

# STUDY GUIDE



## ORGANISATION OF AMERICAN STATES

### AGENDA-

Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Combat  
Transnational Organized Crime in El Salvador

Freeze date: 31st December, 2017

Chairperson: Krisha Bidwatka

# INDEX

1	Chairperson's address.....	3
2	Expectation of Executive Board.....	4
3	Introduction to the Committee.....	5
4	Introduction to the Agenda.....	6-7
5	Important Definitions.....	8-10
6	Timeline.....	10-17
7	Current Status.....	18-19
8	Case studies.....	20-31
9	Major Gangs.....	32-34
10	Past Actions.....	35-43
11	Important Portfolios.....	44-50
12	Questions to Address.....	51-52
13	Paperwork Required.....	53
14	Reference Links.....	54-55

# CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS

“Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.” — Ronald Reagan

Greetings delegates,

Welcome to the Organisation of American States, and THSMUN 2026.

I began my Model United Nations journey out of curiosity and desire to learn more about both the activity and the world around me. After having had the privilege of attending numerous conferences since then, I cannot imagine myself without it. After all, who am I without my urge to argue?

To me, MUN has always been far more than a competition. It has been a platform for expression, discussion, and growth. Through this committee, I hope to create an experience that is not only memorable, but also intellectually engaging for every delegate present. I encourage all delegates to speak confidently, debate constructively, and remain clear in their arguments.

To those who love sharing obscure facts, take this opportunity to tell the world. To all those who love to yap, don't forget to yap.

A MUN is an opportunity for you to tell the world what you believe and learn from the world too.

For first-time delegates, there is absolutely no need to feel intimidated. Prepare thoroughly, participate actively and feel free to approach the executive board at any time.

Finally, don't forget to have fun and please do not use Wikipedia (or use wisely).  
Brownie points for getting me a diet coke. :)

Regards.

OAS Chairperson,

Krishna Bidawatka.

# EXPECTATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Transnational organized crime in El Salvador is a security and governance problem in the Americas.

By December 31 2017 organized crime groups had caused a lot of instability weakened institutions and led to a lot of corruption and socioeconomic problems. Gang violence has gotten worse with gangs fighting over territory extorting people forcing others to join them and clashing with security forces, which affects peoples' lives and public security. This crisis is not a problem for El Salvador; it's a regional issue that needs a coordinated international response.

The Organization of American States is a platform for countries to work together on diplomacy, cooperation and collective security. The Executive Board wants delegates to understand the security issues and the deeper reasons why organized crime is a problem. Delegates should focus on finding solutions rather than just describing the crisis. They should look at ways to share information cooperate on border security stop trafficking, reform institutions and help people get back on their feet.

Some things delegates can explore include: sharing intelligence across regions, working together on border security, initiatives to stop trafficking, reforming institutions, rehabilitation programs and strategies to address economic issues that lead people to join gangs.

The Executive Board wants delegates to work together constructively and engage in meaningful discussions. Delegates should carefully consider proposed solutions work effectively with groups and make sure security measures follow international law and human rights.

The goal is to find cooperative strategies to strengthen regional stability and reduce the influence of organized crime groups, in the Americas. Organized crime groups are a problem and delegates should focus on finding solutions to this issue.

The Americas need to work to address organized crime.

# INTRODUCTION TO COMMITTEE

The Organization of American States is a group that works with countries in the Americas. It was started in 1948 to help these countries get along and be peaceful. The Organization of American States wants to make sure that all countries are treated equally and that they do not interfere with each other. The Organization of American States also helps countries solve their problems in a way.

The Organization of American States has groups that work on different issues. These issues include making sure that elections are fair and that people are safe. The Organization of American States also works on helping countries grow economically and deal with crime that happens in countries. The Organization of American States is very important, for the Americas because it helps countries work together and be more secure.

## LIMITATIONS: -

In the context of this committee's agenda Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Combat Transnational Organized Crime in El Salvador it is important for delegates to know that the Organization of American States or the OAS is mainly a place where countries can talk to each other work together and make policies. The OAS can help countries share information make plans to keep the region safe and support each other in fighting against crime. It can also help countries work together to stop trafficking and suggest ways for them to work together. However, the OAS does not have the power to make countries do things they do not want to do because of the rules in the OAS Charter.

Delegates need to remember that each country is, in charge of itself and the OAS cannot tell a country what to do without its permission. The OAS cannot send troops into a country without being asked. It cannot make a country's government do something it does not want to do. If a delegate suggests something that involves sending troops forcing a country to do something or changing its government it will not work because it goes against the rules of the OAS. Instead delegates should think about ways that countries can work together like partnering with each other helping each other with things working together on law enforcement and sharing information.

They can also think about ways to help countries develop their economies rehabilitate people who have been involved in crime and keep their borders safe. The OAS and its member states, including El Salvador should focus on these kinds of ideas.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

Transnational organized crime continues to be one of the most intricate and swiftly changing dangers facing the Americas. As of the freeze date on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2017, EL Salvador had become a key hub in a wider regional network of criminal activity that included gang violence, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, financial crimes, extortion, migrant exploitation, and illegal cross-border operations. Criminal groups like MS-13 and Barrio 18 evolved beyond typical street gang frameworks, creating complex transnational networks linked to drug trafficking, illegal arms trade, money laundering and organised violence. Accounts of exploitation highlighted the escalating humanitarian aspects of the crisis.

The impact of organised crime in El Salvador goes well beyond internal instability. Criminal organization take advantage of weak borders, poor institutional collaboration, corruption, economic uncertainty and at-risk communities to maintain illegal activities throughout the area. Drug trafficking pathways in Central America have escalated violence and financially strengthened criminal organisation, an illicit arms shipment persists in exacerbating territorial disputes and gang conflicts. Networks involved in human trafficking and the exploitation of migrants specifically focus on women, children and displaced groups, revealing critical deficiencies in regional protective systems. These linked offences have burdened judicial systems, diminished public confidence in institutions, hindered economic growth and led to rising displacement and migration across the hemisphere.

Simultaneously, reactions to organised crime continue to be highly debated. Although governments in the area have implemented security and anti-gang tactics, issues related to extrajudicial violence, overcrowded prisons and human rights abuses remain central to global discussions. The challenge before the Organization of American States is therefore not simply one of suppressing criminal activity, but of developing sustainable, cooperative, and rights-respecting regional strategies capable of addressing both immediate security threats and the structural conditions enabling organized crime to flourish.

This agenda urges delegates to explore the complex characteristics of transnational organized crime and assess ways to enhance inter-American collaboration via intelligence-sharing, initiatives against trafficking, coordination of border security, financial oversight systems, institutional reforms, rehabilitation programs. Delegates must ultimately work toward comprehensive solutions that balance regional security priorities with democratic governance, sovereignty, and the protection of human rights across the Americas.

# IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

1. **Ammunition** - the complete round or its components, including cartridge cases, primers, propellant powder, bullets or projectiles that are used in any firearms
2. **Explosives**-Any substance or article that is made, manufactured, or used to produce an explosion, detonation, or propulsive or pyrotechnic effect except
  - a. Substances and articles that are not in and of themselves explosive; or
  - b. Substances and articles listed in the ANNEX of the CIFTA
3. **Controlled Delivery**-The technique of allowing illicit or suspect consignment of firearms, ammunition, explosives and other related materials to pass out of, through, or into the territory of one or more states, with the knowledge and under the supervision of their competent authorities, with a view of identifying persons involved in the commission of offences referred to in Article IV of the CIFTA.
4. **Illicit Trafficking**- The import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of firearms, ammunitions, explosives, and other related materials from or across the territory of one State Party to that of another State Party, if any of the concerned state parties do not authorise it.
5. **Illicit Manufacturing** - The manufacture or assembly of firearms, ammunition, explosives, and other related materials
  - a. From components or parts illicitly trafficked; or
  - b. without a license from a competent governmental authority of the State Party where the manufacture or assembly takes place; or
  - c. without marking the firearms that require marking at the time of manufacturing.
6. **Firearms**-
  1. Any barrelled weapon which will or is designed to or may be readily converted to expel a bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive, except antique firearms manufactured by the 20th century or their replicas; or
  2. Any other weapon or destructive device such as explosive, incendiary or gas bomb, Grenade, Rocket Launcher, missile, missile system, or mine.

7. **Organised criminal group** - A structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the main aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with UNTOC, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit;

8. **Regional Economic Integration Organisation** - An organisation constituted by sovereign States of a given region, to which its member states have transferred competence in respect of matters governed by UNTOC and which has been duly authorised, in accordance with its internal procedures, to sign, ratify, accept, approve or accede to it; references to "State Parties" under UNTOC shall apply to such organisations within the limit of their competence.

9. **Serious Crime**- As per UNTOC, it shall mean conduct constituting an offence punishable by a maximum deprivation of liberty of at least four years or a more serious penalty.

10. **Proceeds of crime**- Under UNTOC, it shall mean any property derived from or obtained, directly or indirectly, through the commission of an offence.

11. **Predicate Offence**- Refers to any offence as a result of which proceeds have been generated that may become the subject of an offence as defined in article 6 of UNTOC.

12. **Trafficking in persons**- the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of the article.

13. **Smuggling of Migrants** - The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial order or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or permanent resident.

14. **Vessel** - Any type of water craft, including non-displacement craft and seaplanes, used or capable of being used as means of transportation on water, except a warship, naval auxiliary or other vessel owned or operated owned or operated by a government and used, for the time being, only on government non-commercial vessels.

15. **"Fraudulent travel or identity document"** shall mean any travel or identity document:

- a. That has been falsely made or altered in material by anyone other than a person or agency lawfully authorized to make or issue the travel or identity document on behalf of the State; or
- b. That has been improperly issued or obtained through misinterpretation, corruption or duress or in any other unlawful manner; or
- c. That is being used by a person other than being a rightful holder;

16. **Mass Incarnation**- A government measure that temporarily increases the powers of law enforcement, sometimes limiting civil liberties.

