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Ecuador in Brief: Overview and U.S. Relations

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SUMMARY

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Ecuador in Brief: Overview and U.S. Relations

Domestic Situation

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. President Daniel Noboa (2023-present), of the right-leaning National Democratic Action (ADN) movement, has largely centered his policymaking on addressing Ecuador's public security crisis. Since roughly 2021, illicit activity linked to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) has contributed to a security crisis in Ecuador, with gangs fighting for control of drug trafficking routes and prisons and attempting to influence politics. Other aspects of Noboa's agenda include pursuing International Monetary Fund-backed economic reforms to increase investment and improve government finances. Noboa's ADN has forged an informal legislative majority with the support of smaller parties to advance his legislative agenda; he also has sought to advance his agenda through two referendums, with mixed results.

Under the Noboa administration, some observers have voiced concerns about an erosion of democratic norms, including judicial independence and press freedoms. Critics also have argued that several law enforcement investigations targeting members of Ecuador's largest political opposition party, left-of-center Citizen Revolution, are politically motivated. The political opposition also has accused the Noboa administration of co-opting independent electoral institutions following several decisions favorable for ADN ahead of subnational elections scheduled for November 2026. Noboa has rejected claims of rising authoritarianism under his government.

U.S. Relations and Congressional Interests

Following a period of bilateral tensions under former President Rafael Correa (2007-2017), U.S.-Ecuador ties have strengthened, including under President Noboa. During the second Trump Administration, the United States and Ecuador have expanded bilateral security cooperation and conducted combined military operations to curtail drug trafficking and other illicit activity linked to TCOs. Since August 2025, the U.S. government has designated four Ecuadorian gangs as foreign terrorist organizations and specially designated global terrorists. The two countries also have signed nonbinding bilateral agreements to allow the transfer of some third-country migrants from the United States to Ecuador (July 2025) and to advance cooperation on critical minerals (February 2026) and trade (March 2026).

Congress, at times, has sought to shape the executive branch's approach to U.S.-Ecuador relations. In 2022, for example, 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 until December 2027, the act includes measures aimed at strengthening bilateral security cooperation and commercial ties to promote democracy and regional stability and to counter malign foreign influence.

In the 119th Congress, Members have expressed a range of views on Ecuador and U.S. policy. Some Members have commended President Noboa as a strong U.S. ally and called for an expansion of bilateral security cooperation to dismantle TCOs. Some Members have voiced concern about human rights conditions amid Ecuador's security crisis and possible democratic erosion under President Noboa; those of this view have called on the Trump Administration to suspend combined U.S.-Ecuador military operations and to ensure U.S. security assistance does not contribute to potential human rights abuses. Looking ahead, Congress may continue to 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.

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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**). Following a period of bilateral tensions and policy differences under former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa (2007-2017), U.S.-Ecuador ties have strengthened, including under Ecuador's current President Daniel Noboa (2023-present). During the second Trump Administration, the United States and Ecuador have expanded cooperation, including conducting combined security activities, to curtail drug trafficking and other illicit activity linked to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs, four of which have been designated by the United States as foreign terrorist organizations), which have contributed to a security crisis in Ecuador since roughly 2021.

In the 119th Congress, Members have expressed a range of views on U.S. engagement with Ecuador. Some Members have called for an expansion of U.S.-Ecuador security cooperation to dismantle illicit drug and other TCO-linked operations. Some Members have voiced concern about human rights conditions amid Ecuador's security crisis and possible democratic erosion under President Noboa. Those of this view have called on the Trump Administration to suspend combined U.S.-Ecuador military operations and to ensure U.S. security assistance does not contribute to potential human rights abuses. Looking ahead, Congress may continue to assess security, economic, and human rights conditions in Ecuador and consider legislative and other measures to shape bilateral relations.

Political and Economic Conditions

President Daniel Noboa of the right-leaning National Democratic Action (ADN) political movement 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-of-center Citizen Revolution (RC) movement.[1] Although González alleged voter fraud in the election, international observers expressed confidence in the results, while noting concerns about "conditions of inequity during the campaign" that favored Noboa's candidacy.[2]

In February 2025, Ecuador held legislative elections to elect all 151 members of the unicameral National Assembly. Support was largely divided between ADN (66 seats) and RC (67 seats) blocs. Noboa's ADN has forged an informal legislative majority with the support of smaller parties. Intraparty disagreements since the elections have reduced RC's legislative bloc and eroded the block's voting cohesion.[3]

[1] CRS Insight IN12530, *Ecuador's 2025 Elections: Implications for U.S. Policy*.

[2] Organization of American States (OAS), *2025 Presidential Runoff in Ecuador: Preliminary Report OAS Electoral Observation Mission*, April 15, 2025, p. 2. The OAS electoral observation mission has not released a final electoral observation report.

[3] Patricio Díaz, "El Oficialismo Consolidó Mayoría en la Asamblea tras Fracturas en el Correísmo y Pachakutik," *Ecuadvisa*, May 15, 2026.

Figure 1. Ecuador at a Glance



Land Area: 98,982 sq. miles (WB)

Population: 18.1 million (IMF, 2025 est.)

