

Electoral Charade in Honduras: Pity the impoverished, oppressed majority

Below: Article in the Post & Courier, New York Times

- <http://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/electoral-charade-in-honduras-pity-the-impoverished-oppressed-majority>)

Country headed for four more years of racism, exploitation and repression, corruption and impunity, as military-backed candidate – supported by the U.S. and Canada - poised to win violent, manipulated elections

This Sunday, November 25, Hondurans have their chance “to vote” in the corrupted, repressive electoral process. Global companies and investors in the areas of mining, garment industry, tourism, African palm production, etc., and the governments of the U.S. and Canada turn blind eye to repression, corruption and impunity, hoping for four more years of the corrupt, repressive government of Juan Orlando Hernandez.

Danger to Honduran democracy

Nov 20, 2017

http://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/editorials/danger-to-honduran-democracy/article_e9cd85e4-ca43-11e7-b94d-4fbf2bd987cf.html

Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez swept into power in 2014, just five years after a military coup that had the tacit approval of then-President Barack Obama’s administration overthrew a populist government. This month, Mr. Hernandez will seek an illegal second term, despite constitutional prohibitions.

And the United States is openly supportive. That should not be the case.

Mr. Hernandez has been friendly to the United States and its business interests in the region. But he has a troubling record on human rights, underscored by his aggressive militarization of police power.

Meanwhile, at least \$90 million has been diverted from the country's already woefully underfunded health care and pension programs. Mr. Hernandez's opposition contends that the money made its way into the election campaign funds of the president and his allies. Mr. Hernandez denies those allegations.

The administration's handling of the investigation into the 2016 assassination of internationally-renowned environmental activist Berta Caceres has been deservedly criticized. One outside probe concluded the likelihood of complicity by "state agents."

Earlier this year, The Guardian reported that a prominent member of the Honduran military leaked evidence of a "hit list" containing the names of dozens of social activists and said that Ms. Caceres was among them. U.S. State Department officials dismissed the claims.

Since the 2009 coup, the United States has provided hundreds of millions of dollars of military aid to Honduras, and seven U.S. military bases are currently in operation there.

It's worth noting that violent crime has declined somewhat during Mr. Hernandez's time in office, although Honduras' murder rate remains among the world's highest. Mr. Hernandez also helped the United States address a crisis of unaccompanied Central American minors arriving at the U.S. border in 2014.

Polls show Mr. Hernandez in the lead for the Nov. 26 election.

But his reelection would deal a serious blow to the rule of law in Honduras and undermine its fragile democracy. Indeed, his years-long flirting with a run and his eventual candidacy for a second term have already done severe damage.

And evidence of massive corruption alongside troubling human rights violations should further preclude United States support.

But President Donald Trump and his administration continue to provide aid to the Honduran military and have tacitly supported Mr. Hernandez for a second term despite his numerous negatives, all in the name of having a friendly leader in power.

Openness to U.S. economic interests should not be sufficient justification to help prop up yet another Latin American strongman regime.

The Honduran Candidate

By Jan Schakowsky, Nov. 23, 2017

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/23/opinion/honduras-juan-orlando-hernandez-election.html>

Presidential re-election is prohibited by the Honduran Constitution. In fact, the document goes so far as to require the immediate termination of a sitting president who dares to advocate a change to the ban.

Just eight years ago, [former president Manuel Zelaya was ousted](#) after planning to hold a nonbinding referendum on whether to change that article of the Constitution. But that's not stopping President Juan Orlando Hernández from trying.

Mr. Hernández's campaign for re-election began years ago — even before he was president — when he and his acolytes stacked the Honduras Supreme Court with supporters, with the ultimate goal of holding onto power beyond one term.

In 2015, the Supreme Court backed Mr. Hernández's effort, ruling that term limits violate an individual's right to run for office. Now Mr. Hernández is using that ruling to justify his re-election campaign. Hondurans go to the polls on Nov. 26.

While serving as president of the Honduran Congress in 2012, Mr. Hernández [led the effort to illegally fire](#) four members of the Supreme Court in the middle of the night. The next day, they were replaced by Hernández loyalists, who later issued the ruling now used to legitimize his run.

The people of Honduras have protested the Supreme Court decision to no avail. Large groups of civil society have asked the electoral authority to nullify the president's candidacy, citing the constitutional violation. Their requests have also been ignored by officials loyal to the president.

In the face of protests, Mr. Hernández's government has been tightening its already firm grip on society. International observers and human rights defenders have been threatened and kicked out of the country. Student demonstrations have been violently broken up by the police. The government has passed laws that could restrict the right to protest.

Despite that, a powerful opposition is building. The opposition is based in grass-roots social movements and in two new political parties founded in 2012, the center-left Libre (Libertad y Refundación) Party and the right-wing, anticorruption party known as PAC (Partido Anticorrupción). Those two parties have united for the election, forming the Opposition Alliance under the candidacy of Salvador Nasralla of the PAC.

It's possible that Mr. Nasralla would win a free and fair election, as there is plenty of opposition to Mr. Hernández's re-election — [nearly two-thirds of Hondurans oppose re-election](#). But Mr. Hernández and his allies control the much-protested ballot-counting process, the election oversight commission, the army — which under Honduran law moves the ballots — and all appeals processes. Given his total control over the election process, we can't expect him and his corrupt manipulators to allow a free and fair election to decide their fate.

The Honduran government under Mr. Hernández is not new to the business of silencing dissenters. In October, the International Advisory Group of Experts, or Gaipe for its initials in Spanish, [published a detailed report](#) on the death of a friend of mine from Honduras, Berta Cáceres. She was murdered because of her efforts as an environmental and indigenous-rights activist. The Gaipe report outlines how [the government has been deliberately slow](#) to bring the masterminds behind her killing to justice. They are powerful, well-connected men and women who live above the law under the Hernández government. Ms. Cáceres's case is emblematic of the impunity and repression that exist in Honduras today, but it is just one of many.

With violence, [corruption](#) and repression of civil society as the backdrop, the Honduran people will head to the polls. They will be handed a ballot that illegally lists Mr. Hernández as a candidate, and they are likely to face coercion, intimidation and bribes to sway their vote in favor of the sitting president.

Still, the Honduran people remain engaged. Vibrant political campaigns are being waged. Many brave voters will head to the polls and do everything in their power to make their voices heard. I applaud and admire them.

The international community owes it to these citizens to be prudent, skeptical and well-informed when the election results come in. For far too long, the United States has been quick to support Mr. Hernández blindly, seeing him as a useful partner. He relies on international support, and any indication from the United States and our allies that we might revoke our support could go a long way toward making him rethink his next move.

In plain view of the international community and in blatant defiance of his own government's founding documents, Mr. Hernández is inching closer and closer to authoritarian rule and all-out dictatorship. If he succeeds in re-electing himself, the United States should make it clear that we see his power grab for what it is. We should withdraw our unconditional support, roll back the millions of dollars we send Honduras in security aid every year and make it clear that we do not tolerate autocratic behavior by our allies.

More information / Get involved

Honduras Solidarity Network, <http://www.hondurassolidarity.org/>

Rights Action, www.rightsaction.org

Witness for Peace, <http://witnessforpeace.org/>

School of Americas Watch, www.soaw.org

Alliance for Global Justice, www.afgj.org

Centre for Economic Policy Research, www.cepr.org
