

THE END OF DEMOCRACY IN FIVE ACTS

CURATED BY KEITH MILLER
AND LAUREN WALSH



SAMSON OTIENO | JIT CHATTOPADHYAY | HANNAH REYES
MORALES | FRED RAMOS | AGATA SZYMANSKA-MEDINA

SEPTEMBER 9 – OCTOBER 14, 2024

THE END OF DEMOCRACY

IN FIVE ACTS

Almost a quarter of the way through the twenty-first century, the most optimistic promises heralded by the twentieth century seem to be at an inflection point. Among them is electoral democracy as a sign of greater freedom, representation, and transparency. A number of countries have ceded ground to authoritarian right-wing forces not through violence or corruption, but instead through constitutionally sound and electorally justified paths. While this is not a new phenomenon, it seems to have specific contemporary attributes such as the use of new modes of propaganda and publicity, enhanced by social media's ability to create "alternate truths," massive online armies to foster a sense of destabilization in citizens, and rippling angry nationalistic populism.

In their path to power, some have focused on a slow erosion of trust in traditional electoral means. Others have utilized the judiciary, slowly confirming judges whose adherence to what has been understood as democratic principles is slight at best. Once in power, such leaders modify constitutions, expand their authority, and persecute enemies, both domestic and foreign.

The End of Democracy in Five Acts is a look at some of the facts and images on the ground in five countries (Kenya, Poland, El Salvador, the Philippines, and India), across four continents. Each body of work is by one observer and doesn't promise a complete telling of what has happened in these countries, but instead offers a particular vantage point into some of the specifics unique to that place. To be aware that threats against democracy are not isolated to a given country or region can be empowering. The goal with this exhibition is to make palpable the reality that has been transformed under contemporary conditions. Leaving these harmful forms of politics unaddressed seems only to ensure the success of oppressive, antidemocratic, and regressive regimes.

– Keith Miller and Lauren Walsh

PHILIPPINES: HANNAH REYES MORALES



Students review their online-school homework at home as Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte delivers a speech on television.

Hannah Reyes Morales is a Filipina photographer who focuses on bringing historical memory and current events home, by looking at how they shape daily life. Her long-term project *Living Lullabies* explores the role of lullabies in creating safer spaces for children and caregivers in challenging environments globally.

Her work has been published in *The New York Times*, *National Geographic Magazine*, and the *Washington Post*, among others. She is the recipient of the Tim Hetherington Visionary Award and the ICP Infinity Award for Documentary Practice and Visual Journalism, and was named a cultural leader by the World Economic Forum ASEAN. She was commissioned as the Nobel Peace Prize photographer in 2021. She is the recipient of a 2023 Pictures of the Year International Award, and a 2023 World Press Photo Award.

Hannah is currently focusing on longer term projects. She is a co-founder of Emerging Islands, a grassroots program connecting artists with scientists and coastal communities to tell island stories through art. She is a National Geographic explorer and a 2022-2023 fellow at Columbia University's Institute for Ideas and Imagination in Paris.

IN PHILIPPINES, DEMOCRACY DIES IN OTHER WAYS

By: Sheila S. Coronel

There are no armored vehicles rolling down Manila's streets today. No army colonels seizing TV stations and declaring a coup. No dictators haranguing crowds from balconies. Not anymore.

Instead, in my country, democracy dies in other ways, in other spaces.

In an empty courtroom, for example, where a judge convicts a journalist of criminal libel for an article she did not write, edit, or assign. Irony was not there when the judge quoted Nelson Mandela in her verdict, "To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

Or in a classroom where students are taught a whitewashed version of history devoid of any mention of torture, plunder, and long-deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos's other crimes.

And in a dark alley, where a 17-year-old begs for his life as two plainclothes policemen, accusing him of drug dealing, pump two bullets into his head. The police were heeding then-President Rodrigo Duterte's call to "Kill all the drug lords!"

Over forty years earlier, in September 1972, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and ruled by decree. We knew democracy had died because the army padlocked the newspapers and broadcast stations and jailed thousands of dissidents, journalists, and opposition politicians. Congress had been shuttered and gatherings of more than three people banned.

No such drama today. Just a slow, steady accumulation of transgressions by elected autocrats. If you listen hard, you may hear the drip, drip, drip of seemingly minor and mundane acts that erode democratic norms. Otherwise, there is only the silence of corrupt courts, cowardly

congresses, and self-censoring publishers. No one talks about the everyday compromises made by citizens that appease—and normalize— autocratic power: Those who told on their drug-using neighbors, for example, knowing they would be put on a police hit list or those who spread the autocrats' lies on Facebook while averting their eyes from the corruption and abuse.

When Marcos declared martial law, he borrowed from the fascist playbook: Point to a threat and exaggerate it so people believe their safety and security are at stake. Many applauded Marcos when he said only he stood in the way of perdition. Only he could “save the Republic“ from communists and from becoming another Vietnam. Only he could reform a society gone bad.

The slogan of the martial law years was “Sa ikauunlad ng bayan, disiplina ang kailangan.” There can be no progress without discipline. The country’s problem wasn’t poverty, injustice, or inequality, it was an undisciplined people.

Marcos ruled from a barricaded palace for 14 years during which he looted the country and trampled on rights. Finally, in 1986, angry Filipinos gathered on the streets of Manila demanding his ouster. Abandoned by his people, his army, and the United States, which had long been his protector, he and his family fled the country. They boarded two U.S. Air Force helicopters crammed with cash, jewelry, gold bars, and a statue of First Lady Imelda’s patron, the Santo Niño, an infant Jesus adorned with a diamond necklace and a cape sewn with gold thread.

In 1989, Marcos died in exile in Honolulu, and in 1991, his family was allowed back to the Philippines so they could face trial. The new government alleged they had stolen as much as \$10 billion.

Back from exile, Imelda and her two children, Ferdinand Jr. and Imee, ran for public office, winning congressional seats and governorships on their home turf. Deploying their still-considerable resources and influence, they rebuilt their political machine from the ground up, taking advantage

of democratic processes and institutions to assume power, first at the local and later, national, level. On social media, cinema, and popular entertainment, they recast the Marcos years as the country's Golden Age.

In 2016, Rodrigo Duterte, a Marcos fan, was elected president, and soon after allowed the dictator's burial, with military honors, in the national heroes' cemetery. Like Marcos, Duterte declared himself the slayer of the oligarchy and the savior of the poor. In rallies and on social media, he stoked the flames of resentment against effete elites and the corrupt and dysfunctional democracy that displaced dictatorship. He fanned the people's fear of drugs and crime. Crowds cheered him on when he said the fish in Manila Bay would grow fat from feeding on the corpses of criminals.

Duterte was Marcos's heir. He tapped into the shadow policing system that had long carried out the extrajudicial executions of criminals, insurgents, and other threats to the social order. He cranked up the rusty killing machine of a former police state—its death squads, surveillance networks, clandestine operators—and then unleashed it with a force and velocity that left many reeling with shock.

By the time his presidency ended in 2022, the official number of drug war dead was 6,000. Human rights groups say the real number could be as high as 30,000. This carnage, F. Sionil José, a leading Filipino literary figure, said, was “Mr. Duterte's assault on the rotten status quo.”

Banned by the constitution from seeking a second term, Duterte backed the candidacy of his daughter Sara. She ran for vice president alongside the dictator's son. Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said his family were blameless victims of liberal elites that conspired to oust them from power. The pair ran on a platform of unity, telling voters their critics had divided the country by dwelling on the supposed sins of their fathers.

In 2022, fifty years after his father had declared martial law, Ferdinand Jr. took his oath as president in front of

the old Congress building where Marcos Sr. had begun his political career and where his parents had met for the first time. He was sworn into office on the same Bible his father had held during his 1965 inauguration. The hymn of Marcos Sr.'s "New Society" provided the musical backdrop for the ceremony.

It was a Second Marcos Coming, seen by supporters as the fair prince returning to take back the throne that had been unjustly seized from his father. The inauguration was an homage to the Marcos myth and to the past.

Democracy in the Philippines was introduced by American colonizers, who invaded the country in 1898 and ruled it for 50 years. Filipinos have since lived with this contradiction: Democracy was a colonial imposition, both distrusted and desired. The enemies of democracy intuit this and are experts at manipulating popular disaffection with democracy's many flaws. They know that the more democracy and society are in disrepair, the greater the allure of absolute and unaccountable power.

Like bears in winter, they await the autocrats' spring. No tanks or troops needed. Just money, votes, false promises, and lies. The trouble with democracy is you only miss it when it's long dead and gone.

Sheila Coronel is director of the Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism at Columbia University in New York. She is a co-founder of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism and served as its executive director for many years. Coronel is the author and editor of more than a dozen books, including "Coups, Cults & Cannibals", "The Rulemakers-How the Wealthy and Well-Born Dominate Congress", and "Pork and Other Perks: Corruption and Governance in the Philippines". She has received numerous awards for her work, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism in 2003.



A Filipino boy uses his mobile phone in one of the few spots in his low-income community where he can access Wi-Fi through a vending machine called piso net, which allows people to insert one-peso coins for a few minutes of internet access.



Fact checkers from the Vera Files team — a Facebook fact-checking partner — are seen in their office in Manila. “Lies travel faster than the truth,” says Chin Samson (left), and the team see themselves as part of the front line against disinformation.



Blood from a gunshot victim is seen on the street in Metro Manila, Philippines on Monday, September 5, 2016. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s bloody war on drugs has claimed thousands of lives since he took office.



A Filipino child looks on as police tape off sections of her neighbor's house in Metro Manila, Philippines after a drug-related killing in the neighbor's bathroom on Wednesday, September 7, 2016. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has been widely criticized by international human rights organizations for his "war on drugs," which has taken thousands of lives since he took office. Duterte's approval ratings remain strong among Filipinos, however, especially among the poor and working classes.



An internet vending machine is seen in a community in Manila, where low-income Filipinos can access a few minutes of internet for one peso.



A store selling refurbished gadgets is seen in Manila, Philippines.



A view from the ABS-CBN control room. ABS-CBN is the largest broadcast network in the Philippines and one of the few free sources of news for Filipinos. Under the Duterte administration, ABS-CBN's broadcast was shut down, halting its free television and radio programs, forcing the network to lay off employees, and moving many of their programs online. Duterte has accused the network of their biased reporting, and its shutdown was a big blow to the Philippines' free press.



A monument dedicated to the Katipunan ("assembly" in Tagalog), the revolutionary movement that fought for independence and self-governance after three centuries of Spanish colonization.



A priest is seen broadcasting Holy Mass from Binondo Church in the Philippines. The Catholic church is among the biggest influences for how Filipinos communicate and now uses the internet to reach a wider audience.



Young girls in Manila are seen with their mobile phones during a community blackout.



A family shares a mobile device inside their home in Manila, Philippines.



News anchors from ABS-CBN News Channel are seen in the ABS-CBN newsroom. ABS-CBN is the largest broadcast network in the Philippines and one of the few free sources of news for Filipinos. Under the Duterte administration, ABS-CBN's broadcast was shut down, halting their free television and radio programs, forcing the network to lay off employees, and moving many of their programs online. Duterte has accused the network of their biased reporting, and its shutdown was a big blow to the Philippines' free press.



Electrical cables, telephone lines, and network infrastructure are seen tangled together in Manila. The Philippines has one of the slowest and most expensive internet services in the world, largely due to outdated technology and poor network infrastructure.



News anchors from ABS-CBN News Channel are seen in the ABS-CBN newsroom. ABS-CBN is the largest broadcast network in the Philippines and one of the few free sources of news for Filipinos under the Duterte administration.



A portrait of Maria Ressa, the CEO of Filipino news website Rappler. Since President Duterte took office, Rappler has investigated his extrajudicial killing campaign against drug dealers and documented the spread of government disinformation on Facebook. The Duterte administration has filed several lawsuits against Ressa, who has posted bail eight times and been arrested twice.

KENYA: SAMSON OTIENO



Protesters shout slogans during a demonstration against tax hikes as members of the parliament debate the financial bill in Nairobi, Kenya on June 19, 2024. By Samson Otieno

Samson Otieno is a freelance photojournalist and documentary photographer based in Nairobi, Kenya. He was born and raised in Kibera, where he documents the everyday life of ordinary people. His work focuses on daily life, environmental, cultural, political, and socio-economic activities of day-to-day life. Otieno's involvement in the selection panel for the African Resilience in the Wake of a Pandemic campaign demonstrates his recognition within the photography community and his commitment to using his talent to address pressing issues and collaborating with organizations like Bobby Pall Photography and the MasterCard Foundation during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. His work has been published in international media outlets such as the *Washington Post*, *Der Spiegel*, *Al Jazeera*, *the Washington Times*, and the *Guardian*. He is a frequent contributor with the Associated Press. He was also chosen as one of 21 award-winning international photographers to exhibit at the Apfelweingalerie in Frankfurt, Germany.

DEMOCRATIC DECLINE IN KENYA AND PROSPECTS FOR AN AFRICAN DEMOCRACY

By: Fredrick Ogenga

For several years, Kenya has been considered an island of peace and a beacon of democracy in the turbulent Horn of Africa region. It seems it has not lost this position just yet, judging from its recent admission by the US into a non-NATO ally State, a first for a Sub-Saharan African country. But since 2007, the country has witnessed a series of electoral challenges animated by post-election violence following disputed elections. So what is the current democratic profile of Kenya?