Ethnic Makeup: Mestizo (mixed Spanish and Indigenous descent): 77.5%; Montubia (coastal ethnic group): 7.7%; Indigenous: 7.7%; Afroecuadorian: 4.8%; White/Other: 2.3% (INEC, 2022)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)/GDP per Capita: $130.3 billion/$7,199 (2025, current prices, IMF)

Real GDP Growth: 1.8% (2023), -1.9% (2024), 3.7% (2025, constant prices, IMF)

Poverty: 21.4% (INEC, December 2025)

Key Trading Partners: United States (22.9%), China (20.7%), Panama (9.3%) (2025, total trade, TDM)

Key Trade Goods: *Exports*: shrimp, crude oil, bananas. *Imports*: petroleum, motor vehicles, medicines (2025, TDM)

Sources: Map created by CRS using data from U.S. Department of State, Database of Global Administrative Areas, and Esri. International Monetary Fund (IMF); *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2026; World Bank (WB); Ecuador's Central Bank data via *Trade Data Monitor* (TDM); and Ecuador's *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos* (INEC).

President Noboa's policymaking priorities have included addressing Ecuador's public security crisis (see "Security Crisis") and pursuing economic reforms. President Noboa issued executive orders in 2025 and 2026 that aimed to reduce government spending and improve efficiency by eliminating 5,000 public sector jobs and reducing the number of executive ministries from 14 to 10.[4] His administration also initiated a phased removal of fuel subsidies, which have been in place since the 1970s, triggering some public protests.[5] President Noboa has sought to implement portions of his agenda through national referendums, with mixed results. In April 2024, voters approved nine reforms aimed at addressing deteriorating security conditions—including measures

[4] República del Ecuador, *Decreto Ejecutivo 60*, *Registro Oficial*, No. 93, July 31, 2025; and Decretos Ejecutivos 425, 426, 427, *Registro Oficial*, No. 312, June 24, 2026.

[5] The government spent about $3 billion on fuel subsidies in 2024 (roughly equivalent to 2.4% of gross domestic product that year). Banco Central del Ecuador, *Análisis de la Proforma del Presupuesto General del Estado Año 2026*, November 2025, p. 39.

that formalized the armed forces' role in public security functions and enabled the extradition of Ecuadorian citizens—and rejected two economic proposals.[6] In November 2025, voters rejected four Noboa-backed proposals, including measures that would have reversed a constitutional ban on foreign military bases in Ecuadorian territory and established a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution.[7]

Governance and Human Rights Concerns

Some observers have voiced concerns about an erosion of democratic norms under the Noboa administration. In August 2025, the National Assembly passed a law that increased government oversight and regulation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which President Noboa argued was necessary to detect and prevent possible illicit financial flows tied to money laundering and tax evasion.[8] In late 2025, U.S.-based NGO Human Rights Watch asserted that Noboa administration officials used the law to freeze the bank accounts of Indigenous and environmental groups that had protested the government's removal of diesel subsidies.[9] Some observers have asserted that President Noboa has used combative rhetoric to increase political pressure on Ecuador's Constitutional Court—potentially undermining judicial independence—since the court suspended some Noboa-backed security legislation in mid-2025.[10] Some groups have raised alarms about deteriorating press freedoms, pointing to increased violence against journalists by criminal groups and pressure from government officials.[11]

November 2026 Subnational Elections

On November 29, 2026, Ecuador is scheduled to hold subnational elections for more than 5,000 provincial, municipal, and local offices, including 23 prefectures (provincial government heads) and 222 mayorships.[12] Voters are also set to elect all seven members of the Council for Citizen Participation and Social Control (*Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social*)—an autonomous oversight entity charged with conducting the selection process for several independent national offices, including the attorney general, human rights ombudsman, comptroller, and electoral authorities, among other functions.[13] All elected officials are scheduled to take office on May 14, 2027, for four-year terms.

[6] Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE), "Resultados Definitivos del Proceso del Referéndum y Consulta Popular 2024," Resolución PLE-CNE-1-8-5-2024, May 8, 2024.

[7] CNE, "Resultados Definitivos de la Consulta Popular y Referéndum 2025," Resolución PLE-CNE-3-1-12-2025, December 1, 2025.

[8] Amnesty International, *Impact of Restrictive Laws on Civil Society Organizations in the Americas*, March 23, 2026; and Robel Revelo, "Noboa Expide Reglamento de la Ley de Transparencia Social, que Regula el Financiamiento de las Fundaciones," *Primicias*, October 27, 2025.

[9] Human Rights Watch, "Ecuador: Government Freezes Groups' Bank Accounts," December 9, 2025.

[10] See, for example, UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, "Ecuador: Interference with Constitutional Court Threatens Rule of Law and Safeguards Against Abuse of Power," August 15, 2025.

[11] See, for example, Reporters Without Borders, "The Americas: Rather than Helping Hard-pressed Journalists, Authorities are Threatening Them," *2026 World Press Freedom Index*, April 30, 2026.

[12] CNE, "Convocatoria Elecciones Seccionales y CPCCS 2027," *Resolución PLE-CNE-1-31-7-2026*, July 31, 2026. In 23 of Ecuador's 24 provinces, executive power is divided between a directly elected prefect and a presidentially appointed governor. The province of Galápagos, which is governed by a governing council is the only exception.

[13] Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social, "Nuestra Institución," https://www.cpccs.gob.ec/nuestra-institucion/introduccion/.

