CONTRARY REALITIES:

UNPACKING MAINSTREAM AND ALTERNATIVE PRESS COVERAGE OF NICARAGUA'S 1984 ELECTIONS

by

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Ronald Reagan fought a covert war against the Sandinistas, the newly triumphant revolutionary government of Nicaragua after the overthrow of a hated dictator, throughout the 1980's. The Contra War was secretive, controversial, brutal and illegal. Reagan led this CIA-run operation on the grounds that the Sandinista government was a totalitarian communist regime, hated by its people. This accusation became problematic once the Sandinistas held and won elections that were found to be a model of fairness by most of the observant world. The Reagan administration condemned these elections as fraudulent and continued funding the contras until Nicaragua was run into the ground, both economically and in morale, with half the countryside a shambles. In order to take a better look at how the press might have influenced American opinion in these controversial and influential elections, this thesis will examine their coverage in the mainstream and alternative US press.

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INTRODUCTION

Political violence and terrorism have long held important positions in United States political dialogue, though mostly amongst elected policy-makers. In the last year and a half however, terrorism has skyrocketed to the forefront of American political discourse, and not only amongst those in power, but in household discussions as well. The United States now finds itself in the midst of a so-called "War on Terrorism," an effort to eradicate terrorism from the world. This war attacks terrorist organizations, as well as the states that "sponsor" them. The US government has always condemned "terrorism," and now assumes the moral high ground on the matter. We call terrorists "evil," implying that the US is in contrast "good," and we claim as our duty the job of stamping out this evil from the world. The underlying problem is that terrorism is treated in such a cut-and-dry manner. The adage that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" sums the problem up neatly—all terrorists believe their cause is legitimate. By commissioning ourselves to wipe out terrorism, we bestow upon ourselves the right to define it. It is the United States that then assumes the unique right to decide which groups are "terrorist" and therefore evil—allowing us to destroy them—and which ones we will tolerate, or even support. But what do I mean by "support"?--the US government has spent the last year crusading against terrorist groups, and surely would never support one, at least not by its own definition.

One of Ronald Reagan's most controversial crusades as president of the United States was the covert military war he waged in Nicaragua. He funded (or "sponsored") Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries known as the Contras, involved the CIA in the conflict directly and extensively, and imposed an economic embargo on the country, encouraging

the rest of the world to do the same. The war was fought against the Sandinistas, the government and former vanguard of a country that was only beginning to recover from the revolution the people won against their former dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979. The revolution left the country in economic and physical ruin, but by 1981 when Reagan entered office, the Sandinistas had begun to provide unprecedented access to education, health care, nutrition and political voice for the people of Nicaragua. In addition, national elections were slated for a few years down the road.

Reagan and his administration didn't see things this way however. They vocally described this new government as a communist, totalitarian, expansionist, repressive regime. Reagan deemed Nicaragua a threat to US national security, calling it an outpost of the Eastern-bloc in the Western Hemisphere. And so in an effort to topple the government of Nicaragua, or at least undermine it economically, he funded the contras in their counterrevolution against the Sandinistas. Reagan called the contras his "Freedom Fighters," and claimed that they fought for democracy in Nicaragua; he compared them to the founding fathers of the United States. "Given [the Sandinistas'] record of repression," Reagan said, "we should not wonder that the opposition, denied other means of expression, has taken up arms" (Reagan, "Radio . . .April 14, 1984, 536).

Yet the tactics the contras used were infamous. Dieter Eich and Carlos Rincón published a book of interviews with contras that had been caught and imprisoned in Nicaragua. Contra after contra spoke in these interviews quite bluntly about the beatings, torture and killings they carried out. The contras' targets were primarily anything of economic importance to Nicaragua, and civilians, which brings us back to terrorism. The US State Department had a very specific definition of terrorism in 1984, the heart of the contra war. Secretary of State George Shultz wrote an official US Current Policy document called "Terrorism and the Modern World," in which he explicitly defined what

that was:

> We have learned that terrorism is, above all, a form of political violence. It is neither random nor without purpose. Today we are confronted with a wide assortment of terrorist groups . . . Their stated objectives may range from separatist causes to revenge for ethnic grievances to social and political revolution. Their methods may be just as diverse . . . But the overarching goal of all terrorists is the same: they are trying to impose their will by force—a special kind of force designed to create an atmosphere of fear. The horrors they inflict are not simply a new manifestation of traditional social conflict . . . The terrorists want people to feel helpless and defenseless; they want people to lose faith in their government's capacity to protect them and thereby to undermine the legitimacy of the government itself, or its policies, or both.

To this I will add testimony from one of the interviewed contras: "the . . . plan was intended to generate chaos, terror, so that these people who now wear the robes of office would get their hands off" (Eich and Rincón 39).

The subject of Nicaragua, within the context of Central America as a whole, was an important and controversial one in the 1980's. At times, only a third of the American public agreed with the administration's foreign policy in Nicaragua, and the policy was contentiously debated in congress throughout the decade. The president and his administration were presenting a drastically different story than that which most Nicaraguans would have told, or what Nicaraguan experts generally believed. Most of the time the president's arguments were supported by about half of congress, and disputed by the remaining half. That second congressional sector, along with much of the American populace, was not convinced by the president's rhetoric. There was a great deal of sympathy for the Sandinistas in certain contingents of the American public, and Central American solidarity groups around the United States sent thousands of dollars to support Sandinista Nicaragua every year.

Yet none of this changed the hostility of the Reagan Administration toward the Sandinistas, and he continued--primarily in the name of democracy--to malign

Nicaragua's government and wage war in its countryside. Reagan ran into a bit of a glitch when the Sandinistas began preparations for their long-promised elections, slated for 1985, later moved up to November 1984. Democratic elections were hardly consistent with the repressive totalitarianism of which Reagan accused the Sandinistas. If popular opinion deemed the elections legitimate, the public and, most importantly, congress, would probably cease to support his covert but widely known funding of the contras.

Here is an excerpt from the State Department's current background file on Nicaragua:

> The Reagan administration provided assistance to the Nicaraguan Resistance and in 1985 imposed an embargo on U.S.-Nicaraguan trade. In response to both domestic and international pressure, the Sandinista regime entered into negotiations with the Nicaraguan resistance and agreed to nationwide elections in February 1990. (U.S. Dept. of State, *Background*)

From this description one would not think that the Nicaraguans had even held an election in 1984, quite a remarkable thing considering the controversy they caused at the time—in Nicaragua, and above all in the United States. The US government officially and loudly found the elections flawed and illegitimate, though it had not sent an official delegation to observe the elections first-hand. A multitude of other highly qualified groups from around the world did go as official observers to the elections. Their reports told a drastically different story than the Reagan administration's did. The ones I have read reported immaculately planned, well carried out elections that, if flawed in some ways, were still free, fair, and legitimate on their own merits. The observer reports also found the elections to be far and away above what would ordinarily be expected of a revolutionary government's first attempt at elections, in a country with a weak democratic tradition like Nicaragua had. Historians that have written about this period in

Nicaragua have found a very similar view of the elections.

With two views of the elections so different, an important question arises: how did the press, the allegedly neutral recorders and analyzers of world events, convey the elections? After all, journalists were in a sense another kind of observer to these elections, and an important one. The press was the primary outlet to the American people about this situation in which their government was so embroiled, a situation in which lives were lost daily on the United States' bankroll. In a country in which we are expected to vote for the leaders that grapple with political decisions, and in which each person theoretically has a say in what our nation does, the integrity of our information sources is vital. The Reagan administration maintained a dogmatically conservative, aggressive stance toward Nicaragua, leaving the media as the only other outlet with which most people could inform themselves. So then what was the press's story in these events? Was the mass media supporting the administration's communist interpretation of Nicaragua, or was it looking at other possible interpretations, employing a more critical analysis?

To answer these questions I will be examining printed media coverage of the Nicaraguan elections of 1984, one of the pivotal events in US-Sandinista relations and in the legitimacy of the contra war. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky have done previous study in this area in their book *Manufacturing Consent.* By comparing mainstream media coverage of the Nicaraguan elections of 1984 to that of elections around the same time in El Salvador and Guatemala, they concluded that the mainstream US media adhered to the United States government's official propaganda line concerning elections in Central America.

However, the US press is hardly uniform. Mainstream daily papers dominate, and are the sources from which most readers get their news. But alternative, independent

media sources also hold an important, if smaller role in the readership of political news in the United States. Therefore I will analyze coverage of the Nicaraguan elections in both mainstream and small independent news publications in the United States. I will examine the two sources as a comparison, to determine in what way these elections were reported by each; in terms of the official US administration line, or the testimony of official observers to the elections and Nicaraguan scholars.

As representatives of the mainstream media I will be looking at the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. These two elite American newspapers are long-established, highly regarded publications with circulations around the country, not limited simply to local geographic regions. In addition, smaller regional papers throughout the United States use the *Post's* and the *Times'* news-wire services for foreign coverage, because most lack the funds to send their own correspondents abroad. Said *Progressive* magazine in 1984, "The *New York Times* occupies a special position among American media. . . Most of the mainstream media follow the lead of the *Times*; this is especially true of the networks, which have been known to duplicate features right off the front page of the *Times*" (Millman 22). The *Times* and the *Post* each had one or more resident correspondent in Nicaragua for the duration of the election period. I will be using articles that pertain to Nicaragua's elections in a meaningful way, that is, ones that contain more than a passing reference to them, in the period from February 21st, the day the election date was announced, to November 28th, two weeks after they were held. Articles were found using the Lexus-Nexus database Academic Universe, and the fulltext terms "Nicaragua" and "Election."

For the small independent publications I will be using the *NACLA Report on the Americas*, and *Christianity and Crisis*. These are the two alternative American periodicals with regular coverage of Nicaragua in this period, both with a decidedly

liberal bent, that I was able to access. NACLA stands for the North American Congress on Latin America, an independent non-profit organization started in 1966 that still exists today. It did and does consider its bimonthly *Report on the Americas* to be the central part of its work. Today the magazine is the most widely read English language publication on Latin America (*North*). *NACLA* accepted most of its articles as freelance submissions. Individuals that were in Nicaragua at the time of the election period wrote the primary elections articles.

Christianity and Crisis was a biweekly magazine published from 1941 to 1993, and was considered "small but influential" (Hulsether xi). It represented one of many church groups that took a strong interest in Nicaragua during the contra war, though Latin America was not necessarily a general focus for the magazine. A *Christianity and Crisis* staff member, Alan Reding, traveled in Nicaragua for two months of the summer of 1984 and then returned to Nicaragua to observe the elections. Reding wrote every one of the *Christianity and Crisis* articles about the Nicaraguan elections. Because of the nature of bimonthly and biweekly magazines, in which the publication of information can come months after the events, I combed through each edition published by *NACLA* and *Christianity and Crisis* from February 1984 to February 1985 for pertinent articles.

In order to conduct my analysis I read four reports of observer delegations to the elections, two academic books about politics in Nicaragua during this period, numerous government documents about the elections, and an account of them written by one of the most known political figures in the elections (there will be more on these sources shortly). I broke down the process of elections into smaller categories of events and developed a rubric detailing how the different election accounts portrayed the circumstances of each category. With this rubric in mind I analyzed the newspaper and magazine articles qualitatively, using methodology loosely based on the model from

David Altheide's book *Qualitative Media Analysis*. In this way I discerned the trends in each publication, and was able to compare these to the version of elections given by the US government and by the reports of official election observers, as well as to each other.

The first chapter will give historical background to the elections, covering aspects of Nicaraguan history from the 1920's to 1984. The second will go into depth about the election process, starting with its genesis and continuing through to their realization. The chapter will discuss the important issues brought up in the election period in depth, and will examine the relative validity of the sources used in determining how the elections proceeded. Chapters three, four and five will consist of the analysis of Nicaraguan election coverage in the four news publications. Chapter three will focus on the portrayal of the Sandinistas and pertinent election issues. Chapter four will look at the portrayal of Arturo Cruz, a controversial opposition figure in the elections, and will also examine Cruz's negotiations with the Sandinistas throughout the election period. Chapter five will look at the coverage of the elections themselves, along with a few other odds and ends.

Because the observer reports and government documents form, in a sense, the parameters of the analysis, these sources require a little more attention. For the government's accounts of elections I consulted various types of documents. These include a number of public speeches by Ronald Reagan, several US Current Policy statements, and one American Foreign Policy Statement. Additionally, the US government released only one official report about the Nicaraguan elections. This was published before the elections took place, and was called *Resource Book: Sandinista Elections in Nicaragua*. All documents except Reagan's speeches were published by the US Department of State.

In the interest of direct observation of the election I read the reports of four observer delegations. One was a report by the respected international human rights group

Americas Watch, and concerned only freedom of the press and assembly in Nicaragua, not the legitimacy of the elections as a whole. The other three, published by the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group (BPHRG) and the Canadian Church and Human Rights Delegation (CCHRD), reported on every aspect of the elections they deemed relevant.

LASA is currently the largest professional association in the world for those engaged in the study of Latin America, and is primarily academic in nature. The delegation spent nine days in Nicaragua, and detailed their activities and all of their interviews in the investigation report. The delegation was primarily composed of professors of Latin American studies from various academic disciplines, and over half had done substantial fieldwork in Nicaragua. " . . . special care was also taken to insure that a wide range of views regarding the Nicaraguan Revolution would be represented" (LASA 1). The British delegation was comprised of a member of Parliament from each of the major political parties of Britain. Finally, the Canadian group spent 12 days in Nicaragua. Like LASA, the delegation carefully detailed the time they spent there. All three groups not only observed the week of elections, but also spent a great deal of effort in finding out the particulars of the entire election period for their reports.

In addition to the government documents and observer reports, three books were used as sources for election accounts. Two were scholarly works: *Democracy and Socialism in Sandinista Nicaragua* by Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, and *US-Sandinista Diplomatic Relations* by David Ryan. The authors of these books were professors of political science, government and history, at the University of South Florida, St. John's University, Minnesota, and De Montfort University, Leicester, England, respectively, at the time of publication. The third book is a sort of memoir, a personal account of elections by Arturo Cruz, one of the central figures in the election.

BACKGROUND TO THE ELECTIONS: A BIT OF HISTORY

Nicaragua has a turbulent and complex history, replete with civil war, violence, dictatorship, and a great deal of American influence. Some of this history, Nicaraguan history as well as its unavoidable crossroads with US history, is a necessary framework for understanding the country's 1984 elections. Balancing revolution, politics, aggression, ideology, manipulation and worldwide attention, the context for these elections certainly provide no exception to the general spirit of Nicaragua's history. Here will be discussed, as background to the elections, the nationalist hero Sandino, the rise and fall of the Somoza dictatorial dynasty whose repressive policies are ultimately the impetus for the Sandinista revolution, as well as the political, economic and social policies and structures of the Sandinista government through 1984. The Reagan administration's reactions to the Sandinistas, too, will be included, along with the covert war in Nicaragua funded by the United States government throughout the eighties. Through these events, the stage will be set for Nicaragua's 1984 elections and all that they entailed.

Anastasio Somoza Debayle was the long-time dictator that was toppled from power in 1979 by the Sandinista revolution. Somoza was the "president" of Nicaragua, and third in line in a family dynasty that had been in power since they arranged for it in 1936 (Dent 279, 288). For the first three decades of the 20th century Nicaragua was essentially one giant power vacuum, a struggle between the Liberals and the Conservatives, with many messes that the United States did not hesitate to clean up by sending in the marines, and delegating matters as they wished. This ultimately led to revolution led by the nationalist hero Augusto Sandino, who fought to drive the United

States out of Nicaragua. This he achieved in 1933 with the withdrawal of the US marines, due mostly to the domestic unpopularity of the intervention after numerous American casualties in Nicaragua. Sandino was negotiating a cease-fire with the newly elected Nicaraguan president, but insisted on the dissolution of the National Guard, a police and military body created by the marines in the 1920's to suppress dissent in Nicaragua.

The first Somoza, Anastasio Somoza García, was the powerful head of Nicaragua's National Guard at the time, and he arranged for Sandino to be executed in early February. In 1936 Somoza "won" the election with a remarkable 107,201 votes to the 108 garnered by his opponent, after cleansing lower government levels of his opposition by force. He consolidated his power, altered the constitution in order to extend his rule, appointed his own constituent assembly, put family and friends into virtually all positions of power in the government, and used his own position to make a fortune (Countryreports.org). Somoza and his children after him theoretically held elections every few years, but these tended to mirror the ones in which he was originally elected, being marked by fraud and repression (Vanden and Prevost 71).

The Somozas maintained their illegitimate leadership in part through repression, torture and killings by the National Guard, which was under their control and loyal to the family (Jarquin and Barreto 119), and in part through the economic power entailed in the possession of a near economic monopoly in the country. Somoza owned significant portions of nearly every industry, as well as banks, insurance companies and lending agencies. Somoza holdings accounted for some 20% of the productive land in all of Nicaragua (Baumeister 16-21). Their dominance was cemented by the favor curried and cultivated from the United States government. The Somozas were particularly obedient lapdogs to US whims (offering, for example, to send troops to help in the Korean War

[Dent 289]) in exchange for political and financial backing. The first Somoza was the subject of the famous exchange in which Franklin D. Roosevelt said to his Secretary of State Cordell Hull, "Isn't that man supposed to be a son of a bitch?" to which Hull enthusiastically replied, "He sure is, but he is *our* son of a bitch!" (Dent 288).

Daily life under the Somozas was unpleasant for most Nicaraguans. By the seventies, three fifths of the rural population was malnourished, and 95% of the rural population didn't have access to potable water (nor did 35% of the urban population) (Harris "Economic" 40). Health services were next to impossible to access and preventative healthcare was unheard of, for those not in the top echelons of society (Halperin and Garfield 341). Fully half of the population was illiterate, with proportions intensifying in the countryside (Council 334). Increasing numbers of peasants were losing their land while the rich prospered. In addition to miserable living conditions, Nicaraguans had to contend with the brutal treatment of the National Guard. As reported in Amnesty International,

> Torture, arbitrary detention and 'disappearance' appear increasingly characteristic of the human rights situation in Nicaragua. Amnesty International is currently studying the cases of more than 100 prisoners detained in the custody of military courts under the state of siege . . . The state of siege suspends personal guarantees . . . Many of these prisoners have alleged periods of up to four months in complete isolation. Most have allegedly suffered severe torture . . . The broad range of human rights violations under the state of siege can be largely attributed to the unchecked action of the combined army-police force, the Guardia Nacional . . . The unprotected rural population bears the brunt of abuses of human rights. . . (Amnesty 1976, 105-106).

These atrocities were tolerated not only by Somoza, but by the US as well, as a major financial backer of the corrupt Somoza dictatorship (Ryan 2).

It was in response to these conditions that various opposition groups sprouted in the 1950's and 60's, of which the Sandinistas, officially the Sandinista National

Liberation Front (FSLN) were just one of many. The Sandinistas began as a student nationalist and socialist movement in 1961, taking both their name and much of their inspiration from Sandino, the nationalist guerrilla hero that had driven out the US marines in the 1930's. The Cuban revolution and Marxist theory were also influences on the movement, as were the theories of democracy. Support for the FSLN gradually grew, amongst stumbles, failed guerrilla maneuvers and ideological splits. In 1972 an earthquake leveled Nicaragua's capital city Managua. Somoza pocketed the international aid that swept into the country instead of using it to rebuild (Dent 290), cementing the hatred of the populace, and giving the FSLN a leap in popularity. By the mid-to-late 1970's conditions were so out of control that Somoza managed to alienate even the bourgeoisie[1] with his economic and social policies, giving the Sandinistas a "self directing mass base everywhere in the nation" (qtd in Ryan 3).

Tensions mounted until 1977 when war broke out between the Sandinista guerrillas and the National Guard. Through insurrections, demonstrations and general strikes, the anti-Somoza revolution was led by the Sandinistas and supported and fought by the masses. Somoza was forced to flee into exile on July 17, 1979. He was followed by thousands of National Guardsmen who went primarily to Honduras. Before his departure though, Somoza had managed to bomb many of his own factories, loot his farms and warehouses, and as a final good-bye, sacked the government treasury, leaving it with just 3.5 million dollars (EPICA 299-300). On July 19th the Sandinistas marched victoriously into Managua, Nicaragua's capital city.

A junta of revolutionary political leaders that had been formed shortly before Somoza's flight became the National Government of Reconstruction (JGRN), and

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[1]The term bourgeoisie is being used to indicate the relatively prosperous business, or middle class of Nicaragua.

assumed the leadership of Nicaragua. Three of the five members, including Daniel Ortega as president, were FSLN members. The government soon became entirely FSLN-composed when the two non-Sandinistas resigned within the year, beginning what was to become a political conflict between the FSLN and a right wing portion of the bourgeoisie (Ryan 72). The FSLN began to set up a new Nicaraguan government in the war-torn and bankrupt country, a new experiment for a novel government of their own design, influenced both by Marx's philosophy and by democratic principles (Vanden and Prevost 54). Their professed goal was a government marked by political pluralism and mixed economy. In Honduras, meanwhile, exiled former members of Somoza's National Guard began to organize along the Honduras-Nicaragua border, setting up training camps and beginning initial raids on farmers and peasants. These were the first "counterrevolutionaries," the group that would become Reagan's contras.

Enter the United States. The US had always backed the Somoza dictatorship, until the mid-1970's when massive human rights violations under the Somoza government began to receive international publicity. Relations between the US and Nicaragua weakened and went sour when Jimmy Carter, a known champion of human rights, assumed the presidency. Carter had imposed on economic embargo on Nicaragua during the revolution, demanding Somoza's resignation. He was also wary, however of this new FSLN government that was associated with Marxism, preferring the right-leaning bourgeois elements that were in conflict with the new government (Tirado 202-203). Nevertheless he began a tentative relationship with the Sandinistas, saying:

> We have a good relationship with the new government. We hope to better it. We are supplying some minimum humanitarian aid to the Nicaraguan people who have suffered so much. I believe that our position with regard to Nicaragua is appropriate. By no means do I attribute the change in Nicaragua to Cuba. I believe the Nicaraguan people are discerning enough to make their own decisions . . . (quoted in Tirado 203).

And so, like most of the countries of the Americas and Europe, he sent desperately needed aid to Nicaragua, where mass starvation was imminent. By the time Reagan took office, $50 million of a $75 million economic package had been delivered to the Sandinistas.

Reagan arrived in the oval office with a very different set of ideologies than Carter's; as historian Jeff McMahan describes, "the Reagan administration came to power with the belief that the American Way of Life was under threat" (10). To this administration, the cold war was still very much in progress. The traditional east-west ideological conflict between the United States and the USSR was fodder that Reagan thrived on, as it allowed him to pursue an aggressive foreign policy. Under this Cold War paradigm, any stab at US power must have been an element of the Communist Conspiracy, creating an extreme polarization of the world: Russia vs. USA, communism vs. democracy, oppression vs. freedom. Everything and everyone had to fit within this rubric, and if they weren't for us they were against us, because the Russians had a master plan to take over the world, subverting basic freedoms everywhere, or so went the theory. Therefore, the job of the US was to reassert itself as the dominant economic and military global power, to make the world safe for freedom, and for the freedom of capital.

The cold war also provided a convenient excuse for the US to throw its weight around and meddle in the affairs of other countries in ways that served its own self-interest, all in the name of protecting the world from International Communism. (McMahan 10-11). The countries of Latin America were traditionally US allies, if relatively unimportant ones, throughout the Cold War. In the long and illustrious tradition of the Monroe Doctrine, in which the United States claims Latin American interests for itself and warns "hands off" to the rest of the world, Reagan was no exception in viewing these countries as "America's backyard." Like so many presidents

before him, he expected hegemony in Latin America, as well as economic access to its resources (Dent 292-293). This was especially true in near-by Central America, where the weak, dirt-poor countries tended to be led by repressive governments and dictators, backed by US support in exchange for political complicity. Cuba's successful revolution and move to communism had been an ideological disaster for the United States, and had indeed been an inspiration to the Sandinista movement, one of nationalism and anti-imperialism. Reagan was not about to allow a second "communist" government to take hold on his watch.

