

FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2021

El Salvador

PARTLY FREE

63

/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	30 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	33 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

66 /100 **Partly Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)



Overview

Elections in El Salvador are largely credible and free. However, widespread corruption undermines democracy and the rule of law, and lack of physical security remains a grave problem. Authorities have pursued a harsh, militarized response to the country's powerful criminal gangs, resulting in extrajudicial killings and other abuses. There is an active civil society sector and a lively press, though journalists risk harassment and violence in connection with coverage of organized crime or corruption.

Key Developments in 2020

- President Nayib Bukele ordered security forces to occupy the national legislature for one day in early February, in an attempt to compel its approval of a security funding request. Most legislators declined to appear at the emergency session called by Bukele, and the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled the president's actions unconstitutional in October.
- Salvadorans endured a strict COVID-19 lockdown between March and June; residents were largely confined to their homes and faced arrest and arbitrary detention in centers run by the security forces for perceived violations. The Bukele administration resisted judicial orders to curtail the detentions before the lockdown measures expired; much of the economy was reopened by late August.
- The Bukele administration sought to withhold information related to its pandemic response and other activities throughout the year. In March, the public information agency's hearings were suspended, and the same agency withheld documents related to an investigation into Bukele's estate in October, after the president appointed three new members to its governing body.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 30 / 40 (-2)

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?	4/4
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El Salvador's president is directly elected for a single five-year term. In February 2019, Grand Alliance for National Unity (GANU) candidate Nayib Bukele won the presidential election in the first round with 53.1 percent of the vote, followed by Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) candidate Carlos Calleja with 31.72 percent and Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) candidate Hugo Martínez with 14.41 percent. Voter turnout was 51.88 percent. Organization of American States (OAS) observers called the election free and generally fair, and lauded the losing candidates' willingness to concede on election night.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?	3/4
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The 84-member, unicameral Legislative Assembly is elected for three years. In the March 2018 elections, ARENA won 37 seats, the FMLN won 23, GANA won 11, and the National Conciliation Party (PCN) won 8; the rest went to smaller parties and coalitions. Votes for ARENA and the FMLN declined compared with previous legislative elections. Turnout was roughly 46 percent.

A European Union (EU) observation mission declared the elections well organized, transparent, and the calmest since the 1992 peace accords that ended the country's 1980–92 civil war. However, observers also noted a lack of voter education, particularly regarding the issue of cross-voting, a procedure that allows voters to select candidates from more than one party list.

A3 0-4 pts

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Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

4/4

The country's electoral framework has undergone a number of changes in recent years, at times contributing to inefficiencies and confusion surrounding electoral processes. Implementation of a 2015 reform that called on citizens, as opposed to partisan representatives, to oversee vote counting was delayed ahead of the 2018 polls, resulting in inadequate training for the citizens who were drafted. In addition, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) reportedly dismissed nonpartisans in favor of partisans.

In 2018, a list of political donors who gave between 2006 and 2017 was published for the first time, marking an improvement in campaign-finance transparency.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

4/4

Salvadorans are free to organize in different political parties or organizations. While two parties, the leftist FMLN and the right-wing ARENA, have dominated politics since the end of the civil war, new parties have emerged and are able to participate and compete in political processes. In 2018, the first independent candidate was elected to the legislature, and the two major parties saw their share of the vote decline.

Campaign donation records released in 2018 showed that between 2006 and 2017, ARENA received more donations than any other party, and that most of its donations

had come from companies. The FMLN collected the second-most donations, with most of those funds coming from individuals.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

4/4

Opposition parties are able to increase support and gain power through elections. Historically, executive elections were closely contested between the two main parties, while smaller parties performed better in the legislature. President Bukele's 2019 election marked a break in the two main parties' executive dominance; while they commanded a combined 88 percent of the vote in the first round of the 2014 presidential election, they received 46 percent in 2019.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

2/4

Criminal groups hold significant influence over political life. Political candidates face threats from these groups, but parties are also known to engage in transactions with them. For example, party leaders negotiate with criminal groups in order to operate in gang-controlled areas; police have asserted that all major parties engage in such bargains, and some politicians have openly admitted to the practice. Parties have paid gangs to coerce or intimidate voters to cast ballots in their favor, and have hired gangs to provide security for their events. Parties are known to provide gang leaders with special access to politicians, and have sometimes pledged to provide social services to gang members' families.

