

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Haiti

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>6</td> <td>6</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>1</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>Yes</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	5	5	0	Democ:	6	6	0	Autoc:	1	1	0	Durable:		1		Tentative:		Yes		
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Tentative:		Yes																							
SCODE	HAI	CCODE	041	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	2	4	6	3	3																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date		3 August 2004		Begin Date																					
				14 May 2006																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution		1987																							
Executive(s)		President René Préval (Front for Hope-Lespwa); directly elected, 6 February 2006, 51.2% Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis; appointed by the president and approved by National Assembly, 17 May 2006																							
Legislature		Bicameral: Chamber of Deputies (99 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 7 February and 21 April 2006) Front for Hope (Lespwa): 21 Fusion of Haitian Social Democrats (Fusion): 17 Democratic Alliance (Alyans): 12 Organization of the People in Struggle (OPL): 10 Other parties: 39 Senate (30 members; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 7 February 2006) Lespwa: 13 Other parties: 17																							
Judiciary		Court of Cassation																							

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Transitional or Restricted Elections (7)

Haiti remains one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. Chronic political instability and autocratic rule has plagued Haiti since it gained independence from France in 1804. During the second half of the 20th century, Haitian politics were largely shaped by the authoritarian regimes of “Papa Doc” Duvalier and his son, “Baby Doc,” whose ruthless rule was maintained by their own private militia, the Tonton Macoutes. After the overthrow of the Duvalier regime in 1985, the task of reforming the political system fell into the hands of the military. After a series of failed attempts at installing a civilian regime in Haiti, competitive elections were finally held in 1990. In these elections, a left-wing Catholic priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was selected as president. However, Aristide’s efforts at reforming the political system and ending army corruption led to a military coup in September 1991. Amidst an impending economic collapse, rising political instability, and the mounting threat of US military intervention, the military government ultimately abdicated its rule in the autumn of 1994 and Aristide returned to power.

Despite the return of Aristide to power, the fate of democratic rule remained troubled. In 1995 Rene Preval replaced Aristide, who was barred by the Constitution from succeeding himself, in presidential elections that were marred by serious irregularities and an opposition boycott of second-round balloting. Despite these irregularities, the inauguration of Preval in February 1996 marked the first ever transition between two popularly elected presidents in Haitian history. President Aristide returned to power in February 2001 after he won the November 2000 elections. These elections were criticized as unfair both in design and in practice by opposition parties and by international observers. The Provisional Electoral Council, set up by the Preval administration prior to the May 2000 legislative elections, adopted a vote tabulation method that strongly disadvantaged opposition groups not affiliated with the Lavalas Party in National Assembly balloting. Failure to rectify these irregularities resulted in all major opposition parties boycotting the presidential elections later that year. Amidst sporadic political violence and widespread voter apathy, the presidential elections were held without international monitoring. Aristide and his party are alleged to have used voter fraud, violence and intimidation to hold on to power in these elections.

January 2004 was marked by a general strike and mass demonstrations calling for Aristide’s resignation; several protestors were killed in clashes with police. On 29 February 2004, Aristide resigned and was escorted out of the country in the wake of an armed uprising that saw more than half the country fall into the hands of armed rebels commanded by Guy Philippe, a former chief of police who had fled to the Dominican Republic in 2002 after he had been accused of conspiring to launch a coup, and Louis-Jodel Chambelain, a former senior officer in the disbanded Haitian army who had been linked to the activities of death squads in the 1980s. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Boniface Alexandre was subsequently sworn in as president of an interim government. Despite ongoing violence between Lavalas supporters and the combined forces of national police and international peacekeepers, the interim government stayed on track to hold democratic elections.

Presidential elections were originally slated for October/November 2005. Over thirty candidates registered to compete, however, the Lavalas party threatened to boycott the election after its candidate, Gerard Jean-Juste, was barred from registering. Former president and one-time ally of Aristide, Rene Preval, formed his own party, L’espwa (Hope), separate from Lavalas. After a series of delays, first-round balloting was held on 7 February 2006. In this round Preval was credited with 48.7% of the official tally, falling short of the bare majority necessary to prevent a run-off election. Preval supporters and members of Lavalas took to the streets demanding that he be declared President, claiming that massive fraud had prevented him from winning an outright victory. Under increasing domestic and international pressure, the vote tally was reconsidered after 80,000 burned ballots were found in a city dump. Preval was declared the official victor on 16 February with 51% of the total vote and precluded the necessity of a second-round ballot. Preval was inaugurated in May 2006, marking the return to constitutional rule in Haiti.

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Executive Constraints: Near Parity (6)

Historically, the legislature has been subordinate to the executive branch in Haitian politics. However, with the return of electoral politics to Haiti in the early 1990s, the power of the legislative branch increased significantly. Although members of the Lavalas social movement have dominated both the legislative and the executive branches of government since 1995, interparty rivalry has repeatedly gridlocked the government. Preval, who was Aristide's handpicked successor in the 1995 election, initially presided over a legislature dominated by the ex-president's broad-based Lavalas Political Organization (OPL). However, a growing rift within the OPL coalition in late 1996 resulted in Aristide establishing a rival political party, the Lavalas Family (FL). Despite significant defections from the OPL, OPL loyalists retained their hold on Parliament, renaming their group the Struggling People's Party. After the fractionalization of the OPL in late 1996, President Preval became increasingly constrained by factional fighting within the legislative branch. This crisis of governance in Haiti became increasingly intense after the Senate and local elections of 1997. In these elections intense partisan rancor erupted within the Lavalas movement and deep divisions within the Parliament and between the legislative and executive branches of government developed. Between June 1997 and January 1999 the National Assembly refused all three nominees for the post of prime minister forwarded by President Preval. For all practical purposes, the institutions of governance in Haiti came to a virtual standstill.

