

## **State Fragility and Crisis Management:**

### **A Comprehensive Analysis of Haiti's Complex Crisis Through Fragility**

#### **Indicators**

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#### **Executive Summary**

- Emphasis on fragility indicators is needed to find vulnerabilities, address problems from their root, and solve them effectively.
- The crisis management strategies must be based on multi-risk approach models, as this is a case of a complex crisis (natural, political, biological, humanitarian).
- Management strategies must have the local factor as the key component and not rely entirely on foreign aid and foreign standards that possibly do not meet domestic needs. Building resilience requires building sustainable systems and sustainability highly relies on local acceptance, understanding and legitimacy within the community.

#### **Introduction**

Trying to characterize what the term “*fragile states*” is can be a complex process. It is a characterization that applies to countries with significantly weak governance mechanisms, political and economic instability and a general vulnerability or inability to respond to internal and external shocks. Multiple theories analyze this phenomenon and propose certain methods of managing the relative consequences. Numerous organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), have tried to solve this issue, developing their crisis management mechanisms, and applying them to emergent situations globally. However, this practice has not always been proven successful and sometimes lacks important elements, such as legitimacy, efficiency and most importantly sustainability. Such countries could be a crucial threat to international and regional peace and stability, while they also increase the level of

international organized crime and human rights violations and raise multiple humanitarian issues. This research focuses more on analyzing the current situation in the light of multi-hazard crisis management, intending to reach conclusions about good practices that can be adopted in creating crisis management models and strategies, especially in parts of the world that show high levels of instability and insecurity historically.

## **A. Theoretical framework**

### **Definitions and Concepts**

To better analyze the current crisis state of the country, we must initially clarify the specific terms that are going to be utilized for our research purposes. First of all, how can we characterize a country as “fragile” and how has this term been used? Furthermore, is it right saying that Haiti is one of these countries? What are the specific characteristics that indicate the levels of vulnerability in this country? Once the above questions are answered, we can proceed with analyzing the fragility indicators in our case study.

### ***Failed/Fragile States***

The complexity of international matters makes it difficult to provide a clear definition to characterize these cases, whereas the term “failed” or “fragile” can sometimes appear problematic. However, for the purpose of this research, it can be agreed that a state that cannot fulfil the fundamental functions related to its security and development, is unable to control issues related to its territory and borders and appears highly vulnerable against any type of crisis can be characterized as a fragile one. The original use of the term comes from the 90s, and concerns the situation in Somalia, after the fall of Siad Barre, with the list expanding and now including 12 cases of states that appear as fragile. In essence, we are talking about a state that fails to fulfil its fundamental obligations, protect its people and respond satisfactorily to crisis incidents without external aid.

In such cases, the people of the country face the consequences of insurgencies, the rise of crime, political corruption, and dysfunctional judicial systems that extend to levels concerning the health and safety of the population, which may suffer from cases of starvation and malnutrition, pandemics or epidemics, unemployment, violence, displacement, and other humanitarian crisis forms.

### ***Is Haiti a Fragile State?***

Haiti is considered one of the weakest states, unable to fulfil the fundamental functions of a modern state (e.g. delivering crucial public services and rule of law enforcement). The state registers the lowest human development in the Western Hemisphere. Since 1991, a huge number of migration flows in Canada, the US, France and Latin America, come from Haiti, while natural disasters have caused a significant number of internally displaced people (IDP). The country has faced numerous crises, such as the 2010 earthquake crisis, the following cholera outbreak, the protests and political crisis, and the 2021 Earthquake.<sup>1</sup>

The situation in Haiti has become a complex humanitarian emergency. During the past years, the population faced tropical storms, flooding, a devastating earthquake, a pandemic, political unrest and instability, a presidential assassination, and serious levels of organized gang violence, while almost half the population is in need of humanitarian assistance. This is an exact case of multi-risk crisis management and contains important information that can guide us in formulating and designing crisis management models that can be applied to other similar situations. Although this research focuses on fragile states to analyze the crises through fragility indicators, some of the following elements may suit other crises of other states that do not fall on the list.

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<sup>1</sup> Silveira Natalie, Haiti: *Two Steps Forward – Three Steps Back*, Fragile States Index (2022).

## **B. Haiti Crisis: A Case Study**

### **Sources of Fragility and Resilience Fragments**

The following elements are not part of a specific indicators list, but they are a qualitative report of incidents that could relate to the current crisis that has unfolded in the country. This chapter's purpose is to indicate how the fragile elements of a country's system can create a complex situation of multiple and different disasters that could hinder the development of resilient crisis management mechanisms and can lead the country to a complete state of paralysis.