In 2007, hundreds lost their lives and thousands of people, mainly women and children, were displaced by electoral violence. Senior politicians were indicted at the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. In the elections of 2022, former Vice President William Ruto was elected president. His election was opposed by his former boss, Uhuru Kenyatta who supported the opposition leader, Raila Odinga. Odinga has competed for the presidency unsuccessfully four times, each time accusing the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) of stealing his victory. These accusations led to deadly protests and violence in each electoral cycle.

The 2007-2008 electoral violence brought about a national reconciliation process mediated by the then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan. This process resulted in reforms that led to the promulgation of the 2010 constitution, and this has remained Kenya's only hope amidst signs of a steady backsliding of democracy. However, the constitution alone means nothing if its dictates are not adhered to, thus transforming subjective experiences of the citizens in terms of governance, ethnic inclusivity, opportunities for all, civic participation, and economic prosperity.

The democratic decline in Kenya has been seen in the documented lack of trust in virtually all public institutions, especially the judiciary, the legislature, and the executive branches, and in state agencies such as the national police, the IEBC, the Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission, and, most recently, in the church.

The IEBC has been accused of conducting opaque elections, which are later sanitized by the Judiciary and protected by a brutal police force. The Kenya National Commission for Human Rights has been vocal about police brutality, kidnappings, and extrajudicial killings, especially around electoral cycles.

Further, the growing number of unemployed youth has often been regarded as a social time bomb. This exploded recently through the protests in opposition to Finance Bill 2024. The protesters, popularly referred to as Gen Zs, demanded a rejection of the bill, job creation, and government accountability. The democratic decline has also been evidenced through corruption and malgovernance, unprofessional police service, rising public debt, and voter apathy. Democratic deterioration in Africa broadly has been manifest through military takeovers. Some civilians, in fact, were excited at the prospect of such a takeover during the recent deployment of Kenya Defense Forces in the streets of Nairobi. This response speaks to Gen Zs desire for change, no matter the means to the end.

Should Kenya, like many other African countries, strive for democracy in Africa or seek African democracy? Democracy in Africa implies the imported application of a Western version of democracy while African democracy means the organic adaptation of democracy to suit the Kenyan context. The question of whether Kenya needs African democracy or democracy in Africa leads to two different prospects. It seems Kenya has been

experimenting with both possibilities, resulting in mixed democratic prospects for the country. The aspiration to apply Western-style democracy in Africa has largely betrayed the hopes for an African democracy and is now affecting Kenya's democratic prospects. An approach that attempts to import a version of Western democracy without regard for the nuances of Kenya will not succeed. The assumption has often been that democracy largely creates the conditions that lead to economic development. However, Western-style democracy as applied in Africa has been hijacked by local and international actors who have neocolonial interests that have left African economies in shambles.

Fredrick Ogenga is an Associate Professor of Media and Security Studies and Director of, the Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security both at Rongo University Kenya. Ogenga is also the CEO of The Peacemaker Corps Foundation Kenya.



Protesters shout slogans during a demonstration against tax hikes as members of the parliament debate the financial bill in Nairobi, Kenya on June 19, 2024.



Kenya Kwanza political alliance supporters celebrate after the supreme court confirms Deputy President William Ruto as the duly elected President of Kenya in a judgment over six petitions on September 5, 2022.



An Electoral Commission official proceeds to count votes after the closing of the polls during Kenya's general election at Olympic Primary School in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya, on August 9, 2022.



Two women walk past a portrait of Kenya's opposition leader, Raila Odinga of the Azimio la Umoja–One Kenya Alliance, wearing a military uniform, on March 21, 2022. Kenyans went to the polls on Tuesday, August 9, 2022.



Kenya Kwanza political alliance supporters celebrate after the Supreme Court confirms Deputy President William Ruto as the duly elected President of Kenya in a judgment over six petitions on September 5, 2022.



A group of voters queue early in the morning at a polling station at Old Kibera Primary School in the informal settlement of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya while waiting to cast their vote during Kenya's general election on August 9, 2022.



Presiding officers at a polling station wait with ballot boxes following Kenya's general election to return all electoral material to the tallying center in Kibera on August 9, 2022.



A woman runs as she passes Kenyan police troops in Kibera, Nairobi on May 2, 2023. Anti-government protesters are demonstrating in a number of Kenyan cities against newly imposed taxes and the cost of living.



Voters look for their names on the voters' roll at a polling station in the informal settlement of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya on August 9, 2022 during Kenya's general election.



Kenyan police officers wearing riot gear stand on the side of the road near Bomas in Nairobi on August 15, 2022 as Kenya waits for the results of the general election in Nairobi, Kenya.



Raila Odinga and his wife, Ida Odinga, dance during their final electoral campaign rally at Kasarani Stadium in Nairobi, Kenya on August 6, 2022. Kenyans went to the polls the following Tuesday, August 9, 2022.



Opposition supporters throw stones toward Kenyan police officers surrounding a car they use as a barricade during clashes over the high cost of living in Nairobi, Kenya on March 27, 2023.



A protestor carries a burning tire to block the road in the Kibera neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya on Wednesday, July 12, 2023. Anti-government protesters are demonstrating in a number of Kenyan cities against newly imposed taxes and the cost of living.



Protesters in the Kibera neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya carry a placard written in Swahili that reads, “Ruto, what is wrong with your thinking, we are fed up,” referring to Kenya’s President William Ruto on Wednesday, July 12, 2023. Anti-government protesters are demonstrating in a number of Kenyan cities against newly imposed taxes and the cost of living.



Kenya’s presidential candidate Raila Odinga talks to his supporters after casting his vote at Old Kibera Primary School in Nairobi, Kenya on August 9, 2022, the day Kenyans went to the polls for their general election.

INDIA: JIT CHATTOPADHYAY



A protester drags the shield of police personnel as she is arrested during a protest rally against the CAA (Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019). March 1, 2020, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Jit Chattopadhyay is a passionate freelance photojournalist, born and raised in Kolkata, India, known for his compelling storytelling through the lens. He specializes in documenting socio-political, socio-economic, and environmental crises with honesty and depth.

He is currently focusing on the aftermath of frequent cyclones ravaging coastal India, a consequence of climate change intertwining with the harrowing reality of human trafficking. Jit's work resonates internationally, and his collaborations with Vice World News, NBC, Barron's Magazine, The New Humanitarian, and others have earned him recognition. His works are also published by various platforms like BBC, The Guardian, CNN, Daily Mirror UK, Forbes, among others.

NARENDRA MODI AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Narendra Modi did not stage a coup. He was lofted into power a decade ago in a free election. Once in office, he exhibited a disciplined outward commitment to the norms of democracy while vandalizing its vital organs. From the armed forces, which had always remained insulated from politics, to the central bank, whose independence was deemed sacrosanct by successive governments; from the Election Commission, which oversaw largely free and fair elections for six decades, to the network of public universities where young Indians from differing backgrounds mobilized against Hindu nationalism; and from the judiciary, which acted as the guardian of the Constitution and once likened Modi to Nero, to the free press that numbered among the world's most vibrant—Modi succeeded in eroding the autonomy of virtually every institution that could act as a check on his authority or amplify his abuse of it. Modi's success is a reminder that institutions are not self-animating instruments. How they function is contingent upon those who people them.

In the past decade, during which Modi won two successive national elections with an absolute majority in parliament, India has become a warning to other established democracies of the perils of succumbing to strongmen. Having promised to deliver 20 million jobs a year, Modi presided over a crisis of joblessness that has devoured the prospects of a generation of young Indians. Having pledged to lead an inclusive government, he stamped on India's secular ethos and sanctified malevolent Hindu supremacism. Having vowed to be a champion of ordinary Indians, he oversaw the creation of an oligarchy in which a handful of plutocrats favored by the prime minister control most of the economy. Calling himself a democrat, he erected a

cult of personality unrivaled in the democratic world and set loose state agencies on his opponents and critics. India's opposition, operating on an uneven playing field, appeared incapable of putting up resistance. But just as India seemed to be racing to a point of no return, the Indian electorate delivered a near-fatal political blow to the prime minister in the national elections that concluded on June 1, 2024. Modi had launched the election campaign by asserting that he was going to return with a supermajority, portrayed his critics as stooges of an international conspiracy, and deployed rhetoric steeped in anti-Muslim hysteria. He mythologised himself as India's savior, only to become a captive of his own conceit. By the end of the contest, staggered over six scalding weeks, Modi showed signs of having lost touch with reality. He claimed to be a divine agent. "When my mother was alive, I used to believe that I was born biologically," he told a worshipful journalist. "After she passed away, upon reflecting on all my experiences, I was convinced that God has sent me."

Indian voters felt otherwise, and the judgment they delivered left his party nearly two dozen seats short of a majority. Modi, suddenly dependent on coalition partners who do not share his ideological worldview, must moderate his most extreme impulses to remain in power. The result, cast as an unexpected shock in the international press, was the culmination of a citizenly backlash that had begun soon after Modi's re-election in 2019, when the prime minister introduced, in the form of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, legislation which for the first time made religion a determinant of Indian citizenship. Protests against the CAA spread through India. Initially led by Muslims, they quickly drew people of other faiths. The coronavirus pandemic offered only a temporary reprieve to the government. The agitation against the citizenship law gave way to an even larger uprising against Modi's attempt to overhaul India's

agricultural sector without consulting the country's farming communities. Hundreds of millions of Indians protested in solidarity with the farmers, forcing Modi to repeal legislation. Traveling through half a dozen Indian states in the months before the elections, I met voters who, having once backed Modi, were now determined to punish him. "He thinks he is god," a middle-aged woman in Uttar Pradesh, the bastion of Hindu nationalism, said of Modi. "We have a weapon that will bring him back to the earth: the vote."



A woman sits in a field full of flags that were being used for election campaigns. March 30, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India

Kapil Komireddi is an essayist, author, and journalist. His first book, *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India* was published in 2020. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Economist*, the *Indian Express*, the *Guardian*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Daily Mail*, *TIME*, and *Foreign Policy*, among many others. Komireddi is the international editor of *Modern Review*, a forthcoming global monthly magazine, and he appears on international media, including ABC, CBC, BBC and CNN, to discuss international affairs.



A Muslim boy holds a placard that reads “Tumhari laathi se tez hamari awaz hai #Democracy” (“Our voice is louder than your stick #Democracy”) during a protest rally against torture by police in New Delhi. February 25, 2020, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.



A Sikh child chants slogans while sitting on the bonnet of a Jeep during the demonstration staged by Samyukt Kisan Morcha against the Indian government’s newly imposed farm laws. March 12, 2021, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.



A Muslim woman walks past a satirical political mural made by the TMC (All India Trinamool Congress Party) prior to the assembly polls in West Bengal. Members of different political parties of West Bengal painted the walls of the streets in Kolkata with political symbols and cartoons prior to the Assembly elections. March 22, 2021, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.



RAF (Rapid Action Force) personnel pass by a house while patrolling sensitive areas during the assembly election. RAF personnel are deployed by the central government of India to ensure peace during elections. March 30, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.



BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) supporters chant Jai Shree Ram slogans and make gestures during the last election campaign rally staged by BJP supporters prior to West Bengal's assembly election. March 30, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.



Central police force personnel start a baton charge toward BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) supporters during the last election campaign rally staged by the BJP prior to West Bengal's assembly election. March 30, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.



Famous Indian actor and BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) activist Mithun Chakraborty stands on top of a truck that's part of a convoy and makes a victory gesture during the last election campaign rally staged by BJP supporters prior to the West Bengal's assembly elections. March 30, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.



Election officials carry ballot boxes to polling booths prior to West Bengal's Assembly elections. March 30, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.



A polling agent carrying a ballot box passes by Central Force personnel inside a polling booth prior to the assembly election. March 30, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.



A woman with her child shows her inked finger after casting her vote in East Midnapore. Voters of Nandigram cast their votes during the second phase of West Bengal's Assembly elections amid the deployment of heavily armed Central Forces meant to make the elections peaceful. April 1, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.



An armed Central Force officer stands at the entry gate of a polling station at a school in East Midnapore. Voters of Nandigram cast their votes during the second phase of West Bengal's Assembly elections amid the deployment of heavily armed Central Forces personnel. April 1, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.



TMC (All India Trinamool Congress) members chant slogans at the Central police force during clashes that broke out after TMC leaders in the Boyal area of Nandigram, West Bengal alleged that BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) members captured the polling station during the second phase of West Bengal's Assembly election. However, BJP members denied the allegations. April 1, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.

