

Riots erupt in Haiti after announcement of election results

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The Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince erupted in riots and demonstrations Tuesday night and Wednesday morning after the announcement that Jude Célestin, the presidential candidate backed by the despised outgoing head of state, René Préval, would be included in the two-way runoff.

Thousands reportedly took part in the demonstrations and riots. The offices of Préval's governing INITE coalition were torched. Barricades of rubble, tires, and timbers were erected and set alight. Noise from gunfire could be heard throughout the night, and fires were still burning in Port-au-Prince Wednesday morning, producing plumes of black smoke over the city's horizon. Streets were littered with rocks hurled by demonstrators. There are no confirmed deaths.

The rioting took place across Port-au-Prince, affecting the districts of Delmas, Canape Vert, and even upscale Pétionville, among others. Business and schools were closed. Citing concerns over safety amidst the unrest, American Airlines on Wednesday cancelled all flights to and from Haiti. Major riots also took place in the southern city of Les Cayes, where government buildings were burned.

There was evidently little police effort to stop the demonstrations. "Apparently overwhelmed, Haiti's police made no attempt to halt the protesters," Reuters reported, citing local witnesses. "Besides an occasional patrol, there was also no sign of United Nations peacekeepers trying to intervene."

The rioting appeared to be led by supporters of the candidate who placed third in the voting and narrowly missed the runoff, according to the official figures, Michel Martelly. A musician who traded on his popularity among youth, Martelly also has long-standing ties to Haiti's military elite and US diplomats.

The leading vote-getter in the first round of voting is former first lady Mirlande Manigat, whose husband was

installed as president in 1988 with military support after the collapse of the decades-long Duvalier family dictatorship.

According to the official tally, Manigat won 31.37 percent of the vote on November 28, while Célestin beat Martelly for second place by the thinnest of margins, 22.48 percent to 21.84 percent, fewer than 7,000 votes. Because no candidate won 50 percent of the vote, the top two finishers will face off in the January elections.

Martelly immediately challenged the official results. He had earlier warned supporters that Préval would attempt to rig the vote.

Street demonstrators shouted anti-government slogans as the rioting erupted. "Préval is a thief. We don't need Jude Célestin. We need Michel Martelly," they reportedly chanted Tuesday night. Others chanted "Hang Préval!"

Banned from the election from the outset was Fanmi Lavalas, the reformist party of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was twice deposed from the presidency in coups organized by Washington (1991 and 2004). An independent candidate with ties to Aristide, Henry Ceant, finished fifth in the voting.

There were widespread allegations of fraud and abuse, including reports that a large share of the island's population was arbitrarily barred from the voter rolls or were prevented from voting by disorganization at precincts.

Prior to the release of the official results, the National Observation Council (CNO), a European Union-funded election monitoring group, announced that Célestin, the candidate of Préval's INITE party, had lost. Within hours of the announcement of the vote tallies, the US embassy issued a statement pointing to the irregularities in the vote, noting the results are "inconsistent with the published results" of the CNO.

"The United States, together with Haiti's international community partners, stands ready to support efforts to

thoroughly review irregularities in support of electoral results that are consistent with the will of the Haitian people expressed in their votes,” the statement read.

The UN’s Haiti mission (MINUSTAH) initially endorsed the vote, but on Friday UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon changed tune, saying irregularities in voting were “more serious than initially thought.”

The US government paid the entire \$14 million cost of the election, and US officials were deeply involved in the direction of the election process. The selection of the next Haitian ruler is of more than usual interest to both the venal Haitian ruling elite and its masters in Washington, since the incoming president will dispose of a reconstruction fund of as much as \$10 billion, more than the current GDP of the country.

While political infighting within the ruling elite seems to have been the spark for the outbreak of rioting, there is massive social discontent. Some observers are predicting more violence. “It will get worse because of the anger of the people,” said reporter Ernest Moloskot.

The massive earthquake of January, which killed as many as 300,000, exposed the criminality of the Haitian elite and its total subservience to US imperialism, and left in its wake a social catastrophe.

This has been aggravated by the outbreak of cholera on the island, a waterborne disease almost certainly brought to Haiti by UN peacekeepers from Nepal. In spite of persistent pleas from aid groups, almost nothing was done to secure adequate water supplies after the earthquake, and the international response to the cholera epidemic, once it emerged, has been derisory. So far, at least 100,000 have been afflicted with cholera, and more than 2,000 have died. Anger over the cholera epidemic has led to repeated protests and clashes with security forces and UN soldiers.

So despised is Préval for his role in responding to the cholera epidemic and earlier to the earthquake—including sheltering himself at a temporary US military base as the disaster unfolded—that some assumed his associate, Célestin, could not possibly make the runoff vote.

Martelly, a popular musician also known as “Sweet Mickey,” ran as an anti-establishment candidate, tapping into the overwhelming anger against Préval and the hellish conditions in the country.

However, Martelly is himself a political reactionary who was an outspoken supporter of the two US-backed military coups that toppled Aristide. He has also defended the fascistic *Macoutes* death squads that have terrorized Haiti’s working class from the days of the Duvalier

dictatorship. The son of a Shell gas refinery owner and a member of the small mulatto elite, Martelly was a personal friend of US diplomats and military officers, as well as Lt. Col. Michel Francois, the orchestrator of the 1991 coup and a convicted drug runner.

According to a 1997 article from the *Miami New Times News*, “Martelly spent the coup years entertaining leaders and their factotums. While [other musicians] were living in exile, Martelly operated a nightclub called the Garage, which was patronized by the military and other members of the ruling elite.”

Although there was general outrage in Haiti over the election results, Martelly’s strongest political support is in the wealthy neighborhood of Petionville, which was the scene of intense rioting on Tuesday night.

The statement of the US embassy in Haiti questioning the validity of the vote, the about-face of the United Nations, the EU-funded election tally, as well as the fact that security forces and UN peacekeepers did little to quell the rioting, may suggest that Washington is preparing to dispense with Préval and his cronies in favor of a fresh face.

This could be either Martelly, who is being promoted as a “man of the people,” or Manigat, who led all vote-getters in the preliminary elections. She is the wife of Leslie François Saint Roc Manigat, who was installed president by the military junta in 1988, before himself being removed in a coup several months later.

The election contest demonstrates that, whether or not the preliminary election was rigged, Washington and Haiti’s ruling elite have the entire process fixed from start to finish. There is no candidate representing the interests of Haiti’s oppressed masses, or expressing their mounting anger against US imperialism and its island stooges.



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