

THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

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Making Sense of Haiti's State Fragility and Violence: Combining Structure and Contingency?

Andreas E. Feldmann

On 12 January 2010 an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale devastated Haiti, killing 158,000 people and displacing 1.3 million more.¹ The Haitian state was dealt a terrible blow as a significant number of state officers either died or were seriously injured; additionally, most of its infrastructural power (telecommunications, buildings, roads, bridges) was destroyed. The earthquake's devastating effects prompted fears, among Haitians and foreigners alike, that a massive wave of violence would descend over Haiti as criminals—urban gangs and escaped prisoners—took advantage of the anarchy. Yet the feared upsurge in violence did not materialize. Homicides, kidnappings, and crimes against property did not increase after the earthquake; only sexual violence saw a major rise, particularly in and around displaced persons camps.² In a rather perplexing development, the public's overall perception of security actually improved after the earthquake.³

As this phenomenon shows, the nature and characteristics of violence in Haiti remain puzzling. Despite rampant poverty, a history of acute political upheaval, ecological damage, and extensive organized crime activity, Haiti displays relatively moderate crime rates when compared to other Latin American and Caribbean countries.⁴

This chapter seeks to help decipher this puzzle by investigating the root causes of violence in Haiti, particularly since the end of the Cold War. In Haiti, different forms of violence coexist and reinforce each other. There is widespread state-orchestrated violence, notwithstanding the limited coercive capacity of the Haitian state.⁵ Beyond that, a wide array of actors, including agents with loose ties to the state and various nonstate actors, also engage in acts of violence.⁶ Homicides, gender violence, harsh prison conditions, and violent turf battles between criminal organizations are common.⁷ In recent years, kidnapping has become a major problem.⁸ Violence reigns unabated in Haiti because perpetrators enjoy virtually total impunity.⁹

Most of the studies in this volume lean toward arguing that the violence plaguing many Latin American states can be attributed to contingent rather than structural factors. The corollary to this proposition is that the region is not necessarily doomed—that violence can recede, be tamed, or even surmounted, and that there is, therefore, reasonable hope for the establishment of a socioeconomic and political context in Latin America that is hospitable to representative democracies with medium and high human development.¹⁰

Yet if there is one case that confirms the proposition that structural causes inform violence in Latin America, that case is Haiti. In other words, Haiti constitutes what Gerring calls a “crucial case”—that is, a case that confers validity on a given theory.¹¹ While acknowledging that structure plays a role in fueling violence in Haiti, this chapter argues that such a view is partial and incomplete. It posits, rather, that contemporary violence in Haiti results from a combination of structural and contingent factors. This argument is in line with authors who argue that unchangeable structures are very rare, and that the study of social phenomena—in this case violence—requires merging various interacting causal explanations that combine more rigid contextual conditions with contingent ones.¹²

Following Jack Levy, this chapter is presented as a hypothesis-generating case study.¹³ Through a careful examination of the Haitian case, I seek to improve our understanding of the conditions informing violence in the region by questioning the proposition that violence in Latin America and the Caribbean obeys invariant structural conditions.¹⁴ Drawing on Elster’s seminal work,¹⁵ the chapter seeks to disentangle the conditions

informing violence by tracing how the combination of particular historical conditions—structural and contingent—have interacted through particular mechanisms (Elster’s “causal chains”) to create a distinct outcome: violence. More specifically, it is maintained that from within a historical interpretation, violence in Haiti follows what Elster conceptualizes as a “general causal pattern.”¹⁶

In the Haitian case, this refers to the exclusion of the majority of the population by a small native elite that captured the state after the island gained its independence from France in 1804. Post-independence leaders could have transformed the violent, exclusive social order created by French colonialism; instead, they perpetuated many of the features of the old colonial system. From this perspective, the post-independence moment represents a “critical juncture”¹⁷ in the country’s history.¹⁸ The new rulers engaged in predatory behavior, encouraging the creation of a parasitic state devised to serve their narrow political and economic interests rather than creating the basis for a modern state that would protect the wider population and address its urgent social and economic needs. Relying on a combination of coercion, co-optation, and clientelism, the rulers of independent Haiti inhibited the development of civil society, political parties, and, more broadly, opposing views of any kind. They thus deliberately curbed the development of formal institutions that could promote economic development and social well-being, regulate social relations, and arbitrate conflict through a fair, evenhanded process. Against this backdrop, structural conditions fostering violence flourished. These endogenous conditions, it is also maintained, were reinforced by the intervention of external powers that, in their keenness to retain influence in the country, collaborated with domestic ruling elites.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the principal agent of violence in Haiti was the state; with the demise of the Duvalier regime in the mid-1980s, patterns of violence became more complex and heterogeneous, much as the actors unleashing it. Structural conditions undoubtedly play a role in explaining changes in the patterns of violence, but the actual configuration derives from other, more contingent pressures associated with the process of globalization, including democratization and the development of a global organized crime industry.

