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El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations

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Summary

Congress has had significant interest in El Salvador, a small Central American nation that has had a large percentage of its population living in the United States since the country's civil conflict (1980-1992). During the 1980s, the U.S. government spent billions of dollars supporting the Salvadoran government's counterinsurgency efforts against the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). Three decades later, the United States has worked relatively well with two consecutive, democratically elected FMLN administrations.

President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a former guerrilla commander of the FMLN, is in the final year of his five-year term. Sánchez Cerén's approval ratings have been significantly lower than those of prior presidents, as security conditions remain serious and economic growth remains moderate (2.3% in 2017). Polarization between the FMLN government and the conservative Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA)-dominated National Assembly has magnified those challenges.

Political attention is on the February 3, 2019, first-round presidential elections. Nayib Bukele, a former mayor of San Salvador (2015-2018) standing for the Grand Alliance for National Unity (GANA) party, leads the FMLN and ARENA candidates. Both of those parties have lost support due to revelations of corruption involving former presidents, including the August 2018 conviction of former ARENA president Tony Saca.

U.S. policy in El Salvador continues to focus on promoting economic prosperity, improving security, and strengthening governance, the three objectives of the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America. Congress appropriated $57.7 million in bilateral assistance for El Salvador in the FY2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 115-141) to support those objectives. P.L. 115-141 withholds 75% of assistance for the Salvadoran central government until it addresses concerns such as border security, corruption, and human rights abuses. El Salvador also benefits from regional security assistance provided through the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and a Millennium Challenge Corporation compact (MCC).

The Trump Administration requested $45.7 million for U.S. efforts in El Salvador in FY2019. The Senate Appropriations Committee's FY2019 foreign aid appropriations measure (S. 3108) would provide $47.7 million for El Salvador. The House Appropriations Committee's foreign aid appropriations bill (H.R. 6385) would not specify a funding level for El Salvador. Both bills maintain conditions on aid to the central government. A resolution adopted by the House, H.Res. 145, called on the Salvadoran government to support ongoing anti-corruption efforts, and a provision in the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 115-232) requires the Secretary of State to name Salvadoran officials known to have engaged in, or facilitated, acts of grand corruption or narcotics trafficking.

President Trump's shifts in U.S. immigration policies have tested bilateral relations. In January 2018, the Trump Administration rescinded the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) that has shielded some 200,000 Salvadorans from removal (deportation) since 2001. The future of TPS and the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) initiative, which has protected some 26,500 Salvadorans brought to the United States as children from removal since 2012, remains uncertain pending litigation in federal courts.

For more information, see CRS Report RL34112, *Gangs in Central America*; CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*; and CRS Report R44812, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress*.

Contents

Introduction 1
Politics and Governance 1
Sánchez Cerén Administration 3
February 2019 Presidential Election 4
Economic and Social Conditions 5
Security Conditions 8
Judicial System 9
Secure El Salvador 10
"Extraordinary Measures" to Combat Gangs 11
Military Involvement in Public Security Efforts 11
Human Rights 11
Recent Human Rights Violations 12
Confronting Past Human Rights Violations 13
U.S. Relations 14
U.S. Foreign Assistance 14
State Department Assistance: Bilateral and Regional 14
Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Investment Compact 16
Department of Defense (DOD) Assistance 17
Migration Issues 17
Recent Migration Flows 17
Human Trafficking and Alien Smuggling 19
Removals, Temporary Protected Status, and Deferred Action for Child Arrivals 19
"Zero Tolerance" Immigration Enforcement and Restrictions on Access to Asylum 20
Security Cooperation 21
Counternarcotics 21
Gangs 22
Trade Relations 23
Human Rights Cases: Former Salvadoran Officials Tried in the United States 23

Figures

Figure 1. Map of El Salvador and Key Data on the Country 2
Figure 2. U.S. Apprehensions of Salvadoran Nationals: FY2009-FY2018 18

Tables

Table 1. U.S. Assistance to El Salvador: FY2016-FY2019 15

Contacts

Author Information 24

Introduction

A small, densely populated Central American country that has deep historical, familial, and economic ties to the United States, El Salvador has been a focus of sustained congressional interest (see **Figure 1** for a map and key country data).[1] After a troubled history of authoritarian rule and a civil war (1980-1992), El Salvador has established a multiparty democracy, albeit with significant challenges.[2] A 1992 peace accord ended the war and assimilated the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla movement into the political process as a political party. Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a former FMLN commander, is in the final year of his five-year presidency. He leads the second consecutively elected FMLN government after years of conservative Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) rule.

El Salvador continues to face serious governance, security, and economic issues, many of which are interrelated. Deep scars and political polarization remain evident in El Salvador today from a war that resulted in significant human rights violations, more than 70,000 deaths, and massive emigration to the United States.[3] Tension between the FMLN government and the ARENA-dominated legislature has hindered efforts to address fiscal and security challenges. Insecurity and poverty have fueled unauthorized emigration.[4] With both the FMLN and ARENA tarnished by revelations of corruption by former presidents, the leading candidate in the February 3, 2019, presidential contest is Nayib Bukele, a 37-year-old who left the FMLN and is running for the Grand Alliance for National Unity (GANA) party (see "February 2019 Presidential Election").

This report examines political, economic, security, and human rights conditions in El Salvador. It then analyzes selected issues in U.S.-Salvadoran relations that have been of particular interest to Congress, including foreign assistance, migration, security cooperation in addressing gangs and counternarcotics issues, human rights, and trade.

Politics and Governance

After the signing of peace accords in 1992, successive ARENA governments from 1994 to 2008 sought to rebuild democracy and implement market-friendly economic reforms. ARENA proved to be a reliable U.S. ally but did not effectively address inequality, violence, and corruption. Development indicators generally improved, but natural disasters, including earthquakes in 2001 and periodic hurricanes, hindered progress. Moreover, despite ARENA's pro-business policies, economic growth averaged 2.4% over the post-war years in which it governed.[5]

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[1] For historical background on El Salvador, see Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, *El Salvador: A Country Study*, ed. Richard Haggerty (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1990).

[2] Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002); Diana Villiers Negroponte, *Seeking Peace in El Salvador: The Struggle to Reconstruct a Nation at the End of the Cold War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[3] United Nations Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, *From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador*, 1993, at http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/salvador/informes/truth.html.

[4] In Central America, *mixed migration* flows are occurring, which include economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, trafficked persons, and unaccompanied children who travel the same routes and use the same modes of transportation. Also termed *irregular migrants*, these individuals do not have the required documentation, such as passports and visas, and may use smugglers and unauthorized border crossings.

[5] International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Global Economic Database*, October 2018.

The attorney general's office has brought cases against the two most recent ARENA presidents. Francisco Flores (1999-2004) passed away in January 2016 while awaiting trial for allegedly embezzling donations from Taiwan destined for earthquake relief. In August 2018, former president Anthony ("Tony") Saca (2004-2009) pled guilty to charges of money laundering and embezzlement of some $300 million. Saca is now serving a 10-year prison sentence.[6]

Figure 1. Map of El Salvador and Key Data on the Country

Geography	***Area:*** 8,008 sq. mi. (about the size of Massachusetts) ***Capital:*** San Salvador
People	***Population:*** 6.2 million (2017), with 1.1 million in the capital city ***Ethnic Groups:*** Mixed (86.3%), European (12.7%), Indigenous or Other (1%) ***Literacy:*** 88% ***Poverty:*** 41.6%
Health	***Life Expectancy:*** men, 71.4 years; women, 78.1 years ***Infant Mortality:*** 16.8 deaths per 1,000 births
Economy	***Gross Domestic Product (GDP):*** $26.9 billion (2016) ***GDP Composition by Sector:*** agriculture, 10.5%; industry, 25.1%; services, 64.4% (2015 est.) ***Gross National Income (GNI) per capita:*** $3,930 (2017) ***Key Export Partners:*** United States (47.2%), Honduras (14.0%), Guatemala (13.4%) (2017) ***Top Exports to the United States (2017):*** Apparel and textiles, Electrical Machinery Parts, Sugar, Coffee

Source: Graphic created by CRS. Poverty figures are from the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, GNI per capita and GDP are from World Bank, and trade data are from Global Trade Atlas. Other data are from the *CIA World Fact Book*, October 2018.

[6] "Former El Salvador President Sentenced to 10 Years in Prison," Reuters, September 19, 2018.

From 2009 to 2014, Mauricio Funes, a former journalist, served as El Salvador's first FMLN president. Funes remained popular even as he struggled to address security and economic problems. The government expanded crime prevention programs and community policing, but it also supported and then later disavowed a failed truce between the country's gangs.[7] Observers criticized Funes's lavish travel, unfair awarding of government contracts, and conflicts with the private sector.[8]

In 2016, Funes came under investigation by the attorney general's office for allegedly embezzling more than $350 million in state funds. He received political asylum in Nicaragua in September 2016. A judge issued a warrant for Funes's arrest in June 2018 and Salvadoran officials now seek to have him extradited.[9] In October 2018, the attorney general issued another arrest warrant for Funes on charges of involvement in a massive corruption scheme involving contractors, his family, and the former attorney general.[10]

Sánchez Cerén Administration

In March 2014, Salvador Sánchez Cerén narrowly defeated ARENA's candidate, Norman Quijano, in a runoff election. Upon taking office, President Sánchez Cerén pledged to (1) boost growth and address the country's fiscal crisis through infrastructure projects and reforms to improve the business climate, (2) invest in education and health care, and (3) combat crime and violence. He promised to work with the United States and to promote trade with Latin America, Asia, and Europe.

