

## **Crime in Ecuador: State strategies for reducing violence and preventing crime**

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### ABSTRACT

This research focused on analyzing the state strategies implemented in Ecuador to address crime, reduce violence and prevent crime. As a methodology, a descriptive study was developed, with a qualitative and documentary approach, through the inductive-deductive method, where the population focused on the set of doctrinal and normative sources that were consulted and finally content analysis was used as a technique. which facilitated the review, analysis and interpretation between what is stipulated in national legislation and the application of state actions. The results allowed us to know that certainly in Ecuador there have been regulatory and state policy advances to confront crime, however, there are still limitations in the effective exercise of strategies to reduce violence and prevent crime, due to the scarcity of resources and the inequitable application of these actions in various regions. Therefore, it was concluded that the State needs to implement a comprehensive model that promotes social justice, where not only penal justice is established, but also rehabilitation and social change proposals are developed and strengthened.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender violence, human rights, protection of victims, prevention of violence.

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## INTRODUCTION

Crime is a global issue that challenges States and their capacity to provide security and uphold citizens' rights. Internationally, it has become one of the most pressing concerns for many countries, prompting a wide range of strategies aimed at combating and preventing crime in all its forms (Carpio Delgado & Serrano, 2020).

In various countries, the fight against insecurity has shifted from being a purely repressive strategy to a primary policy focus—not so much on punishing the perpetrators, but on addressing the structural causes that drive crime: poverty and its related consequences, including limited access to education, social exclusion, and the emergence of transnational organized crime. According to De la Puente and Rojas (2000), in Europe, for example, there has been “a shift toward a preventive criminal policy,” characterized by social security measures, education, employment opportunities, and inclusion strategies. Meanwhile, in parts of Asia, crime has been addressed through offender rehabilitation by combining mental health care, recidivism prevention, and harm reduction approaches.

From doctrinal and theoretical perspectives, criminality is understood as:

An expression of organized crime that involves a range of actors, actions, and illicit activities, which can be measured through an index that varies from country to country. Criminal scenarios include political, social, and economic systems that encompass all stages of illicit trade and/or the exploitation of goods or people—for example, arms trafficking. Within this context, criminal actors refer to individuals and/or groups who carry out illicit activities linked to criminal markets, including mafia-type groups, criminal networks, state-integrated actors, and foreign criminal operatives (Noriega, 2022, p. 5).

In recent years, this issue has continuously manifested in Latin American countries, where it has reached extremely high levels. For instance, according to the study by Perilla and Garzón (2018), in countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, murders, homicides, and other serious crimes have become increasingly common. Many nations have attempted to address the situation by implementing repressive strategies, including security measures and social programs aimed at disadvantaged communities. Yet despite these efforts, numerous critical issues remain unresolved. Chief among them are the expansion of organized crime, corruption, and drug trafficking. These factors hinder the effectiveness of security measures and undermine the stability of justice systems (Orellana et al., 2022).

This reality is clearly present in Ecuador, where crime-related problems have worsened year after year (Robayo, 2021). Insecurity stands out as one of the most pressing issues, and in combination with drug trafficking, corruption, criminal organizations, and common delinquency, it has fueled increasing rates of murders, homicides, kidnappings, and other crimes. In response, the Ecuadorian state has directed its efforts toward designing strategies to reduce criminality, strengthen crime prevention, and decrease violence (Alarcón, 2023).

Ecuador's geographic location—within a major drug trafficking corridor connecting South America with international markets—makes the country particularly vulnerable to drug trafficking networks and other forms of organized crime, further complicating the public security landscape. According to Montalvo (2024), “Ecuador has positioned itself among the countries with the highest levels of

violence in Latin America. According to official figures, in 2023 there were 7,878 murders, representing a rate of 46.5 intentional homicides per 100,000 people” (p. 1).

In response to this situation, several strategies have been developed to address these alarming statistics. These have evolved from repressive patterns to integrated schemes aimed not only at suppressing crime but also at preventing it. Among the strategies adopted are the strengthening of police forces, the creation of surveillance mechanisms, and the implementation of social programs aimed at reducing violence in high-risk communities.

Amid these circumstances, Ecuador appears to have developed a “traditional” judicial practice, focused mainly on penal resolutions and giving little attention to the systemic causes and effects underlying crime. For this reason, it has become necessary to develop a more inclusive perspective. As noted by Zambrano (2022): “In line with these declarations, the new trends in crime repression and confrontation strategies introduce elements from the paradigm of 'Buen Vivir', grounded in democracy and the role of the State in protecting citizens’ rights, liberty, and social welfare.” Despite this, the author highlights evident shortcomings in such legislative frameworks, which, in his opinion and that of many national and international legal experts, continue to trample on individual rights in the Ecuadorian context.

