



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

Northern Triangle Programs

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The Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras face continuing challenges in building strong and resilient democracies. These challenges affect good governance and the ability to address shared transborder concerns, including economic, migration and security issues. In particular, the countries are combating the corrosive impacts of corruption and impunity from the law by public officials. Despite notable advances, civic advocacy and watchdog groups and pro-reform elected officials in the subregion are increasingly encountering political pushback to anti-corruption efforts mounted by entrenched elites and criminal elements seeking to roll back reforms. The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased pressure on already fragile democratic institutions and underscored the need for transparency, oversight and the safeguarding of fundamental democratic rights.

In this respect, Northern Triangle countries have seen a surge in corruption allegations emerging from government pandemic spending. In Guatemala, analysts contend that the governing party majority in Congress has delayed the selection of Supreme Court (*Corte Suprema de Justicia*) and Court of Appeals (*Salas de Apelaciones*) judges and seeks to influence the make-up of the future Constitutional Court (*Corte de Constitucionalidad*). Guatemalan analysts see this as part of a strategy begun in 2018 to stop and reverse reforms to fight corruption and impunity. Honduran courts recently dismissed a case against two dozen legislators connected to a vast corruption scheme, known as Pandora, to embezzle public funds for political ends. This follows the lack of government agreement in the negotiations to renew the mandate of the Organization of American States Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (*Misión de Apoyo contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad en Honduras*, MACCIH). In El Salvador, the government has disregarded rulings from the Supreme Court (*Corte Suprema de Justicia*) over the constitutionality of COVID-19 quarantine policies and espoused anti-media rhetoric for reporting on corruption in government contracts. The February 2021 elections could result in the president's party gaining a majority in the National Assembly and ultimately controlling all selection processes for public officials, including judges to the high courts and national prosecutors.

Guided by a *voice, space, and accountability* approach, NDI is working to give **voice** to citizen demand for change by supporting anti-corruption efforts by reform-minded legislators, public agency watchdogs, and civic organizations in the Northern Triangle. This includes addressing the new challenges brought by the governmental response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the root causes of migration in the subregion. To help citizens open and occupy political **space**, NDI is strengthening the capacities of reformist legislators, party activists, election authorities, civil society organizations and the private sector to build and carry out an anti-corruption agenda focused on prevention and the early detection of corruption risks and non-transparent practices. To help citizens organize and take action to reshape **accountability**, NDI bolsters the capacity of civil society groups to advocate for reform and build networks that can incentivize elites by working with legislatures, political parties and the private sector to prevent corruption in addition to prosecuting perpetrators. NDI is focusing in particular on increasing transparency and accountability in political financing and facilitating the exchange of best practices among public agency watchdogs and civic activists at the subregional level. A key part of NDI's approach is to promote and strengthen national and regional coalitions to boost anti-corruption efforts.


In **Guatemala**, NDI is: producing a bulletin, *Legislative Dynamic*, to boost transparency in the legislative process and voting records for use by Congress itself and good government advocacy groups; assisting civic organizations to increase transparency in the selection of key government officials that affect anti-corruption efforts such as Supreme Court and Constitutional Court judges; supporting reform-minded legislators and civic groups to develop election reform proposals and provide oversight of government spending in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; aiding congressional committees to advance justice sector and civil service reforms; and building the capacity of all members of congress to increase transparency and effectiveness of the legislative branch.


In **Honduras**, NDI is: supporting the non-partisan Network for Democratic Equity in Honduras (*Red por la Equidad Democrática de Honduras*, REDH) to prepare to observe the 2021 elections, including political party campaign finance; assisting the civic group *Kubernesis* to promote congressional transparency through the Congress First (*Congreso Primero*) website that tracks legislation, voting and spending; providing technical and financial assistance to the Anti-Corruption Coalition (*Coalición Anticorrupción*) to report on the risks and impact of corruption in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic; supporting the Access to Information Institute (*Instituto de Acceso a la Información Pública*) to update information guidelines and ensure compliance by political parties, election authorities and Congress; facilitating the Open Parliament congressional committee to improve the transparency of the Honduran Congress as a whole; and aiding the congressional Parliamentary Front Against Corruption (*Frente Parlamentario contra la Corrupción*) to develop a legislative anti-corruption agenda.

In **El Salvador**, NDI is: working with election authorities to develop methodologies for monitoring political party spending, including developing an audit unit and unified public and private political finance regulatory system that engages key related government agencies such as the General Accounting Office (*Corte de Cuentas*) and Treasury Ministry (*Ministerio de Hacienda*); assisting civic groups to develop approaches to providing oversight of general budget expenditures as well as the response to the COVID-19 crisis; and providing support and information to political parties to develop systems to report political spending as well as collaboration with the Access to Information Institute (*Instituto de Acceso a la Información Pública*) to improve provision of information to the public; and supporting civic advocacy efforts to increase transparency in the selection of judges for the Supreme Court (*Corte Suprema de Justicia*).

At the **sub-regional level**, NDI is promoting exchanges between civil society organizations, reform-minded legislators, political parties, the private sector, regulatory institutions, public officials and academics to boost understanding of corruption risks and promote agreements on anti-corruption and transparency priorities. These priorities include advancing national systems to prevent, control and sanction corrupt practices and build a culture of public integrity. NDI is currently developing a training program on political finance oversight, which includes exchanges on legislative modernization with a transparency focus, a sub-regional legislative bulletin to promote transparency initiatives in Northern Triangle congressional agendas and technical support to civil society and public officials working on priority reforms.

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