

MADAGASCAR: POLITICAL EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTIONARY CYCLE

How Gen Z, the military, and digital mobilisation reshaped a system trapped since 2009



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I. Executive Summary

In this Thraets report, we analyse the ousting of Malagasy President Andry Rajoelina in October 2025. We examine the political history of the preceding 15 years that led to his downfall. The central finding is that Rajoelina's removal in 2025 was a direct result of a cycle of extra-constitutional politics that he initiated with his military-backed rise to power in 2009. His regime, which began with support from the elite CAPSAT military unit, ultimately came to an end when this same faction defected to support popular protests against him.

The final crisis unfolded in two distinct phases. First, Rajoelina orchestrated an institutional coup to secure victory in the November 2023 presidential election. By leveraging a compliant High Constitutional Court (HCC) to neutralise legal challenges and install a loyalist interim government, he won a hollow mandate marked by an opposition boycott and historically low turnout, destroying his democratic legitimacy. Second, beginning in September 2025, a youth-led Gen Z protest movement erupted, sparked by chronic failures in public services like water and electricity. This movement destroyed his performance legitimacy.

The regime collapsed when the CAPSAT military unit, the "kingmaker" from 2009, mutinied on October 11, 2025. Rajoelina fled the country on a French military aircraft, reportedly destined for Dubai. The National Assembly then impeached him for abandonment of post, a move the HCC used to invite the coup leader, Colonel Michael Randrianirina, to assume the presidency. The new military-led transitional government has appointed a national unity cabinet, co-opting Rajoelina's political rivals and leaders from the Gen Z protest movement. This new regime faces profound socio-economic challenges and immediate international isolation, having been suspended by the African Union.



II. Madagascar's Leadership 2010-2023: A Vicious Cycle of Political Crisis

The political landscape of Madagascar over the last 15 years has been defined by the precedent of extra-constitutional regime change and the intractable rivalry between two dominant figures: Marc Ravalomanana and Andry Rajoelina.



Image 1: Andry Rajoelina (L) and Marc Ravalomanana (R)

A. The Legacy of the 2009 Coup: Rajoelina and the High Transitional Authority (HAT)

The timeline of the recent crisis begins in March 2009, following a political crisis that resulted in the resignation of President Marc Ravalomanana. The military, which had seized power from Ravalomanana, immediately transferred it to Andry Rajoelina, the 35-year-old mayor of Antananarivo. Rajoelina was installed as the President of the High Transitional Authority (HAT).

This transfer of power, widely condemned as a military-backed coup, was retroactively deemed lawful by Madagascar's High Constitutional Court (HCC). This action established two dangerous and enduring precedents. First, it normalised a street-and-barracks pathway to power, where popular protest in the capital, combined with the backing of a key military faction, could override the constitutional order. Second, it positioned the HCC not as a neutral arbiter of the constitution, but as



a political instrument capable of legalising *faits accomplis*.

The 2009 ouster was specifically perpetrated by the Army Corps of Administrative and Technical Personnel and Services (CAPSAT). By installing Rajoelina, CAPSAT established itself as a "kingmaker" in Malagasy politics. Rajoelina's HAT (2009-2014) was, in effect, an internationally isolated autocracy. The African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) refused to recognise the regime and exerted pressure for a power-sharing deal with other political factions, including that of the exiled Ravalomanana. Rajoelina, however, repeatedly stalled and snubbed these diplomatic efforts.

B. The 2013 Election and the Rajaonarimampianina Interregnum

To end the transition and regain international legitimacy, SADC mediated a roadmap to elections. This framework explicitly prohibited former heads of state from participating, barring Rajoelina, Ravalomanana, and another former president, Didier Ratsiraka.

Denied the ability to run himself, Rajoelina selected his Minister of Finance, Hery Rajaonarimampianina, as the candidate for his political movement. The 2013 election was thus not a democratic reset but a proxy war between the two dominant, but barred, rivals. Rajaonarimampianina (Rajoelina's candidate) faced Jean-Louis Robinson, the candidate of Marc Ravalomanana's party.

Rajaonarimampianina won the December 2013 run-off with 53.49% of the vote. International observers, including The Carter Center, deemed the election credible, despite some shortcomings. Following the inauguration, the AU officially readmitted Madagascar, ending its five-year suspension.

