

DEMOCRACY IN PERIL: THE FIGHT FOR FREE ELECTIONS IN HONDURAS

HEARING

OF THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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DEMOCRACY IN PERIL: THE FIGHT FOR FREE ELECTIONS IN HONDURAS

Thursday, November 20, 2025

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 p.m., in room 2200, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Maria Elvira Salazar (chair of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. SALAZAR. The Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere will come to order. The purpose of this hearing is to examine the threats to free and fair elections in Honduras under the Xiomara Castro government and to highlight how the United States can ensure that the will of the Honduran people is honored and respected on November 30.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement, a statement that I am going to pronounce in English and in Spanish. I know that this hearing is being broadcasted in Honduras. So, I want the Hondurans to understand what I am going to say in English, also in Spanish.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRWOMAN MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR

On November 30, Honduras will not just pick a new president, it will choose its political destiny for the next century. It is the responsibility of the U.S. Government and this committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. Congress, to ensure that in Honduras freedom and democracy will prevail.

Four years ago, the people of Honduras elected a Socialist president called Xiomara Castro. Madam Castro has been a loyal follower, in her own words, of Fidel Castro in Cuba and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. Do I have to explain to this audience what those two murderers did to their countries? Maybe not, because everybody knows. Unfortunately, and because of the poisonous ideology that the current president has embraced, Madam Castro has pushed her country into an economic abyss. And why do I say that?

First, President Castro welcomed Communist China and even suggested that she may give Palmerola Air Base to the Chinese. The Palmerola Base is a key United States military installation in Latin America.

Second, she broke relations with democratic Taiwan just to please China.

Third, she gave another thug called Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela the highest medal of honor that the country can give to a civilian, the Order of Francisco Morazan. I am sure that Morazan has to be rolling in his grave.

And fourth, she flooded the country with Cuban spies dressed as doctors, teachers, and psychologists.

Ten days from today, the fate of Honduras is in the hands of three candidates, Papito a la Orden, whose real name is Nasry Asfura, Salvador Nasralla, and Rixi Moncada. Mrs. Moncada is the heir to the Communist throne picked by the current president. Mrs. Moncada says that Cuba is a democracy and that she wants Honduras to look just like Cuba. Well, this is the way Cuba looks today. I am sure that Hondurans would not want that in their streets.

At this hour, the voters of Honduras are at a crossroads, and they should think long and hard about who they are going to vote for.

As the chairwoman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee within the House Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. Congress, I am not telling you who to vote for. All I am saying is do not elect a Communist. Communism is beautiful in theory and miserable in practice.

Look at Venezuela, after 25 years ago, the Venezuelans were oblivious to the same warning I am saying today and not even the largest reserves of oil in the world can save them from the economic catastrophe they are living today.

Socialism's No. 1 goal is to corrode democratic institutions, especially the armed forces. The Honduran Armed Forces is the most powerful institution in the country and are demanding direct access to private vote information. The Armed Forces are demanding to know who voted for who.

This is not the military which has made Hondurans proud for over 100 years. That military pulled Manuel Zelaya, the husband of the current president, out of his bed in his PJs, sent him to Costa Rica in the middle of the night for wanting to do the same thing that his wife is trying to do right now, impose Communism in Honduras. Sixteen years ago, the military saved their country from Communism and today, they need to do the same thing.

So this committee is sending a very clear message, supported by the State Department and the Trump Administration, that Honduras must hold a free, fair, and transparent election. No intimidation, no stolen ballots, no foreign interference. The eye of the United States is upon Honduras this November 30.

In the United States, there are more than one million Hondurans, hundreds of thousands of them in my own district, Florida District Number 27, the heart of the city of Miami. Oh, I know Hondurans very well. They are good people, hardworking, God-fearing, law-abiding, who have been beaten by a political class that has not treated them well for decades.

They deserve someone who is not a Communist, who will put the future of Honduras first and that includes the two right candidates as well. Whomever wins these elections needs to put the fatherland above their own personal interests. The Honduras political class admires the American political economic system. Well, it is time for

them to start copying it. The nation's treasury is not their own personal checking account. The well-being of the average Honduran should be their only interest.

Honduras deserves better. May the Lord guide them this November 30.

So those are my remarks in English. I am so sorry I am going to have to say the same remarks in Spanish for those who are watching and those who are not present in this room. And then I will give my colleagues time to ask their questions.

[Spanish language spoken.]

I now recognize the ranking member from Texas, Representative Mr. Castro, for any statement that he may have.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER JOAQUIN CASTRO

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Chairwoman. We are 11 months into a new Congress and a new administration. And this is the very first hearing our subcommittee is holding on the Western Hemisphere.

President Trump has brought us to the brink of war with Venezuela without the consent of the people. He has carried out extrajudicial killings in the Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific.

He has cutoff countered narcotics cooperation with Colombia, a trusted allied. He sent hundreds to mass detention in El Salvador without any due process and now threatens strikes against Mexico.

He has canceled hundreds of millions in regional programs without explanation to Congress. And all of this has occurred without any hearings at all, without transparency, and without the oversight the Constitution requires.

Eleven months in, we haven't even had a budget hearing where a senior administration official comes before this committee and explains priorities for Latin America, the Caribbean, and the entire region.

By November of the first year when the Democrats were last in the majority, this subcommittee had held seven hearings with the administration testifying at four of them.

Madam Chairwoman, I know you pushed for the administration to provide a witness at this hearing. I strongly supported that request. And it is unacceptable that they are refusing to provide a witness for this hearing. In over a decade, actually a dozen years on this committee, I have never seen anything like this.

The Republican administration is refusing to provide a hearing—a State Department witness for a Republican chairwoman. I think that is unprecedented. And it shows you the secrecy of the Trump Administration.

So, Chairwoman, I urge you to hold public hearings with the administration providing testimony on these serious issues in the hemisphere. And I will back up any request to come have the Trump Administration testify.

The American people deserve to hear what their government is doing. And this committee must exercise oversight responsibilities.

The hearing today, of course, is about Honduras, which will be holding elections in just 10 days. And I am certainly concerned. It seems that the Honduran people's faith in their electoral institutions is at rock bottom. This is an election where the three major

candidates could plausibly be within single digit margins of each other without any runoffs.

All three major candidates and their parties have made public statements that they do not trust this process, raising the possibility that they will not respect the results of the elections.

Free and fair elections are the responsibility of everyone, the government, the opposition parties, the electoral authorities, the military, and the economic elite.

The National Electoral Council, the entity responsible for organizing the elections, is deadlocked, under-resourced, and facing intense political pressure by both the government and opposition parties.

The Honduran government declared a State of exception in 2022, restricting civil liberties and due process and significantly restricted the ability of civil society to act freely and independently.

We have also seen worrying levels of violence and intimidation against candidates, journalists, and civil society leaders across the political spectrum, which can chill participation and further undermine confidence in the election results.

This is a difficult situation that Honduran officials, candidates, and civil society will have to navigate if they are to preserve their democracy.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has not met the moment. At the beginning of the year, the Trump Administration ended State Department and USAID programs that supported the rule of law and stronger electoral institutions in Honduras.

Right before the critical March primary elections in Honduras, which Hondurans had serious concerns over, the administration cut funding for civil society organizations that would have provided much needed transparency.

The Trump Administration has also been unwilling to raise any concerns for most of the year, finally making a statement just last—just a week ago when Deputy Secretary Landau raised concerns.

Fortunately, Hondurans in the region seemed to be mobilizing. I am glad that the OAS, the European union, and other organizations will be sending election missions to Honduras. I urge the government to provide them with the transparency and the freedom to conduct their work.

And I am hopeful that we will see a robust civil society presence at the elections to provide much needed transparency and hold both the government and opposition parties accountable to democratic values.

I echo the OAS's recent call for the Honduran government to respect the independent of the National Electoral Council, which must conduct its work to ensure the elections are held on time. And when the elections are held, I hope that the authorities release verifiable results without delay.

We should be principled in standing for democracy and the right of a people to elect their own leaders, regardless of whether the government is on the right or the left.

While the United States and the international community can raise concerns and support Honduran society in advancing Demo-

cratic values and norms, our role is not to pick the leaders of Honduras. And I look forward to hearing fromat this hearing.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Ranking Member. I hardly agree with you on many of the policy issues, but I do have to agree with you what you said. And we certainly hope that the State Department will come to one of these hearings in the very near future. Thank you for your comments.

Now, other members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

We are pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this important topic.

The Honorable Carlos Trujillo, former United States Ambassador to the Organization of American States, the oldest regional international organization in the world. Before that, Ambassador Trujillo served as Special Representative to the General Assembly of the United Nations, and he also served in the Florida House of Representatives for four terms. Thank you for being here, Ambassador.

Deborah Ullmer is the Regional Director of the Latin America and Caribbean Programs at the National Democratic Institute. The NDI is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to promote transparency and fair elections.

Mrs. Ullmer has spent over a decade living and working in Latin America on democracy issues for NDIA, for Freedom House, and for the U.S. Government. Welcome, Madam.

And last, we have Enrique Roig, Vice President of External Affairs at Human Rights First. Mr. Roig previously worked at the State Department and the USAID on Latin American issues and has testified before this committee in other capacities.

