



# OSAC Country Security Report

## Ecuador

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*This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State Ecuador Travel Advisory and [Ecuador Country Information Page](#).*

### Embassy & Consulate Contact Information

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### OSAC Country Chapter(s)

Quito and Guayaquil each hosts active OSAC chapters.

Contact [OSAC's Americas team](#) with any questions.

### Ecuador Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses that travelers to Ecuador should exercise increased caution due to crime, civil unrest, and kidnapping.

### Crime

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Quito and Guayaquil as being **CRITICAL**-threat locations for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Crime "C" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Ecuador, indicating that there may be widespread violent crime and/or organized crime present in the country, and/or that local law enforcement may have limited ability to respond to serious crimes.

Crime is a severe problem throughout Ecuador. Limited police and judicial resources, border security challenges, and low apprehension rates contribute to Ecuador's overall high crime rate. Annual crime statistics from the Ecuadorian National Police (ENP) indicate that criminal activity is most common from after dark.

Violent crime is a significant concern in Ecuador, especially in Guayaquil where transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) are using extremely violent tactics. Over the last year, the homicide rate in Guayaquil and surroundings remains high, as have targeted assassinations of law enforcement and port authorities. Criminal groups are affiliated with/influenced by international drug-trafficking organizations, such as Mexico's CJNG and Sinaloa Cartel, and have resorted to tactics such as public executions to intimidate local law enforcement.

TCOs have expanded their capabilities throughout Guayaquil and coastal Ecuador over the last several years. A spate of public violence including IED explosions throughout the country and the armed storming of a TV station in Guayaquil in January 2024 were the latest examples of the extent to which TCOs are better armed and capable of carrying out terrorist-like activities than even two years ago. While this type of violence does not occur frequently, it indicates that gangs have the capability to carry out attacks across the country if provoked. A quick declaration of a State of "Internal Armed Conflict" by President Noboa and the deployment of additional security forces throughout the country suppressed the level of gang violence below what occurred in January for the first half of 2024. However, violence levels rose drastically again throughout the coastal provinces and Los Rios province from July to December 2024. By February 20, 2025, there were already 1,364 violent deaths in Ecuador, the most in the first two months of any year in Ecuador's history.

Most gang violence does not impact U.S. travelers. However, OSAC members operating in Guayaquil have been targeted by criminal organizations for "vacunas," or protection money and extortion. This trend continues to pose a risk to organizations with long-term or repeated operations in the region. Criminal organizations have also carried out operations in public places throughout Guayaquil, including hotel lobbies, shopping malls, hospitals, police stations, and the airport. While U.S. citizens are not targeted, there is an increased risk of wrong-place-wrong-time incidents in Guayaquil.

Pickpockets and other petty thieves are particularly active in tourist areas, airports, restaurants, bus terminals, public markets, grocery stores, and on public transportation and crowded streets. Criminals frequently target backpackers and travelers carrying laptop bags for robbery. In ~~some~~ many cases, armed robbers have used motorcycles to approach their victims and flee the scene. Thieves often distract their victims, sometimes by purposefully spilling liquid on a victim and pretending to help clean it up (condiment scam), while accomplices snatch the victim's bag or pick the victim's pocket. To lower risk from these or other non-violent crimes, leave valuables in a safe place or do not travel with them. Travelers should not carry more than they are willing to lose and never carry anything considered priceless or irreplaceable. Use hotel safes when available, avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing, and carry only the necessary cash or credit cards on each outing.

Criminals have robbed tourists at gunpoint on beaches and along hiking trails. Criminals may rob those who have just finished using ATMs or exited banks, even after driving several miles away from the bank. In the event of a robbery, comply and provide possessions to

aggressors. Avoid withdrawing large amounts of cash from banks and ATMs and only use ATMs in secure venues or hotels. Reports of credit card fraud are commonplace.

Armed robberies on city buses in Guayaquil are frequent. Robberies and assaults committed against taxi passengers present a significant safety concern, especially in Guayaquil and Manta. Armed thieves have intercepted vehicles and threatened passengers, forcing victims to withdraw money from ATMs. In some instances, these incidents have led to injury and sexual assault. In many cases the taxi driver is complicit in the attack.

Carjacking or thefts have occurred while vehicles are stopped at intersections. Smash-and-grabs occur when thieves break into parked, slow-moving, or stopped vehicles.

Incidents of sexual assault and rape continue to be reported to the ENP, including in well-traveled tourist areas of mainland Ecuador and the Galapagos. The ENP report that use of date-rape drugs (e.g., Rohypnol and scopolamine) to facilitate assault persists. Mitigate risk by traveling in groups, maintaining control over food/drink in bars and restaurants, and exercising caution in nightclubs.

