PARTY SYSTEM BREAKDOWN AND THE BREAKDOWN OF DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF HONDURAS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED ON THE NINTH DAY OF APRIL 2018

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

OF TULANE UNIVERSITY

FOR THE DEGREE

OF

MASTER OF ARTS

BY _____
Roy Jason Taylor

APPROVED: _____
James Huck, Ph.D.
Director

_____
Gustavo Eduardo Silva, Ph.D.

_____
David Smilde, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my academic advisor, Dr. Jimmy Huck, for all of his advice and guidance throughout the process of writing this thesis. To my parents, Roy and Nina, and my sister, Amanda – thank you for your moral support!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

In the early morning hours of Sunday, June 28, 2009, a group of approximately 150 members of the *Fuerzas Armadas de Honduras* entered the country's presidential palace, captured the sitting president, Manuel Zelaya, and put him on a plane bound for Costa Rica in his pajamas, forcing him into exile.[1] Later that day, the National Congress voted 122-6 to confirm Roberto Micheletti as an interim president. The move immediately attracted the attention of the Organization of American States, which declared that it would not recognize any other government as legitimate, and even the United States, with its history of backing military coups and authoritarian regimes in the region, was not particularly supportive of the move.[2]

Although it might not have been apparent at the time, the 2009 coup marked what was only the beginning of an extended breakdown of democracy in Honduras that has continued to this day. When Honduras went ahead with regularly scheduled elections in November 2009, many countries in the region, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela,[3] initially refused to recognize the results of elections administered by an "unconstitutional government." However, other countries such as Canada, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States did (eventually) recognize the November 2009 elections.

---

[1] J. Mark Ruhl, "Honduras Unravels," *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 2 (2010): 101.
[2] Elisabeth Malkin, "Honduran President Is Ousted in Coup," *The New York Times*, June 28, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/29/world/americas/29honduras.html.
[3] "Los países de Mercosur no reconocen los comicios en Honduras," *El País*, December 8, 2009, https://elpais.com/internacional/2009/12/08/actualidad/1260226815_850215.html.

While there was spirited disagreement surrounding the legitimacy of these elections, there can be hardly any disagreement that Honduras's fragile democracy has further eroded under the National administrations of Porfirio Lobo (2010-14) and Juan Orlando Hernández (2014–). Lobo presided over an administration that generated significant controversy over high levels of corruption[4] and repeated violations of human rights and due process,[5] and it was under his administration that the then-president of the National Congress, Juan Orlando Hernández, orchestrated the highly questionable removal of several justices from the country's Supreme Court of Justice (*Corte Suprema de Justicia*, CSJ). Their replacements – named by Hernández – were the same ones who would later issue a ruling allowing presidential reelection in Honduras in spite of the country's constitutional ban on presidential reelection, paving the way for Hernández to seek another term in office.

Unfortunately, it appears that the coup in Honduras is part of a growing trend of democratic breakdown in the modern era. Since the third wave of democracy came to an end around the turn of the century, the number of states classified as democracies has stagnated, while regimes classified as authoritarian have become even less democratic.[6] Many democracies have seen declining levels of freedom. However, the trend that is perhaps the most concerning – and therefore most relevant for the purposes of this thesis

---

[4] "Gestión de Lobo marcada por los escándolos," *La Prensa*, http://www.laprensa.hn/especiales/377787-273/gesti%C3%B3n-de-lobo-marcada-por-los-esc%C3%A1ndalos.

[5] Tamara Taraciuk, "After the Coup: Ongoing Violence, Intimidation, and Impunity in Honduras," Human Rights Watch, December 20, 2010, https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/12/20/after-coup/ongoing-violence-intimidation-and-impunity-honduras.

[6] Larry Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 144.

– is the increasing frequency of democratic breakdown. Breakdowns of democracy, as defined by Larry Diamond (2015), occur "not only through blatant military or executive coups, but also through subtle and incremental degradations of democratic rights and procedures that finally push a democratic system over the threshold into competitive authoritarianism."[7]

Since the year 2000, there have been more than 20 cases of breakdowns of democracy as defined by Diamond, and three of them have occurred in Latin America.[8] By some metrics, Venezuela's breakdown began in 2004, principally due to executive degradation and the violation of the rights of the political opposition, with similar factors leading to a breakdown of democracy in Nicaragua beginning in 2011. However, the third case mentioned by Diamond, Honduras, stands out as having the only democratic breakdown initially caused by the intervention of the military.

But how did Honduras arrive at this point? What factors led to the breakdown of the country's democracy? This thesis aims to explore some of the possible answers to these questions. The first chapter will review some of the major theories that have been proposed to explain why democracies break down, as well as those theories developed specifically to explain democratic breakdown in Latin America. Chapter 2 will look at the politics of Honduras, focusing on three principal topics: an overview of the country's political development during the twentieth century, focusing on the emergence of the bipartisan political system that governed Honduras for much of this time; the initial breakdown of democracy in Honduras as represented by the 2009 military coup that overthrew President Zelaya; and the ongoing democratic breakdown that has continued

---

[7] Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession," 144.
[8] Ibid, 145.

under the administration of President Juan Orlando Hernández. The third and final chapter will analyze how well some of the theories of democratic breakdown reviewed in Chapter 1 explain the ongoing breakdown of democracy in Honduras.

I aim to show that, of the principal theories developed to explain democratic breakdown in Latin America, the ideas advanced by Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán in their 2012 work *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall* best explain the ongoing democratic breakdown in Honduras. In addition, I propose that the partial breakdown of Honduras's previously bipartisan political system – which, unlike other instances of party system breakdown in Latin America, has thus far seen only one of the two major parties collapse – generated a unique political environment in the country that has facilitated the continued breakdown of democracy.

CHAPTER ONE: THEORIES OF DEMOCRATIC BREAKDOWN

Before turning to the specific case of the breakdown of democracy in Honduras – which is the main topic of investigation of this thesis – it is necessary to have a firm grasp of how scholars have tried to explain breakdowns of democracy and how these theories have evolved over time. This chapter will highlight some of the major theories developed to explain democratic breakdown, with a focus on theories specifically developed to understand breakdowns of democracy in Latin America. Ultimately, this chapter will serve to highlight two key points: first, most of these theories, regardless of whether they are geared towards Latin America, tend to place too much emphasis on domestic political processes while overlooking international factors that may contribute to democratic breakdown; and second, none of these theories explicitly discusses the link between party system breakdown and democratic breakdown. Both of these factors are key to understanding the specific way in which democracy has broken down in Honduras.

I. General Theories of Democratic Breakdown

Before delving into some of the theories of democratic breakdown, it is necessary to understand *what* is breaking down and what "breaking down" means. One of the most widely used definitions of democracy comes from Robert Dahl's *Democracy and its Critics* (1989). After analyzing the evolution of democracy from its beginnings in the ancient Greek city-state of Athens to the modern era, Dahl proposed that an ideal democracy would have five key aspects: effective participation by citizens in the political

process; equality between citizens when it comes to voting; the opportunity for citizens to make informed decisions about their political preferences; the ability of the people to choose which policy matters take priority; and that all citizens have an equal stake in the political process. [1] However, Dahl also recognized that this definition of democracy represented a rather utopian ideal and that no nation-state would ever be able to fully satisfy all five of those conditions. As such, Dahl coined the term *polyarchy* to label countries that most people today would refer to as democracies. According to Dahl, polyarchies have the following seven characteristics: rulers are elected by the people; elections are free and fair; almost all citizens are able to exercise the right to vote; almost all citizens have the right to run for office; citizens are free to express their ideas; citizens have access to alternative sources of information; and citizens have the right to form political parties and interest groups.[2] These seven characteristics form the basis for the so-called "procedural minimum" definition of democracy. Democracy can be said to "break down," then, when one or more of these conditions is no longer met.[3]

---

[1] Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 108-113.

[2] Ibid., 221.

[3] Admittedly, the term "breakdown of democracy" has its limitations. It is probably better suited to describing specific instances in which democratic governance is interrupted (such as the military coup that overthrew President Zelaya in 2009) as opposed to the more gradual erosion of democratic norms (as has occurred in Honduras since 2009). However, I agree with Larry Diamond (2015), who emphasizes that, while scholars can debate whether countries were democratic before breakdowns or argue over when breakdowns of democracy actually began, what is most important is the fact that "there is a class of regimes that in the last decade or so have experienced significant erosion in electoral fairness, political pluralism, and civic space for opposition and dissent, typically as a result of abusive executives intent upon concentrating their personal power and entrenching ruling-party hegemony."

By the middle of the twentieth century, it was generally accepted (at least in the West) that economic growth would naturally lead to democracy. However, scholars were forced to reexamine this relationship between democracy and economic development during the 1970s, which featured democratic breakdowns in some of the more industrialized countries of the third world. One of the first main works regarding this topic by Linz and Stepan (1978) questioned the salience of economic factors when looking at breakdowns of democracy. In their view, democratic breakdowns were primarily caused by a variety of non-economic factors:

> Unsolvable problems, a disloyal opposition ready to exploit them to challenge the regime, the decay of democratic authenticity among the regime-supporting parties, and the loss of efficacy, effectiveness (particularly in the face of violence), and ultimately of legitimacy, lead to a generalized atmosphere of tension, a widespread feeling that something has to be done, which is reflected in heightened politicization.[4]

Rather than economic factors, Linz and Stepan emphasize the importance of institutions, along with the strategies chosen and decisions taken by individual political actors, as the key to understanding why certain democratic regimes break down.

However, this has not stopped other scholars from exploring the links between economic development and democratic breakdown. Haggard and Kaufman (1997) study the links between politics and economics within ten different transitions from military rule to democracy. When calculating the odds of whether a new democracy will survive, the authors identify sustained economic growth as one of the principal conditions necessary for the consolidation of new democracies. The absence of meaningful economic growth, then, increases the likelihood of democratic breakdown: "The

---

[4] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 75.

prolonged failure of elected governments to address effectively challenges of growth and equity are likely to erode the depth and stability of support for democracy."[5] The authors point to Peru as the main example of a state that suffered a complete democratic breakdown in the form President Alberto Fujimori's *autogolpe* in 1992 due to ongoing economic malaise and a gradual erosion of faith in a democratic, but dysfunctional political system.

Larry Diamond (2008) focuses on the fact that there has been a "democratic recession" since the mid-2000s, with states such as Thailand, Russia, and Venezuela experiencing breakdowns of their democracies. Diamond suggests that many of the countries we perceive to be democracies are democracies in name only. While they may hold elections, they are often seriously flawed, rule of law is lacking, and leaders are not held accountable for corruption and clientelism, among other problems. Given this reality, it is only natural, in Diamond's view, that citizens might be attracted to less democratic forms of government: "If democracies do not more effectively contain crime and corruption, generate economic growth, relieve economic inequality, and secure freedom and the rule of law, people will eventually lose faith and turn to authoritarian alternatives."[6] Since poor governance is the main driver behind the observed rollback in democracy, Diamond suggests that improving the quality of governance is key to preventing democratic breakdowns.

Kapstein and Converse (2008) take a closer look at the correlation between economic growth and democratization. Specifically, the authors examined the initial

---

[5] Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, "The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (1997): 279.
[6] Larry Diamond, "The Democratic Rollback," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 2 (2008): 37.

economic conditions present when countries democratized to see what impact these had on the chances for democratic breakdown:

> Early indications are, therefore, that initial conditions do significantly affect the survival chances of democratic regimes. Low per capita income, high levels of inequality, high rates of poverty, and higher ethnic fragmentation all harm the prospects that democracy will endure. Yet these relationships are not deterministic. There are several countries (among them Guatemala and Mozambique) in which initial conditions were extremely unfavorable, yet where democracy had endured as of 2004, albeit not without difficulties.[7]

Rather than focusing on economic problems when looking at the likelihood of democratic breakdown, then, the pair suggests that more attention be paid to whether there are strong or weak constraints on executive power.[8] In other words, developing both formal and informal institutions so that they can provide an effective system of checks and balances on the power of the executive is key to avoiding a breakdown of democracy.

In sum, scholars have emphasized a variety of factors that might explain the phenomenon of democratic breakdown, including: the strength of institutions; the decisions made by individual political actors; the absence of economic growth; poor governance; and the extent of constraints on executive power. Notably, however, none of the theories presented thus far mentions the influence that the international environment or a country's political party system might have on whether a democracy breaks down – both of which, I argue, are critical when studying the breakdown of democracy in Honduras.

---

[7] Ethan B. Kapstein and Nathan Converse, "Why Democracies Fail," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 4 (2008): 61-62.
[8] Ibid., 64.

II. Theories of Democratic Breakdown in Latin America

Scholars have also offered a variety of theories for why democratic breakdowns have occurred in Latin America specifically. Guillermo O'Donnell (1973), critiquing modernization theory and the idea that economic development leads to democracy, instead suggests that industrialization is actually one of the main causes behind democratic breakdown in the region. From his perspective, the negative consequences of economic development can lead to popular discontent and protests against ruling (capitalist) elites, who then see no choice but to turn to the armed forces – and away from democracy – in order to protect themselves and their assets.

