

HRS Resilience Foundation

COUNTRY READINESS ASSESSMENT 07

Ecuador: Institutional Readiness, Internal Armed Conflict and Hemispheric Security Cooperation

A 50-year readiness architecture for a country confronting transnational organized crime and persistent internal violence

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About this series. The Western Hemisphere Readiness Series applies the HRS Readiness Cycle and Strategic Dependency Test to country, sector and regional systems. CRA 07 integrates SRA 01–10 into an Ecuador-level system-of-systems assessment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ecuador: Institutional Readiness, Internal Armed Conflict and Hemispheric Security Cooperation

Ecuador enters the final quarter of 2026 as the security-focused counterpart to Peru and Colombia in this series. Where CRA 06 examined Chancay as the sharpest applied case of the Shield of the Americas' Economic Pillar, Ecuador is the sharpest applied case of its Security Pillar: on 9 January 2024, President Daniel Noboa declared an Internal Armed Conflict and designated 22 organized-crime groups — most prominently Los Choneros and Los Lobos — as terrorist organizations and belligerent non-state actors, ordering the armed forces to conduct military operations against them. [1] [2] The conflict has not resolved; it has evolved. Los Choneros function as the Sinaloa Cartel's logistical arm in Ecuador, Los Lobos operate with backing from Mexico's CJNG, and Colombia's Clan del Golfo and FARC dissident factions — already documented in this series' CRA 04 — are active in northern Ecuador, producing drugs, smuggling weapons and extorting local businesses. [3]

On 9 September 2026, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Quito for the second time in a year, the middle leg of a three-country tour alongside Colombia and Peru, meeting President Noboa on security and, increasingly, trade. [4][5] Ecuador attended the founding Shield of the Americas summit at Trump National Doral in March 2026, and President Noboa met separately with the coalition's special envoy, Kristi Noem, in June 2026 specifically to secure international support to "neutralize" organized-crime groups. [6][7] Yet Ecuador's economic reality complicates a purely security-driven narrative: China remains Ecuador's second-largest trading partner, behind only the United States, through the first half of 2026. [4]

CENTRAL HRS PROPOSITION

Ecuador's readiness challenge is not simply military defeat of named criminal organizations — degraded leadership structures have repeatedly fragmented into more numerous, more violent successor factions. It is building the institutional capacity — prison control, financial-intelligence capacity, border and port security, and rural economic alternatives — that outlasts any single military operation or extradition.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Purpose and Scope

Country Readiness Assessment 07 extends the Western Hemisphere Readiness Series from Brazil (CRA 01), Venezuela (CRA 02), Cuba (CRA 03), Colombia (CRA 04), Bolivia (CRA 05) and Peru (CRA 06) to Ecuador. It applies the HRS Readiness Cycle to Ecuador and integrates the ten Sector Readiness Assessments into a single system-of-systems framework, consistent with the methodology used throughout the series.

The assessment uses public information available through 27 September 2026. Statements about U.S. and Ecuadorian government policy are identified as government positions; the designation of specific organizations as terrorist or belligerent actors reflects the Ecuadorian government's own executive decree, not an independent HRS determination. The assessment does not endorse a political party, candidate, or electoral outcome, and takes no position on Ecuador's internal political disputes.

The intended audience includes U.S. institutions, international organizations, private-sector actors evaluating Ecuador entry, and Ecuadorian public and private institutions. The document is a strategic research reference for security-sector capacity building, sovereign-to-sovereign engagement, infrastructure investment, and long-horizon institutional capacity building; project-level decisions require current technical, legal, environmental, financial and security diligence.

