

POLICY BRIEF



GLOBAL  
INITIATIVE

AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL  
ORGANIZED CRIME

# FROM CRIMINAL GOVERNANCE TO COMMUNITY FRAGMENTATION

ADDRESSING HAITI'S  
ESCALATING CRISIS

SEPTEMBER 2025



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## SUMMARY

**A**s deliberations of critical importance regarding the crisis resolution strategy are ongoing within the United Nations Security Council and the Organization of American States (OAS), and as Haiti's political transition advances into its last phase, the country is undergoing a profound transformation of its crisis, characterized by the consolidation of criminal governance, territorial fragmentation and further erosion of state authority. The most powerful criminal groups now function like armed militias, controlling large swathes of the country, while inter-communal violence and cycles of revenge threaten to further undermine social cohesion. The state's capacity to respond remains critically weak, and international responses – most notably, the limited operational impact of the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission – have failed to meet the scale and urgency of the organized-crime led crisis.

This policy brief focuses on the second quarter of 2025, analyzing the political, security and institutional dimensions of Haiti's evolving crisis and outlining urgent priorities – among them, reinforcing Haitian-led governance and justice initiatives, restoring coherence among transitional institutions, going after the networks of brokers that sustain the criminal political economy, and preparing for a credible and coordinated transition beyond February 2026.

### Key points

#### Criminal governance and gang expansion

- Haiti's crisis is marked by violent territorial fragmentation, the proliferation of criminal, armed non-state actors and the erosion of state sovereignty. Gangs now control 90% of Port-au-Prince and are expanding into strategic areas beyond the capital to consolidate their criminal governance model, based in particular on territorial control and extortion, and increasingly frequent interventions in political debate.
- Gangs' territorial expansion has reached unprecedented levels and continues to advance. It follows a three-phase progression – coordination, sustained assault and consolidation – enabling groups to extend territorial control and institutionalize their presence. Criminal governance becomes multidimensional (economic, geographic and social), progressively displacing state influence and reshaping authority to their benefit.
- Gang leaders act as de facto sovereigns in their territories, dictating laws and governing daily life in the absence of the state. Despite the hyperactivity of the police forces, there is still no national and international coordinated strategy to dismantle and replace these entrenched systems of criminal governance.





Coordination with the Haitian security sector remains weak, exacerbated by institutional fragmentation within the police. © Guerinault Louis/Anadolu via Getty Images

## Civilian responses and vigilante brigades

- Vigilante groups ('brigades') have become central actors in Haiti's security landscape since early 2025. Initially formed for community protection, many brigades are now pursuing territorial and political expansion.
- Civilian brigades provide operational support to security forces, compensating for the inability of Haitian and international police to sustain a presence on the ground. While brigades are seen as indispensable, growing state dependence on them risks normalizing outsourcing to armed civilians, with the added danger that some brigades may evolve into criminal groups.
- The line between law enforcement and vigilante groups is becoming increasingly blurred, while the category of 'civilian' (i.e. non-combatant) is following the same path of confusion, reinforcing the polarization of Haitian society. Escalating cycles of violence are targeting civilians, and reprisals and extra-judicial killings are carried out not only by gangs but also by brigades and police forces.

## State security responses

- The Haitian security sector has become even more fragmented, due to internal rivalries and lack of coordination, ongoing privatization and militarization. While the government has created a new task force, recruited a private military company and expanded militarized responses, there is still a lack of coordination between police units.
- The absence of unified leadership and a common strategy has deepened dysfunction within security institutions, ultimately benefiting armed groups.
- While militarized responses – such as drone strikes – may contain certain manifestations of armed violence, they remain insufficient to address the broader political economy that sustains gang operations. Neglecting the structural drivers of crime will leave Haiti vulnerable to actors who benefit from, rather than combat, illicit economies.

- The MSS mission still faces structural and political obstacles. Coordination with the Haitian security sector remains weak, exacerbated by institutional fragmentation within the police. The growing influence of the task force and foreign private contractors has further isolated the MSS mission, undermining its effectiveness.

## **Political responses, risks and transition**

- Political stagnation is eroding legitimacy and worsening state vulnerabilities. While the Transitional Presidential Council (TPC) is expected to hand over power to an elected president on 7 February 2026, not only are the conditions necessary for holding secure elections in November not in place, but in the current context, it is likely that holding polls would trigger further violence and uncontrollable instability.
- There is no plan for the TPC's post-mandate period starting on 7 February 2026. Political stagnation is eroding legitimacy, worsening state vulnerabilities, and deepening a political vacuum that allows criminal actors and their affiliates to increase their influence over Haiti's institutional future.
- The national impasse echoes the broader paralysis of international engagement. Despite ambitious plans announced by the UN, the US, the OAS and Haitian authorities, no consensus has yet been reached. Any such initiative currently faces the same obstacles as the MSS mission: the absence of a clear mandate, guaranteed financial sustainability and effective coordination with Haitian authorities and security forces.
- It is imperative to convene, without delay, the Haitian authorities and international partners around a shared framework and common vision, with the objective of forging a robust consensus and endorsing a clear roadmap to guide both the remainder of the political transition and the formulation of a unified, substantially renewed security and justice strategy.





## INTRODUCTION

**B**etween January and May 2025, Haiti recorded 4 026 homicides – a 24% increase compared to the same period in 2024 – reflecting a sharp deterioration in national security.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Haiti is experiencing a crisis of forced displacement driven by criminal groups.<sup>2</sup> In 2024, the country accounted for nearly 75% of global displacement cases.<sup>3</sup> This trend worsened in 2025: as of 1 July, more than 1.3 million people – over 11% of the national population – were internally displaced, half of them minors. This represents a 24% increase since January 2025.<sup>4</sup>

These indicators, widely cited by international organizations, only partially capture the gravity of the situation. Haiti is no longer experiencing a gradual decline but a structural transformation.<sup>5</sup> The country is undergoing violent territorial fragmentation, driven by the proliferation of armed non-state actors, and the steady erosion of state sovereignty as public authorities lose control over more areas of the national territory.<sup>6</sup> This transformation, shaped by at least five dynamics, has not been met with a strategic response by either national authorities or the international community.

### KEY FIGURES

At least **4 026 people** were killed between 1 January and 30 May 2025.<sup>7</sup>

Almost **1.3 million people** – about **11% of Haiti's population** – are currently displaced within the country, an increase of 24% since January 2025 and a 730% increase compared to the end of 2022.<sup>8</sup>

Nearly **one in six children** in Haiti are now internally displaced, and almost **700 000 minors** live without stable shelter or secure housing.<sup>9</sup>

As of 30 April, more than **1 600 additional schools** have been closed due to violence – a **60% increase** since the beginning of 2025 – leaving more than **243 000 children** with no access to education.<sup>10</sup>

First, gang territorial expansion has intensified. In early 2025, criminal groups consolidated control over the hills surrounding the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area – particularly in Kenscoff – bringing nearly 90% of the capital under their grip. By the second quarter of 2025, this reach had extended in the provinces, into the Centre and Artibonite regions, pushing towards the Dominican border and closer to Haiti's northern regions.<sup>11</sup> Gangs, increasingly resembling armed militias, have developed the capacity to launch simultaneous offensives across distant areas such as Kenscoff, Liancourt and Lascahobas – each almost 100 kilometres apart. This is a capability that both national and international security forces do not possess.

