

HAITI

CONFLICT ANALYSIS 2023



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Executive Summary

Haiti is facing severe and multifaceted challenges. Government institutions have ceased functioning effectively, and gangs, backed by wealthy oligarchs, control nearly two-thirds of the country. Frequent natural disasters further exacerbate the multitude of crises confronting Haiti. While there is certainty about the severity of the situation, few actors have the capacity and willingness to address it adequately. Many of the issue areas examined in this diagnostic are closely interrelated. In addition to data on the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy's (CIFP) nine main indicator clusters, this diagnostic draws on research from other relevant sources where appropriate. Four of the nine indicator clusters are considered high-risk factors that will increase the likelihood of further conflict. The effects of five of the clusters are worsening, and that of the rest are stable. The diagnostic presents a best, worst, and most likely scenario in the next six months.



Background Information

In October 2016, while still not having completely recovered from the earthquake of 2010, Haiti was hit by Hurricane Matthew, which killed 546 people and putting approximately 1.4 million more in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.¹ A few short weeks later, Jovenel Moise was finally elected President of Haiti at the end of a long and controversial electoral process stretching back to 2015.² However, with a voter turnout of only 21% and unaddressed public distrust, his election did little to foster stability.³ In the following years, economic stagnation and increasing levels of gang violence, kidnappings, and murders plagued Haiti.⁴ In 2021, the assassination of President Moise and an earthquake of an even greater magnitude than that of 2010 pushed the country even further into hardship.⁵ Nominated, but not officially sworn in, as Prime Minister by the President two days before his assassination, Ariel Henry has become the Haitian government's de facto, if not completely legitimate, leader.⁶ As of January 2023, the terms of all elected officials have expired as elections have failed to take place since 2016.⁷ Gangs now control much of Haiti's territory given the all but complete absence of the state, and most Haitians live in extreme insecurity and poverty.⁸



Primary Actors (Influence= positive, negative, mixed)

Gangs (Negative)	There are seven main gang coalitions in the department of Ouest Haiti: the G9, G-Pep, 400 Mawozo, Grand Ravine, 5 Second, Baz Pilate, and Baz Galil. ⁹ Each gang is engaged in active conflict with government forces. These gangs control much of Haiti's territory and economic activity. ¹⁰ Gang coalitions are the main destabilizing actors through direct violence.
Oligarchs (Negative)	Haiti's top-tier elites, known to Haitian society as BAM BAM, ¹¹ are colossal benefactors of systematic corruption in Haiti and therefore seek to safeguard this system by helping mobilize and arming several gangs to advance their political objectives. In 2020, US\$194 million was reported stolen from the Haitian government by avaricious oligarchs overcharging the state for oil. ¹² Canada and the U.S. have recently imposed stiff economic sanctions against some of Haiti's super-wealthy political elites, attempting to target individuals engaged in protecting and enabling illegal gang activity. ¹³
Government Institutions (Mixed)	Haiti has no legitimately functioning government institutions. ¹⁴ Parliament has been shuttered for four years, and the handful of elected officials lack the legitimacy or capacity to respond to the multitude of crises Haiti is facing. The Haitian National Police, which is nominally supposed to provide security services, is poorly funded and poorly equipped when compared to the gangs that control most of the country. The reconstituted military is also unable to efficiently respond to the crises that arise.



Secondary Actors (influence= positive, negative, mixed)

Regional Actors (Mixed)	The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a group of 25 countries committed to promoting and supporting a unified Caribbean community, has condemned the increased violence in Haiti and urged members of the Haitian National Police to safeguard peace. ¹⁵ The Canadian Prime Minister and CARICOM leaders have remained in close contact and collaboration regarding the situation in Haiti, and Canada continues campaigning for CARICOM's involvement in both an immediate response and long-term solution to the Haitian crisis. ¹⁶ CARICOM member states Jamaica and Bahamas declared in November 2022 that they would provide military support to Haiti under a CARICOM-authorized mission, ¹⁷ with the Jamaican Prime Minister reaffirming this in February 2023, noting that their police and army are preparing for the eventuality of an international military deployment to Haiti. ¹⁸ The Dominican Republic, Haiti's neighbouring country, has continued reiterating their support for the Haitian people and urging the insurance of international mechanisms such as sanctions; meanwhile, the Government of The Dominican Republic advances the construction of a 13-foot border wall with Haiti. ¹⁹
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Montana Group (Positive)	The Montana Group, a broad-based coalition of Haitian NGOs, civil society members, and politicians, is a principal opponent of the current de-facto government led by Ariel Henry. This alliance recently selected interim leaders for a transitional government hoping to preside over Haiti, restore order, and prepare for new elections in two years. ²⁰ In November 2022, the coalition reaffirmed both their strong rejection of foreign military intervention and their calls for Henry to step down. ²¹
Canada and the U.S.(Mixed)	Both Canada and the U.S. have an interest in seeing improvements in Haiti's situation. The large diaspora communities of both countries exert political pressure for their governments to contribute to a solution in collaboration with the Haitian people, and mass influxes of Haitian refugees at the American southern border have created numerous political controversies. ²² The U.S. and Canada are the two largest donors of humanitarian assistance to Haiti and have contributed to and supported a number of successive UN missions and sanctions. ²³ However, measures taken so far have not been substantial or committed enough to bring about significant improvements in the root causes of Haiti's instability. Nonetheless, neither country has shown a desire to take on a more engaged and direct role in Haiti despite recent calls from Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry and the UN for an armed international intervention. ²⁴
BINUH (Positive)	The United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, established in 2019, has a three-pillared mandate to protect human rights, support political and governmental rebuilding, and continue dialogue. ²⁵ Semi-regular reports are presented to the UN Security Council as updates and calls for international support. Calls for physical intervention have fallen on hesitant nations outside of the Caribbean Region.