CURRENT GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Current Governance and Political Context

Daniel Noboa, son of a banana-export magnate, won a snap election in October 2023 following the assassination of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio weeks earlier, and was re-elected to a full term in April 2025. His government inherited a security crisis with a documented trajectory: Ecuador's homicide rate rose from roughly 6.7 per 100,000 in 2019 to over 46 per 100,000 by the end of 2023, an increase of more than 500% in four years, driven by Ecuador's emergence as a preferred maritime embarkation point for cocaine bound for the United States, Europe and beyond. [8][9]

The 9 January 2024 crisis point — armed men seizing a live television broadcast in Guayaquil amid prison riots and the escape of Los Choneros leader José Adolfo "Fito" Macías Villamar — prompted Noboa's Internal Armed Conflict declaration. Macías was recaptured in June 2025 and extradited to the United States on 20 July 2025, a move enabled by 2024 constitutional reforms permitting extradition of Ecuadorian nationals. [10][11] Rather than ending the conflict, leadership removals have repeatedly fragmented the criminal landscape: by late 2025, deaths linked to organized-crime infighting had risen a further 42% as rival factions contested territory once controlled by a single organization. [12]

Material to readiness planning: This assessment treats Ecuador's Internal Armed Conflict, the specific organizations named in the 2024 executive decree, and the government's characterization of them as terrorist and belligerent actors as documented facts attributable to the Ecuadorian government — not as independent HRS determinations of criminal or terrorist status. This report does not take a position on the legal or political merits of the conflict designation itself.

The legal characterization also requires qualification. While Executive Decree 111 of January 2024 recognized an internal armed conflict, Ecuador's Constitutional Court subsequently and repeatedly held, including in a March 2025 ruling, that the situation did not meet the organizational and intensity requirements to qualify as an internal armed conflict under the constitutional framework governing states of exception; a related National Solidarity Law provision was separately struck down in 2025. The government reasserted the designation via Executive Decree 424 on 18 June 2026, which has itself been challenged before the Constitutional Court. [13][14] This assessment uses "internal armed conflict" as a description of the government's operational framework and public characterization, not as an independent HRS or international-humanitarian-law determination.

01 • ECUADOR 2026 BASELINE

A Country at War with Transnational Organized Crime

Ecuador's baseline combines a formally declared internal armed conflict, a fully dollarized economy (since 2000) with limited independent monetary policy, and a genuine — if increasingly economic — realignment toward the United States. Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city and principal port, has become one of the preferred maritime embarkation points for cocaine bound for North America and Europe, a role that predates and substantially explains the security crisis: homicides rose from roughly 6.7 per 100,000 in 2019 to over 46 per 100,000 by late 2023, with some Guayaquil districts reporting rates near 140 per 100,000 amid the 2025 fragmentation of Los Choneros. [8][9][12]

Ecuador remains the world's leading banana exporter and a significant oil producer, both sectors vulnerable to the same transport and port infrastructure now also used for cocaine transshipment. China's continued position as Ecuador's second-largest trading partner — behind only the United States through the first half of 2026 — means Ecuador's economic realignment is real but not exclusive, distinguishing it from a simple "choosing sides" narrative. [4]

BASELINE CONCLUSION

Ecuador's readiness priority is building durable state capacity — over prison systems, ports, financial flows and rural economies — that survives the fragmentation pattern already observed twice: removing one criminal leader has consistently produced more numerous, more violent successor factions rather than resolution.

02 · THE INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT

The Internal Armed Conflict as a National Readiness Test

The 9 January 2024 crisis exposed dependencies across Ecuador's prison system, media infrastructure, police capacity and border security simultaneously. During 2025 alone, Ecuadorian security forces conducted nearly 53,000 operations, resulting in over \$243 million in estimated losses to criminal structures, alongside the capture of 20 high-value targets. [12] Yet the underlying pattern — fragmentation rather than resolution following leadership removal — represents the core readiness challenge this section documents.

