

Barrio 18



OVERVIEW

AS OF JANUARY 2026

Barrio 18, a.k.a. 18th Street in the United States, is one of the most violent criminal gangs in the Western Hemisphere and has attacked security personnel and public officials in Central American countries. It was formed as a street gang in Los Angeles, California, by Mexican immigrants in the late 1950s. Barrio 18 began to recruit members of other nationalities in the 1980s, and the gang expanded internationally after many of its members were deported from Los Angeles to Central American countries in the 1990s. Barrio 18 mostly operates as loosely organized cells or “cliques,” some of which report to a “program” leader who oversees the gang’s activity in a region. Imprisoned Barrio 18 leaders often continue to coordinate the gang’s activities while in custody.

Operating Area

Primarily in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and the United States; is also present in Canada, Italy, and Spain

Members

Probably tens of thousands

Tactics And Targets

Barrio 18 engages in drug trafficking, human smuggling, and acts of violence, including murders. It exerts control over local populations through extortion and intimidation. Barrio 18 often fights with MS-13 for operating space, and it maintains a close relationship with the Mexican Mafia prison gang.

Terrorist Group Designation

The US State Department designated Barrio 18 a foreign terrorist organization and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity in September 2025.



Barrio 18 *(continued)*

KEY LEADERS



Carlos Lechuga Mojica [DETAINED]

a.k.a. El Viejo Lin

Barrio 18 leader; detained in El Salvador



Aldo Dupie Ochoa Mejía [DETAINED]

a.k.a. El Lobo

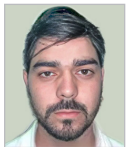
Barrio 18 leader; detained in Guatemala



Angel Haroldo Cu Mejicanos [DETAINED]

a.k.a. El Inquieto

Barrio 18 leader and close associate of El Lobo; detained in Guatemala



Jesus Valmana Cruz [DETAINED]

a.k.a. El Extranjero

Financial facilitator and leader; detained in Honduras



Barrio 18 *(continued)*

NOTABLE ATTACKS

17 January 2026

Guatemala

Guatemala declares a state of emergency after Barrio 18 members kill at least eight police officers, take dozens of hostages, riot in three prisons, and attack law enforcement throughout the country.

25–27 March 2022

El Salvador

Barrio 18 and MS-13 members kill 92 people during three days of violence in response to the El Salvadorian Government's crackdown on gangs.

9–11 November 2021

El Salvador

Barrio 18 and MS-13 members kill 46 people during three days of violence.

2013

El Salvador

Throughout 2013, violence between Barrio 18 and MS-13 causes 6,700 deaths throughout El Salvador.

