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**A Report on the Operations of FUSADES: Promoting Neoliberalism  
Via Relationships to Parties, Governance, Transnational Institutions,  
and Mainstream Media in El Salvador**

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## **Abstract**

# **A Report on the Operations of FUSADES: Promoting Neoliberalism Via Relationships to Parties, Governance, Transnational Institutions, and Mainstream Media in El Salvador**

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FUSADES is the largest think tank in El Salvador, and has been successful in influencing policy towards a neoliberal direction since it was founded in 1983. Guided by four dimensions--cooperative and competitive relationships with political parties, the revolving-door between governments and think tanks, media presence, and transnational ties--pointed out in think tank scholarship, I point to the ways FUSADES is able to influence policy in El Salvador, and how they are limited by the FMLN's rise to power. Using Thomas Medvetz's argument--that think tanks are able to exercise influential power in various ways through their purposeful ambiguity, which allows them to legitimize themselves as objective institutions--I show how FUSADES legitimizes itself as an objective and impartial institution despite their promotion of neoliberal policies. In this thesis, I ultimately argue that FUSADES is a neoliberal institution that has multidimensional influence over Salvadoran policies that shape the country's political and economic system. Questions I address throughout the thesis are: how is FUSADES legitimized as an "impartial" institution? What are the political implications of their professed impartiality? What allows them to influence governance? How is their influence limited? What explicit and implicit role(s) does FUSADES play in the Salvadoran economy and its political system?

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

When people think of how policy is developed, passed, and implemented, political parties, congressional representatives, and the central government tend to come to mind. In public discourse, it is often overlooked how private institutions influence policy. Specifically, it is often discounted how think tanks influence, develop, mediate, and evaluate policies. Founded by USAID and right-wing Salvadoran elites in 1983, The *Fundación Salvadoreña Para el Desarrollo Económico y Social* (FUSADES) is the most prestigious think tank in El Salvador, and the largest think tank in Central America. In their official discourse, FUSADES is a non-partisan and objective institution that seeks to promote “the social and economic progress of Salvadorans via sustainable development, democracy, and individual liberties” (FUSADES 2018a). This thesis will explore *how* FUSADES influences policy in El Salvador through asking the following questions. How is FUSADES legitimized as an impartial institution? What are the political implications of their professed impartiality? What allows them to influence governance? How is this influence limited? What explicit and implicit role(s) does FUSADES play in the Salvadoran economy and its political system?

Although they portray themselves as impartial and objective, FUSADES is a neoliberal institution that has multidimensional forms of influencing Salvadoran policy through its national and international ties to right-wing figures and organizations. Thomas Medvetz (2012) shows how think tanks are purposefully ambiguous, and that such ambiguity leverages their legitimacy despite their role of producing politically charged



research and policy proposals. FUSADES capitalizes on its ambiguity by presenting themselves as impartial while promoting neoliberal policies that are presented as objective proposals. Following Medvetz and think tank scholarship, this thesis shows the various forms FUSADES is legitimized as an impartial institution, how they have been able to influence policy and governance towards a neoliberal direction, and their limitations. This will be noted by the historical relationship the think tank has with the *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* (ARENA) party, as well as recent shifts in this relationship; the challenges the institution has faced since 2009 due to the rise in power of the *Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) party; the collusion between the Salvadoran mainstream media and FUSADES; and the transnational ties FUSADES has with various institutions I studied official documents published by FUSADES, news articles, government documents, and FMLN statements. In the Summer 2017, I also conducted interviews with seven FUSADES members, some of them being prominent public figures such as Luis Mario Rodriguez, the director of the think tank's Political Studies Department, and Pedro Argumedo, a senior researcher in the Economic Studies Department.

El Salvador is a small country, it does not have natural resources it can capitalize from, nor does it hold substantial influence in the global economy. Why would I make FUSADES the subject of my thesis if I could have studied the role of think tanks in more influential countries who yield larger weight in global politics? Think tank scholarship is already largely concentrated on countries like those such as the United States, Western European countries, and some South American countries such as Argentina and Chile,

but there is a lack of scholarship that highlights the role of think tanks in Central America and other third world countries. FUSADES is the largest think tank in Central America, it has received multiple awards from various transnational institutions, and is a paradigmatic example of success, in the sense that FUSADES has been able to establish itself as a legitimate, impartial, and influential institution. Through the case of FUSADES in El Salvador, we can better understand the roles think tanks play in third world countries, particularly those with leftist governments.

#### **CONTEXT: A BRIEF AND POLITICAL HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY EL SALVADOR**

From 1980 to 1992, El Salvador experienced a civil war that was fought between the FMLN guerrilla combatants and the Salvadoran government. This occurred due to a history of “acute socioeconomic inequalities and a rigid societal power structure” (Carrillo 2012:1), as well as an increase in organized armed forces by the late 1970s that eventually formed the FMLN in 1980. Soon after the formation of the FMLN, a right-wing political party emerged in 1981 called ARENA. The latter organization was founded by Roberto D'Aubuisson, a military and death squads commander, and architect of the assassination of Saint Oscar Romero. After dialogue between the key commanders of the FMLN and right-wing Salvadoran government officials, the Chapultepec Peace Accords were signed in January 1992. One of the agreements reached in the peace accords was that the FMLN would transition from a guerrilla force to a formal political party. During the Salvadoran civil war, more than 75,000 people were murdered or disappeared, and more than one million people were displaced.

Although the 1992 peace accords mark a significant point in Salvadoran history, right-wing elites in El Salvador had already begun their restructuring of the country's political and economic system. Before the presidential elections of 1989, FUSADES contracted twenty-five international advisors to assist in the development of an economic and social program for El Salvador (Robinson 2003:96). As anticipated, Alfredo Cristiani, ARENA's presidential candidate and founding member of FUSADES, won the 1989 elections. From that year until 2008, ARENA held presidential power, and ARENA along with other right-wing parties held most seats in the legislative assembly and controlled the country's Supreme Court.

In 2009, the FMLN gained presidential power for the first time with Mauricio Funes as elected president. Funes was a journalist that hosted a popular national show where he interviewed Salvadoran political figures and he also made appearances on *CNN en Español*. While this meant that Funes and the FMLN could begin to reform some of ARENA's policies, their ability to do so was limited due to the right-wing majority in the other two branches of the government, as well as tensions between the FMLN and Funes. Despite these limitations, the FMLN was able to push forth policies and projects that countered the neoliberal economy they inherited such as the distribution of land titles, the affordable medications law, the *vaso de leche* program, the school packages program, efforts to revamp the agricultural and livestock sector, and the creation of *Ciudad Mujer* (Women's City).

In 2014, the FMLN's candidate, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, won the presidential elections. Under his administration, projects implemented under Funes were deepened:

social spending increased (e.g. education and agriculture), more land titles were distributed, agricultural packets were handed to farmers along with technical support, barriers from previous ARENA administrations to trade with China were lifted, and efforts to reform the country's pension system and raise the national minimum wage have been made.

Below, I will show how FUSADES fits into this political tale. To reiterate, FUSADES portrays itself as a non-partisan and objective institution, but through a critical study of the institution, I will present different ways FUSADES has been and continues to be a neoliberal institution that serves the interest of Salvadoran and transnational elites. I will first present a literature review on the cooperative and competitive relationship between parties and think tanks, the revolving door between governments and think tanks, the relationship between think tanks and the media, and literature on the transnational relationships these institutions have. After, I will explain how I conducted this research in the methods section. I will then present my findings, which are largely guided by the dimensions explored in the literature review.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In spite of the variance in topics and arguments for understanding think tanks, authors have found common ground in stating that think tanks are not simply research institutions but institutions that strongly influence and shape society. Scholars have focused primarily on four dimensions of think tank power: (1) How think tanks compete and collaborate with political parties. (2) How think tanks influence governance despite the appearance of being independent from government institutions. (3) How think tanks shape the content of media coverage. (4) The transnational and transregional ties of think tanks. Before presenting the literature review that examines how scholars have approached these four dimensions, a word on how I operationalize *think tanks*, *politics*, and *neoliberalism* as concepts is needed.

### **A NOTE ON THINK TANK AMBIGUITY AND IDEAL TYPES**

The disagreeing perspectives in defining what a think tank is, and thus their roles in society, point to an important characteristic--an intrinsic ambiguity as they are “situated at the crossroads of the academic, political, business, and media spheres” (Medvetz 2012), producing effects in each one. Thomas Medvetz (2012) argues that think tanks are constitutively a “blurry network of organizations, themselves internally divided by the opposing logics of academic, political, economic, and media production” (Medvetz 2012). Following Medvetz, this thesis notes the blurred space in which FUSADES lie in. In this blurred space lies a paradoxical tension--the seeming presentation of think tanks as neutral versus their influence in political systems. This

paradoxical tensions is significant because through these tensions, think tanks are able to attain a sort of legitimation that other actors--such as politicians, businessmen, the media, and academics--struggle in attaining. As Medvetz points out, think tanks often find their niche in the field--academic, economic, political, media--and are able to gain legitimizing and, thus, influential power in one or multiple sites.

