

Haiti's Urban Crime Wave?

Results from Monthly Household Surveys

August 2011 – February 2012

Athena R. Kolbe¹ and Robert Muggah²



Summary

Haiti exhibited a dramatic escalation in criminal violence with Haitians reporting declining confidence in police institutions during the last six months (August 2011 to February 2012). For the first time since 2007, the incidence of violent crime and victimization has shown a consistent increase, and confidence in public institutions appears to be dropping quickly. Random household surveys conducted on a monthly basis between August 2011 and February 2012 indicate that violent crime is increasingly common, particularly over the past few months in the densely packed 'popular' zones of Haiti's largest urban centers.

This assessment is based on a longitudinal survey using random sampling methods. Specifically, households in the urban areas of Port-au-Prince, Les Cayes, Cap Haitien, Gonaives, St. Marc, Jacmel and Leogane were randomly selected and surveyed about their experiences with criminality and faith in public institutions. The survey sought to measure their exposure to insecurity and opinions regarding future safety. Collectively, these surveys demonstrate an increasing dissatisfaction with the government of Haiti after five years of growing confidence as well as fears that political uncertainty and turmoil will increase crime.

The preliminary findings of the assessment are:

- The number of reported homicides across all urban settings increased considerably between November 2011 and February 2012. Half of the reported murders occurred during armed robbery or attempted armed robbery. While Port-au-Prince's overall homicide is low in comparison to other Caribbean cities, this nevertheless represents a rate of 60.9 per 100,000, one of the highest recorded rates since 2004;
- Property crime increased dramatically between October 2011 and February 2012. These property crimes often entailed the theft of modest amounts of cash and personal assets such as mobile phones;
- Residents of low-income popular zones were more likely to be victims of crime than others. For instance, in January 2011, residents of these areas were 20 times more likely to be subjected to a property crime, 18 times more likely to be physically assaulted and 27 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than residents in wealthier and less densely populated areas;
- Complaints of police misconduct, including being asked for bribes and sexual harassment by uniformed officers, increased during the study period. For the first time since 2007, overall support for the Haitian National Police is on the decline with residents expressing concerns that police are unable or unwilling to protect them from crime. Since November 2011, there has been a marked deterioration in public support for the police.

Study Methods

The present assessment applied a random GPS coordinate sampling approach to surveying local populations. Specifically, households in urban areas of Haiti³ were selected for inclusion in the assessment. A total of 3,000 households participated in six surveys, each 30 days apart, with a response rate of 90.4 per cent⁴. A two-member research team visited the selected home and randomly selected an adult over the age of 18 to interview⁵. The same adult was subsequently contacted on a monthly basis for follow-up interviews via telephone each month through February 26, 2012⁶.

A standardized process to monitor the incidence of criminal violence and victimization was administered over the six month period of the study. During each 30-minute interview, the selected respondent was asked a series of demographic questions and supplementary information on their own and other household member's experiences with crime and victimization during the previous 30 days. Respondents were also asked their opinions about a range of security, political and economic issues. Respondents received no remuneration for participation in the study but were given 100 gourdes (roughly USD \$2.50) of phone credit ("pap padap") to enable their ability to participate in follow-up phone surveys⁷.

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Participants

		N	Percentage of murders
Gender	Male	1475	49.1%
	Female	1526	50.9%
Religion	Christian only	989	33.0%
	Christian & Voodoo	1490	49.7%
	Voodoo only	440	14.7%
	Other	14	0.5%
	No Religion	44	1.5%
	Refused/no response	23	0.8%
Occupation	Unemployed but able to work	678	22.6%
	Unskilled laborer	933	31.1%
	Semi-skilled laborer	776	25.9%
	Skilled laborer	270	9.0%
	Professional & white collar	174	5.8%
	Unemployed due to age or disability	85	2.8%
	Refused/no response	84	2.8%



Demographic Profile

The demographic profiles of selected participants were analogous to other household surveys conducted in urban areas of Haiti between 2005 and 2010 by the authors and others⁸. The average reported household size was 5.23 individuals (SD= 2.1 individuals; 95% CI:5.15-5.31 individuals). The average reported age of participants was 25.2 years (SD= 6.7 years; CI: 24.96-25.44 years). As in previous assessments, slightly more women (n=1525) than men (n=1474) participated in the survey (See Table 1).