Several of these negotiations came to light during 2020. In January, Attorney General Raúl Melara accused legislator Norman Quijano of negotiating with members of the MS-13 gang to secure votes for his 2014 presidential campaign, but a legislative attempt to strip Quijano of immunity failed in May. In July, former president Mauricio

Funes (2009–14), who fled to Nicaragua in 2016 while facing a corruption investigation, was accused of offering concessions to gang members in return for a truce. Former defense minister David Munguía Payés was accused of spearheading negotiations with Funes’s approval and was placed under house arrest in late July. The case against Munguía was ongoing at year’s end.

The Bukele administration has also been implicated in such behavior. In September 2020, the news site El Faro reported that the government was working to negotiate a truce with, and secure electoral support from, MS-13 members. Bukele denied the allegations.

Since the transition to democracy, the military has largely been an apolitical institution—though it has not always cooperated with civilian authorities. The military retains a significant role in public security operations, even though the 1992 peace accord originally prohibited its involvement.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	3/4
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All citizens have full political rights and electoral opportunities under the law, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, but women and minority groups are underrepresented in the legislature and in high-level government positions. In 2018, the country’s first openly transgender political candidate ran for a seat on the San Salvador Municipal Council. A 2013 statute requires that 30 percent of legislative and municipal candidates be women, and just over 30 percent of the seats in the Legislative Assembly were held by women following the 2018 elections. However, only 10 percent of mayoral seats were held by women after that year’s municipal elections, and women’s interests are poorly represented in practice. President Bukele’s inaugural cabinet marked an improvement, attaining gender parity in 2019.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

2/4

The government lacks authority over areas controlled by criminal groups, and public officials are known to collaborate with criminal organizations. Several mayors have been accused of facilitating extortion rackets and assassinations and buying campaign support from gangs and criminal networks.

The Bukele administration repeatedly sought to interfere with the legislature's ability to determine policy in 2020. For one day in February, Bukele ordered security forces to occupy the legislative chamber and attempted to compel lawmakers to approve a loan meant to bolster security funding. Most Legislative Assembly members declined to appear, and the Supreme Court instructed the administration to refrain from deploying security forces again; in October, the court's Constitutional Chamber ruled Bukele's actions unconstitutional. Separately in October, El Faro reported that the July resignation of Finance Minister Nelson Fuentes came after Bukele pressured him to freeze legislators' salaries over their resistance to his funding request.

President Bukele also sought to override the legislature regarding the response to COVID-19. In May, he issued an emergency decree to extend pandemic-related measures without legislative approval, though the Supreme Court suspended his declaration. In mid-June, Bukele issued a decree aiming to manage the withdrawal of lockdown measures, but he ultimately acquiesced to the country's staged reopening after lockdown measures legally expired.

The United States wields significant influence over the government's ability to execute policy; El Salvador currently relies on an August 2019 bilateral agreement to bolster its capacity to deal with asylum seekers and maintain internal security. Some Salvadorans have also expressed concern that multinational corporations have excessive influence over local and national government officials.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 due to a pattern of attempts by President Bukele to exceed his legal powers, including his deployment of troops in the legislative chamber as part of a bid to secure increased funding for security agencies.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	2/4
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Corruption is widespread in El Salvador, despite efforts to combat it. In March 2019, the Supreme Court used a narrow reading of the constitution to limit investigations by its Probity Section, which examines illicit enrichment, to public officials who have left office within the past 10 years. The decision effectively closed pending cases against officials whose terms of service ended before 2009.

In September 2019, President Bukele announced the creation of the International Commission against Impunity in El Salvador (CICIES), an OAS-supported anticorruption agency. CICIES cannot independently launch prosecutions, but it provides technical assistance to Salvadoran prosecutors upon request.

In November 2020, the attorney general's office launched a criminal investigation into the suspected misuse of COVID-19-related funds, based on information provided by CICIES. Finance Minister Alejandro Zelaya and Health Minister Francisco Alabí were among those under investigation for misdirecting funds at year's end.

The justice system continues to grapple with multiple corruption cases involving previous administrations. In August 2020, former Funes-era defense ministers Munguía and José Atilio Benítez Parada were charged with receiving ill-gotten funds related to a weapons-modernization program during their tenure; that case was ongoing at year's end.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	2/4
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While there have been advances in the implementation of access-to-information legislation in the past, the government sought to limit transparency as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in 2020. The Access to Public Information Agency (IAIP) suspended hearings as a national lockdown was declared in late March; individuals were notably impeded in efforts to gain information about quarantine conditions and COVID-19 test results as a consequence.