Think tank insiders, Kent Weaver and James McGann identify four “ideal types” of think tanks. These ideal types are: academic, contract, advocacy, and political party (Weaver and McGrann 2000:8). Academic and contract think tanks both recruit academic staff from universities and strive for the production of rigorous, objective, and credible research; they differ in that academic think tanks are largely funded by foundations, corporations, and individuals while contract think tanks are largely funded by government agencies (Weaver and McGrann 2000:7). Advocacy think tanks have ideological linkages to specific groupings or interests (Weaver and McGrann 2000:7). For example, corporations have oftentimes been linked to conservative think tanks. This particular type is typically staffed by government, political parties, and interest groups and not so much by academics. Political party think tanks are “heavily influenced by the needs of the party” (Weaver and McGrann 2000:7), and thus organize their agenda based on the issues and platforms of a political party. These hypothetical conceptualizations of think tanks are often intertwined which shows a dynamism inherent within think tanks. In other words, think tanks can display mixed characteristics at different moments of their existence. In the literature cited below, think tanks are described as dynamic and shifting, depending on their environment and political contexts. FUSADES has displayed an

amalgamation of these characteristics implicitly or explicitly at different political moments in recent Salvadoran history.

## **DEFINING POLITICS**

Before discussing various categorical roles think tanks assume, I will address what I mean by *politics* in this thesis. Max Weber's definition of politics as "the leadership, or the influencing of the leadership of a *political* association, hence today, of a *state*" (Weber 1946:77) will be adopted throughout this thesis. Weber's definition ultimately argues that politics is the struggle for power over the state--which is the power to monopolize legitimate violence. This struggle, he states, can be taken up by professional politicians that either *live for* or *live off* politics--the difference lies in the economic sustainability of the professional politician. While this dichotomy serves useful in many ways, it is necessary to problematize this dichotomy due to the ambiguous nature of think tanks.

Upon problematizing this definition of politics, I can point to a process think tanks engage in while attempting to influence the state. Think tank members are professionals that have the capacity to navigate across the dichotomy of *living for* and *living off* politics since they often navigate to and from parties or government administrations indicating shifts in their economic sustainability. This is not to say that think tanks are the same as political parties or partisan politicians. Political parties are composed of politicians that receive a salary, and openly present their stance on political, social, and economic issues. Parties attempt to make their stance appealing to the general

voting population in order to mold the state to their liking. Think tanks do not openly present their stance on political, social, and economic issues. Instead, they develop research and policy proposals that they then present as objective. This facade of objectivity, along with the intrinsic ambiguity, is what legitimizes the think tank. Nonetheless, think tanks play a fundamental role in molding the state and are thus political players of a different sort.

### **COMPETITION VERSUS COLLABORATION WITH POLITICAL PARTIES**

A dimension that scholars have addressed is the relationship think tanks have or should have with political parties (Garcé 2006; Garcé and Uña 2006; Baier and Bakvis 2006; Peck 2007; Truitt 2000). In the context of Uruguay (Garcé 2007) and Canada (Baier and Bakvis 2007), think tanks and political parties have not been able to establish long-lasting or collaborative relationships. Think tanks in Uruguay have not been able to establish stable influence in policy-making in collaboration with political parties due to the lack of existence of intra-party think tanks, and because political parties fail to engage with think tanks beyond program development during election season (Garcé 2007). In Canada, Baier and Bakvis argue, political parties and think tanks compete with each other in gaining public interest and in the ability to provide the most innovative and analytical personnel to engage political material. Nancy Sherwood Truitt (2000) points out that there are clear markers of party think tanks in examples such as the PRI's relationship with the Fundación Nacional Colosio in Mexico. This think tank is fully funded by the



PRI (Truitt 2000:530). These examples show clear relationships based on cooperation and competition between think tanks and political parties or party leaders.

This tension of collaboration versus cooperation, however, can become unclear in the interactions between political parties and think tanks. In the United States, there have been clear connections between think tanks and government administrations such as the relationship between economically liberal think tanks with George W. Bush in the context of post-Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana (Peck 2007). Think tanks such as the Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute promoted a neoliberal project post-Katrina through the development of economic policies for the gentrification of New Orleans through the guise of development and reconstruction. This, Peck says, happened by “working on the ‘inside’, with government officials and elected politicians” (Peck 104:2007). However, in the implementation of the neoliberal policies post-Hurricane Katrina, think tanks often criticized George W. Bush and the Republican Party for not doing enough to push forth their gentrifying models (Peck 2007). In the cases of CIEPLAN in Chile and CEDES in Argentina, the linkages are not as transparent but are instead presented in the ways “[politicians] are associated with them and [how parties] use some of their material” (Truitt 2000:530). In these examples, think tanks are not confined to the categorization of *party think tanks*.

Think tanks often try to portray an independence from political parties while at the same time engaging and relying on parties for the implementation of policies. FUSADES declares itself an independent and nonpartisan institution. However, their

history of linkages with ARENA demonstrate a coordinated effort to push forth neoliberal policies and economic model. While FUSADES has collaborated with ARENA in the past, they have critiqued the party for their corruption scandals in recent years. Despite some reservations, FUSADES has continued to work with ARENA on multiple occasions since they remain to be largest right-wing party in the country, and are more receptive to FUSADES' proposals and studies.

### **THINK TANKS AND GOVERNANCE: THE PRIVATE-PUBLIC EXCHANGE**

Scholars have not only been successful at pointing out how think tanks and political parties are linked, but also in demonstrating how there is a private-public exchange between think tanks and governments. It is not uncommon for think tank members to be appointed in government offices and administrations, or to serve as advisors and provide expert opinion. Nor is it uncommon for politicians to take positions in think tanks once their political appointments have terminated (Domhoff 2000; Truitt 2000; Gracetti and Prego 2017; Fischer and Plehwe 2013).

Think tanks seek to influence policy, agenda-setting, and debates. They are often able to do so when individuals travel to and from government administrations. Donald Abelson (2007) defines *influence* as the interactions and exchanges between various participants who are directly or indirectly involved in the formulation of policies (Abelson 2007:20). Abelson argues that there are various degrees and levels of influence and that some forms of influence are more visible than others (Abelson 2007). The private-public exchange not only allows me to point to the direct links between think

tanks and governments, it also allows me to understand the ways in which these relationships influence the national environment. Adolfo Garcé and Gerardo Uña (2007), Orazio J. Belletini (2007), and Carlos Acuña (2009) all agree that think tanks are political actors capable of influencing policy through the development and dissemination of non-ideological research, and developing a consensus around political issues. On the other hand, Karin Fischer and Dieter Plehwe (2013), Julieta Gracetti and Florencia Prego (2017), and Ana Belen Mercado (2017) agree that think tanks are indeed political actors, but can serve specific ideological, political, and economic interests. Keeping this tension in mind, I will explore the occupational trajectories of individuals that have traveled through the revolving door between FUSADES and Salvadoran government. In doing so, I hope to explore the roles, both visible and obscured, FUSADES has in influencing Salvadoran policy.

## **MEDIA PRESENCE**

Beyond having direct or indirect ties to political parties and to government administrations, the media is also a vital legitimizing tool think tanks utilize to disseminate discourses, establish debates, promote policy, and to portray an image that they are political actors capable of influencing policy (Abelson 2000:25). A way of measuring the influence of think tanks in the media is by tracking their *mentions* in the largest newspapers and television networks (Abelson 2007). *Mentions* are not simply the number of times a news source mentions a think tank's name, but also how news sources disseminate the positions held by think tanks on specific issues. This can be done by

directly referencing think tank research, by allowing members of think tanks to publish columns or op-ed pieces in their newspapers, or by inviting them to speak on their news programs about certain issues.

Far from simply obtaining a platform for the dissemination of their research, having a presence in the media is part of the process of promoting specific positions on issues and to illuminate issues not yet debated with the goal of influencing public attitudes and policy. Like in the previous dimensions discussed, think tanks have the capacity of establishing not only networks of people but also networks of ideas (Baier and Bakvis 2006). In Latin American countries where the state has lost or is increasingly losing the trust of citizens, civil society organizations like think tanks have regained the trust and legitimacy in a process Belletini calls “the transfer of legitimacy” (Belletini 2006:117). If we take Karin Fischer and Dieter Plehwe, and Julieta Gracetti and Florencia Prego’s argument--that think tanks are ideologically and politically charged institutions--we can explore the process think tanks engage in with the media in transferring legitimacy.

#### **TRANSNATIONAL AND TRANSREGIONAL TIES**

Think tanks are not confined to working within their national boundaries, but are often linked to transnational and transregional networks and organizations. In Latin America, the Atlas Network, the *Fundación para el Análisis y los Estudios Sociales* (FAES), USAID, the Ford Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, the Mont Pelerin Society, among others, are organizations that have been linked to Latin American think tanks

(Truitt 2000; Gracetti and Prego 2017; Fischer and Plehwe 2013; Cockett 1995). Having transnational relationships with think tanks and organizations like the ones stated above have allowed individuals from neoliberal think tanks to expand personal contacts, paving the way for the development of a coordinated effort of disseminating specific discourses, agendas, and projects across national boundaries (Gracetti and Prego 2017; Fischer and Plehwe 2013; Cockett 1995).