In short, rather than an “either/or” explanation, it is argued that violence results from a combination of structural and contingent factors of an environmental, cognitive, and relational nature. Violence in Haiti can be explained against the backdrop of a state that has been ill-prepared to withstand the lethal combination of growing social pressure from a marginalized population and the weakening of state structures due to a complex pattern of globalization that propped up nonstate armed parties and led to the atomization and/or privatization of violence. The interplay between these conditions has set the stage for a qualitative change in the nature of violence, as witnessed in the mutation of traditional armed groups and the emergence of new, more lethal ones (paramilitaries, drug cartels, and transnational youth gangs) whose actions reinforce and recreate violence in ways not seen before in Haiti. A particularly salient factor is the emergence of powerful drug syndicates capable of openly challenging the state by combating and/or infiltrating its institutions (political parties, police, and judiciary) and fomenting a toxic culture of violence.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The first section briefly describes contemporary patterns of violence in Haiti. It then defines crucial terms before presenting evidence to support the proposition that structural and contingent factors have interacted through particular mechanisms to produce the patterns of violence that currently in Haiti. In the concluding section, the findings are discussed in the broader context of contemporary violence in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Patterns of Violence in Haiti

Haiti constitutes a fascinating case for the study of violence in Latin America, for several reasons. First, as indicated above, the nature, sources, and characteristics of violence are multidimensional, complex, and widespread.¹⁹ Second, violence has been long lasting and relentless, haunting the country since its independence. Haiti has oscillated between periods of relative calm (1818-43, 1915-34) and acute violence, such as the long reign of the Duvaliers (1957-86), the regime of Generals Raoul Cedras and Michel François (1991-4), and part of Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s second term (2003-4).²⁰ Third, levels of destitution, economic underdevelopment, and disenfranchisement make the country’s sociopolitical situation desperate,

something that has been exacerbated by severe ecological damage.²¹ And fourth, the state's capture by unfit, venal rulers has crippled the development of formally institutionalized ways of dealing with social tensions and grievances.²²

Data on violence in Haiti is sketchy.²³ In 2010, its homicide rate was 6.9 per 100,000 inhabitants, lower than that of other countries in the region, including Costa Rica (11.3), Ecuador (18), Brazil (22), Puerto Rico (26.2), and Trinidad and Tobago (35), and nowhere near Guatemala (42), Jamaica (52), El Salvador (66), or Honduras (82).²⁴ Data on kidnappings and sexual violence, though also not entirely reliable, shows a rather acute pattern.²⁵ While there are no statistics on mob violence, its brutal outcomes—at times orchestrated by political parties and strongpersons, at times spontaneous—is a common feature of the political landscape.²⁶ Violent riots are also common: in 2008, they paralyzed the country as people furiously protested soaring food and fuel prices in several cities. And yet it is very interesting to note that opinion polls show that the Haitian population's distrust of the state is very high, while the perception of insecurity is not.²⁷

Organized entities that resort to violence to attain their objectives may be related to the state apparatus or linked to economic interests, organized crime, opposition groups, or to a combination thereof. Human rights organizations indicate that politically motivated killings, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, the murder of civilians, rape, beatings, threats, and extortion are regularly perpetrated by agents of the state and nonstate armed groups that operate with virtual impunity.²⁸ Journalists, human rights activists, aid workers, and even UN troops have been victims of the violence that reigns unabated in some pockets of the country. A substantive share of this violence stems from the unlawful actions of organized crime.²⁹ These syndicates target opposing groups and civilians who resist them. Civilians also often die in the crossfire as groups wage violent turf battles. Some of these groups have incorporated kidnapping into their repertoire of felonies.³⁰

Since the end of the Cold War, Haiti has witnessed several major, and at times violent, political crises, and these have severely undermined security in the country. In 1990, the country elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former Roman Catholic priest sympathetic to liberation theology. Aristide, who won with a wide margin of the vote (67 percent), became the

first democratically elected president in the history of Haiti, and the only leader to rise to power without being a member of the country's economic and political elite. A few months after being sworn in to power, however, a military coup deposed him, pushing Haiti back into the dark days of military rule and prompting a major human rights crisis.³¹ A puppet civilian regime controlled by a faction of the military led by General Raoul Cedras and supported by the neo-Duvaliérist militia (Le Front pour l'Avancement et le Progrès d'Haiti) took control of the country. To maintain its grip on power, it combined co-optation with the widespread use of terror. Cedras ruled for almost four years, reinstating kleptocratic practices, before being deposed by an international coalition led by the United States, which helped secure the return of President Aristide to finish his mandate.³²

In 1995, Haitians overwhelmingly voted for René Préval (88 percent), Aristide's political protégé. During Préval's administration (1995–2000), Aristide broke ranks with his old party and created a new political movement, Fanmi Lavalas. In 2000 Aristide won the presidential elections again, although this time with a smaller margin. Now distanced from his foreign allies (France and the United States), and particularly from former local political allies, who accused him of irregularities, Aristide began his administration isolated and weak. Acrimony and mistrust prompted the beginning of a gradual but severe process of political polarization, which erupted violently in February 2004. That month, rebels from the Front Révolutionnaire pour l'Avancement et le Progrès Haïtien (FRAPH) initiated a military offensive from the northern city of Gonaïves that ended deposing the sitting government. As the FRAPH asserted control over the capital, Aristide was forced (again) to flee the country.³³

The configuration of this short-lived internal armed conflict reflects the hybridity and complexity of violence in Haiti. Aristide's government confronted the FRAPH through the newly created Haitian National Police, which replaced the army Aristide disbanded during his first term.³⁴ On the government's side, other major players included pro-Aristide militias loosely associated with the former president through the Famni Lavalas, the *Chimères*. These parties were concentrated in areas where Aristide enjoyed wide popularity, such as Bel Air and Cité Soleil—two vast, marginal neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince. There is credible evidence that

government forces and their allies committed serious crimes against the civilian population during the short-lived conflict.³⁵

Opposition to Aristide's government, in turn, included a varied lot. Several paramilitary groups with ties to Haiti's economic elite and the dissolved army fought against Aristide. Several former members of the old security apparatus were also relevant players in the conflict. Groups of this nature included the Front de Reconstruction Nationale, which was controlled by the gangster Buteur Metayer and included former operatives of the infamous Cannibal Army; the Armée du Nord, led by Guy Phillippe; former paramilitary operatives under the control of Louis-Jodel Chamblain, the right hand of Phillippe's insurgent movement; paramilitary groups based in the country's Central Plateau and led by Remissanthe Ravix; the Front de Resistance du Sud; several armed organizations that operated in the countryside under the orders of former *chefs de section*, who ruled rural areas during the military regime; and, finally, multiple private militias organized under the order of powerful landowners who reclaimed by force land lost during the Aristide administration's land reform program. There is credible evidence that insurgent groups also perpetrated serious human rights violations, including summary executions and killings in pro-Aristide strongholds.³⁶

