

Honduran electoral fraud and repression are rooted in U.S. and Canadian support for 2009 military coup

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- “Crisis of Honduras democracy has roots in U.S. support for 2009 coup”, The Guardian, by Sarah Kinosian
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Protests across Honduras

Keep At It In Canada & U.S.

Honduran people are in the streets every day and night, banging pots, protesting in defense of democracy, against the regime's electoral fraud and repression. In Canada and U.S., continue with all efforts to pressure all elected parliamentarian, congress member and senator.

- What to do: see below
- Emergency support funding appeal: see below

Crisis of Honduras democracy has roots in US tacit support for 2009 coup: The US has been all but silent about the unrest engulfing its ally

Sarah Kinosian, 7 December 2017

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/07/crisis-of-honduras-democracy-has-roots-in-us-tacit-support-for-2009-coup?CMP=share_btn_tw

Since the 26 November vote, at least 11 people have died in clashes with security forces, and [tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets in protests](#) over an electoral process marked by suspicious delays, inexplicable irregularities – and opposition claims that the ruling party is trying to steal the election.

The stand-off pits opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla against the rightwing incumbent Juan Orlando Hernández, but Hondurans say the race isn't just about who will run the country for the next four years.

For many, what is at stake is the credibility of Honduran democracy, which is still reeling from a 2009 military coup against populist president Manuel Zelaya.

The political turmoil will likely have far-reaching consequences, and the United States, which wields considerable influence in the country, shares some responsibility for creating the political landscape that laid the ground for the crisis.

“Many countries around the world are struggling with building representative democracies and fighting against corruption and crime,” said Eric Olson, the director of the Latin American Program at the Wilson Center. “Honduras is definitely one of these, and what happens there will offer the world some

important lessons. So far, the lessons have been more of the painful variety: the kinds of crisis and violence that can emerge when transparency is undermined to guarantee political favour.”

As well as calling for an end to the electoral crisis, Honduran protesters have expressed outrage over a string of scandals including the murder of environmental activist [Berta Cáceres](#), [the pilfering of the country's social security agency](#) and allegations that associates of Hernández are involved in the drug trade.

Protesters often describe Hernández's bid for re-election as an unconstitutional power grab – a charge given added irony by the fact that the current president justified the 2009 coup because of questionable allegations that Zelaya was plotting to seek re-election. After his election in 2013, Hernández changed the constitution to eliminate term limits.

Shortly after the coup, the US froze aid to the Honduran government, but it was restored shortly thereafter, and Hernández has enjoyed continuing support from Washington. And whatever happens with elections will have direct implications for the United States, said Adam Isacson, senior program associate at the Washington Office on Latin America. “Americans should care about the current chaos in [Honduras](#) because of cocaine and migrants,” he said. “After the 2009 coup, the government essentially stopped functioning in rural areas where organized crime took hold and cocaine shipments started arriving in larger numbers. This prompted even more US anti-drug assistance. Then, as institutions hollowed out and became corrupted, gang activity increased and the United States got a wave of migrants. An unstable Honduras will mean more of this.”

Honduras has long been a strategic partner for Washington: since 2009, the US has invested nearly \$114m in security assistance to establish elite military and police units, ratchet up border security, and carry out counternarcotics operations as part of Hernández's crackdown on gangs.

All this has considerably broadened the military's influence. While the security push appeared to cut Honduras's murder rate in half, the country still ranks among the most violent places in the world and remains a key corridor for drug smuggling to the United States.

And despite corruption scandals implicating the government, Hernández is still regarded as a reliable US ally. But the US government has barely commented on the current crisis, beyond a few embassy statements praising a partial recount and “lamenting” the violence.

The US Democratic senator Patrick Leahy said he had yet to receive information he had requested from the US embassy in Tegucigalpa about the electoral irregularities and the violence that followed. “This lack of responsiveness in such a time of crisis is troubling,” he said.

A way out of the current impasse remains unclear. Negotiations over a possible recount have dragged on for days, and some opposition leaders have even called for a new run-off election.

Despite the crisis, however, Reuters reported this week that the US had quietly certified Honduras for making progress in fighting corruption and improving human rights, freeing up millions in US assistance.

As one of the US’s closest allies in Central America, Honduras will probably serve as a litmus test for how the United States will treat other allies with similar stained reputations. “The certification and the weak embassy statements so far tell us how low a priority democracy and human rights are on this administration’s list of US interests,” said Isacson.

Is another coup under way in Honduras? Canada has been complicit with repressive regimes since 2009 overthrow of President Zelaya

By [Steve Stewart](#), Dec.6, 2017

<https://ricochet.media/en/2059/is-another-coup-underway-in-honduras>

Recent days have seen violent repression of mass protests against perceived electoral fraud in Honduras. Resistance to the heavy-handed government response has come from unexpected places, with one elite division of the police forces refusing orders to suppress demonstrations. The Canadian government’s hands are not clean in Honduras, having played a significant role in this Central American country since a coup in 2009 overthrew President Manuel Zelaya.

