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**Repression, Civil Conflict, and Leadership Tenure: A Case Study of  
Honduras**

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**Susan Ariel Aaronson  
George Washington University**

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Institute for International Economic Policy  
1957 E St. NW, Suite 502  
Voice: (202) 994-5320  
Fax: (202) 994-5477  
Email: [iiep@gwu.edu](mailto:iiep@gwu.edu)  
Web: [www.gwu.edu/~iiep](http://www.gwu.edu/~iiep)

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**Susan Ariel Aaronson with Kimberly R. Bullard**



*Source: Picture of Honduras border crossing, Honduras Travel, <https://tinyurl.com/yax8wpkg>*

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## Executive Summary

In many of our case studies, governments use repression to maintain power and to prevent others from obtaining power. But in Honduras, repression needs to be understood as part of a network of corruption, impunity, poverty, violence, inequality, and inadequate development. Honduras is an extremely violent society. Elites in the military, government, street gangs, organized criminal organizations, and the private sector collaborate and occasionally compete to extract rents from both legal and illegal activity. Leaders use the security forces to keep the population docile and to extract these rents. Since 2015, Hondurans have at times taken to the streets to complain about corruption, inadequate governance, crime, and a lack of security. The government has responded to citizens' efforts to disrupt this system of violence, corruption, and impunity with violence, militarization, and a few policy changes at the margins.

Given this mix of corruption, impunity, extreme poverty, inadequate access to public goods, violence, and drug trafficking, it is not surprising that governance is weak and many Hondurans suffer. They are caught in a vicious circle, because Honduras does not have sufficient growth to solve or reduce its systemic problems and thus far nothing—not protests, violent and political repression, or foreign aid, for example—has not brought economic and political stability.

The United States has also played an important role in exacerbating Honduras's problems. For instance, the United States deported gang members back to Honduras in the mid-1990s, after which these individuals often could not find legitimate economic opportunities. As a result, the deportees used their knowledge of the drug trade and their connections to the United States to build new markets for drugs, extortion, and trafficking of persons within Honduras. Continued demand for drugs in the United States perpetuates criminal activities in Honduras. In turn, the military and the police fight gangs, but in so doing, they also tax them through corruption, perpetuating violence.

Although policymakers in the United States and other nations are cognizant of the systemic nature of Honduras's problems, these governments have not worked to address these problems in a coherent manner. Nor have Honduran elites exhibited the will to address these problems systematically. By consequence, Hondurans remain mired in violence, corruption, poverty, and a lack of opportunities.

### **Q1. Do Hondurans respond differently when confronted with political repression, violent repression, or a mix of repressive tactics?**

Hondurans are used to violence and repression. In general, Honduran citizens respond to both violent and political repression with peaceful tactics. They have also tried to emigrate to escape domestic insecurity and the lack of economic opportunities. However, the United States has deported many of these immigrants back to Honduras.

### **Q2. Do officials use different types of repression in response to different types of civil conflict?**

Honduran officials have used both violent and political repression in response to both peaceful and violent protests.

**Q3. Does the use and type of repression (whether political, violent, or some combination) increase the likelihood that rulers retain power?**

Honduran officials have used various forms of repression to maintain power, including the 2009 coup and the packing of the Supreme Court. Under the administrations of Porfirio Lobo Sosa (2010 – 2014) and Juan Orlando Hernández (2014 – present day), government agents have relied on the use of the military in civilian roles. President Hernández has created a new quasi-military police organization, which some Hondurans fear will become his personal protection force.

## **I. Honduras Case Study**

The case study proceeds as follows. First, we give an overview and recent history of Honduras. Second, we outline the civil conflict/repression relationship in Honduras, focusing on the 2009 military coup d'état. Third, we describe the repressors, and then we examine the underlying factors that may cause people to protest (or refrain from protest) in Honduras. Fourth, we focus on the nature of repression in Honduras (types and victims), as well as Honduran citizens' response to repression. Fifth, we discuss the economic and political consequences of Honduran repression at home and abroad and the likelihood that repression will continue in Honduras. Finally, by focusing on our three questions, we note the key points revealed by the Honduran case study.

### **A. Overview**

In the 20th century, the international press often described Honduras in one of two ways. During the first half of the 20th century, it portrayed Honduras as a “banana republic,” because bananas were its main export and foreign banana companies had outsized influence. However, from the 1960s to the 1990s, the global press depicted Honduras as a militarized state, where the military controlled the government (Malone: 2012, 2; Salomón: 2012; Pérez and Pestana: 2016, 8; Shipley: 2016, 4). Honduras today remains dependent on commodity exports, and the military and police still have extensive control. In that regard, it remains a highly militarized, banana republic. But Honduras is also a failing state, because societal violence and crime rates are very high and government services are so poor that many citizens are fleeing the country (Haugaard and Kinoshian: 2015; Ghosh: 2013). Government and business officials, as well as individuals in gangs and organized criminal groups, use both political and, at times, violent repressive means to maintain economic and political control (Meyer: 2017; Chayes: 2017). Nonetheless, many Hondurans are determined to improve their country's governance.

Honduras is located in the Northern Triangle region of Central America. It is a relatively small country with a GDP of \$20.93 billion (2016) and a population of 8.893 million (2016) (CIA: 2017). Approximately 90 percent of the Honduran populace is mestizo, or a mix of indigenous and European ancestries, while 7 percent is indigenous, and 2 to 3 percent is Garifuna, or Afro-descendant (CIA: 2017). In 1821, Honduras gained its independence from the Spanish colonial empire. In 1839, it became a presidential republic. Although its constitution includes some checks and balances and separation of powers, the executive branch is strong and as a consequence has historically dominated the legislative and judicial branches (Merrill: 1995; BTI: 2016, 9). The legislative branch of Honduras is a unicameral congress, whose 128 members are directly elected every four years. The country is divided into 18 departments, eclipsed by the centralization of power and influenced by two large urban hubs, the political capital, Tegucigalpa, in the southeast and the business and industrial capital, San Pedro Sula, in the northwest (CIA: 2017).

Honduras's economy is largely dependent on two sources: exports to the United States and worker remittances (The World Bank: 2017; Department of State: 2015b). Honduras is a signatory of the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), and it exports mainly

textiles/T-shirts, coffee, spices, and seafood.<sup>1</sup> Because of this agreement, the country has offered incentives to attract foreign investment and has a growing maquiladora industry (offshore assembly for re-export) (World Bank: 2017; Department of State: 2015b; Meyer: 2017).

Honduras is not only dependent on the United States for trade, but also for improving governance and security.<sup>2</sup> The United States is one of Honduras's two major development donors and its largest military trainer.<sup>2</sup> According to the Department of State, the United States uses foreign aid to help the Honduran people create a healthy and open economy capable of sustainable growth, improve the business and investment climate, protect U.S. citizens and citizens, strengthen the rule of law, and promote the well-being and security of Honduran citizens. U.S. military and civilian officials work with Honduras to address transnational challenges—including the fight against transnational criminal networks, narcotics trafficking, money laundering, irregular migration, and trafficking in persons—and supports Honduran efforts to protect the environment. In so doing, the United States hopes to encourage Hondurans to stay in their country instead of immigrating (Department of State: 2017b). The U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America (CARSI), designed to promote economic prosperity, strengthen governance, and improve security in Honduras and the rest of the region, guides U.S.-Honduran bilateral cooperation (Meyer: 2017, 2).

But the United States has not always succeeded in helping the country's police and military meet internationally accepted human-rights and good-governance norms. As an example, the United States has trained local law enforcement units in Honduras, yet some members of the U.S.-trained security forces have allegedly committed acts of violent repression (Korthuis: 2014, 20-21). As a result, members of U.S. Congress have required that the U.S. government withhold 75 percent of assistance for the Honduran central government until Honduras addresses concerns such as border security, corruption, and human rights abuses (Meyer: 2017, 2).

Although the Honduran economy has grown slowly, since the 2000s, the country still lags behind the rest of the region. Honduras is one of the least developed and economically diversified countries. The country's growth has not been strong enough to attract significant foreign investment, reduce unemployment, or enable the government to improve the nation's infrastructure, public health, and education (CIA: 2017; The World Bank: 2016; Meyer: 2017). Honduras also has the highest level of economic inequality in Latin America. As of 2013, Honduras had one of the smallest middle classes in Latin America and among the largest shares of poor households, including the highest proportion living on less than \$1.25 per day. The World Bank associates a large and growing middle class with both more stable growth and society (The World Bank: 2017; CIA: 2017). Nearly 65 percent (2015) of the Honduran populace lives in poverty, and the primary school dropout rate is high (CIA: 2017; Department of State: 2015b). Poverty rates are higher among the rural and indigenous people and in the south, west, and along the eastern border than in the north and central areas where most of Honduras's industries and

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the United States Trade Representative. "CAFTA-DR (Dominican Republic-Central America FTA)," Last modified 2017, <https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/cafta-dr-dominican-republic-central-america-fta>.

<sup>2</sup> Both Canada and the European Union are also major development donors and sources of investment. See Canada, Embassy of Canada to Costa, Honduras, and Nicaragua, "Canada—Honduras Relations," October 2015, [http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/costa\\_rica/bilateral\\_relations\\_bilaterales/canada\\_honduras.aspx?lang=eng](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/costa_rica/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/canada_honduras.aspx?lang=eng), and International Cooperation and Development, "Honduras," Last modified [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/countries/honduras\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/countries/honduras_en).

infrastructure are concentrated (CIA: 2017; Department of State: 2017; Meyer: 2017, 1). Many of its citizens are young and could make significant contributions to productivity and growth, but they need more effective education so they can obtain and create jobs. Yet many schools are unsafe and provide an inadequate education (Meyer: 2017).