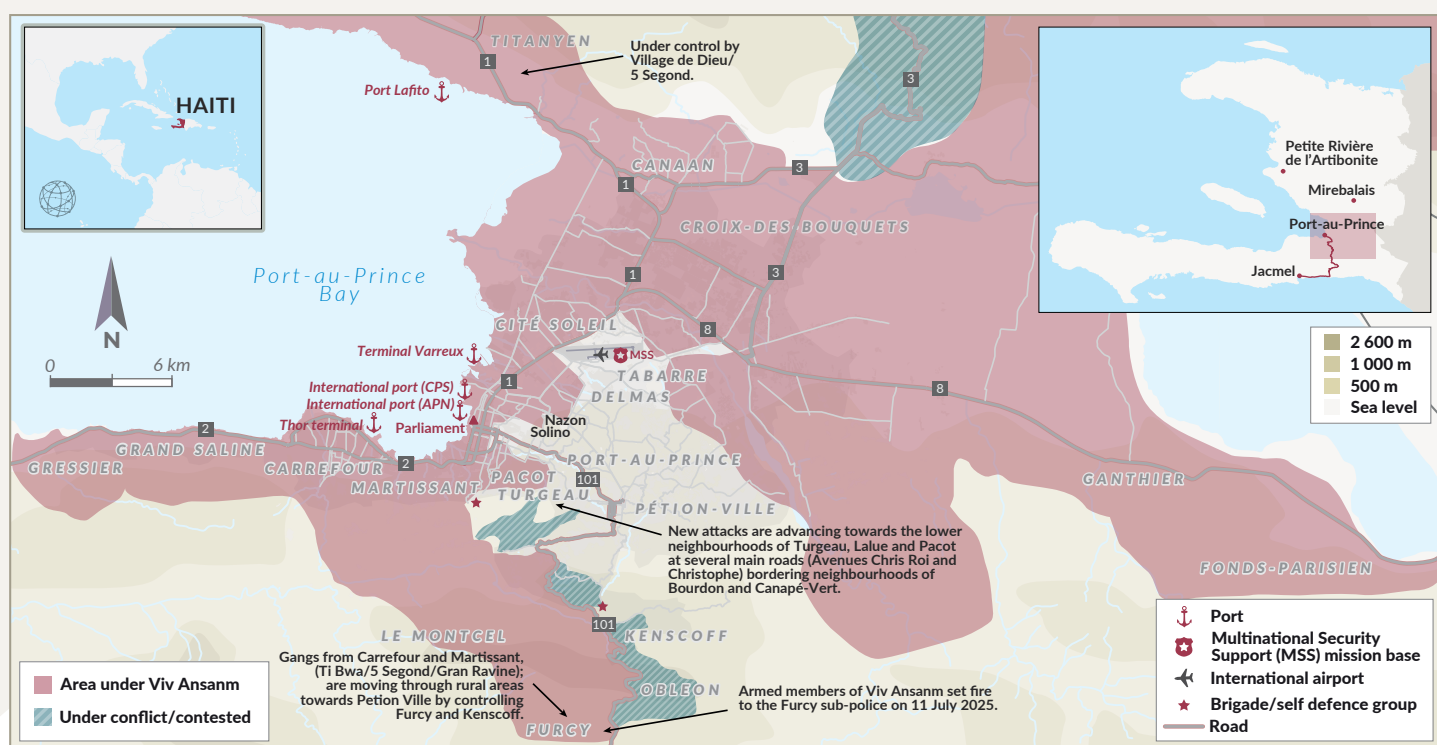
Second, this territorial expansion reflects a will to establish geographic continuity between gang strongholds in Port-au-Prince and emerging zones of influence in the provinces.<sup>12</sup> Gangs are setting up forward operating bases to quickly move into new areas. Their goal is to control critical infrastructure – ports, roads, energy production centres (particularly electricity), urban and rural population centres, and commercial hubs – thereby strengthening criminal governance and enabling revenue extraction. Extortion is a core element of Haitian gangs' business model that the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) has documented since 2023.<sup>13</sup> As of mid-2025, according to the Haitian Ministry of Economy, gangs were generating between US\$60 million and US\$75 million annually from extortion of container transports alone.<sup>14</sup>

Third, the consolidation of gangs under the Viv Ansanm (Living Together, in Haiti Creole) coalition serves not only to deter national and international law enforcement, but also to exert political influence.<sup>15</sup> Territorial and population control is associated with an increase in political messages and demands, through which gang leaders seek to position themselves as key brokers in Haiti's political future. Gang leaders are increasingly seeking to exert pressure on political authorities and shape the post-transition institutional landscape, with the current TPC mandate set to expire on 7 February 2026.

Fourth, the expansion of gangs is triggering the proliferation of self-defence brigades. This trend responds both to a desire for community protection and to authorities' willingness to collaborate with non-state armed actors. In the capital, and in an increasing number of provinces, armed civilian brigades are providing indispensable operational support to security forces.<sup>16</sup> Without them, it is likely that areas such as Kenscoff, Canapé-Vert or Petite-Rivière de l'Artibonite would have fallen under gang control. However, this de facto outsourcing of public security is further fragmenting government authority, blurring the distinction between state and non-state armed actors and raising concerns about future governance – especially considering that many of the current gangs began as community defence groups.<sup>17</sup>

Fifth, and critically, Haiti is increasingly trapped in cycles of revenge and inter-communal violence targeting civilians. This phenomenon is both a symptom and a consequence of escalating clashes between gangs, police and self-defence brigades.<sup>18</sup> One consequence of these dynamics is the transformation of the concept of the 'enemy' in Haiti. Neighbourhood by neighbourhood, village by village, civilians are stigmatized or targeted simply by association: residing in or originating from an area controlled by a gang or a brigade is enough to be labelled a suspect or affiliate of one side, justifying reprisals. This blurs the distinction between civilian and combatant, and fosters a climate where violence against civilians is normalized, as illustrated by the massacres committed by the Gran Grif gang and the self-defence group 'La Coalition' in Artibonite, for example, between March and July 2025.<sup>19</sup>





**FIGURE 1** Gang-controlled and conflict areas in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, August 2025.

Despite the deterioration and transformation of the crisis, national and international responses remain fragmented and insufficient. While the Viv Ansanm coalition stays cohesive, both Haitian and international stakeholders are incapable of developing a unified strategy. The Haitian National Police (HNP), active on all fronts, lacks personnel and resources, while the Kenyan-led MSS mission continues to suffer from significant technical and funding deficits.<sup>20</sup> Its lack of operational integration into the national security framework and poor coordination with Haitian authorities undermines its effectiveness. This impasse reflects the broader paralysis of international engagement. Despite ambitious plans announced by the UN, the US, the OAS and Haitian authorities, none have yet been followed by concrete advancements.

On the political front, the TPC, responsible for steering the country towards a presidential election, is paralyzed by internal divisions, partisanship and corruption scandals.<sup>21</sup> The most recent rotation of the TPC's presidency, assumed by Laurent Saint-Cyr on 7 August 2025, began amid chronic instability. Furthermore, there is no plan for the TPC's post-mandate period starting on 7 February 2026, despite the near-certain cancellation of Haiti's November 2025 elections. This political vacuum allows criminal actors and their affiliates to increase their influence over Haiti's institutional future.

