

In the country of the world's coolest dictator,
women are the resistance.

EL MÉTODO BUKELE

The Bukele method

UN DOCUMENTAL DE ROSA MÁRQUEZ Y MARTA JAENES



THE BUKELE METHOD

According to the United Nations, when a country surpasses 10 homicides per one hundred thousand inhabitants, it experiences an epidemic of death. In 2015, El Salvador broke the world record with 103 homicides, more than any other nation not at war. To put it in context, that same year in Mexico, the land of the cartels, El Chapo Guzmán and the Zetas, the rate was 18, and in the United States it didn't even reach 5.

The maras or criminal gangs that had been besieging the country since the 1990s were responsible for these figures. However, since Nayib Bukele took office in 2019, the government has achieved a

drastic reduction in crime, boasts of dismantling the gangs, and claims to have imprisoned more than 80,000 gang members. El Salvador has thus gone from being the most violent country in Latin America to one of the safest.

Bukele has achieved in less than half a decade what none of his predecessors managed in thirty years, but the price paid by the population has been very high. El Salvador is the country that has regressed the most in democracy over the past three years, after Myanmar and Afghanistan and, as in the latter, it is women who are suffering the brunt of state violence.

SYNOPSIS

Between March 26 and 27, 2022, described by some media outlets as the bloodiest weekend in El Salvador's history, the Mara Salvatrucha 13 murdered 87 people without any apparent pattern. The following day, the government decided to impose a state of exception that allows the arrest of anyone suspected of belonging to the gangs and to keep them imprisoned indefinitely. It is estimated that more than 30,000 innocent people have been arbitrarily detained. Their relatives wander from one prison to another seeking news; their trails often vanish, and many inmates die under strange circumstances. The bodies are not always returned to the families, sometimes they are buried in mass graves to conceal clear signs of torture and malnutrition.

These mass arrests, mostly of young people, have led to almost half of the country's households now being supported by women, many of them elderly and with barely any resources. They have had to take charge not only of the household economy, but also of the care of the children of those detained, whom the state has effectively turned into orphans.

However, it is also these women who are leading the protests against the regime and defending human rights in a country where life, especially women's lives, has never mattered much. This is the story of a lawyer, a journalist, and an environmental activist who have decided to stand up to the government of the self-proclaimed "coolest dictator in the world."





JAYME MAGAÑA

“I risk being arrested, disappeared, tortured, raped... I risk not having a public trial”

Magaña is one of the last remaining human rights defense lawyers in El Salvador. For years, she investigated corruption cases and worked defending the rights of women, migrants, and LGBTQ+ people. She currently handles some of the country’s most emblematic cases, such as that of Génesis, a baby who was born while her mother was imprisoned under the regime and died at only fifteen months old due to the unsanitary conditions inside the prison.

The lawyer denounces that the lack of medicine forces inmates into desperate situations, such as bathing their children in bleach to cure scabies. At least four other babies have died under similar circumstances, though it is suspected that the real number is much higher.

In April 2025, Magaña filed a complaint with the prosecutor’s office regarding sexual assaults against inmates in the women’s prison of Apanteos. There, she has documented forced pregnancies, births under inhuman conditions, and unattended abortions inside the prison. Security guards coerce prisoners into sexual relations in exchange for basic necessities such as sanitary pads or food.

Exposing these abuses and state negligence has placed the lawyer in a dangerous position. Magaña receives continuous threats and must change her residence every week. She knows she could be arrested or disappeared at any moment. However, despite her fear, she has chosen to press on, because, as she asks herself, “If I don’t defend these people, who will?”

LISSETTE LEMUS

“Once someone enters prison, their family doesn’t know if that person is alive, dead, or what has happened to them, because they are never allowed to see them again”

Lemus has been a photojournalist for 25 years, and her work has always revolved around violence, especially that inflicted on women. In 2009, she won the World Press Photo award with an image of a street vendor murdered by gang members just meters away from the school where her daughters studied. At that time, such scenes were repeated across the country an average of fifteen times a day.

Today, her work focuses on the impact of the state of exception on the Salvadoran population. Lemus has documented cases of torture and rape of women in prisons, as well as the difficulties faced by detainees during menstruation, since they lack basic hygiene products like sanitary pads or water.

She is also one of the few Salvadoran reporters who has managed to access the CECOT (Terrorism Confinement Center).

Bukele’s mega-prison has received YouTubers, influencers, and countless foreign media, but local journalists are banned from entering, those whose investigations have proven that Bukele made deals with the gangs to gain power.