Thus, this study aims to analyze the state strategies implemented in Ecuador to address criminality, reduce violence, and prevent crime. The objective is to examine a group of scholars and legal experts who, from a doctrinal perspective, explore the normative and legislative elements that govern the variables studied in this research. This analysis responds to the importance of developing a research-based reference tool that fosters a deeper and more critical understanding of this field of study. The central premise of this research holds that the fight against crime in Ecuador faces significant challenges regarding violence reduction and crime prevention.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The present research is characterized as descriptive in nature, as it has allowed for an inquiry into the most relevant aspects of criminality in Ecuador, systematically detailing the elements that shape violence and crime in the country and describing the actions implemented by the State to address this problem.

The methodological approach was qualitative, based on the review and analysis of doctrinal and legal elements that define criminality in general, including its components, causes, consequences, and the actions implemented through criminal policies to address violence rates in the country.

To ensure methodological rigor and reliability, content analysis was applied to the various documentary sources consulted. Additionally, the inductive method was adopted, through which a specific-level analysis was conducted on the relevant characteristics of criminality in Ecuador. This involved examining its impact on society from a legal and doctrinal perspective, allowing for general conclusions to be drawn regarding the security strategies designed to prevent crime.

For these reasons, the study population consisted of a set of legal sources represented by the constitutional and criminal normative framework (such as the Constitution of the Republic and the Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code, COIP), which regulates criminality in Ecuador, as well as a doctrinal corpus from various specialized authors. Their research has contributed to diverse

perspectives based on criminal theory and other essential bibliographic components that support the development of this study.

Finally, the primary technique used was content analysis, which involved the systematization, review, and analysis of legal texts that regulate criminality, violence reduction, and crime prevention in Ecuador. This was carried out in comparison with the practical implications of the criminal policy strategies that have been established.

## RESULTS

### **Criminology: Reducing Violence and Preventing Crime**

Criminology is an essential discipline within the field of Criminal Law, dedicated to the study of the nature, causes, and methods of controlling criminal behavior. According to Hernández (2021), in recent decades, criminology has substantially shifted its focus toward two main objectives: reducing violence and preventing crime. Although these objectives are related, they pose complex multidimensional challenges that require rigorous analysis grounded in principles of justice and social effectiveness.

Achieving these objectives requires, first and foremost, an understanding of the social and political reality in which violence and crime are contextualized. Violence, in its broadest sense, is not simply individual criminal conduct but the manifestation of social, economic, and cultural tensions that must be addressed in all their complexity. Therefore, the goal is not only to classify and prosecute crimes, but also to propose strategies for their reduction and control through effective public policies aimed at eliminating the structural causes associated with violence and criminality (San Juan & Vozmediano, 2021).

Based on this, Cevallos et al. (2020) state that in current criminology, violence reduction has become one of the most important priorities, especially in contexts characterized by high rates of homicides and violent assaults. Violence, defined as the use of physical force or power to exert authority or instill fear in others, not only harms the person subject to that authority but also destabilizes social coexistence, producing an environment of significant mistrust and anxiety. To address this issue, violence must be treated as a central topic in both crime control and prevention strategies.

A central pillar in reducing violence lies in the effectiveness of public security policies. As with crime in general, criminological studies have shown that simply increasing police forces or applying harsher penalties does not result in a sustained reduction in violence over time. On the contrary, such measures tend to be counterproductive insofar as they fail to address the root causes of the problem. Thus, criminology focused on violence reduction must also address factors such as poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, and economic inequality—conditions that foster criminal activity and punitive violence (Gonzales, 2021).

Another important approach in criminology with regard to violence is the concept of structural violence. This term does not refer to specific violent acts, but rather to how certain social systems and structures foster particular forms of systematic violence. For instance, in places where social inequality is high, disparities in access to resources and opportunities create feelings of resentment and tension, which in turn can lead to violent manifestations. Consequently, violence reduction programs must go beyond crime control to include policies of inclusion and social development that address these underlying tensions.

Another particularly relevant area of criminology in relation to violence is harm prevention. Over the years, this approach has gained traction in criminology, particularly regarding violent harm, as it acknowledges that the complete eradication of violence as a social and political issue remains a distant goal. Thus, the main objective of harm prevention is to minimize the damage that violence inflicts on society, contain its spread, and reduce the escalation of harm through detention and rehabilitation (Patiño, 2023). For example, violence occurring in small communities cannot be effectively addressed solely through arrest and incarceration; rather, community mediation, conflict resolution, and social network interventions offer complementary strategies that punitive programs cannot fully achieve.