Homicidal violence

Homicidal violence appears to have increased dramatically between August 2011 and February 2012. All but one of the murders reported by survey respondents during the six months occurred in Port-au-Prince, the capital (see Table 2). These recent increases in homicidal violence coincide with a wider political crisis within the Haitian government and the growing assertiveness of armed political and criminal groups to traverse neighborhood boundaries. While overall confidence in the government remains comparatively high and optimism is positive compared to previous years⁹, there is growing apprehension about insecurity.

Table 2. Reported murders

	Aug 2011	Sept 2011	Oct 2011	Nov 2011	Dec 2011	Jan 2012	Feb 2012
Number of Murders	0	0	0	1	2	4	4
Percentage of residents (n=15,690)							
Number of murders reported by popular zone residents	0	0	0	1	1	3	4
Relative risk of murder for residents of popular zones compared to other zones	*	*	*	*	10.1	30.2	*
Number of murders reported by Port-au-Prince residents	0	0	0	1	2	3	4
Relative risk of murders for residents of Port-au-Prince compared to other areas	*	*	*	*	*	4.2	*
Murders per 100,000 Port-au-Prince area residents	*	*	*	15.2	30.47	45.7	60.9

* Calculations not applicable due to number of reported incidents.

There are a number of shared characteristics of reported homicides reported during the during the study period. Of the eleven reported murders in participating households between August 2011 and February 2012, more than half (6) occurred during robberies or attempted robberies. What is more, murders occurred more frequently in so-called “popular” zones than in “non-popular” zones¹⁰. Neighborhoods such as Bel Air, Cite Soleil and Martissant in particular appear particularly affected by the surge in homicidal violence. Such areas are also known to exhibit acute forms of urbanization, social marginalization, inequality and poverty.

The dramatic increase in homicidal violence between August 2011 and February 2012 is in contrast to the rapidly declining rates of homicide between 2007 and early 2011¹¹. Nevertheless, the findings from recent monthly surveys coincide with neighborhood-specific data collected by non-governmental organizations such as Viva Rio which operates in Greater Bel Air. For example, Bel Air has reportedly experienced a more than twofold increase of homicide from 19 per 100,000 in 2010 to 50 per 100,000 to the end of 2011¹². Indeed, senior representatives from humanitarian agencies have all reported sharp deteriorations in security over the past six months with each month purportedly growing progressively more violent¹³.

Property Crime

The incidence of property crime, defined as theft, vandalism or intentional destruction of personal property, demonstrated a pronounced threefold increase between August 2011 and February 2012. As a category of property crime, “armed robberies” were comparatively rare during the beginning of the reporting period though they have increased dramatically over the past six months, with virtually all of the armed robberies affecting residents of popular zones¹⁴. Both armed robberies and other property crimes continued rising through February 2012 (see Table 4).

It is useful to recall that reported property crime across Haiti was relatively low in September 2011 with just 1.4 percent of all surveyed households reporting associated incidents. These low rates were similar to previous studies undertaken by the authors which showed that property crime was comparatively rare during 2007 to 2010¹⁵. In the six weeks after the January 2010 earthquake – the only period during which there was a statistically significant increase in crime

Table 3. Property Crimes

	Aug 2011	Sept 2011	Oct 2011	Nov 2011	Dec 2011	Jan 2012	Feb 2012
Number of Incidents	39	41	65	78	83	87	95
Percentage of Households	1.3	1.4	2.2	2.6	2.8	2.9	3.2
Number of Armed Robberies	0	2	10	16	24	29	37
Percentage of Households	0	.07	0.3	0.5	0.8	1.0	1.2
Number of Incidents in Popular Zone	26	24	38	49	52	58	60
Relative risk of victimization for residents of popular zones compared to other zones	20.1	14.2	13.9	17.0	16.8	20.1	17.2
Number of Incidents in Port-au-Prince	30	34	51	55	64	67	73
Relative risk of victimization for residents of Port-au-Prince compared to other areas	4.6	6.8	5.1	3.3	4.7	4.7	4.6
Relative risk of victimization for residents of popular zones	20.1	14.2	14.2	17.0	16.9	20.1	17.3