System	Primary Dependency	Cascading Effect	Readiness Response
Prison system	Physical and administrative control over detention facilities	Prisons function as command-and-control centers for criminal organizations	Prison-control reform; leadership isolation protocols
Ports & maritime	Guayaquil and other Pacific-facing container and banana-export terminals	Legitimate export infrastructure doubles as cocaine-transshipment infrastructure	Cargo-screening technology; port-security partnerships
Border regions	Northern border with Colombia (Clan del Golfo, FARC dissidents)	Cross-border criminal spillover independent of domestic enforcement success	Bilateral border-security coordination with Colombia
Media & public institutions	Physical security of broadcast and government facilities	Direct intimidation of state authority and public confidence	Critical-facility hardening; institutional continuity planning

READINESS PRINCIPLE

Military operations against named organizations address symptoms; the underlying driver — Ecuador's position in global cocaine logistics — requires port, financial and institutional capacity that persists independent of which faction currently controls which territory.

03 • HRS METHOD

Ecuador as a System of Systems

The HRS Readiness Cycle — Detect, Assess, Decide, Coordinate, Deploy, Sustain, Learn — is applied to Ecuador across security operations, institutional capacity-building, and economic diversification simultaneously, since military success against any single organization has not, on its own, produced durable security gains.

HRS Function	Ecuador Application
Detect	Identify criminal-network fragmentation patterns and emerging successor factions early.
Assess	Fuse security, port, financial and prison-system information into a common operating picture.
Decide	Define authorities and thresholds for military, police and financial-intelligence action.
Coordinate	Connect Ecuadorian security forces, U.S. counterparts, and regional partners including Colombia.
Deploy	Move security, technical and financial-intelligence capacity to priority ports and border regions.
Sustain	Maintain institutional capacity through leadership changes on both sides of the conflict.
Learn	Convert the fragmentation pattern observed since 2024 into a durable institutional response.

The HRS Strategic Dependency Test asks whether Ecuador's security response depends on any single tactic — leadership removal — that has repeatedly proven insufficient, and what alternate, durable capabilities would reduce that dependency.

04 • TRANSNATIONAL CARTEL PROXY CONFLICT

Transnational Cartel Proxy Conflict and the Dependency Test

Ecuador's security crisis has a significant proxy-like dimension, with local criminal organizations connected to larger transnational trafficking networks. Los Choneros function as the logistical arm of Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel within Ecuador; Los Lobos have risen through direct backing from the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel (CJNG). Colombia's Clan del Golfo and FARC dissident factions — the same organizations documented in this series' Colombia assessment (CRA 04) — operate in northern Ecuador, producing drugs, smuggling weapons and extorting local businesses. [3] The extradition of Los Choneros leader José Adolfo Macías Villamar to the United States in July 2025, enabled by 2024 constitutional reform, removed a single node but did not resolve the underlying structure. [10][11]

Test Dimension	Ecuador Application	Readiness Question
Concentration	Cocaine-transshipment infrastructure concentrated in a small number of Pacific ports	What alternate screening and enforcement capacity exists across the full port network?
Substitutability	Removing one gang leader has consistently produced fragmentation, not resolution	What non-leadership-dependent enforcement approaches exist?
Control	Prisons function as command centers even under state incarceration	Can the state exert genuine control over detained leadership?
Recovery	42% rise in organized-crime deaths following 2025 fragmentation	What is the recovery plan when enforcement success itself triggers new violence?
Cascading impact	Cross-border spillover from Colombia independent of Ecuadorian domestic policy	How does bilateral coordination address causes originating outside Ecuador's borders?

HRS PROPOSITION

Treating Ecuador's conflict as a series of discrete leadership targets, rather than a proxy contest among transnational networks with independent logistics and financing, risks repeating the fragmentation pattern already observed twice since 2024.

