



AP Photo: Esteban Felix

# THE ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES IN PUBLIC SECURITY IN HONDURAS

Assessing the Limitation of the Role of the  
Armed Forces in Public Security Activities

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# INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the problem of insecurity and impunity has deeply affected the people of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, making this region (known as the Northern Triangle of Central America) one of the most violent in the world. High levels of violence, corruption, and impunity have eroded the capacity of the states to develop accessible and efficient institutions, and address the needs of their populations.

The absence of effective responses has weakened citizens' confidence in state institutions, leading to an alarming number of people who have been internally displaced or forced to migrate to other countries to escape the violence and lack of economic opportunities.

Against this backdrop, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the University Institute on Democracy, Peace and Security (IUDPAS) of Honduras, the University Institute for Public Opinion (Iudop) of the José Simeón Cañas Central American University (UCA) of El Salvador, and the Myrna Mack Foundation (FMM) of Guatemala have developed a tool for monitoring and evaluating the policies and strategies currently being implemented in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to reduce insecurity and violence, strengthen the rule of law, improve transparency and accountability, protect human rights, and fight corruption. This initiative has been made possible thanks to the support of the Latin America Division of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Tinker Foundation, the Seattle International Foundation (SIF), and the Moriah Fund.

## THE CENTRAL AMERICA MONITOR

The Central America Monitor is based on the premise that accurate, objective, and complete data and information are necessary to reduce the high levels of violence and insecurity, and establish rule of law and governance in a democratic state. This will allow efforts to move beyond abstract discussions of reform to specific measures of change.

The Monitor is based on a series of more than 100 quantitative and qualitative indicators that allow a more profound level of analysis of the successes or setbacks made in eight key areas in each of the three countries.<sup>1</sup> More than a comprehensive list, the indicators seek to identify a way to examine and assess the level of progress of the three countries in strengthening the rule of law and democratic institutions. The indicators seek to identify the main challenges in each of the selected areas and examine how institutions are (or are not) being strengthened over time. The Monitor uses information from different sources, including official documents and statistics, surveys, interviews, information from emblematic cases, and analysis of existing laws and regulations.

The indicators were developed over several months in a process that included an extensive review of international standards and consultation with experts. The eight areas analyzed by the Monitor include:

1. Strengthening the capacity of the justice system;
2. Cooperation with anti-impunity commissions;
3. Combatting corruption;
4. Tackling violence and organized crime;

5. Strengthening civilian police forces;
- 6. Limiting the role of the armed forces in public security activities;**
7. Protecting human rights;
8. Improving transparency.

The Monitor reports are published by area and by country. The first series of reports will serve as the baseline for subsequent analysis, which will be updated annually. Each annual series of reports will be analyzed in comparison with reports from the previous year. This allows researchers, civil society organizations, and other actors to assess the level of progress in strengthening the rule of law and reducing insecurity.

The first round of Monitor reports will primarily focus on data sets from an approximate 4-year time period, 2014 to 2017, in order to provide a snapshot of Central America's institutions.

The Monitor will serve as a tool for searchable, easy-to-comprehend data, delineating trends, progress, patterns, and gaps within and between the three countries of the Northern Triangle.

The data, graphics, charts, and reports will be available on the Monitor's website.

This report of the Central America Monitor aims to define a baseline for the indicators related to limiting the role of the Armed Forces in public security activities in Honduras.

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## **ABOUT THE RESEARCH FOR THIS REPORT**

Researchers compiled this report by consulting existing research and through submitting formal requests for information to public information units in government agencies analyzed in this report. It is important to note that the government denied much of the information we requested, which affects our analysis of indicators under this report. Research was also collected by consulting reports published by domestic and international organizations that assess issues related to limiting the role of the Armed Forces in public security activities.

# KEY FINDINGS

- Between 2014 and 2017, Honduras intensified the remilitarization of public security. This included training police officers in military tactics, a sustained increase in the Armed Forces' budget to perform security functions, and the creation of military units to carry out law enforcement activities.
- The creation of units like the Military Police of Public Order (*Policía Militar del Orden Público*, PMOP), the National Interagency Security Force (*Fuerza de Seguridad Interinstitucional Nacional*, FUSINA), and the Special Response Team and Intelligence Troop (*Unidad de Toma Integral Gubernamental de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad*, TIGRES), a hyper-militarized police unit, has institutionalized the Armed Forces' involvement in police work, thereby weakening civilian control over security matters.
- Prior to 2014, the budget of the Ministry of Security (*Secretaría de Seguridad*) was larger than that of the Ministry of Defense (*Secretaría de Defensa Nacional*). However, with the creation of the PMOP, this trend changed starting in 2014, when public security budget priorities began favoring the Ministry of Defense.
- Between 2014 and 2017, the Ministry of Defense's budget increased considerably. Over those four years, its allotted funds grew by 55.6 percent, representing 2.9 percent of the national budget. If the resources distributed among the security, defense, and justice subsectors are added together, 41.4 percent of these funds went to the Armed Forces.
- Despite the budget increase, the Armed Forces are still not accountable to civilian oversight agencies. The lack of transparency in their budget execution is shielded by the Law on the Classification of Public Documents Related to National Security and Defense (*Ley para la Clasificación de Documentos Públicos relacionados con la Seguridad y Defensa Nacional*), which classifies the administration of their funds as a state secret.
- Numerous state and non-governmental entities have warned about the negative impact of remilitarizing security on human rights. This is borne out by the involvement of some military officials in public security tasks who have been implicated in cases of abuse and excessive or illegitimate use of force.
- The military forces were strongly criticized during the 2017 post-election period for using excessive force to control and disperse protests, causing injury and death among demonstrators. In addition, in 2016, they were denounced over the participation of active and retired military officials in the murder of human rights defender Berta Cáceres.
- Despite the accusations against them, the Armed Forces' participation in public security activities has some public support. Some public opinion polls taken between 2014 and 2016 indicate that units like the PMOP and the FUSINA are some of the security and justice institutions with the highest levels of citizen trust.

