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Haiti's Political and Economic Conditions

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Summary

Since the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986, Haiti has struggled to overcome its centuries-long legacy of authoritarianism, disrespect for human rights, underdevelopment, and extreme poverty. Widespread corruption remains an impediment to changing that legacy. Haiti made significant progress in improving governance prior to the 2010 earthquake, but recovery since then has been slow. Democratic institutions remain weak and stability fragile. Poverty remains massive and deep, and economic disparity is wide. Due to its proximity to the United States and its chronically unstable political environment and fragile economy, Haiti has been an ongoing policy issue for the United States. Many in the U.S. Congress view Haiti's increasing instability with concern and have shown a commitment to improving conditions in the country through continued support for U.S. foreign aid.

Haiti has experienced growing instability during the administration of President Jovenel Moïse, with unrest, high rates of inflation, and resurgent gang violence. The government's failure to hold elections in October 2019 resulted in the terms of most of the Haitian legislature expiring on January 13, 2020, without officials elected to succeed them. Moïse is now ruling by decree. The judiciary is conducting ongoing investigations into Moïse's possible involvement in various corrupt activities, which the president denies. Haitian Senate and Superior Court of Auditors investigations allege embezzlement and fraud by current and former Haitian officials managing $2 billion in loans from Venezuela's PetroCaribe discounted oil program.

Moïse's decision in mid-2018 to end oil subsidies, which would increase prices dramatically, sparked massive protests. Government instability has heightened since May 2019, when a report alleged Moïse had embezzled millions of dollars. Mass demonstrations have continued, calling for an end to corruption, provision of government services, and Moïse's resignation.

Haiti occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic, and is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Almost 60% of the country's 10 million people live in poverty, and almost a quarter of them live in extreme poverty. Haiti is still recovering from the devastating 2010 earthquake, as well as Hurricane Matthew in 2016. The latter worsened a process begun by a two-year drought, destroying much of Haiti's food supply.

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) helped restore order from 2004 to October 2017 but was criticized for sexual abuse by some of its forces and for introducing cholera to the country, which Haiti continues to battle. A smaller peacekeeping mission, the U.N. Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), succeeded the MINUSTAH, focusing on rule of law, development of the Haitian National Police (HNP) force, and human rights. In October 2019, a political mission, the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), replaced MINUJUSTH to help Haiti plan and carry out elections and reinforce the HNP through training on human rights, among other duties. Since MINUSTAH's departure, the HNP has had primary responsibility for domestic security. Moïse reinstituted the army, raising concerns about the potential for the army to engage in internal repression, as it has in the past.

According to the State Department, U.S. policy toward Haiti is "designed to foster the institutions and infrastructure necessary to achieve strong democratic foundations and meaningful poverty reduction through sustainable development." The Trump Administration has requested $128.2 million for Haiti in FY2021. The Administration planned to terminate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians as of July 22, 2019. Two U.S. courts issued preliminary injunctions against the decision, however, so TPS designation for Haiti remains in effect pending further court orders. The Administration expressed concern about the Haitian president ruling by decree and urged the Haitian government to set a firm date for overdue elections.

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Political Background[1]

Haiti inaugurated Jovenel Moïse as president on February 7, 2017, marking a return to constitutional order after having been without an elected president from February 2016 to February 2017 due to delayed elections and political gridlock. Moïse, a political newcomer and member of the Bald Head Party (PHTK, former President Michel Martelly's [2011-2016] party), won the November 2016 elections with almost 56% of the vote. Voter turnout was 21%. During Moïse's administration, Haiti has experienced growing political and social unrest, high rates of inflation, and resurgent gang violence. As political gridlock continued, the government did not organize parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2019. Consequently, as of mid-January 2020, there is no functioning legislature and Moïse is ruling by decree.

Haiti at a Glance

Population: 10.9 million (2017; World Bank)

Land area: 27,560 square kilometers (slightly smaller than Maryland; CIA)

GDP: $9.5 billion (2018, current U.S. dollars; IMF)

GDP per capita income: $857 (2018, current U.S. dollars; IMF)

Life expectancy: 63 (2017; World Bank)

Leadership: President Jovenel Moïse; Prime Minister Jean Michel Lapin; Supreme Court Chief Justice Jules Cantave

Sources: World Bank; U.S. Department of State; Central Intelligence Agency, International Monetary Fund

Among the challenges Haiti faces are ongoing recovery from the 2010 earthquake and 2016's Hurricane Matthew, a cholera epidemic, stalled economic growth, and a highly polarized political climate. Other obstacles Moïse faces during his five-year term include a weak mandate due to a relatively low voter turnout and ongoing social unrest due to continued poverty, lack of job opportunities, and growing public calls for an end to corruption. Moïse arrived under the shadow of an ongoing Haitian government investigation into his possible involvement in money laundering and irregular loan arrangements, which Moïse denies. In May 2019, Haiti's Superior Court of Auditors and Administrative Disputes alleged that Moïse and other officials embezzled millions of dollars. The court's report alleges that the Martelly administration contracted a company then led by Moïse to carry out infrastructure projects that it never completed. Moïse and the company deny the allegations.

Moïse's strategy to increase government revenues sparked widespread protests in 2017 and 2018. The legislature approved the policy agenda presented by Moïse's first prime minister, Dr. Jack Guy Lafontant, which focused on reviving the agricultural sector, rolling out a comprehensive national health care insurance system, bringing alternative energy to Haiti, and repairing infrastructure. Other items on the policy agenda included redeveloping the capital, Port-au-Prince, including the presidential palace and other government buildings that were destroyed during the 2010 earthquake. The government took a step toward funding these objectives in May 2017 by ending government fuel subsidies, thereby increasing fuel prices by at least 20%, but freeing up resources for other programs.[2] In September 2017, the legislature approved the president's budget for 2018, which included several tax increases for revenue generation.

[1] For further background on Haiti, and information on relations with the United States, also see CRS Report R42559, *Haiti Under President Martelly: Current Conditions and Congressional Concerns*, by Maureen Taft-Morales, and CRS In Focus IF10440, *Haiti Declares Winner of Presidential Election After Delays*, by Maureen Taft-Morales.

[2] "In Brief: Haiti, Dominican Republic, St Kitts & Nevis, Guatemala," *LatinNews*, May 15, 2017.

Figure 1. Map of Haiti

Source: Map Resources; adapted by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

The public greeted these tax increases with violent street protests. Workers conducted strikes for higher wages, especially in the textile-manufacturing sector. National and local transportation unions held strikes in September and October, leading the president to withdraw certain transport-related tax increases he had proposed. In November 2017, hundreds protested government corruption and the remobilization of the army, demanding that the government direct funds toward public needs such as health and education instead. By the end of 2017, street protests had become a fixture of Moïse's administration.

