

Triple Trouble:

Geopolitics, illicit economies, and the risks of the “war against narco-terrorism” in the Colombia-Ecuador-Peru tri-border area



Triple Trouble: Geopolitics, illicit economies, and the risks of the “war against narco-terrorism” in the Colombia-Ecuador-Peru tri-border area

AMAZON UNDERWORLD

A cross–border investigative alliance covering crime trends in the Amazon
<https://amazonunderworld.org/>

AMAZON WATCH

Protecting the Amazon and our climate in solidarity with Indigenous peoples
amazonwatch.org

MAIN OFFICE

520 3rd Street, Suite 108, Oakland, CA 94607
Traditional Ohlone, Muwekma, and Chochenyo lands
Tel: +1.510.281.9020 Fax: +1.510.281.9021
amazon@amazonwatch.org

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE

1101 15th St NW, 11th Floor, Washington, DC 20005
Tierras tradicionales Nacotchtank (Anacostan) y Piscataway
Tel: +1.202.480.9617

RESEARCH AND WRITING: Amazon Underworld, Amazon Watch, and Al Margen

GRAPHIC DESIGN, LAYOUT AND COVER DESIGN: Laura Alcina

ELABORATION MAPS: Natalie Barusso

WITH THE SUPPORT OF:

**Ford
Foundation**

DISCLAIMER: This research is based on extensive fieldwork including human sources and therefore has the strengths and limitations that come with it. The authors disclaim any liability arising from the use of this document and its contents. Amazon Watch has not spoken to any known representatives of armed groups for this report.

© Amazon Underworld and Amazon Watch all rights reserved.

Triple Trouble:

Geopolitics, illicit economies, and the risks of the “war against narco-terrorism” in the Colombia-Ecuador-Peru tri-border area

AMAZON UNDERWORLD AND AMAZON WATCH
JULY 2026



A pickup truck carries members of the Comandos de la Frontera through a rural area in Putumayo, Colombia. Credits: Bram Ebus.

CONTENIDO

ACRONYMS	5
1. INTRODUCTION	7
2. SECURITY STRATEGIES, GROWING POLITICAL TENSIONS AND CHANGING GEOPOLITICS	10
COLOMBIA	10
PERU	11
ECUADOR	11
UNITED STATES AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION	12
3. EXPANSION AND CONVERGENCE OF ILLICIT ECONOMIES	13
COCAINE	18
MINING	20
4. PEACE NEGOTIATIONS: A FOUNDATION WORTH BUILDING ON?	22
5. CAUGHT BETWEEN ARMED GROUPS AND THE STATE: HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE TRI-BORDER AMAZON	24
HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY ARMED GROUPS	24
HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY STATE ACTORS	26
6. GOVERNMENT TRANSITIONS AND RISKY PROPOSALS	27
DANIEL NOBOA: SECURITIZATION AMID PUSHBACK	27
ABELARDO DE LA ESPRIELLA: FORCED ERADICATION AND A RETURN TO MILITARY APPROACHES	28
KEIKO FUJIMORI: AN “ORDER” PLATFORM, WITH LIMITED AMAZON POLICY	28
7. FINDINGS AND STRATEGIC OUTLOOK	30
8. RECOMMENDATIONS	33
ENDNOTES	37

ACRONYMS

Based on a full read of the report, here's the list of acronyms/initialisms used, with their expansions as given (or supplied where the document uses them without defining them):

<u>ACRONYM</u>	<u>FULL NAME</u>
ACTO	Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization
ART	Agencia de Renovación del Territorio (Territorial Titling/Renewal Agency, Colombia)
CAN	Comunidad Andina / Andean Community
CDF	Comandos de la Frontera / Border Command
CIUP	Centro de Investigación de la Universidad del Pacífico
CNEB	Coordinadora Nacional Ejército Bolivariano
COMBIFRON	Comisión Binacional Fronteriza / Binational Border Commission
CONFENIAE	Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana
C5i	AI-linked predictive command centers (as used in the text; not further expanded)
CUPUMA	Named coalition/structure created in late 2025 (full expansion not given in text)
CV	Comando Vermelho
DAR	Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales
DIRANDRO	Dirección Antidrogas (Anti-Drug Directorate, Peruvian National Police)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional
EMBF	Estado Mayor de los Bloques y Frentes
EMC	Estado Mayor Central
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FOIN	Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Napo
GAFILAT	Grupo de Acción Financiera de Latinoamérica / Financial Action Task Force of Latin America

IACHR	Inter–American Commission on Human Rights
IGAC	Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi
INDECI	Instituto Nacional de Defensa Civil (Peru)
INREDH	Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
MAPP–OEA	Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz de la OEA (OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process)
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co–operation and Development
OECD	Cited as part of a source organization name (full expansion not given in text)
OEA	Organización de los Estados Americanos (Organization of American States)
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ORPIO	Organización Regional de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente (Peru)
PAKKIRU	Pueblo Kichwa de Rukullakta (indigenous organization, Ecuador)
PCC	Primeiro Comando da Capital
PCM	Presidencia del Consejo de Ministros (Peru)
PDET	Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial — used but not spelled out in text
PNN	Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia
SNGRE	Servicio Nacional de Gestión de Riesgos y Emergencias (Ecuador)
SUCAMEC	Superintendencia Nacional de Control de Servicios de Seguridad, Armas, Municiones y Explosivos de Uso Civil (Peru)
SUNAT	Superintendencia Nacional de Aduanas y de Administración Tributaria (Peru)
UNGRD	Unidad Nacional para la Gestión del Riesgo de Desastres (Colombia)
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization
ZUT	Zona de Ubicación Temporal

1. INTRODUCTION

On 3 March 2026, Ecuadorian forces arrived by helicopter at a rural site in the Santa Rosa sector of Sucumbíos, doused several sheds and a farm with gasoline, and set them alight. Three days later, with U.S. support, they returned and bombed the same location.¹ U.S. Southern Command directed the joint force to conduct “lethal kinetic operations against Designated Terrorist Organizations”.² Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell declared that “the Department of War executed targeted action to advance our shared objective of dismantling narco-terrorist networks”.³ The farm’s owner saw it differently: “How can it be a training camp if this is a livestock area?”⁴ *Radio Sucumbíos*, later corroborated by the *New York Times*, reported that forces detained and tortured farmworkers, and that no weapons were discovered.⁵



Two weeks later, on March 17, a 500-pound unexploded bomb turned up on the Colombian side of the border near Jardines de Sucumbíos. Colombian President Gustavo Petro accused Ecuador directly, arguing that irregular armed groups lack the aircraft to carry out such attacks.⁶ Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa fired back on X that “your statements are false; we are acting on our territory, not yours,” blaming Colombia’s “lax border security” for allowing criminal groups to infiltrate Ecuador.⁷ A joint investigation confirmed that the device matched ordnance from the 3 March operation and had first struck on Ecuadorian soil.⁸

The tri-border area of Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru has historically been a hotspot for crime and conflict, but these recent incidents point to heightened geopolitical pressures that are generating friction in Amazon borderlands. Governments in both Colombia and Peru are set to change in the coming months: Abelardo De la Espriella and Keiko Fujimori will join Daniel Noboa as right-wing presidents across the three countries. Simultaneously, the United States has increased its intervention in the region through the launch of the Shield of the Americas initiative,⁹ framing anti-crime responses as a “war against foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs).”¹⁰

In our 2025 report, *In the Shadows of the State*, Amazon Underworld and Amazon Watch documented cross-border dynamics of illicit economies and organized crime in one of the most volatile regions on the continent. We identified an emerging regime of criminal governance, expanding illicit economies, and armed conflict in a territory rich in internationally coveted natural resources, including oil and minerals. These dynamics have harmed the environment, human rights, and Indigenous territories.

Since the publication of this report, geopolitical realities have shifted significantly, while the security conditions have remained fragile. The renewed growing U.S. presence in the region, evolving national security strategies, and the adaptation of armed groups have reshaped territorial control and trafficking routes across the Ecuador–Colombia–Peru borderlands.

While homicides and forced displacement have declined in Colombia’s Putumayo department in the context of peace negotiations with Comandos de la Frontera (CDF), other forms of violence, coercion, and social control have become more entrenched.¹¹ In Ecuador, violence and threats have intensified in Sucumbíos and Orellana, while criminal groups continue to consolidate their presence in Peru, where state authority remains virtually absent.

At the same time, illicit gold mining has expanded across the region, fueled by drug-trafficking revenues and the growing reach of organized crime. New infrastructure projects, such as the Bellavista–El Estrecho highway, on the Peruvian side, may further facilitate the expansion and convergence of illicit economies, as road networks carve further into the rainforest for loggers and drug traffickers.¹²

Heightened geopolitical tensions and pressure to demonstrate progress on coca eradication have added further instability. Armed forces have shown reluctance to undertake manual eradication campaigns, and repeated clashes between coca growers and security forces have generated new friction, including one incident in which protesters set two soldiers ablaze.

Yet these hardline approaches have done little to curb the expansion of armed groups. In Ecuador, military operations have increasingly affected civilian areas, prompting credible allegations of torture and other abuses, while in Colombia, the slow implementation of peace agreements has allowed armed actors to consolidate their influence. Both approaches underestimate how organized crime operates not only through violence but also through its penetration of local economies and institutions. They risk further alienating communities whose support is essential to restoring state authority and reducing insecurity.

With government transitions approaching in Colombia and Peru, heavy-handed responses risk further escalation. A middle ground is needed, one that combines targeted law enforcement to disrupt financial and trafficking flows with protective and supportive measures for local communities, embedded within a broader regional development and conservation agenda. In light of these developments, this new report analyzes the current situation and advocates for de-escalation and a regional agenda of conflict mitigation and peacebuilding, placing community safeguards and environmental protection at its center as core drivers of long-term stability, peace and justice.

The report is based on four recent field trips to the tri-border region, interviews with state officials, community leaders, researchers, and others, and the review of journalistic materials and security documents, in addition to the research done for the 2025 report. We deeply thank the organizations, communities, and leaders whose knowledge and lived experience were essential to the co-creation of this report. Their courage in the struggles for their rights and territories, and the willingness to share testimony, often in contexts of great risk, made this work possible. The authors anonymized sources to provide them with necessary protection due to security dynamics in the territory.



Members of the Comandos de la Frontera stand in an area of Putumayo, Colombia, near the border with Ecuador. In the background, a banner references the peace negotiations. Credit: Tom Laffay.

2. SECURITY STRATEGIES, GROWING POLITICAL TENSIONS AND CHANGING GEOPOLITICS

Since the 1980s, Colombian armed groups and coca economies have spilled across borders into Peru and Ecuador, exposing long-standing weaknesses in regional state capacity and border governance. A convergence of factors explains Ecuador's transformation from one of the safest countries on the continent to one of the most violent in the world, including its proximity to Colombia's major coca-producing regions (Nariño and Putumayo) and the appeal of its dollarized economy and Pacific ports to trafficking and money-laundering networks. The 2020 splintering of Los Choneros triggered a brutal turf war with the fast-expanding Los Lobos, just as underfunded prisons became command centers for organized crime.¹³

These dynamics have fueled diplomatic tensions across the region. Reciprocal tariffs and the recall of ambassadors sharply deteriorated Colombia-Ecuador relations, while disputes between Colombia and Peru over the island of Santa Rosa generated further friction.¹⁴ Ecuadorian President Noboa intervened in Colombia's electoral process, agreeing with candidate Abelardo De la Espriella to lift trade sanctions and highlighting their shared interest in a joint "fight" against "narco-terrorism."¹⁵

Washington's role should not be underestimated. Experts believe that so-called "anti-cartel" and "counter terrorism" campaigns, with the Trump Administration declaring criminal groups as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs), are advancing a broader agenda of securing control and military dominance in regions with a presence of strategic natural resources.¹⁶ The tri-border area concentrates active oil exploration and production in Colombian and Ecuadorian Putumayo, Sucumbíos, Orellana and Napo (Gran Tierra, Parex, Petroecuador, among others), while Mocoa (Putumayo, Colombia) hosts the first proposed megamining project in the Colombian Amazon: Copper Giant Resources.

