



## **State of Honduran Elections**

“Democracy in Peril: The Fight for Free Election in Honduras”  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere  
Committee on Foreign Affairs

Submitted by  
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Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and members of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to address this hearing on “Democracy in Peril: The Fight for Free Election in Honduras.” I have worked for more than 25 years implementing programs to strengthen democracy and human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, including living and working in Honduras, where I witnessed post-election violence in 2017.

The organization I represent—the National Democratic Institute (NDI)—is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that believes a world rooted in freedom—where people have a say in how they are governed and with leaders who are accountable to the people—fosters more stability, security and prosperity for everyone. NDI envisions a world where democracy and freedom prevail, with dignity for all. We are privileged to work with exceptional individuals whose tireless efforts for freedom make the world a safer, more secure and prosperous place.

NDI has worked in Latin America and the Caribbean for 40 years. Today, NDI maintains a presence in Colombia, Ecuador, and Guatemala. We regularly engage other countries in regional programs to promote transparent and fair elections, engage voters through widely broadcast candidate debates, foster accountability and transparency initiatives, promote political and party reform, and counter authoritarian influence. NDI’s work with civic activists, reform-minded government officials and legislators, and political parties across the democratic political spectrum at national and local levels provides us with diverse perspectives into the challenges facing the region. Our work and partnerships span senior political leaders to grassroots activists.

Building on its long history of supporting democracy and credible elections in Honduras since 2009, NDI organized a bipartisan Pre-Election Assessment Mission, which visited Honduras from August 4 to 8, 2025. The Mission met with election authorities, presidential candidates, political parties, private sector representatives, religious leaders, civic groups and the international community. Upon returning, the Mission published a report with findings and recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

In recent months, NDI has also provided technical assistance to a broad-based citizen observation initiative, Election Observers for Honduras 2025 (*Observadores Electorales por Honduras 2025*, OEH25)—made up of the Network for Democratic Equity in Honduras (*Red por la Equidad Democrática en Honduras*, RED-H) and the Network for the Defense of Democracy (*Red por la Defensa de la Democracia*, RDD). These activities—the Pre-Election Mission and support for OEH25—are supported by the National Endowment for Democracy and inform the observations that follow.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/Final-Report-PEAM-2025.pdf>

## Why this Election Matters for the United States

As Honduras barrels toward November 30 general elections, the stakes extend far beyond its borders. At a moment when democracy is being tested across the globe, this vote will determine more than who governs Honduras. It will shape the country's stability for years to come—and influence regional security and U.S. strategic interests in Central America.

A credible election in Honduras is essential to avoiding a slide into deeper political instability. The real stakes lie beyond electoral disputes, which can trigger immediate unrest. The larger danger is more profound: a leadership that assumes office without a genuine mandate, weakening democratic checks, further eroding public confidence, and undermining the country's governability in lasting ways.

Washington has good reason to care. Honduras is already a major transshipment point for cocaine moving from South America to the United States.<sup>2</sup> Political turmoil could make this already serious problem much worse. The country is also home to Soto Cano Air Base, a key hub for U.S. military operations in Central America. And with more than 200 U.S. companies operating in Honduras, instability could put significant American investments at risk.<sup>3</sup>

In short, Honduras' stability matters to American security, economic interests and the lives of thousands of families with deep ties to both countries.

### Electoral Context

On November 30, 2025, Honduras will hold general (presidential, legislative and municipal) elections for the eleventh time since its transition to democracy in the 1980s. These elections are taking place in the context of deep citizen distrust. For example, according to a March 2025 public opinion survey by the Reflection, Research and Communication Team (*Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación y Comunicación*, ERIC-SJ), only 23 percent of the population said they trusted electoral institutions.<sup>4</sup> That lack of citizen confidence is, to a great degree, a function of longstanding political dynamics and trends stemming from the 2009 constitutional crisis that led to a coup d'état. The 2009 crisis had long-term consequences, not only for Honduras' political system, but also for the country's social fabric.

The 2009 elections, which took place in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, established a cycle of three consecutive National Party (*Partido Nacional*, PN) governments in Honduras, one under the leadership of Porfirio Lobo and two under

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<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-International-Narcotics-Control-Strategy-Volume-1-Accessible.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-investment-climate-statements/honduras>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.sop-eric.org/\\_files/ugd/36c4aa\\_4ac2e294c18347038691df21e3e13032.pdf](https://www.sop-eric.org/_files/ugd/36c4aa_4ac2e294c18347038691df21e3e13032.pdf)

Juan Orlando Hernández. The latter became the object of substantial controversy after Honduras' highest court paved the way for his reelection, and allegations of fraud in the subsequent November 2017 elections led to widespread protests and significant post-election violence, including the death of 22 protesters.<sup>5</sup>