Salvador Sánchez Cerén

Born in 1944 in rural Quezaltepeque, El Salvador, to a family of humble origin, Salvador Sánchez Cerén began his career as a teacher. He later transitioned from being a teacher's union leader to serving as a guerrilla commander for the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL) during the war. He was one of several Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) leaders to sign the peace accords in 1992. Sánchez Cerén later served as a legislator from 2000 to 2008 before becoming Mauricio Funes's vice president and minister of education. Sánchez Cerén generally is regarded as more of a leftist than former President Funes. He maintains close ties with Venezuela and Cuba and recently established relations with China.

Four years later, President Sánchez Cerén has not implemented most of his inaugural pledges due, in part, to El Salvador's severe fiscal constraints and his party's lack of a congressional majority. Unlike former president Funes, President Sánchez Cerén reportedly is neither popular nor media savvy. Many observers maintain that Sánchez Cerén, who has faced health challenges, has not demonstrated strong leadership. El Salvador continues to contend with difficult security conditions despite reported reductions in homicides since 2015, modest economic growth (2.3% in 2017), and political polarization.[11] The Central American University released an annual survey in June 2018 in which 67.5% of those polled said that Sánchez Cerén had governed poorly.[12]

[7] "Traducing El Salvador's Truce," *The Economist*, August 26, 2017.

[8] Daniel Valencia Caravantes and Efren Lemus, "La Idea de Crear una CICIG para El Salvador la Mató el Silencio del Presidente" *El Faro Sala Negra*, May 12, 2014; Fundación Salavdoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (FUSADES), *Quinto Año de Gobierno del Presidente Funes*, May 2014.

[9] "El Salvador: No Interpol Red Notice for ex-President Funes," AP, September 24, 2018.

[10] Felipe Puerta, "El Salvador AG's Office Escalates Efforts Against Corruption," *InSight Crime*, October 17, 2018.

[11] Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: El Salvador*, November 7, 2018. Hereinafter EIU 2018.

[12] Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública (IUDOP), *Los Salvadoreños Evalúan el Cuarto Año de Gobierno de Salvador Sánchez Cerén y Opinan Sobre el Pasado Proceso Electoral*, Boletín de Prensa Año XXXII, no.3 (June 2018). Hereinafter IUDOP 2018.

Sánchez Cerén has had a difficult time garnering legislative support for his priorities, save those related to strengthening public security and a 2017 pension reform. Opposition has been particularly strong from the ARENA party, which, along with allied parties, now controls 48 of 84 seats in the legislature (up from 42 prior to the March 2018 legislative elections). ARENA has opposed many FMLN proposals to raise taxes or issue new debt, as ARENA generally supports lower spending rather than higher taxes.

In mid-November, after months of wrangling, legislators appeared to have agreed on appointments to replace five Supreme Court justices whose nine-year terms ended on July 15, 2018.[13] Since that time, the court has lacked four of the five judges on the constitutional chamber, a body that has issued several significant decisions over the past nine years. Although some of the constitutional chamber's decisions have been controversial, others, including its 2016 decision to overturn the country's 1993 Amnesty Law, have received praise.[14] The legislators will soon have to decide whether to reelect Attorney General Douglas Meléndez, as his three-year term ends in January 2019.[15]

The Sánchez Cerén government has maintained relations with the United States, but it also has strengthened ties with Cuba and Venezuela and abandoned its long-standing relations with Taiwan in favor of China. President Sánchez Cerén has often traveled to Cuba for medical treatment and consultations, including an October 2018 trip during which the governments announced a revised trade accord.[16] In 2014, El Salvador joined PetroCaribe, a program through which Venezuela provided subsidized oil to some Caribbean Basin countries.[17] U.S. officials have been concerned about reported illicit ties between Venezuela's state oil company, its Salvadoran subsidiary, and some FMLN politicians.[18] In a move that surprised the opposition and U.S. officials, the Salvadoran government established relations with China in August 2018. President Sánchez Cerén embarked on a state visit to China (the first for a Salvadoran president) in November 2018, seeking investment and trade.[19]

February 2019 Presidential Election

El Salvador is to convene first-round presidential elections on February 3, 2019. If no candidate garners more than 50% of the vote, a second round will occur on March 10, 2019. **Nayib Bukele**, a 37-year-old former mayor of San Salvador (2015-2018) and Nuevo Cuscatlan (2012-2015), leads among all candidates, with 44% support in a CID-Gallup poll released on November 1, 2018.[20] After the FMLN expelled Bukele in 2017 after differences with party leaders, he tried to create his own political party. However, after El Salvador's electoral court did not approve its

[13] Melissa Pacheco, "Acuerdo político para elegir a los cinco nuevos magistrados CSJ," *La Prensa Gráfica*, November 16, 2018.

[14] Daniel Cerqueira and Leonor Arteaga, *Challenging the Amnesty Law in El Salvador: Domestic and International Alternatives to Bring an End to Impunity*, Due Process of Law Foundation, June 2016.

[15] "El Salvador's AG Seeks Re-Election," *LatinNews Daily*, November 6, 2018.

[16] "Cuba, El Salvador Push Trade Relationship," EFE, October 25, 2018.

[17] Due to collapsing oil production, shipments from Venezuela to El Salvador and seven other countries have been indefinitely suspended. "PDVSA Suspends Oil Shipments to Eight Countries in PetroCaribe Agreement," *S&P Global Platts*, June 11, 2018.

[18] Venezuela Investigative Unit, "Venezuela and El Salvador: Exporting Aid and Corruption," *InSight Crime*, May 25, 2018; Melissa Pacheco, "Salvador Sánchez Cerén abogó por Cuba y Venezuela en asamblea de la ONU," *La Prensa Gráfica*, September 27, 2018.

[19] Yanan Wang, "China Hosts El Salvador as Nations Cut Ties with Taiwan," AP, November 1, 2018.

[20] EIU 2018.

registration in time for him to run, Bukele joined the GANA party and became its candidate. Thus far, Bukele's support remains strong, partially because of his use of social media, despite GANA's reputation for corruption (its founder, Tony Saca, is in prison).[21]

The two other candidates are **Carlos Calleja**, a 42-year-old business executive standing for an ARENA-led alliance, with 31% support, and **Hugo Mártinez**, a 50-year-old former foreign minister of the FMLN, with 16% support (according to the November 1, 2018 CID-Gallup poll mentioned above). Both ARENA and the FMLN have lost support due to the previously discussed revelations of corruption involving former presidents.

Economic and Social Conditions

El Salvador continues to face significant economic challenges. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), El Salvador posted an economic growth rate of 2.3% in 2017, the lowest of any country in Central America. The IMF predicts growth of about 2.5% in 2018. Strong remittances, which contributed 20% of GDP in 2017, and low oil prices have benefitted the economy. Nevertheless, natural disasters, including flooding in mid-2017 and a drought in 2018, have hindered agricultural output.

Economists have identified a lack of public and private investment in the economy as a primary reason for El Salvador's low growth rates. According to El Salvador's Central Bank, net foreign direct investment (FDI) reached $791.1 million in 2017, with a total stock of $9.6 billion. Despite El Salvador's relatively low inflation and stable, dollarized economy, FDI in El Salvador has been significantly less than the average among the other Central American countries for several years. Low levels of FDI have been attributed to the country's political polarization, complicated regulations and bureaucracy, security challenges (including violence and extortion), and ineffective justice system (discussed in "Judicial System," below).[22]

In recent years, El Salvador's executive and legislature have clashed over how to respond to the country's social and infrastructure needs and significant financing gaps. The government has tended to swap short-term debt for longer-term debt rather than implement unpopular fiscal reforms. The legislature has been reluctant to approve multilateral financing requests from the executive branch for social programs. In addition, long-standing government practices in El Salvador that preceded FMLN rule—including cash payments to officials, shielded budgetary accounts, and diversion of government funds—have exacerbated fiscal woes.

Since 2017, the IMF has credited the Salvadoran government and legislature with taking steps to improve the country's fiscal situation and implementing "pro-growth reforms."[23] A September 2017 pension reform helped ease the financial burden on that system by raising both employee and employer contributions; the IMF urges a complementary reform to raise the retirement age and better target pension benefits to those most in need. The IMF also praised both major parties for agreeing to a fiscal responsibility law that led to legislative approval of all of the external financing needed for 2017 and the 2018 budgets. Few analysts predict the FMLN and ARENA will agree on a broader fiscal pact before the next president takes office, however.[24]

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[21] Xímena Enríquez, "Will El Salvador's Nayib Bukele Be the Next Social Media President?" *Americas Quarterly*, November 8, 2018.

[22] U.S. Department of State, *Investment Climate Report for 2018*.

[23] IMF, *El Salvador: 2018 Article IV Consultation*, Country Report No. 18/151, June 2018. Hereinafter IMF 2018.

[24] EIU 2018.