As official reports of corruption were released and inflation rose, public dissatisfaction intensified. The Haitian Senate's Special Commission of Investigation issued a 656-page report in November 2017 detailing alleged embezzlement and fraud by current and former Haitian officials managing $2 billion in loans from Venezuela's PetroCaribe discounted oil program from 2008 to 2016. Public pressure reportedly led Moïse to fire two high-ranking officials in his government for their involvement in the scandal.

When the government proposed another plan to raise fuel prices significantly—some by as much as 51%—in July 2018, two days of violent protests ensued, causing at least two deaths. Prime Minister Lafontant resigned and was replaced by Jean-Henry Céant. Riots shut down much of the country's cities for 11 days in February 2019, as citizens demanded better living conditions and Moïse's resignation. The legislature passed a vote of no confidence against Céant in March 2019, saying he had failed to improve living conditions during his six months in office.[3]

[3] "Lapin Confirmed as Haiti's New Prime Minister," Agence France Presse (AFP), April 9, 2019.

Haiti's elected officials have exacerbated the ongoing instability by not forming a government, and they are running out of constitutional means for doing so. The president, who is elected directly by popular elections, is head of state and appoints the prime minister, chosen from the majority party in the National Assembly. The prime minister serves as head of government. The first two prime ministers under Moïse resigned. The Haitian legislature did not confirm the president's subsequent two nominees for prime minister: Jean-Michel Lapin, nominated in March 2019, and Fritz-William Michel, nominated in July 2019. Some legislators actively prevented votes on those nominations by absenting themselves to prevent a quorum or through other tactics. In one instance, four opposition senators ransacked the Senate chamber, ending a third attempt to ratify the government.[4] Nevertheless, a legislative motion to impeach the president did not pass. Because the legislature also did not pass an elections law, parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2019 have been postponed indefinitely.

The Organization of American States (OAS) sent a high-level delegation to Haiti on June 19, 2019, in response to a request from the Haitian government, to help facilitate a national dialogue. The delegation reportedly told Moïse that he was not governing and needed to do so, that those seeking the president's ouster needed to defeat him "at the ballot box," and that the delegation was not going to ask Moïse to resign.[5] Moïse reportedly agreed to the delegation's proposal to establish an OAS-sanctioned commission of international financial experts to help Haitian government auditors determine how much money people stole from the PetroCaribe fund and who should be prosecuted for doing so.[6]

Mass demonstrations have continued to call for an end to corruption, provision of government services, and Moïse's resignation. Between September and November 2019, more than 42 people died and hundreds were injured in Haitian demonstrations.[7] According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Haitian security forces killed 19 people; armed individuals or unknown perpetrators killed the others.[8]

Moïse has said it would be irresponsible of him to resign and he will not do so.[9] He has called repeatedly for dialogue with the opposition.

Moïse is now ruling by decree. As of January 13, 2020, the terms of the entire lower Chamber of Deputies and two-thirds of the Senate expired (as did the terms of all local government posts), without newly elected officials to take their places. Consequently, the parliament will not be able to function unless Moïse calls the legislature back into session or Haitian officials negotiate a political agreement to allow legislators to extend their terms. Previously, when the legislature's terms expired in January 2015 because the government had not held elections, then-President Michel Martelly ruled by decree for over a year, outside of constitutional norms.

[4] Jacqueline Charles, "Haitian Senators Ransack Parliament in Failed Effort to Ratify a New Government," *Miami Herald*, May 30, 2019.

[5] Jacqueline Charles, "OAS Tells Haiti Opposition to Back Off—and Tells President to Start Governing," *Miami Herald*, June 19, 2019.

[6] Jacqueline Charles, "OAS Tells Haiti Opposition to Back Off—and Tells President to Start Governing," *Miami Herald*, June 19, 2019.

[7] "IMF Says Haiti Crisis Is Unprecedented," CE NAFTA, November 25, 2019.

[8] Marta Hurtado, "Press Briefing Note on Haiti Unrest," Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 1, 2019.

[9] Evens Sanon, "Haiti President Breaks Silence, Says Will Not Resign," Associated Press, October 15, 2019.

If President Moïse were to resign or be forced from office, the Haitian Constitution calls for the legislature to meet within 60 days to elect a new provisional president for the remainder of his term. Currently, there is no functioning legislature.

The U.N., the OAS, and the Vatican facilitated a political conference on January 29-31, 2020, aimed at ending the crisis. The talks focused on four key elements: (1) defining the criteria for the formation of a new government; (2) developing a plan for reform; (3) creating a constitutional revision process; and (4) setting an electoral calendar.[10] The participants, including Moïse, political parties, and civil-society and private-sector actors, did not reach an agreement for resolving Haiti's political and institutional crises. Negotiations resumed February 5, 2020, and efforts are continuing.

The Trump Administration supports the efforts to break the political impasse but also states that, "while constitutional reforms are necessary and welcome, they must not become a pretext to delay elections."[11]

Elections are often volatile in Haiti. The next presidential elections are due in 2021 (presidents may not seek consecutive reelection). Some opposition groups calling for Moïse's resignation are calling for early elections. As evidenced by the current situation, organizing elections often has proven difficult in Haiti, leading to long delays, periods without an elected legislature or president, and heightened political tensions.

Given Moïse's lack of experience, government capacity, and public support, political unrest is likely to continue. Some analysts, such as the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), expect Moïse to serve out the remainder of his term, which ends in 2022, while noting that his administration will continue to face pressure from public protests over worsening socioeconomic conditions.[12] Others, such as IHS Global Insight, see the reports of corruption against Moïse and his growing isolation as increasing the possibility of him being ousted in the coming months.[13]

Following an hours-long exchange of gunfire between protesting police officers and soldiers in army headquarters on February 23, 2020 (see "Human Rights," below), some analysts are concerned that tensions could lead to a fragmentation of security forces or an armed uprising if the government does not fulfill its promise to improve working conditions and pay for the police force.[14]

Economic Background[15]

Plagued by chronic political instability and frequent natural disasters, Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and one of the poorest countries in the world. Haiti's poverty is massive and deep. Almost 60% of the population lives under the national poverty line of $2.41

[10] U.N. Security Council, *United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti—Report of the Secretary General*, S/2020/123, February 13, 2020, p. 3.

[11] U.S. Mission to the United Nations (U.N.), "Remarks at a U.N. Security Council Briefing on the Situation in Haiti, Ambassador Cherith Norman-Chalet," New York, February 20, 2020.

[12] Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Country Report: Haiti*, February 10, 2020, pp. 2, 8.

