



Country Report: The Republic of Ecuador

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Abstract

These four country reports, Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador, covered the current popular and official climate between the country and the United States, important cultural sensitivities and economic challenges facing the country.¹ Each report analyzed how the U.S. is portrayed in the national media, the official stance and policies toward the U.S. The economy section stands separate from the political and social, covering the national economy, trade, and debt, if it poses an obstacle for the nation. Each report builds upon media reports, Congressional briefings, State Department Press Releases, and international organization's documents.

Ecuador, under Correa, continues its move away from US-Ecuadorian relations with diplomatic maneuvers and trade negotiations. Human rights agencies worry that Correa's current path leads to a greater oppression of the media. US-Ecuadorian relations remain weak and tense, with no predicted improvement in the near future.

¹ The current climate referred to the public perception and attitude toward the United States and Americans, in the government and society.

I. Introduction

The Republic of Ecuador, a traditional ally of the United States, turned away from its relationship with the US during the Administration of President Rafael Correa. Traditionally, US relations with Latin America reflect a series of historical events that lead to current changes in relations, but this is not the case for Correa's Ecuador. During Correa's presidency Ecuador shifted drastically away from US policy. Correa demonstrated a strong turn away from US relations when he offered Assange Asylum in Ecuador and pensively thought of offering asylum to Snowden. Despite the decidedly negative view Correa has of the US, Ecuador is a key partner in transshipping and counter-narcotic efforts. Ecuador plays an integral economic role as the 11th largest supplier of oil for the US, servicing mainly the West Coast. Correa's recent denouncement of a bilateral trade agreement under the US's Andean Trade Preferences Act demonstrates Correa's desire to lead Ecuador away from "US imperialism." Future relations with Ecuador remain questionable due to Correa's continued efforts to lessen US presence in Ecuador.

II. Background

Ecuador traditionally relies on its oil exports or other nations paying in lieu of exploiting Rainforests.² In recent years, Ecuador's Correa received payments for not excavating an oil field under a National Park. The 1830s marked a period of transition from early independence under Gran Colombia into a separate nation-state.³ However, Ecuador's infancy began with territorial disputes and losses to Peru as well as economic deterioration. In the year 1972, Ecuador moved away from agricultural exportation and moved forward with the oil industry. Despite Ecuador's new energy independence, the economy due to volatile oil prices fell into disarray. By 1992, Ecuador gave land ownership of 2.5 million acres in the Amazon to indigenous people and left OPEC; both moves went against the regional trends but helped to stabilize Ecuadorian society.⁴

In the past two decades, Ecuador experienced a series of tumultuous events that would lead up to Correa's three back-to-back elections. Beginning with the 1999 financial crisis, Ecuador's President Jamil Mahuad Witt "violated constitutional and legal norms with the aim of favoring the owners, managers, officers or directors of private banks," when he decreed a state of emergency and a banking holiday, considered later as a crime of "bank embezzlement."⁵ By 2000, the Ecuadorian army forced Mahuad out of power and Vice President Gustavo Noboa took over the Presidency. Noboa quickly adopted the US Dollar as Ecuador's official currency to stave off depression, but the 2002 indigenous protests of the oil industry brought the economy to

² Vidal, John. "World pays Ecuador not to extract oil from rainforest." *The Guardian*, December 30, 2011, sec. Amazon Rainforest.

³BBC. "Ecuador timeline." BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1212826.stm> (accessed May 2, 2014).

⁴ BBC. "Ecuador timeline." BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1212826.stm> (accessed May 2, 2014).

⁵ Radin, Globe Staff. "DEPOSED ECUADOR LEADER DEFENDS DECISIONS THAT LED TO CHARGES." *The Boston Globe*, July 19, 2000.

a standstill.⁶ Despite stability efforts, Ecuador in March 2006 cancelled a key contract agreement with a US oil firm Occidental Petroleum.⁷ In 2006, Rafael Correa won his first of three elections and transformed Ecuador and its relations with the region and the US.

