



Introduction

HP Risk Management's (HPRM) personnel have been supporting journalists covering events in Haiti for more than a decade. In 2021, the security situation in Port-au-Prince is more precarious than ever. A political power vacuum in the country against a backdrop of gang fighting means the potential for violence in the build up to the [scheduled](#) September elections is high.

Media workers on the ground reporting on the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and the aftermath, have faced uncertainties regarding what security posture to adopt. This advisory assesses the current security environment in Haiti and provides insights into the security options available in the coming months.

Situation Overview

The political and security situation in Haiti remains fragile following [the assassination](#) of President Jovenel Moïse on 07 July 2021. Compounding an already volatile security environment after years of civil unrest relating to [corruption](#), [poverty](#), [inequality](#), and [violent gang crime](#), the interim government recently called for the deployment of [foreign troops](#) to help secure key infrastructure and stabilise the country, a request rejected by the international community to date, and one largely opposed by an [apprehensive public](#).

Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph was replaced by Moïse ally and designated successor Ariel Henry on 20 July, following a [memorial service](#) for Moïse in the capital Port-au-Prince. Promising to meet various sectors "[to build consensus](#)", any disagreements between Henry and leading political figures going forward, or delays to the scheduled September elections, are likely to trigger widespread unrest. The planned burial of Moïse in his home town of [Cap-Haïtien](#) on 23 July could also give cause for violent demonstrations.

High levels of violent crime involving criminal gangs remain a serious hazard. Nearly 14,000 people in Port-au-Prince have been displaced by violence over the past nine months, [according](#) to the UN office overseeing humanitarian coordination. Combined with the ongoing economic and social impact of COVID-19, rising commodity prices and supply shortages, such factors will exacerbate tensions and pose operational challenges for media workers deploying to Haiti.

Interview with Reporter in Port-au-Prince

HPRM asked a foreign correspondent who recently spent a week reporting in Port-au-Prince the following questions:

HPRM: Do you have local security; and how safe does it feel for you out-and-about right now?

"Yes, I have unarmed security with me at all times when traveling or on the streets. It feels very do-able to be out and about. But we carefully select what neighborhoods we are going to. It's clear from everyone I talk to and some of the areas I've driven through, that there are clear "no go" areas. The area down by the water is clearly lawless. Trash isn't getting picked up. Buildings are all shot up. Everyone says to NOT go into those zones. Haitians are more worried than I've ever seen them about security."



HPRM: Are you inclined to think that security really isn't required if you have a good local fixer/driver?

"You might be able to get away without it, but you'd have to tightly limit where you go, and only go to entirely safe areas. Given that many places are borderline, having security adds to your flexibility."

HPRM: Does having a security team raise your profile, therefore adding to the risks of crime/kidnap?

"It does raise my profile but I don't think the gangs want to attack foreign journalists, so the higher profile could make me safer."

HPRM: Does having security make your job harder? Are folks less inclined to talk to you?

"The team I'm working with is a driver who's always in the car and a guy who gets out wherever we go but keeps his distance. I don't think it cramps my style."

Security Assessment

HP Risk Management (HPRM) spoke to a number of journalists and security personnel about the current security situation in Haiti. Please note all sources wished to remain anonymous.

Security Profile

Many media outlets are rightly concerned about the safety of their staff when reporting in Haiti, both for local employees and foreign correspondents on short reporting trips. Security firms in Haiti offer a suite of services that differ greatly, often dictated by the lawlessness at the time of an assignment. The dilemma facing newsroom management is deciding the level of security:

Option 1 - A full security entourage

Many security companies will recommend a B4 armoured vehicle for news teams, typically a Toyota Prado (B6 armoured vehicles are scarce), with a soft skin back up vehicle. Typically both types of vehicles will have a driver provided. Travelling with the news team will be a Close Protection Officer (CPO) and typically two more CPOs in the back up vehicle. This is often considered the 'Gold Standard' of protection for news teams.

Pros: The security presence should deter the majority of criminals.

Cons: News teams could also find their movements restricted and the security presence cumbersome. Although many VIPs use armoured vehicles, they undoubtedly stand out and potentially could make the team a target.

Option 2 - Low profile and minimal visible security

Some media outlets prefer a much lower profile, travelling with a trusted fixer/driver in a vehicle type that blends in and with little or no support from CPOs. Some reporters have told us their preferred transportation are motorcycles, which are much better at manoeuvring away from street blockades or demonstrations.

Pros: Media workers are discrete and more mobile.