Table 4. Physical & Sexual Assaults

	Aug 2011	Sept 2011	Oct 2011	Nov 2011	Dec 2011	Jan 2012	Feb 2012
Number of Physical Assaults	3	6	5	14	19	25	28
Percentage of residents (n=15,690)	.019	.038	.032	.089	.121	.159	.178
Number of Sexual Assaults	1	2	1	6	8	11	15
Percentage of residents (n=15,690)	.006	.013	.006	.038	.051	.070	.096
Number of Physical Assaults of popular zone residents	2	3	3	8	11	16	17
Relative risk of physical assault for residents of popular zones compared to other zones	20.1	10.1	15.0	13.4	13.8	17.9	15.6
Number of Sexual Assaults of popular zone residents	1	1	0	4	5	8	10
Relative risk of sexual assault for residents of popular zones compared to other zones	*	10.1	*	20.1	16.8	26.9	20.1
Number of physical assaults reported by Port-au-Prince residents	1	1	2	5	8	9	11
Relative risk of physical assault for residents of Port-au-Prince compared to other areas	.70	.28	.93	.77	1.01	.78	.90
Physical assaults per 100,000 Port-au-Prince residents	15.2	15.2	30.5	76.2	121.9	137.1	167.6
Number of sexual assaults reported by Port-au-Prince residents	1	1	1	2	6	7	6
Relative risk of sexual assault for residents of Port-au-Prince compared to other areas	*	1.4	*	.70	4.2	2.4	.93
Sexual assaults per 100,000 Port-au-Prince residents	15.2	15.2	15.2	30.5	91.4	106.6	91.4

* Not calculated.

between 2007 and 2011 - only 4.1 percent of surveyed households in the Port-au-Prince area complained of property crimes. The vast majority of these consisted of thefts of food and water and none were carried out at gunpoint.

It is important to note that the nature of property crime in Haiti tends to differ from that commonly seen in middle- and upper-income settings. Despite the resort to violence during some property crimes, thefts are generally for modest

amounts of money or of property valued at less than USD\$ 40. The most commonly stolen items during the August 2011 to February 2012 reporting period were money and cell phones. Popular zone residents were more likely to report property crimes than those not living in popular zones; in January 2012 these residents were 20 times more likely to complain of property crime victimization than other residents.

