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Impact of Perceived Electoral Fraud on Haitian Voter's Beliefs about Democracy

Athena R. Kolbe, Nicole I. Cesnales, Marie N. Puccio, Robert Muggah





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Impact of Perceived Electoral Fraud on Haitian Voter's Beliefs about Democracy

Athena R. Kolbe, Nicole I. Cesnales, Marie N. Puccio, Robert Muggah

Abstract

Haiti's presidential elections in October 2015 were reportedly marred by voting irregularities and fraud. The results issued by the Provisional Electoral Council in early November are contested, with the country again gripped by widespread protest, organized violence and targeted killings. An Igarapé Institute research team administered household surveys with voters from 135 polling stations before and after the election to assess attitudes about the electoral process. The findings suggest an incompatibility between the declared result and the voting patterns of Haitian citizens. They also indicate the corrosive effects of electoral corruption on citizen attitudes and faith in the democratic process.

Introduction

On October 25, 2015, Haiti held its first round of voting for the country's presidential election. After an August legislative election marred by flagrant violence and voter intimidation at the polls, it was not at all certain whether a presidential election would take place. In addition to voting for president, citizens were electing members of Parliament. Haiti's parliament was dissolved last January amid a political crisis. National police made dozens of arrests of people suspected of fraud, but the violence that had marked the August elections was mostly absent in late October. The calm was short-lived. Even before the presidential election results were announced, allegations surfaced of serious fraud and irregularities in the voting process.

In order to measure whether elections were free and fair, an Igarape Institute team of American, Canadian and Haitian researchers interviewed voters at 135 polling locations across the country. The goal was to assess their experiences and attitudes about democracy and community organizing. Two days before the election results were announced, eight presidential candidates, including Jude Célestin and Moïse Jean-Charles, issued a statement alleging fraud and irregularities. After the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) released their tally of the election results on 5th, the capital rapidly descended into protest with mass street marches, targeted killings of political party activists, and organized violence by armed groups. Allegations of fraud continued after the CEP's announcement with large marches protesting the alleged fraud in all of Haiti's major cities and in many rural areas.

After the CEP's announcement of the election results, the Igarape Institute team contacted the original sample and re-interviewed 88.9% (n=1,834) of them to determine changes in attitudes about the election itself, as well as attitudes about democracy and the importance and role of voting in a democracy.

Key findings from this study include:

- Nearly 40 per cent of respondents said they voted for Jude Célestin while roughly a third chose Moïse Jean Charles and 20 per cent chose Maryse Narcisse. Jovenel Moïse, who represented the incumbent political party and was identified by the CEP as the candidate with the most votes, was named by just 6 per cent of the voters interviewed as their choice for president.
- Candidate choice was tied to both geographic region and income with Moïse Jean Charles being most commonly chosen for President by voters in the Nord, Nord-Ouest, and Nord-Est departments and Jovenel Moïse garnering most of his support from voters whose incomes were in the highest 25% percentile.

- During interviews conducted right after voting, survey participants expressed agreement with statements about the importance of voting in a democracy. About two thirds of voters said that it was completely or somewhat true that voting determines who leads the country. Similarly, nearly three quarters of voters said it was somewhat or completely true that “my vote counts”.
- Attitudes about voting and democracy appear to be adversely affected by the experiences and perception of fraud and voter intimidation. After election results were announced, voters were significantly less likely to say that it was true that “in a democracy voting is important because it determines who leads the country”; this was correlated to both experiences of fraud and to the voter’s stated presidential choice.
- Though fraud was not as widely reported by voters on election day, intimidation of voter’s was common with nearly a third of all voters stating they completely disagreed with the statement, “Today’s election was free. There was no intimidation of voters at the polls.” Incidences of fraud were observed by research team members at 12 polling locations with the most common type of fraud being ballot box stuffing by party observers.

