



You decide



tú Decides – Un Periódico Bilingüe

Vol. 18 No. 15

1360 N. Louisiana St., #A715, Kennewick, WA 99336

www.TuDecidesMedia.com

April 11th, 2024



True or false?

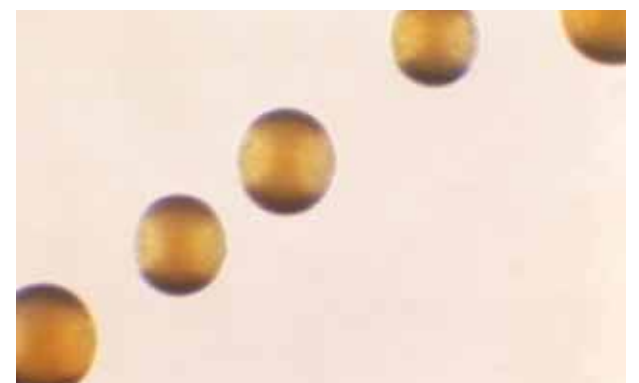
Hispanic voters are a target for misinformation > 15



STATE: Agencies collaborate to confront wildfire crisis > 14



POLITICS: Biden is facing public ire > 13



HEALTH: Warning of increase in bacterial illnesses > 10

POLITICS

Latino voters are coveted by both major parties, but they're also a target for misinformation

PHOENIX, Arizona (AP)

As ranchera music filled the Phoenix recording studio at Radio Campesina, a station personality spoke in Spanish into the microphone.

"Friends of Campesina, in these elections, truth and unity are more important than ever," said morning show host Tony Arias. "Don't let yourself be trapped by disinformation."

The audio was recorded as a promo for Radio Campesina's new campaign aiming to empower Latino voters ahead of the 2024 elections. That effort includes discussing election-related misinformation narratives and fact-checking conspiracy theories on air.

"We are at the front lines of fighting misinformation in our communities," said María Barquín, program director of Chavez Radio Group, the nonprofit



Radio guest Carolina Rodriguez-Greer, with Mi Familia Vota, from left, host Osvaldo Franco and engineer Daniel Orona conduct a live broadcast at the Phoenix, Arizona, studio of La Campesina, a Spanish-language radio network, on Wednesday, March 20, 2024.

that runs Radio Campesina, a network of Spanish-language stations in Arizona, California and Nevada. "There's a lot at stake in 2024 for our communities. And so we need to amp up these efforts now more than ever."

Latinos have grown at the second-fastest rate, behind Asian Americans, of any major racial and ethnic group in the U.S. since the last presidential election, according to a Pew Research Center analysis, and are projected to account for 14.7%, or 36.2 million, of all eligible voters in November, a new high. They are a growing share of the electorate in several presidential and congressional battleground states, including Arizona, California and Nevada, and are being heavily courted by Republicans and Democrats.

Democratic President Joe Biden has credited Latino voters as a key reason he defeated Republican Donald Trump in 2020 and is urging them to help him do it again in November. Given the high stakes of a presidential election year, experts expect a surge of misinformation, especially through audio and video, targeting Spanish-speaking voters.

"Latinos have immense voting power and can make a decisive difference in elections, yet they are an under-messaged, under-prioritized audience," said Arturo Vargas, CEO of NALEO Educational Fund, a national nonprofit encouraging Latino civic participation. "Our vote has an impact. These bad actors know this, and one way to influence the Latino vote is to misinform."

In addition to radio, much of the news and information Latinos consume is audio-based through podcasts or on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube. Content moderation efforts in Spanish are limited on these platforms, which are seeing a rising number of right-wing influencers peddling election falsehoods and QAnon conspiracy theories.

Other narratives are more closely tailored to Latino communities, including false information about immigration, inflation and abortion rights, often exploiting the traumas and fears of specific communities.