In May 2025, the newspaper El Faro published an interview with Charli, a well-known leader of the Barrio 18 gang, who claimed that he and other top members of the criminal structure escaped the country with the government’s help. After that exclusive, the press has been persecuted, forcing more than 40 journalists into exile.

Lemus was fired from the newspaper where she had worked for more than a decade. This has made her work even more vulnerable to lawsuits and harassment, but despite everything, she has decided to stay in El Salvador to keep telling uncomfortable truths.

THE JOURNALIST

A portrait of Lissette Lemus, a woman with long, dark, curly hair, wearing a dark blue turtleneck sweater. She is looking slightly upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with foliage.



THE ACTIVIST

VIDALINA MORALES

“I’m very afraid. Not so much of being killed — death is the end of our time in this world. I fear more being captured and taken to die, as so many innocent people are dying, in one of Bukele’s prisons“

Morales, a farmer and mother of five, lives in a rural area of the Cabañas department, where she has spent decades leading community struggles for access to water. In El Salvador, it rains three times more than in London and nearly four times more than in Madrid — yet one in ten people has no running water at home, and the other nine cannot be sure of its quality.

The voracious gold extraction carried out for a century left rivers and entire towns soaked in cyanide, arsenic, and other poisons that still contaminate the water and make life impossible in many regions.

A decade ago, Morales confronted the rampant extractivism of mining companies, which they eventually managed to drive out of the country. In 2017, she and her colleagues achieved a historic victory: El Salvador became the first nation in the world to completely ban metal mining, a pioneering law that the current government repealed in less than twenty days.

On November 27, 2024, Bukele announced the reactivation of mining with a tweet: “God placed a gigantic treasure beneath our feet,” referring to the precious metal lying under the Pacific Ring of Fire. “Water is worth more than gold,” was Morales’s response to the president and the slogan with which she has once again led the opposition to mining and the defense of the environment.

She knows her fight is that of David against Goliath. Five activists from her same organization have been prosecuted for an alleged crime committed during the civil war. Her own son was arrested as a warning shortly after the protests began. Nevertheless, none of this has stopped Morales, whose battle against the state is causing the most popular president in Latin America a serious reputational crisis.

With two-thirds of the population opposing mining, and the Church, which had so far remained silent, now on the activists’ side, Bukele is starting to lose popular support for the first time.

SONIA ALFARO

“The hardest moment for me was when they were loaded onto the prisoner transport truck. Their ankles were chafed and their legs swollen because they weren’t used to walking with chains. My daughter said ‘don’t worry, mommy. I haven’t done anything wrong, and soon they’ll let me go.’ That was the last time I saw them.”

Alfaro is a widow and mother of three daughters. She lived with the youngest, a 21-year-old university student, and the middle one, 23 and mother of two girls in a neighborhood of Santa Ana harassed by gangs. Bukele’s arrival was initially received with hope by all of them. After years of corruption and neglect, at last a politician seemed willing to do something for his people.

However, this perception changed on April 21, 2022. That day, at the height of the state of exception, the police came to her home and took the youngest daughter out of the house on the pretext of asking her some questions. Shortly afterward, the middle daughter went to the police station to inquire about her sister and both ended up detained, accused without evidence of being gang members. Alfaro has not seen them since that day.

Whenever she manages to gather 200 dollars, she goes to the prison to deliver a “package” to them, but in recent months

she hasn’t had enough money. Alfaro used to work as a supervisor in a textile factory, but she had to leave her job to take care of her granddaughters.

Her two daughters are imprisoned in the Apanteos facility, awaiting trial, the same center where Magaña has denounced sexual assaults by guards. Inmates who do not receive family “packages” are nicknamed “the Russians.” Officials demand sex from them in exchange for basic necessities like toilet paper, soap, or sanitary pads. If, as a result of these abuses, one becomes pregnant, she is forced to undergo an abortion.

Alfaro’s story will serve as the documentary’s narrative thread, as it exemplifies what thousands of mothers in El Salvador are going through. Facing a system that does not respond, with blocked judicial processes and a lack of information, their stories contrast with the triumphant narrative of a country that, in the name of security, has sacrificed the right to justice.