Effective security strategies must move beyond a narrow focus on law enforcement and be integrated into comprehensive rule-of-law frameworks, to reduce vulnerability to crime by reinforcing criminal justice capacities. While militarized responses may contain certain manifestations of armed gang violence, they remain insufficient if they fail to address the broader political economy that sustains gang operations. Neglecting the structural drivers of crime risks leaving Haiti vulnerable to actors who benefit from, rather than combat, illicit economies. A deeper understanding of the political economy of organized crime is therefore indispensable for designing crisis-resolution strategies, advancing peacebuilding and laying the foundations for political reconstruction.



# THE TRANSITIONAL PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL AT A STANDSTILL

**A**lmost 18 months after its establishment in April 2024, the TPC remains paralyzed by institutional inertia and constant personal competition among its members, leaving it unable to provide a framework for governance or make meaningful progress towards Haiti's recovery. As violence escalates, the TPC has failed to deliver on all priorities outlined in its mandate: restoring security, initiating constitutional and institutional reforms, and preparing for democratic elections.

The Council's first year in office was marked by internal fragmentation and a lack of coordination. For example, between 7 March and 30 July 2025, the TPC convened only three meetings of the Council of Ministers – the body responsible for ensuring the proper coordination of activities between advisers – highlighting persistent internal divisions and governance paralysis. During this period, TPC members expressed their profound mutual disagreements in the press, without making any progress towards a settlement or advancement.<sup>22</sup> The TPC is now more of a space for political competition and personal positioning than a tool driving the country's political transition.

A report from the National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH) highlighted serious governance and accountability deficiencies within the TPC.<sup>23</sup> Notably, the Council failed to uphold its commitment to organize a constitutional referendum by 11 May 2025. Instead, a draft constitution was released on 21 May without any prior public consultation or official explanation.<sup>24</sup> This move has raised concerns regarding transparency, legitimacy and inclusiveness, further exacerbating political tensions. Since then, no specific timetable has been provided for its presentation or for a potential vote.

The political stagnation has deepened Haiti's vulnerabilities and eroded public confidence in the transitional process. On 7 August, Saint-Cyr assumed the rotating presidency of the TPC in what should be the Council's final mandate before its withdrawal on 7 February 2026, when a newly elected president is expected to take office. Yet, as of August 2025, the conditions necessary to organize secure and inclusive elections in November are absent. Worse, in Haiti's current security climate, it is likely that holding elections would trigger further violence.

Amid growing concern that it will be unable to transfer power to an elected government, the Council appears to have adopted a strategy of political stalling. Instead of formally requesting an extension of its mandate – which would provoke public backlash and resistance from armed and political opponents – the TPC continues to project the illusion of electoral progress to retain international support and





Demonstrators demand the departure of the Transitional Presidential Council due to insecurity and gang violence in Port-au-Prince.

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create political breathing room. This approach risks prolonging the status quo under the pretence of institutional continuity, while further eroding the credibility of the presidential transition, and feeding the gangs' rhetoric of political opposition.

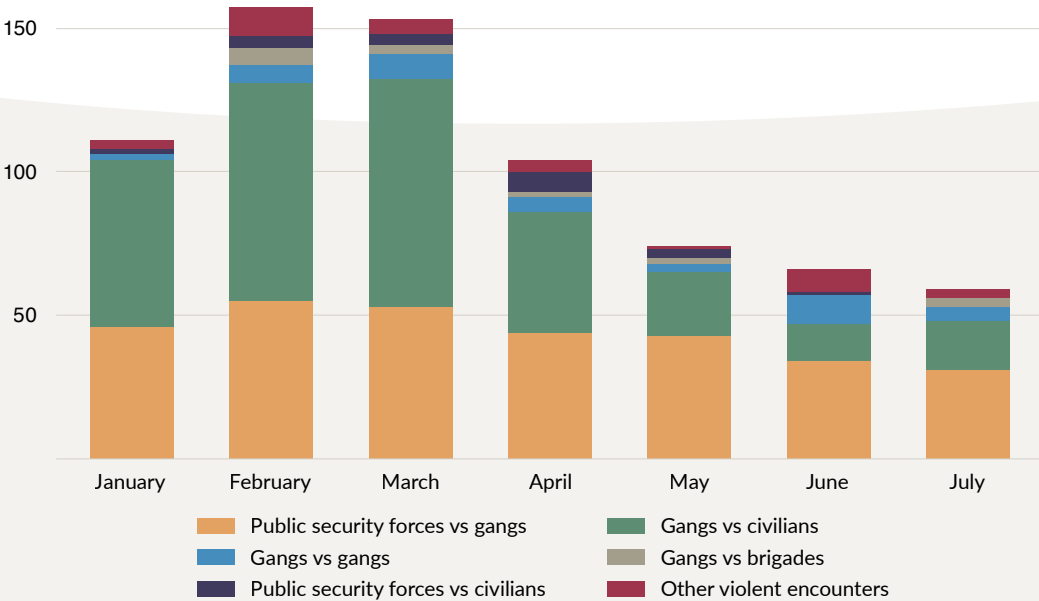
Meanwhile, the government of Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aimé has achieved some progress – particularly in the judicial sector. In April, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security announced several initiatives aimed at addressing impunity. Most notably, it established two specialized judicial units: one dedicated to prosecuting complex financial crimes – including corruption, money laundering and embezzlement – and another focused on mass atrocities, such as massacres, sexual violence and crimes against humanity.<sup>25</sup> While these efforts are limited in their immediate effects, they represent a critical step towards judicial accountability and institutional restoration. Their success, however, will require sustained national political will and robust international support.



# GANG EXPANSION, CRIMINAL GOVERNANCE AND EXTORTION ECONOMICS

Between March and August 2025, Haiti saw continuous confrontations between criminal gangs, security forces and community-based vigilante groups. This period was marked by both a shift in violence dynamics – with more clashes between gangs and vigilante brigades – and a significant geographic expansion of gang operations into the Centre and Artibonite regions. These offensives have targeted peri-urban and agricultural zones located more than 45 kilometres from Port-au-Prince, in Saut-d’Eau, Mirebalais and Lascahobas. As of 30 June 2025, more than 92 300 people were displaced in the Artibonite region and over 147 000 in the Centre region.<sup>26</sup>