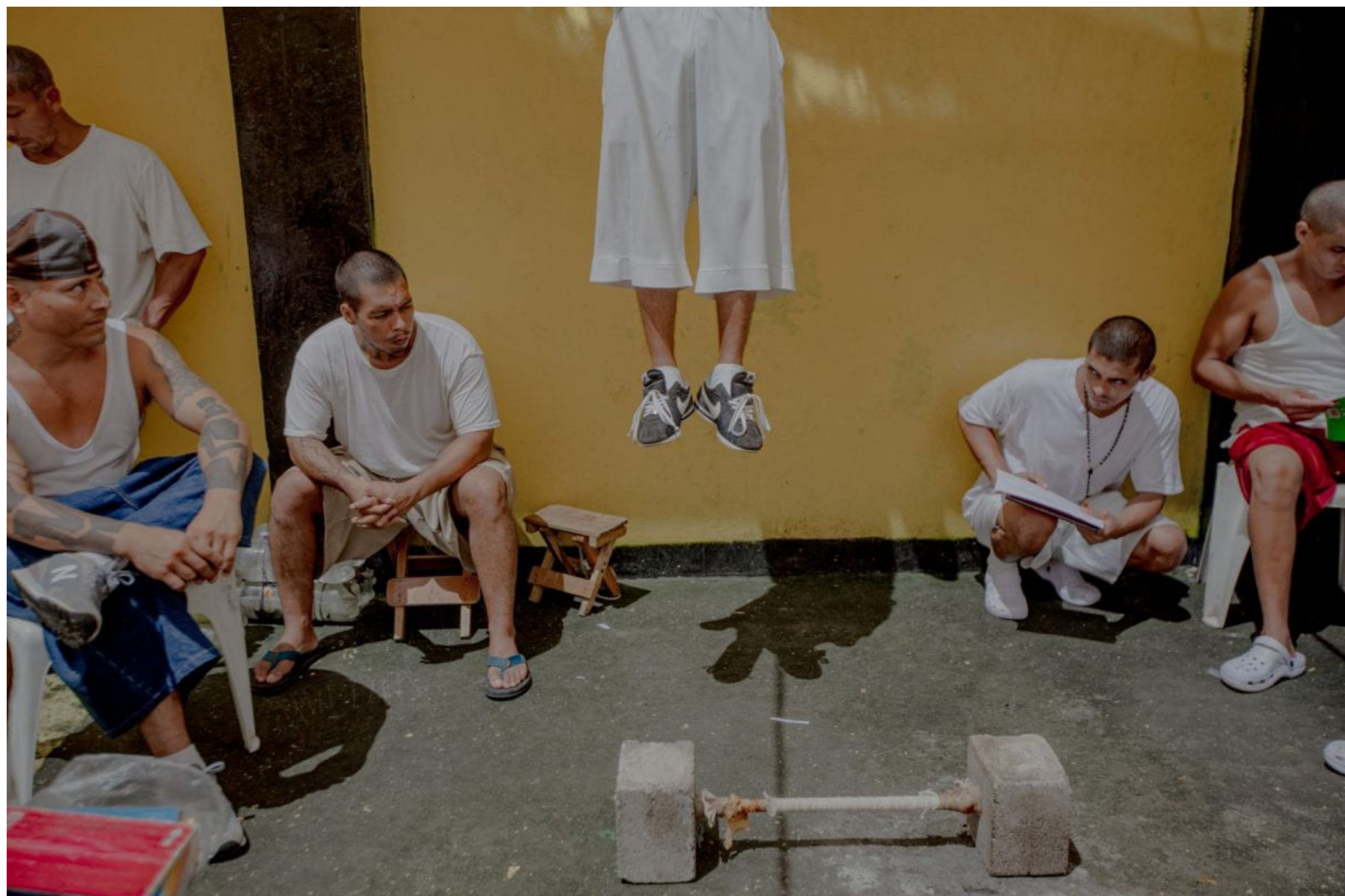


Police officers disperse a crowd of TMC (All India Trinamool Congress) members during clashes that broke out after TMC leaders in the Boyal area of Nandigram, West Bengal alleged that BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) members captured the polling station during the second phase of West Bengal's assembly election. However, BJP members denied the allegations. April 1, 2021, Nandigram, West Bengal, India.



A Muslim boy holds a placard that reads "Tumhari laathi se tez hamari awaz hai #Democracy" ("Our voice is louder than your stick #Democracy") during a protest rally against torture by police in New Delhi. February 25, 2020, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

EL SALVADOR: FRED RAMOS



MS-13 gang members at the former prison of Chalatenango, El Salvador, on September 17, 2018. Over the past three decades, gangs have made El Salvador one of the most murderous countries in the world.

Fred Ramos is a Salvadoran photographer based in Mexico City. From 2013-2010, he worked as a staff photographer for the online newspaper El Faro, one of the most important investigative news outlets in Latin America. In 2014, he won first prize in the World Press Photo's "Daily Life" category for coverage of the thousands of disappeared people in El Salvador. Since moving to Mexico City in 2020, he has covered migration, politics and environmental conflict, among a myriad of topics. He has worked across the Americas, from Ecuador to the U.S., while continuing to regularly visit El Salvador to document the ongoing impact of President Nayib Bukele's war on gangs.

ANOTHER AUTHORITARIANISM RISES IN LATIN AMERICA

By: Óscar Martínez

El Salvador has stopped pursuing its long-awaited democracy. It is, for the moment, a country that stopped believing in due process, in the division of powers; a country that, once again, opts for one man and repression.

To understand this present where a single man, President Nayib Bukele, has all the power and has built a police state, it is necessary to remember how we got here. It's a violent story.

The 20th century left the smallest country in Central America skinned to its bones. El Salvador was coming out of an economic crisis caused by the discovery of synthetic dyes at the end of the 19th century. At that point, the indigo industry, working with natural plant-based processes, lost its value, and the country fell into an economic collapse that it tried to resolve by changing production: it opted for coffee for export. The State was reformed so that the landowners had all the power and indigenous people and peasants lived in conditions of virtual slavery. The popular revolts of the 1930s ended with massacres of thousands of indigenous people by the army and paved the beginning of the military dictatorships that would continue intermittently throughout the century.

Popular indignation grew in response to the nation's military repression, which included murders, torture, and rape. In the mountains of the country, different guerrilla groups were organized during the Cold War—fought as a proxy war in Central America—with the complicity of the Soviet Union and the fear of the United States. With the increasing repression, and after the military's assassination of Archbishop Óscar

Romero in 1980, civil war broke out. At this point, the five guerrilla organizations joined together. The United States, with the fresh wound of the triumph of the Marxist Sandinistas in Nicaragua, invested up to a million dollars a day in the Salvadoran Army, a military that had already perpetrated human rights violations.

El Salvador entered the dark night of the U.S.-backed war that lasted 12 years. After having left more than 75,000 dead and hundreds of migrants who fled to the United States, the guerrillas and the military both were convinced that it was impossible to win the war by armed means. Both sides agreed to end the conflict, and in 1992, the Peace Accords were signed. With El Salvador no longer in the eye of the world's media, the country gave birth to one of its worst lessons: the end of a war can be decreed, the beginning of peace cannot be. Peace is built. And in El Salvador that did not happen. The 1990s were a decade of extreme violence. Guerrillas and demobilized national soldiers who had no other option to survive took up the weapons with which they waged unofficial war and became criminals.

And something else happened. Something that changed everything. Between 1989 and 1994, just as Salvadorans were grappling with the end of the war, the United States injected a lethal change into the country: it deported nearly 4,000 migrants who had joined one of the many southern California street gangs, primarily La Mara Salvatrucha -13, known as MS13, and Barrio 18. These gang members, who had become experts in recruiting children, arrived in a country that had become full of orphans as a result of the more than a decade of the conflict, precisely when there were no solid institutions to care for these abandoned children. Those 4,000 deported gang members grew the gangs to more than 70,000, in just twenty years. In the two decades that followed, MS-13 went from having a presence only in southern California to their current situation, where they are in 39 other states.

El Salvador, little by little, found itself involved in another war that it did not fully understand. The two gangs, Barrio 18 and MS13, began to compete for control of territory. Extortion became their way of subsistence and in 2009, El Salvador would become the most violent country on the planet, with 70 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. That figure would be surpassed by El Salvador itself in 2015 when the national rate reached 106 per 100,000.

In the midst of this new war, the two right-wing politicians who governed between 1999 and 2009 were accused of corruption. Then the left took power from 2009 to 2019, to complete the post-war cycle and take the presidency for the first time. But those left-wing Salvadoran politicians abandoned their country and took refuge in the Nicaraguan dictatorship of Daniel Ortega to avoid accusations of corruption. They chose to fill their pockets instead of rescuing the weak democracy of El Salvador.

The population could not have been more abandoned. The left and the right had looted the country and the promised peace was anything but peaceful. Nayib Armando Bukele Ortez, a politician in his thirties, who had previously worked in his father's advertising firm and had emerged from the ranks of the left-wing party, arrived at the Mayor's Office of the capital San Salvador in 2015. From there, he built the image of himself as the redeemer of the country. He sold himself as an outsider and labeled everyone else as "los mismos de siempre"-- "the same old ones." The Salvadorans, without knowing much about this young politician, and to punish the betrayal of the post-war parties, awarded the presidency to 38-year-old Bukele in 2019.

Once president, Bukele stopped behaving democratically and articulated a unique political vision: to solve the country's problems, he suggested, I need all the power.

He mocked criticism from organizations defending democracy and the international community, and named himself on his social media networks as “the coolest dictator in the world.” Since then he has not stopped, and won’t until he achieves his dream: total power.

To maintain his popularity, he made a pact with the Salvadoran gangs. He offered prison benefits to their leaders and protection from extradition requests by the United States. The homicides decreased and Bukele, through his officials, ordered a rereading of the Constitution so that he would be allowed to be re-elected as president. That had not happened since the 1930s, when the general/dictator Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, was re-elected. This is the same person responsible for the aforementioned massacres of the indigenous people who were revolting against their miserable living conditions.

In the midst of all this, MS-13 felt betrayed by the president leading to the largest massacre of the entire postwar period, with 62 murdered in just 24 hours on the weekend of March 26, 2022.

Bukele understood that it was time to change strategy. He ordered a police state called the “regime [or state] of exception.” The streets were once again filled with soldiers. The military and police capture whomever they want, without the need for evidence. About 4% of the population would end up behind bars after two years, the highest incarceration rate in the world. Hundreds of “arrests” or abductions have occurred because the police or military detected “nervousness” in the person detained. Systematic torture of unconvicted people detained in prisons is abundant and relatives of prisoners have reported more than 260 deaths of people inside prison cells: corpses that, in many cases, have been returned to their families with lacerations on the body.

As a result, after the civil war and during the rise of gang violence, exile, torture, and extensive military dominance, which were thought to be relics of the eighties, returned a militaristic rule to El Salvador. According to polls, a majority of Salvadorans support an authoritarian regime that takes away their rights, as long as it makes the streets safe from gang violence. Of course, less in favor of Bukele's methods are those who have suffered unjust imprisonment personally or to family members, of which there are more and more.

In these photos, Fred Ramos shows the marked bodies of gang members and the idolatry of a country to its authoritarian president, as well as what the supposedly coolest dictator has tried to hide. Bukele has chosen to show perfectly filmed montages of hundreds of tattooed gang members subdued in his mega prison, the so-called Center for the Confinement of Terrorism. This is the other side, the one that the state apparatus hides: young farmers who were arrested for no reason, old women who line up in front of a detention center to find out where their sons are, entire families who shake off their fear and take to the streets to protest for their detainees. These are the effects of a fragile democracy that has been broken down, giving way to a twenty-first-century authoritarianism.

Óscar Martínez is the editor-in-chief of *El Faro* and the author and co-author of numerous books including *Los migrantes que no importan* (latest edition, Debolsillo, 2021), *Una historia de violencia* (Debate, 2017), and *Los muertos y el periodista* (Anagrama, 2021). He has been awarded the National Human Rights Prize by José Simeón Cañas University of El Salvador, the Hillman Prize in 2018, and the Premio Rey de España in 2019. In 2016, he received the Maria Moors Cabot Prize, awarded by Columbia University, and the International Press Freedom Award, given by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). He was a Gallatin Global Fellow and visiting professor at New York University, where he taught the class "Covering Violence."



Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele (center, in brown jacket) at a swearing-in ceremony for 1,400 soldiers in San Salvador in February 2020. The armed forces have gained enormous power under Bukele, who has downplayed its long history of human rights violations.

