

Conflict Theory On The Relationship Between Gang Violence And Haitis's Political Crisis

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between gang violence and political crisis in Haiti through the lens of conflict theory. Social, economic, and political inequalities serve as the primary factors driving the emergence and strengthening of gangs, particularly in the context of weak state institutions. Structural injustices create disparities that push marginalized groups to seek alternative sources of power through criminal activities. By analysing Haiti's political history, this study explores how structural inequalities have exacerbated gang violence and deepened political instability. Furthermore, the role of power actors, both domestic and international, is examined in either reinforcing or mitigating this phenomenon. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the nexus between organized crime and chronic political instability, while also proposing policy-based solutions to curb the escalation of violence in Haiti.

Keywords: Conflict Theory; Gang Violence; Political Crisis; Social Inequality

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas hubungan antara kekerasan geng dan krisis politik di Haiti melalui perspektif teori konflik. Ketimpangan sosial, ekonomi, dan politik menjadi faktor utama dalam mendorong kemunculan serta penguatan geng, terutama di tengah lemahnya institusi negara. Struktur sosial yang tidak adil menciptakan kesenjangan yang memicu kelompok-kelompok marjinal untuk mencari kekuasaan alternatif melalui aktivitas kriminal. Dengan menelusuri sejarah politik Haiti, artikel ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana ketidakadilan struktural telah memperburuk kekerasan geng dan memperdalam instabilitas politik. Selain itu, peran aktor-aktor kekuasaan, baik domestik maupun internasional, turut diperiksa dalam memperkuat atau melemahkan fenomena ini. Studi ini bertujuan memberikan pemahaman lebih dalam tentang keterkaitan antara kejahatan terorganisir dan ketidakstabilan politik yang kronis, serta mengusulkan solusi berbasis kebijakan yang dapat meredam eskalasi kekerasan di Haiti.

Kata kunci: Kekerasan Geng; Ketimpangan Sosial; Krisis Politik; Teori Konflik

Submitted: November 22, 2025 | Revised: March 26, 2026 | Accepted: April 16, 2026 | Published: May 8, 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Even prior to the current crisis, Haiti is widely recognized as one of the most impoverished and politically unstable nations in the Western Hemisphere, a condition deeply rooted in its long and turbulent history. Since the early 21st century, this situation has further deteriorated with the rise of violence perpetrated by armed gangs. (UNICEF, 2025) These gangs are not merely criminal entities; they have become an integral part of Haiti's political landscape. (Romain Le-Cour-Grandmaison, 2024) In many instances, they serve as instruments of political power, utilized by the elite to maintain or seize control. This phenomenon underscores the intricate relationship between structural poverty, political instability, and elite exploitation (Medeus et al., 2024) an issue that can be critically examined through the lens of conflict theory. A contemporary legal issue illustrating the nexus between gang violence and Haiti's political crisis is the collapse of the rule of law and the rise of impunity. Armed gangs control significant territories, undermining judicial institutions and preventing effective law enforcement. State responses, including militarized anti-gang operations, have raised serious human rights concerns due to excessive use of force and lack of accountability. At the same time, international interventions, such as UN-backed security missions, highlight ongoing debates regarding sovereignty and legal legitimacy. These dynamics demonstrate how gang violence in Haiti has evolved into a complex legal and political crisis involving state fragility, elite manipulation, and transnational governance challenges. Poverty in Haiti is not merely an economic condition but a deeply entrenched system that dates back to the colonial era. (Galvin et al., 2023) When Haiti gained independence in 1804, it inherited an economic structure reliant on the exploitation of natural and human resources. (Marcelin, 2015) This system was never fundamentally reformed, leaving the majority of the population in poverty while a small elite continued to monopolize the nation's wealth. This persistent inequality has fuelled deep social frustration. Within this context, armed gangs have emerged as a response to systemic injustice, offering a form of "protection" and economic opportunities that the weak government has failed to provide. (Haiti: A Path to Stability for a Nation in Shock A Path to Stability for a Nation in Shock on JSTOR, n.d.) Haiti's political instability has further exacerbated this crisis. Since its independence, the country has faced a series of coups, authoritarian regimes, and foreign interventions that have weakened its capacity to build stable and functional institutions. In a landscape where the state fails to deliver basic services, gangs often step in to fill the void. (Amnesty International, 2024) However, their presence is not solely a reaction to societal needs. Armed groups in Haiti frequently maintain direct ties with the political elite, who leverage them for various strategic purposes, including political intimidation, electoral manipulation, and mass mobilization. These groups often serve as enforcers for politicians, ensuring compliance from opponents and securing influence over key regions. In many cases, they act as intermediaries between the government and marginalized communities, wielding both fear and patronage to maintain control. This symbiotic relationship allows political leaders to exert power without direct accountability, while armed groups benefit from financial support, weapons, and protection from law enforcement. (Sam Biden, 2024) As a result, these alliances contribute to chronic instability, undermining democratic institutions and perpetuating cycles of violence and corruption in the country. (Amnesty International, 2004).

