

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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The Haut Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC) (constitutional court) orders on 12 October that the presidential election be delayed by a week after a candidate is injured during an anti-government demonstration. Opposition leaders pledge to continue staging protests opposing the government and repressive actions by the state. Former president Andry Rajoelina (2018-2023) launches his re-election campaign after announcing the formation of a new coalition. Rajoelina is currently the only candidate actively campaigning as other leading figures continue staging anti-government protests. The former head of the gendarmerie, Richard Ravalomanana, is elected as senate president on 12 October. The World Bank updates Madagascar's economic prospectus on 25 September, forecasting economic growth of 4% in 2023.

Apex court orders election delay after opposition candidate injured in protests...

The **Haut Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC)** (constitutional court) ordered on 12 October that the upcoming presidential election be delayed by one week from 9 November until 16 November. The ruling came after presidential candidate and leader of the **Anjomara sy Rivo-baovao (ARB)** opposition party **Andry Raobelina** approached the court and cited force majeure after he needed to seek medical treatment abroad after being injured during an opposition-led anti-government protest on 2 October.¹ Notably, the HCC did not fully find in Raobelina's favour finding that the threshold for force majeure had not been reached – under Malagasy election law this typically is only applicable in the event of a candidate's death or major disaster.² As such, the HCC only granted a week-long delay as opposed to a longer postponement.

No candidate has sought to challenge the HCC's ruling, and most presidential candidates appear grateful for the additional week to campaign. Importantly, any second-round run-off election will still take place on 20 December. As such, the delay is not expected to have a material impact on the election.

Raobelina was injured during one of the recent opposition-led protests that have taken place in **Antananarivo**. The demonstrations have been called by an alliance of 11 of the 13 presidential candidates to protest alleged election intimidation and what they claim was an "*institutional coup d'etat*".³ This specifically refers to the HCC's decision to appoint the council of ministers as a so-called collegiate government after then-senate president **Herimanana Razafimahefa** declined the interim presidency (see *August ARC Madagascar Briefing*).⁴ Under Malagasy law, the senate president becomes interim president if the sitting state president elects to run for re-election.

The opposition candidates initially sought to stage a march on 30 September to Antananarivo's **Place du 13 Mai** (also known as **Independent Square**), but they were prevented by local police from reaching the square as there is a current ban on outdoor political demonstrations.⁵ In response, the opposition leaders called for a mass demonstration to take place at Place du 13 Mai on 2 October to protest both collegiate government and the prohibition on demonstrations

¹ L'Express, 13 Oct 2023

² L'Express, 13 Oct 2023

³ Africa News, 2 Oct 2023

⁴ Midi Madagasikara, 11 Sep 2023

⁵ Midi Madagasikara, 30 Sep 2023

Antananarivo authorities, in turn, ordered a heightened security presence at Place du 13 Mai on 2 October which included approximately 2,250 police officers.⁶ These security forces utilised heavy-handed tactics including tear gas to forcibly disperse the demonstrators. It was during these clashes that Raobelina was injured. In addition, to the ARB leader's injury, several other demonstrators were hurt, and multiple protesters were arrested including **Rina Randriamasinoro**, the secretary-general of the opposition **Tiako I Madagasikara (TIM)** party.⁷

Despite this unrest, the 11-candidate alliance – which notably includes former presidents **Marc Ravalomanana** (2002-2009) and **Hery Rajaonarimampianina** (2013-2018) – called for further demonstrations in Antananarivo, now aimed at condemning the state's heavy-handed response to the 2 October protest.⁸ Several of these have ended in further clashes between opposition supporters and security forces.

This election-related violence has caused alarm amongst Madagascar's partners and international human rights organisations. Most notably, the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** released a statement on 10 October expressing concern at what it described as "*the deteriorating human rights situation in Madagascar*".⁹ OHCHR further called for the government to authorise peaceful protests and "*to create an environment conducive to free, fair, and transparent elections*".¹⁰ The UN body further called on officials to resolve the fact that demonstrators, including Randriamasinoro, remain in custody.

