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THE WORLD IN PAGES

GANG RULE IN HAITI: THE STATE UNDONE



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FROM THE FOUNDERS

We are proud to present the latest publication of The World in Pages Magazine. This edition was edited by Neil Nair, who guided the issue through its research, writing and editing to bring you 'Gang Rule in Haiti: The State Undone.'

In Haiti, armed gangs now control most of the capital, Port-au-Prince, and have pushed into the regions beyond it. What began as street crews once used by politicians and business elites has become a coalition, Viv Ansanm, that taxes residents, attacks state institutions and has displaced nearly 1.5 million people. Yet the crisis is rarely explained beyond the headlines about violence.

At the heart of this issue is a simple question. How does a state lose its monopoly on force? Haiti's story runs from a colonial past built on slavery and debt, through decades of dictatorship and foreign intervention, to the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021 and the power vacuum that followed. We examine how the gangs became so powerful, what life under their rule looks like for ordinary Haitians, and whether the international response can change the path ahead.

We thank everyone who contributed to this issue. As you turn these pages, we hope you come away with a clearer understanding of a crisis too often overlooked, and that it fuels the curiosity that lives deep within you.



Videep Agarwal



Dheer Bhandary

THE EDITOR



Neil Nair

INTRODUCTION



Source: Britannica



Source: NYT



Source: Al Jazeera

Gang violence is not a novel threat to Haiti. Gangs have long been part of the Haitian political landscape, but only recently have they managed to exploit the country's fragile politics to leverage power and influence on a scale as grave as today.

Unlike in other parts of the world, gangs in Haiti are not street crews of disadvantaged youth that take to violence, but heavily armed, territorial, and powerful criminal organisations that ravage through society and control most civilian and government infrastructure. Residents of Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital, are systematically preyed on with the aim of gangs securing a slice of political power. Haiti's corrupt and dysfunctional political systems have in no small way given rise to gang violence and the dismaying grip that gangs wield over citizens.

INTRODUCTION



Source: Rolling Stone

Often adversarial with one another, gangs in Haiti were historically tied to a specific political group, for whom they would brandish their control over communities to manipulate political outcomes. Two examples here are critical, that of the gangs G9 (Revolutionary Forces of the G9 Family & Allies) and G-Pèp (Group for the Protection of the Revolution).

As the name suggests, G9 is an exceptionally powerful federation of over nine armed Haitian gangs, founded in June 2020 and led by Jimmy Chérizier, alias 'Barbecue'. Chérizier was a former disgraced HNP (Haitian National Police) officer, being fired in 2018 over his involvement in massacres and extrajudicial killings, and with sanctions placed upon him by the United States Treasury and United Nations Security Council. Despite arrest warrants, he has eluded capture and unfortunately become centre to the Haitian political stage. At its inception in 2020, G9 was employed by ruling party PHTK (Haitian Tèt Kale Party) to maintain control over gang-influenced neighbourhoods where formal state presence was weak. To do so, PHTK supplied G9 with essential resources like vehicles, uniforms and weapons, and most importantly: impunity and political protection.

INTRODUCTION

When G9, backed by state actors like PHTK, approached various gangs in the hopes of growing their coalition, many refused and were as a result attacked. This led to the formation of G-Pèp in July 2020 by Gabriel Jean-Pierre, alias 'Ti Gabriel', in order to resist G9 dominance. Within Port-au-Prince, G-Pèp operates most significantly out of Cité Soleil, an impoverished and densely populated commune where it had considerable dominance, mainly because Jean-Pierre was from Brooklyn, an area in Cité Soleil. Prior to G-Pèp, Jean-Pierre – always a Haitian crime boss – led Nan Brooklyn, one of the founding members of G-Pèp. With G-Pèp counterbalancing G9, it makes sense that G-Pèp was tied to various Haitian opposition parties to PHTK.