Cons: Reporters and journalists are more vulnerable if they do attract unwanted attention from criminals and bad actors. There is no support to evacuate or deal with an injury. Those travelling on motorcycles are more exposed and vulnerable.



Armed Security Considerations

Weapons in Haiti are prevalent, especially in Port-au-Prince. Many security firms will not supply a CPO unless they are armed, but some do. Many media outlets have a strict company policy that they will not operate with armed guards unless in exceptional circumstances.

If engaging in armed security, here are some important questions to ask any provider as part of a due diligence vetting process:

- Are the security company and its operators licensed to carry weapons?
- What level of safety training do armed individuals receive?
- Where are the rounds located in relation to the chamber?
- What are the rules of engagement?

Ultimately any organisation engaging armed security needs to prepare for the fallout of a scenario in which a hired security operator inadvertently kills an innocent bystander while protecting their clients.

Media outlets are advised to adopt a flexible security profile to be adapted by the day-to-day situation on the ground, and the type of assignment(s) that reporters are undertaking. Dynamically risk assessing each day's assignment and changing security levels based on this methodology is sensible.

Note that many private individuals in Haiti will carry a concealed weapon, so consider this when hiring local staff to act as drivers and fixers and ask if they are armed.

Other Media Safety Considerations

Violent Protests

Roadblocks and burning barricades are commonplace during periods of unrest and can restrict movement, particularly around Port-au-Prince. Diplomatic missions are potential flashpoints for demonstrations and have been [targeted by protesters](#) in the past. Police typically use [live fire](#), [tear gas](#), [rubber bullets](#), and beatings to disperse crowds, and have been accused of [colluding with criminal gangs](#) in certain locations.

Crime & Kidnapping

Over 150 gangs are [reportedly](#) active in Haiti, such as the G9 alliance, Fantom 509 and 400 Mawozo. The largest gangs are powerful, well-organised, and can be ruthless as they vye for territory in the poorer districts and neighborhoods. In Port-au-Prince certain neighbourhoods are now 'no-go' zones for local police.

The rate of kidnapping for ransom [significantly increased](#) in the first quarter of 2021, allowing criminal gangs [to acquire](#) increasingly sophisticated weapons. In recent months [journalists](#), [activists](#), [engineers](#), and [the clergy](#) have all been targeted by kidnappers.

Intimidation, extortion and violence at checkpoints and blockades is a significant risk. Foreign nationals travelling to/from Toussaint Louverture airport have been killed in the past, including [a French couple](#) in 2019.

“Gangs have become more brazen, controlling large parts of the capital, attacking at will, kidnapping children on their way to school and pastors in the middle of delivering their services”. *Source: [NY Times](#)*



Media Threats

Police intimidation and brutality against journalists and activists in Haiti is prevalent, a factor that resulted in [media demonstrations](#) in January 2021. Journalists have received [death threats](#), been [beaten](#), and shot with live ammunition while reporting on the ground, including [Setoute Yvens](#), [Edmond Agéonor Joseph](#) and [Chery Dieu-Nalio](#). Other journalists have been kidnapped and murdered, as highlighted with the cases of [Diego Charles](#) and [Vladjimir Legagneur](#).

[HP Risk Management](#) (HPRM) specialises in risk advisory services, training, and crisis management for the media. We provide on-hand support to some of the world's most pre-eminent news organisations and journalist associations. We have been supporting journalists covering Haiti for over 10 years, and are on hand to provide support for deployments, including information on accommodation, local support and regional security dynamics.

[RiskPal](#) is an online risk assessment platform built to improve the quality and efficiency of your risk assessments, launched in May 2020. Containing up to date health, safety and security risk information, including detailed advice on covering civil disorder and conflict zones, RiskPal is bringing the risk assessment process into the digital age. Please get in touch for more information: info@riskpal.co.uk

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared by HP Risk Management Limited (herein "HP") and is based on information available at the time of writing.

The information contained is provided as general advice and information only and any actions taken or not taken by clients or third parties is their own responsibility. HP accepts no liability for any loss (direct or indirect) or damage suffered as a result of reliance on the information provided, save as may otherwise be set out in any terms of business or terms of use agreed with our clients.

While every care has been taken to ensure that the content is useful and accurate, HP gives no guarantees, undertakings or warranties in this regard, and does not accept any legal liability or responsibility for the content or the accuracy of the information so provided. Any errors or omissions brought to the attention of HP will be corrected as soon as possible.