Timeline of Election Events in 2015

- **August 9** – First-round Legislative Elections, in which nearly 2,000 candidates competed for 199 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 20 Senate seats
- **October 25** – First-round Presidential Elections and second-round legislative elections
- **November 3** – Eight presidential candidates, including Jude Célestin and Moïse Jean-Charles, issued a signed letter to the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) asking members to appoint a five-member independent commission to do a deeper scrutiny of the ballot sheets to address the allegations of fraud and irregularities prior to publishing the results.
- **November 5** – Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) announces preliminary election results showing the ruling-party’s Jovenel Moise in first place, followed by Jude Celestin and Moise Jean Charles
- **November 6** – Seven presidential candidates write to the CEP, again calling for an independent commission and labeling the announced results “unacceptable”
- **November 12** – Jaccéus Joseph, the sole member of the CEP who didn’t endorse the election results, speaks out publically for the first time, saying he couldn’t accept the results because the vote tabulation center “could have done more” to check for fraud
- **December 27** – Proposed date for presidential runoff election

Haiti's Election by the Numbers

54 – Presidential candidates approved by the CEP for inclusion in the October 25th election

2 – Presidential hopefuls who will be included in the December 27 runoff elections

6am – Time polling places were scheduled to be opened to voters

72 – Number of hours after the CEP announced election results during which candidates have a right to file a challenge of count with the National Electoral Complaints and Challenges Bureau (BCEN)

2 – Candidates who filed legal challenges to the elections charging widespread fraud

\$30 million – Amount the U.S. government gave to support the Haitian elections this year

5.8 million – Number of registered voters

15,000 – Number of policemen and United Nations peacekeeping force members deployed to prevent violence during on Election Day

1,538,393 – Number of valid votes cast in the October 25th election

120,066 – Number of votes invalidated for fraud and other irregularities

22,238 – Number of voters who choose none of the 54 candidates

490 – Number of polling locations where where votes were thrown out due to fraud

915,675 – Number of accreditation passes that were handed out to political-party monitors and observers allowing them to enter the polling place and stand next to people to observe as they voted

Methodology

Sampling

A multistage process was applied to sample communal sections, households, and main respondents. The sample was drawn from all ten of Haiti's geographic departments with representation of urban, suburban and rural areas. The most current population figures for Haiti nationally are from 2012 based on projections from the national census and published by the Institut Haitienne de Statistique et d'Informatique, or IHSI.¹ These figures were used to calculate the study's sample size. The number of individuals who would be sampled from each department was determined by population density. A weighted random sample of communal sections was generated in SPSS.

¹ See IHSI (2012).

The second phase of sampling involved the random selection of polling places within each communal section. A random GPS coordinate within the communal section was generated and a research team member was sent to the location. Residents were asked which polling place was used by residents of the location. The research team then visited the polling location and confirmed with officials that it did serve the area location randomly selected during GPS sampling. A total of 135 polling places were selected for inclusion in the study.

Fielding

The team approached individuals as they came to vote. Voters were selected randomly using a Kish number table with every nth voter being approached. An informed consent process was completed and the voter was given a card with more information about the survey and instructions to show the card to the research team upon exiting the polling location. A research team member handwrote the time on the card before handing it to the voter and then recorded the time when the voter completed voting. This process documented the time that individuals stood in line or waited to be assisted in the voting process.

After exiting the polling place the voter was invited to sit for a short time with the enumerator and complete a survey. The survey instrument was created collaboratively with Haitian researchers participating in all phases of the survey design including sampling methodology, survey protocol development and survey creation. Survey questions were translated into Haitian Creole and then back-translated into English to assure accurate thought-for-thought translation. Survey questions were orally administered by a team of university-educated Haitians with extensive experience in survey research. Responses were recorded on tablets using iSurvey a dedicated software application designed for use on ipads, ipods, and iphones.

Prior to fielding all team members participated in 20 hours of training on research ethics, the study methodology, and the survey instrument. Fielding took place on October 25, 2015 with follow up interviews beginning the evening of November 5th and concluding the evening of November 10th. In total, 98.8 per cent of individuals (n=2,039) approached to participate in the study were eligible with remainder excluded because they didn't vote, they were observed committing election fraud, they were unable to communicate sufficiently, or they were an election observer for a political party or an election official.² Of the remaining voters, 96.5 per cent (n=1,991) agreed to participate in the study. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.29%

² Four individuals didn't vote because they lacked identification and were turned away. Five didn't vote because the wait to vote was too long. Another two didn't vote for other reasons. Two individuals were excluded because they were observed by the research team as engaging in voter fraud by voting and then returning to vote again. Another two voters were excluded because they had disabilities that prevented them from communicating sufficiently with the research team. Ten individuals were excluded because they were election officials or were wearing badges identifying themselves as political party observers. It should be noted that fraud by non-selected voters was identified at 12 polling places by the enumeration team; in ten of these cases the fraud consisted of the same people voting multiple times, in one location a party observer was witnessed handling voter's boxes, and at the last location an official allowed a party observer to vote "by proxy" for individuals whose voter's cards he had presented to the official.