Another approach emerging in this context is the concept of "harm reduction," which in recent years has gained relevance in criminological policy frameworks for violence prevention. While the ultimate goal of this approach remains the eradication of violence, it is acknowledged that such actions are not effective in the short term. Instead, the focus is on minimizing the consequences of violence through strategies such as mediation, dispute resolution, rehabilitation, and the strengthening of social support networks—measures aimed at reducing criminal acts without relying solely on punitive methods.

On the other hand, crime prevention itself constitutes another key area of criminology, whose goal is to anticipate the occurrence of criminal behavior and reduce its incidence through interventions aimed at discouraging or neutralizing the causes of criminal conduct. Maíllo (2021) explains that this approach is based on the notion that crime is not an inevitable response, but rather a behavior that can be mitigated through policies and programs aimed at modifying the context and conditions that facilitate its occurrence.

Situational prevention is one of the most effective strategies for preventing crime, as it seeks to reduce the opportunities for offenses by modifying the physical and social environment. According to Arias and Luneke (2022), criminology has identified that certain settings—such as degraded urban areas, unsupervised public spaces, or institutions with weak regulations—tend to foster criminal activity. Interventions such as urban design improvements, public lighting, surveillance systems, and the promotion of safe spaces can reduce the temptation to commit crimes in these areas. This perspective stems from the “broken windows theory,” which posits that physical and social decay in a community fosters criminal behavior, and that intervention can help reduce crime incidence.

In terms of social crime prevention, the focus lies on modifying individual and social factors that increase criminal propensity. In this regard, criminology has examined variables such as family environment, education, employment, and psychosocial development, all of which have significant relationships with criminal behavior. The implementation of early-stage intervention programs—such as youth education and employment support or the creation of recreational and community development spaces—are effective crime prevention policies, as demonstrated by Salvatierra and Cedeño (2019). These programs not only provide development opportunities but also reduce the conditions that favor criminal behavior.

An additional aspect that criminology highlights in relation to crime prevention is the need for coordinated inter-institutional action. Prevention cannot rely solely on the penal system; it must include the active involvement of health, education, and social services, all of which are fundamental in promoting prosocial behaviors and reducing risk factors. The integration of these sectors allows for the formulation of comprehensive policies that address both the immediate and structural causes of crime (Patiño, 2023).



Despite recent advances, criminology faces significant challenges in applying violence reduction and prevention policies. One of the most critical problems is the scarcity of resources, due to limited budgets for violence prevention and control programs in many countries. This lack of resources not only hinders proper intervention but also obstructs the development of research and data necessary for evidence-based policymaking.

Another noteworthy challenge is the need for a shift in societal mindset. The reductionist view, which assumes that crime can be controlled solely through harsher sanctions and penalties, tends to ignore the benefits of preventive policies. Criminology emphasizes that social change should be a vital component of crime control strategies. However, this approach often faces resistance from both policymakers and the public, who frequently demand immediate and punitive responses to crime. Moreover, globalization and technological development have brought about emerging criminological perspectives that require increasingly updated prevention policies. Cybercrime, data trafficking, and transnational criminality are just some of the emerging issues that not only resist existing prevention strategies but also demand innovative criminological approaches involving the active participation of health, education, and social sectors—essential for fostering prosocial behavior and reducing risk factors.

### **Crime in Ecuador: A Comprehensive Analysis of Its Causes**

Crime in Ecuador has become one of the most significant challenges for Ecuadorian society in recent decades. This phenomenon affects not only the direct victims of criminal acts but also the entire social and economic structure of the country. It has sparked debates about its root causes and the most effective ways to address it from legal, political, and social perspectives. A comprehensive analysis of the causes of crime in Ecuador must consider multiple factors, both internal and external, that influence criminal behavior. These factors, as outlined by Ríos and Ruiz (2024), are not limited to economic or social issues but also involve cultural, political, and structural elements that require deep reflection to understand the magnitude of the problem and, ultimately, propose effective solutions.

One of the most influential factors in crime in Ecuador is the socioeconomic context. In recent years, the country has experienced high levels of inequality, poverty, and social exclusion—conditions that create a fertile ground for the emergence of criminality. Unequal access to resources such as education, healthcare, and employment generates in many individuals a sense of marginalization and hopelessness, which may lead them to adopt criminal behavior as a means of survival or as a way to assert their identity in an environment of exclusion (Ríos & Ruiz, 2024).

Poverty is not only the absence of material resources but also the lack of opportunities. Many young people, especially those living in marginalized urban areas, find in illicit activities a quick way to obtain what they cannot achieve through formal employment. The high unemployment rate, particularly in urban sectors, contributes to the crime phenomenon by creating a population segment that, unable to access decent jobs, turns to crime. This situation is worsened by the lack of effective social reintegration programs, which hinders the reentry into society of those who have been in conflict with the law.

