

Four Big Myths We Hear About Haiti

To mobilize resources for Haiti, we need to challenge the widespread myths surrounding Haiti which are fueled by lack of information about the historical, political, and economic conditions that lead to the current situation. We do not want to shy away from acknowledging the chronic challenges but want to add crucial context for supporters to understand not only “how we got here” but also what is needed to support the Haitian people to gain true freedom. The following four statements are some of the most common myths we hear about Haiti – and how we should debunk them.

Myth #1: Haiti is incapable of creating a functioning democracy.

Reality: Haiti was the first slave colony to successfully gain independence, and from the start of their free history in 1804, the Haitian people have tried to establish a lasting democratic government. However, internal class power struggles combined with intentional foreign interference (e.g. embargos, tariff reductions, support of corrupt regimes, \$21 billion in reparations that Haiti was forced to pay France in exchange for their independence) have prevented any lasting popular democratic government to take hold. Destructive foreign influence from many countries - including the U.S., who occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 - perpetuates a long history of structural violence and inhibits Haiti’s development to this day.

Myth #2: Haitian society is corrupt.

Reality: Corruption is a chronic issue in Haiti, like it is in many other nations (both developed and developing). It is important however not to make the general assumption that most Haitians are tolerating corruption. Vast social inequality clearly demarks the line between a few members of the Haitian elite and the overwhelming majority of the population. Current unrest in Haiti is a testimony of the popular resistance to widespread corruption and a willingness to reform its own institutions, rooted in the distinctive pride and resilience of the Haitian people.

Myth #3: The current riots prove that Haitians are violent and comfortable with chaos.

Reality: The absence of a stable democracy and the dire human conditions resulting from a wide range of political and economic factors have pushed Haitians to stand up against both domestic and foreign oppressors. Current demonstrations in Haiti are led by the majority of the population, not thugs or gangs of rioters, and while some protests have become violent, the majority have been peaceful. Similar situations in Hong Kong, Chile, and Lebanon are receiving far more media attention. Demonstrations in other countries are widely being hailed as a heroic push by the population to achieve democratic change and Haiti is often completely excluded from this narrative (see for example recent BBC article “[Do Today’s Global Protests Have Anything in Common?](#)” comparing only Hong Kong, Chile, and Lebanon). How is the Haitian situation any different?

Myth #4: Haiti failed to rebuild after the earthquake because they mismanaged foreign aid they received.

Reality: After the earthquake, an already very fragile infrastructure was dealt an almost final blow. Instead of funneling money to rebuild infrastructure, most of the aid was disseminated to thousands of foreign NGOs. Only 3% of funds reached the Haitian government. The lack of coordination and trust in Haitian institutions resulted in a massive misuse of available funds (e.g. the Red Cross could not spend \$500M of the funds it received from donations). Aside from the mismanagement of funds, the extreme level of destruction caused by the earthquake (e.g. 250,000+ deaths, 1.5 million people displaced, 80% of schools destroyed, 50+ hospitals and health centers collapsed) would have taken even the most stable countries a decade to rebuild. For comparison, it took New York City more than a decade to rebuild Ground Zero after 9/11.