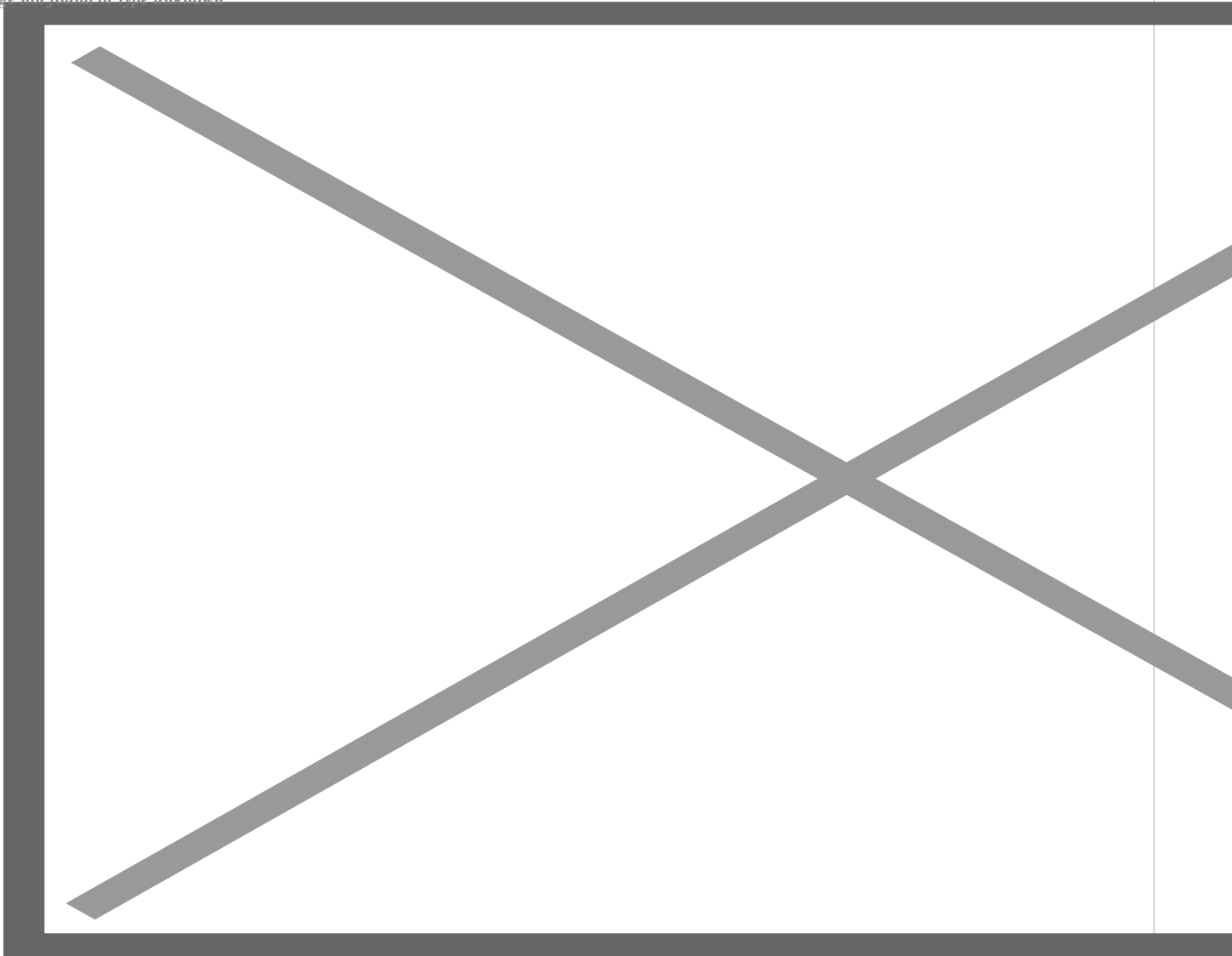


Ecuador convenes elections amid an extreme climate of violence

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Heavily armed troops guard ballot boxes in Ecuador -- where the contrast with Cuba is striking, as school children stand guard during elections.

Quito, August 20 (RHC)-- More than 13 million Ecuadorians are called to participate in a general election to elect the new president, vice president and assembly members amid a climate of violence and insecurity throughout the South American country.

With the polls opening early Sunday morning, the National Electoral Council (CNE), announced that the voting will take place until 5 p.m. local time, when the voting centers close and the counting of votes begins. There are 4,390 voting centers located throughout Ecuador.

Voters will have to choose among eight candidates aspiring to the presidency of Ecuador, including Luisa González, of the Citizen Revolution movement; former vice president Otto Sonnenholzner, of the Actuemos alliance; Jan Topic, of the coalition For a country without fear; Daniel Noboa, of National Democratic Action.

Also aspiring for the presidency are Yaku Pérez, of the Claro que se puede alliance; Xavier Hervas, of the Renovación Total (RETO) movement; journalist Christian Zurita, who replaced the murdered Fernando Villavicencio; and Bolívar Armijos, of the Amigo group.

In addition to electing the next president and vice president, Ecuadorians will have to vote for the 137 legislators of the National Assembly who will complete the current four-year term scheduled until May 2025.

Election day in Ecuador is taking place in the midst of the biggest wave of insecurity in the country, which cost the life of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio on August 9th, when he was shot to death as he left a campaign event in Quito.

After the murder of the presidential candidate, the rest of the candidates focused their campaigns on the fight against violence and organized crime, the main concern of Ecuadorean citizens.

The elections are also taking place during of a state of emergency decreed by the government to deal with violence and with some 100,000 police and military on the streets and polling stations. In spite of the military deployment, in the last hours violent acts were registered which put in doubt the tranquility of the electoral process in Ecuador.

Violence and insecurity in Ecuador left a record of 26 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2022, almost double the previous year.

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