



The Download: Haiti

Democracy! The Podcast

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Adrienne Ross 0:06

Hi, and welcome to *Democracy! The Podcast* that shines the light on some of the darkest challenges facing the fight for democracy around the globe.

Joe Biden 0:16

Democracy will and must prevail.

Adrienne Ross 0:20

This podcast is brought to you by the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening direct from Washington DC, with support from our friends at the United States Agency for International Development through the Global Elections and Political Transitions Award. I'm your host, Adrienne Ross.

The Republic of Haiti often finds itself vulnerable to storms, both natural and manmade. But lately the Caribbean's second largest island has suffered a string of catastrophes. Like the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean, COVID has been crushing. Then the tremendously shocking assassination of President Jovenel Moïse happened in July. In August, just a few weeks later, a major earthquake claimed more than 2000 lives, Prime Minister Ariel Henry said the quake put his nation on its knees. And yet those who know Haiti the best say that these islanders won't stay down for long because they tell me their resilience is extraordinary. And in the face of these challenges, Haitians will rebuild their home and reconstruct their democracy. Today we'll talk to two Haitians who tell us why they look first to the youth of their country for inspiration. And the President and CEO of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems joins us to explain why we should never give up on Haiti. But first, we welcome a few of the Consortium's partners who know Haiti best. Matt Dippell is the National Democratic Institute's Deputy Director for Haiti. And Roger Mitchell serves as the Program Manager for the International Republican Institute, Latin America and Caribbean division. Together with funding from USAID, they've been focused on helping Haiti strengthen its political system. One of the first things we talked about today is what the media gets wrong about Haiti.

Roger Mitchell 2:12

One of the things that we tend to get a lot of coverage on is just the negative headlines. The fact that there's a lot of challenges in the country, there's a lot of endemic or recurring cyclical problems, such as corruption, such as poverty. And what is missing a lot of times is the positive stories that come out of Haiti and there's a lot of resilience in the Haitian people.

Matt Dippell 2:36

I think Rogers, right. I mean, Haiti is faced, you know, a series of seemingly relentless and difficult challenges, both from nature, be it hurricanes or earthquakes, and person made challenges via political conflict and crises. And these tend to be the moments when Haiti gets the greatest media coverage. But unlike other countries in the region that are, or even globally, that are facing some of those same challenges. When there are positive developments, they sometimes get overshadowed by these larger events.

Roger Mitchell 3:11

I would say that there's tremendous culture in Haiti that is often overlooked. There's also a very large Haitian diaspora in the US that has influenced our own cultures. And I think that's something that can be sometimes overshadowed just by the media.

Adrienne Ross 3:25

Matt, one of the areas that CEPPS/NDI has really been focused on is helping to support political parties. How do you help the Haitians assess political context and activities ahead of the elections?

Matt Dippell 3:36

The country's seen protests and disaffection with political leaders in the country and widespread calls for change. I think what's notable at the heart of all these protests is general frustration with the sense that people's everyday concerns are not being heard or addressed. These are concerns like economic inequality, government corruption, crime, and violence. And certain parts of Haitian society are also marginalized in political life. And that's particularly women and young people who make up the majority of the population. But the good news is that in response to these challenges, we're seeing some new levels of political activism. Young people, middle class, members of the diaspora, have returned home and are trying to make a difference in ways we haven't seen before.

Adrienne Ross 4:27

When you talk about enthusiasm, how does that show itself in Haiti? Do you just see people more excited? Do you see higher numbers of turnout of individuals interested in helping? What have you witnessed?

Matt Dippell 4:40

You're seeing more young people take part in political life. They're taking part in social protest movements; they're even starting new political parties. So, you know, this includes elements of the Haitian middle class and university students, some of whom are returning from studies abroad, to make a difference back home in Haiti.

Adrienne Ross 4:59

Roger, your team at the International Republican Institute has created a university course, talking about all these students who have come back home from studying abroad. And you've done it directly to help broaden the voices across the country. Can you tell us a little bit more about this program and how it got started?

