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## **Ecuador's LGBT+ community seen suffering deadliest year in a decade**

By Oscar Lopez

Thomson Reuters Foundation (21.01.2020) - <https://reut.rs/2RREWwC> - Last year was the deadliest in at least a decade for gay and transgender people in Ecuador, campaigners have said, citing a possible backlash against new laws enshrining LGBT+ rights.

There were 16 murders or violent deaths involving LGBT+ people in the South American country in 2019, according to a report released by the Ecuadorian LGBT+ rights group Silueta X Association.

The group said it was the highest number since it began keeping track in 2010 and most of the victims were transgender women. In 2018 it registered two LGBT+ murders.

"As the year went on, we were realizing that the statistics of murders were terrible," said Diane Rodriguez, director of Silueta X and president of the Ecuadorian Federation of LGBTI Organizations.

"It's tough seeing images of someone looking happy on social media, and then all of a sudden they're gone," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation on Monday.

Rodriguez, who was the first trans woman elected to Ecuador's National Assembly, said the legalization last year of same-sex marriage in the conservative, mainly Catholic country may have had "a negative impact".

That followed a move by Ecuador's top court in 2018 to legally acknowledge a lesbian couple as parents for the first time, while a law passed in 2016 allowed trans people to change their gender identity legally without having surgery.

Murders of LGBT+ people also rose in 1998 after homosexuality was decriminalized, Rodriguez said.

For the study, researchers monitored media reports of LGBT+ deaths, as well as complaints lodged with Silueta X directly.

LGBT+ rights expert Javier Corrales said the rise in killings may signal a backlash.

"When there is a major change in public policy toward LGBT communities ... homophobic and transphobic arguments increase in frequency and maybe even intensity," said Corrales, professor of political science at Amherst College in the United States.

"We have reason to think that an expansion of hate speech can lead to increases in hate crimes," he said via email.

Attacks against LGBT+ people are common across Latin America, where conservative religious values and widespread violence can be a deadly mix.

In 2019 almost 40% of trans killings worldwide took place in Brazil, according to the Trans Murder Monitoring research project, from advocacy group Transgender Europe.

Meanwhile, Mexico's National Observatory for Hate Crimes Against LGBT People recorded 57 murders of gay or transgender people last year.

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