# TIMELINE

## THE FOUNDATION PERIOD

The roots of transnational organised crime in el Salvador can be traced back to the Salvadoran civil war, which lasted from 1980 to 1992 between the Salvadorian government and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front. This conflict had resulted in over seventy thousand civilian deaths and over one million people were displaced. Other than the humanitarian destruction caused by the war, the conflict further severely weakened state institutions, militarized Salvadoran society, and created long term economic instability. The collapse of the public's trust in governmental institutions in addition to the rising poverty and unemployment made the environment such where criminal organisations would thrive.

In January 1992, the Chapultepec Peace Accords formally ended the civil war and marked the beginning of El Salvador's democratic transition. The agreement transformed the FMLN from a guerrilla movement into a legitimate political party and established a new civilian police force to replace the heavily militarized security apparatus that had existed during the conflict. While the accords are widely regarded as a major achievement in ending political violence, they did not fully address the structural socioeconomic issues affecting the country. Weak institutions, high levels of inequality, unemployment, and insufficient rehabilitation programs for former combatants continued to undermine long-term stability. As a result, although political conflict declined, criminal violence gradually began to increase throughout the 1990s.

In 1994, el Salvador had recorded an approximate of 131 killings per 1,00,000 inhabitants. During this period, gangs increasingly filled the institutional vacuum left behind by the war, particularly in marginalized urban communities where state presence remained weak. At the same time, the united states deportation policies started to take effect. Thousands of immigrants with criminal records returned to Central America.

Between 1996 to 2002, a large number of gang affiliated deportees came from the united states to el Salvador, including members or the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18, both of which had developed in Los Angeles. Because of the weak reintegration mechanism and limited economic opportunities, these groups expanded their influence rapidly manifolds. This development transformed gang violence from a primarily domestic issue into a transnational organized crime concern, as criminal networks increasingly operated across borders and maintained connections between Central America and the United States.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1997 the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act came into effect, having been signed by President Bill Clinton on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1996.

In late 1990s the number of deportations, including those with a criminal history, arriving in El Salvador increased dramatically. At this time, MS-13 and Barrio 18 absorb local gangs and expand rapidly.

## THE ERA OF MANA DURA

Rising public fear surrounding the increase in gang violence and activity led successive governments to adopt highly militarized security policies throughout the early 2000's. In 2003, president Francisco Flores of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) introduced Plan Mano Dura, or the "Iron Fist Plan". The Iron Fist plan involved joint police-military operations and aggressive anti-gang legislation. The Anti-Bill Gang criminalised gang memberships and allowed authorities to make arrests based on visible indicators like tattoos or any other speculated gang affiliations.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2003 President Francisco Flores introduced the gang-prevention measure called "Plan Mano Dura."

On 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2003 "Ley Anti-Maras", an anti-gang law, was passed, and it provided temporary legal framework for the execution of Plan Mano Dura. It criminalised membership in gangs and allowed for the detention of minors.

In 2004, President Antonio Saca expanded these policies through Plan Súper Mano Dura. While the programme included several social, non-profit community support initiatives, they suffered from inadequate investment and limited implementation of the policies. Between 2004-2008 approximately 4000 gang members were incarcerated. However, unintentionally, rather than dismantling gang structures, the overcrowding of the prisons enables the gang leaders to centralize their operations from within the prisons. The prison system itself emerged as a critical hub for transnational organized criminal activity.

## THE FMLN SHIFT AND THE GANG TRUCE (2009–2014)

With the election of FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes in 2009, el Salvador marked a significant political shift, as for the first time the former left-wing guerrilla movement assumed executive power through democratic means. Funes initially attempted to balance security enforcement with broader institutional reform; however, escalating gang violence continued to place immense pressure on the government. In September 2010, the Gang Proscription Law formally designated major gangs as terrorist organizations, strengthening the legal basis for aggressive anti-gang operations.

In 2012, Muricio and his government, facilitated a gang truce between MS-13 and Barrio 18. The truce stated that gang leaders would be moved to less restrictive prisons in exchange for reduced killings. Subsequently, there was a 40% drop on homicide rates during its initial phase. However, the truce began to collapse in 2013 following growing political backlash and legal disputes surrounding the role of military in domestic security operations. After the supreme court declared the appointment of a military officer to head the civilian police unconstitutionally, killings skyrocketed as the truce disintegrated. By the time Salvador Sánchez Cerén assumed the presidency in 2014, El Salvador continued to face severe levels of organized criminal violence despite repeated shifts in security strategy.

## ESCALATION AND "EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES" (2015– 2017)

In 2015, El Salvador reached the peak of its violence, becoming the most dangerous nation on earth with a murder rate of 103 per 1,00,000 people. Intensifying confrontations between gangs and state security forces contributed to widespread insecurity, international concern and rising migration flow throughout the Northern Triangle region. In response to these concerns the government then launched the "Safe El Salvador" plan. By beginning of 2016 the government approved extraordinary measures; imposing harsh confinement conditions in jails to choke gang communication and restrict operations within prison.

From May to June, 2015 the record set in March was crossed with 622 homicides in May and again in June with 677 homicides reported. MS-13 carries out attacks on police officers and their families in the Panchimalco municipality as a part of an escalating campaign against security forces.

In August, 2015 the homicide is crossed once again with 907 homicides reported. On 15<sup>th</sup> of August there were also reports of a second extrajudicial killing by security forces in Panchimalco (later confirmed by Human Rights Ombudsman).

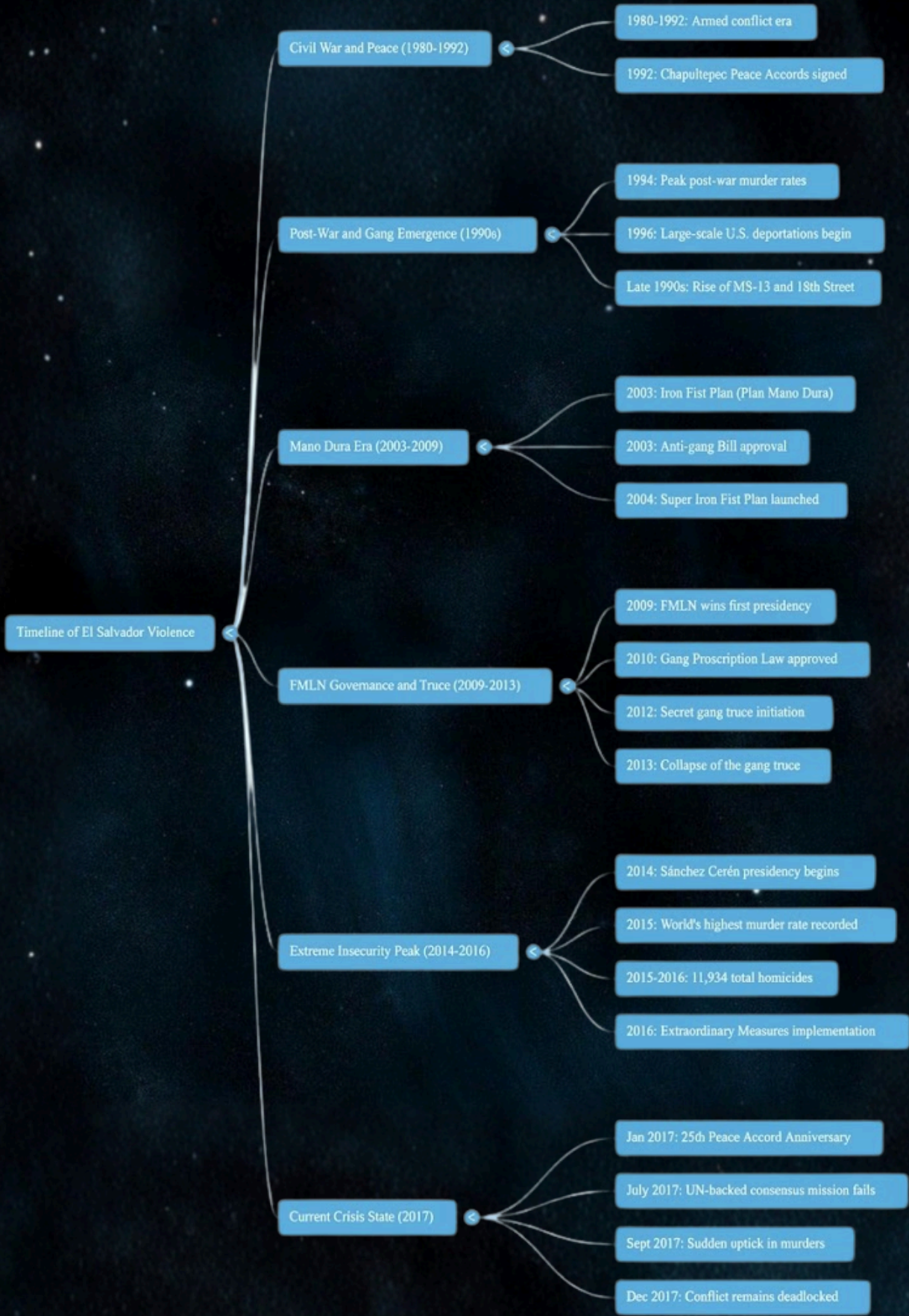
Although these policies disrupted some gang communication it also faced backlash from human rights organisations, which waned against excessive militarisation and deteriorating prison conditions. At the same time, corruption scandals within state institutions further weakened public trust in governance. In August 2016, former Attorney General Luis Martínez was arrested on charges including conspiracy and fraud, highlighting concerns regarding institutional corruption and the penetration of organized crime into state structures.

Early 2017 marked the 25th anniversary of the Peace Accords and a major turning point in el Salvador's security landscape- gangs released a joint communique offering to disband their activities in exchange for renewed dialogue with the government. The authorities rejected any hint of negotiations, maintain a position against gang activity.

