

Is It Time for MINUSTAH to leave?

Popular Perceptions of the UN Stabilization Mission in Port-au-Prince, Haiti

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An August 2011 survey of 800 Haitians living in Port-au-Prince shows that the presence of U.N. troops in Haiti is widely seen as problematic by residents of the country's capital. Survey results show that only a relatively small minority of respondents are supportive of the U.N. mission, called United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (or MINUSTAH). Meanwhile, a majority considers that MINUSTAH is doing an inadequate job responding to violence, and a significant number of those surveyed believe that MINUSTAH has been involved in committing illegal acts. Though responses varied depending on a range of factors including age, education level and the rate of crime within respondents' neighborhoods, a majority of respondents expressing an opinion regarding the duration of MINUSTAH's stay in Haiti indicated that they want MINUSTAH to leave within a year. The survey results also indicate that a vast majority of Port-au-Prince residents believe that the UN should compensate victims of the cholera epidemic.

RESEARCH METHODS

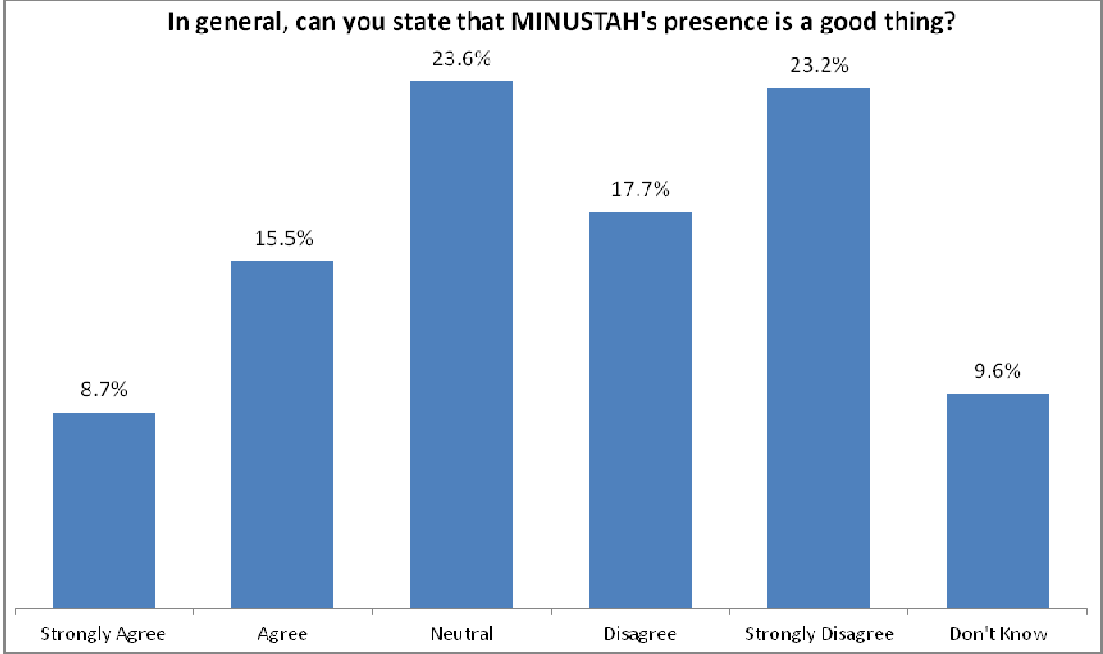
From August 3 to 12, 2011, a team of four researchers from the Faculté d'Ethnologie, l'Université d'Etat d'Haïti (see Annex 1 for list of team) conducted door-to-door surveys of 800 households regarding popular perceptions of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, known by its French acronym, MINUSTAH. The respondents were spread evenly between four neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince, two low-income (Cité Soleil and Martissant) and two mixed-income (Delmas 33 and Canapé Vert). Surveyors also went to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps located within these neighborhoods.

Two hundred oral surveys were conducted in each of the four neighborhoods. Surveys were carried out by selecting every 10th home on streets surrounding the center of the neighborhood. Researchers administered the survey to the first available and consenting resident over 18 years of age in each household they approached, whether male or female. In total, 49.5% of the respondents were female and 50.5% of the respondents were male. Mean age for survey respondents was 33 and median was 30. The age range of respondents included 18.1% who were 20 years old or younger, 49.9% in their 20s and 30s, and 32% over 40 years old. The mean household size in the four neighborhoods was 5.48. Half of the respondents were either street merchants (33.5%) or day laborers (16.5%). [See Annex 2 for complete demographic information]

SURVEY RESULTS POINT TO LACK OF SUPPORT FOR MINUSTAH

To the question "Is MINUSTAH's presence a good thing?" less than a quarter of respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" (24.2% total) that MINUSTAH's presence was a good thing, while 40.9 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed." Also, only 8.7 percent "strongly agreed," but 23.2 percent "strongly

disagreed.” In addition, 23.6 percent of respondents stated that they had a neutral position on the issue and 9.6 percent said that they did not know.



This lack of popular support for MINUSTAH is notable within all the neighborhoods and various social sectors that the study encompasses, but perceptions of the UN troops do vary to some extent depending on respondents’ gender, exposure to violence and other factors. During data analysis all potential independent variables were tested for correlation.

