



## Haití, el país que a nadie le importa

### Resumen:

Hablar del país más pobre del hemisferio occidental puede parecer a simple vista irrelevante. Pero aunque el mundo siga mirando hacia otro lado queremos desde estas páginas dar la voz de alerta sobre la desdicha de un pueblo, en un contexto marcado por la inestabilidad institucional, la violencia, la corrupción y los desastres naturales.

Es difícil que Haití consiga salir de esta espiral de inestabilidad, pero más difícil será si es abandonado a su suerte por la comunidad internacional. Y al contrario, el liderazgo haitiano tendrá que superar su desconfianza a ser ayudado.

Puede que hoy en el debate global poco importe Haití pero no debemos olvidar que en un tiempo fue la colonia más rica de continente americano.

### Palabras clave:

Violencia, magnicidio, terremoto, corrupción, desastres naturales, pandillas, emigración, Caribe, Haití

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## Introduction

Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was gunned down at his private residence in Port-au-Prince on 7 July. This assassination comes at a time when the country is in a profoundly unstable situation that threatens to destabilise it further. This has unexpectedly brought this small republic, once known as the "pearl of the Antilles" but now the poorest country in the western hemisphere, back into the international spotlight.

This assassination, which was condemned by the international community, comes after several months of escalating gang violence in Port-au-Prince, in a context of growing humanitarian and political crisis.

If this were not enough, on 14 August, having not fully recovered from the 2010 earthquake, the country relived that nightmare with another earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale that struck the southwest. With no respite, Tropical Storm Grace, three days later, further complicated the situation of thousands of homeless people.

The convulsive socio-economic and political situation in Haiti has been raging for a long time, but in recent months it seems to have reached a critical point that is putting countries around the world on alert. The direction of this unique country, which we must not reduce to calamities and crises, is still unknown so as not to lose sight of the drama of a population.

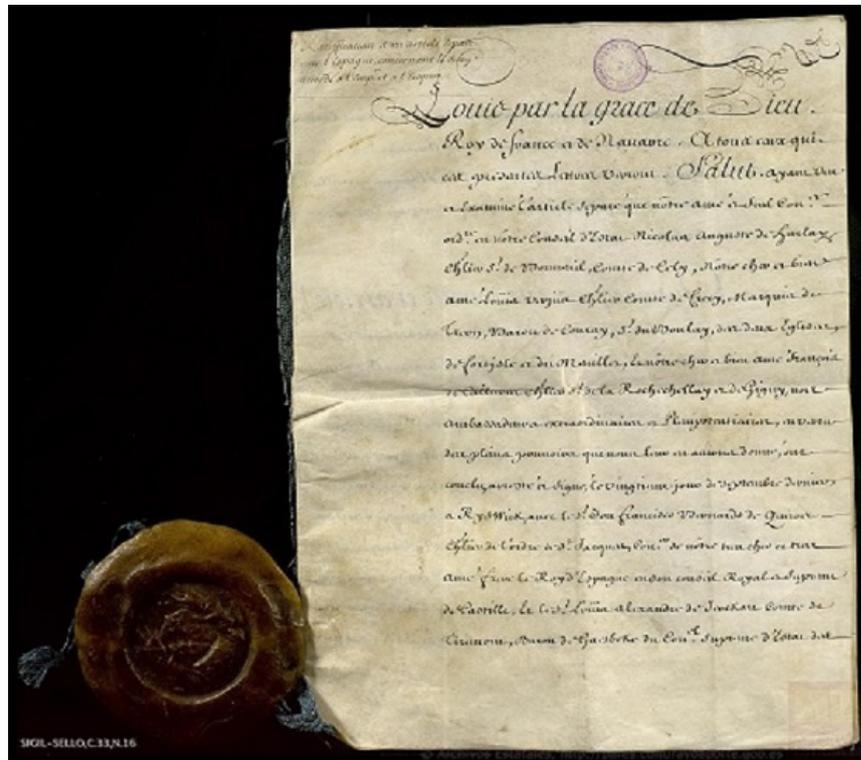
It is at this particular moment that we must ask ourselves how has this country come to have this degree of instability? Does anyone really care what is happening in that little part of the Caribbean?

In the search for an explanation, perhaps a review of its history might help us understand the situation it finds itself in today, or at least help us get to know a little more about a nation that evokes poverty, devastation and disaster.

## A look into the past

Haiti is a small republic, 27,750 km<sup>2</sup>, and the oldest independent country in Latin America. For a long time, the island of Hispaniola was part of the Spanish Empire, which used it as a strategic base for conquest, until 1697, when the Treaty of Ryswick was signed by which Spain ceded the west of the island to France, thus constituting the island's territory.

French "Saint Domingue". This is where the current separation of the island lies, with French in the western part and Spanish in the eastern part of the island sharing the same territory.



Ratification by the King of France of the separate article of the Treaty of Ryswick signed at Fontainebleau on 3 October 1697 and countersigned by Colbert, his Secretary of State. SIGIL-SEAL, C.33, N.16. A.H.N.

The French occupation produced its immediate effects both in terms of resource exploitation and population, making it the richest and most prosperous colony in France and the New World<sup>1</sup>; it had the region's most important port for goods and products to be shipped to Europe, such as sugar, coffee, cotton and indigo. Investments were increasing in the Caribbean island and many French citizens decided to settle there, which is why it became known as the "Pearl of the Antilles": slaves and the largest sugar factory in the world all accounted for a quarter of France's fortune, which afforded it power and wealth. That "plunder" became the basis of the anti-colonial movement that was gradually being forged.