In its 2018 *Doing Business* report, the World Bank credited El Salvador with implementing four economic reforms (the most of any country in the region) and then moved it up 22 spots to 73 out of the 190 countries ranked.[25] El Salvador has taken steps to ease the process for businesses to obtain permits for new construction and pay taxes online, to increase access to electricity, and to place more staff at its ports of entry to speed up border crossings. Nevertheless, the State Department characterized the still burdensome regulations, "contentious" relationship between the public and private sectors, insecurity, and lack of competitiveness as continuing to hinder the business environment in an August 2018 report.[26]

Insecurity remains a primary barrier to growth in El Salvador. A 2017 study by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) estimated the costs of crime and violence in El Salvador could reach 5.9% of GDP.[27] El Salvador ranked last out of 137 countries evaluated in the World Economic Forum's estimates of business costs due to crime and violence.[28] Crimes against small- and medium-sized businesses, which employ 55% of El Salvador's labor force, are of particular concern. According to a survey published in 2016, 42% of such businesses had been victims of crimes in the past year, with extortion the most common crime reported.[29]

Although progress in developing infrastructure, facilitating trade, and easing some regulations has occurred, another barrier to growth in El Salvador continues to be a lack of competitiveness in export sectors, as described in a 2011 joint U.S.-Salvadoran assessment.[30] El Salvador's labor force lacks adequate education and vocational training to align with labor force needs, including English-language skills.[31] According to the IMF, emigration by young Salvadorans has exacerbated this problem.[32] In addition, the country has logistical and physical infrastructure deficiencies, including no direct access to Caribbean ports. El Salvador's small size and high levels of informality (percentage of businesses that do not pay taxes, provide benefits to employees, or register with the government) are widely considered key factors in its reduced competitiveness.

In August 2018, El Salvador took several steps that could affect its economic trajectory. El Salvador joined an existing customs union with Guatemala and Honduras and launched a ferry to Costa Rica to bypass instability in Nicaragua. Both moves could bolster intraregional trade. El Salvador's decision to abandon relations with Taiwan and seek trade and investment from China could have long-term economic implications; it has already resulted in the announcement of $150 million in Chinese investment.[33] The FMLN has proposed a law to establish a special economic zone that would appear to benefit Chinese companies. Since ARENA opposes the legislation, it is

[25] World Bank Group, "Fact Sheet: Doing Business 2018 Fact Sheet: Latin America and the Caribbean," 2018.

[26] U.S. Department of State, *Integrated Country Strategy: El Salvador,* August 2018. Hereinafter U.S. Department of State, *Country Strategy: El Salvador,* August 2018.

[27] Laura Jaitman, *The Costs of Crime and Violence: New Evidence and Insights in Latin America and the Caribbean,* International Development Bank, 2017.

[28] See http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-index-2017-2018/competitiveness-rankings/#series=GCI.A.01.01.05.

[29] Fusades et al., *Extorsiones a la Micro y Pequeña Empresa de El Salvador,* June 2016.

[30] U.S. Department of State, *Partnership for Growth: El Salvador Constraints Analysis,* July 2011.

[31] U.S. Department of State, *Country Strategy: El Salvador,* August 2018.

[32] IMF, 2018.

[33] "Domino Effect Sees El Salvador Embrace China," *Latin News Weekly Report*, August 23, 2018; "China Pledges $150 million aid to El Salvador as Relationship Deepens," Reuters, November 8, 2018.

unlikely to pass.[34] It is unclear how relations with China will evolve under the next Salvadoran government.

Social development indicators in El Salvador generally are better than in neighboring Honduras and Guatemala, yet challenges exist, particularly in rural regions. Approximately 33% of Salvadorans live in poverty, as compared to 59% of Guatemalans and 66% of Hondurans, according to the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL).[35] From 2012 to 2016, poverty and extreme poverty levels in El Salvador remained relatively level.[36] According to a multidimensional measure of poverty published by the government in 2015, 35.2% of all households in the country and 58.5% of all rural households suffer from deprivations associated with poverty.[37] The most common indicators of household poverty included low educational attainment by adults (81%), lack of access to the social security system (70%), precarious employment (56.6%), and living under self-imposed travel and other lifestyle restrictions caused by high levels of insecurity (54.4%).

Income inequality declined by 5% from 2007 to 2016, according to the World Bank. This reduction occurred due to growth in income of the poorest 20% of the population aided by remittances, which some 20% of the population receive.[38] CEPAL asserts that El Salvador is one of only five countries in the region to reduce inequality by 1% per year from 2014 to 2016.[39]

According to World Bank data, most social development indicators improved from 2010 to 2017, but some health and education indicators worsened.[40] The mortality rate for children under the age of five fell from 19 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 15 per 1,000 in 2017. By 2017, skilled health professionals attended nearly all births in El Salvador and the percentage of children underweight for their age fell to 5%. Despite this progress, immunization rates for children under the age of two fell to 85% (from 92% in 2010) and primary school completion rates declined to 85% (from 92% in 2010). According to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), some 300,000 youth aged 15 to 24 in El Salvador neither work nor attend school. Gang-related intimidation and insecurity are two reasons why only about half of eligible Salvadoran youth attend seventh-ninth grades; of these youth, only half will complete secondary school.[41]

Food insecurity, often caused by drought or other natural disasters, has become a major driver of emigration from El Salvador. Although family members who are left behind eventually may benefit from remittances sent by relatives living abroad, they are often saddled with debts owed to smugglers, an increased work burden (especially in agriculture), and emotional trauma.[42] As of

[34] The Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) has proposed its own version of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) law that would allow local investors to participate in the SEZs and prohibit oil or gas exploration in those areas.

[35] U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), *Social Panorama of Latin America*, 2018. Hereinafter CEPAL 2018.

[36] According to CEPAL, 34.5% of Salvadorans lived in poverty in 2012, with 8.9% of those living in extreme poverty. In 2016, the percentage of Salvadorans living in poverty had been reduced to 32.7% and in extreme poverty to 7.9%.

[37] Secretaría Técnica de la Presidencia de la República, *Medición Multidimensional de la Pobreza: El Salvador*, 2015.

[38] The World Bank, "El Salvador: Overview," updated October 5, 2018.

[39] CEPAL 2018.

[40] The data are available at http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=SLV.

[41] Other factors that contribute to dropout rates include lack of quality educational opportunities, early pregnancies, and exclusion of certain groups from secondary education. USAID El Salvador, "Education Fact Sheet," at https://www.usaid.gov/el-salvador/education.

[42] World Food Program et al., *Food Security and Migration*, August 2017.

September 2018, the government reported that this year's drought had damaged $37 million worth of crops and affected 77,000 families.[43]

Security Conditions

El Salvador has been dealing with escalating homicides and generalized crime committed by gangs, drug traffickers, and other criminal groups for more than a decade. In 2015, El Salvador posted a homicide rate of 104 per 100,000—the highest in the world. Although the homicide rate decreased by 20% in 2016 to 81.2 per 100,000 and by another 25% in 2017 to 60 per 100,000, it remains among the highest in the world.[44] In recent years, those homicides have included targeted killings of security forces by gangs, extrajudicial killings of gang suspects by police, and among the world's highest rates of femicides (killing of a woman or girl, often committed by a man, because of her gender).[45] In addition, the attorney general's office has reported that it received more than 3,000 reports of disappeared persons from January through October 2018, nearly 10% higher than in 2017. Many of the disappeared are never found but are suspected dead.[46]

El Salvador has the highest concentration of gang members per capita in Central America. As a result, gangs are responsible for a higher percentage of homicides there than in neighboring countries. A government-facilitated truce between the country's major gangs (the MS-13 or *Mara Salvatrucha* and the 18th Street gang) that unraveled in 2014 likely strengthened the gangs' internal cohesion. Gangs have been involved in a range of other criminal activities, including extortion, money laundering, and weapons smuggling. Although gangs engage in local drug distribution and other crimes that require control over a particular territory, they generally do not have a major role in transnational drug trafficking or human smuggling.[47] Deportees have become targets for extortion and violence, with 70 deportees murdered since 2013.[48]

Gang-related violence has fueled internal displacement and irregular emigration. In August 2016, El Salvador's civil roundtable against forced displacement attributed more than 85% of internal displacement to gang activity. In 2017, El Salvador recorded 296,000 newly internally displaced persons, the highest of any country in Latin America that experienced displacement linked to conflict and violence.[49] The government recently has acknowledged the phenomenon but struggled to address the needs of those fleeing violence. (For more information on gang-related human rights abuses, as well as extrajudicial killings of gang suspects by security forces, see "Recent Human Rights Violations" section, below.)

Drug-trafficking organizations, including Mexican groups such as the Sinaloa criminal organization, have increased their illicit activities in El Salvador, albeit to a lesser extent than in Honduras and Guatemala.

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[43] "ACT Alliance Alert: Drought in El Salvador," September 18, 2018.

[44] Parker Asmann, "El Salvador Citizen Security Plan Struggling to Reduce Insecurity," *InsightCrime*, July 16, 2018.

[45] International Crisis Group, *El Salvador's Politics of Perpetual Violence*, Report No. 64, December 2017.

[46] Francisco Hernández, "10 Personas Desaparecen Cada Día en El Salvador," *La Prensa Gráfica*, November 4, 2018.

[47] Steve Dudley and Héctor Silva, "MS13 in the Americas: How the World's Most Notorious Gang Defies Logic, Resists Destruction," *InSight Crime* and the Center for Latin American & Latino Studies at American University, February 2018, at https://www.insightcrime.org/ ... /MS13-in-the-Americas-InSight-Crime-English-3.pdf.

[48] Anna-Catherine Brigida, "Kicked Out of the U.S., Salvadoran Deportees Are Struggling Simply to Stay Alive," *World Politics Review*, October 9, 2018.

[49] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2018*.

Judicial System

Governance problems have made many actors in El Salvador's criminal justice system susceptible to the influence of criminal elements and unable to guarantee citizen security in many areas. Resource constraints in the security sector have hindered anti-crime efforts. A lack of confidence in the underfunded police has led many companies and citizens to use private security firms and the government to deploy soldiers to perform public security functions (see "Military Involvement in Public Security Efforts"). In 2017, El Salvador's ranking fell 12 places in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, to 112 out of 180 countries ranked, possibly because of the conviction of former president Saca and the investigation of former president Funes. Many also have had serious concerns about corruption in the police, prisons, and judicial system, although the attorney general's office and the Supreme Court have taken steps to address these issues.