From the perspective of conflict theory, this phenomenon can be understood as the result of struggles between groups with opposing interests. Political and economic elites seek to maintain their power by utilizing gangs as instruments of control, while impoverished communities find themselves trapped in a system where they become either passive supporters or active participants. Within this framework, gang violence is not merely a consequence of poor socio-economic conditions but also a manifestation of deeper class conflicts. (Prayogi, 2023) It is essential to recognize that gang-related violence and instability are not solely domestic issues but also have significant international dimensions. Foreign interventions, often carried out under the pretext of “stabilization,” frequently exacerbate the situation by undermining the legitimacy of local governments and reinforcing dependence on external assistance. This dynamic creates a vicious cycle in which the state remains incapable of developing its internal capacity, while public trust in formal institutions continues to erode. (Kolbe, 2022)

An examination of these factors reveals that the gang phenomenon in Haiti is the product of a complex interplay between structural poverty, political instability, and exploitation by elites. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that includes institutional reform, efforts to reduce economic inequality, and initiatives aimed at restoring public confidence in the state. Only through such measures can Haiti hope to break free from the cycle of conflict that has long afflicted the nation.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

How does conflict theory explain the relationship between gang violence and the political crisis in Haiti?

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a normative legal research method with a literature-based approach, focusing on the analysis of legal literature and secondary data. The data utilized in this research consists of primary legal sources, secondary legal materials, and tertiary legal references. Data collection is conducted through various sources, including legal documents, academic journals, research reports, and relevant electronic media, to support the development of this study.

The research adopts a conceptual approach, which aims to explore and analyse legal concepts related to the research topic. The collection of research materials follows two main methods: document analysis and literature review. (Christiani, 2016) The findings derived from these sources are then examined using a descriptive and qualitative analytical framework. This process involves three key stages: (1) reducing legal materials to filter and refine relevant information, (2) systematically presenting the legal materials, and (3) drawing conclusions based on the overall analysis. (Negara, 2023)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is rooted in the ideas of Karl Marx, who argued that human history is fundamentally a history of class struggle. According to Marx, conflict arises from economic inequalities that lead to the exploitation of the working class (proletariat) by the ruling class (bourgeoisie). (Conflict Theory and Society, n.d.) This theoretical framework has been further developed by scholars such as Ralf Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser, and C. Wright Mills, who adapted Marx's approach to analyze conflicts within diverse social and political contexts. Conflict theory emerged in the 19th century as a response to industrialization in Europe and the resulting economic inequalities. Initially developed by Karl Marx, this theory critiques capitalism as a system that inherently produces structural disparities. (Tittenbrun, 2013) Marx argued that capitalism creates two dominant social classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Their relationship is inherently exploitative, with economic benefits concentrated among the bourgeoisie while the proletariat remains alienated from the fruits of their labour. (Marx on Social Class, n.d.) According to Marx, this inequality would progressively worsen, as capitalism naturally leads to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few. Consequently, social class tensions would intensify, ultimately culminating in a revolution aimed at establishing a more equitable and just system. (Prayogi, 2023)

Beyond Marx, other scholars have expanded conflict theory with more nuanced and context-specific perspectives. Ralf Dahrendorf, for instance, linked social conflict to institutional structures and power dynamics. He argued that conflict arises not only from economic class struggles but also from tensions between those who hold authority and those who do not. Unlike Marx, Dahrendorf believed that social conflict is an inherent and continuous element of society, manifesting in various domains, including political institutions and organizations. (Wood, 1983) In his view, social change does not necessarily occur through large-scale revolutions but often through smaller conflicts that reshape different sectors of society. (Nendissa, 2022) Another prominent sociologist, Lewis Coser, introduced a different perspective by highlighting the constructive aspects of conflict. He asserted that conflict is not inherently destructive but can serve as a catalyst for social change.