Under threat of sanctions, Petro reversed his opposition to coca fumigation in April 2025 and restarted forced manual eradication, only for Washington to decertify Colombia that September regardless, ruling it "failing demonstrably" in its anti-drug obligations.¹⁷ The suspension of the extradition of CDF chief negotiator alias "Araña," and Petro's subsequent January ultimatum, show how the U.S. leveraged pressure over Colombia's peace dialogues, and how Petro used Araña as a bargaining chip; talks later resumed.¹⁸

COLOMBIA

Colombia has increasingly prioritized eradication and interdiction. A February 2026 agreement with the U.S. to expand drone-based fumigation accelerated this strategy,¹⁹ eradicating more than 2,289 hectares in Putumayo during the year's first months.²⁰ Yet promised economic alternatives have largely failed to materialize, reinforcing local grievances.²¹ CDF's continued operational capacity illustrates the challenge: the group has targeted state troops (notably the drone attack on the Navy vessel Hichamon in August²²), mobilized civilian resistance to anti-mining operations, and maintained a presence across much of the border region.

President-elect De la Espriella has proposed aeri ally spraying "bioherbicides" over the 330,000 hectares of coca he claims exist in Colombia, an ambitious figure next to the 6,386 hectares²³ voluntarily eradicated under a Petro administration program and independently verified by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Colombia has banned glyphosate spraying since 2015, and the Constitutional Court has blocked

its return. The last time the government tried, under President Iván Duque, the Court ruled, in its 2021 T413 decision, that authorities must first guarantee affected ethnic communities' rights to prior consultation and environmental participation. The Court further required proof that spraying would cause no harm to health or the environment. These requirements raise significant questions regarding the legal viability of the proposed eradication campaign.

PERU

In Peru, prolonged political instability has compounded a string of legislative measures that have undermined anti-crime policy, measures that have proven especially damaging in border regions, where weak state institutions and social services already invite corruption and the co-optation of local authorities. Between 2023 and 2025, Peru's Congress passed laws restricting effective collaboration agreements, narrowing the definition of organized crime, limiting investigative tools, introducing a statute of limitations for crimes against humanity, and curbing civil society oversight. Human Rights Watch, prosecutors, and legal experts say these measures have entrenched impunity and weakened the fight against organized crime.²⁴ President-elect Keiko Fujimori's party both promoted and approved several of these laws in Congress.

Nevertheless, Peru is also implementing its most ambitious institutional reform in years: the Unified Putumayo–Mariscal Castilla Command (CUPUMA), created in late 2025. General Arévalo Kalinowski describes the initiative as a unified border–security command spanning Peru's 3,000-kilometer frontier, integrating the armed forces, specialized police units, and key civilian agencies responsible for counter-narcotics, customs, migration, firearms control, and environmental enforcement.²⁵ A cross-sectoral commission for Putumayo was created in September 2025, bringing together national, regional, local, and Indigenous authorities to coordinate security, public services, infrastructure, and development initiatives.²⁶ Still, authorities acknowledge that decades of state neglect have embedded illicit economies in local livelihoods and governance. Communities remain skeptical, citing failed past development programs.

ECUADOR

In Ecuador, securitization and democratic erosion advanced together from 2024 to the present. Since President Noboa declared an internal armed conflict in January 2024, repeated states of exception have expanded the armed forces' role while forced disappearances, restrictions on dissent, dire prison conditions, and weakened accountability have intensified.²⁷ Environmental defenders, Indigenous leaders, and journalists face combined criminal and institutional pressure. Authorities have frozen bank accounts of environmental and Indigenous organizations under terrorism–financing allegations, and local organizers have reported intimidation and extortion by alleged members of CDF and Los Lobos.²⁸

The strain on institutions is acute: one military intelligence source admitted state forces “cannot maintain border control because of the countless tasks assigned to us: we are in the prisons, doing arms and explosives control, controlling pipelines, and what we are doing least is patrolling the border.”²⁹ In May 2025, an ambush attributed to CDF (which the group denied) killed 11 Ecuadorian soldiers during an anti-mining operation, among the deadliest attacks on the country's security forces in recent years. Institutional exhaustion now defines the picture, compounded by U.S.–backed operations that have drawn international scrutiny. One Ecuadorian security official acknowledged: “people are starting to corrupt themselves, to throw in the towel. We have a serious burnout problem.”³⁰

At the same time, Vivian Idrovo the coordinator of Ecuador's Alliance of Human Rights Organizations argues that: “...successive states of exception and the internal armed conflict declaration appear to function less as security instruments than as political ones, as high-visibility raids produce arrests and press conferences without dismantling the financial infrastructure of criminal organizations.”³¹

UNITED STATES AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Deepening U.S. involvement has accompanied Ecuador’s growing centrality in hemispheric security policy. After Washington designated Los Choneros and Los Lobos as FTOs in September 2025, Ecuador was added to the Shield of the Americas program, a U.S.–led hemispheric security coalition launched in March 2026 to combat drug cartels through coordinated military action among ideologically aligned governments. As one U.S. official put it, “a lot of people are in the sandbox now.”³² The U.S. followed by opening a permanent FBI office in March 2026³³ and launching joint military operations “against narco–terrorists,”³⁴ all drawing international scrutiny. This deepening integration culminated on 19 June 2026, when Noboa signed Executive Decree 424, reiterating an “internal armed conflict” and authorizing allied foreign militaries to operate jointly with Ecuador’s Armed Forces and National Police in the areas most affected by criminal violence— part of what Noboa called an Ecuador that “no longer fights alone.”³⁵ President elect Abelardo de la Espriella announced that Colombia will be part of the Shield of the Americas starting 7 August, the day of his inauguration.³⁶

Such initiatives may strengthen cooperation, intelligence–sharing and cross–border military operations, particularly as incoming presidents De la Espriella and Fujimori share Noboa’s militaristic approach and draw their countries further into U.S.–led collaboration. While counterterrorism frameworks³⁷ and military deployments have dominated recent security responses, these approaches risk deepening institutional fragmentation, sidelining citizen and communities rights and safety, undermining regional cooperation initiatives such as Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), and ignoring the governance gaps that allow armed groups to thrive.



Close-up of a coca leaf, the plant used to produce cocaine. Credits: Bram Ebus.



A coca leaf picker at work on a coca plantation near the Ecuadorian border. Credits: Tom Laffay.

3. EXPANSION AND CONVERGENCE OF ILLICIT ECONOMIES

The tri-border region's strategic location underpins an illicit economy that is increasingly driven by both cocaine and gold. Coca cultivation remains the historic backbone, concentrated in Colombia and Peru, with cocaine processed and trafficked through all three countries by networks involving Colombian armed groups, Ecuadorian gangs, Brazilian criminal organizations, Mexican cartels, and European networks (including Albanian organized crime groups).

However, illicit gold mining has emerged as a parallel and increasingly dominant revenue stream, reshaping armed group behavior, community dynamics, and environmental destruction across the region. "The strong [economy] now is illegal mining, because even in Colombia there is not much talk of coca anymore, as they are not buying, there is no commercialization of it," said a community leader from the Napo-Orellana area in Ecuador.³⁸

Nevertheless, these economies are deeply interconnected. Drug profits are reinvested in mining operations and laundered through the gold trade or property acquisitions, visible in new hotels and casinos in places such as Puerto Asís and Lago Agrio. Meanwhile, Pacific routes from Guayaquil have been disrupted by recent U.S. naval operations, pushing trafficking onto container ships, semi-submersibles, or Amazon river routes along the Putumayo and Napo corridors, linking production zones to Brazil and onward to African and European markets.³⁹

Security officials increasingly describe the Putumayo and San Miguel rivers as corridors under effective CDF influence. The group's presence and territorial control are growing in Ecuador, Peru, and toward the Brazilian border,⁴⁰ where it uses these areas as a logistical rearguard, transit corridor, and source of financing through illegal mining, extortion, and money laundering. An Ecuadorian official notes that CDF is "going back and forth across the border," adding that "the armed forces have lost control over this section."⁴¹ The CDF has also laundered profits through property acquisitions in Ecuador's Andean and coastal regions and has recruited Ecuadorian nationals into its ranks. Its largely invisible leader is known by the alias "Gárgola."⁴²

A Peruvian law enforcement official states: "In the case of Putumayo, it is the [armed criminal group] that uses the Putumayo river and crosses our border using Peruvian territory as a rest zone, but also to finance criminal activities, illegal mining in particular, though there is also drug trafficking and drug production zones."⁴³ Peruvian community leaders indicated that local community members continue to work on coca production in areas controlled by the CDF, with plantations growing in size contrary to the current trend in Colombia.⁴⁴

Despite a decline in violence during 2025, Putumayo remains affected by territorial disputes involving the CDF, the Estado Mayor de Bloques y Frente's (EMBF) Raúl Reyes Bloc, and the Estado Mayor Central's (EMC) Carolina Ramírez Front. Since December 2025, tensions have resurfaced in Curillo, San José del Fragua (Caquetá), and Piamonte (Cauca), where the CDF and the Raúl Reyes Bloc have engaged in sporadic clashes that continued through February and early March 2026.

The Raúl Reyes Bloc is fighting on two fronts—in Curillo, San José del Fragua, Piamonte, and upper Puerto Guzmán. It is also fighting the Carolina Ramírez Front of the EMC in Solano (Caquetá) and Puerto Leguízamo (Putumayo)—resulting in armed clashes, civilian restrictions, transport disruptions, and significant casualties, including a recent battle in San José del Guaviare (in the department of Guaviare, neighboring Caquetá) that reportedly left 48 combatants dead, including 11 minors.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, Brazilian crime group Comando Vermelho increased its foothold on the Peruvian side of the border with Colombia and Brazil, and Los Lobos are reported to have set up cocaine fabrication laboratories near the Colombian border, financed by Mexican cartels intelligence sources allege.⁴⁶



LEGEND

- Main river routes
- Rivers
- Tri-border



Source: Amazon Underworld, 2026,
Open Street Map, 2026; World Bank, 2026

Visualization: Natalie Barusso | Amazon Underworld

Main Armed and Criminal Groups Operating in the Colombia-Ecuador-Peru Tri-Border Region

COMANDOS DE LA FRONTERA (CDF)

Composed of former FARC members, former paramilitaries, former security–force personnel, and drug traffickers, CDF has evolved into one of the most influential criminal organizations in the border region. The group exercises territorial control and social governance while regulating illicit economies. The CDF participates in peace negotiations with the Colombian government under the banner of the

COORDINADORA NACIONAL EJERCITO BOLIVARIANO (CNEB), a coalition of FARC dissident factions.

ESTADO MAYOR DE LOS BLOQUES Y FRENTE (EMBF)

A dissident FARC structure associated with the faction led by alias Calarcá. The group is currently engaged in peace talks with the national government, though negotiations have stalled in recent months amid armed actions and mutual accusations between the parties. In Putumayo, EMBF maintains a presence along the Caquetá River through its Bloque Raúl Reyes, and participates in armed and criminal activities linked to territorial control and illicit economies.

ESTADO MAYOR CENTRAL (EMC)

The largest FARC dissident organization nationally, with its strongest presence concentrated in Cauca. In Putumayo, by contrast, EMC maintains only a residual presence, concentrated in lower Puerto Leguizamo and Solano, Caquetá through the Carolina Ramireaz Front. The group is led by the alias “Mordisco”.

LOS LOBOS

One of Ecuador’s most powerful criminal organizations. After splitting from Los Choneros, the group expanded rapidly and has engaged in violent disputes over strategic territories, particularly illegal mining enclaves and trafficking corridors.

LOS CHONEROS

The armed criminal organization with the strongest presence in Ecuador’s border province of Sucumbíos. It has clashed repeatedly with Comandos de la Frontera (CDF) over territorial control and access to trafficking routes connecting the border region to Ecuador’s Pacific coast.

COMANDO VERMELHO (CV)

One of Brazil’s largest transnational criminal organizations. Originating in Rio de Janeiro, it has expanded its influence across the Amazon basin and increasingly participates in cross–border cocaine trafficking networks linking Colombia, Peru, Brazil, and Ecuador.

