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FEATURED Q&A

Where Does the Assassination of Moïse Leave Haiti?



The assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on Wednesday has resulted in a new crisis and more uncertainty for Haiti. // File Photo: Haitian Government.

Q The assassination early Wednesday morning of President Jovenel Moïse has plunged Haiti, which was already dealing with political unrest, widespread insecurity and economic hardship, into a new and unexpected crisis. The killing was condemned by leaders around the world, including U.N. Secretary General António Guterres, who said, "the perpetrators of this crime must be brought to justice." To what extent will Moïse's assassination create a political vacuum and new unrest in Haiti? Will those responsible face justice? What effects will the episode have on the presidential and legislative elections and the constitutional referendum, which are currently scheduled for September? What will the situation mean for the functioning of Haiti's economy and commerce?

A Bocchit Edmond, Haiti's ambassador to the United States: "Under article 149 of the Haitian Constitution, Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph will assume the functions of the executive branch until elections in September. The government has increased security presence and declared a state of siege to ensure the safety of all citizens. An investigation is underway by the Haitian National Police, Department of Justice and all relevant ministries to ensure that the culprits of this heinous crime are brought to justice. First Lady Martine Moïse was severely wounded and is hospitalized in critical condition. We are committed to finding truth and justice for the family of the president and the people of Haiti. While several suspects have been arrested, we have requested investigative assistance from the U.S. government with our ongoing investigation. Although our nation is mourning

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Authorities Detain 17 in Assassination of Haiti's Moïse

Haitian authorities have detained 17 people, including several former members of Colombia's army and two Haitian-Americans, in connection with the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

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BUSINESS

U.S., Mexico Reach Deal on Union Vote at GM Plant

The United States and Mexico reached an agreement to allow workers at a General Motors plant in the city of Silao to hold a union vote.

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POLITICAL

Bolsonaro Threatens to Cancel Election, Claims Fraud

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said he anticipated fraud in next year's presidential election and suggested the vote could be canceled if the voting system is not reformed.

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Bolsonaro // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Authorities Detain 17 in Assassination of Haiti's President

Authorities in Haiti have detained 17 people in connection with Wednesday's assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, adding that eight other suspects are still being sought and that police had killed three others, the Associated Press reported today. Two of the people arrested are believed to hold dual U.S.-Haitian citizenship, and Colombia's government said at least six of the suspects were formerly members of its army, the wire service reported. On Thursday night, Haiti's National Police chief, Léon Charles, said 15 of the people arrested were Colombian. "We are going to bring them to justice," said Charles. Officials displayed the 17 detainees handcuffed and sitting on the floor during a news conference Thursday to discuss developments in the case. Colombia's government did not release the names of the six detainees it said were former members of its army, but the leader of Colombia's national police, Gen. Luis Vargas Valencia, said Colombian President Iván Duque had ordered the country's police and army to cooperate with Haiti in the investigation. "A team was formed with the best investigators ... they are going to send dates, flight times, financial information that is already being collected to be sent to Port-au-Prince," said Vargas, the AP reported. The U.S. State Department said that while it was aware of reports that Haitian-Americans were among those arrested, it added that it could not confirm the reports or comment on them. Haitian officials identified the Haitian-Americans as James Solages and Joseph Vincent, the AP reported. On a website for a charity he reportedly helped to establish in Florida in 2019, Solages described himself as a "certified diplomatic agent," adding that he previously worked as a bodyguard at Canada's embassy in Haiti. In a statement Thursday, the Canadian government said one of the men arrested had been "briefly employed as a reserve bodyguard" by a private contractor at its embassy. The statement did

not name Solages. Meantime, Taiwan's foreign ministry said police in Haiti had arrested 11 armed suspects who attempted to break into its embassy in Haiti on Thursday. It did not give a reason for the break-in nor release the identities of the suspects. "As for whether the suspects were involved in the assassination of the president of Haiti, that will need to be investigated by the Haitian police," Joanne Ou, a spokeswoman at Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told the AP. She told CNN that officials at the embassy called local police after "a group of armed suspects," which the Taiwanese foreign ministry later described as "mercenaries," were arrested inside the embassy at 4 p.m. without resistance. It was unclear whether the 11 suspects arrested at the embassy were among the 17 that Haitian police had arrested, CNN reported. Tensions were high in Port-au-Prince on Thursday. Haitian officials have called for calm, but some people took to the streets late in the day, burning cars and demanding justice, CNN reported.

