The unending cycle of political violence in Haiti: A case study of the 1991 coup d'etat

2012

Lourdes Eliacin Mars

University of Central Florida

Find similar works at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorstheses1990-2015

University of Central Florida Libraries http://library.ucf.edu

Part of the International and Area Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorstheses1990-2015/1353

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in HIM 1990-2015 by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact lee.dotson@ucf.edu.
THE UNENDING CYCLE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN HAITI: 
A CASE STUDY OF THE 1991 COUP D’ETAT

by

LOURDES S. ELIACIN MARS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Political Science
in the College of Arts and Sciences
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term 2012

Thesis Chair: Paul Vasquez, Ph.D.
Abstract

Dèyè mo-n se mo-n is a proverb in Haiti that roughly translates to “Beyond the mountains, more mountains.” This saying holds a deep meaning to the Haitian peoples, who have lived through unrelenting violence, and poverty. In its 200 years of independence, Haiti’s inhabitants have seldom known a decade without political violence. Like the chain of mountains, political violence in Haiti seems to go on forever with no end in sight. Not only are the devastating effects of violence felt within politics, but also in the economic and social sectors of the country. The collapse of these sectors has created a predatory democracy which fails to provide for the population but rather enriches political elites who fight for the control of power and ignore their civic duties. The result of the political infighting, corruption, and weak governance has left Haiti the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

A recent conflict which continues to have negative effects in the country is the 1991 military coup d’état. The source of the coup was the political classes’ constant fight for the control of power. The consequences of the coup are the collapse of the sectors previously mentioned. This has led to a country’s struggle to reestablish functioning political, economic, and social institutions.

Through secondary literary sources, online journals, and biographies, the causes and negative effects of the coup will be explored in hopes of illustrating the overall proximate and underlying causes of political violence in Haiti. This research will eventually lead to the exploration of different institutional reforms which needs to be enforced to break the cycle of violence.

Keywords: coup d’état, political violence, bourgeois, oligarchy, military junta
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the people of Haiti. Better days are soon to come.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee, especially my thesis chair Dr. Paul Vasquez, for the countless bits of advice and suggestions that made this thesis possible.

I would also like to thank my friends, especially Shardel Jackson and Yumani Davis, for the support and countless hours of proofreading. Love you gals!

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, Antoine and Dylia Eliacin, who have been the best cheerleaders a girl could ask for. Je vous aime beaucoup noy et yaya!
# Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1

Section 1: 1991 Coup d'état (action, reaction, and violence) ....................................................................... 6
  Participants of the Coup and their roles .............................................................................................. 8
  Reactions to the Coup ....................................................................................................................... 12
  Political Naïveté or Bourgeoisie Fear? ............................................................................................ 19

Section 2: Proximate and Underlying causes .......................................................................................... 26
  Zero-sum game ............................................................................................................................... 26
  Civil-military relations .................................................................................................................... 27
  La politique du ventre (politics of the stomach) ............................................................................. 31

Section 3- The direct and indirect effects of coup ............................................................................... 34

Section 4: Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 39

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................................... 42
Introduction

The notion of political violence often evokes images of gun wielding groups issuing threats of death and destruction in order to coerce and intimidate the government and civilian population. The successful Haitian coup d’état of September 1991 reinforces that image.

On September 30, 1991, Jean Bertrand Aristide, the first democratically elected president of Haiti, was overthrown and forced into exile by a military coup.1 His exile took place hours after the Haitian military and its paramilitary forces (attachés) stormed the National Palace and took Aristide into custody.2

The coup d’état was supported by the traditional Haitian oligarchy represented by the bourgeois. This group provided the monetary support for the coup to succeed. The success of the coup d’état not only brought a military junta to power, but also initiated years of political violence between pro and anti- Aristide supporters.3 Similar to some United State’s citizens fears of socialism, the elites were concerned that the proposed economic redistribution would affect their wealth. Their worries of decreased riches ultimately led to the ousting of Aristide, which will be further explored in section one.

For many, it remains puzzling how the situation in Haiti could have become so volatile, so quickly. In less than a year, Haiti went from a successful democratic election, to exiling the democratically elected president. The military junta that took control of the country caused the political, economic, and social collapse of the country. To this day, the 1991 coup continues to have negative repercussions such as weak governance on the Caribbean island.

To assess the lasting political, economic, and social problems left by the 1991 coup d’état in Haiti, we must examine political violence. By examining political violence, meaning an investigation of the causes of the coup, the participants, their different roles, and the outcomes we can begin to show the proximate and underlying causes. It will also explain the direct and indirect effects that the coup d’état had on Haiti during that time period and also explain the continuation of these effects in the country today.

First, a broad explanation of political, economic, and social collapse in the case of 1991 coup is useful. These explanations will be further explored throughout the thesis in hopes of illustrating the vicious cycle and chain of events that causes political violence and poverty in Haiti.

*Political collapse*, which occurred in the 1991 coup d’état, was due to the fighting among the political classes. They wanted control of Haiti through power supremacy, known as a zero-sum game of power. The conflict created allies among the military junta and the oligarchy who wanted to retain their power from Aristide. The intensity of the struggle was fueled by the constant need to acquire Haiti’s scarce resources. Those in power realized that in order to remain in authority, they must regulate the resources to control the population, who were
suffering from the damages of the embargo. Meanwhile, Aristide who was in exile lobbied the United States of America (U.S.), United Nations (UN) and Organization of American States (OAS) to reinstate him as president of Haiti.\(^4\) The ongoing fight for control and supreme power led directly to political violence and hardships which resulted in Haiti’s economic and social collapse.

