

Haiti must not rush to reschedule elections.

A credible, secure electoral process is the priority

Policy Paper

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Summary

- In July 2026, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) announced 13 December 2026 as the date for the first round of presidential and parliamentary elections. On 6 October, however, the CEP confirmed that the start of the official campaign period was cancelled, implying that a revised electoral timetable was being prepared. A new election date has still to be announced, if that is indeed the plan.
- It has been 10 years since elections were last held in Haiti and the country has been led by a variety of fragile interim governments since 2021. According to a May 2026 survey for Chatham House by Q-Q Research Consultants, nearly 90 per cent of respondents believed elections were important to the country's future and 82 per cent believed they should be held before the end of 2027.¹ It is understandable that Haitians want elections to take place soon. But the conditions for a credible and secure ballot are not yet in place.
- The CEP's intervention offers an opportunity to shift the focus from meeting an arbitrary deadline to establishing a credible revised electoral timetable and process, including public consultations on constitutional reform.
- Achieving a workable timeline will require the identification of the specific goals and benchmarks for logistical, security and technical areas that are still lacking. Four areas in particular must be addressed: **the scale and representativeness of voter registration**, including across geographic areas, gender and age groups; **independent and robust mechanisms for vetting candidates**, both for the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections and for future electoral cycles; **secure, transparent and efficient procedures for collecting and tabulating votes**; and **minimum security conditions for the electoral process**, so that candidates – especially women – can campaign safely, voters can cast their ballots free from intimidation, and election workers can carry out their duties without fear of harm.
- The effort must be led and owned by Haitians. But ensuring that the Haitian government and the CEP stick to those goals and benchmarks will require a coordinated international response to ensure progress is maintained. An international pre-election assessment mission that produces a public report on those and other issues before the end of 2026 could help Haitian authorities in building a credible foundation for the election process.

¹ Sabatini, C. (2026), *What Haitians want from the next phase of UN and international support: Insights and policy lessons from a May 2026 nationwide survey of 1,332 Haitian adults*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://doi.org/10.55317/9781784136895>.

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What's the problem?

The CEP's likely postponement of the December elections following the changes to the campaign period is an acknowledgment that the gap between the electoral timetable announced in July and the conditions required for a credible and secure national vote was too large.² While postponement would provide additional preparation time, the underlying problems could remain unresolved.

According to the Chatham House/Q-Q 2026 survey, more than 75 per cent of Haitians have little-to-no trust in their political class. That number increases to 82 per cent among Haitians between the ages of 18 and 29 – most of whom have never cast a ballot given the 10-year lapse since elections were last held.³

To hold credible, safe elections and limit the influence of gangs on the process, there will need to be secure transportation routes and protection both for candidates as they travel to campaign and for voters as they register to vote and cast their ballot. Despite some advances in arresting gang members, the Haitian National Police (PNH) and the international Gang Suppression Force (GSF) have yet to retake territory under direct or indirect gang control. Logistical and material delays have slowed the deployment on-the-ground of GSF troops.⁴

There are also issues with voter registration. Insecurity, a lack of voter education around the process and the absence of clarity over some of the offices and candidates involved all have an effect. Since the CEP started the voter registration process, the daily count has slowed. As a result, the CEP is not on track to meet its own target of registering between 3 to 4 million voters before the election date. The electoral body's records show that only 812,548 voters had been registered by 13 October – just 12 per cent of a potential 6.6 million eligible voters.⁵

Preparations for registering candidates and voters are advancing, as are plans for managing and organizing voting centres, and for the transmission and tabulation of votes. But doubts remain. Concerns have been raised over coordination and the potential for fraud (or the perception of it) following a proposal to decentralize the voter tabulation process. This revised process would represent a big change from past elections, when a single central location tallied all votes from across the country.

