



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# Enabling Environment Snapshot

Ecuador

January 2026

## Context

In the last six months (June to December 2025), Ecuador has experienced a series of setbacks in terms of respect for the rule of law and democratic institutions. Mainly, the Ecuadorian government has continued its policy of normalising the use of emergency powers under the justification that the country is undergoing an internal armed conflict. This declaration was supported by the [Organic Law of National Solidarity](#), presented by President Daniel Noboa and approved on 7 June 2025 as an economic emergency law, whose Article 7 granted the President the power to declare the existence of an internal armed conflict and grant special powers to the National Police and Armed Forces to use force against members of organised armed groups. This law was subsequently declared [unconstitutional](#) because it did not meet the requirements to be considered an economic law. As a result of this and past instances of control by the Constitutional Court, President Noboa has led a [strategy of attacks and discrediting](#) against this institution, and even [attempted to bypass](#) the proper constitutional procedure to convene a constitutional process in November 2025.

In this context, civil society has suffered damage to its enabling environment. In August 2025, the [Organic Law on Social Transparency](#) sent by President Noboa was approved, which [imposed](#), among other things, an ambiguous dissolution clause, measures to freeze funds as a precautionary measure, and transparency requirements that are difficult for low-income social organisations to comply with. This law and its subsequent regulations were used to disrupt the activities of environmental organisations and those belonging to the Ecuadorian indigenous movement by freezing their bank accounts. These organisations played a leading role in [calling](#) for protests against the Ecuadorian government's economic measures, which were criminalised and repressed by the armed forces. In addition, the Ecuadorian government continues to harass the media, even ordering the suspension of community television channels. This scenario constitutes a serious deterioration in the conditions necessary for the full exercise of civil and political rights in Ecuador.

The serious situation facing civil society in Ecuador has been denounced [internationally](#), especially by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on [freedom of association and assembly](#) and on the [situation of human rights defenders](#).

## 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

The Ecuadorian State continues to take measures that violate the freedoms of expression, association and assembly. First, the national government has adopted a more hostile stance toward the media, especially those outlets that have been critical of its administration. For example, on 12 August, during a protest led by President Daniel Noboa himself against the Constitutional Court, plainclothes security agents assaulted journalists who were covering the event. Three days after these events, the General Secretariat of Communication of the Presidency warned of possible legal action against Diario Expreso, a media outlet that revealed links between a communications director of the Presidency and an alleged group that [paid to display messages](#) attacking the Constitutional Court on digital billboards.

Attacks against local media outlets have also taken place. Between September and October, the Telecommunications Regulation and Control Agency temporarily suspended the signal of

community media outlets [MICC TV](#), [Radio Ilumán](#), and [Radio Inti Pacha](#). The three media outlets, which covered the events that took place during a [series of protests against the national government](#) (national strike), were accused of inciting violence and undermining national security.

The demonstrations described above took place in response to President Noboa's decision to [eliminate the](#) diesel fuel [subsidy](#). On 18 September, he declared a state of emergency ([Executive Decree 134](#)) in the provinces where the largest demonstrations were taking place. As a result, freedom of movement and assembly were suspended. In addition, the Armed Forces were ordered to mobilise to restore public order. This led to instances of [aggression against journalists](#) and [excessive use of force against demonstrators](#). Unfortunately, three people were reported dead as a result of the response by the security forces: [Efraín Fúerez](#) (shot in the back), [Rosa Paqui](#) (cardiorespiratory arrest due to tear gas inhalation) and [José Guamán](#) (shot in the chest).

## 2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

The legal framework in Ecuador has undergone changes aimed at greater regulation of civil society activities, based on stigmatising rhetoric that seeks to be framed within the State's security policy. On 29 August, the [Organic Law on Social Transparency](#)<sup>1</sup> (LOTS) was approved, supplemented by its [General Regulations](#) on 27 October. This law, which replaces Executive Decree 193 (2017) governing civil society organisations (CSOs), contains a number of potential risks to their free operation. As a first warning, through subparagraph "d" of the second amendment, the Organic Law on Citizen Participation is amended to include an article that allows the national government to dissolve any social organisation that carries out "any activity that violates the fundamental rights of individuals, public order or state security". In addition, accountability measures based on risk analysis are established that are difficult for social organisations with limited resources to comply with due to their technical complexity.