The political opposition has accused the Noboa administration of co-opting independent electoral institutions following several decisions seemingly favorable for ADN ahead of the elections.[14] In March 2026, a judge on Ecuador's Electoral Dispute Tribunal (TCE) imposed a nine-month suspension on RC, the largest opposition party, amid an ongoing illicit campaign finance investigation.[15] The suspension prevents RC from fielding candidates in the elections. Later that month, electoral authorities rescheduled the elections to be held in November 2026 instead of February 2027, as originally scheduled, to avoid potential weather disruptions related to an anticipated El Niño climate pattern.[16] Some critics argued that the move was a politically motivated attempt to reduce the time available for RC-affiliated candidates to change party affiliation ahead of the elections.[17] In April 2026, electoral officials dissolved two other political organizations for alleged insufficient membership; the TCE reversed one party's dissolution following a legal challenge in June.[18] In July 2026, the TCE suspended another left-of-center party (*AMIGO*)—which had partnered with RC to field some of its candidates—under similar circumstances to that of RC.[19] In August 2026, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an independent regional commission, called on the Noboa administration to ensure "fair political participation" in the upcoming elections.[20]

Security Crisis[21]

Homicide rates in Ecuador were among the lowest in Latin America for decades, but violence has risen since roughly 2021; from 2023 to 2025, Ecuador reportedly had the highest homicide rate in the region.[22] The increase in violence has been driven primarily by increased competition among Ecuadorian gangs affiliated with Mexican cartels and other TCOs, shifts in regional drug-trafficking patterns, and entrenched corruption in Ecuador's law enforcement and judicial institutions. These gangs fight for control of drug trafficking routes, primarily in Ecuador's coastal provinces, that are used to ship Colombian and Peruvian cocaine through Ecuador's ports to international markets. In March 2026, a U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) official stated that about 70% of the world's cocaine is shipped from Ecuadorian ports.[23] High-fatality riots in prisons, from which criminal groups reportedly run their operations, have plagued Ecuador since 2020. Ecuador also has faced increased violence tied to TCO-linked illicit mining operations. Some TCOs appear to have infiltrated Ecuadorian government institutions. In late

[14] "Ecuador: Suspended Opposition Party Warns of Encroaching 'Dictatorship'," *LatinNews Daily*, March 10, 2026.

[15] The investigation is one of several initiated by Ecuador's acting attorney general, which RC representatives argue is politically motivated. Tribunal Contencioso Electoral, Causa Nro. 029-2926-TVE, Boleta de Notificación, March 9, 2026.

[16] CNE, "Resolución de Actualización del Calendario Electoral," PLE-CNE-1-27-3-2026, March 30, 2026.

[17] See, for example, Pedro Labayen Herrera, "Ecuador News Round-Up No. 26: Noboa's Authoritarianism Deepens Amid Growing US Support," Center for Economic and Policy Research, June 23, 2026.

[18] Roger Vélez, "Jueza del TCE Deja Sin Efecto Cancelación de Unidad Popular tras Aceptar Recursos de Partido," *Primicias*, June 3, 2026.

[19] Jackeline Beltrán, "Movimiento Amigo, que Cobija a los Candidatos del Correísmo, es Suspendido por Nueve Meses por el TCE," *Primicias*, July 17, 2026.

[20] Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, "IACHR Calls on Ecuador to Ensure Pluralist Political Participation in Upcoming Local Elections," August 31, 2026.

[21] Unless otherwise noted, this section draws from International Crisis Group, *Paradise Lost? Ecuador's Battle with Organised Crime*, Report No. 109, November 12, 2025; and U.S. Department of State (DOS), *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (INCSR), Vol. I: Drug and Chemical Control, March 2025, pp. 193-197.

[22] See data from InSight Crime's *Homicide Round-Up* for 2023, 2024, and 2025, https://insightcrime.org/news/special-series/yearly-homicide-round-up/.

[23] U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), "FBI Opens Permanent Office in Ecuador," March 19, 2026.

2024, for example, a judge convicted 20 people—including former judges, government officials, and police—for their roles in a corruption network linked to organized crime.[24]

Since January 2024, President Noboa has repeatedly asserted that his government is engaged in an "internal armed conflict," designated 22 local criminal groups as terrorist organizations, enabled the armed forces to conduct public security functions, and declared numerous states of emergency to address the violence.[25] Noboa's approach has led to the arrest of some high-profile gang leaders, although violence remains pervasive. Several human rights groups have alleged that some security forces have committed human rights violations, including enforced disappearances.[26]

Economic Conditions

After three years of declining economic growth amid security challenges and seasonal energy shortages driven by drought and aging energy infrastructure, Ecuador's economy rebounded with 3.7% gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2025; the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects 2.7% GDP growth in 2026.[27] Ecuador's growth in 2025 was aided in part by low inflation, an improved labor market, and strong non-oil exports.[28] Although Ecuador is a net energy exporter, which may allow it to benefit somewhat from increased international oil prices tied to the 2026 U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran, elevated energy prices also have increased government expenditures on remaining fuel subsidies that the Noboa administration has not yet phased out.[29] Fluctuations in rainfall tied to the El Niño climate pattern could also disrupt agricultural production and increase food prices, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit.[30] Reduced rainfall could also hinder hydroelectric power output, which accounts for more than 70% of Ecuador's electricity generation; the Noboa administration initiated electricity rationing measures for some commercial consumers in late September 2026.[31]

A priority for the Noboa administration is to improve Ecuador's fiscal situation in line with a $5 billion IMF financing agreement originally approved in May 2025 (IMF officials expanded the agreement by $1 billion in July 2025). In April 2026, the IMF Executive Board approved a disbursement of about $400 million, bringing total disbursements to date under the agreement to about $3.7 billion.[32] President Noboa also has sought to boost foreign investment in Ecuador, including from the People's Republic of China (PRC, or China), which reportedly has served as a key source of financing and investment since roughly 2009.[33] A free trade agreement between the two countries entered into force in May 2024. President Noboa has traveled to China twice to meet with PRC leader Xi Jinping, most recently in August 2026. During the visit, the two leaders

[24] Fiscalía General del Estado, "Metastasis Case: Prosecutor's Office Obtains Sentences Against 20 Defendants for Organized Crime," November 26, 2024.