# THE ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES IN PUBLIC SECURITY IN HONDURAS

## Assessing the Limitation of the Role of the Armed Forces in Public Security Activities

The processes of democratization and peacebuilding in Central America in recent decades led to separating the functions of civilian police forces and militaries. In El Salvador and Guatemala, the creation of civilian police forces came about as part of stipulations in peace accords that ended internal armed conflicts. By contrast, this process in Honduras was sparked by public protests against blatant incompetence and rights abuses by a police force that had been under military control since the 1963 coup d'état.<sup>2</sup>

For 35 years, the Honduran police operated under the Ministry of National Defense and Public Security (*Secretaría de Defensa Nacional y Seguridad Pública, SDNSP*), led by the head of the Armed Forces. This body's inability to contain the crime wave sweeping the country – combined with growing accusations regarding the participation of members of the Public Security Force (*Fuerza de Seguridad Pública, FUSEP*) in acts of corruption, criminal conduct, and human rights abuses – gave rise to public demands for police reform. Despite the military's opposition, in 1998, the Honduran Congress approved the new Organic Law of the National Police of Honduras (*Ley Orgánica de la Policía Nacional de Honduras*), taking public security functions away from the Armed Forces and subjecting the police forces to civilian oversight.

To fully understand this decision, two key factors must be taken into account. First, in 1993, the National Directorate of Investigation (*Dirección Nacional de Investigación, DNI*) was eliminated, and the Department of Criminal Investigation

(*Departamento de Investigación Criminal, DIC*) was created and placed under the responsibility of the new Public Prosecutor's Office (*Ministerio Público, MP*). This implied returning control over criminal investigations to civilian institutions, after several decades of military usurpation of this power.

Second, in 1994, the government ended mandatory military service. This change resulted from citizen-led protests against the recruitment of Honduran youth to bulk up an Armed Forces that had been bloated as a result of the conflicts in Central America in the 1980s.

These steps forward both took place and may be understood in the context of the signing of the Esquipulas Peace Accords<sup>3</sup> and the reorganization of the Honduran government, which included the creation of public institutions committed to defending the public interest, such as the Public Prosecutor's Office and the National Human Rights Commission in Honduras (*Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CONADEH*) in 1995.

Seen in perspective, this was a historic juncture at which citizens fought harder for their rights and demanded greater participation in the state's political and social decision-making. Multiple factors account for how such complex achievements were made, including: strengthening a culture of democracy instead of traditional authoritarianism; societal openness to debate and pluralism; and the emergence of young people as active agents promoting democratic change.

Nonetheless, in recent years, a push to roll back civil and political rights has taken hold in Honduras (as it has in El Salvador and Guatemala), with the adoption of repressive responses to worsening social problems. By deeming criminality to be a threat to national security, numerous governments found a justification for repeatedly turning to military participation to help maintain public order. As a report by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) notes, “While the military’s presence on the streets may satisfy public demands for action, relying on the military is highly problematic. Inviting the military to take on law enforcement functions not only blurs the lines between the structures and functions of the police and military, it also detracts attention and resources from the pressing urgency to reform the police and criminal justice institutions. Moreover, involving the military can also increase corruption and abuses in the army.”<sup>4</sup>

In Honduras, military intervention in public security is increasing each year. This involves the training of police officers in military tactics, a progressive increase in the Armed Forces’ budget for performing security functions, and the creation of military units to carry out law enforcement activities, such as the Military Police of Public Order (*Policía Militar del Orden Público*, PMOP), created as part of reforms passed by the Honduran Congress in 2013.

Among the arguments used to justify military participation outside its usual jurisdiction over matters of “national defense” is the high impact of transnational organized crime, above all drug trafficking, which, in the case of Honduras, has operations throughout the country.

However, accumulated experience shows that jumbling the tasks aimed at defense with those of security does not produce the desired results; on the contrary, a first visible outcome is the weakening of the rule of law, which is indispensable for tackling a phenomenon as complex as organized crime.

This report outlines some of the main traits of the process of remilitarization, not only of security but of the state itself, which has the underlying strategy of restoring to the military the political power that it lost in the 1990s. This trend is bolstered by constitutional reforms that protect the Armed Forces and multimillion-dollar budgets funded by new security taxes that are administered with no transparency or accountability.

The paradox that lies in remilitarizing the security sphere is that it weakens the ability of relevant public institutions to contain and control insecurity. In this way, a new vicious circle is created in which citizens face both the violence of organized crime as well as many human rights violations at the hands of the military, which further erodes the democratic system.