_Economic collapse_, as previously stated, is a product of political collapse; specifically political violence. Haiti’s economy which was already weak significantly diminished after the international community instituted an embargo on the country, so as to pressure the military junta to relinquish its power in hopes of reinstating the constitutional government. The embargo devastated the already fragile Haitian economy. Prior to the embargo, there were 44,000 workers employed in the garment, electronic, sports, and toy assembly industries.\(^5\) There were also 145 garment factories in operation in 1990.\(^6\) By May 1994, there were fewer than 8,000 assembly workers employed and only 44 of the 145 garment factories were still in business.\(^7\)

_Social collapse_, which I define as the government’s inability to provide social services within a struggling population, was the result of the political and economic downfall. This is illustrated by Haiti’s minimal political culture and an unstable government. Samuel E. Finer


\(^6\) Ibid

\(^7\) Ibid
defines minimal political culture as citizens with convictions, opinions, and political ideas who do not act upon them because of the fear of backlash.\(^8\) Basically, the average civilian will not participate in politics or voice their opinions for fear of their lives. This leads to an unstable government because the violence demonstrated does not allow for civilians to publicly exercise their political rights, which prevents change. These threats of violence and censorship in the economic and political sectors have overall negative effects in the social sector. It causes an enormous amount of social dislocation, lack of education, and overall misery on a population that has seen its share of violence.\(^9\) The already poor country accelerated into deeper poverty which nearly caused Haiti to become a failed state.\(^10\)

Political violence has played a direct role in the failure of the three previously discussed processes in Haiti. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Working Paper Number 26, political violence is “organized violent activity for political goals.”\(^{11}\) Political violence in Haiti transcends two centuries of independence. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is not to give a comprehensive theory of political violence, but rather to examine the specifics of the 1991 coup d’état (different participants and causes) so as to understand the political violence that occurred during that time and its lasting repercussions on

---


\(^9\) *Ibid* pg.1500-1501


Haiti. Furthermore, in examining the 1991 coup, I hope to show the link between the pursuits of power for monetary gains to the overall impoverishment of Haiti.

Consequently, the thesis will be divided into four sections. The first section will explain the different participants and their roles in the coup. These different groups perpetuated the continuous political violence in Haiti, for the pursuit of power. The second section will examine the overall proximate and underlying causes of the coup, further exposing the issues that lead to political violence in Haiti. The third section will outline the direct and indirect impact that the 1991 coup has on Haiti today, thus illustrating the continuous impoverishment of the country. The fourth section will conclude the thesis and suggest ways in which Haiti can break the detrimental pattern.
Section 1: 1991 Coup d’état (action, reaction, and violence)

In 1990, four years after the overthrow of the Duvalier regime by popular insurrection, Haiti organized its first successful democratic election. As a result, Jean-Bertrand Aristide became the first democratically elected President of Haiti with over 67% of the votes cast. Aristide won the 1990 elections with the support of the masses, including farmers, peasants, the unemployed, intellectuals, and basic ecclesial communities known as ti légliz (small church).

Prior to Aristide’s inauguration, the priest was strongly opposed to the Duvalier regime. As a leader of ti legiz- grassroots organizations that practiced liberation theology, his sermons constantly condemned Duvalier and his paramilitary group (Tontons Macoutes) as oppressive thugs. Once Duvalier was toppled by popular insurrection in 1986, steps were taken to democratize Haiti by writing a new constitution and preparing for elections.

This new constitution implemented measures to prevent any future leader from gaining dictatorial power. The constitution made sure to provide different checks and balances to control presidential power. Checks and balances, such as preventing consecutive terms for a president and also having the “parliament ratify and fire the prime minister,” were seen as necessary in the


prevention of any future dictators in Haiti.\textsuperscript{14} At the time these procedures were seen as necessary, but when implemented in a government setting, the measures created gridlock. Depending on which parties controlled the executive branch and the parliament, these two branches of government would fight for control, which resulted in a stalemate. This stalemate can be seen during the first Aristide presidential term, and currently continues to effect Haitian politics.

The other step taken to democratize Haiti was the successful elections in 1990. The election of President Aristide promised to end a long period of agony and oppression suffered by the Haitian people. For many, the new political landscape was welcomed, while others such as the oligarchy and military worried about the loss of their status quo.\textsuperscript{15} The historic election and Haiti’s step towards democracy was short lived when the new president was exiled through a bloody coup d’état led by the military within 7 months of taking power.\textsuperscript{16} Even before taking office, in hopes of deterring the young priest Aristide, physical attacks against him were numerous during his campaign.

\textit{Campaign Attacks}


On December 5, 1990, a week before the election, Aristide was targeted at a rally in Pétion-ville, an eastern suburb of Port-au-Prince. The attack killed at least five people and left dozens injured. Another attack occurred on January 6, 1991, a month before Aristide’s inauguration. Roger Lafontant, a well-known Tontons Macoutes - a paramilitary force active under Duvalier, which was used to suppress dissent among the population; orchestrated a coup against Aristide. The reason for this was to retain power for the oligarchy and to preserve the status quo. However, the coup was a failure because of the masses’ vigilant fight to keep Aristide in power and also the Haitian military’s opposition to the coup. The military’s support for Aristide was shown by its inaction during the attempted coup d’état by Lafontant. Yet in less than 8 months, the military would attempt a second coup and successfully exile Aristide.

**Participants of the Coup and their roles**

Pierre-Raymond Dumas argues that, “the establishment of a viable democratic government in Haiti and elsewhere depends on the attitude of various participants in the political and social sectors (that is, the dominant class and the army).” The eventual success of the 1991

---


coup d’état was the result of multiple participants. The three principle participants were the 
*Front Armée d’Haiti* (Haitian military, FADH), *Front pour l’Avancement et le Progrès d’Haiti* (Front for the advancement and progress of Haiti, FRAPH), and the bourgeoisie. FADH and the bourgeoisie made up the political class that wanted to keep things the same. FRAPH was the paramilitary group controlled by the military and funded by the bourgeoisie. This group was the added muscle to aid the military in suppressing dissenters.

The goal of these three groups was to remain in power, and they worked together to attain that goal. They used any means to intimidate the population into submission, while promoting their own agendas, destroying any semblance of democracy. As Pierre-Raymond Dumas puts it, “[t]o understand the relationship between the military and the problem of democracy, one must recognize the fact that the higher echelons of the army are tied to the interests of the oligarchies.”

