

Securing the State

HAITI BEFORE AND AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

After the 2010 earthquake killed an estimated 158,000 people in Haiti's capital, international actors rapidly focused on promoting increased policing capacities and wider security sector reforms. This international focus on improving security sector capacity in Haiti is not new. For the past 200 years, the country has contended with periodic outbursts of political violence and international efforts to influence internal Haitian governance through structural adjustment programmes and reform of the justice, military, policing, and corrections systems. This chapter considers the context of security promotion efforts in the years preceding Haiti's 2010 earthquake and emerging trends in its aftermath by drawing on the findings of three household surveys administered before and after the earthquake.

A state of injustice

Efforts to codify and implement improved criminal and corrections laws have yielded few returns and Haiti continues to feature outdated and disregarded laws, weak human resources, and practically non-existent infrastructure to manage legal cases. Over the past two decades, a major obstacle to security service delivery was the illegitimacy of security forces in the eyes of Haitian civilians. This was particularly true during the years when unelected governments were in power (1991–94 and 2004–06) and used the police as a tool to suppress popular dissent and punish political opponents.

As a result of the inefficiency and corruption of the Haitian National Police (HNP)—as well as their involvement in human rights violations during the 2004 coup and its two-year aftermath—international donors and local populations lost faith in the police force's capacity and willingness to deliver services. To bridge this legitimacy gap, donors invested heavily in police reform, recruitment, and human rights training, as well as community policing from 2004 onwards.

Violence and crime in Haiti: before and after the earthquake

Despite considerable investment in reform, little was known about whether security improved for ordinary Haitians. To fill this data void, surveys were conducted to assess the experiences and opinions of Haitians over the past five years. Similar sampling procedures and data collection instruments were used in each case, with households randomly sampled from the population; adult household members were then randomly chosen to participate in the study. This allowed for a representative sample that can be generalized to the entire population, providing invaluable insight into the experiences and opinions of ordinary Haitians.

Crime

Before the earthquake, 62.9 per cent of respondents asserted that crime was a serious problem. This rate dropped to 20.0 per cent after the earthquake. For violent crime, a clear pattern



A child cries as he is questioned by a police officer after he witnessed a gunfight in the La Saline slum in Port-au-Prince, March 2010.

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Table 8.5 Who would you turn to first if you were robbed or someone threatened to hurt or kill you?

Response	2009		2010	
	Robbed (%)	Threatened (%)	Robbed (%)	Threatened (%)
Relative, friend, or neighbour	12.0	18.1	38.5	13.5
Police	40.7	38.0	56.6	66.7
Former members of the Haitian army	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.0
Foreign military	9.7	28.9	0.3	0.0
Private security company or similar	0.3	0.7	0.0	0.0
Community elders	3.7	2.5	2.3	8.4
Head of the family	0.6	2.5	0.8	9.2
An armed group	0.4	1.2	0.2	0.0
Nothing/no point in doing anything	29.9	6.6	0.6	0.1
Other/don't know	2.0	1.1	0.6	0.0

emerges that mirrors the country's democratic transitions: crime was low in the first two months of 2004 (under an elected president), rose significantly from March 2004 to late 2006 (during unelected rule), and decreased steadily between early 2007 (after democratic elections) and 2010. Although there were few reports of property crime (only 4.1 per cent of households) in the six weeks after the earthquake, sexual assault increased dramatically, with an estimated 10,813 rapes in this period (almost 70 per cent of the attackers identified by the respondents as 'criminals'). This rate is significantly higher than in the previous three years, when an estimated 30,000–50,000 individuals were sexually assaulted per year.

Attitudes towards security providers

The HNP was the preferred security provider named by survey respondents. In 2010, more than two-thirds of the general population would turn first to the police if faced with a threat to their person or property (see Table 8.5). This stands in sharp contrast to 2009, when just 38 per cent of the population listed the HNP as a first recourse in the case of threats to person or property. Possible explanations for the increased confidence in the HNP include heightened confidence in public institutions, a decrease in the credibility of the United Nations, and disruptions to alternative routes for personal security (such as relying on family or private security guards) after the earthquake.

Ownership of small arms

In 2010, just 2.3 per cent of households reported owning firearms. Political affiliation had no statistically significant impact on gun ownership. Among the wealthy (who were significantly more likely to own weapons), 'personal protection' was most often cited as the reason for gun ownership, while the poor most often declared they held weapons 'for work' as a security guard or police officer.

The presence of firearms is widely considered a major security issue in Haiti. Indeed, half of all respondents said there were too many guns in society today. But these weapons are unevenly distributed throughout society, and it matters fundamentally which groups are armed. When asked in 2010 which segments of society had too many guns, respondents most often named 'criminal groups' (74.1 per cent), 'business people' (65.1 per cent), and 'ex-soldiers' (45.7 per cent). The least commonly named included 'politicians' (2.0 per cent), 'households' (1.8 per cent), and 'armed political groups' (4.0 per cent). In 2010, more than three-quarters of all respondents said that more control over the issuing of firearm licences would make their communities safer.

Options for security promotion

Despite considerable improvement in local perceptions of police capacity and effectiveness, Haitians have identified areas of security promotion that need further attention. One goal relates to enhancing the capacity and responsiveness of the HNP to all Haitians, given the pervasive concern that security provision remains intolerably unequal. In particular, individuals still need to 'know someone' in order to ensure a rapid reaction to complaints. In addition, respondents pointed to the need for better regulation of firearms and the reining in of armed groups. ■