

Haiti

Situation Report: Gang-related political violence and kidnappings
January 2022



Gang-related political violence and kidnappings will continue despite Haitian groups meeting in Louisiana, USA, to discuss forthcoming elections. Interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry's term finishes 07 February, pressurising all attendees to consolidate a political deal.

Summary

- Gang-related violence has continued to increase due to the worsening security situation and the growing power of the gangs.
- On New Year's Day, Prime Minister Ariel Henry fled a mass he was attending to celebrate Haiti's Independence Day before he could give his planned speech.
- Gang leaders have continued to exert their power over the territories they control, defying the rule of law and committing more acts of violence and extortion. The leader of a gang operating in Gonaïves threatened to kill the judge in charge of an investigation case that involves several gang leaders. The gang leader warned in an audio message that he had killed the judge's cousin and another man who were discovered to be informants for the police.
- There have been numerous other kidnaps for ransom and killings, including the murder of two Haitian journalists who were shot and then burned alive just outside Port-au-Prince. These are **VERY LIKELY** to increase further in the coming months given the grim security situation and political power vacuum.
- Six political blocs, as well as academics and Haitian NGOs, met at the Haiti Unity Summit in Baton Rouge, Louisiana from 13 – 19 January.
- Haiti's Senate sat for the first time in a year on 10 January.
- Despite both the Summit and the Senate meeting, concern is building on the ability to develop governance structures.



Analysis

Gangs

The security situation has continued to deteriorate in Haiti. Gang-related violence in particular has increased further in both scope and brutality in the past few weeks. Criminal gangs active across the country have targeted political leaders and civil servants in an effort to maintain their grip over the territories they control and fend off any attempt by the government to regain control.

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On 1 January, Prime Minister Ariel Henry fled a New Year's Day Mass he was attending in the city of Gonaïves to commemorate Haiti's independence from France following a shootout between his security team and armed gangs in the city. Gangs such as "Nou se Revolisyonè" operating in the city had threatened the bishop at the Cathedral of St. Charles Borromeo and had publicly opposed the Prime Minister's visit. They carried out several attacks on the days prior to interrupt the preparations for the planned visit. However, Henry's insistence on attending the mass and giving the speech is indicative of how violent acts have become part of daily life in Haiti and the amount of pressure Henry is under to prove to the international community that he is doing his best to defy the gangs.

There are however claims that the incident has been overstated. Daniel Foote, the former U.S. Special Envoy to Haiti, said in a tweet it was "a fake assassination attempt on a fake prime minister." Foote has been critical of both Henry and of the Biden administration's handling of the situation in Haiti but there is absolutely no evidence to corroborate his assertion that the incident was staged.

In northwestern Artibonite, the leader of the gang "kokorat san ras," nicknamed "General Meyer," threatened to kill a judge conducting an investigation involving several gang leaders. The gang has already killed two informants, one of whom was the judge's cousin. Moreover, gangs operating in Port-au-Prince kidnapped three police officers guarding the Senate President, Senator Joseph Lambert, on 8 January and are demanding a USD 5 million ransom. Credible local reports suggest that this was a politically motivated incident. It took place only two days before Senator Lambert's scheduled speech at the Parliament in which he suggested that the Senate's terms end in January 2023, not January 2022. This reportedly widened a rift between the legislative and the executive branches of government in Haiti.

Such attacks on political figures and judges are evidence of the growing power and defiance of rule of law by the gangs. Indeed, criminal gangs are becoming more than just pawns used by politicians to extend their own power and influence, instead becoming themselves the de facto rulers of large swathes of the country in their own right.

More kidnappings have occurred since the 15 December release of the last 12 Christian Aid Ministries missionaries kidnapped by the "400 Mawozo" gang. One local report alleges that an unidentified individual paid the ransom to free 15 of the missionaries, but only three were released on 6 December. Other captives later claimed to have escaped although their story suggests that they were left to leave by the gang in what could have been an agreement with the same or different individual(s). 400 Mawozo has since kidnapped unionist leader Paul Loulou Chéry and his wife on 5 January and currently demands 500,000 US dollars for their release. Some reports have noted a rise in kidnap-for-ransom crimes through 2021, compared to the previous year.

