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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW
IMMIGRATION COURT
130 Delaware Avenue, Suite 300
Buffalo, NY, 14202

In the Matter of

Oscar Patricio Azogue Martinez

In Removal Proceedings

File No. A 245-892-413

Immigration Judge: N/A

Next Hearing: N/A

**RESPONDENT'S COUNTRY CONDITIONS IN SUPPORT OF ASYLUM AND
WITHHOLDING OF REMOVAL**

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COUNTRY CONDITIONS ANALYSIS: SECURITY SITUATION IN ECUADOR AND THE THREAT POSED BY DESIGNATED FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

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1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF VIOLENCE AND CRIMINALITY IN ECUADOR

Ecuador has experienced a dramatic deterioration in public security over the last several years, largely driven by the expansion of organized crime and transnational drug trafficking networks. Human Rights Watch reports that the country's homicide rate has risen approximately 430 percent within five years, reflecting the growing influence of criminal organizations throughout the national territory (CC 15).

The escalation of violence has transformed Ecuador from one of the safest countries in Latin America into one of the most violent in the region, with organized crime groups recruiting children, killing judges, prosecutors and political candidates, and infiltrating government institutions (CC 15).

Ecuador's worsening security crisis is closely linked to its proximity to Colombia, a major cocaine-producing country, with provinces near the border serving a strategic transit hub for organized crime (CC 5). Criminal organizations such as Los Choneros, Los Lobos, and Los Tiguerones have consolidated control over drug trafficking routes, prisons, and prisons and trafficking corridors (CC 5, CC 6).

Human Rights Watch confirms that organized crime groups have fragmented, giving rise to new groups, with the number of identifiable gangs increasing 54 percent between 2023 and 2024 (CC 2). The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime projected around 9,100 homicides for 2025, a 40 percent increase, driven by internal factionalism following the removal of several gang leaders, including the extradition of Los Choneros leader alias 'Fito' to the U.S., the arrest of Los Tiguerones leader alias 'Negro Willy,' and the assassination of Los Chone Killers leader alias 'Ben 10' (CC 14)." Massacres and armed

attacks have become increasingly common, particularly in provinces where organized criminal groups compete for territorial control and illicit economic activities (CC 9, CC 10).

In response to the escalating violence, President Daniel Noboa declared a nationwide state of emergency in January 2024 and characterized twenty-two transnational criminal groups as terrorists, authorizing expanded military operations (CC 1). Nevertheless, reports from the U.S. Department of State, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International indicate that these measures have resulted in credible allegations of arbitrary or unlawful killings, torture, enforced disappearances, and excessive use of force by security forces (CC 1, CC 2, CC 3).

Despite intensified security operations, InSight Crime concludes that the militarized approach has not only failed to rein in criminal violence and corruption but has also led to rising reports of human rights abuses (CC 13).

2. LOS CHONEROS AND LOS LOBOS AS QUASI-STATE ACTORS DESIGNATED AS FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

On September 5, 2025, the U.S. Department of State formally designated Los Choneros and Los Lobos as Foreign Terrorist Organizations pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1189, effective upon publication (CC 8). This designation represents an official recognition by the United States government that these groups engage in terrorist activity that threaten even national security (CC 8).

The territorial reach and operational capacity of these organizations support their characterization as quasi-state actors. InSight Crime documents that Los Choneros transformed from a local gang into Ecuador's most formidable prison mafia and a key service provider to transnational drug traffickers, uniting smaller gangs into a criminal federation that dominated the prison system and expanded around the country (CC 7). By the start of 2024, the Choneros or their sub-factions, the Águilas and the Fatales, were reported present in ten of Ecuador's twenty-four provinces (CC 7). These groups work directly with Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CC 6, CC 7).

The Global Organized Crime Index confirms that Los Choneros, Los Lobos, and Los Tiguerones stand out as the most prominent and violent organizations in Ecuador, exercising substantial influence over illicit markets and state institutions (CC 5). It is further documented

that organized crime groups like Los Lobos receive instructions and training in the use and handling of large-caliber weapons used to attack police and military precincts, showing their superiority over the power of the government (CC 9). The Chone Killers have been blamed for regular massacres, and the Lobos' dominance derives from territorial control stretching from the Colombian border all the way to Guayaquil (CC 9).

The atomization of these groups has intensified rather than diminished their threat. As leadership has fragmented, local factions of Los Lobos, Los Choneros, and Los Tiguerones have split or changed allegiances, producing more mass killings driven by heightened impunity and access to high-powered weapons (CC 10). The percentage of murder victims in Ecuador dying in massacres has risen significantly since 2020 (CC 10), and street-level cells of Ecuador's largest drug trafficking groups rely on opportunistic crimes such as kidnapping to finance themselves, exposing ordinary civilians to direct predation (CC 11).

3. STATE INABILITY TO PROVIDE PROTECTION AND INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE

The persistence of organized criminal violence in Ecuador is closely tied to the limited capacity of state institutions to investigate and dismantle criminal networks. Human Rights Watch reports that judges and prosecutors often lack basic tools and security to investigate organized crime groups, with the Observatory of Rights and Justice registering ten attacks against the judiciary in 2025 alone, including assassination attempts and killings of judges and prosecutors (CC 2). It also documents that the Attorney General's Office has six hundred vacant positions, and the National Court of Justice operates with fewer than half the magistrates it requires (CC 15).

The penetration of organized crime into Ecuador's state institutions remains a critical vulnerability. The Global Organized Crime Index describes deep-rooted corruption exposing narco-generals within the security forces and the manipulation of judicial appointments by criminal organizations, with criminal groups financing electoral campaigns and maintaining influence over local governance structures (CC 5).

InSight Crime further reports that between 2013 and 2017, nearly one thousand police officers were dismissed, with almost half tied to allegedly criminal behavior, and that criminal groups have successfully exploited corrupt military personnel to source weapons and

participate in drug trafficking (CC 6). The judicial system is notoriously corrupt and frequently manipulated by organized crime (CC 6).

Freedom House confirms that journalists have exposed the ability of organized crime groups to co-opt and bribe political and security authorities, and that at least three mayors were murdered during the year, with the Association of Municipalities of Ecuador reporting that at least one hundred of the country's two hundred twenty-one mayors were at risk of criminal violence (CC 4). Amnesty International documents that the independence of the judiciary was threatened, with the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the IACHR expressing concern regarding the discrediting of the judiciary by the executive branch (CC 3).

Victim distrust in state institutions further undermines the possibility of effective protection. A Manabí police official quoted by InSight Crime stated that corruption is systemic and that it is not as if the police or the military are the saviors, since gangs have bribed these officials (CC 12). Victims commonly avoid reporting extortion because they distrust the police, given the low clearance rate on extortion cases and fear of retaliation, which reinforces the perception that criminal organizations can operate without meaningful legal consequences (CC 12, CC9).

The prison system illustrates the state's inability to maintain effective control. Human Rights Watch reports that since the deployment of soldiers to prisons, monitors have documented corruption, incommunicado detention, physical abuse, and obstruction of medical care (CC 2).

Amnesty International documents that in 2024 the Public Prosecutor's Office opened investigations into the possible enforced disappearance of forty-three individuals following military operations, and that sixteen members of the armed forces were convicted for the enforced disappearance and torture of four Afro-descendant children detained in Guayaquil in 2024 (CC 3). The U.S. Department of State corroborates that released detainees reported systematic torture during the state of emergency, including electric shocks and near-drowning to extract information (CC 1).

The insecurity affecting Ecuador is not confined to coastal provinces but has reached inland regions, including Ambato and the province of Tungurahua. On June 22, 2026, hundreds of members of the three indigenous and peasant movements of Tungurahua

marched in Ambato to demand security in the urban and rural sectors of the province, following the June 5 disappearance of community member Mario Quinatoa, whose whereabouts remained unknown despite searches by community members and the National Police (CC 16).

The march took place despite ongoing searches by the National Police and assurances from the provincial prosecutor, which had produced no results regarding the whereabouts of a missing community member, indicating that hundreds of residents felt compelled to publicly demand security because existing state protection mechanisms in Ambato had failed to deliver concrete results (CC 16).

4. CONCLUSION

The country conditions evidence establishes that Ecuador is confronting an unprecedented security crisis driven by criminal organizations formally designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the U.S. Department of State (CC 8). These groups operate as quasi-state actors exercising territorial control and infiltrating state institutions (CC 5, CC 6, CC 7). The Ecuadorian state has proven unwilling or unable to control these organizations, with corruption, weak investigative capacity, judicial infiltration, and prison instability contributing to persistent impunity (CC 2, CC 3, CC 4, CC 15).

The militarized response has not eliminated the criminal networks and has been accompanied by credible allegations of grave human rights abuses (CC 1, CC 13). Under these conditions, civilians targeted by these designated terrorist organizations face ongoing risks throughout the national territory (CC 16).

Exhibit 2

EXCERPTS FROM COUNTRY CONDITIONS REPORTS

CC 1

2024 COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES: ECUADOR - U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (DOS)

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom.

There were a few reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. President Noboa's January 9 decree of a state of emergency **characterized 22 transnational criminal groups as "terrorists" and authorized security operations targeting these groups**, during which 15 individuals were killed.

In February, gang members killed Diana Carnero, a councilwoman in Naranjal, Guayas Province. Media reported **seven deaths among local officials in at least 10 incidents involving the killing or attempted killing of political leaders and elected officials.**

A released prisoner detained during the state of emergency said that, on one occasion, **military officers put prisoners face down and stepped on their toes, backs, heads, and necks with their boots and then randomly selected prisoners to submerge the detainees' heads into a water tank while applying electric shocks** to demand information regarding weapons or drugs deposits. Several NGOs reported the existence of **arbitrary arrests** by the police and military during the government's declarations of a state of emergency.

WORLD REPORT 2026: ECUADOR - HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (HRW)

Organized crime groups have fragmented, giving rise to new groups. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data monitor, **the number of identifiable gangs increased 54 percent between 2023 and 2024.**

Since January 2024, the government has repeatedly invoked the existence of an "internal armed conflict" in the country, which the Constitutional Court has called into question, **to justify loosening human rights protections in its fight against crime.**

The government's response to organized crime has led to serious human rights violations by security forces, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and ill-treatment. On October 8, a judge sent 17 military officers to trial for the alleged enforced disappearance of four children unlawfully detained in December 2024 in Guayaquil and later found dead.

In June 2025, the Assembly passed laws granting the president broad powers to declare an "armed conflict," dispense with crucial human rights protections, and expand intelligence gathering. The Constitutional Court struck some of them down.

Democratic institutions remained fragile, plagued by impunity for abuses and by allegations of corruption.

Judges and prosecutors often lack basic tools and security to investigate organized crime groups. As of October, the Observatory of Rights and Justice had registered 10 attacks against the judiciary in 2025, including assassination attempts and killings of judges and prosecutors.

Since the deployment of soldiers to prisons, monitors have reported instances of corruption, incommunicado detention, physical abuse, and obstruction of medical care.

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS: ECUADOR - AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

There was little progress in investigations into enforced disappearances. Security forces cracked down on protests and a new law restricting freedom of association was passed. Detainees continued to face very precarious conditions. In the Amazon region, gas flaring and exploitation of natural resources continued without the consent of Indigenous Peoples. Human rights defenders continued to be at risk. **The independence of the judiciary was threatened.**

The Public Prosecutor's Office opened investigations into the **possible enforced disappearance of 43 individuals following security operations carried out by the armed forces in 2024.** However, progress in the criminal investigations was slow, with no cooperation from the armed forces.

Also in December, 16 members of the armed forces were convicted for the enforced disappearance of four Afro-descendant children in 2024 after their detention in the city of Guayaquil. The sentence also confirmed that they had been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during their detention.

Detainees continued to suffer from overcrowding and lack of adequate food and healthcare, as well as torture and other ill-treatment. According to the National Service for Comprehensive Care for Adults Deprived of Liberty and Adolescent Offenders, between January and September, 760 prisoners had died in the country's prisons, 105 of them violently.

Human rights defenders, especially land, territory and environmental defenders, reported harassment, stigmatization, persecution and criminalization, including an attempt on the life of a community leader.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the IACHR expressed concern regarding the discrediting of the judiciary by the executive branch through harassment and public stigmatization, threats and a march led by

President Noboa against the Constitutional Court, among other actions.

Impunity persisted for human rights violations committed by security forces during the 2019 and 2022 protests.

CC 4

FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2026: ECUADOR - FREEDOM HOUSE

Ecuador holds regular, competitive elections, but **the influence of organized crime and related violence have increased significantly in recent years, affecting the functioning of state institutions and the security of ordinary citizens.**

In January 2024, President Noboa declared a state of emergency and an “internal armed conflict,” deploying the military to combat organized crime groups. By the end of the year, however, concerns about abuses by the armed forces were mounting, particularly after the deaths of four children whose bodies were discovered near a military base in December.

Ecuadorians’ political choices are increasingly constrained by criminal organizations and related violence. The surge in political violence in 2023 and concerns about **illicit campaign financing** persisted in 2024. At least three mayors were murdered during the year, leading the Association of Municipalities of Ecuador (AME) to petition the government for special police protection. The AME’s president reported that at least 100 of the country’s 221 mayors were at risk of criminal violence.

Discussion of controversial topics among private citizens is generally free, but **criminal groups continue to intimidate voters, community leaders, and activists in certain parts of the country.**

CC 5

GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX: ECUADOR - GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Criminal groups, some operating from prisons, impose protection payments known as vacunas on businesses, transport companies and mining operations. Violence accompanies these extortion schemes, with reports of bombings and kidnappings linked to non-compliance. Despite increased militarization, law enforcement has struggled to curb this trend. In fact, state-embedded actors are known to facilitate extortion schemes by shielding criminal groups from prosecution or providing them with sensitive law enforcement data.

Homicide rates have risen dramatically, and territorial control is contested by rival groups.

Ecuador's criminal landscape is dominated by powerful mafia-style groups that exert substantial influence over illicit markets and state institutions. Among these, **Los Choneros, Los Lobos and Los Tiguerones stand out as the most prominent and violent organizations**, each with a significant presence in drug trafficking, extortion, arms trafficking, illegal mining and human trafficking. (...) **The growing fragmentation and conflicts between these groups have fuelled Ecuador's escalating homicide rates. Despite recent government interventions, including militarization strategies, mafiastyle groups continue to thrive.**

Criminal networks have expanded into Esmeraldas and Sucumbíos, two key provinces near the Colombian border, which serve as strategic zones for purchasing cocaine from Colombian producers.

The penetration of organized crime into Ecuador's state institutions remains a critical challenge. (...) Recent high-profile investigations have revealed deep-rooted corruption, exposing **narco-generals within the security forces and the manipulation of judicial appointments by criminal organizations**. Reports indicate that state-embedded actors play a pivotal role in arms trafficking, where corrupt security officials resell military-grade weapons, including those previously seized from criminal groups. Leaks from law enforcement agencies continue to compromise anti-mining operations, with officials tipping off criminals before raids on illegal goldmining sites. **The involvement of state actors in political corruption is also**

evident. Criminal groups finance electoral campaigns and maintain influence over local governance structures, particularly in coastal provinces like Guayas and Esmeraldas. This collusion between officials and organized crime weakens state resilience, making Ecuador increasingly vulnerable to criminal governance and illicit financial flows.

The judicial system in Ecuador faces challenges in handling organized crime cases, with reports of bribery and coercion affecting judicial decisions. Corruption allegations include case dismissals and favourable rulings obtained through financial influence.

CC 6

ECUADOR PROFILE - INSIGHT CRIME

In recent years, these international groups and their local proxies have been joined by a new generation of criminal groups known in Ecuador as the “mafias,” which took over the prison system while building up gang networks on the streets. **All of these criminal networks have benefited from rampant corruption that has contaminated security, justice, government institutions, and the country’s politics.**

In the late 2010s, disparate gangs and criminal networks began uniting within the prisons to form powerful mafias that took over the penitentiary system, expanded across the country, and established themselves as key service providers to drug traffickers. The breakup of the most powerful of these groups, the Choneros, in 2021 created an array of splinter groups that violently contested control of the prisons, the streets, and drug trafficking corridors.

The Choneros began as a local gang dedicated to predatory crimes, but over time transformed into **Ecuador’s most formidable prison mafia and a key service provider to transnational drug traffickers.**

These groups work with both Ecuadorian and international drug traffickers. Among them are the Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco Cartel New Generation (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación – CJNG) of Mexico, and Albanian

traffickers, including cocaine kingpins like Dritan Rexhepi, who move tons of the drug from Ecuador to Europe.

As organized crime has expanded there, corruption scandals have grown and the reputation of the police has declined.

Between 2013 and 2017, nearly 1,000 police officers, including high-ranking officers, were dismissed. Just under half of the dismissals were tied to allegedly criminal behavior. **Police involvement in criminal activities has ranged from graft to extortion to facilitating drug trafficking and even transporting drugs in police vehicles.**

However, criminal groups have also successfully exploited corrupt Ecuadorian military personnel, with gangs and traffickers able to source weapons from the armed forces and military officials participating in drug trafficking. The deployment of the military in 2024 to break the stranglehold of prison gangs and relieve the notorious corrupt prison authorities led to allegations of widespread human rights abuses and concerns over growing corruption.

The judicial system is notoriously corrupt and frequently manipulated by organized crime and corrupt elites. In 2023 and 2024, it was a major focus of a series of corruption investigations that embroiled top-level regional and national judicial officials.

CC 7

CHONEROS - INSIGHT CRIME

The Choneros are one of Ecuador's most prominent criminal groups and a leading actor in the violence that has destabilized the country in recent years. The Choneros first emerged in the 1990s as a local gang in Ecuador's western province of Manabí. However, the arrest of gang leaders in 2011 sparked a decade of evolution.

From behind bars, the Choneros united smaller gangs under their banner to build up **a criminal federation that dominated the prison system and expanded around the country.** Using the prisons as an operations base, they established themselves as key service providers for

transnational drug trafficking organizations, while also running local-level criminal economies in territories under their control.

According to information provided by the Ministry of Defense and former intelligence officials, **by the start of 2024, the Choneros or their sub-factions, the Águilas and the Fatales, were present in 10 of Ecuador's 24 provinces.**

The Choneros have long worked with national and international drug traffickers, among them Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel.

CC 8

FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION DESIGNATION OF LOS CHONEROS AND LOS LOBOS - U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (DOS), FEDERAL REGISTER

Based upon a review of the Administrative Records assembled in this matter, and in consultation with the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury, I have concluded that there is a sufficient factual basis to find that the relevant circumstances described in section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended (hereinafter "INA") (8 U.S.C. 1189), exist with respect to: Los Choneros (also known as The Choneros, Aguilas, Fatales); and Los Lobos (also known as The Lobos, Los Lobos Drug Trafficking Organization).

Therefore, **I hereby designate the aforementioned organizations and their respective aliases as Foreign Terrorist Organizations pursuant to section 219 of the INA.**

CC 9

ECUADOR LOSES ITS GRIP ON CRIME - INSIGHT CRIME

Homicide statistics don't tell the whole story about a country's pattern of violence. But **the record-setting figures seen in**

Ecuador in the past year underscore the depth of the security crisis driven by organized crime.

In 2022, Ecuador was the tenth most violent country in Latin America and the Caribbean, after an astonishing 82% rise in murders compared to the previous year. In 2023, Ecuador is set to at least crack the top three, leapfrogging the likes of Honduras, Venezuela, and Colombia, as gangs fight to control the country's drug flows.

In the inland province of Los Ríos, which is located on a route for moving drugs from the Colombian border to Guayaquil, homicides are up 153%.

In a 2022 survey, **75% of the Ecuadorian population found the police unreliable.** And 2023 was hardly a glorious one for Ecuador's security forces.

In Durán, schools have been closed due to the violence, some neighborhoods are essentially no-go zones. Major cities in Ecuador essentially find themselves without local leadership.

Ecuadorians have reasons not to trust the authorities. Police forces have been infiltrated by organized crime in Ecuador, have sold their weapons to gangs, and acted as bodyguards for drug kingpins. Top police commanders were identified as “narco-generals” by the current US ambassador to Ecuador.

“Organized crime groups like the Lobos receive instructions and training in the use and handling of large-caliber weapons. These are used to attack police and military precincts, **showing their superiority over the power of the government,**” said General Jaramillo.

MASSACRES SURGE AS GANGS ATOMIZE IN ECUADOR - INSIGHT CRIME

A recent series of massacres in Ecuador is further evidence that **more access to high-powered weapons, heightened impunity, and an atomized criminal landscape are leading to more mass killings.**

The percentage of murder victims in Ecuador dying in massacres has risen significantly since 2020, spiking from 2% to 15% between 2020 and 2021. Driving this initial phase was a wave of mass killings perpetrated by warring gangs battling for valuable territory within the prison system as they sought to eliminate rivals.

