

Nicaragua

Rice

In 1919, the President of Nicaragua was Emiliano Chamorro Vargas, who had been installed by the United States after US Marines had invaded Nicaragua in 1917. Chamorro had been elected, technically, in 1916, but in an election boycotted by the opposition. Chamorro was a member of the Conservative Party (PC), and remained in office until 1921, at which point his uncle, Diego Chamorro Bolaños, became President through a rigged election (Staten 2010, 39). Further, even though the opposition parties participated in the 1920 elections, Chamorro enjoyed the backing of the United States, further securing his victory, as Nicaragua was a “near United States protectorate” during this period (US Library of Congress 1993). The nature of this transition obviously shows that the political system in Nicaragua was not democratic at the time, and as Diego Chamorro was a member of the National Party (PN), it was definitely not a single-party state. Sources suggest the influence of Chamorristas and the fraudulent elections that were rigged in favor of the Chamorro family (see Barraco 2005, 39; Staten 2010, 39), which indicate a personalist system from 1919-1923.

In 1923, Chamorro Bolaños died before completing his term in office. The presidency was then filled by an acting president, Bartolomé Martínez Gonzalez, a member of PC, who held office for 15 months, which still keeps him in the category of ‘provisional leader’ (Encyclopedia Americana 1943; Wise et al., 23). This is not a SOLS change. Martínez Gonzalez oversaw elections, as well as arranged the departure of the US Marines at the end of his term. The victor in the elections was Carlos Solórzano Gutiérrez, a member of PC and rival of the Chamorros. This is a SOLS change, because two sources suggest that he cannot be categorized as a pre-designated successor of Chamorro, who is the last regular leader. First, Yust (1954, 412) describes Solórzano as an anti-Chamorro conservative. Second, Baracco (2005, 39) considers the Solórzano’s winning presidency as the end of the Chamorro’s family rule. Solórzano appointed a Liberal as vice president.

However, Nicaraguan politics were not yet completely peaceful. As soon as the U.S. military left Emiliano Chamorro seized control of the Army in October 1925, leading to Solórzano’s vice-president fleeing the country, and political pressure led to Solórzano resigning in March 1926. Chamorro exiled Solórzano and had himself declared president, which is a SOLS change (Cruz 2005, 200). Nicaragua soon descended into civil war once again and the United States Marines were sent back to restore peace. Because neither Solórzano nor Chamorro successfully consolidated power, we code no specific autocratic regime type during their rule.

The dissidents in the Civil War were the Liberals, led by Augusto Sandino and Anastasio Somoza García. They came into conflict with the Conservative government, who were backed by the Marines and the Nicaraguan National Guard. Chamorro’s government was practically bankrupt by November 1926, and he was forced to resign during mediation talks led by the United States. The United States then named Adolfo Díaz Recinos, a member of PC who had

previously been President from 1911-1917, as the new President. However, the conflict continued, and in further negotiations, the United States convinced the liberal leaders to agree to the Espino Negro Pact in May, 1927. The conditions of the pact included that Díaz would be allowed to serve out the remainder of his term, following which, fair elections would be held (Staten 2010, 45). Somoza García signed the pact, and from that point forward was seen to have aligned himself with the interests of the United States (Staten 2010, 45). Sandino was the only liberal leader who did not (due to the fact that Marines were still occupying parts of Nicaragua). Polity IV (Marshall and Jaggers 2002) codes Nicaragua -66 from December 1926 through November 1928. This appears to be a period of foreign control, so we do not code a SOLS change for Diaz Recinos.¹

In the elections of 1928, seen to be the “fairest elections ever held in Nicaragua at that point in history” (Staten 2010, 47), PL leader José María Moncada Tapia was elected to office. We code a SOLS change in 1929, when he officially took office. However, Polity IV (Marshall and Jaggers 2002) continues to list Nicaragua as a non-democratic state, perhaps due to the internal conflict between the government, supported by the United States, and the guerrilla forces led by Sandino. This conflict led to the creation of a paramilitary force of Moncada’s supporters, who worked to suppress supporters of Sandino, often through committing “atrocities” against entire villages (Staten 2010, 47). The fight drained the national budget, and led to greater executive control of the National Guard (Staten 2010, 47). Moncada had control over the major security apparatus in the country (which would indicate a personalist regime.. The PL dominated Nicaraguan politics, and Moncada’s supporters were all from the party, which might indicate a single party regime. More likely, it was not a consolidated autocratic regime of any type, which is what we code.

