

The 2011 Nicaraguan Elections and the US Government Role

Report of the June 2011 Nicaragua Network Delegation to investigate US interference in the Nicaraguan elections of November 2011

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Introduction

The Nicaragua Network sent a delegation of academics and activists to Nicaragua June 19-27, 2011, to investigate the role of the US government in Nicaragua's presidential election scheduled for November 6, 2011, most particularly the role of so-called "democracy promotion" programs. The Nicaragua Network is a national network of local committees which has worked for 32 years to change US government policy toward Nicaragua. The delegation had a total of 20 meetings with officials from the US embassy, Nicaraguan government officials, three political parties and alliances of parties running presidential candidates, seven U.S. and Nicaraguan non-governmental organizations that have received funding from the United States government, along with other members of Nicaraguan civil society.

The delegation was organized because of concern that the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and other organs of the US government are working in Nicaragua and around the world to promote a vision of democracy favorable to US transnational corporations that represents neither democracy nor the best interests of the majority of citizens of the US or Nicaragua.

For more information about USAID and the NED's core groups, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), see Appendix 3.

For a list of delegates and a list of those with whom we met in Nicaragua see Appendices 1 and 2. To read an article in a Managua newspaper on the delegation, visit:

<http://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/politica/105756>

To read the press release the delegation issued at the completion of its visit, see Appendix 5.

Brief Overview of US Involvement

The US occupied Nicaragua for virtually the entire period from 1912 to 1933 and left in place a US-trained National Guard that served as the personal army of the Somoza family dictatorship that ruled from 1936 to 1979.



The Sandinista Revolution of 1979 overthrew the Somozas but the administration of US President Ronald Reagan spent nine years (1981-1989) supporting and coordinating counterrevolutionaries fighting to overthrow the Sandinista government. In 1990 the US put together a 14 party coalition to oppose the Sandinistas and spent massively to support its candidate, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, who won the election. US intervention was also particularly notable in the elections of 2001 and 2006. In 2006 a Nicaragua Network delegation met with Nicaraguan political parties and civil

society groups and found that all the Nicaraguans they met with, except for the Nicaraguan employee of the US International Republican Institute (IRI), felt the government of the United States had gone beyond

what was appropriate and correct in its involvement in the electoral process. The United States was unsuccessful in its attempt to unite the right in 2006 and former Sandinista President Daniel Ortega won the three-way race with 38% of the vote and took office in January of 2007.



In the current election cycle, opponents maintain that the magistrates of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) should be replaced and that Ortega's candidacy for reelection to another consecutive term is unconstitutional. While the Nicaragua Network delegation heard these denunciations, they were subjects that the Nicaraguans alone should address without foreign interference and were beyond the purview of our delegation.

Another issue that bears peripherally on the question of US interference in Nicaragua's internal affairs is that of electoral observation, both national and international. President Ortega has said that Nicaraguan civil society groups that have received foreign funds (especially US funds) and have made political statements in opposition to his government should not be allowed to act as election observers. We met with two of these groups (Ethics and Transparency and IPADE) to learn about US funded programs but the question of whether they should or should not observe the elections is up to the Nicaraguans to resolve.

We heard many people express concern about Nicaraguan voters not receiving their voter identification cards and concerns that voter cards were being given only to Sandinista supporters. When we told people that 91% of respondents had told a CID-Gallup poll in May that they had their cards, they said we were mistaken. This poll can be viewed at www.cidgallup.com/.

For more information on recent Nicaraguan history, see Appendix 4.

Executive Summary/Conclusions:

1. Everyone we met with agreed that United States involvement in these November 2011 elections was less than it had been in the 2006 elections when the US openly supported one candidate. Some on the right felt that there should be more US involvement, especially more funding of their group's activities. On the left we heard fear expressed that there could be statements from the US designed to influence voting at the end of the campaign. An official of one of the opposition parties implied that the US had encouraged its candidate to withdraw from the race.
2. We found that the United States funds, principally through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), numerous non-governmental organizations that, while not political parties, are carrying out programs opposed to one of the candidates in a fashion that mimic the activities of a political party.
3. We heard decidedly undiplomatic statements at the US Embassy specifically from the political officer who said that all of Nicaragua's political parties were "feckless, corrupt, nasty, and worthless." We also heard casual dismissal by the USAID officer of the partisan activities of the journalists group funded by USAID.

4. We found wider participation in US government funded political education programs of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) which included young activists from the Sandinista Party along with members of other parties and groups. As far as we could tell, this was the only program which included Sandinista participants.

5. There was much more to find out about US democracy promotion programs in Nicaragua than this delegation had time to investigate. We recommend more research into these programs in Nicaragua and in the other countries of Latin America.

Meetings

Civil society groups not receiving US “democracy promotion” funding

International Foundation for the Global Economic Challenge (FIDEG)

The group met with Alejandro Martinez Cuenca, founder and president of FIDEG, and Enrique Alaniz, FIDEG researcher, in an attempt to learn about the general economic and social situation in the country in the run-up to the November elections. Martinez Cuenca said that he was part of the Sandinista government in the 1980s and founded FIDEG in 1990 to do analysis “in a pluralistic way.” He said that his organization had received funding from Switzerland and the Netherlands to do research on household poverty and from USAID for research on food security.

Martinez told us, “We are seeing changes in relations with the United States. We are seeing poverty reduction and economic growth. Although there have been mistakes, there is progress.” He added that there were more people in the labor force. He stated that CAFTA (the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement with the United States) has been good for Nicaragua adding that there was no conflict between CAFTA and ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for Our Americas). “ALBA,” he said, “gives identity to our countries that we were lacking.” It injects US\$500 to US\$600 million into the Nicaraguan economy each year. CAFTA has brought in US\$1.2 billion in foreign direct investment, up from US\$250 million in the past. And between CAFTA and ALBA, Nicaragua has exported US\$2 billion worth of products in the past year, up from past figures of US\$700 million per year in exports.



Alejandro Martinez Cuenca said “We are seeing poverty reduction and economic growth.”

“I was against Daniel [Ortega] running again,” he confided, “but he has done a good job. He needs to get reelected with legitimacy. International observers would be good. He can win without stealing the vote.”

Enrique Alaniz talked about the 2010 household survey on poverty that FIDEG had recently completed. For that survey, they visit the same households each year. He said that between 2009 and 2010 poverty had declined mainly in rural areas with moderate poverty down 5 percentage points

and extreme poverty down 2 percentage points. He explained that moderate poverty is defined as an income of US\$1.89 per person per day and extreme poverty US\$0.93 per day. Labor market participation has increased but mainly in the informal sector. He said that 75% of the economically active population works in the informal sector—up 2% from 2009. The rise in rural income is linked to the rise in commodity prices, he said.

Alaniz stated that remittances received from family members living and working abroad were a factor in the reduction in poverty but they were not perceived as important as the increase in local family income. Twenty percent of those surveyed said they had received some government help. The rise in food prices has helped small farmers. And the record price for coffee has been a factor also—16% of Gross Domestic Product comes from coffee [which is grown by many small and medium scale farmers as well as large producers].

Illiteracy increased this year to 17% after having dropped from 21% in 2005 to 16% in 2009. The percentage of children in school is not increasing. Alaniz said that 87% of primary school age children are in school, 49% of secondary age children are in school and 10% of young people go on to the university. At this rate, he said, “We won’t make the United Nations Millennium Development Goals with relation to education or drinking water.” He added that, “This is an alert for policy makers.”

Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH)

We met with Vilma Nuñez, president of CENIDH. Nuñez said that there was a great deal of difference between Ambassador Paul Trivelli [US ambassador at the time of the 2006 elections] and current Ambassador Robert Callahan. Trivelli showed a lack of respect for Nicaraguans, she said. She noted that he “told us who should be a candidate for president, who we should vote for and even called one candidate a thief.” He only had relationships with certain sectors. Callahan has behaved differently and has communicated with all sectors. Sometimes, she said, “his mouth gets away from him” and he uses confrontational language toward the government but he is usually diplomatic. We have tried to learn, she said, when Callahan is speaking and when [President] Obama is speaking, adding that Callahan himself



Vilma Nuñez of CENIDH (in dark blue dress) said that Callahan behaved differently from Trivelli. Photo: George Pauk

says it is Obama. Callahan has said that Obama is not interested in having problems in Latin America and that relations will continue with whichever candidate wins the elections. She noted that Callahan has not spoken up about the Supreme Court decision [about Ortega’s reelection] or about the Supreme Electoral Council but he has been clear that the US would like to see observation of the elections.