The perception that all residents of violence-prone areas of Cité Soleil that faced daily clashes during its first couple of years of operation under the interim Boniface/Latortue period seems to have changed over time. It is worth noting that people could respond critically about MINUSTAH’s effectiveness while being more positive in general about MINUSTAH, given that for better or for worse, MINUSTAH is the agency that is publicly charged with providing security. So people who are more at risk for violence – be they women, elderly, or residents of violence-prone neighborhoods – are more likely to have a more positive overall impression of MINUSTAH.

For example, women were twice as likely to strongly agree that MINUSTAH’s presence is a good thing (12.0 compared to 5.7%). People who responded that their neighborhood does not face violence (48.1% of total) were more critical than those who reported facing daily violence (22.5%). More than four times as many of those facing daily violence (17.1% compared to 3.9%) strongly agreed that MINUSTAH’s presence was good, and 9.9 percent (compared to 17.1% in neighborhoods with less crime) strongly disagreed. [See Annex 3 and 4]

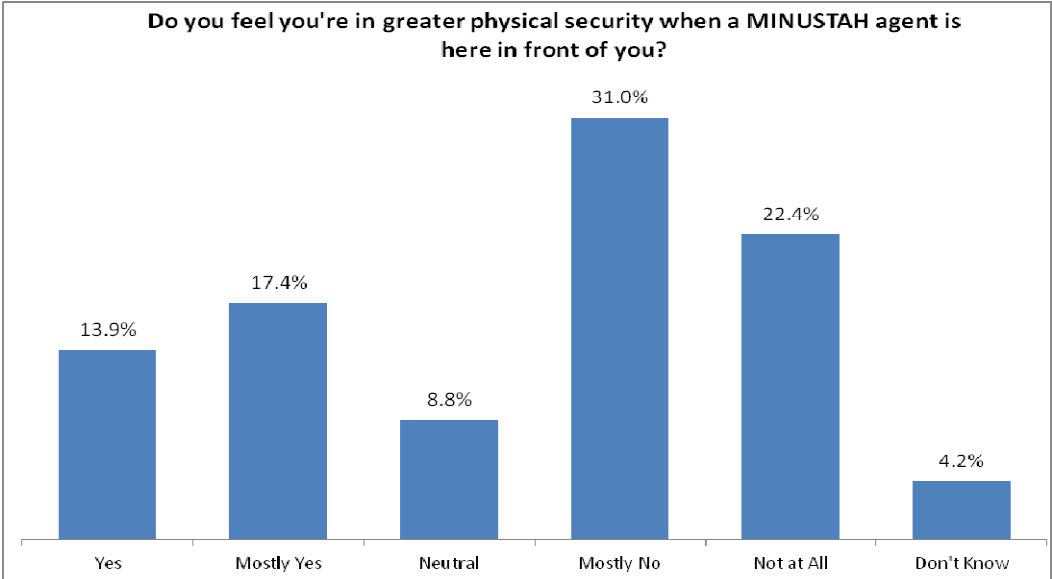
It is also worth noting that only 2.7 percent of people living in IDP camps strongly agreed that MINUSTAH’s presence is a good thing and 28.4 percent strongly disagreed. This could be an indication of the continued problem of security for the estimated 520,000 Haitians still living in IDP camps. [See Annex 5]

These statistics suggest that more people in categories most vulnerable to violence want some form of security and thus support the presence of foreign troops. However, the responses differ between Cité Soleil and Martissant, neighborhoods that – according to respondents – face similar levels of violence: 21.7 percent of Cité Soleil residents strongly support MINUSTAH, compared to 8.3 percent in Martissant. This is more telling in the strong critiques; 48.5 percent of Martissant residents compared to 2.6 percent in Cité Soleil strongly disagree that MINUSTAH is good. The relationships within the neighborhood, proximity to the UN base, and perceptions of collusion with armed gangs may explain these differences.

This study was conducted before the video of a group of MINUSTAH soldiers involved in the alleged sexual assault of an eighteen-year-old boy in Port Salut was made public in October,¹ and a report from the human rights group RNDDH documented MINUSTAH aggression on December 14.² These developments have resulted in several anti-MINUSTAH protests and probably contributed to a further deterioration of MINUSTAH’s image in the general population.