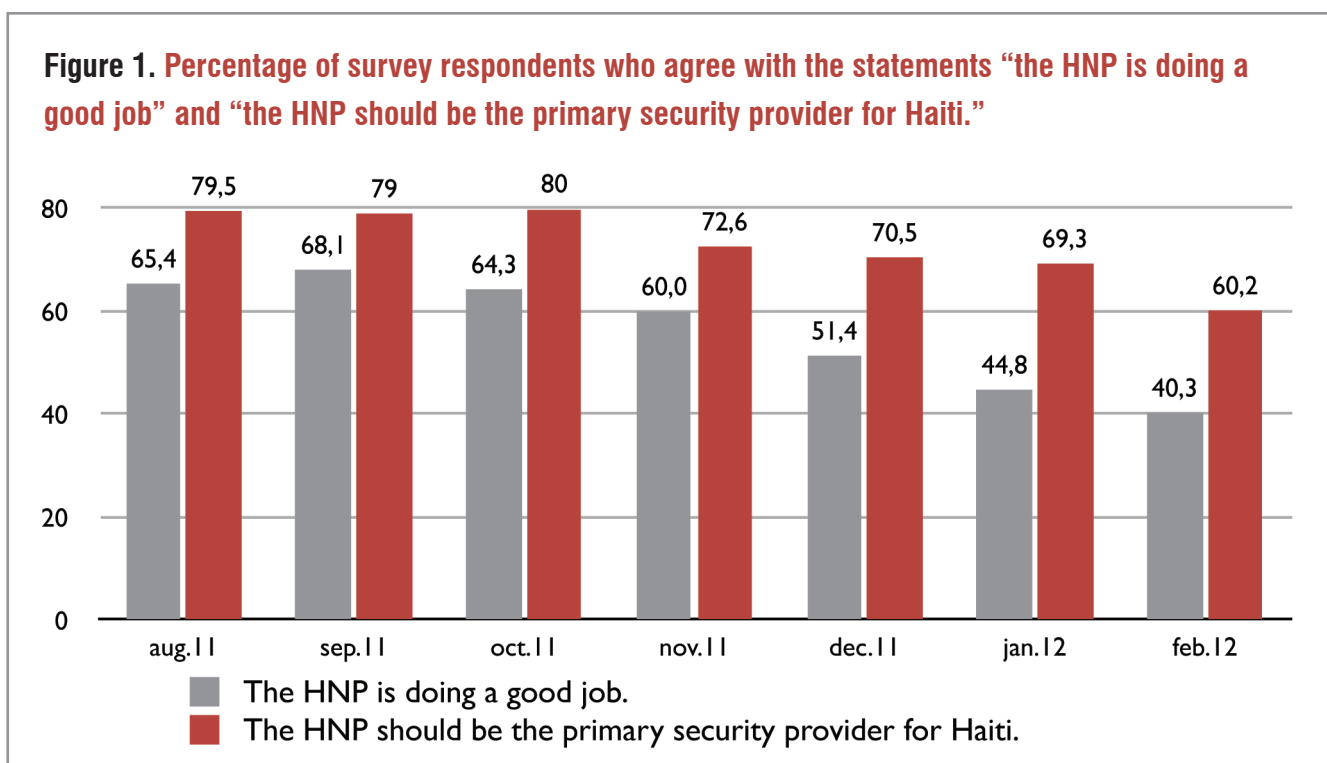
Physical and Sexual Assault

Physical and sexual assaults continued to occur at lower rates than property crimes, though the incidence of such events escalated from November 2011 to February 2012. Both sexual and physical assaults were reported at higher rates by “popular zone” residents than by those not residing in popular zones (see Table 3). It is also important to stress that the risk of physical and sexual assault in informal settlements and displaced person camps are also disproportionately higher than in other areas¹⁶.

There are a number of possible factors explaining some aspects of the surge in physical and sexual assault. For example, the “karnaval” festival which was celebrated in Jacmel and Les Cayes in February 2012 was associated with higher rates of sexual assault in those areas. All of the sexual assaults reported by Jacmel and Les Cayes residents occurred during karnaval time and no other sexual assaults were reported by residents of these two cities between August 2011 and January 2012. Physical assaults were also more common in these two areas during the festival period; all of the reported physical assaults in Jacmel and Les Cayes during karnaval reportedly involved the consumption of alcohol by the victim, the perpetrator(s) or both parties.

Confidence in State Security Institutions

For the first time since 2007, confidence in the Haitian National Police (HNP) has plunged amongst urban residents – both those residing in popular zones and those in other areas. These results are in contrast to what appeared to be far-reaching support in the credibility and effectiveness of the HNP, particularly in the wake of the January 2010 earthquake¹⁷.





By January 2012, almost one in five respondents expressed concern that the HNP were unable or unwilling to protect them from crime. Reports of police misconduct including asking for or accepting bribes, sexually harassing residents, or refusing to respond to requests for assistance increased during the study period (see Figures 1-3 and Table 5).

