

Haiti

Population: 8,300,000

GNI/capita: \$400

Life Expectancy: 52

Religious Groups: Roman Catholic (80 percent), Protestant (16 percent), other (4 percent)

Ethnic Groups: Black (95 percent), mulatto and white (5 percent)

Capital: Port-au-Prince

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Ratings Timeline (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Rating	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

Overview:

In 2005, Haiti descended into violence as the listless government of interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue and an ineffective UN peacekeeping force struggled to move the country towards its first democratic elections in more than five years. Ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide remained a popular figure among a large segment of the population, but his party was accused of fomenting violence and faced internal persecution. More than thirty candidates sought the presidency in elections scheduled for February 2006, but frontrunner and former president Rene Preval benefited from an upsurge of political support among the country's poor.

Since gaining independence from France in 1804 following a slave revolt, the Republic of Haiti has endured a history of poverty, violence, instability, and dictatorship. A 1986 military coup ended 29 years of rule by the Duvalier family, and the army ruled for most of the next eight years. Under international pressure, the military permitted the implementation of a French-style constitution in 1987.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide was first elected president in 1990. After calling on his supporters to use force in defending his government, he was deposed by a military triumvirate after only eight months in office and sent into exile. While paramilitary thugs terrorized the populace, the regime engaged in blatant narcotics trafficking. The United States and the United Nations imposed a trade and oil embargo, and the United Nations authorized the deployment of a multinational force in July 1994 to facilitate the return of the legitimate Haitian authorities. In September 1994, facing an imminent U.S. invasion, the officers stepped down. U.S. troops took control of the country, and Aristide was reinstated. Aristide dismantled the military before the June 1995 parliamentary elections got underway. International observers questioned the legitimacy of the election, and Aristide's supporters fell out among themselves. The more militant Lavalas Family (FL) party remained firmly behind him, while the National Front for Change and Democracy (FNCD), a leftist coalition that had backed him in 1990, claimed fraud and boycotted the runoff elections. The FL won an overwhelming parliamentary majority.

The FL nominated Rene Preval, who had been Aristide's prime minister in 1991, as its presidential candidate, despite the fact that he was not a party member. In the December 17, 1995, election, which was marred by irregularities and fraud, Preval won about 89 percent of the vote with a turnout of less than one-third of those eligible; he took office on February 7, 1996. The United Nations had planned to withdraw its troops by the end of the month. The new U.S.-trained Haitian National Police (HNP), however, lacked the competence to fill the void. At Preval's urging, the United Nations extended its stay but by June cut its presence to 1,300; the final U.S. combat force had withdrawn two months earlier.

Aristide, previously revered as a defender of the powerless, was swept to victory again in November 2000. The elections were boycotted by all major opposition parties and held amidst widespread civil unrest and voter intimidation. Aristide ran on a populist platform of economic reactivation; opponents claimed he was bent on establishing a one-party state. Aristide's win of nearly 92 percent of the vote in the presidential poll was mirrored in contests for nine Senate seats—all won by his FL party—giving his new government all but one seat in the upper house. In May 2000 parliamentary elections, which opponents claimed were rigged, the FL won 80 percent of the seats in the lower house.

Although constitutionally elected, Aristide ultimately lacked the domestic legitimacy and international backing to stay in power. Aristide's troubled government, unable to overcome the fraudulent elections of 2000, found itself alone as the mandates of 4 senators and all 83 deputies expired on January 12, 2004.

With no possibility for popular elections to be held in January and left with only 15 sitting senators—9 had already resigned—Aristide would be forced to govern by decree. The opposition, united under the Democratic Convergence (DC), remained unwilling to negotiate a political solution that would keep Aristide in office. In the meantime, an armed revolt, led by a combination of Haitian political gangs and former army officers, threatened Aristide's hold on power. The United States and France declined to send peacekeepers in the absence of a political settlement between Aristide and opposition groups, and he was forced to resign and accept eventual exile in South Africa.

The circumstances surrounding Aristide's resignation on February 29, 2004, were quickly papered over by a constitutional transition that elevated Boniface Alexandre, head of the Supreme Court, to the position of president. Former prime minister Yvon Neptune, an Aristide ally, agreed to remain in office to help the transition process. Political decay continued throughout the rest of the country. By March 1, the National Resistance Front for the Liberation of Haiti, led by the controversial Guy Philippe, a former soldier and the U.S.-trained chief of police of Cap Haitien, rolled into Port-au-Prince. Without a mandate to disarm the new arrivals, an international peacekeeping force—sent under UN auspices to restore order—limited itself to patrols, while generalized looting took place.

On March 10, a commission of elder statesmen announced that Gerard Latortue, who had been in exile in Miami, would become the country's new prime minister. The multinational peacekeeping force gradually extended its reach from the capital and was renewed by the leadership of Brazil and forces from Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, as well as others. These forces eventually reached 7,400 troops and civilian police, but a protracted struggle only led to an uneasy peace, with the peacekeepers holding nominal control over the country but having a continuous presence only in major cities.

Political stability did not follow the anarchy that coincided with the departure of Aristide. The government of Prime Minister Latortue, lacking a strong political base, continued to try to

establish order, primarily through the use of a retrained police force. During the summer of 2005, Haiti experienced an explosion in homicides and kidnappings that seriously threatened the ability of international troops to provide security for the electoral process.

