



El Salvador:

A Country Report Based on Data 1900-2012

Authors:

Rodrigo Castro Cornejo

Michael Coppedge

V-Dem Country Report Series, No. 5, November 2013.

Prepared for The European Union, represented by the European
Commission

under Service Contract No. EIDHR 2012/298/903



About V-Dem

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) is a new approach to conceptualization and measurement of democracy. It is a collaboration between some 50+ scholars across the world hosted by the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden; and the Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame, USA.

With four Principal Investigators (PIs), three Project Coordinators (PCs), fifteen Project Managers (PMs) with special responsibility for issue areas, more than thirty Regional Managers (RMs), almost 200 Country Coordinators (CCs), a set of Research Assistants (RAs), and approximately 3,000 Country Experts (CEs), the V-Dem project is one of the largest ever social science research-oriented data collection programs.

V-Dem is collecting data on 329 indicators of various aspects democracy tied to the core of electoral democracy as well as six varying properties: liberal, majoritarian, consensual, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian dimensions of democracy.

A pilot study in 2011 tested the preliminary set of indicators and the data collection interfaces and procedures. Twelve countries from six regions of the world were covered, generating 462,000 data points. In the main phase, all countries of the world will be covered from 1900 to the present, generating some 22 million data across the 329 indicators, as well as several indices of varying forms of democracy.

The resulting database will be the largest of its kind, and make possible both highly detailed, nuanced analysis of virtually all aspects of democracy in a country, and quick, summary comparisons between countries based on aggregated indices for at least seven varieties of democracy.

The data will be downloadable from a public V-Dem website as a public good some time in 2015. Users from anywhere will also be able to use sophisticated but intuitive and accessible online analysis tools. Students and media across the world will benefit from the nuanced comparative and historical data. Governments, development agencies, and NGOs will be able to make much better informed decisions, and even go back in time to re-evaluate aid efforts.

V-Dem is funded by (in order of magnitude): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Sweden, the European Commission/EuroAID, the Swedish Research Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Denmark, the Danish Research Council, the Canadian International Development Agency, NORAD/the Norwegian Research Council, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, and the Quality of Government Institute.

For further details and information, see <http://v-dem.net>.

Table of Contents

About V-Dem	2
Executive Summary.....	5
1. El Salvador: The Watershed Chapultepec Accords	6
<i>A Thin Electoral Democracy.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Basic Civil Liberties – Finally</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Resilient but neglected civil society</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Political parties: Well defined competition.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Media Freedom: A recent achievement</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>From Polarization toward deliberation</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Political equality: The greatest challenge.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Judiciary: A longstanding weakness</i>	<i>29</i>
2. Conclusion	31
References	32

List of Figures

Figure 1: Overview	7
Figure 2: Electoral Democracy	9
Figure 3: Electoral indicators	10
Figure 4: Less democratic electoral indicators.....	10
Figure 5: Civil Liberties	12
Figure 6: Civil Liberties indicators	12
Figure 7: More democratic civil liberties indicators.....	14
Figure 8: Less democratic civil liberties indicators.....	15
Figure 9: Civil Society	16
Figure 10: Civil society repression.....	17
Figure 11: Other civil society indicators.....	18
Figure 12: Less democratic civil society indicator	18
Figure 13: Political Parties.....	19
Figure 14: Political Parties indicators.....	20
Figure 15: More democratic Political Parties indicator.....	21
Figure 16: Less democratic Political Parties indicators	22
Figure 17: Media Freedom.....	23
Figure 18: Media Freedom indicators.....	24
Figure 19: More democratic Media Freedom indicators	24
Figure 20: Deliberation	25
Figure 21: Deliberation indicators.....	26
Figure 22: More democratic deliberation indicators	26
Figure 23: Political equality.....	28
Figure 24: Political Equality indicators	28
Figure 25: More or less democratic equality indicators.....	29
Figure 26: Judiciary	30
Figure 27: Judiciary indicators.....	30
Figure 28: Selected rule of law indicators.....	31

Executive Summary

- El Salvador experienced a long history of dictatorships, political violence and repression during most of the 20th century. During this period, the country was long dominated by the armed forces in conjunction with agricultural elites (Wood, 2000).
- It is not until the Chapultepec Peace Accords were signed in 1992 that the country experienced a dramatic improvement in electoral democracy and the party system. Nonetheless, performance lagged in media, civil liberties, judiciary, and especially deliberation and political equality.
- Our data records the most dramatic developments in the 20th century of Salvadoran history. From the 1930s to the 1970s, authoritarian governments in El Salvador employed political repression and limited reform to maintain power. The most notable event was the 1932 Salvadoran peasant uprising headed by Farabundo Martí, and the subsequent government retaliation, commonly referred to as *La Matanza* (the Massacre). Until 1980, all but one Salvadoran temporary president was an army officer, and presidential elections were seldom free or fair.
- Our data also notes the decline of civil liberties and the electoral democracy index during the 1960s and 1970s. Opposition parties were unable to establish their organizations or present any effective challenge. Amid widespread fraud, José Napoleón Duarte's broad-based reform movement was defeated in 1972. Subsequent protests and an attempted coup were crushed and Duarte exiled. These events eroded hope of reform through democratic means and persuaded those opposed to the government that armed insurrection was the only way to achieve change. By the end of the 1970s, political violence and instability significantly increased which eventually led to the Salvadoran Civil War (1979–1992).
- The Chapultepec Peace Accords marked the end of the war in 1992. During this period, our data show notable improvements in electoral democracy, civil liberties, civil society and political parties. Still, despite these improvements, El Salvador today is more of an electoral democracy than a participatory, deliberative, egalitarian, or even liberal democracy.

1. El Salvador: The Watershed Chapultepec Accords

Like many other Central American countries during the 20th century, El Salvador experienced a long history of dictatorships, political violence, and poverty. In particular, during most of the 20th century, El Salvador was dominated by the armed forces in conjunction with an agricultural elite. The economic elites controlled the means of production and their position depended on extra-economic coercion of labor by the state, especially in the production of coffee. This labor-repressive agriculture system remained as the status quo until sustained popular mobilization during the Civil War (1979–1992) made compromise preferable to continued repression. The Chapultepec Peace Accords signed in 1992 brought peace to El Salvador after more than a decade of civil war. As a result, the Armed Forces were regulated, a civilian police force was established, the FMLN changed from a guerrilla army to a political party, and an amnesty law was legislated in 1993. This period of time coincides with dramatic improvements in electoral democracy and political parties, as shown by the Figure 1, but also with lagging performance in media, civil liberties, judiciary, and especially, deliberation and political equality.

Figure 1 notes the most dramatic developments in the 20th century of Salvadoran history. Each line represents a composite index calculated from many more specific indicators. Together they capture the summary trends in various properties of democracy.¹ Subsequent sections of this report “drill down” to the specific indicators in order to explain more concretely what these trends measure.

From the 1930s to the 1970s, authoritarian governments in El Salvador employed political repression and limited reform to maintain power. As shown in this figure, civil liberties suffered during this period, especially important since 1931, the year of the coup in which President Martínez came to power, when there was brutal suppression of the rural resistance. This period of time is known as “La Matanza” (The Massacre), in which over 30,000 peasants died in government repression.

Another interesting point in this figure is during the 1960s and 1970s. Despite a resurgence of civil society during those years, the political opposition was explicitly discouraged and the government-controlled Electoral Council disqualified candidates. The National Conciliation Party succeeded the Renovating Action party (PRUD) as the official and hegemonic party, and opposition parties were unable to establish their organizations or present any effective challenge. Nonetheless, some efforts to reform the political system were attempted by the government.

This figure notes the decline of civil liberties and the electoral democracy index during the 1970s. The government of President Molina attempted to exert coercive control over the country, using a counterinsurgent peasant organization known as the Nationalist Democratic Organization (*Organización Democrática Nacionalista—Orden*). It functioned as a paramilitary adjunct and an important part of the rural

¹ Some indicators in this report have been rescaled to a 0 to 4 interval, with 0 being the least democratic and 4 the most democratic score.

intelligence network for the security forces. In parallel, the military was confronted with left-wing terrorism. Kidnappings and attacks on government buildings and other targets were claimed by the People's Revolutionary Army (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo—ERP*) and the *Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces (Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí—FPL)*. By the end of the 1970s, political violence and instability increased, culminating in the Salvadoran Civil war (1979–1992).

Figure 1: Overview

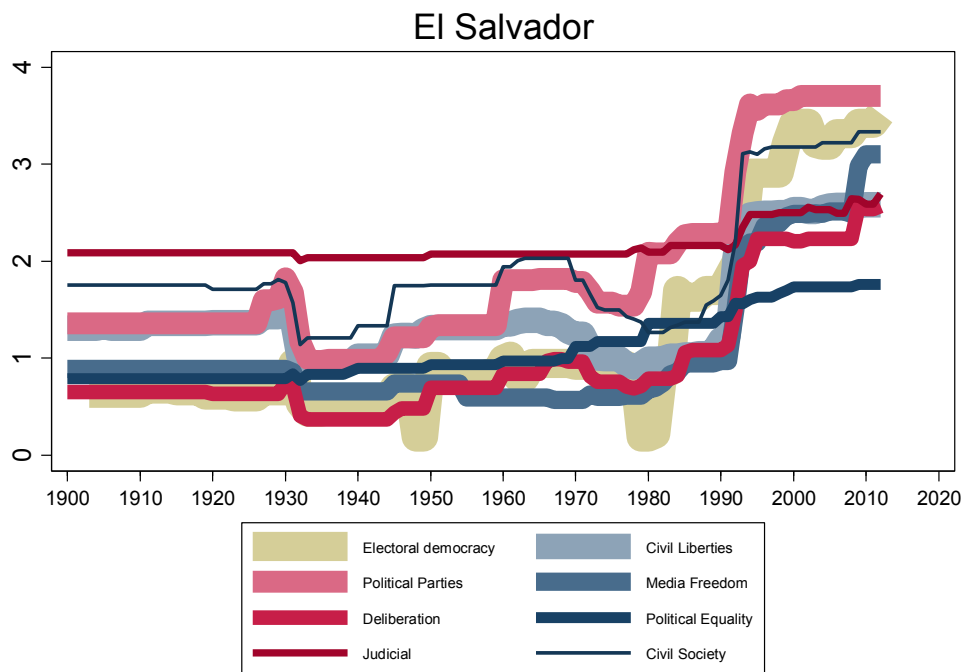


Figure 1 also records the remarkable success of the Chapultepec Peace Accords, which marked the end of the war in 1992. During this period, indicators of electoral democracy, civil liberties, civil society, and political parties improved notably. In particular, the Chapultepec Peace Accords amended in the Constitution to prohibit the military from playing an internal role in security. The Treasury Police, National Guard, and National Police were abolished, and military intelligence functions were transferred to civilian control. The purge of military officers accused of human rights abuses and corruption was completed in 1993 in compliance with the Ad Hoc Commission's recommendations. Thousands of eligible beneficiaries from among the former guerrillas and soldiers who fought in the war received land under the peace accord-mandated land transfer program. The former guerrilla FMLN became one of the major political parties. In the 2009 presidential elections, FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes, a former journalist, won the presidency. This was the first victory of a leftist party in El Salvador's history.

Despite these dramatic improvements, El Salvador's democracy scores near the highest levels only with respect to political parties and elections. The political regime still has middling or low scores on civil liberties, the judiciary, deliberation, and

especially political equality. It best approximates electoral democracy but has deficiencies with respect to participatory, egalitarian, deliberative, and even liberal democracy.