Honduras's recent history is not only colored by poverty, instability, and violence. On October 29, 1998, Category 5 Hurricane Mitch made landfall on Honduras's Atlantic coast (CIA: 2017).<sup>3</sup> Heavy rainfall led to widespread flooding and mudslides, destroying entire villages, a large portion of Honduras's infrastructure, and the vast majority of the country's agricultural crops—a huge economic loss given the fact that the Honduran economy is particularly dependent on agriculture and the maquiladora industry (CIA: 2017; Department of State: 2001, 1).<sup>4</sup> The hurricane was the deadliest tropical storm or hurricane to hit the Western Hemisphere in more than 200 years (i.e. since the Great Hurricane of 1780). It killed more than 5,600 Hondurans and left hundreds of thousands of families homeless and stranded, as well as dependent on international relief efforts for food and water. In 2001, the U.S. Department of State noted that the extensive land instability caused by Hurricane Mitch resulted in more than \$3 billion in damages as well as an economic recession in 1999 (Department of State: 2001, 1; Freedom House: 1998). Many Hondurans lost their primary sources of livelihood. In the immediate aftermath, U.S. officials indicated an increase in unauthorized southern-border crossings by Hondurans, who had left the country in search of better opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

Almost 20 years later, Honduras has not recovered from Hurricane Mitch (Lefebvre: 2016, 19). Honduras's current debt measures more than 40 percent of its GDP (2015) (The World Bank: 2015a, 8-10). At the behest of The World Bank and other major donors, the government has tried to cut costs (The World Bank: 2017; CIA: 2017; Freedom House: 2014). Under an IMF agreement, the government agreed to reduce the budget deficit. The current administration of Juan Orlando Hernández consolidated and eliminated several ministries, which, coupled with the lack of liquidity, affected the quality and reach of social services. Meanwhile, the country has a culture of corruption and impunity. Government officials think they are entitled to take allocated funds as well as goods from state agencies. As a result, the government cannot provide sufficient investment in and adequate access to health care and education.

## **B. What are the Roots of Repression and Civil Conflict in Honduras?**

One of the basic responsibilities of a government is to ensure that its people feel safe and secure. However, polling data reveals that Hondurans do not feel secure.<sup>6</sup> They live in a country that has one of the highest murder rates in the world. Not surprisingly, many citizens have fled the country for safety in addition to greater economic opportunities (Meyer: 2017, 9). While Honduran police and military at times try to disrupt drug-trafficking and criminal networks, they also profit from those same networks and do little to effectively undermine such business. According to the Department of State, the underlying

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<sup>3</sup> NA, "Hurricane Mitch," *History.com*, A+E Networks: 2009, <http://www.history.com/topics/hurricane-mitch>.

<sup>4</sup> NA, "Hurricane Mitch," *History.com*, A+E Networks: 2009, <http://www.history.com/topics/hurricane-mitch>.

<sup>5</sup> NA, "Hurricane Mitch," *Migration News* 6, no. 2 (1999), <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=1721>; NA, "Central America: Hurricane Mitch," *Migration News* 5, no. 12 (1998), <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=3451>; Daniel Reichman, "Honduras: The Perils of Remittance Dependence and Clandestine Migration," *Migration Information Source*, April 11, 2013, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/honduras-perils-remittance-dependence-and- clandestine-migration>.

<sup>6</sup> For further detail and sources, see Section VII below on the public's opinion in Honduras.

problems contributing to these abuses are corruption, high rates of impunity for violators of the law (especially political elites), a weak and underfunded judiciary easily susceptible to politicization and corruption, a lack of accountability, and a profound fiscal crisis that has led to a persistent lack of state resources and increased the state's incapacity to protect its citizens (Department of State: 2017, 2010, 2006, 1). But Sarah Chayes of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace argues that these problems are systemic and endemic. Moreover, she notes that the United States bears significant responsibility for such issues (Interview with Sarah Chayes: 2017). On the one hand, U.S. policymakers have deported gang members and other Hondurans coming to the United States to seek safety and economic opportunities. On the other hand, the United States has done little to reduce the demand for illegal drugs from Central America, to help the country reduce local violence, to encourage growth in regions outside its two largest cities, and to develop strategies to reduce corruption and increase state capacity.

Honduras today is repressive in the sense that state entities including the presidency, the national police, and the military are willing to repress citizens' voice and even commit violence to maintain power, order, and economic control (Chayes: 2017; Meyer: 2017). Until about 50 years ago, the military and police were clearly subordinate to civilians. Nevertheless, the military has gradually gained greater control. Some political scientists including Daniel Altschuler, Javier Corrales, and Cynthia McClintock maintain that the Honduran republic was a relatively stable, democracy from independence in the 19th century until the 1950s or early 1960s (Altschuler and Corrales: 2009; Ruhl: 1998, 1; McClintock: 2016). These scholars note in this period Honduras had a weak, non-professionalized, and very small (e.g. in numbers) military, which did not seek to control the state or the economy. They also suggest that Honduras had few land conflicts between peasants (*campesinos*) and large landowners, low levels of intra-elite political conflicts and fragmentation, and a willingness to adopt social reforms (Altschuler and Corrales: 2009; Ruhl: 1998, 2-4). Lynn Holland suggests elites and peasants were seen as part of a whole community such that Honduran society displayed a level of societal cohesion uncharacteristic of young democracies (Holland: 2014). Some analysts believe that this level of social cohesion helped the country develop one of the strongest trade union movements in Central America as a response to political and military leaders' tradition of concessions, granting social reforms to appeal to the majority of its populace (Merrill: 1995; Ruhl: 1998, 2-4).

In the mid-1950s, as the military became more powerful, visible and interventionist, the country gradually became less stable (Merrill: 1995; Malone: 2012, 2). In 1954, workers went on strike at many of the country's banana plantations. In the same year, President Juan Manuel Gálvez (1949 – 1954) allowed the United States to use Honduran territory to launch its invasion against Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, and Honduras signed the Bilateral Treaty of Military Assistance with the United States (Merrill: 1995; Pérez and Pestana: 2016, 8; International Crisis Group: 2017). In 1956, the military ousted President Julio Lozano Díaz (1954 – 1956), who had become increasingly unpopular with the Honduran people and elites (Merrill: 1995). In 1957, the legislature drafted a new constitution, which institutionalized and gave the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF) legal autonomy as a state agency (Pérez and Pestana: 2016, 9). Moreover, the U.S. government saw significant communist threats in neighboring countries, El Salvador, Guatemala, and later Nicaragua. Over time, the military became progressively more powerful and bellicose (Pérez and Pestana: 2016, 9). As an example, in 1969, El Salvador and Honduras went to war allegedly over soccer, but in fact the two countries clashed over rising immigration from El Salvador to Honduras. The war furthered instability in the region and ironically increased the

clout of the military in Honduras (Merrill: 1995; Pérez and Pestana: 2016, 9).

Beginning in the 1960s through the 1980s, the United States became more involved in Central America. Several countries in the region had become unstable and U.S. officials determined that they would use U.S. soft and hard power to halt the spread of communism in the Americas (CIA: 2017; Merrill: 1995; Holland: 2014; International Crisis Group: 2017; Ruhl: 1998, 2-4).<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, violent civil wars broke out in El Salvador and Guatemala, Honduras's northern neighbors, with the participation of what some analysts considered to be pro-communist guerrillas backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba. Authoritarian leaders who supported the United States also ruled Honduras's southern neighbor, Nicaragua (Merrill: 1993). Because of its location, Honduras became an ally for Salvadoran government forces fighting leftist guerrillas and a refuge for anti-Sandinista contras battling the Marxist government in Nicaragua during the 1970s and 1980s (CIA: 2017; Ruhl: 1998; Kruckewitt: 2005, 171; Merrill: 1995; Holland: 1995).

Not surprisingly, the two countries increased their military and economic cooperation during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>8</sup> In 1983, the United States established a joint task force in Honduras (now known as Joint Task Force-Bravo). The U.S. military also relied on Soto Cano Air Base (then Palmerola Air Base) in Honduras throughout the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Several analysts assert that this new dynamic helped to facilitate the Honduran Armed Forces' (HOAF) control over civilian leaders as the military seemed to have the United States's blessing as well as largesse (Holland: 2014; Kruckewitt: 2005, 171).

Despite their support for the military, Hondurans tired of military control and elected a civilian government in 1981 (Merrill: 1995). Nonetheless, senior military officials continued to exercise considerable control over the new civilian government (CIA: 2017; Ruhl: 1998; DeGaetani: 2006). The Constitution of 1982 guaranteed the military the same political and institutional autonomy as provided in 1957 (Pérez and Pestana: 2016, 11).<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Hondurans suffered an increase in human rights violations—most notably, forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and summary killings—at the hands of the armed forces, since their civilian leaders were unable to curb the military's power (Salomón: 2014; International Crisis Group: 2017; Merrill: 1995; Ruhl: 1998; DeGaetani: 2006).<sup>11</sup> In its 1994 report *The Facts Speaks for Themselves*, Human Rights Watch, in partnership with the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), translated into English the Preliminary Report on the Disappearances of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Rights in Honduras (CEJIL: 2009). The report examined the behavior of both the U.S. and Honduran governments—and in particular, the CIA-trained, Honduran clandestine military death squad, Battalion 3-16—during the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> It documented 179 cases

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<sup>7</sup> NA, "Bolivia expels U.S. Aid agency after Kerry 'backyard' comment," *Reuters.com*, May 1, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-bolivia-usaid-idUSBRE94013V20130501>.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Southern Command, "Joint Task Force-Bravo," Fact Sheet, March 15, 2017, <http://www.jtfb.southcom.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/434598/joint-task-force-bravo/>.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "U.S. Troops Arrive at Honduras Base to Show Support," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1988, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/03/18/world/us-troops-arrive-at-honduras-base-to-show-support.html>; Sánchez, Alex, "Honduras Becomes U.S. Military Foothold for Central America," *Nacla.org*, September 4, 2007, <http://nacla.org/news/honduras-becomes-us-military-foothold-central-america>.

<sup>10</sup> Honduras, Constitution of the Republic of Honduras, 1982 (as Amended), Trans. The Constitute Project, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Honduras\\_2013.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Honduras_2013.pdf?lang=en).

<sup>11</sup> "Honduras Country Profile," *BBC News*, January 3, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-18954311>.

<sup>12</sup> Honduras, 1994, *The Facts Speak for Themselves: The Preliminary Report of the National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights in Honduras*, trans. Human Rights Watch/Americas and Center for Justice and International Law (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994), v-vi, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/HONDURAS947.PDF>.

of forced disappearances as well as a pattern of repressive policies that the Honduran government employed.<sup>13</sup> In the report, the Honduran government acknowledged its responsibility for these abuses, including arbitrary detentions, torture, summary executions, and forced disappearances (Human Rights Watch: 1995). But the government did not punish any perpetrators, and some state actors continued to act in a repressive manner (Amnesty International: 1994, 1997, 1998, 2000).