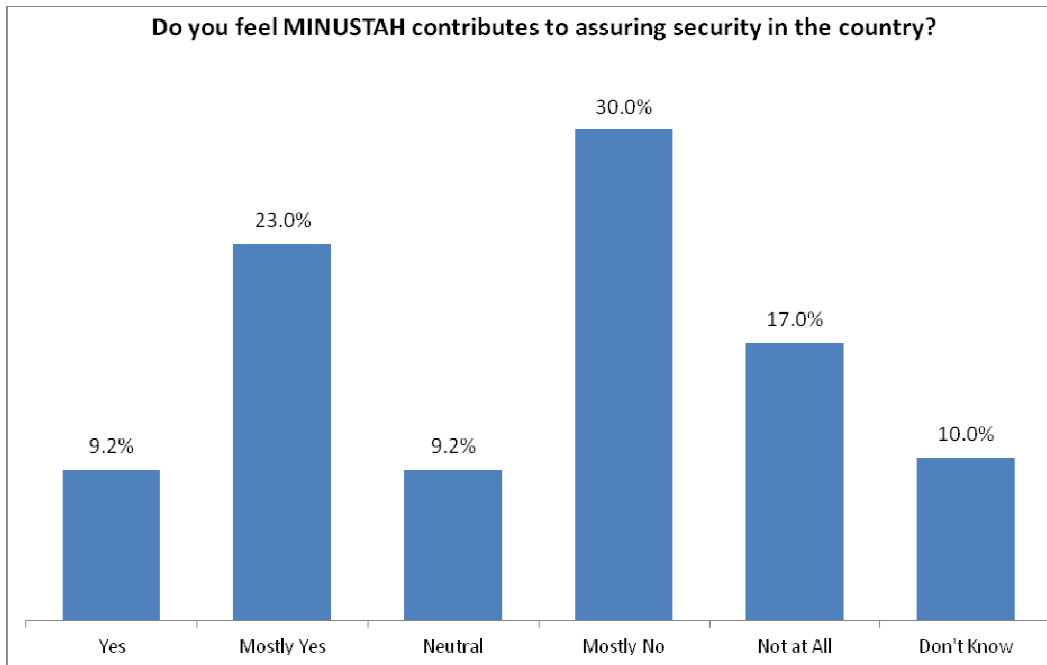
MINUSTAH: NOT DOING THEIR JOB EFFECTIVELY

Less than one-third of respondents (31.3%) felt that they were in greater physical security when a MINUSTAH agent was physically present, only slightly greater than those who declared “mostly not” (31.0%). An additional 22.4 percent reported that they were “not at all” safer with MINUSTAH present. Of people who witnessed a crime occurring in front of MINUSTAH agents, only 10 percent said that the agents made an arrest. It appeared to those surveyed that UN troops pretended not to see the crime in 46 percent of the cases, and in 40 percent of cases the UN troops did “nothing” when they witnessed a crime, according to respondents.



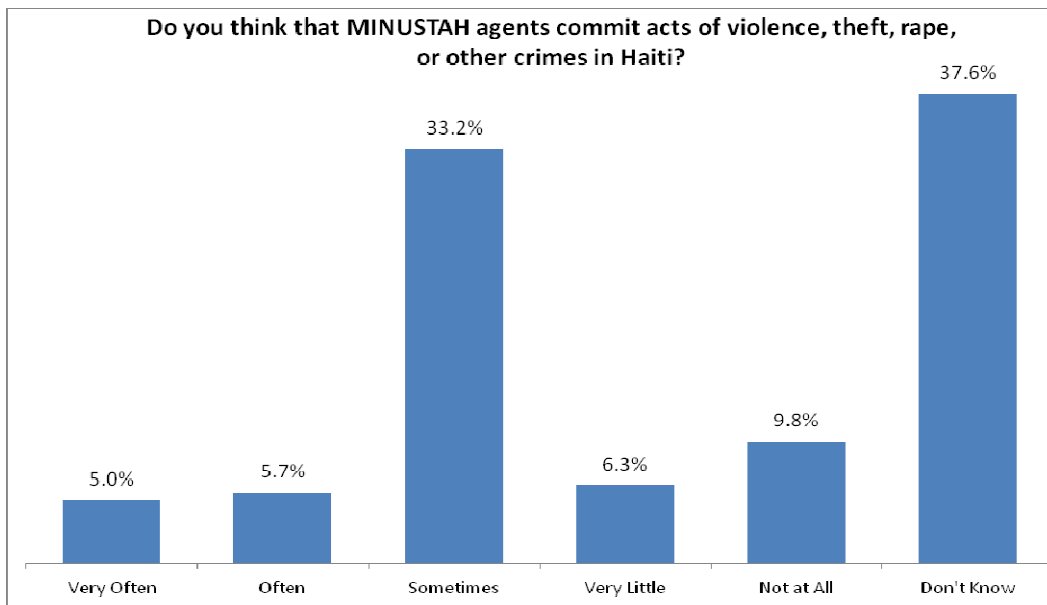
MINUSTAH’s unwillingness or inability to protect Haitians from crime contributes to the overall impression of MINUSTAH’s inefficiency; a majority of residents believe that MINUSTAH does not contribute to security. When asked if MINUSTAH contributes to security in the country, 36.4 percent of people answered “mostly yes” or “yes”, compared to 53.2 percent who answered “mostly no” or “no.”

An additional 10.4 percent answered “somewhat.” Compare this to the responses people gave for the Haitian National Police, where only 25.2 percent said “no” or “mostly no” to the question of whether the police provide security in their neighborhood.



NEGATIVE ACTIONS

This survey asked residents to respond to the question, “Do you think that MINUSTAH agents commit acts of violence, theft, rape, or other crimes in Haiti?” Only 9.8 percent indicated “not at all,” whereas 43.9 percent indicated sometimes, often, or very often. An additional 6.3 percent answered “very little.”

