

Widespread fraud in Haitian presidential vote

By John Marion
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On November 5, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (Conseil Electoral Provisoire, CEP) announced the results of the first round of presidential elections on October 25. Jovenel Moïse, the candidate of President Michel Martelly's PHTK, placed first with slightly less than 33 percent of the vote. Jude Célestin of LAPEH (la Ligue Alternative pour le Progrès et l'Emancipation Haïtienne) placed second with slightly more than 25 percent.

A run-off election between Moïse and Célestin is scheduled for December 27. Nonetheless, the results and allegations of widespread fraud led to protests by thousands in the streets of Port-au-Prince last week, along with violence in at least two northern towns.

Ten thousand Haitian police and 2,500 MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti) personnel were deployed during the October 25 voting, and both MINUSTAH and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) were involved in the transportation of ballots for tallying in Port-au-Prince.

Voter turnout was very low. The CEP reported approximately 1.54 million valid votes, less than 30 percent of total registered voters. Moïse won less than 9 percent of all registered voters.

There were 54 presidential candidates, significantly more than the 34 who ran in the 2010 election. In all, 128 parties took part in this year's campaigning, which includes municipal and legislative elections.

Seven presidential candidates have demanded an independent investigation of the voting results, but only two—Dr. Maryse Narcisse of Fanmi Lavalas and Vिलाire Cluny Duroseau of MEKSEP—have filed official challenges. A decision on those challenges was expected on Sunday. Célestin himself was forced out of the second round of the 2010 presidential elections in favor of Martelly, after the intervention of Hillary Clinton and the Organization of American States.

Martelly, along with his wife, son and top advisers,

have relentlessly used the presidency for fraud and other crimes. In a July 2013 incident, Jean Serge Joseph, the judge in a corruption case against Martelly's wife and son, was called to a meeting in which he was interrogated by the president, prime minister and minister of justice. Joseph suffered a massive brain hemorrhage at the meeting and died two days later. An investigation of the incident by a committee of the Haitian Senate concluded that the hemorrhage was a result of intense psychological pressure put on the judge by the other attendees, and that they had built a "fortress of lies" afterward.

While the Haitian Constitution does not allow Martelly to run for a second consecutive term, his disdain for democratic processes is reflected in the name of his political formation, the Parti Haitien Tet Kalé (PHTK). "Tet Kalé" means "Bare Head" in Haitian Creole, and is Martelly's longstanding nickname. Moïse, the PHTK candidate, was a businessman with no political experience before this campaign and was handpicked by Martelly.

The October 25 voting was rife with fraud. The CEP disallowed tallies from 490 voting places for reasons including more votes than registered voters, irregularities in the use of national identity cards (CINs), discrepancies between the number of ballots and people who voted, and alteration of ballots.

In Haiti, each political party is issued passes for mandataires—its own observers—in each of the country's 13,725 polling places. A person possessing a mandataire pass can vote wherever they are, without their national identity card being checked against the voter list.

A total of 916,000 mandataire passes were issued for these elections, but many of the political parties did not have the resources to send an observer to each polling place. As a result, the cards were bought by better-funded parties that needed votes. Marie Yolene

Gilles of the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights (Réseau National de Défense de Droits Humains, RNDDH) told the *Miami Herald* that the cards were selling for as much as \$30 apiece before the elections, and \$3 apiece the day of.

A January 2014 Haitian election law allows for political parties to be formed by as few as 20 people, while at the same time assuring government control by requiring that parties file detailed statements of policy and goals, along with a notarized list of the names, national identity card numbers, and addresses of the members. The US Center for Economic and Policy Research has reported that at least 12 of this year's political parties are proxies for the government, established to distract and confuse voters.

Antoine Rodon Bien-Aimée, a parliamentary deputy who is rumored to have switched from Martelly's PHTK to Célestin's LAPEH, accused UNOPS of adding to the fraud by switching out ballots as they were transported to Port-au-Prince. The UN has adamantly denied the accusation, while the *Miami Herald* reported it as a case of mistaken identity. According to the Herald, the person involved—Sylvain Coté—was a photographer with a name similar to the UN staffer's.

On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of last week thousands of people took to the streets of Port-au-Prince to protest the announced results. Protests were called by LAPEH, Fanmi Lavas, and the Pitit Desalin party of Moïse Jean Charles. Video of police beating a protester has gone viral, with the head of the Haitian National Police (PNH) issuing a threadbare promise of an investigation into the incident.

Violent protests have occurred in the northern town of Limbé, while barricades of burning tires went up in the streets of Trou-du-Nord, Jovenel Moïse's hometown. The *Haiti Sentinel* reported that the Trou-du-Nord protesters are opposed to Moïse, who benefitted from massive fraud in that location.

The elections are occurring against the backdrop of Haiti's desperate poverty, increasing inflation rate, and government graft. Transport workers, supported by students at the State University of Haiti (l'Université d'Etat d'Haiti, l'UEH), called a two-day strike beginning Monday, November 9 after the government announced increases of up to 450 percent for the cost

of a driver's license (depending on category), the doubling of the cost of a passport, and an increase in the cost of a tax ID from the equivalent of US\$3 to US\$20. The government had also announced an increase in the perks given to former government ministers and secretaries.

Faced with the strike, the government backed down on these measures and the strike ended at midday. Nonetheless, students lit tires on fire in the streets and threw rocks. Students from the UEH law school demanded government action to improve living conditions for the population and against increased taxes, according to *Le Nouvelliste*. They were confronted with tear gas from the CIMO corps of the riot police.

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