Government officials sought to withhold information on COVID-19-related expenditures. In May, President Bukele declined to submit legally mandated spending reports to the legislature. That same month, five members of a special oversight committee resigned, saying the government bypassed it when making spending decisions. In late October, citing alleged violations of public health rules, the Labor Ministry closed two Court of Auditors offices that were reportedly monitoring the Finance Ministry and Bukele's office. In early December, Deputy Security Minister Mauricio Arriaza resigned after he was accused of failing to ensure the finance minister's compliance with instructions to report on pandemic-related spending. Despite these obstructions, some pandemic-related information did become public, with El Faro relying on IAIP records to report on the government's acquisition of faulty face masks from a company connected to a legislator in July.

The Bukele administration also sought to reduce transparency on other subjects, including the president's own affairs. In September, Bukele enacted changes to existing access-to-information legislation, giving the government more time to respond to requests and giving the executive more discretion over the release of records. In October, after the president installed three new IAIP commissioners, the agency reversed an earlier decision that had allowed a journalist to receive documents related to a Probity Section investigation into Bukele's estate.

The government had previously elected to withhold information on its crime-fighting efforts; in July 2019, it announced that it would stop including deaths resulting from encounters with security forces in official homicide data, potentially obscuring both extrajudicial killings and the true homicide rate.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because government resistance to required disclosures, political pressure on the public information agency, and a

suspension of the agency's activities during a COVID-19 lockdown all reduced transparency regarding state spending and other matters of public interest.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	2/4
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The constitution provides for freedom of the press. While the media scene is robust, reporters face significant challenges. Harassment and acts of violence in response to coverage of corruption and organized crime have often led journalists to engage in self-censorship. Access to the internet is not restricted, and online outlets like El Faro and Revista Factum are critical sources of independent reporting. However, most Salvadorans rely on privately owned television and radio networks for news, and ownership in the broadcast sector is highly concentrated. The government launched a daily newspaper, *Diario El Salvador*, in October 2020, under the aegis of a publicly owned energy company.

Police officers and government officials have sought to prevent press coverage of controversial or sensitive matters in recent years. Human Rights Watch has noted cases in which police officers barred journalists from visiting homicide scenes.

President Bukele used verbal attacks and the threat of criminal charges to put pressure on critical journalists and outlets in 2020. In September, he announced via social media that Héctor Silva Avalos, a writer for the nongovernmental organization (NGO) InSight Crime, was under criminal investigation, though Silva reported that he had received no official notification. Later that month, Bukele announced a money-

laundering investigation targeting El Faro, and accused several other outlets of “attacking” the administration.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	3/4
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Religious freedom is generally respected by the government. However, congregants and religious leaders have increasingly faced gang violence and extortion in recent years. People in some communities have been unable to access their churches due to territorial disputes between gangs. In addition, religious leaders working with former gang members have faced harassment and the threat of murder.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?	3/4
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Academic freedom is respected, and the educational system is generally free from extensive political indoctrination. However, teachers and students continue to face intimidation and violence by gang members.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?	3/4
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While private discussion and personal expression are generally free, the prevalence of gang activity leads many Salvadorans to curtail speech about organized crime and other sensitive topics outside of their homes.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	3/4
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Freedom of assembly is generally upheld, and public protests and gatherings are permitted. However, the persistent threat of violence by security forces or gang members serves as a deterrent to participation.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?	3/4
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NGOs operate freely and play an important role in society and policymaking. However, groups that work on human rights and governance-related topics sometimes face threats and extortion attempts from criminal groups. Impunity for such attacks, as well as occasional pressure on NGOs by police, has prompted some observers to question the government's commitment to the protection of freedom of association and human rights in general.

Several NGOs and associations have reported discovering microphones or other listening devices on their premises in recent years, including the National Association of Private Companies (ANEP), the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES), and the National Development Foundation (FUNDE).

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	2/4
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Labor unions have long faced obstacles in a legal environment that favors business interests, including by mandating only light penalties for employers who interfere with strikes. The law prohibits strikes in sectors deemed essential, and the designation is vaguely defined.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	2/4
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Judicial independence is not consistently respected by the government, and the judicial system is hampered by corruption. Elected officials do not always observe Supreme Court rulings. Powerful individuals can evade justice by exerting pressure on the judiciary.

