

MALI: ELECTIONS HIGHLIGHT GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

By Sarah Constantine

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In this photo taken on May 30, 2018, a member of the army stands guards at the entrance of the headquarters of a new, five-nation West African counterterror force in Mali. On June 29, 2018, a car packed with explosives detonated at the headquarters, setting off a gun battle that left at least two soldiers and two attackers dead and several soldiers wounded, officials with the Mali-based force told The Associated Press. (Source: AP Photo/Baba Ahmed.)

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By Dr. Alexander Noyes

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Madagascar's President Hery Rajaonarimampianina shown in Paris, France, Wednesday, June 28, 2017. Hery recently appointed Christian Ntsay as prime minister, part of a "consensus" unity government meant to ease escalating political tensions before elections scheduled for November 7. (Source: AP Photo/Michel Euler.)

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IDA's three federally-funded research and development centers provide objective analyses of national security issues and related national challenges, particularly those requiring scientific and technical expertise.

IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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Presidential Elections Underscore Security and Governance Concerns

On July 7, 2018, [campaigning](#) for Mali's presidential elections officially began. While 24 [candidates](#) will take part, the race will likely be won by either incumbent President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta or Soumaïla Cissé, former finance minister and leader of the opposition Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD).

The vote was nearly delayed following a two-week [strike](#) by election workers responsible for distributing voter cards. The unions representing the workers did agree to a settlement with the government on July 7, but the strike highlighted general [dissatisfaction](#) in the capital, Bamako, with economic conditions in the country.

This [dissatisfaction](#) is echoed nationally as citizens grow increasingly frustrated with the government's failure to control violence, reduce corruption, and deliver services. In June 2015, the central government and two coalitions of armed groups signed a [peace agreement](#), but failed to follow through on a shared implementation plan. Three years on, critics argue that the agreement has failed to stem [violence](#) and has had the perverse effect of encouraging [splintering](#) within the signatory coalitions, complicating peacebuilding efforts.

Notably, the al-Qaeda-linked [Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wa-l-Muslimin](#) (JNIM), which emerged as an amalgamation of four armed groups in 2017, is not a signatory of the 2015 Bamako agreement. JNIM militants have become significant spoilers of the peace process, claiming responsibility for many [attacks](#) against Malian soldiers and members of the UN peacekeeping mission, the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). While some Malian officials have [reportedly](#) considered attempting to negotiate with the JNIM, international partners reject this approach in favor of continued stabilization operations.

Regional and International Stabilization Efforts Show Mixed Success

Mali is currently home to several stabilization operations. A unilateral French force of approximately 4,500 troops has been deployed in Mali since 2012, first under Operation Serval and then under its successor, [Operation Barkhane](#). In addition, there are approximately 15,000 UN peacekeepers deployed in [MINUSMA](#). Finally, a planned 5,000 soldiers will participate in the regional [G5 Sahel](#) force (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), which formally declared operational readiness in April 2018 and has conducted operations along Mali's borders with Niger and Burkina Faso. The Malian army, or [Forces Armées Maliennes](#) (FAMA), deploys independently and in support of the MINUSMA and the G5 force.

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Within the past year the international community has significantly expanded its support to stabilization missions within Mali. In [February 2018](#), the European Union (EU), UN, United States, African Union (AU), Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and G5 regional nations committed to raising €414 million for the G5 Sahel force to be channeled through a coordination hub managed by the EU. This commitment comes on top of continued assurances of support for MINUSMA and multilateral development efforts, including the EU-organized [Alliance for the Sahel](#).

Despite these declarations of support, coordinating security assistance to Mali has proven challenging. To date, the G5 Sahel has [received](#) only €100 million of the pledged total. The G5 Sahel effort also faces significant [coordination](#) challenges with the other forces operating in Mali and neighboring countries.

Other armed groups have further exacerbated this problem, seeking to disrupt coordination efforts and increase political pressure on international partners through attacks that increase the human and financial costs of operating in Mali. Ahead of French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Mauritania in July 2018, [JNIM](#) took credit for a car bomb attack on the G5 Sahel force headquarters in Sèvre, Mali, and a suicide bombing in Gao.

Since its 2013 establishment, MINUSMA has become the world's [most dangerous](#) peacekeeping mission, with [169 peacekeepers killed](#). Conditions for regional forces are also difficult, and morale within FAMA is a concern given the lack of equipment and [grueling conditions](#) soldiers face even when not actively engaged in combat. These recent attacks show the continued cost of security operations in Mali.

Government Abuse a Looming Threat

Both Malian and international observers have by now recognized that government abuses are likely perpetuating the existing conflict. While [human rights organizations](#) have long expressed concern about the negative impact that arbitrary arrests and corruption have on marginalized communities, recent reporting on extrajudicial killings has forced the international community and Malian government to consider the negative impacts stemming from security force violations.