05 • STRATEGIC DEPENDENCY MAP

Ecuador's Critical Capability Network

Capability	Critical Inputs	Failure Consequence	Readiness Response
Security & enforcement	Military and police capacity against transnational cartel-linked organizations	Leadership removal produces fragmentation, not resolution	Institutional, non-leadership-dependent enforcement capacity
Prison system	Physical and administrative control over detained leadership	Prisons remain command-and-control centers	Prison-control and leadership-isolation reform
Ports & export infrastructure	Guayaquil and other terminals serving both banana/oil exports and cocaine transshipment	Legitimate trade infrastructure doubles as illicit logistics	Cargo-screening technology; port-security partnerships
Border security	Northern border coordination with Colombia against Clan del Golfo/FARC dissidents	Cross-border spillover independent of domestic enforcement	Bilateral coordination; border-monitoring technology
Trade partnerships	United States (largest) and China (second-largest) as top trading partners	Economic realignment narrative complicated by continued Chinese trade volume	Transparent, diversified trade and investment relationships
Dollarized monetary system	Full dollarization since 2000; no independent monetary policy	Limited macroeconomic flexibility during crisis	Fiscal discipline; diversified external financing

06 · SRA 01

Telecommunications & Digital Infrastructure

Ecuador implementation objective: protect critical media and communications infrastructure against the kind of direct armed intimidation seen in the January 2024 television-station seizure, while building secure channels for security-force coordination.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Harden physical security of broadcast and telecommunications facilities against armed intrusion.
- Build secure, resilient communications channels for security-force coordination across services.
- Apply transparent, nationality-neutral trusted-supplier standards to new digital infrastructure investment.
- Protect network nodes with resilient, diversified power.
- Strengthen cybersecurity capacity against criminal-network digital operations.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: Critical-facility hardening → secure coordination channels → trusted-supplier standards → cybersecurity capacity → resilient national digital backbone.

07 · SRA 02

Data Centers, Cloud & AI Infrastructure

Ecuador implementation objective: build data-fusion capacity linking security, port and financial-intelligence information into the common operating picture the HRS Method calls for.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Identify critical security, port-logistics and financial-intelligence data sets.
- Build backup and disaster-recovery capacity independent of single facilities.
- Apply trusted-supplier standards to new data-center investment.
- Develop domestic technical capacity for data fusion and analysis across agencies.
- Use AI applications for port-logistics anomaly detection and criminal-network mapping under defined governance.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: Critical-data inventory → distributed backup → trusted-supplier procurement → cross-agency data fusion → selective AI applications.

08 • SRA 03

Critical Minerals & Strategic Materials

Ecuador implementation objective: Ecuador's mineral and oil sectors remain secondary to the security crisis but require the same transparent-screening discipline applied elsewhere in the series as investment interest grows.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Apply transparent, nationality-neutral investment screening to mining and oil-sector transactions.
- Assess exposure of extractive-sector logistics to the same port-security vulnerabilities documented elsewhere in this assessment.
- Invest in domestic processing capacity rather than raw-material export alone.
- Build geological-survey and permitting transparency.
- Coordinate mineral-sector security with broader port and border enforcement priorities.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: Transparent screening → security-exposure assessment → domestic processing investment → diversified offtake → sovereign long-term policy.

09 · SRA 04

Rare Earths & Western Hemisphere Mineral Security

Ecuador implementation objective: distinguish confirmed mineral potential from exploratory data, applying the same transparency standard used elsewhere in the series, while recognizing this sector is not currently central to Ecuador's readiness profile.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Validate rare-earth and critical-mineral geological data through independent survey where relevant.
- Avoid single-buyer or single-financier dependency for any strategic minerals identified.
- Maintain Ecuadorian decision rights over long-term mineral policy.
- Apply national-security review to any strategic-mineral asset sales.
- Sequence mineral-sector development behind security-sector stabilization priorities.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: Data validation → diversified offtake → transparent screening → sovereign long-term policy.

10 • SRA 05

Energy Security & Strategic Power Infrastructure

Ecuador implementation objective: protect oil-sector infrastructure and electricity generation from both the general security environment and periodic drought-driven hydropower shortfalls.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Assess oil-export infrastructure exposure to the same security vulnerabilities affecting Pacific ports.
- Diversify electricity generation to reduce dependence on hydropower during drought conditions.
- Apply transparent regulatory oversight to energy-sector investment regardless of ownership.
- Build grid-security and cybersecurity capacity.
- Coordinate energy-infrastructure security with broader critical-infrastructure protection priorities.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: Infrastructure security assessment → generation diversification → regulatory transparency → grid-security capacity → long-horizon energy resilience.