Arturo Valenzuela, writing in the 1978 work *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, takes some of the pair's ideas and looks specifically at the case of Chile. For Valenzuela, the main cause of the breakdown of democracy in Chile was the growing level of political polarization.[9] This polarization led to increased political competition, which in turn exacerbated competition between classes. Valenzuela builds on the work of Linz, agreeing that it was not the extreme political left or right that brought about Chile's democratic breakdown, but rather it was "the inability of centrist forces – of democrats on both sides of the political system – to see the logic of escalating crisis, or for that matter, foresee the dire consequences of a repressive authoritarian regime."[10]

David Collier's 1979 edited volume *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America* echoes O'Donnell's critiques of modernization theory. Like O'Donnell, Collier and

---

[9] Arturo Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), iii.
[10] Ibid.

others make the observation that modernization theory fails to explain why some of the most economically advanced countries in Latin America during that time – Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay – all ended up being governed by authoritarian regimes. Collier and his co-authors eventually come to the conclusion that three main factors could help explain the breakdown of democracy in the Southern Cone: the availability of diversified or special economic resources and the gap between actual and expected economic performance; the political strength of the popular sector during political and economic crises; and the degree to which technocrats, members of the business community, and the middle class perceive this crisis as a threat to the existing political and economic order.[11]

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s – even as the military dictatorships that had governed most countries in the region were coming to an end – scholars were still grappling with why so many Latin American democracies broke down in the first place. In their seminal work *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (1994), Linz and Valenzuela make the claim that the presidential system of government employed in nearly all Latin American countries – as opposed to parliamentary systems of government seen in most other democracies – is less stable and therefore more vulnerable to breaking down. According to Linz, this is due to a variety of factors, such as the fact that presidential systems have dual democratic legitimacy, divided between the executive and the legislature; given that both are elected, it is often difficult to resolve conflict between

---

[11] David Collier and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 387-89.

the two over which branch of government truly embodies the voice of the people.[12] Linz also points to rigid presidential terms as another factor behind the proclivity of breakdown in democracies with presidential systems. Since presidents are elected to fixed terms in office, voters generally have to wait until the end of their term to choose a new leader, even if the prevailing political, economic, or social context changes dramatically during a president's time in office.[13] Finally, the fact that elections in presidential systems tend to be zero-sum, winner-take-all contests increases the stakes for both the winners and the losers, leading to heightened political polarization and tension, which in turn increases the odds of democracy breaking down.[14]

In response to some of the claims made by Linz and Valenzuela, Mainwaring and Shugart (1997) suggest that presidentialism has not been particularly detrimental to democracy in Latin America. The pair offer two important rebuttals to the idea that democratic breakdown in the region would have been less likely under parliamentary systems of government:

> There are two difficulties with this argument: (1) presidential democracy has existed mostly in Latin America, making it hard to disentangle those obstacles to democracy in Latin America that stem from the regime type and those that stem from socioeconomic or other factors; and (2) parliamentary democracy exists almost exclusively in Europe or former British colonies, which should make us suspicious of arguments that parliamentarism would perform as well outside these settings.[15]

Rather than making the claim that presidentialism itself has been behind the breakdown of democracy in Latin America, Mainwaring and Shugart instead point to specific aspects

---

[12] Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, ed., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 7.
[13] Linz and Valenzuela, *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, 9.
[14] Ibid., 19.
[15] Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Shugart, ed., *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

within presidential systems – including the relative number of seats a president's party has in the legislature, the number of political parties, the level of party discipline, and the relationship between a president's constitutional and partisan powers – as the main factors that explain why democratic breakdowns have occurred.

At the turn of the century, it appeared as though most Latin American democracies were well on their way to consolidation, but in recent years questions have been raised regarding the durability of democracy in the region as the frequency of democratic breakdown has increased. While the 2009 military coup in Honduras is perhaps the most notable example, there are a number of cases in which leaders have slowly but steadily eroded democratic institutions over time using much subtler means. The new ways in which democracy has broken down have forced scholars to revisit previous theories of democratic breakdown. Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2012), who use O'Donnell's 1973 *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism* as the foundation of their piece, concur with O'Donnell's conclusion that there is not a particularly strong link between the level of economic development and the survival or breakdown of democratic regimes in Latin America. Rather, they find that:

> Democracies are more likely to survive when political actors have a strong normative preference for democracy and when they avoid radical policy positions. Moreover, democratic regimes are stronger when the regional environment facilitates the spread of democratic values and political moderation domestically.[16]

The implication of their findings, then, is that breakdowns of democracy in Latin America occur when those in power do not harbor normative preferences for democracy,

---

[16] Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, "Democratic Breakdown and Survival," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2013): 124.

hold radical policy positions, and are in office at a time when the environment in the region is not as conducive to democratic governance.

A 2016 piece by Catherine Conaghan advances a similar theory in order to explain the case of Ecuador. Conaghan examines Ecuador's steady erosion of democracy beginning with the election of Rafael Correa in 2007. From the time Correa was elected until he left office in 2017, Ecuador saw a noticeable decline in its ranking in democracy indices such as Freedom House, drawing the concern of the U.S., the United Nations, and the Organization for American States, among others. So why and how has this happened? Conaghan suggests we start by looking at "the ideas that animated Correa's presidency and consider their impact in relation to the president's own political ambitions and the opportunity structures at hand since 2007."[17] For Conaghan, then, the two main factors leading to the breakdown of democracy in Ecuador are first, that Correa did not have a strong preference for building a "standard liberal or representative democracy," and second, that he came into power "on the promise that he would deliver... a project of radical institutional reinvention."[18]

Returning to the idea that polarization plays a key role in democratic breakdown, Samuel Handlin (2017) posits that a history of state crises, combined with a strong organizational infrastructure on the political left, can explain the high levels of political polarization in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.[19] According to Handlin, high levels of polarization in these countries help explain why all three have

---

[17] Catherine M. Conaghan, "Ecuador Under Correa," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 111.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Samuel Handlin, *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 7.

experienced varying levels of democratic erosion since making their respective "left turns." In contrast, states with strong left-wing movements that do not have the same history of state crises – such as Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay – have not experienced the same levels of political polarization, which helps to explain why their democratic institutions have remained relatively intact.

As seen in the previous section, scholars have approached the problem of democratic breakdown in Latin America from many different angles. But as with the previous section, most of these theories fail to address some of the principal factors behind the breakdown of democracy in Honduras – the international environment, and the country's political party system. While Mainwaring and Shugart (1997) do discuss the importance of political parties within the context of presidential systems of democracy, they do not explicitly mention party systems or how they may relate to democratic breakdown. Of the remaining hypotheses covered in this section, the theory put forth by Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán stands out from the rest due to its emphasis on how the regional environment can contribute to breakdowns of democracy.

III. Conclusions

This chapter offered a brief overview of some of the major theories that have been developed to explain breakdowns of democracy, followed by a discussion of some of ways that scholars have approached the problem of democratic breakdown in Latin America. The goal of this chapter was illustrate two main points about the existing literature on breakdowns of democracy: most theories of democratic breakdown underestimate the salience of international factors, with some ignoring the impact of the

regional environment completely, while the relationship between the collapse of a party system and the breakdown of democracy is left unexplored. Having reviewed how scholars have sought to answer the question of why democracies break down, it is now possible to turn to the specific case of democratic breakdown in Honduras.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BREAKDOWN OF DEMOCRACY IN HONDURAS

In order to evaluate how well different theories of democratic breakdown apply to Honduras, it is necessary to have both a broad understanding of the country's political and social trajectory as well as a certain level of familiarity with how the process of democratic breakdown has played out in Honduras. As such, this chapter is broken up into three sections. The first part will offer an overview of Honduras's political development during the twentieth century, the country's initial transition to democracy in the early 1980s, and efforts to consolidate Honduran democracy during the 1990s and 2000s. Given that the ongoing breakdown of democracy in Honduras has coincided with the breakdown of the country's traditional bipartisan political system, much of this first section will focus on the emergence of the two pillars of this system, the Liberal Party and the National Party. The second part of this chapter will review the initial breakdown of democracy that occurred under the administration of President Manuel Zelaya (2006-09), with a particular emphasis on Zelaya's attempts to reform the constitution, the military coup that removed him from power, and the immediate aftermath of the coup, especially the fracturing of Zelaya's Liberal Party and the rise of new political movements on both the left and the right. The third and final section of this chapter will look at how this democratic breakdown has continued under the administrations of Porfirio Lobo Sosa (2010-14) and Juan Orlando Hernández (2014–). It will detail the political machinations that resulted in a decision by the country's top court that threw out constitutional prohibitions on presidential reelection, which ultimately led to President

Hernández being reelected to a second term. After reviewing the November 2017 elections and the ongoing controversy surrounding the results, the chapter will conclude will conclude by highlighting the role that the partial breakdown of the country's bipartisan political system has played in the breakdown of Honduran democracy.

I. The Political Development of Honduras

For most of the 20th century, Honduras had a political system dominated by two major parties. While the earliest versions of the Liberal Party (*Partido Liberal de Honduras*) began to take shape as early as the 1870s, the modern-day version of the party was founded in 1891. According to historian Thomas Dodd (2005):

> Its basic tenets came from the doctrines of the French Revolution and the Constitution of the United States, with acceptable theoretical precepts but little practical application to Honduran politics. Generally it supported a separation of church and state, a Central American Union, economic progress based on sound fiscal policies, strict adherence to a written constitution, and, if need be, a resort to revolution should elections be set aside.[1]

However, the Liberal Party never coalesced around a coherent ideological framework. Instead, "political fortunes rose and fell on the personal loyalty of people. Choices for a leader were made based on who could provide posts at the national level and distribute favors locally."[2] Personalism and the internal conflicts it generated would dominate the Liberal Party over the next several decades and beyond.

During the Liberal administration of General López Gutiérrez (1920-24), the Democratic National Party (*Partido Nacional Democrático de Honduras*) emerged out of the opposition generated by López Gutiérrez's pronouncement that he intended to stay in

---

[1] Thomas J. Dodd, *Tiburcio Carías: Portrait of a Honduran Political Leader* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 11.
[2] Ibid., 17.

office after his term expired. On paper, the new party differed significantly from the Liberals:

> The new organization was conservative on social and economic issues, interested primarily in reforming government finances and encouraging foreign investment. It reflected many aspirations of a generation of Hondurans who had grown tired of civil wars that had disrupted the economy and made effective administration of government difficult.[3]

In practice, the Democratic National Party – renamed the National Party (*Partido Nacional de Honduras*) in 1922 – also became a means for political elites to distribute rents to their allies. Over the course of the twentieth century, neither party hewed to a consistent policy platform. While the Liberal Party generally governed closer to the political center than the more conservative National Party, both parties could be classified as center-right.[4]

After the reign of National President Tiburcio Carías, who governed the country as a relatively benevolent dictator from 1933 until 1949, the second half of the twentieth century saw weak administrations from both parties repeatedly toppled by the armed forces. Following disputed presidential elections in 1954 and months of political squabbling between various Liberal and National factions, the military seized power in 1956. They "proclaimed themselves the guardians of the nation's security and managers of the political process. They called for elections to a constituent assembly to draw up a new constitution and select a president."[5] The president who emerged from this process, Ramón Villeda Morales of the Liberal Party, almost completed his term, but was overthrown by the military ten days before scheduled elections in 1963.

---

[3] Dodd, *Tiburcio Carías*, 25.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 230.

Apart from a brief period of civilian rule in the early 1970s, the armed forces would govern Honduras until 1982. The nearly 20 years of military rule was made possible by the support – sometimes tacit, sometimes overt – of the United States. Even under the Carter administration, when U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America generally included a greater emphasis on democracy and protecting human rights, the zeal with which democracy was promoted in countries such as Honduras was tempered by the successful overthrow of the Somoza regime by leftist rebels in Nicaragua, as well as burgeoning leftist guerrilla movements in El Salvador and Guatemala.[6] So while the Carter administration remained supportive of efforts to return to civilian rule in Honduras, they also greatly increased aid to the Honduran military. As Schulz and Schulz (1994) explain:

> Democratization was one key to U.S. policy; militarization was the other. These two thrusts, so contradictory in terms of their impact on Honduran politics and society, were in fact strategically complementary. The Honduran military had to be fortified lest revolutionary turmoil in neighboring lands threaten national stability... But militarization was not enough. One of the lessons that the Carter administration had drawn from the Central American crisis was the inability of traditional authoritarian institutions to maintain stability in the face of popular pressures for democracy and social reform.[7]

However, this sharp increase in military aid to Honduras – which was further increased during the administration of Ronald Reagan – ultimately strengthened the hand of the armed forces at the expense of the country's reemerging democracy.[8]

---

[6] Donald E. Schulz and Deborah Sundloff Schulz, *The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 57.
[7] Ibid., 58.
[8] Mark B. Rosenberg, "Democracy in Honduras: The Electoral and the Political Reality," in *Elections and Democracy in Central America, Revisited*, ed. Mitchell A. Seligson and John A. Booth (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 70.

While the presidential elections held in November 1981 were generally free and fair and did manage to return Honduras to civilian rule, they were not without controversy. In the run up to the vote, General Policarpo Paz García, the military officer who served as president from 1978-1982, attempted to postpone the elections, but was rebuffed by other elements of the military as well as civilian politicians.[9] The Liberal candidate, Roberto Suazo Córdova, won the elections and assumed power, officially marking the end of direct military rule in Honduras, but the armed forces continued to play an outsized role in managing the nation's affairs: "It was a strange sort of democracy that was emerging – one in which human rights were increasingly abused and, with the notable exception of the president, civilians had virtually no power. In effect, the military functioned as a state within a state."[10] The military's position was further strengthened due to their success at influencing the constitution of 1982, adopted when Suazo assumed office. Among other provisions, the 1982 constitution allowed the military to recommend its own commander of armed forces to the National Congress, while also giving the commander the right to "mediate" orders issued by the president.[11]

One of the principal factors that allowed the armed forces to maintain their supremacy throughout the 1980s – in spite of a marginally more democratic political system – was the significant increase in aid provided by the Reagan administration to the Honduran military. Concerned with the potential spread of communism in Central America and alarmed by the rise of leftist Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua, the United States provided a substantial amount of funding and training to the country's armed

---

[9] Schulz and Schulz, *The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America*, 69.
[10] Ibid., 87.
[11] Rosenberg, "Democracy in Honduras: The Electoral and the Political Reality," 76-77.

forces. In 1980, American military aid to Honduras was approximately $4 million, but by 1984 this figure had jumped to over $77 million[12] – an increase of more than 1,900%. This aid allowed not only helped the military grow in size and capability, but it also allowed the armed forces to continue to exercise influence over successive civilian administrations. Following the election of Liberal candidate José Azcona del Hoyo in 1985, for example, the military vetoed Azcona's first choice for foreign minister, Carlos Roberto Reina, because of his alleged leftist sympathies.[13]

It was not until the 1990s that the Honduran military began to be reigned in, allowing Honduras to take its first tentative steps towards democratic consolidation. As identified by J. Mark Ruhl (1996), four key factors led to the weakening of the primacy of the armed forces in Honduras during the reign of National president Rafael Callejas (1990-94). First, the end of the Cold War, the Sandinista's loss of power in Nicaragua's 1990 elections, and the resolution of a long-running border dispute with El Salvador all made maintaining a large military less justifiable.[14] Second, the United States shifted its foreign policy following the Cold War, focusing more on the promotion of democracy in Latin America and providing less aid to the region's armed forces. This shift, in turn, helped create more political space for Honduran civil society, which began to push back against military corruption and draw more attention to human rights abuses committed by the armed forces. Finally, the private sector – which has historically been the best-

---

[12] J. Mark Ruhl, "Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 38, no. 1 (1996): 38.
[13] Ibid., 40.
[14] Ibid., 42.

organized and most influential sector of civil society in Honduras – began to turn against the military.[15]

Throughout the rest of the 1990s and 2000s, Honduras appeared to make further progress in terms of weakening the role of the military and strengthening its nascent democratic institutions. Under Carlos Roberto Reina (1994-98) of the Liberal Party, the constitutional requirement for military service was abolished,[16] and the influence and prestige of the armed forces continued to diminish under his successor, the Liberal Carlos Flores (1998-2002). During the elections held in November 2001, the Organization of American States was on hand to observe the voting process, and overall they found that the elections had been conducted in a free and fair manner:

> According to the Mission's observations, the electoral process in Honduras was conducted normally, in strict compliance with the established election standards... The EOM's [Electoral Observation Mission's] general assessment of the election process is positive, with strengths outweighing weaknesses. The problems encountered were mostly logistic and were due to a lack of resources to properly organize the election process... However, these problems did not compromise the legality of the process. The election authorities performed their various functions lawfully and reliably, with the result that the EOM found the elections to be free and transparent.[17]

Many of the recommendations made by the OAS for improving the electoral process in Honduras were ultimately adopted as part of a package of electoral reforms implemented during the National administration of Ricardo Maduro (2002-06). These included the creation of the nonpartisan Supreme Electoral Tribunal (*Tribunal Supremo Electoral*, TSE) to replace the partisan National Elections Tribunal (*Tribunal Nacional de Elecciones*, TNE) and the introduction of primary elections. After observing the primary

---

[15] Ruhl, "Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras," 43.
[16] Ibid., 48.
[17] "Report of the Electoral Observation Mission in Honduras, 2001," Organization of American States (Washington, 2002), 30.

elections held in February 2005, an OAS electoral observation mission praised Honduras as "model" for the region, saying:

> Despite being one of the poorest countries in the Americas (after Haiti, Nicaragua, and Bolivia) and facing a string of social problems – specifically as regards the maintenance of law and order – the Honduran people and government remain firmly committed to democracy. As a result, February 20 of this year saw the first ever open internal and primary elections of two Honduran political parties organized by the electoral authorities... These primary elections, organized and supervised by a recently created electoral authority, mark a clear watershed in the history not only of Honduras but of the Americas as a whole, representing a major step forward toward democratizing all the institutions of the state, up to and including the political parties.[18]

On paper, then, it appeared as though Honduras was well on its way towards democratic consolidation. It is all the more surprising, then, that less than five years after the OAS issued such a glowing report of the state of democracy in Honduras, a duly-elected president was ousted by a military coup, marking the beginning of an ongoing breakdown of democracy that continues to this day.