<sup>1</sup>FORRISI ROMAÑACH, A. TOUSSAUNT, D. "Haiti: y su desenvolvimiento económico" in: XVI International Fomerco Congress. 22-27 2017, Salvador de Bahia, Brazil. P.5

The independence of the United States in 1776, together with the loss of the British trade monopoly, strengthened the economic power of Saint Domingue, which saw its income grow in parallel with its population, which was becoming increasingly socially differentiated, which would eventually provoke the Haitian revolution<sup>2</sup>.

At the end of the century, driven by the ideas of the French Revolution, the first revolts against the metropolis began, culminating in 1804, making Haiti the second independent colony and the forerunner of the victorious anti-slavery movement. But it was a very violent revolution, perhaps the most violent of all modern revolutions: neither the French, nor the Russians, nor the Cubans – perhaps not even the Chinese – claimed that proportion of lives and went to such extremes of violence<sup>3</sup>.

That moment marked a turning point in the country's history, with France imposing an independence payment that was not paid until the middle of the last century, by which time Haiti was already one of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere<sup>4</sup>.

Although it was an independent country on paper, in practice society remained subordinated to the patterns that had been established during the French yoke. Forming an independent polity, run by formerblackslavesin a world ruled by white colonial and slave power could not have been easy. According to Brian Concannon<sup>5</sup>, this meant that Haiti was never allowed to move forwards.

Although the landed estates were distributed among the population, very few could live off them, so this process resulted in the emergence of a large peasantry and raised a class of landowners who, together with the merchants, became the post-decolonisation ruling class.

Added to this is the profoundly heterogeneous nature of the population. The Haitian community was successively prey to weak and authoritarian governments, coups d'état that only increased the poverty of a plundered economy deeply determined by the blockade suffered for much of the 19th century under the French and British yoke, who did not want the slave revolution to serve as an example for their colonies<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> GÓNZALEZ HERNÁNDEZ, M. and MANERO SALVADOR, A. *The Haiti conflict*. Francisco de Vitoria" Institute of International and European Studies. Ministry of Defence. Madrid, 2011.p.48.

<sup>3</sup> RIVARA, Lautaro. "El olvido de Haití es el olvido del imaginario de la Revolución": una conversación con Eduardo Grüner, in: *Latin America on the Move*, 533. August 2021, Year 45, 2nd epoch. Digital edition. p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Haiti's 122-year independence payment is estimated at more than 29 billion dollars.

<sup>5</sup> Founder of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti.

<sup>6</sup> From 1804 to 1915, more than 70 different dictators ruled Haiti.

The first half of the 20th century, between 1915 and 1934, was characterised by the US military occupation, a particularly prosperous period in which it was able to pay off its debt<sup>7</sup>.

But these circumstances soon changed, leading to one of Haiti's first great tragedies. In 1937, the president of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo, massacred the Haitian population on the common border between the two countries, in which more than 30,000 Haitians are believed to have been killed.

With the Duvalier era, the violence did not stop. For three decades, between 1957 and 1986, Haiti suffered one of the bloodiest dictatorships of contemporary times, with a populist campaign in favour of the black population and against the mixed-race population. In the opinion of historians, the developmental problems that the Caribbean republic suffered and still suffers from start from here, however, it can be considered as a period of political stability in Haitian history. The fundamental reason for this stability and retention of power was its recognition as a pre-eminent power by the other competing factions<sup>8</sup>.

A popular uprising in 1986 overthrew Jean-Claude Duvalier and, under pressure from the US administration, forced him to flee the country and go into exile in France. But his departure solved nothing.

For several years, power in Haiti was held by military dictators through coups d'état<sup>9</sup> and permanent instability gripped the country with hundreds of deaths.

It was not until 1990, when elections were called, that a president was democratically elected in Haiti. Jean Bertrand Aristide, a Salesian priest at the head of Lavalas<sup>10</sup>, with a left-wing discourse impregnated with Liberation Theology, swept the elections, although months later he was overthrown in a new military coup led by the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, Raoul Cédras, who employed violence as a weapon of power.

It was then that in 1994, with the support of 20,000 US troops, Aristide was reinstated as president, exhausting his two-year term.

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<sup>7</sup> GÓNZALEZ HERNÁNDEZ, M. and MANERO SALVADOR, A. Op. Cit. p 53.

<sup>8</sup> ALDA MEJÍAS, S. "Haiti. El intento fallido de construir una democracia sin Estado" in: *Local crises and international security. The Haitian case*. Strategy Paper 131. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. 2005. P.19.

<sup>9</sup> Four in particular: Henry Namphy (2), Prosper Avril and Herard Abraham.

<sup>10</sup> Lavalas means "avalanche" in Creole. Popular movement, the avalanche that promises to radically erase the past and lay the foundations for a new nation.

In 2001 he returned to power with another overwhelming majority, although his second term ostensibly failed and the one-time messiah of Haitians was ousted in 2004 in an armed insurrection, and marched into forced exile in South Africa.

Political instability, crime, corruption and misery continued to deepen to such an extent that the UN sent a peacekeeping force (MINUSTAH)<sup>11</sup>, for an initial period of six months, eventually remaining in the country for thirteen years.

One of the major challenges of this mission was to bring about a return to institutional stability to facilitate new elections being held, which took place in 2006 with the victory of René Preval, after scheduled delays and accusations of electoral fraud<sup>12</sup>.

Although there was some political stability for a few years, poverty and violence did not disappear and were aggravated by the force of nature: tropical storms, hurricanes and violent squalls killed around a thousand people and left many thousands homeless<sup>13</sup>.

### **The 2010 earthquake: a before and after in Haiti's history**

It should be noted that Haiti has suffered some of the most severe environmental degradation in the Americas, having lost two-thirds of its arable land since 1940 and suffering from alarming deforestation. In addition, it is continually hit by natural disasters that give it no respite. In 2010, with 98% of the territory already deforested, experts pointed to a clear correlation between deforestation and poverty.