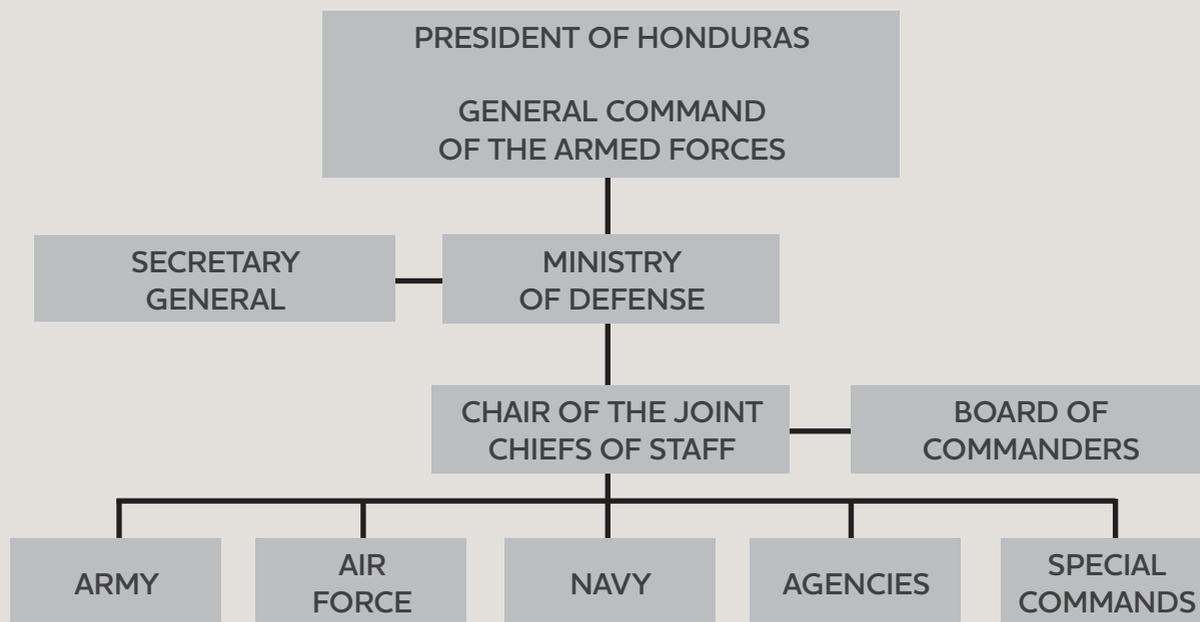
# LEGAL FRAMEWORK REGULATING THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE ARMED FORCES IN POLICING

The Honduran Armed Forces are made up of the High Command – or General Command (*Comandancia General*) – the Army, Air Force, Navy, and the Special Commands established in approved reforms and in the Constitutive Law of the Armed Forces of Honduras (*Ley Constitutiva de las Fuerzas Armadas de Honduras*).<sup>5</sup>

The General Command is composed of the president of Honduras in his/her capacity as Commander-in-Chief, the Minister of Defense, and the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The General Command is the highest-ranking authority of the Armed Forces, responsible for defining overall national defense policy.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 1**

**ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES**



*Source: Created based on information from the Ministry of Defense*

The military's composition, organization, and objectives are outlined in the Honduran Constitution, specifically in Chapter X. In addition, the Armed Forces have a constitutive law and other supplementary policies that regulate their functions.

The Constitution establishes a separation between defense and security functions;

however, it grants military participation in public security activities, establishing in Article 272 that “the Armed Forces will cooperate with the National Police to maintain public order.”<sup>7</sup> Article 274 specifies that this participation can take place at the request of the Minister of Security in order to fight terrorism, arms trafficking, and organized crime, as well as to protect the different branches of government and electoral authorities.<sup>8</sup>

In the last decade, military participation in public security has increased considerably. The Central America Monitor's report on violence and organized crime<sup>9</sup> addresses the laws and legal modifications approved since 2010 that, directly or indirectly, allow for greater involvement of the Armed Forces in security-related activities. These laws and regulations have been accompanied by legislation restricting access to public information, such as approval in 2013 of the Law on the Classification of Public Documents Related to National Security and Defense (*Ley para la Clasificación de Documentos Públicos relacionados con la Seguridad y Defensa Nacional*).<sup>10</sup>

Between 2010 and 2018, at least 36 legislative decrees were approved (including new laws and reforms) in relation to the defense and security sector. This legal framework made possible a gradual remilitarization of functions that fell exclusively to the Honduran National Police (*Policía Nacional de Honduras*, PNH) since 1998, and enabled the military to expand its participation in security activities, increase its budget allotments, and reactivate its leading role in domestic political affairs.<sup>11</sup>

Below is a summary of some of the main policies and reforms adopted to give the Armed Forces a larger role in public security activities.

### ***Decree of Interpretation for Article 274 of the Constitution (Decreto de Interpretación del Artículo 274)***

Preceded by a crisis in the Honduran National Police, in November 2011, the Honduran Congress granted the Armed Forces law enforcement functions upon declaring a state of emergency in public security. These new attributes included authorization for members of the military to make arrests and raids, accompanied by a prosecutor from the Public Prosecutor's Office.

This modification was based on an interpretation of Article 274 of the Constitution, establishing that “as an exception the Armed Forces can exercise police functions on a temporary basis, in emergency situations that affect people and goods; participate permanently in the fight against drug trafficking and also cooperate on combatting terrorism, arms trafficking, and organized crime; at the request of the State Secretariat in the Security Office (*Secretaría de Estado en el Despacho de Seguridad*), the Armed Forces may temporarily carry out police functions, as long as the executive branch issues a corresponding Emergency Decree that establishes the period for which the Decree will remain in force and other aspects regarding its scope.”<sup>12</sup>

With this constitutional interpretation, the conditions were strengthened for the Armed Forces to access the resources of the Fiduciary Law for the Administration of the Population Protection and Security Fund (*Fideicomiso para la Administración del Fondo de Protección y Seguridad Poblacional*), better known as the Security Tax (*Tasa de Seguridad*), which was approved that same year.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Emergency Executive Decree on Security Matters (Decreto Ejecutivo de Emergencia en Materia de Seguridad), PCM-075-2011***

Due to high levels of violence and insecurity, the president decreed a nationwide state of emergency in December 2011. In that context, and with the decree previously approved by Congress, the Armed Forces were empowered to carry out patrols, raids, arrests, and other law enforcement tasks throughout the country for a renewable 90-day period. This period was in fact renewed and extended for another 90 days in March 2012 and again in June of that same year.<sup>14</sup>

### **National Intelligence Law (*Ley de Inteligencia Nacional*), Decree 211-2012**

As described in depth in the Central America Monitor's report on violence and combatting organized crime, the National Intelligence Law, approved by Congress in 2012, created the Committee of Strategic Intelligence (*Comité de Inteligencia Estratégica*, CIE), presided over by the National Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (*Dirección Nacional de Investigación e Inteligencia*, DNII).

