

# ACADEMIC GUIDE



Defying the ordinary, building the extraordinary

Committee

Human Rights  
Watch

# HRW

## Junior

### Topic A:

Systematic censorship of international armed conflicts

### Topic B:

Guarantee of human rights to prisoners in El Salvador



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## Welcoming letter

Dear Delegates,

As your chair it is our greatest pleasure to welcome you to this version of MMUN, a place to explore, learn and amplify your knowledge camps in a pedagogic, academic and diplomatic way.

Learning something new and taking risks is what makes a great delegate and what will make your experience the best of all. We hope you explore and dare yourself to be better each day during and after de model, to be brave and to speak up about the designated topics.

As a chair we are excitedly waiting for your arrival, and we anxiously await for the challenges and problems that will be discussed. Finally, we are available for any doubts or help you may need, either academic or not.

We hope your time at MMUN is memorable and you take yourself to limits regarding knowledge, discussion and leadership.

Sincerely,

Laura Castro y Lucas Vázquez

## **Introduction to the commission**

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an international organization that investigates and denounces human rights violations around the world. It is not part of the government, but it has great influence. HRW investigates, documents abuses, and exerts pressure on governments to respect human rights. Although it cannot judge or sanction, its reports and campaigns raise awareness and promote change. It was founded in 1978 as “Helsinki Watch”, where it mainly supervised any form of violation against human rights within any country signed to the Helsinki Accords, which were the ones created to ease the tension between the Soviets and the Western Block post World War II. From particularly emphasizing on matters behind the Iron Curtain, the Human Rights Watch is now responsible for investigating any sort of disruption to basic human rights across the five continents.

Aside from the investigation of massacres or even genocides, the HRW also overlooks government takeovers of media and biased arrests of activists and political opponents. Additionally, it addresses abuses against those prone to discrimination, including women, LGBT individuals, and disabled individuals. The main sources of information for this organization include in-person interviews, however, with time, satellite images have been used to track down village destruction and city blocks.

The HRW conducts fact-finding investigations into human rights abuses and monitors various countries to ensure they comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which outlines fundamental civil, social, and political rights. With these tools, HRW is determined to defend the rights of people on a global scale by pressuring governments responsible to ensure their citizens rights, while also guaranteeing justice to those in vulnerability.

## **Topic Summary**

### **Topic A: Systematic censorship of international armed conflicts**

For over almost a century, censorship has been misused as a way to influence a public's opinion on a certain matter, as well as to maintain control over the course of information. The digitalized era we live in nowadays has made regulations on censorship far more complex because of the responsibility of each nation to ensure that each of its citizens counts with the liberty to freely express themselves, while also guaranteeing the protection of their public. The internet has given way for new threats to emerge, and even though countless policies have been crafted in order to deal with such threats, these seem to deny citizens of their rights to use social media platforms as a source for help. It's because of this that the international community urges to agree upon efficient measures to tackle this problem.

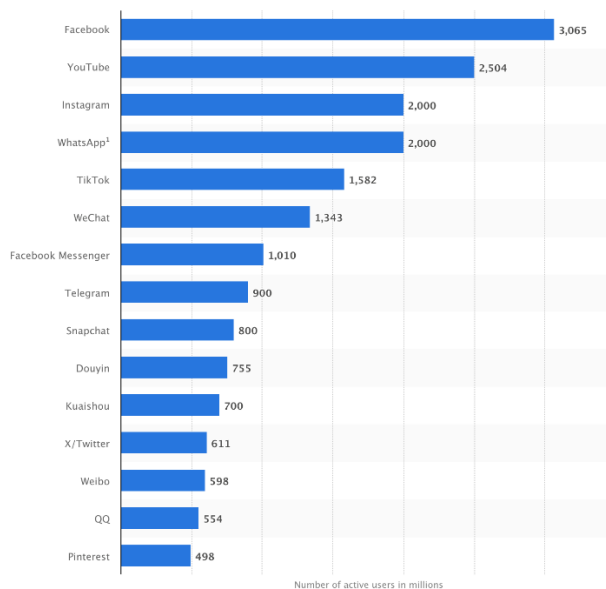
### **Topic B: Guarantee of human rights to prisoners in El Salvador**