Neither human rights abuses nor democracy brought an end to military influence over the polity. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the consecutive administrations of Presidents Carlos Roberto Reina (1993–1998) and Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé (1998–2002) took steps to curb—and constitutionally and legislatively reform—the military’s power (Amnesty International: 2000; Freedom House: 1998). For instance, these leaders reduced the size of the armed forces, eliminated the military draft, separated the police from military control to place it under civilian leadership, and subordinated the armed forces to a civilian defense minister (Department of State: 2001; Freedom House: 1998). Nevertheless, the security forces continued to play a major role in public security, as the Honduran executive branch struggled to find a balance between reining in Honduras’s security forces and addressing a new wave of crime and gang-related violence that was sweeping across the country (Amnesty International: 2001, 121).<sup>14</sup> According to Freedom House, the security forces continued to commit human rights violations with impunity (Amnesty International: 2000; Freedom House: 1998). Finally, the presidents in this period continued to rely upon the military, rather than the national police, to quell public protests by organized civil society groups such as labor unions (Department of State: 2001, Section 2b).

Senior U.S. officials were well aware that the Honduran military had become increasingly interventionist, and at times acted with impunity. In 1996, the Department of State reported that Honduras did not have three branches of government but four (Department of State: 1996). It asserted that the fourth branch was the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF), since “it operate[d] with considerable institutional and legal autonomy, particularly in the realm of internal security and military affairs” (Department of State: 1996). The HOAF “control[led] the police, numerous private sector businesses, and the national telephone company [Hondutel]” (Department of State: 1996). In 1998, the Honduran military came under civilian control through constitutional reform. However, due to the endemic weakness of Honduran institutions, the U.S. government recognizes that the Honduran civilian authorities, with the exception of the presidency, do not have effective control over the military (Department of State: 2017-2006, 1; IACHR: 2016, 26-27; Freedom House: 2017; Pérez and Pestana: 2016, 4-5, 11).

### **C. Recent History of Repression and Civil Conflict in Honduras**

In 2008, the Honduran polity became deeply polarized. Then-President José Manuel Zelaya Rosales (2006–2009) wanted to do more to help the country’s poor and middle classes by providing free public education and higher wages. To finance some of these policies, he reached out to countries such as

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<sup>13</sup> Honduras, 8-124; Chapter II lists the personal information, brief synopsis of disappearance event, alleged repressor, source(s) for all 179 disappeared persons. Chapter III, which begins on Page 125, describes the pattern of human rights abuses and in particular the nature of the chronicled forced disappearances.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Skidmore, Peter H. Smith, and James N. Green, eds. 2013, “Chapter 16: Honduras: A County and a Coup,” in *Modern Latin America* (Web Supplement for the 8th Edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press, <https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-16-latin-america-in-the-world-arena-1990s-present/honduras-a-country-and-a-coup/>.

Venezuela for development aid. Unfortunately, he was unable to halt rising and widespread crime and violence, which reduced public support for his administration (Meyer: 2010, 2-3; Salomón: 2012; Holland: 2014). In 2009, believing that the 1982 constitution required an update to address a changed Honduran society facing new challenges, Zelaya called for a non-binding referendum on constitutional reform despite judicial orders forbidding it. Moreover, although Zelaya was a member of the Liberal Party (one of the two traditional and center-right political parties in Honduras), he had alienated many of his colleagues in the party. Some of the country's elites feared that Zelaya would make the country more like Venezuela and Cuba. Many members of the business community supported his removal as did the Honduran Supreme Court and the majority of the country's national legislators (Meyer: 2017).

Around 5 a.m. on the June 28, 2009, Honduran soldiers breached the presidential palace. The HOAF detained Zelaya and flew him out of the country to forced exile in San José, Costa Rica—still in his pajamas, according to Zelaya's personal account of the coup (Meyer: 2017, 4; Interview with Katalina Montana: 2017). Later that same day, the national congress voted Zelaya out of office and approved Roberto Micheletti of the Liberal Party, as interim president. He served out the remainder of Zelaya's term. According to Peter J. Meyer of the Congressional Research Service, Zelaya was not given due process (Meyer: 2017).

Many Hondurans wanted Zelaya reinstated and took to the streets. However, although the majority of the protestors demonstrated peacefully, the military used brutal force—including tanks on the streets—to dispel protestors. Micheletti declared a state of emergency (Meyer: 2017; Salomón: 2012; Holland: 2014). The government's response in the roughly six months following the June 28, 2009 coup established the trend of impunity, heightened repression, and rise in crime that continues today.

The coup marked a dividing line. Before the coup, the country had a stable, electoral democracy. There were two major political parties that competed for power: the Liberal Party and the National Party. However, after the coup, both parties became weaker, though the National Party retained power. According to Meyer, the coup soured many Hondurans on their country's democracy. Because the two political parties failed to adequately address citizens' concerns, many Hondurans stopped voting and gave up on the political process (Meyer: 2017; Interview with Katalina Montana: 2017).

For the bulk of Hondurans, things did not get better after the coup. The country experienced a huge uptick in violence, including the slayings of labor activists, peasants, politicians, and journalists. Interim President Micheletti responded to citizen protests by giving more authority to the military to maintain stability (Wilkenson: 2015; Meyer: 2017). He suspended civil liberties, and government officials selectively applied the law, appearing to prosecute opponents with greater frequency (Meyer: 2017; Human Rights Watch: 2010b). The Micheletti administration attempted to control civil society and the country through more extreme repressive tactics, like the installation of a curfew, the military's occupation of media outlets such as Hondutel, and authorizing the military to violently quell protests (Human Rights Watch: 2010; Amnesty International: 2009, 5, 7, 14-16).

In response to the grave human rights situation, the Organization of American States (OAS) suspended Honduras from participating in the regional institution, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) conducted an emergency field visit and found the government used the state of

emergency as means of preventing citizen protests (IACHR: 2009a, 2009b).<sup>15</sup> The IACHR was not alone in its assessment of the difficult situation in Honduras. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch found that the rule of law in Honduras disintegrated after the coup (Amnesty International: 2009, 5, 7, 14-16; Human Rights Watch: 2010b).<sup>16</sup> For several months after the coup, the security forces shut down opposition media, arbitrarily detained thousands, and killed a number of protestors (Human Rights Watch: 2010).

Ironically, in 2015, the Honduran Supreme Court struck down an article of the constitution that prohibited a sitting or former president from seeking a second term. But the ban was voided in an unusual manner. Responding to a petition from a group of legislators, a five-member panel of the Supreme Court voted unanimously to rescind the constitution's reelection ban. Furthermore, President Hernández or his proxies had appointed all five of these justices. Observers called this event the "technical coup" (Meyer: 2017). Taking advantage of this new decision, Hernández is running for reelection in November 2017 (Wilkenson: 2015; Meyer: 2017).

## II. Who are the Repressors in Honduras?

Honduras has some similarities with Thailand; in both countries the military has usurped democratically elected governments and the military is highly corrupt. In Thailand, the constitution grants control to officials to maintain stability, while citizens' democratic rights are restricted. However, in Honduras, repression seems to be more ad hoc and uneven. It is a tool to maintain corruption and economic control. Nonetheless, government entities—including the president, the national legislature, the national police, the security forces, the Public Ministry, and the judiciary—are, at times, directly and indirectly complicit in violence against Honduran citizens. Non-state actors, such as private security guards of businessmen and large landowners, transnational and street gangs such as *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) and the 18th Street Gang (M-18), and civilian-vigilante groups, occasionally also act in a repressive manner.<sup>17</sup>

As noted above, although Honduras's government is a constitutional, multiparty republic, it is executive-centered. In practice, the president decides the majority of the country's public policies and makes most of governance decisions (Department of State: 2017, 2006, 2001, 1996, 1; Merrill: 1995). Although Honduran officials revised the constitution to include some checks and balances in 1982, the legislature is not an equal partner. The president exercises significant control over the unicameral congress and judiciary (Merrill: 1995). Furthermore, the president dictates the practices of the military, national police, and other security forces (Pérez and Pestana: 2017, 10; Ruhl: 1998).

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<sup>15</sup> Organization of American States, "OAS Suspends Membership of Honduras," Press Release, July 5, 2009, [http://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-219/09](http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-219/09).

<sup>16</sup> Ismael Moreno, "Honduras: behind the crisis," *OpenDemocracy.net*, July 3, 2009, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/honduras-behind-the-crisis>; Organization of American States, "OAS Suspends Membership of Honduras, July 5, 2009, [http://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-219/09](http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-219/09); Freedom House, 2011, *Freedom in the World: Honduras*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/honduras>.

<sup>17</sup> Civilian-vigilante groups are neighborhood groups, members of the general population, members of the business community, and at times renegade elements of the security forces that allegedly use unwarranted lethal force against supposed habitual or known criminals. According to the Department of State: 2000, "widespread frustration at the inability of the security forces to prevent and control crime, and the well-founded perception that corrupt security personnel were complicit in the high crime rate, led to continued considerable public support for vigilante justice."

Since 2010, the Honduran Congress, influenced by the presidency, has responded to the country’s security problems by creating new militarized police units and by using violent repressive tactics. These new state security forces have used violent repression against criminals as well as innocent citizens caught in the crossfire. The national congress approved new laws allowing these changes. For instance, in November 2011, the national legislature passed an emergency decree that allowed the military to carry out domestic security responsibilities (Human Rights Watch: 2014). In 2013, the congress passed yet another law, which created the Military Police for Public Order (PMOP), a military police force with authority to carry out domestic-security operations (Department of State: 2014, 6-7; Human Rights Watch: 2014; Interview with Eric Olson: 2017; Cáceres: 2014). Under this law, the military can make arrests to facilitate control of violent, gang-run neighborhoods (Department of State: 2014, 6-7; Human Rights Watch: 2014; Olson: 2017; Cáceres: 2014).

