



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Ecuador

March 2026

Context

This snapshot covers events from the period 01/01/2026 to 31/03/2026.

The first three months of 2026 have been characterised by an increase in attempts by the Ecuadorian State to control the media narrative and suppress dissent from civil society organisations critical of the presidential administration. Unlike what was observed in previous months, these actions are not driven exclusively by public order arguments related to the ongoing security crisis facing the country.

Regarding the relationship between the national government and the media, concerns have emerged about the effective degree of independence enjoyed by other branches and institutions of the State relative to the Presidency. Under a narrative by sectors aligned with the ruling party that the media provide disproportionately negative coverage of President Daniel Noboa's government and its security policy, the long-established outlets *Diario Expreso* and *Diario Extra* have been subjected to [administrative harassment](#) by the private sector regulatory body. Both outlets, controlled by the same company, have a history of disputes with authorities of the [national government](#) and have stated that the attacks are an attempt to bend their editorial line. On the part of the [National Assembly](#) there have also been attempts to control the media narrative through legislation.

As a result of these developments, Ecuador has been categorised as a country with “high restriction” on freedom of expression by the [Chapultepec Index of Freedom of Expression and the Press](#).

On the other hand, the executive and legislative branches have continued attempting to use laws classified as “economic emergency” measures¹ to include provisions that hinder the work of environmental protection organisations in territories granted to extractive projects. Given that [mining](#) has once again become a key part of the Ecuadorian government's economic policy for 2026, it is expected that this year will see the approval of several laws aimed at simplifying the concession-granting process, including environmental permits and prior community consultation, and that protect the interests of foreign mining companies above the concerns of local communities.

Even within this context, it remains essential to continue monitoring the actions carried out by the State to combat organised crime, and how these could be used to the detriment of the enabling environment for civil society. With the presentation of the [Águila Plan](#) — the new security strategy promoted by President Noboa — the notion that the State should maintain a punitive approach to addressing the problem has been reinforced, which has previously led to the repression of peaceful protest, the suspension of freedom of assembly and the inviolability of correspondence, among other rights.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental civic freedoms

Over the past three months there have been significant setbacks regarding the exercise of freedom of expression in Ecuador. Most notably, the case of the company *Gráficos Nacionales S.A. (Granasa)* and the attempts by state institutions to undermine the editorial independence of its outlets *Diario Expreso* and *Diario Extra*.

¹ Legal mechanism that allows the President of the Republic to submit legislative proposals addressing economic matters, which must be subjected to a prioritised and temporarily simplified process of debate and resolution.

In late December and early January, Granasa brought to public attention the [decision of the Superintendency of Companies](#) (Supercias), the regulatory body for the private business sector, to reverse a share transfer made in 2020 between Veranera S.A. and Ingrid Martínez Leísker for 40% of Granasa's total share package. Despite the existence of a publicly accessible document on the Supercias' information portal confirming this share transfer, the institution has argued that its reversal is justified by the impossibility of establishing the traceability of the transaction. As Veranera S.A. has been in liquidation proceedings since 2020, Ingrid Martínez Leísker's 40% stake has passed into the hands of a liquidator appointed by the Supercias, who has the capacity to transfer these shares to other natural or legal persons.

In addition to this measure, on 18 February 2026 Granasa announced that it had been placed under intervention by the Supercias at the request of the state-owned company Inmobiliar, which is currently under the administration of the Presidency of the Republic. The intervention requested by Inmobiliar, a minority shareholder of Granasa, was justified on the grounds of the company's refusal to provide access to sensitive information that — according to Granasa's bylaws — can only be granted to majority shareholders, provided that doing so does not aim to harm the company. Unusually, Supercias regulations only allow such interventions upon the justified request of shareholders holding more than 10% of the total share package. [Galo Martínez Leísker](#), president of Granasa, has denounced these actions as a campaign to intimidate the work of Diario Expreso and Diario Extra, whose editorial line has been critical of President Daniel Noboa's administration.

The exercise of disproportionate measures against an independent media outlet is also compounded by the [attempt made](#) in mid-January by a legislator from the ruling party's bloc, through a legal reform, to grant judges the authority to determine what constitutes expressions “of discredit or dishonour” against public officials. It is worth noting that Article 396 of the Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code considers the utterance of such expressions a criminal offence. This bill was shelved by legislative authorities for ["political reasons"](#).

Finally, there have also been cases such as the decision of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces to [restrict press accreditation](#) at official military events based on the editorial line of the applying outlet and its stance towards the constitutional role of the Armed Forces, and the public statements of the Secretary-General of Public Administration Cynthia Gellibert, who declared herself an ["enemy of the media"](#).

2. Favourable legal framework for civil society actors

During the period under review, there have been no significant changes to the legal framework for civil society organisations, while the effects of the application of the [Organic Law on Social Transparency](#) and its [general regulations](#) have yet to materialise.

