

# HAITI / AYITI

**Short History:** The native Taino Amerindians - who inhabited the island of Hispaniola when it was discovered by COLUMBUS in 1492 - were virtually annihilated by Spanish settlers within 25 years. In the early 17th century, the French established a presence on Hispaniola, and in 1697, Spain ceded to the French the western third of the island, which later became Haiti. The French colony, based on forestry and sugar-related industries, became one of the wealthiest in the Caribbean, but only through the heavy importation of African slaves and considerable environmental degradation. In the late 18th century, Haiti's nearly half million slaves revolted under Toussaint L'OUVERTURE. After a prolonged struggle, Haiti became the first black republic to declare its independence in 1804. The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti has been plagued by political violence for most of its history. After an armed rebellion led to the forced resignation and exile of President Jean-Bertrand ARISTIDE in February 2004, an interim government took office to organize new elections under the auspices of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Continued violence and technical delays prompted repeated postponements, but Haiti finally did inaugurate a democratically elected president and parliament in May of 2006.

**Location:** Caribbean, western one-third of the island of Hispaniola, between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, west of the Dominican Republic

**Area:** total: 27,750 sq km, slightly smaller than Maryland

**Climate:** tropical; semiarid where mountains in east cut off trade winds

**Terrain:** mostly rough and mountainous

**Natural resources:** bauxite, copper, calcium carbonate, gold, marble, hydropower

**Natural hazards:** lies in the middle of the hurricane belt and subject to severe storms from June to October; occasional flooding and earthquakes; periodic droughts

**Environment - current issues:** extensive deforestation (much of the remaining forested land is being cleared for agriculture and used as fuel); soil erosion; inadequate supplies of potable water

## PEOPLE (HEALTH, RELIGION, LITERACY)

**Population:** 8,924,553

**Birth rate:** 35.69 births/1,000 population (2008 est.)

**Death rate:** 10.15 deaths/1,000 population (2008 est.)

**Infant mortality rate:** total: 62.33 deaths/1,000 live births

**Life expectancy at birth:** total population: 57.56 years

**Total fertility rate:** 4.79 children born/woman (2008 est.)

**HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:** 5.6% (2003 est.)

**HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:** 280,000 (2003 est.)

**HIV/AIDS - deaths:** 24,000 (2003 est.)

**Major infectious diseases:** degree of risk: high

**Food or waterborne diseases:** bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A and E, and typhoid fever

**Vectorborne diseases:** dengue fever and malaria

**Water contact disease:** leptospirosis (2008)

**Ethnic groups:** Black 95%, mulatto and white 5%

**Religions:** Roman Catholic 80%, Protestant 16% (Baptist 10%, Pentecostal 4%, Adventist 1%, other 1%), none 1%, other 3%

*Note:* roughly half of the population practices voodoo

**Languages:** French (official), Creole (official)

**Literacy:** definition: age 15 and over can read and write: *total population: 52.9%*

## GOVERNMENT

**Government type:** republic

**Capital:** Port-au-Prince

**Administrative divisions:** 10 departments (departements, singular - departement); Artibonite, Centre, Grand 'Anse, Nippes (*where our mission is*), Nord, Nord-Est, Nord-Ouest, Ouest, Sud, Sud-Est

**Independence:** 1 January 1804 (from France)

**Constitution:** Approved March 1987; suspended June 1988 with most articles reinstated March 1989; constitutional government ousted in a military coup in September 1991, although in October 1991, military government claimed to be observing the constitution; returned to constitutional rule in October 1994; constitution, while technically in force between 2004-2006, was not enforced; returned to constitutional rule in May 2006

**Legal system:** Based on Roman civil law system; accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

**Suffrage:** 18 years of age; universal

**Executive branch:** Chief of state: President Rene PREVAL (since 14 May 2006)

head of government: Prime Minister Michele PIERRE-LOUIS (since 5 September 2008)

cabinet: Cabinet chosen by the prime minister in consultation with the president

elections: president elected by popular vote for a five-year term (may not serve consecutive terms); election last held 7 February 2006 (next to be held in 2011); prime minister appointed by the president, ratified by the National Assembly

election results: Rene PREVAL elected president; percent of vote - Rene PREVAL 51%

**Legislative branch:** Bicameral National Assembly or Assemblée Nationale consists of the Senate (30 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve six-year terms; one-third elected every two years) and the Chamber of Deputies (99 seats; members are elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms);

**Judicial branch:** Supreme Court or Cour de Cassation

## ECONOMY

**Economy - overview:** Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with 80% of the population living under the poverty line and 54% in abject poverty. Two-thirds of all Haitians depend on the agricultural sector, mainly small-scale subsistence farming, and remain vulnerable to damage from frequent natural disasters, exacerbated by the country's widespread deforestation. While the economy has recovered in recent years, registering positive growth since 2005, four tropical storms in 2008 severely damaged the transportation

infrastructure and agricultural sector. US economic engagement under the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE) Act, passed in December 2006, has boosted apparel exports and investment by providing tariff-free access to the US. HOPE II, passed in October 2008, has further improved the export environment for the apparel sector by extending preferences to 2018; the apparel sector accounts for two-thirds of Haitian exports and nearly one-tenth of GDP. Remittances are the primary source of foreign exchange, equaling nearly a quarter of GDP and more than twice the earnings from exports. Haiti suffers from high inflation, a lack of investment because of insecurity and limited infrastructure, and a severe trade deficit. In 2005, Haiti paid its arrears to the World Bank, paving the way for reengagement with the Bank. Haiti is expected to receive debt forgiveness for about \$525 million of its debt through the Highly-Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative by mid-2009. The government relies on formal international economic assistance for fiscal sustainability.

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ha.html>