Table of Contents

- 15 POLITICS:** Latino voters are coveted by both major parties, but they're also a target for misinformation
- 14 STATE:** Agencies to collaborate on fire and smoke management to confront wildfire crisis
- 13 POLITICS:** Trump's events aren't drawing big protests this year. Instead, Biden is facing public ire
- 11 LATIN AMERICA:** Mexico's likely next president is a scientist. Politics has her mostly quiet on climate threats
- 10 STATE:** Washington state ban on high-capacity ammunition magazines ruled unconstitutional, but state appeals
- 10 HEALTH:** Officials warn of increase in bacterial illnesses that can lead to meningitis and possibly death
- 9 LATIN AMERICA:** At least 241 people have died in El Salvador prisons during the 'war on gangs,' rights group says



tú Decides Newspaper
1360 N. Louisiana St., #A715
Kennewick, WA 99336
Phone: 509-591-0495
Fax: 800-790-4145

Web Site: www.TuDecidesMedia.com

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are available for \$26 for 6 months

tú Decides is published weekly by tú Decides Media Inc. on every Friday. News deadline is every Monday at 12 p.m. Ad reservation deadline is Monday at 10 a.m., ad material deadline is every Monday at noon.

Albert Torres, **CEO & President**
Albert@tudecidesmedia.com

Ismael G. Campos, **Owner**
Mel@tudecidesmedia.com

Gracie Campos, **Owner**
Gracie@tudecidesmedia.com

Fernando Aceves
Editor & Sales

Dr. Claudia Romay
Translations

Fernando Aceves, Jose Diaz
Distribution

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the express written consent of tú Decides Media, Inc.

Helping clients buy dream homes for 100 years.

WaFd Bank

Visit your local branch or give us a call at 1-800-324-9375.

Member FDIC
NMLSR # 410394
wafdbank.com

STATE

Agencies to collaborate on fire and smoke management to confront wildfire crisis

OLYMPIA, Washington

State and federal agencies and departments have agreed to collaborate on addressing the escalating wildfire crisis by increasing use of prescribed fire and other forest fuel management strategies at larger geographic scales while also increasing outreach to nearby communities as these strategies are deployed. These strategies reduce forest fuels on the ground and allow for strategic burning that minimizes community and public health impacts relative to impacts from uncontrolled wildfires.

Over the past decade, wildfires in the Pacific Northwest and beyond have intensified, posing significant risks to human health, particularly among vulnerable communities and populations. These dangers are exacerbated by a warming climate and increased human development in fire-prone areas. The recent infusion of federal funds through the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act has provided an unprecedented opportunity for collective action amongst government agencies.

This collaborative initiative is a response to a March 2023 Government Accountability Office report which emphasized the need for aligned air quality and land management goals to mitigate wildfire risks effectively. Building on a national Memorandum of Understanding and recognizing the public health crisis that wildfires represent, this joint statement outlines a commitment to regional collaboration for achieving these critical goals.

At a meeting in November 2023, representatives from federal and state agencies discussed the necessity of increasing prescribed fire activities. Prescribed fires, or burning areas intentionally to manage land and resource objectives, are deemed essential for reducing wildfire risks and enhancing ecosystem resilience. This approach is balanced with strategies to minimize public health impacts from smoke, emphasizing the need for comprehensive community engagement and support for vulnerable populations.



This archive photo provided by the Washington State Department of Transportation from August 4, 2022, shows smoke from a wildfire burning south of Lind, Washington.

The principles guiding this initiative include acting with urgency, protecting public health and property, overcoming implementation barriers, embracing innovation, and learning from experience. The agencies aim to leverage expertise, resources, and innovative strategies to increase the scale of prescribed fire implementations while ensuring public health protection.

Two pilot projects, one in West Bend, Oregon and another in North Central Washington, will serve as initial test areas for these collaborative efforts. The insights gained from these pilot projects will inform further actions and strategies, demonstrating a united front in addressing wildfire and smoke management challenges.

“This collaboration represents the beginning of a multi-agency effort towards improved cooperation and scale-up of prescribed fire and smoke management, with recognition that a near-term step will be to engage others, particularly Tribes, that are critical to this effort,” said Jacque Buchanan, Regional Forester for the Pacific Northwest Region of the Forest Service.