#### ***Haitian earthquakes of 2010 and 2021***

Although the country is prone to different types of natural disasters, we must emphasize one of the most devastating events that had a heavy impact. In 2010, a catastrophic magnitude 7.0 Mw earthquake struck Haiti, approximately 25 kilometers west of the capital, Port-au-Prince. This natural disaster caused a huge death toll and number of injured people, and thousands of displaced people. The association of natural disasters with political crises may not be clear at first, but very quickly the two crises began to feed off each other. Another earthquake, in 2021 showed exactly that. How, for example, can the already existing popular anger with the government be reduced, when the latter is unable to properly manage crises that have happened again in the past. And how can humanitarian aid be delivered to the affected population when gangs block access to supply routes and loot food and medicine?

According to the 5<sup>th</sup> Report of the OCHA, in September 2021, thousands of people were left homeless, the displaced increased by the earthquake alone by 38,777 people according to the International Organization for Migration, gender-based violence increased significantly by 70%, 45% of the domestic population in Grand-Sud alone was at risk of extreme conditions

of hunger, about 212,000 people did not have immediate access to safe and potable water. Evacuation centres were overcrowded, with physical distancing being especially difficult, which combined with breakdowns in water supplies and sanitation systems, increased the risk of spreading COVID-19 and other communicable diseases around the population. Approximately 500,000 people needed immediate and long-term support to access water supply systems, posing enormous risks to the country's public health. All the above statistics show not only the vulnerability levels of the country but also the huge humanitarian crisis that arose and impacted the local population.<sup>2 3</sup>

### ***Foreign Interventions***

Undoubtedly, as much research supports, state failure could be significantly linked to the intervention of foreign powers in national matters. Haiti is one of the countries that are highly impacted by the consequences of colonialism. After its independence from France, in 1804, the country faced the intervention of the United States, mostly for strategic reasons. For example, in 1994, under the Clinton administration, a group of 20.000 soldiers tried to restore the Haitian president, after he was thrown out from a military coup. Even today, the foreign impact is high in the area leading to doubts about whether these crisis management practices are the most appropriate. There lies high skepticism around the newly formed international

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Haiti: Earthquake Situation Report No. 5*, 14 September 2021. Retrieved July 23, 2024, from <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/haiti/haiti-earthquake-situation-report-no-5-14-september-2021>.

<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Protracted Crises in Haiti Drive 60 Per Cent Increase in Displacement since March*, International Organization for Migration (2024). Retrieved August 10, 2024, from <https://www.iom.int/news/protracted-crises-haiti-drive-60-cent-increase-displacement-march>.

action group of the UN, raising questions about its efficiency, making it difficult to tell if this initiative is most likely to help or worsen the state of the country.<sup>4</sup>

Even though we cannot doubt the importance of the UN Peacekeeping Missions institution, we must point out the negative effects it had on the case of Haiti. This ‘foreign involvement’ has not been greatly accepted and has been highly criticized. Specifically, from 1993 to 2000, US support towards the UN missions was very important.<sup>5</sup> The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, known as MINUSTAH, from 2004 to 2017, did not accomplish its goal of enhancing safety in the country and allegations concerning the soldier’s behaviour against locals (sexual harassment, rape, violence, etc.) quickly emerged. A major controversy involved the cholera outbreak, which was attributed to sewage leakage from UN facilities, causing more than 9.300 deaths and 800.000 cases of infection, while its long-term consequences continue to affect the population today.

Such failures have prohibited countries, like Canada, from taking the initiative to send personnel for peacekeeping missions, until Kenya decided to take that role in 2024. The UN Security Council's approval of a peacekeeping force led by Kenya's Multinational Security Support (MSS) may resolve issues surrounding the US and UK's colonial past, but challenges such as language barriers may stand in the way of this venture, while there are significant concerns about the Kenyan police's record of human rights abuses.<sup>6</sup> And even if everything works properly, how will the population absorb the help offered, when a great part of it has expressed high disappointment concerning foreign interventions? Will these new measures be accepted and considered legitimate, or will they enhance the internal discontent and crisis state?

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<sup>4</sup> Osgood Brian, *What is the history of foreign interventions in Haiti?* Al Jazeera (2024). Retrieved July 13, 2024, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/14/what-is-the-history-of-foreign-interventions-in-haiti>.