This committee recognizes the importance of the issues before us and is grateful to have you here to speak today. Your full statements will be made part of the record, and I will ask you to keep your remarks to 5 minutes or less. And now I recognize Ambassador Trujillo for his opening statement. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF HON. CARLOS TRUJILLO

Mr. TRUJILLO. Thank you, Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and the 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 has been significantly different. She has institutionalized the government based on extreme political ideology and has repeatedly expressed an affinity for totalitarian regimes, including those of Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua.

As the first months of the administration progressed, concerns immediately grew regarding the direction of the new government, particularly following her decision to eliminate and sever all diplomatic ties with Taiwan and establish and recognize the Communist Party and Republic of China.

She has also failed to seat the Israeli Ambassador, who has been credentialed before her for over a year and a half. They have also

organized groups of street thugs organized and funded by the government, known as “colectivos”, to influence episodes of tension and violence and to intimidate the election authorities and the National Congress.

Several high-level officials also chose to resign due to internal disagreements or differences of opinion with the government. 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 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 have intensified. The former president of the Electoral Council, Cossette López-Osorio, has reported receiving death threats and judicial pressures, which according to her were intended to force her resignation.

Magistrate Ana Paola Hall has similarly conveyed, in public forums, 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.

Just last February, President Xiomara Castro’s government canceled the extradition agreement for narcotics trafficking and organized crime extradition to the United States. The agreement was ultimately reinstated. But I believe the question to the committee is, why would she take such an extreme measure?

She has also threatened to cancel the military cooperation of the American Base in Palmerola, threats that are made repeatedly and constantly at American diplomats in country.

Another sensitive point is the role of the Armed Forces. If we look at the historic 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 Hernandez, have been interpreted by some sectors as an attempt to involve themselves in areas beyond their constitutional authority, raising concerns about their impartiality.

I would also like to add the maneuvers performed within the National Congress by the leadership of Luis Redondo similarly warrant close attention and cannot be disregarded.

The Government of Honduras has been operating under a State of emergency since 2022. The constitutional safeguards and rights of its citizens have ultimately been suspended.

Redondo used this as an opportunity to continue ordinary sessions, despite more than 78 of the 128 Members of Congress demanding to return to regular session.

Instead, he opted to create a permanent commission composed of nine deputies aligned with his Libre party. Through this structure, interim appointments could be imposed once officials of the National Election Council and Electoral Justice Tribunal are suspended or removed from their positions.

Finally, the role of the Public Ministry has been subject to debate. Various opposition parties have alerted that the Attorney General, Johel Zelaya, the nephew of Libre candidate Rixi

Moncada, has been making decisions favoring his aunt, including legally contested actions against electoral authorities. Some officials in this environment have temporarily left the country due to fear of prosecution or death.

For Members of Congress and of the Trump Administration strengthening electoral transparency in Honduras is essential. Washington maintains a significant influence in the country under security operation family ties and deep bilateral trade ties.

I commend the committee members for being here today and discussing this very important election. In less than 10 days, the future of one of our great allies will be decided.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Trujillo follows:]

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.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Ambassador Trujillo.
And I recognize Ms. Ullmer for her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MRS. DEBORAH ULLMER

Ms. ULLMER. Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and members of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, thank you for this opportunity to address this hearing.

I have worked and lived in Honduras where I witnessed the post-election violence in 2017. As you know, NDI organized a bipartisan pre-election assessment mission, when we visited the country in early August. NDI's findings and recommendations and assistance to a broad citizen observation initiative called the Observadores Electorales por Honduras informed my observations. NDI's work is currently supported by the National Endowment for Democracy.

As Honduras heads to the November 30 elections in just 10 days, 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 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 stake lies 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. 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.

In short, Honduras' stability matters to American security, economic interests, and the lives of thousands of families with deep ties to both countries. Yet Hondurans face this election with deep distrust in their government, rooted in the 2009 constitutional crisis that led to a coup d'état and the 2017 Presidential reelection when allegations of fraud resulted in deadly post-election violence.

Recent votes have only stoked public mistrust and instability. The March general primaries were marred by failures to safeguard ballots and significant voting delays occurred in the country's two largest cities Tegucigalpa and San Pedro City.

Since its August mission, NDI has heard consistent concerns about undue political interference and legal pressures on the National Electoral Council and the Electoral Justice Tribunal. These actions contribute to a serious deterioration of democratic norms as sustained attacks from other branches of government against electoral authorities deepened the risk of prolonged political crisis.

In this respect, the work of the National Electoral Council hinges on the cooperation of all political actors in government institutions, including the Armed Forces, which are constitutionally mandated

not only with safeguarding the ballots or providing overall election security but also with guaranteeing the orderly alternation of power.

The Honduran people deserve credible and transparent elections in which their votes are counted accurately and their voices are respected.

NDI is still hopeful that a credible and transparent election is possible. To that end, the timing of this hearing, Madam Chairwoman, is perfect. I would like to offer the following recommendations.

One, that Congress should continue voicing its strong, bipartisan backing for free, fair, and transparent elections in Honduras, including through public statements, letters and continued engagement with the Honduran authorities in civil society.

Two, that the United States should continue working with the Organization of American States to initiate and sustain dialog efforts, which will be essential as the election approaches and in the immediate aftermath when tensions may run high.

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

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

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Ullmer follows:]



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
Deborah Ullmer
Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean
National Democratic Institute
November 20, 2025

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.¹

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.

¹ <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.² 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.³

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.⁴ 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

²

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

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

⁴ 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.⁵

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.⁶

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

6

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

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 system⁷ and transport election materials.⁸

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,

⁷ <https://www.elpulso.hn/2025/06/16/tension-politica-por-aprobacion-del-nuevo-modelo-trep-d-e-cara-a-las-elecciones-generales/>

⁸ <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.⁹

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.¹⁰

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."¹¹ 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.¹²

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/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-073/25

¹² <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,¹³ 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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[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=AOvYawl7uJaHbNK7WdyaLfkPJ-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=AOvYawl7uJaHbNK7WdyaLfkPJ-Na)

Ms. SALAZAR. Thanks to you, Mrs. Ullmer.
And I now recognize Mr. Roig for his opening and last statement.
Thank you.

STATEMENT OF MR. ENRIQUE ROIG

Mr. ROIG. Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I'm here on behalf of Human Rights First to discuss the upcoming elections in Honduras and the ways in which recent U.S. foreign-assistance decisions have impacted the ability to support electoral observation, civil society oversight, media programs, and anti-corruption efforts.

As you know, Honduras enters its next electoral cycle already burdened by increased polarization, a legacy of irregular elections, and a justice system that has been hollowed out by political manipulation and organized crime infiltration. There undoubtedly is a need for increased vigilance and raising of the alarm on the Honduras election.

However, the Trump Administration has been relatively silent and taken a largely transactional approach to the Castro government focused mainly on deportations. According to Human Rights First's ICE Flight Monitor, the United States from January to October 2025 carried out 353 deportation flights to Honduras, making it the second highest deportation destination after Guatemala.

The administration also pressured Honduras into signing Asylum Cooperative Agreements that allow the U.S. to send asylum seekers there without assessing their claims. And the administration's termination of TPS for 72,000

Hondurans in September of this year has further placed even more people at risk of removal.

Now while the Trump administration has remained focused on deportations, there are other national security interests at play that require greater vigilance of the electoral process in Honduras. Fortunately, the European Union and Organization of American States have stepped up and called for greater transparency and legitimacy of the upcoming election.

Today, Honduran civil society, much to their credit, have been able to organize domestic observers. However, they have had to cobble together their effort at the last moment because the foreign assistance they depended on was terminated.

If U.S. foreign assistance had not been decimated, the Honduran observers would have greater resources to ensure increased scrutiny of the elections at this critical juncture.

Unfortunately, this is not just a Honduran problem. Beginning early this year, the administration froze and terminated a broad range of USAID and State Department programs, including those that have long supported election integrity, civil-society resilience, and anti-corruption efforts in the region, including support to independent election observers and technical assistance to electoral authorities, investigative journalism networks and fact-checking consortia that counter disinformation during elections, digital-security programs that protect activists, monitors, and independent media from targeted attacks, rule-of-law and anti-corruption initiatives

that help insulate prosecutors, auditors, and judges from political interference.

Now, I know that members of this Committee have asked what the administration is currently doing to support these democracy and governance programs. The short answer is clearly not nearly enough. And while the State Department has stated publicly that some of these programs continue to be administered, the reality on the ground is a very different story.

The foreign assistance dismantling has terminated or halted the core program lines for democracy, civil society, and election support that this region depends on.

My previous bureau, DRL, has undergone a significant structural downgrade with its entire Western Hemisphere expertise purged and effective elimination of most of its regional programming to support critical work in Honduras.

Former USAID implementers tell us they are in survival mode, unable to plan, unable to hire, unable to continue critical election-integrity and anti-corruption work. And the strategic messaging coming from U.S. leadership today prioritizes deportation and short-term security concerns, not the democracy, rights, and governance work that addresses the root causes driving instability.

The consequences are already visible across the region: weaker civic space, diminished oversight, and far greater room for authoritarian and criminal actors to manipulate electoral processes.