Another fair election was held in 1932 and the PL candidate, Juan Bautista Sacasa was victorious. He assumed office on January 1, 1933. Moncada and Sacasa were closely affiliated with one another, so we do not code a SOLS change based on the pre-designated successor rule (Sacasa had been ambassador to the U.S. for Moncada) (Walter 1993, 30). On that date, the U.S. Marines once again began to withdraw from Nicaragua. Anastasio Somoza Garcia was named to head the Nicaraguan National Guard, which he quickly made a powerful organization in the absence of the Marines. When the Marines withdrew, Sandino and his guerrillas stopped fighting. However, Sandino was quickly assassinated by members of the National Guard, along with many of his followers (Staten 2010, 49).

Somoza declared in 1935 that he wanted to become the next president of Nicaragua, and in June 1936, the National Guard surrounded the Presidential Palace. President Sacasa, wary of the power Somoza was accumulating, appealed to the United States for assistance. The United States chose to remain neutral and uninvolved. Eventually, Sacasa resigned and was replaced by Carlos Brenes Jarquín on June 9, 1936. Several sources consider Carlos Brenes Jarquín as “a

¹ Note that he is listed as Recinos on our spreadsheet but as Adolfo Diaz by Archigos (Goemans et al. 2009).

Somoza García associate” (Krehm 1999, 111; Block and Trown 1942, 780). The later in 1936, a rigged election was held. In this election, Somoza won overwhelmingly and took office on January 1, 1937. Somoza was supported by the Liberal Nationalist Party (PLN) (a Somoza-favoring faction of the Liberal Party), and also had the support of the military. GWF code a personalist regime from June 2, 1936 to July 17, 1979. Accordingly, we code a SOLS change with the entry of Brenes Jarquin in 1936 (not in 1937 when Somoza came to power), which can be considered as the start of Somoza’s personalist regime given Somoza’s influence over the appointment of Brenes Jarquín in 1936.

In 1947, following international pressure, Somoza was convinced to step down and hold elections. Using the National Guard, Somoza secured the election of the PLN’s candidate, Leonardo Argüello Barreto on May 1, 1947. As he is from the personalist party of Somoza, this is not a SOLS change. However, Argüello began to demonstrate independence from Somoza’s policies, and Somoza staged a coup on May 26, installing his wife’s uncle, Benjamín Lacayo Sacasa as acting president. Archigos (Goemans et al. 2009) codes Anastasio Somoza as effective ruler rather than Lacayo Sacasa. The transition back to Somoza is not a SOLS change.

Somoza continues as effective ruler until 1956, when he was assassinated. He was replaced as president by his son, Luis Anastasio Somoza Debayle, also of the PLN. This is not a SOLS change. Somoza Debayle was in power until 1963, when he stepped down. However, through behind-the-scenes orchestrations, he ensured that the PLN candidate, René Schick Gutiérrez, became the next president, which is not a SOLS change either. Schick was in office until his death in 1966, when he was replaced by his Vice President, Lorenzo Guerrero Gutiérrez, also of the PLN. We do not code this as a SOLS change. At the end of Schick’s original term, presidential elections were held, and the PLN candidate, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the second son of Anastasio Somoza Garcia, became president. This is not a SOLS change. Anastasio Somoza Debayle was in power until 1979.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, opposition to the Somoza dynasty manifested itself through the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN): a group which had conducted low-scale guerrilla warfare against the government throughout that entire period. Following a massive uprising led by the FSLN in 1979, Anastasio Somoza Debayle was ousted from office. The FSLN established a single-party state, according to Geddes (2003), led by its leader Daniel Ortega Saavedra. This is a SOLS change.

Ortega remained in power until 1990, when negotiations with resistance groups led to his capitulating to democratic elections. These elections, which were deemed free and fair, led to the election of Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro, the candidate from the National Opposition Union (UNO), as president. This is another SOLS change. At this point, Geddes (2003) no longer codes Nicaragua as an authoritarian state. Torres de Charmorro remained in power until 1997. The presidential elections of 1996 resulted in a victory for José Arnaldo Alemán Lacayo, who was a member of the Constitutional Liberal Party, PLC. This is a SOLS change.

In 2002, Vice President Enrique Bolaños Geyer (PLC) took office as elected president. In 2004, Bolaños was kicked out of the PLC. Soon after, Bolaños formed his own party, the Alliance for the Republic (APRE) (Freedom House 2008, 511). We code this as a minor SOLS change. In 2007, Ortega Saavedra, again the FSLN candidate, was elected president. This is a SOLS change. He remains in office in the present day.

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