Furthermore, Article 4 of the LOTS Regulations sanctions all CSOs that directly or indirectly interfere with legally authorised mining projects with a four-year suspension of their legal status. This limits the scope of action of indigenous organisations and organisations that protect the rights of nature, which have led the main attempts to control the expansion of mining in Ecuador.

Several social organisations and individuals have filed [lawsuits challenging the constitutionality](#) of this law, arguing that – similar to what was described at the beginning of this report with regard to the Organic Law on National Solidarity – the concept of "economic emergency law" was misused to significantly reduce the time for debate and prevent CSOs from participating in the feedback process protected by regulations related to citizen participation.

## 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

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<sup>1</sup> Colloquially known as the Foundations Act or Organic Act for the Control of Irregular Capital Flows, the initial name of the law.

Under the LOTS, CSOs will receive a risk level classification (low, medium or high) according to variables such as the volume of resources administered and the origin of their sources of funding. However, the indicators used to determine these classifications will be at the discretion of the Superintendency of Popular and Solidarity Economy – the new governing body for CSOs in Ecuador. Another concern raised by civil society organisations was the fact that the LOTS also reforms the Organic Law on the Prevention, Detection and Combating of Money Laundering and the Financing of other Crimes. Through these changes, the Financial and Economic Analysis Unit (UAFE) now has the power to immediately freeze funds as a precautionary measure. In other words, if the UAFE identifies alleged suspicious financial transactions involving a CSO, its funds may be retained for up to eight days without the need for a court order. These measures may be extended, modified or lifted based on a judge's ruling in cases of corruption and organised crime.

Although the freezing of funds was presented as a measure that would only affect organisations with links to criminal groups, in October the LOTS was used to freeze the funds of institutional and personal accounts associated with the [Pachamama Foundation](#), the [Yasunidos](#) collective, the [Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador](#) (CONAIE) and the local organisations that constitute it. The national government justified these measures on the grounds that these organisations and their representatives had committed crimes of illicit enrichment, as well as accusing these social organisations of financing violent protests and attempting to destabilise the government during the national strike demonstrations in September and October. However, spokespersons for the organisations involved argued that these measures were taken as political retaliation.

## 4. State openness and responsiveness

The executive branch has become more secretive, again citing the country's security situation. The aforementioned cases involving the suspension of community media signals and the freezing of bank accounts were argued through reports that were inaccessible even to the parties involved. On the one hand, the media outlet "MICC TV" was forced to suspend its operations temporarily based on a legal report from the Telecommunications Regulation and Control Agency (ARCOTEL), which in turn cited a classified report from the Strategic Intelligence Centre. The full content of intelligence report STIE-DC-BIC-004 is not public knowledge; however, it is known that the document exposes "aspects that undermine national security" related to MICC TV's broadcasts. This prevented the decision from being appealed.

In the case of organisations and citizens whose funds were frozen, the government did not justify the reasons behind this measure under the LOTS, and many of those involved were not duly notified by the authorities. On 25 September, one day after the first bank blocks, the Attorney General's Office issued a request for information for an investigation into an alleged crime of unjustified private enrichment. On the other hand, the UAFE [refrained from commenting](#) on the legal justification behind these measures.

Other branches of government, such as the legislature, have also continued to narrow the window of opportunity for civil society organisations and other actors to participate in the feedback process for bills. The main laws debated and approved by the National Assembly continue to be bills classified as urgent in economic matters. This legal mechanism, protected by Article 140 of the [Constitution](#) and under the exclusive responsibility of the President, allows a bill to be debated and approved in 30 days – a fraction of the time it normally takes for a law to be processed. Due to this accelerated process, the ability of social organisations and citizens to influence these laws is minimal. For example, in the debate on the LOTS, only

representatives of [six social organisations](#) appeared, while 13 of those who appeared were ministers or government officials and representatives of productive trade associations. Written contributions were also received from several CSOs, but it is unclear to what extent these contributions were incorporated into the final text of the bill.