“Together, we’re committed to reducing wildfire risk and prioritizing the health and safety of our communities while increasing the resilience of our ecosystems. Our shared efforts with these pilot projects will lay the groundwork for a safer, healthier future for the Pacific Northwest.”

Mpox (previously called monkeypox) What You Need to Know

Mpox (previously called monkeypox) infection is a disease that can cause rashes and other symptoms. Learn how you can protect yourself and those around you from mpox.



Mpox is spread through close contact with a symptomatic person.

Mpox is spread by direct contact with the skin or body fluids of an infected person. It can also spread by touching contaminated objects (such as bedding or clothing) or by respiratory droplets during direct and prolonged face-to-face contact. It is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI).



Symptoms of mpox can vary.

Mpox usually causes a rash that starts as flat spots that become raised fluid-filled blisters that can be painful. Some people have just a few spots on one part of the body while others have many all over the body. Other symptoms can include fever, headache, and swollen lymph nodes.



Prevention is essential to reducing transmission.

Avoid skin-to-skin contact with anyone who has open wounds or rashes, and don't share clothing or other items with them. Reduce the number of people you have close, intimate, or sexual contact with. If you have been exposed or are at high risk for infection, ask about getting the mpox vaccine.



Vaccination is available for people exposed to mpox or at high risk.

If your symptoms have not started, post-exposure vaccination within 4 days of exposure may be an option to reduce or prevent symptoms. Talk to your medical provider or local clinic.



Seek out care immediately.

If you have a new or unexplained rash and think it might be mpox, talk to your medical provider or local clinic. Antiviral medications are available to treat mpox if you have severe pain or other symptoms, or have a condition such as a weakened immune system that makes you more likely to get severely ill.

For more information, visit doh.wa.gov/mpox or call 1-833-829-HELP

If you were exposed to mpox:

If you have been exposed and do not have symptoms yet, talk to a health care provider about vaccination.

How can I get vaccinated?

People who are close contacts of cases or those at high risk of infection can get vaccinated by their medical providers or local clinic.

Vaccine considerations

If you receive an mpox vaccination, you should still practice other prevention measures, such as not having skin-to-skin contact with someone with mpox infection. You are not considered fully vaccinated until two weeks after your second dose. The vaccine may not be 100% effective so continue to watch for any mpox symptoms.

If you think you have mpox:

- Cover your rash.
- Isolate yourself from others.
- Immediately talk to your health care provider. It is important to call as soon as you think you have symptoms of the disease.

If you have been diagnosed with mpox:

Until the scabs are gone and the skin below has healed, do the following:

- Separate yourself from other people and animals (mammals like pets or rodents).
- Restrict family, friends, or other visitors to those with an essential need to be in the home.
- Do not let others touch your skin, especially any areas with a rash.
- Keep lesions covered.
- Do not share bedding, towels, dishes, or utensils.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Consider using disposable gloves to cover hand lesions.
- Wash your own laundry and dishes.
- Routinely clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and items.
- Avoid use of contact lenses to prevent unintentional infection of the eye.
- Do not kiss, hug, cuddle, sleep, play sports, or have sex with others.
- Wear a well-fitting mask, especially when seeing a health care provider or while you have fever or respiratory symptoms.



For more information, visit doh.wa.gov/Mpox or call 1-833-829-HELP

DOH 348-907 April 2023
To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.

POLITICS

Trump's events aren't drawing big protests this year. Instead, Biden is facing public ire



Protesters demonstrate in support of Palestinians at Dupont Circle in Washington, on Saturday, March 30, 2024.

NEW YORK (AP)

When Donald Trump first ran for the White House eight years ago, protesters filled the streets.

His inflammatory rhetoric and often dehumanizing descriptions of immigrants spurred thousands to demonstrate outside his rallies. By this time in 2016, protesters regularly interrupted his speeches, sparking clashes and foreshadowing Trump's habit of encouraging violence against those he casts as his enemies.

"Knock the crap out of them, would you?" Trump once said as he egged on the crowd to go after protestors on their own — even promising to pay their legal bills.

No longer.