One of the ways these relationships manifest themselves are noted through the generous distribution of funding to think tanks. For example, the Atlas Network, a transnational non-profit organization based in Virginia dedicated to the formation of networks in the Americas, distributed \$30 million to organizations and think tanks around the world from 2001 to 2013, with \$600,000 destined to Latin America--with Venezuela and Argentina being their largest beneficiaries (Fischer and Plehwe 2013). Similarly, the Fundación Iberoamérica Europa (FIE), based in Madrid, has conducted 400 projects and distributed approximately 100 million Euros in Latin America with most of that money being destined to think tanks in Bolivia and Venezuela (Fischer and Plehwe 2013).

Other types of support transnational organizations and think tanks have provided are the consultations in the development of economic models, the creation of digital transnational magazines, conferences, summer seminars for the dissemination of research, and a coordinated effort to disseminate similar discourses. For example, the *Iniciativa Democrática de España y las Americas* (IDEA), a Spanish-led international forum based in Miami which is integrated by 37 former Latin American presidents, has recently taken the task of denouncing Nicolas Maduro's governance at a hemispheric

scale through press releases (Gracetti and Prego 2017) and digital publications. Other examples were the conferences the Mont Pelerin Society held, mostly but not exclusively, in France and Britain, as well as the annual conferences the Atlas Network holds in Latin America to foster transnational networks. These conferences created through transnational networks are politically strategic in the sense that they allow think tanks to develop and sustain coordinated platforms for addressing political, economic, and social issues at larger scales.

### **DEFINING NEOLIBERALISM**

Taking David Harvey and Robert Brenner's understanding of *neoliberalism*, I define *neoliberalism* as a political and economic practice promoted by global political and economic elites with the aim of transcending the crisis of overproduction in global manufacturing that began in 1973 by instilling an institutional framework guided by individual entrepreneurialism, free trade, free markets, privatization of public resources, and social austerity measures (Brenner 2002; Harvey 2005). Under neoliberalism, the role of the state is to create the conditions for the enactment of this practice (Harvey 2005:2). The state, then, becomes a contentious battle-ground where groups with varying interests (e.g. political, economic, social, ideological, etc.) confront each other with the goal of gaining control of the state. Based on this definition, neoliberal institutions are any type of institution, such as FUSADES, that promotes and practices the neoliberal principles mentioned above. In a similar vein, I use the term "the right" or "right-wing" to refer to the *neoliberal right* which in the context of El Salvador, as will be seen below,

is largely the reconstitution of the country's old oligarchy. In this thesis, I refer to FUSADES as a neoliberal institution for their influential power over the state in promoting neoliberal policies. When discussing "the international right," I refer mainly to the U.S. government, transnational organizations (e.g. World Bank, OAS, Atlas Network, IDRC, etc.), and neoliberal governments in the region.

### **EL SALVADOR AND FUSADES**

While there is an extensive body of literature surrounding think tanks and their roles in Latin America, this literature focuses on South American countries while Central America and other third world countries have been neglected from those conversations. Academic literature on El Salvador largely focuses on violence, human rights, gangs, and immigration while the actual political system linked to such issues is largely left out of conversations. What I hope to provide throughout this thesis is a report of think tank influence in Salvadoran policy through analyzing the workings of a non-governmental think tank, FUSADES.

Like the case of the Mont Pelerin Society's role in developing a neoliberal economic model that was then successfully implemented in England under Margaret Thatcher, FUSADES served as an institution where the "neoliberal paradigm began to be discussed among prominent segments of the oligarchy as the new way forward" (Carrillo 2012). In the development of the neoliberal program of El Salvador, FUSADES received international support since they contracted twenty-five international advisers to assist in the development of an economic and social program for El Salvador (Robinson 2003:96).

Much effort has been placed by right-wing Salvadoran elites, the U.S. government, and the global community in the development of FUSADES as an institution that represents objectivity and the best interest of El Salvador.

Drawing from elite theorist Ana Castellani (2016), this thesis will also analyze the reconfigurations that have taken place within FUSADES since 2009. The reconfiguration process does not signify a radical departure for an object's previous characteristics, but can indicate ruptures and continuities in any given period studied (Castellani 2016:59). This is relevant to the study of FUSADES, not only because think tanks are dynamic and have the capacity to shift agendas and strategies, but because El Salvador has undergone unprecedented political change since 2009. FUSADES is first and foremost a neoliberal think tank whose principles lie in the beliefs of a representative democracy and an inalienable right to private property (FUSADES Website 2018a). Analyzing the dimensions highlighted above will allow me to formulate an understanding of the ruptures and continuities FUSADES has undergone in terms of their ability to influence policy especially since ARENA lost its presidential reign, and has also experienced a loss of legitimacy due to corruption scandals.

As stated earlier, think tank scholars have often clashed in defining the parameters of what counts as a think tank and what does not. Rather than contribute to this debate, Medvetz embraces the ambiguity and argues that the blurriness in defining think tanks is what gives them the legitimizing power at the crossroads between academia, the media, the economy, and politics. This ambiguity retained by think tanks presents paradoxical tensions--independent versus dependent, non-partisan versus party affiliated, neutral



versus political. Analyzing the four principal dimensions of think tanks forwarded by scholarship--their relationships to political parties, to government administrations, to transnational networks and organizations, and think tanks' presence in the media--provides a window from which to view FUSADES role in Salvadoran society.

### Chapter 3: Methods

During the Summer of 2017, I spent six weeks in El Salvador and was able to collect seven interviews with key informants in FUSADES. The length of the interviews varied with the shortest being fifteen minutes long, and the longest being one hour and a half long. I interviewed FUSADES workers of different rankings including the director of the Political Studies Department, and the director of their program called *Fortalecimiento y Acción Social* (FORTAS). I also interviewed lower ranking employees of the think tank. While I initially set out to interview 10 FUSADES workers, this task proved difficult due to these workers' limited availability. I was able to achieve the seven interviews through snowball sampling.

Reception from the participants varied according to ranking. The first two interviewees were low ranking employees who expressed a sort of fear of losing their jobs. Higher ranking FUSADES workers, however, were welcoming and enthusiastic about participating in my study. They were also more willing to talk about politics and economy than the lower ranking employees were. Like Lauren Rivera (2015) expressed in her study of workers in elite institutions, I was also screened by my interviewees. These screenings facilitate the interviewees ability to relate to the interviewer and thus mitigates their levels of comfort and willingness to participate in the study. My interviewees often asked me about my educational background and birthplace. I was also often asked what *departamento* my parents were from to which I replied with the *departamento* my father is from--La Paz. I consciously omitted my mother's *departamento* which is San Salvador due to the possibility that they would ask for a

municipality within the department. My mother is from Mejicanos, San Salvador--a municipality with strong and historical ties to the leftist political party, FMLN. To avoid any potential influences in their responses, I omitted such information.

The interview guide I formulated contained six different types of questions, each type was meant to produce an understanding of FUSADES and the interviewees' roles in the institution. The first type includes questions about the interviewees' personal histories in the institution. The second type included questions about the changes they have noted in the institution since they started working in FUSADES. The third asked about personal relationships with political parties, especially ARENA. The fourth had questions about personal experiences with international institutions. The fifth type had specific questions about their perceptions of FMLN administrations. The sixth type addressed the institution's funding sources. These 6 types of questions allow me to develop an understanding of the role and influence FUSADES has in El Salvador. These questions address three of the four dimensions presented in the literature review: collaboration versus competition with parties, influence in governance, and transnational and transregional ties. Four of the interviews were audio recorded with permission of the participants, while three participants declined audio recordings and preferred written notes. The three that declined audio recordings were low ranking staff while those that agreed to audio recordings held higher positions in the FUSADES.

In addition to the interviews, I also analyzed 28 newspaper articles published in two Salvadoran news outlets called *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Gráfica*. I collected three types of articles. The first type point to the ways these two media outlets promote

FUSADES' studies. The second were written either by FUSADES representatives or quote them on specific issues. The third type are about FUSADES events these two news outlets covered. These articles allow me to address the fourth dimension--how FUSADES and the media collude to influence policy while critiquing the FMLN.

In addition to the interviews and news article, I also analyzed FUSADES documents, government statements and documents, and a statement by the FMLN. The FUSADES documents I include in this research are: statements on government budget proposals, and an annual assessment of the political environment written by the Political Studies Department. The government statements and documents are different. The statements are published in their government website to discuss or promote projects and events, while the documents are formal documents that present projects in their developmental stages. I also included a statement published in the FMLN website and an article published in the leftist news outlet called *El Diario Co-Latino* that respond to a FUSADES study. The interviews, news articles, FUSADES documents, government documents and statements, and the FMLN statements allow me to develop an analysis of how the largest think tank in Central America influences the political system and the economy, as well as the tensions between FUSADES and the FMLN.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **THE FUSADES PARADOX: IMPARTIALITY AND NEOLIBERAL POLITICS**

The paradox of FUSADES is their self-proclamation and promotion of impartiality even though they advocate for neoliberal policies. They do so by explicitly presenting their work as impartial, demand impartiality in Salvadoran politics, and they often comment on issues affecting the country in Salvadoran mainstream media while the FMLN's perspective is often omitted. It is clear, however, that the think tank is politically biased by the way they critique the FMLN and countries with leftist governments, and the ties they have with the international right such as the U.S. government, the OAS, the Atlas Network, the Lima Group, and the University of Salamanca in Spain. As previously mentioned, they have also held historical ties to the ARENA.

