



The 2013 Honduran general election

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1. Background

Until the elections of 2009, Honduras used to have one of the most stable party systems in Latin America. This country's late democratization during the 1980s did not alter the historical prominence of its main political parties: the Liberal Party (PLH) and the National Party (PNH). These two parties have headed the government since the first democratic elections of 1981. Moreover, the participation of other political alternatives – such as the Christian Democratic Party (PDCH) and the Innovation and Unity Party (PINU-SD) since 1981, and the Democratic Unification Party (PUD) since 1997 – did not alter the bipartisan structure of electoral competition where the national government, as well as most posts in Congress and the municipalities, were seized by the PLH and the PNH. There are two factors that have fostered this stability: first, the internal fractionalization of both parties has allowed the existence of internal factions within the parties that represent different ideological positions and social groups.¹ Therefore, there were no significant differences in the policies that were implemented by the PLH or the PNH when they headed the national government. The second element is the prominence of clientelism as the source of linkages between parties and citizens in Honduras. Because of the lack of ideological differentiation between the main parties of Honduras, the privileged access to public resources that the PLH and PNH have enjoyed gave them a clear cut electoral advantage over the smaller parties.

This long-term pattern of stability was broken in 2009 when a parliamentary coup ousted President Manuel Zelaya (PLH) from power in June 27th, because of his intention to celebrate a non-binding referendum asking whether to include a fourth ballot convening a new National Constituent Assembly (ANC) in the subsequent elections. This event, which was the culmination of several conflicts between Zelaya's administration and the other branches of

government, triggered the worst political crisis in the democratic history of Honduras. However, it also revealed that the causes of this crisis were rooted in structural and political factors that were related to unsolved chronic socio-economic problems and the failure of political representation.

In fact, four years later the effects of the crisis were still noticeable in the Honduran society, which was divided between those who supported Zelaya's project and those who defended the previous *status quo*. Subsequently, this polarization was translated to the political arena where the traditional parties experienced several instances of internal division. This situation was experienced more intensely by the Liberal Party, which suffered the defection of several of its prominent members. Nevertheless, the most important consequence of this exceptional scenario was the creation of new political parties that received the support of the citizens that were critical of the traditional parties.

When Honduran citizens went to the polls on November 24 of 2013, they were able to choose between old and new political options. The former category consisted of the PNH and the PLH, which were situated at the right end of the ideological spectrum, and three small non-traditional parties: Innovation and Unity Party (PINU-SD), Christian Democratic Party (PDCH), both of them centrist parties, and the leftist Democratic Unification Party (PUD). On the other hand, four new political organizations competed. Two of those parties came from the FNRP (National Popular Resistance Front), which was the social movement that supported the restitution of president Zelaya and advocated for a National Constituent Assembly in the aftermath of the coup of 2009. The first and most relevant one was the Liberty and Refoundation Party (LIBRE), which is the party led by former president Manuel Zelaya. It embraced many Liberals who left the PLH after the coup, along with other citizens that came from social movements and labor unions. Composed of five internal movements, this party presents a wide range of leftist positions in the country.² The other

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¹ This feature has been more pronounced in the PLH where conservative and progressive factions have coexisted within the party ranks, whereas most of the PNH members have leaned towards the right.

² *Movimiento Resistencia Popular (MRP), Liberales en Resistencia 28 de Junio, Pueblo Organizado en Resistencia (POR), and Fuerza Refundación Popular (FRP)*.

Table 1
Election results.

Party (presidential candidate)	Presidential election		Legislative election			Parlacen	Municipal election
	#Votes	%	#Votes	%	Seats	Seats	Majors
National Party (Juan Orlando Hernandez)	1,149,302	36.89	9,255,904	33.64	48	6	183
LIBRE (Xiomara Castro)	896,498	28.78	7,568,392	27.51	37	5	31
Liberal Party (Mauricio Villeda)	632,320	20.30	4,670,157	16.97	27	3	83
PAC (Salvador Nasralla)	418,443	13.43	4,169,245	15.15	13	1	0
PDC (Orle Solis)	5194	0.17	444,734	1.62	1	1	1
Alianza Patriótica (Romeo Vasquez)	6105	0.20	272,398	0.99	0	1	0
PINU (Jorge Aguilar)	4468	0.14	504,684	1.83	1	1	0
FAPER (Andres Pavon) –PUD ^a	3118	0.10	128,488	0.47	0	1	0
			469,825	1.71	1	1	
Indep.	–	–	28,971	0.11	0		0
Valid vote	3,115,448	95.12					
Null	108,171	3.30					
Blank votes	51,727	1.58					
Total	3,275,346	100	27,512,798	100	128	20	298
Turnout		60.38					