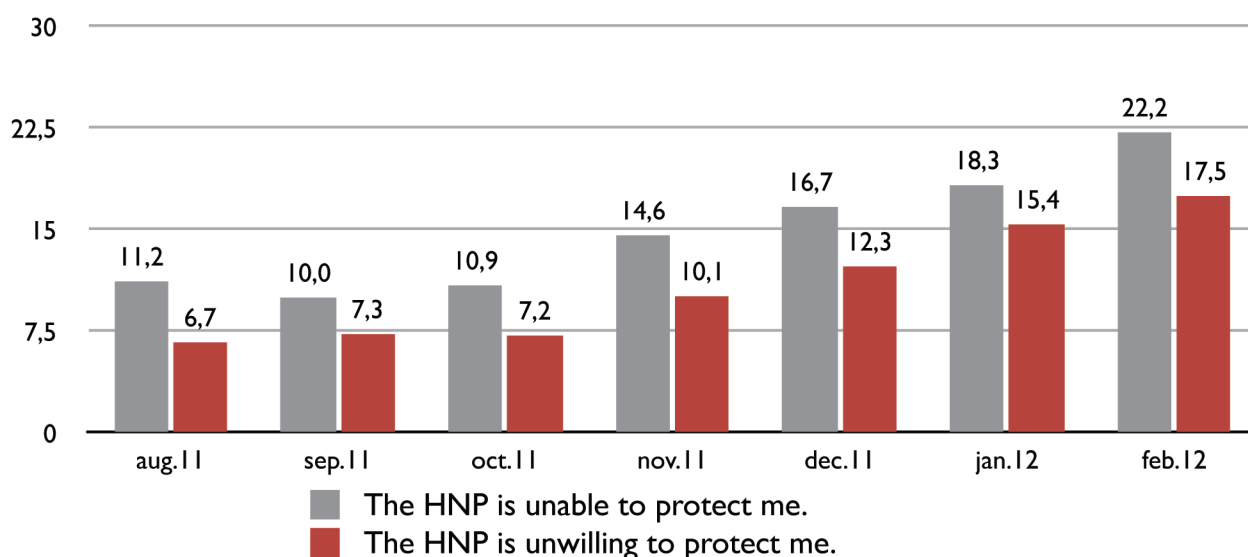
Concluding Reflections

While there is no single factor that can explain the rise in violence in Haiti's urban areas, the circumstances for stability have clearly diminished since the earthquake. One of the unintended outcomes of post-earthquake aid efforts has been the stimulation of an unsustainable demand for employment. Indeed, as cash-for-work projects offering short-term jobs have dried-up, young people have become even more frustrated than before by the lack of employment opportunity. The fluctuation of resource flows to poor areas over the past two years has also unintentionally disrupted traditional forms of community leadership. As international actors with little experience in Haiti entered the popular zones, long-time leaders saw their influence wane, thereby opening the space for opportunists and criminal groups.

As in decades past, political uncertainty is also playing a critical factor in shaping contemporary patterns of violence. Political turmoil, which has historically accompanied rising crime rates, has clearly increased in late 2011 and 2012. Indeed, in 2011 a new President took office after a contested election in which Lavalas, a political party popular amongst the urban poor, was excluded from the ballot. In late February 2012 the Prime Minister abruptly resigned amidst a growing controversy regarding the eligibility of some elected officials to hold office. The current political climate is volatile and appears to be escalating, much to the dismay of international donors who watch on.

And as is so often the case, the political uncertainty has also coincided with a progressive deterioration of service delivery, particularly to Haiti's already under-served popular areas. Services to resource-poor urban areas have decreased considerably according to sources on the ground. Basic social services have been slashed over the past year, garbage collection in some popular zones is now so infrequent as to be practically non-existent, public schools are closing due to lack of funds, and there is currently no organized effort on behalf of the Haitian government to sustain channels of

Figure 2. Percentage of survey respondents agreeing with the statements “the HNP is unwilling to protect me from crime” and “the HNP is unable to protect me from crime.”



communication with marginal urban neighborhoods which were carefully cultivated by the previous administration and the now-defunct national commission on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (Commission Nationale de Désarmement de Démantèlement et de Réinsertion, CNDDR).

Clearly, residents of popular zones are frustrated. Making matters worse, there are few material, economic and social resources available to these areas. Some residents feel excluded both from the electoral process and opportunities to lead and improve their own communities. The deeply traumatic experience of the earthquake and subsequent (temporary and sometimes permanent) displacement continues to have a profound impact on both individual and community well-being. Evidence-based interventions which strengthen the family and community ties are being cut at the very time that they are needed the most. If this continues, the current pattern of escalating crime will likely persist.