Although street crime is prevalent throughout Quito, stay particularly alert near tourist areas including the Panecillo, Bellavista neighborhood, and the downtown Historic District. Other areas such as the Mariscal Sucre district, a popular tourist area, are increasingly a site of crime, as is the area surrounding Plaza Foch at night. Book transportation to and from destinations in advance to avoid reliance on taxis. As a common nightlife destination, Plaza Foch is also a hub for criminal activity, drug-dealing, and prostitution.

U.S. Embassy personnel are not permitted to travel to:

- Guayaquil south of Portete de Tarquí Avenue, due to crime.
- The cities of Huaquillas and Arenillas in the province of El Oro, due to crime.
- The cities of Quevedo, Quinsaloma, and Pueblo Viejo in the province of Los Rios, due to crime.
- The canton of Duran, in the province of Guayas, due to crime.
- Esmeraldas city and all areas north of Esmeraldas city in Esmeraldas province, due to crime.

Additionally, travelers should reconsider travel to:

- Guayaquil north of Portete de Tarquí Avenue due to crime.
- El Oro province outside the cities of Huaquillas and Arenillas, due to crime.
- Los Rios province outside the cities of Quevedo, Quinsaloma, and Pueblo Viejo, due to crime.
- All areas south of Esmeraldas city in Esmeraldas province, due to crime.
- The provinces of Sucumbíos, Manabí, Santa Elena, and Santo Domingo due to crime.

The U.S. Government is limited in its ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in the Colombian border area.

## Kidnapping Threat

The U.S. Department of State has included a Kidnapping “K” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Ecuador, indicating that criminal or terrorist individuals or groups have threatened to and/or have seized or detained and threatened to kill, injure, or continue to detain individuals in order to compel a third party (including a governmental organization) to do or abstain from doing something as a condition of release.

Kidnappings have occurred along the coast of Ecuador and the northern border with Colombia, with some targeting foreigners. Kidnappings occur more due to economic rather than political motivations. The Sucumbíos region and the Manabí province have high rates of kidnappings for ransom. Other coastal provinces of Ecuador have seen kidnapping cases rising continuously since 2023. In 2023, two U.S. Citizens were kidnapped in two different incidents in Manabí province and in one incident, two U.S. citizens were kidnapped in Guayaquil. In 2024, there were eight U.S. citizen kidnappings reported. All were recovered unharmed in these cases. In many cases, the victim(s) and/or their families are hesitant to ask police for assistance because it is widely believed that they’re corrupt and often complicit in kidnapping and extortion by criminal organizations. Kidnappers do not specifically target U.S. citizens.

## Terrorism

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Quito and Guayaquil as being **LOW**-threat locations for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Terrorism “T” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Ecuador.

Consistent with the majority of Latin America, there is moderate risk of terrorist attacks focused on Ecuador. Attacks in Ecuador have traditionally involved domestic organizations as well as Colombian dissident groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia Dissidents (FARC-D) and National Liberation Army (ELN) operating within Ecuador's borders.

In response to a spike in violence in 2024, the Ecuadorian government designated 22 TCOs in Ecuador as “terrorist organizations,” allowing the military and police to take further actions against them.

## Political Violence and Civil Unrest

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Quito as being a **MEDIUM**-threat location and Guayaquil for being a **HIGH**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Civil Unrest “U” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Ecuador, indicating that demonstrations, protests, and/or strikes occur frequently, and/or that local law enforcement may have limited ability to respond adequately. Civil unrest can develop quickly without prior notice, often interrupting logistics and services. Avoid demonstration activity, as even those planned to remain peaceful have the potential to turn violent.

## Elections/Political Stability

Ecuador is a constitutional, multiparty republic with an elected president and unicameral legislature. Ecuador held general elections in fall of 2023 following the use of the *muerte cruzada* by former president Guillermo Lasso, which dissolved the legislature and prompted new national elections. Daniel Noboa won in a vote that was widely considered free and fair, and assumed office in November 2023. The campaign season was marred by the assassination of a presidential candidate in August 2023, Fernando Villavicencio, in uncharacteristic political violence.

In February 2025, Ecuador held presidential elections that did not result in a majority, sending incumbent Noboa and challenger Luisa González to an April 2025 runoff.

## Protests & Demonstrations

Ecuador experienced widespread demonstrations in June of 2022 when indigenous leaders, including representatives from the indigenous union CONAIE, protested political and economic inclusion. These demonstrations caused severe transportation disruptions in Quito and the surrounding areas, forcing OSAC members with travelers in the region to shelter in place for several days. Some were evacuated by helicopter. Since then, CONAIE has threatened a resurgence of indigenous unrest, but none has materialized to the extent seen in 2022.

Ecuador has a long tradition of peaceful political demonstrations. However, in October 2019, protests throughout Ecuador turned violent, with the burning of government buildings and violent attacks against police, military personnel, the media, and ambulances. Road blockades disrupted freedom of movement, airlines canceled many flights to and from Quito, and protesters at times blocked access to the airport by taking control of airport access roads.

