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HONDURAN ELECTORAL POLITICS AND MILITARY RULE: THE GEOPOLITICS --ETC(U)
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"Honduran Electoral Politics and Military Rule:
The Geopolitics of Central America"

For nearly five centuries Honduras has been taken for granted. Hondurans now find themselves near the epicenter of change and revolution in Central America. The sudden acquisition of geopolitical importance is new for the country, and Hondurans are perhaps uncomfortable in their new role. A civilian government is slated to take office in late January 1982 after nearly ten years of direct rule by the Armed Forces of Honduras. The return to constitutional rule began as early as 1976 when an Advisory Council (CONASE), set up by former Chief of State General Juan Melgar Castro, was charged with devising a new electoral law. The Constituent Assembly election of 1980 was the next phase. The Assembly has modified the electoral law and is about to conclude its work on a new constitution. The final phase of moving from military to civilian government includes elections scheduled for 29 November 1981 in which voters will select the president of the republic, deputies to the National Congress, and local officials--the first such elections in ten years. The 1981 elections are significant in practical terms, for the symbolic importance they will have for Hondurans, and the impact they can have in Central America.

The political system of Honduras is at a turning point. This conjuncture of time and conditions is further complicated by the revolution, violence, and global politics that course throughout the Caribbean Basin. No less significant are the perturbing questions that the Honduran situation poses for U. S. policymakers.

II.

The Honduran election campaign is being conducted without the polarized violence that now afflicts El Salvador and Guatemala. Given the context of regional change, the claim that Hondurans "are different" can be supported

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by what promises to be essentially open and honest elections. Honduran society and politics are distinctive within Central America. Besides being the poorest nation within the region, Honduras is also a society that is politically less divided than El Salvador. There is no real ethnic cleavage on the order of Guatemala. And despite formal instability, an underlying elite consensus appears to have governed political decision-making whether dominated by the military or the established elites of the traditional Liberal and National political parties. Moreover, the relatively small participant stratum is composed of an array of overlapping social networks. Political opponents are related through family ties; economic enterprises often crosscut other cleavages of ethnicity, geography, and background; and the intimate familiarity of most participants with each other allows a continuing basis for dialogue.

Not to carry the "somos diferente" concept too far, Honduras has in common with its neighbors the problems of social and economic inequities, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, inadequate health facilities, intransigent ultra-conservative sectors, an incipient but still divided extreme left wing, urban invasions --and amidst this, a sense of rising expectations mixed with apprehension and despair.

The economic crisis is most immediate and will affect Honduras over the next several years. Worsening terms-of-trade, inflation, rising energy costs, decapitalization, and low agricultural and industrial productivity have hindered Honduran economic growth and development. These factors are further exacerbated by the policy stagnation of the provisional government and a bureaucracy concerned with reading the political breezes. The Honduran "difference" exists, but it is possible--given certain conditions--that it could be irrelevant.

III.

The 1981 election campaign proceeds on course despite discussion of voter registration irregularities and rumors of a military coup. For the first time in recent decades, Hondurans will have the opportunity to vote for legally recognized political parties other the historically dominant Liberals and Nationals. The Armed Forces of Honduras are (perhaps reluctantly) committed to election as the best means of extricating themselves from power, but retain lingering doubts as to the capability of either the National or Liberal party to successfully administer an expanded state and confront serious economic and political problems. It is also quite apparent that the military governors,

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are concerned about having their now accustomed access to economic opportunities either restricted or curtailed. Meanwhile, most political parties have made discreet and individualized approaches to various high-ranking officers, cultivating bases for what might be the revised civil-military relations of any new government. Members of the Superior Council of the Armed Forces (CONSUFFAA) discreetly compete to become the next Head of the Armed Forces. For example, it is alleged that Col. Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, currently head of the Public Security Forces (FUSEP) and avidly anti-communist, and Dr. Roberto Suazo Cordova, the Liberal Party presidential nominee, have reached a preliminary understanding on this issue. On the other hand, rather than retire as the new government assumes power, it is said that General Policarpo Paz Garcia is finding it difficult to leave everything behind. Regardless, it appears that elections will be held; but any new administration will have to contend with the military's privileges and national security concerns.