Under the law, the DNII acts as an autonomous entity, with functional, administrative, and budgetary independence. In addition to implementing the public policies promoted by the National Defense and Security Council (*Consejo Nacional de Defensa y Seguridad*, CNDS), it also coordinates the investigative and intelligence activities related to drug trafficking and organized crime that are carried out by the security forces, including the Armed Forces.

### **Law on Interagency Security Strategy and Comprehensive Governmental Special Response to Security (*Ley Estrategia Interinstitucional en Seguridad y Toma Integral Gubernamental de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad*), Decree 103-2013**

Approved by the Honduran Congress in 2013, the Law on Interagency Security Strategy and Comprehensive Governmental Special Response to Security created a special militarized police unit, the Special Response Team and Intelligence Troop (*Unidad de Toma Integral Gubernamental de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad*, TIGRES). The duties assigned to the Strategy and the TIGRES unit include strengthening the state's institutional efforts to fight insecurity, ensuring the protection of people and their goods; guaranteeing the preservation of public order; the prevention, control, and investigation of crime, as well as the charging, arrest, and

processing of perpetrators and accomplices; and carrying out prevention plans as well as action plans focalized in strategic points of urban or rural areas.<sup>15</sup>

In fulfilling its functions, it has the support of prosecutors and judges with national jurisdiction. The TIGRES force forms part of the police force; nonetheless, its members wear camouflage uniforms and are equipped with long-range weapons and special communications equipment.<sup>16</sup> Since its creation, this unit has received training from the U.S. Green Berets.<sup>17</sup>

### **Law of the Military Police of Public Order (*Ley de la Policía Militar de Orden Público*, PMOP), Decree 168-2013**

In 2013, the PMOP was temporarily created to support public security endeavors, based on a national sovereignty approach. This unit forms part of the Armed Forces' Special Commands, along with the Joint Military Education and Doctrine Command (*Comando de Doctrina Conjunta y Educación Militar*), the Military Reserves Command (*Comando de Reservas Militares*), the Logistics Command (*Comando Logístico*), and others established by the Ministry of Defense.

The PMOP was created "in accordance with the hierarchy and command established in the Constitutive Law of the Armed Forces of Honduras"<sup>18</sup> and is made up of members of the Armed Forces and reservists, who "must submit to vetting tests and permit the investigation of their personal, patrimonial, work, and family backgrounds, and meet the requirements established in the law's regulations."<sup>19</sup>

Its functions and attributes include safeguarding peace and public order and cooperating on the recovery of areas, neighborhoods, human settlements, or public spaces where organized criminal networks carry out their illegal

activities. The PMOP has the power to engage in investigative and intelligence work and to arrest people associated with criminal organizations, putting them at the disposal of the authorities.

The law established that the PMOP could have as many as 5,000 members, which meant that the Armed Forces were authorized to increase their personnel by that amount.<sup>20</sup> The creation of the PMOP represents a parallel force that serves to substitute, rather than collaborate with, the Honduran National Police. For instance, there are fewer police officers dedicated to criminal investigation than there are members of the PMOP, which also performs investigative work.<sup>21</sup>

In fulfilling its functions, the PMOP is accompanied by judges and prosecutors with national jurisdiction who have passed vetting tests administered by the DNII. These tests are carried out by members of the military, which some analysts point to as a possible conflict of interest.<sup>22</sup>

The PMOP is funded through the budget allocated to the Ministry of Defense. Its equipment and its members' bonuses, benefits, and insurance plans are covered using revenue from the Population Security Fund and resources obtained by the Office for the Administration of Seized Assets (*Oficina Administradora de Bienes*

*Incautados, OABI*). It was initially funded with 24.5 million lempiras (\$980,000).

The PMOP's creation has sparked criticism over the remilitarization of security and because of constant complaints of abuse perpetrated by its members. The fact that PMOP members enjoy certain privileges that are not granted to other military or police officers is also criticized. For example, PMOP members receive a bonus equivalent to an additional month's wages, which is not tied to the Military Pension Institute (*Instituto de Previsión Militar, IPM*), along with life insurance and additional medical allowances.<sup>23</sup> It is also noted that when its members are charged with committing an offense, the cost of their legal representation is covered using funds from the national budget. Furthermore, if they are detained, they are held in military establishments for the duration of the judicial process.<sup>24</sup>

The PMOP was conceived of as a temporary force. However, in 2014, the National Congress acquiesced to calls from President Juan Orlando Hernández and introduced a constitutional reform to guarantee the PMOP's permanence. This reform allowed the president to give direct orders to the PMOP; however, that provision was not approved due to other political parties' opposition and its rejection by civil society.

## MILITARY PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SECURITY

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Resorting to the military to combat violence and organized crime has been a constant under distinct governments. During the period studied, there was an increase or intensification of the military's role in matters of public security. The PMOP's creation is the clearest example of the remilitarization of public security in Honduras.

The Central America Monitor requested data regarding the PMOP's composition and distribution, but that information was not

provided. Public reports indicate that the PMOP began operations in 2013 with 1,000 members distributed evenly between Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, cities that had homicide rates exceeding the national average that year (79.0 per 100,000 inhabitants).<sup>25</sup>

By the end of 2016, the PMOP was made up of six battalions with 500 members each, which were deployed in more than 24 areas of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. The First Canine

Battalion (*Primer Batallón Canino*) is also part of the PMOP, with more than 130 dogs trained to detect weapons, drugs, and explosives.<sup>26</sup>

Although the government declared that military support for security tasks was temporary, in 2017, it created two more battalions and increased the size of the force to 5,000. According to secondary sources, the PMOP’s members receive training for two months on topics including human rights, handling crime scenes, traffic laws, anti-riot strategies, special operations, and personal defense.