Comandos de la Frontera (CDF)



Estado Mayor de los Bloques y Frentes



Estado Mayor Central (EMC)



Los Lobos



Los Choneros



Comando Vermelho (CV)



Otros grupos armados*



*presencia de otros grupos como Comuneros del Sur; Los Piratas de Yarana; Los Colochos de Pucca

Sin información



Fuente: Amazon Underworld, 2025
Visualización: Natalie Barusso | Amazon Underworld

COCAINE

Since February, the CDF has been quietly announcing to communities that it will stop buying coca base paste, effectively pushing growers toward government-led crop substitution projects while risking the possibility that another group will try to fill the market gap.⁴⁷ The RenHacemos crop substitution program has enrolled almost 12,799 families across seven Putumayo municipalities, with incentives of up to 75 million pesos (approximately 20,400 USD) per family paid across six installments. However, coca production remains high in places such as Puerto Asís, San Miguel, and Valle del Guamuez, despite decreasing cocaine base paste acquisitions.⁴⁸ Local sources indicated agreed upon payments for coca farmers participating in RenHacemos arrived late or not at all.⁴⁹

Drug seizures in Putumayo, nevertheless, indicate ongoing production and movements. The Naval Force of the Amazon recorded its largest-ever marijuana seizure in late September 2025, intercepting 3.5 tons near El Encanto.⁵⁰ A subsequent killing in Leticia is believed to have been a reprisal against the informant who exposed the operation. Days earlier, 895 kg linked directly to CDF finances were seized in Puerto Asís.⁵¹ In January, a truck carrying 1.7 tons of marijuana was stopped in Puerto Caicedo, destined for Ecuador, Peru, or Brazil.⁵² Troops from the Sixth Division destroyed 19 laboratories across Putumayo, Caquetá, and Amazonas in a single week that same month.⁵³

Colonel Da Silveira of Colombia's Grupo Cabal describes that coca is processed in Putumayo, converted into cocaine hydrochloride at laboratories near Santa Bárbara and El Carmelo on the Ecuadorian border (some 15 were destroyed in 2025 alone), then routed through Ecuador because "the route to get it out of Colombia via the Pacific is too long."⁵⁴ Two inland trafficking routes run from Lago Agrio, one toward the coast via Tena, Puyo, and Ambato, another via Baeza and Quito toward Santo Domingo.

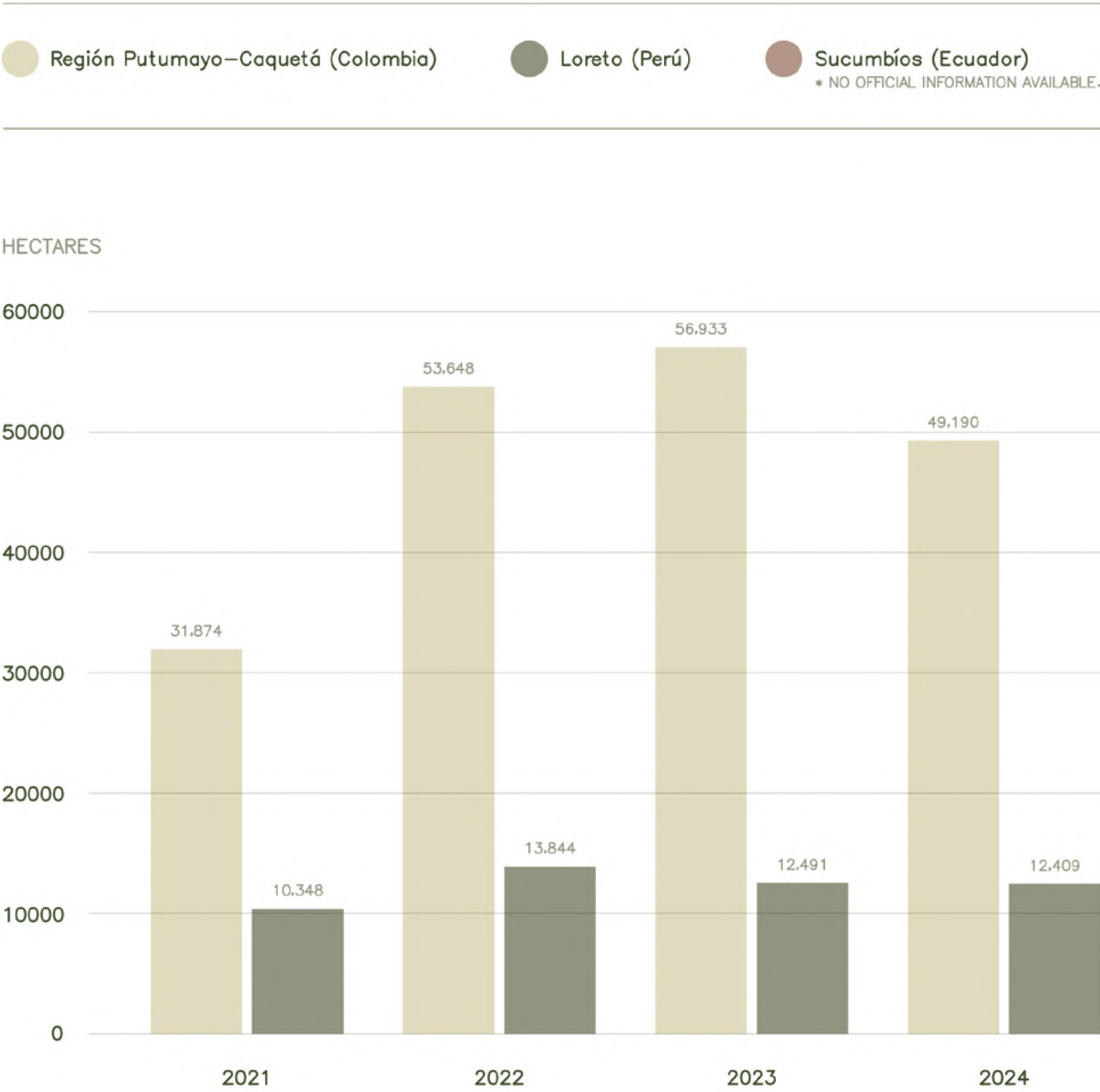
Coca growing continues unabated in areas under CDF control in Peru, which is a likely consequence of Washington's pressure to reduce crops in Colombia. According to the Peruvian General Jorge Arévalo Kalinowski, commander of CUPUMA, coca cultivation in Mariscal Ramón Castilla has expanded from approximately 4,000 hectares in 2020 to nearly 10,000 in 2026.⁵⁵

In southern Putumayo, coca-driven deforestation continues to ravage La Paya National Park, with forest razing intensifying toward the Caquetá River around a hotspot in the Mecaya sector linked to the Carolina Ramírez Front, which actively mobilizes communities against Parques Nacionales: a road likely already breaches the park boundary.⁵⁶

In contrast, the area under CDF influence around La Nueva Paya has cautiously improved and opened to institutions amid the peace negotiations. Colombia’s national parks institute has resumed community engagement, and if implemented, the proposed expansion of RenHacemos into the area would mark the first time the substitution program operates inside a national park. Communities have responded with what a PNN (*Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia* – Colombia’s national parks authority) source describes as “impressive reception,” and IGAC (*Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi*) is already conducting property valuations in La Paya and Alto Fragua.⁵⁷

COCA CROPS

2021–2024



Source: Colombia. Informe de Monitoreo de territorios con presencia de cultivos de coca. UNODC.SIMCI. | Perú. Monitoreo de cultivos de coca 2024. DEVIDA/UNODC.



Coca base paste, obtained by processing coca leaves with chemical precursors and fuel, before it is refined into cocaine.
Credits: Bram Ebus

MINING

Gold mining has become particularly important to the finances of criminal groups. Since late 2025, CDF has expanded from providing security to mining operations to directly controlling production and commercialization. In Colombia, commanders reportedly finance dredging operations and collect a share of profits.⁵⁸ In June 2026, the CDF issued warnings stating that nobody could buy gold locally without the group's prior approval, while also setting the price for approved local buyers.⁵⁹ In Peru, mining operations along the Nanay River are reportedly expanding.⁶⁰ In Ecuador, CDF is also said to own mining equipment held by Los Lobos, which allegedly negotiates mercury imports with Mexican cartels.⁶¹

Gold is moved either to Ecuadorian buyers in USD or to the CDF has also laundered profits through property acquisitions in Ecuador's Andean and coastal regions and has recruited Ecuadorian nationals into its ranks. Colombian hubs with the infrastructure to legalize it, principally Cali and Medellín.⁶²

Consequently, gold mining is now also the fastest-growing environmental and human rights threat in the region, as rising gold prices point to further expansion into biodiverse upper-tributary areas of the Putumayo river.⁶³ Although the CDF claims to respect Indigenous reserve boundaries, and some ethnic authorities have sought to keep mining out, adjacent rivers used for fishing and bathing fall outside legal reserve limits and remain exposed. Mercury contamination has affected major waterways across the tri-border region (including the Putumayo, Napo, Caqueta, and Nanay rivers), producing well-documented health consequences, among them neurological disorders, skin conditions, and cognitive impairment.⁶⁴

Although governments have increased anti-mining operations, enforcement remains limited and frequently ineffective. Forty-two kilograms of gold valued at over 20 billion Colombian pesos were seized in a vehicle check in Pitalito, Huila, attributed to the CDF.⁶⁵ When dredges are destroyed in military operations, owners still owe their loans. A joint Colombian-Ecuadorian anti-mining operation on 10 May reportedly targeted

dredges along a tributary to the Putumayo River; word filtered out in advance and most were hidden before forces arrived, with only several smaller ones destroyed.⁶⁶ An Ecuadorian community leader states that armed groups operate heavy mining equipment, such as river dredges and backhoes, in plain view, “walking around like it’s their home and nobody says anything.”⁶⁷



A woman displays a piece of smelted gold in Puerto Inírida, Colombia. Illegal gold mining has expanded along the rivers of the Amazon biome. Credits: Bram Ebus.



A member of the Comandos de la Frontera in Putumayo, Colombia. Credits: Tom Laffay.

4. PEACE NEGOTIATIONS: A FOUNDATION WORTH BUILDING ON?

The peace process between the Colombian government and the CDF/CNEB was held together less through conviction than through mutual convenience. Both sides remain committed to negotiations until the end of the Petro administration,⁶⁸ with dozens of CDF militants demobilizing just days before the second round of the presidential elections won by de la Esprilla.⁶⁹

However, the Defensoría del Pueblo already warned on 19 May that the process and similar ones are advancing too quickly, without guarantees for victims, independent oversight, or a legal framework for the transition to legality.⁷⁰

The CDF's cross-border presence has been one of the most consequential and least acknowledged spoilers in the negotiations. While the group publicly denies operating in Ecuador and Peru,⁷¹ evidence suggests it maintains logistical corridors, territorial influence, and illicit economic activities across both borders.⁷² On June 22, according to a communique by Peruvian security forces, an army commission clashed with CDF in the province of Putumayo, when encountering a training camp.⁷³ This disconnect raises questions about the long-term viability of any agreement confined to Colombian territory. The organization appeared to be pursuing negotiations in Colombia while simultaneously consolidating its position in neighboring countries, particularly Peru.

Additionally, the risk of escalating violence also remains high. Clashes between the Raúl Reyes structure, belonging to competing FARC dissident organization EMBF, and CDF were recorded in Puerto Guzmán at the end of last year, and again in San José del Fragua, Caquetá and Piamonte, Cauca in late February and early March, raising the prospect of renewed territorial disputes.⁷⁴ Forced eradications, especially when conducted manually accompanied with military presence can increase tensions significantly. In September 2025, assailants doused two soldiers with

gasoline and set them alight in Villagarzón (Putumayo) during an anti-drug operation, prompting a suspension of dialogue. Community sources and the Defensoría del Pueblo attributed the act to CDF-coerced civilians.⁷⁵

On 18 June 2026, 99 members of the Coordinadora Nacional Ejército Bolivariano (CNEB), encompassing the Comandos de Frontera, entered a Zona de Ubicación Temporal (ZUT) in Valle del Guamuez, Putumayo, marking the most concrete step yet in the Petro government's "Paz Total" negotiations with the group.⁷⁶ The move is closely tied to a broader coca reduction agenda, as 13,000 families in Putumayo have signed substitution agreements, with the Comandos de Frontera actively facilitating that process as part of a negotiated target to substitute 30,000 hectares of coca across Nariño and Putumayo, with 15,000 hectares in each department.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, larger cultivation areas farther downriver, controlled by the CDF, remain untouched.⁷⁸ Sources indicate that abstentions from buying cocaine base paste occur while the group continues in the coca growing business across the border in Peru and increasingly shifts to illegal gold mining in Putumayo.⁷⁹

As the Petro administration draws to a close, fears about the fate of the peace process converge on the uncertainty surrounding the 99 demobilized CDF members. "We assume that if the ZUT is not maintained, it could create a situation of territorial destabilization. It would be a completely counterproductive message", said chief government negotiator Armando Novoa. "We believe the state must take in those who have laid down their arms."⁸⁰

Novoa argues that the CDF complied with the main agreements reached at the negotiating table and that shortcomings in security should not be conflated with failures of the peace strategy. "Security policy and peace policy must not be confused. Many of the problems we have faced stem from failures in security policy, not from the peace policy itself. They are two complementary parts of the same challenge."⁸¹

Although unlikely, Novoa expresses hope that the gains of the dialogue process will give the incoming De la Espriella administration reason to consider continuing talks, prioritizing comprehensive state responses and heading off potentially new cycles of violence in the area, particularly along the Ecuadorian border. "We need to advance binational dialogues and establish comprehensive, long-term policies. That cannot happen without an express willingness on the part of the new government to seek a solution to the situation facing these communities and to respond to their demands for social policies in the territory. We have fallen short on that front, but this process has moved forward on the basis that it is gradual and incremental. We have taken a first step with the creation of the ZUT, but there is still a long road ahead."⁸²



Farmers travel by boat along a river near La Nueva Paya, in Putumayo, Colombia. Credits: Bram Ebus.