III. Politics

A. 2008 Constitution

Correa's election prompts a period of transformation in Ecuador, starting with the 2007 affirmative referendum to rewrite the constitution. Under the new constitution, Correa can run for the office and hold that position through elections for up to 10 years. Correa claimed the affirmative vote for the 2008 constitution, a confirmation of a "citizens' revolution" and Correa's "21st-century socialism."⁸ Key points in the 2008 constitution are:⁹

Political

1. Gives the president the authority to abolish congress once each term, but this act would trigger a presidential election
2. allows two consecutive four-year Presidential terms (Correa has the option to stay in power until 2017)
3. gives an appointed citizens' council oversight

Social

4. allows civil unions for gay couples
5. asserts a right to food
6. states drug consumption is a health problem not a crime
7. protects nature

Economics

8. authorizes the state to maintain price stability (assurance to private business that the state will not nationalize the economy)
9. prohibits the state from yielding jurisdiction to an external sources

B. US-Ecuadorian Relations

In the realm of US-Ecuadorian relations, these key points will pose problems, especially in the political points listed that give Correa a stronger presence. Within the social sphere, the decriminalization of drug consumption will destabilize US-Colombian-Ecuadorian anti-narco-trafficking efforts. A final disrupting point of the new constitution deals with external ownership

⁶BBC. "Ecuador timeline." BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1212826.stm> (accessed May 2, 2014).

⁷ BBC, "Ecuador oil move prompts US ire," May 6, 2006.

⁸ Kuffner, Stephan, and Joshua Partlow. "Voters in Ecuador Approve Constitution; New Document Would Enhance Presidential Powers, Allow Consecutive Terms." *The Washington Post*, September 29, 2008, sec. The World.

⁹ *The Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador*. Quito: The Republic of Ecuador, 2008.

of resources. Essentially, this final point aims to eliminate external ownership of natural resources that give foreign firms political power within Ecuador. The nature of the 2008 constitution poses a threat to US-Ecuadorian relations due to the man holding the reins, Correa, who continues to label the US as an imperial power and aims to block any US efforts in Ecuador.

Recent US relations with Correa mirror the nature of the new constitution, a continuous struggle against constantly changing laws and policies. In 2008 US efforts to improve diplomatic relations ended in the 2011 expulsion of the US ambassador, Correa named him persona non grata.¹⁰ Correa has expelled various State Department staffers, World Bank workers, and private firm staffers.¹¹ Many of these expulsions link directly back to the release of cables in the WikiLeaks scandal. After September 2011, Ecuador sent a new ambassador and received the US ambassador in May 2012.¹²

Relations soured again when Ecuador extended asylum to WikiLeaks' Assange and Edward Snowden applied for asylum after the NSA scandal.¹³ Correa's acceptance of Assange personifies Correa's effort to diminish claims that Correa does not respect freedom of expression. Consequently, the US still has a political presence, as demonstrated by Correa's reaction to Vice President Joe Biden's speech asking for Correa to deny Snowden's application. Correa's response, citing that Snowden had to be on Ecuadorian soil to be accepted, could be seen as a Correa's effort to not completely sour US-Ecuadorian relations.¹⁴

Recently, the US has executed a policy of withdrawal, characterized by the 2014 withdrawal of USAID after the agency failed to reach an agreement with its Ecuadorian counterpart.¹⁵ Obama previously attempted to ease tensions between the US and Ecuador in 2010, but Obama turned away from intense efforts after former Secretary of State Clinton's visit failed to smooth over tensions. In response to the apparent US resource withdrawal, Correa fired various military leaders who had close connections to their US counterparts. This came on the tail of Correa expelling 20 Defense Department employees from the US embassy.¹⁶ Since the death of Venezuelan President Chavez, power in ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our

¹⁰ U.S. Department of State. "U.S. Relations With Ecuador." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35761.htm> (accessed March 1, 2014).

¹¹ Beittel, June. *Ecuador: Political and Economic Conditions and US Relations*. Washington DC: Congressional Research Services, 2013.

¹² U.S. Department of State. "U.S. Relations With Ecuador." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35761.htm> (accessed March 1, 2014).

¹³ Beittel, June. *Ecuador: Political and Economic Conditions and US Relations*. Washington DC: Congressional Research Services, 2013.

¹⁴ William Neuman, "Ecuador Leader Says Biden Called Him About Snowden," *New York Times*, June 30, 2013; William Neuman, "Snowden's Fate Is Up To Russia, Ecuador Says," *New York Times*, July 1, 2013.

¹⁵ Shifter, Michael. "U.S. Learning to Live With Strained Ecuador Ties." *World Political Review*.

¹⁶ Solano, Gonzalo. "Ecuador orders US military group to leave." *AP Online*, April 25, 2014.

America) shifted to Correa and in return Correa increased his efforts to criticize the US. With this shift in ALBA and the region, Obama spent less time and resources to smooth over tense relations with Ecuador.

