

Presidential Pardon of Former Honduran President Convicted of Drug Trafficking

December 4, 2025

On November 28, 2025, President Donald Trump [announced](#) on social media that he intended to issue a “full and complete pardon” to former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández. President Trump formally [granted](#) the pardon on December 1, 2025, and Hernández was released from prison on the same day, according to the [Federal Bureau of Prisons](#). Hernández had been [sentenced](#) to 45 years in prison in June 2024 after a U.S. federal jury [convicted](#) him of conspiring to import cocaine into the United States and related firearms offenses. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Hernández and his co-conspirators trafficked more than 400 tons of U.S.-bound cocaine through Honduras between 2004 and 2022. In his pardon announcement, President Trump asserted that Hernández had been treated “unfairly.”

Some Members of Congress have [questioned](#) and [criticized](#) the Hernández pardon. Congress could use its [oversight authority](#) to examine the Administration’s justification for the pardon and the potential implications for U.S. security interests and [relations with Honduras](#), among other issues.

Background on Hernández

Hernández was an influential politician in Honduras, having served as a legislator (1998-2014), president of the national congress (2010-2014), and president (2014-2022). During his 12 years as the head of congress and president, Hernández and his right-wing National Party consolidated their influence over other nominally independent government institutions, including the [supreme court](#) and the [electoral oversight agency](#). This erosion of checks and balances paved the way for Hernández to win a [disputed](#) second presidential term in 2017, despite [Article 239](#) and other provisions of the Honduran constitution that prohibit presidential reelection. The Hernández administration also [allegedly engaged](#) in widespread corruption, diverting social assistance funds to advance personal and political interests. Nevertheless, the Hernández administration was able to maintain some political support through its patronage, conservative social policies, and hard-line approach to public security that coincided with a [decline](#) in the country’s homicide rate.

The Obama Administration and the first Trump Administration maintained close ties with Hernández, welcoming his apparent willingness to collaborate on high-level U.S. priorities, such as counternarcotics and migration. According to [DOJ](#), however, at the same time that Hernández was cooperating with U.S. agencies on certain security matters, he also was acting to protect and enrich his criminal allies. Among

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other actions, Hernández is said to have selectively extradited rival drug traffickers to the United States and used the Honduran security forces to facilitate cocaine trafficking through Honduras. In exchange for this protection and support, Hernández is said to have received campaign contributions and other bribes from drug traffickers, including Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, the then-leader of the Mexico-based Sinaloa Cartel. This weakening of the rule of law in Honduras appears to have contributed to mass emigration, with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement recording nearly 1.1 million apprehensions of Honduran nationals during the Hernández administration.

Honduran Response

President Trump announced his plans to pardon Hernández as part of a broader message endorsing Nasry “Tito” Asfura, the presidential candidate of Hernández’s National Party, and seemingly conditioning future U.S. support for Honduras on Asfura’s victory. While Hernández’s family and some National Party leaders reportedly welcomed the pardon, Asfura’s presidential rivals responded by reminding voters of the corruption and criminal scandals of the Hernández administration. President Trump’s comments on the election appear to have convinced some undecided voters to support Asfura, but the pardon might have reduced the net benefit for Asfura, who reportedly spent much of the campaign attempting to distance himself from Hernández. As of December 4, 2025, with 84.9% of precincts reporting, Asfura was narrowly leading Salvador Nasralla of the center-right Liberal Party, according to the Honduran media. Some Honduran legal analysts have characterized the Hernández pardon as a “mockery” and a “slap in the face” to the Honduran people and have expressed concerns that the pardon could send a message to Hondurans that those who engage in high-level corruption remain beyond the reach of justice. The Honduran attorney general has suggested that Hernández may face charges should he return to Honduras, where he reportedly is the subject of an open investigation.

Issues for Congress

Among other oversight efforts, Congress could inquire with the Trump Administration regarding its justification for pardoning Hernández. President Trump has asserted that Hernández was treated “unfairly” and was “set up” by the Biden Administration. To date, the Trump Administration has not provided any evidence to support those claims other than echoing some of Hernández’s complaints about his trial. The U.S. investigation into Hernández spanned several U.S. presidential Administrations, including President Trump’s first term, during which several of Hernández’s co-conspirators were charged and convicted.

Congress also could seek information regarding how the pardon fits into the Trump Administration’s security policy. The Administration has characterized many of its actions in the Western Hemisphere, including lethal military strikes in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, as aimed at combatting the flow of illicit narcotics into the United States. Some Members of Congress argue that the Hernández pardon calls into question those stated objectives. In 2024, then-Attorney General Merrick Garland asserted that Hernández had supported “one of the largest and most violent drug trafficking conspiracies in the world.” In February 2025, the Trump Administration designated the Sinaloa cartel, with which Hernández worked, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and Specially Designated Global Terrorists.

Additionally, Congress could assess the implications of the Hernández pardon for U.S.-Honduras relations and broader U.S. security interests. Although the next Honduran government is likely to maintain close ties with the United States, perceptions that U.S. law enforcement actions are based on political considerations could erode the broad-based support in Honduras for security cooperation as well as the deterrent effect of the U.S.-Honduras extradition treaty. In the assessment of one former Drug Enforcement Administration official, the impact of the Hernández pardon is likely to extend beyond Honduras, damaging the credibility of the United States and its drug trafficking investigations internationally.

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