<sup>5</sup> Osgood, *What is the history of foreign interventions in Haiti?*

<sup>6</sup> Princewill Nimi, Busari Stephanie, Suri Manveena, & Gretener Jessie, *Kenya police to take on Haiti criminal gangs amid criticism of their human rights record*. CNN (2023). Retrieved August 13, 2024, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/03/africa/kenya-multinational-force-haiti-intl/index.html>.

### ***Socioeconomic Development***

Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. Growth is hampered by numerous factors. The country is vulnerable to disasters of all types (geodynamic, biological, economic, humanitarian, etc.) resulting in the cessation or deterioration of development prospects, with the poorest households bearing most of the consequences. According to data from the World Bank and the Human Capital Index (2020), children's lack of access to fundamental services, such as quality education and health care, poses risks to the development of children, who cannot grow up to their full potential, to their productivity, with over 1/5 threatened by cognitive and physical limitations, while only 78% of 15-year-olds are expected to survive to age 60.<sup>7</sup>

The country's economy has faced significant problems from natural disasters and political instability. At its core, it depends on the agricultural sector, with approximately 50% of the workforce employed in the industry. However, challenges such as deforestation, land degradation, and the inability to adopt or develop new technologies are significant challenges for the industry.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Legal Institutions***

The human rights situation in Haiti has worsened in recent years and the country's legal system is lacking in many ways. It should be mentioned that the country is part of important international human rights treaties. However, the country's judicial system is significantly dysfunctional, with evidence of non-enforcement of laws and procedures, insufficient training

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<sup>7</sup> World Bank Group, *The World Bank In Haiti*. The World Bank (2024), Retrieved August 16, 2024, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview>.

<sup>8</sup> Berman Daphna, & Kuperberg Ivy, *In Haiti, Private Sector Links are Boosting Farmer Incomes*. World Bank Group (2024). Retrieved August 14, 2024, from <https://www.ifc.org/en/stories/2024/haiti-private-sector-boosting-farmer-incomes>.

of judicial professionals, bad prison conditions, corruption, etc., while the ongoing multiple crises do not offer development and improvement opportunities.

The 2010 earthquake provides an example case study of how natural disasters exacerbate the challenges faced by already dysfunctional state institutions. The judicial system was significantly strained due to the loss of a substantial number of its personnel and the widespread destruction of infrastructure, records and equipment. For instance, the disaster caused new civil law issues. Many individuals were left without identification documents and therefore faced difficulties accessing their money in bank accounts, or other issues concerning insurance, etc. Furthermore, post-earthquake reconstruction efforts were hampered by disputes over land ownership, further straining the system's capacity to address these emergent complexities and creating more chaos within the local population.<sup>9</sup>

### *Armed violence*

The country faces a severe problem with gun violence and a widespread influence of gangs that are concentrated in urban areas, like the capital, Port-au-Prince, where they have taken control over large parts of the territory. According to the OHCHR, at least 686 civilians were estimated to have been killed, 371 injured, and 379 kidnapped between January 1 and February 29, 2024, while approximately 695 gang members were killed or wounded, bringing the total number of victims to 2,131, more than 40% of the rate of the previous two months. There are articles criticizing these practices by attributing the blame to arms-producing countries. The country has no weapons production and therefore it is clear that the weapons used by the gangs are imported, mainly from other countries such as the US.<sup>10</sup> The question is

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<sup>9</sup> Crane Keith, Dobbins James, Miller Laurel E., Ries Charles P., Chivvis Christopher S., Haims Marla C., Overhaus Marco, Schwartz Heather Lee, & Wilke Elizabeth, "*Justice*". *Building a More Resilient Haitian State*. RAND Corporation (2010), p. 43–56, <https://doi.org/10.7249/mg1039srf-cc.11>.

<sup>10</sup> Kestler-D'Amours Jillian, "*A criminal economy*": *How US arms fuel deadly gang violence in Haiti*. Al Jazeera (2024), Retrieved August 8, 2024, from

whether arm restrictions on exports to Haiti are capable enough to stop this violence and if not, what other measures can be used to stop the arms trafficking that fuels the violence between gangs and toward civilians.

