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FEATURED Q&A

How Soon Can Haiti's Government Hold Elections?



The head of Haiti's electoral council announced last month that it will be impossible to hold a national election before the transitional presidential council's mandate expires in February. Port-au-Prince is pictured. // File Photo: airmaria via Adobe Stock.

Q Haiti will not be able to hold national elections before the term of the country's interim government ends in February due to persistent gang violence, the head of Haiti's electoral council told Reuters on Oct. 22. Many potential voting stations remain inaccessible, said Jacques Desrosiers; criminal groups, which range from local gangs to organized paramilitaries with transnational operations, control nearly 90 percent of the territory of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, according to U.N. estimates. What's next for Haiti's provisional government? With a recent influx of private mercenaries and a new, 5,000-person U.N. security force soon to be deployed, under what timeline can Haitian police realistically wrest control of the country from criminal groups? What steps can the international community take in the coming months to meaningfully address Haiti's political and security crises?

A Mark L. Schneider, former director of the U.S. Peace Corps and former assistant administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID): "Forget elections until gang control over Port-au-Prince has ended and they are being demobilized there and in the countryside. Neither the Haitian National Police nor the Haitian army can achieve those goals alone, or with minimal external help as the Multinational Security Support Mission proved. Security also is crucial to bring humanitarian relief to 5.7 million Haitians who need emergency food. The U.N. Security Council Gang Suppression Force (GSF) Chapter VII resolution authorizing 5,500 troops and a U.N. support office was a

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

U.S. Senate Rejects Move to Limit Trump's Power to Attack Venezuela

The U.S. Senate voted along party lines to reject a measure to bar President Donald Trump from ordering an attack on Venezuela without congressional approval.

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BUSINESS

LNG Canada Stage One Now Fully Operational: Shell

After more than four months of delays, the second processing unit at Shell's LNG Canada export terminal in British Columbia has begun operations.

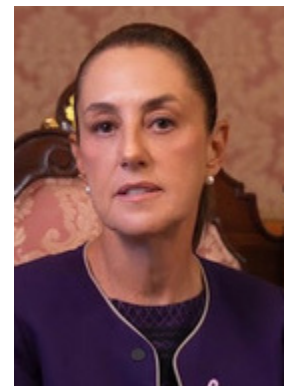
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POLITICAL

Peru's Congress Declares Sheinbaum Persona Non Grata

Peru's Congress on Thursday voted to declare Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum unwelcome in the South American country, a move that deepened an ongoing rift in bilateral relations.

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Sheinbaum // File Photo: Mexican Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.S. Senate Rejects Effort to Block Attack on Venezuela

In a vote along party lines, the U.S. Senate on Thursday blocked legislation that would have blocked President Donald Trump from launching an attack on Venezuela without authorization from Congress, The Wall Street Journal reported. “Venezuela, in the hands of [President Nicolás] Maduro is an existential threat,” Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said during floor debate, the newspaper reported. “Whatever power that President Trump would like to use to stop that, I think he has the authority,” he added. Sen. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), who pushed the war powers resolution, said Congress must assert its power in matters of war. “If that’s where the administration is headed, if that’s what we’re risking— involvement in a war—then Congress needs to be heard on this,” he said on the Senate floor, the Associated Press reported. The measure failed in a vote of 49-51, with all Democrats and only two Republicans—Rand Paul of Kentucky and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska—voting for it, and all other Republicans voting against it. However, some Republicans who voted against the measure expressed reservations about the Trump administration’s actions. Sen. Todd Young (R-Ind.) said in a statement that he opposed the measure because it was not “necessary or appropriate at this time,” but added that he was “troubled by many aspects and assumptions of this operation and believe it is at odds with the majority of Americans who want the U.S. military less entangled in international conflicts,” the AP reported. The U.S. military has built up a large force in the Caribbean Sea that it has said is targeted at narcotrafficking. Since early September, the military has struck at least 17 vessels that it alleged were carrying drugs in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific, killing at least 69 people, the AP reported. The latest strike, on a vessel in the Caribbean, killed three people on Thursday, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said in a post on social media site X.

“To all narco-terrorists who threaten our homeland: if you want to stay alive, stop trafficking drugs. If you keep trafficking deadly drugs—we will kill you,” Hegseth said in the post.