As he runs again with an agenda that is arguably more extreme than his two previous campaigns, mass protests at Trump rallies and appearances are a thing of the past. When Trump returned to New York last week for a hearing in one of his criminal cases, just a smattering of detractors turned up outside the courthouse. During a Midwestern swing Tuesday, Trump was interrupted briefly by a protest in Green Bay, but otherwise encountered minimal opposition.

In a twist, it's now President Joe Biden who is facing a sustained protest movement, largely by those furious over the administration's support for Israel in its war against Hamas. During his first major rally of the year, Biden's 22-minute speech was interrupted no less than a dozen times by detractors calling for a ceasefire in

Gaza. Protesters repeatedly disrupted his celebrity fundraiser last week with former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton at New York's Radio City Music Hall, as hundreds more demonstrated outside.

Nearly a decade after Trump launched his first campaign, organizers and others who participated in past protests describe a change in tactics as they focus their efforts on other issues or turning out voters in November. Some described a "Trump fatigue" after nearly a decade of outrage. Others say it's Biden's policy toward Israel that has them the most agitated and have turned their attention to protesting him.

"All the people that would be protesting Trump, a lot of these people, a lot of that energy are now focused on protesting a genocide in Gaza," said Thomas Kennedy, an immigrant from Argentina who participated in more than a dozen anti-Trump protests and rallies in 2016.

Kennedy still describes the former president as a "horrible threat." But for "a lot of people like me who would have been out there protesting Trump, it's just demoralizing and dispiriting. It's not worth my effort and my energy."

That's a potential warning sign for Biden, whose campaign aims to energize its base by casting Trump as a threat and framing the election as a historic test of the nation's commitment to democracy.

Some who organized protests against Trump in the past say the more muted approach this year is part of a deliberate effort to not elevate his comments and ideas.



Meet Our New Providers

Accepting New Patients



Dustin J. Carlson,
DNP, ARNP, FNP-BC
Family Medicine

Brittany Crane,
ARNP-FNP
Family Medicine, OB/GYN
& Women's Health



James C Lewis,
OD
Optometry

Catherine O'Brien,
DNP, APRN, CNM
OB/GYN & Women's Health



SCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT TODAY!

Call (509) 547-2204 or visit our site at myTCCH.org.



Scan this QR code for more information on COVID-19 vaccines:



Getting Vaccinated to Protect Against COVID-19 Illness

Updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective, and recommended to everyone 6 months and up.

Most people ages 5-64 years old just need one updated 2023-2024 dose to be up to date.

- Children 6 months-4 years may need more than one dose of an updated 2023-2024 mRNA COVID-19 vaccine in order to be up to date with COVID-19 vaccination.
- Adults 65 years old and older should receive 2 doses of updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine at least 4 months apart.
- People 6 months and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised should complete a 3-dose series and may receive additional doses of the updated 2023-2024 at least 2 months after their last dose.

MARCH 2024 DOH 348-782

Which COVID-19 vaccines are currently available?

Pfizer-BioNTech/Comirnaty
2023-2024 formula, 6 months and older*

Moderna/Spikevax
2023-2024 formula, 6 months and older*

Novavax
2023-2023 formula, 12 years and older

**Comirnaty and Spikevax are brand names of the mRNA vaccines currently approved for ages 12 and older. Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines are authorized for ages 6 months and older.*

LATIN AMERICA

Mexico's likely next president is a scientist. Politics has her mostly quiet on climate threats

MEXICO CITY (AP)

The López home kept filling with seawater as the Gulf of Mexico rose and winter storms got worse.

Cristina López and her family decided to leave after one bad storm in November, knowing the ocean would eventually devour their home in the fishing town of El Bosque.

"There was nowhere else to go," said López, who now lives about a 20-minute drive away.

Driven by climate change, sea-level rise and increasingly ferocious storms are eroding thousands of miles of Mexico's coastline facing both the Gulf and the Pacific Ocean. Around this country of nearly 130 million, drought is draining reservoirs dry and creating severe water shortages. Deadly heat is straining people and crops. Aging infrastructure is struggling to keep up.