As the Sandinistas were inspired by Cuba before them, their revolution at least threatened to strengthen socialist and Marxist-oriented guerrilla groups in other Central American nations. It set a precedent for economically repressed people subject to other dictatorships, of a viable nationalistic alternative between economic imperialism and third world dependence. The Sandinistas wanted to shift the balance of power from the elite few to the poor masses, and from Reagan's perspective, this would be bad for business. Though the US didn't have terribly important economic or natural resource-oriented interests in Nicaragua, the example it set had the potential to harm the US if other more economically important countries were to feel inspired by Nicaragua's revolution. On top of all else, since the word Marxist was being thrown around, the parties involved could only be Soviet puppets (McMahan 10-18).[2] This provided both

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[2]The distinction between *Marxism* and *communism* in the case of the Sandinistas was somewhat confusing. The Sandinistas were not Marxists, and nor were they Communists. While there were various degrees of "hard-liner" Marxist tendency in the non-uniform FSLN governing structure, the Sandinistas were not interested in a Soviet-style bureaucracy, and most Sandinistas were not Marxist. FSLN ideology did, however, admire certain ideas stemming from Marxist theory, and actively incorporated them into their governance, leading some Sandinistas to refer to the movement as Marxist or Marxist-Leninist. This was misleading, as it referred to an idea inspired by Marxist theory, rather than Marxism itself, and was never meant to signify communism. The primary ideas stemming from Marxist philosophy revolved around the Sandinista concept of the "logic of the majority." The Sandinistas' political ideology will later be explained at length, but for the time being when the word Marxist is used here, it is because the Sandinistas used it to describe themselves from time to time, and it is meant in this light.

further reason to deplore the new Nicaraguan government, and ample excuse to attack it.

One of Reagan's first acts upon entering office in January 1981 was to freeze aid to Nicaragua. His hostility toward the revolutionary government was swift and strong; it had been one of the bases of his hard-line campaign for president in 1980. In November of that year, the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) "authorized the CIA to work with foreign 'governments as appropriate'; to conduct operations against the Cuban influence" (Ryan 21). In other words, covert operations against Nicaragua had begun. On December 1st Reagan signed an order to "support and conduct [excised] paramilitary operations against [excised] Nicaragua" (qtd in Ryan 21).

Throughout his eight years in office Reagan gave nearly 100 million dollars to the contras (Ryan 142, Harris "Epilogue" 236-237), and continued to fund them even after Congress banned such aid (this is better known as the Iran-Contra scandal). In 1985 Reagan imposed an economic embargo on Nicaragua, the culmination of increasingly severe economic punishments, declaring economic war for all intents and purposes. The CIA was covertly and illegally involved in training, supplying, planning, and acting for the contras for the duration of Reagan's presidency and beyond, and it was even "the United States, and in particular the CIA, that originally cobbled together the main contra army . . . out of a collection of diverse groups of Latin American exiles" (McMahan 160), mostly former Somoza National Guardsmen.

This was the contra war in Nicaragua, a brutal campaign by the Reagan administration against the autonomous government of a sovereign country, and a war that insured that the Sandinistas would never be the leaders of a peacetime nation. It was a war in which 30,000 people were killed (Dent 294), including thousands of Nicaraguan and foreign civilians. The contras frequently targeted places like day cares and factories, carried out illegal acts like the mining of Nicaragua's harbors, and applied grotesque

forms of torture to farmers and other civilians in their raids (McMahan 184). The contras wreaked economic havoc on Nicaragua, creating millions of dollars in damage, destroying thousands of acres of cropland each year, and making it too dangerous to harvest thousands more, deepening Nicaragua's economic straits. Furthermore, there was no real attempt at negotiations to end the war from the American side. Reagan claimed, of course, "We've tried [to negotiate] again and again" (Reagan 1986). Each side blamed the other for failed negotiations, but most scholars agree that the US did not put in a good faith effort (Ryan).[3]

What was the nature of this Sandinista government that Reagan was so intent on grinding into the ground by any means necessary? Reagan himself certainly painted a vivid, ideologically driven picture to the US public, describing the Sandinistas as:

> a Marxist Leninist clique that broke the hearts of the freedom-loving people of their country by imposing a brutal dictatorship soon after taking control in 1979. Functioning as a satellite of the Soviet Union and Cuba, they moved quickly to . . . betray their pledge to hold free elections . . . The Sandinistas aren't democrats, but Communists; not lovers of freedom, but of power, not builders of a peaceful nation, but creators of a fortress Nicaragua that intends to export communism beyond its borders. (Reagan, "Radio Address . . . Feb. 16, 1985" 173).

Reagan attacked not only the Sandinista form of government, but its treatment of the Nicaraguan people as well. He further described the contras, his chosen instrument for ousting the Sandinistas, as "freedom fighters" akin to the founding fathers of the United

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[3]The primary negotiating body was a group called Contadora, composed of representatives from Mexico, Panama, Columbia and Venezuela. Contadora worked in earnest from 1982-1986 to negotiate a treaty for all of Central America. Specifically, their goal was one that would find a compromise between Nicaragua and the United States, presumably eliminating both the contras, and any assistance that Nicaragua was allegedly giving to Salvadoran rebels, as well as initiating a demilitarization of Nicaragua. Nicaragua offered several times to sign draft treaties, and all parties involved even signed a promise to sign a Contadora draft (Ryan 121-127). It was all to no avail, because each time signing seemed near, the US would balk. There would usually be a simultaneous hike in contra activities as well, for example, the illegal mining of Nicaragua's harbors (Ryan 60-87). In these efforts, the Reagan administration made it very difficult to believe, as it claimed, that it desired a negotiated solution in Nicaragua to overthrow of the government.

States. "Democracy, this is all the freedom fighters ask," he said. (Reagan 1986).

As stated earlier, the Sandinistas were not communists, nor had they any desire to be. They were intent, rather, on creating a uniquely Nicaraguan style of government, combining elements from Marxism, western-style democracy, and popular democracy.[4] The Sandinistas were primarily concerned with the improvement of daily life for the masses, in self-determination both for individuals and for the nation, and in *poder popular* or people's power. As historians Harry Vanden and Prevost and Gary Prevost describe:

> Few of the masses knew of the vision of popular democracy represented in Karl Marx's writings about the Paris Commune, but they were clear in their desire to take matters into their own hands and forge their own destiny. Supporting this impulse for democratic empowerment, the Sandinista leadership hoped to lend sufficient support . . . to the empowerment of the masses until the *people* acquired the political consciousness necessary to realize their full potential. (54).

For the Sandinistas, this idea of self-determination for the masses was known as "the logic of the majority."

It is true that the Sandinistas essentially held a monopoly on political power, shared among a nine-man directorate, up until the 1984 elections. This was necessary, in their view, while the country was pulled slowly back into shape after the devastation of the revolution, and as the country organized and prepared itself for these elections in the midst of US aggression. The Sandinistas shared this power, though unequally, with a legislative body called the Council of State. Though Council members were appointed by the Sandinista directorate, it was highly representative of the various political tendencies in Nicaragua.

One of the most problematic aspects of Sandinista government was the integration

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[4]Popular democracy is a particular type of democracy in which "government of the people" is taken literally, and all citizens of a country take an active roll in the political decisions of the country.

of party and state. To American eyes, this integration appeared suspiciously similar to party-state fusion of Cuba. The FSLN controlled the military and the police, as well as the mass organizations, nationally organized grass roots structures that will be discussed shortly. It is also true that the Sandinistas abused their power at times, the most often-cited example being imposed prior censorship of the press. The elections, however, ostensibly represented the Sandinistas voluntarily stepping down from that position of absolute power, and leaving governance to the will of the people. This is assuming the elections were fair and competitive of course. As the British Parliamentary and Human Rights Group suggested, "One of the aims of the elections was to set in train a political process which could begin to correct this state of affairs [of the party-state fusion] without violence by formally opening a share of power to other parties" (18-19). We will save the elections, however, for a much more thorough discussion in chapter two.

Electoral democracy was not the only kind of democracy that was important to the FSLN. It put a high value on participatory democracy as well, a more literal manifestation of rule by the people. One of the most important democratic structures of Sandinista Nicaragua was the mass organization. The mass organizations were large grass roots organizations that had been part of the FSLN since the 1970's. Their popularity exploded after the revolution, incorporating two-thirds of the entire adult population at their peak (Ruchwarger 89). Their success was due to the fact that they offered most Nicaraguans their first opportunity to take control of the political, economic and social decisions that affected their daily lives. The organizations were autonomous bodies, with for the most part democratic, bottom-up internal structures (Ruchwarger 104). They were unafraid to challenge government authority, and the FSLN was actually dependent on them to carry out many of their policies.

Of the five of them, three were for specific social classes: The Union of Farmers

and Ranchers (UNAG) represented peasants, the Rural Workers' Association (ATC) represented agricultural workers, and the Sandinista Workers' Federation (CST) represented industrial workers. The other two were AMNLAE, the women's organization, and the CDS's, the neighborhood organizations that were open to anyone.

The organizations formed an essential link between the government and the people. The only questionable aspect of the mass organizations is that they did not have an officially sanctioned place in the government, meaning that government officials were not legally obligated to listen to them.[5] The agendas of the various mass organizations included the right of women to belong to the military, women's rights in marriage and at the work place, food distribution, projects to encourage people to garden (so as to be more self-sufficient), to help peasants gain access to land, and massive health and education campaigns. They effectively changed government policy on many occasions. It was thanks to the mass organizations, for example, that Nicaragua had progressive women's rights and divorce laws, far ahead of most of Central America.

The political system of Sandinista Nicaragua was clearly not communist, and nor was the economic system. Before taking power the Sandinistas pledged to maintain a mixed economy, and to this promise they held fast. The private sector represented 60% of the Nicaraguan economy during the Sandinistas' tenure, and while many lands were nationalized they were limited almost exclusively to Somoza's extensive holdings (Harris "Economic" 43). The economic policies of the Sandinistas were designed to rebuild the debilitated economy, and to raise the standard of living for the poor, minimizing but not eliminating the existence of an economic elite.[6] Private profits were fine, as long as

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[5]It was at the behest of opposition parties to the right of the Sandinistas that the mass organizations were not incorporated into the constitution as a government body (Vanden and Prevost 84).

[6] The word elite is used in reference to the privileged aristocracy of Nicaragua, mostly under Somoza. Most of the members of this class were chased out of Nicaragua during and after the revolution.

producers recognized the logic of the majority. The basic needs of the majority took the priority over profit, but did not take its place (LASA 5). The FSLN intended to diversify the economy and make Nicaragua more self-sufficient; though the economy was primarily agricultural, virtually all crops were grown for export, and Nicaraguans had to import their food. Key areas of the economy were under state control, such as rent prices, foreign trade and banking (Baumeister 25).

Outside of Somoza's lands and the lands of exiles such as former National Guardsmen, agrarian reform tended to include the confiscation only of fallow and underused lands. This was in order to discourage decapitalization, a common kind of silent protest by large landholders against the socialist potential of the new government. It was a potent protest, and one that the economy could not handle (Baumeister 21). Medium-sized landholders were certainly not affected, and the Sandinistas bent over backward to accommodate the business sector. A top priority for the Sandinistas was, "national unity and . . . maintaining a multi-class alliance of political forces in support of a common project of national reconstruction" (Vilas and Harris 227), and this meant economic compromise.

Rather than parcel out the expropriated land to peasants or keep lands under communal ownership, the government maintained a large state sector in the economy. They did give some land away to the peasants who had worked it and turned many other parcels into farming cooperatives. For the most part, they simply made appropriate land and equipment much cheaper and more accessible to the poor, and raised wages in all sectors. As a result of these policies, the standard of living for almost all Nicaraguans jumped. For the first six or so years of Sandinista governance the economy was broad and varied, with strong showings from the state sector, private sector and small landowners, as well as strongly state-encouraged cooperatives (Baumeister).

Reagan complained of Nicaragua's allegedly expansionist, destabilizing nature, when it was clear that the main disruption in the region was the US-backed contra war. As evidence he cited the alleged Sandinista funneling of arms to guerrillas of similar ideology in El Salvador, and Nicaragua's military buildup. The International Court of Justice found in 1984 that Salvadoran guerrilla assistance had not been "on a scale of any significance" since early 1981, or that "the Government of Nicaragua was responsible for any flow of arms . . ." (Ryan 67-68). In addition, it was exceedingly obvious that the military buildup, found to be defensive in nature by various investigators including a former Colonel in the US Marine Corps (Tirado 209) was necessary in the face of contra attacks and the constant if vague threat of US invasion.

Reagan also accused Nicaragua of being a puppet of the Soviet Union, though he could never supply any proof beyond Soviet aid and weapons sales to Nicaragua. The Sandinistas were accepting aid from wherever they could get it, including many Western-European countries. Since the Reagan administration was not only unforthcoming with aid, but also blocked loans to Nicaragua from international lending agencies, the USSR was a viable aid alternative (McMahan 169).

The issue of human rights was another that was raised frequently against the Sandinista government. Reagan accused the Sandinistas of "internal repression, imprisonment and torture" (Reagan 1986), calling the FSLN "a brutal dictatorship . . . They moved quickly to suppress internal dissent, clamp down on a free press, persecute the church and labor unions. . ." (Reagan, "Radio Address . . . Feb. 16, 1985" 173).

In their 1984 report, Amnesty International began their Nicaragua section:

> Amnesty International's concerns included trials of political prisoners which fell short of internationally accepted standards; the detention of prisoners of conscience; the detention of political prisoners after their sentences had expired; and the prolonged incommunicado detention of political prisoners in the custody of the . . Department of State Security. (Amnesty 1984, 178).

The report goes on to talk about prisons, and not a word is said linking the FSLN to torture. The few examples of prison beatings, and a horrible attack by FSLN soldiers in which seven people were killed, resulted in the arrest of the guilty parties. (182).

Policies in which prisoners are detained beyond their release dates are certainly nothing to be proud of. The comparison to nearby El Salvador, however, where the police and security forces were involved in a systematic, widespread program of torture, "disappearance," and extra judicial execution of men, women and children at all levels of Salvadoran society (Amnesty 1984, 148), was shocking by comparison, and doubly so because the Reagan administration strongly supported El Salvador during this period, praising it as a model of a struggling new democracy (Reagan, "Radio Address . . . April 14, 1984" 536). In contrast, the Sandinistas' first day in office saw the issuing of the Estatuo Fundamental, a document that "dissolved the National Guard, the secret police and the military intelligence service. It also gave full recognition to the Universal Declaration of Human rights. The death penalty was outlawed, and torture, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment forbidden" (qtd in McMahan 171).

The Reagan administration alleged the widespread repression of unions and of the freedoms of religion and the press under the FSLN. Religious oppression, especially, was an important point of Reagan's anti-Sandinista propaganda. He had no specific allegations other than their supposed denunciation of the Pope, but he portrayed the Sandinistas as atheistic and intolerant of Christianity. One of the deep ironies in this case is that the church was one of the major catalysts and supporters of the Sandinista revolution. Instead of the traditional conservative church, new trends were leading people to strive to be more "Christ-like." This meant concern for charity and the poor, and recognition of the intrinsic worth and dignity of every individual (Serra 151-152). After the revolution succeeded however, the traditional right-wing voices of the

Nicaraguan church hierarchy reared their heads, and became antagonistic to the FSLN. This factor was the primary basis for Reagan's complaints.

There were many Christians in the Sandinista government, and far more who were supportive of the FSLN, including the majority of the members of the mass organizations. The Bishop of Matagalpa said for example, "Anyone who says there is no religious freedom in this country is a liar" (Peinado 298). Religious groups in the United States were among the least convinced of all US citizens by Reagan's Nicaragua rhetoric, and were very supportive of the FSLN. The *Catholic Voice* reported that a fact-finding mission by a Franciscan monk "found no evidence of religious persecution by the Sandinista government, enthusiastic support of the Sandinistas by a majority of Nicaraguans, and a government structure and civil society based on a profoundly Christian value system" (Peinado 298). The Sandinistas had a considerably weaker track-record in regard to unions and freedom of the press; the issues surrounding freedom of the press will be addressed at a later time, in the context of the elections.

One of the greatest accomplishments of the Sandinistas was their literacy campaign, which was mostly developed by AMNLAE, the women's organization. At the end of the revolution literacy was miserably low in Nicaragua: 50% nationally, and closer to 75% in the countryside. The literacy campaign consisted of tens of thousands of students that literally went out to the countryside for half a year to teach reading and writing to the illiterate. Anyone could attend, including adults and children both. There was an urban equivalent conducted at the same time, in which literate workers would continue their day jobs and teach classes to the urban illiterate at night. The literacy campaign was phenomenally successful; the literacy rate jumped from 50% to 83% in just five months. Obviously the reading levels of the newly literate were not fantastically high, but with persistence, they continued to advance. Some of the people who were

taught in the first literacy campaign eventually became teachers themselves (Council 334-336).

The Sandinistas also made leaps and bounds in Nicaraguan health care. By 1982, just three years after the FSLN took power, 70% of Nicaraguans had regular contact with health care facilities, as opposed to the 28% that had previously had access. Massive vaccination campaigns took place, especially for children; new hospitals and clinics were constructed; the quantity and quality of adequate housing and sanitation facilities greatly increased, as did the access to basic foods. Within a few years of Sandinista governance, malnutrition all but disappeared, along with polio and a number of other previously widespread but preventable diseases (Halperin and Garfield 340-345).

Starting in the internal FSLN structure long before the revolution, and spreading outward under FSLN governance, the lives of women, too, greatly improved. Nicaragua had cultural traditions similar to those throughout much of Latin America, in which women tended to have traditional roles in the home, without much political or economic power. Women were encouraged by the FSLN to play an active role both in the FSLN, and in fighting for the revolution. AMNLAE, the women's organization, has already been discussed along with some of its formidable list of accomplishments. Simply being a part of the organization was a novel, empowering prospect for most women, and one that contributed immensely to their welfare both before and after the revolution. Said an AMNLAE leader: "We think that the FSLN opened the door for us, made it possible for Nicaraguan women to participate, cautiously at first, and then on a massive scale in the years right before the revolution" (Monterrey 325).

More women were working and receiving an education than ever before. Equal rights for men and women became a part of the constitution. That is not to say, of course, that this actually existed in practice right away, but women's' rights were materially far

improved from what they had been under Somoza, or what they were in the rest of Central America. One important issue that was never satisfactorily resolved in Catholic Nicaragua, however, was that of reproductive rights (Ruchwarger 112).

It is in this light, the light of the achievements of the revolution for the people of Nicaragua, that Reagan's crusade against the Sandinistas can be seen as especially insidious. The revolution was attacked brutally through years of contra actions, and all in the name of democracy, which Reagan claimed the FSLN denied the Nicaraguan people. Reagan spoke of the "freedom fighters" as "the true heroes of the Nicaraguan Struggle." The Sandinistas claimed that the contras were comprised primarily of the ex-National Guardsmen of Somoza, but the US administration called this a lie. It made the contras out to be the disenfranchised people of Nicaragua, who rose up against Somoza only to have their revolution stolen from them by the brutal Sandinistas, and it was this tyranny that they now fought (Reagan, "Radio Address . . . Feb. 16, 1985" 173).

The question of the composition of the contras, ex-guardsmen or no, is a pivotal one because the guardsmen had been Somoza's henchmen, responsible for brutal torture, civil and human rights abuses before the revolution, and tens of thousands of deaths during the fighting. Even Reagan had enough sense to condemn Somoza's dictatorship, and to try to distance himself from Somoza and the National Guard rather than rally around the exiled force. The Members of the Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus found in their 1985 study called *Who Are the Contras?* that "While the 'foot soldiers' of the FDN Army are largely peasants, the army is organized and commanded by former national guardsmen," with 46 out of 48 command positions being filled by them. "While the FDN's civilian directorate has been cleansed to minimize the role of former guardsmen and Somoza associates, the military leadership has not been" (1).

Given the National Guardsmens' human rights record, this is not at all surprising

when Contra tactics are taken into account. It was not the Sandinistas that were brutal killers in Nicaragua, as Reagan claimed, but rather his pet army, the contras, the group that he and the CIA single-handedly maintained. And it is in fact only when it comes to the point of the contras that the Amnesty International report cited earlier finds examples of torture and arbitrary killings in Nicaragua (1984, 182). Reports of gruesome and many times graphic torture and murder abounded in reports of the contra war.

As an additional note, a large contingent of contras was also made up not of Somoza supporters, but of Miskito Indians, indigenous people in the east of Nicaragua. Relations with the Miskitos represented what was arguably the Sandinistas' greatest mistake. Problems developed between the Miskitos and the FSLN when the Sandinistas marched into the largely isolated Miskito area to "better the lives" of the Indians. However, the Miskitos had been left mostly alone by Somoza, and had been only minimally affected by the war. There was an enormous gap in cultural understanding, and the Miskitos were not interested in the reforms that the Sandinistas were imposing on them, especially cooperative farming, which was alien to their traditions. Tensions escalated and many Miskitos fled north to form contra bands themselves, bands that eventually joined with the Somocista groups. Realizing their mistake, the FSLN later made a good-faith effort to improve relations with the Miskitos, negotiating with the main Miskito contra leader Brooklyn Rivera for a time. The tensions that had existed decreased significantly during the mid and late 1980's, especially as the Miskitos began to reap some of the benefits of the FSLN social reforms (Brown 175-201).

The question of legitimacy in the Nicaraguan elections of 1984 is of paramount importance to any analysis of US-Sandinista relations. Much about the Sandinistas can be debated, but a legitimate or illegitimate election makes for solid evidence. Ignoring most of the social headway the Sandinistas made in Nicaragua, Reagan's anti-Sandinista

rhetoric centered above all on his claim that the FSLN was a totalitarian government, depriving Nicaraguans of basic freedoms, and especially of a democratic voice. In the name of democracy, Reagan sponsored mass destruction, terrorism and poverty. By holding elections, the Sandinista government undermined the very premise of his foreign policy program in Nicaragua. The contras were supposed to be fighting for democracy, but if the Sandinistas held legitimate elections, that claim would be a bit silly, as would the suggestion that the Nicaraguan government was illegitimate and despised by the people.

Reagan, along with his administration, hardly acknowledged the Nicaraguan elections of 1984. When pressed he would simply write them off as a "sham," even months before they occurred (Reagan, "Remarks at a Summit" 1061). On the other hand, hundreds of international observers to the elections, as well as the majority of historians that have examined them since, have found the elections to be of excellent quality, and if not perfect, certainly legitimate and quite fair. The elections, then, comprise a pivotal issue in US-Nicaraguan relations in the 1980's. Little could truly justify the mass destruction, terrorism and impoverishment that the Reagan administration inflicted on Nicaragua, but with two sets of views so disparate, the interpretation of the 1984 elections could potentially validate or condemn Reagan's aggression in Nicaragua, or at the least his justification for it. It almost certainly had one of these two effects for the portion of the US populace that was paying attention at the time.

NICARAGUA'S ELECTION: CHRONOLOGY AND CONTENTIONS

We come to the subject of the 1984 elections. A prerequisite to critiquing the press coverage of these elections is a thorough understanding of the elections themselves, in both their chronology of events, and the various issues raised along the way. Chapter one provided the fundamentals of Nicaraguan and Sandinista history, and so chapter two will now lay out the framework of the elections, from their announcement to the counting of the votes. The process of elections included the making of laws governing elections and political parties, the establishment of a structure for the elections and the resulting government, the campaign period, and the election itself. The process was marked by the clashing of strong personalities and political groupings, internal and external debate over the legitimacy of the process, and constant revision of the framework. After all, if this were not a controversial topic to some degree, the newspaper analysis would be little worth discussing.

Some of the issues raised are either more complex than meets the eye, or disputed; though mentioned here, they will be discussed more fully in the remaining chapters, in the context of how they were reported in newspapers and magazines. Because there were so many controversial issues, discerning just what happened during the election period can be difficult, leading to vastly different interpretations. To start then, the chapter will discuss the accounts of the election that are available, and their comparative merits. This includes both government sources and independent ones such as non-profit and academic groups.

The list of those that have interpreted Nicaragua's 1984 elections is long. While the United States sent no official delegation to observe the elections (they already knew it

was a "sham" according to Reagan), the administration had no qualms in offering its own account and opinion in any area to which it felt so inclined, including an official report released before voting day. A large number of qualified delegations from around the world, invited officially by the FSLN government and including groups from the US, did observe the elections, and wrote evaluative reports. In reading the various accounts, government and independent both, the views offered soon develop into two distinct and obvious encampments. Most generally, they are the accounts that legitimize the elections, and those that don't. While the specific focuses of the reports varied, that is to say, which issues within the election were deemed most important, these two encampments tended to agree within themselves about most of the particulars. Between the groupings however, unknowing readers might think they were reading about two different elections; one in a country run by totalitarian dictators, the other in a fledgling socialist-democracy.