Simultaneously, United Nations backed mission launched to establish political consensus between Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front and the Nationalist Republican Alliance failed due to deep political polarization. During the same period, United States Attorney General Jeff Sessions visited El Salvador and emphasized a stronger regional crackdown against MS-13, reflecting the growing perception of gangs as hemispheric security threats rather than purely domestic actors.

Security operation, “operation jaque” targeted the financial structure of gangs, focusing on extortion networks and illicit financial flows in July, 2017. In September 2017, operation tecana further target gang financial structures. These initiatives represented a shift toward intelligence-based and financial disruption strategies rather than relying solely on traditional policing methods. Nevertheless, violence continued to escalate throughout late 2017, with nearly 887 murders recorded during September and October alone. On October 26, 2017: Mexico and Central American countries sign the MIRPS framework for refugees; El Salvador is the only Northern Triangle country that does not sign. By December 2017, official reports indicated that 45 police officers had been killed by criminal groups during the year.

On 19th December 2017, the international crisis group released its reported titled “El Salvador’s Politics of Perpetual Violence,” describing the country as being trapped in a prolonged deadlock between the state and criminal organizations. The report advocated for long-term strategies, including strengthening judicial and security institutions, rehabilitation programs, and economic alternatives for the youth.



# CURRENT STATUS

El Salvador remains a significant source, transit and destination country for human trafficking, exacerbated by weak democratic institutions and high levels of corruption. Alongside Guatemala and Honduras, the country is part of a region notorious for human trafficking, where criminal networks actively exploit vulnerable individuals. Victims of smuggling often fall into human trafficking when they cannot repay debts to smugglers, leading to forced labour in criminal enterprises such as drug and arms trafficking, extortion and prostitution. Gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 recruit children, some as young as eight years old, coercing them into criminal activities. These groups facilitate human trafficking operations, using social media platforms and encrypted messaging services to lure victims with false employment opportunities. The involvement of state-embedded actors in human trafficking has been reported, with legislators and government officials implicated in trafficking operations.

Data on migrant smuggling in El Salvador is scarce, though reports suggest the trade has becoming more lucrative. Smuggling operations employ trochas (unofficial crossing points) and use both private and public transportation networks. The cost of smuggling varies by route and individual profiles, with some migrants paying via international remittances. The presence of state actors in smuggling networks is suggested by the use of Salvadoran airports for illicit transit. However, despite crackdowns, the smuggling trade persists, with migrants from Africa and Asia paying substantial fees to transit through the region. Historically, extortion has been the primary financial mechanism for gangs like MS-13 and Barrio 18, generating substantial revenue from businesses, transport operators and even schoolchildren.

The Extraordinary measures done by the government have tried to put an effective crackdown on these gangs but it has resulted in various problems compounding to the Severe Organised crime Situation.

1 Severe human rights violation done by the Elite police force formed by the Extraordinary measures under President Salvador Sanchez Saren have put the El Salvadorian government under heavy scrutiny by the International community and most of these cases are putting a burden on the judicial system of El Salvador.

2. With the increased workload of El Salvador's judiciary system on the grassroots level most of these cases are getting ignored.
3. Opposition in Right wing Legislators in the El Salvador are not happy with these new measures which they consider to be soft towards the Gangs. They wanted a national Emergency and often pressured the President to do this.
4. During these extraordinary measures period the Barrio 18 and MS 13 gangs were in a truce so during this time they were rebuilding themselves slowly and steadily.
5. With an Effective Ban on Abortion Femicide rates in El Salvador are highest in the world and it seems like the government is not taking significant reform to address this.

The government created a hybrid security approach, combining militarised policing with limited social programs. Gang leaders' movements within prisons were restricted, and they were placed in maximum security conditions. These measures were taken as prison had developed into headquarters for the coordination of gang activity. However,

- Impunity rates for homicides remain extremely high, with the state leaving 95% of cases unsolved or unprosecuted.
- The Judicial System was severely strained with a backlog of cases and witnesses being intimidated, which undermined prosecutions.
- Alleged Extra-Judicial Killings by the National Civil Police and Military

Due to gang violence, hundreds of thousands of people were forced from their homes in El Salvador, which has one of the worst rates of internal displacement in Latin America. The irregular migration flow towards Mexico and the United States increased as a result. Additionally, the crisis hindered the nation's development, resulting in low economic growth, unemployment, and other issues that actually exacerbate the cycles that El Salvador has been stuck in since the 1990s.

# CASE STUDIES

## The Mana Dura Policy.

The adoption of “Mano Dura” (“Iron Fist”) measures in El Salvador represented a major change in the nation's strategy against gang violence and organized crime in the early 2000s and continued into the next decade. Initially established by President Francisco Flores and subsequently forwarded by President Antonio Saca, these policies depended significantly on militarised law enforcement, widespread arrests, and strict anti-gang laws to diminish the escalating power of gangs like Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18. Although these strategies received considerable backing from parts of the public discontented with increasing insecurity and homicide rates, there was elicited significant criticism from international organizations, civil society groups, and human rights advocates. By 2017, the effects of the Mano Dura strategy had grown more contentious, as numerous critics claimed that the government's security measures were fostering a cycle of violence instead of addressing it.

A central criticism of the Mano Dura approach was its dependence on militarization and the growing role of security forces in civilian policing. In numerous gang-dominated neighbourhoods, inhabitants started voicing concerns not just about criminal groups, but also about governmental agencies functioning in these regions. Local communities and human rights groups reported claims of excessive use of force, unjust detentions, and unlawful violence executed during anti-gang operations. These worries gained particular importance because of El Salvador's historical backdrop, with memories of atrocities from the civil war still deeply ingrained in Salvadoran culture.

Numerous incidents documented during this timeframe underscored the escalating friction between state security measures and the safeguarding of civilians. A well-known instance arose in Distrito Italia, where a bunch of teenagers convened late at night to commemorate a birthday. As reported by nearby residents, the assembly was disrupted when armed troops arrived in the area and apprehended

Local residents report that the assembly was disrupted when armed soldiers arrived in the area and apprehended some of the boys.

Witnesses claimed that while the majority of the teens were held on the ground, two tried to escape, leading security staff to chase after them. A boy, known by the alias “Pablo Ortega,” was said to have been shot while trying to flee and was subsequently discovered deceased close by. Relatives asserted that he had just graduated from high school and had no verified connections to organized crime. The case quickly became a representation of increasing public anxieties regarding the enforcement of Mano Dura policies.

Residents in gang-dominated areas increasingly claimed that aggressive anti-gang measures blurred the line between suspected gang affiliates and regular citizens. During interviews with journalists and human rights observers, several families reported living in ongoing fear of both gangs and security forces, feeling that young people in underserved areas were inherently viewed with distrust. Frequent comparisons arose between modern security operations and the violence faced during the Salvadoran Civil War, highlighting the profound psychological effects that militarized policing had on community residents.

Another case frequently referenced by human rights groups involved accusations of mistreatment against a young mechanic named Cristian Hernández Beltrán. Reports indicated that Hernández was arrested with a friend prior to reportedly facing harsh abuse from police during an anti-gang operation. Human rights supporters cited instances like these to contend that crime-fighting strategies were progressively allowing excessive violence and undermining public trust in law enforcement agencies. While officials asserted that rigorous measures were essential to tackle influential criminal groups, detractors cautioned that these strategies could further isolate at-risk communities and continue cycles of violence.

While officials presented these actions as essential parts of anti-gang efforts, community members contended that non-combatants were increasingly trapped in the ongoing clash between gangs and law enforcement. Families residing in marginalized areas frequently expressed feelings of being caught between criminal groups and harsh state actions, fostering an environment of fear and distrust.

A different case often cited by human rights monitors involved claims of mistreatment of young detainees during police actions. Civil society groups asserted that certain individuals believed to have gang ties experienced violent treatment, intimidation, or illegal detention, even though there was minimal evidence directly connecting them to organized crime.

Human rights defenders contended that the extensive targeting of youth from at-risk communities threatened to criminalize entire areas instead of tackling the underlying issues of gang recruitment like poverty, unemployment, social marginalization, and inadequate educational resources.

Entities like Cristosal and Amnesty International have consistently condemned the Salvadoran government's significant dependence on militarized security measures. "In the 1980s, having long hair and carrying a book made you a target; being young still makes you a target today. The public discourse is warlike. It focuses on eliminating gang members – not crime. [But] the *mano dura* approach hasn't worked and won't suddenly start to work in the future. In the meantime, we are turning a blind eye to grave human rights abuses." Said Jeanne Rikkers, research director at the violence prevention group Cristosal. She observed that public discussions are more often centred on "removing gang members" instead of tackling crime via long-term prevention and systemic reform. Critics contended that the militant language used around gang violence fostered a climate where abuses by security forces were frequently overlooked or rationalized under the guise of public safety.

Additionally, analysts highlighted that *Mano Dura* policies often led to unintended outcomes that bolstered organized crime networks over time. Mass arrests resulted in significant prison overcrowding, enabling gang leaders to consolidate operations and enhance communication networks from inside correctional institutions. Instead of breaking down gang structures, prisons progressively turned into operational hubs for extortion, recruitment, and coordination. As a result, the state's forceful security measures frequently strengthened the organizational abilities of gangs while also increasing public scepticism toward state institutions.

In 2017, discussions focused on the efficacy of *Mano Dura* policies became central to security and governance dialogues in El Salvador. Advocates claimed that strict enforcement actions were essential to tackle well-armed criminal groups that represented a direct danger to national stability. Nonetheless, critics argued that solely militarized approaches did not tackle the fundamental social and economic factors fuelling gang recruitment and violence. Moreover, claims of human rights abuses brought significant worries about accountability, the rule of law, and the equilibrium between national security and the safeguarding of civilians.

