

### 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

# 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.

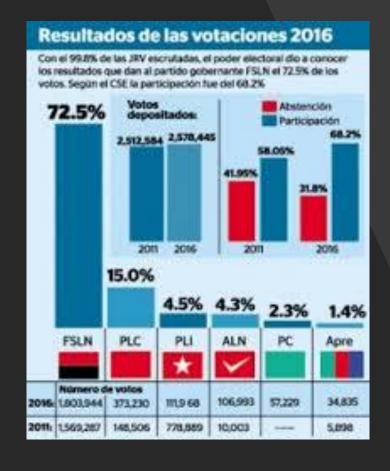
- **PROTECT U.S. CITIZENS** dismantle transnational criminal organizations.
- INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR U.S. BUSINESSES – increase private sector investment.

WWW.STATE.GOV

Nothing about poverty or social development

### 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 threated 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

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



### 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

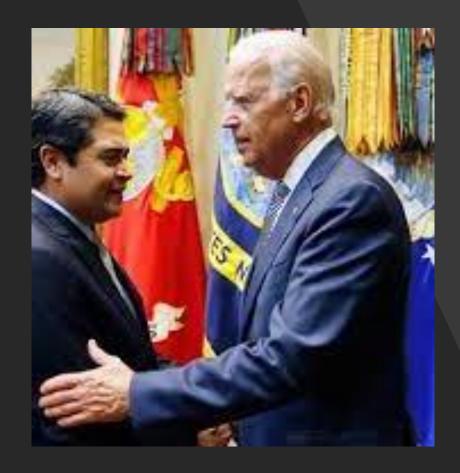
Limited attempts to tackle corruption ended in January with closure of the MACCIH

• 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

Joe Biden Urges Allies To Curb Iran's "Destabilizing" Activities In Middle East

U.S. seizes terrorist websites used to recruit, destabilize Iraq

behavior' at ministers' meeting

"The threat of nuclear proliferation also continues to require careful diplomacy and cooperation among us," Joe Bilden told fellow leaders via teleconference.

\*\*EVENT Approx France: Update: France: 10,004 for France: 10,0

U.S. blacklists Chinese entities for supporting 'destabilizing' efforts

White House says China's moves around Taiwan 'potentially destabilizing'

Pentagon: China military exercises will 'further destabilize' S. China Sea

U.S. condemns North Korea's ballistic missile launches as 'destabilizing'

Dr. Daurana Sraff

Iran's destabilizing role has been exposed in Gaza

Top US officials have met with their Japanese counterparts in Tokyo. The Myanmar coup.

North Korea's nuclear program and containing China's influence were all high on the

Stabilization Is Essential to Accomplishing the Mission

COMMENTARY (The RAND Blog)

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

#### **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**





- 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...