	History of Armed Conflict	High Risk	Deteriorating
Stabilizing Factors	The UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) continues to provide up to date information regarding the deteriorating situation and is reporting to the UN Security Council. ²⁶ BINUH has increasingly called for international intervention, successfully achieving coordinated sanctions against oligarchs supporting the conflict. ²⁷ With BINUH, diplomatic channels remain open.		
Destabilizing Factors	Haitian National Police (HNP) are underfunded and overwhelmed by organized gang activity. ²⁸ Gang coalitions have killed 14 HNP Officers 25 days into 2023 ²⁹ and 78 have been murdered since the assassination of President Jovenel Moise. ³⁰ Deaths from gang violence surpassed 2,200 in 2022, more than doubling from 2021. ³¹ Internal displacement numbers have increased exponentially from 2,100 in 2019, 7,900 in 2020, 17,000 in 2021, ³² to more than 88,000 in August 2022. ³³ 22% of displaced people reside in Port-au-Prince. ³⁴ IDP concentration in Port-au-Prince compounds with gangs now controlling more than two-thirds of the city. ³⁵		
Assessment	Conflict intensity has been increasing exponentially since the assassination of President Jovenel Moise and government structures and agents have been unable to counter gang advancements. ³⁶ Should deaths from gang conflict activity be considered 'battle related deaths,' this conflict would constitute a war as deaths have surpassed 1,000 in a one-year period. Although BINUH continues to report up to date information and act as a diplomatic channel, conflict intensity will continue to rise as destabilizing factors continue to multiply. Jamaica has expressed the willingness to send soldiers and police to Haiti for an intervention, but the nature of this intervention remains unclear and may act as a stabilizing or destabilizing factor. ³⁷ A lack of clarity inhibits analysis.		

	Government Stability	High Risk	Deteriorating
Stabilizing Factors	There are no trend indicators providing stability to this factor. However, Prime Minister Henry has agreed to the establishment of a High Transition Council with the purpose of rebuilding political institutions and restarting democratic processes. ³⁸		
Destabilizing Factors	As of 9 January 2023, there are no longer any elected national representatives. ³⁹ The Democracy Index has shown a three-year decline from a high in 2018 of 4.91/10 to 4.22/10 in 2020. ⁴⁰ Since that recording, significant democratic backsliding has occurred, including the disintegration of the Cour de Cassation, Haitian National Police, and electoral systems. ⁴¹ Civil and political rights have also declined regularly over the past 6 years from 39/100 in 2017 to 33/100 in 2022 according to the Freedom House Index. ⁴² Freedom of the press scores are similarly declining from 73.18 in 2018 to 64.55 in 2022. ⁴³		
Assessment	Haitian government institutions lack the financial, bureaucratic, and organizational capacity to repair the damage to democratic institutions in the near future. The dissolution of government functioning is affecting all three arms of the government, the executive, judicial, and legislative. ⁴⁴ As many of these factors continue to decline, there is a possibility for a negative feedback loop in relation to the other eight indicators within this report. A continued lack of, or deteriorating, government capacity may exacerbate human development, economic, and environmental indicators as an example.		