At least **328 kidnapping victims** were reported to Haiti's police in the first eight months of 2021, compared with a total of 234 for all of 2020, according to a report issued in September by the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti. Other sources put the 2021 figure at over 600 kidnappings, compared with 231 over the same period in 2020 while the Center for Analysis and Research in Human Rights (CARDH) reported at least 782 known kidnappings in Haiti since January 2021.



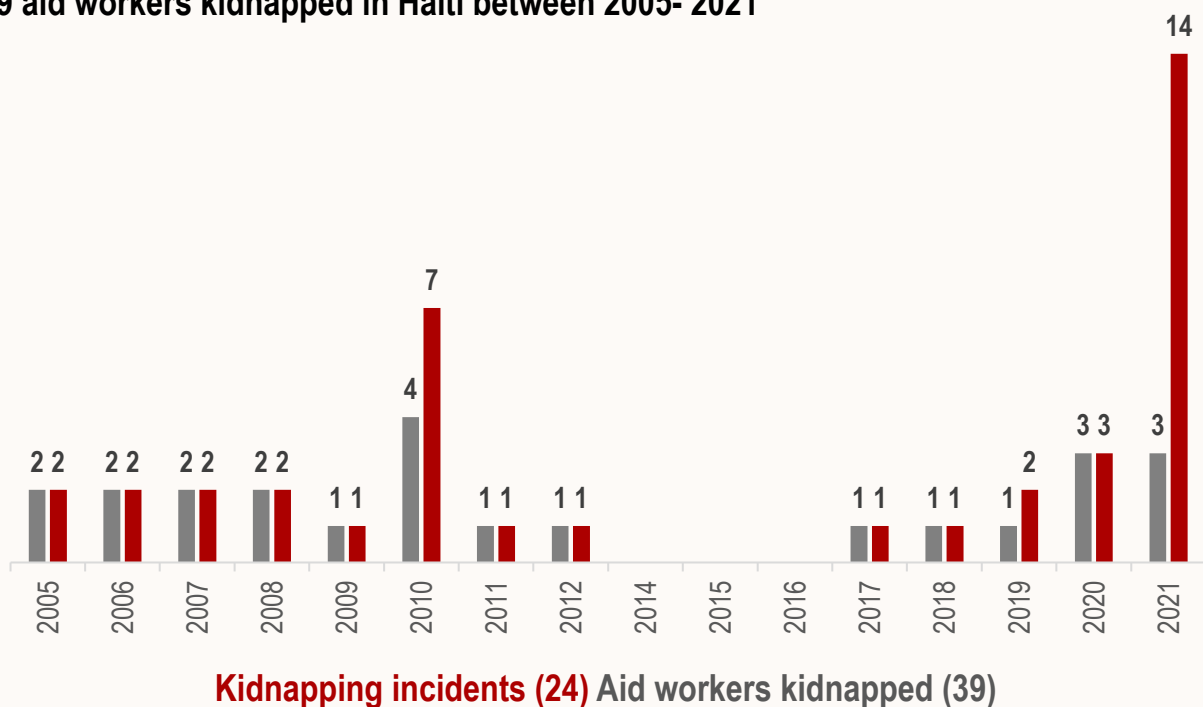
Aid Data Analysis: Kidnappings

Monitoring by Insecurity Insight identified 24 kidnapping incidents directly affecting aid organisations involving 39 aid workers between 2005 and 2021.

Since 2005, most kidnappings involved one aid worker, the exceptions being the October 2021 kidnapping of the 12 US and Canadian missionaries. In addition, two aid workers were also kidnapped together in three events in 2010 and in one event in 2019. In all incidents, the perpetrators are described as ‘armed gunmen’ or ‘criminals’.