A Thin Electoral Democracy

There are three important moments according to the electoral democracy index: 1931, 1959 and after 1980. These three moments coincide with specific events in Salvadoran electoral history. In particular, in a context of severe economic crisis and popular discontent, President Araujo scheduled municipal election on 1931 in which he offered the unprecedented gesture of allowing the Communist Party of El Salvador (Partido Comunista de El Salvador—PCES) to participate. As a reaction, the military deposed president Araujo. His successor, President Martínez, organized the elections to take place only a month later than originally scheduled, and allowed the participation of the PCES. Nonetheless, the communist candidates who won municipal offices were barred from assuming those offices. The denial of the municipal posts has been referred as the catalyst for the launching of a rural insurrection, which eventually led to the military response known as “La Matanza.” This moment represents the consolidation of a period of time in which the military directly or indirectly ruled the country for about fifty years. “La Matanza” also represented the government demonstration to the rural population that the military was in control of El Salvador and that it would not allow any challenges to its rule or to the prevailing economic system.

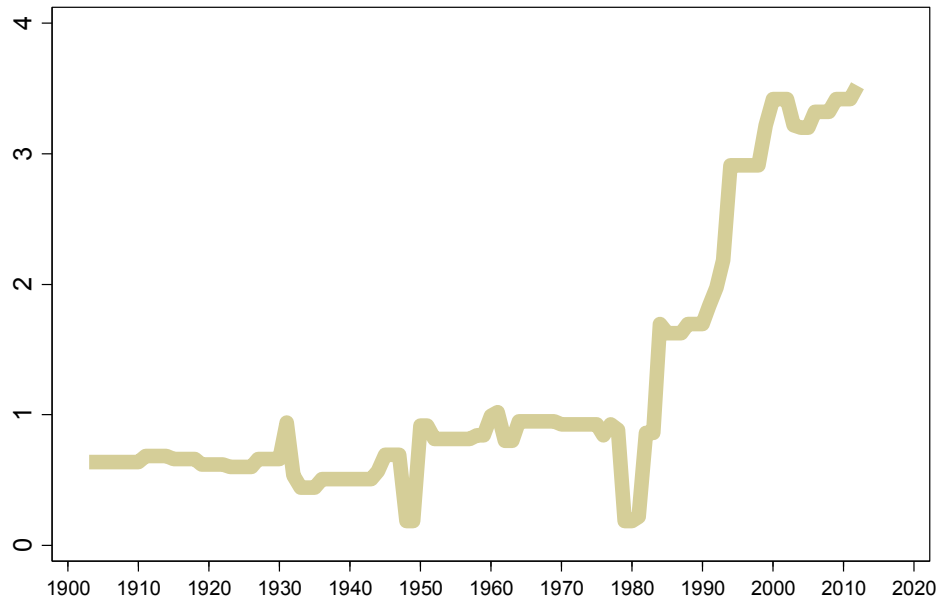
Figure 2 also notes a decline in the electoral democracy index in the late 1940s and sudden improvement in the beginning of the 1950s. During those years, President Castañeda tried to extend his term in office without elections. The military prevented him from staying in power in an action known as the “Revolution of 1948” and established a Revolutionary Council for twenty-one months and guided the country toward elections in March 1950. President Osorio was elected and consolidated the hegemonic role of the Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unification (Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Democrática—PRUD) until the 1960s, when the National Conciliation Party succeed the PRUD as the official party in El Salvador.

The electoral index also notes a decline by the end of the 1970s. This decline coincides with the fraudulent election of President Romero in which opposition candidates and voters were intimidated by government-sponsored paramilitary forces. Eight days after the 1977 election, massive demonstrations gathered in downtown San Salvador to protest the electoral fraud. It is estimated than 1,500 civilians were killed by the security forces. Government forces regularly abducted, tortured and killed civilian opponents of the government. The civil-military Junta finally deposed the President in 1979.

It is not until the end of the Civil War and the sign of the Chapultepec Peace Accords when the electoral index significantly improved. With these Accords, the former guerrilla FMLN became one of the major political parties and, in 2009, won the presidency.

Figure 2: Electoral Democracy

El Salvador: Electoral Democracy



At the indicator level (Figure 3), the 1931 municipal election is also noted, when Free and fair election and Multiparty election increased significantly due to the participation of the Communist Party. (Election dates are marked by small dots for indicators that are election-specific.) Figure 3 also notes an important decline of multiparty elections during the 1970s after a surge in the 1960s. During the beginning of that decade, El Salvador experienced some moderate political reform led by President Lemus, who was eventually deposed in a coup in 1960. The governmental authority passed into the hands of a military-civilian junta. During that decade, the PCN consolidated as the official party in El Salvador, in part due to the strong economic growth, which allowed the party to preserve the elite-dominated system and their alliance with the armed forces. The PCN worked closely with the military leadership, seeking its advice and support on policy initiatives and political issues. In the 1964 municipal elections, the PCN retained an unchallenged majority in the Legislative Assembly. In the 1967 presidential election, the candidate of the PCN, Colonel Sanchez won with more of the 50% of the votes. These experiences satisfied the low standard of the Multiparty elections indicator, which requires only the existence of at least one opposition party. Fittingly, the Election free and fair variable remains at quite low levels during all of these periods.

Figure 3: Electoral indicators

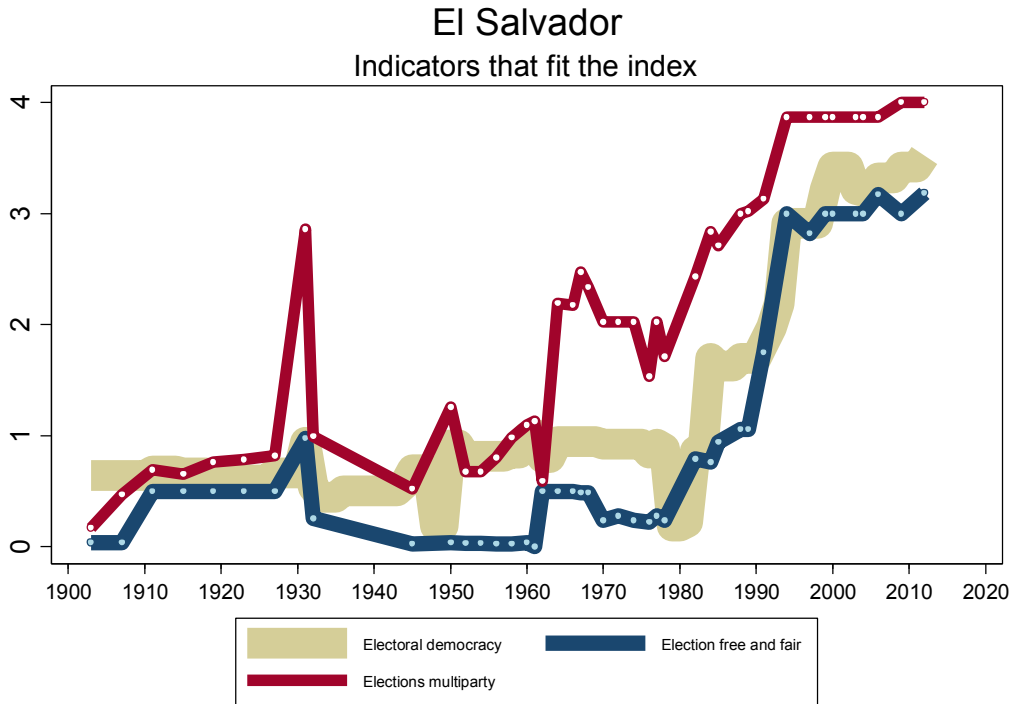
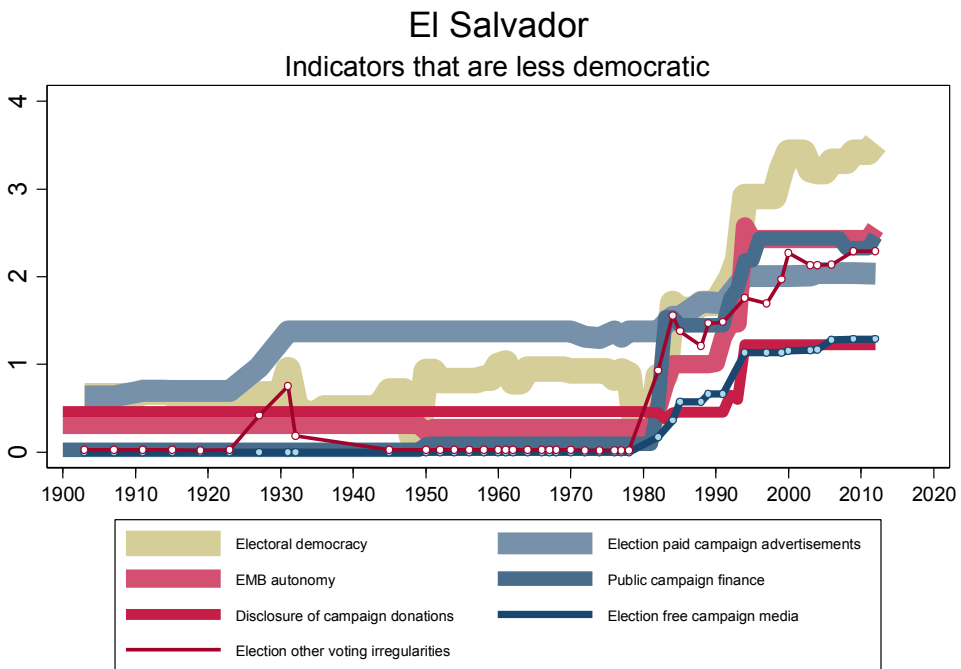


Figure 4: Less democratic electoral indicators



Most of the other indicators used to produce the electoral index follow the same trajectory but show less improvement after 1992 (Figure 4). They shed more light on in the mid-1980s, when some aspects of elections were reformed but others

remained unreformed. In 1982 the Legislative Assembly voted on three candidates nominated by the armed forces to establish a Government of National Unity. Nonetheless, the activities of the insurgency continued during the period of interim government, as did government repression.

As noted in Figure 4, election irregularities relatively declined (signified by the upward trend in this line) in the 1984 presidential election, in which the Christian Democrat, José Napoleón Duarte won the presidency against Army Major Roberto d'Aubuisson, of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). Although it was possible for an opposition candidate to win the election, the campaign was held under exceptional circumstances. For example, there were unprecedented high levels of repression and violence, candidates to the left were excluded from participating, and the fear of a d'Aubuisson presidency encouraged the CIA to finance Duarte's campaign. So although some public campaign finance was instituted and the electoral management body (EMB) gained a modicum of autonomy, the media did not provide equal coverage to the campaigns and sources of campaign funding were hidden from voters.

Election conditions improved again, and across the board, after 1992. El Salvador is now more of an electoral democracy than it has ever been before: it holds competitive elections and the winners are allowed to govern. Yet campaign conditions, voting irregularities, and even the autonomy of the EMB fall short of the highest standards for electoral democracy, and there are still reasons to question the fairness of the elections. It is a rather thin electoral democracy that satisfies the most minimal standards.

Basic Civil Liberties – Finally

The index of Civil Liberties closely follows El Salvador's major trends: authoritarian rule before 1992, then some democratization afterwards. However, more than the other indices it reflects some liberalization of political life in the 1960s, before the civil war of the 1970s.

The two most representative indicators of civil liberties in El Salvador during the 20th century are freedom from political killings and freedom from torture. These two indicators follow a common trend of the civil liberties index produced by our data. As noted earlier, from the 1930s to the 1970s, authoritarian governments in El Salvador employed political repression and this is noted in Figure 5. Between the 1930s and when the Chapultepec Peace Accords were signed, torture –and other threats to physical integrity in El Salvador-- were practiced systematically and were incited and approved by the leaders of government. For example, during the 1970s, the Salvadoran government implemented state-of-siege declarations, the suspension of civil liberties, systematic use of torture, death squads, forced disappearance and extrajudicial killing against the opposition. Government forces regularly abducted, tortured and killed civilian opponents of the government.