As part of the process to remilitarize public security, 2014 saw the creation of the National Interagency Security Force (*Fuerza de Seguridad Interinstitucional Nacional, FUSINA*), an elite corps made up of the Armed Forces, National Police, Intelligence Directorate, Public Prosecutor’s Office, and the Supreme Court of Justice, among other bodies. Led by a member of the Armed Forces, the FUSINA’s objective is to combat organized crime and drug trafficking as well as common crime.

According to an article published in February 2016 by the United States Southern Command, the FUSINA had a strong presence in 115 communities with high levels of gang-related crime, carrying out patrols to identify and arrest gang members.<sup>27</sup> It also engaged in operations on the Honduras-Guatemala border, which is one of the crossings most frequently used for drug trafficking.

In 2010, the Armed Forces began an educational program in public schools to provide civic-religious instruction to children and adolescents. Under the name “Guardians of the Homeland” (*Guardianes de la Patria*), the program was institutionalized and extended nationwide in 2014, reaching some 35,000 children by 2017.<sup>28</sup> Human rights organizations have questioned this program for fomenting the militarization of society and education.

## FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Between 2014 and 2017, the Ministry of Defense’s budget increased considerably. As shown in Table 1, over that four-year period, its funds grew by 55.6 %, representing 2.9% of the national budget, which totaled 804 billion lempiras (\$32.4 billion).

As shown in Table 2, the Ministry of Defense saw its budget increase each year, rising from 4.5 billion lempiras (\$182 million) in 2014 to 7 billion lempiras (\$279.9 million) in 2017. In total, the Armed Forces received 23.7 billion lempiras (\$947.1 million dollars) of the national budget.

Prior to 2014, the Ministry of Security’s budget was larger than the Ministry of Defense’s. However, with the creation of the PMOP, this trend changed as of 2014, showing that the budget priority on public security matters had shifted to the Ministry of Defense.

**TABLE 1**  
**NATIONAL BUDGET OF HONDURAS, 2014-2017**

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Budget in billions of lempiras	183.6	185.5	206.3	228.7	<b>804.1</b>
Estimate in billions of U.S. dollars	7.4	7.5	8.3	9.2	<b>32.4</b>

Source: Created based on information from *La Gaceta*

**TABLE 2****MINISTRY OF DEFENSE BUDGET, 2014-2017**

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Budget in billions of lempiras	4.5	5.4	6.8	7.0	23.7
Estimate in billions of U.S. dollars	182	216.7	268.5	279.9	947.1

Source: Created based on information from *La Gaceta*

If the defense and security budgets are compared, the former was 16.7% higher than the latter between 2014 and 2017. This means that the Honduran National Police received 3.4 billion lempiras (\$136 million) less than the Armed Forces.

In 2017, the 7 billion lempiras funding the Ministry of Defense represented 3.0% of the national budget. To put this in context, that amount was higher than the combined 6.7 billion lempiras allocated to public institutions working on matters related to human rights, children, migration, women, ethnic groups, and cultural promotion.<sup>29</sup>

**TABLE 3****BUDGET OF THE SECURITY AND DEFENSE MINISTRIES (IN BILLIONS OF LEMPIRAS), 2014-2017**

Entity	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Ministry of Security	4.0	3.9	6.1	6.3	20.3
Ministry of Defense	4.5	5.4	6.8	7.0	23.7

Source: Created based on reports by the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ)

**TABLE 4****COMPARATIVE BUDGET BETWEEN DEFENSE, SECURITY, AND JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS (IN BILLIONS OF LEMPIRAS), 2014-2017**

Entity	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total	Increase over 4 years
Ministry of Security	4.0	3.9	6.1	6.3	20.3	+57.5%
Ministry of Defense	4.5	5.4	6.8	7.0	23.7	+55.6%
Judiciary	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.2	7.9	+15.8%
Public Prosecutor's Office	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.7	5.4	+54.4%

Source: Created based on data from the TSC, ASJ, and *La Gaceta*

An analysis of the budget distributed between the security, defense, and justice sectors shows that the Armed Forces obtained 15.8 billion lempiras more than the judiciary, and 18.3 billion more than the Public Prosecutor's Office.

If the resources distributed to the subsectors of security, defense, and justice are added together, they total 57.3 billion lempiras (\$2.3 billion) between 2014 and 2017, representing 7.2% of the country's entire budget. Of these funds, 41.4% went to the Armed Forces, 35.4%

to the Honduran National Police, 13.8% to the judiciary, and 9.4% to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

In addition to their national budget allocations, the Armed Forces also received some of the funds collected via the Population Security Law, adopted in 2011. Between 2014 and 2017, the government obtained 10.5 billion lempiras (\$422 million) through this fund; from this amount, the Ministry of Defense received 4.3 billion lempiras, or 41% of total revenue.

**TABLE 5**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION SECURITY TAX (IN MILLIONS OF LEMPIRAS), 2014-2017**

Entity	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total	Increase over 4 years
Ministry of Security	695	988	1,401	1,649	4,732	45%
Ministry of Defense	1,476	1,471	660	719	4,324	41%
Judiciary	104	56	90.5	80	330	3%
Public Prosecutor's Office	56	183	140	225	605	6%

*Source: Created based on information from the Citizen Security Tax (tasadeseguridad.hn)  
 \*Due to rounding, the exact sum of annual statistics may differ slightly from the overall total*

In total, considering both budgetary sources, the Armed Forces received 28 billion lempiras (\$1.1 billion) between 2014 and 2017. However, there is no accountability mechanism to monitor these

funds, since the military hides behind the Law on the Classification of Public Documents Related to National Security and Defense to avoid any oversight by civilian oversight agencies.<sup>30</sup>

# THE ARMED FORCES AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

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Numerous government agencies and non-governmental organizations have warned about the negative impact of remilitarizing security on human rights. This risk is borne out by some military officials implicated in perpetrating abuse or engaging in the excessive or illegitimate use of force while carrying out public security tasks.