On June 19, the Malian government announced that members of the FAMA were "implicated" in extrajudicial killings of civilians after mass graves were discovered in the Mopti region. This announcement followed several [reported instances](#) of extrajudicial killings in 2018. In July 2018, a [UN Independent Expert](#) on the situation for human rights called on the government to open inquiries into allegations of security force human rights violations.

[Interviews](#) with marginalized communities suggest that abuses committed by security forces encourage young men to join armed groups, both for self-protection and as an expression of frustration with government abuses. A [security-focused response](#), without strong efforts to improve the rule of law and livelihoods, could therefore exacerbate conflict by driving marginalized communities to tolerate or support terrorist organizations.

Conclusion

The upcoming elections in Mali may prove to be an inflection point in the country's progress since the 2015 peace agreement. The government has improved its coordination with regional and international partners, but the impact of increased security operations within the country remains mixed. Although counterterrorism and peacekeeping operations remain necessary to control high levels of violence, Mali's government needs to improve its responsiveness to its citizens to compensate for the underlying factors driving conflict. By improving service delivery, limiting corruption, and addressing security force violations, the Malian government could win back citizen support for a conflict-resolution process.

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Madagascar's President Hery Rajaonarimampianina shown in Paris, France, Wednesday, June 28, 2017. Hery recently appointed Christian Ntsay as prime minister, part of a "consensus" unity government meant to ease escalating political tensions before elections scheduled for November 7. (Source: AP Photo/Michel Euler.)

Background

Madagascar is a low-income island nation of [24 million](#) located off the southeast coast of Africa. In 2016, it had a GDP of \$10 billion, with a growth rate of 4 percent. The country has a long history of instability punctuated by military coups and political violence. Indeed, no president has both [gained and left](#) power through elections in the country's history. An oft-shifting political battle among Hery, Ravalomanana, and Rajoelina continues to play a central role in the country's politics. In 2009, Rajoelina launched a military-backed overthrow of Ravalomanana, leading to a four-year period of international isolation. Through a deal negotiated by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), both Ravalomanana and Rajoelina were barred from the 2013 poll. Following Hery's peaceful election in 2013, international cooperation resumed, and the country made some political and economic [progress](#), a positive development following years of crisis. But Hery has not escaped controversy during his time in office, as exemplified by a 2015 [impeachment](#) attempt and the recent deterioration of political conditions ahead of the 2018 elections.

Latest Crisis

The latest escalation of tensions has been [brewing](#) for some time. Despite sitting out the 2013 elections, Ravalomanana and Rajoelina have refused to depart the political scene and maintained significant [political support](#) throughout Hery's tenure. Hery's attempted amendment of the electoral laws in April was seen by supporters of both Ravalomanana and Rajoelina as a move to again sideline the two influential politicians before this year's elections. A group of 73 MPs, called [MPs for Change](#) and comprising several different opposition parties—including Ravalomanana's TIM [Tiako-i-Madagasikara] and Rajoelina's MAPAR [Miaraka amin'ny Prézidà Andry Rajoelina]—came together to fight the proposed electoral bills and launched protests. Hery took a hardline stance in response to the demonstrations. He deemed the actions as a [coup](#) attempt aimed at his overthrow and met protestors with force.

Signaling the security establishment's enduring political role, General Beni Xavier Rasolofonirina, the Defence Minister, [weighed](#) in on the crisis in May: "We, the law enforcement officials, call loud and clear for the leaders of the political parties involved in the current crisis to be responsible and find a solution as soon as possible." The African Union, SADC, and the European Union also appealed for a resolution and [sent mediators](#). But outside intervention was rejected by the MPs for Change. Referring to the 2013 SADC deal, Hanitra Razafimanantsoa, the spokesperson for the group, [said](#), "We no longer want solutions imposed by the international community."

Will Unity Government Bring Unity?

Madagascar's Constitutional Court ultimately delivered a domestic solution in the form of a unity government with broad cross-party representation. After appointing Ntsay, a technocrat with a background at the International Labor Organization, Hery [declared](#) that the mission of the coalition government was to deliver elections "whose results have to be accepted by all." Opposition parties were allotted 12 of 30 ministerial positions. The makeup of the new government is meant to reflect the 2013 legislative election results, but some in the opposition are not satisfied, seeing the arrangement as bloated. Honore Tsabotokay, an independent MP, [decried](#) the arrangement: "The government has given birth to a seven-headed monster and must be buried unconditionally." But Hery [hailed](#) the unity government as "a victory for the country, for democracy because it proves that when the best interest of the nation requires it, pride and partisan claims must be set aside."

Conclusion

The formation of a unity government in Madagascar will likely ease tensions and avoid a relapse into conflict, but its impact is likely to be only temporary. In the run-up to national elections in November, significant risks remain for election-related violence between the government and anti-government protestors, as well as between supporters of Rajoelina and Ravalomanana. Indeed, upcoming elections threaten to unravel the current marriage of convenience between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana, which could reopen long-running political fault lines between the two camps.

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