Comandos de la Frontera members move through populated areas of Putumayo in military uniforms and carrying weapons. Credits: Bram Ebus.

5. CAUGHT BETWEEN ARMED GROUPS AND THE STATE: HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE TRI-BORDER AMAZON

Militarization, criminal expansion, and state absence have created an interlocking crisis of human rights and environmental destruction in the Colombia–Ecuador–Peru border region, with Indigenous communities, environmental defenders and women and minors bearing the disproportionate cost.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY ARMED GROUPS

HOMICIDE, THREATS AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE – In the last year of the Petro administration, Putumayo saw a sharp drop in homicides in 2025 according to official numbers (from 183 in 2024 to 41 in 2025). Across the border, the Ecuadorian Amazon provinces of Sucumbíos and Orellana rank among the ten most violent in the region.⁸³ The provincial director of the Judicial Council in Orellana survived an assassination attempt in October 2025 after reporting judicial corruption linked to Los Choneros to her superiors; her complaint received no response.⁸⁴ Selective killings and “social cleansing” persist in urban centers, particularly Puerto Asís, La Hormiga, and Orito. Recent incidents include the 14th of March four–person massacre in El Coca in Orellana⁸⁵, the 12th of April execution of an abducted couple in Caquetá⁸⁶ and a five–person massacre in Mocoa on April 22.⁸⁷ Community sources report disturbing new patterns in the tri–border region: killings staged as suicides, domestic disputes, or isolated attacks despite evidence of prior detention by armed actors. These

tactics appear to be designed to obscure armed–group involvement and frustrate accountability.⁸⁸ As the peace negotiations have been implemented, direct threats to community leaders and human rights defenders have decreased in Colombia, while in Ecuador community leaders and human rights defenders have reported intimidation and extortion by alleged members of CDF and Los Lobos.⁸⁹

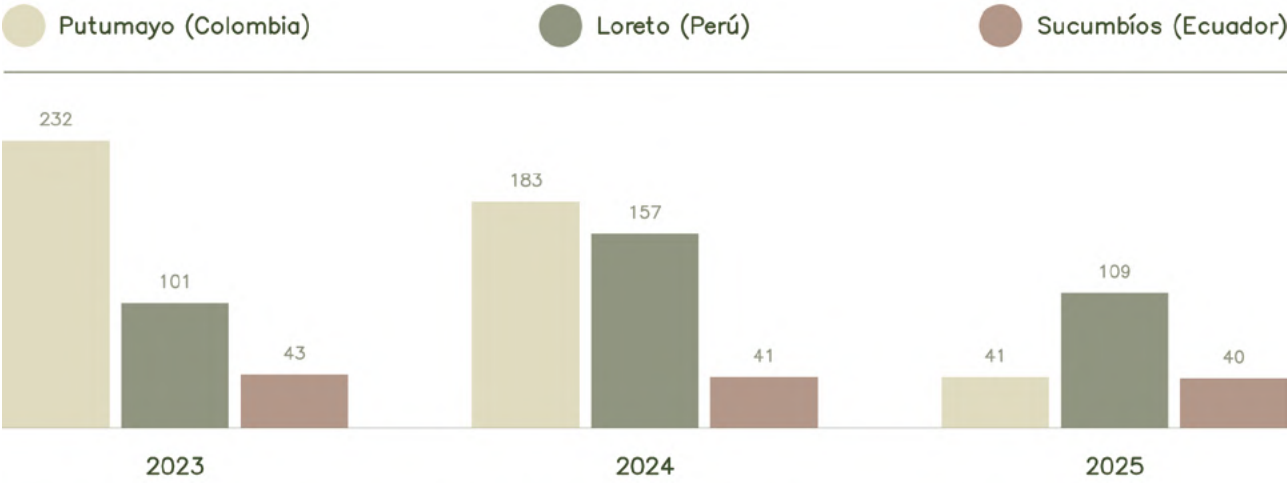
DISPLACEMENT AND CONFINEMENT – Other forms of violence intensified as FARC dissidents (Frente Carolina Ramírez and Raúl Reyes) clashed with the CDF, particularly in the Medio and Bajo Putumayo. In 2025, 1,789 people were forcibly displaced from municipalities including Puerto Guzmán, Puerto Asís, and Puerto Leguízamo.⁹⁰ In early 2026, the Frente Carolina Ramírez declared armed blockades, on main transport rivers, imposing forced confinement on civilian populations, a practice in which armed groups prohibit all movement, effectively trapping communities in place and cutting off access to food, healthcare, and basic services. River traffic on the Caquetá and Caguán and roads along both rivers were blocked entirely.

USE OF LANDMINES – Putumayo recorded 83 landmine and unexploded ordnance incidents in 2024, more than any other department in the Colombian Amazon.⁹¹ In Puerto Guzmán alone, 58 incidents were registered in 2024, with local human rights monitors noting that armed groups use mines to mark territory and keep rivals out.⁹² In April 2025, a military operation in Mocoa uncovered a CDF stockpile of 1,014 antipersonnel mines and nearly 500 kg of explosives.⁹³

RECRUITMENT AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE – Several community sources also reported the continued recruitment of Indigenous minors and community members, despite the CDF’s public denial of this ongoing practice.⁹⁴ Recruitment primarily relies on financial proposals and occurs in all three countries: in Colombia, new recruits receive about 2 million Colombian pesos (approx. 580 USD), while Indigenous youth in Peru are offered 2,000 soles per month (approx. 585 USD).⁹⁵ Mining outposts along the Putumayo river have also been linked to sexual exploitation, tied to cash economies, weak oversight, and coercive debt relations –risks that disproportionately threaten girls through early unions, school dropout, and trafficking, which all warrant further investigation.⁹⁶

RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION – Indigenous communities across the tri–border area bear the brunt of armed groups’ territorial control. Armed actors have imposed codes of conduct, ordered lockdowns and movement restrictions that cut communities off from parts of their own territory, required residents to carry group–issued identity cards, and inserted themselves into internal community decision–making. Criminal governance disrupts indigenous self–determination and cultural practices alike, particularly in the case of transborder nations.⁹⁷ The risk this poses to Indigenous survival is not new: Colombia’s Constitutional Court found, in its landmark 2009 Auto 004, that 13 of Putumayo’s 15 Indigenous peoples face a documented risk of physical and cultural extinction.⁹⁸

HOMICIDES IN BORDER JURISDICTIONS



Source: Colombia: Briefing Departamental – Putumayo, enero a diciembre de 2025. OCHA, 3iS. | Ecuador: OECO/Ministerio del Interior. Fiscalía General del Estado. | Perú. DIVCOP–Policía Nacional.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY STATE ACTORS

HOMICIDE AND EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS – Even as official violence statistics in Colombia declined significantly under the Petro government, state forces have a record of serious and widespread human rights abuses that justifies concerns over the incoming De Espriella government. The Remanso massacre (see text box) is a recent reminder of extensive State violence in Putumayo, which remains impune. In Ecuador, state violence has increased since Noboa’s declaration of a “non–international armed conflict”. The June 2026 operation in the Shuar communities of Taruka and Etsa, in Cascales canton, illustrates these tensions: while the army described the deaths of three Shuar men and the wounding of several others as the result of an armed ambush during an anti–mining operation, community members asserted they were attempting to prevent the seizure of equipment rather than attack soldiers.⁹⁹

The Remanso Massacre: State Violence and the Long Road to Reparation

On 28 March 2022, Colombian army soldiers opened fire during a community bazaar in Alto Remanso, Puerto Leguízamo, killing eleven people including civilians like the Indigenous governor of the neighboring community of Bajo Remanso, in what the military presented as a combat operation against the CDF.¹⁰⁰ The Fiscalía has charged 24 soldiers and the case is slowly advancing in the civilian justice system, while the National Land Agency gave a land title of approximately 16,800 hectares for the Lower Remanso reservation as part of collective reparations in a collective ceremony in June 2026.¹⁰¹ Other governmental commitments like support for collective protection measures are yet to be fulfilled.

MILITARIZATION AND EMERGENCY POWERS – In Ecuador, expanding military deployments and states of emergency (Sucumbíos has remained under recurring states of emergency since January 2024) have raised growing concern over human rights impacts without addressing the structural drivers of violence. In March 2026, eight UN special rapporteurs warned that Ecuador’s prolonged use of emergency powers, authorization of lethal force, and expanding military role increase the risk of human rights violations.¹⁰²

TORTURE, ARBITRARY DETENTION AND EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE – On January 24, 2024, Indigenous guards from the Kichwa community of San José de Wisuya, in the Putumayo parish of Sucumbíos Province, were arbitrarily arrested without evidence or legal justification and denied access to legal counsel.¹⁰³ Following the Alto Punino incident in May 2025, communities that initially welcomed the military reported warrantless searches, theft, and torture.¹⁰⁴ This pattern recurred in early March 2026, when Ecuadorian forces, with U.S. support, carried out an operation against a suspected CDF training camp in Santa Rosa, Sucumbíos. Radio Sucumbíos (later corroborated by the *New York Times*) reported that forces detained and tortured farmworkers at the site, and that no weapons were found.¹⁰⁵

RIGHTS TO FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT – Tri–border governments have systematically failed to meet their obligation to adequately consult Indigenous Peoples on extractive and infrastructure projects, as well as on security policies. This is the case for the Iquitos–El Estrecho road¹⁰⁶, the proposed Archidona megaprisn¹⁰⁷, and security operations alike.¹⁰⁸



Military patrol in Tena. An Ecuadorian Army patrol moves along Avenida 15 de Noviembre in Tena, capital of the Amazonian province of Napo, days before the killing of 11 soldiers during an anti-mining operation in the Alto Punino area. Credits: Armando Lara.

6. GOVERNMENT TRANSITIONS AND RISKY PROPOSALS

Beginning in August 2026, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador will be governed by ideologically aligned, right-wing administrations for the first time in years — part of a broader rightward shift across Latin America — each having campaigned on a shared “iron fist” discourse against organized crime. The following profiles outline each leader’s stated approach to the tri-border area and the challenges it faces.

