

# First round of Haitian legislative elections held amidst immigration and political crises

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On August 9, Haiti held the first round of legislative elections for 20 (out of 30) senatorial seats and all 119 seats in the chamber of deputies. Results of the balloting may not be available until the middle of next week; roughly 1,500 polling stations were open nationwide, with most using paper ballots.

Nearly 130 political parties ran a total of 1,850 candidates. The Organization of American States, with funding from France, the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and several other countries, sent 28 observers to monitor 171 of the polling sites. France and the United States have longstanding imperialist interests in Haiti, with France reviving its interest in recent years. Brigadier General Fernando Rodrigues Goulart of Brazil is the commander of the UN's MINUSTAH force in Haiti, which also includes 558 Argentine military personnel.

Pierre-Louis Opont, president of Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council, reported that 54 polling stations were closed by disruptions. There were reports of two murders on election day, in addition to five that occurred during the campaign. Paper ballots were torn up in some voting locations, while others opened late or closed early. Seeking to blame the disruptions on workers and peasants, a group of foreign diplomats released a statement praising "the efforts of Haitian authorities including the police, government and elections officials."

Haiti has not had a legislature since January of this year because of a four-year delay in holding elections. The second round of voting for the new legislature will coincide with the first round of presidential elections at the end of October. President Michel Martelly, who under electoral law is not eligible for a second term, will continue to rule by decree in the meantime.

Martelly's government is, nonetheless, in crisis. Last

week his Women's Affairs minister, Social Affairs minister, and Secretary of State for Alphabetization announced their resignations in reaction to rude and vulgar comments the president made to a woman who criticized him during a campaign rally for his political party.

More significantly, Haiti's ambassador to the Dominican Republic, Daniel Supplice, was fired in July for calling the PIDIH—a Haitian government agency tasked with providing documentation to emigrants of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic—a "failure". Supplice had been in the job only since February of this year, when his predecessor resigned because of complaints about the agency's ineffectiveness.

These political clashes have not lessened the Haitian government's open cynicism. As thousands of emigrants are returning from the Dominican Republic and living in desperate conditions just inside the border, Frantz Pierre-Louis from the Department of Civil Protection told NPR: "We don't give them too much because if you give them, let's say, an overload of food, then that might put them in a position to sell the food." He went on to threaten, "The Haitian government will not help any person it determines is Dominican."

According to the Dominican government, nearly 66,000 Haitians and people of Haitian descent have "voluntarily" returned to Haiti since a June 17 deadline for filing regularization applications. There have been some reports of small deportation operations, but so far the Dominican government has relied on threats of deportation and theft of personal possessions instead of instituting an organized campaign.

Mothers have been separated from their children, and Haitians who have worked in the Dominican Republic for decades are leaving out of fear. The new camps arising on the Haitian side of the border have no

running water, electricity, or food. The lack of sanitary conditions puts returnees at risk for cholera.

The Guardian recently described one of the camps, which is ironically named Parc Cadeau (“gift park”), as “a settlement with more than 500 shelters built with branches, cardboard, and other discarded materials.”

Al Jazeera America reported on “one of a half-dozen sites nationwide where the Haitian government promised it would build reception centers to receive new arrivals ‘with dignity.’ So far the only thing it has built is a sign welcoming the ‘repatriated.’”

The Dominican government is now saying that 239,000 people who started the regularization application process before the June 17 deadline can stay in the Dominican Republic for up to two years. This delay is motivated in part by the need to keep low-wage workers in agricultural and service jobs on the Dominican side of the border.

Unemployment and population density are significantly lower in the Dominican Republic than in Haiti. Both countries have roughly equal populations, but the land mass of Haiti is only about 57 percent that of its neighbor. For years Dominican sugar growers profited by hiring Haitian immigrants, but did not sponsor them for citizenship.

Fear and intimidation will continue for those who are able to remain in the Dominican Republic. In May 2014, its government passed a law providing an application process for the estimated 210,000 people left stateless by the Constitutional Court’s infamous TC/0168/13 decision in 2010. Known as the *sentencia*, TC/0168/13 denied Dominican citizenship to anyone born in the Dominican Republic after 1929 to parents in irregular immigration status.

The May 2014 naturalization law threatens penalties of two to five years in prison and fines based on multiples of the minimum wage for anyone whose application contains a “falsehood.”

The Dominican government has kept a tight seal on its motivation for provoking the immigration crisis. One possibility is a plan for confrontation with the Haitian government over a gold ore seam that runs under the northern border of the two countries. In May 2012, the Associated Press estimated the value of the ore at \$40 billion.

Whatever its motivations, the Dominican Republic has hired Steptoe and Johnson, legal consultants, to

hide its ruthlessness behind a public relations campaign. The contracted services include “preparation of press releases and distribution through US agencies in Spanish and English; constant search of informational opportunities for the placement of news items of all types ... specific management of opinion pieces in the US media; management/reinforcement of opinion pieces in the media ... and management of relations with third parties in the field of culture and US Non-Governmental Organizations dealing with migration issues.”

Former Puerto Rican Governor Luis Fortuño is one of the Steptoe and Johnson partners committed in the contract, at a rate of \$1,162 per hour. John Rizzo, a longtime CIA lawyer who oversaw torture and drone assassinations, is also a senior counsel in the firm although he is not associated with the Dominican Republic contract.



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