Ecuador's criminal groups have since recuperated, albeit in an atomized way. In response to shuffling leadership, **many local factions of the Lobos, Choneros, and Tiguerones, for example, have split or changed allegiances, diversifying income sources and exploiting growing criminal economies like extortion, kidnapping, and illegal gold mining.**

CC 11

ECUADOR'S KIDNAPPING EPIDEMIC, TOLD BY A SURVIVOR - INSIGHT CRIME

Statistics from the Interior Ministry show that Ecuador has suffered a meteoric rise in homicides since 2021. The country, which has seen violence related to organized crime mushroom, closed out 2022 with a more than 80% year-on-year rise in murders.

This modus operandi fits an increasingly common pattern in which the street-level cells of Ecuador's largest drug trafficking groups, like the Choneros and the Lobos, rely primarily on these opportunistic crimes to finance themselves.

While Ecuador has specialized units with operational and investigative expertise to deal with cases of extortion and kidnapping, experts say there is no national policy focused on express kidnappings and few resources to help victims deal with the psychological aftermath.

"The very fact that express kidnapping is a crime of opportunity reveals an absence of a comprehensive national policy to combat it," Renato Rivera, coordinator of the Organized Crime Observatory of Ecuador, told InSight Crime.

Ecuador's response to the surging organized crime threat has so far leaned heavily on militarization with near-ubiquitous support from Ecuadorians. But experts say that **this only helps impact the perceptions, not the reality, of security.**

CC 12

ECUADOR SAYS EXTORTION IS DOWN. THE REALITY IS MORE COMPLICATED - INSIGHT CRIME

Photos circulating on social media show the extortion threat left for school bus drivers at an elementary school in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

They turned to extortion, growing it into a criminal market worth millions of dollars. Some local groups approach residents in their own neighborhood strongholds, asking for \$1 to \$5 in daily or weekly payments from each household. Local businesses pay more, with gangs demanding payments of a few hundred to even a couple thousand dollars or more. In other cases, gangs kidnap, extorting family members and friends of victims for exorbitant ransoms.

Victims often do not report extortion, they said, out of distrust of police, the low clearance rate on extortion cases, and **fear of retaliation by extortionists if they find out the victim notified authorities.**

“Corruption is systemic. It is not as if the police or the military are the saviors...[gangs] have bribed these officials,” a Manabí police official, who chose to remain anonymous as they were not authorized to speak publicly, told InSight Crime.

CC 13

ON THE RADAR: VIOLENCE FROM GANGS AND GOVERNMENTS RULES THE REGION - INSIGHT CRIME

Ecuador's President Noboa doubled down on his hardline security policy as violence reached record levels there. The government now plans to attack suspected drug boats off the country's coast,

mirroring US military operations in international waters. Drug trafficking is fueling much of the bloodshed, with a lot of the fighting driven by local groups embedded in the cocaine business. Upping the use of force has been the core characteristic of Noboa's security strategy since he took office. But so far this approach **has not only failed to rein in criminal violence and corruption, it has also led to rising reports of human rights abuses.**

CC 14

ECUADOR'S CRIMINAL CRISIS - GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

The fragmentation of criminal groups has driven Ecuador into a new cycle of violence.

Following a 14 per cent fall in intentional homicides between 2023 and 2024 in Ecuador, **projections for 2025 estimate around 9 100 deaths – a 40 per cent increase, equivalent to a rate of nearly 50 per 100 000 inhabitants.**

This trend, which would continue to make Ecuador the country with the highest homicide rate in Latin America, is driven by divisions within criminal groups resulting from the arrest, murder or extradition of their leaders.

The surge in violence caused by such fragmentation is nothing new in Ecuador. Following the split of the gang Los Choneros after their leader was assassinated in 2020, the country experienced an earlier wave of violence involving what amounted to an open war for control of several prisons and major illicit markets. However, the current wave shows a more dispersed and volatile pattern, with the **emergence of new criminal groups lacking solid hierarchical structures, which is leading to more frequent and unpredictable acts of violence.**

This second wave has been shaped by three recent incidents: the arrest of 'Negro Willy'; the assassination of Benjamín Camacho, alias 'Ben 10', leader of the gang Los Chone Killers, in December 2024; and the July 2025 extradition to the US of Los Choneros leader José Adolfo Macías Villamar, alias 'Fito'. The elimination of these bosses has created internal factionalism in the gangs and

intensified conflict over access to and control of illicit economies, in particular cocaine trafficking.

CC 15

ECUADOR NEEDS A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO FIGHTING ORGANIZED CRIME - HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Ecuador's crisis of violence is at an alarming level: **the country's homicide rate has risen 430% in five years, as organized crime groups extort entire neighborhoods, recruit children, kill judges, prosecutors and political candidates, and infiltrate government institutions.**

The government reports that the homicide rate decreased roughly 17 percent compared to 2023, but even government figures show an increase in extortion and kidnappings compared to 2023.

Courts and prosecutors' offices remain severely understaffed. Officials with the Attorney General's Office told us they have 600 vacant positions, including prosecutors and assistants, in part due to lack of funding. The National Court of Justice, the highest appeals court, has fewer than half the magistrates it requires.

CC 16

MARCH IN AMBATO TO DEMAND MORE SECURITY AFTER DISAPPEARANCE OF COMMUNITY MEMBER - EL UNIVERSO

Despite searches undertaken by community members and the National Police, there are still no results regarding the whereabouts of the community member who disappeared on June 5.

Hundreds of people grouped in the three indigenous and peasant movements of Tungurahua participated in the march called for this Monday, June 22, to demand security in the urban and rural sectors of Ambato and the province.

Manifestos were left demanding increased security, not only in the city but also in rural areas. Manifestos were also left outlining the demands of various social movements, as well as urging swift action in locating Mario Quinatoa, a community member who disappeared on June 5th. He was last seen in Chibuleo San Luis, Juan Benigno Vela parish, in Ambato.

In addition to shouts demanding security and unity to confront crime, signs were seen at the march such as "we don't want to live in fear," "peace for Ambato," "no to crime, yes to a dignified and safe life." "This shows that as indigenous communities and the rural sector we are united, we will not allow harm to continue being done to our comrades, we do not want anyone to be harmed," said Jaime Pacha, president of the Indigenous Movement of Tungurahua, Atocha branch (MITA).

Exhibit 3

Ecuador 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

On January 9, President Daniel Noboa decreed a state of emergency to stem escalating violence from local and transnational organized crime groups. The president directed police and military forces to conduct enhanced security operations against these groups to address security threats.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

Kidnappings and extortion by criminal groups increased. Imprisoned members of criminal gangs staged disturbances leading to prison breaks. The government investigated and prosecuted instances of violence and threats of violence likely perpetrated by nongovernment actors against journalists and public officials.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were a few reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. President Noboa's January 9 decree of a state of emergency characterized 22 transnational criminal groups as "terrorists" and authorized security operations targeting these groups, during which 15 individuals were killed.

President Noboa issued 11 executive decrees declaring and renewing states of exception throughout the year to curb rising crime and support the government's efforts to counter organized crime groups, as well as electric power outages caused by drought conditions. The decrees enabled armed forces support to police operations. The Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional two executive decrees and limited the scope of two others.

In February, gang members killed Diana Carnero, a councilwoman in Naranjal, Guayas Province. Media reported seven deaths among local officials in at least 10 incidents involving the killing or attempted killing of political leaders and elected officials.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the

part of government authorities.

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but laws restricted this right. The law prohibited persons from using “discrediting expressions,” treated as a misdemeanor with a 15- to 30-day detention. The government did not invoke this law to restrict freedom of expression during the year.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Local government authorities and criminal groups committed acts of violence and harassment against journalists. The Observatory for Rights and Justice of Ecuador reported that journalists claimed they were subject to government surveillance and interception of communications.

On January 30, the mayor of Loja criticized journalists, asserting media “exuded verbal violence”; the mayor also characterized journalists as “extortionists.”

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police

Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

The media nongovernmental organization (NGO) Fundamedios reported several censorship cases between January and August. The NGO noted the government did not adequately investigate or prosecute these cases.

Some media outlets reported officials removed them from official chat rooms and restricted their access to public information.

On June 10, the national television interview program *Los Irreverentes* was discontinued. The network cited commercial justifications for the discontinuation of the program.

Unknown persons not presumed connected with government authorities conducted attacks against journalists during the year. Reporters Without Borders reported the rise of criminal gangs and drug cartel-related violence impacted aggression, threats, attacks, and killings.

Between January and August, Fundamedios registered 22 aggressions perpetrated by alleged criminal and terrorist organizations against media. These aggressions suggested a pattern of intimidation, threats, and direct attacks against journalists and media outlets.

On January 30, members of a criminal gang in Guayaquil attacked the shared facility of the state-owned networks TC Televisión and Gamavisión during a live broadcast. Armed men invaded the studio and beat and then kidnapped

several media workers.

Efforts to Preserve the Independence of the Media

On March 20, President Noboa signed the Chapultepec and Salta Declarations, committing the government to promote freedom of expression.

On August 23, the government issued a decree that defined risk prevention and protection measures for journalists. The decree included new risk prevention measures, such as mapping risks facing journalists, the development of protection protocols, and the creation of support networks. New protection measures included monitoring threats and attacks and security training for journalists.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law, with exceptions, provided certain workers the right to form and join trade unions of their choice, to bargain collectively, and to strike. The law required a minimum of 30 workers for the creation of an association or labor union, regardless of the total number of employees in the workplace. To form a work committee, the law required the participation of 50 percent of a company's employees. Only labor unions that represented 50 percent of a company's employees could sign a collective bargaining agreement.

The law prohibited the dismissal of union members from the moment a union notified the labor inspector of its definitive board members.

Employers were not required to reinstate workers fired for union activity but were required to pay such workers compensation and a fine of one year's annual salary for everyone wrongfully dismissed. Individual workers still employed could take complaints against employers to the Labor Inspection Office. Individuals no longer employed could take their complaints to courts charged with protecting labor rights. Unions with at least 50 percent of a company's total workers could take labor complaints to a tripartite arbitration board established to hear their complaints. The law obligated that mediation begin within 48 hours of issuing a complaint. All private employers with unionized employees were legally required to negotiate collectively when the union so requested.

Ministerial resolutions allowed for the use of certain types of short-term or outsourcing labor contracts, with specific provisions for the flower, palm, fishing, livestock, and construction sectors.

The right for workers to organize at a sectoral level was recognized by the courts but was not always protected.

The law provided for the right of private-sector employees to strike and conduct solidarity strikes or boycotts on behalf of employees in other industries, after mandatory steps had been taken. The law established that before most strikes were declared, collective labor disputes had to be

referred to courts of conciliation and arbitration.

The law required a 10- to 20-day cooling-off period from the time a strike was declared before it could take effect. During this time, workers and employers had to agree on how many workers were needed to ensure a minimum level of service; at least 20 percent of the workforce had to continue to work to provide essential services. The law provided the employer could contract substitute personnel only when striking workers refused to send the number of workers required to provide the minimum necessary services. The law did not provide for time-limited, seasonal, hourly, or part-time contracts.

The law prohibited formation of unions and restricted the right to collective bargaining and striking of public-sector workers in a long list of “strategic sectors” that went beyond International Labor Organization standard for essential services. Workers in these sectors attempting to strike could face charges with penalties of two to five years’ imprisonment. The government effectively enforced the law on “strategic sectors.”

All unions in the public sector fell under the Confederation of Public Servants. The law specified that only the private sector could engage in collective bargaining.

The government did not effectively enforce all applicable laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for other laws involving denial of civil rights,

such as discrimination, but they were rarely applied against violators.

Employers did not always respect freedom of association and collective bargaining. Unions reported the Ministry of Labor delayed unions' requests to update their boards of directors, which led to delayed registration. Labor unions and associations reported difficulties and delays in registering unions in the ministry due to excessive and ever-changing requirements – sometimes not stated in the regulations – and ministry staff shortages.

There were a few cases in which employers fired leaders of new unions while the unions were awaiting ministry registration. Even if a court supported a union's registration efforts, dismissed leaders were entitled only to compensation, not reinstatement, which undermined the union's ability to form. In addition, dismissed union leaders could not turn to the Ministry of Labor but were required to go through the courts.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The law provided for a minimum monthly wage, which was above the poverty income level. The law limited the standard work period to 40 hours

a week, eight hours a day, with two consecutive days of rest per week. The labor code stipulated workers should be paid at 150 percent for each hour of overtime while working on the weekend; between midnight to 6 a.m., workers should be paid at 200 percent of the hourly salary in overtime. Overtime was limited to no more than four hours per day and a total of 12 hours per week. Mandatory overtime was prohibited. The law mandated penalties for employers who did not register workers with the Social Security Administration.

The law allowed employers and employees to enter force majeure agreements, addressing unforeseen events beyond an employer's control that could temporarily suspend work and allowing employers to adjust working hours without incurring overtime pay to recover lost time. Employers were required to compensate employees for the interruption, while adhering to regulations regarding maximum working hours and minimum wage stipulated in wage laws.

The dismissal of an employee was permitted only if the business ceased operations permanently. The law permitted employers to reduce working hours and salaries by up to 50 and 45 percent, respectively, by signing "emergency contracts" with their employees to prevent job losses. In 2021, the Constitutional Court declared the force majeure provision unconstitutional, arguing it was "incompatible with the right to legal certainty recognized in the constitution." In June 2022, the National

Assembly approved a partial repeal of the law, which the president vetoed in July 2022, preventing the legislature from addressing it for a one-year period. Labor unions filed a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court the same month challenging other provisions in the law. The law remained in effect.

Labor leaders and NGOs reported that there were no specific sectors with a concentration of alleged violations of wage, hour, or overtime laws.

Occupational Safety and Health

The law provided for the health and safety of workers and outlined occupational safety and health (OSH) standards, which were appropriate for the country's main industries. Authorities could conduct labor inspections of formal workplaces either by appointment, after a worker complaint, or through unannounced visits. If a worker requested an inspection and a Ministry of Labor inspector confirmed a workplace hazard, the inspector then could close the workplace. Labor inspections generally occurred because of complaints, not as a preventive measure. In some cases, violations were remedied, but other cases were subjected to legal challenges that delayed changes for months.

Workers in the formal sector could generally remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, and authorities effectively protected employees in this situation. Labor representatives from the agricultural sector said they

registered cases in which employers forced workers to return to plantations shortly after fumigations took place, risking illness or bodily harm.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcement of wage, hour, and OSH laws. The government did not effectively enforce the laws. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections. The ministry issued fines for wage, and hour, and OSH violations. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud or negligence, but were rarely applied to violators. The ministry had an insufficient number of inspectors to ensure compliance.

The law singled out the health and safety of miners, but the government faced challenges to enforce safety rules in informal (artisanal), often illegal, small-scale mines (frequently linked to local community leaders and criminal groups), which made up most mining enterprises. Illegal mining rose precipitously during the year following the increase in the price of gold in legal and illicit markets, with criminal organizations behind much of the expansion in territory and extraction. Mining activity was present in 17 of the 24 provinces. Migrants and refugees were particularly vulnerable to hazardous and exploitative working conditions. According to media and labor associations, local organizations reported complaints of Venezuelans being paid below the minimum wage, particularly in the informal sector. Gig workers reported conditions that did not follow wage, hour, and safety laws.

The informal sector employed 53.5 percent of the working population as of June. The government did not enforce applicable labor laws in this sector. Wage, hour, and OSH regulations and standards did not apply to workers in the informal sector.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

The government disputed an NGO's reporting of an alleged enforced disappearance in the Cotopaxi prison and vouched that the individual was in custody and "in good health." The government did not comment on two other alleged enforced disappearances by the same NGO.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

Several NGOs reported the existence of arbitrary arrests by the police and military during the government's declarations of a state of emergency.

In a report covering the period from January 8 to April 8, the Regional Human Rights Advisory Foundation noted at least five arbitrary arrests, three by the military and two by police. NGOs noted the number of arbitrary detentions was likely much higher during the year.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom*

Report at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibited torture and similar forms of intimidation and punishment.

A released prisoner detained during the state of emergency said that, on one occasion, military officers put prisoners face down and stepped on their toes, backs, heads, and necks with their boots and then randomly selected prisoners to submerge the detainees' heads into a water tank while applying electric shocks to demand information regarding weapons or drugs deposits.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

Child Marriage

The legal marriage age was 18. There were reports of early and forced marriage in rural and poor areas.

According to a 2023 study by the Gender Roundtable of International Cooperation, Plan International, UN Population Fund, and UNICEF, an estimated 30,000 girls and adolescents were in early unions in the country.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Provision of First Asylum

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees.

Resettlement

As part of the regularization initiative, the government sought to achieve better integration of migrants and refugees in their host communities;

nevertheless, discrimination as well as limited access to formal employment, education, and housing affected migrants' and refugees' ability to integrate.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There was a small Jewish community, including an estimated 450 individuals in Quito, 50 individuals in Guayaquil, and an unspecified number of individuals elsewhere in the country. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents.

Exhibit 4

World Report 2026: Ecuador | Human Rights Watch

[hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/ecuador](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/ecuador)

January 12, 2026



Ecuador

Events of 2025

A military truck patrol the streets during a demonstration in Quito, Ecuador on October 12, 2025, during a national strike convened by the CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) after the government of Daniel Noboa announced cutting subsidies for diesel.

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Ecuador continues to face high levels of violence, driven by organized crime. President Daniel Noboa's security response has failed to curb violence and has led to increased reports of human rights violations.

The government has advanced laws and measures that endanger rights, undermine the independence and security of Constitutional Court judges, and threaten constitutional safeguards.

Longstanding structural problems, including limited access to health care and employment, remain largely unaddressed.

Ecuador [was elected](#) to the UN Human Rights Council for the 2026-2028 term.

Violence and Organized Crime

After declining in 2024, homicides increased sharply in 2025, by about 40 percent by September according to the [Ministry of Interior](#), bringing Ecuador close to its [highest homicide rate](#) ever.

Between January and July 2025, the Attorney General's Office [recorded](#) 9,522 extortion complaints, down 40 percent from 2024. Kidnapping reports declined slightly compared to 2024 but remained at high levels.

[Organized crime groups have fragmented](#), giving rise to new groups. According to the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data](#) monitor, the number of identifiable gangs increased 54 percent between 2023 and 2024.

“Internal Armed Conflict” and Human Rights Violations

Since January 2024, the government [has repeatedly invoked](#) the existence of an “internal armed conflict” in the country, which the Constitutional Court has [called into question](#), to justify loosening human rights protections in its fight against crime.

The government's response to organized crime has led to [serious human rights violations](#) by security forces, including [extrajudicial killings](#), [enforced disappearances](#), arbitrary arrests, and ill-treatment. On October 8, a judge [sent](#) 17 military officers to trial for the alleged enforced disappearance of four children unlawfully detained in December 2024 in Guayaquil and later found dead.

In June 2025, the Assembly passed laws granting the president broad powers to [declare](#) an “armed conflict,” [dispense](#) with crucial human rights protections, and expand [intelligence gathering](#). The Constitutional Court [struck](#) some of them down.

Democratic Institutions and the Rule of Law

Democratic institutions remained fragile, plagued by impunity for abuses and by allegations of corruption.

Judges and prosecutors often [lack](#) basic tools and security to investigate organized crime groups. As of October, the Observatory of Rights and Justice had [registered](#) 10 attacks against the judiciary in 2025, including assassination attempts and killings of judges and prosecutors.

The government organized [demonstrations](#) against the Constitutional Court and senior officials called its judges “[enemies of the people](#).” The [UN special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers](#), the [UN high commissioner for human rights](#), and [the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) expressed concern regarding threats to the independence and security of the judges.

In September, President Noboa [issued](#) a decree establishing a referendum to convene a Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution. He attempted to bypass the Constitutional Court's review of the decree, as required under the Constitution, but electoral authorities ultimately referred the situation to the court. The court [approved](#) the referendum.

On November 16, Ecuadorians [voted down](#) the referendum proposals that included allowing the government to sign agreements to host foreign military bases and beginning a process to draft a new constitution.

Prison Conditions

Since January 2024, the military has overseen several prisons. As of August 2025, soldiers reportedly [remained](#) in 11 of the country's 34 facilities. Since the deployment of soldiers to prisons, monitors have reported instances of corruption, incommunicado detention, physical abuse, and obstruction of medical care.

[Media outlets](#) and [human rights groups](#) reported that tuberculosis killed dozens of detainees during 2025, notably during an outbreak in a Guayaquil prison.

More than 500 detainees [have been killed](#) in violent confrontations inside prisons since 2021. As of November, prison massacres in [Machala](#) and [Esmeraldas](#) left around 60 dead and others injured.

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

As of June, 24 percent of Ecuadorians earned incomes below the nationally defined [poverty](#) line (US\$92 per month) and 10.4 percent were experiencing "extreme poverty" (monthly income below \$52), with rates much higher in rural areas (42 and 25 percent, respectively). The [unemployment rate](#) was just 3.9 percent, but 52.6 percent of workers were in the informal sector.

Almost [14 percent](#) of Ecuadorians face undernourishment due to insufficient food consumption, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

The public healthcare system faces a [severe crisis](#), including chronic shortages of medicines and food. In September, a patient advocacy group for people requiring dialysis [warned](#) that a clinic in Quito serving hundreds of patients would soon stop providing dialysis "due to the failure of the State to pay."

