



Background Brief **April 2018**

Honduras: Post-Election Crisis and U.S. Response

Background

In the Central American nation of Honduras, disputed elections in November 2017 have triggered a human rights crisis.¹ Honduran security forces, many of which receive U.S. aid, are directly implicated in recent human rights violations stemming from the election.²

Events prior to the November 2017 vote led many Hondurans to question the integrity of the political process. These included a 2015 Honduran Supreme Court ruling abolishing constitutional term limits, enabling current president Juan Orlando Hernández to run for reelection. The justices who issued this ruling were appointed after Hernández himself, then-leader of the National Congress of Honduras, unseated four members in 2012. The Honduran government's internal human rights monitor condemned this action as illegal.³

When the election results were confirmed in December and Hernández maintained power,⁴ protests continued around the country. The Honduran government has responded with a far-reaching crackdown on the rights to assembly and expression, declaring a state of emergency and imposing a public curfew. At least 1,351 people have been arrested as a result.⁵

Since the election, Honduran security forces have committed severe human rights violations, including beatings, ill-treatment, and the unjustified use of deadly force against protestors. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at least 16 people have been killed by security forces in the context of post-election protests, including two women and two children. Sixty people have been injured. OHCHR has documented instances of Honduran military and police units shooting people who were fleeing and discharging live ammunition on bystanders.⁶

This ongoing crisis occurs amidst existing political instability and human rights abuses in Honduras – problems in which the United States has long played a role. Most recently, in 2009, the center-left Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was forced from power in a coup d'état. While the United States originally condemned the ouster, the Obama administration reversed course in November 2009, backing away from the demand that authorities reinstate Zelaya.⁷ In the years since, the United States has continued to provide significant military and security funding to the government of Honduras, despite the failure of subsequent administrations to reckon with the legacy of the coup or to end persistent human rights abuses, which included the assassination and intimidation of activists, journalists, indigenous and Afro-Honduran leaders, and human rights defenders.⁸

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee Recommendation

Congress should use the FY19 appropriations process to withhold funding to Honduran security forces until the Honduran government upholds rights protections for its people. The United States maintains close ties to the Honduran government, even as human rights violations have intensified over the past several months. While Congress places strict limits on funding to other foreign governments implicated in gross violations, the State Department nevertheless certified Honduras as meeting aid conditions on November 28, 2017.⁹ Congress should use its authority over appropriations to bring U.S. security aid to Honduras into better alignment with our nation's core values of the right to free expression and the legitimacy of political dissent.

Additional Resources

- Meyer, Peter J. *Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2017. Accessed March 30, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34027.pdf>.
- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Human rights violations in the context of the 2017 elections in Honduras*. New York, NY: United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human

Rights, 2018. Accessed March 30, 2018,
http://ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/HN/2017ReportElectionsHRViolations_Honduras_EN.pdf.

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- ¹ Lisa Haugaard, "Protest Met with Brutal Repression: A Summary of Human Rights Abuses in Post-Electoral Honduras," *Latin America Working Group*, January 26, 2018, <http://www.lawg.org/action-center/lawg-blog/69-general/1981-protest-met-with-brutal-repression-a-summary-of-human-rights-abuses-in-post-electoral-honduras>.
- ² United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), *Human rights violations in the context of the 2017 elections in Honduras* (New York, NY: UNOHCHR, 2018), accessed March 30, 2018, http://ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/HN/2017ReportElectionsHRViolations_Honduras_EN.pdf.
- ³ Peter J. Meyer, *Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2017), accessed March 30, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34027.pdf>.
- ⁴ Heather Gies, "Hernandez declared winner in Honduras disputed election," *Al Jazeera*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/hernandez-declared-winner-honduras-disputed-election-171218082740078.html>.
- ⁵ UNOHCHR, op. cit.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Congressional Research Service, op. cit.
- ⁸ See Human Rights Watch, "Honduras," in *World Report 2017* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2017), accessed March 30, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/honduras>; Center for Economic and Policy Research, "The Situation of Human Rights and Democracy in Honduras Since the Elections of November 2013," accessed March 30, 2018, <http://cepr.net/publications/briefings/testimony/the-situation-of-human-rights-and-democracy-in-honduras-since-the-elections-of-november-2013>; and John James Conyers Jr. et al., "America's funding of Honduran security forces puts blood on our hands," *The Guardian*, July 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/08/american-funding-honduran-security-forces-blood-on-our-hands>.
- ⁹ Lisa Haugaard, op. cit.