

## **EL SALVADOR**

### **Indigenous Peoples**

Activity: 1959-2020

#### **General notes**

NA

#### **Movement start and end dates**

- The indigenous peoples of El Salvador make up about ten percent of the nation. Most belong to the Nahuatl-Pipil tribe, which is native to the Sonsonate, Ahuachapán, La Libertad, and Santa Ana states in the southwest region of the country. Though a small portion of indigenous people speak Nahuatl and maintain cultural traditions such as lifestyles, traditional dress, etc., most only speak Spanish and have abandoned indigenous traditions (Minority Rights Group International). Thus, as Cultural Survival writes, “A commonly held notion...is that there are no longer any Indians in the country; ...that indigenous culture has been abandoned, except for a few extremely threadbare and insignificant pockets in remote, rural areas” (Cultural Survival 1989). While a large portion of the indigenous peoples of El Salvador have integrated themselves into Salvadorian society, they remain discriminated politically and economically and thus have no say in the redistribution of traditional lands or the allocation of natural resources (Minorities at Risk).
- According to Minority Rights Group International, uprisings over land allocation took place in the 19th and 20th century. A large uprising in 1932 resulted in government-sponsored massacres, named La Matanza, which killed between 35,000-50,000 people. A subsequent massacre in 1983, La Hojas, killed 74 indigenous people. Today, despite laws against discrimination in El Salvador, indigenous people remain the poorest group of people in El Salvador. They have been relegated to menial jobs such as harvesting coffee and sugar cane, industries that have decreased over the years. Minority Rights Group International reports that 78 percent of indigenous peoples are illiterate, as most do not have access to basic services such as education. Only five percent own land in comparison to the 95 percent landowners amongst non-indigenous people. A key grievance remains the lack of formal recognition of indigenous communities, histories, and cultures (Minorities at Risk Project).
- The indigenous peoples of El Salvador, led by the organization Asociación Nacional de Indígenas de El Salvador (ANIS), aim to revive indigenous language and cultures. ANIS was founded in 1959. The National Coordinating Council of Salvadoran Indigenous Coordination Council (CCNIS) was subsequently founded in 1994. CCNIS aims to defend indigenous rights and preserve cultural identity. Though the indigenous people have protested in the early 1900s, Cultural Survival notes that, since the 1932 massacre, “The Indians of El Salvador went underground, for decades denying their existence to the outside world and hiding their identity” (Cultural Survival 1989). No instances of protest were found between 1932 and 1959 in Keesing’s. Thus, the start of the movement is coded as 1959 when ANIS was formed. The movement is coded as ongoing since both ANIS and CCNIS remained active as of 2020 (Orellana 2020; Chapin 1989; MAR; MRGI; WiserEarth n.d.). [start date: 1959; end date: ongoing]

#### **Dominant claim**

- The most prominent organizations representing the indigenous interests are the Asociación Nacional de Indígenas de El Salvador (ANIS) and the Consejo Coordinador Nacional Indígena Salvadoreño (CCNIS). Their goals, as of all other indigenous organizations, includes the recognition of indigenous land under Salvadoran law (Patrick 2004), the revival of indigenous

customs and language, the inclusion of indigenous peoples into national politics and the “recognition of the existence of their communities and their distinct histories, culture and needs” (Minorities at Risk Project). While the indigenous claim is predominantly cultural, there are also claims to “autonomy or even sovereignty within their ancestral territories” (Tilley 2005: 59). [1959-2020: autonomy claim]

### **Independence claims**

- Tilley (2005: 19) reports that some tribes claimed “sovereignty within their ancestral territories”. However, ‘sovereignty’ should not be seen as internationally recognized statehood in this context, but as extended autonomy over ancestral lands (see Tilley 2005: 50, 104). [no independence claim]

### **Irredentist claims**

NA

### **Claimed territory**

- The Indigenous Peoples have sought to improve their land rights and political autonomy for their ancestral territories in El Salvador. These territories are approximately congruent with GeoEPR’s settlement polygons for the indigenous peoples in El Salvador located in the provinces of Sonsoatem, Ahuachapan, La Libertad, and Santa Ana. Therefore, we code this claim territory based on the group’s settlement area according to GeoEPR.