When asked about US government funded organizations such as the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), Nuñez said that the NDI has funded Ethics and Transparency to do election observation and the IRI has invited CENIDH to breakfasts to form a network to monitor radio journalism. (She gave the impression that

they have not attended.)

Nuñez said that women have less representation in the government than in the past. The political parties “use” women, she said putting them at the bottom of the parties’ National Assembly slates of candidates where they have little chance of winning a seat. In speaking about labor rights, she said that 8,000 workers were fired from government posts by the Ortega administration and 28 non-Sandinista unions were suppressed. There has been a small improvement in conditions and wages in the Free Trade Zones, she noted, but conditions are bad for the workers at the nation’s gold mines, where a miner is currently trapped underground. [The miner died.]

The government, Nuñez said, has complied with the IMF and the World Bank and the macroeconomic situation is better, but that is not reflected in the micro economy where people still live in extreme poverty. She claimed that there is no real strategy to counter poverty and asserted that the Ortega family is now the second richest family in Nicaragua.

When asked about the LGBT situation in the country, Nuñez said that there was no repression but that the government LGBT ombudswoman is not paid any salary, rather it is an unpaid position.

Nuñez said that while the government has had success in fighting drug trafficking, local crime is being ignored. The National Police is being politicized, she said, adding that Police Chief Commissioner Aminta Granera wanted to have an independent police but she was forced to concede on that issue. Even though Nicaragua is the least violent country in Central America, juvenile gangs are growing, Nuñez said, and the Sandinista Party sometimes uses youngsters from gangs as mobs to attack political opponents. With regard to the Army, Ortega is appointing retired military officers to many government posts.

Nuñez said that she, a long-time Sandinista, was being harassed, libeled, insulted, and threatened by Sandinista forces. [Nuñez challenged Daniel Ortega for the FSLN presidential nomination at the party congress of 1996 and after that was slowly pushed aside by party leaders.]

Organizations that receive “democracy promotion” funding from the United States government

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)

The delegation met with Felix Ulloa, Nicaraguan Resident Director of the NDI. He told us that he was a human rights lawyer from El Salvador who had served on the Salvadoran electoral tribunal for five years as an appointment from the left. He has been with the National Democratic Institute since 2000 and has observed elections in several countries and served in Haiti for seven years.

Ulloa stated that the mission of the NDI is to work with the political parties in promoting candidate effectiveness. He said that the NDI belongs to the Socialist International, the Christian Democratic International, and the Liberal International, placing it “center left to center right” on the political spectrum. He told us that current Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Arturo Valenzuela is on the NDI board but “doesn’t talk to us now” since he occupies an official Obama administration post.



Felix Ulloa of the NDI said all their funding comes from USAID. Photo: Katherine Hoyt

He said that all NDI funding now comes from the US Agency for International Development (USAID). When the Republicans were in power there was more money for democracy promotion, he said. Money for the International Republican Institute (IRI) was matched by funding for the NDI. He said, “We have refused money from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED),” but did not expand on that.

At the moment, he is working on one part of a three part five-year program funded by USAID. The first is technical assistance for political parties; the second is assistance for

domestic election observers with IPADE and Ethics and Transparency; and the third is an academic program as part of a consortium with two Nicaraguan universities (American University in Managua and

URACCAN on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast) and George Washington University in the US. That program, which he is directing, provides a certificate of political management to young men and women from all the political parties and from civil society groups. The students must be recommended by a political party or an organization, from its national office or a local office. Twelve political parties, including the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC), the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), the Nicaraguan Resistance Party (PRN), and the Sandinista Party (FSLN) have all sent students. The recommendations for the Sandinista Party students have come from local or departmental (provincial) party offices, rather than from the national level.

Ulloa said that the education program is funded this year at US\$12,000 by USAID and there is a further US\$10-30,000 to IPADE and Ethics and Transparency for election observer work. "But," he said, "we have to wait and see what the rules for observers will be." When asked about the Carter Center, which had a team in Nicaragua at the same time as our delegation, he said that he recommends they send a team to observe the elections even if they are invited late in the process.

In answer to a question, Ulloa said that the US Chamber of Commerce funds the Nicaraguan organization known as the American-Nicaraguan Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM). He noted that funding for all USAID democracy promotion programs is in doubt because the Republicans want to close the whole organization (USAID) down.

International Republican Institute (IRI)

The delegation met with Miguel Hernandez, director. He told us that the IRI is currently receiving two grants from the United States government, one from the State Department and the other from the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Both grants are directed to media and radio with the goal of building the capacity of reporters in the areas of human rights and democracy. He said that the IRI was also working with the Nicaraguan people to help them understand the basic concepts of democracy. He said the IRI believed these "basic concepts" included freedom of expression and the freedom to elect one's own government. He said that all the agencies work with funds from the same donors and they meet frequently with representatives of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) about different programs.



Miguel Hernandez (center) said the IRI taught journalists to be "impartial". Photo: George Pauk

Hernandez explained that the IRI was working with small groups of 100 journalists and one on one in workshops with national radio stations. When asked about the content of the training, he answered that it consisted of material on human rights, democracy, the ethics of journalism, how to do a report, etc. When asked about the course material on human rights and democracy, he said that they taught about "general democracy." When asked, "Do you consider economic and civil rights?" he answered that they included material on the Nicaraguan constitution, the electoral law, and the right to alternative sources of information. In answer to another question about the role of media in democracy,

he said that journalists should only do impartial reporting.

Hernandez told the delegation that the IRI in Nicaragua received no corporate funding; only money from the US government. He added that USAID coordinated the work among the aid recipients.

Questions from delegation members returned to the matter of the IRI definition of democracy. Hernandez said that the IRI espoused the simplest definition of democracy—the existence of conditions for people to seek their individual happiness and development in equality and freedom. “Doesn’t your audience already know this?” asked one delegation member. Hernandez answered, “If people understand that, then they are free to choose their leaders on their own.” He was asked about the obstacles to democracy in Nicaragua and answered that there was a lack of respect for the rule of law, rights were not being respected, freedom of expression was being restricted, and the electoral law violated. He added that the constitution is being violated and there exists a theory that if the tree is poison, then the fruit is also.

Hernandez said that the “family in power,” meaning the Ortega family, held a monopoly on the media. But at the same time he objected that, instead of being objective, all the TV and radio stations were either in opposition to the government or FSLN supporters. [The major daily newspapers are all in opposition.] Hernandez was asked if the IRI vision of objective journalism was perhaps a US import. He answered that they would like to see more outlets, more sources of information. Hernandez said that those television stations that have not been bought by Sandinistas are “harassed” economically by the government which only places public announcements in media outlets that are favorable to government policies.

Hernandez was asked if the IRI would tell people that the government that comes out of this election will be corrupt as a result of a corrupt process. He said, “We have never said this in our trainings but we report that other groups say this. We are not here to offer partisan positions.” He was asked if IRI information can be impartial when its funding comes from the US government and if the IRI was accepted by the public as being impartial. He answered that it was.

Movement for Nicaragua (MpN)

The delegation met with Felix Maradiaga, director of leadership training at the *Movimiento por Nicaragua* (MpN). He told us that it was a movement or network, not an agency, and that it was founded in 2004 as an improvised response to the pact of 1999 between then President Arnoldo Aleman and FSLN leader Daniel Ortega “which we felt would impose bipartisanship on Nicaragua.” He added, “Bi-partisanship should not be imposed but should come organically.”

He said that there were seven MpN offices in the country that concentrated on citizen participation, democracy training, including the principles of democracy (with the collaboration of the Managua-based American University), and the promotion of the rule of law. “We have a commission of legal experts,” he said, and added, “We have made free elections our core program since we feel that reelection is unconstitutional.” Maradiaga said that they work on getting out the vote but do not support any party. They give technical assistance to citizens to help them get their voter identification cards so they can vote. Getting the ID’s is manipulated by the parties depending on who’s in power, he said.

Their original funding came from the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and then they later received grants from USAID, Japan, and the European Union. Beginning in 2007, they received money from the Open Society Institute for youth camps and also funding from Germany. Maradiaga inserted at this point that the current government “believes we are engaged in subversion.” In 2006 [a presidential election year], they had a budget of US\$1 million. The current annual budget is US\$100,000 to support

offices in Matagalpa, Masaya, and Leon besides the office in Managua. They also network with Nicaraguans living abroad “who want to rescue democracy in their home country.”

