

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Madagascar Monthly Briefing December 2023

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#### Madagascar Summary 13 December 2023

*Andry Rajoelina is re-elected president after the Haut Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC) (constitutional court) upholds the provisional election results on 1 December. This ruling highlights the miscalculation the opposition alliance, the Candidates Collective, made when it decided to boycott the election. Yet the Candidates Collective pledges on 8 December to continue to stage demonstrations opposing him. Police arrest four high-ranking officers between 27 and 29 November in connection with an alleged coup d'état plot. World Bank pays Madagascar \$8.8m under the Emission Reductions Payment Agreement (ERPA) aimed at combatting deforestation in the country. Developments in 2024 are expected to be dominated by the upcoming legislative elections and Rajoelina's efforts to cement his control over the state.*

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#### Andry Rajoelina re-elected president

The **Haut Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC)** (constitutional court) officially declared former president **Andry Rajoelina** (2018-2023) the winner of the 16 November presidential election on 1 December, upholding the provisional election results which had been declared by the **Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI)** (electoral commission) on 25 November.<sup>1</sup> CENI's final count showed that Rajoelina secured re-election with a commanding, majority of 58.95% beating second-placed **Siteny Randrianasoloniaiko** who received 14.40%. Rajoelina's arch-rival, former president **Marc Ravalomanana** (2002-2009) received only 12.10% of the vote.<sup>2</sup> Rajoelina's commanding victory is largely due to the decision by the **Candidates Collective** - an alliance of ten opposition presidential candidates including Ravalomanana - to boycott the election (*see ARC Briefing Madagascar Nov 2023*). This group of ten candidates refused to participate in the election campaign and staged protests demanding that the election be postponed, CENI be reformed, and Rajoelina be barred from contesting the presidency due to the fact he acquired **French** citizenship in 2014.

The collective's call for their supporters to boycott the election was somewhat successful as the voter turnout was a historically low 46.36%. However, it is evident by Ravalomanana's 12.10% and the 5.18% secured by fellow former president and Candidates Collective member, **Hery Rajaonarimampianina** (2013-2018) that the call to boycott was not universally communicated or adhered to.<sup>3</sup> Although a 46.36% voter turnout was low it was not sufficiently low to undermine the legitimacy of the election in the eyes of either the HCC or the international community.

Accordingly, it is clear that the opposition's decision to boycott the election was a miscalculation. The collective would have had a better chance of defeating Rajoelina if they had decided to wholeheartedly contest the election and then unify around whichever candidate made it through to the second-round run-off election. As it stands, Rajoelina has been decisively returned to power and the political opposition appears weakened ahead of the upcoming legislative elections which are anticipated to take place in the first half of 2024.

Although the HCC declined to uphold any of the nine complaints and challenges to Rajoelina's victory, the election has not been universally accepted.<sup>4</sup> Local Malagasy elections watchdog the **Safidy Observatory**, released a statement on 25 November noting that its observers had been subject to

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<sup>1</sup> CENI, 25 Nov 2023

<sup>2</sup> CENI, 25 Nov 2023

<sup>3</sup> CENI, 25 Nov 2023

<sup>4</sup> News Mada, 28 Nov 2023

threats and intimidation by local officials and security forces.<sup>5</sup> Safidy Observatory further noted several irregularities including a lack of transparency and illegible electoral cards.

However, the Safidy Observatory's concerns were largely ignored by local authorities especially after the election result was accepted by major regional observer missions including those from the **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** and the **European Union (EU)**. This is unsurprising as the opposition's boycott resulted in a scenario in which the will of the voters was reflected by the result regardless of any irregularities which may have occurred. However, it should be noted that both the EU and the **United States (US)** tempered their congratulations to Rajoelina by urging the government to pursue reforms to enhance the country's electoral processes and transparency.<sup>6</sup>

Rajoelina will be inaugurated for his new term on 16 December at a ceremony in **Antananarivo**; in the meantime, his close ally **Richard Ravalomanana** (no relation to Marc Ravalomanana) will remain interim president.

