El Salvador

Vision and Strategy for a Future of Peace
El Salvador: The Basics
Blast from the Past

A (brief) History of Violence in El Salvador
El Salvador colonized by Spain in 1525
- Indigenous Salvadorans kicked off land ideal for growing indigo
  - Primary plantation crop in El Salvador for the 1500s to early 1800s
- Repressive ruling system

Independence from Spain in 1821
- Strengthened inequalities between the indigenous and Salvadorans of Spanish ancestry
  - Economic (e.g. land ownership)
  - Political power
1841-1932

Sovereignty and (Brief) Stabilization

- El Salvador became an independent nation on January 1, 1841
- 1881 abolishment of communal land system
- Leadership changed rapidly from 1841-1898
  - Series of military coups
  - 58 changes in Presidency (33 different Presidents)
  - Many shifts, but few changes in “political allegiance”
- No coups occurred from 1898-1932
- Relative stability led to centralization of government control
- Series of promising democratic reforms from 1927-1932
1932-1979

Authoritarian Regime

➔ Political oppression
➔ The 1932 Massacre
  ◆ January 22, 1932
  ◆ Root causes:
    • Military dictatorship of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez
    • Unfair distribution of wealth
    • Civil dissatisfaction: social uprising by farmers, indigenous, and political leaders
    • Dictatorship responded with violence
  ◆ Consequence: ~30,000 deaths
1979-1992

Civil War

- Conflict between the military-led government (Romero) and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN)
- October 15, 1979: Turning point: coup that led to killings of protesters from both sides and the disposition of President Romero
- Results?
  - More than 1 million people displaced
  - Living standards decreased by 30% since beginning of conflict
  - Unemployment skyrocketed
  - Inflation rose almost 40%
The Current
El Salvador
1992-Present

Violence in the Current Era

➔ Peace Accords in 1992
➔ Massive presence of gang activity
  ◆ Temporary ceasefire in 2012
  ◆ Breakdown in mid-2013
➔ Economic inequality
➔ Political corruption
➔ Violence against women
➔ Health issues
➔ Violence against minorities and indigenous persons
➔ Gang violence

Source: The Telegraph
**Economic Inequality**

*Structural/Direct*

- Poverty
  - High unemployment rate
  - Underpaid workers
  - Low living standards
- Wide rich-poor gap
- Economic losses due to natural disasters
- Dependence on a single commodity export
The institutions considered by the public to be most corrupt are 1) political parties, 2) police, 3) public officials and civil servants, and 4) the judiciary.

Judiciary
- Only 3,898 convictions out of 28,324 cases
- Judges have received death threats for ruling against gang members

Police
- Are monitored by gangs
- Open to bribes

Representatives
- Government Ethics Tribunal received 148 complaints involving 293 public officers as of September 2

Source: The Economic Times
Gender-Based Violence

Direct Violence

➔ Domestic Abuse
➔ Sexual Assault
  ◆ Gangs
➔ Femicide
  ◆ Highest female murder rate per capita in the world
  ◆ Special Integrated Law for a Life Free of Violence Against Women of 2012
1999: Article 1 of the Constitution specifies that one’s right to life begins at the moment of conception, deeming all abortions homicide => harsher sentencing

Unsafe abortions

Incarceration and “Las 17”
**Health**

**Structural**

- Private and public spheres
  - Public healthcare facilities are poorly equipped and understaffed (especially hospitals)

- Inequality of services
  - Quality directly linked to income levels (affluent versus poor)

**Direct**

- Malnutrition due to poverty (especially young children)
  - Poorer population: 63% required calories and 56% of protein
  - Overall population: 77.2% of minimum caloric consumption and 83.6% of protein consumption

Source: [Supplement Centre](https://www.supplementcentre.com)
MINORITY/INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

➔ About 10% of population are indigenous (estimated in '75)
  ● Main indigenous group: Nahua-Pipil (Salvadoran Indian)

➔ After the peasant revolt in 1932, Náhuatl was banned by the dictatorship
  ● Results: stripped of land, language, culture, autonomy and self-worth

➔ Poorest of the poor
  ● 80% obtain water at ground source while other 20% from river of public fountains
  ● Average household size of 13 versus 6 of non-indigenous
  ● 5% own land versus 95% (mostly communal lands)
  ● Illiteracy rate of 78% versus the 43%
State Proportion of the Salvadoran-Born Population in the United States