In Haiti’s case, the general’s in FADH accumulated as much wealth and power as their bourgeoisie counterparts. Both groups had a lot to lose monetary and resource wise, if the status quo did not remain. Thus, these groups played a role in planning, financing, executing, and maintaining the coup d’état.

*Role of the Military Institution*

The history of the Haitian military shows an anti-democratic organization which “exists essentially to the detriment of civilian society.” According to Dumas, Haiti’s military prevents the establishment of a democratic system by being “controlled by a minority class and defends

---

21 *Ibid* pg. 17
22 *Ibid* pg. 16.
interests of the dominant classes.” In fact, the higher echelons of the army are tied to the interests of the oligarchies so that both groups can achieve control and power that they desire.

On September 30, 1991, with the financial backing of the oligarchy, the military and its generals used violence to forcefully gain control of the country.

The 1991 coup d’état was a violent battle to attain power supremacy. This violence was instigated by the oligarchy and executed by the military and the paramilitary groups. While the oligarchy continuously provided monetary support for the military, the military used violence to suppress the masses’ displeasure of Aristide’s exile. This partnership became visible when the military junta elected Joseph Nérette as President and Jean-Jacques Honorat as Prime Minister of Haiti; both were key bourgeois figures.

Role of the Paramilitary (attachés)

While the coup was orchestrated by the military, the bulk of the violence was perpetrated by FRAPH, a paramilitary force. The U.S. Department of Defense defines paramilitary forces as “forces or groups distinct from the regular armed forces of any country, but resembling them in

---

23 Ibid
26 Girard, Phillip. Paradise lost: Haiti’s Tumultuous History from Pearl of the Caribbean to Third World Hot Spot. (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005) 130.
organization, equipment, training or mission.” FRAPH played a huge role in the post-coup violence. Ordered by the military and funded by the bourgeoisie, this heavily armed group’s role was to terrorize all those who expressed their disagreement with the coup d’état. In this group, the rank and file were made up of average citizens who were supplied and trained by the bourgeois and military. These men were led by military personnel that directly ordered them to eradicate any Aristide supporters. FRAPH carried out a sustained and violent pacification campaign through killings, rape, and pillaging. The Platform of Haitian Organizations of Human Rights states that “there were 1,021 cases of extrajudicial executions from October 1991 to August 1992.”

The Aristide supporters were not the only ones victimized by the FRAPH; government and military officials were terrorized as well. Anybody who did not support the coup d’état were terrorized. The terror tactics ranged from property damage to death. Among the victims of the violent suppression was Guy Malery who was the Minister of Justice under the Aristide government. Malery was assassinated for his open criticism of the coup d’état. Amnesty International also reported that military men against the coup were hunted down and faced either arrest or death. Fear and terror by FRAPH and the ruling class was the way of controlling everyone.

---

29 Ibid
30 Ibid pg. 66
31 Ibid pg. 65
32 Ibid pg. 64
Role of the Bourgeoisie

A segment of the bourgeoisie financed the 1991 coup. The Haitian bourgeoisie which made up 1% of the population controlled most of the country’s resources during the Duvalier dictatorship.\textsuperscript{33} Once Aristide came into power, their fears of losing economic monopoly and supreme power caused a segment to revolt against Aristide by financing his overthrow. The bourgeoisie supplied FADH and FRAPH with arms and money. An example of this is when the bourgeoisie “slipped Michel François [who led the attack on the National Palace and Aristide] and his men a few thousand dollars after the deed [Aristide’s exile] was done.\textsuperscript{34} The result of the funding was the reestablishment of the bourgeoisie political supremacy by the appointment of two of their own as President and Prime Minister.

Overall, these three participants collectively orchestrated the coup d’état. Next, we will explore the reactions of the population and the military during the coup. Then, we will explore two different groups of literature that attempt to explain the reasons for the coup d’état.

Reactions to the Coup

Confusion among the population took hold of the country hours before the departure of Aristide. When his removal was confirmed, the masses took to the streets of Port-au-Prince to


voice their displeasure and request the return of their President. In the beginning, the crowd was peaceful. The calm protest began to materialize into hostility when the population learned that the military had seized power. In response to this revelation, the masses began chanting anti-military and anti-bourgeois slogans: viv Aristide (long live Aristide), aba lame (destroy the army); Aristide ou lamò (Aristide or death); dechoukaj la poko fini (the uprooting is not finish).

There were also some attempts at limited armed struggle to overpower the military, but the masses soon recognized the futility. They could not overcome or fight the well armed military and paramilitary groups with rocks and machetes. This realization led to passive resistance. By passive resistance, I mean impromptu demonstrations to show discontent for the coup. Grassroots organizations took the lead in organizing and executing demonstrations.

**Role of Grassroots Organizations**

Grassroots organizations are “active community-based organizations seeking fundamental social, economic, and political change.” These groups play a fundamental role in Haitian history. Throughout the country’s history, these organizations represented by peasants, women, and students have served as community organizers and resistance fighters.

---

37 *Ibid* pg. 72

These communities organized themselves in order to survive and help fellow neighbors. The groups elected officers whose duty was to organize the rest of its members in order achieve their objective. In the simplest forms, peasant organizations in villages would become a *Kove* (working groups) which would help clear fields for planting or help build houses. Although peaceful most of the time, when threatened, these groups would transform into rebellious and political action groups that would fight for equality among the elites.

As community organizers, the different organizations adopted the slogan *yonn ede lot* (one helping another). The lower classes rely on themselves and their fellow neighbors to survive. The sense of community and the governmental abandonment felt by the masses created a fissure between the elites and the lower class. This split is seen in Haiti’s history and was prominent during the 1990 elections of President Jean Bertrand Aristide as well as the 1991 coup d’état. When the feeling of injustice boiled over, the reactions by grassroots organizations ranged from violence to passivity in the form of demonstrations and elusiveness. The violence came in the form of rebellions and uprisings.