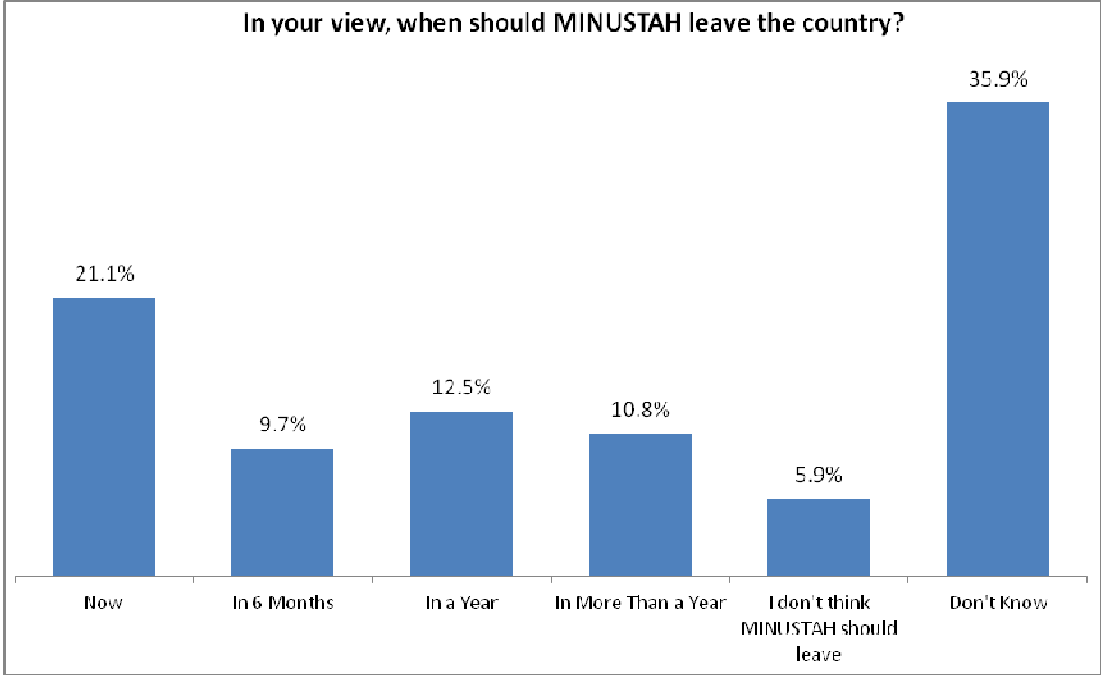


Many people (37.6%) answered “I don’t know,” which might have been because of the sensitive nature of the question and questionnaire, given the context of the door-to-door research with a stranger. Of the residents who had an opinion, 73.3 percent indicated that MINUSTAH commits crimes “sometimes,” “often,” or “very often.”

The widely-reported discussion of the sexual assault in Port Salut is only a highly visible case because there is video proof. Evidence of other incidents that suggests that there is a consistent pattern of abuse: particularly involving prostitution and rape. In 2007, more than 100 Sri Lankan soldiers were repatriated for sexually exploiting young Haitian women and girls.³ A recent news article revealed that sex with minors, which is prohibited under Haitian and international law, is not uncommon for MINUSTAH soldiers.⁴ In August 2010, the body of a 16 year-old was found hanging inside of MINUSTAH’s base in Cap Haïtien.⁵ MINUSTAH has never announced results from any investigation into the incident.

MINUSTAH TROOPS SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN

More than a fifth of people polled (21.1%) said that MINUSTAH should leave “now,” with an additional 9.7 percent believing they should leave within six months and 12.5 percent within a year. Aggregated, 43.3 percent of people polled that believe that MINUSTAH should be out of Haiti within the year, compared to 5.9 percent of people who said that they wished MINUSTAH to stay indefinitely. The 72.2 percent of people who expressed an opinion to the question argued that MINUSTAH should leave within the year compared to 9.8 percent of people who believe that MINUSTAH should stay. Almost 40 percent of respondents stated that they did not know when the troops should leave.



The poll asked residents to identify how MINUSTAH’s withdrawal would be good for the country or bad for the country. These responses were qualitative, to elicit the range of opinions from the population. One commonly cited answer yields clues as to why some respondents were favorable to MINUSTAH