The National Party (PNH) led by Ricardo Zuniga A. entered the campaign with determination and an overtly unified political following. Its close relations with the military have been altered and more reserved since the 1980 electoral loss. The PNH follows the Liberals in public opinion support, and is likely to lose the presidency. It will gain a substantial portion of the Congress. The Nationals have raised the issue of voter registration irregularities, and suggested the possibility of delaying the elections to "correct" the registration deficiencies.

The Liberal Party (PLH), following its customary pattern, entered the campaign divided between the Rodista-Suazo faction and the more center-left People's Liberal Alliance (ALIPO). A small group of Liberal dissidents are coalesced into the United Liberal Front (FUL) led by Ramon Villeda Bermudez. The conservative wing led Suazo Cordova excluded other factions from participating in the party's primary elections, thus assuring Liberal divisiveness. However, ALIPO represents a sizeable voting bloc, and by mid-September signs of reconciliation had appeared. The Liberals are favored to win the presidency and most of the congress, though the PLH will most likely need to form a coalition with a third party in order to control the legislative body.

The new political parties will have an impact on the electoral balance of power although it is difficult to predict specific impacts. The Innovation and Unity Party (PINU) will most likely retain its urban vote of 30-40,000, and

keep its three seats in an expanded congress. The Christian Democrats (PDCH) should draw more votes but its strength is tied to campesino organizations in Choluteca, Cortes, and Copan. Interestingly, it is thought that the party's program of transformation and reform may be a bit militant for many urban groups and thus its message is less-well received in those sectors. The PDCH was the first party to register its candidates with the National Election Board (TNE) and thus strategically has "forced" the issue of holding elections as contemplated.

The other political movement, the Honduran Patriotic Front (FPH), has also registered one of its candidates for deputy--the head of the Socialist Party, Marco Virgilio Carias. The FPH was originally sponsored by the Christian Democrats and grouped together the communists, popular organizations, and several urban-based associations. Its objective during the 1980 constituent assembly elections was to protest what was perceived as fixed elections once the PDCH had been barred from participation. The FPH's objectives were frustrated by an enthusiastic turnout in 1980. Once the Christian Democrats received legal recognition, they pulled out of the FPH. However, the Front remains as an important means whereby the militant left in Honduras can directly participate in the electoral process.

IV.

A public opinion poll taken in June 1981 by a Venezuelan firm and commissioned by the Christian Democrats indicated that the Liberal Party was favored by most Hondurans and had a relatively stronger base than the Nationals in urban areas. General questions also reflected some pessimism about the future in Honduras: almost 95% felt that change was necessary; at the same time over 80% responded that "communism was bad." The divisions among candidates and party choice were similar. When asked, respondents indicated:

	<u>Choice of Candidates</u>	<u>Second Choice</u>
Zuniga-	35%	9%
Suazo-	46%	11%
Corrales-	7%	15% (PDCH)
Andonie-	6%	19% (PINU)
	<u>Choice of Party</u>	<u>Second Choice</u>
PNH-	34%	
PLH-	46%	
PDCH-	5%	15%
PINU-	6%	18%
Other-	8%	No other choice: 30%

Despite this observer's analysis that the traditional Liberal and National parties are anachronistic and outmoded, voter loyalty, tradition, and even some signs of revitalization serve to keep them alive. Thus, challenges from new political parties are fraught with formidable obstacles--even in a relatively free political environment. Citizens who might prefer either of the new parties are evaluating the value of their vote. Discussions include the realities of which party has a chance of winning and subsequently governing.

V.

During the campaign, amidst coup rumors, several issues have been topics of political debate. Indirectly most issues relate to the multitude of social and economic problems and the ability or inability of government to resolve them. Some sectors have criticized the lack of specific programs put forth by the traditional political parties. However, this absence of programatic content is normal and will probably not affect the election results.

The electoral census has been a "political" issue and one that appears to be a pawn of the parties themselves plus other official sectors. The primary concern is the advantage or disadvantage each political movement sees in the current voter registration lists, and how they evaluate any purging of unqualified registrants. In overall terms, the issue seems minor and the electoral machinery most likely will continue ahead.

