



Freedom in the World - ↓ Haiti (2011)

Capital: Port-au-Prince

Population:
9,242,000

Political Rights Score: 4 *

Civil Liberties Score: 5 *

Status: Partly Free

Trend Arrow

Haiti received a downward trend arrow due to evidence of massive fraud in November 2010 elections, as well as disregard for electoral laws and lack of transparency in the operation of the Provisional Electoral Council.

Overview

A powerful earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010, killing approximately 200,000 people and leaving close to 1.2 million others homeless. The country's bureaucratic infrastructure was heavily damaged, as were prisons, police stations, and judicial facilities. A cholera outbreak that began in October had killed more than 3,000 people by the end of 2010. The November first round of the presidential and parliamentary elections was marred by instances of massive fraud, violations of electoral law, and violent street protests, leading to a political crisis that paralyzed the country through year's end.

Since gaining independence from France in 1804 following a slave revolt, the Republic of Haiti has endured a history of poverty, violence, instability, and dictatorship. A 1986 military coup ended 29 years of rule by the Duvalier family, and although the military permitted the implementation of a French-style constitution under international pressure in 1987, army officers continued to dominate political affairs for most of the next eight years.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a popular former priest, was elected president in 1990. After only eight months in office, he was deposed and exiled by a military triumvirate. While paramilitary thugs terrorized the populace, the ruling junta engaged in blatant narcotics trafficking. The United Nations ultimately authorized a multinational force to restore the legitimate Haitian government, and in September 1994, facing an imminent invasion, the military rulers stepped down. U.S. troops took control of the country, and Aristide was reinstated. He dismantled the military before the June 1995 parliamentary elections, but his support began to fracture when international observers questioned the legitimacy of the balloting. Aristide retained the backing of the more radical Lavalas Family (FL) party, which won an overwhelming parliamentary majority.

FL nominee René Préval, who had been Aristide's prime minister in 1991, won the 1995 presidential election and took office in February 1996. The constitution had barred Aristide from seeking a second consecutive term. U.S. forces withdrew from the country in April 1996, while the UN force extended its stay at Préval's urging.

Aristide returned to the presidency in the 2000 election, which was boycotted by all major opposition parties amid widespread civil unrest and voter intimidation. He ran on a populist platform of economic revitalization, though opponents claimed that he was bent on establishing a one-party state. His supporters gained a majority of seats in both the upper and lower houses in that year's parliamentary elections.

Aristide's second term was undermined by cuts in foreign aid, increasing levels of poverty, and conflict with business elites and opposition groups. Faced with an armed revolt by political gangs and former army officers in February 2004, Aristide was flown out of the country in a plane chartered by the United States. He eventually accepted exile in South Africa.

A constitutional transition elevated Boniface Alexandre, head of the Supreme Court, to the position

of president, and a new prime minister was named in March. As political decay continued throughout the country, the UN peacekeeping force gradually expanded beyond the capital. Renewed with troop contributions from Brazil and other Latin American countries, the force grew to approximately 9,000 personnel.

Former president Préval returned to power in the relatively well-conducted 2006 elections with 51 percent of the presidential vote, but his newly organized Front for Hope (Lespwa) party failed to win a majority in either house of parliament. Security improved the following year after a UN crackdown on gangs in the capital.

The parliament clashed with the government in 2008 and 2009, forcing out two prime ministers, though the replacement for the second was approved in an orderly succession in late 2009. Also during 2009, Lespwa won 5 of 11 seats at stake in elections for the Senate, retaining a plurality in the chamber.

On January 12, 2010, a powerful earthquake struck 16 miles from Port-au-Prince, killing more than 200,000 people and injuring as many as 300,000. At year's end, over a million people remained homeless, living in approximately 460 camps. The UN headquarters in Port-au-Prince was destroyed, and the infrastructure of the police force and judiciary were severely damaged, compromising security and leading to lost case work and trial delays for an already overburdened court system. In October, the country suffered an outbreak of cholera, which had killed over 3,000 people by year's end.

The first round of parliamentary and presidential elections, held in November, was marred by widespread reports of fraud, voter intimidation, violations of electoral law, and problems with the composition of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). Prior to the elections, the government refused to consider changes to the council that had been requested by the opposition and strongly recommended by the international community. Moreover, new documents had to be issued to displaced voters, and purging the deceased from voter lists proved difficult, as death certificates were unavailable in many cases. Following the election, doctored election tally sheets (procès-verbal) were posted online, and the majority of opposition candidates reiterated their calls for the election to be voided, receiving growing support in Haiti and from abroad.

In the presidential contest, Mirlande Manigat, a former first lady and the candidate for the opposition Rally of Progressive National Democrats (RDNP), won a surprising 31 percent in the first round of voting. Jude Célestin, backed by Préval, captured approximately 22.5 percent, while popular musician Michel Martelly finished third with 21.84 percent. All three candidates had supported voiding the elections, but Manigat and Célestin retracted their calls after the results were released. Meanwhile, Martelly's supporters took to the streets, claiming that fraud had prevented their candidate from advancing to the runoff. The resulting political crisis remained unresolved at year's end, with a runoff election between Manigat and Célestin scheduled for January 2011.

