



2015 Haiti elections: key issues

After four years without any national elections in Haiti, the terms in office of all mayors, legislative deputies and two-thirds of senators have expired. That leaves the country with only eleven elected officials in office - the president and ten senators. Elections in Haiti are [scheduled](#) to happen on three dates in 2015: August 9, October 25 and December 27. Haitians will vote for 20 members of the Senate, 118 members of the Chamber of Deputies, and the new President.

Highlighted below are a number of key issues that make these elections particularly complex:

1. Electoral violence

Since mid-May there has been a drastic increase in the number of politically-driven incidents of violence and intimidation. Haiti's National Police (PNH) and the CEP (Provisional Electoral Council) initially hesitated to recognize the scale of the pre-electoral violence, but the statistics clearly indicate a rise in the number of victims who have been involved in the elections. The CEP recently released a [clip](#) urging all candidates and their supporters to refrain from using violence. So far, acts of violence, intimidation and vandalism have been targeted at CEP offices, members of the Council, party candidates and party supporters. Over twenty instances of violence and intimidation have been reported across the media with the most infamous one being President's Martelly [verbal abuse](#) of a female participating in his party's, PHTK, meeting in Miragoâne (Nippes).

This [map](#) compiles reports of violent incidents from media outlets in French, English and Haitian Creole.

On the 5th of August, RNDDH (*Réseau National de Défense des Droits Humains*, National Network for the Protection of Human Rights) [published](#) a comprehensive report (in French) of cases of violence linked to the elections. The report covers the period between July 9 and August 2, and provides an even higher number of violent incidents, among them:

- Nine (9) armed confrontations
- Five (5) assassinations
- Two (2) attempted assassinations
- Seven (7) wounded by gun shots
- Two (2) wounded by machete
- Seventeen (17) wounded by stone-throwing
- Ten (10) beatings

2. Participation of female candidates and voters

Despite legal requirements, female representation in politics [remains extremely low](#). Both the Haitian Constitution (Article 17.1) and the Electoral Decree (Article 100.1) set a quota of female participation at 30 percent. According to the most recent lists published by the CEP, 4 out of 55 candidates for the [President](#) (7.2 percent), 23 out 209 [Senatorial](#) candidates (11 percent) and 129 out of 1,492 [Deputy](#) Candidates (8.6 percent) are female. The clash between legislative directives and the political reality could not be any more indicative; the existing legislative framework is not enough to combat female underrepresentation in the political sphere.

3. Voter confusion

The record-high number of 128 political parties and groupings [registered](#) for the upcoming elections [risks causing](#) a high-level of voters' confusion and increasing the difficulty of administering fair elections. The CEP, responsible for the organisation and administration of the elections, [admitted](#) that such high numbers make managing the elections much more difficult. In addition, with an almost 50 percent illiteracy rate in Haiti, voters will find it difficult to find their preferred candidates on the ballot papers. Finally, rather than being an expression of vitality of Haiti's democracy, this proliferation points to the contrary. According to [some analyses](#), President Michel Martelly is closely linked to as many as 66 of these parties.

4. Voter apathy

Long overdue, the upcoming legislative elections have not generated as much public interest as might have been expected. It is important to remember that following the January [political crisis](#), the establishment of the [new CEP](#), the uncertainty over the electoral schedule, and the questioning of the CEP's credibility (e.g. over its [ruling of décharge](#)), many voters doubted that these elections would actually take place. In addition, the recent citizenship crisis on the Haiti-DR border and the drastic [weakening](#) of gourde (1 USD=56 HTG) have been at the centre of political preoccupations.

A low turnout for the August 9 voting does not necessarily predict a low turnout for the full election cycle. In Haiti, as elsewhere, purely legislative elections typically have a lower turnout than Presidential ones. Public financing for the first round arrived late, and it appears that many parties are holding back campaign resources for the October voting. If the CEP builds its credibility through the August 9 voting, that fact combined with the longer lead time, the addition of the Presidential and local races, the narrowing of options in the legislative race, and higher campaign expenditures could lead to a high turnout.

5. Risk of foreign intervention

Current electoral challenges are inseparable from the instances of voter fraud, [foreign intervention](#) and voters' disillusionment which shaped the 2010 elections.

The 2010 elections were hindered by preparatory and administrative failures, voter disenfranchisement and numerous legal and political irregularities. Post-earthquake conditions as well as the UN-triggered cholera epidemic, for which the UN is [yet to be held accountable](#), made it difficult for people to re-register to vote. Incidents of political violence, voter intimidation, and the arbitrary disqualification of over a dozen political parties further undermined the credibility of the elections. This directly contributed to an extremely low voter turn-out (below 23 percent).

Foreign intervention damaged the legitimacy of the electoral process in 2010 and could have a similar impact in 2015. When conflicts erupted in 2010 over [irregularities](#) with voting tabulations, an Observer Mission from the Organization of American States (OAS) stepped in to impose a solution. Ricardo Seitenfus, the OAS's Special Representative to Haiti at the time, [denounced](#) his organization's role in the dispute as "a white coup and a blatant electoral intervention." (Seitenfus was dismissed from his position in December 2010 after publicly criticizing the international community's influence over Haiti.) The OAS played an equally [controversial role](#) in disputes that arose after the May 2000 legislative elections. Recent investigations [reveal](#) that USAID provided funding to a group supporting Michel Martelly, the Haitian President, in 2011.

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