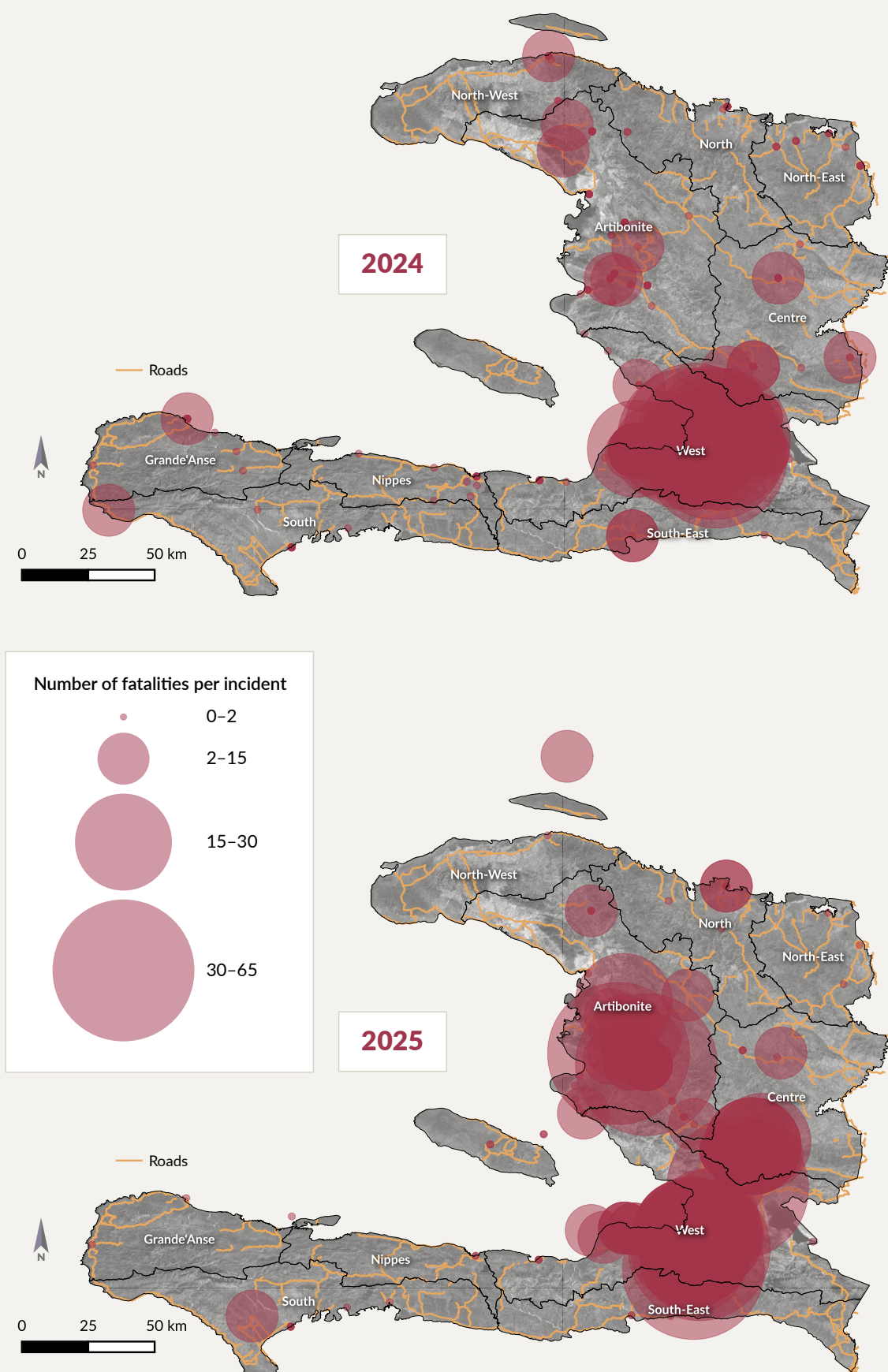
The Savien-based Gran Grif gang – led by Luckson Elan, who is sanctioned by the UN Security Council, and the Kokorat San Ras gang, have been responsible for dozens of attacks in the Artibonite between March and August.



**FIGURE 2** Number of violent incidents per month in Haiti, by type of actor (January–July 2025).

SOURCE: Based on ACLED data





**FIGURE 3** Reported violent incidents in Haiti, 1 January to 31 July, 2024 and 2025.

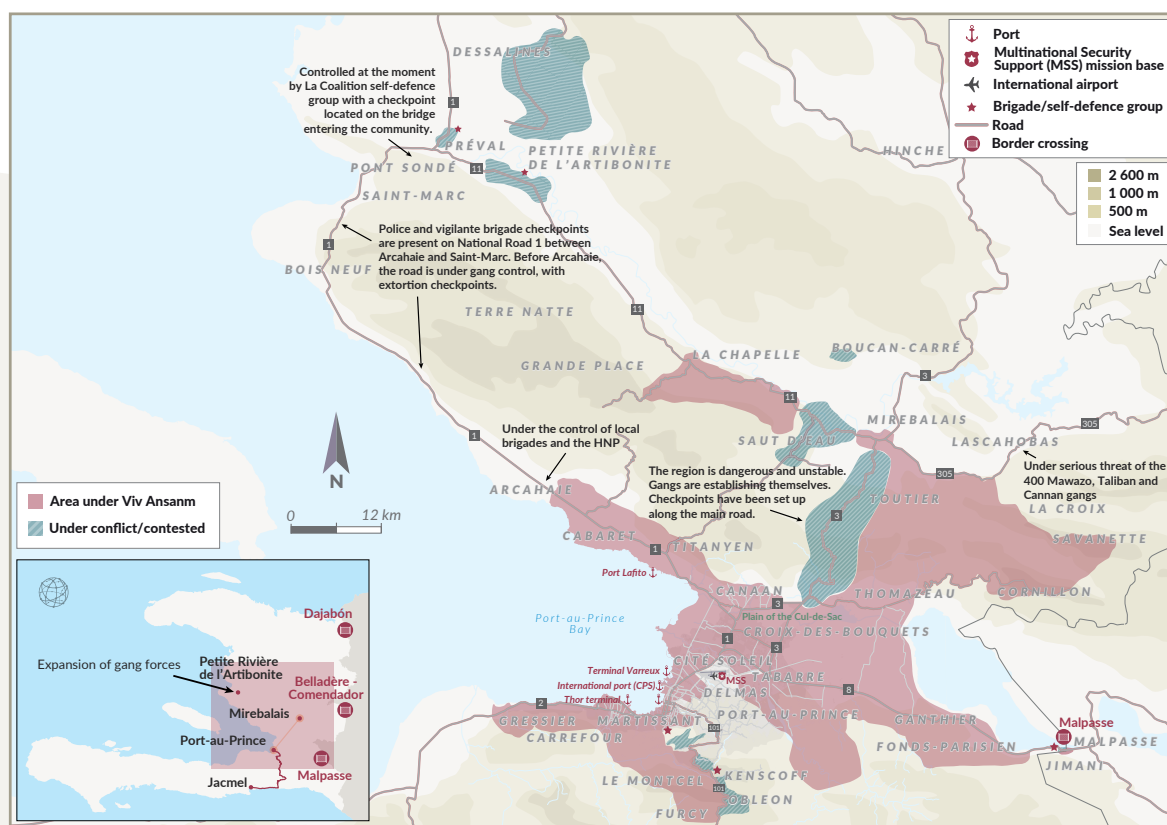
SOURCE: Based on ACLED data

On 30 April, during an offensive lasting more than 12 hours, Gran Grif executed dozens of Petite-Rivière residents, including people who attempted to flee by swimming across the town's river.<sup>27</sup> Gran Grif and Kokorat San Ras are reportedly advancing with support from criminal groups operating out of Port-au-Prince – particularly the Canaan (Taliban), 5 Segond and 400 Mawozo gangs. This collaboration includes the provision of personnel, firearms, ammunition and, in some cases, financial compensation for combatants.