In short, Haiti displays a level of violence that, while acute, is less than that of many other Latin American countries. Haiti, however, experienced a period of short-lived yet fierce internal armed conflict during which the country experienced an almost total breakdown of the state's monopoly on violence.³⁷ Fighting reached low urban warfare status as parties indiscriminately utilized assault rifles with massive firepower in densely populated civilian areas.³⁸ To address violence and a looming humanitarian calamity, in April 2004 the UN Security Council through resolution 1542 dispatched the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). MINUSTAH's mandate included assisting and protecting civilians; disarming armed parties; pacifying the country; helping the transitional government by strengthening and reforming institutions (e.g., the police, judiciary, and prison system) and buttressing the rule of law; endorsing the political process and organizing and monitoring free elections; and promoting human rights.³⁹ The presence of an internationally mandated peace enforcement mission such as MINUSTAH, along with several

international humanitarian and development organizations working in situ, revealed the existence of a political and humanitarian crisis of vast proportions.⁴⁰

MINUSTAH's presence helped to reduce levels of violence, though insecurity remains widespread across Haiti.⁴¹ The country saw an important improvement in security conditions following the arrival of MINUSTAH in 2004 (the force stayed until 2017). The presence of UN peacekeepers helped to stabilize the country by deterring potential attacks by renegade armed parties, thus facilitating the transfer of power from the administration of President René Préval to that of Michele Martelly (2011-16).

Following the 2010 earthquake, the problem of how to avoid a major breakdown of law and order asserted itself with great force. Security in several of the displaced persons camps created multiple challenges, the most acute of all concerning gender violence: women and young girls were systematically beaten and raped by armed men, generally at night.⁴² After the most acute phase of the humanitarian crisis faded, security returned to ex ante conditions characterized by state-orchestrated violence coupled with the activities of gangs and organized criminal groups and severe levels of nonlethal violence such as robberies, assaults, and riots.⁴³ General conditions of impunity continue to entrench societal violence, posing an enormous challenge to the new administration of President Jovenel Moïse (elected in 2017).⁴⁴

The Root Sources of Violence in Haiti

As previously mentioned, in seeking to explain the sources of violence in Haiti this chapter asks two questions: 1) Are the root causes of violence structural, contingent, or a combination thereof? And 2) What accounts for the change in the configuration of violence from one prominently orchestrated by the state to one that is much more diffuse and complex? Mindful of the conceptual challenges posed by the investigation of violence,⁴⁵ I opt for a relatively broad definition that captures the particularities of this phenomenon in Haiti, a microcosm where multifarious expressions of violence arise simultaneously. In trying to strike a balance between excessively broad and too-narrow conceptualizations, for the purposes of this

study, following Kalyvas, violence is restricted to its physical dimension. As such, it is defined as the premeditated victimization of people with the intent of killing or harming them for political or criminal motives.⁴⁶ But this definition differs from Kalyvas's in that it includes both situations of peace and internal armed conflict.⁴⁷ Nor do I distinguish rural from urban violence because, again, although they differ in their manifestations, they share most of the same roots. As far as the perpetrators are concerned, I include the state, actors with links to but not part of the state (i.e., death squads and paramilitaries), and nonstate armed actors.

I also purposefully include violence with political as well as criminal intent because the literature on violence and armed conflict has convincingly shown that drawing a clear line between these types of violence is very difficult.⁴⁸ Indeed, distinguishing between political violence and (nonpolitical) criminal behavior is particularly difficult in the Haitian case because heterogeneous forms of political violence (extrajudicial executions, targeted assassinations, torture, death threats, kidnappings, and forced disappearances) coexist with several manifestations of economically and sexually motivated crimes such as extortion, burglaries, robberies, theft, and rape, crimes that oftentimes display very high levels of violence.⁴⁹

By focusing on the structural causes of violence, this chapter refers to long-lasting, consolidated social, historical, demographic, economic, and ecological conditions that shape the political landscape—including its institutions—and tend to endure over time. These include the state, whether strong or weak, the general distribution of wealth, access to public goods, and patterns of discrimination.⁵⁰ The conceptualization of contingency is intricate and its attributes often diffuse. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is little consensus on what the term really means beyond colloquial interpretations.⁵¹ In discussing this matter, Schedler manifests that common interpretations of contingency view it as “accidental events that are under-determinate and unpredictable, even accidental events (causes) that have the potential of having big consequences.”⁵² In developing a more refined conceptualization of the meaning of contingency, Schedler posits that the concept stands on three abstract pillars: indeterminacy (i.e., it could be different), conditionality (it depends), and uncertainty (it is impossible to know).⁵³ Pettit, by contrast, argues that contingency is

commonly understood as issues that are not strictly necessary for a given outcome; that is to say, they may happen in the actual world but do not figure in all conceivable worlds.⁵⁴

This chapter also draws on Brown's useful typology regarding the sources of armed conflict. Brown distinguishes four clusters of factors (structural, economic, political, and cultural) that may prompt armed conflict, asserting that diverse permutations of all or some of them may prompt internal armed conflict. An important aspect of Brown's argument is that different permutations of these four clusters have to interact with some catalysts (i.e., leaders or opportunistic neighbors) to spark internal armed conflict.⁵⁵ This chapter complements Brown's categories with Tilly's work on the politics of collective violence, which discusses violence broadly by looking at the conditions informing it, not solely its most extreme manifestation as measured by the severity and intensity of armed conflict and genocide. Tilly develops several insightful categories of violence, including violent rituals, broken negotiations, coordinated destruction, scattered attacks, individual aggression, brawls, and opportunism.⁵⁶

In sum, this chapter proposes to look at the root causes of violence following a broad conceptualization that includes both political violence and the more restricted category of internal armed conflict.