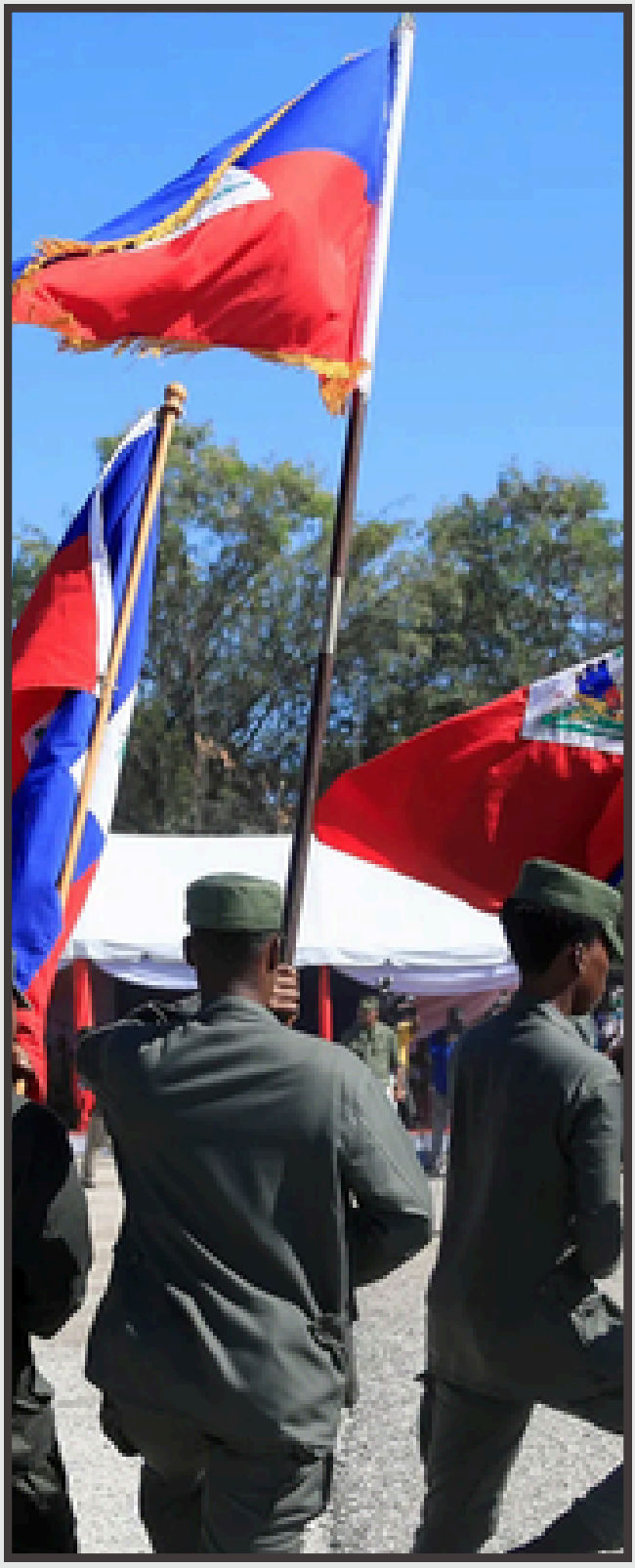
Source: Ayibi Post



Source: Just Security

INTRODUCTION

Though Haiti did not have a centralised opposition, a notable example was MTV (Third Way Movement), led by Reginald Boulos, Haitian businessman and former presidential candidate. MTV support of G-Pèp is murky and largely undocumented, though certain crisis reports and organised crime analyses do show Boulos providing some degree of backing for G-Pèp. This backing is described as political alignment, rather than the operational command that was more stark with G9 and PHTK. This all changed in the early hours of 7 July 2021, when Haitian President and the head of PHTK, Jovonel Moïse, was assassinated at his private Port-au-Prince residence in Pétion-Ville. Moïse's wife, Martine, was severely wounded and airlifted to the US for emergency treatment, though she survived. The assasination was conducted by a group of 28 foreign mercenaries, mostly Colombian but some Haitian-American.



Source: New Yorker

INTRODUCTION

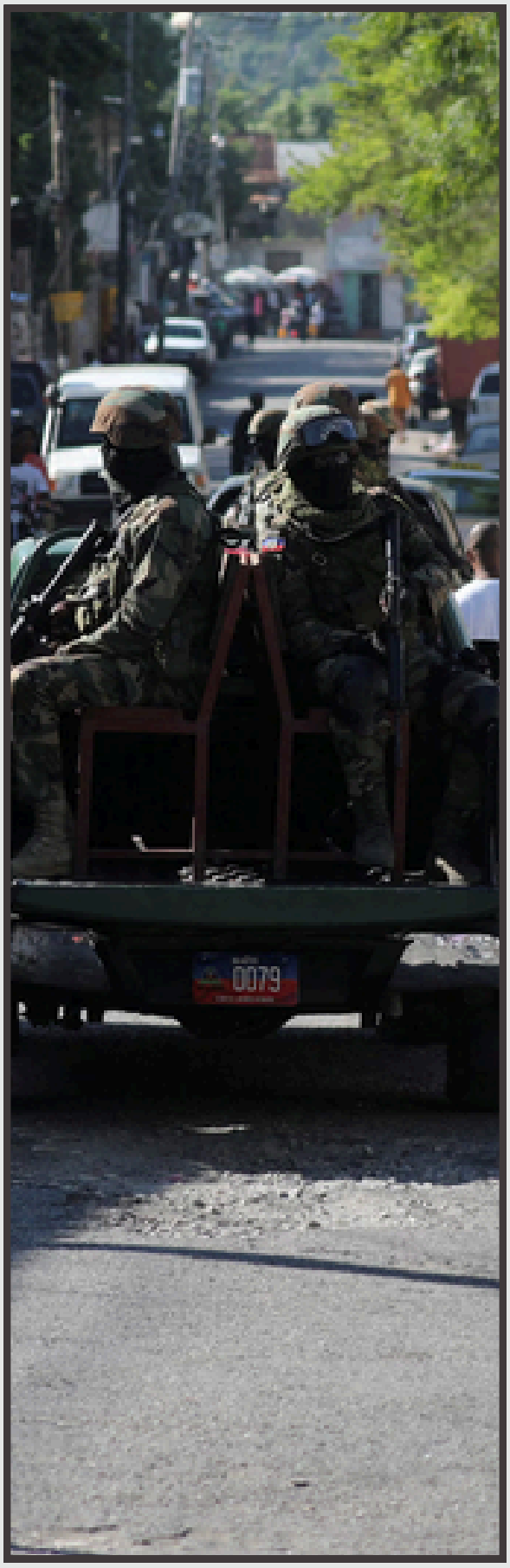


Source: WSJ

In a report published on 19 February 2024, a Haitian judge indicted widow Martine Moïse, former Prime Minister Claude Joseph, and former National Police chief Léon Charles – accusing them (and others) of roles from complicity to criminal association in Moïse's assassination. These charges are disputed and part of an ongoing and highly contentious legal battle, which will be further elaborated on. What is clear though is that no gangs were held culpable for Moïse's assasination, though they were the most direct beneficiaries of the power vacuum that his death inflicted on Haitian politics. In the months and years that followed, a lack of proper governance set the stage for a reshaping of the role played in Haitian society. Rather than being puppeted by political parties and figures, gangs now control elites and politicians; the guardrails being fully unleashed.