However, various sectors have expressed concern over the approval of the [Organic Law for the Strengthening of the Strategic Sectors of Mining and Energy](#), on the grounds that it could jeopardise citizen participation in territories where extractive projects are being developed. On 26 February 2026, the National Assembly approved this reform to the [Mining Law \(2009\)](#) with the objective of “strengthening the operational performance of the strategic sectors of mining and energy”. However, civil society organisations such as the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador ([CONAIE](#)) y [Amazon Frontlines](#) have denounced that Article 7 of the new law could, in practice, eliminate the requirement to carry out free, prior and informed consultation processes with communities located in the areas of influence of potential mining projects.

Prior to the entry into force of this law, the ministry responsible for mining policy was required to authorise the transition between the sub-phases of initial exploration and advanced exploration of a concession, following verification of compliance with technical and environmental parameters, including the results of prior consultation. Under the new regulations, this transition between sub-phases is to be automated, which introduces uncertainty as to when the consultation process would take place and whether it would effectively occur before environmental harm was caused to communities. Given that Articles 57 and 398 of the [Constitution](#) — which recognise the right of communities to be consulted prior to the execution of extractive projects — remain unaltered, civil society organisations have filed [legal actions before the Constitutional Court](#), requesting the suspension of the application of this new law.

In the coming months, the Constitutional Court will need to admit and rule on the petitions filed by civil society, while there is also the possibility that the Executive branch may issue new regulations to the Mining Law clarifying the scope of application of the reforms introduced through the new law.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

The Organic Law on Social Transparency remains in force, which, through an amendment to the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Crimes, allows for the freezing of funds as a precautionary measure in response to reports of “suspicious transactions” carried out by civil society organisations in the national financial system. In 2025, this law was used to justify the freezing of organisational accounts and accounts of individuals affiliated with organisations such as Fundación Pachamama, Yasunidos and Alianza Ceibo during the national strike of September 2025.

No new cases of fund freezes have been reported in the first months of 2026. Furthermore, there is no publicly available information to confirm the progress of the investigations [initiated in September 2025](#) by the Attorney General’s Office against social leaders and activists for the alleged crime of illicit enrichment. In the face of this uncertain scenario, and given the existing challenges in securing funding sources, civil society organisations in Ecuador remain vigilant against any additional attempts by the Ecuadorian State to obstruct access to economic and non-economic resources.

4. Open and responsive State

Civil society organisations have succeeded in filing legal challenges before the Constitutional Court in response to actions by the national government and recently adopted legislation.

On 3 February 2026, the Constitutional Court resolved to admit four separate public actions of unconstitutionality against the Organic Law on Social Transparency, which — due to the number of petitions filed — were consolidated into a single case ([118-25-IN](#)). Among the extensive list of petitioners, notable representatives include organisations working in diverse fields such as the Federation of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations of Azuay, the Federation of Neighbourhoods of Quito, the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, *Front Line Defenders*, among others. This demonstrates that, despite the ongoing hostility from the national government, various sectors of Ecuadorian civil society have joined forces in an attempt to suspend the application of a law with potentially negative effects on the enabling environment. The actions filed argue that the law violates the rights to freedom of association, legal certainty and due process.

Civil society has also succeeded in having the Constitutional Court recognise the responsibility of the Ecuadorian State for the commission of enforced disappearances. This recognition falls within the so-called “[Las Malvinas Case](#)”, which arose following the disappearance and subsequent death of four minors in a peripheral area of the city of Guayaquil. On 8 December 2024, the minors were detained by a military patrol and their whereabouts remained unknown until, sixteen days later, their bodies were found burnt and bearing signs of torture near a military base on the outskirts of the city.

Through ruling [1732-25-EP/26](#), issued on 5 March 2026, the Court determined the responsibility of the Ecuadorian State for the enforced disappearance of the minors and for having restricted access to key information about their detention by members of the Armed Forces. This decision would not have been possible without the sustained support of civil society organisations, particularly the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, one of the parties to the habeas corpus action that gave rise to the ruling, as well as other human rights organisations that provided support to the victims’ families.

5. Public culture and discourses favourable towards civil society

The Ecuadorian State continues to consolidate negative discursive lines against civil society and journalists, as has been reported in previous months.

In late January 2026, the Secretary of Public Administration and [senior official of President Daniel Noboa](#), Cynthia Gellibert, made comments that raised concerns about the national government’s growing intolerance of critical public opinion. In a *podcast* alongside another cabinet minister, Gellibert declared herself an “[enemy of the media](#)”, arguing that the media only seek to obtain the answers they expect from interviews with public officials. These comments, which for Gellibert only amounted to “[a reflection on objectivity in the media](#)”, were widely criticised.

On the other hand, cases have also been documented at the subnational level in which the media have been used to amplify negative narratives against the press and civil society organisations.

