



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Country Profile: El Salvador

Since independence in 1841, El Salvador has experienced endemic violence. Its civil war from 1979 to 1992 between government death squads and leftist insurgents cost 75,000 lives. It has a [corrupt national police](#) force. El Salvador has one of the [highest homicide rates](#) in the world. Over 60,000 gang members control entire cities. El Salvador's two primary gangs, MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha) and Barrio 18, committed over half of El Salvador's [93,000 murders](#) between 1993 and 2017.

The [El Mozote Massacre](#) of 1981, wiped out an entire village of 978 people, including 533 children. Its perpetrators have not been brought to justice, though a trial against them began in 2016 after a report by a UN Commission of Inquiry. A [National Reconciliation Law](#) was vetoed by President Bukele in 2020 because it would have granted impunity for crimes against humanity during the civil war.

Women and LGBTQ+ persons are often victims of murder and rape. [One woman](#) is murdered every 18 hours. Two out of three (67%) women experience sexual violence in their lifetimes. [Abortion is a criminal offense](#). [LGBTQ+ marriage](#) is prohibited. Transgender individuals [cannot change](#) their gender on official documents. The Roman Catholic Church supports these restrictions. Violence against transgender persons has resulted in a [41-year lower than average life expectancy for this group](#).

In 2011, El Salvador passed the [Law for a Life Free of Violence against Women](#). It criminalizes various forms of [violence against women](#), such as domestic violence, including [marital rape](#), psychological abuse, and economic abuse. However, it is seldom enforced.

Gang terror in many cities and towns has spurred the flight of hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans to the U.S. The [U.S. State Department](#) estimated in October 2018 that there are over 71,500 Internally Displaced Persons in El Salvador due to gang violence.

Because El Salvador's violence disproportionately affects women and members of the LGBTQ+ community, Genocide Watch considers El Salvador to be at **Stage 3: Discrimination**. Besides rampant domestic abuse against women, most of the violence is perpetrated by armed gangs and the corrupt army and police, a sign of **Stage 5: Organization** and **Stage 8: Persecution**. Perpetrators of the El Mozote Massacre and other crimes against humanity during the civil war have not been brought to justice, placing El Salvador at **Stage 10: Denial**.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- El Salvador's law "For a Life Free of Violence Against Women" should be enforced after replacement of many of the country's corrupt police.
- El Salvador should resume the "El Mozote Trial" of perpetrators of the El Mozote massacre.
- The U.S. government should release essential [documents](#) from its archives to assist trials for crimes committed during El Salvador's civil war.
- El Salvador should vigorously investigate and prosecute cases of femicide.
- El Salvador should hire more female police, and it should provide ombudspersons for women to police and the justice system in cases of rape and domestic violence.
- The reign of terror of El Salvador's gangs must be defeated by arrests, trials, and imprisonment.
- El Salvador should pass legislation prohibiting discrimination against the LGBTQ+ population.