In addition, the social breakdown in certain urban sectors—especially in major cities like Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca—has fostered the formation of criminal gangs operating under structures of power parallel to the State. These organizations, sustained by drug trafficking and other related crimes, contribute to the increase in violence and criminality by offering an alternative for youth who see no prospects for a better future. Poverty and social exclusion, therefore, are direct causes that facilitate the rise of criminality in various forms.

The culture of violence in Ecuador also contributes significantly to criminality. The normalization of certain violent behaviors in society—such as physical aggression, domestic abuse, or intolerance toward conflict—can trigger criminal acts. In many communities, violence has historically been perceived as a legitimate way to resolve disputes, generating a cycle of aggression that perpetuates itself over time.

Drug consumption, which has increased in various regions of the country, is another factor closely linked to criminality. Drug trafficking in Ecuador has not only turned the country into a transit point for narcotics destined for other markets but has also fueled informal economies in which young people participate, attracted by the quick profits promised by drug trafficking. Dependence on these substances contributes to the rise in violent crimes such as assaults and homicides, as drug users often engage in criminal activity to finance their addiction (Urgilés, 2024).

In addition, the lack of a culture of respect for the law and social norms reinforces impunity and the absence of social control. On many occasions, citizens tend to disregard the criminal actions occurring around them, either out of fear of retaliation or due to distrust in the authorities responsible for ensuring public safety. This collective irresponsibility facilitates the expansion of crime.

Another factor—perhaps one of the most complex and dangerous—that has influenced criminality in Ecuador is drug trafficking. As a drug transit country, Ecuador has become fertile ground for the operations of international cartels trafficking narcotics to other countries. Drug trafficking has led not only to an increase in drug-related crimes but also to a surge in violence and organized crime, as criminal groups battle for control over trafficking routes and drug markets.

The presence of transnational criminal organizations has disrupted the country's social and political structure. According to Rivera and Bravo (2020), these organizations are not only involved in drug trafficking but also engage in a variety of crimes such as extortion, kidnapping, arms trafficking, and human trafficking. The weakening of internal control structures, lack of international cooperation, and domestic corruption have enabled drug trafficking to remain one of the primary drivers of criminality in Ecuador.

Social inequality and the exclusion of significant segments of the population also play a crucial role in the country's high crime rate. Like other Latin American nations, Ecuador faces a wide gap between the wealthiest and the poorest sectors, which contributes to a widespread sense of injustice and hopelessness in many communities (Ortega & Pino, 2021). This economic divide, combined with limited access to basic services and quality education, creates a fertile ground for the intensification of criminal activity.

### **Legislative Framework in the Fight Against Crime in Ecuador**

Ecuador has been facing high levels of criminality, which has led to the implementation of various regulations within its legislative framework to counteract the negative effects of this social phenomenon. Criminal law, as an integral part of the legal system, is the fundamental mechanism through which the State sanctions criminal conduct and establishes norms for its prevention.

To begin with, it is important to mention the international instruments that Ecuador has ratified to address crime, reduce violence, and promote crime prevention, committing itself to align its



legislation with international standards in this area. By adhering to these treaties, the country aims to improve its criminal justice system and strengthen its response to criminal challenges, particularly those of a transnational nature. Table 1 below outlines the main international agreements and regulatory frameworks, highlighting their impact on national legislation and public policy.

**Table 1.**

**International Legal Instruments Designed to Combat Crime**

Instrumento legal	Descripción
<b>The Palermo Convention and the Fight Against Transnational Organized Crime (2004)</b>	In 2000, one of Ecuador's most significant commitments in the fight against transnational organized crime was its accession to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, also known as the Palermo Convention. This treaty was signed to combat organized crime in all its forms, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, and other serious crimes that significantly affect Ecuador due to its geographic location and role as a transit route. By adopting the Convention, Ecuador amended its legislation to ensure international cooperation in criminal investigations, extraditions, and coordinated legal actions. The Convention provided clear guidelines for prosecuting transnational organized crime networks and promoted unified efforts in intercepting and prosecuting such crimes.
<b>The United Nations Convention against Corruption (2004) and Its Implications for National Legislation</b>	A second major risk closely linked to criminality—one that threatens States and poses a barrier to development and security—is corruption. Ecuador ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption in 2005. Through this convention, Ecuador committed to adopting measures to prevent and punish corruption in both the public and private sectors. The Convention and its implementation in Ecuador have led to substantial reforms in the country's legal framework regarding transparency and accountability, affecting both private entities and public officials. In terms of prevention, Ecuador is obligated to implement ethics policies, regulatory frameworks, and mechanisms to investigate and punish corrupt practices. The Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code (COIP) criminalizes offenses such as bribery, embezzlement, and other corruption-related crimes, with penalties ranging from 1 to 10 years of imprisonment. Additionally, the Convention has enabled Ecuador to receive technical assistance and exchange best practices with other countries—an essential component in addressing crime not only as a consequence but as a systemic threat.