Current President Hernández has also relied upon two new hybrid forces: the aforementioned PMOP, which is under control of the Ministry of Defense, and another military-trained police unit under the control of the Honduran National Police (HNP) and known as the TIGRES (in English, Special Response Team and Intelligence Troop). In addition, an interagency task force (FUSINA, or National Interinstitutional Security Force) coordinates the military and police forces, as well as prosecutors, judges, and intelligence agencies. Because he helped establish these new entities, some analysts fear that these militarized groups remain loyal to Hernández and that they will place his interests over the national interest (Meyer: 2017; Chayes: 2016; Interview with Orlando Pérez: 2017; Frank: 2015).

In 2017, the Department of State asserted that these widely dispersed authorities have failed to make the country safer, improve trust, or address the country’s problems. Moreover, as previously noted, the civilian authorities are unable or unwilling to effectively maintain civilian control over the security forces (Department of State: 2017-2001, 1). Similarly, Sarah Chayes reports that President Hernández increasingly uses the Honduran military for non-defense purposes, including the patrol of indigenous communities, to protect land claimed by elites as their property, and to prevent their constituents from exercising their free speech rights (Chayes: 2016, 32-33).

In Honduras, the security forces represent a complex mix of various repressive state, non-state, and criminal actors as the following table illustrates:

**Figure 1: Honduras’s Repressive State Actors**

<b>Year Created</b>	<b>Repressive Actor</b>	<b>Reports To</b>	<b>Security Function</b>	<b>Type of Repression</b>
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Reestablished with the 1982 Constitution	Civilian authorities (president, congress, Public Ministry, Supreme Court, and national court system)	--	--	Political repression towards prisoners and detainees, judges and prosecutors, members of indigenous and Afro-descendent communities; Inadequate protection measures for activists; Ineffective enforcement of labor laws; Pretrial detention; Surveillance
2014	Special Response Team and Intelligence Troop (TIGRES)	National Police	Domestic Security	Surveillance; Political and violent repression
1825	Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF)	Secretariat of Defense	External Security / Domestic Security	Violent repression; Surveillance
2014	National Interinstitutional Security Force (FUSINA)	Civilian authorities led by the President, and representatives from Supreme Court, Congress, Public Ministry, Secretariats of Security and Defense	Coordination of overlapping responsibilities of HNP, PMOP, National Intelligence Directorate, Public Ministry, and national court system	Violent and political repression
2013	Military Police for Public Order (PMOP)	Military authorities	Operations sanctioned by civilian security officials and military leaders	Violent repression such as torture, arbitrary arrest, and illegal detention
1888-1959, then reestablished 1998	Honduran National Police (HNP)	Secretariat of Security	Internal Security	Use excessive force such as torture, arbitrary arrest, and illegal detentions

Approx. Mid-1990s	Organized Criminal Elements (i.e. DTOs; Transnational gangs (maras) like Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the Eighteenth Street Gang (M-18); street gangs, or pandillas)	--	--	Use excessive force; Commit violent crimes and acts of murder, extortion, kidnapping, torture, human trafficking, and intimidation of journalists, women, and human rights defenders
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*Source: Table prepared by Kimberly R. Bullard with data from the U.S. Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Honduras, 1996 to 2017*

### **A. The National Police**

Police are supposed to create and maintain internal security. However, observers report that often police actions make many Hondurans less secure. Chayes asserts that “they rarely seem to work in the interests of the ordinary population” and often have relationships with members of gangs and trafficking organizations. The police number between 13-14,000 men and women. The Honduran police allegedly harass government opponents and in particular reporters, anti-corruption activists, human rights defenders, and environmental activists (Chayes: 2016, 27; Ghosh: 2013). The police also reportedly engage in petty corruption. Some police officers are allegedly on the payrolls of gangs. They also engage in extortion, extrajudicial killings,<sup>18</sup> and so-called “social cleansing” campaigns (Chayes: 2016, 29-30; Interview with Eric Olson: 2017).

Honduras does not have state or municipal-level police forces. Instead, the Honduran National Police (HNP) is the only agency responsible for the long-term provision of community-oriented security (Interview with Eric Olson: 2017). Unfortunately, the HNP faces serious structural problems that make the citizens, as well as the international community, question the effectiveness and seriousness of its operations (Human Rights Watch: 2017; Interview with Eric Olson: 2017). On the one hand, the HNP lack the personnel, equipment, and training necessary to respond to the country’s public security challenges, including gangs, criminal activity, corruption, poverty, and violence (Human Rights Watch: 2017; Interview with Eric Olson: 2017). The government also pays the police lower salaries than it does the military. On the other hand, many senior officials lack the will to effectively tackle these problems (Meyer: 2017; Interview with Katalina Montana: 2017; Interview with Sarah Chayes: 2017). Human Rights Watch found that one of the most serious challenges hindering citizen security and HNP operations is endemic corruption within the police (Human Rights Watch: 2017). Many analysts consider that the HNP as part of the problem exacerbating crime, violence, corruption, and impunity in the country.

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<sup>18</sup> In the case of Honduras, social cleansing campaigns refer to the government’s systematic targeting and elimination (through extrajudicial killings) of specific social classes, especially street children, suspected gang members, and certain sexual minorities.

## **B. The Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF)**

In response to ineffectiveness of the national police, the government of President Hernández (as well as those of his predecessors) has called on the Honduran military to protect public-security operations (Haugaard and Kinoshian: 2015, 8-10; Interview with Eric Olson: 2017). Since 2013, the presidency has used an arm of the military—the Military Police for Public Order (PMOP) as a rapid-response tool. Soldiers armed with rifles and large, heavily armed trucks are a constant presence in the daily lives of citizens and in public areas. They patrol violent neighborhoods where the police have no control. But Olson argues that one of the drawbacks of this militarized policing model is that it does not provide a long-term, security presence or a community-oriented approach (Interview with Eric Olson: 2017).

## **C. The Interplay of Elites and Government and Business Interests**

As noted above, international observers have described Honduras as a state where governance institutions are captured in the service of gangs, criminal elements, and elites (Chayes: 2017; Global Witness: 2017, 5). Frequently, rural and indigenous communities suffer extreme levels of violence and intimidation when they protest mining, logging, dams, or agriculture on their lands. Since the 2009 coup, 123 land and environmental activists have been killed (explained further below) (Global Witness: 2017, 8). Meanwhile elites (mostly from within the agro-export oligarchy) depended on the military to protect their interests. In the last 20 years, some of these elites have used the military as a personal shield to protect their personal land claims and businesses. For example, an InSight Crime investigative report found that many wealthy people in Honduras have enjoyed tax benefits for their businesses, profited from the sale of public companies and lands, and marauded Honduras's natural resources which they depend on for more income. These elites at times also cooperate with the country's criminal interests.<sup>19</sup>

## **D. The Judiciary**

The public generally sees Honduras's judiciary as corrupt and biased (Interview with Katalina Montana: 2017; Department of State: 2017, 2016, 1). When the judicial system does not deliver due process and evenhanded access to procedures, it is acting in a repressive manner (Department of State: 2015). Honduras's judiciary does not provide justice to its people in a fair manner. In 2006, for example, only 1,000 of 63,000 criminal complaints filed resulted in a conviction (Ghosh: 2013). As previously mentioned, political and business elites exert excessive influence over the Honduran judiciary, including the Supreme Court (Department of State: 2017, 21-22). The executive branch, with the cooperation of the legislature, makes judicial appointments with little transparency and removes judges from their posts for political reasons. Moreover, a number of legal professionals have been killed in recent years, and prosecutors and whistleblowers handling corruption cases are often subject to threats of violence (Freedom House: 2017).

In addition, the court system is poorly funded and victims and criminals alike face lengthy judicial proceedings and a trial backlog (Department of State: 2015). Bribes and irregular payments are often

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<sup>19</sup> Steven Dudley, 2016, "Elites and Organized Crime," *InSight Crime*, 6-9, [http://www.insightcrime.org/images/PDFs/2016/Honduras\\_Elites\\_Organized\\_Crime](http://www.insightcrime.org/images/PDFs/2016/Honduras_Elites_Organized_Crime).

exchanged to obtain favorable court decisions. Sarah Chayes also notes that individuals, who exposed corruption have been prosecuted and convicted of defamation or have their briefs rejected on spurious pretext. Others complain of differential treatment for some defendants with connections to elites as opposed to others (Chayes: 2016, 24-25).

Lastly, the courts are also not effective at settling disputes or adjudicating between the interests of citizens and business elites. Prosecutors and whistleblowers in corruption cases are frequently subject to threats (Human Rights Watch: 2014; GAN: 2016; Department of State: 2015). As a result, indigenous rights organizations, environmentalists, and other activists may not be able to get a fair trial (Department of State: 2017, 21-22).

### **E. Street and Transnational Gangs (Maras)**

Although Honduras has had street gangs for decades (as has the United States), they remained mostly small and local. Nevertheless, in the late 1990s, gangs became more plentiful, violent, and powerful. Gang violence, which affects innocent citizens, security forces, and members of rival gangs is a form of repression. In Honduras, the gangs tend to concentrate their activities in the large cities (InSight Crime: 2016).

