

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN



(U//LES) Mara Salvatrucha Members Likely Implementing Security Measures To Conceal Gang Affiliation, Hindering Law Enforcement Detection Capability

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DIVISION
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(U//LES) The FBI assesses Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) members likely^a are implementing security measures to conceal their gang affiliation, hindering law enforcement's ability to detect the gang's presence. This assessment is made with medium confidence,^b based on FBI investigations, proffer sessions, reporting from local law enforcement, and human source reporting with direct access.

(U//LES) A key assumption is that the MS-13 techniques described in this intelligence bulletin are for the benefit of the gang's security rather than for other non-gang, non-operational security-related reasons such as convenience. The FBI judges MS-13's implementation of security measures very likely will evolve in the short term, making the detection of the gang's presence and operations more difficult and law enforcement investigations of the gang more challenging. If human source reporting or subject interviews indicate MS-13 members use the techniques described in this intelligence bulletin for reasons other than operational security, the FBI will re-evaluate its overall assessment.

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(U) Source Summary Statement

(U) Reporting in this intelligence bulletin was derived primarily from FBI investigations, proffer sessions, reporting from local law enforcement, and a human source with direct access. The totality of the reporting was critical to the key analytic judgment herein. The human source reporting was corroborated by reporting from local law enforcement. FBI and local law enforcement reporting provided context. The collection occurred between January 2017 and November 2019, and was current as of 17 December 2019.

^a (U) See Appendix A: Expressions of Likelihood.

^b (U) See Appendix B: Confidence in Assessments and Judgments Based on a Body of Information.

(U) MS-13 Members Likely Implement Security Measures To Conceal Gang Affiliation, Hindering Law Enforcement Efforts To Identify Gang Presence and Activity

(U//LES) The FBI assesses MS-13 members likely are implementing security measures to conceal their gang affiliation, hindering law enforcement's ability to detect the gang's presence and activity. This assessment is based on reporting indicating MS-13 members avoid traditional indicators of gang affiliation, including visible tattoos, wearing blue clothing, and the use of graffiti to mark territory, as a way to hinder law enforcement's ability to identify members solely on visual clues.

- (U//LES) As of November 2019, a law enforcement officer from another agency reported MS-13 members are moving away from traditional clothing and colors associated with the gang.¹ As of January 2017, MS-13 members were authorized to wear one red piece of clothing, according to a human source with direct access. The gang believed law enforcement did not recognize the color red as being a color worn by MS-13 members.²
- (U//FOUO) As of June 2018, MS-13 members in Las Vegas, Nevada, were directed to refrain from collecting extortion money and committing burglaries and to avoid killing anyone except members from the 18th Street Gang, according to a proffer interview of a gang member with direct access to MS-13 motivations and activity in the FBI Las Vegas area of responsibility.³ Additionally, members were directed to refrain from getting tattoos that revealed gang affiliation, according to the Nevada High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA).⁴
- (U//FOUO) As of June 2018, MS-13 members in Las Vegas were directed to wear clothing that resembled the trends of high school students, including wearing collared shirts and fitted jeans, and to avoid wearing clothing traditionally associated with MS-13 membership, such as Nike Cortez shoes, jerseys with the number 13, and loose-fitting clothing. Members were also directed to stop marking gang territory using graffiti, according to the Nevada HIDTA.⁵

(U) Perspective

(U//LES) While MS-13 maintains a concentrated presence in Houston, Texas; Los Angeles, California; Long Island, New York; and the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, the gang also operates in some suburban and rural communities across the United States. MS-13 is well networked and has gained notoriety for its reputation and culture of violence. Violent acts committed by MS-13 members are generally perceived as more brutal than those of other street gangs in the United States. Recently, the gang has escalated its efforts to gain more territory, recruit new members, and generate more revenue. MS-13 members may move from one area to another to conduct criminal activity, flee law enforcement detection, or establish a clique in an area without an MS-13 presence. The transient nature of MS-13 is exacerbated by operational security measures disguising visual signs of MS-13 activity, further complicating law enforcement efforts to identify and disrupt the gang in a given area.

(U//LES) This is the first externally disseminated finished intelligence product written by the FBI on MS-13's implementation of security measures to conceal gang members' affiliation.

(U) Analysis of Alternatives

(U) The FBI considered the alternative hypothesis that MS-13 members likely were not concerned with detection by law enforcement, but rather implemented certain practices, such as wearing mainstream clothing and avoiding visible tattoos, simply for convenience. The FBI discounted this alternative hypothesis due to reporting indicating these activities are being used to avoid law enforcement detection. If future reporting indicates MS-13 is not concerned with evading law enforcement detection, the FBI would re-assess its current hypothesis and adjust the assessment, if necessary.

(U) Outlook

(U//FOUO) The FBI judges MS-13's implementation of security measures very likely will evolve in the short term, making the detection of the gang's presence and operations more difficult and law enforcement investigations of the gang more challenging. In the long term, the FBI assesses MS-13 likely will expand operations to areas in the United States not yet identified by law enforcement due to the gang's use of security measures and continued changes to identifying characteristics. As a result, these measures will make it increasingly difficult for law enforcement to identify and disrupt the gang in the future. Indications of MS-13 operating in an area while maintaining a low profile could include apprehended MS-13 members with fewer visible tattoos, gang members wearing non-gang colors, or a reduction in graffiti without a reduction in gang activity in the area.

(U) If you would like to provide qualitative feedback on this product, please send an email to the appropriate address with the product title as the subject line: DI_Customer_Feedback@fbi.gov; DI_Customer_Feedback@fbi.sgov.gov; or DI_Customer_Feedback@fbi.ic.gov.

(U) Criminal Investigative Division's National Gang Intelligence Center and the Las Vegas Field Office of the FBI prepared this intelligence bulletin. Please direct comments and queries to National Gang Intelligence Center Unit Chief at 1-703-414-8600.

(U) Appendix A: Expressions of Likelihood

(U) Phrases such as “the FBI judges” and “the FBI assesses,” and terms such as “likely” and “probably” convey analytical judgments and assessments. The chart below approximates how expressions of likelihood and probability correlate with percentages of chance. Only terms of likelihood should appear in FBI products; the chart includes terms of probability strictly for comparison, as they sometimes appear in reporting of other government agencies. Furthermore, the FBI does not arrive at judgments through statistical analysis and will not use terms of probability to convey uncertainty in FBI external intelligence products.

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Terms of Likelihood	Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain(ly)
Terms of Probability	Remote	Highly Improbable	Improbable (Improbably)	Roughly Even Odds	Probable (Probably)	Highly Probable	Nearly Certain
Percentages of Chance	1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%

(U) Table showing terms of likelihood aligned with terms of probability and percentages of chance.

(U) Appendix B: Confidence in Assessments and Judgments Based on a Body of Information

(U) Confidence levels reflect the quality and quantity of the source information supporting a judgment. Consequently, the FBI ascribes high, medium, or low levels of confidence to assessments, as follows:

(U) **High confidence** generally indicates the FBI's judgments are based on high quality information from multiple sources. High confidence in a judgment does not imply the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong. While additional reporting and information sources may change analytical judgments, such changes are most likely to be refinements and not substantial in nature.

(U) **Medium confidence** generally means the information is credibly sourced and plausible but not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence. Additional reporting or information sources have the potential to increase the FBI's confidence levels or substantively change analytical judgments.

(U) **Low confidence** generally means the information's credibility or plausibility is uncertain, the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make solid analytic inferences, or the reliability of the sources is questionable. Absent additional reporting or information sources, analytical judgments should be considered preliminary in nature.