

Haiti

Ethnicity in Haiti

Group selection

We do not identify any politically relevant ethnic groups in Haiti, where 95% of the population is black and 5% is mulatto or white (²³⁶⁶). Haiti was the second country in the New World (after the USA) that gained independence in 1804 after an uprising of African slaves that began in 1791 (²³⁶⁷). In fact, it was the first country in the world to gain independence thanks to a victorious slave revolution (²³⁶⁸, 137). Since then, Haiti has struggled to establish and maintain a democratic political system (²³⁶⁹), but even within this struggle, ethnicity never emerged as a salient political cleavage. Apart from the Duvalier period, Haiti is not marked by any significant ethnic or religious cleavages (²³⁷⁰) and there has never been a black movement.

In Haiti, fundamental class divisions have traditionally overlapped with differences in skin color. Since 1945, however, black middle and upper classes have emerged and they have successfully challenged the mulattos' dominance. This does not mean that skin color plays absolutely no role in Haitian society. Accordingly, Levinson (²³⁷¹, 357) probably goes too far by stating that Haiti's population "is ethnically homogenous and free of ethnic conflict." Skin color has been of certain significance in politics with the mulatto minority making up half of the elite, even though they make up such a small segment of the population.

Issues of race became a more important issue under the first part of the Duvalier dictatorship (1957-1971: Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier who was succeeded by his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, in 1971 and stayed in power until 1986). Under Duvalier, an extreme cleavage between power and powerlessness emerged, where power was concentrated in the hands of the French-speaking commercial elite of Port-au-Prince, the military and the church. The major rest of society, the Kreol-speaking peasants, were traditionally excluded from this trinity of power. In this context, Papa Doc rose to power on a noiriste platform, his doctrine consisting mainly in (²³⁷², 42-45) "wresting power from the mulatto elite by creating a rival Afro-Haitian elite. His efforts to remodel the Haitian power structure comprised both suppressive as well as promotional activity" (²³⁷³, 45). Duvalier put special emphasis on Haiti's folk religion, the voodoo, to control the population (²³⁷⁴, 46).

²³⁶⁶ [CIA, 2014]

²³⁶⁷ [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

²³⁶⁸ [Charles, 1995]

²³⁶⁹ [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

²³⁷⁰ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008]

²³⁷¹ [Levinson, 1998]

²³⁷² [Lewis, 2004]

²³⁷³ [Lewis, 2004]

²³⁷⁴ [Lewis, 2004]

Ethnicity is coded as “irrelevant” throughout during the Duvalier period, as the dictator focused his efforts principally on cultural aspects of Afro-Haitianism (taking into consideration that cultural, social, and economic discrimination is not considered as a valid variable in the EPR). In addition, there was no organized black movement that backed Duvalier so that, by our coding standards, he was not a representative of (segments of) Afro-Haitians.

In the years since Duvalier, Haiti has experienced considerable political disturbances like continuing corruption and the temporary lack of an elected and functioning government, only to name a few (²³⁷⁵: 1; ²³⁷⁶: 1). Haiti’s civil society can be broadly divided into three blocks: a) the social-democratic, pro-Aristide Lavalasian bloc that appeals to the Haitian poor; b) the neo-liberal “reformist” bloc with its middle-class supporters; and c) the “neo-Duvalierist” faction comprised of former military officers, warlords and politicians bent on preserving the social inequalities in Haiti (²³⁷⁷). Yet, ethnicity still does not have a significant impact on power structures within the country (²³⁷⁸: 9, 21).

²³⁷⁵ [Freedom House, 2017]

²³⁷⁶ [USDS, 2017]

²³⁷⁷ [Center for Systemic Peace, 2010]

²³⁷⁸ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Haiti

From 1946 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Haitians	0.955	IRRELEVANT



Figure 440: Political status of ethnic groups in Haiti during 1946-2021.

Conflicts in Haiti

Starting on 1989-04-02

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Haiti	Military faction (forces of Himmler Rebu and Guy Francois)		1989-04-02			
Government of Haiti	Military faction (forces of Raol Cédras)		1991-10-01			
Government of Haiti	FLRN	Haitians	2004-01-06	No	Yes, from EGIP	Split
Government of Haiti	OP Lavalas		2004-08-30			