However, the underlying political polarisation was not resolved. The relationship between President Rajaonarimampianina and his patron, Rajoelina, soon soured. Rajoelina sought to be appointed Prime Minister, but Rajaonarimampianina picked another candidate. In retaliation, Rajoelina supported a May 2015 effort to impeach Rajaonarimampianina, accusing him of constitutional violations. The National Assembly successfully voted for impeachment, but the High Constitutional Court ultimately ruled the justification unfounded and rejected the motion. This event further entrenched the HCC as the ultimate arbiter in all high-level political disputes.

C. The Return of Rajoelina: The 2018 Presidential Election

The 2018 election saw the direct return of the main rivals: Rajoelina, Ravalomanana, and the incumbent Rajaonarimampianina. The first round confirmed the political landscape, eliminating the sitting president and setting up a final run-off between Rajoelina (39.19%) and Ravalomanana (35.29%).

Rajoelina won the December 2018 run-off with 55.66% to Ravalomanana's 44.34%. True to form, Ravalomanana immediately denounced the results as being tainted by electoral problems and filed complaints with the HCC seeking cancellation. The HCC, however, dismissed the complaints, and



Rajoelina was inaugurated as the democratically elected president in January 2019.

This election effectively reset the political landscape to the 2009 status quo, confirming that Malagasy politics had become a zero-sum, bipolar conflict between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana. The deep polarisation meant Rajoelina's mandate was inherently fragile, as nearly half the politically active population viewed him as illegitimate. This set the stage for an extremely high-stakes 2023 election.



Image 2: Rajoelina casts his vote in 2023



III. The Unravelling of the Rajoelina Regime (The 2023-2025 Crisis)

The ouster of Andry Rajoelina was the result of a dual failure that unfolded over two years. His regime first suffered a catastrophic failure of *democratic legitimacy* in the 2023 election, followed by a total failure of *performance legitimacy* that triggered the 2025 uprising.

A. The 2023 Presidential Election: An Institutional Coup

Rajoelina's 2023 re-election strategy appeared to be a systematic dismantling of the legal and constitutional framework of the election to guarantee victory.

1. **The French Nationality Controversy:** The crisis began with the revelation that Rajoelina had acquired French citizenship in 2014. Under Malagasy law, the voluntary acquisition of foreign nationality can result in a loss of Malagasy citizenship, which would have disqualified him from holding the presidency. The opposition argued he was ineligible. Rajoelina's defence was technical, and the HCC ultimately sided with him, ruling that his citizenship was valid due to the lack of a decree removing his nationality.
2. **Constitutional Subversion:** The most overt manoeuvre involved subverting the constitutional line of succession. When Rajoelina stepped down in September 2023 to run for re-election, the Constitution dictated that the President of the Senate, Herimanana Razafimahefa, would serve as interim leader. Razafimahefa publicly refused the role, citing death threats from Rajoelina's advisors. When he later changed his mind, the Senate, dominated by Rajoelina's party, impeached him for mental deficiency. A collegial government led by Rajoelina's close ally, Prime Minister Christian Ntsay, was appointed instead. The High Constitutional Court, once again, upheld this highly irregular decision.
3. **The Opposition Boycott and Hollow Mandate:** These actions signalled to the opposition that the state's most powerful institutions, particularly the HCC, were captured. In response, a collective of 10 candidates, including his chief rival Marc Ravalomanana, announced a full boycott of the election. The government banned all opposition protests and used security forces to violently crack down on any pre-election rallies.

The boycotted election proceeded on November 16, 2023. Rajoelina was declared the winner by the HCC with 58.96% of the vote. However, turnout was a historically low 46.35%, with many polling stations remaining empty. This victory proved to be Pyrrhic. By securing a legal mandate from a court perceived as biased, Rajoelina effectively undermined his democratic legitimacy. With the support of only approximately 27% of the total electorate, his regime became politically isolated and significantly exposed to challenges beyond the electoral arena.

B. The Gen Z Uprising (September-October 2025)

Having survived the 2023 crisis, Rajoelina's regime was toppled less than two years later by a challenge that was not political, but socio-economic.



