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Cocaine and Corruption: The Rise in Drug Trafficking in Ecuador and Why It Isn't Being Stopped

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Cocaine and Corruption: The Rise in Drug Trafficking in Ecuador and Why It Isn't Being Stopped

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A state of emergency in Ecuador continues to be in effect as cocaine trafficking and gang violence become increasingly problematic. What started as cartel rivalries and increased cocaine production in bordering countries, Peru and Colombia, has turned into a full-scale drug war in Ecuador, stirring humanitarian and governmental concerns about the mounting violence in the once peaceful country. Increased regulation and United States intervention might be the only approach to save Ecuador from becoming a country ravaged by violence and run by the cartels, but local governmental corruption is currently acting as a barrier to a timely solution. While quick reaction from Ecuador's newly elected president, Daniel Noboa, has resulted in increased military and police violence against the cartels, some U.S. military officials are warning against a strict crackdown. Fighting the cartels in a way that circumvents the law could lead to even worse retaliation and decreased security, escalating the conflict while putting civilians at risk. To avoid a civil war, the systemic corruption and infiltration of state institutions must be addressed, and there must be a recognition that Ecuador cannot handle this issue on its own. Though Ecuador's capital, Guayaquil, now serves as the epicenter for cocaine trafficking in Latin America, the ongoing distribution continues to affect countless countries. International intervention must be seriously considered as a solution to prevent a worldwide cocaine crisis.

I. Introduction

In recent years, Ecuador, a country historically known as the “island of peace,” has seen a significant increase in cocaine trafficking and government corruption. Since 2016, Ecuador's homicide rate has risen almost fivefold to 22 murders per 100,000,² making it the country with the fourth highest homicide rate in Latin America.³ The region is no stranger to conflict, but until recently Ecuador had managed to escape most of the repercussions of the nearby violence in border countries Peru and Colombia.⁴ It was only a matter of time before a similar drug war began raging in Ecuador.⁵ A severe uptick in coca cultivation, after the United States and Colombian governments stopped their support of aerial fumigation, has caused trafficking rates to soar. Corruption deeply embedded within the government has led to a lack of policing and an increase in organized crime.⁶ Furthermore, Ecuador's peaceful border control operations, mainly kept intact by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), have been crumbling since the

¹ J.D. Candidate, SMU Dedman School of Law, 2025; Staff Editor for the International Law Review Association.

² *The Guardian view on murder in Ecuador: a tide of violence reaches new heights*, THE GUARDIAN (August 11, 2023, 1:35 PM), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/aug/11/the-guardian-view-on-in-ecuador-a-tide-of-violence-reaches-new-heights#:~:text=What%20is%20clear%20is%20that,to%2022%20people%20per%20100%2C000.> [https://perma.cc/DS2C-QZPT].

³ Will Freeman, *A Surge in Crime and Violence Has Ecuador Reeling*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS: WORLD POLITICS REVIEW (June 14, 2023, 3:57 PM), <https://www.cfr.org/blog/surge-crime-and-violence-has-ecuador-reeling> [https://perma.cc/2GVN-TEV8].

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

disbandment of the rebel group.⁷

The combination of these events has led to incarceration rates being at an all-time high. The resulting prison gangs, which have formed alliances with local and international drug cartels, are a driving factor for the continued violence and corruption.⁸ This heightened gang presence, along with geographic location, extensive borders, and major Pacific Ocean ports, means that Ecuador has become a hub for cocaine trafficking.⁹ This note will explore how Colombia's peace accord with the FARC severely impacted Ecuador, how increased cultivation of the coca plant in Colombia has directly affected trafficking in border countries, and the effectiveness of local corruption and trafficking laws in Ecuador. Additionally, a deeper look into Colombian and Costa Rican laws and South America's efforts to lessen the impact of the drug trade might show a light in the darkness for Ecuador.

