



# EL SALVADOR

## Security and Democracy

### Introduction

In the past five years, El Salvador has shifted from being one of the most violent countries in the region to being considered one of the safest in the world. This transformation results from President Nayib Bukele's security policy, which relies on a state of exception that has been extended 38 times, from March 2022 to the cut-off date of this report in May 2025.<sup>1</sup>

Available official statistics, surveys, and expert opinions all concur in highlighting a substantial improvement in the country's objective security conditions upon the implementation of the state of exception. Among the most noteworthy indicators are the reduction in the homicide rate to 1.9 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2024, according to the National Civil Police, and a 57% decrease in extortion cases between 2022 and 2023.<sup>2</sup> However, these advances have also been accompanied by restrictions on civil rights, resulting in the detention<sup>3</sup> of over 85,000 individuals without due legal safeguards.

This document, framed within a regional project aimed at promoting a public security policy agenda that is both effective and democratic across Latin America and the Caribbean,<sup>4</sup> explores the importance of advancing such an agenda in today's El Salvador. It focuses on three core areas: (i) addressing the consequences of the state of exception for democracy and human rights; (ii) implementing strategic criminal investigations that are both effective and compliant with due process; and (iii) prioritizing prevention and rehabilitation measures for all individuals involved in criminal activities, including those detained under the state of exception.

This report does not seek to settle the debate on what El Salvador's security policy should look like, but rather to serve as a kick-off point toward enabling a democratic framework through which the country can sustain its security gains. The next step will be to identify the policies necessary to ensure these advances endure over time.

# Background

Extending over 21,040 km<sup>2</sup> and home to over 6 million inhabitants (268.5 people per km<sup>2</sup>), El Salvador is a small and densely populated country. It has been classified as one of the most violent countries in the world, primarily due to gang activity, such as the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), currently recognized as a transnational criminal organization and listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) by the U.S. Department of State.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1980s, El Salvador endured a 12-year civil war (1980-1992) between the National Army and the guerrilla movement, later turned into the political party Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), which resulted in over 75,000 deaths and 8,000 disappearances. After the Peace Accords, the country underwent rapid urbanization without adequate public policies to address the growing needs for education and employment, triggering a wave of migration to the U.S. Many children were left under the care of relatives or other guardians, only to be recruited years later by emerging gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio 18, which had been reorganized by Salvadorans deported from various neighborhoods in Los Angeles, California. This sparked violent disputes over control of impoverished territories.

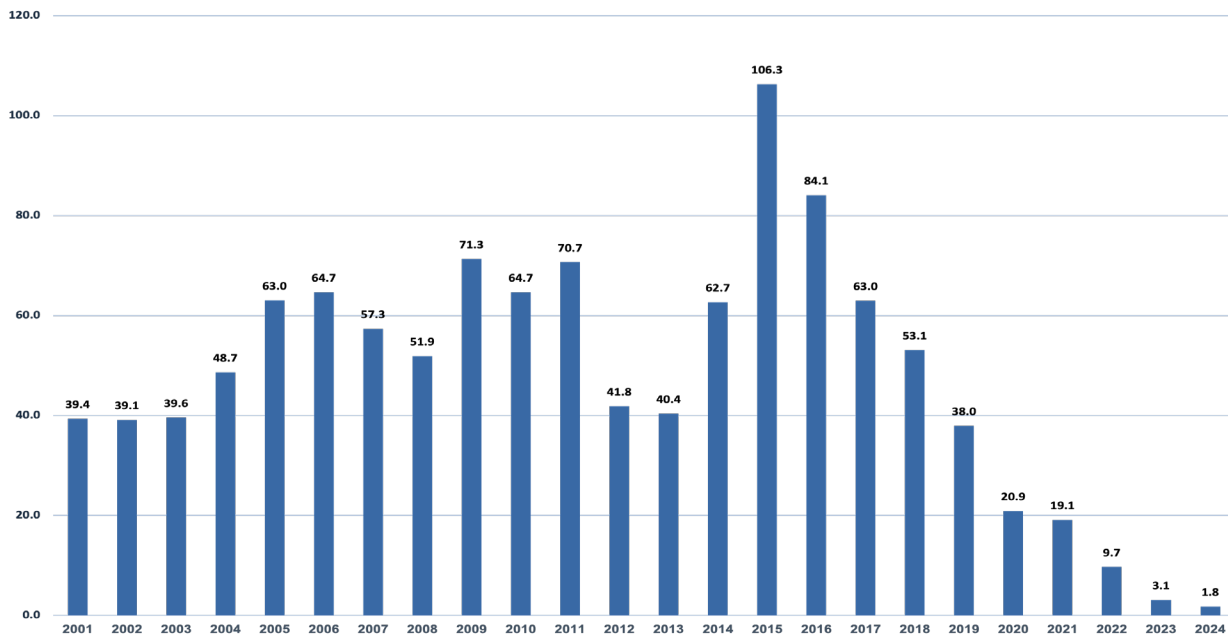
Between 2003 and 2009, Presidents Francisco Flores and Antonio Saca, from the conservative party Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), implemented the *Mano Dura* and *Mano Súper Dura* plans to combat gang violence. These strategies harshened penalties, promoted mass raids and arrests, and criminalized gang membership, which exacerbated prison overcrowding but yet failed to address the root causes of the problem.