11 · SRA 06

Ports, Logistics & Maritime Infrastructure

Ecuador implementation objective: this is the central readiness gap of the assessment — Guayaquil and other Pacific ports serve simultaneously as legitimate export infrastructure and cocaine-transshipment points.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Deploy advanced cargo-screening technology across all major export terminals.
- Build port-security partnerships combining Ecuadorian, U.S. and private-sector capability.
- Digitize customs and cargo visibility to reduce opportunities for concealment.
- Protect port power, communications and administrative systems.
- Apply consistent security standards across both banana/oil export terminals and container ports.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: Cargo-screening deployment → port-security partnerships → customs digitization → protected infrastructure → resilient, secure maritime logistics.

12 · SRA 07

Food Security & Strategic Agricultural Resilience

Ecuador implementation objective: protect the banana-export sector — the world's largest — from both security disruption and the kind of criminal infiltration already documented in adjacent logistics chains, while building rural economic alternatives to criminal recruitment.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Secure banana and agricultural export logistics against criminal infiltration.
- Invest in rural economic alternatives to reduce recruitment into criminal organizations.
- Diversify agricultural export markets beyond current concentration.
- Expand storage and cold-chain capacity linking rural producers to ports.
- Coordinate food-security investment with the broader port-security and rural-development tracks.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: Export-logistics security → rural economic alternatives → market diversification → cold-chain capacity → resilient agricultural economy.

13 · SRA 08

Pharmaceutical & Medical Supply Chains

Ecuador implementation objective: build health-logistics resilience independent of the urban and prison-system violence documented throughout this assessment.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Establish regional medical stockpoints independent of high-crime urban corridors, particularly Guayaquil and Durán.
- Strengthen prison-system medical capacity given documented violence within detention facilities.
- Diversify medical-device and medicine suppliers.
- Build local repair capacity for medical equipment.
- Protect health-logistics personnel and infrastructure from security-related disruption.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: Regional stockpoints → prison-system medical capacity → supplier diversification → local repair capacity → security-protected health logistics.

14 • SRA 09

Advanced Manufacturing & Industrial Capacity

Ecuador implementation objective: build domestic industrial capacity for port-security equipment and technology maintenance, reducing dependence on imported systems for critical screening infrastructure.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Identify industrial bottlenecks around port-security and screening equipment.
- Develop technical training linked to cargo-screening and port-security technology.
- Prioritize repair and maintenance capacity for security and logistics equipment.
- Evaluate domestic manufacturing opportunities in agricultural processing and export packaging.
- Measure industrial resilience by recovery time and substitution options.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: Repair capability → technical training → equipment maintenance capacity → domestic manufacturing evaluation → diversified industrial base.

15 • SRA 10

Western Hemisphere Strategic Infrastructure & Resilience

SRA 10 is the integration layer, converting the ten sector assessments into an Ecuador-level dependency architecture, with the transnational cartel proxy conflict as the defining test case for the series' Strategic Dependency Test methodology applied to security.

Ecuador implementation — priority actions

- Maintain a national Security-Infrastructure Dependency Register spanning ports, prisons, borders and financial flows.
- Run Scenario Stress Tests for compound security-plus-fragmentation disruption.
- Use Readiness-to-Investment Assessments applied consistently regardless of investor nationality.
- Specify decision rights, recovery time and alternate capacity for every critical security and economic system.
- Coordinate with Shield of the Americas partners on shared security and readiness standards.

HRS TEST

For every major project, identify concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time and cascading impact. A second supplier or facility is effective redundancy only when both are not dependent on the same upstream failure point.

Implementation sequence: National dependency register → scenario stress testing → nationality-neutral readiness assessments → regional coordination → integrated long-horizon resilience.