Children's Rights

Between 2014 and April 2025, the Ministry of Education [received reports](#) that 8,378 children suffered school-related sexual violence committed by teachers, students, and other school staff. Government measures to address these abuses have [not progressed](#) at the scale and pace needed.

Rising violence by organized crime groups has affected children, with 504 [homicides of children](#) aged 10 to 19 between January and June 2025, a 68 percent rise from 2024. Organized crime groups [recruit](#) children to engage in various [roles](#); some are sexually exploited.

In June, President Noboa officially [declared](#) that preventing and eradicating the recruitment and use of children by non-state actors was a “national priority.” He ordered the creation of an interinstitutional committee tasked with formulating and implementing public policies to achieve this goal.

Later that month, the National Assembly [passed amendments](#) to the Child and Adolescent Code, [raising sentences](#) for children sentenced for crimes tied to the “internal armed conflict” from 8 to 15 years and prohibiting the use of any measures other than incarceration for children sentenced to five years or more. In February, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child had [urged](#) Ecuador to allow the detention of children only as a last resort and for the shortest time necessary. The Constitutional Court [struck down](#) the amendments in September.

Environmental Protection and Indigenous People’s Rights

The government has [not complied with a 2023 nationwide referendum](#) establishing a moratorium on oil drilling in the Ishpingo, Tambococha, and Tiputini (ITT) area of Yasuní National Park. The Constitutional Court [ruled](#) that the government should end the drilling by 2024 but the government has dragged its feet, at [times citing the country’s security crisis](#). As of September, most of the block’s 240 wells remained active.

In September, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, joined by other Indigenous and social movements, conducted [protests](#) on cuts to diesel subsidies and the expansion of oil extraction in Indigenous territories.

Women’s and Girls’ Rights

Abortion is criminalized in Ecuador except in cases of risk to health or life, or rape, and even then access remains limited due to stigma, mistreatment, fear of prosecution, and restrictive interpretations of the law. Ecuadorian law [fails](#) to protect women and girls from violence and discrimination, undermining their autonomy and perpetuating gender inequality.

The Ministry of Women and Human Rights [reported](#) 429 violent deaths of women and girls as of late June, almost doubling the number [reported](#) during the same period in 2024.

That ministry is one of six that President Noboa [merged](#) in July, incorporating it into the Ministry of Government.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

In January, the Constitutional Court [ruled in favor](#) of a transgender girl whose school failed to respect her gender identity (preferred name, uniform, bathroom access). The court ordered authorities to adopt a mandatory protocol for addressing sexual orientation and gender identity diversity in schools.

At time of writing the legislature had not taken action to align the law with other court orders to revise [civil marriage](#) provisions to include same-sex couples, regulate assisted reproduction, and allow same-sex couples [to register](#) children with their surnames.

The constitution prohibits same-sex couples from adopting children.

Internal Displacement and Migration

According to the [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#), the data analysis center of the Norwegian Refugee Council, in 2024 Ecuador had the region's third-highest number of people displaced by violence, after Haiti and Colombia. The Ombudsperson's Office [estimates](#) that 316,000 were displaced internally between 2022 and 2024.

Many migrants and asylum seekers in Ecuador [struggle](#) to obtain regular status and [integrate](#). In August, Ecuador [ended](#) an agreement that simplified the procedure for Venezuelan citizens to obtain visas and residency in the country.

During a visit by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Ecuador [said](#) it would accept third-country nationals deported from the United States.

Freedom of Expression and Association

[Journalists](#) and civil society organizations have [reported](#) growing stigmatization, harassment, and [attacks](#) by organized crime groups and authorities.

In August, the National Assembly passed a [law](#) that allows authorities to shut down organizations that commit "grave" infractions, such as carrying out "unauthorized" activities. The law also allows authorities to freeze the bank accounts of groups without a court order.

Authorities restricted freedom of assembly and at times [used excessive force](#) in their response to anti-government protests that started in mid-September. They [froze the bank](#) accounts of environmental and Indigenous groups and leaders, claiming they had [funded](#) violent protests, and [suspended community media outlets](#). Protesters were involved in some [violent incidents](#).

[Browse countries](#)

Exhibit 5

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS

APRIL 2026



AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



the human rights crisis in their country of origin.

In April a healthcare protocol for migrants was introduced, establishing that those with irregular migratory status would be subject to deportation after receiving treatment. This protocol disproportionately affected access to health for Black people, Haitians and Dominican nationals of Haitian descent – in particular pregnant women – who were afraid to access public health services.¹

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

A new Penal Code was approved in August establishing a total ban on abortion. It also maintained a statute of limitations for criminal proceedings relating to sexual violence against adult women; a regressive classification of the crime of intimate partner sexual violence that falls short of international standards; tolerance of physical punishment of children; and failure to punish discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

1. *Dominican Republic: Health Without Stigma: Myths and Realities About Healthcare for Haitian People in the Dominican Republic* (Spanish only) 17 November 1

ECUADOR

Republic of Ecuador

There was little progress in investigations into enforced disappearances. Security forces cracked down on protests and a new law restricting freedom of association was passed. Detainees continued to face very precarious conditions. In the Amazon region, gas flaring and exploitation of natural resources continued without the consent of Indigenous Peoples. Human rights defenders continued to be at risk. The independence of the judiciary was threatened.

BACKGROUND

Daniel Noboa was re-elected president in April, and the militarization of public security continued. As of 19 December, a total of 8,847 homicides were recorded, the highest annual rate in the country's recent history.

In June, the National Assembly passed a series of security-centred laws proposed by the government that posed a threat to human rights. In September, the Constitutional Court declared the new Public Integrity and National Solidarity laws null and void and provisionally suspended some sections of the Intelligence Law.

In November, Ecuadorians voted against the call for a constituent assembly.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

The Public Prosecutor's Office opened investigations into the possible enforced disappearance of 43 individuals following security operations carried out by the armed forces in 2024. However, progress in the criminal investigations was slow, with no cooperation from the armed forces.¹ In December, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted urgent protection measures to 26 of those people and six *mujeres buscadoras* (women searchers).

Also in December, 16 members of the armed forces were convicted for the enforced disappearance of four Afro-descendant children in 2024 after their detention in the city of Guayaquil. The sentence also confirmed that they had been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during their detention.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

In August, the National Assembly passed a law that put freedom of association at risk, with the corresponding regulations being published in October.

The authorities carried out mass arrests and used unlawful force against protests led by Indigenous, social and trade union organizations, and opened abusive criminal proceedings against and froze the bank accounts of social leaders and protesters.²

Civil society organizations reported at least two people killed, 473 injured and 206 arrests during the protests that took place in September and October.

Journalist Patricio Aguilar was murdered on 4 March while reporting from the canton of Quinindé, Esmeraldas province. At the end of the year, the investigation into his murder remained open.

DETAINEES' RIGHTS

Detainees continued to suffer from overcrowding and lack of adequate food and healthcare, as well as torture and other ill-treatment. According to the National Service for Comprehensive Care for Adults Deprived of Liberty and Adolescent Offenders, between January and September, 760 prisoners had died in the country's prisons, 105 of them violently.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The government continued to allow gas flaring in the Amazon region, despite a 2021 court ruling ordering the removal of flares. In January, the Constitutional Court rejected an appeal filed by the same group of girls who had brought the original lawsuit, which sought to ensure full compliance with the initial ruling.³

By year's end, the government had not yet ordered the closure of the hundreds of oil wells in Yasuní National Park in the Amazon rainforest, ignoring the result of the 2023 referendum held on the issue.

The exploitation of natural resources continued to violate individual and collective rights, in particular the right to free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights condemned Ecuador for violating the right to collective property of Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon region by authorizing mining projects in their territory.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders, especially land, territory and environmental defenders, reported harassment, stigmatization, persecution and criminalization, including an attempt on the life of a community leader.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Access to abortion, which was legally allowed in three cases, continued to be limited by institutional barriers, lack of official data, medical precariousness and stigma. The UN Human Rights Committee condemned Ecuador for violating the rights of a 13-year-old girl survivor of sexual violence who had been forced to carry her pregnancy to term.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Ecuador to prevent and combat all forms of violence against children and to address the issue of child deaths, especially in security operations carried out by the military.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the IACHR expressed concern regarding the discrediting of the judiciary by the executive branch through harassment and public stigmatization, threats and a march led by President Noboa against the Constitutional Court, among other actions.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

The government publicly apologized to the more than 300 victims of practices akin to slavery by a foreign company, pursuant to a 2024 ruling. The victims were still awaiting comprehensive reparation. Ecuador had still not signed or ratified the Ljubljana-Hague Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance.

IMPUNITY

Impunity persisted for human rights violations committed by security forces during the 2019 and 2022 protests.

1. *"It Was the Military. I Saw Them": Enforced Disappearances in Ecuador at the Hands of the Armed Forces*, 23 September ↑

2. *"Ecuador: Alert over repression of protests, judicial independence and enforced disappearances"*, 8 October ↑

3. *"Ecuador: Justice has failed the Warriors for the Amazon, but their fight continues"*, 26 March ↑

Exhibit 6

Invest in Freedom’s Future. Support Freedom House.



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2025

Ecuador

PARTLY FREE

65
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	28 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	37 /60

LAST YEAR’S SCORE & STATUS

67 /100 Partly Free

A country or territory’s Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0–40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0–60. See the methodology.



Overview

Ecuador holds regular, competitive elections, but the influence of organized crime and related violence have increased significantly in recent years, affecting the functioning of state institutions and the security of ordinary citizens. Due process violations, attacks on journalists, human rights abuses, and official corruption are ongoing challenges, and the new government of President Daniel Noboa Azín has engaged in practices that further threaten civil liberties.

Key Developments in 2024

- In January 2024, President Noboa declared a state of emergency and an “internal armed conflict,” deploying the military to combat organized crime groups. By the end of the year, however, concerns about abuses by the armed forces were mounting, particularly after the deaths of four children whose bodies were discovered near a military base in December.
- The country’s economy and political agenda were severely disrupted by an energy crisis. At its peak in the last quarter of the year, the government was forced to impose continuous blackouts of up to 14 hours per day.
- The government was accused of interfering with press freedom, including through alleged pressure on the political analysis program *Los Irreverentes* and the expulsion of Cuban journalist Alondra Santiago from the country, both in June.
- Tensions arose between President Noboa and Vice President Verónica Abad Rojas, with Noboa’s administration assigning Abad to diplomatic duties abroad and ultimately suspending her in November in an apparent effort to avoid transferring presidential powers to her during Noboa’s reelection campaign in early 2025.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?	4/4
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Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because an electoral court disqualified a prominent opposition presidential candidate on dubious grounds.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?	2 / 4
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Ecuadorians’ political choices are increasingly constrained by criminal organizations and related violence. The surge in political violence in 2023 and concerns about illicit campaign financing persisted in 2024. At least three mayors were murdered during the year, leading the Association of Municipalities of Ecuador (AME) to petition the government for special police protection. The AME’s president reported that at least 100 of the country’s 221 mayors were at risk of criminal violence. In addition, journalists have exposed the ability of organized crime groups to co-opt and bribe political and security authorities, particularly to protect lucrative activities such as illegal mining, which also facilitates money-laundering operations.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	3 / 4
--	--------------

Citizens enjoy formal political equality regardless of race, gender, and other such distinctions, though some disparities in access and influence persist in practice. Electoral regulations mandate that women account for 50 percent of the candidates on party lists in multimember districts, and women must also lead half of a party’s lists; presidential tickets must include a woman candidate for president or vice president. However, efforts to increase electoral participation among ethnic and racial minority groups, as well as LGBT+ people, remain incomplete. While some parties, such as the Indigenous movement Pachakutik, advocate for the interests of minority groups, these issues are not a focus of major parties’ platforms.

violence and political pressure have increasingly constrained the work of journalists in recent years.

In June 2024, *Los Irreverentes*, a political opinion show that often featured criticism of the government, was canceled by the television broadcaster Canal RTU and taken off the air. RTU had reportedly been threatened with the possible suspension of government advertising contracts and unusual information requests from the Telecommunications Regulation and Control Agency (ARCOTEL), though RTU’s general manager declined to comment on the matter.

Also in June, the government revoked the visa of Alondra Santiago, a Cuban journalist who had lived in Ecuador for almost two decades. She had recently posted a social media video that was critical of the Noboa administration. Separately, a series of Ecuadorean journalists have sought safety abroad after facing threats for investigating organized crime and corruption, and this trend continued in 2024.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	4/4
---	------------

Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?	3/4
---	------------

Academic freedom is generally upheld, and the education system is mostly free of political indoctrination. In the country’s largest public universities, however, political parties and movements have traditionally controlled key positions of authority.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

3/4

Discussion of controversial topics among private citizens is generally free, but criminal groups continue to intimidate voters, community leaders, and activists in certain parts of the country.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

3/4

Protests typically occur throughout the country without incident. However, national security legislation provides a broad definition of sabotage and terrorism, extending to acts against persons and property by unarmed individuals. States of emergency that were declared for security reasons in recent years have also periodically affected freedom of assembly.

In January 2024, President Noboa declared a state of emergency to combat organized crime, then announced an “internal armed conflict” shortly thereafter. The emergency decree, which was in place or renewed for most of the year, specifically allowed security forces to limit freedom of assembly. The Constitutional Court, ruling in November on the latest version of the emergency declaration, struck down that component and stated that the right to peaceful protest must be respected.

E2 0-4 pts

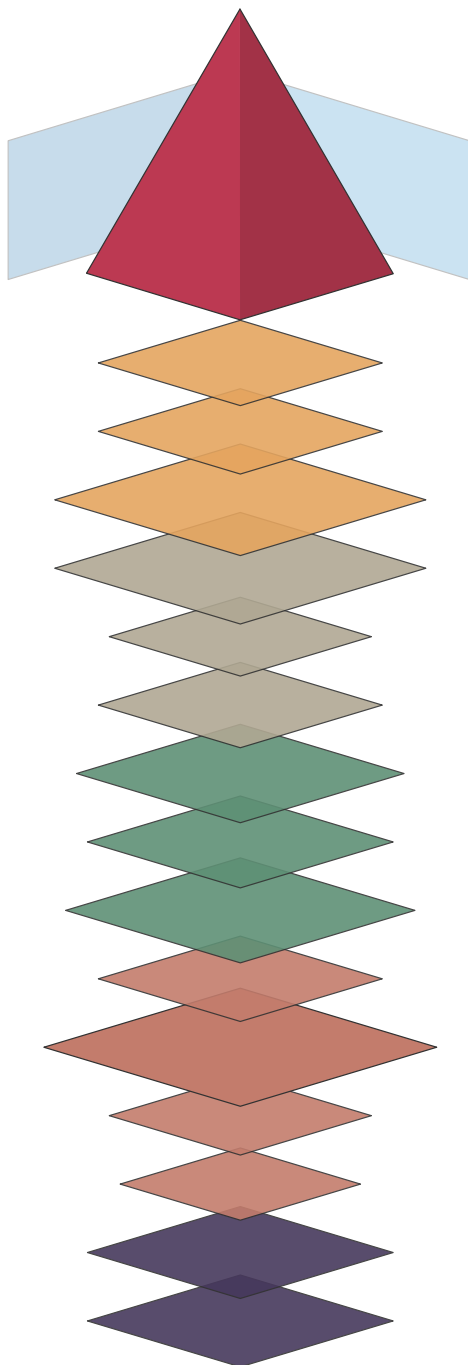
Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

3/4

Exhibit 7

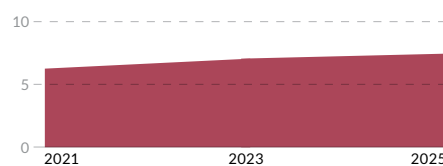


ECUADOR



7.48 $\nearrow 0.41$
CRIMINALITY SCORE

4th of 193 countries $\nearrow 7$
3rd of 35 American countries $\nearrow 1$
2nd of 12 South American countries $\nearrow 1$



CRIMINAL MARKETS **7.07** $\nearrow 0.34$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	8.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.00	0.00
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
FLORA CRIMES	7.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
FAUNA CRIMES	7.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	8.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
HEROIN TRADE	6.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	9.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
CANNABIS TRADE	6.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.50	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.00	$\nearrow 0.50$



CRIMINAL ACTORS **7.90** $\nearrow 0.50$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	8.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	8.50	$\nearrow 1.00$
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
FOREIGN ACTORS	8.00	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.00	$\nearrow 0.50$



This project was funded in part
by a grant from the United
States Department of State.

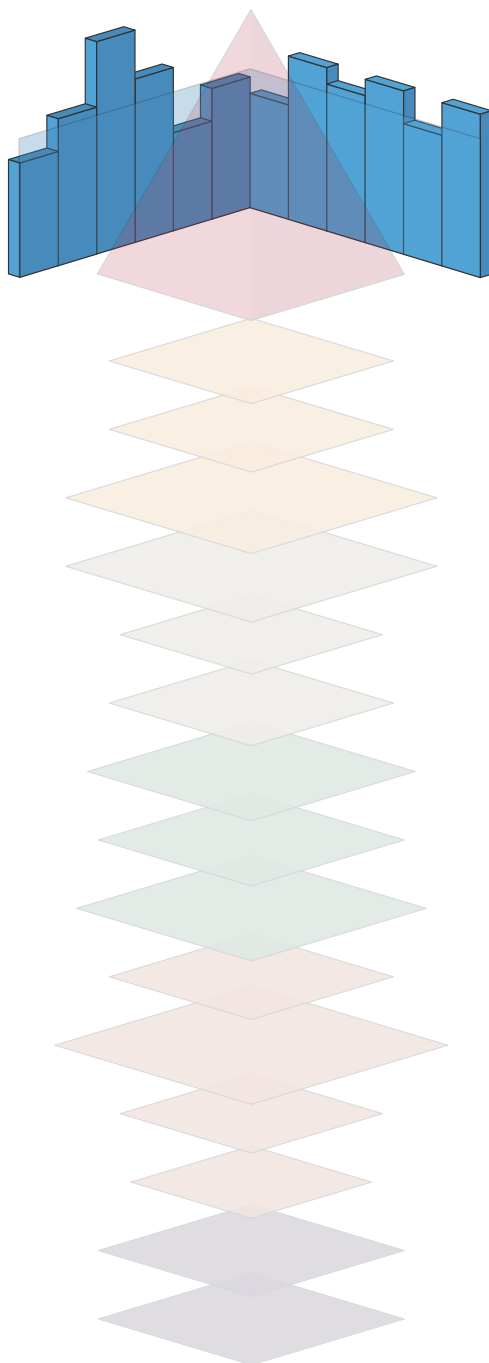


Funded by
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ENACT is funded by the European Union
and implemented by the Institute for
Security Studies and INTERPOL, in
affiliation with the Global Initiative Against
Transnational Organized Crime.



ECUADOR



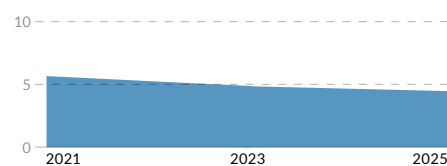
4.46 $\searrow 0.42$

RESILIENCE SCORE

114th of 193 countries $\searrow 18$

24th of 35 American countries $\searrow 5$

7th of 12 South American countries $\searrow 1$



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE **3.50** $\searrow 1.00$

GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY **4.50** $\searrow 1.00$

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION **6.50** $\nearrow 0.50$

NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS **5.00** 0.00

JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION **3.00** $\searrow 1.00$

LAW ENFORCEMENT **4.00** 0.00

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY **3.50** 0.00

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING **5.00** $\searrow 0.50$

ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY **4.50** $\searrow 0.50$

VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT **5.00** $\searrow 0.50$

PREVENTION **4.00** $\searrow 0.50$

NON-STATE ACTORS **5.00** $\searrow 0.50$



This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.



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the European Union

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking remains a significant issue in Ecuador, with criminal organizations exploiting vulnerabilities in migration policies. Victims, both domestic and foreign, are trafficked within Ecuador and across borders for purposes of sex trafficking and forced labour. Women and children are particularly vulnerable, with trafficking occurring in labour-intensive industries such as agriculture, domestic work and fishing. Criminal networks operate in border regions and urban centres, employing various tactics, including social media, to recruit victims. Corruption within certain institutions has facilitated trafficking activities, with some private-sector entities indirectly benefiting from exploited labour. Trafficking routes frequently involve movement between Ecuador, Colombia and Peru, with some victims continuing onward to Central America and beyond.

Human smuggling has intensified as Ecuador remains a key transit and origin point for irregular migration, especially to the United States. Criminal networks, including Tren de Aragua and Clan del Golfo, profit from these flows, charging high fees and leveraging Ecuador's porous borders. Smuggling routes through both Colombia and Peru allow for clandestine movement of individuals. Private-sector actors, particularly in the transportation and hospitality sectors, facilitate smuggling operations. Informal crossings into Colombia and Peru allow smugglers to operate with minimal state interference, with corrupt officials reportedly providing false documentation for smuggled individuals.