In the face of the alarming situation that seemed to be beginning to resolve itself in the country, another misfortune was added to the fate of this small nation. On 12 January 2010, an earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale left Haiti's capital in absolute chaos under rubble.

Earthquakes have killed thousands of people, destroyed homes and condemned the country to extreme suffering, but the 2010 earthquake was undoubtedly the most intense in 240 years. At least 220,000 people died, 350,000 were injured and 1.5 million people were affected.

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti.

<sup>12</sup> "René Préval proclaimed president of Haiti to avoid a wave of violence". [https://elpais.com/diario/2006/02/17/internacional/1140130802\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/2006/02/17/internacional/1140130802_850215.html)

<sup>13</sup> Jeanne (2004), Fay, Gustav, Hanna and Ike (2008).

This would aggravate the acute and painful social crisis. The country was partially ruined, with hundreds of thousands of homes, government buildings and churches destroyed. It lost almost \$8 billion, representing 120% of its GDP.

The Préval government, even with a clear will to rebuild the country, lost not only its facilities, but also some of its high ranking officials who died during the catastrophe<sup>14</sup>.

A huge wave of solidarity was translated into international emergency aid, which was to arrive en masse in Haiti. The international community pledged \$11 billion for the reconstruction of the country. Optimistically, it can be considered that half of it was actually paid. However, only 2% of this amount was channelled through Haitian state institutions. Thus, aid went to the "TNGOs"<sup>15</sup> and the UN system"<sup>16</sup> The prevailing perception that the government was too corrupt to handle aid, which was true, caused the state to weaken further.

To top it off, cholera suddenly broke out in the Haitian population for the first time in its history. A UN waste station polluted the Artibonite River, causing an epidemic that killed 10,000 people and made more than 600,000 ill.

An independent investigation soon found the source of the deadly epidemic: the MINUSTAH military base run by Nepalese soldiers in Mirebalais. Despite the evidence, the UN denied responsibility and was criticised, and it was not until December 2016 that it admitted responsibility.

All these disasters, mismanagement by the government and the international community, in a chaotic and corrupt country, a week away from new elections, provoked an uprising among the population. The first protests took place in Cap-Haïtien, in the northwest of the country, and later spread to Port-au-Prince. Tensions were high, but these popular uprisings did nothing to improve the situation, especially when the protests resulted in an unknown number of deaths.

Eleven months after the earthquake, on 28 November, elections were held in which almost five million Haitians exercised their right to vote to elect a new president, beginning with accusations of fraud by most of the opposition candidates, denouncing manoeuvres to include the ruling party's candidate for the presidency, Jude Celestin.

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<sup>14</sup> GÓNZALEZ HERNÁNDEZ, M. and MANERO SALVADOR, A. Op. Cit. p. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Transnational Non-Governmental Organisations.

<sup>16</sup> RIESCO, Ricardo. "From independence to MINUSTAH: Haiti's ordeal in international relations" in: América Latina en movimiento, 533, Op. Cit. p.44.

These complaints prompted a review process led by the Organization of American States (OAS), which, after reviewing the voting records and finding irregularities in more than 234 of them, helped to correct the discrepancies.

The final result was that the musician Michel "Sweet Micky" Martelly won the election with 67 % of the vote<sup>17</sup>. A democratically elected president succeeding a democratically elected president. His campaign was based primarily on the promise to rebuild a ravaged and depleted country, with \$8 billion available for this task, a fund he had to manage effectively as it was a time when many of the NGOs, brought in to help by the earthquake, were already leaving.

Haitians had to take the reins of the country, and not expect everything from the international community, but to rely on themselves, with a recovery plan that would mitigate the effects of the catastrophe.

But he was unable to deliver on his government's promises because of his arm wrestling with parliament. In his five-year presidency, his achievements were outweighed by a list of challenges and misfortunes, punctuated by corruption and backsliding on many social issues.

In 2015, new presidential elections took place, contested by a high and confusing number of contenders, 54 to be precise, and marked by fraud.

Martelly's candidate was Jovenel Moïse, a young businessman totally unknown in the political world, as the candidate of his Tèt Kale party (PHTK), a centre-right party with liberal leanings. Jude Celestin, for the Alternative League for the Progress and Emancipation of Haiti (LAPEH), received the second highest number of votes. These results provoked complaints from a coalition of opposition parties, accompanied by riots, who demanded the annulment of the elections, alleging electoral fraud, and the elections were finally annulled.

The president of the Senate, Jocelerme Privert, was named interim president of Haiti, the first time since 1946 that a head of state in Haiti had been indirectly elected<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Martelly, "winner" of Haiti's elections. BBC Mundo. 4-04-2011. [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2011/04/110405\\_haiti\\_elecciones\\_sweet\\_micky\\_michel\\_martelly\\_az](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2011/04/110405_haiti_elecciones_sweet_micky_michel_martelly_az)

<sup>18</sup> Who is Jocelerme Privert, the new interim president of Haiti? 15-02-2016. Le Nouvelliste. <https://lenouvelliste.com/article/155495/qui-est-jocelerme-privert-nouveau-president-provisoire-dhaiti>

In addition to the institutional crisis, that same year, 2016, Haiti was hit by the devastating Hurricane Matthew, one of the most powerful in the last ten years, which left nearly 800 dead<sup>19</sup>, more than two million people affected and thousands displaced, with GDP plummeting by 32%. These losses caused by Matthew came on top of two years of drought and the major impact of the 2010 earthquake.

Desperate after this new blow of nature and with no time to recover, with a country in ruins, Haiti is once again trying to overcome the political crisis with the call for a new general election on 20 November.