Upon the rise of the left-wing FMLN party to power, the administrations of Mauricio Funes (2009-2014) and Salvador Sánchez Cerén (2014-2019) alternated repressive measures with attempted truces. In 2012, Funes facilitated a truce between MS-13 and Barrio 18 to reduce homicides in exchange for prison benefits. Despite an initial drop in daily murders from 14 to 5, the agreement eventually collapsed, and El Salvador reached its highest homicide rate in recent history in 2015: 106 per 100,000 inhabitants, becoming the most violent country in the world that year.<sup>6</sup>

Nayib Bukele officially took office as president on July 1, 2019. While he had previously served two terms as mayor under the FMLN, he presented himself as a novel and alternative political figure. Supported by the Grand National Alliance (GAN), Bukele unveiled the *Territorial Control Plan* as his flagship security initiative.<sup>7</sup>

**FIGURE 1: HOMICIDES IN EL SALVADOR FOR EVERY 100,000 INHABITANTS**

Source: Office of the Attorney General



## Public Security in El Salvador

Although the country had already experienced improvements in certain security indicators in the final years (2016–2019) of Sánchez Cerén’s administration –such as a 50% reduction in the homicide rate, from 106 to 53 per 100,000 inhabitants between 2015 and 2018<sup>8</sup>– President Nayib Bukele’s government inherited a nation still plagued by high levels of violence, primarily driven by gang activity. This was reflected in a persistently elevated homicide rate, widespread extortion, disappearances, internal displacement, and forced migration.

This paper outlines the main measures implemented by the current government under the state of exception, the present situation of the prison system, as well as the prevention and rehabilitation measures that have been adopted.

## State of Emergency

Between March 25 and 27, 2022, a surge in violence resulted in the murder of 87 people. The severity of the situation led the authorities to declare a state of exception to restore order. The measure, nonetheless, has been irregularly extended for three years in a row.<sup>9</sup>

More than 85,000 people have been detained<sup>10</sup> without due process<sup>11</sup> under the state of exception. The Salvadoran government has acknowledged the possibility of a 1% “margin of error” in the arrests,<sup>12</sup> without providing any official figures on the number of innocent people thus affected. In fact, during an official visit to Costa Rica in November 2024 President Bukele admitted that “no policy in the world is perfect” and that “in El Salvador, as in Costa Rica, France, Germany, and the United States, innocent people get arrested.” He went on to add that 8,000 people had been released and that all innocent individuals would eventually be freed, without providing a specific timeline.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, multiple reforms to criminal and administrative laws have been introduced under the state of exception. Among them are the 2023 amendments to the Special Law Against Organized Crime,<sup>14</sup> which increased sentences up to 60 years<sup>15</sup> and allowed for mass trials of detainees arrested under the state of exception. Several of these legal reforms violate fundamental rights, such as the right to be tried within a reasonable time –due to repeated extensions of pretrial detention– as well as the presumption of innocence, the right to effective legal

defense, to communicate with family members, and to the protection of life, health, and physical integrity while in custody.