Extortion and protection racketeering have surged, with mafia-style groups such as Los Choneros, Los Lobos and Los Tiguerones increasingly relying on extortion for revenue. Criminal groups, some operating from prisons, impose protection payments known as vacunas on businesses, transport companies and mining operations. Violence accompanies these extortion schemes, with reports of bombings and kidnappings linked to non-compliance. Despite increased militarization, law enforcement has struggled to curb this trend. In fact, state-embedded actors are known to facilitate extortion schemes by shielding criminal groups from prosecution or providing them with sensitive law enforcement data. Loansharking – locally known as chulcos – also remains widespread, often operated by mafia-style and private-sector actors.

TRADE

Arms trafficking in Ecuador has expanded due to rising demand from criminal organizations. Firearms are sourced from Peru and the United States, with security forces implicated in arms diversion. The black market for weapons has grown alongside gang-related violence, with seizures of firearms and ammunition increasing. Ecuador's relaxed regulations on carrying arms have further fuelled demand. Smuggling routes exploit Ecuador's maritime and land borders, and illicit arms are frequently recycled within security forces before being resold to criminal groups. Cross-border arms trafficking with Colombia has been identified as a major concern, with dissident factions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) involved in these operations. Additionally, weapons trafficking is facilitated by corruption among certain security officials, who supply arms directly to organized crime groups.

The counterfeit goods market in Ecuador is sustained by smuggled textiles, pharmaceuticals and electronics. Criminal organizations collaborate with private-sector actors to distribute fake medicines and alcohol, often sourced from Asian markets. Smuggling networks exploit Ecuador's weak border enforcement, and authorities continue to struggle to dismantle these operations. Operations targeting counterfeit liquor rings and fake pharmaceutical distributors have highlighted the extent of the problem. Informal markets in urban centres, including Guayaquil, serve as key distribution hubs for counterfeit goods, with local criminal networks ensuring their circulation. The market for counterfeit medicines has grown notably during the reporting period, with criminal organizations collaborating with foreign suppliers, particularly from Asia.

The illicit trade in excise goods, particularly cigarettes and alcohol, has expanded. Smugglers use the country's ports and informal crossings to move goods from Asia, Paraguay and Colombia. Mafia-style groups and criminal networks are increasingly participating in this market, importing and trading illicit goods within the country. These groups often source products from foreign actors, particularly from Asian countries, due to the lower costs and high availability. The participation of corrupt security forces and private-sector actors, who facilitate the importation of these goods through established links with suppliers, further exacerbates the problem. Despite efforts to combat this trade, it continues to grow, with Ecuador reaching a historic peak in illicit cigarette trade, now accounting for most of the market. This widespread prevalence has turned Ecuador into both a consumption hub and a transit point for these illicit goods. Additionally, reports indicate that proceeds from excise goods smuggling are used to fund other illicit activities, including drug trafficking and money laundering operations.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in Ecuador are driven by illegal logging, particularly in the Amazon and coastal forests. The trade in precious woods such as mahogany and cedar is facilitated by bribery and weak enforcement. Criminal networks and foreign actors exploit Ecuador's forests, often using timber shipments to launder illicit profits. The illegal timber trade is closely tied to narcotics smuggling, with traffickers using lumber exports to conceal drug shipments. Reports suggest that state-embedded actors provide falsified permits to allow illegal timber to enter formal markets.

Fauna crimes, including the illegal trade in wildlife and marine species, remain significant. Ecuador's Amazon and Galápagos Islands are major hotspots for wildlife trafficking, with species such as jaguars and turtles targeted for international markets. Shark finning persists, with substantial under-reporting of shark fin exports despite international regulations. Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing by foreign fleets, particularly Chinese vessels near the Galápagos, has strained Ecuador's marine resources. Ecuadorian ports are frequently used to facilitate the trans-shipment of illegally caught marine species to Asian markets. Investigations suggest that some legal fishing enterprises serve as fronts for laundering illicitly obtained marine resources, further complicating enforcement efforts.

Non-renewable resource crimes are largely driven by illegal gold mining, which has expanded across 17 provinces. Criminal groups, including dissidents from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), extort and control mining operations. Mercury use in illegal mining has caused severe environmental damage, with efforts to dismantle operations proving ineffective. Oil theft has also become a growing issue, with organized crime actors siphoning diesel for use in drug trafficking operations. Corrupt state officials have been implicated in facilitating these activities, further undermining enforcement efforts. Reports indicate that illegal mining networks often operate with impunity, taking advantage of remote terrain and limited state presence.

DRUGS

Heroin trafficking persists in Ecuador, primarily as a transit activity. Most heroin originates from Colombia, but Ecuadorian groups are increasingly involved in distribution. Recent seizures indicate a decline in volume, although consumption remains stable. Criminal networks exploit ports and logistical infrastructure, often using the same channels as other drug trades. Local consumption is concentrated among youth in urban centres and is often linked to dangerous substances such as fentanyl. The widespread use of heroin, particularly among youth in urban centres, is contributing to a growing public health issue.

Cocaine trafficking is highly pervasive in Ecuador. The country serves as a key transit hub for the transnational market due to its location between Colombia and Peru.

Ports such as Guayaquil and Manta are central nodes in global trafficking networks. Criminal actors include mafia-style groups, foreign cartels (Sinaloa, Jalisco) and Balkan networks, often supported by corrupt state and private-sector actors. Cocaine is exported in fruit shipments and maritime containers. Violence in Ecuador has surged alongside the expansion of the cocaine trade. Homicide rates have risen dramatically, and territorial control is contested by rival groups. The economic benefits of the trade have fostered local acceptance, especially in marginalized communities where micro-trafficking is widespread. The growing cultural normalization of criminal actors in public discourse, particularly through social media, contributes to the entrenchment of the cocaine economy in Ecuador.

Ecuador has a large domestic cannabis market. Despite a legal parallel market introduced in 2020, the illegal trade has expanded, largely driven by organized crime. Criminal groups import, cultivate and distribute cannabis, with foreign suppliers playing a supporting role. Corrupt officials facilitate operations. High domestic demand, particularly among youth, sustains the market. Border provinces such as Carchi, Sucumbíos and El Oro are key trafficking zones. The legal market suffers from competition with illicit actors, and cannabis is often trafficked using the same infrastructure as other narcotics.

Synthetic drugs, including 2CB, ecstasy and LSD, represent a growing market. Consumption is concentrated among youth and tourists, particularly in Quito and Guayaquil. Ecuador also serves as a transit hub for synthetic drugs, supplied by actors from Colombia and Chile. Domestic distribution is handled by subcontracted networks under mafia-style groups. Despite large-scale seizures and identified trafficking routes, the market continues to expand. Prices for synthetic drugs are significantly higher than in neighbouring countries, making the trade highly profitable.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Ecuador has emerged as a target for cyber-dependent crimes, with both domestic and foreign actors involved in ransomware attacks, hacking and malware use. Cybercriminals exploit weaknesses in banking and retail systems, using malware to steal funds. Reports indicate that hacker groups with links to international criminal networks are increasingly active in Ecuador. There has been a surge in cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure, including energy companies and public institutions, with state-embedded actors reportedly involved in some cyber-espionage activities. Cybercriminal groups have also been implicated in cryptocurrency fraud, using digital assets to launder illicit proceeds while evading financial oversight mechanisms.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Ecuador span tax evasion and fraudulent investment schemes. These schemes thrive on economic vulnerability and impunity, with victims concentrated in urban centres such as Pichincha. The dollarized economy and high informality rate facilitate cross-border cash movements and obscure financial flows. State-embedded actors, including high-ranking officials, have been implicated in tax evasion and fraud, deepening public distrust. Recent cyber-enabled crimes such as identity theft, phishing schemes and scams account for a significant share of arrests. Despite regulatory frameworks, enforcement remains weak and financial crime continues to undermine Ecuador's economy and institutions.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Ecuador's criminal landscape is dominated by powerful mafia-style groups that exert substantial influence over illicit markets and state institutions. Among these, Los Choneros, Los Lobos and Los Tiguerones stand out as the most prominent and violent organizations, each with a significant presence in drug trafficking, extortion, arms trafficking, illegal mining and human trafficking. These groups operate within Ecuadorian prisons, which serve as command centres for their criminal enterprises. Their internal structures remain fluid due to frequent leadership assassinations and factional disputes, leading to the proliferation of violent splinter groups. Recent notable law enforcement operations revealed the extent of these groups' infiltration into Ecuador's judicial and political systems, highlighting their ability to influence court rulings and finance election campaigns. The growing fragmentation and conflicts between these groups have fuelled Ecuador's escalating homicide rates. Despite recent government interventions, including militarization strategies, mafia-style groups continue to thrive.

Unlike the hierarchical mafia-style organizations, criminal networks in Ecuador function as intermediaries, facilitating illicit transactions across various markets without exerting territorial control. These groups play a key role in cocaine trafficking, arms smuggling and human trafficking, often operating between mafia-style groups and foreign actors. They specialize in logistics, enabling the transportation of drugs through ports, establishing clandestine airstrips and creating storage facilities for illicit goods. Recent developments highlight their growing influence. The killing of a prominent Ecuadorian gang leader in 2024 intensified violent disputes in Durán, Ecuador's most dangerous municipality, where rival networks compete for control of local drug trafficking routes. Similarly, internal divisions within the Chone Killers have exacerbated instability, reflecting a broader trend of power struggles within Ecuador's underworld. Criminal networks have expanded into Esmeraldas and Sucumbíos, two key provinces near the Colombian border, which serve as strategic zones for

purchasing cocaine from Colombian producers. These networks also facilitate the movement of international trafficking organizations, providing armed enforcers and intermediaries for foreign criminal groups seeking access to Ecuador's illicit economies. Despite their significance, authorities have historically underappreciated the role of these fluid and adaptable networks, focusing primarily on the high-profile violence of mafia-style groups.

The penetration of organized crime into Ecuador's state institutions remains a critical challenge. Corrupt officials at multiple levels – police, judiciary and political leadership – facilitate the operations of criminal groups through bribery, information leaks and active participation in illicit activities. Recent high-profile investigations have revealed deep-rooted corruption, exposing narco-generals within the security forces and the manipulation of judicial appointments by criminal organizations. Reports indicate that state-embedded actors play a pivotal role in arms trafficking, where corrupt security officials resell military-grade weapons, including those previously seized from criminal groups. Leaks from law enforcement agencies continue to compromise anti-mining operations, with officials tipping off criminals before raids on illegal gold-mining sites. The involvement of state actors in political corruption is also evident. Criminal groups finance electoral campaigns and maintain influence over local governance structures, particularly in coastal provinces like Guayas and Esmeraldas. This collusion between officials and organized crime weakens state resilience, making Ecuador increasingly vulnerable to criminal governance and illicit financial flows.

Numerous foreign criminal organizations are attracted by Ecuador's strategic location, each seeking to exploit the country's ports, border crossings and financial systems. Mexican cartels such as Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation have solidified their presence, partnering with Ecuadorian mafia-style groups to transport cocaine to international markets. Similarly, Balkan mafias leverage Ecuador's banana export routes to smuggle narcotics into Europe. The Colombian Clan del Golfo and FARC dissidents have become increasingly active, particularly in northern Ecuador, where they engage in drug production, arms smuggling and extortion of local businesses. Venezuelan gangs, most notably Tren de Aragua, have also attempted to establish operations in Ecuador, though authorities officially deny their presence. Beyond direct criminal engagement, foreign actors influence Ecuador's criminal landscape through financial networks. Money laundering operations linked to Colombian and Mexican organizations exploit Ecuador's dollarized economy, using real estate, construction firms and agriculture to disguise illicit funds. The interplay between domestic and foreign actors has made Ecuador a pivotal hub in the global drug trade.

Private-sector entities, particularly in transportation, agriculture and finance, play a crucial role in enabling organized crime, either through negligence or direct

collusion. The banana export industry remains a key conduit for cocaine trafficking, with shipments frequently used to conceal narcotics destined for Europe. Shipping companies and logistics firms facilitate human smuggling by providing safe passage, often in exchange for bribes. Illegal gold mining is another sector where private enterprises contribute to criminal economies. Mining companies have been

implicated in the use of illegally extracted minerals, while local businesses engage in money laundering to obscure the origins of illicit gold. Reports indicate that fuel companies and fishing fleets also engage in illicit activities, supplying vessels linked to IUU fishing operations – a market heavily influenced by external actors.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Ecuador's political leadership has been tested by the deep infiltration of organized crime into the country's institutions and political sphere, which became starkly evident following high-profile assassinations, violent attacks and prison riots that shook public confidence. Organized crime has increasingly shaped political, social and economic debates, particularly during elections and amid an ongoing security crisis. Despite efforts to combat these threats through militarized security measures and declaring an internal armed conflict against criminal groups, violence has escalated both inside prisons and across cities and mining regions, with rising extortion, kidnappings and homicides in areas previously less affected. Governance has also been undermined by a persistent financial crisis, weak institutional planning and a de-institutionalization process that neglected critical state functions, limiting the state's capacity to respond effectively. Corruption at multiple levels of government has further eroded institutional effectiveness, with investigations uncovering links between political and judicial actors and organized crime, weakening transparency and oversight. While partnerships and reforms aim to strengthen Ecuador's response, the security and governance challenges remain severe and evolving. Government transparency and accountability mechanisms function within a context of judicial inefficiencies and reports of political interference. Public confidence in state institutions has been affected by corruption cases and limited prosecution of high-profile figures. The Organic Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information provides a framework for transparency, but enforcement remains inconsistent across state institutions. Recent restrictions on public data access have raised concerns regarding oversight, particularly regarding security operations and crime statistics.

Ecuador engages in international cooperation initiatives to counter organized crime through agreements with the United States, Colombia and the European Union, as well as participation in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and INTERPOL. The country has received financial and security assistance, including technical training and military aid, to strengthen its capabilities against drug trafficking and other transnational crimes. Furthermore,

the country also maintains security partnerships with other South American countries. For example, in 2024, a binational council with Colombia was established to address environmental and organized crime in border regions. Despite these efforts, limitations in inter-agency trust and operational coordination have been noted, particularly with the US, Peruvian and Colombian counterparts in border security operations. Furthermore, Ecuador's diplomatic ties with Mexico were severed in 2024 following a police raid on the Mexican Embassy in Quito, which led to the suspension of relations between the two countries.

National policies and laws that address organized crime include legislation targeting human trafficking, money laundering and drug trafficking, with varying levels of enforcement. Ecuador's 2023 anti-human-trafficking law has strengthened prevention and protection measures, although implementation challenges remain. The Phoenix Plan, announced by the government, outlines security strategies, but limited public information on its operational scope has raised concerns about transparency. In terms of its environmental policies and laws, CITES issued an ultimatum to Ecuador to implement measures ensuring sustainable shark fishing in late 2024. In response, Ecuador announced initiatives to regulate the practice. However, an absence of transparency regarding the findings of CITES-mandated studies has compounded concerns raised in 2019 by the European Union's 'yellow card' for the country's failure to control illegal fishing.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Ecuador faces challenges in handling organized crime cases, with reports of bribery and coercion affecting judicial decisions. Corruption allegations include case dismissals and favourable rulings obtained through financial influence. Ecuador's criminal investigation system has been described as relying on in-flagrante arrests rather than long-term investigations, limiting its capacity to dismantle complex criminal organizations. Additionally, 35% of the prison population is in preventive detention, with over half facing drug-related charges. The penitentiary system remains a focal point of organized crime activity, with high-profile gang

leaders operating from within prisons. Frequent escapes and prison massacres have been linked to gang conflicts and the presence of illicit arms within detention centres. The government has implemented emergency security measures in response, including transferring inmates between facilities and deploying military personnel. However, these have not fully curtailed gang control over prisons, as evidenced by ongoing security breaches.

Law enforcement agencies have conducted operations targeting organized crime, with a focus on anti-narcotics and counter-extortion efforts. However, cases of corruption within police ranks have been documented, including instances of collusion with criminal groups. Intelligence-sharing and coordination between different branches of law enforcement have been affected by trust issues and information leaks. The government has initiated reforms, including the rotation of police officials, to mitigate corruption risks. While these measures have led to arrests of high-profile figures, operational challenges persist in containing the expansion of organized crime.

Territorial integrity is affected by criminal organizations operating along key border regions and strategic trafficking routes. Informal crossings facilitate the movement of arms, narcotics and smuggled individuals. State presence remains limited in some areas, enabling criminal groups to establish control. The government has increased joint security operations with neighbouring countries, but arms trafficking from Peru and transnational criminal networks remain persistent issues.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Ecuador's anti-money laundering framework includes regulatory measures aimed at preventing financial crimes, but enforcement has been inconsistent. Financial networks tied to drug trafficking continue to exploit real estate, commercial enterprises and informal financial systems. The government has taken steps to expand financial oversight, including reforms to enhance banking-sector compliance with anti-money laundering regulations. Nevertheless, Ecuador remains particularly vulnerable to money laundering, largely due to the overall ineffectiveness and limited impact of its recent efforts to combat it.

The economic regulatory environment includes oversight mechanisms for financial transactions and tax compliance. However, informal markets and tax evasion remain challenges that disrupt economic stability. Reports have highlighted instances of corruption within regulatory bodies, hindering the enforcement of financial laws. Ecuador has received international assistance to strengthen its financial intelligence capabilities, but legal loopholes continue to be exploited by organized crime groups.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Resources and implementation for victim and witness support services in Ecuador vary across regions. The national system for the protection of and assistance to victims and witnesses provides legal and psychological support, though limitations in security measures for key witnesses in high-profile cases have been noted. The murder of witnesses, including state officials, in organized crime cases has created a disincentive for participation in judicial processes. In recent years, efforts have been made to improve victim identification and access to specialized services, including the creation of two new task forces, though both remain understaffed and under-resourced. For drug users, interagency and multisectoral programmes promote social inclusion, early intervention, treatment and rehabilitation, but lack recovery support. Additionally, the absence of mechanisms to coordinate, collect, and analyze information on these services makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of victim support systems.

Although the central government has yet to establish a definitive policy on crime prevention, several municipal authorities have proactively developed their own plans and policies. Many of these initiatives have been formulated with the support and collaboration of civil society partners. These include community-based programmes and security sector reforms. A criminal policy council coordinates national efforts in crime prevention, though its long-term impact is still under assessment. Reports indicate that efforts to combat forced labour and human trafficking have been impaired by enforcement challenges. The 2023 human trafficking law included enhanced prevention measures, but access to specialized victim services remains limited in some regions.

Non-state actors, including civil society organizations and investigative media, have played a role in exposing corruption and organized crime. Ecuador's media continue to report on governance and security challenges, despite legal pressures and security risks for journalists and activists. Documented threats and violence against reporters covering organized crime have led to cases of self-censorship. Civil society organizations engage in transparency and accountability initiatives, including advocacy for anti-corruption measures and judicial integrity. The government has announced an integrity strategy to regulate CSOs, with implications for operational oversight. Some activists have raised concerns regarding potential restrictions on freedom of association under its framework. Despite these challenges, non-state actors continue to monitor crime trends and advocate for governance reforms.

This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.

Exhibit 8

Ecuador Profile

 insightcrime.org/ecuador-organized-crime-news/ecuador-profile

InSight Crime

December 3, 2024



Ecuador is one of the region's most significant drug trafficking hubs, used to dispatch Colombian and Peruvian cocaine to Europe, Mexico, and Central America. It has long been the site of operations for Mexican, Colombian, and European drug trafficking organizations, and Colombian guerrilla groups in its northern border region. In recent years, these international groups and their local proxies have been joined by a new generation of criminal groups known in Ecuador as the “mafias,” which took over the prison system while building up gang networks on the streets. All of these criminal networks have benefited from rampant corruption that has contaminated security, justice, government institutions, and the country's politics.

While long regarded as an island of relative peace despite its importance to organized crime, the emergence of the prison mafias has destabilized the country, as the prisons descended into brutal violence, murder rates reached among the highest in the region, and the country's institutions were shaken by political violence and top-level corruption scandals.

In This Profile:

- [Geography](#)
- [History](#)
- [Criminal Groups](#)
- [Security Forces](#)
- [Judicial System](#)

- [Prisons](#)

Geography

Ecuador, one of South America's smallest countries, borders the two largest cocaine producers in the world: Colombia to the north and Peru to the east and south. This, combined with its extensive western coastline along the Pacific Ocean, has made it one of the primary dispatch points for the global cocaine trade. In particular, the country's port city of [Guayaquil](#) has become a crucial transshipment point for drugs heading to Europe, while the coastal provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas are major trafficking corridors used to reach Mexican and Central America. As one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, Ecuador is [susceptible](#) to an assortment of environmental crimes like [illegal fishing](#). The illicit trade of [shark fins](#) in the [Galápagos Islands](#) is a particular problem. In addition, there is rampant [wildlife trafficking](#) in the country's eastern Amazon basin, and the vast forests along Ecuador's borders with Peru and Colombia have been decimated in recent years, partly due to [illegal logging](#). Furthermore, in the mountains of the north and far-flung Amazonian provinces in the east, [illegal mining](#) has proliferated at an alarming rate.

History

Ecuador became an independent country in 1830. Its first century was marked by turmoil fueled by internal conflict among elite factions.

