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FEATURED Q&A

Will a New Leader Be Able to Bring Haiti Together?



Ariel Henry (pictured), whom Haitian President Jovenel Moïse appointed prime minister shortly before his assassination, took office last week. // File Photo: Pan American Health Organization.

Q In a political compromise, Ariel Henry was sworn in July 20 as Haiti's prime minister. Henry took office after Claude Joseph, who had led the country since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, agreed to step down as prime minister and become Henry's foreign minister. How likely is Henry to accomplish his stated goals, which include re-establishing confidence in the government, fighting corruption, reinvigorating the economy and making Covid-19 vaccines available to all Haitians? What actions by Henry will be necessary in order for him to accomplish those goals? Will the country's elections, scheduled for Sept. 26, happen as planned, and what must be done to assure they are free and fair? How much are the United States and other international actors involved in Haiti's politics, and what effects will such involvement have on Henry's ability to govern?

A **Fulton Armstrong, senior fellow at American University's Center for Latin American & Latino Studies and former U.S. National Intelligence Officer for Latin America:** "The handover from Joseph to Henry itself made sense as a short-term measure to create an impression of order, but the 'Core Group' players that forced the deal must know that papering over problems is not a solution. Henry sits atop a political and social volcano, and he lacks the government, police and judiciary tools with which to prevent further eruptions. The United States, OAS, and others in the hemisphere stood idly by, and even supported, Moïse as he expanded his grip on power and, like his opponents, increasingly resorted to surrogate violence. While

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Haiti's Henry Vows Elections as Soon as Possible

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry said the country will hold elections as soon as possible. Henry said his government will work to make elections free and fair.

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BUSINESS

Mexico's Pemex Swings to a Profit in Second Quarter

Mexican state oil company Pemex reported a net profit of 14.4 billion pesos (\$721 million) for the second quarter of the year. Crude production rose 3.8 percent as compared to the same period a year ago.

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POLITICAL

Castillo Takes Office as Peru's President

Leftist schoolteacher Pedro Castillo took office Wednesday as president of Peru. In his inaugural address, Castillo said colonial-era divisions still separate Peruvians from each other.

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Castillo // Photo: Facebook Page of Pedro Castillo.

POLITICAL NEWS

Castillo Inaugurated as Peru's President

Leftist rural schoolteacher Pedro Castillo, a political novice who has never before held an elected office, was sworn in Wednesday as president of Peru. Castillo defeated conservative former lawmaker Keiko Fujimori in a razor-thin June 6 runoff that election officials took six weeks to decisively call. In his inaugural speech, which also marked the country's bicentennial, Castillo said colonial-era divisions still separate Peruvians from each other, Reuters reported. "The defeat of the Inca Empire gave rise to the colonial era, it was then ... that the castes and differences that persist to this day were established," said Castillo, whose support was fueled by the rural poor. "It is the first time that this country will be governed by a peasant," Castillo added. In a conciliatory message to investors, Castillo said he would respect private property and set clear rules for the mining sector. However, he also called for a new constitution and said he would crack down on monopolies in the utilities and financial services sectors, leading bonds to fall, Bloomberg News reported. Castillo added that he would seek to regain Peru's sovereignty over its natural resources and renegotiate free-trade deals. Additionally, Castillo said he will not live in the presidential palace, the House of Pizarro, and instead will turn it into a museum. "I will not rule from the House of Pizarro, because I believe that we have to break with colonial symbols to end the ties of domination that have been in force for so many years," said Castillo, Reuters reported. "We will cede this palace to the new Ministry of Cultures to be used as a museum that showcases our history, from its origins to the present." Castillo succeeds Francisco Sagasti, whom Peru's Congress appointed last November following weeks of turmoil in the country's politics. Castillo now faces a deeply divided Congress that will make it challenging for him to push through his agenda. "Castillo's position was already precarious given his lack of government experience, a narrow margin of victory,

limited support in Congress, the lack of his own political party, a radical electoral platform and allies, and high expectations for change," then-Congressman Gino Costa told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published July 22.

Haiti's Henry Vows to Hold Elections as Soon as Possible

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry held his first press conference on Wednesday, where he pledged to hold elections as soon as possible following the slaying of President Jovenel Moïse on July 7, the Associated Press reported. At least 26 people have been arrested in Moïse's killing, including 18 former Colombian soldiers and the head of Moïse's security detail. Authorities are still searching for other suspects. Henry said in the 10-minute briefing that the mission of his government is to prepare the necessary conditions for "the organization of free, honest, transparent elections, with the broad participation of the population," the Miami Herald reported. Henry will need to decide whether to keep Sept. 26 as the date for the first round of presidential and legislative voting. He will also need to decide whether it will keep the nine-member Provisional Electoral Council, which the Supreme Court refused to swear in after Moïse handpicked its members, the Miami Herald reported.