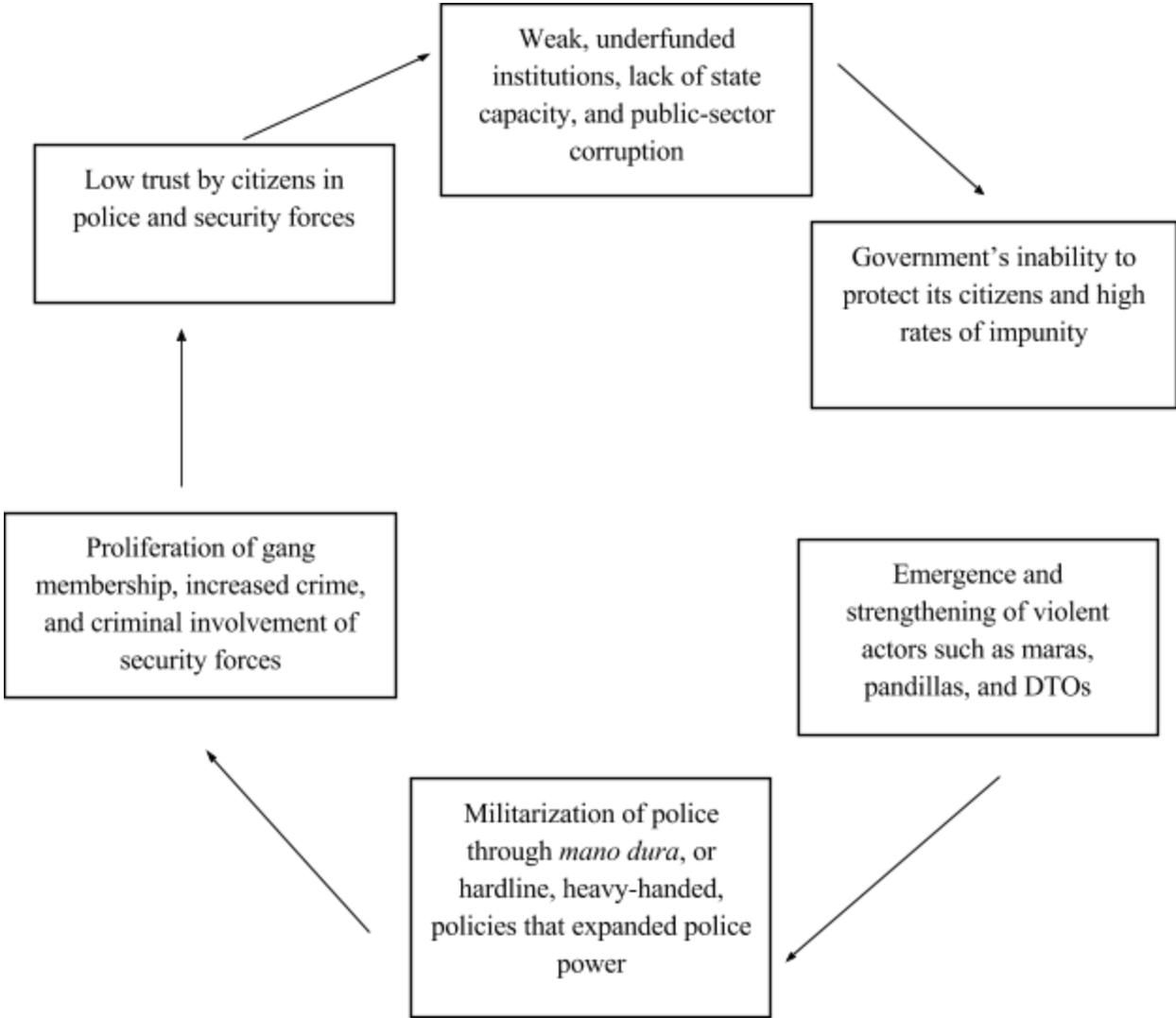
The United States has some responsibility for these gangs. In 1996, the U.S. government passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which allowed officials to deport<sup>20</sup> Honduran (and other Central American) members of U.S. gangs, who had been convicted of crimes. After these deportations, Honduras became increasingly crime-ridden. Two transnational gangs (maras), MS-13 and Barrio 18, used violence to gain territory, new members, extortion revenue, and drug markets. Gang members also extort public transportation and collaborate with authorities in extortion rings. In response to the problems created by these gangs, the Honduran government tried to jail suspected gang members, but this strategy backfired. According to InSight Crime, “the policy allowed them to consolidate their leadership within the prison system, expand their economic portfolios, and make contact with other criminal organizations.” In short, it made the gangs stronger and more effective (InSight Crime: 2016, 1-2).

The diagram below illustrates how the conduct of, and at times cooperation among, the various repressive actors has led to repression in Honduras.

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Congress, Division C—Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), Passed as part of the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act, 1997, Div. C, Pub. L. 104-208, 110 Stat. 3009–546 (Washington, D.C., September 30, 1996), [http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/iirira\\_-\\_illegal\\_immigration.pdf?n=7780](http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/iirira_-_illegal_immigration.pdf?n=7780).

**Figure 2: Honduras's Feedback Loop of Repressive Actors, Violence, Corruption, and Inadequate Governance**



Source: Diagram prepared by Kimberly Bullard

### III. The Role of Impunity in Honduras

U.S. government officials and international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch argue that Honduras has a culture of impunity. Government officials are not held to account for corruption and inadequate governance (Department of State: 2017, 1). Moreover, security forces violate domestic and international laws using extreme forms of repression, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture (Department of State: 2017, 2, 5, 9). Some police officers have also collaborated with criminal organizations (Department of State: 2017, 10). Yet, few Honduran officials, who commit these acts are held to account.

Human rights bodies and organizations also see impunity as part of systemic and grave human rights problems (Human Rights Watch: 2017, 2016, 2015). In 2014, Physicians for Human Rights noted that, although Honduras has legislation prohibiting torture, Honduran law does not consider the pain or suffering that occurs at the hands of a public official as torture.<sup>21</sup> In April 2017, the U.N. Office of the High Commission for Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur, who reviewed the country's practices and stressed that inadequate governance and embedded corruption facilitate the high levels of impunity and violence in Honduras (UNHCR: 2016, 15). Moreover, the Special Rapporteur pointed out that violence, corruption, and the culture of impunity have undermined trust in the government and its agents (UNHCR: 2016, 15).

In 2016, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR) reported that high levels of violence led to increased demands for justice (IACHR: 2015, 11, 107). But the state has not responded to these demands effectively. After significant outside pressure, President Hernández created a Special Commission in Charge of Purging and Restructuring the Honduran National Police (HNP) through legislative decree 21-2016 to clean up the national police force (Department of State: 2016-2015, 3). Yet, we see little evidence the decree is yielding results (IACHR: 2015, 107; Department of State: 2017, 1, 2-4, 10; Interview with Eric Olson: 2017).

The IACHR found that Honduras's continued rate of impunity is between 95 and 98 percent (IACHR: 2015, 107). The regional human rights body reiterated its previous finding that "80 percent of the homicides go unpunished" (IACHR: 2015, 107). For instance, in 2013 of the 1,141 complaints submitted to the Honduran Office of Special Prosecutor for Human Rights only 73 were prosecuted and only 17 resulted in convictions (IACHR: 2015, 113).

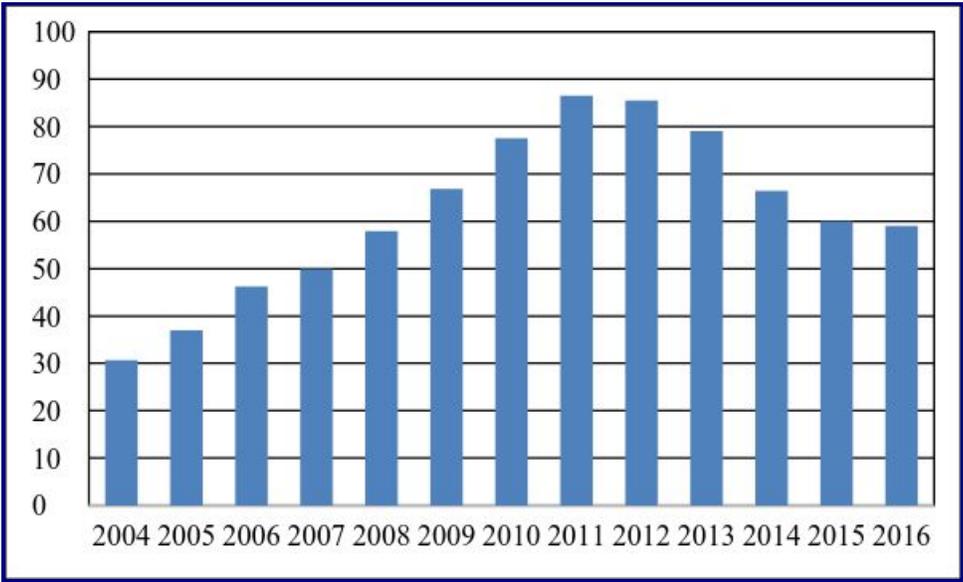
Moreover, the Honduran government has also been unwilling to examine the behavior of those responsible—including the military and police—for post-coup human rights abuses in 2009 (Human Rights Watch: 2010b). As of 2015, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found that no one has been held criminally responsible for the acts committed during the interim administration of Roberto Micheletti in 2009 (IACHR: 2015, 110).

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<sup>21</sup> Physicians for Human Rights, 2014, *Impunity in Honduras: Torture and Ill-Treatment after the Coup d'État A Forensic Medical Investigation*, 7, [https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR\\_Reports/Honduras-Impunity-Report-February-2014.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR_Reports/Honduras-Impunity-Report-February-2014.pdf).

In Honduras, impunity facilitates violence, and violence facilitates impunity. Murders are daily, normal occurrences. The police, which may be responsible for some of these murders, cannot or are unwilling to investigate all these homicides (Human Rights Watch: 2016). As the chart below reveals, although levels of homicides have declined, the Violence Observatory at the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) reports that the homicide rate per capita remains unusually high (UNAH: 2016).

**Figure 3: Homicide Rate per 100,000 People in Honduras  
(Annual %)**



*Source: Chart prepared by Kimberly R. Bullard with data from the Violence Observatory at the National Autonomous University of Honduras (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras - UNAH)*

**IV. The Nature of Repression in Honduras**

Most Hondurans do not feel safe in their own country, because so many of their countrymen and women kill for sneakers, for food, and to protect criminal networks. On a daily basis, individuals face extortion, theft, and gang recruitment (Norwegian Refugee Council: 2016; Meyer: 2016). Many feel that their basic right to life, privacy, and ability to control their destiny are constantly under attack (Interview with

Katalina Montana: 2017; Department of State: 2015a, 2016a)

Although Honduras is a democracy, government agents have used various types of repression to deny citizens' voice. For example, in a wide array of reports and press releases, observers have frequently called Honduras one of the most dangerous countries in the world (Human Rights Watch: 2017; IACHR: 2015, 11; Global Witness: 2017; Haugaard and Kinosian: 2015, 11-12; FIDH and World Organization Against Torture: 2016, 3).<sup>22</sup> In 2015, a field investigation, conducted by the Center for International Policy and the Latin America Working Group, found that since 49 journalists had been killed (46 of them since the June 2009 coup), since 2010 22 human rights defenders were killed, 100 land-rights activists were killed between 2010 and 2013, 86 legal professionals (e.g. judges and prosecutors) were killed between 2010 and December 2014, and at least 31 trade unionists were killed between June 2009 and February 2014 (Haugaard and Kinosian: 2015, 11-12). The report also linked many of these murders to President Hernández's increased use of the military in domestic security (Haugaard and Kinosian: 2015, 8-9). The Organization of American States (OAS) and other groups assert that among the social groups most susceptible to the violence and repression are: human rights defenders, journalists, campesinos, indigenous, and Afro-descendant leaders involved in land-rights struggles (IACHR: 2015, 11, 107; International Federation for Human Rights: 2011, 4, 6; Meyer: 2017, 22; Interview with Katalina Montana: 2017).