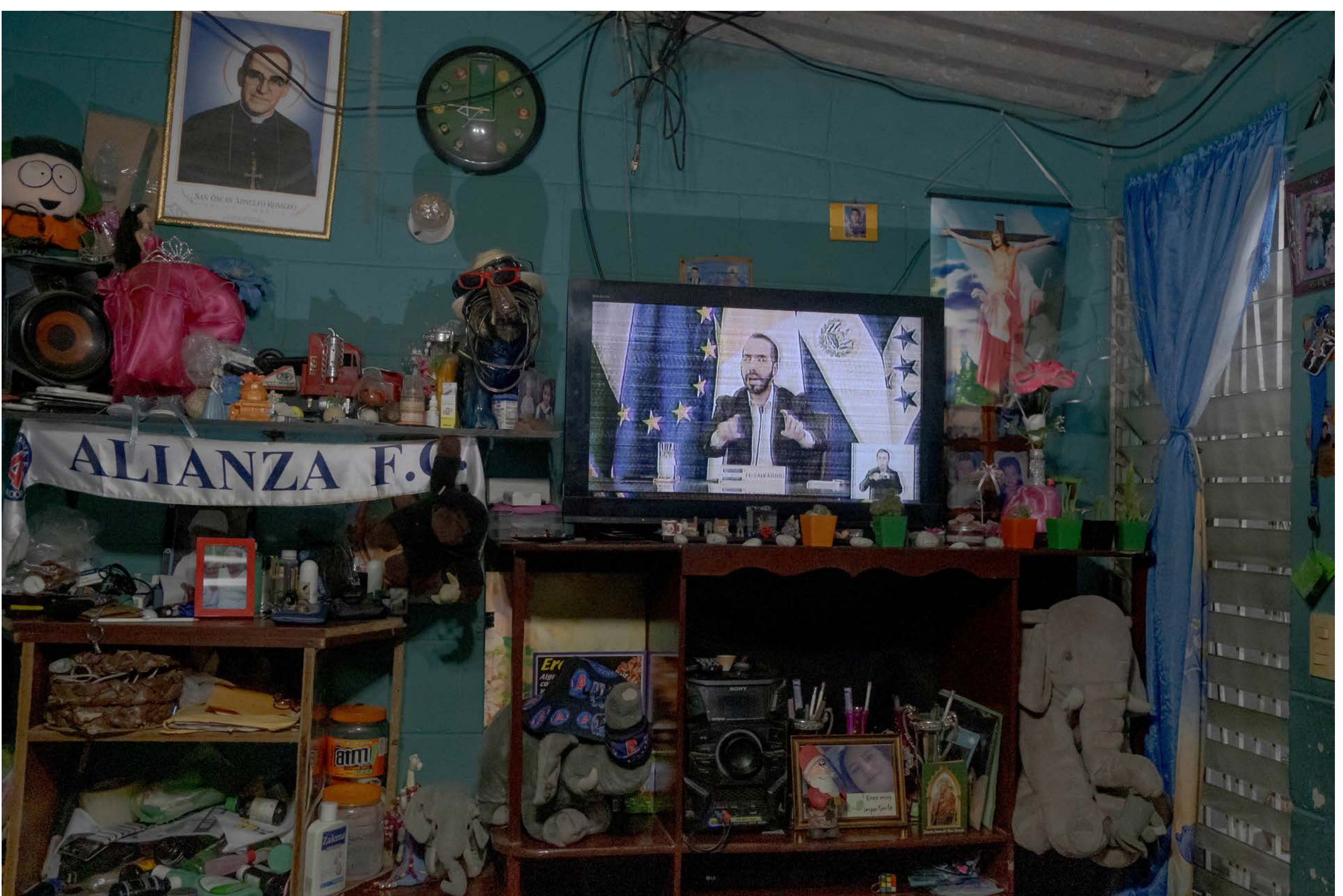
Óscar Martínez is the editor-in-chief of El Faro and the author and co-author of numerous books including Los migrantes que no importan (latest edition, Debolsillo, 2021), Una historia de violencia (Debate, 2017), and Los muertos y el periodista (Anagrama, 2021). He has been awarded the National Human Rights Prize by José Simeón Cañas University of El Salvador, the Hillman Prize in 2018, and the Premio Rey de España in 2019. In 2016, he received the Maria Moors Cabot Prize, awarded by Columbia University, and the International Press Freedom Award, given by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). He was a Gallatin Global Fellow and visiting professor at New York University, where he taught the class “Covering Violence.”



MS-13 gang members at a prison in Chalatenango, El Salvador, in September 2018. The state of emergency was triggered by the massacre of 87 people by MS-13 gang members over three days in March 2022, the bloodiest weekend since the end of El Salvador's civil war in 1992. Salvadoran journalists from the investigative news outlet El Faro reported that the killing spree stemmed from the breakdown of a secret truce between the gang and the government of President Nayib Bukele.



A woman hugs her boyfriend before police officers take him into a provisional detention center in San Salvador in June 2022. Since March 2022, 80,000 people have been arrested in El Salvador under the state of emergency declared by President Bukele. The state of emergency gives authorities broad powers to make arrests based on flimsy to no evidence, intervene in communications without a warrant, and ignore due process protections. Government officials have repeatedly claimed that all those arrested are gang members, but thousands of people have denounced what they say are arbitrary arrests of their relatives.



President Nayib Bukele is seen on television in Mariona, a neighborhood in San Salvador controlled by the MS-13 street gang, as he discusses his dismissal of the country's attorney general and Supreme Court judges on May 4, 2021. Bukele's handpicked replacement of the Supreme Court judges effectively gave him control over all three branches of government. His absolute command has allowed him to extend the state of emergency for 10 months. Today, the top police commander reports directly to Bukele, and the Bukele-controlled Supreme Court has created "specialized courts" specifically to review arrests stemming from the state of emergency. Despite these authoritarian moves, Bukele remains one of the most popular leaders in Latin America.



A protest in San Salvador to demand the release of relatives detained during the state of emergency in San Salvador on January 22, 2024. A report by Human Rights Watch revealed that, during the first five months of the state of emergency, authorities arrested 385 people daily and police were required to meet daily arrest quotas. Those officers who didn't meet the quotas were punished and sent to remote stations, according to Human Rights Watch.



President Nayib Bukele stands under a painting of Saint Oscar Romero during a news conference in San Salvador in July 2023. Bukele has decimated El Salvador's gangs at the cost of indefinitely suspending constitutional rights and undermining judicial independence.



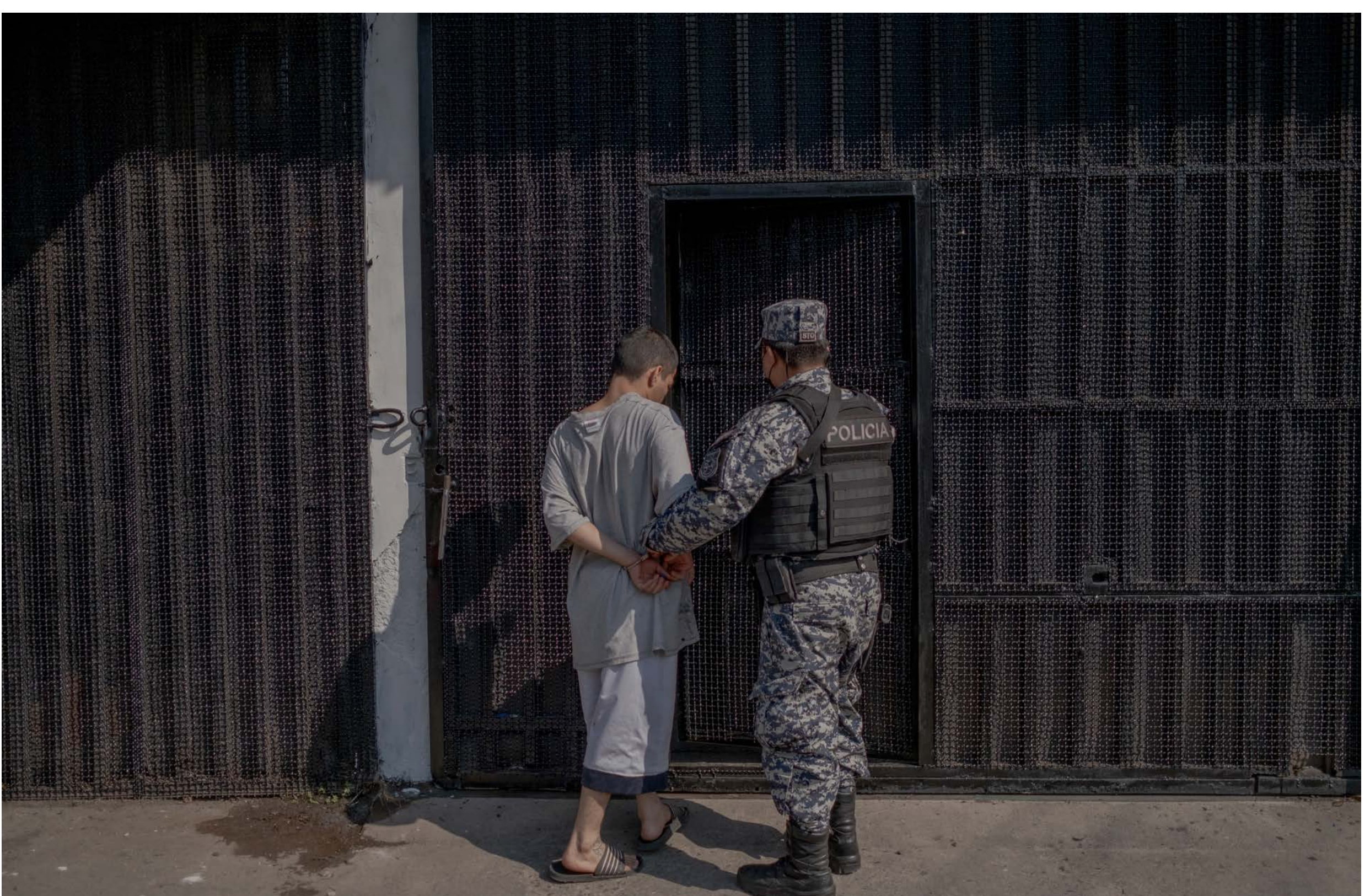
(From right to left) Cristian Machado, 18, Manuel López, 27, and Johnny Sánchez, 18, pose for a portrait in the Department of La Libertad in December 2022. Machado, López, and Sánchez were detained for eighteen days under the state of emergency. In April 2022, they were at home when a group of policemen arrived and arrested them, accusing them of being MS-13 gang members. While in prison, they said, guards forced them to remove their clothes, beat them, and subjected them to psychological torture. After 18 days, the men were released without explanation. On April 5, 2023, López was rearrested, with the police again accusing him of being a gang member. His family has not received any information about him since then.



A woman arrested under the state of emergency is taken by police patrol car to her hearing in June 2022. Homicides have plummeted under the state of emergency, but corruption, unskilled investigations, and an overwhelmed judicial system have left thousands of innocent people languishing in overcrowded prisons. One man who spent 12 months after being wrongfully accused of being a gang member said that under President Bukele, “The country is better but my life is worse.”



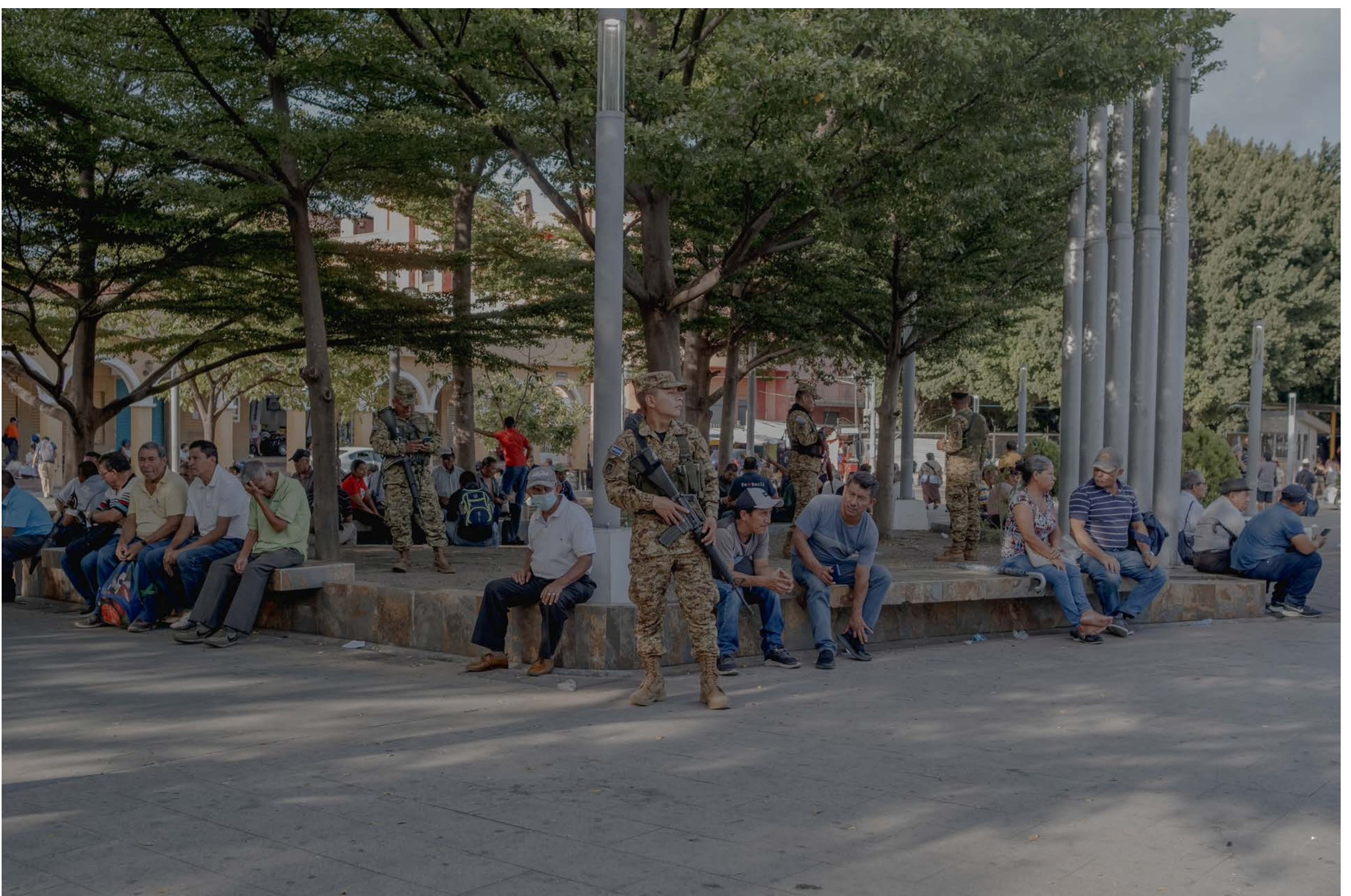
An alleged gang member blows a kiss to relatives while being transported in a bus by police to a prison during the state of emergency on April 19, 2022.



