

Protests in Nicaragua

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

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The following is an article from the AS/COS (American Society Council of the Americas) newsletter:

Pro-Government Protests Rattle Nicaragua

Michal Toiba

April 26, 2010



President Ortega at the anniversary celebration of his party's 2008 municipal election vic

Nicaraguan lawmakers reentered the National Assembly late last week, following demonstrations by Sandinista and pro-government followers who [took to the streets](#) of Managua in protest of attempts by opposition politicians to overturn a presidential decree. The protests [p](#)

[revented](#) opposition lawmakers from holding an unplanned legislative session in Nicaragua's parliament aimed at countering President Daniel Ortega's January decree extending the mandate of two Sandinista-affiliated Supreme Court justices and several public officials. The decree has been [viewed](#) as an attempt to extend his presidency, given that in November 2009 Sandinista-supporting justices on the Supreme Court overturned a constitutional ban preventing the president's reelection.

The blockade [forced](#) the legislators to convene at a nearby hotel, upon which a crowd that followed them proceeded to throw rocks and explosives at the building, injuring three legislators. While the Organization of American States (OAS) expressed “ [deep](#)

[concern](#) ” about the violent protests, the Nicaraguan government called the demonstrations “ [simple, legitimate expressions of the people](#)

” and demanded that OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza refrain from making declarations based on biased media reports. The OAS has

[received](#) both support and criticism from Ortega's government, reports

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. Ortega supported the organization's decision to isolate Honduras following the June 28 ouster of then-President Manuel Zelaya, but warned Inzulza against meddling over last week's incidents.

The latest round of friction is part of the growing dispute between Ortega and opposition lawmakers over legislation approved by Nicaragua's Supreme Court that would allow Ortega to be [reelected](#) in 2011. Opposition groups [say](#) they have the required 47 votes to overturn Ortega's decision to keep 25 officials in office and that keeping them in office violates the constitution. Ortega, whose first term ran from 1984 to 1990, won his second term in 2006 with 38 percent of the vote. Since then, the Sandinista leader's approval rating has dropped, with a recent poll [showing](#) support for Ortega at 23 percent. Despite dwindling support, Ortega has tried to pressure his country's Congress to reelect the current electoral council in order to enable his third presidential bid. But after Congress refused to heed his calls, Ortega issued a decree in January 2009 allowing two Supreme Court judges—both of whom [took part](#) in last week's protests—and the electoral council to stay in office. The council oversaw 2008 municipal elections widely considered fraudulent, [sparking](#) the loss of million of dollars in lost foreign aid from the United States and the European Union.

Despite criticism of Ortega's government, the Hemispheric Brief blog [points out](#) that pro-government lawmakers claim the opposition has not done enough to implement important economic and social legislation and has refused to accept Supreme Court rulings. Quoted in the blog, the Alliance for Global Justice says Ortega's actions were a “[last ditch effort to maintain a functioning national government](#).” Still, other observers raise [concerns](#) over the future of Nicaragua's democracy. As Tim Rogers writes in *Time*, “[T]he latest crisis has shown that Nicaragua's rickety democracy, 20 years in the making, [could come down like a Jenga tower](#).”