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STRENGTHENING  
DEMOCRACIES  
IN LATIN AMERICA

**NOVEMBER 2021**

# Honduras

## Presidential and legislative elections Pre-election report

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# Executive Summary

Next Sunday, November 28, presidential, legislative, municipal and Central American Parliament (PARLACEN, in Spanish) elections will be held in Honduras. On this occasion, the president, the 128 deputies of the National Congress, the 298 mayors and 20 regional parliamentarians will be elected for the 2022-2026 period.

Nasry Asfura, current mayor of Tegucigalpa, will seek to assure the ruling National Party another four years at the head of the Executive Power, which has governed the Central American country since January 2014. However, the ruling party's victory is not certain. This is due to the fact that, according to opinion polls, the approval level of the outgoing government of Juan Orlando Hernández is barely 18%, one of the lowest in the region. This, together with allegations of corruption of Asfura, has had an impact on the National Party's voting intentions.

Against this backdrop, the opposition is leading the polls of voting intention, with the favorite being the candidate of the Freedom and Refoundation Party (Free), Xiomara Castro, wife of former president Manuel Zelaya. Castro managed to seal an alliance with Salvador Nasralla, who in the 2017 elections lost the presidency against the current president by less than two percentage points, which has increased her chances of accessing the highest office. In addition, Hondurans will be able to choose among 13 other candidates, although none of them has a real chance of winning.

The elections will be held in a context of political polarization, which, added to the low confidence in the three branches of the State and particularly in the electoral institution, will demand consensus and commitments from the main candidates and the political actors involved in the electoral process, to guarantee expeditious and transparent results that avoid an escalation of violence similar to that of 2017.

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# Basic questions

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## What is at stake?

The president, three presidential appointees or vice presidents, 128 deputies of the National Congress, 298 mayors and 20 representatives of the country to the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN in Spanish) will be elected for the 2022-2026 term.

## How is the vote cast?

According to the country's [Constitution](#), suffrage is universal, mandatory, equal, direct, free and secret. The [Electoral Law](#) also establishes that voting is a right of citizens over 18 years of age. Honduras also allows the vote of nationals domiciled abroad, but only for the offices of president and vice-presidents.

## How are contestants elected?

The President will be elected by simple majority, without the possibility of a second round or runoff. This implies that the candidate with the highest number of votes on Sunday will win the election.

On the other hand, the deputies will be elected in 18 plurinominal districts based on the departmental division of the country. The proportional representation system by electoral quotient will be used to distribute seats in each of them.

## Who are the candidates?

Although more than a dozen presidential candidates will participate in the election, in practice, two have a real chance of winning: Xiomara Castro (Partido Libre y Refundación) and Nasry Asfura (Partido Nacional). In third place would be Yani Rosenthal (Partido Liberal), who would obtain a significant number of votes, although far from the two favorites..

However, on the [presidential ballot](#), citizens will be able to choose among 12 other candidates from different political parties. In the case of the Unión Nacional Opositora de Honduras (UNOH), candidate Salvador Nasralla decided to support Castro's candidacy and run as first vice-president for the Partido Libertad y Refundación. In his place Alexander Mira will be the presidential candidate.

## When will the next government take office?

On January 27, 2022, the President and Vice Presidents will take office. The National Congress will be installed two days earlier, on January 25.

# Political context

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## From the crisis of 2017 to an election marked by new election rules

Next Sunday's elections will be the first to be held after the controversial reelection obtained by Juan Orlando Hernández in 2017. They were marked by uncertainty in the vote count, as initially opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla remained in the lead until the loading of votes in the provisional count was interrupted. This fueled speculation of fraud, which led the opposition to disavow the results, which in turn spiralized social discontent generating protests, arrests, a curfew and 23 deaths. In spite of this, more than 20 days after the elections were held, the electoral authority decreed Hernández's victory by a margin of 1.71% of the votes.

That is why, with a view to prevent a repetition of these events, the Honduran Congress approved a series of electoral reforms, under the influence of the United Nations (UN). These included in 2019 the creation of new electoral bodies, such as the National Electoral Council (CNE, in Spanish) and the Electoral Justice Tribunal (TJE, in Spanish) with the aim of resolving disputes and protecting the integrity of the elections. Likewise, in May 2021 a reform was also approved that installs a new system for the transmission of results and obliges the CNE to disseminate the first results three hours after the closing of the elections.