Figure 5: Civil Liberties

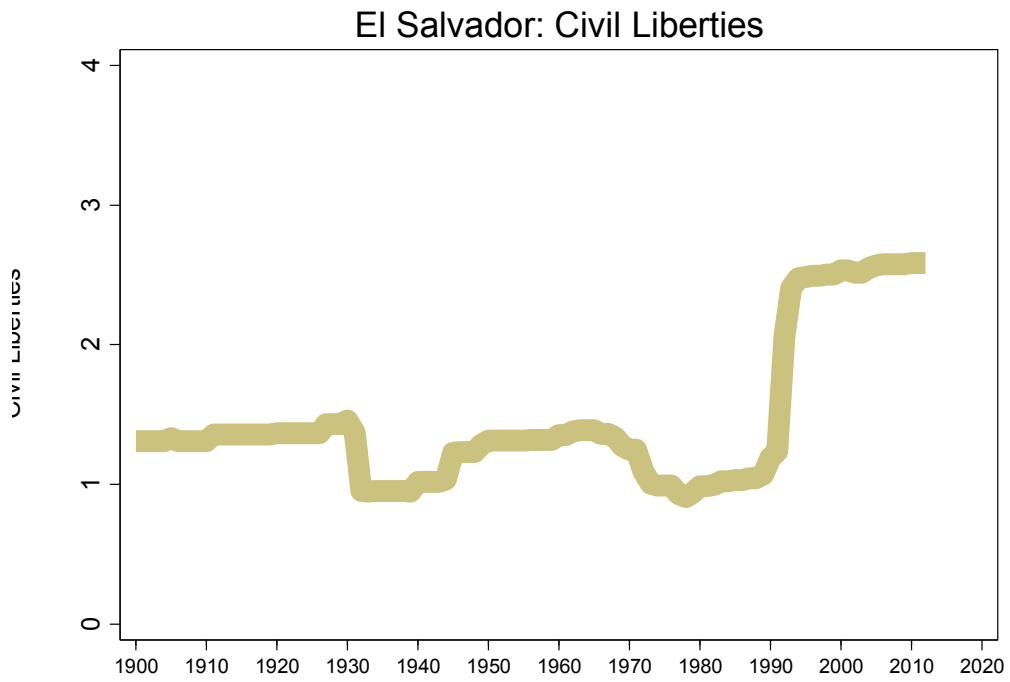
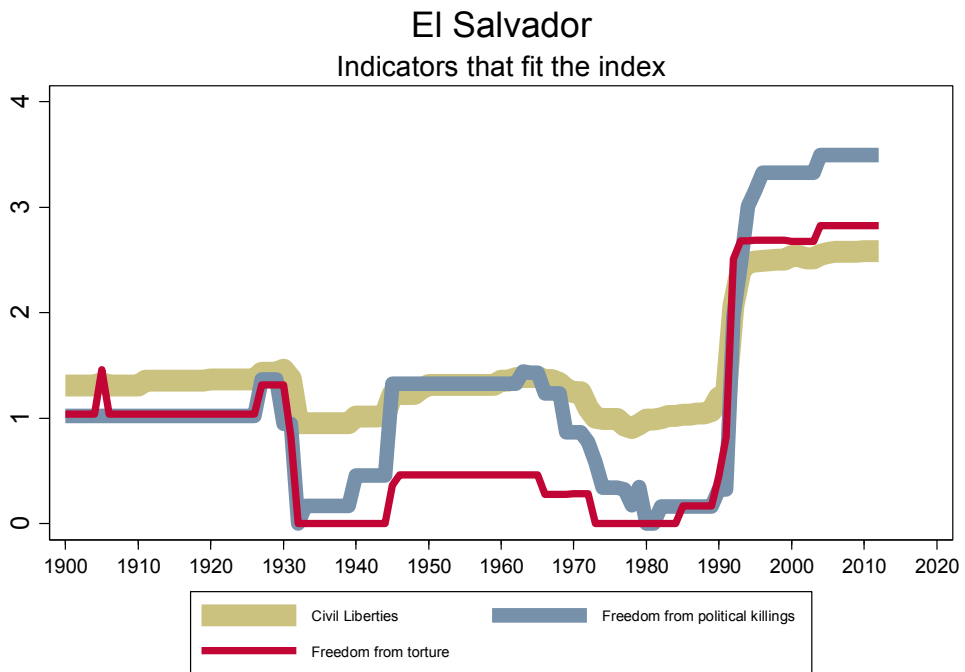


Figure 6: Civil Liberties indicators



The Catholic Church documented 687 civilians killed by government forces in 1978 (Truth Commission 1993). The government's systematic use of terror-tactics and violent repression against the civilian population escalated through 1981 and is estimated that the army and security forces killed 16,000 civilians in total over the course of that year. Most of the victims were peasants, trade unionists, teachers, students, journalists, human rights advocates and priests. Amnesty International identified "regular security and military units as responsible for widespread torture, mutilation and killings of noncombatant civilians from all sectors of Salvadoran society" (Amnesty International 1985).

One of the most symbolic political killings throughout this period was the assassination of the Archbishop Óscar Romero in 1980. The Archbishop was assassinated by a death squad while giving a mass, a month after his request to US President Jimmy Carter in which he pleaded to suspend the ongoing program of military aid to the Salvadoran regime and the day after he called upon Salvadoran soldiers and security force members not to follow orders of their commanders to kill Salvadoran civilians.

At war's end, the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador registered more than 22,000 complaints of political violence in El Salvador between January 1980 and July 1991; 60 percent concerned about summary killing, 25 percent kidnapping, and 20 percent torture. Almost 85 percent of the violence was attributed to the Salvadoran Army and security forces alone. The Salvadoran Armed Forces were accused in 60 percent of the complaints, the security forces in 25 percent, military escorts and civil defense units in 20 percent of complaints, the death squads in approximately 10 percent, and the FMLN in 5 percent. The Truth Commission report concluded that more than 70,000 people were killed, many in the course of gross violation of their human rights. More than 25 per cent of the population was displaced as refugees before the U.N. peace treaty in 1992.

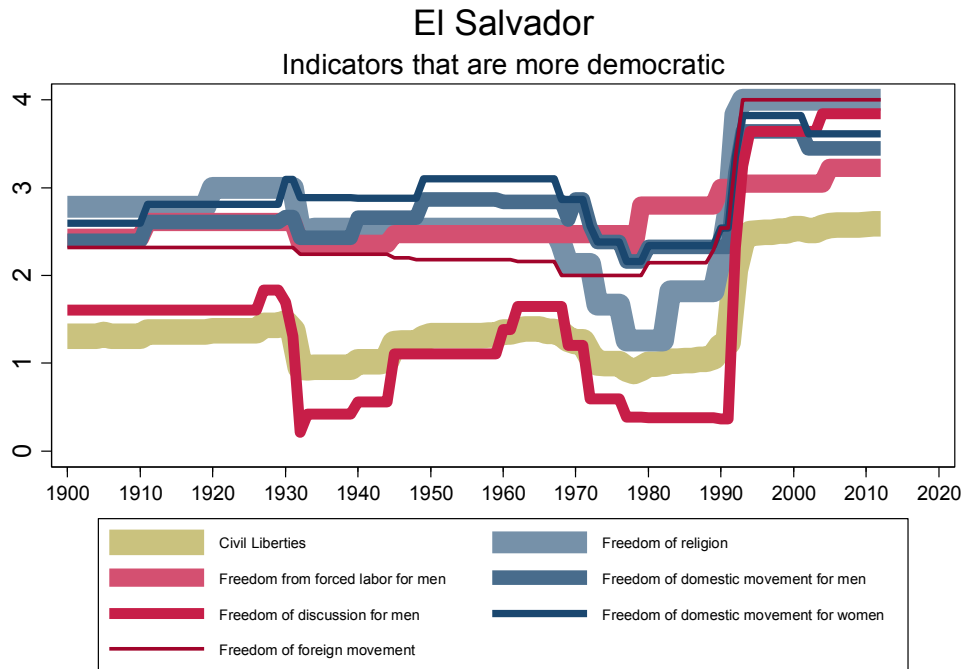
Murder rates are still extremely high in El Salvador, but they are considered common crime rather than political violence.

Some indicators are more democratic than average in El Salvador, especially after the Chapultepec Peace Accords. Freedom of religion is one example. Although during the Civil War period, as noted in Figure 7, the Salvadoran government harassed the Catholic Church, especially the human rights office and members of the clergy, this situation prompted many in the Catholic Church to denounce the government. Another indicator that suffered during the Salvadoran civil war was freedom of domestic movement. The repression in rural areas resulted in the displacement of large portions of the rural populace, and many peasants fled. The army and death squads forced many of them to go to the United States or makeshift refugee centers on the Honduran border in conditions of poverty, starvation and disease. In many cases, it was reported that Salvadoran government method was to eliminate entire villages from the map, to isolate the guerrillas, and deny them any rural base off which they can feed.

In general, the civil liberties that are hardest to deny are now provided in El Salvador: freedom of movement and freedom from forced labor (for men). Men also enjoy freedom of discussion. Freedom of religion is also practiced, despite growing

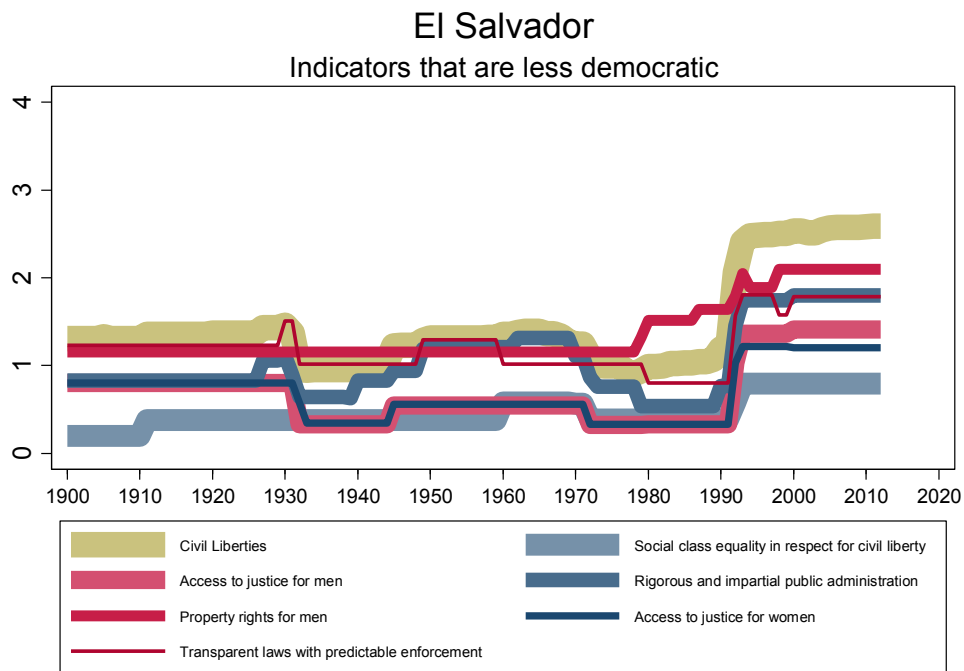
competition between Protestant churches and the traditionally dominant Catholic Church.

Figure 7: More democratic civil liberties indicators



Some civil liberties, however, are harder for the state to guarantee. The low ratings on “Transparent laws with predictable enforcement” and “Rigorous and impartial public administration” reflect weak state capacity. Weak states are often unable to guarantee access to justice as we see in Figure 8 for both men and women. Property rights (for men) are also less respected. Furthermore, there are deep class inequalities that undermine equal enjoyment of civil liberties. For example, by 1989, after major attempts of land reforms in El Salvador, it was estimated that 1% of the landowners owned 41% of the land, while 60% of the rural population owned 0%. During these years, land occupation, dispute, and contested property rights were widespread until the end of the civil war. The land transfer program established by the Chapultepec Peace Accords ended in January 1997. Although beneficiaries from among the former guerrillas and soldiers who fought in the war received land, in El Salvador it remains that a minority of the people enjoy some private property rights, but most have none.

