

Hondurans Repudiate Corrupt U.S.-Backed Coup Regime at Polls

Elect leftist Xiomara Castro as first female president in a blow to Washington and the party of Narco-Dictator Juan Orlando Hernández, who could now be put on trial

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Honduras’-twelve-year nightmare prompted by a U.S.-backed coup came to an end this week with the election of Xiomara Castro as the country’s new president, with [68 percent voter turnout](#).

Thousands of Hondurans poured into the streets the day after the vote, shooting fireworks and singing [“J.O.H., J.O.H., and away you go,”](#) a reference to the deeply unpopular outgoing President Juan Orlando Hernández.

At the victory celebration. Castro proclaimed:

[“for 12 years the people resisted, and those 12 years were not in vain. God takes time but doesn’t forget. Today the people have made justice.”](#)

She continued:

[“we’re going to build a new era. Out with death squads, out with corruption, out with drug traffickers, out with organized crime. We’re going to transform the country. No more poverty. No more misery.”](#)

Castro is the wife of José Manuel Zelaya, Honduras's president from 2006 to 2009, who was overthrown in the 2009 coup, and served as Castro's campaign manager.

Zelaya had earned the wrath of Honduras' reigning oligarchy and U.S. by raising the minimum wage, increasing teacher pay, opening the door to restoring the land rights of small farmers, and joining the Hugo Chavez-led Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), which [aimed to integrate Latin American economies independent of the U.S.](#)

Miguel Angel, a political activist in his 20s who fled Honduras after the coup, stated that "Zelaya was the best president Honduras had ever had"; one who "followed through on his campaign promises." The latter proved to be his undoing as the wealthy "didn't like the fact that a man of power gave a plate of food to the poor."

Improved Prospects

With Castro now in charge, Honduras's prospects are suddenly much better—the poor may indeed get a plate.

Castro campaigned on a platform of cleaning up corruption, [adopting a new constitution](#), [loosening restrictions on abortion](#), and adopting more social democratic policies compared to the neoliberal austerity measures that have devastated Honduras since the coup.

Castro has also floated the idea of [dropping diplomatic support for Taiwan](#) in favor of China, a policy proposal keenly watched in Washington.

Al Jazeera correspondent Manuel Rapalo reported from Tegucigalpa that Castro had won the election because ["many people feel hungry for change after 12 years of single-party rule. Many people see the ruling National Party \[PN\] as being endemically corrupt, leading to worsening poverty in the country."](#)



Hondurans protest narco-dictator. [Source: globalexchange.org]

Honduran scholar Suyapa Portillo of Pitzer College said that [many voted in the election for the "dead"—](#) those killed in the 2009 coup and subsequent [state repression that was financed considerably by the U.S. through security assistance programs and under the War on Drugs.](#)

A Government of Criminals

Honduras' departing president Juan Orlando Hernández has been [accused by a prosecutor in the Federal District Court of Manhattan of protecting Honduras's drug traffickers and helping them to flood the U.S. with cocaine.](#)

Hernández was nevertheless [considered by the Washington](#) establishment as a trusted partner on sensitive issues, including counterterrorism and anti-narcotics efforts, and had won plaudits for privatizing the health-care and education sectors and vowing to help curb immigration from Honduras.

Hernández' brother Tony, a congressman from 2014 to 2018 and associate of Mexican drug kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, was [found guilty in 2019 of importing nearly 200,000 kilograms of cocaine into the United States](#) and sentenced to life in prison. A man at the sentencing observed: ["Look how these people, who had so much power in Honduras, end up here like rats."](#)

Many of the drug shipments—which had Tony's initials emblazoned on his own brand—were overseen by the former [Honduran chief of National Police, Juan Carlos Bonilla Valadares \(aka "El Tigre"\)](#), whom [Tony said was "very violent," and "trusted with special assignments, including murders."](#)^[1]

"El Tigre" [long enjoyed U.S. support](#) even as evidence of human rights atrocities and drug-running mounted against him.

Tainted Candidate

Juan Orlando Hernández' designated successor, Nasry "Tito" Asfura, [conceded defeat late on Tuesday with 34.1% of the vote, compared to Castro's 53.4%—with 52% of the vote recorded.](#)

Asfura's candidacy was tainted by his link to influence peddling in Costa Rica in the [Panama Papers](#), and by his being named in a government investigation into embezzlement of more than one million dollars of city funds in Tegucigalpa where he was mayor.

The charges stemmed from an investigation into a complex series of transactions that ended with tax funds shunted to personal accounts, according to [court documents](#).

Reversal of Anti-Historic Counteroffensive

Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez characterized the 2009 coup against Zelaya as part of a "retrograde and anti-historic counter-offensive by the U.S. empire," whose aim was to "roll back the union, sovereignty and democracy of our continent."

The Center for Economic and Policy Research in 2017 concluded that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dropped by two percent and unemployment rose from 3 to 7.4 percent in the years after the coup in Honduras, while the women's underemployment rate more than doubled.

Hondurans complained that [the price of beans had risen so much in this period that only the rich could afford to eat them.](#)

The social and environmental cost of the government's policies was borne most by indigenous groups like the Moskitia, Miskitu and Garifuna, [whose waterways and land were threatened by a 2013 agreement granting the BG Oil Group, subsequently bought over by Shell, oil and gas exploration rights off the Honduran coast.](#)



U.S. armed police repress anti-government protests in Tegucigalpa in 2018. [Source: globalexchange.org]

Castro's election victory could prove chimeric if the Nationalist Party retains control of the Congress and blocks her major legislative initiatives.

The State Department issued a statement on Tuesday expressing [optimism about the high voter turnout and asserting its willingness to work with Castro](#)—though could easily turn against her if her policies turn left.

The majority of Hondurans, nevertheless, are feeling better about their future prospects today than they had been before the election.

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Notes

1. In October, 2019, eight days after Hernández was convicted, his former business partner who had cooperated with the DEA, [Nesry López Sanabria was shot and stabbed to death, by assassins who had been allowed to breach an area of the maximum-security Honduran prison where he was being held.](#) Six weeks later, his lawyer was killed. Three days after that, the warden of the prison was killed, too.

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