Of broader public concern was the issue of both official and private corruption including high-ranking military officers, bureaucrats, and some business leaders. While corruption has been and will continue to be indigenous to Honduran political life, public perception of excessive abuse, flagrancy, and a growing sense of injustice are contributing an element of cynicism and alienation to the political process. The point here is that corruption has its limits. At some point, the factor of corruption can become dysfunctional as the balance shifts from "oiling the machinery of government" toward the erosion of legitimacy.

National security is an issue that is approached obliquely. To this observer, it is surprising that the public in general and political leaders in particular are not more forthcoming about the dynamics of Central American politics. It is suggested that Hondurans react with more aplomb to events, or are in fact fatalistic. On the other hand, campaign statements and themes allude

to violence and the desirability of avoiding it. The lack of confidence by domestic and international investors, the turnabout in university student politics, and a hardening of the regime in response to perceived threats of subversion indicate that national security is an issue, though one that is expressed in understated terms. If pressures increase from El Salvador, the issue will generate much more attention in Honduras. Nevertheless, national security will have to compete with economic and broader development issues during the campaign and as the new government takes office in late January.

Golpe rumors, suggestions of postponing elections, and the prospect of the same "old faces" in office have perhaps contributed to the opinion that Honduran voters are apathetic this year. A generalized demoralization stimulated by the public's awareness of corruption and the low-level of political debate may also have generated a degree of apathy. However, voter turnout is affected more by political party mobilization efforts, the fact that election day represents a holiday for many rural Hondurans, and if the elections are open and free, most Hondurans are anticipating a visit to the polls.

VI.

While the elections can be functional in buying time and assisting the transition to civilian government, the new regime will be faced with basic demands that will tax its political sophistication, its political fortitude, and its capacity to respond. The key to any new administration will be its ability to perform. Both symbolic and concrete actions are important. Both short-term and long-term economic issues are critical--bus fares, inflation, investment levels, BOP, etc. Regardless, the demands that will be made will tax the cadre of political, interest-group, and bureaucratic leadership. Honduras has a small base from which to draw its leaders. The political process has been shut down for nearly a decade; and many of the likely candidates for government positions in 1982 are those who were around in 1972. The question then is whether old leaders can rise to the occasion and/or whether new faces are able to make some input. The Liberal party candidate, Suazo Cordova, has indicated he will draw from all sectors and parties in order to acquire a competent and broad-based government team.

VII.

A. Elections though important, are only a means of creating the new government and determining initial support. They do not insure the future success of the administration.

U. S. policy should avoid labeling Honduras the "showcase of democracy" in Central America. This would only increase the pressure on the regime, poise U. S. policy on a rather narrow premise, and has little historical support. The example of the Dominican Republic in 1963 demonstrates some of the risks and considerations that might be involved.

B. Support of the new Honduran regime is imperative and proper given the presumed longer-term US-Honduran objectives; i.e., development, national security, and domestic stability. The new government could suffer a dramatic decline in its legitimacy through a lack of performance and resort to political violence. A deepened economic crisis could worsen these problems. The more direct intervention of individuals or countries intent on destabilizing the Honduran political structure remains a distinct possibility. In conjunction with a crumbling economy and a noneffective government, external intervention would enjoy more propitious conditions for its success.

One consideration is whether Honduras is overdue for some type of anti-US nationalism. There were few overt signs of this in mid-September 1981, but past relations have cumulative effects. If certain combinations of events and conditions occur, the U. S. could find itself identified with militarization, official repression, corruption, and international exploitation. While this is the normal critique of the extreme left in Latin America, any broader-based anti-US feelings would transcend this customary phenomenon and present a host of distinct problems.

C. A question that arises is whether the Honduran political system is sufficiently "resilient" to withstand destabilizing pressures that might be specifically directed at the country. As of 1981, conditions in Honduras were not revolutionary in El Salvadorean terms. It must be observed, however, that the ancien regimes must face essential change or alteration if they are to survive both internal and external pressures. The material for drastic political change is present in Honduras: increasing polarization of socioeconomic conditions, heightened political awareness (though vague in some sectors), institutionalized corruption that approaches the limits of public toleration, signs of official political violence (itself perhaps a response to perceived/actual threats to national security), economic hardships, and the momentum contributed by regional and world currents of change.