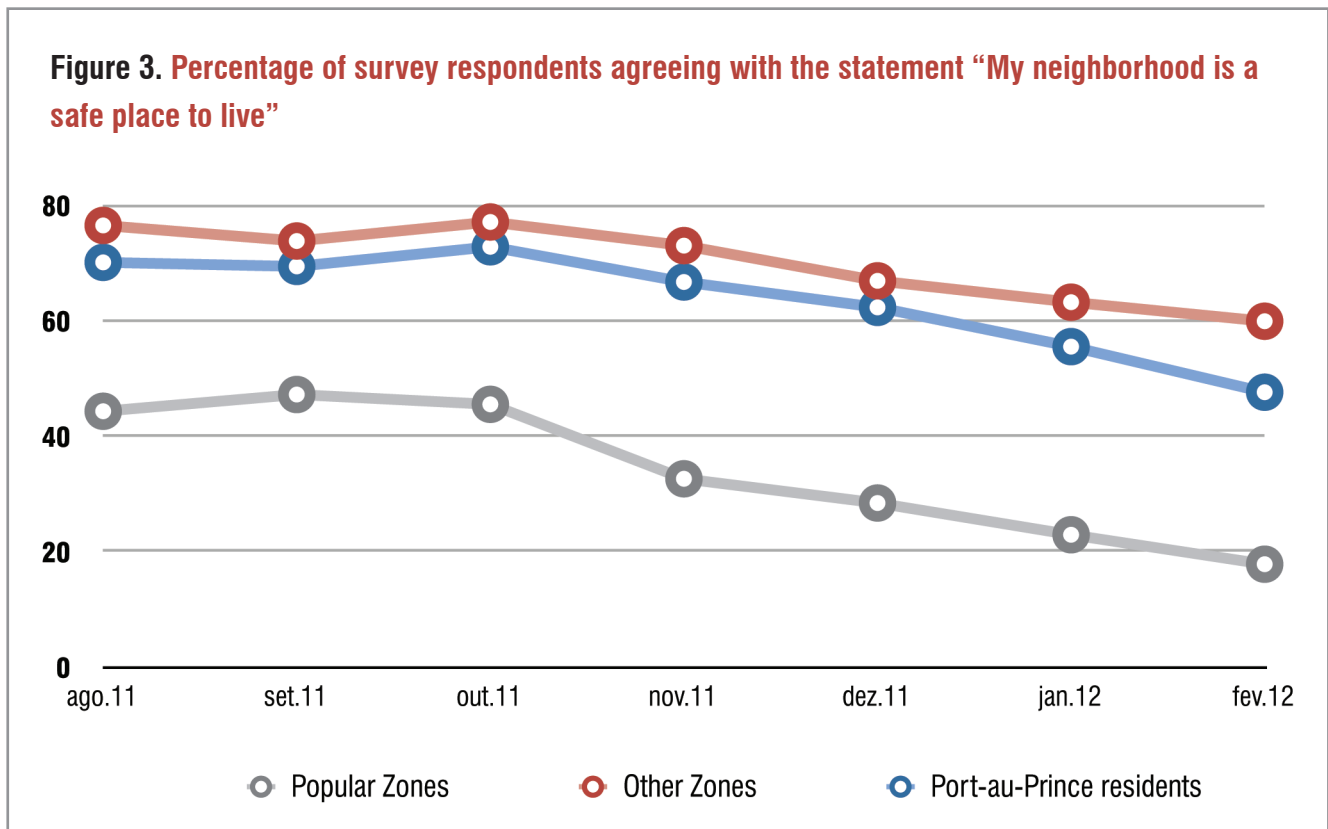


Table 5. Police misconduct as reported by survey respondents

	Aug 2011	Sept 2011	Oct 2011	Nov 2011	Dec 2011	Jan 2012	Feb 2012
HNP asked for/accepted bribe	0	2	3	8	15	18	21
Percentage of residents (n=15,690)	0.0	.012	.019	.051	.100	.115	.134
HNP sexually harassed resident	1	0	1	2	4	3	6
Percentage of residents (n=15,690)	.006	0.0	.006	.013	.025	.019	.038
HNP refused to respond to request for assistance	2	1	3	4	6	6	11
Percentage of residents (n=15,690)	.013	.006	.019	.025	.038	.038	.070