Global human rights organisation, **Transparency International (TI)** was even more forthright in its criticism of the Malagasy state's response¹¹ TI's local chapter released a statement on 11 October noting that this crackdown on opposition demonstrations raises concerns over the legitimacy of the upcoming presidential election.

For his part, former president **Andry Rajoelina** (2018-2023) has condemned the opposition protesters and the demands and has alleged that the protest campaign is intended to distract from the fact that they are unprepared for the elections.¹² Rajoelina is essentially the incumbent candidate given that he resigned on 9 September in order to run for re-election as required by Madagascar's constitution. However, the council of ministers, the senate, and the national assembly remain controlled by his allies and supporters.

.. as Rajoelina embarks on his re-election campaign

Rajoelina unofficially began his re-election campaign on 22 September when his supporters announced the formation of a new coalition – the **Union des Pro-Andry Rajoelina (UPAR)** – during an event at Antananarivo's **Ivato International Conference Centre**.¹³ This coalition will be spearheaded by Rajoelina's **Tanora malaGasy Vonona (TGV)** party.

The former president then formally launched his re-election campaign on 10 October in the **Akamasoa** neighbourhood on the outskirts of Antananarivo.¹⁴ The official campaign period also commenced on 10 October. Rajoelina has since campaigned in several towns and regions including Antananarivo, **Antsinanana**, and **Antanimena**.

Thus far, Rajoelina is the only major candidate to be actively campaigning ahead of the election. The majority of opposition candidates – including Ravalomanana and Rajaonarimampianina – have continued with their anti-government demonstration campaign. This has allowed, Rajoelina to

⁶ Midi-Madagasikara, 2 Oct 2023

⁷ 2424, 2 Oct 2023

⁸ Midi-Madagasikara, 9 Oct 2023

⁹ OHCHR, 10 Oct 2023

¹⁰ OHCHR, 10 Oct 2023

¹¹ Madagascar Tribune, 11 Oct 2023

¹² 2424, 1 Oct 2023

¹³ Midi Madagasikara, 23 Sep 2023

¹⁴ France24, 10 Oct 2023

campaign largely uncontested across Madagascar over the first week of the campaign period cementing his frontrunner status.

However, this has not prevented incidents of election-related violence. Most notably, opposition demonstrations clashed with UPAR supporters in Antananarivo's **Ampasampito** neighbourhood as they passed one another on the street on 14 October.¹⁵ Such incidents will likely increase in frequency as the campaign period progresses and will probably worsen in the potential scenario in which the opposition rejects the election results.

Senate president replaced

In a development that has further elevated the political environment in Madagascar, Razafimahefa was removed as senate president on 12 October.¹⁶ Razafimahefa was removed by a unanimous vote by the 15 senators present – three opposition senators did not attend the sessions. This dismissal was in retaliation for Razafimahefa approaching the HCC on 10 October in an effort to rescind his refusal to be interim president.¹⁷ Razafimahefa alleged that he initially refused to accept the position as he and his family had been threatened by close allies of Rajoelina. It was only after he ensured his family was abroad that he sought to rescind his previous refusal.

Rajoelina and the UPAR coalition vociferously denied these allegations.¹⁸ However, Razafimahefa's statement predictably angered the former president and his supporters leading to his removal two days later. This is despite the fact that the former senate president had been a supporter of Rajoelina for several years and was a senior member of the TGV party.

After removing Razafimahefa from office, the Senate then elected retired general and former head of the gendarmerie, **Richard Ravalomanana**, as the new senate president on 13 October.¹⁹ Richard Ravalomanana is a staunch Rajoelina loyalist and was appointed by Rajoelina to the senate on 8 September, just before the former president stepped down.²⁰ As such, the new senate president will ensure that Rajoelina retains his influence over the senate and that even if the HCC reverses its decision on the collegiate government, a Rajoelina ally will occupy the interim presidency.

