

“All the News  
That’s Fit to Print”

# The New York Times

## Why Cocaine Has Ecuador On Its Knees

### U.S. Focus on Fentanyl Let a Problem Fester

By MARIA ABI-HABIB and JOSÉ MARÍA LEÓN CABRERA  
GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador — Fighting an international alliance of gangs, guerrilla groups, drug cartels and mafias, the Ecuadorean military found itself alone. By 2022, the government had lost control of major prisons, with gangs running them as recruitment centers. Killings were rising fast, and it was clear that far more cocaine was moving through the country than the authorities could ever hope to seize.

But when the U.S. ambassador at the time, Mike Fitzpatrick, phoned Washington to convey Ecuador’s plea for help, his calls fell on deaf ears, he said.

“Where is the fentanyl? That’s our focus right now,” he recalled being told by senior State Department officials. “Ecuador didn’t have a fentanyl hook to sell to Washington, it’s all cocaine.”

Since President Trump first took office in 2017 and continuing through President Joseph R. Biden Jr.’s term, the United States largely shifted its focus to combating fentanyl, the drug driving a national overdose crisis.

Given the soaring fentanyl deaths in the United States, making it a priority made sense, officials say. But the severity of the switch gave room for cocaine traffickers, once a prime target of American law enforcement, to thrive — so much that Ecuador nearly collapsed into the grip of criminal groups, according to five current and former U.S. and Ecuadorean officials. In the decades-long war against drugs, cocaine, it seemed, was no longer a priority.

Even now, after the United States eventually mustered a response and increased financial aid to help Ecuador’s military fight drug groups, its government is struggling to keep control.

Several of Ecuador’s cities now rank among the world’s most dangerous — a situation unthinkable just four years ago, when the country was known for its safety, roses and Galápagos tortoises. Car bombs terrorize civilians, and gangs frequently clash with military troops. Officials describe a criminal culture so powerful that schoolchildren aspire to join gangs.

“This is an existential war,” said Giovanni Davoli, the Italian ambassador to Ecuador, who compared the fight to Italy’s struggle against mafias. “Ecuador is not a narcostate, but it needs help.”

The Trump administration has launched an aggressive military campaign in the region, attacking boats it says are smuggling drugs,

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DANIELE VOLPE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The aftermath of a car bombing in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Such explosions, tied to gangs linked with the drug trade, terrorize civilians.

## A.I. Bubble? Stock Market Pooh-Poohs It.

By JOE RENNISON

The stock market has broken multiple records this year, brushing past tariffs and signs of a strained American consumer, and recovering from a recent dip, largely because of the promise of artificial intelligence.

Share prices of some A.I. companies have risen dramatically in a short time, and tech companies are spending billions to build data centers and microchip plants to power the boom.

While investors and analysts see good reasons to justify the exuberance behind the nearly 50 percent increase in the S&P 500 over the last two years, some warn that current valuations still rest on a big bet on the future.

The stock market found itself at a similar moment 29 years ago, when Alan Greenspan famously warned of “irrational exuberance” fueling a bubble in internet stocks. The S&P 500 had risen more than 60 percent in the two years before Mr. Greenspan’s speech.

Policymakers are again sounding alarm bells.

“On some measures, equity valuations in the U.S. are approaching levels not seen since the dot-com bubble,” Andrew Bailey, the

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## For One ICE Detainee, Severe Pain and Neglect

By ANA LEY

The 23-year-old man arrived at immigration court in New York City this spring with no obvious signs of illness.

That changed after federal immigration officials took the man, Javier Tomas Muñoz Materano, into custody.

For more than three months, he was held in detention and not allowed to bathe or change clothes for days at a time as he was transferred 10 times to eight facilities across four states. He eventually began feeling excruciating pain and discomfort in his genitalia. At times his legs became numb, and he lost the ability to walk. A judge ordered his release in September,

### Judge Orders Release as Criticism Mounts Over Conditions

agreeing with his lawyers that he had “a sufficiently serious medical condition” to be let out. In his decision, the judge chronicled the graphic details of what Mr. Muñoz Materano had gone through, saying that ICE officials had acted “with deliberate indifference” toward his medical needs.

Across the United States, several other judges have also criticized conditions at federal immigration detention centers or re-

leased migrants who lacked access to adequate medical care.