With a majority of the national civilian police (PNC) budget devoted to salaries and benefits, there has historically been limited funding available for investing in training and equipment. The PNC has deficient wages, training, and infrastructure. It has also lacked a merit-based promotion system. Corruption, weak investigatory capacity, and an inability to prosecute officers accused of corruption and human rights abuses have hindered police performance.

The State Department maintains that "impunity persisted despite government steps to dismiss and prosecute" some officials who had committed abuses, partially due to "inefficiency and corruption" in the judiciary.[50] As police and prosecutors are often loathe to work together to build cases, El Salvador's criminal conviction rate is less than 5%. International observers generally have praised the efforts to identify public officials who may have used their positions for illicit enrichment made by the Probity Section of the Supreme Court.[51] They also have welcomed efforts to investigate abuses and reduce impunity by Attorney General Meléndez, a career prosecutor who began a three-year term in January 2016.

Meléndez pursued cases against politicians of all parties (including three former presidents), former attorney general Luís Mártinez, security forces, and gang affiliates. In August 2017, a judge dismissed the government's case against former officials accused of illicit involvement in the 2012 gang truce. In September 2017, a judge acquitted five police that prosecutors had charged with committing the "summary execution" of a young man whom police claimed was a gang member in 2015. Despite those setbacks, thus far in 2018 the attorney general has convicted police officers for aggravated homicides and for participating in a death squad, former president Saca for corruption, and a key gang truce mediator for extortion. In October 2018, Meléndez issued new arrest warrants against former president Funes, former attorney general Mártinez, businessperson Enrique Raíz, and others for alleged involvement in a massive corruption scheme.[52]

Attorney General Meléndez has received criticism and faced periodic death threats throughout his term. In August 2018, President Sánchez Cerén vetoed a reform of the law governing the attorney general's office that would have granted independence to its financial investigative unity in line

[50] U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices: El Salvador*, 2018. Hereinafter U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights*, 2018.

[51] U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights*, 2018.

[52] Felipe Puerta, "El Salvador AG's Office Escalates Efforts Against Corruption," *InSight Crime*, October 17, 2018. Hereinafter Puerta, "AG's Office Escalates Efforts."

with international standards.[53] It is unclear whether the Salvadoran legislature will reappoint Meléndez or someone equally independent to replace him in January 2019.

Prison reform is another area in need of reform. Delays in the judicial process and massive arrests carried out during prior anti-gang sweeps made under *mano dura* (heavy-handed) policing efforts have resulted in severe prison overcrowding.[54] According to a study cited by the U.S. State Department, prison capacity increased by almost 2,000 inmates but prisons continued to operate at more than 300% above capacity as of mid-2017.[55] In May 2016, the constitutional chamber of El Salvador's Supreme Court issued a declaration finding prison overcrowding to be an unconstitutional violation of inmates' human rights and ordering regular visits to the country's prisons by the health ministry. In addition to building new facilities, the government has channeled more prisoners into rehabilitation and job training programs, some of which have received U.S. support. Nevertheless, human rights groups maintain that sanitation and access to medical services have worsened since the government adopted more restrictive prison conditions for gang inmates in 2016 (see ").[56]

Secure El Salvador

Upon taking office, the government formed a National Council for Citizen Security, which designed an integrated security plan (with support from the U.S. government and the United Nations). In January 2015, the administration announced the plan Secure El Salvador (*El Salvador Seguro*), estimated to cost $2 billion over five years. It includes (1) violence prevention and job creation initiatives, which account for nearly three-quarters of the funding; (2) an increased state presence in the country's 50 most violent municipalities, with the goals of improving public spaces, expanding community policing, and increasing student retention in schools; (3) improved prison infrastructure; and (4) increased services for crime victims.[57]

Plan Secure El Salvador is now being implemented in 50 of the country's most violent municipalities. Although government figures point to 45% lower homicide rates and 32% lower reported extortions in those municipalities, citizens and analysts remain wary.[58] Some 65% of those surveyed earlier this year by officials from the U.N. Development Program expressed fear of insecurity on public transportation. Some analysts also doubt the reliability of the Salvadoran government figures and have questions concerning whether apparent reductions in homicides may be due to other factors, such as certain gangs achieving territorial control over certain areas.[59] Many critics question the plan's focus on bolstering security forces that continue to

[53] Puerta, "AG's Office Escalates Efforts."

[54] *Mano dura* approaches have involved incarcerating large numbers of youth (often those with visible tattoos) for illicit association and increasing sentences for gang membership and gang-related crimes. A *mano dura* law passed by El Salvador's Congress in 2003 was subsequently declared unconstitutional but was followed by a *super mano dura* package of reforms in July 2004. These reforms enhanced police power to search and arrest suspected gang members and stiffened penalties for convicted gang members, although they provided some protections for minors. For background, see Sonja Wolf, *Mano Dura: the Politics of Gang Control in El Salvador* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017). Some analysts argue that the current government has returned to a *mano dura* approach to policing. See Héctor Silva Ávalos, "El Salvador Violence Rising Despite 'Extraordinary' Anti-Gang Measures," *Insight Crime*, October 3, 2017.

[55] U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights*, 2018.

[56] Carlos Martínez, "The Unbelievable Hell Inside El Salvador's Prisons," *Insight Crime*, December 28, 2016.

[57] See http://www.presidencia.gob.sv/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/El-Salvador-Seguro.pdf.

[58] CRS electronic communication with U.S. Embassy in El Salvador, October 12, 2018.

[59] Parker Asmann, "El Salvador Citizen Security Plan Struggling to Reduce Insecurity," *InSight Crime*, July 16, 2018.

commit abuses and a judicial system that remains corrupt rather than emphasizing licit economic activities and education.

"Extraordinary Measures" to Combat Gangs

In April 2016, the Sánchez Cerén government started implementing "extraordinary measures" focused on moving gang leaders to maximum-security prisons, cutting off cell phone service around prisons and restricting visitors to those facilities. A majority of Salvadorans polled in 2017 and again in 2018 thought the extraordinary measures had little or no effect on crime levels.[60] Nevertheless, the measures garnered support from a broad spectrum of politicians.

In August 2018, the National Assembly made the "extraordinary measures," which they had previously extended, permanent. Salvadoran officials and legislators maintain that the measures have helped reduce communications between inmates and the outside, including incidents of murders ordered from imprisoned gang leaders.[61] However, U.N. officials and human rights groups have raised concerns about the measures' impact on inmates' rights and health, including an uptick in tuberculosis cases, some of which have proved fatal, among inmates in overcrowded prisons.[62]

Military Involvement in Public Security Efforts

For many years, El Salvador has deployed thousands of military troops to help the police carry out public security functions. In April 2014, the Salvadoran Supreme Court upheld former president Funes's October 2009 decree that authorized the military to carry out police functions. Three battalions each made up of 200 police and elite members of the Armed Forces were deployed in 2015 to control gang violence. In April 2016, Sánchez Cerén created the El Salvador Special Reaction Force, a 1,000-member force made up of 400 police and 600 soldiers, into rural areas to which gang members had fled. In November 2016, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala launched a tri-national anti-gang force, comprised of military and police officers, to target gangs on the borders. According to U.S. estimates, roughly 8,000 of El Salvador's 17,000 active-duty armed forces personnel are involved in public security at any given time.[63]

Human Rights

Violence and human rights abuses have been prevalent for much of El Salvador's modern history. Mass atrocities committed during the civil war (1980-1992) are just beginning to be investigated (since the Supreme Court overturned the 1993 amnesty law in July 2016), as discussed below. In addition to past crimes, many of the most serious human rights abuses in El Salvador today are related to gender and intra-familial violence, gangs and criminal groups, and the excessive use of force by security forces. The Salvadoran government's ability to address these challenges has been hindered by resource constraints, political polarization, and corruption.

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[60] IUDOP 2018.

[61] Mike LaSusa, "El Salvador Congress Makes 'Extraordinary' Prison Measures Permanent," *InSight Crime*, August 20, 2018.

[62] U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein at the end of his Mission to El Salvador," November 7, 2017.

[63] U.S. Department of Defense, *Congressional Report on Citizen Security Responsibilities in the Northern Triangle of Central America Pursuant to Section 1069 of the FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act*, July 20, 2017.

Recent Human Rights Violations

Since the end of the civil war, El Salvador has had a relatively free press and civil society. Nevertheless, journalists and some non-governmental organizations focused on transparency have been harassed for reporting on corruption, police abuses, gangs, and drug trafficking.[64] Human rights defenders have also suffered extortion and attacks, including Karla Avelar, a transgender advocate who reportedly received death threats in May 2017.[65]

Indigenous rights and land conflicts have not been as common in El Salvador as in neighboring countries, likely because only 0.2% of the population identified as Amerindian in 2007 (the most recent year available). Although a 2014 constitutional amendment recognized indigenous rights, no laws ensure that indigenous people benefit from natural resource development that occurs on land historically held by indigenous communities. Still, land rights advocates have praised El Salvador's decision to ban all metal mining to protect communities' water sources.[66]

Women, children, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people often are targets of gang violence.[67] Gang initiations for men and women differ. Whereas men are subject to a beating, women often are forced to have sex with various gang members. Female gang members tolerate infidelity from their partners, but women may be murdered if they are unfaithful. Non-gang-affiliated women and girls have been murdered as a result of turf battles, jealousy, and revenge. Those who have refused to help gangs or reported crimes are particularly vulnerable, as are those who are related to, or have collaborated with, the police. Harassment by gangs has led thousands of youth to abandon school, including some 39,000 in 2016.[68] In August 2017, prosecutors from a newly established specialized unit of the attorney general's office filed charges against eight gang members for murdering three transgender people.