II. The Initial Breakdown of Democracy

In his 1996 article on changing civil-military relations in Honduras, Ruhl – while lauding the progress that Honduras had made towards consolidating its democracy – also warned that these gains ran the risk of being reversed:

> If the present endemic corruption and lack of accountability for actions continue, Hondurans may eventually become discouraged with, and disillusioned by, democracy, particularly if the economy also grows too slowly to ameliorate the miserable social conditions most must now endure.[19]

---

[18] "Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Honduras: Primary Elections 2005," Organization of American States (Washington, 2006), iv.
[19] Ruhl, "Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras," 58.

Indeed, in the years prior to the military coup that overthrew President Manuel Zelaya in 2009, the population of Honduras registered some of the lowest indications of confidence in democratic institutions in Latin America. According to the region's 2008 Latinobarómetro poll, Hondurans indicated below-average levels of confidence in the legislature (26%), political parties (20%), and the government overall (25%).[20] Additionally, nearly 63% of Hondurans – almost a two-thirds majority and the third highest in the Americas – indicated that they would accept an undemocratic government if it meant resolving economic problems.[21]

The low levels of confidence registered in Honduras's democracy and political institutions make sense in the context of the country's prolonged development challenges. In 2008, the poverty rate in Honduras measured nearly 60%, while GDP per capita was barely about $3,000.[22] That same year, the Gini coefficient reached 55.7, indicating a very high degree of inequality; Honduras has long been among the most unequal countries in a region that is already known for its pervasive inequality. Other metrics recorded that year paint a similarly troubling picture. The murder rate reached an astounding 61 per 100,000 (although the rate has unfortunately climbed even higher in recent years),[23] and Honduras scored a dismal 26 out of 100 on Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking 126th out of 180 countries.[24]

---

[20] "Informe 2008," Corporación Latinobarómetro, http://www.latinobarometro.org/docs/INFORME_LATINOBAROMETRO_2008.
[21] Ibid.
[22] "Honduras," The World Bank Group, https://data.worldbank.org/country/honduras.
[23] Ibid.
[24] "Corruption Perceptions Index 2008," Transparency International, 2008, https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2008/0.

It was in this context that Manuel "Mel" Zelaya was elected in 2005 and took office the following year. Although Zelaya was elected and began his term as a typical Liberal politician, he gradually shifted to the left, attracting the ire of the opposition National Party, business owners, and other members of the conservative political establishment. In addition to taking initial steps towards redistributing land to poor *campesinos* and raising the minimum wage,[25] the leftward shift of the Zelaya administration was encapsulated by Honduras's deepening ties with Venezuela and in Zelaya's personal relationship with Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. In 2008, Honduras joined Petrocaribe, allowing it access to steeply discounted Venezuelan oil, and later that year the country also joined the Venezuela-led trading bloc Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*, ALBA).[26]

While Zelaya's leftward swing caused some consternation within Honduras, it was his push to reform the constitution that raised even more alarm. Zelaya, maintaining that Honduras's political system was broken and biased towards the wealthy, began calling for a constituent assembly around the end of 2008 in order to amend the country's constitution.[27] While Zelaya did not specify exactly which reforms he wanted to undertake, his efforts to hold a constituent assembly were seen by some as a vehicle by which he could potentially amend the constitution and lift the ban on presidential reelection in Honduras.

---

[25] "Gobierno hondureño aumenta salario mínimo," *La Prensa*, August 29, 2008, http://www.laprensa.hn/economia/557517-97/gobierno-hondureno-aumenta-salario-minimo.
[26] Ruhl, "Honduras Unravels," 99.
[27] Ibid., 100.

In March 2009, Zelaya ordered the National Statistical Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, INE) to hold a nonbinding referendum with regard to the constituent assembly. It is important to note that the referendum Zelaya called for was not on whether the constitution should be amended, or even whether a constituent assembly should take place, but rather sought to ask Hondurans whether there *should* be a question about holding a constituent assembly on the ballot during Honduras's regularly scheduled November elections. However, the move to hold the referendum attracted opposition from across the political spectrum, including the Supreme Court, the National Congress, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (*Tribunal Supremo Electoral*, TSE), and even Zelaya's own attorney general.[28]

Although all of these institutions agreed that Honduran law only allowed the National Congress to call for a referendum and the TSE to run such a referendum, Zelaya refused to back down. When rumors surfaced that Zelaya was planning to ask the armed forces to assist in carrying out the referendum, the military's top officer warned Zelaya not to order the military to help with the plebiscite. Zelaya ignored his warning, however, and on June 24, 2009 he issued orders instructing the armed forces to help with the vote.[29] When the military refused, Zelaya fired the top officer, General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, which led other military leaders to resign in solidarity. The next day the Supreme Court ruled that Zelaya's firing of General Vásquez was unconstitutional, but Zelaya refused to recognize the order and continued with his plans to hold the referendum. In the face of Zelaya's refusal to back down, the military entered the

[28] Ruhl, "Honduras Unravels," 100.
[29] Ibid, 101.

presidential palace on June 28 and forced Zelaya into exile in Costa Rica, and the National Congress soon named its leader, Roberto Micheletti, as interim president.

The international community reacted strongly to the breakdown of democracy in Honduras. The United States, which in the past had readily participated behind the scenes in overthrows of leftist leaders across Latin America, initially condemned the coup, the Organization of American States immediately suspended the country's membership, and most nations withdrew their ambassadors to protest how the new regime came to power.[30] In Honduras, however, domestic reactions to the coup were decidedly more mixed. While Zelaya maintained the support of several influential unions, as well as part of his Liberal Party, most other political actors supported the move by the military to remove him from power, including the Supreme Court, the TSE, the Roman Catholic Church, and most of the National Congress.[31]

In response to the coup, a variety of popular organizations emerged to protest both the coup as well as the wider problems in Honduran society that had precipitated the removal of Zelaya. The largest and most well known of these organizations was the National Popular Resistance Front (*Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular*, FNRP). The FNRP brought together a diverse coalition of left-wing activists, *campesino* movements, unions, and other groups that were opposed to the coup that ousted Zelaya.[32] Almost all of the FNRP's members were also supportive of efforts to change the Honduran constitution, which they viewed as enabling a conservative elite to amass political and

---

[30] Ruhl, "Honduras Unravels," 102.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Alexander Main, "Honduras: The Deep Roots of Resistance," *Dissent* 61, no. 2 (2014): 11.

economic power at the expense of ordinary Hondurans. Initially, most of the leaders of the FNRP were not interested in participating in elections:

> Instead, they favored broadening the resistance and intensifying peaceful mobilizations against the coup government's most retrograde policies and in support of a *constituyente* [constituent assembly]. But when Zelaya began playing a more direct leadership role in the resistance after he returned from exile in May 2011, he pushed it toward electoral politics. By the time the FNRP's June national assembly took place, the membership favored creating a new party that would compete in the 2013 presidential, legislative, and municipal elections.[33]

It was at that assembly in June 2011 that the Liberty and Refoundation Party (*Partido Libertad y Refundación,* Libre) was born.

While Libre was the main political force to spring up from the left, other challenges to the political status quo in Honduras emerged from the right. The most notable was the Anti-Corruption Party (*Partido Anticorrupción*, PAC). Founded by Salvador Nasralla, a well-known sports broadcaster and TV personality, the party echoed many of Libre's critiques of the Honduran political system, albeit from a more conservative perspective.[34] Like Libre, the PAC also aimed to attract disaffected Honduran voters, many of whom had grown increasingly cynical of the country's political system since the 2009 coup. However, both the PAC and, to a lesser extent, Libre – despite their professed ideological differences – suffered from the same personalist tendencies seen in the National and Liberal parties. Supporters of the PAC and Libre were much more loyal to Nasralla and Zelaya, respectively, than to either party's platform.

---

[33] Main, "Honduras: The Deep Roots of Resistance," 11.
[34] Patricia Otero Felipe, "El sistema de partidos de Honduras tras la crisis política de 2009. ¿El fin del bipartidismo?" *Colombia Internacional* 79, no. 3 (2013): 270.

At first glance, the emergence of new political movements like Libre and the PAC might seem to be a positive development for the Honduran political system, shaking up an entrenched political elite and giving ordinary Hondurans more of a voice in their country's direction. However, this phenomenon was accompanied by the splintering of the Liberal Party in the aftermath of the coup. As the bipartisan political system that had been in place for over a century began to crumble and with its principal rival seriously weakened by internal divisions, the National Party was in the perfect position to capitalize on these developments. As the following section will illustrate, this incomplete breakdown of the party system in Honduras allowed Hernández and the National Party to consolidate their hold on power, laying the groundwork for the ongoing breakdown of democracy in Honduras that persists to this day.

III. Ongoing Democratic Breakdown

Article 239 of the Constitution of Honduras reads as follows:

> The citizen that has served as the head of the Executive Branch may not be President or Vice-President of the Republic. Those who break this provision or propose its reform, as well as those who support it directly or indirectly, will immediately cease serving in their respective offices and will be disqualified from exercising any and all public function for ten (10) years.

In addition, Article 42 lists "inciting, promoting, or supporting the continuity or reelection of the President of the Republic" as one of the conditions under which Hondurans can be stripped of their citizenship, and Article 374 expressly prohibits

amending or modifying any of the articles of the constitution that deal with presidential term limits or reelection.[35]

Given the exceptionally strong constitutional prohibitions against reelection in Honduras, as well as longstanding public opposition to reelection, how was it that Juan Orlando Hernández was able to run for and win reelection to the presidency in November 2017? In order to understand how the country arrived at this point, it is necessary to look back to 2009, the year in which the ongoing democratic breakdown in Honduras began. After President Zelaya was ousted by the military and flown to Costa Rica, Honduras conducted regularly scheduled presidential and congressional elections later that year. Porfirio Lobo Sosa of the National Party, who lost to Zelaya in the 2005 election, was successful this time around, winning more than 56% of the vote.[36] The National Party also won 71 of the 128 seats in the National Congress, while the Liberal Party, struggling to cast off its association with the polarizing and unpopular Zelaya, lost more than a dozen seats. The newly elected National Party majority chose Juan Orlando Hernández to serve as President of the National Congress.

During Lobo's time in office (2010-14), his administration repeatedly clashed with the country's Supreme Court of Justice. In October 2012, the Constitutional Court[37] ruled against a law strongly supported by Lobo and the National Party that would have

---

[35] An original Spanish version of the Honduran constitution can be found at https://www.oas.org/dil/esp/Constitucion_de_Honduras.pdf.

[36] "Resultados Electorales," Tribunal Supremo Electoral, https://www.tse.hn/web/estadisticas/procesos_electorales.html#.

[37] The Honduran Supreme Court of Justice has 15 members. However, in Honduras (as elsewhere in Latin America), cases that make their way to the Supreme Court are initially heard not by the entire court, but rather by one of several *salas*, or chambers. These "sub-courts" are made up of sitting Supreme Court justices. If the ruling of a *sala* is unanimous, then it stands; otherwise, the case is heard by the full court.

created special economic zones with their own police forces and systems of taxation.[38] His attempt to reform the country's police force was also frustrated by the Court. As part of a plan to carry out a purge of corrupt police officers, Congress passed a law that would have required officers to undergo lie detector tests; but in November 2012 the Constitutional Court ruled against the administration by a vote of 4-1, finding that this and other aspects of the law violated due process.[39]

In response to the Court's ruling, the National Congress created a commission to investigate the four justices who ruled against the administration. The commission, which took less than 48 hours to arrive at a decision, claimed that the justices had ignored the worsening security environment in Honduras and had been dangerously negligent when they rejected the constitutionality of certain provisions of the police reform law.[40] In the middle of the night of December 12, 2012, the National Congress voted 91-37 in favor of dismissing the four justices from the Constitutional Court who had voted against the law. The decision to remove the justices is notable not only for the speed with which it was carried out, but also because the decision of the Constitutional Court was not final; since the ruling was not unanimous, the full Supreme Court was scheduled to hear the case the following year. Hernández and the ruling National Party then had the opportunity to

---

[38] "Honduras: declaran inconstitucional plan de 'ciudades modelo,'" *British Broadcasting Corporation*, October 12, 2012, http://www.bbc.com/mundo/ultimas_noticias/2012/10/121018_ultnot_honduras_ciudad_privada_cch.shtml.

[39] "Lobo dice que la depuración de la Policía se hará pese al rechazo de la Corte Suprema," *CRHoy*, November 30, 2012, http://www.crhoy.com/archivo/lobo-dice-que-la-depuracion-de-la-policia-se-hara-pese-al-rechazo-de-la-corte-suprema/mundo/.