Plans for the Haitian diaspora of voting age to participate create another set of logistical and political decisions to be made. Principal among these decisions is where to set up voting centres abroad. With the diaspora being dispersed widely from Canada to Chile, the US to France, not all communities of Haitians living abroad will be able to vote under a pilot effort like that proposed, meaning that diaspora vote totals will unavoidably be skewed.

The CEP is also short of the time and institutional capacity needed to vet candidates thoroughly for possible ties to illicit groups or criminal activity, aside from those individuals already sanctioned by the UN Security Council.

² Charles, J. (2026), 'Haiti revises electoral law again, but doesn't formally postpone Dec. 13 vote', *Miami Herald*, 9 October 2026, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article317549168.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Charles, J. (2026), 'U.N. Security Council renews gang-fighting force for Haiti amid fresh attacks', *Miami Herald*, 29 September 2026, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article317423130.html>.

⁵ The CEP's website gives a running total of voter registrations. See Conseil Electoral Provisoire (2026), 'Estatistik enskripsyon elektoral', <https://cephaiti.ht/statistiques-inscription-des-electeurs>.

Finally, the 13 December presidential and parliamentary elections are due to be accompanied by a popular vote on constitutional reforms. Despite this, there is no detailed presentation of what precisely those reforms are and the expected process of public and popular consultation on the merits and risks of those reforms is yet to start.

Why does it matter?

The UN Security Council's approval and recent renewal of the GSF, as well as growing international attention and support for Haiti, have created momentum.⁶ Haiti's business community has also asserted that it is committed to pulling together for change.

As the GSF begins its deployment, Haiti may be on the cusp of that change. Effective progress will require free and fair elections. But elections held too soon and under current conditions could lead to further instability.

A failure to convene an election that is free of coercion and fraud – and one that is seen as representative by a majority of Haitians – risks producing a discredited and weak government. Any elections that exclude large segments of the population, including the estimated 1.5 million Haitians displaced by violence or others living in gang-controlled areas, may lead to greater social upheaval.

Haiti would be tipped even further into unchecked criminal violence, which could lead to the government being controlled directly or indirectly by the gangs. Haiti would then go from a failed state to an elected criminal state. The possibility of an accountable, democratic government would slip further away. Popular demands for the restoration and improvement of basic public services – like education, healthcare and sanitation – and formal jobs will go unanswered. Most importantly, this scenario would lead to intolerable levels of insecurity and violence.

For Haiti's neighbours, including the Dominican Republic, the US, Mexico and the Caribbean island nations (some of which are members of the British Commonwealth), a social and political collapse like this would bring increased pressure from outward migration. Violence may also spill over into the region, as Haiti's gangs seek to consolidate their hold on transnational crime, including narcotics trafficking.

Policy options and trade-offs

The CEP's expected decision to postpone the election shifts the policy debate from whether the original timetable can be maintained to how the additional preparation time should be used, and under what conditions a revised electoral calendar should be established.

⁶ United Nations (2026), 'Adopting Resolution 2829 (2026), Security Council Renews Haiti Gang Suppression Force for Six Months', press release, 29 September 2026, <https://press.un.org/en/2026/sc16466.doc.htm>.

The CEP itself had not treated the electoral calendar as unconditional: the calendar it published in July 2026 explicitly stated that implementation depended on an acceptable security environment and sufficient financing,⁷ although neither condition was clearly defined.

A revised calendar alone will not resolve any of the underlying constraints. The task is not just to determine *when* elections should occur, but to untangle processes that have already started and to set the minimal thresholds for each of those processes, with a timeline and benchmarks against which to measure progress.

The following options are available:

Postpone elections indefinitely

The CEP's expected decision to delay the elections provides more time to address outstanding electoral preparations, but a long delay or an open-ended postponement carries its own political risks. Without a clear and widely understood pathway towards elections, prolonged uncertainty could further weaken public confidence in the electoral process and deepen divisions over the political transition. Continued uncertainty over when the transitional government will end and an elected government will return may also weigh on economic confidence and investment.

