

# El Salvador

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	SLV02002.ZNK
<b>Date:</b>	December 28, 2001
<b>Subject:</b>	El Salvador: Information on Salvadorans Who Return to El Salvador From the United States
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	El Salvador / Crime victims

## Query:

Are Salvadorans who return to El Salvador from the United States targeted by criminals because they are perceived as wealthy?

## Response:

There are a number of indications that Salvadorans returning from the U.S. might be targeted by criminals because of a perception that they are relatively well-off.

In November 1999 a report entitled "The Social and Economic Factors Associated with Violent Crime in El Salvador" was prepared for the World Bank by the Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública at the Universidad Centroamericana (IUDOP/UCA). The study does not specifically mention returnees but does conclude that people of means, including even people with ordinary but steady jobs, are targeted and that "participation in productive activities which generate some kind of economic well-being makes the person more of a target for those committing crimes" (IUDOP November 1999, 89).

One specific group that has been targeted by violent criminals is Salvadorans living in the U.S. or elsewhere abroad who come to visit in El Salvador, according to David Marroquín, crime reporter for La Prensa Gráfica, one of El Salvador's principal daily newspapers. One pattern has been that such visitors are assaulted after leaving the Comalapa international airport south of San Salvador, and while traveling to the homes of relatives or friends when presumably they would be carrying gifts, money and/or goods brought from abroad. Such attacks reportedly have diminished recently, possibly because of heightened security by police on the major roads leading away from the airport. Nonetheless, the U.S. State Department, in a Consular Information Sheet issued in June 2001, continued to warn that travelers with conspicuous amounts of luggage, late-model cars or foreign license plates are particularly vulnerable to random banditry, criminal assault, carjacking and kidnapping, even in the capital city of San Salvador (Marroquín July 2001; US Department of State June 2001).

Also, according to Marroquín, kidnappers and other criminals are known to target people who have relatives living in the U.S. because it is known that such people usually are being sent dollar remittances by their relatives (Marroquín July 2001).

Another group that has been targeted for similar reasons are the so-called encomenderos, entrusted ones, or viajeros, travelers. They are Salvadorans who personally transport goods, documents, money and other items back and forth by commercial passenger flights between the U.S. and El Salvador for a fee, competing relatively successfully with commercial outfits such as Western Union and Fedex by undercutting their rates. Moreover, few Salvadorans trust the Salvadoran postal service. It has been estimated that about a third of remittances arriving in El Salvador are carried by encomenderos. The encomenderos therefore have become targets of violent criminals. La Prensa Gráfica

reported in August 2001 that in the previous year there were a significant number of assaults, robberies and even some murders of encomenderos in the eastern portion of the country alone, a region which has sent substantial numbers of Salvadorans to the United States (LA PRENSA GRAFICA Aug. 2001; NEWSDAY May 1999).

Finally, it should be noted that while the sharp rise in violent crime in the early and mid-1990s has leveled off and rates in some categories have declined somewhat since the 1990s, El Salvador continues to be among the most violent countries in the world and opinion polls show that many Salvadorans continue to view crime as the principal problem in the country. (DIARIO CO LATINO July 2001 and Dec. 2001; LA PRENSA GRAFICA Dec. 2001)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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