### **A. Political Repression**

The Department of State has noted that public officials rely on several types of political repression. As an example, some officials have interfered in the judiciary, denied legal services to indigenous, rural, and prison populations, and arbitrarily arrested and detained protestors and political opponents. The government has also failed to provide due process equally to all citizens (Department of State: 2017, 2016, 2010, 2009, see Section 2).

Observers are particularly concerned about violence against members of the press (Department of State: 2017, 14-15). Journalists, social commentators, and their families have been victims of threats, violence, and murder, and the perpetrators are rarely implicated and punished (Department of State: 2016, 1, 15; 2013, 1; 2010, Section 2a; Human Rights Watch: 2017, 2011). The government has also blocked transmissions of radio and television stations and organized power outages to repress the media (Department of State: 2016, 1, 15; Department of State: 2013, 1; Department of State: 2010: Section2a; Human Rights Watch: 2017, 2011). Human Rights Watch stated that media repression reached its highest levels after the coup in 2009 and 2010.<sup>23</sup> In 2010, Freedom House changed the country's press freedom status from "partially free" to "not free" (which is its current status) due to the increase in attacks and threats against journalists that coincided with the election of President Porfirio Lobo (Freedom House:

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<sup>22</sup> John Holman, "Honduras 'most dangerous country' for environmentalists, *Al Jazeera*, January 31, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/honduras-dangerous-country-environmentalists-170131174941302.html>; Philip Sherwell, "Welcome To Honduras, The Most Dangerous Country On The Planet," *Business Insider*, November 16, 2013, <http://www.businessinsider.com/welcome-to-honduras-the-most-dangerous-country-on-the-planet-2013-11>; Organization of American States, "Honduras, one of the most dangerous countries for human rights defenders – Experts warn," Press Release, [http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media\\_center/preleases/2016/118.asp](http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2016/118.asp).

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Honduras: Prosecute Post-Coup Abuses: Attacks and Threats Remain a Very Serious Concern," December 20, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/12/20/honduras-prosecute-post-coup-abuses>.

2017, 2011). In 2011, the Lobo administration passed a law on the interception of private communications, which allowed its agents to intercept online and phone messages (Freedom House: 2017). The situation has barely improved. In 2016, Reporters without Borders described the country as one of the worst nations to be a journalist. For example, the government and elites have brought legal proceedings against journalists as a means of harassment. If journalists and publishers lose these cases, they are at times prohibited from writing and some have been jailed.<sup>24</sup>

Nor does the Honduran government adequately protect human rights defenders (Human Rights Watch: 2017; Global Witness: 2017; IACHR: 2015, 11).<sup>25</sup> From 2013 to 2017, Amnesty International reported that human rights defenders remain frequent targets of intimidation, physical attacks, threats, and killings (Amnesty International: 2017-2013). Many of the victimized human rights defenders are also environmental and land rights activists or leaders (International Federation for Human Rights: 2011, 8; Amnesty International: 2017-2015; International Criminal Court: 2015, 27-28).

Since 2009, the security forces have arbitrarily arrested individuals without warrants and illegally detained others without sufficient cause (Department of State: 2017, 2016, 2011, 2006, 2001) In addition, individuals arrested are often held for months without access to a lawyer, formal charges, or a trial. Prisoners also suffer from inhumane treatment, including severe overcrowding, malnutrition, limited access to potable water, and the excessive use of force by security guards (Department of State: 2017-2016, 5-8; 2010-2006, Section 1c). Reportedly, security guards subject prisoners to beatings and hold them in isolation (Department of State: 2017-2016, 7; Department of State: 2010-2006, Section 1c). Due to the problems of overcrowding and a lack of adequate training for prison staff, prisoners also suffer from other abuses, including rape, violent attacks, and harassment. Between September and December 2015, the National Commission on Human Rights in Honduras (CONADEH) reported 20 complaints of torture and mistreatment. Moreover, gangs have infiltrated the prison system, and the government is unable to control criminal activity inside the correctional facilities (Department of State: 2017, 5-6; CONADEH: 2015).

## **B. Violent Repression**

As noted above, Honduran officials have relied on violent tactics for decades. The government has used arbitrary arrests and detention, forced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary or extrajudicial killings to suppress the opposition (Department of State: 2017, 2-4, 10).

Between 2000 and 2016, the Department of State reported that the Honduran government, and in particular the security forces, has routinely committed arbitrary or extrajudicial killings (Department of State: 2017a, 2016a, 2010, 2009, 2006, 2001, 1-2, 4). The victims of these unlawful or summary killings are usually members of the country's vulnerable populations, like human rights defenders, journalists, land-rights activists, and indigenous communities. The Violence Observatory at the National Autonomous University of Honduras reported that between 2004 and 2012 homicides rose steadily, and from 2009 to present, the percent of total deaths ruled homicides have remained above or at 20 percent (per 100,000

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<sup>24</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Honduras," Last modified July 2017, <https://rsf.org/en/honduras>.

<sup>25</sup> NA, "Attempts by Honduran authorities to silence outspoken journalists," Reporters Without Borders, September 16, 2016, <https://rsf.org/en/news/attempts-honduran-authorities-silence-outspoken-journalists>.

habitants).<sup>26</sup> Since then, Amnesty International also noted that since 2010 violence against Hondurans has continued to increase (Amnesty International: 2015/2016, 178; Department of State: 2016c).

### C. Discrimination and Repression of Indigenous Communities

Policymakers, the national police, and security forces deny indigenous and Garifuna (Afro-descendant) citizens' rights, political voice, and social services. As noted above, some 7 to 10 percent of the population is indigenous and 2 to 3 percent are Garifunas (Department of State: 2017, 1, 32; CIA: 2017). The principal indigenous groups include Miskito, Tawahkas, Pech, Tolupans, Chortí, Chorotega, Maya, Pupil, Nahual, and Tol-Ixcaque, but the largest group is the Lenca, from which several murdered land-rights and environmental activists emerged (CIA: 2017).

The Lenca leader and activist, Berta Cáceres, was murdered on March 3, 2016 when armed men forced themselves into her home. She was allegedly killed, because she opposed the Zarca Dam hydroelectric construction project (Department of State: 2017, 1, 32; Amnesty International: 2016, 2017).<sup>27</sup> Human rights observers assert that many other activists have been killed, even when they ask their government and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) for protection (Human Rights Watch: 2017; Department of State: 2017: 1, 32; Global Witness: 2017). According to the Department of State, Cáceres had filed numerous reports of death threats and other occurrences of intimidation with the police, but none were ever investigated (Department of State: 2017, 1, 32).

Individuals from these ethnic groups lack influence (and often money) and thus struggle to control their political destinies. The Department of State and international NGOs report that no representatives of the Afro-Honduran (Garifuna) population were elected to the national congress in the most recent elections in 2013 (Department of State: 2017, 20; Freedom House: 2015). In addition, Freedom House noted that in 2014 members and proponents of the indigenous and Garifuna populations rebuked the government's move to dissolve the Ministry for Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Hondurans into the more generalized Ministry for Social and Community Development. While this action was part of a broader reorganizational effort aimed at reducing the public deficit, ethnic groups largely criticized the move (Freedom House: 2015).

Not surprisingly, the country's indigenous populations have significant problems of joblessness and poverty (CIA: 2017). As an example, indigenous (as well as rural) communities have inadequate access to basic social welfare services such as health care and education. Because many of these individuals live in poverty, they possess very few opportunities to change their situations (CIA: 2017).<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, in 2016, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples underscored that

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<sup>26</sup> Honduras, National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) and Public Ministry, Instituto Universitario en Democracia, Paz, y Seguridad (IUDPAS), "Boletín del Observatorio January - September 2016, Edition 43," Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Observatory of Violence, December 2016, <http://www.iudpas.org/pdf/Boletines/Nacional/NEd43EneSep2016.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Honduras: Investigate Environmental Activist's Killing," March 4, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/04/honduras-investigate-environmental-activists-killing>; Jonathan Blitzer, "The Death of Berta Cáceres," *The New Yorker*, March 11, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-of-bera-caceres>.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Agency for International Development, "Honduras: Nutrition Profile," Last modified June 2014, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/USAID-Honduras-Profile.pdf>.

Honduras' indigenous citizens had not received adequate protection of their rights to lands and property titles, territories, and natural resources, lacked sufficient access to courts, and feared violent retaliation when claiming their rights given the underlying culture of impunity and high levels of violence in the country (Department of State: 2017, 1; UNHCR: 2016, 8). Moreover, the Honduran government's agrarian and investment policies at times supersede the rights of the rural poor in the issuance of land permits to international corporations, in particular Canadian and U.S. firms. According to Human Rights Watch, the most vulnerable peoples affected by these big development projects tend to have limited legal recourse courts to protect their rights (Human Rights Watch: 2012b). Lastly, as reported by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights, these individuals are often unable to obtain identity documents, so that they can vote or receive state services (UNHCR: 2016, 8).

#### **D. Online Repression**

According to the Department of State, the Government of Honduras does not use the internet to restrict its citizens' freedoms of speech or association (Department of State: 2017, 17; Department of State; 2011; 22; Department of State: 2006, 13). However, the Department of State indicated "there were credible reports that the government monitored private online communications" (Department of State: 2017-2016, 17). Under the Special Law on Interception of Private Communications, passed in 2011, the government can intercept online and telephone messages (Freedom House: 2016). We could not find any evidence that the government uses malware to monitor its citizens.

