

Murder victims in Ecuador were conducting probes into Noboa and US boat strikes

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29 July 2026

On June 15, Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa was received at the Pentagon by US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, who thanked him for being a founding member of Donald Trump's "Shield of the Americas" coalition. "You have been a model partner with us," Hegseth told him.

In the week before that meeting, two women behind probes into the criminal activities of both governments and the Noboas were killed.

On June 8, Monika Silva Koniuszek—who had spent months investigating the ties between the Noboa family's banana empire and international cocaine trafficking—was found dead on the floor of her home in Montañita, Santa Elena, with a noose around her neck. She was 41 and the mother of two daughters, aged four and nine.

On June 14, prosecutor Gloria Alexandra Bravo Cedeño, whose active files included the drone attacks on Ecuadorian fishing boats carried out under Washington's Operation Southern Spear, was gunned down in central Manta.

Neither killing has produced an arrest, and both expose the criminal foundations of the regime Washington has armed, trained and proclaimed a model for the hemisphere.

The cover-up began within 24 hours

Before any autopsy of Silva, Interior Minister John Reimberg announced on Radio América that Silva's death was being treated as a suicide. "The necessary evidence to reach that conclusion was found at the scene," he said.

The forensic examination released on June 18 demolished this claim, establishing a premortem blow to the back of the head and injuries consistent with strangulation, along with bloodstains in a room other than the one where the body lay. On July 7, the Olsztyn district prosecutor's office in Poland, Silva's birthplace, told AFP that the autopsy indicated a death "very probably the result of a deliberate act committed by third parties."

Silva had spent a decade exposing rigged public contracts and land deals in Santa Elena. In her final months, she turned to ties between cocaine trafficking and Noboa Trading, the conglomerate of the president's family. "My latest revelations were regarding links with the Noboa

Group," she wrote, adding that she had run into them repeatedly ever since.

A March 2025 investigation by the Colombian outlet *Revista Raya* documented some 700 kilograms of cocaine seized at the Naportec terminal in Guayaquil between 2020 and 2022, concealed in Noboa Trading banana containers. Police reports were buried because of who owned the company. The journalist who first published them, Andrés Durán, was driven from the country by death threats.

In December 2025, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project revealed that alleged Balkan traffickers boasted of exclusive rights to move cocaine in Noboa Trading containers. Reporters matched their references—including 430 kilograms in container MEDU9747725 leaving Ecuador on January 25, 2021—against actual export records.

Some 70 percent of the world's cocaine transits Ecuador's ports, and no family controls more of the banana trade, from plantation to private port to shipping line, than the Noboas.

In April, Silva delivered her dossier directly to the US Embassy in Quito and the Drug Enforcement Administration. Nothing followed. Two months later she was dead, and Washington's response was to receive Noboa at the Pentagon.

The state's answer to these investigations came on July 27, when a judge sentenced journalist Gabriela Panchana to 30 days in prison over a post on X demanding that Silva's murder be clarified and stating that she had handed documentation on Noboa Trading to the embassy and the DEA. As Panchana noted, Silva's murder has produced not one detention, while her tweet was adjudicated in six hours and 40 minutes.

The prosecutor investigating the boat strikes

Six days after Silva was found dead, Gloria Bravo was shot as she walked to her car in Manta. Her sister Olinda, who tried to shield her, was killed as well. Bravo, 46, had spent 15 years in the Manabí prosecutor's office.

Among her files were the US drone strikes on the fishing vessels *La Negra Francisca Duarte II* and *Don Maca*, and

the disappearance of the *Fiorella* with eight crew members, off the Galápagos. In early May she told Human Rights Watch anonymously that neither her office nor the investigative police had the authority or logistical means to conduct inquiries at sea, and that port and naval authorities had never answered her requests for information. She had warned for months that she was at risk and moved under police escort. “The danger is always present,” she said.

The state stonewalled her investigation into attacks carried out by the US Southern Command, and then she was killed.

Operation Condor reborn

These killings expose the gangster character of the “Shield of the Americas,” the bloc of far-right governments Trump assembled in Florida in March. The WSWS characterized that summit as a repetition of Operation Condor, the network of state terror coordinated across borders under Washington’s direction from 1975. The parallel is now concrete.

Silva was a Polish national murdered in Ecuador. The Ecuadorian justice investigating US killings was murdered near her home. Fishermen from multiple nationalities have been killed, while the survivors of drone strikes have been seized by US soldiers, hooded, zip-tied and handed to the Salvadoran coast guard, which shipped them to El Salvador. Repression is again subcontracted across borders, victims moved between jurisdictions until accountability becomes impossible.

The “narco-terrorism” fraud

The killing of Silva exposes the pretext of “narco-terrorism” behind the entire apparatus. Cocaine leaves Ecuador in containers aboard merchant ships owned by the same oligarchic family installed in power with US support, not in the fishing boats the US government openly boasts about bombing out of the water.

Human Rights Watch’s July 21 report, *A Dangerous Partnership*, documents that during a US-Ecuadorian “partnered operation” in Sucumbíos in March, soldiers tortured four Colombian dairy workers—beatings, waterboarding, mock executions—then released them without charge and bombed their farm. Hegseth reposted the footage, boasting that narco-terrorists were now being bombed on

land as well.

The HRW report also found that of the 46 crew members aboard the three Ecuadorian fishing vessels that disappeared or came under attack between January and March 2026, only four had any criminal record—“none for violent or potentially violent crimes, or drug trafficking-related offenses.”

Since September 2025, Southern Spear has destroyed at least 67 vessels and killed at least 221 people.

On July 27, the *Washington Post* revealed that the DEA assessment concluded that the bombing campaign has had no discernible effect on cocaine availability, price or purity in the United States; traffickers simply diversified into larger commercial vessels, coastal routes and aircraft.

The reality behind the “war on narcoterrorism” was further displayed on July 26, when former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández returned home to a welcoming crowd, pardoned by Trump from a 45-year US sentence for importing cocaine. Hernández famously boasted, according to prosecutors, that he would “shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos.”

The real target of the militarization and repression is the mass opposition to Noboa’s policies. In November, Ecuadorians rejected foreign military bases by more than 60 percent; he overrode the vote by decree in June, citing his meeting at the Pentagon. Over 70 percent disapprove of his government, with its \$5 billion IMF program, a value-added tax raised to 15 percent, eliminated fuel subsidies, and prisons in which 1,220 died last year.

The uprisings of 2019, 2022 and 2025 demonstrated the immense power of the Ecuadorian working class. What disarmed it each time was the leadership of what passes as “left,” including Rafael Correa’s Revolución Ciudadana Party, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE) and the Stalinist-led unions, which channel every explosion behind a faction of the bourgeoisie and demand “national unity” with the same repressive state that murders activists and prosecutors.

The fight for justice for Silva, Bravo and other investigators and activists murdered in recent months is inseparable from the fight for the independent and international political mobilization of the working class against imperialist war, fascism and the capitalist system that produces them.



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