FUSADES declares their impartiality and objectivity most explicitly in the assessments and statements the think tank publishes. For example, in FUSADES' 2018 political assessment of El Salvador, they stated that the purpose of the document is to present an "objective evaluation of the actions of the presidency" (FUSADES 2018e:1). In October 2018, FUSADES published an article in their website that presented a project they are currently working on in coordination with USAID and Glasswing International. The purpose of the project is to monitor the quality of life of people in multiple municipalities, and "among the main lines of action is to generate trustworthy, impartial, and comparable information about cities, quality of life, and citizen participation"

(FUSADES 2018d). The use of *impartiality* and *objectivity* signifies their desire to portray their work as so with the goal of gaining support and credibility.

Using their influence in the media, FUSADES promotes impartiality. For example, they explicitly demanded for the appointment of impartial federal judges based on merit rather than partisanship and ideology (Zometa 2018a). In an interview with *El Diario de Hoy*, Roberto Murray Meza--the founding president of FUSADES--stated that FUSADES' "impartiality and integrity are, without a doubt, the most valuable legacy of the institution" (Reyes 2018). Meza also stated that "FUSADES has been able to maintain their impartiality due to the support of international institutions such as the World Bank, the University of Oxford, the Inter-American Dialogue, and the University of Salamanca" (Reyes 2018).

In the following sections, I will outline the paradoxical nature of FUSADES' declaration of impartiality. I will point out the historical link between FUSADES and the right-wing party, ARENA, as well as the tension in their relationship since ARENA's loss of the presidency. I will also highlight the antagonistic relationship between FUSADES and the leftist political party, FMLN. Equally important are FUSADES' prominence in the Salvadoran mainstream media, and their transnational ties to various neoliberal institutions. By analyzing these dimensions, I show the contradictory nature of FUSADES self-proclaimed impartiality while pointing to the ways FUSADES promotes neoliberal policies and state support of this political economic practice.

## **FUSADES AND ARENA: RELATIONSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

Existing literature on the relationships between political parties and think tanks have pointed to a dichotomy--cooperation versus competition. In countries such as Uruguay and Canada, think tanks have been unable to develop cooperative relationships with political parties and instead compete against them in pushing forth policies and discourses (Garcé 2007; Baier and Bakvis 2007). In other places, such as the United States and Mexico, there have been clearer cooperative relationships between political parties and think tanks (Peck 2007; Truitt 2000). FUSADES is the largest think tank in El Salvador and the most prestigious think tank in Central America according to the University of Pennsylvania (Molina 2018). Their relationship to the right-wing party, ARENA, has undergone a shift from full-fledged support and cooperation with them to publicly distancing themselves from a party marred with corruption scandals.

Throughout the ARENA administrations (1989-2009), FUSADES played prominent roles in influencing governance through their direct participation in those administrations. In other words, this period marks a relationship based on explicit cooperation between both institutions. Alfredo Cristiani, a coffee producing oligarch, was among the founding members of FUSADES. When ARENA was founded in 1981, it was formed by El Salvador's oligarchy who held assets in traditional agricultural exports. By the late 1980s, however, ARENA experienced a shift. It became fragmented and largely dominated by elites who moved away from traditional agricultural exports and into finance (Wade 2016; Carrillo 2012). To consolidate this shift, Alfredo Cristiani became the president of ARENA in 1985 and later became their presidential candidate for the

1989 elections; 5 years after he joined the party and 6 years after co-founding FUSADES (Associated Press 1985). While this shift was happening in ARENA, FUSADES was developing the neoliberal model that was implemented in El Salvador starting in 1989 with the presidential election of Cristiani. In 1987, Arnold Harberger, a former economist at the University of Chicago and mentor of the “Chicago Boys,” was hired as a consultant and worked with FUSADES to develop this economic model and its application in El Salvador (The Christian Science Monitor 1989). When Cristiani gained presidential power in 1989, he ushered in an era of neoliberal policies in El Salvador. In this first ARENA administration, 17 FUSADES members held positions in the government (Wood and Segovia 1995:2081).

Cristiani is not the only case of cooperative ties between FUSADES and the right-wing party. Luis Mario Rodriguez, the current director of the Political Studies Department of FUSADES, held multiple government official positions during ARENA administrations. Before working for FUSADES, Rodriguez worked in the attorney general’s office, working specifically for the Supreme Court (Personal Communication, June 12, 2017). After that, he worked in the *Asociación Nacional de Empresarios Privados* (ANEP--National Association of Private Enterprise) for five years. After those five years, he was hired by the last ARENA administration, which was headed by President Elias Antonio Saca from 2004 to 2009, working in legal affairs for the Executive Office. Pedro Argumedo, one of my interviewees, provides another example of this linkage between FUSADES and ARENA. After graduating from the University of El Salvador in 1992, Argumedo took a government position in the Ministry of Economics



under Cristiani's administration to work on diagnostics and growth. After working in the Ministry of Economics, he worked in the Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador for five years. He was then offered a position in the Department of Economic Studies in FUSADES and is currently a Senior Investigator of Economic Studies.

After Saca's administration, ARENA lost its twenty year reign to the leftist political party, the FMLN. This loss deeply affected ARENA and resulted in its fragmentation. A year later, in 2010, an alternative right-wing party was founded by Saca and disillusioned ARENA members. They called this new party *Gran Alianza Nacional* (GANAN--Grand National Alliance). With the FMLN now in the presidency, it became more difficult for FUSADES to push forward proposals and projects due to their political and historical links to ARENA. Since the founding of GANA, multiple former officials of ARENA administrations, including former Presidents Elias Antonio Saca and Francisco Flores, were prosecuted for embezzling millions in government funds. Rodriguez is among those accused of receiving fraudulent overpayments under Saca's administration.

When asked about the relationship between FUSADES and political parties, my interviewees expressed a complicated relationship marked by both tension and cooperation. While pointing out that FUSADES members have also participated in the ARENA party, Rodriguez also highlighted a shift that has taken place in FUSADES since 2009--the year that the FMLN gained presidential power for the first time. Rodriguez stated:

Since 2009, a series of reforms were presented in the electoral sphere as a consequence of the demand citizens were making to the Supreme Court, claiming that some of their political rights were being violated -- for example, forcing us to vote for a party instead of individual candidates. Also, an issue was corrected when party representatives were at the forefront of institutions such as the Republic Court's of Audit, the Supreme Court of Audit, the Supreme Court, the *Tribunal Supremo Electoral*, the Republic's Prosecutor's Office. So the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court decided to remove these persons that were linked to parties, and replace them with independent individuals. Our institution supports those changes (Personal Communication, June 12, 2017).

FUSADES promotes impartiality even though various members have worked under ARENA administrations. However, Since ARENA lost its hold of the presidency, FUSADES supported the a change in the electoral system. This change encouraged voters to choose individual candidates rather than political parties. This electoral shift came at the same time that ARENA experienced a decline in popularity due to general dissatisfaction and corruption scandals. Since then, FUSADES has distanced itself from ARENA while retaining its right-wing roots. Argumedo, Senior Investigator of the Economics Department in FUSADES, stated:

So until 2009, I could say that there was a party and a government that was sustained by the idea to promote economic policies to develop the private sector, insert themselves into the market, improve competitiveness... [Now] they're corrupt. Whether it's the right or the left... So what this ultimately denotes is that if one evaluates the policies of development of the society, one can see the interests of the actors that represent political parties of the country, they haven't had a complete commitment to democracy (Personal Communication, June 16, 2017).

And Lidia Gonzalez, a researcher in the Center for Research and Statistics of FUSADES, expressed a similar opinion:

I think that we cannot only talk about the FMLN when it comes to corruption. In ARENA, their cap has been removed and there have been cases exposed on corruption in their administrations...I think that we need to demand for what is right, as citizens. Even though there is political polarization--you either vote for

one party or the other--in reality there is no ideological polarization. Parties don't reflect the ideologies they claim to reflect (Personal Communication, June 15, 2017).

Luis Mario Rodriguez, Pedro Argumedo, and Lidia Gonzalez expressed similar sentiments regarding Salvadoran political parties--that they are corrupt and no longer credible. These FUSADES members point to the tensions between ARENA and the think tank, which might support their claim of impartiality. Their critiques about ARENA are, however, based on the corruption scandals that haunt the party rather than their policies and practices throughout the 20 years of governance. While they refer to the leftist party (i.e. FMLN) as corrupt in these interviews, their critiques of the FMLN are different in that they largely critique the policies and practices of this party. This shows how they have retained their neoliberal roots, even when they have distanced themselves from ARENA.