Former Mexican Governments Spent \$61 Mn on Spyware

Previous Mexican governments spent \$61 million on spyware from Israeli company NSO Group, Mexico's top security official said Wednesday, the Associated Press reported. Governments around the world have reportedly used the spyware, called Pegasus, to spy on opponents and journalists. Mexican Public Safety Secretary Rosa Icela Rodríguez said officials have found records for 31 contracts for the spyware signed during the administrations

NEWS BRIEFS

Salvadoran Judge Orders Arrest of 10 Ex-Officials Including Sánchez Cerén

A judge in El Salvador on Wednesday ordered the pre-trial arrest of 10 former government officials, including ex-President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, on corruption charges that involve \$2.6 million in illicit money, the Associated Press reported. All of the former officials were part of the government of ex-President Mauricio Funes, who has received political asylum in Nicaragua. The court said it would work with Interpol to seek the arrest of Sánchez Cerén, who is reported to be out of the country, and four others who are at large.

Ecuadorean Court Revokes Citizenship of WikiLeaks' Assange

An Ecuadorean court this week revoked WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's citizenship in the South American country, CNN reported Wednesday. Then-Ecuadorean President Lenín Moreno's government granted citizenship to Assange in January 2018. Assange had spent nearly seven years holed up in Ecuador's embassy in London but was eventually arrested in 2019 and is currently imprisoned in Britain.

Union at BHP's Escondida Mine in Chile Urges Strike Vote

The union at BHP's massive Escondida copper mine in Chile on Wednesday urged its members to vote to strike, Reuters reported. Negotiations over the past two months between the company and its union have been held in secret, and the union has to submit any offer by the company to a vote by its more than 2,300 members before the present offer expires on Aug. 1. Output levels at the copper mine, the world's largest, play a role in global pricing for the commodity as well as Chilean economic activity.

of former President Felipe Calderón, who was in office from 2006 to 2012, and former President Enrique Peña Nieto, who served from 2012 to 2018. Some of the contracts may have been disguised as purchases for other equipment, she said. Last week, the Mexican government's top anti-money laundering investigator said officials from the two previous administrations had spent some \$300 million on spyware.

BUSINESS NEWS

Mexico's Pemex Swings to a Profit for Second Quarter

Mexican state oil company Pemex on Wednesday reported a net profit of 14.4 billion pesos (\$721 million) in the second quarter, Reuters reported. Crude production rose 3.8 percent as compared to the same period a year earlier, with profits boosted by higher prices for oil. However, financial debt at Pemex surpassed \$115 billion at the end of the quarter, raising alarms among investors over the sustainability of its debt burden. In an earnings call Wednesday, Pemex CEO Octavio Romero pushed back on a decision this week by Moody's Investors Service to downgrade Pemex's ratings further into junk status. "It seems to us that it's an action taken by the credit rating agency that lacks professionalism, ethics—in short, it's something shameful," Romero said, Bloomberg News reported. Pemex was also in headlines Wednesday over a proposal from President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration to set a maximum price for cooking and heating gas, a practice that harkens back to before major energy reforms nearly a decade ago that introduced competition to Pemex's monopoly role in the sector. López Obrador tried this week to invoke emergency powers to decree a six-month price cap, but the country's federal economic competition commission has pushed back, saying in a statement that current law does not allow the president to set price ceilings, the Associated Press reported.

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Washington, the OAS and others focused on effecting regime change in Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, a poor little country nearby, where we could have had influence, careened toward collapse. Henry needs emergency humanitarian assistance to deal with Covid and some kind of international police presence—even small multinational deployments have worked in the past.

“We can't run away when we hear the first gunshots in the distance as our delegation did at Moïse's funeral.”

— Fulton Armstrong

Washington and Bogotá need to support an apolitical investigation into the Moïse assassination, including the role of their citizens and 'security' companies. Henry also needs the United States and others to put on notice all Haitian parties, including the wealthy elites who wield massive power behind the scenes (many of whom have U.S. residency or citizenship), that they'll be held accountable for obstructing progress toward stability and inclusion. Any effort by Henry or a successor to govern and prepare the country for meaningful elections will be doomed if the international community doesn't get serious. We can't run away when we hear the first gunshots in the distance as our delegation did at Moïse's funeral.”

