

Delayed Haitian elections mostly peaceful

A low turnout characterized long-delayed local elections in which Haitians had to choose among 29,000 candidates running for 1,420 slots.

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PORT-AU-PRINCE - AP) -- Haitians cast ballots Sunday in long-awaited municipal and local elections marked by low voter turnout and isolated reports of violence.

Some 29,000 candidates were vying for 1,420 local and municipal posts in Sunday's vote, billed as the final step in the troubled Caribbean country's return to democratic rule following a bloody February 2004 revolt that toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Assailants burned two polling stations and shot and wounded a man in the northern town of Limonade, local media reported. Police later shot and wounded an official of the Fusion party after they found him with two Molotov cocktails.

In the Port-au-Prince slum of Martissant, automatic gunfire rang out after polls opened, but there were no immediate reports of injuries. Rival gangs have been fighting for weeks and had threatened to disrupt the polling, residents said.

United Nations peacekeepers used tear gas to disperse a small crowd that shouted anti-U.N. slogans at a polling station in Cite Soleil, a volatile slum on the edge of Port-au-Prince.

Voter turnout appeared low in most parts of the capital of Port-au-Prince, with many polling stations virtually empty.

Officials had predicted turnout at 40 to 50 percent, well below the massive participation in February's presidential vote won by Rene Preval.

Visiting a polling center in the capital, Preval's prime minister, Jacques Edouard Alexis, praised the organization of the elections but said he had hoped for a higher turnout.

"Citizens must be informed of the importance of local communities," Alexis told local Radio Metropole.

Sunday's election took place more than a year late because of street violence and logistical delays.

Final results aren't expected for at least several days.