When asked about MpN’s stand on presidential reelection, he said that “Ortega’s decision to run again without amending the constitution has become our major focus.” He added that United Citizens for Democracy has formed to try to persuade the president to go the correct route. He went on to say that the Supreme Court cannot amend the constitution even with its ruling that the clause saying every Nicaraguan has a right to run for office overrules the prohibition on reelection. He noted, “We have taken a strong stand against reelection which creates a problem for us because it aligns us with opposition political parties.”

With relation to the issue of voter identification cards, he said that there is a delay in the issuing of the cards for those who are not Sandinistas and do not have a letter from their local Council of Citizen Power (CPC) [local community groups begun when the Sandinistas took office in 2007] and, he added, there is a charge of 300 cordobas (US\$14) for a card that should be free. [We later learned that the US\$14 cards are new cards with digitized photos. The old style cards can be obtained for the cost of an ordinary photo. Evidently the Supreme Electoral Council received the machinery to produce the digitized cards as a donation, but there was no funding in the budget to actually produce the new cards, only the traditional ones.] Maradiaga added that MpN had received a small grant from the NDI three years ago to work on



*Felix Maradiaga said that the MpN had supported an opposition primary.
Photo: Katherine Hovt*

the voter ID issue but it was not clear what that work was. When asked about the CID-Gallup poll that said 91% of those surveyed reported that they already had their cards, he said that he did not see that poll. He admitted that there has been some improvement in the distribution of the cards but “the ruling party is providing incentives for its members to get their cards. He said that the Liberals had done the same thing when they were in power. He said he did not know how long members of the FSLN had to wait for their cards [compared to members of other parties].

Maradiaga said that MpN had begun as a network that organized marches and rallies. He talked about a march on April 2, 2011, for which he said they had a permit but which became violent because Sandinistas organized a march for the same time and place. He said that, “We still think that elections are a way out,” adding that some members of their board have resigned to work on the campaign of presidential candidate Fabio Gadea. He said that MpN, along with Hagamos

Democracia, had supported the holding of an opposition primary election but that was never held. He stated that, “If Ortega is reelected, we will not recognize him” and he suggested that they would do civil disobedience.

Maradiaga said that they would like more money from international funders. He said that 70% of their funding has come from the NED, the IRI, and the NDI and that “has affected our credibility.” The European countries, he said, are funding other things. So, he said, “We have amplified our use of volunteers.”

Maradiaga explained that “only in our first year did we support [political] parties; now we do not support parties.” He added that, “We do not promote capitalism even though many of our members do.” He said that the group’s original position supported “liberal democracy” but when Sandinista Renovation

Movement members joined, “it reshaped our views and now we want a big government with increased budgets for things like education.”

Grupo Fundemos

The delegation met with Patricia Mayorga, the director. She told us that Grupo Fundemos was formed in 1996 “by citizens interested in democracy.” She said that they have received funding from Switzerland, Sweden, the European Union, Finland, and from two US government-funded agencies, USAID and the Inter-American Foundation. They are especially focused on citizen participation, particularly at the local level.



Patricia Mayorga said that CHF International administers USAID’s municipal governance programs.

Mayorga said that Grupo Fundemos provides training for local government officials and for local citizens, with “a lot” of support from USAID. She said that they have worked with city councils independent of which party is in control of the city government. But, she said, Sandinista city councils have pulled back from working with us. Fundemos had helped support the local citizen-based municipal development committees. USAID assisted in the formation of the committees and in the monitoring of city council budgets. But then, under the Sandinista government, the parallel Councils of Citizen Power were formed.

Mayorga said that, although a number of countries have lowered their aid or cut it entirely, currently Fundemos has a project funded by Finland and Denmark for €800,000 along with US\$20,000 from USAID. She stated that the NDI and IRI helped them earlier when they

were working with political parties. Now most US funding comes from USAID, recently to the tune of about US\$150,000 per year. Meanwhile the NDI and IRI have provided more funding to Ethics and Transparency and IPADE. [Note: We found that most of the NDI and IRI funding originates with USAID.] She said that USAID offers funds and Fundemos submits a proposal but in some cases AID has sought them out for a project.

A member of the delegation asked what work Fundemos had done with political parties and Mayorga said that they had worked for democratization of the parties, especially focused on youth. They also provided training for new deputies elected to the National Assembly in the 1996 elections.

Mayorga was asked what the project was for which USAID had sought them out. She said it was a project to train citizens to participate in lobbying their local governments on programs, especially figuring out at what point they could have influence. “We had a few programs adopted,” she said. At USAID, she said, there is an Office of Democracy and Governance which promotes these efforts. A contractor, in this case CHF International, administers the project here in Nicaragua; it is known as a municipal governance program.

She noted that in some cases, there is concern expressed about participating in US-funded projects, for example when participants see the AID logo. It has happened with groups of Sandinista Party members in Leon and Masaya.

Ethics and Transparency (E&T)

The delegation met with Juan Carlos Narvaez, project officer of Ethics and Transparency (E&T). He said that his organization had been helped for over 15 years by US groups such as the NDI. He told us that for the election of 1996, E&T fielded 4,000 observers, and in 2006 they had 12,000 volunteer observers, at least one for all 11,000 precincts in the country.

He said that in 2001 and 2006, E&T did a survey to find out about the levels of youth participation and found that many young people did not have voter identification cards. They also found that the voter rolls were outdated. So they began a campaign to improve the process. In 2006, he said, 25% of the population did not have their voter ID cards because there were problems in the production of the cards. Offices in the municipalities did not open until late in the election cycle.

Narvaez said that E&T was trying to get funding from USAID. In elections previous to 2008, E&T was accredited to observe inside polling places. Since 2008, “We have not had permission to observe,” he said. He stated, “Our constitution allows us to criticize election results so we will observe but from outside the polling places,” and added, “We will have about 4,000 people that we will train.”

In answer to a question about E&T’s political position, he noted that E&T said that there was fraud in the 2008 municipal elections. “We have many clues,” he said, “many incidents that lead us to believe that there was fraud.”

“We need resources,” he reiterated, noting that some organizations are reluctant to fund them because they are not accredited to do true observation. E&T is planning five workshops with training about the importance of voter identification cards, clean campaigns, and respect for the will of the people at the time of the voting.



Juan Narvaez [with pamphlets] said E&T will observe the elections from outside the polls. Photo: George Pauk

Narvaez said that E&T was worried about the poll watchers that each party will have at the polling places and whether they will be able to watch the count of all the ballots and about whether the ink used to mark voters’ fingers will be secure. He said, “Our volunteers can get inside their own precincts to vote and observe then.” He explained that based on the results of the last national elections, the Sandinista Party (FSLN) and the National Liberal Alliance (ALN) will name the electoral officers at each polling place. [In the 2006 elections, Daniel Ortega of the FSLN came in first and Eduardo Montealegre of the ALN came in second.] So, he continued, because they will not have electoral officers at

each precinct, the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) wants to have as many poll watchers as possible, especially where they have won or could win.

The Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) receives the list of poll watchers for each precinct from the political parties, five people from five parties running candidates. But, Narvaez asserted, the CSE can appoint people based on political whim. He said that the poll watchers can challenge the decisions of the electoral officers at each polling place and there are also poll watchers at the municipal level for the second level of vote count and at the departmental level. The FSLN has the capacity to have poll watchers at each point throughout the count but not all the parties do. And at the national level, within the

Supreme Electoral Council itself, no one can get in, he said. In the 2008 municipal elections, 30% of the results were never published, he said.

When asked if he believed there was foreign money involved in the campaign, he said, “I don’t think so.”

Narvaez said that E&T will use a new methodology in these elections with volunteers and other citizens reporting irregularities; “we will send someone to investigate and we will post those claims.” He said that they would use citizens as a tool to get information and post that information on an interactive map. Then they can compare it with the vote tallies that they hope to get from poll watchers. “We don’t say there WILL be fraud but there MAY be,” he stated.

He said that E&T volunteers were recruited from civil society groups, churches, and others “outside of party membership.” He said they were applying for a grant from the IRI for workshops for the volunteers. But, he added, NDI will not fund them because they are not accredited as official observers.

Nicaraguan Association of Journalists (APN)

We met with Ramon Rodriguez, director of the Nicaraguan Association of Journalists (APN) and Gustavo Bermudez, president of the APN. Rodriguez said that his group was a democratic association that was separate from the government-affiliated union of journalists. He explained that the organization was founded in 1981 and named after journalist Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the publisher of La Prensa newspaper, who was killed in 1978.