	Environment	High Risk	Deteriorating
Stabilizing Factors	Haiti is a signatory of the Paris Agreement and recent governments have made some commitments to reinforce the state's capacity to provide fresh drinking water. ⁴⁵ Last year the Ministry of the Environment launched Haiti's first National Adaptation Plan (NAP) outlining how they can work with international stakeholders to address climate change. ⁴⁶		
Destabilizing Factors	Two-thirds of Haiti's land are mountainous and not well suited for agriculture, but up to 40% of the GDP is generated by agriculture and some 70% of the population relies on it for their livelihood. ⁴⁷ Arable land and freshwater resources continues to shrink. ⁴⁸ The rate of deforestation continues to grow steadily. ⁴⁹ A vicious cycle of deforestation to provide fuel has led to the extensive loss of natural habitats and ecological diversity and is causing soil erosion, which climate change is further accelerating and severe natural disasters. Haiti is particularly vulnerable to making land already tenuously fertile, overcultivated and at high risk of further degradation. ⁵⁰ Haiti has almost no protected areas and since 2018 has ranked low on the Environmental Performance Index, resting at number 173 out of 180 in 2022. ⁵¹ Haiti is ranked 29 th among the most affected from natural disasters and has some of the highest fatality rates. ⁵² Severe weather events cost an average of 2% of GDP annually without adding damages from earthquakes; these losses are significantly greater than the Dominican Republic which covers a larger portion of the island of Hispaniola. ⁵³		
Assessment	The sustainability of agricultural practices is highly questionable, and the land is at high risk of further degradation. Losses to the agricultural sector would not only wreak havoc on Haiti's economy but also exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. Severe storms and devastating earthquakes are too regular to be considered shocks particularly given the state's lack of capacity to respond to them. The Environment has a high risk of worsening the crisis Haiti faces.		

	Economic Performance	High Risk	Deteriorating
Stabilizing Factors	Relative to other countries in the region, Haiti has maintained a low government-debt-to-GDP ratio over the past decade of between 19-24%. ⁵⁴ Approximately 160 million dollars (USD) of recently announced aid from the IMF ⁵⁵ and the U.S. ⁵⁶ may help address the balance of payment gap and food insecurity.		
Destabilizing Factors	Haiti continues to be the poorest country in the Americas with a GDP per capita (PPP, Current International \$) of \$3,153 as of 2021. ⁵⁷ GDP growth in 2022 was -1.2%, making it the fourth consecutive year of negative growth. ⁵⁸ In 2022, inflation reached even higher into double-digit figures at 47.2%, which contributed to a 48% increase in the number of people affected by food insecurity. ⁵⁹ Close to 60% of Haitians now live below the poverty line, ⁶⁰ and 30% with less than \$2.15 a day. ⁶¹ Meanwhile, approximately half of national income goes to the richest 10%. ⁶² Trade as a percentage of GDP fell from 49.16% in 2019 to 37.05% in 2021, ⁶³ and incoming foreign direct investment remains considerably lower than the regional average. ⁶⁴ The Haitian Gourde has also depreciated sharply against the dollar, going from 89 ⁶⁵ to 148 Gourde per USD between 2021 and 2023. ⁶⁶ A 5.5% drop in remittances in the 2021/22 fiscal year has further aggravated economic conditions. ⁶⁷		
Assessment	Essentially all of Haiti's economic indicators trend negatively, leaving the majority of Haitians in severe precarity and fostering conflict. Although IMF projections leave open the possibility for inflation to slow and a return to positive GDP growth in the coming years, this progress is marginal and contingent on tangible improvements in security and structural reforms, ⁶⁸ which appear unlikely. In the short run, positive developments are set to remain scarce, and unimpeded gang activity will continue to grind the economy to a halt.		

	Human Development	Moderate Risk	Deteriorating
Stabilizing Factors	In recent years, life expectancy in Haiti has demonstrated a marginal improvement, increasing slightly from 63.85 years in 2017 to 64.75 years in 2023, ⁶⁹ while expected years of schooling have remained stable, sustaining an average of 9.7 years between 2019 - 2021. ⁷⁰ Prospective stabilizing factors are the Global Environment Facilities' 2022 approval of US\$4.5 million dedicated to strengthening the climate resilience of the drinking water sector in Haiti, ⁷¹ as well as more recent international donor pledges to help attain the 2023 projected humanitarian assistance funding requirements in Haiti of US\$210.3 million ⁷²		
Destabilizing Factors	Haiti remains the only country from the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region trending low on human development classification, and most recently received an HDI score of 0.535, indicating a -0.005 change in the country's HDI value from 2020 ⁷³ . Access to safe drinking water and sanitation services continues to deteriorate and 3.3 million people currently lack access to safe water. ⁷⁴ After three years of no reported Cholera cases, Haiti reported a total of 13 672 suspected cases between 2 October 2022 and 6 December 2022, ⁷⁵ The Ouest Department of Haiti, where gangs have gained most territorial control, accounted for 89% of those suspected cases. ⁷⁶ The escalation of violence has directly impacted at least 1.5 million people in accessing education and health services ⁷⁷ and while 90% of schools were reported operating in January 2023, thousands of children, notably those living in		