[13] Carla Selman, "Haitian President's Mention in Court Corruption Report Raises Ousting Chances, Power Vacuum over Coming Months Highly Likely," IHS Global Insight Daily Analysis, June 21, 2019.

[14] Carla Selman, "Haitian Police and Army Gunfire Exchange Indicates Potential Fragmentation of Security Forces, Raising Civil War Risks," IHS Global Insight Daily Analysis, February 26, 2020.

[15] Data in this section are from World Bank, "Haiti Overview," and "Data" at https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti, accessed February 10, 2020, unless stated otherwise.

per day. Almost a quarter of the population lives under the national extreme poverty line of $1.23 per day. In addition, Haiti continues to recover from the 2010 earthquake that devastated the capital of Port-au-Prince, whose original estimated economic damage was $8 billion to $14 billion.[16] In October 2016, Hurricane Matthew, which the World Bank characterized as the most devastating disaster since the earthquake, caused damage estimated to equal 32% of Haiti's gross domestic product (GDP). The agricultural, livestock, and fishing sectors suffered losses of about $600 million. A two-year drought, compounded by Hurricane Matthew, largely destroyed Haiti's food supply. More than 96% of Haiti's 11 million people are at risk from natural disasters, and Haiti is one of the most exposed countries in the world to climate change.[17]

Haiti has few resources to tackle these challenges. Few people or businesses pay taxes, according to the World Bank, and the state provides limited services.[18] Haitians rely heavily on remittances from Haitians living abroad to supplement their incomes; the World Bank estimated remittances to Haiti were over $3 billion for 2018, constituting almost one-third of Haiti's GDP.[19] Widespread corruption depletes funds intended for government institutions and public services. A Haitian Senate investigation alleged that government officials had mismanaged almost $2 billion dollars between 2008 and 2016 (see "Human Rights" below). As noted above, in May 2019, Haiti's Superior Court of Auditors alleged that Moïse and other officials embezzled millions of dollars. The government was supposed to have used those funds for improving infrastructure, including restoring ministry buildings destroyed by the 2010 earthquake, and health and education programs for Haiti's poor.

Nonetheless, according to the State Department, Haiti has made long-term development progress over the past 10 years.[20] For example, basic health indicators improved significantly, most notably achieving zero laboratory-confirmed cases of cholera for the last nine months of 2019. The State Department also reported that with U.S. and other international support, Haiti had created 27,000 jobs through programs to improve private sector competitiveness and another 14,000 jobs at the Caracol Industrial Park in northern Haiti.

Political gridlock is hampering further economic development efforts, however, and contributing to government instability. The legislature did not pass a 2019-2020 budget or confirm multiple executive branch appointments before it lapsed. Without a budget, a confirmed prime minister, or a cabinet, pending agreements with donors could not move forward, causing increasing concern among experts that policy cannot be effectively developed or implemented. For example, a three-year, $229 million loan with the International Monetary Fund that the government secured in March 2019 expired without being approved.[21]

Public frustration with economic woes has contributed greatly to ongoing demonstrations, some of which have become violent. In addition to low economic growth and the government's failure to address corruption adequately, year-end consumer price inflation was 17% for 2019, one of the highest rates in the region; the Haitian gourde depreciated significantly over 2019; fuel supply is

[16] Eduardo A. Cavallo, Andrew Powell, and Oscar Becerra, *Estimating the Direct Economic Damage of the Earthquake in Haiti*, Inter-American Development Bank, February 11, 2010.

[17] World Bank, "Towards a New Road Map for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Haiti: New Country Partnership Strategy for Haiti 2015-2019," Infographic, September 29, 2015.

[18] Ibid.

[19] World Bank, "Personal Remittances, Received (current US$)—Haiti," and "Personal Remittances, Received (% of GDP)—Haiti," Data, accessed February 10, 2020.

[20] U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Haiti," Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet, January 6, 2020.

[21] EIU, *Country Report: Haiti*, February 10, 2020, p. 8.

low while prices are high; and public investment is limited.[22] Furthermore, the protests themselves disrupt and diminish economic activity.

The EIU reports a decline of 0.8% in economic growth in 2019 and predicts economic growth of less than 1% in 2020. In the short term, President Moïse announced emergency policy measures to address state corruption and improve the quality of public spending. In the long term, however, the EIU also states that Haitian institutional weaknesses will inhibit greater economic growth and continue to limit the government's ability to address economic structural deficiencies.[23]

Security: U.N. Missions, Haitian Police, and Revival of the Haitian Army

Congress has expressed concern over citizen security in Haiti, which has struggled since 1986 to establish a democratic government. Congress has supported various U.N. missions in Haiti and the professionalization and strengthening of the Haitian National Police (HNP) and other elements of the country's judicial system to improve security conditions.

U.N. Missions

MINUSTAH, a peacekeeping mission that was in Haiti for 13 years, was established to help restore and maintain order after the collapse of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's government in 2004. The U.N. began reducing MINUSTAH's troops in 2012 and closed the mission in October 2017. The U.N. Security Council provided for a smaller follow-on mission to succeed MINUSTAH, the U.N. Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH). That mission concluded in October 2019, and a special political mission, the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), succeeded it for an initial one-year period.

The 2017 resolution ending MINUSTAH cited Haiti's peaceful completion of a long-delayed electoral process and return to constitutional order in February 2017 as a major milestone toward stabilization. The Security Council also commended the mission for supporting the political process, professionalizing the police, and maintaining a secure and stable environment in Haiti.

Many Haitians and other observers criticized MINUSTAH for its role in introducing cholera to Haiti and for allegations of sexual abuse by some of its forces. Prior to the 2010 earthquake, Haiti had no cases of cholera for at least a century. According to multiple scientific reports, MINUSTAH peacekeepers inadvertently introduced the disease in the country. Vulnerability to disasters—due to a lack of immunity, overcrowded living conditions, environmental degradation, poor construction standards, dysfunctional or insufficient sewage and sanitation systems, and political instability in Haiti—facilitated the rapid spread of the disease and the largest cholera outbreak in the world.[24]

In August 2016, after years of criticism and demands that the U.N. take full responsibility for introducing the disease to Haiti, then-U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said that the U.N. had a "moral responsibility" to the epidemic's victims and announced a new program to support them, although the U.N. continues to claim diplomatic immunity. Advocates for cholera victims

[22] EIU, *Country Report: Haiti*, February 10, 2020, pp. 12-13.

[23] EIU, *Country Report: Haiti*, June 24, 2019, p. 2.

