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## Latin America Advisor

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**FEATURED Q&A**

# Why Are Ecuador-Colombia Trade Tensions Flaring?



Trade tensions have heightened in recent weeks between Ecuador and Colombia. The border crossing between Tulcán, Ecuador and Ipiales, Colombia is pictured. // File Photo: Jose via Adobe Stock.

**Q U.S. President Donald Trump has offered to act as a mediator in a trade war between Colombia and Ecuador, Colombian President Gustavo Petro said after he met with Trump on Feb. 3 at the White House. The meeting happened on the same day that protesters gathered at a border crossing between the two Andean nations to demand that they eliminate tariffs of 30 percent on dozens of goods. What is at the root of the trade tensions between Ecuador and Colombia, and what are the main points of contention? How has the Ecuador-Colombia trade war affected both countries' economies and residents? To what extent will Trump and his administration be able to help the two sides reach a deal?**

**A** **Angélica Herrera Muñoz, CEO and founder of Coex Corporation:** "Trade tensions between Colombia and Ecuador stem primarily from longstanding disputes over safeguards, tariffs and concerns about asymmetric competitiveness in key sectors such as agriculture, processed foods and manufactured goods. Both governments have historically faced domestic pressure to protect local industries and jobs, which has reinforced the use of temporary trade barriers and intensified political rhetoric. The immediate friction is linked to the imposition of tariffs on dozens of products and the growing discontent among producers and border communities that depend on cross-border trade. For residents of border regions, the conflict translates into higher prices, disruptions to the normal flow of trade and reduced income opportunities. For both economies, the dispute risks undermining regional value chains and affecting agreements, such as the Andean

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**TODAY'S NEWS**

POLITICAL

## Mexican Army Kills Leader of Jalisco New Generation Cartel

Mexico's army on Sunday killed Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes, known as "El Mencho," the leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel.

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POLITICAL

## Venezuela Frees 54 More Political Prisoners

Venezuela released 54 more political prisoners following the passage last Thursday of an amnesty law, a rights group said.

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ECONOMIC

## Trump to Impose 15% Tariff on Imports From All Countries

U.S. President Donald Trump said Saturday that he will impose 15 percent tariffs on imports from all countries. The previous day, the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated tariffs he imposed under a 1977 law.

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Trump // File Photo: White House.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Mexican Army Kills Powerful Kingpin, Violence Ensues

Mexico's army on Sunday killed the leader of the powerful Jalisco New Generation Cartel in a shootout, leading the cartel to unleash a wave of violence that left at least 14 people dead across three states—Jalisco, Michoacán and Guanajuato—the Associated Press reported. The kingpin, Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes, known as “El Mencho,” was wounded in an operation that the army had launched to capture him in the town of Tapalpa in Jalisco state, the AP reported. He died as he was being flown to Mexico City, the wire service reported, citing Mexico's Defense Department. During the operation to apprehend the cartel leader, troops killed four people; three others, including Oseguera, were wounded at the scene and later died, the AP reported. Authorities arrested two people and seized rocket launchers, armored vehicles and other weapons. The military said three armed forces members were wounded in the operation to capture Oseguera, and a Jalisco state official said one National Guard member was killed in the mission. The operation involved Mexico's air force and an elite unit of the National Guard trained to fight drug cartels, The Wall Street Journal reported. Oseguera's death set off a wave of retaliatory violence by the cartel, known by its initials in Spanish, CJNG. Six National Guard members were killed in the city of Zapopan, a jail guard was killed in Puerto Vallarta as prisoners rioted, and an agent from the state prosecutor's office in Jalisco was killed, the AP reported. Cartel members torched cars and used them to block roads in more than 250 places across 20 states, authorities said, the wire service reported. School classes were canceled for today in Jalisco and six other states, the Financial Times reported. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum called for calm. “There is absolute coordination with the governments of all states; we must remain informed,” she said in a post on social media site X. “We work

every day for peace, security, justice, and the well-being of Mexico,” she added. Oseguera's killing came amid pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump for Mexico to do more to fight drug trafficking. The United States had a \$15 million bounty for the kingpin, The Wall Street Journal reported. In a post on Sunday, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said the United States provided intelligence to aid Mexico in the operation against Oseguera. “El Mencho’ was a was a top target for the Mexican and United States government as one of the top traffickers of fentanyl into our homeland,” she said. In the post, Leavitt said the Trump administration “commends and thanks the Mexican military for their cooperation and successful execution of this operation.”