Roger Mitchell 5:17

Of course, and maybe just to echo some of what Matt has already said, you know, this program that we've done under the CEPPS Consortium in northern Haiti is a program that targets local grassroots organizations, these are groups that are really just starting that are maybe mainly composed of volunteers, and that are really at the local level and communities. In partnership with a local Haitian University, we developed a curriculum, of course, that could benefit them, that could help them increase their capacity in areas such as advocacy, communications, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and looking for additional resources to be more sustainable. One of the successes, I would say, of this program is the fact that these independent groups, these 10 to 15, different organizations, didn't know each other at the beginning of the course. And through the course they were able to establish these new relationships, and form a sort of network, an informal network, I would say. And we're hopeful that in the future, we can continue to leverage those groups and that network, in order for greater collaboration to take place between organizations and greater civic engagement to take place at the local level.

Adrienne Ross 6:25

You both have remarked repeatedly to me in private, and again, in this conversation about the resiliency of the Haitian people, can you each just take a minute to talk about what you found to be so hopeful in this time of despair.

Matt Dippell 6:36

We're seeing new elements of Haitian society get involved in politics. And these are new voices, and they hold the promise to begin potential, perhaps incremental renewal of patient politics and political leadership, if they're able to successfully take part in elections. We are also seeing Haitian

good government watchdog groups, particularly in the area of election observation. And these groups are in touch with colleagues abroad, and they're adapting proven tools that Haiti can use to improve the transparency of elections. So, I think that the work of these national civic groups can begin to help shed light on and reform some of the long running shortcomings we've seen of Haitian elections and has been conducted successfully by colleagues in other countries. So, the hope is the work of these good government watchdogs will give citizens more confidence in the integrity of elections and encourage participation, which in the end is going to be the key to any change in the needed public accountability in Haiti.

Roger Mitchell 7:46

What I find really hopeful, and what really gives me motivation in our work in Haiti is the resilience of our staff and our partners, something that I find very hopeful is the work that we do, bringing activists, local government officials, and other members of the community together to work together. I think that's something that we see in a lot of these moments of disaster or be it political unrest is when community members come together and try to solve these problems together. That's something that gives me hope.

Adrienne Ross 8:19

It's excellent.

Two individuals who are really focused on solving some of Haiti's electoral problems join us direct from Port-au-Prince now. Fitzgerald Jean and Jude Judy work together with the Consortium. Jude is NDI Haiti's Program Director and has worked with citizens, grassroots organizations and political parties for almost 20 years. He's also founded his own community organization, worked as a radio director, and a history and social studies teacher. Fitzgerald Jean is a consultant with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. He helps to support Haiti's provisional electoral Council, and National Civil Society partners. Fitzgerald has studied electronic engineering and has a bachelor's degree in computer science. But he really is an elections expert who has worked in many places, including the Congo and Kosovo. They were both home when the recent earthquake struck in August.

Fitzgerald Jean 9:16

As you know, the earthquake struck mainly in south, contrary to the January 2010 earthquake, where many people died, thinking they would be safe in their homes, rushing back to the shelter at home, the education on how to behave during an earthquake clearly paid off. As this time, everyone worked outside in the streets, that knowledge has probably saved many, many lives.

Jude Jeudy 9:46

Since we are living in Port-au-Prince our region has not been really affected. But our sisters and brothers in the south of the country have been really affected. So, most people of the country mobilized to help friends or sisters or brothers, and it was an occasion for Haitian people to show solidarity, one to another.

Adrienne Ross 10:12

If we switch gears a little bit to talking about elections that are slated for November, Fitzgerald, what are the priorities for holding elections this year in Haiti?

Fitzgerald Jean 10:22

As you know, Haiti is caught in a political crisis, one of the first priorities would be to have a political accord to solve the crisis. In all those accords, there's of course a new provisional actor council to be nominated, because the last one wasn't really perceived as being legitimate.

Adrienne Ross 10:48

You're both deeply experienced working many aspects of elections in Haiti. Jude, you've been a grassroots electoral trainer for many years, what do you think the biggest challenges are facing Haiti's electoral system now?

Jude Jeudy 11:01

We think the lack of confidence from the population is the main challenge faced by the electoral system, but you have also to consider the violence, the insecurity that we observe, and the Port-au-Prince area and other areas of the country.

Adrienne Ross 11:23

I understand you both are focusing on particularly working with women and youth. Can you tell us what that's been like? Fitzgerald, why don't you answer first.