[25] Presidente Daniel Noboa, *Decreto Ejecutivo 111*, January 9, 2024 and *Decretjo Ejecutivo 424*, June 18, 2026.

[26] UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances Publishes Findings on Ecuador, Iraq, Malawi, and Samoa," March 25, 2026.

[27] Gross domestic product data in this section are drawn from International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook* database, October 2026.

[28] IMF, *Ecuador: Fifth Review Under the Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility*, April 22, 2026.

[29] "Subsidios a Combustibles Aumentan Pese a Baja de Precios en Ecuador," *El Oriente*, July 15, 2026.

[30] Economist Intelligence Unit, *One-Click Report: Ecuador*, October 6, 2026.

[31] Energy Institute, *Statistical Review of World Energy*, 2026, pp. 63, 66; and see, for example, Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía, X post, October 9, 2026, https://x.com/EcuadorMAE/status/2108701017953239510.

[32] IMF, *Ecuador: Fifth Review Under the Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility*, April 22, 2026.

[33] Sebastián Hurtado, "Noboa's Balancing Act Between China and the U.S.," *Americas Quarterly*, July 2, 2025.

signed seven agreements to strengthen cooperation in various areas, including trade and investment, energy, and security. China also committed nearly $43 million for projects intended to improve security, health, and education.[34]

U.S.-Ecuador Relations and Issues for Congress

During the second Trump Administration, U.S.-Ecuador cooperation on several issues of U.S. concern has increased. The two countries have expanded bilateral security cooperation and initiated combined military operations to combat TCO-linked illicit activity under the Shield of the Americas and Americas Counter Cartel Coalition (A3C)—two interrelated U.S.-led regional initiatives composed largely of ideologically aligned Western Hemisphere governments.[35] During a September 2026 visit to Ecuador, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated that Ecuador was "the most involved and aggressive partner" in the Shield of the Americas and A3C.[36] During his visit, Secretary Rubio also announced the launch of a Millennium Challenge Corporation compact with Ecuador, which he stated would include a $12 million grant to the Ecuadorian government to benefit the country's electricity sector and economy.[37] In 2025 and 2026, the two countries signed nonbinding bilateral agreements on migration, critical minerals, and trade (discussed below).

Congress, at times, has sought to shape the executive branch's approach to U.S.-Ecuador relations. 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 until December 2027, the act includes measures aimed at strengthening the bilateral partnership between the United States and Ecuador in support of democratic institutions and rule of law, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and conservation.

Security Cooperation

Over the past decade, successive U.S. Administrations have expanded security cooperation with Ecuador to support the country's efforts to counter TCO-driven violence and related illicit activity. In February 2024, Ecuador ratified a status of forces agreement (SOFA), which creates a framework for U.S. military personnel to operate in Ecuador, and an agreement enabling combined maritime naval operations to combat drug trafficking and other illicit activities.[38] In June 2026, President Noboa issued an executive decree stating that foreign personnel participating in security operations would "enjoy immunity" in accordance with international agreements Ecuador has signed.[39] In March 2026, the FBI opened a permanent office in the capital city of Quito to enhance law enforcement cooperation on investigations related to drug

[34] Gobierno del Ecuador, "Ecuador y China Abren una Nueva Etapa de su Relación con el Inicio de la Cooperación Fotovoltáica y Nuevos Acuerdos," August 18, 2026.

[35] The Department of Defense (DOD) is "using a secondary Department of War designation," under Executive Order 14347 of September 5, 2025. DOD, "Americas Counter Cartel Conference Joint Security Declaration," March 5, 2026; and DOS, "Joint Statement on Defending Hemispheric Sovereignty," September 22, 2026.

[36] DOS, "Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Roberto Kury Deliver Statements," September 10, 2026 (hereinafter: DOS, September 10, 2026.)

[37] DOS, September 10, 2026.

[38] DOS, *Ecuador (24-223.1) – Status of Forces Agreement*, signed at Quito October 6, 2023, entered into force February 23, 2024; and *Ecuador (24-223) – Agreement Concerning Counter Illicit Transnational Maritime Activity Operations*, signed at Washington, September 27, 2023, entered into force February 23, 2024.