The Salvadoran case illustrated the wider regional difficulties encountered by countries trying to tackle transnational organized crime using exclusively forceful methods. Though Mano Dura policies briefly showcased state power and addressed public security demands, they also exposed the shortcomings of depending solely on repression without simultaneous investments in prevention, institutional reform, and regional collaboration. As transnational gangs persisted in operating across borders and adjusting to government crackdowns, it became more evident that lasting solutions would necessitate not just security enforcement but also enhanced governance, social investment, and synchronized regional strategies.

## Forced Migration

The Northern Triangle of Central America, comprising El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, became one of the most violent areas globally outside of active conflict zones during the 2010s. Prevalent gang violence, extortion, compulsory recruitment, corruption, and fragile state institutions led to the annual displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians. Approximately 500,000 people are estimated to enter Mexico each year, with most coming from the Northern Triangle area. While the crisis was often portrayed globally as a matter of irregular migration, humanitarian groups increasingly contended that the movement of individuals constituted a type of forced displacement stemming from conditions akin to armed conflict.

Since 2012, the global humanitarian group Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders or MSF) has offered medical and psychological support to migrants and refugees journeying through Mexico along one of the largest migration routes worldwide. MSF recorded extensive patterns of violence faced by migrants during field surveys, medical consultations, and psychosocial evaluations, occurring both in their home nations and along the migration path. The organization states that numerous refugees from the Northern Triangle are escaping threats from gangs, extortion, sexual violence, forced recruitment, and targeted persecution by criminal organizations like MS-13 and Barrio 18.

The results released by MSF highlighted the seriousness of the humanitarian emergency developing throughout the area. A 2015 survey of 467 migrants and refugees in shelters backed by the organization in Mexico revealed that around 39.2 percent of participants indicated that direct attacks, threats to family,

extortion, or forced recruitment by gangs were the main reasons for leaving their home countries. Additionally, 43.5 percent of respondents from the Northern Triangle indicated that they lost a family member to violence in the last two years. The scenario seemed especially dire in El Salvador, as over half of Salvadoran participants indicated that a family member had been killed because of violence during that time. Moreover, approximately 54.8 percent of Salvadorans polled reported that they had faced blackmail or extortion, underscoring the deep-rooted impact of organized crime in their daily lives.

For numerous migrants, though, the violence did not cease after escaping their nations. Along migration paths in Mexico, refugees and asylum seekers were often preyed upon by criminal groups engaged in kidnapping, trafficking, extortion, and sexual violence.

Of those interviewed, 39.2 percent mentioned direct attacks or threats to themselves or their families, extortion, or gang-forced recruitment as the main reason for fleeing their countries.

Of all NTCA refugees and migrants surveyed, 43.5 percent had a relative who died due to violence in the last two years. More than half of Salvadorans surveyed (56.2 percent) had a relative who died due to violence in this same time span.

Additionally, 54.8 percent of Salvadorans had been the victim of blackmail or extortion, significantly higher than respondents from Honduras or Guatemala.

Humanitarian groups and investigators expressed worries about the supposed involvement or silent endorsement of some local officials in the abuses perpetrated against migrants. Consequently, people fleeing violence frequently faced additional exploitation and insecurity while in transit. Meanwhile, regional migration enforcement measures grew progressively more stringent. Even with legal safeguards provided by Mexican and international refugee law, many migrants from the Northern Triangle were routinely detained and expelled.

The migration crisis in the Northern Triangle demonstrated the growing interrelation among organized crime, fragile governance, humanitarian turmoil, and regional safety. Instead of being merely a migration problem, the crisis illustrated how transnational organized crime could actively lead to massive forced displacement across borders. The failure of states in the region to adequately safeguard civilians, dismantle criminal organizations, and synchronize humanitarian efforts highlighted the necessity for enhanced regional collaboration frameworks. As a result, the Northern Triangle emerged as both a representation of migration challenges in the Americas and a significant

illustration of how transnational organized crime can disrupt societies, burden institutions, and create lasting humanitarian effects throughout a whole region

## Drug Trafficking

Street gangs, or maras, are like the classic territorially organized crime groups, but with a key difference. They are made up almost totally of young people, and “youth” here is stretched to the 20–30 age range. In this region they are often not even labelled as “organized crime groups”, mainly because their main focus isn’t financial gain. Still, taking people’s money is just one way to control territory. Maras manage territories and then ask for a “rent” payment, so they can “guarantee” their protection of the community or neighbourhood. Usually, this “tax” is pressed out of workers in public transportation, merchants, and sometimes even institutions like private schools. Right now, in El Salvador, the two most dangerous and most well-known maras are Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Mara “Barrio 18” (MS-18), and they are, basically, long time historical rivals. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, says that MS-13 and MS-18 look like they’re involved in theft and robberies, extortion, street level drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, human trafficking, murder-for-hire, and firearms trafficking. These groups seem to have ties inside the US, or they send people out from El Salvador, and then they run drug trafficking, arms dealing and human trafficking activities. That kind of pattern shows the criminal networks are transnational. So, in the end, whatever policies are adopted to deal with this problem directly impacts the US too. Maras control certain territories and ask for the payment of a fixed amount ‘rent’ to ensure, kind of, their protection of the community or the neighbourhood. They usually zero in on charging this ‘tax’ to workers in the public transportation business, and to merchants. At times, they even reach out to institutions like private schools, yes.<sup>152</sup> Right now in El Salvador, two of the most dangerous and the most well-known maras are the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Mara ‘Barrio 18’ (MS-18), and they are historical rivals to each other. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has concluded that maras MS-13 and M-18 look like they’re getting involved in theft and robberies, extortion, street-level drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, human trafficking, murder for hire and firearms trafficking. These kinds of groups also seem to have links in the US, or they emigrate from El Salvador, and they keep running drug trafficking, arms trafficking and human trafficking ventures,

showing how truly cross-border the criminal networks are. Because of that, the policies put in place to tackle this menace have a direct effect on the US. Maras say they don't really have an ideology aiming to overthrow the Government, and they don't have any interest in creating political parties. Still, Cantor notes that "the supra-national gang structures of the MS-13 and MS-18 and local street gangs affiliated with one or other structure violently dispute the control of territories and populations in a similar way to that of armed actors in an armed conflict". These Salvadorian locally affiliated gangs are getting increasingly well-armed, with M-16, AK-47 and basically all kinds of rifles (which are considered war weapons in Salvadorian legislation), plus grenades and military hardware. This seems to point to another similarity between non-state armed groups 'in scenarios of low-intensity armed conflict'. Furthermore, armed attacks between police and military agents versus gangs have become extremely common. By September 2015, since the year had started, 432-gun fights between officers and alleged gang members were reported, that is an annual increase of 171 percent. Armed attacks among gangs are also reported as very frequent since the end of the civil war, even inside prison facilities. According to the Global Report on Internal Displacement, the number of civilians fleeing conflict and violence in El Salvador during 2016 rose to as much as 220,000, which could be read as an indicator that the intensification of armed attacks between gangs and the police/military has, triggered more displacement. This, together with various other factors, has led the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in its 2016 and 2017-Armed Conflict Survey, to describe El Salvador as a country where active armed conflict persists.

The Salvadorian Minister of Defence has said, there are roughly 60,000 gang members in El Salvador, according to its security organs while the country has a total police and army of about 50,000 officials. A study that the Salvadorian Ministry of Defence has carried out estimated that around 10 percent of the country's inhabitants work directly for the two major armed groups. Also, if a relative is involved with a gang, then it gets complicated to dissociate, not just the person but the whole household from the gang network. In situations where gang members are declared insubordinate, or they mess up while doing criminal assignments, their families can end up facing persecution, or in some cases death. MS-13 gang members are not allowed in areas controlled by other maras, and it works the other way too; the cost of crossing over can turn into death. MS-13 and other groups, it is extensively risky for young people who are not gang members

to move from one territory to another, because they might get mistaken for an enemy gang member. MS-13 and MS-18 are not the only gangs operating in El Salvador, but they have the broadest membership, and they hold the most territorial influence, and are viewed as the most dangerous and lethal. Each gang still runs its own internal ladder, codes of conduct, and rules. The real scale of the two gangs' power was visible in 2015, when they carried out a national transportation strike with the intention of forcing talks with the Government, which paralysed day to day activities across the country, and during that period some workers in public transport were killed for not following the gangs' instructions.

## Gang Wars

In the 2000s and 2010s the growth of transnational gangs, like MS-13 and Barrio 18, really reshaped the whole picture of violence and insecurity in El Salvador. Not only because there were high homicide counts and very organized criminal business, but also because gang power came with some very harsh ripple effects. A big part of it was how they started targeting regular people, the civilians, through extortion, threats, forced displacement, and a sort of territorial grip. In a lot of cities around San Salvador, these groups had serious sway on everyday life, and they often ended up acting like parallel administrations, meaning they could decide when people move around, set up informal payment schemes, and keep order via intimidation and brute violence. One such example involved a family living in a densely populated neighbourhood near San Salvador. According to humanitarian reports, a woman identified under the pseudonym "Lorena" described the drawn-out intimidation her family had to deal with after local gang members began targeting the little shop they ran right out of their home. At first, the gang pushed for steady payments in exchange for what they called "protection," something usually mentioned as extortion or even "rent." The family, worried about violent revenge, ended up complying again and again, sometimes handing over parts of their store inventory when cash payments just weren't there. Over time though, that extortion arrangement became harder, like increasingly unsustainable. As the family's finances collapsed, Lorena's husband reportedly told the gang members they could no longer continue with the payments. Soon after, about twenty-armed gang members allegedly showed up at the family home, insisting on US\$10,000 and warning they would kill the family if they didn't pay.

