

Political polarization determines perceptions of corruption and class of citizenship in Nicaragua

Perceptions determined by politics: The opposition has lost all faith in the CSE, but the

Sandinistas think the institution is working better than ever (photo/ Tim Rogers)

By Tim Rogers/ Nicaragua Dispatch
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Nicaragua's political polarization has widened under the self-proclaimed "Government of Reconciliation and National Unity," according to a forthcoming study entitled "Political Culture and Democracy in Nicaragua 2012."

The study, which will be released next month, demonstrates a growing divide between supporters of President Daniel Ortega and his opponents, according to a preview presentation by John Booth, a political science professor at North Texas University and the author of the report.

The study, which polled 1,600 people in six regions of the country during February and March of this year, reveals that Nicaragua's widening political gap affects people's perceptions of government institutions, but also their class of citizenship—particularly when it comes to voting access.

The polarization in Nicaragua is "more extreme than in other countries in the region," Booth said during a presentation today at the University of Central America (UCA) in Managua.

The ideological divide seems to be creating parallel realities in Nicaragua. A clear example of this was the 2011 general elections, which were fraudulent in the eyes of the opposition and impeccable in the opinion of the ruling party, Booth notes.

The political analyst and veteran Nicaraguan watcher says 25% of Nicas surveyed in the study said they perceived or witnessed voting irregularities in 2011, including acts of voter intimidation and ballot-box stuffing. Curiously, he says, few of those complaints were made by Sandinistas.

The Sandinistas perceived significantly fewer irregularities than other Nicaraguans, Booth said.

Furthermore, Booth said, while much of the country has lost all faith in the Sandinista-controlled Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), Sandinista voters say they have more confidence than ever in the electoral institution.

Booth says the CSE has mutated dramatically from a serious and professional electoral institute to a party apparatus.

“In the 1990s, the electoral machine here worked. But that has changed a lot,” Booth said. “Now the electoral regime is dominated by one party. Before it was a technical institution, but now it’s just partisan. It works very differently now.”

One of the results of the single-party control over the CSE is that Nicaragua is now divided into two classes of citizenry when it comes to exercising the right to vote. Booth says that 30% of the population ages 16-20 does not have voting ID cards (cédulas), and that “followers of the FSLN have better access to voting.”