The interview took approximately 15 minutes. The survey included questions about voting attitudes, community involvement, opinions about political issues and the government, and experiences with state agents. In addition to questions about voting and political participation, sections of three other surveys instruments were included: the World Values Survey, the United Nations Rule of Law Indicators Public Opinion Survey, and the Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project.

Some 1,968 (95.3 per cent) of the selected participants completed the entire baseline interview. Before leaving, they were asked if the research team could contact them for a follow up interview after the election results were made public. Of all study participants, 94 per cent (n=1,940) agreed (with 1.4 per cent, n=28 declining a follow-up interview). Those who agreed to do a follow up interview were asked three personal identifier questions³ and additional contact information.⁴ Respondents also helped locate their home using maps and satellite photographs.

Three hours after the election results were announced by the Provisional Electoral Council on Thursday, November 5th, research team members began calling study participants and re-interviewing them via phone. Personal identifier questions, and well as the name and birthday of the respondent, were asked and verified to assure that the person doing the follow up interview was the same as the person who was initially interviewed. In 102 cases the respondents lacked the minimum of three points of contact and were visited at their home by a research team member for the follow up interview.

All other interviews took place by phone, sometimes after contact via email or social media and often after repeated phone calls to family members, neighbors, and friends. Individuals who could not be located after an in-person home visit or 12 attempts at contact via phone, email, or through social media were coded as non-responders. No other household member or individual was interviewed in their place. In the end, 94.5 per cent (n=1,834) of those who agreed to follow up contact were located and interviewed. This comprised 88.9 per cent of the original sample, which is within the norm for response rates in national surveys of Haitian adults.

Data was cleaned and analyzed using SPSS v.22. During the initial analysis, while enumerators were still in the field, data was analyzed for plausibility. For instance, year of birth was compared to the age and the total number of household members was compared to the number of adults plus the number of children in the household. During cleaning, data was also checked for entry errors.

3 These questions were "What was the name of your first boyfriend/girlfriend?", "What is your favorite food?" and "What is the name of your mother's mother?".

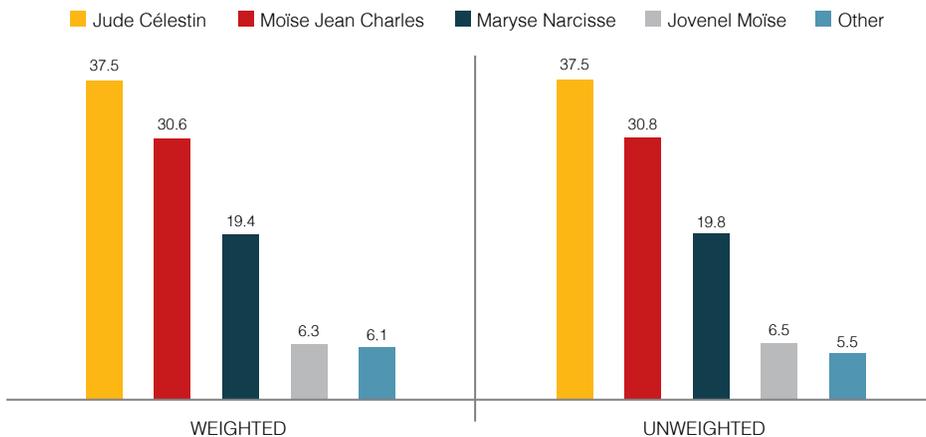
4 Specifically, they were asked to give their first name, birthday, and contact information to the enumerators for a follow up survey. Contact information included the respondent's cell phone number and address, email address, the cell phone numbers of five family members/friends/neighbors, and contact information on social media such as WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook, or a similar application.

Findings

Voter Demographics

Demographic information was collected at the beginning of each interview. Slightly more than half of all voters were female, which mirrors the general population. The average household size was 5.6 individuals (SD: 4.2) which is within the norm for Haiti. However there was some difference between the demographics of voters and the demographics of the general population. The unweighted mean age of voters was 35.88 years (SD: 10.177) which is somewhat older than the general population.⁵ The income of respondents was compared to the income quartiles of the general population; voters were more likely to be poor with 40.4 per cent from the lowest quartile (n=778), 20 per cent (n=771) from the second lowest quartile, 12.8 per cent (n=247) from the second highest quartile, and 6.8 per cent (n=6.4) from the highest quartile.⁶

Figure 1. Who did you vote for in the election?