[39] Presidente Daniel Noboa, *Decreto Ejecutivo 424*, June 18, 2026.

trafficking and other TCO-related activity.[40] Since August 2025, the U.S. government also has designated four Ecuadorian gangs (*Los Choneros, Los Lobos*, *Chone Killers,* and *Los Tiguerones*) as foreign terrorist organizations and specially designated global terrorists.[41] Since the approval of a 2024 referendum permitting the extradition of Ecuadorian nationals, several high-profile gang members have been extradited from Ecuador to the United States.[42]

The State Department has provided security assistance to support Ecuadorian security forces' efforts to combat TCOs and strengthen maritime security, among other purposes. U.S. obligations of security assistance to Ecuador have increased since FY2018, following a decade of strained relations during the Correa administration (2007-2017).[43] Such obligations totaled nearly $176 million in FY2022 and $168 million in FY2023, driven primarily by Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for the procurement of defense-related articles and services. U.S. security assistance in FY2024 and FY2025 reached $15.9 million and $12.5 million, respectively, with International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) aid accounting for roughly 80% of those obligations each year.[44] (FY2026 comprehensive obligation data are not yet available.) During his September 2026 visit to Ecuador, Secretary Rubio stated that the State Department is launching a $10 million initiative to address illegal mining and that he would ask the U.S. Congress for an additional $45 million to continue dismantling TCOs in Ecuador.[45]

Some news outlets have reported that the U.S. government has shifted some security assistance and military assets from other regions to Latin America, including Ecuador. In October 2026, the Trump Administration reportedly reprogrammed $52 million in FMF to Ecuador and Colombia from the Middle East and Europe, bypassing a congressional hold.[46] News outlets also have reported that the U.S. military has transferred MQ-9 Reaper drones from Africa to Ecuador and Colombia; Ecuador's defense minister reportedly stated that two drones are operating in Ecuador.[47]

U.S. Military Presence in Ecuador and U.S.-Ecuador Combined Operations

Ecuador has hosted U.S. military personnel to support counter-TCO activities under the SOFA since at least December 2025. That month, according to the U.S. Embassy in Ecuador, U.S. Air

[40] FBI, "FBI Opens Permanent Office in Ecuador," March 19, 2026.

[41] DOS, "Foreign Terrorist Organization Designation of Los Choneros and Los Lobos," 90 *Federal Register* 43020, August 6, 2025, published September 5, 2025; "Foreign Terrorist Organization Designation of Chone Killers," 91 *Federal Register* 40651, June 12, 2026, published July 2, 2026; and "Foreign Terrorist Organization Designation of Los Tiguerones," 91 *Federal Register* 57675, August 3, 2026, published September 10, 2026. Specially Designated Global Terrorist designations are pursuant to Executive Order (EO) 13224 of September 2001, as amended.

[42] For example, José Macías Villamar, the leader of Ecuador-based *Los Choneros* gang, was extradited to the United States in July 2025. U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York, "José Adolfo 'Fito' Macías Villamar, Leader of Los Choneros Transnational Criminal Organization Extradited to Brooklyn Federal Court to Face International Drug and Gun Charges," July 21, 2025.

[43] *Security assistance* includes aid provided through the following State Department authorities: Foreign Military Financing (22 U.S.C. §2763); International Military Education and Training (22 U.S.C. §2347); International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (22 U.S.C. §2291); Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (22 U.S.C. §2349aa-2349bb); and Peacekeeping Operations (22 U.S.C. §2348).

[44] Obligation data from ForeignAssistance.gov database maintained by the U.S. Department of State, accessed October 6, 2026.

[45] DOS, September 10, 2026.

[46] John Hudson, "Trump Defies Democrats, Diverts Aid for Europe to Latin America Instead," *Washington Post,* October 1, 2026.

[47] Annie Correal and Eric Schmidt, "U.S. Sends 'Hunter-Killer' Drones to South America to Target Cartels," *New York Times,* October 6, 2025.

Force personnel arrived in the coastal city of Manta to help build counternarcotics capacity.[48] In August 2026, Ecuador's defense minister, Gian Carlo Loffredo, stated that Manta would host two U.S. military vessels and three Black Hawk helicopters for joint counternarcotics efforts; one of the vessels reportedly engaged in counternarcotics operations in late August 2026, according to U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM).[49] News outlets also have reported on the presence of U.S. military personnel at an Ecuadorian air force base in Taura, about 24 miles east of Guayaquil; in a September 2026 interview, President Noboa proposed that military cooperation with international partners could be concentrated out of the Taura base.[50] Some critics and members of Ecuador's political opposition have argued that a U.S. military presence runs counter to the results of a November 2025 referendum whereby voters upheld Ecuador's constitutional prohibition on foreign military installations on Ecuadorian territory.[51]

U.S. and Ecuadorian forces have conducted combined military and law enforcement operations in Ecuador. On March 6, 2026, SOUTHCOM announced that U.S. forces supported "lethal kinetic operations" against "Designated Terrorist Organizations."[52] Although Ecuador's Ministry of Defense stated that the combined operation in Ecuador's northern Sucumbíos province destroyed a property used by Colombia-based armed group *Comandos de la Frontera*, media reports indicated that the strike targeted a dairy farm.[53] Neither government publicly specified the role that each country's forces played in the operation.

Despite some human rights concerns from international and local observers, combined operations within Ecuador have continued. In a September 2026 interview, Ecuador's defense minister stated that the two countries were prioritizing security cooperation activities in the city of Manta and along the northern border with Colombia and would begin to conduct operations on the southern border with Peru.[54] The defense minister further stated in the interview that U.S. Navy personnel were working with Ecuador's marines on interceptor boats in northern Esmeraldas province and that U.S. military personnel were working with Ecuador's Armed Forces Joint Command (*Comando Conjunto de las Fuerzas Armadas*) to plan U.S.-Ecuador combined operations.[55] Later that month, SOUTHCOM leader General Francis Donovan held a trilateral A3C meeting with Ecuadorian and Colombian officials to "refine a joint operational strategy" to dismantle TCOs

[48] Between 2000 and 2009, U.S. forces operated counternarcotics aerial detection and monitoring missions from Manta, pursuant to a 1999 agreement. The Correa administration chose not to renew the agreement in 2008. US Embassy Ecuador (@USembassyEC), X post, December 17, 2025, https://x.com/USembassyEC/status/2001262223612674546.

