



# Integrated Country Strategy

---

---

**EL SALVADOR**

**FOR PUBLIC RELEASE**

Originally Approved: March 21, 2022  
Reviewed and Updated: April 21, 2023

**Table of Contents**

- 1. Chief of Mission Priorities 3
- 2. Mission Strategic Framework 6
- 3. Mission Goals and Objectives 8
- 4. Management Objective 22

## 1. Chief of Mission Priorities

We have no higher duty than the protection of American citizens, and that is our top priority. Beyond that, we face two overriding challenges in El Salvador: restoring faith in democracy and promoting growth so Salvadorans need not migrate.

### **Democracy**

Over three decades since the end of their civil war, Salvadorans watched corruption and misgovernance stymie growth and allow brutal criminal gangs to proliferate. Through it all, too many Salvadorans headed north – legally or otherwise – weakening the labor force and leaving behind too many people dependent on remittances.

By 2019 Salvadorans had enough. Rejecting what they called “the same ones as always,” they elected an iconoclastic politician who promised change in a way that resonated, especially with the young. He was swiftly rewarded with a supermajority in the legislature. Backed by that majority, President Nayib Bukele then took control of the judiciary. By May 2021, power in El Salvador was concentrated in the hands of its president.

Since then, President Bukele has been on a whirlwind effort to remake El Salvador. He offers a social media-savvy vision of El Salvador as a futuristic mecca for surfers and cryptocurrency aficionados which he pairs with old-fashioned economic subsidies. In 2022, he added iron-fisted policing that freed Salvadorans from the gangs at the price of due process of law. So far, that is a price the great majority of Salvadorans seem happy to pay. Along the way, President Bukele has reduced the transparency of government. Given his party’s legislative majority and control of the judiciary, there are no checks and balances and little accountability. For those who do not share President Bukele’s vision, there is the worry that opposition could bring government harassment or worse. He has declared he will run for a second five-year term in 2024, despite an apparent prohibition on immediate reelection in the Salvadoran constitution.

Originally Approved: March 21, 2022  
Reviewed and Updated: April 21, 2023

Democracy, whatever its past failings here, remains the best guarantee of individual liberty and broad-based economic growth, and that is the case we must make to the Salvadoran people. Polling shows they regard the United States as their most important international partner. Trade, remittances, and three million Salvadorans in the United States mean we continue to have influence. We will use that to advocate for democratic values including transparency, separation of powers, free and fair elections, and respect for human rights such as freedom of speech. We will also support effective public security policies that include due process of law and more attention to the causes of crime and gangs. We will strengthen existing partnerships with Salvadoran institutions to address shared challenges such as narcotics trafficking, human smuggling, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and international peacekeeping. We will promote trust between the United States and El Salvador and partnership on regional and international issues.

### **Economy**

El Salvador faces high external debt (a problem President Bukele inherited and has not yet solved) and sluggish growth. Many Salvadorans are trapped in poverty, and some 70 percent of jobs are informal. Access to basic services such as clean water remains a problem for many. Infrastructure is inadequate. Salvadorans are vulnerable to natural disasters and the effects of climate change, exacerbated by the need for better environmental policies. Public education is severely lacking. Women face high levels of gender-based violence and have fewer economic opportunities than men. The investment climate suffers from uncertainty stemming in part from questions of public finance as well as weakness in rule of law, opacity, and haste in both economic policymaking and government regulation.

We will support prosperity by encouraging entrepreneurship, particularly among women; promoting sustainable environmental policies; and urging changes that will bring an improved investment climate. We will encourage investment in El Salvador and support micro, small, and medium enterprises in growing their businesses and creating jobs. We will help keep Salvadoran children in school and out of gangs and improve school quality through investing in

Originally Approved: March 21, 2022

Reviewed and Updated: April 21, 2023

teachers. We will also support legal pathways for Salvadorans to work in the United States such as the H-2 visa program.

We will encourage regional integration and facilitation of customs procedures to make it easier for Salvadorans to export via neighboring countries. We will promote stable and sustainable fiscal policies, government transparency, and a more deliberate approach to regulation, all of which will improve the investment climate.