The Bukele administration repeatedly defied or criticized court orders related to its COVID-19 response during 2020. After the Supreme Court issued rulings in March and April that limited the government’s ability to detain people during the pandemic, Bukele called on law enforcement personnel to ignore the rulings. In May, after the Supreme Court’s Constitutional Chamber suspended a state-of-emergency declaration, Bukele threatened to sue the body at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	2/4
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Due process rights are constitutionally guaranteed but inconsistently upheld. Interpreters are not always provided for defendants who do not speak Spanish. Rights advocates report that police have carried out arbitrary arrests and detentions as part of the country’s crackdown on gangs.

The authorities routinely denied due process to individuals accused of violating the strict COVID-19 lockdown measures. In April 2020, the human rights ombudsman’s office (PDDH) reported that it had received 778 complaints in the lockdown’s first month; the PDDH’s report to the Legislative Assembly also highlighted incidents involving excessive use of force and arbitrary detention. Security forces reportedly continued to carry out such detentions after the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court issued three rulings to curtail the practice in March and April.

Progress on addressing crimes committed during the civil war has been inconsistent. In 2016, the Supreme Court struck down a 1993 law preventing the investigation and prosecution of war crimes. In February 2020, the legislature passed a new reconciliation bill that rights groups warned would offer amnesty for war criminals. Bukele vetoed the measure, which was then placed under the review of the Supreme Court’s Constitutional Chamber, where it remained at year’s end.

The Bukele administration resisted calls to cooperate in the ongoing El Mozote trial, in which 17 high-ranking military officers stand accused of massacring nearly 1,000 people in the northeastern town of El Mozote in 1981. The administration continued to ignore an October 2019 judicial order requiring it to open defense archives on El Mozote and other military operations. In September 2020, a magistrate investigating the massacre was prevented from examining a military archive, and was told that Bukele and Defense Minister René Merino Monroy prohibited the inspection. In October, El Faro reported that “declassified” documents released by the Bukele administration were in fact previously released by former president Salvador Sánchez Cerén (2014–19).

Also in October, the Supreme Court ordered the closure of criminal proceedings in a separate civil war–era case involving the 1989 killings of six Jesuit priests at the hands of the military.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	1/4
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Crime and other violence, much of which is linked to gang activity, remain grave problems. The government reported 697 murders in the first half of 2020, a decline from the 1,630 recorded in the first half of 2019. Deaths resulting from security operations were not included in official homicide figures beginning in 2019.

Civilians in El Salvador are vulnerable to forced disappearances, with the attorney general’s office counting 1,225 missing persons in 2020 through mid-November. Relatives of the disappeared often fear reprisals for discussing their cases publicly.

Police and other security forces have been implicated in hundreds of extrajudicial killings as part of the government’s militarized response to organized crime. In August 2019, the PDDH released a report documenting evidence of extrajudicial executions by police during its 2014–18 reporting period, noting that most victims were unarmed. Witnesses who spoke to the PDDH said officers commonly hid evidence, moved bodies, and engaged in acts of torture and sexual assault against their victims. Extrajudicial killings allegedly continued under the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2020, authorities claimed that the apparent victim of an extrajudicial killing had instead died of COVID-19, despite evidence that the individual was beaten. Meanwhile, gangs continue to engage in targeted violence against security officers and their families, among other victims.

Prisons remain extremely overcrowded, and conditions for inmates can be lethal due to disease, lack of adequate medical care, and the risk of attack by other inmates. In 2018, the legislature voted to make permanent the “extraordinary measures” implemented in 2016 to increase security in prisons. Human rights groups and UN officials criticized the decision, with the latter saying the move would “dehumanize” detainees. In April 2020, President Bukele ordered a lockdown in prisons in response to a spike in murders. Prison authorities restricted gang members to their cells for a 24-hour period, and members of rival gangs were forced to share cells.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

2/4

Women are granted equal rights under the law, but are often subject to discrimination. Indigenous people disproportionately face poverty, unemployment, and labor discrimination. Certain other populations, particularly internally displaced persons and LGBT+ people, also have inadequate access to the justice system. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prevalent, and LGBT+ people are often the targets of hate crimes and violence, including by state security agents. In February 2019, a transgender woman who had been deported from the United States died from a violent assault committed in January. In August 2020, three police officers were convicted of aggravated homicide for killing her, and they received 20-year prison terms.

Local NGOs supporting transgender Salvadorans reported that their clients had difficulty accessing medication and financial resources during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, and faced heightened risks of violence and housing insecurity.

In 2018, in a sign of increased attention to discrimination against LGBT+ people, the government approved an Institutional Policy for the Care of the LGBT Population. Officials indicated the government’s commitment to its tenets in public statements and events, though its practical effects remain unclear.