A police officer takes a man into the provisional detention center El Penalito in San Salvador on April 20, 2022. Despite widespread abuses committed by authorities during the state of emergency, most Salvadorans support the policy.



President Nayib Bukele's face adorns an apartment building in the Zacamil neighborhood of San Salvador in January 2024. The Barrio 18 street gang controlled the neighborhood for decades until its members were arrested under Bukele's state of emergency. In February 2024, Bukele won re-election by a landslide. His popularity stems from his dismantling of the country's powerful gangs, but critics say this success has come at too high of a price.



Soldiers patrol Plaza Libertad in San Salvador's historic center in July 2023. Human Rights Watch claims that, during the state of emergency, authorities have committed human rights abuses, including arbitrary mass detentions, torture, forced disappearances, and illegitimate judicial proceedings.

POLAND: AGATA SZYMANSKA – MEDINA



Agata Szymanska-Medina (b.1981) is a Polish visual artist, photojournalist, and storyteller based in Berlin, Germany. She graduated in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Hannover, Germany. Her work focuses on long-term multimedia projects that address socio-political issues.

Her work has been published in DER SPIEGEL, Stern, DIE ZEIT, ARTE TV, The Guardian, Aperture Magazine, Politiken, and SZ-Magazine. Her projects have received support from the Magnum Foundation, the European Cross-Border Grant for investigative journalism - Journalismfund. eu, the Robert Bosch Foundation, VG Bild-Kunst, and the Pulitzer Center. She received the Lotto Brandenburg Photography Art Prize in 2021, the German-Polish T. Mazowiecki Journalist Award in 2020 and was nominated for the German Reporter Award in 2020.

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN POLAND

By: Elisabeth Zefrosky

Many of the words used to describe Poland in the 21st century are superlative. Poland is the growth champion of Europe, having experienced a 30-year economic miracle, and expanding faster than any country of comparable development since communism ended in 1989. Indeed, Poland's economy was the only European economy that did not fall into recession after the 2008 global financial crisis. During the 1980s, it was the Polish anti-communist movement that brought some of the first capitulations of the communist regime in Eastern Europe. Poland has been called the poster child, and model student, of democratization in the post-Soviet bloc. To visit Warsaw or Krakow today is to experience these cities' dynamism, and to revel in a cultural renaissance that has been ongoing for the last 30 years.

Yet, in 2015, when the right-wing Law and Justice Party, headed by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, came to power, Poland became a poster child of another sort: for what was by then being called "illiberal democracy," in contrast to liberal democracy. After the Cold War, the highly influential American political scientist Francis Fukuyama declared the ideological battles had ended. This was "not just ... the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such." Illiberal democracy in Poland eschews the "liberal" part — meaning certain individual freedoms, like marriage equality or abortion rights — in favor of enforcing more traditional cultural norms, often drawn from religion, in this case, the Catholic Church.

Is "illiberal" democracy still democracy? The question is being debated by political scientists. Such regimes have often been accompanied by democratic backsliding. In Poland, the right-wing Law and Justice Party, as well as its main adversary, the liberal Civic Platform Party, were

both part of the dissident movement that freed Poland from communism in the 1980s. But the two sides went separate ways. Civic Platform became internationalist and socially progressive, while Law and Justice promoted the values of the Catholic Church and nationalism. They appealed to voters outside urban areas whose lives had also been drastically improved by the economic boom, but who often felt excluded, or condescended to, by a new culture that looked outward — to the European Union, to foreign investors, to the trends of the West. The conservative forces in Poland seemed to ask what was wrong with the way things had always been done?

Like many of its allies in other countries, Law and Justice presented its political opponents not just as adversaries, but as a threat to the continued existence of the nation. When one views their opponents as enemies who are destroying morality, family, Christianity, seemingly everything that forms European civilization, then all manner of action in wielding and holding onto power becomes justified.

And that is what happened, as the Law and Justice Party worked to tighten its grip during its eight years in power, 2015-2023. Yet many of the processes that might fall under the banner of democratic backsliding are opaque, complicated, and highly technical.

Agata Szymanska-Medina's photos allow us to see the emotion of each of these stories, and to see them as the personal stories that they are. For example, Igor Tuleya is the judge who presided over a legal case in 2016 in which Law and Justice was accused of violating procedures on a vote in parliament in order to pass important legislation. Tuleya ruled against the government, and, subsequently, the National Prosecutor's office, which was headed by one of the most zealously ambitious Law and Justice politicians, accused Tuleya of violating the law by allowing the hearing to take place in public and in the presence of the media. Tuleya was suspended from office, and the National Prosecutor's office wanted to detain him while

they investigated whether he'd committed an offense that could result in a two-year prison sentence. Szymanska-Medina's series on Tuleya transforms the complex minutiae of the case into a portrait of a diminutive, serious man harassed by the state and wrongfully removed from his position for refusing to play along with the violations of the ruling power.

This is one example of how the Law and Justice party stormed through the Polish judiciary, replacing judges by the hundreds, and rearranging the authority structures within the institutions so that the party would have more control over the outcomes.

Observers elsewhere, particularly in the U.S., will recognize the modus operandi of a political party that wants to change its country quickly and lastingly by way of the courts. Other political fights that have happened in Poland will also resonate: battles over public education and what to teach our children about our national history, efforts to discredit the media and control the public narrative, in short, a power struggle over who gets to define "the nation."

When we talk about the "decline of democracy" today, we are not witnessing a repeat of the 1930s, or the 1840s, but something decidedly of the 21st century. It demands our precise attention and understanding, lest we find ourselves living in societies that are not the kind of societies we want to live in.

Elisabeth Zerofsky is a journalist and contributing writer for the New York Times Magazine. She is currently working on a book for Farrar, Straus and Giroux about the onset of illiberal democracy in Europe and the United States. She has reported extensively from France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary, the Balkans, the Baltic states, and across the US, with a special focus on central Europe and the American New Right. She lives in Berlin.



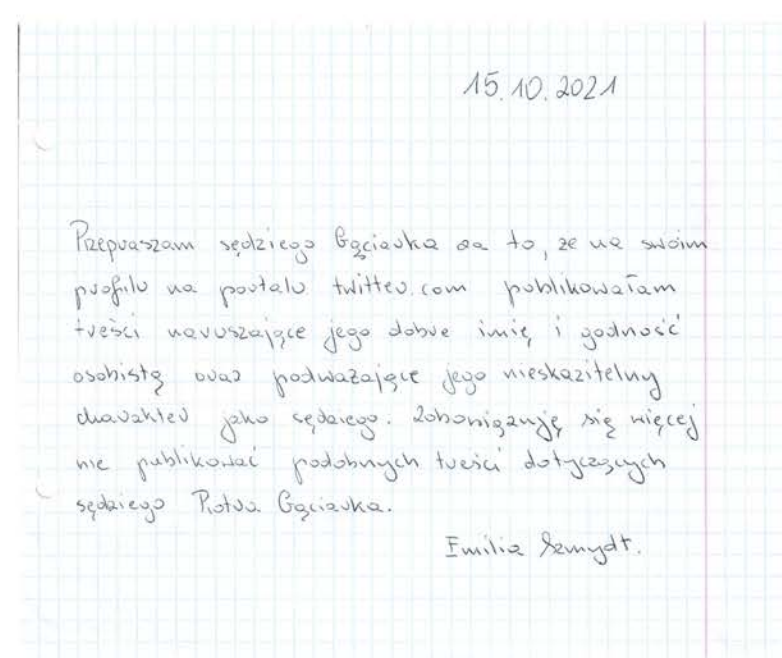
On October 10, 2021, tens of thousands of people protested against “Polexit” at Castle Square in Warsaw. On this day, protests took place across Poland in support of the European Union after the Polish Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the Polish constitution takes precedence over EU law, thus invalidating some EU laws. Critics of the right-wing nationalist government fear that the court ruling could lead to “Polexit,” as Poland could be forced to leave the EU if it blatantly rejects the Union’s laws and values. Since the PiS party took power in 2015, there has been a restructuring of the Constitutional Court, leading to constitutional crises in Poland. The Constitutional Court is now dominated by PiS party supporters.

According to a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg, the composition of the Constitutional Tribunal alone is illegal. However, Warsaw no longer adheres to this ruling because, according to Kaczyński’s PiS party, the ECtHR, like the European Court of Justice, constantly “exceeds its powers.”



The Supreme Court in Poland. With the judicial reform passed in 2017, the PiS party sought to gain control over the courts. The changes primarily impacted the Supreme Court, the National Council of the Judiciary, and the general courts. The retirement age of Supreme Court judges was lowered from 70 to 65, which allowed the PiS party to replace numerous judges with its own candidates.

An apology letter from Emilia, a member of the Kasta group, who, along with the group, launched a smear campaign against Judge Gąciarek in public and on social media. A television program with manipulated content about Judge Gąciarek's private life was prepared.



In 2021, Judge Gąciarek won a defamation lawsuit against Polish Public Television (TVP1). As part of the settlement, the individual Emilia S. had to issue a public apology.

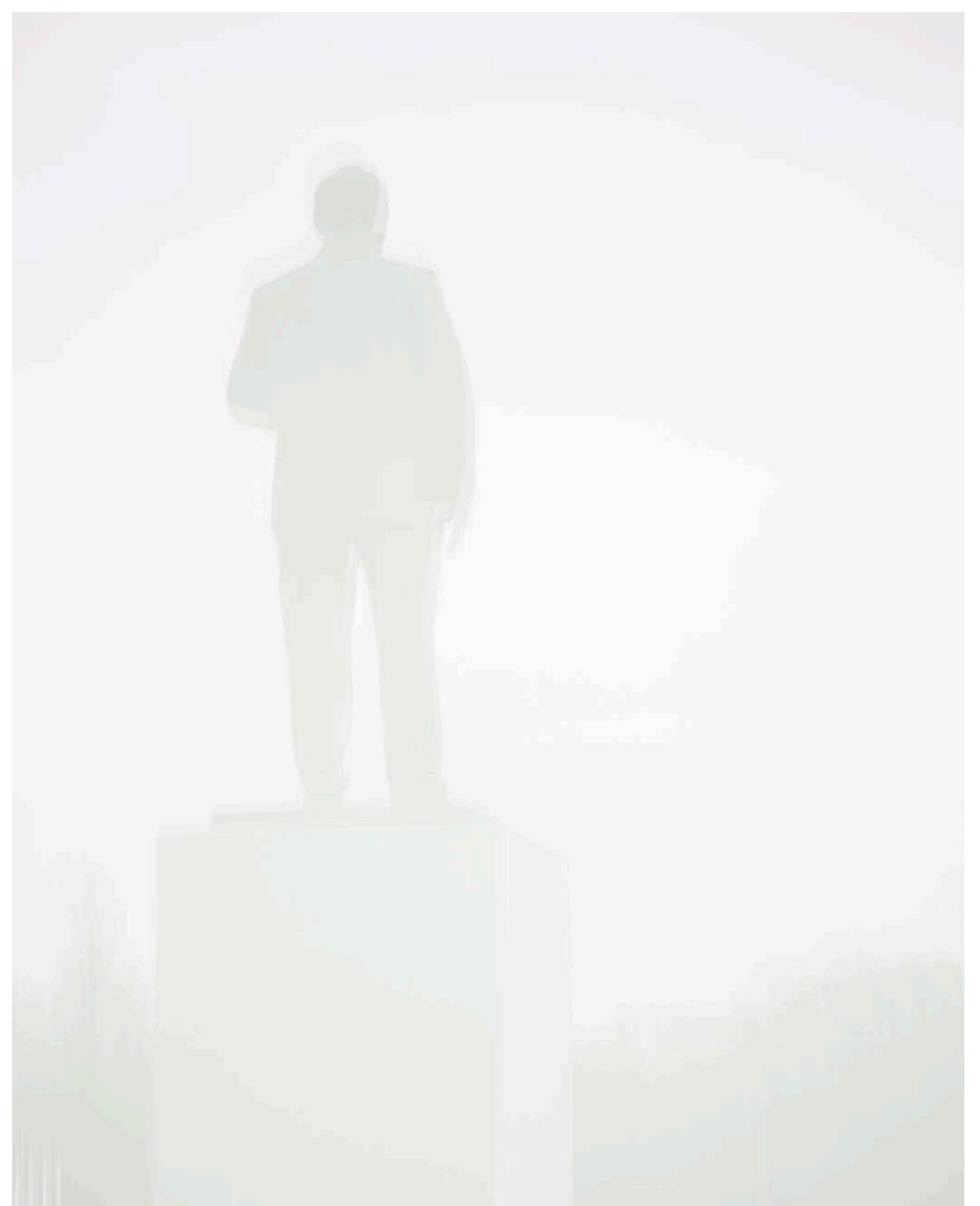


Suspended judge Piotr Gąciarek during a political debate in the studio of Polsat TV station in Warsaw. Critical judges are no longer invited to TVP1. Since the PiS party won the elections in 2015 and installed a new PiS-affiliated director at TVP1, nearly the entire staff of the television station has been replaced. Hundreds of journalists have been fired or left the station themselves, replaced by government-friendly colleagues. As a result, the public broadcaster became a propaganda tool of the PiS party, airing manipulated broadcasts, incitement against the opposition, and hate propaganda.