According to private reports for the year 2021, Honduras has the lowest support for the electoral institutionality in Latin America, with only 13% of those consulted supporting the National Electoral Council. This is why Honduras will have the opportunity, by implementing the aforementioned legal changes, to rebuild part of the credibility of its electoral institutionality. In addition, and in order to reinforce this objective, more than 20 social, academic, business and religious organizations signed a statement urging the parties to reach a consensus to guarantee certainty and confidence in the electoral process.

## Polls marked by polarization and political violence

Honduras will go to the elections in an environment marked by political violence and polarization, since the two candidates with chances of winning belong to dissimilar and antagonistic ideological spaces. This has been reflected in the campaign, which was marked by crossed accusations, ranging from Castro's denunciation of communist tendencies to Asfura's qualification of dictator.

Regarding violence, the murders of Mayor Francisco Gaitán (Liberal Party) and the leader of the Free Party, Elvir Casaña, obviously stood out, which came after both had participated in political rallies. According to data from the National Violence Observatory of the Autonomous University of Honduras, from December 2020 to October 2021, 64 victims of political violence have been registered.

For this reason, and in order to prevent a further escalation of violence, the National Congress approved a law prohibiting the carrying or transfer of weapons during the ten days before and after the elections.

### **A ruling party hit by allegations of corruption and drug trafficking**

The ruling party will have to overcome the decline in the image of the current president Juan Orlando Hernández and the candidate for the ruling Partido Nacional, Nasry Asfura, after being involved in accusations and investigations for crimes of corruption and drug trafficking.

In March 2021, a New York prosecutor claimed that Hernández gave protection to the Honduran Cachiros cartel in exchange for million-dollar bribes to facilitate drug trafficking to the United States. Likewise, a US judge sentenced his brother, former congressman Tony Hernández, to life in prison for being part of a drug trafficking gang.

In turn, the ruling party candidate, Nasry Asfura, is under investigation by the Honduran justice system for crimes related to corruption, money laundering, fraud, falsification of documents and embezzlement of funds during his term as mayor of Tegucigalpa.

### **OAS and the United States call for peaceful elections and remain on alert**

Polarization, violence, the memory of what happened in 2017 and allegations of corruption have alerted the international community of the possibility that the elections could suffer alterations in their proper development.

In this regard, the Organization of American States (OAS) called on the different political actors to commit to a non-violent pact so that the elections can be conducted in a peaceful manner.

Also, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Brian Nichols, visited the Honduran capital where he met with officials and members of the private sector. The official supported the National Electoral Council (CNE in Spanish) and urged it to make a pact "to promote peaceful elections".



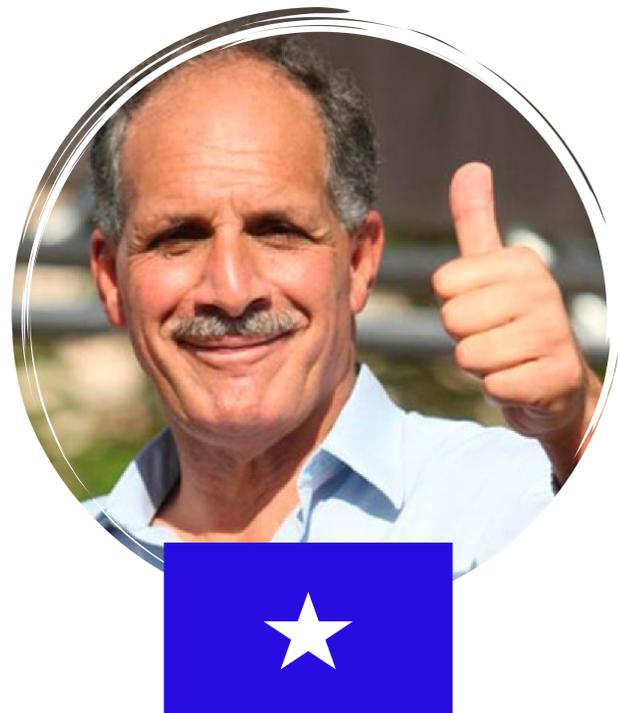
# Presidential Elections

In a context of increasing political violence, voter preferences on Sunday will be polarized between the leftist opposition candidate, Xiomara Castro, of Partido Libertad y Refundación (Libre) and the ruling party's candidate, Nasry Asfura, of the right-wing Partido Nacional.