Rodriguez said that the focus of the APN currently is seminars for journalists that will be financed by the International Republican Institute. Fifty trainers will go out from the capital to train journalist around the country. They will learn all the tricks for stealing elections and then go into the polling places as journalists and also observe the election procedures, he explained.



Ramon Rodriguez [standing] said that the APN was training journalists with IRI funds to play a double role as election observers. Photo: George Pauk

“Democracy is not just to be in opposition; [in the workshops] we will teach them that the candidacy of Ortega is illegal and we will teach what is legal,” Rodriguez stated.

The IRI is also providing a recording studio, Rodriguez said, adding that this was the first year of IRI funding. “We need more US involvement,” he said. Ethics and Transparency is coordinating the journalists’ training with all expenses paid for the trainees with the funding provided by the IRI.

Rodriguez was asked if journalists can enter the polling places on election day. He answered that, yes, they have the right to enter with their press cards. He said that

they can serve a double role as journalists and election observers.

One member of the delegation asked Rodriguez if it could be called balanced journalism when you went into the process with your mind made up. He responded that he would answer for himself personally. He said: “Politics is business and, if I go into an election as an illegal candidate, it is for power and money. Anything goes in Nicaragua. They’re robbing the elections but I can’t put the handcuffs on them.”

In answer to a question about who was training the leaders of the workshops, he said that among the teachers were [former education minister] Carlos Tunnermann and [former CSE president] Rosa Marina Zelaya. He said that the organization Ethics & Transparency was setting the agenda for the training workshops for the journalists but the materials were not yet ready. There will be workshops in Managua, Esteli, Chontales and Masaya, he said.

He stated that the International Republican Institute was the APN's principal funder but he could not at the moment give an amount as the proposal he had presented had not yet been approved. He said that this would be their first year of funding from the IRI because, although the organization was founded 30 years ago, it was dormant for a number of years and has only recently been revived. When asked how much US influence he saw in the electoral campaign, Rodriguez said "Very little; we need more!" He said, "People here don't know about democracy." When asked to expand, he said, "The United States needs to be more forceful. Now the new ambassadorial appointee [Jonathan Farrar] is questioned about being too soft on Cuba! The US needs to be the 'enemy of humanity' [as the Sandinista anthem said] and be stronger."

At this point in our meeting, Gustavo Bermudez, president of the APN, arrived. He said that the APN was independent but that the government had sidelined its members by not placing government announcements (such as those for health campaigns) in media outlets run by APN members. "We have difficulty getting access to government press conferences also," he said.

Bermudez said that the IRI supports his organization with a webpage that has as its goal "telling the truth to the world." The president is violating the constitution in his attempt to get reelected, he said, adding that his is a family project financed by Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. Ortega is trying to revive the Cuban Revolution, but we want the rule of law and a democratic state, Bermudez concluded.

Institute for Development and Democracy (IPADE)

Two members of the delegation met with Mauricio Zuñiga, executive director of the Institute for Development and Democracy (IPADE). Zuñiga explained that IPADE had 23 funders, among them USAID, the NDI and the IRI. The IRI has funded IPADE opinion research and the NDI education programs and electoral observation, he said.

The IPADE democracy education program for children has been approved by the Ministry of Education for the entire educational system. Zuñiga noted that it was very difficult to teach children how to form opinions in an election year since everything was "mostly negative." He added, "We want to teach the youth to change the system."



When asked if the values in the programs funded from abroad were viewed as imported, he said that the donors have been respectful of national values and of the local educational curriculum. He said that with K-12 education still only 3.7% of the national budget, there was still a lot to do.

Zuñiga talked about the diploma program in political management about which we had learned in our meeting with the NDI. This program, he explained, focuses on political leadership and is carried out in partnership with George Washington

University in the US and URACCAN in Nicaragua. He said that all parties are represented plus numerous non-governmental organizations. He said that the role of the NDI has been preponderant for the first two years but that IPADE was claiming space. “Just because you have the money,” he said, “doesn’t mean you can run the program, for example, naming the students.” The program receives about 2,000 applications per course, he said. The Sandinistas come with recommendations from their local Councils of Citizen Power or local FSLN committees. The program will last five years, he said, noting that the NDI is “ceding management of the program to us.”

He said that while in the past IPADE received money from the IRI for polling, they were receiving none at the present time. He said that they had applied for a grant for education for the indigenous on the Atlantic Coast including Miskito-Spanish literacy with the support of the Ministry of Education. They got no funds from the IRI but continued with the program in Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas) neighborhoods. There is support from Germany, he said, for a rotating fund to help people economically.

Zuñiga said that the USAID provided support for electoral observation and citizen participation for many years, including programs that teach people to make demands on political leaders. There have been national observers, he said, in all elections except the 2008 municipal elections and the 2010 Atlantic Coast elections. But, he said, voters now are trained to observe. His opinion is that exit polling is not reliable in Nicaragua and he prefers the quick count. [Note: The quick count is defined by the NDI as: “Observers watch the voting and counting processes at selected polling stations, record key information on standardized forms and report their findings to a central data collection center.” Ironically, it was the quick count in the 2006 elections that helped establish the credibility of Daniel Ortega’s win.]

Zuñiga explained that the membership of the municipal electoral councils is based on the results from the last national election. So the first member is from the top vote getter and the second member from the party that came in second, etc. So, the Sandinista Party should be first, the ALN second, and the PLC third. However, in some cases the CSE is now naming members of the party Alternative for Change instead of the PLC to that third position. Also, in some areas, the ALN has allied itself with the Sandinistas. He added that, because of this, the role of the poll watchers is key and the problem will be in training enough poll watchers to cover all the precincts.

He stated that, without accredited observers, it is easy to do damage because so much goes on behind closed doors. He said, “We’re not going to judge before hand and we are waiting for the regulations to come out. If observers are not allowed, that means they are planning fraud.” Observers should have been invited by now, he added.

In the 2008 municipal elections there was fraud in 14 municipalities, Zuñiga stated. The government accused us of making partisan statements then but, while we are political, we are not partisan, he said.

In these elections, domestic observers could cover more territory than the much smaller international observer teams could, Zuñiga said. The government may only allow international observers and then say that we had electoral observation for the elections, he added. The rule announced by CSE President Roberto Rivas that foreign observers would not be allowed to speak out about the elections is a Mexican rule, not a part of our law, he concluded.

Meetings with leaders of the major political parties and alliances with candidates in the presidential election of Nov. 6, 2011

Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) United Nicaragua Triumphs Alliance

President Daniel Ortega

President Ortega first talked about Honduras, noting that half of the members of our group were joining an accompaniment delegation in that country after completing their time in Nicaragua. He told those who would be travelling to Honduras to be careful because of the dangerous situation, noting that an aide of deposed President Manuel Zelaya had recently been arrested after returning to his homeland.

As to US aid, President Ortega wanted more rather than less, at least for fighting drug trafficking and organized crime. “We make great efforts on these issues with little aid,” he said. He stated that the problems of drug trafficking and environmental damage will not be solved under the development model of “savage capitalism” from the north. It is the developing countries that are showing the way, he said. The rich countries don’t have the will to sacrifice their concentration of wealth, he insisted, adding, “We need a sustainable model rather than a consumerist model.”



President Ortega [in jacket center] said that the Sandinistas are interested in election observers because they are sure of winning. Photo: George Pauk.

With relation to the role of the US in the electoral process, Ortega said that the US had an ambassador currently in Nicaragua [Robert Callahan] who has intervened in Nicaragua’s affairs. He was compromised by his work with John Negroponte in Honduras [supporting the contras] in the 1980s, he said, adding, “He wants to get rid of the FSLN.”

The president said, “We’re not against observers or accompaniment, but only against people coming to take control and decide which forces are democratic.” Then he added, “You are welcome to come and observe, in accordance with the rules to be released on August 16th.” He said that ALBA, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Carter Center, and the European

Union could come. “We are the most interested in observation,” he said, “because we are sure of victory and we don’t want it to be compromised by doubts.” He ended by noting the “thousands in your country” who have displayed “north-south solidarity” through the years.

