

ORION FORUM

When Even the Rural Communities Fall Victim: Haiti's Descent into Gang Rule Demands Immediate Action

MAY 1, 2026

Haiti's security crisis is no longer confined to the streets of Port-au-Prince or the headlines of political instability. It has [reached into places](#) once untouched by the gang violence—rural homes, places of worship, and faith-based properties. With the strength to seize property and kill those connected to it, the new reality is unavoidable.

In recent days, friends connected to the Ellie Ducharme Mission House in Seguin have been killed, according to contacts on the ground. The property, first dedicated in January 2019 by [Parakaleo International](#) was a place dedicated to serving the community. Following the attack, it was reportedly occupied by armed gangs. While [public reporting](#) has begun to capture the violence, local accounts suggest fatalities are being underreported and the scale of the attacks is broader than currently understood.

What is unfolding in Seguin is not isolated but [reflects a pattern](#).

Armed groups appear to be [consolidating control](#) in the area and pushing south, likely along key routes toward the southern coast, including [Marigot](#) and Cayes-Jacmel. This kind of movement is consistent with efforts to secure logistics corridors, diversify revenue streams, and strengthen long-term control.

Haiti's gangs are not small, disorganized criminal bands. Experts estimate there are roughly [200 armed](#) groups operating across the country, with dominant coalitions exerting control over large territories. In the capital alone, as of 2024, armed groups controlled as much as [80-85 percent](#) of Port-au-Prince, demonstrating both their operational capacity and the severe limitations of state security forces. These groups have evolved beyond traditional criminal

organizations, operating as territorially embedded networks with growing political influence and ambitions.

Haiti is now facing overlapping humanitarian, political, economic, and security crises, with organized crime acting as a central driver of instability rather than a secondary consequence. Armed groups are increasingly embedded in illicit economies, including trafficking, extortion, and control of key economic routes, allowing them to sustain operations and expand influence even in the absence of formal state authority. Weak rule of law, corruption, and limited state presence have enabled gangs to operate with relative impunity, further accelerating their territorial expansion and weakening any remaining governance structures.

Between March 2025 and January 2026 alone, at least 5,519 people were killed in Haiti and 2,608 injured between. Gangs are not simply engaging in opportunistic violence; they are using killings, kidnappings, and sexual violence systematically to assert control over populations living in areas under their influence.

Missionary properties, houses, churches, and local aid centers are not incidental targets. They are pillars of informal governance in Haiti, often filling the void left by a weakened or absent state. When gangs take control of these spaces, they are not simply committing acts of violence but are dismantling alternative sources of authority and replacing them with their own.

The result is never-ending cycle of instability. As gangs expand into new territories, displacement increases, with more than 1.45 million currently displaced. As displacement increases, communities fracture. As communities fracture, the ability of local institutions to function collapses. Each step further entrenches gang authority while reducing the capacity for internal recovery.

Recent policy movement in Washington reflects growing recognition of Haiti's deteriorating conditions. On April 15, 2026, the House advanced a bipartisan effort led by Ayanna Pressley to extend Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitian nationals, passing a key procedural vote and moving toward a final decision. This is a meaningful and necessary step. Extending TPS provides immediate protection for Haitians already in the United States, preventing forced

returns to an environment that is increasingly unlivable.

But it also highlights a deeper problem: even significant policy actions like this barely scratch the surface of the crisis itself, with more than [6.8 million](#) people in need of humanitarian assistance.

TPS addresses the consequences of Haiti's collapse but does not address the collapse. It protects those who have already fled but does little for those still trapped in areas like Seguin, where gangs are [actively expanding](#) their control and it threatens those in the path of gangs in the coming weeks, including American living in Haiti. Without a strategy aimed at stabilizing conditions inside Haiti, such measures risk becoming reactive rather than corrective.

Despite the escalation, international responses have struggled to match the scale and evolution of the threat. Haiti continues to be treated primarily as a humanitarian crisis with security dimensions, rather than as a security crisis with profound humanitarian consequences. This distinction is shaping policy. Efforts have focused on aid delivery and limited security assistance, while gangs have adapted into decentralized, territorially embedded networks capable of projecting power far beyond traditional urban strongholds and often working alongside the police. A more effective response requires a more offensive approach.

First, policymakers must recognize Haiti's gang landscape as a form of hybrid threat—one that combines elements of organized crime, insurgent governance, and territorial control. This demands a coordinated approach that integrates law enforcement, intelligence, and, where appropriate, security assistance.

Second, international efforts must prioritize the protection and restoration of civil society infrastructure. Mission houses like the Ellie Ducharme Mission House and the local medical clinic are critical nodes of stability in areas that have no other resources. The clinic in Seguin had been close to opening the maternity department and pharmacy, but the impact of the current violence on the health clinic remains unknown. Their loss represents not only immediate humanitarian harm but long-term degradation.

Third, the United States and its partners should expand support for targeted disruption of gang financing and logistics. If gangs are indeed pushing toward coastal corridors such as Marigot

and Cayes-Jacmel and their ports, this suggests an effort to secure access points that could facilitate trafficking, resupply, and external connectivity. Disrupting these pathways should be a priority.

Haiti's crisis has reached a point where even its places of refuge are no longer safe. Treating this as anything less than a rapidly evolving security threat risks allowing the destruction to become irreversible.

*image credit: VOA.

Orion Policy Institute (OPI) is an independent, non-profit, tax-exempt think tank focusing on a broad range of issues at the local, national, and global levels. OPI does not take institutional policy positions. Accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions represented herein should be understood to be solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of OPI.