## Venezuela Frees 54 More Political Prisoners: Foro Penal

Venezuelan authorities have released 54 people held in the country for political reasons since the government of acting President Delcy Rodríguez enacted amnesty legislation last Thursday, human rights group Foro Penal said Sunday in a post on social media site X. National Assembly leader Jorge Rodríguez, the acting president's brother, on Saturday said that Venezuela's government was processing more than 1,500 applications for people to be released under the amnesty law, the Associated Press reported. At least 600 people remain detained in Venezuela for political purposes, the AP reported, citing Foro Penal's estimates. Nongovernmental organizations have criticized Venezuela's amnesty law, which was a key demand from the U.S. government following last month's ouster of President Nicolás Maduro, for its limited scope. The law covers cases dating back to 1999 but only applies to criminal allegations tied to specific high-profile events of civil unrest. Released detainees, many of whom are former public officials, are banned from speaking to the press, leaving the country and participating in politics, the Miami Herald reported. The law also bars from the political process people who allegedly called for foreign

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Cuba's Health Care System Being Pushed to Collapse: Minister

Cuba's health care system is close to a breaking point amid the U.S. government's efforts to block oil shipments to the island nation, the country's health minister said Friday, the Associated Press reported. Already plagued with a lack of adequate staff, supplies and medicine, the system now has shortages of fuel for ambulances, and power outages have hit hospitals, Health Minister José Ángel Portal Miranda told the wire service.

## Lula, Modi Sign Economic Cooperation Agreement

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday signed a cooperation agreement in mining and minerals as part of Lula's three-day trip to India, Reuters reported. The leaders pledged to boost bilateral trade by 33 percent over the next five years, the wire service reported. Brazil-India trade totaled around \$15 billion last year; bilateral trade between Brazil and China was more than \$170 billion in 2025, the South China Morning Post reported.

## Colombia Lacks U.S. License for Natural Gas Imports from Venezuela

Colombian state-run oil firm Ecopetrol will be unable to import natural gas from neighboring Venezuela in order to address domestic fuel shortfalls because the U.S. Treasury Department has not issued a license permitting it to do so, Colombian energy minister Edwin Palma Egea announced on Sunday, Bloomberg News reported. Colombia's government will pursue other avenues for short-term natural gas supplies that are less time-consuming than securing a U.S. sanctions-waiver license, Palma Egea said.

intervention against Maduro's government. Since Maduro's ouster on Jan. 3, Venezuela's government has released a total of more than 450 people that Foro Penal classifies as political prisoners, the AP reported.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

# Trump to Impose 15% Tariffs on All Imports After Court's Ruling

U.S. President Donald Trump said Saturday that he will impose tariffs of 15 percent on U.S. imports from all countries, raising that level from 10 percent, which he vowed to levy following a ruling on Friday by the U.S. Supreme Court that invalidated a wide swath of the tariffs he has imposed over the past year. Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform that the 15 percent tariffs are "fully allowed, and legally tested" and are needed because many countries "have been 'ripping' the U.S. off for decades, without retribution." Trump is imposing the new tariffs under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974. The law allows tariffs of up to 15 percent for 150 days but requires congressional approval to be extended beyond that, Reuters reported. Trump said in a social media post on Saturday that he would use that 150-day period to construct other "legally permissible" tariffs. No president has previously invoked Section 122 to impose tariffs, and its use could spark new legal challenges, Reuters reported. Trump's moves follow the Supreme Court's invalidation on Friday of tariffs that Trump has imposed under the 1977 International Emergency Powers Act. The 6-3 decision by the high court drew sharp criticism from Trump. "I'm ashamed of certain members of the court, absolutely ashamed, for not having the courage to do what's right for our country," he said at a news conference, The Washington Post reported. Among the justices voting to strike down the tariffs Trump imposed under the 1977 law were Neil Gorsuch and Amy Coney Barrett, whom Trump appointed in his first term.

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Community, to which both countries belong. Furthermore, this situation discourages investment and weakens confidence in the trade and investment framework. While the magnitude of the conflict is manageable, prolonged uncertainty could erode bilateral trade flows and disproportionately affect small and medium-sized exporters. The most constructive path forward lies in technical dialogue, regulatory harmonization and mechanisms that provide temporary relief without distorting competition. U.S. mediation could facilitate political dialogue and de-escalation, particularly by promoting transparency and structured negotiations. However, a lasting agreement will ultimately depend on bilateral institutional channels and a shared commitment to restoring predictability. External support can accelerate talks, but the solution must emerge from coordinated economic policy, private sector participation and the building of trust between the two governments."