And Metropolitan Areas with 25,000 Salvadoran Born or More

State Share of the 1,095,000 Salvadoran Born**

- Less than 1%
- 1.0% to 4.0%
- 4.1% to 8.4%
- 14.9%
- 36.5%

**No state accounted for the following shares: 8.5% to 14.8% and 15.0% to 36.4%

Number of Salvadoran Born in a Metropolitan Area*

- 25,000 to 100,000
- 100,001 to 135,000
- More than 270,000

*Refers to Metropolitan Statistical Area

Gang Violence

→ Increased emigration from El Salvador to the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s
  ◆ Emigrants primarily from rural communities
  ◆ 129,000 Salvadorans emigrated in 1982
  ◆ Los Angeles the primary destination

→ Individual Responsibility Act of 1996
  ◆ Deportation of Salvadorans involved in gang activities

→ Beginning of the gangs MS-13 and the 18th Street gang in El Salvador

Source: The Guardian
Gang Violence

“We come from broken homes, extreme poverty, the only strong force that is alive in our communities is called gangs”

- Youth make up the majority of new gang members
  - A result of structural violence
    - Economic inequality
    - Lack of education
      - 70% of 16-17 year olds don’t have access to secondary education

- Gangs control territories in El Salvador
  - Leads to segregation of El Salvador (e.g. education system)

“Right now, any youth from a poor community in El Salvador is a suspect.”

- **Police corruption** in El Salvador
  - Drives entry into gangs

- Femicide and gang violence
Peace:
The Final Frontier
What is Peace, Anyway?

Group definition: A global state that exists when instances of physical and psychological violence are lessened in their damaging effects by the absence of any structural, institutional and systemic support.

Vision for El Salvador:
- Economic equality
- Government serving the needs of the people, including minorities
- Fair enforcement of the law
- Women treated equally
- Health access for all
- Absence of physical violence
A Vision for a Peaceful El Salvador
Stages & Their Aims

➔ **Actors:** NGOs, IGOs, Local Community Leaders
   ◆ Because of the high rates of distrust in governmental bodies, the population will be more likely to trust these actors and they are less likely to be corrupt

➔ **Stage 1:** Negative Peace
   ◆ **Purpose:** Improving understandings amongst conflicting constituencies within El Salvador and laying the groundwork for a more peaceful society

➔ **Stage 2:** Negative and Positive Peace
   ◆ **Purpose:** Both reduce experiences of need and injustice on an individual level (negative) while also creating structures that ensure the longevity of equity in legal and economic sectors (positive)

➔ **Stage 3:** Positive Peace
   ◆ **Purpose:** Continue the healing process begun in Stage 1, while also building upon the peace infrastructure developments brought about in Stage 2
Stage 1: Overview

➔ Track-3 Diplomacy
  ◆ Feminist Perspectives
  ◆ Peace Education
  ◆ Nonviolence

➔ Third-Party Settlement
  ◆ Functionalism/International Law
  ◆ Human Rights
  ◆ Reconciliation
Stage 1: Track-3 Diplomacy

➔ **Meaning:** Utilizes grassroots efforts, transforms unjust situation, and builds cooperative social relationships

➔ **How to Implement:**

◆ **Subtools:**
  - Feminist Perspectives
  - Peace Education
  - Nonviolence

➔ **Importance of the Tool:** Address the culture of violence and motivate a vision for peace

Source: HuffPost
Stage 1: Peaceful Settlement/ Third-Party Involvement

➔ **Meaning:** Involvement of a third party to provide solutions for conflicts and disagreement between opposing groups

➔ **How to Implement**
  ◆ Subtools
    ● Functionalism/International Law
    ● Human Rights
    ● Reconciliation

➔ **Importance of the Tool:** Establish a system for future peacebuilding efforts and facilitate discussion and understanding
Stage 2: Overview

➔ Rule of Law
➔ Democratization
➔ Arms Control/ Disarmament
➔ Sustainable Development

Farabundo Martí National Liberation (31)
Nationalist Republican Alliance (28)
Grand Alliance for National Unity (10)
National Coalition (7)
Christian Democratic (1)
Democratic Change (1)
Independent (1)
Stage 2: Arms Control/Disarmament

➔ Meaning: Gangs, the government, and security forces will lay down all their weapons through incremental general and complete disarmament

➔ How to Implement:
- NGOs and IGOs will be involved in encouraging gang members
- Government and security forces cut back on various forms of weaponry incrementally
  - Starting with the most damaging weapons (e.g. assault weapons)
  - Ending with smaller arms

➔ Importance of the Tool: Weapons are used in many gang conflicts, so the elimination of them amongst gangs will create a negative peace that allows for inter-gang relations to be improved. The same is true for relations between the government and gangs
Stage 2: Sustainable Development

➔ **Meaning:** Developing the economy in a way that takes the effect on the environment, both now and in the future, into account.