Now, for decades, Democrats and Republicans alike understood that investing in these democracy and governance programs is not just about values. It is about national security. Restoring and protecting these programs are critical as we have seen in the lead up to high-risk elections in Honduras and elsewhere in the region. It is in the strategic interest of the United States.

So thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Roig follows:]

Testimony of Enrique Roig
Vice President of External Affairs, Human Rights First
before the
House Foreign Affairs Western Hemisphere Subcommittee
November 20, 2025

Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, Members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I’m here on behalf of Human Rights First to discuss the upcoming elections in Honduras and the ways in which recent U.S. foreign-assistance decisions have impacted the ability to support electoral observation, civil society oversight, media programs and anti-corruption efforts.

Honduras enters its next electoral cycle already burdened by increased polarization, a legacy of irregular elections, and a justice system that has been hollowed out by political manipulation and organized-crime infiltration. There undoubtably is a need for increased vigilance and raising of the alarm on the Honduras election.

However, the Trump administration has been relatively silent and taken a largely transactional approach to the Castro government focused mainly on deportations. According to Human Rights First’s ICE Flight Monitor, the United States from January to October 2025 carried out 353 deportation flights to Honduras, making it the second-highest deportation destination after Guatemala. The administration also pressured Honduras into signing Asylum Cooperative Agreements that allow the U.S. to send asylum seekers there without assessing their claims. The administration’s termination of TPS for 72,000 Hondurans in September 2025 has further placed even more people at risk of removal.

While the Trump administration has remained focused on deportations, there are other national security interests at play that require greater vigilance of the electoral process in Honduras. Fortunately, the European

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The short answer is clearly not nearly enough. And while the State Department has stated publicly that some of these programs continue to be administered the reality on the ground tells a very different story.

- The foreign-assistance dismantling has terminated or halted the core program lines for democracy, civil society, and election support that this region depends on.

- DRL itself has undergone a significant structural downgrade—with its entire Western Hemisphere expertise purged and the effective elimination of most of its regional programming to support critical work in Honduras.
- Former USAID implementers tell us they are in “survival mode”—unable to plan, unable to hire, and unable to continue critical election-integrity and anti-corruption work.
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For decades, Democrats and Republicans alike understood that investing in these democracy and governance programs is not just about values—it is about U.S. national security.

Restoring and protecting these programs are critical as we have seen in the lead up to high-risk elections in Honduras and elsewhere in the region. It is in the strategic interest of the United States.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Mr. Roig. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning. So I think we are all on the same page. We want Honduras to have a free, fair election on November 30 and that is the reason why we are here.

I have two questions, and I can start with you, Ambassador Trujillo. And obviously, Deborah, you can always pitch in. Is the current Castro government trying to rig the elections, yes or no? And if they are, how are they doing it? And No. 3, what can the United States do in order to stop that effort?

Mr. TRUJILLO. Thank you, Madam Chair. The answer is yes. And how are they doing it, if you look at the way they have gone after the Electoral Council. The Electoral Council is composed of one member from each party. There are three major parties in Honduras. Everyone sends their representative.

The Attorney General, who happens to be Rixi Moncada, one of the candidates' nephew, has decided to summon the two opposition parties to come and testify before his office.

The purpose of this testimony is to present criminal charges to ultimately disqualify them from serving in that capacity. Who will be the replacements—

Ms. SALAZAR. What is the importance of the National Electoral Council for those that don't understand well? Why are they so important?

Mr. TRUJILLO. The Council adjudicates the outcomes of the elections and certifies its results. And the reason it is composed of all political parties is because you want buy-in, you want finality, you want certainty. The fact that those two members are being attacked by the actual government and by the nephew of one of the opposition candidates shows you where this election is headed.

Furthermore, Redondo, who controls the National Assembly, has already named the replacements. The replacements for partisan positions are not from the same party. They are hand-selected by their government in order to influence the outcome of the election.

Ms. SALAZAR. What can the United States do at this hour, 10 days out from the election, in order to prevent any type of stealing or rigging of the Presidential elections? What can we do?

Mr. TRUJILLO. First, I commend you on this hearing. I think the vigilance of this committee and the private statements and influence of members of the committee, sometimes it is difficult to recognize when you are sitting in the seats that you are sitting, the importance of the words that you say and how important they are in country, in Honduras, and how it gives hope to the Honduran people, the amount of people you see sitting here behind us, who really their hope on saving their democracy is kind of vested in a hearing like this.

The other thing is the U.S. Government has a plethora of tools that they could use in order to apply individual sectoral pressure to individuals who violate or usurp the rule of law, who violate or usurp democracy, individuals who commit human rights violations, whether it is in a targeted sanctioned matter toward an individual or toward an entire institution. I think all of those tools are available, and ultimately, the lack of recognition for the legitimacy of these regimes.

If they do steal the election and they do go down that road, how does it end? And it has to end without any credible democratic actor recognizing the legitimacy of the regime.

Ms. SALAZAR. Deborah, if you would like to add, I have a couple of questions for you.

Ms. ULLMER. Yes. Sure. Thank you. I would like to add a message that the U.S. and your committee is already giving through this hearing the messages that can be amplified. That is ensuring the respect for minimum principles of election integrity, ensuring that the elections take place on the planned date as the OAS Secretary General has set, guaranteeing that party representatives and non-partisan citizen observers have access to polling stations and the collation centers to ensure transparency and accountability, respecting the independence of electoral institutions so that they can fulfill their mandates, publishing prompt and verifiable results, including polling station level results and demonstrating the unwavering respect for the will of the people. Thank you.

Ms. SALAZAR. Mr. Roig, I am not sure if you feel comfortable answering this question, but the Armed Forces is one of the most respected institutions in Honduras. I just mentioned during my initial statement, in 2009 they pulled Manuel Zelaya out of his bed—I was there as a journalist—in the middle of the night in PJs, put him on a plane, and sent him to Costa Rica because Manuel Zelaya wanted to implement Communism in Honduras. Now 16 years later, his wife is doing that job.

Just explain to us in which way the Armed Forces could stop everything that the other witnesses have described.

Mr. ROIG. Yes, so Madam Chairwoman, the Armed Forces obviously play an important role in the elections in Honduras. They are there to safeguard and ensure the transportation of election materials. And so it is going to be important to have continued vigilance over that role they are going to be playing and ensure that they are not further politicized, as we have seen some of the statements coming out of heads of the military, particularly against the media.

And so it is concerning. And that's why, you know, we have electoral observation, observation happening on the ground to ensure that things do go smoothly in a way that is transparent.

Ms. SALAZAR. I just would like to hear from the three of you, why have the Armed Forces been involved in a way that has not been seen in the last 50 years?

Mr. TRUJILLO. Yes, I would say through General Roosevelt and many others, they are much more politicized. The rank and file Armed Forces—

Ms. SALAZAR. When did that start?

Mr. TRUJILLO. That started under this administration, under Xiomara Castro.

Ms. SALAZAR. And why did that happen? What incentives did the current president or government give the top echelon of the Armed Forces to become more politicized? What happened?

Mr. TRUJILLO. It is absolute loyalty to the executive rather than to the Constitution.

Ms. SALAZAR. That has not been the case in Honduras for the last 100 years.

Mr. TRUJILLO. Historically, it would be difficult to see the president of the country giving multiple political speeches with high ranking Federals standing behind them.

Ms. SALAZAR. And then why did that happen? Because I remember when I lived in Honduras that this is the only country in Central America which did not have a guerrilla, right? We would go to Honduras just to rest from El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua. Honduras was like the haven—I would go for the haven. But what happened with those Armed Forces that kept at bay a guerrilla movement?

Mr. TRUJILLO. The top portion of the Armed Forces—the top brass of the Armed Forces have been purged and replaced by ideological loyalists to the regime.

Ms. SALAZAR. That happens in Cuba with Castro, Chavez in Venezuela—

Mr. TRUJILLO. And Nicaragua.

Ms. SALAZAR. I yield back, and I recognize Ranking Member Castro for 5 minutes.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Chairwoman. That is happening in Donald Trump's America right now, too.

You know, on these kinds of hearings, one of the disadvantages that we have here when you are not in the country that we are discussing is that we are not on the ground. We are not in the middle of the action so to speak. And so we rely on witnesses and experts and others to come and tell us based on their expertise what is going on.

And it is hard sometimes to sort out what is fact and fiction or exaggeration or hyperbole, you know, and you probably can never be 100 percent certain of anything that you hear.

But I wanted to start with you, Ambassador Trujillo, because you did mention conflicts of interest with the Attorney General and so forth. And I want to commend you for your service as U.S. Ambassador to the OAS.

But I also want to ask you about conflicts of interest that you have sitting here today. You are a registered foreign agent, is that correct?

Mr. TRUJILLO. That is correct but not in Honduras.

Mr. CASTRO. You represent the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Guyana, Japan, and Bosnia, is that correct?

Mr. TRUJILLO. And Kenya as well.

Mr. CASTRO. And Kenya. You also have—you and your firm have significant corporate clients in Honduras who are actively working against the sitting government, is that correct?

Mr. TRUJILLO. That is not correct.