The high level of kidnappings has also increased the risk of ‘pretend kidnappings’ where people may receive phone calls claiming that a close relative is held trying to extract ransom money. **Read the report covering 2017 to 2021 [here](#).**

39 aid workers kidnapped in Haiti between 2005- 2021



There have been numerous other incidents of gang-related violence such as the shooting and burning alive of two Haitian journalists, one of whom was a dual Canadian national, in the northern outskirts of Port-au-Prince.

In Martissant, another area of the capital, gangs fired at two minibuses on 28 December 2021 killing five people and wounding eight more. Three days prior, the same area had witnessed the killing of more than three people, one of whom was the coordinator of the northern department of the Unified Front of Transporters and Workers of Haiti.

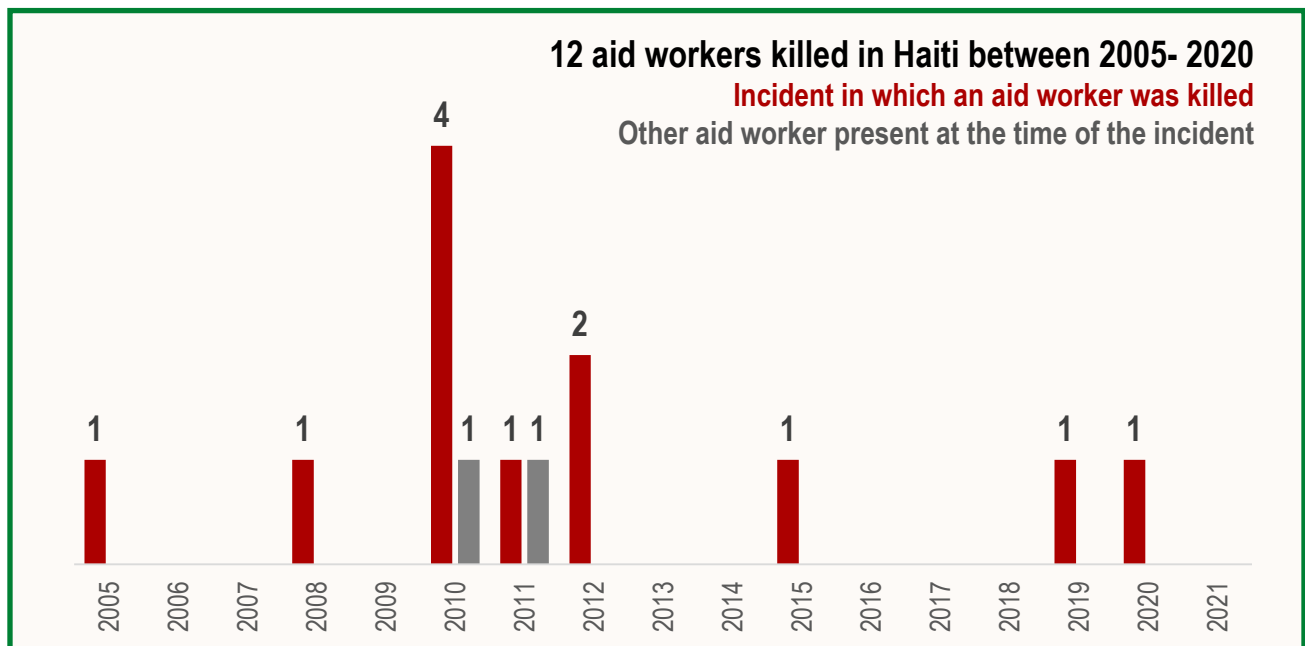
Meanwhile, in an attempt to take advantage of the worsening security situation, a group of inmates at the Croix-des-Bouquets Prison attempted an armed escape on 31 December in which 10 inmates were killed and four police officers wounded. This follows another jailbreak from the same prison in February 2021 in which more than 200 inmates escaped and more than 38 were killed.