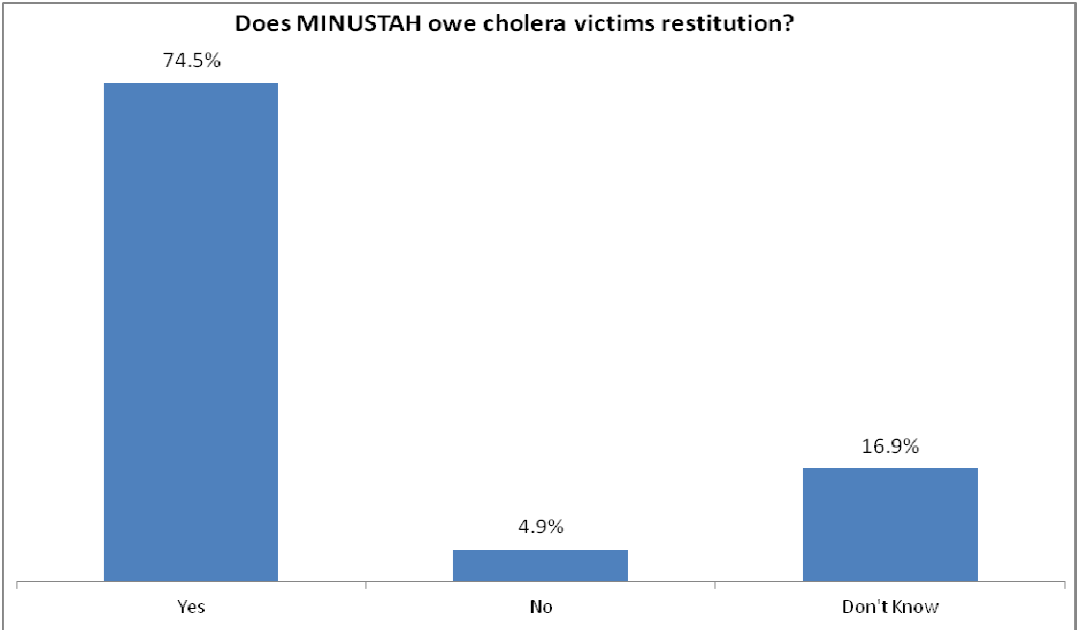
staying longer, namely concern was expressed that if MINUSTAH left the country, there would be fewer jobs in the country. MINUSTAH’s budget of over \$800 million per year – if invested wisely – could go far to vaccinate against cholera or build water treatment and sanitation facilities to stop its spread. Though MINUSTAH troops are a tangible source of occasional income for some Haitian people, much of their funds spent in the country go to more established classes, to grocery retailers selling imported goods and owners of restaurants, bars, hotels, and night clubs, for example.

On the other hand, some of the respondents that were not favorable to MINUSTAH’s extended presence considered that the UN troops contributed to the high cost of living, certainly for rent. Still others said that MINUSTAH’s presence was an obstacle to the restoration of Haiti’s sovereignty and the ability to make decisions in the people’s interests.

MINUSTAH SHOULD COMPENSATE CHOLERA VICTIMS

In October, 2010, a cholera epidemic struck Haiti, resulting in over 500,000 infections and over 7,000 deaths by January 2012. Ninety-seven people are getting infected every day with 200 dying every month.⁶ Six independent, peer reviewed studies, including an Independent Panel of Experts appointed by the United Nations, provide overwhelming evidence that the UN troops from Nepal stationed just outside of Mirebalais brought cholera to Haiti and that the negligent actions of the UN caused the outbreak of the disease.⁷ In November, 2011, over 5,000 victims of cholera and relatives of victims filed a suit against the UN and MINUSTAH to demand individual compensation, a public apology and a nationwide response to the epidemic that includes medical treatment for current and future victims and clean water and sanitation infrastructure.⁸ To date, MINUSTAH has denied responsibility for the devastating epidemic but, as the survey shows, a majority of Haitians appear to think differently.

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents – 74.5 percent – believed that the UN owed victims of cholera restitution, with only 4.9 percent saying no (16.9% said they did not know.)



This survey question and the responses that it generated raise the larger issue of MINUSTAH's accountability before the law and the people of Haiti. Haitians and human rights organizations have expressed their concern over the fact that MINUSTAH operates in Haiti with very little legal accountability for their criminal conduct.⁹ Under a Status of Forces Agreement (or SOFA) that the Haitian government signed with the UN, MINUSTAH troops enjoy an almost blanket waiver of liability in Haitian courts for any crimes they commit in Haiti.¹⁰ Both military and civil members enjoy immunity for all acts performed in their official capacity.¹¹ MINUSTAH military members who commit a crime outside of "their official capacity" are only subject to their home country's jurisdiction.¹² Civilian members can only be prosecuted if the UN agrees. Haitians may not seek damages for civil liability in a Haitian court unless the UN certifies that the charges are unrelated to the member's official duties.¹³ The SOFA requires the UN to establish a standing claims commission to hear private claims against MINUSTAH members when the SOFA denies the Haitian Judiciary jurisdiction. The commission has never been established, leaving Haitians without legal recourse for criminal and human rights abuses perpetrated by MINUSTAH members.

CONCLUSION

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has renewed MINUSTAH's mandate every year since 2004. On October 14, 2011, a UNSC resolution renewed MINUSTAH's mandate for the seventh time and announced that up to 10,581 foreign soldiers and police agents would remain in Haiti, a number well above the 9151 troops and police in place back in 2009. The UNSC also, for the first time, expressed its intention to renew the mission's mandate beyond the following year. The controversies that have dogged MINUSTAH and calls for MINUSTAH to withdraw from Haitian civil society, appear to have made no significant impression on the Council members.

The results of this survey provide further confirmation that there is little support for MINUSTAH in Haiti's capital city. A majority of respondents wish to see MINUSTAH forces depart within a short time frame and consider that the UN force should be held accountable for the massive human damage caused by the introduction of cholera to Haiti. Furthermore, only a minority of respondents considers that MINUSTAH helps enhance security in their neighborhoods. These results point to a disconnect between the deliberations that have taken place to date at the UNSC and the prevailing perceptions of a population that is frequently in close proximity to U.N. troops. Previous studies, cited by U.N. personnel, have actually generated similar data; however the conclusions reached by these previous studies wherein a majority of residents expressed a desire for the U.N. to leave within a year are based on a radical interpretation wherein this is expressed as support for the force.

