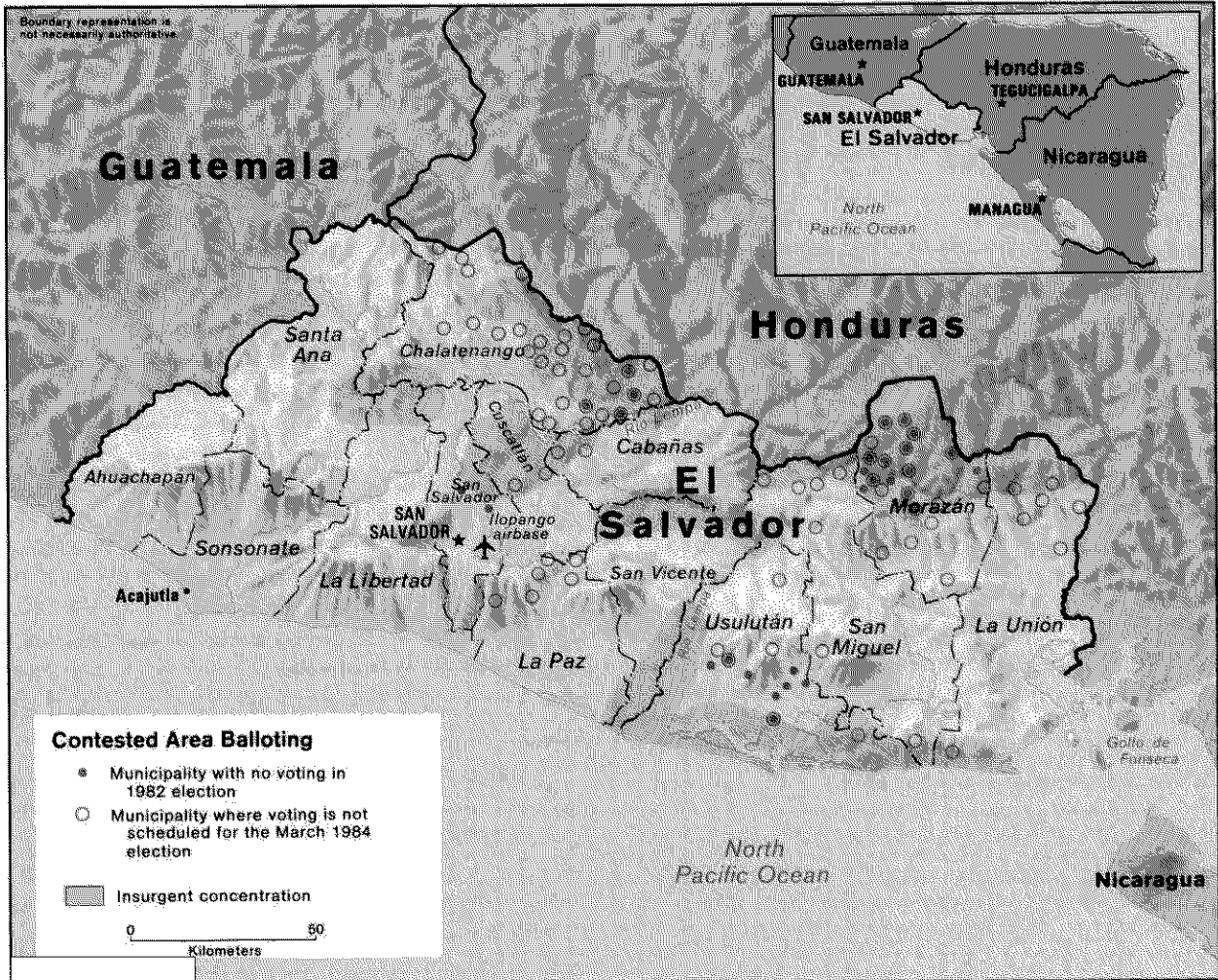
Possible Outcomes

41. The Christian Democrats have the only party with any real hope of attaining a first-round victory in

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the 25 March balloting. Opinion polls generally suggest voting patterns similar to those in 1982, with the PDC placing first, ARENA second, and the PCN a close third. A large percentage of poll respondents, however, remain undecided about their choice for president.



