

## **U.S. Cries Foul Because Nicaragua Stops It from Buying This Year's Elections** **By Rita Jill Clark-Gollub**

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The corporate media is again awash with accusatory articles about Nicaragua, claiming that the government is disqualifying political opponents to give the FSLN an easy win in this year's elections. Let's take a look at what is actually happening, from new laws, to eligibility of political parties, to treatment of those accused of crimes. It is a combination of people engaged in real crimes claiming to be presidential candidates before they get arrested, an incredible amount of U.S. regime change money flowing into the country for years, and Nicaraguan government institutions trying to put a stop to it.

### **Context**

The first and most important element of context is that Nicaragua is a country under attack. Since the 2018 coup attempt, documents have come to light indicating that the leaders of the violence were receiving tens of millions of dollars from such CIA front groups as USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) through programs to "promote democracy" and "facilitate transition"—code words for regime change. Additionally, as revealed in August 2020, there is an ongoing [USAID coup plot](#) called Responsive Assistance in Nicaragua ([RAIN](#)) which seeks to ensure that this year's election results in a government to the liking of the U.S. The document even admits that the FSLN is likely to win in a fair election, in which case a "sudden, unanticipated transition" may be necessary. Finally, there is a very active effort in the U.S. Congress to impose additional and far-reaching sanctions on Nicaragua: the [RENACER Act](#). Its "targeted sanctions" take blunt aim at virtually half the population—including all government officials and members of the FSLN party and their family members. This would be an unprecedented escalation of unilateral coercive measures that could potentially plunge this financially stable nation into the economic hardship currently being experienced by Cuba, Venezuela, and Iran.

The various branches of the Nicaraguan government have responded. First, some important laws have been passed by the legislature in the past few months. The Foreign Agents Law (modeled on an 83-year-old law in the U.S.) requires nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to give an accounting of any foreign funding they receive, including who its donors are, what money was received, the purpose of donations, and a description of how the money was spent. This information needs to correspond to the NGO's financial statements. Another recently enacted law is the Law to Defend the Rights of the People to Independence, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination for Peace. The law says, among other things, that those who fund or lead a *coup d'état* or who facilitate or encourage economic or other sanctions against the Nicaraguan State or its citizens, may be charged with treason and prevented from holding public office. The Ministry of Justice is in charge of prosecutions under these and other laws.

## **Legal recognition of political parties and elections governance**

Legal status has long been an issue given the infighting and splintering of opposition parties, particularly since the 2018 coup attempt and despite the best efforts of the U.S. embassy in Managua to form a united opposition. But new electoral reforms allow parties to receive government reimbursement for election campaigns, even if they enjoy less than 4% support. While polls show that if the opposition can unite around a single candidate, it could potentially garner up to 21% of the vote, such unity has remained elusive; meanwhile, the FSLN has consistently polled upwards of 60%. This makes it hard to swallow reports in the corporate media of the government eliminating opposition parties to ensure an FSLN victory. One such story is that of the Party for Democratic Restoration (PRD) which recently lost its legal recognition. But this was not done at the initiative of the government; rather, board members of the PRD itself asked the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) to annul its status because they accused the evangelical pastor leading the organization of ignoring the party's own statutes and forming an alliance without its members' agreement.

Another favorite theme of Nicaragua's detractors is that the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), the fourth branch of government that oversees elections, is biased in favor of the FSLN. Recent electoral reforms included some of those suggested by the Organization of American States after the 2016 election. A new CSE was elected in May that includes one-third members from outside the governing party despite the FSLN having a super majority in the National Assembly, as [detailed](#) by Louise Richards in NicaNotes of three weeks ago. This CSE is also one of the most diverse electoral bodies in the region, including several indigenous and Afro-descendant persons, and a female majority. But Washington is still upset with its composition since none of its favorite politicians were elected by the National Assembly.

## **Enforcement of laws to protect national sovereignty**

Last week the Director of the Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation (FVBCH), Cristiana Chamorro, was charged with money laundering and placed under house arrest after she refused to account for the millions of dollars she received from USAID and other U.S. government agencies and foundations in recent years. The day before, U.S. journalist Ben Norton published an [extensive exposé](#) of how her Foundation has been used to channel millions to an assortment of opposition NGOs and media outlets favorable to U.S. regime change plans. One of the most scandalous revelations in this article is how the vast network of Nicaraguan opposition media outlets has been cultivated and nurtured by USAID and the NED. Anyone who has been watching Nicaragua knows that these supposedly "independent" media in Nicaragua have been the main source of Nicaragua news reported here in the United States. In other words, in my country most people get information about Nicaragua from the CIA!