Mr. CASTRO. You have clients in Honduras?

Mr. TRUJILLO. I do have clients in Honduras.

Mr. CASTRO. You represent Prospera Honduras?

Mr. TRUJILLO. I do no longer represent Prospera Honduras.

Mr. CASTRO. Does your firm still represent Prospera Honduras?

Mr. TRUJILLO. We do not represent Prospera Honduras.

Mr. CASTRO. Well, when did you represent them, for what period of time?

Mr. TRUJILLO. Prior to the Trump Administration, probably through—it was one of my partners in my firm. Probably through the first quarter of this year.

Mr. CASTRO. You also represent two financial institutions in Honduras, you or your firm?

Mr. TRUJILLO. They are all over Central America, yes.

Mr. CASTRO. And so I want to ask you, did you discuss your upcoming testimony with any of your clients before this hearing?

Mr. TRUJILLO. I have not.

Mr. CASTRO. Did you get advised—

Ms. SALAZAR. Ranking Member, sorry for interrupting. I think we are here for just one purpose, to assure that clean and fair elections in Honduras occur on November 30.

Ambassador Trujillo may have many clients in Honduras, but that does not mean that he does not want the best outcome on November 30. So I think we should just concentrate on finding out what is really happening right now and how we can preserve the integrity of those elections.

Mr. CASTRO. Well, Chairwoman, I have never interrupted your time, and you have never interrupted my time. And these are fair questions about a witness, especially when the witness talked about conflicts of interest of others in Honduras.

I think it is fair to consider whether there is conflicts of interest being presented to us here today. And so that is why I asked him about the clients that he represented, including Prospera, which is very controversial in Honduras, which was fighting with the government there, involved in litigation and later arbitration. I think that is a significant perspective and obviously one that you have chosen to discuss this. But I think that folks need to know that. I think that is important.

Mr. TRUJILLO. If you are insinuating, just to be clear, Ranking Member—

Mr. CASTRO. Sure.

Mr. TRUJILLO [continuing]. if you are insinuating that my testimony here is tainted because 9 months ago I represented—and I didn't even personally represent them—my firm represented Honduras Prospera, which is another asset—an American asset by the way—that was sequestered and taken away by this government and is actually being actively supported not only by the Biden's State Department, but also by the Trump one. If you are insinuating that somehow taints my testimony, it is factually inaccurate.

Mr. CASTRO. Well, Ambassador, I commended you for your service as Ambassador to OAS. I am not saying that your testimony is tainted, but I want there to be a full understanding about your perspective as a witness.

It is very rare that we have a registered foreign agent and a registered lobbyist sit in that chair where you are sitting. That almost never happens. So when it does, I think it is important to discuss that.

But I have a question for Mr. Roig really quickly. I want to ask you actually Mr. Roig or Ms. Ullmer, both of you have emphasized the importance of independent electoral institutions.

Given the deadlock inside the National Electoral Council and the political pressure facing Tribunal for Electoral Justice, what are

the most urgent steps Honduras must take in the next 10 days to restore minimum public confidence in these institutions? There are 10 days left. What has to happen?

Ms. ULLMER. Thank you. The independence of the Honduran electoral institutions are vital. And that is not only of the National Electoral Council but it is also the Electoral Justice Tribunal. They both have important results, one who administers the results, the other who adjudicates any challenges. But it is critical that these institutions are able to fulfill their mandates and ensure credible and transparent elections.

I commence the CNE for accrediting, I think, a record number of domestic observers. The Hondurans are doing their part. They have come together. And thousands of volunteer observers have come together to provide oversight and to protect the will of the people.

I also commend the private sector for stepping in and providing funding for these observation efforts.

Mr. CASTRO. Mr. Roig, if I could just get a quick answer there.

Mr. ROIG. Ranking Member, in terms of what more we can be doing, having worked at the State Department, I would say at this stage it is really important that the State Department be much more vocal between now and November 30. You know, the silence has been deafening.

And so to the extent—I know you tried to get a witness here today. But I think that, you know, the State Department has a critical role to play in demonstrating that it is watching what is happening and showing vigilance over this process. And so I would hope that they would take that to heart in the lead up to the election.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Ranking Member. I now recognize Congressman Shreve from Indiana.

Mr. SHREVE. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for holding this hearing today recognizing that the elections are at the end of the month, and Honduras has held democratic elections for 45 years now. But the country continues to struggle with authoritarian governance leaving these democratic institutions fragile.

We see ominous signs. The current AG, Johel Zelaya, is prosecuting the Electoral Justice Tribunal magistrates who have to certify this election at the end of this month, issued formal charges against it. The Honduran Supreme Court ruled that the magistrates have constitutional immunity. It is a case of electoral misconduct, actions reminiscent of the autocratic regimes of the Nicaraguan and Venezuelan governments. Thank you.

Ambassador Trujillo, this may seem like an obvious question, but for my edification and for the record, are you concerned about this possibly illegal escalatory action? And what does it say about the State of democracy in Honduras over this 45 year context that we have had the opportunity to observe?

Mr. TRUJILLO. I would say the State of democracy is very, very fragile. If you look at the institutions, if you look at the weaponization of those institutions, if you look at the Electoral Council, the prosecution of some of the members of opposition parties, I have been to Honduras dozens of times. I spent a significant

time there through my time as OAS Ambassador. I worked with the anti-corruption missions. I know the country relatively well.

It is as fragile as I have seen it in recent times. And that is taking into account that the previous president is serving time in Federal prison for drug trafficking.

Mr. SHREVE. Let me offer another example. The National Electoral Council, the party representative, Ana Paola Hall, resigned after facing threats and intense political pressure from the Castro Administration.

Ambassador, as you know, the CNE is an independent body responsible for organizing and guaranteeing all elections in Honduras.

Mr. Ambassador, what actions did our State Department take in response to the actions taken against Representative Hall by the Castro Administration?

Mr. TRUJILLO. I am not sure of exactly—I am not a U.S. Government official. So I am not sure of exactly what actions the U.S. State Department took. I am not sure.

I believe they did have some private consultations with them. But I am not sure.

Mr. SHREVE. I appreciate that. I know that you are not presently in service. And that speaks to the merit in this subcommittee's wish to have a representative of our State Department in service with us for such a hearing today. But I appreciate that, and I don't know if any of our other witnesses has a perspective to offer on that front. And if not, I would yield back. Mr. Roig?

Mr. ROIG. Congressman, I would just offer up that, you know, on the surface what we have seen and what I mentioned in my opening statement is the transactional nature of this—the Trump Administration with Honduras. If the focus is mainly on deportations with 353 flights just this year alone, then that obviously sends a message to the Castro government of what our interests are. And I think ultimately weakens our leverage on issues like this around the election.

And so I don't know behind the scenes what kind of discussions you might have had on specifically to your question, but again on the surface, I think we can all see what is happening here. And that, you know, having been a State Department official, you don't want to give that much leverage when the other side knows exactly what you are all about when it comes to the bilateral relationship.

Mr. SHREVE. Sure. How are the democracy watchers in your organization funded? Will it be on the ground in Honduras? Will you have a representative of your organization on the ground?

Mr. TRUJILLO. My organization will not be on the ground. We are not currently operating in Honduras. But my colleague here can speak to that.

Mr. SHREVE. Please

Ms. ULLMER. Yes, sir. We are currently funded by the National Endowment for Democracy. They funded our pre-election assessment, which was bipartisan in August. And they are helping fund us for providing technical assistance to a national observation initiative that will be observing in large numbers on election day.

Mr. SHREVE. Thank you. My time has expired, and I yield back.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you Congressman Shreve from the State of Indiana. Now I recognize Mr. Stanton from the State of New Mexico.

Mr. STANTON. Close.

Ms. SALAZAR. For 5 minutes.

Mr. STANTON. Arizona and New Mexico like each other very much, but the Southwest we have got to hang together.

Ms. SALAZAR. Hey, listen, they gave me the wrong—I am sorry.

Mr. STANTON. That's Okay.

Ms. SALAZAR. I am very sorry, Arizona. It sounds a little bit better than New Mexico. Thank you. Yes, thank you.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you, Madam Chair, for convening this hearing. Thank you for our witnesses for being here today, particularly on very short notice. We understand that you were asked to appear before this committee on very short notice.

And I associate my comments with a lot of the comments made by our chair and our ranking member about the critical importance of free, fair, democratic elections in Honduras.

I also associate myself with the comments of Representative Castro. We wouldn't need a registered lobbyist before us if the Trump Administration had sent their representative because we have some very tough questions for the Trump Administration and their policy in the Western Hemisphere.

And I don't diminish the importance of these critical upcoming elections in Honduras at the end of the month and the serious threats to free and fair elections, taking a page out of some Maduro's bag of tricks if you will to usurp a free and fair election. These matters deserve our attention.

But for me it is unfathomable that this single topic would dominate our first hearing in over half a year. We have not met as a subcommittee in more than 6 months. During that time, the Trump Administration has been carrying out unchecked actions that fall squarely within the purview of the Foreign Affairs Committee and this particular committee.