It is important to clarify that while FUSADES has distanced itself from ARENA, the think tank continues to be in political coordination with this party. FUSADES may critique the political party for its corruption as pointed out in the interviews, but they continue to be aligned when it comes to issues regarding the economy and politics. In 2016, the government and ARENA planned a negotiating table where representatives of both parties would address issues surrounding the country's privatized pension system and attempt to find a solution. Among the representatives ARENA sent was Alvaro Trigueros Arguello--the director of the Economic Studies Department in FUSADES (Diario Co-Latino 2016a). Another example is elaborated in the subsection titled "FUSADES and FMLN: Relationship and Governance--Economy," but to synthesize, ARENA's

parliamentary group has proposed the creation of a committee to oversee and administer the management of the country's water. The committee ARENA has proposed is composed of three private institutions and two government institutions. FUSADES is one of the proposed institutions to manage and oversee the nation's resource. Both these examples show how they may have differences, largely marked by ARENA's decline in popularity and credibility, but continue to be aligned with each other when it comes to policy, specifically economics.

### **FUSADES AND FMLN: RELATIONSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

The FMLN and FUSADES have not had the private-public exchange as noted in the case of ARENA, but the think tank has attempted to influence public policy in other ways throughout the FMLN's administrations. While there have been instances of cooperation between FUSADES and the FMLN, it is largely an antagonistic relationship.

As Pedro Argumedo said:

We've had internal sessions, sessions at the Legislative Assembly, to try to get these public policies approved. Now we've done it just as much with *diputados* from ARENA, from the little parties, and with the FMLN. What I can say is that it is more difficult to have open receptiveness of the FMLN because the FMLN says 'no, you are from ARENA (Personal Communication, June 16, 2018).

FUSADES has publically critiqued the government's international relations, social policies, as well as economic policies. The FMLN has retained positive relations with leftist governments such as Nicaragua and Venezuela--a relationship the Salvadoran right-wing, including FUSADES, has openly critiqued. FUSADES has also denounced the government's social policies and have referred to them as clientelistic (Caceres 2013).

I will also point to examples where FUSADES has critiqued the leftist executive office's proposed economic policies, and instances when the party has accused the think tank of manipulating data in their studies to delegitimize the government's efforts.

### **I. International Relations: Venezuela and Nicaragua**

FUSADES has publically critiqued the FMLN's support for the current Venezuelan and Nicaraguan governments. More than 52,000 Salvadorans were deported from the United States in 2016 according to data acquired by FUSADES, and, they argue, this number could increase due to the FMLN administrations' support of the Bolivarian government headed by Nicolas Maduro. They argue that any benefits that Salvadorans have, such as the Temporary Protected Status, a temporary status that affords nationals from specific countries the ability to reside in the United States, could be revoked due to said support (El Mundo 2017; Melendez 2017). FUSADES also argues that El Salvador's ties with the United States and other countries that criticize the Venezuelan government could weaken. This could result in, FUSADES argues, risking aid provided by the U.S. (El Mundo 2017; Melendez 2017).

Luis Mario Rodriguez shows how FUSADES' concerns on El Salvador's relations with Venezuela are political in nature and not entirely based on their concerns about Salvadorans. In an op-ed by Rodriguez released in *El Diario de Hoy* in June 2018, he describes his opinion on the FMLN's support of both President Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela and President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua. In this statement, Rodriguez claims that President Sanchez Cerén's support for these governments indicate a failure to

support democracy and denounce tyranny. He states that President Cerén’s support of these governments “makes him an accomplice to those who distort the rule of law, repress their opposition, obstruct free, transparent, and just elections, violate the autonomy of institutions and concentrate power” (Rodriguez 2018a). He also states that Cerén’s recognition of Maduro’s triumph in the Venezuelan presidential elections in May 2018 contradicts the rejection of it expressed by The *Lima Group*, *La Iniciativa Democrática de España y las Américas* (IDEAS), and the Organization of American States (OAS). In this statement, Rodriguez does not mention the concerns FUSADES had previously expressed but rather shows the political nature of his position towards the relationship the FMLN has with the Bolivarian government.. His claims that Maduro is a tyrant, undemocratic, violent, and a detractor of freedom and individualism are claims made by the international Right on political figures, parties, or systems that attempt to challenge neoliberalism. Despite their claims of objectivity, this is a clear demonstration of how they explicitly take political positions. By disguising these critiques as objective analysis, Rodriguez and FUSADES are able to influence and promote dissenting attitudes towards not only President Cerén and the FMLN but also the Latin American Left. This shows how FUSADES and the FMLN have opposing stances on the government’s foreign relations with other Leftist governments.

## **II. Social Proposals and Policies**

FUSADES has also critiqued the government’s social policies and proposals. The think tank has opposed the government’s federal budget proposal formulated by the

FMLN and has promoted austerity measures. One of the most controversial proposals was the 2016 federal budget proposal the FMLN formulated since it was heavily debated in the legislative assembly. In official statements, FUSADES criticized the lack of transparency and sustainability for the use of the funds stated in the proposal (FUSADES 2015a). In another statement, FUSADES argued that the 2016 national budget proposal is “divorced from the needs of the population” (FUSADES 2015b; La Prensa Grafica 2015). Instead, FUSADES has promoted austerity measures of cutting down federal spending on social programs and have declared the government’s social policies to be clientelistic (Cáceres 2013; Diario Co-Latino 2016b).

The FMLN, however, rejects the proposal to cut down federal spending and rejects the characteristic of their policies being clientelistic. In 2015, 46.57% of the national budget was designated to social spending and in 2016, 46.06% of the national budget was designated to social spending (Rivera 2018:37). These spendings exceed any of the previous national budget allocations for national social spending. Beyond those two years, some of the projects that have benefited from the government social spendings since 2009 are: the construction and development of Ciudad Mujer--a government program meant to provide women holistic support via specialized services to meet their needs and improve their quality of life; distribution of school packages and *vaso de leche* program--including uniforms, school materials, milk and lunch for public school students; distribution of agricultural packages--including seeds and fertilizer; and the distribution of land titles. One of the projects that FUSADES has referred to as clientelistic is the *one girl, one boy, one computer* project the government is leading with

the support of ALBA Petroleos (FUSADES 2016b:7). This project aims to provide computers to students in public schools throughout the country. They argue this project is clientelistic because Alba Petroleos receives funds from the national budget and funding provided to the Salvadoran government by Taiwan in order to support the manufacturing of the computers (FUSADES 2016b:7). Robert Gay defines political clientelism as “the distribution of resources (or promise of) by political office holders or political candidates in exchange for political support, primarily-although not exclusively-in the form of the vote” (Gay 1990:648). Political clientelism is a means-to-an-end. Politicians offer or hand-out resources with the goal of retaining or gaining political support via votes. What the FMLN has done, however, cannot be characterized as clientelistic by definition. Clientelistic politics are often immediate in effect, do not have long-term, large-scale, or substantial social impact. The FMLN’s social programs and policies aims to redistribute resources the Salvadoran population was historically deprived of and aim to have long-term effects of reducing poverty, reducing crime, empowering historically marginalized populations such as women and rural workers, stimulating national industry and economy, and establishing a foundation for a socialist alternative. Calling policies like these clientelistic is a tactic used to delegitimize such efforts. Concerning FUSADES’ statement on the lack of transparency and sustainability, they argue that the government does not have sufficient funds in order to execute all the projects and programs included in the budget and will ultimately increase the national debt. However, the overwhelming majority of the national debt was accrued during the ARENA administrations and the FMLN has been tasked with paying them back (Villalona 2016). To reiterate, FUSADES’



critiques about the FMLN and their administrations' social policies are political and partial. As a result, FUSADES and the FMLN have an antagonistic relationship in issues concerning social policies and programs.

### **III. Economy**

FUSADES has also publicly expressed opposition towards the FMLN's economic policies and activities. Examples can be noted in FUSADES' official documents that analyze the country's political and economic conjuncture and challenges. In 2014, FUSADES published a document analyzing the official political platforms the FMLN and ARENA presented in 2013 for the presidential elections. In their analysis of the FMLN's platform, FUSADES highlights multiple points written in the official document published by the FMLN called "*El Salvador adelante*" and in the then-presidential candidate, Salvador Sanchez Cerén's, book titled *El país que quiero*. FUSADES, an institution that openly promotes the protection of private property and individual rights (FUSADES 2018a), states that there are multiple instances in the FMLN's documents where individual rights and private property rights are in danger (FUSADES 2014).

Concerning the economic platform in the FMLN's document, FUSADES states that the following individual rights are breached: private property, freedom of contract, opposition to economic intervention and regulation, and commercial opening and equality before the law (FUSADES 2014). The language as well as the policies in Cerén's book is also interrogated. They express contrasts in the language in both Cerén's book and in the party document. For example, they point to how the official party

document does not make any mention on deprivatization efforts, nor does it mention economic relationships with *Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA) but Cerén's book does.

In mid-2018, the Department of Political Studies released a political assessment of the environment in El Salvador that covered June 2017 to May 2018. In the section titled "The Relationship Between the Executive and the Private Sector," FUSADES states:

In the past 12 months, we have observed little advancements in the development of trusting relationships between the Executive office and the private sector. The recurrence of issues throughout the administration of President Sanchez Cerén, as well as the inflexibility of the political position of the official party, are factors that have contributed to the decaying relationship of the president with the private sector. This situation is materialized in the meager performance of dialogue, and in a growing gap between the official discourse and the observed results (FUSADES 2018e:35).

