

Honduras

Honduras is divided into eighteen *departamentos* which are subdivided in 298 *municipalidades*, 3,731 *aldeas*, and 27,969 *caseríos*. Some *caseríos* are further subdivided into *barrios* or *colonias*. *Municipalidades*, with an average population of 28,000, are local government. *Municipalidades* can establish voluntary intermunicipal associations (*mancomunidades*) that do not meet the criteria of metropolitan governance as they only address specific “problems that cannot be addressed individually” as determined jointly by their member municipal governments (Decree 143-2009, Art. 20-A).¹ There is also a legal basis for the creation of special *Zonas de Empleo y Desarrollo* (Zones for Employment and Development, ZEDE), but none have been created as of 2019.² There were seventeen *departamentos* until 1957, when an additional *departamento*, Gracias a Dios, was created from Colón’s and Mosquitia’s territories. Two departments, Tegucigalpa and Comayagüela, constitute the *Municipio del Distrito Central* or Central District (C 1965, Art. 338; C 1982, Art. 295). We code them alongside the other *departamentos* because they have no special competences.

Honduras revised its constitution in 1957, 1965, and 1982, and these constitutions remained in force during military dictatorship (Merrill 1995). There were military governments until 1955, from 1963–70, and from 1972–82. In 2010, elected President José Manuel Zelaya was deposed by a coup d’état. A popularly elected president assumed executive power later in the year.

The *departamentos* are headed by a *gobernador*, who is appointed and removed by the president (Decree 134, Arts. 5 and 6). The *gobernador* acts as the liaison between the national executive, the *departamento*, and the *municipalidades* (Decree 134, Art. 7). While *municipios* are defined as

¹ There were 45 *mancomunidades* as of 2018. “Directorio de mancomunidades,” *Asociación de Municipios de Honduras*, https://www.amhon.org/inicio/images/demo/doc/Mancomunidades_Amhon_2018.pdf. Accessed July 11, 2019.

² In January 2011, congress passed a law for the creation of *Regiones Especiales de Desarrollo* (Special Development Regions) to promote investment and job creation. This law was declared unconstitutional in 2012 by the Supreme Court. New laws were subsequently passed for the creation of *Zonas de Empleo y Desarrollo* (Zones for Employment and Development, ZEDE) (Decree 236-2012, ratified by Decree 9-2013, and regulated by Decree 120-2013). The Supreme Court declared the new law to be constitutional in 2014. The law gives Congress the authority to create special zones subject to a special fiscal regime, with borrowing authority, and with the same “functional and administrative” autonomy as *municipios* (Decree 236-2012, Art. 1; Decree 120-2013, Arts. 3-4). ZEDEs are to be governed by a Committee for the Adoption of Best Practices, appointed by the Presidential and ratified by Congress (Decree 120-2013, Art. 11).

“autonomous” in the constitution (C 1936, Art. 179; C 1957, Art. 334; C 1965, Art. 338; C 1982, Art. 296), the competences of the *departamentos* are determined by national congress (C 1936, Art. 176; C 1957, Art. 332; C 1965, Art. 336; C 1982, Art. 294).⁷

Departamentos “supervise” the central institutions that implement national policy in their area (Decree 134, Art. 7), and in this vein play some role in education, health, security, and public services. But they remain firmly deconcentrated institutions. To the extent that decentralization has occurred, as for example in the water and sanitation sector, it has meant “municipalization” (Dickson 2006). The 2016 Law for the Decentralization of the State of Honduras defines decentralization as the process by which “competences, functions, associated services, capabilities, and resources” are transferred “to *municipios* and *mancomunidades*” (Decree 85, Art. 2). Hence, *departamentos* score 1 on institutional depth and zero on all other dimensions for the entire period.

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Self-Rule in Honduras

		Institutional Depth	Policy Scope	Fiscal Autonomy	Borrowing Autonomy	Representation		Self-Rule
						Assembly	Executive	
Departamentos	1950–2018	1	0	0	0	0	1	

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