Fitzgerald Jean 11:32

Indeed, CEPPS/IFES has been working with different partner organizations, including women with disabilities and also youth. And those activities were quite hampered lately, because first because of the COVID 19 crisis, and then, because of the political crisis.

Adrienne Ross 11:54

Jude, have you had the same experience?

Jude Jeudy 11:57

In our work with the partner political parties, we have focused on recruiting women and young people, we have also supported both political parties to strengthen their women and youth wings. So, we are certain that these efforts will result in a greater number of women and young people as candidates and the next elections

Adrienne Ross 12:22

Jude, gang violence and COVID has been a significant challenge in Haiti, can you talk a little bit more about what challenges you've had to face?

Jude Jeudy 12:30

COVID have been the biggest challenge. And it has been practically impossible to implement some program activities with these partners. For a long period of time, the quality of internet connections in the country didn't help to work remotely. For the gang violence, it had impacted and continue to impact our work, it is very difficult to travel in some regions of the country to realize some activities. We are dealing with this problem which we are trying to do what we can when we can.

Adrienne Ross 13:04

I understand that Haitian politics, in particular, tends to be very personality driven. What does this do to the political process in Haiti?

Fitzgerald Jean 13:13

We are wrong in the way of in establishing a real democracy because they're often with parties that they are built around the persona of a single person. And it's really personality driven. And we've witnessed that once that person disappears, the persistence tends to lose their clout.

Adrienne Ross 13:39

If you had a crystal ball, what would you predict for Haiti's futures? Jude, what do you think?

Jude Jeudy 13:45

Despite all the problems that the country faces, we believe that the future will be better than the present. We are hopeful. When I observe the determination, the commitment of young people to participate and building a better Haiti, I remain hopeful.

Adrienne Ross 14:04

Fitzgerald, do you agree with that?

Fitzgerald Jean 14:06

I personally am quite pessimistic, because so far, every time we reach some depth, we found a way to, to dig deeper. So, we hope that politicians will come to their senses, and we need to take the country first. But so far, this is what not we witnessed on the ground.

Jude Jeudy 14:27

Oh, it's a reason why we need more new young women, honest, competent people in politics. And it's a reason why we work to bring these kinds of people in politics because we know if we want to change the situation of the country, there is a necessity to have other people involved in politics. People with new ideas.

Fitzgerald Jean 15:00

Yes, I agree with you in principle. But so, for those people, I don't see them forthcoming. I don't see no one emerging, meeting those criteria. And what we have seen during the last years maybe not the last year but during the last decades is an exhausting episode of the most capable, permanent people aboard. Because the youth, most young people, as soon as they get a chance to go study would go leave, or where would they take the chance. And they rarely come back, these sort of people who could really make a difference.

Jude Jeudy 15:44

You have a lot of young people were in France and United States and Canada, who have their scholarship in these countries who came back to Haiti, and these people want to participate in the building of a new country. And it's a reason why you have this movement in 2018, the Patriot Challengers' movement, it was a lot of young people who understand that Haiti is their country, and they have to fight to have another country because only Haitians can help building another country. So, I've met these people in every region in the country. I'm traveling a lot in the country. And when you when you meet young people from the universities, young people from community organizations, you can feel the vibe, you can feel their will to take part in these movements to have

a new Haiti, I understand that with the situation we have now, you know, it's not about that people are pessimistic, but there is no other way we have to change this country and Haitian have to do so.

Adrienne Ross 17:02

Well, gentlemen, we will leave it there. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Here now to help us put Haiti into context is Anthony Banbury, the President and CEO of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Tony came to lead the foundation in 2018 after an extensive career with the United Nations and the United States government. He lived in eight countries over a 12-year period. In fact, in the 1990s, Tony served as a Human Rights Officer for the Joint Organization of American States UN Civilian International Mission in Haiti. In 2010, when the UN leadership was tragically killed in the earthquake, Tony was tapped to serve as the emergency Acting Deputy Head for the UN peacekeeping mission. There is no one better to help us the breadth of the conversation on democracy in Haiti today. Tony, when I look back at some of the congressional testimony you've given on Haiti, you historically describe your service there as one of the most difficult proudest moments of your career. Can you share a little bit more about your firsthand experiences working in Haiti?