According to Coser, conflict strengthens group solidarity, clarifies social norms, and fosters innovation. In many instances, conflict facilitates structural adjustments by introducing new rules better suited to contemporary realities. Additionally, he suggested that conflict helps define group identities and reinforces social cohesion among individuals with shared interests. (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014) Therefore, rather than being entirely detrimental, conflict can be managed in ways that generate positive transformations. C. Wright Mills further advanced conflict theory by emphasizing the concept of the "power elite" in modern societies. He argued that in capitalist systems, a small group of individuals in key positions within economic, political, and military institutions holds disproportionate control over resources and decision-making processes. This concentration of power perpetuates deep inequalities, marginalizing the broader population from meaningful participation in governance. Mills criticized how power remains concentrated among elite groups that often prioritize their own interests rather than representing the needs of the majority. (Conflict Theory in Sociology: The Complete Guide, n.d.) As a result, economic and political disparities become increasingly entrenched, making systemic change highly challenging.

Over time, conflict theory has undergone various modifications and adaptations to reflect the complexities of modern societies. Scholars have applied its principles to diverse fields, including gender studies, racial inequality, and globalization. In gender studies, for instance, conflict theory is used to analyse how gender disparities in economic, political, and social spheres stem from entrenched patriarchal power structures. In the context of globalization, it helps explain how economic imbalances between developed and developing nations mirror the exploitative dynamics described by Marx. (Prayogi, 2023)

Conflict theory is also highly relevant in labour relations, particularly in understanding tensions between workers and capital owners. Differences in interests often lead to disputes, such as demands for higher wages or better working conditions. From a conflict theory perspective, these tensions are natural and serve as drivers of change within labour systems. Historical labour movements exemplify how organized resistance and negotiations have led to significant advancements in workers' rights. In education, conflict theory is utilized to examine how educational systems reinforce existing social inequalities. Access to quality education is often easier for individuals from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, while those from disadvantaged communities face systemic barriers. (Zickafoose et al., 2024) This educational disparity perpetuates social stratification, reinforcing cycles of poverty and injustice. (Mzangwa, 2015) Political analysis frequently employs conflict theory to explore how different groups compete for power and resources. (Deitelhoff & Schmelzle, 2022) Political conflicts often reflect struggles between dominant groups seeking to maintain their influence and marginalized groups striving to challenge the status quo. Many significant political changes have resulted from prolonged conflicts between competing factions with divergent interests. On a broader scale, conflict theory provides insights into various social phenomena, including social movements, economic inequality, discrimination, and power dynamics across multiple domains. While conflict is often perceived negatively, this theoretical perspective frames it as a natural aspect of social life that can drive meaningful reform. Understanding conflict theory is thus valuable not only in academic discourse but also in practical settings, where individuals and groups must navigate and respond to social tensions. Overall, conflict theory offers a critical lens through which to examine socioeconomic and political inequalities. By emphasizing the role of power structures, institutions, and conflict in shaping society, it not only identifies the root causes of injustice but also highlights pathways for achieving greater social equity. (Conflict Theory in Sociology: The Complete Guide, n.d.)

Social and Political Context in Haiti

Haiti, a small nation in the Caribbean, has a long history marked by struggle, conflict, and instability. Its independence in 1804 was not only a symbol of resistance against colonialism but also the beginning of a challenging journey. The Haitian Revolution, which took place between 1791 and 1804, remains one of the most significant events in global history. This revolution emerged in response to the brutal oppression experienced by African slaves who were brought to Saint-Domingue, France's wealthiest colony, to work on sugar plantations. (Haitian Revolution | Causes, Summary, & Facts | Britannica, n.d.) The uprising was led by key figures such as Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Henri Christophe, who united enslaved individuals to resist

French colonial forces. Their struggle ultimately led to the defeat of the French army, which was under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte at the time. On January 1, 1804, Haiti declared its independence, becoming the first nation in the world founded by former slaves and the first Black republic to achieve sovereignty. (Blackburn, 2006)