### **Jovenel Moïse: from businessman to president of Haiti**

Jovenel Moïse ran in the new 2016 election as the candidate of the right-wing party Tèt Kale (PHTK), ideologically opposed to the centre-left current led by Jean-Charles Moïse of the Pitit Desalin party, close to former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, where he eventually won again. He was elected on a promise to develop the country's economy and took office on 7 February 2017, his first time in public office.

It should be noted that barely 18% of the population went to the polls, so that more than 4 out of 5 Haitians refused to participate in the election, which means that he only had the support of 9% of the electorate, making him "surely" the president with the worst legitimacy on the American continent.

With successful business credentials and a rural background, 46-year-old Moïse focused on promoting bioecological agriculture as an economic driver for the country "in his campaigns", whose rural population is over 50%. His speech was aimed at the idea of personal success, setting himself up as an "example of possible success"<sup>20</sup>, he had even promised to bring running water and electricity to the whole country.

His controversial mandate will unfold amidst accusations of corruption, authoritarianism, mobilisations and violence.

Already at the end of 2018, the government began to falter due to the devaluation of the national currency and rising inflation, although it was already a country with a severe

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<sup>19</sup> More than 800 dead and a wave of destruction: Hurricane Matthew's devastating passage through Haiti. BBC Mundo. 6-10-2016. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-37577828>.

<sup>20</sup> CAROIT, Jean-Michel. "Jovenel Moïse, "petit paysan qui réussit", nouveau président haïtien". 29-09-2016. Le Monde. [https://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/article/2016/11/29/jovenel-moise-petit-paysan-qui-reussit-nouveau-president-haitien\\_5040106\\_3222.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/article/2016/11/29/jovenel-moise-petit-paysan-qui-reussit-nouveau-president-haitien_5040106_3222.html)

economic depression before Moïse's arrival in government with 60% of its population in poverty and 24% in extreme poverty.

As part of the adjustment package signed in February with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the draconian fuel price increase sparked the first anti-government protests in July. Although the government rescinded the controversial measure immediately after announcing it, the transport strike brought the country to a standstill after three days of violent unrest, blocking streets, burning numerous vehicles, attacking businesses and looting supermarkets.

Business leaders blamed the president and his prime minister for a "lack of leadership" in dealing with the crisis and a failure to protect the lives and property of Haitians.

This crisis led to the forced resignation of Prime Minister Guy Lafontant and his entire cabinet, with Moïse appointing the renowned notary Jean-Henry Céant, who would be ratified by the Haitian parliament.

Shortly afterwards, Moïse was hit by embezzlement scandals, which uncovered the corruption of his cabinet and that of his predecessors.

A violent social outburst takes place in 2019 due to the PRETOCARIBE<sup>21</sup> case. According to a report revealed by the Higher Court of Accounts, the money that would have been used for part of Haiti's reconstruction and to turn its economy around, more than two billion dollars, was only used to enrich three governments. Corruption in the management of this fund confirmed the involvement of President Jovenel Moïse and his cabinet in the embezzlement.

Demonstrations continued throughout the year, and in the meantime this crisis was increasingly weakening the country's socio-economic conditions.

In 2021, Haiti explodes again. This time the disagreement is over the date on which the president was due to end his mandate: for Moïse his mandate ended in 2022, five years after he took office in 2017. But for another sector, the opposition, Moïse should have left office a year earlier, in February 2021, based on the date of the vote. The Supreme Council of the Judiciary issued a resolution stating that Moïse's presidential term did indeed end on 7 February, but the president refused to hand over power, arguing that he

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<sup>21</sup> This was an alliance between Venezuela and the Caribbean countries whereby Caracas supplied oil on very favourable terms, with very low interest rates.

had one more year left in office, this instability essentially due to an ambiguity surrounding the constitution.

Several protests rocked the capital Port-au-Prince and other cities, with many calling for the president's resignation.

As early as January 2020, the president dissolved parliament and has since been accused by his critics of hoarding power and ruling Haiti by decree. This was demanded by a large part of the opposition and numerous civil society organisations. It could be said that from this point onwards, Moïse's government embarked on the systematic construction of what could be understood as a "one-man dictatorship".

Joe Biden's administration and the Core Group<sup>22</sup>, supported the idea of Moïse governing until 2022. However, these countries joined the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) in criticising the Haitian president's latest decrees, which served to create a National Intelligence Agency and criminalise acts of vandalism as "terrorism".

Similarly, Moïse had pushed for a referendum on a controversial constitutional reform, although it was eventually postponed<sup>23</sup>.

The UN, the OAS and countries such as the US also criticised the consultation process on the new constitution for lacking transparency and not being sufficiently inclusive, as the text of this constitutional reform is aimed at strengthening the executive. Moïse's aim was to hold the referendum before organising the legislative and presidential elections scheduled for September, when his successor would be chosen.

Meanwhile, in the heat of the protests, the Haitian president denounced an attempted coup d'état and asserted that there was a great conspiracy against him to eliminate him, accusing a group of families and businessmen linked to the electricity sector of trying to assassinate him.

A few days before the fatal outcome of the Haitian president, the UN Security Council insisted, in a unanimous statement, on "the urgent holding of free presidential and

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<sup>22</sup> It currently comprises the ambassadors of the United States, France, Canada, Brazil, Germany, Spain and the European Union, and special representatives of the UN and OAS Secretaries General.

<sup>23</sup> Haiti postpones referendum on new constitution to 27 June. 23-02-2021. EFE AGENCY <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/politica/haiti-aplaza-al-27-de-junio-el-referendum-para-la-nueva-constitucion/20000035-4472389>

legislative elections in 2021"<sup>24</sup>, a demand that had already been made by the Core Group last April<sup>25</sup>.