Gang-related violence is part of a broader spectrum of violence in El Salvador that often affects women and children. Child abuse and spousal rape are major problems. According to a 2015 study, El Salvador had the highest rate of femicide (killing of women) in the world. Femicides have been linked to domestic disputes, gangs, and other crimes such as human trafficking; they resulted in the deaths of some 551 women in 2017.[69] There is a total ban on abortion, even in the case of rape or incest, and women in El Salvador have been imprisoned after suffering miscarriages that authorities have deemed illegal abortions.

Human rights groups and journalists have warned the Salvadoran government that its aggressive anti-gang policies have exacerbated human rights abuses committed by underpaid and ill-trained security forces, some of which the State Department and U.N. entities have documented.[70] In

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[64] Committee to Protect Journalists, "Two Salvadoran News Websites Threatened for Their Reporting," August 28, 2017.

[65] "Extorsionan a Defensora de Mujeres Trans Nominada a Premio," *La Prensa Gráfica*, May 12, 2017. Violence based on sexual identity is common in El Salvador, with 52% of transgender people having suffered death threats. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: El Salvador*, 2017.

[66] Sarah Sheets, "El Salvador's Mining Ban: Land Rights, Development, and Democracy in Latin America," May 2, 2017.

[67] KIND, *Neither Security nor Justice: Sexual and Gender-based Violence and Gang Violence in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala*, May 4, 2017.

[68] "MINED Reporta Deserción de 12,000 Estudiantes," *La Prensa Gráfica*, August 26, 2017.

[69] Flacso et al., *Mapa de Violencia no Brasil: Homicidio de Mulheres no Brasil 2015*, 2015; U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights*, 2018.

[70] U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: El Salvador Covering 2017*, 2018; OHCHR, "El Salvador End of Mission Statement of the U.N. Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary

June 2017, authorities arrested 4 police and 10 soldiers suspected of involvement in some 36 murders that occurred between 2014 and 2016.[71] In August 2017, reporters released evidence of death squads operating within the police. In 2017, Salvadoran officials downplayed those developments in cases before the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights. In 2018, El Salvador's attorney general has convicted four police officers for aggravated homicide and six others for participating in a death squad.[72]

Confronting Past Human Rights Violations

Twenty years after a U.N. Commission released its report on the war in El Salvador, Amnesty International issued a statement lamenting that the perpetrators of crimes identified in that report had not been brought to justice in El Salvador and that survivors had not received reparations.[73] In October 2013, then-President Funes signed a decree creating a program to provide reparations to the victims of the armed conflict. It is unclear how much funding has been budgeted for that program and how many people it has assisted thus far.

In September 2017, President Sánchez Cerén launched a commission to help people find out what happened to their family members who disappeared.[74] The commission includes two members proposed by families of the missing and is modeled after the government-sponsored national search commission that has located children who went missing during the conflict. In order for the commission to be successful, it is likely to need access to Salvadoran military records and some classified U.S. documents from the period of the conflict so that that information collected from the testimonies of survivors and witnesses can be corroborated.

After the Supreme Court overturned the 1993 Amnesty Law in July 2016, Attorney General Meléndez created a small group of prosecutors to investigate past crimes. It is receiving technical assistance funded by USAID and implemented by experts from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.[75] The group is providing complementary assistance to civil society organizations engaged in investigating historic crimes and carrying out transitional justice programs. In 2017, a Salvadoran judge ordered the case of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero reopened. In October 2018, the judge issued a warrant for the arrest of a former military officer suspected of carrying out the killing whose whereabouts are unknown.[76] The case against the intellectual authors of the 1989 murders of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter also has been reopened but is proceeding slowly.[77]

Private human rights attorneys have re-opened the emblematic case against 18 surviving military officers charged with involvement in the El Mozote massacre carried out by an elite Salvadoran army battalion in December 1981 in Morazán that resulted in some 900 deaths.[78] Investigators

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Executions," February 5, 2018.

[71] James Bargent, "El Salvador Strikes against Death Squads Led by Army, Police," *Insight Crime*, June 23, 2017.

[72] Victoria Dittmar, "El Salvador Police Convictions Fall Short in Curbing Abuses," *InSight Crime*, June 26, 2018.

[73] Amnesty International, "El Salvador: No Justice 20 Years on from UN Truth Commission," press release, March 15, 2013.

[74] This paragraph draws from Geoff Thale, "Tracking El Salvador's Progress in Historic Human Rights Cases," WOLA, October 27, 2017.

[75] See "Rights and Dignity Project" on USAID/El Salvador, Country Fact Sheet, July 2018.

[76] Nelson Rentería, "El Salvador Issues Arrest Order for Archbishop Romero's Killer," Reuters, October 23, 2018.

[77] Tim Muth, "Jesuit Murders Legal Update," *El Salvador Perspectives*, April 12, 2018.

[78] For historical background, see Mark Danner, "The Truth of El Mozote," *The New Yorker*, December 6, 1993.

have encountered difficulties, with the military refusing to turn over its historical records on its operations in that region.[79] Still, the case is before a provincial criminal court whose judge is committed to hearing all survivors' testimonies; he predicts the trial may last "well into 2019."[80]

Some remain skeptical that this and other emblematic cases will be solved. Parties on both the left and the right may feel vulnerable to political or legal attack about abuses that took place during the war and might prefer that the crimes of the past remain unexamined. An illustrative example of the problem confronting political actors is that shortly after the El Mozote case was re-opened against former military officers, a private party filed a case against President Sánchez Cerén and several others for alleged kidnappings that occurred in the late 1980s.[81]

U.S. Relations

U.S. relations with El Salvador have remained friendly, although recent changes in U.S. immigration policies, particularly the January 2018 termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for some 200,000 Salvadorans (discussed below), and U.S. threats to cut foreign assistance have tested relations.[82] Combating gangs, particularly the MS-13, was a central focus of then-Attorney General Jeff Session's July 2017 visit to El Salvador. Migration and security issues likely will continue to figure prominently on the bilateral agenda, but other issues may emerge as well, including how the Trump Administration may respond to the Salvadoran government's recent establishment of diplomatic relations with China.[83]

Congress plays a key role in appropriating bilateral and regional aid to El Salvador and in overseeing implementation of U.S. assistance programs. Congress is likely to monitor how the Salvadoran government is or is not improving the investment climate in El Salvador, dealing with gangs, preventing emigration, and combating corruption.

U.S. Foreign Assistance

State Department Assistance: Bilateral and Regional

The United States has provided significant foreign assistance to El Salvador over the past decade. Since FY2008, El Salvador has received regional security assistance through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). From 2011 to 2016, El Salvador participated in the Partnership for Growth (PFG), a foreign aid initiative involving close U.S. whole-of-government cooperation with four selected countries on mutually agreed upon objectives.[84] In 2014, the

[79] Cristosal, "Attorney General's Office Must Investigate What Munguía Payés [Minister of Defense] Did to Declare That Information on El Mozote Is Non-Existent," October 16, 2017.

[80] Elisabeth Malkin, "Survivors of Massacre Ask: 'Why Did They Have to Kill Those Children?'" *New York Times*, May 26, 2018.

[81] Gabriel García, "Avanza Investigación Contra Sánchez Cerén por Secuestro," *La Prensa Gráfica*, February 9, 2017.

[82] "Trump Issues Threat to Central America's 'Northern Triangle,'" *Latin News Daily*, October 17, 2018.

[83] The United States recalled its ambassador for consultations in August 2018 but did not suspend aid because of the country's new ties with China. Gardiner Harris, "U.S. Weighed Penalizing El Salvador Over Support for China, Then Backed Off," *New York Times*, September 29, 2018.

[84] The Partnership for Growth (PFG) initiative involved close collaboration between the U.S. and Salvadoran governments on specific barriers to economic growth—namely, violence and lack of competitiveness in export industries. As part of that effort, U.S. law enforcement and prevention programs began to be colocated through a "place-based approach" in the same cities that the Salvadoran government prioritized in its security plan. A final evaluation found "mixed and often negative" security and economic indicators still present in the country at the end of

Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) signed a $277 million compact with El Salvador to develop the southern coastal region and help El Salvador take better advantage of the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). El Salvador completed a $461 million MCC compact in 2012.

Current assistance to El Salvador is guided by the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, which is designed to promote economic prosperity, strengthen governance, and improve security in the region.[85] The Obama Administration introduced the new strategy and sought to increase assistance for El Salvador and its neighbors following a surge in migration from Central America in 2014. Congress has appropriated nearly $2.1 billion for the strategy since FY2016, including at least $341.7 million for El Salvador (see **Table 1**). The aid has been subject to two sets of legislative conditions that require the Salvadoran government to take steps to address a range of concerns, including border security, corruption, and human rights abuses, prior to receiving assistance. The State Department certified that El Salvador met both sets of conditions in FY2016 and FY2017. For FY2018, it has issued a certification that El Salvador met the first set of conditions but not the second set.