THE MOTHER





OTHER CHARACTERS

IVANIA CRUZ

A lawyer providing legal defense to victims of the state of exception. Her own brother, a public health doctor who was on the front lines during COVID and a councilman in the municipality of Zacatecoluca, was arrested, becoming one of the country's first political prisoners. She herself is being surveilled by state intelligence and was forced into exile after the arrest of Fidel Zabala, a human rights defender from the same organization as Cruz. He was the first to denounce torture and forced disappearances inside Bukele's prisons, where he saw numerous corpses being taken out "in black bags."

ZAIRA NAVAS

A former police inspector, she worked for three years in internal affairs as head of a group investigating corruption and human rights violations. Her investigations and her colleagues' testimonies led her to denounce the imposition of daily arrest quotas on police officers. During her shift, each agent had to arrest at least ten people suspected of gang membership. This has resulted in numerous arbitrary detentions and abuses. Some police officers used the decree to extort people, demanding money or sex to avoid arrest. Navas currently works for the NGO Cristosal.

INGRID ESCOBAR

A lawyer and human rights defender, she has accompanied families during the exhumation of corpses. The association she belongs to, Socorro Jurídico, has documented up to 500 deaths under state custody to date, almost all due to torture, malnutrition, or denial of medicine. They suspect this figure is just the tip of the iceberg and that the state hides clandestine graves in the Izalco prison. Escobar has had to flee the country due to persecution and threats from the government.

GABRIELA CÁCERES

An investigative journalist at the newspaper El Faro. One of her most important reports was "Cathedral," which exposed the Bukele government's corruption and its pact with gang leaders, such as Elmer Canales Rivera, a.k.a. "El Crook de Hollywood," arrested in Mexico in 2023 when he was supposed to be serving a 30 year sentence in El Salvador. Bukele agreed to act as Trump's jailer in exchange for the extradition of these gang members, to prevent them from testifying in the United States and revealing details of the deal. The journalists who exposed it have had to go into exile. Cáceres is one of the few who remain in the country.

INTENTION OF THE AUTHORS

In 2023, we traveled to El Salvador to work on a historical memory project with women survivors of the civil war. Upon arrival, we discovered a place full of stories, a reality that surpassed the imagination of any screenwriter.

After decades of violence, for the first time it was possible to do such ordinary things as travel across the country with the help of a GPS, something unthinkable just two years earlier, when under gang control, the entire territory was divided by invisible borders, and crossing them without permission could mean a death sentence.

How could one not feel sympathy, then, for the millennial president and his security method, which had worked such

a miracle? Even his eccentricities and unrealistic policies were forgiven, like adopting Bitcoin in a country where 70% of the population doesn't even have a bank account, or creating a hospital for pets while the public health system ranks among the worst in the world.

However, during that first trip, we already saw that the country bore no resemblance to the "Instagrammable" nation Bukele proudly displayed on his social networks. From there began an investigation that has lasted more than two years, combining fieldwork with documentary analysis and a second trip in July 2025 to search for new stories and characters.



Bukele is not only the president of El Salvador — he is also a global media phenomenon: a ‘cool dictator’ who flaunts his prison crackdown on TikTok with images that look like they’re taken from a Netflix series. Under his rule, the country has become a massive prison where impoverished citizens, political opponents, trade unionists, and now even deportees from the United States rot — a measure that has already earned him the nickname “Trump’s jailer.”

Yet, after a thousand days under the state of exception, despite corruption and worsening living conditions for the population, the president’s popularity continues to grow beyond his borders, and he is now the most popular leader in Latin America.

And it’s no coincidence: Bukele, who was a publicist before becoming a politician, is a marketing expert capable of turning repression into spectacle.

“The Bukele Method’ is the name given to this security policy based on fear and mass detentions, a model already being implemented in other parts of the region, such as Honduras, and one that threatens to spread to more countries, including the United States, where it is being applied against migrants.

It is also the title chosen for this documentary, which explores how El Salvador has become the testing ground for new populisms but from a

new perspective — that of the women who stand as a barrier against totalitarianism.

This is a threat worldwide including in Spain, where 26% of young men believe that, in some circumstances, authoritarianism is preferable to democracy.



A photograph of two women standing in front of a vibrant, abstract mural on a concrete wall. The mural features large, bold shapes in blue, red, yellow, and purple. The woman on the left is wearing a green tank top and black pants, with her hand on her hip. The woman on the right is wearing a black tank top and black pants, with her hand on the wall. The text 'THE DIRECTORS' is overlaid in large white letters in the center of the image.