### **Violence and insecurity**

The context of widespread insecurity in the country is exacerbated by clashes between rival gangs in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, which began in 2019. Dozens of criminal groups sow terror and control entire neighbourhoods. The streets turned violent, police arbitrariness, indiscriminate kidnappings, in short, a crisis that is of little concern to the world.

They thrive mainly on drug trafficking, as Haiti has become a hub between South America and the United States for the illicit trade of drug traffickers, mostly from Colombia. In the midst of such lawlessness and given the ineptitude of the police forces that have no control over their coasts, drug traffickers found an open sea route that allowed them to transport the merchandise to Puerto Rico and finally distribute it in the United States.

It was against this confusing backdrop that the assassination of the president of the Port-au-Prince Bar Association, Monferrier Dorval, in July this year caused great consternation in the country.

While the population continued to struggle to feed itself, gangs extorted traders and looted trucks of goods and disposed of their enemies through targeted assassinations. Faced with corruption and the breakdown of power, the gangs fought each other and the police, a practice they continue today. They have real arsenals, guns and automatic weapons and control entire neighbourhoods of the capital that have become lawless zones. Anyone is a potential victim to be kidnapped; gangs choose victims at random, without any specific pattern. Even today, according to the UN, thousands of citizens are still internally displaced due to the fighting.

The whole situation highlights the general worsening of security in the country and, above all, the growing crisis of governability of President Moïse, who has been accused at best

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<sup>24</sup> "Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU insiste sur des élections en 2021" 1-07-21. LE NOUVELLISTE. <https://lenouvelliste.com/alaminate/19009/le-conseil-de-securite-de-lonu-insiste-sur-des-elections-en-2021>

<sup>25</sup> CORE GROUP PRESS RELEASE. 8-04-2021. [https://ht.usembassy.gov/fr/communique-du-core-group/?\\_ga=2.45148580.1049114367.1629394472-1764841962.1629394472](https://ht.usembassy.gov/fr/communique-du-core-group/?_ga=2.45148580.1049114367.1629394472-1764841962.1629394472)

of being under the control of these armed gangs, and at worst of directing and using them to establish his power.

In the same vein, members of the opposition and private sector leaders are also accused of having links to these gangs, receiving funding and being in the pocket of prominent Haitian figures.

During the first quarter of 2021, the country recorded 142 kidnappings, almost three times as many as in the same period last year. The Haitian security forces were unable to contain the situation. This was the case of seven Catholic religious – five Haitian and two French – kidnapped in April, for whom a ransom of one million dollars was demanded, and who were eventually released.

At the end of June, fifteen people were shot dead in the Haitian capital, including a journalist, Diego Charles, and an opposition political activist, Antoinette Duclair, both 33 years old.

An example of the seriousness of the situation is the fact that Médecins Sans Frontières decided to suspend its activities for a week in the hospital it managed, only to abandon it definitively in August, as it felt unable to guarantee the safety of its teams. For fifteen years, this NGO-operated health centre was located in the middle of the most troubled area, Martissant, the poor neighbourhood fought over by the gangs.



The leader of Haiti's main armed gang, the G9 Federation, Jimmy Cherizier, alias 'Barbecue', dressed in military fatigues and armed, walks down a Port-au-Prince street. / EFE

Thousands of inhabitants of this gang-run district were forced to flee their homes and be housed by relatives or in gyms because of the brutal confrontation between the Grand Ravine versus Ti Bois armed group, who are fighting for control of Fontamara and Martissant, neighbourhoods that have been emptied of their occupants<sup>26</sup>. The area has been referred to as "death row".

Experts claim that crime and kidnappings increased by 200% during Moïse's term in office.

Three days before his assassination, on Sunday 4 July, the Haitian president took a stand against the gangs in Port-au-Prince, structured in the G9<sup>27</sup>, saying that the capital could not be allowed to "become a lawless zone..." where it is even "impossible" to give the vaccine against COVID-19. Was the president playing a dangerous double game? For political scientist Jacques Nési, there is complicity between the gangs and the executive. "Justice is paralysed and is not investigating. This chaos allowed him to stay in power"<sup>28</sup>.

### **What can you say when a president is assassinated in a country like Haiti?**

Against this backdrop of crime, insecurity and political instability, in the early hours of 6-7 July, President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated in his private residence in Port-au-Prince by a commando of at least 28 men, leaving his wife seriously wounded. The interim prime minister, Joseph Claude, orders a state of siege and convenes an extraordinary cabinet meeting.

The international community's reactions to Moïse's assassination were swift. UN Secretary-General António Guterres called on all Haitians to "preserve constitutional order, remain united and reject all violence". The OAS General Secretary considered it "a criminal act".

On the other hand, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Policy, Josep Borrell, warned that the criminal action could fuel a "spiral of violence" and "entails a risk

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<sup>26</sup> "Thousands of Haitians live in an overcrowded gymnasium to flee urban war", MegaDiario 17-06-, 2021. <https://megadiario.com.do/miles-de-haitianos-viven-hacinados-en-gimnasio-para-huir-de-la-guerra-urbana/>

<sup>27</sup> The nine main bands in the city.

<sup>28</sup> ATTAL L. Assassinat du président d'Haïti: 5 minutes to understand a political and security crisis. 7-07-21. Le Parisien. <https://www.leparisien.fr/international/assassinat-du-president-dhaiti-5-minutes-pour-comprendre-une-crise-politique-et->

of instability". British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he was "shocked and outraged", while White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the US was ready to help the troubled country.

The assassination of the Haitian president has certainly surprised and shocked the world, but it is nothing less than the culmination of a long political crisis. In addition to being historic, this assassination sets a dark precedent for Haiti's already battered democracy.