## 5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Since mid-2025, civil society in the country, especially indigenous and environmental organisations, has achieved a high level of visibility in public discourse. However, due to their opposition to the national government, many of them have received negative media coverage and have been subjected to stigmatising discourse by elected officials.

In July, before the presentation of the Social Transparency Law, President Noboa anticipated that the bill [was justified](#) by the fact that foundations are used to commit money laundering, finance "narco-terrorist" organisations and receive funds from abroad to destabilise the country. In addition, National Assembly President Niels Olsen also referred to organisations that are receiving foreign funding to "[heat up the streets](#)". This has delegitimised the right to protest in the country and sets a dangerous precedent that seeks to associate social organisations with criminal organisations declared as military targets.

This narrative resurfaced during the national strike in September-October. Protesters, especially those associated with environmental rights organisations and the indigenous movement, were labelled [terrorists](#) by national government authorities, who accused them of having links to transnational criminal organisations such as the [Tren de Aragua](#). President Noboa also claimed – without any evidence – that the demonstrations were being financed by [illegal mining](#).

## 6. Access to a secure digital environment

The Ecuadorian state has made clear its intentions to control – directly or indirectly – the digital environment, mainly private communication channels and social networks. In the [absence of an adequate regulatory framework](#) to protect fundamental digital freedoms and promote security in cyberspace, coupled with the [state of emergency](#) that suspends the right to inviolability of correspondence in different provinces of the country, there have been several incidents in the last six months that demonstrate unfavourable conditions for a secure digital environment in Ecuador.

At the end of August, the Indigenous and Peasant Movement of Cotopaxi denounced the existence of [surveillance operations](#) against Leonidas Iza, an indigenous leader and former president of CONAIE. Among the investigations carried out by members of the indigenous community of San Ignacio, an alleged network of police agents infiltrating instant messaging groups for journalists was uncovered. Given the government's response to [downplay these findings](#), there are fears that the Ecuadorian state will continue to restrict the free exercise of freedom of expression, the right to privacy and the inviolability of communications through this type of covert action.

On 28 September, during the national strike, the Regional Foundation for Human Rights Advisory Services (INREDH) denounced the [blocking](#) of internet and mobile phone signals in the cities of Ibarra and Otavalo (in the province of Imbabura, the main focus of the protests);

there were even reports [of power cuts](#) in the city of Peguche, also in this province. Journalists and members of social organisations accused the national government of carrying out these blockades through the use of military-owned signal inhibitors with the aim of preventing community media from covering the arrival of a convoy of the Armed Forces and the National Police in the province of Imbabura.

On social media, there have been reports of instances of journalists being discredited and an increase in the number of disinformation campaigns surrounding social and political events of great importance. In August and September, journalist [Xavier Bonilla](#) and the media outlet [Diario Expreso](#) were victims of smear campaigns orchestrated by users or digital media outlets affiliated with the national government as a result of their critical stance on the presidential administration. On the other hand, during the [national strike](#) and the "[\(We are all in this together\) electoral campaign](#)" for the Popular Consultation and Referendum in November, there was a high volume of viral posts aimed at spreading false narratives.

## Challenges and Opportunities

With the entry into force of the Organic Law on Social Transparency and its regulations, it is necessary to monitor its application and the consequences it could have for civil society organisations, especially those at the local level. In addition, in the coming months, the situation of organisations defending nature and indigenous rights must be monitored with particular attention. Given the precedent set during the 2025 national strike and the state's response to these protests, there is a possibility that the Ecuadorian state will use national security concerns to repress opposition from these sectors.

Finally, the normalisation of states of emergency and the militarisation of public order represent a persistent threat to democracy and the full enjoyment of fundamental civil liberties, which are protected by international human rights instruments.



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