II. Why is Ecuador Seeing a Rise in Cocaine Trafficking?

A. The Rise in Coca-Cultivation

Coca, the crop used to make cocaine, is widely grown in Colombia with 570,000 acres being planted in 2022 alone.¹⁰ Colombia is the world's largest exporter of cocaine, accounting for 90% of the cocaine sold in the United States each year.¹¹ Historically, coca cultivation was largely controlled by aerial fumigation, a process in which crop dusters fly over farmland and dump a defoliant on the vast fields to curb the production of the crop.¹² But in 2015, following concerns from the World Health Organization that the main pesticide used in the aerial spraying was linked to an increase in cancer rates, the Colombian government banned aerial fumigation.¹³ Following the ban, cocaine production soared, and much of the newly cultivated drug began being trafficked through Ecuador because of its extensive—and poorly secured—borders with Colombia.¹⁴ Within three years, Ecuador became the top exporter of cocaine to Europe.¹⁵

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Genevieve Glatsky & José María León Cabrera, *How Narco Traffickers Unleashed Violence and Chaos in Ecuador*, N.Y. TIMES (August 17, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/17/world/americas/ecuador-drug-trafficking-election.html> [https://perma.cc/26CK-AE7P].

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Manuel Rueda, *UN says Colombia's coca crop at all-time high as officials promote new drug policies*, ABC NEWS (September 11, 2023, 4:47 PM), <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/colombias-coca-crop-time-high-officials-promote-new-103102747#:~:text=The%20new%20findings%20on%20coca,increase%20from%20the%20previous%20year.> [https://perma.cc/BQA7-83UB].

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Juan Forero, *Colombia Takes U-Turn on Drug Policy*, WALL ST. J. (May 14, 2015, 10:37 PM), https://www.wsj.com/articles/colombia-takes-u-turn-on-drug-policy-1431650471?mod=article_inline [https://perma.cc/H996-C2EY].

¹³ Cole Baldecchi, *Up in the Air: Colombia's Continuing Fight Against Coca Production*, IALR POSTS, STUDENT BLOG (March 9, 2020), <https://inter-american-law-review.law.miami.edu/air-colombias-continuing-fight-coca-production/> [https://perma.cc/VN6R-QJLL].

¹⁴ Ryan Dubé & José de Córdoba, *Ecuador Assassination Reflects Rapid Rise of Violent Cocaine Trade*, WALL ST. J. (Aug. 11, 2023, 8:19 PM), https://www.wsj.com/articles/ecuador-assassination-reflects-rapid-rise-of-violent-cocaine-trade-aa27aedc?mod=Searchresults_pos15&page=1 [https://perma.cc/7NXV-RR8].

¹⁵ Glatsky, *supra* note 7.

While the COVID-19 pandemic initially slowed production, cocaine trafficking made a “dramatic comeback” in early 2023 as the world started to return to its pre-COVID practices.¹⁶ There were also new opportunities to harvest and sell more, as the pandemic caused lasting unemployment, with only 34 percent of Ecuadoreans having adequate jobs.¹⁷ During the slowdown, criminal groups slowly recruited young, jobless individuals who were perfect for cultivating and selling cocaine—and these new additions only intensified the intergang feuds as individual groups grew stronger and fought for control over trafficking routes.¹⁸ Fueled by a lack of regulation and discipline, these gangs began to cultivate cocaine at an all-time high.¹⁹