But don't expect the leading presidential candidate, Claudia Sheinbaum, an environmental scientist and a co-author of the 2007 Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, to make climate a central part of her campaign ahead of the June 2 election.

That is because as many countries move away from the burning of fossil fuels like oil and gas, which cause climate change, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, one of Mexico's most popular leaders in generations, has moved his country in the opposite direction.

Sheinbaum is often seen as the mentee



Yahir Mayoral and Emily Camacho walk amid the rubble of their grandmother's home, destroyed by flooding driven by a sea-level rise in their coastal community of El Bosque, in the state of Tabasco, Mexico, on November 30, 2023.

of López Obrador, who is restricted by law to one term. As president, he has pumped billions of dollars into Mexico's indebted state oil company and has been pushing an overhaul of the country's energy sector that has boosted fossil fuel production and stymied investment in renewable energy projects. That has resulted in Sheinbaum, who until last June was Mexico City's mayor, having largely gone quiet on global warming in Mexico, the world's 11th-largest oil producer.

At the heart of her silence appears to be the conundrum facing many leaders in the face of climate change: should they sacrifice immediate political and eco-

nomics to grapple with the longer-

term changes necessary for human survival?

Sheinbaum has told The Associated Press that she believes in science, technology and renewable energy but also has said that if she wins she would continue increasing power generation by state-owned companies, which often run power plants with oil and coal.

Her main opponent, Xóchitl Gálvez, a former opposition senator, has said she would promote private investment in the energy sector, if elected. The businesswoman has promised to permanently close refineries in Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas states within the first six months of her presidency, and has proposed transforming the country's state-run oil and gas company into one that could also produce electricity using renewable sources such as geothermal energy.

Whoever wins will be the first female president of Mexico.



TRANSLATION SERVICES NOW AVAILABLE

Tú Decides Media is now offering professional English to Spanish translation services to translate documents, advertisements, newsletters, brochures, website content, company notices and much more. We have great rates and excellent turnaround time. Contact us for a quote today! info@tudecidesmedia.com



tú Decides.
You decide.

To advertise, call Gracie Campos
at (509) 438-0781 or Fernando Aceves
at (509) 305-7608.

www.tudecidesmedia.com

STATE

Washington state ban on high-capacity ammunition magazines ruled unconstitutional, but state appeals

SEATTLE, Washington (AP)

A judge in Washington state ruled Monday that the state's ban on high-capacity ammunition magazines is unconstitutional — but the law will remain in effect while the state appeals the decision.

Cowlitz County Superior Court Judge Gary Bashor ruled that Washington's ban on magazines that hold more than 10 rounds violates both the Washington state and U.S. constitutions, The Seattle Times reported. He issued an immediate injunction to stop the state from enforcing the ban, which has been in place since 2022.

Attorney General Bob Ferguson filed an emergency appeal to the state Supreme Court seeking to keep the law in effect during the appeals process. That was granted Monday evening and the ban will stay in place for now.

In granting the emergency appeal, Washington State Supreme Court commissioner Michael Johnston wrote that he considered “the debatable nature of the factual and legal issues raised in this case, and the public safety issues concerning the proliferation of large capacity maga-

zines.”

Bashor in his ruling referred to the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 decision in which gun regulations must be “consistent with the Nation's historical tradition of firearm regulation.”

The Supreme Court's so-called Bruen decision changed the test that lower courts had used for years to evaluate challenges to firearm restrictions. The justices said judges should no longer consider whether the law serves public interests like enhancing public safety.

Bashor wrote that the state needed to show a historical law, from around the time of the Second Amendment's adoption, that justifies its current regulation. He said the state had failed to do so.

“There was no appetite to limit gun rights by the Founders. Though the specific technology available today may not have been envisioned, the Founders expected technological advancements,” Bashor wrote. “The result is few, if any, historical



A semi-automatic rifle at right that has been fitted with a so-called bump stock device to make it fire faster sits on a table at the Washington State Patrol crime laboratory in Seattle, Washington.

analogue laws by which a state can justify a modern firearms regulation.”

