

An Overview of El Salvador



History

The Olmecs came to the region in 2000 B.C., followed by the Maya in 1500 B.C. When the Maya civilization ended in 900 A.D., the Toltec Empire took hold in El Salvador. In the 11th century, the Pipil people became the dominant group in El Salvador until the Spanish conquerors landed.

The Pipil Indians, descendants of the Aztecs, likely migrated to the region in the 11th century. In 1528, Pedro de Alvarado, a Spanish lieutenant of Cortés, took over El Salvador and forced the native people to become servants. The forced intermixing and intermarriage by Spanish men with the Native American Indigenous Lenca and Pipil women happened almost immediately after the arrival of the European Spanish. **The majority of Salvadorans in El Salvador identify themselves as 87% mestizo, leaving 12% white and ~1% indigenous Salvadoran population as a minority.**



El Almirante Don PEDRO de ALVARADO de "Badajoz."

El Salvador, with the other countries of Central America, declared its independence from Spain on Sept. 15, 1821, and was part of a federation of Central American states until that union dissolved in 1838. For decades after its full independence in 1841, El Salvador experienced numerous revolutions and wars against other Central American republics. From 1931 to 1979 El Salvador was ruled by a series of military dictatorships.

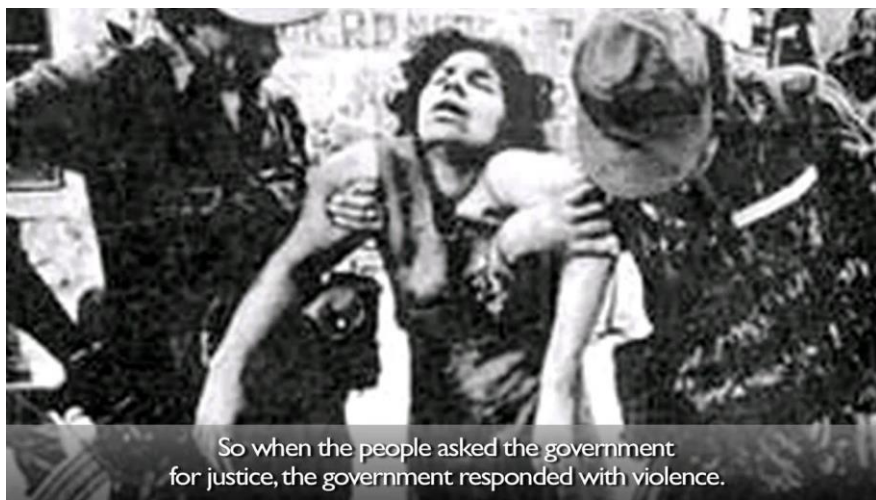
Salvadorans who are racially European, especially Mediterranean, as well as tri-racial Pardo Salvadorans and indigenous people in El Salvador who do not speak indigenous languages nor have an indigenous culture, also identify themselves as Mestizo culturally. El Salvador is the only country in Central America that does not have a significant African population due to many factors including El Salvador not having a Caribbean coast, and because of president Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who passed racial laws to keep blacks out of El Salvador against the belief and will of Salvadoran people, though Salvadorans with African ancestry are present in El Salvador, the majority are tri-racial Pardo Salvadorans who largely cluster with the Mestizo population.

The enslaved Africans that were brought to El Salvador during colonial times, eventually came to mix and merged into the much larger and vaster Mestizo mixed European Spanish/Native Indigenous population creating Pardo or Afromestizos who cluster with Mestizo people of Indigenous and European ancestry creating the modern day Mestizo population in El Salvador.

Thus, there remains no significant extremes of African physiognomy among Salvadorans like there is in the other countries of Central America. Maximiliano was also responsible for La Matanza ("The Slaughter"), in which indigenous people were murdered in an effort to wipe out the indigenous people in El Salvador during the 1932 Salvadoran peasant uprising. Indigenous peoples, mostly of Pipil and Lenca descent are still present in El Salvador in small communities, conserving their languages, customs, and traditions.

In 1969, El Salvador invaded Honduras after Honduran landowners deported several thousand Salvadorans. The four-day war became known as the "football war" because it broke out during a soccer game between the two countries.