16 • SECURITY-TO-INSTITUTIONAL-CAPACITY

A National Conversion Architecture

The conversion model treats military and law-enforcement operations against named organizations as a necessary but insufficient anchor within a wider capability program, not as resolution itself.

Stage	Core Action	Readiness Result
1. Measure	Security-dependency register; port, prison and border vulnerability mapping	Public baseline and auditability
2. Stabilize	Sustained military and police operations; prison-control reform	Reduced immediate violence
3. Rebuild	Port cargo-screening technology; border-security coordination with Colombia	Reduced transshipment capacity
4. Industrialize	Domestic technical capacity for security and screening equipment	Reduced import dependence for critical systems
5. Diversify	Rural economic alternatives; diversified trade partnerships	Reduced recruitment base; reduced economic concentration
6. Institutionalize	Administration-independent security and financial-intelligence institutions	Continuity across changes of government
7. Adapt	Technology renewal, criminal-network evolution, demographic change	2076 resilience

HRS ALLOCATION PRINCIPLE

Security investment should be structured to build institutional capacity that persists independent of any single leadership removal, given the documented fragmentation pattern observed twice since January 2024.

17 • MIGRATION AND PRISON REFORM

Migration, Human Capital & Prison System Reform

Ecuador's large diaspora — concentrated particularly in the United States and Spain, according to national census data — alongside internal displacement driven by criminal violence in Guayaquil and Durán, represents a significant human-capital and readiness consideration distinct from the migration dynamics documented elsewhere in this series. [9][30]

Priority	Readiness Action	Expected Capability
Prison reform	Physical and administrative control over detention facilities functioning as criminal command centers	Reduced capacity for incarcerated leadership to direct external operations
Rural economic alternatives	Legal value chains as alternatives to criminal recruitment, particularly of youth	Reduced organized-crime recruitment base
Diaspora engagement	Structured engagement with Ecuadorian communities abroad	Remittance stability; potential return-migration capacity
Urban security	Reduced violence exposure in Guayaquil and Durán	Improved urban economic confidence

HRS READINESS METRIC

Whether prison-system reform reduces incarcerated leadership's demonstrated capacity to direct external criminal operations — the single clearest indicator of whether military success is converting into durable institutional gain.

18 • TRADE DIVERSIFICATION

Trade Diversification and External Economic Partners

Unlike Colombia, Bolivia and Peru elsewhere in this series, Ecuador's readiness challenge is led by security rather than strategic-infrastructure dependency. Nonetheless, the same external-partner discipline applies: China remained Ecuador's second-largest trading partner, behind only the United States, through the first half of 2026, even as security cooperation with Washington deepened. [4] This assessment did not identify evidence of a Russian or Iranian strategic footprint in Ecuador comparable to cases documented elsewhere in this series, and does not characterize either as a current Ecuador-specific security actor on available evidence.

Partner	Relationship	Readiness Consideration
United States	Largest trading partner; lead security-cooperation partner; Shield of the Americas coalition	Deepening but not exclusive relationship
China	Second-largest trading partner through H1 2026	Transparent, nationality-neutral screening applies equally
Colombia	Shared northern border; joint exposure to Clan del Golfo/FARC dissident spillover	Bilateral security coordination priority

HRS PROPOSITION

Security realignment toward the United States and continued economic engagement with China are not contradictory; applying the same nationality-neutral screening principle used throughout this series avoids forcing an unnecessary binary choice.