Criminal gangs are expanding into the Artibonite and Centre regions to consolidate control over key transportation corridors – specifically National Road 1 (RN1), Departmental Road 11 (RD11) and parts of RN3. This expansion aims to strengthen illicit revenue streams through extortion and roadblock taxation. Simultaneously, the Kokorat San Ras gang is seeking to assert dominance over the Gonaïves–Saint-Marc and Gonaïves–Port de Paix corridors to set up checkpoints, extract tolls and potentially seize key agricultural zones.

In the Centre region, gang factions are nearing full territorial linkage along RD11, connecting Liancourt, Verrettes, La Chapelle, Saut-d'Eau and Mirebalais. Control of La Chapelle gives the Canaan gang command over critical routes linking Port-au-Prince with the Centre and Artibonite regions. This also demonstrates the operational coordination between the Canaan and 400 Mawozo gangs, both of which operate well beyond their traditional strongholds. Sustained pressure along this axis could lead to a nationwide conflict.

The gangs' push toward the north and east, which poses immense risks to Haiti's stability, presents a formidable challenge to security forces, whose capacity to deploy on multiple fronts simultaneously is very limited. The threat now extends as far north as L'Estère (25 kilometres from Gonaïves) and as far east as Lascahobas (less than 20 kilometres from Belladère), signalling proximity to Haiti's northern cities and eastern frontiers. This raises concerns for the security of Cap-Haïtien, the large city in the north, which has become a de facto alternative economic capital for the country.



**FIGURE 4** Criminal control in Ouest, Centre and Artibonite, August 2025.



## SEQUENCED EXPANSION AND STRATEGIC ENTRENCHMENT: GANG TACTICS IN 2025

**G**I-TOC analysis of attacks carried out since January 2025 reveals how gangs, working more and more like militias, are adopting an increasingly systematic approach to territorial expansion, enabled by the coordination capabilities offered by the Viv Ansanm coalition. These offensives can be divided into three phases.

### Coordination phase

At the start of each campaign, gang leadership mobilize their forces through coordination and inter-group cooperation. Contingents of armed men from different gangs are deployed in advance to the target areas, often over the course of several days. The offensives on Kenscoff illustrate this: beginning in January 2025, three different gangs took part in the initial assaults: Gran Ravine, Ti Bois and Village de Dieu, with reinforcements from 400 Mawozo group arriving later, after traversing Port-au-Prince to join the campaign.<sup>28</sup>

These coordinated troop movements, logistically supported by allied gangs along the way, underscore both the strength of operational collaboration and the strategic advantage of having contiguous territory under Viv Ansanm control. The coalition currently maintains uninterrupted control over more than 100 cumulative kilometres – from Gressier, through Port-au-Prince, to Ganthier in the west and Arcahaie in the north.

### Offensive phase

Once in position, gangs are equipped to sustain prolonged assaults, deploying fighters along with large stores of weapons and supplies. Their offensives unfold in successive waves that resemble harassment campaigns, which vary in intensity based on the level of resistance from local vigilante brigades and security forces.



These operations involve looting, arson and atrocities, including massacres and sexual violence. Each wave, whether advancing or retreating, leaves communities more vulnerable and state forces further fractured. These attacks go beyond seizing territory; they aim to erase the state's presence by systematically destroying essential public services and law enforcement infrastructure. This tactic was observed during the twin assaults on Mirebalais and Saut-d'Eau on 31 March 2025. The 400 Mawozo and Taliban gangs stormed both communes and attacked the local prison in Mirebalais, freeing more than 500 inmates.<sup>29</sup> They also looted and burned down police stations, clinics, hospitals, businesses and residential neighbourhoods.

In such instances, once state institutions are expelled, no public force or authority can reassert control – creating a power vacuum that gangs immediately fill. Beyond the physical damage, the objective is also psychological: to intimidate, exhaust and demoralize both the population and law enforcement, who see the gangs continuing to return, even after weeks or months.

## Consolidation phase

The final stage – which can be initiated alongside earlier phases – involves the establishment of a criminal structure on site. A criminal command cell is installed in the captured territory, led by a designated commander responsible for asserting gang rule. In Kenscoff, for example, Frantzy Valmé, alias 'Didi', supervises the occupied areas on behalf of the 5 Second gang.<sup>30</sup>

Through this three-phase progression – coordination, sustained assault and consolidation – criminal groups expand their territorial reach and institutionalize their presence. Criminal control therefore becomes multidimensional: economic, geographic and social. This model mirrors a tightening tourniquet, gradually cutting off state influence and civic life within affected communities. The gangs eventually reshape systems of governance and coercion to their benefit, functioning as de facto authorities in the absence of the state.



Residents displaced by gang attacks take refuge at Kenscoff town hall in February 2025. As of July 2025, more than 1.3 million people were internally displaced. © Guerinault Louis/Anadolu via Getty Images



## VIV ANSANM: INTERNAL DISCIPLINE AND THE BUREAUCRATIZATION OF EXTORTION

**D**uring the first half of 2025, Haitian gangs united under the Viv Ansanm coalition exhibited a high level of internal discipline. However, by May, this cohesion showed signs of strain. A defection from the Chen Mechan gang to 400 Mawozo reignited tensions in the Cul-de-Sac area.<sup>31</sup> While these tensions escalated into a series of clashes that persisted in June and July, sporadic ceasefires – such as the temporary truce between the 400 Mawozo and Chen Mechan gangs to allow for school exams – illustrate ongoing mediation efforts among gang leaders. Despite internal tensions, the Viv Ansanm coalition has preserved its cohesion, with frictions underscoring its capacity to manage disputes through structured coordination and negotiated restraint.

The coalition's strength is also reflected in the propaganda and political participation of gang leaders, led by Jimmy Chérizier, who increasingly release videos portraying themselves as benefactors. Often appearing among the population, they present themselves like politicians on the campaign trail, travelling far from their strongholds to signal both mobility and their role as indispensable brokers.<sup>32</sup> The paralysis of the political transition, contrasted with gang cohesion, further legitimizes these political-criminal dynamics.

### Mafia-style protection racket

Beyond conflict management and political propaganda, Viv Ansanm continues to consolidate an economic model based on systematic extortion and the strengthening of criminal governance.

Across the territories and transport networks under their control, gangs collect taxes. Residents of Kenscoff, for example, reported to the GI-TOC that shortly after the first wave of attacks in January 2025, gang-affiliated 'tax collectors' began going door to door to businesses and homes demanding payment.<sup>33</sup> Similar patterns have been documented in the Artibonite region, where Gran Grif extorts farmers and traders, sometimes seizing crops, land or livestock as payment in kind.<sup>34</sup>

The financial scale of this extortion-based model – which has been in place in areas of the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area for years – is reaching unprecedented levels. Along RN1, in and around the

capital, gangs are estimated to extort a total of US\$6 000 to US\$8 000 per day from transporters, and up to US\$20 000 per day from businesses operating along the corridor; at the Port-au-Prince fuel terminal, extortion fees reportedly doubled in May from 25 000 to 50 000 gourdes per truck (approximately US\$160–US\$350, depending on exchange rates).<sup>35</sup>

These growing pressures, combined with the capture of major commercial hubs such as Saut-d'Eau and Mirebalais, have placed a significant burden on transportation operators. According to interviews conducted by the GI-TOC, extortion charges imposed on the transport of goods on the routes between Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien now reportedly range between US\$4 500–US\$6 000 per round trip.