For example, the Canadian Church and Human Rights Delegation found that, "the campaign can be judged fully within democratic standards applying freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, absence of fraud and intimidation, balanced treatment of bonafied parties . . . [and] fully within the bounds of democratic practice" (30). Compare this with the commentary by US Department of State Spokesman John Hughes:

> The Sandinista electoral farce, without any meaningful political opposition, leaves the situation essentially unchanged. . . . the Sandinistas continued to manipulate every aspect of the electoral process, including the police, the army, the media and mass organizations in an attempt to project the illusion of popular support" (US Dept. of State, "Nicaraguan Elections" 1107).

Despite these gaping differences in interpretation, there were a host of indisputable facts about the 1984 elections and the process of bringing them about. I will lay out the specifics of the elections and the election process from its beginnings, and will return at the end of the chapter to address the validity of the various reports from which I gathered

the information. All of the following information comes from the sources described in the introduction.

Elections had been part of the FSLN's revolutionary program since 1969, ten years before the Nicaraguan revolution (Robinson and Norsworthy 85). The Sandinistas promised to hold them the day after they assumed power and announced one year later that the first elections would take place in 1985. Discussions about a law governing political parties commenced in 1981 and the law was approved in 1983. It was in early 1984 on February 22nd that the date of the elections was announced, set for November 4th of the same year, several months ahead of schedule. "Thus the 1984 elections had been in the making for more than five years, and the Sandinistas had essentially adhered to their own publicly announced schedule for holding them" (LASA 3).

At the time the elections were announced, the most controversial election issue was that 16 year olds, a demographic favorable to the Sandinistas, were given the vote (CCHRD 19).[7] The electoral process was well under way by this time. The election law, which was to define nearly every aspect of the election and its apparatus, had been drafted and the details were under contentious debate in an election committee from the Council of State, the legislative body with representation from all of the major political groupings, both pro and anti-Sandinista.

Early in 1984 an alliance formed called the *Coordinadora Democratica Nicaragüense* (Democratic Coordinating Committee), or CDN, which was to have an immeasurable impact on the elections. The CDN was composed of most of the far right elements of the political spectrum, including three small political parties, two labor unions, and COSEP, the Superior Council of Private Enterprise. COSEP was an

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[7]The FSLN and its supporters felt that old enough to fight in a war (as many youths did) was old enough to vote, and critics claimed that 16 was too young and too immature for such responsibility.

organization of large Nicaraguan business leaders—a very conservative organization, and quite influential. While there is no evidence that the CDN ever had any more of a popular base than any other party in opposition to the Sandinistas (LASA 18), the power and influence of the mostly rich, well-educated CDN members was to make the CDN (or Coordinadora as it was frequently called) the FSLN's biggest headache throughout the election period.

The CDN quickly became the loudest political voice in Nicaragua, on the international stage most particularly. It was a voice defined by criticism of not only the FSLN, but the entire electoral process as well. From the beginning the alliance derided the process as closed and deeply unfair, and heavily in favor of the Sandinistas. As early as December 1983, COSEP published a document of nine demands (or nine points) that they claimed were necessary for free elections, and without which they would not participate in the elections. These conditions included certain clearly legitimate demands, such as an end to press censorship, and the abolition of the government-imposed state of emergency that compromised certain constitutional freedoms and had been in place since a period of particularly intense contra attacks in 1982. However they also included fundamental changes in the governmental system of Nicaragua, and a total reorientation of the FSLN's government policies. These were items better left to a campaign platform than conditions for fair elections, a point raised frequently by others, but never addressed by the CDN itself (LASA 19-20).

The CDN frequently boycotted electoral discussions and negotiations, forfeiting their chance to be a part of the debate. The electoral law was finally published in March of 1984 after the commission toured democracies around the world to study the different electoral systems (BPHRG 15), and after extensive debate amongst the parties. Negotiations resulted in dozens of amendments to original FSLN proposals and

additional amendments later on in the pre-election period; throughout the process, the only areas in which the FSLN was inflexible included the 16 year voting age, permission of military personnel to vote, and a refusal by the FSLN to negotiate face-to-face with contra leaders—one of the CDN's nine points for free elections (LASA 11).

The electoral law established that the elections were for a president and vice-president, to be decided by a majority of the votes; suffrage was universal over the age of 16. The election would also create a 90 member national assembly that would have two years to create a new Nicaraguan constitution, after which they would become the legislative body. The national assembly was to be elected by proportional representation, favoring small parties by ensuring that even the most diminutive ones would have a representative or two. This is the system used in many Western European countries, and Nicaragua's system was further altered in a technical way later on in the election period so that votes would be tallied in a way that would further favor small parties (LASA 26). In addition, each losing presidential candidate would have a place on the national assembly (LASA 11).

In addition to defining the rules for the election and the campaign period in detail, the electoral law established the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), a fourth branch of government for overseeing elections.[8] All complaints about the campaigning or voting were to be fielded by the CSE in a formal review process (LASA 14). There was in addition to be thorough training of tens of thousands of electoral officials to run the election in a fair manner. The electoral law ensured that each polling place was entitled one *fiscal*, or observer, from each party participating in the elections, both during voting

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[8] The CSE was originally composed of three Supreme Court-elected members. There were broad complaints that all three were Sandinista supporters, and so two more were added that summer, nominated by the National Council of Political Parties, a body created under the law of political parties, and composed of one member of each party. This resulted in two new members to the CSE from parties in opposition to the FSLN.

and ballot tallying, and likewise each registration place was entitled to an observer from each party during the registration period (CCHRD 33). The campaign period was initially established as two months long, and extended to three months, from August first to November second, after complaints from other political parties (CCHRD 28).

By the Nicaraguan Law of Political Parties of 1983, the purpose of a political party was to strive for power, and anyone could start a political party; there was no restriction on political ideology, except a ban on advocating a return to "Somozismo or the establishment of a similar political system" (qtd in Robinson and Norsworthy 89).[9] By the electoral law, each party participating in the election could be funded without limit, domestically or from abroad (Americas Watch 2). Each was allotted 9 million Córdobas (US $300,000 or $900,000, depending on the reference) for campaigning, along with 15 minutes of national prime time television and 30 minutes of national radio time free each week. After some complaints, this was changed to 30 minutes of TV and 45 minutes of radio, and additional time could be freely purchased (BPHRG 19-20).

It was shortly after the publishing of this electoral law that Reagan first publicly attacked the elections, saying,

> The Sandinistas have announced elections for November, but don't hold your breath. Will new parties be permitted? Will they have full access to the press, TV, and radio? Will there be unbiased observers? Will every adult Nicaraguan be allowed to vote? Given their record of repression, we should not wonder that the opposition, denied other means of expression, has taken up arms. (Reagan, "Radio Address . . . April 14, 1984" 536).

The next month saw the illegal mining of Nicaragua's harbors by the contras and the CIA. The complaints of opposition parties, especially the CDN alliance, uncannily echoed many of Reagan's complaints.

Most of all at this stage, opposition complaints revolved around Nicaragua's state

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[9] This is comparable to anti-fascism laws in Italy and Germany.

of emergency. Though the emergency was a far cry from a repressive state of siege such as one that had existed under Somoza in the late seventies, it did restrict important freedoms including freedom of the press[10] and freedom of assembly; outdoor rallies were illegal for example, and 30-40% of the copy from the opposition newspaper *La Prensa* was censored on a regular basis (Americas Watch 6). Clearly, these were problematic conditions for an election campaign. It is worth noting that according to the delegation from Americas Watch, which was concerned specifically with freedom of speech and assembly in Nicaragua, *La Prensa* was an incredibly partisan newspaper, and was allowed to publish scathing and usually untrue articles about the Sandinistas on a regular basis; it was generally political and economic articles that were censored, such as those concerning the widely unpopular military draft, or product shortages in the country. In addition, the two other major newspapers, *Barricada*, the government paper, and the independent *Nuevo Diario* were never censored, and covered a wide variety of topics including opposition party campaigns (7). While television was state-run and quite biased toward the FSLN, it also ran live, uncensored political debates between all the parties several times (BPHRG 20).

Nonetheless, the FSLN did lift most of the state of emergency on the fifth anniversary of the revolution, July 19th, a few weeks before the beginning of the campaign period. From this point on, the only censorship that was to be allowed was that of sensitive military matters, and the censored content of *La Prensa* went down to 10 - 20%, though there were still abuses of censorship powers (BPHRG 19). Outdoor rallies were now permitted for political parties, provided they were registered with the Regional Electoral Council, for the purpose of avoiding conflicts and providing police protection (CCHRD 28).

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[10]Television and radio broadcasts were not subject to censorship; only newspapers (Americas Watch 5).

On July 23rd, two days before the registration deadline for parties to participate in elections, an important political figure returned to Nicaragua from self-imposed exile in the United States. Arturo Cruz had been part of the government Junta of Nicaragua until he resigned over differences with the other Junta members. He then served as Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States, until breaking ties with the Sandinistas altogether. The CDN alliance had been hoping that Cruz, a well-known political figure in Nicaragua, would head up the alliance's ticket. Up until this point the CDN had continued to point to their nine points for free elections, threatening to boycott if the demands were not met.

Cruz took up this cause with a vengeance, accepting the CDN presidential ticket, but refusing to register unless the nine points were adhered to. He scoffed at the lightening of the state of emergency, but focused his efforts on the ninth and final point of the CDN's demand list: direct negotiations by the FSLN with the contras (LASA 19). His argument was that the "civil war" had to end, and that "national reconciliation" was what Nicaragua needed. By legitimizing the contras in this way Cruz angered most Nicaraguans, and came to be seen by many of them as the political arm of the contras. At one point the contras even offered to lay down their arms if they could run in elections. However, the FSLN had no intention of negotiating with or allowing the participation of the contras, who were attacking the country from outside, killing people and destroying infrastructure and the economy. The registration deadline passed, was extended for Cruz, and passed again, without the CDN registering to take part. As a result, and due to previously established stipulations of the electoral law, the parties in the CDN lost their legal status and therein the right to campaign and hold out-door rallies.

It was around this time that the United States and the CDN as well started to focus on the idea that the Coordinadora was the main opposition to the Sandinistas in the

elections. Besides the parties of the CDN and the FSLN there were six viable parties in Nicaragua, all of which ran in the elections, though without nearly as much publicity. The Independent Liberals (PLI) and the Democratic Conservatives (PCD) were the two traditional political parties of Nicaragua. The PLI was a breakaway from Somoza's party in 1944, and was a long-time hater of the Somoza dynasty. It was centrist in orientation, and widely thought to be the second-most popular party in Nicaragua after the FSLN, as well as to have the most sophisticated organizational structure of the opposition parties. The PCD dated back to the 1800's, and had a far right political orientation; it actually broke away from the CDN alliance in favor of participating in the election in June of 1984, splitting the party and leaving an unofficial splinter still in the Coordinadora alliance.

In addition to these two major parties there was the Popular Social Christian Party (PPSC), a small centrist party formed in 1976, and three small parties to the left of the Sandinistas: The Marxist-Leninist Popular Action Movement (MAP-ML) founded in 1972, the Communist Party of Nicaragua (PCdeN) founded in 1970, and the Socialist Party of Nicaragua (PSN) founded in 1944. Though various parties worked cooperatively with the Sandinistas in the government, they all made virulent attacks on the Sandinistas and their policies before and during the campaign period. The three parties to the left of the Sandinistas thought the FSLN too "soft", and those to the right attacked any number of Sandinista policies, capitalizing especially on the country's unpopular military draft.

Needless to say, the CDN loudly attacked the Sandinistas too. However, while they were certainly larger than the three smallest opposition parties, there is no evidence that they even approached the popularity of the PLI or the PCD (LASA 18). The parties that made up the CDN were all small; the largest claimed 2000 members (BPHRG 10).

The consensus by election observers was that "we are satisfied that competing parties represented a wide choice of ideologies" (BPHRG 29). This is because while the CDN represented most of the far right and advocated a move to pure capitalism, the PCD had a very similar platform, and other parties represented various ideologies between the extremes. In light of these reasons, it seems odd that the United States would dub Cruz and the CDN the "main opposition", and proclaim elections without their participation (even if it was due to self-imposed boycott) illegitimate. Nonetheless, proclaim this they did.

It all gets especially sticky with evidence that the US government actually pressured Cruz and the CDN to stay out of the elections in an effort to delegitimize them, and the Sandinistas, in the process. This is not an element of the elections that is considered gospel truth, but several anonymous US government officials are on the record as saying things such as, "the Administration never contemplated letting Cruz stay in the race, because then the Sandinistas could justifiably claim that the elections were legitimate" (qtd in Ryan 93). Some observers to the elections suspected that Cruz never planned to run at all (Vanden and Prevost 78), and even more observers believed that COSEP, the influential business association, never intended to let Cruz run, but only to put the Sandinistas in an embarrassing position (CCHRD 26).

On the other hand, Cruz claimed that he was not running in the elections because conditions for free elections did not exist, a view seconded and trumpeted by the Reagan administration (US Dept. of State, "Resource" 16). By the end of August, contra leaders had lost interest in a dialogue with the Sandinistas, and so Cruz was forced to drop this condition for participation in the elections (LASA 26-27). He still did not register the CDN in the elections however, though the deadline for registration was extended once again. His complaints now focused on the continuing press restrictions under the revised

state of emergency.

Though the CDN had no legal status because of its refusal to register in the elections, Cruz continued to campaign throughout August as if he were running. At a number of rallies he held around Nicaragua, angry crowds called *turbas* formed around Cruz, disrupting the rallies. This was a somewhat controversial issue in which there were no solid "facts" to be relied on, because eyewitness accounts varied greatly. Cruz himself described the events as wild, angry mobs, throwing stones, shaking his car and injuring him, with the police just barely making moves to protect him. He viewed the mobs as being maintained, trained, and directed by the FSLN in order to disrupt him (Cruz 9-10). Though less extreme than his, there were eyewitness accounts that more or less agreed with Cruz, and also those that disagreed entirely. These versions will be addressed in chapter three.

It is important to understand though, that Cruz was very unpopular in Nicaragua among certain sectors, hated even, because of his association with the contras. They were the violent, brutal attackers of Nicaragua, and believed to be made up of Somoza's former National Guard. Cruz's advocacy for the contras echoed Reagan's propaganda, and it was widely known in Nicaragua that the CDN, especially COSEP, considered by observers to have the most dominant voice in the CDN, had very close ties with the US government. The US was another hated aggressor from the standpoint of so many Nicaraguans, to whom the threat of possible US invasion was real (Robinson and Norsworthy 91).

Ultimately, negotiations of electoral conditions continued with offers and excuses on both sides of the table, from both Cruz and the FSLN. It was all in an attempt to satisfy the CDN objections, and to convince them to register for the elections. The Reagan administration was trumpeting such fanfare about the importance of Cruz as the

only legitimate opposition that, though the idea of the CDN winning the elections was laughable inside Nicaragua (Robinson and Norsworthy 96), and though there were six other diverse parties vigorously campaigning, the participation of Arturo Cruz became an essential factor in the international arena; the only factor as far as the US government was concerned.

As concessions were made on old demands, a new one, the postponement of the election date, became Cruz's major condition for electoral participation in late September. He pushed for this on the grounds that since the CDN would be registering late, it would need time for a full three-month campaign, like the parties that registered on time had received. The negotiations culminated in talks in Rio de Janeiro at the annual meeting of the Socialist International in the opening days of October. This was just one month before the elections. Here the FSLN gave into each and every one of the CDN's demands: no censorship of the press except for the most sensitive of military matters, absolute guarantees against any mob violence at rallies, extra free radio and television access to make up for lost campaigning time, and a postponement of the elections until January if the CDN could negotiate a cease-fire with the contras (CCHRD 27). Despite the desirability of this agreement to all sides, negotiations fell through, with each side blaming the other; theories abound as to whose fault it really was (LASA 19).

Though slight attempts at negotiations did continue, the failed Rio talks marked the end of any real possibility that the CDN would run in the elections. In this last month before elections, the participating parties campaigned vigorously, with their various colors adorning the streets of Managua and other Nicaraguan cities in the form of giant billboards, posters, and graffiti (LASA 26). The final piece of pre-election drama occurred just weeks before the elections. On October 21st, the PLI, considered the opposition party with the broadest popular support, voted to withdraw from elections.

They cited unfair electoral conditions, which seemed to lend credence to the CDN's stance. The vote to withdraw came after the ballots had been printed and distributed to voting districts, so the PLI would remain on the ballot. The PLI's withdrawal is an area that has drawn quite a bit of controversy for various reasons. For example, Virgilio Godoy, the PLI's presidential candidate, did not officially withdraw his party from the elections until October 30th, after the official deadline for such action. In addition, there is evidence of strong US government pressure for the party's withdrawal, though the details are murky (LASA 30). This issue, along with the disruption of a PCD meeting expected to result in a vote to withdraw from elections, will be examined much more in depth in chapter four.

The November elections went forward with all Nicaraguan parties on the ballot except those that belonged to the CDN. The elections were heavily monitored by observer delegations from around the world, and were further checked by the presence of thousands of foreign journalists, all of whom had ready access to the polls, to elections officials, voters, the counting of ballots, and anything else they wished to see. The vast majority reported no irregularities of any sort on voting day, and those irregularities that did exist were no more serious than a person dressed in costume, passing out campaign literature less than a block from a polling place.[11] The four-day registration period had proceeded without a hitch the previous August, registering 93.7 % of the eligible population in a process that received no official complaints (LASA 14). The day of elections followed suit, drawing 75% of the registered voters though voting was not mandatory. The day received no official complaints, not about the conduct of voting, or about vote counting. It was a day with few problems, outside of the 16 polls that were never able to open because of contra activity (Vanden and Prevost 78).

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[11]All campaigning was banned near or in voting places.

The Sandinistas received 67% of the eligible votes, and 63% of the total votes (6% of votes were invalid). The PCD came in second with 14% of the vote, and despite the confusion stemming from their late and controversial withdrawal the PLI received 10% of the vote for third place. Because of the method of counting votes, the National Assembly had a wide distribution of political representation: 2/3 of the 90 seats belonged to the FSLN, but the PCD received 14 seats, the PLI nine, and the PPSC six. All three parties to the left of the FSLN, though receiving less than two percent of the vote each, could claim two national assembly seats apiece. Had the National Assembly vote used a majority vote per seat, as in the United States, the FSLN would surely have won nearly every seat. As it was other parties now had an official voice in the government, and each of their presidential candidates was now sitting in the National Assembly, poised to begin drafting the new Nicaraguan constitution (CCHRD 36).

This concludes a summary of the election process in Nicaragua based on various accounts of them, though a few of the most important issues that defined the process have yet to be addressed. In order to discuss these, we must return to the topic of the different observation reports about the elections. Here is a list of the major issues of legitimacy and fairness of the election process that were raised, mostly by the US government and the CDN (the registration and voting day themselves were so spotless that allegations were leveled at the campaign period and the electoral rules instead):

The biggest concern raised by both of these parties, as previously mentioned, was Arturo Cruz (the "major opposition" of Nicaragua), and his vocal non-participation in the election—along with his professed reasons for abstention. These were the major conditions he deemed unfair on constantly changing grounds: first negotiations with the contras were necessary, then when that demand was dropped his focus turned to freedom of speech and assembly; when guarantees were made in that area by the Sandinistas, the

new issue was the date of the elections. A further election issue was an accusation that the Sandinistas generally abused their incumbency powers, and complaints were made about the advantages that the Sandinistas received from their impressively well-developed party infrastructure. Correspondingly, the US government and the CDN claimed that the Sandinistas created a climate of fear and intimidation, in which Sandinista neighborhood watch committees were used to threaten and cajole, and to withhold access to ration cards from those that abstained from voting.

Those that have observed or commented on Nicaragua's elections found them either completely flawed and like a soviet "sham" election—citing the points just listed, though rarely supporting them with evidence—or, while flawed in various ways, overwhelmingly fair and legitimizing. Not surprisingly, the first category was composed of the US government and Arturo Cruz, and the second was composed of just about everyone else: observer delegations to the elections, and the analyses of Nicaraguan experts.

Much of the fact base for the basic description of elections just outlined comes from the second group, the group that legitimized the elections. This is primarily because the details simply were not there from the US government. For example, Secretary of State Shultz said, with almost no explanation, "The fact is, this wasn't a very good election. In fact, it wasn't an election; in fact, was a kind of piece of theatre for the Sandinistas to manipulate" (US Dept. of State, "Nicaraguan Elections" 1107). No real information was conveyed, only opinion. The most extreme example is President Reagan's famous and unilluminating comment that, "no person committed to democracy will be taken in by a Soviet-style sham election" (Reagan "Remarks at a Summit" 1061).

The discrepancies in the US government's accounts of the elections compared to other observer reports lay primarily in ideological and interpretive realms based around

the laundry list of complaints listed above, although to drastic effect. Take Reagan's hyperbolic description: "Right to dissent was denied. Freedom of the press and freedom of assembly became virtually nonexistent. There was an outright refusal to hold genuine elections, coupled with the continueal promise to do so" (Reagan "Address" 661). In some cases relatively few details from observer reports were contradicted by the government documents. Rather, the few facts that were presented by the government were consistent with election observer's reports, but were hidden behind ideologically driven, unsupported accusations and judgments. The State Department's *Resource Book: Sandinista Elections in Nicaragua* is the primary example of this.

Only Cruz's own account was thorough on the delegitimizing side, but he constantly threw out facts that were not corroborated anywhere else, such as 400,000 "ghosts" (slightly less than one third of the total number registered)--imaginary voters "registered" by the FSLN to pad any unsatisfactory outcome on voting day (Cruz 32). Cruz's account is the only source I have found that had any complaints about the voter registration process, or about the fairness of vote tallying on election day. Despite its readiness to hurl accusations at any point during the voting, the US documentation of the Nicaraguan electoral process in 1984 was sketchy at best, and unlike the observer reports and other publications by non-US government sources, the US documents almost never backed up their facts with cited sources. This made outside sources not only more thorough, but more trustworthy as well, especially because such sources corroborate each other almost without exception.

Where government documents addressing the election relied on unsupported accusations and selective evidence, observer and academic reports relied on a fact-base to support their assertions, evident in the quotations found throughout this chapter. They presented a fleshed-out picture of the process from beginning to end, instead of just

spotty details. Many of these reports were upwards of 30 pages long. They extensively discussed each issue that was encountered, and included a good deal of contextualizing background as well. The accounts addressed not only issues that supported a view of the elections as fair, but also addressed fully the concerns and problems raised by the Reagan Administration, and by Arturo Cruz and the CDN. One report, by Americas Watch, specifically focused on the issues of free speech and assembly. Following are the primary differences in interpretation found between the accounts of the US government and election observer reports:

Where the US government protested the absence of the CDN from the elections, the observer reports stressed that he had every opportunity to register, that the FSLN was always flexible in negotiations right up through October, and they especially focused on the fact that the CDN was only one small contingent in a wide political spectrum (e.g. LASA 18-21). The US government and Cruz complained about press censorship and freedom of assembly restrictions; observer reports freely admitted that this was the most problematic aspect of the elections, and that abuses of press censorship, especially, were highly problematic. They also pointed out, however, that the press was still given a wide leeway, especially in comparison to the press in other wartime countries of all political systems, including democratic ones. They emphasized the TV and radio time allotted to parties, and the posters and graffiti that they found everywhere (e.g. LASA 21-22). According to LASA, "The opposition could, and did, get its message out" (26).

United States rhetoric spoke of Sandinista abuse of incumbency, and a climate of fear created by the ruling party. Observer reports found little evidence of this, and no basis for the incidences of fear that they did find (BPHRG 30). LASA found some Nicaraguans in lower-class sectors that felt a vague fear of disobeying government generally, probably as a legacy of Somoza's repressive style of governance (27). The

delegations did find outspoken and unafraid criticism of the FSLN in all different segments of the population however. There were no instances of ration cards being withheld (LASA 22), and voter registration cards were taken away once a citizen had voted, so that no one would be able to stop that person in the street and demand proof that they had voted (Vanden and Prevost 80).

The evidence of fear and intimidation that the observer delegations did find, however, stemmed from the ongoing war, perpetuated by contra terrorist attacks and kidnappings from the borders to the north and south. Eight election officials were killed in contra attacks and a ninth was kidnapped during the campaign (Robinson and Norsworthy); by contrast, not one person was killed in any other way during the campaign, and there was only one injury reported, very impressive statistics indeed in a Latin American election, especially a war-time, post-revolutionary one (LASA 26). Supersonic flyovers of Managua by American military aircraft, in violation of Nicaraguan airspace, served to remind Nicaraguans of American military power with an ear-shattering explosion each morning the week of elections (BPHRG 40).