### Opposition threatens to continue demonstrations

Although Rajoelina's return to the presidency is assured, the Candidates Collective has pledged to continue protesting his presidency. The Candidates Collective announced on 8 December that they had formed a new "*crisis unit*" to coordinate the group's ongoing opposition to Rajoelina and that they would resume staging demonstrations in Antananarivo before Rajoelina's inauguration.<sup>7</sup>

However, the opposition alliance has not staged any protests since the HCC upheld the election result. This is reportedly due to a lack of consensus with the Candidates Collective on the way forward with several of the lesser-known political leaders considering abandoning the alliance. Furthermore, the Christmas period is a major holiday in Madagascar during which it is more difficult for political parties to mobilise their supporters. This is further compounded by the fact that these leaders have not articulated a path to achieving their goals for their supporters to rally behind.

Madagascar's authorities have also threatened to respond forcefully to any political demonstrations in the coming weeks. Richard Ravalomanana announced on 17 November that the state would adopt a "*no tolerance*" approach to anti-government protests going forward.<sup>8</sup> This was reiterated by Antananarivo police prefect, General **Angelo Ravelonarivo**, on 11 December when he issued a statement that the ban on political demonstrations in the capital city will remain in place until at least January.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, there is a strong possibility that security forces will respond in a heavy-handed manner to any opposition-led protests leading to violent clashes and arrests. The threat of such punitive action combined with no clear path to victory will undermine the Candidates Collective's ability to mobilise their supporters.

### Alleged coup plotters arrested

An exaggerated response to any opposition-led protests is also more likely given the heightened security sentiment in the country after an alleged coup plot was uncovered. Officials announced on 27 November that police arrested two army colonels on charges of conspiring to stage a coup d'état.<sup>10</sup> Two days later on 29 November, an additional two officers were reportedly arrested related to the same plot. Unconfirmed reports suggest that at least one of those arrested on 29 November is an army general.

Investigators have declined to publicise additional information about the officers or the alleged planned putsch. The first hearing for the accused has been set for 16 January.<sup>11</sup> The threat of a

<sup>5</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 25 Nov 2023

<sup>6</sup> Midi Madagasikara, 4 Dec 2023

<sup>7</sup> Midi Madagasikara, 11 Dec 2023

<sup>8</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 18 Nov 2023

<sup>9</sup> Midi Madagasikara, 12 Dec 2023

<sup>10</sup> L'Express, 28 Nov 2023

<sup>11</sup> Reuters, 29 Nov 2023

military-backed insurrection is a sensitive issue in Madagascar. The country has experienced several military takeovers since its independence in 1960, the most recent of which was the 2009 coup in which the military deposed Marc Ravalomanana and Rajoelina was installed as president of **Haute autorité de transition (HAT)** (high transitional authority). This was how Rajoelina first came to power.

In August 2021, 21 people were arrested and charged with planning to overthrow Rajoelina's government (*see ARC Briefing Madagascar Aug 2021*).<sup>12</sup> This plot was led by former presidential advisor **Paul Rafanoharana** and former French colonel **Philippe Francois**. However, only six of these defendants, including Rafanoharana and Francois, were convicted.<sup>13</sup>

This latest alleged coup plot highlights the ongoing politicisation and factionalism within Madagascar's armed forces which alongside the cultivation of personal loyalties have long been a source of instability in the country. Rajoelina, himself, has been an active player in exacerbating this problem. Illustrative of this, his close ally and loyalist interim president Richard Ravalomanana was a former general in the gendarmerie and played a leading role in the 2009 putsch which elevated Rajoelina to the presidency.

The latest coup plot did not appear to have much support within the armed forces as seen by the comparatively calm manner in which the plotters were arrested. Furthermore, no troops or units were ordered or confined to barracks which typically occurs when there is a fear of an impending insurrection. Regardless of the legitimacy of the threat, Rajoelina will likely use the failed plot to justify increased reforms and leadership changes within the military further entrenching his influence over the armed forces.

### Madagascar secures carbon capture funding

The **World Bank** announced on 4 December that it had granted Madagascar \$8.8m in exchange for carbon credits for reducing 1.76 million tons of carbon emissions in 2020.<sup>14</sup> This payment occurred under Madagascar's **Emission Reductions Payment Agreement (ERPA)** with the World Bank's **Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)**. The ERPA aims to unlock \$50m in capital for Madagascar in exchange for reducing ten million tonnes of carbon emissions by the end of 2024. Madagascar will receive this funding in three separate tranche payments of which the \$8.8m was the first. This programme covers around 10% of Madagascar, including at least seven million hectares along the country's eastern humid forest ecoregion which is home to more than half of Madagascar's biodiversity-rich rainforests.