The President continues to halt foreign assistance, leaving the door wide open to greater PRC influence. He has threatened Brazilian officials, who convicted his friend Bolsonaro of attempting a coup. He has illegally deported immigrants to El Salvador where they were tortured according to a recent report by Human Rights Watch. And the Foreign Affairs Committee has remained for the most part silent.

Congress has failed to provide the American people with any meaningful debate or discussion about these consequential actions. There has been no attempt to demand justification under our Constitution.

Just as my Republican colleagues have made no real attempt to check the President's abuse of tariff authority, my Republican colleagues seem content to let him impose tariffs as high as he chooses, on any country he chooses for any reason he chooses, consequences for American consumers and businesses be damned.

Again and again, the GOP-led Congress is missing in action on these critical issues, but nowhere is this advocacy more dangerous than in Venezuela. President Trump has usurped Congress

war powers. He has unilaterally declared hostilities and launched lethal attacks without congressional authorization.

The administration has provided no credible rationale to Congress or the American people for these actions. The Pentagon hasn't even provided evidence that the people they have struck are narco-traffickers.

Congress has made importation of illegal drugs into the United States a felony offense to be prosecuted in our courts with severe criminal penalties. And American officials are already doing that work, like the women and men of the U.S. Coast Guard and the DEA.

Now, though, the Administration has deployed an invasion level force in the Caribbean, 15,000 troops, a carrier strike group, a nuclear submarine, and military aircraft, the largest military buildup in the region since the Cuban Missile Crisis for what they claim is a counter-narcotics mission.

And the President has openly threatened land strikes in Venezuela despite his own administration assuring lawmakers that there were no such plans and that they lack legal justification. This is a stunning escalation to the brink of war in the Western Hemisphere.

The President believes he can act as judge, jury, and executioner, and no one will stop him. My colleagues across the aisle have given him no reason to think otherwise. Make no mistake, Nicolas Maduro's regime is illegitimate and undemocratic. And I am constantly inspired Maria Corina Machado in her fight to advance democracy in Venezuela.

But the history of U.S. military intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean should warn us that military action may not lead to the democratic transition the Venezuelan people desire and for which they voted peacefully in 2024. These actions put U.S. soldiers at risk. They erode our relationships across the hemisphere. Already, one of our closest allies, the United Kingdom, suspended intelligence sharing with the United States over concerns with these killings.

Ranking Member Meeks has introduced a war powers resolution to halt the Trump Administration's unauthorized military actions, a resolution I am proud to back.

The American people do not want another forever war with loosely defined goals fought without so much as a debate. That is not what they elected us to do and that is not what our Constitution permits.

So, Madam Chair, I appreciate this hearing. It is an important matter, but I wanted to address what I consider some incredibly constitutional threats to our democracy by the actions of Venezuela. I yield back.

Ms. SALAZAR. Honorable Representative Stanton from the State of Arizona, I very much appreciate your comments. I do agree. I think that we should send a message that regardless of whether we have a representative from the State Department or not, that we are united, Democrats and Republicans, in sending a message to the Hondurans and to the Armed Forces in Honduras that they should preserve the integrity of the elections coming on November 30. Don't we agree on that?

Mr. STANTON. Well said.

Ms. SALAZAR. And we also agree, as Republicans and Democrats, members of the Subcommittee of the Western Hemisphere, that Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela is a threat to democracy in the Western Hemisphere.

Not only that, I think that you forgot to mention he is the head of one of the drug cartels called the Suns Cartel. Not only that, he was also indicted in 2020 in a Federal grand jury for drug trafficking, he stole the election, 70 to 30, and the legitimate president of Venezuela is hiding in a tunnel somewhere in Caracas waiting for the United States to do what we need to do, which is to maintain free and fair elections, for democracy and for freedom in this hemisphere.

I think that you agree with me, don't you? I think that you missed out on saying those.

Mr. STANTON. Of course. And I look forward to a hearing on that matter at our next—

Ms. SALAZAR. And we will. And I am sure that you will be here. Thank you very much for your words.

Now I am going to give the opportunity to Congresswoman Kamlager-Dove of California. Thank you.

I yield back and give you 5 minutes.

Ms. KAMLAGE-DOVE. Thank you, Madam Chair. And thankfully you didn't say from Texas.

Ms. SALAZAR. Right, or from Arizona.

Mr. CASTRO. That would be a compliment if you said from Texas.

Ms. KAMLAGE-DOVE. Ooh, that is right. That is right. That is right.

Madam Chair, thank you for holding this meeting, this hearing, and it is absolutely ridiculous that 11 months into the year this subcommittee has not had a single administration official come to testify on any issue on the Western Hemisphere.

If nothing else, it is vivid display of the total lack of respect this administration has for my Republican colleagues, your constituents and their expectation of your acquiescence. But it is not surprising.

Trump has completely sidelined Congress as a co-equal branch of government and nowhere is that more apparent than in his Latin America policy, a region that demands better from us and actually deserves our thoughtful attention, like talking about free and fair elections in Honduras.

In the time that this subcommittee has failed to exercise its constitutional oversight duty or play any meaningful role in the United States foreign policy toward Latin America, the Western Hemisphere has become ground zero for the administration's illegality.

Trump has deported people with no due process in violation of the Constitution to a maximum security gulag like prison in El Salvador, his temper tariffs on Mexico rooted in an abuse of IEEPA authorities, have inflated prices on the produce and coffee we get from our largest trading partner, hurting my constituents in LA and Americans across the country.

Trump has slapped 50 percent tariffs on Brazil, with whom we have a trade surplus just to prevent his political ally Jair

Bolsanaro from being convicted of a coup attempt inspired by Trump's own January 6 insurrection.

Trump revoked TPS for Venezuelan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, and Haitian legal immigrants, thousands of whom reside in your district, Madam Chair, and I know you have been trying to work on that. It is to the point that Republican donors are calling Republicans out to do something.

He has executed a \$40 billion bailout to Argentina during a government shutdown where he refused to spend \$4 billion in SNAP emergency funds to feed his own constituents in this country. And I haven't even gotten to the second elephant in the room because the first elephant is that no one from the Secretary of State, no one from State Department or an administration official is here. But the second elephant in the room, the reason this administration is running scared from Congress and refused to show up is because Latin America has become a staging ground for Trump's blatantly illegal use of military force abroad and his trampling of the Constitution.

To date, the administration has conducted 21 strikes in the Caribbean, killing at least 83 people. And its justification, that it can target whoever it wants, wherever it wants, as long as it claims that they are drug traffickers with or without evidence. And these illegal strikes just got even more illegal because if the administration does want the authority for these strikes, the War Powers Act requires that they come to Congress for an authorization of military force 60 days after it first enters into hostilities.

It has been 77 days since the Administration informed Congress of the strike. The 60 day war powers deadline has come and gone. And the administration has refused to follow the law and seek an AUMF from Congress.

The illegality of this military action is provoking a crisis within our Armed Forces. The admiral at U.S. Southern Command, which is overseeing the boat strikes, retired rather than be complicit in this illegal behavior. And yesterday, NBC news reported that the senior military lawyer at SOUTHCOM believed the strikes could amount to extrajudicial killings. But he was overruled by senior administration officials, meaning the administration knowingly broke the law, which brings me to Venezuela, where we are returning to the cold war.

Just yesterday, Trump reportedly authorized CIA plans for covert action inside the country. In an era of great power competition and limited resources, he has diverted significant naval capabilities to South America, including our most advanced carrier. And he has not provided a single briefing to either chamber of Congress on these outrageous plans.

I don't know a single voter whose top issue in 2024 or even this past November was launching a ground invasion of Venezuela.

I have to say, Madam Chair, you are a strong sister. And you deserve more than this. And you should not let them do you like this. You should not let them do any of us like this. And I support you as you continue to demand that administration officials show up and testify before this body. If you have nothing to hide, than you should have everything to share.

And it is Okay, it is Okay, to sit before us and have to answer uncomfortable questions. But you should at least have the decency, the decency to respect this body. We are moving into a moment that is shameful. It is dystopian. And it is a dereliction of duty. And none of us, none of us want those subscriptions attached to our names and our work and our commitment to this region.

Madam Chair, I thank you for holding this meeting. I actually have two things I would like to enter into the record, asking unanimous consent. You know, I got so worked up because I know you care about this region. You know I care about this region. I know you care about your people. And we care about doing what is right.

I would like to enter into the—I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record an NBC news titled article, Top Military Lawyer Raise Legal Concerns About Boat Strikes and I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record an open letter to the Miami-Dade delegation, Defend Immigrants Now. It is an opinion op ed in the Miami Herald.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you. I appreciate your words. I agree with some of them. Thank you, Congresswoman Kamlager-Dove from, of course, California.

Now I recognize Congressman Randy Fine from the beautiful and marvelous State of Florida, 5 minutes.

Mr. FINE. Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you. I am new to the committee or the subcommittee having just been added to Foreign Affairs shortly before the August recess. It is an honor to be here and to be discussing the subject.

I want to talk about why I think this is important, why we should care because that is really what many of my constituents ask me on all of these issues of international relations, why should they care? And I am going to give my reasons and then I have got a couple of questions.

I worry about this because we clearly have a problem in Venezuela with narco-trafficking, trafficking of drugs. And I am incredibly grateful to President Trump for showing such leadership in saying, I am not going to let these drugs come into our country. And I fully applaud and support everything that he is doing there.

