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FEATURED Q&A

What Do Sandinista Election Victories Mean for Nicaragua?



President Daniel Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front won big victories in Nicaragua's local elections this month. // File Photo: Nicaraguan Government.

Q Nicaragua's ruling Sandinistas on Nov. 5 extended their dominance in the country's local elections, maintaining control of most of Nicaragua's municipalities, including Managua, winning 135 of the 153 mayoral posts up for grabs. Violence marred the result, however, and after the balloting, the Organization of American States' mission in Nicaragua called on the government to investigate and punish those responsible for at least five killings that occurred amid the elections. What do the election results mean for President Daniel Ortega and his agenda? To what can the Sandinistas attribute their victories? How free and fair were the elections?

A Marc Becker, professor of history at Truman State University: "Daniel Ortega's high level of popular support and the Sandinistas' electoral victory are direct results of their policies that benefit poor and marginalized populations in Nicaragua. Naturally, wealthy conservatives are opposed to these policies that redirect resources to the majority of the country's population, rather than pursuing neoliberal economic measures that encourage an upward redistribution of resources. Furthermore, deep divisions in society mean that those who oppose the Sandinistas do not understand the popular appeal of their policies to the majority of the country's population. Unfortunately, it is those wealthy conservatives who have the ear of the international media and foreign policy establishment, and therefore create a misleading narrative. The Organization of American States is hardly a neutral or impartial observer. From its founding in 1948 it has been a tool of United States imperialist oppression in Latin America, and its criticism

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The company said it has not been paid as agreed to help restore electricity to the U.S. territory following two hurricanes.

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U.S. Ends Temporary Protected Status for Haitians

The Trump administration announced the end of Temporary Protected Status nearly 60,000 Haitians, giving them until July 2019 to leave. Acting Homeland Security Secretary Elaine Duke said the "extraordinary conditions" caused by Haiti's 2010 earthquake "no longer exist."

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Duke // File Photo: U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.S. Ends Temporary Protected Status for Haitians

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday announced that it was ending Temporary Protected Status for the nearly 60,000 Haitians living in the United States under the immigration status, giving them until July 2019 to leave or face deportation, The New York Times reported. The humanitarian program has allowed the Haitians to live and work in the United States since the catastrophic earthquake that hit their country in 2010. The administration of former U.S. President Barack Obama extended the protections for the Haitians several times, but the Trump administration has said the program was intended to be temporary, not a way to make foreign nationals long-term residents of the United States. "Since the 2010 earthquake, the number of displaced people in Haiti has decreased by 97 percent," Acting Homeland Security Secretary Elaine Duke said in a statement, The Washington Post reported. "Significant steps have been taken to improve the stability and quality of life for Haitian citizens, and Haiti is able to safely receive traditional levels of returned citizens." Allowing Haitians living in the United States under Temporary Protected Status a year and a half before they must leave will allow for an "orderly transition," that will allow them to "arrange for their departure" and Haiti's government to prepare for their return, Duke added. The United States created the immigration designation, known as TPS, in 1990 to shield foreign nationals from deportation if the executive branch determined that armed conflict or disasters in the foreign citizens' home countries created unstable conditions. Among those who have called for Haitians' Temporary Protected Status to be renewed is U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.). Those "sent home will face dire conditions, including lack of housing, inadequate health services and low prospects for employment ... Failure to renew the TPS designation will weaken Haiti's economy and

impede its ability to recover completely and improve its security," Rubio wrote last week in the Miami Herald. Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security ended TPS for some 2,500 Nicaraguans living in the United States, giving them until Jan. 5, 2019 to obtain legal immigration status through a different category or leave. At the same time, the department also extended the deadline for some 57,000 Hondurans living in the United States under TPS until next July. The administration may end TPS for Hondurans after that extension ends. [Editor's note: See [Q&A](#) about Temporary Protected Status in the Nov. 16 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