On June 26, 2009, I received a curious email from the Canadian consulate in Honduras. It urged Canadians in Honduras to stay off the streets the following Sunday, June 28. Although I was safely ensconced in an office in Vancouver at the time, I had met with officials at the consulate earlier that year, so I assumed that they thought I was stationed in the country.

What was strange about the message was that the only event of note planned in Honduras for June 28 was a non-binding consultation to ask citizens if they favoured including on the ballot in the November national elections a referendum question on electing a constituent assembly to rewrite the Honduran constitution. Hardly, I thought, a reason for foreigners to hide in their homes.

The consultation was never held. Early on June 28, soldiers stormed the presidential palace, arrested progressive president Manuel Zelaya and forced him, still in his pajamas, on a plane and into exile.

The coup ushered in what has now been eight years of repression of social activists, environmental defenders and marginalized groups, skyrocketing murder rates, and the increased penetration of organized crime into higher and higher levels of the state, while opening the country to foreign investment and the expansion of mining, agro-industry and infrastructure.

Back in 2009, Canadian diplomats joined the U.S. in blocking efforts in the Organization of American States and the United Nations to restore the constitutional order immediately after the coup. The violent suppression in Honduras of the popular uprising that has followed this year's elections is a result of the unfinished business of the 2009 coup.

Disputed election

The 2017 presidential election saw incumbent President Juan Orlando Hernández of the National Party — principal vehicle of the country's traditional oligarchy — face off against Salvador Nasralla, candidate of a coalition calling itself the "Alliance Against the Dictatorship." The alliance is comprised of the left-wing Libre party, formed by supporters of ousted president Zelaya, and the centre-right Anticorruption Party.

Hours after the polls closed, with 58 per cent of the votes counted, results gave Nasralla a strong lead of 45 per cent to Orlando's 40 per cent. The count was suddenly halted (The electoral tribunal blamed a "computer glitch"), and when it began again on Nov. 27 Nasralla's advantage had almost disappeared. Counting proceeded at a snail's pace for the next couple of days and gradually, Hernández replaced Nasralla's lead.

The Honduran national congress backed the 2009 coup that overthrew Zelaya, arguing that his planned consultation would violate the constitution, which prohibits re-election of presidents. The consultation, congressional leaders argued, could lead to a referendum that might approve the election of a constituent assembly, which might have modified the constitution to allow for re-election.

Juan Orlando Hernández presided over the National Congress in the first post-coup government. Now it is Orlando Hernández himself who stands for re-election, bypassing the constitutional articles prohibited this by replacing Supreme Court judges with more malleable ones, who ruled last year that the ban on re-election violates Hernández's civic rights.

With still no official final count announced, supporters of the opposition, suspecting fraud, gathered outside the Electoral Tribunal headquarters in Tegucigalpa on Nov. 29. Repression by security forces sparked new anti-fraud demonstrations throughout the country, and running battles between protesters and government security forces ordered to suppress them.

Police refuse orders

On Dec. 1, Hernández declared a state of emergency and a dusk-to-dawn curfew, permitting police and military to detain anyone caught outside during those hours. Alarming cell phone footage of widespread violence by security forces showed handcuffed prisoners repeatedly beaten while lying on the ground, people dragged behind police motorcycles, and troops firing live ammunition into crowds.

Undeterred, tens of thousands of anti-fraud protesters gathered in Tegucigalpa on Dec. 3 in defiance of the curfew and participated in a torchlight march through the streets. As of Dec. 4, according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, at least 11 people have been killed. Dozens more have been wounded by

security forces, detained, or disappeared. At that point, the Cobras, Honduras' crack counterinsurgency police, announced that they will refuse further orders to repress the people and were returning to their bases. Throughout the night, other national police units abandoned their posts to join the Cobras.

Canadian complicity

Canada has been a staunch ally of the National Party governments that have maintained power since the 2009 coup. In November 2009, after the de facto regime held highly-controversial elections in which the leading opposition candidate spent the campaign in hospital after a police beating, Canada was the first state to congratulate Honduras on "free and peaceful elections."

Shortly afterwards, Canada opened free trade negotiations with the new National Party government of President Pepe Lobo, and, in April 2010, Canada's Minister of State for the Americas Peter Kent led a delegation of Canadian mining executives to the country, promising hundreds of millions in investment if the Honduran government were to repeal regulations imposed on mining corporations by the former Zelaya administration. The trade agreement, incorporating special rights for Canadian corporations, was ratified in 2014, and Honduras became Central America's leading recipient of Canadian aid.

