

NICARAGUA 2020 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nicaragua has a highly centralized, authoritarian political system dominated by President Daniel Ortega Saavedra and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo Zambrana. Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front party exercises total control over the executive, legislative, judicial, and electoral functions. President Ortega was inaugurated to a third term in office in January 2017 following a deeply flawed electoral process. The 2016 elections expanded the ruling party's supermajority in the National Assembly, which previously allowed for changes in the constitution that extended the reach of executive branch power and the elimination of restrictions on re-election for executive branch officials and mayors. Observers noted serious flaws in municipal, regional, and national elections since 2008. Civil society groups, international electoral experts, business leaders, and religious leaders identified persistent flaws in the 2019 Caribbean regional and 2017 municipal elections and noted the need for comprehensive electoral reform.

The Nicaraguan National Police maintains internal security. The army is responsible for external security but also has some domestic security responsibilities. Both report directly to the president, pursuant to changes in the police and army code in 2014. Parapolice, which are nonuniformed, masked, and armed groups with tactical training and organization, act in coordination with government security forces, under the direct control of the government, and report directly to the national police. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over police and parapolice security forces. Members of the security forces committed numerous abuses.

Significant human rights issues included: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings, committed by the government or its agents; forced disappearances by parapolice forces; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by prison guards and parapolice; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary detentions by police and parapolice; political prisoners and detainees; politically motivated reprisal against individuals located outside the country; a serious lack of independence of the judiciary; and

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, government officials ordered medical staff not to wear personal protective equipment. In response to this and the lack of government response to the pandemic, 25 doctors signed a letter in July requesting that doctors be issued protective equipment and not be prosecuted for using it. The doctors were fired in retaliation. In November the Citizen's Observatory reported that approximately 100 health workers had died of the virus.