

## **US ready to work with winner of El Salvador election**

Agence France Presse  
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WASHINGTON— The United States will respect the choice Salvadoran people make in their presidential election Sunday, the State Department's top diplomat for Latin America, Tom Shannon, said Friday.

"We are committed to free and fair elections in El Salvador. And we've also made it very clear that we will work with whomever the Salvadoran people elect," he told a press briefing.

Sunday's vote could end a 20-year rule by right-wing National Republican Alliance (ARENA) in El Salvador, and could usher in the leftist and former rebel group-turned political party Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN).

FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes and ARENA's Rodrigo Avila are neck and neck in current polls.

"I have met with both political candidates here in Washington," Shannon said. "We have engaged both major political parties in El Salvador. And we have made it very clear that this is a choice of the Salvadoran people that we will respect ..."

He said US officials "look forward to continuing our very positive relationship with El Salvador, and working with the next elected government."

The result of Sunday's vote could impact El Salvador's relations with the United States, which backed a repressive military government during the 1980-1992 civil war in which more than 70,000 people died.

**House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs chairman Howard Berman, in a separate briefing, dismissed rumors that Washington's Temporary Protected Status (TPS) extended to Salvadorans living in the United States was at stake in Sunday's vote.**

**"I am confident that neither TPS nor the right to receive remittances from family in the United States will be affected by the outcome of the election, despite what some of my colleagues in Congress have said," Berman told reporters.**

In a recent letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, several lawmakers warned that a Funes victory on Sunday would jeopardize US national security interests in the region.

Extended on an annual basis, the TPS is a temporary immigration status granted to aliens in the United States who are unable to safely return to their home country because of ongoing armed conflict, an environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions.

There are nearly one million Salvadorans living in the United States, many of whom send money regularly back to their families, contributing significantly to their impoverished country's gross domestic product.

Some 4.3 million eligible voters will take part in Sunday's presidential election.