[40] "Descabezados cuatro magistrados de la Sala de lo Constitucional de la Corte Suprema de Justicia," *Proceso Digital*, December 11, 2012, http://www.proceso.hn/component/k2/item/28528.html.

choose four new justices to fill the seats of those they had forced out. It was these same justices who would later rule in favor of allowing presidential reelection in Honduras.

In December 2014, a group of 15 deputies from Hernández's National Party (as well as one deputy from an allied political party) brought a case to the Constitutional Court challenging the Constitution's prohibition on reelection in Honduras.[41] The case revolved around Article 239 (which prohibits presidential reelection) as well as a subsection of Article 42 (which criminalizes the discussion of reelection). The deputies argued that the articles not only violated the political rights of Honduran voters by denying them the opportunity to choose whether to reelect a president, but also violated the political rights of those seeking to hold office again. Although Hernández was not officially involved in the suit, almost all of the deputies in the suit were from his National Party, and he was widely viewed as supportive of their efforts. In March 2015, an additional challenge to constitutional provisions banning reelection was brought by Rafael Callejas, a member of the National Party who served as president from 1990 until 1994.[42]

On the evening of April 22, 2015, the Constitutional Court ruled 5-0 in favor of the challenges brought by the deputies and Callejas.[43] Given that the Honduran constitution explicitly prohibits modifying any of the articles that pertain to reelection,

---

[41] "Honduras: Piden derogar artículo que penaliza hablar de reelección," *El Heraldo*, December 8, 2014, http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/774975-331/honduras-piden-derogar-art%C3%ADculo-que-penaliza-hablar-de-reelecci%C3%B3n.

[42] "Expresidente Callejas solicita reelección a CSJ de Honduras," *El Heraldo*, March 12, 2015, http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/821466-214/expresidente-callejas-solicita-reelecci%C3%B3n-a-csj-de-honduras.

[43] "Reelección en Honduras: Corte Suprema de Justicia aprueba fallo favorable," *La Prensa*, April 23, 2015, http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/833657-410/reelecci%C3%B3n-en-honduras-corte-suprema-de-justicia-aprueba-fallo-favorable.

the ruling was a stretch, to say the least. The Court claimed in the decision that they were not "modifying" any of the relevant articles, but instead that they simply found that the articles "did not apply" to those seeking to run for president again. The following day, the only Liberal justice on the Constitutional Court, José Elmer Lizardo, attempted to remove his signature from the decision, but by that point the decision had already been published and was therefore valid. The ruling was upheld by the full Supreme Court in August 2016, clearing the way for Hernández and other ex-presidents to run for reelection. The Court did not rule on the merits of presidential reelection, but rather found that since the decision of the Constitutional Court was (initially) unanimous, the ruling was final.

Following the decision of the Supreme Court, Hernández did not immediately declare his intention to run for reelection, although it did not take him long to do so. Less than two months after the Court's decision, at a political rally held in October 2016, Hernández hinted at the possibility. Near the end of the rally, while discussing a video made for him by some of his supporters, he made the following statement:

> So as that video said, it was an informal video, I'm going to more or less repeat what it said: I'm Juan Orlando Hernández, I come from the lands of the indomitable cacique Lempira, from the hand of God and the support of the Honduran people I'm going to be the next president of Honduras."[44]

On November 6, Hernández officially declared his intention to run for a second term as president of Honduras.[45]

---

[44] Julissa Mercado, "Honduras: ¿Lanzó su candidatura el presidente Juan Orlando Hernández?" *El Heraldo*, October 18, 2016, http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1009561-466/honduras-lanz%C3%B3-su-candidatura-el-presidente-juan-orlando-hern%C3%A1ndez.

[45] "JOH lanza su ilegal reelección presidencial," *Criterio*, November 6, 2016, https://criterio.hn/2016/11/06/joh-lanza-ilegal-reeleccion-presidencial/.

In response to Hernández's announcement, in January 2017 several of the major opposition parties in Honduras – with the notable exception of the Liberal Party – signed an agreement to run a joint presidential ticket in the 2017 elections.[46] The parties to the agreement included Libre, the Innovation and Unity Party (*Partido Innovación y Unidad Social Demócrata*, PINU-SD), and the Anti-Corruption Party (*Partido Anticorrupción*, PAC). At the time the pact was signed, the alliance – officially known as the Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship (*Alianza de Oposición contra la Dictadura*) – did not even know who would run against Hernández in November. While the parties did manage to overcome their diverse ideological leanings and agree on a joint platform, it was clear that they were chiefly united by their opposition to Hernández and his possible reelection.[47]

In March 2017, internal primary elections were held by all of the major political parties to select their candidates for president and the National Congress, as well as local positions. Hernández dominated the elections within the National Party, winning over 90% of the 1.15 million votes cast. In the Liberal primary, the divisions that had riven the party since the ouster of Zelaya were on full display. In the end, Luis Zelaya, an engineer and an academic with no relation to the former president, was chosen, but not without some competition. He won about 56% of the approximately 600,000 votes cast in the

---

[46] "Honduras: Libre, Pac y Pinu sellan alianza opositora durante asamblea nacional," *El Heraldo*, January 15, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1035247-466/honduras-libre-pac-y-pinu-sellan-alianza-opositora-durante-asamblea-nacional.

[47] "Ideología de las bases es el primer obstáculo de la alianza opositora de Honduras," *El Heraldo*, January 19, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1036464-466/ideolog%C3%ADa-de-las-bases-es-el-primer-obst%C3%A1culo-de-la-alianza-opositora.

primary. Finally, Libre once again nominated former first lady Xiomara Castro. She won the primary by a large margin, winning over 93% of the roughly 427,000 valid votes.[48]

Although Libre was the only member of the opposition alliance to hold primary elections to choose a presidential candidate, in the end the alliance ended up choosing Salvador Nasralla, the former television host and founder of the PAC, as the coalition's candidate for president.[49] Although not as well known as other opposition figures such as the former president Zelaya, Nasralla was a less polarizing candidate. Xiomara Castro agreed to run as Nasralla's vice-president, with Manuel Zelaya remaining the "coordinator" of the opposition coalition.

Apart from the debate over presidential reelection in Honduras, the campaign also focused heavily on gangs, crime, and public safety. Hernández campaigned on the reduction in the country's homicide rate seen during his first term, which he credited to the implementation of *mano dura* policies against gang members and other suspected criminals. While the murder rate did fall during his administration, it is unclear whether these hardline policies – such as the creation of a special military police force– had any impact on this decrease.[50] Hernández also proposed focusing more on innovation in order to create more jobs. Nasralla, meanwhile, promised free electricity for *campesinos* and farmers, as well as the eventual creation of 600,000 jobs in maquilas and in the

---

[48] "Elecciones Primarias," Tribunal Supremo Electoral, http://resultadosprimarias2017.tse.hn/cortes/.
[49] Gustavo Palencia, "Alianza opositora en Honduras elige a presentador de televisión como candidato presidencial," *Reuters*, May 21, 2017, https://lta.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idLTAKBN18H120-OUSLD.
[50] Charles Parkinson, "Honduras Congress Votes for Military Police Force," *InSight Crime*, August 17, 2013, https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/honduras-congress-votes-for-military-police-force/.

agricultural sector,[51] while Luis Zelaya of the Liberal Party advocated for the creation of industrial parks, greater investment in infrastructure, and increased access to financing for small businesses.[52] As a whole, many of the campaign proposals by all three of the major candidates were devoid of specifics, relying on vague promises such as increased employment without actually explaining how these promises would be kept.

As the election approached, polls suggested that Hernández was on course to win the election by a comfortable margin. A poll published in September by CID Gallup showed Hernández leading the pack with 37%, followed by Nasralla with 22% and Luis Zelaya with 17%, while an October poll, commissioned by Paradigma, found Hernández earning the support of 41% of voters, with Nasralla and Zelaya earning 25% and 16%, respectively.[53] However, it is important to note that Honduran law prohibits conducting or publishing opinion polls or other electoral surveys in the month preceding the date of an election,[54] meaning that these polls do not capture any late movement of voters to one candidate or away from another.

On Sunday, November 26, 2017, the vote went ahead as planned. Despite the tensions leading up to the election, the vote itself proceeded without any major incidents.

---

[51] "Salvador Nasralla cierra su campaña electoral en Choluteca y en la colonia Kennedy," *El Heraldo*, November 20, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/partidoalianza/1127693-508/salvador-nasralla-cierra-su-campa%C3%B1a-electoral-en-choluteca-y-en-la-colonia.

[52] "Luis Zelaya propone una Honduras con oportunidades, pero sin privilegios," *El Heraldo*, September 18, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/1107530-508/luis-zelaya-propone-una-honduras-con-oportunidades-pero-sin-privilegios-.

[53] Julia d'Amours, "Explainer: The 2017 Honduran Presidential Election," AS/COA, November 21, 2017, https://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-2017-honduran-presidential-election.

[54] "Cronograma Electoral: Elecciones Generales 2017," Tribunal Supremo Electoral, https://www.tse.hn/web/elecciones_2017_EG/CRONOGRAMA_EG_2017.PDF.

A mission of electoral observation from the Organization of American States was on hand to observe the voting. Observers did note some irregularities during the voting process, such as the fact that some polling places opened late while others closed late.[55] Additionally, many Honduran media outlets reported on exit polls during the day despite their potential to influence voting. Overall, however, the vote itself proceeded without any major problems.

Issues with the vote counting began to surface soon after the polls closed. In past presidential elections, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal had generally released partial results only a couple of hours after voting had ended, and in many cases the winner of the election was known Sunday night. Additionally, tests of the system used to transmit and count votes only a few days before the election had shown that all of the votes could be tabulated in as little as three hours after the polls closed.[56] However, in this case the TSE did not release any results until early in the morning on Monday, increasing the uncertainty and tension surrounding what was already a controversial election. According to the information released by the TSE, Nasralla led Hernández 45.17% to 40.21% with about 57% of the vote counted.[57] Even though over 40% of the vote remained to be counted, both Hernández and Nasralla declared themselves the winner of the vote.

In spite of pressure by the opposition, as well as by Honduran civil society and international election monitors, the vote counting – which was already slow even by

---

[55] "Informe Preliminar de la Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA en Honduras," Organization of American States, December 4, 2017, https://www.oas.org/documents/spa/press/informe-preliminar-moe-honduras-2017-4dic.pdf.

[56] Marilyn Méndez, "En tres horas y media, sistema tendrá el conteo presidencial," *La Prensa*, November 23, 2017, http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/elecciones2017/1128941-410/conteo-presidencial-elecciones-honduras-tribunal_supremo_electoral.

[57] "Informe Preliminar de la Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA en Honduras."

Honduran standards – slowed down even further. On the morning of Wednesday, November 29, one of the servers used by the TSE in the transmission and counting of votes crashed. The President of the TSE, David Matamoros, blamed it on unspecified technical problems and the system being overwhelmed, although he did not provide details.[58] Despite the fact that the server in question repeatedly crashed and was offline for much of the day, the TSE continued to release updated vote totals throughout the day. In order to decrease the tension, the OAS attempted to mediate between Hernández and Nasralla, managing to get both candidates to agree to respect the official results as announced by the TSE, but only several hours later Nasralla and the Alianza backed out of the agreement, claiming that the election results were being manipulated by the TSE.[59] As the votes were tallied, Nasralla's lead over Hernández began to shrink. By Wednesday evening, Hernández had passed up Nasralla. With approximately 83% of the vote counted, Hernández led Nasralla by an extremely narrow margin of 42.21% to 42.11% – a difference of less than 3,000 votes.[60]

On Friday, December 1, in response to the growing number of protests regarding the election results – many of which led to violent confrontations between demonstrators and security forces – the Honduran government declared a curfew from 6:00 PM until 6:00 AM for the following ten days. Despite the curfew, opposition supporters continued

---

[58] "Sistema de transmisión de resultados de TSE se cayó por cinco horas," *Criterio*, November 29, 2017, https://criterio.hn/2017/11/29/sistema-trasmision-resultados-del-tse-se-cayo-cinco-horas/.

[59] "No reconoceremos datos tramposos del TSE, dice Nasralla y agrega retirará firma de documento con OEA," Proceso Digital, November 29, 2017, http://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/no-reconoceremos-los-resultados-tramposos-del-tse-dice-nasralla-y-agrega-retirara-firma-de-documento-con-oea.html.

[60] "JOH ya supera a Nasralla en conteo de votos presidenciales, según TSE," *El Heraldo*, November 29, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/1130678-508/joh-ya-supera-a-nasralla-en-conteo-de-votos-presidenciales-seg%C3%BAn-tse.

to protest in the streets during the day and from their houses at night, banging on pots and pans to signal their discontent. On Sunday, December 3, thousands of Hondurans – mostly young people – headed calls by Nasralla to turn out in cities across Honduras to demonstrate against the alleged *fraude electoral* committed by Hernández. Over 100 people were injured in the resulting unrest, and at least one person was killed.[61]

The next day, the TSE finished counting all of the outstanding votes, but did not officially declare a winner of the election. According to the TSE, the final vote count showed Hernández to be ahead with 1,411,517 votes (42.98%) to Nasralla's 1,359,170 votes (41.39%).[62] That same day, the international mission of electoral observers commissioned by the Organization of American States released their preliminary report on the 2017 presidential elections in Honduras. Due to the various irregularities in the vote counting process, as well as the narrow margin of victory, the OAS observer mission concluded that they could not be fully confident in the election results as reported by Honduran electoral authorities.[63]

A more detailed analysis of the vote commissioned by the OAS further cast doubt on the integrity of the election results as reported by the TSE. According to Dr. Irfan Nooruddin, a professor at the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University who examined the vote tallies from Honduras, his review of the vote count revealed a number of startling trends that were highly unlikely to be the result of mere chance.

---

[61] Jacobo García, "Miles de personas protestan en varias ciudades de Honduras ante lo que consideran un fraude electoral," *El País*, December 4, 2017, https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/12/03/america/1512267455_834020.html.
[62] "Resultado final del Tribunal Supremo Electoral da como ganador a JOH sobre Nasralla," *El Heraldo*, December 3, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/1131652-508/resultado-final-del-tribunal-supremo-electoral-da-como-ganador-a-joh-sobre.
[63] "Informe Preliminar de la Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA en Honduras."

When analyzing the cumulative vote at the national level, Dr. Nooruddin found that the opposition lead over the National Party steadily increased as the first 68% of the vote was counted. However, the remaining 32% of the vote saw a sharp swing towards Hernández and his National Party. This is demonstrated in Figure 1, which shows the size of the opposition advantage over the National Party as the votes were counted at the national level.