**Xiomara Castro**

**Partido Libertad y  
Refundación**



**Nasry Asfura**

**Partido Nacional**

Castro, appears as favorite thanks to the alliance made with Salvador Nasralla on October 13. Nasralla was a presidential candidate for the UNOH party, but opted to run as Castro's vice-president. Before the alliance, he was the third favorite for the presidency. For his part, Asfura arrives with the endorsement of the outgoing president, Juan Orlando Hernández, and will seek to extend the power of the Partido Nacional for 4 more years.

In addition, the following will also be candidates: Yani Rosenthal ( Partido Liberal), Julio López (Partido Anticorrupción), Kelin Pérez (Movimiento Frente Amplio), Esdras Amado López (Partido Nueva Ruta), Romeo Vásquez Velásquez (Partido Alianza Patriótica), Santos Rodríguez (Movimiento Dignidad y Esperanza), José Ramón Coto ( Partido Vamos), Lempira Viana (Partido Lidehr), José Alfonso Díaz (Unificación Democrática), Carlos Portillo (Democracia Cristiana), Marlon Escoto (Partido Todos Somos Honduras), Milton Benítez (Partido Honduras Humana), and Alexander Mira (Alianza Unidad Social Opositora).

## Main Candidates

### Xiomara Castro | Partido Libre y Refundación (Libre)

She is the main opposition leader to the government of Juan Orlando Hernández. As the wife of former president Manuel Zelaya, deposed in 2009 through a coup d'état, she has since deepened her political career, positioning herself as a key reference in the opposition.

Regarding her education, she has a degree in Business Administration from the Honduran Institute of Inter-American Culture. She has not formally held any political office, although she has run as a candidate in the 2013 and 2017 presidential elections, although in the latter she gave up her place to support Salvador Nasralla's candidacy.



## Proposals

He presented his "[Government Plan for the Refoundation of the Nation and the Construction of the Socialist and Democratic State](#)". There she proposes:

- Promote the purchase of medicines for the entire public network at the national level, guaranteeing them on a continuous basis for the population.
- It will create the National Cancer Institute and the National Drug Laboratory.
- In environmental matters, she will seek to ensure a strategy for recycling solid materials.
- She will formulate an industrial policy to development of high-potential sectors such as the food industry.
- Implement mechanisms for access to financing for MSMEs .
- To agree on a tax reform that includes a single tax on large fortunes.
- Reduce interest costs on personal loans and through the use of credit cards.
- Concretize a digital economy agenda to boost the creative industries.

## Nasry Asfura | Partido Nacional

Academically, he holds a Bachelor's degree in Science and Literature. He developed most of his political life in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital. He began as a municipal prosecutor in 1990, until in 2010 he went to the national scene as a deputy in Congress. Since 2014 he has been mayor of the aforementioned district.

His candidacy is framed in allegations of corruption. In 2020, the Specialized Prosecutor Unit Against Corruption Networks (Uferco in Spanish) of the Public Prosecutor's Office issued a request for pre-trial proceedings against him for money laundering. Although the request was initially accepted, last June the Supreme Court of Justice rejected it. He has also been implicated in the recent investigations on offshore tax havens based on the Pandora Papers.



### Proposals

Although he has not presented an official document with his government program, he has stated the following intentions throughout the campaign:

- Generate job opportunities in infrastructure, agriculture and livestock farming..
- Promote decentralization, to "empower" each mayor in the management of his or her municipality in the areas of education, health and infrastructure.
- He promises not to raise taxes "just as I did in the mayor's office", referring to his administration in Tegucigalpa.
- In the area of health, he assured that each health center will have a first response emergency care center.
- He will seek sources of financing for microenterprises with better long-term interest rates.