<p><b>Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime (1990) and the Focus on Social Development</b></p>	<p>oAnother area in which Ecuador's international commitments follow a specific structure is its adherence to the guidelines adopted by the United Nations on crime prevention. Although the country has not signed the <b>United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime</b>, promulgated in 1995, the provisions of several UN resolutions—each of which Ecuador has supported—indirectly acknowledge this framework.</p> <p>The main premise of these UN resolutions is that crime should not simply be punished, but also prevented. Preventive action should involve a plan of measures aimed at eliminating its root causes, which are often not only individual but also social and economic in nature.</p> <p>Ecuador seeks to address these root causes by developing inclusion programs in areas such as education and employment, among others. It also uses this approach to ensure that its own citizens are not driven toward criminal behavior, which is why many of these measures target specific groups such as youth.</p> <p>Furthermore, these efforts are reinforced by the 2008 Constitution, which introduced the principle of “<b>Buen Vivir</b>” (Good Living), a model of integral development that includes benefits for the poor and social guarantees—elements that contribute to the reduction of criminal behavior.</p>
<p><b>International Human Rights Standards Applied to the Criminal Justice System</b></p>	<p>Ecuador's adherence to various international human rights treaties, such as the <b>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2015)</b> and the <b>American Convention on Human Rights (1969)</b>, establishes obligations within the criminal justice system to ensure respect for the rights of individuals involved in criminal proceedings. These treaties require, for example, that Ecuador's criminal justice system guarantee the right to a fair trial, the presumption of innocence, and access to adequate legal defense.</p> <p>Ecuador has incorporated these standards into its <b>Constitution</b> and the <b>Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code (COIP)</b>, which regulate judicial procedures with the aim of preventing abuses of power and ensuring dignified treatment for all individuals, including those facing judicial processes. Through the creation of human rights monitoring institutions, Ecuador has demonstrated its commitment to protecting people involved in the justice system, striving for a balance between combating crime and safeguarding human rights..</p>
<p><b>International Cooperation to Strengthen the Fight Against Organized Crime</b></p>	<p>Ecuador recognizes the threat of terrorism and transnational organized crime. In response, it has ratified numerous international treaties and agreements that promote cooperation among countries to combat this phenomenon. In addition to the <b>Palermo Convention</b>, the country has signed treaties that</p>

	<p>facilitate the exchange of information, the extradition of suspects, and collaboration in cross-border investigations. A notable example is the <b>International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (2000)</b>, which Ecuador ratified in 2002.</p> <p>The ratification of this treaty led the country to adopt legislation aimed at tracking and preventing the financing of terrorist acts, and to become an active member of organizations such as <b>INTERPOL</b>, when necessary. The implementation of these international provisions has significantly enhanced Ecuador's ability to address security issues at a level that cannot be managed solely through national efforts.</p>
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Source: Own elaboration (2024)

Likewise, at the national level, the main regulations that make up the Ecuadorian legislative framework in the fight against crime are analyzed, with emphasis on the relevant articles that address the issue within Criminal Law (Table 2).

Table 1.

*National legal instruments designed to combat crime*

Instrumento legal	Descripción
<b>The Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008)</b>	<p>The supreme norm of Ecuador, promulgated in 2008, is the <b>Constitution</b>, which establishes the fundamental legal and political principles for criminal policy in Ecuador. In force, several articles mention the rights and guarantees that must be observed in the field of Criminal Law, while at the same time providing a basis for the fight against crime.</p> <p>On the one hand, <b>Article 3</b> confirms that the State must guarantee the security and protection of citizens' rights, so the fight against crime must lead to the protection of public order without violating fundamental rights. On the other hand, <b>Article 66</b> states that all individuals are entitled to their fundamental rights, including liberty, personal integrity, and security. The relevance lies in the fact that, although the State decides to fight crime, it does so in a way that ensures all citizens—regardless of their status as defendants—have their human rights preserved.</p> <p>Finally, <b>Article 77</b> guarantees that no person shall be denied liberty without legal process; that is, authorities must provide the accused with the opportunity to receive a fair trial and ensure that detentions are lawful.</p>

### The Ecuadorian Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code (2023)

The **Ecuadorian Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code** is one of the key legal instruments governing the fight against crime, as it defines criminal offenses, corresponding sanctions, and the fundamental principles that guide criminal justice in the country. Although this legal body has undergone reforms over time, it remains essential for the classification of crimes and the determination of penalties.