Possibly the most important way that observer reports and non-US government election analyses differed from the administration's examination was their placement of the elections, and all of the issues that came with it, into the larger context of Sandinista Nicaragua in 1984. For example, observer reports pointed out that by waiting five years to hold elections, the Sandinistas were avoiding the automatic and almost unanimous validation they would have received in an election so close to the triumph of the revolution; they were giving the electorate a chance to see their governance in action first. The FSLN ran an extensive literacy campaign in the interim before elections, raising literacy from less than 50% to more than 80% of the population, resulting in a more informed electorate (Council 334-336).

US government documents tended to emphasize the problems in the FSLN, such as biased TV coverage, abuses of incumbency, poor relations with the church, and worse relations with the Miskito Indians. The observer delegations frankly addressed these issues, and acknowledged them as problems that needed improvement. In addition they looked at the broader Sandinista picture, with its leaps in education and healthcare, its incredible flexibility to opposition requests, and its steady moves toward pluralism while maintaining a mixed economy. These discussions were backed by cited references, while US government documents conspicuously lacked them.

Finally, and in the same vein, observer reports remind us that these elections took place just five years after the FSLN served as the vanguard party of a popular revolution, swept to power after vanquishing a hated dictator. Of course the FSLN had great advantages, both in infrastructure and popularity; they had been working hard for more than 20 years, and were unapologetic about the gains this had gotten them (LASA 8). As the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group (BPHRG) put it, "The advantages which the Sandinistas enjoyed as the incumbent party and as a ruling revolutionary government cannot be disentangled from their genuine popularity" (20).

It is in the context of this electoral framework that the newspaper and magazine coverage of these elections, from the announcement of the election date through to the voting returns, will be analyzed. Will the reports of large mainstream and small independent news sources resemble the thoroughly-researched, well-supported, contextualized findings of observer delegations and academic analysis, or will they agree with the much patchier, poorly-backed and entirely decontextualized complaints and accusations of the US government and Arturo Cruz?

MEDIA ANALYSIS: PORTRAYAL OF THE SANDINISTAS

With the fundamentals of Nicaragua's elections established, we can move to an examination of their coverage in the mainstream and alternative presses. Throughout the following three chapters, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *NACLA Report on the Americas* and *Christianity and Crisis* magazine will be put under scrutiny, to discern where their perspectives lay in 1984 concerning Nicaragua's elections. Did these publications write on the elections in a manner that more closely resembled the Reagan administration's condemnation of elections and the entire process, or the commendation of the process found in the reports of official observer delegations to the elections? In this investigation, the newspapers and magazines will be analyzed with an eye to how much context and supporting evidence were provided by the publications, in coming to the conclusions they did. Even when the periodicals did not directly pass judgment on the elections, conclusions were clearly reached, and conveyed to their audiences through the manner in which they were reported. I aim to discern how well these conclusions were supported and how much analysis went into them.

This chapter will begin with a preliminary discussion of first the *Times* and the *Post*, then *NACLA Report on the Americas* and *Christianity and Crisis,* in general terms. A rough sketch of their overall approaches to the elections will be drawn, addressing the presence of context, evidence and analysis in reporting. This will serve as an introductory treatment, to be refined as the chapters progress. Following this discussion, the analysis will move for the remainder of the chapter to the portrayal of the FSLN in the four publications. Because it was essentially the FSLN's legitimacy that was on trial in these elections, depiction of the Sandinistas is inseparable from election coverage

generally. A number of specific electoral events are linked to the portrayal of the Sandinistas. The end of the chapter will address the contras.

Approaches of the Press: Overview of the Mainstream and Alternative News-Sources

The election reporting from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, in most general terms, cast doubt on the Nicaraguan elections; *NACLA Report on the Americas* and *Christianity and Crisis* did not. The delegitimizing manner found in the *Times* and the *Post* was usually subtle in form, though it was sometimes explicit. An indirect example is found in this unwarranted comparison between the 1984 elections and the Somozas' elections: "Nicaraguan elections have rarely, if ever been instruments of change. The party in power has traditionally fixed election laws unilaterally, censored the press, produced cooperative opposition candidates to provide a facade of democracy and then counted the votes as it saw fit" (*New York Times [NYT]* 26 Aug. 1984). There was also the occasional outright attack: "The Sandinistas are making it clear that the election is for the purpose of 'confirming revolutionary power,' not to allow someone like Mr. Cruz . . . to come to power" (*NYT* 29 July 1984).

These and other statements were not backed with supporting evidence to demonstrate continuity between Somoza and FSLN elections, or to explain at how the second, strongly accusatory conclusion was arrived at all. Most of the validating aspects of the elections were omitted from reporting in the *Times* and the *Post.* The painstaking electoral negotiations and guarantees, the making of the electoral law, and the support of Western democracies such as Sweden, to name a few examples, either went entirely unreported, or as in the case of the Swedes, were mentioned once briefly, and with no impact on future analysis of the elections.

Of course there were important variations in the reporting of the *Times* and the

Post, but there were more similarities than differences. Both papers wrote volumes about the elections, nearly an article each day as the event drew near. However, neither appeared to be terribly discerning of what was really going on in Nicaragua during the election period. Both papers failed to present a clear, contextualized picture of Nicaragua and its elections. Reporting instead seems murky and a bit haphazard, picking at certain details, ignoring others at will.

The result was the creation of a narrative of the election process that was strikingly different from the one found in observer reports. Through selective reporting of events, and even more selective provision of historical and contemporary context for these events, the mainstream press created a technically accurate story of elections, but a fairly consistent, highly skewed picture of elections overall. In this process, both papers featured imprecise language and misleading, selective examples, as well as a general lack of analysis of events as they were reported. Though never approaching the hyperbole of the US administration, which would throw the words "sham" and "totalitarian" about with impunity, the mainstream US press did, with relatively few exceptions, follow the administration's lead. They attempted to create a climate of hostility toward the incumbent Sandinista government, and to undermine of the legitimacy of the elections.

The typical tone for election reporting by the *Times* and the *Post* was set by the *Time's* opening line for the article that appeared the day of the elections: "More than a million Nicaraguans are expected to vote Sunday in national elections that have been criticized abroad and boycotted by several parties at home, but hailed by the Government as 'the first free election in Nicaragua's history'" (4 Nov. 1984). The two newspapers rarely reported about the elections without bringing up the taint of controversy created by the administration and by Arturo Cruz. And, while the FSLN was technically represented in this part of the article, it was made the fool by the positioning such a positive comment

about the elections directly after the paper itself told us about the criticism the elections had received. This article went on to describe only controversial aspects of the elections, further detracting credence from the government's proclamation.

The focus of the above election day article was skepticism, a skepticism that started from the beginning. The *Times* article the day the election was announced was no better; it contained skepticism from beginning to end. There was skepticism from the CDN (the elections were "ridiculous") and from the US Ambassador to Nicaragua (the ambassador said, "We still know very little about the conditions in which the elections will be held over the next eight or nine months. We'll have to wait and see") instead of a focus on the elections themselves (22 Feb. 1984).[12] And so the coverage began with the burden of proof for fair elections laid squarely on the FSLN's shoulders, but no description of the steps the Sandinistas had taken toward that aim. This pattern was repeated over and over again in these papers. While the facts were technically correct, it was the focus of articles, and the, in a sense, "incorrect" set of contexts presented, that created a bias.

By contrast, *Christianity and Crisis* (*C&C*) and *NACLA Report on the Americas* (*NACLA*) approached the topic of elections with a completely open tone. Instead of beginning with skepticism, the articles of these magazines started from a position much closer to neutrality. They relied on evidence, not hopes or suspicions, to explain the legitimacy of elections that was ultimately conveyed in their pages. The open tone and use of evidence and context, throughout reporting, represented the most fundamental

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[12]As a matter of contrast, a year before this Nicaraguan announcement of the acceleration of their electoral calendar, near-by El Salvador considered doing the same. El Salvador was a Central American country with no democratic tradition, and in an analogous situation to that of Nicaragua's except that the US administration supported the government and not the guerrillas. The *Times* reported that though El Salvador "is not a bastion of democracy," US officials were "enthusiastic about the process of elections." Also, "The purpose in moving up the election date, officials said, would be to dramatize the Salvadoran leaders' commitment to democratic rule and national reconciliation." (3 March 1983).

differences between the reporting of the mainstream papers and the independent magazines.

For example, the first election article in *NACLA* was printed in the September/October issue, after much of the election process had run its course. As part of the electoral context, the article spoke plainly about early international concerns over the Sandinistas' conduction of elections: "Nevertheless, until early August, the government was apparently unprepared to relax the sweeping powers it has held under emergency legislation since 1982" (Jenkins 5). The contrast with the mainstream papers came later, when in the same article the author explained that, "following discussions with other opposition parties . . . the government announced the lifting of almost all the restrictions established under the State of Emergency" (8). The article went on to describe the details involved.

This clear relation of events was not to be found in the *Times* or the *Post*, which never put the lifting of emergency restrictions in such concrete terms. Contextualized discussion and analysis of this type was the general mode of reporting to be found in both this magazine, and in *Christianity and Crisis* as well. In this manner, with drastically fewer—though considerably longer—articles about the Nicaraguan elections (four and six respectively, to the *Times'* 69 and the *Post's* 54), *C&C* and *NACLA* were both able to create much clearer and more fact-driven accounts of the elections than the two mainstream newspapers.

Portrayal of the Sandinistas

The first area in which the context and analysis of articles will be analyzed in depth is, underlyingly, the most important aspect of the elections: depiction of the Sandinistas. Given the controversial status of the FSLN in the United States due to the

Reagan administration's hostility toward the government, the portrayal of the FSLN in both its presiding over elections and the general character of the FSLN, was key. First the overall portrayal of the FSLN will be discussed, moving gradually to more specific issues.

Life in Nicaragua under the FSLN was probably *C & C's* area of greatest interest. A large portion of an article was devoted to the topic after Andrew Reding, the magazine's only reporter for Nicaragua, traveled there for two months in the summer of 1984. His articles formed a sort of travel diary of his time there, investigating life and politics in Nicaragua. He lived in Estelí in the north of Nicaragua, and in Managua, for several weeks each, and later returned to observe the elections as a journalist.

Reding gave endless details about the Nicaragua that he found, details that matched the social accomplishments described in observer reports. He recorded clean, sanitary streets, healthcare available to every Nicaraguan for free, and the resulting eradication of many diseases. He found no beggars anywhere, and no starvation, but he did observe women holding prestigious jobs, and education that was free for all—including newly opened special education facilities throughout the country. As a basic need, even transportation was subsidized by the government. One of his most significant observations was the general lack of social tension, even in the preparations for elections, and amidst the contra war. Finally, he reported that all of these findings were in stark contrast to what he observed in Guatemala and Honduras, through which he had traveled immediately before going to Nicaragua, and whose governments were supported by the United States (Reding "Central" 420-424).

Reding was not blind to problems in Nicaragua. Though he was truly impressed with the social advances, he did warn that he found a disturbing amount of communist propaganda from Russia broadcast over public radio, and a few other troubling signs. He

concluded in the end that, "In my two months in Nicaragua I saw tendencies going in both directions: some inclining toward totalitarianism, others—at this juncture far more pronounced-- . . . looking to establish a socialist yet nontotalitarian democracy, with enough leverage to carry out . . . profound social change" (Reding "Central" 29).

NACLA did not have nearly the same emphasis on the FSLN's social programs, but the matter hovered always in the background, almost as a given context for discussion of Nicaragua. The Sandinistas' economic structure was more *NACLA's* forte: "Neither experience nor theory offers easy answers about the . . . transition [to socialism], the gradual establishment of a socialist economy, which tolerates the continuation of a high degree of private ownership, as Nicaragua has" (Black "Four" 39). In the cases of both magazines, this evidence was described in no uncertain terms, and as demonstrated in the *C&C* example, was not one-sided.

In stark contrast, the mainstream papers did not place the elections in a contextualized Nicaragua. The social accomplishments of the Sandinistas were almost universally ignored in the *Times* and the *Post*, and were never brought up in the context of elections. Specifics about the FSLN that were offered were usually those things that could be subject to criticism. For example, instead of writing about the considerable list of concessions that had been made by the Sandinistas right before the electoral law was published, the *Times* pointed out that the Council of State was composed of 40 members who "support the leftist Sandinista junta," out of 51 total (10 March 1984). Not only was "support" an ambiguous, virtually meaningless distinction, but the article completely overlooked the involved negotiations of the law between the various Nicaraguan political voices.

Some articles would go out of their way to throw barbs at the FSLN with phrases such as: "The Sandinistas showed an unusual measure of flexibility by inviting such a

wide range of people" (*NYT* 11 Nov. 1984), or "Police stood by unobtrusively as the crowd chanted 'Democracy yes, Communism no!'" (*NYT* 29 July 1984). Though flexibility was one of the praises most often offered to the Sandinistas by non-CDN political parties and the international community, and though there was no precedent for FSLN police breaking up anti-government demonstrations, the opposite impressions were implied, and without cause.

Events concerning the FSLN were reported selectively. The *Times* explained that, "[The Sandinistas] have dealt forcefully with resolute anti-Sandinista groups like the Democratic Conservative Party. Last month, the party's leaders were forbidden to use the party name, emblem and headquarters." (1 July 1984). Since this was not substantiated anywhere else, not even in Arturo Cruz's account of elections, I can only conjecture that this referred to a June split in the PCD party, in which one branch was recognized as the legitimate PCD party. The other never attained legal status, and was presumably barred from headquarters. This was the only interaction reported between the Sandinistas and other political parties in this article, and in all of the articles in this period, even though the Sandinistas were in the process of meeting with opposition parties to negotiate major electoral changes at the time.

The mainstream press also quoted the FSLN selectively. FSLN quotations were infrequent, and usually demonstrated some kind of intransigence in their attitudes. For example, the Sandinista government made frequent speeches about the state of Nicaragua, the strength of the Nicaraguan people and the importance of national unity, and the accomplishments that had been achieved. The same *Times* article mentioned above, however, only quoted the FSLN to say that small businessmen were representatives of what the Sandinistas called "the defeated class," a far cry from the Sandinistas' general tone toward the business class, and a sentiment that I have not found

attributed to the FSLN by any other source.

Both the *Times* and the *Post* quoted Ortega to the effect that "We do not accept the lessons in democracy that the North American rulers want to give us" (*WP* 22 Feb. 1984). Though there was some dissent in the ranks of the Sandinista directorate over just how elections should proceed, the public face of the FSLN government was always pro-western-style elections; it is unfortunate that this out-of-context quotation, by which Ortega could have meant so many things, was all that was reported of his half-hour address about the democratization of Nicaragua. The "Marxist-led" Sandinista leaders (*WP* 4 July 1984) were made to appear resistant to democracy even as they were announcing their elections.

The term "Marxist" was quite problematic, and of a similar nature to a misquotation in that it entirely misrepresented the Sandinistas. Loaded terms such as this and "communist" were thrown about with abandon in the *Times* and the *Post*, as were the remarks such as, "the Reagan administration has declared its refusal to live with a Nicaraguan government allied with Cuba" (*WP* 25 Feb. 1984). The political nature of the FSLN, Marxist or otherwise, was not ever discussed in either paper (though it was in *NACLA* and *C&C*, who did not use such labels), nor was the nature of its relationship with Cuba. Yet these comparisons, so salient in the United States in the 1980's, were used frequently and thoughtlessly.

Some of the Week in Review articles in the *Times* went beyond the misrepresentation caused by selective quotation and powerful, incorrect labels, to actually attribute trends and emotions to the FSLN, or make predictions about the future of Nicaragua without explanation or support. In the July 1st article referred to previously, the Sandinistas "want to put on a good show" with elections. They were "worried" about the results of an open election campaign, and "especially anxious" to maintain their ties

to friends abroad in this period.

The Week in Review on November 4th, the day of elections, explained that one result of the elections would be an elected national assembly, charged with writing a constitution and passing laws. The reporter then opined that "Regardless, the key policy-making body is likely to remain one that has no official standing: the National Directorate of the Sandinista Front. Its nine members . . . are expected to continue making the final decisions" (*NYT*). This was an accusation that the FSLN would ignore election results and act as a dictatorship, using the assembly only as figureheads, a heavy claim to make. Yet the allegation came out of the blue, with no explanation or back up offered. *C&C*, on the other hand, pointed out the pains the Sandinistas took so that the Sandinista directorate would not dominate the new government. For example, only one of the nine FSLN directorate members was on the candidate list for national assembly, along with only two lower-ranking government commandantes. Fifteen of the assembly candidates weren't even party members, but respected FSLN supporters in their communities (Reding "What" 491).

In the *Times* and the *Post,* the Sandinistas were not often given a chance for rebuttal or explanation of any of the events and quotations of the last several paragraphs. Accounts of "resolute treatment" by the Sandinistas and other accusatory reports—were they general or specific, the complaints of the CDN or the conclusions of reporters themselves—stood alone. There was no consultation of the FSLN's own views on the subjects, or even that of the Nicaraguan people. By contrast, when the *Times* mentioned the FSLN's allegations (backed by video tapes as evidence) that the Catholic hierarchy and Coordinadora were collaborating with the contras and with the CIA, both the Archbishop and a CDN spokesmen were given a paragraph between them to explain their side of the story, and their innocence (*NYT* 1 July 1984).

Occasional instances in which the Sandinistas acted commendably, or in which their actions were presented within an appropriate context, did appear. When the elections were announced, for example, the *New York Times* described the FSLN's no-strings-attached amnesty offer to any Nicaraguan contra members that turned themselves over to the government, provided they were not ex-National Guardsmen or in contra leadership positions. A problem arose with these commendable types of snippets though, in that they were never incorporated into the overall picture that the *Times* or the *Post* drew of the FSLN, or of elections. They were rarely brought up a second time, and they did not alter the basic framework in which the FSLN and elections were perceived or portrayed by the papers.

This same kind of treatment was given to Rafael Cordova Rivas (A PCD member on the government junta) by the *Times* when he admitted that it would take a few more years for Nicaragua to get to the point of completely free elections, because there wasn't a previous democratic tradition in Nicaragua. It was used by the *Washington Post* when it reported the Sandinistas' point that the timetable for elections could not have been accelerated more than it was, because of the literacy campaign and careful research and planning for elections laws. It was also used for Daniel Ortega's announcement that the Contra war was sapping 25% (a low estimate) of Nicaragua's annual budget, and in the announcement of the creation before elections of an open national dialogue between the Sandinistas and the six opposition party leaders. Each of these was an important factor concerning the FSLN and pluralism (or the economy), yet all were mentioned once in passing, at the end of an article focused on some entirely different topic. The subjects were never mentioned again, and didn't result in an amendment of newspapers' generally skeptical tone concerning the elections.

The Sandinistas' popularity with Nicaraguans was another important topic.

Recall from chapter two that a major point in observer reports was that it was the genuine popularity of the Sandinistas that was responsible for their quasi-hegemonic role in society, and not a totalitarian style of governance. Whatever any outsider thought of their programs, the Sandinistas were overwhelmingly popular in Nicaragua. Even the *Times* and the *Post* would not infrequently mention that the Sandinistas were expected to win the election by a landslide. Yet, in tandem with a favorite Reagan topic, the mainstream newspapers often highlighted what they called "popular discontent with the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front" (*Washington Post [WP]* 4 Apr. 1984).

A lengthy July 1st article in the *Post* was devoted to the topic, and managed not to mention a single FSLN accomplishment, but only the disorganization in the government, and the unrest amongst the populace. An article in the *Times* the same day highlighted a leaflet made by Nicaraguan market vendors that complained of food shortages, calling them "the product of bad government policies" (qtd in 1 July 1984). The journalist apparently couldn't find any of the hordes of Nicaraguans in support of government policies; not in this article or in any other leading up to elections.

Like the FSLN's social accomplishments, its popularity, too, was a general background assumption in the reporting from *NACLA*. *C&C*, however, emphasized the FSLN's overwhelming popularity (though it did not deny, in different articles, that there were plenty of complaints as well). The most striking example was in the case of the FSLN's final election rally:

> Because other parties were having difficulty in turning out more than a few hundred supporters for their rallies, I wasn't surprised to find only several thousand FSLN sympathizers in the square at the scheduled time. But then, over the next couple of hours, seemingly endless lines of people . . . surged into the plaza. Eventually, more than 300,000 of Managua's 850,000 residents turned out . . . (Reding "What" 489).

This show of FSLN strength went unreported in the *Times,* and in the *Post* it was

mentioned in a few sentences appended to an article covering the contra's cease-fire announcement for election day (*WP* 2 Nov. 1984).

A particularly important aspect of the FSLN's relationship with Nicaraguans, at least for the United States, was the FSLN's antagonistic relationship with the Catholic Church hierarchy. This problematic topic was covered by the mainstream papers to the exclusion of any other church-related subject. There was one April article in the *Times* that highlighted a United States priest that was critical of Reagan's Central American policies, demonstrating the support for Nicaragua that was felt in the US religious community. Any mention of the church within Nicaragua, however, covered exclusively the derogatory comments of the Catholic hierarchy.

One article carried a passing reference by the Nicaraguan Bishop Pablo Vega to the FSLN as a "dogmatic, closed scheme of totalitarianism" (qtd in *Post* 4 July 1984). Both papers devoted articles that appeared just days before the election to Vega's unsupported claims that the FSLN imposed a political system "by force and deceit" (qtd in *Post* 26 Oct. 1984). The *Times* featured its article on the front page, and also quoted Vega to say Nicaraguans had "lost their sense of freedom" (qtd in 25 Oct. 1984). No one but Bishop Vega was interviewed in the articles, and there was no additional article in either paper to introduce a different church leader's point of view, or examine how Vega was perceived by Nicaraguans. In omitting the context for what the bishop's letter meant in Nicaragua, the author made his article essentially meaningless.

For obvious reasons, the relationship between the Sandinistas and the church was of particular interest to *Christianity and Crisis* magazine, and was a major focus of Reding's investigations in Nicaragua. What he found and reported was an amicable, mutually supportive relationship between the Sandinistas and most religious organizations in Nicaragua. Priests held prominent positions in the government, and the

priest that had headed Nicaragua's literacy campaign became the new Minister of Education in the midst of the *C&C* reporter's stay. He reported that at the announcement of this move, Daniel Ortega shouted to a chorus of cheers: "This people of Sandino, this people of Christ!" (Reding "Central" 429). As it turned out, the issue of whether or not the FSLN supported or was supported by Christians was not an issue at all in Nicaragua; only in the United States. The problems were almost exclusively related to the official church hierarchy, and *C&C's* reporter saw hope even there. He cited the pastoral letter written by Bishop Pablo Vega, the one the *Times* and the *Post* had written entire articles about. What the mainstream papers did not mention was that, contrary to expectations, the letter was not endorsed by the rest of the nine-member Bishop's conference (Reding "What" 499).

The first half of this discussion of Sandinista portrayal has addressed general ways in which the FSLN was portrayed. In *NACLA* and *C&C* it was usually with adequate context, reporting many of the same ideas found in observer reports. The *Post* and the *Times* by contrast tended to lack the appropriate context for presenting the FSLN. Now we move on to coverage of the FSLN regarding specific aspects of the election period. The most complex of these, negotiations of the electoral law and negotiations with Arturo Cruz, will be reserved for chapter four; here we will address the topics for which the FSLN came under fire. The most controversial and most publicized of these were the state of emergency restrictions, which continued to be discussed throughout the period. In addition, the CDN and the Reagan administration leveled three strong charges at the Sandinistas, summarized in this particularly extreme editorial from the *Washington Post* (though it gave no evidence to support the accusations):

> The Sandinistas produced a big turnout—easy in Central America where the democratic tradition is weak and the power of official suggestion is strong . . . the Sandinistas alone control mass organizations and used them

> to bring in a landslide . . .the Sandinistas cheated—with mob violence [and] logistical harassment . . . " (11 Nov. 1984).

More generally, the accusations included allegations of government intimidation toward those that would abstain from voting, a less specific accusation of the FSLN's acute abuse of incumbency during the campaign period and elections, and the formation of *turbas*, mobs that were supposed to have been sent by the Sandinistas to disrupt Cruz's rallies.

Let us start with the state of emergency. The *Times* described: "Mr. Ortega was chosen this weekend as the Sandinista candidate for president, and he is viewed as the heavy favorite to win in November. Critics say the Government has restricted their activity to such an extent that they are unable to launch a strong campaign," (20 July 1984). The restricted activity was a reference to the state of emergency.