Peru’s Congress Declares Sheinbaum Persona Non Grata

Peru’s Congress on Thursday voted to declare Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum unwelcome in the South American country, deepening a recent rift between the two countries, Reuters reported. Peruvian lawmakers declared Sheinbaum persona non grata after the administration of interim President José Jerí broke diplomatic relations with Mexico on Monday. The moves followed Mexico’s granting of asylum to former Peruvian Prime Minister Betsy Chávez, who faces conspiracy charges connected to the unsuccessful 2022 attempt by now-jailed former Peruvian President Pedro Castillo to dissolve Congress. Chávez is currently taking refuge at Mexico’s embassy in Lima. Mexico’s government said Thursday that it rejected the Peruvian Congress’ declaration of Sheinbaum as persona non grata and said it offered asylum to Chávez in accordance with international law, Reuters reported.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Brazil Receives \$5 Billion in Pledges for Forest Fund

Brazil’s government announced Thursday that it has received \$5 billion in pledges for its new forest conservation fund, which President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva announced earlier this week as world leaders began gathering in the city of Belém for the United Nations’ COP30 climate conference, the Associated Press reported. The fund will pay countries an annual stipend to preserve tropical rain forests. Among the donors is Norway, which pledged \$3

NEWS BRIEFS

More Than Half of Jamaica Without Power One Week After Category 5 Storm

More than half of Jamaica remains without power and debris continues to block access to multiple communities affected by Hurricane Melissa, which struck the island as a Category 5 storm last week, the Associated Press reported Thursday, citing the United Nations and local government officials. Approximately 120,000 structures, mostly homes in the western part of Jamaica, had their roofs ripped off by the hurricane’s winds. At least 32 people were killed in the storm, the AP reported.

Mexican Central Bank Cuts Key Interest Rate Amid Cooling Inflation

Mexico’s central bank cut its benchmark interest rate on Thursday by 25 basis points to 7.25 percent, the lowest level since May 2022, Reuters reported. One of the central bank board’s five members, Deputy Governor Jonathan Heath, voted to keep interest rates unchanged at 7.5 percent, arguing that greater caution is needed, the wire service reported. Mexico’s headline inflation rate was 3.6 percent in the first half of October, down from 3.8 percent at the end of September, according to data from Mexico’s national statistics agency.

Heineken Opens Factory in Minas Gerais State

Dutch brewing company Heineken on Thursday inaugurated a new factory in Brazil’s Minas Gerais state, the firm announced in a statement. The brewery, which received \$462 million in investment, now employs 350 workers, 210 of whom live in the nearby town of Passos. The facility is Heineken’s first-ever greenfield project in Brazil, Reuters reported. “Brazil is one of the most dynamic beer markets in the world,” Heineken CEO Dolf van den Brink said on Thursday.

billion, an amount contingent on Brazil raising \$9.8 billion in other donations. The Tropical Forests Forever Facility aims to eventually generate \$125 billion that can be used to pay developing countries to preserve their rain forests, the wire service reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

LNG Canada Stage One Now Fully Operational: Shell

The first stage of the LNG Canada export terminal in British Columbia is now fully operational, a spokesperson for Shell, the firm leading the export terminal project, told Reuters on Thursday. The LNG Canada project's second processing unit came online in recent days after months of delays due to technical issues, Reuters reported. Shell began shipping cargoes of liquefied natural gas from the first processing unit in June. LNG Canada is Canada's first-ever major LNG export terminal and the first to open on the west coast of North America. The facility now has an annual production capacity of 13 million metric tons per year. Malaysia's Petronas, PetroChina, Japan's Mitsubishi Corp and South Korea's KOGAS are also partners on the project. Natural gas producers in western Canada hope that the doubling of LNG Canada's export capacity will help alleviate a supply glut that has formed in recent months, Reuters reported. "The completion of the first phase of the LNG Canada project and its first shipment marks a major milestone that will allow Canadian natural gas to reach international markets," Lisa Baiton, president and CEO of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, told the weekly Energy Advisor in a Q&A published July 11. Canada is the fifth-largest producer of natural gas in the world, according to International Energy Agency data, with the wide majority of that output taking place in the western province of Alberta. No nation in Latin America produces more gas than Canada, and only the United States ranks higher in the Western Hemisphere.

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Trump administration diplomatic success. It will come to naught unless the GSF brings heavy weapons, operational intelligence and logistics, including air. The United States, as one of the GSF's 'Standing Group of Partners,' could give the GSF a better chance for early success by lending Marine special operations units, air and naval resources from its massive Caribbean fleet today. That also might spur countries like Brazil, Argentina and Chile to contribute their own already-trained peacekeepers. Additionally, the Trump administration should reverse its huge cuts to U.N. peacekeeping and boost the U.N. fund that finances troop salaries. The gangs have killed nearly 5,000 people this year, displaced 1.4 million and use rape as a weapon—they need to be stopped. As for governance, the United States, GSF partners, Caricom and the OAS should urge the Transitional Presidential Council to immediately negotiate a Haitian consensus for a post-Feb. 7 transition after consulting with civil society, private sector and political leaders. With security, that legitimate provisional government can then plan elections for a year later, maybe even in late 2026."