Structural Conditions

In examining the structural conditions informing violence in Haiti, this chapter looks at three main issues: the nature of the state, political conditions, and economic development. This approach follows Elster's advice to dig into a subject's history as if it were a black box.⁵⁷ A sound way to start examining the structural conditions informing violence in Haiti is by considering the development of its state. This provides information on the other key variables and mechanisms informing violence.

The Nature of the Haitian State

The literature on weak states posits that when (for a variety of reasons) states fail to fulfill their basic functions, conditions become ripe for social unrest, violence, and internal armed conflict.⁵⁸ The literature identifies two main functions states need to fulfill to curb violence. First, relying on

Weber's classical conception, it underlines that a state needs to rule over a specific territory and its people, effectively holding a monopoly on the means of coercion.⁵⁹ IR scholars also assert that states ought to be recognized by the members of the international society of states.⁶⁰ This classic conceptualization has been complemented with a more modern view that incorporates the notion that states ought to enable the conditions for the development of social life.⁶¹ Rotberg claims that states ought to provide "political goods," including the development of the means to adjudicate disputes, basic infrastructure, and a functional economy that, regardless of its ideological stance, creates an environment that is conducive to the emergence of economic activity (banking system, currency, regulation). Following Weber, a modicum of legitimacy also represents an important element of state strength.⁶²

According to this line of reasoning, states led by unprincipled rulers, characterized by rudimentary institutions, and unable to provide basic public goods foster the conditions for violence. The most critical factor explaining the emergence of violence is a state's inability to provide security and uphold the rule of law. This process may unleash a vicious cycle of insecurity by pushing communities to the brink, convincing them that the only option of guaranteeing their survival is the provision of their own security. This may generate what IR scholars characterize as "the security dilemma." This insight, originally used to depict an international order where no overarching authority exists among nations,⁶³ has also been used to describe domestic scenarios fraught with armed conflict in which the actions a community takes to increase its security (e.g., arming the population) are perceived as hostile by rival communities, thus sparking a chain reaction that ends up making everyone more insecure.⁶⁴ This line of argument has mostly been applied to explain the outbreak of ethnic conflict, but seems equally useful for explaining other cases of violence.⁶⁵

Haiti clearly fits into this pattern. Its weak state is unable to control the multiple armed factions—political and criminal—that exercise influence and at times control sections of its territory. Widespread violence and criminality are compounded by an inefficient judicial system characterized by high levels of corruption, incompetence, and dehumanization.⁶⁶ According to Jean-Germain Gros, who has developed a very useful typology on state strength, Haiti represents a "counterinsurgency free anemic

state.⁶⁷ Anemic states are able to partially fulfill their basic functions only in main urban areas. Anemic states result when dysfunctional development hamstrings the state's capacity to create adequate mechanisms and institutions to meet the challenges posed by modern societies.⁶⁸

Why does Haiti have an anemic state? Most authors, both Haitian and foreign, point to the path taken by the country after the triumph of the 1791-1804 slave insurrection led by Toussaint L'Ouverture and his lieutenant, Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The defeat of Napoleonic France led to Haitian independence in 1804, making it the first postcolonial state in Latin America and the world's first modern independent black republic.⁶⁹

The enormous expectations brought by independence were shattered as divisions in the victorious emancipation movement allowed a small elite to take power. In what became a common development among decolonization movements worldwide,⁷⁰ a native elite emerged from among those who had formerly occupied important positions during French rule. As large sugar estates collapsed as slaves refused to go back to their former masters, Haiti's new rulers had to develop a new mode of economic production. Unlike other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, where oligarchy was associated with land tenure, in Haiti the elite engineered a rentier state based on an export-import-oriented economy. Most former slaves settled unclaimed land and/or areas abandoned by former landowners in the island's hinterland. There they created a collective system of production known as *corvéé* and lived only at the subsistence level. A lack of organization and isolation kept liberated slaves disempowered. This, in turn, facilitated the new ruling elite's construction of mechanisms of economic control (in particular, a biased tax system) over the custom-houses and urban markets where peasants had to sell their produce. This power was maintained and reinforced through force and intimidation.⁷¹

Soon after independence, the country's new rulers organized a national army and police force. It is no exaggeration to say that the national army became the most relevant institution in the country, operating as the highest arbiter of political controversy. Historically, the overwhelming majority of Haitian rulers have belonged to the ranks of the military. Yet the absence of any formal mechanisms for resolving disputes predisposed the country to continuous instability as factions within the elite jockeyed for political power by controlling the armed forces. Adams and Malone

indicate that in its more than 200 years as an independent state, Haiti has had 22 constitutions and 42 heads of state, of which 29 were assassinated or overthrown, while 9 proclaimed themselves rulers for life.⁷²

Nicholls explains that from independence until the 1915 US occupation, Haitian heads of state rose to power thanks to the power they garnered as military leaders. A few times, leaders were chosen as a compromise because no single military faction was able to impose its terms.⁷³ The story did not change after the United States withdrew from the island in 1934. On the contrary, the United States reinforced centralism and state-orchestrated violence. US troops and advisors collaborated in the creation of a new and more disciplined national army as well as rural police, the section chiefs (*chefs de section*), who became de facto rulers with virtually total autonomy from the central state. These section chiefs ruthlessly maintained order in the areas under their jurisdiction.⁷⁴