### ***Sexual harassment and violence***

The use of sexual violence tactics by gangs has intensified. Many incidents are recorded in which women and girls have been harassed, raped, or even killed, at any time of the day, going to school or work. However, such tactics are not recorded, as many victims do not report them, due to multiple factors (social stigma, intimidation, insufficient health system and psychosocial services and mistrust in the justice system). In particular, internally displaced women are more vulnerable to sexual violence, as they live in dangerous areas, which significantly increases the risk of trafficking of women and girls, with experts expressing the need for local authorities to implement all necessary measures for the participation of women in the peacebuilding process, with the main aim of creating institutions that prevent gender-based violence.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Migration and IDPs***

The above conditions have forced much of the population to choose migration to survive, with tens of thousands fleeing the country to escape growing poverty, corruption, and violence. The most popular destination is the United States, with other countries in South America, the Caribbean, and Europe following. According to data from the U.S. Customs and

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<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2024/3/25/a-criminal-economy-how-us-arms-fuel-deadly-gang-violence-in-haiti>.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee, *Women and girls bear the brunt of crisis ravaging Haiti*, say UN experts, 2024, Retrieved August 16, 2024, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/women-and-girls-bear-brunt-crisis-ravaging-haiti-say-un-experts>.

Border Protection, in 2023 authorities encountered 45,065 Single Adults, 30,655 FMUAs and 387 UC/Single Minors at the southwest border who are of Haitian descent.<sup>12</sup>

Gang violence has displaced an estimated 313,900 people. As of June 2024, an estimated 60% increase in population displacement since March is estimated, with about 580,000 people internally displaced, according to the IOM. It should not be overlooked that the communities hosting these populations are already vulnerable and have issues such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient medicines and medical services, etc., which add to the humanitarian crisis.<sup>13</sup>

However, the United States has received considerable criticism for the handling of the immigration issue. The UN agencies are trying to urge the government not to force the Haitians to return to their country, at the risk of losing their lives and their health. Moreover, some have also referred to racial causes behind the management of Haitian immigrants, accusing the government of racist practices. In most -if not all- cases, there are different reactions to immigrant inflows within host countries' societies. On a humanitarian level, given the domestic conditions and the inability of the state to protect these people from any hazard or disaster, the poor treatment they receive from society is reflected in various aspects of US politics and society. A very representative example of these racist mindsets towards these specific communities in the US is the Harris-Trump presidential debate of 2024, where Trump claimed that “Haitian migrants are stealing and eating pets in Springfield, Ohio”, a statement that caused a huge controversy while a great part of the right-wing supported this narrative.<sup>14</sup> This raises

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<sup>12</sup> Customs and Border Protection, *U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Nationwide Encounters* (2024), Retrieved August 18, 2024, from <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>.

<sup>13</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Protracted Crises in Haiti Drive 60 Per Cent Increase in Displacement since March*, IOM (2024), Retrieved August 10, 2024, from <https://www.iom.int/news/protracted-crises-haiti-drive-60-cent-increase-displacement-march>.

<sup>14</sup> Reinstein Julia, & Demissie Hannah, *Trump pushes false claim that Haitian migrants are stealing and eating pets*, ABC News (2024), Retrieved September 11, 2024, from <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-pushes-false-claim-haitian-migrants-stealing-eating/story?id=113570407>.

serious questions about the treatment of these people and the conditions under which they live, even if they manage to flee the country and save themselves and their families.

### ***Food Insecurity and Health***

According to IPC data, hunger levels in Haiti have reached approximately 5 million people (nearly 50% of the population).<sup>15</sup> Violence significantly hinders the action of humanitarian groups in the field, making the situation difficult, as humanitarian aid often fails to reach its target. Special emphasis is also placed on new mothers, infants and children, who are in an emergency state of malnutrition.<sup>16</sup>

Food security in times of crisis is a very crucial subject. Violence and insecurity have made it very difficult to secure food for the local population. Many times, in these cases the weaponization of hunger is observed, with the aim of controlling the population, as the supply roads and rural areas have come under the control of the gangs. For example, in November 2019, there was a shutdown of services such as schools, courts, businesses, public services, and services related to the financial sector, lasting two and a half months. This meant that many children whose meals came from school feeding programs were threatened and many families and individuals faced terrible living conditions. The food crisis is not only due to the actions of the gangs but has its roots in the political and economic crisis of the country. Furthermore, environmental reasons such as natural disasters (floods, droughts and earthquakes) have caused significant deforestation, contributing to this problem.<sup>17</sup> In numerous cases, ordinary people choose to survive by choosing illegal and criminal tactics, further enhancing the crisis.