D. U. S. policymakers should carefully evaluate the role that emerging regional powers might play in the Caribbean Basin and Central America. This observer has concluded that U. S., Mexican, and Venezuelan objectives, in the broader geopolitical sense, have much in common.** Approach, attitudes, and style differ, but that does not preclude parallel goals or an outcome that serves differing perceptions. These parallel interests may be in some cases more effectively pursued with the U. S. acting in complementary ways, doing nothing, or tacitly following the lead of Mexico, Venezuela, or both. The issue here is to assess long-term objectives of regional stability.

VIII.

Honduran political stability and development are important for U. S. interests in Central America and the Caribbean Basin. They are even more critical for the republic itself. The 1981 elections are only a step along the way. Even so, they carry their own immediate and lingering significance. To the extent that Honduran elites are able to continue their dialogue, work to diffuse tensions, and eventually reach the political decision of acting on the nation's development problems, U. S. support is crucial and desirable. The nature of that support and our relations with Honduras should be assessed with constant reference to long-term perspectives.

**"U. S. Foreign Policy in the Caribbean Basin: New Relations and Parallel Interests." Central American Working Group Paper, New Mexico State University, 1981.

Presidential Terms and Changes of Government
in Honduras, 1932-1981

Tiburcio Andino Carías (1933-1949)	-Elections	30 October 1932
	-new Constitution	March 1936
	-term extended	1939
Juan Manuel Gálvez (1949-1954)	-Elections	11 October 1948
Julio Lozano Díaz (1954-1956)	-Elections	10 October 1954
	-Elections	7 October 1956
Military Triumvirate* (1956-1957)	-Golpe	21 October 1956
Ramón Villeda Morales (1957-1963)	-Elections	21 September 1957
Col. Oswaldo López Arellano (1963-1965)	-Golpe	3 October 1963
Gen. Oswaldo López Arellano (1965-1971)	-Elections	12 February 1965
Ramón Ernesto Cruz (1971-1972)	-Elections	28 March 1971
Gen. Oswaldo López Arellano (1972-1975)	-Golpe	4 December 1972
Gen. Juan Alberto Melgar Castro (1975-1978)	-Auto-golpe	22 April 1975
Gen. Policarpo Paz García (1978-1980)	-Auto-golpe	7 August 1978
Gen. Policarpo Paz García (1980-)	-Elections	20 April 1980
	-Elections	29 November 1981

*Members of the Triumvirate were Gen. Roque Rodríguez, Hector Caraccioli, and Maj. Roberto Gálvez Barnes.

National Elections in Honduras, 1954-1981

Year	Liberal Party	National Party	Third Parties	Total Voters	Registered Voters
1954	122,312 (47.9%)	79,648 (31.2%)	53,241 (20.9%)	255,231	NA
1956*	41,724 (10.1%)	2,003 (0.5%)	370,318 (89.4%)	414,045	NA
1957*	209,109 (61.5%)	101,274 29.8%	29,489 (8.7%)	339,872 (65.1%)	522,359
1965*	272,062 (44.2%)	335,726 (54.6%)	---	614,696 (75.4%)	815,261
1971	269,989 (44.4%)	299,807 (49.3%)	---	608,342 (67.5%)	900,658
1980*	495,768 (49.4%)	423,642 (42.2%)	35,044 (3.5%)	1,003,470 (81.3%)	1,233,756
1981					

*Constituent Assembly elections.

Sources: 1954, El Cronista (20 October 1954); 1956, Anderson in Needler; 1957, El Día (23 September 1957); 1965, 1971, Consejo Nacional de Elecciones; 1980, 1981, Tribunal Nacional de Elecciones.

