

Earlier this month, Haiti experienced an insurrection. A group planned and carried out an attempt to assassinate the democratically elected President. It capped off a period of small but sometimes violent rallies encouraged by false theories about the President's term limit in office. In what is a hugely important year in our country's history, we want the world to understand what's happening in Haiti.

A few months ago, a handful of politicians in Haiti began to argue that President Moise's term in office should end not after five years, as set out in our constitution, but after four years. Their reason was a muddled explanation that included the fact that we had a troubled election cycle in 2015, marred by violence and re-run in 2016. It ignored, however, the determining factor: President Moise was inaugurated in February 2017, which means legally and constitutionally, that his term ends in February 2022. Just like in America, Haiti's president takes office – the term begins – on inauguration day.

Months on, the theory of a revised term continues to be propagated, prompting the US State Department, United Nations, and Organization of American States all to weigh in to confirm that President Moise's term indeed ends in February 2022. None of these objective observers think this anti-democratic message is responsible, and all agree we need to let the voters choose our next president on schedule.

Meanwhile, some politicians in opposing parties in Haiti have sought to depict Moise as a figure so universally disdained as to be on the verge of being toppled by people power. This is false and media outlets whose coverage has reflected that narrative without scrutiny should examine their reporting processes. Like many countries, including the US, Haiti is a deeply polarized environment with tense partisan politics. In a recent poll, 57% of respondents reported unfavorable views of Moise's party. But standards need to be applied evenly. Moise's polling, despite being conducted amid high tension, still puts him in similar territory as several American presidents: Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter's average approval rating were both 45%. Barack Obama's average was just under 48% and at times as low as 38%. Polling everywhere has its flaws, but even at their lowest points in popularity, none of those American presidents would be characterized the way this very newspaper does Moise: a would-be despot scarcely clinging to power.

At some point, facts and perspective matter. Protests in the streets are highlighted as a proof point that the bulk of the population is calling for Moise to go but, demonstrably, protests have been habitually small in scale and limited entirely to just one city: the country's capital, Port au Prince. No American news outlet would conclude – based on sporadic, partisan protests in Washington – that the whole country wants Biden gone. It makes as little sense to interpret events in Haiti that way as it would in the US.

It is a fact that our legislature has been missing in action since January 2020. Under the 1987 constitution, Haiti's branches of power are woefully imbalanced and are marked by dysfunctional decision-making processes. Just a few legislators can block essential proceedings, including movement for elections. Last year, the legislature failed to hold a vote on the budget needed to conduct legislative elections when the process was obstructed by a few fringe members. In Haiti, the President – very limited in authority – has no ability to interfere, so legislative elections were postponed and the body's term expired without newly elected members, leaving the President to govern by executive order without parliamentary oversight. This has happened to five successive presidents since 1987 for the same reason. That means

there are fundamental flaws to our governing system. These problems are the very reason Moise moved to reform the constitution, an effort supported by nearly 90% of Haitians alongside the UN, OAS and other international partners.

The new constitution was drafted by an independent commission with wide-ranging consultation and will be put to a national referendum for the voters' approval in April. The new constitution strengthens our weak, unstable democratic structure and creates considerably more accountability – laying the groundwork for Haiti to have a functioning representative democracy, finally. The referendum will be followed by local, state and national elections in which Moise will not be a candidate, and for each of these we have actively sought and recruited international support and on-ground observation to help ensure transparency, security and credibility of results.

To make it possible for the next administration and those thereafter to govern effectively and deliver the positive change for which the people of our country have waited and suffered for far too long, we have to fix our faulty foundation. We have to prevent the same cycle from occurring again: political deadlock, chaos, instability, repeat. Before leaving office next February, President Moise is working to deliver constitutional change, and it will mean something. It will give our country a chance. That's the reality.

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