This power shift was most clearly demonstrated on 22 September 2023, when the adversarial G9 and G-Pèp gang factions announced that they were forming a coalition named Viv Ansanm, or 'all together' in Haitian Creole; claiming that they would act as a united front against the political turmoil that ensued in the country since Moïse's assasination, which will be detailed later on. Pledging to protecting citizens and reinstating stability, the gang began to control the vast majority of Port-au-Prince.

INTRODUCTION



It is safe to say that Viv Ansanm did not live out their mission, and that their coalition was not beneficial for Haitian national security.



Source: Reuters

HISTORICAL & POLITICAL CONTEXT

HISTORICAL & POLITICAL CONTEXT_

Before considering the grave human rights violations committed by the newly founded Viv Ansanm, it is important to understand the historical context that allowed a gang coalition to seize control of most of the capital and impose its rule on Haiti's twelve million inhabitants.



HISTORICAL & POLITICAL CONTEXT

In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on an island he named 'La Isla Española,' or 'the Spanish Island,' later Latinised as 'Hispaniola.' By 1697, Spain had formally ceded the western part of the island to France, which named it 'Saint-Domingue.' With coffee and sugar as its key export crops, it quickly became one of the world's most profitable colonies, but at a brutal cost. Enslaved Africans endured extreme exploitation and high mortality rates, and in 1791 they rose in revolt, beginning the Haitian Revolution. The struggle against European imperialism lasted until 1804, when the independent Republic of Haiti was formed. Independence came at a price. In 1825, France demanded 150 million francs in return for recognition, a debt that drained Haiti's finances for more than a century.

From 1915, Haiti was ruled under martial law by the United States, until a disengagement agreement in 1934 transferred authority to the Garde d'Haïti, a force created by US-backed forces.

Dumarsais Estimé, who took office in 1946, led a relatively stable period and was widely admired for championing the middle class. This changed when François Duvalier, a rural physician turned politician, presented himself as Estimé's heir. Elected in 1957, he plunged the country into a kleptocratic rule that remains among the most repressive in history. Duvalier built a paramilitary militia, the Tontons Macoutes, to terrorise his opponents, setting a precedent for armed groups serving political power. His son Jean-Claude continued the dictatorship until he fled in 1986.

The decades that followed brought coups, disputed elections and foreign interventions. Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected in 1990, overthrown in 1991, restored in 1994 and ousted again in 2004, after which a UN stabilisation mission stayed until 2017. That mission was marked by controversy, including a cholera outbreak linked to peacekeepers that killed around 10,000 people. The 2010 earthquake, which killed more than 200,000, left the state weaker still.

HISTORICAL & POLITICAL CONTEXT

Throughout this period, armed groups became tools of political competition. Politicians and business figures were widely reported to have armed neighbourhood gangs to win votes or intimidate rivals, leaving behind well-armed groups with no loyalty to the state. In 2020, Jimmy Chérizier brought several gangs together as the G9 federation. In July 2021, President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated, creating a power vacuum. By 2023 and 2024, the G9 and its rival G-Pèp had united as Viv Ansanm, and the state has struggled to fight back ever since.



Source: The Washington Post

THE ANATOMY OF HAITIAN GANGS

THE ANATOMY OF HAITIAN GANGS

Haiti's gangs are no longer scattered street crews. An estimated 200 gangs operate across the country, around 95 of them in or near Port-au-Prince, and they have merged into a handful of major coalitions. The most powerful is Viv Ansanm, Creole for "Live Together." It was first formed in September 2023 and formally launched in February 2024, when the rival G9 and G-Pèp federations joined forces. Its public face is Jimmy Chérizier, known as "Barbecue," a former police officer.



