

Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)

MS13

OVERVIEW

AS OF DECEMBER 2025

Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) is a gang that formed in Los Angeles, California, in the 1980s to offer protection from rival gangs to Salvadorans fleeing the Salvadoran civil war. MS-13's membership has expanded to include migrants fleeing from Guatemala and Honduras to the United States. MS-13 operates mainly in North and Central America after some Los Angeles-based members were deported to Central American countries in the 1990s and internationalized the gang.

MS-13 operates as loosely organized cells or "cliques," some of which may report to a "program" leader who oversees the gang's activity in a geographic region. The level of command and control that more senior leaders have over cliques varies by region and country, with US-based cliques generally remaining diffuse and El Salvador-based cliques maintaining more connectivity.

Operating Area

Operates mainly in the United States, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras; also has members in Belize, Costa Rica, Italy, Mexico, and Spain

Members

Probably tens of thousands

Tactics And Targets

MS-13 engages in acts of violence, extortion, drug trafficking, human smuggling, and murders throughout the countries where it operates. The group exerts territorial control over local populations in parts of El Salvador. MS-13 has diversified its criminal activity and its investments in noncriminal enterprises, which include taxis in El Salvador and Honduras; and funeral homes, gas stations, houses, hospitals, and recycling centers in Honduras. The group uses nicknames, tattoos, and satanic altars in gang-related activities.

Terrorist Group Designation

In February 2025, the US State Department designated MS-13 as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and Specially Designated Global Terrorist. In October 2012, MS-13 was the first transnational gang to be designated as a Transnational Criminal Organization by the US Treasury Department.



Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) *(continued)*

KEY LEADERS



Yulan Adonay Archaga Carias

a.k.a. "El Porky"

MS-13 leader for Honduras; directs drug trafficking, kidnapping, money laundering, and murders



Cesar Antonio Lopez Larios or Cesar Humberto Lopez Larios

a.k.a. "El Grenas" or "Oso"

Operated as an MS-13 leader in the United States, Guatemala, and Mexico; oversaw drug trafficking, money laundering, and murders; deported from United States to El Salvador in March 2025

NOTABLE ATTACKS

15 June 2015

San Salvador, El Salvador

MS-13 members use IEDs to attack three Salvadoran Government targets, resulting in no casualties.

Early 2012 to mid-2014

El Salvador

MS-13 and rival gang Barrio-18 reach a truce in 2012; however, conflict continues between the gangs, causing the murder rate in El Salvador to spike to 30 per day in August 2013, with 6,700 total killed in 2013. The truce collapses by the middle of 2014.

23 December 2004

San Pedro Sula, Cortes, Honduras

MS-13 members open fire on a bus, killing 28 people in the group's most deadly attack to date.