For over a decade now, El Salvador has had one of the world's highest incarceration rates, leading to prisons operating at over 148% capacity causing allegations for numerous deaths regarding prisoners, due to violence, lack of access to basic necessities like food or medical attention, harsh conditions, and unsanitary facilities. As a response to criminal group violence the Salvador Government declared a state of emergency which gave them absolute power to detain anyone with suspicious behavior, according to Amnesty International, over 78,000 civilians have been detained without warrant or due processes and international law expect. Though it is not the most specific and rigid detention method it has indeed collaborated to the downfall of violence in the country from 2019 (violence rate of 36%) to 2022 (violence rate of 7.8%) And with the decrease of homicides within 10.000 citizens of 495. International peace seeking agencies are not in favor of this behavior and are seeking for penalization and they call for an end to the state of emergency, independent investigations into abuses, and improved prison conditions.

## TOPIC A: Systematic censorship of international armed conflicts

### Introduction to the topic

Social media is defined as a computer-facilitated form of exchanging ideas, thoughts and information through virtual means and communities. Nowadays, social media has become one of the most predominant networks by which people are allowed to freely express themselves and interact with contents of their liking. Social media can be used for a variety of purposes, from learning simple dances to the allowance of heated political discussions between relevant figures. The following graph showcases the most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2024, ranked by number of monthly active users.



Dixon, S. J. (2024, May 22). *Biggest social media platforms 2024*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

Unfortunately, social media has also evolved into a tool for social oppression and discrimination. In response to the rising conflict between Palestine and Israel, initiated in October of 2023, the HRW published a report in which they conducted an investigation aimed to assess the rates at which Meta (the company responsible for apps like Instagram and Facebook) had been misusing its power to suppress Palestinian support, not only violating their own community guidelines, but also compromising its responsibility to ensure and promote human rights. The report found that out of the 1050 studied cases, 1049 had been unduly suppressed or censored.

## Key Concepts

Power: capacity and ability of someone to influence over others.

Freedom of expression: right to freely, but peacefully, express one's opinion, thoughts and beliefs.

Oppression: prolonged unjust and cruel treatment or exertion of authority by a powerful figure.

Prejudice: preconceived opinion based on subjective beliefs, discarding factual information.

Community: a group of people who share values, beliefs and interests.

Equity: recognition of the particular needs of a specific group in order to level the plainfield and ensure balance.

## Historical Context

The term “censorship” comes from the Latin word *censere*, which means to give one's opinion and to assess. In ancient Rome, censors were in charge of collecting the census and to provide thorough assessments regarding morality and conduct. Even so, censorship has morphed through time, and nowadays is considered an appropriate response to behaviors deemed dangerous or inappropriate based on the judgment of a particular group.

In like manner, propaganda is defined as a type of information, generally biased or misleading, used to incentivize a political cause or movement. Propaganda, as well as censorship, have evolved side by side as a way of subtly exerting power and influence over those who are oblivious of a situation.

One of the first, and strongest, manifestations of censorship and propaganda can be seen from both world wars. During the First World War, various forms of communication, including mail, telegrams, pamphlets, books, news articles, newspapers, plays, photographs, films, and speeches, were subject to censorship or restrictions. This censorship, modeled after the British system, aimed to prevent sensitive information, such as troop movements, from



reaching enemy hands. Nevertheless, it quickly became a way for those in power to strengthen their control during unstable moments.