Since that time, despite growing evidence of deep-rooted corruption and participation in drug trafficking, Canada has stood by the National Party governments. In March of this year, a former top Honduran drug lord [who is now cooperating](#) with the DEA testified in the U.S. cocaine trafficking trial of former President Lobo's son that Hernández had received large sums of money from drug traffickers, and in late 2016 President's Hernández brother was named as a "person of interest" in a DEA [investigation](#).

Recount and investigation required

Although the Honduran Electoral Tribunal announced Dec. 4 its final tally with a small advantage to Hernández, the outcome of the elections remains unclear and the tribunal stopped short of declaring Hernández re-elected.

Many international observers now believe that the credibility of the results can only be restored through a complete recount of votes overseen by international

observers and an investigation into the manipulation of the constitution prior to, during, and after the electoral process.

[Steve Stewart is the executive director of CoDevelopment Canada, a Vancouver-based organization that facilitates solidarity between social and labour organizations in Canada and Latin America.]

Do Not Write Letters of Protest to the Regime!

Wondering what to do about this latest act of State repression in Honduras? Don't write letters of protest to the regime. They are impervious to them; they are protected from them by their political, economic and military relations with the "international community". In power since the 2009 coup, the corrupt, repressive Honduran rulers care about two things:

- maintaining their mutually beneficial economic and political relations with and support from the international community (primarily the governments of U.S. and Canada; but also the European community; the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank; and a host of global investors and companies working in the sectors of African palm, sugar cane, bananas, garment "sweatshop" factories, mining and tourism);
- maintaining relations with and support from the U.S. military.

The repression, corruption and impunity in Honduras are not "Honduran" problems. They are problems of this so-called "international community" together with the Honduran elites. International economic and military relations are the lifeblood of the regime. This is how power works.

Through our denunciations and activism, we have to make this "international community" – particularly the governments of the U.S. and Canada - take responsibility for their actions. If accountability is not brought to complicity of the military, economic and political backers of the Honduran regime, the repression, corruption and impunity will not stop.

U.S.A.

In the U.S., call the U.S. Capital Switchboard to directly contact your Senators and Representatives: (202) 224-3121. Get their phone numbers and email addresses; send them copies of this and other information; politely insist that they agree to

any and all of the following demands; share your efforts with the media, family, friends and networks.

CANADA

In Canada, find your MP by entering your postal code on this page:

<http://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>. Get their phone numbers and email addresses; send them copies of this and other information; politely insist that they agree to any and all of the following demands; share your efforts with the media, family, friends and networks.

In the short term, the U.S. and Canadian governments and politicians must:

- Publicly condemn the multiple acts of documented electoral fraud being carried out by the corrupt, military-backed government of Juan Orlando Hernandez and the National party;
- Publicly condemn the suspension of constitutional rights, the imposition of a curfew and the acts of police and military repression happening across Honduras against anti-electoral fraud protesters and other citizens;
- State unequivocally that the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez and the National Party will be held fully accountable for any and all electoral fraud and repression taking place;
- Immediately suspend all economic, military, police and other “security” related relations with the corrupt, repressive government in power;
- Advocate for a complete recount of ALL votes, carried out under full national and international supervision, or a new run-off election is held under full national and international supervision.

In the medium and longer terms

There must be legislative and senate inquiries in the U.S. and Canada into the underlying causes of Honduras’ now endemic situation of repression and exploitation, corruption and impunity, with a specific focus on:

- The role played by the U.S. and Canadian governments supporting and legitimizing the 2009 military coup;
- The role played by the U.S. and Canadian governments supporting and legitimizing the fraudulent and repressive elections in 2009 and 2013;
- The role played by the U.S. and Canadian governments supporting the expansion of corporate and investor interests in Honduras, in concert with the repressive, corrupt governments in power, in the areas of mining,

garment “sweatshop” industry, bananas, hydro-electric dams, tourism, and more;

More information

- Honduras Solidarity Network: <http://www.hondurassolidarity.org/>,
<https://www.facebook.com/HondurasSolidarityNetwork>,
<https://twitter.com/hondurassol>
- Witness for Peace: www.witnessforpeace.org,
<https://twitter.com/WitnessforPeace>,
- School of Americas Watch: www.soaw.org, <https://twitter.com/SOAWatch>
- La Voz de los de Abajo: <https://www.facebook.com/lavozchicago/>,
[@lavozchicago](https://twitter.com/lavozchicago)

Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.) – Emergency humanitarian relief funds

As the Honduran people are courageously protesting and saying no to electoral fraud and repression, they are suffering the consequences of military and police repression. Rights Action is sending emergency relief funds to our long-term partner groups in Honduras - COPINH and OFRANEH - and other community groups as they continue with their community-controlled development, environmental and human rights defense work and their emergency response to the electoral fraud and repression work, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

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