Source: Kayak.sg



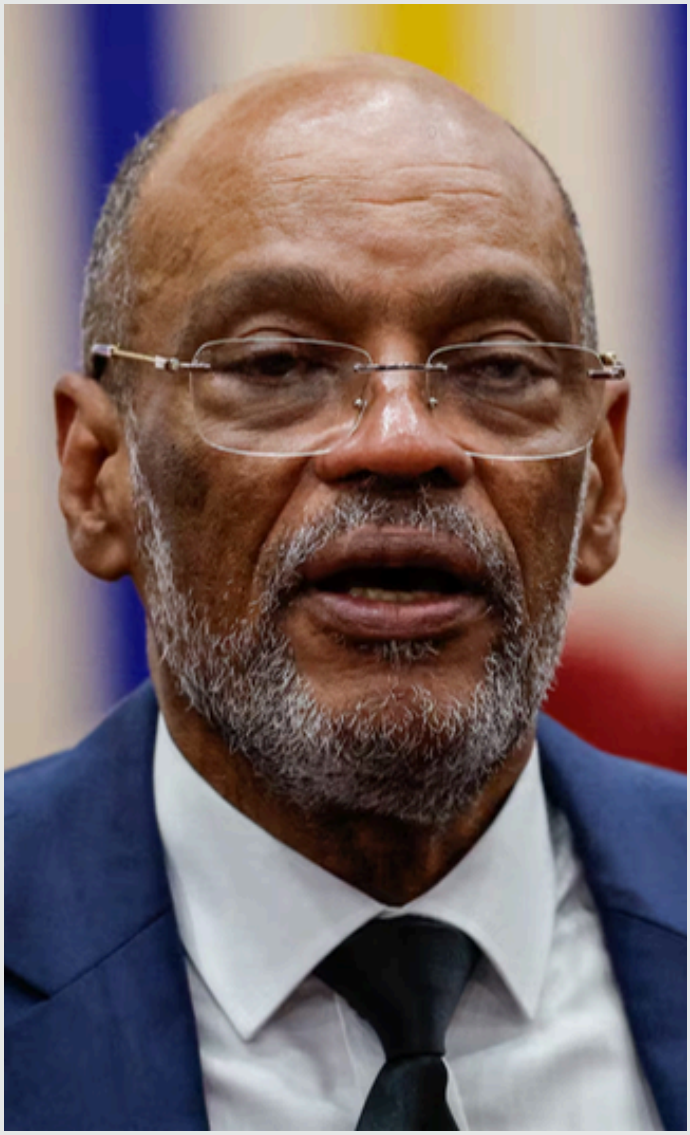
Source: War Watch

Viv Ansanm is less a single organisation than an alliance. G9 and G-Pèp are themselves umbrella groups made up of smaller gangs, among them Bel Air, 5 Segond and the Taliban. Each keeps its own leader and neighbourhoods, but the alliance lets them coordinate large attacks and speak with one voice.

Estimates vary, but Viv Ansanm is believed to control between 80 and 90 percent of the capital, and it has pushed into the Ouest, Centre and Artibonite regions. In the Artibonite, the dominant force is Gran Grif, led by Luckson Elan, which has been tied to massacres including Pont-Sondé in October 2024, where at least 115 people were killed.

THE ANATOMY OF HAITIAN GANGS

Since 2024, the coalition has also targeted the institutions that could stop it. In March 2024, mass prison breaks and the takeover of the main airport helped force Prime Minister Ariel Henry to resign. In April 2025, a prison in Mirebalais was stormed and around 500 prisoners were freed. What makes these groups so durable is that they behave like a parallel state. They run a criminal taxation system, extorting residents, businesses and drivers on the roads they control. Kidnapping for ransom adds to the income. Each newly captured area brings more revenue, which funds the next advance. Between January and September 2025 alone, criminal groups were linked to at least 4,384 deaths and 491 kidnappings, and more than 1.4 million people have been displaced.



Source: The Boston Globe



Source: Reuters

THE ANATOMY OF HAITIAN GANGS



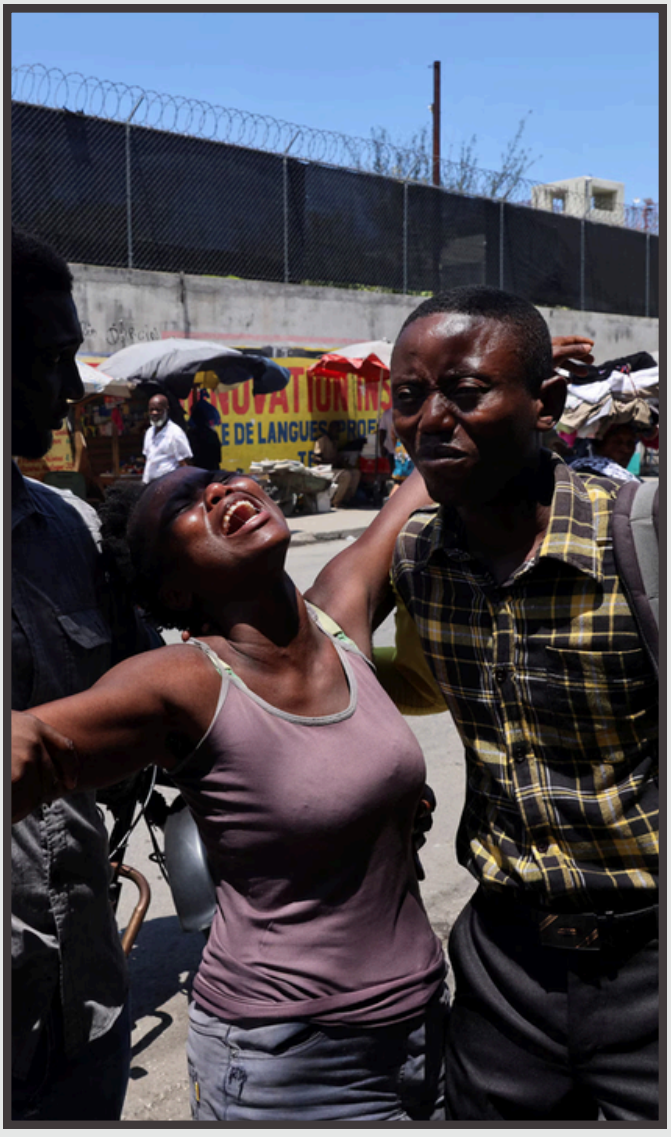
Source: Reuters

Their strength also comes from weapons and people. Haiti manufactures no firearms, and UN reports have repeatedly traced much of the gangs' arsenal to weapons smuggled in from abroad, particularly the United States. Children make up a large share of recruits, as UNICEF has warned. The gangs are also tied to the state they claim to oppose. Chérizier is an ex-officer, and Dimitri Hérard, the former head of the National Palace Guard, is suspected of working with Viv Ansanm. The coalition has announced plans to form a political party and has asked for amnesty ahead of elections.