The proposed 2005 electoral timetable suffered repeated postponements throughout the year. The first round of elections was originally scheduled for mid-October, was then pushed back to November 20, and then was further delayed. Despite the urging of the UN Security Council and other international bodies, Haitian electoral authorities decided to postpone the first round of presidential and legislative elections until February 7, 2006. The interim government and international authorities agreed that a newly elected government should be sworn into office no later than February 7, 2006—the date that would have marked the end of former president Aristide's term had he not been ousted prematurely.

Haiti's electorate consists of approximately 4.5 million potential voters, and more than 3 million had registered for the 2006 elections. Meanwhile, more than 30 candidates registered for the presidential race, but the interim government questioned the validity of those who may also have U.S. citizenship, which sparked strenuous debate among Haitians living overseas. The Provisional Electoral Council was widely seen as ineffective, and the United Nations and Organization of American States had to step in to fill the gap.

Haiti has the lowest life expectancy and highest infant mortality rates in the Western Hemisphere. Haiti's people are among the poorest in the Western Hemisphere and have the lowest levels of human development, including a literacy rate of less than 50 percent. In the view of many foreign and local observers, Haiti today represents the closest example of a failed state in the Western Hemisphere.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Citizens of Haiti cannot change their government democratically. Credible charges of irregularities and fraud have beset every election since 1990. Haiti's 1987 constitution provides for a president elected for a five-year term, an elected National Assembly composed of the 27-member Senate and the 83-member Chamber of Deputies, and a prime minister appointed by the president. Senators are elected for six-year terms, and deputies for four-year terms.

Haiti's political party system has undergone a complete meltdown, and few organized party structures exist, although there are at least one-hundred political parties, most affiliated with a single leader or clique. The most relevant of these embryonic party structures in Haiti today are the Lespwa grouping of former president Rene Preval, former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Lavalas party, the Protestant evangelist party of Union, and the socialist coalition party of Fusion.

Haiti was ranked 155 out of 159 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of speech and the press continues to be limited, and violence against journalists is common. International observers find that media outlets still tend to practice self-censorship from fear of violent retribution. There are a variety of newspapers, including two French-language ones, with a combined circulation of less than 20,000 readers. Many newspapers include a page of news in Creole. While opposition to the government can be found in the written press, access to such views is beyond the reach of most Haitians, primarily because of illiteracy and cost. There are 275 private radio stations, including more than 40 in the capital. Most stations carry news and talk shows, which many citizens regard as their only opportunity to

speak out with some freedom. Television is state-run and strongly biased toward the government. There are five television stations, and although satellite television is available, it has a minimal impact, as most Haitians cannot afford access to television. The few stations carrying news or opinion broadcasts express a range of views. There is no official censorship of books or films, and access to the internet is free, but Haitian citizens fear violence from non-state actors if they express their views freely.

The government generally respects religious and academic freedom. However, the absence of a functional police force means that there is little protection for those who are persecuted for their views by state or non-state actors.

Freedom of assembly and association, including labor rights, are not respected in practice. Haiti has rich civil society traditions at the local level, but many of its formally organized civil society groupings have been co-opted by political and economic elites for their own gain. Unions are too weak to engage in collective bargaining, and their organizing efforts are undermined by the country's high unemployment rate.

The judicial system continues to be corrupt, inefficient, and dysfunctional. The legal system is burdened by a large backlog of cases, outdated legal codes, and poor facilities. Moreover, business is conducted in French, rather than Creole, Haiti's majority language. Prison conditions are harsh, and the ponderous legal system guarantees lengthy pretrial detentions.

The Haitian National Police (HNP) force, currently estimated at 4,000 officers, virtually collapsed during the 2004 uprising and is only slowly evolving into a recognizable force. The HNP has been accused of using excessive force and mistreating detainees, and accusations of corruption are frequent. The HNP has been used against protesters attacking the government, but it is too disorganized and poorly equipped to be an effective instrument of state repression except on an ad hoc basis. Police brutality is still on the rise, and there is credible evidence of extrajudicial killings by members of the HNP. The UN peacekeeping force has helped to instill a minimum level of security in some parts of the country, but much of Haiti remains ungovernable.

In 2005, urban violence in the Port-au-Prince slums of Cite Soleil and Bel Air proved to be especially debilitating to efforts to move the country towards new elections. Mob violence and armed gangs pose serious threats in urban areas. Former soldiers and others linked to the former military regime, as well as common criminals, are responsible for much of the violence, including political assassinations. Break-ins and armed robberies are commonplace, and many observers tie the growing violence directly to increases in the drug trade and local narcotics consumption. Haitian officials also say that the rise in crime is due to the repatriation of convicted criminals from other countries, particularly the United States. Turf wars between rival drug gangs have resulted in the killing of scores of people, including policemen. Private security forces that carry out extralegal searches and seizures are flourishing. The trafficking of drugs and people is a serious problem.

There is widespread violence against women and children. Up to 300,000 children serve in *restavec* ("live with," in Creole), a form of unpaid domestic labor with a long national history.