What is even more surprising is that this same trend was observed across *all* departments in Honduras, including in both opposition and National Party strongholds. This is illustrated by the graphs in Figure 2, which show how the Alianza lead over the National Party changed over time as the votes were counted in each of Honduras's 18 departments as well as among the diaspora in the United States. All 18 departments in Honduras show the same pattern: the Alianza led in the initial vote count and slowly but steadily built up their lead over the National Party, but after approximately two-thirds of the vote was counted, the remaining votes swung sharply in favor the National Party. The odds that polling stations won by the opposition just happened to report first across all departments in Honduras – while polling stations won by the National Party just happened to report later – is extremely unlikely, to say the least.

Figure 1: Cumulative Vote, National Level

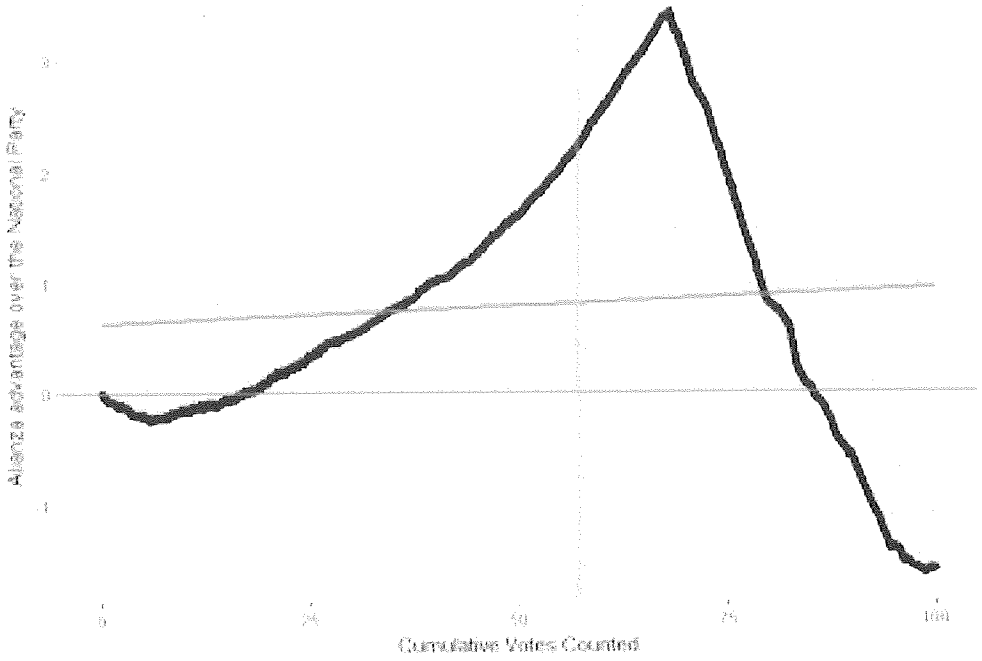
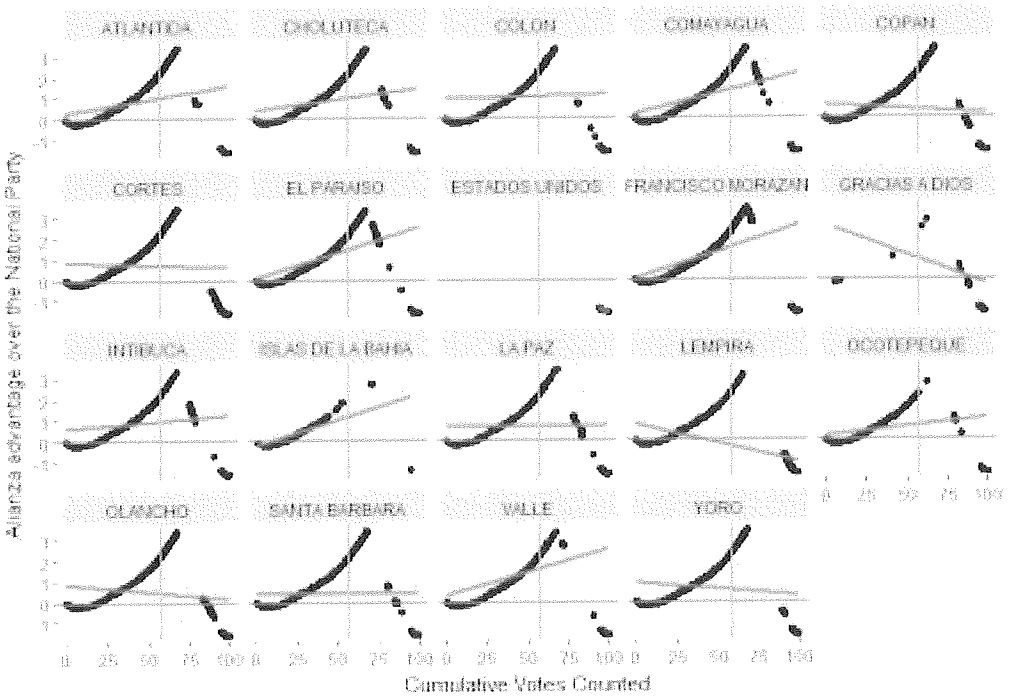


Figure 2: Cumulative Vote, Departmental Level



Also suspicious was the sharp increase in the apparent rates of voter turnout between the first two-thirds of polling stations that had their votes tallied compared to the final third. Overall, roughly 57% of Honduran voters turned out to vote.[64] Among the first two-thirds of polling stations that had their votes counted, the average rate of turnout was 56%, closely mirroring the national rate. However, the average turnout rate for the final third of polling stations counted was approximately 63%.[65] There is no reasonable explanation as to why turnout would be significantly and consistently higher at late-reporting polling stations.

Additionally, the last third of polling stations to report showed a marked increase in the number of polling stations that the National Party won, as well as a marked decrease in the number of polling stations won by the Alianza.[66] This can be seen in Figures 3 and 4. Each dot on the graph represents the results of an individual polling station, which shows the share of the vote won by either the Alianza or the National Party as well as when the polling station reported in the vote counting process. Figure 3 shows the share of the vote received by the National Party from each of the 18,104 polling stations in the country. The first two-thirds of polling stations that reported their results, which are to the left of the green line – show the National Party consistently winning less than 50% of the vote at individual polling stations. However, a noticeable shift can be seen in the final third of polling stations that reported their results, showing a significant increase in the proportion of polling stations at which the National Party earned more than 50% of the vote.

---

[64] Irfan Nooruddin, "Analysis for the Organization of American States," December 17, 2017, https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/Nooruddin-Analysis-for-OAS-Honduras-2017.pdf.
[65] Nooruddin, "Analysis for the Organization of American States."
[66] Ibid.

Figure 3: Cumulative Votes by Polling Station, National Party

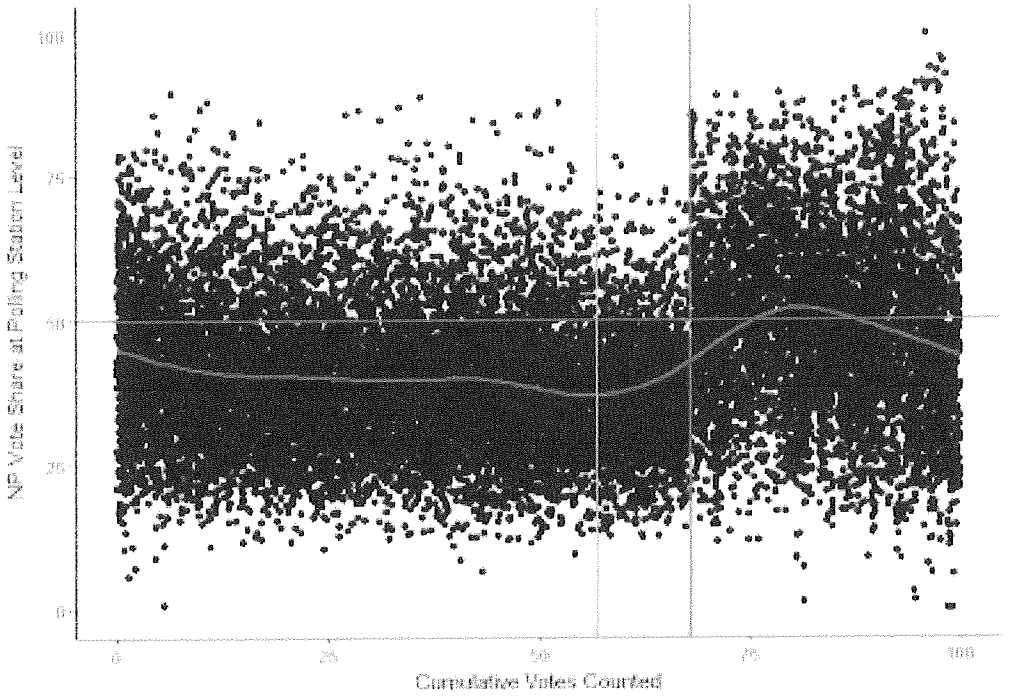


Figure 4: Cumulative Votes by Polling Station, Alianza

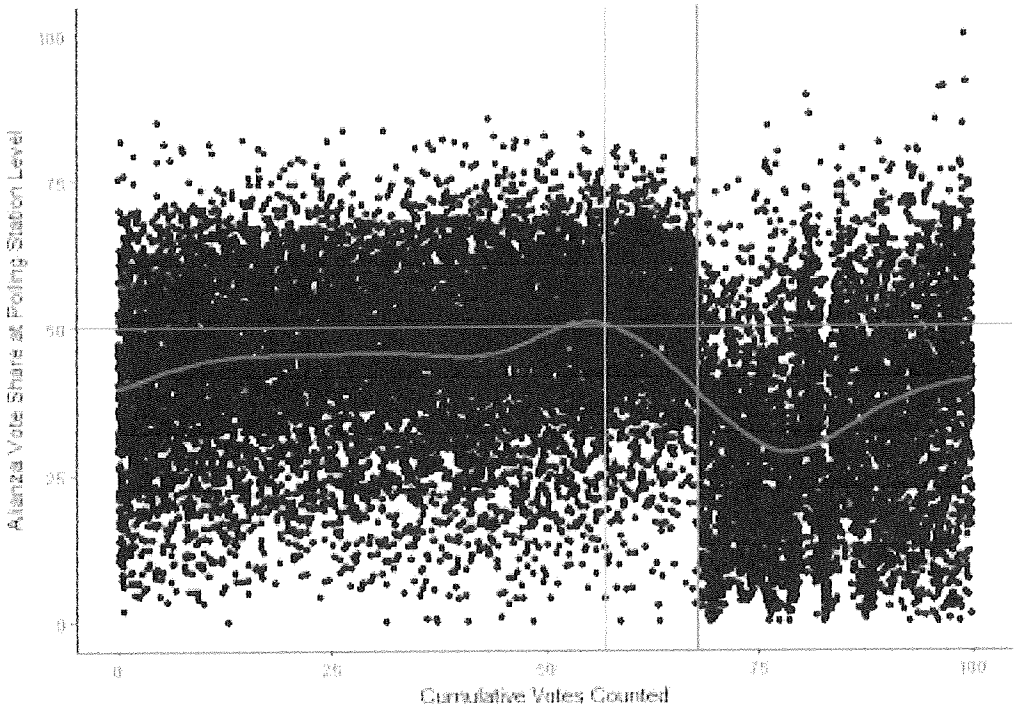


Figure 4 shows results from all 18,104 polling stations in terms of the share of the vote won by the opposition. As in Figure 3, a clear division can be seen between the first two-thirds of polling stations that reported and final third. Initially, the Alianza was winning, on average, nearly 50% of the vote, as illustrated by the blue trend line. However, the results from the final third of polling stations indicate a startling reversal of this trend. Not only did the number of polling stations at which the Alianza won more than 50% of the vote decrease, but there was also a sharp increase in the number of polling stations where the opposition won an extremely small share of the vote.

Together, all of the evidence strongly suggests that while the first two-thirds of the vote was counted correctly, the remaining third of the vote was systematically manipulated at the national level in order to favor Hernández and the National Party. In light of the findings of Dr. Nooruddin's report, as well as a preliminary audit of the vote counting system carried out by the OAS, the OAS electoral observation mission issued a second report on December 17, again finding that they could not say with certainty whether the results of the election were valid.[67] Given the combination of the narrow margin separating Hernández and Nasralla, as well as the scale of electoral irregularities, the OAS issued a press release calling for new general elections in Honduras, claiming this to be the only way to resolve any lingering doubts about the electoral process.[68] However, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal apparently did not agree, officially declaring

---

[67] "Segundo informe preliminar de la Misión de Observación Electoral en Honduras," Organization of American States, December 17, 2017, https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/segundo-informe-preliminar-moe-honduras-18dic-final.pdf.

[68] "Comunicado de la Secretaría General de la OEA sobre las elecciones en Honduras," Organization of American States, December 17, 2017, https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=C-092/17.

Hernández the winner of the election that same day. According to their final count, Hernández eked out a narrow victory over Nasralla, winning 42.95% of the vote (1,410,888 votes) to Nasralla's 41.42% (1,360,442 votes). Despite the closeness of the vote at the presidential level, Hernández's National Party won the most seats in the legislature (61 out of 128) as well as a clear majority of the country's municipalities (173 out of 298).[69]

On December 22, following the five-day period after the conclusion of the vote counting during which challenges could be brought against the results, the United States recognized the reelection of Hernández as the president of Honduras, congratulating him on his victory "as declared by the Honduran Supreme Electoral Tribunal."[70] By December 26, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, and Peru had all recognized Hernández's reelection.[71] On December 27, the OAS observer mission released their final report on the Honduran elections, concluding for the third time that they could not say with certainty who had won the contest and calling for new elections.[72]

IV. Conclusions

As described in this chapter, for most of the twentieth century Honduran politics was marked by instability, fantastic levels of corruption, painstakingly slow progress in

---

[69] "Elecciones Primarias," Tribunal Supremo Electoral.
[70] "On the Presidential Elections in Honduras," U.S. Department of State, December 22, 2017, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/12/276752.htm.
[71] "Conozca los países que reconocen la reelección de Hernández pese al fraude," *Criterio*, December 26, 2017, https://criterio.hn/2017/12/26/40929/.
[72] "Informe Final," Organization of American States, November 26, 2017, http://scm.oas.org/pdfs/2017/CP38551SMOEH.pdf.

the fights against poverty and inequality, and the repeated intervention of the military and the United States. All of this took place in a political system defined by the presence of two major parties – the National Party and the Liberal Party – that both relied on a combination of charismatic leaders and control of state resources in order to maintain their popularity. This makes the coup that occurred in June 2009 that much more significant: not only did this represent a clear breakdown of the country's democratic institutions, but it also represented a breakdown of the seemingly stable two-party system that had reigned in Honduras for nearly a century.