Move quickly to establish a new date

While elections are essential to restore constitutional government to Haiti, rushing to meet a specific and fast-approaching date would be unrealistic and potentially dangerous. Establishing a new date that is too close to the original one will not give the CEP and government enough time to address the issues of voter and candidate registration, organizational challenges and insecurity that led to the original postponement. Citizens' confidence in the electoral process will only be further eroded if another election date has to be cancelled.

Establish a firm, realistic election date and timeline

A revised electoral timetable must be realistic and there must be accountability for progress. The CEP, Haitian authorities, political and civil society actors and international partners will need to coordinate to identify specific conditions, targets and benchmarks for the remaining stages of the electoral process, as well as a timeline for achieving them. A new election date should provide political predictability, but should also reflect a realistic assessment of the time required to meet the necessary conditions.

A longer time horizon before elections will also allow for closer coordination between Haitian society and the international community. Coordination should include agreement on and communication of a set of commitments for the processes, steps and benchmarks necessary for credible elections. Those commitments should include, at least, a framework for voter registration, candidate registration and vetting, an agreement on a framework for fielding registration and voting centres, the timing and focus for voter education programmes, security thresholds, and the role of international assistance and observation at the invitation of Haitian authorities.

⁷ CEP Haiti (@cep_haiti) via X (2026), 'Le Conseil Electoral Provisoire Publie Officiellement Le Calendrier Electoral 2026-2027' [The Provisional Electoral Council Officially Publishes the 2026–2027 Election Calendar], 27 July 2026, https://x.com/cep_haiti/status/2081793156035579923?s=48&t=qlB4WIsNA9ZJkC82_c74Sw.

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All those efforts should be led and owned by Haitians. But ensuring that goals and dates are met – after elections have already been postponed twice under transitional governments – will require international assistance and oversight.

The last of the three options above would still present a number of problems to be considered. These include:

- **Registration totals and representative participation.** Any postponement of the election date will have to bring a dramatic increase in voter registration beyond the 12 per cent of qualified voters reported on 13 October. There are three possible answers to this problem:
 - Conduct a broad effort on voter education and mobilization to expand the current CEP registration process.
 - Return to the original National Identification Office (ONI) civil registry, rather than creating an entirely new voter database, and adjust for those who have been displaced, are deceased or have emigrated.
 - Create a hybrid model that is based on the CEP voter registry, while allowing Haitians to vote with their ONI biometric ID cards on election day regardless of the CEP registration.

Whatever numerical target is set, the issue of the representativeness of those registered voters remains. Current patterns of voter registration show uneven territorial concentrations and low levels of youth registration. The CEP acknowledges that security, displacement, documentation requirements and physical access have created an unrepresentative national sample of potential voters. All sections of the population must have a say in Haiti's future for elections to be credible.

- **National security and the electoral process.** Elections cannot be delayed to a fixed date until the GSF and PNH restore full security in Haiti. But having both operations in place creates a dilemma around sequencing and temporary distortion. Waiting for those forces to gain comprehensive territorial control would delay political participation indefinitely. Proceeding while gangs can still determine which candidates are able to stand and where they can travel risks embedding security inequalities and gang influence directly into the electoral process.

The minimum-security threshold will need to be clear on how to secure the electoral process, alongside its other mission objectives. Among other issues, the threshold should focus on ensuring that voters have access to registration and voting sites, that those sites are protected, that transportation corridors are secure, that the movements of candidates are protected, and that security forces are on alert during the vote, the counting process and afterwards.

Recommendations

Haiti and its people have already started to prepare for elections. Their work will provide an important foundation for continued preparations whenever those elections are held. A postponement should not interrupt any preparations already undertaken. Instead, the additional time should be used to establish a framework of realistic timelines, measurable benchmarks and targets – accompanied by clear public communication.

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International partners such as the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organization of American States, as well as foreign embassies, should continue supporting existing electoral preparations while working with Haitian authorities, political leaders, civil society and election experts to establish a detailed framework for a revised timetable. Their role should be to assist – but not lead – a Haitian-owned process.