DANIEL NOBOA: SECURITIZATION AMID PUSHBACK

President Noboa has pursued three simultaneous agendas: securitization, constitutional reform, and U.S. alignment. Each has encountered structural limits that now constrain the broader regional security architecture. His constitutional reform agenda suffered a major setback when more than 61 percent of voters rejected a November 2025 referendum proposing a Constituent Assembly and the removal of the constitutional ban on foreign military bases.¹⁰⁹

The Constitutional Court, the principal remaining counterweight to a government that controls the Assembly majority and the Judicial Council (Body for the administration and oversight of the judicial function), has struck down two flagship laws: the *Ley de Solidaridad Nacional*,¹¹⁰ which sought financing for police and military operations and included a provision granting Noboa pre-emptive pardons for security force personnel, and the *Ley de Integridad Pública*.¹¹¹ It has also suspended 17 articles across three other laws, prompting a public campaign against its judges that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called “unacceptable.”¹¹²

A proposed maximum–security megaprison sited in Archidona, in the Amazonian province of Napo, was suspended indefinitely after a 15–day road blockade in December 2024 led by Mayor Amanda Grefa and the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Napo (FOIN), with support from indigenous organizations CONFENIAE and PAKKIRU, and following a National Assembly resolution urging the president to halt the project.¹¹³

Despite these setbacks, Noboa has shown no inclination to abandon the securitization agenda itself. At a military ceremony in the coastal city Santa Elena, he declared the start of “a phase of total offensive, of total war” — framing remarks delivered alongside Executive Decree 424, which renewed the designation of an “internal armed conflict.” The decree paired that renewal with expanded presidential authority to grant pardons and sentence reductions to military, police, and civilian personnel involved in security operations, and to extend immunity to foreign personnel operating under international cooperation agreements.¹¹⁴ At the same time, Noboa has maintained aggressive plans to expand the extractive frontier in the Amazon.¹¹⁵

ABELARDO DE LA ESPRIELLA: FORCED ERADICATION AND A RETURN TO MILITARY APPROACHES

President–elect Abelardo de la Espriella has promised to recover territorial control in regions like Putumayo through a “mano dura” or “iron fist” military offensive, with the declared goal of dismantling armed groups within 90 days.¹¹⁶ His anti–drug strategy involves intervening in what he estimates to be 330,000 hectares of coca, which in his view have become the primary source of financing for armed groups, a figure that appears to be his own estimate, likely accounting for unreported or newly cultivated areas beyond the approximately 262,000 hectares registered by the UN for 2024.¹¹⁷

De Espriella’s eradication formula combines aerial fumigation, drones, manual eradication, and artificial intelligence, though aerial spraying poses well–documented public health risks and collateral damage to, for example, nearby food crops.¹¹⁸ In his own words, de la Espriella proposed to “start fumigating the primary source of all forms of violence, which is the more than 330,000 hectares of coca,” while also calling for “bombing narco–terrorist camps” as part of an integrated offensive, which in all likelihood could also target underage victims of forced recruitment present in those camps.¹¹⁹ To that end, de la Espriella will seek backing from the United States and Israel for airstrikes and fumigation campaigns, including the acquisition of surveillance technology, drones and artificial intelligence.¹²⁰

De la Espriella has also announced the definitive end of the *Paz Total* policy and the cancellation of any negotiations with the ELN and FARC dissidents, alongside the reactivation of extradition processes and the construction of maximum–security megaprisons. In Putumayo, where the CDF exercise dominant territorial control and where the Petro government had just established a temporary demobilization zone for the CNEB, peasants and community leaders are already expressing fear that coca crops will be fumigated by force, while experts warn that his promises of a military offensive risk triggering a new spiral of violence.¹²¹

KEIKO FUJIMORI: AN “ORDER” PLATFORM, WITH LIMITED AMAZON POLICY

Fujimori, who won Peru’s June 7, 2026 runoff, has built her platform around “orden” (order) as an organizing principle, explicitly invoking the 1990s defeat of the maoist Shining Path, under the authoritarian regime of her father, as precedent. Her plan establishes a Permanent Unified Command against organized crime led directly by the president, backed by AI–linked predictive command centers (C5i), and proposes joint police–military street patrols, the revival of “jueces sin rostro” (faceless judges), a figure widely criticized in the 1990s for undermining basic due–process guarantees, and the withdraw from the Interamerican Court of Human Rights.¹²² Internationally, Fujimori has positioned herself within the region’s broader hard–right realignment, naming Javier Milei, José Antonio Kast, Daniel Noboa, and Rodrigo Paz as reference points and seeking alignment with the Trump administration.¹²³

In Peru, the border crisis and the Amazon barely registered in campaign debates. Fujimori offered few clear proposals on anti–narcotics policy or the Amazon, beyond generic references to educational programs and a mention

of the need of strengthening military border patrols.¹²⁴ This marks a notable asymmetry: her party faced criticism during the campaign for backing forestry legislation that opponents say opened the Amazon to illegal mining and organized crime. At the end of the electoral campaign, Fujimori said she would review the laws Congress had approved and that critics blame for benefiting organized crime, despite her party's central role in passing them.¹²⁵



Pickup trucks belonging to the Comandos de la Frontera travel along a road lined with coca plantations in Putumayo. Credits: Tom Laffay.

7. FINDINGS AND STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

The tri-border area connecting Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru is at an inflection point. Criminal dynamics, militarization and state violence could harden into open armed conflict involving three countries, or the region could become a testing ground for trilateral security cooperation prioritizing community wellbeing. Competing criminal and geopolitical interests, expanding drug corridors, illegal gold mining, and weak state presence create conditions conducive to further escalation of violence.

1. A pivot toward repression and militarization is underway. Incoming governments have adopted a discourse of escalation and hardline security approaches, which may mean a return to forced eradication (including a push for aerial fumigation in Colombia, which as of today remains illegal), expanded military operations, and closer alignment with U.S. security initiatives. Rising global commodity prices and proposed fast-tracking of extraction licenses point toward an expansion of oil and mining activity in the border region across all three countries, adding further environmental and territorial pressure on local communities. Infrastructure projects such as the proposed Iquitos–El Estrecho road present additional risks, since new road networks historically accelerate deforestation, facilitate criminal mobility, and open previously inaccessible areas to environmentally harmful activity. Without strong checks and balances, this militarized and extractivist posture risks repeating a pattern in which civilian harm and impunity have historically deepened, rather than weakened, armed groups’ grip on local populations.

<p>PUTUMAYO</p>	<p>In <u>2020</u>, Putumayo had 1.9 million hectares of natural forest, covering <u>74 % of the department.</u></p>	<p>In <u>2025</u>, it lost 11,000 hectares.</p>	<p>In Putumayo, from <u>2001</u> to <u>2025</u>, 93 % of tree cover loss occurred in areas where the dominant drivers of loss resulted in <u>deforestation.</u></p>
<p>SUCUMBÍOS</p>	<p>In <u>2020</u>, Sucumbíos had 1.4 million hectares of natural forest, covering <u>79 % of the province.</u></p>	<p>In <u>2025</u>, it lost 6,600 hectares.</p>	<p>In Sucumbíos, from <u>2001</u> to <u>2025</u>, 83 % of tree cover loss occurred in areas where the main drivers of loss resulted in <u>deforestation.</u></p>
<p>LORETO</p>	<p>In <u>2020</u>, Loreto had 35 million hectares of natural forest, covering <u>93 % of the department.</u></p>	<p>In <u>2025</u>, it lost 42,000 hectares.</p>	<p>In Loreto, From <u>2001</u> to <u>2025</u>, 37 % of tree cover loss occurred in areas where the dominant drivers of loss resulted in <u>deforestation.</u></p>

Source:
Global Forest Watch.

2. A U.S.–led regional security architecture appears to be emerging – a de facto “Plan Colombia” for the wider tri–border zone, and beyond. Washington’s narco–terrorism framing, drone–fumigation pressure, and platforms like the Shield of the Americas are structuring how Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru engage with the crisis, pushing the region toward a security logic that may be poorly matched to local conditions and that prior experience suggests cannot, by itself, reverse the structural advantages criminal economies have built over years of state retreat. Beyond combating organized crime, this strategy, as outlined in U.S. security doctrine, seeks to reassert control over the Western Hemisphere’s territory and critical natural resources..
3. As its underlying drivers of booming international markets are untouched, illicit economies will adapt. Coca, gold, and associated trafficking are flexible: crackdowns in one country or sector tend to displace activity rather than end it, and every previous alternative–development effort has collapsed for the same structural reasons–absent markets, no institutional continuity, and insufficient local ownership. Without credible, sustained local alternatives, repression will reshape illicit economies rather than reduce them. In this context, Peru risks becoming a safe haven and displacement zone for CDF armed operations and coca cultivation pushed out of Colombia and Ecuador, due to lower institutional presence in the border area and the more favorable legal framework for illicit economies.
4. Over the last years, CDF has simultaneously engaged in peace negotiations and reshaped its territorial presence: the Valle del Guamuez transition zone remains the key test of whether demobilization commitments are genuine. If so, the level of progress of agreements should not be abandoned. At the same time, documented CDF activity in Ecuador and Peru cannot be ignored in any future negotiating round.

Nevertheless, president elect De Espriella has announced an end to any negotiation, which combined with intensified U.S.–Colombia–Ecuador military cooperation, would likely harden criminal dynamics into more open armed conflict. Armed groups have already shown a willingness to use landmines, armed drones, enforced confinement, and civilian populations as leverage against security forces. Escalating violence and conflict would further increase the impacts and risks for communities and defenders, once again caught between criminal and state pressure.

5. The region’s underlying problem is one that military action alone cannot fix. The CDF and Ecuador’s criminal organizations are not just armed invaders running territories at gunpoint but embedded actors who have penetrated local businesses, civil authorities and state institutions through years of coercion, co–optation, and corruption. The CDF simply cannot be bombed out of the territory. Communities living under this pressure are victims of both criminal governance and state absence, and at the same time, crucial actors for any security or peacebuilding strategy, instead of adversaries to be confronted. Organized crime has understood better than most state institutions that communities are of utmost importance, extracting extortion fees through threats, using populations as a human shield and building political legitimacy through coercion. Strategies that bear down on communities rather than protect them are structurally destined to fail: every military operation that perpetrates human rights violations with impunity only tightens armed groups’ grip and deepens the distrust the state urgently needs to overcome.
6. When governments prioritize security measures and investment over territorial rights, they dismantle from above the institutional safeguards on which Indigenous communities and conservation programs depend, even as armed groups undermine those same safeguards from below through territorial expansion. In the tri–border region, environmental and indigenous territorial governance are among the last lines of defense against criminal and extractive expansion. A trinational program covering a four–million–hectare conservation corridor¹²⁶ remains a rare bright spot, developing joint protocols for protection, surveillance, and analysis of criminal pressures.¹²⁷ Charapa turtles were recently released jointly at the triple–border crossing, a symbolic demonstration of renewed cooperation in an area where, two years ago, a PNN source notes, “we could not even cross to the other side of the river.”¹²⁸

However community and agency–led conservation cannot function without direct sustained political commitment from the governments concerned. Rising gold prices, expanding illicit economies and vulnerable diplomatic relations make future cooperation very uncertain.

7. Without recovering trust and access, neither military campaigns nor development programs will succeed. Working with community governance structures, addressing corruption within security forces and state authorities, protecting defenders and communities at risk, and building genuinely local sustainable development alternatives are not secondary concerns but will determine whether any security strategy will fail or reach its objectives. Gender–blind strategies will miss the early–warning role that women leaders, Indigenous women, and girls often play in detecting recruitment, exploitation, and displacement risks. And lack of intercultural approaches will weaken the fundamental role of Indigenous communities in territorial governance. Law enforcement, in short, must form part of a broader effort of peacebuilding and strengthening state legitimacy, not substitute for it.



A coca grower walks near La Paya National Park in Putumayo, Colombia. Credits: Bram Ebus.

8. *Recommendations*

1. MANDATE JOINT FINANCIAL INVESTIGATIONS TARGETING CROSS-BORDER GOLD FLOWS

Illegal gold mining has displaced cocaine as the primary income flow across significant stretches of the Putumayo–Napo corridor, yet regional security frameworks remain structured around counternarcotics, leaving gold supply chains (including mercury trading networks and equipment imports) largely unaddressed by financial investigators. The Financial Intelligence Units of Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, coordinated through the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America (GAFILAT), should establish a trilateral task force dedicated exclusively to tracing illegal gold revenues, supported by additional public prosecutors seconded from environmental crimes units in each country.

Beyond asset seizure cases, the task force should develop a proposal for harmonized environmental crimes legislation across the three countries, submitted to the Andean Community (CAN) as the appropriate multilateral vehicle for regional legal standardization. The trilateral task force should also document mercury contamination as a transboundary human rights harm requiring reparation mechanisms for affected Indigenous communities, consistent with the Colombian Constitutional Court’s ruling T–106 of 2025, and in accordance with Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

2. REDIRECT LAW ENFORCEMENT RESOURCES FROM INFRASTRUCTURE DESTRUCTION TO SECONDARY SUPPLY CHAIN INTERDICTION

Across the tri–border area corridor, enforcement operations targeting cocaine base paste laboratories and illegal mining continue to prioritize the destruction of equipment, producing visible results while leaving the underlying criminal economies structurally intact. Colombia’s Attorney General’s Office (Fiscalía), Peru’s Public Prosecutor’s Office (Ministerio Público), and Ecuador’s Attorney General’s Office (Fiscalía General) should issue joint operational guidelines reorienting enforcement toward fuel supply routes, mercury and precursor trading networks, and mining equipment supply chains, therewith targeting the logistical foundations that illegal miners and cocaine producers share, rather than the infrastructure they can readily replace. Seizing and interdicting precursors, mercury and equipment imposes sustained operational costs that asset destruction does not and disrupts the convergence between mining and cocaine logistics that makes both economies resilient to conventional interdiction. Joint operational guidelines should include mandatory internal anti–corruption protocols for security forces operating in illegal mining zones, given documented patterns of collusion between armed forces and criminal mining operations across the tri–border area.