Although the incumbent government has not been neither the first or the only one to resort to the militarization of public security, the role of the Army has been notably intensified during the state of exception. In 2021, President Bukele announced a plan to double the number of Armed Forces personnel and assign them public security duties.<sup>16</sup> While previous administrations also deployed the military in these roles, Bukele’s government has consolidated its presence as a permanent component of his security strategy. This approach has been accompanied by a significant increase in the defense budget: in 2019, the military budget was approximately \$156 million, whereas for 2025, it is expected to reach \$314 million.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the Ministry of Security will face budget cuts in 2025, with allocations dropping from \$604.5 million approved in 2024 to \$589 million.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, the Bukele administration has expanded its influence over the judiciary, curtailing the possibility of independent institutions capable of acting as a check on abuses of power.<sup>19</sup> In fact, after three years under the state of exception, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court has ruled favorably in only 98 out of 7,074 habeas corpus petitions,<sup>20</sup> which barely accounts for 1.4% of the total.

**Changes in the judiciary and the attorney general’s office enabled the implementation of policies without institutional oversight.**

This context has fueled a growing fear of reprisals for reporting abuses and has increasingly limited or suppressed critical opinions on political matters. The 2023 AmericasBarometer revealed that El Salvador is one of the countries in the region with the fastest growing fear of expressing criticism of the government –from 70% in 2016 to 89% in 2023.<sup>21</sup> In addition, access to public information has been restricted, weakening the Institute for Access to Public Information (IAIP),<sup>22</sup> which hinders the work of journalists and limits citizens’ right to information. Nevertheless, the 2023 AmericasBarometer data (collected

by LAPOP between July 12 and August 3, 2023) also show that El Salvador has a 67% level of support for democracy and a 77% satisfaction rate with its functioning—among the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean. This support is closely tied to a significant improvement in perceived security. Furthermore, 77% of the population approves of President Bukele’s administration.<sup>23</sup>

## The Prison System

The mass detention of approximately 85,000 people in recent years has significantly worsened prison overcrowding. Just before March 2022, the prison system housed 39,538 individuals despite having an official capacity of only 27,280,<sup>24</sup> resulting in an occupancy rate of 145%. In January 2023, the government inaugurated the Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT), a high-security facility built to hold individuals accused of gang affiliation under the state of exception. This new prison added 40,000 spaces to the system, raising total capacity to nearly 70,000. Nonetheless, the expansion remains inadequate in light of the ongoing wave of arrests. El Salvador currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with 1,086 inmates per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>25</sup>

**El Salvador has 1,086 people incarcerated per 100,000 inhabitants—the highest rate in the world.**

With regard to juvenile detention centers, as of September 2021, there were 2,006 children and adolescents under the custody of the Salvadoran Institute for Children and Adolescents within the juvenile justice system.<sup>26</sup> By September 2022—following the launch of the government’s “war on gangs”—this number had risen to 4,926,<sup>27</sup> i.e., a 146% increase in just one year. In February 2024, the Minister of Justice and Public Security reported that 1,065 minors had been convicted under the state of exception.<sup>28</sup>

Public defenders have faced an overwhelming surge in caseload due to mass arrests, often handling collective hearings involving dozens or even hundreds of defendants with little or no knowledge of the specific cases or the defendants. By October 2023, with over 60,000 individuals in detention, each public defender was responsible

for 219 cases on average. The situation has since deteriorated even further due to continued arrests and staffing cuts in the public defense system as a result of budget reductions introduced in the previous year.<sup>29</sup> Compounding these challenges are persistent reports of *incommunicado* detention, deaths in custody from violence or lack of medical care, torture, ill-treatment, and enforced disappearances since the state of exception began.<sup>30</sup>

## Prevention and Reintegration Measures

The government of El Salvador has begun implementing a series of prevention and reintegration initiatives which, while valuable, must be prioritized, strengthened, and extended to all detainees, including those held under the state of exception.