However, the hard-fought independence marked the beginning of prolonged internal conflicts involving various factions. Following independence, Haiti was divided into two regions: in the north, Henri Christophe established a monarchy, while in the south, Alexandre Pétion led a republican government. The rivalry between these leaders created political tensions that resulted in prolonged power struggles. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, instability persisted, characterized by frequent coups and violent leadership transitions. One of the most controversial figures in Haiti's history was François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, who ruled as a dictator from 1957 to 1971. (Sarah Ruffing Robbins, Andrew Taylor, Heidi HakimiHood, Adam Nemmers Linda K. Hughes, ed., "Suffrage And Citizenship," in *Transatlantic Anglophone Literatures, 1776–1920* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press., 2022), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.3366/jj.7.358699.15.pdf>.) He maintained power through the use of a personal militia known as the Tonton Macoute, which was responsible for suppressing opposition and consolidating his authority. After his death, power was passed to his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, who continued the authoritarian rule until he was overthrown in 1986. (Frederick I. Case Patrick Taylor, *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions: Volume 1: A-L; Volume 2: M-Z* on JSTOR, 1st ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

Beyond internal conflicts, foreign interventions have also played a significant role in Haiti's history. The United States, for instance, occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 under the pretext of stabilizing the country. However, this occupation only deepened social tensions and increased public distrust toward foreign powers. In recent decades, Haiti's political and social landscape has grown increasingly complex. (U.S. Invasion and Occupation of Haiti, 1915–34, n.d.) Armed gangs have emerged as key players in the country's political dynamics. These groups often maintain ties with the political elite, serving as tools for intimidation, election manipulation, or the protection of specific interests. The country's persistent political instability, driven by weak state institutions, has created a power vacuum that allows non-state actors to exert significant influence. Furthermore, severe economic inequality exacerbates existing conflicts. Haiti remains one of the world's poorest countries, with the majority of its population living in extreme poverty. Widespread social injustice has fuelled frustration among the people, which is frequently exploited by gangs for recruitment and mobilization. (Hazen, 2010) It is within this historical context that the current gang violence and political uprisings in Haiti must be understood.

The persistent foreign interference in Haiti's political affairs, the economic hardships stemming from its sovereign debt to France, and the weakness of its state institutions are all key factors contributing to the country's instability and power vacuums. Successive weak or corrupt governments sometimes led by officials who do not even reside in the country, lack the authority, resources, or willingness to implement meaningful societal change. From the military coup in the 1990s until 2017, Haiti was not permitted to have its own armed forces, and the newly reestablished military remains in the early stages of development, with limited expertise, experience, and training.

Corruption is widespread, particularly among the wealthy elites who dominate much of the nation's resources, often selling them at undervalued rates to private international actors for personal gain. Gangs frequently obtain weapons and support from various sources, including the government, the elites, international actors, or a combination of all three. At the same time, these gangs claim to be fighting on behalf of the people, employing populist rhetoric to incite uprisings that ultimately serve to consolidate power in their own hands. (Understanding the Gang Violence and Instability in Haiti, n.d.) From its struggle for independence to its present-day challenges, Haiti's history is a testament to resilience, sacrifice, and the continuous pursuit of hope.

Conflict Theory in the Relationship Between Gang Violence and Political Crisis

Gang violence and political crises are deeply interconnected phenomena, particularly in countries with high levels of political and economic instability, such as Haiti. From the perspective of conflict theory, the relationship between these two issues reflects power struggles within societies fragmented by economic inequality, weak state institutions, and exploitation by elite groups. To better understand these dynamics, it is essential to explore key aspects, including the role of gangs as alternative power actors, the exploitation of gangs by political elites, and the vicious cycle of violence that perpetuates state instability. (Vanda Felbab-Brown, 2023)

Conflict theory, heavily influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx, asserts that societies are inherently divided into competing groups seeking control over resources and power. Within the context of gang violence and political crises, this theoretical framework provides insight into how economic and social inequalities contribute to the emergence of armed groups that function as alternative power structures in fragile states. In societies marked by extreme economic disparities, marginalized individuals often turn to criminal gangs as a means of accessing resources that are otherwise unavailable through legal channels. Beyond their role as criminal entities, gangs also serve as social institutions, offering protection, employment, and even a sense of identity to their members. When the state fails to provide basic services, these groups step in to fill the void, supplying security and economic support to the communities under their control. (Marcelin, 2015)

In many politically unstable countries, gangs operate as alternative power actors with significant territorial control. This occurs when the state is unable to enforce the rule of law effectively, creating a power vacuum that allows armed groups to dominate certain regions. In some cases, gangs function as de facto governments, providing essential services such as security, food distribution, and conflict resolution. Haiti serves as a clear example, where gangs have seized control over large portions of the capital, Port-au-Prince, managing trade, transportation, and local security. In such environments, communities often rely more on these groups than on corrupt or ineffective state institutions. The state's failure to assert its authority exacerbates the cycle of violence, further legitimizing gangs as political and social forces. (Torgman, 2012)