Figure 8: Less democratic civil liberties indicators



Overall, then, after decades of repression culminating in an extremely violent civil war, El Salvador is finally beginning to provide the most basic civil liberties to its people; yet some civil liberties that require a well financed and capable public administration remain elusive.

Resilient but neglected civil society

The Civil Society figure notes similar trends to those in civil liberties. Two special declines are remarkable in the 20th century: around the 1930s and the 1980s, which coincide with two important moments, the period of time known as “La Matanza” (The Massacre) and the Salvadoran Civil War (1979-1992).

By the beginning of the 1930s, the rule of President Hernández Martínez marked the shift to a personalistic dictatorship and created an official state party patterned after the Mexican PRI. The PRUD established an extensive patronage machine incorporating labor unions, peasants, and bureaucrats. Martínez also completed the control of the army, the National Police and the National Guard. Beginning with the Martínez regime, an almost unbroken succession of military governments ruled for five decades. Since 1931, the year of the coup in which Martínez came to power, there was brutal suppression of the rural resistance. As noted earlier, this period of time known as “La Matanza” (The Massacre), the government is estimated to be responsible for killing over 30,000 peasants.

Figure 9: Civil Society

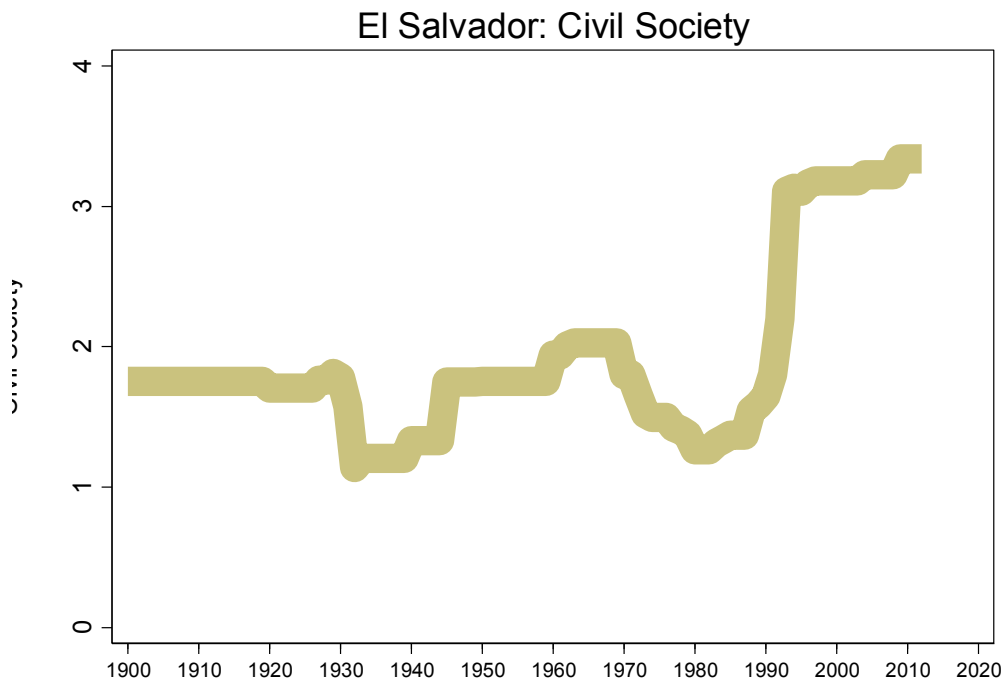


Figure 10, with disaggregated indicators, also notes this pattern. This is especially clear in the civil society repression indicator. During the 1980s, the government's systematic use of terror-tactics and violent repression against the civilian population escalated. As noted earlier in this report, organizations like Amnesty International identified "regular security and military units as responsible for widespread torture, mutilation and killings of noncombatant civilians from all sectors of Salvadoran society" (Amnesty International 1985).

The structure of civil society in El Salvador remained constant in between the 1920s and the 1980s. The country was long dominated by the armed forces in conjunction with an agricultural elite. The economic elites controlled the means of production and their position depended on extra economic coercion of labor by the state, specifically, in the production of coffee. This labor repressive agriculture system which excluded other actors remain the status quo until sustained popular mobilization made compromise preferable than continued repression. The Chapultepec Peace Accords made possible that new organizations and actors became active part of Salvadoran society. For example, the former insurgent FMLN became one of the major political parties in El Salvador.

Figure 10: Civil society repression

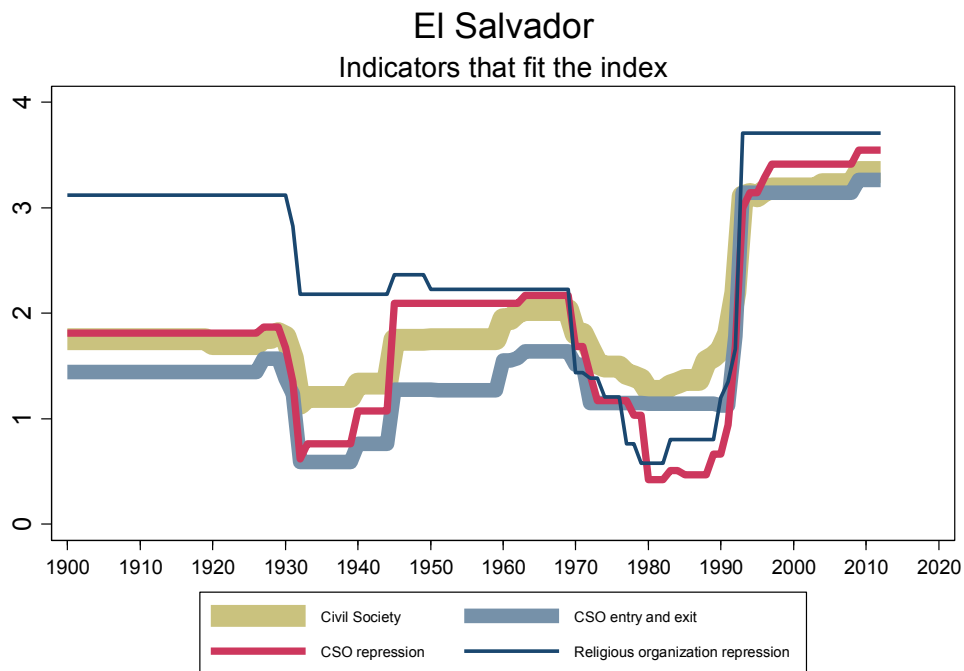


Figure 10 also shows that religious repression was present during the Civil War but *not* during the 1930s. This makes perfect sense, as Church leaders tended to support the landed elite until the 1970s, when liberation theology inspired Archbishop Romero and others to take sides with the poor and the revolutionary left. There is no longer any significant religious repression; this constitutes virtually the only aspect of civil society that is currently better than the overall trend.

Figure 11 displays some other civil society indicators that fit the overall index well today, but followed different patterns in the past. Religious organization consultation and civil society structure have varied within rather narrow bounds but like many other indicators also increase in 1992. The Civil society organization (CSO) participatory environment, however, shows a much more incremental and long-term improvement. According to this indicator, civil society suffered during the 1930s but not during the Civil War of the 1980s. The secular change reflects, first, a growing number of organizations; and second, an expanding rate of participation in them. This captures, therefore, the vibrancy of civil society participation, and this trend suggests that participation was not dampened by the Civil War; it may even have been stimulated during this period of deep political polarization.

In one respect civil society has improved little in El Salvador. Specifically, its leaders tend not to consult civil society (Figure 12). In general terms, arrangement in which the country was dominated by the armed forces in conjunction with an agricultural elite remained constant during the 20th century, and slightly changed after the peace accords. Civil society was and has rarely been consulted when formulating policies.

Figure 11: Other civil society indicators

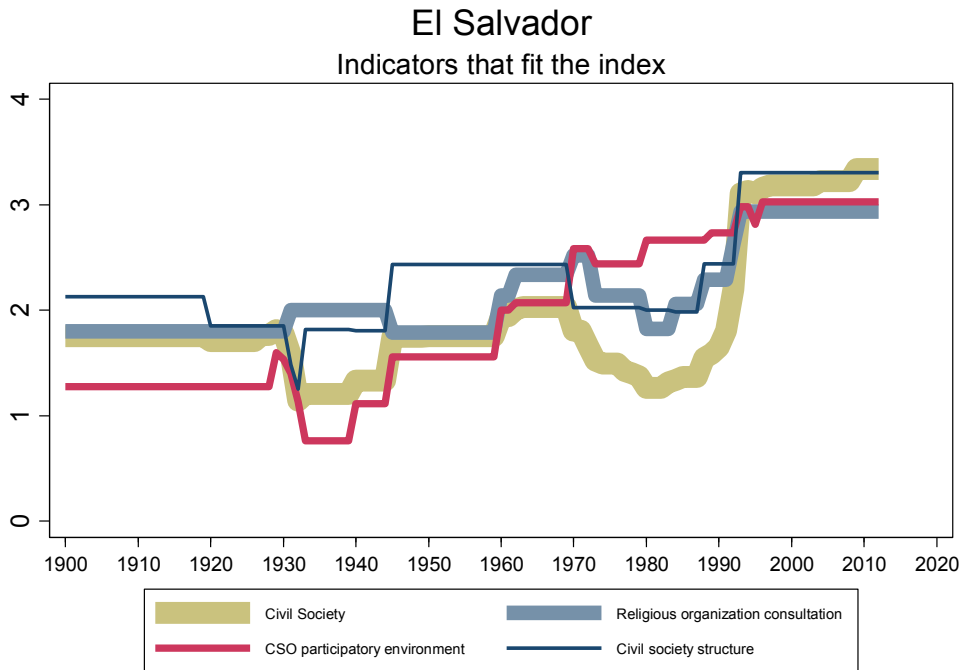
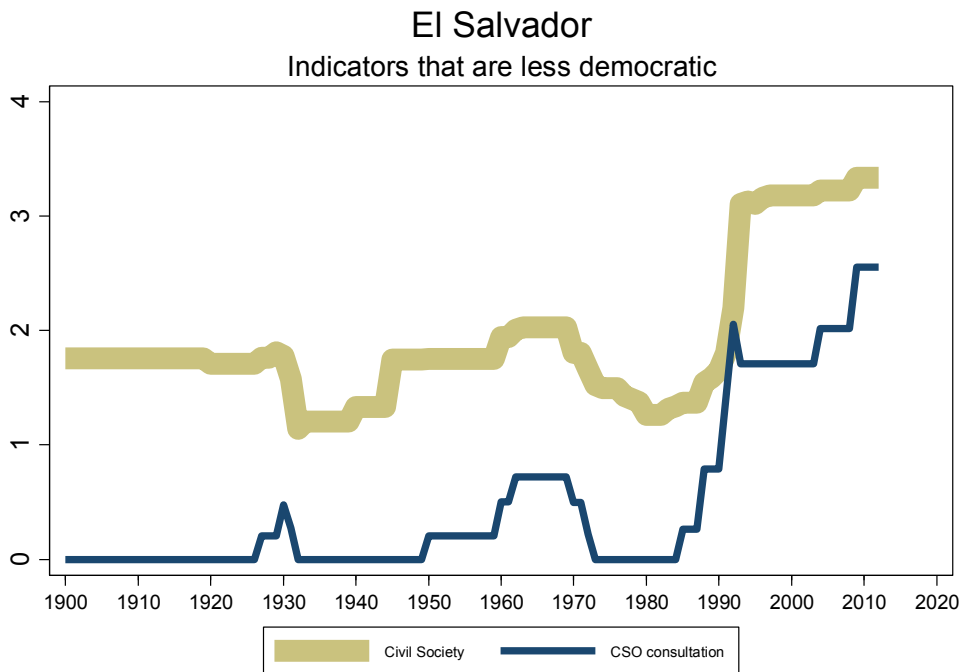


