



Country Profile: Haiti

In Haiti, political violence has been the pattern since it was a slave colony of France from 1625 to 1804. A slave revolt led by Touissant Louverture defeated Napoleon Bonapart's troops, and in 1804, Jean Jacques Dessalines declared Haiti's independence. Dessalines massacred Haiti's white planter class, its once rich forests were cut down, its soil eroded, and it returned to subsistence agriculture. Although its official religion is Catholicism, most Haitians practice voodoo, based on West African religions, as well.

Since 1804, Haiti has been ruled by a succession of brutal dictatorships, propped up by official gangsters with complete impunity to imprison, torture, and murder regime opponents. Lofty provisions in Haitian constitutions have never restrained the dictators' power.

The United States occupied Haiti from 1915 through 1934. An outspoken opponent of American occupation and Haiti's mulatto elite, Dumarsais Estimé, became President from 1946 through 1950, when he was overthrown by a military junta. Power remained in the hands of the army until September 1957, when Dr. François Duvalier, a physician known as "Papa Doc", was elected President, supported by blacks who saw in him the end of the "reign of mulattos."

Papa Doc rapidly assumed absolute power, maintained by corruption, violence and terror. He took control of the army by ousting its top officers, and created his own private militia, the notorious "*Tontons Macoutes*" a brutal secret police and death squad.

Duvalier corrupted the idea of "negritude" championed by black intellectuals into a racist idea: "Negroism." He used it to divide the black masses from the Haitian elite, traditionally composed of descendents of mulattoes. Duvalier kept the Haitian people in ignorance and illiteracy. 2,000 opponents were executed by his *Tontons Macoutes* in 1967 alone.

Papa Doc Duvalier served as "President for Life" until his death in 1971. He was succeeded by his son, Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier, who continued his father's brutal rule until 1986, when he was overthrown in a popular uprising. Baby Doc was forced onto exile, leaving power to a National Council of Government (CNG), headed by General Henri Namphy. Elections scheduled for November 1987 were cancelled after troops killed 300 voters on election day. 1988 elections were boycotted by most parties, with only four percent of voters casting ballots, and the winning candidate was ousted by military coup three months later. The military burned down the St. Jean Bosco Church led by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a liberation theologian.

In 1991, Aristide was elected President with 67% of the vote. Supporters of Aristide hunted and killed "*tontons macoutes*" and other supporters of the Duvalier regime after a failed coup attempt led by "*tontons macoutes*" and former Duvalier government minister Roger Lafontant. According to an Organization of American States report (ICHR, 1991), 75 individuals were killed and 150 wounded, all of them "*tontons macoutes*" or persons directly associated with Roger Lafontant. Many of the victims were believed to be voodoo priests because of their association with Duvalier, who wrote a book on Voodoo.

Aristide was overthrown in a bloody military coup in 1991 that killed over 300 people. Under General Cédras, 3000 – 5000 people were murdered and over 41,000 Haitians in boats to the US were stopped by the US Coast Guard and repatriated. In July 1994, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 940 authorizing use of all necessary means to restore civilian rule. Aristide returned to the Presidency and was succeeded after 1995 elections by Rene Preval, who won 88% of the vote.

Aristide won a second term in November 2000 with over 90% of the vote. In 2004, Aristide was forced out of office and flown to the Central African Republic in an American airplane. Aristide claims he was kidnapped and did not resign. Allegations of corruption against Aristide were dropped by the Haitian government in 2006 for lack of enough evidence to prosecute.



The UN Security Council authorized a UN Peacekeeping Force in 2004, and 1000 US Marines were on the ground the same day, followed the next morning by Canadian and French troops. Brazil then took the lead in the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti. Rene Preval was re-elected President in 2006.

On January 12, 2010, Haiti suffered one of the deadliest earthquakes in history, which killed 200,000-300,000 people, and leveled nearly every building in Port au Prince. The country remains devastated and the economy has ground to a halt.

In April 2011, Michel Martelly, a former musician, won election to the Presidency. Coming out of exile, Baby Doc Duvalier has boldly returned to Haiti, accompanied by his gang of "*Tontons Macoutes*," and is reportedly seeking to make Haiti a major center for the drug trade.

Haiti remains one of the poorest states of the world. The country has an official unemployment rate of 60% and a gross domestic product per capita of U.S. \$ 469 per year and a life expectancy of less than 50 years for men and 54 years for women. According to the Human Development Index of the UN, Haiti ranks 150th out of 173 countries surveyed in the world.

Haiti's population will reach 20 million by 2019. Haitians are certain to find any means necessary to escape from their grinding poverty, and emigration to the US, either legally or illegally, is the most attractive way out. After the earthquake of 2010, hundreds of millions of dollars of international aid are needed to rebuild Haiti, but most of the pledged money is frozen, for want of reliable and honest institutions to administer it.

Haiti could quickly fall back into its historical pattern of government by dictators, thugs, and now drug gangs unless the international community makes good on its magnanimous promises of billions in aid following the earthquake of 2010. Such aid will put Haitians to work in rebuilding their own country, without any military intervention from abroad. Prevention of atrocities is always cheaper and wiser than sending in troops to overthrow dictators and bury bodies.

Because of this, Genocide Watch considers Haiti to be at Stage 6: Preparation.