It is important, however, to note some of the divergences that exist among responses depending on factors such as gender and exposure to violence. These divergences suggest that, though a majority of respondents don't feel safer in the presence of UN troops, women and individuals who live in areas with high rates of violence are more favorable to the troop presence. Without a doubt, the discussion around MINUSTAH's eventual departure must incorporate the very real security concerns of significant segments of the population. The international community and the Haitian government share a responsibility in the lack of progress in professionalizing the Police Nationale d'Haïti (PNH); both parties need to make a well-functioning, democratic, transparent, professionalized, and well-trained PNH a priority so the country can be ready for MINUSTAH's departure. This will require work, focused attention, and resources. Just under a fifth of respondents (18.9%) believed that the PNH would be ready to assure security now, with an additional 39.7% believing that PNH would be ready in 1-2 years.

This said, it is important to point out that, while there has been violence in certain parts of Haiti, especially in the capital, Haiti's homicide rate of 8.2 per 100,000 is consistently more than three times lower than that of Brazil (26.4), the country at the head of MINUSTAH's military unit, and almost seven times lower than Jamaica (54.9), across the Windward Channel.¹⁴

This survey has obvious geographical limitations and only provides a partial snapshot of popular perceptions of MINUSTAH in Haiti. However, the opinions expressed by respondents should give pause to policy makers within the group of countries that provide troops to the UN mission and/or are involved in approving the annual MINUSTAH mandate at the UNSC. The abuses perpetrated by MINUSTAH personnel, the lack of accountability mechanisms, and the lack of a clear timeline for withdrawal are issues that are highly problematic for Haitians. Now that the Security Council has a mission in Haiti, it is time that these issues begin to be addressed by the international community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Schuller is Assistant Professor of African American Studies and Anthropology at York College (CUNY) and affiliate at the Faculté d'Ethnologie, l'Université d'État d'Haïti. Supported by the National Science Foundation and others, Schuller's research on globalization, NGOs, gender, and disasters in Haiti has been published in twenty book chapters and peer-reviewed articles as well as public media. He is the author of forthcoming Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International aid, and NGOs (Rutgers, 2012) and co-editor of four volumes, including Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake (Kumarian, 2012). He is co-director / co-producer of documentary Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy (Documentary Educational Resources, 2009). He chairs the Society for Applied Anthropology's Human Rights and Social Justice Committee and is active in many solidarity efforts.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: List of researchers

Mackenzy Dor, Finissant, Faculté d’Ethnologie
Robenson Jean-Julien, Finissant, Faculté d’Ethnologie
Levenson Lucien, Finissant, Faculté d’Ethnologie
Roody Therlius, Finissant, Faculté d’Ethnologie

Annex 2: Demographics of survey respondents

Occupation:

- (1) timachann 33.5%
- (2) day laborer 16.5%
- (3) factory worker 7.3%
- (4) office 1.1%
- (5) state 3.1%
- (6) NGO 3.0%
- (7) other professional 15.9%
- (8) aid 19.6%

Type of house:

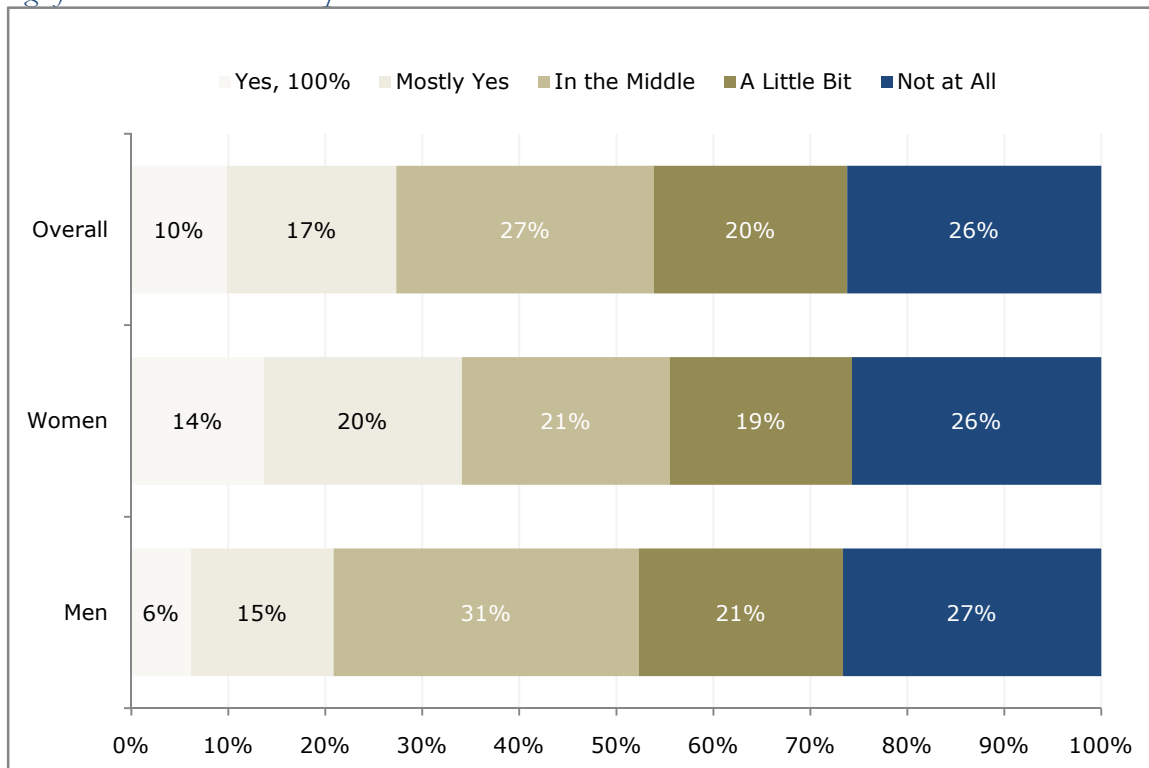
- (1) house 44.8%
- (2) apartment 16.7%
- (3) one-room shack 15.0%
- (4) t-shelter 6.9%
- (5) tent 15.7%
- (6) other 0.9%