Emancipation, it is argued, represents a critical juncture in Haiti's development, one that created the structural conditions, including the characteristics of the state and the political and socioeconomic system, that rendered the country prone to violence. This manifested itself in the creation of an illiberal political system with marked authoritarian tendencies and prone to resort to violence in order to resolve political disputes. Critical junctures are times of pivotal transformations derived from major crises or cleavages that arise from preexisting conditions and which create distinct outcomes or important legacies. It is relevant to underscore that this concept is not conceived as a particularistic historical episode, but rather as an event with cross-case significance. According to this line of reasoning, emancipation from colonial rule in Latin America (and elsewhere) opened the way for huge transformations of the political, social, and economic systems of the newborn countries.⁷⁵

In Haiti, rather than correcting the injustices and biases of colonial rule, the state's capture by a greedy elite created the conditions for the development of an anemic state. Most slaves who had won their right to live as equal members of a social community were brought back to the *ex-ante* status characterized by submission to a small urban minority. The entire nation thus became hostage to the will of a capricious sector associated with economic power holders that had created institutions to perpetuate their grip on power and accrue the wealth and privileges associated with

it.⁷⁶ To follow Tilly's approach, the mechanism informing violence in Haiti is relational because marginalization shaped connections among social units.⁷⁷ That is to say, the policies implemented by native leaders conspired against the development of a fair, inclusive political system based on institutions designed for the common good to create a state vulnerable to capture by leaders engaging in predatory practices.⁷⁸ The almost complete lack of constraints—save for intra-elite fighting—that Haiti's political system imposed on its rulers permitted predatory governance,⁷⁹ the most serious form of which was rent-seeking. Some authors argue that it is no exaggeration to claim that the rural hinterland became a colony of urban elites.⁸⁰

Political Conditions

Structural explanations of violence in Haiti ought to take political factors into account. The literature underscores the salience of discriminatory practices that become institutionalized through the political system. This discrimination, generally conceptualized and justified on ideological, ethnic, national, or religious grounds, materializes in restrictions on electoral participation and inadequate representation in crucial institutions of the state. When sectors of the population are purposefully and blatantly excluded, they may resort to violence to redress the situation and create a different social order. Classic studies addressing this issue include those by Huntington, who emphasizes the disconnection between societal conditions and institutions, and Gurr, who develops the theory of relative deprivation following a period of rising expectations.⁸¹ Another group of studies trace the political sources of violence to the role of power and the nature of leadership, emphasizing the existence of ambitious, opportunistic leaders or groups who through exclusion and manipulation seize power and cling to it.⁸² Similarly, some studies point to intergroup rivalries based on incompatible goals, recalcitrance, and the lack of an accommodative spirit as political sources informing armed conflict.⁸³

Many of the political elements identified by the literature as potential causes of conflict and violence are present in Haiti. The country developed insidious forms of discrimination that were institutionalized through its political system. Discrimination was conceptualized and justified on

racial and cultural grounds, curbing representation of the peasantry and pauperized urban sectors in crucial institutions of the state. Racial distinctions were used to marginalize the majority of the population and prevent upward mobility. Skin color has also been used as a subtle mechanism of discrimination, creating an ominous type of caste system. At the expense of the vast majority of the population, Mulattos, a small but economically powerful minority, managed to attain economic supremacy and to share political power with a small number of urban blacks. This small, emerging black middle class rose to places of privilege in the twentieth century through marriage and economic success. Institutions such as the national army recruited peasants but curbed their professional development by preventing their advance through the ranks based on class and origin. Religion, too, was used as a tool of discrimination. The small ruling elite professed Catholicism and displayed a contemptuous attitude against voodoo, an “eclectic blend of Dahomian religions and Catholicism” and the religion practiced by the majority of the population.⁸⁴ Discrimination was further exacerbated by the use of language. The Haitian state introduced French as the official language. French was used in courts, universities, the bureaucracy, and government. As a way to keep peasants disempowered, the state did not extend the teaching of this language to the rural areas. This totally marginalized the vast majority of the population. Jean-Bertrand Aristide became the first president who spoke Creole as his mother tongue. Clientelistic arrangements devised to control dissatisfaction among the population were also widely used as tools of political control.⁸⁵

Economic Development

Economic explanations of violence also apply to the Haitian case. Studies linking violence to economic factors have underscored the destabilizing effects of uneven wealth distribution and poor economic performance (i.e., endemic unemployment, stagnation, and the erosion of people’s purchasing power). This literature also underlines how discriminatory economic practices denying parts of the population access to crucial resources and services provided by the state may increase the likelihood of violence.⁸⁶ A related strand in the literature identifies environmental factors as possible sources of conflict. These authors argue that access to and capture of

scarce resources such as land and water are potential sources of conflict.⁸⁷ Other studies have underscored the economic functions of violence—that is, the utility that parties gain from a lawless scenario, while not necessarily a root cause of violence, is nevertheless a factor that explains why violence persists over time.⁸⁸

For most of Haiti's national history, the vast majority of the population has endured economic misery as a result of exclusion and marginalization. Most of the rural population has lived at a subsistence level, lacking access to indispensable social services while enduring the heavy taxation of their meager resources. Basic infrastructure, including roads, sewage systems, power sources, schooling, health care, postal services, and transportation, among many others, were not provided, and this has seriously curbed the ability of the population to live a dignified existence. The rentier state economy offered very limited formal work opportunities for most of the population.⁸⁹

The problems described above have created a dire situation in Haiti. Today, the majority of Haitians struggle to get by, deprived as they are of work and access to basic social services such as housing, health, education, drinking water, and public transportation.⁹⁰ If these conditions were not enough, natural disasters with devastating consequences, such as hurricanes, floods, and droughts, strike the country on a regular basis, further deepening the predicament of its population.⁹¹