	gang-controlled areas, have been unable to start the school year due to rising insecurity. ⁷⁸ 4 million children aged 5-19 years are at risk of losing all learning opportunities ⁷⁹ , while youth marginalization and recruitment into gang violence has intensified. ⁸⁰
Assessment	Increased violence in Haiti has continued dwindling Haitians' right to a decent standard of living and a long and healthy life, both of which are necessary for human development to flourish. Access to essential services like water, health, and education is only worsening, posing a grave threat to the well-being of millions in the country. Many other countries in the LAC region continue achieving high classifications of HDI scores while others, like the Dominican Republic, even manage to stabilize their recent 2021 HDI scores after reporting some decline in 2020. ⁸¹ Yet, Haiti's human development score continues consistently trending downwards. Given the recent Cholera outbreak, political instability, and continued breakdown of government capacity, it is likely that Haiti's HDI score will only continue to decrease in the next year as delivery of essential services becomes more and more difficult. This conflict has exacerbated Haiti's already low human development trends and emphasized a complete lack of regard for Haitians' physical and mental comfort and security, which will inevitably aggravate the Haitian crisis further.

	Militarization	Moderate Risk	Stable
Stabilizing Factors	Haiti's military, whose authority was frequently abused by the political leaders, was disbanded in the mid-1990's and replaced by a national police force to provide security services. ⁸² Concerted efforts have been undertaken to professionalize the police force, as recognized by the US and UN, and for the force to provide Haitians with greater access to security services. ⁸³ Although the military was recently reconstituted military expenditure remains low. ⁸⁴		
Destabilizing Factors	Both the police and military services face severe challenges in providing security services to Haitians. Gangs control 2/3rds of Haiti's territory and are often better equipped than the police, whose 168.5 million dollar annual budget (USD) is only 55% covered by the Haitian state and the international community has been falling behind on its obligations to cover the remaining 45%. ⁸⁵ Police service members wishing to unionize have been blamed for the violence that broke out in early 2020 when the police marched on the National Palace and ended up in an exchange of gunfire with the military. ⁸⁶ The efficacy of both services to respond to emergencies has been increasingly called into question particularly in the wake of natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, and political assassinations. ⁸⁷		
Assessment	Militarization overall is low, but neither the police nor the military have the capacity to adequately respond to the gangs which control much of Haiti's territory or even provide meaningful stabilizing support during times of crisis. This lack of capacity to respond to the gangs increases the country's instability. ⁸⁸		

	Demographic Stress	Moderate Risk	Stable
Stabilizing Factors	In 2021, the annual population growth rate was 1.2%, down from 1.5% in 2012. ⁸⁹ This rate is relatively high but comparable to other countries in the region. ⁹⁰ Haiti's population in 2021 was 11 447 569. ⁹¹		
Destabilizing Factors	Haiti's population density has increased steadily over the past decade and reached 410 people per square kilometer in 2020, almost twice that of the Dominican Republic. ⁹² This follows from a high average annual urban population growth rate of 3.19% between 2012 and 2021. ⁹³ 58% of Haiti's total population now lives in cities. ⁹⁴ Moreover, just under 50% of the urban population lives in slums. ⁹⁵ In the slums of Port-au-Prince, the population density is as high as 58 000 people per square kilometer. ⁹⁶ Haiti also has a large "youth bulge" of people aged 10 to 24, who account for 30% of the total population. ⁹⁷		
Assessment	Haiti's demographic profile does not lend itself to stability. Although increasing urbanization is usually associated with improvements in living standards, in the case of Haiti, poor urban planning and a lack of municipal infrastructure and financing have undermined its potential benefits. ⁹⁸ Instead, urbanization has mostly led to the concentration of poverty. Many Haitians now find themselves in exceedingly vulnerable living situations in cities largely controlled by gangs—including Port-au-Prince, of which at least 60% is under gang control. ⁹⁹ These gangs are fueled by a large supply of disaffected youth left with few economic opportunities. In line with this observation, studies have found that a combination of poor economic prospects and a large youth bulge can increase the risk of political violence. ¹⁰⁰		

	Population Heterogeneity	Low Risk	Stable
Stabilizing Factors	The ethnic makeup of Haiti is an overwhelming majority, with 95% of Haitians coming from African descent, while the other 5% of the population is mostly made up of a mixture of European-African descendants. ¹⁰¹ The main religions practiced by Haitians are denominations of Catholic and Christian faiths, with a small percentage openly practice the syncretic African religion known as voodoo. ¹⁰² The current population is ethnically homogenous, and all major religions are officially recognized by the Haitian government. ¹⁰³		