In the post-World War II period, Ecuador alternated between periods of constitutional governance and military rule until 1979, when the military ceded power to an elected president for the last time.

Transnational organized crime began establishing a foothold in the country during the latter half of the 20th century. From the 1970s to the 1990s, Colombia's Medellín and Cali cartels used Ecuador as a transshipment point for trafficking drugs and as a smuggling hub for precursor chemicals needed to process coca leaf into cocaine.

In the 1990s, the now-demobilized guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – [FARC](#)) began crossing into the country in search of supplies and safe haven. They would go on to establish a permanent presence in the border region, maintaining camps, controlling drug trafficking routes and processing laboratories, and establishing support networks and supply lines in the cities. The presence of the insurgents drew the attention of their enemies – right-wing Colombian paramilitary groups – and their conflict spilled over the border.

In the early 2000s, Ecuador also experienced an increase in the presence of street gangs and violence. This led the government to take the unprecedented step of [legalizing gangs](#) that participated in a “pacification process”, recognizing groups like the Latin Kings as “urban youth groups.” As a result, the homicide rate in Ecuador dropped drastically.

Despite Ecuador's efforts to deal with internal criminal groups, in the late 2000s, international drug trafficking networks from Colombia and Mexico increased their presence in the country. As the European drug market boomed, they were soon joined by European traffickers, above all Albanian nationals who sent emissaries. Mexican drug trafficking organizations sourcing cocaine in Colombia also used Ecuadorian gangs and drug traffickers as [intermediaries](#) and providers of logistical and security services. In the 2010s, the most prominent international networks began to withdraw from the country after being debilitated by international law enforcement efforts. This led to a new generation of homegrown drug traffickers to fill the vacuum.

In the late 2010s, disparate gangs and criminal networks began uniting within the prisons to form powerful mafias that took over the penitentiary system, expanded across the country, and established themselves as key service providers to drug traffickers. The breakup of the most powerful of these groups, the Choneros, in 2021 created an array of splinter groups that violently contested control of the prisons, the streets, and drug trafficking corridors.

These disputes led to a period of unprecedented criminal violence, characterized by brutal prison massacres, soaring murder rates, terror tactics, and political violence culminating in the assassination of a candidate in the 2023 presidential elections. With the security situation spiraling out of control, in early 2024, the government deployed the military to the prisons and the streets.

Criminal Groups

Ecuador is home to several prison mafias and drug trafficking gangs that have vastly grown in sophistication and size in recent years.

The two largest and most sophisticated groups operating in the country today are the [Choneros](#), and the [Lobos](#). The Choneros began as a local gang dedicated to predatory crimes, but over time transformed into Ecuador's most formidable prison mafia and a key service provider to transnational drug traffickers. The Lobos, meanwhile, are a Choneros splinter group, which, since breaking away in 2020, has grown exponentially both inside and outside the prisons. Multiple smaller groups are also prominent in Ecuador's prisons and criminally strategic territories. Among them are the Lagartos, the Choneros' long-time rivals in the prison system, and other groups that began as factions of the Choneros, including the Tiguerones, and the Chone Killers. Factions of the Latin Kings have also returned to organized crime, either out of disillusionment with the pacification process or to protect themselves.

These groups work with both Ecuadorian and international drug traffickers. Among them are the [Sinaloa Cartel](#) and Jalisco Cartel New Generation (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación – CJNG) of Mexico, and [Albanian traffickers](#), including cocaine kingpins like [Dritan Rexhepi](#), who move tons of the drug from Ecuador to Europe.

Other international groups that have a significant presence in Ecuador include dissident FARC factions known as the Oliver Sinisterra Front (Frente Oliver Sinisterra – FOS) and the Border Command, which remain active along the Colombian border. Additionally, the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – [ELN](#)), another Colombian rebel group, has used Ecuador as a safe haven.

Security Forces

Ecuador has a national police force that is overseen by the Interior Ministry, which is the primary institution dedicated to fighting organized crime in the country. As organized crime has expanded there, [corruption scandals](#) have grown and the reputation of the police has declined.

Between 2013 and 2017, nearly 1,000 police officers, including high-ranking officers, were dismissed. Just under half of the dismissals were tied to allegedly criminal behavior. Police involvement in criminal activities has ranged from graft to extortion to [facilitating drug trafficking](#) and even transporting drugs in police vehicles.

In 2012, the administration of then-President Rafael Correa [began expanding](#) the [military's role](#) in public security and [anti-drug trafficking](#) operations, in part because of police corruption and his government's strained relationship with the force.

However, criminal groups have also successfully exploited corrupt [Ecuadorian military personnel](#), with gangs and traffickers able to source [weapons](#) from the armed forces and military officials participating in drug trafficking. The deployment of the military in 2024 to break the stranglehold of prison gangs and relieve the notorious corrupt prison authorities led to allegations of widespread human rights abuses and concerns over growing corruption.

Judicial System

Ecuador's highest judicial body is the National Court of Justice, which includes a specialized chamber for criminal cases. Below this are the Constitutional Court, specialized tribunals, provincial courts and community-level peace courts that mediate in local conflicts. The Attorney General's Office is responsible for criminal investigations, including those related to organized crime.

The judicial system is notoriously corrupt and frequently manipulated by organized crime and corrupt elites. In 2023 and 2024, it was a major focus of a series of corruption investigations that embroiled top-level regional and national judicial officials.

Prisons

Ecuador's penitentiary system has become one of the world's most violent. It has faced chronic [overcrowding](#), under-resourcing, and corruption, which contributed to the rise of prison mafias. Disputes between these groups sparked a series of [prison massacres](#) that killed hundreds of inmates between

2019 and 2023. The crisis in the prisons and its effect on citizen security led to the 2024 military intervention in the prison system.

Exhibit 9

Choneros

 insightcrime.org/ecuador-organized-crime-news/los-choneros

InSight Crime

December 3, 2024



The Choneros are one of Ecuador's most prominent criminal groups and a leading actor in the violence that has destabilized the country in recent years. The Choneros first emerged in the 1990s as a local gang in Ecuador's western province of Manabí. However, the arrest of gang leaders in 2011 sparked a decade of evolution.

From behind bars, the Choneros united smaller gangs under their banner to build up a criminal federation that dominated the prison system and expanded around the country. Using the prisons as an operations base, they established themselves as key service providers for transnational drug trafficking organizations, while also running local-level criminal economies in territories under their control.

The murder of their charismatic leader, Jorge Luis Zambrano, alias “Rasquiña” or “JL,” in 2020 led to the breakup of that federation as the different factions turned on each other, waging a war inside and outside the prisons, which fueled levels of criminal violence previously unseen in Ecuador.

While Rasquiña’s successor, José Adolfo Macías Villamar, alias “Fito,” would go on to become one of the most notorious figures in Ecuador’s criminal history, the Choneros entered a period of decline, which has accelerated since Fito’s arrest in 2025.

In This Profile:

- [Special Series: Behind Bars, Beyond Control: The Fall of Ecuador’s Prisons and the Rise of Its Mafias](#)
- [Recent Choneros News](#)
- [What Is the Choneros’ story?](#)
- [Who Leads the Choneros?](#)
- [Where Do the Choneros Operate?](#)
- [Who Are the Choneros’ Allies and Enemies?](#)
- [What Lies Ahead for the Choneros?](#)

Recent Choneros News

July 12, 2026 — Fito’s Brother Murdered in Ecuador.

Gunman disguised as police [murdered David Macías Villamar](#) in the coastal province of Santa Elena. Officials identified Macías, the little brother of Ecuador’s most notorious gang boss, José Adolfo Macías Villamar, alias “[Fito](#),” as a regional Choneros commander. The killing is the latest in a series of blows to the Macías family and the Choneros. In June 2026, another of Fito’s brothers, senior Choneros leader Ronald Javier Macías Villamar, alias “Javi,” was arrested in Colombia, while in May, six members of the Macías family were sentenced in a money laundering case.

What Is the Choneros’ story?

The Choneros take their name from the Manabí town of Chone, where they started operating in the 1990s under the leadership of Jorge Bismarck Véliz España, alias “Teniente España.” The gang expanded into the nearby city of Manta, where it carried out robberies, kidnappings, and assassinations and ran microtrafficking and extortion rackets.

In the early 2000s, a violent conflict with their rivals, [the Queseros](#), would raise the Choneros’ public profile. While the Choneros would eventually emerge victorious, it would come at the cost of the life of Teniente España, who was killed in a clash with the Queseros in 2007. It would also draw the attention of the police, who killed several of Teniente España’s successors.

By 2011, leadership had passed to Rasquiña, aided by his top lieutenant, Fito. However, both men were arrested on murder charges that same year and sent to the maximum security prison La Roca. In 2013, they staged a cinematic escape from La Roca but were recaptured some months later. At that point, they turned their attention to reforming the Choneros from within the prisons.

Rasquiña recruited gangs of robbers, extortionists, and microtraffickers, as well as factions of youth gangs such as the Ñetas and the Vatos Locos, converting the group into a federation of smaller organizations behind bars united under Rasquiña's leadership. As these gangs also maintained operations on the outside, the process allowed the Choneros to simultaneously expand around the country. Rasquiña then hired out his new army to criminal elites, including transnational drug traffickers, to whom he provided logistical and security services.

In 2020, Rasquiña was murdered six months after securing his early release from prison in an allegedly corrupt court ruling. After his killing, several factions, most prominently the Lobos, the Tiguerones, and the Chone Killers broke away to form a new coalition and went to war with what remained of the Choneros.

The conflict led to a series of brutal massacres in the prisons that claimed hundreds of lives and sent violence rates in Ecuador through the roof. By 2023, Fito, who had taken over after Rasquiña's murder, had repaired relations with the Chone Killers and the Tiguerones, changing the tide of the conflict. But the Lobos remained firm in their opposition to the Choneros and the fighting continued.

In early 2024, Fito escaped from prison ahead of plans to transfer him to La Roca. The subsequent fallout saw a military intervention in the prisons and on the streets that targeted the Choneros as well as their allies and enemies, as well as a countrywide offensive by the prison gangs, including the takeover of a live television broadcast.

Fito remained on the run until June 2025, when authorities tracked him down to a luxury bunker in Montecristi, a small town just a few kilometers south of Manta. Within a month, he had been extradited to the United States. Since then, authorities have targeted what remains of the Choneros network, capturing several figures touted as possible successors to Fito, among them his brother Ronald Javier Macías Villamar, alias "Javi."

Who Leads the Choneros?

Rasquiña was a venerated figure in Ecuador's criminal underworld who earned not only respect and loyalty but a near-mythical status. Under his leadership, the Choneros permitted the different factions that comprised the gang's federation to retain their structures and a level of autonomy as long as they answered to him.

Amid the fallout from Rasquiña's murder, Fito inherited the top leadership position of the Choneros. He maintained some semblance of the group's previous federation structure, running his faction, the Fatales, and allowing his top lieutenant, Junior Roldán, alias "JR," to do the same with his faction, the Águilas.

Fito established a structure consisting of often incarcerated regional commanders, who answered to him while managing the operations of the gang's street level and prison networks.

However, this system has weakened over time. JR was reportedly killed in 2023, although rumors have circulated that his death was staged. The following year, Fito's escape and the subsequent military intervention in the prisons disrupted the lines of command. While both Choneros sources and US authorities asserted he continued to manage the organization from hiding, the stability of the Choneros network steadily eroded. Since Fito's extradition, there is no clear successor capable of exerting the same levels of influence in an ever more fractious and fragmented criminal landscape.

Where Do the Choneros Operate?

The Choneros' historical stronghold is their home province of Manabí, in particular the city of Manta. This grants the group control over one of the principal drug trafficking corridors used to reach Mexico and Central America. From this base, they have expanded around the country.

According to information provided by the Ministry of Defense and former intelligence officials, by the start of 2024, the Choneros or their sub-factions, the Águilas and the Fatales, were present in 10 of Ecuador's 24 provinces.

Within the prison system, the Choneros had total control of the La Regional prison in Guayaquil, which was the group's criminal command center until the 2024 military intervention. They also had total control over Rodeo prison in Manabí and several smaller prisons, along with several wings in Ecuador's biggest prison, known as Litoral, in Guayaquil. However, that stronghold was also disrupted by the military intervention in 2024.

Since then, the Choneros control has slipped, both inside the prisons and outside, with the group even losing ground to its rivals in Manabí.

Who Are the Choneros' Allies and Enemies?

From the late 1990s until the late 2000s, the Choneros' primary enemy was the Queseros, a rival gang operating in Manta. After reconstituting themselves as a prison gang, the Choneros' chief rivals became a coalition of Guayaquil street gangs that would later unite under the umbrella of the Lagartos. The breakup of the Choneros federation after Rasquiña's death turned a host of former Choneros factions into their enemies. Most prominent among them were the Lobos, the Tiguerones, and the Chone Killers.

The Tiguerones and the Chone Killers later reunited with the Choneros, albeit as partners rather than subordinate factions. The Choneros broader network has also included alliances with multiple smaller gangs nationwide. However, as the Ecuadorian underworld becomes increasingly atomized, these ties are weakening.

The Choneros have long worked with national and international drug traffickers, among them Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel.

What Lies Ahead for the Choneros?

Since their formation, the Choneros have survived multiple setbacks, from the capture and killings of key leaders to the nationwide conflict against their former factions and the military intervention in the prisons. In doing so, they have demonstrated resilience and the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.

However, following the recapture of Fito in mid-2025, the group is at its weakest since Rasquiña first reformed the organization from within the prisons in the 2010s. With the atomization of the Ecuadorian underworld accelerating, the Choneros' days as a unified network with a national reach could be coming to an end.

Exhibit 10

Foreign Terrorist Organization Designation of Los Choneros and Los Lobos

 [federalregister.gov/documents/2025/09/05/2025-17067/foreign-terrorist-organization-designation-of-los-choneros-and-los-lobos](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/09/05/2025-17067/foreign-terrorist-organization-designation-of-los-choneros-and-los-lobos)

5 de setembro de 2025



FEDERAL REGISTER
The Daily Journal of the United States Government

Notice

Department of State

Based upon a review of the Administrative Records assembled in this matter, and in consultation with the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury, I have concluded that there is a sufficient factual basis to find that the relevant circumstances described in section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended (hereinafter “INA”) ([8 U.S.C. 1189](#)), exist with respect to: Los Choneros (also known as The Choneros, Aguilas, Fatales); and Los Lobos (also known as The Lobos, Los Lobos Drug Trafficking Organization).

Therefore, I hereby designate the aforementioned organizations and their respective aliases as Foreign Terrorist Organizations pursuant to section 219 of the INA.

This determination shall be published in the **Federal Register**. The designations go into effect upon publication.

Dated: August 6, 2025.

Marco Rubio,

Secretary of State.

Exhibit 11

Ecuador Loses Its Grip on Crime

 insightcrime.org/news/gamechangers-2023-ecuador-loses-grip-crime

Chris Dalby

January 4, 2024



Homicide statistics don't tell the whole story about a country's pattern of violence. But the record-setting figures seen in Ecuador in the past year underscore the depth of the security crisis driven by organized crime.

In 2022, Ecuador was the [tenth most violent country](#) in Latin America and the Caribbean, after an astonishing 82% rise in murders compared to the previous year. In 2023, Ecuador is set to at least crack the top three, leapfrogging the likes of Honduras, Venezuela, and Colombia, as gangs fight to control the country's drug flows.

In the main port and drug trafficking hub of Guayaquil, murders were up 80% by the end of November. In the inland province of Los Ríos, which is located on a route for moving drugs from the Colombian border to Guayaquil, homicides are up 153%. The northwest city of Esmeraldas has become one of the [deadliest](#) urban centers in all of Latin America.

The scale of the violence and its causes – namely, fragmentary gangs fighting over large cocaine flows – are well understood. But authorities have struggled to mount an effective response.

The murder of a top gang leader [sparked the country's gang war](#) three years ago. Several more [openly targeted](#), well-known gang leaders were killed this year. Grisly displays of corpses hanging from bridges, once [unheard of](#) in Ecuador, became more commonplace. Despite hundreds of prisoners dying in

orchestrated massacres and repeated vows to improve security behind bars, riots kept [happening](#) in 2023. Even the country's highest-profile prisoners, the suspected assassins of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio, were [killed](#) in their jail cell within weeks of their arrests.

The Wolves at the Door

While Ecuador has plenty of dangerous gangs, 2023 saw a winner emerge from the pack after a brutal three-year war.

The [Choneros](#), pioneers of Ecuador's [drug trafficking scene](#) who ran cocaine from Colombia to Guayaquil for close to two decades, have been battling a group of three allies, led by the [Lobos](#). The war, which began in 2020 and ended this year, was bookended by the murder of two Choneros leaders, alias Rasquiña in December 2020 and [Junior Roldán, alias "JR," last May](#).

In the wake of their victory, the Lobos have become the engine of Ecuador's criminal machine. "They control the transport, storage, and trafficking routes for cocaine through the country, and contaminate containers to take it to other countries," said Max Campos, a security analyst and Ecuador's former deputy interior minister.

The group has cemented its takeover of Ecuador's criminal scene by adapting to new opportunities.

"The Lobos have become [specialized](#) in other areas like illegal mining, extortion, and human trafficking. They have continued changing and evolving," Campos said.

SEE ALSO: [4 Reasons Why Ecuador Is in a Security Crisis](#)

For example, the group expanded a [lucrative illegal gold mining business](#) in the province of Imbabura, thanks in part to a corruption network backed by local government, military, and the police, according to an [investigation](#) by Ecuadorian media, Periodistas sin Cadenas.

These connections may run deep. In November, an alleged Lobos leader was [arrested](#) in the city of Puerto Bolívar. Weapons, ammunition, and thousands of dollars in cash were found in his car. A police station in the city was fired upon by alleged Lobos members shortly afterward. Yet, the gang member [walked free](#) without charge within hours.

Furthermore, the Lobos have entrenched themselves as crucial partners in the drug trade to both North America and Europe. They acquire and transport tons of cocaine annually, using connections with their Colombian partners, especially the [Oliver Sinisterra Front](#) (Frente Oliver Sinisterra), a splinter group from the now-demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – FARC).

They then sell the cocaine to their [long-term associates](#) in Mexico, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación – [CJNG](#)), as well as Albanian crime groups.

The Lobos have counted on the support of two other gangs, the Tiguerones and Chone Killers since 2020, but in 2023, more [details emerged](#) of how this triumvirate operates. The Lobos' dominance comes from territorial control, with operations stretching from the Colombian border all the way to Guayaquil. To do so, they coerced or removed any smaller gangs or family clans that controlled drug trafficking and extortion in these provinces. Young people from poor backgrounds are often forced to join or killed.

The Tiguerones dominate extortion. Police reports have blamed the Tiguerones for more than twice as many extortion attempts in the city of Guayaquil than any other gang. In urban and rural areas alike, the Tiguerones seem to extort everything that moves, including market stalls, delivery trucks, and clean water deliveries.

The Chone Killers are the heaviest. Based in the city of Durán near Guayaquil, they ensure that the drug shipments connected to the Lobos pass safely through the port city. The Chone Killers pioneered the worst displays of carnage Ecuador has seen, including [bodies hanging from bridges](#), amid a war with local rivals, the Latin Kings. The Chone Killers have been blamed for regular massacres in 2023, including six people shot dead on December 3 for allegedly refusing to pay extortion fees.

Institutional Apathy

In a 2022 survey, 75% of the Ecuadorian population [found](#) the police unreliable. And 2023 was hardly a glorious one for Ecuador's security forces.

The investigation into the murder of Fernando Villavicencio has not produced any major results beyond the quick arrest of the alleged triggermen, who were [themselves killed in prison](#). In Durán, schools have been closed due to the violence, some neighborhoods are essentially no-go zones. Major cities in Ecuador essentially [find themselves without local leadership](#).

Luis Chonillo, the mayor of Durán, a city of almost 300,000 people, was attacked on his first day in office in May and has rarely visited the city since. The mayor of Manta, a Pacific city of similar size which is key to the cocaine trade, was shot dead in July. Some initial arrests were made, but no more information has been released as to these investigations. Even President Daniel Noboa told the UN he receives daily death threats.

Thieves have been [lynched](#) by mobs after police repeatedly didn't attend crime scenes.

Ecuadorians have reasons not to trust the authorities. Police forces have been [infiltrated](#) by organized crime in Ecuador, have sold their weapons to gangs, and acted as bodyguards for drug kingpins. Top police commanders were identified as "narco-generals" by the current US ambassador to Ecuador.

This corruption has come [amid years of neglect](#). Security budgets went unspent, leaving police vehicles broken down, and officers suffering from a critical lack of equipment and training.

As violence reaches new levels and security forces remain hamstrung, resignation is setting in. “It seems that the police and the Ministry of the Interior have learned to live with these [homicide] rates,” said Renato Rivera, coordinator of the Ecuadorean Observatory of Organized Crime (Observatorio Ecuatoriano de Crimen Organizado) attached to the Pan-American Development Foundation.

New President Faces Tough Decisions

Can Ecuador’s new president, Daniel Noboa, turn the situation around? He has less than 18 months to do so.