Reports said that several family members, including children, were physically assaulted and also intimidated during the whole encounter. In the end, the family was told they had seventy-two hours to leave the area, or else face severe retaliation. Unable to gather the money they were demanded to provide, and with real fear for their safety, the family sort of fled their neighbourhood and then moved to another district inside the city. But moving didn't really ensure anything, like, security at all. Because rival gangs kept territorial borders all over the urban areas, going from one place to the next often made civilians face yet more danger. Time and again families that tried to leave gang-controlled blocks ended up entering neighbourhoods run by competing criminal groups, and in that situation they were placed right back under suspicion, extortion or outright violence. In Lorena's case, humanitarian reports said that relatives who stayed behind were later hit with brutal retaliatory attacks—murder included—while, meanwhile, the family still kept getting threats even after they relocated. Situations like these showed wider patterns of how civilians were victimized across El Salvador during that time. Humanitarian organizations, like United Nations Children's Fund and local civil society groups, kept repeating that gangs were not only criminal outfits involved in illicit trading, but they had become rooted social actors, exerting authority over whole communities. Extortion, became one of the main financial tools that kept gang operations running, and it touched shop owners, transport workers, students, plus small businesses in many parts of the country. A lot of people, civilians, were pushed to abandon homes, schools, and their ways of earning a living just to get away from gang control, and that fed higher internal displacement and migration levels. The situation was particularly alarming given El Salvador's extreme homicide rates during the mid-2010s. In 2015, the country recorded approximately 103 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, making it one of the most violent countries in the world at the time. Analysts argued that this level of violence reflected not only the power of organized criminal groups, but also the limitations of state institutions in guaranteeing public security and civilian protection. In many marginalized communities, distrust toward law enforcement remained high due to fears of corruption, retaliation, or excessive use of force during anti-gang operations. The experience of families such as Lorena's demonstrated how transnational organized crime extends beyond traditional understandings of drug trafficking or gang warfare.

Criminal organizations increasingly shaped the social, economic, and psychological realities of civilian life, particularly within vulnerable communities. The Salvadoran case highlighted the manner in which gangs utilized fear, extortion, and territorial domination to sustain power while simultaneously contributing to displacement, migration pressures, and humanitarian instability across the wider region. Ultimately, the persistence of gang extortion and forced displacement emphasized the limitations of purely militarized responses to organized crime. While aggressive security policies sought to weaken gangs through arrests and military operations, critics argued that long-term stability would also require stronger social protection systems, institutional reform, economic opportunities, and coordinated regional responses capable of addressing the structural causes that allowed criminal organizations to thrive.

### The Human Cost

The impact of transnational organized crime in El Salvador extended far beyond homicide statistics and gang confrontations, deeply affecting the everyday lives of ordinary civilians, particularly women and children living in gang-controlled communities. Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 increasingly exercised territorial control over urban neighbourhoods, using extortion, intimidation, forced recruitment, and violence to maintain influence. As a result, thousands of families across the country experienced displacement, economic instability, interrupted education, and long-term psychological trauma. One of the clearest illustrations of this humanitarian crisis can be seen through the experiences of families living under constant gang threats. In one reported case, two brothers identified under the pseudonyms Bryan and Jaime were forced to abandon their education after violence and threats in their community made attending school impossible. According to reports from the Salvadoran Ministry of Education, more than 15,000 students dropped out of school in 2015 due to violence and insecurity, highlighting the widespread disruption caused by gang activity across the country. For many children living in gang-controlled areas, schools became dangerous spaces vulnerable to recruitment, extortion, or retaliation from rival groups. The psychological impact of this environment was equally severe. Following the murder of relatives and continued gang threats against their family, Bryan and Jaime reportedly became convinced that they too would eventually be killed.

Humanitarian workers and civil society organizations repeatedly documented how prolonged exposure to violence created fear, anxiety, trauma, and hopelessness among children and adolescents. Many young people were effectively deprived of normal childhood experiences such as attending school, playing outdoors, or socializing freely within their communities. Instead, daily life became defined by survival, fear, and uncertainty.

The situation also placed enormous pressure on parents attempting to protect their families in areas dominated by organized criminal groups. In the same case, the children's father described how ordinary activities such as leaving the house or sleeping peacefully at night became impossible due to constant fears of gang retaliation. Families frequently adopted survival strategies including self-imposed confinement, relocation, or rotating night watches to monitor potential threats. However, these coping mechanisms often deepened poverty and social isolation, particularly for families already struggling with limited economic opportunities.

At the same time, the Salvadoran government attempted multiple strategies to address escalating gang violence. Following his election in 2009, President Mauricio Funes introduced both prevention-based and enforcement-based anti-crime initiatives. Between 2010 and 2013, the government announced national violence prevention strategies aimed at supporting vulnerable communities, at-risk youth, and convicted individuals through rehabilitation and social programs. Nevertheless, these initiatives suffered from inadequate funding, limited institutional capacity, and inconsistent implementation. Simultaneously, the government intensified joint military-police operations and approved the Gang Proscription Law in September 2010, further strengthening punitive security measures.

As homicide rates continued to rise dramatically, with more than 4,300 murders recorded in 2011, the Funes administration adopted a controversial shift in strategy by facilitating indirect dialogue between gangs in 2012. The so-called "gang truce" sought to reduce killings through negotiations involving imprisoned gang leaders. Initially, the truce resulted in a substantial decrease in homicide rates and was viewed by some as evidence that dialogue could reduce violence more effectively than purely militarized responses. However, the process lacked broad public legitimacy and political consensus. Both the Mauricio Funes administration and major political parties distanced themselves publicly from the negotiations, while critics argued that the truce strengthened gang influence and failed to address extortion or recruitment activities.

The collapse of the truce in 2013 marked the beginning of renewed escalation between gangs and state authorities. Under President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, the government returned to increasingly aggressive security strategies, including rapid-reaction military-police forces and the implementation of “extraordinary measures” in prisons beginning in 2016. Authorities also launched operations such as Operation Jaque and Operation Tecana in 2017 to target gang finances and extortion networks. Although officials reported temporary reductions in homicide levels, violence remained widespread, and allegations of human rights violations by security forces generated growing criticism from humanitarian organizations and civil society groups.

By the second half of 2017, violence surged once again, with hundreds of murders recorded within only a few months. A senior government official publicly admitted that authorities were engaged in “a war that cannot be won,” reflecting the deep institutional and social challenges posed by transnational organized crime in El Salvador. Despite years of militarized policies, gang structures remained deeply entrenched within marginalized communities, while prevention programs continued facing resource shortages and weak implementation.

Ultimately, the experiences of children and families living under gang control demonstrated that the consequences of organized crime extended far beyond conventional security concerns. The Salvadoran case highlighted how transnational criminal networks can undermine education, weaken social cohesion, generate forced displacement, and create long-term psychological trauma across entire communities. It also underscored the limitations of relying solely on force-heavy security responses without parallel investments in social protection, institutional reform, education, and regional cooperation aimed at addressing the structural causes of violence and gang recruitment.

# MAJOR GANGS AND THEIR ROLES

## Barrio 18-

Barrio 18 Gang's origin traces back to America in Los Angeles. During the 1990s they were mass deportations of El Salvadorian immigrants back to El Salvador. After coming back to El Salvador Barrio 18's gang members split up into 2 parts Around 2005 known as Revolutionaries and Sureños. These factions remain rivals, and have fought with each other with the same fervour as they do the MS13 —Central America's largest street gang and the Barrio 18's historic enemy. Barrio 18 began to systematically extort the public transportation system, displace entire communities, and barge its way into politics. This was most evident in March 2012, when Barrio 18 leaders and their MS13 rivals agreed to a nationwide "truce" mediated by a government envoy and the Catholic Church. The country's homicide rate plummeted by more than half following the ceasefire, but violence again exploded as the truce quickly unravelled. At the top of the Barrio 18 are palabreros (leaders), most of whom are in the prison system. They coordinate all criminal activities. One palabrero keeps a notebook that keeps track of all finances, homicides, drugs, and weapons. Outside, the gang organizes itself in canchas. A cancha is a territorial division that isn't necessarily based on municipal delineations. Each cancha has several tribus, or tribes, the smallest units of the Barrio 18 organization. Finally, there are collaborators: those who are not quite or never will be gang members. They help the gang with small jobs, like gathering intelligence and moving or holding illicit goods. The Barrio 18 operates mainly in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Barrio 18 also operates in the US with an expected membership of 30,000-50,000 in the 2010s. It is reported also that Barrio 18 members are expanding to Europe with few arrests of Barrio 18 members in Spain and Italy. In El Salvador after the approval of Extraordinary measures against the gangs of El Salvador By formation of an elite police force and harsher lockdowns in prisons. The homicide rate in El Salvador dropped but these 2016 measures were not enough as certain months faced huge spikes like recently in September 2017 El Salvador recorded 435 homicides. It remains to be

seen How Barrio 18 members survive this Crackdown since MS 18 Members have been asserting their territorial gains after the violent month of September 2017 and Infighting between Barrio 18s different factions is not helping the cause of Barrio 18s status as a prominent gang in El Salvador.

## MS 13 –

The Ms 13 Gang originated in Los Angeles in the 1980s due to civil war in El Salvador prompting many civilians to flee to the US during that time. During the 1990s as the El Salvadorian war was coming to an end many civilians were deported back to El Salvador where the El Salvadorian Government backed by the USA emerged victorious. In Central America the MS 13's activities range from Extortion to extorting the local petty drug market. Gangs in Central America act as a transit country for drug trafficking into Mexico where the Drugs are mainly managed by The Mexican Cartel which is more renowned in drug trafficking and handles larger quantity of drugs. Ms 13 members are active supporters of this illegal drug smuggling into Mexico which later enters the USA. They usually extort bus companies in El Salvador. The MS 13 gang members deportation to Central American countries proved to be a disastrous decision as many of these Gang members were not able to adapt to Central American life and resorted to gang fighting again. The leaders of Ms13 are known as "corredores," or "runners," and "palabrerros," loosely translated as "those who have the word." These leaders control what are known as "cliques," the cells that operate in specific territories. Ms 13 Members are now asserting their territorial control over El Salvador by engaging in violence and extortion in the violent month of September 2017. Ms 13 members are now dissatisfied with the "2016 Extraordinary Measures and are now looking to again extort the public transportation system. Ms 13 members are now committing Femicide in their controlled territories contributing to the world's highest femicide rate.

