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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-57071

Title: Democratic representation and autocratization in El Salvador,

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓,		
Techn. Quality		✓,		
Clarity	✓,			
Significance	✓,			

Reviewer Name: Abdul Haseeb Mir

Detailed Reviewer's Report

The article titled "Democratic Representation and Autocratization in El Salvador" offers a critical interdisciplinary analysis of the shifting political landscape in El Salvador during the 21st century. By bridging political science and constitutional law, the author examines the increasingly visible tension between formal democratic mechanisms and a substantive drift toward autocratization. The central thesis posits a "paradox of legitimacy," where high levels of popular support for the executive branch serve as the foundation for the systematic dismantling of institutional checks and balances. This narrative of "competitive autocratization" is framed not as a sudden coup, but as a gradual reconfiguration of the state that maintains the procedural appearance of democracy while eroding its democratic essence.

One of the manuscript's primary strengths is its nuanced exploration of the "Executive-led" transformation of the Salvadoran state. The author effectively argues that the current political moment is characterized by a high degree of "popular legitimacy" that has allowed for the concentration of power without the traditional resistance usually seen in authoritarian transitions. The analysis of how periodic elections and political parties—once the bedrock of the post-civil war democratic transition—are being repurposed to facilitate executive dominance is particularly compelling. The author correctly identifies this as a regional challenge, suggesting that El Salvador serves as a bellwether for the quality of democracy and the rule of law across Latin America.

The manuscript is also successful in its application of constitutional law to political reality. The discussion regarding the "erosion of constitutional counterweights" provides a clear legal roadmap of how judicial independence and legislative oversight have been compromised. By focusing on the 21st-

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century evolution, the author provides a necessary historical arc that connects the failures of the traditional bipartisan system (ARENA and FMLN) to the rise of the current populist movement. This context is essential for understanding why the Salvadoran electorate has seemingly traded institutional stability for a more centralized and decisive form of governance.

However, the peer review reveals several areas where the manuscript could be strengthened for academic publication. While the article is strong on theoretical framing and descriptive analysis, it would benefit from a more robust engagement with primary data or specific case studies of recent legislative or judicial decisions. For example, a detailed examination of the removal of the magistrates of the Constitutional Chamber or the Attorney General in 2021 would provide concrete empirical evidence of the "autocratization" process discussed in the abstract. Without these specific touchstones, the argument remains somewhat abstract and risks being perceived as a purely ideological critique.

Furthermore, the "interdisciplinary approach" promised in the abstract could be more integrated. While the paper mentions both law and political science, the two fields often feel like parallel tracks rather than a synthesized analysis. The author could deepen the work by exploring how specific constitutional "reforms" or interpretations are used as political tools to redefine "representation." For instance, how does the current administration redefine the concept of the "sovereign will" of the people to justify the marginalization of minority political voices? Addressing this would bridge the gap between legal theory and political practice more effectively.

A significant scholarly concern is the balance of the narrative. To achieve a comprehensive analysis, the author should consider addressing the socio-economic factors that have driven the high legitimacy of the Executive. While the paper focuses on the "erosion of democracy," it would be more analytically complete if it also evaluated the "performance-based legitimacy" derived from security policies or economic measures. Understanding *why* a population supports a process of autocratization is as crucial as describing the process itself. This would prevent the manuscript from appearing as a one-sided normative defense of liberal democracy and instead present it as a complex sociological and political inquiry.

The language of the manuscript is sophisticated and appropriate for an academic journal, and the "paradox of procedural appearance" is a strong conceptual hook. However, the author should ensure that the bibliography includes more recent quantitative data from sources like the Latinobarómetro or V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) to bolster the claims regarding the decline of democratic quality. Such data would provide an objective benchmark for the "competitive autocratization" the author describes.

In conclusion, "Democratic Representation and Autocratization in El Salvador" is a timely and insightful contribution to the study of contemporary Latin American politics. It captures the precarious balance between populism and institutionalism and raises vital questions about the future of the Rule of Law in

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the region. With revisions aimed at increasing empirical specificity and balancing the analysis of legitimacy, this article has the potential to become a significant reference for scholars monitoring the global trend of democratic backsliding.

Recommendations:

- Incorporate specific empirical case studies, such as the 2021 judicial removals or recent changes to electoral laws, to provide concrete evidence of institutional debilitation.
- Utilize quantitative data from international democracy indices (e.g., V-Dem, Economist Intelligence Unit) to provide an objective, comparative measure of El Salvador's democratic trajectory.
- Deepen the analysis of the "crisis of the traditional party system" to explain the socio-political vacuum that facilitated the current concentration of power.
- Ensure the interdisciplinary link between constitutional law and political science is more explicitly synthesized in the "Result and Discussion" section.
- Address the role of digital communication and social media in maintaining "popular legitimacy" and shaping the narrative of representation.
- Balance the critique of autocratization with an analysis of the specific state successes (e.g., in security or public works) that maintain high levels of executive approval despite institutional erosion.

Recommendation: Recommend for publication with minor revision.