According to the CONADEH, members of the PMOP and the Armed Forces have been denounced for committing abuses of authority, illegal detentions, homicide, kidnapping, torture, rape, raids, and extrajudicial killings.<sup>31</sup> This continues to occur despite the fact that the Honduran Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (*Secretaría de Justicia y Derechos Humanos de Honduras*, SEDH) had trained 5,800 members of the PMOP and the Armed Forces by 2017.<sup>32</sup>

According to the U.S. Department of State, the extrajudicial killings carried out by the security forces, along with the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators, are among the most serious human rights violations being committed in Honduras.<sup>33</sup>

In 2015, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) stated that one of Honduras' most severe human rights problems lay in its situation of violence and widespread insecurity, part of which stemmed from the PNH, the PMOP, and the Armed Forces "through their illegitimate use of force, in some cases in complicity with organized crime."<sup>34</sup>

Between 2012 and 2014, there were official complaints lodged in relation to at least nine murders (five in 2014 alone), more than 20 cases of torture, and roughly 30 detentions that were either illegal or involved the abusive use of force by military officials.<sup>35</sup>

In 2015, around 24 members of the military were facing homicide charges before the courts, and several more were being investigated on accusations of torture, rape, extortion, theft, and kidnapping, among other crimes.<sup>36</sup> According to figures from the National Violence Observatory of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (*Observatorio Nacional de la Violencia de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras*, ONV-UNAH), between 2013 and 2016, the judiciary had linked members of the Armed Forces to 18 homicides.<sup>37</sup>

Between 2014 and 2017, there were two emblematic cases worth highlighting. The first took place in 2015, when 10 soldiers from the Second Battalion of the Naval Infantry (*Infantería de la Marina*) murdered two Garífuna youth, having wrongly assumed that they were engaged in drug dealing. In 2018, a court convicted 10 members of the Armed Forces in relation to this crime.<sup>38</sup>

The second case centered on the participation of active and retired military officials in the 2016 murder of human rights defender Berta Cáceres. Military authorities denied any involvement in the case and downplayed the importance of the fact that an active member of the military was arrested for the crime – one who also happened to head the Army's Intelligence Service in 2015.<sup>39</sup>

The accusations against the military for committing torture, violent arrests, and other abuses grew notably during the period under study. For instance, the Network of Sex Workers of Honduras (*Red de Trabajadoras Sexuales de Honduras*) repeatedly denounced the violation of sex workers' human rights, especially in relation to kidnapping and rape.<sup>40</sup>

Some of the most serious accusations made during the period analyzed involved the abuses perpetrated during the protests marking the post-election period in 2017. In this context, the IACHR and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras (OHCHR) called on the Honduran government to respect human rights and refrain from excessive and unjustified use of military force against demonstrators.<sup>41</sup>

According to the report produced in 2017 by the OHCHR,<sup>42</sup> military officials used excessive force to control and disperse protests, including lethal force, which caused death and injury among demonstrators. The OHCHR indicated that the PMOP opened fire indiscriminately against protesters in order to disperse them, causing death and injury.<sup>43</sup> The report recorded at least 23 people who died in the context of post-election protests, including 22 civilians and one police officer. Of those, around 16 victims died violently as a result of shots fired by security forces, including two women and two children. In addition, at least 60 people were injured, half of them due to the use of firearms.

According to this United Nations office, the homicides committed during the demonstrations “may amount to extrajudicial killings.”<sup>44</sup> However, as of January 2018, no charges over these

incidents had been brought against any member of the security forces.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, the OHCHR’s report sustained that the state of emergency decreed in the post-election crisis went beyond what was strictly necessary in that situation, “resulting in mass and indiscriminate arrests, and discouraging people from exercising the right to peaceful assembly and of association.” Thus, 1,351 people were detained in December 2017, leading to denouncements of “ill-treatment of persons at the time of arrest and/or detention, illegal house raids, and a surge in threats and intimidation against journalists, media workers, and social and political activists.”

In light of the 2017 post-election context, the United Nations urged authorities to restrict the use of the PMOP and the Armed Forces and to regulate the use of force by all security agencies and forces in accordance with international human rights norms and standards.

For the purposes of this report, information was requested on the number of complaints filed with the Public Prosecutor’s Office against members of the Armed Forces over the perpetration of alleged human rights abuses and violations; however, this data was not provided.