The relationship between gangs and political crises becomes even more complex when political elites exploit these armed groups for their own interests. In many developing nations, politicians leverage gangs as tools to maintain or expand their power, providing financial support, weapons, and legal protection in exchange for services such as voter intimidation or mass mobilization during protests. Reports from Haiti indicate that politicians

frequently use gangs to secure their interests during elections or to suppress opposition movements. Through these mechanisms, gangs become integrated into broader political strategies, serving as instruments for elites to preserve the status quo. However, these dynamic carries significant risks. As gangs grow stronger, they may demand greater autonomy or resources, posing a direct threat to the elites who once empowered them. As gangs solidify their influence as dominant power actors, the state becomes trapped in a cycle of violence that is difficult to break. Escalating gang violence leads to deeper instability, further weakening the state's ability to function effectively. As public trust in government erodes, more individuals seek protection and opportunities within gang structures, perpetuating the crisis. This situation presents a significant policy dilemma for governments. A heavy-handed approach involving military or police crackdowns risks escalating violence and exacerbating civilian suffering. (Ana Paula Oliveira Romain Le Cour Grandmaison, *A Critical Moment Haiti's Gang Crisis And International Responses*, 1st ed. (Geneva: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2024). Conversely, attempts to negotiate or compromise with gangs could lead to their institutionalization within national politics, further undermining state authority. Additionally, the persistence of gang violence is often linked to external factors, such as illicit arms trade, drug trafficking, and the involvement of international actors. In many cases, gangs operate within transnational criminal networks, complicating efforts to combat violence since the root causes extend beyond national borders and into the global sphere. (Romain Le Cour Grandmaison, 2024) To effectively address the interconnected issues of gang violence and political crises in Haiti, a comprehensive and sustainable policy approach is required. Key strategies should include security sector reform, socio-economic initiatives, demobilization and reintegration programs, and international cooperation:

a. Security Sector Reform

Enhancing the professionalism and accountability of the police and other security institutions is essential to rebuilding public trust in the state. Currently, public confidence in Haiti's security institutions is at an all-time low due to widespread corruption, law enforcement inefficacy, and the involvement of security personnel in illicit activities. Corruption within the police force and judicial system not only undermines the credibility of these institutions but also exacerbates the ongoing crisis. Establishing effective independent oversight mechanisms is crucial to identifying and addressing misconduct within the security sector, thereby restoring faith in law enforcement. Additionally, recruitment processes must be strengthened by adopting a meritocratic system that ensures only individuals with high levels of competence and integrity can enter the police force. Enhancing the capacity of security personnel is a critical step toward developing a professional and public service-oriented system. Training programs should focus on human rights, modern investigative techniques, and the use of technology in law enforcement. (United Nations Office Drugs, 2011) Furthermore, improving the welfare of security personnel such as salary increases and benefits is crucial in reducing incentives for corruption and illegal practices. Transparency within the legal system is also a fundamental element in restoring public confidence in security institutions. Expanding public access to information on law enforcement policies and actions is necessary. Establishing independent monitoring bodies consisting of academics, journalists, and civil society representatives can serve as a strategic measure to evaluate law

enforcement performance. With such oversight mechanisms in place, the legal system can function with greater accountability and responsiveness to the broader public interest.

b. Socio-Economic Approaches

Economic hardship is a significant driver of gang membership, as individuals who struggle to secure stable employment often turn to gangs as a means of survival. Therefore, socio-economic interventions must be an integral part of efforts to combat gang violence, ensuring greater access to economic opportunities. Job creation is a crucial strategy to reduce criminal involvement. Collaboration between the government, private sector, and international organizations can facilitate job opportunities, particularly for young people who are vulnerable to gang recruitment. (of Justice et al., n.d.) Investment in agriculture and local industries also has the potential to generate sustainable employment, enabling communities to achieve greater economic stability. Quality education plays a vital role in preventing youth involvement in criminal activities. Expanding access to formal education and vocational training programs provides individuals with viable alternatives for their future. Scholarships and financial aid for students from low-income families can help ensure that economic hardship does not prevent them from continuing their education. Additionally, social support for impoverished families is necessary to alleviate economic pressures that push individuals toward gang affiliation. Social assistance programs including food aid, healthcare services, and housing support can help improve living conditions for vulnerable communities. Mental health services should also be prioritized to support individuals affected by gang violence and political instability, providing them with the resources needed to rebuild their lives. (Provide Opportunities for Children and Youth, n.d.)