Bolsonaro Threatens to Cancel Election, Suggests Fraud

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Thursday ramped up rhetoric anticipating fraud in next year's presidential election, suggesting the vote could be canceled unless the voting system is reformed, the Associated Press reported. "Either we do clean elections in Brazil, or we don't do elections at all," he told supporters in Brasília. Bolsonaro for week has been raising concerns about Brazil's electronic voting system, which has been in place since 1996. He has claimed past elections have been fraudulent, including the 2018 presidential vote that he won, which he says he should have won without a second round. The national electoral tribunal last month ordered Bolsonaro to present any evidence of fraud, which he has not yet done. In a live broadcast on social media this week, Bolsonaro said he could reject next year's election results if he loses. The president is seeking re-election, and the latest polls show that he would lose to former President

NEWS BRIEFS

At Least Five Killed in Gun Battles in Caracas, Authorities Close Roads

Venezuelan authorities have closed roads in Caracas amid escalating gun violence between security forces and organized crime gangs that human rights groups in the country say has killed at least four people and wounded another four, Reuters reported. Analysts say criminal groups are trying to expand the territory under their control in the capital, moving from slums in the outskirts of the city and into more residential and commercial areas, according to the report. Gun battles have broken out in at least five populous neighborhoods over the past day.

Recent Power Outage in Central America Cost \$18.2 Million: Official

The economic cost of a regional power outage in Central America on Wednesday totaled about \$18.2 million, said René González, the head of the region's electricity operator, EOR, Reuters reported. The blackout left Honduras and Nicaragua and parts of Guatemala and El Salvador in the dark. González said two failures had caused it, one at the key Amateca-Toncontín transmission line in Honduras followed by an overload at the Brillantes power substation near the Mexico-Guatemala border that led to a "voltage collapse," according to the report.

Brazil's Inflation Hits Nearly Five-Year High

Brazil's rate of inflation last month hit its highest level in almost five years, according to government statistics agency IBGE, Reuters reported Thursday. The annual rate now stands at 8.4 percent, more than twice the central bank's goal for the end of the year. The rise in June was fueled by a 1.1 percent increase in housing costs, including electricity. The annual rate last month was up from 8.1 percent in May and the highest since September 2016.

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party. In a poll by Inteligência em Pesquisa e Consultoria (IPEC), which was published by local newspaper O Estado de S. Paulo in late June, 49 percent of respondents said they would vote for Lula, versus 23 percent for the current president. Bolsonaro's approval ratings have plummeted over the past year as Brazil struggled with the Covid-19 outbreak. Corruption scandals involving Bolsonaro are also taking a toll on his popularity. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in Thursday's Advisor.]

BUSINESS NEWS

U.S., Mexico Reach Deal on Union Vote at General Motors Plant

The United States and Mexico on Thursday reached a deal allowing workers at a General Motors facility in the Mexican city of Silao to hold a union vote on Aug. 20, said the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, or USTR. The New York Times reported. The plan came in response to a request by the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden for Mexico to review labor conditions at the auto plant as part of a new so-called "rapid response" mechanism included in the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA. "Reaching an agreement with Mexico on a remediation plan shows the USMCA's potential to protect workers' rights and the benefits of a worker-centered trade policy," USTR Katherine Tai said in the statement. "Fully implementing and enforcing the USMCA not only helps workers there, it also helps American workers by preventing trade from becoming a race to the bottom," she added. Democratic legislators in the United States pushed for the labor provisions to be part of the trade pact. The point of the rapid response mechanism "is to promote change at the plant level without having to resort to sanctions," Kim Nolan García, assistant professor at FLACSO México, and Tamara Kay, a professor at the University of Notre Dame, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published June 2.

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the assault on our democracy, the government, including all relevant stakeholders, are working to ensure free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections in September. President Moïse may have been assassinated, but his vision for a more prosperous Haiti has not. While Haiti is one of the three countries of the region that managed the Covid-19 pandemic successfully, we cannot ignore or overlook the economic impact of the pandemic on tourism and agriculture, as well as tax collections and the informal sector. Despite the economic challenges, the government increased its spending to purchase medical equipment and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. We are nonetheless open for commerce. The death of the president may further exacerbate the economic challenges facing our nation, but the people of Haiti are incredibly resilient. Thus, we shall overcome."