The FCPF is aimed at achieving the goals outlined under the **United Nations (UN) Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD+)** programme. Essentially, it seeks to provide economic benefits for Madagascar in return for the country aggressively combatting deforestation and forest degradation in the country. Madagascar has been identified as one of a few key countries whose forest ecosystems are essential to preventing the worst effects of climate change.

The environment and sustainable development ministry has previously reported that the country loses around 100,000 hectares of forests every year.<sup>15</sup> This deforestation is being driven by small-scale agriculture, energy production, artisanal and illegal mining, forest harvesting, and livestock practices. The creation of a financial incentive to reverse this deforestation could be potentially impactful in saving Madagascar's rainforests. This would also have secondary economic benefits such as boosting the country's tourism industry which is dependent on the island's unique biodiversity. In addition, the loss of forest cover in the country – especially in the eastern regions – has contributed to the worsening impact of seasonal tropical storms as the forest slows the passage and intensity of

<sup>12</sup> News24, 5 Dec 2021

<sup>13</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 18 Dec 2021

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, 4 Dec 2023

<sup>15</sup> L'Express, 20 Nov 2023

these storms. Restoring Madagascar's forests will help mitigate some of the worst effects of these annual cyclones.

### Madagascar's 2024 outlook

Malagasy politics in 2024 are expected to be dominated by the after-effects of the contentious 16 November 2023 presidential election and the National Assembly elections which are expected to be held in the first half of the new year. Rajoelina will be seeking to entrench his control over the state and will push hard for his coalition to dominate the legislative elections. These legislative elections will be accompanied by a heightened risk of civil unrest as what occurred ahead of the presidential elections. Madagascar's legislature is under pressure both domestically and externally to pass several pieces of key legislation. The most important of these is the remaining legislation required to implement the country's new mining code.

### Planner

16 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** Presidential inauguration;  
2024 **(Madagascar)** National Assembly Elections;

### Chronology

12 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** 2424. Police arrest six individuals on suspicion of beheading victims in **Vondrozo (Atsimo-Atsinanana Region)**;

11 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Midi-Madagasikara*. Police arrest **Betsiboka Region** governor **Jean Roger Randrianjafinindrina** on charges of corruption, abuse of state resources and illegal mining;

8 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Madagascar Tribune*. The Senate passes the **2024 Finance Bill** without amendment paving the way for the government's 2024 budget;

8 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. Antananarivo member of parliament (MP) **Naivo Raholdina** is voted in as the new vice president of the National Assembly;

8 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. National Assembly president **Christine Razanamahaso** confirms that Madagascar's new bill on money laundering and terrorist financing will be considered by the legislature before the end of 2023;

7 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** 2424. Transport and meteorology minister **Valéry Ramonjavelo** unveils the government's \$100m business turnaround plan for **Madagascar Airlines** dubbed "**Phoenix 2023**";

6 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Midi-Madagasikara*. Authorities arrest 10 **Chinese** nationals on charges of illegal mining in the **Maevatanana (Betsiboka Region)**;

6 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. **Agence de recouvrement des avoirs illicites (ARAI)** (illicit assets recovery agency).reveals that it has seized MGA 6.3 billion (\$1.38m) of assets in 2023;

5 Dec 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. One person dies from a suspected case of plague in **Ambositra (Amaron'i Mania Region)**;

28 Nov 2023 **Toamasina (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. At least one person is killed in a shootout between police and armed robbers in Toamasina;

24 Nov 2023 **Ankazobe (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. A group of around 20 bandits attack the village of **Manotanitsiloza (Analamanga Region)** and kidnap three people;

24 Nov 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** 2424. Authorities deploy additional security forces to the **Melaky, Bongolava** and **Menabe** regions to heighten security and combat banditry in these areas;

22 Nov 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. Staff at the **University of Antananarivo** go back on strike as wage negotiations stall.

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