19 • U.S.-ECUADOR COOPERATION

A Readiness-Based Cooperation Framework

Secretary Rubio's second visit to Quito in a year — 9 September 2026, following his first visit in September 2025 — reflects a maturing bilateral relationship extending from security cooperation toward expanded trade discussion. [4][5] Ecuador's participation in the founding Shield of the Americas summit in March 2026 and President Noboa's direct engagement with coalition special envoy Kristi Noem in June 2026 establish the current cooperation architecture. [6][7] On 22 September 2026, Ecuador joined the United States and other participating governments in the Joint Statement on Defending Hemispheric Sovereignty, which announced coordinated action — including sanctions and other measures — against 24 named transnational criminal and terrorist organizations. [28] For Ecuador, the announcement is directly relevant: the list includes Los Choneros, Los Lobos, Chone Killers, Los Tiguerones, Clan del Golfo and FARC dissident groups, several of which are directly discussed in Section 04. Separately, in August 2026 the U.S. Treasury sanctioned an Ecuador-based maritime network linked to Los Choneros and Los Lobos, targeting vessels operating near Manta used to transport cocaine northward — reinforcing this assessment's emphasis on port, coastal and cargo-screening resilience in SRA 06. [29]

Domain	Illustrative Readiness Objective	Authority / Accountability
Security	Sustained counter-cartel operations; extradition cooperation	Ecuadorian and U.S. security and judicial authorities
Ports	Cargo-screening technology and port-security partnerships	Ecuadorian port authorities and U.S. technical partners
Trade	Expanded bilateral commercial relationship alongside continued Chinese trade	Ecuadorian and U.S. trade authorities
Regional coordination	Shield of the Americas coalition engagement	Ecuador and coalition partner governments

COOPERATION PRINCIPLE

Build systems that remain useful if an administration changes, a criminal organization fragments into successor factions, or a bilateral relationship evolves.

20 · 2027–2030

Conflict Stabilization

Objective: reduce immediate violence while building the institutional capacity — prison control, port screening, border coordination — that survives leadership-removal-driven fragmentation.

Priority portfolio

- Prison-control and leadership-isolation reform
- Port cargo-screening technology deployment
- Bilateral border-security coordination with Colombia
- Rural economic-alternative pilot programs
- Critical-facility hardening (media, government, ports)

HRS LONG-HORIZON TEST

Security investment should be traceable to measurable institutional outcomes — not only tactical victories against named leadership.

21 · 2031–2035

Institutional Recovery

Objective: move from conflict stabilization to durable, administration-independent security and economic institutions.

Priority portfolio

- Administration-independent financial-intelligence institutions
- Expanded rural economic diversification
- Domestic technical capacity for security and port-screening technology
- Reduced homicide and organized-crime-violence trajectory
- Diversified export markets beyond current concentration

HRS LONG-HORIZON TEST

The central transition is from military-operational success to institutional capacity that outlasts any single security campaign.

22 · 2036–2050

Diversification

Objective: reduce structural dependence on any single trading partner, export sector, or bilateral security relationship.

Priority portfolio

- Diversified trade and investment partnerships, applied on nationality-neutral terms
- Expanded domestic manufacturing and agricultural processing capacity
- Institutionalized rural-development mechanisms
- Regional leadership in transparent port-security standards
- Sustained reduction in organized-crime recruitment base

HRS LONG-HORIZON TEST

A resilient Ecuadorian system should continue functioning if one criminal network is replaced by another, one trading partner's priorities shift, or one security relationship evolves.

23 · 2051–2065

Renewal

Objective: replace first-generation post-2027 security and port infrastructure before systemic failure, applying updated technology and institutional standards.

Priority portfolio

- Renewed port-security and screening technology
- Updated prison-system infrastructure and protocols
- Continued security-institution professionalization
- Renewed rural economic-development infrastructure
- Sustained diversified trade relationships

HRS LONG-HORIZON TEST

Long-horizon readiness means avoiding a second generation of security infrastructure that reproduces the leadership-dependency fragility of the first.

24 · 2066–2076

Intergenerational Resilience

Objective: establish a continuously renewing portfolio of Ecuadorian security and economic institutional capabilities.

Priority portfolio

- Effective redundancy across port, prison and border-security systems
- Diversified international partnerships, applied consistently and transparently
- Recurring national security and economic stress tests
- Sustained rural economic alternatives to criminal recruitment
- Durable, administration-independent governance institutions

HRS LONG-HORIZON TEST

Build systems that remain useful when governments change, criminal networks evolve, or great-power trade competition shifts.