National Policy Advisor Paul Oquist

Paul Oquist began with a rundown of US involvement in recent Nicaraguan elections knowledge of which has been expanded by Wikileaks cables. He spoke of the psy-ops operation during the “silent period” before the election of 2001. First Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) made threats and then came the paid ad in the Nicaraguan daily La Prensa by Florida Governor Jeb Bush. In small letters above the headline was: “The Brother of the President of the United States” and in a massive headline below: GEORGE W. BUSH SUPPORTS ENRIQUE BOLANOS. He said that the US forced Conservative Party candidate

Noel Vidaure out of the race because he was getting 18% in the opinion polls. Oquist said that the Conservative Party has not been able revive since then.



Paul Oquist [yellow shirt] gave a history of recent US intervention in Nicaraguan elections. Photo: George Pauk

In the 2006 race, Oquist said that Wikileaks cables show that the United States [Paul Trivelli was the US ambassador at the time] was the campaign manager for Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) candidate Eduardo Montealegre and pressured Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) candidate Jose Rizo to drop out. [Those efforts were unsuccessful; the right was divided and Daniel Ortega was elected with a plurality.]

As for the current election cycle, Oquist said that Ambassador Robert Callahan began in 2009 to work for opposition unity for these elections. The United States wants Ethics and Transparency and IPADE to observe the November elections. The US has created a series of organizations supportive of US positions

and then quotes them as Nicaraguan organizations, he said. He added that the US supports political parties, groups, and media that organize unfounded allegations that do damage.

Oquist addressed the accusations of fraud in the municipal elections of 2008. He said that [losing Managua mayoral candidate] Eduardo Montealegre did not file any challenges with the Supreme Electoral Council. The FSLN did, he said, and got a recount in Managua, which Montealegre did not attend. The purpose of the allegations, Oquist said, was to accuse the CSE of allowing fraud in 2011. [One member of our delegation asked a supporter of Montealegre why the challenges were not filed. “We didn’t have to,” he said, “We won.”] Oquist went on to say that the polls are showing Ortega well ahead and “for the party so far ahead to commit fraud would be obsessive-compulsive fraud.”

With relation to the legality of Daniel Ortega’s candidacy, Oquist said that the 1987 constitution did not include a prohibition on reelection but this was added in the 1990s. Presidents Oscar Arias [Costa Rica] and Alvaro Uribe [Colombia] “did the same thing,” he stated. [He referred to Ortega’s petition to the Supreme Court to allow him to run based on the supremacy of the clause allowing citizens to “elect and be elected” over the more recent prohibition on consecutive reelection and to the 2003 ruling by the Supreme Court of Costa Rica which annulled a 1969 change to the country’s constitution and allowed Arias to run for reelection.]

Oquist next gave us an overview of the Sandinista government’s development plan. He said that capitalism leads to ever greater concentration of wealth so a government needs to have progressive income taxes and other measures to redress the inequalities. He stated that while programs such as the Zero Usury microcredit program with 5% interest and others were making a difference, the government’s program for construction of low income housing was still only a drop in the bucket. He told us that government subsidies added 45% to the budgets of Nicaraguan families.

Independent Liberal Party Alliance

Vice-presidential candidate Edmundo Jarquin

The delegation met with Edmundo Jarquin, a member of the Sandinista Renovation Movement, who is the running mate of Fabio Gadea, the presidential candidate of the Independent Liberal Party Alliance. Jarquin said that, contrary to 2006, the United States government was not involved in the current electoral campaign. The only foreign actors, he said, were the Venezuelans who give Daniel Ortega USD\$500 million each year, 8% of the nation's GDP which, he emphasized, is managed outside the national budget. This money has several advantages for Ortega, he said. First, he doesn't have to comply with the conditions that countries from the European Union, for example, would place on the money. Second, he can put in place populist programs that don't resolve poverty in the long term. Third, it gives him enormous leverage with business groups. And finally, the independence from conditionalities has allowed him to violate legal restrictions.

Jarquin said that the country came out of the revolution with three achievements. First, an excellent electoral council and system. But, he said, it has gone downhill since and the 2008 municipal elections were fraudulent. Second, a system of checks and balances. But now, Jarquin stated, Daniel Ortega is in control of the executive, the comptrollers' office, the Supreme Court and other organs. Third, we had peace, he said, but now Ortega uses mobs against protesters and the peace is violated.

He said, in a series of contradictory statements, that NDI and IRI were not involved as they were in the past and that the PLI candidate had not received any money directly or indirectly from the US government. He added, however, that there had been some support from NDI, and IRI. He said that this support was offered at the same time to all political parties including Sandinista parties and was "very small technical assistance." The only assistance programs to political parties that we found (which was offered to all political parties, including the FSLN) were the NDI's technical assistance program and the education program for young political leaders. We should have followed up to clarify this point with Jarquin.



Edmundo Jarquin said the only foreign actors in this campaign are the Venezuelans. Photo: Katherine Hoyt

Jarquin said that the PLI Alliance platform is to restore democratic dignity and keep current social programs but enhance them by giving everyone access to them, asserting that now access to the programs is restricted [to Sandinista sympathizers]. Our polls, he said, show that 60% of the population feels that the government's programs are too much linked to the Sandinista Party. During the years of Sandinista government, the annual growth rate has been at 2% when it should be 7% because our population growth is 2%, he said. "We need legal security and political trust and we don't have either," he stated. Part of his party's strategy for long term growth, he said, is to reform the legal system and resolve property rights problems. We also want a national agenda with all sectors participating in its formation, he stated.

When asked about possible differences between his party and the Liberals in the PLI alliance, he said that they had no differences. "The opposition is not of the right and the Sandinistas of the left," he said, adding, "Ortega is for power, for money and power." He added that the PLC [the party of former President Arnoldo Aleman] is not a real opposition party. However, he noted, big business is happy with Ortega. The two major business groups, the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP) and the American-Nicaraguan Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) are only participating to the extent of urging people to vote.

Recent polls, he said, show that only 3% say they would never vote for Fabio Gadea but 60 % say they would never vote for Daniel Ortega. We feel that the opposition is more and more united, Jarquin stated.

The US government is staying out of the electoral process and that is good, Jarquin said, adding, “Chavez should also stay out.”

Jarquin said that Gadea has only a high school degree. He is a self-made man, having founded Radio Corporacion almost 50 years ago. Gadea went into voluntary exile in the 1980s and returned when Violeta Chamorro was elected president. Jarquin said that Gadea “is an outsider” to politics. Gadea says, according to Jarquin, “Mundo [Edmundo] is the head; I am the heart.” “Like Reagan,” notes Jarquin with a smile.

Dora Maria Tellez

The delegation met with Dora Maria Tellez of the Sandinista Renovation Party which is part of the PLI Alliance. Tellez said that the elections were already corrupted because there was no constitutional amendment passed to allow President Daniel Ortega to run for a second consecutive term. Also, she said, Ortega has taken control of the electoral mechanisms at all levels. Voter identification cards are being distributed by Ortega supporters and young people who are not FSLN are not getting their cards. Tellez said that it is doubtful that election observers will be allowed and for that reason people suspect that fraud similar to the 2008 [municipal elections] is planned.

“Daniel wants power by any means,” Tellez said, adding “He is not committed to any program.” He uses leftist discourse but his family is enriching itself, she said. He maintains good relations with the United States in spite of anti-US rhetoric, she said, and he has good relations with big business and the right wing of the Catholic Church.

Tellez predicted that international observers will be allowed for the last week before the elections. She



Dora Maria Tellez said US involvement changed under Obama. Photo: Katherine Hoyt

said that the European Union and the Carter Center were waiting for invitations. However, Tellez said, national observation is more important and that is uncertain.

Tellez said that her party, the Sandinista Renovation Movement, lost its legal standing in 2008 and cannot run candidates on its own. In the presidential elections of 2006, she said, the MRS received a quarter of the vote in the Department of Managua, which includes the capital city. She said that the MRS agrees with Fabio Gadea, the candidate of the PLI Alliance, on some things, including the return to democratic practices and giving high priority to poverty reduction. She noted that the MRS members occupy some of the top

positions on the PLI slate of National Assembly candidates [and thus have a good chance of being elected] and also Edmundo Jarquin, a leader in the MRS, is Gadea’s running mate.

United States involvement in Nicaraguan internal political life has changed under Obama, Tellez explained. Under [George W.] Bush, the US was involved in “cooking” Nicaraguan politics, she said, adding that “It was a relic from the past that failed because we do things differently in Nicaragua.” Now, there is no interference, she insisted. US interests are limited to trade and the drug war and also resolving

property disputes left from the 1980s. Ambassador Callahan has told the MRS that US policy is not to interfere. “That is magnificent!” she exclaimed. She remembered that in 2006 and 2008, the NDI and IRI trained poll watchers but they are not doing so in this election cycle.