[24] For further information, see CRS In Focus IF10502, *Haiti: Cholera, the United Nations, and Hurricane Matthew*, by Maureen Taft-Morales and Tiaji Salaam-Blyther.

say that the U.N. did not consult victims regarding compensation.[25] The U.N.'s $400 million cholera plan still has not been fully funded or implemented. As of February 6, 2020, international donors had pledged only $20.5 million to the fund.[26]

Charges of sexual abuse by MINUSTAH personnel also fueled anti-MINUSTAH sentiment. The U.N. has a zero-tolerance policy toward sexual abuse and exploitation. The U.N. returns alleged perpetrators to their home country for punishment. The U.N. substantiated 43 of 84 alleged sexual abuse and exploitation cases among MINUSTAH personnel; one case is pending.[27]

MINUSTAH's successor mission shifted focus from stabilization to institutional strengthening and development. MINUJUSTH focuses on rule of law, development of the HNP, and human rights, "to support the Government of Haiti in consolidating the stabilization gains and ensuring their sustainability." MINUJUSTH began operations in October 2017, deploying police units in five political departments (similar to states), plus up to 295 individual police officers.

MINUJUSTH established a zero-tolerance policy toward sexual exploitation and abuse that included training, raising awareness, and enforcement. There were no allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by MINUJUSTH police officers and staff in 2018.[28]

BINUH's mandate is to advise the government of Haiti on strengthening political stability and good governance through support for an inclusive inter-Haitian national dialogue and to protect and promote human rights. More specifically, the U.N. Security Council's resolution on BINUH directs it to help Haiti plan and carry out elections; reinforce the HNP through training on human rights and responding to gang and sexual and gender-based violence; develop an inclusive approach with all social sectors to reduce intercommunal violence (particularly gang violence); address human rights abuses and violations and comply with international human rights obligations; improve administration of Haitian prison facilities; and strengthen the justice sector through adoption and implementation of key legislation.[29] The mission is run by a Special Representative and includes a U.N. Police Commissioner, up to 30 police and corrections advisers, and about 80 to 100 personnel.

Haitian National Police

With the support of MINUSTAH, MINUJUSTH, and U.S. and other international assistance since its creation in 1995, the HNP has become increasingly professional and has now taken on responsibility for domestic security. New police commissariats built in areas previously not served by police have given more Haitians access to security services. Currently, the police force has 14,000-15,000 officers. It is unlikely to meet its goal of having 18,000 officers by December 2021, according to the U.N., unless the government provides significant additional funding.[30] The

[25] Jacqueline Charles, "On Eve of High-Level U.N. Haiti Visit, Trump Continues to Say 'No' to Cholera Request," *Miami Herald*, November 2, 2017.

[26] "Funding Status—UN Haiti Cholera Response MPTF," table, February 6, 2020, at "UN Haiti Cholera Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund Fact Sheet," at http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/CLH00.

[27] Conduct in U.N. Field Missions, "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse," at https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-investigations.

[28] U.S. Department of State, *Haiti 2018 Human Rights Report*, March 2019.

[29] Edith M. Lederer, "U.N. Votes to Establish Political Mission in Haiti," Associated Press, June 25, 2019.

[30] U.N. Security Council, *United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti—Report of the Secretary General*, S/2020/123, February 13, 2020, p. 8.

Haitian police force remains below international standards for the size of the country's population and is underfunded.

While acknowledging the increased ability of the HNP to plan and execute security operations without the backup of international forces, some observers have raised serious concerns about police involvement in and failure to respond to some violent events. A recent U.N. report said the HNP conducted 20 anti-gang operations in the 2019 holiday season alone, arresting 62 suspected gang leaders and members.[31] The police operated under difficult conditions, with at least 1,341 demonstrations, roadblocks and barricades from September through November, some of which included heavily armed civilians. The U.N. Secretary General stated, "The resolve of the national police to manage public safety throughout the country, notwithstanding the challenging context, attests to its increasing capabilities and professionalization." Nonetheless, the Secretary General also reported that three active police officers allegedly participated in an attack by a criminal gang on the Bel Air neighborhood of the capital in early November 2019 and the HNP failed to intervene. The Haitian judicial branch and the HNP Inspector General are investigating the case.

In 2020, the police have been seeking the right to unionize, looking for better working conditions and better pay. Some police officers reportedly have led protests that have turned violent.[32] Six officers reportedly were fired over their efforts to unionize. On February 23, men who reportedly said they were off-duty police officers marched with hundreds of supporters to the national palace, across from which is the army headquarters.[33] The police and soldiers exchanged gunfire for several hours. At least three police officers and one soldier were wounded.

(For further discussion of the Haitian police, see "Human Rights," below.)

Revived Haitian Armed Forces

In what proved to be a very controversial move, former President Michel Martelly (2011-2016) began reviving the Haitian army, after a 22-year absence. The former army allegedly committed gross violations of human rights over decades, according to numerous reports by the State Department, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Amnesty International, and others. It also carried out numerous coups. After returning to office following one of those coups, former President Aristide disbanded the army in 1995. Martelly sent recruits to Ecuador for training. President Moïse has continued to implement Martelly's plan and began recruiting 500 additional soldiers in July 2017.[34]

The Haitian government says the army will be different this time and will focus on patrolling the border with the Dominican Republic, combating smuggling, and executing recovery efforts after natural disasters. Many observers, including many Members of Congress, remain concerned about the potential use of the army for internal repression. Moïse appointed six former soldiers to head the command, all of whom the United States had sanctioned for supporting the military coup that overthrew former President Aristide.[35] Many members of the international community, including the United States, have said that Haiti should focus on strengthening its police force

[31] Statements in this paragraph from U.N. Security Council, *United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti—Report of the Secretary General*, S/2020/123, February 13, 2020, pp. 5, 9.

[32] See Evens Sanon and Michael Weissenstein, "Police Burn Cars, Lawyer's Office in Haiti Protest," *The Canadian Press*, February 20, 2020.

[33] See Evens Sanon and Michael Weissenstein, "Haiti Police Exchange Fire with Troops near National Palace," Associated Press, February 23, 2020.

[34] Amelie Baron, "Haiti's Army Reborn 20 Years After It Was Demobilized," AFP, July 18, 2017.

[35] Jacqueline Charles, "Haiti Has a New Army with Much of the Old Leadership. Some in the U.S. Aren't Happy," *Miami Herald*, updated April 3, 2018.

instead. Congress, through the FY2020 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-94), prohibited the provision of appropriated funds for assistance to the armed forces of Haiti.

Corruption and Efforts to Address It

High levels of corruption have plagued Haiti for much of its history. President Moïse came to office while under investigation for corruption. Over the past couple of years, public protests have included demands for the government to do more to combat corruption.

