

Topic 2: Upheaval in Haiti

Executive Summary

Haiti has faced massive turnover this year. On July 7th, the president of Haiti, Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated in his home at the dead of night. This killing prompted a major constitutional crisis regarding succession, where the following role of leadership was disputed between Ariel Henry, who Moïse had unofficially chosen to be his Prime Minister prior to his death, and Claude Joseph, the actual prime minister at the time of Moïse's death. After a two week struggle, Joseph stepped down from his position and Henry was inaugurated to the role of president of Haiti. His inauguration raised concern from the Haitian population as well as the global community, including skepticism regarding Henry's promise to hold fair and free presidential elections.

In the meantime, the nation has faced a massive natural crisis in the form of an August 14th earthquake that registered 7.2 on the Richter scale. The earthquake killed at least 2,248 people and has affected more than 800,000 Haitian citizens. Months on from this natural crisis, tens of thousands of Haitians face shortages of safe water and a lack of safe shelter with no end in sight. The crisis has led to a massive surge in violent crime throughout the nation which has in turn contributed to the increasingly negative outlook towards the national government that had been the prevailing narrative for years.

Topic History

Haiti has a long history of political instability, most recently involving coup d'état attempts in 1958, 1988, 1989, 1991, and 2004. As such, national faith in the government has been relatively low in Haiti's history. In the years leading up to 2021, the nation has seen an unprecedented rise in fuel prices, in turn leading to mass protests and cries for President Moïse to resign over the course of several years.

Haiti's geographical location in the Caribbean is conducive to a vast number of natural disasters, including hurricanes, floods, droughts, landslides, and earthquakes. The impact of these natural disasters is exacerbated by the weak infrastructure, widespread socio-economic issues, and high population density, and as such, a natural disaster that takes place in Haiti may be exponentially more catastrophic than an equivalently powered one in a more developed nation. In addition, Haiti has very weak health infrastructure, and as a result, emergency situations from natural disasters often result in large-scale epidemiological breakouts in addition to the direct personal and property damage.

In 2021, both had massive impacts on national outlook. On July 7th, the president of Haiti, Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated in his home at the dead of night. This killing prompted a major constitutional crisis regarding succession, where the following role of leadership was disputed between Ariel Henry, who Moïse had unofficially chosen to be his Prime Minister prior to his death, and Claude Joseph, the actual prime minister at the time of Moïse's death. After a two week struggle, Joseph stepped down from his position and Henry was inaugurated to the role of president of Haiti. His inauguration raised concern from the Haitian population as well as the global community, including skepticism regarding Henry's promise to hold fair and free presidential elections.

In the meantime, the nation has faced a massive natural crisis in the form of an August 14th earthquake that registered 7.2 on the Richter scale. The earthquake killed at least 2,248 people and has affected more than 800,000 Haitian citizens. Months on from this natural crisis, tens of thousands of Haitians face shortages of safe water and a lack of safe shelter with no end in sight. The crisis has led to a massive surge in violent crime throughout the nation

These two major situations have together greatly contributed to the negative reception of the national government. Especially in the wake of further postponed elections, citizens are concerned about the democratic institutions of Haiti, whose function is critical to addressing such situations as the fallout of the serious earthquake.

Case Example

Assassination of President Moïse

Nations across the world, as well as the United Nations Security Council itself, condemned the assassination and committed to working with the Hatian government to find Moïse's killers. The UNSC held a closed-door briefing for its member nations on the circumstances of the killing just days afterwards.

More interestingly, both the United Nations and the United States backed sitting Prime Minister Claude Joseph to succeed in the leadership until an election period later in the year. However, this decision drastically differed with the Hatian government's take — eight of the ten members of Hati's Senate decided that Ariel Henry should become the next president.

Questions to Consider

- 1) Given disagreements regarding the political future of the country between foreign/international bodies and the local Haitian government, what is the proper role of these foreign powers in the political turmoil in Haiti?
- 2) What should international relief efforts be focused on?
- 3) How can international aid be focused towards preserving national stability in the future in the face of recurring political and natural disasters? Can international aid be directed in a manner to mitigate them in the future?