The current president of Honduras, Xiomara Castro of the Liberty and Refoundation Party (*Libertad y Refundación*, LIBRE), won the 2021 elections by more than 14 percentage points, after forming a last-minute alliance with Salvador Nasralla, then candidate of the Savior of Honduras Party (*Partido Salvador de Honduras*, PSH). Yet, there were significant administrative challenges, largely due to the National Congress' (*Congreso Nacional*, CN) failure to enact the new electoral law to implement 2019 reforms and approve the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral*, CNE's) budget in a timely manner, which led to delays in preparations and key contracting processes, including for the Preliminary Election Results Transmission (*Transmisión de Resultados Electorales Preliminares*, TREP) system. Nevertheless, the decisive victory, driven by historic voter turnout and broad public discontent with the incumbent party, was widely accepted and helped to temporarily overcome administrative issues that persist today.

However, the March 2025 general primaries (presidential, legislative and municipal) served as a reminder that many of the administrative problems that sparked widespread protests in 2017 remain unresolved. Authorities failed to ensure proper safekeeping of ballots, which arrived late at many polling stations in the country's two largest cities, Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, causing significant delays for thousands of voters.<sup>6</sup>

Against this background, a wide cross-section of Honduran society—academics, faith leaders, human rights defenders, independent journalists, lawyers and business representatives—is raising the alarm about the potential for electoral manipulation, particularly undue political interference and legal pressures on electoral authorities.

### **Politicization of Electoral Institutions**

As a result of constitutional reforms approved in 2019, Honduras adopted a bicameral electoral organization model composed of the CNE, which administers elections, and the Electoral Justice Tribunal (*Tribunal de Justicia Electoral*, TJE), which resolves

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<sup>5</sup>

<https://iudpas.unah.edu.hn/dmsdocument/12534-informe-final-redh-observacion-electoral-2021>

<sup>6</sup>

<https://cespad.org.hn/el-caos-electoral-en-las-primarias-y-la-urgencia-de-gestionar-los-riesgos-en-las-elecciones-generales-en-hondurasel-caos-electoral-en-las-primarias-y-la-urgencia-de-gestionar-los-riesgos-en-las-elecc/>

disputes and administers electoral justice. This model has yet to be fully consolidated, leaving electoral authorities with significant challenges in inter-institutional coordination and capacity.

The electoral institutions are composed of three councilors (or magistrates, in the case of the TJE) appointed by political parties (since 2019, the PN, the Liberal Party (*Partido Liberal*, PL) and LIBRE, which are the three largest parties in the National Congress). Although Honduras has a long tradition of political parties naming the leaders of the electoral institutions (and representatives from different political parties jointly operating the polling stations (*juntas receptoras de votos*, JRV), their involvement is a key factor complicating election administration and increasing the potential influence of political actors and other government institutions.

Tensions among the CNE's current leadership have created an internal governance crisis and negatively impacted the institution's public image and decision-making. Since the primaries, the CNE has faced significant challenges reaching agreements on key decisions, including contracting firms to operate the TREP system<sup>7</sup> and transport election materials.<sup>8</sup>

To effectively fulfill their mandates, the CNE and the TJE require not only clear and standardized legal frameworks and sufficient and timely funding, but also protection from threats and autonomy from political interference. Such autonomy is a key factor in restoring effective governance and mitigating the effects of paralysis.

### **Political Interference in the Election**

During its August Pre-Election Assessment Mission, NDI heard consistent concerns about undue political interference and legal pressures on the CNE and the TJE. These actions contribute to a serious deterioration of democratic norms, as sustained attacks from other branches of government against electoral authorities deepen the risk of a prolonged political crisis.

Specifically, NDI heard concerns about the ongoing criminal proceedings targeting CNE councilors and TJE magistrates appointed by opposition parties. The LIBRE-appointed CNE councilor has filed complaints against the two councilors appointed by the Liberal and National parties, accusing them of treason, electoral offenses and abuse of authority related to their electoral planning duties. In addition,

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<sup>7</sup>

<https://www.elpulso.hn/2025/06/16/tension-politica-por-aprobacion-del-nuevo-modelo-trep-de-cara-a-las-elecciones-generales/>

<sup>8</sup>

<https://criterio.hn/retrasos-impugnaciones-y-dudas-asi-se-adjudico-el-transporte-del-material-electoral/>

the Attorney General has accused the National Party-appointed CNE councilor of conspiring against the elections and later released audio recordings, allegedly of that councilor's conversations with the National Party's leadership and an unnamed member of the military.<sup>9</sup>

The public prosecutor's office also asked the Supreme Court of Justice (*Corte Suprema de Justicia*, CSJ) to lift the immunity of two TJE magistrates from the opposition on charges of judicial misconduct. The two magistrates had previously issued a final resolution ordering the CNE to register two congressional candidates, but had done so without the participation of the tribunal's third member (nominated by the ruling party). Although the CSJ ultimately declared the prosecutors' pretrial motion inadmissible, these actions have further fueled an atmosphere of intimidation and uncertainty.<sup>10</sup>