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Killings

The National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH) said that **900 people were murdered** in Haiti between January to November 2021. Monitoring by Insecurity Insight identified 12 aid workers killed in Haiti between 2005 and 2021.

In most cases, aid workers were alone when they were attacked, with the exceptions being two incidents which took place when they were travelling to and from project sites in NGO vehicles with international colleagues. In May 2010, a Haitian driver was found dead after being kidnapped from his car. His British colleague who was also kidnapped was released unharmed. In October 2011, a Haitian driver was killed and his expat colleague injured when gunmen opened fire on their vehicle.



Documented incidents where aid workers were killed:

- **Feb 2020:** Haitian INGO aid worker killed in a home invasion over programme benefits.
- **Apr 2019:** INGO aid worker wounded in an attempted vehicle robbery. He died later in hospital.
- **Oct 2015:** Haitian UN staff member shot and killed while trying to obtain transportation to go to work.
- **Dec 2012:** UN international staff member robbed and fatally shot after exiting a bank.
- **May 2012:** Guard at an INGO school shot in a targeted killing at the school in a suspected personal dispute.
- **Oct 2011:** Haitian NGO driver fatally shot. The expatriate staff in his car was wounded.
- **Oct 2010:** Haitian NGO aid worker killed by gunmen soon after receiving his first paycheck.
- **Oct 2010:** INGO staff shot and killed after cashing a cheque for the INGO.
- **May 2010:** Haitian INGO driver found dead after kidnapping. The British aid worker who was also kidnapped was released unharmed.
- **Jan 2010:** Haitian INGO aid worker fatally shot while transporting corpses to a cemetery.
- **Sep 2008:** UN Haitian staff member killed allegedly due to a private dispute.
- **Jun 2005:** ICRC staff member kidnapped and later found dead.

Political context

Six political blocs, as well as academics and Haitian NGOs, met at the Haiti Unity Summit in Baton Rouge, Louisiana from 13 – 19 January. The stated aim is to agree a way to set up a transitional government and hold elections, after a two-year hiatus without a functioning legislative or judicial branch. Each of the six blocs will offer a differing view of how they see a way forward, with Georges Casimir, President of the Haitian Diaspora Political Action Committee and one of the organisers, stating that he hopes the Summit will lead to a final plan of action that leads to Haiti gaining a functioning government, while also dealing with the current levels of gang violence and kidnapping.

Meanwhile, Haiti's Senate sat for the first time in a year on 10 January. Only 7 members attended, because no legislative elections have been held since October 2019, and only 10 of the 30 seats are still filled. Senate President Joseph Lambert demanded elections be held this year as he is worried over Haiti's governance legitimacy, and over a lack of political consensus: "This year should be a year of dialogue." He also said that he would continue to lead Senate sessions, even after his term expires, something that will undoubtedly itself lead to further accusations of illegitimacy. This comes as Jamaican authorities arrested former Haitian Senator John Joel Joseph on 14 January. Joseph is as a prime suspect in the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse.

With interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry's term finishing on 07 February, the Summit is under pressure to reach a consensus over how Haiti's new governance structure should be finalised. However, although there appears to be broad agreement among the factions attending that elections should take place, the process is proving hard to finalise. Some want a power sharing arrangement including a Prime Minister and President, whilst others are looking for a single Head of State. Although retired U.S. Lieutenant General Russel Honoré will be acting as mediator during the Summit, the US has not officially offered support; instead, it is Haitian-led and community-backed.

As long as Haiti remains a regional conduit for the international drug trade, it is probable that the US will continue to take a significant (though informal) interest. This was reinforced by the [11 November US Advisory](#) (still in place) warning all US citizens to leave the country due to the deepening insecurities. Honoré told Mainstream Media that the Summit organisers were hoping to produce a final accord that they could present to the international community. However, even he was pragmatic enough to note: "Not everyone will get what they want... but the country will get what it needs."