Endnotes

¹ Athena R. Kolbe is affiliated with the University of Michigan School of Social Work/Enstiti pou Travay Sosyal ak Syanns Sosyal, Petio-Ville, Haiti. She can be reached at kolbe@umich.edu

² Dr. Robert Muggah is associated with the International Relations Institute of the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, the SecDev Group, and the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and oversees the Humanitarian Action in Situations Other than War (HASOW) project. He can be reached at rmuggah@gmail.com.

³ Participants included 1,255 households in the greater Port-au-Prince area, 532 in Cap-Haitien, 201 in Jacmel, 212 in St. Marc, 298 in Gonaives, 243 in Leogane, and 259 in Les Cayes.

⁴ A total of 3,318 households were approached and invited to participate in the study. Of these, 318 did not participate in the study. A two-person research team visited the home up to four times. If no adult was home during any of these visits the household was excluded; this accounted for 68 non-participating households. For 116 households, no one was found at home during the four attempted visits. The remaining 134 households declined to participate in the study.

⁵ An adult household member (over the age of 18) who had the most recent birthday was selected to be the survey respondent.

⁶ For a more through explanation of research protocols, sampling methodology and data analysis, please contact the authors.

⁷ Participants who had no cell phone were given the option of providing the phone number for a neighbor or friend in the area. In these cases, the phone credit was provided to the phone owner rather than the participant.

⁸ See, for instance, Kolbe, A.R., Hutson, R. A., Shannon, H.A., Trzcinski, E, Miles, B., Levitz, N., Puccio, M., James, L., Noel, J.R., Muggah, R. (2010). "Mortality, Crime and Access to Basic Needs Before and After the Haiti Earthquake: a Random Survey of Port-au-Prince Households". *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 26 (4): 281-297; Kolbe, A.R. and Hutson, R. A. (2006) "Human Rights Abuses and Other Criminal Violations in Port-au-Prince, Haiti: A Random Survey of Households". *Lancet* 368 (9538): 864-873; Kolbe, A.R., Muggah, R. (2010) "Surveying Haiti's Post-Quake Needs: A Quantitative Approach." *Humanitarian Exchange* 52; Ponsar, F, Ford, N, Van Herp, M, Mancini, S, and Bachy, C. (2009) "Mortality, Violence and Access to Care in Two Districts of Port-au-Prince, Haiti". *Conflict and Health* 3(4):1-6.

⁹ See Gallup (2012a) "'Suffering' in Haiti at Lowest Since 2006," February 1; Gallup (2012b) "Confidence in Government Rebounds," January 31; Kolbe, A.R. and Muggah, R. (2011) "*Securing the State: Haiti Before and After the Earthquake*" in *Small Arms Survey 2011: States of Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ Popular zones are low income urban neighborhoods with high population density; these areas -- many of which lack adequate policing -- have historically had higher crime rates than less densely populated urban areas.

¹¹ See Kolbe and Muggah (2011).

¹² See Viva Rio statistics on total recorded homicides in Bel Air. Personal correspondence with Director, February 2012.

¹³ Interviews undertaken by the authors in Port-au-Prince in February 2012.

¹⁴ Of the ten armed robberies reported by survey respondents in October, nine took place in popular zones during the last ten days of the month.

¹⁵ Kolbe and Muggah (2011); Kolbe and Muggah (2010), and Kolbe et al (2010).

¹⁶ See Kolbe and Muggah (2011). See also Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (2011) Sexual violence in Haiti's IDP camps: Results of a household survey, published online at <http://www.chrgj.org/press/docs/Haiti%20Sexual%20Violence%20March%202011.pdf>; and Davis, L and Bookey, B (2011) Fanm Ayisyen Pap Kase: Respecting the right to health of Haitian women and girls. *Health and Human Rights* 13(1): 1-12.

¹⁷ See Kolbe and Muggah (2011).