C. Correa and Ecuadorian Media

Correa's treatment of national media prompted an outcry from human rights and international media organizations. Under the 2008 constitution, the citizens are guaranteed the right to expression, but Article 18.1 allows for the government to undermine this right if necessary.¹⁷ 2013 law and presidential effort to nationalize various private media holdings pose a threat to freedom of speech due to Correa's nationalization of key media outlets that were previously critical of Correa.¹⁸ Media lynching under Correa's new law is any "disseminating information with the purpose of "undermining the prestige" or "reducing credibility" of a person or legal entity."¹⁹ Before 2013, Correa confiscated various media outlets claiming the private ownership/control of media distorts the news and poses a threat to the "citizens' revolution."²⁰ Correa attempted to soften the international outcry with his acceptance of Assange, but the law remains in place.

D. US-Ecuadorian Counternarcotic Efforts

The realm of counternarcotic operations, an important joint effort between the US, Colombia, and Ecuador, presents another reversal under Correa. Ecuador continues successful internal counternarcotic efforts with 2012 cocaine seizures amounting to 21.4 metric tons, roughly equal to 2011 seizures.²¹ Despite Correa's unilateral success, his 2009 refusal to renew the U.S. Forward Operating Location (FOL) at Manta, a key base in the regional antidrug surveillance and interdiction effort, weakened joint efforts in the region.²² Correa submitted a formal complaint in 2008 with the International Court of Justice declaring Colombia's herbicide spraying on their shared borders as a violation of international borders.²³ In September 2013,

¹⁷ *Assessment of Media Development in Ecuador -2011*. Quito: UNESCO: The International Programme for the Development of Communication, 2011, 25.

¹⁸ Brian Ellsworth and Alexandra Valencia, "Ecuador Backing for Snowden Spurs Criticism of Correa Media Law," *Reuters*, June 27, 2013.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Ecuador: End Assault on Free Speech," Press Release, June 17, 2013; Chris Kraul and Pablo Jaramillo Viteri, "Granting Snowden Asylum Could Help and Hurt Ecuador's Leader," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2013.

²⁰ *Assessment of Media Development in Ecuador -2011*. Quito: UNESCO: The International Programme for the Development of Communication, 2011

²¹ U.S. Department of State, *2013 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)*, March 2013.

²² The FOL, operates on a coastal air base in Manta, Ecuador, which was integral for regional counterdrug operations and enabled U.S. forces to patrol the Pacific Ocean efficiently. Following Correa's campaign promise to decrease US regional presence, Correa did not renew the 10-year lease (1999-2009). July 2009 marks the last U.S. mission flown from Manta.

²³ "Aerial Herbicide Spraying (Ecuador v. Colombia) Case removed from the Court's List at the request of the Republic of Ecuador," ICJ, September 17, 2013.

Ecuador requested that the case be dropped from the court agenda after both parties signed an agreement.^{24 25} Ecuador allowed for US supported reforms, aimed at weakening the grip of cartels, in sectors like judicial reform, alternative development of economic opportunities, and training Ecuador's National Antinarcotics Police.²⁶ In a gambit to break clean from US dependence, Correa denied any counternarcotics and humanitarian aid in 2012.²⁷ Ecuador still participates bilateral and multilateral efforts, such as regularly attending the U.S.-sponsored Multilateral Counterdrug Summit.²⁸

IV. Economics

A. Ecuador and Oil

Ecuador's oil revenues account for 30-40% of government revenues, making oil its greatest bargaining tool.²⁹ Correa's efforts to control the oil industry forced various US-based or US-linked firms to back out of Ecuador, pushing more of the production burden upon the inadequately invested state controlled firm.³⁰ As a result of soured relations with the US firms, Ecuador executed a joint venture with Venezuela that now accounts for 73% of Ecuador's oil production.³¹

The economy of Ecuador, predominantly based upon its oil reserves, continues to struggle after the 2008 global recession. In 2009, Ecuador's GDP growth rate plummeted to 0.6%, bounced back to 7.8% in 2012 only to drop to 5.1% in 2013.³² Despite the fluctuations in growth rates, the prosperity is dispersed equally, as demonstrated by the GINI coefficient's drop³³ and a doubling in social program spending.³⁴ As of April 6th, 2014, Ecuador committed to 305 million USD loans for various projects with the World Bank, International Development Association,

²⁴ The agreement stipulates that Colombia must pay 15 million dollars in compensation and Colombia will not spray the 10 km wide border. However the 10 km border may diminish to 2 km within two years. Correa firmly believes that this agreement will not prevent spraying or solve the dispute centered on counternarcotic methods. Despite the lack of faith in the agreement, the signing will strengthen Ecuadorian-Colombian relations.