^a PUD and FAPER were in coalition for the legislatives in three departments (Copan, Gracias a Dios, and Intibuca).

Source: La Gaceta, Republic of Honduras, [Declaratoria Final of the TSE 12 December 2013](#) and TSE webpage

party that emerged from the FNRP was the Broad Political Front in Resistance (FAPER), which was also formed from popular organizations and former members of other political parties. On the other hand, two new conservative forces were created: the Anti Corruption Party (PAC), led by a popular sports journalist Salvador Nasralla, and the Patriotic Alliance, a party that was created by former military Romeo Vasquez.³ Overall, there were nine political organizations vying for representative posts in the general elections which represented several ideological positions from the left to the radical right. For the first time, some non-traditional options had real chances to transform the two-party system and change Honduras' political dynamic.

Furthermore, the socio-economic situation of the country was very delicate. On the one hand, and despite relatively modest levels of economic growth of about 2.5%, the Honduran State has experienced an accelerated growth of its debt resulting in a fiscal deficit of 7.7% of the GDP, which will condition the policies enacted by the new government. Moreover, President Porfirio Lobo's administration leaves a high unemployment rate and increased levels of inequality and poverty, which has not stopped growing since 2009 –66% of the population lives below the poverty line (UNDP, 2012). Even more serious is the escalation of violence. The country has experienced a rise of violence linked to criminal gangs and organized drug trafficking organizations. Honduras is one of the most violent countries in the world with 90 homicides per 100,000 residents, – in 2005 it was 46 per 100,000 (UNODC, 2013). In this sense, the 2013 Honduran elections have certainly been the most important and complex ones since the establishment of democracy.

Despite the novelty of the new contestants, the rules that regulated these elections did not undergo major changes. National and local elections took place the last Sunday of November 2013, like every four years. The president was elected by simple majority, along with the three “Designados Presidenciales”⁴ (re-election is not

permitted), and in the same ballot the Hondurans voted for the PARLACEN candidates. The 128 members of Congress were selected in 18 constituencies or “*departamentos*” with a district magnitude that ranges from 1 to 23. Since 2005, these legislators are elected from an open-list with a *pan-achage* ballot in which voters can vote for as many candidates as their district magnitude. The formula to translate votes into seats is the *Hare* method with largest remainders, except in two single-member constituencies where a majority rule is used. This system has allowed small parties to achieve representation, although they had never threatened the dominance of the Liberal and Nationalist parties.

The Electoral Law was amended in 2012 in order to increase the female quota, which was moved from 30% to 40%, for members of the party structures and positions in candidate lists.⁵ However, given the open list system in the primaries, there is a discrepancy between the percentage of female candidates that run in the primaries and the proportion who actually achieve a candidacy. For example, the percentage of female candidates in legislative primaries was 45.1%, 45.1% and 44.5% for the National, the Liberal and LIBRE parties respectively, but only 35.9%, 35.1% and 31.2% of women appeared in the final ballot.

2. Candidates and campaigns

In Honduras, the formal campaign starts 90 days before the Election Day. However, those parties with internal factions, such as the PNH, PLH, and LIBRE, start their informal campaigns one year before the voters go to the polls when they carry out their primary elections. In these processes, which took place on November 18 of 2012, Hondurans voted in open primaries to select municipal, legislative and presidential candidates, while party sympathizers were called to elect partisan authorities that would control the party structures. Apart from resulting in

³ Vasquez was the General who executed the arrest warrant on Zelaya in 2009.

⁴ They are similar to vice-presidents.

⁵ Articles 105 and 116 of *Ley Electoral y de las Organizaciones Políticas* (2004). This female quota will be 50% in the next primaries and electoral processes.

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