The organizations had a range of ways to resist injustices done by *leta* (government and elite), but its greatest feature is the ability to adapt to different situations, which took place during the 1991 coup d’état. By adjusting to different situations in the country, the organizations can weaken under government oppression but will never disappear.

*Historical Resistance by Grassroots Organizations*

---

Grassroots organizations have always resisted government and elite injustices done to the lower class. In the earlier years of the Republic, violent peasant rebellions forced leaders like Alexandre Pétion to reform government policies which gave concessions, such as land redistribution and relaxation of controls of labor, to the lower class. Other rebellions occurred from 1840’s to 1890’s, by grassroots groups who called themselves armée souffrante (army of the poor). Arming themselves with wooden spikes, they violently fought against the government’s unpopular labor practices until the government responded with concessions. Even during the United States occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, organizations formed guerrilla groups and attacked the U.S. Marine Corps in hopes of “regaining national sovereignty.” One of these groups was called the Kako guerrillas, whose fighting ranks were made up entirely of peasants. This group, led by Charlemagne Péralté, strategically attacked U.S. Marines in Haiti. The force of these attacks slightly diminished after the assassination of Péralté by the Marines. In any case, attacks did not subside until the last Marine left Haiti.

Violence was not always the method used by the grassroots organizations. During the Duvalier dictatorship, the organizations practiced mawonaj (elusiveness). This form of

\[\text{Ibid pg.40}\]
\[\text{Ibid}\]
\[\text{Ibid}\]
\[\text{Ibid pg. 41}\]

resistance was practiced when the organization was exposed to external threats.\textsuperscript{45} External threats such as Duvalier’s Tontons Macoutes’ violent crackdown of these organizations, made it smarter to become elusive rather than being wiped out. The goal of \textit{mawonaj} was survival. The organizations and its leaders secluded themselves until it was deemed safe to reemerge and continue their political work. The different adaptation of the grassroots organizations makes it not only an organization for change but also a key factor for Haiti’s advancement.

The progression of Haiti was popularized by the beliefs of liberal theologians. Liberation theology is a “school of thought among Latin American Catholics that demands the Church concentrate its efforts on liberating the people of the world from poverty and oppression.”\textsuperscript{46} The Catholic Church in Haiti took an active role in condemning the Duvalier dictatorship’s oppression of freedoms. Once Duvalier was exiled, the \textit{ti legliz}(small church) movement continued its work with the help of the Church, in educating the public. Programs such as “Programme Alpha” (literacy program) and political education began to create economic, social, and political awareness among the lower class. The combination of \textit{ti legliz} and other grassroots organizations created understanding among the masses and would help catapult a leader of the \textit{ti legliz} movement to the presidency.

\textit{1990 Democratic Elections and the Grassroots Support}


The elections of 1990 marked the grassroots ability to freely express their discontent with social, economic, and political institutions. These different groups represented by ages, sexes, and occupation, converged to create a functioning Haiti. Once Duvalier was exiled, Robert E. Maguire explains that “the muzzle came off and Haiti’s grassroots leaders and groups truly emerged.”⁴⁷ The groups began educating their base and the masses on the electoral process and the changes needed to “fix” Haiti. They advocated programs that would resolve “fundamental problems that kept them poor, isolated, and locked out of the political process.”⁴⁸ To prevent the election of the status quo, Marc Bazin, political parties and grassroots organizations alike created a coalition to elect one of their own, Aristide. In him, they saw the ability to have their voices heard and their rights restored.

The coalition of grassroots groups and political parties strongly campaigned for Aristide to become president. Where they failed to campaign was for magistrate and senate seats. The focus of the coalition was to elect a president that would represent the lower class. The irony was that the coalition’s lack of focus in gaining a majority of parliamentary and municipality seats from the small elites caused the status quo to control the parliament. As Robert E. Maguire explains “Aristide would have to govern in conjunction with a parliament that largely opposed him and sought to play out politics as usual.”⁴⁹ The end result of these battles would be Aristide’s exile.

⁴⁸ Ibid
⁴⁹ Ibid pg. 164
When Aristide was exiled by the military and the oligarchy, supporters took to the street in protest. Grassroots leaders and groups organized demonstrations with the masses to protest and demand the return of the President.

With the rising protests, the military reacted brutally. According to Jeb Sprague, human rights investigators estimate between four to seven thousand people were murdered by FADH and FRAPH. These two entities coordinated violent attacks on popular organizations that opposed the coup d’état. The opposition was at their mercy. The greatest attacks took place in slums such as Cité Soleil, where the most fervent of Aristide supporters resided.

As the military junta took control of the country, FADH and their paramilitary group FRAPH began to crack down on dissidents. It is clear that along with known supporters of Aristide, grassroots organizations were victimized by the military and paramilitary groups. They never relinquished on their attacks on the groups until the return of Aristide. According to the Platform of Haitian Organization of Human Rights “an estimated 3,000 extrajudicial executions took place from October 1991 to August 1992.” Leaders and supporters of the grassroots organizations were hunted down, killed and “buried in mass graves or carried away in trucks, never to be seen again.”

The attempt to eradicate the grassroots movements and supporters of Aristide not only had negative social outcomes but simultaneously had negative consequences on the economy.

---

50 Ibid pg.65
51 Ibid pg.66
53 Ibid
The external threat caused the grassroots organizations re-implement *mawonaj*. The leaders and groups secluded themselves to survive the assault. Adapting to *mawonaj* kept the organizations functioning even though it was significantly weakened by the military junta. The self-imposed exile by organization members had grave consequences on Haiti’s economy. The economy which was already suffering from an embargo was further weakened by the peasant’s inability to cultivate their fields and securely sell their goods at *marché* (open markets). The implementation of the embargo combined with the killings of the peasants declined agriculture inputs and declined the production of staple crops by more than 20%. According to Elizabeth Gibbons, “from September 1991 to September 1994, the price of rice increased by 137% and the price of corn by 187%”, plunging the already impoverished country into near famine and collapse.