In August, a federal judge directed the Trump administration to fix what detainees have called squalid and overcrowded conditions inside migrant holding cells in New York City. In October, a judge in Detroit ordered that a Michigan man who had leukemia be released from custody or at least be given a bond hearing in immigration court as he faced the prospect of deportation. And in November, a judge in Chicago imposed restrictions on an Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility that he said had subjected migrants to “conditions that are unnecessarily cruel.”

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IAIN DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, 1942-2025



ORIA DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, VIA SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

The founder of Save the Elephants was an empathetic zoologist who fought poachers. Page B11.

## Former V.P. Still Has a Voice. What Will Her Message Be?

By SHANE GOLDMACHER

The one thing that Kamala Harris absolutely, definitely, most certainly does not want to talk about is whether she is thinking about running for president again.

“It’s three years from noooooo,” the former vice president pleaded in an interview last month, sitting in a leather chair backstage at Ryman Auditorium in Nashville before one of the final stops on her nationwide book tour. “I mean, honestly.”

Ms. Harris is busy selling books — a lot of them. She is not yet selling herself.

Old advisers, both allied and estranged, have squinted from afar at her book tour, wondering what exactly her strategy is, or if there is any at all. She has done little to distance herself from former

President Joseph R. Biden Jr. besides admitting aloud that it was “recklessness” on her part not to have discouraged him from running again. There has been virtually none of the strategic repackaging that a future candidate typically does, the buffing out of flaws and shining up of strengths.

Defeat hit Ms. Harris deeply. She had not felt such grief since the death of her mother, she has said, a line that sears even as she repeats it so often as to become a talking point. She spent the early months of 2025 cooking and cooing away from the cameras.

But it has been a year since her loss to President Trump, the traditional period of mourning.

Friends and allies swear she is

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## Same Product, Same Store, but on Instacart, Prices Might Differ

By BEN CASSELMAN

On a Thursday in early September, more than 40 strangers logged in to Instacart, the grocery-shopping app, to buy eggs and test a hypothesis.

Connected by videoconference, they simultaneously selected the same store — a Safeway in Washington, D.C. — and the same brand of eggs. They all chose pickup rather than delivery.

The only difference was the price they were offered: \$3.99 for a couple of lucky shoppers; \$4.59 or \$4.69 for others. And a few saw a price of \$4.79 — 20 percent more than some others, for the exact same product.

The shoppers were volunteers, participating in a study published on Tuesday and organized by the Groundwork Collaborative, a progressive policy group, and Consumer Reports, a nonprofit con-

### Tech Aims to Optimize Costs, but for Whom?

sumer publication. In tests in four cities across the country, nearly 200 volunteers checked prices on 20 grocery items on Instacart.

On item after item, they found significant differences. In a Target in North Canton, Ohio, some shop-

pers were charged \$3.59 for a jar of Skippy peanut butter that others could get for \$2.99. At a Safeway in Seattle, some people paid \$3.99 for a box of Wheat Thins while others paid \$4.89. And at a Target in St. Paul, Minn., some people were charged \$4.59 for a box of Cheerios that others could get for \$3.99.

“Two shoppers who are buying the exact same item from the ex-

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The photographer Martin Parr, who died on Saturday, captured his subjects with unflinching clarity.

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### Scrooge Meets His Match

The actor Christine Baranski brings a distinctive voice to her narration of Dickens’s “A Christmas Carol.”

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### Campaign Finance Arguments

The case at the Supreme Court involved a Republican effort to lift limits on how much money parties can spend in coordination with candidates.

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### Abortion Rate Is Climbing

In the three years since Roe was overturned, the divide among states over the issue has deepened.

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### He Took Readers to the Moon

John Noble Wilford, a Pulitzer recipient, covered the 1969 landing for The New York Times. He was 92.

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### Cultural Roots in Kyiv

Ukraine has been highlighting the Ukrainian roots of Kazimir Malevich, a renowned avant-garde painter.

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### Fleeing Thai-Cambodia Border

As fighting flared, hundreds of thousands returned to where they sheltered during deadly clashes in July.

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### Fighting for Ownership

If companies can modify internet-connected products and charge subscriptions after something was purchased, what does it mean to own?

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### Cramping Their Style

Many in the N.H.L. seemed taken aback by the news that the Olympic rink will have a smaller playing surface. But how might it affect play?

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### Nancy Mace

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FOOD D1-14

### All You Can Eat, and More

Members of our Food staff offer their favorite dishes, desserts and new restaurants of the year, in New York and nationwide.

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