When asked who they voted for in the presidential election, the results did not reflect those reported by the CEP on November 5, 2015. The CEP reported that Jovenel Moïse was the front-runner with more than a third of the vote followed by Jude Célestin. Survey respondents, however, were much more likely to state that they

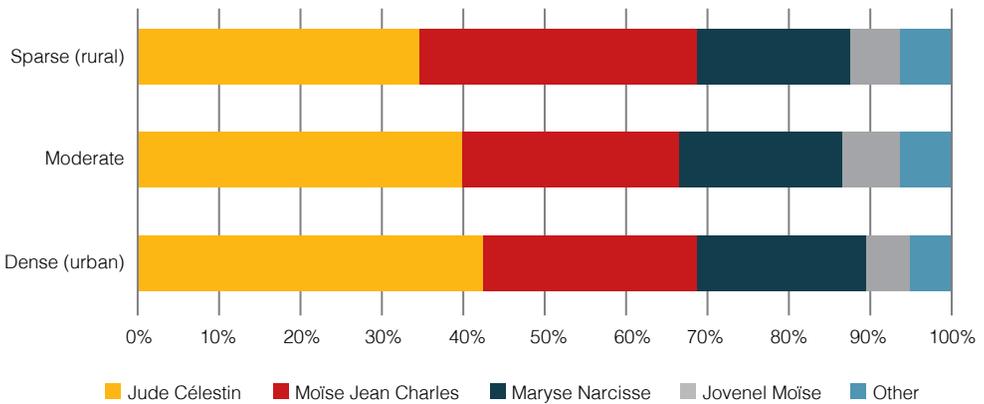
⁵ The weighted mean age was 36.06 (SD: 10.33) which is still higher than expected. Both weighted and unweighted results for key variables are included in this report to facilitate the evaluation and use of this data by readers. Additional analysis and exact figures of summarized results are available from the authors upon request.

⁶ When weighted the income of respondents put 38.7% in the lowest quartile, 41.2% in the second lowest, 13.3% in the second highest quartile, and 6.8% in the highest quartile.

voted for Moïse Jean Charles or Maryse Narcisse, and less likely to vote for Jovenel Moïse, than was reflected in the numbers released by CEP (Figure 1).

Presidential choice was correlated to both income levels and geographic department. Higher income voters were more likely to choose Jovenel Moïse while lower income individuals were more likely to say they voted for Moïse Jean Charles or Maryse Narcisse. There was no statistically significant relationship between voting for Jude Célestin and either income or geographic department; he was a popular choice for voters across the socioeconomic and geographic spectrum. Moïse Jean Charles garnered most of his support from rural areas (55% of those voted for him). Though Jude Célestin was the most common presidential choice in all communal section population density types, he had an equal (weighted) per centage of the vote in rural areas when compared to Moïse Jean Charles (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Voter Choice by Population Density of Communal Section



Free and Fair Elections

Additional survey questions asked participants if the elections were free (“there was no intimidation of voters at the polls”) and/or fair (“there was no fraud”). Respondents endorsed each statement as either “completely true”, “somewhat true”, or “not at all true”. During interviews right after voting, survey respondents reported some fraud, mostly in the form of election observers and political party monitors ballot box stuffing or placing multiple votes (Figures 7 and 9). Though fraud was not as widely reported by voters on Election Day, intimidation of voter’s was common with nearly a third of all voters stating they completely disagreed with the statement “Today’s election was free. There was no intimidation of voters at the polls” (see Figure 3).

When asked a few weeks later survey respondents were more likely to say there had been intimidation of voters at the polls and that fraud had taken place (figures 6 and 8).⁷ However, there was no statistically significant difference to the survey item “How true is it that ‘I personally witnessed or experienced intimidation at the polls’.” (Figures 5 and 6) This indicates that respondents were not conflating their own experiences of voter intimidation but rather that they heard about incidents of voter intimidation from others, which colored their perspective of the extent and severity of this problem during the October 25th elections.



Official police Twitter account shows a person arrested with 15 electoral cards.