[49] Ministerio de Defensa Nacional Ecuador (@DefensaEc), X post, August 20, 2026, https://x.com/DefensaEc/status/2090468772595323119; U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), "Interdiction of Narco-Terrorist Refueling Vessel," August 28, 2026..

[50] See, for example, Adam Isacson, "The U.S. Presence at a Base in Ecuador," blog post, September 24, 2026. Adam Isacson is the director for defense oversight at the research and advocacy organization Washington Office on Latin America.

[51] See, for example, Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, "Asambleísta Paola Cabezas – Sesión 106," Youtube, July 7, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_IqjIoLRps; and Joshua Collins, "The US is Building an Illegal Military Base in Ecuador," *Pirate Wire Services*, September 27, 2026.

[52] U.S. Southern Command (@Southcom), March 6, 2026, https://x.com/Southcom/status/2030056869624955036.

[53] Luis Ferré-Sadurní et al., "The U.S. Said It Helped Bomb a Drug Camp. It Was a Dairy Farm," *New York Times*, March 24, 2026.

[54] "Gian Carlo Loffredo, Ministro de Defensa: "La Cooperación Internacional de Estados Unidos Nos Ayuda a Fortalecer Nuestra Soberanía," *El Universo*, September 19, 2026.

[55] Ecuador's Armed Forces Joint Command is the highest entity charged with planning, preparing, and conducting military operations. República del Ecuador, *Ley Orgánica de la Defensa Nacional*, Ley 74, Chapter 4, Art. 15, https://www.defensa.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2015/04/mar15_LEY-ORGANICA-DE-LA-DEFENSA-NACIONAL.pdf.

operating in both countries.[56] Also in September 2026, SOUTHCOM and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration officials joined Ecuador's national police in an operation to dismantle a criminal structure linked to a Mexican cartel across three of Ecuador's coastal provinces, resulting in more than 30 arrests.[57]

U.S. forces also have conducted operations targeting Ecuador-based TCOs in the Pacific Ocean. Between late August and mid-September 2026, for example, SOUTHCOM announced it, in coordination with Ecuadorian authorities, had interdicted and sank eight Ecuadorian vessels linked to *Los Choneros* that had served as refueling stations for smaller drug-trafficking boats.[58] Before sinking the vessels, U.S. forces reportedly detained the vessels' crew members and transferred them to Ecuadorian authorities. According to an October 2, 2026, statement by Human Rights Watch (HRW), 56 of the 160 crew members transferred to Ecuadorian authorities were released without charges following two court orders, in part due to a lack of evidence.[59] Days later, an Ecuadorian judge reportedly acquitted an additional 32 crew members on similar grounds.[60] In its October 2026 statement, HRW called on the U.S. government to disclose the legal basis for the operations and to investigate reports that some of the detained crew members were abused by U.S. forces.

Legislative Action and Issues for Congress

Although the National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs (NRSP) Appropriations Act, 2026 (P.L. 119-75, Division F), did not provide an aggregate amount for bilateral aid in Ecuador, the act and its explanatory statement specified $30 million in INCLE aid and $10 million in FMF for Ecuador. It also allocated an additional $20 million in INCLE aid to combat illegal mining in Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru. During the FY2027 appropriations process, Congress could consider whether to appropriate law enforcement and/or military assistance for Ecuador or to leave such allocation decisions to the executive branch. The House-passed FY2027 NSRP appropriations bill (H.R. 8595) and its accompanying report (H.Rept. 119-631) would designate $40 million in INCLE aid and $12.5 million in FMF aid for Ecuador. H.Rept. 119-631 would also direct that an unspecified amount of assistance be made available for Ecuador to combat illicit activity, to strengthen Ecuador's democratic institutions and rule of law, and to promote economic development. The Senate Appropriations Committee has yet to mark up an FY2027 NSRP appropriations bill.

During the 119th Congress, Members have expressed a range of views on U.S.-Ecuador security cooperation. Some Members of Congress have called for an expansion of bilateral security cooperation to dismantle TCOs.[61] In August 2026, for example, five Members requested that the U.S. State Department designate Ecuador as a major non-NATO ally, which would make Ecuador eligible for certain cooperative agreements and priority delivery of U.S. transfers of excess

[56] SOUTHCOM, "Gen. Donovan Visits Colombia," August 28, 2026.

[57] John Reimberg (@JohnReimberg), X post, September 24, 2026, https://x.com/JohnReimberg/status/2103073955263181121. Reimberg is Ecuador's interior minister since February 2025.

[58] See, for example, SOUTHCOM, "Interdiction of Narco-Terrorist Refueling Vessel," August 28, 2026; and U.S.Southern Command (@Southcom), X post, https://x.com/Southcom/status/2100391285366358521.

[59] Human Rights Watch, "US: Rights Concerns for Maritime Operations Near Ecuador," October 2, 2026.

[60] EFE News Agency, "Ecuadorian Judge Acquits 32 Crew Members of Two Boats Bombed by US," October 7, 2026. The article reports slightly different figures than the Human Rights Watch statement, namely that 88 crew members faced criminal charges rather than 90.

