

Haiti election result to be announced this week

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Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) announced last week that it will release preliminary results from the March 20 presidential election runoff by the end of the month. Final official results are expected on April 16.

The runoff, following last November's first round in which 19 candidates contested the presidency, came down to a choice between two right-wing candidates: 70-year-old Mirlande Manigat, the wife of former president Leslie Manigat, and 50-year-old singer Michel Martelly.

The March 20 vote met with general satisfaction within the "international community"—the United Nations, the major powers that control this body, and various other regional organizations that all defend the status quo of imperialist domination that has left the island country one of the poorest in the world. The United States was among those nations that sent more than 200 observers to Haiti for the runoff.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon extended his congratulations on the "successful conduct" of the vote. The head of the Organization of American States/Caribbean Community mission also labeled the vote "quite an improvement" on the first round. The European Union added its praise as well.

While the runoff was less chaotic than the first round, the voter turnout is not expected to surpass the abysmal 23 percent showing in November. That level of participation means that whoever wins the second round will become Haiti's president based on the support of barely one-eighth of the electorate.

As the ballot counting proceeds, both Manigat and Martelly have issued claims that they lead in the voting. Some opinion polls have suggested that Martelly, who secured 21.8 percent in the first round compared to 31.4 percent for Manigat, is nevertheless favored to win the

runoff, presumably with the aid of most of the votes that went to other candidates. A challenge to the preliminary results from the second-place finisher is possible if not likely.

Martelly himself was originally excluded from the runoff, after being officially credited with about one percent less of the vote than Jude Célestin, the candidate backed by the party of the incumbent president, Rene Preval. Under pressure from the United States, including a public statement from Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, and after a report on the first round voting by the Organization of American States, the CEP replaced Célestin with Martelly in the runoff.

Mrs. Manigat is closely tied to the tiny oligarchy that has ruled the impoverished island for most of its recent history. Her husband's political history stretched back to the regime of Jean Claude Duvalier, who was deposed in 1986, as well as his father Francois Duvalier. Manigat was elected president in January 1988, in an election controlled by the military and boycotted by nearly all other candidates, but was forced out by General Henri Namphy less than six months later.

Martelly, whose backers have promoted him as a break from politics as usual, has a history of collaboration with the most reactionary forces. He has been tied to the FRAPH, the paramilitary organization involved in backing various military regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s and carrying out death squad killings of their opponents.

Among Martelly's friends is Col. Michel Francois, who played a key role in the 1991 coup that removed elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide and in the bloody repression against Aristide supporters.

The Obama administration has made little attempt to disguise Washington's ongoing interference into

Haitian political life. Aristide was twice elected president by overwhelming margins but has lived in exile in South Africa since he was deposed in a 2004 coup backed by the US. When the former president announced some weeks ago that he was considering returning to Haiti, the US State Department issued a statement opposing his presence in the country. The *New York Times* reported that in the days before Aristide flew back on March 18, President Obama even called South African President Jacob Zuma to suggest, according to a spokesman for the National Security Council, that his return could have a “destabilizing” effect. The South African government made no effort to delay Aristide’s trip, however.

Concerns over Aristide arise not because his brand of left nationalist politics poses any serious threat to imperialist interests, but because he continues to command the enthusiastic support among sections of the Haitian population, despite his own surrender to the demands of the International Monetary Fund during his earlier terms in office. The reentry of masses of the Haitian workers and the poor into political struggle is what generates concern in Washington and other major capitals. The entire election charade has been designed to install a regime that will cause a minimum of “disruption,” both in Haiti and in the Caribbean region. This was no doubt a factor in the exclusion of Aristide’s party, Fanmi Lavalas, from the first round of the voting last year, on dubious technical grounds.

“The exclusion of Fanmi Lavalas is the exclusion of the Haitian people,” Aristide declared on his return to the country last week. He was greeted by thousands of supporters, many of whom said they would not be voting in the runoff. The former president made no endorsement of either of the candidates in the March 20 vote.



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