FUSADES directs the blame towards the executive office. They believe that the presidency should become more flexible in order to develop ties with the private sector. While it is not explicitly stated, it can be assumed that FUSADES refers to *ANEP*, an association multiple members of FUSADES and ARENA participated in previously, when they promote the development of ties between the private sector and the government. For the think tank, a *positive relationship* means having the state facilitate the conditions for free enterprise with minimal intervention in the economy--in other words, *laissez faire* economics. To reiterate, when asked about the concerns he holds about the direction the FMLN is taking the country, Rodriguez stated:

It is problem we have in this country, different visions that public politicians and the private sector have. The private sector wants clear rules, greater ease in doing

business, professionals in the state...[The FMLN wants] the state to intervene more in the economy, there is a lot of bureaucracy, they don't approve the law of public functions so public officials are, majorly, militants of political parties and are not prepared to provide services (Personal Communication, June 12, 2017).

This, however, directly contradicts the values and principles of the FMLN. In 2015, the FMLN held their first congress to discuss the party's direction, strategies, and internal issues. In one of the official documents that came out of that congress titled "Document on The Party Program and Strategy," they point out that the party's objectives are to eradicate neoliberalism, strengthen the state, strengthen public property as well as micro-, small-, and medium scale businesses (FMLN 2015). While Rodriguez argues for less state intervention in the economy, the FMLN pushes for state intervention.

FMLN militants have responded to studies and statements FUSADES has published in antagonistic forms, which further contributes to their inability to coordinate and cooperate with each other. The party has accused the think tank of omitting data in order to delegitimize the FMLN's administrations, and have critiqued the think tank for supporting policies that would privatize basic necessities. Most recently, ARENA has taken steps to privatize water via reforms in the management law of the resource called *La Ley de ANDA*. ARENA's legislative group has proposed the creation of a commission that would evaluate and establish water rates, as well as oversee the National Administration of Aqueducts and Sewage (ANDA in Spanish; ANDA is the government institution that controls and administers the country's aqueducts and sewage system). ARENA proposes the creation of a commission composed by 5 institutions, including ANEP and FUSADES. Of the 5 institutions, 3 of them are private while 2 are state

institutions. FMLN representatives have denounced the participation of private institutions, including FUSADES, arguing that the country's water should be entirely administered by the state (Monge 2018; Ramos 2018; FMLN 2018).

Another example of the uncooperative relationship between these two institutions can be noted in the responses the FMLN and their affiliates have made regarding studies FUSADES has released. The FMLN has accused FUSADES of omitting data in their economic research studies in order to portray a negative image of the party and the country's economic growth under the FMLN's administrations. For example, the FMLN's secretary-general, Medardo Gonzalez as well Cesar Villalona, an economist that sympathizes with the FMLN, have stated that it was shameful that FUSADES only used data from January and February 2015 in their trimestral economic analysis, excluding March (FMLN 2015; Valencia 2015). Gonzalez stated that if FUSADES would have included data on March, FUSADES' study would have pointed to a growth in capital goods of 3.9% rather than the 1.1% the think tank reported for the first trimester of that year (FMLN 2015). Gonzalez also accused the think tank of omitting data on the growth of tax revenue, and stated "it is clear that FUSADES wants to present the least favorable data on the economic evolution to promote negative propaganda against the government" (FMLN 2015). Additionally, Villalona pointed out, in *El Diario Co-Latino*, how the Salvadoran economy had not experienced substantial growth since 1995--a period of early accumulation that occurred during the transition into a neoliberal economic model--and even experienced a 3.1% drop in the last year of the ARENA government (Diario Co-Latino 2015). FUSADES and the FMLN have not been able to establish amicable

relationships and can be noted in their differences on issues of international relations, social policies, and economics.

#### **IV. Instances of Cooperation**

In comparison to the case of ARENA, the type of cooperation the think tank has had with the FMLN can be described as distant, at best. In the past, the FMLN has referenced research studies conducted by FUSADES and the party has also received proposals from FUSADES (GOES 2015; GOES 2014). The think tank has provided positive feedback on government policies, albeit not many. In these instances of cooperative relations, there have been either direct links to aid provided by the United States or relations with private enterprise. For example, in 2018 both FUSADES and Cerén's administration agreed on the amending of a constitutional article in order to legalize advertising in roads where it is currently banned to do so. This agreement is directly tied to measures that need to be taken in order to receive funding under a program called FOMILENIO II--a U.S. funding program that would direct \$365.2 million to El Salvador--for the installation of security cameras on roadways (Aleman 2018; FOMILENIO II 2018). FUSADES has also expressed support of a social government project called *El Salvador Educado*. While this project is largely administered by government institutions such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the National Council for Childhood and Adolescence, the business sector also plays an important role in the execution of this project (CONED 2016). In an instance where FUSADES recognized their partiality, the president of FUSADES, Miguel Angel Siman

stated “I would like to say that in all the spaces we participate in as FUSADES, the most important one is the National Council of Education. Despite our political differences, we are committed with you in this topic of education” (GOES 2016). This is, however, a rare case where FUSADES recognized their partiality to politics. Another example of cooperation between the leftist executive office and FUSADES was their participation in the Security and Prosperity of Central America Conference hosted in Miami, Florida in 2017. The Salvadoran delegation included multiple government officials of various ministries, ANEP, FUSADES, and other representatives of the private sector (GOES 2017). In addition to the Salvadoran delegation, representatives of the other countries in the so-called Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), as well as representatives of the United States participated in this conference to discuss public-private alliances for the execution of the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle--a strategy developed and administered by the United States government. In all these examples, we can note that there have been instances of cooperation between FUSADES and the FMLN due to either U.S. government involvement or the involvement of the private sector. In other words, FUSADES is more inclined to support government plans when these two groups are involved.

**FUSADES AND SALVADORAN MAINSTREAM MEDIA: *LA PRENSA GRÁFICA* AND *EL DIARIO DE HOY***

FUSADES’ presence in the mainstream media legitimizes its role in Salvadoran society as objective and as an institution that works in the interest of Salvadoran population. The Salvadoran mainstream media often presents favorable stories about

right-wing institutions such as political parties, ANEP, FUSADES. The media routinely depicts ARENA more favorably than the FMLN. As Abelson shows, a way of measuring political influence in the media is to track *mentions* (Abelson 2007). FUSADES receives media mentions often through the publication of op-eds written by prominent FUSADES members; through newspapers and digital outlets featuring stories on their latest research; and covering their public events. The two largest newspapers in El Salvador, *El Diario de Hoy* (EDH) and *La Prensa Gráfica* (LPG), provide FUSADES with ample space to disseminate their ideas, allowing them to promote free market economics and conservative politics in ways that are accessible for the Salvadoran population.

EDH and LPG are owned by some of the most prominent members of El Salvador's oligarchy. EDH was founded in 1936 by Napoleon Viera Altamirano and continues to be owned by the Altamirano family. Falling in line with its conservative and free-market ideas, EDH has demonized the FMLN and leftist movements, it promotes neoliberal political and economic positions. Some of the ways this newspaper has demonized the FMLN is by recently publishing articles related to events that took place during the Salvadoran civil war such as the FMLN destroying a bridge in 1981 (El Diario de Hoy 2018a) and the then-guerrilla group carrying out an assassination of the Minister of the Presidency in 1989 (El Diario de Hoy 2018b), while it publishes an article that commemorates the birth of Roberto d'Aubuisson--the founder of ARENA and architect of the assassination of Monsignor Oscar Romero, now Saint Romero (Zometa 2018b). EDH circulates throughout El Salvador through print and holds the [www.elsalvador.com](http://www.elsalvador.com) website where news is distributed digitally.

Like EDH, LPG also promotes right wing positions through their journalism. It is also distributed throughout the entire the country through print and is digitally available on [www.laprensagrafica.com](http://www.laprensagrafica.com). LPG was founded by Jose and Antonio Dutriz in 1915 and is owned by the Dutriz Group, a company that owns and publishes multiple newspapers and magazines in El Salvador. Like EDH, LPG often makes reference to studies published by FUSADES, statements made in events and interviews by members of FUSADES, and provides spaces for members to publish or voice their analysis.

In *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market 2* (2003), Pierre Bourdieu points to the pervasive ways the neoliberal doxa is culturally and intellectually legitimized and upheld by the dominant, while calling for academics to abandon the concept of neutrality and actively involve themselves in the political field in order to challenge neoliberalism. On think tanks and the neoliberal doxa, Bourdieu argues that think tanks make previous economic models such as liberalism appear to be progressive (leading to liberty and abundance) and by doing so, challenging this model is deemed conservative and backwards; Bourdieu calls this the paradox of the neoliberal doxa (Bourdieu 2002:22). This paradox can be noted in the examples provided below. Also notable in these examples are what Bourdieu refers to as “logical monstrosities” (Bourdieu 2002:79), in other words, faulty assertions made through the usage of seemingly neutral information and lexicon in order to appear to be unfalsifiable.