Yet this is actually an excerpt from the article that announced the Sandinistas' partial lifting of emergency restrictions. After mentioning the easing of restrictions, the article stated ambiguously: "Many opposition leaders, however, said that only a complete repeal of the emergency law and other restrictive decrees could persuade them to take part in the elections." (Which opposition leaders? How many said this?) Yet the state of emergency restrictions were never themselves analyzed in any article. As if to further tarnish the luster of eased restrictions, the front page that day carried an article about the administration's views of Nicaragua's election, an infamous one in which Reagan dubbed them a sham (20 July 1984). The *Post's* article on the lifting of restrictions was anything but an improvement; Cruz's unexamined indictment of the changes as "totally insufficient" concluded the very sentence in which the changes were announced (22 July 1984).

Complaints about the state of emergency, mentioned in nearly every early election article, formed a solid block of CDN ideas that went reported but unexamined in the

mainstream press. The press strongly emphasized a theory invented by certain US diplomats, that the contra war was simply used as an "excuse" for the state of emergency. The press did not address, however, that for a country at war and under attack, emergency laws are standard (even if they are not always strictly necessary) for all countries—including the United States. The Sandinista measures almost certainly went further than they needed to, but one could not in good conscience single out the FSLN from any other government on the matter.

Neither *C&C* nor *NACLA* pointed out these things either. In failing to do so, the small magazines showed a more conservative viewpoint than the observer reports in this case. Nonetheless, recall the example concerning the state of emergency from the beginning of the chapter. A *NACLA* article explained that, initially, there had been a lot of international concern over the Nicaraguan elections, when it looked like the Sandinistas might not lift the state of emergency; however, according to the magazine, in July and August, they lifted almost all of the restrictions. The article went on: "But Cruz was adamant. 'It is still not enough . . .' he said. For the first time irritation in the diplomatic community was directed at the CDN" (Jenkins 8). Even if the legitimacy of demands related to the state of emergency demands were not analyzed, *NACLA* reported with great clarity the removal of most restrictions, and the face Cruz lost internationally in continuing his complaints.

The primary concern about the state of emergency restrictions was that opposition parties would not be able to get their message out. *C&C* did not directly address the state of emergency per se, but did emphasize the ability of all opposition parties to be heard: "Everywhere one saw a riot of colorful campaign posters, banners, billboards, and graffiti for the seven parties contesting the election" (Reding "What" 488). And, "All of a sudden the FSLN was being out-graffitied [by the PLI]" (Reding "Central" 427).

Of course, the most important arena for getting ones message out, and the most interesting aspect of the state of emergency for members of the press, was official censorship: " . . . the political passions that seethe here are often veiled by censorship," stated the *Post* (4 April 1984). Many of the observer reports found press censorship to be one of the most worrisome problems under the Sandinistas, and so by highlighting censorship, the *Times* and the *Post* were in concert with election observers. Problems arose, however, in the way in which the opposition newspaper *La Prensa* itself was portrayed. The morning after elections its headlines read, "Voting Under Great Apathy," and "First Results -- 18% Abstention, 7.5% Invalid Votes" (BPHRG 19). *La Prensa* also ran many tabloid-type articles that had virtually no basis in reality. Biases in the other two "pro-government" papers in Nicaragua were pointed out more than once by the *Times* and the *Post*. The extremely partisan stance of *La Prensa*, however, went unreported.

In writing about the censorship of *La Prensa*, the *Times* consulted only Edgar Chamorro, its editor: "We want to publish every day . . . but they do not let us print the news," said Chamorro. This would have been an appropriate place for the *Times* to describe *La Prensa's* reporting style, but it did not. However, the article did allow that candidates had been allowed to speak "and be quoted in the press attacking the regime in terms that have not been heard publicly here since the Sandinistas took power" (24 Oct. 1984). This was an important point in the opening of the Sandinistas, though it implied a tighter FSLN hand prior to the election period than I have found evidence for elsewhere.

Conspicuously missing from this article, as well as articles in *C&C* and *NACLA*, was the fact that TV and radio were not subject to censorship. However, the magazines did provide other important information missing from the *Times* article. *C&C* pointed out that prime-time TV included complete, live, uninterrupted coverage of events like a

visit to Nicaragua by Jesse Jackson, including the tough questions he asked Daniel Ortega about religious freedom and the Miskito Indians. Political debates, too, were covered in their entirety. The reporting in *C&C* was not one-sided though, because it found on the other hand that public TV news was quite biased in favor of the Sandinistas (Reding "Nicaragua's" 425). *NACLA* reminded its readers that each opposition party was allotted automatic, free, uncensored time on the radio and TV each week, and could buy more with the campaign funds received from the government. It also said that CDN rallies were reported live on private radio stations (Spence 12).

C&C's Reding had a unique view of Nicaragua's press, and found all three newspapers biased: one toward the CDN, another toward the Sandinista government, and the third toward Christian political movements (like the PPSC political party). In this, he viewed the press in Nicaragua as a traditional "marketplace of ideas," with censorship of *La Prensa* providing a measuring stick for the openness of Nicaraguan society. He was therefore impressed that *La Prensa*, often associated with the contras, was freely available in the war-torn north. However, both magazines said that press censorship had been all but done away with in Nicaragua. According to observer reports, they are being too generous to the Sandinistas in saying this. The magazines were half-right, because *La Prensa* was able to bad-mouth the FSLN any time it wanted to, on virtually all subjects. Censorship was still abused though, on matters relating to the unpopular draft, economic shortages, and the PLI's withdrawal from elections.

Moving on, the next controversial topic is the *turba* phenomenon, that is, the disruptions of Arturo Cruz's rallies. Cruz's own accusations on the topic were discussed in chapter two. Though not as extreme as his story, other accounts of the events did describe the crowds as mobs, angry and out of control, and as possibly using Sandinista vehicles for transport (though no other account described them as an explicit conspiracy

as Cruz did). There were also many accounts that varied considerably from these. Multiple eye-witnesses claimed that the mobs formed spontaneously, and were comprised mostly of angry housewives and citizens—especially the widows of those that had died either in the revolution or in the contra war—who saw Cruz as a contra supporter (LASA 24-25). The human rights observer group from Americas Watch concluded that there was no organized attempt by the FSLN to disrupt the rallies, though they did admonish that:

> There is no doubt . . . that the FSLN has a large measure of political and moral influence over these organizations. . . Accordingly, it was the responsibility of the FSLN to avoid incidents that could only have a chilling effect on citizens contemplating participating in opposition politics. (10).

Some aspects of the *turba* issue were not under dispute: the CDN was the only group that had problems from turbas (BPHRG 20).[13] The Sandinistas disciplined members of the FSLN that were involved, and the police were on-hand at the rallies to maintain order, and made arrests when things got out of control. Though the police did not stop the crowds from chanting angrily and wielding sticks, stories that rocks were pelted at Cruz were never substantiated, nor were allegations that government vehicles were used to bring in protesters. Afterward, the Supreme Electoral Council of Nicaragua ran paid advertisements in the papers urging people to respect all political voices, and to be orderly at rallies. The disturbances quickly trailed off, and none were reported in the last two months of the election period.

The *Times* seemed unaware of the subtleties of these events in their discussion of the *turbas*:

> Mr. Cruz had a rough reception at the three towns he visited this week. On two occasions, including today in Masaya, he needed a police escort

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[13]The only exception was a little-reported instance of a mob that disrupted a protest rally by widows of contra deaths, reportedly composed of CDN supporters (LASA 24).

> through a hail of rocks form hostile demonstrators. Many of today's protesters were brought to Masaya on Government vehicles. They chanted "Reagan's man, go home!" and "The people have already had their election!" (23 Sept. 1984).

The disruptions were repeatedly referred to in subsequent articles, but the disciplinary action taken by the FSLN was never reported. The only FSLN response (in words or action) ever offered in the papers was this sorely misrepresentative Daniel Ortega quotation: "We are not ashamed to be mobs because to be part of a mob is to be part of the people" (qtd in *Times* 24 Sept. 1984).

As the pattern seemed to go, *NACLA* filled in many of the blanks left by the coverage in the *Post* and the *Times* (*C&C* did not address the *turbas*). Using the LASA observer report as a reference, the magazine said that campaign violence was exaggerated in the US press. It also said that the violence was extremely minimal for Latin America; the only major injury was a stab wound received by a Sandinista supporter (Spence 10-12). This was trivial, it remarked, compared to recent election campaigns in Panama, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic (Black "Nicaragua" 3).

The implication by Arturo Cruz and the Reagan administration, frequently hinted by the *Times* and the *Post*, was that *turbas* were just one manifestation of a Sandinista government that had a tight grip on Nicaraguan society—a government that badly abused the advantages of incumbency. The LASA observation delegation paid particular attention to these sorts of accusations, and investigated complaints. It found that:

> The FSLN took substantial advantage of its incumbent position and, in some ways, abused it. However . . . generally speaking, in this campaign the FSLN did little more to take advantage of its incumbency than incumbent parties everywhere (including the United States) routinely do, and considerably *less* than ruling parties in other Latin American countries traditionally have done. (Summary)

The *Times* and the *Post* did not offer this type of contextualized analysis. They didn't raise the point that Nicaragua had no democratic tradition, or hail the progress that

this democratic election, despite its problems, necessarily represented. Instead, each small problem was fleshed out and emphasized. As was pointed out earlier in this chapter, the mainstream papers also did not acknowledge the genuine popularity of the Sandinistas, a popularity to be expected five years after leading a popular revolution, and following 20 years of grass-roots organizing. Instead, the popularity of the Sandinistas, and their presence throughout the society, were considered suspect. Following the pattern that is developing in analyzing the mainstream press, one *Post* article, instead of reporting real events concerning the elections, spoke only in the hypothetical and without evidence to back up the claim:

> Although voters register without party affiliation, the Sandinista Front's countrywide organization, including the Army, militia and grass-roots Sandinista Defense Committees, are expected to guarantee that large numbers of revolutionary supporters get registered, something for which the opposition parties to not have the network. (*WP* 4 July 1984).

The *Post* paper did not later round out this theme by reporting the careful thoroughness of the registration period that resulted in 93% registration, or the daily newspaper advertisements paid for by the CSE, that urged all Nicaraguans to register to vote and explained how to do so. Concerning the CDS's, LASA found that "the only concrete cases of governmental abuse involving CDS's during the pre-election period which we encountered was their use in at least some neighborhoods to distribute FSLN campaign propaganda (exclusively), and to mobilize people to go to FSLN campaign rallies" (27). This was not reflected in the mainstream press reports.

The Supreme Electoral Council, too, was subject to skepticism in the mainstream papers. When Ortega left to the council the controversial decision of whether to postpone the elections for the CDN, the *New York Times* pointed out that "All of the council's members have expressed support for the Sandinista Front" (21 Sept. 1984). Here was a return of the meaningless word "support," which insinuated a deck stacked against "the

opposition." The paper conspicuously neglected to report a key development concerning the CSE: the council had grown by two members earlier in the summer, after complaints by various opposition parties that the original (Supreme Court-elected) members were all three Sandinista supporters. The two new members were nominated by the National Council of Political Parties, a body created under the law of political parties and composed of one member from each party participating in elections. This resulted in the addition of two new members from opposition parties; by definition, not Sandinista supporters (LASA 11).

Finally, one of the graver accusations by Cruz and the Reagan administration alleged that not only was the FSLN abusing its incumbency to tilt the election in its favor, but that it was in fact using its supposed control of the society to intimidate Nicaraguans into voting, and to create a general climate of fear. (Because the CDN was not running, it was hoping for a high voter-abstention rate as "proof" of the Sandinistas' low popularity and the illegitimacy of the election to Nicaraguan eyes. The Sandinistas, of course, desired the reverse.) LASA's delegation, in response to these allegations, concluded that

> Neither did the FSLN use its control of mass organizations, the food rationing system, or police to create a generalized climate of fear and intimidation. Our delegation interviewed some individuals who clearly *felt* intimidated by the Sandinista government, but we also observed that many people in Nicaragua are not reluctant to criticize the government, in public, and often in the harshest possible terms. (Summary).

LASA found no evidence of the FSLN intentionally fostering fear or intimidation.

The *Times* and the *Post* alluded several times to Nicaraguan fears that through the CDS's ration cards for basic foodstuffs would be revoked or supplies from the government would be cut off, though they did not attempt to offer evidence that this was a real possibility. In a *Times* article of November 4th, the only Nicaraguan voter interviewed said, "There are rumors that something could happen if you don't vote, that

the next time you need something from the Government you could have trouble." The *Times* article the next day, which covered the election day itself, featured a remarkable three out of seven citizen interviewees expressing fear of the consequences if they were to abstain from voting, a remarkable number considering LASA's findings. Particularly noteworthy was 84 year old Andres Aguirre who said, "I've always voted because it is always required . . . Of course, the law says one thing, but after a while one realizes that voting is part of patriotism, and patriotism leads to long life." (qtd in 5 Nov. 1984). A *Washington Post* article the same day quoted a middle aged lawyer: "'You might have some troubles getting ration cards for milk for your kids if you don't vote,' he said. He made the comment in English, he said, because 'somebody probably is listening.'"

None of these articles explained, though it was highlighted in every observer report, that Nicaragua's balloting system was specifically designed to protect the voter by arranging voting mechanics so that authorities could not tell who did and did not vote in the elections (LASA 11). Therefore, there could be no recourse for abstentions even if it were desired. The papers did not remind the reader that the old Somoza junk elections, just five years in the past, had been marked by National Guard intimidation and brutality, and that perhaps these election-related fears were linked to Nicaragua's violent history.

Christianity and Crisis's Reding, after living in Nicaragua for two months, found that the CDS's, rather than serving as the controlling arm of the revolution, gave staple foods to everyone regardless of political beliefs or participation—he could not find anyone denied their rightful share. Though "I encountered many people who were unhappy with the FSLN," he said, "not once did I hear any complaint about this aspect of the CDS's work in Estelí" ("Central" 422-423). More generally, Reding felt at ease on the streets of Nicaragua because the Sandinista police never patrolled the streets, in marked contrast to the vigilance he had found in Guatemala and Honduras. *NACLA*, too,

addressed this issue. It pointed out that with the hundreds of international journalists and observers on the scene, it would be very difficult for the Sandinistas to use strong-arm tactics or fraud in the elections (Jenkins 8).

Though the mainstream press found the alleged Sandinista climate of intimidation an important news item, it somehow missed the true source of intimidation and fear in Nicaragua at the time: the contra war, fought throughout the election process. Ironically, though president Reagan was spending a great deal of public time and effort to retain Congressional funding for the contras during this period, it was precisely Nicaragua's status as under attack that was most ignored as a factor in the elections, by both the administration itself and the US mainstream press.

Neither of the small magazines failed to notice the contras. A *NACLA* editorial called the contra war "the defining reality of Nicaragua today." The contras attacked brutally, burning down daycare centers and health posts. Because of this, *NACLA's* editor was amazed that the Sandinista revolution could be characterized by a spirit of such pragmatism and openness in this environment (Black "Nicaragua" 17). Reding was particularly aware of the contra reality, having lived in the north of Nicaragua for a time. Though he never reported feeling intimidated by Sandinista officials, he did indeed feel intimidated by the contra gunshots and explosions he heard on a regular basis. In Estelí, the contras still raided and killed, and several of his neighbors were murdered during his stay. He reported that the residents of Estelí believed that the contras were returned National Guardsmen (Reding "Central" 421).

In contrast to this reporting, coverage by the mainstream papers seemed sorely insufficient. Contra activity actually increased dramatically during the campaign period (Robinson and Norsworthy 105), but the *Times* and the *Post* tended to downplay its effects. The papers reported the mere possibility of coercion through ration card

manipulation, while entire contra attacks and battles went ignored. When contra activity was reported, it was minimized with sanitary language. The *Times* said, for example, that "fighting between government troops and insurgents" (the usual euphemism in the newspapers) this month had the result that "110 rebels had been killed and that the Sandinista army had lost 52 of its own." (10 Oct. 1984). Though torture and frequent attacks targeting civilians were well documented, they were not mentioned in the papers, excepting only one August *Washington Post* article.

The *Times* and the *Post* reported several times that "many critics [in Managua] agree that the ongoing guerrilla war may have helped the government somewhat" (*WP* 4 April 1984), though they didn't cover the chorus that found the guerrilla war extremely damaging to the Sandinistas in obvious ways. The absurd notion was backed by the idea, soon adopted by the editorial boards of both papers, that "The Sandinistas . . . use America's attacks to justify economic failure, increasing dictatorship and military alignment with Cuba and the Soviet bloc" (*NYT* 27 Sept. 1984).

Contra activity caused massive economic damage during the election period, and eight election officials were killed, 13 injured, and one kidnapped (Robinson and Norsworthy 105). *C&C* reported this kind of event prominently (Reding "What" 490). But in the mainstream press, elements of these events were printed sparingly: a 141 word wire report on page A10 of the *Washington Post* announced that two voter registration officials that were killed by contras in July, and there was an article that mentioned the contra release of the official they had kidnapped (2 Nov. 1984); the kidnapping had never been reported. Additionally, on election day, a single sentence--appended in brackets at the end of an article about the elections--mentioned that soldiers carrying election materials had been ambushed in a contra attack.

The only instance in which the two mainstream papers did devote a significant

number of inches to the contras was to report the cease-fire called by the contras for election day. The *Post* devoted an article to the topic: there were no "reported clashes" in the "civil strife" in Nicaragua, the *Times* reported on November 5th, the day after elections. The article didn't tell of the nine polls that were forced to remain closed election day due to of contra activity (BPHRG 24).

The *Times* and the *Post* underplayed American coercion in Nicaragua as well as contra aggression. The daily sonic-booms made by American plane flyovers of Managua during the week of elections were cited by *C&C* as rattling, disturbing, and an extremely conspicuous form psychological intimidation (Reding "What" 490). The sonic booms received A32 coverage by the *Washington Post* in an article that said only: "A loud explosion was heard in Managua at about 11:30 a.m. . . . A military spokesman said that the explosion was only the noise of the sonic boom" (1 Nov. 1984).

Overall, *Christianity and Crisis* and *NACLA* presented the Sandinistas as part of a fully contextualized Nicaragua. Each had their own strengths; *C&C* preferred social issues, *NACLA* political ones. And while they had weaknesses in each others' areas (*C&C* did not directly address *turbas* or the state of emergency; *NACLA* omitted discussion of the social achievements and popularity), between them they addressed every important aspect pertaining to the Sandinistas. While sometimes too lenient toward the FSLN, as in the case of press censorship, they managed for the most part to discover problems along with commendable areas, and not to simply take the FSLN's part in every issue; *C&C's* concerns about communist propaganda broadcast over the radio and about biased evening news are examples of this. The magazines did sometimes produce reporting that was more conservative than what the carefully researched observer reports had found, and sometimes less. Yet the remarkable part is that, though the magazines did not work in concert with the observer reports (though *NACLA* once cited LASA's report

in an article published after the elections were over), their findings were virtually identical regarding the FSLN, and related election issues.

In contrast, the *Times* and the *Post* provided only very selective reporting of events concerning the FSLN during the election period. Key events, without which many of the election issues and developments could not be properly understood, were left unreported. For example, the strong disciplinary action and education that followed the *turba* events, and the fact that these events stopped occurring two months before the elections, were never reported; nor was the isolation of Bishop Pablo Vega in his sharp criticism of the Sandinistas. Other factors were strongly implied, but were not investigated for legitimacy. The implication that the Sandinistas were intimidating Nicaraguans into voting was an example of this. No evidence for coercion was offered, or even sought, and there was no meaningful analysis. For example, election-related fear was not placed in the context of Nicaragua's violent history. Other aspects of Sandinista coverage were reported out of all proportion. The papers focused again and again on Nicaraguans' discontent with the Sandinistas, never mentioning citizens that supported the Sandinistas during the campaign period, despite their acknowledgment that the Sandinistas were expected to win the election by a landslide.

After months of this kind of treatment, of prominent FSLN criticism with a trickle of praise, the mainstream press succeeded in creating an overall image of the FSLN that approached the terms in which Ronald Reagan liked to describe it: totalitarian, manipulative, hated by Nicaraguans. When the *Times* did finally devoted an entire article to Daniel Ortega a few days before the elections and reported that he "affirmed that the Sandinistas were committed to democracy," professing that, "We have not betrayed the original program of the Sandinista Front" the words sounded hollow, contradicted by the disparaging coverage of the FSLN that had come before.

MEDIA ANALYSIS: ARTURO CRUZ, ELECTORAL LAWS AND VARIOUS NEGOTIATIONS

Because the elections were primarily of interest for what they said about the Sandinistas, the portrayal of the FSLN was arguably the most meaningful aspect of election press coverage. However, the heart of the election issues, and their controversy, lay with Arturo Cruz and the Coordinadora. It lay, too, with the seemingly endless negotiations between the alliance and the Sandinistas, adjusting the structure and conditions of the elections. That, then, is the domain of this chapter. Following a brief reminder of what Reagan administration and observer viewpoints on these topics were, this chapter will discuss how the *Times, Post, NACLA and Christianity and Crisis* covered the election issues concerning Arturo Cruz and the Coordinadora.

The discussion will first examine how the publications treated the central role in elections given to Cruz by the Reagan administration, a role strongly disputed in observer reports. It will then follow coverage of the negotiations of the electoral law, and negotiations between the CDN and the Sandinistas throughout the election period. Special attention will be paid to the same key reporting devices discussed in chapter three: contextualization, supporting evidence, and analysis of events.

It was primarily Arturo Cruz's loudly proclaimed boycott of Nicaragua's elections, professedly because he found conditions for them closed and unfair, on which the Reagan Administration based its denouncement of the Nicaraguan elections. The administration ignored the presence of other opposition parties and implied a political duality between the FSLN and the Coordinadora; under this model, there could be no pluralism without the CDN. The administration cited many of the issues debated in

electoral negotiations, such as state of emergency restrictions. But it ignored the negotiations themselves, as well as the epic debates between the Sandinistas and the Coordinadora. Official observers to the election, however, challenged the view put forth by the Reagan administration. Backed with more concrete evidence than was ever cited in US government documents, they found vibrant campaigning by popular opposition parties, and an electoral atmosphere that was truly pluralistic. They concluded that the CDN, while competitive with some of the other opposition parties, had no more importance than the largest three (the PLI, the PCD, and the PPSC). The observers found Cruz's own reasons for boycott lacking as well, noting the consistent flexibility of the FSLN in negotiating the terms of the election, and the free and fair rules and conditions under which the elections were held, despite a few problematic areas.

Contrary to the findings in the observer reports, the mainstream papers proceeded as if Arturo Cruz and the CDN comprised not only the most important opposition in Nicaragua, but the most important political force in Nicaragua altogether. Most mainstream newspaper coverage of the election period was framed from the CDN's perspective, with little representation of the FSLN's voice, and virtually no place for the perspectives of parties that ran against the Sandinistas in the elections. Though the *Times* and the *Post* never offered evidence that the CDN was the most important opposition party, it seemed as if, with any new development in the election saga, the first matter of business was to find out what Arturo Cruz thought of it. This alone, this constant referral to the opinions of Cruz and the CDN, went far in legitimizing the alliance and its political views, making them appear the largest and the "only legitimate" opposition. Saying so outright later on in the election period cemented the impression.

By contrast, *NACLA* and *C&C* did not focus inordinately on Cruz or the CDN. In fact, *C&C* barely mentioned Cruz, presumably because Cruz had very little effect on

what *C&C's* Redding observed during the election period in Nicaragua. Reding spent more time focusing on the PLI and the PCD, in concert with the levels importance attached to the two parties in observer reports. *NACLA* did mention Cruz considerably more frequently. One article could even be said to have revolved around him. However, the real purport of the article was a critical analysis of the central role appointed Cruz by the Reagan administration and the US press. It acknowledged that the Reagan administration *made* Cruz into news, so he and his coalition could not be ignored.

At the same time, they could not be accepted at face value; Cruz's role had to be analyzed, his validity tested. The article concluded that Cruz's central role of electoral importance was unwarranted, that the CDN possessed the loud political voice it did because its members were wealthy, well-traveled and well-educated, and that many of Cruz's arguments, forwarded by the Reagan administration, were full of holes (Jenkins 5-8). Because the two alternative magazines did not place Cruz in a central role for deciding election legitimacy, they will not factor heavily into the following discussion of Cruz's role at the forefront of reporting in the *Times* and the *Post*. They will, however, return to the playing field for the later discussion of the electoral law and negotiations.

