

The Situation in Haiti

History



From European Contact to Independence

The Island of Hispaniola - hosting Haiti to the west and the Dominican Republic to the east - has long been hostage to armed conflict and political crisis. Encountered by Europeans during Christopher Columbus' first voyage in 1492, the Taino natives were persecuted and the island was slowly settled by Europeans. Ultimately, the natives were killed by disease, overworked and systematically exterminated. For the 1500s and most of the 1600s the entire island was controlled by the Spanish, but Spanish settlement was limited to the eastern part (modern-day Dominican Republic). French settlement slowly started in the west with the settlers hoping to become involved in the lucrative, but work intensive, sugar

trade.¹

In 1697, the island was split by the Treaty of Ryswick, officially granting French ownership over Haiti; known as Saint-Domingue.² With a population of about 556,000 in 1789 (500,000 of which were African slaves), St. Domingue's importance to France had become undeniable; accounting for two-thirds of its foreign investment. Under French rule St. Domingue began to move away from sugar production towards coffee and other labor-intensive cash crops.³ This caused the French to import more slaves, about 40,000 a year, and laid the foundation for modern-day Haiti's demographic and economic system.⁴ French colonists were significantly outnumbered by the slave population and efforts at resistance began. In particular, the slave population began to unite via Vodou; a religion derived from their roots in West-Africa.⁵

United by vodou - a religion consisting of various African ideals, allowing individuals to celebrate their culture - and the outcome of the French Revolution, freed slaves rose up against the colonialists. Joined by the wider population of slaves in August of 1791, the war for independence had begun. Following various attempts by France to restore order - including the abolition of slavery and even sending Napoleon's brother-in-law to lead loyalist forces - the main French forces surrendered in 1803. Haiti officially declared independence on January 1st of 1804.

As a young nation, Haiti struggled to maintain stability, undergoing numerous power

¹ "Africa Enslaved." *University of Texas*. https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/hemispheres/files/pdf/slavery/Slavery_in_Haiti.pdf.

² "The Treaties of Ryswick." *Peace Palace Library*. <https://www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/2017/08/the-treaties-of-ryswick-1697/>.

³ "Africa Enslaved." *University of Texas*.

⁴ "Haiti: a long descent to hell." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/14/haiti-history-earthquake-disaster>.

⁵ "Timeline of Haitian History." *University of Pennsylvania*. <http://www.dolphin.upenn.edu/dhsa/history.html>.

struggles and governmental changes. Additionally, as a republic run by former African slaves surrounded by slavery dependent economies in the Caribbean and the southern United States, Haiti was deprived of international recognition by most nations.⁶ These countries viewed Haiti as a threat as they believed that Haiti would cause their slave populations to rise up and attempt a similar revolution. Under President Jean-Pierre Boyer in 1825, Haiti was finally recognized as independent by their former colonizers, but for a price; an annual indemnity of 100 - 150 million francs. This took Haiti 122 years to pay, only sending the last payment in 1947.⁷ Haiti would eventually be recognized by Britain, and eventually the United States under President Lincoln in 1862.⁸ The western hemisphere's second republic served as a symbol for the abolitionist movement, helping set the stage for the American Civil War & numerous other events.

Haiti from the 1900s until today

Following recognition by the United States, Haiti's situation did not improve. The United States used Haiti as a market for its exports and a source for its natural materials, two dynamics which helped prevent the rise of industries in Haiti and keep it economically underdeveloped.⁹ Due to Haiti's immense debt to France and other European nations and its political instability the United States occupied Haiti in 1915, taking control of vital ports throughout the country.¹⁰ The Marines forced Haitian citizens to build roads and build other infrastructure against their own will, causing sentiment to grow against them. In 1919, American soldiers assassinated nationalist leader Charlemagne Peralte; a leader who openly opposed American invasion. The occupation ended in 1934 during the Great Depression, leaving Haiti to pick up the pieces.