#### **E. Economic Repression**

While the government does not appear to deny state benefits to minority groups, several analysts reported that many Honduran officials see government agencies as venues for personal gain rather than agencies to implement policies or programs (Chayes: 2017; Meyer: 2017). Under Hernández's presidency, the state budget grew to 7.6 percent of Honduras's GDP as a result of weak tax collection, higher spending, and losses in state-owned companies. Beginning in 2013, the government occasionally stopped paying state employees, and basic public services were interrupted. The employees, who are not paid often, demanded bribes for services, and the poorest citizens are punished twice—first, they do not receive the services without bribes, and second, they must pay bribes to receive public services that are often inadequate and uneven (Meyer: 2017, 8). Hence, inadequate governance is a spillover effect of the corruption, repression, and civil-conflict relationship.

#### **F. Repression against Women and Children**

While the state does not engage in deliberate gender-based repression, women and children are often the main victims of inadequate governance, corruption, impunity, inadequate growth, and repression. Freedom House reports that violence against women is a serious issue, and femicide has risen dramatically since 2009. Many of these murders, like most homicides in Honduras, go unpunished although the legislature added femicide as a crime to the penal code in 2013. In addition, women remain vulnerable to exploitation by employers, particularly in the low-wage, maquiladora (i.e. assembly plant) export sector. Finally, women and children are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked for the sex trade and forced labor. Within Honduras, women and children have been forced to traffic drugs, perform sex

work, and carry out violent acts. Police, military, and other government officials have been implicated in protecting sex-trafficking rings and paying for sex acts, in yet another example of the relationship between impunity, corruption, and repression (Freedom House: 2017).

## **V. The Role of Corruption and Inadequate Governance in Honduras**

As noted above, corruption, inadequate governance, impunity, and repression in Honduras are closely linked (Chayes: 2017; Global Witness: 2017; Schwartz: 2015). These factors interact and feed upon each other. Corruption is endemic at both the local and national levels.

Corruption is widespread and a major source of public discontent (Department of State: 2017, 21). According to the Department of State, corruption plagues all of the country's institutions and economic sectors—weakening the rule of law and hindering good governance (Department of State: 2017, 21; GAN: 2016; Main: 2016; Schwartz: 2015). Because corruption is so deeply rooted in Honduran society, the government cannot equitably provide basic services, such as health care and education. Many hospitals do not have vital supplies, such as dialysis machines or x-ray plates (Suazo and Atkins: 2016). Moreover, Eric Olson, a senior analyst at the Wilson Center for International Scholars, describes how in some cities “municipal services function on the basis of direct payments by an individual. If you need a permit or license, or need your trash picked up, one has to pay for it directly” (Olson: 2017, 10).

Analysts have not found common ground regarding why corruption is so entrenched in the country. Fulton Armstrong, a research fellow at American University, argues that it is a values problem. He thinks the Honduran people want stability more than they want transparency and inclusiveness—values that can lead to more effective governance (Armstrong: 2016). Other observers believe that the U.S.-Mexican crackdown on migration has reduced the ability of Hondurans to flee poverty, violence, and impunity. As a result, Hondurans are in a rut, mired in corruption, violence, and impunity, and unable to grow out of the problem (Bird and Main: 2017; Pérez and Pestana: 2017; Chayes: 2017).

Moreover, Honduran officials are still unwilling to hold each other to account for corruption. As noted above, in 2013, Mario Zelaya, the director of the Honduran Institute of Social Security (IHSS), embezzled \$350 million in public funds from the IHSS's budget (Department of State: 2017, 21; GAN: 2016). Prosecutors indicted Zelaya and the IHSS board of directors in early 2014. Later, leaked documents showed some of these misappropriated had ended up in the pockets of the ruling party of President Hernández, the National Party (PN) (Department of State: 2017, 21; Freedom House: 2017). But although Hernández admitted that his party received funds embezzled from the agency, no charges were brought against the president or other top party officials over the diversion of funds to the party (Frank: 2015). The scandal led to the flight of the investigating prosecutor in charge of this case in the Honduran Attorney General's office due to death threats against him and his family (Meyer: 2017). Furthermore, Honduran Attorney General Oscar Chinchilla has so far failed to investigate or prosecute National Party leaders in the diversion of health care funds to party accounts.

Yet, the Honduran public is not quiescent in the face of corruption. In 2015, hundreds of thousands of Hondurans took to the streets in 50 cities. Many joined a grassroots anti-corruption movement known as *Los Indignados* (in English, The Outraged) (Suazo and Atkins: 2016). *Los Indignados* demanded Hernández's resignation and a U.N.-backed international commission to investigate corruption.

Hernández responded with a tightly controlled “national dialogue,” in which many opposition leaders refused to participate. Then, he proposed a government-sponsored, investigative body with no autonomy. When this solution failed to placate protestors, the Organization of American States stepped in to help design an alternative plan. (Main: 2016; Armstrong: 2016).

Later in 2015, the Honduran government announced the creation of the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity (MACCIH), a regional body backed by the Organization of American States. MACCIH will investigate and prosecute criminal activities in the country’s political, judicial, and security systems as well as provide advice and oversight to national institutions fighting corruption. It is modeled on neighboring Guatemala’s U.N.-led International Commission against Impunity (CICIG), which eventually led to the arrest of former President Otto Pérez Molina in 2015. But MACCIH is made up of a team of international judges and prosecutors tasked with supervising, advising, and supporting Honduran authorities in curbing corruption. This organization cannot investigate or prosecute. It is only providing support to Honduran judges and prosecutors already susceptible to great political pressure. Local NGOs have since denounced it as toothless (Transparency International: 2016c). Although many governments are supporting MACCIH, some Hondurans already see it as unworkable. Some worry that it will undermine existing institutions or the government will ignore its findings. Others argue that it is dependent on the very government it is investigating (Suazo and Atkins: 2015).

The Honduran government is taking some steps to fight corruption. The country has legal mechanisms in place, but the laws are inadequately enforced and officials have little incentives to follow them, given impunity. As an example, Honduras’s Penal Code and Penal Procedures Code criminalize passive and active bribery. Conflicts of interest, post-public employment, and gifts and hospitality are regulated under the Code of Civil Servants Ethics. Public officials are subject to financial disclosure laws, yet they rarely comply. Honduras also has a Law on Witness Protection that provides for the protection of whistleblowers (GAN: 2016). Efforts to promote transparency are also helpful. Honduras is a member of the Open Government Partnership. Honduras also joined the Construction Sector Transparency Initiative, an organization that helps countries pursue public-infrastructure accountability. Honduras’s project disclosure compliance has improved from 27 to 84 percent, and the country is publicly sharing data on more than 450 public infrastructure projects online.<sup>29</sup> In addition, according to Transparency International, the Special Commission for the Restructuring and Purging of the National Police has achieved significant progress in cleaning up the corrupt police force. So far, 68 police officers of a total of 164 reviewed have been dismissed, including five generals, 27 commissioners, and 36 sub-commissioners (Transparency International: 2016a, 2016b, and 2016c).

However, as noted earlier, corruption and impunity are closely tied. Civil society representatives taking part in the police-reform initiative, including Transparency International’s national chapter in Honduras, the *Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa* (ASJ), face numerous threats and attempts of intimidation (Transparency International: 2016a, 2016b, 2016c) at the hands of government officials. In so doing, the judiciary and police signal that both corruption and impunity will be tolerated.

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<sup>29</sup> Jesús Arturo Mejía Arita, “Letter to the Editor: Honduras is making progress on transparency and corruption,” *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2017.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/honduras-is-making-progress-on-transparency-and-corruption/2017/06/27/2e75eef0-5a7f-11e7-aa69-3964a7d55207\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.13a6dd2b0f8f#comments](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/honduras-is-making-progress-on-transparency-and-corruption/2017/06/27/2e75eef0-5a7f-11e7-aa69-3964a7d55207_story.html?utm_term=.13a6dd2b0f8f#comments); Mejía Arita is managing director of the National Electric Energy Company of Honduras.

Moreover, the country does not have strong anticorruption counterweights (GAN: 2016). As noted above, transparency and accountability are not strongly held norms in Honduras. For example, in 2013, Honduras passed the “Law of Secrets,” which allows the government to withhold information regarding security and defense spending for up to 25 years. This law includes the military police budget, which is funded through a security tax.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the regime is signaling that it does not want its citizens to know how much it spends—and in particular, how much is spent on the security that makes it harder for citizens to hold the government to account (Kinosian: 2015b; Nalvarte: 2015).

## VI. Honduran Public Opinion Regarding Repression and Reconciliation

Because of the high levels of violence and insecurity in Honduras, Honduran citizens may be reluctant to state their opinion. Nevertheless, polling data reveals that the populace is unhappy with and distrustful of their government and institutions (Altschuler and Javier Corrales: 2009; BTI: 2016, 3, 7, 13). The following table shows Hondurans’ low level of perceived support for their political system.

**Figure 4: How Much Confidence Do Hondurans Have in Their National Government?**

	1996	2002	2005	2008	2009	2010	2011	2013	2015	2016
‘A great deal’	6%	17%	14%	7%	8%	18%	3%	6%	9%	6%

<sup>30</sup> NA, “Secrecy law deals major blow to public’s right to be informed,” Reporters Without Borders, January 16, 2014, <https://rsf.org/en/news/secrecy-law-deals-major-blow-publics-right-be-informed>.