c. Demobilization and Reintegration Strategies

Addressing gang violence requires not only law enforcement but also efforts to encourage gang members to disengage from criminal activities. Experiences from various countries demonstrate that well-designed demobilization and reintegration programs, supported by sustainable initiatives, can be effective solutions. Rehabilitation efforts are essential in facilitating a transition to stable livelihoods. Offering conditional amnesty to those willing to leave their gangs can serve as a strong incentive, particularly when accompanied by job training programs, psychological counselling, and administrative support to obtain official identification and work permits. Providing alternative pathways for former gang members enables them to reintegrate into society productively. Social support plays a crucial role in the success of reintegration efforts. Former gang members often face significant challenges in readjusting to their communities, making mentorship programs, employment opportunities, and protection from rival gangs' essential components of the reintegration process. Collaboration between the government and civil society organizations can enhance rehabilitation services and create an environment conducive to lasting reintegration. One of the main obstacles to reintegration is the stigma attached to former gang members. Without community acceptance, the likelihood of recidivism remains high. Public awareness and education campaigns can help shift negative perceptions, fostering greater societal support for those seeking to leave a life of crime. (Bunn et al., 2024)

By combining rehabilitation, social support, and public education efforts, gang violence reduction strategies can become more effective and sustainable.

d. International Cooperation

Addressing gang violence in Haiti cannot be achieved in isolation, as many aspects of criminal activity involve transnational networks. Collaboration with the international community is essential to strengthening law enforcement, improving intelligence-sharing, and disrupting the illicit arms and drug trade that finance criminal groups. Cooperation with regional and international organizations is a strategic step in combating cross-border crime. (Enrique Bonilla et al., 2023) Support from entities such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS)², as well as coordination with neighbouring countries like the Dominican Republic, can enhance efforts to curb gang violence. Through such alliances, monitoring mechanisms for criminal group movements can be improved, allowing for more rapid and effective responses. Intelligence-sharing and specialized training for security personnel are critical components in bolstering Haiti's law enforcement capacity. Partnerships with countries that have experience in combating gang violence, such as Colombia and Mexico, can provide valuable insights into operational strategies and the use of advanced technology in criminal investigations. Strengthening technical capabilities and equipping security forces with modern resources can significantly improve their ability to counter armed groups. (Olson, 1998) Strict regulation of the arms and drug trade is crucial in weakening the financial foundations of gang operations. Many criminal groups in Haiti acquire weapons and funding through illegal supply chains that span multiple countries. Several gangs in Haiti possess more extensive arsenals than the police, as criminal groups grow stronger, wealthier, and more independent through illegal arms trafficking, according to UN experts. This situation has pushed the Caribbean nation into a prolonged political and humanitarian crisis, with lawlessness reaching unprecedented levels. These illicit weapons are frequently used in violent acts, including random sniper attacks, mass looting, kidnappings, and prison raids aimed at freeing thousands of inmates. As a result, more than 362,000 Haitians have been forced to flee in search of safety from the escalating violence. (Haiti: Gangs Have 'More Firepower than the Police,' n.d.)

Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology

In this study, the analysis is grounded in the critical paradigm, particularly drawing on conflict theory as its primary theoretical framework. This paradigm emphasizes power relations, structural inequality, and the role of domination in shaping social realities. Within this context, gang violence in Haiti should not be understood simply as a criminal act, but rather as a manifestation of deeper structural conflicts. Haiti is marked by severe economic inequality, where a small elite controls significant resources while the majority of the population lives in extreme poverty. Such inequality generates a social environment characterized by tension, frustration, and conflict. (Marcelin, 2015)

From an ontological perspective within the critical paradigm, gangs in Haiti are not merely perpetrators of violence but also function as social actors that emerge from structural conditions and state failure. When the

government is unable to provide essential services such as security, education, and healthcare, gangs fill these institutional voids within local communities. Their existence reflects a complex social reality shaped by structural injustice. The interactions between gangs, communities, and the state illustrate an ongoing struggle over power and resource distribution in a fragmented society. (Astuti et al., 2022) Furthermore, understanding this phenomenon requires examining the relationship between gangs and political elites, particularly how financial support and legal protection are used to sustain dominance and preserve the status quo. International interventions also play a significant role, demonstrating how global dynamics influence domestic conflict escalation. (Romain Le Cour Grandmaison, A Critical Moment Haiti's Gang Crisis And International Responses).