The routinization of these payments reflects not only the normalization of extortion but also the consolidation of a parallel, mafia-style administrative order. For a growing number of residents and business operators, extortion fees are no longer exceptional – they have become a regular cost of living, doing business or moving across the country. It underscores the installation of criminal governance in areas where the state is absent or forced to follow the orders of gangs, as well as the fragmentation of sovereignty in Haiti, with gangs increasingly taking on state functions. In their territories, gang leaders represent authority. They dictate the law and govern the daily lives of residents without any state presence, sometimes for years. Beyond the lack of security progress to regain a foothold in some of these areas, there is no national or international plan to dismantle and replace these mechanisms of criminal governance.





## BRIGADES AND VIGILANTE JUSTICE

**B**etween January and August 2025, vigilante groups (called 'brigades') emerged as central actors in Haiti's security landscape. These groups vary widely. Some, such as the Canapé-Vert brigade, number in the hundreds, possess semi-automatic weapons and exert control over several square kilometres and tens of thousands of residents. Others are small, localized groups armed only with machetes or a few guns.

While formed to protect communities from gang violence, the evolution of many brigades since the beginning of 2025 suggests a shift towards territorial and political expansion, particularly in organizing or coordinating demonstrations against the TPC and the government in March 2025, under the leadership of Canapé-Vert.

As already documented by the GI-TOC, vigilante brigades have strong ties to the Haitian police and army. A large number of brigade operatives, and several brigade coordinators are active or former police officers. This includes 'Commander Samuel' – leader of Canapé-Vert – who was a member of the General Security Unit of the National Palace (USGPN).<sup>36</sup>

Civilian groups have also taken on a critical role in providing operational support to security forces. In Kenscoff, Pacot, Canapé-Vert, Tabarre, and the Centre and Artibonite regions, fighting increasingly pits gangs against a mix of police forces and self-defence brigades. These groups, deeply familiar with the areas, operate alongside the police, or independently, and are mobilized by Haitian authorities to hold territory – particularly to make up for the lack of police personnel. With Haitian and international police forces unable to maintain a sustained presence on the ground, collaboration with civilian brigades has become a de facto necessity.

However, this convergence carries risks. While brigades now appear indispensable to Haiti's survival – and enjoy strong popular support and legitimacy – the growing dependence of state authorities on self-defence groups risks reinforcing a logic of outsourcing and transactional relationships between the government and armed civilian groups. There is also a risk that some brigades could themselves become criminal groups, following a trajectory already observed among several of Haiti's current gangs – including the groups led by Krisla, Chen Méchan or Ezequiel, among others.

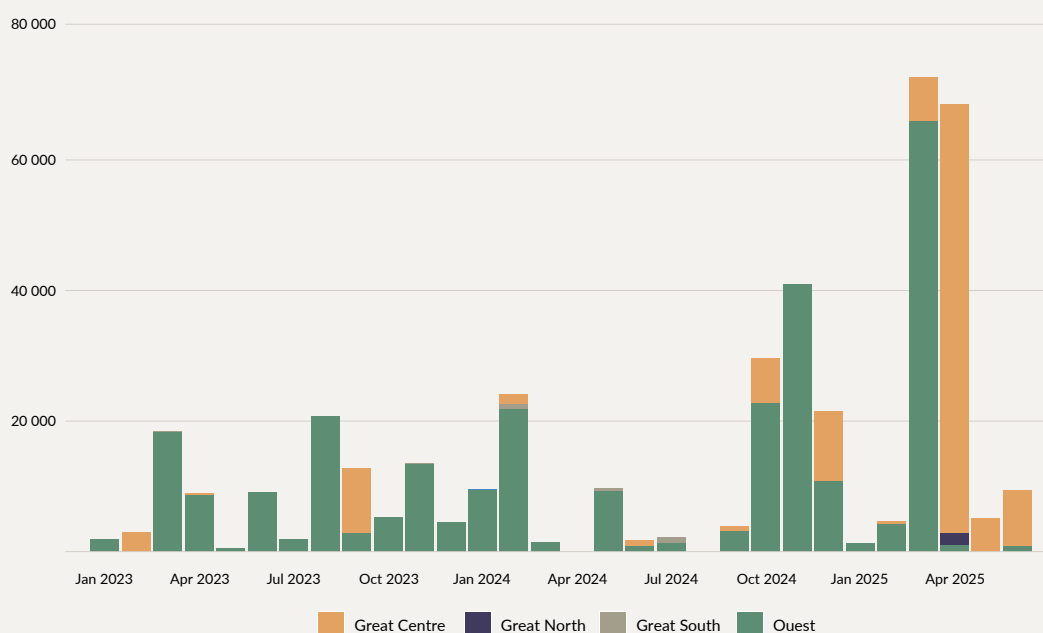
## The rise of intra-communal violence and the blurring of civilian protection

The brigades are increasingly on the front line in the daily fight against gangs. These confrontations have triggered a dangerous escalation of reciprocal violence against civilians, targeted in waves of reprisal or extra-judicial killings carried out not only by gangs but also self-defence groups, and, as reported by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, police forces.<sup>37</sup>

These dynamics intensified between March and June 2025, particularly in Artibonite. On 20 May, the vigilante group known as the Coalition Jean Denis carried out a massacre in the town of Préal, targeting civilians accused of supporting the Gran Grif gang. A total of at least 55 people were killed – some of them decapitated or burned alive – but no official investigation followed.<sup>38</sup>

These atrocities reflect patterns observed in Port-au-Prince: territorial fragmentation, deepening social polarization and the targeting of civilians based on imposed affiliations. People are not only attacked for what they do – being a gang member, for example – but for where they live or come from. Living in a neighbourhood associated with gang control can provoke reprisals from brigades or law enforcement. Likewise, gangs routinely target those living in areas under the influence of vigilante groups.

While some of these practices may be triggered spontaneously – for example, lynching – their systematization is more akin to a deliberate desire to use reprisals and fear as a means of controlling communities and eroding their confidence in the protection offered by any other competing actor, be it gangs, police or self-defence brigades. By punishing civilians, these actors seek to set an example and ensure that civilians will be less inclined to cooperate with others in the future.



**FIGURE 5** Number of displaced individuals by host region, January 2023–June 2025.

SOURCE: Based on IOM data

The logic of territorial identity fuels a climate of ‘automatic suspicion’ in which civilians are ascribed inescapable stigma. This is driving a profound yet under-reported transformation of Haiti’s social fabric, marked by the normalization of inter- and intra-communal violence, and punishment of civilians. As front lines between gangs, self-defence brigades and state actors continue to shift, populations trapped in these contested spaces face a stark dilemma: collaborate, resist or face displacement. Each option, including fleeing the area, carries the risk of reprisals, making neutrality nearly impossible.

