

Canada and Haiti: Democratic Interference and Development

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Canada and Haiti have a longstanding relationship, beginning in the 18th century with immigration and extending into the 21st century with Canada's commitment to providing foreign aid (Hammond, 2010). Haiti ranks as one of the least developed countries in the world, riddled with political corruption, sizeable debt, and an unfortunate proximity to a seismic fault line. While Canada's aid to Haiti has occasionally provided short-term relief following natural disasters, it has arguably served to encourage and enforce a state of violence and political instability in the country. As we examine Canada's foreign initiatives in Haiti, we can see the advantages and disadvantages of its impacts in the political, economic, security, and aid sectors, and how this has overall changed their course of development. Canada often touts the importance of democracy, but an examination of its relationship with Haiti reveals it has contributed to undermining the democratic regimes of other countries in the pursuit of advantages in the trade, security, and humanitarian sectors.

A History of Democratic Interference in Haiti

In 1990, Haiti held its first democratic elections with Jean-Bertrand Aristide's victory based on his human rights' electoral platform. His victory, however, was short-lived, as a coup d'état removed him from power and reinstated oligarchic governance

(Burron & Silvius, 2013). The United States, Canada, and international organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) were not satisfied with this change and used their power to reinstate Aristide (Burron & Silvius, 2013). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) implemented an oil and arms embargo against Haiti until control was handed back to Aristide, and Canada was instrumental in enforcing this embargo by volunteering its ships for patrol (Veteran Affairs, 2024). This decision had positive effects on both Canada and Haiti. Haiti would no longer be under control of a few select individuals with power and had a president who seemingly valued social institutions and human rights. Aristide's political approach focused on improvements to healthcare, housing, and education, which stood to improve development outcomes in Haiti.

However, in 2004, Aristide was removed from power permanently. Canada had a role to play in Aristide's removal, as they had hosted the "Ottawa Initiative on Haiti", which was a conference held in 2003 led by Canada, the United States, and France (Sanders, 2010). The purpose of the conference was to discuss the eviction of Aristide, who many had decided was displaying traits of authoritarianism and committing human rights violations (Sanders, 2010). Canada employed the Responsibility-to-Protect (R2P) doctrine, an international agreement which allows developed countries to intervene if they believe a country is being subjected to crimes against humanity (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2022).

In February of 2004, Canada and the other Ottawa Initiative contributors deployed troops to threaten Aristide to resign, stationing soldiers near his residence, at the primary airport, and central locations in the capital city of Port-au-Prince (Sanders, 2010). This decision benefitted Canada who sought to align with the United States, a central economic partner in the country, to gain further influence in Haiti through a forceful regime change (Burron & Silvius, 2013). This decision, however, negatively impacted Haiti undermining the democratic right of citizens to elect their leader. Canada's choice to invoke R2P demonstrated its true objectives and eventually led to more autocratic ruling.

Government instability and the outsized influence that Western countries hold over Haiti have hindered Haiti's development. There was considerable controversy surrounding Aristide's political career. During Aristide's first period of removal, Haitians were subjected to a military dictatorship, which resulted in widespread violence and injustice (Clinton Digital Library, n.d.). Aristide was reinstated and he received both praise and criticism for his actions while in office. He enacted some programs to promote development, including literacy programs and human rights campaigns (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2024). However, criticisms included his associations with gang activity and corruption. International intervention coupled with unstable and inconsistent governance stalled or even worsened progress on economic and social welfare impacting Haiti's path to development.

Haiti and Canada: Trade

The Canadian government categorizes the trade relations between Haiti and Canada as “modest”, with Haitian exports consisting of agri-food and textiles, and Canadian exports consisting of agri-food and machinery (Government of Canada, 2022). According to the Government of Canada, the 2021 trade relations between Haiti and Canada had a total merchandise value of \$153.6 million.

During the 1990s, multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF published and promoted a set of economic policies called the Washington Consensus (Grier, 2021). Neoliberal economics, trade liberalization, and limited government intervention guided this set of policies (Grier, 2021). Developing countries were the primary target of these policies, and while they helped some economies, they also exacerbated economic disparities between countries.