Though President Reagan and Secretary of State Shultz never went into a great deal of detail about Arturo Cruz (i.e. "there is a resurgence of interest on the part of the people that is notable, through the efforts of Arturo Cruz and others, toward pluralism" [Reagan "Interview With the Editors" 1698]), the mainstream US press filled in where the politicians left off. Yet in all of the inches devoted to Cruz and the CDN in the *Times* and the *Post*, it was never suggested in their pages that to stigmatize an election solely because one party chose not to run of their own free will was a logical fallacy. *NACLA* pointed out that, "Sandinista leadership clearly resented the fact that international reaction to the elections was dependent on the participation of a group whose interests

they believe are allied to the United States" (Jenkins 5-8), a situation strongly exacerbated by the mainstream press.

The proportions of articles concerning various topics are telling. Of 69 *New York Times* articles that were substantively about the Nicaraguan elections, five of the articles were specifically and exclusively about the Coordinadora, nine more were devoted expressly to articulating the CDN's point of view, and an additional four were reserved for Arturo Cruz, constituting about a quarter of the articles all told. In comparison, there were only two articles that specifically demonstrated the FSLN's point of view, and three about Daniel Ortega, the president of the Nicaragua and presidential candidate for the FSLN—one of these appeared after the elections were over. Several of the few articles that highlighted the FSLN's perspective were countered the same day with a disparaging report on the elections or the Sandinistas from Reagan's perspective, or that of some other Sandinista critic. A total of four articles were devoted in a substantive way to some part of the six other opposition parties running in the elections; two of these were about the PLI's decision to withdraw from elections, and a third was about the meeting in which the PCD "was expected" to vote to withdraw from elections. The *Washington Post's* statistics, while slightly more admirable than those of the *Times*, are similar.

In July when Arturo Cruz entered the scene, coverage of the elections picked up rapidly in both papers. In one week the *New York Times* devoted three lengthy articles to Arturo Cruz and his return to Nicaragua, specifying his complaints against elections and the Sandinistas, as well as his plans and demands. His "cheering supporters" at the airport—an immense several hundred—were described, as were the "euphoric" members of the "opposition" in Nicaragua, at the "long-awaited return of their most prominent champion." No distinction was made between the CDN and other opposition parties, in particular with regard to Cruz's declaration that he would be the "candidate of a united

opposition" (*NYT* 29 July 1984).

In stark contrast stood the one article about Daniel Ortega that appeared in the *Times* before the week of elections. It was cold and distant, stating only facts and simple quotations. For example:

> Mr. Ortega announced he would address the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday. 'Naturally we are going to emphasize the importance of Nicaragua's acceptance of the Contadora Act,' he said. Mr. Ortega said that he was planning a series of meetings in New York and that he hoped to travel to Los Angeles before returning home." (28 Sept. 1984)

The article also set Ortega firmly against Cruz in a dualistic drama, without space for the opposition parties that participated in the elections. The article featuring Ortega on Oct. 30th, a few days before the elections were held, was even colder: "Sandinista leaders, now without substantial opposition in their campaign, have concentrated their efforts on guaranteeing a big voter turnout. They appear to believe that this will show the world they have popular support."

Even if the CDN were the most important competitor in the elections, and Cruz the most popular opposition figure, the relative proportion of mainstream news coverage they received would remain grossly unbalanced in their favor, to the detriment of Ortega and the Sandinistas. Yet neither the mainstream papers—nor the US administration for that matter—were ever able to offer evidence in support of such a postulate in the first place. Nonetheless, that didn't keep them from operating as if they had.

At first implicitly and later stated definitively, the *Times* and the *Post* gave Cruz and the CDN the role of "opposition leaders," or the "main opposition" in the elections. Even articles that were otherwise quite impartial suffered under the unproved and highly doubtful impression. An August 7th *Post* article announced the second easing of state of emergency restrictions. It was a pragmatic article in which an FSLN decision was reported primarily from the point of view of the FSLN, and the entire opposition (not just

the CDN) was given a say as well. However, even this article called the Coordinadora the "largest political group opposing the Sandinistas," a distinction that just would not do—the idea was found laughable inside Nicaragua, according to observer reports.

It is actually possible to track the increasing and unquestioned status of Cruz in the estimation of the mainstream press. An April *Washington Post* article implied that all of the opposition parties combined, including the PLI and the PCD as the largest and best organized, were nearly as big or bigger than the FSLN.[14] A contradictory article in June then described all opposition parties as "tiny" (25 June 1984). But by July and forever after, the Coordinadora was transformed into the "main opposition," and in August received the distinction of being the "largest political group" (7 Aug. 1984). The *Times* was on a similar schedule, explicitly calling the Coordinadora the "principal opposition coalition" for the first time in a Week in Review article on the first of July.

Ironically, crowds gathering around Cruz were never reported to be more than "several hundred," except in one article that cited "thousands" of supporters between two different Cruz rallies (*NYT* 26 Aug. 1984). This was noted by Clemente Guido, leader of the opposition PCD party, and reported in *NACLA*. On Cruz's most recent visit to Managua, Guido said, "Cruz was unable to rally more than 50 people, most of them press" (Black "Nicaragua" 18). In the *Times* and the *Post*, numbers never got more specific than in these vague counts. The contradiction of the major opposition drawing "hundreds" to his rallies was never pointed out in the mainstream papers, and no other proof of the CDN's importance or popularity was ever offered by them.[15] Nonetheless, the distinction of the CDN as "opposition leader" became so standard that a journalist assigned to Costa Rica who did not ordinarily write about Nicaragua sounded quite

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[14] Though it falsely attributed the CDN's electoral complaints to the entire opposition spectrum.

[15] Rallies for other opposition parties were not reported in the mainstream papers.

uninformed when he referred to Cruz as the "head of a coalition of small opposition parties," though he was in fact correct by most accounts.[16]

The phrase "opposition leader" was a problematic one. The wording was ambiguous and undefined, and it was thrown about by both newspapers with abandon. The term almost always referred specifically to the CDN, coming to be synonymous with Coordinadora at times. Headlines such as "Sandinista Opposition Nominates Candidate" crowning an article about Cruz's presidential nomination (the other parties had already nominated their candidates and with little fanfare from the papers) were common (*NYT* 26 July 1984). No definition of the phrase was forthcoming however, and to add to the confusion, it would be expanded to include other opposition parties on rare, unpredictable occasions.

Though it took time for the newspapers to grow bold in this type of rhetoric, it was from the start that they featured the CDN almost exclusively in their pages, while ignoring all other opposition groups in Nicaragua. Recall from chapter three that the first article in each paper, about the announcement of the election date, presented the skeptical CDN viewpoint, the skeptical American viewpoint, and no other. Those articles and the vast majority of others about the elections were framed from the Coordinadora's perspective, as demonstrated by the *Post*: "Although the rules are still under debate in the Sandinista-controlled Council of State, the leadership has prepared starkly different election plans [than the CDN would like]" (*WP* 23 Feb. 1984). Three days later the *Post* published another story that was devoted exclusively to the CDN's complaints about election procedures. The next major election article from the *Post* appeared in April on

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[16]*NACLA's* account, for example, described the CDN as comprised of three small political parties, two of which could claim only a few hundred members, the third of which has fallen from its height of 5,000 members in the early eighties; Nicaragua was a country of three million people at the time. When the FSLN says the CDN is a minority, wrote the journalist, "they are probably right" (Jenkins 5).

the front page, and it too, was exclusively about the Coordinadora, with slight acknowledgment of the PLI, and so on and so forth.

One might argue that it is newsworthy when a political group complains that its country's elections are fundamentally undemocratic, and so this press focus on the CDN was warranted. If this is the case however, it is then imperative that the legitimacy of such complaints be analyzed and placed in a proper context so that readers can correctly understand the issues involved. Such weighty complaints cannot be accepted at face value as a matter of course. In the case of these papers though, the word of the CDN seems to have been enough. As we will continue to see, neither critique nor FSLN rebuttal was usually offered when CDN's complaints were reported.

The papers lent vast legitimacy to the CDN in this framing of election articles from its perspective. From February through early October, the major manifestation of this behavior was found in the coverage of Nicaragua's electoral law—which encompassed the entire electoral framework—and of negotiations between the FSLN and opposition parties, especially the CDN of course. Recall from chapter two that over forty amendments to the electoral law were made by the Sandinistas in this period, earning the FSLN a reputation for remarkable flexibility, especially concerning the electoral framework. The FSLN also extended the deadline for party registration for the CDN multiple times after the alliance failed to register. Yet these things were not the subjects of mainstream news articles during the lengthy election period. As we shall see, more typical topics were ones like these: "The Sandinista Government announced Thursday night that it would allow opposition parties 12 weeks to wage the first national political campaign since the 1979 takeover. But opposition leaders said . . ." (*NYT* 26 May 1984). "Mr. Ortega gave no suggestion that the Government was considering further concessions to opposition parties in order to persuade them to participate in the election" (*NYT* 23

July 1984). "They did not provide conditions for a fair election, so we are staying out" (*NYT* 23 August 1984), and so it continued.

Let us begin with the electoral law. The stipulations of this law and its origins were entirely ignored in the mainstream press's copious coverage of the elections. Instead, the complaints about it were listed. The *Times* and the *Post* never mentioned the multi-party commission to study the constitutions and electoral laws of European and Latin American democracies. They barely addressed the free weekly radio and TV time that was allotted to each political party under the electoral law, and the government funding of each party. They didn't report the expansion of the free media allotments after opposition groups complained that the original portions were not enough. When the Sandinistas extended the campaign period by a month after complaints by other parties—complaints covered in several articles in the two papers—the *Times* and the *Post* did not report that either. The multiple registration deadline extensions for the CDN were glossed over. The expansion of the Supreme Electoral Council to add two opposition party members was never reported. The unique electoral rule designed by the Sandinistas, in which the presidential candidates for all losing parties were to receive a seat in the National Assembly, was barely mentioned.

Each of these developments in the electoral law could be found reported in the articles of *NACLA* and *C&C*, which clearly recognized the importance of describing the electoral framework in order to analyze the election. As I said, these two publications did not place Cruz in a central role for deciding the legitimacy of the elections, but rather judged the election in its own merits. *C&C* devoted an entire article to the Nicaraguan electoral system and its negotiation (Reding "System"). *NACLA* went so far as to translate how far the government allotted money (9 million Córdobas) could go toward purchasing more media time. Additionally, *NACLA* published a list of each concession

made by the FSLN, as well as the three points about which they would not compromise, in a timeline (Jenkins 6-7).

The two magazines also went into detail about these other aspects of the elections that were ignored by the mainstream press: the vote casting and counting procedures, the carefully trained electoral staff of 40,000 Nicaraguans, and the permission of representatives from each party to be present for every step of the registration, voting and counting procedures. Finally, and in no uncertain terms, *NACLA* and *C&C* reported their individually thought-out conclusions that the entire electoral framework was geared to include opposition parties, and to be as accommodating, and as free of fraud as possible—conclusions in stark contrast to the implications of the *Times* and the *Post.*

Instead of listing these many aspects of the electoral law, the *Times* kept close track of each move by the CDN. It noted, for example, the various times the CDN walked out of the early electoral debates in protest, but paid virtually no attention to the debates themselves, or to the rules of the electoral law. Both papers seemed to report on the debates only to list the CDN's complaints, and uncritically. The May 14th *Washington Post* article "Nicaraguan Timetable Criticized," for example, delivered just what it promised, and no more.

The CDN's complaints themselves were centered on the state of emergency, and the CDN's nine points for fair elections. The mainstream newspaper analysis of the state of emergency was already discussed in chapter three, so we move to the nine points. These documented CDN complaints, in particular, were controversial topics often mentioned and never scrutinized by the *Times* and the *Post.* Otherwise a savvy journalist would have noted that several of the points, such as freedom of religion, the promulgation of an amnesty law for contras, and arguably laws that "respected human rights" (though definitions are subjective in this area), were already quite present in Nicaragua. Instead,

the validity of the complaints was not discussed. *NACLA* reported the Sandinista argument that the nine points had nothing to do with the mechanics of free and fair elections (Jenkins 5). *C&C* wrote about the CSE's suggestion that the Coordinadora run with the nine points as their platform—then the people could choose democratically—but that Cruz refused (Reding "Central" 427). None of these things was reported or discussed in the *Times* or the *Post.*

As the early tension between the CDN and the Sandinistas rose, the contras began to enter into the debate. Some of the contras, among them a man named "Eden Pastora, a former Sandinista hero" (*WP* 4 July 1984), offered in the early summer to lay down their weapons if the demands of the CDN were heeded, and even began to demand their own place in the elections.[17] If the *Post* and the *Times* had been reluctant to identify with the FSLN, they were certainly willing to do so for the contras. The *Post* wrote three articles at the beginning of the summer, and the *Times* one, that were exclusively from the perspective of the contras, and allowed the brutal guerrillas to plead their case for running in elections. The reporters did not add any reference to the daily murder, torture and economic destruction the contras were carrying out. Nor did they point to the unlikelihood of any sovereign government allowing the leaders of those that were attacking it from the outside participate in national elections.

When Cruz returned shortly afterward to Nicaragua he was depicted by the press as a peacemaker, firmly demanding that the nine points be recognized, particularly negotiation with the contras. This demand for negotiations with attackers clearly had no

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[17] Eden Pastora was a somewhat different case than other contras. His anti-Somoza credentials were solid, and he did fight as a Sandinista during the revolution. He was probably as wary of ex-National Guardsmen as most Nicaraguans were. However, his faction of the contras was a small minority compared to the separate and dominant FDN, the primary contra group and the one that received most of the US contra aid. The FDN's leadership was comprised almost entirely of ex-National Guardsmen, as established in chapter two. Though both newspapers chose Pastora as their personality focus for the contras, he was not indicative of most contras, nor was he the only contra leader trying to manipulate the election process.

relevance to electoral fairness, yet the *Times* faithfully reported that "Only if the Sandinistas agree to begin peace talks with insurgent rebels, [Cruz] declared, will he become an official candidate" (29 July 1984).[18] At the same time the newspapers reported that "church leaders" had been urging the FSLN to open elections to the "rebels," and berating them along with the *Washington Post* editorial staff when they refused. A much later *Times* article followed up the period by highlighting that Cruz had dropped his demand for contra negotiations, implying that it was in the interest of continuing with election negotiations (16 Aug. 1984). The article failed to mention that the demand was dropped when the contras, not Cruz, lost interest in the proposal (Robinson and Norsworthy 103-104).

Sandinista compromise, though frequent and much remarked on by observer reports (and *NACLA* and *C&C*), was not often reported in the *Times* and the *Post*; the complaints that either led to compromise or called compromise insufficient, were. To the contrary, the *Times* and the *Post* often found ways to demonstrate, or at least to imply linguistically, a rigidity in the way the Sandinistas conducted themselves, often using quotations and episodes reported out of context.

When "opposition leaders" complained, before the lifting of emergency restrictions, that they were not able to hold rallies, advertise or make speeches and so were unable to recruit new members, the *Post* paraphrased a Sandinista response that "the Sandinistas needed no ones permission to recruit when true opposition existed" (1 July 1984). It seems likely that the Sandinistas had something more than this to say on the subject, but other comments went unrecorded by the *Post*. Even if this were the only response, the *Post* correspondent should have reported the pertinent fact that, at the time

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[18] Cruz's advocacy for the contras was actually a major detriment to his ability to gain popularity among Nicaraguans, as he came to be seen as the political face of the guerrillas.

the article was published, the long awaited lifting of the state of emergency was expected on the fifth anniversary of the revolution, a date only two and a half weeks distant. In a different implication of Sandinista intransigence, the *Times* reported that Ortega "rejected Mr. Cruz's demand for talks with the rebels as 'totally unacceptable.'" This rigid reaction came ten days after the substantial lifting of the state of emergency, but the article didn't mention the recent compromise. Instead it went on to say that "The Sandinistas are making it clear that the election is for the purpose of 'confirming revolutionary power,' not to allow someone like Mr. Cruz . . . to come to power" (29 July 1984).

Though the CDN's methodology usually involved boycott rather than compromise, especially where the demand for contra negotiations—so irrelevant to the fairness of the elections—was concerned, inflexibility on the part of the CDN was usually not reported by the *Times* or the *Post*. The *Post* rightly highlighted a series of meetings in early August between the FSLN and the participating electoral parties, discussing campaign conditions with the intent of devising additional FSLN concessions in the interest of electoral fairness (7 Aug. 1984). Both the *Times* and the *Post* reported the announcement of these new concessions, and unfettered by opposition complaints—a landmark for each. We learn from *NACLA* what neither newspaper writes, however: the Sandinistas invited the CDN to these meetings as well, and the CDN rejected this chance at dialogue and negotiation, refusing to participate unless the FSLN agreed to negotiations with the contras first (Jenkins 8).

There was one instance in which the CDN's intractability was belatedly revealed. The *Post* told in October of events from July, in which the Sandinistas had offered to concede the CDN's demands in exchange for a letter from Cruz to President Reagan. The letter would ask Reagan to end contra aggression against Nicaragua so that the

elections could proceed in peace. Cruz refused, with excuse only that the idea was "absolutely ridiculous" (2 Oct. 1984). The reporting was technically objective, but Cruz was shown to be the fool by the absurdity of his remark; the FSLN's usual treatment had been applied to him.

Returning to the subject of contextualization in the negotiations between the Sandinistas and the Coordinadora, it must be said that context was not always enough to guarantee an impartial article. The *New York Times* published an article in August about the CDN losing its legal status as a consequence of not registering for elections, as per the previously established law of political parties. This unusual article was full of accurate and contextualizing aspects: all six participating opposition parties were mentioned, and the FSLN was given a say. A Sandinista official was even quoted saying that Cruz "has a very inflated image abroad, far beyond the level of its true strength within Nicaragua" (23 August 1984).

Even in the case of this more balanced article however, Sandinista and alternate opposition party perspectives were embedded in an article that showcased the Coordinadora point of view. The article began and ended with the arguments of the CDN. The article was full of phrases such as, "Cruz backers, however . . ." that followed any information about the FSLN, and introduced whole new sets of demands for free elections that had previously been in the background or nonexistent. This led eventually to the focal point of the article, the CDN's statement that: "At this point, it looks impossible for us to participate . . . They did not provide conditions for a fair election, so we are staying out" (23 Aug. 1984). This all came two weeks after a second major revision of electoral rules and civil liberties by the Sandinistas, the ones for which the CDN had boycotted discussions. Indeed, *NACLA*'s coverage attested that at this time the FSLN had "announced the lifting of almost all the restrictions established under the state

of emergency" (Jenkins 8).

Changing demands were a hallmark of the CDN/Cruz strategy in these negotiations. After Cruz's primary demand of Sandinista negotiations with the contras became moot (when the contras lost interest), he returned to demands related to the state of emergency, along with various other new demands that would materialize. The mainstream press kept up, and without comment. According to the *Times,* as of the August 23rd article discussed above, Cruz's demands included the release of "scores of prisoners," arrangements for foreign observers to monitor elections, and sweeping changes in the form of the Nicaraguan government (the second condition was already in place, and had never been in doubt). By the middle of September though, the *Times* reported demands that had undergone a curious metamorphosis, as old demands had been forgotten, and new ones presented: they included complete press freedom, no disruption of rallies, the removal of election machinery from the hands of CDS's, and no voting booths near military installations (this time was is the third demand that was moot; election machinery was never in the hands of the CDS's, but rather of highly trained election officials). (14 Sept. 1984).

A week later the *Times* reported that the Sandinistas had made concessions on every item Cruz listed. This was still not enough though, because a new issue was now on the table, the one that became the most contentious as the elections approached: postponement of their date (21 Sept. 1984). Cruz stated and maintained from this point on that elections on the fourth of November would be a farce, though later ones under similar conditions would be legitimate. There is a large gap between farce and legitimacy, a rather remarkable one for a schedule change of a few weeks. Following the old pattern though, Cruz's demand was reported in the *Times* article, but the validity of the demand, and of Cruz's "farce," went unquestioned.

This brings us to the negotiations in Rio de Janeiro, the culmination of discussions between Cruz and the FSLN, in which a change of election date and a contra cease-fire were both seriously discussed, but in which talks broke down before the mutually beneficial agreement could be finalized (see chapter two). The coverage from Rio de Janeiro, reported by different correspondents situated permanently in Rio, was a refreshing example of great reporting in both mainstream papers, and was treated well in *NACLA* too (*C&C* did not address the Rio negotiations). The period lasted from October 2nd to the 4th, and contained some of the best reporting and analysis to be found in both the *Post* and the *Times*. The mainstream articles were in most respects actually more discerning than the *NACLA* account for these events, and went into more detail.

The *Times* and the *Post* both demonstrated thorough investigations of each negotiator's side of the issue, and accurately depicted what was on the table, and what was at stake in a broader sense. Both found the explanation for the collapse of talks inconclusive, and went far out of their way to suggest plausible reasoning for a balk on each side, such as threat of American invasion if the election was delayed past the US election date (i.e. Reagan's assumed reelection), and Cruz having overstepping his authority within the CDN. There was never an implication that blame belonged to one side or the other. This was in perfect concert with the reports of the observer delegations, which found both sides at fault in the Rio negotiations. In another good move, the *New York Times* printed on successive days an article from Ortega's point of view, and then one from the US administration's during this time. The major flaw in this reporting was that these reporters, too, clung to the notion that Cruz and the CDN comprised the only major opposition to the Sandinistas. Then, with the return of election events to Nicaragua and to the mainstay Nicaraguan correspondents, so was there a return to the mainstay Nicaraguan reporting.

After the Rio negotiations ended, discussion between the FSLN and the CDN essentially came to a standstill, though many international players urged the two sides to continue to strive for an agreement. Before the negotiations, the *Times* reported that, "several important leaders, especially president Belisario Betancur of Colombia, are pressing the Sandinistas to change election laws to persuade the Cruz coalition to take part," (*NYT* 23 Sept. 1984). Afterward, the *Post* printed: "Coordinator officials said former chancellor Willy Brandt of West Germany, representing the Socialist International, had written a letter to Nicaraguan head of state Daniel Ortega, asking that [the negotiations from Rio de Janeiro] be resumed" (*WP* 4 Oct. 1984).[19]

Selective reporting was misleading in these cases, and in others instances where international opinion was reported. For example, as we learn from observer reports as well as from *NACLA*, Brandt wrote this letter to *both* Ortega and to Cruz (Black "Nicaragua" 18). Other than the representatives of the US administration, members of the international community that advised the FSLN or the CDN about the election at this late stage, like Brandt, almost universally pressured both sides to compromise and find agreement. They did not place this responsibility solely on the Sandinistas' shoulders, or the CDN's.

The Rio de Janeiro negotiations were an extreme example of the duality between the FSLN and Cruz that was conveyed by the press. However, this was because all of the other parties had already registered for the elections, had participated in lengthy negotiations with the Sandinistas, and had been on the receiving end of a lot of FSLN compromise. During the Rio negotiations, the other opposition parties were busy campaigning. This brings us to the final element in the mainstream press's illumination

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[19]It was former Chancellor Willy Brandt, head of the Socialist International, who had mediated the negotiations in Rio de Janeiro.

of Cruz and the CDN, to the detriment of the Sandinistas: that was their dramatic minimization of opposition parties that were participating in the elections. Most notably this included the Independent Liberals (PLI) and the Democratic Conservatives (PCD), the opposition groups that each observer report found to be the most popular, and the ones that received the most votes in the elections. One *New York Times* headline, "Sandinistas May Win Big in Elections, but Against Whom?" (7 Oct. 1984), summarized the attitude of the press—and the Reagan administration—perfectly.

Yet there were six other parties participating in the elections, three of which had substantial popularity, according to both election observers and vote returns. *C&C* and *NACLA* were fully aware of the opposition parties, and gave them adequate coverage. Amongst other things, *Christianity and Crisis* noted that the parties on the ballot included the country's two main pre-revolutionary parties, the PCD and the PLI (Reding "Central" 427). A later article found that a full spectrum of political choice was represented, because the CDN and the PCD had essentially the same platform, centered on free enterprise, negotiation with the contras, and anti-communism; the PLI fell somewhere between this extreme and the FSLN's position (Reding "System" 493). *NACLA* reported that there were "vigorous campaigns being waged by the other parties," which all took the opportunity to blame the Sandinistas for what was wrong with the world (Spence 12). With 1,600,00 registered voters, the magazine suggested, if a large proportion of these turned out to vote and opted for any party on the ballot, it would be difficult to say that the elections were not representative (Jenkins 8).