Coming back to the ideological differences within the PLI Alliance in answer to a question, Tellez said that “Gadea calls himself center-left but I would say he is center-right.” She added, “We are open with him about our differences.” She said that he is well liked in the countryside because of his broadcasts on Radio Corporacion. He seemed right for a broad alliance especially now because the divisions are not between left and right but between democracy and authoritarianism, she stated, adding “Pro-democratic Sandinistas are in alliance [with Gadea] and authoritarians are in alliance with Ortega.”

“We are clear,” she said, “that the policies of [President Enrique] Bolaños created the conditions for Ortega’s populism.” She said there have been two of Ortega’s policies that are popular: free education and health care and increased attention to the countryside. “Poverty is a great challenge,” she said, “and the temptation is populism; giving stuff out is easier than making structural changes.”

Tellez was asked a question about Edmundo Jarquin’s statement that a Gadea administration would continue to do what the Ortega government was doing that was good. She answered that there is a consensus that “We have to have poverty reduction programs that are serious and it is also clear that support for small business is necessary.” She said that Pres. Bolaños provided credit only for big businesses. A Gadea administration would support small businesses, she stated.

She spoke extensively in answer to a question about ALBA and 21st Century Socialism. She said that ALBA support has been “great—US\$500 million per year, more than Europe provides in aid but it is not included in the national budget and we don’t see it.” The MRS wrote a letter to Venezuela three years ago saying that the money was being used by one family and we have yet to get an answer, she said.

Constitutional Liberal Party Alliance

Jorge Castillo Quant, Leonel Teller, and Lester Flores

The delegation met with Jorge Castillo Quant, president of the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) Alliance which is running former President Arnoldo Aleman as its candidate; Leonel Teller, Managua city council member for the PLC; and Lester Flores, PLC organization secretary. Teller told us that the PLC is the largest opposition party in Nicaragua. He said that it was the wrong-headed foreign policy of the US in 2006 that led to a division in the Liberal parties and allowed Daniel Ortega to win that year’s presidential elections. He explained that when [Arnoldo] Aleman won in 1996, the PLC got 59% of the vote and, when [Enrique] Bolaños ran in 2001, he received 54%, “but in 2006 we were divided and now again we are divided.”

Teller insisted that the Supreme Electoral Council was preparing fraud in the November elections. “We requested an audit of the electoral rolls by the OAS [Organization of American States], but Ortega refused.” He added that “they are manipulating the voter ID cards—some people have five cards.” But, Teller said, “We can’t repeat the mistake they made in Venezuela when the opposition refused to run and [Hugo] Chavez won the congress.” He added that if the PLC didn’t run a candidate, the party could lose its legal recognition.

Teller said he and another Managua city council member were under attack by Fidel Moreno [general secretary of the municipality and a Sandinista] because they denounced misuse of city funds. His fellow

PLC councilman Luciano Garcia was indicted on charges of libel against Moreno for accusing him of corruption. He added, "My lawyer's car was stolen by Sandinistas."

When asked about US involvement in the current electoral cycle, Teller said that, after the US failed in its 2006 interference in "our internal affairs, they are not financing any candidates or issuing public statements" this time. However, he implied that the PLC has privately been encouraged by the US Embassy to withdraw from the race. "And there are non-governmental organizations funded by the EU and the US that have criticized us strongly [for staying in the race], but that's part of democracy," he said.



Leonel Teller said that the US funded NGOs have trouble mobilizing large crowds. Photo: Katherine Hoyt

In answer to a question, Teller said that the CSE originally was set up with three magistrates from the FSLN, three from the PLC and one proposed by the Catholic Church. "That worked for a while," he said. But after the 2006 elections, two magistrates moved over to support Ortega and they approved the fraud in the 2008 municipal elections, he stated.

In answer to a question about the groups funded by US democracy promotion programs, Teller said, "We need those programs but they can be problematical." The groups try to mobilize people but they have not been so successful in getting out large crowds, Teller explained. He said that the organizers of a recent march "asked us to join but without our traditional red shirts; however, we wear them always." "So we could see that we mobilized 40,000 of the 65,000 who came out for that march," he told us, "and that exposed the lack of strength of the NGO's." He went on to say, "They wanted to say that they could mobilize people but they couldn't."

At that point we were joined by Lester Flores, organization secretary of the PLC. He said that he represented a new generation of Liberals, adding that his party had been around for more than 150 years, along with the Conservative Party. "Our party has the biggest base in the country," he stated, "and after the FSLN, the most members."

In answer to a question about how the party was funded, he said that party members paid a quota to the party. Those who held a political post related to the party gave 5% of their salary in non-election years. Then, in election years, he explained that the party borrows money for campaign expenses which are later reimbursed from a government campaign fund.

A member of the delegation asked why, if Fabio Gadea comes from the Liberal Party, the factions are separated. Flores' answer was that Gadea tried to run for president in 1996 against Arnaldo Aleman. He was invited to be on the slate of candidates for the Central American Parliament. He accepted and won a seat. He also became a *consuegro* of Arnaldo Aleman when his son married Aleman's daughter. According to Flores, Eduardo Montealegre made a deal with Daniel Ortega to avoid prosecution for fraud in the renegotiation of some government bonds when he was Minister of the Treasury and as part of that deal he had to find someone to run against Aleman. [PLI Alliance leaders say that it was Aleman who made a deal with Ortega to avoid prosecution for fraud while in office.]

Flores said that the PLC had proposed opposition primary elections and offered Gadea the vice-presidential spot on an Aleman ticket but Montealegre did not accept. Gadea, he stated is running with former members of the FSLN who live in stolen houses.

United States Embassy

In 2006, the Nicaragua Network pre-election delegation had a private 45 minute meeting with US Ambassador Paul Trivelli and the deputy political officer, Tim L. Smith. Our 2011 delegation arrived at the gigantic compound housing the new US Embassy expecting a similar meeting. However, when we arrived we were told that the system had changed and the embassy staff met once a week with all groups and individuals who had requested meetings at the same time in one big room. We, therefore, shared the meeting with a group of about 60 high school students from the San Francisco Bay Area.

Present on a panel of Embassy officials were political officer Matthew Roth, economic officer Dale Carden, USAID officer Jan Howard, and a consular officer whose name we did not get. Carden said that



The new US Embassy in Managua is a massive walled compound with several large buildings. No cameras were allowed inside.

her section monitors the Nicaraguan economy and makes links between exporters and importers. She said her office helps “US citizens whose property was confiscated in the 1980s.” [The vast majority were Nicaraguan citizens at the time of confiscation.]

Howard said that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) had a budget of US\$36 million to spend in Nicaragua in 2010 on democracy promotion, economic development programs, and health programs. In the area of municipal development, USAID works with local city

governments “that will work with us,” she said. She said that the agency has a political leadership program and promotes get out the vote campaigns and education about how to register. Howard said USAID does not support particular candidates but does fund election observers. She said that observers found fraud in the 2008 municipal elections. She explained that NDI carries out the USAID-funded political leadership program and USAID also funds other civil society groups to promote democracy with a total yearly budget of US\$6 million.

Howard said that USAID funds media programs to get messages out on such subjects as breast feeding and how to get a voter ID card. It also has education programs for journalists to promote objective reporting. She said “With our funds we are not here to attack the government or to promote a particular party.” Later, when told that journalists funded by USAID said that they intended to teach reporters to oppose the re-election of President Daniel Ortega and to play a double role as reporters and unofficial electoral observers, she acknowledged, “Sometimes they get a little carried away.”

She said that USAID funds do not go into the Nicaraguan government budget. “We work through contractors,” she said.

In answer to a question from the delegation about US interference in the presidential election of 2006 in support of one candidate, political officer Matthew Roth said that whatever was done at that time was done on orders of the administration. But he said that for the 2011 elections, “I won’t support any party as worthless as these are.” He said Nicaraguan political parties were “feckless, corrupt, nasty, and worthless.” When asked if the Embassy was still trying to unite the opposition, he said, “It is not correct that we want to do this.”