The 35-year-old was elected until 2025 to finish the term of former President Lasso, who stepped down amid a constitutional crisis. The new leader must choose his battles carefully: his National Democratic Action (Acción Democrática Nacional) party only has 14 seats in the 137-seat parliament.

In addition to these limitations, Noboa has flip-flopped on how [he wants to tackle](#) the security crisis. On the campaign trail, he spoke about new job opportunities and community policing, encouraging young people at risk of gang recruitment to choose another path. But as he came to power, he took a more hard-line stance, promising to use the military to patrol ports, airports, and highways to crack down on gangs. He even plans to exile the most dangerous criminals on prison ships offshore.

However, these types of strategies have been used elsewhere without much success. Mexico and Honduras have relied on the military to put down gangs, but both countries remain among the most violent in the region. And while investment in jobs and rehabilitation is necessary, Noboa’s security plans don’t directly address the principal driver of gang violence: Ecuador is [awash with cocaine](#).

In terms of narcotics, Noboa’s policies are hardly groundbreaking. His main move since taking power has been to scrap guidelines that allowed Ecuadorians to carry up to 10 grams of marijuana, two grams of cocaine paste, and one gram of cocaine for personal use. Noboa said these rules encouraged small-scale drug trafficking, but they had been in place since 2013. This move will not make a dent in Ecuador’s current crisis, fueled by [record cocaine production](#) in recent years, and seems more designed to appease a right-wing political base.

SEE ALSO: [From Rhetoric to Reality on Ecuador’s Security Challenge](#)

Yet Ecuadorians appear eager for drastic solutions, and candidates promising hard-line policies, including Noboa, finished the 2023 campaign [on an upswing](#). Some prominent analysts also support the idea.

“The laws in Ecuador must be updated, when we have uncontrolled and unequal violence by criminal groups,” said General Juan Jaramillo, a security analyst and former police commander for Ecuador’s northern border area.

“We have to forget about community policing, and start working toward... troops that prioritize forceful reactions and intelligence and counterintelligence tactics,” he told InSight Crime.

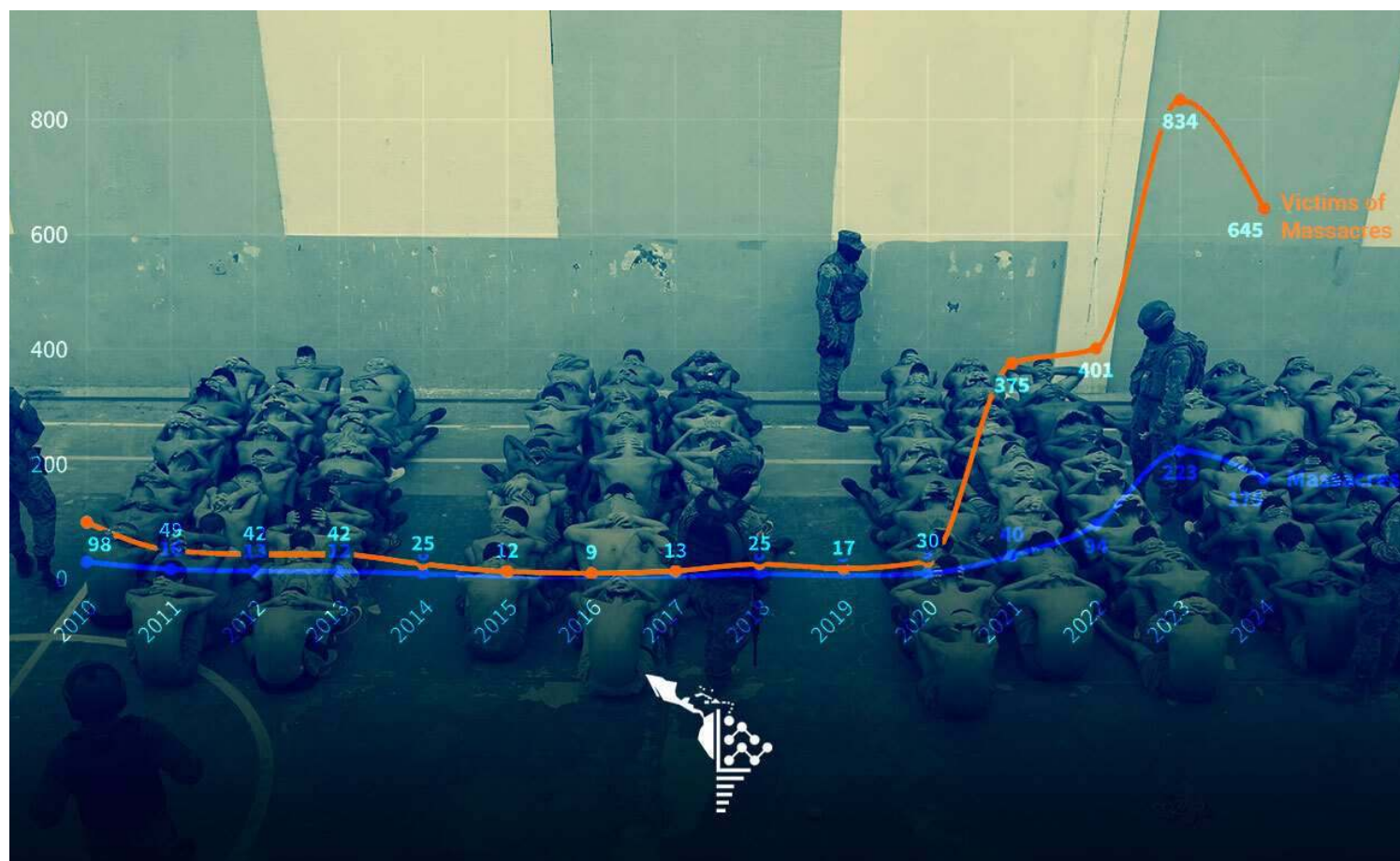
Yet, a month into his term in office, Noboa’s security plans have stalled. An idea to merge two ministries to streamline decision-making about security proved unpopular and was scrapped. The details of his security plan, named Phoenix, have not been released. How he plans to use the army is unclear.

Noboa may look for easier political wins to boost his chances of re-election. Less than a week after taking office, he [proposed](#) a major economic reform plan as his top political priority. In comparison, key elements of Noboa’s security plan are lagging, including exactly how he will use the military.

But the longer major security overhauls are delayed, the more difficult it will be to turn around soaring violence.

“Organized crime groups like the Lobos receive instructions and training in the use and handling of large-caliber weapons. These are used to attack police and military precincts, showing their superiority over the power of the government,” said General Jaramillo.

Exhibit 12



News Homicides

Massacres Surge as Gangs Atomize in Ecuador

by Gavin Voss
2 Dec 2024

A recent series of massacres in Ecuador is further evidence that more access to high-powered weapons, heightened impunity, and an atomized criminal landscape are leading to more mass killings.

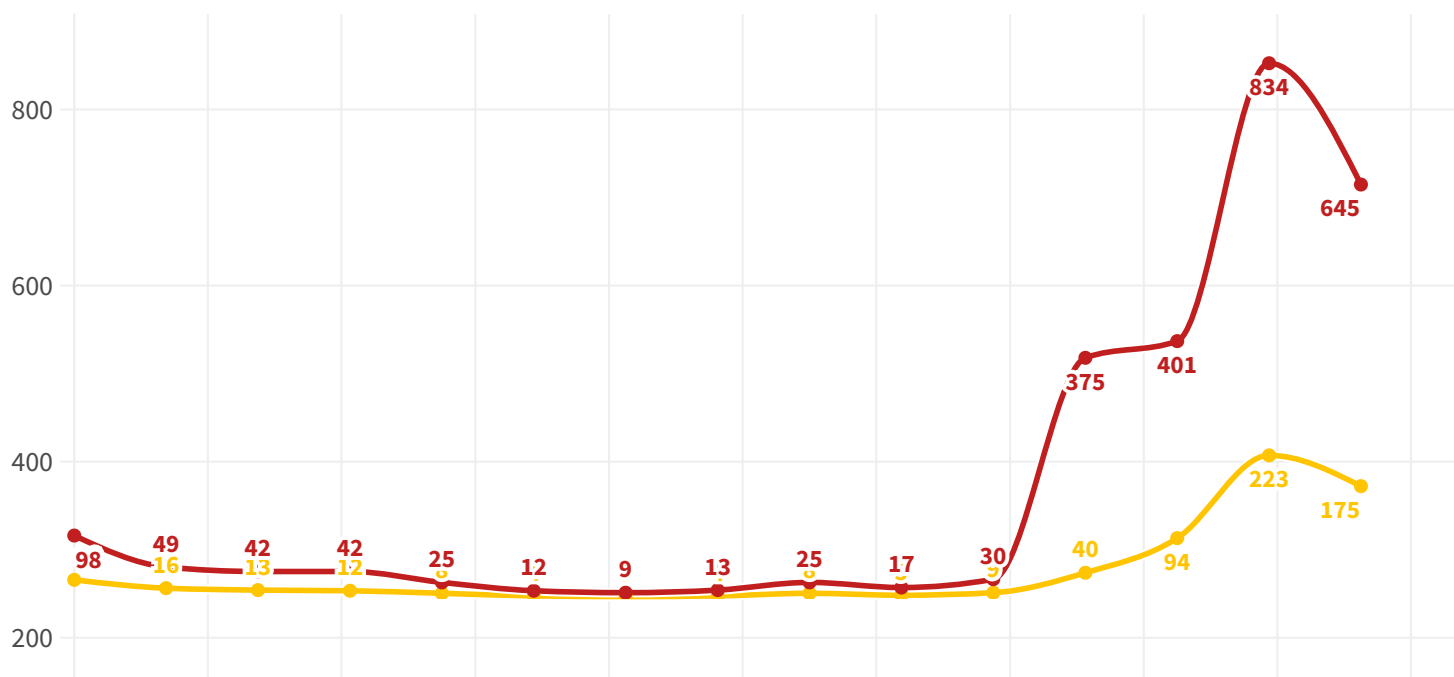
Ten people were gunned down and dismembered in a mass shooting on December 1 in the province of El Oro, among them nine Colombians and an Ecuadorian national. Just days earlier, on November 28, gunmen killed three people and injured at least three more in **Durán** at a local soccer pitch.

Massacres — incidents in which three or more people are killed at the same place and time — have risen steadily in Ecuador since 2020, affecting parts of the country previously untouched by extreme acts of violence. Such killings in 2024 are approaching 2023 levels despite Ecuador’s government declaring a “state of internal conflict” and an unprecedented military crackdown on organized crime.

Massacres have remained common in Ecuador amid a state of internal conflict *insightcrime.org*

Number of Massacres and Victims of Massacres (2010-2024)

Massacres refer to events in which three or more people were murdered at the same place and time. Data for 2024 was collected from January through October.



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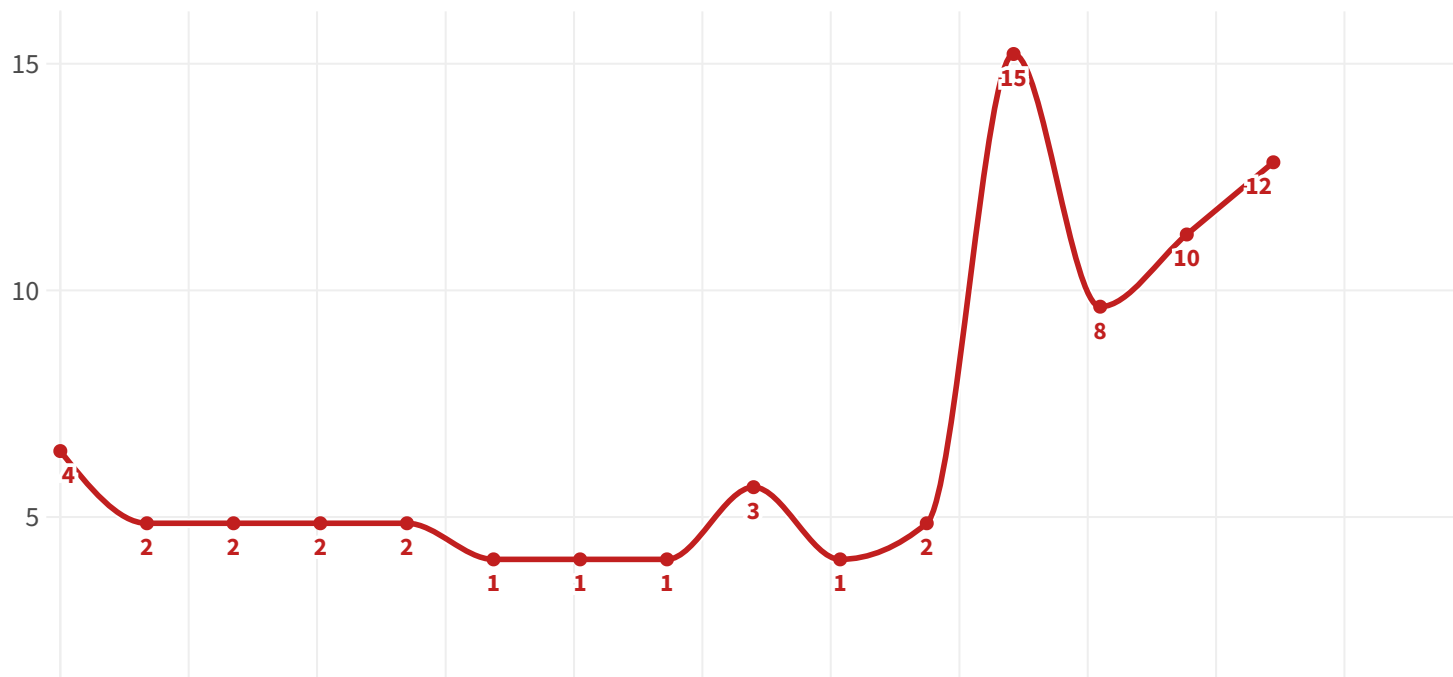
The percentage of murder victims in Ecuador dying in massacres has risen significantly since 2020, spiking from 2% to 15% between 2020 and 2021. Driving this initial phase was a wave of mass killings perpetrated by warring gangs battling for valuable territory within the prison system as they sought to eliminate rivals. In September 2021, a gang clash resulted in 119 deaths in Guayaquil's Litoral Penitentiary.* Authorities tallied 68 and 34 victims in other prison massacres that year. Overall, the Ministry of Defense recorded 18 prison massacres between 2021 and 2023.

Massacre victims as a percent of total homicide victims have risen steadily since 2022 in Ecuador

insightcrime.org

Massacre Victims as a Percentage of Total Homicide Victims (2010-2024)

Massacres refer to events in which three or more people were murdered at the same place and time. Data for 2024 was collected for January through October, and figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.



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But so far, in 2024, criminal groups have perpetrated only **one massacre** in the prison system, while the percentage of total murder victims dying in mass killings in Ecuador has remained high. There are various explanations for this.

To begin with, Ecuador's criminal groups now have greater access to high-powered, automatic weapons. Spurred by both looser arms ownership **regulations** and a boom in illegal weapons trafficking, this has exacerbated the evolution of massacres beyond prison walls, providing warring criminal groups with the means to take out large clusters of rivals at once.

"The killing capacity of a gun is so great that there is undoubtedly a close relationship between the availability of guns and the number of deaths," Carla Álvarez, a professor at Ecuador's Institute for Higher National Studies (Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales), told InSight Crime.

SEE ALSO: [How Ecuador's Criminals Are Taking Advantage of Private Security Firms](#)

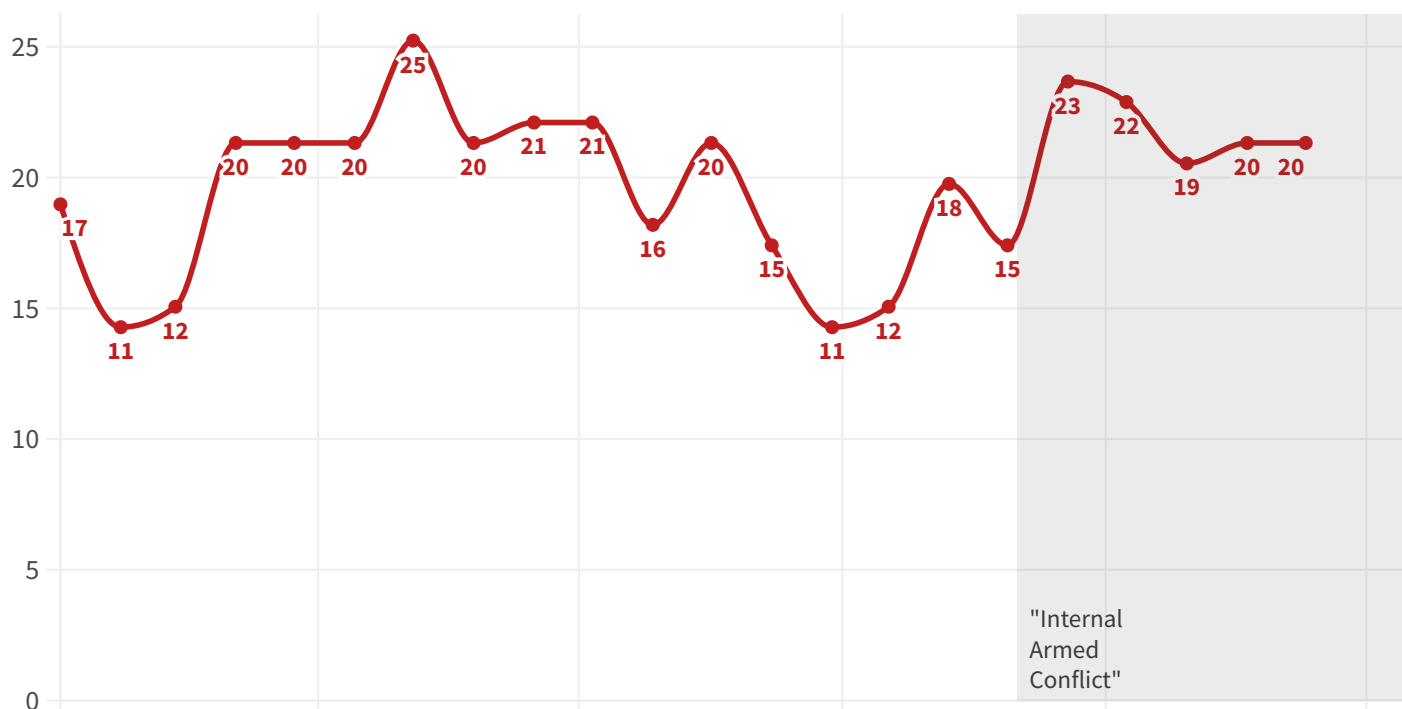
Compounding the issue is the ongoing impunity for violent crimes within Ecuador's judicial institutions, a dynamic that signals to criminal groups that massacres will go unpunished. Impunity rates for homicide cases exceeded 90% in 2023 in many coastal provinces, El Universo **reported**, as authorities lack the investigative capacity to keep pace with persistently high murder rates. Even if caught, **judicial corruption** networks like those exposed by the landmark **Metastasis** case provide ways around sentences and other legal consequences.

The rise in massacres also comes as increasingly fragmenting gangs fight for their place in the country's lucrative criminal landscape. Security officials, criminal sources, and security experts told InSight Crime in recent fieldwork in Ecuador that gangs on the streets were cut off from their leaders in the prisons after the military crackdown began in January, leaving them without orders. Many leaders also fled the country in response to the measures.

Mass killings in Ecuador dropped, then rose, after the military was deployed to fight gangs

Massacres by Month (January 2023-October 2024)

Massacres refer to events in which three or more people were murdered at the same place and time.



Made with Flourish • Create a chart

Ecuador's criminal groups have since recuperated, albeit in an **atomized way**. In response to shuffling leadership, many local factions of the Lobos, Choneros, and Tiguerones, for example, have split or

changed allegiances, diversifying income sources and exploiting growing criminal economies like **extortion**, **kidnapping**, and illegal gold mining.

As a result, conflict and competition between them have increased, and they have frequently turned to the use of massacres to eliminate their enemies and affect the kind of mass defections that have happened inside the penitentiary system. In June 2024, authorities recorded the second-most massacres of any month in Ecuador's history.

“There's hostility with all the changes of sides that have taken place,” a local leader of the Ñetas street gang in Guayaquil, who chose to remain anonymous for security reasons, told InSight Crime in May. “Many Choneros have become Lobos, and many Lobos have become Tiguerones. They have mixed among themselves.”

Massacres have become increasingly common around Ecuador, especially in the coastal region *insightcrime.org*

Massacres in Ecuador by Province (2010-2024)

► 2010

Massacres refer to events in which three or more people were murdered at the same place and time. Data for 2024 was collected from January through October.

0 112



Source: Ecuador's Ministry of the Interior • November 2024

insightcrime.org

Made with Flourish • Create a map

The impact of these shifts is most apparent in gold-producing areas. To make incursions into the industry, groups have **consolidated** their control over artisanal miners, first extorting their operations

and then taking over the mines for themselves, disputing territory with other criminal groups in the process.