## LOS PERRONES-

A UN report confirms that in El Salvador operate two drug trafficking groups that, in addition to trafficking cocaine, have been involved in " a broad spectrum of organised crime activities and have manipulated local politics."

When speaking about El Salvador and its international drug trafficking organisations (DTOs), the UN identifies Los Perrones and the so – called Texas cartel as the two primary criminal groups, although it clarifies that there may be other smaller trafficking groups.

Los Perrones is a group of "transporters" that works moving drugs and other contraband north, and taking cash back south, for a variety of criminal organisations. The group has ties to Mexican and Colombian organisations, and receives cocaine shipments brought from South America, which it then moves north to Guatemala. Los Perrones has historically been one of El Salvador's most notorious drug trafficking groups, operating out of San Miguel and other cities in eastern El Salvador.

# ACTIONS TAKEN

By the early 2000s, it had become increasingly clear that organized crime in El Salvador was no longer only a national policing issue. Gangs, trafficking networks, arms smuggling routes, and financial crimes were operating across borders and connecting Central America to larger criminal systems stretching into North America and beyond. Violence linked to groups such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 began affecting migration, public trust in institutions, economic stability, and even regional diplomacy.

This changing reality forced regional organizations to respond differently. Governments could no longer rely only on domestic crackdowns or temporary security operations because criminal networks themselves were becoming increasingly transnational. As a result, the Organization of American States (OAS), along with institutions such as UNODC, SICA, INTERPOL, and CICAD, gradually expanded cooperation mechanisms involving intelligence sharing, anti-trafficking frameworks, judicial coordination, prison reform discussions, and anti-money laundering measures.

## OAS Institutional Frameworks Against Transnational Organized Crime

As violence linked to gangs and trafficking networks grew across Central America, the OAS slowly started shifting the way it looked at security in the region. Earlier, organized crime had mostly been treated as a domestic policing issue — something individual governments were expected to handle on their own. But by the early 2000s, that approach was clearly no longer working. Criminal groups were operating across borders, using migration routes, illegal financial systems, and weak institutions to expand their influence. What happened in one country was beginning to affect the entire region. For El Salvador especially, this became a major concern. Gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 were no longer restricted to small local territories. Their influence stretched across parts of Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and even the United States through deportation networks, trafficking systems, and extortion chains.

As a result, the OAS increasingly argued that organized crime should be treated as a “multidimensional” threat — one connected not only to violence, but also to migration, corruption, governance, economic instability, and human rights concerns.

One of the main institutional responses was the strengthening of the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security (SMS). The purpose of this body was basically to bring together different regional security concerns under one framework. Instead of treating narcotics trafficking, gang violence, cybercrime, terrorism, and corruption as separate problems, the OAS tried to encourage governments to see how interconnected these threats actually were.

Within this structure, the Department against Transnational Organized Crime (DTOC) became particularly important. The DTOC worked on issues such as anti-money laundering systems, trafficking in persons, arms smuggling, migrant smuggling, and legal cooperation between states. It also organized workshops, training sessions, and technical meetings involving prosecutors, police officials, border agencies, and judicial authorities from across the Americas.

A major idea repeatedly pushed by the OAS during this period was the principle of “shared responsibility”. This mattered because many Central American governments felt they were being blamed for a crisis that had much deeper regional roots.

Officials from countries such as El Salvador argued that drug demand in North America, deportation policies from the United States, illegal arms trafficking, poverty, and weak development across the region all contributed to the expansion of organized criminal networks. The OAS therefore tried to frame the issue as a hemispheric challenge rather than only a Salvadoran problem.

At the same time, there were obvious limitations to what the organization could actually achieve. The OAS could recommend policies, create frameworks for cooperation, and facilitate dialogue, but implementation still depended almost entirely on individual governments. Some states focused more on military style crackdowns, while others preferred prevention and rehabilitation strategies. Political disagreements often slowed regional coordination, and corruption remained a constant obstacle.

By 2017, the OAS had definitely succeeded in making transnational organized crime a major regional priority. However, the gap between policy discussions and realities on the ground remained significant.

Violence, extortion, and gang activity in El Salvador continued despite years of regional meetings, security frameworks, and cooperative agreements.

## Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD)

One of the most active OAS bodies working on organized crime before 2017 was the InterAmerican Drug Abuse Control Commission, better known as CICAD. Although the organization was originally created to deal with drug abuse and narcotics trafficking, its role became much broader over time, especially as Central America emerged as a major transit route for drugs moving from South America toward North America.

By the late 2000s and early 2010s, countries such as El Salvador were increasingly being affected by drug related criminal activity even if they were not major producers of narcotics themselves. Drug trafficking routes passing through the region strengthened gangs, increased corruption, and contributed to the growth of illegal financial networks. Because of this, CICAD began focusing more heavily on institutional cooperation and regional coordination.

One of the commission's main goals was to help governments improve their ability to respond to organized crime. This included training police forces, strengthening border security systems, improving anti money laundering mechanisms, and supporting investigations into financial crimes connected to trafficking organizations. CICAD also worked closely with national governments to improve data collection and information sharing regarding drug trafficking routes and criminal operations.

An important initiative introduced through CICAD was the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM). Through this system, member states were periodically reviewed on the effectiveness of their anti-drug policies and institutional responses. The idea behind the mechanism was not necessarily to punish governments, but rather to encourage accountability and allow states to identify weaknesses in their existing strategies.

CICAD also supported prevention-based initiatives, particularly those connected to youth violence and gang recruitment. Programs focused on education, rehabilitation, public awareness, and community outreach were promoted as long term methods of reducing criminal involvement among vulnerable populations. This was especially relevant in El Salvador, where gangs often recruited young people from marginalized communities with limited access to education or employment opportunities.

However, despite these efforts, criticism surrounding CICAD and broader anti-drug strategies continued throughout the period leading up to 2017. Many analysts argued that regional policies remained too focused on militarized enforcement, arrests, and interdiction operations while failing to address deeper structural issues such as poverty, inequality, corruption, and weak institutions.

Others pointed out that aggressive anti-drug operations sometimes contributed to prison overcrowding and strengthened gang structures instead of weakening them. In El Salvador, for example, mass arrests under anti-gang policies often allowed criminal leaders to consolidate power inside prisons, where gangs continued coordinating extortion and recruitment activities.

Another challenge was the uneven capacity of member states. Some countries had stronger investigative systems and more resources for enforcement, while others struggled with limited funding, corruption, or weak judicial institutions. This made regional coordination difficult because implementation levels varied significantly across the hemisphere.

Even with these limitations, CICAD remained one of the OAS' most important operational mechanisms against organized crime before 2017. It helped create a platform where states could cooperate more closely, exchange information, and develop common approaches to narcotics trafficking and related criminal activity. While the results remained mixed, the commission played a major role in shaping regional discussions surrounding organized crime and security in the Americas.

## REMJA and Judicial Cooperation Mechanisms

Another important regional mechanism was REMJA, the Meetings of Ministers of Justice or Other Ministers or Attorneys General of the Americas. Its main purpose was to improve legal and judicial cooperation between countries dealing with transnational organized crime.

As gangs and trafficking networks expanded across borders, governments found it increasingly difficult to investigate crimes using only domestic legal systems. Criminal organizations were moving money, weapons, drugs, and people across multiple countries, while police and courts often struggled to coordinate investigations internationally.

REMJA therefore focused on issues such as extradition agreements, anti-money laundering laws, cybercrime, witness protection, prison reform, and cooperation prosecutors, border authorities, and security experts from different countries to exchange information and discuss common strategies.

For countries like El Salvador, judicial cooperation became especially important because gangs such as MS-13 operated through networks extending into Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States. Without regional legal coordination, arrests and prosecutions often became ineffective.

REMJA also encouraged countries to modernize legislation and strengthen judicial institutions. However, implementation remained uneven across the region. Corruption, weak court systems, political pressure, and lack of resources continued limiting the effectiveness of many reforms.

Despite these challenges, REMJA helped strengthen communication between justice systems in the Americas and became an important part of wider regional cooperation efforts against organized crime before 2017.

## RANDOT and Regional Security Cooperation

The OAS also tried to improve regional coordination through the Inter-American Network against Transnational Organized Crime, commonly known as RANDOT. The main purpose of the network was to strengthen communication and information sharing between countries dealing with organized criminal activity.

By the 2010s, governments across the region increasingly understood that criminal groups were adapting faster than state institutions. Gangs and trafficking networks were operating across borders, using technology, migration routes, and financial systems to expand their influence. Because of this, intelligence sharing became a major priority.

RANDOT organized technical meetings, workshops, and conferences involving police officials, prosecutors, border authorities, and security experts from different countries. Discussions often focused on trafficking routes, money laundering, arms smuggling, migrant smuggling, and financial investigations connected to organized crime.

The network also reflected the growing understanding that isolated national responses were no longer enough. Gangs such as MS-13 had networks extending beyond El Salvador into neighbouring countries and the United States, making regional cooperation increasingly necessary.

However, RANDOT faced several limitations. Many governments were hesitant to fully share intelligence because of corruption concerns, political mistrust, and fears of information leaks. Different countries also had very different levels of institutional capacity, making coordination difficult at times.

Even so, RANDOT represented an important attempt by the OAS to strengthen practical regional cooperation against organized crime before 2017.

## OAS Responses to Gang Violence and Public Security Challenges

As gang violence continued increasing in El Salvador during the 2000s and 2010s, the OAS became more involved in discussions surrounding citizen security, prison conditions, violence prevention, and public safety. The organization repeatedly stated that organized crime could not be solved only through military operations or mass arrests.

Instead, many OAS officials and policy experts argued that violence in El Salvador was linked to deeper structural issues such as poverty, unemployment, weak education systems, social exclusion, and lack of institutional trust. Because of this, the organization often emphasized the importance of prevention programs, youth rehabilitation initiatives, and community level development alongside security operations.