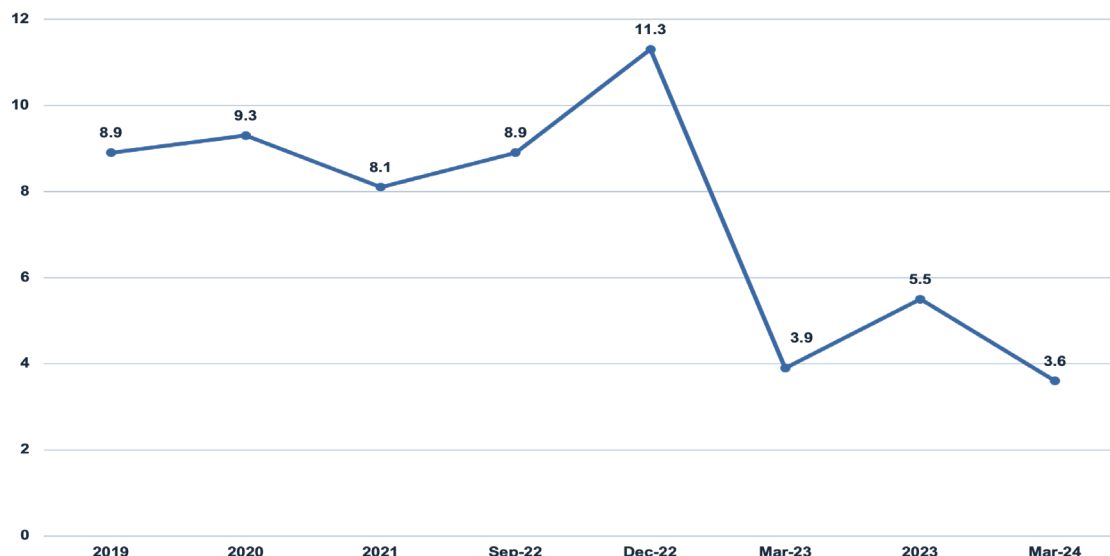
One of the most prominent initiatives has been the creation of Urban Centers for Well-being and Opportunities (CUBOs)—modern, multifunctional facilities that house libraries, computer centers, children’s play areas, and collaborative workspaces.<sup>31</sup> Currently, there are 11 operational CUBO centers already in operation, with an additional 10 under construction, all located in areas previously considered high-risk.<sup>32</sup>

In April 2024, the government released the first systematized statistical data on these centers: 98% of users reported feeling safe within the facilities, and 51% of users are women. The age group with the highest usage is adolescents between 13 and 17 years old.<sup>33,34</sup> The National Library of El Salvador (BINAES)—built with support from the Chinese government—was modeled after the CUBO initiative and has played a key role in revitalizing San Salvador’s Historic Center.

Another measure worth pointing was the creation of the National Directorate of Integration, whose flagship program is the Integrative Schools: free-access educational spaces that promote learning and personal development. The firsts of these schools opened in September 2024<sup>35</sup> in the departments of Sonsonate, San Salvador, and San Miguel. The program comprises four thematic branches: the School of Art, the School of Sports, the School of Technology, and the School of Technical Training, which has taken on the functions of the now-defunct National Institute for Vocational Training (INSFORP).<sup>36</sup> A Psychology and Family service has also been added, offering emotional support counseling. As of February 2025, no official statistics have been released regarding public use of these facilities.<sup>37</sup>

**FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF VICTIMS PER CRIME IN EL SALVADOR (2019-2024)**

Source: IUDOP: 2019-2024 annual surveys and special assessments of the state of exception for 2022, 2023 and 2024



In terms of rehabilitation and reintegration, the government has made a public announcement on the launch of the *Cero Ocio* (Zero Idleness) program, aimed at engaging “non-violent” incarcerated individuals in public service activities, such as repairing public infrastructure and producing school uniforms. According to official figures, around 48,000 inmates are expected to participate in this program.<sup>38,39</sup> In addition, the Directorate for the Reconstruction of the Social Fabric, with support from international cooperation, is leading the *Rutas de Reinserción* (Reintegration Routes) project. This initiative targets non-gang-affiliated individuals over the age of 18 who have completed their sentences, promoting their economic reintegration through employment or entrepreneurship opportunities.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding children and adolescents navigating the criminal justice system, the governing body CONAPINA, supported by international partners, has launched reintegration programs in the four specialized centers it operates. Additionally, the judicial system notifies CONAPINA whenever a person sent to prison has underage dependents.