El Salvador's vulnerability to natural disasters combined with chronic poverty make it imperative that we have a robust humanitarian assistance program both to alleviate suffering and to prepare first responders and communities for the next earthquake or hurricane. We must be ready to coordinate large-scale disaster relief response when the moment comes, as it will.

### **Conclusion**

The Salvadoran people were not wrong to want dramatic political change, but they may have conflated poor governance and bad economics with democracy and free markets. Their public security problems were not the fault of due process of law but of flawed criminal justice institutions. Their poverty was not the result of old-school notions of public finance but of practices that discouraged investment and job creation and rewarded corruption. As a friend and partner, the United States should respectfully encourage Salvadorans to seek the change they need within a context that will yield better results for El Salvador and at the same time preserve our historically strong bilateral ties.

## 2. Mission Strategic Framework

**Mission Goal 1:** Strengthen democracy characterized by transparency, separation of powers, free and fair elections, and respect for human rights such as freedom of speech.

- **Mission Objective 1.1:** Defend democratic institutions and elections while maintaining the ability of competing voices to challenge ideas and present alternate views.
- **Mission Objective 1.2:** Support the ability of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media, and relevant government institutions to effectively identify, prevent, document, and sanction corruption.
- **Mission Objective 1.3:** Support the government's ability to provide effective public services to its citizens.

**Mission Goal 2:** Encourage public security and the rule of law.

- **Mission Objective 2.1:** Foster sustainable citizen security, particularly for marginalized communities.
- **Mission Objective 2.2:** Promote the rule of law and equal access to justice.
- **Mission Objective 2.3:** Enhance bilateral, regional, and international law enforcement coordination; efforts to combat transnational crime organizations (TCOs); and efforts to detect and deter malafide travel to the United States.

**Mission Goal 3:** Support prosperity through entrepreneurship, particularly among women; sustainable environmental policies; and an improved investment climate.

- **Mission Objective 3.1:** El Salvador develops a more predictable regulatory and business environment and advances regional customs integration to facilitate trade and attract investment.
- **Mission Objective 3.2:** El Salvador promotes inclusive development of its human capital and strengthens its resilience and capacity to face external challenges.

**Mission Goal 4:** Promote trust between the United States and El Salvador and partnerships on regional and international issues.

- **Mission Objective 4.1:** Build trust between the United States and El Salvador at the national and subnational level.
- **Mission Objective 4.2:** Build and promote partnerships between the United States and El Salvador on regional and international issues.

**Management Objective 1:** The embassy maintains a robust operating platform for a growing mission while increasing efficiency; protecting its people and resources; building a diverse and equitable workforce; and controlling operating costs.

### 3. Mission Goals and Objectives

**Mission Goal 1** | Strengthen democracy characterized by transparency, separation of powers, free and fair elections, and respect for human rights such as freedom of speech.

**Description** | The consolidation of power in the hands of one political party has reduced the efficacy of the traditional system of checks and balances. As a result, we must work with Salvadorans to safeguard democratic institutions and elections and maintain the ability of competing voices to challenge ideas and present alternate views. We will support the ability of government agencies and NGOs to effectively identify, prevent, document, and sanction corruption. We also will support the Salvadoran government's ability to provide effective public services to its citizens in alignment with U.S. government objectives to reduce irregular migration.



**Objective 1.1** | Defend democratic institutions and elections while maintaining the ability of competing voices to challenge ideas and present alternate views

- **Justification** | The operational space available to non-governmental organizations and independent media in El Salvador is challenged by the strength of a dominant, single political party. We will focus on working with Salvadorans to maintain the current space and expand where possible. We will protect democratic institutions, promote democratic values and norms, and support civic space for public debate and dialogue. El Salvador will hold presidential, legislative assembly, municipal, and Parlamento Centroamericano (PARLACEN) elections in 2024. We will promote civic and voter engagement in these elections, and assist government entities to implement free, fair, and inclusive elections. We will support independent domestic and international efforts to monitor these elections, while advancing civic education efforts.
- **Linkages** | NSS; RCS Pillar II; JSP Goal 3; JRS Goal 1; USAID CDCS DO3.
- **Risks** | Combined imbalance of political power erodes traditional checks and balances; and limits the role of NGOs and independent media.