Economic and diplomatic isolation caused by foreign powers, in particular France and the United States, reinforced Haiti's skewed, problematic socioeconomic development.⁹² Aggravated by the loss of its colony, France demanded considerable economic compensation. Meanwhile, fearful of the Haitian precedent, the powerful pre-Civil War pro-slavery caucus successfully pressured the US government to diplomatically and economically isolate the embryonic state. These actions represented a heavy burden for Haiti, accentuating a perception of encirclement and further constraining its political options. Foreign pressure reinforced a perverse cycle whereby the elite felt isolated and attacked and thus resorted to every imaginable policy to secure its survival, even if that meant scarifying the rural population.⁹³

The result of this combination of bad governance, economic mismanagement, elite abuse, and external pressures is breathtaking. Haiti

registers the lowest human development in the Western Hemisphere. The country ranks 158 out of 187 countries per the Human Development Index, with indices such as life expectancy (61.2 years) and per capita income (US\$ 1,102) among the lowest in the world.⁹⁴ The formal economy remains marginal and most of the population works in the informal sector. Incapable of collecting taxes, the state is unable to extend the most basic rights to the population. The country also suffers from severe ecological damage as a consequence of environmental degradation and resource shortages associated with population growth and unsustainable consumption patterns.⁹⁵

Not surprisingly, emigration has become a major feature of Haiti's modern history. Up to a million Haitians live in the Dominican Republic, and there are sizable communities of Haitians in French Canada (Quebec), the United States (mostly in Florida), France, and other nations in Latin America. While most are considered economic migrants, repression and human rights abuses have created important flows of forced migrants.⁹⁶

The New Shape of Violence in Haiti: Globalization and Contingency

The historical conditions informing violence in Haiti can be traced to several structural factors identified in the literature. The current patterns of violence in Haiti, however, are characterized by a different, much more complex configuration. Violence in Haiti has evolved in the context of a weak state, with limited legitimacy, incapable of satisfactorily fulfilling basic functions.⁹⁷ As in other Latin American states, a wide variety of violent actors have emerged in Haiti.⁹⁸ These include the military, the intelligence services, the police, agents that rely on "extralegal violence" to buttress the political status quo such as paramilitary forces or militias, guerrilla groups, and other anti-systemic forces, uncivil radicalized movements, and an archipelago of criminal organizations.⁹⁹

As indicated above, during the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, barring sporadic rebellions, mob violence, and factional fighting among the armed forces, the principal agent of violence in Haiti was the state. A lack of institutions to constrain the behavior of leaders who rose to power and used it to remain there played a pivotal role in the origin and nature of violence. Terror under Duvalier was only the most extreme

manifestation of an enduring tale of violence discharged by the state against a disenfranchised, disempowered population.¹⁰⁰ Since the late 1980s, however, a steady, if gradual, proliferation of newer violent actors has changed the configuration of violence in the country.

This chapter posits that current patterns of violence arise from a combination of structural conditions discussed earlier with some more contingent elements that have acted as catalysts or mechanisms for generating violence. Structural conditions do not in and of themselves seem able to provide a full, convincing account for the changes in the nature of violence experienced in Haiti over the last two decades. The explanation, therefore, needs to be sharpened by looking into other contingent factors that act as intervening mechanisms to account for the transformation of violence. These contingent elements, it is claimed, derive from or are associated with the process of globalization.¹⁰¹ They include 1) the transition to democratic processes and 2) the flourishing of global illegal industries helping to propagate organized crime.

The contingent factors just described are inextricably connected to the process of globalization. Globalization has had a big impact in the spread of liberal representative democracy as a political regime type.¹⁰² Concerning the relation between violence and transitions to democracy, the literature approaches the matter from the viewpoint of democracies emerging from situations of armed conflict. These authors argue that states undergoing a process of democratization following an internal armed conflict (e.g., Sierra Leone, El Salvador, Afghanistan) normally endure difficult, destabilizing conditions that make them prone to violence.¹⁰³

Many factors explain this development. First, weakened institutions such as the police and the judiciary may face growing difficulties enforcing the rule of law in a new democratic setting. Second, if what prompted the conflict in the first place was not resolved at the outcome of the conflict, and *ex-ante* conditions persist, aggravated parties may reengage in violence. Third, peaceful ways to resolve disputes and grievances, and the development of the capacity to undertake lawful economic activities, take time to become socialized. Therefore, unless conditions on the ground change dramatically, groups that participated in armed conflict often-times relapse into violence because they have a hard time adjusting to new conditions. Fourth, incentives to engage in illicit activities for economic

gain persist in a situation of weak institutionalization, such as those that characterize postconflict transitions.¹⁰⁴ Lastly, studies find that previous patterns of armed conflict and violence normally foment violent practices that may lead to a relapse into war.¹⁰⁵

Globalization has undoubtedly revolutionized many other aspects of life, and it should therefore come as no surprise that it has influenced patterns of violence and armed conflict around the world.¹⁰⁶ However, the complex relationship between globalization, violence, and armed conflict is not a straightforward one. Within the scholarly literature addressing this matter there is wide disagreement. On the one hand, neoliberals claim that the economic interdependence brought about by globalization favors prosperity and democracy—and therefore peaceful conditions—both in the domestic and global realms. They make this argument by using the analogy of liberal interpretations about international peace.¹⁰⁷ Marxists, structuralists, and dependency theorists, on the other hand, argue that open economies tend to increase the likelihood of conflict by exacerbating economic inequality, poverty, and injustice.¹⁰⁸ For them, the economic changes brought about by globalization have expanded social marginalization and alienated large swathes of society. The paradox is that although these sectors are passed over by the economic miracles of globalization, they remain largely exposed to them through mass media. Hegre, Gissinger, and Gleditsch review the merits of these positions, observing more empirical evidence supporting the liberal position, although they recognize that their findings are not conclusive.¹⁰⁹