From an epistemological standpoint, the critical paradigm adopts an interdisciplinary and reflective approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to uncover hidden power structures and systemic inequalities. Knowledge is not viewed as neutral but as inherently linked to power, and thus serves both explanatory and transformative purposes. In this research, knowledge production aims not only to analyse the causes of gang violence but also to identify pathways toward structural change and social justice.

An axiological perspective, the critical paradigm places strong emphasis on normative values such as justice, equality, and human rights. This study recognizes that policy responses to gang violence must go beyond coercive measures and instead address root causes such as poverty and inequality. Approaches based solely on repression tend to be ineffective, whereas policies grounded in social justice seek to empower communities and reduce their dependence on gangs. Moreover, the paradigm highlights the importance of transparency, accountability, and ethical responsibility in the relationship between the state and society. (Adrian C. Williams, Androniki Kavoura, Andrzej Klimczuk, Ave Kovaljov, Badru Musisi et al., 2024)

Strengths of Conflict Theory in Analysing Gang Violence and Political Crisis in Haiti

One of the key strengths of conflict theory is its ability to identify social injustice as a primary catalyst for gang violence in Haiti. The country is characterized by sharp social inequality, where a small elite controls the majority of resources, while the larger population lives in extreme poverty. This inequality creates deep social tensions, with impoverished communities feeling excluded from access to education, employment, and healthcare. As a result, many individuals, perceiving limited opportunities for economic advancement through conventional means, join gangs as an alternative route to power and influence. Gangs in Haiti often function as instruments of protest against perceived injustices faced by marginalized communities. (Jadotte, 2007) They become a channel for expressing frustration regarding social inequities, such as mass unemployment, lack of access to basic rights, and unfair wealth distribution. In many instances, individuals who have no chance to improve their economic or social status view gangs as a way to reclaim lost power in their lives. In this context, conflict theory effectively explains how social injustice drives the persistent gang violence in Haiti. (Seepersad, 2015)

Through conflict theory, one can comprehend how tensions between political elites holding power and marginalized communities seeking recognition create opportunities for gangs to emerge as political actors. Conflict theory is highly relevant for understanding the relationship between gang violence and political crises in Haiti

because it emphasizes how social tensions arising from economic and political injustice can ignite violence. (Swee-Hin & Floresca-Cawagas, 2008) These tensions are often rooted in competition for access to limited resources, whether political power, territory, or economic assets. Gangs frequently act as channels for individuals and groups who cannot access resources through conventional means, allowing them to seize control over certain territories or gain power through intimidation and violence. In this regard, conflict theory offers critical insight into how competition among groups for control over resources contributes to the rise in gang violence in Haiti. (Jeong, 2022)

Weaknesses of Conflict Theory in Analysing Gang Violence and Political Crisis in Haiti

One major criticism of conflict theory is its tendency to overly emphasize societal conflict while neglecting the possibility of cooperation or harmony among different social groups. Although Haiti experiences significant social tensions and gang violence related to social and political inequalities, it is also important to recognize community initiatives aimed at fostering peace. Numerous local and international community organizations strive to create spaces for dialogue and social reconciliation in efforts to reduce violence and mitigate the political crisis. Conflict theory often focuses on tension and resistance between groups involved in conflict, without allowing for adequate understanding of how society can collaborate to effect positive change. (Nendissa, 2022) In Haiti, despite instability and social strain, there are several instances of communities working together to build peace and improve existing socio-economic conditions. In this regard, conflict theory may not fully capture the entire spectrum of social realities in Haiti, especially those concerning reconciliation and peaceful resolution efforts.

Conflict theory tends to focus more on structural and collective levels, which often means it overlooks individual factors that may influence violent actions taken by gang members. (Wood, 1983) While this theory can explain why gangs form and operate within Haiti's society of social injustice, it does not sufficiently address the personal motivations of individuals involved in gangs. Gang members in Haiti come from diverse backgrounds, and their motivations for joining gangs are not solely triggered by social or political injustice. Psychological factors, life experiences, and local community dynamics play a significant role in influencing individual behaviour. Some gang members may join due to social or familial pressures, while others may be influenced by economic factors or drawn to the power and status offered by gang membership. Therefore, to gain a more holistic understanding of gang violence in Haiti, it is crucial to consider the individual factors that shape behaviour, (Wu et al., 2022) which may not be fully explained by conflict theory's emphasis on structural analysis.