Figure 12: Less democratic civil society indicator



The overall picture of civil society in El Salvador is resilience: state repression has severely discouraged civil society organizations more than once, yet very soon after repression was relaxed—in fact, while the last wave of repression was still in place—

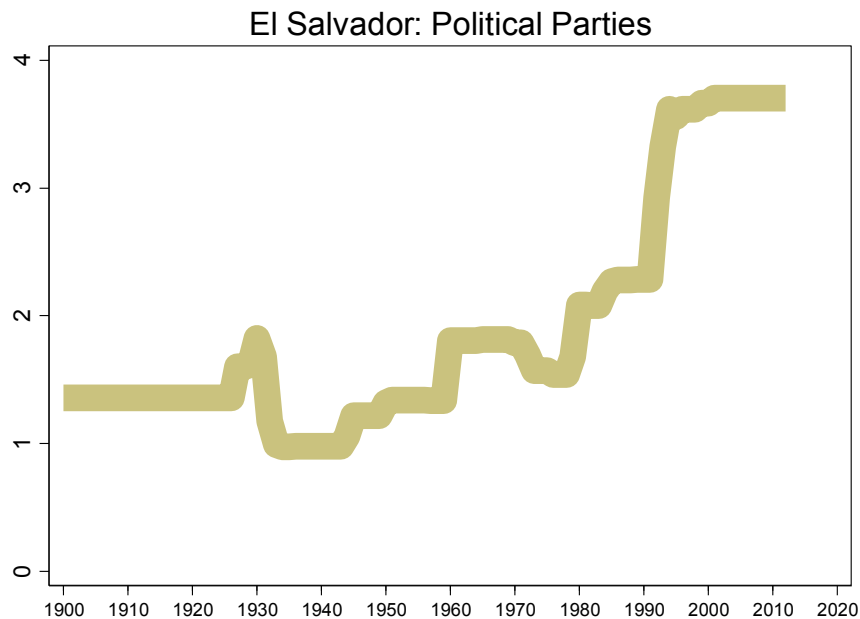
these organizations began to spring back. That said, Salvadoran governments appear not to have made special efforts to consult with these organizations. El Salvador would be unlikely to score highly on consensus or participatory democracy.

Political parties: Well defined competition

Nothing confirms the electoral nature of democracy in El Salvador better than the characteristics of its political parties. This is the dimension in which El Salvador has (recently) achieved its highest comparative ratings, and it is a dimension that is intimately connected to electoral politics.

Figure 13 notes four important periods of time in El Salvador’s 20th century history: between the beginning of the century and the 1930s, the 1930s and the 1980s, the 1980s and the 1990s and the last twenty years. In the first period, there is relative stability since Gen. Tomas Regalado implemented the practice of designating successors. In 1930, President Arturo Araujo was elected in what was considered the country’s first freely contested election. Nonetheless, his government lasted only nine months before it was overthrown by the military led by Gen. Martínez. This is the first moment of decline.

Figure 13: Political Parties



In the case of party ban, there is a noticeable decline in the beginning of the 1930s. General Martínez became president of El Salvador after a military coup that overthrew the freely elected government of President Araujo in 1931. As noted earlier, the government led by Gen. Martínez represented the consolidation of political repression and the consolidation of a labor repressive agriculture system. He censored the media, banned political opposition, abolished local elections, rigged national elections, and severely repressed dissidents. During “*La Matanza*” (“The

Massacre”), around 30,000 workers and peasants who were labeled as “communists” were murdered.

From the 1930s to the 1970s, authoritarian governments employed political repression and limited reform to maintain power, which coincides with the consolidation of the hegemonic role of the PRUD and National Conciliation Party, which succeeded the PRUD as the official party in El Salvador. Figure 13 also notes improvements in the political parties index during the 1960s due to the liberalization of the electoral system to allow the participation of opposition parties through proportional representation. In 1964, the first elections were held under the new system.

During the 1970s our data notes a small decline in the political parties index. This coincides when, in 1976, the opposition parties decided that electoral participation was pointless and declined to run candidates for the legislative elections. At the end of this decade, there is a relative improvement due to consolidation of the Christian Democratic Party, which eventually became the leading opponent of the PCN and a major force for peaceful change in the Salvadoran system. In 1984, the Christian Democrat José Napoleón Duarte won the presidency (with 54% of the votes) against Army Major Roberto d’Aubuisson, of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). This figure also notes the impressive improvement after the Chapultepec Peace Accords were achieved.

Figure 14: Political Parties indicators

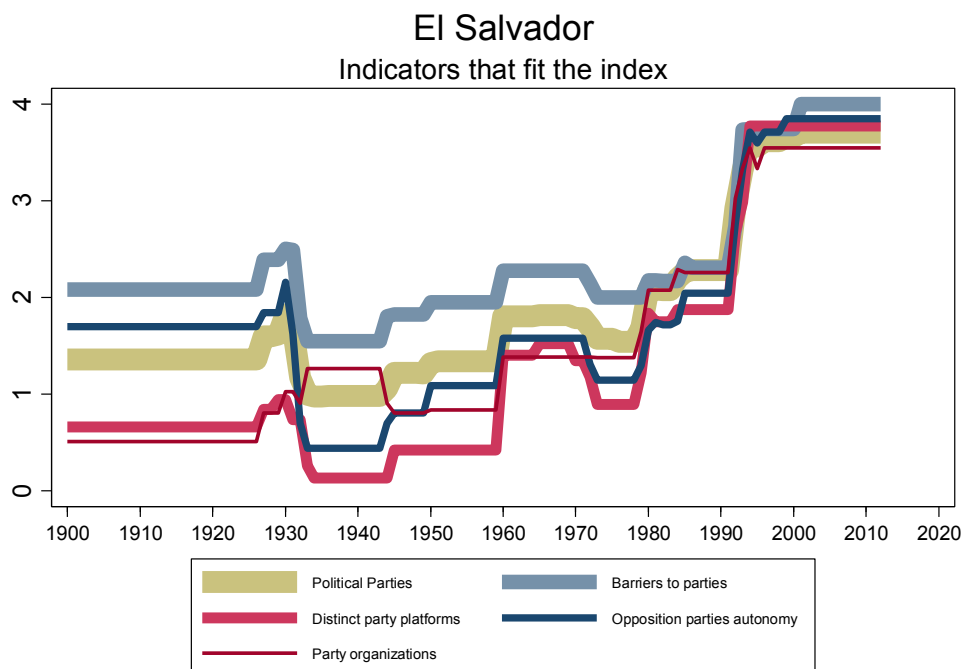
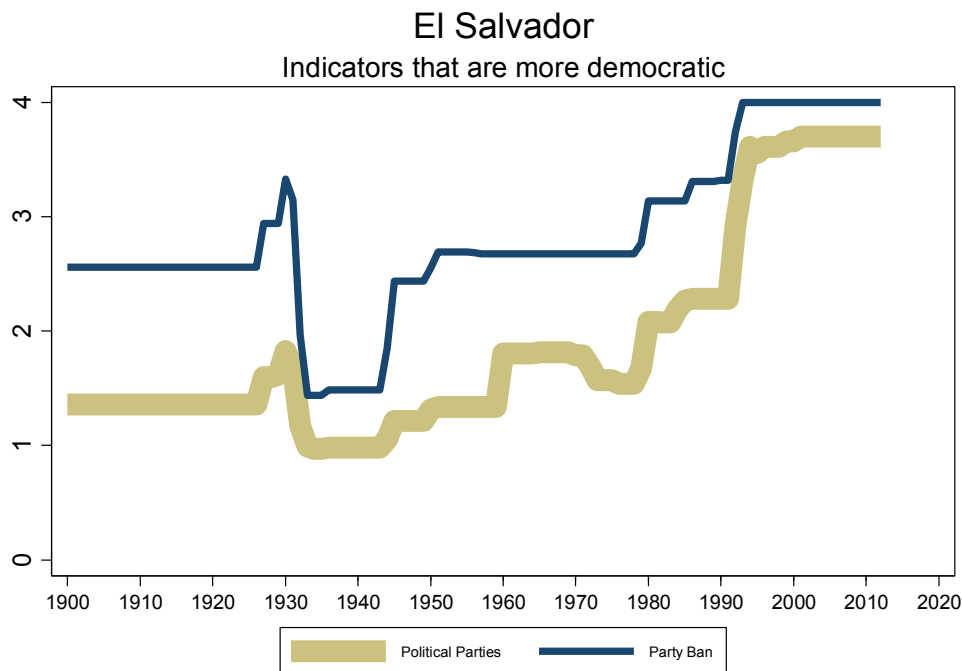


Figure 14 shows the indicators that follow these trends in El Salvador. They include indicators of both party competition and party institutionalization. Barriers to parties have fallen completely. As Figure 15 shows, El Salvador has a perfect score on not banning parties since 1993. It was not until 1992 that the FMLN became a legal

political party. Nowadays, the FMLN is one of the two leading parties in the Salvadoran party system and has participated in the 1994, 1999, 2004, and 2009 presidential elections.

Figure 15: More democratic Political Parties indicator



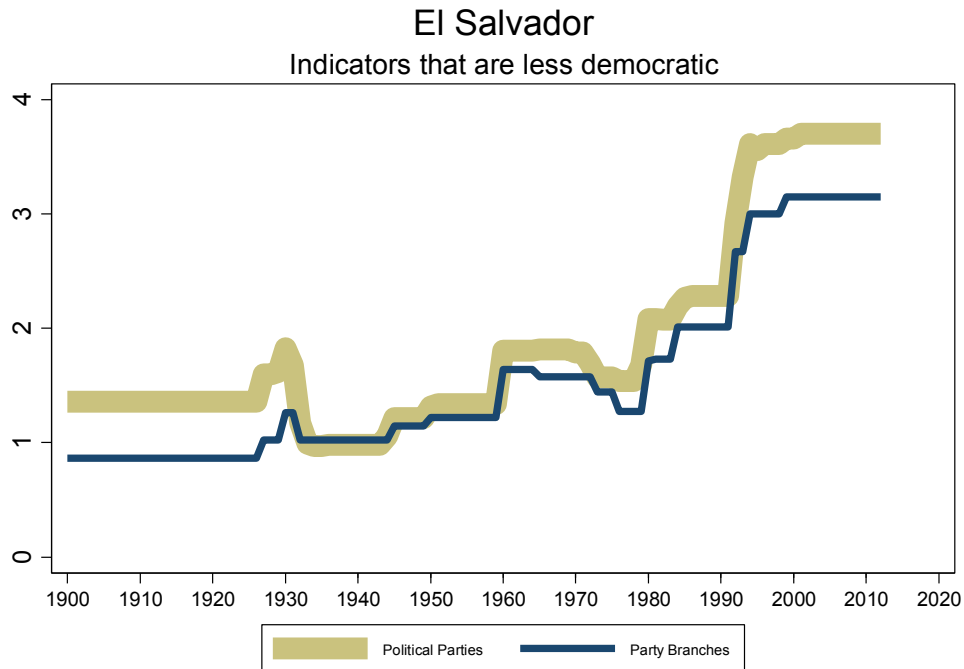
The other two indicators in this figure show a strengthening of party organizations and increasingly distinct party platforms. El Salvador’s party system has slowly evolved into a party system with ideological linkages between political parties and voters. During the 1930s, most political expressions were repressed, in fact, insurrected leaders started a guerrilla revolt against the government with a Marxist-Leninist ideology. When the electoral system was liberalized during the 1960s to allow the participation of opposition parties through proportional representation, the importance of party platforms in the Salvadoran party system increased.