**Objective 1.2** | Support the ability of NGOs, media, and relevant government institutions to effectively identify, prevent, document, and sanction corruption.

- **Justification** | Ongoing corruption and impunity undermines public faith in governing institutions and the rule of law, essential components of a functioning democracy. Therefore, we will support independent oversight institutions, regulators, and committed Government of El Salvador ministries in efforts to prevent and sanction corruption. We will also support efforts that expand the technical and organizational capacity of NGOs and independent media to detect, deter, expose, or otherwise combat corruption and impunity.
- **Linkages** | NSS; RCS Pillar II; JSP Goal 3; JRS Goal 1; CDCS DO3.
- **Risks** | Entrenched interests may prevent anti-corruption efforts. Reduced transparency and independence of oversight bodies prevents rigorous oversight of government operations. Given consolidated, single-party governance, traditional U.S. interest in anti-corruption initiatives could be viewed through a political lens.

**Objective 1.3** | Support the government's ability to provide effective public services to its citizens.

- **Justification** | Much of El Salvador's population does not receive effective, basic public services. These problems may include, but are not limited to, lack of access to clean water, affordable and safe housing, and quality healthcare, issues which are particularly acute outside of the country's urban centers. This lack of public services undermines faith in democracy, limits economic growth, and is a contributing factor that drives irregular migration towards the United States. We will work to ameliorate these concerns through initiatives, especially at the municipal level, to improve the quality of services while ensuring equal access to them, especially for women, who are disproportionately affected. These initiatives will take place in conjunction with efforts to strengthen governance at the national and municipal level through projects designed to improve the quality and transparency of public procurement and public financial management systems.
- **Linkages** | NSS; RCS Pillar II; JSP Goal 3; JRS Goal 1, GNDR-3; CDCS DO3.
- **Risks** | A government unable to provide effective public services to its citizens leads to an erosion of public confidence in its government and increased migration. Absent basic services, citizens are constrained in their ability to pursue education and engage in economic activity.

**Mission Goal 2 | Encourage public security and the rule of law.**

**Description |** In an effort to reduce the influence of violent gangs, the Bukele administration suspended due process rights and engaged in mass arrests following a spate of homicides in March 2022. Legislative reforms have codified permanently into the law lengthy pretrial detention times and more severe penalties for criminal association. Although the effort has produced a sharp decrease in homicides, it presents serious civil liberty concerns and creates a vacuum which could be filled by other criminal actors absent rigorous social programs to provide alternatives. Converting security gains to real security and safety improvements, for Salvadorans and the approximately 120,000 U.S. citizens in the country at any one time, is key to building a functioning society and to attracting foreign investment. This can be accomplished by professionalizing security agencies; restoring due process; building community resilience; and ensuring transparent, equitable access to justice. In addition, law enforcement cooperation is critical to combating transnational criminal operations that operate in both the United States and El Salvador, while hiding behind international borders.

Originally Approved: March 21, 2022  
Reviewed and Updated: April 21, 2023

**Objective 2.1 | Foster sustainable citizen security, particularly for marginalized communities.**

- **Justification |** The State of Exception has reduced gang violence and extortion in El Salvador, and this presents an opportunity to build up communities to ensure the criminal vacuum isn't exploited by other actors. As the State of Exception continues into its second year with little transparency on arrests and judicial processes and unprecedented power in the hands of law enforcement without checks and balances, this dynamic could further erode trust in security officials, especially among vulnerable populations. There is an opportunity to support the Government of El Salvador in improving partnerships between communities and citizen security agencies to promote long-term sustainable security for the Salvadorans and U.S. citizens in the country. Work in communities to build resilience and protective factors will be key to preventing a resurgence of crime.
- **Linkages |** NSS; RCS Pillars III, IV, and V; JSP SO 1.4; JRS Goal 3, Bureau Objective 3.2; USAID CDCS DO1; CA FBS Goal 1.
- **Risks |** Long-term extensions to the State of Exception and its resulting suspension of due process rights could result in increased human rights violations. Lack of transparency and accountability in law enforcement erodes citizen confidence in police, municipalities, and other actors. Low community resilience can lead to victimization of marginalized groups and participation in crime and violence by at-risk youth. The root causes of irregular migration and willing participation in gang violence and/or other criminal activity are similar. Insufficient social services to mitigate these root causes of irregular migration can produce further insecurity.

