

## LASA condemns Bukele government's threats against El Faro and independent journalism in El Salvador

May 2025

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) expresses concern over [reports](#) that El Salvador's Attorney General's Office is preparing arrest warrants for El Faro journalists following the publication of an interview with former gang leaders. This is the latest in a series of attacks by the government of Nayib Bukele against independent investigative journalism in El Salvador, and specifically against El Faro journalists, since he came to office in 2019. But it is the first time in decades that prosecutors seek to press charges against individual journalists for their work. It is important to note that El Faro has built a productive relationship with academia, and its journalistic investigations constitute an indisputable and solid foundation for academic work both within and beyond El Salvador.

The government's ongoing campaign of public attacks against El Faro and the recent report that its journalists may be detained is a clear reprisal for their investigative journalism. Bukele and his allies have publicly and repeatedly accused El Faro of money laundering, tax evasion, being gang members, and other illegal acts. The Bukele government has unlawfully surveilled their physical movements and their cell phones using Pegasus software, and engaged in constant attacks against the media outlet and individual journalists, especial its director and co-founder, Carlos Dada, and its editor-in-chief, Óscar Martínez. In April 2023, the media organization relocated its administrative and legal offices to San José, Costa Rica for safety reasons. In 2022, at least ten of its journalists were forced into exile, [according](#) to the Salvadoran Journalists' Association (APES).

The [interview](#) published by El Faro on May 1, 2025 sheds light on President Bukele's years-long relationship with gangs, including negotiations during the 2014 campaign in which gangs received payment and other benefits in exchange for a reduction in homicides and voter coercion in favor of the Farabundo Martí National Front (FMLN) presidential candidate, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, and the following year, Nayib Bukele, who was running for mayor of San Salvador on the FMLN ticket. Bukele's ascent to the mayorship of San Salvador is widely seen as a critical stepping stone to the presidency, which he won in the next round of elections in 2018 on a different party platform that criticized the FMLN and the other main political party, ARENA, of corruption and back-room deals with gangs, which Bukele promised to eradicate.

El Faro's reporting throws such claims into question. El Faro has long published articles denouncing Bukele's pact with gangs, a charge he vehemently denies. The May 1 interview confirms the media outlet's claims that Bukele's ascent to power was, at least in part, a result of a negotiation with gang leaders to coerce people into voting for him. It also [suggests](#) that several top officials of the Bukele

government are involved in ongoing negotiations with the gangs and that among other questionable actions, they ordered the release of several top gang leaders despite their involvement in serious criminal activities. These alarming revelations stand in stark contrast to Bukele's carefully cultivated [public image](#) as the man who defeated El Salvador's gang problem and who is currently accepting payment from the Trump administration to house deported migrants in a notorious prison known for serious abuses.

LASA calls on the Bukele government to immediately desist from its efforts to criminalize El Faro journalists and staff. Independent journalism is vital to democracy and journalists should be able to do their jobs without fear of persecution. We express our solidarity with the journalists, staff, administrative and support staff at El Faro. We would like to especially mention our support for Carlos Dada, who received the prestigious LASA Media Award in 2009, and Óscar Martínez, a member in good standing of LASA for several years who has served ad honorem on committees and participated in several panel discussions at our annual congresses.

## About LASA

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is the world's largest professional association constituted by individuals and institutions devoted to the study of Latin America and the Caribbean. LASA currently has over 12,000 members from around the world and a committee that defends academic freedom and human rights.

If you wish to interview a LASA Executive Council member, you can contact the LASA communications office at (412) 648-7929 or send an email to [lasa@lasaweb.org](mailto:lasa@lasaweb.org).

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