General elections were meant to be held last year but were delayed due to a range of factors including COVID-19, an increase in gang violence and previous Prime Minister Jovenel Moïse's assassination (07 July 2021). Prime Minister Henry had also promised to hold elections promptly after his selection, however, that was quickly followed by the August 2021 earthquake and Storm Grace, meaning no new date has yet been issued, and the country still has no elections council.

Indeed, the illegitimacy of the current Senate's term continues to be discussed openly on social media and Haiti radio stations, with the governance vacuum also affecting moves to rein in the gang violence (see above) and gang leaders now influencing the politics of the country (see above and [report 21 Dec](#)).

Prime Minister Henry, who has not travelled to the Summit in Louisiana, met the remaining Senators on 10 January. The meeting is **LIKELY** a result of the continued influence that Senate President Lambert retains within the Senate, with his promise to continue the sessions. Following Prime Minister Moïse's assassination, Lambert declared himself President, with the support of some politicians – though his claim was largely ignored. He has also criticised an agreement that Prime Minister Henry signed with several political groups and leaders last September in order to build a provisional consensus government, until elections. Lambert's repeated focus on elections, stating "In any case, 2022 will be an election year...", reflect not just concerns over his and the Senate's legitimacy, but also his political ambitions – however, this will only be confirmed if Presidential elections are held, and he stands as a candidate.

The arrest of former Haitian Senator Joseph, indicates that despite the ongoing problems with governance, there are still some efforts to establish those behind Moïse's assassination, especially with the US FBI continuing to investigate his death, though the Jamaican Constabulary spokesperson did not comment on whether the request to hold Joseph came directly from the FBI.



Predictions

Gangs

- International pressure will continue to mount on Prime Minister Ariel Henry to put an end to the chaos in Haiti, but it is **UNLIKELY** that anything he will be able to make any substantial gains given the level of corruption and incompetence among the political elite, military and police.
- Kidnap for ransom is **HIGHLY LIKELY** to increase, perhaps to double or triple the number of incidents in 2021. It has become clear that gangs will target politicians, foreigners, religious leaders, civil servants, NGO workers, journalists, business owners and anyone else they deem dangerous or who could be used for a lucrative ransom.
- Ransom amounts demanded are **LIKELY** to continue to rise. This includes ransom demands for local Haitians - as can be seen from the USD 5 million ransom demand for the three Senate policemen.
- Murders are **VERY LIKELY** to also increase in 2022 given the growing power of criminal gangs and the prolonged security and political vacuum in the country.
- The latest attempted jailbreak at the Croix-des-Bouquets Prison shows that it is still possible to smuggle weapons into Haiti's prisons and so more such incidents are **LIKELY**.

Political context

- It is **HIGHLY UNLIKELY** that a consensus for either a transitional government or new elections will emerge. Indeed, one of the attendees – the National Haitian American Elected Officials (NHAEO - a diaspora group) – plans to discuss Haitian priorities further at the end of January, emphasising that even those attending see the Summit as the beginning of a long discussion over Haiti's future political make up.
- Prime Minister Henry and Senate President Lambert will **LIKELY** remain for some months at least, unless Presidential elections are held (and the result validated), or they may be assassinated. The continued tensions between the two – especially from Lambert – will **LIKELY** remain low key, with more attacks both on social media or mainstream media, or via targeted gang strikes. However, both will continue to work together officially, in order to give some credence to Haiti's current weak governance structures.

