



US Must Change Course in Central America

Howard County Progressive Democrats believe in the humane treatment of refugees from violence, climate change disasters, and inhumane conditions. We also oppose foreign policy that unnecessarily creates the conditions in which people are forced to flee from their homeland.

Central America provides a poignant example. Immigration from Central American countries including Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala is in crisis as people flee violence, poverty, climate disasters, and lack of opportunity.¹ The US government supported campaigns for the current Presidents in each of these countries, and in the case of Honduras supported a military coup in 2009.² These governments cut social services and privatized their economies to the detriment of the poor majority. Benefits from excessive deforestation for export production did not trickle down to the majority of their population, but rather exacerbated regional and global climate issues.

The US blockaded and funded a proxy war against Nicaragua from 1980-1990, which at the time also increased migration. Eventually, Nicaraguans elected a US-backed Presidential candidate in order to end the war. Three different neoliberal Presidents ruled Nicaragua until 2007. Despite some increases in agricultural and forestry exports, half of Nicaraguans lived in poverty under food scarcity.

Despite US efforts to prevent it, the Sandinistas narrowly won the Presidential election in 2006. Since that time, Nicaragua's GDP per capita grew at the fastest rate in Central America, poverty was reduced by half, literacy and healthcare availability increased, hospitals and clinics were built, roads were constructed throughout the country enabling more people to participate in the economy.^{3,4} Nicaragua's violent crime rate is among the lowest in the hemisphere.⁵ Nicaragua is now 90% food self-sufficient, and they have been planting trees.⁶ For these reasons, the Sandinistas were repeatedly re-elected, and there is currently very little net migration from Nicaragua to the US.^{7,8}

The US funds hundreds of anti-government organizations in Nicaragua, and encouraged violent protests in 2018 calling for a coup.⁹ The mainstream news media parroted claims from the CIA and National Endowment for Democracy that attributed all of the violence to the Sandinistas. Also in 2018, the US resumed economic sanctions stopping most foreign investment in the country¹⁰. Currently, Congress has proposed even more drastic sanctions on Nicaragua that would close the country to most imports and exports and continue to stifle investment¹¹. The bill called the RENACER Act was approved by the Senate with virtually no discussion, and is up before the House. The stated goal of the RENACER Act is to restore "free elections" but election observers note that Nicaragua's elections are already free. The actual goal is to cause widespread poverty and suffering so the Nicaraguan people will vote the Sandinistas out just as

they did in 1990 after ten years of similar sanctions and US-funded war.¹² Recent polls show President Ortega is predicted to receive 61.2% of likely votes to 19.5% for the opposition.¹³

Sanctions on Nicaragua are not likely to facilitate “regime change” in the near future because the current elected government is very popular, and US support for opposition parties only weakens support for the opposition among the Nicaraguan people. Nonetheless, sanctions aimed at causing poverty and funding of violent opposition groups will be a hardship for the Nicaraguan people and are likely to cause mass migration to the US.

We call for an end to US sanctions on Nicaragua, and we stand with progressive Democrats like Greenbelt Mayor Colin Byrd and Congressional Candidate McKayla Wilkes in asking Congress to vote no on the RENACER Act.

¹ Cohn, D., Passel, J.S., Gonzalez-Barrera, A. 2017. Rise in US immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras outpaces growth from elsewhere. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2017/12/07/rise-in-u-s-immigrants-from-el-salvador-guatemala-and-honduras-outpaces-growth-from-elsewhere/>

² Weisbrot, M. 2014. Hard Choices: Hillary Clinton admits role in Honduran coup aftermath. Aljazeera America. <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/9/hillary-clinton-honduraslatinamericaforeignpolicy.html>

³ World Bank, 2021. Data by country, Nicaragua. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/nicaragua>

⁴ World Bank, 2017. Nicaragua: Paving the way to faster growth and Inclusion: Systematic country diagnostic. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/365991498843795990/pdf/Nicaragua-SCD-Copyedit-final-jun-20-06272017.pdf>

⁵ Lovato, R. 2019. Why is Nicaragua’s homicide rate so far below that of its Central American neighbors? The Nation. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/why-is-nicaraguas-homicide-rate-so-far-below-that-of-its-central-american-neighbors/>

⁶ Kohn, R.A., 2021. Nicaragua: U.S. Sanctions will disrupt sustainable beef production and reforestation. Council on Hemispheric Affairs. <https://www.coha.org/nicaragua-u-s-sanctions-will-disrupt-sustainable-beef-production-and-reforestation/>

⁷ O’Connor, A., Batalova, J., Bolter, J. 2019. Central American Immigrants in the United States. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states-2017>

⁸ Sefton, S., 2021. NicaNotes: Nicaragua and Central American migration. Alliance for Global Justice, May 13, 2021. <https://afgj.org/nicanotes-nicaragua-and-central-american-migration>

⁹ Perry, J. The US contracts out its regime change operation in Nicaragua. Council on Hemispheric Affairs. July 7, 2021. <https://www.coha.org/the-us-contracts-out-its-regime-change-operation-in-nicaragua/>
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1041>

¹⁰ Nicaragua Human Rights and Anticorruption Act, 2018. House Resolution 1918. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1918>

¹¹ RENACER Act, 2021. Senate Bill 1041 and 1064. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1041>

¹² Perry, J. 2021. Sanctions may impoverish Nicaraguans but will not change their vote. North American Congress on Latin America. <https://nacla.org/sanctions-may-impoverish-nicaraguans-will-not-change-their-vote>

¹³ M&R Consultores, 2021. Nicaragua Rumbo al 2021 6ta Encuesta Pre Electoral. <https://www.myrconsultores.com/nicaragua-rumbo-al-2021-6ta-encuesta-pre-electoral/#>