But Attorney General Bondi stated in August of this year that the Venezuelan regime has paid for access to Honduran air space to transport cocaine without detection. And that bothers me and so we should care because Honduras' geographic position makes it critical for us to stop this.

It also matters because we have to worry about geopolitical competition. We have to worry about a world in which China wishes to be ascendant. And as they come into our part of the world, the Western Hemisphere, we need to be cognizant of that. And as we have seen in Honduras, that is a risk.

And then, finally, I am very focused on the pitfalls of illegal immigration and the extraordinary damage that it has done to my constituents in the State of Florida with higher criminal costs, higher health care costs, higher education costs, higher insurance costs, and higher housing costs. And it is my view that all illegal immigrants, every single one should be sent home.

And so the last thing we need is to create situations where more want to come to our country. So I think for all of these reasons, we need to be concerned about what is happening in Honduras.

So I have a question for the Ambassador, who I served with in the Florida House. And it is always an honor to see you here.

Honduras was among only four Latin American countries, along with Bolivia, Cuba, and Nicaragua that recognized Maduro's fraudulent election in July 2024. How does that fact reflect on their commitment to democratic norms and what does that say we should be concerned about with the election that is coming up in just a few days?

Mr. TRUJILLO. Thank you, Congressman. Great to see you.

It is a complete abandonment of traditional democratic norms. No country, center left, center right, Republican, Democrat, recognize the Maduro election. And the ones who did recognize it, recognize that Maduro was not elected and Maria Corina Machado was actually the elected representative of the country of Venezuela.

But I think it speaks much deeper to the long-term plans. When you recognize fraudulent elections, when you participate in fraudulent elections, when you celebrate fraudulent elections, it really is their modus operandi of what they plan to do in the next 10 days.

And I think all the steps they have taken, the State of emergency, the politicization of the Attorney General being related to one of the candidates, the elimination of the Electoral Council, the replacement of the Electoral Council, the military being involved in the election, it is all the roadmap to what is to come. We hope it doesn't get there.

Mr. FINE. So my followup, and I shall ask this for all of you, but I would ask you to keep your answers to sort of 10 seconds. Do you each of you have legitimate concerns that the outcome of the election will not be free and fair and something that we can take great confidence in or are you saying, no, we can count the votes and we will know where we are the next day?

Mr. TRUJILLO. I have concerns.

Ms. ULLMER. I would say we would have concerns if the CNE and the TGE are not allowed to do their jobs.

Mr. FINE. Okay. And do you think they will be allowed to do their jobs? I will get to you in a second, sir. But do you think they will be allowed?

Ms. ULLMER. We hope so. And we hope that this hearing is sending a strong message.

Mr. ROIG. Yes, I would agree with my colleagues here that we definitely have concerns. But I would also just note quickly that this problem of authoritarianism isn't one just on the left, it is also on the right.

I will note that El Salvador has imprisoned Ruth Lopez, a civil—

Mr. FINE. Not the subject of the hearing today. I got a minute and 8 seconds left. So I have got another question for my friend, the Ambassador.

Do you assess that the pattern of prosecuting electoral judges, forcing resignations of opposition CNE representatives, releasing allegedly fabricated audio recordings mirrors the authoritarian

playbook that we have seen in Venezuela and Nicaragua and what are your thoughts on that?

Mr. TRUJILLO. It was actually copyright written by the Cubans and then exported across the region. I agree with your assessment.

Mr. FINE. Well, I share that concern. We obviously want great relationships with our neighbors. You know, to me, it is less about who wins an election. It is more about can you have confidence in them. And I think you all have raised grave concerns about what is going to happen. I hope that the Hondurans are able to have a free and fair election and that we can continue to have great relations with the country. And with that, I yield back.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Representative Fine. Now, I recognize Representative Titus from the State of Nevada for 5 minutes. Thank you for being here.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

[Spanish language spoken.] I am glad that after—

Ms. SALAZAR. Your accent is really good.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. Thank you. It is a little southern accent.

Well, I am glad that after 11 months of the administration that we are finally having a hearing that is really focused on the Western Hemisphere because that is what our committee is supposed to be looking at, and it has taken us awhile to get here.

And in the meantime, we have seen Trump threaten to seize the Panama Canal. He has renamed the Gulf of Mexico. He has given \$40 billion to Argentina. He has threatened military strikes against Mexico. He has bombed boats in the Caribbean without legal justification. He has slapped crippling tariffs on our partners in the North and South and Central America, which has resulted in skyrocketing prices for my constituents. And now he is just itching to invade Venezuela and talking about covert activities there. We haven't addressed any of that up until this point and yet it is happening as we speak, all of these things going on in the hemisphere.

Now, that is not to minimize the importance of what is happening in the Honduras and the value of democratic institutions there and elsewhere. But it is merely to highlight the fact that the committee knows what the Trump Administration is doing in Latin America. It is creating chaos throughout the hemisphere.

It is not advancing U.S. interests in the region. It is not making our constituents in this country or throughout the region safer, stronger or more prosperous. And it is not how this country should be doing foreign policy.

Republicans on this committee know that if we talk about those things, they may lose the narrative on any of these issues. So we have just diverted attention away from everything else that is going on there, and especially now that we know the President probably doesn't have any trouble putting boots on the ground in a foreign country.

So I would ask you, Mr. Roig, do you think that the chaos that the administration has wrought throughout the hemisphere would have any negative impacts on Honduras on its institutions going beyond the election and migration policy, security challenges, other things? I mean, the election is just 1 day. Then you have got to

deal with the future. How is all this chaos going to impact what happens next?

Mr. ROIG. Yes, Congresswoman, as I stated in my opening statement, the Trump Administration has largely operated a very transactional approach to the region.

With Honduras, there have been 353 deportation flights this year alone. And so it is very obvious to the Castro government if they play ball on that count, they, you know, can get away with a lot of other stuff. And so that is of concern to many of us.

On Venezuela, my organization, Human Rights First, has been pretty vocal that what is happening with the boat strikes amounts to extrajudicial killings, particularly without any evidence.

We all know that fentanyl is not coming from Venezuela. It is coming through Mexico. And so it is really at the end of the day a dysfunctional game of Whac-A-Mole that is being played out right now in the Caribbean and probably will have no impact on drug markets here in the U.S.

Just a month ago, I was up in Baltimore doing police ride-alongs at drug markets. And I can't tell you the number of fentanyl deals that were all over the ground in these neighborhoods. So very hard to imagine that any of this is going to have any impact on that which is what the Trump Administration says they are trying to do.

And last point, we have to be consistent when we call out left leaning authoritarian regimes. There are also, as I said earlier, ones on the right. Bukele in El Salvador has demonstrated authoritarian tendencies. You have seen Cristosal, one of the leading human rights organizations, which has had to leave the country because one of their anti-corruption activists is now currently in prison. So let's be consistent also in the sense of how we deal with these issues.

Ms. TITUS. Well, do you think cutting out foreign assistance for democracy and good government programs would make a difference? That's been a negative impact on this notion that we need free and fair elections? We have got no NDI, no IRI down there working on these issues because we have cutoff all that foreign aid?

Mr. ROIG. I will say definitely the dismantling of USAID and the cut in assistance that my bureau, DRL, provided definitely has had an impact on the electoral observation, support the civic activist to media outlets, other organizations.

NDI has been able to continue their operation at a reduced scale. But we would be in a different position if we had a much more robust foreign assistance apparatus at this point that we could have started much sooner to prepare the way for the elections on November 30 in Honduras.

Ms. TITUS. Well, we have heard a lot of testimony about how the Honduran people have low trust in their government and they are not confident that these elections are going to be free and fair.

Do you think having the Chairwoman of this committee say I am not going to tell you who to vote for, but don't vote for the Communist, is that going to help increase trust in the electoral process or think that it is fair and being done in Honduras and not with a thumb on the scale from somewhere else?

Mr. ROIG. Well, Congresswoman, obviously, we want to maintain impartiality in all of this. But it is important to call out the irregularities that we are seeing currently on the ground. And so I think that is what we have all stated here in our opening testimonies that there are things that do concern us on what is happening in Honduras.

But, again, I will go back to my point. Let's be consistent and call it out on both the left and the right when we see governments that are demonstrating authoritarian tendencies on both sides of the political side.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Madam Titus, from the State of Nevada. Now I recognize Congressman Mackenzie from Pennsylvania for 5 minutes.

Mr. MACKENZIE. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate today's hearing. Obviously, Honduras is a key U.S. partner in Central America, and we want to make sure that they are secure and prosperous and maintain a good relationship with our country.

We also want to work with the Honduran government to address shared challenges in the region, like drug trafficking and reducing crime.

And so I have a couple questions. I will followup on election irregularities, which we just touched on a little bit. But I am also concerned about what the elections and irregularities, how they can affect our ability to work together and what it also means for China's growing influence in the region.

And so Ambassador Trujillo, during your tenure as Ambassador to the OAS, Honduras shifted diplomatic relations from Taiwan to China. And in your estimation, what factors drove that decision and how have you seen Chinese influence expand in the country since the decision?