1. **The Triggers: "Jiro-Kapoaka" Protests:** On September 25, 2025, spontaneous protests erupted in Antananarivo. The specific, non-political triggers were chronic and severe water and power outages. Power cuts lasting up to 12 hours a day crippled businesses and daily life. The yellow jerrycan (for water) and the "jiro-kaipoaka" (a simple tin-can lamp) became the symbols of the protest, representing the state's failure to provide the most basic services.
2. **The Movement's Evolution:** The protests were spearheaded by a leaderless, youth-driven movement that adopted the transnational banner, Gen Z Madagascar. This movement, fueled by social media, quickly evolved from a service-delivery complaint into a massive, nationwide uprising. The protesters' demands escalated to the resignation of Rajoelina, denouncing corruption, nepotism, and poor governance.
3. **The Underlying Drivers:** The "Gen Z" movement was born from the total failure of the *entire* political class to address dire socio-economic conditions. Between 75% and 80% of Madagascar's population lives below the international poverty line. The protest was a response to this reality, exacerbated by visible, high-level corruption. In August 2023, Rajoelina's own chief of staff was arrested in London for allegedly soliciting a bribe from a mining firm. His infrastructure projects, meanwhile, were increasingly seen as white elephants.



Image 3: Gen Z Protests

This was a post-political uprising. The generation that took to the streets had grown up in the shadow of the 2009 crisis and viewed *both* Rajoelina and Ravalomanana as the authors of their country's malaise. Having failed the test of democratic legitimacy in 2023, Rajoelina's regime now failed the test of performance legitimacy in 2025.



Image 4: The Gen Z protests



IV. The Fall of Andry Rajoelina

The regime collapsed in a matter of days when the popular protest movement triggered a mutiny from within Rajoelina's own security apparatus.

A. The Decisive Defection: The CAPSAT Mutiny

The government's initial response to the Gen Z protests was a violent crackdown that left at least 22 people dead. As the protests grew, Rajoelina made a too-little, too-late concession. On October 6, 2025, he dissolved the government of PM Christian Ntsay and appointed a military general, Ruphin Zafisambo, as the new Prime Minister.

This move failed to appease the protesters and may have alienated factions within the military. On October 11, 2025, the elite CAPSAT military unit, the same faction that installed Rajoelina in 2009, mutinied and joined the protesters in Antananarivo. This was the decisive moment. The defection of his Praetorian Guard, a well-armed and powerful faction, signalled the end of the regime. On October 12, CAPSAT seized the capital with little resistance.



Image 5: The Capsat Army joins the protests



B. The Mechanics of the Takeover and Rajoelina's Impeachment

The 2025 ouster was a sophisticated, three-pronged operation that combined popular protest, military force, and constitutional legalism:

1. **The Military Force (CAPSAT):** CAPSAT, led by Colonel Michael Randrianirina, provided the hard power that seized the state.
2. **The Legal Process (Parliament & HCC):** On October 13, Rajoelina fled the country. On October 14, from an undisclosed location, he issued a decree dissolving the National Assembly, which was preparing to impeach him. The National Assembly *ignored* his decree and proceeded to impeach him for abandonment of post.
3. **The Constitutional Legitimation (HCC):** This impeachment for abandonment was a critical legal manoeuvre. It framed Rajoelina as having *abdicated* his office, not as having been *deposed*. This created a constitutional vacancy. The High Constitutional Court immediately stepped in, inviting the CAPSAT commander, Colonel Michael Randrianirina, to exercise the functions of head of state.

The HCC, which had legalised Rajoelina's 2009 coup and his 2023 institutional coup, now provided the legal veneer for his removal. Colonel Randrianirina was officially sworn in as interim president on October 17, 2025.

C. The Flight of the President

The user query regarding Rajoelina's flight to France is partially correct and highly significant. While his final destination was not France, his escape appears to have been facilitated by the French government.

Multiple reports, including from French state radio RFI, stated that Rajoelina was flown out of Madagascar on a *French military aircraft*. This was allegedly part of a deal with President Emmanuel Macron. Rajoelina, who holds French citizenship, was reportedly flown to Mauritius and then on to Dubai. The French Foreign Ministry declined to comment on the reports.

This implies a negotiated exit, likely brokered by Paris to prevent a violent civil conflict. From his location in exile, Rajoelina broadcast a defiant speech on social media on October 13-14, claiming he was "forced to find a safe place to protect my life" and framing the events as a coup d'état. He has refused to formally resign. However, his acceptance of a brokered escape effectively validated parliament's abandonment of post charge and rendered his defiant statements politically impotent.