A **Georges Fauriol, fellow at the Caribbean Policy Consortium and senior associate at the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS):** “Prime Minister Ariel Henry governs as Haiti's interim leader with thin political and constitutional margins. He faces deep challenges that the international community can help address but cannot resolve. For starters, the function of

holding national elections is entrusted to the presidency. However, the normal succession involving the head of Haiti's judiciary could not take place because of his death in June. This wobbly political apparatus faces unresolved the two hallmarks of Moïse's tenure: a proposed constitutional reform and a referendum process, as well as delayed national elections, both scheduled for Sept. 26. Obviously, this is unrealistic. The ambivalent position of the United States regarding the constitutional referendum—belatedly opposing it—did not help matters. But naming a U.S. special envoy should now be seen as a confidence-building measure for Haiti's key political stakeholders. An initial policy adjustment would be for the United States to view holding elections as a desirable objective, with the caveat that the process needs to take stock of the Haiti's political realities. How international actors also respond to emerging preferences of key sectors of civil society is also essential—this would suggest first a reset of the constitutional reform process toward a more credible outcome, followed by national elections. The United States and other actors will need to be agile enough to encourage the development of a working consensus that does not have an open-ended timeline. This will require hard work.”

A **Cécile Accilien, board member of the Haitian Studies Association:** “The key is knowing whether Henry will really listen to the majority of Haitians and build consensus and trust. The only way to ensure an adequate measure of security is by curtailing the gang violence that has taken over the country in the last two decades and which has worsened this past year. To have an economy in the midst of a pandemic, you must have security for all Haitians as it relates to all forms of violence, food security, access to education and health care and respect for all human beings. People are nervous about the elections, and

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that is understandable. A president was just killed in the most horrific and inhumane way, with lots of rumors and no clear answers as to how it happened; yet there is talk about elections. Who will the elections benefit? Is Henry sincere? Does he have a willingness to 'chavire chodyè a' (literally 'overthrow the boiler')? That is, is he willing to change the paradigm and work with all sectors of civil society in order to create a new paradigm in which Haitians feel respected, maintain their dignity and have access to health care, food security and education—the minimum that every human being deserves? How will Henry be able to build trust in less than two months before the elections? How will he create a space for true conversations among different sectors of society and allow Haitians to freely choose and elect their own leaders? There must be clear transparency as to how the United States and other countries and international partners are 'helping' Haiti and who exactly they are helping. There are a lot of empty statements about what needs to happen in order to support civil society. Many groups inside and outside Haiti as well as in the United States are working on preventing stability so that they can enrich themselves. The international community needs to stop working behind the scenes with the 1 percent who monopolize the wealth and instead allow Haitians living in Haiti to find their own solution."

A **Francois Pierre-Louis, professor of political science at Queens College, City University of New York:** "Interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry has an impossible assignment. Like Haitians would say in Kreyol, 'Yo ba li yon siga limen nan 2 bout'—he has been given a cigar that is lit at both ends. For him to succeed, he must break with the very same people who put him in power. Members of the opposition parties would be willing to join his administration if he takes the following measures: 1) Cancel the tax privileges Martelly and Moïse gave

to his allies. 2) Disarm the gangs and bring to justice the gang leaders who have been accused of murders. 3) Make it safe for the 15,000 internally displaced Haitians to move back to their neighborhoods. 4) Rescind the unpopular decrees that Moïse signed. 5) Allow remittances from the diaspora to be given in U.S. dollars. 5) Cancel the

“For him to succeed, he must break with the very same people who put him in power.”

— **Francois Pierre-Louis**

new constitution. 6) Create a truth and reconciliation commission to investigate all the political crimes that took place under Moïse. Haiti needs free and fair elections as soon as possible to restore the democratic order. However, it would be an insult to the population if Henry maintained the Sept. 26 election date as conditions do not exist right now to hold free and fair elections. He must build trust with the population, restart the economy and put together a new electoral council. For the past 10 years, the United States and the 'Friends of Haiti' have created more problems for the people instead of helping the country transition to democracy. The international community should have never accepted Moïse's decision to skip parliamentary and local elections. The United States should have engaged directly with civil society groups, primarily the church, human rights organizations and the opposition parties. A major task of the international community now is to help Henry obtain the people's trust by supporting these six important measures and letting the chips fall where they may."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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