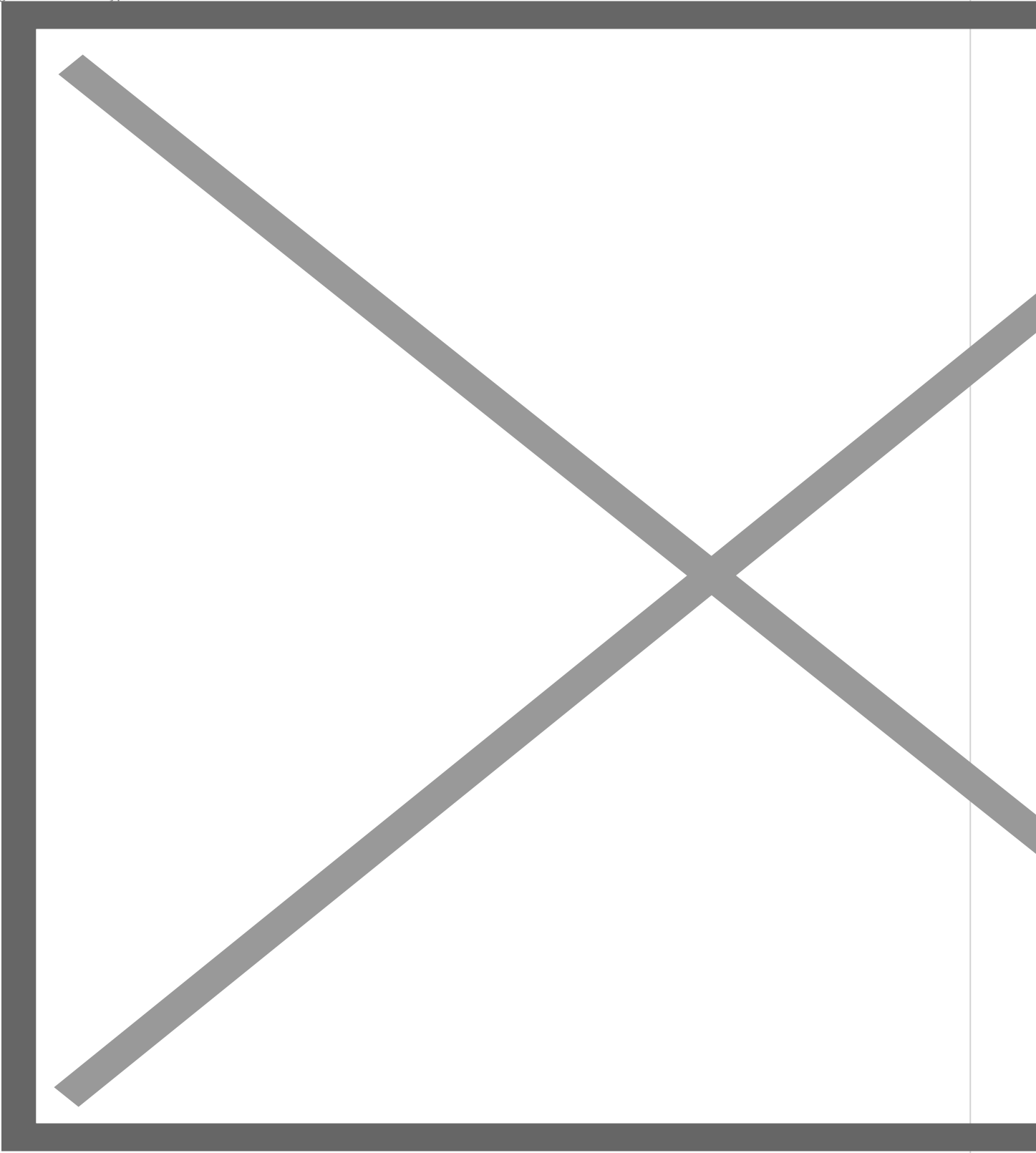


Electoral challenge with few surprises

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By Roberto Morejón

Buoyed by a vast campaign to reduce crime rates, Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele appears headed for a comfortable victory in the upcoming elections.

It remains to be seen whether his New Ideas party can win a majority in the elections, which also cover the legislative sphere.

More than six million Salvadorans are called to the polls to determine who will be the president, the vice president and the 60 deputies.

Five opposition candidates, among them Manuel Flores of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, and Joel Sánchez, of the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance, are challenging Bukele, supported by a frenetic propaganda campaign.

The former editor has been backed by the most favorable use of public resources in the electoral campaign, according to opponents and social organizations.

In a report on the consultation, the electoral consortium Observa El Salvador argues that the political groups lacked the minimum financing from the State, besides the fact that the Congress, with a majority of the Nuevas Ideas party, approved legal reforms with direct incidence in the race.

The document recalled that the reduction of the number of deputies from 84 to 60, a change in the formula for calculating the allocation of seats and variations in the administrative political division, made the representation of political minorities difficult.

To a Supreme Electoral Tribunal noted for having limited autonomy, the only thing left was to abide by the interpretation of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice on the viability of Bukele to opt for another term, despite the fact that the Constitution forbids it.

Once the legal and political paths were cleared of obstacles, it remained for the government to overcome the questions about the continued regime of exception and the limitation of rights.

Procedures aside, what is certain is that the population perceives the effects of the considerable reduction of homicides, from 2,390 in 2019 to 496 in 2022, according to official figures.

To achieve this, the forces of law and order took more than 75,000 alleged members of criminal gangs to jail.

Critics of the government argue that the economic and social conditions that gave rise to crime have not changed. Whether Salvadorans will remember those factors or whether they will be inclined to give a new mandate to the president who reduced violence will be evident at the polls.

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