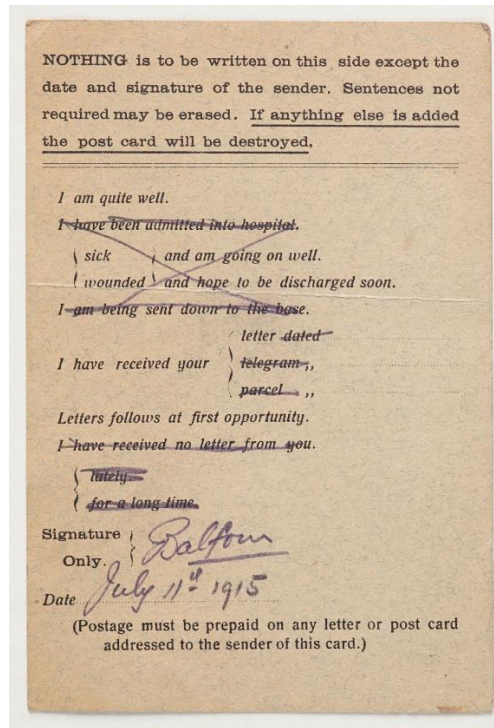
Multiple laws censoring printed material had been constructed around two decades before the eruption of the First World War, and the development of the cinema in the 1900s also triggered the creation of film censorship laws. In spite of that, WW1 marked a turning point in the history of censorship and state control. Different from confrontations in the past, the war was now much more than just a conflict between armies, it was perceived as a conflict between societies, and failure on the home front could lead to the defeat in the battlefield. With this new knowledge, public opinion gained new significance and value among nations, which is why governments began investing in the creation of impactful, encouraging and demanding forms of propaganda (as can be seen in the images below) in hopes of maintaining social harmony and loyalty.



Wargaming. (n.d.). *World War Propaganda Posters | Historical Spotlight | News*. Wargaming.  
[https://wargaming.com/en/news/world\\_war\\_propaganda\\_posters/](https://wargaming.com/en/news/world_war_propaganda_posters/)

Censorship reached such an extent that even personal letters began to be censored by British commanders under the pretext of protecting the nation and its people. The creation of field service postcards (like the one shown below) allowed censors to approve correspondence from soldiers more efficiently. Instead of writing a letter, soldiers were provided with a series of statements, of which they were obliged to choose as the most fitting to their message and cross out the rest of the options.





Davidson, J. (n.d.). *The history of censorship and State Control During the First World War*. WW100. <https://ww100.govt.nz/censorship-state-control>

In like manner, during the Second World War, the Axis Powers were famously recognized by their continuous usage of propaganda as a tool of war and political control over the news media. Following the Nazi's rise to power in 1933, head of the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, stated that "The essence of propaganda consists in winning people over to an idea so sincerely, so vitally, that in the end they succumb to it utterly and can never again escape from it" (PBS, n.d.). Goebbels is just a symbol of how censorship was manipulated to such an extent that it convinced people to act inhumanly towards what was considered dangerous by German culture. His purpose was to inflame the anger of Germans over their defeat in the First World War, while emphasizing on their own cultural and military achievements as a way of boosting national pride and simultaneously fostering hatred toward the Allied Powers. It was because of his knowledge on propaganda and censorship that he played a pivotal role in creating an atmosphere that allowed the Nazis to commit terrible atrocities towards Jews and other minorities without any social repercussions.

## Current Situation

Nowadays, governments and private entities have developed various methods to suppress speech, information and ideas on a larger scale thanks to the digitalization era. For instance, censorship has evolved from tangible and direct forms of suppression (like the ones shown in the historical context) to more subtle digital tactics like filtering, blocking, hacking websites and even “trained functionaries”, who are paid online “trolls”. Contrary to popular belief, governments went from observers in the digital revolution to tactical adopters of advanced technologies, enabling them to monitor and redirect the flow of information to their liking.

Furthermore, private entities like social media companies have also engaged in censorship via “content moderation” practices. These include the removal of misinformation and disinformation, suppression of hate speech, protection of public safety and the elimination of obscenity. Even though these content moderation practices are meant to protect the public from online predators, censorship is still up for debate on where to draw the line between free speech and the restriction of harmful or offensive material.

Moreover, censorship still remains a delicate topic because of internationalization. In the past, the guidelines that ruled over these practices were local and national, which facilitated its control. However, with all the new private companies that have risen over the past two decades, as well as the optimization of the ways in which people interact with each other across the globe, international guidelines are the ones in charge of regulating how censorship is used. While this has its advantages, now it is much harder to find the appropriate guidelines to address the multiple situations presented in the digital world to effectively adhere to the context in which they present themselves.

The thing about censorship is that the great technological advancements developed throughout the years as a form of protection have also made this tool powerful enough to silence those in need for help. Instead of providing a safe environment, censorship has been used to suppress information and discussions around sensitive topics like mental health, sexual abuse, domestic violence and much more. These restrictions make it much harder for those suffering to make use of their natural right as humans to find support and resources.