**Article 1** sets forth the guiding principles of the Ecuadorian criminal system, stating that the application of penalties must be proportional to the offense committed and must not violate the human rights of the individuals involved. The principles of proportionality in sentencing and non-arbitrariness are fundamental to the COIP, reinforcing the need for a criminal justice system that respects the rights of all individuals, regardless of their circumstances.

**Article 5** establishes a series of guarantees for victims, which is crucial in a context where crime particularly affects the most vulnerable sectors. Moreover, this article promotes a comprehensive approach to justice that, beyond punishing the offender, also seeks to repair the harm to the victim and ensure their right to justice.

**Article 25** refers to the fundamental principle of legality in criminal law, representing a key element for the application of justice, as it prohibits the creation of crimes or the imposition of penalties based on broad or subjective interpretations of the law. Through this principle, Article 25 protects citizens from being prosecuted for actions that are not clearly defined as illegal, thereby strengthening certainty and transparency in the administration of justice. Additionally, the article reaffirms the principle of legality by ensuring that behaviors not expressly provided for in the criminal law cannot be punished—an essential aspect of upholding a fair rule of law and respecting individual rights.

Within this context, reference is made to the types of crimes recognized in Ecuador, such as: Crimes against personal integrity (**Articles 151–184**), Crimes against sexual and reproductive integrity (**Articles 164–175**), Crimes against property rights (**Articles 185–208**), Crimes against public administration (**Articles 278–294**), Crimes against the financial system (**Articles 322–326**), and Crimes against public trust (**Articles 327–330**).

In this regard, **Article 140** defines **murder**, **Article 143** addresses **contract killing (sicariato)**, and **Article 144** defines **homicide**. These are among the most serious crimes committed in Ecuador and are penalized with severe sanctions ranging from prison sentences to harsher penalties, depending on the

	<p>circumstances of the case. These types of crimes have become one of the main concerns of Ecuadorian society, given their alarming increase in recent years.</p> <p>In contrast, <b>Article 185</b> regulates crimes related to <b>extortion</b>, one of the most common offenses associated with organized crime in Ecuador. Extortion is one of the most harmful forms of criminality, especially when linked to organized gangs and violence.</p> <p>With regard to <b>crime prevention</b>, <b>Article 52</b> establishes the main objectives of penalties within the justice system. It specifies that punishment is not solely retributive but fulfills multiple essential functions: <b>general prevention</b>, <b>rehabilitation of the offender</b>, and <b>reparation of the victim's rights</b>:</p> <p><b>General prevention:</b> The article emphasizes the deterrent function of punishment, known as general prevention. The idea is that the imposition of sanctions for criminal acts serves as a warning to society, discouraging others from committing similar crimes. This approach seeks to reduce crime by demonstrating that unlawful acts carry legal and social consequences.</p> <p><b>Rehabilitation and development of the convicted person:</b> Another crucial aspect highlighted in the article is the development and rehabilitation of the convicted individual. This means that the Ecuadorian penal system, rather than focusing solely on punishing the offender, also aims at resocialization and strengthening the person's abilities and rights. The goal is to reintegrate the individual into society in a positive and constructive way, encouraging lawful behavior after the sentence is served.</p> <p><b>Reparation of the victim's rights:</b> The article also underscores the importance of reparation for the victim. This implies that the justice system not only seeks to punish the offender but also aims to restore or compensate the victim for the harm suffered. The purpose of the penalty, in this sense, includes a <b>restorative dimension</b>, aimed at recognizing and redressing the victim's violated rights.</p>
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Source: Own elaboration (2024)

**Legislation in Ecuador related to combating crime** functions as a set of rules that include international treaties, the Republican Constitution, and more specific laws addressing organized crime and gender-based violence. In this regard, these norms are responsible for describing unlawful behaviors along with their corresponding penalties, while also promoting essential principles such as proportionality in punishment, respect for human rights, and compensation for victims. However, the

success of this legislation will be measured by its proper implementation and the strengthening of the judiciary to ensure justice and security for all citizens.

## State Strategies for Reducing Violence and Preventing Crime

Currently, Ecuador faces significant challenges in terms of crime and violence, which require multi-causal and coordinated responses. In this context, Ecuador has implemented various security strategies under its criminal policy. Many of these align with international frameworks employed by organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS). These programs are not merely reactive responses to crime, but rather aim to address the systemic causes that generate it.