A **Georges Fauriol, fellow at the Caribbean Policy Consortium and senior associate at the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS):** "With disputed national elections and a constitutional referendum delayed several times but now scheduled for Sept. 26, the assassination of Jovenel Moïse generates even greater uncertainty. The tragedy does, however, offer a narrow opportunity for a consensus to emerge among Haiti's dysfunctional political factions and the government—outlining an agreement regarding an interim national leadership structure, tied to a legally functioning national electoral council, an electoral timetable and concrete plans to clamp down on gang violence. But none of this will be easy. The short-term challenge is confirming the institutional authority, let alone political legitimacy, of Moïse's immediate successors. Outgoing interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph claims he is running the country, but he faces a challenge from his successor, Ariel Henry, designated by Moïse on Monday but not sworn in. Any dispute emerging over the

nation's leadership, coupled with a fractured opposition, worsens the odds that Haiti's political community will on its own reach a workable agreement. What the United States does in the coming weeks is therefore critical. For starters, the United States and oth-

“The tragedy does, however, offer a narrow opportunity for a consensus to emerge...”

— Georges Fauriol

ers must help Haiti identify those behind the assassination. Perhaps by naming a special envoy, Washington can also play an effective behind-the-scenes role encouraging Haitian political and civil society leaders to coalesce around a path forward. This implies that the international community synchronizes a core message—essentially lacking so far. Most importantly, this means that the Biden administration must shift from its seeming indifference toward Haiti and ratchet up its focus on the country's widening crisis."

A **Bianca Shinn Desras, social justice advocate and policy advisor:** "President Moïse's assassination has widened Haiti's political unrest and insecurity. The perpetrators of this crime must be brought to justice with the urgent assistance of Haiti's international community and friends. Unfortunately, we have rarely witnessed criminals and organized thugs being brought to justice in Haiti. The utopia of impunity in Haiti must come to an end for the country and its citizen to have an opportunity to move forward. The perpetrators and network of operatives that planned the president's execution will most likely face no consequences for their actions. We have witnessed the brutal killings of journalists, and recent massacres, and too many to list go unpunished. The

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current situation will force the country into an economic whirlwind of collapse. We must prepare for a complex humanitarian crisis because of Covid-19, insecurity and a leadership vacuum. The international community's neocolonialist and systemic racist postures and policies require a shift. These practices have consistently led to a chaotic history of instability. This new crisis will only create more division among the political class while certain powerful entities will solidify their authority in the country. The climate is not feasible for an election. The Biden administration must shift its policy toward forced elections in Haiti and, for once, listen to the voices of the Haitian civil society. The priority should be placed on strengthening institutions, such as the police, judiciary and public health, to avoid plunging into a complete failed state."

A **Chantalle F. Verna, associate professor of history and international relations at Florida International University:** "The vacuum and unrest are already at play, despite Prime Minister Claude Joseph's statements that things are under control. The declared state of siege extends executive power to Joseph, whose authority was already under question. It is uncertain how consensus will be reached in order to move forward with elections, but such consensus is essential. If there is any role for foreigners, it is to support dialogue and movement in that direction among in-country actors across sectors rather than pushing any particular trajectory. Close attention to and following of the existing constitutional guidelines are a sound course of direction. Also, serious engagement with leaders and

representatives of popular organizations to ensure the involvement of perspectives from across civil society is critical. It is not clear who is responsible for this heinous act—be they individuals from inside and/or outside of Haiti—and at what point we may ever come to know. That said, statements in

“**The vacuum and unrest are already at play..”**

— Chantalle F. Verna

Haiti and outside of it have emphasized that those responsible must be held accountable. The record thus far on holding individuals and organizations involved in the murder of men, women and children across sectors of Haitian society has not been encouraging, particularly during the past year and decades. Furthermore, given the history of foreign involvement in political assassinations, be it through funding, weapons supply, training or hired mercenaries, and the broader forms of assault on human life in Haiti, it will be critical that we see a far-reaching conversation about accountability. Remittances are likely to be even more in demand in Haiti. But innovative approaches to supporting Haiti's economy and commercial opportunities should also lean further toward the needs and interests of consumers with less disposable income and small-scale entrepreneurs."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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