The PCN consolidated as the hegemonic party and represented the interests of the economic elite. The Christian Democratic Party represented middle class interests and became the major opposition party. In 1964, coinciding with an improvement in the distinct party platforms indicator, the PDC won fourteen seats in the Legislative Assembly, along with thirty-seven mayoralties, included the capital, San Salvador. The most impressive improvement is motivated by the Chapultepec Peace Accords, which allowed that all political parties regardless of their ideology were allowed to compete. Indeed, El Salvador’s sustained confrontation between the former Marxist insurgency of the FMLN and the extreme right-wing roots of ARENA gives it the reputation of having the most ideologically polarized party system in the Americas.

Only one political party indicator has a relatively low score: Party Branches, the extent to which political parties possess permanent local branch organizations. Even

this is hardly a weakness in a country of 8 million people in a territory half the size of Denmark.

Figure 16: Less democratic Political Parties indicators



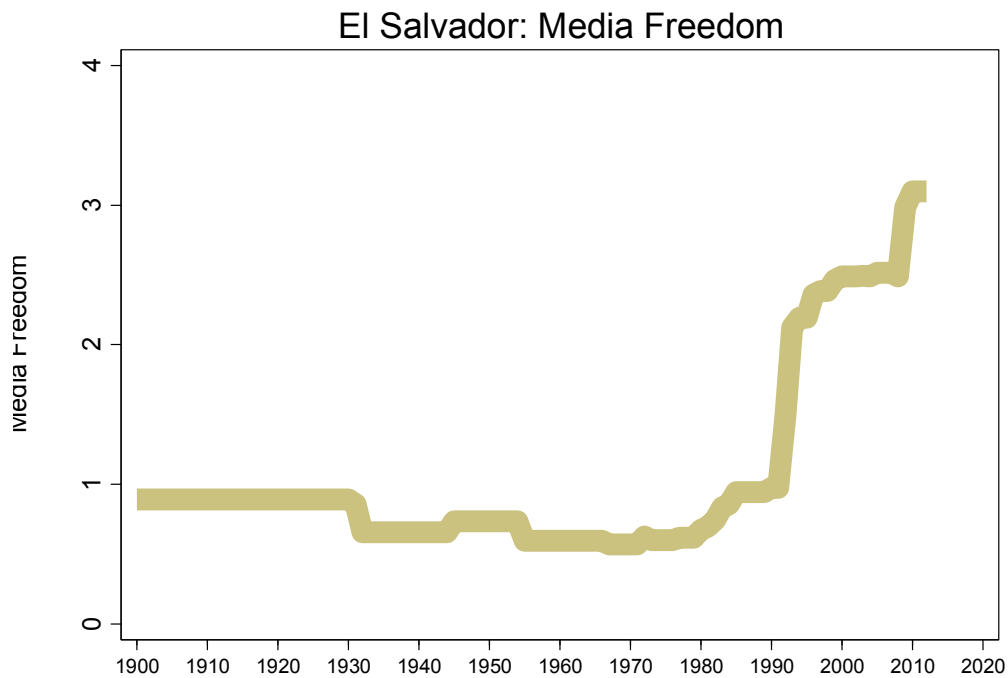
In El Salvador, therefore, the long experience of repression, polarization, and civil war has forged a system of political parties with well defined ideologies and fairly strong organizations. They present voters with a clear choice at election time, which is one of the most important necessary conditions for electoral democracy.

Media Freedom: A recent achievement

During most of the 20th century, media freedom has suffered in El Salvador. Before the Chapultepec Peace Accords were signed, for example, government attempts to censor were direct and routine, self-censorship was thorough—especially during the Civil War—and only a small part of the population had access to any print or broadcast media that were critical of the government.

Before the 1960s, the political opposition was practically excluded from the media. The 1967 political reform slightly improved this situation, but leftist political parties such as the PAR were still denied media access by broadcasters who either disagreed with the party's political line or feared some retaliation from the government if they granted opposition parties air time. In this way, media coverage of El Salvador for most of the century was responsive to official government policies. Moreover, the Truth Commission's report stated that the government killed any opponent it suspected of sympathy with the guerrillas — including not only peasants, clergy or political activists, but also journalists (Truth Commission 1993).

Figure 17: Media Freedom



During most of the 20th century, media outlets were mildly critical of the government in spite of heavy repression. With the Chapultepec Peace Accords, El Salvador began a new era. For example, the Accords specifically addressed the necessity of granting licenses to allow the political opposition, specifically the FMLN, to participate in the mass media. Government censorship also ceased to be direct and routine, and media access has also improved as a result of these Accords (Figure 18). These changes did not happen immediately after the accords were signed. Rather, as Figure 18 suggests, the government dropped its censorship efforts first, and publishers and broadcasters reduced their self-censorship; but it took about five years for media bias to be reduced. It was not until 2010 that media perspectives broadened to include most parts of the political spectrum, and mass access to diverse media is still lagging behind. Print/broadcast criticism of the government reached the highest possible level only in 2010 as well. Finally, the Internet has not been censored ever since it reached El Salvador in the early 1990s.

In short, free and politically varied media perspectives are a very recent development in El Salvador, but the political system rates fairly high on most of these criteria today.

Figure 18: Media Freedom indicators

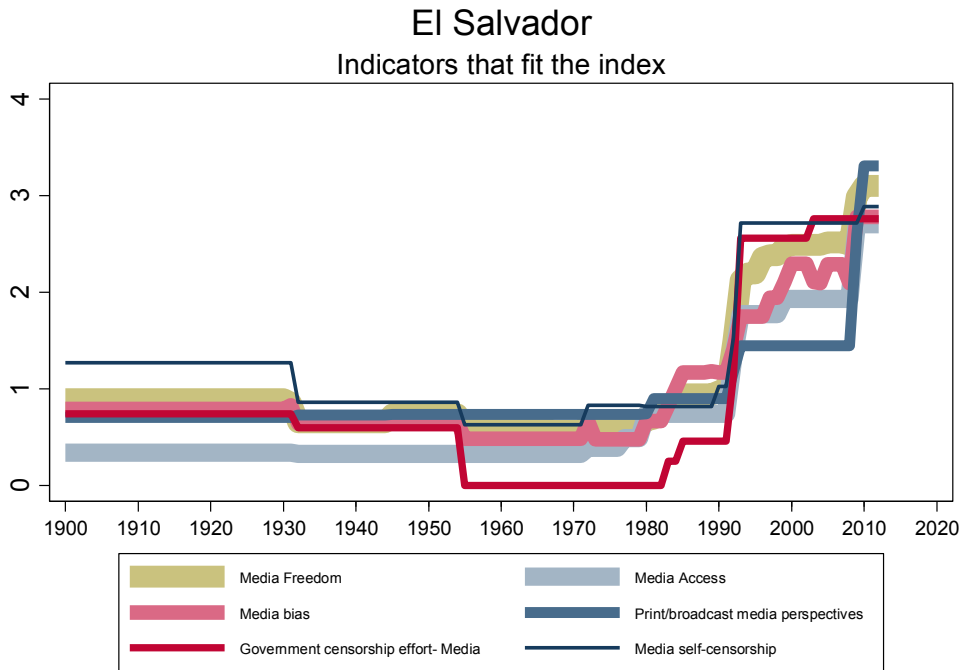
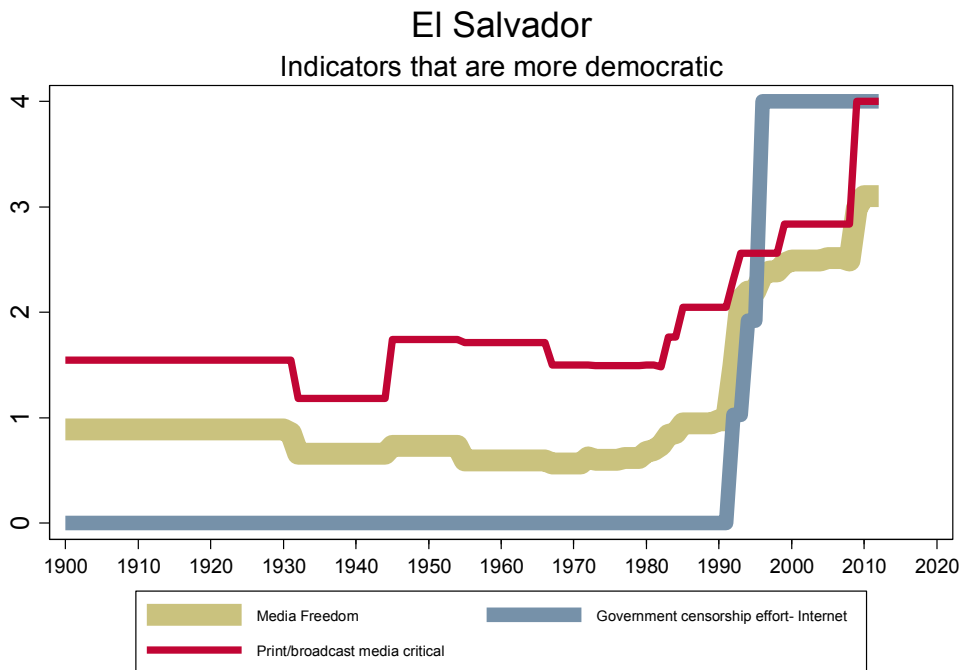


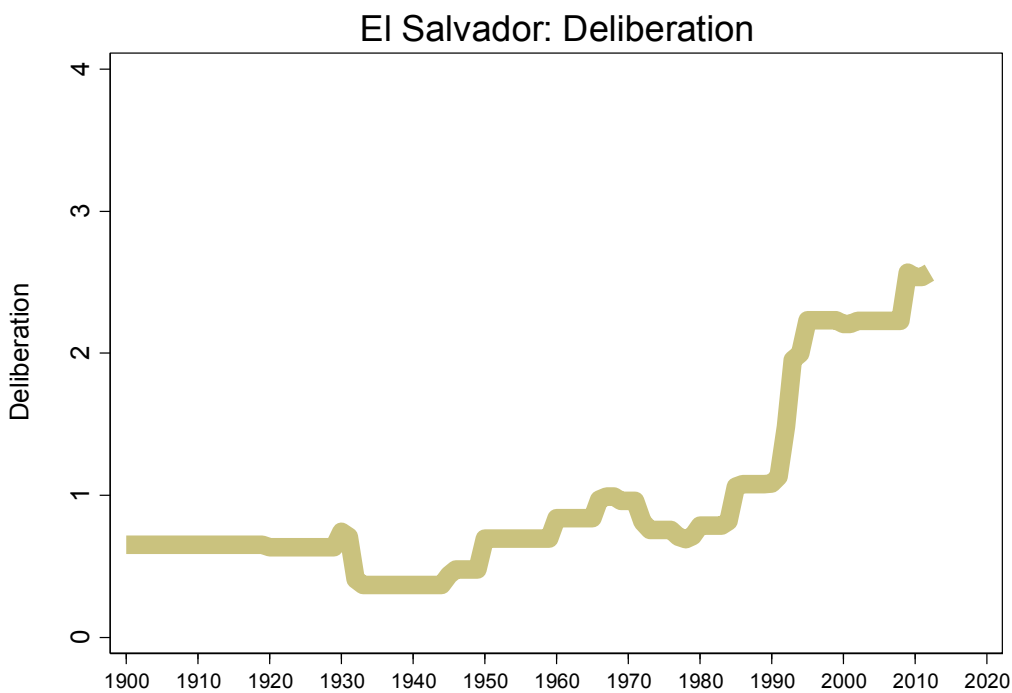
Figure 19: More democratic Media Freedom indicators



From Polarization toward deliberation

The deliberation index measures the environment of respectful discourse in which government must listen to citizens and provide reasoned justifications for its policies. Figure 20 has a trend similar to that of civil liberties, civil society, political parties, and the media scores; very low before 1992, with dips in the 1930s and during the 1979-1990 Civil War; and rapid improvement thereafter. It is not until the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords were achieved that indicators such as common good, engaged society or respect counterarguments significantly improved (Figure 21).