Judge Igor Tuleya, 51, is one of the most prominent critics of the judicial reforms. In 2020, his immunity was revoked by the Disciplinary Chamber, which has been declared illegal by the European Court of Justice for lack of independence because he had handed down rulings that angered the government. Tuleya has become an icon in the struggle for the rule of law in Poland.

The monument to former President Lech Kaczyński, who died along with 95 other passengers in a plane crash in Smolensk, Russia, on April 10, 2010, stands in Piłsudski Square in Warsaw. This national tragedy has contributed to the deepening divide in Polish society.

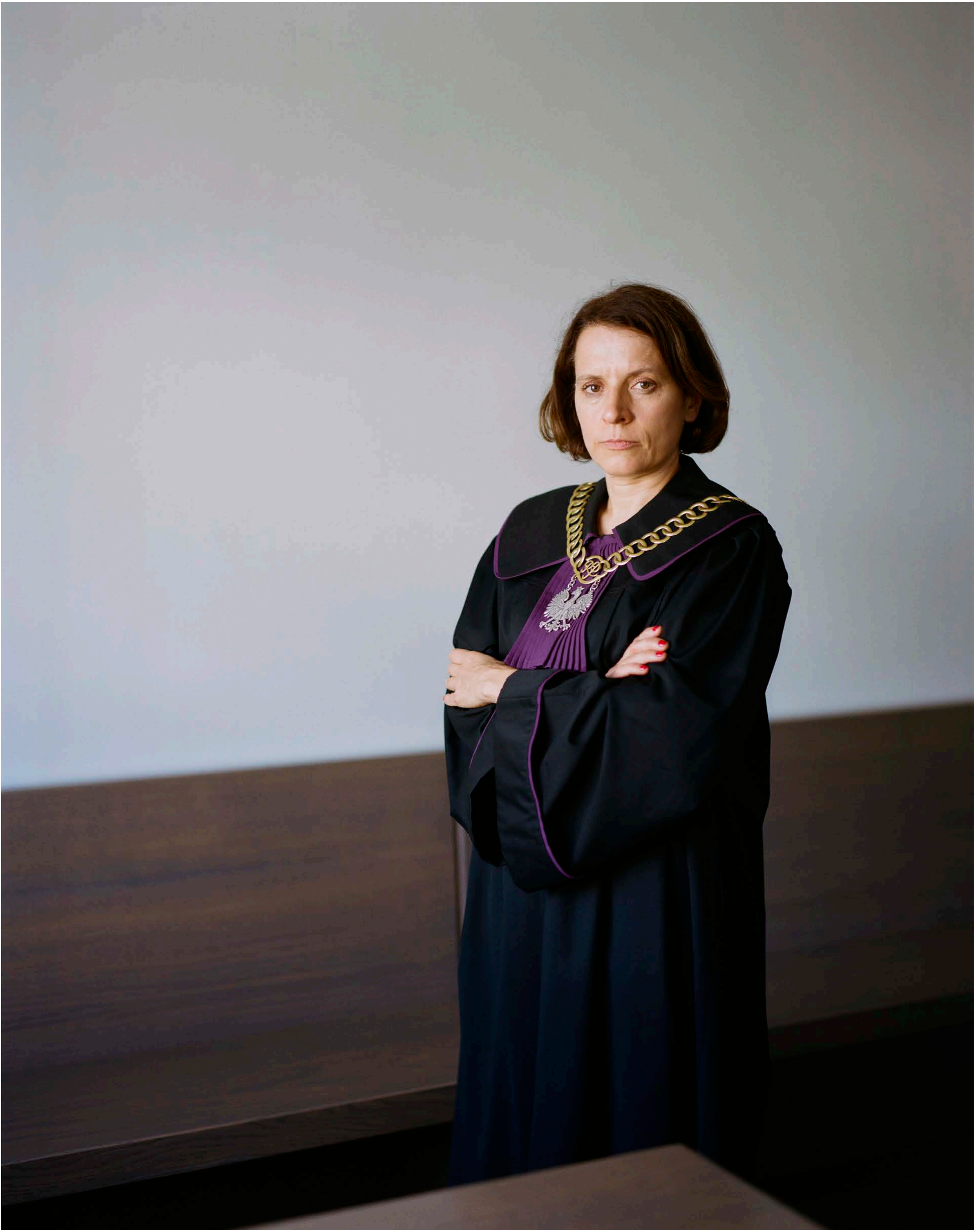


The crash of the government plane is often cited as a 'founding myth' of contemporary Poland and seems to have played a major role in the implementation of reforms aimed at legitimizing state power.



The facade of the District Court in Kraków, where the court president was replaced as part of the judicial reform. Dagmara Pawełczyk-Woicka, nominated by Minister of Justice Z. Ziobro, assumed the position. Since then, critical judges at the Kraków court have faced disciplinary actions in numerous proceedings. Some, including B. Morawiec, M. Ferek, and A. Glowacka, have been suspended from office and are no longer permitted to preside. Disciplinary proceedings are not the only reprisals employed against judges who uphold the rule of law. Other forms of repressions include transfers, unjustified reassignments, department closures, harassment, and constant monitoring of judges' actions.

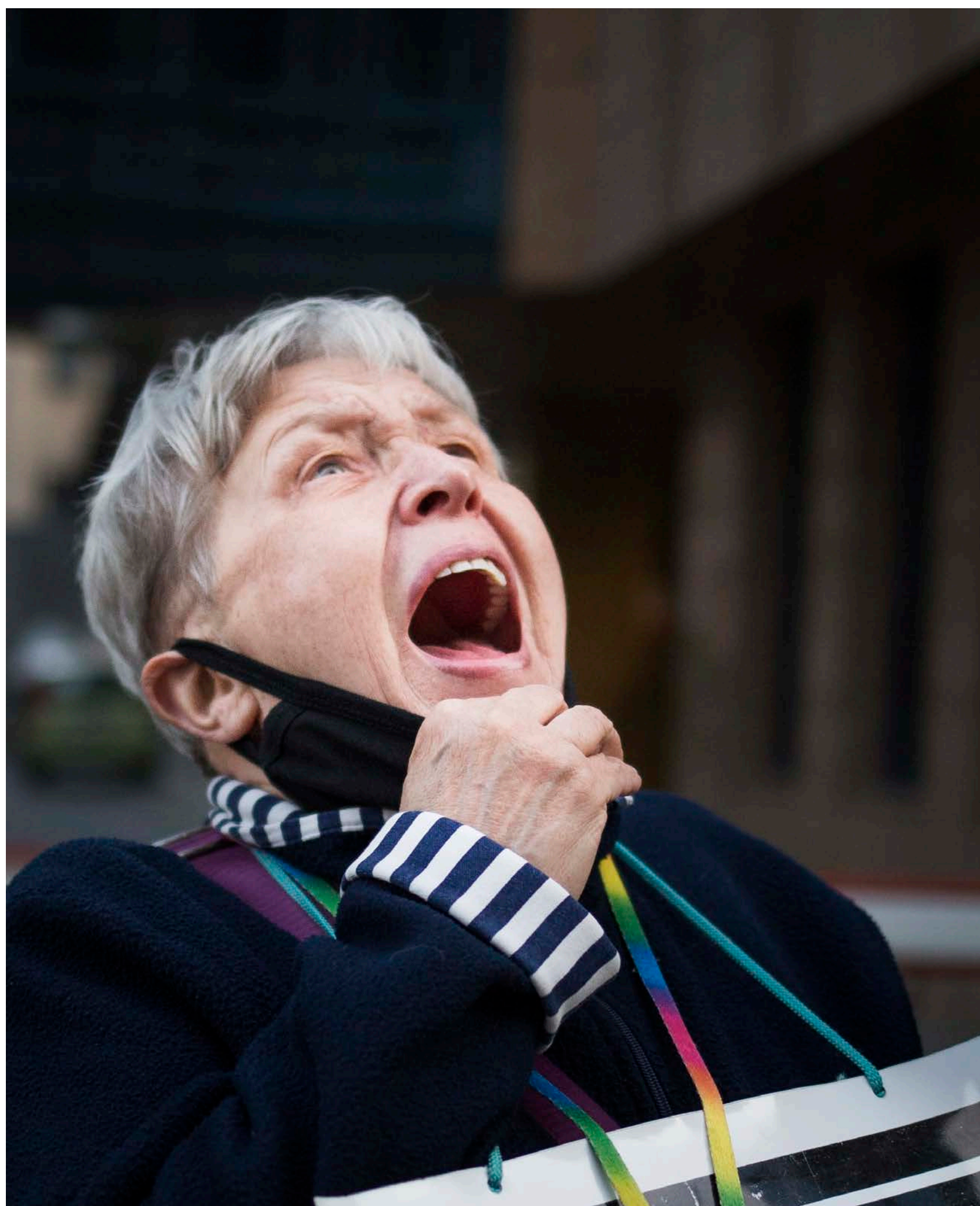
The new president of the Kraków court, Pawełczyk-Woicka, has also imposed significant restrictions on the journalists seeking to interview Kraków court judges. In 2018, she mandated that all interviews and conversations with judges must be authorized by her, and journalists arriving at the court must complete a questionnaire about the purpose of their visit in the presence of police officers. The Helsinki Foundation of Human Rights has protested against such restrictions, to no avail.



Judge Monika Frąckowiak, in her court in Poznań, is facing five pending disciplinary cases. Among other things, she has called the Polish Constitutional Court, staffed by PiS party members, a “false institution” and criticized the Minister of Justice in the European Parliament. Frąckowiak has also become the victim of a smear campaign, receiving death threats on Twitter and having her address and the names of her daughters published online.



On November 11, 2022, the annual Independence Day March took place in Warsaw. Roughly 100,000 people took part, including right-wing radicals shouting racist slogans and carrying banners with messages like “Europe will be white or abandoned” or “All different, all white.” Since the PiS (Law and Justice) party’s victory in 2015, many journalists have been fired or replaced, public media has adopted a pro-government stance, and the independence of the constitution court has been limited. Nationalist and fascist organizations, known for their racism, violence, and anti-Semitism, used to have proponents among football hooligans, extremists, and other marginalized groups. These organizations have since grown in numbers and attract members from all social groups.



Every day, during prime-time news at 7:30 p.m., demonstrators in Warsaw gather in front of the main building of the state TV channel TVP1 to protest against the broadcasting of propaganda.



On April 10, 2021, the 11th anniversary of the Smolensk plane crash, critics of the PiS party gathered at Piłsudski Square in Warsaw for a peaceful demonstration. The police brutally suppressed the gathering and arrested the demonstrators. Since 2015, the PiS party has attempted to curtail the right to demonstrate.

On April 21, 2021, the politicized Disciplinary Chamber of the Supreme Court in Warsaw considered a request to detain suspended judge Igor Tuleya and whether he should be forcibly taken to the prosecutor's office. The police blocked the entrances while a large number of Tuleya's supporters gathered in front of the Supreme Court.

Judge Tuleya is one of the most prominent critics of judicial reform. Last autumn, the PiS-created Disciplinary Chamber, which has been declared illegal by the European Court of Justice, revoked his immunity on the basis that his rulings displeased the government. He was subsequently suspended.



In 2018, a controversial Disciplinary Chamber was created within the Supreme Court to deal exclusively with disciplinary proceedings against judges. Since then, documents on the behavior of critical judges have been collected by the disciplinary officers at the competent courts. A critical public statement or an appearance at an event by a judge can be grounds for disciplinary proceedings.



Waldemar Żurek is a judge at the Kraków District Court with sixteen disciplinary proceedings against him. Until 2018, he served as the spokesman of the Polish National Council of Justice and the Court of Appeal in Kraków. Dagmara Pawełczyk-Woicka, the new court president, dismissed Żurek and transferred him to a lower court. Żurek publicly criticized the judicial reform and campaigned for the independence of the judiciary, leading to four additional disciplinary proceedings against him.

He is accused of allegedly not paying tax on a small tractor he used to clear snow at his dacha, of allegedly faking a crime, of allegedly refusing to work, and of allegedly engaging in prohibited political activities as a judge.

