



## 2021 Elections in Honduras

Updated November 23, 2021

Honduras is scheduled to hold presidential, congressional, and municipal elections on November 28, 2021. The elections come at a difficult moment for Honduras, as many Hondurans have [lost confidence in their democratic institutions](#) and the country faces a protracted recovery from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, two hurricanes, and a deep recession. Depending on their perceived legitimacy, the elections could help foster stability in Honduras or could exacerbate the country's challenges. The elections also will determine whether the U.S. government will have credible Honduran partners, with whom it can work to address migration, drug trafficking, and other policy concerns, and may influence congressional foreign assistance decisions.

### Domestic Context

President Juan Orlando Hernández (2014-present) of the conservative National Party (PN) is nearing the end of his second term and is not seeking a third. Many Hondurans maintain his [2017 reelection](#) was unconstitutional and the result of electoral fraud. Over the past eight years, Hernández and the PN-controlled congress have enacted business-friendly [economic policies](#) and a series of [security- and justice-sector reforms](#) while consolidating their influence over the supreme court and other nominally independent institutions.

In September 2021, [74% of Hondurans](#) surveyed thought the country was on the wrong track. They identified corruption as the principal problem facing Honduras and unemployment, COVID-19, and crime as top concerns for their families.

- **Corruption.** [Perceptions of corruption](#) have increased as President Hernández and other current and former government officials have been implicated in various [corrupt activities](#), including [drug trafficking](#). Although the Honduran government enacted some anti-corruption measures during Hernández's first term, it has [rolled them back](#) over the past two years as prosecutors have investigated the president and his congressional allies.
- **Unemployment.** The Honduran economy contracted by an [estimated 9%](#) in 2020 due to a pandemic-driven recession and the damage wrought by two hurricanes. From 2019 to 2020, the unemployment rate increased from [5.7%](#) to [10.9%](#) and the underemployment rate increased from [60.6%](#) to [70.7%](#). In September 2021, an estimated [3.3 million people](#) (a third of Hondurans) were contending with acute food insecurity.

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IN11795

- **COVID-19.** As of November 22, 2021, Honduras [had recorded](#) more than 377,000 cases and 10,300 deaths from COVID-19, though some experts argue there may be [significant underreporting](#). The country’s vaccine rollout has been slower than the global average, with [40% of the population](#) fully vaccinated as of November 22.
- **Crime.** Homicide and crime victimization rates have declined over the past decade but [remain high](#) by regional standards and [have increased](#) over the past year.

## Election Dynamics

Although [polls suggest](#) most Hondurans are ready for change after 12 consecutive years of PN rule, they also suggest the PN remains the country’s most popular party. The political opposition has splintered since a [2009 coup](#) split the centrist Liberal Party (PL) and prompted the creation of the leftist Liberty and Re-foundation (LIBRE) party. The launch of the Savior of Honduras Party (PSH)—a personality-driven and anti-corruption-focused party led by 2017 presidential runner-up Salvador Nasralla—further fractured the opposition.

Given those divisions, the PN’s candidate, Tegucigalpa mayor Nasry “Tito” Asfura, initially was favored to win the presidency. In October 2021, however, Nasralla forged a coalition with LIBRE’s Xiomara Castro, withdrawing from the presidential race to serve as her running mate. [A poll](#) conducted afterward found Castro leading the race with 38% support, followed by Asfura at 21%, and the PL’s Yani Rosenthal at 3%; most of the remainder were undecided. [Another poll](#) reportedly found Castro and Asfura locked in a tight race. Whereas Asfura would likely [maintain the status quo](#), Castro has called for a U.N.-backed anti-corruption commission, diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China, legalized abortion under certain circumstances, and a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, among other [policy changes](#).

The high level of uncertainty, combined with Hondurans’ [lack of confidence](#) in their elections, could undermine the legitimacy of the results and could spark a cycle of social unrest and repression similar to what occurred in the [aftermath of 2017 elections](#). Since September 2020, the U.N. Human Rights Office in Honduras [has recorded](#) 63 cases of political violence, including 29 killings. The U.S. State Department has [condemned the violence](#) and [called for](#) “free, fair, transparent, and peaceful elections.” The [Organization of American States](#) and the [European Union](#) have dispatched electoral observation missions to Honduras to strengthen the transparency and credibility of the process.

## Implications for the United States

Difficult living conditions and periodic instability in Honduras have contributed to relatively high levels of displacement and emigration. In FY2021, U.S. authorities at the Southwest border [encountered more than 319,000 Hondurans](#), or 3.2% of the Honduran population. [Systemic corruption](#) and weak rule of law also contribute to Honduras’s status as a [major drug transit country](#).

The Biden Administration has sought to collaborate with Honduras and other Central American countries to [manage migration flows](#) and [address the underlying conditions](#) that push people to leave the region. The Administration proposed allocating \$4 billion of assistance to Central America over four years and requested [\\$861 million](#)—including at least [\\$95.8 million](#) for Honduras—for FY2022. Some Members of Congress are skeptical of funding such efforts, [arguing](#) that corruption is deeply entrenched and the United States lacks credible government partners in the region.

In July 2021, the Biden Administration imposed visa sanctions on [21 current and former Honduran officials](#) who allegedly have engaged in corruption or undemocratic actions, pursuant to the United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act (P.L. 116-260). President Hernández was not among those identified, despite U.S. Department of Justice [allegations](#) that he accepted bribes to protect drug traffickers. The targeted sanctions do not appear to have resulted in greater cooperation from the Honduran congress, which has continued to [impede anti-corruption efforts](#).

If Honduran officials elected in November 2021 prove unwilling to address corruption and other deep-seated challenges, U.S. policymakers could opt to scale back support to the Honduran government and/or redirect U.S. assistance to civil society. More broadly, U.S. policymakers may reevaluate whether and how they can achieve their objectives in Central America.

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