In response to these norms, people have started to behave in ways that are commonly denominated as self-censorship. This term makes reference to the continuous awareness over what a person says and does as a way of avoiding criticism. Fearing the response of the public and the consequences of community guidelines, victims of the violation of human rights have opted to remain silent, which completely shuts out external help and incarcerates them in awful circumstances.



Brown, D. (2023). *Meta's Broken Promises: Systemic Censorship of Palestine Content on Instagram and Facebook*. Human Rights Watch. [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2023/12/ip\\_meta1223%20web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/12/ip_meta1223%20web.pdf)

## Relevant approaches

Taking into account the jurisdiction of this committee, which is to investigate and report abuses all around the world, the delegates are encouraged to seek tangible, effective and innovative proposals to tackle the ways in which censorship must be modified on a global scale in order to work for people and not against it.

To solve any problem in the long term it must be addressed by the root cause, meaning that delegates must fully understand what drives the international community, as well as private entities, to make use of censorship as a weapon rather than a tool. Once the root causes are identified, the delegates must begin proposing what changes can the delegation make within its borders, as well as those that require collective action.

It's important to highlight that each delegate must be very wary of their own country's position on the topic, as well as the philosophy reigning over their society. A country with authoritarian tendencies will be much less flexible when it comes to laying out new ground

plans for censorship guidelines. Additionally, the delegates must also take into account the dangers of loosening policies, and the implications this would have on their country's society.

A relevant case to study is the one proposed by the Human Rights Watch itself, titled *Meta's broken promises* (the link will be in the supporting material). This report sheds light onto the unjust policies towards Palestinian supporters in the ongoing Hamas-Israel conflict, and the responsibility of each country to ensure that every citizen of the world is granted with their basic rights as humans. The delegates must always opt for inclusive solutions, promoting both respect and companionship within the committee.

## **Block Positions**

During the debates regarding the possible solutions towards the problematic to discuss, different countries may join together in groups, which are denominated as blocks, based on their ideas about what is the best course of action. These blocks are broken down into three main categories, which may be relevant in the discussion.

***Block of Unwilling Countries:*** It may be possible that some countries are unwilling to modify their policies on censorship or believe that it is their responsibility to filter certain types of information. These countries may argue that modifying these rules does more harm than good, and that it is a violation to their sovereignty. They may believe that they have other priorities and shouldn't be pressured to change. These are countries that have authoritarian or dictatorial ways of governing, and believe in the selectiveness of the content consumed by their people.

***Block of Urgent Action Countries:*** On the other hand, some countries are in desperate need for immediate action. These nations see the urgent need to tackle unjust censorship as a way of protecting their own interests. They are worried that waiting too long could lead to severe consequences within their society (or the international community) and believe that the costs to repair these will be much greater. This bloc calls for everyone to act as quickly as possible, while also promoting collaborative work in order to make a significant difference and ensure that everyone is granted their rights. countries with high rates of public sanitation, national insecurity, obscenity and hate speech might be in this group of countries.

***Block of Slow Transition Countries:*** Some countries are slowly moving towards the implementation of innovative policies, as well as the modification of existing ones regarding censorship guidelines. These nations are taking steady steps to increase the freedom of speech of their citizens and grant public recognition to different matters, but their pace of change is likely to be slower than what the urgent action bloc demands. They believe in a gradual transition towards the openness of different forms of speech and public communication to ensure a smooth shift without causing harm to their social order, support and beliefs.

These different blocks might have their reasons and priorities, but it is of vital importance to keep in mind that the lives of many innocent citizens are at stake. If action towards the misuse of censorship is not taken promptly, society could face serious problems in terms of people's well-being, their right to freely express themselves, the right to seek help when needed and even the deterioration of trust and morale. It is important for everyone, regardless of their bloc, to work collectively in order to find solutions that benefit society as a whole.