⁷ Intimidation was defined for survey respondents as “when a person uses threatening words or gestures to try to prevent you from voting or to try to force you to vote a particular way. In addition to threats, intimidation can also include someone physically blocking you from accessing the election box, someone taking your ballot from you without your permission to take your vote away, or someone threatening you with a weapon. In this survey we are only looking at intimidation that happened here at the polling location, not while you were traveling here or in another place. Also we are just referring to intimidation by officials such as police, people who work for the government, election observers, soldiers or employees of MINUSTAH [the UN Mission in Haiti], and the political party officials or monitors who are here at this location today. Only consider these types of intimidation when you give your response. Do not consider intimidation in another place, intimidation with words that were not threats, or intimidation by people who are not officials or authorities, such as intimidation by a family member, friend, or another voter.” This narrow definition of intimidation was chosen because it was the most conservative; other forms of intimidation, such as having an election monitor look over one’s shoulder while they voted (something that was widely complained about by Haitian voters on radio call-in shows in the days after the election) may have also impacted voter behavior though it is not captured by this study.

Figure 3. Weighted Responses to Likert Scale Questions: How true is it that “Today's election was free. There was no intimidation of voters at the polls.”?

1 = Completely true; 2 = Somewhat true; 3 = Not at all true

		Mean	SD
Gender of Voter	All Voters	1.88	.834
	Women	1.92	.832
	Men	1.84	.847
Who did you choose when you voted for president?	Jude Célestin	1.81	.083
	Moïse Jean Charles	1.99	.844
	Maryse Narcisse	1.84	.867
	Jovenel Moïse	1.79	.966
	Other	1.91	.958
	Artibonite	1.58	.743
Geographic Department	Centre	1.53	.709
	Grand'Anse	1.52	.699
	Nippes	1.55	.716
	Nord	2.31	.939
	Nord-Est	2.21	.942
	Nord-Ouest	2.37	.908
	Ouest	1.93	.907
	Sud-Est	1.98	.890
	Sud	1.79	.764
	Communal Section Population Density Type	Densely Populated (urban)	1.79
Moderately Populated		1.65	.769
Sparsely Populated (rural)		2.05	.850

Figure 4. Weighted Responses to Likert Scale Questions: How true is it that “The October 25th election was free. There was no intimidation of voters at the polls.”?

1 = Completely true; 2 = Somewhat true; 3 = Not at all true

		Mean	SD
Gender of Voter	All Voters	2.08	.903
	Women	2.14	.887
	Men	2.01	.930
Who did you choose when you voted for president?	Jude Célestin	1.98	.902
	Moïse Jean Charles	2.17	.915
	Maryse Narcisse	2.10	.959
	Jovenel Moïse	2.11	1.020
	Other	2.13	1.019
	Artibonite	1.94	.932
Geographic Department	Centre	1.75	.889
	Grand'Anse	1.89	.938
	Nippes	1.89	.971
	Nord	2.52	.842
	Nord-Est	2.27	.990
	Nord-Ouest	2.49	.879
	Ouest	2.02	.982
	Sud-Est	2.12	.969
	Sud	1.91	.945
	Communal Section Population Density Type	Densely Populated (urban)	2.12
Moderately Populated		1.64	.830
Sparsely Populated (rural)		2.28	.888

Figure 5. Weighted Responses to Likert Scale Questions: How true is it “Today I personally witnessed or experienced intimidation at the polls”?

1 = Completely true; 2 = Somewhat true; 3 = Not at all true

		Mean	SD
Gender of Voter	All Voters	2.43	.883
	Women	2.41	.905
	Men	2.46	.871
Who did you choose when you voted for president?	Jude Célestin	2.48	.875
	Moïse Jean Charles	2.34	.937
	Maryse Narcisse	2.44	.922
	Jovenel Moïse	2.65	.814
	Other	2.39	.986
	Artibonite	2.75	.668
Geographic Department	Centre	2.80	.639
	Grand'Anse	2.82	.607
	Nippes	2.73	.713
	Nord	1.87	1.029
	Nord-Est	2.06	1.043
	Nord-Ouest	1.89	1.080
	Ouest	2.33	.984
	Sud-Est	2.37	.967
	Sud	2.71	.691
	Communal Section Population Density Type	Densely Populated (urban)	2.48
Moderately Populated		2.64	.782
Sparsely Populated (rural)		2.30	.928

Baseline

Figure 6. Weighted Responses to Likert Scale Questions: How true is it “During the October 25th election I personally witnessed or experienced intimidation at the polls”?

