

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Nicaragua

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>8</td> <td>9</td> <td>+1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>8</td> <td>9</td> <td>+1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="3">17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	8	9	+1	Democ:	8	9	+1	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:	17			Tentative:	No			
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SCODE	NIC	CCODE	093	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	7	2	4																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date		26 February 1990		Begin Date																					
				27 February 1990																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution																									
1987 (1995/2000)																									
Executive(s)																									
President Daniel ORTEGA Saavedra (FSLN); directly elected, 5 November 2006, 38.1%																									
Legislature																									
Unicameral: National Assembly (92 seats; 90 members are proportionally elected, 2 seats reserved for immediate past president and runner-up of previous presidential election; most recent elections, 5 November 2006) Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN): 38 Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC): 25 Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN): 23 Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS): 5 Alliance for the Republic (APRE): 1 (outgoing President Bolanos)																									
Judiciary																									
Supreme Court of Justice																									

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

After a successful revolution against the repressive Somoza dynasty in 1979, the Marxist-oriented Sandinistas ruled Nicaragua for more than a decade. However, in the face of international isolationism, economic collapse and a US-backed insurgency, the Sandinistas agreed to conduct multiparty democratic elections in 1990. In these elections the Sandinista candidate, Daniel Ortega, was replaced as president by the candidate of the democratic opposition, Violetta Chamorro. Despite claims by the FSLN of electoral fraud in the 1996 presidential contest, international observers declared this election, in which Arnaldo

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Aleman defeated Daniel Ortega, as being “free and fair.” Daniel Ortega was once again defeated in the November 2001 elections, which were won by the Constitutional Liberal Party candidate, Enrique Bolaños, with 53.6% of the vote. However, in the November 2006 presidential election Ortega staged a surprising political comeback with an electoral victory over his conservative rival, Eduardo Montealegre. The country’s right-wing, which had previously managed to field a single candidate against Ortega, was divided in this election cycle. While Ortega won only 38% of the vote, under a law pushed through Congress in 2000 by Sandinista MPs, a candidate needs to win either forty percent of the vote or thirty-five percent with a five-point margin of victory in first round balloting in order to avoid a second round. These elections were once again deemed to be free and fair by international electoral observers.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

After months of deadlock and negotiation, in July 1995 President Chamorro signed 65 amendments to the 1987 constitution that gave the National Assembly many new powers that had previously belonged to the executive branch. These reforms provided the Assembly with the power to override a presidential veto with a simple majority; eliminated the president’s ability to “pocket veto” bills; increased the Assembly’s control over the budget, taxation and international financial accords; and gave the Assembly the right to nominate candidates for top cabinet positions. The National Assembly reflects an almost equal split in popular support for the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). While the judiciary is largely independent, nevertheless, it continues to be susceptible to limited executive branch influence.

In recent years, the Nicaraguan government has been plagued by a constant battle between the executive and legislative branches. While President Bolanos took office in 2002 with a slight legislative majority, nonetheless, after his decision to prosecute former President Arnaldo Aleman for corruption many of his own Liberal party supporters in Congress turned against him and joined ranks with the Sandinistas. Former President Aleman was sentenced to 20 years in prison on charges of fraud and money-laundering. In 2005 Congress stripped two of cabinet ministers and three senior officials in the Bolanos government of their legal immunity thus paving the way for an investigation into alleged campaign funding irregularities. Congress has also threatened to strip the President of his immunity from legal prosecution. President Balanos has denounced the actions of the legislature as tantamount to a slow-motion coup led by congressional forces loyal to former President Aleman and Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega. In the fall of 2005 Congress was openly considering impeaching the President for alleged campaign finance violation. However, many considered this action as simply a threat to persuade Bolanos to accept constitutional reforms that would further limit executive branch power. In October 2005 President Bolanos announced an agreement with Congress to end the political crisis. Under this agreement, Congress agreed to delay the implementation of constitutional reforms, which would further weaken presidential powers, until after the 2006 elections.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization (9)

After a decade of multiparty democracy in Nicaragua the factional struggle between former members of the revolutionary government and anti-Sandinista forces has begun to wane. While the Sandinistas continue to use their organizational and institutional powers to block government initiatives that they believe threaten the social reforms of the 1979 revolution, nevertheless, Daniel Ortega has been relatively successful in portraying the FSLN as a moderate party that is committed to national unity and reconciliation. However, the FSLN continues to threaten the use of violence on occasion in an effort to enhance their bargaining position vis-à-vis the Government. Since the opening of politics and the return to electoral government with the 1990 elections, Nicaraguan politics has coalesced around a dual party structure that is promoted and protected by the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), which is empowered to supervise elections and political parties but remains dominated by the PLC and FSLN. In the run up to the November 2001 elections, the CSE voted not to recognize two emerging parties: the National Unity Party led by former army commander Gen. Joaquin Cuadra Lacayo and the Liberal Democratic Party led by former Defense Minister Jose Antonio Alvarado. The decision of the CSE to deny recognition prevented the parties from adding candidates to the ballot. While the rights of assembly and speech are constitutionally protected in Nicaragua, nevertheless, class-based violence and human rights abuses, particularly in the rural countryside, continue to undermine the consolidation of democracy in this country.

With the election of Daniel Ortega to the office of President in November 2006, Nicaragua seems to have passed another hurdle in its movement toward creating a liberal democratic order. These elections,

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which saw the return to executive power of the Sandinistas after a 16 year absence, were deemed to be free and fair by international observers and were accompanied by little electoral violence. While Ortega continues to employ socialist rhetoric on the campaign trail, nonetheless, his political platform has moved significantly to the center in recent years. This movement away from the radical socialist agenda that defined the first era of Sandinista rule helps explain why Ortega's return to power did not trigger the same level of violent political opposition as has been so common in the past.