23.06.2018, 13:56 - Emilia: Dzień dobry Panie Ministrze. Czy informacje są przydatne? I czy cis z nimi robimy?
23.06.2018, 16:05 - Min [REDACTED]: Ja to już kiedyś dostałem ale nie miałem pomysłu jak wykorzystać więc nie wykorzystałem. Jeżeli Pani ma to świetnie.
23.06.2018, 16:15 - Emilia: Tym Pani strasznie czuje się staro
23.06.2018, 16:15 - Emilia: Pomysł mam taki:
23.06.2018, 16:16 - Emilia: Rozesłać to anonimowo do wszystkich oddziałów Iustitii
23.06.2018, 16:16 - Emilia: I do samego zainteresowanego
23.06.2018, 16:16 - Emilia: Gazety odpadają
23.06.2018, 16:16 - Emilia: Bo brak dowodów
23.06.2018, 16:17 - Emilia: Mam nr do męża kochanki
23.06.2018, 16:17 - Emilia: Jest możliwość skorzystać z bramki internetowych
23.06.2018, 16:18 - Emilia: Lub karty sim, ale nie mam jej na kogo zarejestrować
23.06.2018, 16:18 - Emilia: Mogę zagadać z [REDACTED]
23.06.2018, 16:18 - Emilia: Może on pogrzebie
23.06.2018, 16:19 - Emilia: Ale brak źródła i dowodów trochę kiepsko
23.06.2018, 16:19 - Emilia: Jakie jest Pana zdanie?
23.06.2018, 16:21 - Emilia: I czy to ogólnie nam coś da
23.06.2018, 16:21 - Emilia: Czy nam pomoże?
23.06.2018, 16:27 - Emilia: Jest jeszcze [REDACTED] to on robił program o G [REDACTED]
23.06.2018, 16:28 - Min [REDACTED]: Myślę, że da i pomoże. Ważne by się przeszło choćby i po Iustitii z kim mamy do czynienia. Ludzie to rozniosą, a Markiewicz przygaśnie wiedząc co na niego jest. Może Kuba miałby pomysł jak to rozpowszechnić nie zostawiając śladów?
23.06.2018, 16:28 - Emilia: Hyyymmm
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Min [REDACTED]: Dziennikarz i materiał byłby świetny ale nie wiem czy znajdzie się taki odważny.
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: Kuba się jakby boi
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: To chyba koleżdy dawni
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: Ok
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: Zrobię co mogę
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Min [REDACTED]: Dziękuję
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: Pogadam z dziennikarzami
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: I porozsyłam pisma
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: Anonimowo
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: Mailem
23.06.2018, 16:30 - Emilia: Ale i listami
23.06.2018, 16:30 - Emilia: Jedyny problem nie mam adresów i maili
23.06.2018, 16:30 - Emilia: Zrobię wszystko tak jak umiem, jka zawsze. Za rezultat nie ręczę
23.06.2018, 16:30 - Emilia: Ale postaram się
23.06.2018, 16:31 - Emilia: Mam nadzieję że mnie nie wsadzą
23.06.2018, 16:32 - Min [REDACTED]: Za czynienie dobra nie wsadzamy
23.06.2018, 16:32 - Min [REDACTED]: Listy poszukam. Kiedyś miałem
23.06.2018, 16:32 - Emilia: Dobra, dobra
23.06.2018, 16:33 - Emilia: Super
23.06.2018, 16:33 - Emilia: Im szybciej tym lepiej. Biorę się do oracy
23.06.2018, 16:54 - Min [REDACTED]: [56832.doc (załączony plik) 56832
23.06.2018, 16:56 - Min [REDACTED]: To jest warszawska Iustitia sprzed kilku lat ale zapewne aktualna. Może Rafał ma ogólnopolską ale nie mogę się do niego dodzwonić
23.06.2018, 16:56 - Min [REDACTED]: Dość aktualna
23.06.2018, 17:14 - Emilia: Super. Dziękuję
23.06.2018, 17:30 - Emilia: Panie Ministrze a adres domowy i sądu Markiewicza?
23.06.2018, 18:33 - Min [REDACTED]: Ustalam
23.06.2018, 18:45 - Min [REDACTED]: Sądu jest w necie bodajże [REDACTED] Do sprawdzenia. Domowy będę miał późnym wieczorem.
23.06.2018, 18:46 - Min [REDACTED]: Jutro Rafał się odezwie (dzisiaj jest na weselu) to skoordynujecie działania.
23.06.2018, 18:46 - Emilia: Ok
23.06.2018, 18:46 - Emilia: Wszystko pójdzie w poniedziałek
23.06.2018, 18:46 - Emilia: Hurtem
23.06.2018, 18:46 - Emilia: Hurtem
23.06.2018, 18:46 - Emilia: Zawalimy ich
23.06.2018, 18:47 - Emilia: Od dziennikarza:
23.06.2018, 18:47 - Emilia: Poczytałem. Gdyby znalazł się ktoś ze środowiska prawniczego na Śląsku, kto zechciałby opowiedzieć o tej karierze i metodach pana M., przydałoby to wiarygodności tej historii. [REDACTED] jako źródło ok, ale tylko jedno z kilku.
23.06.2018, 18:51 - Min [REDACTED]: Pomysłem
23.06.2018, 20:35 - Emilia: Jeszcze raz bardzo proszę o kontakt
23.06.2018, 21:16 - Min [REDACTED]: [IMG-20180623-WA0024.jpg (załączony plik)
23.06.2018, 22:45 - Emilia: To jego adres meldunkowy czy zamieszkania?
23.06.2018, 22:45 - Min [REDACTED]: Chyba obydwą
23.06.2018, 22:45 - Emilia: Ok. Dziękuję
23.06.2018, 22:46 - Emilia: Wszystko pójdzie w poniedziałek
23.06.2018, 22:46 - Emilia: Maile i listy
23.06.2018, 22:46 - Min [REDACTED]:
23.06.2018, 22:46 - Emilia: Będzie tego dużo
23.06.2018, 22:47 - Emilia: A jak zdobędzie Pan informatora zrobimy program
23.06.2018, 22:47 - Min [REDACTED]: Oczywiście
23.06.2018, 22:47 - Min [REDACTED]: Super
23.06.2018, 22:47 - Emilia: Dziękuję za wszystko. Spokojnej nocy
23.06.2018, 22:48 - Min [REDACTED]: Wzajemnie
24.06.2018, 17:41 - Emilia: Dzień dobry Panie Ministrze. Czy mam dziś czekać na tel od Pana Rafała?
24.06.2018, 19:36 - Min [REDACTED]: Będzie dzwonił jeżeli już tego nie zrobił
24.06.2018, 20:05 - Emilia: Jeszcze nie zadzwonił
25.06.2018, 03:06 - Emilia: Dopiero skończyłam wysłać nie mieli. Część adresów mailowych jest nieaktualnych bo odrzucają lub są zmienione. Jutro zaliczę ile poszło, ale B. Dużo-myślę że ok 200. Postaram się wziąć jutro za listy do sądów jak dam radę bo padam z nóg. Dobranoc. PS żądam podwyżki
25.06.2018, 09:00 - Min [REDACTED]: Dziękuję bardzo. Teraz trzeba wypocząć by dalej walczyć o dobrą zmianę. O podwyżce się pomyśli
25.06.2018, 14:09 - Emilia: Tomek kup toner do drukarki, dwie ryzy papieru do i z 200dużych kopert. Do tego dojdą znaczki. Ogłaszam bankructwo
25.06.2018, 14:10 - Emilia: Przepraszam to nie do pana

An excerpt from the Whatsapp chat history between a troll named “Emi” and Deputy Justice Minister P. about the planned discrediting of Judge Krystian Markiewicz.

23.06.2018, 16:15 - Emilia: I have this idea:
23.06.2018, 16:16 - Emilia: Distribute this anonymously to all branches of Iustitia.
23.06.2018, 16:16 - Emilia: And to the person concerned herself
23.06.2018, 16:16 - Emilia: Newspapers are out
23.06.2018, 16:16 - Emilia: Because there is no evidence
23.06.2018, 16:17 - Emilia: I have the number of the lover’s husband
23.06.2018, 16:27 - Emilia: There is also -----, he is the one who did the show about Gaciarek.
23.06.2018, 16:28, Min P ----: I think he will give it to us and help us. The important thing is to disseminate it among the Iustitia members with whom we are dealing. People will spread it, and Markiewicz will quieten down, knowing what we have on him. Maybe Kuba has an idea about how to spread it without leaving a trace?
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: I will talk to journalists.
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: And I will send letters
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: Anonymous
23.06.2018, 16:29 - Emilia: By e-mail
23.06.2018, 16:30 - Emilia: But also by post
23.06.2018, 16:30 - Emilia: the only problem is that I don’t have the addresses and emails
23.06.2018, 16:30 - Emilia: I will do everything I can, as always. I will not vouch for the result
23.06.2018, 16:30 - Emilia: But I will try.
23.06.2018, 16:31 - Emilia: I hope they don’t lock me up.
23.06.2018, 16:32 - Min P ----: We don’t imprison anyone for doing good.
25.06.2018, 03:06, Emilia: I have just finished sending the e-mails. Some of the e-mail addresses are out of date because they are rejected or are changed. Tomorrow I’ll count how many I sent, but it was a lot, about 200 I think. I’ll try to get to work on the letters to the courts tomorrow if I manage, because I’m falling over. Good night. PS. I want a pay increase
25.06.2018, 09:00, Min P ----: Thank you very much. Now you need to rest to keep fighting for good change. We shall think about the increase.



The chain of office of Judge Igor Tuleya in the Warsaw District Court. Since his suspension in October 2020, he has not been allowed to wear this chain, which is an essential part of the judge's official court dress.

Warszawa, 10.15.2021



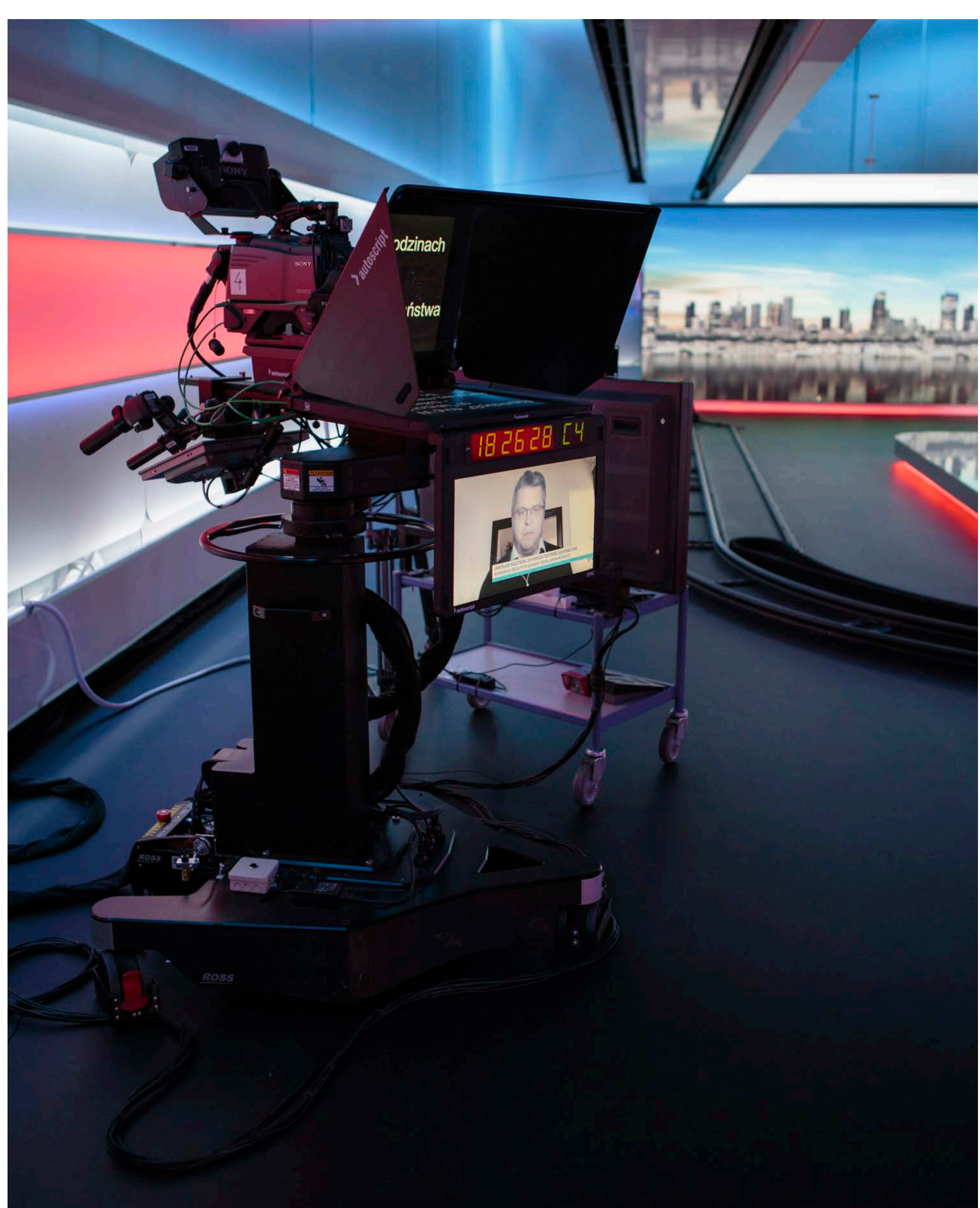
Judge Igor Tuleya of the Regional Court in Warsaw has become one of the most harassed and repressed judges in Poland for fighting the rule of law. Tuleya was reinstated in November 2022 after over 700 days of suspension. In July 2023, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled that the decision to suspend Tuleya was incompatible with EU law. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) held that Poland breached Tuleya's right to a fair trial, his right to respect for private life, and his freedom of speech.



Dowód: wstępy z komentarzami Twitter habanki Emii z kont MalaEmi, MalaEmiEmi, MalaEmiE, oraz innych użytkowników z konta KastaWatch

Evidence: Twitter posts by Emilia, using the handles @MalaEmi, @MalaEmiEmi, @MalaEmiE, and various other users from the @KastaWatch account.

Evidence: Twitter posts by Emilia, using the handles @ MalaEmi, @MalaEmiEmi, @MalaEmiE, and various other uses from the @KastaWatch account.



Warszawa, 04.28.2021



“Their actions are meant to intimidate people, to make judges realize that, if you remain silent and don't cause any trouble, you'll be left alone. But if you do something, you should be aware that we shall make life difficult for you. And, to some extent, this is working.”