➔ **How to Implement:**
  ◆ Create policy regulating industrial waste dumped into water
  ◆ Privatize trash disposal services
  ◆ Diversify economic investments in new industries and creative endeavors
  ◆ Implement tax policies that create a more egalitarian wealth situation

➔ **Importance of the Tool:** By protecting the environment, the current population, as well as future generations, will be able to live more healthily and better utilize domestic resources. Additionally, diversifying the opportunities within the economic sector will help El Salvador assert itself as an active participant in the international community and work to eliminate poverty. Thus, this tool confronts both health and economic issues.
Stage 2: Rule of Law

➔ **Meaning:** Laws will be applied equivalently to all individuals and will be enforced in accordance with how they are written

➔ **How to implement:**
  - Strengthen aspects of the Salvadoran government focused on ethics reviews
  - Incorporate IGOs into the process of hearing ethics complaints
  - Increase punishments for soliciting and/or receiving bribes
  - Tighten federal spending regulations

➔ **Importance of tool:** An increased focus on the rule of law in El Salvador will combat corruption in the police force, the judiciary, and in the legislative branch. It will also ensure that women are not punished for having miscarriages due to laws prohibiting abortions.
Stage 2: Democratization

➔ **Meaning:** Control of the government will be held by a representative sample of the population, including members of indigenous people groups and women.

➔ **How to implement:**

- Require a portion of each group’s ballot to be from underrepresented groups
- Shorten the election cycle for representatives to two years
- Increase the strength of an internal ethics board
- Ensure that elections are truly free and fair

➔ **Importance of tool:** This tool ensures that the laws in place are representative of the needs of the people. By focusing on having a more responsive and thus more accountable government, there will hopefully be less corruption within the government.
Stage 3: Overview

➔ Post-Conflict Peacebuilding
➔ Reconciliation
Stage 3: Reconciliation

➔ **Meaning:** In order to move forward and sustainably dismantle gang culture, there must be apologies, acknowledgement of wrongdoings, forgiveness, a resumption of constructive relationships, and rebuilding trust over time.

➔ **How to Implement:**
   - Mediated dialogues between gangs, gangs-government, and gangs-community moderated jointly by NGOs and the Catholic Church.
   - Hold gangs accountable for the violence they have committed through legal recourse.

➔ **Importance of the Tool:** Salvadoran society needs to heal from decades of gang violence so that gang members can be reintegrated and moved out of/legitimize the illegitimate economy.
Stage 3: Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

➔ **Meaning:** To reinforce restorative justice means of conflict resolution and encourage healing following the gang violence that has plagued Salvadoran society

➔ **How to Implement:**

◆ Invest in community organizations and local economies

◆ NGOs and IGOs create programming for children to have safe spaces and alternative identity-building memberships available
  ● e.g. sports teams, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.

◆ Both an aspect of continued Track-III efforts to improve cross-group understandings and a necessary stage to cultivate these understands after they have been established

➔ **Importance of the Tool:** While El Salvador needs to heal from the pervasive culture of violence that has terrorized their country for decades, this must also be done in a manner that continues to dismantle the legitimacy of retributive justice
Critiques:
Every rose has its thorns...
Kailea: **Arms Control:** Starting process will need a deeper level of trust between groups to be initiated than what actually occurs.

Cecilia: **Perspective:** As students at a liberal arts institution in the US, we have a privileged, Western point of view with which we analyze the problems of El Salvador and construct solutions.

Khue: **Reconciliation between civilians and gangs:** It is difficult to persuade civilians, especially those who have family members or friends killed by gangs, to forgive prior gang members and accept them as co-workers in the workplace or as friends or neighbors in daily lives. This remained anger, hatred, and fear are barriers to the rehabilitation of gang members.

Ben: **Possible Breakdown of Democracy:** How can we keep rule by the people from turning into majoritarianism? We can’t.

Matt: **Arms Control:** Gangs will be hesitant to disarm and right wing political powers may attempt to aid the gangs with arms in order to destabilize peacebuilding efforts.