Destabilizing Factors	Although the Haitian constitution guarantees the free exercise of all religious groups, ¹⁰⁴ Haitians choosing to practice faiths outside of the state-prioritized religions can face social stigmatization and violence based on their beliefs and practices. ¹⁰⁵ There has been an increase in ransom kidnappings of religious leaders due to the belief that religious organizations are privy to money and more willing to pay large ransom sums. ¹⁰⁶ Haiti's elite oligarchy is referred to as a miniscule but economically-powerful set of light skinned, "white" families that, unlike most Haitians, do not come from African descent and rule against middle-class Haitians. ¹⁰⁷
Assessment	The ethnic and religious makeup of Haiti currently poses little threat to intensifying the current conflict. However, lingering stigmatization towards Haitian Voodooists, and potential ethnic division between Haiti's most elite and most impoverished seem to imply that religious beliefs and ethnic heritage remain embedded in Haiti's political power struggles. As some gang leaders utilize religious symbols of the Vodou faith to justify violence, ¹⁰⁸ others pursue kidnapping of religious leaders for financial gain, while Haitian ultra-elites are accused of reinforcing racist and imperial structures, the ethnic and religious attributes of Haitians should therefore be monitored to ensure they are not utilized as motivating factors to increase division and violence within the current conflict.

	International Linkages	Low Risk	Stable
Stabilizing Factors	Haiti maintains strong diplomatic ties with the United States, ¹⁰⁹ Canada, ¹¹⁰ and the Organization of American States. These relationships have led to the implementation of significant economic sanctions at the request of the Haitian government and BINUH. ¹¹¹ Haiti also is a member of La Francophonie which further expands its diplomatic ties. ¹¹²		
Destabilizing Factors	Haiti's international linkages at present do not create a destabilizing factor. However, previous international linkages have negatively influenced the current conflict. The OAS has condemned the previous Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti as a failure that has brought more harm and instability. ¹¹³		
Assessment	The threat facing the Haitian conflict remains minimal from international linkages. Although there are calls for an interventionist force from the international community, the likelihood of this is uncertain. Canada and the United States remain reluctant as influenced by previous mission failures in Haiti. ¹¹⁴ While the impact at this time remains a low risk, the propensity to change from low risk to medium risk as states discuss intervention remains high.		

6-Month Scenario Forecast	
Best Case	Severe weather events and natural disasters are minimal, limiting further environmental devastation and avoiding exacerbating the humanitarian and economic crisis. The UN Integrated office succeeds in persuading international actors to provide support to address the immediate humanitarian crisis, including medical, fresh water, and food provisions. International support is provided in coordination with the Haitian people through local partnership. Government institutions are stabilized through the work of the High Transition Council, laying the groundwork for future elections with the possible support of the Organization of American States. Part of the stabilization process would involve providing the police and military with the support needed to fulfill their security mandate without coming into conflict with each other. Improved security will allow for the long-term capacity building of Haitian institutions and government services. International sanctions continue to target elites, which, combined with the domestic stabilization efforts, will begin to curtail the influence of the oligarchs and gangs.
Worst Case	Gangs, oligarchs, and other powerful individuals will not see their power disrupted by domestic or international actors, resulting in the entrenchment of their influence. Government institutions will continue to flounder, lacking the capacity to provide basic services. Efforts charting a course towards democratic revitalization will stall. Military and security institutions will continue to lose faith in the government as they remain terminally underfunded and vulnerable to gang violence. Failing to provide security, the difficulty delivering of international aid will increase, including the provision of resources to address the health and environmental crisis (food, medical supports, freshwater resources, environmental adaptation measures, etc.). The humanitarian and environmental crisis will be exacerbated by a severe hurricane season, environmental devastation, or other natural disasters. Extreme weather events will heighten economic stress particularly if international support to address these issues fails to reach the people, or if international aid is not implemented in conjunction with domestic actors.
Most Likely	Some form of non-military international intervention will be agreed upon. The success of this intervention will depend on the form it takes and a number of situational factors. Coordination with OAS and the Montana group is likely to provide local legitimacy. BINUH will encourage international aid and facilitate its distribution to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Small projects to address environmental adaptation and resilience may be launched. Sanctions will remain targeted at oligarchs, and aid and international support will ensure that institutions, like the police or Transition Council, can pursue their work. Institutional capacity and stability will remain low, and the continued negative influence of gangs will need to be coped with.

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