B. Previous Government Policies and Corruption

Though historically peaceful, Ecuador has struggled with poor governance and insufficient lawmaking for years.²⁰ After a decade of implementing new policies, populist former President Rafael Correa, who was in office from 2007 to 2017, made several improvements under his leadership:²¹ Ecuador’s homicide rate was reduced to a historic low, poverty and inequality rates dropped, and gangs were allowed to become “cultural associations” if they stopped eliciting violence in the streets and with each other.²² But these policies were not forward-looking. Through their implementation, President Correa, “weaken[ed] Ecuador’s capacity to confront transnational narco-trafficking, which he regarded as a problem for drug-consuming countries like the U.S. and European Union members, not Ecuador.”²³ Proving his point even further, Mr. Correa decided not to extend the lease for a U.S. military base in one of Ecuador’s port cities, a major route for planes used to fly interdict drugs.²⁴ He also severed ties and ended cooperation with the U.S. State Department’s international narcotics agency, creating chaos along the border as drug routes were no longer under strict surveillance.²⁵ After borrowing billions of dollars to implement these seemingly beneficial policies, Correa left the country in a vulnerable position, unable to pay its debts and on the brink of catastrophe as gang violence was ramping up.²⁶ Additionally, Correa’s increased budgets for local police meant U.S. military staff that had been assisting in anti-narcotic investigations were expelled, opening up the floodgates for even more complex and corrupt practices within the prisons and along trafficking routes.²⁷

After leaving Ecuador in a state of turmoil and with deep unrest in its government, Correa’s illegal practices were exposed, solidifying the distrust that had been fermenting since his tenure in office:

¹⁶ United Nations, *Cocaine Trafficking Surges Following COVID-19 Related Slowdown*, UN NEWS (March 16, 2023), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1134607> [https://perma.cc/YZ2C-C99T].

¹⁷ Julie Turkewitz, *How a Peaceful Country Became a Gold Rush State for Drug Cartels*, N.Y. TIMES (July 12, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/12/world/americas/ecuador-drug-cartels.html> [https://perma.cc/NP42-NPMU].

¹⁸ Freeman, *supra* note 2.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Glatsky, *supra* note 3.

²⁵ Freeman, *supra* note 2.

²⁶ Anna Gordon, *How Gang Violence Is Shaking Up Ecuador’s Election*, TIME (August 19, 2023, 11:02 AM), <https://time.com/6306577/ecuador-election-gang-violence-safety/> [https://perma.cc/J7QU-UC3M].

²⁷ *Id.*

“On April 7, 2020, Ecuador’s National Court of Justice sentenced Mr. Correa to eight years in prison for bribery in the corruption case “Briberies, 2012-2016.” The court found Mr. Correa to be the leader and mastermind of a “criminal structure” that included his Vice President Jorge Glas and 18 other senior government and business associates,” wrote the senators. “Mr. Correa also has a proven record of violating internationally recognized human rights while in office. According to Freedom House, Mr. Correa ‘oversaw attacks on judicial independence, press freedoms, and other civil liberties’ during his presidency.”²⁸

Unfortunately, the dishonest methods of Correa seem to have persisted among his successors. Current president Guillermo Lasso was recently accused of being caught in a “web of corruption” that ties some of his key associates to organized crime figures, most notably to the president’s brother-in-law and business associate, Danilo Carrera.²⁹ President Lasso faced his second impeachment in May, triggering a *muerte cruzada* clause and imposing a six-month deadline for holding national elections in which he was disqualified from competing.³⁰ While other officials have been accused of being co-opted by criminal groups, those who speak out against corruption are the ones facing the consequences.³¹ Presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio, known for standing up against violence and fighting corruption, was recently assassinated at a political event.³² Villavicencio was a “courageous whistleblower” and campaigned under the slogan, “It’s time for the brave.”³³ Despite the tragedy of Villavicencio’s death, there still remains those who want to speak out against the current situation. But with journalists fleeing the country, prosecutors being killed, and human rights activists being silenced for speaking out against the state of Ecuador and its corruption, it’s getting increasingly harder for those brave enough to take a stand.³⁴

C. Colombia’s Peace Accord with the FARC

In the past, Ecuador has been shielded from cocaine and drug-related violence common in surrounding countries due in part to government policy and primarily because of a status quo agreement with the FARC.³⁵ The FARC, an armed guerilla group and the most active entity in

²⁸ Risch, *Colleagues Encourage Biden Admin to Hold Former Ecuadorean President Correa Accountable for Corruption, Human Rights Abuses*, FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE (October 2, 2023), <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/rep/release/risch-colleagues-encourage-biden-admin-to-hold-former-ecuadorean-president-correa-accountable-for-corruption-human-rights-abuses> [https://perma.cc/GH52-BBRV].

