

Updated August 18, 2025

## Ecuador: Country Overview and U.S. Relations

Ecuador is an ethnically and geographically diverse country of 18.1 million people, encompassing parts of South America’s Pacific coast, Amazon Basin, and Andean highlands (see **Figure 1**). Ecuador faces a security crisis, with gangs fighting for control of drug trafficking routes and prisons, and attempting to influence politics.

In the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress, some Members have commended Ecuador’s government as a “valued partner” and called for an expansion of bilateral defense and security cooperation to combat transnational drug trafficking and other threats. Some Members have voiced concern about human rights conditions amid Ecuador’s security crisis and possible attempts to undermine democratic processes. These Members called on the State Department to ensure U.S. security assistance does not contribute to potential human rights abuses by Ecuadorian security forces. The 119<sup>th</sup> Congress may assess security, economic, and human rights conditions in Ecuador—including any implications for regional security efforts—and consider legislative and other measures to shape bilateral relations.

### Current Political Conditions

President Daniel Noboa of the center-right National Democratic Action (ADN) party first took office in November 2023. Ecuadorians elected Noboa to complete the term of former President Guillermo Lasso (2021-2023), who had called snap elections held in August 2023. In April 2025, Noboa won a full four-year presidential term after obtaining 55.6% of the vote in a presidential runoff election against Luisa González of the left-leaning Citizen Revolution (RC)—an ally of U.S.-sanctioned, exiled RC party leader and former President Rafael Correa (2007-2017). Although González has alleged voter fraud in the election, international observers expressed confidence in the results, while noting some concerns about “conditions of inequity during the campaign” that favored Noboa’s candidacy.

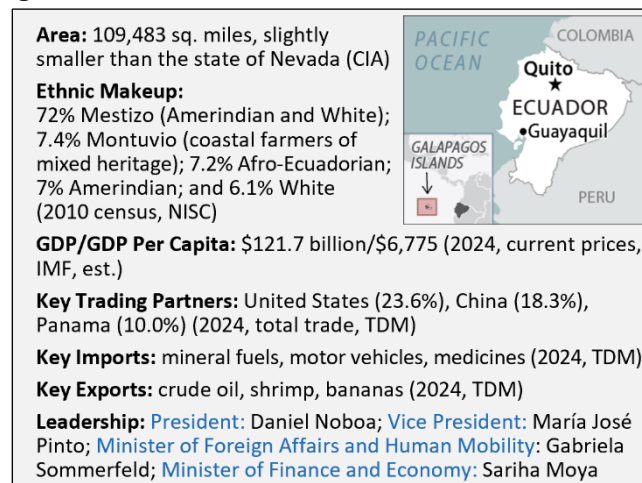
In February 2025 legislative elections, to elect all 151 members of the unicameral National Assembly, support was largely divided between ADN and RC. President Noboa’s ADN has forged an informal legislative majority with the support of smaller parties. Meanwhile, the RC has grappled with intraparty turmoil following González’s failed presidential run, reducing RC’s legislative representation.

President Noboa’s policymaking priorities have included tackling Ecuador’s public security crisis and pursuing reforms aimed at improving government finances. In July 2025, the Noboa administration issued an executive order that aimed to reduce government spending and improve efficiency by eliminating 5,000 public sector jobs and reducing the number of executive ministries.

Noboa also has secured some legislative victories. In June 2025, the legislature approved Noboa-backed security and government reforms, which, inter alia, restructured and

increased the authority of the country’s national intelligence system, broadened the legal use of lethal force by security forces, and increased prison sentences for minors. Some civil society and human rights groups have argued that the laws violate constitutional rights. In August 2025, Ecuador’s constitutional court suspended several provisions of the new laws while it examines legal challenges to them, escalating tensions with the Noboa administration. Noboa’s rhetoric against the constitutional court and his proposal for a constitutional reform, which would enable the impeachment of the court’s judges, have prompted some observers to voice concerns about threats to judicial independence.

**Figure 1. Ecuador at a Glance**



**Sources:** Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *World Factbook*, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Ecuador’s National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (NISC), Trade Data Monitor (TDM).

### Security Crisis

Violence has risen since roughly 2021, primarily because of increased competition among gangs affiliated with transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), including Mexican cartels and European crime groups. After decades of comparatively low homicide rates, violence surged after the COVID-19 pandemic; Ecuador reportedly recorded the highest homicide rate in South America in 2023 and 2024. High-fatality riots in prisons, from which criminal groups reportedly run their operations, have plagued Ecuador since 2020. These groups also are alleged to have infiltrated Ecuadorian politics and institutions. In late 2024, a judge convicted 20 people—including former judges, government officials, and police—for their roles in a corruption network linked to organized crime. Ecuador also has faced increased violence linked to illicit mining operations.

Between FY2022 and FY2024, rising insecurity coincided with an increase in unauthorized migration from Ecuador to the United States. U.S. Customs and Border Protection encountered about 124,000 Ecuadorians at a U.S. land border

in FY2024—a nearly 400% increase from FY2022 levels. During the first 10 months of FY2025, however, encounters have declined by about 89% from the same period in FY2024.