THE ANATOMY OF HAITIAN GANGS



Source: UN News; 20 Minutes



Source: Reuters



The outside world has treated them as a major threat. The United States designated Viv Ansanm and Gran Grif as terrorist organisations in May 2025, and the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on the coalition that July. Yet the gangs continue to expand, and a UN-backed Gang Suppression Force is operating with about 1,000 personnel against an authorised 5,500. Together, these features show a group that has moved beyond crime into something closer to governance, with its own revenue, territory and political ambitions.

HUMANITARIAN & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

HUMANITARIAN & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS



Source: PBS

Behind the headlines about gang offensives and political collapse lies a human emergency on a scale few countries face. In 2026, the UN estimates that 6.4 million people in Haiti, more than half the population, need emergency humanitarian assistance. Gang rule has not only taken lives. It has dismantled the systems people rely on to eat, learn, heal and feel safe, and its effects will outlast the violence itself. The most visible consequence is displacement. By mid 2026, nearly 1.5 million people had fled their homes, around 12 percent of the population, and about 751,000 of them are children. For the first time, more than 300,000 displaced people were living in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, after clashes in Cité Soleil in March and May 2026, while nearly 80 percent of the displaced are outside the capital as the gangs have spread into the Artibonite and Centre regions. Most are hosted by relatives or live in precarious conditions, which strains communities that were already poor. Some have begun to return, with more than 165,000 reported by May, but families say the conditions are not yet in place to rebuild sustainably.

HUMANITARIAN & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Hunger follows displacement. Nearly 6 million Haitians face acute food insecurity, as farmland is abandoned, roads are taxed or blocked, and supplies must pass through gang-controlled networks. In the Artibonite, often called Haiti's breadbasket, attacks in March and April 2026 drove further flight from the region that feeds much of the country. In the first six months of 2026 alone, 21,514 children were admitted for treatment for severe acute malnutrition.



Source: FAO (UN)



Source: World Vision

HUMANITARIAN & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Healthcare is close to collapse. Only about 10 percent of hospitals and clinics with inpatient capacity are fully operational, and in Cité Soleil and Croix-des-Bouquets nearly all health facilities have closed. Médecins Sans Frontières suspended operations at a Port-au-Prince facility in March 2025 after its vehicles were fired upon, and permanently closed its Turgeau emergency centre that October.