Following a long period of power-struggle and democratic uncertainty, the military tried to force democratic elections. These elections in 1957 saw Dr. François Duvalier win.¹¹ In July of 1958, Duvalier formed the Tonton Macoutes in response to the military's efforts to stage a coup. The Macoutes were a paramilitary group which would commit numerous human rights violations. Under the reign of Duvalier and the Macoutes, tens of thousands would be killed; including political opponents who would be hung in the streets. The Macoutes were the regime's secret police allowing the Duvaliers to maintain their rule despite Haiti's deplorable economic conditions.¹² In 1971 "Papa-Doc" died, leaving the presidency to his son, Jean-Claude. Though many oppressive policies remained the same, his regime maintained a semi-isolationist foreign policy; though it depended on foreign-aid for economic activity. A series of events from 1971-1985 including the arrest of aid workers, the massacre of school children, and even a visit by the Pope would ultimately lead to the exile of

⁶ "In 1825, Haiti Paid France 421 Billion to Preserve its Independence—Time for France to Pay it Back." *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/12/06/in-1825-haiti-gained-independence-from-france-for-21-billion-its-time-for-france-to-pay-it-back/#782b6173312b>.

⁷ *Ibid*.

⁸ "A History of United States Policy Towards Haiti." *Brown University*. <https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-14-the-united-states-and-latin-america/moments-in-u-s-latin-american-relations/a-history-of-united-states-policy-towards-haiti/>.

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ "U.S. Invasion and Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934." *US Department of State*. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920/haiti>.

¹¹ "The Duvalier Dynasty 1957-1986." *Latin American Studies.org*. <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/haiti/duvalier-dynasty.htm>.

¹² "The Tonton Macoutes: The Central Nervous System of Haiti's Reign of Terror." *Council on Hemispheric Affairs*. <http://www.coha.org/tonton-macoutes/>.

Duvalier and his family, again placing the country under military rule. During his reign, Jean-Claude and his associates stole hundreds of millions in aid funds and taxes collected by the government in order to line their own pockets.¹³

Following a failed military-run election, the president-elect was ousted by General Prosper Avril instituting a plethora of repressive policies. He resigned following a popular uprising in 1990, leaving the Organization of American States and United Nations to oversee an election.¹⁴ The winner of this election, a parish priest and champion of the poor, is Jean-Bertrand Aristide with 67.5% of the vote. As he establishes his government, a coup attempt is fended off by the military. After instituting programs and addressing the United Nations General Assembly, President Aristide's administration looked strong. Once returning from his United Nations visit, a coup d'état forced him from power. President Aristide fled to the United States where he rallied international bodies against the coup-regime. After actions by the United Nations, Organization of American States, and various other nations, both the Governors Island Accord (which calls for the creation of a new civilian-lead police force) and the New York Pact are signed; establishing a plan to reinstate Aristide as president. On October 15th, of 1994 he returns as the legitimate leader of Haiti.¹⁵

The Current Situation

Humanitarian Crises & Continued Instability

Political instability plagues Haiti and hurts its ability to recover from its troubled past. Though political violence and oppression is significantly less likely in modern Haiti than it was in the past, systemic abuses remain in the judicial system and protests often turn violent.¹⁶ Another contributing factor to Haiti's crises is its uneasiness toward foreign entities and organizations, including the United Nations. Given Haiti's history with colonialism and foreign interference, can occasionally stop aid and investment plans in their tracks; sparking violent protests and anger among the Haitian people.

Though progress is slowly being made, issues such as government corruption plague the process. One such situation involved the President of the Senate, characterized by foreign bodies as a "Mafia boss" In late 2017 this corruption, allegedly, turned fatal, when a government official supposedly committed suicide before testifying against senatorial corruption. These shady actions by the government continue to this day, involving other actions such as, "bribery and appeasement." An anti-corruption investigation believes that politicians and members of the business community embezzled nearly \$2 billion in aid money from Venezuela after the 2010 earthquake.¹⁷

Governmental dysfunction and corruption are detrimental to the democratic process, but it also destroys the government's ability to provide for their people. Simple amenities that others around the world take for granted are noticeably absent, including food, water, and basic electricity. Besides humanitarian issues, the government is failing to address police forces that often fail to

¹³ "The Duvalier Dynasty 1957-1986." *Latin American Studies.org*.

¹⁴ "A Chronology of Major Haiti Events." *Los Angeles Times*. http://articles.latimes.com/1994-10-16/news/mn-51100_1_bertrand-aristide.

¹⁵ "Summary of AG-068 United Nations Political and Peacekeeping Missions in Haiti (1993-2001)." *United Nations*. <https://search.archives.un.org/downloads/united-nations-political-and-peacekeeping-missions-in-haiti-1993-2001.pdf>.

¹⁶ "Haiti: Events of 2017." *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/haiti>.