Once Aristide was reinstated as President, the organizations reemerged and continued their community and political works. Peasants were able to return to their fields to toil in their trade and once again the muzzle of oppression came off.

**Political Naïveté or Bourgeoisie Fear?**

An abundant amount of literature has been written about the causes of the September 30, 1991 Coup d’état. The literature is split into two groups. The first group “charges that Aristide

---


55 Ibid
was unaccustomed to the wheels of government.”

Thus, the cause of the coup was Aristide’s political missteps due to his lack of experience. The second group argues that the coup was initiated by a segment of the Haitian bourgeoisie who wanted to maintain their monopoly on power.

*Group 1: Political Naïveté*

The first group argues that the cause of the coup was Aristide’s lack of political experience, which resulted in political blunders. The group critiques Aristide’s political inexperience as direct cause of the coup. The inexperience led to his inability to compromise with the military institution and different political parties.

The first misstep that Aristide made as president, which eventually was a cause of the 1991 Coup d’état was provoking the ire of the military. In his inaugural speech on February 7, 1991, Aristide announced the forced retirement of six top ranked generals. According to Sprague’s *Paramilitaries and the Assault on Democracy in Haiti*, the reason for the forced retirement “was to remove some of the most dangerous FADH commanders,” who he feared could cause a coup d’état. The decision of Aristide to make a public speech without forewarning the generals of their own retirement was considered a dangerous political move. As a result, the announcement galvanized the military institution to take action against the Aristide government.

---

56 *Ibid* pg. 60
57 *Ibid*
58 *Ibid* pg. 55
59 *Ibid* pg. 60
Another political blunder was Aristide’s inability to compromise with different political parties. Aristide won the presidency through a popular democratic coalition called “Opération Lavalas.”\textsuperscript{60} The coalition was under the banner of \textit{Front National pour le Changement et la Démocratie} (Front for National Change and Democracy, FNCD) and was made up of popular organizations of the poor and progressive anti-Duvalierist parties.\textsuperscript{61} This coalition came together in support of Aristide so as to prevent the election of Bazin, a U.S.-supported conservative candidate.\textsuperscript{62} The coalition went as far as to remove their chosen candidates to make way for Aristide.

As a candidate, Aristide promised to work with all political parties for a better Haiti; but once he became president, this promise was quickly forgotten and he began to separate himself from the coalition.\textsuperscript{63} One of the ways he achieved this was his questionable appointments. Instead of choosing FNCD party members, who controlled seats in parliament, to be a part of his cabinet, Aristide chose outsiders.\textsuperscript{64} There only qualifications were their loyalty to him. An example of this was his choice of prime minister; René Préval. Prior to becoming Prime Minister, Préval had no political background and no political experience. In Robert Fatton Jr.’s book \textit{Haiti’s Predatory Republic: The Unending Transition to Democracy}, he points out that Aristide chose Préval for his loyalty and the lack of political experience, because “Aristide was

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{63} \textit{Ibid} pg.79.
\end{thebibliography}
against appointing career politicians to his government.” 65 When the parliament discussed a vote of no-confidence against Préval on August 13, 1991, Aristide and his supporters did everything in their power to prevent the vote. The supporters went as far as using intimidation to get there way.66 The FNCD, who had rallied around him were disillusioned because of Aristide’s lack of cooperation. The little support he had in the parliament was quickly lost.

This disillusionment split the once united coalition into three groups. The first group began to build a political opposition against the Aristide government. The second group became the radicalized opposition who allied themselves with the traditional oligarchy and the military to plot the ousting of Aristide. The third group was made up of Aristide supporters, who continued to share his vision. The supporters later became his new political party Organisation Politique Lavalas (Political Organization of the Flood, OPL).67

Thus, the first school of thought concludes that if Aristide was politically savvy, the 1991 coup d’état might have been avoided.

*Group 2: Bourgeoisie’s Fear*

On the other hand, the second perspective believes that the coup was unavoidable because of the refusal of a segment of the bourgeoisie to accept Aristide’s presidency and the reforms which came with it.


This group argues that the bourgeoisie directly caused the coup d’état by supplying the military and the paramilitary forces with arms and money to successfully oust Aristide. The underlying reason for the support was the historical class fissure between the elite and the lower class. This fissure was further split by Aristide’s proposed reforms and his campaign call for electoral déchoukaj- the violent uproot by the Haitian population of anything that represented the Duvalier regime.68

During the 29 year rule of the Duvalier regime, the bourgeoisie which makes up 1% of the Haitian population controlled over half of Haitian owned businesses.69 While more than 90% of the country lived under the poverty line, the bourgeoisie enjoyed an opulent lifestyle through business ventures, which separated the two classes.70 This inequality elevated the contempt which the masses held for the bourgeoisie. This disdain created the perfect atmosphere for the Aristide campaign to win the election because he was seen the saviors of moun andeyo (outsiders), to gain presidential power.71

In fact, during the 1990 campaign Aristide called for “electoral déchoukaj”, which was a slogan to rally voting support.72 The words were spoken to unite the masses in voting against the

68 Ibid pg. 78-82
72 Ibid pg. 78
oligarchy, however, the call created fear among the bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{73} It was the vengeance taken by the Haitian population against the Tontons Macoutes and other oppressors who supported the Duvalier regime. When Aristide, uttered those words, the bourgeoisie began to fear that their power would disappear and a wave of violence against them was imminent. The fear of losing the monopoly of power to the masses led them to support the coup.