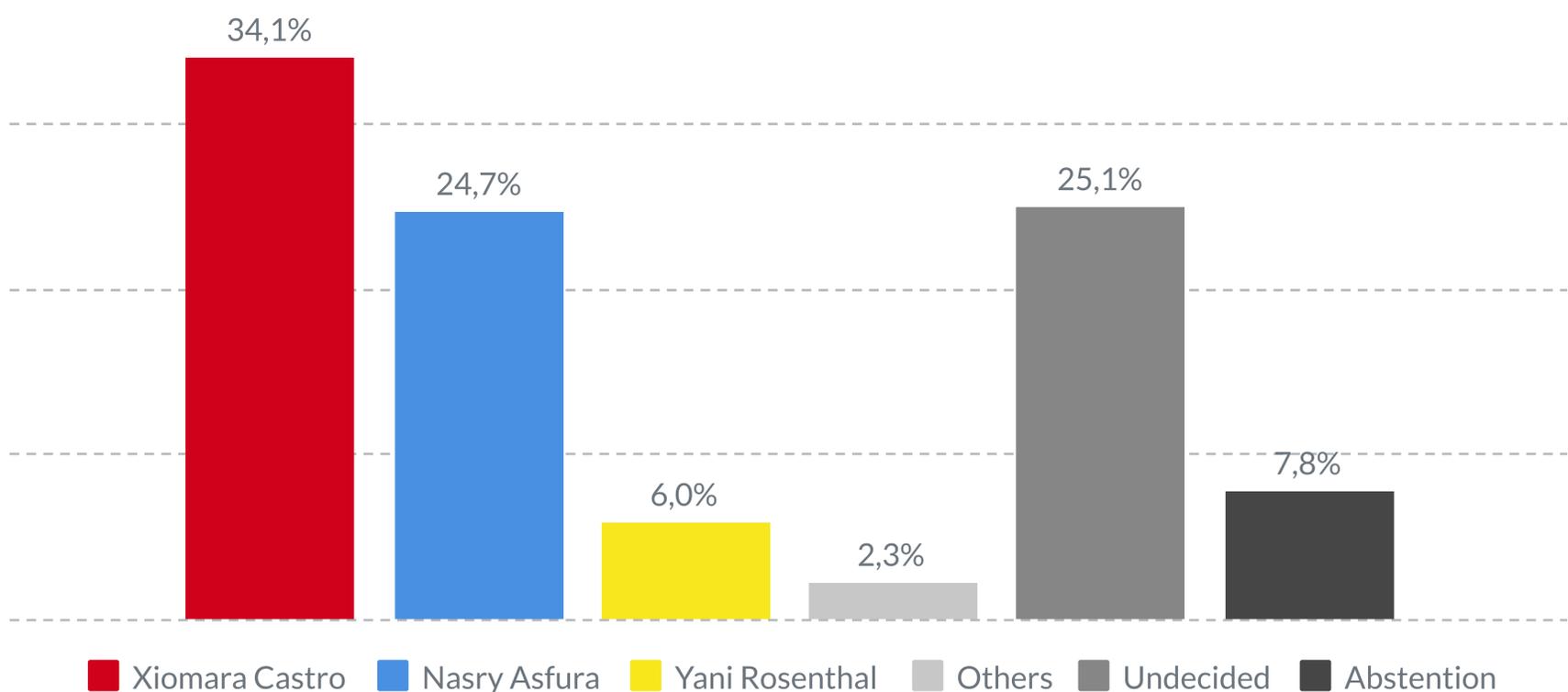
# Projections

According to article 237 of the Electoral Law, the disclosure of polls is prohibited 30 days prior to the elections, and until that moment only those agencies authorized by the National Electoral Council (CNE) may disclose opinion polls.

Thus, the latest available data are from polls conducted at the end of October, where the data do not allow predicting a clear winner. However, the data do allow us to assume that the election will be polarized between two options, Xiomara Castro (Partido Libre-Opposition) and Nasry Asfura (Partido Nacional- Ruling party).

In the midst of such polarization, Castro runs with an advantage in voting intentions, especially after his alliance with Salvador Nasralla. However, the high percentage of undecided voters suggests that Asfura still has concrete chances of winning the presidency on Sunday.

## Latest Polls October 2021



**Source:** Own elaboration based on polls conducted by local consulting firms in October 2021.

# Legislative Elections

The entire National Congress, composed of 128 deputies, will also be renewed. Two departments elect deputies by simple majority while, due to their number of inhabitants, only one seat is at stake. The rest elect seats by proportional system.

