



# US and Central America

Why does it treat Honduras differently from Nicaragua?

# Neighbours with big differences

- Honduras – 9.7m population; Nicaragua – 6.5m
- Honduras – GDP \$25bn; Nicaragua – GDP \$12.5bn
- Honduras – neoliberal governments except for brief period before 2009 military coup
- Nicaragua – Sandinista government since 2007
- Both have elections in November 2021





# What are the US's interests in Central America?

- Reducing migration
- Stopping drugs
- 'Security'
- 'Human rights' and 'promoting democracy'
- Promoting US business interests

*Nothing about poverty or social development*

**A SECURE AND STABLE CENTRAL AMERICA  
contributes to a safer and more  
prosperous United States by helping to:**



- **SECURE OUR BORDERS** – combat drug trafficking and illegal migration.
- **PROTECT U.S. CITIZENS** – dismantle transnational criminal organizations.
- **INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR U.S. BUSINESSES** – increase private sector investment.

[WWW.STATE.GOV](http://WWW.STATE.GOV)

# The 2016 Nicaraguan elections and the US response

- Daniel Ortega wins with 72% of the vote, after leading in opinion polls
- US condemns the election:
  - ‘deeply concerned’ by the election
  - ‘flawed’ electoral process
  - ‘sidelined’ opposition candidates
  - lack of ‘free press’
- Had already threatened sanctions via the ‘NICA Act’





# The 2017 Honduran elections and the US response

- After 57% of votes counted, opposition was in the lead by 5%
- Counting halted by a 5-hour power cut
- When it resumed, Juan Orlando Hernández (JOH) was winning
- OAS expert declared fraud and OAS said election had 'low integrity'
- US chose that moment to issue Honduras with a favorable human rights certificate
- JOH retained the presidency
- Within 3 weeks, 24 people had been killed by police in protest demonstrations








# Trump befriends Juan Orlando Hernández

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Favoured by Trump as he was willing to stop migrants and support US business interests

Trump was happy to overlook:

- Incompetent government
- Corruption – government funds diverted into election campaigns
- Violence (Honduras is one of the most dangerous countries in L America)
- Human rights violations (most notably, the murder of Berta Cáceres in 2016)
- JOH manipulation of successive elections



# Hondurans continue to migrate north

- Migration across southwest border highest for two decades
- Forecast to reach one million during 2021
- After Mexico, biggest source of migrants is Honduras
- Already 23,400 Hondurans deported so far this year

# Biden's dilemma and the 'narcostate'

Biden was part of the Obama administration which...

- Turned a blind eye to the 2009 coup
- Ushered in corrupt, Nationalist party governments

Limited attempts to tackle corruption ended in January with closure of the MACCIH

- 93% of those accused now free

US court cases have exposed JOH's narcostate

- conviction of JOH's brother Tony – faces 30 years in US prison
- JOH implicated in 2<sup>nd</sup> drugs case – quoted as saying: we will 'shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos' by flooding the US with cocaine

*'We are committed to partnering ...with those in the Honduran Government that are committed to working with us to root out the corruption that has become really endemic to that country'*





# Divided opposition in Honduran elections

- No less than 13 candidates
- JOH not standing but National Party's Nasry Asfura leads the polls: more of the same?
- Traditional rival Liberal party's Yani Rosenthal spent 3 years in US prison and faces new court action
- Libre party's Xiomara Castro – best progressive hope
- National Party to win with more fraud and/or buying votes?



# US response to corruption in two countries

Nasry Asfura, PN candidate, was accused formally of corruptly spending \$1.1m to benefit 78 family members, friends, etc – case dropped to allow him to stand

- No response from US government

Cristiana Chamorro – accused of using her NGO to fund opposition media in Nicaragua and provoking the 2018 attempted coup

- Had not even been adopted as a candidate
- Condemned by US

*‘Ortega Regime Should Immediately Release  
Opposition Leader’*

*‘A clear attempt to thwart free and fair  
elections’*





# US allies can use 'lawfare' to manipulate elections with no codemnation by the US

Recent 'lawfare' attacks on Latin America left-wing politicians

- Rafael Correa in Ecuador, forced into exile
- Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil
- Cristina Kirchner in Argentina
- Evo Morales as a candidate for the Bolivian Senate



# Unfriendly 'regimes' are 'destabilising' Latin America

Alan MacLeod points out in FAIR how the US differentiates between 'friends' and 'enemies'

- enemy states are led by 'regimes,' not 'governments'
- 'stability' = 'under US control'
- 'destabilizing' = 'challenging the US'

So:

- Venezuela = 'destabilizing force' (2005-2009)
- Venezuela-Cuba-Bolivia pact = was a 'destabilizing alliance' (2005)
- Nicaragua: 'trying to destabilize democracies in the area' - Admiral Fuller, head of US Southern Command, February 2021

<https://fair.org/home/stability-news-codeword-for-under-us-control/>







# US response to electoral reform in two countries

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## Honduras

- National Party pushes through cosmetic reform at last moment in electoral calendar
  - US urged Honduran congress to approve it; OAS: 'a significant step forward'
  - Doris Gutiérrez (a candidate) warned: 'due to the winds that are blowing, a fraud is brewing now which will be difficult to control, as happened in past elections.'
  - Only 38% of Hondurans have identity cards needed to vote

## Nicaragua

- Passes electoral which ensures equal role for women and other improvements
  - US says Nicaragua refusing to pass 'meaningful reforms'
  - OAS condemns a process it largely endorsed in 2017
  - 95% of Nicaraguans have ID cards via a newly modernized system

# Honduras fails to handle natural disasters

Hurricanes Eta and Iota hit both countries last November

- Nicaragua:
  - almost no deaths, people evacuated, repairs in hand
- Honduras:
  - 6,000 homes destroyed, 85,000 seriously damaged
  - 55,000 still in temporary shelters





# Honduras fails to cope with Covid-19

- Severe lockdown – widespread protests – people shot and imprisoned
- Depleted health service can't cope – only 29 hospitals – medics on the street demanding PPE
- Over 230,000 Covid cases
- Plentiful international aid, \$248m spent - but widespread corruption, faulty medical supplies, contracts going to president's family
- Of seven mobile hospitals ordered last year to fill the gaps, only two are working properly
- Lowest vaccination rate in C America – Hondurans going to Nicaragua to get vaccinated
- Poverty rose to 70% in 2020, 10.7% higher than in 2019



# US response to Covid-19 in two countries

## Honduras – US aid

- \$8m assistance
- 11,600 test kits
- 210 ventilators
- Will benefit from Biden promise of vaccines for Latin America

## Nicaragua – US aid

- Only \$0.75m assistance – to NGOs, not government
- No equipment, no vaccines
- Economic sanctions

Vaccination in Nicaragua: the country has a higher rate of vaccination than either Honduras or Guatemala





A photograph of Kamala Harris, Vice President of the United States, standing in a room with wood-paneled walls and a large wooden cabinet. She is wearing a dark suit and is speaking to a group of people. Several photographers and videographers are visible in the foreground, some holding cameras and others holding video cameras. The room has a patterned carpet and a framed picture of a ship on the wall.

# US won't cut migration if it supports corrupt, neoliberal governments

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- Kamala Harris visits Mexico and Guatemala to address 'root causes' of migration
- Throwing more money at corrupt governments doesn't work
- Solidarity groups in Northern Triangle countries are working on Congress to seek controls on how US aid is spent
- While even a supposedly progressive Biden government ignores Central America's real needs, migration will continue...