## PUBLIC OPINION

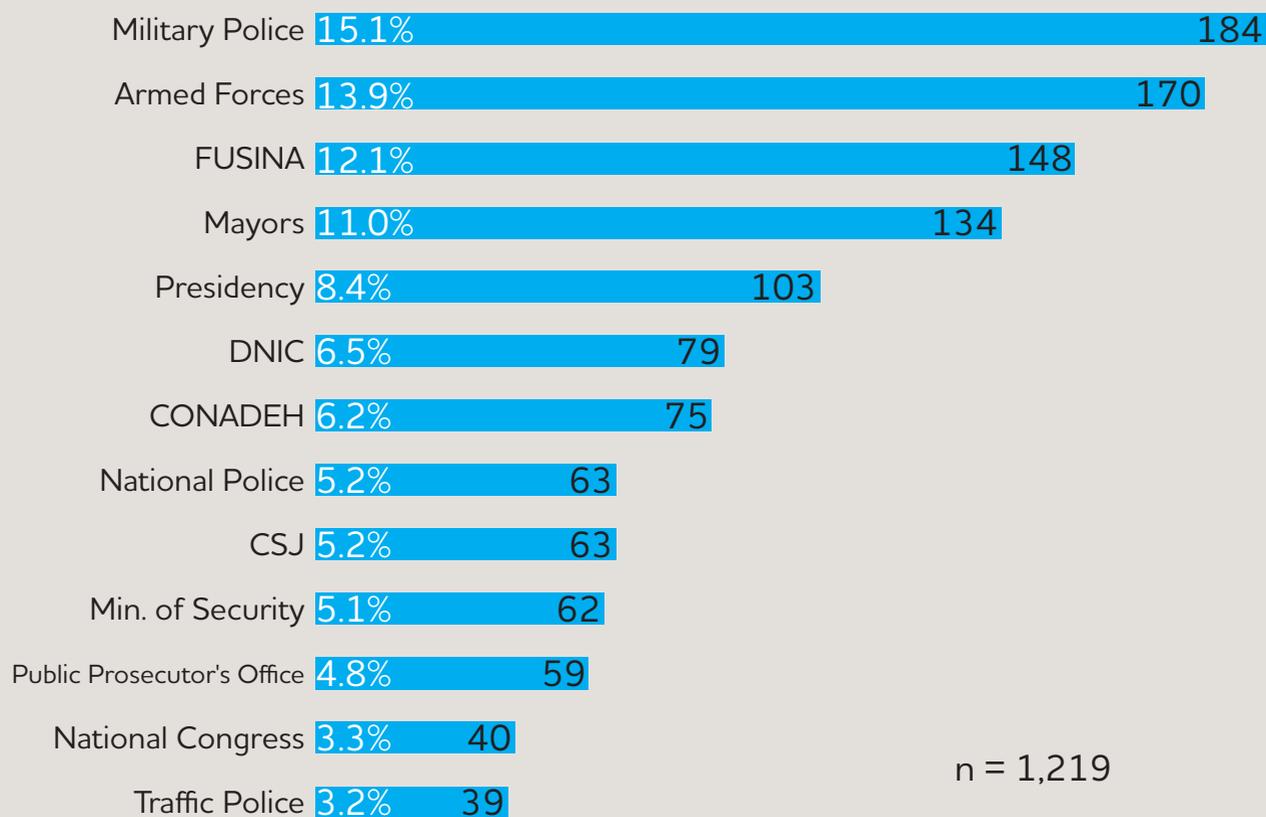
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In 2014 and 2016, the University Institute for Democracy, Peace and Security (*Instituto Universitario en Democracia, Paz y Seguridad*, IUDPAS) carried out nationwide surveys to assess the population’s perceptions regarding insecurity, victimization, and trust in institutions. Their aim was to provide input to the institutions responsible for security and for imparting justice.

The 2014 survey revealed that the PMOP and Armed Forces enjoyed the highest levels of citizen trust, even though only 15.1% of those polled reported that they had a lot of trust in the PMOP, 13.9% in the Armed Forces, and 12.1% in the FUSINA.<sup>46</sup>

## GRAPH 1

### TRUST IN HONDURAN SECURITY AND JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS, 2014 (PEOPLE WHO REPORTED HAVING A LOT OF TRUST)



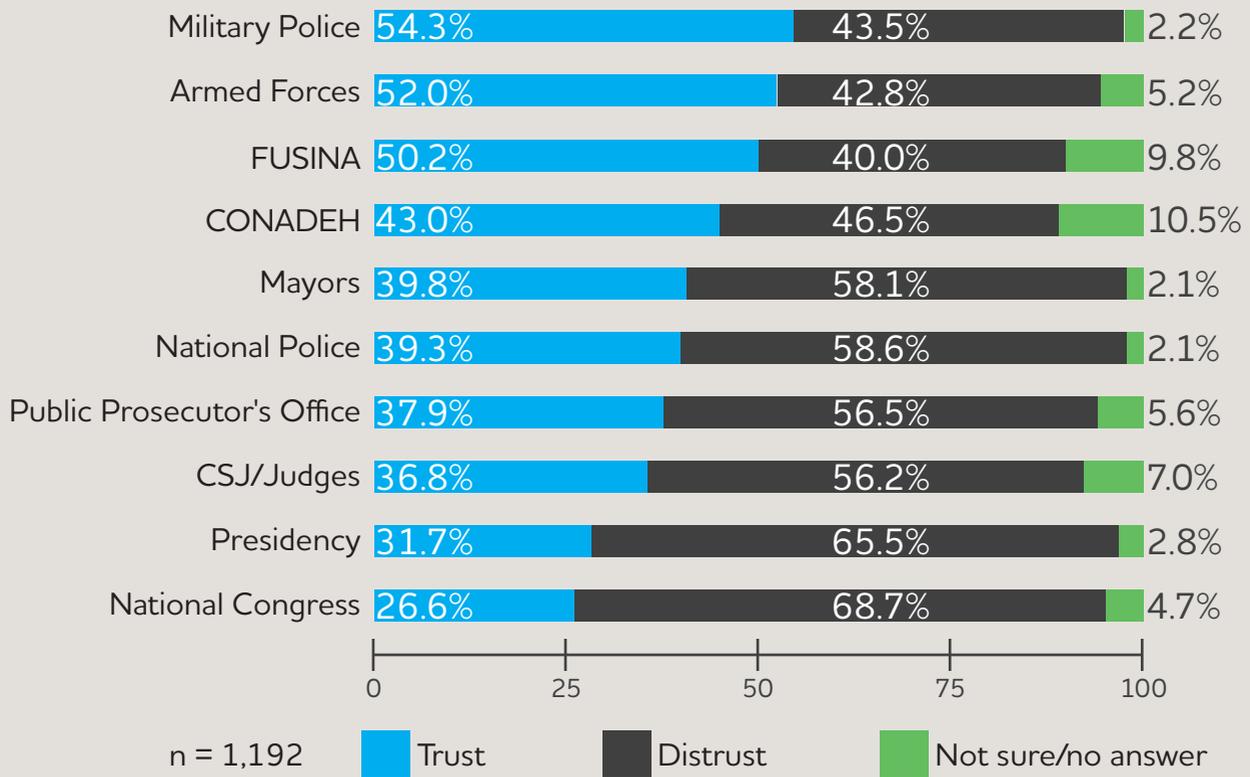
Source: Public opinion polling on insecurity and victimization in Honduras, 2014

In 2014, 62.0% of those surveyed expressed that the PMOP was the most effective institution in fighting insecurity, versus 18.9% of people who named the PNH. According to IUDPAS' analysis, the fact that the majority of people indicated

that the PMOP was more effective may have numerous explanations, such as the association of the term "security" with the military forces, the crisis within the PNH, or the campaigns in favor of remilitarizing public security.