Tony Banbury 18:12

I've lived and worked in Haiti on two different occasions. The first was in 1993. I was a very junior UN Human Rights Officer working with a joint UN/OAS human rights mission in Haiti which went in after General Raoul Cédras kicked out the elected President Aristide, it was a really grim situation there. Cédras was a thug and autocrat and a dictator. And I'll never forget it. I was on the balcony of the hotel room that served as the office of my boss, a French woman. And I was looking out into the bay, and she had her back to the bay and President Clinton at the time had sent in a navy ship, basically threatening Cédras to get his act together, or the US was going to take action. It was the USS Harlan County. And ship was there for three days. And as I was talking with my boss, and she was telling me where I was going to deploy, the ship steamed up and turned around and started heading out of the bay. And so, I said to my boss, I was only in the country a relatively short period of time then, excuse me, is that significant? And she turned around and saw the ship steaming out and said I've got to go, and things deteriorated very quickly after that. And overnight, the Canadians pulled out Ottawa sent to C130 all the Canadians left. And all of a sudden, I was the only person in the hotel. They turned off the generator was very creepy, and by then, Raoul Cédras' thugs, there was this band of thugs called the frap, which is to hit in French or Creole, they were banging on our cars with sticks as we tried to drive through the streets, and we evacuated the next day, to the Dominican Republic to Santiago. Much more dramatic even, I was working at UN headquarters in 2010, when the earthquake hit January 10, 2010. And a couple days later, I was on the ground leading the UN's operational response. It's hard for people to understand, but more than 230,000 Haitians were killed in that earthquake. 230,000. That's a number that's impossible to comprehend.

It hit at the center of the Capitol, not in the remote countryside. It also hit around 4:50pm, which is when a lot of government workers had already left the office buildings. But a lot of hard working, dedicated government officials were still in their ministries, and they were killed. So, the government was devastated. The infrastructure was devastated, the port and airport were dysfunctional, roads were just impassable because of debris. It was the largest loss of UN life in the history of the organization. Never before had so many UN people, 102, been killed, most of them in that same Hotel Christopher that I had been staying in all alone, back in 1993, which would become the UN headquarters. And among those killed were the head of the UN mission, the deputy head of the UN mission. And so, I arrived with a team right after that, and it was just absolute insanity chaos. All the UN staff are traumatized. The government wasn't functioning, desperate humanitarian needs. And we retooled the whole UN mission to focus on three objectives, saving Haitian lives and providing humanitarian assistance, addressing the desperate needs of the UN staff that once were killed their family members, the ones who were traumatized, the ones who were still caught under the rubble. A friend of mine was pulled out of the rubble five days after the earthquake when I was there. And then the third mission was building the capacity of the UN so that we could meet those first two needs.

Adrienne Ross 22:31

When you come into a disaster like that, first of all, what goes through your mind? And secondly, how do you start to organize your democracy work after something so dramatic?

Tony Banbury 22:42

The first thing when I go into a disaster like that is to get as good an understanding as possible, the needs, the humanitarian needs, meeting the needs of people, it depends, in different contexts. I worked in the Indian Ocean tsunami, Haiti earthquake, cyclone Nargis and each one's a little bit different. But essentially, food and water come first shelter next. And then emergency health care. While you're trying to build information, you can't wait for perfect information, you're just trying to get it as quickly as possible, while at the same time, surging supplies and capability, teams, planes, aircraft, handling stuff, logistics stuff, you're surging them, you're just throwing stuff at the problem as fast as you can. But in terms of democracy, it's such a different set of problems and hence a different approach needed. Democracy, as you well know, is a very long process takes a long time to build a lot of elements are necessary, including a lot of intangibles going to the very heart of the social contract in a given society between the people and their government. So, it requires a very different approach, very different mindset, very different set of tools and capabilities.

Adrienne Ross 24:03

One of the things I like that I've heard you say is that the international community should not be dissuaded by the level of difficulty when we look at the political infrastructure in Haiti. Can you explain more about that and why we shouldn't be dissuaded?

Tony Banbury 24:16

I don't think we can ever be dissuaded from this kind of work, whether it's meeting humanitarian needs of those desperately in need, or it's the long hard work of building democracy. The people in a society they want it. They have the right to democratic governance. It's the autocrats and dictators who want us to be dissuaded. And the Haitian people are proud and strong, and they've never given up and I don't I certainly don't think we as their partners should ever give up.