López Obrador Vows to Prioritize Mexico's Economic Stability

Mexico's left-wing presidential frontrunner, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known as AMLO, on Monday vowed to prioritize economic stability while boosting spending for infrastructure, Reuters reported. His political aides also urged the government to delay NAFTA renegotiation talks until after the country's presidential elec-



López Obrador // Photo: López Obrador Campaign.

tion in July. López Obrador on Monday unveiled his economic plan, which includes austere government spending in order to more easily identify and root out corruption and redirecting government spending to go toward more public works projects and social programs without creating new taxes or increasing Mexico's debt-to-GDP ratio. He rejected critics' concerns that

NEWS BRIEFS

Bus Plunges Into Ravine in Colombia, Killing 14

Fourteen people were killed and at least 38 were injured in Colombia's northern Antioquia State after a bus slid off a road and fell into a ravine on Sunday, Colombian police said, the Associated Press reported Monday. The incident involved a local bus known as a "chiva." Chivas are often painted in bright colors and carry passengers inside and on top of the roof. Two young children were among those killed in the crash.

Officials of Gas-Exporting Countries to Convene in Bolivia

Officials from major gas-exporting countries will convene in Bolivia this week at the Gas Exporting Countries Forum as the conditions for a buyers' market appear to be strengthening, Reuters reported today. The forum, which has modeled itself after the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, is expected to draw energy ministers from Qatar, Iran, Russia and Venezuela. The talks come as expanding supplies of natural gas give global customers more sway over purchase and contract terms, and as market oversupply reduces revenues for the sector.

Ecopetrol, Repsol Acquiring New Gulf of Mexico Oil Blocks

Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol and Spain-based energy company Repsol have partnered to acquire four new oil blocks in the Gulf of Mexico for deepwater exploration, Ecopetrol said Friday, Reuters reported. Ecopetrol's U.S. subsidiary, Ecopetrol America, and Repsol will be able to explore the blocks for five years at a depth of about 240 meters or 787 feet, per the contract. The four blocks, Garden Banks 77, 78, 121 and 122, are close to platforms and existing infrastructure.

he would implement Venezuela-style economic policies if elected. "Let's be very clear, we are not inspired by any foreign governments, neither [Venezuelan President Nicolás] Maduro nor [U.S. President Donald] Trump," said López Obrador. Though AMLO has largely avoided making comments about Trump throughout his campaign, on Monday he said he would seek friendly relations with the U.S. government but would demand respect, as well. His team also reiterated previous calls for the Mexican government to hold off on renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement until after the election, saying that the current administration under President Enrique Peña Nieto would not defend the country's interests during the negotiations.

BUSINESS NEWS

Whitefish Halts Work in Puerto Rico Citing Nonpayment

Montana-based energy company Whitefish Energy Holdings on Monday said it was stopping work to help restore electricity to Puerto Rico following Hurricanes Irma and Maria earlier this year, saying the U.S. territory's government had not paid its workers as part of a contract that had led to accusations of the company overcharging for its services and of incompetence, and which contributed to the resignation of the company's director, the Associated Press reported. The company said in a statement that invoices for work done were outstanding, and that Whitefish could no longer provide services without pay. The Associated Press obtained a letter signed by Whitefish Energy CEO Andy Techmanski that said Puerto Rico's government owed more than \$83 million to the company, and that work would be suspended if Whitefish was not paid. The company said the lack of payments is a breach of the \$300 million contract that Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Roselló canceled last month. Even though the contract had been canceled, both the company and the commonwealth's government agreed

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of left-wing governments in Latin America highlights that it continues to represent the interests of the region's wealthy capitalist class and U.S. foreign policy objectives. Conservatives, their allies in the OAS and the U.S. foreign policy establishment delegitimize their criticisms of electoral processes when they embrace their electoral victories as legitimate, and condemn others held under the same conditions that they lose as fraudulent. The political opportunism and hypocrisy of such criticisms is blatantly obvious. As long as the Sandinistas continue their current policies, they will continue to enjoy popular support and by extension win elections as long as they are free and fair."