This chapter also showed the ways in which the breakdown of democracy in Honduras has manifested itself have changed over time. In 2009, the democratic breakdown was clearly encapsulated by the military coup that overthrew President Zelaya. Since 2009, however, the country's ongoing breakdown of democracy has been marked by more subtle forms of democratic erosion, as seen in the moves by Hernández to stack the judiciary and other state institutions in his party's favor. Additionally, since the coup in 2009, the Liberal Party – split into pro- and anti-coup factions – has seen its standing in the Honduran electorate erode, while new parties have emerged on both the left (Libre) and the right (PAC) to challenge the country's political establishment. This breakdown of the party system – occurring at a time when the regional environment has gotten steadily less favorable for democratic governance – has facilitated the ongoing breakdown of democracy in Honduras and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ROLE OF PARTY SYSTEMS IN DEMOCRATIC BREAKDOWN

On January 27, 2018, President Juan Orlando Hernández was sworn in to office for a second term as president amidst nationwide protests.[1] In the days and weeks following the disputed elections, which were marked by widespread allegations of fraud and lacked credibility with much of the international community, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Honduras found that at least 23 people had died in the unrest.[2] A report issued by OHCHR also found that at least 60 people had been injured, while over 1,300 Hondurans were arrested,[3] most for violating the curfew imposed in the days following the vote. The elections in November 2017 followed a decision by the Honduran Constitutional Court that *literally found part of the country's own constitution unconstitutional* and took place in an environment that has seen an increasing number of human rights violations, incidents of corruption, and extrajudicial killings in recent years. All of this is made more surprising by the fact that, until the 2009 military coup, Honduras seemed to be on the road to democratic consolidation. The country had held multiple, regularly scheduled elections since 1982, and those elections were relatively free and fair.

---

[1] Faustino Ordóñez Baca, "Juan Orlando Hernández asume su segundo e histórico mandato," *El Heraldo*, January 27, 2018, http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1146795-466/juan-orlando-hern%C3%A1ndez-asume-su-segundo-e-hist%C3%B3rico-mandato.
[2] "Human rights violations in the context of the 2017 elections in Honduras," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/HN/2017ReportElectionsHRViolations_Honduras_EN.pdf.
[3] Ibid.

So how did Honduras get to this point? Chapter 1 identified some of the major theories scholars have devised to explain why democracies break down, while Chapter 2 described how democracy actually broke down in Honduras. The goal of this chapter, then, is twofold. First, it will analyze how well some of the principal theories of democratic breakdown explain the ongoing breakdown in Honduras, demonstrating that – with the exception of the theory proposed by Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán – the theories offered by scholars in Chapter 1 largely fail to explain why democracy has broken down in Honduras. The second aim of this chapter is to show that the partial breakdown of the country's bipartisan political system played a significant role in the breakdown of democracy in Honduras.

I. Revisiting Theories of Democratic Breakdown

How well do some of the theories discussed in Chapter 1 explain the breakdown of democracy in Honduras? To begin, it is clear that O'Donnell's theory of bureaucratic authoritarianism does not explain this case of democratic breakdown. To recap, O'Donnell views democratic breakdown and the subsequent rise of bureaucratic authoritarian regimes in Latin America as primarily due to industrialization and the popular discontent generated by this process, which in turn leads to clashes between popular sectors and ruling elites. It is certainly true that there was popular discontent in Honduras, particularly in the years leading up to the coup. The continued implementation of neoliberal economic policies over the preceding decades, including repeated rounds of spending cuts, had shredded the country's already-weak social safety net, while the economic growth arising from these policies largely failed to translate to reductions in

sky-high levels of poverty and inequality in Honduras. It is also true that many of Zelaya's supporters did include some segments of what could be called the popular sector, such as some of the country's major trade unions and largest teachers' union, while some of his strongest opponents consisted of the country's ruling political elite, including the National Party, the armed forces, and even a faction within Zelaya's own Liberal Party. However, the main point of contention between these camps was over Zelaya's proposed constituent assembly to rewrite the country's constitution, not economic policy per se. Additionally, in the months and weeks leading up to the coup, there were no large-scale protests or other signs of friction between these groups. In fact, clashes between the president's supporters and opponents primarily arose *after* the military coup that ousted Zelaya, not before. Finally, while Zelaya did have the support of many within the labor movement, as well as certain segments of the population, the president did not possess anything close to a broad base of popular support. Although reliable public opinion surveys in Honduras are few and far between, what surveys were conducted prior to the coup indicated that large majorities of Hondurans disapproved of Zelaya's rule. One survey conducted in February 2008 found Zelaya's approval rating to be a mere 7%,[4] while another survey carried out in October of that year indicated that only 25% of Hondurans approved of his administration.[5]

Linz (1994) suggests that presidentialism is the main factor behind the frequency of democratic breakdown in Latin America. In his view, presidential systems of

---

[4] "Hechos y personajes del 2009: Manuel Zelaya, un presidente derrotado," *El Tiempo*, December 21, 2009, http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-6818948.
[5] "Uribe, Lula y Correa: Los presidentes con mayor aceptación de América," *Noticias 24*, January 19, 2009, http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/23012/uribe-lula-y-correa-los-presidentes-con-mayor-aceptacion-de-america/.

government are less stable and therefore more likely to breakdown because of several factors, including: the dual legitimacy of the executive and the legislature, since both are elected by the people; fixed terms of office; and political polarization resulting from the winner-take-all nature of elections in presidential systems. In the case of Honduras, though, the apparent weaknesses inherent in presidential systems do not appear to explain initial breakdown of democracy that occurred in Honduras as manifested by the 2009 coup. For example, it does not appear that polarization was one of the main factors behind the ouster of Manuel Zelaya from the presidency. Prior to the coup, Honduras did not have particularly high levels of polarization despite having a bipartisan political system. Both of the two major parties were not particularly ideological and lacked coherent policy platforms, relying instead on the personalities of their candidates to win elections. As such, most Hondurans did not demonstrate a particularly strong or consistent affinity for one party or the other, instead making their decision (at least at the presidential level) based on individual candidates. Additionally, while Zelaya was not a particularly popular leader – either among ordinary Hondurans or among the country's political elite – Honduras didn't face any major economic or social crises during his time in office.

Mainwaring and Shugart (1997) make a more nuanced case that presidential systems have caused breakdowns of democracy in the Latin America. While they do not reject outright the idea that presidentialism has led to democratic breakdowns in the region, they point to political parties as the key factor that determines whether or not presidential democracies break down.[6] Specifically, the two focus on the following

---

[6] Mainwaring and Shugart, *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, 53.

characteristics: whether a president's party has a majority in the legislature, and if so, how large; the number of political parties in the legislature; the degree of party discipline; and the relationship between partisan and constitutional powers.[7] In other words, democracy is more likely to break down if: a president's party lacks a majority in the legislature; there are a large number of political parties; party members are relatively free to vote their conscious; or some combination thereof. All of these circumstances make it harder for a president to advance his or her agenda and therefore increases the likelihood of a leader resorting to extralegal means to achieve policy goals.[8]

While their theory is intriguing, it fails to explain why democracy broke down in Honduras. At the time of the 2009 coup, Manuel Zelaya's Liberal Party controlled the National Congress, having won 62 out of 128 seats in the 2005 elections, while the Liberal and National parties controlled a combined 117 seats. Both of these factors should have contributed to the stability of Honduran democracy, yet a military coup happened regardless. Additionally, Mainwaring and Shugart suggest that the presence of certain attributes in presidential systems of democracy can decrease the likelihood of democratic breakdown:

> Legislative elections should be concurrent with a presidential election that is based on a plurality or else on a runoff with a lower threshold than majority for first-round victory; and an electoral system should offer some compromise on the usual dichotomy of open versus closed lists.[9]

However, Honduras actually satisfies all of these requirements, raising questions about how much these characteristics actually affect the chances of a breakdown occurring. Since the end of direct military rule in the early 1980s, legislative elections have been

---

[7] Mainwaring and Shugart, *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, 394-95.
[8] Ibid., 435.
[9] Ibid., 436.

held on the same date as presidential elections, and presidents have been able to win elections with only a plurality of the vote. Although Honduras previously had a closed-list system in which Hondurans did not even know the names of the candidates running under each party, electoral reforms implemented under President Ricardo Maduro (2002-06) means that Hondurans are now able to select individual candidates from among party lists.[10]

Approaching the problem from a different angle, Handlin makes the case that democratic breakdown in Latin America – especially in South America – results from high levels of political polarization, which in turn is dependent on the presence of two main factors: a history of state crises and a strong, organized political left. He suggests that countries with a strong and organized political left that have endured repeated state crises end up with an environment that generates intense political polarization, which in turn is the primary cause of democratic erosion or democratic breakdown. However, Handlin's theory fails to explain the breakdown of democracy in Honduras because it relies on the presence of strong leftist political movements. While Honduras has certainly experienced its fair share of state crises, the country does not have a history of strong left-wing political parties or movements. Prior to the 2009 coup, both of the country's major political parties could be classified as center-right, while the private sector – not known for its leftist bent – has generally been among the most influential and well-funded forces in Honduran civil society. In fact, it was not until *after* the initial breakdown of democracy in Honduras and the subsequent erosion of democratic norms under the

---

[10] Ernesto Paz Aguilar, "La Reforma Política Electoral en Honduras," Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007, http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Parties/Honduras/Leyes/ReformaElectoral.pdf.

administrations of Lobo and Hernández that Libre – Honduras's first major left-leaning political movement – was formally organized. Yet another complication when attempting to apply Handlin's argument to the case of Honduras is the fact that Libre does not actually lean all that far to the left. While grassroots activists of the left were instrumental in the party's founding, and the centrist-turned-leftist Manuel Zelaya serves as the party's leader, it was Salvador Nasralla – a conservative former television commentator – who ultimately led the party's presidential ticket in the 2017 elections.

Of the remaining theories regarding breakdowns of democracy in Latin America reviewed in Chapter 1, the approach offered by Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán would appear to do the best job of explaining why a democratic breakdown occurred in Honduras. The pair suggests that democracies that are most likely to breakdown are those in which leaders lack strong normative preferences for democracy and embrace radical policy positions in an international context unfavorable for democratic governance. To varying degrees, all three factors have been factors in the ongoing breakdown of democracy in Honduras. Neither President Zelaya nor President Hernández, for example, demonstrated strong preferences for democratic governance and the checks and balances inherent in such a system. Zelaya repeatedly ignored decisions from the Supreme Court, the TSE, and the National Congress regarding the nonbinding referendum on adding a question about holding a constituent assembly to the November 2009 ballot. Likewise, after the Constitutional Court issued a series of rulings against the National administration of Porfirio Lobo, Hernández orchestrated the ouster of justices who had voted against the ruling party.

However, it is the importance that Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán assign to the international environment when studying democratic breakdown that makes their theory particularly applicable to the case of Honduras. As the authors write:

> Transnational trends and actors profoundly influence domestic regime outcomes. It is impossible to understand regime dynamics exclusively in terms of the cumulative effect of isolated political processes in individual countries. What happens in one country affects others. Moreover, developments among transnational and international actors affect political regimes in multiple countries.[11]

What has been happening in Honduras is not occurring in a vacuum. The breakdown of democracy in the country is part of a recent worldwide trend that has seen democratic breakdowns occur with increasing frequency amidst declining levels of democracy and freedom overall. According to Freedom House, a nonprofit organization that tracks civil and political liberties in individual countries, there has been a decline in the average freedom score across the globe for the past 12 years. Unfortunately, Latin America is no exception to this trend. The "Freedom in the World 2018" report singled out Honduras – in addition to Bolivia, Mexico, and Nicaragua – as having registered a notable decline in the country's average level of freedom in 2017.[12]

More specifically, the successful effort by Hernández and his National Party to eliminate term limits is also part of a wider regional trend of presidents either using questionable legal mechanisms in order to extend their time in office or simply doing away with restrictions on reelection altogether.[13] After Hugo Chávez was elected president of Venezuela in 1998, he pushed for the adoption of a new constitution that,

---

[11] Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America*, 271.
[12] "Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis," Freedom House, 2018, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018.
[13] For more on debate on term limits and reelection in Latin America, see Corrales and Penfold (2014).

among other measures, lengthened the presidential term from five years to six while also allowing for the possibility of consecutive reelection.[14] However, in 2009 Chávez pushed through a constitutional referendum that eliminated term limits, allowing for unlimited presidential election and facilitating Chávez's fourth run for the presidency in 2012. In Colombia, President Álvaro Uribe – relying on the popularity generated by his hardline approach to dealing with leftist guerillas – successfully pushed to amend the constitution to allow him to run for a second term, which he won in 2006. Uribe later attempted to change the constitution again in order to allow him to run for a third term, but the country's Constitutional Court rejected his proposed referendum in February 2010.[15]

In the context of Honduras, however, perhaps the most relevant case is Nicaragua. The country's most recent constitution, adopted in 1987, was amended in 1995 to limit presidents to a single term in office. However, after Daniel Ortega returned to power in elections held in 2007, he soon began pushing to reform the constitution in order to allow him to run for reelection. Unable to obtain the necessary votes in the National Assembly, Ortega petitioned the country's Constitutional Court – controlled by a majority belonging to his political movement – to lift the country's ban on reelection. The Court subsequently found the relevant article prohibiting presidential reelection to be

---

[14] Gregory Wilpert, "Venezuela's New Constitution," *Venezuela Analysis*, August 27, 2003, https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/70.

[15] "Colombian Court Blocks President's Bid for a Third Term," *The New York Times*, February 26, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/27/world/americas/27colombia.html.

"inapplicable," thus opening the door for Ortega to run for a second consecutive term in 2011.[16]

So why are these cases relevant to Honduras? To put it simply, countries learn from each other. Scholars have identified a variety of ways in policies and ideas spread between countries, a phenomenon otherwise known as norm diffusion. As highlighted by Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett (2007), scholars that seek to explain the international diffusion of norms can be divided into four camps. Constructivist theorists view norm diffusion through the lens of ideology, while coercion theorists focus on countries that are forced to adopt policies by more powerful actors such as the United States or the International Monetary Fund. Competition theorists propose that if one country adopts a policy that gives it a competitive (economic) advantage, other countries will be likely to follow. Finally, learning theorists suggest that policymakers engage in a kind of cost-benefit analysis of policies adopted in neighboring countries.