²⁵ Meléndez, Angela. "Ecuador-Colombia Settlement Won't End Spraying." *Interpress Service*, .

²⁶ *INCSR*, 2013 op cit.

²⁷ *INCSR*, 2013 op cit.

²⁸ *INCSR*, 2013 op cit.

²⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Background Note: Ecuador*, March 8, 2012.

³⁰ Beittel, June. *Ecuador: Political and Economic Conditions and US Relations*. Washington DC: Congressional Research Services, 2013.

³¹ US Energy Information Administration. "Ecuador." . <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=ec> (accessed May 4, 2014).

³² The World Bank. "Ecuador." Overview. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ecuador/overview> (accessed May 4, 2014).

³³ The GINI coefficient dropped from 54 to 48 within the time period of 2006 up to 2012.

³⁴ The World Bank. "Ecuador." Overview. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ecuador/overview> (accessed May 4, 2014).

and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The last commitment Ecuador made only amounted to 2 million USD in 2012.³⁵ Ecuador's absence in the international bonds and lending markets originated from its defaulting on 3.2 billion USD in debt in December 2008.³⁶ Since 2008, Ecuador has bought back two maturing bonds and diminished the debt to 288 million USD.³⁷ Ecuador's public debt amounts to 23.2% of its GDP, but recent efforts to bring in Citigroup, and Credit Suisse enhance Ecuador's viability on the market.³⁸ Investors and Ecuadorian officials claim that Ecuador will return to the bonds market as early as May or June of 2014. Correa's April 6th promise to sell 700 million USD will be the first sale since 2008.³⁹

B. US-Ecuador Economic Relations

US-Ecuadorian economic relations have weakened under Correa while Chinese-Ecuadorian economic relations flourished. Ecuador maintains trading relations with the US based on oil, but the Chinese capitalized on the 2008 default by trading its economic aid for Ecuadorian oil and goods.⁴⁰ This agreement with China also requires Ecuador to "invest a share of the loaned amount in projects involving Chinese companies."⁴¹ Both stipulations pull Ecuador closer to China economically, but without political closeness.

Within the region, Ecuador maintains close economic and political ties with the ALBA states and further distances itself from the US. The 2006 efforts to sign an FTA between the US, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia failed when Ecuador withdrew and began courting MERCOSUR for membership.⁴² Ecuador continues to accept US aid, but refuses to improve economic or political relations due to the US's perceived imperial nature that is believed to pose a threat to Ecuador's sovereignty.⁴³ Correa's distrust or distaste for the US is reflected in his sudden denouncement of the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA) established in 1999 that gave Ecuador, among others, trade preferences in return for counternarcotic operations. The ATPA expired in July 2013 after Correa ceased his campaign to renew the agreement, at the same time

³⁵ The World Bank. "Ecuador." Overview. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ecuador/overview> (accessed May 4, 2014).

³⁶ Magee, Joan. "After default, Ecuador preps return to market: sources." *Reuters*, April 2, 2014.

³⁷ Magee, Joan. "After default, Ecuador preps return to market: sources." *Reuters*, April 2, 2014.

³⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. "Ecuador." Central Intelligence Agency. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ec.html> (accessed February 1, 2014).

³⁹ *Reuters*, "Ecuador says to issue some \$700 mln in bonds in 2014," April 6, 2014.

⁴⁰ *Reuters*, "Ecuador says to issue some \$700 mln in bonds in 2014," April 6, 2014.

⁴¹ US Energy Information Administration. "Ecuador." . <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=ec> (accessed May 4, 2014).

⁴² Beittel, June. *Ecuador: Political and Economic Conditions and US Relations*. Washington DC: Congressional Research Services, 2013.

⁴³ Beittel, June.

as Snowden submitted his application for asylum.⁴⁴ US-Ecuadorian trade relations will operate without ATPA, but the effect the expiration has upon counternarcotic efforts will be key in future discussions with Ecuador.