While criminal and administrative oversight are fundamental to the rule of law, such processes must not obstruct the CNE's ability to manage the electoral process or the TJE's responsibility to adjudicate disputes. As the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) recently emphasized, "Electoral authorities must be allowed to carry out their technical work in accordance with the law, free from interference and undue pressure of any political actor."<sup>11</sup> In this respect, the work of the CNE hinges on the cooperation of all political actors and government institutions—including the armed forces, which are constitutionally mandated not only to safeguard ballots and provide overall election security, but also to guarantee the orderly alternation of power.<sup>12</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Honduran people deserve credible and participatory elections where the will of voters is respected. Likewise, establishing the necessary political, institutional and technical conditions is vital to ensure elections are conducted peacefully in a climate of mutual trust. It is clear that Honduran society is eager for sincere and respectful avenues for dialogue, where different voices can be heard and actively contribute to participatory, transparent and accountable elections.

With just days remaining before the 2025 elections, a wide cross-section of Honduran society—academics, faith leaders, human rights defenders, independent journalists,

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<https://www.wola.org/analysis/uncertain-path-to-the-polls-integrity-and-trust-at-risk-in-honduras-2025-elections/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-073/25](https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-073/25)

<sup>12</sup>

<https://www.freiheit.org/es/central-america/elecciones-en-honduras-aprender-de-los-errores>

lawyers and business representatives—is raising the alarm about the risk of political interference in the process. They are also taking action to defend Honduras’ democracy: a broad coalition of civil society organizations from across the political spectrum has come together under the umbrella of OEH25 to independently deploy volunteers to monitor the polls and ensure the will of the people prevails at the ballot box. The willingness and commitment of ordinary citizens to step forward during a period of political tumult and uncertainty are among the most hopeful signs for Honduran democracy.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Reinforce Bipartisan Congressional Support for Electoral Integrity**

NDI commends Congress’ strong bipartisan support for and interest in Honduras, as exemplified by the Committee advancing the Chairwoman’s and Ranking Member’s legislation to support free and fair elections in Honduras, including by strengthening international and national election observation. Congress should continue to voice its strong, bipartisan backing for free, fair and transparent elections in Honduras, including through public statements, letters and continued engagement with Honduran authorities and civil society.

### **2. Encourage Active Dialogue at the OAS**

NDI applauds the OAS’ Secretary General’s timely statements in support of free and fair elections in Honduras. Similarly, NDI is encouraged by the United States using its voice and vote within the OAS to promote constructive dialogue on electoral preparations and to underscore the need for adherence to the principles enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Sustaining these efforts will be essential as the election approaches and in the immediate aftermath, when tensions may run high.

### **3. Support and Protect Honduran Election Observers**

The United States should explicitly affirm the importance of Honduran observers and convey its strong support for their work, emphasizing that nonpartisan and independent observation is essential for public confidence in the vote.

### **4. Respect for Principles for Credible Elections**

The international community should also urge respect for minimum standards for electoral integrity, such as those contained in the Model

Commitments for Advancing Genuine and Credible Elections,<sup>13</sup> to promote the legitimacy of the process, including:

- Ensuring elections take place on the planned date;
- Guaranteeing that party representatives and nonpartisan citizen observers have access to polling stations and collation centers to ensure transparency and accountability;
- Respecting the independence of the electoral institutions so that they can fulfill their mandates;
- Publishing prompt and verifiable results (including polling station-level results) and demonstrating unwavering respect for the will of the people;
- Addressing unresolved electoral complaints impartially, promptly and in strict compliance with the law;
- Preventing further violence, intimidation or wrongful prosecution of politically active individuals, election officials or civic leaders; and
- Providing necessary measures to guarantee access by international election missions, Honduran civil society observation groups and journalists to all aspects of the electoral process, free from harassment, threats and criminalization.

NDI underscores the value of international and national election observation as a tool for strengthening citizen confidence and transparency in elections. Honduras has a long tradition of nonpartisan citizen election observation, which international observers, like the European Union and the OAS, have complemented. Through the use of internationally proven methodologies, citizen observation has been able to gather systematic information on electoral processes, contributing to the transparency of Honduran elections, especially since 2009. NDI notes the efforts of a broad range of Honduran civil society organizations represented in the OEH25 to find common ground and join in systematic observation efforts.

Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro and members of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

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<sup>13</sup>

[google.com/url?q=https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/CC\\_Model%2520Commitments%2520Report\\_B3\\_final-r.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1763651754625012&usq=AOvVaw17uJaHbNK7WdyaLfkPJ-Na](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/CC_Model%2520Commitments%2520Report_B3_final-r.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1763651754625012&usq=AOvVaw17uJaHbNK7WdyaLfkPJ-Na)