Due to the stalemate of governance between 1997 and early 1999, legislative elections scheduled for the end of 1998 were cancelled. Using this as a pretext to reassert his control over Haiti's government, in January 1999 President Preval dismissed the entire Chamber of Deputies and all but nine members of the Senate, claiming that their terms in office had officially expired. The President then ruled by decree for the next year-and-a-half, establishing a cabinet composed almost entirely of FL partisans. Preval used this time of limited executive branch oversight to create a Provisional Electoral Council, stacked with FL supporters, to organize new legislative elections that were ultimately held in May 2000. These elections, decried by both opposition parties and international observers as blatantly undemocratic in nature, produced a landslide victory for the FL. Under the new legislature, the President's FL party held twenty-six out of twenty-seven Senate seats and seventy-two of the eighty-three seats in the lower house (in addition to the vast majority of local administrative posts). These flawed 2000 elections established the FL as a hegemonic force in Haitian politics and reasserted the dominance of the executive branch in governance.

President Aristide, who was returned to office in November 2000, ruled with only limited legislative or judicial oversight. In response to international pressure, especially from the Organization of American States (OAS), President Aristide extended an offer in June 2001 to hold new elections in late 2002 or 2003. His offer was met with skepticism by the newly formed Democratic Convergence, an alliance of 15 opposition parties, and in March 2002, President Aristide announced a new government to be led by Prime Minister Yvon Neptune. Prior to the establishment of a negotiated settlement to the electoral crisis, President Aristide was forced from office in February 2004. An interim government was established and was provided with the mandate to hold new elections in November 2005, which were postponed until February 2006. Former President Preval emerged as the victor from these elections and was inaugurated 14 May 2006.

In October 2007 President Preval raised the issue of reforming the Constitution prior to the end of his term in 2011. Preval argued that the Constitution, adopted after the collapse of the Duvalier dynasty, focused too much on the checks and balances of executive power and, in the process, is too bureaucratic and expensive. Many Haitians distrust his desire to reformulate the Constitution, recalling his first term in office (1996-2000), in which a disputed election led him to close down parliament and rule by decree. Demonstrating their reluctance to adhere to the will of the President, in May 2008 the parliament rejected his choice for a new prime minister. Thus far Preval's actions have been limited by the political necessities of holding together a diverse and fragile governing coalition in the legislature.

Political Participation: Factional/Restricted Competition (6)

Despotism, factionalism and deep-rooted socioeconomic inequalities have long defined Haitian society. While Haiti is a racially homogeneous society, with 99% of the population tracing their lineage to African slaves, nevertheless, fundamental class divisions in this country have historically overlapped with differences in skin color and cultural identification to produce intense social animosities and violent political factionalism. Despite the return of electoral politics to Haiti in 1995, democracy continues to face an uphill battle in this impoverished Caribbean country where there is no tradition of popular participatory

rule, no coherent structure of stakeholders, no heritage of rule of law and human rights, and little experience with political parties and electoral procedures.

Haitian civil society can be broadly divided into three, somewhat fluid, blocks: (1) the social democratic, pro-Aristide *Lavalasian* block that appeals largely to the Haitian poor; (2) the neo-liberal “reformist” bloc with its middle class supporters; and (3) the “neo-Duvalierist” faction comprised of former military officers, warlords and politicians bent on preserving the social inequities in Haitian society through repression and corruption. The Lavalas Alliance served as an umbrella organization for a loose and diverse coalition of parties and groups with competing factional interests until its fractionalization in 1999-2000, which led to the disbanding of Parliament for 18 months. There is also a broad spectrum of non-Lavalas parties operating in Haiti. Some of these parties, such as the FNCD and KONAKOM, repeatedly boycotted the electoral process, claiming that Lavalas domination of the electoral apparatus unfairly skewed the democratic process in their favor. Other small parties have participated in elections but have performed poorly. With the exile of former-President Aristide in 2004, the institutional power of Lavalas has been significantly weakened. In the elections of 2006, many parties, most notably Lavalas, were prevented from full participation. While President Preval’s party, Platform Lespwa, enjoyed strong backing from Aristide supporters of the former Lavalas Party, Preval has shown no signs of allowing the former president to return from exile in South Africa.

Political competition in Haiti is intense and often violent. During the months preceding the 2000 elections, for example, Lavalas militants and the national police increased their harassment of opposition political activists. Opposition candidates were arrested, beaten, shot, and some were killed. Moreover, in the wake of these elections many opposition candidates and activists were arrested for their involvement in street protests aimed at overturning the fraudulent legislative elections. The factional nature of Haitian politics was dramatically demonstrated in February 2004 when President Aristide was forced to abandon his office and leave the country. The “coup” against Aristide was launched by a loose coalition of politically-supported armed gangs, former members of the military (which Aristide had disbanded in 1995) and US-supported opposition political parties. While this new coalition promised to reestablish political transparency and accountability to government and promote economic growth, the interim government they established proved to be unable to control the factional forces at work in the country. Members of the Lavalas party were imprisoned without charge and systematically threatened by armed gangs. While 7,000 UN peacekeepers were assigned to help the interim government keep the peace, political violence continued to escalate and the interim government proved incapable of effectively exerting its control either inside the capital city or in the countryside. Former members of the armed forces became the *de facto* authority in many towns outside the capital city while armed gangs divided political power in Port-Au-Prince amongst themselves. Despite the inability of the interim government to maintain control over its territory, the 2006 elections proceeded with strong international involvement and seem to have calmed the political discord in Haiti, at least for the immediate term. In mid-October 2007 the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the UN Stabilization Mission until 15 October 2008. Efforts by the UN force to disarm the population have been largely unsuccessful.