[61] See, for example, Letter from Senator Bernie Moreno to U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth (who is using "Secretary of War" as a "secondary title" under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025), May 27, 2026.

defense articles.[62] Members supportive of expanded U.S.-Ecuador security cooperation could seek to appropriate increased security assistance for Ecuador, designate the country as a major non-NATO ally legislatively, or take up other legislation to shape the U.S. policy approach toward shared security issues of concern, including illegal mining (e.g., S. 3496).

Some other Members of Congress have voiced concern about reported U.S. military action in and around Ecuador. Some of these Members have called for a suspension of combined military operations pending an investigation into alleged human rights violations during prior operations.[63] Some Members also have expressed concern about reports from media and human rights groups that between January and March 2026, U.S. forces may have been involved in three alleged drone attacks on Ecuadorian fishing vessels in the Pacific Ocean.[64] SOUTHCOM, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Ecuadorian government have reportedly denied involvement in or knowledge of the reported attacks.[65] In August 2026, the *Washington Post* reported that the attacks may be linked to a covert U.S. Central Intelligence Agency program aimed at countering narcotics trafficking.[66]

Members of Congress concerned about U.S.-Ecuador security cooperation could seek to impose conditions on, or obtain additional information about, such cooperation. Areas for potential congressional oversight could include the extent of U.S. military presence in Ecuador and activities conducted under U.S.-led regional security initiatives such as the A3C. For example, Congress could consider whether to enact reporting requirements about the number of U.S. military personnel operating in Ecuador and their activities and assess whether to restrict the number of such personnel or limit their participation in combined security operations. Congress also could consider conditioning U.S. security assistance to Ecuador on human rights conditions or other factors of congressional interest in annual appropriations bills or other legislation. Congress also may seek information on the Trump Administration's compliance with existing U.S. legislation, including several laws commonly referred to as *Leahy Laws* (22 U.S.C. §2378d and 10 U.S.C. §362), which require that the U.S. government vet potential assistance recipients for possible involvement in human rights abuses prior to providing security assistance.[67]

Trade Ties

The United States is Ecuador's largest goods trading partner. U.S.-Ecuador goods trade reached $17.6 billion in 2025, with the United States running a $543 million trade deficit. Petroleum oils

[62] Letter from María Elvira Salazar, Member of Congress, et al., to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, August 4, 2026, https://files.constantcontact.com/1849eea4801/65fdda74-b521-46b2-925e-74fed441c9cd.pdf.

[63] See, for example, Letter from 20 Members of Congress to U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, May 13, 2026, https://chuygarcia.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/chuygarcia-evo.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/letter-to-dod-re-ecuador-final-5.13.26.pdf.

[64] Two of the ships' crews were allegedly detained and transferred to El Salvador before being released in Ecuador without criminal charges; one ship remains unaccounted for as of August 2026. See, for example, House Committee on Armed Services, "Fiscal Year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act Markup," 119th Cong., 1st sess., June 4, 2026; and Comté Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, "Desparición Forzada de Pescadores por Militares de Estados Unidos," April 21, 2026.

[65] Joseph Gedeon and Cate Brown, "U.S. Claims It Is Not Responsible for Strikes on Ecuadorian Fishing Boats—So Who Is?," *The Guardian*, June 13, 2026; and Council on Foreign Relations, "Unclaimed Boat Strikes in Ecuador: Has Trump's Operation Southern Spear Opened a Hidden Front?," August 17, 2026.

[66] Imogen Piper et al., "Covert CIA Program Said to Be Behind Mysterious Attacks on Galápagos Boats," *Washington Post*, August 13, 2026.

[67] For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10575, *Global Human Rights: Security Forces Vetting ("Leahy Laws")*.

and gases (e.g., liquefied propane and butane) accounted for more than 60% of total U.S. goods exports, while top U.S. imports from Ecuador included crude oil, shrimp, and cocoa beans.[68]

In March 2026, the U.S. and Ecuadorian governments signed an agreement on reciprocal trade (ART).[69] The nonbinding ART aims to reduce tariff and nontariff barriers to trade and to increase national security alignment by cooperating on investment security and export control measures. The agreement, inter alia, would set a new tariff schedule for some U.S. imports from Ecuador. In October 2026, Ecuador's Constitutional Court ruled that the ART requires legislative approval before its ratification in Ecuador.[70] U.S. imports from Ecuador may continue to face additional tariffs. In July 2026, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) imposed tariffs, with some exceptions, on goods imported from 60 economies, including Ecuador's, after an investigation under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (19 U.S.C. §§2411-2420), into the alleged "failure to impose and effectively enforce a prohibition on the importation of goods produced with forced labor."[71] As a result of the ART, Ecuador was one of 17 economies that received a 10% tariff rate rather than the 12.5% rate imposed for most of the other investigated economies.