In arguments and motions, the state said “the enduring tradition of firearms

regulation” satisfies the requirements of Bruen and justifies the ban. The state also argued that gun violence and mass shootings are “an unprecedented societal concern,” but Bashor brushed that argument aside.

The 2007 mass shooting at Virginia Tech was “widely publicized,” Bashor wrote, and yet the U.S. Supreme Court broadened Second Amendment protections the next year.

“The Washington legislature has found that gun violence and mass shootings are on the increase,” Bashor wrote. “The problem, however, is not an unprecedented societal concern.”

Ferguson issued a statement calling the decision incorrect.

“Every court in Washington and across the country to consider challenges to a ban on the sale of high-capacity magazines under the U.S. or Washington Constitution has either rejected that challenge or been overruled. This law is constitutional,” he said.

HEALTH

Officials warn of increase in bacterial illnesses that can lead to meningitis and possibly death

NEW YORK (AP)

U.S. health officials are warning of an increase in rare bacterial illnesses that can lead to meningitis and possible death.

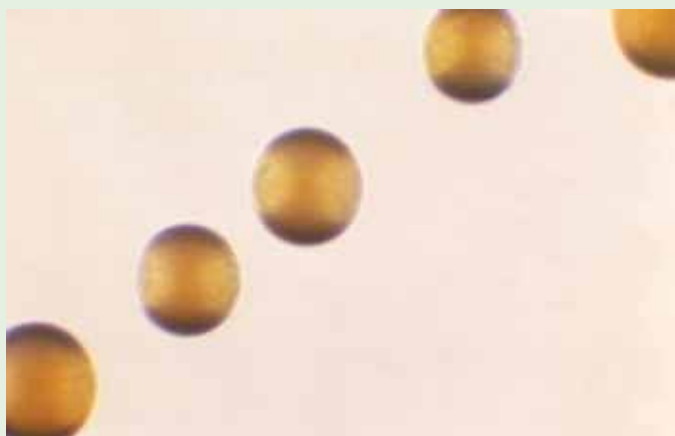
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued an alert to U.S. doctors on Thursday about an increase in cases of one type of invasive meningococcal disease, most of it due to a specific strain of bacteria.

Last year, 422 cases of it were reported in the U.S. — the most in a year since 2014. Already, 143 cases have been reported this year, meaning infections appear to be on track to surpass 2023, the CDC said. Most of the cases last year did not involve meningitis, though at least 17

died. The cases were disproportionately more common in adults ages 30 to 60, in Black people and in people who have HIV, the CDC said.

The bacteria can cause a dangerous brain and spinal cord inflammation called meningitis, with symptoms that may include fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea and vomiting. The bacteria also can cause a bloodstream infection with symptoms like chills, fatigue, cold hands and feet, rapid breathing, diarrhea, or, in later stages, a dark purple rash.

The infection can be treated with antibiotics, but quick treatment is essential.



This 1966 microscope photo shows five colonies of Group-B Neisseria meningitidis bacteria.

An estimated 10% to 15% of infected people die, and survivors sometimes suffer deafness or amputations.

There also are vaccines against meningococcal disease.

Officials recommend that all children should get a meningococcal conjugate vaccine, which protects against the rising strain, at around the time they enter a middle school. Since vaccine protection fades, the CDC also recommends a booster dose at age 16. Shots also are recommended for people at higher risk, like those in a place where an outbreak is occurring or those with HIV infection or certain other health conditions.

LATINOAMÉRICA

Al menos 241 personas han muerto en las cárceles de El Salvador durante la “guerra contra las pandillas”, dice un grupo de derechos humanos

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP)

Al menos 241 personas han muerto en las cárceles de El Salvador desde el inicio de la “guerra contra las pandillas” del presidente Nayib Bukele hace dos años, según la organización Ayuda Legal Humanitaria.

Ingrid Escobar, directora de la organización de derechos humanos, dijo que recibieron 500 reportes de muertes bajo custodia estatal, pero han confirmado alrededor de la mitad, incluidos dos menores. El año pasado, la organización documentó 126 muertes, apenas la mitad de las que documentaron este año.