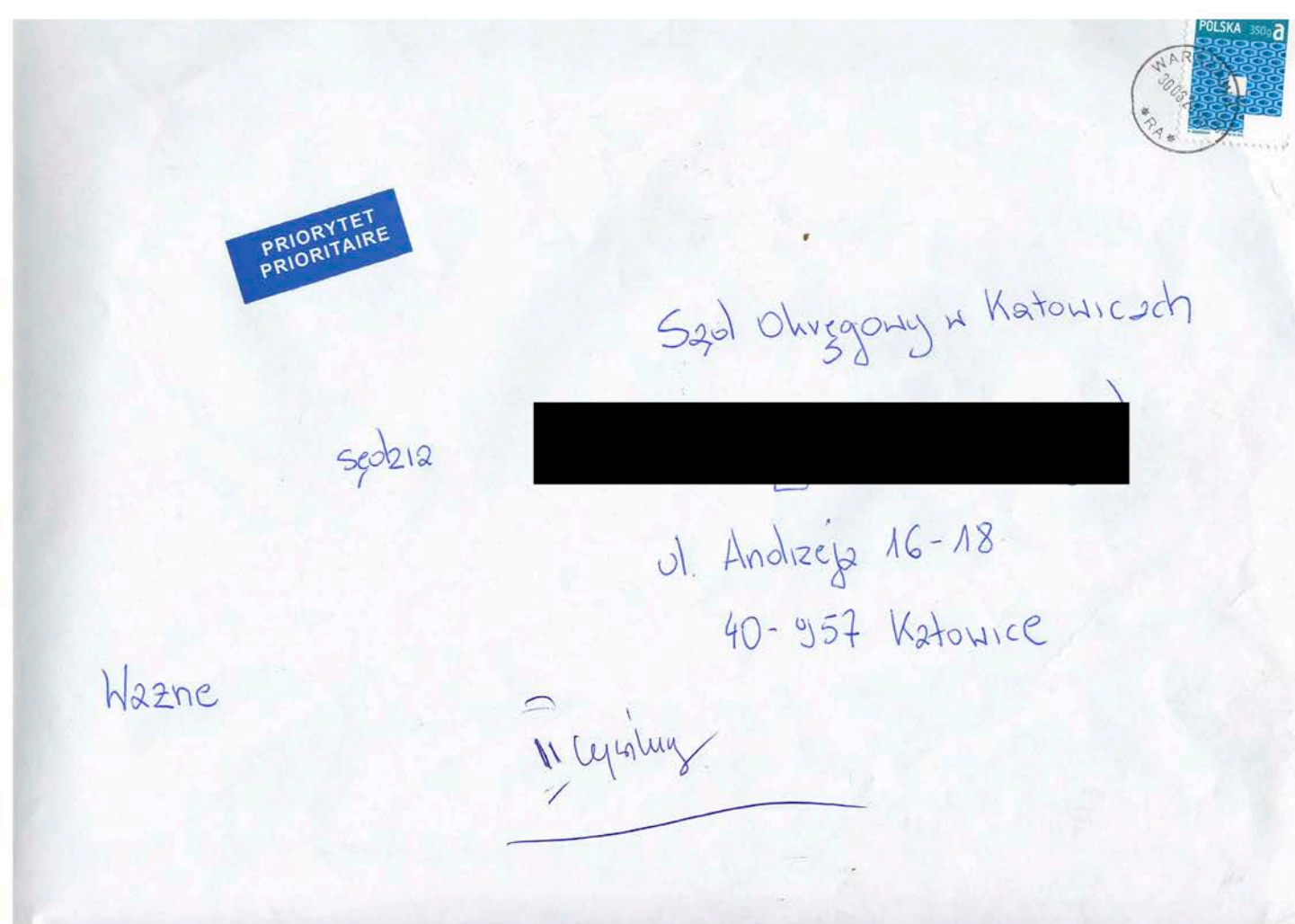
An excerpt from the WhatsApp chat between a troll named “Emi” and a member of the Kasta group about the planned strategy to smear critical judges in the media.

19.07.2018, 16:57 – emi: A te nowe skreeny się przydadzą?
 19.07.2018, 16:58 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: To właśnie tych inf to dotyczy.
 19.07.2018, 16:59 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Postępowanie wyjaśniające dla sędziego. Patrzmy na ręce naszemu rzecznikowi dyscyplinarnemu. Krajowy (Przemek) kontroluje naszego rzecznika
 19.07.2018, 17:00 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Doceniam, popatrz – pomogłaś. Bez Ciebie byłoby dużo trudniej.
 19.07.2018, 17:01 – emi: Chcesz to puścić w Polskę?
 19.07.2018, 17:03 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Teraz nie. Zbierzemy ich więcej. Trzepiemy aktywność medialną. Ten gość to plotka. Szkoda ploszyc teraz większe rybki [REDACTED] Oczywiście według uznania Lukasa
 19.07.2018, 17:04 – emi: Spoko. Założysz plik?
 19.07.2018, 17:04 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: To „niby kolega“, ale nic mu nie jestem winien i wstawiać się za nim nie bede
 19.07.2018, 17:04 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Tzn?
 19.07.2018, 17:05 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Aha, zalaczysz, tak?
 19.07.2018, 17:05 – emi: Nie
 19.07.2018, 17:06 – emi: Masz bezpieczny komputer? Albo pendrive?
 19.07.2018, 17:06 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Mam szyfrowany sprzętowo pendrive służbowy. Jeden w [REDACTED] i jeden w [REDACTED]
 19.07.2018, 17:07 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Bezpiecznego komputera nie
 19.07.2018, 17:09 – emi: Załóż folder sędziowie-dyscyplinarki. Tam zrób plik sędzia Strumiński i wrzuc wszystko co mamy. Łącznie ze skreenami
 19.07.2018, 17:09 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Ok, zrobię.
 19.07.2018, 23:38 – emi: trzeba zrobić listę najważniejszych sędziów, przeciwników reformy sadownictwa i zacząć szukać materiałów. Zastanów się od kogo warto zacząć i z kim można porozmawiać by zdobyć informacje i dokumenty
 20.07.2018, 05:38 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Jak już mówiłem, mam w tym zakresie małe możliwości. Nigdy nie byłem aktywny jako członek Iustitii a w życiu „towarzystwo – imprezowo – prywatnym „ środowiska sędziowskiego nie uczestniczyłem.
 Teraz z racji funkcji i „kolaboracji“ z MS jestem izolowany, zarówno towarzysko, jak i informacyjnie.
 [REDACTED] Wiedzę mam taką jaka wynika z obserwacji mediów, ale to wie każdy. Oczywiście postaram się zrobić, co w mojej mocy.
 Myślę jednak, że faza zdobywania informacji to mocna strona ludzi bezpośrednio z [REDACTED], ewentualnie tak aktywnych w środowisku, jak np. Rafał S [REDACTED]. To od niego można byłoby próbować uzyskać coś ważnego na temat KM. Sam tego nie zdołam zrobić, Rafał nie da mi takich informacji, tłumaczyłem już wcześniej dlaczego.
 Służę wszelką pomocą, ale większe możliwości mam w obróbce informacji a nie w ich zdobywaniu.
 20.07.2018, 05:38 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Tak w ogóle, to dzień dobry.
 20.07.2018, 05:40 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Innych spraw nie komentuję, choć mam zupełnie inne zdanie. Coś ustaliliśmy, wytyczasz granice i reguły kontaktów. Pozostaje mi się dostosować.
 20.07.2018, 08:10 – emi: Dzień dobry
 20.07.2018, 08:25 – emi: Ok. Porozmawiam że [REDACTED]. Co do informacji poufnych, zdobywanych nie wiem jaka droga jest Kuba niech grzebie. My skupmy się na tv i mediach społecznościowych
 20.07.2018, 08:25 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Dobrze.
 20.07.2018, 11:00 – Arkadiusz C [REDACTED]: Emi, co w takim razie zrobić dla Ciebie teraz. Czytać materiały od WB? Co jest najpiękniejsze?
 20.07.2018, 11:00 – emi: [REDACTED]
 20.07.2018, 11:01 – emi: A wymyśliłam tak. Co ty myślisz o tym?
 20.07.2018, 11:01 – emi: W Polskim Państwie Podziemnym powstało coś takiego jak Społeczny Komitet Antykomunistyczny. Deklarację podpisało 26 stronnictw politycznych Polski Podziemnej.
 [REDACTED] mi. Pewnie mogliby pomóc. Pomyślałam o takiej nieformalnej komórce przy MS/KRS

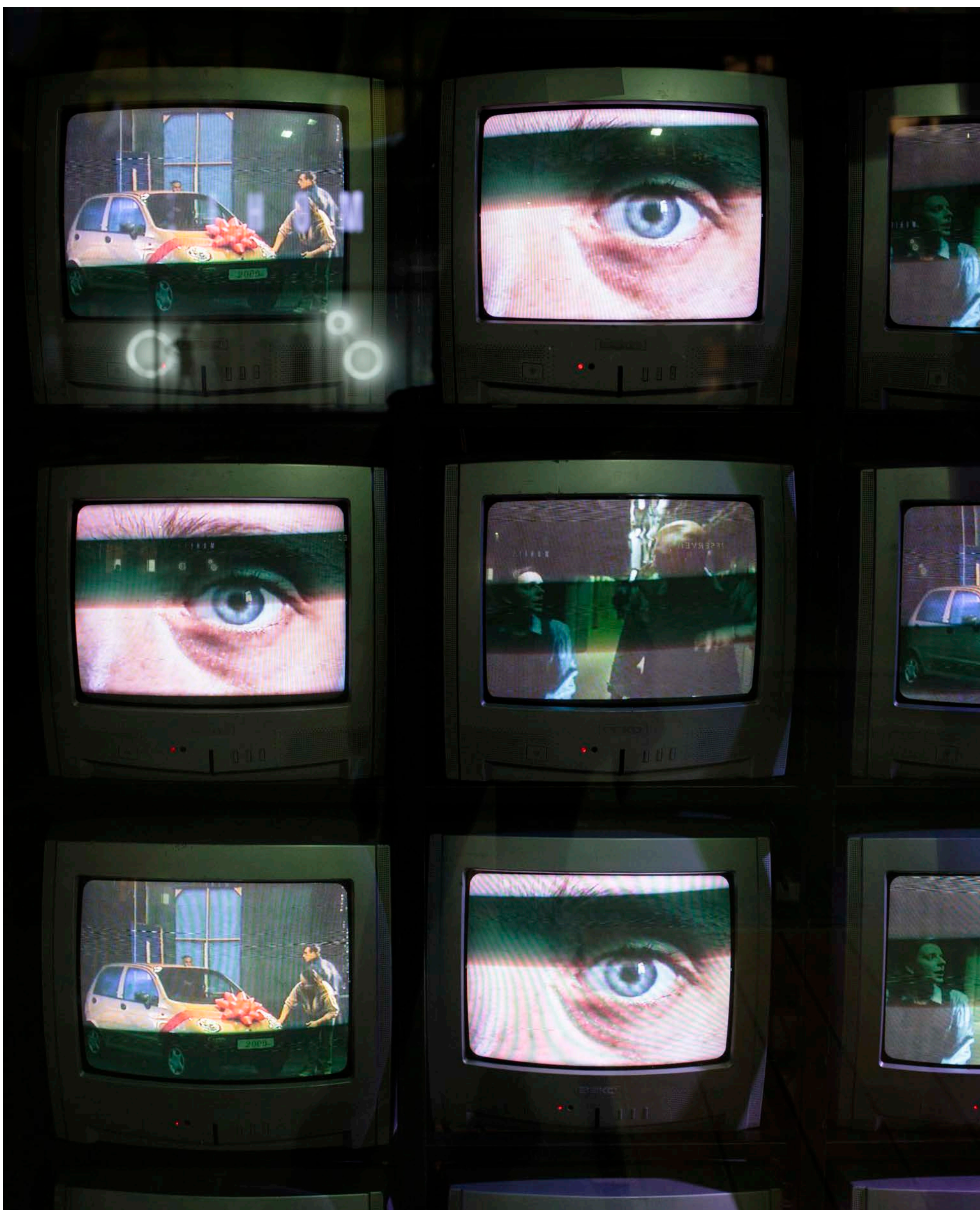


Katowice, 12.03.2021
 Prof. Krystian Markiewicz

Krystian Markiewicz, 45, is a judge, law professor, and president of the Polish Association Judges Iustitia. Both Markiewicz and Iustitia strongly condemned the PiS party's judicial reforms. As a result, the Kasta group has targeted Markiewicz with a hate campaign on social media.



Evidence: The envelope in which a dossier on Krystian Markiewicz was sent by a troll named “Emi” as part of the Kasta group’s hate campaign against select critical judges. The recipient of the letter was Markiewicz’s partner, who is also a judge. The letter was sent directly to her workplace at the court in Katowice.



Since the PiS party won the elections in 2015 and installed a new boss at TVP1, almost the entire staff of the TV station has been replaced. Hundreds were dismissed or resigned and were replaced by government loyalists. TVP1 became a propaganda tool for the PiS government, leading to increased bias, incitement against the opposition, and hate propaganda. On January 14, 2019, the former mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz, was stabbed to death at a concert following a hate campaign by pro-government media.