



Mapping Haiti's Criminal Dynamics

Conclusions and Recommendations Brief

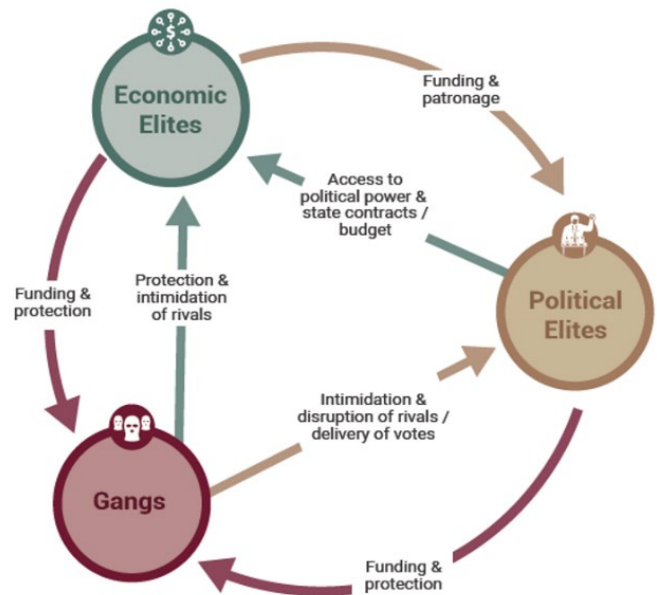
Under the LACLEARN (Latin America and Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response) Task Order, this analytical activity completed in November 2021 aimed to examine the criminal dynamics in Haiti. The full report described the evolution of criminal organizations and their intersection with state and political forces, their use of violence, and the country's main criminal economies. This brief summarizes the report's conclusions and recommendations to support Haiti in improving its political and citizen security.

Context

Politics and violence have long been linked in Haiti. Gangs now control much of the capital of Port-au-Prince and are gradually spreading across the country and expanding their influence. Three reinforcing centers of criminal power in Haiti—the political elite, economic elite, and gangs (see Figure 1)—are shaping the country's political future. While the gangs are the most visible face of criminality, their partners among the political and economic elites also operate unchallenged and in much more lucrative criminal enterprises (see Figure 2). In Haiti, access to the state budget and the systematic pillaging of funds underpins criminal organizations.

This study estimates between **160-200 active gangs** in the country. Gangs are increasingly independent rather than operating as tools for other actors. Gangs and the G9, Haiti's most powerful criminal federation, are realizing the extent of their influence. The G9 controls at least five electoral strongholds in Port-au-Prince representing up to 60 percent of the capital's electorate, along with key roads and ports. Candidates for political office now face the reality that part of their campaign must include gangs. The political vacuum following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021 left space for gangs to further expand their influence in politics and the country's security.

Figure 1. Three Centers of Criminal Power in Haiti
(Credit: InSight Crime)



Conclusions

The immediate danger in Haiti is that criminal elements take complete control of the political system by manipulating elections and advancing constitutional reforms that entrench their position. Without a legitimate, democratic government, no progress to solving Haiti's long-term problems can be made. International support is needed to stabilize the security

situation in the short-term to allow for fair elections. This outside help may be publicly requested by the Haitian government and its duration and scope clearly outlined, with realistic expectations established.

Figure 2. Haiti's Main Criminal Economies
(Credit: InSight Crime)



Recommendations

Create the conditions for free and fair elections.

Basic requirements are a stable security situation that allows for campaigning without intimidation or disruption, access to voting stations, and safeguards against fraud. Part of this should include building public confidence in the electoral process.

Establish an independent police force. Support should help the PNH carry out constitutionally mandated tasks, including criminal investigations, without overt political manipulation. Combined with establishing a community policing system and strengthening the Office of the Inspector General, these measures will help the state to challenge gangs that have set themselves up as local governing structures.

Strengthen the rule of law. The investigation into the killing of President Moïse demonstrated the failings of the judiciary. One model to support an effective judiciary could be the International Commission Against

Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala, CICIG).

Ensure delivery of basic services. The Haitian state appears to have developed a dependence on foreign assistance to provide its population with basic services. This dependence must end, especially as foreign assistance has fueled corrupt elites and criminal gangs.

Establish independent media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There are few effective civil society bodies dedicated to issues of citizen security or fighting corruption. Those that do exist are vulnerable to influence and intimidation by organized crime. Two elements that can respond in a short period of time: investigative journalism and NGO watchdogs.

Employ a public relations campaign to undermine gang influence. The gangs are increasingly using sophisticated social media campaigns to present themselves as credible actors. Credible and fact-based reporting at national and community level must counter these campaigns.

Help stop the flow of weapons to Haiti. The United States is the primary sources of arms into Haiti. Addressing arms trafficking networks could help cut flow of weapons.

Help Haiti keep watch of dangerous gang deportees. The US deports countless ex-convicts to Haiti, a small percentage of whom have gang ties. The US should help keep a lawful watch over them, without infringing on their rights.

Cut visas and economic lifelines of criminal and corrupt elites. The US has powerful diplomatic and economic levers that can create conditions for change in Haiti.

About this Activity

This analytical activity, conducted through a grant to InSight Crime, had three objectives: to determine the country's key criminal economies; to develop a typology of these various criminal groups and their corresponding networks; and to mark patterns and trends and ways to mitigate criminal organizations' influence. The activity drew on rigorous desk research, secondary analysis of data, and interviews with civil society, law enforcement, business, and other relevant stakeholders in Haiti.

The full report was prepared by InSight Crime, a think tank dedicated to the study of organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean. Learn more about InSight Crime [here](#) and the Latin America and Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response (LACLEARN) Task Order [here](#).

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