25 • READINESS METRICS

Readiness Metrics and Governance

Country readiness should not be reduced to a single score. Metrics should be tracked by sector, geography and critical function.

Domain	Illustrative Metric
Security	Homicide-rate trend; organized-crime fragmentation indicators; incarcerated-leadership operational capacity
Ports	Cargo-screening coverage; interdiction-to-throughput ratio
Border	Cross-border incident trend with Colombia
Economy	Trade-partner diversification; rural economic-alternative program reach
Institutional continuity	Security and financial-intelligence institution continuity across administrations

26 • GOVERNANCE & IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

HRS Ecuador Readiness Improvement Framework

Cycle	Ecuador Implementation
Detect	Maintain security, port and border dependency registers.
Assess	Stress-test compound fragmentation-plus-cross-border-spillover scenarios.
Decide	Establish clear decision rights across military, police and financial-intelligence action.
Coordinate	Align national, regional (Colombia) and international (U.S., Shield of the Americas) counterparts.
Deploy	Execute security and institution-building packages with measurable readiness outcomes.
Sustain	Fund security and economic-diversification institutions through political cycles.
Learn	Conduct annual continuity exercises and update assumptions through 2076.

MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLE

The HRS improvement framework should be used as a management system rather than a one-time report — particularly important given the demonstrated pace of criminal-network adaptation in Ecuador.

27 • CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Ecuador's September 2026 position is defined by a documented, ongoing tension: a formally declared internal armed conflict against transnational cartel-linked organizations, a maturing security and economic relationship with the United States, and continued significant economic engagement with China. The conflict has already demonstrated a specific, repeatable failure mode — leadership removal producing fragmentation rather than resolution — twice since January 2024.

The HRS opportunity is not to promise military victory over named organizations, which has proven elusive, but to build the institutional capacity — prison control, port screening, border coordination, rural economic alternatives, and financial intelligence — that reduces Ecuador's dependency on any single tactical success and persists across changes of criminal leadership, changes of government, and shifts in great-power trade competition.

FINAL HRS PROPOSITION

Ecuador's resilience should be measured not by any single leadership removal or military operation, but by whether its port, prison, border and economic institutions can function independent of which criminal organization currently controls which territory — capable of enduring when governments change, criminal networks fragment, or trade relationships evolve.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND LIMITATIONS

Methodology, Research Integrity and Limitations

This assessment is an original HRS Resilience Foundation synthesis based on public-source evidence and the Foundation's Western Hemisphere Readiness Series. It integrates the HRS Readiness Cycle, Strategic Dependency Test, effective-versus-nominal redundancy distinction, sector readiness logic and 50-year planning principles.

The assessment does not claim access to classified intelligence, confidential commercial information or privileged government information. Conditions in Ecuador, U.S. policy, and the security situation can change rapidly.

Statements attributed to the U.S. or Ecuadorian governments are presented as government positions. The designation of specific organizations as terrorist or belligerent actors reflects Ecuador's own 2024 executive decree, presented here as a documented government determination, not an independent HRS finding. Company statements are treated as representations, not independent verification. Scenario propositions are analytical pathways, not forecasts.

The report is not a political judgment, electoral recommendation, intelligence product, procurement recommendation, legal opinion, engineering certification or investment solicitation. Country conditions are analytical categories, not rankings.

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About the HRS Resilience Foundation: The HRS Resilience Foundation is an independent research organization advancing institutional readiness and health security across the Western Hemisphere.

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HRS Resilience Foundation

Independent research for institutional readiness, continuity, and 50-year resilience planning across the Western Hemisphere. Research Outputs span Strategic Reports, Policy Briefs, Technical Papers, Sector Readiness Assessments and Country Assessments, translating public-source evidence into practical frameworks built to remain valid for governments, infrastructure operators, investors, and institutional decision-makers across changes in technology, suppliers, and political leadership.

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