Mr. TRUJILLO. Thank you. It happened after my term in the OAS. But they did shift, and they campaigned on breaking diplomatic relationship with Taiwan in order to favor China. China has been significantly much more active not only in Honduras but in the region.

If you look at the last 10 years from Honduras to Panama to the Dominican Republic—I am sure I am missing a few—but a lot of those countries have shifted diplomatic relationships from Taiwan to China.

And in Honduras in particular, they have been significantly aggressive in providing intelligence, in providing some communication support, in providing telecom support, and also providing strengthening diplomatic ties, including multiple State trips from Honduran high ranking officials, including the president, to Beijing.

Mr. MACKENZIE. So just to highlight again and expand on what you said there about how they had campaigned on that. Tell me how that played in the elections or how did that contribute to the outcome of the elections?

Mr. TRUJILLO. Well, they actively campaigned on, you know, having more normalized relationship. And they always obviously paint it as trade, right, this economic engine of China. We are going to have trade. It is going to help grow our economy. It is played out throughout the rest of Latin America.

It has never been the case. China is really good at importing. They are really bad at purchasing exports. So I think that continues to be the case.

Going forward, it will be interesting to see if the candidates from the opposition switch to diplomatic recognition and whether they leave from Beijing back to Taipei.

Mr. MACKENZIE. And do you think the decision to make that a part of the political campaign in the election was driven by Hondurans or was that driven by the Chinese?

Mr. TRUJILLO. I think by both. I would say the Honduran officials who accepted the challenge and the Chinese who provided the opportunity.

Mr. MACKENZIE. Okay. Thank you.

We are also—we were pleased to see that the Deputy Secretary of State statement last week on the upcoming Honduran elections. He echoed the concerns of the OAS.

What were those concerns and what are the concerns that you have regarding the elections, potential irregularities, and what we should be looking for because we do want to make sure that there are free and fair elections occurring there.

Mr. TRUJILLO. I think the poor functioning primaries were an indicator of what is to come. The delay in the vote counting, the military's active role, the military taking possession of ballots and not having a lot of transparency for all parties involved, including civil society.

And I think going forward it is really the role as some of my colleagues have said on this panel, of the Electoral Commission. If they are truly allowed to be independent, I am not saying it will 100 percent change the outcome, but at least we will have the information to verify the outcomes of the election.

The question becomes whether Honduran government officials are going to allow them to fulfill their role, and the next 10 days will determine it. But it seems increasingly putting more and more pressure on the independence of the Electoral Council.

Mr. MACKENZIE. All right. Well, thank you again to all of you for being here again today. Obviously, a great topic of interest that we are following very closely in the region. And I appreciate your input and testimony today.

With that, I yield back to the chair.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Congressman Mackenzie from Pennsylvania, and we are about to wrap this up.

I think that we have been able to send a very clear message to the Hondurans, those who are watching this hearing back in Honduras, Tegucigalpa, and whatever other area in the country that, regardless whether we agree or not, Democrats and Republicans, you have seen that we have not always agreed on every single topic, but we have sent a very clear message how the American democracy works. And that is exactly what we want for Honduras and for the rest of Central America.

We are sending a very clear message, Republicans and Democrats from the U.S. House of Representatives that we want fair, clean elections, transparent elections, and for the Hondurans to decide their future for the next 4 years.

With that, I thank them for their valuable testimony and the members for their questions. The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, which can be responded to in writing.

Pursuant to committee rules, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions or other materials for the record subject to the length of the limitations.

And I am going to say a few words before we close, once again in Spanish, to the Hondurans who are watching this committee. Usually, this has to be done in English, but since we are talking about our very close ally in Central America

[Spanish language spoken].

With that, may the Lord help the Hondurans and Honduras. This committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:35 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



Chairman Brian Mast

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Maria Salazar (R-FL), Chairwoman

November 19, 2025

Revised

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere at 2:00 p.m. in Room 2200 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Thursday, November 20, 2025

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: 2200 RHOB

SUBJECT: Democracy in Peril: the Fight for Free Elections in Honduras

WITNESSES:

- * The Honorable Carlos Trujillo
Former U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS)
- * Deborah Ullmer
Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean Programs
National Democratic Institute (NDI)
- * **Enrique Roig**
Vice President of External Affairs
Human Rights First

*NOTE: Witnesses added/changed.

**NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202 -226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF WHEN SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

Day Thursday Date November 20, 2025 Room 2200 RHOB

Starting Time 14:00 Ending Time 15:35

Recesses ☐ (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairwoman Salazar

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

Democracy in Peril: the Fight for Free Elections in Honduras

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

N/A

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Attached

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 15:35

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
119th Congress

ATTENDANC

Meeting on: Democracy in Peril: the Fight for Free Elections in Honduras
Date: November 20, 2025

[illegible]

Mike Fernandez: Open letter to the Miami-Dade delegation: Defend immigrants now | Opinion

www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article304271841.html



[Op-Ed](#)

By Michael "Mike" B. Fernandez

Updated April 16, 2025 3:32 PM



A Coral Gables businessman and philanthropist has written an open letter to Miami U.S. Reps. Carlos Gimenez, Maria Elvira Salazar and Mario Diaz-Balart, left to right. Al Diaz adiaz@miamiherald.com

Editor's note: Miami healthcare CEO Michael "Mike" B. Fernandez wrote the following open letter to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and members of the Republican Cuban-American Miami-Dade congressional delegation: U.S. Reps. Mario Diaz-Balart, Carlos Giménez and María Elvira Salazar.

For decades, I have stood with you in defense of the freedoms we cherish, those we were denied in the country of our birth and found in the grace of this one. I know what it means to flee tyranny.

Like you, I carry that history in my bones and that pain in my heart.

But like a growing number in our community, I have watched with dismay as the very values we once found sanctuary in are now being attacked by a previously unthinkable threat — the sitting president of the United States.

In the face of all of this, [the silence from our own leaders —](#) the sons and daughters of exiles — has become deafening.

Your silence is neither neutral nor ignorance; it is complicity and cowardice.

Today, the Trump administration has adopted a posture of cruelty towards immigrants that is beneath the values this country has always promised. Revoking protected status for Venezuelan and Cuban immigrants, many of whom fled oppression just as our families once did, is not just policy — it is hypocrisy.

When funding for USAID, which directly supports efforts to foster political and social change in Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and throughout the region, is eliminated overnight — it is a betrayal.

When community institutions like Radio and TV Martí are destroyed, cutting off the Cuban people from information they often cannot get any other way — it is personal.

Most alarming is the Trump administration's disregard for our allies around the world and the embrace of dictators, like those in the countries we escaped from — this is unacceptable.

Your silence has caused fear and real harm to many in our community and your districts.

Yes, the Cuban, Venezuelan and Nicaraguan dictatorships remain a focal point and must continue to be condemned.

But we must not become so fixated on the wounds of our past that we fail to see those being inflicted in the present.

Our leaders must focus on addressing the needs of our neighbors across Miami-Dade: immigrants, workers, families struggling with housing, healthcare and opportunity.

We need a new strategy, grounded in courage and focused on the people of South Florida — the people that elected you to represent them.

What representative leadership demands today:

- Defend the vulnerable. Immigration policy must reflect the same compassion for those today that we once benefited from, not that long ago.
- Focus on home. Champion policies that bring real relief to South Florida families, on affordable housing, healthcare, access to education and job opportunities.
- Stand for human rights. Condemn authoritarianism wherever it rises, whether in Havana, Caracas, Managua, Moscow or Washington, D.C.
- Listen to the next generation. Engage with immigrant communities to understand their priorities and bring them into the political conversation.
- Lead with courage. In the end, we are not measured by loyalty to a party or president but by loyalty to the Constitution and to principles, even when they cost something.

If you can't find your voice at this moment, or tell the difference between one dictator and another, then perhaps it is time to make room for others who can and have a vision that you may lack.

I write not in anger but with urgency, alarm and purpose.

Since you have not yet raised your voices as our representatives to defend those who have none, [I intend to use my efforts](#) and ask other voices to join in elevating this crisis in our community that cannot be ignored.

These are the voices of mothers and grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers, students, workers and Dreamers all calling out for dignity, for safety and for leadership that remembers its roots.

You were elected because of our votes; remember, public trust isn't guaranteed — it's earned and maintained.

Your constituents and this community need you to speak up.

Miguel "Mike" B. Fernandez is the CEO of MBF Healthcare Partners in Coral Gables. He is a Cuban-American community activist and philanthropist.

This story was originally published April 16, 2025 at 2:41 PM.

EXCLUSIVE



NATIONAL SECURITY

Top military lawyer raised legal concerns about boat strikes

The lawyer at U.S. Southern Command, which oversees the operations against alleged drug-smuggling boats near Venezuela, disagreed that the strikes are legal and was overruled, according to six sources.



— A video posted by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on X reportedly shows U.S. military forces conducting a strike on a vessel in the Caribbean Sea on Oct. 23.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth via AFP - Getty Images

Nov. 19, 2025, 9:32 PM EST

By Gordon Lubold, Courtney Kube and Dan De Luce

WASHINGTON – The senior military lawyer for the combatant command overseeing lethal strikes on alleged drug-smuggling boats near Venezuela disagreed with the Trump administration’s position that the operations are lawful – and his views were sidelined, according to six sources with knowledge of the legal advice.