## GRAPH 2

### TRUST IN HONDURAN SECURITY AND JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS, 2016



Source: Public opinion polling on insecurity and victimization in Honduras, 2016

The trend evident from 2014 held steady two years later. According to the 2016 public opinion survey, the PMOP was rated favorably by 54.3% of respondents, followed by the Armed Forces, which attained 52.0%.<sup>47</sup> However, upon analyzing the graph on trust and distrust in the institutions responsible for tackling insecurity, perhaps the most striking trend is people's distrust in nearly all of the country's institutions.

Despite a reduction in the country's homicide rate between 2014 and 2017, public credibility and confidence remained low in institutions working on security issues. Many sectors continue to question the increase in the Armed Forces' budget, size, and involvement in public security affairs.

# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ANAPO</b>	National Police Academy
<b>CCOP</b>	Police Leadership Training Center
<b>CCPCS</b>	Training Center for Police Agents, Classes, and Noncommissioned Officers
<b>CEDTPN</b>	Special Commission to Purge and Transform the Honduran National Police
<b>CES</b>	Council of Higher Education
<b>CETEP</b>	Center for Technical Police Specialties Schools
<b>CIE</b>	Committee of Strategic Intelligence
<b>CIP</b>	Police Training Center
<b>CNDS</b>	National Defense and Security Council
<b>CONADEH</b>	National Human Rights Commission
<b>DNI</b>	National Investigation Directorate
<b>DNII</b>	National Intelligence and Investigation Directorate
<b>FMM</b>	Myrna Mack Foundation
<b>FUSEP</b>	Public Security Force
<b>FUSINA</b>	National Interagency Security Force
<b>IACHR</b>	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
<b>IPM</b>	Military Pension Institute
<b>Iudop</b>	University Institute for Public Opinion
<b>IUDPAS</b>	University Institute for Democracy, Peace and Security
<b>MP</b>	Public Prosecutor's Office
<b>OABI</b>	Office for the Administration of Seized Assets
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>ONV-UNAH</b>	National Violence Observatory at the National Autonomous University of Honduras
<b>PMOP</b>	Military Police of Public Order
<b>PNH</b>	Honduran National Police
<b>SDNSP</b>	Ministry of National Defense and Public Security
<b>SEDH</b>	Ministry of Justice and Human Rights of Honduras
<b>SIF</b>	Seattle International Foundation
<b>TIGRES</b>	Special Response Team and Intelligence Troop
<b>UCA</b>	José Simeón Cañas Central American University
<b>WOLA</b>	Washington Office on Latin America

# NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> A detailed list of indicators is available in English at <https://www.wola.org/cam/>, and in Spanish at <https://www.wola.org/es/cam/>.
- <sup>2</sup> On October 3, 1963, the day commemorating Honduran soldiers, the Armed Forces carried out a coup d'état against the liberal government of President Ramón Villeda Morales. The military operations targeted the posts of the Civil Guard (Guardia Civil), which was seen as supporting the president. The number of fatal victims among this police corps is unknown. At midday, the surrender of the civil guards spelled the end of their historical cycle. Police work was put under military control, and in 1976, the Public Security Force was created and incorporated as the fourth operational branch of the Armed Forces (made up of the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy).
- <sup>3</sup> At the end of the 1980s, the region found itself enmeshed in the context of the Cold War, with conflicts that mainly caused bloodshed in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, threatening to destabilize the entire region. Inspired by the efforts of the Contadora Group (Grupo de Contadora) led by Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama to put an end to the conflicts in the region, the Peace Accords in Central America – Esquipulas I (1986) and II (1987) – became historic milestones that enabled the region to give certain social and economic support to the peacemaking process.
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- <sup>13</sup> In 2011, the government of Porfirio Lobo Sosa (2010–2014) enacted the Population Security Law (Ley de Seguridad Poblacional), better known as the “Security Tax.” The law’s stated purpose was to combat organized crime and violence by collecting funds for security, defense, and justice institutions. The law originally stipulated a 5-year period for the fund’s duration, although it was extended for another 5-year period in 2014, though 2021. To administer the security tax, in 2011, the National Congress enacted the Fiduciary Law for the Administration of the Population Protection and Security Fund (Fideicomiso para la Administración del Fondo de Protección y Seguridad Poblacional), and designated the Central Bank of Honduras as the administrator of the fund. Between 2014 and 2017, the government collected 10.5 billion lempiras (\$422 million) through this tax.
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## **ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS**

**THE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY, PEACE AND SECURITY (INSTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO EN DEMOCRACIA, PAZ Y SEGURIDAD, IUDPAS)** is affiliated with the Faculty of Social Sciences of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH). It was created to strengthen the research capacity of the UNAH, promote multidisciplinary in methodological theoretical approaches in the areas of security, public policies, city studies, democracy and development, issues related to youth, as well as to strengthen the competences of different university professionals.

**THE WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA (WOLA)** is a leading research and advocacy organization advancing human rights in the Americas. We envision a future where public policies protect human rights and recognize human dignity, and where justice overcomes violence.

## **ABOUT THE PROJECT**

The Central America Monitor is a subregional project that seeks to assess the level of progress being made by the countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador in the areas of strengthening the rule of law, reducing violence, combating corruption and organized crime, and protecting human rights through the use of a series of indicators. The project also monitors and analyzes international cooperation programs in the aforementioned areas.

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