In the event of future conflict resolution, these imposed identities may persist, potentially perpetuating cycles of revenge, marginalization and long-term exclusion from civic life. This is particularly true for the hundreds of thousands of Haitians who have lived under gang rule for years. These dynamics, which Haitian authorities and international actors currently fail to take into account, must be integrated into a long-term strategy that should focus not only the demobilization and reintegration of gang members, but also broader reconciliation and social mediation mechanisms aimed at rebuilding the social fabric.





## THE UNRAVELING OF HAITI'S SECURITY SECTOR

**B**etween January and August 2025, Haiti's public security landscape underwent further fragmentation, driven by the absence of a coherent national strategy and a growing privatization of state responses.

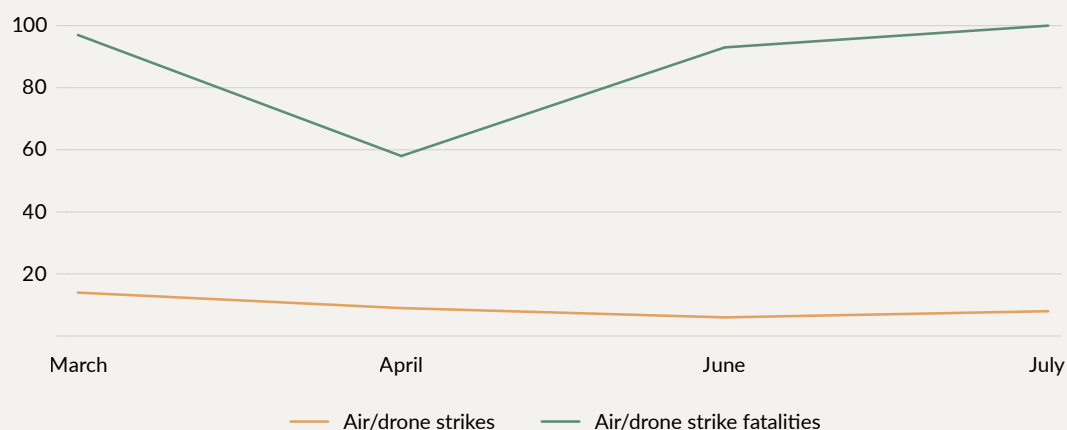
Adding to the institutional chaos and rivalries that characterize Haiti's security sector, on 7 March 2025, Prime Minister Fils-Aimé announced the creation of the Prime Minister's Office Task Force, a police unit operating under the personal authority of the Prime Minister's Office and independent of the Haitian police.<sup>39</sup> Comprised of personnel coming from the Prime Minister's security unit and the USGPN, the task force was created without formal publication of its mandate, chain of command or institutional oversight. The lack of accountability mechanisms and coordination with the actual police structure reflects deep mistrust within the state and its law enforcement agencies.

Moreover, the task force introduced an unprecedented tactical shift: the deployment of armed drones in Haiti. In early March, footage circulated by gangs showed the apparent use of commercially modified drones to drop improvised explosive devices. Authorities later confirmed the use of 'explosive' or 'kamikaze' drones, though they did so without presenting a framework for monitoring these strikes.<sup>40</sup>

Since then, drone attacks have become a near-daily occurrence in Port-au-Prince, raising serious humanitarian and legal concerns. Their application in densely populated urban areas endangers civilians and violates principles of international humanitarian law.<sup>41</sup> Drone strikes have concentrated on neighbourhoods known to be strongholds of major gangs, including Gran Ravin, 5 Second and Kraze Barye, and were also employed during security operations in Kenscoff or Carrefour-Feuilles, among other areas.

According to an RNDDH report, the deployment of attack drones has resulted in the deaths of at least 300 gang members and injuries to more than 400 others.<sup>42</sup> However, no official report makes mention of potential civilian casualties. This omission effectively amounts to considering that anyone residing in a gang-controlled area is a legitimate target – a particularly worrying development given the potential human rights violations related to drone strikes.

While the latter have achieved limited tactical successes – such as the pushback of gang assaults in Kenscoff, the displacement of gang leader Vitel'Homme Innocent and disruptions in Tabarre or Pernier – they have proved fleeting.<sup>43</sup> The lack of sustained territorial presence and coordinated



**FIGURE 6** Number of air/drone strikes and fatalities per month in Haiti (March–July 2025).

NOTE: The absence of reported fatalities may be attributed to a lack of information on specific events.

SOURCE: Based on ACLED data

ground tactics have hindered any substantive reconfiguration of power dynamics. In this context, the use of drones appears to be less of a strategic asset and more of an escalation of the militarization of public security policies – once again, without the necessary coordination between the various police units.

In this context of institutional fragmentation, media revealed the Haitian government’s recruitment of a private military company, Vectus Global, owned by Erik Prince – founder of Blackwater – to provide logistical and operational support against gang violence.<sup>44</sup> In practice, these private operators appear to support the task force, not the entire Haitian police force. This outsourcing of core security functions raises serious legal, ethical and political concerns. While the HNP suffers from an alarming lack of resources and personnel, prioritizing the hiring of a foreign private company threatens ongoing police reform and rebuilding efforts, institutional coherence and the integrity of public security governance.

The fragmentation of Haiti’s security sector both mirrors and deepens internal divisions within the HNP itself. The institution is split along several fault lines in its chain of command: between elite squads and regular units, and between general management and field officers. As a result, it is increasingly difficult to determine how the institution is governed in practice. Tensions within the police force have been reported, with factions allegedly becoming increasingly loyal to individuals (for example, the unit commander) rather than to the hierarchical structure. According to interviews conducted by the GI-TOC, this leads to conflicting operational agendas and could even cause clashes between different police units themselves.

The absence of a central chain of command prevents implementation of a unified response to security challenges. As a result, the lack of coordinated leadership has entrenched dysfunction within state security mechanisms, ultimately benefiting armed groups that continue to expand territorial control.



## STALEMATE IN INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH HAITI

**M**ore than a year after its launch in June 2024, the MSS mission in Haiti stands at a critical juncture. The challenges facing the MSS mission are as much political and structural as they are operational. The mission remains trapped between its vague mandate, limited operational impact and mounting doubts about its long-term financial viability. Coordination with the Haitian security sector remains fraught, exacerbated by the deepening fragmentation of the security apparatus. The internal disarray within the HNP – compounded by the increasing influence of the task force and the presence of foreign private contractors – has further isolated the MSS.

Operating within this complex environment, the Kenyan contingent – a regular police force – is tasked with combating gangs-turned-militias but does not have adequate tactical training, logistical support or a clearly defined operational strategy to do so. Unless the MSS is rapidly reinforced – through increased troop deployment, logistical support and a recalibrated mandate – it risks becoming little more than mere support, unable to shift the balance of power on the ground.

With the MSS's mandate coming to an end on 30 September 2025, and after months of discussions and consultations, various international initiatives have emerged since March. First, the US government has designated Viv Ansanm and Gran Gwif as foreign terrorist organizations, opening the door (if these legal tools are effectively used) to potential advances in the fight against the political and economic networks that support gangs.<sup>45</sup> Second, the US Congress has shown interest in addressing Haiti's security and governance crisis through legislative action. The bipartisan Haiti Criminal Collusion Transparency Act of 2025 signals growing recognition of the need to disrupt the nexus between organized crime and entrenched political and economic interests.<sup>46</sup> If passed, the bill would mandate the US Department of State to identify Haiti's dominant criminal groups, map their leadership structures and expose their linkages to key economic and political elites – with the objective of imposing additional targeted sanctions and diplomatic pressure to dismantle networks of collusion.