En marzo de 2022, Bukele anunció un “estado de excepción”, renunciando a muchos derechos constitucionales para combatir a las pandillas que han aterrorizado a la nación centroamericana.

Desde entonces, El Salvador ha arrestado a 80,000 personas—más del 1% de la población del país—y las ha metido en prisión, a menudo con poca evidencia

de sus vínculos con pandillas y casi sin acceso al debido proceso. Las cárceles han sido comparadas con cámaras de tortura, con condiciones espantosas.

Según el informe de la ONG, “de estas muertes, el 44% murió por muerte violenta, torturas graves, el 29% por falta de atención médica”.

Si bien se acusa al gobierno de cometer abusos masivos contra los derechos humanos durante su represión, Bukele sigue siendo muy popular en El Salvador porque las tasas de homicidio cayeron drásticamente después de las detenciones. La nación centroamericana pasó de ser uno de los países más peligrosos del mundo a tener la tasa de homicidios más baja de la región.

Bukele aprovechó esa popularidad hasta la reelección en febrero, a pesar de que la



Hombres detenidos bajo estado de emergencia son transportados a un centro de detención en un camión de carga, en Soyapango, El Salvador, el viernes 7 de octubre de 2022.

constitución del país prohíbe segundos mandatos presidenciales.

El gobierno ya ha tenido que liberar a 7,000 personas por falta de pruebas y en enero el vicepresidente de El Salvador dijo a Associated Press que el gobierno había

“cometido errores” en sus arrestos.

El grupo de derechos estima que de las personas arrestadas en los dos años del régimen de excepción, el 35% son inocentes y afirma que el 94% de los fallecidos no tenían afiliación a ninguna pandilla.

“La mayoría eran trabajadores, como comerciantes informales, taxistas y/o trabajadores del transporte informal, agricultores, pescadores, pastores y predicadores evangélicos, empleados municipales y un sindicalista”, afirma el informe.

Ayuda Legal Humanitaria también exigió al gobierno de El Salvador que investigue los “homicidios” ocurridos en las cárceles y “todas las desapariciones forzadas de detenidos”.

LATIN AMERICA

At least 241 people have died in El Salvador’s prisons during the ‘war on gangs,’ rights group says

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP)

At least 241 people have died in El Salvador prisons since the start of President Nayib Bukele’s “war on gangs” two years ago, according to the organization Humanitarian Legal Relief.

Ingrid Escobar, director of the rights organization, said they received 500 reports of deaths in state custody, but they have confirmed about half, including two minors. Last year, the organization documented 126 deaths, just half of the number they documented this year.

In March 2022, Bukele announced a “state of exception,” waiving many constitutional rights to combat the gangs that have terrorized the Central American nation.

Since then, El Salvador has arrested 80,000 people – more than 1% of the country’s population – throwing them into prison, often with little evidence of

their ties to gangs and almost no access to due process. The prisons have been likened to torture chambers, with horrifying conditions.

According to the NGO report, “of these deaths, 44% died of violent death, serious torture, 29% due to lack of medical attention.”

While the government is accused of committing mass human rights abuses in their crackdown, Bukele remains highly popular in El Salvador because the homicide rates sharply dipped following the detentions. The Central American nation went from being one of the most dangerous countries in the world to having the lowest homicide rate in the region.

Bukele rode that popularity into re-election in February, despite the country’s



Men detained under a state of emergency are transported to a detention center in a cargo truck, in Soyapango, El Salvador, on Friday, October 7, 2022.

constitution prohibiting second terms for presidents.

The government has already had to release 7,000 people due to lack of evidence and El Salvador’s vice president in January told the Associated Press the gov-

ernment had “made mistakes” in their arrests.

The rights group estimates that of the people arrested in the two years of the exception regime, 35% are innocent and affirms that 94% of the deceased had no gang affiliation.

“The majority were working people such as informal traders, cab drivers and/or informal transport workers, farmers, fishermen, evangelical pastors and preachers, municipal employees and one trade unionist,” the report states.

Humanitarian Legal Relief also demanded El Salvador’s government investigate “homicides” that have occurred in prisons and “all the forced disappearances of detainees.”