**Objective 2.2 | Promote the rule of law and equal access to justice.**

- **Justification |** Historic corruption and inequity has eroded the confidence of the public in Salvadoran governance and justice. Increasing the competency of the Government of El Salvador to deliver modern, impartial, human-centered justice will rebuild that confidence and lead to a more just, secure, and prosperous society. Because historically marginalized communities are often re-traumatized in the justice process, improving access to justice, implementing best practices for working with these groups, and providing higher quality victim services will lead to fewer individuals from marginalized groups abandoning the justice process.
- **Linkages |** NSS; RCS Pillars II, IV, and V; JSP Goal 3; JRS Goal 1, Bureau Objective 1.3, USAID CDCS DO1.
- **Risks |** Lack of judicial independence could translate into use of prosecutorial powers against organized opposition and/or shielding administration officials from prosecution and/or an erosion of transparency, due process, and impartiality in the justice system. Resulting mistrust of law enforcement bodies could discourage citizens from reporting crimes, including violent crimes.

**Objective 2.3** | Enhance bilateral, regional, and international law enforcement coordination; efforts to combat transnational crime organizations (TCOs); and efforts to detect and deter malafide travel to the United States.

- **Justification** | TCOs use national borders to hide their illicit activities. Violent gang members, drug traffickers, human smugglers and traffickers, and other malafide actors create networks that help them hide from law enforcement and seek out new victims in other countries. Cooperation between agencies of multiple governments allows information sharing, investigation, and prosecution that disrupts activities that harm both countries' security. El Salvador has proven itself a capable partner by making large interdictions of narcotics far offshore with U.S. support. Increased collaboration will expand this success to other modes of criminal activity.
- **Linkages** | NSS; RCS Pillars II, IV, and V; JSP Goal 3; JRS Goal 1; USAID CDCS DO1; CA FBS Goal 3.2.
- **Risks** | The Government of El Salvador reduces its support for pursuing and prosecuting violent and illicit actors with nexus to the United States. Criminal actors seek to exploit the space left open by the dissolution of the gangs' criminal networks.

**Mission Goal 3** | Support prosperity through entrepreneurship and job creation; sustainable environmental policies; an improved investment climate, and support of the National Gender Strategy.

**Description** | El Salvador has the second slowest economic growth rate in Central America, averaging 1.9 percent per year for the past 15 years. El Salvador has also struggled to attract foreign direct investment. Lack of economic opportunity is a major driver of irregular migration and is reflected in El Salvador's heavy dependence on remittances, which eclipsed 25 percent of GDP in 2022. An unpredictable regulatory environment, high and unsustainable levels of debt, corruption, trade barriers, weak digital infrastructure, extreme climate events, and an underdeveloped workforce, including pay disparities and other discrimination against women, are all major factors that hamper El Salvador's economic growth. We will support the adoption and implementation of inclusive growth-friendly economic policies in El Salvador to remove the obstacles that impede entrepreneurship, foreign investment, regional integration, and job creation. We will strengthen El Salvador's human capital and increase educational outcomes that link citizens to greater economic opportunities. The reduction or removal of trade frictions and other inefficiencies, coupled with regional customs integration will lead directly to economic growth and job expansion. Lastly, we will support environmental priorities and resilience at the national, municipal, and local levels to mitigate against external shocks.

Originally Approved: March 21, 2022  
Reviewed and Updated: April 21, 2023



**Objective 3.1** | El Salvador develops a more predictable regulatory and business environment and advances regional customs integration to facilitate trade and attract investment.