The Sierran province of Azuay, a mining hotspot, reported no massacres in 2023 but seven in 2024. In the Amazonian provinces of Sucumbíos and Orellana, also mining hubs, authorities recorded nine mass killings so far in 2024, after only 13 in total from 2010 through 2023.

SEE ALSO: As Government Pressure Mounts, Ecuador's Gangs Strike Gold

Part of the motive for massacres appears to be as a tool for control of civilian populations, Luis Fernando Trejos, a professor at Universidad del Norte who has studied massacres in the Colombian context, told InSight Crime.

“There are zones in which the armed group already controls the territory, and massacres appear as mechanisms of collective punishment for the violation of norms established by the group,” he said.

Local media, for example, has reported on the Colombian Border Command's (Comandos de la Frontera) dominance over the criminal underworld in Sucumbíos, lying on Ecuador's northeast border with Colombia. There, the group regulates criminal activity and metes out violence, with Sucumbíos' police chief telling Primicias on November 9 that murders in the province can be **attributed** to a “social cleansing” campaign by the Border Command.

**An earlier version of this article misstated the location of the prison massacre in September 2021 that left 119 dead. The massacre took place in Guayaquil's Litoral Penitentiary. This article was updated on December 4.*

Exhibit 13



News Kidnapping

Ecuador's Kidnapping Epidemic, Told by a Survivor

by Anastasia Austin

6 Sep 2024

“In those moments, I swear to you, you can’t even remember your mother’s name,” Felipe* told InSight Crime about the moment he tried to remember his iCloud password as kidnappers held a gun to his head.

In February 2023, Felipe, who works as a fruit broker for a large company, was the target of a haphazard kidnapping.

“It’s so horrible. You’re in shock, and all you want to do is get out alive. You get to a point where you want to say, “Listen, just leave me alone. I already gave you everything,”” he said.

Known as express kidnappings and classified as “common crimes” in Ecuador, such incidents get scant attention compared to the transnational drug trafficking that has transformed the country into one of the region’s most violent in less than a decade.

But common crimes like kidnapping and extortion have **climbed** at alarming rates in recent years. Felipe’s story demonstrates the devastating physical and psychological effects of these crimes on Ecuadorians.

Crimes of Opportunity

Traveling around Ecuador changed after the COVID-19 pandemic, said Felipe.

“You didn’t use to feel the same fear you feel now,” he said.

Statistics from the Interior Ministry show that Ecuador has suffered a **meteoric rise** in homicides since 2021. The country, which has seen violence related to organized crime mushroom, **closed out** 2022 with a more than 80% year-on-year rise in murders.

But Felipe said he felt like the danger was far off on the sunny Friday morning when he and his technician made a routine visit to passion fruit fields in the inland province of Los Ríos, which lies just north of coastal Guayas province.

SEE ALSO: *Ecuador’s War on Gangs Stumbles in Key Coastal City*

The vines on which the passion fruit grew created a curtain of vegetation that blocked Felipe and his colleague’s view of the main road and the five armed men who pulled off the road shortly after them.

The youngest looked barely 20, and the oldest was not yet 30, according to Felipe, who said he thinks they must have seen his truck from the road and decided to steal it and ransom it back to him. But when they realized that the truck belonged to a large company – the kind that has insurance, puts tracking chips in its cars, and does not negotiate with gang members – the criminals changed tack and went after Felipe and his technician instead.

The men identified themselves as members of the Lobos, one of Ecuador’s **largest and most violent** gangs. But Felipe described them as amateurs, armed with only a revolver, and with their faces uncovered. The man giving orders was also the only one who knew how to drive.

“This was nothing planned. Even the spiel they gave us betrayed that this was random – a crime of opportunity,” Felipe said.

This *modus operandi* fits an increasingly common **pattern** in which the street-level cells of Ecuador’s largest drug trafficking groups, like the Choneros and the Lobos, rely primarily on these opportunistic crimes to finance themselves.

But Felipe took no solace from their lack of sophistication.

A Comedy of Errors

As he described the next four hours of his life, Felipe occasionally laughed. Though filled with violence and fear, the encounter played out like a comedy of errors.

The beatings started at once. “They threw us to the ground, beat us, took our phones. Then, they covered our faces and put us in the car,” Felipe recalled.

The young men were scrambling to figure out what to do.

“They were nervous. They were asking us where the guns were, if we had weapons, or if we were policemen,” Felipe told InSight Crime.

The rookie kidnapers knew enough about modern banking to go for their victims’ phones, where bank accounts are accessed through a mobile application, rather than the physical bank cards in their wallets.

SEE ALSO: [Financial Vulnerability Fuels Predatory Crime in Peru](#)

They were elated to find Felipe had \$1,200 in one of his accounts.

“They were so happy to get money out of this,” Felipe explained. “It was never their intention to hold us for ransom. They hadn’t even considered it.”

But the kidnapers’ good mood didn’t last long. They didn’t know how bank transfers worked, and their inexperience triggered more nervousness and another barrage of violence against Felipe. As he tried to get the necessary information to transfer his bank balance to their account, the youths beat him repeatedly, paranoid that he was asking for their personal data to later report them to the police.

“And of course I was, but not to report them. I was just trying to survive the situation,” Felipe said. “Yet, every question was a tragedy. They beat me for everything.”

With a gun to his head, Felipe finished the bank transfer. But one final hurdle remained. In Ecuador, inter-bank transfers take 20 minutes minimum. Felipe said those minutes, tied up and waiting, felt like the longest of his life.

Forever Changed

In the end, the bank transfer went through. After the kidnappers confirmed the receipt of Felipe's money, they told him and his technician to count to 100 giving them time to leave. Felipe's technician had been beaten so badly that he could barely walk, let alone give chase.

It took the two men 15 minutes to hobble to a road and even more time to get someone to stop.

“Nobody wants to help you, no one stops,” Felipe said. “I mean, I wouldn't either. They see you all dirty, waving desperately.”

Felipe remains haunted by the events of that day and now lives with a permanent sense of insecurity. “I see danger everywhere now. Anyone can hurt me. I no longer stop along the road nor help anyone,” he said.

And, although he says he has moved on, he also describes deep psychological scars.

“At first, I struggled to sleep. I kept hearing their voices,” he said. “I am always on guard.”

His inner world reflects a **[national shift](#)**, one that the government simply wasn't prepared for.

SEE ALSO: [From Rhetoric to Reality on Ecuador's Security Challenge](#)

While Ecuador has specialized units with operational and investigative expertise to deal with cases of extortion and kidnapping, experts say there is no national policy focused on express kidnappings and few resources to help victims deal with the psychological aftermath.

“The very fact that express kidnapping is a crime of opportunity reveals an absence of a comprehensive national policy to combat it,” Renato Rivera, coordinator of the Organized Crime Observatory of Ecuador, told InSight Crime.

Ecuador's response to the surging organized crime threat has so far **leaned heavily** on militarization with near-ubiquitous **support** from Ecuadorians. But experts say that this only helps impact the perceptions, not the reality, of security.

“The solution will not come from more militarization,” Katherine Herrera Aguilar, a political analyst specializing in public and state security, told InSight Crime.

But Felipe feels boots on the ground serve a purpose

“I feel calmer when there are soldiers on the streets,” he said. “Even though I know it's a false sense of calm and that the country is still dangerous.”

**For security reasons, InSight Crime has changed the protagonist's name*

Exhibit 14

Ecuador Says Extortion Is Down. The Reality Is More Complicated.

insightcrime.org/news/ecuadors-authorities-say-extortion-down-reality-more-complicated

Gavin Voss, Steven Dudley

May 4, 2026



This article is part of our [Narrated Stories Series](#)

It was time for after-school pickup at the San Francisco de Asís elementary school in downtown Guayaquil one recent afternoon when someone slotted pamphlets beneath the windshield wipers of the school's minibuses. The message was cordial but ominous.

"Greetings from the CJNG Group," it said, misspelling the word "greetings." "We want to come to an agreement: 6,000 to 4,500 Are we clear (sic)."

At the top of the page, the pamphlet's authors had fashioned the "j" into a pistol and left a Chilean telephone number for the bus owners to call.



TE SALIDA EL GRUPO CJNG



Queremos llegar aún acuerdo con la compañía queremos evitar hacer un atentado encontrá de TODOS ustedes nosotros caminamos entre ustedes

Queremos llegar aún acuerdo

6000 hasta 4500

Estamos CLARO

LE DAMOS 24 HORAS PARA Q SE COMUNIQUE AH ESTÉ NUMERO 56920123774

Donde quieran pasarse de avistados vamos ah tener problemas directamente con todos ustedes sin compacion le metemos

SEGUIREMOS PRESENTE HASTA LLEGAR AÚN ACUERDO ATT. LA VERDADERA MAFIA 🍷

JUEGA VIVO NO QUEREMOS ERRORES

COMUNICATE AH ESTÉ NUENRO 56920123774

Juega vivo no queremos errores

Donde te comuniques a otros bandos te ejecutamos y la deuda pasa a tu Familia

Photos circulating on social media show the extortion threat left for school bus drivers at an elementary school in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

“We do not want any mistakes,” said the pamphlet, adding another signature from what it called the “true mafia.”

CJNG is the acronym for the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación, or [Jalisco Cartel New Generation](#), a Mexico-based criminal group. That they were extorting the buses for a small, Catholic primary school in Ecuador seemed unlikely but provoked fear all the same.

“It’s in the hands of the authorities now,” one driver told InSight Crime before scurrying to his bus and speeding away with close to a dozen children inside.

The scheme was part of a national trend. In a country where big criminal groups are atomizing at a rapid rate, the remnants, derivatives, and copycats of these groups have expanded into extortion equally fast.

Ecuadorian police say their ongoing offensive against gangs has displaced extortionists, citing crime statistics. But experts and victims say there is a dissonance between what authorities are saying about extortion and what Ecuadorians are experiencing.

Extortion: A Criminal Gold Mine

Extortion has skyrocketed in the last five years, rising in tandem with an unprecedented wave of organized crime and violence that turned what was once one of Latin America’s most peaceful nations into [its most violent](#).

In 2019, Ecuador’s Attorney General’s Office [recorded](#) 1,616 cases of extortion. In 2024, that number rose to 23,080, an increase of over 1300%. During this time period, criminal groups like the [Choneros](#), [Lobos](#), and [Tiguerones](#) gained strength, expanding their involvement in criminal economies like transnational cocaine trafficking and [illegal gold mining](#). Local muscle—street gangs—were crucial to their rise, helping secure drug trafficking corridors and move and store drugs. But they needed a way to keep rank-and-file members paid.

SEE ALSO: [Why Have Ecuador’s Drug Trafficking Gangs Turned to Extortion?](#)

They turned to extortion, growing it into a criminal market worth millions of dollars. Some local groups approach residents in their own neighborhood strongholds, asking for \$1 to \$5 in daily or weekly payments from each household. Local businesses pay more, with gangs demanding payments of a few hundred to even a couple thousand dollars or more. In other cases, gangs kidnap, extorting family members and friends of victims for exorbitant ransoms.

“They’ve now realized the power they hold through kidnapping,” Lieutenant Colonel Herbie Guamaní, the former police commander in northwest Guayaquil, a stronghold of gangs like the Tiguerones and Águilas, told InSight Crime in 2025.

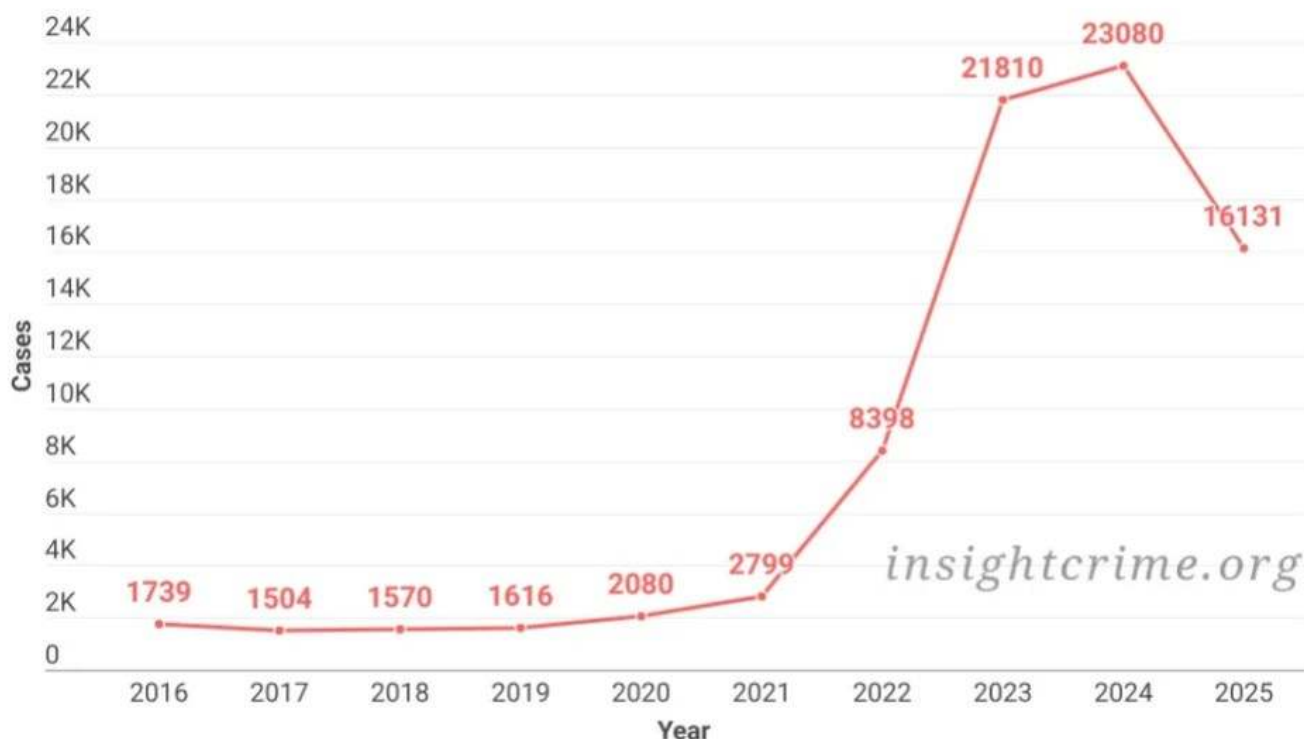
Guamaní said kidnappers demand anywhere between \$10,000 and \$500,000. And while victims often have no means of paying these ransoms, gangs still cash in on the biggest sums their families can offer.

Have Authorities Clamped Down?

In 2025, the police conducted near-constant operations targeting extortion networks, while they instituted [new measures](#) to deter the perpetrators by giving victims an easier path to denouncing crimes to the police. And by the end of last year, reported extortion cases had plummeted. The Attorney General's Office data showed 16,131 cases for 2025, a 30% drop from 2024 and the lowest yearly total since 2022.

Extortion cases in Ecuador spiked between 2019 and 2024 before dropping 30% in 2025

Extortion cases reported to Ecuador's Attorney General's Office (2016-2025)



April 2026 | Source: Ecuador's Attorney General's Office

Police data—which differs slightly from the Attorney General’s Office in its classification of cases—shows an even greater drop in reports. Cases fell 64% between the first nine months of 2024 and the same period in 2025, according to statistics shared with InSight Crime.

The decrease is “a clear indication of the effectiveness of the measures taken,” a police spokesperson told InSight Crime by email.

Nevertheless, experts, security officials, and residents cast doubt on the police’s version in interviews with InSight Crime. Victims often do not report extortion, they said, out of distrust of police, the low clearance rate on extortion cases, and fear of retaliation by extortionists if they find out the victim notified authorities. As a result, extortion statistics may be significantly lower than actual levels.

“There comes a point where the number of extortion cases reaches such a high level that citizens feel the authorities are doing absolutely nothing about it,” Renato Rivera Rhon, an Ecuadorian security analyst for the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, told InSight Crime. “That, from my perspective, does have an impact on the number of reports. Cases will reach a peak and then start to decline.”

SEE ALSO: [Ecuador’s Official Security Claims Belie Reality](#)

Still, in some cases, authorities may indeed be having success in preventing extortion. But the gains are limited to certain segments of the population, with criminals adapting strategies and targets in response to law enforcement scrutiny. For example, a [Durán](#) business community leader, who chose to remain anonymous for safety reasons, told InSight Crime in 2025 that the city’s large industrial companies were seeing drops in extortion and improvements to security, but that the extortion of small businesses and individuals was increasing.

The Harsh Extortion Reality

Extortion has seemingly touched every sector of society. Victims now include teachers, port workers, motorcycle taxi drivers, fishermen, water truck drivers, and, as noted, school bus company owners, among others. Some even pay extortion to [secure a burial plot](#) in Guayaquil’s public cemetery.

The government is aware of the problem and its widespread political implications. In 2024, President Daniel Noboa launched an offensive against organized crime, sending the military into the streets and prisons. Over two years later, security forces have captured dozens of Ecuador’s top criminal leaders.

But the reshuffling and fragmentation resulting from the government crackdown has, in many cases, exacerbated extortion. Previously united street gang factions now seek new extortion arrangements with businesses, while independent criminal opportunists have taken advantage of the chaos to threaten victims by impersonating criminal groups.

One Guayaquil businessman, who chose to remain anonymous for security reasons, told InSight Crime that the increasing number of dispersed gangs means his distribution company now has to pay multiple groups to continue operating, all while navigating an increasingly complex set of gang territories and invisible borders. In another case from Durán, the capture of [Chone Killers](#) leader [Julio Alberto Martínez](#), alias “Negro Tulio,” led to extortion hikes for vendors as other gangs [moved to impose their will](#) over the captured leader’s extortion territory, a high-ranking Durán local government official told InSight Crime.

As part of the government crackdown, the military runs [11 of Ecuador’s 36 prisons](#), which have long been [hubs](#) of organized crime activity, including extortion. Still, in 2026, authorities have uncovered a number of extortion networks operating out of prisons in [Guayaquil](#), [Manabí](#), and [Cotopaxi](#). This shows that the intervention has failed to prevent corrupt security forces from smuggling items like cell phones to inmates, facilitating extortion.

“Corruption is systemic. It is not as if the police or the military are the saviors...[gangs] have bribed these officials,” a Manabí police official, who chose to remain anonymous as they were not authorized to speak publicly, told InSight Crime.

The official added that the “vast majority” of extortion demands in the coastal province come from its prisons.

Featured image: Collage created by InSight Crime’s design team using images captured by InSight Crime during fieldwork in Ecuador.

Exhibit 15

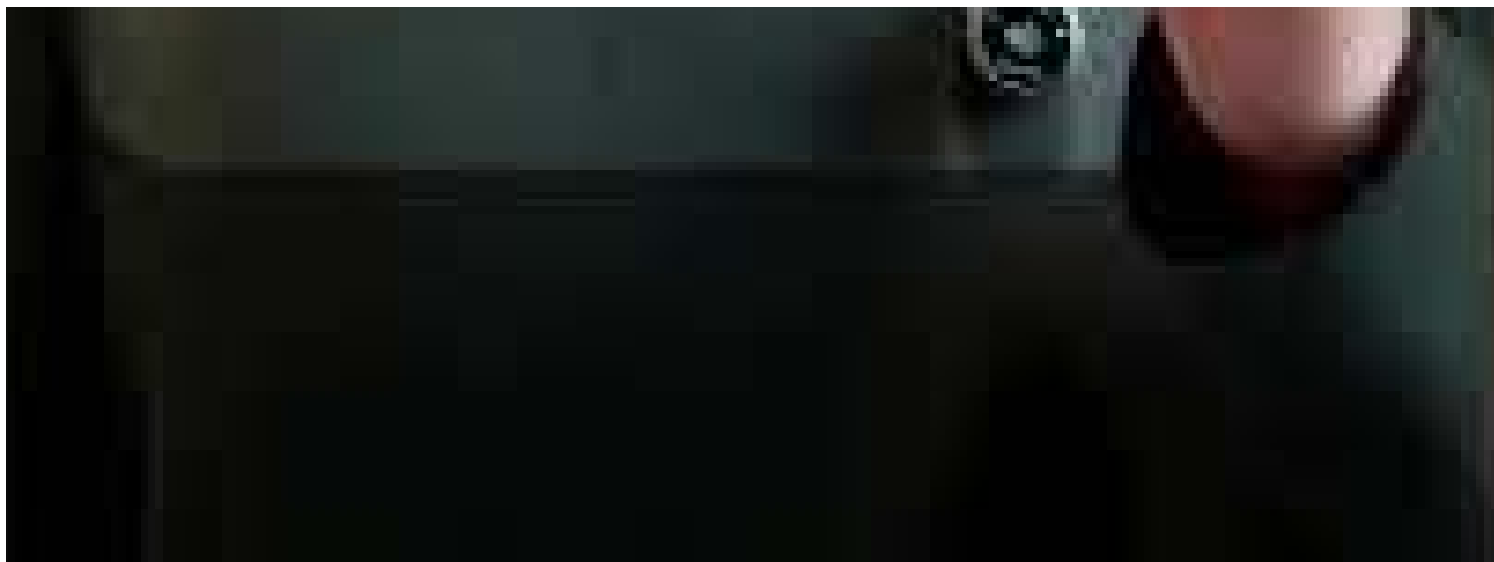


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News On the Radar

On the Radar: Violence from Gangs and Governments Rules the Region

by *Deborah Bonello* and *Daniel Reyes*
30 Jan 2026



Gang massacres in Mexico, more hardline measures against drug-related violence in Ecuador, and legal action from the victims of Trump's missile strikes in the Caribbean dominated the conversations around organized crime in the Americas this week. Here's our take.