In recent years, some Haitian institutions have made progress investigating government corruption. In November 2017, the Haitian Senate's Special Commission of Investigation issued a 600-page report detailing alleged embezzlement and fraud by current and former Haitian officials managing $2 billion in loans from Venezuela's PetroCaribe discounted oil program, from 2008 to 2016. The benefits of those low interest loans were supposed to go to social programs and economic development. Also in 2017, Haiti's Central Unit of Financial Intelligence prepared an investigative report that implicated Moïse in money laundering. In May 2019, Haiti's Superior Court of Auditors and Administrative Disputes alleged that Moïse and other officials embezzled millions of dollars. Former President Michel Martelly's administration (2011-2016) allegedly contracted and paid a company led by Moïse to carry out infrastructure projects that it never completed.[36] Moïse denies the allegations against him.[37]

Although Moïse has taken some steps to address corruption, observers say he has also made investigations more difficult. Moïse fired two high-ranking officials in his administration for their involvement in the PetroCaribe scandal. Nevertheless, at a public Inter-American Commission on Human Rights hearing on corruption in Haiti, witnesses said the Moïse administration has weakened state and judicial institutions responsible for anti-corruption efforts.[38] For example, the former investigating magistrate and head of the Central Unit of Financial Intelligence said that Moïse fired him, one year into his three-year term, following his office's writing of the report implicating the president.[39] Furthermore, an attorney with an international human rights lawyers' organization described threats and attacks against people calling for government accountability, including attacks on journalists, threats against judges on the Court of Auditors, and police killings of protesters.[40]

The State Department reported that the Haitian government rarely took steps to prosecute government and law enforcement officials accused of committing abuses and that corruption and a lack of judicial oversight severely hampered the judiciary. The judicial branch investigated several corruption cases, but none of them resulted in prosecutions in 2018. The government fired 21 assistant prosecutors because of corruption allegations. According to the U.S. Department of State's 2018 human rights report, "the perception of corruption remained widespread in all branches of government and at all levels," yet no Haitian government has prosecuted a high-level official for corruption.[41]

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[36] Jacqueline Charles, "Haiti President Accused of Embezzlement Scheme in Government Audit of Venezuela aid money," Miami Herald, June 4, 2019.

[37] "Accused by judges, Haitian president denies corruption allegations," AFP, June 12, 2019.

[38] Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, "Hearing Before Regional Human Rights Body Leads to Request for Site Visit to Haiti," October 4, 2019, p. 2.

[39] Ibid, and Samuel Maxime, "Haiti's Anti-Corruption Chief Abruptly Fired, 1 Year into 3-Year Term," *Haiti Sentinel*, July 9, 2017.

[40] Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, op. cit, p. 2.

[41] U.S. Department of State, *Haiti 2018 Human Rights Report*, March 2019, p. 17.

Haiti's 2009-2019 national anti-corruption strategy ended, and the government has not developed a new national anti-corruption strategy to replace it.

Concerns over Haitians and People of Haitian Descent in the Dominican Republic

Relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which share the island of Hispaniola (see **Figure 1**), have been strained throughout their history. New tensions arose after a 2013 court ruling in the Dominican Republic stripped Dominicans of Haitian descent of their citizenship, applied retroactively to 1929, essentially rendering them stateless.

The Dominican government said it was trying to normalize a complicated immigration system. Nevertheless, U.N. and OAS agencies, foreign leaders, and human rights groups challenged the decision's legitimacy, concerned that it violates international human rights obligations to which the Dominican Republic is party. The IACHR concluded that the Constitutional Court's ruling "implies an arbitrary deprivation of nationality" and "has a discriminatory effect, given that it primarily impacts Dominicans of Haitian descent."[42]

The Dominican government established a "regularization of foreigners" plan in 2013. The plan required all foreigners, immigrants, and descendants of immigrants born between 1929 and 2007 to register, after which they could obtain temporary residence or possibly confirm their eligibility for naturalization. Out of almost 290,000 people who applied, about 240,000 qualified for legal status.[43] The Dominican government said it would help rectify the immigration status of people who missed registration deadlines. Nonetheless, thousands of people have difficulty obtaining documents demonstrating they were born in the Dominican Republic because for decades, Dominican officials have denied birth certificates and other documents to many Dominican-born people of, or perceived to be of, Haitian descent.

After the June 2015 registration deadline passed, the Dominican government authorized its officials to expel forcibly individuals of Haitian descent who lacked the new documentation. From July 2015 to September 17, 2017, according to the U.N. migration agency, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 58,271 people were officially deported, and 37,942 claimed to have been deported. Over 4,000 presumed unaccompanied and separated children crossed the border into Haiti.[44] A naturalization law developed a process to revalidate Dominican citizenship for 55,000 people whose Dominican identity documents the government had invalidated, and to allow them to register their children as citizens as well. After four years, less than half of those people had received new documents.[45] The regularization of foreigners plan ended in August 2018. According to Human Rights Watch, more than 200,000 people of Haitian descent remained in the Dominican Republic without valid documents and at risk of deportation.[46]

In May 2017, Haiti and the Dominican Republic revived the Joint Bilateral Commission to address security, border, and migration issues. The commission was inactive while Haiti was dealing with its earlier electoral problems. Tensions over these issues remain.

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[42] Organization of American States, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, "IACHR Wraps Up Visit to the Dominican Republic," press release, December 2013.

[43] CRS In Focus IF10407, *Dominican Republic*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

[44] IOM Haiti, "Border Monitoring Sitrep," September 28, 2017 (latest report available as of June 27, 2019).

[45] CRS In Focus IF10407, *Dominican Republic*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

[46] Human Rights Watch, "Haiti," in *World Report 2019*.

On April 23, 2019, the IACHR found that the Dominican Republic has not complied with the court over the past four years, affecting the rights of Haitian-descended people seeking Dominican nationality.[47] It also stated that the Dominican Republic failed to send legal representatives to an early 2019 public hearing, becoming one of only two countries (the other being Nicaragua) to do so in the history of the court.

U.S. Relations with Haiti

According to the State Department, U.S. policy toward Haiti is "designed to foster the institutions and infrastructure necessary to achieve strong democratic foundations and meaningful poverty reduction through sustainable development."[48] Policy priorities include support for economic growth and poverty reduction, including through bilateral trade and investment to promote job creation; improved health care and food security; promoting respect for human rights; strengthening democratic institutions; and strengthening the HNP so that the country can provide its own security and work more effectively with U.S. agencies to combat international crime. Tensions between the two rose over the Trump Administration's decision to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS; see "Immigration" section below) for about 60,000 Haitians as of July 2019. Two U.S. courts issued temporary injunctions against implementing the decision. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed concern about the president ruling by decree and urged the Haitian government to set a firm date for overdue elections.[49]

U.S. Assistance[50]

Because Haiti is the poorest country in the hemisphere, and because of its proximity to the United States, Haiti has received high levels of U.S. assistance for many years. In recent years, it has been the second-largest recipient of U.S. aid in the region, after Colombia. In 2010, the year the earthquake hit Haiti, U.S. aid reached a peak of $505 million in base funding, plus $908 million in a FY2010 supplemental. Aid to Haiti has been declining steadily over the past 10 years. (See **Table 1** for U.S. aid to Haiti from FY2012 through the FY2021 request.)