Another basis for the monetary support of the coup was the unwelcomed reforms which Aristide began to implement after his inauguration. Aristide had support from some of the affluent but a large segment was “opposed to his call for social solidarity and for an equitable redistribution of wealth.”\textsuperscript{74} Reforms such as these were seen as “social bolshevism”\textsuperscript{75}

There is no doubt that the situation between Aristide and the bourgeoisie was tense; consequently the event which further fanned the flames of discontent was Aristide’s speech “Père Lebrun.”\textsuperscript{76} This speech was considered a direct attack on the bourgeoisie and a challenge to their decades of monopoly of power. The September 27, 1991 speech alluded to the practice of necklacing against any non-supporter of Aristide’s call for reform, specifically the sharing of wealth.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, the controversial speech which was made 3 days prior to the coup d’état served as a point of contention.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid
\textsuperscript{74} Fatton Jr., Robert. \textit{Haiti’s Predatory Republic: The unending transition to democracy}. (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002) 79.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid pg. 85-88
As can be seen, the second group of literature argues that the bourgeoisie’s fear of the loss of power combined with the inability to accept Aristide’s proposed reforms funded the coalition that would cause his ousting.

These two differing groups of literature about Aristide’s incompetence or the bourgeois resistance to his agenda make valid points on the causes of the coup d’état. Through their arguments, both groups describes to the proximate cause of the 1991 coup d’état and the overall cause of political violence in Haiti, the zero-sum game of power. The zero-sum game of power suggests underlying causes which are represented by weak civil-military relations and la politique du ventre (politics of the stomach).
Section 2: Proximate and Underlying causes

Zero-sum game

Zero-sum game of power is defined as the fight among political factions to obtain supremacy. In the case of the Haitian coup, the political groups were the civilian government of Aristide, the bourgeois oligarchy, and the military. The political factions look at power as an indivisible quantity that can be won collectively, but retained solely for their own benefit.

These three plotted for the control of Haiti and power supremacy was gained by the collaboration between the oligarchy and the military. The military would keep the power and with the help of FRAPH, would suppress dissention among the Haitian population.

The fight for power is not new to Haitian history. The 1991 coup was only the latest of many struggles for power among political factions. Before the coup d’état, the Duvalier dictatorship used similar tactics to maintain power. The Tontons Macoutes, the paramilitary force active under Duvalier was used to suppress dissention among the population.

With all these terror tactics and violence used to attain power, the real question remains, why? Why do the political factions ferociously fight to gain supremacy? To answer this question, we

---


79 Ibid pg.118
must take a look at two underlying causes of the 1991 coup, which plays a role in the overall political violence in Haiti; weak civil-military relations and *la politique du ventre*.

Civil-military relations

A source of political violence in Haiti is the weak civil-military relation that generates military politicization, which manifests itself into a zero-sum game of power.

Civil-military relations is “the relationship between civil society and the institution that protects it, the military.”80 According to the introduction in Finer’s book, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, “the government relies on two pillars; the military and civilian.” The two pillars can cause political violence when the institutions interfere in each others affairs. In the case of Haiti, the military’s interference in civilian politics, also known as military politicization, creates political violence.

Military politicization in Haiti, which is when military personnel directly involve themselves in civilian politics,81 began within a decade of Haiti’s independence. In 1807, Haiti was divided into two Republics; the North Republic led by Henri Christophe and the South Republic led by Alexandre Pétion.82 In the South Republic, due to poor resources, Pétion began


to divide land among his soldiers so as to retain power and loyalty. Pétion’s 1809 land distribution decrees extended to the northern part of the country after Haiti was reunified in 1820. Although the ruling class had distributed land to the public, it was only due to the pressures of peasant rebellions. The ruling class would pacify the peasants by giving into their demands so as to retain their power. The land distribution and other privileges were aimed solely to garner the fidelity of the military.

In the earlier years of the Republic of Haiti the ruling class used decrees such as land distribution in hopes of building a patron-client relationship- “vertical exchanges between individuals who are unequal in power or access to resources,” between themselves and the military. The ruling classes’ goal was to have the military become their clients and loyally serve their interests. In exchange, the ruling class would reward the military institution through material gains. What they failed to realize was that the generals of the army were also establishing their own patron–client relationship among their personnel. The generals began to obtain colloquial demands from the highest bidder. By colloquial demands, I mean whoever could provide an abundant amount of material and social gain to the generals. Those gains would trickle down to different military personnel. This “trickle down economy” established in the military institution created loyalty for the generals, rather than the country.

Haiti is a country with limited means; with the unemployment rate at 40.6% and 90% of the population under the poverty line, military service provided an avenue for social and material gains.

---

83 Ibid pg. 62.
84 Ibid pg. 63.
advancement. These advancements laid out the main motivator for military politicization in Haiti, political power. This power is the way in which the military can gain and retain its social and material opportunities, which ultimately results in economic power.

An aspect that has been popularized in explaining why military politicization occurs is the structural theory that “low external threats causes factionalism between the military and the civilian government.” In the case of Haiti’s military, this theory does apply to the civilian government’s lack of knowledge and experience when dealing with the institution. Maybe with an external threat, the government could gain knowledge on how to deal with the institution. However, the overall theory, that a lack of clear threats may “reduce the military’s cohesiveness, making it less capable of concerted collective action” is less applicable to Haiti. The reason for this is the patron-client relationship that the generals establish with the lower ranked military personnel.

The patron-client relationship adds another dimension to political power by illustrating the allegiance that the military personnel have for their generals. The loyalty comes from the ability of the generals to provide the monetary and social opportunities, which the Haitian government is unable to provide, due to corruption. In simple terms, the generals are able to pay their personnel fairly and on time. If left to the government, the military institution sees their

---


88 Ibid
fate as bleak as the Haitian population. The institution would be underpaid, under equipped, and poverty stricken. As a result of the uncertainty under a civilian government, the military maintains their statuses through their loyalty of the generals. They follow the orders given to them and use violence, oppression, corruption, and intimidation to further their interests; hence, the zero-sum game of power at work.\textsuperscript{89}

Petion’s land distribution marks the beginning of the military’s presence in civilian politics and from then on, the role of the Haitian military (FADH), evolves from protector to political powerhouse. Although colloquial demands, in terms of increases in salaries or promotions have replaced land distribution decrees, the same objective of gaining and retaining power through military allegiance endures. At the peak of its power and control, the military ousted 14 presidents from 1820 to 1956, earning the name of “the king-maker and king-breaker of Haitian politicians.”\textsuperscript{90}

In the case of the 1991 coup, the military began to take action against Aristide after the announcement of the forced retirement of the generals, hence the patron-client relationship was threatened. The military institution took actions to prevent its loss of power and prestige which resulted in the coup d’\textsuperscript{e}tat. The Haitian military which had a history of maintaining their status by any means saw Aristide as a direct threat to their politicized institution.