A César Niño, professor at Universidad Militar Nueva Granada in Colombia: "The future of Haiti does not appear promising. The constellation of criminal forces has turned the country into a geopolitical black hole and a kind of 'criminocracy.' The forthcoming multilateral military intervention will face organized criminal shock forces, which could result in extremely high levels of violence against the civilian population. It is important to keep in mind that the United Nations does not have the best record or credentials regarding its past involvement in Haiti's pacification efforts. Most likely, we will witness a new wave of uncontrolled violence—one in which criminal actors fully understand the limits of states and international organizations, and where criminal governance structures will

overpower legitimate forces of order. The most sensible course of action for the international community would be to find ways to strengthen Haiti's own security forces so that they themselves can restore order and combat crime and violence. However, that will only be possible once legitimacy is regained among the population. Haiti has become a ghost state, where any timeline for implementing a pacification plan will fail if it is criminals who continue shaping both the state and society."

A Keith Mines, former Special Forces officer and diplomat and former vice president for Latin America at the U.S. Institute of

Peace: "The new contingents of the U.N.-authorized Gang Suppression Force (GSF) will begin to arrive in Haiti around the first of the year but will not be up to full strength until late spring, although the former MSS comprised of Kenyans and others is now the acting GSF. Private security forces contracted by the Haitian government are also operating with some apparent effectiveness alongside a newly emboldened Haitian National Police (HNP), which is slowly retaking territory. Assuming a best-case scenario—always a risk in Haiti—the new force along with contractors will begin to make real inroads against the gangs by the end of summer 2026. But as important as applying real force against the gangs may be, there are a host of other essential tasks to be accomplished. Haiti needs a functional, even if temporary, justice and prison system; there is a need for a gang rehabilitation program to peel off the thousands of junior gang members; the economy needs a boost to support struggling communities; full government services need to accompany liberation of cities; and the HNP and army (which needs to be expanded) need a major recruitment drive complete with accompanying advisors and mentors. But none of this will work without a serious government to take over after February when the current arrangement with the Transition-

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al Presidential Council ends. And through all of this, there needs to be a stronger role to play for civil society, which several entities are trying to create through various dialogue processes. This would be considerably strengthened if there was a kind of national advisory council created to sit alongside the new government in a more formal way and better connect the government with regions and sectors. There are tremendous opportunities for Haiti in the coming six months, but it will require continued focus, resources and unity of effort to capitalize on them. And as always, U.S. leadership will be key.”

A Sam Vigersky, international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations: “There are no quick fixes for Haiti’s polycrisis, but the United Nations has adopted a new, more aggressive mandate: a Gang Suppression Force (GSF) authorizing up to 5,500 military personnel and a U.N. Support Office in Haiti (UNSOH). The shift is an explicit acknowledgment that the Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission—long-delayed, logistically inept, under-resourced and understaffed—failed to stabilize the country. The GSF is mandated to conduct independent counter-gang operations to ‘neutralize, isolate or deter gangs that continue to threaten the civilian population.’ With only six months to transition from the MSS to the GSF, the international community must act with urgency. In August, a ‘Standing Group of Partners’ for Haiti—led by the United States, Canada, Kenya, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica and the Bahamas—was established to ensure high-level strategic direction, oversight and political decision-making for the future force. The Standing Group now faces several tests: most critically, assembling a volunteer force of 5,500 troops and funding to pay them. In addition, the group must finalize a military concept of operations (CONOPS) detailing how the GSF works alongside the Haitian National Police, Standing Group, UNSOH,

and U.N. Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH). Finally, at the tactical level, the CONOPS will need to reckon with international law and confront a difficult operational reality: nearly half of Haiti’s gang members are children. Their decisions will determine whether the mission disrupts Haiti’s cycle of violence and moves the country toward free and fair elections by the end of 2026.”

A Michelle Austin Pamies, partner at Austin Pamies Norris Weeks Powell, PLLC and founding member of the Haitian Lawyers

Association: “Haiti may hold elections before the end of the interim government’s term as the international community is indicating that it must in order to establish a legitimate government. However, in any such election, most voters in the country would fear participating, resulting in minimal participation. Many fear that gang leaders would influence the vote. It is worth considering giving the diaspora the ability to vote. Absentee ballots for the Haitian diaspora would have the best chance for increasing participation, making for a more credible election. If there is no election, the provisional government is likely to remain in power, albeit in a modified form. That is, there may be fewer members of the council. There has been broad criticism that having nine council members has made for slow and ineffective decision-making. So far, the influx of private mercenaries has not changed the power dynamic. Gangs are still in control of 90 percent of Port-au-Prince and are spreading out to other regions. The 5,000-person security force will definitely be helpful, but the timeline for its funding and deployment is unclear. The Kenya-led mission was never fully funded or deployed. What the international community can do in the coming months is assist in establishing a credible election when one is possible, and fully fund and deploy the 5,000-person security force.”

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