The OAS was also indirectly connected to the 2012 gang truce process in El Salvador. Although it did not create the agreement, representatives linked to the organization participated in observation and verification efforts during the negotiations between the government and gang leaders. Initially, the truce led to a major decline in homicide rates, causing some policymakers to argue that dialogue-based approaches could reduce violence more effectively than constant armed confrontation. However, the truce quickly became politically controversial. Opposition parties, sections of the media, and large parts of the public criticized the process, arguing that it gave gangs too much legitimacy and failed to weaken their structures. Once the truce collapsed in 2013, homicide rates rose sharply again.

Following this, the Salvadoran government returned to harsher security policies under President Salvador Sánchez Cerén. Military police operations had expanded, prisons imposed stricter controls, and extraordinary measures were introduced in 2016 to limit gang communication inside prisons.

While authorities defended these policies as necessary for restoring public security, human rights organizations raised concerns regarding excessive force, prison conditions, and allegations of abuses by security forces. The OAS repeatedly emphasized the need to balance security enforcement with democratic institutions, rule of law, and human rights protections.

By 2017, there was still no clear agreement regarding which strategy worked best. Negotiation efforts remained politically unpopular, but militarized crackdowns had also failed to fully dismantle gang structures. This uncertainty became one of the defining features of the Salvadoran security crisis.

# PAST ACTIONS BY UN

## UNHRC- Monge Contreras V. Canada

On May 18, 2017, the UN Human Rights Committee delivered a significant ruling determining that Canada breached the rights to life and freedom from torture by extraditing a Salvadoran individual without thoroughly evaluating the potential danger of gang violence posed by MS-13. The Committee stressed that nations must take into account the overall human rights context and individual risk when deporting people to nations plagued by widespread gang violence. This decision upheld the principle of non-refoulement in instances of violence by non-state actors, establishing a binding precedent for all states that are parties to the ICCPR.

## UNODC Report on Transnational Organised Crime

A UN report establishes that El Salvador has two drug trafficking organizations that, besides cocaine smuggling, engage in a wide range of organized crime activities and have influenced local politics. Cocaine trafficking, shielded by high-level corruption, has been permitted for years, and to date, there appears to be no ongoing investigation. Antonio Mazzitelli, head of UNODC for Mexico and Central America, stated in September 2012 that transporters act more like federations, lacking clear leadership, enabling rapid reorganization of operations when a member is arrested, for instance. They are fundamentally illegal transport businesses that transport various types of contraband, including drugs, and the primary mechanism for these organizations is corruption, enabling them to function for years unnoticed.

## UNHCR Reports on Northern Triangle Displacement

Increasing gang violence in these three nations has positioned them among the most lethal countries globally, outside of war zones, regarding murder rates, according to the UNHCR, prompting hundreds of thousands to flee their homes annually. Numerous Central American migrants escaping gang violence still do not view themselves as refugees and are unaware of their right to seek asylum, with this lack of knowledge being the main obstacle.

## UN Anti-Corruption Program (January 2017).

On January 25, 2017, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime revealed the launch of an anti-corruption initiative in El Salvador. The initiative will collaborate with current institutions by educating Salvadoran officials to identify and examine instances of corruption. The government of the United States will fund the three-year initiative. The United States Agency for International Development is funding a distinct anti-corruption organization in El Salvador at a cost of \$25 million. The United States Congress has recently allocated \$750 million for assistance programs aimed at tackling widespread gang violence and poverty, which have devastated the Northern Triangle and displaced millions from their residences. Seventy-five percent of the aid funds rely on Northern Triangle governments curbing corruption and impunity while enhancing the rule of law standards.

# IMPORTANT PORTFOLIOS

## EL SALVADOR

As of the freeze date of 31st December 2017, El Salvador emerged as one of the clearest illustrations of the detrimental effects of transnational organized crime and gang violence in the Americas. The nation encountered extreme insecurity largely due to criminal groups like Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18, which had transformed from local street gangs into sophisticated transnational crime syndicates. These organizations functioned via extortion, drug smuggling, contract murders, compulsory recruitment, arms trafficking, human smuggling, and control over territories. Their impact reached schools, public transit systems, local enterprises, and underserved urban neighbourhoods, significantly influencing civilian existence and economic performance.

The crisis's origins can be linked to the aftermath of the Salvadoran Civil War (1979–1992), rampant poverty, fragile post-conflict institutions, high unemployment, and migration trends connecting El Salvador to the United States. In the 1990s, many Salvadorans residing in Los Angeles engaged in gang culture, especially with MS-13 and Barrio 18. Following U.S. deportation policies, numerous gang-related individuals were sent back to El Salvador, where inadequate reintegration programs and feeble law enforcement enabled gangs to grow swiftly.

A key characteristic of gang dominance in El Salvador was extortion. Civilians, transport workers, vendors, and business owners were regularly compelled to pay "rent" to gangs in return for safety or secure passage. Rejection frequently led to aggression, coercion, or homicide. Gangs reinforced their territorial control by instilling fear and using violence, leading numerous families to abandon their residences. The coercive enlistment of children and young adults grew more prevalent, especially in poor regions with few educational and financial prospects.

Government reactions predominantly focused on "Mano Dura" and "Super Mano Dura" security strategies highlighting militarized law enforcement, widespread arrests, and increased security authorities. Although these actions initially boosted arrests and the state's visibility, detractors contended that they reinforced.

Government actions predominantly focused on "Mano Dura" and "Super Mano Dura" security strategies highlighting militarized law enforcement, widespread arrests, and increased security authorities. Although these actions initially raised arrests and state visibility, opponents contended that they enhanced gang collaboration within congested prison systems and led to human rights issues like arbitrary detention and excessive use of force. By 2017, discussions continued about whether strict security measures adequately tackled the fundamental reasons for gang growth.

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The United States holds a vital role in conversations about transnational organized crime in El Salvador because of its historical, political, economic, and security impact on the area. A significant portion of the current gang issue can be associated with migration trends during and after the Salvadoran Civil War, when many Salvadorans moved to U.S. cities, especially Los Angeles. In these communities, gangs like MS-13 and Barrio 18 appeared and grew. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the United States enforced rigid deportation policies that sent back thousands of individuals linked to gangs to Central America, including El Salvador, frequently without sufficient coordination or support for reintegration. These deportations played a crucial role in the transnationalization of gang networks. El Salvador's fragile post-war institutions, insufficiently funded law enforcement agencies, elevated unemployment rates, and pervasive poverty fostered an environment where gangs could gain territorial dominance and recruit swiftly. Consequently, the United States became significantly engaged in regional strategies against crime and narcotics via funding initiatives, intelligence-sharing systems, border security efforts, and collaboration in law enforcement.

As of 2017, the United States backed various security and development initiatives in the Northern Triangle area, such as anti-corruption measures, police training initiatives, judicial reform support, and anti-trafficking collaboration. U.S. agencies collaborated with Central American governments to address drug trafficking, money laundering, weapons smuggling, and gang activities that span multiple countries. Nonetheless, U.S. policy continued to be contentious. Critics contended that some strategies placed too much emphasis on militarized security

measures while not adequately tackling socioeconomic disparity, institutional corruption, and migration challenges.

Migration also turned into a significant part of this portfolio. Violent gangs and organized crime have led to a rise in displacement and migration from El Salvador to the United States. Numerous migrants mentioned extortion, threats of recruitment, and violence as key reasons for leaving their neighborhoods. This sparked discussion regarding refugee safeguards, asylum regulations, border security, and the humanitarian duties of nations.

## HONDURAS AND GUATEMALA (NORTHERN TRIANGLE)

Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador together constitute the “Northern Triangle” of Central America, a region significantly impacted by organized crime, gang-related violence, drug trafficking, corruption, migration issues, and instability in institutions. Because of porous borders, ineffective enforcement measures, and linked trafficking networks, criminal activities in one Northern Triangle nation often extend into adjacent countries. Consequently, tackling organized crime in El Salvador must be considered within the context of wider regional dynamics.

By 2017, Honduras and Guatemala both faced significant gang-related activities and organized crime violence associated with groups like MS-13 and Barrio 18, along with drug trafficking networks operating throughout Central America. These nations acted as key passage routes for drugs traveling from South America to North America. Criminal groups took advantage of inadequate border surveillance, poorly funded institutions, corruption, and minimal government presence in rural regions to grow their activities.

Honduras, specifically, experienced very high homicide rates throughout the 2010s, largely fuelled by gang conflicts, extortion operations, trafficking rivalries, and organized crime. Guatemala likewise faced issues with the infiltration of organized crime into government institutions, corruption in security agencies, and difficulties with judicial independence.

Both states enacted robust measures against gangs and trafficking, involving militarized law enforcement, emergencies, enhanced monitoring, and widespread arrests. Nonetheless, these actions sparked discussions about their efficacy, overcrowding in prisons, corruption issues, and concerns for human rights.

The Northern Triangle became linked to significant displacement and migration. Numerous civilians escaped areas dominated by gangs due to extortion, forced enlistment, sexual violence, and lack of safety. Criminal organizations increasingly focused on migrants via abduction, trafficking, exploitation, and smuggling activities, generating wider regional humanitarian issues.

## MEXICO

Mexico is pivotal in conversations about transnational organized crime because it serves as a significant transit and operational center for drug trafficking networks throughout the Americas. By 2017, Mexican cartels like the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas retained significant control over trafficking paths linking South American drug suppliers to North American consumers. These entities often worked alongside Central American gangs and criminal organizations, such as MS-13 and Barrio 18, engaging in drug trafficking, arms distribution, money laundering, and enforcement activities.

The connection between Mexican cartels and gangs in El Salvador greatly enhanced the financial and operational power of organized crime groups across the area. Cartels leveraged Central America as a tactical route for drug trafficking, depending on local gangs for territorial dominance, information, logistics, and enforcement. The growth of trafficking networks associated with cartels escalated violence, corruption, and instability throughout the Northern Triangle.