For these specific cases, CONAPINA, in partnership with the Public Prosecutor’s Office, has developed a Psychosocial Care Center for children and adolescents who are victims of violence or have been affected by the state of exception. According to official figures, the program has benefitted 890 individuals and 120 families.<sup>41</sup>

## Perception of Security and Measurable Outcomes

Although the implementation of the state of exception has coincided with a reduction in overall violence, the decline in criminal activity did not happen overnight. As illustrated in the figure below, rates of victimization increased in September 2022 and continued to rise through December, despite the emergency measures having been in effect for nine months at that point.

It was not until 2023 and 2024 that a sharp plunge in criminal activity became evident, hitting a record low. However, the decrease in crimes such as homicide and extortion has not been accompanied by a similar reduction in crimes against women.<sup>42</sup>

According to a survey conducted by the University Institute of Public Opinion (IUDOP), two years into the state of exception, the population assigned it an average score of 8.13 out of 10. Some 87% of respondents reported feeling safer under the measure,<sup>43</sup> and 96.8% believed that crime had decreased nationwide.<sup>44</sup> These high approval ratings—largely attributed to perceived improvements in public security and the government’s strategic communication efforts—have sustained President Nayib Bukele’s strong popularity. This was further confirmed in the 2024 elections, where official figures indicate he was re-elected with 82.66% of the vote.<sup>45</sup>

Despite this widespread support, 38% of respondents voiced disagreement with the total suspension of rights under the state of exception, compared to 14% who supported such suspensions unconditionally. As of March 2024, 36.6% of the population identified the wrongful arrest of innocent people as the most significant flaw of the regime,<sup>46</sup> and 26% reported either having experienced or witnessed mistreatment by security forces during its implementation.<sup>47</sup>

In parallel, data from the Multipurpose Household Survey (EHPM), carried out by the National Statistics and Census Office, show significant shifts in the household structure over the first two years of the state of exception.

While the number of female-headed households had remained relatively stable in earlier years—696,584 in 2018 and 701,322 in 2020<sup>48</sup>—2022 brought along a sharp increase, with 776,599 female heads of household recorded that year and 859,825 in 2023.<sup>49</sup> Another concerning trend reported by the EHPM is the rise in the number of children and adolescents in situations of abandonment, which reached its highest level in 2023 since the indicator was first measured in 2014. Between 2021 and 2022, the abandonment rate climbed from 35.3% to 37%, and then again to 37.9% in 2023.<sup>50</sup>

**87% of the population feels safer under the state of exception, although 36.6% cite the arrest of innocent people as its main flaw.**

# THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SECURITY IN EL SALVADOR

In order to maintain low levels of violence over time, it is essential to strengthen the reconstruction of the social fabric, which was severely eroded by decades of gang violence, while simultaneously restoring a democratic system of checks and balances that ensures the separation of powers. This effort requires consolidating recent security gains within the framework of the rule of law.

The independence of state powers is a necessary condition for safeguarding the human rights of all Salvadorans, including those deprived of liberty, whether formally convicted or not. A balanced approach that combines both preventive and punitive strategies—alongside concrete steps to restore democratic institutions—is essential for ensuring that the tangible improvements perceived by much of the population become sustainable in the long term.

Emerging from this crossroads will not be easy. It demands a strong governmental commitment to hear the diverse voices of citizens, civil society, academia, and the independent press.

## SECURITY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICIES

To erase or mitigate the negative impact on democracy and human rights, it is imperative to ensure the prompt resolution of cases involving individuals detained under the state of exception, through due process. Particular priority should be given to the immediate release of those for whom there is no substantive evidence linking them to criminal activity. This requires expediting investigations and judicial proceedings, as well as returning legal certainty to the country.

At the same time, structural reforms are urgently needed to restore the independence of key institutions identified in this section. This is a crucial step toward reestablishing a security and criminal justice policy circumscribed to the bounds of the rule of law. Furthermore, it is essential that the leadership of these institutions be entrusted to qualified, experienced professionals who are independent of the executive branch.