Table 1. U.S. Assistance to El Salvador: FY2016-FY2019

(millions of current dollars)

Foreign Assistance Account	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018 (est.)	FY2019 (req.)
Bilateral Aid, Subtotal	**67.9**	**72.8**	**57.7**	**45.7**
Development Assistance	65.0	70.0	55.0	—
Economic Support and Development Fund	—	—	—	45.0
International Military Education and Training	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.7
Foreign Military Financing	1.9	1.9	1.9	—
Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), Subtotal[a]	**73.4**	**70.2**	**NA**	**NA**
Economic Support Fund	35.5	28.5	NA	NA
International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement	37.9	41.7	NA	NA
Total	**141.0**	**143.0**	**57.7**[a]	**45.7**[a]

Sources: U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justifications for Foreign Operations*, FY2018-FY2019; FY2018 653(a) report; "Congressional Notification: CARSI," CN #15, October 14, 2016; USAID, "Congressional Notification: CARSI," CN #134, June 22, 2018; U.S. Department of State, "Congressional Notification 16-282—State Western Hemisphere Regional: CARSI, El Salvador," October 15, 2016; and U.S. Department of State, "Congressional Notification 18-117—State Western Hemisphere Regional: CARSI, El Salvador," May 9, 2018.

Notes: El Salvador receives some additional assistance from other U.S. agencies, such as the Inter-American Foundation and the Department of Defense.

the five-year period but credited the PFG with helping El Salvador pass legislation (on taxes and access to public information), create new institutions (such as a Growth Council to foster public-private dialogue), and fulfill its Millennium Challenge Corporation commitments. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *Performance Evaluation of the Partnership for Growth in El Salvador*, July 2017, https://sv.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/ ... /Final_Evaluation_English.pdf.

[85] See CRS Report R44812, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress*, by Peter J. Meyer; U.S. Department of State, Integrated Country Strategy: El Salvador, August 2018.

a. CARSI funding levels for FY2018 and FY2019 are not yet available.

El Salvador also has received regional security assistance provided through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). In recent years, CARSI funds have supported justice sector reform, police unit vetting, border security, anti-gang efforts, and violence prevention efforts, among other initiatives. From FY2008 to FY2018, Congress appropriated more than $2.1 billion through CARSI. The State Department and USAID allocated $73.4 million in FY2016 CARSI funding to El Salvador and $70.2 million in FY2017 CARSI funding.[86] The FY2018 CARSI funding total for El Salvador is not yet available.

The Trump Administration has pledged to maintain the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, albeit with more of an explicit focus on combating transnational crime and drug trafficking, deterring illegal immigration, and encouraging private investment.[87] The FY2019 foreign aid budget request includes some $45.7 million in bilateral assistance for El Salvador, $12 million less than Congress appropriated in FY2018. All of the bilateral aid, with the exception of $700,000 to train the Salvadoran military, would be provided through a new Economic Support and Development Fund foreign assistance account. The Administration proposed $13.9 million to support small businesses and government entities that promote exports; $5.4 million to improve education and workforce development; and $7.0 million for educational programs for out-of-school youth. The Administration also requested $263.2 million for CARSI, though it is unclear how much of that assistance would be allocated to El Salvador.[88]

The Senate and House Appropriations Committees reported their respective FY2019 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations measures (S. 3108 and H.R. 6385) on June 21 and July 16, 2018. According to S.Rept. 115-282, the Senate committee bill would provide $47.7 million for El Salvador and $254.7 million for CARSI. The assistance would be provided under the same terms and conditions as the assistance appropriated in FY2018. According to H.Rept. 115-829, the House Appropriations Committee's bill would provide up to $595 million for the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, but it does not specify an aid amount for El Salvador. A full-year appropriations measure has yet to be enacted, but a continuing resolution (P.L. 115-245), signed by President Trump on September 28, 2018, continues to provide assistance at the FY2018 level until December 7, 2018.

Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Investment Compact[89]

El Salvador signed a second $277 million compact on September 30, 2014, to focus on improving transportation infrastructure, employment opportunities, and the investment climate. The Salvadoran government committed to match that contribution with $88 million in complementary investments. Key compact projects include the following:

- **Investment Climate Project ($42 million MCC funds/$50 million Salvadoran funds):** seeks to help the government develop and implement regulatory

[86] U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Notification, State Western Hemisphere Regional: Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), El Salvador*, October 14, 2016; USAID, *CN #15, Congressional Notification for the Central America Regional Security Initiative*, October 14, 2016.

[87] U.S. Department of State, "United States Key Deliverables for the June 15-16, 2017 Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America," June 16, 2017; U.S. Department of State, *Report to Update the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America*, August 8, 2017.

[88] U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2019, Appendix 2*, March 14, 2018, at https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/279517.pdf.

[89] See CRS Report RL32427, *Millennium Challenge Corporation*, by Curt Tarnoff.

improvements and to better partner with private investors to build infrastructure and provide public services.

- **Human Capital Project ($100.7 million MCC funds/$15 million Salvadoran funds):** supports full-day schooling; reforms to the policies and operations that govern teacher training and student assessment; and a new technical, vocational, education, and training system that is aligned with labor market demands.
- **Logistical Infrastructure Project ($109.6 million MCC funds/$15.7 million Salvadoran funds):** will widen the part of El Salvador's coastal highway that connects the airport and the ports of La Unión and Acajutla and improve border crossing facilities into Honduras at El Amatillo.

In response to some lingering concerns expressed by board members, the Salvadoran government designed a Priority Action Plan that was then agreed to by both governments to be completed prior to the compact's signing. The action plan required the Salvadoran government to (1) appoint a director and deputy director to a newly established financial crimes investigation unit in the police; (2) approve an asset forfeiture law; (3) approve reformed anti-money-laundering legislation that meets international standards; (4) approve reforms to the country's public-private partnership law to make it attractive to investors; and (5) issue a revised decree on how corn and bean seed are procured that is consistent with CAFTA-DR. The fifth condition was subsequently removed. The compact entered into force in September 2015.

Department of Defense (DOD) Assistance

DOD provides counternarcotics foreign assistance to train, equip, and improve the counternarcotics capabilities of relevant agencies of the Salvadoran government with its Counternarcotics Central Transfer Account appropriations. DOD assistance totaled $6.4 million in FY2016, $4.7 million in FY2017, and an estimated $4.5 million in FY2018.

Migration Issues

Migration is a major issue in U.S. relations with El Salvador. As of 2016, some 1.4 million people born in El Salvador resided in the United States, and an estimated 700,000 of them (50%) were in the country without authorization.[90] In 2017, remittances sent from Salvadorans abroad contributed close to 20% of El Salvador's GDP, according to the World Bank. Recent unauthorized migration from El Salvador has been fueled by a combination of poverty, natural disasters, poor security conditions, and a desire for family reunification.[91]

Recent Migration Flows

Since FY2013, the profile of migrants apprehended on the southwest border from El Salvador and neighboring Guatemala and Honduras (the so-called northern triangle countries of Central America) has changed. In years past, those apprehended from northern triangle countries were primarily single men; however, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began to track increasing arrivals of unaccompanied minors in FY2013 and of family units in FY2016 (see

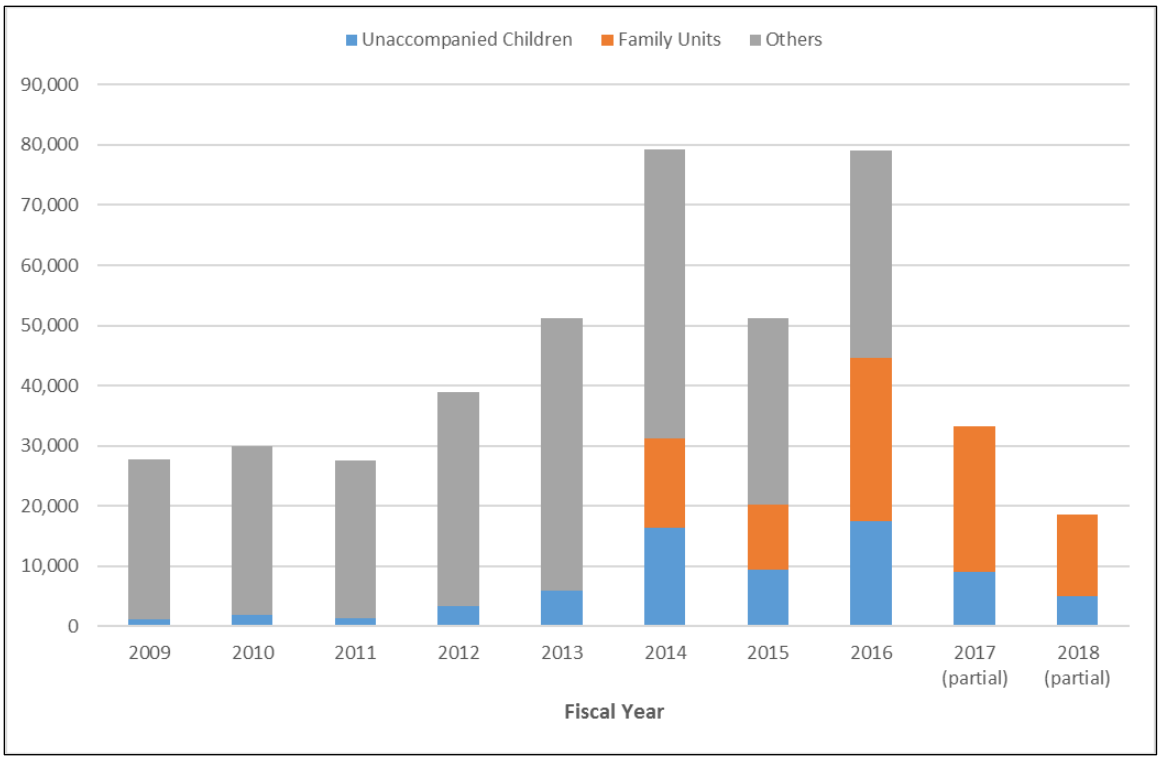
[90] U.S. Census Bureau, *2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*, accessed by CRS on American Factfinder Website, October 2018; Jeffrey S. Passel and D'vera Cohn, *Overall Number of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants Holds Steady Since 2009*, Pew Research Center, September 20, 2016.