## **QARMAS**

- What type of regulations does your delegation have regarding censorship?
- Has your country ever tried to change their regulations on censorship?
- How do private entities operate within your country?
- What are the indexes of public sanitation, national insecurity, obscenity and hate speech in your country?
- What type of government does your country operate under? Monarchy? Democracy? Authoritarian? Communism?
- How does your country feel about freedom of expression?
- Has your country used censorship to manipulate information and beliefs in the past? How did it stop, if it ever did? How did citizens react?
- Has your country ever publicly addressed the matter? If so, what was its approach?
- Has your country been involved in international actions to address this issue? If so, how did it play out? Does your country still abide by those agreements?

## Useful links

- *Meta's Broken Promises: Systemic Censorship of Palestine Content on Instagram and Facebook* | HRW  
[https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2023/12/ip\\_meta1223%20web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/12/ip_meta1223%20web.pdf)
- Fahrenheit 451 (book/movie): written by Ray Bradbury, this book/movie depicts a dystopian society in which books are considered a crime and must be burned on sight. This piece demonstrates how a power figure makes use of censorship in order to prevent people from acquiring new knowledge and ideas. The movie is available on HBO or Prime Video.
- Censorship and Disinformation: The online war on Gaza | The Take (YouTube podcast) [Censorship and disinformation: The online war on Gaza | The Take](#)  
This podcast shows a detailed analysis of how censorship has been used in Gaza to limit the ways in which citizens can reach out for international aid.
- Why The USA Military Censors Movies | The Infographics Show (YouTube video) [Why The USA Military Censors Movies](#)  
This YouTube video sheds light onto the reasons behind systematic censorship among one of the most influential countries in the world.
- Map of the countries involved in international armed conflict, military occupation and non-international conflict <https://www.rulac.org/browse/map#> \*
- Press freedom index of 2024 <https://rsf.org/en/index> \*

\*The last two sources can be used interchangeably. Compare how your country's rate of conflict is related to its index of press freedom.

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# Topic B: Guarantee of human rights to prisoners in El Salvador

## Introduction to the topic

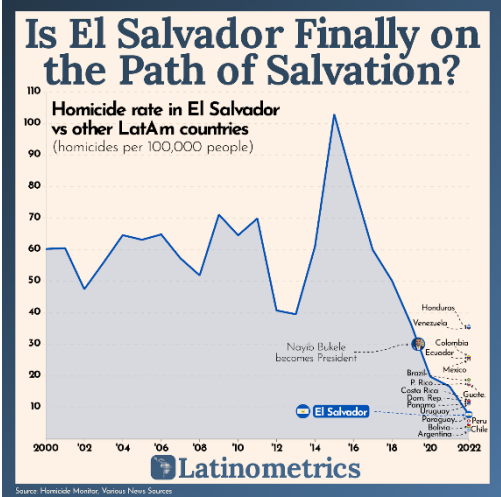
In early 2022 El Salvador finished building one of the biggest and largest prisons in Latin America as a result of the violent rise the past decade as in March 2022, El Salvador saw a dramatic increase in gang-related killings.

Figure 1: El Salvador maximum security prison



Note: Figure 1 shows the maximum security prison built by el salvador. Taken from: <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2023/02/02/63da98fa21efa065018b459e.html>

Existing prisons were already overcrowded, and the mass detentions under the state of emergency meant El Salvador needed a new facility to house the influx of prisoners. The prison known as the Center of Terrorist Confinement was built as a solution to this problem and it is designed to hold up to 40.000 inmates. Human rights groups criticized the approach, arguing that it focused on punishment rather than rehabilitation and could worsen overcrowding issues. As this wasn't the first time El Salvador faced these allegations President Nayib Bukele framed CECOT as a way to take dangerous gang members off the streets and improve public safety.



The process has effectively decreased the homicide rate in El Salvador since 2020, when Nayib Bukele became president, but the allegations and the numbers for human rights violations can not be ignored.

Declaring a state of emergency, is a measure that is considered temporary, with the purpose of initiating a series of amendments to criminal law that ignores the innocence and the right to defense, among other guarantees of due process, the government of El Salvador by continuing to execute this measures, though having decreased the problems in a very significant way, ignores its international human rights obligations claiming and declaring a “security strategy”. Victims protest, local human rights organizations and media reports had registered 327 cases of enforced disappearances, more than 78,000 arbitrary detentions with a total of approximately 102,000 people now deprived of their freedom in the country causing a prison overcrowding of approximately 148%, and at least 235 deaths in state custody.