Despite all this, the *Times* and the *Post* hardly mentioned the opposition parties that were not a part of the CDN alliance. One exception to this rule was found in the *Times* profile of the presidential candidate for the Nicaraguan Socialist Party, the party that actually fared second-to-worst in the elections (CCHRD 35). This constituted one of

the four *Times* articles about opposition parties. The PLI and the PCD, the two opposition parties universally agreed have the strongest followings by observer reports (even when taking the CDN into account) were mentioned only rarely. Instead a dualistic political paradigm between the FSLN and the CDN, similar to the Democrats and Republicans in the US, was invented in the mainstream press.

The participating opposition parties were usually dismissed in the mainstream press in one of three ways. Sometimes the size or importance of the parties was maligned. For example, "The Independent Liberals and Democratic Conservatives, remnants of Nicaragua's two traditional parties . . ." (*NYT* 4 Nov. 1984). Other times their platforms were described as too similar to the FSLN's to be relevant: "As things stand, Mr. Ortega's only rivals [in the election] will be people who generally support the Sandinista program." (*NYT* 29 July 1984). Most times they were simply not mentioned as part of the process, and only the CDN's perspective was reported. Contradictions were not infrequent in this area however; a few weeks after the July 29th article above, the same reporter wrote a contradictory and anomalous article, saying that the presidential candidates for the PLI and the PCD "strongly criticized" the Nicaraguan government (23 Aug. 1984)--implying that they did not "generally support the Sandinista program" after all.

The PLI finally became big news and "the most prominent party participating in the campaign" (*WP* 22 Oct. 1984) according to the mainstream press when it voted to boycott the elections. The conditions surrounding the PLI withdrawal received particularly decontextualized and misleading press attention. The *Times* only reported that Virgilio Godoy, the party's president, said he would withdraw because there "were no conditions" for a free election on Nov. 4 (22 Oct. 1984). It mentioned in a later article that since ballots had already been printed, the PLI would remain on them, but did not

bring up the fact again. A different article alluded to Sandinista accusations that the US was interfering with candidates, trying to influence them to boycott.

The reality of the issue was much more complex. The PLI did, on Sept. 28th, vote to boycott the race. However, the debate over this issue was heated, and the vice-presidential candidate Constantino Pereira was quite vocal in his insistence that the party run. At the same time that Godoy announced his intention to withdraw from elections, Pereira used the party's state-allotted half-hour of prime time television to announce that he was still running in the race along with the rest of the PLI. He continued to campaign vigorously, along with many other candidates from the party. The PLI's formal notice of withdrawal to the Supreme Electoral Council was not filed until October 30th, after ballots had been printed and distributed. Since it was impossible to remove the party from the ballots, the CSE announced that any *candidate* that wished could submit an official letter of resignation up to the day of elections in order to withdraw. Though not a single letter of resignation was received, not even from Godoy himself, 40 "unsolicited and legally-unnecessary" letters were submitted by PLI candidates, affirming that they were staying on the ballot (CCHRD 27-28).

Christianity and Crisis was quite concerned about the withdrawal of the PLI. The magazine was put in an awkward position when these events transpired after Reding's first visit to Nicaragua, and before his article about the trip went to press. To solve this problem, when the PLI or the boycott of parties were mentioned in Reding's article, editorial brackets were inserted that briefly mentioning the PLI's withdrawal and added that the election's "integrity as a democratic process has been laid open to new questioning" ("Unusual" 411). However, *C&C* did not automatically assume that the new development invalidated the elections. The magazine explicitly reserved judgment, pending further evidence to be gathered during Reding's return to Nicaragua. After the

correspondent's second trip, he included in his article a full and detailed account of the nuanced events surrounding the PLI's withdrawal (Reding "What" 488-489). *NACLA's* account was nearly as thorough, though it did not bring up the role of Pereira, the PLI vice-presidential candidate (Spence 11).

By contrast, neither the *Post* nor the *Times* reported any of the extenuating circumstances of the PLI withdrawal, which drastically changed the implications of the episode. The *Post* explicitly stated that the PLI was "having trouble pulling out of the election," without explaining the legitimate causes. The article described pro-PLI posters that continued to be plastered on buildings, and ads run in one of the newspapers. Godoy said, "We have tried to stop them from being published, and it's been impossible . . . It's a mysterious thing" (30 Oct. 1984). Yet it was not so mysterious with the whole story revealed.

Toward the end of the PLI scandal, the PCD, too, considered withdrawing from the elections. When a PCD meeting that "looked ready to vote to quit the electoral campaign" (29 Oct. 1984) but was broken up by rowdy youths was reported in the mainstream media, the accounts approached falsity. The identity of the mobbing youths was not a controversial matter; every observer report said that they were the PCD's own young members beyond question, and not Sandinista disrupters. In the *Times'* front page article on the topic though, the youths' identity was not specified. In the *Post*'s, the matter was up for debate with the reporter's own suggestion that labeling the youths PCD was just a ploy to cover up Sandinista interference.

Additionally, the *Post* pointed out that "The lack of a vote at the convention did not prevent the pro-Sandinista newspaper *El Nuevo Diario* from running a banner headline on its front page this morning saying that the conservatives were staying in the race" (30 Oct. 1984). This simple critique was key, because it demonstrated that the

mainstream press was indeed capable of analyzing a situation about which it was reporting. The information was not necessary, but it was included because it demonstrated the bias in *Nuevo Diario*. It was a perfect example of the sort of context and analysis that was missing from most of the election reporting in the mainstream papers.

This brings us to the brink of the elections themselves, a topic for the next chapter. That being the case, a few reflections about the news coverage of the CDN, and its crossroads with the Sandinistas, are due. In this arena the mainstream press again, as with their portrayal of the Sandinistas, presented reporting that was for the most part selective, and lacking proper context and analysis. Using these devices, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* presented a picture once again in concert with the views forwarded by the Reagan administration: a flexible Coordinadora alliance whose only intent was to create truly free elections, and a rigid, uncompromising FSLN, determined to maintain its grip on power.

The reporting neglected compromise in favor of gripes, and the very form elections were to take was implied only through the complaints of the CDN. The electoral conditions and procedures, so acclaimed by observation reports and decried by the CDN and the Reagan administration, were never actually described. Much of this was achieved by the exhaustive amount of time spent by the *Times* and the *Post* in covering Cruz and the CDN—far more than was spent on any other single aspect of the elections. Favoritism of the CDN was coupled with the status granted to it of only "major opposition" in the race, despite the six other competing parties with broadly different platforms. The bias was held to the degree that some of the clearest, most balanced and contextualized reporting in the papers still suffered under the impression, despite so much evidence to the contrary in other sources.

Two of these sources were *Christianity and Crisis* and *NACLA Report on the Americas*. Their findings on these topics were in accord with the findings of observation reports, and supported in a concrete manner. The magazines not only established that six other parties were running in the race, but presented the parties' platforms to demonstrate the breadth of representation, and gave supported estimates of the parties' popularity in Nicaragua. *C&C* and *NACLA* did not accept the role assigned the Coordinadora by the Reagan administration, but nor did they simply write off the alliance. Instead *NACLA*, especially, tracked the different interactions between the alliance and the FSLN, and recorded the outcomes of each negotiation and each offer. Specific lists of what was compromised and what was not, on each side of negotiations, were presented in the magazine. Both *NACLA* and *C&C,* through their in-depth coverage and analysis of the negotiations, concluded that the Sandinistas provided nothing but flexibility, and Cruz and the CDN, in most cases, the opposite. Through negotiations, the magazines found the negotiated structure of elections to be open, fair and competitive.

MEDIA ANALYSIS: ELECTION DAY AND OTHER CONCERNS

We have now seen how four different news publications reported on Nicaragua's election process, including their portrayal of the Sandinistas, of Reagan's "main opposition" the Coordinadora, and of the negotiations of the electoral structure and other issues. Each publication demonstrated distinct trends in how each of these areas were covered, casting either general doubt or general confirmation on the entire process. It is now time to examine the culmination of these trends with the arrival of election day in Nicaragua, and with how the publications dealt with the most controversial issue concerning Arturo Cruz and the CDN, namely, the very motives driving their actions throughout the election period. Subsequently the coverage of the elections themselves, in light of all of the reporting that had come before, will be discussed, including their results and aftermath. Two peripheral issues missing from the analysis up to this point, coverage of the Reagan administration and the perspectives of the editorials will then be addressed. Finally, their will be a discussion concerning the consistency in reporting of all four news publications, the *Times*, the *Post*, *NACLA* and *Christianity and Crisis*.

But first we will start with one of the most fundamental elements affecting election legitimacy, and CDN legitimacy as well—what was possibly the most controversial aspect of the elections. Willy Brandt, former Chancellor of West Germany and mediator of the negotiations at Rio de Janeiro, made these statements before leaving Nicaragua after an October visit that was in hopes of rekindling negotiations:

> . . . the sensible thing would have been for Arturo Cruz's group to participate [but they] missed the train. One must not make the mistake of thinking that Cruz's group is the only opposition group that exists in Nicaragua . . . It is astonishing that [US Secretary of State] Shultz is calling the Nicaraguan elections a sham because a sector of the opposition

> decided not to run of its own accord. (qtd in Robinson and Norsworthy 105).

The ideas brought up here by Brandt, if one is to believe observer reports, are obvious, but they were almost never addressed in the *Post* or in the *Times*. Digging even deeper into the issue, each of the election observation reports I read questioned Cruz's very motives in his role in the election process. In alignment with the Reagan administration, the *Post* and the *Times* framed virtually all articles concerning Arturo Cruz around the premise that Cruz and the CDN had found electoral conditions unfair and unacceptable, and therefore decided to boycott the elections, just as he claimed. However, recall from chapter two that observer reports gave solid evidence for two related theories that turned this assumption on its head, and, if true, would have very serious implications. The first of these was that the CDN had always intended to boycott the elections, even while it gave a pretense of earnest negotiation, in order to embarrass the FSLN and discredit the elections. The second was that they were prodded along in this venture by strong US government pressure (applied to both the CDN and the PLI), and even bribes, to convince them to boycott the elections.

On these matters *NACLA* nonchalantly said that, "a CDN boycott of the elections has been in the cards since the Sandinistas first announced the date of the polls last November" (Jenkins 5). *C&C's* reporting took for granted that Cruz's intent in boycotting was to discredit the elections, and spent very little time on the issue (Reding "Central" 472). These accusatory theories were a major part of the political discourse surrounding Nicaragua's elections. Yet for all intents and purposes, the mainstream press did not even indicate an awareness of them. However, the *Times* and the *Post* printed one exposé-type article each about the elections—articles that stood in marked contrast to the papers' general reporting. Both were on this topic.

On the 30th of July the *Post* proclaimed on its front page: "Sandinista's Foes

Always Intended to Boycott Vote." The article revealed the scandalous information that according to CDN leaders, the alliance had been acting on a long-term plan to embarrass the FSLN by pretending to negotiate election conditions, but to ultimately boycott the vote. Much as CDN critics may have suspected this, the publishing of the fact was big news. The article possessed information that could have in theory stripped the CDN of its credibility, and therefore its ability to undermine international reception of the elections with a boycott. The CDN should have lost credibility with the *Post* at the least. Yet this article came in isolation, and did not affect the future analytical framework for Nicaraguan elections in the *Post*, or the *Times* for that matter. By the next day the article had been forgotten—the *Post* printed an article claiming that despite the many problems he had faced, Cruz "was ready to enter the race . . . if they would open peace talks with the armed Nicaraguan opposition" (31 July 1984). The article of the 30th was not referred to again.

The *New York Times* followed a nearly identical pattern. On October 21st a reporter for the *Times* broke the news that US administration officials were admitting to a heavy-handed role in convincing Cruz and the CDN to boycott the elections, so as to discredit election and FSLN alike. "The Administration never contemplated staying in the race," said one official, "because then the Sandinistas could justifiably claim that the elections were legitimate, making it much harder for the United States to oppose the Nicaraguan Government." The US government had "covertly tried to influence the outcome of foreign elections in the past" the reporter explained. This article was more consequential and more revealing than the one in the *Post* because of its involvement of the US administration. This might help to explain why such startling news was hidden on page twelve of the paper. Unlike articles about alleged FSLN scandals, the US administration as the group under scrutiny was allotted adequate space for rebuttal, in

which it denied the story and explained away the evidence.

The information disclosed in the article drastically altered the significance of Arturo Cruz's boycott, Virgilio Godoy's withdrawal, the near-withdrawal of the PCD, and the elections as a whole—not to mention the role of the Reagan Administration. Yet there was no reference to this new information in future articles. As was the case with the *Post*, the *Times'* overall frame of analysis for the Nicaraguan elections remained unaltered. Cruz's boycott continued to be offered by the *Times* as the major source of doubt about Nicaragua's tarnished elections, and without mention of the US government and its mission to discredit the Sandinistas.

Only one article approached an allusion to the administration's admitted role in Cruz's boycott. It was a *Times* article that articulated the Nicaraguan government's protests to the United States concerning the information revealed in October 21st article. The article ambiguously referenced "a recent news report quoting American officials" as the Sandinistas' source (25 Oct. 1984). This appeared on page nine of the *Times*; a front page article the same day featured Bishop Pablo Vega blasting the FSLN: "Leading Nicaraguan Bishop Says Sandinistas Impose 'Oppressions.'" After this date, the revealing *Times* article of the 21st may as well have never been written. In the *Times* article of October 31st, "Nicaragua Opposition Parties Cite Sandinista Aid and U.S. Pressure," the *Times* failed to cite its own article, or any hint of testimony by US administration officials. By election day, Cruz had once again become "the opposition leader who refused to run for president because, he said, the Sandinistas had stacked the election in their own favor" (*NYT* 5 Nov. 1984).

And so we come to the coverage of election day itself. A commendable article was published by the *New York Times* around election day covering the international observers that would be attending elections, "lending an element of credibility to an

electoral process that has been criticized here and abroad" (4 Nov. 1984). Unfortunately this article was buried on page 20, along with the article about the elections themselves. Though criticism of the elections by Arturo Cruz, the CDN, and Nicaraguan Bishop Pablo Vega were all important enough to receive front-page coverage in the *Times*, the event of elections apparently was not. The *Washington Post* featured the elections on its front page three days running, a vast improvement over the *Times*. However, the content of election articles in the two papers was markedly similar.

Articles about election day in both the *Times* and the *Post* emphasized an alleged general apathy among voters throughout Nicaragua. The *Post* described that in the North voters "trudged" for miles to polling sites. "Long lines moved slowly," it observed, and "some voters complained about the wait" (5 Nov. 1984). The *Times* featured headlines such as "Going Through the Motions in Nicaragua" (4 Nov. 1984), and descriptions like, "lines were generally short. There was little visible enthusiasm . . . although there was interest in some slums, the large houses in comfortable neighborhoods were closed, and people who answered their doors said they considered the election not worth their participation" (5 Nov. 1984). Voter abstention in general was emphasized in both newspapers, a curious thing considering the 75% voter turnout the election produced.

Outside of voter apathy and abstention, the articles on election day in the mainstream papers emphasized all of the same points they had been busy emphasizing throughout the election period, as described in chapters three and four. A *Post* article printed the day of the elections emphasized the climate of controversy created by the CDN and the United States: "The Sandinistas' near monopoly of most major institutions . . . gave them an unrivaled network of activists already in place at the start of the campaign. Government trucks have carried the faithful to Sandinista rallies, and mobs of pro-Sandinista youths have disrupted at least half a dozen opposition rallies" (4 Nov.

1984). Other topics included Arturo Cruz, the CDN's boycott, fear of government retribution for not voting, limits on media time given to opposition parties, press censorship, and the incorrect assertion that Virgilio Godoy was forced to run in elections against his will. The *Post* did point out in a front-page article the day before elections that the CDN had missed an important opportunity by choosing to boycott the elections, for even if there were problems, it would still have resulted in pluralism (3 Nov. 1984). Unfortunately, this sentiment assumed an FSLN-CDN duality, in which pluralism would only exist with Cruz's participation. It only served to reinforce this element in election day reporting by the *Times* and the *Post*.

Additional buttressing of the Cruz-FSLN duality was achieved by a particularly pernicious device found in the *Times*: vague and ambiguous language—the device was used throughout the election period, but was at no time more evident than the day of elections. According to the *Times*, "some" Nicaraguan voters that were interviewed said they hoped their votes would be interpreted as a symbol of their confidence in the Sandinistas, "others" said they would not vote ("There is no one to vote for," explained the abstainers), and "several" critics of the election said they "considered themselves supporters of Arturo Jose Cruz, the opposition leader who refused to run for president because, he said, the Sandinistas had stacked the election in their own favor." The article went on, "But Sebastian Guevara . . . said Mr. Cruz 'is a traitor because he wants us to negotiate with the killers who are murdering our people" (5 Nov. 1984). This was in addition to three different interviewees that expressed fear of official punishment if they abstained from elections. Vagueness served to imply an intense rivalry between Arturo Cruz and the FSLN, accompanied by a population divided for and against Cruz, when in fact there were eight political contenders (including the CDN), five of which had considerable followings. In addition, the ambiguousness of the reporting implied a

tension between Nicaraguans that believed in the validity of the elections, and those that did not.

All of this presented a drastically different picture than the one given in observer reports, or the one given by the election results themselves. The reports certainly brought up the controversial points like Arturo Cruz's boycott, but also a host of other features of elections were discussed. Topics not covered on election day by the *Times* or the *Post* included the procedures and guarantees of voting, electoral conditions for opposition parties—such as the 9 million Córdobas and free weekly media time allotted to opposition parties—or even any mention of the participating opposition parties, except to feature the PLI and PCD's efforts to boycott. There was no allusion to contra violence, or to the endless negotiations and compromises along the road. Most important of all was the absence of any sense of the momentousness of the occasion, these long-promised first elections of Sandinista tenure, a step toward democracy in a country with no democratic tradition.

By comparison, *Christianity and Crisis* seemed absolutely elated about the elections. Both *C&C* and *NACLA*, which published relatively few articles in each issue of their magazines, devoted extensive articles to the topic of election day. *C&C's* Reding had gone back to Nicaragua full of doubts about the electoral process, even despite so many positive impressions from his first two-month visit. As the primary cause of this he cited, interestingly enough, US media coverage, especially its botched reporting about the PLI withdrawal ("What" 488). But Reding found the elections to be free, and quite fair. He alluded in his article to the US government's accusations about elections, but focused on all of the elements identified above, the ones that were sorely missing from the *Times'* and the *Post's* election day coverage. Reding said that out of "dozens" of polls all over Nicaragua, and after observing the sorting and counting of the ballots at a station in

Managua, "nowhere did I witness the slightest hint of coercion. . . among dozens of US and European electoral observers and journalists with whom I traded observations the verdict was unanimous: 'clean as a whistle'" ("What" 489-490).

NACLA's election article, and every observer report I have read, corroborated Reding's version of events, emphasizing the ease of information gathering, and the free access they all had to any polling or vote counting site they wished to observe. Somehow, the *Times* seems to have had a drastically different experience, most likely the result of more misleading and ambiguous language, not diverse experience. It reported that "In some places" observers were allowed to enter voting areas and to question officers. "But at many polls, Sandinista police and soldiers refused admission to journalists" (5 Nov. 1984). This drastic discrepancy effectively cast doubt on what was established by so many other observers to be one of the most spotless areas of the election.

After the elections were over, *NACLA* found itself enthusiastic about the whole process: "Let's think about the Nicaraguan election, because I can't remember a lot of other elections like that in post-revolutionary societies" (Black "Four" 42). *C&C* reported a key result of election day: the satisfaction of opposition leaders that participated in the elections. Both Mauricio Diaz, head of the PPSC (the smallest of the parties with substantial popularity), and PCD party leaders were quoted to the effect that, "this experiment is unique because the Revolution has known how to combine itself with Western democratic forms." The leaders said that even in a country at war, under siege by the world's most powerful country, these steps toward Western democracy took place. "After that, how can you call the FSLN a communist party?" (Reding "What" 491). These sentiments, echoed in the *NACLA* article, were really the most important piece of context of all for the elections, and one that could not be put better by official observers

to the elections themselves.

In the end, if there was any definitive proof that the impressions of the election in the mainstream press were on the wrong track, that the elections were respected by Nicaraguans, that opposition parties besides the CDN had considerable support and clout with Nicaraguans, and that the Sandinistas did not have a choke-hold on the society, it was found in the election results themselves. The Sandinistas received two-thirds of the vote overall. This was enough to show strong societal support for the government, but little enough to debunk theories of totalitarianism. The Sandinistas did not sweep the elections; in this first post-revolution vote, the third of the vote earned by opposition parties indicated a real level of pluralism. In addition, the voter turnout, at 75%, would be high in any country, yet not high enough to indicate a constituency that was coerced into going to the polls. And finally, an abstention rate of 25% showed clear evidence that the support of the Coordinadora could not have been substantially higher than support for the PLI, PCD or the PPSC, even if it was assumed that the majority of the abstentions had been in protest.

Between *NACLA* and *C&C*'s election coverage, each of the points above was addressed at least once. To this the magazines added that there was substantial regional variation in vote results—an indication of pluralism at work (Reding "System" 493), and that the Sandinistas won the votes of 44% of the entire voting population of Nicaragua, as opposed to Reagan's 31% of the voting US population two days later (Spence 12).

Perhaps the *Times* forgot about an article it had published in March, in which the FSLN estimated that it would receive two-thirds of the vote, an opinion seconded by diplomats and political analysts (17 March 1984), and confirmed by the elections. For whatever reason, it didn't bother to report an article about the election results. There was no *Times* article about the elections at all from the fifth of November to the 11th, when the

results were referred to in article called "Managua Can't Vote Away Pressures," in which Ortega was said to have "won 67% of the valid vote against weak opposition."

The *Washington Post* took a more active but no less apathetic role in follow-up election reporting than the *Times* did. After simply announcing that the Sandinistas "appeared to have achieved their goal of an 80% turnout," the article checked the information by pointing out that "There was no way to independently confirm the Sandinistas' estimate of the turnout" (5 Nov. 1984). Cruz was quoted in a later article to say that, "Ortega's vote was 67 percent of the total, but less than 50 percent of Nicaraguan's registered voters . . . and many ballots were spoiled in protest" (15 Nov. 1984). This was an odd thing to say right after the US presidential election, which received a dismal 53% voter turnout, and in which only 31% of the voting-age population voted for Reagan. Yet the *Post's* editorial staff followed suit a few days later: "With all of the advantages they assured themselves in their elections, the Sandinistas still only won 4% more of the vote than did Mr. Reagan" (18 Nov. 1984). The editorial did not address the voter turnout, a time-and-a-half that of the US election, nor did it suggest so much as the possibility that these results could indicate a freer election than had been previously supposed.

Clearly, mainstream media bias against the FSLN continued even after the elections were over, as did the press's preference for Cruz. Both the *Times* and the *Post* published one major follow-up article after the election was over and the vote-tallies completed. Instead of addressing, as *NACLA* and *C&C* did, the impact (good or bad) of a newly elected Sandinista government and an elected assembly that would write a new constitution, the *Times* article primarily concerned whether the CDN had made the right choice in boycotting elections. The *Post's* interviewed Cruz for his post-election musings. And so election coverage in the *Times* and the *Post* ended in the same place it

began: with copious, borderline-irrelevant coverage of the opposition alliance, that completely missed the point, and the real significance of the moment.

Coverage of Nicaragua's elections has now been discussed from beginning to end, and from many angles. However two peripheral, yet important angles also deserve a bit of attention: coverage of Reagan administration itself, and editorials. The first of these served to cement the quarantine, by the mainstream press, of the FSLN's perspective and others in opposition to the US administration's. The second provides insight into the reporting of all four publications. The election coverage in the *Times* and the *Post* was built around a framework defined by many of the Reagan administration's biases. An additional boon to the Reagan administration, however, was the way in which the two newspapers showcased the administration's viewpoints directly, frequently, and uncritically, throughout the election period. Reagan's opinions and pronouncements were treated as news items about the Nicaraguan election just as much as actual events in Nicaragua, like a round of negotiations, were.

At the beginning of chapter four I compared the number of *Times* articles about the CDN or Cruz to the number about the FSLN—there were 18 and five respectively. I will now add to the comparison the 14 articles whose topics concerned solely and specifically the Reagan administration's views on Nicaragua.[20] In addition to these specialized articles, both papers regularly interviewed administration officials as "experts," but never consulted scholars or other knowledgeable Nicaragua sources. Nor did they usually consult Nicaraguans, officials or otherwise. This resulted in steady and plentiful input directly from the administration throughout the election period.