- **Justification** | To increase economic opportunities for its citizens, the Government of El Salvador will need to work collaboratively and transparently with the private sector to facilitate commerce and implement fiscal and regulatory incentives that will attract potential job-creating investments.
- **Linkages** | U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration, Pillar 1 and Central America Forward; Regional Strategy Goal 4; JSP Strategic Objectives 2.1 and 2.2
- **Risks** | Failure to prioritize consulting with the private sector, attracting investment, improving the enabling environment, and following the rule of law will limit economic opportunities and private investment, increasing El Salvador's overdependence on remittances and further driving irregular migration. Hastily enacted measures could undermine trade and investment or full integration into the regional customs union.

**Objective 3.2** | El Salvador promotes inclusive development of its human capital and strengthens its resilience and capacity to face external challenges.

- **Justification** | El Salvador needs a highly skilled, gender-diverse workforce with strong technical expertise and critical life skills, which requires access to quality primary, secondary, and tertiary education. If likely migrants obtain the skills and education needed to participate in the formal economy and El Salvador is better prepared against external shocks – natural or man-made – the country will grow and prosper, and the root causes of irregular migration will be reduced.
- **Linkages** | U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration, Pillar 1; JRS Goal 4; JSP Strategic Objective 2.2; CA FBS Goal 3.
- **Risks** | Potential for vacuums in funding and influence could open opportunities for less credible actors and partners to pursue their self-interests in El Salvador. Failure to provide tools needed for Salvadorans to grow and thrive economically could increase incentives for criminal activity and irregular migration.

**Mission Goal 4** | Promote trust between the United States and El Salvador and partnerships on regional and international issues.

**Description** | The United States and El Salvador have a unique history, and the bilateral relationship has been one of the strongest in the region since the Salvadoran Civil War that ended with the 1992 Peace Accords. Despite the robust economic, political, social, and military ties between our two countries, the bilateral relationship has been challenged in recent years by internal and external factors. We seek to build strong partnerships to shape and influence the strategic environment and to solve shared challenges. To achieve this end, we will seek greater levels of cooperation on areas of mutual shared interests. Focusing on shared areas of interest and challenges are the cornerstone to building strong partnerships. Several shared challenges include climate and energy security; pandemic and biodefense; food insecurity; transnational organized crime; and a secure cyberspace.

**Objective 4.1** | Build trust between the United States and El Salvador at the national and subnational level.

- **Justification** | The United States and El Salvador can reduce their vulnerability to external influence and promote a more stable and prosperous future for both countries by leveraging inclusive partnerships to support rules-based order and to advance democracy and human rights.
- **Linkages** | NSS; RCS Pillars I and III; JRS Goal 1 & 6; CA FBS Goal 3.
- **Risks** | Differing views on the best way to achieve shared goals could reduce cooperation in the face of mutual challenges.

**Objective 4.2** | Build and promote partnerships between the United States and El Salvador on regional and international issues.

- **Justification** | El Salvador is an influential country in Central America, and a stable and prosperous El Salvador will contribute to regional prosperity. Capacity building in humanitarian response and cybersecurity helps counter malign external influence and enhance regional cooperation by strengthening governance, protecting critical infrastructure, and promoting economic stability.
- **Linkages** | NSS; RCS Pillar I; JRS Goal 1 & 6
- **Risks** | Competing influences cause El Salvador to take for granted strong U.S. relations and trade ties, subjugating long-term interests for short-term rewards while moving away from promoting our shared values internationally.

## 4. Management Objective

**Management Objective 1** | The embassy maintains a robust operating platform for a growing mission while increasing efficiency; protecting its people and resources; building a diverse and equitable workforce; and controlling operating costs.

- **Justification** | To better serve the embassy's needs and provide optimal customer service, the embassy must build a diverse and dynamic workforce, use funding judiciously, and ensure all personnel and assets are properly protected.
- **Linkages** | JSP Objectives 4.1 and 4.3, JRS Cross-Cutting Management Objective.
- **Risks** | Failure to achieve this objective could result in loss of life or bodily harm to mission members, squandered resources, and degradation of our ability to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives. The embassy will mitigate this risk by working closely with OBO to ensure compound and residence physical security upgrades are prioritized and completed. The embassy will promote a culture of preparedness and inclusiveness to ensure the embassy has the best available workforce which is able to respond in a crisis.