The Trump Administration has requested $128.2 million for Haiti in FY2021. If enacted, U.S. assistance to Haiti would decline by nearly 34% compared to the estimated $193.8 million provided in FY2019.

The FY2020 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-94) contains several provisions related to Haiti, including that aid may be provided to Haiti only through the regular notification procedures. Under the act, Economic Support Funds for Haiti may not be made available for assistance for the central government of Haiti unless the Secretary of State certifies and reports to the Committees on Appropriations that Haiti's government is taking effective steps to strengthen the rule of law, combat corruption, increase government revenues, and resolve commercial disputes. The act provides a budget authority of $51 million in Development Assistance, including $8.5 million for reforestation. The act appropriates $10 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funds for prison assistance in Haiti, prioritizing improvements to meet basic sanitation, medical, nutritional, and safety needs at the National Penitentiary. The act also prohibits the provision of appropriated funds for assistance to the armed

[47] Economic Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Haiti*, generated on June 24, 2019, p. 15.

[48] U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Haiti," Fact Sheet, January 6, 2020.

[49] U.S. Mission Haiti, "Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Election Message," January 24, 2020.

[50] Budget figures from U.S. Department of State, *FY2018 Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs*.

forces of Haiti. The House Committee on Appropriations said in its report (H.Rept. 116-78, to the House Appropriations Committee-reported State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill, H.R. 2839) that it was "greatly concerned" by civil unrest in Haiti and that it expected the Secretary of State and USAID Administrator to support dialogue aimed at resolving the political crisis and ensuring the upcoming elections are transparent and inclusive. The committee also encouraged providing technical support for thorough and independent investigations into allegations of corruption and human rights abuses. Addressing other concerns, the committee also encouraged USAID to consider strategies that work with local governments to assess areas of potential economic growth and urged the Secretary of State to work with the Haitian and Dominican Republic governments to develop a strategy for enhancing border security.

Table 1. U.S. Assistance to Haiti, FY2011-FY2020

($ in thousands)

	FY2012 Actual	FY2013 Actual	FY2014 Actual	FY2015 Actual	FY2016 Actual	FY2017 Actual	FY2018 Actual	FY2019 Actual	FY2020 Request	FY2021 Request
TOTAL	**351,829**	**332,540**	**300,796**	**242,922**	**190,744**	**184,426**	**184,563**	**193,752**	**145,455**	**128,155**
Economic Support Fund	148,281	135,985	119,477	100,000	—	8,500	8,500	—	—	—
Development Assistance					65,245	36,500	32,000	—	—	—
Economic Support and Development Fund					—	—	—	51,000	25,500	25,500
Economic Support and Development Fund *(Pre FY2017 DA + ESF to compare)*	*(148,281)*	*(135,985)*	*(119,477)*	*(100,000)*	*(65,245)*	*(45,000)*	*(40,500)*	*n/a*	*n/a*	*n/a*
Foreign Military Financing	0	1,519	1,600	800	1,200	1,200	5,000	—	—	—
Global Health Programs—State	141,240	129,865	124,013	104,013	87,185	84,913	99,386	103,011	90,000	75,000
Global Health Programs—USAID	25,000	25,017	25,200	25,200	25,200	25,200	24,2000	24,500	21,700	22,000
International Military Education and Training	224	208	241	272	246	239	233	241	255	255
International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement	19,420	17,448	12,000	6,000	6,000	8,000	12,000	15,000	8,000	5,400
P.L. 480 Title II	17,664	22,498	18,265	6,637	5,668	19,874	3,244	0	0	—

Sources: U.S. Department of State, Congressional Budget Justifications (CBJ), Fiscal Years 2014-2021.

Note: "n/a" signifies not applicable.

Counternarcotics[51]

Haiti is a transit point for cocaine from South America and marijuana from Jamaica headed to U.S. and other markets, according to the Department of State's 2019 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report. Haiti does not produce a significant amount of illicit drugs for export. Although some cannabis is grown for local consumption, the country's subsistence-level economy means that most people cannot afford drugs, so domestic drug use is not widespread. Criminal gangs in Haiti are involved in international drug trafficking.

The Haitian government has committed to combating drug trafficking, and has taken steps to follow through on that pledge. The HNP has increased staffing of its counternarcotics unit (Bureau for the Fight Against Narcotics Trafficking, or BLTS), which conducted several successful investigations and interdiction operations against drug trafficking organizations in 2018.

Nonetheless, according to the State Department, Haiti remains unable to secure its borders against illicit drug traffic, and drug and cash seizures decreased in 2018. The land border with the Dominican Republic is basically uncontrolled, although the HNP formed a border police unit to begin to control some border crossings. The underequipped Haitian Coast Guard has minimal ability to patrol Haiti's 1,100 miles of coastline and seven international ports. Furthermore, Haiti's judicial system remains extremely weak, limiting its ability to prosecute drug traffickers or money launderers.

In terms of money laundering and financial crimes, the State Department notes, "while Haiti itself is not a major financial center, regional narcotics and money laundering enterprises utilize Haitian couriers.... Much of the drug trafficking in Haiti, and related money laundering, has a connection to the United States."

A significant example of successful cooperation between the two countries' law enforcement forces was the extradition of former coup leader Guy Philippe to the United States in January 2017. HNP officers arrested Philippe and transferred custody to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. Philippe, who led a coup that overthrew then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004, admitted in a U.S. court that he accepted $1.5 million to $3.5 million from drug smugglers while he was police commander of a Haitian coastal city from 1999 to 2003.[52] Philippe was sentenced to nine years in prison.

Haiti passed an anti-corruption law in 2014, but the government has not yet implemented it effectively. According to the State Department, obstacles in 2018 included "frequent changes in leadership, fear of reprisal at the working level, rumored intervention from the Executive, and the failure of judges to follow through by investigating, scheduling, and referring cases to prosecutors."

Similarly, Haiti amended an anti-money laundering law in 2017 that strengthened its regulatory framework, but, according to the State Department, undermined the independence and effectiveness of its Central Financial Intelligence Unit by moving it under the control of the executive branch. Haiti made no prosecutions or convictions for money laundering in 2017 or 2018.