This attack remains shrouded in many questions as to who the perpetrators were and who ordered and paid for the operation. There are theories that Moïse was "handed over" by his security officials<sup>29</sup>.

It could also be a question of the slovenliness of a disorganised judicial system that still relies on paper files, hindering an investigation full of irregularities.

What does seem to be clear, so far, is that the commando team that allegedly killed him consisted of 28 Colombians, former members of the Colombian armed forces and two Haitian-Americans.

In this regard, the latest news this October reveals the arrest in Jamaica by the Colombian police of Marco Antonio Palacio, the main suspect, as the person who shot and killed the president. Although Haitian police have indicated that investigations point to Christian Enmanuel Sanon, a 63-year-old Haitian living in Florida, as the conspirator who hired the Colombian mercenaries with the idea of seizing power, he is considered a link in the chain of suspects.

But the question is who could have wanted to assassinate the president just three months before the 26 September legislative and presidential elections and why, when the constitution prohibits a second term and Moïse himself had already announced that he didn't intend to run. However controversial his figure may have been, nothing can justify his assassination.

From then on, what was to be the line of presidential succession without any roadmap being drawn up. The Caribbean nation's constitution does not define who should assume the post, in fact, it would have fallen to the president of the Supreme Court, René Sylvestre, but he had died of COVID days earlier. This situation led three politicians to

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<sup>29</sup> "A Haitian human rights organisation concludes that Moïse was "handed over" by his security officials". 24-08-2021. Europapress. International. <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-organizacion-ddhh-haiti-concluye-moise-fue-entregado-responsables-segurid>

presume that they are legitimate successors to assume interim power: Senator Joseph Lambert, who was appointed interim president by the Haitian Senate, Claude Joseph, who is recognised by the United States and the Haitian Embassy in the Dominican Republic as Haiti's interim prime minister, since before the assassination of the president he held the post, and the prime minister appointed by decree 48 hours before the assassination, Ariel Henry, as announced by Moïse on his Twitter account<sup>30</sup>, with the task of forming a new government to replace Joseph's, although the latter was never sworn in. Ultimately, all of this highlights the country's political instability and the collapse of the state.

Claude Joseph Moïse nevertheless proclaimed himself prime minister after the president's death, but as suspicions spread that Joseph might have been involved in the assassination, the US and the Core Group tipped the balance in favour of Henry as prime minister within thirteen days of Moïse's death.

However, as Ariel Henry took the decision to form a government alone, without consulting the opposition, which had signed a memorandum of understanding with the PHTH party, it decided to rescind the agreement and withdraw its support for the prime minister, considering his appointment and subsequent government to be the result of international consensus. Both opposition political parties and civil society organisations regretted having been sidelined and called for participation in a political agreement before the elections. This does not seem to be the way to calm the mood in the run-up to the September elections, and at the same time a great opportunity was missed to have achieved a major national political agreement.

### **When it rains, it pours**

At a time when the 2010 earthquake was still present in the collective imagination and the country had not yet fully recovered, the same nightmare was about to be relived. An earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale hits the southwest on 14 August, as a tropical storm bears down on the Caribbean and a tsunami threat was issued for the region by the US Tsunami Warning System but later withdrawn<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> President Jovenel Moïse (@moisejovenel) 5-07-2021 [pic.twitter.com/w5qSOjncSJ](https://pic.twitter.com/w5qSOjncSJ)

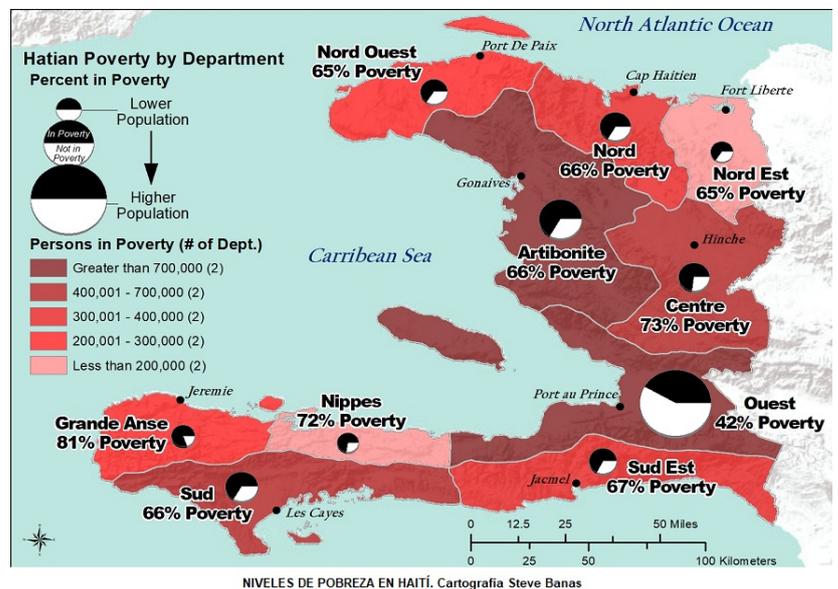
<sup>31</sup> U.S. Tsunami Warning System. <https://www.tsunami.gov/>

According to Haitian authorities, more than 2,000 people were reported injured and hundreds missing at first, with the government declaring a state of emergency. In approximate terms, the tragedy has left more than 2,000 dead and 1.2 million people affected.

In the face of the catastrophe, the international community was quick to show its support by offering technical and financial backing, and statements of solidarity poured in from around the world amidst the devastation.

Victim relief efforts, which came pouring into the capital Port-au-Prince, were hampered by torrential rains and flooding left by the tropical storm. At the same time, emergency logistics were also at great risk due to the insecurity that has plagued Haiti for months, making it difficult to reach the affected areas.