Level of education:

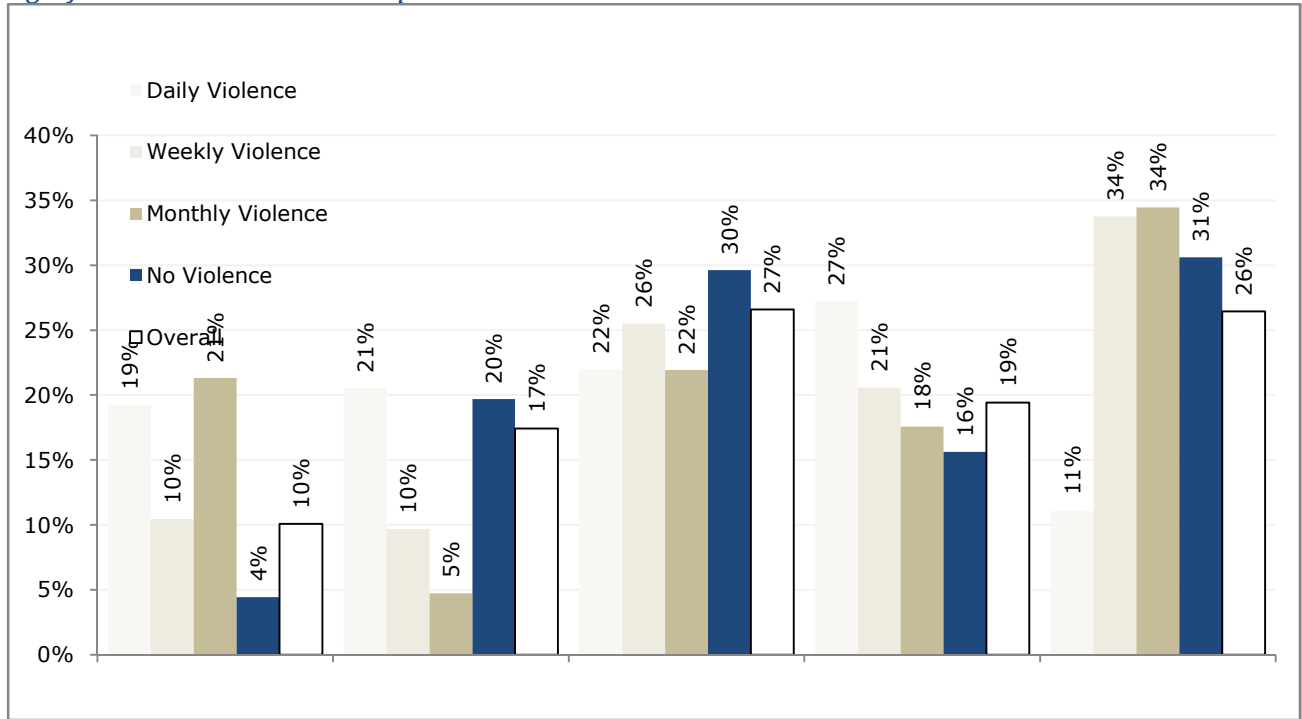
- (1) no schooling 8.5%
- (2) some primary 15.5%
- (3) finished primary 20.7%
- (4) secondary 42.1%
- (5) university 13.2%

Annex 3: Is MINUSTAH’s presence a good thing? (by sex)