3. MAINTAIN PROCESSES OF NEGOTIATION WITH THE CDF WITH NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS, INCLUDING A CROSS BORDER MONITORING ARRANGEMENT

With peace negotiations with the CDF at an advanced stage, a breakdown would carry a high cost: escalating violence, territorial disputes among armed actors, and a reconfiguration and displacement of illicit economies. The risks are increased due to the absence of adequate coordination among the three governments on

monitoring, compliance, or the cross-border implications of any negotiating collapse. A more intelligent approach would mean a strictly conditional continuation of the process, with necessary adjustments and pressure on the armed actor, including strengthening guarantees for participation of different social actors.

A crucial adjustment, as peace negotiations with the CDF proceed, would be the acknowledgement of the cross border nature of CDF activities and logistical networks. The UN Verification Mission in Colombia, in coordination with Ecuador's Foreign Ministry and Peru's Ministry of External Relations, should request observer status over CDF compliance commitments in border-adjacent zones, particularly given that 99 members have already entered the ZUT and a suspension of talks by the incoming government would leave those who demobilized unprotected. A signed observer protocol between the three foreign ministries and the UN Mission should be the minimum deliverable before any formal suspension of dialogue is announced, ensuring that gains achieved under negotiation are not silently reversed as the political winds shift in Bogotá.

4. CONDITION RENEWAL OF CROP SUBSTITUTION FUNDING ON MAINTAINING COMANDOS DE LA FRONTERA AGREEMENTS AND EXPANDING COVERAGE TO COMMUNITIES INVOLVED IN GOLD MINING

Although president elect De la Espriella has pledged to eradicate Colombia's supposed 330,000 hectares of coca through aerial spraying and forced eradication, terminating the CDF peace process in Putumayo would complicate rather than advance that goal. Coca base paste acquisitions in the department have already dropped under current negotiated arrangements and a breakdown would likely trigger both a return to forced coca production and accelerated illegal gold extraction in the same communities, reversing hard-won gains on two fronts simultaneously.

Colombia's Territorial Titling Agency (Agencia de Renovación del Territorio, ART), through its Directorate for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (Dirección de Sustitución de Cultivos de Uso Ilícito), should insert explicit conditionality clauses into the next Renhacemos funding cycle in Putumayo, requiring that investments extend to communities historically alternating between coca and gold mining and that any arrangement with the CDF remains active as a precondition for disbursement. Individual signatories to Renhacemos involved in gold mining should be expelled from the program. Where Renhacemos coverage is incomplete, the same conditionality logic should apply to active PDET instruments (created as part of the peace agreement in 2016 with the FARC) in the same territory, ensuring no funding gap allows criminal actors to fill the space vacated by a collapsed negotiation.

5. CONVENE A STRUCTURAL TRILATERAL SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE COUNCIL AT SUB-MINISTERIAL LEVEL, WITH MANDATORY PARTICIPATION FROM NON-SECURITY AGENCIES

Existing trilateral mechanisms, such as the "Tripartita de Inteligencia Militar," are dominated by security actors, excluding the civilian institutions whose presence determines whether security gains translate into reduced community vulnerability. Colombia's Office of the High Commissioner for Stabilization, Peru's Presidency of the Council of Ministers, through the Multisectoral Commission for the Pacification and Comprehensive Development of the Province of Putumayo, created by Supreme Decree 119-2025-PCM, and Ecuador's National Planning Secretariat should establish a formal coordination body that includes environmental authorities and the Ombudsman's Offices (Defensorías del Pueblo), and health and education ministries alongside military and police representatives. The body should build on the Binational Border Commission (COMBIFRON) framework and formally interface with the ATCO's security commission and CAN's Illegal Mining commission to ensure that intelligence on illegal mining reaches subnational governance actors. The Defensorías should anchor community protection monitoring while the three Fiscalías drive a shared criminal investigation agenda, ensuring the council produces both accountability and operational outputs rather than becoming a forum for information exchange alone.

6. ENSURE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS INCLUDE BINDING HUMAN RIGHTS SAFEGUARDS AND COMMUNITY OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS

The Shield of the Americas framework, as currently structured, risks prioritizing unchecked military action, such as lethal kinetic operations, over the governance and development investments the tri-border region requires. Documented abuses from joint military operations in Sucumbíos, and President Noboa's June 2026 decree granting immunity to foreign military personnel, illustrate the human rights and sovereignty risks this approach generates. The United States and its regional partners should reorient Shield of the Americas contributions toward criminal intelligence sharing, cross-border financial investigations and rebuilding trust for law enforcement institutions in Amazon communities. Where peace negotiations with armed groups continue, coordinated law enforcement should function as a credible consequence mechanism for groups that violate human rights commitments or break negotiating agreements. Any security cooperation must be conditioned on compliance with international humanitarian law and independent human rights monitoring, with foreign military deployments excluded from Indigenous and civilian-populated border areas, in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 30. U.S. security assistance must adhere to the Leahy Law, withholding training, weapons, intelligence or other support from units credibly alleged to have perpetrated human rights violations.

7. TREAT THE TRI-BORDER AREA AS A HIGH-RISK ZONE FOR EXTRACTIVE INVESTMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS UNTIL BASELINE GOVERNANCE CONDITIONS ARE MET

Security arrangements tailored to extractive industry protection in the tri-border area risk deepening community distrust, displacing civilian protection priorities, and generating the conditions for prolonged conflict rather than resolving them. The presence of armed groups with territorial control, a history of extortion in adjacent areas and active peace negotiations in flux represent clear red flags for conflict financing under the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations on proceeds of crime, all of which require companies to conduct enhanced due diligence before operating in such environments. The Inter-American Development Bank, European Union Global Gateway, and any corporate investors entering the tri-border area should treat these conditions as disqualifying risk factors until baseline governance is in place, including Free, Prior, and Informed Consent processes and land title registration through Colombia's Agencia Nacional de Tierras, Peru's Ministry of Agriculture and Loreto Regional Government and Ecuador's Secretaría Nacional de Planificación.

8. FUND AND FORMALIZE INDIGENOUS TERRITORIAL MONITORING NETWORKS AS A FRONT-LINE SECURITY LAYER

Across the tri-border area, Indigenous and community leaders represent the front line of resistance against criminal expansion and forest destruction, but they face threats and assassination with minimal institutional backing and no formal role in early-warning or protection systems, except for their status in Colombia as "environmental authorities" since 2025. Colombia's Ministry of the Interior, Peru's Ministry of Justice (through the Intersectoral Mechanism for the Protection of Defenders) and Ecuador's Ministry of Government should allocate dedicated budget lines to existing Indigenous territorial monitoring systems (including Indigenous guard structures and community-based early-warning networks that train local members to record and report incursions and environmental threats) and formalize their legal

status as recognized early–warning actors with direct reporting channels to each country’s Prosecutor’s Office . Protection frameworks must adopt a differential approach for remote ethnic communities, whose geographic isolation, distinct governance structures, and cultural relationships with territory make standard urban–designed protection schemes ineffective and at times counterproductive.

9. MANDATE GENDER-DISAGGREGATED MONITORING ACROSS ALL TRI-BORDER SECURITY AND PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMS

Women and girls face compounding threats that generalized security frameworks fail to capture. In mining and coca hubs, the concentration of transient male labor, cash economies, and armed actors fuels widespread sexual exploitation. Extreme climate events, including droughts and floods, hit remote Amazon communities hardest, and women bear a disproportionate burden as primary caregivers, facing the sharpest consequences for household and community resilience. The UN Verification Mission and the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP–OEA), together with delegated offices of the Ministries of the Interior, should revise their monitoring frameworks to systematically document sexual exploitation, threats against women leaders, and gender–based restrictions on mobility. Women’s organizations and Indigenous women’s organizations should play a formal role in data collection. Each country’s Office of the People’s Defenders should also publish a gender–disaggregated violence report covering the tri–border area.

10. DEPLOY A JOINT CROSS-BORDER EMERGENCY RESPONSE UNIT AHEAD OF THE NEXT EL NIÑO CYCLE

The region’s remoteness and the near–total absence of state emergency infrastructure mean that forest fires, droughts, and flood events routinely go unaddressed for days, creating humanitarian vacuums that criminal actors exploit to deepen community dependence. Colombia’s UNGRD, Peru’s INDECI and Ecuador’s SNGRE —all institutions in charge of emergency and disaster management— should treat the incoming El Niño cycle as both an urgent incentive and a practical opportunity to establish a pre–positioned joint emergency response unit covering these particular borderlands, with shared protocols for forest fire combat and emergency response. Tri–national funding and staffing of units embedded in remote border communities would substantially reduce costs compared to deploying separate national responses to the same emergencies, while keeping trained personnel present year–round.