- The Summit, however, has successfully brought together a large number of those involved in Haiti's political and community-based organisations, without either US or UN or international coordination and is therefore locally focused – a positive step in itself. That being said, the pressure on the organisations to find a solution will remain significant given the influence of gangs on the current political environment. Indeed, mainstream media has recently repeated claims first made last summer (and noted in our [Sept 30 report](#)) that [Prime Minister Henry](#) was linked to Moïse's assassination. The renewed claims may be an effort to undermine Henry as he seeks to continue his stance against the gangs, and also enable a more legitimate government.
- Senate elections are **LIKELY** to be held at some point this year, if only to ensure its continued legitimacy. Presidential elections, however, are **MORE LIKELY** to either be held at the end of the year, or in 2023. Neither of these can be carried out unless an elections council is formed, a point the Prime Minister's spokesman emphasised: "We need to create (the elections council) first to have credible, fair and clean elections". Therefore, Henry will **LIKELY** look to form an elections council in the short term, with the emphasis on Senate elections – though this is **UNLIKELY** within the next three months while gangs continue to target politicians and their structures.
- Joseph's arrest - for now - will have little impact on the ability to hold either elections or the new consensual government. However, if he offers information that either implicates Henry (about whom unverified reports continue to be repeated claiming his apparent involvement in Moïse's assassination) or other senior politicians or gang members, then Haiti's already fragile political establishment will see further fragmentation, and this would also exacerbate current levels of violence.



Mitigation

Global and regional management

- Be supportive of Haitian staff and partner organisations who live and work in very challenging circumstances. Ensure that global staff is mindful of the difficult working conditions.
- Provide information and guidance on small, low-cost practical measures via remote support and training to local staff and partner organisations.
- Support local partners to nominate (and train) a Security Focal Person with clear tasks assigned in sharing and managing security information
- Regularly check in with local Security Focal Points.
- If you are working with partner organisations, check in regularly and share security training materials.

Training and security systems for local staff and support for partner organisations

- Train all staff and in particular security guards and drivers in basic surveillance awareness.

- Train drivers in safe driving techniques including dealing with crowds, checkpoints, barricades and corruption.
- Consider 'buddy systems' where staff members inform a buddy of intended travel (including to and from work) and report safe arrival. Provide clear instructions of how to check in if the 'buddy' does not report safe arrival and the steps and procedures to follow within the organisation if a staff member cannot be contacted.
- Put in place systems to ensure that there is always a team of staff members carrying out higher risk tasks such as withdrawing cash. Be aware that bank employees may pass on information on high cash withdrawals and that robberies are a risk on the way back to the office and teams should stay extra vigilant. Provide instructions and training of how to safely respond in a situation of an attempted robbery that prioritises staff personal safety over protecting money and assets.
- Consider thanking dedicated security guards and drivers to highlight the importance of their work during challenging security times and their important contribution to keeping colleagues safe and enabling your organisation's mission.
- Proactively involve security guards and drivers in security risk assessments, training and finding suitable mitigation measures.

Kidnap prevention

- Do not organise high profile donor or media visits to projects at the moment.
- Ensure all deployed staff are covered by abduction mitigations and the appropriate supporting packages.
- Update and safely store proof-of-life questions.
- Make staff aware of social engineering and ensure staff do not unnecessarily share personal information on their social media platforms.
- Implement specific kidnap prevention and survival training with all staff including partners.
- Implement crisis management training in which a kidnap situation is simulated so the Security Management Team can rehearse their readiness.
- Train staff how to respond to 'pretend kidnapping' calls where the caller claims to have taken a family member and demands immediate ransom payment by knowing how to ask
 - to speak to the reportedly abducted person, and
 - to ask for a proof of life question before paying money.
- Share surveillance awareness material with staff and local partner organisations.

Planning high value transport

- When planning a value transport of aid supplies, plan the route carefully. Consider to pre-inform key actors - including gangs - to ensure safe passage if reliable tolerance contacts have been previously built. Collaborate with other aid agencies to establish such contacts. Some religious leaders can be helpful in this process.

Surveillance Awareness. Used with courtesy of [CBM International](#)

Surveillance Awareness is a key element in kidnap prevention. Ensure that staff are familiar with basic principles. Remember – most attacks or kidnap attempts are well planned and are preceded by a period of observation, scouting out the target's soft spots.