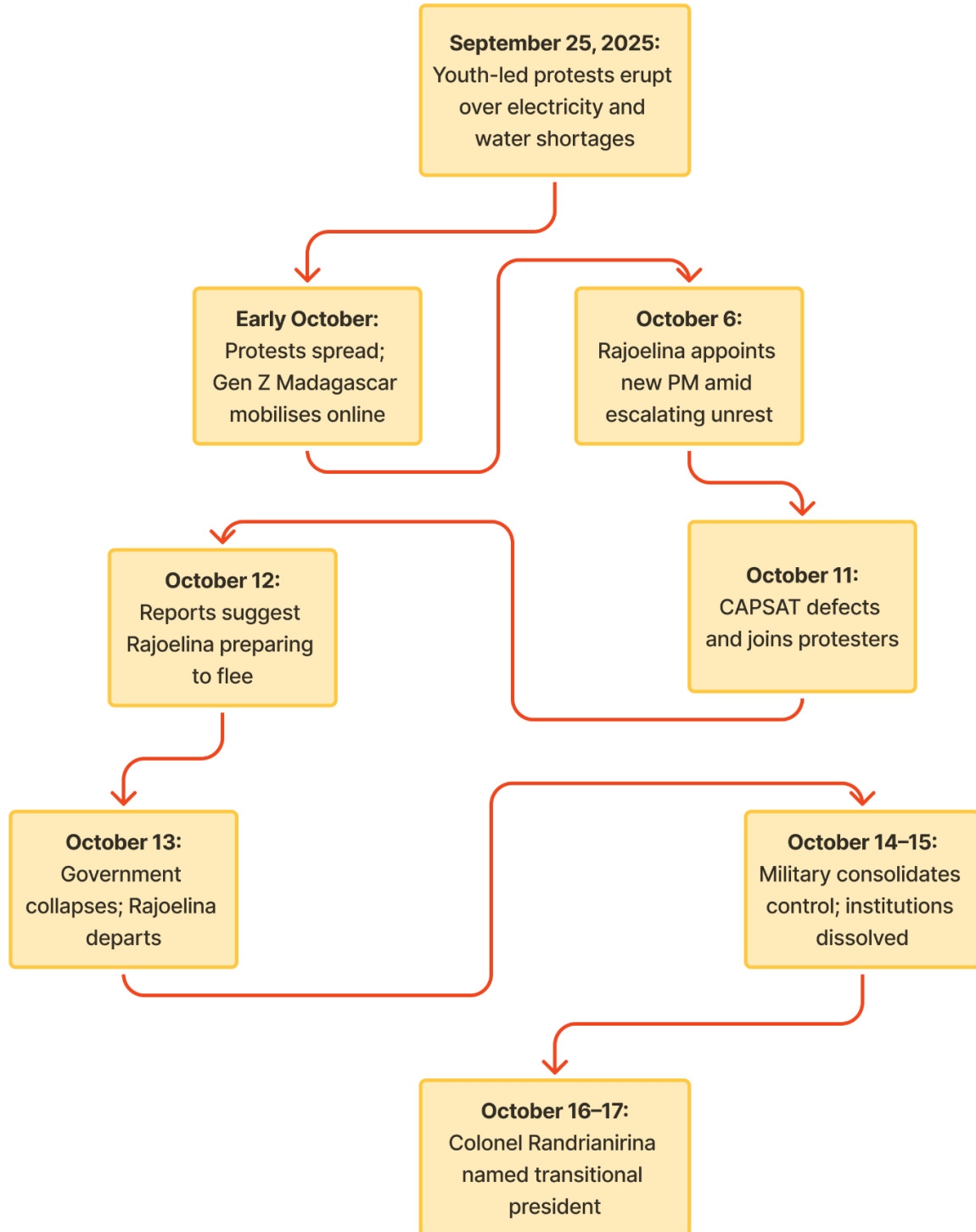


Image 6: A timeline of events in Madagascar.



V. Current Status: The New Transitional Government and International Response

As of November 2025, Madagascar is under the control of a military-led transitional government that is attempting to build domestic legitimacy while facing total international isolation.

A. The Military Head of State: Colonel Michael Randrianirina

The new interim president is Colonel Michael Randrianirina, the commander of the elite CAPSAT unit that led the mutiny. He is not a political unknown; he previously served as governor of the impoverished Androy region from 2016 to 2018.

Critically, Randrianirina is a direct institutional rival of Rajoelina. He was arrested in November 2023—just before the controversial presidential election—and accused of planning a mutiny. He was given a one-year suspended sentence and released in early 2024. This background suggests the 2025 ouster was the culmination of a pre-existing conflict within the security forces, for which the Gen Z protests provided the critical opportunity.

Randrianirina has suspended the 2010 Constitution and promised a refoundation of the Republic over a transitional period of 18 to 24 months, after which new elections are to be held.