Although it is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter to settle the dispute between those who see globalization as a driver of violence and those rejecting this proposition, it is at least possible to list some influencing factors that seem clearly present in the Haitian case. First, changes in manufacturing, communication, and transportation derived from technological advances have led to new modes of economic interaction characterized by flexibility, outsourcing, and “just in time” production. This has prompted a major revolution in several key industries, including the arms industry. Held and McGrew argue that globalization has indeed brought about the transformation of warfare as “globalization, commercialization and criminalization” converged.¹¹⁰ One aspect of this transformation concerns the privatization of the agents of violence, including mercenaries,

pirates, and private security companies. Keohane refers to these actors as agents of informal organized violence.¹¹¹ The emergence of organized crime syndicates with transnational operations is particularly relevant. These groups are defined as organizations that engage in illegal activities for economic profit within more than two countries simultaneously.¹¹² Organized crime can be distinguished from other, more informal criminal organizations by the continuity, specialization, and sophistication of its activities, as well as by its corrupting power and capability to inflict violence. According to Lee, organized crime is an archipelago composed of organizations with different hierarchical and decentralized forms engaging in illegal activities, including prostitution, extortion, money laundering, kidnapping, slavery, piracy, and drug, arms, organ, and human trafficking. The emergence of these types of organizations constitutes a worldwide trend. By exploiting the voids left by weak states, these actors' lucrative activities normally worsen and prolong violence and armed conflict.¹¹³

Further, deregulation derived from a globalized economy has meant the near loss of control over the production and commercialization of arms, over which the state used to maintain a monopoly. This has permitted private agents to acquire an important share of the industry. The result has been a qualitative change in the arms industry, particularly a colossal growth in the commercialization of small arms.¹¹⁴ The literature has examined the link between this development and patterns of armed conflict, establishing how the diffusion of technologically sophisticated small weaponry with enormous fire power (for example, rocket-propelled grenades and various models of assault rifle) has fed conflicts around the world, with particularly deleterious impacts of the well-being of civilians.¹¹⁵

With regards to the relationship between the aforementioned aspects of globalization and violence in Haiti, the links seem clear. Democratization in Haiti, while certainly welcomed, has spawned a number of problems, some of which are related to violence. The downfall of the Duvalier regime led to an anarchic era (there were five governments in four years until the election of Aristide in 1990) characterized by a resurgent army attempting to reassert its power. This period coincided with the end of the Cold War, something that decreased Haiti's strategic value, prompting a concomitant decline of US interest in the country. This would later change,

however, as the chaos following the ousting of Aristide prompted a massive wave of Haitian asylum seekers to arrive on the shores of Florida.¹¹⁶

After Aristide assumed power, his government clashed violently with the old power holders supported by the Haitian army, which was intent on flexing its muscles. Most authors point out that the ambitious reformist agenda pushed by Aristide was perceived as a threat to the traditional economic and political elite. Cedras's violent coup was masterminded to derail the newly elected leader's political project without foreseeing that Aristide's many supporters were committed to violently resisting the coup. This resistance came about within the context of a debilitated state that, since Duvalier's departure in 1986, had lost its ability to monopolize (at least partially) the means of coercion. This created a window of opportunity for diverse forces to strengthen their ability to resist, both politically and militarily. At the same time, purged members of the former security apparatus were either recruited by Aristide, provincial *caudillos*, or simply turned to crime in order to make ends meet. Given their training, many soon mutated into structured armed militias that engaged in illegal enterprises. Corruption among the security forces and the disbanding of paramilitary forces that formerly supported the Duvalier regime prompted the dissemination of weapons through an incipient black market. In short, democratization in a highly deinstitutionalized context created political frictions that favored violence.¹¹⁷

This dynamic coincided with a fortuitous and quite unexpected development that played a significant role in shaping the contours of violence in Haiti: the advent of Colombian drug cartels during the early 1990s. As American authorities successfully shut down the smuggling of cocaine via Florida, the highly adaptable Colombian cartels moved to the Caribbean for the transshipment of drugs. Haiti—a transitional weak state characterized by endemic corruption and home to scores of unemployed men with military training—became an ideal hub.¹¹⁸ In 2007, an estimated 10 percent of all cocaine destined for the United States passed through Haiti.¹¹⁹

The impact of this highly contingent event has been crucial for the development and configuration of violence in the country. The Haitian market has become awash with drug money. This money exacerbated corruption by financing payments to bureaucrats, judges, the police, and politicians. Haiti has the highest level of perceived corruption in the

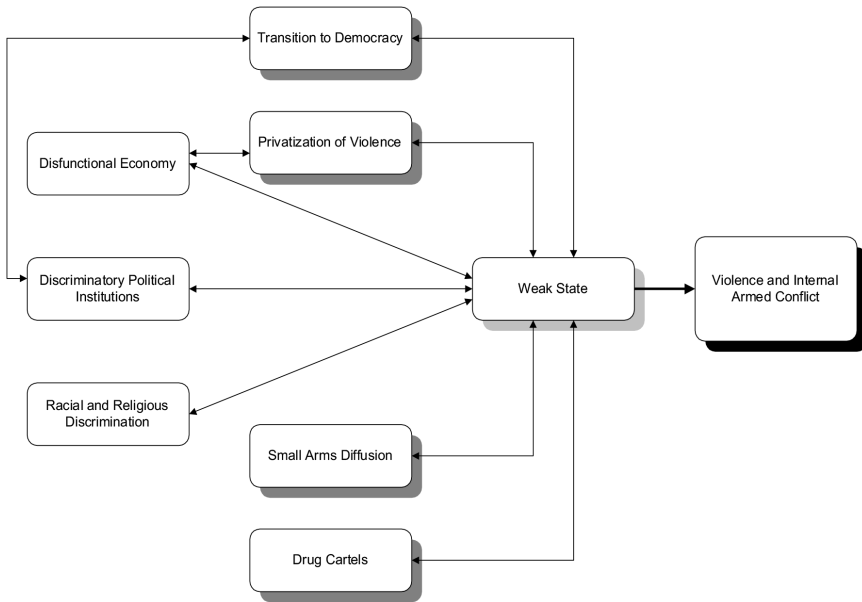


FIGURE 1.1
The Interplay Between Structural and Contingent Factors in Haiti.