To advance toward a democratic model in public security and criminal justice, several key actions are required:

### **A. Review of the legal status of individuals detained under the state of exception, including:**

- The establishment of an up-to-date information system accessible to family members, allowing them to track the location, legal status, and health conditions of detainees.
- Authorization of regular visits by relatives and legal representatives of inmates.

- Implementation of mechanisms to prioritize the review of cases opened under the state of exception through due process, supported by interdisciplinary technical teams tasked with analyzing and classifying cases based on criteria such as criminal records, family or employment ties, and parental responsibilities as identified by CONAPINA.
- Expansion of the public defender system by hiring well-qualified professionals, guaranteeing job stability to protect their independence. This effort, aimed at having an adequate number of defenders to meet the needs of the current prison population of El Salvador, requires an increase in the budget of the Public Prosecutor's Office.
- Adoption of legal criteria applicable to individuals involved in group criminal activities, allowing both for the identification of each individual's liability in the commission of such crime and for the enforcement of the applicable penalties. Liability should be solely imposed for the specific actions in which the individual was directly involved and in respect of which individual criminal responsibility can be proven, as previously outlined in the Criminal Code. This would not provide for collective liability, introduced under the new regulations adopted within the framework of the state of exception.
- Prioritization and expedited, independent resolution of habeas corpus petitions filed by relatives of detainees, particularly those related to the state of exception.

**B. Adoption of effective criminal investigation and prosecution policies, including:**

- Promoting interdisciplinary technical cooperation to incorporate modern case management systems and strategic criminal prosecution approaches, thereby enhancing the operational effectiveness of the Office of the National Prosecutor and the criminal investigation units of the National Civil Police, particularly in cases of organized crime, financial crimes, corruption, and gender-based violence.
- Strengthening intelligence and investigative capabilities to detect emerging or rapidly growing organized criminal networks seeking to fill the void left by dismantled gangs in illicit markets.
- Ensuring transparency and public access to official crime and justice system statistics.

**C. Progressive demilitarization of public security tasks**, through the institutional and budgetary strengthening of the National Civil Police as the sole nationally competent public security authority.

**D. Adoption of a more active role for the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDDH), as an autonomous entity responsible for ensuring the protection of human rights through enforcement of national laws.**

- Increasing the budget and institutional capacity of the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDDH), to effectively document, process, and investigate both reported and self-initiated cases of human rights violations.
- Generating and publishing reports and statistical analyses on received complaints, ongoing investigations, recurrent patterns of human rights violations, and formal recommendations to the State.

- Conducting regular inspections in detention facilities to assess infrastructure conditions and monitor the observance of fundamental rights among incarcerated individuals.

## **REFORMS TO REVERSE THE IMPACT OF THE STATE OF EXCEPTION ON DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **A. Legislative and institutional reviews and reforms, including:**

- Developing an exit strategy from the state of exception featuring concrete legislative and institutional actions aimed at restoring due process and expediting determination of detainees' legal status.
- Restoring access to public information by lifting disclosure restrictions, thereby enabling the population to exercise their right to access information and participate fully in public affairs.

### **B. Restoring the Independence of the Judiciary in the country. To achieve this, it is necessary to:**

- Uphold the judicial independence of the Office of the Attorney General and other oversight bodies to allow them to act as effective checks on policies and practices that violate human rights.
- Establish transparent mechanisms for evaluating candidates for key positions, such as the Attorney General and justices of the Supreme Court, to ensure their suitability, independence, and the absence of conflicts of interest.
- Strengthen internal control mechanisms within the security and justice sectors to ensure that they are capable of investigating and sanctioning any action contrary to legal mandates and human rights standards.

### **C. Redress for human rights violations and protection of victims of crime and abuse. To this end, it is necessary to:**

- Develop a system of redress for victims of human rights violations in line with El Salvador's international obligations, following a thorough review of cases of detentions carried out under the state of exception.
- Ensure access to state-run protection programs for children and adolescents who have been left without parental care upon the arrest of their parents or guardians.
- Guarantee proper care and a dignified standard of living for children placed under the care of secondary caregivers. This will require an increase in funding for the child protection system managed by CONAPINA.