An example of such assistance could be an external pre-election assessment mission before the end of 2026. A group of international multilateral organizations and election experts would travel to Haiti meet with political and civic leaders to produce a public report on pre-electoral conditions and needs. Such an effort could help Haitian authorities as they wrestle with the design decisions noted above and competing demands.

The priorities should be to:

Develop a framework of electoral processes and benchmarks for progress towards agreed targets

The CEP and the Haitian government (with technical support from international partners) should work together to develop a framework of processes and sectors to prioritize. Those frameworks could include a timeline, specific metrics and realistic goals grouped around themes (and sub-themes). The following themes and actions are recommended:

- **Participation.** Continue to measure total numbers of voters enrolled over time; track the representativeness of voter rolls (based on Haitians with ONI ID cards); run voter education campaigns; and determine both interim and final threshold targets for progress.
- **Institutional effectiveness and responsiveness.** Agree on clear and objectively enforced candidate eligibility rules and processes; draw up detailed plans for the organization and operation of the polls and the tabulation of votes; and ensure database and software security for the CEP.
- **Constitutional clarity.** Identify specific constitutional reforms to be voted on alongside the presidential and parliamentary elections; conduct public education campaigns and continue popular consultations on the proposed reforms; and determine how those reforms will be presented on ballots.
- **Voter and candidate security.** Devise operational plans for the PNH and other forces to secure the electoral process; coordinate with the GSF as it reaches the full deployment; and determine areas of the country in which to prioritize security ahead of the elections.

Align security support with electoral access

Haitians and international donors should agree on a method to objectively measure improvements in security. One of the main points of focus should be securing Haiti's electoral logistics. The GSF, Haitian security authorities and international partners should incorporate electoral access into their operational planning, while preserving each other's roles and responsibilities.

Priority should be given in security planning to communes, transport corridors and population centres where insecurity is preventing voter registration, constraining candidates' ability to campaign or blocking access to polling sites. Particular attention should be paid to the Artibonite, Centre and Ouest departments, where insecurity affects a significant share of the electorate.

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Any security gains, however incremental, must translate into broader and more equitable political participation.

Sustain international engagement across the full electoral cycle

International financing for the elections should be structured around the electoral process as a whole, not a single voting date. Support will be required for multiple elements of the process, including voter registration and education; public consultations and informational campaigns on constitutional reform; election administration; observation; vote tabulation; dispute resolution; a possible second round of voting; and, if necessary, adjustments to the electoral timetable. The UNDP's Electoral Basket Fund provides an established mechanism for coordinating such assistance.

To help keep the process on track and reassure Haitian citizens, international donors will need also to coordinate over and send clear signals of potential costs for failing to meet agreed timelines and goals.

Prepare mechanisms for dispute management and electoral contingency

Haitian authorities and international partners should anticipate disputes over candidacies, voter registration, constitutional questions, vote tabulation or the final results. They should therefore strengthen the mechanisms available to address such disputes before political tensions escalate. Domestic observation should be reinforced and complemented by sustained international monitoring across the electoral cycle.

These mechanisms are to support, and not substitute for, formal Haitian electoral and judicial processes and authorities. The value of such mechanisms lies in offering avenues for de-escalation and an independent evidentiary basis against which possible election violations such as vote fraud, large spending of unaccounted funds for campaigns and voter intimidation can be assessed.

The same principle should apply to any possibility of delay. Haitian authorities and international partners should prepare to coordinate and agree on potential scenarios. The priorities will be maintaining the momentum of the work done so far towards securing the credibility of the upcoming elections, and ensuring the predictability of the elections that will follow in future years. Public confidence in the process must also be built. This goal can be achieved by setting clear timelines and benchmarks and communicating them clearly, along with education campaigns on how, why and where to vote.

Future work should ensure that the electoral calendar remains tied to demonstrable progress towards a credible, secure process – one that Haitians can participate in freely, institutions can administer objectively, and all political actors can accept.

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