### Adoption of Regional and Global Strategies

One of the first actions adopted by Ecuador was the creation of the **"National Strategy for Citizen Security and Social Cohesion"**, an effort to coordinate security policies at the national and inter-institutional levels. This strategy is inspired by international models that promote collaboration among various state institutions, such as police forces, health and education services, and even the military. The key to this approach lies in recognizing that security is not solely a matter of repression, but also of prevention and the creation of conditions for peaceful coexistence. This strategy represents a shift toward inclusive and preventive policies that not only address the consequences of violence, but also its root causes, such as poverty and social exclusion (Zambrano Iglesias, 2022).

### Strengthening Community Policing

One of the most notable actions in the field of security has been the strengthening of local policing. This model seeks to bring the police closer to communities, creating a bond of trust and cooperation. Rather than relying solely on punitive actions, the goal is to adopt a preventive approach that enables the detection and management of issues before they escalate into crimes. The deployment of specialized units in vulnerable areas and neighborhoods aims to foster citizen involvement and improve the image of the police (Torres et al., 2023). In this way, an environment of cooperation is created, where the community becomes an active participant in crime prevention.

### Creation of Specialized Units Against Organized Crime

Ecuador has also enhanced its operational capacity through the creation of specialized units to fight organized crime, particularly in relation to drug trafficking. Due to its transnational and networked nature, this type of criminal activity requires specialized strategies and international cooperation. The establishment of specialized units, supported by advanced technology and continuous training, seeks to improve the effectiveness in identifying and dismantling criminal networks. Cooperation with international agencies such as the DEA has been crucial in this regard, although efforts must be continuously renewed given the adaptive capabilities of criminal groups (Morales, 2024).



## Social Prevention Programs

Crime prevention through the improvement of social conditions is another priority for the Ecuadorian government. It is recognized that poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and marginalization are factors that fuel criminality, which is why social programs have been implemented to address these issues. Initiatives like **"Mi Futuro es Hoy"** (My Future is Today) aim to offer development alternatives to at-risk youth, preventing them from falling into the hands of criminal networks (Salvatierra & Cedeño, 2019). In addition, the social reintegration of individuals deprived of liberty—through education and job training—is a key measure to reduce criminal recidivism and ensure effective reintegration into society.

## Use of Technology for Monitoring and Security

Ecuador has also invested in technology as a component of its protection strategy. For example, the **ECU 911 system** has played a crucial role in coordinating responses to emergency situations. Security cameras and early warning systems help detect criminal patterns and respond more effectively. Through this service, other emergency contacts have been replaced to achieve the unification and integration of all security institutions in the country. However, the implementation and maintenance of these technologies require ongoing investment, which poses an additional challenge in terms of financial resources. This has raised some doubts about the effectiveness of the service, with complaints reported regarding delayed responses in various emergencies (Morena & Vila, 2023).

## Judicial Reforms and the Criminal Justice System

In the legal sector, Ecuador has implemented changes to its criminal justice system with the aim of more effectively addressing serious crimes. The intensification of penalties and the acceleration of judicial procedures are measures intended to reduce impunity and strengthen the judicial response to crime. However, reforming the criminal justice system is a complex process that requires not only legal modifications but also improvements in the infrastructure and resources of the judicial system, in order to make these reforms practically effective.

Despite Ecuador's efforts to reduce violence and prevent crime, the results have been mixed. The strategies implemented have shown progress in specific areas, such as improving the relationship between the police and communities, and strengthening operational capacities against organized crime. Nevertheless, violence remains a complex structural issue that cannot be resolved solely through repression or police intervention. While social prevention policies are essential, they still face significant challenges related to limited resources and effective implementation in certain regions of the country.

International cooperation and changes to the judicial system represent important advances, but they must be supported by strong political will to ensure that these strategies are viable in the long term. Moreover, it is necessary to foster trust in justice and security institutions through transparency, accountability, and active citizen involvement. In this context, although Ecuador has made progress in implementing comprehensive security strategies, there is still a long way to go to ensure that these efforts lead to a significant reduction in violence and crime.

## DISCUSSION

The findings presented earlier, along with the qualitative methodology applied in this research, have made it possible—through the results of various scientific studies, contributions from the related literature, and legislative analysis—to understand that despite certain advances observed in the treatment of criminology in Ecuador, the implementation of effective preventive policies still faces considerable challenges. The lack of resources represents one of the main obstacles to the creation of strategies that could generate a real impact. Additionally, there is resistance to changing mindsets within society and institutions, where there is a prevailing tendency to favor punitive responses over preventive strategies. These results are consistent with the arguments made by Maíllo (2021), who emphasizes that contemporary criminology promotes the integration of perspectives that go beyond punishment, including preventive and transformative actions. However, this paradigm shift is met with resistance from those who demand swift and visible responses to crime.