1. Commuting

- Be vigilant - be aware of what is happening around you.
- Vary routes, travel times and types of transport.
- Consider travelling in groups.
- Consider using a 'buddy system' to announce travel and safe arrival.
- Do not share routes in advance.
- If you do not know your driver or the company providing them well, announce routes at the last minute and do not allow phone calls in cars. If possible, do not give the destination to the driver's dispatcher.
- Use rear and side mirrors and verify that no car is following. But try to avoid looking around - and particularly backwards - nervously. It will only draw attention to you.
- If you have a suspicion, slow down and see if they pass. Take a detour via a side route (think of going along three sides of a block rather than one), or if that is not possible, around a block, to see if they follow.
- If you think you are being followed, drive to the nearest place where you know you are safe (a police station, a well-guarded compound).
- Call your security focal point immediately if you are concerned that you are being watched/ followed. Don't wait, it might be too late by the time you are sure.
- Always report suspicions on being watched to your security focal person.
- Keep your doors and windows closed and locked at all times.
- Always keep some distance between your vehicle and the car in front of you so you can manoeuvre if you need to. If you cannot see the ground between your vehicle and the one in front there is not enough room to manoeuvre in an emergency.
- Avoid (illegal) roadblocks where feasible. Do not attempt to drive forcibly through roadblocks. If you do encounter one, turn around and get to a safer area or use a safer route where possible.

2. Office / house

- Ensure that the area around your house has minimal places where something could be hidden or someone could easily hide. Remove waste bins (trash cans), consider cutting down shrubs/overhanging branches, and check holes and pipes.
- When you have a gate, ensure it has a small window or hatch that you can use to check the surroundings before you leave.
- Before leaving your house/gate, (ask your guards to) check the street looking out for any nearby vehicle with occupants. Even better, set up CCTV to allow you to do so remotely.
- Be aware of people around your office, house or any other places you visit regularly, in particular about people who may be regularly hanging about. Be especially careful if you see such a person make a phone call/send an SMS once you are leaving.
- If in doubt, do not leave but ask for assistance, including from a local neighbour.
- Instruct your guard(s), if applicable, to make (ir)regular spot checks at all times of the day and night around the compound.
- Where possible ensure you have outdoor lighting and guards have torches for their patrolling.

3. Building relationships

- Hire your own security guards and build trusted relationships - do not use security companies who may rotate staff.
- Maintain a good employment environment for your guards and drivers to ensure loyalty. Ensure guards are well equipped such as rain gear/boots, a guard hut, 1st aid / fire fighting equipment.
- Ensure that you and all staff have good relations with your (local) neighbours so they inform you if anything suspicious is happening in your area.
- Encourage in particular your security guards and drivers to develop relationships with people close to your office such as other drivers or security guards as well as street vendors to ensure they inform each other of any suspicious activities.

4. Stay informed

- Monitor local media for breaking events – such as protests and route / checkpoint access - and be prepared to adjust your plans accordingly.
- If kidnappings occurred in your area, study what happened and learn.

5. Maintain as low a profile as possible

- If the above suggestions are carried out too openly there is a risk that hostile actors will observe and assume that the person (or group) doing so is a more valuable target. Therefore try to make any route changes, observations or other actions as natural looking as possible.

Map showing the areas discussed in this report



Related content

- Haiti [website](#) and [mailing list](#)
- Previous editions: [Kidnappings](#); [Fuel and Looting](#); [Gangs and the Haitian state](#); [Security and Politics](#). Also available in [French](#).
- Haiti Aid Worker KKA data. Available on our [website](#) or [HDX](#).

This document is part of Vigil Insight.

It is published by Insecurity Insight and made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the H2H Fund, which is supported by UK aid from the UK government. The contents are the responsibility of Insecurity Insight and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, H2H Network or the US or UK governments.

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Insecurity Insight. 2022. Haiti: Vigil Insight Situation Report: Haiti: Vigil Insight Gang-related political violence and kidnappings January 2022. Switzerland: Insecurity Insight.