In January 2024, President Noboa declared the first of several states of emergency and an “internal armed conflict” after the leader of Ecuador’s *Los Choneros* gang, José Macías Villamar, escaped from prison and a wave of violence swept the country. The order limited some constitutional rights, designated 22 criminal groups as terrorist organizations, and enabled the armed forces to conduct public security functions and take control of some prisons. Ecuadorians voted to formalize the armed forces’ role in public security in an April 2024 referendum.

Noboa’s security efforts appear to have had mixed results. According to the government, the annual homicide rate declined by nearly 16% in 2024 but has surged by nearly 47% in the first six months of 2025 compared to the previous year. Security forces have arrested high-profile criminals, including Macías Villamar, who was extradited to the United States in July 2025; several politicians also have been assassinated. Military control reportedly has restored order in some prisons but failed to suppress some deadly riots. Human Rights Watch has alleged that some security forces have committed serious human rights violations.

## Economic Situation

Economic growth has declined since 2022. In 2024, the economy contracted by 2% amid security and energy challenges. In 2023 and 2024, economic growth was impeded by seasonal power blackouts due, in part, to drought—which limited hydroelectric power generation—and aging infrastructure. President Noboa has sought to boost foreign investment in Ecuador’s energy sector, including from the People’s Republic of China (PRC, or China), which has served as a key source of financing and investment since 2009. Some PRC-built infrastructure projects during this period reportedly have been plagued by operational deficiencies and increased Ecuador’s indebtedness to China.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects the economy to recover somewhat in 2025, with 1.7% growth. The Noboa administration has taken steps to improve Ecuador’s fiscal situation, including implementing reforms to reduce energy subsidies and reopen the country’s mining sector for the first time since 2018. In July 2025, IMF officials expanded a \$4 billion financing agreement approved in May 2024 to \$5 billion, citing “significant progress” in the implementation of the IMF-supported economic program.

## U.S.-Ecuador Relations

During his decade in power, former President Correa’s populist rhetoric and self-styled “anti-imperialist” policies contributed to friction in an otherwise historically close U.S.-Ecuador relationship. Among other actions, Correa shuttered U.S. counterdrug operations at Manta Air Force Base in 2009 and expelled the U.S. ambassador in 2011. Closer bilateral ties resumed under subsequent Ecuadorian administrations.

In 2022, Congress enacted the United States-Ecuador Partnership Act of 2022, as Title LV, Subtitle B, of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for FY2023 (P.L. 117-263). Authorized for five years, the act includes measures aimed at strengthening bilateral security cooperation

and commercial ties to promote democracy and regional stability and counter malign foreign influence.

Successive U.S. administrations have expanded security cooperation with Ecuador. The United States has provided equipment, technical assistance, and training to support Ecuador’s antinarcotics efforts. In February 2024, President Noboa ratified two military cooperation agreements with the United States aimed at enhancing defense cooperation and combatting illicit maritime activities, including drug trafficking. Noboa also has proposed a national referendum to reverse a constitutional ban on foreign military bases to bolster efforts to counter TCOs with international partners. The U.S. Treasury Department has imposed asset-blocking sanctions on *Los Choneros* under Executive Order 14059.

The United States allocated an estimated \$49 million to Ecuador in FY2023 (latest year available). U.S. assistance to Ecuador has aimed to build capacity to counter TCOs, drug trafficking, and corruption and to improve economic integration for marginalized groups, among other activities. The explanatory statement accompanying the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-47, Division F), specified \$17.5 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) aid for Ecuador. It is unclear how the Trump Administration’s review and subsequent cancellation of thousands of unspecified U.S. aid awards and contracts has affected programs in Ecuador, although some U.S.-backed antidrug efforts were reportedly impacted. The report accompanying the House-reported version of the National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2026 (H.Rept. 119-217 to H.R. 4779), would designate at least \$50 million in security assistance to Ecuador through the Foreign Military Financing and INCLE accounts.

The U.S.-Ecuador goods trade totaled \$16.1 billion in 2024, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, making the United States Ecuador’s top trading partner. In 2020, the United States and Ecuador signed a protocol to strengthen the 1990 U.S.-Ecuador Trade and Investment Council (TIC), which guides bilateral engagement on trade and investment issues. In April 2025, President Trump issued an executive order declaring a national emergency over “a lack of reciprocity” in bilateral trade and imposed a minimum tariff of 10% on all U.S. imports (including those from Ecuador), with certain exceptions, effective April 5, 2025. The tariff rate for Ecuador increased to 15% on August 7, 2025. In the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, some Members called for increased U.S. engagement with Ecuador to help counter China’s commercial influence in the country. A free trade agreement between Ecuador and China entered into force in May 2024.

The 119<sup>th</sup> Congress may evaluate the Trump Administration’s approach to U.S. trade policy with Ecuador and assess whether to address U.S.-Ecuador commercial ties through legislation. Congress also may assess broader U.S. policy objectives in Ecuador and consider whether to authorize or appropriate any future U.S. foreign aid for Ecuador, including to address concerns about the country’s security conditions.

**Joshua Klein**, Analyst in Foreign Affairs

## Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.