Honduran Electoral Data by Department, 1980

Department	Liberal Party	National Party	Innovation Party	Total Vote	Registered Voters
Atlantíd.	26,927-54.1%	18,392-36.9%	2,372-4.8%	49,797-77.4%	64,329
Colón	13,121-55.8%	8,444-35.9%	619-2.6%	23,512-72.1%	32,617
Comayagua	30,423-50.6%	25,684-42.7%	1,424-2.4%	60,091-82.6%	72,766
Copán	29,254-45.2%	31,526-48.7%	1,366-2.1%	64,767-85.7%	75,606
Cortés	83,646-59.5%	42,571-30.3%	7,475-5.3%	140,595-76.7%	183,372
Choluteca	26,786-41.4%	35,527-50.3%	2,565-4.0%	64,650-81.6%	79,211
El Paraíso	33,026-56.4%	22,478-38.4%	888-1.5%	58,594-81.4%	71,998
Fr. Morazán	75,232-48.1%	65,487-42.1%	8,518-5.4%	156,508-82.5%	189,631
Gracias a Dios	1,890-43.2%	2,141-48.9%	104-2.4%	4,376-67.2%	6,519
Intibucá	10,558-33.7%	18,420-58.7%	594-1.9%	31,364-83.8%	37,411
Islas Bahía	2,172-45.1%	2,393-49.7%	147-3.1%	4,819-76.2%	6,324
La Paz	14,400-49.1%	12,773-43.6%	586-2.0%	29,312-86.9%	33,729
Lempira	15,868-33.7%	27,165-57.7%	1,347-2.9%	47,075-80.9%	58,218
Ocoatepeque	11,443-47.6%	11,231-46.7%	387-1.6%	24,041-85.7%	28,070
Olancho	20,059-49.7%	25,303-43.3%	1,748-3.0%	58,453-79.7%	73,351
Santa Bárbara	38,514-49.6%	34,060-43.8%	2,366-3.1%	77,683-84.9%	91,470
Valle	14,016-45.7%	14,866-48.4%	505-1.7%	30,698-82.5%	37,195
Yoro	39,432-54.6%	27,821-38.5%	2,033-2.8%	72,187-78.5%	91,939
Republic	495,768-49.4%	423,642-42.2%	35,044-3.5%	1,003,470-81.3%	1,233,756

Source: Tribunal Nacional de Elecciones, "Resultado de las elecciones para diputados a la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, 20 abril de 1980." Tegucigalpa D. C., June 1980. Totals do not include 4,948 votes for independent candidates in the department of Cortés.

General Data for Central American Countries

Compiled by James A. Morris
1981

	Population 1980 (000s)	Area Km ²	% Urban 1979	GNP/Capita 1978	% Literacy	Life Expectancy at Birth
Guatemala	6,939.8	108,890	39.0	\$910	45.4 (1973)	57.8 yrs (1975-80)
El Salvador	4,812.7	20,935	40.2	\$660	59.5 (1975)	62.2 yrs. (1975-80)
Honduras	3,594.7	112,088	35.1	\$480	59.5 (1979)	57.1 yrs (1979)
Nicaragua	2,669.5	130,550	56.6	\$840	50.0 (1979)*	55.2 yrs (1979)
Costa Rica	2,285.7	50,900	45.2	\$1540	89.8 (1973)	70.0 yrs (1978)
Panama	1,930.8	75,650	53.1	\$1290	79.3 (1977)	67.9 yrs (1975-80)
Total(s)	22,233.2	500,528				
Sweden	8,300.0	450,000	87.0	\$10,210	99.0 (1975)	75.0 yrs (1978)

*Now claimed to be 85-90%

Sources: IDB; World Bank

	% Labor in Agriculture	Energy Consump/ Kgs. coal Equivalent (1978)	Capita	% GDP (1978) Agri.	Indus.	Services	Exports/GDP (1978)
Guatemala	57	260		29	21	50	19.5 %
El Salvador	52	265		32	26	42	19.2
Honduras	64	284		23	26	51	28.5
Nicaragua	44	517		22	27	51	34.8
Costa Rica	29	564		4	33	63	38.1
Panama	35	991					46.6
Total(s)	5	5,954					
Sweden							

Distribution of Farm Holdings by Size and Number (1970 estimates)

	Area (%)	Number (%)	
Landless	-	27.7	
Subsistence 0-4 has.	6.6	48.8	Ave size = 1.1 has or 2.7 acres
Med/Family 4-35 has.	20.2	17.9	
Multifamily 35-350 has.	35.2	4.0	
Large Holdings 350 + has.	38.0	0.4	Ave size = 790 has or 1950 acres