1 = Completely true; 2 = Somewhat true; 3 = Not at all true

		Mean	SD
Gender of Voter	All Voters	2.45	.874
	Women	2.43	.898
	Men	2.48	.863
Who did you choose when you voted for president?	Jude Célestin	2.53	.846
	Moïse Jean Charles	2.35	.936
	Maryse Narcisse	2.44	.924
	Jovenel Moïse	2.65	.827
	Other	2.39	.996
	Artibonite	2.79	.655
Geographic Department	Centre	2.79	.649
	Grand'Anse	2.86	.540
	Nippes	2.75	.694
	Nord	1.88	1.031
	Nord-Est	2.09	1.052
	Nord-Ouest	1.94	1.105
	Ouest	2.32	.990
	Sud-Est	2.40	.962
	Sud	2.75	.642
	Communal Section Population Density Type	Densely Populated (urban)	2.48
Moderately Populated		2.66	.768
Sparsely Populated (rural)		2.33	.919

Follow Up Interview

Figure 7. Weighted Responses at Baseline to How true is it “As far as I can see, this election is fair, there is no fraud.”

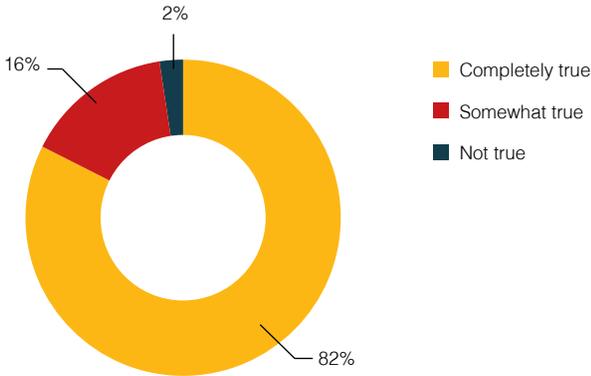


Figure 7. Weighted Responses at Follow Up to How true is it “The October 25th election was fair; there was no fraud.”

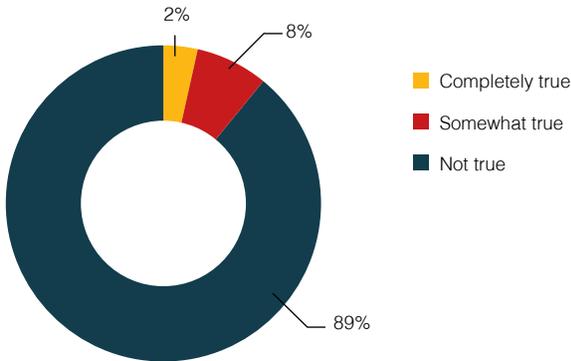
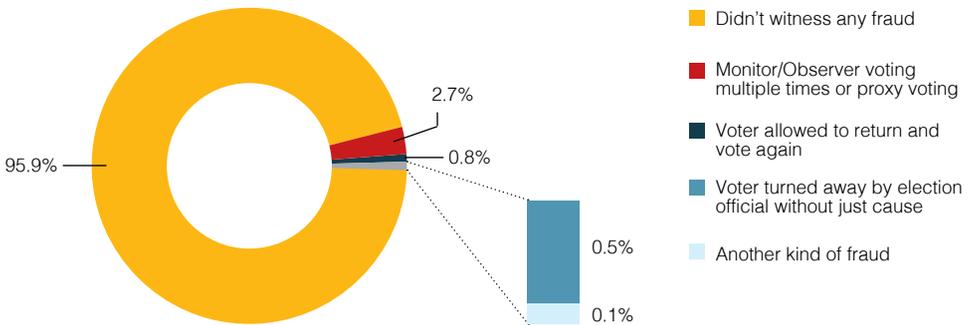


Figure 9. What kind of fraud did you witness today?

