

Understand Nicaragua

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As president Daniel Ortega prepares to run for an unprecedented third term, Nicaragua plans to build a big canal.

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Rebels with a cause from Diriangén to Sandino and the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front; FSLN) take on colonialists, imperialists and dictators.

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Nicaragua might be poor but the locals are far too busy enjoying themselves to pay attention to statistics.

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A masterclass in poetic expression from Rubén Darío to the revolutionary bards.

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Awe-inspiring landscapes of rugged volcanoes, delicate cloud forest and magnificent beaches.

Nicaragua Today

Like him or loathe him, President Daniel Ortega's reelection in 2011 delivered something that Nicaragua had lacked for a long time: a sense of stability. After years of devastation from civil war, the country's infrastructure slowly started rebuilding. Gone were the transport strikes, debilitating power rationing and unpredictable rallies. But as he prepares to run for a third consecutive term in 2016, Ortega's anti-poverty platform has raised questions – behind Haiti, Nicaragua remains the second-poorest country in the Western hemisphere.

Best on Film

La Yuma Portrays the challenges facing a female boxer from Managua.

Palabras Mágicas The making of modern Nicaragua through the lens of a young filmmaker.

Walker Biopic of a megalomaniac with music by the late, great Joe Strummer.

Carla's Song British bus driver falls for Nicaraguan dancer in exile in romantic drama with a political edge.

Pictures from a Revolution The story behind the famous war images of Susan Meiselas.

Best in Print

Blood of Brothers (1991; Stephen Kinzer) Fascinating account of revolution and war.

The Country Beneath My Skin (2002; Gioconda Belli) Autobiography by revolutionary poet.

Selected Poems of Rubén Darío (2001; translated by Lysander Kemp) Bilingual anthology of the master poet's best work.

The Jaguar Smile (1987; Salman Rushdie) Accessible insider's look at the Sandinistas during the revolution.

Tycoon's War (2008; Stephen Dando-Collins) Documents the epic battle between imperialists Vanderbilt and Walker.

2011 Election Controversy

Prior to reclaiming the top job, President Daniel Ortega had appeared on the ballot paper in every one of the previous four Nicaraguan elections, so it was not a huge surprise when, as his return term was nearing its end, reports surfaced that the FSLN leader was not too hot on the idea of handing over the reins to a successor.

Confirmation that Ortega was not yet ready to relinquish power surfaced in 2009 when the Supreme Court – dominated by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front; FSLN) – overturned a constitutional ban on consecutive presidential terms. The opposition launched unsuccessful legal challenges in an attempt to overturn the ruling.

Despite the controversy, the lead-up to the November 2011 election was somewhat subdued. Ortega's return to the presidency had not turned out to be the disaster that many on the right had predicted. During his five years in office, the economy had performed strongly with exports doubling and foreign direct investment increasing fivefold.

Polls leading up to the election showed Ortega well in front, confirming the suspicion that many in the once-rabidly anti-FSLN private sector had gotten over its distrust of the former rebel.

In the end, Ortega cruised to victory with 62.7% of the vote, more than twice that of his closest rival, conservative radio personality Fabio Gadea, who claimed fraud. Observers from the Organization of American States reported significant irregularities, but not sufficient to change the outcome.

Ortega's democratic credentials were further challenged in local elections in 2012, in which the FSLN won 127 of the 153 municipalities. Monitoring organization, Ética y Transparencia (Ethics and Transparency), identified irregularities in 70 municipalities it surveyed.