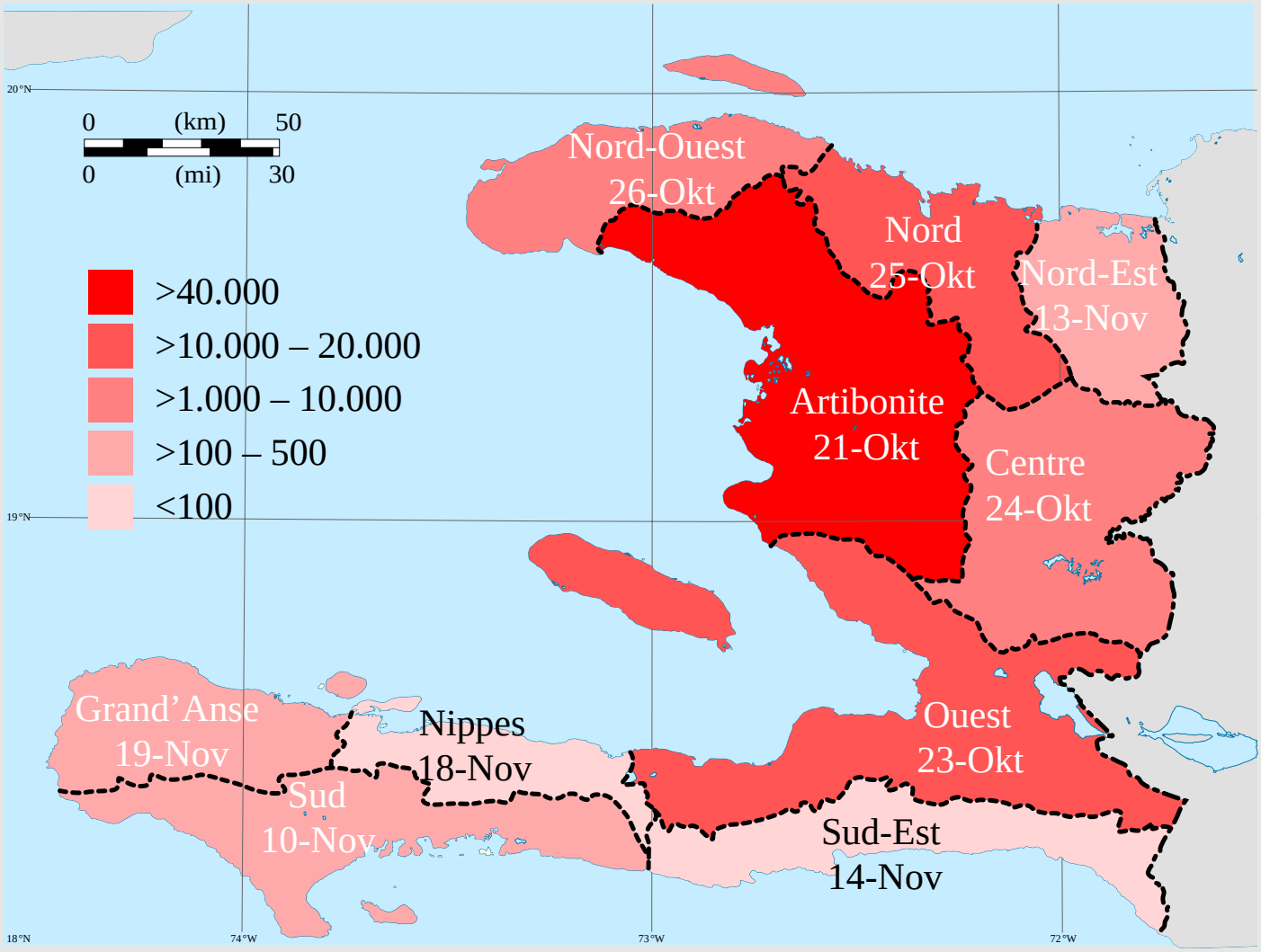


Source: Wikipedia



Source: Fandom

HUMANITARIAN & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS



Source: Wikipedia

Disease spreads when care disappears. Cholera surged in 2025, and while the 442 suspected cases recorded by late June 2026 are well below the 2,138 in the same period of 2025, the outbreak shows how fragile the situation remains.

The impact on children may be the most lasting. More than 1,600 schools have closed, and the occupation of school buildings by criminal groups has disrupted the education of 243,000 students and 7,500 teachers. Gangs have also turned children into fighters. The UN verified that 892 children were recruited or used by armed groups in 2025, nearly triple the 302 recorded in 2024, and it has reported that at least 30 percent of gang members are children.

HUMANITARIAN & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS



Source: CFR

They serve as lookouts and messengers, and are used in extortion, kidnapping and killing. In total, the UN documented 2,088 grave violations against 1,661 children in 2025, including 620 killed or maimed. A generation is losing its schooling and, for some, its childhood. Sexual violence is widely used to terrorise communities. The UN recorded 1,270 cases between January and September 2025, mostly attributed to criminal groups, and 2,888 cases of gender-based violence were reported to humanitarian protection teams between January and May 2026, about 68 percent of them rape. Survivors often have little or no access to medical care, counselling or justice, and US funding cuts in 2025 deprived about 750,000 women and girls of health care and psychosocial services.



Source: OHCHR

HUMANITARIAN & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The death toll cannot be blamed on the gangs alone. Criminal groups killed at least 4,384 people between January and September 2025, but the UN found that more than half of all killings in that period happened during security operations. Between January and March 2026, 69 percent of the 2,387 people killed or injured were linked to security force operations and police summary executions, against 27 percent attributed to gangs. Explosive drones have also killed civilians, including children. For ordinary Haitians, danger comes from several directions at once, and trust in every institution is eroding.



Source: The Guardian

HUMANITARIAN & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding has not kept pace. In late May 2026, the UN's 880 million dollar response plan was just under 23 percent funded, and UNICEF's own appeal was 79 percent short in June. Disasters compound the strain. Hurricane Melissa killed at least 46 people in October 2025 and damaged or destroyed homes and infrastructure. Meanwhile, foreign governments returned more than 251,000 people to Haiti in 2025, 98 percent of them from the Dominican Republic, sending more people into a country that cannot house or employ them.

The humanitarian and social cost of gang rule is therefore not a side effect. It is the mechanism by which the gangs hold power, by making ordinary life impossible without their permission. Defeating them will not be enough. Rebuilding Haiti will mean restoring schools, clinics, markets and trust, which will take far longer than any military campaign.



Source: UNICEF

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

Haiti's crisis cannot be understood inside its borders alone. Weapons, money and people move across them, and the response has been driven largely by outside powers. The centrepiece is the Gang Suppression Force (GSF). Authorised by the UN Security Council on 30 September 2025 after a proposal from the United States and Panama, it was meant to have 5,500 personnel and, unlike earlier missions, the power to arrest gang members and act alongside or independently of Haiti's forces. It replaced the Kenya-led Multinational Security Support Mission, which ended in April 2026 after struggling with funding and numbers, with about 1,000 personnel against a target of 2,500. Chad, Jamaica, El Salvador and Guatemala have deployed troops. By late September 2026 the GSF had about 1,500 troops, roughly 30 percent of its intended size, and when the Council extended its mandate to 31 March 2027, China, Russia and Pakistan abstained, doubting its effectiveness. El Salvador has since announced it will send 2,000 soldiers.



Source: UN News

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

Money is a constraint. More than 200 million dollars has been pledged by 13 Council member states, but only 59 million has been disbursed, according to the UN's Haiti office. Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aimé has said that the countries backing the force must "live up to their engagement." Beyond the force, outside pressure has focused on sanctions and designations. The US designated Viv Ansanm and Gran Grif as terrorist organisations in May 2025, and the Security Council imposed sanctions on the coalition in July 2025. Yet a September 2026 report by the UN Panel of Experts found that the arms embargo is regularly violated.



Source: Bloomberg



Source: The Haitian Times

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS



Source: The Haitian Times, WLRN, ABC, NBC

Guns and ammunition reach the gangs through transnational networks and diversion from stockpiles, with a rifle selling for 5,000 to 8,000 dollars and a single round costing about three. Police seized 356 firearms in 2025. Almost no assets have been frozen, and Haiti has no national process to identify and freeze sanctioned assets.

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

Neighbouring states also feel the crisis and shape it. In 2025, foreign governments returned more than 251,000 people to Haiti, 98 percent of them from the Dominican Republic. In June 2026, the US Supreme Court allowed the end of Temporary Protected Status for Haitian nationals, raising the prospect of further returns to a country already struggling to support 1.5 million displaced people.



Source: NYT

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

Critics remain wary. Haiti's history includes a US occupation and a UN mission linked to a cholera outbreak, so a new foreign force invites suspicion.