Recent coverage of FUSADES has cited their studies and statements, which question the FMLN and their governance. In tandem with the political proclivity of FUSADES, these news outlets published articles on FUSADES that critiqued the



FMLN's policies and actions in the government. Some of the research topics published by FUSADES that critique the FMLN's executive government and are disseminated in both mediums are: FUSADES arguing that the government has closed its spaces for the business sector (Mendoza 2018); FUSADES arguing that the government's social programs have not reduced national poverty (La Prensa Grafica 2017a); a statement released by FUSADES noting their dissatisfaction with the FMLN's move to break ties with Taiwan and establish ties with China due to, they argue, the economic uncertainties and because the private enterprise was not part of the discussions (Pacheco 2018); and that the water subsidy provided by the leftist executive office is inefficient (Paz 2018). In the article published by the EDH that disseminates FUSADES' position that government social programs have not reduced national poverty, the think tank utilizes numerical data to show that despite social spending being the highest it has been in the past, poverty has remained at the same level it was in 2006 (Mendoza 2018). The assumption that social programs cannot reduce poverty and that they are the only policies implemented by the government to revamp the economy is aligned with what Bourdieu refers to as "teratological paralogism" (Bourdieu 2002:80). The usage of numbers and the ambiguous definition of "poverty" attempt to make this article appear to be neutral and truthful.

LPG and EDH often quote members of FUSADES and provide prominent members with space to publish opinion pieces. Luis Mario Rodriguez, the director of the Department of Political Studies of FUSADES, is the most prominent member that publishes op-eds in both news outlets on issues regarding the political, economic, and social conjuncture of the country and Latin America. He has also published his concerns

with Salvadoran politics due to the recent economic shifts of breaking ties with Taiwan and establishing ties with China. Without evidence, Rodriguez claims that China will likely be providing El Salvador with gifts, commencing a relationship based on clientelism and where China funnels money into the electoral campaigns of the FMLN due to the leftist party's historical ties to the Communist Party of China (Rodriguez 2018b). This is a peremptory fallacious deduction, a faulty argument Bourdieu also points out (Bourdieu 2002:79). Rodriguez deduces that China will fund the FMLN simply because of their historical ties. He does not present any evidence, but asserts that ties with China are bad for the well-being of El Salvador.

Rodriguez is not limited to comment on issues in El Salvador, but as a member of the largest think tank in Central America, is able to comment on political issues in Latin America, often critiquing leftist governments and the FMLN's relationships to them. Rodriguez has also published an op-ed that argues that Latin America is experiencing the deterioration of democracy and points to Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Nicaragua as examples (Rodriguez 2017). In this piece, Rodriguez argues that Latin America is experiencing a political conjuncture where democratic processes are deviating from its principle in multiple ways such as:

Inequity in the financing of political parties, the official advantages in favor of candidates of the governing party, the adulteration of the results, insufficient information provided to voters, political bias held by electoral referees, [the] appalling organization of the election (Rodriguez 2017b).

Additionally, Rodriguez states--through both LPG and EDH--that populist approaches, political clientelism (e.g. Nicaragua according to Rodriguez), "*new constitutionalism*"

(i.e. allowing the indefinite reelection of presidents in countries like Venezuela and Ecuador) and antipolitics (he points to Mexico) contribute to the weakening of representative democracy (Rodriguez 2017b). Further evidence that Rodriguez publishes on political issues in Latin America through a neoliberal perspective is an op-ed presenting his analysis on “clientelism” in multiple countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela (Rodríguez 2017a). In this article, he argues that the social programs these governments have executed are political vehicles that facilitate popular support--in other words, government social programs have clientelistic ends. While these articles attempt to appear neutral through usage of technical words such as “new constitutionalism,” “magna carta,” “clientelism,” these articles argue that these leftists governments are becoming ever-more undemocratic and clientelistic. As William Robinson states, however, “Democracy promotion’ programmes seek to cultivate these transnationally oriented elites who are favourably disposed to open up their countries to free trade and transnational corporate investment” (Robinson 2013:229). Both Bourdieu and Robinson point to how “globalization” and “democracy”, respectively, are manipulated by elites in order to consolidate their neoliberal project using these “*pseudo-concepts*” (Bourdieu 2002:85) which are generally appealing and considered forward-looking.

While Rodriguez is one of the most prominent members in these news outlets, other think tank members have also been quoted making statements about Salvadoran issues. FUSADES members Marjorie de Trigueros and Pedro Argumedo have both been quoted by LPG and EDH on their concerns about the recent ties established with China as

well as their concerns about the recent policy approved called *zonas económicas especiales* (Zometa 2018c; Orellana 2018). Javier Castro, the director of Legal Studies in FUSADES, has also been quoted demanding that the legislative assembly appoint impartial federal judges by a specific date (Luna 2018; Morales 2018a).

LPG and EDH have also covered events that FUSADES has organized themselves, such as forums and semi-public reporting events. From April 10-12, 2018, FUSADES organized the 6th annual *Foro Internacional de Análisis Político* (FIAP - International Forum for Political Analysis). This forum is organized by FUSADES' Political Studies Department and is meant to bring together European, U.S., and Latin American political scientist that are members of the *Consejo Asesor Externo* to discuss varying issues regarding the political environment in Latin America (FUSADES 2018b; Melendez 2018a). Political Scientists that participate in the FIAP are university faculty, members of think tanks, and work in nonprofit organizations. A week prior to the 6th FIAP, La Prensa Grafica released two news articles about the forum and its goals. One directly quoted Luis Mario Rodriguez, the director of the Political Studies Departments, who stated the importance of the forum in allowing political scientists to discuss issues of “clientelism, populism, and *inmediatismo*” in Latin America while exploring solutions (Melendez 2018a). This piece reiterates, in a more subtle way, Rodriguez's political stance that the Latin American Left is clientelistic and anti-democratic as was addressed earlier in this section. The other article is a broader overview of the FIAP's purpose and directly makes reference to information obtained by FUSADES as an institution (Melendez 2018b).

Other events LPG and EDH have covered with frequency are semi-public events where FUSADES presents research findings and reports (Morales 2018a; Morales 2018b; Morales 2017; Molina 2017; La Prensa Gráfica 2017b; Melendez 2017). For example, on September 2017, *La Prensa Grafica* published an article that covered one of these events where FUSADES discussed concerns with the Salvadoran executive office expressing support for Venezuela under the PSUV's government (Melendez 2017). As explained earlier, this article highlighted FUSADES' concerns about this support because they argued it could affect U.S. support for El Salvador. On May 2017, *El Diario de Hoy* covered one of these events and highlighted FUSADES' critique of how the FMLN has been uncooperative and unwilling to reach a consensus with private businesses due to their political position (Morales 2017). Going back to Bourdieu, this example shows how the neoliberal think tank portrays the FMLN as archaic for having a relationship based on tension with the private businesses that demand for deregulation, privatization, and state-support; another tactic used by neoliberals. Having the media cover these events not only allow FUSADES to solidify and retain a strong network of people, but they also allow for the dissemination of a network of ideas to the public in order to try and influence attitudes about policy and general politics.

FUSADES' presence in the mainstream media legitimizes its role in Salvadoran society as objective and as an institution that works in the interest of Salvadoran people. While FUSADES claims impartiality in their research studies and analysis, they focus their criticisms on the FMLN's politics and policies as well as other left Latin American governments. As Bourdieu shows us, claiming impartiality is a strategy utilized by elites

to legitimize and consolidate the neoliberal doxa, and critique opponents. It is through the media, that the Salvadoran right-wing, including FUSADES, is able to “impose very broadly a worldview suited to their interests” (Bourdieu 2002:79). Without LPG and EDH, FUSADES’ research findings would only be accessible to the professional class, especially academics, other think tanks, and the business elite. The LPG and EDH allows their research to be accessible and digestible to the general Salvadoran population.

### **FUSADES AND TRANSNATIONAL TIES**

FUSADES’ ties to transnational and transregional organizations have existed since its birth and have persisted throughout their existence as think tank scholars often note as being intrinsic of think tanks. Think tanks develop transnational relationships with organizations in order to receive funding, expand their networks and reach, and for the development of a coordinated effort across national boundaries. FUSADES has had historical ties to USAID, in both funding and supporting the institutionalization of the think tank in its early years. FUSADES has also participated in and worked with non-Salvadoran institutions such as the Atlas Network, the University of Salamanca, and International Development Research Centre (IDRC). FUSADES has been provided a platform for the dissemination of their research in these institutions, and they have also participated in a coordinated effort of the dissemination of specific agendas and discourses alongside these institutions. They have received awards and recognition from the ATLAS Network, the Interamerican Development Bank, German Corporation for

International Cooperation (GIZ), the University of Pennsylvania's Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, and RedEAmerica (FUSADES 2018c).

One type of support transnational entities provide think tanks are funding. With the financial support of USAID, FUSADES was co-founded in 1983. As of 1984, USAID began to advocate a strategic change in economic policy that promoted nontraditional exports--a package of economic policies the United States saw fit for political stability and economic growth (Segovia 1996:42; Negroponte 2012:58). From 1984 to 1992, USAID donated approximately \$100 million to FUSADES (Negroponte 2012:58). Working outside of the Salvadoran government it established its social base of support for the economic model they promoted by funding FUSADES. As Negroponte points out, "Washington constructed its own top-down NGO that was accountable only to USAID, and indirectly to the U.S. Congress" (Negroponte 2012:58).

