Since regaining the Nicaraguan presidency in 2007, Daniel Ortega has led a steady assault on the country’s institutions and has accumulated vast personal power and wealth. This consolidation of authority has been felt most acutely over the past two months. The jailing of dozens of opposition leaders, including formal pre-presidential candidates, private sector leaders, and erstwhile Sandinista revolutionaries, as well as the criminalization of political dissent, represent the Ortega-Murillo regime’s final blow to the elections scheduled for November 7 of this year.

Nicaragua has transformed into the region’s third full-blown dictatorship, joining Cuba and Venezuela. Since Ortega’s reelection, the country has been on a rapid decline from representative democracy through all stages of regime hybridity—now reaching consolidated dictatorship. Following the tried-and-true playbook of regional strongmen, Daniel Ortega has been chipping away at Nicaragua’s political institutions since his return to power, through constitutional reforms, co-optation of political parties, and the takeover and politicization of judicial institutions. Ortega relied on the distraction provided by Venezuela’s political and economic crisis and Cuba’s entrenched dictatorship to avoid the spotlight shining too brightly on Nicaragua.

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