El Salvador Suffers During 12-Year Civil War



In the 1970s, discontent with societal and economic inequalities, and the repressive measures of dictatorship led to civil war in 1980 between the government, ruled since 1961 by the right-wing National Conciliation Party (PCN), and leftist antigovernment guerrilla units, whose leading group was the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). Many Salvadorans, rich and poor, fled to the United States. The U.S. intervened on the side of the military dictatorship, despite its scores of human rights violations.

Between 1979 and 1981, about 30,000 people were killed by right-wing death squads backed by the military. José Napoleón Duarte—a moderate civilian who was president from 1984 to 1989—offered an alternative to the political extremes of right and left, but Duarte was unable to end the war. In 1989, Alfredo Cristiani of the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) was elected. On January 16, 1992, the government signed a peace treaty that provided for military and political reform with the leftist guerrilla forces, formally ending the 12-year civil war that had killed 75,000.

In 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated the country, leaving 200 dead and over 30,000 homeless. In January and February 2001, major earthquakes struck El Salvador, damaging about 20% of the nation's housing. An even worse disaster befell the country in the summer when a severe drought destroyed 80% of the country's crops, causing famine in the countryside.

In 2004, Antonio Saca of ARENA was elected president. The nation implemented a free-trade agreement (CAFTA) with the U.S. in March 2006, the first Central American country to do so. Mauricio Funes, a former journalist and member of the FMLN party (leftist), was elected President in March 2009, ending two decades of conservative rule in El Salvador.



The new government focused on promoting the Universal Social Protection System as a strategy of social development, while seeking coverage of basic social services to the impoverished population, such as education, health, violence prevention, and basic pension. The need to halt environmental degradation and curb proneness to disasters caused by natural phenomena has also been recognized.

Gang Truce Leads to Drop in Crime

In March 2012, the government in El Salvador reported a 40% drop in crime. A gang truce was the reason cited for the drastic drop. For example, in the first two months of 2012, there was an average of 16 murders per day. That number dropped to less than five killings per day in late March 2012. By April 14, 2012, there were no killings per day for the first time in over three years.

As of May 2013, there were 70,000 gang members in El Salvador, with 9,000 serving time in prison. The *Alto al Crimen* program, a type of Crime Stoppers, was in full operation. The program offered financial compensation for information resulting in the arrest of gang leaders.

Government and Economy

Salvador Sánchez Cerén, is a Salvadoran politician who has been President of El Salvador since 2014. He previously served as Vice President from 2009 to 2014 under the presidency of Mauricio Funes.

In the 2014 presidential election, he ran as the candidate of the left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and was elected as President, narrowly defeating Norman Quijano of the conservative Arena party. He took office on June 1, 2014. In his inauguration speech, Sanchez Ceren said he would focus on fighting corruption and reducing violence.



In essence his experience and the things he learned in San Salvador at Masferrer School from his peers he took back to his town and began to implement it. He was an active member of the ANDES 21 de Junio, a teachers union that practiced and believed in the ideas of Paulo Freire and his analysis on pedagogy.

In the 1970s he joined the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación “Farabundo Martí” (FPL), one of the five left-wing organizations, all of differing Marxist-Leninist tendencies, that later merged to form the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN).

For nearly two decades, the dominant economic model promoted a rapid liberalization of markets and a reduction in social spending, with little investment in basic services such as education, health and drinking water. Public investment in the agricultural sector was minimal, converting the country into a net importer of grains and other basic products.



This economic model generated very low growth rates which were insufficient to promote the development process, with rates of inequality remaining high, and the country seeing an exodus of its most valuable resource: its people. Approximately 25% of the Salvadoran population lives in countries that offer better living conditions, primarily the United States.



El Salvador's democratic government has added manufacturing jobs—but faces the challenges of poverty, crime, and natural disasters. Coffee, sugar, corn, rice, shrimp, and beef are the main agricultural products in El Salvador.

Top 5 Exports: Knit T-Shirts, Coffee, Knit Socks and Hosiery, Electrical Capacitors, and Raw Sugar.

Top 5 Imports: Refined Petroleum, Crude Petroleum, Light Rubberized Knitted Fabric, Packaged Medicaments, and Planes, Helicopters, and/or Spacecraft.

People & Culture

El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated (6.3 million people) country in Central America. About half of all Salvadorans live in the countryside and are poor – living without electricity or running water in their homes. Most of the wealthy families live in San Salvador in houses and apartments. About three million Salvadorans live in the United States and send money home to El Salvador.