‘Somewhat’	22%	25%	13%	18%	17%	23%	26%	13%	20%	16%
‘Not very much’	56%	34%	34%	36%	31%	33%	39%	27%	25%	27%
‘None at all’	10%	22%	38%	38%	41%	24%	32%	51%	44%	49%
‘No answer’	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	*	0%	1%	0%
‘Don’t know’	4%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	3%	2%	2%
Number of respondents	998	1.004	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

*Source: Table prepared by Kimberly R. Bullard with data from Latinobarómetro Database. Latinobarómetro is an annual public opinion survey based in Santiago, Chile and involving some 20,000 interviews in 18 Latin American countries, representing more than 600 million inhabitants. It is available at: <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>.*

In 2015, Latinobarómetro found that the percentage of Hondurans that considered “democracy preferable to any other type of government” was 40.1—which falls below the regional average for Latin America.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Honduran perceived satisfaction with democracy has remained much lower—by, at least, 20 percent—than its support for democratic values.<sup>32</sup> In 2015, 20 percent of Hondurans said they were “satisfied with the functioning of democracy,” which ranked Honduras near the bottom of the region.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, only 8.7 percent of Honduran citizens said that they “very much trust their government,” which signals a high level of social mistrust in the country.<sup>34</sup>

In 2016, CID-Gallup surveyed Hondurans for the Atlantic Council’s Northern Triangle Task Force.<sup>35</sup> CID-Gallup asked Hondurans about governance and corruption in their country. Hondurans responded overwhelmingly in a pessimistic fashion.<sup>36</sup> For example, the researchers found that 70.4 percent of Hondurans (slightly less than their Salvadoran and Guatemalan counterparts) considered Honduras was “headed in the wrong direction”—only 23 percent concurred.<sup>37</sup> More the 85 percent (87.2 percent of

<sup>31</sup> Data taken from the online analysis section of Latinobarómetro Database, which is available at: <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Atlantic Council/ Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, 2017, *Building a Better Future: A Blueprint for Central America’s Northern Triangle*, [http://publications.atlanticcouncil.org/northern-triangle/assets/AC\\_Northern\\_Triangle.pdf](http://publications.atlanticcouncil.org/northern-triangle/assets/AC_Northern_Triangle.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Hondurans) perceived high levels of corruption in the country. Honduran respondents were equally worried about their country's economy. The main concern for 42.7 percent of Hondurans surveyed was "the cost of basic needs/ not having enough money" while 16.9 percent said, "There is a lot of crime and violence in the neighborhood where I live." 46.7 percent of Hondurans said that their family's economic situation was worse than the year before, while 18.0 percent perceived it as better, and 35.3 percent the same. In addition, 77.2 percent decided that the "rich and powerful receive special treatment" in Honduran courts. Unfortunately, we could not determine the exact number of Hondurans surveyed (a total of 2,400 were surveyed from the three Central American countries). However, this poll revealed high levels of mistrust in the institutions—illustrating that Hondurans have little confidence—if any—in the military, police, judges, and other government agents.<sup>38</sup>

## **VII. The Economic and Political Consequences of Repression in Honduras**

### **A. Economic Consequences**

Honduras has immense economic challenges because of the intertwined relationships between corruption, impunity, repression, civil conflict, income inequality, and slow growth. The World Bank warned that the country may be trapped in a low-level equilibrium where high crime and low growth, high migration and remittances flows, inadequate governance, and poor development outcomes reinforce each other. Hence, The World Bank argued that the nation must tackle crime and violence, high migration, and dependence on remittances flows (The World Bank: 2015b).<sup>39</sup> Yet given the country's inadequate governance, policymakers may be unable to effectively remedy this situation unless donors collaborate, demand, and incentivize real change, such as ensuring that the government devotes more funds to its citizens' education, healthcare and infrastructure needs.

The World Bank is trying to push the country to develop a long-term strategy to reduce impunity, strengthen the judicial system, and improve the government's accountability. It also recommends that policymakers focus on improving both access and quality of education, which would also reduce crime and violence while stimulating further growth. Finally, it recommends that the country address its relatively weak institutions and increase accountability (The World Bank: 2015a, 13). While Honduras is a member of the Open Government Partnership, it has not met many of its commitments. Hence, senior officials do not seem committed to transparency and accountability as essential to good governance.<sup>40</sup>

### **B. Domestic Political Consequences**

Honduras's inability to solve its problems has led to a vicious cycle. As noted above, polling data reveals that the Honduran people no longer believe that the government can or is willing to solve these problems. Therefore, until policymakers<sup>41</sup> and the public can reestablish trust, government policies are likely to succeed only at the margins.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The World Bank says that 17 percent of Honduras's GDP comes from remittances.

<sup>40</sup> Open Government Partnership, "Honduras," n.d., <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/countries/honduras>.

<sup>41</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Trust in Government," n.d., <http://www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm>.

### C. International Political Consequences

The United States and other donors have worked with the country on specific problems, rather than addressing those problems systemically. For the 2014 – 2017 fiscal years, U.S. development and security assistance to Honduras rose steadily, in part to combat the high levels of violence and narco-traffickers (Department of State: 2017c, 444-450).<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in 2015, the United States provided additional training to the military police units, despite their checkered record of allegations of human rights violations (Department of State: 2016; Conyers, Jr. et. al: 2016).<sup>43</sup>

Some members of the U.S. Congress want tighter controls over U.S. aid to Honduras. In 2017, in response to Berta Cáceres’s murder, more than 20 members of the U.S. Congress called for suspension of all security aid to Honduras (Bird and Main: 2017). The U.S. government and international organizations like the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) have also not only funded, but increased allocations to Honduran military and police units (Conyers, Jr. et. al: 2016).<sup>44</sup> However, cutting off security aid is not likely to prevent further violence or impunity.

Meanwhile, U.S. policymakers have tried to provide funding to the Honduran government to prevent immigration to the United States, under the Alliance for Prosperity. They want the government to improve services in Honduras, but the regime has decided to invest in policing (Frank: 2015).

While the United States implored Central American leaders to encourage their citizens to remain at home, in June 2017, Honduran leaders asked Vice President Mike Pence to ensure that their citizens could remain in the United States as part of a work program that temporarily authorizes their residency. Since 1999, the United States has provided temporary protected status (TPS) to eligible Hondurans. The United States first did so to help the country obtain funds in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch. It has been extended 13 times, but Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly indicated he might not extend it again for approximately 57,000 Hondurans currently residing in the United States. These Hondurans have lived in the United States for some 20 years—and some who arrived in the United States as children no longer have a strong support system or familial ties in Honduras. Moreover, the Honduran government told the Trump Administration that should all these people be deported, they expect to see even more instability in Honduras. With these actions, the United States could exacerbate the security problems that the United States is trying to help Honduras address. In July 2017, 26 U.S. senators sent a letter to General Kelly and Secretary of State Tillerson, urging them to carefully review TPS designations for Honduras and nine other nations. These senators warned that the U.S. approach to deportations was counterproductive. The Trump Administration refused to commit, but it has suggested that the countries in the region must collaborate to address the linked relationships mentioned above (Harris: 2017; Frank: 2015; Meyer: 2017, 18).

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<sup>42</sup> U.S. Congress, Letter to Secretary of State John Kerry from U.S. Congressmen,” Washington, D.C.: August 19, 2015, [http://www.defenseassistance.org/primarydocs/150819\\_house\\_honduras\\_letter.pdf](http://www.defenseassistance.org/primarydocs/150819_house_honduras_letter.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> Adam Isaacson, and Sarah Kinoshian, “Which Central American Military and Police Units Get the Most U.S. Aid?,” Washington Office on Latin America, April 15, 2016, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/which-central-american-military-and-police-units-get-the-most-u-s-aid/>; Ed Pilkington, and Nina Lakhani, “U.S. investigating allegations Honduran military had hit list of activists to target,” *The Guardian*, July 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/08/honduras-military-hitlist-activists-us-investigation>.

<sup>44</sup> Danielle Renwick, “Central America’s Violent Northern Triangle,” Council on Foreign Relations, January 19, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/transnational-crime/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle/p37286>.

Honduran officials have also reminded U.S. leaders that the Honduran government and people are dependent on migrant remittances. These remittances are the primary source of income for more than one-third of the Honduran households that receive them. Thus, efforts to deport Hondurans could also undermine the Honduran economy and affect social conditions (Meyer: 2017, 18).

Meanwhile, the U.S. government is unwilling to accept more refugees, especially children and help them assimilate in the United States. In so doing, they may be empowering the very gangs whose influence the United States wants to reduce in Honduras and domestically. The FBI contends that, after a long period of relative quiet, many of the gangs from Central America have grown both more violent and visible. During the past five years, more than 185,000 children have fled across the U.S. southern border largely to escape gang violence in Central America. Their parents are left with two choices—to hide their children at home or help them flee. In both cases, these children are prevented from going to school in Honduras. When they flee north to México and/or the United States, these minors have grown into rudderless teenagers, struggling with a new culture and language, leaving them vulnerable to recruitment. Many drop out of school and find it difficult to rejoin society. Lastly, these minors are often victims of gang extortion and are forced to join the very gangs that they were fleeing from (The Economist: 2017; Norwegian Refugee Council: 2016; Pérez and Pestana: 2017).

### **VIII. Will Repression Continue in the Near Future? What Does that Mean for Civil Conflict?**

Honduran scholar, Dana Frank, argues that Honduras is a “captive nation.” It has no alternative to close ties with the United States. Moreover, it has been unable to break the financial and political stranglehold of the oligarchic families that have been supported by the U.S. government (Frank: 2015).

No one knows what the future will bring for Honduras. But it is increasingly clear that the country cannot tackle its problems without investing in improving citizen security conditions at home. It also must begin investing in its own people’s health and education so that they can create opportunities at home and not just abroad.

### **IX. Repression, Civil Conflict, and Leadership Tenure: The Honduran Case Reveals**

#### **Q1. Do Hondurans respond differently when confronted with political repression, violent repression, or a mix of repressive tactics?**

*Hondurans are used to violence and repression. In general, Honduran citizens respond to both violent and political repression with peaceful tactics. They have also tried to emigrate to escape domestic insecurity and the lack of economic opportunities. However, the United States has deported many of these immigrants back to Honduras.*

#### **Q2. Do officials use different types of repression in response to different types of civil conflict?**

*Honduran officials have used both violent and political repression in response to both peaceful and violent protests.*

**Q3. Does the use and type of repression (whether political, violent, or some combination) increase the likelihood that rulers retain power?**

*Honduran officials have used various forms of repression to maintain power, including the 2009 coup and the packing of the Supreme Court. Under the administrations of Porfirio Lobo Sosa (2010 – 2014) and Juan Orlando Hernández (2014 – present day), government agents have relied on the use of the military in civilian roles. President Hernández has created a new quasi-military police organization, which some Hondurans fear will become his personal protection force.*

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### **Interviews**

**Armando Trull**, WAMU Analyst on Central America, National Public Radio, August 2, 2017

**Eric Olson**, Senior Fellow and Deputy Director, Latin America Program, Wilson Center for International Scholars, August 14, 2017

**Katalina Montana**, Chief, Mediation and Dialogue, Department of Sustainable Democracy and Special Missions, Organization of American States, August 9, 2017

**Dr. Orlando J. Pérez**, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Humanities, Millersville University, August 8, 2017

**Sarah Chayes**, Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2, 2017