Legislative Action and Issues for Congress

Congress may assess whether to shape U.S. trade relations with Ecuador through legislation and oversight.[72] During the 119th Congress, some Members of Congress have expressed concern about the effects of increased U.S. shrimp imports from Ecuador on local U.S. producers. In 2025, the United States imported about 486,000 pounds of shrimp from Ecuador, an increase in volume of nearly 180% from 2019 levels.[73] The United States has imposed antidumping and countervailing duties on shrimp exports from certain Ecuador-based companies, most recently on imports from calendar year 2022.[74] Such duties are imposed when the U.S. government determines that U.S. industries or workers are being harmed by dumping or illegal foreign subsidies.[75] S. 5613, introduced in late September 2026, would increase tariffs on certain shrimp products originating from Ecuador, among other measures. Other Members have called for USTR to investigate alleged unfair acts, policies, and practices in several countries' seafood sectors, including Ecuador's, arguing that they undermine domestic seafood producers.[76] Congress also could

[68] U.S. Census Bureau data, as reported by *Trade Data Monitor*, accessed October 29, 2026.

[69] Unless otherwise noted, this paragraph draws from U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), "Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Ecuador on Reciprocal Trade," signed March 13, 2026.

[70] Corte Constitucional (@CorteConstEcu), X post, October 16, 2026, https://x.com/CorteConstEcu/status/2111191006448148918.

[71] Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "Notice of Actions in Section 301 Investigations of Acts, Policies, and Practices of Various Economies Related to the Failure of Each Economy to Impose and Effectively Enforce a Prohibition on the Importation of Goods Produced with Forced Labor," 91 *Federal Register* 47318, July 28, 2026.

[72] See CRS Report R47679, *Congressional and Executive Authority Over Foreign Trade Agreements*.

[73] In 2025, the value of U.S. shrimp imports from Ecuador was about $1.6 billion, up from about $526 million in 2019. U.S. Census Bureau data on six-digit Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) code 030617, as reported by *Trade Data Monitor*, accessed October 8, 2026.

[74] U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, "Frozen Warmwater Shrimp From Ecuador: Final Results of Countervailing Duty Expedited Review," 91 *Federal Register* 50765, July 31, 2026, published August 6, 2026.

[75] CRS In Focus IF10018, *Trade Remedies: Antidumping and Countervailing Duties*, by Christopher A. Casey.

[76] Letter from 20 Members of Congress to USTR Ambassador Jamieson Greer, May 11, 2026, https://troycarter.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/troycarter.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/section-301-seafood-letter.pdf.

review congressional and executive authorities over foreign trade more broadly and assess whether to legislatively codify, adjust, or repeal U.S. tariffs or the ART.

Migration Cooperation

The Noboa administration has cooperated with the United States on migration issues. In July 2025, the two governments entered into an agreement allowing the transfer of some third-country nationals from the United States to Ecuador.[77] Although the agreement text does not specify requirements for such transfers, Ecuadorian officials reportedly have stated that Ecuador has agreed to receive a maximum of 300 adult Spanish-speaking asylum seekers with no criminal records from the United States per year to pursue their protection claims in Ecuador.[78] Between January and July 2026, Ecuador reportedly received 121 migrants of various nationalities (with Venezuelan, Cuban, and Honduran nationals accounting for the majority) from the United States pursuant to the agreement.[79]

Some NGOs have argued that Ecuador is not equipped to receive asylum seekers, in part due to the country's security challenges, which have contributed to emigration from Ecuador.[80] According to UN data, an increasing number of Ecuadorians have sought asylum abroad since 2020, including over 122,000 in 2025 (with 93% of claims made in the United States).[81] Violence also has driven increased internal displacement. One NGO recorded 132,000 internal displacements due to conflict and violence in Ecuador in 2025, a 31% increase from 2024 and the third-highest level recorded among countries in the Americas, after Haiti and Colombia.[82]

Legislative Action and Issues for Congress

Congress may conduct oversight over third-country migrant transfers from the United States to Ecuador as it assesses whether to support, modify, or reject such transfers through its legislative prerogatives. During the 119th Congress, some Members have sought more information about human rights conditions in Ecuador and measures to deter potential human rights abuses, including within the context of the country's third-country migrant transfer agreement with the United States. S.Res. 879, introduced in September 2026, would require the State Department to provide a report within 30 days of adoption on human rights practices in Ecuador, including the treatment of third-country migrants transferred from the United States, pursuant to Section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (22 U.S.C. §2304). The resolution would prohibit the delivery of security assistance to Ecuador unless subsequently authorized by law until the report is provided.[83] Congress also could consider whether to authorize, restrict, or require reporting on the use of U.S. foreign assistance to implement the third-country migrant transfer agreements with Ecuador and other countries in FY2027 NSRP appropriations legislation.

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[77] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Ecuador Relating to the Transfer of Third-Country Nationals to Ecuador," 90 *Federal Register* 51376, exchange of diplomatic notes dated July 16, 2025, and July 23, 2025, November 17, 2025.

[78] See, for example, Carlos Cuevas, "Este es el Acuerdo con el que Ecuador Recibirá Desde EE.UU. Migrantes que Solicitan Asilo," *Bloomberg Línea*, November 14, 2025.

[79] "Decenas de Migrantes Llegan a Ecuador en Vuelos desde Estados Unidos," *Ecuavisa*, July 17, 2026.

[80] See, for example, Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, "The U.S.-Ecuador Asylum Cooperative Agreement: Why It Fails the Law and Endangers Asylum Seekers," March 25, 2026.

[81] UN High Commissioner on Refugees, *Refugee Data Finder*, accessed July 20, 2026, https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics.

[82] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement*, May 2026, p. 49.

[83] 22 U.S.C. §2304(c)(3). For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11197, *U.S. Arms Sales and Human Rights: Legislative Basis and Frequently Asked Questions*, by Paul K. Kerr and Michael A. Weber.

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