In the parliamentary elections, 22 candidates for the lower house won outright majorities in the first round, with the remainder of the seats to be decided in the second round in 2011. Inité took 13 of the 22 initial seats, and five smaller parties won the others. Of the 11 Senate seats at stake, Inité won three outright, and Alternativ secured one; the rest went to the 2011 runoff.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Haiti is not an electoral democracy. The first round of the presidential and parliamentary elections held in November 2010 suffered from a number of critical flaws. These included widespread complaints of unfairness and lack of transparency in the approval of candidates by the CEP, as FL candidates and the Haitian-born hip hop star Wyclef Jean were barred from participating despite high levels of support. Several past and current FL party members ran under other party banners, however.

The country's 1987 constitution provides for a president elected for a five-year term, a National Assembly composed of the 30-member Senate and the 99-member Chamber of Deputies, and a prime minister appointed by the president. Senators are elected for six-year terms, with one-third coming up for election every two years, and deputies for four-year terms. There are no term limits, but a president cannot serve consecutive terms. Lawmakers are sorely short of financial and administrative resources, and the parliament plays a reactive role, opposing or accepting initiatives

from the executive branch.

The legislature is currently divided among several small parties, with no single faction holding a majority. Most parties are driven by personality or support from a particular region.

Endemic corruption continues to hobble Haiti's political and economic development. A number of lawmakers elected in 2006 and several on the 2010 ballot have reportedly been involved in drug trafficking and other criminal activities; many seek parliamentary seats primarily to obtain immunity from prosecution. President René Prével identified the fight against corruption as a major priority, demanding full disclosure of financial records for top government officials. However, campaign financing remains unregulated and emerged as a serious issue in the 2010 campaign. Foreign donors attempted to safeguard the massive inflows of post-earthquake aid, though their success in preventing graft was not immediately clear. Haiti was ranked 146 out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of the press has been constrained by the absence of a viable judicial system and widespread insecurity. Violence against journalists remains a problem, and media outlets tend to practice self-censorship to avoid violent retribution for critical reporting. The country hosts a number of newspapers from across the political spectrum, though their circulations are fairly small. More than 90 percent of Haitians have access to radio, and more than 290 stations operate without a license on FM bandwidth. There are more than 70 community radio stations that are often linked to political groups or parties. Television stations are far less common, with about 20 in Port-au-Prince and another 15 in the provinces, and the total television audience in Haiti remains below 10 percent due to lack of electricity and resources. Internet access is hampered by similar problems.

The government generally respects religious and academic freedoms. However, the absence of an effective police force has led to poor protection for those who are persecuted for their views.

Freedoms of assembly and association, including labor rights, are not respected in practice. While Haiti has rich civil society traditions at the local level, many of its formally organized civil society groupings have been co-opted by political and economic elites. Unions are too weak to engage in collective bargaining, and their organizing efforts are undermined by the country's high unemployment rate. New labor regulations introduced in 2009 included a stratified minimum wage system for the commercial and industrial sectors, and minimum health and safety standards. Still, the minimum wage increases apply only to a small segment of the population, and enforcement remains weak.

The judicial system is corrupt, inefficient, and dysfunctional. It is burdened by a large backlog of cases, outdated legal codes, and poor facilities. Moreover, official business is conducted in French rather than Creole, rendering large portions of court proceedings only marginally comprehensible to those involved. Prison conditions are harsh, and the ponderous legal system guarantees lengthy pretrial detentions. An estimated 60 to 80 percent of prisoners have not been formally charged, and the majority are not suspected of violent or serious crimes. On average, defendants wait more than a year to appear before a judge, and family members have reportedly been incarcerated when a suspect cannot be found. In the aftermath of the earthquake in January 2010, some 4,000 prisoners escaped from the heavily damaged National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince. During a prison riot in Les Cayes that month, police shot dead 12 prisoners who had been living in overcrowded and inhumane conditions, and subsequent investigations found evidence of excessive use of force.

Hundreds of police officers suspected of corruption have been purged from the Haitian National Police (HNP), and new recruitment and training expanded the total police force from 5,700 officers in 2006 to more than 11,000 in 2009, though that was far short of the target of 15,000 officers. The UN peacekeeping force has helped to establish a minimum level of security in some parts of the country, but the HNP remains unprepared to take over in the peacekeepers' absence. The police force virtually collapsed following the 2010 earthquake, but had recovered to some extent by the end of the year.

Widespread violence against women and children worsened considerably in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. Rapes were reportedly commonplace and pervasive in the camps, where insufficient police protection and inadequate housing exacerbated the vulnerability of women and children. Trafficking of children out of the country also reportedly increased sharply after the earthquake. More than 7,300 thousand were thought to have been smuggled to the Dominican Republic in 2010, often to work in the sex trade, compared with an estimated 950 in 2009. Also in

2010, approximately 300,000 children in Haiti were reportedly serving in *restavec* ("live with," in Creole), a form of unpaid domestic labor with a long history in the country.

**Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom. Click [here](#) for a full explanation of Freedom in the World methodology.*