World Bank updates its economic forecast for Madagascar

The **World Bank** updated its economic prospectus for Madagascar on 25 September, forecasting that the economy will grow by 4% in 2023, marking a recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic-induced economic slowdown.²¹ The bank further expects the country's economic growth to accelerate in the 2024-2015 financial year to around 4.7%. The organisation has noted that Madagascar is experiencing inflationary pressure and anticipated annual inflation in 2023 to equal around 10.5% before easing to an average of 8.5% next year. However, the finance ministry does not appear to be concerned by this comparatively high inflation rate and on 9 October stated that it views inflation as "*under control*".²²

The World Bank's latest update notes that several other of Madagascar's economic indicators have worsened.²³ The country's current account deficit is around 5.6% of GDP but hopefully will fall to 4.5% in the medium term if the anticipated decline in global oil prices occurs. If not, this situation will likely worsen as Madagascar's imports continue to exceed exports. Such a scenario will worsen the country's debt burden which is currently estimated to be around 56.9% of GDP.

¹⁵ Madagascar Tribune, 14 Oct 2023

¹⁶ 2424, 12 Oct 2023

¹⁷ RFI, 10 Oct 2023

¹⁸ 2424, 10 Oct 2023

¹⁹ Madagascar Tribune, 14 Oct 2023

²⁰ Andalou Agency, 13 Oct 2023

²¹ World Bank, 25 Sep 2023

²² L'Express, 9 Oct 2023

²³ World Bank, 25 Sep 2023

Madagascar has significant economic challenges and will need a competent and decisive government to address them. As such, it is concerning that the current election campaign is being dominated by the recent security crackdown on opposition protesters as opposed to focusing on economic solutions.

Planner

16 Nov 2023 (**Madagascar**) Presidential election (first round);
20 Dec 2023 (**Madagascar**) Presidential election (second round);

Chronology

18 Oct 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Midi Madagasikara*. Prime Minister **Christian Ntsay** meets with the ambassadors from the **United States, France, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland**, and the **European Union (EU)**. These are the leading donors to Madagascar's elections fund;

11 Oct 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. Meteorological officials predict a calmer tropical storm season in the coming months – Madagascar's storm season typically takes place between October and May;

16 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Midi-Madagasikara*. Resident director of **Germany's Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)** organisation **Constantin Grund** expresses concern that Madagascar's democracy has regressed in recent years;

13 October **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Orange*. Officials warn that air pollution has exceeded the thresholds recommended by the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** reaching up to nine times the recommended safety limits;

12 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. **University of Antananarivo** students protest outside the university campus demanding a resumption of classes which have been suspended due to an ongoing educators' strike;

12 Oct 2023 **Antsirabe (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. The government of **Japan** donates a fire engine to emergency services in **Antsirabe (Vakinankaratra region)**;

12 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Madagascar Tribune*. Council of ministers announces that health minister **Zely Randriamanantany** will also now oversee the national education portfolio and technical education and vocational training minister **Gabriella Vavitsara Rahantanirina** will also oversee the communications ministry;

10 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *2424*. The **Fianarantsoa Côte-Est (FCE)** railway line resumes service returning an essential logistics route between **Fianarantsoa (Haute Matsiatra region)** and **Manakara (Fitovinany region)**;

10 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. A suspected pneumonic plague outbreak is reported in **Analamanga** region, which includes the capital Antananarivo. There are no reported cases in the capital city but at least two people died from pneumonic plague-like symptoms on 4 October in **Manandriana** and a further six died in **Ambohitsoa** on 3 and 4 October. In response, officials have placed the villages under preventative quarantines.

9 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Info*. Communications minister **Lalotiana Rakotondrazafy** and national education minister **Marie Michelle Sahondrarimalala** resign in order to actively campaign for incumbent president **Andry Rajoelina**;

9 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *2424*. Health officials announce that the next mass polio vaccination campaign will take place between 17 and 20 October;

7 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. Trade unions stage a march in Antananarivo calling for more jobs to be created in the country;

6 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Madagascar Tribune*. Madagascar and **South Korea** commemorate 30 years of diplomatic relations;

5 Oct 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Madagascar Tribune*. Council of ministers confirms that it has received a draft of the planned revision to Madagascar's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing (AML-CFT) legislation;

28 Sep 2023 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. A **United Nations** delegation arrives in Madagascar to observe preparations for the November presidential election;

23 Sept 2023 **Ihoso (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. A police shootout leaves at least five suspected bandits dead in **Ihoso** district (**Ihorombe region**).

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