¹⁷ "Haiti owes Venezuela \$2 billion-and much of it was embezzled, senate report says." *Miami Herald*. <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article184740783.html>.

protect innocent citizens from crime, lacking important training, funding, and equipment. More recently the inability of Haiti's government to deliver basic services caused protests to erupt over the government's plans to raise fuel prices.¹⁸ These protests left around four people dead. With nearly 60% of its population living below the poverty line, raising fuel prices makes it cost prohibitive for many Haitians to buy fuel. Even after the violent protests dissipated they saw attempts to undermine the current government through a vote of no-confidence in the parliament.¹⁹

Natural Disasters and Development Struggles



As the nation struggles to stabilize politically, funds are utilized in areas other than disaster prevention or recovery; or just lost in corruption. This unfortunate misappropriation results in casualties exponentially higher than other Caribbean nations, relying almost exclusively on foreign aid and humanitarian intervention. While aid is positive in the immediate aftermath of natural disasters in Haiti food aid is cheaper than products farmed locally by Haitians, pushing many

Haitian farmers out of business and contributing to the nation's immense poverty.²⁰

One of the largest humanitarian disasters in the nation's history, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake rocked the poverty-stricken nation in 2010. The United Nations, which lost 102 of its own workers, responded immediately along with the international community. It is estimated that nearly 220,000 to 300,000 Haitians were killed, around 3% of the population, in the earthquake's aftermath.²¹ Again the country relied on international help, struggling to even provide basic search and rescue services. Homes, businesses, and governmental buildings were wiped off the map, sending the nation back to the drawing board in many cases. It is believed that Haiti received \$10 billion in aid in the five years after the earthquake.²² But much of this aid has been wasted with an investigation into the American Red Cross discovering that the NGO could not locate \$500 million in aid that had supposedly been given to relief projects on the island.²³ With support pouring in from around the world, Haiti was able to begin the long recovery. Though despite the generous aid sent to Haiti, scars are still visible today and displaced families and those that lost loved ones will never be the same.

When Hurricane Matthew hit in October of 2016, landslides, storm surges, and massive flooding crippled the already poverty-stricken population. Affecting over 20% of the population and killing 546 people, Matthew tore apart the island-nation in an event that is predicted to happen once

¹⁸ "Unrest over fuel prices sparks political crisis in Haiti." *France 24*. <https://www.france24.com/en/20180709-haiti-protests-deadly-unrest-fuel-prices-subsidies-political-crisis-moise-lafontant>.

¹⁹ "Haiti government faces no-confidence vote amid violent protests." *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/haiti-government-faces-no-confidence-vote-violent-protests-180714142259798.html>.

²⁰ "The Negative Effects on Haiti of Too Much Foreign Aid." *The Daily Signal*. <https://www.dailysignal.com/2015/12/18/the-negative-effects-on-haiti-of-too-much-foreign-aid/>.

²¹ "Haiti Earthquake Fast Facts." *CNN*. <https://www-m.cnn.com/2013/12/12/world/haiti-earthquake-fast-facts/index.html>.

²² "Has the international community failed Haiti." *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-33802203>.

²³ "In Search of the Red Cross' \$500 Million in Haiti Relief." *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2015/06/03/411524156/in-search-of-the-red-cross-500-million-in-haiti-relief>.

every 56 years. In the aftermath, the World Bank scrambled to provide monetary aid along with United Nations organizations, but ultimately, just as history has proven, these funds were allocated incorrectly and did little to help.²⁴ A majority of the recovery was orchestrated in the agricultural field, where as much as 90% of crop-yield was lost in some cases. Given the inability to stabilize Haiti after the 2010 earthquake and Hurricane Matthew, how can the international community ensure that future development is handled effectively and efficiently?²⁵

Environmental Calamity



Emblematic of Haiti's political, economic and social issues are its environmental degradation. Haiti had an economically important logging industry during the Duvalier regime but did not work to replant felled trees.²⁶ This has caused massive soil erosion and degradation, reducing the soil's fertility for agricultural production. When earthquakes and hurricanes occur, the loosened soil, which is not held together by tree roots, is easily washed away causing mudslide, flash floods and further degrading the soil. On top of the

destruction of Haiti's forests, Haiti's rapidly growing population and limited public services have seen construction in areas prone to hurricanes and mudslides with few proper sanitation facilities built. This pollutes Haiti's waterways and the immediate ocean ecosystem. Moreover, even when Haiti has environmental regulations they are extremely difficult to enforce as the enforcers are often bribed to look the other way, therefore illegal logging flourishes.