When looking at cases of democratic breakdown and democratic erosion in Latin America, it appears that the fourth camp is best able to explain the spread of policies and court decisions that have undermined democracy in the region. Indeed, in the case of Nicaragua, the constitutional branch of Nicaragua's Supreme Court of Justice (*Corte Suprema de Justicia*, CSJ) partially justified its decision to lift the constitutional prohibition on presidential reelection by pointing towards other countries in the region that had done the same. Prior to the decision, one of the justices on the court, Rafael Solís, admitted that the CSJ was looking at a decision by the top court in Costa Rica that

---

[16] Carlos Salinas, "El Tribunal Supremo de Nicaragua da vía libre a la reelección de Ortega," *El País*, October 21, 2009, https://elpais.com/diario/2009/10/21/internacional/1256076010_850215.html.

allowed for nonconsecutive reelection: "It's interesting how the Costa Ricans dealt with the case of [former President Oscar] Arias, where effectively he didn't reach the votes in the Assembly and went to the Court. And the Court declared the prohibition unconstitutional."[17] Following the decision of the CSJ to allow presidential reelection in Nicaragua, the President of the court, Francisco Rosales, complained about criticism of the court's decision, saying: "If (Álvaro) Uribe does it, it's fine. If (Oscar) Arias does it, it's fine. But if we do it, then it's bad."[18]

Much like Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Juan Orlando Hernández relied on a friendly Supreme Court to open the door to extending his rule. And much like Ortega, Hernández has suffered few consequences for the decision; as of this writing, both men are still in office and appear set to remain in power for at least the next several years, if not longer. The relative success that Ortega and Hernández have had using a pliant judiciary to lift term limits (in order to provide a veneer of legitimacy to the process) has emboldened other Latin American leaders to employ the same strategy. Following his election in 2005, President Evo Morales pushed for a constituent assembly to rewrite the country's constitution. The new constitution, which was approved and took effect in 2009, allowed presidents to run for a second term in office. However, since Morales was elected prior to the writing of the new constitution, his reelection to a second term in office in 2009 was counted instead as his first term, allowing him to run for another term in 2014. In 2016, the Morales administration held a nationwide referendum asking whether presidents should be able to run for unlimited reelection. After a narrow majority

---

[17] "Nicaragua abre camino a la reelección," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, October 20, 2009, http://www.bbc.com/mundo/america_latina/2009/10/091020_nicaragua_reeleccion.
[18] Ibid.

of the population voted against the proposal, Morales brought a case to Bolivia's Supreme Tribunal of Justice, which ruled in November 2017 that the articles limiting the president to two terms in office violated the "political rights" of citizens running for public office in Bolivia, opening the door for Morales to run for fourth term in 2019.[19]

All of this has taken place in a regional environment that is less favorable towards democracy than it has been in recent years. It is well-established in the literature on democratization that regional environments are key to whether transitions to democracy succeed. However, the ability of the international environment to improve prospects for democratization suggests that the international environment can, in fact, *decrease* these prospects under certain circumstances. In a 2005 piece by Levitsky and Way on the role of international leverage and linkages in democratization, for example, the pair explicitly highlights the fact that the ability of Western countries to encourage democracy – or discourage authoritarianism, for that matter – might be restricted by their own competing priorities: "Leverage may be limited, and regimes less vulnerable to external democratizing pressure, in countries where Western governments have important economic or security interests at stake."[20] Under both the Obama and Trump administrations, the United States has viewed Honduras as key partner in both combatting drug trafficking and also limiting migration from the Northern Triangle to the U.S. It is not surprising, then, that the United States failed to forcefully condemn either the 2009 coup or the severely flawed elections that took place in 2017.

---

[19] "Evo Morales dice que el fallo que permite su reelección es 'el mandato del pueblo,'" *The New York Times*, November 29, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/11/29/evo-morales-cuarto-mandato-reeleccion/.

[20] Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "International Linkage and Democratization," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (2005): 21.

II. Party System Breakdown and the Breakdown of Democracy

The ongoing democratic breakdown in Honduras, which has largely occurred under the successive National Party administrations of Porfirio Lobo (2010-14) and Juan Orlando Hernández (2014–), has been facilitated by the partial breakdown of the country's two-party system, which has resulted in a fragmented political opposition that has been unable to offer a coherent alternative to current administration's policies and has thus far failed to mobilize the international community against the Hernández administration. I argue that the continued weakness of the Liberal Party, in the context of a previously bipartisan political system, is one of the principal factors that has contributed to the breakdown of democracy in Honduras.

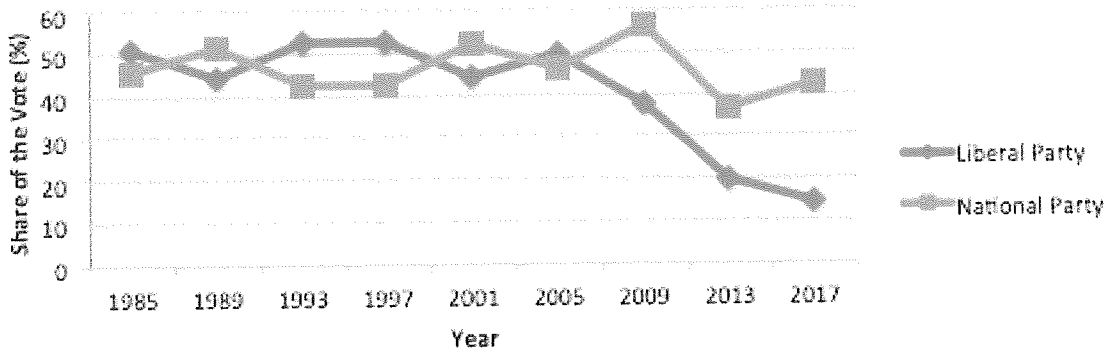
Following the 2009 coup, the Liberal Party was racked by divisions between pro- and anti-coup factions, and the party has not fully recovered. While the faction that was more supportive of the coup, led by Roberto Micheletti – the Liberal leader of the National Congress turned interim president – ultimately retained control of the party, those most opposed to the coup joined Zelaya in the new left-leaning political movement known as Libre. This ongoing split within the party is partially illustrated by the fact that the party's average share of the vote in presidential elections has plummeted over the past decade, as seen in Figure 5. From 1985 until 2005, the Liberal Party earned, on average, nearly 50% of the vote in presidential elections.[21] However, in the most recent elections in 2009, 2013, and 2017, the Liberal Party candidate received only 38.1%, 20.3%, and 14.7% of the vote, respectively. At the same time, the National Party has hardly seen any

---

[21] Patricia Otero Felipe, "Honduras: Elecciones presidenciales y legislativas (1980-2009)," Universidad de Salamanca, http://americo.usal.es/oir/opal/elecciones/Elecc_Honduras_Otero.pdf.

change in its share of the vote over the past 30 years. Prior to 2009, the party received, on average, roughly 46.4% of the vote across seven presidential elections.[22] Since 2009, the party has received an average of 45.5% of the vote – a decline of less than one percent.

Figure 5: Vote Shares of Major Parties in Presidential Elections (1985-2017)



The slow-motion implosion of the Liberal Party has contributed to the breakdown of democracy in Honduras. It is important to note that the disruption within the Honduran political system that has weakened the Liberal Party is not bad in and of itself, and it could be argued that the country's political system *needs* some disruption, given the pervasive levels of corruption, personalism, and cronyism at all levels of government. However, to date this disruption – as seen in the graph above – has principally affected only one of the country's two main political parties. For all of its flaws, the Liberal Party, as the oldest political party in Honduras, represented the National Party's strongest political rival, the only other political party in Honduras with a nationwide infrastructure capable of repeatedly and successfully mobilizing its supporters each election cycle.

[22] Otero Felipe, "Honduras: Elecciones presidenciales y legislativas (1980-2009)."

Indeed, the Liberal Party remains the only political movement in the country's history to have officially beaten the National Party at the ballot box.

The decline of the Liberal Party, then, left the door wide open for the National Party to take advantage of the relative power vacuum and advance its agenda. In the 2009 elections, the National Party was able to capitalize on the internal division within the Liberal Party. Porfirio Lobo won the presidency by a nearly 20-point margin, besting the Liberal candidate Elvin Santos 56.6 % to 38.1%[23] - the largest electoral landslide since the country began holding regularly scheduled democratic elections in 1981. The National Party similarly dominated congressional elections, winning 71 of the 128 seats in the National Congress.[24] With the Liberal Party in disarray and having decisively won control of the both the presidency and the legislature, it was not long before the National Party exerted its influence over the judiciary. Following a string of unfavorable decisions issued by the Constitutional Court against the Lobo administration, the National Congress – then led by Hernández – eventually forced the justices who ruled against the administration from the bench, naming much friendlier replacements. These new justices would later rule in favor a petition, filed by National Party deputies, to lift the constitutional restrictions on presidential reelection, opening the door for Hernández to run for a second term.

Additionally, the fact that it is specifically a *two-party* system that has broken down has implications for how the opposition has behaved in the case of Honduras. Under the previously bipartisan system, which defined the Honduran political arena for over a century, there was no need for either the Liberal Party or the National Party to

---

[23] Otero Felipe, "Honduras: Elecciones presidenciales y legislativas (1980-2009)."
[24] Ibid.

form any sort of coalitions. While both parties occasionally needed to rely on minor parties in order to secure a majority in the National Congress, the Honduran political system certainly did not resemble anything close to a multiparty system in which major parties regularly form alliances and generally *have* to form coalitions if they want to enter the government. Essentially, the bipartisan system encouraged competition rather than cooperation between the two parties.

The absence of a history of coalition building in Honduran politics, then, helps to explain why the breakdown of one party has contributed to the breakdown of democracy in Honduras. This was illustrated in both of the elections that have taken place following the initial breakdown of democracy in 2009. The 2013 presidential election was a four-way race between candidates from the National Party, the Liberal Party, Libre, and the Anti-Corruption Party. Although the outgoing National administration was not particularly popular, Hernández was able to win thanks to splits both within the Liberal Party and among the political opposition as a whole. Additionally, both Libre and the PAC, being relatively new political movements, lacked the infrastructure needed to effectively compete at the national level. In the end, Hernández was elected with less than 37% of the vote.[25] Although nearly two-thirds of Hondurans voted for someone other than the National Party candidate, Honduran law does not require presidential candidates to earn a minimum amount of the vote – nor does it provide for a runoff election if no candidate wins a majority of the vote – so Hernández assumed office.

Even though he was elected with the lowest percentage of the vote in modern Honduran history, Hernández decided to run for reelection following the controversial

---

[25] "Elecciones 2013," Tribunal Supremo Electoral, http://siede.tse.hn/escrutinio/index.php.

ruling issued by the Constitutional Court. Despite the fact that court's decision – which found a constitutional prohibition against presidential reelection unconstitutional – was a clear sign of democratic breakdown, it was not enough to get the opposition to work together. While Libre and the PAC did form the Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship, the Liberal Party fielded its own presidential and congressional candidates. Once gain, the inability of the various factions of the opposition to cooperate cost them a chance to oust Hernández and the National Party. Even making the assumption that the results of the November 2017 elections were not tampered with, Hernández again won the presidency with less than a majority of the vote. According to official tallies, the presidential candidates from Libre and the Liberal Party earned more than 55% of vote, with Hernández earning less than 43%.[26]

Although it is not possible to know for certain, it is not unreasonable to imagine that if the Liberal Party had joined forces with the Alianza – thus recreating the bipartisan political dynamic that had persisted in Honduras for almost 100 years – then the opposition could have beaten Hernández and the National Party by a significant margin. However, despite its greatly weakened political standing, the Liberal Party refused to join the Alianza. In May 2017, the Liberal presidential candidate, Luis Zelaya, rejected the idea of joining the opposition alliance, joking that he would join as long as he was the official candidate for president.[27] In a way, it is not all that surprising that a political party

---

[26] "Elecciones Primarias," Tribunal Supremo Electoral

[27] Faustino Ordóñez Baca, "Presidente del Partido Liberal Luis Zelaya acepta unirse a la Alianza Opositora pero si él es nombrado candidato," *El Heraldo*, May 7, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/partidoliberal/1068972-508/presidente-del-partido-liberal-luis-zelaya-acepta-unirse-a-la-alianza-opositora.

much more used to competition rather than cooperation would reject out of hand the idea of joining a coalition with other political parties.

It is also not all that surprising that Hernández and the National Party have capitalized on the political opportunity presented to them with the implosion of their main rival. Just like the Liberal Party, the National Party also lacks a history of having to form coalitions or seek compromise with other political parties. It makes sense, then, that the party would seek to fill the vacuum left by the decline of the Liberal Party – and that's exactly what the National Party did. Under the leadership of Hernández, the party has taken advantage of its control of both the executive and legislative branches of government to exert more influence over the judiciary while also placing allies in control of key institutions such as the TSE. These and other efforts to protect the party's newfound grip on power, however, are the principal cause behind the ongoing breakdown of democracy in Honduras.

III. Conclusions

When looking at the case of the breakdown of democracy in Honduras, I argue that incomplete breakdown of the country's party system – taking place in the context of a regional and international environment that is increasingly less concerned with the promotion of democracy – is the principal factor behind the country's democratic breakdown. More specifically, I highlight the fact that prior to 2009, Honduras had a seemingly stable two-party system, but since 2009, one the country's two major political parties – the Liberal Party – has suffered from internal divisions and seen its status as one of the two principal parties in Honduras erode. This, in turn, has paved the way for

President Juan Orlando Hernández of the National Party to consolidate his hold on power to such an extent that it represents a breakdown of democracy.

This combination – a partial breakdown of a two-party system leading to breakdown of democracy – is unique to the region and makes Honduras a worthwhile case to study. While the disintegration of party systems has happened repeatedly in Latin America, it is rare to see a bipartisan system in which only one of the two major political parties breaks down or is left severely weakened. Both Colombia and Venezuela, for example, also enjoyed relatively stable bipartisan political systems for much of the twentieth century. However, when those party systems were eventually destabilized, both of the major parties in each of those systems suffered serious electoral setbacks and greatly diminished standing in the eyes of the electorate.

As established earlier in this chapter, the breakdown of Honduras's century-old bipartisan political system, the ongoing weakness of the Liberal Party, and the moves by Hernández to extend both his stay in office as well as the reach of his party have all contributed to the breakdown of democracy in Honduras. However, it is impossible to ignore the fact that this breakdown is occurring in a regional and international environment that at the moment is not particularly favorable for defending democracy. In recent years, Latin American leaders such as Evo Morales in Bolivia, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, and Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela have all sought to extend their time in office through questionable means. At the international level, Honduras represents one of the more recent instances of the increasingly common phenomenon of democratic breakdown.