▼ Transcript

Daniel Reyes: [00:00:00] Ecuador's change in security policy, a court case against the US by the families of two men killed in US attacks, and the clash between two cartels during a soccer match in Mexico are the top news stories we're presenting in this week's On The Radar.

[00:00:18] Ecuador's President Noboa doubled down on his hardline security policy as violence reached record levels there. The government now plans to attack suspected drug boats off the country's coast, mirroring US military operations in international waters. Drug trafficking is fueling much of the bloodshed, with a lot of the fighting driven by local groups embedded in the cocaine business. Upping the use of force has been the core characteristic of Noboa's security strategy since he took office. But so far this approach has not only failed to rein in criminal violence and corruption, it has also led to rising reports of human rights abuses.

[00:01:05] Families of two men killed in a US military airstrike on a small boat in the Caribbean have filed a federal lawsuit against the US government. The men were from a fishing village in Trinidad and Tobago, and were killed when the boat they were traveling on was struck in October. The move highlights the legal gray zone in which the US government strikes in the Caribbean live. Evidence has yet to be presented that the boats targeted during the strikes, which started in September, were carrying drugs, or that they were operated by the criminal organizations that the US government blames.

[00:01:45] Finally, in Mexico, gunmen opened fire at a football match in central Guanajuato state, killing at least 11 people and wounding a dozen more over the weekend. Reports suggest the attack is part of an ongoing conflict between the Santa Rosa de Lima and Jalisco New Generation cartels, which have been fighting to control oil theft, extortion, and methamphetamine trafficking in the area. Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel boss José Antonio Yépez

Ortiz, alias “El Marro,” was captured six years ago, but US authorities believe he is still running the group from Mexican prison.

[00:02:28] For in-depth profiles of El Marro and all of the other criminal dynamics mentioned in this week’s On the Radar, please visit [InSightCrime.org](https://insightcrime.org). We’ll be back with more next week.

Dig Deeper

GameChangers 2024: Ecuador Finds Victory Elusive in ‘War on Gangs’

27 Dec 2024

Timeline of US Strikes Against Alleged Drug Boats

4 Nov 2025

Special Series: The Deadly US Strikes on Suspected Drug Traffickers

29 Oct 2025

Winner of Colombia-Ecuador Trade War Could Be Organized Crime

28 Jan 2026

Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG)

23 Feb 2026

Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel (CSRL)

19 Sep 2025

Exhibit 16

Ecuador's criminal crisis

 globalinitiative.net/analysis/ecuadors-criminal-crisis

September 22, 2025

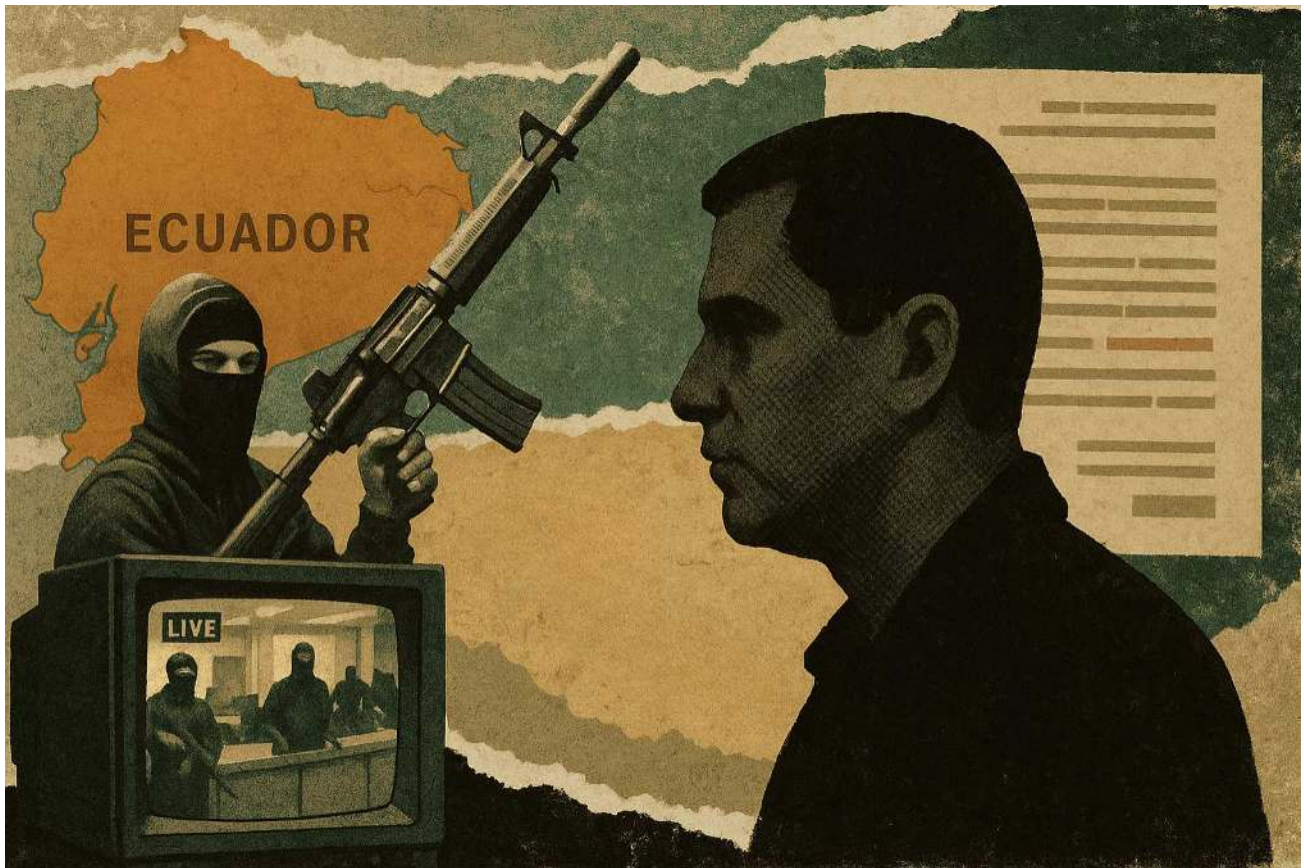
The fragmentation of criminal groups has driven Ecuador into a new cycle of violence

William Joffre Alcívar Bautista, known as 'Negro Willy', rose to lead the Ecuadorian gang Los Tiguerones while serving as a prison guard. After relocating to Spain in September 2023, he allegedly continued orchestrating the gang's criminal operations from abroad, including a brazen [attack](#) on a live television station in Guayaquil in January 2024. Spanish authorities raided his residence and [arrested him](#) in October 2024 on terrorism charges related to the televised assault. His arrest sparked violent internal warfare that fractured Los Tiguerones into competing factions.

The case of 'Negro Willy' and Los Tiguerones is one example of a broader pattern: the absence of leadership within Ecuador's main criminal organizations has triggered skyrocketing levels of violence as competing gang factions vie for control of the illicit economy. Following a 14 per cent fall in intentional homicides between 2023 and 2024 in Ecuador, projections for 2025 estimate around 9 100 deaths – a 40 per cent increase, equivalent to a rate of nearly 50 per 100 000 inhabitants.

This trend, which would continue to make Ecuador the country with the highest homicide rate in Latin America, is driven by divisions within criminal groups resulting from the arrest, murder or extradition of their leaders. At the same time, the diversification of lucrative illicit markets, including extortion, kidnapping for ransom, the transportation and storage of illicit drugs, and illegal mining, has ensured the gangs' profitability.

The surge in violence caused by such fragmentation is nothing new in Ecuador. Following the split of the gang Los Choneros after their leader was assassinated in 2020, the country experienced an [earlier wave of violence](#) involving what amounted to an open war for control of several prisons and major illicit markets. However, the current wave shows a more dispersed and volatile pattern, with the emergence of new criminal groups lacking solid hierarchical structures, which is leading to more frequent and unpredictable acts of violence.



Homicides in Ecuador, 2020–2025. Source: Ministry of the Interior of Ecuador

The domino effect

This second wave has been shaped by three recent incidents: the arrest of ‘Negro Willy’; the [assassination](#) of Benjamín Camacho, alias ‘Ben 10’, leader of the gang Los Chone Killers, in December 2024; and the July 2025 [extradition](#) to the US of Los Choneros leader José Adolfo Macías Villamar, alias ‘Fito’. The elimination of these bosses has created internal factionalism in the gangs and intensified conflict over access to and control of illicit economies, in particular cocaine trafficking.

The province of Guayas has become the epicentre of this criminal reconfiguration. Since late 2024, marginalized neighbourhoods in Guayaquil, the province’s capital, have experienced an increase in homicides driven by the recruitment of minors into gangs, the use of explosives and vying for control over strategic access points to the city’s ports. In Durán, a city with an astronomically high homicide rate of 140 per 100 000 inhabitants, the fracturing of Los Chone Killers has fuelled a rise in intentional homicides among young people.

Against this backdrop, the extradition of ‘Fito’ in July 2025 weakened Los Choneros, sparking a series of revenge massacres, power struggles and targeted killings, particularly in the port city of [Manta](#). Although the leader’s removal from the country partially dismantled the group’s

criminal governance in certain areas and compromised its internal cohesion, it remains to be seen what impact his absence will have on the criminal ecosystem.

New alliances

But the problem is not all about division. The latest fractures within criminal groups have also given rise to new alliances. The arrest of 'Negro Willy' [split](#) Los Tiguerones into two groups: Los Fénix and Los Igualitos. The former maintain ties with Las Águilas (a faction of Los Choneros), while the latter have strengthened links with the Los Lobos gang – a process similar to the [alliances](#) formed after a string of [prison massacres](#) in 2021, when Los Choneros splintered into various rival groups. This ultimately led to the creation of the Nueva Generación alliance, uniting Los Tiguerones, Los Lobos and Los Chone Killers into a single criminal network.

Similarly, Camacho's killing triggered the division of Los Chone Killers into at least five factions. At least two of these are aligned with Los Lobos, a gang seeking to enforce a monopoly on drug trafficking and illegal mining.

Looking ahead

The volatile criminal landscape that has emerged from these leadership vacuums and organizational schisms presents multiple potential trajectories for Ecuador's security landscape. Although fragmentation has driven homicide rates to unprecedented levels, the ultimate direction of this violence will largely depend on how these power struggles resolve. Three primary scenarios are likely to shape the country's criminal ecosystem through 2026.

Firstly, in June 2025, Spain [granted](#) Ecuador a three-month deadline to extradite 'Negro Willy', provided that his human rights are guaranteed. His potential extradition remains uncertain but if it happens, his return to Ecuador could trigger an increase in violent acts inside prisons, especially among Los Igualitos and Los Fénix, driven by Willy's interest in carrying out an 'internal cleansing' of Los Tiguerones. Such disputes could spill over into the streets. His potential extradition comes at a time when Ecuador lacks the capacity to prevent prison massacres, as Daniel Noboa's government is focusing on building '[mega prisons](#)' while seeking to reduce administrative costs.

The second scenario hinges on the strengthening of alliances among Los Lobos, Los Igualitos and Los Chone Killers, which may lead to a partial reduction in levels of armed violence in some areas of the provinces of Los Ríos, Guayas and Manabí by late 2025. This consolidation would reinforce Los Lobos' territorial and logistical control, strengthen drug trafficking routes and extend the group's dominance into illegal mining and extortion, temporarily lowering levels of armed violence as a result of the group's dominance.

Thirdly, the struggle over criminal leadership will directly affect the security of community leaders, who play a crucial role in containing organized crime in urban environments. The constant turnover of criminal leaders will force the renegotiation of previous agreements, thereby exposing communities to accusations of collaborating with rival factions. This scenario increases the risk of community leaders being kidnapped or assassinated.

Understanding these potential pathways is crucial for policymakers and security analysts as Ecuador navigates this critical juncture. The interconnected nature of these criminal networks suggests that developments in one organization will have cascading effects across Ecuador's security landscape. Ultimately, the country's ability to break the cycle of violence generated by fragmentation and reconsolidation will depend on addressing not only the immediate symptoms of violence, but also the underlying structural factors that enable criminal governance to flourish.

Exhibit 17

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

JANUARY 17, 2025

Ecuador Needs a Different Approach to Fighting Organized Crime

Published in Americas Quarterly.



Juanita Goebertus Estrada

Director, Americas Division

 [JuanitaGoe](#)

Ecuador's crisis of violence is at an alarming level: The country's homicide rate has risen 430% in five years, as organized crime groups extort entire neighborhoods, recruit children, kill judges, prosecutors and political candidates, and infiltrate government institutions.

While Daniel Noboa government has had some success bringing the murder rate down, it hasn't done the less glamorous work of shoring up the country's weak justice system to fight criminals in

accordance with the law. This, rather than bellicose rhetoric and shows of force that threaten human rights, should be the priority moving forward. There's much that Noboa, or whoever wins next month's election, can do.

The Attorney General's Office needs an investigative body to keep it from having to rely on police investigators, prosecutors and judges need basic security measures, and the government needs to integrate its crime-fighting efforts better with the justice system. Common-sense measures like these could make a real difference in Ecuador's fight against organized crime, while protecting everyday Ecuadorians' rights.

Into the abyss



An older woman looks at an Ecuadorean police member taking part in a security joint operation with armed forces in Duran, Ecuador on October 24, 2024.

© 2024 MARCOS PIN/AFP via Getty Images)

Shortly after Noboa took office a year ago, organized crime groups took over a state-owned TV station and the leader of a prominent criminal group escaped from prison. Noboa responded by announcing that the country was in an “armed conflict,” suspending some basic constitutional rights, and deploying the military to fight organized crime in the streets and control the prisons.

The government reports that the homicide rate decreased roughly 17 percent compared to 2023, but even government figures show an increase in extortion and kidnappings compared to 2023. Organized crime experts and prosecutors told me during my visit in November that while organized groups are more fragmented, their leaders, territorial control, and illicit economies remain largely untouched.

Noboa has not done enough to strengthen the country’s weak justice system, plagued by allegations of corruption and improper pressure on courts. Prosecutors and judges told me, one after the other, that they didn’t feel safe and lacked basic support and tools to do their job.

At the same time, there are increased reports of human rights violations by security forces. Prosecutors are investigating more than 200 allegations of excessive use of force, 80 reports of torture, 8 of forced disappearances and 15 of extrajudicial executions by security forces since January—a clear uptick compared to 2023. In December, four children disappeared in Guayaquil and were later found dead after being apprehended by military personnel. Meanwhile, the government has branded critics “unpatriotic” or defenders of criminals.

Noboa has touted a security plan called “Plan Fénix,” as a solution to organized crime. But the prosecutors and security experts with whom I spoke don’t see a workable, concrete strategy. Constitutional Court judges have repeatedly found Noboa’s “armed conflict” announcement unconstitutional because the government has failed to provide evidence to back it. Prosecutors told me that they were not aware of the content of “Plan Fénix” or whether it changes the way they investigate organized crime.

A vulnerable justice system

Meanwhile, at least 15 judges and prosecutors have been killed since 2022. Yet even in some of the most dangerous provinces, many prosecutors and judges, including those at risk, lack basic security, such as bulletproof vehicles, to enable them to travel between courtrooms and their offices. In a province heavily affected impacted by violence, I was surprised that I could walk, without being stopped or questioned, directly to the office of a high-ranking prosecutor in charge of investigating organized crime and other sensitive cases.

Courts and prosecutors’ offices remain severely understaffed. Officials with the Attorney General’s Office told us they have 600 vacant positions, including prosecutors and assistants, in part due to lack of funding. The National Court of Justice, the highest appeals court, has fewer than half the magistrates it requires.

Some provinces don’t even have enough personnel to remove dead bodies from a crime scene or to conduct a ballistics analysis. Investigators in Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city and a hotspot for organized

crime, told us that they must send forensic materials to the capital, Quito, for testing, which delays investigations.

Prosecutors and judges say there isn't enough coordination with the police and other institutions to ensure effective investigations into organized crime groups. Given these weaknesses in the criminal justice system, it is unsurprising that organized crime groups feel they can operate with impunity. A lawyer who represents clients accused of money laundering told us that his job is "easy" given how many mistakes understaffed and poorly trained prosecutors and judges make in criminal proceedings.

A prison system in crisis

The prison system remains in crisis. Prison experts and human rights lawyers told me that soldiers deployed there have increasingly been involved in corruption and human rights abuses, including torture. Criminal groups still use prisons to extort and recruit other detainees. Lack of adequate control over prisons has enabled criminal groups to kill hundreds in a string of massacres.

Tackling the crisis

Of course, these are long-lasting problems that won't be fixed overnight. But there are concrete steps that can be taken. Noboa's administration, or its successor, should re-establish the Ministry of Justice, a key entity to coordinate criminal policy with the Attorney General's Office, law enforcement and the prison system, closed in 2018. Drawing lessons from Colombia and other countries in the region, the president should work with the Legislative Assembly to create an investigative body at the Attorney General's Office, so that prosecutors do not have to rely on often overwhelmed and at times poorly trained police officers to investigate crimes.

When they appoint a new Attorney General late this year, Ecuadorian authorities should elect a candidate with serious plans to improve protection for prosecutors and prioritize investigating high-level corruption and money laundering.

The government should also re-establish drug regulations abrogated in 2023 that made it easier for prosecutors to prioritize strategic, high-level investigations, instead of overburdening the justice system with low-level drug possession cases. Fewer delays in awarding legally provided reductions in sentences for good behavior would make Ecuadorian prisons less crowded.

The crisis in Ecuador still needs urgent and effective action. Deploying the military is not the right response. Having effective and rights-respecting security policies is possible, but it demands focusing resources and efforts to increase the capacity to effectively administer justice.

Related Content

[Ecuador: Unchecked Abuses Since 'Armed Conflict' Announcement](#)
Region / Country

Exhibit 18

March in Ambato to demand more security after disappearance of community member

EU eluniverso.com/noticias/ecuador/busqueda-continua-nota

Wilson Pinto

June 22, 2026

Ecuador

Despite searches undertaken by community members and the National Police, there are still no results regarding the whereabouts of the community member who disappeared on June 5.



AMBATO, Tungurahua. Hundreds of community members participated in Monday's march to demand security for the public. **Photo: Wilson Pinto**

June 22, 2026 - 2:44 PM

Hundreds of people grouped in the three indigenous and peasant movements of **Tungurahua** participated in the march called for this Monday , **June 22**, to demand security in the urban and rural sectors of Ambato and the province.

The march began after 10:30 from Cevallos Avenue and Abdón Calderón to travel through the center of **Ambato** until reaching first the **Prosecutor's Office** and finally the Tungurahua Governorate.

Manifestos were left demanding increased security, not only in the city but also in rural areas. Manifestos were also left outlining the demands of various social movements, as well as urging swift action in locating **Mario Quinatoa** , a community member who disappeared on **June 5th**.

He was last seen in Chibuleo San Luis, Juan Benigno Vela parish, in Ambato.

Names are being considered for the mayoralty of Ambato and the prefecture of Tungurahua in the local elections in November.

The family's cry

The march was led by Quinatoa's family. His mother, **Manuela Villa** , was inconsolable, unable to hold back her tears, as she pleaded with the authorities to expedite the process of finding out what happened to her son.

In addition to shouts demanding security and unity to confront crime, signs were seen at the march such as "we don't want to live in fear", "peace for Ambato", "no to crime, yes to a dignified and safe life".

“This shows that as indigenous communities and the rural sector we are united, we will not allow harm to continue being done to our comrades, we do not want anyone to be harmed,” said **Jaime Pacha** , president of the **Indigenous Movement of Tungurahua**, Atocha branch (MITA).

Tungurahua strengthens contingency plans in the face of a possible El Niño phenomenon and a multi-threat situation

Commitment of the Prosecutor's Office

Once he received the list of demands, **Galo Romero** , prosecutor of Tungurahua, reiterated his commitment to continue working with firmness, and to generate within the investigations all actions to find the whereabouts of **Mario Quinatoa** .

PROOF OF SERVICE

On this day, I, Otavio Haverroth Silva, served a copy of the following documents:

**RESPONDENT'S COUNTRY CONDITIONS IN SUPPORT OF ASYLUM AND
WITHHOLDING OF REMOVAL**

To the following:

Office Location:	Mailing Address:
Office of the Principal Legal Advisor Department of Homeland Security 250 Delaware Avenue, Suite 773 Buffalo, NY 14202	US Immigration and Customs Enforcement US Department of Homeland Security Office of the Chief Counsel 250 Delaware Avenue, Suite 773 Buffalo, NY 14202

by:

- ☒ Through the EOIR Courts and Appeals System (ECAS), which will automatically send service notification to both parties that a new document has been filed.



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