Similarly to how the United States, Canada, the World Bank, and the IMF worked to restore Aristide to power when he was ousted from his first presidency, they also worked together to create the Emergency Economy Recovery Program (EERP), which focused on export-processing zones and privatization. This was done to benefit Canada and other foreign investors. It could be seen as a positive program for Haiti since it could have encouraged more foreign investment, promoted employment, and attracted more trade partners. However, questions remain as to whether resources are being overconsumed or if Western countries are taking advantage of the countries with a developing economy.

Haiti and Canada: Security

Canada has maintained its global reputation as a peaceful and unproblematic country, relative to nations like the United States and Russia. However, Canada actively contributes to the militant securitization of Haiti, specifically through police funding and training. At first glance, many would assume Canada's police funding in Haiti was a positive demonstration of their commitment to Haiti's development, but upon closer inspection, it was a nuanced decision balancing the complexity of Canada's vested interests versus their desire for Haiti's social and economic success.

Canada has treated Haiti as a “fragile state”, which Western states perceive as a threat (Shamsie, 2008). After 9/11, the United States and Canada view security threats more seriously and responded with a greater number of interventions (Shamsie, 2008). This has led to Canada's heavy involvement in Haiti's policing (Shamsie, 2008). Canada renovated prisons, police stations, coast guard facilities, and provided millions of dollars to promote security and secure Haiti's criminal justice system.

While the financial aid given to Haiti for these measures helped enhance Haiti's security, it also resulted in the “Haitian paradox” (Baranyi, 2014). The “Haitian paradox” refers to conditions of mass incarceration and overcrowding in Haitian prisons, which leads to the poor treatment of prisoners and prolonged processing times within the judicial system as inmates await their sentences (Baranyi, 2014). The condition of the Haitian criminal justice system demonstrates a lack of a

proactive approach, given the creation of unexpected pressures on law enforcement teams and the legal system. We can understand that this is an advantage for Canada because they are now attempting to control elements of securitization in other countries, which establishes Canada's strong influence in the developing world and eliminates any potential threats that Haiti could pose.

Haiti and Canada: Humanitarian Assistance

Over the years, Canada has contributed substantial amounts of humanitarian and development aid to Haiti. Canada has dedicated over \$400 million in international assistance to Haiti in the last three years (Government of Canada, 2024). The former Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) distributed the aid to Haiti and worked closely with the OECD, World Bank, and European Union (Klepak, 2006). Their concerns included health, the Haitian economy, human rights, security, and the justice system (Klepak, 2006).

Haiti's vulnerability to disasters, such as earthquakes, in part due to an underdeveloped economy, has led to a dependency on foreign assistance. In 2022, Haiti experienced a 7.2 magnitude earthquake. The International Development Minister, Harjit Sajjan, announced that Canada would give \$50 million in assistance. Of this money, \$12 million was allocated to food security and other humanitarian efforts, \$15 million to the National Police Academy, and another unnamed amount was to be given to support women and girls (Blanchfield, 2022). This

humanitarian aid was a positive contribution to Haitian development, since Haiti had suffered through a significant disaster which greatly disturbed the country's economy and the livelihoods of its people. However, Canada also benefited from providing this aid. In doing so, Canada was perceived as "heroic" by other countries for the aid dispersed. This decision also allowed the Canadian government to meet development aid quotas, as well as exert control and influence on decision making in Haiti. Haiti might have a need for the aid, but it also puts them in a hard position because they must abide by certain conditions Canada imposes. There is no denying that Haiti's need for aid is urgent. However, this need leaves them at the will of the Canadian government, as the Haitian government must abide by the conditions put on the aid of the donor country.

Conclusion

Overall, the relationship between Haiti and Canada provides disadvantages and advantages for Haiti. The analysis proves that Canada benefits from most aspects of the relationship, whereas Haiti seems to have less benefits and more examples of exploitation. Through the examination of Canada's influence on Haiti, we can see how democratic interference has helped shape the country's political system and stagnated its growth. This paper calls into question the power of the state and whether developed countries are continuing to infringe upon the sovereignty of developing countries, while safeguarding their

own. While Haiti has reaped some benefits from Canada's aid, most of this aid has been conditional or harmful. Following the analysis, how can developing countries diversify political approaches without upsetting 'developed' countries who only value the neoliberal approach?

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