Mexico grappled with significant internal security issues associated with organized crime, such as cartel-related violence, disappearances, corruption, and militarized anti-drug campaigns. The Mexican government implemented stringent enforcement strategies that included military deployments and anti-cartel initiatives, while opponents contended that these actions led to human rights issues and increasing violence in specific areas.

## COLOMBIA

Colombia continues to be pivotal in conversations about organized crime because of its historical involvement in worldwide cocaine production and local drug trafficking networks. Despite Colombia's notable advancements in diminishing violence and undermining major cartels in the 2000s, by 2017, drug production and trafficking persisted in shaping organized crime throughout Latin America.

Drug trafficking paths that begin in Colombia pass through Central America, such as El Salvador, before arriving at North American markets. Criminal groups in Central America gained financially by aiding narcotics transportation, leading to increased gang violence, arms trafficking, corruption, and organized crime across the area.

Colombia gained worldwide recognition for its anti-narcotics and counterinsurgency strategies, which involve intelligence-sharing, extradition pacts, military updates, and international collaboration efforts. Initiatives like Plan Colombia greatly impacted regional security dialogues and affected the anti-drug approaches embraced in other parts of Latin America.

Nonetheless, Colombia's anti-drug initiatives sparked debate over militarization, displacement of civilians, human rights issues, and the lasting impact of force-focused drug strategies. Delegates should assess if Colombia's security strategies offer a viable model for regional collaboration or if different methods emphasizing development and prevention might prove more enduring.

## BRAZIL

Brazil stands out as a key regional player because of its size, economic power, and persistent issues with organized crime, illegal arms trade, drug trafficking, and gang networks operating from prisons. By 2017, Brazilian criminal groups like the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) had broadened their reach beyond national limits and established links with transnational trafficking networks throughout Latin America.

Brazil's vast borders and significant port systems provided chances for criminal smuggling organizations engaged in narcotics, weapons, and illegal financial operations. Weapons that are illegal and either come from or pass through Brazil have fuelled organized violence across the region, including in Central America.

Brazilian gangs have also become more involved in money laundering, prison recruiting, and forming international trafficking alliances.

The Brazilian government launched extensive anti-crime initiatives, military interventions, and prison reforms in reaction to rising organized violence. Nonetheless, prison overcrowding, corruption, and police brutality continued to be significant issues in both domestic and global discussions.

## VENEZUELA

In 2017, Venezuela encountered intense political, economic, and institutional turmoil, circumstances that greatly influenced regional organized crime patterns. Fragile governance frameworks, economic failures, shortages of vital products, and decreasing institutional capability provided openings for unlawful trafficking organizations, corruption, and organized crime to thrive.

The decline of border management and law enforcement systems led to a rise in smuggling activities involving drugs, arms, fuel, and illegal items throughout the area. Criminal groups took advantage of turmoil in Venezuela to bolster smuggling routes that reach into Central America and further. The nation also faced increasing migration patterns, many of which led to risks of trafficking, exploitation, and organized crime recruitment.

Venezuela's political turmoil further hindered regional collaboration in groups like the OAS, with member countries split over issues of sovereignty, intervention, sanctions, and diplomatic relations. This rendered the Venezuelan portfolio especially significant for debates regarding the boundaries of regional collaboration and the political difficulties tied to tackling organized crime through multilateral means.

## CANADA

Despite being geographically removed from the core violence of the Northern Triangle, Canada continues to be a significant participant in dialogues about transnational organized crime, owing to its involvement in global financial systems, efforts in anti-money laundering, advocacy for human rights, and multilateral diplomatic initiatives.

Canada has historically focused on governance reform, enhancing institutions, offering humanitarian protections, advocating for refugee rights, and employing development-oriented strategies to address regional security issues. Consequently, the Canadian portfolio frequently aids in reconciling enforcement actions with human rights commitments and sustainable development efforts.

## PANAMA

Panama holds a crucial role in conversations about transnational organized crime because of its geographic position, global financial systems, and governance over a key maritime trade route: The Panama Canal. By 2017, Panama had emerged as a crucial transit and logistical centre not just for international trade, but also for illegal trafficking activities related to drugs, arms, human smuggling, and financial offenses.

Its advantageous location between South America and Central America rendered it especially susceptible to organized crime groups attempting to move illegal goods towards North American and global markets. A key factor in Panama's importance to this agenda is its link to money laundering and illegal financial transfers. Criminal groups active across Latin America often employed offshore banking systems, shell corporations, and financial secrecy tools to hide earnings derived from drug trafficking, extortion, smuggling, and organized violence.

The 2016 "Panama Papers" leak heightened global examination of offshore finance, tax evasion, corruption, and the exploitation of financial systems by criminals and political figures. While not every offshore operation was unlawful, the scandal underscored the weaknesses in global financial systems that could be taken advantage of by organized crime syndicates. Panama encountered difficulties related to maritime trafficking pathways. Criminal groups increasingly utilized ports, shipping containers, and maritime routes to move narcotics, weapons, and illegal items across areas. Lax customs supervision, corruption, and restricted oversight abilities allowed for criminal infiltration into trade and shipping networks.

In reply, Panama collaborated with regional and global partners on initiatives against money laundering, maritime monitoring, customs collaboration, and reforms for financial transparency. Nonetheless, maintaining a balance among economic competitiveness, banking privacy, sovereignty, and global pressure continued to be a major challenge.

# QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

- How can the Organisation of American States strengthen regional cooperation against transnational organised crime while respecting state sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention?
- What measures can member states implement to reduce gang violence and territorial control exercised by organisations such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 in El Salvador?
- How can regional intelligence-sharing and cross-border law enforcement cooperation be improved to combat organised criminal networks more effectively?
- What steps should be taken to address narcotics trafficking routes and the financial structures supporting organised crime across the Americas?
- How can OAS member states strengthen anti-money laundering mechanisms and disrupt illicit financial flows connected to criminal organisations?
- What regional strategies can be developed to prevent illegal arms trafficking and reduce the circulation of illicit firearms fueling gang warfare?
- How should member states address the humanitarian consequences of organised crime, including internal displacement, migration, trafficking, and civilian insecurity?
- What protections should be implemented for vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, migrants, journalists, and youth exposed to gang recruitment and exploitation?
- To what extent should militarised anti-gang operations be utilised, and how can states ensure such measures remain consistent with human rights obligations and democratic principles?

10. How can prison systems across the region be reformed to prevent prisons from becoming centres of gang coordination and recruitment?
11. What role should socioeconomic development, education, rehabilitation, and youth outreach programs play in preventing criminal recruitment and reducing long-term violence?
12. How can regional anti-corruption initiatives strengthen judicial independence, institutional accountability, and public trust in state institutions?
13. What mechanisms can the OAS establish to improve coordination between member states on border security, trafficking prevention, and criminal investigations?
14. How should member states balance migration management and border security with refugee protections and humanitarian responsibilities?
15. What long-term regional frameworks can be developed to ensure sustainable cooperation against transnational organized crime beyond immediate security responses?

# PAPERWORKS IN COMMITTEE

- 1 Position paper (deadline 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2026)
- 2 Communiques
- 3 Policy Paper
- 4 Draft Resolutions

# REFERENCE LINKS

1. <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2017/12/19/el-salvador-s-politics-of-perpetual-violence>
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/06/el-salvador-gangs-police-violence-distrito-italia>
3. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/report-forced-flee-central-america-northern-triangle>
4. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/latin-american-politics-and-society/article/conceptualizing-mano-dura-in-latin-america/5B422E72251729BA30782DC3C7415EDD>
5. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348384695\\_Mano\\_Dura\\_The\\_Politics\\_of\\_Gang\\_Control\\_in\\_El\\_Salvador\\_Sonja\\_Wolf\\_Austin\\_University\\_of\\_Texas\\_Press\\_2017\\_304\\_pp](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348384695_Mano_Dura_The_Politics_of_Gang_Control_in_El_Salvador_Sonja_Wolf_Austin_University_of_Texas_Press_2017_304_pp)
6. <https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>
7. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/Convention/English/ENG\\_Protocol\\_to\\_Prevent\\_Suppress\\_and\\_Punish\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_Persons\\_Especially\\_Women\\_and\\_Children\\_UNTOC.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/Convention/English/ENG_Protocol_to_Prevent_Suppress_and_Punish_Trafficking_in_Persons_Especially_Women_and_Children_UNTOC.pdf)
8. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/Convention/English/ENG\\_Protocol\\_against\\_the\\_Smuggling\\_of\\_Migrants\\_by\\_Land\\_Sea\\_and\\_Air\\_UNTOC.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/Convention/English/ENG_Protocol_against_the_Smuggling_of_Migrants_by_Land_Sea_and_Air_UNTOC.pdf)
9. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/Convention/English/ENG\\_Protocol\\_against\\_the\\_Illicit\\_Manufacturing\\_of\\_and\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_Firearms\\_their\\_Parts\\_and\\_Components\\_and\\_Ammunition.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/Convention/English/ENG_Protocol_against_the_Illicit_Manufacturing_of_and_Trafficking_in_Firearms_their_Parts_and_Components_and_Ammunition.pdf)
10. [https://www.oas.org/xxxivga/english/reference\\_docs/convencion\\_cifta.pdf](https://www.oas.org/xxxivga/english/reference_docs/convencion_cifta.pdf)

1. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2018/02/el-salvador-end-mission-statement>
2. <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/how-mano-dura-is-strengthening-gangs/>
3. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mano\\_Dura](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mano_Dura)
4. <https://www.oas.org/en/>
5. <https://www.wola.org/>
6. <https://www.cia.gov/stories/story/spotlighting-the-world-factbook-as-we-bid-a-fond-farewell/>
7. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/el-salvador>
8. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>
9. <https://insightcrime.org/>
10. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/central-america-and-the-caribbean/el-salvador/>  
<https://www.hrw.org/americas/el-salvador>