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[51] This section draws from U.S. Department of State, "Haiti," in *2019 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control*, pp. 177-180; and "Haiti" in *Volume II: Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*, March 2019, pp. 108-109.

[52] Marcos Martinez, "Former Haiti Rebel Gets 9 Years in Prison in US Drug Case," Associated Press, June 21, 2017.

Immigration

Haitians began migrating to the United States in larger numbers after the collapse of the 29-year Duvalier dictatorship in 1986. Recurrent political instability and violence, endemic poverty, and natural disasters have contributed to the continued flow of migrants from Haiti. About 5,000 Haitians lived in the United States in 1960.[53] In 2018, the number was over 687,000.[54] Half of foreign-born Haitians living in the United States in 2018 entered the country before 2000; 24% arrived from 2000 to 2009, and 25% arrived from 2010 through 2018.[55] As of 2018, 61% of the foreign-born Haitians residing in the United States were naturalized citizens. Haitians constitute 1.5% of the foreign-born population in the United States.[56]

Temporary Protected Status

Following the 2010 earthquake, the United States granted TPS for 18 months to Haitians living in the United States at the time of the disaster. TPS provides temporary protection from removal and work authorization to foreign nationals in the United States from countries experiencing armed conflict, natural disaster, or other extraordinary circumstances that prevent their safe return. Then-Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano extended TPS regularly, and expanded it to include eligible Haitians who arrived in the United States up to one year after the earthquake. On May 22, 2017, then-DHS Secretary John Kelly extended TPS for Haitians for an additional 6 months—rather than the usual 18 months—from July 2017 through January 2018, saying that TPS recipients should use that time to obtain the necessary papers and make arrangements to return to Haiti. He added that the Haitian government should prepare to receive "all current TPS recipients" and indicated that Haiti's recovery progress "may not warrant further TPS extension past January 2018."[57] There are an estimated 55,338 Haitians with TPS living in the United States.[58]

President Moïse responded in the press, "[I]t is out of the question that they will be sending back 60,000 Haitians."[59] In October 2017, the Haitian government formally requested that the Trump Administration extend TPS for Haitians for another 18 months. Later that month, then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson wrote then-acting DHS Secretary Elaine Duke that the conditions in Haiti that led to Haitians initially being granted TPS no longer justified their continuation in a protected status.[60] On November 20, 2017, DHS announced that TPS for Haitians would terminate on July 22, 2019, giving Haitians with the status 18 months to return to Haiti or seek another legal status.

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[53] Jennifer Schulz and Jeanne Batalova, "Haitian Immigrants in the United States," Migration Information Source, August 2, 2017.

[54] U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, "Selected Population Profile in the United States, Haiti," accessed February 27, 2020, at https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=701%20-%20Haiti&tid=ACSSPP1Y2018.S0201&hidePreview=true&vintage=2018.

[55] Ibid.

[56] U.S. Census Bureau, "Table B05006: Place of Birth for the Foreign-Born Population in the United States," 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, at https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=b050&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B05006&vintage=2018.

[57] Department of Homeland Security, "Secretary Kelly's Statement on the Limited Extension of Haiti's Designation for Temporary Protected Status," May 22, 2017.

[58] U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS0 data as cited in CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*, by Jill H. Wilson.

[59] Jacqueline Charles, "After Canceling with TPS Families, Haitian President Tells Recipients to 'Calm Down,'" *Miami Herald*, June 17, 2017.

[60] "Tillerson: Central Americans, Haitians No Longer Need Protected Status," *Washington Post*, November 3, 2017.

In October 2018, however, a U.S. district court issued a preliminary injunction blocking implementation and enforcement of the order. In April 2019, another district court also issued an injunction against the termination order. The TPS designation for Haiti remains in effect pending further court orders.[61]

Some Members of Congress have expressed concern that the potential return of tens of thousands of Haitians, and the loss of remittances from Haitians working in the United States, could heighten instability in Haiti. Haitians sent over $3 billion in remittances to Haiti in 2018, constituting the equivalent of almost 33% of Haiti's GDP.[62] Other Members, and some business and labor organizations, have expressed concern that removal of tens of thousands of Haitians would be detrimental to local U.S. economies. In February 2020, several Members of Congress called on the State Department's Inspector General to investigate the extent to which the Trump Administration included electoral considerations in the decision to terminate TPS for Haitians and some Central American nationalities.[63]

Members have introduced a range of bills related to TPS. Some would create a new protected status that would last for six years rather than rely on the DHS Secretary to redesignate it every 6-18 months, or provide a path to permanent residency for TPS holders. Others would limit the program, by transferring country designation authority from DHS to Congress, making unauthorized foreign nationals and members of criminal gangs ineligible, or making TPS holders subject to detention and expedited removal.[64] Bills that would grant or support TPS for Haitians include H.R. 4112 and H.Con.Res. 5.

The Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program

Through the DHS's Haitian Family Reunification Parole (HFRP) Program, eligible U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents have been able to apply for parole for certain family members residing in Haiti. DHS created the program to promote family unity and to "support broader U.S. goals for Haiti's long-term reconstruction and development by allowing the beneficiaries of the HFRP Program to work in the United States and contribute to Haiti through their remittances."[65]

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within DHS is terminating the program in response to President Trump's Executive Order on Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements.[66]

The HFRP Program began in December 2014 to expedite family reunification and to support U.S. development and reconstruction goals in Haiti by allowing HFRP parolees to work in the United States and send remittances back to Haiti.[67] DHS warned Haitians against trying to enter the

[61] USCIS, "Temporary Protected Status Designated Country: Haiti," May 13, 2019. See also, CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10215, *Federal District Court Enjoins the Department of Homeland Security from Terminating Temporary Protected Status*, by Hillel R. Smith.

[62] World Bank Remittances Data at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?locations=HT, and https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=HT.

[63] Congressional Hispanic Caucus, "Congressional Leaders Demand Watchdog Investigate Trump Administration Decision to Terminate TPS," press release, February 4, 2020.

[64] For further background information on TPS, see CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*, by Jill H. Wilson.

[65] USCIS, "The Haitian Family Reunification Parole (HFRP) Program," updated February 21, 2018, at https://www.uscis.gov/HFRP.

[66] USCIS, "USCIS to End Certain Categorical Parole Programs," news release, August 2, 2019.

[67] USCIS, "The Haitian Family Reunification Parole (HFRP) Program," updated February 21, 2018, at

United States illegally, stating that only people living in Haiti would be eligible to participate in the reunification program.[68] Potential beneficiaries in Haiti cannot apply for themselves. The sponsoring family members in the United States, or "petitioner," must wait for the Department of State's National Visa Center to invite them to apply for the program.