Adrienne Ross 24:50

When we look at Haiti, again, in your opinion, what should we look to as an indicator of democratic success? How do we evaluate that?

Tony Banbury 24:58

So, the starting point is a new and good constitution. The current prime minister, Henri, recently proposed one with a different model, get rid of the Prime Minister have a strong President, Vice President, but also some pretty strong provisions, dealing with accountability for government officials. I don't want to pass a judgement, it's not for me to judge the choices that Haitians will make on their constitution. But clearly, a new good constitution that addresses issues related to power and roles and responsibilities and authorities of different state bodies is essential. And related to that it should be in the Constitution, getting at the issue of corruption in Haiti, which is at the heart of its dysfunction, where you have very corrupt elites who seek to undermine the good functioning of a democratic government. So, they can continue to enjoy the benefits that they get at the expense of the people. The previous President Jovenel Moïse who, of course, was assassinated, he had intended to bring a constitution to referendum. But the existing 1987 Constitution says it cannot be changed via any kind of public voter referendum. And so, the system is currently just dysfunctional.

Adrienne Ross 26:18

CEPPS/IFES, in particular, has had a long history of empowering traditionally underrepresented groups in Haiti's electoral and political participation. Does this remain a priority now that there are so many other things in Haiti that also needs strengthening?

Tony Banbury 26:32

Absolutely, and it should be a priority in any society, the role of women, the role of youth, the future of any country in the world is its youth. And of course, groups who are marginalized are not traditionally able to access full political, economic and social power and resources, such as that

LGBTQI+ community in Haiti, and we can't pick and choose all of the this work has to be done, unfortunately, simultaneously, given how great the needs are right now in Haiti.

Adrienne Ross 27:07

You've referenced the resilience and the incredible qualities we see in Haitians, what is it that people who have never been to Haiti or don't know a lot about this issue, what should they know about Haiti?

Tony Banbury 27:19

Haitians are a wonderful, warm, fun, interesting people with a rich culture. It's a beautiful country, Haitian people care a lot about education and the education of their children. After the earthquake, when Port-au-Prince was absolutely devastated, hardly a road was passable, hardly a house was left fully standing and unimpacted and within a very short period of time, on Sundays, you would see people walking the streets, going to some makeshift church, dressed in immaculately clean Sunday best clothes. I couldn't understand how that happened, how they could somehow manage to have such clean and nice clothes after such a devastating earthquake and their devotion to their religion, their children's education, I mean things that people around the world care about, and Haiti also has some fantastic food and culture, the art in Haiti is great. The beaches are amazing, the water is amazing, some of the historical sites, it's really a fantastic country to visit.

Adrienne Ross 28:42

And it's quite a bookend to describing the earthquake. I mean, really, it's unfortunate that there's been such tragedy on the island.

Tony Banbury 28:51

Haiti's partners have a special responsibility to do more to provide the support, whether it's humanitarian nature or support to political processes, rule of law, anti-corruption, we have a big responsibility, I think to provide the assistance that's really desperately needed.

Adrienne Ross 29:10

In your congressional testimony last year, you said the story of Haiti is the story of democratic governance that is forever a work in progress. Does that remain true? And what do you expect to see from Haiti in the future as they work to rebuild their country?

Tony Banbury 29:23

In any country, the work of democratic development is a process. Look at the United States and challenges to democracy in the United States. So, Haiti is on a path of democratic development as any country is, and it's been a very hard, steep, rocky, bumpy path for the Haitians. But it's a path where they can and will continue to make progress. Haitian people, civil society leaders, political party leaders are deeply committed to improving the lives of their people through democratic development. And certainly, CEPPS will be there with them walking down that path.

Adrienne Ross 30:06

Well, president of IFES Tony Banbury, we are smarter for having talked to you about Haiti today. Thank you so much for joining us.

I have an important footnote to leave you with on this discussion. Our friends at USAID have been focused on helping Haiti in the aftermath of the most recent earthquake. A special Disaster Assistance Response Team, or DART, has continued to lead the Joint Task Force Haiti and providing relief. To date they have completed more than 660 missions, assisted nearly 500 people, and transported nearly 600,000 pounds of emergency relief commodities to affected areas by working with the US Department of Defense and the US Coast Guard. In total this year, USAID has provided more than \$180 million in humanitarian aid for Haiti.

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