

NIGERIA VOTES: THE PAST AS PROLOGUE

By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

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Supporters of Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan dance, during an election campaign rally, at Tafawa Balewa Square in Lagos, Nigeria, Thursday, Jan. 8, 2015. (Source: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba.)

Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard is a Research Staff Member on the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

MADAGASCAR: PROGRESS ON RECONCILIATION AMID GOVERNMENT RESHUFFLE

By Alexander Noyes

On January 14, 2015, President Hery Rajaonarimampianina of Madagascar (known as Hery) [appointed](#) Jean Ravelonarivo, a general in the air force, as his new prime minister. Former Prime Minister Roger Kolo, a technocrat, resigned, along with his cabinet, on January 11 after facing criticism for failing to adequately address widespread electricity failures on the island. On January 25, Hery [announced](#) replacements for eight ministers, including the minister of finance. Twenty-two other ministers retained their positions in the shake-up. While the cabinet reshuffle made headlines—with the appointment of a “military man” as prime minister raising fears of a [return](#) to military intervention in politics—Hery has quietly been leading an impressive effort toward political reconciliation. [more...](#)



President Hery Martial Rajaonarimampianina of Madagascar addresses the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly at U.N. headquarters, Thursday, Sept. 25, 2014. (Source: AP Photo/Jason DeCrow.)

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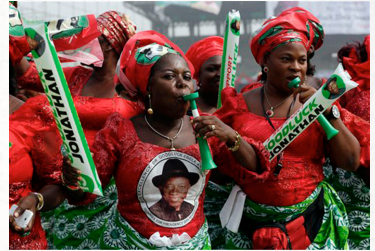
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Nigeria's Recent Electoral History

Since the return to civilian rule and multiparty elections in 1999, one political party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), has won every election. No incumbent Nigerian president has ever lost a presidential election, and there is no guarantee that an incumbent president would accept electoral defeat. This possibility is frequently a concern in the African context, and particularly in Nigeria, where previous military governments have [annulled elections](#).

Complicating matters, the 2015 presidential election is a virtual repeat of the 2011 election in which incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP ran against former military leader Muhamadu Buhari. Unlike the 2011 election, however, Buhari is now a member of the All Progressives Congress (APC), a party formed in 2013 by members of several opposition groups that came together to more effectively contest elections in 2015 against President Jonathan and the PDP. Over the past few years, [several high-ranking disaffected PDP members](#) have crossed the aisle and [joined the APC](#), creating acrimonious relations between the two camps.

President Jonathan continues to be a controversial candidate. Throughout the 2000s, the PDP was able to secure support from a wide swath of political elites by forging an unwritten agreement regarding the positions of president and vice president. The leadership of the PDP decided that to preserve the fragile peace between religious groups—roughly half the population of Nigeria is Muslim and half is Christian—the presidency and vice presidency should rotate between a southern Christian and a northern Muslim. Jonathan explicitly broke this rule in 2011 when he decided to run for election after his predecessor, Umaru Yar'Adua, a northern Muslim, died in office in 2010 and his vice president, at the time Jonathan, assumed office. Much of the leadership within the PDP was split over whether or not Jonathan should be allowed to contest elections in 2011. This debate again came up before the 2015 elections. These fractures contributed to the defection of several of members of the PDP to the APC.

Fraud and Violence

Nigeria's past elections have been marred by serious irregularities and violence. Even elections that are believed to be well organized and with minimal levels of fraud have seen significant violence: the [2011 elections](#), which many have hailed as Nigeria's cleanest, resulted in more than 800 deaths. Already, violent confrontations are taking place before the 2015 elections in places such as [Kaduna](#), [Rivers State](#), and the [Niger Delta](#). Pre-election violence is often a sign of future violence.

In 2011 Buhari's supporters rioted in several cities in the north after it was announced that he had lost to Jonathan. Buhari turned to the courts and, when they found Jonathan the rightful winner, [decried](#) the court's decision. He claimed that Jonathan's presidency was illegitimate and that the court had been captured by the PDP. As Buhari is running again, in his fourth attempt to win the presidency, there is serious question of whether his camp will accept defeat. The government has accused Buhari of threatening [bloodshed](#) if the 2015 elections are not "transparent."

Boko Haram and Fair Elections?

In May 2013, President Jonathan declared a state of emergency in the three states in the northeast most affected by Boko Haram violence—Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe—which remained under a [state of emergency](#) with nightly curfews, blockades, and information blackouts until November 2014. At that point, the National Assembly rejected the president's request for an extension (which would have been the third). Several members of congress claimed that the state of emergency was doing nothing to combat the insurgent group but, by making access to people and information more difficult, was exacerbating the situation.