42. The Christian Democrats hope to build on the 40 percent of the vote they captured in 1982. Recent reporting indicates that they have gained additional support from some peasant and urban labor organizations as a result of their strong reformist stance in the Assembly and their promises to position these elements in a new government. Nevertheless, the PDC will have to attract support from additional sectors to garner more than 50 percent of the vote. An ARENA victory in the 25 March balloting is unlikely because conservative voters will be distributed among several rightist parties.



43. Prospects for a first-round victory also might be diminished if some voters decide to vote for the smaller parties in the first round, knowing that the second-round ballot is the one that really counts. For example, some middle-class voters who might have been persuaded to vote for the PDC, may balk at the controversial Duarte candidacy and cast their first-round ballot for the tiny, centrist Democratic Action party. Similarly, potential second-round ARENA voters might throw their support initially to the smaller ultraright parties. Others could decide to support the center-right PCN on the assumption that a vote for the AD or the PPS would be wasted, while the PCN is in a strong enough position to challenge both political extremes.

Runoff Election Possibilities

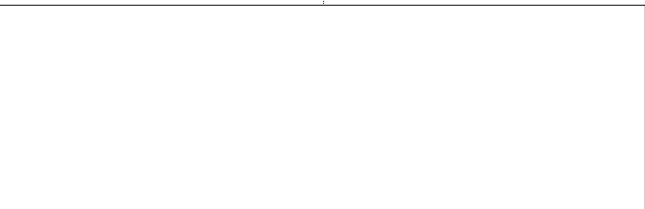
44. A runoff election most likely would match the Christian Democrats against ARENA. Although such a contest would have some polarizing effect within society, it also would offer the electorate a definitive choice and probably inspire a good voter turnout.



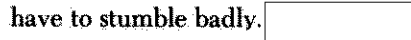
45. According to the new electoral law, party slates cannot be altered between the first and second rounds of balloting. Thus the PDC and ARENA could not form coalitions by offering the vice-presidential slot to another party, but they probably would seek the support of other parties by offering positions in the cabinet or other political favors.



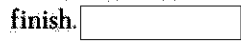
46. In the second round, the AD probably would align itself with the Christian Democrats while the four rightwing parties—PPS, PAISA, POP, and MERECEN—would look to ARENA. This would leave the PCN in a swing position. Even with the backing of all the far-right parties, ARENA almost certainly would require the support of most PCN voters to defeat the PDC. Likewise, PCN backing for the Christian Democrats would virtually assure success for Duarte and his party, although it is possible that the PDC could win a runoff election if it came to terms only with the AD and its middle-class constituents.



48. It is highly unlikely the PCN could win a first-round victory, but there is an outside chance it might place second in the first-round balloting behind the Christian Democrats. This is the scenario most feared by the PDC, which is concerned that the PCN's moderate rightist presidential candidate, Francisco Guerrero, could attract sufficient votes in the second round from the far right and the center to gain the presidency. For such an outcome to occur, however, the well-funded and highly organized ARENA would have to stumble badly.



49. If D'Aubuisson or Duarte were assassinated, the electoral situation would change dramatically. The loss of D'Aubuisson would be a serious blow to ARENA's prospects because the party lacks an adequate replacement for its well-known and charismatic presidential candidate. It would also give the PCN a large boost and greatly improve its chances for a second-place finish.



50. The assassination of Duarte, however, would not necessarily harm the PDC's election prospects. Foreign Minister Fidel Chavez Mena is the logical replacement candidate, and his stature within the party as well as his rapport with conservative sectors of society would bring to the ticket advantages that Duarte lacks. The assassination of either major presidential contender, however, would undermine the credibility of the electoral process and could precipitate serious partisan violence after the balloting.



