

Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)

Also known as: MS-13

History: Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), a Hispanic, Central American gang, is believed to have formed in the Rampart area of Los Angeles, California during the mid-late 1980s. Immigrants, fleeing war-torn El Salvador, settled into the Hispanic communities in Los Angeles. The El Salvadorans formed MS as a method of protection from other Hispanic gangs operating in the region, particularly the 18th Street Gang. The 13 was added to the name later to show their alliance to the prison gang La Eme (Mexican Mafia). In the early 1990s, the Los Angeles law enforcement agencies began to target the Hispanic community's violent areas. Law enforcement began deporting MS-13 members in the United States illegally. MS-13 began new cliques (groups of members operating in the same region and under the leadership of an individual member) and continued their gang activities in El Salvador and spread into other areas of Central America, Mexico, and throughout the United States. The gang has become recognized for their violent activity and their ability to adapt to new areas and law enforcement efforts.

Membership/Hierarchy: Initially, all members were El Salvadoran Nationals, but today the gang is known to accept individuals from various Central American countries that share the Hispanic heritage and culture, as well as US-born and Mexican members.

While there is no identified international or national leadership, there is a hierarchy within the organization based on member's status. Status is obtained by the reputation of the member, those that have performed and earned a reputation within the gang and those who joined the gang in Los Angeles are often given higher status within the gang. The title of leader (also called "shot-caller" or "ranflero") is usually determined within the cliques. These leaders oversee the clique's activities in their region.

Location: The gang has been identified in 33 States and the District of Columbia as well as having members in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico and Canada.

Criminal Activity: MS-13 members have been arrested for violent crimes including murder, robbery, drive-by-shootings, stabbings, assault, rape, witness intimidation, extortion, malicious wounding, and threats against law enforcement. MS-13 cliques will adapt their criminal activity based on the opportunities available in a specific area.

Gang Identifiers: The most identifiable MS-13 tattoo consists of the letters "M" and "S" in conjunction with the numbers "1" and "3" or "Mara Salvatrucha." The most common gang hand-sign is created with the index and pinky fingers extended with the middle and ring fingers folded into the palm and the thumb covering the folded fingers. This hand sign is commonly referred to as the "Devil's Pitchfork."