La politique du ventre (politics of the stomach)

The second underlying cause of the 1991 coup and the political violence in Haiti is la politique du ventre (politics of the stomach). Fatton Jr. defines la politique du ventre, as “a form of government based on the acquisition of personal wealth through the conquest of state offices.”91 Whereas military politicization must be a member of the institution, politique du ventre can be executed by any civilian, the backing of the military is helpful. The leaders of these countries focus on gaining personal wealth through government institutions by “devouring limited resources for their exclusive private gain.”92 By obtaining the power, Haiti’s resources can be captured and used by the winning faction. These groups use their power to enrich themselves and their supporters through corrupt means which results in the further impoverishment of the country.

In Haiti, this predatory political practice is a result of material scarcity and an unproductive economy.93 Haiti’s economy is dependent on the agricultural industry- coffee, sugarcane, and mangoes.94 During the Duvalier years, the elites were devouring resources in the agricultural sector and other sectors of the economy, which had negative effects on the overall market economy. Once Duvalier was exiled in 1986, Haiti attempted to rebuild its economy. In 1987, a year after Duvalier’s ousting, Haiti’s GDP was approximately 1.95 billion U.S. dollars

---

92 Ibid
93 Ibid
with 32% of GDP dependent on the agricultural industry. As of 1990, the economy was making modest gains with a GDP of 2.4 billion dollars but had long ways to go with a 1.3% annual production decline in agriculture and 1.5% annual employment decline in the assembly industry. Unfortunately, this attempt at an economic recovery was short lived once economic sanctions were implemented in 1991. As a result of the embargo, the employment at the assembly industry, which had decreased 7.5% from 1986-1991 plummeted to 80% between 1991 and 1994. Agricultural production which also had a declining annual trend of 1.3% saw its production plunge to 20% between 1991 and 1994.

The overall declining economic trend which results in scarce resources creates an unending cycle for the control of power and to this day prevents the country from thriving economically, politically, and socially. The embargo, which will later be discussed, helped the continuation of la politque du ventre. Resources that were already diminishing became close to nonexistent after its implementation. This situation continues to further degrade the humble conditions of the masses in Haiti.

This deprivation is the principle motivator which ushered Aristide into power on February 7, 1991. The Aristide ascension to the presidency sparked the anger of the traditional Haitian oligarchy and the military who wanted the keep the monopoly of power. The fear of

---

96 Ibid 1499-1500.
97 Ibid pg. 1500
98 Ibid
reforms was because of the possible loss of control over resources- agricultural and assembly industries scarce materials, which would limit their personal wealth. The risk of losing profit, made the oligarchy and military take extreme measures to keep the monopoly of power.
Section 3-The direct and indirect effects of coup

The late 20th century was plagued by scenes of political violence around the world. In general, these scenes of violence often times left a negative impact on the affected countries. In the case of Haiti, the 1991 coup d’état ravaged the country and left economic and social hardships which Haiti tries to improve to this day. For example, Haiti’s per capita GDP in 1990 was 367 dollars, which had risen from the 1987 GDP of 293 dollars; however by 1993 when the economic sanctions on trade and oil were supported and executed by the international community, the per capita GDP fell to 205 dollars.\textsuperscript{100} It took the country 5 years to regain and eventually surpass the 1990 GDP (1998, GDP $413).\textsuperscript{101} Taking five years to surpass the 1990 GDP per capita illustrates the devastation that the military junta and the embargo provoked. Not only did it cause instant suffering for the Haitian population but it also had lasting effects on the overall slow economic development in Haiti.

The violence directed by the military junta and perpetrated by FRAPH and FADH left thousands killed, tortured, and displaced during the conflict. The violence in Haiti caused an abundant amount of displaced peoples (internal and external). Haitians that could not escape the violence by migrating to the Dominican Republic and other countries, such as U.S and Canada, were forced to leave there homes and to flee to rural areas because of the lack of security. Some


\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Ibid}
300,000 fled from the city to rural areas.\textsuperscript{102} Also, thousands of Haitian refugees that did escape the violence and immigrated to other countries were mostly intellectuals and public service workers. Another sector that was affected due to the violence was education. Gross school enrollment fell from 83\% in 1990 to 57\% in 1994 because of the violence.\textsuperscript{103}

In the first eight months after the coup, the United States Coast Guard intercepted 38,000 “Haitian boat people” off of Florida.\textsuperscript{104} The long term effects of emigration from Haiti because of political violence and unrests have caused a brain drain on the island. The lack of professionals such as doctors and teachers has destroyed the public service sector of the country. The inability to provide education or health care has contributed to weak governance which continues to affect Haiti today. For example, in 2004, the United Nations Development Jobs (UNDP) estimates that there were only 2.5 doctors and 1.1 nurses for every 100,000 people.\textsuperscript{105} In contrast, the Dominican Republic has 19 doctors and 18 nurses for the same amount of people.\textsuperscript{106} The brain drain in Haiti makes the government unable to provide essential services such as health care, education, and electricity to the public.


\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid} pg.1500

\textsuperscript{104} Haitian Immigration.


