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By: Ella Sicking<sup>1</sup>

A state of emergency in Ecuador continues to be in effect as cocaine trafficking and gang violence become increasingly problematic. What started as cartel rivalries and increased cocaine production in bordering countries, Peru and Colombia, has turned into a full-scale drug war in Ecuador, stirring humanitarian and governmental concerns about the mounting violence in the once peaceful country. Increased regulation and United States intervention might be the only approach to save Ecuador from becoming a country ravaged by violence and run by the cartels, but local governmental corruption is currently acting as a barrier to a timely solution. While quick reaction from Ecuador's newly elected president, Daniel Noboa, has resulted in increased military and police violence against the cartels, some U.S. military officials are warning against a strict crackdown. Fighting the cartels in a way that circumvents the law could lead to even worse retaliation and decreased security, escalating the conflict while putting civilians at risk. To avoid a civil war, kdown. Fighting the cœW\*ny 612 792 t Tcad iy at t thesed ccy in œe3( )] TJETntu-13(t)7(i) TJ27(g



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“On April 7, 2020, Ecuador’s National Court of Justice sentenced Mr. Correa to eight

Andean drug trafficking,<sup>36</sup> was once Colombia's largest rebel group.<sup>37</sup> By 2016, it is estimated that the FARC controlled over half of the world's most productive coca crops.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the insurgency, the Ecuadorian government maintained a "cautious but stable relationship with the FARC," which kept things relatively calm in Ecuador.<sup>39</sup> Though they were based in Colombia, the FARC maintained a monopoly on cocaine routes from southern Colombia to Ecuador's Pacific ports, where its dominancy tended to minimize violence.<sup>40</sup> But in 2016, the FARC signed a peace accord with the Colombian government, ending the fifty-year insurgency and creating "power vacuums" in rural areas of Colombia and Latin America. This led to gaps for new rebel groups, thirty of which quickly took root.<sup>41</sup>

When the peace accord between Colombia and the FARC was in its infancy, the country experienced some positive effects, such as the integration of hundreds of rebels back into local communities, farming substitution crops to replace coca, and wide-spread disarmament.<sup>42</sup> But the peace was short-lived. Because the drug trade in Latin America was no longer being controlled by one dominant group, gangs from Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela began fighting for the position once held by the FARC.<sup>43</sup> Once these gangs discovered the open cocaine market in Ecuador's ports, which are strongly connected to markets in Europe and Asia, they began competing for territorial control.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, increased prison populations, a result of former

Unfortunately, evidence of intent to commercialize is not easy to obtain, as most of the traffickers that are caught play intermediary roles, and shipments of cocaine often aren't commercialized until they reach their end destinations, such as Europe or the United States.<sup>48</sup> While Colombia is far

cocaine to smuggle their product out of the country.<sup>55</sup> Because 7.2 million tons of bananas are



government organizations, the Costa Rican Institute on Drugs has implemented a “joint commission that works as a co-ordination mechanism in the fight against corruption.”<sup>65</sup> They also have a Political Constitution which establishes that “all public servants must be elected using criteria of proven suitability.”<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Costa Rica’s law against Corruption and Illicit Enrichment in Public Service aims to “address cases of conflict of interest and abuse of public office.”<sup>67</sup> The implementation of monetary compensation in certain cases and the continuance of