UN Peacekeeping Operation

Beginning in 2004, the United Nations Security Council authorized the deployment of a multi-national force to assist the Aristide administration in creating stability.²⁷ Peacekeepers have even given blood for the island nation, with 96 being killed in the 2010 earthquake. As a result, more troops were sent to assist in aid work, designating the mission as vital to the future of Haiti. Throughout the mission's duration, peacekeepers assisted and protected humanitarian operations all over Haiti. Ultimately this mission wasn't considered a success, leading to the continued need for peacekeeping involvement. In 2017, this United Nations--mandated forces was replaced by a smaller transitional follow-up force. UNSC Resolution 2350 designated the goal of these forces to be the establishment of law, actively assisting and training the Haitian police.²⁸

With hundreds of thousands of dead and even more injured, an estimated \$14 billion of

²⁴ "Rapidly Assessing the Impact of Hurricane Matthew in Haiti." *The World Bank*.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2017/10/20/rapidly-assessing-the-impact-of-hurricane-matthew-in-haiti>.

²⁵ "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/haitis-troubled-path-development>.

²⁶ "Haiti's Legacy of Environmental Devastation Compounded by Earthquake." *Scientific American*.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/earth-talk-haitis-legacy/>.

²⁷ "MINUSTAH Fact Sheet." *United Nations Peacekeeping*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minustah>.

²⁸ "Resolution 2350 (2017)." *Security Council*. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1286538/files/S_RES_2350%282017%29-EN.pdf.

damage, and a central government unable to recover, the international community stepped in; providing \$13.5 billion in aid.²⁹ Along with monetary support, the United Nations sent peacekeepers and aid personnel. This support had some unfortunate consequences as the peacekeepers spread cholera amongst the population. Cholera in the following years would affect, “more than 720,000 Haitians,” and ultimately kill 9,000.³⁰ The failures of foreign assistance do not stop there. Growing reliance on regional powers, such as the United States, shows why infrastructural development plans fail, pointing out that flying in workers and getting materials alone is exponentially more expensive for foreigners. Improper allocation of the monetary aid led to money going to places of little effect. The result of this misuse of funds not only hurt the nation’s development, it completely failed to assist the very programs they were meant to assist.

Displaying the extent by which foreign failures have disgruntled the Haitian people, a series of class-action lawsuits were even filed against the United Nations in American courts. These cases sprouted from dozens of cases, claiming failures of the United Nations to provide compensation and remediation after the cholera outbreak. Though these cases were thrown out by a federal judge in 2017, it explains why Haitians question international involvement.

In conclusion, the current situation of Haiti is one of political limbo. Still struggling from the aftermath of natural disasters, endemic poverty, and class disparity, Haiti needs a force for good. The government has still failed to assist citizens who have been displaced by the earthquake - even this much later. Vital infrastructure such as the justice system, specifically the prison system which struggles with overcrowding need relief. To make matters worse, the primary force relied upon worldwide for fighting poverty still struggles to take shape; this force being education. According to *Human Rights Watch*, “Approximately ½ of Haitians age 15 and up are illiterate.” Without adequate support from a stable regime, the people of Haiti may see a continuation of their historical plight.³¹ Scope of the Issue: In conclusion, Haiti is currently fighting a plethora of political issues. Government corruption prevents large-scale progress to take hold, allowing the greed of a few to hold back the nation as a whole. A struggling economy and lack of sustainable infrastructure contribute greatly to the problem. The solution - despite the weariness of locals toward foreign assistance - does seem to be held in the hands of international partners.

Questions to Consider

- To what extent has the United Nations contributed to Haiti’s perilous situation?
- In what ways can the United Nations and the international community work to improve Haiti’s situation?
- How will the solutions to Haiti’s problems overcome the country’s track record of poor governance?
- Should solutions be implemented by Haiti or by a regional or global organization?

²⁹ “Haiti earthquake damage estimated up to \$14 billion.” *The Washington Post*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/16/AR2010021605745.html?noredirect=on>.

³⁰ “U.N. Admits Role in Haiti Cholera Outbreak That Has Killed Thousands.” *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/08/18/490468640/u-n-admits-role-in-haiti-cholera-outbreak-that-has-killed-thousands>.

³¹ “Haiti: Events of 2017.” *Human Rights Watch*.