On October 3rd, the day of one of the *Times'* three articles about Daniel Ortega, the facing page contained an article about the US government's disparaging views of the

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[20]The *Post* had a more modest five.

Sandinistas and their elections. The same thing happened, as I have mentioned, the day that the lifting of the state of emergency was announced. If this kind of balance could be achieved every time, there wouldn't necessarily be a problem, because perspectives would be represented equally. As it stood however, the Reagan administration's testimony overwhelmed any attempts at articulating the FSLN's point of view. It was impossible for the Sandinista perspective, featured with detachment in only five *Times* articles and three in the *Post*, to compete with this kind of press. The only intrinsic problem with articles about the Reagan administration's electoral opinions was that they were presented absolutely uncritically; if full, uncritical representations of the FSLN were just as frequent, objectivity would be realized. Compounding this with the steady preference shown for covering the CDN and its demands, the chances for the Sandinistas' getting their voices heard through the channel of the US mainstream press were dismal indeed.

The easy contrast is with *NACLA*, a magazine highly interested in politics and policy, but that did not take its cues from the Reagan administration. The administration was discussed and quoted from time to time as one of the factors of the Nicaraguan election. For example: "But, if CDN support internationally has been eroded, it is business as usual in Washington" (Jenkins 8). But critical analysis and facts came from a broad variety of sources, not limited to the opinions of government officials, especially a government that was anything but objective on the topic of the Sandinistas.

The authorities consulted, and the general tone characteristic of reporting throughout the election period, as described in the last three chapters, makes a little more sense with a look at the editorials printed in them. This is true of all of the news sources examined, though *C&C,* because its Nicaragua coverage was in itself editorial in nature, will not be discussed here. Though the editorial boards of the *Times* and the *Post* made

an active point of not agreeing with the Reagan administration's contra war, their attitude toward the Sandinistas was absolutely hostile, and they used Reagan's own logic as their justification for the stance. One editorial in the *New York Times* called Reagan's Nicaraguan rhetoric "overdrawn," but then went on to say that "Mr. Reagan has reason to deplore Nicaragua's election as a sham." Vaguely citing state of emergency restrictions as the cause of election illegitimacy, the editorial advised Reagan to call off the contras, who "serve only to excuse [the Sandinistas'] denials of freedom," in favor of diplomacy (24 July 1984). This is an approximation of the stance that was taken in every editorial concerning Nicaragua by the *Times*. The *Post's* editorials were if anything more hostile, and more ideological: "The Sandinistas insist they will not open their elections—elections they seem intent on running in the Soviet style anyway . . ." (27 April 1984). Both editorial boards frequently threw ideas into the ring about which they clearly had little idea and which they didn't defend: "Something like political debate continues," said the *Times* (1 Sept. 1984); the elections will solve nothing, claimed the *Post*, because "Their Marxist-Leninist side showed through" (1 Nov. 1984).

The editorials parlayed these phrases without demonstrating any real understanding of the elections. Their ultimate judgment of elections followed consistently with their earlier criticisms: "Only the naive believe that Sunday's election in Nicaragua was democratic or legitimizing proof of Sandinista popularity" (*Times* 7 Nov. 1984). The *Post* stated in uninformed, ideological form:

> ". . . the vote in Nicaragua last Sunday was not encouraging. The Sandinistas produced a big turnout—easy in Central America where the democratic tradition is weak and the power of official suggestion is strong. They also produced a big victory. That too was easy: the major opposition didn't run, and while the minor opposition had a fling in the media, the Sandinistas alone control mass organizations and used them to bring in a landslide—although it was not one of these 99.93 percent Soviet jobs." (11 Nov. 1984).

The contrast with the one editorial concerning elections found in *NACLA* is enormous:

> In a country besieged by war and economic strangulation, [the revolution] has been characterized by a spirit of pragmatism and openness. That same spirit was present during the recent electoral process that culminated on November 4 . . . The Sandinista idea to hold multi-party elections—with rules as truly 'Western-style' as any of their detractors could have demanded—was a remarkable one. (Black "Nicaragua"3).

Also said Black, "many journalists and foreign observers who expected a 'Soviet-style sham' had to swallow their surprise" (Black "Nicaragua" 18). These contrary editorial attitudes go far in explaining where the perspectives in their respective publications are coming from.

Coming to the end of this analysis, one last point must be addressed. I have attempted to convey the overall manner in which elections were reported in two outlets of the mainstream media, and two outlets of the small independent media. These later two stand apart from each other in ways that are obvious and apparent in their structure, though they are not dissimilar in their perspectives. In the case of the *Times* and the *Post* however, I have tended to blend the two sources, for they are quite similar in structure as well as substance in most instances.

This substance I have found to be strongly influenced by the views of the Reagan administration, not the realities observed by other knowledgeable and qualified observers in Nicaragua. It goes without saying though, that the reporting was not always consistent, and both papers did contain varying examples of in-depth, well supported context and analysis in their reporting. A few were outstandingly well-researched and balanced articles, especially in the *Washington Post*. The two exposé-type articles I discussed were the most conspicuous of these, but they were not the only ones; the Rio de Janeiro coverage in both of the mainstream papers was another example. However, other

instances of more balanced reporting in the two newspapers were omitted, because they were only rare exceptions to the general tone found in the two papers.

Additionally, though the approaches of the *Times* and the *Post* were markedly similar, they were certainly not the same paper. Around the beginning of July the *Washington Post* changed its Managua correspondent. Before this time, the *Post* had been notably more CDN-focused and more critical of the FSLN than the *Times*, and less analytical of the election process. After the switch, however, the *Post*'s rapidly became considerably more multi-sided and contextualized than the *Times* for a period of a couple months. Several articles (e.g. 12 August 1984) went into detail about the Sandinista front and the political currents within, territory never approached by the *Times*.

Indeed, a few articles were remarkably open. An article a few days later opened with the line: "The left-wing Sandinista government has launched a nationwide election campaign by easing press censorship and restoring political liberties to the six opposition parties fielding candidates." It then astutely suggested that the Sandinistas' image at home and abroad depended not on Cruz's participation, but "on whether they stick to their pledge to permit free campaigning by the parties that are participating, and on whether they refrain from coming down hard on the parties that are boycotting" (15 Aug. 1984). This fresh perspective went entirely ignored by the *Times*. An October article posited that the real US worry in Nicaragua was not Soviet influence in Central America, but that Nicaragua's survival could encourage other Latin American nations to become nationalistic and independent. It said, "The Reagan administration lies about the Nicaraguan reality, which is that no priests, journalists or critics have been killed at government hands and that a market economy continues." The article quoted Ortega to say, "Our revolution is not perfect, but we're trying to construct a better society" (9 Oct. 1984).

The improvement was inconsistent at best however, and these articles were mixed with many others that followed the tone I have described throughout these chapters. In early October the inconsistency in reporting grew, being sometimes analytical and balanced, but closed and controversy-focused increasingly often. By the week of elections, the reporting style of the *Post* was indistinguishable from the *Times*. Even in the best of the writing though, in the Rio de Janeiro coverage in both papers, and the three months of improvement in the *Post*, Cruz remained the "main opposition," without any question as to the validity of the distinction. Articles highlighting the Reagan administration's views always laced the reporting, and heavy-handed coverage of Cruz did not diminish.

Just as the *Times* and the *Post* had notably good points that demand recognition, so, too, did *C&C* and *NACLA* have their weaknesses. There was one topic in particular on which *NACLA* carried a much harsher tone than any observer report, and that was Nicaragua's very decision to hold elections in the first place. The articles in the magazine viewed the elections as being forced, finally, by outside pressure and not by internal forces or by the long-time plan of the Sandinistas. The elections were "little more than a costly distraction" from the contra war (Jenkins 4). This was territory not entered by the *Times* or the *Post*; only Reagan made the same claim. The difference though, is that *NACLA* did not condemn the election or the Sandinistas for this reason. Instead it saw the elections as the pertinent move for the Sandinistas to make, and one that they committed to fully. Additionally, the same article cited above did provide a history of Nicaragua's promise to hold elections since the late 1970's, and its steady moves toward doing so.

On the other end of things, there were several areas in which *C&C* was clearly too lenient toward the Sandinistas. For example, after Reding's two-month stay in Nicaragua

he did not address the shortages of goods (other than basic foodstuffs) that were rampant throughout the country. This was a real social factor at the time. It was also a problem that the Sandinistas were sensitive about, but one that was generally known, which made the omission a bit troubling. Both *NACLA* and *C&C* were far too lenient where press censorship was concerned. Each observer report listed censorship of *La Prensa* as its biggest worry for how open the Sandinista government was found to be, and found multiple abuses of it. Yet both magazines, while spending a good deal of time discussing the press, glossed over the censorship issue saying that the Sandinistas had virtually done away with it.

Though none of the four papers was entirely consistent, or entirely "good" or "bad" in their coverage, they did follow easy-to-identify trends most of the time—trends that were fully in synch with the opinions of their editors—and this has been the real purport of my investigation. Throughout the election period, the mainstream press followed a line of inquiry not dissimilar from what the Reagan administration would have directed, focusing on Arturo Cruz and the complaints he raised, producing coverage strongly unfavorable to the Sandinistas, and heavily reporting the views of the Reagan administration itself. The *Times* and the *Post* focused on the controversies raised by the administration and the CDN, but not the controversies these two groups created. The papers never examined the basic logic they forwarded, logic that condemned an election because of the voluntary absence of one party, without a critical look at his reasons. When the elections themselves finally rolled around, the reporting fared no differently. On that momentous day, all that the *Times* and the *Post* could point to were the same controversies and issues that they had been describing for months. They produced interviews with an uncanny number of dissatisfied Nicaraguans, and could find scarcely a single point to praise in the elections.

It is difficult to believe that *C&C* and *NACLA* reported on the same election as did the newspapers. The newsmagazines had virtually nothing negative to say about the elections at all, but found a multitude of specific areas to praise. Their praise of elections was backed by the evidence found in carefully researched and well-supported articles throughout the process, taking cues from the reality they found in Nicaragua over the opinions of any government, United States or otherwise. During the pre-election period, both magazines had certainly found reasons for concern in the process. By the end however, the few problems were overwhelmingly outweighed by things done well, and by the significance of the occasion. After all, the Sandinistas had held basically free, fair, open elections by most estimations, a rare feat for a revolutionary government indeed. As expected, the Sandinistas won by a landslide—but not too much of one—making the Sandinistas the first legitimately elected government of Nicaragua since the 1920's.

CONCLUSION: METHODS OF REPRESENTATION AND REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESS

The Sandinistas were provided a fresh popular mandate and renewed legitimacy by their electoral triumph, a triumph that came not only in winning the elections, but also in holding them in such an exemplary manner. Unfortunately, what mattered most for Nicaragua's future was not its legitimacy in Nicaragua or most of the rest of the world, but almost solely in the United States. The American public was little aware of the praise for the elections from all over the world, for the mainstream papers had tarnished the elections along each step of the way. In other words, Reagan had succeeded in manipulating hegemonic United States political discourse so that his own views dominated. Without trifling with matters of evidence, he managed to undermine the legitimacy of the elections in both official and unofficial opinion with an impact so permanent that even today the election does not appear in the State Department's history of Nicaragua. Now unhindered by the contradiction of contras that "fought for democracy" by attacking a democratically elected government, Reagan continued to sponsor terrorism in Nicaragua. The contra war continued into the waning years of his presidency, on to the first years of President Bush's.

By the time Bush took office Nicaragua was exhausted by war, death and political conflict. Its economy, never given a chance to recover after the revolution, had been slowly ground down by contra attacks, military spending, and the US embargo. Fully 40% of the Nicaraguan government budget went to defense spending each year, gradually forcing the routing of funds from social and agrarian programs. Indeed, one of the saddest results of the US economic and military war against Nicaragua was the reversal

of the social reforms that had been so novel, and that had been beneficial to Nicaraguans in such concrete ways. Malnutrition returned to the country, as did many diseases that had been nearly eradicated. Infant mortality rates grew, the literacy campaign ground to a halt, and the mass organizations stagnated as the late eighties wore on.

When Bush inherited this Nicaragua he continued to fund the contras, while at the same time orchestrating the merging of thirteen Nicaraguan political parties in opposition to the Sandinistas, groups to both the left and the right of the FSLN including, ironically, the Communist Party. The new coalition was called the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO), and had many ties to the Contras. UNO's only cohesive platform was its dislike of the Sandinistas, and it was heavily funded by the United States both overtly and covertly with an estimated $17.5 million going toward the 1990 electoral campaign (Ryan 142). Bush promised massive economic aid to Nicaragua, an end to the trade embargo, and the disbanding of the contras—if and only if UNO's candidate won the elections. At the same time, contra attacks increase in intensity (Ryan 176-179).

Nicaraguans were being asked to choose between the revolution, poverty and war on the one side, and the promise of peace and prosperity on the other. Ortega ultimately lost to the UNO candidate in elections that were deemed free and fair by all. Ortega stepped down from office gracefully, proving once and for all that he did abide by the democratic principles he had been espousing for the previous decade. The United States hailed the electoral success of UNO as a victory for democracy, but as David Ryan pointed out, "an important distinction must be made between an electoral process that was judged to be free and fair, and an election that was not fair" (178).

In the end Reagan, with some help from George Bush, managed to topple the Sandinista government after all, with the contras as his primary instrument. By 1990 when the contras were disbanded, some 30,000 Nicaraguan lives had been lost in the

covert war in the name of democracy, though it was, ironically, an attack on a democratically elected government. Nicaragua's economy was in ruins, and as a result social conditions had begun a decline toward pre-revolution levels. Ultimately the Nicaraguan people voted their own revolution out of power, blackmailed by the prospect of peace.

How much did the press have to do with the end result? That is impossible to say. At the beginning of 1984 49% of Americans were already opposed to Reagan's foreign policy generally, so there was clearly some leeway for public opinion outside of that suggested by the mainstream press (PBS Online). But one has to imagine the outrage that would have resulted if the American public had come to the conclusion that Reagan was unleashing the brutal contras on a democratically elected government in Nicaragua. Presumably the press's role was to check the government, and investigate the validity of its rhetoric and policies. As it was, the mainstream press in the form of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* laid out a picture of the Nicaraguan elections that was based technically on facts, but that was not based on reality, preferring the administration's view.

A constant though usually subtle stream manipulation in reporting came out of these papers, maligning the FSLN and the elections, and bolstering Cruz, his complaints, and Reagan's position. Various techniques were utilized to this end, beginning with vocabulary. Loaded vocabulary was used in many cases, for example needlessly referring to the FSLN as the "Marxist-led Sandinistas" or associating them with Cuba and the Soviet Union in an irrelevant context. Other terms were sanitized; the attacking contras became "insurgents," their terrorist-style attacks part of the "civil strife." A new and ambiguous vocabulary was invented, in which the unproven CDN was the "opposition leader," and instead of a Council of State, Nicaragua had a "Sandinista-

dominated Council of State." Such leading terms were thrown about with much implication and little substance. Other seemingly innocuous terms were used to ill effect as well. The words "support", "several", "a few", and "others" could be manipulated to indicate a variety of things that were contradictory to reality.

Context was another arena for manipulation. History, as one example, was conveniently forgotten and inserted at will. Somoza and his recent legacy were never mentioned, unless it was as a reminder that Nicaraguan elections were "traditionally fixed." Current events of the time, too, were selective. Poor relations with the Catholic hierarchy received front-page coverage; good relations between most church organizations and the FSLN received none. Ortega was reported to find Cruz's suggestions "absolutely unacceptable"; Cruz's boycotts of negotiations were either not mentioned, or minimized. The Coordinadora's opinion was given on every particular; the PLI and PCD's on almost none. "Popular discontent" with the FSLN was a topic of frequent reporting, and though the FSLN won the election by a landslide, Sandinista popularity was never discussed. Accomplishments of the revolution were not featured; controversies raised about the Sandinistas were. When commendable Sandinista news was reported, the same day's issue would feature a virulent attack from the US government on the front page of the same paper.

The final issue was in the analysis. The views of the Reagan Administration and the CDN, the contras and the Catholic Church hierarchy, were reported consistently, and without critique. There was no investigative reporting of these malcontents and their copious complaints. Fresh insight was not incorporated into the framework through which the elections were presented, unless it reflected poorly on the Sandinistas and their election, as in the case of the PLI's withdrawal. This is an incomplete list of the grievances identified in these pages, though it is not meant to imply that there were no

exceptions in the mainstream reporting, and some parts were certainly more admirable than others. However, it certainly gives an idea of the general methodology of the mainstream press in reporting the Nicaraguan elections, painting an incorrect picture with a selective paintbrush. The result was the creation, in the pages of newspapers, of a Nicaragua much closer to what the Reagan administration described than it was to the Nicaragua observed by those who were there.

The argument could be raised that these reporters and papers did the best they could with a controversial and often confusing situation, the reports of their government in contradiction to the events that they found there. Yet *NACLA Report on the Americas* and *Christianity and Crisis* provided, in contrast, election reporting of real clarity, embedded in a fleshed-out, contextualized Nicaragua. No question, the two magazines had their problems as well, such as occasions of excessive lenience toward the Sandinistas. But their reporting was balanced overall, and demonstrated investigation and analysis behind every observation. Most striking was their resemblance to each other and to the many observer reports. All of these publications had little, if any, contact with each other, yet they presented virtually identical interpretations of the elections, in which each conclusion they reached was fully explained and supported. They presented a legitimizing, though not perfect view of elections, placed into the context of Nicaragua's history and political reality.

The magazines did have two distinct advantages over the mainstream papers however. The first was in their format. Because they were magazines, articles could be lengthy, instead of the condensed shots of news required by the newspaper format, allowing for a much greater ease in developing a contextualized whole and analyzing the connections between events. In addition the articles weren't daily. Writing fewer articles about more events at a time allowed a more cohesive picture to come together in any one

article. For this reason, a similar study to the one here conducted, but exploring mainstream newsmagazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* instead of newspapers would be a pertinent topic for further study.

The second advantage of the small magazines is that they were under far less scrutiny than the major newspapers, and therefore had a great deal more leeway to explore alternative explanations to the government's mainstream without coming under fire. Not only were the mainstream newspapers more answerable to public thought and policy makers, but they were answerable to corporate interests as well. Mainstream publications exist for the purpose of providing advertising space as much as they do for giving the news, or whatever else their sphere may be. They sell information to consumers, and they sell a consumer audience (that is, the ability to communicate with one) to corporations. Mainstream newspapers are therefore dependent on corporations for their major source of income.

In Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*, mentioned in the introduction, the two media critics tested what they called their "propaganda model," which was based on these ideas. They predicted that the mainstream news media would toe the government's propaganda line in the interest of not rocking the boat, ultimately (though this is a great simplification) so as to pacify advertisers. They found their model confirmed by the mainstream news coverage of various Central American elections, including Nicaragua's in 1984. In a sense my study resulted in further confirmation of their hypothesis. In addition, the alternative, independent magazines I examined presented much more meaningful, accurate coverage of the Nicaraguan elections than did mainstream newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post.* Herman and Chomsky's model suggests that they were able to do this because they had no need to maintain the status quo, not being dependent on large

corporate advertisers.

If the mainstream press feels the need to conform to US government opinion, then it begs the question of who is responsible for the words that get printed in the papers, the reporters or their editors? Just how much control do editors have? There is evidence in support of either answer. Analysis of the editorials of all of the news sources examined here, including *NACLA Report on the Americas*, showed editorials that were in strong agreement with the general tone of reporting. *NACLA* printed freelance articles however, so it makes sense that the editors would accept articles in general agreement with their views. In the case of the *Times* and the *Post*, the editors had a considerably more hostile attitude toward the Sandinistas and the elections than did most articles, even though they were not the ones on the scene in Nicaragua. This is not necessarily conclusive however. When the *Post's* resident Nicaragua correspondent changed, the overall reporting changed noticeably, and the improved quality of coverage from Rio de Janeiro in both newspapers was reported by a new and different correspondent. Clearly, the reporters did have some input on the type of coverage they reported.

On the other hand, the *Times'* resident Managua reporter, Stephen Kinzer, was responsible for some of the most vituperative attacks on the Nicaraguan elections in his highly accusatory Week in Review articles. He was responsible for statements like, "The Sandinistas are making it clear that the election is for the purpose of 'confirming revolutionary power,' not to allow someone like Mr. Cruz . . . to come to power" (*NYT* 20 July 1984). Yet when he was interviewed by the LASA observer delegation he sounded like a completely different person, connected in no way to the *Times'* general reporting:

> The FSLN gave in on almost all of the opposition parties' demands concerning how the electoral process would be run. Their stance seemed to be, 'If any clause of the election law causes controversy, we'll modify it.' Most of the opposition's complaints about the process had nothing to do with the mechanics of the elections, but rather were more general

> criticisms of the political system. . . In short, they want Nicaragua to become a parliamentary democracy first, before they'll participate. But this isn't Switzerland! (LASA 12).

The level of in-depth analysis apparent in this one quote far surpasses any that was to be found in Kinzer's dozens of Nicaraguan election articles. Clearly, something was going on between the time election information entered his head and the time it hit the printed page, apparently in his own words. Some kind of editorial restriction, either limits on what he was allowed to write, or editing of his words at the office in New York after he submitted his articles, was almost certainly at play.

In a 1984 article in *Progressive* magazine, Ray Bonner, a former *New York Times* correspondent, spoke of the gradual isolation he experienced after defying the status quo. He insisted on writing about the Salvadoran Army's massacre of nearly 1,000 peasants at a time that the Reagan administration was trying to clean up the Salvadoran government's violent image in the popular consciousness. As Bonner continued to pursue the Salvadoran violence and human rights violations, he started being given the cold shoulder at the US Embassy, and lost many of his contacts and lead sources. Shortly thereafter, he was transferred to a less turbulent assignment, and resigned soon after. A *Wall Street Journal* reporter said of the event: "The *Times* sees itself as the Establishment . . . so by the paper's own definition, you can't have a reporter who can't talk to the US Embassy like Bonner," (qtd in Millman 22).

Clearly there is a tension between the autonomy of reporters and the control of editors, but we can see how reporters not willing to toe the line might often end up working for different publications than the *Times* or the *Post*. It is for this reason that I have attributed names and trends to the newspapers themselves, and refrained from identifying reporters by name. For in the end, the editors have the last say in what gets printed, resulting in a more or less cohesive voice.

So what is the importance of the alternative media? For all of *NACLA* and

Christianity and Crisis's careful research and analysis in reporting the Nicaraguan election, their message clearly did not get very far; the American public, as a whole, was not outraged by Reagan's contra war in Nicaragua. Most people get their news from the major media outlets, such as the *Times*, the *Post*, and the countless other sources that they influence. If Herman and Chomsky's model is correct, then status quo, government-aligned news will always be the information that reaches the broadest audience.

If the mainstream press is supposed to act as government watchdog, a certain contingent of the alternative press fills this roll in its place, but also serves as watchdog to the mainstream media. Both *NACLA* and *C&C* wrote critiques of the mainstream media's Nicaraguan news coverage, expressing a great deal of frustration at what they read in the major newspapers. These articles elucidated a similar kind of systematic bias to the one I have shown here, to raise awareness among its readership of how subtle the reporting could be, yet give such unjust impressions. The mainstream is really reason for alternative media's existence, and provides a model it a model, but a model to strive against. The alternative press is constantly reacting to the trends in the mainstream press.

More importantly though, there clearly is an audience for the alternative media, or the hundreds of publications out there, including *NACLA* and *C&C*, would not exist. Though independent media sources reach a far smaller audience, they do reach one, indicating a substantial contingent of the US population that is not content to hear only the mainstream media's interpretation of events. Free of the restraints felt by the mainstream press, alternative sources supply new and challenging information on all levels of the political spectrum, not only the left. Their ability to publish unpopular opinions is one factor that keeps the mainstream message from attaining complete hegemony.

In the case of Nicaragua it was largely responsible for a lively dialogue in the United States that did lead to a substantial portion of the US populace sympathetic to the Sandinistas and disgusted by the contra war, right up through the ranks of Congress. Without these and similar publications, very few people would have had any idea at all what was happening in Nicaragua. As long as there is a mainstream press there will be an alternative one, to check the major publications, and flush fresh ideas into the popular consciousness. We should hope so at least, because the existence of an alternative media is one of the major sources from which new and challenging ideas are fed into the political discourse, keeping political dialogue alive.

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