Third, the OAS, in August, presented a Roadmap for Stability and Peace in Haiti.<sup>47</sup> The roadmap draws up a detailed plan that aims to address both security and development, including other aspects (notably elections, the justice system and governance) and the need to restructure decision-making and accountability mechanisms. While this proposal reflects a shift in strategy, its feasibility remains uncertain. Major challenges include the lack of an established framework for such a mission under OAS auspices, unclear commitments from member states and questions about political ownership, command structure and long-term funding.



On the other hand, the US, supported by Panama, presented a draft resolution at the UN Security Council aimed at transforming the MSS mission into a Gang Suppression Force (GSF), and, in line with the Secretary General's letter from February 2025, creating a new UN Support Office in Haiti, to channel technical and logistical support to all multilateral security efforts, as well as the HNP.

Although it is too early to predict the direction that future discussions and votes will go, it is of the utmost importance that the various plans are perfectly coordinated and complementary. The OAS one must be better connected to the UN Security Council proposal, which, while recognizing the OAS's contribution, does not currently explain how the various initiatives will be articulated, nor how a hierarchy and decision-making structure will be designed between the new positions that may be created in Port-au-Prince (including a special representative for the GSF and a GSF force commander, among others). This is in addition to the lack of clarity regarding Kenya's role in the transition to the new force, as well as the terms of coordination and cooperation between the GSF and the HNP.

More critically, for both the UN Security Council and the OAS, there is no guarantee that the various plans will be approved, nor that they will be properly financed by international stakeholders, which remains the critical issue with the current Kenyan-led MSS mission. Moreover, another stumbling block lies in the TPC's ability to collaborate fully with this initiative, particularly with regard to its post-mandate plans. Beyond the value of international proposals, which on paper represent real progress, risks remain, including the difficulty of finding an international consensus and engaging in dialogue with Haitian stakeholders; the possibility of funding the various initiatives and ensuring coordination between them; the ability to get the members of the TPC, the Haitian government and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to work together to design a specific agreement on the elections (or their postponement); as well as coordination between the various entities in the security sector.



## CONCLUSION

**H**aiti faces a growing proliferation of armed actors, expansion of violence and paramilitarization of the security response. Added to this is the country's territorial disintegration, where sovereignty is eroding, shared among dozens of political and armed bosses, while neither the national authorities nor the international community seem able to fully grasp the scope of the ongoing crisis or to provide solutions commensurate with the urgent challenge it represents.

Moreover, the profound evolution of gangs towards criminal, militia-style groups is scarcely taken into account in existing analyses. Yet it is precisely on this dynamic that security and governance efforts must focus in order to understand the Haitian criminal landscape and the gangs' expanding capacity for governance. In addition, one of the most underestimated but most consequential risks is the cycle of reprisals carried out against civilian communities by gangs, police and brigades.

Taken together, these dynamics highlight both the gravity of Haiti's crisis and the insufficiency of the current international response. As bilateral and regional actors seek solutions within and outside the UN, the lack of a unified strategic framework continues to undermine collective action. Without decisive political leadership and a clear commitment from the TPC, the prospects for stabilization will remain out of reach. Given the national scope of the crisis, a comprehensive reorientation of both national and international strategies is urgently required. Rather than pursuing fragmented and at times contradictory agendas, stakeholders must coalesce around a single, coherent political and security roadmap. Failure to do so could render the political transition completely null and void and exacerbate instability, to the benefit of criminal groups and the political and financial actors who support them.

## Recommendations

Haiti must remain firmly on the international policy agenda. The country occupies a critical place in global discussions, as it faces what is the most acute security and humanitarian crisis linked to criminal groups worldwide. This moment demands urgent coordination and a determined commitment to mobilize the tools and resources already at our disposal, to advance a coherent and effective response to the crisis.

### Understanding and addressing criminal governance

- Existing analyses and recovery plans have not adequately accounted for the development of gangs into militia-style groups. Security and governance strategies must focus on this dynamic to grasp the gangs' expanding capacity for governance.

- Strengthen the implementation of a comprehensive strategy to secure Haiti's principal transport nodes – ports, border crossings and major road corridors. Such efforts should aim not only to safeguard critical infrastructure, but also to enhance the state's capacity to collect customs revenues and monitor the movement of goods, thereby acting against gangs' main sources of revenue.
- In close coordination with regional partners, accelerate and strengthen the enforcement of the arms embargo on Haiti, embedding it within a broader regional strategy to combat illicit firearms trafficking. These efforts must be accompanied by intensified action against other transnational criminal flows, particularly cocaine trafficking and illicit financial flows.

## **Protecting civilians and rebuilding the social fabric**

- Escalating violence against civilians, including reprisals and extra-judicial killings by gangs, brigades and police forces must be addressed as a priority. These dynamics should be central to security assessments and policy responses.
- In future conflict resolution efforts, imposed identities and collective stigmatization risk persisting, perpetuating cycles of revenge, marginalization and exclusion. Long-term strategies should include demobilization and reintegration efforts, and incorporate reconciliation and social mediation mechanisms aimed at rebuilding the social fabric.

## **Strengthening judicial and governance mechanisms**

- Strengthening judicial and security governance is critical to dismantling Haiti's criminal political economy. International efforts should prioritize coordinated initiatives in partnership with the Haitian Ministry of Justice and Public Security.
- The various tools for sanctioning and prosecuting gang supporters, whether from the UN Security Council, Canada, the US or the EU, must work more closely together to support judicial investigations that will ultimately dismantle the political and economic networks sustaining gangs. While their immediate effects may be limited, these efforts represent a necessary step toward accountability and institutional restoration. Success will depend on sustained national political will and robust international support.

## **Political transition and institutional continuity**

- Planning for Haiti's political transition beyond February 2026 is urgent. Given the likelihood that elections scheduled for November 2025 will not take place, stakeholders must establish a clear timeline for the end of the TPC's mandate.
- A coordinated roadmap is needed to ensure institutional continuity and prevent further destabilization. Without a unified strategy between Haitian and international actors, the transition risks collapse, leaving the country in an institutional vacuum that will strengthen the power of gangs.

## **National and international responses**

- Should the Haitian government opt to pursue its engagement with private security providers, it is imperative to establish a robust oversight and monitoring framework to ensure accountability. Such a mechanism must track operational progress, guarantee transparency in the use of force and safeguard full compliance with international human rights standards.
- Institutional fragmentation in the security sector must be addressed through reestablishing a clear chain of command across the police, task force, the army, private military companies and MSS mission, under a single unified strategy.

- If the MSS is to remain deployed in Haiti, the mission must receive technical, tactical and financial support in accordance with its roadmap and mandate, and it must be fully integrated into the national security strategy.
- The various political plans presented by international stakeholders – the US, UN, OAS and CARICOM – must be coordinated at all costs to avoid redundancy and move towards the design of a politically and financially viable strategy that can be implemented as quickly as possible on the ground.





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