
Hillary Lost My Vote in Honduras

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I am one of the many young women who to the consternation of so many pundits is just not Ready for Hillary in 2016. And it's not because I am a bad feminist, it's because I am judging Hillary Clinton, just as she has asked to be judged, on her record and her foreign policy credentials. I spent nearly five years in Central America working as a cross-border solidarity activist and I now work with immigrants in Massachusetts who have fled the violence in that region. So, I might have been moved by Clinton's recent pledge to "campaign for human rights" and take on immigration reform. But I have seen first-hand how Clinton failed on that front when top military commanders in Honduras (all men, of course) overthrew its democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya in 2009.

Since that military takeover, nearly all sectors of Honduran society—union organizers, farmers and teachers, women and young people, gays, journalists, political activists, anyone who resisted the coup—have faced systematic repression. Honduras has become one the most violent countries in the world not formally engaged in a civil war, and it's now a leading source of forced migration to the U.S.

President Obama initially criticized Zelaya's ouster and forced exile as a threat to democracy throughout the region. But the Obama administration, led by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, refused to formally recognize that a military coup had taken place and never cut U.S. military aid to Honduras. Clinton's State Department even lobbied the Organization of American States, which strongly condemned the coup, to readmit Honduras after its suspension from the OAS. In November 2009, the Administration recognized the election of Porfirio Lobo, even though most opposition parties and major international observers boycotted the election. Since the coup, the U.S. has built two new military bases in Honduras and increased its support and funding for the Honduran military and police.

While living in El Salvador, I participated in four human rights delegations to Honduras and witnessed how the country's democratic institutions were destroyed by the military takeover and its aftermath. During each visit, we interviewed multiple victims of physical threats, beatings, kidnappings, and imprisonment and heard stories about growing government corruption.

I would love to have a female foreign policy expert and human rights crusader as the next president of the United States, but Clinton's chance to prove herself as such and send a strong message to our neighbors to the south was back in 2009. If Hillary Clinton had stood up for democracy in Central America then, maybe we wouldn't have so many Central American immigrants today trying desperately to enter and stay in the U.S. , because more of them would be able to survive in their home countries.