

EDUCATION REFORM—A KEY TO SOUTH AFRICA'S FUTURE

By George F. Ward, Jr.

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Anele Ramphomana, front left, cries as he gives his mother, unseen, the thumbs up as he starts his school career with assembly, at the Themble Primary School, in the Kagiso Township, Krugersdorp, South Africa. (Source: AP Photo/Lungelo Mbulwana.)

Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is editor of Africa Watch and a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses. He is a former U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Namibia.

CONTESTED PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN MADAGASCAR

By Alexander Noyes

On December 20, 2013, Madagascar [held](#) the second round of long-delayed presidential elections, aiming to put an end to a four-year political crisis precipitated by a military-backed coup d'état in 2009 that brought transitional President Andry Rajoelina to power. On January 3, 2014, Madagascar's electoral commission [announced](#) that former finance minister Hery Rajaonarimampianina, who was backed by Rajoelina, had won the poll with 53.5 percent of the vote. The results have yet to be confirmed by the electoral court, which must make a ruling on the election by January 19. Rajaonarimampianina's opponent, Jean Louis Robinson, who was a proxy candidate for exiled former president Marc Ravalomanana, ended up with 46.5 percent of the vote, although he has contested the poll results. Robinson's camp said the vote was rigged and demanded a recount, submitting nearly 300 complaints to the electoral court. While the international community has largely endorsed the vote, the potential for a drawn-out period of contestation remains high. [more...](#)



A voter right, casts his vote, at a polling station in Antananarivo, Friday, Dec. 20, 2013. (Source: AP Photo/Florence Treuil.)

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Both the South African office of [Goldman Sachs](#) and the South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR)¹ have recently produced studies that take stock of the past 20 years of South African history and look ahead to the next decade. Each study connects the high level of unemployment to the failure of the educational system to properly prepare workers. Goldman Sachs cites the fact that 51 percent of the labor supply has not completed the school-leaving qualification known as the “matric.” The IRR foresees that without education policy reform and greatly improved results, South Africa is at risk of transitioning into a “Dark Night” rather than a “New Dawn.”

Other studies support these conclusions. According to [The Global Competitiveness Report 2013–2014](#) published by the World Economic Forum, factors related to education detract significantly from South Africa's ability to compete effectively on world markets. The report cites an inadequately educated work force as the most problematic factor for doing business in South Africa. It ranks the quality of the South African educational system at 146th out of 148 countries studied. Only Yemen and Libya fared worse. Perhaps even more ominous for the future, the report ranked the quality of math and science education in South Africa last among the 148 countries studied. Ghana, in contrast, was in 62nd place and Zimbabwe, South Africa's troubled neighbor, was in 63rd place.

These disappointing results are not due to lack of spending on education. South Africa reportedly spends [20 percent](#) of its government budget on education, or 6.4 percent of GDP. This proportion is considerably more than many other emerging market economies. For example, South Africa spends almost [five times as much](#) per pupil as Kenya, but Kenya's pupils achieve significantly better functional literacy rates, according to a report by the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality.

Various factors are cited as responsible for the underperformance of the South African educational system. Lack of pupil commitment to learning is one, and the practice of promoting pupils from one grade to the next despite low levels of achievement (“condoning”) is another. The most frequently cited factors, however, relate to the [performance of teachers](#): there is a shortage of teachers; many teachers are underqualified; teachers often perform poorly in the classroom; and academic leadership is often deficient. One example of the problem: only 38 percent of South African grade 6 teachers were able to [correctly interpret](#) a simple graph.

The many recommendations for improving the quality of education include better teacher training, strengthened parent-teacher-student associations, better supervision of schools and enforcement of teacher standards by reintroducing government education inspectors, and reversal of the pattern of moving teacher training colleges away from rural areas. The last is aimed at taking advantage of the large numbers of bright, motivated, rural students, who might view a teaching position as a step upward, in contrast to urban students, who often see teaching as a low-status position.

Winning the support of the teachers union is perhaps the most significant hurdle on the way to education reform. The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) is an affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, which in turn is a constituent element of the ruling African National Congress (ANC). SADTU has already expressed its opposition to some proposed reforms, and the government is unlikely to take a confrontational stance toward the union in the run-up to this year's national elections. Assuming that the ANC emerges victorious from the upcoming elections, the post-election period will be the time for the government to grasp the nettle of reform. If it fails to do so, the likelihood of continued deterioration of South Africa's educational system, and of a "Dark Night" rather than a "New Dawn" for the country as a whole, will increase.

¹Dr. Frans Cronje, "The Next Ten Years: A Time Traveller's Guide to the Future of South Africa," lecture and discussion at the Atlantic Council, Washington, DC, December 4, 2013.

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A voter right, casts his vote, at a polling station in Antananarivo, Friday, Dec. 20, 2013. (Source: AP Photo/Florence Treuil.)

As highlighted in the October 31, 2013 [edition](#) of *Africa Watch*, the first round of presidential elections was held on October 25. Robinson and Rajaonarimampianina emerged as the two leading candidates, [garnering](#) 21.16 and 15.85 percent of the vote, respectively. Despite some irregularities, the results of the first round were deemed free and fair by international and regional observers. Since neither candidate secured more than required 50 percent of the vote, a second round was scheduled for December 20, when parliamentary elections were also scheduled to take place.

But in a troubling development for the prospects of an even electoral playing field in the second round, on November 22, Rajoelina's government [dismissed](#) 10 of 22 regional governors, replacing 8 of the 10 with senior military officers. As outlined in the August 1, 2013 [edition](#) of *Africa Watch*, Madagascar has a long history of unstable civil-military relations, with a highly factionalized and politically involved security sector. Mamy Rakotoarivelo, president of the National Assembly and ally of Ravalomanana's, expressed concerns about the change at the time, "We are worried by this decision which comes on the eve of the second round. . . . We're worried that pressure, direct or indirect, will be put on voters." In the event, voting was largely peaceful, and despite this maneuver and other irregularities, international observers again [hailed](#) the vote as legitimate.

Rajaonarimampianina's ostensible win has raised hopes that Madagascar may finally move on from its long-running political crisis, recover economically, and regain international support. Before the coup, international aid accounted for up to 70 percent of the country's budget. Sahondra Rabenarivo, an attorney, [expressed some optimism](#) on *Voice of America* last week: "For the average people going to the polls was just to try to move forward, turn the page, get on with life and hopefully bring back what we need the most, which is unfortunately the international donors and investors and so on who went away during this crisis."

Unfortunately, given Madagascar's history of political violence and deeply entrenched political rivalries, the potential for unrest in the interim period and after the electoral court's final ruling remains high. For now, Robinson and the Ravalomanana camp have not directly called for demonstrations, although surrogates of Robinson seemed to imply that he would not denounce street protests. As Elyse Razaka, who worked on Robinson's campaign, told *Reuters*, "Robinson won't order people to take to the streets. But it is different if there is a spontaneous movement." The role and conduct of the divided military will be particularly critical during this period, especially if street demonstrations are staged. Another violent chapter of political struggle between the Rajoelina and Ravalomanana camps—now being waged through proxies—would be disastrous for Madagascar, dashing hopes for a prompt recovery and perpetuating the country's international isolation.

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