[91] Cecilia Menjívar and Andrea Gómez Cervantes, *El Salvador: Civil War, Natural Disasters, and Gang Violence Drive Migration*, Migration Information Source, August 29, 2018.

Figure 2, below). Record apprehensions of families from northern triangle countries, many of whom are seeking asylum, have occurred during a period when overall apprehensions at the southwest border are at historic lows.[92]

Salvadoran officials have touted their recent successes in reducing crime rates as a major reason why illegal emigration from El Salvador to the United States declined over the past two years.[93] U.S. apprehensions of unauthorized family units from El Salvador peaked in FY2016 at 27,114 before declining to 21,122 in FY2017 and to 13,669 in FY2018.[94] Similarly, U.S. apprehensions of unaccompanied child migrants from El Salvador peaked in FY2016 at 17,512 before falling to 9,143 in FY2017 and 4,949 in FY2018. These declines in apprehensions from El Salvador stand in contrast to trends for Guatemala and Honduras. The number of other immigrants, including single adults, apprehended in FY2017 and FY2018 is not yet available.

Figure 2. U.S. Apprehensions of Salvadoran Nationals: FY2009-FY2018



Source: CRS presentation of data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), *Yearbooks of Immigration Statistics*, at https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook; and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, "U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border Apprehensions," press releases, at https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/usbp-sw-border-apprehensions.

Notes: Unaccompanied children = children under 18 years of age without a parent or legal guardian at the time of apprehension. Family units = total number of individuals (children under 18 years of age, parents, or legal guardians) apprehended with a family member. Family unit data is not available prior to FY2014. DHS has not released total apprehension data for FY2017 or FY2018.

[92] See the appendix of CRS Report R45266, *The Trump Administration's "Zero Tolerance" Immigration Enforcement Policy*, by William A. Kandel.

[93] See the comments of Salvadoran Vice-President Oscar Ortiz at U.S. Department of State, "Remarks at the Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America," October 11, 2018.

[94] U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, "U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border Apprehensions," press release, at https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/usbp-sw-border-apprehensions.

Human Trafficking and Alien Smuggling

The U.S. Department of State has acknowledged El Salvador for its efforts to combat human trafficking, giving the country a tier two ranking in its annual *Trafficking in Persons* reports since 2008. In 2017, El Salvador investigated 76 cases, including 2 forced labor cases; convicted 6 sex traffickers; and opened 15 municipal-level offices to inform victims of trafficking of their rights and refer them to services. Services for boys and LGBTI victims remained lacking, and investigations into corrupt government officials accused of involvement in human trafficking failed to advance. In August 2018, the State Department certified that El Salvador had met the conditions related to combating human trafficking, alien smuggling, and other migration-related topics on assistance provided in P.L. 115-141. In that certification, it described how the Salvadoran government has tried 43 cases related to human trafficking or alien smuggling thus far in 2018, with 28 individuals convicted for those crimes.[95]

Removals, Temporary Protected Status, and Deferred Action for Child Arrivals

Some 18,830 Salvadorans were removed (deported) from the United States in FY2017, making El Salvador the fourth-largest recipient of deportees in the world.[96] Salvadoran officials have expressed concerns about their country's ability to absorb deportees, as it is often difficult for those returning to the country to find employment and deported gang members may exacerbate security challenges. El Salvador has received some part of roughly $46 million that USAID has provided to help northern triangle governments receive those removed from the United States or Mexico and reintegrate them into their communities, but services remain limited, particularly at the municipal level.[97] Deportees have become targets for extortion and violence, with at least 70 deportees reportedly murdered since 2013.[98]

Concerns about repatriations to El Salvador increased in January 2018 after DHS announced the decision to terminate TPS for El Salvador, originally provided in 2001 after a series of earthquakes and then renewed 13 times, after an 18-month transition period.[99] The Salvadoran government has expressed hope that the U.S. Congress will enact legislation to protect its roughly 200,000 nationals whose TPS protection is scheduled to end, particularly since lawsuits have been filed challenging the termination.[100]

Although some press reports predict the end of TPS could have negative consequences for the Salvadoran economy (declining remittances, increasing fiscal demands by repatriated individuals), the IMF maintains that the impact probably will be minimal.[101] The government is nevertheless working with USAID, other donors, and the private sector to prepare reintegration assistance for former TPS beneficiaries who may return voluntarily or face removal. The State

[95] U.S. Department of State, "Certification Pursuant to Section 7045(a)(3)(A) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2018," 83 *Federal Register 46242*, September 12, 2018.

[96] U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), *Fiscal Year 2017 ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Report*, December 13, 2017, p. 15.

[97] USAID, "Return and Reintegration in the Northern Triangle: El Salvador," 2018; Olivia P. Tallet and Marie de Jesus, "Strangers in Their own Homelands," *Houston Chronicle*, November 27, 2017.

[98] Anna-Catherine Brigida, "Kicked out of the U.S., Salvadoran Deportees Are Struggling Simply to Stay Alive," *World Politics Review*, October 9, 2018.

[99] See CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*, by Jill H. Wilson.

[100] See CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10215, *Federal District Court Enjoins the Department of Homeland Security from Terminating Temporary Protected Status*, by Hillel R. Smith.

[101] IMF 2018.

Department also is preparing to be able to provide consular services to the U.S. citizen children of TPS beneficiaries (estimated to number more than 190,000) who may return to the country.[102]

In addition, Salvadoran officials are concerned about the future of another 26,520 young Salvadorans currently protected from deportation through their participation in the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) initiative.[103] If DACA ends and its Salvadoran beneficiaries return, they could have difficulty continuing their education or obtaining employment, as the country is already struggling with high levels of youth unemployment. On September 5, 2017, DHS announced its decision to rescind the DACA initiative. The future of the DACA initiative remains uncertain, as dueling lawsuits are under way in federal courts to preserve DACA and to force its termination.[104]

"Zero Tolerance" Immigration Enforcement and Restrictions on Access to Asylum[105]

In May 2018, the Department of Justice (DOJ) implemented a zero tolerance policy toward illegal border crossing. Under the policy, DOJ prosecuted all adults apprehended while crossing the border illegally, with no exception for asylum seekers or those with minor children. This policy resulted in up to 3,000 children being separated from their parents, including children from El Salvador.[106] After a federal judge mandated that all separated children be reunited with their families in late June 2018, DHS reverted to some prior immigration enforcement policies. In August 2018, Salvadoran officials announced they would investigate allegations of abuse of three Salvadoran minors in U.S. detention facilities.[107]

The Trump Administration has changed U.S. asylum programs and policies that have affected Salvadorans. In August 2017, the Administration ended an in-country refugee/parole processing program known as the Central American Minors program for children with parents residing legally in the United States.[108] On June 11, 2018, then-Attorney General Sessions issued a decision maintaining that victims of gang violence or domestic abuse perpetrated by nongovernmental actors generally do not meet the standards required for receiving asylum in the United States.[109] This decision is likely to restrict the ability of many Central American migrants to quality for asylum. On November 9, 2018, President Trump issued a presidential proclamation prohibiting individuals who arrive between ports of entry on the U.S. southwest border from

[102] U.S. Department of State, *Country Strategy: El Salvador,* August 2018.

[103] Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) is a program the Obama Administration implemented in 2012 to provide temporary relief from removal and work authorization to certain unlawfully present individuals who arrived in the United States as children. See CRS Report R44764, *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA): Frequently Asked Questions,* by Andorra Bruno.

[104] CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10216, *DACA: Litigation Status Update,* by Ben Harrington.

[105] CRS Report R45266, *The Trump Administration's "Zero Tolerance" Immigration Enforcement Policy*, by William A. Kandel.

[106] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), "HHS Issues Statement on Ms. L, et al., Status Report Regarding Plan for Compliance for Remaining Class Members," press release, July 13, 2018.

[107] "El Salvador Probes Alleged Cases of Child Abuse in U.S. Detention Centers," Reuters, August 15, 2018.

[108] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "In-Country Refugee/Parole Processing for Minors in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala (Central American Minors – CAM)," August 16, 2017.

[109] Matter of A-B-, 27 I. & N. Dec. 316 (A.G. 2018), at https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1070866/download/.

requesting asylum for a period of 90 days.[110] A federal judge temporarily blocked those restrictions on November 19, 2018.[111]

Security Cooperation

Counternarcotics

Although El Salvador is not a producer of illicit drugs, it does serve as a transit country for narcotics, mainly cocaine and heroin, cultivated in the Andes and destined for the United States. In September 2018, President Trump included El Salvador on the annual list of countries designated as "major" drug-producing or "drug-transit" countries for the eighth consecutive year.[112] A country's inclusion in the list, however, does not mean that its antidrug efforts are inadequate.