Within Ecuador's legal framework, crime is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of social, economic, cultural, and political factors. Ríos and Ruiz (2024) point out that poverty and social marginalization are crucial elements in the rise of crime, as the lack of opportunities drives many young people to become involved in illegal activities, especially in the most disadvantaged urban areas. This point is supported by Ortega and Pino (2021), who argue that social inequality increases the feeling of injustice, generating hopelessness and contributing to rising criminality. Urgilés (2024) also highlights the normalization of violence in certain communities and drug consumption as factors related to increased delinquency, which is likewise supported by Ríos and Ruiz (2024), who state that drug trafficking has exacerbated violence and related crimes.

Likewise, drug trafficking has been identified as a central element in the analysis of criminality in Ecuador. Rivera and Bravo (2020) indicate that transnational criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking and other serious crimes are largely responsible for the increase in violence and organized crime in the country. This phenomenon is also addressed by Ríos and Ruiz (2024), who affirm that criminal gangs linked to drug trafficking operate as parallel structures to the state, intensifying insecurity. Furthermore, the lack of effectiveness in control systems and the presence of corruption are factors that facilitate the expansion of this issue—highlighted in both studies on socioeconomic and cultural factors and in analyses of drug trafficking—which coincide in identifying inequality, structural violence, and drug trafficking as key elements in the rise of criminality in Ecuador.

Regarding legislation, Ecuador has aligned its domestic laws with its international commitments, such as the ratification of treaties like the Palermo Convention and the Convention against Corruption, reflected in the Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code (COIP). This comprehensive approach seeks not only to punish unlawful conduct but also to promote international cooperation and crime prevention. These aspects are highlighted in theoretical frameworks such as that of Rodríguez (2021), who emphasizes that the design of criminal policies should focus on legislative actions that address not only punishment but also social prevention—an approach reflected in COIP reforms aimed at tackling the structural causes of crime, such as inequality and lack of opportunities, through social inclusion programs.

Likewise, theoretical considerations such as those of García (2019) support the need for a balance between security and respect for human rights, a principle that Ecuador has incorporated by adopting international human rights standards, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Despite these advances, practical challenges persist, particularly regarding the protection of the rights of the accused and the effectiveness of preventive policies. Article 52 of the COIP reflects a shift

toward a restorative justice system, although López (2020) notes that its implementation remains uneven and faces obstacles, especially in the face of complex phenomena such as organized crime and corruption. These challenges require ongoing legislative adjustments and enhanced training for authorities, as highlighted by the World Bank (2023), which emphasizes the need to strengthen institutional capacities to more effectively address transnational crime and terrorism.

For all these reasons, Ecuador has implemented various strategies to reduce violence and prevent crime, aligned with international frameworks from organizations such as the UN and the OAS. One of the main initiatives is the **“National Strategy for Citizen Security and Social Cohesion”**, which aims to coordinate security policies at the national and inter-institutional level, addressing both the repression and prevention of violence. Initiatives such as strengthening community policing, creating specialized units for organized crime, and social programs like **“Mi Futuro es Hoy”** are key to tackling the structural causes of crime, such as poverty and social exclusion. Additionally, the use of technology—such as the **ECU 911 system** and surveillance cameras—has improved emergency response, although it presents challenges related to investment and maintenance.

Despite these efforts, the outcomes have not met expectations. Although there has been progress in areas such as improving police-community relations and the fight against organized crime, violence continues to be a complex structural problem. Social prevention strategies face difficulties due to limited resources and uneven implementation across various regions. Despite reforms in the judicial system and international cooperation, a continuous political commitment is still required to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of these strategies, which is essential to achieving a lasting reduction in crime in Ecuador.

## CONCLUSIONS

Further research on crime in Ecuador—particularly regarding strategies for its prevention and control—demonstrates how challenging the situation is: despite the existence of legislative and strategic frameworks, tangible progress is hindered by a multitude of structural and contextual challenges that require immediate attention.

On the one hand, there has been a commitment to international regulatory frameworks, and several citizen security strategies have been established. On the other hand, institutional infrastructure continues to fail, essential resources remain scarce, and cultural resistance to a paradigm shift toward preventive approaches limits the effectiveness of government policies.

The current perspective continues to favor punitive measures instead of addressing complex phenomena such as drug trafficking and organized crime. Therefore, overall, Ecuadorian laws have made significant strides toward integrating human rights with the criminal justice system. However, their implementation remains uneven and ineffective.

Despite a supporting framework that aligns with international models, preventive policies have not had a meaningful impact in reducing crime rates as seen in other comparable contexts. As such, the dissemination of these approaches remains scarce and incomplete.

The uneven implementation of security and social programs further highlights the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach—not only in prosecuting crime but also in rehabilitation and social prevention. Ecuador must move beyond a model where punishment is the only response to crime and instead allocate space for rehabilitation and social transformation.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.