With less than two weeks left for preparations, it remains to be seen how elections will be held in these three states. The conflict with Boko Haram has caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of potential voters, and there seems to be no provision for the displaced to vote on an absentee basis. In total, there may be more than 2 million potential voters affected by the conflict. The chairman of the electoral commission has stated that he will not hold elections anywhere he is [unable to guarantee the safety and security of his staff](#). The APC, however, has warned that elections [must take place](#) in the northeast, where a majority of voters are believed to support the opposition. It is almost certain that attacks by the group Boko Haram, as well as other electorally motivated groups, will continue unabated until at least election day and perhaps long after.

In almost any other country, such a volatile security situation might be cause for the delay or postponement of elections. But in Nigeria, it seems that not holding elections could result in just as much, if not more, violence than holding them. The opposition is demanding that [elections proceed as planned](#). The government's national security advisor suggested in late January that a [slight delay](#) in the vote might be in order to allow the electoral commission additional time to properly prepare for elections and to finish distributing voter cards. As of February 5, only [44 million out of nearly 66.8 million voter cards](#) have been issued. The opposition immediately responded that any delay would be interpreted as an attempt by the government to rig the election. The situation is so combustible at this point that any perceived fraud, injustice, or unfairness in the election process might trigger violence that could envelop the country.

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President Hery Martial Rajaonarimampianina of Madagascar addresses the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly at U.N. headquarters, Thursday, Sept. 25, 2014. (Source: AP Photo/Jason DeCrow.)

Previous Political Instability

Madagascar has an extended history of political instability, electoral violence, and military coups. A bitter rivalry between former presidents Marc Ravalomanana and Andry Rajoelina has dominated the political landscape since 2009, with both men still wielding considerable political influence. In 2009, Rajoelina ousted Ravalomanana from office with backing from the military. Ravalomanana fled to South Africa and was subsequently [sentenced](#) to life in prison for deaths that occurred in his overthrow. From 2010 to 2013, Ravalomanana made several attempts to return, but was thwarted by the Rajoelina government.

After both Ravalomanana and Rajoelina were barred from running in the December 2013 elections—under the terms of a Southern African Development Community agreement—Hery [won](#) the elections (with backing from Rajoelina). The new president then quickly fell out with Rajoelina, after Hery refused to do the former president's bidding (until recently, they [reportedly](#) had not met since March 2014). With a peaceful democratic election and an exchange of power in the rearview mirror, Madagascar looked set to return to normalcy and stability. Shortly after elections, international actors welcomed the country back into multilateral organizations and trade agreements.

Reconciliation Initiatives

As highlighted in the October 17, 2014, [edition](#) of *Africa Watch*, in October 2014 Ravalomanana returned unannounced from South Africa to Madagascar. He was quickly arrested and [detained](#). His return and Hery's forceful response threatened to push Madagascar back toward instability. Since December 2014, however, Hery has embarked on a number of reconciliation initiatives. With assistance from several South African negotiators, Hery met separately with both Rajoelina and Ravalomanana in mid-December. Days later, under the auspices of the Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar (FFKM), Hery [met](#) collectively with four ex-presidents of Madagascar: Rajoelina and Ravalomanana, as well as Albert Zafy and Didier Ratsiraka, who were in power prior to Ravalomanana. All five men [professed](#) their support for a program of national reconciliation.

Hery also [loosened](#) restrictions on Ravalomanana's detention, allowing him to travel home for the Christmas holidays and remain under house arrest at his residence in the capital, Antananarivo (he was previously being held in a military town in the north). The FFKM meeting between the four former presidents and Hery resulted in his pledge to free political prisoners, a promise he kept on December 24, 2014, when he [pardoned](#) five prisoners that were close to Ravalomanana, including Jean Heriniaina Raelina, a former military adviser to Ravalomanana.

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Conclusion

These reconciliation efforts have significantly lessened tensions on the island and led to an unexpected [alliance](#) between Hery and Ravalomanana. It seems only a [matter of time](#) before Ravalomanana is also pardoned and perhaps asked to participate in Hery's government in some capacity (there were [rumors](#) that he was discussed as a possible candidate for the recently vacant prime minister position). Rajoelina appears bothered by this alliance, and publicly [objected](#) to Hery's new pick of prime minister, saying Ravelonarivo benefited from personal ties to the current president and his wife. Despite disagreements between Hery and Rajoelina, Hery's recent reconciliation efforts seem genuine and should be applauded for decreasing prospects for political instability in Madagascar, at least in the short term. International and regional actors—South Africa, France, and United States in particular—should continue to urge Hery, his new cabinet, and Ravalomanana to consolidate the substantial progress already made. There are [reports](#) that a national political dialogue may be held this spring. That would be another step in the right direction and should be encouraged and supported logistically by regional and international stakeholders.

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