A **Mario Arana, director of the Nicaraguan Foundation for Social and Economic Development and former Nicaraguan minister**

of finance and central bank president: "Elections in Nicaragua unfortunately have devalued significantly since the electoral system began to lose legitimacy and credibility in the 2008 municipal elections, and especially since the presidential election of 2011. This situation has worsened, and abstentionism has become the norm. People are no longer bothering to vote, which should be a major problem for the country as much as for Ortega. Under those circumstances, the outcome is predetermined by the Sandinista militants, who are still going to the ballot box. The reaction and the threat of sanctions by the U.S. Congress in the context of the anomalies of the last presidential election led the government and the Organization of American States to agree on a roadmap over the next three years to address the many shortcomings. It has also led to an effort by

that Whitefish would continue to work on its current projects and would remain on the island through Nov. 30. "It may have not been the best business decision coming to work for a bankrupt island," Techmanski told CNN. "We were assured PREPA was getting support from

the private sector, concerned by the potential damage to the economy, to lobby against those sanctions, but with the understanding that Nicaragua's government must undertake

“People are no longer bothering to vote...”

— Mario Arana

a transition to democracy and institutionalization. This much Ortega has recently offered to do after the current municipal elections, to perfect the electoral process, as he publicly and indirectly recognized the high level of abstentionism and reminded everyone that elections present the appropriate alternative, as opposed to chaos and war, which Nicaragua experienced in the past. The lack of reforms could also derail an outstanding economic performance if the country ends up confronting U.S. economic sanctions. The effectiveness of the Ortega administration under abundant Venezuelan external resources has reached its limits, and a potential adverse balance is tilting against its ability to maneuver economically and politically in the future. The government must undertake institutional and electoral reforms as Ortega ponders his own historical legacy. It seems closer to becoming a more reasonable option than other alternatives, which under current circumstances could lead to polarization and undesirable economic and political instability. The country's economy has been doing well, and it will strengthen if reforms are timely and effective."

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FEMA and there was money available to pay us for 100 percent of our work." CNN contacted PREPA, the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority, for a comment, but a spokeswoman who responded did not directly address the situation with Whitefish.

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A **Chuck Kaufman, co-coordinator of the Nicaragua Network / Alliance for Global Justice**
 “The Organization of American States’ electoral mission recommended some changes to Nicaraguan electoral procedures, which the Nicaraguan government has said it will implement, but overall stated that the municipal elections were carried out in a safe, peaceful and orderly manner. The head of the OAS mission, Dr. Wilfredo Penco said, ‘Significant progress and limitations inherent of any process were identified without affecting in any way the popular will of the people and their right to vote.’ The other primary observer mission was organized by the Nicaraguan National Council of Universities (CNU). Its president, Telemaco Talavera, said, ‘This electoral process ratifies Nicaragua’s commitment to peace, security and democracy.’ President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo both pledged to work together with the OAS to implement the recommendations. ‘This is a sovereign decision that reaffirms our commitment to democracy and the improvement of our electoral system,’ Murillo said. The U.S. State Department recognized the results of the elections. Of course, Nicaragua’s voting system can still use improvement. But the electoral victories of the Sandinista Party are

based on factors including the country’s 4.5 percent economic growth year after year, the increases in social spending in each year’s budget resulting in progress in education

“**Until the small, fractured opposition can offer Nicaraguans better prospects than these, the FSLN will continue to win elections.**”

— Chuck Kaufman

(especially rural education), health care (including vastly increasing the numbers of maternity wait homes), increased numbers of formal sector jobs where workers are paying into Social Security for their retirement and more emphasis on providing affordable housing. Until the small, fractured opposition can offer Nicaraguans better prospects than these, the FSLN will continue to win elections.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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