*“In the absence of any kind of evaluation and checks and balances within the country, and with only a timid response from the international community, the false illusion has been created that president Bukele has found the magic formula to solve the very complex problems of violence and criminality in a seemingly simple way. But reducing gang violence by replacing it with state violence cannot be a success. The authorities in El Salvador must focus the state response on comprehensive policies that respect human rights and seek long-term solutions,”* (Ana Piquer.2024).

## **Key Concepts**

Arbitrary: *“based on random choice or personal whim, rather than any reason or system.”* (Oxford Languages)

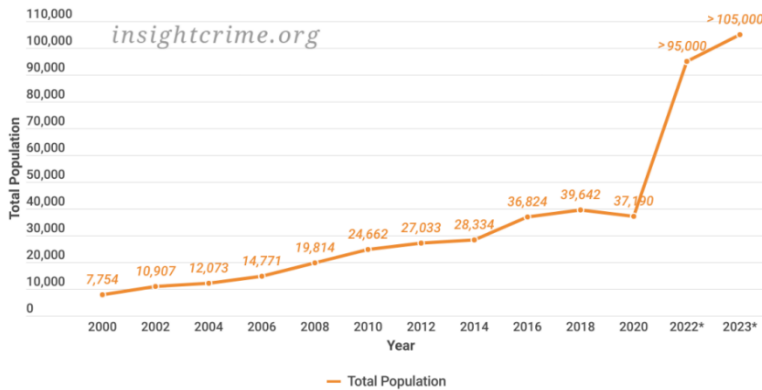
State of emergency: *“an extreme condition caused by severe weather or war in which a government allows itself special powers”* (Cambridge Dictionary)

Overcrowding: *“the presence of more people or things in a space than is comfortable, safe, or permissible.”* (Oxford Languages)

Homicide Rate: *“deaths per 100,000 individuals per year”* (Oxford Languages)

## Historical Context

### Prison Population in El Salvador (2000-2023)



\*2022 and 2023 estimates based on on pre-state of emergency data from El Salvador prisons authorities, in addition to arrest and prisoner release figures announced by government officials during the state of emergency.

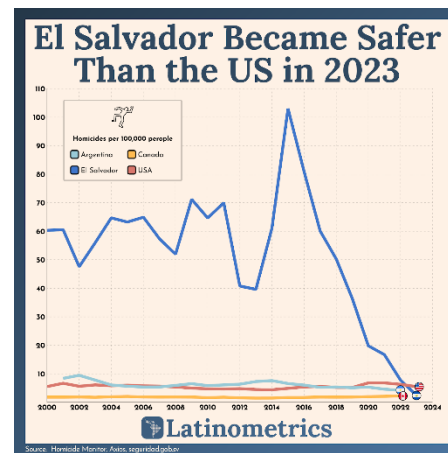
December 2023

Sources: World Prison Brief and El Salvador government

<https://insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/El-Salvador-Prison-Population-in-El-Salvador-2000-2023-InSight-Crime-Dec-2023-1024x710.png>

During the past 2 decades El Salvador has been a country known for its extreme violence and harsh human conditions, it has been framed as an insecure country and a place where life is in a dangerous condition. El Salvador entered a dark period in 2015 as the nation struggled with a worrying spike in violence that sent it to the top of the global homicide rankings. El Salvador became the most violent nation outside of active conflict zones, surpassing Honduras with a homicide rate of 103 per 100,000 people. Something needed to change and action had to be taken.

On the other hand, 2016 presented a spark of hope. The number of killings was lower than in 2015. When compared to the same period in 2015, officials recorded an 18.5% decrease in homicides between January and November of 2016. This was accredited to the efforts made by the former president Salvador Sanchez Cerén who transferred gang members to higher security prisons, and blocked cell phone signals to reduce gang communications and homicide orderings.



Latinometrics

Source: Homicide Monitor, Avian, seguridad.gov.cr



Defying the ordinary, building the extraordinary

During the years 2017, 2018 and 2019, once again, the rate had decreased, but it wouldn't be until the year 2020, when Nayib Bukele became president when El Salvador would have a shift of realities, with a downfall of 20 homicides per years the salvador surpassed security measures and even became a safer country than the United States by 2023 (3 homicides per 100.000 habitants per year).