The lawyer, who serves as the senior judge advocate general, or JAG in military parlance, at U.S. Southern Command in Miami, raised his legal concerns in August before the strikes began in September, according to two senior U.S. officials, two senior congressional aides and two former senior U.S. officials.

His opinion was ultimately overruled by more senior government officials, including officials at the Justice Department’s Office of

Legal Counsel, the six sources said. Other JAGs and military lawyers at various levels of seniority weighed in on the boat strikes, as well. It's unclear what each of their opinions were, but some of the military lawyers, including civilians and those in uniform, also expressed concerns to senior officials in their commands and at the Defense Department about the legality of the strikes, the two senior congressional aides and one of the senior former U.S. officials said.

The JAG at Southern Command specifically expressed concern that strikes against people on boats in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific Ocean, whom administration officials call "narco-terrorists," could amount to extrajudicial killings, the six sources said, and therefore legally expose service members involved in the operations.

The opinion of the top lawyer for the command overseeing a military operation is typically critical to whether or not the operation moves forward. While higher officials can overrule such lawyers, it is rare for operations to move forward without incorporating their advice.



— Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth posted images on X reportedly showing strikes on four

vessels in the Eastern Pacific on Oct. 27.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth via X

Chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement: “The War Department categorically denies that any Pentagon lawyers, including SOUTHCOM lawyers, with knowledge of these operations have raised concerns to any attorneys in the chain of command regarding the legality of the strikes conducted thus far because they are aware we are on firm legal ground. Our current operations in the Caribbean are lawful under both U.S. and international law, with all actions in complete compliance with the law of armed conflict.”

A spokesperson for Southern Command referred questions to the Defense

Department, which the Trump administration calls the War Department. A spokesperson for the White House did not respond to a request for comment.

The JAG is Marine Col. Paul Meagher, according to three people familiar with the matter. Attempts to reach Meagher for comment were unsuccessful.

The strikes on alleged drug boats have drawn support from Republicans, as well as criticism from members of both parties, [NBC News has reported](#).

The opinion of the Southern Command JAG, which has not been previously reported, adds a new dimension to concerns that lawmakers, retired military officers and legal experts

have raised about the administration's legal justification for striking alleged drug boats.

Those concerns have centered on questions about whether the strikes violate international and U.S. law.

Since Sept. 2, it says, the administration has killed 82 people in 21 strikes on small vessels it says were transporting drugs bound for the United States.

Administration officials have not put forward any specific evidence backing up their claims.

The administration has told members of Congress that President Donald Trump determined the United States is in "armed conflict" with drug cartel members, [NBC News has reported](#). The administration

designated some drug cartels in Latin America as foreign terrorist organizations this year.

Trump has argued that drugs from the region pose a significant threat to American citizens. He has linked the boats to fentanyl to argue that the military strikes have saved tens of thousands of American lives, although fentanyl is typically [smuggled into the United States by land](#) across the Mexican border. Cocaine, which is most often moved via sea, is considered far less lethal than fentanyl.

JAGs' opinions on possible military operations are usually shared with higher authorities, including the Defense Department's general counsel, Justice Department officials and ultimately the White

House, according to current and former U.S. officials familiar with the process.

JAGs typically play an integral role in defining the legal parameters of any military operation, and often their collective advice would be the primary guiding principle as political leaders decide whether to take such action, according to the current and former U.S. officials familiar with the process.

In the Trump administration's campaign against alleged drug boats, politically appointed lawyers at senior levels have often defined the legalities of the operations with minimal lower-level legal input, according to the two senior congressional aides and one of the former senior U.S. officials.

There have been other signs of disagreement within the administration over the strikes. The head of Southern Command, Adm. Alvin Holsey, plans to step down after less than a year in a job that typically lasts about three years.

Holsey announced in October that he will depart next month.

In addition to concerns about the legality of the strikes, Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill have complained that the administration has not provided them enough information about the legal rationale or the intelligence used to target the vessels and people the administration purports are bringing drugs into the United States.

“There is no world where this is legal,” said a current JAG, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak publicly.

Congress has not declared war or authorized the use of military force against the drug traffickers, and [U.S. law](#) allows the president to take military action without lawmakers’ approval only if there is a national emergency due to an attack on the country or American forces.

Dan Maurer, an associate professor of law at Ohio Northern University and a former Army JAG, argued that the drug cartels’ narcotics smuggling and other actions are crimes but do not qualify as an armed attack on the United States as defined by U.S. and international law.

“These drug cartels may be violent, they may be aggressive, they may be transnational,” Maurer said in an interview. “They may be doing terrible things within their own countries; they may be importing terrible things into our country that have bad consequences. But all of those are crimes, and none of which meets the traditional meanings of an attack or invasion.”

Maurer and other former military lawyers and experts believe the Trump administration’s legal rationale for the strikes is so tenuous it could put commanders and troops in legal peril after Trump leaves office in 2029.

Trump administration officials have defended the legality of the strikes and argued that

they have shared ample information about them with members of Congress.

The legal debate about the strikes is likely to intensify if Trump decides to hit targets inside Venezuela, as he has threatened to do. The current legal rationale for strikes on vessels does not apply to any strikes on land, a senior administration official told lawmakers in a closed-door briefing last week, according to two additional congressional aides.

Some of the military's strikes on boats have killed people who critics of the operations say may be noncombatants or even immigrants who are hitching rides on the vessels and have nothing to do with the drug trade. Two survivors of a strike were captured and repatriated to Colombia and Ecuador rather

than taken into U.S. custody, a decision that one of the congressional aides said raises questions about whether there is sufficient evidence to prosecute them for a crime.

The internal differences over the legality of the boat strikes echo a similar debate more than 20 years ago. During President George W. Bush's administration, senior military lawyers for the Army, the Air Force and the Marines [raised objections](#) over proposed “enhanced” interrogation techniques in 2003 and later testified to Congress about their concerns. They warned that U.S. courts could find those techniques amounted to torture and were illegal.

John Yoo, the controversial legal architect of Bush’s “war on terror” after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, now argues the Trump

administration's boat strikes risk crossing the line between "crime fighting and war."

"Americans have died in car wrecks at an annual rate of about 40,000 in recent years; the nation does not wage war on auto companies," he wrote recently in an [op-ed in The Washington Post](#). "American law instead relies upon the criminal justice or civil tort systems to respond to broad, persistent social harms."

Gordon Lubold

Gordon Lubold is a national security reporter for NBC News.

Courtney Kube



Courtney Kube is a correspondent covering national security and the military for the NBC News Investigative Unit.

Dan De Luce

Dan De Luce is a reporter for the NBC News Investigative Unit.

House Committee on Foreign Affairs
“Democracy in Peril: The Fight for Free Elections in Honduras”
November 20, 2025
Subcommittee Ranking Member Joaquin Castro
Questions for the Record for Ambassador Carlos Trujillo

Disclosures:

1. Under Rule 6(b)(4)(B) of the rules of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, witnesses are required to provide “a disclosure of whether the witness is negotiating or awaiting approval to receive a contract with, a grant or payment from, a foreign government.”

Are you currently negotiating or awaiting approval to receive a contract with, a grant or payment from, a foreign government? If so, please disclose all such contracts, grants, or payments.

The firm under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) is listed as a registrant for the following entities found here:

https://efile.fara.gov/ords/fara/f?p=1381:130:11664245466884:::130:P130_DATERANGE::N

A proposal for services was recently sent to the Republic of Kazakhstan.

2. Under Rule 6(b)(4)(E) of the rules of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, witnesses are required to provide a disclosure of whether the witness is an active registrant under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

Are you currently an active registrant under the Foreign Agents Registration Act? If so, which foreign entities are you an agent of?

Yes, I am a registered agent under the Foreign Agents Registration Act for the following entities found here:

https://efile.fara.gov/ords/fara/f?p=1381:220:8130889577151:::220:P220_REG_NUMBER_P220_SHORT_FORM_LAST_NAME.P220_SHORT_FORM_FIRST_NAME:7545,Trujillo,Carlos

3. What clients do you or your firm have that are based in Honduras or have business interests in Honduras?

Out of our 100+ clients, a significant number are global entities maintaining a presence across multiple countries. A complete client list is available via the link provided here.

https://lda.senate.gov/filings/public/filing/search/?registrant=®istrant_country=®istrant_ppb_country=&client=&client_state=&client_country=&client_ppb_country=&lobbyist=carlos+trujillo&lobbyist_covered_position=&lobbyist_conviction_disclosure=&lobbyist_conviction_date_range_from=&lobbyist_conviction_date_range_to=&report_period=&report_year=2025&report_dt_posted_from=&report_dt_posted_to=&report_amount_reported_min=&report_amount_reported_max=&report_filing_uuid=&report_house_doc_id=&report_issue_area_description=&affiliated_organization=&affiliated_organization_country=&foreign_entity=&foreign_entity_country=&foreign_entity_ppb_country=&foreign_entity_ownership_percentage_min=&foreign_entity_ownership_percentage_max=&search=search#js_searchFormTitle