The earthquake has destroyed markets, infrastructure, warehouses and irrigation systems, leaving people's ability to produce and access food



completely disrupted. Some 4.3 million Haitians are in a state of severe food insecurity, which is a stepping stone to famine. Not to mention the impact of Covid on the population, for whose vaccination Haiti has received some 500,000 doses, despite needing many more.

The FAO warned of these circumstances in a report last March<sup>32</sup>, when all these disasters had not yet occurred in the Caribbean republic. It then appealed to the international community for an investment of \$20 million to address Haiti's humanitarian emergency and restore livelihoods<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> FAO and WFP warn that acute hunger will increase in more than 20 countries. 23-03-2021. FAO. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <https://www.fao.org/news/story/es/item/1390765/icode/>

<sup>33</sup> First post-earthquake assessment in Haiti finds increased hunger in affected areas 9-09-21 FAO. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1438448/icode/>

On the other hand, the fuel crisis adds to the already complex situation the country is going through, intensified by the clashes between gangs that make access to the main distribution terminals difficult, with their demanding the payment of 100,000 dollars to allow the resumption of supplies.

At the same time, the interim government is striving to find an institutional stability that is difficult to achieve under such adverse circumstances. A new draft of the Constitution has been prepared, seeking to make it an "inclusive" and "realistic" draft, as Prime Minister Henry noted, to clarify the competences of the state. The international community supports his efforts for an inclusive government, but urges him to speed up the process to reach a consensual agreement for the normal functioning of democratic institutions and the holding of elections.

At the end of September, Henry dismissed the members of the Provisional Electoral Council with a view to appointing a new one in preparation for the elections, although the members of the Provisional Electoral Council rejected this dismissal outright, as only a president can dismiss or appoint them. Even so, the prime minister initiated steps towards the formation of a new Electoral Council in October to organise the new elections scheduled for late 2022.

However, despite these political agreements, insecurity and violence are still present in various parts of the country, especially in Port-au-Prince, with an increase in kidnappings – 117 in September – protests and demonstrations. The latest have been caused by fuel rationing and the closure of petrol stations, with the leader of the G-9 Federation<sup>34</sup> gang demanding the resignation of the prime minister as blackmail to remove the blockades preventing distribution.

Meanwhile, public transport workers went on indefinite strike in mid-October in protest at the upsurge in violence, which has already claimed the lives of some drivers.

The latest tragedy of which we are aware is the kidnapping of 17 American and Canadian missionaries, including five children, by the 400 Mawozo gang demanding \$1 million for each of the abductees, according to Haitian authorities.

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<sup>34</sup> G9 "An Fanmi e Alye". (the Group of 9, a Family and Allies)

## The plight of Haitians: the migration crisis

Thousands of Haitians are seeking new opportunities in various Latin American countries and in the United States in the face of their country's uncertain future.

Political instability, corruption and natural disasters have forced them to find a way out of their lives, especially after the impact of the August earthquake. In addition, the pandemic has only further aggravated the unsustainable crisis for millions of people, and has also disrupted the lives of Haitians in Latin America.

One could speak of a new diaspora like the one that occurred after the 2010 earthquake; according to the UN, one fifth of the Haitian population has been forced to emigrate – close to two million people – ranking third among the main source countries of refugees in Latin America and the Caribbean at the end of 2018<sup>35</sup>.

Since then, the main destinations for Haitians have been visa-free countries, the neighbouring Dominican Republic<sup>36</sup>, where an estimated half a million Haitians live, and also Brazil and Chile, where an estimated 230,000 are currently settled in the Andean country.

However, the difficulties they encountered in these countries due to the lack of employment, the crisis generated in Latin America by the pandemic<sup>37</sup>, as well as a worsening of inequality indices in the region and the obstacles they had to overcome to obtain legal status, have led Haitians to look again towards the United States, with Brazil and Chile becoming transit countries.

One might ask what are the factors that have driven this quest for the "American dream". We can mainly consider two:

First of all, because of a misinterpretation of President Joe Biden's immigration policies. Many thought that, upon his arrival at the White House after Donald Trump's administration, with its hardline policy against migration, there would be a change of course by relaxing the reception of migrants. In fact, he signed several executive orders

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<sup>35</sup> World Migration Report 2020 [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr\\_2020\\_es.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020_es.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Although it has recently taken tough measures to curb Haitian immigration, including banning visas for Haitian students.

<sup>37</sup> According to a March 2021 report by CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), poverty and extreme poverty in 2020 reached levels not seen in the last 12 and 20 years, respectively. <https://www.cepal.org/es/comunicados/crecimiento-america-latina-caribe-2021-alcanzara-revertir-efectos-adversos-la-pandemia>

intended to counteract the "bad immigration policies"<sup>38</sup> of his predecessor, including a proposal to grant citizenship for the nearly 11 million undocumented migrants living in the country and family reunification. This encouraged Haitians to seek resettlement in the United States.

Secondly, with the historic migration of Haitians to this country, which is, in fact, home to the world's largest Haitian population of 1.7 million. Thus, at various points in the region, huge traffic jams of Haitian migrants in very precarious conditions have formed, desperate to reach their final destination and at risk of being captured by human traffickers. In early October, Chilean police and Interpol dismantled a transnational criminal organisation that smuggled Haitian migrants, including 267 children under the age of five from Chile to Peru to continue their journey to the US. The US is the only country in the Darien Gap Jungle, between Colombia and Panama.

One of the points in the region where the situation is most chaotic is the northern port of Colombia, where almost 20,000 migrants, mostly Haitians, are waiting to board boats that will take them to the border with Panama and, from there, continue their journey to the United States. In addition to a lack of food, the poor conditions in which they wait have led to sanitary problems for adults and children.