All this imprisonment and arrests made caused an increase of jail population by 156% in prison facilities, leading to bad conditions and human right problems with which El Salvador would have to deal with in the future. 153 inmates have died while in state custody between March 27, 2022, and March 27, 2023. They were all incarcerated over the same time frame. Of these, 46 were either under "suspicions of criminality" or "probable violent deaths," while 29 died violently. The examination identifies the presence of cuts, hematomas from beatings, wounds from sharp objects, and indications of choking or strangling on the cadavers among those 75 cases as a "common pattern." One of the "most frequent" causes of death included in medical legal reports, according to the paper, is mechanical asphyxiation.

Three concerning aspects of this situation have been noted by Amnesty International: 1) The vast array of human rights breaches occurring; 2) The high level of state cooperation in the planning and execution of this action; and 3) A state reaction that tends to downplay and hide these acts, failing to acknowledge and thoroughly look into the violations.

Unfortunately, the El Salvadorian government's pattern of minimization, concealment, delegitimization, and denial in response to national and international actors' allegations regarding the serious violations documented in the nation raises the possibility that President Bukele's second term in office will see a worsening of the crisis that has been going on for the past few years. The instrumentalization of the legal system and the development of a policy of torture within the prison system may continue if this direction is not changed, which could raise the already concerning rates of due process violations, deaths in state custody, and the precarious conditions of those who are deprived of their freedom.

## **Current Situation**

*February 4th, 2024, Nayib Bukele is re-elected as president of El Salvador*

The current re-election of Nayib Bukele, brings many scenarios to the problem. This arbitrary arrest will continue under his mandate as it has mostly brought forward efficiency, crime reduction and a safer country.

Amnesty International isn't just criticizing El Salvador's prison crisis, they're advocating for change. Their plan calls for an end to the state of emergency and a shift towards humanitarian solutions. They urge investigations into human rights abuses and a move away from mass incarceration. Their goal is comprehensive public security policies that respect the rights of all Salvadorans, not just a violent crackdown.

No major changes have been reported by Amnesty International regarding the stopping and decrease of this problem.

## **Relevant approaches**

### ***The power and reach of the HRW***

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an international NGO that investigates human rights abuses around the globe. They don't have legal enforcement power, but pressure governments and raise awareness to promote justice for victims. The purpose is to report and deeply study the root cause of major worldwide problems.

### ***Discussion points***

The case of human rights violations in El Salvador's jails raises critical questions that demand discussion. While the state of emergency aims to address gang violence, its effectiveness and potential violation of human rights must be weighed. Finding a balance between security and upholding detainee rights is crucial. Furthermore, exploring the role of international pressure is vital in understanding its potential to influence El Salvador's prison reforms and ensure adherence to human rights standards. These discussions are important because they

can illuminate potential solutions and hold all actors accountable for creating a safer and more just El Salvador.

Respectful dialogue is key when discussing the experiences of detainees and the challenges faced by the government. Utilizing credible sources like reports from human rights organizations and official government updates ensures a balanced perspective. Openness to diverse viewpoints, including those of affected communities and international observers, fosters a well-rounded understanding of the situation. Ultimately, a solution requires a collaborative effort that prioritizes both public safety and the fundamental rights of all individuals within the justice system.

## **QARMAS**

1. How has the El Salvador historical context influenced the actions and the problematics that have arised the past decade?
2. Until which point can a human being be prived from necessities and be punished with torture, despite being a criminal?
3. How can international pressure effectively decrease and solve the problem?
4. Has your country ever participated in such activities or behaviors? How were they addressed? Why?
5. How can your country pose sanctions or solutions to stop this behavior and actions?
6. How can the international community collaborate without being taken as obsolete or un-useful? What solutions or actions can be planted?
7. How did political power (Nayib's bukele's presidency) influence the beliefs and thoughts of the people, causing a wrong vision towards the solution that the government has given to the problem?

## Useful links

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5TXN9reja0>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmsFMT2nHr8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYfp24P8qlg>

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