Between March 2015 and June 2016, the State Department's National Visa Center issued 12,534 invitations to apply for HFRP covering 23,993 possible beneficiaries.[69] As of September 30, 2019, according to USCIS, no invitations to apply had been issued after June 2016, and of 10,524 applications accepted, it had denied 2,202, approved 8,302, and had 20 cases pending.

Human Rights

According to the State Department's most recent human rights report, Haiti's human rights issues included allegations of unlawful killings and excessive use of force by police; "arbitrary detention; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; a judiciary subject to corruption and outside influence; physical attacks on journalists; widespread corruption and impunity; and human trafficking, including forced labor."[70]

The State Department report also cited isolated reports of unlawful killings by police, some of which resulted in administrative sanctions, including dismissal, but not criminal proceedings. Amnesty International verified excess use of force by police during 2019 antigovernment protests, including the deaths of some protesters.[71] The State Department also reported that the HNP took steps to impose discipline on officers who committed abuses or fraud, and the HNP's Inspector General strengthened accountability measures, including responding to complaints lodged on a 24-hour hotline for the public to report police corruption or misconduct and recommending disciplinary actions. Some human rights groups complain about the lack of a tracking mechanism once the cases are referred to the HNP director general.

Police officers have been killed in protests as well. In 2019, 42 officers were killed. Complaining of working for months without pay, under difficult conditions, police officers have called for the right to unionize.[72]

High numbers of arbitrary arrests and pretrial detentions drive prison overcrowding: 73% of detainees awaited trial as of May 2019, and prisons operate at 365% occupancy rate.[73] Prisons lack basic services and sanitation. From January to October 2018, 100 to 120 people died in

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https://www.uscis.gov/HFRP.

[68] U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "DHS to Implement Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program," October 17, 2014; and Erick Eckholm, "Obama Administration to Expedite Reunification for Some Haitians," *New York Times*, October 17, 2014.

[69] USCIS, "Number of I-131 Travel Document Applications for the Haitian Family Reunification Parole (HFRP) Program as of September 30, 2019," accessed February 20, 2020, at https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/Family-Based/HFRP_performancedata_fy2019_qtr4.pdf.

[70] U.S. Department of State, *Haiti 2018 Human Rights Report*, March 2019, p. 1.

[71] Amnesty International, "Haiti: Amnesty International verifies evidence of excessive use of force against protesters," October 31, 2019.

[72] Haitian Times, "Haiti Police call for Right to Unionize," November 18, 2019.

[73] Human Rights Watch, "Haiti: Events of 2019," *World Report 2020*, January 8, 2020.

detention, most from starvation, tuberculosis, or other communicable diseases, according to the State Department.[74]

Two U.N. offices raised concerns about the alleged involvement of state agents in a planned attack on La Saline, Port-au-Prince, in November 2018 in which at least 26 people were killed.[75] The attack reportedly was executed in retaliation for the neighborhood's involvement in the anti-corruption movement; Haiti's Central Directorate of Judicial Police reported the complicity of two senior government officials, who, after further protests, the Moïse administration removed from office.[76]

Haitian journalists operate under difficult circumstances. According to Reporters Without Borders, they "suffer from a cruel lack of financial resources, an absence of institutional support, and difficulty in accessing information."[77] Some reporters suffer threats and violence; in 2019, one suffered a gunshot wound and another was shot dead.

Numerous domestic and international reports describe corruption in all branches and all levels of the Haitian government. As discussed above, Haitian Senate and court investigators alleged embezzlement and fraud involving billions of dollars by current and former Haitian officials, including President Moïse.

Many observers believe a top human rights priority in Haiti is to eradicate illiteracy, as part of the right to education. Approximately one of every two Haitians aged 15 and above is illiterate.[78] At least 350,000 children and youth do not attend primary or secondary school, in part because 85% of schools are privately run and their school fees are often beyond what low-income families can afford. Schools closed for prolonged periods during the unrest of 2018-2019.

The ongoing political gridlock is contributing to spreading violation of the right to a standard of living adequate for one's health and well-being. The gridlock, along with sustained protests and violence, has led to shortages of food, fuel, water, and medical supplies, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).[79] The disruptions have made it difficult for humanitarian organizations to deliver aid. According to OCHA, food insecurity in Haiti's rural areas increased by 15% in 2019.

Reopened investigations into alleged corruption, gross violations of human rights and crimes against humanity committed during the 1971-1986 dictatorship of the late Jean-Claude Duvalier by his collaborators remained pending, according to Human Rights Watch's 2019 report.[80]

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[74] U.S. Department of State, *2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Haiti*, March 13, 2019.

[75] OHCHR, OHCHR public reports on Haiti, "MINUJUSTH and OHCHR release a report on the violent events of 13 and 14 November in La Saline," Information Note, June 21, 2019.

[76] Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, "Human Rights Groups Petition IACHR to Protect Survivors of La Saline Massacre," August 14, 2019; and Human Rights Watch, "Haiti: Events of 2019," *World Report 2020,* January 8, 2020.

[77] Reporters Without Borders, "Haiti," January 28, 2020.

[78] Human Rights Watch, "Haiti," in *World Report 2019*.

[79] Alice Zhang, "Haiti Hunger Crisis 2019: What You Need to Know and How to Help," Reliefweb, OCHA Services, November 19, 2019.

[80] Human Rights Watch, "Haiti," in *World Report 2019*.

Human Trafficking[81]

Haiti is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. According to the State Department's *2019 Trafficking in Persons Report*, most of Haiti's trafficking cases involve children in domestic servitude, known as "restaveks," from the French for "to stay with." Most frequently, poor families place children with better-off families with an expectation that the host family will house, feed, and educate their children. Instead, many are kept in slave-like conditions, are physically and sexually abused, and do not go to school. The State Department cites a joint Haitian government-international organization report that found that one in four children do not live with their biological parents, and about 286,000 children under age 15 work in domestic servitude.

Other groups vulnerable to trafficking include children exploited in other forms of labor; internally displaced people; migrants going to or returning from the United States and other countries; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex (LGBTI) youth.

The State Department classified Haiti as a Tier 2 Watch List country—meaning the country's government does not fully comply with the minimum standards of the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (Division A of P.L. 106-386) for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance with those standards. The Haitian government investigated, prosecuted, and convicted more traffickers than in the previous year, passed a 2017-2022 national action plan, closed several abusive orphanages, and increased antitrafficking law enforcement training. The government did not prosecute officials recently alleged to be complicit in trafficking. The Haitian government also, according to the State Department, did not allocate sufficient funding for its antitrafficking efforts or victim services and did little to combat child domestic servitude.

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[81] U.S. Department of State, "Haiti," in *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2019.

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