- Ensure that both the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women (ISDEMU) and the Judiciary comply with national legal frameworks in servicing and protecting women arbitrarily detained, caregivers or searching for detained family members. These efforts must be guided by a human rights approach and supported by adequate budget allocations to guarantee meaningful reparation and autonomy for affected women— including financial independence.

## **STRENGTHENING PREVENTIVE AND REINTEGRATION POLICIES**

In the current context, characterized by lower rates of homicide, extortion, and other crimes, authorities now have the opportunity to establish or expand social violence prevention and community cohesion strategies aimed at reducing the risk of renewed violent dynamics in communities that are currently free from gang activity, while also strengthening their social fabric. These initiatives should be encompassed by efforts to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals currently incarcerated.

These policies should have a tangible impact on social dimensions such as overcoming social exclusion, particularly among youth, adolescents, and children. They must take into consideration cultural factors—such as the normalization of violence against women—and address the root causes of violence, including the widespread circulation of firearms. This will require making progress on the following areas:

### **A. Violence Prevention Policies (at both central and local levels), including:**

- Strengthening the initiative of the Urban Centers for Wellbeing and Opportunities (CUBOs), promoted by the Directorate for the Reconstruction of the Social Fabric, as a hub for coordination and implementation of programs and projects supporting local communities—particularly children, adolescents, and youth—by promoting social inclusion and guaranteeing enforcement of their rights. It is essential to establish partnerships with civil society organizations so that these facilities can be used for complementary workshops or to expand the reach and content of existing programs.
- Intensifying efforts to recover and activate public spaces, especially in those most affected by gang-related violence.
- Prioritizing the efforts of CONAPINA and the Public Prosecutor's Office (PGR), aimed at the comprehensive care of children affected by all forms of violence, in the understanding that this mandate may only be achieved through significant increase in budgetary resources.
- Urgently expanding and strengthening programs of care, support, and treatment currently offered by CONAPINA to children whose parents are deprived of liberty, as well as supporting initiatives for the reunification of families affected by the state of exception.

- Maximizing efforts to ensure the full educational development of children, adolescents, and youth by promoting inclusion, retention, and dropout rate reduction, especially among elementary and high school students. This requires proper maintenance of school infrastructure to guarantee access to basic services and internet connectivity.
- Promoting, expanding, and facilitating access to higher education through the programs led by the National Directorate of Integration.
- Strengthening and expanding programs and strategies aimed at reducing and eliminating violence against women and sexual violence. Violence against women is the most widespread, normalized, and routine form of violence, with significant impacts on the socialization of future generations. Therefore, its prevention and eradication are essential to breaking the cycle of violent cultural norms and transforming societal attitudes in the medium and long term.

**B. Rehabilitation Policies or Programs for the Incarcerated Population, including:**

- Enforce the mandate laid down in Article 27 of the Constitution of the Republic on the social reintegration of individuals deprived of liberty. Promoting resocialization is not only a constitutional obligation but also a key strategy to prevent recidivism and to disrupt the emergence of criminal dynamics within the prison system.
- Ensuring individuals in pretrial detention are held separately from those formally convicted by judicial authorities, including in cases involving children and adolescents.
- Establishing support programs for individuals released from prison and their families to facilitate their reintegration into society, including economic reinsertion and access to healthcare services.
- Creating working groups between civil society organizations and state institutions to support individuals—especially children and adolescents—in developing skills and life plans upon their release.
- Managing and strengthening programs for the social reintegration of children and adolescents with a criminal law background, to ensure a full return to society, with a focus on promoting access to education and responsible caregiving.

