

Haitian Perspectives on MINUSTAH Before the Mandate Renewal

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On October 15th, 2011, the mandate of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH, ends. Diplomats have debated the merits of extending the mandate, policymakers have drafted resolutions for extension or exit, and last week, when speaking at the UN General Assembly, President of Haiti Michel Martelly requested that MINUSTAH stay. But what do most Haitians think? Recent coverage of anti-UN riots in the wake of the cholera epidemic and sexual abuse scandals suggests that Haitians are deeply opposed to a continued MINUSTAH presence. However, protesters are rarely representative of the population and often hold extreme views. Rather than assuming that all Haitians hold these opinions, we collected a random sample of 600 households in metropolitan Port-au-Prince in August 2011. This brief analyzes the data collected in the first methodologically rigorous household survey on Haitians' opinions towards MINUSTAH.¹

The primary purpose of our survey is to understand how individuals form beliefs about peacekeeping. The complete analysis will be circulated at a later date. Given the looming decision about MINUSTAH's mandate, we have analyzed our data with this policy choice in mind. When deciding whether and how to renew MINUSTAH's mandate, it's imperative that policymakers know how long Haitians want MINUSTAH to stay, how Haitians perceive the mission's mandate, and what Haitians desire the mandate to be. This illuminates the ways in which expectations can be harmonized with realities. In addition to these aspects of Haitian opinion, we present data on what Haitians think of past performance in key programmatic and procedural areas in order to identify potential areas of improvement. In this brief, we present our measurements of these opinions in hopes that it may help the analysts and policymakers working on mandate renewal.

The data speaks for itself: despite disillusion with MINUSTAH, those living in metropolitan Port-au-Prince do not want MINUSTAH to immediately leave. Rather, Haitians expressed willingness to cooperate with MINUSTAH by providing the mission with information, and have credited MINUSTAH with improvements in economic recovery and security. Strikingly, Haitians want MINUSTAH to stay even though they express deep skepticism about its motives and internal accountability. Ultimately, the data collected tells a story of skepticism and opportunity, in which Haitians are acutely aware of the negative aspects of a foreign-funded military intervention yet believe that this force should stay and should change its direction to better reflect local interests and build local trust.

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¹An equal probability random sample of all households in Port-au-Prince was taken. A discussion of methodology is available upon request.

When do Haitians think MINUSTAH should leave?

The majority of Haitians living in metropolitan Port-au-Prince want MINUSTAH to stay in Haiti rather than leave immediately. While 30 % of the population surveyed wants MINUSTAH to leave immediately and 10 % wants them to leave within the next six months, 60 % of individuals prefer that they stay longer than this.

Table 1: Preferences for Minustah’s Departure, N = 347

Response	Percent
Immediately	30 %
During the Next 6 Months	10 %
During the Next Year	25 %
During the Next 2 Years	19 %
After 2 Years	16 %

About a third of the population would like MINUSTAH to stay longer than one year. Though we only surveyed people living in metropolitan Port-au-Prince, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is probably even less resistance to a continued mandate outside the capital. It is important to note that there is little variation in these opinions across gender, income, or education. These preferences suggest that regardless any negative perceptions individuals have of MINUSTAH, they do indeed want them to stay and think Haiti is better off if MINUSTAH remains in the country in the short term. Table 1 presents the full breakdown of opinions

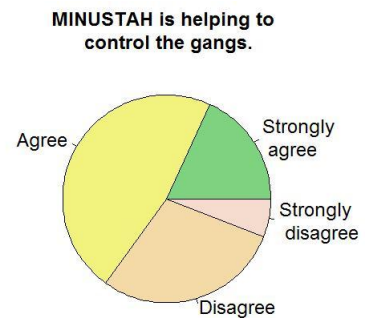
on when MINUSTAH should leave Haiti.

How do Haitians evaluate MINUSTAH?