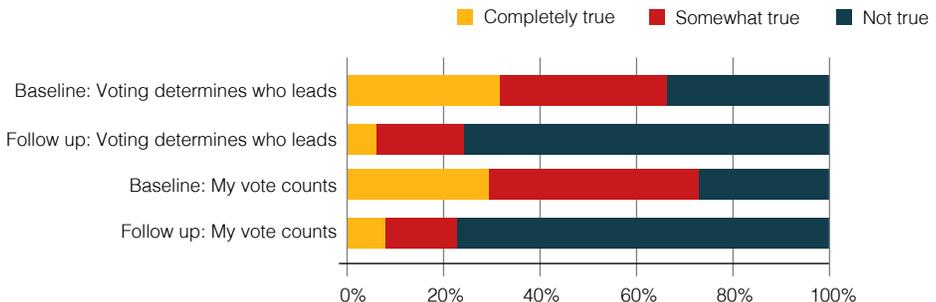


Attitudes about Voting and Democracy

Attitudes about voting and democracy appear to be adversely affected by the experiences and perception of fraud and voter intimidation. Just after voting, survey participants expressed confidence that their vote counted and that voting is important in a democracy because it determines who leads the country. However, people who experienced or witnessed intimidation or fraud at the polls were much less likely to endorse these statements as true. Similarly, after election results were announced, voters (with the notable exception of those who said they voted for Jovenel Moïse) were significantly less likely to say that it was true that “in a democracy voting is important because it determines who leads the country”. They were also less likely to say it was true that “in a democracy my vote counts.”

There was a statistically significant relationship with (1) who a person voted for, (2) whether they personally witnessed or experienced fraud or intimidation at the polls, and (3) the income level with the voter’s responses during the follow-up interviews. Those who experienced or witnessed fraud or intimidation at the polls were less likely to say that it was true that voting determines who leads the country and to say it was true that their vote counted. Voters who selected Jovenel Moïse and those from the highest income quartiles expressed the most confidence that their vote counted, though there was no statistically significant correlation between beliefs that voting determines who leads the country and choice of Jovenel Moïse for president or being from the highest income quartile. Individuals who voted for Moïse Jean Charles, Maryse Narcisse, or one of the minor party candidates (listed as “other” in this report) most often expressed a lack of confidence that their vote counted and that voting determines who leads the country.

Figure 10. Weighted Survey Responses at Baseline & Follow up Regarding the Role of Voting in a Democracy



Concluding Reflections

This study is not without limitations. Most notably, our study design relies on self-reported data. Therefore, social desirability bias threatens the interpretation of our results. For example, fear of violence may have contributed to participants over-reporting or under-reporting witnessing fraud in the election process.⁸ Additionally, caution should be exercised in interpreting differences between individual voters and generalizing to the entire electorate in Haiti. Future surveys of voters should incorporate validated, culturally appropriate social desirability scales to minimize the effects of this threat.

In Haiti, political party monitors (“mandataires”) are allowed inside voting areas to observe the vote and to sign off on the count at the end of the day. According to Pierre Louis Opont, the CEP distributed more than 916,000 passes to political parties to distribute to mandataires. These individuals were excluded from the study. However, mandataires, in addition to being paid or volunteer political party organizers in their community are also voters. It is possible that the exclusion of mandataires from the data set impacted our findings.

Furthermore, our design did not permit for the systematic collection of data by the research team on the election fraud they witnessed. While respondents report low levels of witnessed fraud, actual instances of fraud may be higher. Future research should consider incorporating methods of observation of the election polling locations to measure this phenomenon. Finally, our survey assessed voter opinions, not voter intent to act upon their opinions. Because of historical and cultural contexts some respondents may hold pre-existing perceptions of ingrained fraud in the electoral process that influenced their reported beliefs. While voters may have not have actually witnessed such fraud in this election, it is important to recognize that these perceptions exist among the majority of participants.

Nevertheless, Haiti's experience as an emerging democracy has been wrought with challenges and the latest presidential election is no exception. However, it is now possible to learn about what is actually happening at the polls using robust social science research methods. This added layer of transparency allows for comparisons between individual experiences with the election and what is being reported in the media. Furthermore, it is possible to examine reported governmental election results with the same amount of scrutiny what would be applied in any other democratic country.

The focus of this report is on perceptions of the voting process and corruption more specifically. In order to increase the confidence of citizens in the electoral process,

⁸ See Paulhus (1984).

it is essential to reduce irregularities and fraud. Experience with corruption fuels widespread perceptions that an individual's vote does not impact election outcomes. In a culture where rumors rapidly spread and can magnify tensions, future elections must be as transparent and integrate neutral monitoring processes. Both international and domestic participants in the Haitian electoral process must work towards a higher standard of assuring voter rights. Ultimately, the voter is the true judge of electoral efficacy and improving voter confidence in the electoral process is a positive step for Haitian democracy.

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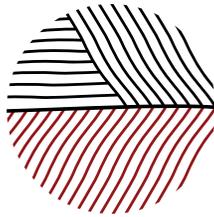
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