ENDNOTES

1. Legislative Assembly of El Salvador. (2025, May 1). Assembly guarantees the safety of Salvadorans by extending the state of exception. <https://asamblea.gob.sv/node/13557>
2. Office of the Attorney General. (2025). Fiscal General y Gabinete de Seguridad presentan balance 2024 [Attorney General and Security Cabinet present 2024 report]. "A significant decline in the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants to 1.9 in 2024, the lowest figure in the country's history." <https://www.fiscalia.gob.sv/fiscal-general-y-gabinete-de-seguridad-presentan-balance-2024/> (Available in Spanish).
3. Legislative Assembly of El Salvador (n.d.). Decree No. XYZ: The effects contained in Legislative Decree 333/22, which established the state of exception, are hereby extended until April 5, 2025. <https://www.asamblea.gob.sv/sites/default/files/documents/decretos/48856849-02FD-4EED-85A4-5BE3CBB8953F.pdf>.
4. To produce this report, a roundtable was held in San Salvador in September 2024 with members of civil society organizations, journalists, academia, and think tanks to gather their views on the security situation in the country and their outlook for the future. This activity followed the Chatham House Rule, so the names of participants and their specific opinions are not disclosed in this report. To obtain the official perspective, interviews were conducted with the Vice President of the Republic, Félix Ulloa; the Minister of Justice and Public Security, Gustavo Villatoro; the Director of Social Fabric Reconstruction, Carlos Marroquín; and the Executive Director of the National Council for Early Childhood, Children, and Adolescents (CONAPINA), Linda Amaya de Morán. The analysis was complemented by a wide range of documentary sources, including those from intergovernmental and official organizations, and interviews were conducted with members of civil society organizations, international cooperation, academia, and citizen security experts, who shared their views on government policy and the challenges in the short, medium, and long term.
5. U.S. Department of State. (2025, February 20). Designation of International Cartels. <https://www.state.gov/designation-of-international-cartels/>
6. Office of the President of the Republic of El Salvador. (2020) Policía proyecta bajar la tasa de homicidios por cada 100000 habitantes al cierre de 2020 (The Police expects to reduce the homicide rate for every 100,000 inhabitants by 2020 year end).
7. Office of the President of the Republic of El Salvador (2019). Territorial Control Plan. <https://www.presidencia.gob.sv/tag/plan-control-territorial/>
8. National Civil Police (2025). Logros y Memorias. <https://www.pnc.gob.sv/logros-y-memorias/>; Insight Crime. (2020, agosto 13). "Disminución de homicidios en El Salvador: ¿decisión de las pandillas o triunfo presidencial?" (Homicide rate drop in El Salvador: a gang decision or presidential victory? Available in Spanish.) <https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/disminucion-homicidios-el-salvador-pandillas/>
9. Pursuant to Article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of El Salvador, the maximum duration of the state of exception is 30 days, subject to a single extension for an equal period.
10. Legislative Assembly of El Salvador. (n.d.). Decree No. XYZ: The measures set out in Legislative Decree 333/22, which established the state of exception, are hereby extended until April 5, 2025. [PDF]. <https://www.asamblea.gob.sv/sites/default/files/documents/decretos/48856849-02FD-4EED-85A4-5BE3CBB8953F.pdf>.
11. In March 2024, according to IUDOP surveys, 16.5% of respondents reported knowing at least one case of individuals with no apparent criminal ties who had been unjustifiably detained during the past year under the state of exception. The figure had been 33.8% in 2023, which could be explained by a greater intensity of arrests during the first year. See: IUDOP. (2024, April 15). La población salvadoreña evalúa el segundo año del régimen de excepción. Boletín de prensa. (The Salvadoran population assesses the second year of the state of exception. Available in Spanish). Press release. <https://uca.edu.sv/iudop/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Bol.-Regimen-de-Excepcion-V2.pdf>; SSPAS et al. (2023, April). Informe anual sobre violaciones a derechos humanos durante el estado de excepción en El Salvador. (Annual report on human rights violations during the state of exception in El Salvador. Available in Spanish). <https://sspas.org.sv/sspas/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/SSPAS.-Informe-regimen-de-excepcion.pdf>
12. Bukele, N. (2022, April 11). The error margin in arrests may be 1%. But we need to do whatever it takes to restore calm in the country. X. <https://x.com/nayibbukele/status/1512893151496781824>
13. Agence France-Presse. (2024, November 12). Salvadoran President Says 8,000 Innocents Freed in War on Gangs. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYmnM9oC7Xo>
14. Legislative Assembly of El Salvador. (n.d.). Incrementarán hasta 60 años las penas de prisión para cabecillas de grupos criminales (Prison sentences for criminal kingpins enhanced to up to 60 years). <https://www.asamblea.gob.sv/node/12882>
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