But when they arrive at the US border, Haitians do not find it easy to cross; on the contrary, border agents chase the undocumented migrants, which has provoked great indignation. The media were able to capture images showing border patrol officers on horseback chasing migrants who had crossed into the US, including capturing Haitians with nooses.

From the heart of the problem, in the Mexican border town of Del Rio, Texas, US Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas warned of border closures. In fact, Biden has upheld Trump's foreign entry restriction, the so-called Title 42<sup>39</sup>. Thus, the border is closed for non-essential activities due to the pandemic and that includes asylum seekers and refugees.

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<sup>38</sup> Biden signs three executive orders to reverse Trump's "bad" immigration policies.3-02-21. EUROPA PRESS. <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-biden-firma-tres-ordenes-ejecutivas-revertir-malas-politicas-migratorias-trump-20210203010155.htm>

<sup>39</sup> A Guide to Title 42 Expulsions at the Border. American Immigration Council. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/guide-title-42-expulsions-border>

Since March, thousands of Haitian families seeking asylum have been subjected to this process and summarily returned to Haiti.



U.S. Border Patrol agents on horseback try to prevent Haitian migrants from entering an encampment on the banks of the Rio Grande near the Acuna Del Rio International Bridge in Del Rio, Texas, on 19 September 2021. (Photo by PAUL RATJE / AFP)

In September, immigration authorities began the first deportation flights. The strategy agreed with the Haitian authorities is supposed to be to send migrants back to their country of origin or to the nations from which they left, such as Brazil or Chile, with an average of 400 people expected to be deported every day for the next few months. Those who are not deported are sent to other border points to process their asylum applications. The Mexican government announced that it had reached an official agreement with Haiti to restart deportation processes, while the Bahamas and Cuba said they had received several Haitians seeking to enter the United States, who will soon be returned to Haiti<sup>40</sup>. Many of them were born outside Haiti, so returnee families face increasing levels of violence, poverty and displacement, factors that initially drove them to flee the island.

<sup>40</sup> Haiti: Tremblement de terre. Rapport de situation N° 7. 7-10-2021. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. OCHA. [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021-10-07\\_Haiti%20Earthquake%20SitRep%20no.%207\\_French%20version.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021-10-07_Haiti%20Earthquake%20SitRep%20no.%207_French%20version.pdf)

The deportation policy has been denounced by international organisations, as it puts those who flee their country in fear of losing their lives<sup>41</sup>.

The consequence of this whole situation is that thousands of Haitians are currently facing a humanitarian crisis in several Latin American countries and on the US-Mexico border, for which governments do not seem to be able to find a quick solution.

## Conclusions

Haiti has been the victim of foreign invasions or international interventions, which, far from bringing progress, have set it back even further and turned it into a welfare recipient, thus ending its domestic production, destroying local markets and generating external dependence, with the consequent corruption and political instability.

Hopelessness seems to be endemic in this small nation. There is no magic recipe for Haiti, the country that has had the most governments since the end of the 20th century – 20 in 35 years – and where none of them has been able to move forwards by providing it with a democratic process with guarantees so that it can grow socially, politically and economically.

Only a very small minority of the Haitian population has been able to withstand the blows of fate. Just when you think things can't get any worse, natural phenomena in the form of hurricanes or earthquakes, unleashed violence and assassinations, have plunged the country into utter helplessness.

Sad as it may seem, only catastrophes rescue this nation from oblivion. While all eyes are now on Afghanistan, Algeria or Sudan, we have no hope that the misery of Haitians will make the headlines in the coming months.

Since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on 7 July, nothing has changed in the country. The investigation is stalling and gangs are imposing their rule more than

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<sup>41</sup> UN agencies have stated in a joint UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and UN Communiqué that international law prohibits collective expulsions and requires a case-by-case assessment to identify protection needs "<https://www.acnur.org/es-es/noticias/press/2021/9/6155c70c4/agencias-de-la-onu-piden-medidas-de-proteccion-y-un-enfoque-regional-integral.html>

ever. But it appears that this violence may proliferate further, not least because of Haiti's political instability on its stormy road to democracy.

The international community should lead the way so that institutional stability can be achieved within a reasonable timeframe. Donors should focus their efforts on supporting urgent reforms in the judiciary, the police and the prison system in order to facilitate the fight against violence, armed gangs and widespread insecurity.

Holding elections is another important step and although the country is in deep crisis, they should be held in this context, even if they will not solve the problems just by holding them.

Good crisis management requires willingness and mutual agreement to resolve disputes well, and dialogue in which other views are respected. This is the only way to get the country out of the difficult situation in which it finds itself. After all, what Haiti is experiencing is nothing more than the decline of a system that has been repeatedly repaired, but which is already finding it difficult to recover due to its own exhaustion.

It would be safe to say that Haiti's problem may last for generations because of the lack of strong institutions, the lack of reliable political procedures and the lack of trust in governments.

Beyond the human and material disaster, many Haitians are convinced that their country is being hit by a curse, but we should also be moved by the resilience and recovery that these people have shown over the years.

There are regions of the world against which destiny seems to be constantly fighting; in the words of Eduardo Galeano "Haiti is not known for the talent of its artists, wizards of junk capable of turning trash into beauty, nor for its historical feats in the war against slavery and colonial oppression. It is worth repeating once more, so that the deaf can hear: Haiti was the founding country of American independence and the first to defeat slavery in the world"<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Text read on 27 September 2011 by the Uruguayan writer at the National Library (Buenos Aires) as part of the round table discussion on Haiti and the Latin American response. <https://sinpermiso.info/textos/hait-pas-ocupado>