ENDNOTES

- 1 [Radio Sucumbíos](#) (March 2026). Ferré–Sadurní, Luis; León Cabrera, José María; Correal, Annie y Schmitt, Eric (24 March 2026). [“The U.S. Said It Helped Bomb a Drug Camp. It Was a Dairy Farm”](#), *NYT*.
 - 2 Source: <https://x.com/Southcom/status/2030056869624955036?s=20>
 - 3 *CBS News* (9 March 2026). [“U.S., Ecuador carry out joint “lethal kinetic operations” to combat drug trafficking, video shows”](#).
 - 4 [Radio Sucumbíos](#) (March 2026). Ferré–Sadurní, Luis; León Cabrera, José María; Correal, Annie y Schmitt, Eric (24 March 2026). [“The U.S. Said It Helped Bomb a Drug Camp. It Was a Dairy Farm”](#), *NYT*.
 - 5 Ibid.
 - 6 Ferré–Sadurní, Luis and Ismay, John (17 March 2026). [“An Unexploded Bomb on a Colombian Farm Leads to a Diplomatic Clash”](#); *Noticias DW* (19 March 2026). [“Ecuador y Colombia investigarán juntos el hallazgo de bomba”](#).
 - 7 Daniel Noboa, post on X, 17 March 2026; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lZtrlsW5Y8>; Ferré–Sadurní, et al. *Ídem*.
 - 8 Colombia One (19 March 2026). Nomesqui Rivera, Jimmy (18 March 2026). [“Ecuador reconoció propiedad del explosivo encontrado en Colombia: los detalles de la conversación entre los ministros de Defensa”](#), *Infobae*.
 - 9 Shield of the Americas is a U.S.–led hemispheric security initiative launched in March 2026 under the Trump administration. Its stated purpose is to strengthen cooperation among participating countries to combat transnational criminal organizations, particularly drug cartels, while also addressing border security, intelligence sharing, critical infrastructure protection, and foreign influence in the Western Hemisphere.
 - 10 See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/17/mexico-trump-cartels-military-intervention>
 - 11 Homicide numbers went down from 232 in 2023, to 183 in 2023, to 41 in 2025, and massive displacements from 3215 in 2023 to 453 in 2024 and 230 in 2025. Source: https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/colombia-briefing-departamental-putumayo-enero-diciembre-de-2025?gl=1*1f8qns*_ga*NTY5NjcyODQ2LjE3MDU2Nzk0MjU*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*czE3NzkxMzc1NTEkbzlxOCRnMSR0Mtc3OTEzNzU1NSRqNTYkbDAkaDA
 - 12 See: <https://spda.org.pe/conectividad-vial-sostenible/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/BELLAVISTA.pdf>
 - 13 International Crisis Group (12 November 2025). [“Paradise Lost? Ecuador’s Battle with Organised Crime”](#).
 - 14 *SEMANA* (14 August 2025). [“Gobierno de Colombia rechaza la detención de topógrafos en Santa Rosa, territorio en disputa con Perú”](#).
 - 15 *EFE* (30 May 2026). [“Noboa le dice al candidato colombiano Abelardo De la Espiella que desde el 1 de junio levantará los aranceles”](#).
 - 16 Interviews, analysts and academics, Bogota, Lima and Quito, 2026.
 - 17 Pannel, Alfie (16 September 2025). [“For the first time in decades, U.S. says Colombia is falling short in the drug war”](#), *NPR*.
 - 18 Lombo Delgado, Juan Sebastián (29 January 2026). [“Presidente Gustavo Petro le da ultimátum a alias ‘Araña’ para frenar extradición: ‘Tiene 10 días para demostrar el compromiso de erradicar’”](#), *El Tiempo*.
 - 19 Patiño, Javier (16 February 2026). [“Así se alista el Gobierno para usar drones fumigadores en los cultivos ilícitos”](#), *Cambio*.
 - 20 See: <https://x.com/mindefensa/status/2044796608802369830>
 - 21 Interview, Community leader, May 2026.
 - 22 A drone attack on the navy vessel Hichamon on the Putumayo river bordering Peru, in late August, demonstrated CDF’s capacity to target military infrastructure. [Conexión Putumayo](#) (24 August 2025).
 - 23 See: <https://www.presidencia.gov.co/prensa/Paginas/Sin-glifosato-y-con-aval-de-la-ONU-asi-avanza-la-sustitucion-voluntaria-260519.aspx>
 - 24 Between 2023 and 2025, Peru’s Congress enacted a series of measures criticized by Human Rights Watch, prosecutors, and legal experts for weakening the fight against organized crime and corruption, including [Law No. 31990](#) (restricting effective collaboration agreements), [Law No. 32108](#) and [Law No. 32138](#) (narrowing the definition of organized crime and limiting investigative tools), [Law No. 32107](#) (introducing a statute of limitations framework for crimes against humanity), and [Law No. 32301](#) (restricting civil society oversight). Critics argue that these reforms have facilitated impunity and reduced the capacity of prosecutors and judges to dismantle criminal networks. See: [Human Rights Watch, Legislating for Impunity: How Peru’s Congress Is Allowing Organized Crime to Thrive](#) (2025)
 - 25 The coordinated entities include the Army, Navy, Air Force, the Anti–Drug Directorate of the Peruvian National Police (DIRANDRO), special operations and environmental police units, the National Superintendency for the Control of Security Services, Weapons, Ammunition and Explosives for Civilian Use (SUCAMEC), the National Superintendency of Customs and Tax Administration (SUNAT), and the National Superintendency of Migration (Migraciones). Interview, General Arévalo Kalinowski, CUPUMA commander, Peru, 2026.
 - 26 Since its creation in September 2025, the Putumayo Multisectoral Commission agreed on an agenda for “integral development and pacification for the Putumayo province) in a meeting in June 2026. So far there is still limited public evidence of major infrastructure or service–delivery outcomes on the ground. See: https://www.gob.pe/institucion/pcm/noticias/1409376-pcm-reafirma-compromiso-del-gobierno-para-promover-el-desarrollo-integral-y-pacificacion-de-la-provincia-del-putumayo?utm_source=chatgpt.com
 - 27 Noboa declared the existence of an internal armed conflict and ordered the Army to restore order in the streets, in response to the country’s severe security and prison crisis. He also listed transnational organized crime groups and identified them as “terrorist organizations and belligerent non–state actors.” Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have argued that Ecuador’s extensive use of states of exception, military involvement in public security, documented cases of enforced disappearance, attacks on judicial independence, and financial measures against civil society reflect a broader pattern of shrinking civic space and weakened accountability. See: Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2025/26*; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2026: Ecuador*; Alianza por los Derechos Humanos Ecuador, *Informe de situación de derechos humanos en el contexto del conflicto armado interno*, mayo 2026, and interview with an Alianza representative, 2 June 2026;
- By March 2026, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances had documented at least 51 alleged enforced disappearances linked to military operations. See: UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (March 2026). [37](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/un-committee-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

[enforced-disappearances-publishes-findings-ecuador-iraq-malawi-](#)

The militarization of Ecuador's prison system, declared alongside the internal armed conflict, has produced a documented humanitarian crisis: at least 1,220 people died in Ecuadorian prisons in 2025 — more than three per day — with deaths classified as “natural” or “undetermined” quadrupling compared to prior years, against a backdrop of systematic food deprivation, untreated tuberculosis, and institutional concealment of causes of death. See: Karol E. Noroña, “En 2025, más de tres personas privadas de la libertad murieron cada día en Ecuador,” *Tierra de Nadie* / CONNECTAS, 2 June 2026, <https://www.connectas.org/especiales/tierra-de-nadie>;

Amnesty International also documented the forced disappearance of at least ten people across five military operations in 2024; on 22 December 2025, a court sentenced eleven soldiers to 34 years and eight months in prison for the disappearance of four Afro-descendant adolescents in Guayaquil, a ruling immediately appealed by two of those convicted. Amnesty International “Ecuador bajo escrutinio internacional por desapariciones forzadas.” March 2026, <https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2026/03/ecuador-desapariciones-forzadas>.

28 Interviews, community leaders, 2025 and 2026.

29 Cazar Baquero, Diego (12 February 2026). “[Ni estado ni ley](#)”, *Amazon Underworld*.

30 Ibid.

31 Interview, Ecuador, 2026.

32 Interview, US Official, 2026.

33 See: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/fbi-opens-permanent-office-in-ecuador>.

34 See: <https://www.southcom.mil/News/PressReleases/Article/4420523/ecuadorian-and-us-military-forces-launch-operations-against-narco-terrorists/>.

35 See: <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/seguridad/noboa-explica-alcance-intervencion-militar-extranjera-ecuador/>.

36 García Suárez, Raúl Andrés (23 June 2026). “[¿Qué es la iniciativa de EE. UU. llamada Escudo de las Américas? El presidente electo, Abelardo de la Esprilla, anunció que Colombia hará parte](#)”, *El Tiempo*.

37 The expansion of U.S. counterterrorism frameworks into the field of transnational organised crime has accelerated since 2025. On 28 May 2026, the U.S. Department of State announced the designation of Brazil's two largest criminal organisations, Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (CV), as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) and Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs), with the measures entering into force on 5 June 2026. The announcement followed broader initiatives launched by the Trump administration under its March 2026 directive on countering cartel criminal activity and reflected a growing tendency to frame organised criminal groups through counterterrorism categories. While supporters argue that such designations strengthen sanctions, financial disruption and international intelligence cooperation, critics have warned that extending terrorism frameworks to organised crime may blur important legal distinctions, expand the scope for external security intervention and reduce policy space for locally driven responses to violence, governance deficits and illicit economies. See The White House, [Commitment to Countering Cartel Criminal Activity](#), Presidential Action, 7 March 2026; U.S. Department of State, [Terrorist Designations of Primeiro Comando da Capital \(PCC\) and Comando Vermelho \(CV\)](#), 28 May 2026.

38 Interview, community leader, June 2026.

39 Interviews, U.S. officials, 2026; Ebus, Bram; Alvarado, Sinar and Valdivieso, Jeanneth (19 December 2025). “[U.S. attacks on boats in the Caribbean and Pacific intensify trafficking through Amazon routes](#)”, *Amazon Underworld*.

40 In addition to our 2025 report, other references include: https://elpais.com/america/amazonia-sin-fronteras/2025-02-20/los-comandos-de-la-frontera-controlan-el-narcotrafico-desde-peru-a-metros-de-la-armada-colombiana-los-tengo-aca-al-frente-pasando-el-rio.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com and: <https://www.codigovidrio.com/code/la-sombra-de-los-comandos-de-la-frontera-se-expande-desde-colombia-a-ecuador-y-peru/>

41 Cazar Baquero, Diego (12 February 2026). “[Ni estado ni ley](#)”, *Amazon Underworld*.

42 Venera Salazar, Santiago Andrés (13 May 2025). “[¿Quiénes son los Comandos de la Frontera, el grupo criminal detrás del asesinato de 11 soldados en Ecuador?](#)”, *El Tiempo*.

43 Interview, Peruvian law enforcement official, 2026.

44 Interview, Peruvian community leader, June 2026.

45 Interview, community leaders in Putumayo, 2026.

46 Cazar Baquero, Diego (12 February 2026). “[Ni estado ni ley](#)”, *Amazon Underworld*.

47 Interviews with peasants in Putumayo, 2026.

48 *El Espectador* (20 April 2026). “[Gobierno dice que sí tiene dinero para cumplir metas de erradicación y sustitución de coca](#)”; *Conexión Putumayo* (14 January 2026). “[Inscripciones en Putumayo para familias cultivadoras de hoja de coca: incentivos de hasta \\$ 71.5 millones](#)”.

49 Interviews with coca-growers in Puerto Guzman, Puerto Assis and Valle del Guamuez, 2026.

50 See: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1BEVL5uCiV/>

51 See: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1BaWXUbRX4/>

52 See: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1195816642726863&set=a.531194842522383>

53 See: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1189215070053687&set=a.531194842522383>

54 Interview, Colonel Da Silveira, Grupo Cabal, 2025.

55 Interview, General Jorge Arévalo Kalinowski, commander of CUPUMA, 2026.

56 Interview, state official, 2026.

57 Interview, state official, 2026.

58 In Putumayo Colombia, for example, community sources report that CDF commanders have personal economic interests in gold mining,

lending capital to locals to purchase dredging equipment and collecting a cut of profits. Dredges are constructed in the regional town of Puerto Asís, ferried through the streets and launched in the river, with no reported action taken by law enforcement.

59 Interview, community leader, June 2026.

60 Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (DAR). "Oro Sombra: La expansión de la minería ilegal y sus efectos en la Amazonía". Repositorio DAR. See: <https://repositorio.dar.org.pe/items/f66da47f-2d63-43f5-b2c3-6e4f98fb393c>

61 Interviews, security officials, Colombia, 2025 y 2026.

62 Interview, Colombian law enforcement officials, 2026.

63 Interview, Community leader, May 2026.

64 Mercury contamination from mining has reached crisis levels: 79% of residents along Peru's Río Nanay exceed World Health Organization (WHO) mercury thresholds;# Ecuadorian research found alarming contamination of water, fish, and human hair among Kichwa communities in Napo; and Colombia's Constitutional Court (ruling T-106 of 2025) found contamination up to seventeen times safe limits, violating the rights of 30 Indigenous peoples in the Caquetá and Apaporis basins. See: A. V. Pinedo et al., "Mercury Exposure and Sustainable Development Challenges in the Río Nanay Basin, Peruvian Amazon," *Sustainability* 18, no. 2 (2025): 552, https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/18/2/552?utm_source=chatgpt.com; Latoya Abulu (9 July 2025). "Indigenous Amazonians win landmark ruling against mercury pollution in Colombia." *Mongabay*.

65 See: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/18PBrUtyn/>

66 Interviews, community leaders, May 2026.

67 Interviews, community leaders, 2026.

68 Diplomatic sources assess that the CDF "maintains a real interest in continuing to negotiate" and "has shown itself to be pragmatic." Interviews, diplomats, 2026.

69 Morales Castillo, Cindy A. (20 June 2026). "Las Zonas de Ubicación Temporal, el experimento de Petro y la difícil herencia para el próximo gobierno." *El Espectador*.

70 Defensoría del Pueblo Colombia (19 May 2026). "Pronunciamento de la Defensoría del Pueblo sobre las Zonas de Ubicación Temporal", press release.

71 Interview, CDF leadership, 2025.

72 Interviews, diplomats, 2025 and 2026.

73 Communique on file.

74 Interviews, community leaders, 2025.

75 Triana Sánchez, Santiago (4 September 2025). "Dos militares, heridos tras un intento por quemarlos vivos en la destrucción de un laboratorio de cocaína en Putumayo", *El País*.

76 Morales Castillo, Cindy (18 June 2026). "Con ingreso de 99 guerrilleros, empezó la primera Zona de Ubicación de la paz total de Petro", *El Espectador*.

77 Penagos Ramírez, Juan Pablo (14 April 2026). "Gobierno y Coordinadora Nacional Ejército Bolivariano vuelven a suspender el séptimo ciclo de diálogos", *El Tiempo*.