Figure 20: Deliberation



Almost all of the deliberation indicators hew closely to the overall deliberation index, so much so that it is difficult to tease them apart (Figure 21). All were low and stable, with little variation, before 1992, except Reasoned justification—the tendency of a government to provide ample reasons for its policy decisions—which increased early, in 1985. By 2009, there appeared to be a small separation between Common good, Engaged society, and Reasoned justification, on the one hand, which were more positive; and Encompassing-ness, Respect for counter-arguments, and Means-tested vs. universalistic policy, on the other, which stayed flat. However, the differences are too small to distinguish from the margin of error, so it is best to ignore this apparent difference.

Figure 21: Deliberation indicators

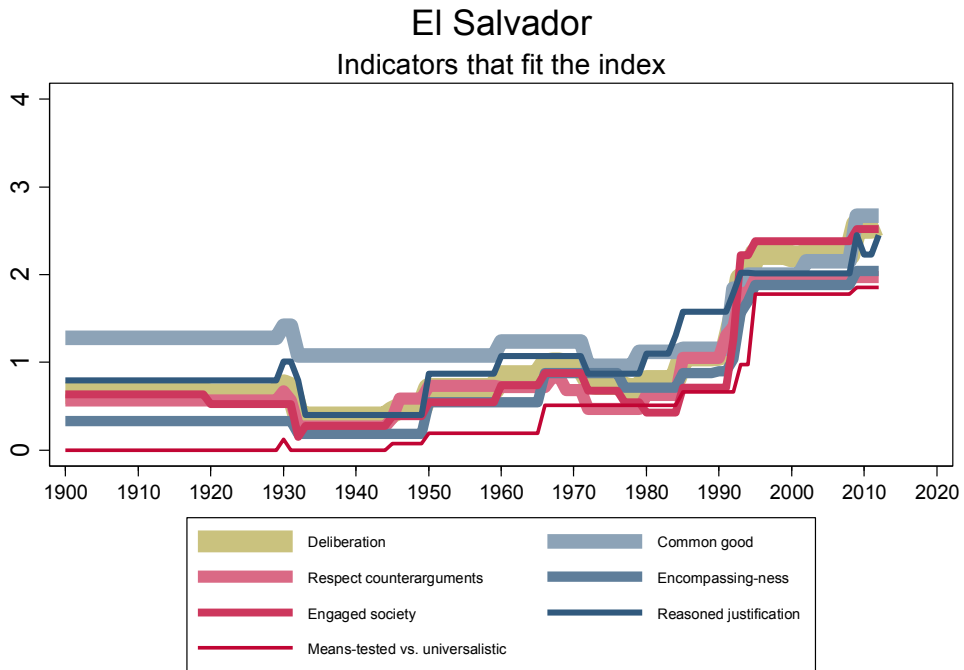
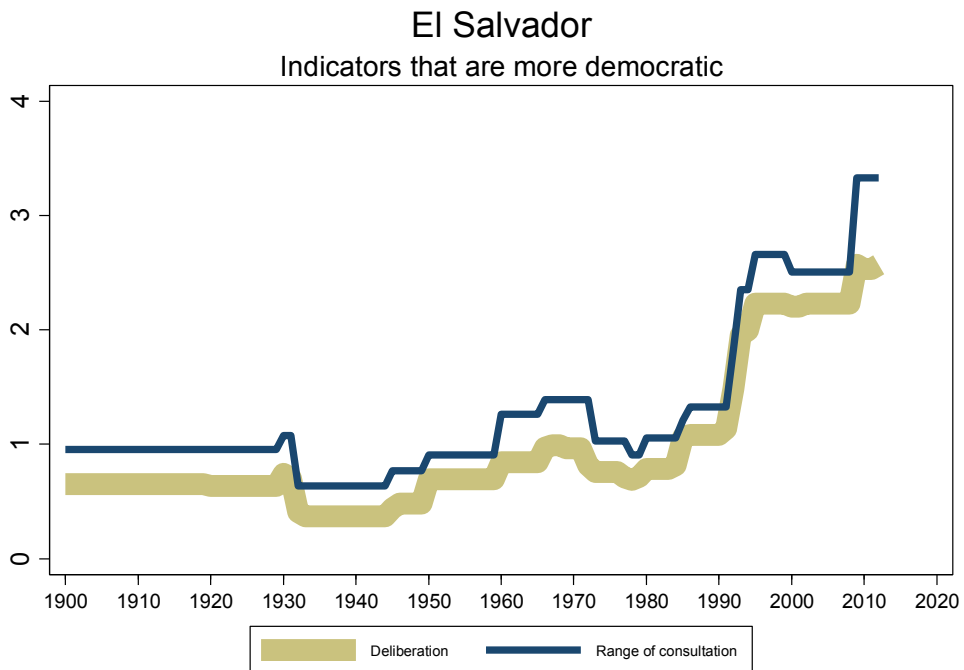


Figure 22: More democratic deliberation indicators



However, one real exception is Range of consultation, which has recently exceeded the general trend in El Salvador (Figure 22). This indicator began to slightly improve in the 1950s and 1960s, probably reflecting the moderate efforts of Salvadoran government to reform the political system. For example, in 1956, President Lemus

declared a general amnesty for political prisoners and exiles and eliminated some repressive legislation approved by previous governments. Nonetheless, in the context of the Cuban Revolution, President Lemus abandoned earlier efforts to reform the political system, banned free expression and assembly, and political dissidents were again detained arbitrarily. This indicator may also reflect the liberalization of the electoral system led by President Rivera during the early 1960s to allow the participation of opposition parties through proportional representation. More notably, this indicator continued rising dramatically in 2010, probably reflecting an effort by President Mauricio Funes build a broader base of support for governing. This open attitude is also reflected in a 2013 law that ensures that state-owned media have editorial independence.

In a few respects, therefore, El Salvador is beginning to create an atmosphere of respectful dialogue. However, we must not lose perspective: most of its score are nearly the middle of the range, as would be expected in a society that is still highly polarized.

Political equality: The greatest challenge

The political equality index reflects a minor improvement although it remains in a poor level throughout the 20th century (Figure 23). This is the case of most indicators such as health and education equality; or power distribution by gender, socioeconomic position, or sexual orientation. This represents the outcomes of a political regime that depended on extra economic coercion of labor by the state, specifically, in the production of coffee and based their political power on an alliance with armed forces in conjunction with the agricultural elite. Multiple actors were excluded in El Salvador's economy or the political system, and even harassed and politically repressed.

Figure 24 breaks these trends down by indicator. Only Power distributed by sexual orientation fails to follow an upward trend, but this probably reflects the difficulty of answering the question in a context where sexual orientation has never been an politicized issue. Power distribution by gender remains at an intermediate level, but it improved somewhat over the decades, especially after 1980. Women were clearly not integrated in the political system before then, and in many cases they were the target of repression. One example in particular is the massacre at the Sumpul on May 14, 1980, in which an estimated 600 civilians were killed, mostly women and children. Women were also target of sexual violence throughout the Civil War. As reported by Elizabeth Wood, nearly 1,000 people killed by the Salvadoran military at El Mozote in 1981 were raped. In fact, sexual violence (alone or in conjunction with some other abuse) comprised at least four percent of the human rights violations reported to El Salvador's Truth Commission.

Figure 23: Political equality

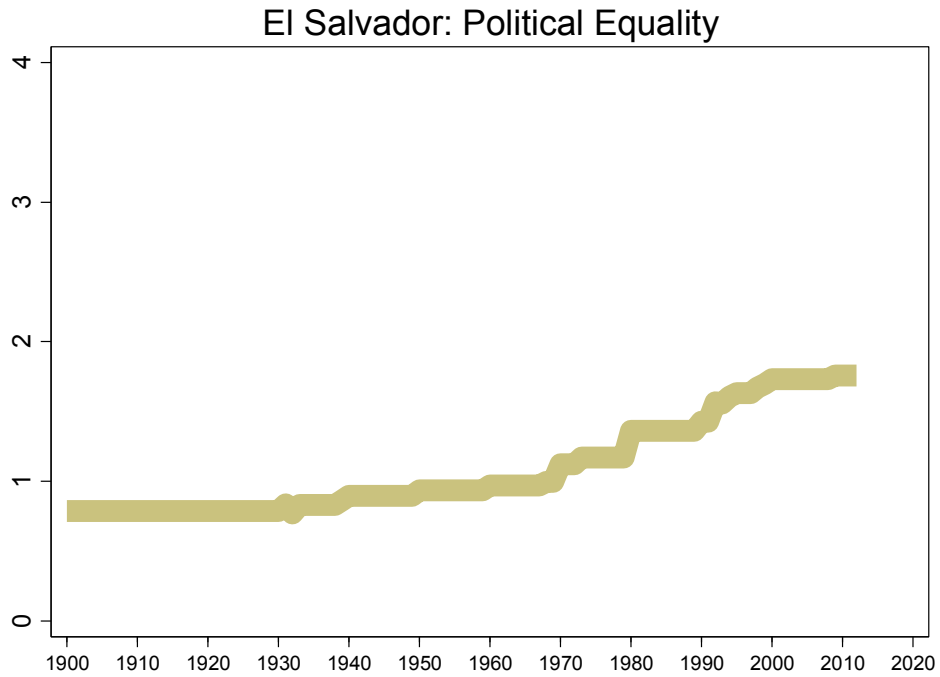
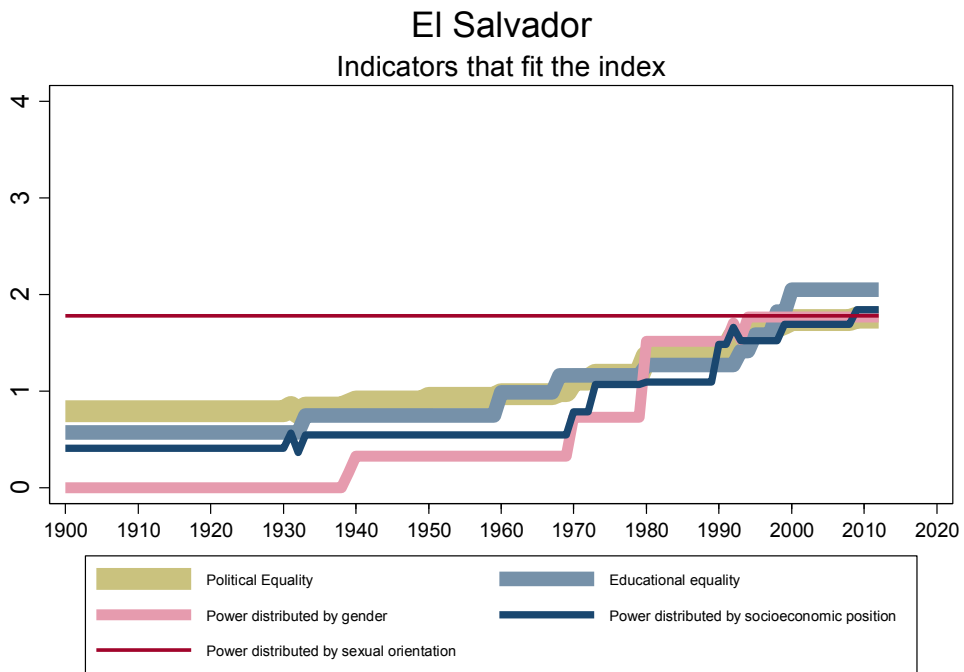