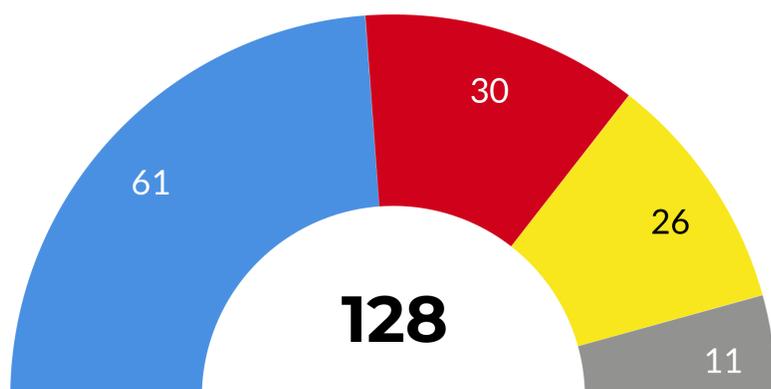
## How will the Congress be composed after Sunday?

The legislative bench that each candidate obtains will be key to guarantee the governability of the country. Currently, the Congress of Honduras, of unicameral character, has 61 official seats belonging to the Partido Nacional, 4 behind the simple majority. The remaining 67 seats are distributed among the opposition, with the Partido Libre holding 30 seats.

Based on the available polls, and projecting the undecided votes, the conformation of the Congress could undergo a significant political transformation. If Xiomara manages to win, she would obtain the first minority in the chamber and adding the deputies of the Liberal Party, she could reach the necessary majorities to promote her government agenda.

On the other hand, the Partido Nacional, if the polls are respected, would be far from its own majority and, in case it wins the presidency, it will have to build alliances with the opposition to promote its legislative agenda.

2018-2022



**Ruling Party (61)**

● PARTIDO NACIONAL

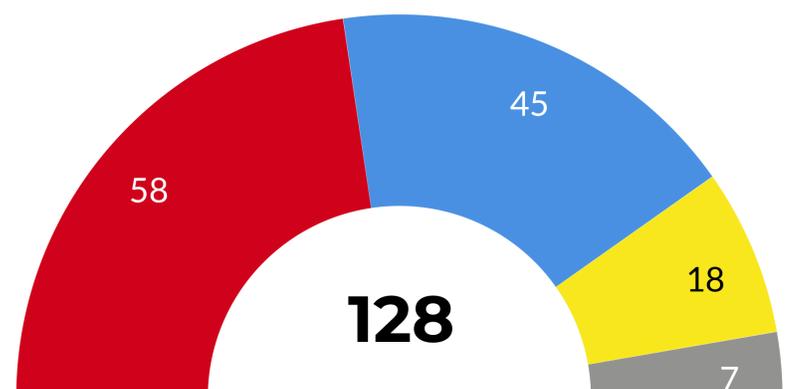
**Opposition (67)**

● PARTIDO LIBRE

● PARTIDO LIBERAL

● OTHERS

2022-2026



**Ruling Party (45)**

● PARTIDO NACIONAL

**Opposition (83)**

● PARTIDO LIBRE

● PARTIDO LIBERAL

● OTHERS

# Conclusions

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Uncertainty and tension will be the protagonists in the electoral scenario of Honduras, in view of the presidential and legislative elections, to be held next Sunday, November 28. There, Nasry Asfura will seek the continuity of the National Party in the Executive Power, while the opposition Xiomara Castro of the Freedom and Refoundation Party (Free) will try to lead the left to power and become the first woman to reach the presidency of the country. The latest available information positions Castro as the favorite, although the outcome remains uncertain due to the high number of undecided voters and the country's recent electoral history.

The elections are framed in a scenario of increasing political violence, which has resulted in the assassination of candidates and supporters from all political arcs. This is partly explained by the political polarization between the right wing represented by the National Party and the left wing of the Free Party. This panorama is reinforced by the low approval of the current government and the scarce confidence of the citizens in the electoral institutions and therefore in the transparency of the process.

In addition to the distribution of political power, the main concern about these elections revolves around a possible repetition of the scenario that happened in 2017. At that time, more than 20 days after the election, the electoral authorities made the winner of the race official. This took place in a context of allegations of fraud by the opposition, irregularities pointed out by international observers, and violent protests that led to the establishment of a national curfew.

To prevent a new escalation of violence and a deepening of the lack of confidence in the Honduran electoral body, the country has approved several electoral reforms. However, it is expected to be a tense election day. Thus, the effectiveness of the approved reforms and the role of the CNE will be at the center of the scene to see if the country learned from its past. In this context, the national and international community is expectant and hopes that the elections will take place in peace so that the country can take a step towards strengthening democracy.



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