



Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme
Record of Reflection

Navigating Positionality, Depth, and Stereotypes in Ecuador

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This summer, I had the unique opportunity to travel to Ecuador and embed myself in the local society to conduct research on the escalating violence and its impact on the country's sociopolitical landscape. As an Ecuadorian, returning to my home country for academic research allowed me to access communities and resources that might otherwise have been unavailable to a foreign researcher. Yet, while my positionality afforded me many advantages, it also presented certain dilemmas—specifically, the internal conflict I faced between contributing to academic discourse on Latin American violence and inadvertently reinforcing harmful stereotypes about the region.

The Inspiration Behind the Research

My research was deeply personal and was inspired by the rapid and disturbing increase in violence in Ecuador. In recent years, the country has witnessed a surge in crime, much of it related to drug trafficking and organized crime. As I watched the situation unfold from abroad, I was struck by the severity of the violence and its implications for Ecuador's political and social fabric. The rise in crime had begun to infiltrate daily life in ways that were unimaginable when I was younger. Seeing the stark difference between the Ecuador I once knew and the one I saw in the news ignited a desire in me to understand the root causes of this shift and, more importantly, how these dynamics could be addressed.

With this in mind, I embarked on my research with a dual purpose. On one hand, I wanted to produce an academic analysis that could contribute to understanding the reasons behind Ecuador's rising violence. On the other hand, I hoped to provide a narrative that offered a more nuanced view of the country than the one typically portrayed in media accounts. I was motivated by a deep love for my country, coupled with the hope that my research could contribute, even in a small way, to solutions that might one day bring peace.

Embedding Myself in Ecuadorian Society

Traveling to Ecuador for this research was both a return home and an academic journey. My positionality as an Ecuadorian provided me with a certain level of access and understanding that would have been difficult to achieve otherwise. I was able to integrate into the community, not as an outsider, but as someone with shared history, cultural references, and personal stakes in the country's future. This allowed me to gain insights from local perspectives that would have been inaccessible to researchers without a similar connection to the country.

My conversations with locals offered valuable qualitative data that enriched my work. These exchanges revealed the complexity of the current violence and its intricate relationship with political corruption, economic inequalities, and the expansion of organized crime. Many people I spoke with expressed a deep sense of frustration and helplessness in the face of rising crime, but there was also a sense of resilience. While these conversations were not included as official

interviews in my research, they allowed me to situate Ecuador's violence within the larger Latin American context, while also respecting the country's unique historical and social trajectory.

The Tension of Positionality

My positionality as both an insider and a researcher presented a complex tension. While my Ecuadorian identity helped build rapport and trust with participants, it also made me acutely aware of the responsibility I carried. I constantly wrestled with the fear that my work might perpetuate the very stereotypes I sought to dismantle. Research on violence in Latin America often runs the risk of feeding into a one-dimensional narrative, painting the region solely as a place of corruption and brutality. As an Ecuadorian, I was sensitive to how such research can shape public perceptions of the country and the region.

I found myself at a crossroads: on one side was the desire to present a comprehensive and truthful analysis of the violence plaguing Ecuador, but on the other was the fear that my research might reinforce harmful clichés that Latin America is inherently violent or backward. This internal struggle became particularly intense when I found myself reporting on the involvement of organized crime and government corruption—subjects that have already been heavily sensationalized in global media. As I conducted interviews and gathered data, I had to balance this awareness, ensuring that my research didn't strip away the humanity of those affected by violence or reduce Ecuador to a mere case study of crime.

The Challenge of Producing Depth

This challenge also sharpened my focus on producing depth in my research. Rather than simply identifying the factors contributing to the violence, I aimed to explore its roots in a way that honored the complexity of Ecuador's sociopolitical landscape. I realized that violence in Ecuador cannot be separated from its broader history of economic inequality, political exclusion, and external pressures like drug trafficking. By embedding myself in Ecuadorian society and drawing on personal experiences, I was able to contextualize my findings, highlighting not only the challenges but also the resilience of communities working to resist these pressures.

My research sought to provide an in-depth analysis that captured the multifaceted nature of the issue—one that recognized the agency of Ecuadorians in navigating a rapidly changing landscape, rather than portraying them merely as victims. Through interviews with scholars, local authorities, and community members, I came to understand how many Ecuadorians are actively engaged in seeking solutions, from grassroots movements to policy reform. This provided me with hope and a renewed sense of purpose, as I began to see that addressing violence in Ecuador requires a comprehensive approach that involves not just law enforcement, but social, economic, and political reform as well.

As I reflect on my research, I remain committed to contributing to Ecuador's future in meaningful ways. While my work this summer was a small step toward understanding the complex dynamics of violence, it is only the beginning. I hope to continue this research, delving deeper into how violence can be curbed through policies that address root causes, such as poverty, inequality, and corruption. Additionally, I aim to advocate for more nuanced representations of Latin America in both academic and media circles, where the region's rich cultural, social, and political diversity is given its due.

Ultimately, my research experience in Ecuador has strengthened my resolve to contribute to a more peaceful and just society. I believe that, by engaging in critical and nuanced research, I can help shape a narrative that goes beyond stereotypes and that fosters real understanding and change. The path ahead is long, but my hope is that through continued research, dialogue, and action, Ecuador can find a way out of the cycle of violence that has engulfed it in recent years.