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Ecuador: escalation of death threats against reporters exposes authorities' willingness to restrict, not protect, the press



ORGANISATION:  RSF_en

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has documented four cases of death threats against journalists in Ecuador between January and February 2026, a shocking spike as a RSF partner recorded three of these threats for the whole year of 2025. The threats — phone calls and direct messages — often follow reporting on criminal networks, alleged misconduct in municipal land management and other sensitive local issues. Some threats even target journalists' family members. The surge comes amid new rules restricting media access to official coverage, raising fresh concerns over the protection of journalists and the state of press freedom.

On 7 February 2026, in Ecuador's highlands region, freelance journalist **Jonathan David Quezada Castillo** received death threats linked to social media posts attributed to the journalist about complaints from local inhabitants in Guaranda, a city in the province of Bolívar, on a Facebook page which Jonathan David Quezada Castillo says he has never produced content for or administered. This case is a prime example of how disinformation is often used to fuel grave threats against reporters. In his complaints to the Public Prosecutor's Office, the journalist stated that he received a WhatsApp audio message containing threats from a number with a Colombian country code and that, after filing a first complaint, he received another death threat to both him and his family. According to RSF information, the Public Prosecutor's Office has recently initiated investigative proceedings in the case. RSF has [documented prior threats](#) against Jonathan David Quezada Castillo in 2024.

On the northern border, on 23 January 2026, **Jonathan Bonifaz**, director of the digital outlet *Llamingo EC*, received a death threat via WhatsApp after publishing information about criminal groups operating in the area. According to information provided by the journalist to RSF, sources close to him warned that two individuals had been sent to Quito, the capital of Ecuador, to kill him in retaliation for his work. The journalist was forced to relocate and keep his whereabouts confidential, making it extremely difficult to continue investigations in a territory marked by the presence of criminal groups and cross-border violence. According to RSF information, a complaint was filed with the Public Prosecutor's Office and the local organisation Periodistas Sin Cadenas, an RSF partner, provided the journalist with psychological support. However, because the state protection mechanism relies heavily on location factors in its logistics, it is hard to implement protection measures when the individual must conceal their location.

On 6 January 2026, **Joffre Paredes Ronquillo**, a journalist and presenter on the programme "Sin Anestesia" on the digital channel *KLN*, received a text message on his cell phone that said he was being watched and threatened him and his family. The message followed the journalist's reports on alleged misconduct in land management in the city of La Libertad in Ecuador's coastal region. According to RSF information, the case was reported to the Public Prosecutor's Office and the journalist was placed under a protection scheme that includes a panic button, police escort when leaving his home and daily police patrols outside his house. Despite these security measures, his work was immediately impacted as he reduced his time spent in public and limited his reporting.

Similarly, on 15 January 2026, **Fernando Muñoz**, a journalist at *Radio Salinas*, was threatened with death both in person and via WhatsApp not to broadcast an interview with an activist on alleged corruption in land sales in the city of Salinas, also in the Santa Elena region. The messages succeeded in their goal and the interview was cancelled. This episode of self-censorship restricted the local audience's right to be informed about an issue that concerned them. According to RSF information, the case was reported to the protection mechanism, but the journalist chose not to file a legal complaint and to maintain a low profile — a common choice as journalists under threat often do not trust state institutions to protect them effectively and fear that filing a formal complaint could increase their risk to danger.

“These death threats are not isolated incidents in Ecuador: they are a tool used to silence investigations into local corruption, illegal economies and organised crime. And the impact is immediate: coverage is reduced as journalists self-censor and even flee the areas where they report for safety reasons. The state response remains insufficient, and its capacity to investigate and prevent these attacks is further weakened by official decisions that restrict the press' access to public information. RSF calls on the Ecuadorian authorities to urgently strengthen the protection systems for threatened journalists and investigate these cases — including forensic analyses of the messages, audio recordings, phone numbers — to ensure those responsible are identified and punished. The NGO also warns that the adoption of restrictive measures against the press poses a serious risk to the public's access to information in a country already facing a worrying increase in threats against journalists.

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Director, RSF Latin America

Threatened and restricted

This hostile work environment for journalists is compounded by increasing restrictions imposed on the press by the state. On 28 January 2026, the Armed Forces issued an internal document, seen by RSF, establishing rules to determine which journalists and media outlets have access to cover their official events, filtering outlets based on their editorial line and previous publications, and permitting the exclusion of outlets that, in the military's view, “damage” the institution's image. Although the measure is not

currently in force, as the Armed Forces publicly stated, its issuance and announcement highlight the government's apathy towards the country's faltering press freedom.

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