To be clear, the breakdown of a party system does not guarantee that democracy will also break down. Indeed, even the partial breakdown of a bipartisan political system, as in the case of Honduras, does not necessarily have to lead to a breakdown of democracy. Individual political actors in the surviving political party might have strong normative preferences for democracy that override their temptation to strengthen their hold on power beyond a certain point, for example. Likewise, an independent judicial branch could prevent the stronger political party from overreaching, even if they control the other branches of government.

Unfortunately, to date neither of these conditions has proved true in Honduras. As indicated by his decision to seek another term in spite of the constitutional provision barring presidential reelection (the decision of the Constitutional Court notwithstanding), President Hernández has not demonstrated a strong preference for democracy, and Hernández and the National Party have used their joint control of the executive and legislative branches to reshape the judiciary and other nominally independent institutions to their liking. At the same time, the gradual erosion of democratic norms in Honduras since the 2009 military coup has appeared to escape any significant consequences from the international community. As Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán observe: "The international community has devised mechanisms to deal with overt attempts to impose authoritarian rule, but it is ill equipped to deal with more subtle or gradual authoritarian regressions."[28] It is my hope that a deeper understanding of the causes of "authoritarian regression" in the case of Honduras might help both domestic actors and the international

---

[28] Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America*, 272.

community better respond to instances of democratic breakdown and ultimately work to avoid breakdowns of democracy in the first place.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Collier, David and Fernando Henrique Cardoso. *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979.

"Colombian Court Blocks President's Bid for a Third Term." *The New York Times*, February 26, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/27/world/americas/27colombia.html.

"Comunicado de la Secretaría General de la OEA sobre las elecciones en Honduras." Organization of American States, December 17, 2017. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=C-092/17.

Conaghan, Catherine M. "Ecuador Under Correa." *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 109-18. doi:10.1353/jod.2016.0040.

"Conozca los países que reconocen la reelección de Hernández pese al fraude." *Criterio*, December 26, 2017. https://criterio.hn/2017/12/26/40929/.

"Corruption Perceptions Index 2008." Transparency International. 2008. https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2008/0.

"Cronograma Electoral: Elecciones Generales 2017," Tribunal Supremo Electoral, https://www.tse.hn/web/elecciones_2017_EG/CRONOGRAMA_EG_2017.PDF.

d'Amours, Julia. "Explainer: The 2017 Honduran Presidential Election." AS/COA, November 21, 2017. https://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-2017-honduran-presidential-election.

"Descabezados cuatro magistrados de la Sala de lo Constitucional de la Corte Suprema de Justicia." *Proceso Digital*, December 11, 2012. http://www.proceso.hn/component/k2/item/28528.html.

Diamond, Larry. "The Democratic Rollback." *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 2 (2008). https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2008-03-02/democratic-rollback

Diamond, Larry. "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 141-55. doi:10.1353/jod.2015.0009.

Dodd, Thomas J. *Tiburcio Carías: Portrait of a Honduran Political Leader*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.

"Elecciones 2013." Tribunal Supremo Electoral. http://siede.tse.hn/escrutinio/index.php.

"Elecciones Primarias." Tribunal Supremo Electoral. http://resultadosprimarias2017.tse.hn/cortes/.

"Evo Morales dice que el fallo que permite su reelección es 'el mandato del pueblo.'" *The New York Times*, November 29, 2017. http://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/11/29/evo-morales-cuarto-mandato-reeleccion/.

"Expresidente Callejas solicita reelección a CSJ de Honduras." *El Heraldo*, March 12, 2015. http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/821466-214/expresidente-callejas-solicita-reelecci%C3%B3n-a-csj-de-honduras.

"Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis." Freedom House, 2018. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018.

García, Jacobo. "Miles de personas protestan en varias ciudades de Honduras ante lo que consideran un fraude electoral." *El País*, December 4, 2017. https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/12/03/america/1512267455_834020.html.

"Gestión de Lobo marcada por los escándolos." *La Prensa*. http://www.laprensa.hn/especiales/377787-273/gesti%C3%B3n-de-lobo-marcada-por-los-esc%C3%A1ndalos.

"Gobierno hondureño aumenta salario mínimo." *La Prensa*, August 29, 2008. http://www.laprensa.hn/economia/557517-97/gobierno-hondureno-aumenta-salario-minimo

Haggard, Stephan and Robert R. Kaufman. "The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions." *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (1997): 263-83. doi:10.2307/422121.

Handlin, Samuel. *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

"Hechos y personajes del 2009: Manuel Zelaya, un presidente derrotado." *El Tiempo*, December 21, 2009. http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-6818948.

"Honduras." Freedom House. 2009. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2009/honduras.

"Honduras." The World Bank Group. 2017. https://data.worldbank.org/country/honduras.

"Honduras: declaran inconstitucional plan de 'ciudades modelo.'" *British Broadcasting Corporation*, October 12, 2012. http://www.bbc.com/mundo/ultimas_noticias/2012/10/121018_ultnot_honduras_ciudad_privada_cch.shtml.

"Honduras: Libre, Pac y Pinu sellan alianza opositora durante asamblea nacional," *El Heraldo*, January 15, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1035247-466/honduras-libre-pac-y-pinu-sellan-alianza-opositora-durante-asamblea-nacional.

"Honduras: Piden derogar artículo que penaliza hablar de reelección." *El Heraldo*, December 8, 2014. http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/774975-331/honduras-piden-derogar-art%C3%ADculo-que-penaliza-hablar-de-reelecci%C3%B3n.

"Human rights violations in the context of the 2017 elections in Honduras." United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/HN/2017ReportElectionsHRViolations_Honduras_EN.pdf.

"Ideología de las bases es el primer obstáculo de la alianza opositora de Honduras," *El Heraldo*, January 19, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1036464-466/ideolog%C3%ADa-de-las-bases-es-el-primer-obst%C3%A1culo-de-la-alianza-opositora.

"Informe 2008." Corporación Latinobarómetro. http://www.latinobarometro.org/docs/INFORME_LATINOBAROMETRO_2008.pdf.

"Informe Final," Organization of American States, November 26, 2017, http://scm.oas.org/pdfs/2017/CP38551SMOEH.pdf.

"Informe Preliminar de la Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA en Honduras." Organization of American States, December 4, 2017. https://www.oas.org/documents/spa/press/informe-preliminar-moe-honduras-2017-4dic.pdf.

"JOH lanza su ilegal reelección presidencial," *Criterio*, November 6, 2016, https://criterio.hn/2016/11/06/joh-lanza-ilegal-reeleccion-presidencial/.

"JOH ya supera a Nasralla en conteo de votos presidenciales, según TSE." *El Heraldo*, November 29, 2017. http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/1130678-508/joh-ya-supera-a-nasralla-en-conteo-de-votos-presidenciales-seg%C3%BAn-tse.

Kapstein, Ethan B. and Nathan Converse. "Why Democracies Fail." *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 4 (2008): 57-68. doi:10.1353/jod.0.0031.

Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way. "International Linkage and Democratization." *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (2005): 20-34. doi.org/10.1353/jod.2005.0048.

Linz, Juan J. and Arturo Valenzuela, ed. *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

"Lobo dice que la depuración de la Policía se hará pese al rechazo de la Corte Suprema." *CRHoy*, November 30, 2012. http://www.crhoy.com/archivo/lobo-dice-que-la-depuracion-de-la-policia-se-hara-pese-al-rechazo-de-la-corte-suprema/mundo/.

"Los países de Mercosur no reconocen los comicios en Honduras." *El País*, December 8, 2009. https://elpais.com/internacional/2009/12/08/actualidad/1260226815_850215.html.

"Luis Zelaya propone una Honduras con oportunidades, pero sin privilegios." *El Heraldo*, September 18, 2017. http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/1107530-508/luis-zelaya-propone-una-honduras-con-oportunidades-pero-sin-privilegios-.

Main, Alexander. "Honduras: The Deep Roots of Resistance." *Dissent* 61, no. 2 (2014): 11-16. https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2014.0036

Mainwaring, Scott and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. "Democratic Breakdown and Survival." *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2013): 123-37. doi:10.1353/jod.2013.0037.

Mainwaring, Scott and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Mainwaring, Scott and Matthew Shugart, ed. *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Malkin, Elisabeth. "Honduran President Is Ousted in Coup." *The New York Times*, June 28, 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/29/world/americas/29honduras.html?

Méndez, Marilyn. "En tres horas y media, sistema tendrá el conteo presidencial." *La Prensa*, November 23, 2017. http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/elecciones2017/1128941-410/conteo-presidencial-elecciones-honduras-tribunal_supremo_electoral.

Mercado, Julissa. "Honduras: ¿Lanzó su candidatura el presidente Juan Orlando Hernández?" *El Heraldo*, October 18, 2016. http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1009561-466/honduras-lanz%C3%B3-su-candidatura-el-presidente-juan-orlando-hern%C3%A1ndez.

"Nicaragua abre camino a la reelección," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, October 20, 2009, http://www.bbc.com/mundo/america_latina/2009/10/091020_nicaragua_reeleccion.

"No reconoceremos datos tramposos del TSE, dice Nasralla y agrega retirará firma de documento con OEA." Proceso Digital, November 29, 2017. http://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/no-reconoceremos-los-resultados-tramposos-del-tse-dice-nasralla-y-agrega-retirara-firma-de-documento-con-oea.html.

Nooruddin, Irfan. "Analysis for the Organization of American States." December 17, 2017. https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/Nooruddin-Analysis-for-OAS-Honduras-2017.pdf.

"On the Presidential Elections in Honduras," U.S. Department of State, December 22, 2017, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/12/276752.htm.

Ordóñez Baca, Faustino. "Juan Orlando Hernández asume su segundo e histórico mandato." *El Heraldo*, January 27, 2018. http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1146795-466/juan-orlando-hern%C3%A1ndez-asume-su-segundo-e-hist%C3%B3rico-mandato.

Ordóñez Baca, Faustino. "Presidente del Partido Liberal Luis Zelaya acepta unirse a la Alianza Opositora pero si él es nombrado candidato." *El Heraldo*, May 7, 2017. http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/partidoliberal/1068972-508/presidente-del-partido-liberal-luis-zelaya-acepta-unirse-a-la-alianza-opositora.

Otero Felipe, Patricia. "El sistema de partidos de Honduras tras la crisis política de 2009. ¿El fin del bipartidismo?" *Colombia Internacional* 79, no. 3 (2013): 249-87. http://dx.doi.org/10.7440/colombiaint79.2013.09.

Otero Felipe, Patricia. "Honduras: Elecciones presidenciales y legislativas (1980-2009)." Universidad de Salamanca. http://americo.usal.es/oir/opal/elecciones/Elecc_Honduras_Otero.pdf.

Palencia, Gustavo. "Alianza opositora en Honduras elige a presentador de televisión como candidato presidencial." *Reuters*, May 21, 2017. https://lta.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idLTAKBN18H120-OUSLD.

Parkinson, Charles. "Honduras Congress Votes for Military Police Force." *InSight Crime*, August 17, 2013. https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/honduras-congress-votes-for-military-police-force/.

Paz Aguilar, Ernesto. "La Reforma Política Electoral en Honduras." Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007. http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Parties/Honduras/Leyes/ReformaElectoral.pdf.

"Reelección en Honduras: Corte Suprema de Justicia aprueba fallo favorable." *La Prensa*, April 23, 2015. http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/833657-410/reelecci%C3%B3n-en-honduras-corte-suprema-de-justicia-aprueba-fallo-favorable.

"Report of the Electoral Observation Mission in Honduras, 2001." Organization of American States, 2002. https://www.oas.org/sap/docs/permanent_council/2002/cp_doc_3585_02_eng.pdf.

"Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Honduras: Primary Elections 2005." Organization of American States. Washington, 2006. https://www.oas.org/sap/docs/permanent_council/2006/cp_inf_5339_06_eng.pdf.

"Resultado final del Tribunal Supremo Electoral da como ganador a JOH sobre Nasralla." *El Heraldo*, December 3, 2017. http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/1131652-508/resultado-final-del-tribunal-supremo-electoral-da-como-ganador-a-joh-sobre.

"Resultados Electorales." Tribunal Supremo Electoral. https://www.tse.hn/web/estadisticas/procesos_electorales.html#.

Ruhl, J. Mark. "Honduras Unravels." *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 2 (2010): 93-107. doi:10.1353/jod.0.0170.

Ruhl, J. Mark. "Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 38, no. 1 (1996): 33-66. http://www.jstor.org/stable/166395.

Salinas, Carlos. "El Tribunal Supremo de Nicaragua da vía libre a la reelección de Ortega." *El País*, October 21, 2009. https://elpais.com/diario/2009/10/21/internacional/1256076010_850215.html.

"Salvador Nasralla cierra su campaña electoral en Choluteca y en la colonia Kennedy," *El Heraldo*, November 20, 2017, http://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2017/partidoalianza/1127693-508/salvador-nasralla-cierra-su-campa%C3%B1a-electoral-en-choluteca-y-en-la-colonia.

Schulz, Donald E. and Deborah Sundloff Schulz. *The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994.

"Segundo informe preliminar de la Misión de Observación Electoral en Honduras." Organization of American States, December 17, 2017. https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/segundo-informe-preliminar-moe-honduras-18dic-final.pdf.

Seligson, Mitchell A. and John A. Booth, ed. *Elections and Democracy in Central America, Revisited.* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

"Sistema de transmisión de resultados de TSE se cayó por cinco horas." *Criterio*, November 29, 2017. https://criterio.hn/2017/11/29/sistema-trasmision-resultados-del-tse-se-cayo-cinco-horas/.

Taraciuk, Tamara. "After the Coup: Ongoing Violence, Intimidation, and Impunity in Honduras." Human Rights Watch. December 20, 2010. https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/12/20/after-coup/ongoing-violence-intimidation-and-impunity-honduras.

"Uribe, Lula y Correa: Los presidentes con mayor aceptación de América." *Noticias 24*, January 19, 2009. http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/23012/uribe-lula-y-correa-los-presidentes-con-mayor-aceptacion-de-america/.

Valenzuela, Arturo. *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Wilpert, Gregory. "Venezuela's New Constitution." *Venezuela Analysis*, August 27, 2003. https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/70.

BIOGRAPHY

R.J. Taylor hails from Woodridge, Illinois. He began his academic career at Saint Louis University before transferring to Georgetown University, where he graduated magna cum laude from the School of Foreign Service in 2015. After a brief stint working on the Latin America and Caribbean team at the National Democratic Institute in Washington, DC, R.J. returned to school to pursue a Master of Latin American Studies at Tulane University. He currently resides in New Orleans, Louisiana.