Meetings in the Department of Esteli

Activist/journalist Toni Solo

The delegation met with Irish activist/journalist Toni Solo of the web page www.tortillaconsal.com. He spoke about the accusations of fraud made by opposition parties and groups after the municipal elections of November 2008. No evidence or challenge was ever presented to the competent authorities, he said. [Sources within the opposition confirmed this to a delegation member.] Solo explained that the seven magistrates of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) are at the top of the nation's electoral machinery; just



Activist/journalist Toni Solo (center, yellow shirt) said voters will be able to use old cards for voting. Photo: George Pauk

below them are the departmental electoral councils, and finally there are municipal electoral councils. The first place to file a challenge is at the local level; if it is not resolved the second place is at the departmental level; and finally at the national level.

Much to the consternation of the opposition, the magistrates of the CSE continue to serve even though their terms have run out, based on a decree by President Ortega. That decree said that officials whose terms were complete could remain in office until new officials could be nominated and approved by the National Assembly. Neither the governing Sandinista Party nor opposition coalitions could bring together the 56 votes needed to approve new magistrates. Solo said, "Neither Arnaldo Aleman nor Eduardo Montealegre

[major opposition leaders] wanted to be accused of making a deal with Ortega."

Another complaint of the opposition is the tardiness in completing voter identification cards for voters who are not Sandinistas and the cost of the cards. Solo said that there is undoubtedly some bureaucratic delay but free cards are available and the old ones will be usable for voting.

Addressing the subject of US interference in Nicaraguan affairs, Solo said that US Secretary of State Colin Powell told President Enrique Bolaños after he was elected in 2001 not to collaborate with the FSLN. This affected his government's policy effectiveness.

Solo suggested that we investigate the role of the company Dyncorp in democracy promotion programs in Nicaragua. While the Nicaragua Network delegation did not hear any mention of DynCorp during our time in Nicaragua, we subsequently found that Casals & Associates, a Dyncorp International Company, has "anti-corruption, transparency, and accountability programs in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama," apparently with funding from USAID. A summary of the crimes Dyncorp has been charged with committing can be read at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DynCorp>.

Local El Limon leaders:

Ismael Blandon
Saida Delgadillo
Hannah de Urrutia

In the village of El Limon, Esteli, the delegation met with Ismael Blandon, Saida Delgadillo, and Hannah Given-Wilson de Urrutia. Blandon said that he had been a poll watcher for the Sandinista Party since 1984 but will not serve this time. He added that his son, who is studying veterinary medicine, has been an election official at the local polling place for the last two elections.



*Ismael Blandon and Saida Delgadillo work on elections in El Limon.
Photo: Katherine Hoyt*

Blandon stated that he expected these elections to be easy to run because “the FSLN is in power and we will have the supplies we need.” He added that there have not been problems during past elections even when families are of different parties. He explained that three area communities, El Limon, Los Jobos, and Quebrachos, vote together, divided into two precincts.

New arrivals in the community can vote by filling out a form while those who have lost their cards can do the same, he explained. He said that there were ten new voters in his community for these coming elections. The young people get their first card free. You can get a fancy card for US\$14 or a plain one for the cost of the photo at about US\$2.25. Hannah de Urrutia added that the authorities always announce that old, expired cards will be valid for voting. Blandon pulled out his old, expired card and said he expected to use it to vote in November.

Blandon said that all parties that have the capacity to do so will have poll watchers at each voting place. However, it is unlikely that the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance, for example, will be able to do it, he added. This, even though the ALN candidate, Eduardo Montealegre, came in second in the 2006 presidential elections.

Esteli City Council Secretary Rafael Raudez (FSLN)

The delegation met with the secretary of the municipal council of Esteli, Rafael Raudez, a Sandinista. Raudez told us that for the elections of 1984 and 1990, Nicaragua did not use voter ID cards. It was only after new reforms were passed in 1995 that “we began to use voter ID cards,” he said. He stated that 95% of voters in Esteli have their ID cards although there are still 3,000 waiting to be picked up by their owners. “We are trying to impress people of the importance of these cards,” he said, adding, “We don’t expect any serious problems in Esteli.”

Raudez said that the voter ID cards are free and there are electoral workers who go out to the rural communities to sign people up for their cards, including taking the photograph. He further explained that a voter only needs one photo for the card but most photographers in town will not make up only one photo but rather three. “We have made arrangements [with some photographers] to make just one photo for US\$0.70,” he said.

When asked about election observers, Raudez said that in Esteli they have had them in the urban areas. Some try to intervene, he said, but others just observe and write up their reports. We have to explain to them, he said, that they cannot be present during the vote count [which only the election officials and the poll watchers can witness].

Raudez said that Esteli’s mayor, Francisco Valenzuela, was one of the Sandinista mayors who went to court with President Ortega to successfully challenge the article in the constitution against consecutive reelection. When asked if Valenzuela would run for reelection, Raudez said that the Sandinista party would decide.

In answer to a question about media reports citing very serious problems with people getting their voting cards, Raudez said that it had been a media frenzy. “There have been some bureaucratic problems but nothing like what has been reported,” he said. He added, “Journalists have political positions and there is censorship within the media outlets.” Locally, he said, there is less of a problem and people trust the media more.



Delegation members also visited the Tisey Nature Reserve. Photo: Katherine Hoyt

Raudez said that USAID provides aid for economic development and for political training. They trained poll watchers from opposition parties but did not train Sandinistas “saying we were not democratic,” Raudez stated. He said that Esteli journalists have participated in the journalism workshops funded by USAID and one went to the United States.

Raudez asked the delegation to help Nicaraguan’s vote freely without threats or pressure. Fifteen percent of voters still fear US reaction to a Sandinista victory. It is less now, he said, but there is still a chance of last minute threatening statements such as were made in 2006 by US officials.

Appendix 1

Members of the delegation were:

Margaret Boehme, writes for public radio, volunteer English teacher.

Diana Bohn, teaches pottery, co-director of NICCA in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Amy Bromsen, retired electrician, union organizer, graduate student at Wayne State University in Detroit.

Julie Charlip, teaches history at Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA, author of *The Farmers of Carazo, Nicaragua, 1880–1930*.

David Craven, teaches art history at University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, author of *Art and Revolution in Latin America: 1910-1990: Mexico, Cuba and Nicaragua*.

Dave Davis, former local government administrator in Overland Park, KS, Latin America solidarity activist

Irene Hodgson, teaches Spanish at Xavier University in Cincinnati, directs Academic Service Learning Semesters including Nicaragua program.

Katherine Hoyt, Co-Coordinator, Nicaragua Network, author of *The Many Faces of Sandinista Democracy*.

John Mineka, retired math professor, living in New York, active in Latin America solidarity.

George Pauk, retired physician, member of Doctors for Global Health and active in Alliance for Global Justice, lives in Phoenix.

Brian Peterson, Lutheran pastor and music teacher in Austin, TX, works with projects in Nicaragua.

Brad Roth, teaches law and political science at Wayne State University in Detroit, has visited Nicaragua many times, published work includes Nicaragua.

Susan Severin, retired health educator in San Anselmo, Calif., Witness for Peace volunteer in Nicaragua in the 1980s.

Dale Sorensen, director of the Marin Task Force on the Americas in California

Christine Wade, teaches political science at Washington College in Maryland, co-author with Thomas Walker of *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle*.

Stephen Watrous, community college teacher, fair trade activist in Milwaukee.

Appendix 2

Meetings held by the delegation:

The delegation held meetings with representatives of the three major political alliances with candidates on the November ballot:

1. President Daniel Ortega, presidential candidate of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN-Sandinista Party), head of the United Nicaragua Triumphs Alliance; and Paul Oquist, national policy advisor to the president
2. Edmundo Jarquin, vice-presidential candidate of the Independent Liberal Party (PLI) Alliance which has Fabio Gadea Mantilla as its presidential candidate; and Dora Maria Tellez, leader of the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), a member of the PLI Alliance
3. Jorge Castillo Quant, president of the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) Alliance which is running former President Arnaldo Aleman as its candidate; Leonel Teller, Managua city council member for the PLC; and Lester Flores, PLC organization secretary.