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Implications of the Election

51. Whoever is elected president of El Salvador—Duarte, D'Aubuisson, or conceivably Guerrero of the PCN—will be constrained in exercising his power by the military, the current Legislative Assembly and that elected in 1985, the new Constitution, and, inevitably, 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. To achieve this agenda the new president—at least over the near term—probably will be forced to adopt the cautious pragmatism of the provisional governments that have preceded him since the 1979 coup. [redacted]

PDC Victory

52. A majority win on 25 March by the Christian Democrats would assure continued progress toward reforms, but it would also carry with it significant risks. A first-round victory by the PDC could be viewed by Duarte as a mandate to push more ambitious social and economic reforms. Such reformist zeal would be likely to antagonize military and civilian rightists, leading to possible coup plotting or other destabilizing activities. Even if the Christian Democrats were to follow a cautious path, their radical image among conservatives—who especially distrust Duarte—could provoke a confrontation pitting the executive branch against the military and conservative civilian leaders. [redacted]

53. Prospects for continued moderation of the political process and long-term social and economic development probably would be enhanced if a PDC victory did not result until the second round. In a runoff election, Duarte most likely would seek the backing of one or both of the more centrist parties—the AD and the PCN. If the AD and, more important, the PCN agreed to back the PDC in exchange for positions in the new administration and other favors, then centrists in the executive branch would be sharing power with a centrist majority in the Assembly. Such a coalition would offer the best chance for support from the private sector, organized labor, and the military for policies favorable to long-term democratization and economic recovery. [redacted]

54. A key to stability for such an arrangement would be the attitude of the armed forces. The

inclusion of the AD and the PCN in a PDC-led coalition probably would reassure the majority of the officer corps. Although suspicious of Duarte, conservative officers would be prepared to work with his administration as long as perceived objectionable tendencies within the PDC were offset by the pragmatism of conservative elements within the coalition. In turn, support from the military would help the new government to reach an accommodation with some civilian rightist elements in the other parties and the private sector. [redacted]

55. 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 PDC 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 PDC, generating major tensions and impeding the leadership's ability to govern. [redacted]

56. A Duarte presidency would assure continued progress toward reforms, and popular support for the government would grow, rather than trending toward the guerrillas. A Duarte presidency would have little near-term impact on the tactical military situation, but the government would be more inclined to move toward reconciliation with insurgent elements that could be persuaded to participate in the legislative elections in 1985. Prospects for a political settlement, however, would be severely constrained by the military's fear of a sellout and the guerrillas' basic intransigence. [redacted]

57. It is unlikely that a Christian Democratic-led government would make much progress on the economic front, and much will depend on whether Duarte seeks the cooperation of the private sector. Nevertheless, economic prospects might improve somewhat because a moderate government would be in a better position to attract foreign aid. Any substantial increase in foreign investment, however, will depend primarily on improvement in the security situation. [redacted]

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58. El Salvador's diplomatic position probably would improve. Some West European governments would be more inclined to upgrade their relations, but bias against El Salvador in Western Europe and Latin America will remain strong. The government's legitimacy would be strengthened, perhaps enabling its leaders to press for a regional treaty in the Contadora context more favorable to its own and US interests. El Salvador's image in the United States probably would improve as well, strengthening public support for Washington's policies in the region.

ARENA Victory

59. A first-round victory by D'Aubuisson would create at least as many problems as one by Duarte. D'Aubuisson and his party could, for example, interpret an outright victory as a mandate to undo most of the economic and agrarian reforms initiated in the past four years. Such actions would require repressive violence, leading to an even greater polarization of Salvadoran society, and virtually preclude any hope of attracting external support. An ARENA victory would further politicize the armed forces. A major confrontation with the military could ensue if a cutoff in US assistance appeared imminent.

60. Victory by ARENA in a runoff election would be less problematic, at least in the near term, to the extent that ARENA entered into a coalition with other, less radical parties. PAISA, the PPS, and especially the PCN would exert at least some moderating influence. Nevertheless, over the longer term, prospects for successful political and economic leadership by a conservative coalition would probably worsen. Such a government might be preferred initially by the

armed forces, but an attempt by a rightist civilian administration to subordinate the military command structure to a particular ideology or economic strategy could provoke a crisis.

61. Although there would be strong domestic private-sector confidence in an ARENA government, local economic and security conditions still would hamper capital investment. Moreover, foreign assistance would be constrained by skepticism over the policies—real or imagined—of a rightwing administration. The new government also would be less willing and able to engage the guerrillas or their political allies in a dialogue.

62. 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.

63. Under an ARENA-led coalition government, the human rights situation would be unlikely to improve. While death-squad activity might wane somewhat if the ultraright felt less compulsion to use this form of control so indiscriminately, the persecution and intimidation of political opponents could escalate, driving many of them to side with the insurgents or to leave the country.

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