Source: The New Yorker



Source: The Haitian Times

Supporters argue that Haiti's own security forces cannot defeat the gangs alone. US Ambassador Mike Waltz, who co-sponsored the resolution, said previous missions achieved "limited success" and that the GSF is meant to be "genuinely different." Whether it is will depend less on speeches than on troops, money and the political will of outside powers.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Haiti enters its next phase with no elected president, a security force a fraction of its intended size and gangs that are still expanding. The political path is uncertain. Haiti has not held elections since 2016, and its last elected president, Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated in 2021.



Source: CNN

WHAT LIES AHEAD

The Transitional Presidential Council was dissolved in February 2026, leaving Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aimé as the sole executive authority. Elections planned for 13 December 2026 and 21 February 2027 were postponed in October because several gang-controlled municipalities had no registration centres and road closures blocked the delivery of electoral materials.



Source: wbur

WHAT LIES AHEAD

A new date of 18 July 2027 has since been reported. Whether people can vote safely by then depends on whether the gangs lose ground.



Source: Reuters

Source: TeleSur



Source: Al Jazeera

Source: Democrata

WHAT LIES AHEAD

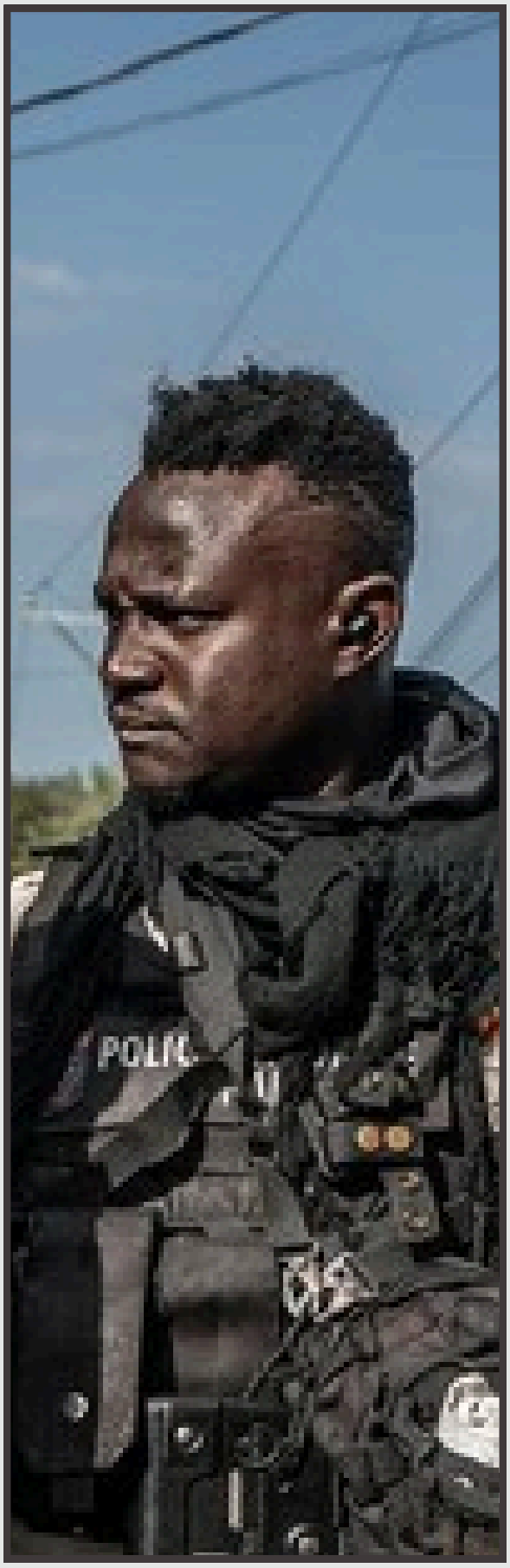


Source: L'OBSERVATOIRE

The security path is just as unclear. The Gang Suppression Force has about 1,500 of its planned 5,500 personnel, and its mandate runs only until 31 March 2027. Through 11 September 2026, the UN recorded at least 5,700 people killed or wounded that year, more than 1,000 women and girls raped and 230 kidnappings, and warned that the real figures are likely much higher. Analysts argue that force alone will not remove gangs from the communities they control or cut their ties to politics.

That raises the hardest question, which is whether to talk. Viv Ansanm has announced plans to form a political party and has demanded a general amnesty. Many Haitians oppose negotiating with groups responsible for massacres, and officials say the state cannot negotiate from a position of weakness.

WHAT LIES AHEAD



Source: UN News

One recent analysis argues that dialogue becomes viable only once security forces gain the upper hand. It rejects general impunity in favour of a transitional justice process that offers limited reprieve to members who disarm and cooperate, alongside an expanded exit programme for children in gang ranks. Citizen self-defence groups complicate matters, since they have provoked violent gang retaliation.