At the United States Embassy, the delegation met with:

1. Matthew Roth, political officer and first secretary
2. Jan Howard, program officer with the United States Agency for International Development
3. Dale Cardin, economic officer

The delegation met with representatives of several organizations that do not receive funds from the United States government:

1. Alejandro Martinez Cuenca president of the International Foundation for the Global Economic Challenge (FIDEG)
2. Vilma Nuñez, president of the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH)
3. Raiti Juarez of the National Youth Movement (*Movimiento Juvenil Nacional*)
4. Andres Zamora and Jose Angel Bermudez of the Health Workers Union (FETSALUD)

The delegation met with a number of organizations that receive democracy promotion funding from the United States government:

1. Miguel Hernandez, director, International Republican Institute (IRI)
2. Felix Ulloa, director, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)
3. Patricia Mayorga, director, *Grupo Fundemos*
4. Felix Maradiaga, director of leadership training, Movement for Nicaragua (*Movimiento por Nicaragua*)
5. Juan Carlos Narvaez, project officer, Ethics and Transparency (*Etica y Transparencia*)
6. Ramon Rodriguez, director, Association of Nicaraguan Journalists (APN) and Gustavo Bermudez, APN president
7. Mauricio Zuñiga, director, Institute for Development and Democracy (IPADE)

In Esteli, the delegation met with:

1. Toni Solo, British journalist with Tortillaconsal.com
2. Raul Raudez, secretary to the city council
3. Polo Urrutia, musician, and Julio Moreno, muralist
4. Election officials and poll watchers in the village of El Limon

Appendix 3

US agencies funding “democracy promotion”

The USAID, known mainly for funding economic development projects, also funds “democracy promotion” and that funding increased with relation to development aid under the administration of George W. Bush. USAID funds some projects directly as well as the “democracy promotion” programs of the National Endowment for Democracy and its core groups, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), linked to the US Democratic Party, and the International Republican Institute (IRI), linked to the US Republican Party, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity also known as the Solidarity Center, linked to the AFL-CIO, and the Center for International Private Enterprise, linked to the Chamber of Commerce. These groups carry out the programs in coordination with their national partners.



The National Endowment for Democracy was founded by Congress in 1983. Alan Weinstein, co-founder of the NED, boasted to a major daily newspaper that, “A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA.” It is more than 90% funded by US taxes. Yet it is officially designated a private organization—thus it carries out foreign policy efforts in the name of US citizens, with US taxes, but with no meaningful public oversight. In Nicaragua, in 1990, the NED spent more than \$20 per voter to influence the presidential elections—more than had been spent per voter by both the Dukakis and Bush, Sr. campaigns in the 1988 US elections! The NED funds democracy promotion

directly and also through its major grant recipients, the IRI and the NDI.

The International Republican Institute (IRI) is a nonprofit organization affiliated with the Republican Party that serves as a funding vehicle for the NED and USAID. It was created by the Ronald Reagan administration in 1983 to push “democratization efforts” and roll back the influence of the Soviet Union. The IRI funded and coordinated the groups that overthrew Haiti’s elected government in 2004, leading to the bloodiest year in Haiti’s modern history. Senator John McCain is the chairperson of its board of directors.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization affiliated with the Democratic Party that serves as a funding vehicle for the NED and USAID. It was founded in 1983. Its chairperson is Madeleine Albright.

Appendix 4

Recent Nicaraguan history

Nicaragua's two traditional political parties, going back to the time of independence from Spain, were the Conservative Party, supported by the landed oligarchy and the Catholic Church, and the Liberal Party, supported by merchants and exporters. Political power changed hands through violent overthrow of the government. United States political and military intervention was extensive and of long duration. The US occupied the country for virtually the entire period from 1912 to 1933 and left in place a US-trained National Guard that served as the personal army of the Somoza family dictatorship that ruled from 1936 to 1979.

The Sandinista Revolution of 1979 overthrew the Somozas and put in place revolutionary economic, social and political policies. The reaction of the administration of US President Ronald Reagan was to spend nine years (1981-1989) supporting and coordinating counterrevolutionaries fighting to overthrow the Sandinista government. The Sandinistas also set up a democratic structure that led to the first peaceful turnover of power to another political party in Nicaragua's history in 1990. However, that handover itself was a result of US intervention—the US forcefully cobbled together a 14 party coalition to oppose the Sandinistas and spent massively to support its candidate, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, during the election campaign. The coalition collapsed shortly after the election.



The US actively supported Violeta Barrios de Chamorro in 1990.

US intervention was also particularly notable in the elections of 2001 and 2006. In 2006 a Nicaragua Network delegation met with Nicaraguan political parties and civil society groups and found that all the Nicaraguans they met with, except for the Nicaraguan employee of the US International Republican Institute (IRI), felt the government of the United States had gone beyond what was appropriate and correct in its involvement in the electoral process. Even the spokesperson for Eduardo Montealegre, the US-favored

candidate of the National Liberal Alliance (ALN), said that US Ambassador Paul Trivelli's statements had probably hurt his candidate. The United States was unsuccessful in its attempt to unite the right in 2006 and Ortega won the three-way race with 38% of the vote and took office in January of 2007.

Ortega immediately declared that public education and primary health care services would again be free after years of World Bank-IMF mandated fees for those services. He announced that his government would not confiscate property and instead promote a revitalization of the agriculture sector. He joined the Bolivarian Alliance for Our Americas (ALBA) and brought an end to the energy shortages the country was suffering. Programs such as Zero Hunger, Zero Usury, Plan Roof, and others brought assistance to the poor, especially the rural poor. The Nicaraguan economy has been stable and growing with exports reaching record levels. Literacy rates have improved and extreme poverty decreased.

However, on the other side of the equation, his party supported the elimination from the country's penal code of the century-old provision allowing therapeutic abortion, opposition civil society groups were harassed with audits and threats of loss of legal standing, Sandinista mobs in some cities have attacked political opponents, and there were allegations of fraud in the 2008 municipal elections and of corruption in the use of ALBA funds.

Based on his economic and social successes, Ortega declared his intention to run for again for president. Opponents noted that two constitutional provisions made this illegal: one prohibiting consecutive reelection and the other saying that no president can serve more than two terms. City mayors have the same prohibitions. Ortega went to the Supreme Court saying that those provisions in the constitution violated another more important constitutional provision establishing each citizen's right to elect and be elected to office. In October of 2009 the Court ruled in favor of Ortega and the 105 Sandinista mayors who had brought suit with him.



Opponents maintain that the magistrates of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) should be replaced. These magistrates validated the 2008 municipal elections which the opposition alleges were fraudulent. The magistrates remain in office based on a January 2010 presidential decree allowing all high level officials to remain until their replacements can be approved by the National Assembly. Since no party or coalition can achieve the 56 vote super majority in the Assembly necessary to approve these officials, many of them, particularly those who are Sandinistas, have stayed at their posts

Appendix 5

Press Release from the delegation at the completion of its meetings

Press Release

U.S. Delegation Finds Inappropriate U.S. Involvement in the 2011 Nicaraguan Electoral Process

June 27, 2011

Contact -- Prof. Brad Roth -- brad.roth@wayne.edu
Katherine Hoyt -- kathy@AFGJ.org

Last week, a top official of the U.S. Embassy in Managua dismissed Nicaragua as no longer important to the U.S. and told a Nicaragua Network delegation from the United States that he wanted nothing to do with the country's political parties, all of which he characterized as "feckless, corrupt, nasty and worthless."

Despite these comments by Matthew Roth, the political officer of the U.S. Embassy, the U.S. Agency for International Development is funding Nicaraguan groups to provide training in "democratization" and media skills.

Media programs, such as those offered by the International Republican Institute, are supposedly designed to help Nicaraguan media, particularly radio stations, learn to provide fair and balanced coverage.

However, leaders of the Association of Nicaraguan Journalists (APN), told the delegation that they intended to teach reporters to oppose the re-election of President Daniel Ortega and to play a double role as reporters and unofficial electoral observers. Jan Howard, the USAID officer for the embassy, acknowledged, "Sometimes they get a little carried away."

In the 2001 and 2006 presidential elections, the U.S. embassy overtly supported a particular candidate opposed to Ortega. Such public declarations have not been issued this year, although the delegation heard concerns about the possibility of threatening or leading public statements from US officials late in the campaign term as occurred in 2001 and 2006. Such prior statements included threats about the termination of remittances, which many Nicaraguan families rely on. Additionally, the US has urged and even organized a united opposition in past elections. In the current cycle, a representative of the Constitutional Liberal Party implied that the party has privately been encouraged by the US Embassy to withdraw from the race.

The delegation from the Nicaragua Network, which has more than 30 years of experience following Nicaraguan issues, recently concluded a one-week trip to Nicaragua to investigate the role of the United States in the upcoming Nicaraguan elections. The delegation met with officials from the US embassy, Nicaraguan government officials, three political parties and alliances of parties running presidential candidates, and several U.S. and Nicaraguan non-governmental organizations that have received funding from the United States government.

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