\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid}
Another negative impact of the 1991 coup was the embargo. The already weak Haitian economy was devastated when the OAS and the UN jointly decided to institute a trade and oil embargo on Haiti. The embargo which was supposed to put pressure on the ruling class caused added misery to an already suffering population. The embargo had a direct impact on all economic and public sectors in Haiti. Within 3 years, unemployment affected 15% of Haiti’s population.\(^{107}\) The oil embargo which caused gasoline shortage caused the closing of many schools and the reductions of classes to 3 days per week.\(^{108}\)

The long term impact of the embargo can be seen by Haiti’s struggle to recover economically and socially in the 21\(^{st}\) century. According to Gibbons, “during the three years that the sanctions were applied, the gross national product declined by 120 dollars (30%).”\(^{109}\) This decline explains why the scarce resources which dwindled under the embargo are slow to recover in Haiti today. In the long run, the embargo not only destroyed the ability to provide essential necessities to the population which further weakened governance, but it also perpetuated the continuation of la politique du ventre among Haitian officials. Even though the international community provided monetary support in Haiti’s recovery after the embargo, it still took Haiti five years to regain its per capita GDP pre-coup d’état. After the embargo was lifted, as previously mentioned, the practice of la politique du ventre through corruption continued because the already scarce resources were almost nonexistent.


\(^{108}\) Ibid

\(^{109}\) Ibid pg. 1502.
Overall, the long term negative effect of the embargo and the political violence on Haiti is weak governance.

**Governance**

Effective governance requires the ability of government institutions to provide security to the population, resolve conflicts peacefully, and offer employment and material progress to citizens.\(^{110}\) In Haiti’s case, the fight for supremacy among the political class has created weak governance. In the bid to gain total control, so as to exploit Haiti’s limited resources for personal gain (*politique du ventre*); government institutions are unable to provide essential services, essential services such as a continuous electric power supply. According to the CIA World Factbook, out of 218 countries, Haiti is ranked 173 for electricity consumption and 153 for electricity production.\(^ {111}\) These numbers clearly represent the Haitian government’s inability to provide for its people.

The zero-sum game of power which has caused weak governance has made Haiti into a “predatory democracy” - a system of governance based on a zero-sum game of power caused by fighting factions of the political class.\(^ {112}\) A country such as Haiti that has a “predatory democracy” leaves the population to suffer because elected officials are driven by self-gain

---


through corruption. The corruption diminishes Haiti’s economic growth which prevents different institutions from providing essential services, law and order, and functioning public programs. As a result, the country has an unemployment rate at 80 percent and the illiteracy rate at 85 percent. The country was taking small steps towards economic, political, and social recovery, until the violence and lack of trade with the international community from 1991 to 1994 caused another plummet. The devastation and collapse of Haiti was avoided only through the aid of the international community. During the embargo, humanitarian assistance totaling 250 million dollars was provided by the UN and OAS to Haiti. Although this assistance only accounted for a third of the GDP per capita loss in three years, it kept Haiti afloat and avoided mass famines and health crises. After the embargo was lifted, the UN and OAS members pumped millions of dollars in the Haitian economy, which accounted for 40% of its GDP in 1995. Though all the aid was greatly needed in Haiti, it does not offset the fact that Haiti lost 3 years of economic growth because of the violence and sanctions. The ultimate effects of the slow recovery can be seen through weak governance in the country.

117 Ibid
118 Ibid
Section 4: Conclusion

The previous pages highlight the many issues of this Caribbean island. Haiti has social, economic, and political problems. These issues create political violence and weak governance that has transformed the country into a “predatory democracy”, a system of governance based on a zero-sum game of power caused by fighting factions of the political class.¹¹⁹

The 1991 Coup d’état illustrates the political violence which faced a country that attempted to democratize itself after three decades under dictatorial rule. Through this thesis, we learned that the proximate cause of the coup was Aristide’s inexperience and lack of cooperation with the elite class. This created fear among the bourgeois and resulted in the coup. These proximate causes were accompanied by two underlying causes, military politicization and politique du ventre, which manifest itself into the zero-sum game of power. The direct and indirect result of the 1991 coup d’état is the continuous political, economic, and social instability seen today.

The answer is as complicated as the history of the small island. To break this cycle, Haiti needs to reinforce its economic, social, and political institutions. By reinforcing the Haitian economy, it would create more funding for social programs and provide essential services to the population.

The way in which to reinforce the economy and social programs is to limit the practice of *la politique du ventre* which causes rampant corruption. By controlling *la politique du ventre*, the fight for power would diminish. Thus, this would promote good governance and eventually prevent political violence. It would promote progress as well as democracy.

As of right now, there is no clear way in which to control *politique du ventre*. For Haiti to begin to achieve the above goals, the country has to create new institutions and transform old ones. Haiti would have to change its “organizational design, institutional design, legitimacy, and socioculture factors”\(^{120}\) to see progress.

By organizational design, I mean the policing, justice and central bank (to name a few), would need to transform into functioning institutions. As for institutional design, governance would need to be strengthened. Also the legitimacy of Haiti as having a market economy would need to be fortified. Last but not least solidarity and responsibility would have to be integrated in Haiti’s socioculture. As Alice Blanchet, aide to Prime Minister Malval puts it, “[i]n Haiti, you always blame the other person. You never take responsibility. It’s a national disease.”\(^{121}\)

*Looking towards the Future*

Achieving these goals is not impossible but it will take the determination and the conviction of the Haitian peoples. These institutional reforms have to be done through bottom-

---


up organization. Grassroots organizations must once again take the lead in educating the masses by explaining the different reforms that need to be implemented for a successful Haiti. By focusing on each community, its needs, and promoting *yonn ede lot* (one helping another), then the communities in Haiti can begin to transform its institutions. The masses have the capability to change Haiti and the status quo; they just need dedicated organizations and the support of the government to provide guidance.

I hope through this research that more studies will be done to transform and improve the institutions in Haiti. The transformation will not be easy, but it is achievable. This country has seen plenty of violence during its two centuries of independence. It is time for Haiti and its people to look towards a better future. This is a great challenge but if each Haitian takes responsibility and stops blaming the other person, as previously stated by Blanchet, the country will achieve sustainable development and progress. This could eventually create political, economic, and social stability.
Bibliography


Center for Systematic Peace. *Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research.*

Central Intelligence Agency. WorldFactbook: Haiti.


Haitian Immigration.


UNdata. Statistic GDP per capita Haiti.
  