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<sup>15</sup> World Food Program, *New IPC data confirms record levels of hunger in Haiti*, WFP (2024).

<sup>16</sup> Hammad Nour, & Birkbeck Tanya, *World Breastfeeding Week: In Haiti and Gaza, mothers and children in the crosshairs of malnutrition emergencies*. WFP (2024).

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group. (2024). *Explainer: 5 things to know about food security in Haiti in times of crisis*. UNSDG (2024), Retrieved August, 16, 2024, from <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/explainer-5-things-know-about-food-security-haiti-times-crisis>

## **Conclusion**

All the issues discussed above raise important questions for further investigation: what is the appropriate way to deal with crises in states that show evidence of vulnerability? When it comes to foreign intervention, what method is preferable? Full autonomy or a mixed approach considering the local factors? How can we prevent countries from being so dependent on foreign aid that they never develop resilience? All these questions are serious matters that could help us form better mechanisms.

These crises may concern geographically small areas, often far from the Western world. However, despite the differences in the characteristics of each case, we can form a list of states that comply with the rule and need to be addressed immediately. For example, Haiti may be very far from the Middle East and Europe, but some of the characteristics of the crisis mentioned above, typically conform to the crises observed in Gaza, Sudan, Afghanistan and in non-fragile states, such as Ukraine, especially when it comes to humanitarian crises. Therefore, how we approach these problems can also contribute to solving global issues. Whether natural or man-made disasters, basic human needs (e.g. WASH systems, food, shelter, etc.) and human rights must be ensured to the maximum extent possible. Disasters can happen at any time and every state must be prepared to handle the consequences, otherwise, a domino effect might occur, impacting other countries and creating hazards globally.

## **Recommendations**

Certainly, where more emphasis should be placed on researching these issues is what is the main goal of aid provided in times of crisis. Of course, in the immediate period after the occurrence of a disaster, the main objective is the immediate care of the affected population. However, in the long run, what do we want to achieve through the meddling of foreign actors in the internal affairs of a country? Do we want to create a country completely or significantly

dependent on foreign aid, or do we want to emphasize building resilience so that the country can stand on its own feet and deal with its issues independently? And how can the latter be achieved? If foreign organizations and personnel do not fully cooperate with the local population, how can the latter function autonomously? As we have seen, most cases of vulnerable countries show a significant presence of foreign powers and interference in internal issues.

If we want to find appropriate solutions to these problems, we must focus on the factors that cause state fragility against different types of crises. What are the specific characteristics we must investigate? In such a manner, we can reach long-term resilience and not short-term solutions to chronic problems. For example, as we saw above, poverty, political unrest and foreign intervention can cause fragile elements in the management mechanisms through the dissatisfaction of the population and the lack of legitimacy within the country.

Another important practice that must be implemented is the cooperation of foreign actors with the local ones. For example, when it comes to enhancing the domestic economy with the goal of sustainable functioning of the country, foreign aid should consider the local businesses and markets. Thus, humanitarian organizations that care for issues like nutrition, must try to buy resources from local businesses, acting more as an intermediary, and strengthening the country's domestic production and economy. Another example is cash-for-work practices in disaster situations. This is perhaps the most important element in the successful restoration of stability and peace after a period of crisis: how will the fragile country learn to function as an independent and self-sufficient entity? Listen to the local communities and pay attention to the solutions they prefer. As the famous quote says: “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime”, however always in accordance with the community needs.

To ensure that these policies are sustainable, we must not only encourage the participation of the locals in the mechanism development process but also make sure these mechanisms are designed within the scope of multi-hazard crisis management. Nowadays,

crises are complex and usually there is more than just one type of incident. For example, in Haiti, in 2021, the catastrophic earthquake was soon followed by a tropical storm and a flood. Such situations require strong mechanisms that can respond to multiple crises at the same time. That can be achieved by scenario planning, readiness drills, effective and flexible services, and generally, a whole process of preparedness building. We must remember that crises do not wait to happen at the right time and usually they surprise us.

In February 2024, the intensity of violence increased significantly. At this stage, the new United Nations mission must be closely monitored, and in any case, there must be a check on the proper functioning of the procedures and the omission of past mistakes. If the transitional government proceeds safely and justly, coupled with enhanced security by Kenya's UN-led bodies, Haiti can break the cycle of violence and begin building a stable state and securing a brighter future. We must remember that: behind every crisis lies the potential of opportunity.

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