The government restricted the rights of asylum seekers by signing an agreement with the United States in September 2019, whereby El Salvador would accept asylum seekers trying to reach the United States and stop them from traveling north. Human rights groups objected, warning that the country was unsafe, but the two governments reportedly finalized the agreement in December 2020.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?	1/4
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Freedom of travel within El Salvador is complicated by gang activity. MS-13 and another major gang, Barrio 18, control certain neighborhoods of Salvadoran cities, making it dangerous for residents to travel, work, and attend school. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center has estimated that hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced by violence in recent years. In mid-2018, the Supreme Court ruled that the government failed in its obligations to those displaced by violence, instituting a six-month deadline for the development of a new policy to address their needs. While the government missed this deadline, it did enact legislation meant to address the issue in January 2020.

Salvadorans faced additional movement restrictions when the government instituted a strict COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. Residents were only allowed to leave home for basic goods, medical appointments, or work that was considered essential, and some people reportedly ran low on vital supplies as the lockdown continued. For two days in April, the town of La Libertad was cordoned off by the military, with residents unable to purchase basic goods. Mass transit was suspended nationwide for 15 days in May.

In May, President Bukele attempted to declare another state of emergency to extend pandemic-related restrictions, but conceded to the lockdown's expiration in mid-June. The economy largely reopened by August, though authorities reserved the right to restrict travel in municipalities reporting high COVID-19 positivity rates. As many as 23,000 police officers were deployed to enforce the government's lockdown, and by August over 16,000 people had spent periods of forced confinement in quarantine centers overseen by the police and military.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to excessively harsh and lengthy COVID-19 lockdown measures that restricted free movement and featured abusive enforcement by security agencies.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?	2/4
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Businesses and private citizens are regularly subject to extortion. According to a 2018 report from the National Council of Small Businesses in El Salvador, some 90 percent of small businesses are affected by extortion. A 2019 report from InSight Crime and the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime found that businesses and individuals pay extortion fees worth 1.7 percent of the country’s gross domestic product.

Indigenous people, the majority of whom belong to the Nahua-Pipil ethnic group, face difficulties in securing land rights and accessing credit. Most Indigenous Salvadorans live on communal land or in rented accommodations.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?	2/4
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Men and women have equal legal rights on matters such as marriage and divorce, and there are few formal restrictions on such decisions. However, same-sex marriage remains illegal in El Salvador. The rights of transgender people were slightly expanded in January 2019, when a judge in the southern city of Zacatecoluca ruled in favor of a transgender woman who sought to update her name and gender on government-issued identification documents.

Abortion is punishable by imprisonment, including in cases where the pregnant person’s life is at risk. Some women have been jailed despite credible claims that their pregnancies ended due to miscarriage; in March 2020, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention warned that three Salvadoran women were unfairly imprisoned for abortion-related crimes, and called on the government to reconsider their cases. At least one woman received a sentence commutation or acquittal in 2020, though this remains rare.

The prevalence of adolescent pregnancy is a serious problem, accounting for approximately a third of all pregnancies, and many are the result of sexual assault. Female students with children often leave school, sometimes under pressure from

their principals. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and femicide, is also common. An April 2019 report by the Organization of Salvadoran Women for Peace (ORMUSA) indicated that the majority of sexual-assault survivors were girls between the ages of 12 and 17. El Salvador has Latin America's highest femicide rate.

These issues were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2020, women's rights campaigners warned that over 100 girls had become pregnant as the result of sexual assault during the lockdown. ORMUSA reported 878 cases of familial domestic violence against women during the first half of the year, along with 84 cases of femicide in the first eight months of the year. The majority of the femicides took place during the lockdown.

There have been several reported incidents in recent years of femicide-suicide, in which women and girls die by suicide as a result of abuse. El Salvador remains one of the only countries in the world where this is considered a crime, and the first conviction was handed down in March 2019.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?	2/4
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El Salvador remains a source, transit, and destination country for the trafficking of women, children, and LGBT+ people. There are instances of forced labor in the construction and informal sectors. According to the 2020 edition of the US State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the government has bolstered its ability to prosecute traffickers and enacted legislation granting temporary residency rights to trafficking survivors. However, shelter and public services for survivors remain insufficient.

Children are vulnerable to economic exploitation, and child labor is a serious problem. Children perform dangerous jobs in agriculture and are recruited by gangs and other criminal elements to carry out illegal activities. While the government has made improvements in collecting and publishing data on these issues, and continues to

implement a National Policy for the Protection of Children and Adolescents, progress in combating child exploitation remains slow.



On El Salvador

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