²⁹ *Reps. Grijalva and García Urge AG Garland to Investigate Ecuadorean President Lasso’s Corrupt Business Deals in Florida*, CONGRESSMAN GRIJALVA (June 7, 2023), <https://grijalva.house.gov/reps-grijalva-and-garcia-urge-ag-garland-to-investigate-ecuadorean-president-lassos-corrupt-business-deals-in-florida/#:~:text=Investigative%20journalists%20have%20uncovered%20a,and%20business%20associate%20Danilo%20Carrera>.

³⁰ Jessica Ludwig, *Can Guatemala and Ecuador’s Upcoming Elections Cast Light On Corruption Hidden in the Darkness?*, GEORGE W. BUSH PRESIDENTIAL CENTER (August 16, 2023), <https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/can-guatemala-and-ecuadors-upcoming-elections-cast-light-on-corruption-hidden-in-the-darkness> [https://perma.cc/6HEW-6BY4].

³¹ Turkewitz, *supra* note 16.

³² The Guardian, *supra* note 1.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ Gordon, *supra* note 25.

Andean drug trafficking,³⁶ was once Colombia's largest rebel group.³⁷ By 2016, it is estimated that the FARC controlled over half of the world's most productive coca crops.³⁸ Throughout the insurgency, the Ecuadorian government maintained a "cautious but stable relationship with the FARC," which kept things relatively calm in Ecuador.³⁹ Though they were based in Colombia, the FARC maintained a monopoly on cocaine routes from southern Colombia to Ecuador's Pacific ports, where its dominancy tended to minimize violence.⁴⁰ But in 2016, the FARC signed a peace accord with the Colombian government, ending the fifty-year insurgency and creating "power vacuums" in rural areas of Colombia and Latin America. This led to gaps for new rebel groups, thirty of which quickly took root.⁴¹

When the peace accord between Colombia and the FARC was in its infancy, the country experienced some positive effects, such as the integration of hundreds of rebels back into local communities, farming substitution crops to replace coca, and wide-spread disarmament.⁴² But the peace was short-lived. Because the drug trade in Latin America was no longer being controlled by one dominant group, gangs from Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela began fighting for the position once held by the FARC.⁴³ Once these gangs discovered the open cocaine market in Ecuador's ports, which are strongly connected to markets in Europe and Asia, they began competing for territorial control.⁴⁴ Additionally, increased prison populations, a result of former President Correa's policies, meant less crime on the streets but a perfect storm brewing in the prisons. There, new drug gangs were forming, and established ones were growing stronger due to their connections on the outside.⁴⁵

III. Laws Governing Corruption and Trafficking, or the Lack Thereof

A. Current Ecuadorian Laws in Place

Because Ecuador has limited history with coca cultivation, trafficking regulation, and gang violence, there is a serious lack of established law needed to gain control of the increasingly problematic situation. Currently, Ecuador's revised criminal code requires prosecutors to prove that a person apprehended with drugs intends to commercialize them.⁴⁶ This revised anti-drug law sought to help Ecuador's efforts to decriminalize small-scale drug use, however, it set the bar extremely high as it limits prosecutors' ability to convict large-scale traffickers, and it also marks a deviation from anti-drug laws employed in other Latin American countries, such as Colombia.⁴⁷

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Who are the FARC?*, BBC (November 24, 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36605769> [https://perma.cc/95Z7-JR3Y].

³⁸ Gordon, *supra* note 25.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Freeman, *supra* note 2.