The sums of money that Nicaraguan journalist William Grigsby, Ben Norton, and others have revealed are astronomical for a poor country of 6.5 million people. In fact, the USAID website indicates that since 2015 it has spent US\$160,586,742 on Nicaraguan

NGOs. This sum must be put into context. It amounts to US\$24.70 per person in Nicaragua. If a hostile foreign power wanted to do this to the United States, it would have to spend US\$8.2 BILLION to cover the US population of 331 million. A comparison of the wealth of the two countries makes the figure even more outrageous. Nicaragua's GDP is around \$12 billion, while the GDP of the US is around \$21 trillion—that makes the U.S. economy more than 1,750 times larger than Nicaragua's. We can multiply US\$160,586,742 by that figure to see that for the U.S. economy this would be like a hostile infusion of US\$281 BILLION. No wonder Nicaragua has begun to ask for an accounting of the money. US citizens, who were so alarmed by reports of Russian interference in US elections, should be equally concerned and alarmed by this massive US interference in the elections of small countries like Nicaragua around the world.

A sad corollary to this is that Nicaragua is not receiving aid funds from the U.S. that it would like to receive and that might actually help people. The country was blocked from receiving COVID relief funds from multilateral organizations until the end of 2020; after Nicaragua took the first and hardest blows from hurricanes Eta and Iota in November 2020, it received only a fraction of the aid the U.S. sent to Honduras and Guatemala; and Nicaragua is excluded from the COVID-19 vaccine assistance that the U.S. recently decided to provide to other countries.

Cristiana Chamorro's own statement about the propriety of her funds is rather bizarre: "The US State Department rejected the charges of money laundering against the Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation based on audits they conducted that did not find evidence of money laundering or diversion of funds." Not only does she expect the fox to guard the henhouse, she has forgotten which country she lives in. The charges against her also include depositing Foundation money into her personal bank account.

Chamorro and her supporters are calling this a political prosecution. Although at the very end of May and as the seriousness of the charges against her became apparent, Ms. Chamorro announced her intent to seek the opposition alliance's nomination for president, she was never a viable candidate, was barely visible in the polls, and was never a model of "independent journalism." Most importantly, not prosecuting her because she claims to be a candidate would be against Nicaraguan law. As Italian journalist [Fabrizio Casari](#) says, "That Daniel Ortega may fear her candidacy looks like hyperbole. [But] to think that the judiciary should stop the process just because she is a self-appointed candidate would be politicization of justice."

The aforementioned Law to Defend the Rights of the People to Independence, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination for Peace is being applied in some high-profile cases. Arturo Cruz, a businessman who had also thrown his hat into the ring for the opposition coalition's nomination, was apprehended on June 5 upon arrival at the airport from the United States with a large sum of undeclared foreign currency. The prosecutor's office indicates that there is strong evidence that he was in the United States calling for and collaborating in efforts to impose sanctions on Nicaragua, and that he was paid for this. Some wonder whether he brought in a briefcase full of cash because he wanted to be arrested, knowing that it would play well in the mainstream

press. And on June 8 Felix Maradiaga was charged with violating that same law and also arrested. Maradiaga, a Harvard-educated Aspen Fellow who is a long-time recipient of NED funds through his own NGO, became notorious during the 2018 coup attempt as one of the masterminds of the violence. He benefited from the amnesty granted by the government in 2019 to all those involved in crimes related to the 2018 violence, and since then he has been traveling to the U.S. and international organizations, openly advocating for sanctions to be imposed on his country. Given the animosity he has created for himself among average Nicaraguans, it is astounding that he could call himself a presidential candidate. As we go to press, another person was arrested on June 8 and charged under this law. Juan Chamorro García had also been publicly calling for sanctions against his country to help facilitate the overthrow of the government. He has received millions of dollars from Washington, primarily through his NGO FUNIDES, some of it channeled through his cousin Cristiana at the Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation.

Yes, the new laws to protect the country from foreign interference are being enforced, and there are likely to be more arrests. People are being prosecuted based on evidence, regardless of name recognition and social status.

Commentators have noticed another aspect of U.S. hypocrisy, which is that it complains when legal action is taken against its allies in Latin American politics, but turns a blind eye when clearly contrived legal maneuvers are taken against its enemies. This happened when Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was prevented from running for election in Brazil and Rafael Correa was forced into exile from Ecuador, to name just two examples of “lawfare” waged against leftist politicians with US support.

### **What can we do?**

It is very important for those of us in the solidarity movement to remember why the current Nicaraguan government is polling so strongly among the people: it has rejected neoliberal capitalism in favor of protecting the people and planet with policies that have brought more prosperity to more Nicaraguans since 2007 than at any other point in the nation’s history. For this it has incurred the wrath of the corporate-dominated government of the United States. Our role in this situation remains the same as it has always been: to advocate for our country to stop spending our tax dollars to meddle in other countries’ affairs. That is, to allow the Nicaraguan people to forge their own path, unencumbered by the old U.S. neocolonial mindset that purports to know what is best for people in other countries.

This week marks the four-year anniversary of the passing of an important Nicaraguan leader, Fr. Miguel d’Escoto, who was Foreign Minister in the 1980s and President of the UN General Assembly in 2008-2009. A quote of his is very apropos of this moment: “It is totally incomprehensible that anyone would call themselves a democrat while at the same time seeking the sponsorship of Washington for their electoral aspirations.”