

Violent clashes follow announcement of businessman Jovenel Moïse as election winner in Haiti

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Protests and clashes with police broke out in Haiti Tuesday amid charges of electoral fraud in the country's November 20 presidential election. Losing candidates have vowed to challenge the victory of banana exporter Jovenel Moïse, the candidate of former president Michel Martelly's PHTK (Parti Haïtien Tèt Kale).

The largest demonstration erupted in Port-au-Prince's sprawling shantytown of La Saline, a stronghold of Fanmi Lavalas, the party of former president Bertrand Aristide, which has described the official vote results as an "electoral coup." Police used tear gas in an attempt to disperse protesters.

Meanwhile, the US Embassy issued a report Tuesday that it had "received reports of gunfire and burning tires at a protest in downtown Port-au-Prince," advising American citizens to stay out of the area.

Preliminary results of the November 20 election have awarded the presidency to Moïse. If challenges to the vote count do not result in a change, the country's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) will publish the confirmed results on December 29 and Moïse will take office on February 7. Because he won more than 50 percent of the vote, there will be no runoff election.

Nonetheless, only slightly more than 20 percent of eligible voters participated. The election was originally scheduled for October 9, but postponed because of Hurricane Matthew. A month and a half after the storm tens of thousands of people in the south of Haiti still have no homes, and some polling places were being used as shelters as election preparations took place. An accurate count of how many thousands of people lost their voter identification cards in the storm is not possible, but according to the *Miami Herald* only 6,000

people had reapplied for cards before November 20.

The Sud, Grand'Anse, and Nippes departments, hit hardest by the storm, also lost most of their fruit trees and other crops, leading to what *Le Nouvelliste* has called "a food catastrophe." According to United Nations figures, nearly 600,000 people in these areas are in urgent need of food assistance.

Haitian workers and peasants have good reason to be wary of elections organized by the country's ruling elites. The vote to replace Martelly was originally scheduled for October 25, 2015 but was so blatantly fraudulent that the runoff scheduled for January 2016 was postponed and then cancelled. Jocelerme Privert, the president of Haiti's Senate, was named provisional president when Martelly stepped down.

Political parties in Haiti are allowed to send observers, or mandataires, to voting centers; the mandataires receive credentials allowing them to vote where they are stationed, rather than at their normal polling place. More than 900,000 of these passes were issued for the October 25 election, and were so uncontrolled that they were openly being sold for as low as \$3 each on election day. Nonetheless, European Union and Organization of American States observers called the vote "a breath of hope for Haitian democracy."

Legislative elections held on August 9, 2015 were also so corrupted that, according to a National Lawyers Guild report, "fraud, violence and voter intimidation were widespread, affecting 67.8 percent of voting centers." The NLG report noted that the police at polling centers did not stop "acts of violence and other disruptions, raising questions about whether officers had received an order from above directing them to

stand down.”

Moïse, a businessman and former Secretary General of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Haiti, was given first place in the results of the October 2015 election, but did not receive enough votes to avoid a runoff. Jude Célestin of the Alternative League for Progress and Haitian Emancipation (LAPEH) came in second but boycotted the scheduled runoff, leaving Moïse as the only candidate holding campaign events. Célestin won second place again in the voting just concluded, but with slightly less than 20 percent of the vote.

The number of mandataire credentials issued for November 20 was significantly less (125,800) than in 2015, and controls were supposedly put in place requiring that each badge correspond to the voter ID number of the person wearing it. Nonetheless, a US lawyer from the National Human Rights Network told the *Miami Herald* that incidents of fraud had been observed.

With or without fraud, Moïse benefited from the votes of those who are not struggling just to survive. There were reports of dancing and celebrations in Petionville, a wealthy suburb of Port-au-Prince. One of Martelly’s last acts in office was an attempt to establish an off-shore banking haven on the island of Gonâve; it does not require a stretch of the imagination to predict that his protégé will work to benefit international finance.

The elections were held under extraordinary restrictions, ostensibly to prevent violence, but also suppressing basic rights. On November 18, the Haitian National Police (PNH) announced the prohibition throughout the country, from the evening of November 19 through midnight on the 21st, of selling or drinking alcohol; driving a car or motorbike within 100 meters of a polling place; and carrying guns, knives, and blunt weapons. The forced closing of all nightclubs was included in the decree which, however, made no mention of prohibiting bribery.

The PNH mobilized 9,400 police across Haiti, and approximately 3,600 of the UN’s hated MINUSTAH force were also used to police the elections. Five hundred MINUSTAH vehicles were made available for the crackdown. In an intimidating statement released November 16, the US embassy in Port-au-Prince said “the United States is taking note of parties involved in

electoral violence.”

The CEP, obviously afraid of public opposition to the election results, made its announcement under heavy guard in Petionville. It also waited until late Monday night, even though the results were supposed to be announced Sunday.

Dr. Marysse Narcisse, the Fanmi Lavalas presidential candidate, won slightly less than 9 percent of the vote, despite campaign support from former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. A lawyer for Fanmi Lavalas has sent a letter to the CEP questioning the vote tally, which was rebuffed by CEP president Léopold Berlangier even before the official count was announced. Opposition parties will be allowed a short window to challenge the results, from December 3 to the 5.



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