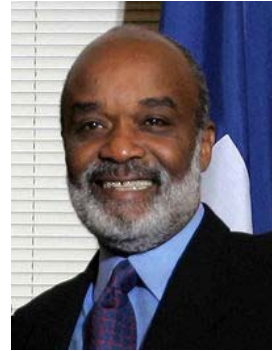


## *René Garcia Préval*

*René Garcia Préval*, born January 17, 1943 in Port-au-Prince, is currently the President of Haïti. He previously served as president from February 7, 1996 to February 7, 2001 and Prime Minister from February 1991 to September 2, 1993.



Préval studied agronomy at the College of Gembloux and the University of Louvain in Belgium. He was forced to leave Haïti with his family in 1963 after being targeted by the then-dictator, Francois Duvalier, aka "Papa Doc".

Préval's father, an agronomist too, had risen to the position of Minister of Agriculture in the government of Général Paul Magloire, the predecessor of Duvalier. Exiled from Haïti because his political past presented him as a potential opponent, he found work with UN agencies in Africa, more specifically in Belgian Congo, where he raised his family.

After spending five years in Brooklyn, New York, occasionally working as a restaurant waiter, Préval returned to Haïti and obtained a position with the National Institute for Mineral Resources. After a few years as a civil servant, he opened a bakery in Port-au-Prince with some business partners. While operating his company, he continued to be active in political circles and charity work. Providing bread to the orphanage of Salesian Father Jean Bertrand Aristide, with whom he developed a close relationship.

After the election of Aristide as president in 1990, Préval served as his Prime Minister from February 13 to October 11, 1991, going into exile following the September 30, 1991 military coup.

### **First presidency**

In 1996, Préval was elected as President for a five-year term, with 88% of the popular vote. Upon his 1996 inauguration, Préval became the second democratically elected head of state in the country's two-hundred-year history. In 2001, he became the first President of Haïti ever to leave office as a result of the natural expiration of his term.

As president Préval instituted a number of economic reforms, most notably the privatization of various government companies. Some have suggested that these privatizations were a result of Préval bowing to the pressure exerted on him by external entities including the IMF. The unemployment rate (though still quite high) had fallen to its lowest level since the fall of Duvalier by the end of Préval's term. This trend toward a decreasing unemployment rate continued during the subsequent tenure of Aristide until the 2004 coup.

As president, Préval was a strong supporter of investigations and trials related to human rights violations committed by military and police personnel.

Préval dissolved the parliament in 1999 and ruled by decree for the duration of the final year of his presidency.

### **Second presidency**

Préval ran again as Lespwa candidate in the Haïtian presidential election of 2006. Partial election results, released on February 9, indicated that he had won with about sixty percent of the vote, but as further results were released, his share of the vote slipped to 48.7% – thus making a run-off necessary. Several days of popular demonstrations in favour of Préval followed in Port-au-Prince and other cities in Haïti. On February 14, Préval claimed that there had been fraud among the vote counts, and demanded that he be declared the winner outright of the first round. On February 16, 2006, Préval was declared the winner of the Presidential Election by the Provisional Electoral Council with 51.15 percent of the vote, after the exclusion of "blank" ballots from the count.

Préval draws much of his support from Haïti's poorest people; he is especially widely supported in the poorest neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince.

Préval was sworn in on May 14, following Haïti's legislative run-off vote in April.