In 2016, Salvadoran officials seized around 12.3 metric tons of cocaine, an amount roughly four times larger than the total seized in 2015.[113] The government also denied some $203.4 million in illicit revenue to crime groups, including assets seized during a major takedown of gang-affiliated money launderers ("Operation Check") in July 2016 carried out, in part, by U.S.-funded vetted units. Drug seizures decreased in 2017 due to authorities' focus on anti-gang efforts, but successful maritime efforts and coordination with other countries pushed drug smugglers out of Salvadoran waters.[114] According to the State Department, El Salvador needs to maintain funding for security forces and the attorney general's office and continue to combat corruption if it is to maintain successful antidrug efforts.

In June 2017, some Members of Congress asked the Treasury Department to consider making José Luis Merino, a high-ranking FMLN party official and deputy minister of foreign affairs, subject to U.S. sanctions under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act.[115] Over the past decade, Merino has amassed a fortune and served as the intermediary between Venezuela, *ALBA Petróleos*, and the party. He also reportedly has ties with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas and drug traffickers.[116] In August 2018, some Members of Congress asked the Treasury and State Departments to examine whether Merino and a business executive named José Aquiles Enrique Rais López could be subject to sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act for engaging in corruption.[117]

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[110] The White House, "Presidential Proclamation Addressing Mass Migration Through the Southern Border of the United States," November 9, 2018.

[111] Dan Levine, "U.S. Judge Blocks Trump Asylum Restrictions," Reuters, November 19, 2018.

[112] White House, "Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2018," September 13, 2017.

[113] U.S. Department of State, *2016 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2017.

[114] U.S. Department of State, *2017 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2018.

[115] Héctor Silva Avalos, "US Congress Members Request Investigation of El Salvador Official Linked to Organized Crime," *InSight Crime*, June 23, 2017.

[116] Venezuela Investigative Unit, "Venezuela and El Salvador: Exporting Aid and Corruption," May 25, 2018.

[117] Office of U.S. Representative Eliot Engel, "Bipartisan Group in Congress Urges Trump Administration to Utilize Global Magnitsky Sanctions in Central America," August 2, 2018.

Gangs

U.S. agencies have engaged with El Salvador and other Central American governments on gang issues for more than a decade, with some regional efforts housed in the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador. In July 2007, an interagency committee announced the U.S. Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico, which emphasized diplomacy, repatriation, law enforcement, capacity enhancement, and prevention. Between FY2008 and FY2016 (the most recent year available), Congress provided nearly $50 million to support a variety of anti-gang efforts in the northern triangle countries.

On the law enforcement side, U.S. funds support vetted police units working on transnational gang cases with U.S. law enforcement. In cooperation with vetted law enforcement units in El Salvador, U.S. law enforcement has brought criminal charges against thousands of MS-13 members in both countries.[118] Since 2012, anti-gang cases have been bolstered by the establishment of an electronic monitoring center in San Salvador and efforts to target the financing of MS-13, designated by the Treasury Department as a Transnational Criminal Organization subject to U.S. sanctions pursuant to E.O. 13581.[119]

National-level programs have been complemented by municipal-level model police precincts, which are designed to build local confidence in law enforcement by converting police forces into more community-based, service-oriented organizations. In addition to the model precincts, the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) has sponsored educational programs to keep kids from joining gangs that are taught by police and police-run athletic leagues to improve police-community relations. According to a survey of municipalities in which those leagues are active, more than 98% of participants expressed increased confidence in the police.[120] INL's policing initiatives have been integrated in a "place-based" strategy with USAID prevention programs and focused on municipalities targeted by the Salvadoran government's Plan Secure El Salvador.

Ensuring that anti-gang efforts are not carried out using police tactics that violate human rights and supporting efforts to have civilian police rather than military forces in public security efforts are major goals of U.S. programs.[121] The State Department reportedly has donated body cameras and other equipment to the internal affairs unit within the police that investigates reported abuses.[122] As of August 2017, that unit reported that 38 officers were facing homicide charges.[123] According to a September 2018 Government Accountability Office report, U.S. police training in El Salvador and the other northern triangle countries had not established consistent human rights-related objectives in its police professionalization programs.[124]

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[118] See, as an example, U.S. DOJ, "16 Ms-13 Gang Members Indicted for Assault and Drug Trafficking," September 14, 2018.

[119] U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization: Designation Targets Latin American Gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), October 11, 2012.

[120] U.S. Embassy in El Salvador, "2017: Year of Positive Action," January 2017.

[121] U.S. Department of State, *Integrated Country Strategy: El Salvador*, August 2018.

[122] Danielle Mackey and Cora Currier, "El Salvador is Trying to Stop Gang Violence, but the Trump Administration Keeps Pushing Failed "Iron Fist" Policing, *The Intercept*, October 2, 2018.

[123] U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights*, 2018.

[124] U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Central American Police Training: State and USAID Should Ensure Human Rights Content Is Included as Appropriate, and State Should Improve Data*, GAO-18-618, September 2018.

USAID has used CARSI funds to implement a variety of crime- and violence-prevention programs. USAID interventions include primary prevention programs that work with communities to create safe spaces for families and young people, secondary prevention programs that identify the youth most at risk of engaging in violent behavior and provide them and their families with behavior-change counseling, and, most recently, "tertiary" prevention programs that seek to reintegrate juvenile offenders into society. Youth in violent communities are also some of the beneficiaries of the 22,000 jobs USAID's economic programs have helped generate.[125] Due to the aforementioned sanctions on MS-13, the State Department and USAID had to obtain a waiver from the Treasury Department to carry out programs involving former or inactive MS-13 members; the agencies reportedly did not receive a license for those types of programs until 2017.[126] Since 2015, USAID programs have complemented the government's Plan Secure El Salvador efforts in the 50 most violent municipalities. Violence has been reduced by 61% in municipalities where USAID works, as compared to 42% nationally.[127]

Trade Relations

In December 2004, El Salvador became the first country to sign the CAFTA-DR trade agreement and to pass its required legislative reforms, implementing CAFTA-DR on March 1, 2006.[128] Since that time, the volume of U.S.-Salvadoran trade has tended to follow trends in growth rates in the United States, with a variety of factors inhibiting the performance of Salvadoran exports vis-à-vis the other CAFTA-DR countries. Those factors have included a continued dependence on the highly competitive apparel trade, low levels of investment, public security problems, and broader governance concerns.

The United States is El Salvador's main trading partner, purchasing 46% of its exports and supplying 30% of its imports.[129] Salvadoran exports to the United States, which totaled $2.6 billion in 2017, include apparel, electrical equipment, sugar, and coffee. El Salvador's top imports from the United States, which totaled $3.9 billion in 2017, are fuel oil, electrical machinery, nuclear reactors and parts, plastics, and vehicles. In 2017, the United States had a $1.3 billion trade surplus with El Salvador.

Because the United States enjoys a trade surplus with CAFTA-DR countries, most analysts had not predicted that the Trump Administration would seek to renegotiate the agreement, as it has with the North American Free Trade Agreement. On October 2, 2017, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said that CAFTA-DR and a number of other U.S. free trade agreements with Latin American countries "need to be modernized, more or less."

Human Rights Cases: Former Salvadoran Officials Tried in the United States

Although the amnesty law made bringing cases against human rights abusers from the war era nearly impossible to do in El Salvador, some former Salvadoran military leaders who have

[125] USAID, "USAID/El Salvador Country Fact Sheet," July 2018.

[126] Danielle Mackey and Cora Currier, "El Salvador is Trying to Stop Gang Violence, but the Trump Administration Keeps Pushing Failed "Iron Fist" Policing, *The Intercept*, October 2, 2018.

[127] USAID, "USAID/El Salvador Country Fact Sheet," July 2018.

[128] CRS In Focus IF10394, *Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR)*, by M. Angeles Villarreal.

[129] Trade data contained in this section are from Global Trade Atlas.

resided in the United States have faced judicial proceedings regarding their immigration statuses. In recent years, the Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Unit within the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has conducted investigations focused on past human rights violations in El Salvador.[130]

- In February 2012, an immigration judge ruled that former Salvadoran Defense Minister Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova could be removed (deported) from the United States based on his role ordering the torture of Salvadoran citizens, the 1980 killings of four American churchwomen, and the 1981 killings of land reformers. That decision was upheld in March 2015, and Vides Casanova was deported to El Salvador on April 8, 2015.
- In September 2012, Colonel Inocente Orlando Montano, one of the officials named by the Spanish judge as responsible for the aforementioned Jesuit murders, pled guilty to immigration fraud. Montano had hidden his military past when applying for TPS in the United States. He was sentenced to 21 months in prison. In August 2017, a federal judge approved a lower court ruling that Orlando Montano could be extradited to Spain to face charges for his role in the 1989 killing of six Jesuit priests, most of whom were Spanish. The extradition took place in November 2017; he remains in a Spanish prison.
- In February 2014, a federal judge determined that a former Salvadoran defense minister, General José Guillermo García, can be removed based on his role in brutal human rights violations. The judge ruled that he "assisted or otherwise participated" in 11 violent incidents, including the 1980 killing of Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero. He was deported to El Salvador in January 2016.
- In February 2017, the U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Texas filed a civil lawsuit against Arnoldo Antonio Vasquez, a Salvadoran who misrepresented his past in order to obtain U.S. citizenship. According to an investigation conducted by ICE, Vasquez failed to acknowledge his involvement as a military officer in the extrajudicial killing of 10 civilians in San Sebastian, El Salvador, in 1988.[131] Both the prosecution and the defendant have submitted their written arguments, but the judge has not yet ruled on this case.

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[130] For an update on pending cases, see http://www.cja.org/article.php?list=type&type=199.

[131] ICE, "Denaturalization Lawsuit Filed Against Alleged Human Rights Abuser Originally From El Salvador Residing in North Texas," press release, February 10, 2017.

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