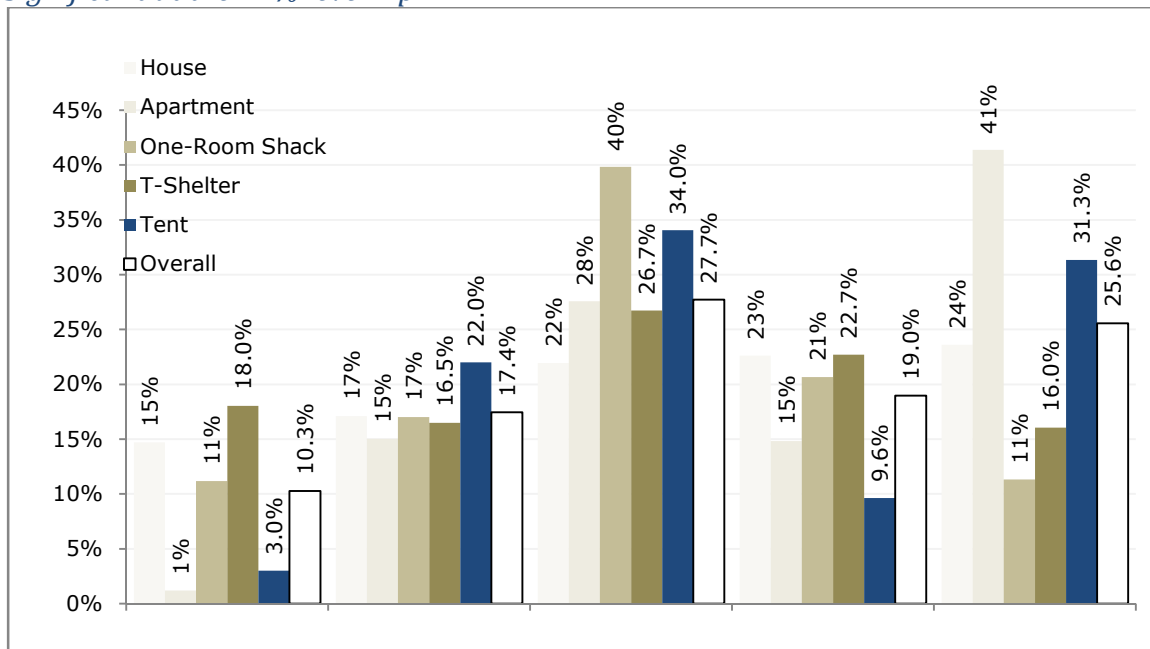
Significant to the 95% level – $p = 0.0102$



Annex 4: Is MINUSTAH's presence a good thing? (by level of violence in neighborhood)
Significant at the 99% level – p = 0.0001



Annex 5: Is MINUSTAH's presence a good thing? (by house type)
Significant at the 99% level – p = 0.0063



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¹ <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/peacekeepers-accused-sexually-assaulting-haitian-teen/story?id=14437122&singlePage=true>.

² http://www.rnddh.org/IMG/pdf/MINUSTAH_violence.pdf

³ <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jv1Dg19IGQjacW3GTAozDzgm43iQ>.

⁴ <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=105016>.

⁵ *What Happened to Gerard Jean Gilles?*, CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND POLICY RESEARCH, Sept. 24, 2010, available at <http://www.cepr.net/index.php/blogs/relief-and-reconstruction-watch/what-happened-to-gerald-jean-gilles>.

⁶ *New York Times*, January 10, 2012 story, "Haitian Cholera Epidemic Traced to First Known Victim." Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/10/health/haitian-cholera-epidemic-traced-to-first-known-victim.html>. See also Health Cluster Bulletin: Cholera and Post-Earthquake Response in Haiti #29, Report of the Government of Haiti and Pan American Health Organization, Nov. 8, 2011 and *Not Doing Enough: Unnecessary Sickness and Death from Cholera in Haiti*, CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND POLICY RESEARCH, Aug. 2011, available at <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/not-doing-enough-2011-08.pdf>.

⁷ Studies on the origins of the cholera epidemic in Haiti were conducted by the U.S. Center for Disease Control; Dr. Renaud Piarroux, commissioned by the Haitian and French governments, an Independent Panel of Experts appointed by the United Nations – available at http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/17/7/11-0059_article.htm; American Society for Microbiology – Dr. Rene Hendriksen et. al. – available at <http://mbio.asm.org/content/2/4/e00157-11>; the Harvard Cholera Group; the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute in Cambridge, England; and the International Vaccine Institute in Seoul, Korea.

⁸ *Haiti Group Demands UN Pay for Cholera Outbreak*, Trenton Daniel, Associated Press (Nov. 8, 2011), available at <http://ijdh.org/archives/23105>. See <http://www.cdc.gov/cholera/publications.html> for a partial listing of reports on cholera.

⁹ *The United Nations Should Hold MINUSTAH Personnel Accountable for Human Rights Violations to Haitians*, Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti, Sept. 20, 2011, available at <http://ijdh.org/archives/21673>; *Haiti's Renewal of MINUSTAH's Mandate in Violation of the Human Rights of the Haitian People*, Bri Kouri Nouvèl Gaye, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Haiti Let Haiti Live, and UnityAyiti, Mar. 2011, available at http://ijdh.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Final_MINUSTAH_English.pdf.

¹⁰ Accord entre l'organisation des nations unies et le gouvernement haitien concernant le statut de l'operation des nations unies en Haiti, para. 51 (2004) available at http://untreaty.un.org/unts/144078_158780/6/9/13920.pdf.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Id.

¹³ Id. at para. 52.

¹⁴ US Department of State, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, *Haiti 2011 Crime and Safety Report*, <https://www.osac.gov>.