### **Sovereignty declarations**

NA

### **Separatist armed conflict**

- The above-mentioned 1983 massacre of 74 indigenous people is not coded as low-level violence as this was an instance of one-sided violence (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. 1993). All other years are coded as NVIOLSD too as, despite some violence, deaths do not rise above 25 deaths a year. [NVIOLSD]

### **Historical context**

- In 1881 and 1882, the Spanish colonial government issued several decree laws that abolished communal lands and recognized only private property. As a consequence, land was concentrated in the hands of a small, Spanish-descended landowning elite. The traditional communal land ownership was abolished, leaving a large majority of the indigenous, rural population as landless peasants, forced to work on the plantations (Minority Rights Group International; Patrick 2004).
- The issue of land ownership and the resulting social and economic imbalances also lay at the core of several indigenous uprisings. When the 1920 recession hit the vastly coffee-dependent economy, the situation of the indigenous population deteriorated. Violence escalated in 1932, when ladino landholders were attacked by rural campesinos and indigenous people and approximately 35 ladinos were killed. The upheaval, orchestrated by communist forces, was brutally crushed by Salvadoran state forces and paramilitary troops. In a systematic act of killing

(‘La Matanza’), between 15,000 and 50,000 people were killed (Minority Rights Group International; Chapin 1989).

- The consequences for the indigenous population were devastating. The economic consequence of La Matanza was an additional transfer of land from indigenous people to the Ladinos. Politically, the events of La Matanza are at the roots of social erasure of the indigenous population that created the myth of the indigenous “extinction”, according to which indigenous peoples, deterred from exposing their identity, adopted the mainstream language and culture (Tilley 2005). Contributing to this process of social erasure was the 1945 and 1950 elimination of racial notations from the civil registry (Ching and Tilley 1998) that led the Salvadoran legislature declare that “in our country indigenous populations do not exist” (Tilley 2005: 20). [1950: cultural rights restriction]

### **Concessions and restrictions**

- Although the state policy towards indigenous peoples has undergone some slight changes in the 1990s, it remains one of social and political neglect. In 1991, the government established CONCULTURA (Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y el Arte) in order to promote, rediscover and revive the country’s indigenous origins. In 1994, CONCULTURA established an Indigenous Affairs Office and a Centre for Cultural Revival to emphasize its revivalist efforts. However, according to Tilley (2002: 535), these initiatives were mostly “rhetoric and token gestures” as the government continued to follow a “no Indians” policy. Symptomatic in this regard is also the 1998 initiated program of the Ministry of Education with the support of CONCULTURA and the National Indigenous Salvadorian Coordinating Council (CCNIS) that aimed at revitalizing the Nahuat-Pipil language but, as of 2006, has only been implemented in five schools. Therefore, we do not code a concession.
- In 2011 and 2012, the municipal governments of Izalco and Nahuizalco recognized the rights of self-determination and land ownership of the indigenous inhabitants of these towns (Hernández Moncada 2020). In line with our codebook, we do not code changes in autonomy at the municipal level.
- Mauricio Funes became president of El Salvador in 2009. After this, there were some important changes in the rhetoric around indigenous people. For instance, at the First Indigenous National Congress in 2010, Funes apologized on behalf of the state for the persecution and extermination of indigenous peoples in El Salvador. Moreover, in June 2014, the government amended the constitution to recognize the existence and rights of indigenous people (Minority Rights Group International). Yet, Minority Rights Group International reports that no policies or laws were subsequently adopted that would have implemented the constitutional provision. Therefore, we do not code a concession.

### **Regional autonomy**

NA

### **De facto independence**

NA

### **Major territorial changes**

NA

## EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Indigenous Peoples
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Indigenous peoples
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	9202000

### Power access

- We follow EPR. [1959-1994: discriminated; 1995-2020: powerless]

### Group size

- We follow EPR. [0.1]

### Regional concentration

- According to GeoEPR, El Salvador's indigenous peoples reside scattered across two larger areas in the country's eastern and western part, respectively. This suggests that they cannot be concentrated according to our definition (note that the indigenous peoples make up but 10% of El Salvador's population). Further evidence in this direction comes from Tilley (2005: 62), who states that the indigenous communities of El Salvador are fragmented and "scattered through wooded countryside dominated by ladino towns". [not regionally concentrated]

### Kin

- The respective EPR group (scenario 1:1) is coded as having several kin groups. EPR lists the Maya in both Mexico and Guatemala and the Indigenous Peoples in Honduras. MAR V also provides evidence of "close kindred across a border which does not adjoin its regional base" without giving details where these groups live (though in earlier versions of MAR, the indigenous peoples in El Salvador are coded as having no kin groups). We rely on EPR and code the presence of kin in neighboring countries. [kin in neighboring country]

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