⁴¹ Ivan Garcia, *Peace and Pesos: How Colombia's Peace Treaty is Impacted by its Developing Economy*, HARV. INT'L. L. REV. (September 5, 2022), <https://hir.harvard.edu/peace-and-pesos/> [https://perma.cc/XYS8-3Z6Y].

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ Gordon, *supra* note 25.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ Shane Sullivan, *Ecuador's Self-Defeating Anti-Trafficking Law*, INSIGHT CRIME (April 12, 2021), <https://insightcrime.org/news/ecuador-drug-trafficking-law/> [https://perma.cc/C2LM-XW4D].

⁴⁷ *Id.*

Unfortunately, evidence of intent to commercialize is not easy to obtain, as most of the traffickers that are caught play intermediary roles, and shipments of cocaine often aren't commercialized until they reach their end destinations, such as Europe or the United States.⁴⁸ While Colombia is far from completely eradicating both the cultivation and trafficking of cocaine, its experience in combatting the drug trade is much more extensive than Ecuador, and its current policies reflect years of fighting the war.⁴⁹ Colombia's increase in seizures is attributed not only to increased coca production, but also to the government's anti-drug strategy, which prioritizes crop substitution over eradication.⁵⁰ Ecuador's current trafficking laws aren't conducive to the new level of illegal trade they're facing, and looking at Colombia—the root of Ecuador's problem—may reveal potential ways to start improving trafficking enforcement.⁵¹

While Ecuador's trafficking laws aren't great, the current laws on corruption might be even further behind. According to the U.S. Department of State's 2022 Investment Climate Statement on Ecuador,

Ecuadorian law provides criminal penalties for corruption by public officials, but the government has not implemented the law effectively, and officials have engaged in corrupt practices. Ecuador ranked 105 out of 180 countries surveyed for Transparency International's 2021 Perceptions of Corruption Index and received a score of 36 out of 100 . . . Illicit payments for official favors and theft of public funds reportedly take place frequently. Dispute settlement procedures are complicated by the lack of transparency and inefficiency in the judicial system. Offering or accepting a bribe is illegal and punishable by imprisonment for up to five years.⁵²

Ecuador's anti-corruption laws are contained in the Criminal Code, passed in 2014, and the current language criminalizes corruption and related practices.⁵³ But Ecuador has not enacted any specific anti-bribery or anti-corruption laws in the past ten years. While specific bills, such as the Anti-Corruption and Whistleblower Protection Laws have been proposed, there has been no legislative movement to advance these proposals further.⁵⁴

B. The Lack of Regulation

As with Ecuador's current laws on corruption and trafficking, its regulation and inspection processes are similarly lacking. Ecuador is currently the world's largest exporter of bananas: a profitable business that has been taken over by drug traffickers filling banana containers with

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ Juan Diego Posada, *Record Cocaine Seizures in Colombia As Government Negotiates With Traffickers*, INSIGHT CRIME (February 3, 2023), <https://insightcrime.org/news/record-cocaine-seizures-colombia-government-traffickers/> [https://perma.cc/8J6H-TAVE].

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ Sullivan, *supra* note 45.

⁵² U.S. Dep't. of State, Bureau of Econ. and Bus. Aff., *Investment Climate Statements: Ecuador* (2022), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-investment-climate-statements/ecuador/> [https://perma.cc/W9LJ-R3AY].

⁵³ Paz Horowitz, *Ecuador*, LATIN LAWYER REFERENCE ANTI-CORRUPTION 2021 (2021) <https://www.dentons.com/en/insights/articles/2020/november/16/-/media/982d59b4e9294bf1a8fdfa3edf76d9db.ashx> [https://perma.cc/JU23-7P9Y].