Student, labor union, and indigenous protests against government policies are a regular feature of political life. While disruptive, especially to transportation, violence is usually minimal and localized. Protesters occasionally burn tires, throw Molotov cocktails, engage in destruction of property, and detonate small improvised explosive devices, but fatalities are rare. Protesters sometimes use pamphlet bombs to disseminate political literature.

It is against the law for foreigners to engage in any political activity that promotes civil instability, or that authorities consider likely to instigate international conflict.

## Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

Generally, there is little to no anti-U.S. or anti-Western sentiment. Limited and isolated demonstrations with a U.S. nexus are generally led by proxy groups to protest a political activity, such as the U.S. involvement in the Middle East. These demonstrations are very rare and peaceful as they are intended to raise political awareness.

## Law Enforcement

The Ecuadorian National Police (ENP) has the primary responsibility of law enforcement. With roughly 51,000 officers and support staff, ENP has a large presence in the major cities, with the largest concentration of officers in Guayaquil and Quito. The national headquarters is in Quito. Larger cities such as Quito have smaller city police agencies that are autonomous from the ENP; while they have security functions, they have no law enforcement arrest authority. Other support elements such as the transit authority help with traffic enforcement, citations, and accidents.

Civilian authorities maintain effective control over the security forces. The ENP maintains internal security and law enforcement and is under the authority of the Ministry of Government. The military is under the supervision of the Ministry of Defense and is responsible for external security. Police and military forces share responsibility for border enforcement, with the military also having limited domestic security responsibilities during a time of crisis, such as the October 2019 riots to assist the ENP. Migration officers are civilians and report to the Ministry of Government.

## Police Response

Police coverage can be unreliable outside major urban areas. Response times vary, commonly taking at least 45-60 minutes. Ecuador has a low conviction and incarceration rate for major crimes. Victims of crime in Ecuador should not expect the justice system to proceed with the speed and thoroughness seen in the United States. The threshold for petty crime is USD 600, dependent upon if violence or other mitigating issues are involved, meaning that police do little for victims whose loss is less than that amount. Although the U.S. Mission monitors and encourages investigations, its ability to assist in enforcement is limited.

If police arrest or detain you in Ecuador, you have the option to request that the police, prison officials, or other authorities alert the nearest U.S. embassy/consulate. Outside of Quito and Guayaquil, awareness of international protocols is uneven. If police arrest or detain you, request that the authorities contact the Embassy on your behalf. If you feel you are a victim of police corruption, bribery, or harassment, contact American Citizen Services at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General.

The government of Ecuador has employed a number of measures to reduce the risk of organized crime violence, including ongoing States of Exception that impose curfews in high-risk areas and empower additional employment of security officials. Travelers should adhere to all official curfews and should cooperate with law enforcement if they encounter any checkpoints.

## Travelers with Special Considerations

For [specific traveler concerns](#) in Ecuador, review the local laws and circumstances on the Department of State's Country Information Page.

- [Women Travelers](#)
- [LGB Travelers](#)
- [Travelers with Disabilities](#)
- [Student Travelers](#)
- [Faith-Based Travelers](#)

## Rule of Law, Arbitrary Detention, Official Harassment, Corruption, & Transparency

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Risk of Wrongful Detention “D” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Ecuador.

Although the law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court, there are reports that provincial and local authorities do not always observe these provisions. According to NGOs, illegal detentions continue to occur. While the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, outside pressure and corruption impaired the judicial process. Legal experts, bar associations, and NGOs reported on the susceptibility of the judiciary to bribes for favorable decisions and faster resolution of legal cases.

The government is focused on rooting out corruption and holding public officials accountable under the law. The law imposes criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government has taken steps to implement the law effectively. However, officials, particularly at the local level, sometimes engage in corrupt practices with impunity. The government has launched multiple investigations, judicial proceedings, and legislative audits of officials accused of corruption related to state contracts and commercial endeavors that reached the highest levels of government.

## Cybersecurity

Ecuador has no specific cybersecurity threats, although travelers should always exercise caution and employ best practices to secure their information.

## Import/Export Restrictions

The Ecuadorian government restricts the entry of certain items into the Galapagos. Visit the [Agency for Biosecurity and Quarantine Regulation and Control for the Galapagos](#) for more information.

There are no reports of restrictions on the import of personal satellite phones. Personal medication should be transported in its original packaging and travelers should carry a copy of their prescription, especially of anti-psychotic medication.

A country-specific listing of items/goods prohibited from being exported to the country or that are otherwise restricted is available from the U.S. International Trade Agency [website](#).

*Additional resources and reports can be found in the [OSAC Traveler Toolkit](#).*