THE DIRECTORS



Screenwriter and audiovisual director, with a PhD in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, most of her work has revolved around the feminist struggle and gender equality. In 2023, she traveled to El Salvador to work on a historical memory project from which the documentary *Voices of Warriors* emerged, about women survivors of the armed conflict.

She has directed five short films and has participated in numerous government campaigns against gender violence, digital violence, and prostitution.

She is co-author, together with Marta Jaenes, of the documentary *What the F** Is Going On?*, released on Netflix in 2019; of the book on sexual violence *Did You Close Your Legs? Against the Culture of Rape*, published in 2021 by Penguin Random House; and of the documentary *Where Is My Name?*, about Afghan women.

A woman with dark hair and bangs, wearing a dark sleeveless top and a gold necklace, is sitting at a desk. She is looking towards the right with a slight smile. In front of her is a white laptop. To the left of the laptop is a glass of water and a red mouse. The background is a blurred image of a person in a red shirt. The name 'MARTA JAEÑES' is written vertically in large white letters on the right side of the image.

MARTA JAEÑES

Journalist specialized in equality and social policy. She worked as a reporter for La Sexta Noticias for more than a decade. She has been the Madrid correspondent for the Dutch television network VPRO and has worked in news and current affairs programs for outlets such as COPE, Castilla-La Mancha Televisión and Telemadrid, among others.

She studied Screenwriting and Filmmaking at the International Film and Television School of San Antonio de los Baños, in Havana. In addition to the documentary about feminism in Spain *What the F** Is Going On?*, she has directed *Sentidos*, a short documentary filmed in Cuba in 2015, and *Where Is My Name?*, about Afghan women after the Taliban's return to power in 2021.

She is currently deputy director and columnist at the digital newspaper InfoLibre.

PRESS QUOTES



EL PAÍS

Televisión

PROGRAMACIÓN TV · SERIES · CALENDARIO DE SERIES · PROGRAMAS · COMUNICACIÓN · CRÍTICA TV · AVANCES · ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS

E Por qué arrasa ‘¿Qué coño está pasando?’, el documental de Netflix sobre el feminismo en España

El trabajo, firmado por Rosa Márquez y Marta Jaenes, hace un repaso del contexto social a través de la voz de 40 mujeres

EL ESPAÑOL

SERIES / CINE DOCUMENTAL

El documental feminista de Netflix del que todo el mundo habla y que odiará Ortega Smith

Marta Jaenes y Rosa Márquez dirigen ‘¿Qué coño está pasando?’, un trabajo sobre el feminismo desde muchísimos y diferentes puntos de vista.

elPeriódico

Feminismo

El ensayo '¿Cerró usted las piernas?' radiografía la violencia contra las mujeres

Las periodistas Marta Jaenes y Rosa Márquez recogen testimonios y reflexionan sobre la cultura de la violación



Foto: Rosa Márquez, directora del documental Voces de Guerreras/Cortesía

“RECUPERAR LAS LUCHAS DE LAS MUJERES”, LA MIRADA DE LA ESPAÑOLA ROSA MÁRQUEZ, LA DIRECTORA DEL DOCUMENTAL VOCES DE GUERRERAS

David Ramírez · 19 de julio de 2023 · El Salvador · 90 Views

“Voces de Guerreras: mujeres, historias y luchas”, es el recién estrenado documental que visibilizó a cuatro valientes mujeres de Suchitoto que atravesaron y sobrevivieron la etapa del conflicto armado salvadoreño, y cómo desde sus diferentes trincheras aportaron a la sociedad y la memoria histórica en el país. El filme fue dirigido por la española, periodista y feminista Rosa Márquez.

VINYL PRODUCCIONES

Vinyl Producciones is an audiovisual company founded in 2009, with extensive experience in content creation and production services. Over the years, it has developed projects for both institutional and private clients, as well as its own productions.

Among its in-house productions stand out the short film Crisis (Rosa Márquez, 2011), Taro (Dani Rebner, 2019), and the feature-length documentary The Vatican and the Third Reich (Rufo Pajares, 2014).

Regarding commissioned content, the company has produced audiovisual pieces for That's English!, the official distance-learning English course created by Spain's Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and broadcast by TVE.

It has also produced large-scale campaigns such as Don't Let It Go Out, on awareness of heart failure (Spanish Society of Cardiology and Spanish Heart Foundation), and Networks Without Machismo, promoted by the Provincial Councils of Andalusia.

At the head of the production company is Dani Rebner, producer and audiovisual director with a long-standing career in the production and distribution of audiovisual content.

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