

Haiti's political crisis deepens in wake of fraudulent elections

John Marion
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As Haitian President Michel Martelly continues to rule by decree and make preparations for suppressing popular dissent, the crisis resulting from the country's corruption-ridden elections is deepening.

Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (Conseil Electorale Provisoire, CEP) named Jovenel Moïse, the candidate of Martelly's PHTK political formation, the winner of the first round of presidential elections that were held on October 25. However, Moïse was given only enough votes to advance him to the second round of elections scheduled for December 27, with Jude Célestin as his opponent.

Célestin, the second-place finisher, so far has refused to campaign for the runoff, instead aligning himself with other opposition candidates who have been dubbed the Group of 8 or G8. The result of Célestin's tactic is that Moïse is the only candidate campaigning in an election scheduled for next Sunday.

In the weeks following the announcement of the October 25 presidential results, Port-au-Prince was the center of street protests called by the opposition parties that had run candidates, including Fanmi Lavalas, Pitit Dessalines, and Célestin's Alternative League for Haitian Progress and Emancipation (Ligue Alternative pour le Progrès et l'Emancipation Haïtienne, LAPEH). However, after the CEP's December 18 announcement of legislative and local results— from the same October 25 balloting—violent protests spread across the country: in Jacmel, Les Cayes, Trou-du-Nord (Moïse's hometown), and other locations.

The UN still has thousands of MINUSTAH troops in the country for use in suppressing the population. They are working alongside the Haitian National Police (Police Nationale d'Haiti, PNH). The Departmental Operations and Intervention Brigade (Brigade d'Opération et d'Intervention Départementale, BOID),

a PNH unit created last June, arrested 27 members of opposition parties in the days following the elections—many just for wearing the t-shirts of their parties. Protests since then have called for the disbanding of the BOID along with the resignations of Martelly and the CEP.

Thousands protested in Port-au-Prince on December 10 to demand honest elections and the resignation of the CEP. December 16, the 25th anniversary of Jean-Bertrand Aristide's first election to the presidency after the fall of the Duvalier regime, saw protests of a similar size. The G8 parties had called a general strike for Monday, December 7, but postponed it after protests on December 5 were suppressed with tear gas and water cannons.

This election is not the first in which Célestin's actions have benefited Martelly or his lackeys. In 2010 Célestin finished second in the first round, qualifying him to run against Mirlande Manigat in a second round. However, the Organization of American States and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton challenged those results; Martelly, who had finished third, was given a spot in the runoff, while Célestin backed down without a fight.

In the current standoff, Célestin has been reluctant to meet with either the CEP or Prime Minister Evans Paul's "independent" commission, but jumped at the chance to meet with Obama administration emissary Kenneth Merten during his week-long visit to Haiti at the beginning of December.

Merten is a former US Ambassador who has now been sent back to impose Washington's will as a "Special Coordinator for Haiti." Haitian Communication Minister Mario Dupuy told *Le Nouvelliste* that Merten wanted "simply to inform himself more precisely about the [Haitian] executive's

understanding of the electoral process. He was informed about it. There is nothing abnormal in that quest.” Dupuy also tried to excuse the widespread voting fraud by complaining about “an amalgamation between frauds and irregularities.”

A second article in *Le Nouvelliste* gives an idea of the machinations and contradictions underlying Célestin’s decision to call protests rather than campaign. By aligning himself now with Pitit Dessalines, Fanmi Lavalas, and other Group of 8 parties, he expects their support if and when he campaigns for the presidency. However, Moïse Jean-Charles, the candidate of Pitit Dessalines and third-place finisher on October 25, went on the radio to declare that “those who support Jude Célestin are part of the traditional economic elite which has kept the country hostage for two centuries.” Dr. Maryse Narcisse of Fanmi Lavalas has declared that she won’t support any other candidate.

A December 14 letter from Célestin to the CEP, released publicly, cravenly calls on that body to reform the process. After noting that Haiti has no sitting parliament, mayors, or local legislatures, he warns that a President not trusted by the people “will not have any legitimacy, nor moral authority, nor political authority for taking the difficult measures indispensable to the proper functioning of our country and to the sociopolitical stability that will permit it to proceed resolutely into development and democracy.” In other words, imperialism requires a stooge still capable of deceiving the public. Célestin concludes his letter to the CEP with a suggested reading list that includes editorials from the *Miami Herald*, *Washington Post*, and *New York Times*.

The 1987 Haitian Constitution calls for the establishment of a Permanent Electoral Council, but the use of “provisional” bodies has become routine. The CEP is supposedly representative of various sectors of society, but its president, Pierre-Louis Opont, is the choice of big business. Of its nine members, two—one Episcopalian and the other evangelical—are explicitly religious.

The current CEP is so distrusted that Prime Minister Evans Paul has attempted to appoint a separate commission to resolve the electoral crisis. Calling his commission “independent,” he nonetheless tried to appoint three members with ties to his administration to a five-member body. The electoral opposition and what

remains of the Senate have objected, but on Thursday Martelly tried appointing the commission by decree with a mandate for it to complete its work in three days.

While Moïse benefited from ballot stuffing and other forms of fraud on October 25, he is hardly alone. Last week, the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights (Réseau National de Défense des Droits Humains, RNDDH) released a detailed report on a case in which a candidate of the Vérité platform was forced to pay bribes of more than US \$25,000 in a disputed parliamentary election. Despite that sum and the intervention of Reginald Boulos, the president of the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the seat was given to the Fanmi Lavalas candidate who finished second, but paid a higher bribe.

The RNDDH notes that the acronym of the National Electoral Litigation Office (Bureau de Contentieux Electoral National, BCEN)—which decided the dispute and received the bribes—is now sarcastically called the Banque Centrale Electorale Nationale (National Central Electoral Bank) by the population.

Radio Kiskeya reported that in a similar scheme in Mont-Organisé/Capotille, a parliamentary candidate was forced to pay \$30,000.

The political crisis is unfolding as economic developments are further impoverishing one of the poorest countries in the world. The national currency, the gourde, has been weakening, and the resulting inflation was exacerbated by a spring drought that led to weak harvests. For October 2014 the annualized inflation rate was 5.8 percent, but it has now climbed to more than 11 percent. A weak gourde also makes imports from the United States more expensive.

Violence is being used to intimidate the press as well as voters. On the night of November 30, the offices of Radio Kiskeya were shot at by as yet unidentified gunmen. No one was hurt, but Senator Simon Dieuseul Desras had warned several days earlier that Martelly’s government would target media outlets.



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