Americas,¹²⁰ and among the highest in the world, according to Transparency International, a global corruption watchdog.¹²¹ Drug money has also flooded the market with small arms. According to a credible estimate, there were around 190,000 small arms circulating among Haitian civilians in 2007.¹²² While the ratio of arms ownership to population is comparatively low, the number of such weapons represents a major security threat in the context of a weak state. Violence tends to be concentrated in areas where there is large presence of organized crime. Daudelin refers to such places as “dysfunctional drug frontiers.”¹²³ They have also helped create the conditions for the escalation of kidnappings.¹²⁴

High rates of unemployment among a pauperized population, and the repeated disbandment of security forces following external international interventions in 1994 and 2004, has created an endless supply of people willing to fill the ranks of criminal organizations. Similarly, as part of a long Haitian tradition, influential political leaders continue to organize armed wings (uncivil movements) to assert their power and influence. The

creation by former president Aristide of the *Chimères* is just one of the most recent examples of this trend. From the security standpoint, the consequences of these developments have been very negative. The multiplication of violent groups pursuing diverse interests has negatively impacted security in Haiti.¹²⁵

Figure 1.1 presents a summary of the main argument. Structural conditions derived from a particular historical trajectory prompted by environmental, cognitive, and contextual factors, combined with harmful leadership, have fostered the development of an anemic state characterized by its inability to fulfill basic functions. Contingent variables associated with the process of globalization, the transition to democracy, the penetration of foreign organized crime, and the dissemination of small arms have further weakened the state, thereby making recent violence in Haiti much more complex, fluid, and intractable.

Conclusion

This chapter has assessed the conditions informing the most recent waves of violence in a seemingly ceaseless pattern played out across Haitian history. The main question addressed was whether the root conditions informing violence and armed conflict in Haiti obey structural or contingent conditions. Instead of answering in an either/or form, my analysis and the evidence presented here shows that violence in Haiti stems from a combination of both types of factors interacting through particular mechanisms. Following the seminal work by Elster, I show how the combination of particular historical conditions, both structural and contingent, interacted through particular “causal chains” to create a distinctly violent outcome.

In Haiti, a complex historical process derived from incompetent and selfish leadership, external pressure, and patterns of discrimination created a deeply flawed, parasitic state unfit to regulate social relations. Coercion, co-optation, clientelism, and violence became so widespread that they amounted to the normal state of affairs. All the while, the majority of the population was condemned to a life of destitution. The long rule of the Duvalier family epitomized this state of affairs. Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier were only the most grotesque manifestation of a long tale

of despotic, wicked rulers who brutally repressed opposition, undermined the creation of institutions, and lavishly wasted meager state resources while the general population lived in abject destitution.

Haiti's dysfunctional state and crippled economy are ill-prepared to withstand the forces associated with the process of globalization. New phenomena, including the diffusion of democracy, the penetration of foreign organized crime, and the dissemination of small arms, have created daunting challenges for Haiti. Whereas for most of its history, the principal agent of violence was the state, there has been a gradual though steady proliferation of other violent actors since the late 1980s. These include paramilitary organizations, organized criminal networks, and armed gangs related to diverse interests. Violence therefore has turned much more complex, fluid, and intractable.

Particular historical and cultural differences notwithstanding, the Haitian case illustrates the changing nature of violence in much of Latin America.¹²⁶ Reflecting the trials and tribulations of modern life, violence in Latin America has undergone a profound transformation in the last two decades. Before the latest wave of democratization in the 1980s, sociopolitical violence in Latin America was the result of confrontations between repressive and unresponsive elitist states and ideologically inspired armed and unarmed groups that opposed them.¹²⁷ Nowadays, Latin America experiences what Pinheiro terms "lawlessness"¹²⁸—that is, a situation in which the most vulnerable groups of society, in particular destitute and marginalized children and women, bear the brunt of brutality and victimization at the hands of various armed groups. Kruijt and Koonings posit that this violence is not really a holdover of uneven systems that fostered cycles of insurrection and repression between the 1950s and 1980s.¹²⁹ According to them, there were certainly instances in that period where the border between politically motivated organized violence and criminal activity was hard to discern because they interacted and mutually reinforced themselves. Nonetheless, for the most part, it was possible to draw distinctions between them. Today, distinctions of this sort seem much more difficult to discern, as are the effective palliatives to this problem.¹³⁰

This chapter has been presented as a hypothesis-generating case study. This careful examination of the Haitian case is meant to improve our understanding of the conditions informing violence. More generally,

my aim is to use the Haitian case to contribute to the reflection on and discussion of the conditions prompting violence in Latin America. In combination with the other case studies contained in this volume, this material could be later tested through other methods to buttress and refine the proposition that violence in the Latin America context can be traced to a combination of structural and contingent factors that operate through specific mechanisms. This is meant to oppose the more negative and deterministic argument that violence in the region obeys invariable structural conditions, condemning Latin Americans to live indefinitely with this heavy burden.

NOTES

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