⁵⁴ *Id.*

cocaine to smuggle their product out of the country.⁵⁵ Because 7.2 million tons of bananas are shipped out of Ecuadorean ports yearly, the opportunity to infiltrate the shipments and disperse the smuggled cocaine is vast.⁵⁶ Some traffickers have even created “front companies” to imitate authentic banana exporters, implicating “banana growers, exporters, shipping corporations, port operators, private security companies, customs agents, agriculture officials, police, and buyers,” who, knowingly or not, participate in the illegal trade.⁵⁷ Other traffickers have taken advantage of Ecuador’s fragile government and law enforcement systems, corrupting or intimidating “police, customs agents, security guards, and port workers to assist with—or ignore—tampering with containers at the ports.”⁵⁸ Even though the amount of cocaine seized at Ecuador’s ports has tripled over the last three years, according to Ecuador’s national director of drug enforcement, National Police Gen. Pablo Ramírez, this is not due to better policing, but increased smuggling.⁵⁹

Regulation is a major problem at major export points, with only around thirty percent of shipping containers being currently inspected at Ecuadorian ports, either manually or with drug-sniffing dogs⁶⁰ According to President Lasso’s government, scanners were supposed to have installed at the ports to better assist with shipment container inspection, but Ramírez says these have yet to be set up and may not be fully-operational until mid-2024, if all goes as planned.⁶¹ Even if these extra security measures are implemented, agriculture and customs officials in Ecuador have recently accused major banana exporters, some with \$100 million security expenses, of being directly involved in trafficking cocaine.⁶² Banana plantation owners have voiced their frustration and concern and have proposed these exporters be kicked out of the industry, but “there is no regulation that can be used to revoke a company’s banana-exporting permission when the business is tied repeatedly to drug trafficking.”⁶³ Although other countries in Latin America don’t export bananas at the same level as Ecuador, the region has years of experience fighting corruption and trafficking and has more developed methods that Ecuador could implement.

IV. How Other Countries are Fighting a Similar War

While Ecuador has a long road ahead of it in terms of containing the out-of-control trafficking and corruption practices that are plaguing the country, turning to surrounding regions and analyzing how similar governments have reduced criminal narcotic and corrupt activity could be the key to implementing the right methods. Costa Rica, for instance, also has a history of extreme drug trafficking and gang violence along its borders but is currently one of the lower-ranking countries for corruption in the Latin American region.⁶⁴ Combined with other anti-trafficking and

⁵⁵ Regina Garcia Cano, *Security in Ecuador Has Come Undone as Drug Cartels Exploit the Banana Industry to Ship Cocaine*, AP NEWS (September 4, 2023, 4:46 PM), <https://apnews.com/article/ecuador-bananas-cocaine-europe-drug-trafficking-6d6529e2b1d8f3cbd16aea74ade0b93d> [https://perma.cc/634Z-SQMT].

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ Garcia Cano, *supra* note 50.

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ Corruptions Perception Index, CPI (2022), <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022> [https://perma.cc/DZ5G-BMLT].

government organizations, the Costa Rican Institute on Drugs has implemented a “joint commission that works as a co-ordination mechanism in the fight against corruption.”⁶⁵ They also have a Political Constitution which establishes that “all public servants must be elected using criteria of proven suitability.”⁶⁶ Similarly, Costa Rica’s law against Corruption and Illicit Enrichment in Public Service aims to “address cases of conflict of interest and abuse of public office.”⁶⁷ The implementation of monetary compensation in certain cases and the continuance of investigations into political campaign financing have helped Costa Rica maintain its ranking and has allowed it to work towards becoming one of the lowest-ranking and least corrupt states in the region.⁶⁸

Likewise, Colombia has stricter laws against corruption and trafficking, as previously discussed.⁶⁹ Imprisonment starts longer for corruption, there is strict corporate liability for bribery acts, and laws governing contributions leading up to political elections are much more extensive than Ecuador’s current laws.⁷⁰ Colombia’s National Drug Policy for 2023-2033 represents a monumental step towards implementing new policies and strategies to tackle the criminal economy.⁷¹ The new plan involves cracking down on Colombia’s established drug trafficking networks and aims to relieve small coca growers and consumers from bearing the brunt of the “war-on-drugs.”⁷² Another principle in the new plan “directs security forces to key flashpoints of the drug trade by boosting their ability to interdict drug shipments and destroy drug processing infrastructure” while also aiming to “capture key members of drug trafficking gangs and increase investigations into related money laundering and corruption.”⁷³