Beyond supporting FUSADES through explicit donations, USAID's support for FUSADES took another form. While USAID donated \$100 million from 1984 to 1992, it is estimated that FUSADES received \$102,397,000 in U.S. government funding accounting for 94 percent of FUSADES' total budget (Kernaghan 1997:79). In 1987, FUSADES was audited by USAID. By that point, USAID had provided \$70 million to FUSADES even though none of the activities administered by FUSADES were evaluated, nor was there criteria established for measuring how well or poorly projects were executed. To alleviate the unsettling conclusions drawn from the audit, "USAID essentially gave FUSADES a bank" (Kernaghan 1997:90) and was projected to earn \$5

million a year in 1994 and beyond. This credit line was originally capitalized at \$15 million plus an additional \$600,000 to cover administrative costs (Kernaghan 1997:91).

From 2012 to 2017, USAID, FUSADES, the Business Foundation for Educational Development (FEPADE), the National Foundation for Development (FUNDE), the Salvadoran Foundation for Health and Human Development (FUSAL), and Glasswing International partnered up for a violence prevention program called *SolucionES*. Rather than funding the FMLN government's efforts in violence prevention, USAID allocated \$20 million to *SolucionES*; another \$22 million were provided by private-sector funders. Of these 5 organizations, FEPADE "is responsible for all aspects of project administration and implementation" (USAID 2016). This organization was founded by "nearly every major Salvadoran corporation along with the foundations of the oligarchic Siman, Poma, and Duenas families -- a veritable who's who of ARENA financiers" (Goodfriend 2017). According to USAID, *SolucionES* "promotes corporate social investment to have a greater impact on crime- and violence-prevention at the municipal level" (USAID 2016). This private-led prevention program offers multiple services-- sports clubs, job training, youth leadership programs, and provides grants for local projects. This project is similar to the government's preventative efforts under their policy called *Plan El Salvador Seguro*. This policy highlighted prevention, rehabilitation, and victim-care as well as improving law enforcement. Despite the similarities, FUSADES has opted to work with USAID in promoting social programs rather than join the government in their efforts.



Another institution that has awarded FUSADES funding is the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). From 2014 to 2019, FUSADES will be granted \$500,000 by the IDRC's program called Think Tank Initiative (TTI). IDRC is a Canadian state-owned enterprise that supports and invests in the production and dissemination of knowledge in developing countries (IDRC 2018a). They have invested in research projects in more than 25 countries in the Americas and in more than 80 countries worldwide. According to IDRC, the TTI funding will strengthen the role of FUSADES as a legitimate public policy institution by “[enhancing] its research quality, organizational performance, and policy engagement” (IDRC 2018b). In a recent study published by FUSADES' Department of Economic Studies, the think tank aims to develop a measure for understanding to the economic development of each *departamento* in El Salvador in comparison to those in Uruguay, Paraguay, and Chile--countries that are also funded under the TTI (Argumedo and Zuleta 2018:1). Methodically, the think tank produced three indicators to measure economic development in each of the 14 *departamentos*--productive development, enterprise development, and development of the local environment (Argumedo and Zuleta 2018:66). In this study, the think tank also makes multiple recommendations to increase economic development in each *departamento* (Argumedo and Zuleta 2018:71-74).

FUSADES is also able to learn from other institutions, and participate in the development of coordinated efforts across national borders with organizations and institutions with similar economic and political principals. Among the institutions FUSADES has worked with are the Atlas Network and the University of Salamanca in

Spain. The Atlas Network was founded in 1981 by Antony Fisher, who was notorious for starting think tanks that promote free-market economics. Like so, the Atlas Network is a U.S.-based organization that is partnered with 483 institutions in 94 countries (Atlas Network 2018a). In June 2018, before the start of the annual Atlas Network Latin American Liberty Forum held in Santiago, Chile, 23 think tank professionals from 14 countries received training on fundraising. Among those 23 think tank professionals was Carmen Vergara Rodriguez, the funding coordinator for FUSADES (Atlas Network 2018b). The purpose of this training was to “[encourage] a culture of philanthropy toward free market think tanks” (Atlas Network 2018b). Apart from this training, some of the conference themes addressed were “corporate social responsibility,” combating socialism, and free market and social justice. The keynote speaker for this conference was Jose Piñera--former “Chicago Boy”, former Minister of Labor and Social Security, and former Minister of Mining in Chile. The Atlas Network serves to provide think tanks with training and a network for promoting free market politics and economics.

The University of Salamanca has also worked with FUSADES in supporting the development of academic programs, and in publishing content about the economy and politics of El Salvador. In 2016, FUSADES and the University of Salamanca signed two agreements where both institutions would work with each other in the development of two programs. The first agreement was to create a scholarship program for students that desire to pursue a Master’s degree in the university (FUSADES 2016a). The second was to continue collaborations with the Central American School for Government and Democracy directed by FUSADES’ Department of Political Studies. The University of

Salamanca also published a study with the support of FUSADES titled “Political Clientelism in El Salvador?: A Study on Alba Petroleos and Related Businesses” (Ferraro and Rastrollo 2013) that argues that Alba Petroleos’ social programs could be used for clientelistic ends, giving the FMLN an electoral advantage due to their relationship to the enterprise (Ferraro and Rastrollo 2013:4).

The transnational relationships FUSADES has developed have served specific functions and purposes. USAID supported FUSADES’ founding through providing funding, guidance for the institutionalization, and to push forth a neoliberal agenda in the country. The Atlas Network serves to expand the institution’s network, to receive training on specific issues and to coordinate a consensual discourse and agenda across borders. Lidia Gonzalez and Pedro Argumedo state that having these transnational ties helps gain a sense of validation for their work, and to learn about issues being debated internationally (Personal Communication, June 15,2017; Personal Communication, June 16, 2017). The IDRC and The University of Salamanca support FUSADES as a knowledge-producing institution through funding and disseminating their research. What all these organizations have in common are their economic and political principles of neoliberalism and individualism.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has shown that FUSADES is a neoliberal think tank that influences policy-making in El Salvador through their national and transnational ties to right-wing figures and institutions while declaring themselves an impartial institution. This paradoxical ambiguity has served FUSADES and its Salvadoran right-wing elite allies well, in their efforts to transform El Salvador's political and economic systems to their liking.

FUSADES' ties to ARENA and their administrations show the direct ways in which the think tank has been able to influence policy and governance. Individuals such as Pedro Argumedo, Luis Mario Rodriguez, and Alfredo Cristiani are evidence of the revolving-door that links ARENA and FUSADES. Because of this revolving-door, FUSADES was able to develop and execute the Salvadoran neoliberal model. Most recently, FUSADES has distanced itself from ARENA due to the party's loss of credibility and decline in popularity. The relationship between FUSADES and the FMLN has, however, been hostile. To the FMLN, FUSADES is not an impartial institution but one that promotes the interests of the national and international right-wing elite. To FUSADES, the FMLN is a clientelistic party that hinders democracy and prosperity. Due to this tension, FUSADES' influence on policy has been limited and challenged especially since the FMLN gained power over the government's executive office in 2009.

The media has been a legitimizing tool and a vehicle for FUSADES to promote its ideas. *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Gráfica* present FUSADES' studies, provides

think tank members with space to publish or reference them on political and economic issues, and they cover FUSADES' events. Taking Pierre Bourdieu's analysis on how the neoliberal doxa is consolidated in the intellectual and cultural spheres, I show how the Salvadoran think tank makes faulty assertions that appear unfalsifiable. They critique the FMLN for their relations with other leftist governments, their social policies, and their economic policies, while promoting deregulation, privatization, and state-support for creating a *business-friendly environment*.

The relationships FUSADES has established with institutions at a global level also play a role in legitimizing the think tank and what it produces. Of all the institutions that FUSADES has relationships with, their ties to the United States government via USAID is the longest and most substantial. USAID co-founded FUSADES, funded the institution, provided them with a bank, and supports development projects that FUSADES leads. More recently, USAID and FUSADES partnered up in implementing development projects in the country. Under the existing context of leftist executive governance, projects like these implicitly attempt to delegitimize the efforts and strides the government has made in crime- and violence-prevention through the social programs. FUSADES' other transnational ties to organizations such as the Atlas Network, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and the University of Salamanca serve to expand FUSADES' networks, to receive training, and to coordinate a unified neoliberal agenda across international borders.

All over the world, grassroots organizations, political parties, governments, and some academics are challenging the neoliberal order. This thesis intends to contribute to

this struggle by showing how think tanks like FUSADES are key players in promoting neoliberal policies in third world countries. FUSADES has been an indispensable asset in pushing forward the neoliberal political and economic model in El Salvador, and grasping this truth is needed to effectively transform El Salvador. While the FMLN has publicly pointed to the many ways FUSADES is a partial institution that promotes right-wing elite interests, academics and grassroots organizations rarely target the institution. This thesis has aimed to expand our understanding of neoliberal think tanks, with the goal of effectively eradicating neoliberalism.

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