In an interview given to a local television channel on 18 March 2026, the mayor of Cotacachi (Imbabura province) used the expression “[GDOs of communication](#)” to refer to reports that according to his account had been created by certain media outlets solely to generate interactions on social networks. These reports referred to an alleged decision linked to a request by the Union of Peasant Organisations of Cotacachi to ban the presence of the Ecuadorian National Police and the Ecuadorian Armed Forces at future local festivities, in response to events during the national strike of September 2025. In this context, the use of the term “GDO”, an abbreviation of “Organised Crime Group” in Spanish, officially employed by the Ecuadorian government to refer to criminal structures responsible for the current violence crisis, is significant, as it applies a label associated with organised crime to the realm of journalistic practice and civil society action.

Finally, and in continuity with the stigmatising coverage carried out by this outlet in [2025](#) following the cessation of operations of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the media outlet owned by the provincial government of Pichincha published a [new decontextualised article](#) on the so-called “gringo aid” given to certain civil society organisations. In this report, the outlet referred to “substantial resources” disbursed to organisations such as Fundamedios, which it described as “an NGO that defends certain

journalists and media”. The article also criticises other organisations such as *Participación Ciudadana* and Fundación Pachamama, reiterating (and in line with the narrative promoted by the government of then-President Rafael Correa) that this organisation was shut down for having led “a violent protest” that threatened public order.

The article fails to note that the majority of the disbursements mentioned correspond to commitments previously made under projects approved in past years, which form part of the 5,341 contracts that were [publicly cancelled](#) by USAID following the cessation of its operations.

6. Access to a safe digital environment

Ecuador continues to be a country where the regulatory framework has not provided full guarantees for access to a safe digital environment. Furthermore, under Executive Decree 311 of 28 February 2026, the suspension of the right to inviolability of physical and digital correspondence remains in force in nine provinces (including Guayas, Pichincha and Manabí, which are the three most populous in the country), and in two cantons of the provinces of Cotopaxi and Bolívar.

Following the Constitutional Court ruling on the Las Malvinas Case, the company Golden Social Suite, dedicated to monitoring and analysing digital discussion, produced a report that found that 26% of the debate on social networks was promoted by *bots*, with X being the social network with the highest incidence of these actors (34.8% of the discussion was promoted by *bots*). Between 10 and 12 March, these accounts were responsible for [spreading messages accusing](#) the Court of not politically protecting the opposition party *Revolución Ciudadana*. Despite the fact that the case of the disappeared and murdered minors was generally not mentioned explicitly, the discursive line was that this ruling was not relevant, and that instead, the case of alleged irregular financing of the political party’s electoral campaigns should have been addressed.

However, in recent months there have been regulatory initiatives to address matters related to this principle. On 10 February 2026 the National Assembly approved the [Organic Law for the Strengthening of Cybersecurity](#), which granted the lead body for digital transformation the authority to design the National Cybersecurity Policy in cooperation with the public and private sectors and civil society. In addition, the law requires the public sector and digital service providers to report digital security incidents to the lead body for digital transformation (Ministry of Telecommunications), and instructs the Ministry of Education to implement policies aimed at promoting digital education and the protection of children and adolescents in digital environments. There is expectation as to whether the proposed National Policy will include the establishment of laws and institutional mechanisms to ensure privacy and free, unrestricted access to the internet.

Regarding this last matter, the legislature is currently considering the [Amending Bill to the Code on Children and Adolescents to Reinforce the Right to Dignity, Reputation, Honour and Image of Children and Adolescents](#). This bill seeks to prohibit children under the age of 15 from accessing social networks; however, it has received comments from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) indicating that the bill could [encourage](#) minors to access less regulated digital spaces.

Finally, in a key ruling by the Constitutional Court ([2032-20-JP/25](#)), it was determined that the blocking of other users by social media profiles belonging to public institutions constitutes a violation of the right to freedom of expression. This decision arose from a complaint filed by a citizen against the local government of the city of Lago Agrio for preventing him from posting

comments on publications made by the Facebook account belonging to the city's mayor's office.

Challenges and opportunities

The ongoing recourse to states of exception and the militarisation of public security continue to be latent risks to constitutional and democratic order.

Disregard for freedom of expression has emerged as one of the main concerns to monitor in 2026. Faced with a national government that is increasingly unreceptive to public criticism, it is necessary to closely monitor cases such as that of Granasa and of other media outlets that could also be subject to administrative and judicial actions used as a pretext to influence their editorial line.

On the other hand, there is expectation as to whether the approval of the Organic Law for the Strengthening of Cybersecurity will lead to the design of public policies that address the significant regulatory gaps that exist regarding personal data protection, the privacy of communications, and the establishment of conditions for a safe digital environment.

Finally, owing to recent successful cases of filing and acceptance of legal challenges before the Constitutional Court, there is a window of opportunity to establish mechanisms that enable civil society to file future joint petitions, drafted with meticulous legal rigour.



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