Ecuador deviates from this strategy with their high bar for prosecuting large scale traffickers.⁷⁴ While a focus on convicting smaller-scale distributors may have been Ecuador’s focus in the past, with the new levels of crime rates and the extreme rise in gang-related cocaine distribution Ecuador could benefit from mimicking Colombia’s newest strategy. In 2022 a coca and cocaine regulation bill was discussed in the Colombian senate, and even though it faced opposition, it was noted as an important and historic step forward because it “serve[d] to help normalize the discussion around responsible regulation of drugs (other than cannabis) within the mainstream political debate; in Colombia, in Latin America, and the wider world. It makes meaningful public engagement and

⁶⁵ OECD, *Corporate Governance in Costa Rica*, OECD I LIBRARY (2020) (<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/844cf8f4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/844cf8f4-en>) [https://perma.cc/W4EG-A7SJ].

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Setbacks and Progress: Costa Rica’s Fight Against Corruption*, TICO TIMES (June 29, 2023), <https://ticotimes.net/2023/06/29/setbacks-and-progress-costa-ricas-fight-against-corruption> [https://perma.cc/844W-RZHW].

⁶⁹ Posada, *supra* note 48.

⁷⁰ Carolina Pardo and Bibiana Cala, *Anti-Corruption in Colombia*, GLOBAL COMPLIANCE NEWS, <https://www.globalcompliancencews.com/anti-corruption/handbook/anti-corruption-in-colombia/> [https://perma.cc/M9EF-39L6].

⁷¹ Lara Loaiza, *The Opportunities and Pitfalls of Colombia’s New Drug Policy*, INSIGHT CRIME (September 12, 2023), <https://insightcrime.org/news/opportunities-pitfalls-colombia-ambitious-drug-policy/> [https://perma.cc/5MYK-RQTQ].

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ Sullivan, *supra* note 45.

advocacy on this issue much easier.”⁷⁵ With such a fragile government it may be a while before Ecuador can successfully implement new regulation bills, but Colombia’s proposal and forward-looking views leave a blueprint for Ecuador to follow as the country stabilizes.

V. Conclusion

Ecuador’s current turmoil is the result of many factors that have been building for years and which continue to develop as new factors emerge. An emergency presidential election was recently held in Ecuador following President Lasso’s impending impeachment, and the country elected Daniel Noboa, the youngest president in Ecuadorian history and son of Ecuador’s richest man, as their new leader.⁷⁶ Noboa has proposed various reforms to tackle Ecuador’s economic and violence-related issues but has not yet announced any strategies for tackling corruption and criminal capture.⁷⁷ It is predicted that Noboa will likely strengthen ties with the U.S. to boost Ecuador’s security assistance, which might be the path of least resistance and also the most benefit when it comes to solidifying international ties.⁷⁸ While a new president could mean change in Ecuador, it is going to take many more years, determined lawmakers, and a strong leader to rebuild the “island of peace.”

⁷⁵ Mary Ryder, *Legal Regulation of Drugs in Colombia*, Transform Drug Policy Foundation (August 12, 2022), <https://transformdrugs.org/blog/legal-regulation-of-drugs-in-colombia> [https://perma.cc/S6NV-PXDQ].

⁷⁶ Will Freeman, *Ecuador’s 2023 Election: What Noboa’s Victory Means*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS (October 19, 2023), <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/ecuadors-2023-election-what-noboas-victory-means> [https://perma.cc/K4PW-JHN8].

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ *Id.*