Conflict theory often leads to excessive generalizations about certain social phenomena. (Omelaenko, 2021) In the context of Haiti, the theory might assume that all gang violence is entirely driven by broad social or political tensions, neglecting the influence of other local factors. Cultural dynamics, historical social factors, and individual psychological influences also play a significant role in shaping gang violence patterns in Haiti. By focusing exclusively on structural injustice, conflict theory may be less sensitive to the nuances present in Haiti's social life. Moreover, the long history of colonialism and slavery in Haiti has created deeper social tensions that continue to influence current patterns of violence and social inequality. These tensions are not always explained

solely by social or political disparities but also require consideration of how social history and group identity shape gang dynamics. Thus, conflict theory may fall short in accounting for the more complex local context.

A major criticism of conflict theory in explaining gang violence in Haiti is its tendency to overemphasize economic and class factors as the primary causes of instability. While it is true that poverty and economic inequality in Haiti are severe, and these factors are often primary drivers of armed gangs seeking resources through violence, the reality in Haiti is far more complex. Other factors, such as the legacy of colonialism, racism, and external influences, also play crucial roles in creating the current violent situation. Viewing the situation solely through the lens of class struggle risks overlooking how cultural and historical elements have shaped Haiti's political and social landscape.

Furthermore, conflict theory tends to neglect psychological, ideological, and group identity factors that can be key drivers of gang violence. In many cases, criminal groups in Haiti are motivated not only by economic incentives but also by deeper identity factors, such as loyalty to specific groups or belief in a particular cause. Some gangs in Haiti are politically affiliated and act not only as criminal entities but also as political actors within a broader political landscape. In this case, conflict theory's focus on economic interests does not sufficiently explain the complexity of motivations behind gang violence. Moreover, conflict theory often assumes that resistance within marginalized communities is structured and organized as a form of struggle against dominant elites. However, in the context of Haiti, gang violence is often opportunistic and does not always have a clear political agenda. Many armed groups in Haiti compete against each other to control territories or gain benefits from the illicit economy, without a well-organized ideological agenda. Thus, conflict theory's approach, which views resistance as always structured and ideological, does not fully capture how gang violence in Haiti develops dynamically. Additionally, the theory simplifies the state's role in social conflict dynamics. (Dorte Verner, Stephanie Kuttner, 2007) Conflict theory generally views the state as an instrument used by dominant groups to repress marginalized groups. While this concept is relevant in some cases especially regarding how the Haitian government often acts in the interest of specific elites the state in Haiti is not merely a repressive tool but also a fragmented and unstable entity. In many instances, state actors themselves are involved in gang violence, either directly or indirectly. For example, some Haitian politicians are known

to have ties with armed groups, using them to maintain power or suppress political opposition. Therefore, a more nuanced approach to understanding the state's role in Haitian conflict is needed to fully comprehend how gang violence develops. Finally, conflict theory has limitations in accounting for the external influences that shape gang violence in Haiti. The country has long been subject to international intervention, through military intervention, humanitarian aid, and economic policies imposed by powerful countries like the United States and France. (Hauge, 2018) Neoliberal economic policies have worsened social inequalities, while foreign military interventions have often failed to create lasting stability. In this sense, classical conflict theory does not adequately explain how global dynamics contribute to exacerbating Haiti's crisis. Overall, while conflict theory offers valuable insights into social inequality and violence in Haiti, it needs to be complemented by other perspectives for a more comprehensive understanding. Combining it with institutional theory, social anarchism, and cultural and historical approaches can

provide a more accurate depiction of Haiti's complex reality. By considering the various factors influencing gang violence and political crises in the country, a deeper understanding and more effective solutions can be developed to address the existing issues.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while Conflict Theory provides valuable insights into understanding the social inequalities in Haiti, it is essential to supplement this framework with additional perspectives to achieve a more comprehensive analysis. Key factors such as identity, gang opportunism, the complex role of the state, and global influences must be taken into account to accurately grasp the dynamics of gang violence and the political crisis in Haiti. A multidimensional approach that incorporates historical, cultural, and global analyses is necessary to design more effective solutions to address the root causes of violence and instability in the country. By integrating these various elements, a more holistic understanding can be achieved, offering a broader foundation for crafting sustainable and impactful interventions to resolve the ongoing challenges faced by Haiti.

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