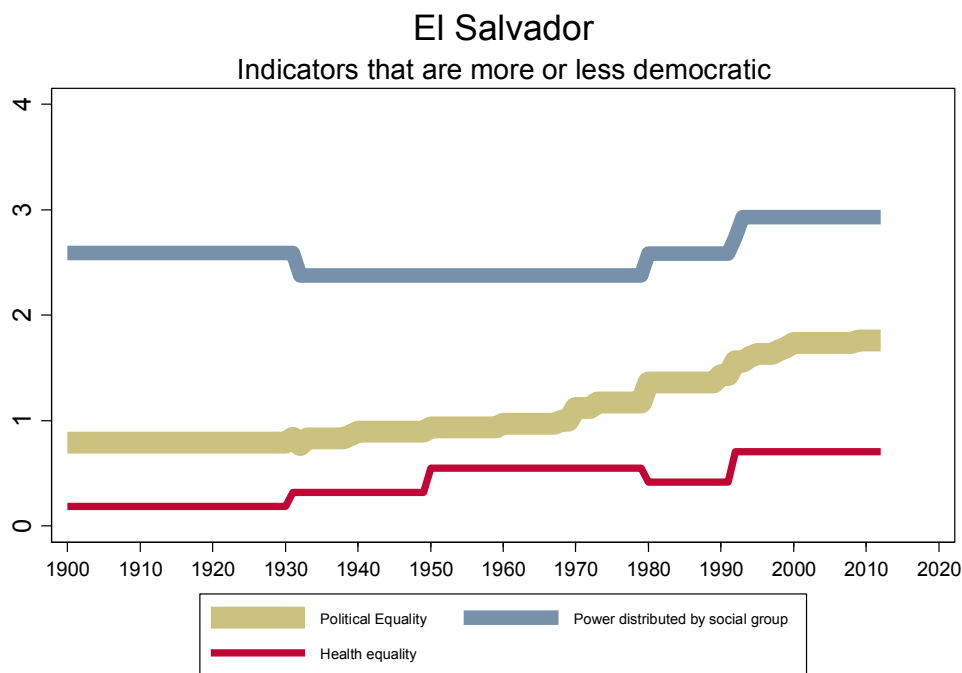
Figure 24: Political Equality indicators



The only indicator that is slightly more democratic than the Salvadoran average is power distribution by social group, which lies at moderately high level throughout the century (Figure 25). In El Salvador, power inequalities are defined primarily by class and gender; it is difficult to know which “social group” would be relevant for

answering this question. El Salvador lacks a large indigenous population such as Guatemala has, or a large black population, as Nicaragua has. Almost everyone speaks Spanish, and the emerging Catholic-Protestant divide is not well aligned with political power. El Salvador is a relatively homogeneous Catholic, mestizo, Spanish-speaking population.

Figure 25: More or less democratic equality indicators



Health equality, however, is below the overall political equality trend (Figure 25 as well). According to V-Dem’s country experts, about a quarter of the country’s population lacks access to health care, and one consequence of this deficit is a grossly unequal ability to participate in political activity. This situation is judged to have been fairly unchanged for more than a century.

Despite some notable improvements on several indicators of socioeconomic and political equality, El Salvador still has a society hindered by very significant disparities in political power. It does not begin to satisfy requirements for egalitarianism.

Judiciary: A longstanding weakness

For most of the 20th century there were no significant changes in the Judiciary index. The most improvement is due to the Chapultepec Peace Accords in which the judiciary institutions were reformed with the goal to foster their independence. For example, the Accords established a new Supreme Court of Justice and new mechanisms to elect its members. Most of the changes were implemented to avoid

the impunity and corruption of the judicial system that prevailed during the Civil war and before.

Figure 26: Judiciary

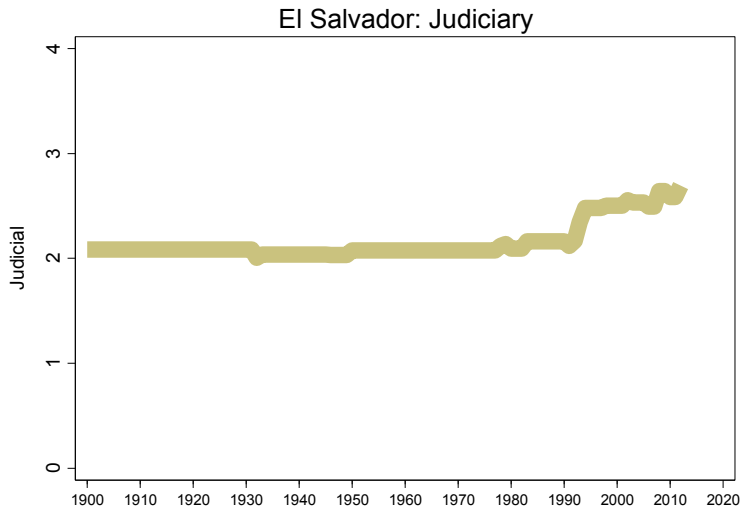
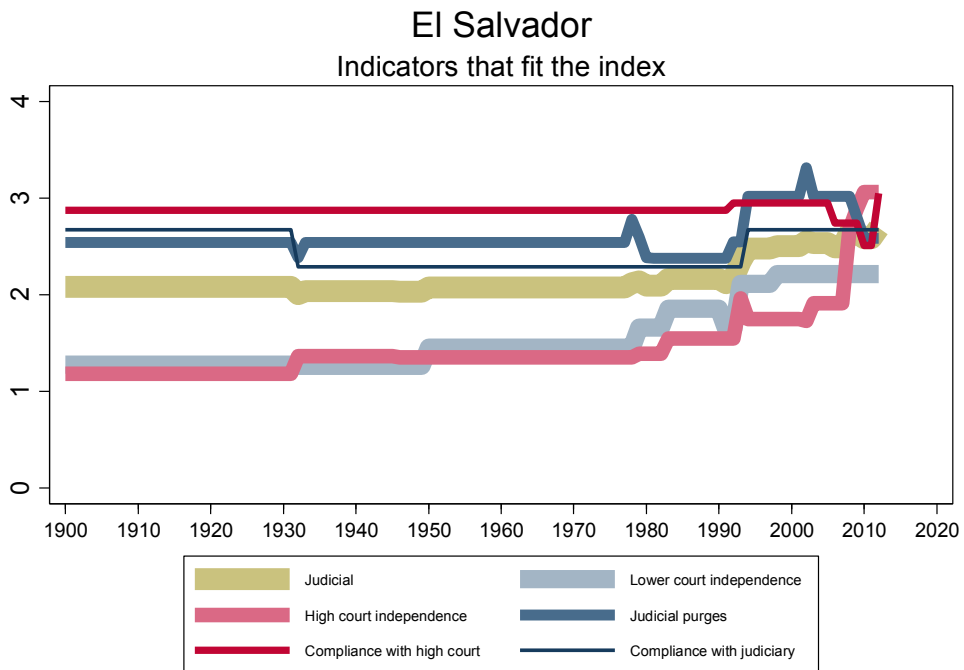


Figure 27: Judiciary indicators

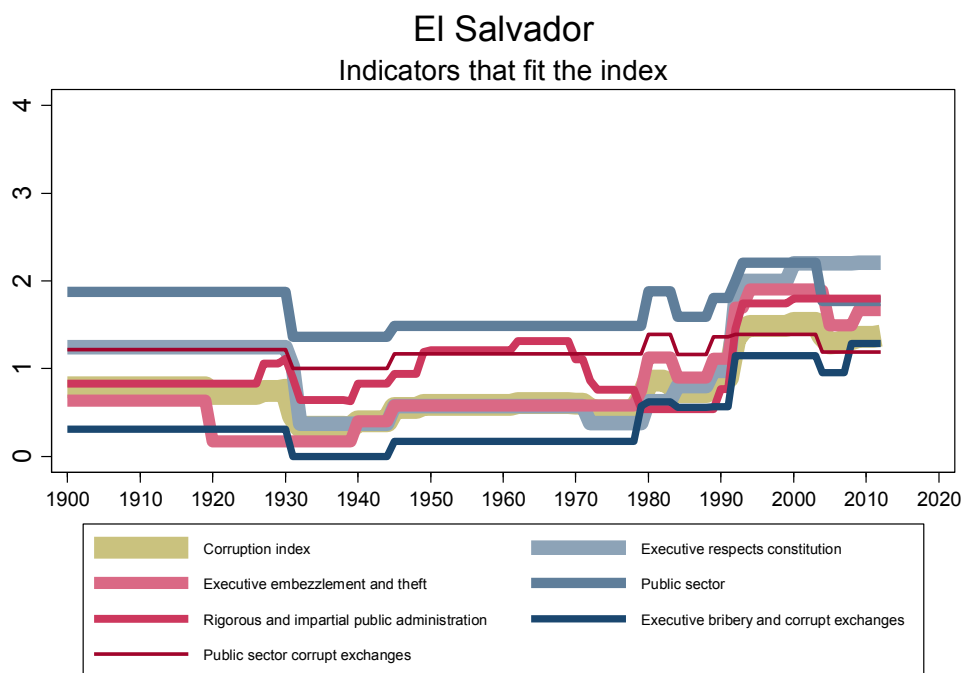


Several V-Dem indicators provide some evidence about the rule of law more generally. The rule of law more properly belongs under the heading of “governance” rather than “democracy,” but a certain degree of governance is a prerequisite for any

successful regime, and it is particularly relevant for liberal democracy, which calls for the government to be checked by the constitution and the courts. These are all perception-based indicators, but as estimates of perceptions shared by experts who know the country well, they may hold some interest.

Figure 28 shows the trends for these selected indicators for El Salvador. The “Corruption index” is a composite of the other plotted indicators. The most obvious trend is that the average level is low, in the bottom half of the scale. A second observation is that most of these indicators vary little over time. By these measures, El Salvador has been, and for the most part still is today, a rather corrupt state in which bribery, embezzlement, and corrupt exchanges are fairly common. Nevertheless, the two most dynamic series document improvements in two respects. First, embezzlement and theft in the executive branch has become less common since the peace accords. Second, presidents increasingly respect the constitution, although this is still not guaranteed.

Figure 28: Selected rule of law indicators



Overall, the judicial sector, and the rule of law generally, is one of the weaknesses of democracy in El Salvador. Performance improves slowly, if at all.

2. Conclusion

El Salvador was never a promising site for democracy. Before the 1990s, it had known only dictatorship punctuated by violent disturbances, most recently in the Civil War. Wealth and power were concentrated in the hands of an economic elite and the armed forces, neither of whom were anxious to share power.

From this perspective, the significant democratization the country has undergone since the 1992 Chapultepec Accords is a great achievement. Leaders are now routinely chosen in competitive full-suffrage elections. And even though these elections are contested vigorously by strong political parties with diametrically opposed ideologies, the outcomes of elections have been peaceful for the past 20 years. Winners are inaugurated and real power changes hands, resulting in significant policy changes.

Given El Salvador's historical legacies of economic inequality and violent conflict, it is not surprising that the democratic transition is incomplete in many ways. El Salvador is at most an electoral democracy, and a rather thin one at that. The state is too weak for it to be a liberal or majoritarian democracy. Civil society organizations are too marginalized from power for it to be considered consensual. It is not very participatory or deliberative, and political equality is difficult to imagine there.

However, electoral democracy is still a great achievement, and it may yet lay the foundation for further reforms that will make a more challenging form of democracy possible in the future.

References

- *Amnesty International Report*. Amnesty International Publications. 1985.
- Report: Commission on the Truth for El Salvador (Comisión de la Verdad Para El Salvador, CVES). *From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador*, on March 15, 1993.
- Wood, Elizabeth (2000), *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador*, Cambridge University Press.
- --- (2003), *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*, Cambridge University Press.