**A** **Manuel Echeverría, CEO and general manager of Trade and Business Partners:** "First and foremost, it's important to consider that this is purely a political issue that has developed into a trade conflict between Ecuador and Colombia. It's crucial to understand that Colombia is among Ecuador's top five trading partners globally and undoubtedly its most important partner in South America. Therefore, these measures not only affect Ecuador but also both countries. This conflict comes from pressure by Ecuador on Colombia to more effectively control the border crossing between southern Colombia and northern Ecuador. This area is known not only for its significant informal trade and smuggling, but also for its insufficient controls on the trafficking of weapons and illicit substances. The most affected ones in this trade war are consumers in both countries. Ecuador has a strong presence of Colombian products, particularly in the food, textile, apparel and manufacturing sectors.

Similarly, Ecuador primarily sells processed foods to the Colombian market, as well as products from the metalworking industry, plastics and other sectors. President Donald Trump's support or offer comes precisely

**“The most affected ones in this trade war are consumers in both countries.”**

— Manuel Echeverría

because the United States wants to act as a mediator on various geopolitical issues in Latin America, so that it can have a more direct involvement in regional security matters, specifically regarding the control or reduction of drug trafficking from Latin America to the United States."

**A** **Allison Fedirka, director of analysis at Geopolitical Futures:** "The media portrays organized crime and insecurity along the Colombia-Ecuador border as the root of the trade conflict. The most present danger from the trade war is the slow destabilization of local communities along the border. While this is indeed a legitimate issue, the Colombia-Ecuador conflict fits in with the larger U.S. strategy to secure the rim of the southern Caribbean, which includes Venezuela and Colombia. (As seen with Venezuela, fighting drug trafficking groups provides the ideal pretext for diverse U.S. actions.) Ecuadorean President Daniel Noboa is seen as a trusted U.S. ally in the region. Both countries have parallel cases against one another within the framework of the Andean Community. While this could potentially resolve the trade issue, such avenues take a long time to complete the process. This increases the potential for Trump to mediate a deal—especially given his meeting with Petro on Feb. 3 and potential meeting with

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Noboa on March 7. That said, officials from Colombia and Ecuador are holding their own talks to find a solution to the trade issue. Regardless of how instrumental Trump may be in resolving any trade dispute between the two countries, he will take full credit for making any deal happen. In reality, a resolution of the trade war will be driven largely by the United States and Colombia improving their own differences, which will then allow things with Ecuador to cool down."

**A** **Carlos Enriquez Montes, member of the technical committee of the Conference of Latin American & Caribbean Express Companies (CLADEC):** "The escalating trade tensions between Ecuador and Colombia, including the imposition of additional tariffs, introduce friction at a moment when regional supply chains require greater predictability. For the express delivery industry, which depends on speed, transparency, regulatory alignment and efficient customs processes, abrupt tariff measures and border disruptions directly affect time-sensitive shipments, including those from small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) engaged in cross-border e-commerce, and integrated logistics networks. Even short-term uncertainty can lead to delayed customs clearance, increased compliance costs and

reduced business reliability. These dynamics are especially consequential in the current U.S. trade and security policy context, which emphasizes stronger economic ties and security cooperation within the Western Hemisphere, as well as more resilient regional supply chains. Escalating trade and security tensions between Ecuador and Colombia risk creating fragmentation at a time when the region is well positioned to benefit from nearshoring and expanded e-commerce. For the express industry, which serves all sectors and businesses of all sizes, from health care and manufacturing to technology to SMEs, regulatory stability is as critical as market access itself. The express sector and the businesses we serve thrive in an enabling business environment characterized by streamlined customs procedures, transparent tariff frameworks and regulatory coordination. Adding layers of complexity or administrative burden, particularly in a climate of heightened global regulatory uncertainty, risks undermining competitiveness for both countries. It is key for these countries to renew their collaboration efforts and find practical solutions to enhance the business environment."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.*

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## Upcoming Events

### ONLINE EVENT: Mexico's Electoral Reform-What's at Stake

February 27, 2026 | 11:00 am ET | Online

### Second Annual Money Services Business Industry Forum

March 3, 2026 | 9:15 am ET |

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