

Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and distinguished members of this Committee, I am deeply grateful for the invitation to appear before you today to offer testimony concerning the critical matter of the upcoming elections in Honduras.

When Xiomara Castro was elected president in 2021, many welcomed her as a voice of change. Unfortunately, the reality was different. She has instituted a government based on far-left political principles and has repeatedly expressed an affinity for Nicolas Maduro and Chavismo, which has destroyed Venezuela.

As the first months of her administration progressed, concerns grew regarding the direction of the new government, particularly following decisions interpreted as a shift toward more radical positions, such as the severing of relations with Taiwan and the establishment of ties with the People's Republic of China. Additionally, there were reports of pressure groups aligned with the administration, compared by some analysts to Venezuela's "colectivos", which allegedly influenced episodes of institutional tension, including the controversial election of the authorities of the National Congress.

Several high-level officials also chose to resign due to internal disagreements or differences of opinion. Among them was Edmundo Orellana, who served as Secretary of Transparency and Anti-Corruption.

In the period leading up to the current elections, civil society organizations, political sectors, and observers have expressed concern over alleged irregularities, particularly regarding delays and obstacles in the contracting of essential services for election day.

Recently the tensions between the Executive Branch and the National Electoral Council (CNE) have intensified. The former president of the CNE, Cossette López-Osorio, has reported receiving threats and judicial pressures, which, according to her, were intended to force her resignation.

Magistrate Ana Paola Hall has similarly conveyed, in a public forum, that she perceives threats to her security, escalating concerns regarding a potential maneuver to replace current electoral authorities with individuals deemed more aligned with the interests of the current administration.

We must not overlook the decision last February when President Castro's government canceled the extradition agreement regarding narcotics trafficking and organized crime. This action could jeopardize future extradition requests from the U.S., should they become necessary.

Another sensitive point is the role of the Armed Forces. If we look at the historical record, their function in elections has been limited to the custody and transport of ballot boxes across the country. However, recent statements by the high command, particularly General Roosevelt Hernández, have been interpreted by some sectors as an attempt to involve themselves in areas beyond their constitutional authority, raising concerns about their impartiality. To add on to this, the ongoing security concerns related to the U.S. base at Palmerola include the possibility of risk posed by adversary actors.

I would also like to add that the maneuvers performed within the National Congress under the leadership of Luis Redondo similarly warrant close attention and cannot be disregarded. Redondo refused to continue with ordinary sessions, despite more than 78 of the 128 deputies demanding it and instead opted to create a Permanent Commission composed of nine deputies aligned with the Libre party. Through this structure, it is alleged that interim appointments could be imposed once officials of the National Electoral Council or the Electoral Justice Tribunal are suspended or removed from their positions.

Finally, the performance of the Public Ministry has also been subject to debate. Various opposition parties have alerted that the Attorney General, Johel Zelaya, who has family ties to the Libre party candidate Rixi Moncada, has been making decisions favoring the Executive, including legally contested actions against electoral authorities. Some officials, in this environment, have even temporarily left the country, citing a credible fear of persecution.

For international actors, including the Trump Administration in the United States, strengthening electoral transparency in Honduras is essential. Washington maintains significant influence in the country, largely through security cooperation frameworks and deep bilateral trade ties. The diplomatic and legislative sectors have emphasized that any signs of electoral manipulation should be closely monitored and could have consequences for the bilateral relationship, including the possible imposition of sanctions.