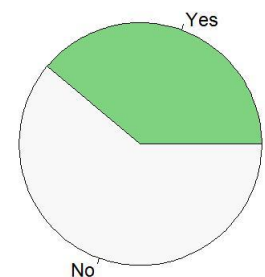
Haitians hold mixed views on MINUSTAH’s track record. Generally the views on MINUSTAH’s programmatic aspects are quite positive. The majority of Haitians believe that MINUSTAH is helping control local gangs. A sizeable majority of 61% also think that MINUSTAH is helping reconstruct the country after the earthquake. Not only do Haitians have largely positive assessments of MINUSTAH’s impact, but they also express willingness to engage with MINUSTAH in ways that would facilitate their security mandate. About 60% report that they would be willing to provide information to MINUSTAH.

Nonetheless, Haitians are quite skeptical about who MINUSTAH ultimately serves. Most believe that MINUSTAH is accountable to the foreign governments that are its donors and troop contributors, but not necessarily to the Haitian public. Ultimately, this is probably a realistic opinion, but not one that will help the operation accomplish its mandate in Haiti.

Moreover, Port-au-Prince residents express deep pessimism about MINUSTAH’s internal accountability mechanisms. More than 40% of respondents, more than any other category, believe that MINUSTAH does not have strong enough



MINUSTAH is helping to reconstruct the country.



systems to punish its agents when they commit abuses. Furthermore, large majorities believe that MINUSTAH soldiers are not punished impartially. A full 60% believe that peacekeepers are punished differently according to their rank, and more than 80% believe that MINUSTAH peacekeepers are punished differently according to the status of their accuser.

The Expectation Gap.

We also asked Port-au-Prince residents about their perceptions of MINUSTAH’s actual mandate, and what they think that MINUSTAH should be doing in Haiti. The data demonstrates that individuals think MINUSTAH is improving the security situation or not doing much at all. Haitians would like MINUSTAH to continue its focus on security, but also invest in post-earthquake reconstruction and economic development. The following two tables present the full results.

The problem of managing expectations is well known in peacekeeping; distressed populations often expect peacekeepers to provide a huge peace dividend. Anecdotal and journalistic accounts often center on the argument that Haitians want MINUSTAH to provide them with some tangible benefits, and our data supports this story. The gap between Haitians’ perceptions of MINUSTAH’s actual mandate and their preferred mandate suggests that some dissatisfaction with MINUSTAH is probably inevitable.

Table 2: Perceptions of MINUSTAH’s Mandate

Response	N
Election Support	1 %
Economic Development	0 %
Gang Elimination	0 %
Train the Police	0 %
Nothing	45 %
Security	53 %
Post-Earthquake Reconstruction	0%

Table 3: Opinions of What MINUSTAH Should o

Response	N
Election Support	1 %
Economic Development	9 %
Gang Elimination	1 %
Train the Police	3 %
Nothing	5 %
Security	39 %
Post-Earthquake Reconstruction	42%

Simultaneously though, it is important to emphasize that Haitians are not simply fed up with a peacekeeping force that has already been in the country over many years. Combined with the evidence that they do not want MINUSTAH to immediately leave, it seems that Haitians in Port-au-Prince still have faith in the mission’s ability to have a positive impact on their security and livelihoods.

Conclusions

The results of our random and representative sample of residents of Port-au-Prince suggests that Haitians are positive about MINUSTAH. In spite of violent anti-MINUSTAH protests, sexual abuse scandals and a widely publicized cholera epidemic, the median Haitian does not want MINUSTAH to immediately leave and thinks that they have had a substantial impact on gang activity and economic recovery. Nevertheless, respondents are deeply concerned about the missions’ intentions and internal accountability mechanisms.

This leaves room for the mission to build on its gains in security and relief with the cooperation of the population, while ameliorating some of the gaps in its accountability to its ultimate beneficiaries. Specifically, focusing on raising awareness about mechanisms by which Haitians can report abuses by peacekeepers, and following through on ensuring that peacekeepers are fairly punished regardless of political considerations, could enable MINUSTAH to make its next mandate the last one to be needed.