Source: UN News

WHAT LIES AHEAD

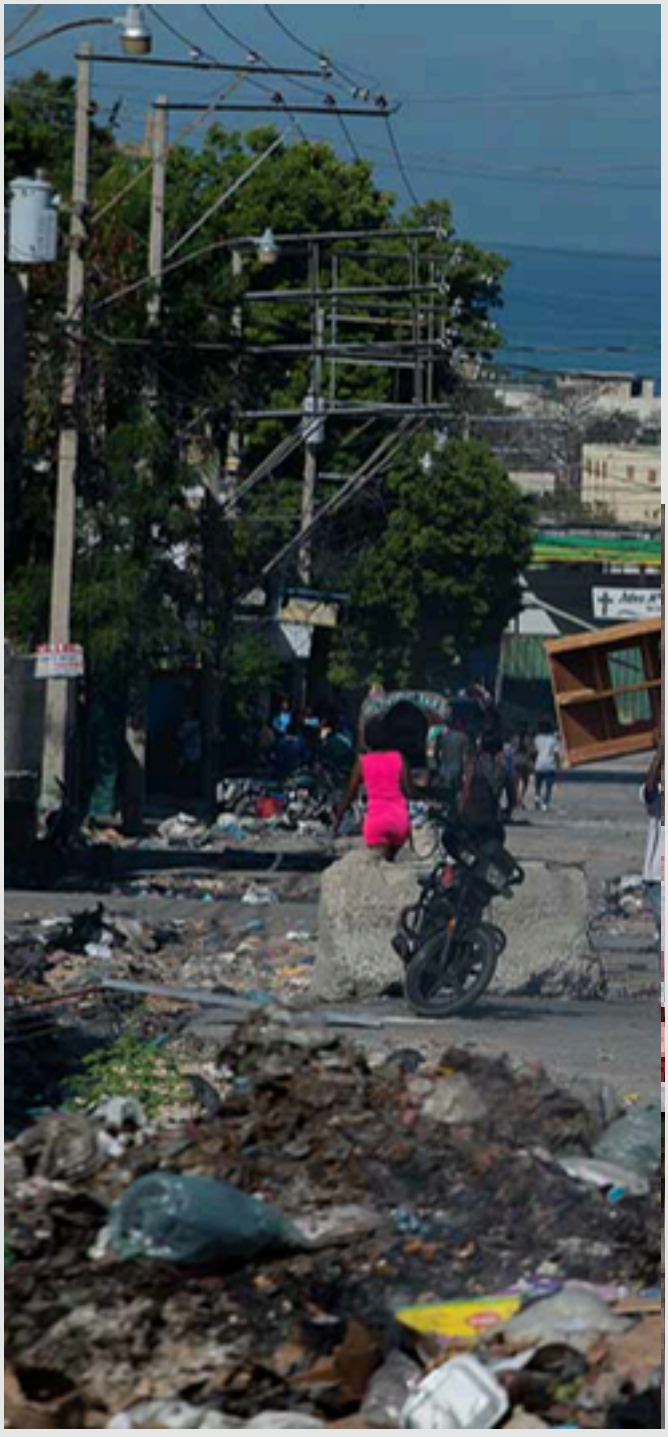
The humanitarian outlook is also bleak. Nearly 1.5 million people remain displaced, the UN response plan was under a quarter funded in May, and returns from abroad continue.



Source: Reuters

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Three broad outcomes are possible, and this is our reading rather than a forecast. A strengthened force could shift the balance and open the door to elections and disarmament.



Source: ICG



Source: NBC News

WHAT LIES AHEAD

A stalemate could leave Haiti divided between a weak state and gang territory. Or a rushed political deal could legitimise armed groups without delivering justice. Which path Haiti takes will depend on whether security, politics and aid move together, and on whether the outside world keeps its promises.



Source: HRW

THE BOTTOM LINE.

Haiti's crisis is not only a story of criminal violence. It is the story of a state that lost its monopoly on force, and of armed groups that now tax, govern and negotiate like a political power. Their rise was shaped by a long history of colonial debt, dictatorship, foreign intervention and politicians who armed street crews, and by weapons that continue to flow in despite an embargo.

There is no agreement on the way out. Supporters of the Gang Suppression Force argue that only stronger security can make elections and recovery possible. Critics point to Haiti's history of foreign interventions, the force's slow deployment and civilian deaths in security operations, and argue that force alone will not break the gangs' hold. Others say talks and a limited reprieve for those who disarm may be unavoidable, while many Haitians reject any deal with groups responsible for massacres.

What is clear is the human cost. Nearly 1.5 million people are displaced, millions face hunger, and a generation of children is losing its schooling and, in many cases, being recruited into the violence. Unless security, working institutions and sustained funding move together, the cycle is likely to continue.

GLOSSARY

Viv Ansanm: Creole for "Live Together." The gang coalition formed when the G9 and G-Pèp federations united, and the group that controls most of Port-au-Prince.

G9 and G-Pèp: The two rival gang federations, each made up of smaller gangs, that joined forces to form Viv Ansanm.

Gran Grif: A powerful gang based in the Artibonite region, known for kidnapping and mass killings.

Gang Suppression Force: A UN-authorised multinational force approved in September 2025 to support Haiti's police against gangs. It replaced the Kenya-led mission.

Power vacuum: A situation in which no one holds effective authority, allowing others to take control.

Kleptocracy: A system of government in which leaders use their power to steal public wealth for personal gain.

Extortion: Forcing people to pay money through threats or violence

Internally displaced person: Someone forced to flee their home who remains within their own country.

Acute food insecurity: A level of hunger so severe that it threatens lives or livelihoods in the short term.

Arms embargo: A ban on supplying weapons to a country or group. The UN Security Council imposed one on armed groups in Haiti in 2022.

Foreign terrorist organisation: A group designated by the US government as a terrorist organisation, which makes it illegal to give it material support. The US designated Viv Ansanm and Gran Grif in 2025.

Amnesty: A pardon, usually for a group of people who committed offences. Viv Ansanm has demanded one.

Demobilisation: The process of disbanding armed groups and returning their members to civilian life.

Definitions taken from Oxford Languages (unless otherwise specified)

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