B. Structure of the Transitional Government and Key Personnel

The new regime has sought to build a broad civilian coalition. On October 20, 2025, Col. Randrianirina appointed businessman Herintsalama Rajaonarivelo as the new transitional Prime Minister. On October 28, a 29-member cabinet was announced.

This cabinet is mostly civilian, with only four military or paramilitary officers appointed to security-related posts. The composition of the cabinet is a clear strategy to co-opt all three major streams of opposition to Rajoelina:

1. **Institutional Rivals:** Christine Razanamahasoa, the former National Assembly president whom Rajoelina's party had stripped of her post, was named Foreign Minister. Fanirisoa Ernaivo, an exiled magistrate and prominent Rajoelina opponent, was named Justice Minister.
2. **The Old Guard Opposition:** Hanitra Razafimanantsoa, a lawmaker from Marc Ravalomanana's Tiako i Madagasikara (TIM) party, was appointed State Minister for Refoundation.
3. **The New Guard Protesters:** Lucie Vololoniaina (also known as Lily Rafaralahy), a municipal councillor and a key leader of the 25 September citizen movement (the Gen Z protests), was named Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts.



This national unity structure is inherently fragile. Gen Z activists have already criticised the process, claiming the new Prime Minister was appointed non-transparently and has ties to the previous regime.

Table: Key Figures in Madagascar's 2025 Transitional Government (as of October 28, 2025)

Role	Incumbent	Background & Significance
Interim President	Colonel Michael Randrianirina	Commander of the elite CAPSAT military unit. A direct rival of Rajoelina, he was arrested for planning a mutiny in November 2023. He represents the hard power of the new regime.
Prime Minister	Herintsalama Rajaonarivelo	A businessman and consultant. Appointed as a technocratic civilian head of government, but his appointment was criticised by Gen Z activists for lacking consultation.
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Christine Razanamahasoa	Former President of the National Assembly. She became an institutional rival of Rajoelina after his party stripped her of her post.
Minister of Justice	Fanirisoa Ernaivo	A former magistrate and prominent Rajoelina opponent who returned from exile in France. Her appointment is a symbolic reversal of Rajoelina's political suppression.
Minister of State for "Refoundation"	Hanitra Razafimanantsoa	A prominent lawmaker from the TIM party. Her inclusion is a direct move to co-opt the old guard opposition loyal to former president Marc Ravalomanana.
Minister of Tourism & Handicrafts	Lucie Vololoniaina (Lily Rafaralahy)	A key leader of the Gen Z / 25 September citizen movement. Her inclusion is intended to lend popular legitimacy from the street protests to the new military-led government.



Image 7: The New Cabinet

C. International Isolation: Condemnation from the African Union and SADC

The new regime's legal justification from the HCC holds no weight internationally. Reaction from regional bodies was swift and negative.

The African Union (AU) immediately suspended Madagascar from all activities, citing an unconstitutional change of government. The AU's Peace and Security Council held emergency sessions and is deploying a high-level delegation to press for a peaceful return to the constitutional democratic order.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) expressed grave concern and announced it is deploying its own fact-finding mission to engage with the transitional authorities. The United Nations also condemned the military takeover.

This places the transitional government in the exact same position of international isolation that Rajoelina's HAT faced post-2009. The regime now faces the threat of sanctions and a freeze on foreign aid, which would be devastating given the country's profound poverty.

VI. Concluding Analysis and Outlook

The 2025 ouster of Andry Rajoelina was not a revolution that broke the cycle of Malagasy political crises; it was a reaffirmation of it. The political doom loop, established in 2009, has fully consumed its



originator.

While the Gen Z protests represented a new and genuine popular grievance against state failure, the mechanism of regime change was identical to that of 2009. Political power in Antananarivo was not decided at the ballot box, but by a street-and-barracks alliance: a popular uprising provided the legitimacy for the *same* elite military unit, CAPSAT, to act as the kingmaker. And the *same* politically ambiguous High Constitutional Court provided the post-hoc legal justification.

The fundamental problem of Malagasy politics, that power is arbitrated by a military faction and a pliable court, has not been solved. The new transitional government is a fragile coalition of Rajoelina's old enemies, new-guard activists, and military leaders. Its stability depends entirely on Colonel Randrianirina's control of CAPSAT, his ability to manage the rivalrous civilian factions he has invited into his government, and his success in fending off international pressure.

All of this must be accomplished while facing the same, persistent, and unmet demands for water, power, and jobs from the Gen Z movement. This movement, which has now proven its ability to topple a government, remains vigilant. The 18-to-24-month transition will be a period of extreme political and economic fragility.







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