V. Society

A. Identity and Governance

Ecuador's population reflects a regional mestizo culture with 71.9% identifying as mestizo. Only 14% identify as indigenous, but this percentage only represents those who actively participate within the indigenous community.⁴⁵ Ecuadorians, like their regional counterparts,⁴⁶ will consider themselves mestizo whether or not they have indigenous parents. Despite recent revivals of indigenous heritage and pride, the identity of being indigenous still is synonymous with laziness, poverty, or backwardness.⁴⁷ Unlike other Latin American nations, Ecuador named Quechua and Shuar as official intercultural languages, due to the low literacy and speaking capabilities among the indigenous groups.⁴⁸ Ecuador's mountainous terrain hinders many efforts to reach and provide social works to the indigenous communities. Under Correa, the Ecuadorian government improved its relations with the indigenous communities and supported the indigenous community's lawsuit against Chevron. Correa will continue championing indigenous rights against "US imperialism" and building large blocks of support within the minority communities.

B. US-Ecuadorian Media Relations

Despite Correa's best efforts to sway the population towards an anti-US mindset, Ecuadorians welcome US tourists and some US investment. Ecuadorian media demonstrate a leaning towards Venezuela with a daily article on the supposed American plan to destabilize the Maduro government.⁴⁹ One of Ecuador's leading newspapers in Quito, *Hoy*, published an article per two days updating the Ecuadorian public about the US-Venezuelan scandal. The majority of these updates rely heavily on Venezuelan quotes and briefly cover the US response.⁵⁰ In another

⁴⁴ Alexandra Valencia and Brian Ellsworth, "Ecuador Offers U.S. Rights Aid, Waives Trade Benefits," *Reuters*, June 27, 2013; Rory Carroll, "Ecuador Breaks U.S. Trade Pact to Thwart 'Blackmail' over Snowden Asylum," *The Guardian*, June 27, 2013.

⁴⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. "Ecuador." Central Intelligence Agency.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ec.html> (accessed February 1, 2014).

⁴⁶ Ecuador is regionally and culturally linked to Colombia and Venezuela. All three nations gained independence under the Gran Colombia flag.

⁴⁷ This is apparent throughout Latin America when issues of welfare targets poor immigrants and indigenous. Ecuador's fairly high percentage of self-identified indigenous is not synonymous with ready acceptance into mainstream society.

⁴⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. "Ecuador." Central Intelligence Agency.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ec.html> (accessed February 1, 2014).

⁴⁹ *Hoy*, "Maduro: EEUU sería el más perjudicado si sanciona a Venezuela," March 19, 2014.

⁵⁰ *Hoy*, "Maduro: EEUU sería el más perjudicado si sanciona a Venezuela," March 19, 2014.

segment of US news, *La Hora* claims that the firearm violence disproportionately affects Hispanics in the US.⁵¹ Both cases follow Correa's media policy of criticizing the US without being outright antagonistic. Correa continues to display a strong influence within the Ecuadorian media, a vestige of Correa's attempt to nationalize or heavily restrain Ecuador's media.

C. US-Ecuadorian Social Relations

The US loses societal support when big US oil firms, like Chevron, drill and pollute patrimonial lands. US relations with the Ecuadorian public are further soured by the US's continued support of Colombia's herbicide spraying that spreads over to Ecuador's territory.⁵² With these points in mind, the US will need to adapt its outreach efforts to balance out the negatives that come from oil firms and herbicide spraying. Declaring the support for Ecuador's widely popular unilateral counternarcotic efforts is a possible solution to improving the US image amongst the Ecuadorian population. The US should also support the Colombian-Ecuadorian agreement on herbicide spraying near the border. As both sides demonstrate a skeptical outlook on the agreement, the US must aid in the enforcement of the herbicide spraying agreement. Another solution could be sponsoring more cultural exchange programs that give Ecuadorian students the chance to travel, live, and study in the US. With the pool of privately owned media outlets shrinking, the Ecuadorians will not have access to viewpoints outside of Correa's anti-US propaganda, endangering the US's image.

⁵¹ LA HORA. "violencia con armas de fuego afecta más a hispanos, según estudio." . http://www.lahora.com.ec/index.php/noticias/show/1101667033/-1/EEUU%3A_violencia_con_armas_de_fuego_afecta_m%C3%A1s_a_hispanos,_seg%C3%BA_n_estudio.html \I".U2ckuPldWMM (accessed April 30, 2014).

⁵²"Aerial Herbicide Spraying (Ecuador v. Colombia) Case removed from the Court's List at the request of the Republic of Ecuador," ICJ, September 17, 2013.

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