78 Interview, Community leader, May 2026.

79 Interviews, community leaders, 2026.

80 Interview, Armando Novoa, June 2026.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 Orellana ranked fifth among Ecuador's most violent provinces in 2025, with a homicide rate of 64.8 per 100,000 inhabitants and 127 recorded homicides; Sucumbíos registered a rate of 53.4 per 100,000, with 109 homicides — both above the national average of approximately 50–51 per 100,000, itself the highest in Ecuador's recent history, with 9,216 total homicides nationwide (a 32% increase over 2024). Within these provinces, violence is concentrated in specific cantons: Shushufindi (Sucumbíos) reached a rate of 104.27 per 100,000 in 2025, and Francisco de Orellana hit 96.42 per 100,000. See Observatorio Ecuatoriano de Crimen Organizado (OECO) / Pan American Development Foundation, "La creciente victimización de niños, niñas y adolescentes: Análisis estadístico anual de homicidios intencionales en Ecuador 2025." <https://oeco-padf.org/homicidios2025/>; El Diario (27 January 2026). "Ecuador cerró 2025 con cifras récord de homicidios y una violencia sin precedentes."

84 *Prensamerica* (20 January 2026). "Cuando juzgar cuesta la vida: el colapso de la protección judicial en Ecuador." <https://www.prensamerica.com/blog/cuando-juzgar-cuesta-la-vida-el-colapso-de-la-proteccion-judicial>. Judge Carlos Serrano, of Ecuador's Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Court, went into exile in December 2025 after a car bomb exploded outside his courthouse weeks earlier and the Judicial Council failed to act on his written warnings. The report situates this alongside the Lozada case within a broader pattern: Ecuador recorded at least 16 attacks on its judicial system in 2025.

85 See: <https://www.ecuavisa.com/amp/seguridad/masacre-en-orellana-cuatro-personas-fueron-asesinadas-en-el-coca-20250314-0067.html>

86 See: <https://www.facebook.com/RedDigitalNoticias/photos/identificada-pareja-que-fue-asesinada-en-zona-rural-de-curillo-en-caquet%C3%A1-se-trat/977131784854333/>

87 See: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia/mas-regiones/masacre-en-mocoo-asesinaron-a-cinco-jovenes-en-zona-boscosa/>

88 Interviews, community leaders, 2025 and 2026.

89 Interviews, community leaders, 2025 and 2026.

90 OCHA. Colombia: Briefing Departamental – Putumayo, enero a diciembre de 2025 https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/colombia-briefing-departamental-putumayo-enero-diciembre-de-2025?_gl=1*1f8qnbs*_ga*NTY5NjcyODQ2LjE3MDU2Nzk0MjU.*_ga

- 91 Sierra, María Paula (20 November 2025). "[Minas antipersonal en Puerto Guzmán: la herida sigue abierta](#)". *Consejo de Redacción*.
- 92 Sierra, María Paula (15 December 2025). "[Así es como minas antipersonal en Putumayo ponen en riesgo rituales e identidad de pueblos indígenas](#)". *El Espectador*.
- 93 Muñoz Medina, Lina (15 April 2025). "[Más de mil minas antipersona fueron destruidas en operación militar en Mocoa](#)". *Infobae*.
- 94 Interviews, community leaders, 2025 and 2026.
- 95 Interviews, community leaders, 2026.
- 96 Interviews, community leaders, 2026.
- 97 Interviews, community leaders, 2025 and 2026.
- 98 See: <https://www.hchr.org.co/pronunciamientos/analisis-sobre-la-situacion-de-riesgo-de-exterminio-fisico-y-cultural-de-los-pueblos-indigenas-fronterizas-region-del-putumayo-y-otras-zonas-de-colombia-balance-frente-a-la-recomendacion-67-fpci-2018/>
- 99 *Radio Pichincha* (13 June 2026). "[Conaie exige justicia por la muerte de tres comuneros shuar durante un operativo militar en Sucumbíos: así ocurrieron los hechos](#)."
- Primera Plana* (13 June 2026). "[Choque armado en Sucumbíos deja heridos y fallecidos](#)." <https://primeraplana.com.ec/enfrentamiento-militares-mineria-ilegal-sucumbios-cascales/>.
- 100 *Vorágine* (10 April 2022). "[El operativo del Ejército manchado con sangre de civiles](#)."
- 101 Fiscalía General de la Nación (Colombia), imputación de cargos contra 24 militares, 19 de julio de 2024, reported in: *El Espectador* (19 July 2024), "[Los detalles de la masacre de Alto Remanso \(Putumayo\) | Fiscalía imputó a 24 militares](#)."
- 102 OHCHR, "UN Special Rapporteur expresses deep concern over announcements of pardons for members of security forces involved in human rights violations" See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/un-special-rapporteur-expresses-deep-concern-over-announcements-pardons#:~:text=GENEVA%20-%20The%20United%20Nations%20Special%20Rapporteur%20on%20human%20rights%20violations%20during%20the%202019%20social%20unrest>.
- 103 Ortiz-T., Pablo. (25 April 2025). "The Indigenous World 2025: Ecuador," IWGIA, citing INREDH, *Informe sobre los hechos de violencia policial y militar durante la Declaratoria del Decreto 111* (Quito, 2024), <https://iwgia.org/en/ecuador/5732-iw-2025-ecuador.html>.
- 104 Cazar Baquero, Diego (12 February 2026). "[Ni estado ni ley](#)". *Amazon Underworld*.
- 105 *Radio Sucumbíos* (marzo 2026). Ferré-Sadurní, Luis; León Cabrera, José María; Correal, Annie y Schmitt, Eric (24 de marzo de 2026). "[The U.S. Said It Helped Bomb a Drug Camp. It Was a Dairy Farm](#)". *NYT*.
- 106 ORPIO, "Relación contractual de tercero perjudica proceso de consulta previa, violentando derechos fundamentales," December 2025, <https://www.orpio.org.pe/relacion-contractual-de-tercero-perjudica-proceso-de-consulta-previa-violentando-derechos-fundamentales/>; Mongabay Latam (May 2026). "[Perú dividirá una comunidad indígena y dos áreas protegidas para construir una carretera hacia Colombia](#)."
- 107 Ortiz-T., Pablo (25 April 2025). "The Indigenous World 2025: Ecuador," IWGIA.
- 108 Infobae (23 April 2022). "[Comunidad indígena de Putumayo denuncia incursión militar irregular dentro de su territorio](#)."
- 109 National Electoral Council of Ecuador, Final Results, 1 December 2025. Constitutional Assembly referendum: 61.8% voted against; foreign military bases: 60.82% voted against. Primicias, available at: <https://www.primicias.ec/politica/resultados-definitivos-consulta-popular-referendum-ecuador-cne-consejo-electoral-110793/>
- 110 Constitutional Court of Ecuador, ruling of 27 September 2025, declaring the National Solidarity Organic Law and the Public Integrity Organic Law unconstitutional. The National Solidarity Law included a provision granting the president the authority to issue "preemptive pardons" to police and military personnel prosecuted for crimes committed in the context of the internal armed conflict. The 17 suspended provisions corresponded to the National Solidarity, Public Integrity, and Intelligence laws. *Swissinfo/EFE*, 27 September 2025, available at: <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/la-corte-constitucional-de-ecuador-deja-a-noboa-sin-dos-leyes-emblema-de-su-nuevo-mandato/90075799>
- 111 Constitutional Court of Ecuador, ruling of 27 September 2025, declaring the National Solidarity Organic Law and the Public Integrity Organic Law unconstitutional. The National Solidarity Law included a provision granting the president the authority to issue "preemptive pardons" to police and military personnel prosecuted for crimes committed in the context of the internal armed conflict. The 17 suspended provisions corresponded to the National Solidarity, Public Integrity, and Intelligence laws. *Swissinfo/EFE* (27 September 2025), available at: <https://www.swissinfo.ch/>
- 112 Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, statement of 12 August 2025: "Attacks against Ecuador's Constitutional Court are unacceptable. Authorities must guarantee the independence of the Court and the safety of judges and staff." The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) simultaneously expressed concern regarding "acts and statements that may threaten the independent work of judges." *Infobae/EFE* (13 August 2025), available at: <https://www.infobae.com/>.
- 113 Ortiz-T., Pablo (25 April 2025). "The Indigenous World 2025: Ecuador," IWGIA, <https://iwgia.org/en/ecuador/5732-iw-2025-ecuador.html>.
- 114 *El Comercio* (18 June 2026). "[Daniel Noboa decreta un nuevo conflicto armado interno en Ecuador](#)"; *Expreso* (June 2026), "[Las reglas del nuevo conflicto armado interno y las dudas que genera](#)"; *Primicias* (18 June 2026). "[Daniel Noboa decreto Ecuador conflicto armado interno cooperación internacional](#)."
- 115 On August 15, 2025, Ecuador's Ministry of Energy and Mines officially unveiled the "Hydrocarbon Roadmap" during the event "Investment Kickoff: Boosting Ecuador's Hydrocarbon Potential," led by Energy Minister Inés Manzano. The plan comprises 49 projects — grouped into four bidding rounds covering the Coastal region (Litoral), the Southeast (Suroriente), the Sub-Andean region (Subandina), and marginal fields (Intracampos) — with a projected investment of USD 47.367 billion. The blocks in the Suroriente and Subandina rounds, which span more than 36,000 km² of Amazonian territory, overlap with the territories of the Achuar, Shiwari, Sapara, Andwa, Waorani, and Kichwa nationalities. See Primicias, "Government relaunches oil-sector roadmap with 49 projects worth USD 47.367 billion in investment," August 19, 2025, <https://www.primicias.ec/economia/gobierno-daniel-noboa-hoja-ruta-sector-petroleo-inversion-privada-103170/>; and Ecuador's Ministry of Energy and Mines, Hydrocarbon Roadmap, Portfolio of Prioritized Projects, August 15, 2025.
- 116 Mazo González, Daniella (8 April 2026). "[Abelardo de la Espiella promete mano dura: este es el plan para recuperar la seguridad de Colombia](#)

en 90 días”, *Infobae*.

- 117 *El Colombiano* (19 June 2026). “[Los 90 decretos con los que Abelardo espera sacudir el país desde el 7 de agosto si gana las Presidencia](#)”; Ávila, Ricardo (11 February 2026). “[Colombia’s Bukele? Abelardo De La Espriella Surges Ahead](#)”, *Americas Quarterly*.
- 118 *El Colombiano*. Ibidem.
- 119 Ortiz, Jerson (20 May 2026). “[Propuestas bomba del programa de Abelardo de la Espriella](#)”, *La Silla Vacía*.
- 120 Mosco, Liliana (21 June 2026). “Abelardo de la Espriella proclama una “nueva era” tras ganar en Colombia”, *Excélsior*.
- 121 Ibidem.
- 122 *Infobae*, 11 April 11 2026 (op. cit., n. 4). Reports Fujimori’s stated plan to propose Armed Forces–backed action to “recuperar el orden” within the first 100 days of government; her foreign–policy alignment with Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, and the United States; her proposal to reinstate “jueces sin rostro”; and her stated intention to withdraw Peru from the Inter–American Court of Human Rights.
- 123 *Diario Correo* (June 2026). “[Elecciones 2026: ¿Quién es Keiko Fujimori y cuáles son las propuestas clave de su plan de gobierno?](#)”; France24 (3–4 June 2026). “[Balotaje en Perú: ¿cuáles son las propuestas de Keiko Fujimori y de Roberto Sánchez?](#)”; and: Pérez Guadalupe, José Luis. “[Elecciones Generales 2026: Análisis de las propuestas en materia de seguridad ciudadana](#).” Centro de Investigación de la Universidad del Pacífico (CIUP).
- 124 *Infobae* (June 1, 2026). “En la frontera con Ecuador, solo hay dos patrullas,” Keiko Fujimori, presidential debate, May 31, 2026, cited in “[Keiko Fujimori en el Debate presidencial 2026: más policías, expulsión de migrantes y trabajo obligatorio en cárceles para frenar ola de crimen](#)”.
- 125 Cifuentes, Cristina (4 June 2026). “[Fuerza Popular plantea revisar las denominadas 'leyes procrimen' en un eventual gobierno de Keiko Fujimori en Perú](#),” *La Tercera*.
- 126 “Corredor Trinacional Amazónico. Colombia, Ecuador y Perú actualizan línea base y definen plan de acción para su conservación”, Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia, 26 de agosto de 2025. <https://www.parquesnacionales.gov.co/sala-prensa/noticias/corredor-trinacional-amazonico-colombia-ecuador-y-peru-actualizan-linea-base-y-definen-plan-de-accion-para-su-conservacion/>
- 127 Interview, state official, 2026.
- 128 Ibid.



AMAZON UNDERWORLD



AMAZON WATCH

al margen