The government offers free education to children up to the ninth grade, but many families cannot afford the cost of supplies and transportation.

About 90 percent of Salvadorans are mestizo, descendants of Spanish and Indigenous American ancestors while nine percent have Spanish descent. Mestizo, a mixed population was formed as a result of intermarrying between the native Mesoamerican populations of Cuzcatlán with the Spanish settlers. Spanish is the official language and is spoken by virtually all inhabitants. Some indigenous people speak their native tongues, such as



Nahua and Maya, but indigenous Salvadoreans who do not identify as mestizo constitute only one percent of the country's population.

Rice, beans, and tortillas (Pupusa) are the main foods in El Salvador. Most people cannot afford meat and do not have enough food to eat every day. Malnutrition is a leading cause of death among the poor rural people.

Football or (American Soccer) is the national sport and very popular in El Salvador.



Cabañas is a department of El Salvador in the north central part of the country. With more than 55 percent of the population being impoverished, the department ranks second in the country for poverty. Cabañas Department is mainly involved in agricultural production, producing basic grains, coffee, sugar cane, indigo, grass, sesame, and is dedicated to raising cattle, pigs, horses, asses, mules and goats. The pottery industry also employs some people as does gold, silver and copper mining. Also of note is the population of Ilobasco, noted for their arts and crafts. Historically, the Department has also had lime and cheese factories, as well as distilleries.

Human Rights

Amnesty International has drawn attention to several arrests of police officers for unlawful police killings. Other current issues to gain Amnesty International's attention in the past 10 years include missing children, failure of law enforcement to properly investigate and prosecute crimes against women, and rendering organized labor illegal.

In El Salvador if a woman miscarries it is frequently assumed she deliberately induced an abortion or could have saved the baby. Women who did not know they were pregnant or who could not have prevented a miscarriage face long prison terms.

Religion

The Catholic Church plays an important role in the Salvadoran culture. Archbishop Óscar Romero is a national hero for his role in resisting human rights violations that were occurring in the lead-up to the Salvadoran Civil War. Significant foreign personalities in El Salvador were the Jesuit priests and professors Ignacio Ellacuria, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and Segundo Montes, who were murdered in 1989 by the Salvadoran Army during the height of the civil war.

Geography

Officially, the Republic of El Salvador, is the smallest country located in Central America. The country's capital city and largest city is San Salvador, and the country is divided into 14 departments (*departamentos*), which in turn are subdivided into 262 municipalities (*municipios*).

El Salvador borders the North Pacific Ocean to the south and southwest, between Guatemala and Honduras to the north; it is the only Central American country that has no Caribbean coastline.

Nature

The forests of El Salvador have been cut down for firewood, coffee plantations, and for the building of homes. The result is the destruction of wildlife habitats in El Salvador.

Along the coastal plains, there are palm trees and tropical fruit trees, such as mango, coconut, and tamarind. Armadillos, snakes, and iguanas also inhabit the warm, humid coast.

High in the mountains, at the (2,417-meter) summit of Monte Cristo Mountain, is a cloud forest in the international nature preserve of El Trifinio. The governments of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras are trying to protect this rain forest.

The cloud forest is home to orchids, ferns, spider monkeys, jaguars, anteaters, and many bird species, including green toucans.

Climate, Weather, and Natural Disasters

El Salvador has a tropical savanna climate with pronounced wet and dry seasons. Temperatures vary primarily with elevation and show little seasonal change with only two seasons: *verano*, or dry season (November to April), and *invierno*, or wet season (May to October) includes the occasional tropical storms, causing flash floods and landslides in the lower Lempa River area, and hurricanes. Almost the entire annual rainfall occurs during the wet season and at night. The month of July is characterized by *essentially constant* daily high temperatures, with daily highs around 32°C and humidity throughout the month. The relative humidity typically ranges from 57% (mildly humid) to 98% (very humid) over the course of a typical July.

Known as the Land of Volcanoes, El Salvador has frequent earthquakes and volcanic activity because of its location in a highly active seismic zone. Tremors occur regularly, while major earthquakes occur more intermittently. The *Sistema Nacional de Estudios Territoriales* reports above-normal levels of volcanic activity at the San Miguel and Conchagua volcanoes. Travellers should pay close attention to all warnings, avoid restricted areas and follow the advice of local authorities in the event of another eruption.

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